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# Introduction

## Poetry, Music, and Sound: Mapping the Field

The cycle *Trí Amhrán* [Three Songs] (2019) by Irish composer Jennifer Walshe takes the listener on a tour of the past hundred years of the art song. It begins with "The Robot," an impressionistic setting of an evocative, haiku-like short poem; its vocal line is full of plangent melodies and sustained tones supported by a pointillistic accompaniment. The subsequent piece, "New Proverbs," showcases a variety of postwar avant-garde influences: extended vocal techniques, sonorous piano clusters, and open form – as the singer is free to choose any one or two of the twenty quirky, absurdist monostiches that compose the work's textual material. The final part, "Twelve Climate Change Songs" – a cycle within a cycle – is a postmodernist pastiche of pop music idioms and lyrics composed from the buzzwords and tropes of the climate discourse. Importantly, all the musical and textual material in *Trí Amhrán* is algorithmically generated – produced by an artificial neural network (ANN) that the composer trained on a large corpus of Irish pop and art music, resulting in unusual combinations of vaguely recognizable musical and poetic references. The cycle as a whole thus continues this historical lineage, bringing the art song into the digital era.[1]

Musico-literary referentiality and unexpected genre combinations are also characteristic of the spoken-word performance "From Jewish Life" (2017) by Croatian-German poet and performer Dalibor Marković. Its title playfully refers both to the composer Ernest Bloch's eponymous suite for cello and piano, and to the biblical references that the poems in the performance employ to comment on contemporary culture – a juxtaposition of the sacral and the prophane that distinguishes Bloch's cycle as well. In the third part of his performance, titled "Jewish Song," Marković makes use of beatboxing – the onomatopoeic imitation of electronic, mainly percussive sounds – to create a sort of musical accompaniment to his reading. This may be regarded in part as a clever trick to circumvent the rules of the slam competition, which forbid musical accompaniment and demand that the performers rely on their voices alone. But the way in which Marković integrates beatboxing into the poem itself – with certain elements of the musical pattern simultaneously being incorporated into words as consonants or syllables – draws attention to the fuzziness and permeability of the boundaries between poetry and

1 For an in-depth discussion of the piece, see Henkel (2025)


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music. Marković's performance thus brings together two distinct musical traditions, Western classical music and contemporary hip-hop, while also foregrounding the musicality of the poetic voice, oscillating between speech and song.[2]

The central role of onomatopoeia connects Marković's work with the video installation *Repeat After Me* (2022–2024) by the Ukrainian artist collective Open Group. On two screens facing each other, the installation presents refugees from Russia's invasion of Ukraine recounting their war experiences while recreating its soundscape with their voices: the sounds of shelling, explosions, war planes, military drones, air raid sirens, etc. A row of microphones in front of the screens along with onomatopoeic subtitles in the video invite the audience to join in and voice those sounds as if participating in a sort of karaoke. The playful format balances irony and sincerity in a way distinctly characteristic of digital culture (cf., e.g., Papacharissi 2014), providing a safe aesthetic distance for the audience to attune itself to the unimaginable trauma of an ongoing war. On the one hand, the work alludes to the avant-garde tradition of "belliphonic"[3] sound poetry, such as F. T. Marinetti's "Zang Tumb Tuuum" (1914) or Ernst Jandl's "schtzngrmm" (1957), turning to glossolalia to express the experiences that words fail to describe. On the other hand, its spatialized structure and interactivity make *Repeat After Me* a work of participatory sound art, pulling the audience inside the belliphonic experience and inviting them to empathize with it by repeating the onomatopoeic utterances in the first person as a "gesture of togetherness" (Keylin 2023, 128).

What can these three examples tell us about the musico-poetic art forms of the digital age? Certain common threads have already emerged in the short descriptions above. Playful referentiality has an obviously prominent role in all three. It is a mode of expression that creates novelty and authenticity by bringing together far-fetched phenomena and texts, both musical and poetic – one of the three core aspects of the "digital condition" according to Felix Stalder (the other two being communality and algorithmicity; cf. 2017, Ch. II). The dialectic of digitality and postdigitality[4] manifests not only in Marcović's use of beatboxing – a no-tech imitation of a digital technology – but also in Walshe's setting of AI-

**2** For a discussion of the use of beatboxing in performance poetry, see Dürr and Keylin (2024).

**3** J. Martin Daughtry introduced the term "belliphonic" to refer to "the spectrum of sounds produced by armed combat," in particular those generated by weaponry and "the motorized vehicles that carry weapons into combat," but also "sonic material that is less directly or conventionally associated with warfare" (2015, 3–4).

**4** The notion of postdigitality is used to describe contemporary culture as one in which "the historical distinction between the digital and the non-digital becomes increasingly blurred" and where "digital disruption is not transcended as such, but becomes routine or business as usual" (Berry and Dieter 2015, 2, 6). As an aesthetic and an artistic practice, the postdigital is "[l]inked to ideas like the 'off-internet' and 'neo-analogue'," and "recognizes the revival of 'old' media for-

generated songs for the traditional combination of unamplified voice and piano, as well as the Open Group's use of interactivity to stage raw documentary material. Other common features can be clearly inferred – like the renewed attention to the embodied sonority of the poetic voice, positioned between sound, meaning, and identity. But perhaps what unites these examples most – as well as the manifold works discussed in this book's contributions – is precisely their *difference*, the way that each of them combines musical and poetic media, traditions, and references in a unique manner that resists classification into clear-cut genres.

This interdisciplinary volume aims to explore the diverse relationships between poetry, music, and sound in the digital age, focusing in particular on artworks that stage these relationships in innovative, often experimental ways. The contributions collected here investigate the multifaceted musical or sonic settings of poetry, ranging from contemporary art songs, to rap and experimental spoken word, to poetic sound installations. At the same time, a number of chapters consider the musicality inherent to recent poetry – the ways in which sound and music are present in both the form and content of poetic texts and their performance. The fact that most of the contributions in this book are individual or comparative case studies, which might at first glance seem to have been arbitrarily selected, attests to the diversity of contemporary musico-literary constellations, as each case demands an in-depth analysis of its own unique configuration of poetic and sonic aspects, making sweeping generalizations difficult if not impossible.

In and of itself, this diversity is hardly anything new: the fragmentation of the musico-literary unity of traditional oral poetry in print culture brought about a whole range of new intermedial forms as far back as in the Early Modern era. Writing in 1982, Steven Paul Scher – one of the founding fathers of the field of *word and music studies*[5] – classified such forms into "music and literature, literature in music, and music in literature" (2004 [1982], 175), drawing primarily on the works of the Western literary and musical canon. His first category attends to the various art forms that combine text and music, both traditional – such as

mats like cassette tapes or analogue synthesizers" (Berry and Dieter 2015, 5–6; see also Olsson 2022; Hamel and Stubenrauch 2023).

**5** The field of word and music studies consolidated in the 1990s to address the diversity of musico-literary forms and genres through four international interdisciplinary conferences, held in Dartmouth (1988), Lund (1995), and Graz (1990, 1997), culminating in the establishment of the International Association for Word and Music Studies and its eponymous book series (see Bernhart 1999, 1). The foundational works that led to its formation include Calvin Smith Brown's *Music and Literature – A Comparison of the Arts* (1948), Steven Paul Scher's *Verbal Music in German Literature* (1968), and Lawrence Kramer's *Music and Poetry: The Nineteenth Century and After* (1984).

song or opera – and avant-garde; the other two refer to strictly literary or strictly musical works (cf. 2004 [1982], 177–180). *Literature in music* comprises genres such as, e.g., program music, i.e., musical interpretations of literary sources without any spoken or sung text in the musical work, as well as symphonic poems, which use the literary notion of the poem as a metaphor to describe a purely musical structure. Conversely, Scher proposes the category of *music in literature* to refer to the various "intermedial references" (Rajewsky 2005, 50) to music on the levels of both structure and content in poetry or prose. These include musical ekphrasis and "word music" – that is, the "imitation in words of the acoustic quality of music (frequently also of non-musical sound)" (Scher 2004 [1982], 180).

Scher's classification illustrates that traditional musico-literary genres already encompass a wide spectrum of forms that cannot be reduced to any single overarching principle. What distinguishes text-music relationships in the digital age, however, is the way they are inflected by digital technologies, whether embracing and incorporating the new intermedial and intertextual possibilities that they bring or pointedly rejecting them. As Hazel Smith argues, "contemporary experimental intermedia and multimedia work" fundamentally differs from established musico-literary genres and practices in three main respects: (a) "a strong tendency [. . .] to juxtapose or superimpose words and music, but not usually to set words to music"; (b) "different kinds of creative process that have improvised, indeterminate or algorithmic components, in which certain aspects of the words and/or music are not fixed"; and (c) "the impact of new technologies on the word and music relationship," enabling "algorithmic synaesthesia, where both words and sound share the same algorithms" (2016, 1, 21–22). At the same time, the impact of (post-)digitality can be felt across a broad range of cultural practices and not only in experimental works that directly engage with digital technology. This volume's contributions chapters analyze, for example, contemporary griot practices that bring together ancient African oral traditions and pop-musical influences, acquiring a global audience in online culture; audiowalks that map poetry recordings onto urban routes with the help of mobile media; or *spoken music*, a form of poetry performance that integrates spoken word, acapella singing, and beatboxing.

The increasingly blurred boundaries between traditional literary genres and experimental multimedia works are characteristic of "the digital reading condition," as Maria Engberg, Iben Have, and Birgitte Stougaard Pedersen argue in their eponymous book (2022). This necessitates rethinking the very notion of reading as multisensory and including various forms of listening – "reading with the ears" – in this category (Engberg et al. 2022, 111). Under the digital reading condition, the sounding forms of poetry are expanding beyond familiar musical forms to incorporate all things sound, reflecting the "sonic turn" in the contemporary

humanities. The interdisciplinary field of sound studies has formed as a response to the conceptual shift, effected by the invention of audio technologies. Whereas sound "had previously been conceptualized in terms of particular idealized instances like voice or music," recording gave rise to the holistic idea of sound as an object of hearing, of which "speech and music became [only] specific instances" (Sterne 2003, 2, 71), alongside a variety of heterogenous phenomena, such as natural soundscapes, industrial noise, data sonifications,[6] and sound design for radio, film, or digital media. As the case studies in this book show, contemporary multimedia poetry engages with an incredibly wide spectrum of sounds and listening experiences, necessitating a broad, interdisciplinary theoretical perspective that goes beyond the literary-musicological conjunction.

This is reflected, for instance, in Frieder von Ammon's notion of *poetophony* (*Poetophonie*) (2020). Building on Bernie Krause's classification of sound into geophony, biophony, and anthropophony (that is, produced by inorganic matter, nonhuman life forms, and humans, respectively; cf. 2012, 157), von Ammon defines poetophony as "all the sounds produced in and with literary texts" (2020, 243; trans. VK). This includes both literature as part of sound culture (in, e.g., poetry readings or audiobooks) and representations of sound culture in literature (cf. von Ammon 2020, 243–244). The field of *literary sound studies* that has emerged in recent years is responding to the same urgency to address the intersections of literature and auditory culture.[7] As Anna Snaith proposes, key research areas in this field can be classified into (a) literature as sonic art; (b) rhythm, orality, and voice; (c) listening and hearing; (d) literary soundscapes; and (e) media history and sound technologies (cf. 2020, 11–22). Similar to von Ammon's definition of poetophony, this categorization emphasizes the reciprocity of the literature-sound relationship. While Snaith's first two categories deal with the sonic

**6** The term "sonification" refers to the practice of using large arrays of numerical data, irrespective of its source, as parameters for algorithmic composition or sound synthesis. In this sense, it is an acoustic analog to data visualization.

**7** The establishment of literary sound studies as a field has been signaled by several independent handbook-style publications in recent years: *Handbuch Literatur und Audiokultur* (2020), *Sound and Literature* (2020), and *The Edinburgh Companion to Literature and Sound Studies* (2024). A fourth publication, *The Routledge Companion to Sound and Literature* (to be published in 2027), is currently being edited by one of this book's authors, Birgitte Stougaard Pedersen, in collaboration with Maria Engberg.

Although literary sound studies offers an expanded conceptual and methodological framework for investigating the multifaceted relationship between sound and literature, its focus lies predominantly on the narrative prose of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Notable exceptions that situate contemporary poetry within the sound studies context include Vorrath (2019), Meyer-Sickendiek (2020), and Skoulding (2020).

features of literature itself, both in performance or recording and in silent vocalizations of the printed text, the last three consider literary representations of auditory phenomena. Although the essays in this volume tend to prefer sounding forms of poetry – perhaps a reflection of the musico-literary historical origins of poetry and the prominence of sonic aspects even in written poetic forms – they make full use of this expansion of the theoretical perspective offered by literary sound studies to address the complexity of the intermedial and intertextual relationships involved.

Furthermore, the diversity and heterogeneity of the musico-literary field in the digital age demands not only interdisciplinary perspectives but also flexible and adaptable methodologies that foreground the uniqueness and situatedness of text-sound relations in each individual work. Two methodological paradigms can be identified as central to this book: phenomenology and intermediality. On the one hand, the phenomenology of perception, informed by the works of Maurice Merleau-Ponty (cf. 2012 [1945]), remains one of the dominant paradigms in sound studies (cf. Ihde 2007 [1976]; Nancy 2007; Voegelin 2010) and has gained a certain traction in musicology (cf., e.g., Berger et al. 2024). On the other hand, as Lawrence Kramer has suggested, the language of phenomenology is best suited to describing the structural parallels and connections between music and poetry (cf. 1984, 7). It allows scholars to regard musico-literary works as holistic, embodied experiences, emphasizing the relational and contextual aspects of "reading with the ears." At the same time, the ubiquity of technology in the digital age and its effect on poetic practices requires that phenomenology be extended into "post-phenomenology" – integrating the technological mediators of experience as a necessary part of the methodological apparatus (cf. Ihde 2009). Correspondingly, a number of chapters in this book complement phenomenological reflections with tools and methods from the digital humanities such as sonograms and phonetic analysis software.

Whereas phenomenology focuses on the integrity of the musico-literary experience, intermediality draws attention to the individual components and their multifaceted relationships. As a field, intermedial studies has developed in parallel and often in conjunction with word and music studies (cf. Redling 2017; Wolf 2017) – which is unsurprising, given how musical poetry is one of the more evident and established intermedial art forms. Irina Rajewsky's influential classification of intermedial relationships into "media combinations" (works that combine two or more media), "media transpositions" (works that realize the content of one medium in another), and "intermedial references" (monomedial works that refer to other media; cf. 2002, 2005) explicitly builds and expands on Werner Wolf's intermedial interpretation of Scher's tripartite schema of musico-literary forms mentioned above (cf. 1999, 70). In a later article, Wolf in turn builds on Ra-

jewsky's typology and her distinction between inter- and transmediality, categorizing text-music relationships into "transmediality" and "intermedial transpositions" (grouped together as "extracompositional intermediality") and "intermedial references" and "plurimediality" (grouped together as "intracompositional intermediality"; Wolf 2015, 468).

Such schemas offer useful heuristics for thinking about the relationships between poetry and music or sound in terms of their medial provenance and structure. At the same time, it is perhaps even more crucial to consider the aesthetic effects of their interplay. Smith suggests that most musico-literary works engage in a "semiotic and perceptual exchange" or mutual enrichment, making the listener "perceive music as more referential and words as more sonic" (2017, 23–24). She furthermore hints at a broader range of possible configurations, including (a) *coordination*, that is, one medium illustrating the other; (b) *parallelism*, which emerges when the two media are not deliberately coordinated but may be perceived as such; (c) *heterogeneity*, a dynamic relationship that is being constantly renegotiated; and even (d) *antithesis* and antagonism (cf. Smith 2017, 24). While the origins of these paradigms can be traced to historical avant-gardes, in the digital age, technologies are extending the rande of possibilities even further, as "[t]he relationship between words and sounds may also, in technologically based work, take the form of interactive variability, algorithmic synaesthesia or sonification" (Smith 2017, 24).

What unites the diverse musico-literary forms discussed in this volume and the intermedial constellations that they exemplify is, perhaps, the unique mediality of poetry itself. Though it is historically connected to *music* through its rhythmic structures and its "singability" (cf. von Ammon 2025), it incorporates the whole range of *sound*, emphasizing the materiality of oral speech (cf. Keylin 2025b) and may convey a variety of *listening* experiences (cf. Skoulding 2020; Keylin 2025a). The way poetry holds these sonic modalities in superposition provides a common thread that runs through the individual case studies. The chapters in Part I consider new forms of oral poetry – which was historically the most prominent musico-poetic genre – investigating both transformations of traditional practices and innovative phenomena like dub poetry or rap. The focus of Part II is the relationship between poetry and art music, in particular the ways in which prominent classical genres, such as the art song, are being reimagined by contemporary composers and poets. Part III is dedicated to the intersections between poetry and sound art, exploring how they engage with memory, community, and the environment, whether through digital audio archives, participatory sound performances, or multisensory poetic experiences. Finally, Part IV examines the phenomenology of the poetic voice across a range of performative and intermedial practices. With these four parts, this volume aims to bring diverse theoretical

and methodological trends together to address the intricate entanglements of poetry, music, and sound in the digital age and to restore poetry to the forefront of musico-literary research.

## Oral Poetry Between Tradition and Innovation

Oral poetry is arguably the oldest form of poetry – and at the same time, the oldest musico-literary form. Ruth Finnegan prefaces her landmark study *Oral Poetry* with the disclaimer that, by considering only the literary and sociocultural aspects of the art form, her book is only telling half the story – with the other half necessitating a musicological analysis of the same corpus (cf. 2017 [1977], xxii). Paul Zumthor illustrates the difficulty of defining a boundary between oral poetry and music by pointing out how African griots were described as professional musicians in eighteenth-century European travelogues, while the Arabic word for griots translates unambiguously as "poets" (1990 [1983], 142–143). "Ethnography would incline me to presuppose," he argues, "that every oral poetic genre is also a musical genre, even if the users fail to recognize it as such" (Zumthor 1990 [1983], 142). Although the relationship between text and music in oral poetry is not a static one, with individual cultural traditions and practices putting different emphases on the two components and weighing them differently, the relationship itself persists as one of the art form's defining traits.

This fundamental intermediality of oral poetry also makes it the art form most responsive to the evolving mediascape of "tertiary orality" that characterizes the digital age (cf. Heyd 2021; Have 2023).[8] On the one hand, it is easily propagated through both broadcast media and online audiovisual platforms, extending its reach beyond local and national contexts and engaging in multicultural exchange. On the other hand, new media are reshaping the aesthetic practice of oral poetry itself, offering new technological tools of composition and performance, as well as an extensive archive of musical and lyric practices to draw from. Russell H. Kaschula and Andre Mostert propose the term *technauriture*, defined as "the intersection of orality, the written word and digital technology"

**8** The concept of tertiary or digital orality is an extension, proposed by some authors (cf., e.g., Jensen 2006; Soffer 2010), of Walter Ong's theory of the "secondary orality," according to which the twentieth century audiovisual media have reinstated the sounding word as the main medium of communication, initiating a post-print culture (cf. 1982). The term digital orality has been used to refer to two distinct, yet connected, phenomena: the oralization of written language on digital platforms in the literalization of oral speech in audiovisual media (cf. Nobile 2019).

(2011, 3), to describe media-inflected forms of oral poetry in the digital age – for example, the audio recordings of African oral poetry distributed on the internet. At the same time, Kaschula also suggests that the term could be interpreted more broadly to include "rap, dub poetry, slam and contemporary Xhosa praises on radio, television, musically backed audio discs, CD-ROM and the web" (2004, 45). Although Kaschula and Mostert, coming from a literary studies perspective, do not consider the specifically musical aspects of technauriture, it is clearly in the musical dimension that the effects of new media on oral poetry are most strongly felt.

Most of the chapters in Part I of this volume deal with phenomena that could be categorized as technauriture. For instance, Gardy Stein's essay explores how contemporary West African artists with griot heritage are navigating the evolving mediascape to maintain and modernize their oral traditions. These "modern griots" are integrating the traditional elements of their art – both literary (including proverbs, praise songs, and storytelling) and musical (utilizing traditional instruments like the kora, balafon, and ngongi) – into contemporary music while utilizing digital platforms like Spotify and YouTube to reach global audiences. Their works thus extend beyond oral performance to include sonic (audio recordings), visual (music videos), and textual (lyric transcriptions) elements, ensuring the continued relevance of griot artistry.

In contrast to griot art, dub poetry – the subject of Rachel Bolle-Debessay's chapter – emerged comparatively recently, in the 1970s Jamaican reggae scene. A product of the age of secondary orality, it draws on African oral traditions, including griot art, and on modern popular music shaped by audio technologies in equal measure (cf. Martino 2010). Bolle-Debessay's study traces the evolution of dub poetry in the digital age through a comparative analysis of two poems: Linton Kwesi Johnson's classic "Street 66" (1980) and Roger Robinson's more recent work "Wheel and Come Again" (2015). Her analysis examines how the poetics of bass have developed as a foundational element in dub poetry over the decades, both in texts and performances. Bolle-Debessay presents the bass as a creative force shaping poetic rhythm, imagery, and embodied experience, and linking sonic vibrations to memory, resistance, and diasporic identity.

Importantly, the core components of technauriture include not just orality and technology but also the written word. Contrary to the common view that literariness necessarily comes after orality and supersedes it, oral poetry, as Finnegan points out, has always existed in a dynamic relationship with written literature, both borrowing from it and being borrowed from (cf. 2017 [1977], Ch. 5.4). Furthermore, a number of recent studies have successfully argued in favor of approaching pop music lyrics (cf. Bradley 2017b; Tontiplaphol and Klimchynskaya 2024; Schumacher 2025) and rap as literary genres (cf. Wolbring 2015; Bradley

2017a). Oral poetry in the digital age is similarly characterized by a culture of remixing and referentiality (cf. Stalder 2017, Ch. 2), as the phenomenon of "lit-hop" demonstrates – a genre of hip-hop music that draws on literary texts from the Western canon. In his chapter, Gregor Herzfeld explores how lit-hop artists are reimagining Edgar Allan Poe's poetry through hip-hop's rhythmic and performative conventions, creating a dialogue between historical literary forms and digital-era musical expression. He argues that these adaptations do not simply reference classical literature but engage in a form of creative dialogue that reshapes both the source material and the musical genre. The chapter also situates lit-hop within broader cultural and media landscapes, discussing its relationship to digital dissemination, its pedagogical applications, and the tensions surrounding race and authenticity in hip-hop subcultures.

A complementary process to the literalization of oral poetry is what Frieder von Ammon calls the re-peformativization and re-musicalization of literary poetry (cf. 2018). Over the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, genres and forms like jazz poetry, sound poetry, and musicalized spoken word were at the forefront of the gradual restoration of performative and musical qualities that poetry had historically possessed before the rise of print culture (cf. von Ammon 2018, 38) – a trend that is still continuing, well into the digital age. Cornelia Gräbner's chapter offers a compelling example of this phenomenon. The subject of her study is *Estuary* (2017) – a collaborative album between poet Seán Street and musician Neil Campbell that fuses spoken poetry, instrumental music, and singing. Through the interplay of voices, instrumentation, and field recordings, the work creates what Gräbner, drawing on Nina Sun Eidsheim, describes as a "thick event" (2015, 2) – an immersive, multisensory performance that resists its reduction into isolated poetic or musical elements. In this way, *Estuary* reconstructs the fluid and dynamic sonic environment of the River Mersey estuary in Liverpool, inviting audiences to engage with poetry as a vibrational and spatial experience rather than a static textual artifact. This mode of poetic-musical composition, which integrates improvisation and environmental soundscapes, is indicative of a broader trend in contemporary performance poetry: the dissolution of the boundaries between literary and oral traditions, and the embracing of the possibilities of modern audio media.

Taken together, the chapters in Part I reveal that oral poetry is a living, dynamically developing practice that is constantly reinventing itself, influenced by contemporary culture, digital technology, and evolving literary and musical traditions. Of course, the cases of contemporary oral poetry explored here are not exhaustive – nor are they meant to be. Further research could take a closer look at rap (cf. Wolbring 2015; Bradley 2017a) or pop music (cf. Bradley 2017b; Tontipla-

phol and Klimchynskaya 2024), or it could delve into the manifold multimedia practices of poets from the Global South that have been bringing local musico-literary traditions into dialogue with digital technologies and new media (cf. Ramazani 2025). The goal of this part is to offer a panorama of the diverse ways in which orality, literariness, and technology can become entangled in technauriture – not only as transformations of ancient traditions but also as completely new genres, or as the re-oralization and re-musicalization of literary poetry.

## After the Art Song

The art song – typically defined as a form of vocal chamber music composed for solo voice and piano or chamber ensemble[9] – is perhaps the most prominent representative of musico-poetic intermediality in Western modernity. In contrast to oral poetry, it is part and parcel of print culture. This applies not only to the poetic component of the art song, but to music as well, since – as Richard Taruskin argues – Western art music as a tradition is defined by its *writtenness*, by the fact that it is committed to paper in the form of a score (cf. 2011, Ch. 1). Crucially, writing allows for the functions that were typically fulfilled by the sole figure of the poet-musician in oral traditions to be divided up into the individual roles of poet, composer, and performer (cf. von Ammon 2025). Thus, rather than constituting the essential unity of oral poetry, the art song represents a "media combination" (Rajewsky 2005, 52) of two individually authored texts that are re-enacted and re-interpreted in each performance.

The minimalism of the art song as a musical form – mirroring the minimalism of poetry as a literary form – results in a relationship between voice, text, and music that can be described as intimate and intense (cf. Günther 2016, 345). These close interactions between text and music allow for heightened expressiveness, placing equal emphasis on the depth of the text and music, and exploring their interrelationship in a nuanced manner that enhances its reflective and inward-looking character (cf. Floros 1988, 36; Brinkmann 2004, 11). At the same time, as Lawrence Kramer observes, while "both music and poetry juxtapose elements that are referential, mimetic, or conceptual with purely formal patterns

**9** There is a range of opinion among musicologists on whether ensemble pieces can be included into the art song category (cf. Meister 1980, 13) or whether it should be reserved for songs "written exclusively for voice and piano" (Olson 2015, 1). Since this book deals with the musico-poetic forms of the digital age, which has redefined and reimagined many traditional genres, we have opted for the broad interpretation of the song genre.

that are largely independent of external meanings," what separates them is "a complementarity in the roles that the two arts assign to their connotative and combinatory aspects: each art makes explicit the dimension that the other leaves tacit" (1984, 5–6). In the art song, poetry and music thus "pull the voice in different directions" (Kramer 2017, 3), presenting it as both a source of poetic utterance and a musical instrument. As a result, "it is hard to separate the defamiliarizing of an utterance [in vocal music] from the destroying of it" (Kramer 2017, 8).

In the digital age, vocal chamber music is building on postwar avant-garde approaches to text and speech as musical materials, emphasizing their sonic and corporeal aspects over the semantics of the poetic utterance (cf. Nonnenmann 2016; Nonnenmann and Utz 2016). Instead of the delicate dialectic of defamiliarization and destruction inherent to the art song as Kramer describes it, such compositions lean heavily into deconstruction, disassembling texts into syllables and phonemes, and frequently manipulating the spoken or sung voice electronically – although, as Elena Ungeheuer notes, this does not render such musical speech meaningless but rather foregrounds other, non-semantic levels of meaning (cf. 2016, 85). As a counter-trend, recent years have seen a resurgence of the art song proper, with several major projects and festivals revisiting the genre and rethinking its relevance to contemporary culture. This can be framed as part of the broader phenomenon of postdigitality or nostalgia aesthetics, as the intimate combination of unamplified voice and solo instrument responds to the longing for authenticity characteristic of digital culture. However – as the example of Jennifer Walshe's *Tri Amhrán* discussed at the beginning shows – many contemporary art songs are making explicit use of digital technologies while still staying true to the art song form. In this regard, such projects parallel the "neo-semantic" turn in electronic literature – the move away from deconstructive practices that foreground digital manipulation toward more conceptual explorations of digitality (cf. Matter 2025; see also Cayley 2017).

The two chapters that open Part II directly engage with these two trends. Kira Henkel considers how text-music relationships have been reimagined in recent works that invoke the art song form, either explicitly or implicitly. Her two in-depth case studies exemplify two complementary interpretations of the art song: Eres Holz's *Sich einstellender Sinn* (2011) reflects its genre structure as a musical setting of a contemporary poem for voice and keyboard instrument, while Luxa M. Schüttler's ongoing cycle *Posthuman Songbook* (since 2018) offers a conceptualist reflection on the art song as a genre. A particular focus in both case studies is the use of digital tools – algorithmic composition, generative AI, and voice synthesis – and their impact on the text-music relationship.

Susanne Kogler's contribution complements Henkel's chapter in a sense, exploring the broader range of contemporary approaches to musical settings of po-

etry that cannot be reduced to the form of the art song. Analyzing the works of Austrian composers Elisabeth Harnik and Pia Palme, Kogler examines how contemporary musico-literary compositions both develop and reassess postwar avant-garde ideas, employing intertextuality and fragmented poetic structures to dissolve the linearity of traditional musical narration. However, contrary to the deconstructive ethos of twentieth-century art music, both composers foreground the semantics and symbolism of the text, framing composition as a site of poetic and political negotiation.

Another prominent twentieth-century phenomenon was the interpenetration of classical and popular music, resulting in a variety of "neo-classical" styles that, in the digital age, have also begun adopting the more avant-garde elements of New Music. A case in point is the oeuvre of Scottish composer Erland Cooper, discussed in Jakob Kingsbury Downs and Nicola Dibben's chapter. Cooper's album *Carve the Runes Then Be Content with Silence* is a three-movement concerto for a string ensemble drawing on neo-classical, ambient, and popular music idioms. Rather than setting poetry to music, the piece integrates archival audio recordings by Orcadian poet George Mackay Brown, emphasizing both the poetic and sonic qualities of the spoken text as auditory signifiers of the Orkney Islands and their history. Moreover, Cooper's decision to bury the master tape in Orkney soil before retrieving and digitally restoring it underscores his engagement with environmental aesthetics, turning the natural world into an active agent in the compositional process. These techniques make *Carve the Runes* a prime example of how musico-literary intermediality is being expanded in the twenty-first century, fusing historical poetic voices with contemporary digital mediation and posthumanist thought.

In the final contribution in Part II, Beata Kornatowska points to the reciprocity of the relationship between poetry and art music. The separation of the poet and composer roles brought about not only the practice of setting poetry to music but also of incorporating music into poetry – referencing musical forms, individual musical pieces, and musical experiences in general (cf. Scher 2004 [1982]; von Ammon 2025). Kornatowska analyzes these phenomena in contemporary Polish poetry by examining the prize-winning poems from the 2019 Chopin Poetry Competition. She identifies three principal strategies employed by the poets when dealing with musical material: (a) references to the literary mythos surrounding Chopin and his works, (b) "verbal music" (Scher 1968, 7) that evokes the composer's style through poetic imagery and rhythmic structures, and (c) poetic reflections on the experience of listening to Chopin in the twenty-first century. Furthermore, Kornatowska highlights the role played by digital media in shaping these poetic-musical interrelations, as many of the winning poems were

published online alongside audio recordings of their recitations, often accompanied by Chopin's music.

Owing to its fast and radical evolution over the past century, art music's intersections with poetry must be assessed against two different traditions: the classical form of the art song and avant-garde text-sound compositions. As the chapters in this part show, contemporary musico-poetic works, on the one hand, explicitly revisit and reimagine classical genres, and on the other, return to setting poetry proper to music, as opposed to utilizing text and language as sonic material. At the same time, their approaches to poetry differ significantly from the classical musical settings of poetry – and can be described as musical "non-settings," where the poetic text is not (necessarily) sung but might also be spoken, sampled from an archival audio recording, or even silent, incorporated into the score or the stage setting. This shift could be seen as a parallel to the move from "singability" (*Sangbarkeit*) to "speakability" in contemporary poetry, where musicality is no longer associated with the song form (cf. von Ammon 2025).

## Time and Space in Poetic Sound Art

In addition to reimagining traditional musico-literary forms, the digital age introduces a variety of practices and genres that recombine poetry, music, and sound in innovative ways, influenced by the new sonic forms and sound practices of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. As reflected in the title of this volume, one of its central goals is to explore the intersections of poetry and sound art. Despite being "an aggressively expanding art form" (Krogh Groth and Schulze 2020), the definition of sound art remains rather nebulous (cf. Engström and Stjerna 2009; Wong 2012; Maes and Leman 2017). In German scholarship, the category of *Klangkunst* is used in the narrow sense to refer to practices that emerge from the convergence of music and visual art – such as sound installation and sound sculpture (cf. Motte-Haber 1999; Engström and Stjerna 2009). Conversely, in Anglophone literature, the term "sound art" describes a broad and ambiguously defined corpus of works – not just gallery art but also audio-only pieces like field recordings – that explore the phenomenology of sound and listening. Sound art theorists contrast it with more analytical and structured approaches characteristic of art music, without, however, drawing clear boundary between the two arts (cf. Licht 2007; Engström and Stjerna 2009; Voegelin 2010). In the context of poetry studies, a further difficulty is distinguishing poetic sound art – as a media combination (cf. Rajewsky 2005) of text and non-musical sound – from sound poetry, a separate art form that foregrounds the sonic qualities of the text and speech itself,

often by technological means (cf. Matter 2025). This volume thus follows Sanne Krogh Groth and Holger Schulze in embracing this nebulosity as the defining trait of sound art, emphasizing that it "is not separated from phenomena outside the artistic work, the music culture or the art world" (2020, 4–5), in contrast to Western traditions of fine art and art music that stipulate autonomy of art. The main criteria bringing together the works discussed in Part III are, first, the fact that they cannot be reduced to established musico-literary forms and, second, their engagement with the experiential, medial, and cultural dimensions of sound.

Despite the relatively extensive, ever-growing corpus of research into sound art proper, its intersections with literature and, in particular, poetry remain underexplored. This may in part have to do with the phenomenological orientation of much of both sound art practice and scholarship, which prioritize experience over semantics (cf. Kim-Cohen 2009), thereby downplaying the role of language. Even Seth Kim-Cohen's iconoclastic book *In the Blink of an Ear: Toward a Non-Cochlear Sonic Art*, despite its forceful rejection of sound for sound's sake, promotes the more conceptualist works that approach sound as language, while relegating language-as-sound to the field of sound poetry and thus excluding it from the book's purview (cf. 2009, 155–157).

To an extent, literary sound art is explored by Claudia Benthien, Jordis Lau, and Maraike Marxsen as a special case of *The Literariness of Media Art* (cf. 2019, Ch. 3.1), particularly with regard to voice and speech. Their central proposition is that incorporating texts into media and sound artworks can function similarly to poetic devices in literature proper, defamiliarizing language and foregrounding its poetic function. The two works discussed in Holger Schulze's contribution rely on this very principle in their staging of archival documents. *Memory Loops* (2008) by Michaela Melián erects a sonic memorial to the Jewish victims of the Holocaust in Munich by transforming historical testimony into an immersive audio-poetic experience. The documentary texts are transcribed, poetically restructured, and voiced by actors, embedding them within a musical landscape that shapes their affective impact, and emphasizing an experiential mode of remembrance. In contrast, *Audio.Space.Machine* (2019) by Christian Wittmann and Georg Zeitblom takes a more ironic, performative approach, reworking Bauhaus texts and voices into a hyper-produced audioliterary soundscape. By restaging historical avant-garde material within a contemporary musico-poetic framework, the work distances itself from traditional historiography, instead offering a playful yet critical engagement with the Bauhaus legacy. Both projects that Schulze discusses exemplify how poetic sound art mobilizes archival material – not as static documentation, but as a dynamic, affective intervention into cultural memory.

At the same time, incorporating poetry into sound artworks does not just defamiliarize language through sound but also imbues the resulting intermedial works with the idiosyncratic aesthetics of sound art. The notion of the acoustic space – that is, space perceived by listening rather than by seeing – plays a key role in this context. In fact, many definitions of sound art emphasize its spatial organization in contrast to the temporal organization of music (cf. Engström and Stjerna 2009; Kahn 2014). Spatiality is important to the works Schulze discusses as well: listeners were able to access the recordings of *Memory Loops* from the streets and squares of Munich by calling a designated number to embed the historical experiences within the contemporary urban space, whereas *Audio.Space.Machine* was presented as a gallery installation in the form of spatialized binaural audio. However, acoustic space takes center stage in Pejk Malinovksi's poetry audiowalk *Passing Stranger*, the subject of Birgitte Stougaard Pedersen's chapter. This audiowalk takes the listener through East Village in New York, accompanied by recordings of historical and contemporary poets living and working in the area, as well as the voices of other key figures from the local art scene. Stougaard Pedersen situates the genre of the poetry walk at the intersection of contemporary audioliterary media such as the audiobook and radio montage on the one hand and, on the other, the sound art genre of the soundwalk – an "excursion whose main purpose is listening to the environment" (Westerkamp 2007, 49). She argues that audiowalks are both documentary and poetic, fostering multisensory engagement with the urban site through text, sound, and movement.

According to Brandon LaBelle, one essential consequence of the spatiality of sound is its relationality (cf. 2015). Since "sound is always in more than one place [. . .] multiplying and expanding space," he contends, "sound necessarily generates listeners and a multiplicity of acoustical 'viewpoints,' adding to the acoustical event the operations of sociality" (LaBelle 2015, xii). This sociality emerges irrespective of whether the space in question is physical or virtual as the materiality of sound establishes a spatiotemporal continuum of listening (cf. Keylin 2023, Ch. 4). In her chapter, Zoë Skoulding explores how digital technologies have reshaped poetic communities through sound. She discusses the online event series *Language is à Virus* (2020–2021) curated by Felipe Cussen and Martín Bakero, which brought together poets and artists from across continents in weekly Zoom performances and collective improvisations. Drawing on Jean-Luc Nancy's concept of *methexis* – participatory and "contagious" relationality (cf. 2007, 42) – Skoulding argues that these virtual gatherings did not merely replicate preexisting communities but instead produced new forms of sonic and poetic exchange. The improvisational sessions in particular functioned as a form of being-with, generating an auditory space where meaning emerged not only through lin-

guistic content but also through resonance, interruption, and shared sonic presence.

Furthermore, recent studies on ecological sound art have extended this acoustic relationality and the forms of co-presence that it enacts to encompass all kinds of nonhuman beings, whether animate or not. As Anette Vandsø argues, artworks that present recordings of natural soundscapes or data sonifications of ecological processes are "not merely referring to an already gained scientific knowledge" but rather "redistribute what can and cannot be heard and what can and cannot be recognized as significant sounds or even a voice in a political debate" (2020, 30, 32). Facilitating affective engagement by staging documentary materials in listeners' lifeworlds, sound artworks transform "the scientific matter of fact" into "a matter of concern" (Vandsø 2020, 39). The same can be said of ecological poetry, which makes use of the intimacy endemic to the lyric experience, staging the lyric "I" or "you" as non- or posthuman to provoke sympathy and identification with the perspectives of the nonhuman world (cf. Simecek 2019; Rustad 2025). Alison Maggart's contribution to this volume explores how these two threads intersect in *Bioluminescent Baby*, the first part of the collaborative transmedial project *In the Company of Insects* (2019–2020) by poet Fiona Benson and sound artists Mair Bosworth and Eliza Lomas. Maggart argues that the work's integration of poetry, expert entomologist interviews, music, and field recordings crafts an auditory landscape that unsettles the anthropocentric subject, inviting listeners to perceive the insect world from a posthuman perspective. By foregrounding insect communication and translating its rhythms into poetic forms, *Bioluminescent Baby* challenges the boundaries between human and nonhuman voices, turning listening into an act of ethical attunement. Through its layered sonic textures and interwoven poetic voices, the work articulates an eco-poetics and politics in which poetry becomes a site of multisensory entanglement with the natural world.

Poetic sound art thus brings poetry into dialogue with not (only) music but also broader auditory culture(s) and "acoustic territories" (LaBelle 2015), foregrounding the material and sociocultural contexts of listening to poetry. This may involve exploring how the spatial relationships between spoken text, environmental sounds, and the listener can contribute to the "excess structuring" (*Überstrukturiertheit*; Link 1977)[10] of poetry, imbuing data and documents with

**10** "That which seems to constitute the 'tone' [*Stimmung*] in poetry is based on the fact that the way poetic texts are constituted tends to layer plural levels of meaning on top of each other, i.e., multiple partial structures in the manner of a multi-vocal musical movement. In this way, a synthetic texture is created that we will call excess structuring" (Link 1977, 245; translation quoted from Benthien et al. 2019, 115).

poeticity; or how it can evoke a sense of place and community in both physical and online environments. Poetic sound art reinforces the intimacy and intersubjectivity of lyric poetry (cf. Simecek 2019) by drawing on the relationality inherent to sound to effect new ways of relating across space and time, and of attuning to natural, urban, or digital ecologies.

## Poetics of the Voice

A common thread running throughout the chapters discussed above is the central role of the voice in its mediation of text and sound – be it the singing voice of contemporary vocal music, the speaking voice in a sound installation or an audiowalk, or the voice that oscillate between speech and song, which is characteristic of oral poetry and rap. This is hardly surprising given the importance of voice to poetry in general. *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* suggests that "it is difficult to imagine how one would go about discussing poetry in particular if we were forbidden to use the terms *voice*, *speaker*, and other vocal terms" (Richards 2012, 1525), owing both to the oral origins of poetry and to the strong association of voice and subjectivity in the Western lyric tradition. This duality informs the equivocal meaning that the figure of the voice assumes in poetry discourse: as an embodied reading voice, realizing the prosodic and phonetic features of the text, and as a metonym for the author's individual style or the poem's speaker (cf. Nowell Smith 2015, 3; Keylin 2025b). However, recent studies of the poetic voice argue that its superposition of the material and the symbolic is not a problem of ambiguous terminology but a core feature of the phenomenon itself (cf. Nowell Smith 2015; Simecek 2023). According to Karen Simecek, "the voice of the poem [. . .] is informed by the poet's own uniqueness of (literal) voice" with both providing "meaningful context to the words uttered. Consequently, hearing and experiencing words as voiced brings the affective to bear on the cognitive" (2023, 25–26).

The study of the poetic voice is gaining a renewed urgency in the digital age. According to Steven Connor, audio media and voice technologies – voice assistants, screen readers, dictation software – have brought about a "panophonic" condition, where "everything speaks" and voice is no longer a necessary index of human- and subjecthood, dissociated "from its own force of vocality" (2012, 4). In response, a variety of sound poetry practices have emerged that explore these new technologies and the new forms of vocality that accompany them (cf., e.g., LaBelle 2010; Górska-Olesińska 2018; Keylin 2024). The growing popularity of both traditional poetry readings and slam and spoken-word practices – decidedly min-

imalistic, with the voice only amplified but neither electronically altered nor accompanied by any kind of musical soundtrack – can likewise be framed in this context as a reaction to the panophonic condition, an attempt to return to the poetic human voice as a marker of authenticity and sincerity (cf. MacArthur 2016; see also Weidman 2015). Another trend that can be observed is the emergence of new "techniques of the voice" (Neumark 2010, xx) – idiosyncratic ways of speaking and vocalizing informed by the audio technologies of digital culture, such as the previously mentioned practice of beatboxing or the sibilant whisper of ASMR.[11]

In addition to shaping the sound of the poetic voice, digital culture also extends its reach to a global audience that is not limited to the immediate copresence of a live event, as seen in the example of oral poetry. Social media has made the audio and video recordings of both professional and amateur poets performing their own poetry so widely available that, as Skoulding notes, "[r]eading any contemporary poetry now [. . .] is difficult to separate fully from performance" (2020, 20). Proliferated through media technologies, the poet's voice "might imprint itself in the ear in such a way that it changes all subsequent silent readings" (Skoulding 2020, 21), making it necessary to develop new interdisciplinary methodological apparatuses for the study of the poetic voice. Valentina Collona's chapter presents one such project informed by the digital humanities, phonetics, and musicology. Collona offers exemplary analyses of poems recorded by contemporary Spanish poets Francisca Aguirre and Ángeles Mora, responding to the challenges of poetry research in the digital age but also making use of the tools offered by digital technology. The *Voices of Spanish Poets* project builds on her previous work on Italian poetry, utilizing instrumental phonetics to examine how prosody, rhythm, and intonation shape the poetic voice and revealing evolving trends in poetry reading styles. Situating Aguirre's and Mora's recordings within the historical context of Spanish poetry readings, Colonna highlights how both poets exemplify a contemporary trend toward a more natural and spontaneous reading style, which sets itself apart from earlier, more theatrical declamation.

Whereas Colonna's project applies digital technologies to the study of the poetic voice, Rebecka Dürr and Vadim Keylin argue for the importance of considering voice in the research of digital poetry. Their chapter investigates the impact of digitality on the association between the voice and authorship by considering a

**11** The acronym ASMR stands for "autonomous sensory meridian response" – "a tingling, static-like sensation across the scalp, back of the neck and at times further areas in response to specific triggering audio and visual stimuli" (Barratt and Davis 2015, 1). Audio and video performances aimed at provoking this reaction have become a viral online phenomenon (cf., e.g., Klausen 2019).

rather unique case study. In 2022, German poet Monika Rinck read a poem generated by a neural network trained on Rinck's own poetry as part of a lecture she gave at the Swiss poetry festival Neonfische. Applying methods from speech communication studies, Dürr and Keylin conduct a comparative analysis of Rinck's readings of the AI-generated text and one of her own poems. They highlight the ways in which the poet performs her authorship and (dis-)identification with the poem's speaker(s) on the phonetic, prosodic, and intonational levels. The chapter makes the case for a "sonic turn" in electronic literature research, highlighting how paying attention to the voice and sound can reveal crucial insights into and produce innovative perspectives on the field's key problems, which would be overlooked when taking a text-centric approach.

In contrast, at the center of Eleonora Fisco's contribution is a phenomenon that can be described as postdigital: the genre of "spoken music." Exemplified by the art collective Mezzopalco, this practice challenges traditional distinctions between spoken-word poetry, rap, and musical composition. Unlike conventional poetry readings or recorded spoken-word performances, spoken music integrates the voice as both a textual and sonic element, often in complex interplay with beatboxing, singing, and rhythmic delivery. Fisco explores the extent to which this genre is shaped by a unique intermediality, where poetry is conceived of not only as text but as a dynamic, vocal event that adapts to different media, from live performances to recorded albums and audiovisual productions. Fisco's analysis suggests that, in the digital age, the poetic voice is no longer confined to the author's presence but extends into technologically mediated forms, blurring the lines between poetry, music, and digital culture.

As in the other Parts of this book, these studies do not produce one single narrative of the poetic voice in the digital age but rather reveal its multifaceted interactions with digital technologies and digital culture. Whereas literary studies has in the past been content with focusing on the metaphoric dimension of the voice in silent print texts, the panophonic condition and the proliferation of audio media in the digital age make it essential to address the vocal dimension of spoken, sung, or otherwise sounded poetry. As the contributions in this final part show, the "vocal turn" does not just mean taking the materiality and performativity of the voice into account as poetic devices but also reframing and reconceptualizing the practice of poetry in light of its vocality.

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