

Poetry, Music, and Sound Art

Lyrik, Musik und Klangkunst

Poetry in the Digital Age

Edited by Claudia Benthien

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Volume 6

Poetry, Music, and Sound Art

Lyrik, Musik und Klangkunst



Recent Medial Correlations

Neuere mediale Konstellationen

Edited by

Rebecka Dürr, Kira Henkel, and Vadim Keylin

DE GRUYTER

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Vorwort

Es ist mir eine besondere Freude, als Leiterin des mit einem ERC Advanced Grant geförderten Forschungsprojekts ‚Poetry in the Digital Age‘ an der Universität Hamburg das Vorwort dieses Sammelbands zu schreiben. Das Forschungsprojekt wurde in drei interdisziplinären Teilprojekten durchgeführt, von denen jedes eine Tagung verantwortet hat und einen zweisprachigen Sammelband herausgibt. Nach den Bänden *Lyrik und zeitgenössische Visuelle Kultur / Poetry and Contemporary Visual Culture* (2023), herausgegeben von Magdalena Elisabeth Korecka und Wiebke Vorrath, und *Audioliterary Poetry between Performance and Mediatization / Audioliterale Lyrik zwischen Performance und Mediatisierung* (2024), herausgegeben von Marc Matter, Henrik Wehmeier und Clara Cosima Wolff, wird hiermit kurz vor Projektende auch der dritte Band, *Poetry, Music, and Sound Art: Recent Medial Correlations / Lyrik, Musik und Klangkunst: neuere mediale Konstellationen*, vorgelegt. Er beruht auf der gleichnamigen Tagung, die im Juni 2024 im Warburg-Haus der Universität Hamburg stattgefunden hat. Die Tagung ebenso wie der vorliegende Band wurden von Rebecka Dürr, Kira Henkel und Vadim Keylin gemeinsam konzipiert. Alle drei konnten ihre unterschiedlichen fachlichen Expertisen in die Veranstaltung und die Buchpublikation einbringen. Besonderer Dank gebührt Rebecka Dürr, die bereits zum Zeitpunkt der Tagung nicht mehr Wissenschaftliche Mitarbeiterin im Forschungsprojekt war.

Das ERC-Projekt (Laufzeit 2021–2025) hat Analyseparameter für die facettenreichen aktuellen Lyrik-Formate entwickelt, die von populärkulturellen Werken bis zu elaborierter Sprachkunst reichen, indem es die neuen Formate und Genres, aber auch die Formen und Räume ihrer Präsentation und Performance untersucht hat: von der Theaterbühne bis zu Social Media, von der Schriftseite bis zum urbanen Raum, von Spoken Word bis zu experimenteller Lautpoesie – erschaffen von menschlichen oder posthumanen Autor:innen. Die interdisziplinären Forschungen im Projekt galten den folgenden Leitfragen:

- Welche Faktoren haben zur aktuellen Popularität von ‚Poetry‘ beigetragen?
- Wie können neu entstandene Genres systematisiert werden und welche Methoden und Theorien werden benötigt, um sie zu untersuchen?
- Wie unterscheiden, interagieren oder vermischen sich in ihnen Unterhaltungskultur und ‚Hochkultur‘?
- Welche – ästhetischen, kulturellen, sozialen, politischen – Funktionen kommen den neuen Modi der Präsentation von Gedichten zu?

Als eine ‚Poetik neuer Formen‘ hat das Projekt die Diversität, das mediale Spektrum und die Verbreitung zeitgenössischer Lyrik untersucht. Seine Forschungsergebnisse zielten auf eine erweiterte Definition von Lyrik und setzten sich zum

Ziel, die Art und Weise zu verändern, wie Wissenschaft, Lyriker:innen und die Öffentlichkeit diese literarische Gattung im digitalen Zeitalter betrachten. Dafür waren Expertisen unterschiedlicher Fächer gefragt, viele davon waren im Forschungsprojekt, aber auch in dem hier vorliegenden Band vertreten: Literaturwissenschaft, Performance Studies und Medienwissenschaft, Sound Studies, Musikwissenschaft, Sprechwissenschaft, Psychologie, Soziologie, Kunstgeschichte, Visual Culture Studies, Kunst- und Filmwissenschaft.

Dieser Band nimmt die Untersuchungsfragen des Teilprojekts 2 zu ‚Music (alization) and the Lyric: Recent Medial Correlations‘ auf und bringt dessen Forschungen in einen Dialog mit weiteren Ansätzen und Gegenstandsbereichen. Das Teilprojekt hat sich dem Verhältnis von zeitgenössischer Lyrik, Musik und gesprochener Sprache gewidmet. Im Unterschied zu bisherigen Studien, die oft mit der Gattungstheorie der Lyrik sowie literaturhistorischen Praktiken argumentieren, wurden hier nicht zuletzt die Auswirkungen der Digitalisierung auf musikalische Formen von Lyrik erforscht. Relevant waren insbesondere hybride Gattungen zwischen Musik und Lyrik – sowohl neuere Transformationen traditioneller Genres wie z.B. das Kunstlied, als auch innovative Formen des digitalen Zeitalters wie poetische Klanginstallationen und Soundwalks. Ferner hat das Teilprojekt Rhythmus und Melodie in der Lyrik in Bezug zu musikalischen Strukturen untersucht. Stimme und Vokalität in gesprochener und gesungener Poesie sowie Performancestile zwischen Sprechen und Singen – wie Rap oder digital manipulierte und synthetische Stimmen – waren von besonderem Interesse.

Die Forschung von Postdoc Vadim Keylin mit dem Arbeitstitel *Digital Oral Poetry: Voice and Subjectivity in Algorithmic Culture* hat sich unterschiedlichen Formen digitaler mündlicher und performter Poesie gewidmet. Sein Korpus umfasst u.a. Sound-Poetry mit synthetischer Sprache oder Audio Deep Fakes, Performances von KI-generierter Poesie sowie Überschneidungen von Poesie und digitalen Klangpraktiken. Die Studie ist an der Schnittstelle zwischen Sound Studies (insbesondere Voice Studies), Literaturwissenschaft und Digital Culture Studies angesiedelt. Rebecka Dürrs Dissertation *Zur sprechkünstlerischen Gestaltung von Live-Lyrik. Lesung, Slam und Rap* widmet sich der Untersuchung von performativer Lyrik und führt sprechwissenschaftliche mit literatur- und theaterwissenschaftlichen Ansätzen zusammen. Der Schwerpunkt ihrer Untersuchung liegt auf der Analyse und systematischen Beschreibung von gesprochenen Äußerungen und deren Ausdrucksmerkmalen, ergänzt durch Close Readings des performten Textes. In ihrer laufenden Dissertation mit dem Titel *Intime Zwischenräume. Zur Beziehung von Lyrik und Neuer Musik in der zeitgenössischen Liedkunst* untersucht die Doktorandin Kira Henkel, wie zeitgenössische Kompositionen Lyrik und Vokalmusik in Beziehung setzen – insbesondere im kreativen Dialog mit dem

Genre des Kunstliedes. Ihre Arbeit verbindet musikwissenschaftliche, literatur- und kulturwissenschaftliche Perspektiven. Die drei Studien erweitern und ergänzen den hier vorgelegten Band um vertiefte Perspektiven im Forschungsfeld von zeitgenössischer Lyrik, Musik, Sound und mündlicher Sprache. Sie werden ebenfalls in der von mir herausgegebenen Buchreihe *Poetry in the Digital Age* erscheinen.

Claudia Benthien

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Vadim Keylin

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)

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 postdigitality⁴ 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 range 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-performativization 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 ensemble⁹ – 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 reimaged 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 myths 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 pre-existing 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 audio-walk, 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 co-presence 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 Colonna’s chapter presents one such project informed by the digital humanities, phonetics, and musicology. Colonna 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 re-conceptualizing the practice of poetry in light of its vocality.

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Part I: **Oral Poetry between Tradition
and Innovation**

Gardy Stein

Jeliya goes Spotify: From Griot Oral Traditions to Multimodal Representations of Contemporary West African Music and Languages

Introduction

For centuries, griots¹ have dominated the musical traditions of West African cultures, combining the professional skills of poets, instrumentalists, singers, and mediators (cf. Hale 2007). With colonial conquest and the subsequent independence of modern nation-states in Africa, these traditional lyricists faced the challenge of adapting to a rapidly changing socio-political environment – a challenge their children have successfully mastered today.

Taking an interdisciplinary approach (combining musicology, cultural studies, sociolinguistics and history), this chapter will introduce the musical oeuvre of three outstanding West African artists hailing from griot families, namely Sona Jobarteh (Gambia), Tiken Jah Fakoly (Côte d'Ivoire), and Habib Koité (Mali). Not only were they introduced to composing, songwriting, and performing music from an early age, they also managed to transcend the local and transmit their craft to a global audience and can thus be considered true “modern griots” (Sajnnani 2013).² How their contemporary art form relates to the original elements of a griot's craft, which frames are evoked in the multimodal representation of their songs, and how international audiences react to their music and the use of African languages in their lyrics are questions this chapter seeks to answer.

After a short literature review and a presentation of the methodology, I will give some background on the important role griots played in Mande society. The subsequent section will show how West African spoken art forms transitioned

1 The different theories to explain the etymology of the term “griot” are discussed in Hale (1997).

2 For a critical discussion of the inflationary usage of the phrase “modern griot” especially in US Hip Hop, see Sajnnani (2013).

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from oral delivery to multimodal representations, which today can be heard (sonic representation, as in recordings), seen (visual representation, as in music videos), and read (textual representation, as in CD booklets or on internet platforms). Next to an analysis of both their lyrics displayed on digital streaming sites such as Spotify and the accompanying music videos on YouTube, this section will also look at recipients' comments on social media to evaluate the impact these artists' compositions have. I will then summarize the findings and discuss how the artists' choices to sing in their respective indigenous languages can contribute to an international appreciation of the depth and richness of African musical and poetic output. Finally, the chapter will close with a conclusion and a suggestion for future lines of inquiry into this understudied field.

Literature Review and Methodology

Griots are described as praise singers, poets, or traditional troubadours who provide wit, wisdom, education, and musical entertainment at social gatherings and special events. Their function usually surpasses the mere singing and playing of instruments, however, since “they have served as respected advisors to rulers, as tutors for princes, and as diplomats in delicate negotiations” (Hale 1997, 250). They are referred to as *jeli* in Mali (*jeliw* in plural), *djely* in Guinea, and *jali* in Gambia; in the Pulaar language, they are called *gawlo*. In Mande languages, the word *jeliya* is used to describe the artistry of a griot, and the closely related term *jelikan* designates a griot's speech as social practice and function (cf. Jansen 2000; Roth 2008).

One of the first publications about griots was a Ph.D. thesis of Knight in 1973. Many more publications followed, including the important emic perspectives of Camara (cf. 1976) and Keita (cf. 1988), who described how the griots Banzouma Sissoko and Massa Makan Diabaté successfully installed their *jeliya* tradition in post-independence Mali. Focusing on the diplomatic aspect of *jeliya*, Jansen (cf. 2000) cites many examples from the West African Mande population, and Roth (cf. 2008) treats the often-misunderstood aspects of monetary and goods exchange involved (other detailed descriptions of griot cultural practices can be found in Hale 1997; Counsel 2009; Ebine 2019).

While Keita calls his paper “Jaliya in the Modern World,” it was already written in 1988, thus preceding the internet age; the same is true for several subsequent studies that discuss the impact of broadcast media on the griot tradition (cf. Panzacchi 1994; Hale 1997; Henrich 2001). Other sources do include internet research, but mostly write about “modern griots” outside of Africa, especially in

Afro-American cultural contexts (cf. Sajnani 2013); contributions that focus on the visibility of griot musical practices in the digital sphere and their reception on social media are rare. Translations and analyses of griot lyrics are available for older orally transmitted texts (cf. Innes 1974; Pfeiffer 1997), but not for contemporary songs. This chapter attempts to close these gaps and presents examples of how jeliya cultural practices transcend their local context, finding new audiences around the world.

As for the theoretical frame underlying this work, I align with Williams (cf. 1958), who stated that culture cannot be studied in isolation, but that it is interwoven with the lived everyday experience of the people, which is why listeners' views and reactions are included in this study. The underlying frames of cultural performances may, according to Bailey, "be coded in the text itself and therefore discoverable"; others, however, "remain non-lexical, internalized, incorporated, embodied" (1996, 16) and are harder to decipher. The present analysis is concerned with the former, the lexical texts used in music lyrics. Aware of the critical discussion concerning the concept of "tradition" (cf., e.g., Phillips and Schochet 2004), I will use the terms "tradition" or "traditional" to refer to precolonial times, while "modern" will be used to refer to the post-millennial present.

Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were used in a triangulation of data. The choice of the three case studies is based on an attempt at geographic diversity (the artists hail from Senegal, Mali, and Côte d'Ivoire) as well as the international success of the artists, including album and ticket sales. Having examined their musical output of the last 20 years, I chose one song from each artist based on the following criteria: a) written in an indigenous African language, b) listed on Spotify, including a transcription of the lyrics online, and c) having an accompanying music video on YouTube.

Using *Musixmatch* as a source, the song lyrics were downloaded and checked for spelling errors. The translation provided by internet sources was verified by consulting existing translations or native speakers. To analyze the transcribed lyrics and music videos, I used a combination of *Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis* (MCDA) as suggested by Machin and Mayr (cf. 2023) and *Framing Analysis* as developed by Entman (cf. 1993).

An important focus of the analysis was the reaction of the audience to the frames evoked by the lyrics and videos. To do so, the comments left by viewers and listeners under the respective YouTube videos were used as data sources. Scraping a randomized sample of comments with *Octoparse*, they were sifted (identical comments by the same person or consisting of emojis only were excluded) and coded with *MaxQDA 2022* using *In Vivo Coding* (cf. Saldaña 2013, 91). To ensure anonymity, no names are mentioned in the analysis, except those of the artists.

Griots in West African Society and Culture

With the current re-calibration of cultural studies, any research into aspects of a culture other than one's own requires careful study of the historical and social circumstances in which cultural products emerge. Therefore, this section provides some insights into the emergence of griots in West Africa.

Their origins are obscure but seem to lie in the Mali Empire (ca. 1230–1470), according to the narrative of Soundiata Keita and his “original” griot Balla Fasseké Kouyaté, which forms one of the oldest and core pieces in the epic narrative tradition. Hale (cf. 1997) points to pre-Islamic times, while Bird (cf. 1976) suggests an even older origin, claiming that griots evolved from priest-bards of hunters' societies (cf. Counsel 2009, 31).

From the beginning, there was a close relationship between the Mande ruling classes (called *horon*) and the griots, who come from a class of artisans called *nyamakala*. Every noble household had one or more griots who became highly specialized experts on the genealogy of “their” houses, reciting praises whenever the *horon* appeared in official functions in public or received important guests (cf. Counsel 2009, 30).³ In turn, the nobles would provide for the griot and his family with presents or money in an exchange relationship called *jatiga*. Next to this praise singing function, the griots kept the history of their people alive in epics presented at social gatherings (the most famous of which is the Soundiata epic mentioned above). They also acted as masters of ceremony for occasions such as birth, marriage, or burial, mediators in disputes, and counselors in diplomatic and political affairs (see also Camara 1976 for a detailed description of these functions).

Their occupation with language and communication made them “masters of the word,” venerated but also feared by their people. Even after the introduction of the Arabic script during Islamization, “communication via the spoken word is a highly valued commodity [. . .] often more prestigious than the written” (Jansen 2000, 42). Innes differentiates between three modes of delivering these words during a griot performance: the speech mode (in which the griot addresses the audience in his own words or narrates an event), the recitation mode (which uses formulaic expressions to praise patrons or share stories and observations), and the song mode (which uses fixed phrases and may refer to special incidents; cf. 1974, 15–16). Instruments such as the *bala* (balafon) and the *ngoni*⁴ were used among

³ See Hale (1997) for an overview of the different subgroups and categories of Mande griots.

⁴ The *ngoni* is a string instrument described as “the oldest and most ubiquitous instrument in the griotworld” by Hale (1997, 268).

the Mande griots to accompany these presentations; the *kora* is a later addition, believed to have been invented in the seventeenth century (cf. Charry 2023).

The griot profession is not necessarily gender-based (female singers are called *griottes*), but the majority are male. Players of instruments used to be exclusively male, and aspiring griots learned to play the *kora*, the *ngoni*, and the *bala* during their apprenticeship that lasted many years and was hereditary (cf. Counsel 2009, 40).

Modern Griots: Adapting to a Changing Environment

With the advent of colonialization, the fine-grained equilibrium of Mande society was permanently disturbed when kings and nobles lost their traditional domains of power and income and often could not afford griots anymore. The latter were forced to travel and seek other patrons, moving from royal families to the new elites, such as merchants or administrators (cf. Counsel 2009, 53). After World War II, griots turned to the emerging political parties, “praising the highest bidder” (Jansen 2000, 56), which resulted in a loss of prestige.

Instrumental music became more important than historical knowledge (cf. Jansen 2000, 54), and the acoustic guitar, which reached West Africa in colonial times, was quickly adapted by local musicians and griots. They often used it in the style of *ngoni* playing, thus creating a link between the old and the new (cf. Counsel 2009, 67). Equipped with these instrumental skills, many young griots migrated from rural to urban areas in search of subsistence (cf. Jansen 2000, 55). Here, they found new possibilities to play their music for entertainment, and first compositions emerged that went beyond epic narratives and praise songs. Radio diffusion (until today one of the most used medium in West Africa) and professional recordings facilitated the spread of these new compositions, bringing griot artistry to loudspeakers all over the world.

After independence, many West African states celebrated their new status with pride in their own traditions, and musicians and orchestras used historical events, griot epics, and folktales as inspiration for contemporary artistic expression. Griots were also responsible for the composition of several West African national anthems. Banzoumana Sissòko composed the one for Mali, Guinea’s anthem is a composition by griot Alifa Yaya, and Ghana held a competition which was won by griot Jali Nyama Suso (cf. Counsel 2009, 67).

During the 1960s and 1970s, griots also appropriated foreign styles in their musical expressions, experimenting with Jazz and Blues and collaborating with

international singers. With the boom of this “world music” (cf. Bohlman 2002) on global markets, a new class of musicians appeared: young artists who did not come from griot families but established themselves quite successfully on the emerging scene of popular music (Salif Keita, hailing from a horon family, is a well-known example, cf. Harris n.d.). At the same time, local music kept diversifying, assimilating Reggae in the 1980s and Hip Hop in the 1990s.

Another important factor in the global spread of African music was the increased migration during the last three decades. Not only did the migrants bring their musical preferences to the respective host countries, but the rapidly growing diasporic communities also constituted a grateful audience for artists from “back home” (cf. Dorsch 2004, 2006, 2017). The advent of the internet and social media offered further opportunities to quickly gain international fame, and these developments led Jansen to observe that the “griot tradition has adapted very effectively to the commercial and political exigencies of modern African life and its global linkages” (Jansen 2000, ix).

Coming from a traditional line of griot families, “modern griots” have established themselves in the contemporary music business. Oumou Sangaré and Kandia Kouyaté, for instance, became well-known first locally, and in the suite of their careers even outside of their native country Mali (cf. Liman 2021, 892). While their reputation as skilled *jelimuso* (griotte) secures them a steady income in their home country, and international performances add to that, they cannot rely on music sales alone. Although their albums exist in millions of copies throughout West Africa, those are often pirate copies and do not generate income for the artists.

The following case studies introduce artists hailing from griot lineages who have successfully managed to transcend the local and reach a global audience through their albums and performances. In contrast to the two examples cited above, they are not professional griots in the narrow sense of the word but use elements of their jeliya heritage in their contemporary creations, thus representing a class of musicians that adapt traditional forms of griot artistry to the demands of modern popular music.

Sona Jobarteh – “Gambia”

Sona Jobarteh is the first professional female kora virtuoso hailing from a griot dynasty. Her grandfather Amadu Bansang Jobarteh is a widely renowned kora master who taught her cousin Toumani Diabaté his craft. Learning to play the kora from her father, Sona studied Western Classical Composition at the Purcell

School of Music, adding to that a degree in cello, piano, and harpsichord at the Royal College of Music in London (cf. The African Guild 2024). As singer, composer, and instrumentalist, she has since been working on commissions and on her solo career, touring the world. She is also a social activist, speaker, and lecturer in Mande music, history, and social anthropology, and she has founded *The Gambia Academy* in 2015, a school that places a heavy focus on African arts and music (cf. The African Guild 2024). Next to the soundtrack of the movie *Motherland* in 2010, she also released her debut album, *Fasiya*, in 2011. The cover depicts her holding a kora, and all songs are in Mandinka, her paternal language.⁵

Her next album *Badinyaa Kumoo* was released in 2022 (African Guild Records), including the song “Gambia,” which was released in 2015 on the occasion of Gambia’s 50th Independence Day. Written in Mandinka, it focuses on the positive properties of The Gambia (full lyrics and translation in Appendix 1.1): *peace, calm, development, progress, and humanity* are terms used to describe it, and the singer claims in the first verse that “happiness is on all faces.” By constantly repeating the country’s name in combination with these exuberant words, Jobarteh uses the praise pattern typical for griot recitations, as described by Innes: “praises consist mainly of names of ancestors [. . .] and of phrases which refer to some incident in the hero’s life” (1974, 16). In the case of “Gambia,” the country takes the place of invoked ancestors, and the characteristics cited may be seen as a hero’s achievements:⁶

- (1) ‘The home of peace – everyone say Gambia’

kayira suu ali a fo Gambia
 peace home 2pl 3sg say Gambia

According to Pfeiffer, another typical pattern for griot praise singing is the use of elaborated speech and aphorisms (cf. 1997, 155), an example of which can be found as well:

- (2) ‘The truth is, if you forget your ancestors, you forget yourself’

toɔnaa i jina- i bonsuɔ la I jina- i faɲo le la
 ta ta
 truth 2sg forget 2sg origin POST 2sg forget 2sg self EMPH POST

⁵ Mandinka belongs to the Western branch of the Mande language family, comprising about 1,5 million speakers in The Gambia, Senegal, and Guinea Bissau (cf. Creissels 2024).

⁶ Here, as well as in the other two case studies, the examples are taken from the original lyrics of the song (see Appendix 1) and are presented in a simplified interlinear translation that does not constitute a full linguistic analysis; a list of abbreviations is provided in Appendix 2.

While using the first-person singular in verses one and four, thus relating her personal experience, the singer switches to the inclusive first person plural in the bridge and in verse three to create a feeling of togetherness. She also directly addresses fellow Gambians in the chorus and in verse two: “wherever you are, don’t allow yourself to forget your homeland Gambia.”

The official video of the song was uploaded on November 19, 2015 and has 28,674,899 views at the time of writing. It was shot exclusively in The Gambia and, with min. 5:37, is the longest and most elaborately produced video among the three case studies. From the 90 scenes, 42 show the singer walking, singing, in interaction with others, or playing instruments (acoustic guitar and kora). The remaining 48 scenes show everyday scenes on the market or in workshops, nature and animals, children playing, and African dancers performing (a crew called *The Fab Team*). The video also features Musafilly Jobarteh and Mamadou Sarr on percussion, singer Sekouba Bambino from Guinea, and Lamin Suso, a famous kora maker, as well as students of the ABJ Music School (cf. Jobarteh 2015).

With this strong focus on West African people, arts, and crafts, the video reinforces the message brought across by the lyrics, portraying The Gambia as a beautiful country. The dominant frame evoked by words and visuals is the pride that Gambians feel toward their roots and culture.

Tiken Jah Fakoly – “Tata”

Hailing from Odienné in Côte d’Ivoire, the real name of singer Tiken Jah Fakoly is Doumbia Moussa Fakoly. While most online sources claim that he comes from a griot family (e.g. Bax 2016; Fischer 2024), Kouame writes that, “hailing from the caste of blacksmiths, his [Tiken Jah Fakoly’s] parents were not supportive of the life of a professional musician of which he dreamed” (2023, 548; transl. GS), without citing sources, however. In 1987, Fakoly founded a band he called *Djelys*, meaning ‘griots,’ which quickly became known in his country and beyond. Releasing their first self-titled album in 1993, a string of solo releases followed, of which *Mangercratie* (1996) and *Françafrique* (2002) are among the most successful and politically outspoken ones, causing the Ivoirian government to ban the album and the singer to seek exile in Mali (cf. rfi musique 2021). Until today, Fakoly has released 16 albums, the most recent *Acoustic* in 2024. His first language Dyula, a Western Mande language closely related to Bambara, is used in many of his songs, but to reach an international audience, he also sings in French and English.

The song chosen for analysis here is “Tata,” released on Fakoly’s album *Dernier Appel* (2014, *Barclay*). It is sung in Dyula and takes a first-person perspective, presenting the true love story of the singer and Tata, who fell in love but were not allowed to marry. In the chorus of the song, Tiken asks Tata for forgiveness (full lyrics and translation in Appendix 1.2), while verse one describes what Tata had to suffer at the hands of her father “because of me,” as the singer repeatedly states. In verse two, he explains that men from far came to marry Tata, but she refused because “it is me she wants”:

- (3) ‘People who came from far wanted to marry Tata’
sangawuli na na ku ye Tata furu la
 famous.people come AFF contain for Tata marriage POST
- (4) ‘Tata said it is me she wants’
Tata ko kale be n le fɛ
 Tata say swear COP 1sg EMPH want

Verse two seems to correspond to the song mode of griot epics described by Innes, which “may also take the form of interpolated reflections on, or summaries of events described in the speech mode” (1974, 19). If verse one is considered to be the description of the event, then verse two summarizes her resolve to not marry anybody else. While example (3) is the first of four instances of men asking Tata for marriage (coming from far-away places like France and America), example (4) shows her repeated refusal.

In the outro, Fakoly praises Tata for being upright and true to her words and, using the conditional tense, claims, “if I had been like you, we would have left together.” Here, the praise formulations so typical of jelian epics are intensified by repeating the word *kankelentigi* [person who keeps her word; trans. GS] seven times. In verses one and two, as well as in the chorus and the outro, the name of the “hero” of the song, Tata, is repeated 28 times in total.

A video for the song was uploaded on May 10, 2018 on the artist’s YouTube channel and has 3,414,445 views to date. With a duration of min. 4:28, it has a total of 52 scenes, most of which play in the past (34 scenes). After starting in the present, depicting a woman who finds a photo of a young couple she shows to the singer, the camera zooms in and we experience a cut to the past, transitioning from the black-and-white of the picture to the scene photographed, coming alive in vivid colors. The following scenes alternate between the young couple on the one hand, happy, smiling, and singing in natural African surroundings, and the girl in her home compound on the other, repeatedly scolded and scoffed by her father. The video shows how the couple first met and fell in love, how the girl’s

father then chases away the singer from his compound, instead receiving visitors who come to ask Tata's hand in marriage, offering him money. At the end of the video, the young man steps up to a rope as if to hang himself, shakes his head and turns away. We then see him at rehearsal with other musicians, followed by a cut to present-day Tiken on stage in front of a big audience (cf. Fakoly 2018).

There are several frames evoked here: while the visuals highlight the beautiful natural surroundings, again conveying a sense of pride in the singer's African origins, the plot focuses on how true love overcame arranged marriage; also, a frame of guilt and regret for what happened in the past is discernible.⁷

Habib Koité – “Wari”

Habib Koité grew up with 17 siblings, learning to play the *ngoni* as part of his griot heritage. Displaying a natural talent for it, he accompanied his griotte mother whenever she performed. In 1978, he started studying music at the National Institute of Arts (INA) in Bamako, and through his outstanding talent, he was made conductor of the school band in just six months. Graduating as top of his class in 1982, the school hired him as guitar teacher (cf. Contre-Jour Belgium n.d.).

Koité's compositions are unique because of his pan-Malian approach, which includes musical styles from different ethnic groups. He founded his own band, *Bamada*, in 1988, winning several prizes in the following years and embarking on their first international tour in 1994. The following year, they released their debut album, *Muso Ko*, followed by seven others until the latest, *Kharifa*, in 2019. Most of his songs are in Bambara, one of the most widely spoken Mande languages. The song “Wari” [money; trans. GS] is featured on Koité's album *Baro* (2001, *Contre-Jour*). The video, which also includes French subtitles of its lyrics, was uploaded on January 8, 2014, to the artist's YouTube channel and has 835,532 views to date (cf. Koité 2014).

Turning to the lyrics first, the singer expresses his point of view on money. Like a letter, Koité addresses his son, Tidjani. He talks about the difficulties of life without (enough) money, mentioning emic African knowledge through proverbs and similes, as in the following (a full transcription and translation of the lyrics is included in Appendix 1.3):

⁷ In an interview with *Les Femmes d'Ici* (2022), Fakoly recounts the true story behind the song: how his teenage lover Tata died after waiting for him for ten years.

shakers and balafon. The opening and closing scenes work like a thematic bracket, giving a special spin to the narrative. When Koité enters the room, he picks up a piece of chalk, paints a “T” on a blackboard (probably signifying “Tid-jani”) and starts singing. The boy, who was immersed in a video game, stops playing and listens attentively. At the end, he goes to the blackboard, picks up the chalk, and adds a few strokes to make the “T” look like an African mask. Although different interpretations are possible, I understand it as a sign that the message of the song, framing traditional African values as more important than money, has been passed on and understood by the next generation.

Impact and Public Reactions

The artists described above have gained considerable following over the course of their years active. In Tab. 1, some social media numbers that bear proof of this standing are given:⁹

Tab. 1: Social media followers.

	Sona Jobarteh	Tiken Jah Fakoly	Habib Koité
Spotify	797,161	411,570	155,059
YouTube	33,300	558,000	20,800
Instagram	77,396	226,250	3,197 ¹⁰
Facebook	169,328	3,355,671	143,578

In the following section, some reactions to the artists’ songs, expressed by listeners via YouTube comments under the corresponding music videos, will be analyzed to demonstrate the international appeal of their music.

As can be seen from Tab. 2, which lists the code frequencies of the analyzed comments, the category with the most comments is “Positive Evaluation”, including praise of the song, artist, or music video. Coded as “Identity Expression”, the next largest category is the one in which commenters tell personal stories, mention “Africa”, or ask others for a reaction, followed by the category “Emotion”

⁹ The respective social media pages were visited on September 9, 2024; numbers may have changed since then.

¹⁰ The low number of followers on Instagram can be explained by the fact that the artist is not active there (no post at the time of writing this article, November 2024).

Tab. 2: Code frequency of YouTube comments (full code book in Appendix 3).

Codes	Sona Jobarteh – Gambia	Tiken Jah Fakoly – Tata	Habib Koité – Wari	Total
Positive Evaluation	56.1% (370)	35.9% (173)	35.9% (33)	576
Identity Expression				536
– Storytelling	22.9% (151)	16.4% (79)	10.9% (10)	240
– Africa	35.5% (234)	1.2% (6)	0	240
– Touch base	2% (13)	6.2% (30)	14.1% (13)	56
Emotion				485
– Love	43.2% (285)	11.2% (54)	7.6% (7)	346
– Touching	4.2% (28)	7.3% (35)	1.1% (1)	64
– Tears	3.2% (21)	7.3% (35)	0	56
– Goosebumps	0.6% (4)	2.9% (14)	1.1% (1)	19
Origin				481
– Africa	25.6% (169)	7.3% (35)	0	204
– Europe	10.9% (72)	0.6% (3)	1.1% (1)	76
– South America	8.2% (54)	1% (5)	1.1% (1)	60
– North America	6.5% (43)	0.8% (4)	1.1% (1)	48
– Asia	5.3% (35)	0.4% (2)	0	37
– Gambia	3.6% (24)	0	0	24
– Mali	0.3% (2)	0.4% (2)	17.4% (16)	20
– Côte d'Ivoire	0.1% (1)	2.3% (11)	0	12
Artist Address				366
– Gratitude	13.3% (88)	11% (53)	16.3% (15)	156
– Blessings	8% (53)	8.7% (42)	5.4% (5)	100
– Pride	7.6% (50)	1.2% (6)	4.3% (4)	60
– Respect	3.2% (21)	6% (29)	0	50
Reference to Lyrics				261
– Discussion	10% (66)	20.1% (97)	9.8% (9)	172
– No Understanding	8.5% (56)	6.4% (31)	2.2% (2)	89
Action Call	7.3% (48)	2.9% (14)	5.4% (5)	67
Critics	0.8% (5)	1.5% (7)	1.1% (1)	13
Total comments (N)	660	482	92	

(485 occurrences in total). Whenever commenters spoke directly to the singers, this was coded as “Artist Address”, including “Gratitude” (156 comments), “Blessings” (100 comments), “Pride” (60 comments), and “Respect” (50 comments). The category coded as “Origin” shows that commenters come from all over the world, most prominently from Africa (204), Europe (76), South America (60), North America (40), and Asia (37).¹¹ The three countries of The Gambia, Mali, and Côte d’Ivoire were coded separately, as they represent the countries of origin of the respective performing artists.

Of special interest are the comments coded as “Reference to Lyrics.” 172 commenters in total discuss or relate to the lyrics in some way (subcode “Discussion”): while around 10% of the commenters refer to the content of the songs “Gambia” and “Wari,” this number is doubled (20.1%) under Fakoly’s song “Tata.” The reason for this higher engagement might be the emotional charge this song carries, as many commenters seem to be aware of the tragedy described in footnote 7 and express their compassion in phrases like “may her soul rest in peace” or “a true and unconditional love” (Fakoly 2018; transl. GS). Next to those who commented on the content, a group of commenters mentioned the *language* of the lyrics, admitting that they do not understand it or asking for a translation (89 in total, coded as “No Understanding”):

- (8) “I don’t know the lyrics of this song, but I am totally in love with it!” (@benimakwela2356 2022, under “Gambia”)
- (9) “It is in moments like these i [sic!] wish to speak the language sung.” (@engratiabanks9033 2021, under “Tata”)
- (10) “SVP quel est le dialecte, j’ai envie d’apprendre, c’est juste magnifique” [“Please, what is the dialect, I want to learn it, it’s really beautiful”; trans. GS] (@radibenjellounlilia2471 2021, under “Tata”)
- (11) “In English Please?” (@terristokes7446 2016, under “Wari”)

This hints at both the appeal these artists have outside of their own linguistic group and their important role as cultural ambassadors, a thought picked up in the discussion below.

¹¹ No IP-addresses were analyzed for these results. Comments were coded as “Origin” only when commenters explicitly mentioned where they are from, e.g. “I’m from France.”

Discussion

The three case studies presented have shown that the artists use several elements of their griot heritage in their contemporary works. Thus, Sona Jobarteh has acquired great skill in playing the kora, an instrument traditionally associated with griots, and uses the form of praise singing in her lyrics; Tiken Jah Fakoly, in the example cited, has chosen a “song mode” form for narrating the past, embedding it into griot instrumental traditions with the use of balafon, drums, and kora. Habib Koité, finally, includes word play and proverbs in his lyrics, as well as clapping and call-and-answer singing, a feature found in audience interaction during griot performances (Pfeiffer 1997, 12). All three artists employ visuals that are exclusively filmed in Africa, thus expressing their love and appreciation for their origins and evoking a frame of pride. In response to this frame, 240 commenters acknowledge “Africa” in their comments (234 under “The Gambia” and 6 under “Tata”, see Tab. 2).

A direct opposition to this frame can be seen in early Afrobeats music videos, which often show Western metropolis, airplane travel, swimming pools, jewelry, and sports cars. Ugor, for instance, mentions “material wealth and consumption; [. . .] transnational mobility and hybrid selves; high-class fashion, accoutrements of postmodern life [. . .]” as dominant themes in the lyrics and videos of Nigerian pop music (2021, 135). While these material symbols seem of paramount importance for Afrobeats artists to portray a modern, postcolonial, and affluent identity, the (re-)turn to spiritual values and precolonial musical traditions seems to set apart the case studies presented in this chapter.

All three artists further have in common the use of their respective indigenous language in their songwriting. Both Fakoly and Koité (or their management) have added their lyrics to *Musixmatch* so that they are displayed on music portals such as Spotify, as shown in the screenshots in Fig. 1 and Fig. 2.

Additionally, both artists included a French translation in the subtitles of their respective music videos. Although Jobarteh has not uploaded the lyrics to her song on Spotify, they can be found on several online platforms such as lyricstranslate.com.¹² Audibility and visibility of African languages thus enhanced, this cultural performance practice has a direct impact on listeners. While speakers of these languages feel gratitude and pride, as many of the YouTube comments show, those who do not understand it express curiosity and love (see examples (8)–(11) above). As comment (8) illustrates, not knowing a language does not deter listeners from loving a song; the fact that these artists choose to sing in their re-

12 <https://lyricstranslate.com/de/gambia-gambia.html-2> (accessed September 21, 2024).

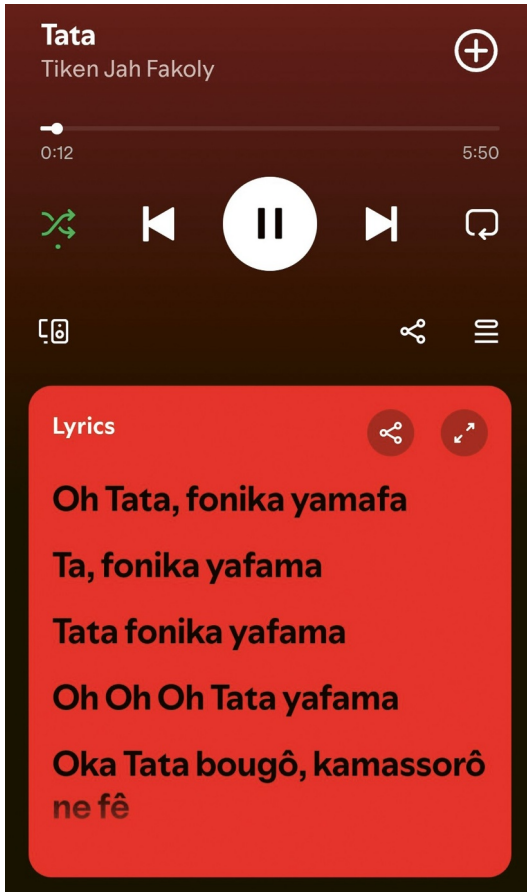


Fig. 1: Screenshot – Tiken Jah Fakoly, “Tata,” Spotify, 14.05.2024.

spective African languages thus contributes to the appreciation of alternative modes of expressions in foreign speech communities. The use of indigenous languages in song lyrics may be seen as an important decolonial practice that raises the prestige and reach of the idioms used, as Carter-Ényì and Carter-Ényì remark: “[S]inging in indigenous African languages has become an intentional act of decolonization and a recognizable signifier of Pan-African identity for African audiences” (2019, 63). This, in turn, can foster positive attitudes toward minority languages and multilingualism, thus contributing to the maintenance of African languages (cf. Yekini-Ajenifuja and Okùnádé 2013).

By transcending African audiences through international performances and the diffusion of their music on platforms such as Spotify, these artists grant visi-

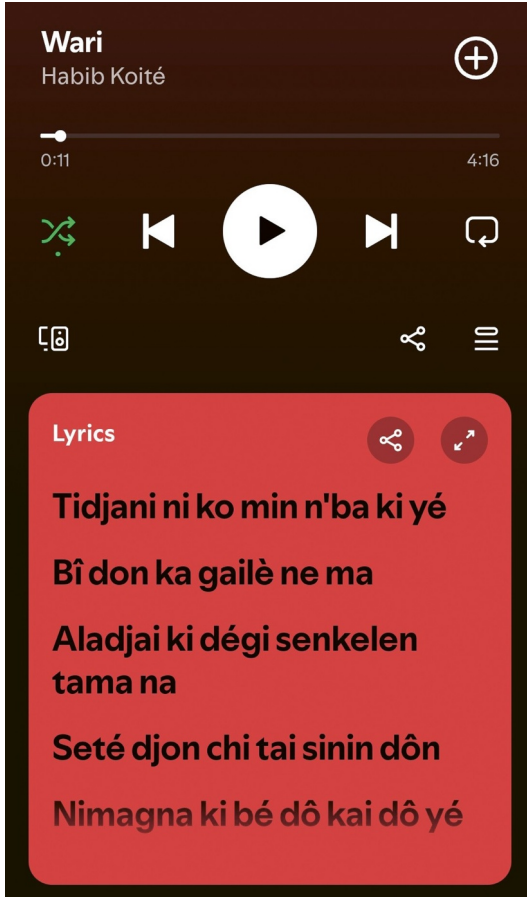


Fig. 2: Screenshot – Habib Koité, “Wari,” Spotify, 14.05.2024.

bility to African languages¹³ and globally underrepresented voices, foster cultural exchange, and connect different generations through music that unites both traditional and modern elements of composition and presentation.

¹³ Portals, such as <https://m.afrikalyrics.com/public/lyric-languages>, provide links to song lyrics in several African languages online.

Conclusion and Outlook

Until today, artists descending from griot lineages use traditional praise lines in their songs or in live performances (cf. Counsel 2009, 129), and the typical arrangement patterns and stylistic devices of jeliya art can be found in modern compositions. The three case studies have shown that, next to the typical vocal performance, different jeliya elements such as word play and proverbs (“Wari”), praise (“Gambia”), narratives of the past (“Tata”), and traditional instruments are used. At the same time, the artists have used modern techniques to bring the message of their songs across to an international audience, e.g. by producing music videos and uploading their songs, including lyrics and translation, to streaming sites such as Spotify. This makes their music accessible through several modalities, including auditory modality (hearing the song on Spotify, radio, or MP3/ CD), visual modality (watching the music video or reading the lyrics online), and somatosensory modality (experiencing the music during live concerts or while dancing to it).

While traditional griot performances are also multimodal (people are present to hear, see, sing, and dance along), a new dimension is that of unlimited repeatability because the songs are recorded. Thus, the audience can replicate the listening or watching experience as often as they like. This, then, brings us to the ways in which these presentations differ from those of traditional griots. First, the modern audience is physically present only during live concerts. All other listening or watching instances are experienced in the absence of the performing artist (at home, in the car, or with headphones). Thus, the audience’s feedback (if there is any at all) is considerably delayed via social media, whereas, during griots’ live performances, it is immediate. The comments on YouTube stem from listeners all over the world and concern both the content of the specific music videos and the personalities of the artists, as well as the individual emotional reactions to their music.

Another difference lies in the flexibility of the lyrics. Traditional griots usually stick to a core subject, but deliver it differently every time they perform, adapting to the audience or including references to recent events. The songs of modern artists, however, are static. Once recorded, they remain the same whenever they are played, although artists may vary some elements slightly in live performances.

Finally, while traditional griots performed within their own speech community, modern artists transcend these linguistic limits. Through the global diffusion of their songs, indigenous African languages are transported to listeners who do not understand their lyrics and might search for a translation online. At the very least, these artists’ cultural practices raise the audibility and visibility of minority languages, adding to their international prestige, which in turn might foster positive attitudes and slow down language shift; they also provide researchers with a rich corpus for analysis. Although some articles point to the possibility of preserving languages through

music (cf., e.g., Ledwaba 2021 on SiNdebele; Siririka 2022 on Oluzemba; Vermillion 2022 on Garifuna), more case studies and a thorough scientific treatment of the subject are necessary to suggest possible lines of action in the future.

Through the international success of Afrobeats, “some vocabularies have become generic among societies outside the original speakers’ environment” (Yekini-Ajenifuja and Okùnádé 2013, 236), and it is now quite common to hear audiences in big Western metropolis sing along to, e.g., Yoruba lyrics. The more elaborated poetic lyrics of griot artists are less popular on the dancefloor, but those who do listen to them do so with concentration, as the reactions in the YouTube comments suggest. However, more research is needed to analyze and explain the stylistic devices used in both traditional and modern griot lyrics. The problem is that there are few specialists fluent enough in the respective African languages to perform such studies, and few African linguists are sufficiently well versed in poetics and literature studies. The solution seems to lie in an interdisciplinary collaboration of experts from both fields or the training of native speakers, so that oral modes of presentation and lyrics in African languages can be documented and analyzed lest the beauty and richness of indigenous African poetry is lost.

Appendix 1.1: Lyrics and Translation: Sona Jobarteh “Gambia”

Verse 1:

Kayira ye a loo	peace built it ¹⁴
Tenkungo ye a beng	calm brought it together
Yiriwaa ning nyaatotaa le ye a jiyaa	development and progress hosted it
Hadamayaa	humanity
Seewo ye nyaadaalu beng	happiness is on all faces
N na banku kendemaa le mu, Gambia	my good country Gambia

Verse 2:

I be daa-wo-daa	wherever you are
I kana song muumee	don't allow yourself
Ka nyina i faasuwo la, Gambia	to forget your homeland Gambia

¹⁴ The lyrics and translation were originally taken from <https://lyricstranslate.com/de/gambia-gambia.html-2> and have subsequently been corrected with the help of Katrin Pfeiffer (personal communication).

(continued)

Toonyaa (ning) i nyinata i bonsungo la I nyinata i fango le la	The truth is, if you forget your ancestors, you forget yourself
Bridge:	
N si nganiyaa Nte nganyiaata n na banku le la N si nganiyaa, N si nganiyaa Ali nga naa kafu nyooma, nga nyoo muta N si nganiyaa Wo le mu nyaatotaa (ti) ning n na fang-sotoo	we are proud we are proud of our country we are proud, we are proud let us come together and unite we are proud this is our progress and our independence
Chorus:	
Gambiankoolu lee Nying ne mu banku nyimaa ti Gambiankoolu lee Nying banku kayiramaa Gambiankoolu lee Nying ne mu moolu la banku ti Gambiankoolu lee Nying ne nyongo mang siyaa	People of the Gambia (lit.: Where are the Gambians?) this is a beautiful land People of the Gambia this is a peaceful land People of the Gambia this is the land of our people People of the Gambia there is nothing that compares to this land
Verse 3:	
A neemata wo le ye a saabu Moolu ye a buunyaa A barakata wo le ye a tinna Moolu mang nyanna, Nying banku nyimaa fayi laa Aaaaaaaaaaaaaa banko dingolu Ali nga naa kafunyooma	It is blessed, this is why people honour this country It is blessed, this is why people should not abandon our beautiful country children of this land let us come to together
Verse 4:	
Toonyaa m mang nimisa Nying banku dingyaa la muumee Ning n taata duniyaa kono Nying bankoo la diyaa m be a fo la Gambia, nyong te	the truth is I don't regret to hail from this country at all wherever I travel in this world I shall tell of the wonders of this country there is nowhere that compares to Gambia
(Chorus)	
Gambia le ma, Gambia le ma M be kuu ma la (repeat) Kayira-suu, ali a fo Gambia Neema-suu, oohhhoo Gambia Hadamayaa-suu, ali a fo Gambia Baadingyaa-suu, oohhhoo Gambia...	About Gambia, about Gambia all say The home of Peace. . . everyone say "Gambia" The home of Blessings. . . oohh "Gambia" The home of Humanity. . . everyone say "Gambia" The home of Family. . . oohh "Gambia"

Appendix 1.2: Lyrics and Translation: Tiken Jah Fakoly “Tata”

Chorus:

Oh Tata, foni ka yafa n ma	Oh Tata, I beg you to forgive me ¹⁵
Ta, foni ka yafa n ma	Ta, I beg you to forgive me
Tata foni ka yafa n ma	Tata, I beg you to forgive me
Oh Oh Oh Tata yafa n ma	Oh oh oh Tata forgive me

Verse 1:

Oka Tata bugɔ, kamassɔɔ ne fe	they have beaten Tata because of me,
Oka neni kamassɔɔ ne fe	they yelled at her because of me
Oka Tata djebe, kawa kunkɛ neye	they have hurt Tata because of me
Oka neni kamassɔɔ ne fe	they blamed her because of me.
Oh Tata, fonika yafama	Oh Tata, I beg you to forgive me
Oh oh oh oh tata yafama	Oh oh oh Tata forgive me
Oka Tata bugɔ kamassɔɔ ne fe	they have beaten Tata because of me,
Oka neni kamassɔɔ ne fe	they yelled at her because of me
Oka Tata djebe, kawa kunkɛ neye	they have hurt Tata because of me
Oka neni kamassɔɔ ne fe	they blamed her because of me
(Chorus)	

Verse 2:

Sanga wolu nana, kuye Tata furula	People who came from far wanted to marry Tata
Tata ko kalɛ be nelefe	Tata said it is me she wants
Ameriki kalu nanan kuye Tata furula	People who came from America wanted to marry Tata
Tata ko kalɛ ye nelefe	Tata said it is me she wants
Bo Faransi kalu nanan, kuye Tata li furula	People who came from France wanted to marry Tata
Tata ko kale ye nelefe	Tata said it is me she wants
Ameriki kalu nanan kuye Tata furula	People who came from America wanted to marry Tata
Tata ko kalɛ ye nelefe	Tata said it is me she wants

¹⁵ The lyrics were transcribed by the author based on the respective Spotify lyrics entry (<https://open.spotify.com/intl-de/track/6Nuf4dy4COQATWSsWfhTtc>); they were translated by the author based on the French subtitles provided under the YouTube-video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iVVvVaet84Y>).

(continued)

 Outro:

Ma Tata kankelentigi	My Tata, true to her words,
Awa bamusso kankelentigi	Awa's mother is worthy
Tata kankelentigi	Venerable Tata
Tata kankelentigi	Honest Tata
N'gile keni kankelentigiye	You had only one word until the end
Ninetonkake kankelentigiye	If I had been like you
Ninetonkake kankelentigiye	If I had been like you
Antunbeta yunfe	we would have left together
Chorus (2x)	

Appendix 1.3: Lyrics and Translation: Habib Koité “Wári”

Tidjani ni ko min n'ba ki ye	Tidjani, I'll do everything you want for you ¹⁶
Bi don ka gɛlɛn ne ma	but today, times are hard for me
Aladjɛ ki dege senkelen taama na	you should try to learn to walk on one leg
Sete jon ci tɛ sinin dɔn	C.T., nobody knows what tomorrow will be like.
Ni manya ki bɛ dɔ kɛ dɔ ye	if you want to do something for yourself
Adɔn, dɔ kɛ dɔ ye son'na nyeni ma	my son, know that you will suffer
Nyeni fana fura ye hɛɛɛ ye	the only cure for suffering is a moment of happiness
Hɛɛɛ bi la nyina nyeni kɔ	happiness will make you forget the suffering
Den mirila fa tɛ se dɛɛ ko la	the child thinks that his father cannot fail
Fa tɛ fantanya kisi den'ni ma	no father ever wishes poverty for his son
Den ko, a ye ne dɛmɛ den ko la	ah this story of the child, help me with it!
Tidjani jon ci tɛ sinin dɔn	Tidjani, nobody knows what tomorrow will be like.
Ni mamin ko bi kunkolo yi dimin na	in our days, if you have a simple headache
(Ko fu ye)	(Tell them!)

¹⁶ The lyrics were transcribed by the author based on the respective Spotify lyrics entry (<https://open.spotify.com/intl-de/track/1PVTG8C4XY9e76QGallMu3>); they were translated by the author based on the French subtitles provided under the YouTube-video with the help of Ba Hawa Fofana (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=34cvzIHpiF0>).

(continued)

Ni CFA mugan tɛ sipirini tɛ dila fu	if you don't have 100 CFA you won't get aspirin for free
Misiriman sigile saraka deli la siraba dala	the beggar who asks for alms by the side of the road
Ni se tun bɔ ye o na kɛ dow ma jigiya ye	if he was rich, somebody else could count on his help
Nin wari ko	when it comes to money,
Cɛ bɛ kanyan ni dɔ ye	I think everyone has a right to it.
Ni mamin ba fɛ ka kɛ jɔn ye dunuya	but if you want to become a slave to life,
I ka jarabi wari la	be the lover of money
Wari tigiya ne ba fɛ ni jɔnya ye	but I would rather be rich than be a slave
Jɔn bɛ fama ka nyɛni wari ye	the slave rarely suffers when he is rich
Hali ka dan i dahirime ma	even if you limit yourself to a minimum of food
Tilela tɛ dun ni ma CFA billet da finye'na	you won't eat breakfast if you don't take out your money
Kamalan gulu'len duruni kɛɛ la paranti'ya	the young person who hangs at the side of public transport as apprentice
Jɔn-maya wale tɛ i dahirime nyini cɛ	there is no such thing as a bad (slave) job when you look for your daily bread, my friend
Kuma kɔɔ dɔ ko wari tɛ se bange la hɛɛɛ la	an old proverb says that money doesn't give you happiness
O tanw ka tɛnye ye wari bɛ ma bɔ nɔɔla ko ye	this is not our truth – money can take away many worries
Ni se tun bɛ nye na yiri-nin turu Mali fan bɛ	if I had the power, I would go plant trees all over Mali
Fan bɛ yiri'mɔ ye CFA billet ye	and the fruits of these trees would be money bills
Nin wari ko (Ko fu ye)	when it comes to money, (Tell them!)
cɛ bɛ kanyan ni dɔ ye (Ko fu ye)	I think everyone has a right to it. (Tell them!)
Nko nin wari ko (Ko fu ye)	I say, when it comes to money (Tell them!)
cɛ bɛ kanyan ni dɔ ye (Ko fu ye)	I think everyone has a right to it. (Tell them!)

Appendix 2: List of Abbreviations

AFF	affirmative particle
CFA	currency in Mali (<i>Franc de la Communauté Financière Africaine</i>)
EMPH	emphatic particle
FUT	future tense
COP	copula
NEG	negation
pl	plural
POST	postposition
sg	singular

Appendix 3: Code Book YouTube Comments

Code	Subcode	Content	Example
1. POSITIVE EVALUATION		Praising song, lyrics, video or artist	“Fascinating music!” (HK)
2. IDENTITY EXPRESSION			
	2.1. Personal story	Storytelling of personal past, present or future	“My dream is to return back home after 35 years.” (SJ)
	2.2. Africa	Hailing Africa / Africans	“I love Africa.” (TJF)
	2.3. Touching base	Asking for answers / comments	“Qui l’écoute en 2021?” (HK)
3. EMOTION		Expressing emotions	
	3.1. Love		“Love you my Gambia sisters and brothers!” (SJ)
	3.2. Touching		“Trop touchant!” (TJF)
	3.3. Tears		“This music made me cry.” (SJ)
	3.4. Goosebumps		“Ça donne des frissons.” (TJF)
4. ORIGIN		Stating country of origin	
	4.1. Africa		“Love from Ethiopia.” (SJ)
	4.2. Europe		“Tienes una fan en Madrid.” (HK)
	4.3. South America		“Depuis Haïti” (TJF)

(continued)

Code	Subcode	Content	Example
	4.4. North America		“Love from San Diego” (SJ)
	4.5. Asia		“Love from Hong Kong” (TJF)
	4.6. Gambia		“We the Gambians” (SJ)
	4.7. Mali		“depuis le Mali” (HK)
	4.8. Côte d’Ivoire		“la musique de chez nous” (TJF)
5. ARTIST ADDRESS			
	5.1. Gratitude	Thanking artist	“Merci papa Habib” (HK)
	5.2. Blessings	Blessing artist	“Que Dieu vous protège” (TJF)
	5.3. Pride	Proud of artist	“Am so proud of you” (SJ)
	5.4. Respect	Respect to artist	“Big respect!” (TJF)
6. REFERENCE TO LYRICS			
	6.1. Discussion of lyrics / video		“Le chanson là est plein de conseils.” (HK)
	6.2. No understanding / Translation request		“I don’t speak your language but I love this song.” (SJ)
7. ACTION CALL		Share, stand up, make a change	“Africains réveillés vous unissez vous” (TJF)
8. CRITICS		Expressing dislike or critical views	“Tenemos un presidente que no nos permite la libertad” (SJ)

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Rachel Bolle-Debessay

Music and Literary Imagination: The Creative Impulse of Sonic Vibrations in Dub Poetry

When you go [to Aba Shanti I Sound System] the bass was [sic!] so loud that it would wash you and you feel like “oh, there’s something that happened to me in there” and people talk about that kind of idea of bass by vibrational wash. So I found that quite interesting. I want to get into words.

(Robinson in Coll 2024)

In *The Great American Songbooks: Musical Texts, Modernism, and the Value of Popular Culture*, T. Austin Graham’s observation indicates that “of all the arts, poetry and music may have the longest-standing and most intimate association with one another” (2013, 34). The sonic aspect of a recited poem frequently serves as the analytical foundation upon which this convergence is acknowledged. The sound of poetry suggests musical analogies that are discussed as the musicality of the poetry. Yet, in discussing these similarities, experts have historically been unable to agree on what musicality is, what its components are, and how it should be measured, as noted by Mary Louise Serafine (cf. 1988, 10). Her comments, originating in 1988, highlights a persistent challenge in the field. Since then, interdisciplinary research that traverses the boundaries of sound studies and musicology as well as performance and literary studies, examining the various interactions between music and poetry, has expanded significantly (cf. Moten 2003; Meta 2011; Mackey 2015; Reed 2021, to name just a few studies highly relevant in the context of this article). This chapter contributes to the extension of that interdisciplinary field.

Alongside offering theoretical tools to appreciate the literary imagination created by music, this chapter provides a novel analysis of such intermediality by examining the creative impulse provided by the bass. Using two dub poems by Linton Kwesi Johnson (hereafter LKJ) and Roger Robinson as case studies, I argue that bass functions as a significant element in shaping both their texts and the performances of those texts.

I will draw thematic comparisons with LKJ’s poem “Street 66” (1980) to demonstrate how bass continues to animate and invigorate new poetics, as evidenced in Roger Robinson’s more recent work “Wheel and Come Again” (2015). In my article “Low Frequencies and Poetic Innovation,” I provided a detailed analysis of LKJ’s poem in relation to music (cf. Bolle-Debessay 2022). By reading “Wheel and Come Again” in the echo of the analysis of “Street 66” proposed in this article, I

aim to show that the creative impulse of bass is not an isolated phenomenon found solely in LKJ's poetic innovations. Instead, through its repetition across different poetic works, I argue that bass and its creative impulse should be recognized as an additional element in the established toolkit of Afro-diasporic aesthetics. I will use spectrograms to analyze Robinson's poem in its sonic environment.

Thinking Through Sound

My investigation of the creative power of the bass takes place in the Afro-diasporic context, more specifically in Jamaica and the West Indian Afro-diaspora. It aligns with the term known as Bass Culture and its musical practices deeply rooted in low frequencies, such as reggae but also ska, dub, jungle, drum and bass, garage, dub-step and grime. In this context, bass becomes "a musical signifier invested with the same types of resonance associated with 'swing' in jazz or 'clave' in Afro-Cuban music – a musical signifier of a Jamaican cultural ethos" (Veal 2007, 60). At the same time, I position dub poetry within literary traditions that critically and creatively engage with sound. My analysis operates in a "web of filiation" (Gates 1988, xxii) between texts, wherein "sound is used to signify between genres and across wide swaths of time" (Stoevers 2016, 18).

Bass, low frequencies, and vibrations are terms that can be interpreted in various ways. In this essay, they are used interchangeably to refer to a sound with a particular kind of vibration. This includes sounds produced by bass instruments such as the bass guitar, double bass, and subwoofers in music systems. In the acoustic spectrum, the measure of which is frequencies, the number of oscillations or cycles per second of a sound wave (in Hertz), the sonic qualities referred to as bass occupy the lower end of the spectrum. Due to their longer wavelengths, low frequencies differ from higher frequencies in their capacity to travel further and penetrate physical barriers (such as bodies, floors, and walls) more easily. Under approximately 30 Hz, sound is felt by humans rather than heard. Here, I focus on the impact of low frequencies created by the sound of the bass to argue for a poetic inspired by the physical encounter with these sonic vibrations. In an interview, Roger Robinson addresses this physically immersive dimension: "also the idea of a sound bath. I don't know. Have you ever heard about sound baths? Sound baths [. . .] it's a kind of new age thing where they hit gongs and stuff like that. I actually feel that dub in a dancehall works in a similar way, it is like a sound bath, you know?" (Robinson in Bolle-Debessay 2024). I contend that the audio recording of the poem becomes a space where the central place of the

bass found in Jamaican sound systems is (re)presented by strategic signifying.¹ Digital sound is used to (re)produce the immersive dimension of this live sound system. There exists an interdependence between the recorded poem and the liveness of the event, whereby the centrality of low frequencies produced by a pre-dominant bass is digitally (re)produced in the performed poem. Moreover, to evoke this live context, where bodily experience with bass vibrations is most palpable, poets choose a poetic language that brings the multisensory dimension of vibrations, low frequencies, and sound into the poem.

In *Sonic Warfare: Sound, Affect, and The Ecology of Fear* (2012), musicologist Steve Goodman emphasizes that bass demands more theoretical attention, as it is frequently equated with a buzzing confusion of sensation, thus being perceived as the enemy of clear auditory perception and, by implication, clear thought (2012, 81–84). However, for many artists, musicians, dancers, and listeners, vibratory immersion in the low frequencies of bass provides the most conducive environment for both bodily movements and movements of thought (cf. Goodman 2012, 79). This cultural aspect of the bass warrants recognition, as it informs us about influences, connections, and networks. Focusing on dub poetry, I further argue that the bass contributes to poetic creativity and artistic innovation.

Since Goodman pointed out the importance of the bass, more work has been conducted on the role and place of bass and its vibratory dimensions in cultural studies. Central to my analysis are the theoretical frameworks proposed in Nina Sun Eidsheim's *Sensing Sound* (2015), and Marcus Boon's *The Politics of Vibrations* (2022). Eidsheim's book introduces the concept of "sensing sound" to argue that sound is more than an auditory phenomenon; it is a vibrational event that creates a multisensory experience where touching, hearing, and seeing sound extend its significance beyond the auditory. I have already explained how sound can be felt. Moving to the relation between sound and vision, she states:

[T]he collective inner ear that we have developed to listen to music is tied to the visual/sonic image or situation of statically facing the orchestra while seeing and hearing the instruments in front of us, with the sound moving between our left and right: a static spatial-relational dynamic in relation to sound. (Eidsheim 2015, 68)

I will argue that by thinking and writing through sound, poets use hearing references to sound and music, visual imagery alongside bodily sensations to engage

¹ Sound systems, originally from Jamaica, are "mobile outfits playing recorded music in dance-halls or outdoor clearings, which emerged as a more viable economic alternative to the large dance bands that they rapidly replaced" (Veal 2007, 42).

the reader's imagination in the experience of the bass. While Eidsheim's study focuses primarily on singing and listening practices, my own exploration includes sound in its digitized forms – such as music played by DJs or sound engineers in Jamaican sound systems – where technology is employed to enhance bodily sensations. While the live musical event and its physical impact on the body (sensing sound) inspire the poet, I argue that the performance of the poem seeks to recreate the essence of a live sound system experience, with particular attention to the bass, its low frequencies, and its vibrations. I, therefore, apply her multisensory understanding of sound and its vibrational aspect to analyze how different senses shape the poetics and its audio-version. Through different strategies, both Robinson and LKJ use the recorded version of the poem where the bass, its low frequencies and its vibrations are emphasized and made explicit. I also draw on Boon's exploration of ontological vibrations in sound (cf. 2022). Boon frames music and its sonic vibrations as dynamic processes that act on and shape spaces and lives, both human and non-human. According to Boon, the transformative power of vibrations extends beyond their physical properties: it influences our ontological state, altering consciousness and reshaping both social and individual realities (2022, 138–140). He writes: "In elaborating on what it means to think of music as an action on/in a space, I explore what it means to think about 'a life' (Deleuze) as a topological entity, or, in Fred Moten's words, what it would mean to embrace a 'topological existence' through music" (Boon 2022, 11). By referencing Deleuze's concept of the topological entity and Moten's notion of topological existence, Boon suggests that in the ever-changing nature of life, which continually redefines itself through time and space, musical vibrations participate in shaping this fluid process. Musical vibrations impact our ontological being (Boon 2022, 47–48). I build on this framework by arguing that poets' encounter with sound and its vibrations experienced in the liveness of a musical event, such as a dance in a sound system, alters their state of being by influencing their creativity. In other words, the poetry itself would not exist if the poets had not had experiences of immersion in the sonic environment of sound system performances. Having been in those musical spaces becomes the transformative power behind the development of that poetic style. The sensory dimension is then translated into both the text and the recording of that text. Robinson explains the immersive dimension of sound systems and their effect:

I'm kind of born from parties, you know? It's like literally . . . I think some of it I kind of . . . not freestyle. I kind of toast part of poems in parties [. . .] you know what I'm saying? I defi-

nitely come from a DJ culture . . . So definitely, my poetry comes from that kind of toasting in tradition. (Robinson in Bolle-Debessay 2024)²

My analysis also draws from Jennifer Lynn Stoever's book *The Sonic Color Line* (2016). There, she examines American culture to connect "sound with race [. . .], showing how listening operates as an organ of racial discernment, categorization, and resistance in the shadow of vision's alleged cultural dominance" (2016, 15). Stoever introduces the concept of the "sonic color line" to argue that racial differences are perceived and constructed not only through visual cues, but also through sound. She explains that listeners are trained to hear racialized sounds, demonstrating how sound, like visual cues, has been central in maintaining hierarchies and cultural norms (2016, 7). By examining how sound functions within its cultural context in relation to race, genre, and class, Stoever invites "scholars toward literary soundscapes as a subject of critical attention" (2016, 18). I share her emphasis on the centrality of sound in culture, and particularly in literary texts, as a space of critical investigation in the production and the reception of poetic traditions. Building on her work, I expand this approach to a transnational context, applying it to a Black literary tradition that transcends the U.S. context, namely dub poetry. With a Black Atlantic framework in mind, my analysis participates in "a much longer, broader, and blacker history of thinking and writing sound, enabling us to hear theorists, artists, writers, and thinkers silenced by institutional histories built on their very exclusion" (Stoever 2016, 18–19).

"Wheel and Come Again" (2015) – Roger Robinson

Roger Robinson, a recipient of the T. S. Eliot Prize, adopts various roles, including poet, writer, performer, educator, and mentor, as indicated on his website. He moved from Trinidad to the UK in his early years and has resided there since. In 2015, he released *Dis Side Ah Town* album of recorded poems that he introduced as dub poetry. On the official website of the label Jahtari, this album is described as evoking "the golden era of dub poetry, reminiscent of Prince Far I, Big Youth,

² The term 'DJ' can refer to different actions. In Robinson's quote, DJ means the singing, toasting, chanting practice of Jamaican artists such as Big Youth, U-Roy, I-Roy, and Dillinger. It refers to the practice of the master of ceremonies (MC) and is the art of the rapper, the verbalist. In his poem "Wheel and Come Again", however, the DJ is the selector, the person who plays the song for a dance. For an in-depth analysis of Jamaican deejay culture in the UK, see Henry (2006).

and Linton Kwesi Johnson – a time when dub poetry made you dance in the club but also made you think on the way home” (Jahatari 2015, n.p.). This entire album is inspired by the 2011 London riots, with Robinson depicting various scenes from his personal experience of walking through Brixton and witnessing the unrest. The album follows a documentary-style narrative, guiding listeners through the neighborhood with rich descriptions, effectively transporting them into the streets of that neighborhood. The poem “Wheel and Come Again” (2015) was first performed as part of a theatre show called *Mixtape*, a collaborative piece with the writer Nick Makoha. The show was about immigration and survival in the UK and the poem was performed to illustrate parties and enjoyment in the immigration process and its survival strategies. The poem is now featured on the album. “Wheel and Come Again,” the final poem on the album, continues this immersive narrative by focusing on a night at a sound system.

“Wheel and Come Again” has no printed version. It does not have an official video clip either. The poem exists solely in audio form. It is available on the album and streaming platforms. An audio clip on Roger Robinson’s Facebook page features added subtitles, allowing the audience to read and listen to the poem simultaneously. The written text, however, does not have the status of a visually structured printed version with line breaks, punctuation, or typography. It is an unofficial transcript of the recorded words that helps the listening and the understanding of the poem. I will refer to this transcript for quotations in the following analysis as it is easily accessible on Robinson’s Facebook page.

Recited over a richly textured, dub-heavy soundtrack produced by Disrupts, the poem plunges the listener into the experience of a sound system event. The title itself refers to a key practice within sound system culture. The rewind, also known as “pull up,” is the moment when a song is stopped and returned to the beginning to be replayed at the crowd’s demand during a particularly impactful moment. The rewind is an essential aspect of DJ practice, acting as a means of communication between the DJ, also known as the selector, and the audience. When experienced live, the rewind can disrupt the linear flow of time, allowing the crowd to relive a moment as many times as they desire. The rewind is, therefore, strongly associated with the liveness of the musical event. Drawing inspiration from the dancehall, Robinson constructs a dynamic call-and-response interaction between the selector and the crowd. In the poem, this is expressed in the repeated refrain that echoes the audience’s demand for a rewind. “DJ wheel and come again | Make the bass line glide ’pon the drum again | Make we rock till the morning sun again” (Robinson 2015) is repeated several times throughout the recording. The title also references Kwame Dawes’ anthology *Wheel and Come Again: An Anthology of Reggae Poetry* (1998), further cementing the poem’s deep-

rooted connection to the music played at a sound system party and affirming ties with literary texts in the intermediality between music and poetry.

Although the poem's exclusive audio format may simply be due to "random chance" as Robinson puts it (in Bolle-Debessay 2024), this mode of transmission reinforces the heritage of DJs' performances in the early years of dub poetry. DJs would improvise over deconstructed reggae tracks created by sound engineers. As LKJ notes in his article "Jamaican Rebel Music" (1976), dub poetry evolved from the performative traditions of Jamaican DJs in the 1950s. Taking inspiration from these "dub lyricists," he explains:

The dub lyricist is the DJ turned poet. He intones his lyrics rather than sings them. Dub lyricism is a new form of (oral) music poetry, wherein the lyricist overdubs rhythmic phrases onto the rhythm background of a popular song. Dub lyricists include poets like Big Youth, I Roy, U Roy, Dillinger, Shorty the President, Prince Jazzbo, and others. (Johnson 1976, 398)

The fact that "Wheel and Come Again" circulates in audio format repeats this tradition, where the lyricist's voice is received "off the page," much like live and improvised DJ performances. Although Robinson's poem was produced in a studio, its reference to the cultural practice of the rewind evokes the energetic spontaneity between the crowds and the DJ found in a live event.³ To analyze "Wheel and Come Again" in its sonic environment, I use a spectrogram as it captures the rich texture introduced by digital sound production and technology. With visual representation of sound frequencies, temporal dynamics, and interactions between sonic elements, the spectrogram is a practical tool to explore different strategies to bring into the recording of the poem the centrality of bass.

Grounding the Audio Recording: Bass-Driven Aesthetic

Figure 1 is a representation of the first recorded minute of "Wheel and Come Again". Time is depicted on the X-axis and frequency (measured in cycles per second, Hz) on the Y-axis. It utilizes color-coded frequencies to enhance legibility: brighter colors correspond to a higher amplitude (volume, measured in decibels) at a given frequency. The bass occupies frequencies between 20 Hz and 250 Hz, with deeper bass (sub-bass) found in the 20 Hz to 60 Hz range. The

³ As mentioned, the term DJ in the poem refers to the person who selects and plays records at a party rather than the one who sings and improvises over a musical track.

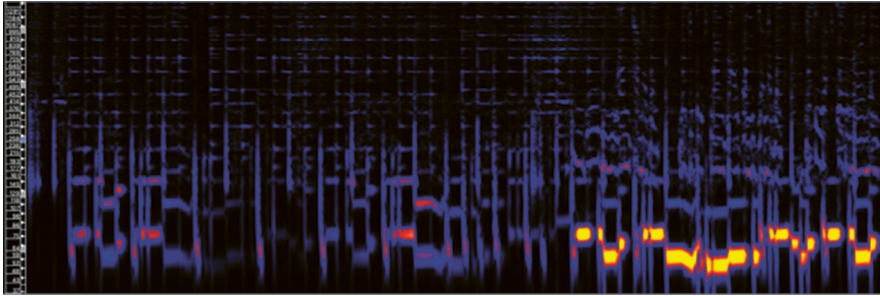


Fig. 1: “Wheel and Come Again” (0:00–0:07). Spectrogram created in Sonic Visualizer.

clearest and strongest bands are located between 60 Hz and 250 Hz. This shows the predominant presence of bass frequencies. The spectrogram depicts these bands in bright yellow-orange hues, which are the most prominent feature of the visualization, confirming the predominant role of the bass. There is little dynamic fluctuation, as the yellow-orange bands remain consistent throughout the poem. These frequencies are stable and repetitive. They indicate steady melodic and rhythmic movement throughout the recording. This steadiness reflects how the bass functions as the pulse, the heartbeat of a sound system. Just like a walking bass, it drives the performance and forms the essential foundation upon which the entire soundscape is constructed. The steadiness of the bass grounds the poem’s recording in the deep structure of sound. The sub-bass appears faint. This suggests that it is difficult to distinguish it audibly although it is present in the fabric of the work. Played on an appropriate medium such as large speaker boxes, this sub-bass would be felt rather than heard. On a general level, the poem exhibits a rich sonic texture, demonstrated by the extended range of harmonics which contributes to its density.⁴ The digitalization of the poem’s sonic texture visually re-creates the immersive quality of a sound system. Indeed, enhanced by the layering of sonic elements that digital technology enables, this digital rendition brings the listening experience closer to the immersive dimension of a live sound system. It employs media transposition to evoke the live event within the poem.

The immersive dimension of low-frequency evoked in Robinson’s poem is similarly evident in LKJ’s poem “Street 66”. This poem first appeared in LKJ’s poetry collection *Dread Beat and Blood*, published in 1975. “Street 66” was later republished in 2002 in the retrospective collection *Mi Revalueshanary Fren*, where

⁴ The term harmonic refers to the additional high-frequency tones generated simultaneously during the production of sound (i.e. the fundamental frequency).

it is categorized within the “Seventies Verse” section. This classification aligns with LKJ’s early artistic phase, which includes poems such as “Bass Culture”, “Reggae Sounds”, “Five Nights of Bleeding,” and the lesser-known “Klassikal Dub”. The poems from this period, including “Street 66”, are deeply interwoven with reggae music, reflecting a strong sense of intermediality. However, while poems such as “Bass Culture” and “Reggae Sounds” engage in a broader form of intertextuality by discussing the lived experiences associated with reggae music at that time, “Street 66” is distinct in its focus on the specificities of a local blues dance within London’s cultural landscape. This localized engagement parallels the environmental specificity described in Robinson’s poem.

In 1980, LKJ recorded “Street 66” with a band for his album *Bass Culture*, released on Island Records. My analysis of the poem uses this audio recording and the publication in *Dread Beat and Blood* (1975). In term of sonic texture, “Street 66” has a lighter sonic texture, which allows for a clearer differentiation between sonic elements: the bass, the drums and percussion, the keyboard, the flugelhorn, the guitar, the harmonica, and the horns. The poem is accompanied by musicians. It does not use digital sound. The thinner horizontal strands in the lower range indicate a less dominant role of the bass in shaping the poem’s sonic density. There are fewer yellow-orange hues, indicative of lower intensity in the frequencies used. Despite the lighter texture, the bass remains significant, especially when compared to the higher range of the spectrum, where sporadic reddish dots and darker blue spots suggest less emphasis on higher frequencies. In figure 2, the lower part of the spectrogram shows red-purple bands that translate sustained low-frequency sounds:

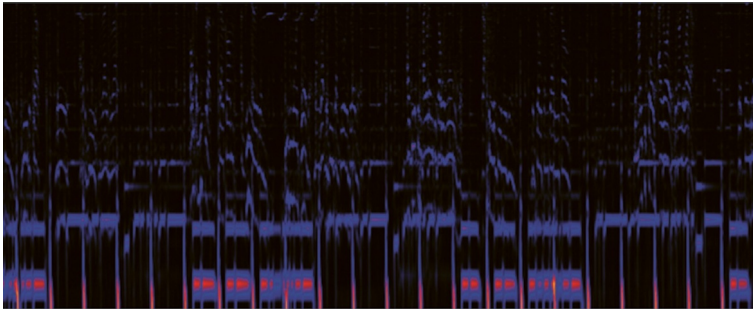


Fig. 2: “Street 66” (0:18–0:28). Spectrogram created in Sonic Visualizer.

In both poems, the poet’s voice occupies a distinctive position above the sonic texture. It is heard clearly. It functions as both the vehicle for transmitting the text and an additional acoustic element within the overall soundscape. Compared to

other manifestations of Robinson's voice on the same album, "Wheel and Come Again" features a deep, steady tone.

This low baritone voice is not an arbitrary aesthetic choice. In a conversation with John Doran recorded by the Quietus podcast series, Robinson explains that for him dub poetry invokes the presence of a "nearly preacher, god-like voice" (Doran 2017). He notes that to achieve this effect, he intentionally uses a deep voice, as heard in this particular poem.⁵ Jamaican toasters like Prince Far I, a major influence on dub poets, used a conversational tone imbued with a preaching, sermonic quality. His album *Psalms for I* (1976) reflects this desire to preach and teach the Rastafarian faith. Similarly, in dub poetry performances, where the poet "dub[s] out some unconsciousness, and dub[s] in some consciousness" as Oku Onuora says (in Doumerc 2017, 3), the listener can discern a communal preacherly voice emerging from low frequencies.

LKJ, a pioneer in that tradition, is also recognizable for his low-tone voice. In an interview for the Bass Culture project, he said:

I wanted to write reggae poetry because, for me, the bass guitar sounded as though it was speaking. Like it was a talking bass. So, I wanted to write words that sounded like a bass line. I wanted my meter to be the meter of the bass line and the speech, the actual vocalizing of the words, to be like the reggae bass line. [. . .] Then the importance of the bass, once vocalized in the word (whether spoken or written), is also translated in the way the poem is recorded. Not just how it is put into music, but how the recorded sound brings the right type of bass. (LKJ in Melville 2021)⁶

In my previous analysis of LKJ's poetry already mentioned, I unpacked this "talking bass" using classical notation, I demonstrated how the poet's voice interacts with the bass at the beat and the bar level. Whether following or diverging from the bass's rhythmic and melodic patterns, the poet's voice becomes another medium through which the bass is evoked. I argue that this is a poetic strategy to reinforce the presence of low frequencies in the performance of the poem (cf. Bolle-Debessay 2022).

In Roger Robinson's poem, the voice is similarly used to reinforce the presence of the bass. In addition to intentionally using a deep baritone voice full of grain, the interaction between the bass and voice is thoughtfully crafted. For in-

5 In "Can a Dub Poet be a Woman?" (1990), Jean Binta Breeze, an influential figure in dub poetry, provides insightful reflections on the male-dominated nature of this tradition. Her commentary underscores how defining elements of dub poetry, particularly the association with a low baritone voice and revolutionary words, are often aligned with masculine characteristics (cf. Breeze 1990, 48). Breeze's observations reveal the complex gendered dimensions inherent in dub poetry.

6 The quoted text is from an unpublished transcript, used with permission.

stance, toward the end of Robinson's poem, the bass "drops." This bass drop technique is a common practice in Jamaican sound systems, where the bass is temporarily removed from a track by adjusting a mixer knob. This creates a stripped-down sound, often thin and bare, especially as bass frequencies are amplified to extreme levels during the event. The intention behind this practice is to reintroduce the bass at a point of heightened tension, typically just before a verse begins. During this break, the deejay adds to the sense of anticipation by toasting, or chatting/talking, over the track. This technique is designed to make the eventual return of the full song – complete with bass – all the more impactful. Although primarily a live performance method, bass drops have been incorporated into studio recordings since the late 1960s (cf. Veal 2007, 45–94). When the bass drops, Robinson mirrors this action vocally by going silent until the bass resumes:

Mister DJ no we no go
till the heat of the morning sun
(drop bass and voice)
DJ Wheel and come again
Make the bass line glide 'pon the drum again
Make we rock till the morning sun again *(3x refrain)*
(Robinson 2015)

This parallel movement reinforces the strong connection between the two sonic elements of voice and bass. This moment occurs near the poem's conclusion, just before the refrain re-emerges to close the piece. In the narrative structure of the poem, this also occurs at a climax point: the crowd has been dancing all night and will continue to do so until the morning sun comes up. The dance is at its highest energy point, and no one is ready to go home. Much like in live performances, this technique creates a climactic moment before the final refrain. Similar to the use of the rewind, the dropping of the bass, accompanied by the stopping of the voice, is a deliberate strategy to bring the liveness of a dance into the recorded performance. In figure 3, the spectrogram visualizes these parallel movements of bass and voice, rendering their interaction visible.

In the denser sonic texture of "Wheel and Come Again," the voice is integrated into the soundscape. It becomes an additional element to add to the sonic density. Subtle sonic effects, such as echoes, delays, reverbs, are layered onto the poet's voice throughout the recording. For instance, in the lyrics, when "the speaker box [is] pumping loud" (Robinson 2025, 1:12), the word "loud" has stronger echoes, not only enhancing the reference to sound effects experienced in a dance (the echoes *per se*) but also densifying the sonic texture of the poem. Similar effects are added to the words "sweat," "regret," "forget" in the following passage:

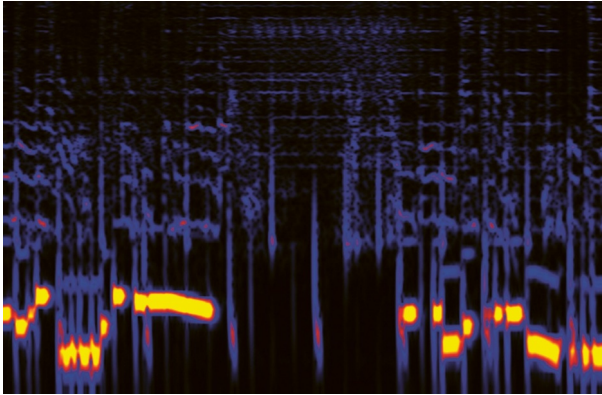


Fig. 3: “Wheel and Come Again” (2:15–2:18). Spectrogram created in Sonic Visualizer.

consoling me with sweat
and we dancing past regret
little trouble on me mind
make we hug up and wine
and in time I will soon forget
(Robinson 2015)

In the three words mentioned above, the last syllables are echoed. Again, this digital and technological manipulation of the voice adds to the sonic texture, bringing an immersive sonic atmosphere to the performance. As opposed to LKJ’s performance where the voice is not defamiliarized by any effects, echoes and delays blur Robinson’s words, creating a murkier delivery that mimics, here again, the essence of a live event found in the performances of dub-lyricists in the dancehall.⁷

“Sensing” the Bass: Embodied Poetics

I have already discussed how sound is not only merely heard but also experienced through different senses. In order to fully experience these senses, one must be physically present in the musical event. In a night in a sound system, it is undeniable that the loud bass impacts the body when standing close to large speaker boxes. In devices like computers or smartphones, where sound is com-

⁷ This recording of a live appearance of the dub lyricist I Roy, for instance, depicts a voice with defamiliarized effects: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QIfWb1n8-ro>.

pressed and bass frequencies are flattened, the physicality of the bass can only be imagined. In the absence of this live experience, I argue for the development of a poetic language that activates our senses to bring into the poetics the sonic presence of the bass, its low frequencies and its vibrations. The poets find a language to “sense” sound. Here again, I propose to read Robinson’s poem in counterpoint to LKJ’s to see how this poetic of “sensing” is recycled, creating a web of filiation between their poems.

In “Wheel and Come Again,” words or expressions with musical allusion are an obvious strategy to establish an immediate connection between the poem and its musical inspiration: “bass line,” “drum,” “snare snap,” “riddim,” “rhythm rocksteady,” “the groove”. “Snare snap like shots in the dancehall” (Robinson 2015) is another line where musical vocabulary is used. Here, the sharpness of the snare drum is likened to the percussive impact of a gunshot, capturing the rhythm’s dynamic of the drum and bass. The monosyllabic words such as “snare,” “snap,” and “shot” create vivid sonic images, also mimicking the percussive nature of the drum and bass, placing the listener within the soundscape of the dancehall. Through meticulous descriptions of the environment, the poem conveys the atmosphere of a night during a sound system. The dancehall sound scape is evoked through a combination of visual, kinesthetic, and tactile imagery. The DJ spins records while the crowd dances through the night:

And the speaker box pumping loud
 ‘Cause the riddim just a catch this crowd
 And they swaying to the rhythm rocksteady
 and no one ready to go home
 (Robinson 2015)

The poem visualizes people dancing. It depicts a dark, dimly lit atmosphere – “half-light” – where fleeting moments are illuminated by brief flashes: the contours of a waistline, a “gleaming silhouette of a neckline,” or the “glint of a gold-toothed smile” (Robinson 2015) that momentarily brightens the scene. These brief visual cues transport the listener into a nightclub setting. This evocation is activated through the audience’s memories of being in a sound system or, more generally, in a club environment. By imagining the space, we imagine its sound.

References to physical sensations experienced in those live moments are similarly used to create this multi-sensory poetic. The phrases “she turning front to face me,” “stuck on my waistline,” “they swaying to the rhythm rocksteady,” and words such as “sweat,” (Robinson 2015) evoke the press of bodies on the dance-floor in an atmosphere charged with heat and touch. This corporeality is vividly portrayed through images of body movements, and more particularly dance. There is a kinesthetic response to sound. Bodies move “slow and low to the

rhythm of the bass line flow”. Descriptions like “waistline grinning winning,” “gleaming silhouette of a neckline,” and “pretty little daughter stuck on my waistline rolling” (Robinson 2015) invoke a sense of sensuality and intimate bodies moving together to the pulse of the bass. The bass, pulsing from below, from the low frequencies of the sonic spectrum, resonates through the body like a heartbeat. The bass is also described as something physical: “A bass pulse of the heart”. The encounter with the bass line transcends mere enjoyment; it has metaphysical qualities. Robinson explains:

[W]hat bass could do was wild, even [played] for a minute, it could actually make you forget what you're thinking about [. . .] the raw power of something [. . .] in reggae tradition, the bass is like a heartbeat, but it also resonates. I actually believe that people use those particular frequencies of bass because it [is] quite trauma purging, you know what I'm saying? (Robinson in Bolle-Debessay 2024)

His comment aligns with Boon's notion of the transformative power of sonic vibrations on an ontological level. Boon uses the term “target states” to refer to a matrix point in the reception of sound that changes your state of mind and being (2022, 139). Using the example of jazz, he explains:

It's pretty obvious that jazz's challenge to classical music was precisely this, that is, it's a music organized around target states, particular kinds of pleasure, jouissance, and “agapic praxes of community”, which are not necessarily discursively articulated or formalized, but which, for those involved, are carefully assembled, realized, and collectively shared. (Boon 2022, 139–140)

From the poem, we understand that the heavy bass played brings the audience to a target state. There is a psychological dimension in how the bass and its vibrations are received. The poem describes the bass as a source of relief.⁸ Amid life's hardships – low-wage jobs, high rents, and challenging workdays in a society shaped by imperial and colonial histories – dancing to the bass line offers a form of escape. The crowd is “dancing past regret”, and no one wants to go home. There is a collective “we” that experiences the healing effect of “bass line ther-

⁸ A plethora of literature explores the psychological effects of vibrations. For instance, Goodman, in *Sonic Warfare* (2012), investigates how vibrations have been used as a tool of warfare, emphasizing their capacity to incite terror and exert control over populations. He examines how sound waves, especially low-frequency vibrations, can be weaponized to disturb and manipulate the human psyche (cf. 2012, xiii–xx). In contrast, Henriques offers a different perspective in *Sonic Bodies* (2011). In the context of Jamaican sound systems, he emphasizes how the deep, resonant frequencies of the bass create a shared, embodied experience that connects people through music, fostering a sense of collective empowerment and emotional release (cf. 2011, Ch. 8). These contrasting views demonstrate various capacities of vibrations to bring different target states, depending on their context and use.

apy,” a communal recognition of the vibrations felt in the dancehall. The tension between the oppressive “dark damp grief” of the club atmosphere described in the poem and the relief offered by the bass line underscores the contrast between life’s struggles and the temporary liberation found in music. The dancefloor, in this context, becomes a space of fleeting joy or solace from the weight of everyday life. In *Sonic Bodies* (2011), Henriques describes Jamaican sound systems as carefully organized sonic spaces where vibrations are deliberately curated and collectively experienced. These vibrations cultivate distinct “ways of knowing” unique to sound system culture and the individuals involved in this sonic environment share a mode of “think[ing] through vibrations” (Henriques 2011, 122). The poem reflects this dynamic by conveying a shared emotional experience of how to engage with and feel the bass. It highlights a communal understanding of the affective power of the bass:

Cause the riddim just a catch this crowd
 And they swaying to the rhythm rocksteady
 and no one ready to go home
 from this late-night bass line therapy
 in a club of dark damp grief
 but a bass line brings relief
 (Robinson 2015)

LKJ’s poem similarly opens by transporting the audience into a reggae scene at a blues dance. The poet captures the sense of the event by specifying the time, “six-a-clack,” and describing the setting: “de room woz dark-dusk howlin softly” (LKJ 1980). Words such as “soun,” “muzik,” “dance,” “riddim,” and “beat” are also straightforward references which evoke a musical scene, drawn from a lexical field that triggers an auditory response. Their presence in the poem creates a music that is heard. The reader experiences the dance through the eyes of an unnamed character. The shift from the singular “I” – “I felt de sting” – to the collective “wi” in “how wi move” connects the personal perspective of the character to the communal experience of those present at the dance. Music plays, and people are “feelin I-ry,” dancing and smoking (LKJ 1980). A sense of déjà vu pervades the poem, as the narrator is already familiar with the bodily encounter with the music: “cause when de muzik met I taps, I felt de sting, knew de shock”. There is a familiar bodily impact. The sound of reggae, specifically referencing the Mity poet I-Roy, is evoked. The vibrant colors of the Rastafarian flag, red, green and gold, aligns the poem with the Afrocentric consciousness found at the heart of reggae. The visual imagery that these three symbolic colors bring is accompanied by a particular soundscape. In the third stanza, the sensory impact of sound continues to shape the poetics. The phrase “vibratin violence” refers to the music’s

low frequencies, as felt in I-Roy's song. This vibration, mentioned above as a received "shock," moves the body into dance: "vibratin violence is how wi move rockin wid green riddim" (LKJ 1980). Here, the pleasure derived from these intense vibrations aligns with an aesthetic appreciation of sound's impact on the body in Bass Culture. In the poem, the vibrations' intensity, while potentially painful, also brings aural and physical pleasure: "no man would dance but leap an shake dat shock thru feelin ripe" (LKJ 1980). The pleasure found in the reception of these violent vibrations enters a frame of interpretation where the impact of sound on bodies is recognized as an aesthetic value. Feeling the music is a sign of fine-tuned bass in the speakers, which demonstrates the dance's quality. As Hitchins explains in his insightful book on Jamaican sound *Vibe Merchants: The Sound Creators of Jamaican Popular Music* (2014), low frequencies are an undeniable aspect of the recording process, which are then translated into a form of experience in the sound system: a "'good' sound-reproduction system should be capable of producing bass that can be physically felt as well as heard" (2014, 83). The target state of joy and pleasure is reached when the sound is felt. The poem similarly evokes this target state. This multisensory poetics, by no means accidental, is designed to bring the heavy bass into the poem.

Conclusion

This analysis opens new pathways for understanding the intermedial relationship between music and poetry, particularly through the lens of bass frequencies in dub poetry. By examining the creative role of bass in shaping the performative and the textual dimension of Roger Robinson's poem "Wheel and Come Again," this chapter engaged deeply with the sonic dimensions of cultural production. The detailed analysis of the audio version of the poem employed spectrograms to offer a visual representation of sonic aesthetics to show how the immersive nature of sound systems is digitally (re)produced in the recordings. In the absence of a live performance where the bass takes on a central organizing role, the audio version of the poem uses different sonic strategies to (re)present bass frequencies and its essential function in sound systems. The analysis also examined a poetic language inspired by music, expanding the concept of intermediality beyond the purely auditory. The multi-sensory dimension of sound fosters a poetics that elicits tactile, kinesthetic, and visual responses that evokes the experience of being in a live sound system. Dub poetry's engagement with sound is rooted in the cultural context of Bass Culture, where low frequencies become a vehicle for expression and even metaphysical experience. By bringing thematic comparisons with Lin-

ton Kwesi Johnson's poem "Street 66," this chapter highlighted a literary practice where sonic vibrations have shaped and continue to sustain Black literary traditions. It demonstrated how bass notes serve as a critical space for anchoring literary practices within a Black diasporic framework. In doing so, it emphasized the necessity of considering sound not merely as an aesthetic choice but as a powerful force in the creation, reception and interpretation of poetry.

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Gregor Herzfeld

Flow like Poe – Lit-Hop zwischen Dichtungstheorie und digitaler Pädagogik

Einleitung

Allianzen von Poesie und Musik können neben bekannten und traditionsreichen Formen wie Gedichtvertonungen, Lyrics für Songs oder musikalischen Referenzen in poetischen Texten auch ungewöhnlichere Formate in unwahrscheinlichen Verbindungen ausbilden. Dies gilt insbesondere für das digitale Zeitalter,¹ das befeuert von neuen Weisen der technischen sowie medialen (Re-)Produzierbarkeit und Verbreitungsmechanismen zuvor wenig in Frage gestellte Grenzen innerhalb und zwischen den Künsten aufweicht. Nischen und Subkulturen wird dabei im Sinne einer basisdemokratischen Ermöglichungslogik immer größere Aufmerksamkeit geschenkt. Crossover-Bewegungen sind in allen erdenklichen Dimensionen zum Signum digitaler Ästhetiken geworden; in ihnen entlädt sich eine Lust am intermedialen Kombinieren, Mischen, Re-Mixen, Samplen, Zitieren (vgl. Born 2022) und stellt sich so ihrer ästhetischen Gegenspielerin – der Idee von Reinheit – entgegen. Reinheit ist überall dort bestimmend, wo „Praktiken der Grenzziehung, Absonderung und Bereinigung, die mit einer normativen Differenzierung von Innen und Außen“ (Thums 2022, 521) einhergehen, vorherrschend sind. Im Musikalischen formieren sich diese Praktiken zu Idealen einer „Reinheit der Tonkunst“ (Thibaut 1825) im Klassischen, Volksliedhaften oder Musikalisch-Autonomem. Das dialektische Gegen- oder Miteinander beider Strömungen, Purismus versus Crossover, ist somit kein Phänomen, das allein dem Digital Age zuzurechnen wäre. Vielmehr lässt es sich in unterschiedlichen Ausprägungen in zahlreichen Konstellationen der Geschichte immer wieder finden. Im Hinblick auf die Verbindung von Musik und Poesie kann etwa auf Dichter wie Edgar Allan Poe verwiesen werden. Dieser befürwortete bereits im ersten Drittel des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts versatile Allianzen und spannte dafür mediale Innovationen (zum Beispiel die massenhafte Verbreitung von Literatur durch die recht neue Lithografie) ein; zu einer Zeit also, in der die Folgen einer Auseinandersetzung um Regel- versus Genieästhetik früherer Jahrhunderte (vgl. Campe 2021, 113–124) erneut verhandelt wurden. Schließlich kann ebenfalls auf die musikalische Rezeption solcher Bemühungen verwiesen werden,

¹ Der nicht unproblematische Begriff wird hier verwendet im Sinne Claudia Benthien's als „a heuristic category to denote the present day, where most information is available on computers and in digital form“ (2021, 2).

die selbst einen entsprechend transgressiven, stilistisch und genretheoretisch „unreinen“ Charakter aufweist (vgl. Herzfeld 2013). Poe etwa ist als Dichter und Poetologe zum Fixpunkt einer zirkumpolaren musikalischen Anknüpfung geworden, die bis heute neue, unter anderem digitale sowie populäre Blüten austreibt. Davon handelt der folgende Beitrag, indem er Lit-Hop (von *literature*), ein Subgenre des Nerdcore, seinerseits wiederum eine Sonderform des Hip-Hop, im Lichte der Verbindung von Poes Lyrik und Musik im Digital Age präsentiert und kontextualisiert. Nach einer Einordnung des Lit-Hop in den Umkreis von Hip-Hop und Nerdcore, die auch das Themenfeld der Darstellung von Männlichkeiten problematisiert, werden mit den Songs „Mr. Raven“ und „Flow like Poe“ von MC Lars Stücke beschrieben und analysiert, die sich explizit auf Poe beziehen. Art, Ausprägung und Stoßrichtung dieses Bezugs bilden den zentralen Aspekt des Beitrags. Neben poetologischen und ästhetischen Aspekten soll dabei auch ein Augenmerk darauf gelegt werden, ob und wo sich die traditionellen Macht- und Männlichkeitsdiskurse des Hip-Hop im Lit-Hop wieder Bahn brechen. Schließlich möchte ich auch auf den ausgeprägten didaktischen Hintergrund der Lit-Hop-Bewegung und ihre digital-medialen Voraussetzungen und Praktiken eingehen.

Hip-Hop, Nerd Core und Lit-Hop

Hip-Hop ist eine, heute vielleicht *die* dominante Form der Popular Culture; ihm geht es meist um den Alltag auf den Straßen an den sozialen urbanen Brennpunkten. Es ist ein Musikgenre (inklusive eines weitverzweigten Netzes von Subgenres), das überwiegend von People of Color in den USA produziert wird. In aller Regel geben sich Hip-Hop- oder Rapkünstler:innen betont cool, lässig, physisch hartgesotten und performen – wenn sie männlich sind – eine Hypermaskulinität, selbstverherrlichend, aggressiv, gelegentlich fiktional oder tatsächlich kriminell (als *pimp* oder *hustler*), nicht selten misogyn: „Overarching tropes of misogyny, rape culture, and violence against women present hip-hop as a hypermasculine and gendered space of (Black) American cultural expression that is profitable“ (Bradley 2015, 181).

Die Untergattung Nerdcore hingegen wird fast ausschließlich von jungen weißen Männern, die sich selbst als „Nerds“ verstehen, bedient. Und auch wenn sich hinter dem Begriff „Nerd“ kein einheitliches Phänomen verbirgt und die Zuschreibungen häufig fluid sind, hat das Signalwort „Nerd“ im Titel Auswirkungen auf die in populären Kulturen besonders relevante Imagekonstruktion. Gemäß sowohl eigenen als auch landläufigen Zuschreibungen agieren Nerds, die sowohl die Produzent:innen als auch die Zielgruppe des Nerdcore bilden, betont uncool, sozial ungeschickt. Sie sind an Sexualität desinteressiert oder zumindest darin

nicht erfolgreich. Sie legen eher Wert auf intellektuelle Stärken und zeigen sich auf den ersten Blick jeder Form hegemonialer Männlichkeit abhold; zumindest definiert sich ihre Form männlicher Geschlechtsidentität dadurch, dass sie sich dem Druck, hypermaskuline Klischees zu erfüllen, entziehen. Gleichzeitig riskieren sie mit der Zurückweisung des Männlichkeitsklischees, rassistische Stereotypen zu unterstützen, wenn damit suggeriert würde, dass es sich beim aggressiven Männlichkeitsgefahren im Hip-Hop um ein unkultiviertes, primitives Verhalten vornehmlich Schwarzer Männer handele, was weiße nicht betreffe. Tatsächlich kann eines der Fallbeispiele im Folgenden in diese Richtung gelesen werden. Für ihre Divergenz vom Männlichkeitsbild im Hip-Hop nehmen Nerdcorer durchaus Verluste auf der Beliebtheitsskala in Kauf, die der gesellschaftliche Mainstream (in den USA) in Form von Stereotypen, Images, Werten, Habitus sowie entsprechenden Erwartungshaltungen ausgehandelt und mehr oder weniger festgelegt hat. Doch wäre es nicht angemessen anzunehmen, dass männliche Nerds grundsätzlich als Teil einer Gegenkultur für alternative Maskulinitäten streiten und in keiner Weise männliche Hegemonie ausüben (vgl. Ronald 2012, 63–64). Der Austauschprozess ist weitaus komplexer. So wurde einerseits darauf hingewiesen, dass „[u]nlike bravado-laden mainstream hip-hop, many nerdcore rappers address their romantic and sexual ineptitude rather than prowess“ (Sewell 2015, 225), was nicht gerade Stereotypen hegemonialer normativer Männlichkeit entspricht. Andererseits scheint sich gegenläufig eine Art kapital-ökonomische Restituierung derart zu ereignen, dass

the nerd, previously a liminal masculine identity, gets rehabilitated and partially incorporated into hegemonic masculinity during the period from the early 1980s through the present. In the process, the nerd becomes implicated in a variety of discourses about race and class as well as masculinities. The reconfiguration of hegemonic masculinity to include aspects of the once subjugated masculine stereotype of the nerd relates both to changes in economic and job prospects for middle-class white males, and to the growing pervasiveness of computers in work and leisure activities. (Kendall 1999, 261)

So kam und kommt es auch im Nerdcore zu Kollaborationen mit Mainstream-Rappern wie KRS-One, Sage Francis et cetera.

Mit dem Lit-Hop hat der Nerdcore eine Spielart des Hip-Hop entwickelt, die sich inhaltlich und kreativ auf den klassischen Kanon der (englischsprachigen) Literatur bezieht: William Shakespeare, Edgar Allan Poe, Herman Melville. Literarische Kunstformen also, die in ihrer artifizialen Verdichtung den rauen Alltag der Straßen zusätzlich zu transzendieren scheinen. Der Begriff „Lit-Hop“ geht zurück auf zwei Schriftsteller und Mitglieder der Hip-Hop-Szene, Wayne Compton und Adam Mansbach. Beide verwenden ihn, um eine bestimmte von ihnen gepflegte Literatur zu bezeichnen, die sich von der Poetik oder Ästhetik des Hip-

Hop beeinflusst versteht, so etwa im Zusammenhang mit der Technik des Samplings (vgl. Mansbach 2006; Sherman 2009). Lit-Hopper wie MC Lars hingegen, um den es hier geht und der nicht Schriftsteller, sondern primär Musiker ist, dreht das Verhältnis um: Sein Lit-Hop ist Hip-Hop-Musik, die von kanonischer Literatur, Gedichten und Dichtungstheorie beeinflusst ist. Die Oppositionen des Nerdcore und Lit-Hop zu üblichen Themen und Darstellungsformen des Hip-Hop haben Zweifel darüber aufkommen lassen, ob Nerdcore und Lit-Hop überhaupt als Subgenre des Hip-Hop Geltung beanspruchen dürfen. Sowohl die Produzenten als auch die Hörer:innen oder Fans sowie auch die Inhalte der Lyrics weichen so eklatant von im Hip-Hop üblichen Settings ab, dass eine Zugehörigkeit mit Recht in Frage gestellt werden kann. Dieser Status des Abjekten ist gewollt, wird innerhalb der Szene thematisiert und gehört daher durchaus zum Programm, wie sich im Folgenden erweisen wird. Der Beitrag zielt auch darauf, die ganz augenscheinlichen Differenzen der Stile durch eine Reihe von Gemeinsamkeiten abzumildern und eine möglicherweise zunächst überraschende Familienverwandtschaft plausibel zu machen, die letztlich im Einklang mit dem Prozess einer Integration von Nerds in die dominante Kulturpraxis Hip-Hop stünden.

MC Lars & Edgar Allan Poe

Der Musiker MC Lars aka Andrew Robert Nielsen ist Mitbegründer des Nerdcore, der sich in den frühen Nullerjahren um den „Godfather of Nerdcore“ MC Frontalot (Damien Hess) entwickelt hat (vgl. Sewell 2015, 224–225). Außerdem ist er Repräsentant des Lit-Hop im obengenannten musikalischen Sinne. Insbesondere der amerikanische Dichter Edgar Allan Poe steht im Zentrum mehrerer Arbeiten von MC Lars. So hat er ein ganzes Album mit acht Hip-Hop-Tracks nach Poe veröffentlicht. In seinen 2012 bis 2014 gehaltenen TEDTalks, also jener populären Form des kurzen öffentlichen Fachvortrags, der auch auf Internetplattformen gestreamt wird, erscheint immer wieder Poe als Referenz für seine Mission, Musik und Literatur zur Entwicklung eines ästhetischen und sogar demokratischen Bewusstseins unter jungen Leuten zu verbreiten.

Die Art der Bezugnahme auf Poe kann exemplarisch für den Lit-Hop an den Lyrics des Tracks „Mr. Raven“² studiert werden:

² Publiziert auf diversen Internetseiten, etwa bei GENIUS (<https://genius.com/1811785>), inklusive Anmerkungen zum Text. Der Track existiert in mindestens zwei Versionen: 1. In der hier verwendeten von *The Laptop EP* (2004) und 2. in einem Remix „feat. The Dead Milkmen“ von *The Edgar*

[Intro]

We got EAP in the house tonight, Edgar Allan Poe.
America's favorite anti-transcendentalist.
We're taking this back, way back, nineteenth century style.

[Refrain]

Who's that (who's that) rapping?
Who's that rapping at my chamber door?
Mr. (mister) Raven!
All up in my grill like, "Nevermore."

[Verse 1]

Kick it! Once upon a midnight dreary, while I kicked it weak and weary,
Dark and cold just like Lake Eerie, Brand New sample, someone clear me.
While I nodded nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping.
Up like, "What?", this thunder clapping in my brain like graphic Halfings.
Staffing me, I put down Milton. Cell phone mute like Paris Hilton.
Open window, halfway built-in. Times a changing like Bob Dylan.
Twenty-pound bird black as could be, cold feet cold eyes aimed straight at me.
Grim face, grim stare, death carnivore, quote that raven "Nevermore."

[...]

(MC Lars 2004, o. S.)

Der Text enthält zahlreiche Anspielungen sowohl auf Poe und sein berühmtestes Gedicht „The Raven“ von 1845 als auch auf Pop- und insbesondere Hip-Hop-Kultur, was zu erkennen und zu goutieren eine gewisse Bekanntschaft oder gar Kennerschaft der jeweiligen Szenen voraussetzt. Dies gilt für umgangssprachliche Ausdrücke oder solche des Straßenslangs, wie „all up in my grill“, was so viel heißt wie „someone who is excessively annoying and bothering“ (Urban Dictionary 2005, o. S.). Weiter nennt der Text Persönlichkeiten des popkulturellen Lebens von Paris Hilton über Bob Dylan bis zu den Rappern Slug und Murs. Darunter finden die eher auf den popkulturellen Mainstream verweisenden Anspielungen, die teilweise nur des Reimes wegen („Hilton“ und „Milton“) entstanden zu sein scheinen, einen stärker inhaltlich aufgeladenen Counterpart in solchen Referenzen, die die Lokalisierung des Textes zwischen Hip-Hop und klassischer Literaturwelt deutlich machen. Das gilt wiederum für das bloße Namedropping, Nietzsche und Milton vs. Fugees und Fred Durst, wie auch für längere Zitate. So ist die Zeile des ersten Verses „While I nodded nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping“ ein direktes Zitat aus „The Raven“, „If you got a problem, look, I'll solve it. He checked my hook, DJ revolved it“ (Vanilla Ice 1990, o. S.) hingegen stammt aus dem Track „Ice, Ice Baby“ (1990) des ersten kommerziell erfolgreichen weißen

Allan Poe EP (2012), wobei die Lyrics und die musikalische Aufmachung leicht differieren („Lovecraft“, statt „Milton“ et cetera).

Rappers Vanilla Ice. Und während die musikalische Gestaltung dem Klangdesign des Hip-Hop mit einem Funk-Beat, Scratchings, Sprach- und Geräuschsamples (ein unheimliches Lachen, Donnerrollen et cetera) sowie einem Bass und Chord-Loop von zwei Takten weitgehend entspricht, macht sich MC Lars im Text sprachsensibel den Duktus des Poe'schen Gedichts, den trochäischen Oktameter mit auffallend vielen Binnenreimen und Alliterationen zu eigen, um eine moderne Paraphrase des Originals zu erstellen. Mit dem Klang seiner Stimme, die schließlich das zentrale Gestaltungsinstrument des MC im Hip-Hop darstellt, verleiht Lars dem Track seinen eigentümlichen Charakter. Auch wenn Klang- und Timbresbeschreibungen notwendig subjektiv bleiben müssen, kann hier festgestellt werden, dass das Timbre im Vergleich zu zahlreichen anderen Rappern auffallend hell, hoch, wenig rau ist. Die Stimme des Nerds scheint aufgrund dieses Timbres weniger mit dem Körper verbunden, „Nebengeräusche“ (wie Kratzen, Knarzen, extreme Tiefe, Rauheit) sind ausgeblendet. Solche möglichen Spuren eines Lebens auf der Straße, das dem Image nach von Drogen, Gewalt, Härte und Durchsetzungskraft unter anderem gekennzeichnet ist, sind im stimmlichen Timbre nicht zu hören.³ Grammatik und Aussprache sind nicht oder kaum vom im Hip-Hop üblichen *African American Vernacular English* geprägt.

Aber worum geht es in dieser Poe-Paraphrase? Wie bei vielen Pop-Lyrics kann, wie auch in zahlreichen Gedichten, der Inhalt oder die Aussage nicht mit zweifelsfreier Gewissheit benannt werden. Die Lyrics enthalten Leerstellen, Spielräume, die entweder stehen bleiben und/oder durch eine Interpretation gefüllt werden müssen. Grundsätzlich übernimmt MC Lars das Poe'sche Setting: Ein Rabe klopft nachts an die Tür des lyrischen Ich, wird zum unheimlichen, erratischen Gast, der auf jede Frage, insbesondere auf die, ob jemals wieder Glück zu erlangen sei, mit dem Wort „Nevermore“ antwortet. So wird der Vogel zum Boten des Unglücks, eventuell des Todes, zum Sinnbild der Verzweiflung und Hoffnungslosigkeit. Der Kontext des Settings allerdings wird dem Nerdcore entsprechend modifiziert. Während Poes lyrisches Ich dem Unglück des Verlusts seiner Geliebten Lenore nachtrauert, sieht sich MC Lars in eine Art Battle-Situation mit Mr. Raven verstrickt. Es geht also nicht um das nach Poe „most poetical topic“ (Poe 2021, 387), nämlich den Tod einer schönen Frau,⁴ das sich – gerade hier beim Rappen – als Mittel zur Darstellung von normativen Männlichkeitsattributen angeboten hätte, sondern der Rabe wird als feindseliger Rapper, Mr. Raven, vorgestellt: „Who's that rapping? | Who's that rapping at my chamber door? | Mr.

³ Die enorme Bedeutung und Vielfalt der Stimme als Gestaltungsebene im Hip-Hop untersucht Porco 2011, 151–200.

⁴ „the death, then, of a beautiful woman is, unquestionably, the most poetical topic in the world“ (Poe 2021, 387).

Raven!“ Die Doppeldeutigkeit des Worts „rapping“ wird ausgeschöpft. Bei Poe bedeutet es „klopfen“ oder „pochen“, der Rabe klopft an die Zimmertür, während hier zugleich das „Rappen“ im popkulturellen Sinne gemeint ist. Entscheidend für die Bedeutung des Raben-Rappers ist, dass dieser den „fresh MC [Lars]“ (MC Lars 2004, o. S.) weniger aus persönlichen, denn aus ästhetischen Gründen ablehnt. Dieses *dissin* (von *to be disrespectful*) ist für Raptexte typisch und beinhaltet das „Runtermachen“ eines Antagonisten, zum Beispiel um eine Fehde auszutragen. Hier folgt aus dieser Ablehnung Zweifel des lyrischen Ich an seiner musikalisch-poetischen Eignung und Existenzberechtigung und ein entsprechend schlechtes Selbstwertgefühl. So rappt es von seinem Befinden, nachdem das erste „Nevermore“ mit des Raben Feindseligkeit verbunden wurde: „Satanic raven, Nietzsche glee, killing me softly like the Fugees“ (MC Lars 2004, o. S.).⁵ Dies zeitigt unmittelbar Konsequenzen für die eigene Kreativität: „Now I feel worse, my verse is terse, joy inverse just like Fred Durst. Call a nurse, disperse my thirst put this process in reverse“ (MC Lars 2004, o. S.). Ich meine, dass die Auseinandersetzung über die genre-spezifische Wettkampfsituation im Hip-Hop, das Battle, hinausgeht beziehungsweise vom üblichen Ausspielen der Konkurrenzverhältnisse abweicht. Erstens ist und bleibt Mr. Raven in einer dominanten Position; er scheint wörtlich den Ton anzugeben und über (künstlerischen) Tod oder Leben entscheiden zu können. Zweitens steigt das lyrische Ich gar nicht in das Battle ein, versucht also gar nicht, Respekt und Ansehen durch die eigene Performance zu gewinnen. Dem *dissin* wird nicht mit *boastin*, also dem Anpreisen der eigenen Vorzüge begegnet, sondern der MC fügt sich umgehend in seine Verliererrolle und macht die Folgen mit sich allein aus: „Wish I’d had some warning first, MC Lars, ‘88 hearse. Now I’ll never be Slug or Murs, under that black raven’s curse.“⁶ (MC Lars 2004, o. S.) Dies entspricht dem von MC Lars als Grundbefindlichkeit der Nerdszene angegebenen Gefühl der Isolation (vgl. Sewell 2015, 225). Was aber gibt Mr. Raven die Macht, über die Existenz von MC Lars zu entscheiden? Die Antwort scheint mir im letzten Zitat zu liegen. Denn während bei Poe die Farbe des Raben kaum eine Rolle spielt – nur einmal wird in den 108 Zeilen des Gedichts die Farbe des Gefieders angesprochen, und zwar indirekt („ebony“) –, fällt bei MC Lars zweimal direkt das Adjektiv „black“ zur Charakterisierung von Mr. Raven: neben dem „black raven’s curse“ die Beschreibung „twenty-pound bird black as could be“ (MC Lars 2004, o. S.). Es scheint also nicht von geringer Bedeutung zu sein, dass Mr. Raven schwarz ist. Im Kontext des Nerdcore liegt damit die Interpretation auf der Hand,

5 „Killing me softly“ war 1996 ein sehr erfolgreiches Cover des gleichnamigen Hits von Roberta Flack (1973) der Hip-Hop-Band The Fugees.

6 Der „Hearse 88“ ist ein Modell der Automobilmarke Cadillac, das als Leichenwagen verwendet wird. Slug und Murs sind Rapper, die zusammen in der Band Felt musizieren.

dass Mr. Raven die Ästhetik der Black Artists der Hip-Hop-Szene verkörpert, die aufgrund der Geschichte der Schwarzen in den USA ein angespanntes Verhältnis zur Dominanz der weißen Bevölkerung besitzt, insbesondere zu solchen Vertreter:innen, die sich spezifisch Schwarze Formen von Kunst und Kultur aneignen, wie es immer wieder vorgekommen ist (Ragtime, Jazz, Rock'n'Roll, Disco und jetzt auch hier beim Hip-Hop; vgl. Jeffries 2011). Aus der Sicht des Nerdcore-Rappers ergibt sich dadurch eine Missachtung seiner Kunst und der feindselige Ausschluss aus dem Kreis der Hip-Hopper. Der Diskurs scheint sich daher eher um Race und Class (*street credibilty* vs. *middle class*, *suburbian*) als um Gender zu drehen. Gender, Misogynie, männliches Dominanzgebahren spielen hier wenn dann nur indirekt eine Rolle. Trifft die Interpretation zu, hätte es eine deutlich rassistische Konnotation, People of Color als Rabentier darzustellen, und zwar in der Linie der Minstrel Show-Figur Jim Crow und der nach ihm benannten diskriminierenden Gesetzgebung. Offen bleibt an dieser Stelle, ob der Lit-Hop bereits Gegenstand des Ausschlussverfahrens oder das geschilderte Raven-Battle Anlass und Dokument der Gründung eines Genres oder Subgenres eigenen Existenzrechts bildet. Uneindeutig muss auch bleiben, ob der Nerdcore-Rapper den Ausschluss anklagt oder stolz darauf ist, weil daraus auch folgte, dass Nerds unfähig und/oder unwillig seien, die sexistischen, hypermaskulinen Ideale der Szene zu übernehmen. In jedem Fall zeigt sich hier der grundlegende identitätspolitische Ansatz der Lit-Hopper. Doch warum eignet sich gerade Poe als Referenzpunkt?

Inhaltliche Anknüpfungspunkte

Poe war Außenseiter oder zumindest stilisierte er sich dazu. Er stellte sich bewusst, hin und wieder allzu forciert gegen einen „Mainstream“, der sich in den jungen USA entweder volksnah gab auf theologische Themen in puritanischer Manier geicht und von idealistischer Romantik erfüllt war oder naiver das abenteuerreiche Leben in und mit der Natur stilisierte. Und auch wenn Poe für seine Werke von amerikanischen Kollegen viele Züge übernehmen konnte, allem voran die Form der Kurzgeschichte, so waren doch seine eigentlichen Idole weitaus umstritteneren, düsteren Charakters wie das europäische *enfant terrible* Lord Byron oder E.T.A. Hoffmann. Dazu kam, dass Poes eigener Charakter und Lebenswandel den amerikanischen Tugenden und Träumen so gar nicht entsprach, was ihm lange Zeit, auch über seinen Tod hinaus, vorgehalten wurde und in allgemeinen Misskredit brachte. Noch „in the 1920s, Poe still figured as a problematic talent in literary histories and biographical accounts. He seemed [...] far from the 'main currents of American thought'“ (Kennedy und Peebles 2019, 1). Diese Außenseiterposition mani-

festierte sich nicht zuletzt in der Fixierung auf damals eher abseitig-sensationelle, dunkle Themen, also die amerikanische Antwort auf die populäre englische Gothic-Mode um 1800. Außenseiter zu sein oder sein zu wollen, verbindet Lit-Hopper mit Poe. Doch mittlerweile ist der Dichter längst zum Klassiker des weißen Bildungskansons avanciert. Und genau diesen zum Thema von Hip-Hop zu machen, war innerhalb der Szene ein No-Go und selbst höchst abseitig, aber es entsprach den Vorstellungen der Produzent:innen von Nerdcore, die sich nicht nur in amerikanischen Jugendkulturen, sondern insbesondere gegenüber den Idealen des Hip-Hop als weiße, uncoole Außenseiter betrachteten. MC Lars macht allerdings auch verschiedene, erst auf den zweiten Blick erkennbare Verwandtschaften zwischen Hip-Hop und Poe aus: In seinem TEDTalk bezeichnet er die oft als Horrorcore gelabelte Hip-Hop-Band Odd Future und den Rapper Tyler the Creator, aber auch insgesamt die dunklen, Gothic-nahen Themen vieler Hip-Hop-Künstler:innen als verwandt mit jener düsteren Schönheit, der auch Poe nachstellte. Die Ästhetisierung von Gewalt, Verbrechen und Tod hat Poe seit Mitte des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts zu einem Referenzpunkt für Kulturen werden lassen, die sich für die Schattenseiten der menschlichen Psyche interessieren, wie der französische Symbolismus, von diesem inspirierte Fin-de-Siecle-Kreise, H.P. Lovecraft, Horrorfilme, Heavy Metal-Bands oder die neue Gothic-Bewegung seit den 1980er Jahren (vgl. Herzfeld 2013, 154–172). Diese Themen bilden somit zugleich eine Schnittmenge mit populären Kulturen, die sich fasziniert davon zeigen, dass sich literarische Klassiker diesen Inhalten wandten und dabei nicht allzu intellektuell, verkopft, trocken oder elitär sein müssen. So kann der Poe'sche Rabe, dessen Unheimlichkeit heutigen Horror-geimpften Jugendlichen keinen Schauer mehr über den Rücken jagen dürfte, zumindest mit einem Augenzwinkern in Richtung Popkultur immer noch als Symbol des ewigen Unglücks auf Erden fungieren. Gleichzeitig rechtfertigt die behauptete inhaltliche Nähe von Hip-Hop und Poe die Beschäftigung mit Letzterem und legitimiert Lit-Hop als Subgenre des Ersteren. Mit einer solchen Rechtfertigungsstrategie stellt der Nerdcore seine Ausgrenzung seitens des Hip-Hop in Frage und sucht als untergeordnete Ausdrucksform um Integration in die dominante Kulturform. Mit dem Raben verbindet sich außerdem eine möglicherweise noch aufschlussreichere Komponente, die Poe zum Anknüpfungspunkt für Lit-Hop werden ließ.

Dichtungstheorie

Poe ist jeder Schüler:in im englischen Sprachraum dafür bekannt, dass er nicht nur düstere Gedichte schrieb, sondern das Dichten selbst zum Thema einiger Aufsätze machte. In Essays wie *Philosophy of Composition* (1846), *The Poetic Principle*

(posth. 1850) und *The Rationale of Verse* (posth. 1850) gewährt Poe Einblick in seine Dichter-Werkstatt, indem er Überlegungen und Entscheidungen, die seinen Gedichten zugrunde liegen, mit den Leser:innen teilt. Es handelt sich also um eine Art Selbstvergewisserung über den Vorgang des Dichtens und eine Legitimation seines Produkts. Poe wollte damit beweisen, dass die Unheimlichkeit und die massiv von affektiven Zuschreibungen wie Trauer, Schrecken, Verzweiflung geprägte Dichtung nicht durch einen geheimnisvollen Akt der Inspiration zustande gekommen, wie es diverse romantische Konzepte suggerieren, sondern vielmehr Ergebnis einer fast schon mit mathematischer Präzision kalkulierenden dichterischen Intelligenz seien: „It is my design to render it manifest that no one point in its composition is referrible either to accident or intuition—that the work proceeded, step by step, to its completion with the precision and rigid consequence of a mathematical problem“ (Poe 2021, 384). Im Grunde entmythisiert Poe hier das Dichter-Genie und präsentiert es als (technischen) Produzenten von Schönheit und das Gedicht als sein höchst reflektiert designtes Produkt. Poe verkörpert somit die handwerkliche Einstellung der marktorientierten Popular Culture, die mit den Gothic Novels des ausgehenden achtzehnten Jahrhunderts begann oder zumindest an Fahrt aufnahm. Eine auffällige Parallele zum Hip-Hop besteht meines Erachtens darin, dass auch die Rapper:innen in ihren Texten überdurchschnittlich oft vom Rappen als kreativem Akt sprechen. Ich möchte das kurz belegen: Bereits die ersten Hip-Hop-Tracks enthielten solche Selbst-Reflexionen. Die Sugarhill Gang und ihr MC Melle Mel lassen ihren Track „Rapper’s Delight“ 1979 mit folgenden Worten beginnen, die den poetischen Ort des Rappens beschreiben:

Now what you hear is not a test, I’m rappin’ to the beat
 And me, the groove, and my friends are gonna try to move your feet
 You see, I am Wonder Mike, and I’d like to say hello
 To the black, to the white, the red, and the brown, the purple and yellow
 But first I gotta bang-bang the boogie to the boogie
 Say up jump the boogie to the bang-bang boogie
 Let’s rock, you don’t stop
 Rock the riddle that’ll make your body rock
 Well, so far you’ve heard my voice, but I brought two friends along
 And next on the mic is my man Hank
 And come on, Hank, sing that song!
 (Sugarhill Gang 1979, o. S.)

Das MC-ing ist häufig auch eine rap-poetologische Selbstvergewisserung und Legitimation des eigenen *style*.⁷ Eines von unzähligen, späteren Beispielen wäre der Track mit dem sprechenden Titel „Build ya Skillz“ von Busta Rhymes und KRS-One von 1995. Busta Rhymes, dessen Name bereits seine Tätigkeit „to bust the rhymes“, also die Reime oder Verse aufsprengen (oder auch schnappen), benennt, gehört ohnehin zu den hochgeachteten Rappern, da er über eine Technik verfügt, die es ihm erlaubt, ein extrem hohes Tempo zu erlangen. In „Build ya Skillz“ geht es um einen angeblichen Verfall des Rappens in den frühen 1990er Jahren, dem gegenüber Qualität und Authentizität hochgehalten werden sollen.

That's the Hip-Hop, the hibby
 I rip it in a minute cause I'm gifted like December 25th
 Now let me flip I'm all knowing, lyrically syllable growing
 Even when it's snowing, I'm party going
 Free flowing and stomping! Never tip-toeing
 Overthrowing the comp Big up Bronx!
 I got more styles than the planet got women
 I got as many rhymes as is many styles of women (tell 'em).
 (KRS-One 1995, o. S.)

Der eigene genuine, unverwechselbare Stil wird in den Rap Lyrics also beschrieben und angepriesen; der aus Geschwindigkeit, Rhythmisierung und Wort- und Sujetwahl entstehende *flow* ist gewissermaßen der poetische Fingerabdruck des Rappers (vgl. Kautny 2015). In den Lyrics bleibt es natürlich im Rahmen der poetischen Umschreibung und beim Nachweis durch die Lyrics selbst; die Rapper vertiefen sich nicht explizit in technische Details, was Versmetren oder rhythmische und modulatorische Details anbelangt. Doch auch Poe unternimmt dies ja nicht in den Gedichten selbst, sondern in den sie begleitenden Essays. Die Parallele besteht vielmehr im hohen Maß an Reflexion des eigenen lyrischen Tuns und der Mitteilung seiner Absichten und Ziele *ad choram publico*. So gibt Poe dezidiert die Herstellung melancholischer Schönheit als Ziel seiner Dichtung an und beschreibt die Mittel, die er zur Erreichung des Ziels wählt: musikalisch bestimmte Klänge in den Vokalen und Konsonanten (der *tone*) und deren Wiederholung bis hin zum Refrain, im Falle von „The Raven“ das Wort „Nevermore“. Aus der Perspektive des Rappers beschreibt Poe hier seinen *flow*. MC Lars hat nun beide Seiten zusammengebracht und daraus seinen Track „Flow like Poe“ gemacht. Hier, vor allem im dazugehörigen Video, tritt MC Lars als Dichter Poe auf, der wiederum mit einem Rapper verglichen wird. MC Lars nutzt die Verbindung, um in knapp drei-

7 Erstaunlicherweise wurde diesem Phänomen in der umfangreichen Hip-Hop-Literatur bisher kaum ausführlich nachgegangen.

einhalb Minuten in wesentliche Elemente von Dichtungstheorie einzuführen: Versmaße, rhetorische Figuren, Metaphern, Sujets. Außerdem beleuchtet er das historisch-literarische Umfeld des Dichters, nämlich die Konkurrenten Emerson, Melville und Dickens, um es mit den Battles zwischen Hip-Hoppers zu analogisieren. Poe wird dabei zum *Bad Boy* der Szene stilisiert, der Rauschmittel nahm und Gewaltfantasien dichterisch auslebte. Schließlich äußert sich MC Lars zu den Effekten, zur Wirkmacht, die Dichtung zeitigen kann, also zu den rezeptionsästhetischen Implikationen. Die Botschaft ist also: Wenn ihr Rap mögt und wissen wollt, wie er funktioniert, dann lohnt es sich, sich dem Klassiker Poe zuzuwenden, der nicht so viel anders als die heutigen Hip-Hop-Künstler lebte und arbeitete und darüber auch noch berichtete.

Pädagogik

Die angesprochene Wirkung bei der Rezeption von Poesie und Musik wird von ihren Produzent:innen selten bloß als rein ästhetisch geschätzt. Vielmehr verbinden sich damit oft erzieherische Programme, eine ästhetische Erziehung, um mit Friedrich Schiller zu sprechen (vgl. 1993 [1794]); eine Erziehung durch oder mit Kunst, die zu mehr Freiheit führen soll. Worin Freiheit im Einzelnen besteht, darüber gibt es allerdings unterschiedliche Ansichten. Schiller sah sie bekanntlich durch das an Kant angelehnte freie Spiel der Phantasie und Erkenntniskräfte gewährleistet, das zu einem Durchspielen des Verhältnisses von Gesetz, Ordnung, Willen, Neigung und Pflicht einlade (vgl. 1993 [1794], vor allem 26. Brief, 655–661). Auch Poe sah sich – das machen seine Essays und gefürchteten Literaturkritiken deutlich – als literarischer Erzieher des jungen, medial und kulturell sich rasch verändernden Amerika. So können „Poe’s reviews as crucial to understanding how his theory of art responded, whether positively, negatively, or ambivalently, to popular mass culture“ (Hurr 2018, 444) angesehen werden. Er befand sich in einem literaturpädagogischen Feldzug gegen seine publizistischen Feinde, die die Poesie von unterschiedlichen, seiner Ansicht nach unangemessenen Idealen her einzuschränken trachteten und die er mit Hohn und Spott bedachte. Doch

Poe’s persisting struggle to influence the taste of the reading public was not so much a reactionary attempt to resurrect old aesthetic standards but rather an effort to institute a new order of criticism that would enable the evaluation and sorting of a new supply of literary commodities. (Whalen 1999, 76)

Ästhetische Freiheit versprach sich Poe von der radikalen Verfolgung des Ziels, Schönheit herzustellen, ohne Rücksicht auf Tradition, Didaktik, Wahrheit oder

Moral. Für Rapper und Hip-Hopper besteht Freiheit wiederum darin „to speak up for oneself“, also den Mut und die Zivilcourage, das Recht auf Mitsprache und gesellschaftliche Anerkennung im von weißen Männern dominierten Amerika aufzubringen und einzufordern. Hip-Hop ist schließlich eine Kultur, die ihre Kunstformen Musik, Reimen, Break Dancing und Graffiti dezidiert dazu nutzt, die marginalisierte Black Culture zu ermächtigen und in den gesellschaftlichen Diskurs einzubringen (vgl. Jeffries 2011; Deis 2015), Sprechen aus „subalternen“ Position heraus, wie die Postkolonialistin Gayatri Spivak es nennt (vgl. 1985). Letzteres hat auch der Lit-Hop im Sinn: junge Menschen, Nerds, aber auch anderweitig marginalisierte Jugendliche dazu zu ermutigen, sich zu äußern, für sich selbst zu sprechen und dabei auf die von Poe und anderen beschriebenen, letztlich traditionellen dichterischen Gestaltungsformen und Wirkmechanismen von künstlerisch geformter Sprache (mit Musik) zu vertrauen und zurückzugreifen.⁸ Ein TED-Talk von MC Lars enthält bezeichnenderweise auch einen kurzen Exkurs in die Neurobiologie des Gehirns, und zwar nicht zufällig direkt nach der Einführung in die Ideen Poes; ein Exkurs, der erklären soll, warum gereimte Sprache und Musik nahezu das gesamte Gehirn – Frontal-, Temporal- und Scheitellappen, sowie die emotionalen und gedächtnisrelevanten Zentren Amygdala und Hippocampus – ansprechen und so für kognitive Aktivierung und Speicherung von Kultur sorgen – Effekte, die Poe bereits ähnlich, aber ohne Verweis auf das Organische beschrieben hatte. Nach diesem Exkurs spricht MC Lars ein konkretes pädagogisches Projekt an, das die Theorie in die Praxis setzen soll. Mit Schüler:innen der sozial und künstlerisch engagierten Robert-Kennedy-School in Koreatown Los Angeles transformierte er Poes Geschichte „The Masque of the Red Death“ in einen Hip-Hop-Song, um den Schüler:innen mit einem reizvollen Horror-Thema eines literarischen Klassikers zu einem zeitgemäßen Hip-Hop-Produkt zu verhelfen, mit dem sie letztlich üben können, frei zu spielen, kreativ zu sein, ihre Stimme zu finden und zu äußern, an etwas Gemeinschaftlichem teilzunehmen und sich so in partizipatorischer Demokratie zu üben. Es liegt die Vermutung nahe, dass MC Lars und seine Nerdcore-Kollegen selbst das neue Subgenre dazu nutzten, um in

⁸ Dialektische Komplexität und Fragilität erhält dieses Vorhaben vor allem dann, wenn man sich bewusst macht, dass ehemalige Nerds mittlerweile in sehr mächtigen wirtschaftlichen und politischen Positionen tätig sind und dabei, wie Elon Musk, Mark Zuckerberg etc., nicht immer demokratische Verhältnisse unterstützen. Aus dem Empowerment wird so schnell wieder die traditionelle Unterdrückung von Minderheiten durch mächtige weiße Männer. Dieser Wandel gegenüber der Gründungszeit des Nerdcore bedarf weiterer Untersuchung und Bewertung ausgehend von Lockhart 2015 und Latini 2023. MC Lars selbst hat in letzter Zeit ebenfalls auf das Thema *racial appropriation* durch Nerdcore reflektiert, allerdings sieht er eher die Anfänge des Genres kritisch und beobachtet wachsende Diversität und Inklusion (vgl. MC Lars 2025, o. S.),

der von Gangster-Rapper:innen dominierten Szene des Hip-Hop eine nerdige, weiße, aber auch authentisch eigene Stimme zu finden und ihre Partizipation zu erstreiten – Dokumentarfilme wie *Nerdcare Rising* (2008) stützen diese Interpretation.

Medien

Abschließend sei auf die Rolle der digitalen Medien eingegangen. Poe war wie bereits angedeutet ein geschickter Mann der Medien. Er hatte die große Öffentlichkeit im Auge und nutzte die zeitgenössischen Medien, Zeitung, Zeitschrift, Magazin, um Werke und Meinungen zu verbreiten. Die Musik betrachtete er als Schwestermedium der Dichtung, wenn nicht gar als Leitmedium, durch das die Dichtung als *Song Lyrics* vervollkommen und natürlich auch verbreitet wird. Poe hatte eine durchaus populäre Musikform zur Vertonung seiner Lyrik im Sinn.⁹ Hip-Hop ist der Prototyp der digitalen Pop-Kunst des 21. Jahrhunderts. Er ist nicht nur umgeben vom jeweils aktuellen Medium, sondern findet darin seine *conditio sine qua non*. Das zunächst noch analoge Sampeln und Remixen mit Turntables und Vinylplatten der frühen DJs wurde unter den digitalen Bedingungen ab den 80er Jahren zur genuin digitalen Produktionsweise ausgebaut. Wie die gesamte Szene machte sich auch Nerdcore zudem seit den frühen 2000er Jahren das Internet auf eine Weise zu Nutze, dass man sagen kann, ohne das Internet gäbe es kein Nerdcore. Die Protagonist:innen und ihr Publikum bestehen zu einem beträchtlichen Teil aus Computer-Spieler:innen, Programmierer:innen und Netzwerker:innen. Frühe Nerdcore-Künstler:innen wie MC Frontalot erreichten ihre erste Popularität durch Präsenz auf Online-Plattformen und Teilnahme an deren Wettbewerben und Aktionen wie auf der Comic- und Gaming Plattform Penny Arcade oder der Competition-Plattform Song Fight! Das Internet sei, so Nerdcore-Sympathisant Weird Al Yankovic, das neue MTV (*Nerdcare Rising* 2008, 12:05). MC Lars verbreitete seine Tracks, quasi von unten, zunächst auf Streaming-Plattformen, bevor er auch Audio-CDs vertrieb. Insbesondere auf YouTube kommen Videos wie das zu „Flow like Poe“ dazu (MC Lars 2012). Schließlich nutzt er als weitere Plattform die analog zu Poes theoretischen Essays zu verstehenden TEDTalks; TED steht für Technology, Entertainment, Design und die TED-Konfe-

⁹ Vgl. u. a. seine Bestimmung aus dem „Longfellow-Review“: „We will but add, at this point, that the highest possible development of the Poetical Sentiment is to be found in the union of song with music, in its popular sense“ (Poe 2021, 370). Die Verleihung der Literaturnobelpreises an Bob Dylan 2016 wirkt wie eine verspätete Bestätigung von Poes Idealen.

renzen sind im Umfeld eines medien- und technologiebegeisterten Westküsten-Milieus entstanden. Diese finden zwar in Präsenz zum Beispiel an einer Hochschule oder im Rahmen einer anderen Konferenz statt, werden aber schließlich als Videos auf Internet-Plattformen, auf der TED-Seite oder dann auf YouTube, Twitter beziehungsweise X, TikTok et cetera millionenfach verbreitet, geteilt, kommentiert und geliked. MC Lars findet somit auch jenseits des traditionellen Konzert- und Vortragswesens seine seelenverwandte Community. Das Format trägt die Plattformenlogiken bereits in sich, indem eine bestimmte Dauer und ein bestimmter Präsentationsmodus vorgegeben sind – es geht darum, sich kurz zu fassen, nicht zu speziell für ein Fachpublikum zu sprechen, sondern für eine breite, interessierte Öffentlichkeit, aber gleichzeitig soll ein komplexer Sachverhalt mit viel Fachwissen aufbereitet werden. Gefragt ist also ein Spezialist:innen-tum, das sich dem großen Publikum öffnet, wobei Wissen und Rhetorik, Inhalt und Form eine ebenso unterhaltsame, wie lehrreiche Fusion eingehen sollen. Böse Zungen, wie der libanesische Essayist und Wirtschaftsexperte Nassim Nicholas Taleb, kritisieren an diesem Format, dass es Denker:innen und Wissenschaftler:innen zu Entertainer:innen und Zirkusdarsteller:innen mache (vgl. 2010, 336). Aber auch dieses Edutainment kann formal-rhetorisch auf Poe zurückgeführt werden, namentlich seine ambitionierte Sprache (die französische und lateinische Fremdwörter und Zitate nicht scheut), die aber in der verdaulichen Form der Kurzgeschichte und des Gedichts verpackt wird, sein Kalkül der Länge des Produkts, die ein zusammenhängendes Auffassen ohne Unterbrechung ermöglichen soll, zudem durch Refrainbildung oder eine spannungsreiche Dramaturgie erleichtert, wobei ein genaues, intensives Zuhören notwendig ist, um die Feinheiten der Sprache und des beschriebenen Grauens nicht zu verpassen.

Schlussbemerkung

Durch die Anknüpfung an Poe im Genre Lit-Hop werden Studien zu Poes Rezeption in literarischen und musikalischen Popular Cultures (vgl. Neimeyer 2002; Perry und Sederholm 2012; Herzfeld 2013) bekräftigt in dem Ergebnis, dass der Dichter in zahlreichen und höchst unterschiedlichen Belangen zum Ahnherren und intellektuellen sowie künstlerischen Bezugspunkt vieler aktueller Strömungen geworden ist, zum Prototyp des modernen, unter den Vorzeichen sowohl kommerzieller wie auch ambitionierter Kultur schaffenden, Künstlers. Besonders und nicht zufällig sind es populäre Musikkulturen, die gleichzeitig einen Hang zum „Klassischen“ besitzen, die sich Poe zuwenden. Dem Progressive Rock und Heavy Metal, der Gothic-Szene und dem Künstlermusical kann nun auch der auf

den ersten Blick unwahrscheinliche Fall des Hip-Hop hinzugefügt werden, freilich in seiner weißen Spielart des Nerdcore. Die ursprünglich auf die Marginalisierung der Black Community reagierende Hip-Hop-Kultur wird hier auf eine von jener ausgegrenzten Gruppe der Nerds ausgeweitet. Sie findet bei Poe zunächst Verwandtschaft zum Hip-Hop allgemein, und vor allem auch fruchtbare Anreize für das Projekt Lit-Hop, wenn es um Inhalte, Selbstreflexion sowie die mediale und didaktische Ausrichtung geht. Ob wir es dadurch mit einem klassischen Fall von rassistischer Aneignung [*appropriation*], wie es die Interpretation von „Mr. Raven“ nahelegt, oder aber gerade im Vergleich zu Vanilla Ice oder Eminem mit einem Angebot der Überbrückung sozialer und ethnischer Gräben zu tun haben, wäre weiter zu diskutieren. Die Themen Gender und männliche Hegemonie, die sowohl im Hip-Hop- als auch Poe-Diskurs großen Raum einnehmen, spielen zumindest *prima facie* und in den hier untersuchten Beispielen eine eher ungeordnete Rolle. Andere Poe-Tracks von MC Lars wie „Leonore“ oder „Annabel Lee“, also Adaptationen klassischer „Frauen-Gedichte“ von Poe, stellten hierfür ungleich geeignetere Objekte dar und versprechen weiteren Aufschluss. Die Geschichte der musikalischen Poe-Adaptationen jedenfalls scheint lange noch nicht an ihr Ende gekommen zu sein.

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Cornelia Gräbner

Into the Sound World: Worlding and the Thick Event in Neil Campbell and Seán Street's Collaborative Album *Estuary* (2017)

Introduction

In May 2023 I was drawn into the unique sound world of *Journey into Space* (2023), a collaboration between poet Seán Street and multi-instrumentalist, composer and producer Neil Campbell, put on as a live event during the annual, month-long Writing on the Wall festival in Liverpool.¹ It featured Campbell on classical guitar and Seán Street on spoken word, with Street sometimes offering paratextual interventions between the pieces. The performance took place in the performance space of Prohibition Recording Studios, a space which is both make-shift and thoughtfully tended. The walls are covered with recycled wooden boards, creating a warm acoustic environment. Clearly visible pipes and cables, as well as offices adjacent to the corridor that leads to the performance space, show that this is also a working environment. A small bar in the back of the room invites social interactions. The furnishings – folding tables and chairs, fairy lights and light chains – suggest that the studios can be easily converted into a different type of space for a different use, thus conveying an atmosphere of creative dynamism, work-in-progress and the possibility of transformation. There are no windows and therefore, no outside sonic interference so that the space enables concentration, focus and attunement. Performers and listeners alike were immersed

¹ The organization Writing on the Wall emerged from the Liverpool Dockers Strike in the late 1990s. This was an industrial dispute which involved the lock-out of around 500 unionized workers employed by Mersey Docks, who had refused to cross a picket line set up by fellow workers who had been sacked by another company. Such solidarity actions are illegal under British (anti-) trade union legislation brought in by the Conservative government led by Margaret Thatcher and John Major. While the lock-out was the spark that lit the fuse, the issues at stake went deeper and involved the casualization of labor and the social and political impact of changes in the shipping industry, such as container shipping. Writing on the Wall is now a community organization that promotes writing as a community activity. See: <https://writingonthewall.org.uk/about/>.

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in the sound world that emerged from the interplay of spoken word, conversational intervention, and music. I grew to realize that I experienced that evening the gradual transformation of a guided journey into a sound world in the form of a performance, into what Nina Sun Eidsheim in *Sensing Sound: Singing and Listening as Vibrational Practice* conceptualizes as a *thick event*: an event that is multisensorial and dynamic; that is interpersonal and intermaterial; and that cannot be appreciated or understood by dissecting it into its singular, separate facets or referents (cf. 2015).

Eidsheim's study, and the emerging interdisciplinary field around vibrations and vibrational listening, offers a promising approach to intermedial collaborations that comprise musical, poetic, social and spatial facets, such as Campbell and Street's previous collaborative project, *Estuary* (2017), a collaboration which also included singer Perri Alleyne-Hughes. Here, the two artists created a piece that responds to, and emerges from within their perception of, the spatial, ecological and sensorial complexity of estuaries as thick events. Eidsheim begins *Sensing Sound* with a reflection on an occurrence in an ecologically and perceptually complex space: the falling of a tree in a forest (cf. 2015, 1). She defines this as a thick event because it involves a myriad of phenomena and therefore, a myriad of forms of perception. Such complexity, Eidsheim argues, must not be reduced to a singular sensory mode when we try to understand the event (cf. 2015, 4). However, modes of understanding that are channeled through academic disciplines encourage such reductivism. The thick event is dissected into – usually, quantifiable – components by representatives of these disciplines, who then lay claim to offering an adequate understanding of each of these components, thus suggesting that a thick event can be accessed through only one of its components, and that each can be understood without considering the others. According to Eidsheim, this approach is not appropriate for a thick event. She makes this argument with regards to music; however, she quotes poet Billy Collins who identifies an analogous process in the study and reception of poetry, and she suggests that music and poetry, and the approaches they have been subjected to, are comparable. Moreover, she argues that “the way we conceive of our relationship to music could productively be understood as an expression of how we conceive of our relationship to the world” (Eidsheim 2015, 6). This analogy between our relationship to music (and poetry) and our relationship to the world drives *Estuary*: Campbell and Street are themselves immersed listeners to the thick event that is the estuary, and they then create through poetry and music an analogous thick event in the form of a performance (live or recorded), into which listeners are invited to immerse during the process of listening.

Yet, *Estuary* reaches beyond the collaborative piece or performance. On a conceptual and analytical level, *Estuary* offers an excellent opportunity to bring

together the register of music and sound study through the concept of the *thick event* (cf. Eidsheim 2015) and the register of ecopoetry² and New Materialism through the concept of *worlding*. *Worlding* is an activity as well as a concept. It responds to the awareness that all beings and all matter are entangled with each other and that a “world” is not an external object, but an active process in which we as humans always participate, as “we come to know and enact a world from inhabiting it, from becoming attuned to its differences, positions and juxtapositions, from a training of our senses, dispositions and expectations and from being able to initiate, imitate and elaborate skilled lines of action” (Anderson and Harrison 2010, 9). The creation of a performance of the thick event that is an estuary participates in a worlding, and the performers extend this opportunity to *Estuary*’s listeners and invite them into the event.

Campbell and Street both have wide-ranging and pluralistic creative trajectories. Campbell is a performer, composer and producer. His repertoire as an acoustic classical guitarist and multi-instrumentalist spans a variety of musical styles, including contemporary classical music, Irish traditional and contemporary folk music, prog rock, and jazz, and he collaborates regularly with other artists. His compositions include several musical responses to works of literature, among them *Frankenstein* (2009) and *The Smoky God* (2024). Recently he has focused on production, and when reflecting on his work he devotes significant time and attention to the ways in which music and sounds affect listeners and how sensorial experiences can be encouraged, achieved and nurtured through composition and production. Campbell is also involved in Liverpool’s lively cultural scene, as the venue director of Hope University’s performance venue, the Capstone Theatre. Street trained as an actor and worked as a radio broadcaster. He is a dramatist, a poet, and professor emeritus of Radio Studies at Bournemouth University. He has published fourteen poetry collections, theoretical and historical works on radio, essayistic-theoretical reflections on sounds, and several books of prose on historical and topographical subjects, most recently *Wild Track: Sound, Text and the Idea of Birdsong* (2023).³ Like Campbell, he frequently works on short-term and

2 Poet Forrest Gander offers a succinct definition of the difference between nature poetry or pastoral poetry on the one hand, and ecopoetry on the other. In the Introduction to the online collection *Ecopoetry and Water*, he writes that “whereas ‘nature poetry’ often takes the so-called ‘natural world’ for its themes, as though it were separate from the human world, ecopoetry asks how we are involved in—and a part of—all that surrounds us. Ecopoets attempt to offer insights, both formally and thematically, into the complex interrelationships between nature and culture, language and perception” (Gander 2024, n.p.).

3 Street’s approach to sounds is characterized by his interest in the dynamic and vibrant character of sound. His usage of the concept does therefore not map onto the ossified conception of Sound that Eidsheim criticizes in her work. Street in his own work often refers to “sound.” To

long-term collaborative cross-genre projects with other artists, especially musicians; among them composer Cecilia MacDowall, for whom he works as a librettist.

Estuary was their second collaborative project, the first having been a jazz-based collaboration around Street's chap book *Jazz Time* (2014). *Estuary* was commissioned by Writing on the Wall for the celebrations of the centennial of the Cunard Shipping Line in 2015. The company was founded and based in Liverpool and its former headquarters, the Cunard Building, is one of the three iconic buildings known as the Three Graces, which line the banks of the Mersey. *Estuary* was first performed on the eve of the central anniversary event, which saw three of the company's famous vessels sail up the Mersey Estuary. A second performance, which took place at the Capstone Theatre, featured a documentary film inspired by the recorded piece and a live dance performance, with a dancer responding to the ensemble of film, poetry and music.⁴ Finally, the artists recorded it as an album. My reflections here will refer to the album version of the work.

The work is tightly tethered to the vibrant materiality of the landscapes of estuaries, from which its sound world, its ecology and its social world arise. Estuaries are complex spaces which, due to their geographical features, enable unique coexistences and constellations of matter, human life, and the more-than-human.⁵ Michael Allaby in *A Dictionary of Geology and Earth Sciences* defines an Estuary as a "semi-enclosed coastal body of water which has a free connection with the open sea and where fresh water, derived from land drainage, is mixed with sea water. Estuaries are often subject to tidal action and where tidal activity is large, ebb and flood tidal currents tend to avoid each other, forming separate channels" (2020, n.p.). An Estuary is thus a transitioning space between sea and river, surrounded by land and opening out into the sea. Its topology is both bounded and

avoid misunderstandings and conflation with Eidsheim's use of the singular, I will in this article use the term "sounds" in reference to his work.

⁴ See Street et al. 2022 for the film.

⁵ The concept of the *more-than-human* recognizes the relational entanglement of all life (human and non-human) and worlds (including matter) and establishes a conceptual alternative to a dualistic conception of humans and worlds. The concept was coined as part of the wider theoretical enquiry into how to articulate the existence of all life as "always already entangled," a – now widely used – expression first used as such by Donna Haraway (1988). The term *more-than-human* has been adopted as an alternative to the *post-human* and the *non-human*, to avoid the dualism expressed in the term non-human, as well as the chronological implications of the post-human. It also sets a boundary towards conceptions of post-humanism linked to the biosciences and to the ideology of trans-humanism. There is a wide plethora of work that uses and defines this terminology. Lorimer and Hodges offer a concise and up-to-date overview of the concept (cf. 2024, 13–15).

dynamic in that it is semi-enclosed and has a free connection to the open sea, thus relating sea and land, facilitating the coming and going of ships which led to so many port cities being built on estuaries. The tidal dynamics and the channels – which feature in some of the poems I will discuss below – demand the navigational skill of humans if one wants to travel on them. The mix of fresh water and sea water finds its reflection in the hybrid cultural socialities that emerge around estuaries, especially in port cities. The tidal rhythms generate and symbolically evoke cyclical rhythms of life along the estuaries, a theme that recurs through the musical motives on *Estuary* and the texts of the poems. The material components of estuaries are “vibrant” in the sense proposed by Jane Bennett and it is in their vibrancy that we detect “a fuller range of the non-human powers circulating around and within human bodies” (2010, ix). When a work of art can make us feel these powers circulating around and through us, we feel more present in that worlding. The process of getting to that point of awareness is what I refer to as coming-into-presence.

Estuary consists of seventeen pieces. Five of them are musical pieces composed by Campbell. The remaining twelve are based on poems written by Street, most of which are embedded within a composition by Campbell. Only one poem is a spoken word track only. The poems were previously published in *Time between Tides (1981–2009)* (2009) and *Cello* (2013). All poems address the poetic sound world of estuaries from across the Northern hemisphere: the Mersey Estuary around Liverpool, the San Francisco Bay Estuary, Newfoundland, Donégal, and the Leigh Estuary in Essex. When Campbell and Street created *Estuary*, they started by selecting poems from Street’s publications, whereby Street proposed those he considered most suited for the spoken word and Campbell picked those he wanted to musically respond to. Campbell then started composing and selecting recorded sequences and field recordings that chimed with the project, and the two started to rehearse in an improvisational style. Eventually, as the project advanced, they invited jazz singer and choir leader Perri Alleyne-Hughes to collaborate as a vocalist. *Estuary* features classical guitar sequences, some field recordings and, to a lesser extent, keyboard and electronic arrangements. Instrumental pieces – entitled *Redux* – establish a sense of flow between the various sections of the album.

That said, Campbell and Street’s shared interest lies in sounds and in how music and poetry as practices emerge from and respond to sounds. Drawing on Eidsheim’s distinction between what she considers ossified Sound and Music on the one hand, and a vibrational, dynamic practice of sound on the other, I wish to clarify that Campbell and Street, like Eidsheim, are interested in poetry and music as dynamic practices that engage with sound worlds (cf. Campbell 2024b; Street 2024). This matches my interest as a cultural analyst, as distinct to a literary critic. Like Campbell, Street and Eidsheim, I am interested in exploring the prac-

tice, the dynamism and the import of poetry and any other art form it is placed in a relationship with. Here, I am interested in investigating how an intermedial, collaborative performance of a sound world becomes a worlding. *Estuary* takes listeners on an exploratory journey of attuning sensorially to estuaries' different facets, so that we can then become alive to the multi-layered, pluralistic vibrancy of a space that is a thick event. I will take readers on this exploration following the example of Street himself. In the preface to *The Sound Inside the Silence: Travels in the Sonic Imagination* (2019) he clarifies that instead of offering a "technical exposition" he will "invoke the voices of writers and poets as guides to the sound world" (Street 2019, ix). I will approach *Estuary* in the same spirit, treating Campbell and Street as guides into the concrete sound world of estuaries that they had entered, and into the imaginative sound world they created in response and that enacts a worlding. I will first analyze the introductory poem "Change" as an opening piece that familiarizes listeners with the poetics of the listening journey they are about to embark on. I will then turn to a mid-album sequence book-ended by two instrumental pieces, "Fog Redux" and "Vigil Redux" and comprising the composite pieces "Another Place," "Pier Head with Ferry," and "Tidal." The Redux pieces mark thematic and sonic sections of the performance and sonically relate them to each other; the three composite pieces are set on the Mersey Estuary. An analysis of these pieces will allow me to address different aspects of this specific estuary, as well as the range of sonic, poetic and musical strategies that Campbell and Street draw on in each.

"Change": Poetics

Estuary starts with "Change," a short piece which familiarizes listeners with the mode of travel on this journey. The piece opens with recordings of bird calls and birdsong. It then flows into a musical sequence which evokes the rolling sound of the sea and the pitch of bird calls, from which Street's voice rises with the spoken word track of the poem. The speech rhythm continues the rhythm of the guitar track of the previous sequence; the poignant alliterations and assonances resonate with the pitch of the bird calls and their sonic representations, seemingly translating the sounds of the musical sequence into the spoken word.⁶ The sequential unfolding

⁶ I write "seemingly" because in the sequence of the actual creative process, the musical track was created by Campbell as a response to Street's poem. In the sequence of the creative process, Campbell thus translated Street's poem into a composition, though the performance presents this in reverse.

of perception is crucial. Perception begins with sounds, then moves on to words, then the brain turns sound and words into knowledge and understanding:

Its sounds tell us of the tide's turn first. Down by
mud flats, deceptive sand, sea sends signals, high
frequency. It's really worth a close listen
because flood starts with hiss, then a glisten
then drowns. Transmission's current. Sound shows us.
Curlew, Plover, Redshank, they hear, each knows.
(Street 2013, 78)

As our attention follows the enunciation of the words, we also follow the signals sent by the sea, which announces the turning of the tide before we can apprehend it visually: “flood starts with hiss, then a glisten.” We hear the water coming in before we can see it; the “hiss” comes before the “glisten.” By the time we see, we already know that the tides are turning. Vision confirms what hearing has already let us know. The progression and sequencing of perception in the poem reflects the development of our senses and our nervous system when we are still in the womb; we can hear and sense before we can see, and the “drown” evokes the gurgling we hear when we are still inside the womb. The poem thus appeals to a mode of perception before socialization in which the senses dominate. We have all experienced it but not transformed it into a source of knowledge. Yet, in the poem, it is the predominance of sensorial perception upon which the knowledge addressed in the last line of the poem is predicated.

Human beings tend to consider conscious knowledge their privilege; but here, it is the water birds who are the agents of this process. Collectively, as a species, they hear the sea announcing the turning of the tides. They know how to listen to and interpret these sounds. This is how each individual bird seamlessly turns perception into knowledge.

The Drift: Fog Redux

The instrumental piece “Fog Redux” closes the first section of *Estuary* and takes the listener into the second section, which consists of composite pieces based on poems emerging from the artists’ experience of the Mersey Estuary around Liverpool. “Fog Redux” is one of five instrumental pieces which, interspersed across *Estuary*, invite the listener to tune in to the sonorous weave and weft of *Estuary*; or, to rephrase it in the terminology used by Jean-Luc Nancy in his reflections on the sonorous and on listening, to become part of *Estuary*’s “sonorous present”: “The sonorous present is the result of space-time: it spreads through space, or

rather it opens a space that is its own, the very spreading out of its resonance, its expansion and reverberation” (2007, 13). These instrumental pieces open such a space. They focus the listeners’ attention on the sonorous alone and, in so doing, set the mode of listening for the composite pieces, in which the spoken word is slightly louder than the instrumental track. Nancy, in the passage quoted above, deploys a terminology that strongly relies on the vibrational and what we will see in the alternation of composite and instrumental pieces is the presence of vibrations in the multiple ways identified by Marcus Boon as “a mathematical and physical concept, as a religious or ontological force, and as a psychological / psychoanalytic determinant of subjectivity” (2022, 3). We will see how listeners attune to these manifestations of vibrations by settling into what Campbell refers to as a “cumulative immersive effect of music” (2024b, n.p.). Campbell points out that instrumental music is potentially egalitarian because no instrument or sound necessarily dominates or stands out, certainly not permanently. The instrumental constellation is akin to the estuary worlding: none of its elements and facets can claim centrality, they all participate in the worlding of the estuary. The focus of listening might shift, but this occurs from within the sonorous presence and worlding and does not assign importance to any one of the estuary’s or *Estuary*’s constituents. The state of attunement created through the instrumental Redux pieces carries over (Campbell refers to this colloquially as a “drift”; 2024b, n.p) into the composite pieces, and listeners will respond to the composite pieces from within the sonorous worlding they have just entered by immersing themselves into an instrumental piece.

“Another Place”: Imaginative and Concrete Sound

The poem “Another Place” takes the listener into the sound world surrounding the sculpture installation “Another Place” by Antony Gormley, erected in 2005 on Crosby Beach. Crosby is located on the Mersey Estuary, just outside Liverpool City and adjacent to still operational docks which can be seen from the beach. It is home to one of the port’s busiest stretches of shipping lane. The installation is responded to as a reflection on emigration and on the hope for a better life elsewhere.⁷ Gormley designed 100 iron statues, based on 17 molds of his own body. They are placed across Crosby beach at varying distances from the waterline,

⁷ Emigration and immigration define Liverpool’s social fabric. It is estimated that between 1830 and 1930, over 9 million emigrants sailed from Liverpool to the U.S., Canada and Australia. (<https://www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/archivesheet64>). The city has one of the oldest Chinese-descendant communities in the country, as well as a large Irish community. It is believed that

some of them on the beach and some of them on mud flats. Some are partially submerged in the sand. Each of them faces outwards towards the sea. As the tides come and go, the statues are gradually submerged by the floods at high tide and gradually emerge as the waterline recedes for low tide. People can (and do) spend hours watching the tides change in relation to the statues, attuning themselves to the rhythm and the temporality of ebbing and flowing. Gormley himself has noted that “many people have expressed to me the consolation or the use that they put *Another Place* to, either to deal with personal loss or just as a place that’s there constantly in the changing conditions of the year, the sea, the sky, but also our moods, and that this work can become in a way a foil to or measure of our life course” (Jones 2015, n.p.). Originally, the statues had been intended to be taken to New York and to be installed there, at the point of arrival of many European emigrants; however, it was decided that they should remain in Crosby and not emigrate. Over the years, their appearance has changed: all are showing signs of corrosion, some are covered in barnacles, sea snails and other marine life, and many of them are temporarily adorned by passers-by with clothes, hats, glasses, or other items. As a result, each statue has acquired its own characteristics.⁸

In *The Sound Inside the Silence*, Street mentates throughout the book on the ways in which we adorn mute objects – mostly, pieces of art or nature – with imagined sounds (cf. 2019). He is particularly interested in public art because of its availability and present-ness. Public art can become a part of each of us “because one comes upon it rather like a rock or a cleft in the landscape. It is there as we are, on equal terms, and it is invested with a voice in the same way that everything that surrounds it interacts with us as we pass through” (Street 2019, 156). Statues in particular speak to and in our imagination. Street observes that we as human beings often imagine sounds for mute objects like statues. These sounds he terms “imaginative sounds,” and he places them in a dynamic, complementary relationship to “concrete sounds” (Street 2019, Ch. 2). The statues of “*Another Place*” stand within the rich soundscape made up of the concrete sounds of the seashore: the swishing of the waves and of the wind, the water trickling into the sand as the tides come and go, the sound of the wind in the dunes, people’s voices. Street has described beachscapes as “rooms with all portals open, and just as we change a space by our presence in it, so unforeseen forces alter the sound of a shoreline as they pour in through the windows of air, brushing, touching,

50% of Liverpool’s population are Irish-descendant, whereby this often includes other ethnicities as well.

8 See: <https://www.antonygormley.com/works/exhibitions/another-place> for illustrations.

striking and shaping its character” (2020, 96). In his work on soundless art, Street reflected on statues and their appeal to the imagination:

We have heard of legendary statues that have become empowered with the ability to walk, weep and speak. Imaginatively, every statue that engages us fully seems uncannily to possess the potential to do so. Placed within the landscape, with all the elements singing around it, this potential seems only a whisper away. (Street 2019, 156)

Gormley’s installation inspired such a response in Street:

We hear Antony Gormley’s statues of human beings against the backing track of the landscape, the sound of which constantly evolves, while the figures seem to observe the terrain, lost in their own thoughts. They may shock, or at least startle us, at first sight, these apparent aliens who are reflections of ourselves, yet when we approach them, they seem to possess a poignant voice that enters us by other means than the auricular. (Street 2019, 155)

In the poem “Another Place” Street imagines the voices of these statues. These imagined voices interplay with music and song on *Estuary*, which evokes “the elements singing around them” (Street 2019, 156). It is composed of a classical guitar track and Street’s poem. The guitar track embeds and holds both speech and song, like the elements hold the statues. Street’s spoken word alternates with vocals by Perri Alleyne-Hughes. The poem consists of five stanzas. Stanzas 1, 2 and 4 are read by Street. These stanzas first contemplate and characterize the statues and then, imagine thoughts and intentions for them, or affective responses to them.

He is left behind by imperatives
of outward freight and ferry,
Their time passing his, rooted in sand.
He imagines the shipboard sight of him,
looking astern at a man intense even
from their distance, transmitting
to departure his diminished longing.
(Street 2013, 72)

Stanzas 3 and 5, sung by Alleyne-Hughes, contemplate and evoke the affective forces of nature in terms of a tidal dynamic of “two presents”:

Purpose and escape arc away, slow
arrows falling beyond oceans’ curve,
weft through offshore’s hefting forest.
Two presents pull these weathers
apart, tided by wind’s dynamic.
(Street 2013, 72)

The two presents, like the tides, give each other energy and create the poem's dynamism: high tide and low tide, ebb and flow, stay and go, embracing and setting free, the view from the statues and the gaze of passengers on passing ships upon the statues.

Correspondingly, the alternation between the two voices invites a meta-reflection on authenticity and origin. Just as the statues were created by one person and on the mold of one body, the poem was originally written by one person and the poetic voice throughout is Street's. Yet, wind, salt water, animals and humans have set to work on the statues and as a result, each now looks different. The elements are to the statues what performance is to the poem. Similarly, a different voice and elocution style – Alleyne-Hughes' – performs the poem's words and turns them into song. Neither the statues nor the poem have abandoned their respective origins; yet they are changed. We might even extend this metaphor to suggest that the social dynamics of emigration affect the personalities and cultural identities of human beings in a way analogous to the effect that the elements of wind and sea have on the statues and indeed, to the effect that the performance has on the words of the poem. The social, the elemental and the artistic all change the original, without transforming it altogether. As we emigrate and are receptive to our new environment, we change and transform without losing who we were before we came to "another place."

"Pier Head with Ferry, Evening": Stillness

The title of "Pier Head with Ferry, Evening" is reminiscent of a naturalist painting; it captures a specific moment in time and space. The performance of the poem is sparse; Street reads it without musical accompaniment. It is set in Liverpool, by the Pier Head. The Pier Head is located in the town center on the banks of the Mersey, just by the Three Graces, and it is the point of departure and arrival for the ferries that cross the Mersey towards the town of Birkenhead, on the opposite Wirral Peninsula. This is also where the Mersey is at its narrowest, and the location is known as "The Narrows." The poem is created from the poet's immersion in the moment of dusk, looking out from the Liverpool Pier Head towards Birkenhead:

. . . estuary
 dusk burst by navigation's green and red, rumours
 gathering on the far shore, granary and spire
 flowering silhouettes, shipyards' last echoes ringing
 clear across the river's deepening sea habit
 (Street 2013, 74)

The green and red signal lights are more strikingly visible during dusk. The spire and the granary refer to buildings in Birkenhead, the outlines of which are visible as silhouettes from the Pier Head, as is the shipyard. Also visible from across the water is the Belfast ferry, which sails from Birkenhead docks every evening at 6.30 pm. Boarding begins at around 5.30 pm. If the poem is set at dusk, it must be set in early April or in early October. The atmosphere is of attentive waiting (for the Belfast boat to board and set off) and of detailed observation; of a stillness that Street has described as “not a stasis, but the infinite silence of possibility” (2019, 8). In this stillness, as we are perfectly attuned and receptive to all aspects of vibrations in ourselves and with our surroundings, we tune in to sounds through cochlear and non-cochlear listening alike. Cochlear listening refers to sounds that we apprehend through the ear; non-cochlear listening are the vibrations of sound and matter that we perceive vibrationally, through the sensitivity of touch. In *In The Blink of an Ear* (2009), a work that Street repeatedly refers to throughout his own reflective work (cf. Street 2019), Seth Kim-Cohen makes a case for a non-cochlear, conceptual art; that is, a sonic art that abandons “the confidence in the constitution of the sonic self” (2009, xx) that is constructed by way of cochlear listening and instead, explores the wide-open field of the interplay of cochlear and vibrational listening. This, he argues, does not discard cochlear listening; rather, it questions its dominance and instead engages “both the non-cochlear and the cochlear, and the constituting trace of each in the other” (Kim-Cohen 2009, xxi). The attentiveness to both modes of listening and their constant interplay with each other – Kim-Cohen adapts the phrase “to pass into one another indefinitely” from Derrida (2009, xxi) to characterize their interdependent dynamic – liberates us from constantly listening *for* or *to* sound; instead, it encourages us to explore what is *around* or *pertains to* certain sounds (cf. 2009, xvii). Kim-Cohen argues that this mode of listening “allows for sound’s interactions with the linguistic, the philosophical, and the social” (2009, xvii). “Another Place” already featured this interaction through the theme of emigration; “Pier Head” develops it through the metaphor of navigation.

Apart from the obvious reference in the title, the first line of the poem emphasizes navigation: “At low water through mud banks’ shine and slip they’ve learnt | to navigate a deep channel out there downstream” (Street 2013, 74). Navigation conjoins attentiveness to materiality, sociality, ecology and subjectivity. Learning to navigate without modern technology requires the ability to be still, attentive, receptive, and responsive. As John Mack notes in his study *The Sea: A Cultural History*, “being ‘attuned’ is one of the qualities that all descriptions of navigational practice insist on” (2011, 114). Such attunement relates the individual with all the other forces that are at work in a given moment; in the case of “Pier Head,” this manifests in the poem’s peculiar representation of agency.

“Pier Head” lacks individual agents. Instead, it mentions collectivities (“they” have learnt to navigate, “we” wait for the tides down river, “we” are a widening tidal place), and it is very much alive to the force of actants, as Jane Bennett understands them through her reading of Bruno Latour. She summarizes his definition as “a source of action that can be human or nonhuman; it is that which has efficacy, can *do* things, has sufficient coherence to make a difference, produce effects, alter the course of events” (Bennett 2010, ix). In “Pier Head,” relationality with “the presence around us” (2019, 16), metaphorized by Street as the moment of “chiming” with the tides, makes us alive to the most powerful actant in this poem and the following one, the tides:

The Belfast boat, due out late evening, is boarding.
 We wait for tides down river, we’re a widening
 tidal place ready to chime with the next high or
 the one after that. There goes the ferry again
 weaving its dance home. Departing lights shape darkness.
 (Street 2013, 74)

“Tidal”: Cochlear and Vibrational Listening

After the absence of the instrumental on “Pier Head,” the next composite piece “Tidal” initiates with a sequence of guitar arpeggios, guiding the listener into a lateral, vibrational mode of listening; and “Tidal” indeed invites the listener to engage in constant, minute shifts between lateral and focused forms of listening, between vibrational and cochlear listening.

Throughout his reflective work, Street is attentive to the difference between, and the interplay of cochlear and vibrational listening (cf. 2017, 2019). “Cochlear listening” refers to sounds that enter the ear; “vibrational listening” refers to the receptiveness of the body to vibrations. Cochlear listening allows us to focus on specific sounds, including words; vibrational listening is similar to peripheral vision in that it gives us a sense of the place or the situation we are in, and of who else is in it with us. Poetry readings and performances tend to privilege cochlear over vibrational listening because the event genre invites us to focus on voice and words. On recordings, the spoken word usually takes precedent over all other sounds. Indeed, poetry performances are usually framed as opportunities to make one’s voice heard, or to give voice. This is a legacy of the lyrical mode, which claims that poetry is an expression of subjectivity. Rarely is a poetry reading or a poetry performance conceptualized as a space that invites listeners to attune to the vibrations of an environment, guided by the poet. Campbell identi-

fied this as a challenge when reflecting on his work as a producer, and I have argued above that taking the reader into a sound world is a defining characteristic of the collaborative work of Campbell and Street. “Tidal” invites readers to engage in lateral, vibrational listening through the instrumental track as well as the reading voice and the style and content of the poem’s words.

Street’s reading voice drifts in and out of the guitar track, replicating the drift effect that Campbell introduces in the instrumental Redux pieces that frame the sequence. The words in the poem are evocative, touching on each other rather than conveying a linear, structured meaning:

With flood, incoming
memory washes
shorelines unequal
to their horizons,
the quay’s broken stone
imaging old ship
tonnage on harbour,
the rough embrace
of a returning
longed for at each tide.
(Street 2013, 72)

There is little point in listening to the poem in a focused, cochlear manner. One would only pick up half sentences, a collection of charged and meaningful words that do not quite hang together but seem to touch each other in strange ways. If, in contrast, we allow our sensations to tune into the drift of the music and the resonances between the words, then we find ourselves listening from within the weave and weft of the tidal movements and we become ourselves tidal Estuary-creatures. Eidsheim has articulated this process with regards to sound:

Like sound, which comes into being through its material transmission, human beings are not stable and knowable prior to entering into a relationship; rather, we unfold and bring each other into being through relationships. Our potential for recognizing and accepting self and other rests on our ability and willingness to be changed by our encounters, rather than merely by the potentially desirable qualities (or their absence) in others. (2015, 24–25)

Street articulates this same effect poetically, when he writes that we are “sharing lives with sea | swallowed up by land | at a moon’s will, hope’s | shout along cracked wharves” (2013, 75). That state of mindful awareness from within the sound and rhythm of the tides tunes us right into the vibrations of the sea, which is the material weave and weft of the thick event of the Estuary, holding and moving all its elements in a constant, ever-present, ever-changing relationship with each other.

Conclusion: “A widening tidal place ready to chime”

I hope that I have shown through this exploration of *Estuary* how the interplay of poetry and music can create an intermedial performance that we can approach and experience as a “worlding,” a constellation of facets that together create a thick event and also, respond to the thick event that we participate in through our presence in the estuary.

The interplay of vibrational and cochlear listening, of concrete and imaginative sound, and of stillness and the movement of drift are all crucial to our journey into the sound world of the estuary. If we practiced these techniques separately from each other, they would allow us to explore different facets of the Estuary. But if we engage not only with each facet but with the weave and weft that holds everything together and turns different facets into forces in a constellation, then we can engage with the thick event, with the vibrancy of its materialities, socialities, ecologies and subjectivities. When this happens, we feel fully present and become participants in a worlding through listening. This generates immense pleasure, a sense of agency, and ethical responsibility for the worldings that we are a part of, and for the conditions of their existence.

Campbell and Street curate this coming-into-presence as an experiential process that subsequently grounds itself in a reflective process. In this process, different registers intersect with each other. Kim-Cohen points out that approaching sound as non-cochlear does not mean that one register replaces the other; quite the contrary, “a conceptual sonic art would engage both the cochlear and the non-cochlear, and the constituting trace of each other” (2009, xxi). Similarly, Eidshheim points out that the pre-symbolic order exists at the same time as the symbolic order (cf. 2015, 159–160). *Estuary* places these different registers in conversation with each other.

Estuary is an unusual piece with regards to the plentiful and rich contemporary artistic work on space, especially when we approach it from the angle of poetry. In traditional nature writing and pastoral poetry, poets draw on the art of poetry to validate landscapes, nature and the wild, and to advocate on their behalf. In *Estuary*, by contrast, the artists do not anthropomorphize the world of estuaries by imagining any part of them as voice, or by claiming to give voice, or speak on behalf of them; in this way, *Estuary* could be considered an example of ecopoetry. Instead, *Estuary* teaches us to be still and attentive so that we can hear and listen to sounds beyond voice. In that place of attentive stillness, “we’re a widening tidal place ready to chime with the next high or | the one after that” (Street 2013, 74). But once we have become part of the worlding that is this tidal

place, we must protect it because without it, the person we have become will be dispossessed, severed from the relationality that now defines us as part of that worlding. In the performance, collaboration enacts such relationality because collaborations are in and of themselves relational acts. For this reason, such a performance must include several media – in the recording discussed here, speech and music, and in other versions of *Estuary*, those two as well as dance – that stand in an egalitarian relationship to each other.

But – and this is where another ethical dimension comes in – collaborations do not happen out of nowhere, and they do not thrive just by themselves. They emerge in contexts in which the artists are embedded within a relational, social-artistic fabric. These fabrics are held in place, maintained, mended, and spun by organizers. Campbell and Street met because another Liverpool-based poet and organizer – Dave Ward, Director of The Windows Project⁹ – recognized an affinity between them and put them in touch, after he had met Street through a recommendation and Campbell through a chance encounter. Moreover, the cultural scene in Liverpool has fostered and educated audiences to act as astute listeners who have built their competence in listening to collaborative intermedial projects since the 1960s. Organizations like Writing on the Wall, which commissioned *Estuary* and showcased *Journey into Space*, facilitate and enable such a culture of experimentality and of listening, and places like Prohibitions Studios and the Capstone Theatre provide spaces for production and performance. It is crucial that these relational fabrics and their weavers receive the support – including the funding – that keeps them going.

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⁹ <https://www.windowproject.co.uk/>.

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Part II: **After the Art Song**

Kira Henkel

Das Kunstlied und das Jetzt

Überlegungen zu einer zeitgenössischen Beziehung zwischen Lyrik und Musik

Einleitung

Die Musikgeschichte der letzten Jahrzehnte ist geprägt von stilistischer Pluralität und einem Perspektivreichtum, der Versuche ihrer systematischen Beschreibung häufig vor Herausforderungen stellt (vgl. Hiekel und Utz 2016, IX–XVI). Auch die zeitgenössische Liedkunst spiegelt diese Vielfalt wider: Ihr Spektrum reicht von Kompositionen, die durch präzise klangliche Gestaltung die rhythmisch-metrischen Strukturen eines Gedichts nachvollziehen, bis hin zu Werken, in denen Sprache als lautliches Material behandelt und ihre semantische Ebene gezielt dekonstruiert wird. Dieser Aufsatz untersucht diese intermediale Verbindung anhand zweier Werke: *Sich einstellender Sinn* (2011) von Eres Holz und *Posthuman Songbook* (seit 2018) von Luxa M. Schüttler. Beide Kompositionen reflektieren, so die These, auf unterschiedliche Weise Aktualisierungs- beziehungsweise Transformationsmomente der Liedtradition im digitalen Zeitalter. In diesem Zusammenhang stellt sich insbesondere die Frage, inwiefern sich charakteristische Merkmale der klassischen Kunstliedtradition in diesen Werken wiederfinden – und auf welche Weise sie aufgegriffen, modifiziert oder überschritten werden. Dabei rückt auch die Rolle digitaler Technologien in den Blick: Wie verändern sie die Beziehung zwischen Text und Musik, welche kompositorischen Verfahren lassen sich daraus ableiten und welche neuen ästhetischen Möglichkeiten ergeben sich daraus? Um diese Fragen zu klären, wird das Kunstlied in diesem Aufsatz zunächst historisch kontextualisiert. Dabei dient das neunzehnte Jahrhundert als Ausgangspunkt, da sich seine gattungsspezifischen Eigenschaften in dieser Zeit besonders stark herausbildeten. Anschließend werden die beiden Beispiele analysiert und miteinander in Beziehung gesetzt.

Beide Kompositionen entstanden innerhalb der letzten 20 Jahre, lassen sich jedoch trotz fließender Genrengrenzen der Neuen Musik zuordnen.¹ Sie weisen, so eine weitere These, liedhafte Merkmale auf, die sie als Teil einer zeitgenössischen Liedkunst erkennbar machen. Entscheidend dafür ist die intermediale Verbindung von Lyrik und Musik, die jeweils unterschiedlich gestaltet wird. Neben der Auswahl des textlichen und musikalischen Materials spielt der technologische

¹ Zum Diskurs um den Sammelbegriff Neue Musik sei an dieser Stelle weiterführend verwiesen auf: Hiekel und Utz 2016, 334–344 und Haffter 2023, 9–12.

Einsatz für die folgenden Analysen eine zentrale Rolle, da beide Beispiele durch den Einsatz technologischer Mittel in ihren kompositorischen Prozessen geprägt sind. Während Holz algorithmische Modelle und Live-Elektronik integriert, nutzt Schüttler Künstliche Intelligenz (KI) und eine Stimmensoftware, um sowohl die musikalische als auch die textliche Ebene zu generieren. Für die Analyse liegt der Fokus primär auf zwei Aspekten: Erstens werden die Auswirkungen des Einsatzes digitaler Tools auf den kompositorischen Prozess und die daraus resultierende klangliche Realisierung untersucht. Zweitens wird die Rolle der Stimme analysiert – sei es durch ihre klangliche Transformation oder durch die vollständige Substitution des menschlichen Gesangs durch synthetische Stimmen. Die Frage danach, welche Funktion die Stimme in diesem Kontext übernimmt, ob sie, wie für die Kunstliedtradition üblich, Hauptträgerin des poetischen Ausdrucks des zugrundeliegenden Textes bleibt oder ob sich diese Positionierung beispielsweise durch elektronische Bearbeitung verändert, ist dabei zentral.

In beiden Werken rücken die konkreten Formen des Zusammenspiels von Text und Musik in den Fokus. In *Sich einstellender Sinn* nutzt Eres Holz ein einzelnes Gedicht des deutschen Gegenwartslirikers Asmus Trautsch als textliche Grundlage. Es bildet den strukturellen Ausgangspunkt der musikalischen Gestaltung, wodurch eine enge Wechselbeziehung zwischen musikalischer Dramaturgie und poetischer Aussage entsteht. In den Kompositionen der *Posthuman Songbook*-Reihe hingegen wurden die Liedtexte nicht von einem menschlichen Autor:in verfasst, sondern durch ein KI-gestütztes Verfahren generiert, das neue poetische Strukturen aus bestehenden Textkorpora entwickelt. Diese Automatisierung des Textprozesses hat signifikante Auswirkungen auf die Beziehung zwischen Musik und Lyrik, da sie das traditionelle Konzept der künstlerischen Autor:innenschaft und die Interaktion zwischen Text und Musik grundlegend verändert.

Zur Situation des Kunstliedes seit dem neunzehnten Jahrhundert

Das Kunstlied im engeren Sinn (vgl. Jost 2015, o. S.; Hinrichsen 2017, 389) gilt als paradigmatische musiko-poetische Form innerhalb der westlichen Kunst- beziehungsweise Vokalmusik. Durch seine reduzierte Besetzung – Stimme und Begleitung – wird es allgemein als die Vokalmusikgattung verstanden, in der eine besonders enge Interaktion zwischen Text (vorrangig Lyrik) und Musik erreicht werden kann (vgl. Hinrichsen 2017, 392). Während sich im deutschen Sprachraum bis zum achtzehnten Jahrhundert noch keine „explizite Liedtheorie“ (Jost 2015, o. S.) herausgebildet hatte, begannen im Zuge der Entwicklung des Klassizismus

und einer zunehmenden Hinwendung zu kleineren, intimen musikalischen Formen erste Versuche, eine allgemeingültige Kunstliedästhetik² zu entwerfen (vgl. Dürr 1984, 7–16). Aufgrund der sich über die Zeit hinweg verändernden kompositorischen Konventionen und des damit verbundenen „jeweils wechselnden Verhältnis[s] der Musik zu sprachlichen Strukturen und poetischen Prozessen“ (Dürr 1984, 23) wandelte sich dieser Anspruch nach einer einheitlich geltenden Norm der Liedästhetik jedoch zunehmend hin zu einer Pluralität nebeneinander bestehender ästhetischer Vorlieben (vgl. Dürr 1984, 20–24). Dies zeigt paradigmatisch, dass das Kunstlied nie einer starren Definition unterlag, sondern bis heute stets flexibel auf musikalische, poetische und gesellschaftliche Veränderungen reagiert.

Auch wenn sie aus unterschiedlichen Perspektiven betrachtet und unterschiedlich gewichtet wird, spielt die Reflexion über das Verhältnis der Stimme zu Text und Begleitung in allen Diskursen zur Liedkunst und somit auch zum Kunstlied bis heute eine zentrale Rolle. Die Stimme wird dabei in vielen Betrachtungen nicht nur als bloßes Medium zur Hörbarmachung des Textes verstanden, sondern trägt durch ihren Einsatz – etwa in Bezug auf Phrasierung und Dynamik – wesentlich zur Vermittlung der dem Text innewohnenden poetischen Bedeutung bei (vgl. Krones 2001, 11–21). Neben dem Einsatz der Stimme spielt auch die Begleitung (im neunzehnten Jahrhundert primär durch das Klavier besetzt) eine bedeutende Rolle.³ Bereits ab der Frühromantik verliert die Klavierbegleitung schrittweise ihre rein unterstützende Funktion und gewinnt zunehmend an Eigenständigkeit. In diesem Prozess tritt das Klavier verstärkt in einen Dialog mit der Gesangslinie, indem es eigenständiges musikalisches Material einbringt und den kompositorischen Verlauf aktiv mitgestaltet (vgl. Brinkmann 2004, 60–62). Besonders in der zweiten Hälfte des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts rückte die differenzierte Abstimmung von Wort und Klang immer stärker in den Fokus. Während dieser Prozess bereits im frühen Kunstlied angelegt gewesen ist, führte er in der musikalischen Hochromantik zu einer immer feineren Durchdringung beider Ebenen (vgl. Brinkmann 2004, 25; Schmierer 2017, 121–125). Janina Klassen beschreibt dies mit Blick auf den Kompositionsprozess wie folgt:

Wer 1840 Kunstlieder schrieb, ging nicht naiv mit Text um. Man wußte wen und was man las. Von Poesie erwartete man Emotion und Verzauberung, erhoffte und fand eine artifiziell gestaltete, ästhetisch geformte Sprache sowie ein untergründig komponiertes Konzept. Man kannte das oszillierende Spiel von Mehrdeutigkeiten, den beredten Umgang mit Nicht-Gesagtem, den affektiven Einsatz von Schlüsselreizen im Vokabular, von syntaktischen Raf-

2 Der Terminus *Kunstlied* ist in der musikästhetischen Diskussion erst seit den frühen 1840er Jahren nachzuweisen (vgl. Hinrichsen 2017, 389).

3 Seit dem späten neunzehnten Jahrhundert erscheint das Kunstlied auch zunehmender in größerer Orchesterbesetzung (vgl. Hinrichsen 2017, 390).

finessen und semantisch Unvorhersehbarem, von einer durchgestalteten Metrik, lebendigen Rhythmen, betörenden Farben oder verstörenden Klängen. (Klassen 2011, 324)

Diese enge Verzahnung von textlicher und musikalischer Ebene zeigte sich auch an einer wachsenden Präferenz für die durchkomponierte Liedform, die eine flexiblere musikalische Gestaltung des Textes ermöglichte (vgl. Debryn 1983, 253; Dürr 1984, 106). Seit dem späten neunzehnten Jahrhundert verlagerte sich das liedästhetische Ideal zunehmend auf die Vorstellung „der Eigengesetzlichkeit der musikalischen Faktur und de[m] Vorrang der Musik [...]“ (Schmierer 2017, 122): Zwar blieb das Verhältnis von Text und Musik in den Werken von Komponisten wie Gustav Mahler, Hugo Wolf oder Richard Strauss zentral, doch gewannen gleichzeitig Tendenzen an Bedeutung, die die musikalische Struktur stärker selbstständigten (vgl. Debryn 1983, 253).

Im zwanzigsten Jahrhundert setzte sich dieser Prozess fort: Einige Komponist:innen, wie Arnold Schönberg, Alban Berg, Benjamin Britten und später Hans Werner Henze, Luciano Berio, Ruth Zechlin oder Wolfgang Rihm arbeiteten weiterhin, wenn auch in ihren eigenen, erweiterten Klangsprachen entlang der tradierten Form des Kunstlieds (vgl. Jost 2015, o. S.). Peter Jost beschreibt diese Phase mit Blick auf die theoretische Auseinandersetzung mit der Gattung als einen Übergang von einer deskriptiven, normativen Produktionsästhetik hin zu einer diskursiven Rezeptionsästhetik (vgl. Gruhn 2011, 362; Jost 2015, o. S.). Gleichwohl diese Auseinandersetzung bestehen blieb, führten die zunehmenden Auflösungsbestrebungen bestehender Gattungskonventionen im weiteren Verlauf des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts dazu, dass die Frage nach einer „Krise des Kunstliedes“ (Jost 2015, o. S.) immer lauter wurde (siehe auch Andraschke 2001, 341).

Das Kunstlied und das Jetzt?

Bereits in seinem 1928 veröffentlichten Aufsatz *Situation des Liedes* vertrat Theodor W. Adorno die Auffassung, dass die in der Romantik so populäre Form des Kunstliedes nicht über die ästhetischen Mittel verfüge, um den Anforderungen der Moderne gerecht zu werden. Er stellte die drastische Prognose: „Alle Wege scheinen dem Lied gleich versperrt“ (Adorno 1984 [1928], 364). Seine Argumentation war jedoch keine grundsätzliche Ablehnung des Kunstliedes als verlorene musikalische Form, sondern vielmehr ein Aufruf zu dessen notwendiger, zeitgemäßer Neudefinition. Er erkannte einen grundlegenden Änderungsbedarf in der Befreiung der tradierten Gattung von der überholten, sentimental-Ästhetik zugunsten einer „objektive[n] Kraft“ (Adorno 1984 [1928], 351), die lediglich durch eine radikale Rückbindung an die Realitäten des modernen gesellschaftlichen Le-

bens zu erreichen sei, womit er seine in der *Ästhetischen Theorie* (1970) in größerer Allgemeinheit formulierten Thesen zum adäquaten Hören und Verstehen des Kunstwerks bereits gewissermaßen vorwegnahm (vgl. Gruhn 2011, 362).

In den frühen 2000er Jahren lässt sich, wenn auch langsam, die Forderung nach einer ästhetischen Wandlung in der Haltung gegenüber dem Kunstlied feststellen. Im Jahr 2012 diagnostizierte Verena Fischer-Zernin ihm beispielsweise innerhalb des klassischen Konzertbetriebs ein Image-Problem: „Heute jedoch scheint die Konzertgattung, bei der auf der Bühne nichts weiter zu sehen ist als ein Sänger, ein Pianist und vielleicht noch ein Blumengesteck, vom Aussterben bedroht“ (Fischer-Zernin 2012, o. S.). Und auch noch einige Jahre später, 2019, betitelte der Regisseur und Journalist Michael Stallknecht in der NZZ das Lied als eine „akut bedrohte Gattung“ und „als die Form, die es unter den klassischen Musikgattungen wahrscheinlich am schwersten hat“ (2019, o. S.). Wie Fischer-Zernin erkannte auch Stallknecht vor allem die Präsentationsform als Kern des Problems: „Vielleicht“, so schrieb er, „ist also gar nicht so sehr der Liedgesang an sich in der Krise, sondern nur die tradierte Form seiner Präsentation“ (2019, o. S.). Beide Einschätzungen zeigen auf, dass die tradierte Form des klassischen Liederabends den gegenwärtigen ästhetischen und gesellschaftlichen Ansprüchen vor allem mit Blick auf ein jüngeres Konzertpublikum scheinbar nicht mehr standhalten können, obwohl ein allgemeines Interesse an der Liedform und ihrer medialen Anlage weiterhin vorhanden ist.

Ein Blick in die jüngsten Konzertprogramme der zeitgenössischen Musik- und Literaturszene in Deutschland belegt das allmählich wieder aufkeimende Interesse an der Liedform. Am deutlichsten ist dies an der Vielzahl von eigens für diese Kunstform konzipierten Projekten und Aufführungsformaten zu erkennen, die seit der Jahrtausendwende sukzessive entstehen. In dieser Entwicklung glauben Musikwissenschaftler:innen wie beispielsweise Elisabeth Schmierer sogar die allgemeine Bestrebung einer „Rehabilitierung des Liedes [...]“ (2007, 281) zu erkennen. Unterzieht man die den Projekten zugrundeliegenden Konzepte jedoch einer genaueren Prüfung, wird klar, dass dem gegenwärtigen Interesse an der Kombination von Lyrik und Musik beziehungsweise von Stimme und Instrument auch wesentlich weitreichendere Beweggründe als die bloße Wiedereingliederung der tradierten Gattung in das zeitgenössische Konzertleben inhärent sind. Denn auffällig ist, dass sich neben den von Schmierer gemeinten Projekten, wie etwa der im Rahmen der EXPO 2000 entstandenen Veranstaltungsreihe *Lied:strahl*,⁴ beson-

4 *Lied:strahl* ist der Name für ein Musikprojekt im Rahmen der Expo 2000 in Hannover. Es verfolgte das interdisziplinäre Vorhaben, Lyrik, Gesang und Neue Musik im zeitgenössischen Kontext künstlerisch zu erforschen. Für weitere Infos siehe: <http://www.dp.expo2000.de/kuv/va00-01.html>.

ders in den vergangenen fünf Jahren auch Projekte entwickelt haben, deren kuratorisches Anliegen nicht durch eine „Auseinandersetzung mit einer Tradition [bestimmt ist], die in der zweiten Hälfte des achtzehnten und im neunzehnten Jahrhundert geprägt wurde“ (Schmierer 2007, 281), sondern die vielmehr die Liedkunst an sich in den Vordergrund stellen, die im Jetzt neu gedacht werden kann und muss. In diesen Projekten wird die liedkompositorische Anlage, die sich wie bereits erwähnt insbesondere durch ihre enge intermediale Verbindung beider Kunstformen auszeichnet, mehr und mehr als Möglichkeitspool erkannt, um zeitgenössische Thematiken in verdichteter, ‚intimer‘ Weise in der Gegenwart zu verhandeln. Das Projektteam um Silke Gäng und Dr. Ludovic Allenspach des Festivals LIEDBasel legen hierzu beispielsweise wie folgt fest:

LIEDBasel ist eine zeitgemäße und interdisziplinäre Auseinandersetzung mit der Kunstform Lied. Dabei geht es nicht nur um die Intimität von Gesang und Klavier. Und nicht nur um die Vergangenheit. Denn die Interpret*innen sind Menschen, die in der Gegenwart leben. Das Lied handelt vom Leben in nuce. (LIEDBasel 2019, o. S.)

Die Liedform stellt, so wird aus diesem der Projektbeschreibung entnommenen Abschnitt deutlich, eine produktive kompositionsstrukturelle Möglichkeit dar, um gesellschaftsrelevante Themen in einer besonderen Direktheit künstlerisch aufzubereiten. Im Fokus dieses Ansatzes steht demnach nicht nur der Wunsch nach der bloßen Wiederherstellung der tradierten Liedform, sondern vielmehr ihre zeitgenössische Transformation. Hier lohnt es, noch einmal zurück zu Adorno zu kommen, welcher in bereits erwähntem Essay einen ähnlichen Ansatz reflektiert:

Die gesellschaftliche Realität bietet dem Lied keine sichere Aussicht – aber keiner anderen Musik bietet sie größere. Und manche von uns, die recht wohl wissen, was die Stunde geschlagen hat, können sich das Liederschreiben nicht abgewöhnen. So ungewiß und voller Hoffnung sind wir dabei wie nur einzelne es sein können in ihrer paradoxen Lage: die lieber im Vertrauen auf eine kommende Gesellschaft das tun, was sie gerade wirklich vermögen, als daß sie sich aufzugeben gedächten um der gegenwärtigen Gesellschaft willen. (Adorno 1984 [1928], 353)

Auch die Kurator:innen des vom Haus für Poesie im Jahr 2023 initiierten Projekts *Vocations. Reimagining the Lied* evaluieren diese von Adorno formulierte paradoxe Lage der Liedform. Sie stellen etwa Fragen danach, wie eine vor allem im europäischen Kontext und in nicht unerheblicher Weise durch die deutsche Romantik geprägte Vokalmusikform wie die des Liedes in unserer globalisierten Zeit, gedacht werden kann: „Was kann ein Lied heute sein? Wie kann die europäisch geprägte Tradition des Kunstliedes neu imaginiert werden“ (Vocations 2023, o. S.). Ähnliches wurde auch für das im Rahmen des Heidelberger Liederfrühlings 2022 entstandene Konzept des Projekts *Lieder für das Jetzt* thematisiert: „Welche

Gegenwart und welche Zukunft gibt es für die Liedlyrik und wie könnte sie aussehen? [...] Vielleicht müssen wir anders sehen und hören lernen, um die Aktualität des Lieds auch in der Gegenwart wahrzunehmen“ (Czollek und Gerzenberg 2022, 1). Die Lyriker Max Czollek und Daniel Gerzenberg, die Kuratoren dieses Projekts, sprechen mit der in ihrem Vorwort formulierten Forderung ein Bedürfnis an, welches von Adorno in seinem Essay ebenfalls zum Ausdruck gebracht wurde. Auch er forderte eine Liedkunst, die nicht an bestehenden Konventionen festhält oder sich modischen Strömungen anpasst. Stattdessen betonte er die Relevanz der Entstehung von Liedern, in welchen eine unvermittelte Ausdrucksweise entfaltet wird, und die eine in ihrer Zeit verwurzelte Wahrheit verkörpern, die dadurch eine überdauernde Beständigkeit erlangt:

Wer also ist es, von dem uns heute Lieder kommen? Gewiß nicht die Stabilisierten; gewiß nicht die Neusachlichen, deren Sache schlecht ist, gewiß aber auch nicht die, die sich weiter ausdrücken oder nicht ausdrücken, als wäre nichts geschehen [...] nicht historische Etappen sind es, sondern unvermittelte Darstellungen von Wahrheit; wohl aus ihrer Zeit in aller Aktualität entsprungen, eben darin aber konkret genug, um zu dauern. (Adorno 1984 [1928], 351)

Die hier exemplarisch aufgezeigten Beispiele für eine zeitgenössische Auseinandersetzung mit dem Kunstlied verdeutlichen einerseits das allgemein gegenwärtige Interesse innerhalb der westlichen Kulturszene an der Gattung und geben andererseits konkrete Hinweise auf dessen Rezeption und die an sie gestellten Ansprüche im Jetzt. Sie vereint dabei die von Adorno bereits 1928 postulierte These, das Lied als eine besonders aussichtsreiche Kunstform zur Verhandlung gesellschaftlicher Themen begreifen zu wollen. Daraus ergeben sich unmittelbar Fragen danach, ob und falls ja, wie diese Ansprüche an eine zeitgenössische Liedkunst konkret am Material nachvollzogen werden können. Anhand der für diesen Aufsatz ausgewählten Beispiele wird im folgenden Abschnitt diskutiert, wie sich die Komponist:innen Eres Holz und Luxa M. Schüttler mit der Liedform auseinandersetzen. Dabei wird die Frage nach einer dort zu findenden Neuverhandlung tradierter gattungsspezifischer Kompositionsmerkmale eine ebenso große Rolle spielen, wie die These, dass sich in jüngsten Liedkompositionen auf unterschiedlichen Ebenen Entwicklungen nachvollziehen lassen, welche die uns bekannte Kunstliedform über verschiedene Aspekte ins Gegenwärtige transformieren.

***Sich einstellender Sinn* (2011) – Eres Holz**

Die 2011 entstandene Komposition *Sich einstellender Sinn* von Eres Holz ist als raumbezogenes live-elektronisches Werk konzipiert. Obwohl sich in seiner Partitur kein expliziter Hinweis auf die Zugehörigkeit zur Gattung Kunstlied findet,

weist das Stück dennoch liedhafte Qualitäten auf. Es lassen sich gleich mehrere Argumente dafür anführen, die am eindeutigsten auf der kompositionsstrukturellen Ebene gefunden werden können. Sie betreffen einerseits die für die Gattung bereits erläuterte typische intermediale Anlage, also die Verbindung von Lyrik und Musik, und andererseits die Auswahl der Besetzung: Singstimme (Mezzosopran oder Kontratenor) und Klavier (Keyboard). Während das erste Argument als direkte Weiterführung der tradierten intermedialen Grundkonstitution der Gattung erkennbar ist – die textliche Grundlage des Stücks basiert auf dem gleichnamigen Gedicht des Lyrikers und Komponisten Asmus Trautsch – kann das zweite Argument vorerst als Erweiterung der Besetzungskonvention angesehen werden. Durch die Hinzunahme von live-elektronischen Elementen knüpft Holz an die bereits erwähnte Entwicklung seit der Mitte des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts an, in welcher zunehmend elektronische Tools in den kompositorischen Prozess eingebunden werden (vgl. Andraschke 2001, 341). Im Fall von *Sich einstellender Sinn* erfolgt dies in erster Linie durch den Einsatz der visuellen Programmiersoftware (IDE) Max/MSP 5, mit welcher sowohl die Stimme als auch das Keyboard angesteuert und bearbeitet werden.

Die 115-taktige Komposition hat eine Dauer von ca. elf Minuten.⁵ Die Partitur umfasst sowohl die Notation der Sing- und Keyboardstimme als auch mehrere Anweisungsebenen, die sich auf die Verwendung der Live-Elektronik beziehen. Holz, der unter anderem bei Hanspeter Kyburz und Wolfgang Heiniger Computermusik studierte, baut seine Kompositionen zu weiten Teilen auf algorithmischen Kompositionsmodellen auf. Wie er in einem Interview mit der Autorin dieses Beitrags beschrieb, resultiert diese Hinwendung einerseits aus einem generellen Interesse an mathematisch beschreibbaren Prozessen von generierten elektroakustischen Klängen (Klangsynthese) und andererseits aus einer allgemeinen Präferenz für die harmonische, also vertikale Strukturierung von Musik (Holz 2024, o. S.). Auch für die Erarbeitung von *Sich einstellender Sinn* nutzt Holz algorithmische Verfahren. Das dieser Komposition zugrundeliegende Ton- und Klangmaterial wurde dazu über die Anwendung einer weiteren Software (*OpenMusic* oder *Common Music*)⁶ nach algorithmischen Prinzipien vorselektiert (Holz 2024, o. S.). Während die algorithmische Organisation des musikalischen Materials in seinen weiteren Arbeiten eine offen gestalterische Rolle einnimmt, ist ihr Einsatz in *Sich einstellender Sinn* als technische Vorarbeit und somit eher verdeckt zu verstehen. Aus diesem Grund bleibt die Anwendung der Software hier auf die Generierung von Listen mit verschiedenen Akkordkombinationen beschränkt, welche Holz im daran anschließen-

5 Die Dauer kann je nach Interpretation der Live-Elektronik-Angaben variieren.

6 Der Komponist hat dazu keine genaueren Angaben gemacht.

den kompositorischen Prozess als Möglichkeitstabellen dienten, um die das Stück bestimmende harmonische Verlaufsform zu konzipieren.

Die klangliche Grundatmosphäre dieser Komposition, so Holz selbst, ist von den Sounds alter Atari-Heimcomputer inspiriert, die er als „roh, unkultiviert, unentwickelt – etwas primitiv“ beschreibt (Holz 2024, o. S.). Diese Ästhetik wird in seinem Werk mit einem weiteren zentralen Element kombiniert: dem Orgelklang. Die elektronische Verarbeitung beider Klangquellen prägt nicht nur die musikalische Struktur, sondern auch die Text-Musik-Beziehung. Während die Atari-Sounds eine digitale, artifizielle Qualität betonen, verweist die Orgel auf eine historische Tradition. Durch ihre elektronische Modulation entsteht eine akustische Umgebung, die die Wahrnehmung der Stimme und des Textes verändert. Die vokale Linie wird nicht isoliert präsentiert, sondern in eine vielschichtige Klangtextur eingebettet, die sich auf den Ausdruck und die Semantik des Textes auswirkt.

In der tradierten Kunstliedform wird diese narrative Dimension des Textes ausschließlich durch die analogen klanglichen Mittel von Stimme und Instrument vermittelt. Die von Holz vorgenommene Einbindung elektronischer Klänge erweitert diese Struktur somit, indem sie zusätzliche klangliche und räumliche Manipulationen ermöglicht (vgl. Andraschke 2001, 341–357). Wie bereits aufgezeigt, geschieht dies in *Sich einstellender Sinn* weniger durch eine direkte Bearbeitung der Singstimme, sondern vielmehr durch die Erweiterung der Begleitung. Zwar verändern elektronische Modulationen die Klangfarbe der Stimme, und Effekte wie Delays und Reverbs beeinflussen die zeitliche Wahrnehmung und die räumliche Platzierung des Gesangs, doch die dramaturgische Struktur des Stücks entfaltet sich primär über die klangliche Transformation der begleitenden instrumentalen Schicht. Die über das Keyboard generierten elektronischen Klangsichtungen deuten, so die These, einzelne semantische Aspekte des Textes musikalisch aus, wodurch sich in der Kombination mit der Singstimme eine vielschichtige Klangtextur ergibt. Besonders eindrücklich ist dabei die bereits erwähnte Dominanz des vertikalen Klangeindrucks, der sich aus den algorithmisch generierten Schichtungen ergibt: Dichte, simultan erklingende Klangblöcke überlagern sich und formen eine komplexe harmonische Struktur, die den Fluss und die Verständlichkeit des gesungenen Textes sowohl kontrastieren als auch verstärken. Diese klangliche Emanzipation stellt die in der romantischen Liedtradition zentrale Rolle der Singstimme als primäre Trägerin der Textsemantik infrage und rückt stattdessen die Lautlichkeit und klangliche Struktur von Sprache selbst ins Zentrum – ein Paradigmenwechsel, den der Musikwissenschaftler Rainer Nonnenmann mit Blick auf das zwanzigste Jahrhundert folgendermaßen beschreibt:

Erst die neuen Vokal- und Sprachkompositionen des 20. Jh.s begriffen Sprache nicht mehr primär als Träger von Gesang und Textinhalt, sondern machten die spezifische Lautlichkeit und Struktur von Sprache selbst als Musik gestalt- und erlebbar. Dazu bedurfte es sowohl kompositorischer Strategien, die den selbstverständlichen Alltagsgebrauch von Sprache als Verständigungsmedium durchkreuzen, als auch erweiterter Vokal- und Sprechpraktiken jenseits traditioneller Gesangs Ideale. (Nonnenmann 2016, 562)

Diese Strategien der klanglichen Durchkreuzung von Sprache fanden in der zweiten Hälfte des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts zunehmend Unterstützung durch elektronische Hilfsmittel, die es ermöglichten, Sprachmaterial klanglich zu dekonstruieren und auf neue Weise in musikalische Prozesse einzubinden. Nonnenmann fasst diese Entwicklung weiter zusammen: „Fast alle Vertreter der Nachkriegsavantgarde komponierten auf je individuelle Weise ‚Sprache als Musik‘. Etliche bedienten sich dazu auch elektronischer Hilfsmittel“ (Nonnenmann 2016, 563).

Eres Holz knüpft in *Sich einstellender Sinn* an diese Entwicklungen an, geht jedoch einen eigenen Weg, indem er Elemente der elektronischen Sprachkomposition mit der Ästhetik des traditionellen Kunstlieds verbindet. Während Werke wie Karlheinz Stockhausens *Gesang der Jünglinge* (1955–1956), Luciano Berios *Visage* (1961) oder Jonathan Harveys *Mortuos Plango, Vivos Voco* (1980) durch radikale Bearbeitung und Fragmentierung der Stimme die semantische Ebene zugunsten einer rein klanglichen Betrachtung auflösen, bleibt in Holz' Komposition die Gesangsstimme strukturell klar definiert und in ihrer Textverständlichkeit weitgehend erhalten. Dennoch verändert die elektroakustische Erweiterung der instrumentalen Begleitung die Wahrnehmung des Gesangs und des poetischen Textes grundlegend. Die Verschmelzung dieser beiden Traditionen – der klassischen Liedkunst und der experimentellen Sprachkomposition – führt, so könnte man es beschreiben, zu einer ästhetischen Hybridform, die sowohl die klangliche Struktur der Sprache als auch ihre semantische Dimension neu verhandelt. Wie sich diese Verbindung in der klanglichen Gestaltung des Stücks konkret äußert, wird die folgende Analyse zeigen.

Die textliche Grundlage des Stücks bildet das Gedicht *Sich einstellender Sinn*, das Asmus Trautsch in seinem Band *Treibbojen* (2010) veröffentlicht hat. Es besteht aus drei Strophen, von denen jede fünf reimlose Verse umfasst. Das Gedicht kann als poetologisch bezeichnet werden, da es die Frage nach der Entstehung und Wirkung von Poesie thematisiert und die Sprachhandlung als solche reflektiert. Alle drei Strophen lassen sich über einen dramaturgischen Aufbau miteinander verbinden. Während die Grundstimmung der ersten Strophe bis zu der Anrufungs-Figur des Ichs: „Kommt Silben, kommt“ (V. 5)⁷ einem vornehmlich lethargischen, er-

7 An dieser Stelle und im weiteren Verlauf werden Textfragmente aus der Partitur von *Sich einstellender Sinn* zitiert (vgl. Holz 2012, 5).

schöpften Gestus folgt, welcher semantisch zuvor durch Wörter wie „müde“ oder „harrt“ angezeigt ist, wird in der zweiten Strophe ein Stimmungswechsel vollzogen. Das Ich wird hier in einem Zustand der eigenen Ratlosigkeit präsentiert, der durch die Formulierung „Ich weiß nicht“ (V. 6) selbstreflexiv zum Ausdruck kommt. Diese thematisierte Ungewissheit wird durch einen generellen Eindruck der Richtungslosigkeit und den Aspekt des Chaotischen weiter ausgedeutet, was sich beispielsweise in der Wortverbindung „kreuz und quer“ (V. 8) ausdrückt. Die an ein nicht näher definiertes Außen gerichtete Ansprache des Ichs „Müder Zuschauer, wart ab“ (V. 10) im letzten Vers der zweiten Strophe leitet einen erneuten Tonwechsel zur dritten und letzten Strophe ein. Mit Vers 11 (Enjambement zu V. 12) vollzieht sich eine Auflösung und Entspannung, die durch die Erkenntnis des Ichs gekennzeichnet ist: „Glück, wenn schließlich das Dickicht bricht und dich sagen lässt ich, ohne Müh und Ziel“.

Holz greift für seine Komposition einzelne dieser poetischen Figuren auf, indem er die oben beschriebene übergreifende Dramaturgie übernimmt und die stropheninternen Stimmungswechsel in die musikalische Struktur integriert. Gleich zu Beginn des Stückes, welcher als ein instrumentaler Prolog interpretiert werden kann, wird der lethargische Gestus der ersten Strophe musikalisch ausgedeutet. Das an dieser Stelle elektronisch bearbeitete Klangmaterial setzt sich primär aus Haltetönen beziehungsweise -akkorden und arpeggierten, also sich auffächernden, längenbildenden Tonrepetitionen mit gleichbleibendem Tonmaterial zusammen, wodurch sich ein zwar dynamisch-mehrschichtiger aber dennoch übergreifend monoton, statischer Grundklang ergibt. Die bereits weiter oben angesprochene, von Holz angestrebte Emanzipation des Klanglichen innerhalb seiner Kompositionen wird somit gleich zu Beginn dieses Stückes hervorgehoben, da diese 26 Takte bereits das für das gesamte Stück geltende Klangmaterial bereithält. Holz entwirft damit, so die These, bereits in diesem ersten instrumentalen Teil eine klangliche Interpretation des lyrischen Tons, der das Gedicht prägt, noch bevor der erste Vers in der Singstimme erklingen ist. In Takt 27 fügt sich dann die Singstimme fast schon unmerklich in diese dynamische, aber dennoch statische Klangästhetik ein. Während der Text in der Singstimme durch eine eng geführte, von Tonrepetitionen geprägte Melodielinie erklingt, nimmt das Keyboard nun eine deutlichere Begleitrolle ein, wobei die zuvor erklingene Atmosphäre über lange, und elektronisch modulierte Akkorde beibehalten wird.

Nach einem viertaktigen instrumentalen Einschub beginnend in Takt 45, markiert die in der Singstimme erklingende und bereits in der Textanalyse angesprochene Anrufung „Kommt Silben, kommt“ eine Veränderung hinsichtlich der von Holz vorgenommenen Textbehandlung. Denn der Text des ersten und zweiten Verses der zweiten Strophe wurde von Holz für die Komposition über die Verdopplungen von Textfragmenten erweitert. Diese werden innerhalb des Stückes

den Höreindruck und die Rezeption des Textes aus, da sie die Möglichkeit eröffnet, die einzelnen Melodielinien sowohl im Gesang als auch im Keyboard transparenter zu machen, sodass sich die einzelnen melodischen Stränge besser nachvollziehen lassen. Diese kompositionsstrukturelle Entscheidung für eine Hinwendung zur horizontalen Struktur kann mit der semantischen Ebene der dritten Strophe des Gedichts zusammengedacht werden. Wie bereits thematisiert, ist diese von einer Atmosphäre der Erleichterung und Auflösung geprägt. Durch die ‚Verklarung‘ der musikalischen Strukturierung wird eben diese Atmosphäre kompositorisch aufgegriffen. In Kombination mit dem in diesem Teil eher sprechenden, aber dennoch kantilen Stil der Gesangsstimme wird dies noch deutlicher. Die Stimme entfaltet sich hier in einer zunehmend linearen Bewegung, was deutlicher als in ihren Einsätzen zuvor eine gestische Entwicklung suggeriert. Verstärkt wird dies durch die in diesem letzten Teil der Komposition hohen Anzahl von Tonübernahmen und ‚Tontreffpunkten‘ zwischen Gesangsstimme und Keyboard (vgl. T. 102, 112). Sie unterstreichen diesen Prozess der Auflösung weiter, da Gesang und Begleitung hier Momente der Einheit bilden.

Innerhalb dieses letzten Teils der Komposition fungiert die Live-Elektronik als klangliche Erweiterung und strukturelles Element, das die horizontale Ausrichtung dieses Abschnitts unterstützt. Durch spektrale Transformationen, Delays und resonanzbasierte Filterung wird der Klangfluss auf allen Ebenen moduliert, was den Höreindruck verstärkt, dass sich Stimme und Keyboard in einer gleitenden Textur immer wieder berühren und partiell verweben. Im Gegensatz zu früheren, harmonisch und vertikal strukturierten Abschnitten trägt die Elektronik hier demnach zur Auflösung fester Klangblöcke bei, was die fließende, prozesshafte Gestaltung des Abschnitts tendenziell verstärkt.

Zusammenfassend kann festgehalten werden, dass Eres Holz in *Sich einstellender Sinn* ein komplexes Zusammenspiel von Live-Elektronik, algorithmischer Kompositionsweise und der intermedialen Beziehung zwischen Text und Musik entwickelt. Die Hinzunahme elektronischer Tools dient dabei nicht nur als Möglichkeit für klangliche Erweiterung, sondern prägt auch maßgeblich die strukturelle Organisation des Werks. Während die algorithmisch generierte Harmonik zunächst eine dichte, akkordische Klangstruktur prägt, die den musikalischen Gesamtklang bestimmt, verändert sich dieses Verhältnis im Verlauf der Komposition. Besonders in der letzten Strophe treten die Akkordkomplexe zurück, wodurch die Textur durchlässiger wird, und eine stärker melodische Gestaltung hervortritt. Die Live-Elektronik unterstützt diesen Übergang, indem sie durch spektrale Modulationen, Filterungen und zeitliche Manipulationen die Wahrnehmung der Text-Musik-Beziehung subtil verändert. Dadurch wird die Stimme nicht mehr ausschließlich als Trägerin des Textes behandelt, sondern zunehmend als klanglich flexible, elektronisch erweiterte Ebene in das instrumentale Geschehen

integriert. Sie bewegt sich freier innerhalb der Klangstruktur und verbindet sich mit der Begleitung zu einer dichten, aber durchlässigen Textur. Dies führt zu einer Verschiebung des Verhältnisses zwischen Text und Musik, in der sich beide Elemente gegenseitig beeinflussen. Während die starke Fokussierung auf vertikale Strukturen und schichtweise überlagerte Klangfelder auf Ästhetiken der Chormusik verweist, trägt die räumliche Anordnung der Lautsprecher dazu bei, das Klanggeschehen in eine immersive Hörerfahrung zu überführen.

Holz erweitert in seiner Komposition die Kunstliedtradition, indem er algorithmisch generierte Harmonik, Live-Elektronik und digitale Klangverarbeitung in die kompositorische Struktur integriert. Dabei bewahrt er zentrale Prinzipien des Liedes – insbesondere die enge Verbindung von Text und Musik –, rückt jedoch die klangliche Gestaltung stärker in den Fokus. Dies führt zu einer Transformation der Liedtradition, die nicht nur technologische Erweiterungen einbezieht, sondern auch etablierte Konzepte der Textvertonung und musikalischen Narration hinterfragt. Durch die Dezentrierung der Singstimme wird die traditionelle Hierarchie zwischen Text und Musik aufgebrochen: Der gesungene Text ist nicht mehr eindeutig über der instrumentalen Begleitung angesiedelt, sondern wird Teil einer vielschichtigen Klangtextur. Dies führt dazu, dass die semantische Verständlichkeit des Textes je nach Abschnitt variabel bleibt – in dichter harmonischer Überlagerung kann der Text daher stellenweise in den Gesamtklang eingebettet oder von der elektronischen Bearbeitung verändert werden.

Gleichzeitig entsteht eine neue Form der semantischen Klanggestaltung: Die Live-Elektronik verstärkt bestimmte poetische Momente nicht durch eine direkte Vertonung des Wortlauts, sondern durch klangliche Prozesse wie spektrale Modulationen oder räumliche Verfremdungen. Auf diese Weise wird der Text nicht nur durch seine sprachliche Bedeutung, sondern auch durch die klangliche Verarbeitung vermittelt. Die Musik greift also nicht nur auf semantischer Ebene in den Text ein, sondern erzeugt eine eigene klangliche Dramaturgie, die sich mit dem Gedicht verschränkt und es auf einer auditiven Ebene transformiert.

***Posthuman Songbook* (2018) – Luxa M. Schüttler**

Luxa M. Schüttler ist Komponist:in und Performer:in, dessen:ren künstlerischer Fokus – laut eigener Beschreibung – auf der Neudeutung sozialer, medialer, biografischer und körperlicher Bedingungen von Musik liegt. In Schüttlers Arbeiten treffen heterogene Klangwelten aufeinander, die eine bewusst vielschichtige Ästhetik erzeugen und häufig popkulturelle Anspielungen integrieren (vgl. Schüttler in Humboldt-Stiftung 2022, o. S.). Eben diese Offenheit für unterschiedliche klang-

liche und mediale Ebenen prägt auch *Posthuman Songbook*, deren seit 2019 fortlaufende Kompositionsreihe.⁸ In dieser Arbeit werden von Schüttler Methoden der Künstlichen Intelligenz (KI) genutzt, um musikalische Strukturen zu generieren, die die zentralen Prinzipien des Kunstlieds hinterfragen und transformieren. Wie bereits in der Analyse von *Sich einstellender Sinn* werden auch in der Betrachtung von *Posthuman Songbook* folgende Aspekte im Vordergrund stehen: die Beziehung zwischen Text und Musik, der Einsatz von KI als kompositorisches Werkzeug sowie die veränderte Rolle der Stimme in der musikalischen Produktion. Schüttler gibt selbst folgende Hinweise zum Projekt:

Posthuman Songbook ist eine offene, potentiell unendliche Sammlung von Songs, an der ich seit 2019 arbeite. Kompositorisches Konzept ist die Verwendung neuronaler Netzwerke, die fortlaufend immer neue Songs generieren und sowohl Text als auch Melodie erzeugen. Die heute uraufgeführten Songs entstammen der ersten Sub-Reihe #0, bei der ein neuronales Netzwerk mit einer Sammlung von anglo-amerikanischen christlichen Chorälen trainiert wurde. Die Singstimme wurde mittels einer historischen Software zur Sprachsynthese produziert. Das Programm *DECTalk* ist vor allem als Stimme von Steven Hawking bekannt. (Schüttler in Humboldt-Stiftung 2022, o. S.)

Bereits aus dieser Beschreibung wird deutlich, dass in den einzelnen Songs von *Posthuman Songbook* nicht nur die musikalische Gestaltung durch KI transformiert werden soll, sondern auch das Verhältnis von Text und Musik neu verhandelt wird. Während wie bereits weiter oben thematisiert, in der tradierten Kunstliedform die musikalische Gestaltung maßgeblich von der Semantik der Lyrik beeinflusst wird, verändert Schüttlers Arbeit diesen Zusammenhang grundlegend. Die KI-generierten Texte basieren nicht mehr auf einer bewussten Auswahl durch eine:n Komponist:in, sondern entstehen durch ein algorithmisches Verfahren, wodurch sich eine neue Qualität der Wechselbeziehung zwischen Musik und Text ergibt. In den bereits entstandenen Songs der Subreihe #0 wird dies erreicht, indem ein neuronales Netzwerk aus einem Katalog vorselektierter anglo-amerikanischer christlicher Choräle, die primär aus dem neunzehnten Jahrhundert stammen, phonetisch deformierte Sprachfragmente produziert. Diese lehnen sich klanglich zwar an ihre Vorlagen an, verlieren jedoch ihre semantische Kohärenz. Die daraus resultierenden Textfragmente, wie die folgende Transkription zeigen soll, verdeutlichen diesen Prozess:

sahm breyk ahs wuhd nayn striyz aend prey ey dha suwn
 biy kraestr fehlow lahv ehvriy baht staym
 sihn sey kihn a wehey
 preyh ahv hihihz lahv [...] (Schüttler 2018)⁹

⁸ Aus dem Jahr 2018 stammt das Konzept. Der erste Song wurde von Schüttler 2019 fertiggestellt.

⁹ Ausschnitt – Texttranskription (T. 1–10) aus der Partitur zu #0.a.1.

Die synthetischen Klangmuster scheinen Elemente der selektierten Choräle zu reflektieren, lassen sich jedoch nicht mehr als zusammenhängende sprachliche Einheiten erfassen. Es entsteht ein akustisches Echo der Vorlage, das zwischen Wiedererkennbarkeit und völliger semantischer Auflösung oszilliert. Dies zeigt sich exemplarisch in den generierten Textfragmenten, die phonetisch zwar noch an ihre ursprünglichen Quellen erinnern, deren Bedeutung jedoch fragmentiert und entstellt ist. So lässt sich beispielsweise in Zeilen wie „sahm breyk ahs wuhd nayn striyz aend prey ey dha suwn“ möglicherweise noch die Spur einer grammatikalisch deformierten Phrase wie „*Some break as wood, nine streets and pray in the sun*“ erkennen.¹⁰ Doch diese Rekonstruktionen bleiben spekulativ, da die synthetische Stimme nicht mehr einer stabilen lexikalischen Semantik folgt, sondern eine neue Form sprachlicher Klanglichkeit erzeugt.

Während sich in der romantischen Liedtradition eine expressive Wechselwirkung zwischen Lyrik und Musik vollzieht, verlagert Schüttlers Ansatz wie es auch Eres Holz in *Sich einstellender Sinn* tut, den Fokus stärker auf die klangliche Qualität der Stimme. Das KI-generierte Sprachmaterial bewegt sich dabei in einem Spannungsfeld zwischen Sinnhaftigkeit und Lautlichkeit, wodurch ein verändertes Text-Klang-Kontinuum entsteht, in dem sich semantische Bezüge lockern und die Stimme stärker als formbares klangliches Objekt erfahrbar wird.

Eine der radikalsten Veränderungen in *Posthuman Songbook* betrifft die Singstimme. Wie bereits mehrfach aufgezeigt, fungierte diese insbesondere in der romantischen Kunstliedtradition oftmals als Ausdrucksträgerin des lyrischen Subjekts – eine Funktion, die im zwanzigsten Jahrhundert zunehmend hinterfragt und aufgebrochen wurde. Schüttler radikalisiert diesen Wandel, indem er die Stimme nicht nur transformiert oder verfremdet, sondern sie vollständig durch eine künstlich generierte, nicht-menschliche Klangquelle ersetzt. Mithilfe der Sprachsynthese-Software DECTalk, die vor allem als digitale Stimme von Stephen Hawking bekannt wurde, entzieht er der biologischen Stimme ihre verkörperte Performativität und scheint sie gänzlich aus der Liedform zu tilgen.

Diese spezifische klangliche Qualität unterscheidet sich fundamental von der körperlichen Unmittelbarkeit des romantischen Kunstlieds, in dem der Gesang als direktes Ausdrucksmedium fungiert und in der physischen Präsenz des Singenden verankert ist. In *Posthuman Songbook* hingegen wird diese Kopplung aufgelöst, sodass sich die Performativität der Stimme in einen neuen, technologisch vermittelten Ausdrucksraum verlagert. Allerdings sollte dies nicht vorschnell als Akt der ‚Entmenschlichung‘ interpretiert werden. Vielmehr hinterfragt Schüttlers Komposition die konventionelle Vorstellung einer unmittelbaren Verbindung zwischen

10 Diese Rückübersetzung wurde mithilfe von ChatGPT 4o angefertigt.

Singstimme und Rezipient:in, indem sie die Stimme als eine von ihrer biologischen Verankerung gelöste, klanglich formbare Instanz konzipiert. In diesem Sinne kann *Posthuman Songbook* als eine ästhetische Reflexion über die sich verändernden Bedingungen vokaler Expressivität im digitalen Zeitalter verstanden werden.

Wie bereits in *Sich einstellender Sinn* erfährt die instrumentale Begleitung auch in *Posthuman Songbook* eine gesteigerte ästhetische Eigenständigkeit – hier jedoch nicht durch elektroakustische Erweiterung, sondern durch spontane, live improvisierte Klavierbegleitung. Während die synthetische Singstimme algorithmisch generiert wird, agiert die Pianistin als reaktive Instanz innerhalb der Aufführungssituation. Ihre Improvisation fungiert als flexibles, prozessuales Element, das auf die klanglichen Gegebenheiten der synthetischen Stimme reagiert und eine situative Klangrelation zwischen menschlicher und nicht-menschlicher Instanz herstellt. Schüttler beschreibt diesen Prozess folgendermaßen:

Während Text, Melodie und Gesang vom Computer erzeugt wurden, ist die Klavierbegleitung als konzeptuelle Improvisation entstanden. Das bedeutet: Zu jedem AI-Song habe ich einmalig und ohne nachträgliche Bearbeitung am Klavier improvisiert. Die in Notentext übertragene Improvisation wird schließlich von der Pianistin als Begleitung des synthetischen Gesangs live gespielt. Die AI-Songs treffen auf ein anderes neuronales Netzwerk, das Unterbewusstsein des Komponisten-Gehirns. Die Grenzen sind fließend, trainierte Maschinen sind auch wir. (Schüttler in Humboldt-Stiftung 2022, o. S.)

Diese Gegenüberstellung verweist auf eine grundlegende Neukonfiguration performativer Rollen im Kontext KI-generierter Musik: Während die Singstimme von tradierten Vorstellungen vokaler Expressivität entkoppelt wird, bleibt die Klavierstimme als prozessuales, verkörpertes Element ein zentrales Moment der Aufführung. *Posthuman Songbook #0.a.1* ersetzt den menschlichen Faktor demnach nicht vollständig, sondern reorganisiert das Verhältnis von Stimme und Begleitung, indem es die Klavierimprovisation als interaktives, situatives Gegengewicht zur synthetischen Stimme einsetzt. Die Aufführungssituation wird dadurch offener und unvorhersehbarer, da sich maschinelle Determiniertheit und menschliche Spontaneität in einem Spannungsverhältnis begegnen.

Diese hybride musikalische Struktur manifestiert sich auch auf notierter Ebene in *Posthuman Songbook #0.a.1* und zeigt, wie das Werk die Gegenüberstellung von algorithmischer Vorgabe und interpretativer Freiheit kompositorisch verankert.

Die Vokalpartie besteht aus phonetisch transformierten Sprachfragmenten, die in einer synthetischen, nicht-menschlichen Stimme erklingen, während die Klavierstimme als frei improvisierte Schicht fungiert. Die Verteilung der Tempi und Metrik zeigt eine nicht-lineare musikalische Entwicklung, in der Beschleunigungen (*accel.*) und Verlangsamungen (*rit.*) als instabile Zeitstrukturen erschei-

Luxa M. Schüttler
posthuman songbook (2018 - ...)
#0.a.1

System 1: Tempo $\text{♩} = 52$. Time signature 3/8. Vocal line: *rit.* (♩ = 37) *accel.*. Piano line: *p*, *pp*, triplets.

System 2: Tempo $\text{♩} = 59$. Time signature 4/4. Vocal line: *accel.* (♩ = 66) *rit.*. Piano line: *p*, *pp*, *mp*.

System 3: Tempo $\text{♩} = 76$. Time signature 3/4. Vocal line: *rit.* (♩ = 63). Piano line: *pp*, *mf*.

Vocal Lyrics:
 System 2: sahm breyk ahs wuhd nayn striyz-aend prey ey dha suwn biy krae - str feh-low lahv
 System 3: eh-vriy baht staym sihn sey kiln a wehey preyz ahv hi-hihz lahv

Abb. 2: T. 1–10, Schüttler, *Posthuman Songbook* #0.a.1, 2018, Partitur. © Luxa M. Schüttler.

nen. Die Harmonik der Klavierbegleitung oszilliert zwischen klanglichen Verdichtungen und plötzlichen Öffnungen, wodurch sich ein Spannungsverhältnis zwischen algorithmischer Vorgabe und interpretativer Offenheit ergibt. Diese ästhetische Spannung verweist auf ein tieferliegendes konzeptuelles Moment der Komposition: das Spiel mit Wahrnehmung, Erwartung und Täuschung.

Ein produktiver theoretischer Zugang ergibt sich in diesem Zusammenhang aus Jean Baudrillards Konzept des Simulakrums, das er in *Simulacres et Simulation* (1981) erstmals formulierte. Baudrillard beschreibt Simulakren darin nicht als bloße Kopien von Wirklichkeit, sondern als Zeichen, die ihre eigene, von Simulation bestimmte Realität erzeugen und dadurch die Referenz auf ein ur-

sprüngliches Original auflösen. Im Kontext von Schüttlers Komposition bedeutet dies, dass *Posthuman Songbook* zwar explizit auf die Form des Kunstliedes verweist, sich jedoch im Kompositionsprozess maximal von dessen historischer Anlage entfernt. Der Einsatz von KI zur Liedgenerierung führt nicht zu einer Fortschreibung des Kunstliedes im tradierten Sinne, sondern zu einer algorithmischen Simulation dieser Form. Während Text und Melodie maschinell erzeugt werden, bleibt die Klavierbegleitung als improvisatorisches Element an eine menschliche Interpretationsinstanz gebunden. Dadurch entsteht ein Spannungsverhältnis zwischen algorithmischer Kontrolle und situativer musikalischer Gestaltung, das die tradierte Einheit von Stimme und Begleitung im Kunstlied aufricht. Der Bezug zur Liedform bleibt als ästhetisches Referenzsystem zwar erhalten, wird jedoch durch die technologischen Verfahren fundamental transformiert.

Diese Transformation zeigt sich besonders in der strukturellen Offenheit des Werks: Da das neuronale Netzwerk fortlaufend neue Songs generieren kann, existiert keine festgelegte oder abgeschlossene Form mehr. Die Komposition ist potenziell unendlich – ein weiterer Bruch mit der traditionellen Konzeption des Kunstliedes als zyklisch geschlossene Form. Dadurch vollzieht *Posthuman Songbook* nicht nur eine radikale Auseinandersetzung mit der Transformation der Liedkunst im digitalen Zeitalter, sondern hinterfragt auch grundlegende ästhetische Konzepte wie Autor:innenschaft und musikalische Intimität (vgl. Keylin 2025). Durch die algorithmische Erzeugung von Musik, die Entfernung der biologischen Singstimme und die improvisatorische Klavierbegleitung entsteht eine hybride musikalische Struktur, die sich zwischen maschineller Kontrolle und menschlicher Unvorhersehbarkeit bewegt. Die Komposition zeigt damit, dass zeitgenössische Liedkunst nicht nur als Fortführung historischer Traditionen verstanden werden kann, sondern auch als kritische Reflexion über die veränderten Bedingungen von Musikproduktion im digitalen Zeitalter fungiert. Die Dezentrierung des menschlichen Akteurs, die algorithmische Kontrolle über Text und Melodie sowie die Auflösung der semantischen Kohärenz des Liedtextes eröffnen neue klangliche Perspektiven und werfen zugleich die Frage auf, was ein Lied in der Gegenwart eigentlich noch ist – und ob es sich in einer technologisch geprägten Musikkultur weiterhin als eigenständige Kunstform behaupten kann.

Zusammenfassung

Dieser Aufsatz hat untersucht, inwiefern die tradierte Form des europäischen Kunstliedes im digitalen Zeitalter weiterbesteht und welche klanglichen, technologischen und intermedialen Perspektiven sich aus einer künstlerischen Auseinan-

dersetzung mit ihm ergeben. Anhand der Werke *Sich einstellender Sinn* (2011) von Eres Holz und *Posthuman Songbook* (seit 2018) von Luxa M. Schüttler wurde sichtbar, dass die Beziehung zwischen Text, Stimme und Musik durch digitale Technologien tiefgreifend transformiert wird. Beide Kompositionen greifen auf algorithmische Prozesse zurück, um musikalische Strukturen zu generieren und verändern damit die traditionelle Wechselbeziehung von Lyrik und Musik. Ein zentrales Ergebnis dieser Analyse ist die Erkenntnis, dass das Kunstlied nicht nur durch sein musikalisches und poetisches Material definiert wird, sondern vor allem durch seine intermediale Struktur, die in beiden Werken auf unterschiedliche Weise weiterentwickelt wird. Während Holz in *Sich einstellender Sinn* mit algorithmisch generierten harmonischen Strukturen arbeitet und die Stimme elektronisch erweitert, ersetzt Schüttler in *Posthuman Songbook* die biologische Singstimme vollständig durch eine synthetische Instanz, die durch neuronale Netzwerke generierte Texte und Melodien hervorbringt. Diese Verschiebung vom menschlichen Ausdruck hin zu einer posthumanen Klanglichkeit wirft grundlegende Fragen nach Autor:innen-schaft, Performativität und Intimität im Liedkontext auf.

Ein weiterer zentraler Aspekt betrifft die Funktion der instrumentalen Begleitung. Während sie in der Tradition des Kunstlieds über weite Strecken als dialogischer Partner der Singstimme fungiert, erfährt sie in den hier untersuchten Werken eine Neukonzeption: In *Sich einstellender Sinn* strukturiert die Elektronik den kompositorischen Verlauf aktiv mit, wodurch die Beziehung zwischen Stimme und Instrumentalpart eine prozessuale Dimension erhält. In *Posthuman Songbook* bleibt die Klavierbegleitung hingegen das einzige menschlich gespielte Element und bildet einen Kontrast zur synthetischen Stimme. Die Kombination aus algorithmisch generierter Stimme und improvisierter Begleitung zeigt, dass sich nicht nur die Rolle der Stimme, sondern auch das Verhältnis zwischen Gesang und Begleitung auf neue Weise entfaltet. Dadurch verlagert sich der Fokus von einer erweiterten Stimmbehandlung hin zu einer radikalen Dekonstruktion des vokalen Ausdrucks, die nicht nur die traditionelle Liedästhetik, sondern auch das Verhältnis von Autor:innenschaft und musikalischer Produktion hinterfragt.

Die Analyse hat verdeutlicht, dass sich die künstlerische Auseinandersetzung mit der Kunstliedtradition nicht allein auf die Wiederbelebung einer historischen Gattung beschränkt, sondern auch neue kompositorische und mediale Kontexte erschließt. In diesem Spannungsfeld zwischen historischer Form und ästhetischer Neuerung lässt sich ein Gedanke aufgreifen, den Adorno bereits in seiner musik-ästhetischen Reflexion zum Kunstlied anlegt: die Frage nach seinem Fortbestehen unter veränderten kulturellen und technologischen Bedingungen. Die hier untersuchten Werke zeigen, dass die Beziehung zwischen Stimme, Text und Ausdruck nicht mehr als selbstverständlich vorausgesetzt werden kann, sondern jeweils neu bestimmt werden muss. In diesem Sinn lässt sich die zeitgenössische Lied-

kunst nicht nur als Fortschreibung einer historischen Tradition begreifen, sondern auch als Feld experimenteller Auseinandersetzung mit neuen ästhetischen Bedingungen.

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Susanne Kogler

Dichtung und die Poetik der Stille

Zur Funktion von Klang, Wort und Bild im zeitgenössischen Musikschaffen

Ausgehend von einer aktuellen grundlegenden Definition von Dichtung und einiger allgemeiner Überlegungen zum Verhältnis von Musik und Lyrik heute widmet sich mein Beitrag folgenden Aspekten des Verhältnisses von Klang, Wort und Bild im zeitgenössischen Musikschaffen: Dichtung als Formelement und struktureller Hintergrund in der zeitgenössischen Musik, Dichtung als kontemporäres Element zwischen den Epochen, Dichtung und die Schaffung eines spezifischen künstlerischen Sinns in der Musik, Dichtung zwischen Gesang und Sprache sowie Dichtung als Ausdrucks- und Dokumentationsmittel für Komponistinnen und Komponisten. Anhand von zeitgenössischen Stücken wie den Sappho-Vertonungen der bei Graz lebenden Komponistin, Pianistin und Performerin Elisabeth Harnik oder aktueller kompositorischer Beschäftigung mit poetischem Text im Œuvre der in Wien lebenden Flötistin, Komponistin und Performerin Pia Palme werde ich darlegen, inwieweit die fünf oben genannten Aspekte für eine Analyse des Zusammenspiels von Musik und Dichtung im zeitgenössischen Kunstschaffen fruchtbar gemacht werden können. So trägt Dichtung in jeweils unterschiedlicher Weise zu Struktur und Form sowie der jeweils spezifischen Ausdrucks- und Sinnstiftung eines Werkes bzw. Stückes bei, kann aber auch als Dokumentationsmittel des kreativen Prozesses fungieren. Für die ästhetische Wirkung ist der multimediale Raum, der zwischen Sprache, Klang und Bild entsteht, entscheidend. Stille erscheint als eine wesentliche Bedingung seiner Konstituierung, die auf der Fähigkeit aller Beteiligten zuzuhören beruht. Diese wird als politisch relevant angesehen. Um eine Entwicklungslinie zu dieser aktuellen Produktion zu skizzieren, dient die späte Lyrik-Vertonung *Risonanze erranti* (1986) des für die neue Musik bis heute einflussreichen italienischen Avantgarde-Komponisten Luigi Nono (1924–1990) als Ausgangspunkt, in der schon alle diese Aspekte erkennbar sind. Dichtung fungiert darin als Katalysator und Kern einer reflexiv-sinnlichen Hörästhetik mit gesellschaftspolitischen emanzipatorischen Zielsetzungen, die nicht zuletzt von einer an weibliche Traditionslinien anknüpfenden feministischen Sichtweise getragen wird.

Musik und Lyrik heute

Dichtung, Poesie und Lyrik bezeichnen allgemein gesprochen dieselbe Kunstform. Seit der Antike unterscheidet man Lyrik bekanntlich von Epos und Drama, wenn sich auch in den unterschiedlichen Epochen die mit diesen Begriffen verbundenen Gestaltungsvorstellungen selbstverständlich verändert haben. Versucht man dennoch, eine grundlegende Definition für Lyrik zu finden, ist zunächst an die Nähe zur Musik zu denken, die der Definition von Lyrik in unterschiedlichen Ausformungen und Kontexten dient. Dabei erscheint es nicht uninteressant, den Faktor Zeit als Ausgangspunkt heranzuziehen, zumal dieser aufgrund der sich rasant beschleunigenden Technologiefortschritte heute neben dem Aspekt Raum besondere Beachtung verdient (siehe dazu u. a. Couldry und Hepp 2023, 129–154). Im von Hermann Danuser herausgegebenen Handbuch zur musikalischen Lyrik hat Reinhold Brinkmann bereits 2004 Zeit als Bestimmung für Lyrik vorgeschlagen: Diese sei „durch die fiktive Suspension der Zeitfortschreitung ausgezeichnet, durch den Anschein einer Neutralisierung der Zeit“ (2004, 20). Müsste man auch in Betracht ziehen, dass dieser Einstand der Zeit für die Musik generell fiktiv ist, sei Lyrik dennoch im Besonderen mit „dem einzelnen gelebten Augenblick, dem erfüllten Moment“ verbunden, während Epik aufgrund des erzählten Zusammenhangs in der Zeit fortschreite. Lyrik sei also eher stationär, vermittele demnach „geistige Stationen, Gedanken, Gefühle“ (Brinkmann 2004, 21). Dass die Lyrik zum Statischen und Bild tendiert, zeigt sich unter anderem an Hans Pfitzners Definition der Kategorie des Lyrischen als „das Geschlossene, das Raumgreifende, eine musikalische Zeit, die auf alles dynamisch vorwärts Treibende verzichtet“ (zit. nach Danuser 2004, 165). Hermann Danuser weist diesbezüglich darauf hin, dass hierbei ein „nicht hierarchischer musikalischer Diskurs“ (2004, 165) entsteht. Der Begriff der *musikalischen Lyrik* impliziert den Wunsch nach einer Vereinigung mehrerer Kunstgattungen, wie er im neunzehnten Jahrhundert bestimmend wurde (vgl. Brinkmann 2004, 23). Als oder in Verbindung mit Lyrik wie beispielsweise im Lied wird somit die zeitliche Struktur der Musik in besonderer Weise auf den Augenblick ausgerichtet und tritt damit in Gegensatz zu einer teleologisch fortschreitenden musikalischen Zeit, wie sie etwa die Symphonik Beethovens prägte. In der Verwendung des Liedbegriffs zeigt sich zudem die Interdisziplinarität der Lyrik, bezeichnete ein Lied im neunzehnten Jahrhundert doch sowohl die musikalische Komposition als auch ein rein sprachliches Gebilde. Das Lied ist somit eine Gattung, wie Brinkmann es formulierte, „die von vornherein im Zwischenreich von Sprache und Musik angesiedelt ist“ (2004, 25). Auch Sprechen wird im achtzehnten und neunzehnten Jahrhundert im deutschen Sprachraum als Singen aufgefasst, wie etwa Autoren wie Eichendorff deutlich erkennen lassen

(vgl. Brinkmann 2004, 45). Sowohl die Musik als auch der Text sind von einem individuellen Ton gekennzeichnet.

Dafür, dass ein einzelnes Wort die ganze Welt zum Singen bringen kann, kann auch Hölderlin als Gewährsmann herangezogen werden. Den Dichter als Sänger zu verstehen, geht nicht zuletzt auf die Rezeption von Antike und Mittelalter zurück. Mit Orpheus ist diese Vorstellung nachhaltig in die Musikgeschichte eingedrungen und hat bis heute Gültigkeit. Im Begriff der Dichtung steckt ferner der der Verdichtung, der formalen Gestaltung der Sprache, die oft auch als Musikalisation verstanden wird. Diese Verdichtung kann allerdings auch eine Ausdünnung sein, kann man doch Lyrik auch als „die Gattung der konzisen und konzentrierten Form“ (Meyer 2004, 229) bezeichnen. Gerade Kürze repräsentiert einen besonderen Wert. Auch Kürze ist mit einer Reflexion der Zeit verbunden. Andreas Meyer nennt „die erlebte Spannung von verbrauchter und (an den Augenblick) verschwendeter Zeit“ (2004, 229) als spezielles Charakteristikum von Lyrik im zwanzigsten Jahrhundert, man denke nur an Mallarmés fast leere Buchseite oder die Kürze des Lebenswerks von Anton Webern.

Die Vorstellung von einem wirkungsmächtigen Wort, die in die Romantik verweist, zeigt sich sowohl im Bereich der vertonten Lyrik zum Beispiel bei Luigi Nono, als auch im Bereich der Musikdramatik, wo bekanntlich Giuseppe Verdi die für den Handlungsverlauf entscheidende *parola scenica* produktiv machte.

Von Anfang an hat auch das Fehlen der Worte im Bereich der Lyrik Tradition, man denke nur an die beliebte Instrumentalgattung *Lieder ohne Worte*, und neben der Ironie war bekanntlich das Fragment eine zentrale Ausdrucksform der Romantik. In Stücken der deutschen Nachkriegsavantgarde wurde Sprache zum reinen Lautmaterial oder war – mitunter nach seriellen Musikalisierungsprozessen – auch nur mehr latent virtuell anwesend. Bei Pierre Boulez ist das Gedicht zugleich Zentrum und Abwesenheit (vgl. Reichert 2004, 325–327). Nonos Extremposition, Fragmente Hölderlins nur in die Partitur einzutragen, ohne dass diese dem Publikum zu Gehör gebracht würden, ist mit dem Gedanken verbunden, damit „schweigende Gesänge aus anderen Räumen, anderen Himmeln“ (Reichert 2004, 327) in die Komposition einzubinden. Die Fragmente, die als Spielanweisungen für die Musiker fungieren und von Innehalten signalisierenden Fermaten begrenzt werden, öffnen den Raum für weitere Räume und die Stille „zeitlosen Singens“, wie der Komponist selbst schrieb (zit. nach Reichert 2004, 328). Laut Klaus Reichert ist hier der Text „ganz Musik geworden“ (2004, 328). Diese Position, die sich auch bei Komponisten der sogenannten gemäßigeren Moderne wie Hans Werner Henze findet, verbindet das zwanzigste Jahrhundert eng mit dem neunzehnten.

Bezeichnet man üblicherweise die Postmoderne als jene Epoche, in der eine Fortschrittsgeschichte und damit eine große Erzählung unmöglich geworden ist,

so ist es doch das neunzehnte Jahrhundert, in dem durch den Historismus bereits im Sinne eines „imaginären Museums“ verschiedenste Epochen zur gleichen Zeit präsent wurden. „An der Wende des 18. zum 19. Jahrhundert entsteht in der Literatur eine Art von imaginärem Museum, indem sich für Interesse und Zugriff der Komponisten eine ganze Reihe thematisch stilistisch zu gliedernder Räume denken ließe“ (Kreutzer 2004, 129). Diese Verfügbarkeit der Dichtung für die Musik beeinflusste die Gestaltung musikalischer Kompositionen mit Text maßgeblich.

Wohl nicht zuletzt aufgrund dieser Wurzeln in der Romantik erscheint Lyrik allerdings auf den ersten Blick nicht unbedingt dazu geeignet, die Kunst des zwanzigsten und einundzwanzigsten Jahrhunderts zu charakterisieren. Das Verschwinden der Sprache ist auch mit dem Aspekt des Verstummens verbunden, der im zwanzigsten und einundzwanzigsten Jahrhundert zunehmend ambivalent erscheint, steht doch nach diversen Krisen der Sprachlosigkeit von Hugo von Hofmannsthal bis Paul Celan oder Ingeborg Bachmann und multiplen Krisen der Weltsituation heute die Kunst immer wieder generell auf dem Spiel.

Mitunter wird Lyrik, noch deutlicher ist im Deutschen das Wort Poesie, auch als Gegenpol zur technischen Gestaltung und Weiterentwicklung der Welt gesehen. Oft wird diesbezüglich, wenn auch vielfach missverstanden, Adornos Wort herangezogen, dass sich nach Auschwitz keine Gedichte mehr schreiben ließen (siehe dazu u. a. Meyer 2004, 225; Kogler 2014). Nichtsdestotrotz bilden sich gerade aktuell neue Formen und Funktionen der Poesie heraus. Die im Poetry Slam deutlich herausragende performative Dimension der Lyrik erscheint hier im Besonderen von Interesse wie auch das Phänomen der an der Grenze zwischen den Gattungen operierenden lyrischen Prosa, das in der Literatur eine bedeutende Rolle spielt.¹

Schon bei John Cage hat die Stille die Musik letztlich im Klang der Wirklichkeit aufgelöst (vgl. Reichert 2004, 321–325). Heute erscheinen ähnliche Positionen zunehmend dringlicher, auch im Sinne einer Sprache der Dinge, die in Überwindung der Sprache des Menschen zu erreichen wäre.² In seinem berühmten Vortrag *Silence* hat Cage den Klang der Stille poetisch gefasst. Seine Lautgedichte wiederum lassen Sprache zum stummen Klangbild jenseits musikalischer Bedeutung werden (vgl. Reichert 2004, 321–325).

Im zwanzigsten Jahrhundert ist unter dem Begriff der Lyrik eine Vielfalt an Formen verstanden worden. Als technische Minimaldefinition kann mit Dieter

¹ Zu nennen wären hier insbesondere österreichische musikkaffine Dichter und Dichterinnen wie Friederike Mayröcker oder Julian Schutting.

² Diesbezügliche Überlegungen könnten eine Verbindung von aktuellen Positionen des Ecocriticism mit Ansätzen der Kritischen Theorie im Anschluss an Walter Benjamin darstellen. Siehe dazu unter anderem Vetlesen (2021).

Lamping Lyrik als „eine Rede in Versen“ genannt werden (1989, 23), was nicht unbedingt metrische Regulierung meint sowie Einzelrede nicht zwangsläufig die Existenz eines lyrischen Ichs. Allerdings wird die „graphische Strukturierung nach Zeilen“ als Kriterium genannt (Meyer 2004, 228). Impliziert lyrische Sprache demnach eine strukturelle Dimension, ist im Begriff Lyrik zugleich die Funktion einer freien und doch zugleich künstlerisch gestaltbaren Rede impliziert. Die freie ungebundene Form der Dichtung entspricht den Entwicklungen in der Musik hin zur musikalischen Prosa, wie sie etwa bei Arnold Schönberg im Besonderen zur Zeit der a- bzw. freitonalen Kompositionen zu finden ist.

Luigi Nono *Risonanze erranti*

Risonanze erranti. Liederzyklus a Massimo Cacciari (1986) kann mit dem Musikwissenschaftler Jonathan Impett als das Komplement zu Nonos größtem Werk, dem *Prometeo, Tragedia dell'ascolto* (1984), angesehen werden (vgl. Impett 2019, 443–447). Die Komposition erscheint hinsichtlich ihrer Materialbehandlung, Formgenese und Ästhetik bis heute als zukunftsweisend. Impett beschreibt das überlieferte Material zur Komposition als eine Fusion aus zwei in etwa zeitgleich entstandenen Kompositionsprojekten: einerseits einem Liederzyklus basierend auf Stücken von Guillaume de Machaut, Johannes Ockeghem und Josquin Desprez, andererseits aus einem vorerst textlosen Stück für Mezzosopran, Flöte, Piccolo, Kontrabassflöte, Klarinette in C, Kontrabassklarinette, Tuba und Euphonium. Über die Hinzunahme der Dichtungen von Herman Melville und Ingeborg Bachmann verschmolzen beide schließlich zu einem neuen Projekt (vgl. Impett 2019, 442).

Die Form des Liederzyklus korrespondiert mit dem Text-Netzwerk, das Nono gemeinsam mit dem italienischen Philosophen Massimo Cacciari während der Arbeit am *Prometeo* als Grundlage für das Libretto entwickelt hatte. Alle drei Lieder handeln von Verlust und Trauer: *Malor me bat*, *Lay de plour* und *Adieu mes amours*.

Jedes der drei Lieder wird in 23 Fragmente geteilt, Pausen und Fermaten werden hinzugefügt. Die Fragmente werden auf Alt, Tenor und Bassregister verteilt. Daraus konstruiert Nono eine Monodie, um daraus wieder eine vierstimmige Motette zu komponieren. Impett nennt die Textur einen „minimalen Kontrapunkt“ (2019, 443; trans. SK). Noten werden durch Pausen ersetzt, Entfernungen werden vergrößert. Selten kommen mehr als zwei Stimmen zusammen, Simultanität entsteht durch Echo, Verdopplung oder Transposition. Imitation wird durch die ent-

stehende Komplexität des Zusammenklangs zu verändernder Resonanz, die die Wahrnehmung prägt.

Transposition und Verzögerung konnten mit einer neueren Computertechnik präziser durchgeführt werden, Samples in Echtzeit hergestellt werden, sodass eine neue Stufe in der digitalen live-Elektronik erreicht wurde. Der akustische Raum, vielfältige Zeiträume und Erinnerung strukturieren das Material, aus dem *Risonanze erranti* entsteht. Die Reduktion von Melvilles Sammlung *Battle Pieces and Aspects of the War* von 1866, die den amerikanischen Bürgerkrieg reflektieren, tritt als weitere Resonanz hinzu. Auch aus Bachmanns Gedicht *Keine Delikatessen* von 1963 wählt Nono Fragmente aus, sodass ein neues semantisch-phonetisches Netzwerk und Resonanzen entstehen können, die sowohl im originalen Kontext als auch für Nono persönliche Bedeutung haben (vgl. Impett 2019, 443). Der Inhalt des Gedichts korrespondiert mit der Forderung in ihrem Nono bekannten Essay *Musik und Dichtung*, dass die Künstler die moralischen und geistigen Herausforderungen ihrer Zeit annehmen und darauf reagieren sollten. Zudem thematisiert das Gedicht den kreativen Prozess, der Nono zu dieser Zeit ebenfalls grundlegend beschäftigte.

1986 werden beide Projekte unter dem Titel *Risonanze erranti* für eine Aufführung in Köln vereint. Hans Höller hat die poetologische Dimension des Gedichts und dessen Bedeutung für Nono erläutert (vgl. 1998). Bachmanns poetologische Reflexion entspricht der Nonos: Kunstferne muss in die Kunst eingehen. Ein neuer Schaffensprozess ist daher von Nöten, der als durchschrittener Weg in Spuren ins Werk selbst eingeht (vgl. Höller 1998, 81–93). In *Keine Delikatessen* ist das Kunstfremde die Welt des Geschäfts, der Warencharakter, der alles erfasst – auch die Gebilde der Kunst. Die Vermarktung der Lebensmittel als Delikatessen wird mit dem ästhetischen Konsum des Kunstwerks verbunden. Ein grundlegendes Problem ist für die Dichterin, wie die Kunst den Schein der Warenwelt auflösen könnte, „um wieder authentische menschliche Erfahrungen möglich zu machen“ (Höller 1998, 92). „Die Sprache von Keine Delikatessen bewegt sich paradoxerweise auf das Verstummen zu“ (Höller 1998, 92). Das Verstummen ist „Voraussetzung des Schreibens in unserer Zeit“ (Höller 1998, 92), es ist der kunstferne Weg, der in den Vorstufen des Gedichtes fassbar wird. Ekel erscheint als affektive Triebkraft, die destruktive Negativität wird sich „von Textstufe zu Textstufe ihrer Geschichtlichkeit und poetologischen Relevanz bewusst“ (Höller 1998, 92). Das Werk ist der Prozess der Kreation, die Interpretation und Rezeption sind dessen Mimesis.

„1985 Venezia Freiburg Köln Milano Berlin 1987“ notiert Nono in die Reinschrift des Stückes (zit. nach Impett 2019, 448). Das zeigt, dass er das Stück als Prozess betrachtet, im Zuge dessen es seine Form fand. Bereits die ersten Aufführungen spielen als Stationen in diesem Prozess eine Rolle. Erinnerung und Imagination verbinden sich sowohl beim Komponieren als auch beim Hören (vgl. Impett 2019, 449).

1985 hatte er in Toledo an einer Klostermauer den berühmten Spruch gefunden, dass es keine Wege gäbe, sondern nur das Gehen, eine Phrase eines Gedichts des spanischen Lyrikers Antonio Machado. Nietzsches Wanderer und die kontinuierliche Suche von Cacciaris *Prometheus* bildeten den Hintergrund für diese Position, die Bachmanns Gedicht mit Nonos Musik teilt. In der geteilten Sinnsuche wird Hören produktiv, Ziel wie Voraussetzung von Sinn.

Mit Nonos Stück führt eine Traditionslinie in die Gegenwart, die die produktive Rezeption als eine dem Werk eingeschriebene Dimension kenntlich macht. Für die Aufführung in Berlin und Paris 1987 nahm er Kürzungen vor, die den Resonanzschichten zwischen Perkussion und Live-Elektronik mehr Zeit einräumten. Diese Änderungen weisen darauf hin, wie das Stück wahrgenommen werden soll. Die Fragmente enthalten als sinnvoll erkennbare melodische, rhythmische und semantische Figuren. Da Wiederholungen oder auch zwingende Kontinuität fehlen, bleibt die Wahrnehmung an den Augenblick gekoppelt, die Echos und Erinnerungen bieten Reflexionsmaterial. Fermaten, lange Stille und die Passagen des Schlagzeugs sowie die elektronischen Resonanzen überschreiten die Grenzen von Echo, Erinnerung und bewusster Reflexion. Das Ohr führt zu individueller Erfahrung und individuellem Verstehen. Individuelle und geteilte Wahrnehmungen spielen zusammen. Es entsteht eine Dialektik zwischen Gesellschaft und Einzelnen. Lange Stille im Konzertsaal erscheint ebenso politisch wie rhetorische Interventionen. Die Aufmerksamkeit wird auf die geteilte Gegenwart und die transformative Kraft gemeinsamer Reflexion gelenkt. Aktives Zuhören ist nicht mehr optionale Zutat, sondern ein strukturelles Element der kompositorischen Sprache.

Zahlreiche Komponistinnen und Komponisten wurden von Nonos Weg inspiriert. Auch Stücke zeitgenössischer Komponistinnen können in dieser poetischen Traditionslinie betrachtet werden, die Stille und Klang zu einem reflexiven zeitüberschreitenden Hörraum verbindet.³ Dichtung erscheint dabei als kontemporäres Element zwischen den Epochen. Der virtuelle Raum, der entsteht, ist zugleich Zukunfts- und Erinnerungsraum. Intertextualität bestimmt die Assoziationen, zu denen er inspiriert. Unterschiedliche Klang- und Zeiträume greifen bei dieser Konzeption ineinander, Gleichzeitigkeit wird zum vorherrschenden Erfahrungsmodus.

3 Auch Beat Furrers *Œuvre* wäre dieser Traditionslinie zuzurechnen sowie die explizit weibliche Erkundung des Hörraums durch Pauline Oliveros.

Elisabeth Harnik: (Sappho-)Fragmente

Diese schon bei Bachmann und Nono angelegte intertextuelle Struktur findet sich zum Beispiel auch in Werken der österreichischen Pianistin und Komponistin Elisabeth Harnik. Durch die von ihr zitierten Verse, die oftmals als Titel fungieren, knüpft sie an unterschiedliche Dichter, häufig Dichterinnen an. Der spezifische Sinn stellt sich beim Hören und Reflektieren des Gehörten ein. Unter anderem hat Harnik Fragmente von Sappho künstlerisch bearbeitet, darunter *of all stars the most beautiful* für Klavier solo 2018⁴ und *someone will remember us* 2020.⁵ Das Stück entwickelt durch die langsamen Gesten der Musiker:innen einen Hörraum, der sowohl Ausführende als auch Publikum quasi in eine andere Zeit entführt, die zugleich überzeitlich, neu und gegenwärtig ist.

Eine weitere von Harniks neueren Kompositionen ist *in change is rest*, eine Raummusik für vier Chorgruppen, Solist:innen, Orgel, Akkordeon und zwei Kontrabässe aus dem Jahre 2022/2023. Harnik verwendet darin Texte nach Heraklit und ein Fragment von Sappho (vgl. 2023, o.S.). Die Komposition kann als Meditation angesehen werden, in der sowohl die Künstler:innen als auch das Publikum durch die Klänge und diese begleitenden Textfragmente zur Reflexion angeregt werden sollen. Die räumliche Disposition von vier Chorgruppen und Solist:innen, die sich auch verändert, lässt die Wahrnehmung, das Hören selbst zum Gegenstand der Reflexion werden, wie die Komponistin ausführt:

Jede Änderung der Raumpositionen der Chorgruppen bedeutet auch immer eine Verschiebung der Hörwahrnehmung der Zuhörenden. Das Hören kann sich selbst zuhören, es wird sich selbst gewahr und je nach Sitzplatz im Raum, stellen sich beim Publikum zusätzlich zur individuellen ‚Gestimmtheit‘, unterschiedliche Wahrnehmungen der raumklanglichen Wirklichkeit des Werkes ein. (Harnik 2023, o. S.)

Das Stück gliedert sich in sieben formale Abschnitte, deren Titel die Zuhörenden zur assoziativen Deutung der Klänge und zur aktiven Reflexion anregen:

- I – the unlike is joined together
- PATTERN
- TRANSITION
- II – threshold
- III – change
- IV – a mixture separates when not kept in motion
- V – transformation
- VI – the harmony of the world is a harmony of oppositions

4 Siehe Videoaufnahme unter: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XDfjBnJzGoQ>.

5 Siehe Videoaufnahme unter: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VoNXLLcCmTo>.

VII – time is a child playing at draughts
(Harnik 2023, o. S.)

Der Inhalt, dass das Leben einem ständigen Wandel unterworfen ist und die Gegensätze letztlich ineinander übergehen, ist Thema des Stückes. Es wird durch die Dichtung eindeutig bezeichnet, allerdings in einer Weise, die einen weiten Spielraum für Assoziationen offenlässt und individuelle, persönliche Bezüge neben allgemeinen erlaubt. Durch die sich verändernde Verteilung der Solist:innen im Publikum und die von der Komponistin verlangte körperliche Nähe – die Solist:innen sollen an bestimmten Stellen einzelnen Zuhörenden die Hand auf die Schulter legen – wird dieses auch individuell angesprochen und zur aktiven Wahrnehmung aufgefordert. Es entsteht auf Basis der zitierten Fragmente der Dichtungen ein gemeinsamer Hörraum, Hören wird zur gemeinsamen reflektierenden Aktion. Die Komponistin erklärt ihren Ansatz wie folgt:

Ich sehe mich als Künstlerin in der Verantwortung, die Komplexität unserer Zeit zu absorbieren und in meiner Arbeit zu reflektieren. Um mit Uneindeutigkeiten und Unsicherheiten konstruktiv umzugehen, finde ich es wichtig, Widersprüche zu erkennen und auszuhalten – das zeichnet für mich Offenheit aus. Und genau diesen offenen Möglichkeitsraum fand ich in den Fragmenten Heraklits, insbesondere im wiederkehrenden Thema seines Philosophierens: dem Prozess beständigen Werdens und Wandels. Seine Auseinandersetzung mit dem Verhältnis von Gegensätzen resonierte sehr stark in mir. Gerade im Kontrast zueinander, werden die Pole eines Gegensatzes besonders stark erfahrbar. (Harnik 2023, o. S.)

Ein Jahr später entstand die Komposition ... *spirat adhuc amor* (2023/2024), die ebenfalls ein Fragment Sapphos als Textgrundlage verwendet. Der Titel entstammt einem Gedicht von Horaz. Das Stück ist ein Auftragswerk des Ensembles Cantando Admont. Aus einem Obertonsingen schält sich langsam der von Sappho genannte Name der Geliebten, Anaktoria, hervor. Er wird als Lebensbezug der Dichterin zur Bekräftigung ihres Statements herangezogen, das den einleitenden Statements zur Frage, was das Schönste auf der Erde sei, kontrastierend gegenübersteht.

Some men say an army of horse and some men say an army on foot
and some men say an army of ships is the most beautiful thing
on the black earth. But I say it is
what you love.
(Carson 2003, 27)

Die Kürze des Textes erlaubt es wiederum, einen assoziationsreichen Raum zu eröffnen, der die Zeit für persönliche Reflexionen offenlässt. Wie mit der bewusst gewählten Übersetzung von Anne Carson unterstreicht die Komponistin auch durch diesen Text für sie wichtige Standpunkte, nicht ohne allerdings den Zuhö-

renden genügend Freiräume für andere individuelle Deutungen zu eröffnen. Das Stück scheint dabei an den Standpunkt Nonos in *Risonanze erranti* anzuknüpfen. Die Komponistin schreibt in ihrem Einführungstext:

Anaktoria ist für mich die Konstruktion eines imaginären Raums der Verbundenheit und Fürsorglichkeit für alles was wir lieben, erschaffen einst im Akt des Dichtens Sappho's und weitergegeben an uns, hier und jetzt. Wir sind eingeladen, uns an der Wahrnehmung dieses Möglichkeitsraums aktiv zu beteiligen. Unsere Imagination kann bewusste und unbewusste Prozesse in Gang setzen als Basis für Veränderung. Sappho's Lied gegen den Krieg und für die Liebe, hineingesungen in die Zeiten des Krieges und der Zerstörung, damals wie heute – es könnte keinen besseren Zeitpunkt geben. (Harnik 2024, o. S.)

Die Stimme beinhaltet für die Komponistin wie für Nono einen besonderen Ausdruck, weil sie zugleich mit dem eigenen Körper und der Außenwelt verbindet. Dadurch sind in den stimmlichen Äußerungen auch immer bestimmte und unbestimmte Anteile enthalten, sie ist „ein Ort des Austauschs und Wechsels. In ihr verschmelzen sowohl Abgrenzung als auch Öffnung“, schreibt Harnik (2024, o.S.). Einzelne Wörter, die als solche verständlich sind, bestimmen die Aufmerksamkeit und den Assoziationsraum des jeweiligen Stückes.

Die Gegensätze, die Harnik mit ihrer Textauswahl thematisiert, können zugleich auch als poetologische Kommentare für ihr eigenes Schaffen, das zwischen Improvisation und Komposition unterschiedliche Modalitäten der Zeiterfahrung und der künstlerischen Entscheidungsfindung auslotet, angesehen werden. Der Ausgleich der Gegensätze bzw. deren Ineinanderfallen sind ebenfalls wiederkehrende Themen, mit denen sich die Komponistin beschäftigt.

Im Zentrum eines weiteren Sappho-Fragments, das einer älteren Komposition aus dem Jahr 2005 für vier Frauenstimmen zugrunde liegt, *belem*, steht die Frage, was zu tun sei.⁶ Die Komponistin nimmt sie von der antiken Dichterin auf und antwortet selbst in poetischer Form.

belem
für 4 Frauenstimmen (2005)
Text nach Sappho

Sappho:
Der Strophen und Verse zweites Buch XXVII
Weiß nicht, was ich zu tun;
denn entzweit ist das Denken mir.

Entzweit ist mir das Weiß.
Was tun;

⁶ Siehe Audioaufnahme unter: <https://soundcloud.com/austria-1/belem>.

nicht zu denken,
denn
ich
(Harnik 2024, o. S.)

Durch den Titel *belem*, was auf Slowenisch *weiß* bedeutet, ist die Komposition mit anderen Stücken Harniks verbunden, die ebenfalls auf Texten einer Dichterin basieren: Gertrude Stein. *White Object* ist der Titel einer 2001 entstandenen Miniatur für Stimme solo, die später zum Kernstück des Zyklus *Solo for Gertrude* wurde (vgl. Harnik 2019). Steins experimentelle Sprache korrespondiert mit der der Komponistin. Experimentelle Vokaltechniken und Sprachkompositionsmethoden finden wie in vielen Stücken Harniks auch in *belem* Verwendung: Sprachreduzierung, Wiederholung und Variation sowie Einsatz experimenteller Stimmtechniken. Harnik schreibt dazu: „Der Klang der Wörter, zerlegt in seine Laute, lenkt das Ohr auf den Sprachklang selbst. Klangschichten wie Flüstern, rhythmisch Gesprochenes, Ein- und Ausatemklänge oder Gesungenes durchdringen einander“ (2024, o. S.).

Die von Harnik gewählten Anknüpfungspunkte eröffnen eine Traditionslinie, die explizit weibliche Bezüge schafft, wie sie in der Kunst nach wie vor noch nicht allgemein etabliert sind. In diesem Sinne kann die Textwahl auch als feministisches politisches Statement angesehen werden. Die Reflexion, die mit den Kompositionen angeregt werden soll, zielt auf eine konkrete Veränderung der gesellschaftlichen Wirklichkeit und der Kultur. Im Zentrum stehen fragmentarische Verse, die Stille erscheint in ihrer Potenzialität als Raum positiven Neuanfangs. Es entsteht ein vom Publikum und den Ausführenden hörend zu erschließender von Simultanität geprägter, dynamischer, visionärer Klangraum, der zugleich Erinnerungsfunktion hat und eine neue Zeit kreiert. In diese wird die weibliche Tradition als kreativer, gemeinsamer Weg in die Zukunft eingeschrieben.

Pia Palme: Wechselwirkung(en)

Poesie hat bei der Komponistin und Performerin Pia Palme eine besondere Funktion. Einerseits dient sie als Textelement im Sinne eines Librettos oder Liedtextes, wobei sie gerne auch mit Dichterinnen zusammenarbeitet, wie etwa Anne Waldman. Andererseits ist aber die Poesie auch Palmes ureigenes Ausdrucksmittel, sei es, dass sie ihre Libretti selbst verfasst, sei es, dass sie Kompositions- und Probenprozesse schreibend begleitet. Die daraus hervorgehenden Texte bilden quasi einen zweiten Strang in ihrem Œuvre, der bislang noch wenig Beachtung erfahren hat. In *Notationen aus Zorn* beschreibt sie diese Praxis, die sie auch als Auto-

ethnographie bezeichnet (vgl. Palme 2017, 34–48). Der beschriebenen Traditionslinie gehört sie insofern an, als sie ihre Kompositionsweise als politische Handlung versteht. Ihre Werke sind jedoch keine politischen Werke, sondern es geht ihr um die Hörwahrnehmung im Unterschied zum Sehen. Als Frau habe sie in besonderer Weise gelernt, „zwischen den Zeilen zu lesen und hinter die Sprachstrukturen zu horchen“, erklärt die Komponistin, „ich höre in die Stille und lausche nach dem Ungesagten“ (Palme 2017, 35). Wie Harnik verweist sie auf die amerikanische Komponistin, Performerin und Aktivistin Pauline Oliveros, für die das Hören einen den gesamten Körper und auch den Geist umfassenden gesellschaftspolitisch zukunftsweisenden Akt darstellte (vgl. Palme 2017, 35). Für Palme ist auch das Denken, der Denkvorgang hörbar, als vokaler Prozess: „Ich kann mein Denken, meine geistige und bewusste innere Aktivität hören“ (2017, 35). In ihrem Komponieren will sie die Hörwahrnehmung grundlegend untersuchen, indem sie in sich hinein und aus sich heraus horcht. Das „Rauschen im Hintergrund“ und der „Klang der Stille“ (Palme 2017, 35) sind Teile der künstlerischen Klangerkundung. Das Persönliche wird im Sinne eines feministischen Hörens bewusst mit dem Politischen verbunden. Die Welt, wie sie gehört wird, wird zugleich rekomponiert. Hören soll aus einer feministischen Perspektive heraus neu definiert werden (vgl. Palme 2017, 36). Stille und Hören müssen laut Palme eine Aufwertung erfahren. Die Position der Hingabe, der Resonanz, ist für die Komponistin typisch weiblich (vgl. Palme 2017, 37). Sie ist damit analog zum *male gaze* in der Kunstgeschichte an einem *female ear* interessiert.⁷ *Feminist listening* ist, was Palme als Komponistin zu verwirklichen versucht: „Diese Form des Hörens erzeugt aktiv komponierend meine/jemandes Sonosphäre“ (2017, 37).

Auch eine poetologische Perspektive ist bei Palme präsent. Ein wichtiger Teil ihrer Klangerforschung ist die Beschäftigung mit dem Kompositionsprozess, wobei sie in ihr Inneres hineinspürt. Ihr Antrieb ist ein „Verlangen, sich mit der Umwelt in Verbindung zu setzen – und zwar in einer sehr persönlichen, einzigartigen Weise“ (Palme 2017, 37). Zorn ist die Emotion, die für sie zum kreativen Antrieb wird. Im Sinne des antiken Gesanges, wie er beispielsweise bereits Homers *Ilias* prägt, geht es ihr um eine Kultur der Live-Performance, die Teilhabe voraussetzt, eine „Kultur des Sprechens, Singens und Zuhörens“ (Palme 2017, 38). Durch die „[...] körperliche Gemeinschaft von Performenden und dem Publikum [...] wird] die Gemeinschaft/Community [...] in der performativen Aktion gespiegelt, abgebildet, geformt und verstärkt“ (Palme 2017, 38). Die Stimme steht im Zentrum dieser Forschungsarbeit, denn als Vokalistin und Performerin exponiert man sich

7 Einen Überblick zu dieser heute interdisziplinär erforschten Thematik bietet u. a. Revell und Shin (2024).

direkt und körperlich, die physische Gegenwart ist essentiell. Auch die haptische Ebene spielt eine Rolle, wenn es um Papier oder andere Objekte und Materialien geht, die Palme verwendet.

Während der Notation eines Stückes öffnet sich der private Raum zu einem, der zugleich privat und öffentlich ist. Es entsteht ein Zwischenstadium, das die Komponistin auch als „dritten Raum“ bezeichnet, der zwischen ihr und der Außenwelt liegt (vgl. Palme 2017, 39). Dieser „dritte Raum“ zwischen ihr und den Mitmenschen ermöglicht erst den Austausch, er wird von einer Gemeinschaft definiert und quasi benutzt, sodass Lernprozesse stattfinden können. Bei der Aufführung wird die Komposition den Zuhörenden übergeben, „die Rezeption des Werkes findet auf persönliche Art statt“: „Meine Musik wird durch einen individuellen Hörvorgang von den Zuhörenden neu geschaffen, rekomponiert und dekodiert. An diesem Punkt tritt ein Werk aus dem dritten Raum hinaus“ (Palme 2017, 40).

Die Komposition *Setzung* für eine Vokalistin bzw. Schauspielerin aus dem Jahre 2014 verdeutlicht diesen Standpunkt. Dabei arbeitet Palme mit einer Partitur, die in Form eines großen, die Performerin dahinter verbergenden papiernen Transparents quasi als Membran zwischen die Ausführende und das Publikum gesetzt ist (vgl. Abb. 1 und 2).⁸ Der Vorgang der Notation wird sichtbar, die Zwischenphase wird zum dauerhaften Objekt. Indem eine Umkehrung der traditionellen Verhältnisse stattfindet, wird der Stellenwert der Frau als Performerin thematisiert: Die Komposition wird als Partitur sichtbar, während die Performerin unsichtbar bleibt. Der künstlerische Prozess, Komposition und Niederschrift, werden zum Thema und Gegenstand der Reflexion. Die Komposition soll auch als Zeichen des Widerstands gegen die Digitalisierung der Notation, gegen Vereinfachung und Standardisierung fungieren, die sich auf immer mehr Teile des Kompositionsprozesses ausdehnen, der vorprogrammiert und automatisiert wird, schreibt die Komponistin. Programme übernehmen Entscheidungen gegen den Willen der Komponistin. Das wird als Störung erlebt. Die Wut gegenüber dieser Bevormundung sei ein Antrieb für das Stück gewesen, die Partitur in *Setzung* signalisiert eine Gegenposition zu diesen Entwicklungen.

Dichtung dient auch hier als Ausgangspunkt, nämlich das *Poem 21* von Sor Juana Inéz de la Cruz, das im letzten Vers des Textes der Komposition zitiert wird: „es höre mich dein AUGE“:

8 Siehe auch Videoaufnahme unter: <https://piapalme.at/works/setzung-palme-2014/>.

[...]

mit
geteilt

Verantwortung
haben halten teilen
mit sein

MACHT STATT PFLEGE

aus-
einander Setzung

Ende
unser aller

mit ihr
mit euch
und dazwischen
dieser Raum

„es höre mich dein AUGE“
(Palme 2014, o. S.)

De la Cruz ist für Pia Palme deshalb interessant, weil sie einerseits im Kloster unsichtbar blieb, ihre Werke jedoch weltweit publiziert wurden. Schriftlich war sie im Austausch mit der gesamten damaligen gelehrten Welt. Mit ihrem Werk konnte sie die Regeln der Gesellschaft durchbrechen. In diesem Sinne kann die Partitur auch als Anspielung auf die Klostermauern und den Rückzug aus der Gesellschaft, den Schleier, verstanden werden. Der letzte Vers thematisiert das Zusammenspiel von sehen und hören, wobei es Palme auch um die vokalen Eigenschaften des Denkvorganges geht: „Ein Text, Gedicht oder Brief wird beim Lesen innerlich gehört“ (2017, 44).

Die roten geschwungenen dünnen Linien auf der Partitur, die Bewegungsabläufe nachzeichnen, erinnern, unterstreicht Palme, an Schnittmuster und damit an Hand- und Schneiderarbeiten, wie sie für gewöhnlich Frauen ausführen. Die Performerin fährt diese mit einer Gänsefeder nach. De la Cruz wird auf zeitgenössischen Gemälden mit einer Feder porträtiert, die Wissenschaft und Literatur symbolisiert. Auch auf der Partitur findet sich eine gezeichnete Feder.

Text ist für Palme nicht zuletzt deshalb wichtig, weil sie Körper, Geist und Klang als essentielle Bestandteile der Stimme betrachtet. Sprache ist zugleich Klangereignis, Geist und Bewusstsein.

Handwritten musical score for a piece titled "Schöpfung". The score is written on multiple staves, with various musical notations including notes, rests, and dynamic markings. The text is in German, with annotations and corrections in red ink. The score is divided into sections, with some parts marked "1. Teil" and "2. Teil". The handwriting is in cursive, and the overall appearance is that of a working manuscript.

Abb. 1: Pia Palme, *Setzung 1.1*, 2014, Partitur. © Pia Palme.



Abb. 2: Pia Palme, *Setzung 1.1*. © Pia Palme.

Text ist für mich eine weitere Möglichkeit, einen dritten Raum aufzuspannen. Das Schreiben von Texten hilft mir, den kompositorischen Prozess in Gang zu halten. Ich kann schreibend Aspekte in diesem Vorgang erfassen, die ich anders nicht bearbeiten kann. Das Schreiben ist eine Erweiterung meiner künstlerischen Praxis. (Palme 2017, 45)

Die Partitur kann auch als Zwischenobjekt angesehen werden, das mit Bedeutung aufgeladen wird. Es steht in *Setzung* mit dem Thema Verschleierung in Zusammenhang und wird Gegenstand der künstlerischen Arbeit und Reflexion. Auch Kleidung stellt in diesem Sinn ein Zwischenobjekt dar, das sowohl von der Trägerin als auch von der Umwelt mitgestaltet wird. Als Gesellschaft bewegen wir uns in einer intermediären Zone, schreibt die Komponistin. Dieser kollektive dritte Raum sollte Gegenstand der Diskussionen sein. „Hier finden Lernprozesse statt, hier wird gestritten, Neues erforscht und kreativ ausverhandelt“ (Palme 2017, 46).

Palme hat Texte auch „Agencies in Composition“ (2023) genannt. In ihrem diesbezüglich betitelten Text erklärt sie die Bedeutung von Text für ihr Komponieren. Von einem explizit posthumanen Standpunkt aus beschreibt sie Texte als künstlerische Kräfte, mit denen sie kooperiert, Komponieren wird als ökologischer Prozess betrachtet. Einzelne Wörter werden zu Katalysatoren oder Enzymen einer vielfältigen Praxis. Durch die Sprache kann das Ich auf eine Gemeinschaft hin erweitert werden, wie es Amanda Gorman in einem Gedicht beschrieb, das Palme zitiert:

A human
Microbiome is all the writhing forms on

& inside this body
Drafted under our life.

We are not me –
We are we.

Call us
What we carry.
(zit. nach Palme 2023, 194)

Mit Rosi Braidotti spricht Palme von einem polyphonen Denken und integrationalistischen Zugängen (vgl. Palme 2023, 195). Texte gehören quasi zur Umwelt, mit der sich die Komponistin verbindet. Wiederum ist Hören wichtig, werden doch Texte als innere Stimmen reflektiert. Auf dem Papier wird der Text quasi inszeniert. Eine diesbezügliche Reflexion formuliert die Komponistin selbst in poetischer Form:

Scene I

Paper as space and stage.
Inside our mind, words sing on yet another hidden stage
Mirroring the external visible one.

Do you hear them?
Listen again, they talk to you.

Take your time.

They take your time.

We love you, dear reader.
We have turned into sounds.
We have turned into voices, inner voices.
We have turned into thoughts.

Your thoughts.
You create us with your every breath.

Or is it the other way round? Do we create you?

[It doesn't matter whether you read this text silently or whether you audibly pronounce it
while reading.]
(Palme 2023, 196)

Lesen, Denken, Komponieren, Sprechen und Schreiben sind für Palme Aktionen, die mit dem Hören verbunden sind. In ihrer Kompositionspraxis vermischen sich

diese ständig. Hören ist immer mit Sprache und Denken als innerer Stimme verbunden (vgl. Palme 2023, 197). Hören ist quasi der Spiegel der Komposition, lesen, der Spiegel des Schreibens (vgl. Palme 2023, 198). Bedeutung und politischer Gehalt werden durch Sprache und Text vermittelt.

Ihre Libretti stellt Palme aus einer Kollektion von poetischen Texten zusammen, die sie mit Respekt verwendet, um Resonanz zu erzeugen. Bei zeitgenössischen Autorinnen und Autoren sei es oft schwieriger, kreativ mit dem Text umzugehen, betont die Komponistin. Historische Texte wiederum inspirieren, daran weiterzuarbeiten. Im Musiktheater, aber auch bei Solostücken dienen handgeschriebene Texte mitunter als Teil des Bühnenbildes. In *Wechselwirkung*, komponiert in den Jahren 2019 und 2020, werden diese auf der Bühne ausgestellt.⁹ Sie entstanden während der Kreation des Stückes in nächtlicher spontaner Schreibarbeit.

Ein Textausschnitt aus *NOCH RADIKALER. Eine Anrufung* (2022) verdeutlicht die Bedeutung inspirierender Stimmen für die Kreation des Stückes, ihre Anrufung wird poetisch zum Ausdruck gebracht. Der Text wird in der Aufführung als Beschwörung kreativer Kräfte inszeniert, der das Publikum beiwohnt:

In diese verblichene Halle mit eisernen Säulen
Seid gerufen!
In den verwachsenen Park
Seid gerufen!
Wir machen für euch Musik und Lärm
Seid gerufen!

[...]

In den Hohlräumen im Inneren taumeln Klänge und Worte
Tanzt mit meiner Zunge
Tanzt in unseren Köpfen
Tanzt in unseren Herzen
Tanzt in meiner Stimme
(Palme, 2022)

Palme unterscheidet zwischen funktionalen Texten, Libretti und poetischen Texten und den Rollen von Texten in einer Performance. Funktionale Texte betreffen auch das Schreiben im Sinne künstlerischer Forschung. Auch Spielanweisungen in Partituren zählen zu dieser Kategorie sowie Kommentare zu Werken, wie sie von Komponierenden heute verlangt werden. Schreiben ist dabei auch als Distanznahme vom eigenen Text zu sehen, im Schreiben wird die Zeit zum Raum,

⁹ <https://www.fragilityofsounds.org/wechselwirkung/>.

der Raum zur Zeit. Das weiße Stück Papier korrespondiert mit der Stille. Texte evozieren die Stimme der Autorin, wie etwa beim Liebesgedicht in *Setzung* (2014) die Stimme von Sor Juana, die die zitierten Worte zu ihrem Geliebten spricht. Palmes Text über das Schreiben ist selbst als Theater inszeniert. In der dritten Szene und im Finale verlassen die Wörter gleichsam die Bühne.

Scene III

Final scene, enter:
Silence

The white horizon.

The diva among words.

Lavishly, languidly, they trail their long white robe over the floor with a soft scraping noise.

Place your hand on this paper and stage. Touch it. Is it empty?

Gently sweep your hand across the page,
Then rest your palm lightly on your cheek.
Feel the warmth as skin touches skin.
(Palme, 2023, 203)

In Bezug auf ihre kompositorische Arbeit hat Palme von einer Spannung zwischen Innenschau und Ausdruck gesprochen. Hinsichtlich der aktuellen ökologischen Krise spricht sie auch von einer Notwendigkeit, die sie dazu drängt, etwas zu tun, ohne dass sie wüsste, wie dieser Prozess ausschauen wird. Im Besonderen mit Frauen, die künstlerisch und als Aktivistinnen tätig sind, fühlt sie sich verbunden, auch über kulturelle Grenzen hinweg.

Verschiedene Bezugspunkte und Verbindungen klingen an. In *Wechselwirkung* beispielsweise sind Referenzen an barocke Musik zu entdecken. Indem Palme an Francesca Caccini (1587–1641) und Claudio Monteverdi (1567–1643) anknüpft, wird eine Revision im Sinne einer kritischen Postmoderne komponiert, Erinnerung und Zukunft sind gleichermaßen präsent. Caccini ist für die Komponistin von besonderem Interesse, weil sie die erste Frau in der Geschichte der Oper ist, von der sich eine musiktheatrale Komposition erhalten hat: *la liberazione di Ruggiero dall'isola d'Alcina* von 1625. Sie war auch Gesangsvirtuosin und am Hof der Medici in Florenz engagiert. In dem von Palme verfassten Libretto fanden einige Passagen aus Caccinis Arie *Lasciate mi qui sola* von 1618 Eingang (vgl. Palme 2020, 13–14). Im Text verschränken sich die unterschiedlichen Zeiten, auch Anspielungen an Monteverdis berühmte Arie *Lasciate mi morire* (1608) sind enthalten. Die Ergänzung oder auch Überschreibung seines berühmten Lamentos

durch das Stück einer berühmten, doch in der Musikgeschichte weit weniger bekannte Zeitgenossin, deutet einen Emanzipationsprozess an.

Palmes Verständnis des musiktheatralen Raums als Kooperationsraum, in dem auch verwandte Ideen in Erscheinung treten können, enthält ebenfalls eine Nähe zur barocken Opernpraxis, in der Sängerinnen und Sänger auch mit selbst gewählten Stücken reisten und diese in Neuproduktionen einbringen konnten. Die Arien von Francesca Caccini fanden auf Vorschlag der Tänzerin Juliet Fraser in *Wechselwirkung* Eingang.

Conclusio

Betrachtet man an traditionelle Genres wie das Lied angelehnte Formen der Einbindung von Dichtung in Musik, etwa bei Komponisten wie Hans Werner Henze oder Wolfgang Rihm, diente der poetische Text zumeist als struktureller Hintergrund und formgebendes Element der Komposition. Schon in den 1980er Jahren kam dabei auch das Fragment zu neuen Ehren, das Wort löste sich letztlich in Klang auf (vgl. u. a. Kogler 2003). Von Luigi Nono wurde insofern eine neue Richtung eingeschlagen, als er radikaler eine Poetik des Hörens und der Stille begründete. In seinem späteren Œuvre im Kontext des *Prometeo* wird nicht nur ein weiter, von diversen Referenzen durchdrungener Hörraum gestaltet, sondern Selbstreflexion des kreativen Prozesses erscheint als Inhalt der Werke selbst. Musik wird zum Resonanzraum der in sie eingegangenen poetischen Sprache. Die neue künstlerische Haltung ist auf Reflexion angelegt und beansprucht dadurch in neuer Weise politische Relevanz. Als Hintergrund dieses neuen Denkens kann eine vermehrte Auseinandersetzung mit der immer bedrohlicher werdenden Lage der Welt angenommen werden, die radikalere Stellungnahmen von Künstlerinnen und Künstlern zu verlangen scheint. Dabei fungiert das Wort als sinngebend für den Klang und vice versa. Sinn entsteht in einem Zwischenraum, der durch die Interaktion der Klänge und Wörter, aber auch der Körper der Musizierenden und Zuhörenden entsteht. Sich Zeit zu lassen, Klänge und Stille wirken zu lassen, erscheint als Voraussetzung für die Kreativität, in die auch die Zuhörenden aktiv eingebunden sind. Erinnerung, Reflexion und Kommunikation wirken zusammen. Durch die Reduzierung, die zugleich mit raumgreifender Bewegung verbunden ist, entsteht der Sinn in einem Zwischenraum, der als Resonanzraum beschrieben werden kann. Hören erscheint als zentrale Aktivität, die die multiplen Stimmen zu jeweils kontextabhängiger Bedeutung zusammentreten lässt. Besonderen Stellenwert genießt die Stimme, die im performativen Hörraum ge-

meinschaftsbildend und damit politisch wirkt. Die Dichtung als Basis vermittelt zwischen Sprache und Gesang.

Wie bereits bei Nono wird bei Harnik und Palme durch fragmentarische poetische Texte ein die Gegenwart überschreitender simultaner Raum der Reflexion und der Verbundenheit erzeugt. Texte und Sprache verleihen der Musik ihre spezifische Materialität, Stille und Leerräume sind die Voraussetzung für Reflexion und kreative Praxis. Die Funktion der Gedichte ist eng mit dem Schaffensprozess verknüpft. Es ist die Stille, die Bedeutung generiert und Resonanz entstehen lässt. Das Entstehen eines Zwischenraums ist Voraussetzung für Sinngene. In diesem „dritten Raum“ treffen sich, so erläuterte es Palme, innere und äußere Stimmen während des Schaffens- wie auch des Rezeptionsprozesses. Denken und Reflexion können als stimmlich verstanden werden. Die Poesie dient als Ausdrucks-, Kommunikations- und Dokumentationsmittel und gewinnt dadurch politische Bedeutung. Harnik vernetzt sich mit Stimmen von ihr verehrter Künstlerinnen, die sie inspirieren, indem sie poetische Bezüge setzt. Palme begleitet sich schreibend selbst beim Komponieren. Selbstaussdruck ist vor allem lyrischer Ausdruck, die Stimmen der anderen erscheinen als Reibungs- und Überraschungsmomente, die die eigene Kreativität inspirieren. Schon bei Nono hatten Dichterstimmen als Identifikationsmodelle fungiert, die den eigenen Weg begleiteten. War jedoch Ende des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts immer noch die Gefahr des Verstummens und der Resignation präsent, ist nun im Engagement für das Hören und für Kollaboration ein größerer Optimismus zu bemerken. Diese neue Haltung wirkt insofern kämpferisch, als die weibliche Stimme bewusst politisch gesetzt wird. In der mitunter erdrückenden Gegenwart des Anthropozäns mag dieser Befund durchaus überraschend erscheinen.

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Jacob Kingsbury Downs and Nicola Dibben

Intermedial Environmental Aesthetics: The Musical Afterlife of George Mackay Brown's Poetic Recordings

In the summer of 2021, the Scottish composer Erland Cooper “planted” a spool of quarter-inch magnetic tape in the soil at an undisclosed location on the Orkney Islands. Having recently signed to a major record label, Cooper had set about working towards what was assumed to be his first release under the new contract: a violin concerto titled *Carve the Runes then be Content with Silence* (hereafter *Runes*). In a manner consistent with that of his other recent solo compositions, the resulting piece was stylistically positioned between contemporary classical, ambient, and popular idioms. Cooper recorded the work in Glasgow, mastered it to tape, then deleted almost all trace of it. All that remained was the single master tape: an analog, material manifestation of the work's recording – and one that Cooper had now consigned to the earth.

Cooper's intention was to leave the tape in the Orkney soil for three years, then to unearth it and examine the impact of its subterranean treatment on the recording.¹ “The material on the tape may have eroded completely,” he is quoted as saying, “or the peaty soil may have preserved it perfectly well. [. . .] Any alterations to the sound and music, when it comes out of the earth, will be reincorporated into the pages of a new score and live performance. This is an act of patience, a collaboration with time and the natural world” (Cooper, in Barbican Centre 2022, n.p.).

Framing “the natural world” as a collaborative agent in the compositional process resonates with Cooper's broader commitment to environmental aesthetics in his work. In the case of *Runes*, the music, made material through its mastering to tape, was subjected to edaphic decomposition not as a means of destruction but of evolution and growth: the tape was “planted” in the soil; the music would be *recomposed* by the earth. Moreover, in the promotional materials accompanying the release, Cooper was keen to foreground patience as a foundational theme in *Runes*, presenting the work as an antidote to the immediacy of a recorded music industry dominated by digital streaming platforms (DSPs) such as Spotify and Apple Music which incentivize frequent releases for commercial gain.

¹ Cooper left clues as to the tape's whereabouts as a treasure hunt for fans of his work, two of whom dug up the spool the following year (cf. Hall 2022).

That said, no sooner had Cooper set the unearthed analog tape to play in his studio than he began its digitization, preserving and later disseminating the recomposed work via digital means.

As listeners would come to hear when the album was released in 2024 and reached #1 in the UK Official Classical Albums Chart (cf. Levine 2024), a core element of Cooper's *Runes* is the inclusion of poetry recordings. There are traces of poetry's influence throughout Cooper's work: the very title of *Runes* is a quotation from the Orkney poet George Mackay Brown's (1921–1996) "A Work for Poets" (2005, xix). Much of the verse included by Cooper relates to Scotland's culture, landscape, and wildlife, contributing to an emergent nexus of nature- and place-based meaning. Moreover, Cooper's decision to include recordings of spoken recitations by Brown on *Runes* suggests an interest in foregrounding not only the content of the words but also their sounds as vocalized by the poet, affording listeners an auditory glimpse of Brown's personhood as an Orkney native. The evocations of place and identity carried by Brown's regional accent, together with the intimacy of close-miked voice recording, contribute to the sense that these words are being transported from their historical "source" directly and authentically to listeners' ears.

In *Runes*, the sound of poetry forms an integral part of the intermedial musical artifact, with intermediality understood here as the production of direct/overt (intracompositional) relationships between conventionally distinct media (cf. Wolf 1999, 39–40). In this chapter, we analyze how Cooper integrates poetry and music in a manner that foregrounds the *material* and *spatiotemporal* modalities of these media. Our theoretical framework and method are influenced by Lars Elleström's characterization of intermedial communication in terms of material, spatiotemporal, sensorial, and semiotic media modalities (cf. 2021, 16–24). Combining critical, musical, and literary analysis, we argue that the technical devices of production and display that constitute the physical media of recorded music and poetry are made audible and visible in Cooper's work, and that this in turn affords audiences' perception of specific nature- and place-based meaning. Insight into the compositional process was gained by working closely with Cooper throughout the genesis and release of *Runes* as part of a broader research project, and by the first author's role supporting the re-transcription of the unearthed tape.² We demonstrate, then, how Cooper exploits the material and spatiotempo-

² The project, "Influencing Environmental Values through Music" (2023–2024), combined theoretical, empirical, and music-analytical methods and a knowledge exchange component (PI Dibben). It was funded by the Higher Education Innovation Fund, based at the University of Sheffield. It explored environmental aesthetics in contemporary music, taking Cooper's work as a case study to examine the relationship between audiences' ecological worldviews and the nature-

ral modalities of the intermedial artifact and the authoritative sound of spoken-word recordings (cf. Lane 2006, 7–9) to contribute to the perceived authenticity of his work while also bringing poetry into new, intermedial constellations for a community of listeners in the digital age.

Recorded Poetry and Music: Intermedial Entanglements

In historical terms, the close association of music and (lyric) poetry is by no means unusual. Their intersection spans millennia, with the professions of poet and musician often indivisible in early literate cultures. The term “poet-composer,” for example, has been used to describe lyric performers across Western history, whether associated with Ancient Greece (cf. D’Angour 2018), medieval Europe’s vernacular traditions (cf. Leach 2007), or the singer-songwriter movements of the present day (cf. Bentley 2019). Common to practitioners across the ages was an attention to the rhythmical and metrical resonances between poetic verse and melody, with a poem’s musical realization often developing in tandem with its lexical and syntactical content. Only “in the light of the increased textuality of the later Middle Ages” did poetry become more readily detached as an art-form from music (Leach 2007, 5), after which poetry’s oral mediation dwindled; in many domains, it became written to be read, not composed to be performed.

Over recent centuries, as the professional disciplines of music and poetry have grown more disparate, composers have looked to existing poems for texts to set. In cases where poetry settings – that is, the use of existing poems in the composition of songs – represent the primary objects of study, much of the Anglophone scholarly literature has been devoted to Western art music, particularly nineteenth-century Romantic song traditions (cf. Thym 2010; Weliver and Ellis 2013). Scholarly accounts often foreground explicitly intermedial relationships between music and text (cf. Scher 1992; Wolf 1999).

The setting of existing poetry in popular music traditions has been relatively neglected in academic circles. Where discussions of “poetry” enter popular music studies, debates tend to focus on the extent to which certain (newly written, not existing) song lyrics constitute poetry (cf. Frith 1996; Ricks 2004) and, by extension, the broader high/low binary and popular music’s “literary capital” (Hibbett

and place-centered meanings they perceived in the music. Further accounts of the study, including its empirical components, are forthcoming.

2023). This is especially true of recent scholarly accounts of the poetics of rap, which emphasize the inextricable link between text and music in the structures of flow, rhythm, and pace (cf. Bradley 2009; Balestrini 2019) – for example, in the case of Kae Tempest’s recent commercial recordings (cf. Goursaud 2022).

Where the musical setting of existing poetry is concerned, there is a modest, though rich, literature focusing on the meanings of transhistorical (and transcultural) interplay. For example, Simon Keegan-Phipps and Trish Winter have analyzed how the British-Bengali composer Bishi weaves together English and Indian musical and literary references in her album *Albion Voice* (2012) to produce a “celebration of a contemporary multiculturalism,” setting the texts of poets including John Milton to music in a manner that “reinforces a sense of antiquity” and “invokes associations not only with a historical England, but with the surviving cultural institutions of that place” (2017, 198). In this way, Bishi superimposes the cultural products of different times and places, harnessing the resulting tensions to speak specifically to transhistorical issues of intercultural transfer.

Bishi also incorporates recordings of her own readings of Geoffrey Chaucer into *Albion Voice*, contributing to a decades-long tradition of artists including spoken, not sung, recordings of existing poems in their songs. More recently, Eduardo Barros-Grela and Andrea Patiño de Artaza have considered the issue of “cultural translatability” in the case of Beyoncé’s incorporation of Warsan Shire’s spoken-word poetry into her album *Lemonade* (2016), arguing that the album showcases how today’s “singer-songwriters adapt literary texts to the new media in ways that speak directly to contemporary global subjects” (2023, 95).

While the incorporation of novel poetry recordings into popular music has become more commonplace over recent decades, the use of existing recordings is much less common. The use of archival recordings of non-poetic speech has certainly featured across musical genres: Beyoncé, for one, incorporates an extended excerpt from a talk by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie into her feminist anthem “Flawless” (2013); and the British band Public Service Broadcasting incorporate voiceovers sampled from public information films and archive footage into, e.g., their album *Every Valley* (2017). As sound artist and theorist Cathy Lane has argued, in such cases, “the main function of the spoken word material is as a signifier to historical authenticity, a voice of authority or *vérité*”; it serves to “retain both the meaning and the idea of the authenticity of the speaker as a genuine voice from the past” (2006, 9). In this way, the incorporation of spoken-word recordings into musical works results in the weaving of an intermedial tapestry of voices and other sounds that draws upon multiple sources and discourses in its mediation of meaning.

However, as adduced above, there is little evidence of composers using archival recordings of spoken poetic recitation in their music. A recent exception to

this trend comes in the form of Cooper's *Runes*, in which the composer integrates recordings of Brown's poetry on the subject of the natural and cultural worlds of the Orkney Islands into his musical score. In what remains of this chapter, we analyze *Runes* to better understand how the use of archival spoken-word recordings in contemporary music represents an intermedial crossing between music and poetry that foregrounds issues of materiality, authenticity, and – in the present case – (regional) place. We use a combination of musical, sonic, and textual analysis to spotlight emerging intermedial practices pertaining to musico-poetic creativity in the digital (and environmentalist) age, attending closely to the meanings of the poetic verse, its co-constituting role in the intermedial nexus of the work, and the broader sonic character of the recordings. In this way, we demonstrate how Cooper both exploits the musical affordances of the texts and of the poet's own voice and highlights the materiality and spatiotemporal mediality of the recordings themselves. Recordings of poetic recitations, then, form one of a host of musico-sonic elements that Cooper integrates into his aesthetic palette as a means of evoking ideas about temporality, place, and the natural world, and in a manner which accentuates the intermedial relations between music, poetry, and sound recording in the digital age.

The Poet's Voice through the Archives: George Mackay Brown

Cooper was raised in Stromness, Orkney, and moved to the south-east of England in early adulthood (cf. O'Connell 2019). Though he now lives away from the Islands, many aspects of the production, promotion, and presentation of Cooper's music are linked to, or aim to cultivate a sense of, Orkney's geography and culture. The critic Robin Murray describes Cooper's work as "intertwined with the natural world," suggesting that the composer "carries a piece of Orkney within him" that he channels through his work in a manner that "seems to connect with a vast array of people" (2024, n.p.). This transmission of a sense of rooted place, of a faraway home, is partly achieved through musical materials, such as those which draw upon stylistic features of Scottish folk music, as well as through visual and audiovisual outputs that accompany his releases, some of which are filmed on the Islands. Moreover, Cooper often names tracks and album projects after dialect terms or Orkney locations: for example, his first solo album, *Solan Goose* (2018), takes its name from the Orcadian dialect term for the northern gannet (*Morus bassanus*), a seabird native to the Islands; and his second and third albums, *Sule Skerry* (2019) and *Hether Blether* (2020), are both named after islands

(one real, one fabled) associated with the archipelago. During live shows, Cooper sometimes encourages audiences to imagine the concert venue as a ferry crossing the sea between mainland Scotland and the Orkneys (cf. Seaman 2020). Similarly, he often uses bespoke lighting to conjure a sense of the sun rising over the horizon of the sea, doing so in conjunction with field recordings of natural phenomena such as storms.

As well as recordings of Orkney's natural landscape, the rich, lilting accents of the Islands' inhabitants can be heard throughout Cooper's solo oeuvre. For example, an archival recording of an Orkney resident recounting how he kept a short-eared owl as a pet in his youth is heard at the opening of Cooper's track "Cattie-Face" (from *Solan Goose*, 2018). The audible artifacts of the tape recording, produced to document an interview conducted by local historian Ann Marwick sometime during the 1980s and 1990s (cf. Freeman 2018; Marwick 2020), contribute to a distinct sense of an oral past being mediated to the present through sound. The effect, recalling Lane's argument that spoken-word material can be used in music and sound art to act as a "signifier to historical authenticity" (2006, 9), is one of genuine, intimate testimony linked inextricably to a specific, temporally distant culture (Orkney), one to which listeners are afforded access via recording. In this way, past sonic events are made audible to listeners in the present day, which may serve to bring these voices into critical consciousness.

In her typology of the spoken-word recordings often used by composers and sound artists, Lane classifies the audio sources into three imbricated strands: those in which "the words are initially scripted or scored," those that gather material from "everyday conversations or interviews," and those drawn "from pre-existing archival sources" (2006, 4–5). Marwick's "Cattie-Face" interview recordings might be said to straddle the latter two categories; but for what remains of this chapter, we deal with the final of Lane's types as it pertains to Cooper's album *Runes*: the harnessing of material – specifically, spoken-word poetry recordings – from the archive.

As noted above, in *Runes*, Cooper integrates recorded recitations of poems by Orcadian poet George Mackay Brown, creating an intermedial artifact which foregrounds its own materiality. Brown is regarded as one of Scotland's most accomplished poets of the twentieth century (cf. Bevan and Murray 2005a, xxii; Fergusson 2006). Much of his poetry presents fragments of stories pertaining to the culture and life of the Orkney Islands. His style has variously been described as blending "the laconic and aphoristic diction of his Norse inheritance with traditional folklore structures" (D'Arcy 1996, 247) and as striking "a fine balance of affection and sharp observation" (Fergusson 2006, 247) in language rich in symbolism and evocative of agricultural, religious, and Orcadian community life.

Brown's work received renewed prominence in 2021 with the centenary of his birth.

The recordings of Brown that are featured in *Runes* were made on reel-to-reel tape over several years by fellow Orkney resident, and later executor and editor of his poems, Archie Bevan (cf. "George Mackay Brown" n.d.). Originally released on vinyl in 1971 (Brown 1971), they can now be found online in digital form (via The Poetry Archive 2025), though still featuring the hiss and crackle of the playback medium – a feature to which we return below. The intermedial character of *Runes*, the relationships it manifests between poetic and musical expression, arises from the way in which this pre-existing spoken-word recording is interwoven with what is ostensibly a three-movement classical-crossover work for string ensemble.

The structure of *Runes* bears the mark of the poetry it features. Each of its three movements is titled with a section of the run-on couplet that ends Brown's poem "A Work for Poets": "Carve the runes [Mvt. 1] | Then be content [Mvt. 2] with silence [Mvt. 3]" (Brown 2005, 378). The same couplet is carved into his headstone as an epitaph (cf. Bevan and Murray 2005b, xix) and forms the title of Cooper's work. There is no regular pattern to the temporal or structural integration of the recited poetry and music: the recitations are extracts, often sectioned and distributed across musical movements. The first recitation is of "The Coat," the first verse of which is heard in "Mvt. 1 Pt. 2," and the second and third verse in "Mvt. 1 Pt. 3."³ Elsewhere, poems are reordered and interspersed with each other: "Sea Orpheus" follows in "Mvt. 2 Pt. 1" and "Mvt. 2 Pt. 2," but beginning at its fifth section and being intersected by a complete rendition of the poetic miniature "Country Girl" ("Mvt. 2 Pt. 1"). The final recitation (in "Mvt. 3 Pt. 3") comprises the first four sections of the poem "From Stone to Thorn," incidentally one of the first of Brown's poems set to music by British composer and fellow Orkney resident Peter Maxwell Davies (cf. Crawford 2007, 23–25). The honed, austere statements characteristic of the poet's later style are foregrounded over a string accompaniment that provides temporal and motivic continuity. The central, "forward" placement of spoken word on an instrumental background is consistent with other studio music songwriting styles (cf. Dibben 2013, 113), though the two are closely integrated here through the use of specific techniques. For example, in "Mvt. 1 Pt. 2," the intake of breath and first entry of the voice forms the anacrusis to the string entry on the downbeat of "She *bowed* in her door" (from the first verse of "The

3 When listed on DSPs, the individual tracks on *Runes* are titled in a specific format, which includes a title that sometimes refers to Brown's poetic excerpts (e.g. "Then be Content (Mvt. 2): Pt. 2 'driftweed scored the strings'"). For the sake of brevity and consistency, we reduce the length of the track names when referring to them here (e.g. "Mvt. 2 Pt. 2").

Coat”; Brown 2005, 66, added emphasis); elsewhere, the recitation enters after a brief string introduction (“Mvt. 2 Pt. 1,” from Brown’s “Sea Orpheus”; cf. 2005, 68–69), or voice and strings start together as if the two are equal instrumental parts (“Mvt. 3 Pt. 3,” from Brown’s “Stations of the Cross”; cf. 2005, 178–192). In moments where words are notably absent, instrumental sound takes precedence – sometimes in the form of granular, gritty textures (e.g., “Mvt. 3 Pt. 1” and “Mvt. 3 Pt. 2”) and other times as lush, orchestral crescendos (“Mvt. 2 Pt. 3”) and elegiac melodies (“Mvt. 3 Pt. 2”). Throughout the work, then, there is evidence of the poetry becoming structurally interweaved with musical features, suggesting that the poetry is integrated into the musical object to a degree that extends beyond mere “voiceover.”

Compositional techniques such as word-painting and obvious mimesis between words and music are used sparingly. For instance, a coolth of dissonance follows the mention of “a cold mermaid” (“Sea Orpheus,” in Brown 2005, 68) in “Mvt. 2 Pt. 2”; and the strings sound out the metaphorical “dance” of life referenced in the recitation of Brown’s “The Coat” in “Mvt. 1 Pt. 3” (“Between crib and coffin | You must dance in a beautiful coat”; 2005, 67) and conjure the image of the “lyrical tramp” (“The Poet”; 2005, 46) in “Mvt. 2 Pt. 2.”

The visual images evoked by Brown’s poetry – of a rural, community life based around fishing and farming (cf. Baker 2009, 136) – serve to frame the melodic contours and rhythms of solo violin lines as folk-like reels. The first words recited in *Runes* (from “The Coat”) feature the characters of weaver and reaper, between them symbolic of both rural activity and beliefs about the end of life, and place the reader in a rural, coastal setting (“spindrift” referring to salty sea foam blown inland):

She bowed in her door, all ripeness.
 The reaper went round and round.
 Wave after wave of bread
 Fell with a secret sound.
 She sent the shuttle flying,
 She laid the new cloth by,
 And through that yellow spindrift
 She sent a drowning cry.
 (Brown 2005, 66)

This sense of temporal and geographical location is bolstered by the recorded presence of the poet’s Orcadian accent. Orcadians speak with a distinctive accent and Scots dialect (often referred to as “Orcadian” or “Insular Scots”), which derives partly from Norse and is sometimes described as having a lilting, rising intonation (cf. Heddle 2010, 53–54). The sound of Brown’s voice is a marker of a place and, by extension, of the people whose lives are recounted in Brown’s poetry. The

“work” that the recorded voice of the poet does here, then, is to place the listening imagination in a temporally ambiguous geographical location and community (Orkney), one rooted in a seemingly pre-industrial past made present by virtue of hearing the words spoken by the now-dead poet. This imbrication of Cooper’s musical “present” and the poet’s lyrical “past,” both linked by their geographical and cultural connection to Orkney, speaks not only to the work’s intermedial character but its foregrounding of the “liveness” and “deadness” of the various sonic materials – that is, as Jason Stanyek and Benjamin Piekut would term it, its *intermundane* character (cf. 2010, 14): its bridging of the acoustically recorded “worlds” of the living and the dead. In doing so, the listener may be transported to a quasi-idealized “place” that sits somewhere between Brown’s and Cooper’s mediations of Orkney, suggestive of a culture apparently unblemished by the forces of urbanism and postmodernity, and one that emerges equivocally – even precariously – between the worlds of Orkney’s (living) present and of its (dead) past.

On this account, the presence of Brown’s own recorded voice performs a dual function in *Runes*: it serves to transport listeners to a place somewhere between the real and the imagined, the past and the present; and also, in its status as an archival recording, it brings a sense of historical “*vérité*” to the intermedial work. As Lane argues, for such “historical authenticity” and “authority” to be communicated effectively in a multimedia artwork, “[t]he voice must sound authentic in terms of the quality of the recording and the delivery of the words and indeed the accent of the speaker. It signifies a witness and it is a carrier of the past” (2006, 9). Brown’s voice, then, adds gravitas to *Runes*; Cooper harnesses the poet’s renown and the “depth” of his poetic verse, integrating his voice into the very fabric of the music in a manner that extends far beyond voiceover and, in turn, reveals the rich intermediality of the work.

Vinyl, Tape, Digital: (Inter)mediality and Materiality

Just as the verse and its performance in the poet’s own voice may evoke for some the sense of an Orkney of times past, so too can the “vintage” sound of the recorded medium. Cultivating something of a retro aesthetic is at the core of Cooper’s artistic ambitions: promotional photographs taken inside his London studio (cf., e.g., O’Connell 2019; Murray 2024) portray the composer surrounded by mid-century furnishings, and he consistently plays sound from large reel-to-reel tape machines onstage during live performances. Thinking specifically of *Runes*, such a vintage quality is perhaps most evident in Cooper’s foregrounding of the materiality of the recorded medium itself: its technical devices of production and display (cf. Elleström 2021, 18). Its record sleeve depicts the “planted” master tape,

and much of the promotional material surrounding the release is focused on the novelty of its burial and subsequent impact on the sound of the recording. The mediality of the tape is also manifested sonically: throughout *Runes*, we hear the warp and bend of magnetic tape; and when Brown's recordings enter the texture, we hear the hiss, crackle, and bump of a needle on vinyl. As with all analog recordings, we can hear traces of the technologies used to produce them – sonic artifacts that litter the texture of the tape medium, producing an aged, warm tone, or traces of the analog “noise” of a record player's stylus passing across dust in the grooves of a vinyl disc. By foregrounding these sounds, Cooper draws attention to the status of the intermedial work as a collage of recordings, bringing with it the associations with the physicality of analog, material technologies.

As adduced above, Lane foregrounds the “quality” (2006, 9) of a recording in its transmission of a sense of authenticity. Similarly, musicologists including Stan Link (cf. 2001), Eric Clarke (cf. 2007), and Ragnhild Brøvig-Hanssen and Anne Danielsen (cf. 2016, Ch. 4) have drawn attention to the ways in which composers and producers have used the sound of recordings to varied aesthetic ends. In all such accounts, the focus is on the tension between the “noise” of analog technologies and the “clean” sound of digital recording technologies – what Brøvig-Hanssen and Danielsen term “digital silence,” the advent of which “allowed for a contrast with the noise inherent in previous recording and playback media that had never before been possible, and thus suddenly made these sounds from the very recent past seem ‘old’” (2016, 79). The analog–digital superimposition of certain popular music recordings might therefore be read as opening a critical and aesthetic dialogue between past and contemporary practices: “In terms of technological progress,” writes Link, “noise is clearly ‘backwards.’ Much noise has been obviated by technological change, and retro filtering harkens back to an earlier time in a way that is obviously critical as well as functional” (2001, 36). Thinking in terms of the “critical” dimensions of such techniques, Clarke argues that the acoustic presence of analog noise “confers a certain authenticity on the sound”: “A noisy sample specifies sounds that ‘really happened,’ a preserved and precious past” (2007, 56). Such sounds, then, may be heard as vestiges of an acoustic past grounded in the materiality of vinyl, magnetic tape, and related media (cf. Reynolds 2011, 329–330; Fisher 2013, 46). On these accounts, and drawing, too, from Lane's argument about the quality of spoken-word recordings, analog noise might be heard to denote historical authenticity, and it may in turn serve to mediate certain depths of meaning that are rendered otherwise “silent” via digital means.

In the case of *Runes*, mediality is foregrounded through the sonic signatures of both vinyl and magnetic tape. In “Mvt. 2 Pt. 1,” the vinyl crackle accompanying the poet's voice places the sound firmly “in past tense” (Link 2001, 39) but is brought to life through the first-person, present-tense perspective of the poetic

miniature “Country Girl,” which begins: “I make seven circles, my love | For your good breaking” (Brown 2005, 50). Later, as *Runes* draws to a close, the crackle heard at the end of “Mvt. 3 Pt. 4” is accompanied by the gentle thud of the needle cycling around the central groove of a vinyl disc, its audible revolutions foregrounding the materiality of the sound technology and bringing with it the “real,” physical sense of the medium.

Thinking more generally about the timbral textures of the recording’s medi-ality, it is as though all that we hear in *Runes* is in sepia tone (cf. Fisher 2013, 49), sonically akin to the subdued glow of an old photograph. The warmth offered by the album’s mastering to magnetic tape is audible throughout, as are the sonic signatures of tape-hiss and pitch-bend. *Runes* opens (in “Mvt. 1 Pt. 1”) with low-level recording hiss, over which solo violin and accompanying strings enter in an arrangement reminiscent of a classical concerto whose timbral clarity betrays the notion that the hiss we hear is an integral part of the string sound. When staged, Cooper is careful to realize this sonic world through the presence of a reel-to-reel tape player, which he visibly turns on at the beginning of the work to indicate its fundamental role in the overall texture of the work.

In the recording of *Runes*, the noise of the magnetic tape is most vivid and aesthetically central at the opening of “Mvt. 3 Pt. 1.” The wider movement is titled “With Silence,” so it appears both thematically and sonically significant that this “silence” manifests as the sound of the recording medium. Around 1’20” of rich, woody tape sound is marked in the score “*con la memoria* [with memory],” a name that Cooper includes in the track’s title on DSPs. This further enhances the multimodal sense that we, as listeners, are reaching back through time, remembering and memorializing something spatiotemporally separate from us. Out of this near-silence emerges a glass-like texture of string harmonics, a *crescendo dal niente* that is initially imperceptible in its timbral similarity to the high-frequency hiss of the tape; a listener may not notice immediately that the strings have begun playing, requiring the dynamic to increase gradually over time to register the musico-sonic shift. It is at this point that the boundary between silence and sound is most unstable, in turn foregrounding the close interweaving of musical and non-musical sounds in the intermedial work.

The aesthetic imbrication of both musical sound and the “noise” of the recording medium is also reflected in Cooper’s various attempts to simulate non-musical sounds in the instrumental writing. Throughout *Runes*, Cooper manipulates certain aspects of the musical materials to imitate both natural and technological sounds. For example, at the very opening (“Mvt 1. Pt. 1”), the upper strings emulate the sounds of gulls and waders through fast-paced, rhythmic *glissando* gestures redolent of birdsong, while the lower strings play in near-unison, gradually bending their pitches microtonally to replicate the sounds of a ship’s horn

“bouncing and bending in the harbour” (as both score instructions and the DSP title of the track indicate). For much of *Runes*, the string arrangements are consonant and melodic with simple, memorable themes: they have clear, diatonic key centers and are performed in a style characteristic of much recent classical-crossover music, saturated with dynamic swells and fades, as well as regular use of *portamento* slides and expressive *vibrato*. However, this tonal certainty and timbral clarity is artfully destabilized at certain points. For example, at the very end of “Mvt. 2 Pt. 3,” the soaring, filmically affective strings groan to an unsettling halt, their pitch wavering widely and slowly in a manner that seems to evoke the rural imagery of the track’s DSP title (“walking through heather and peat”). In this way, the moments of pitch-bending appear conspicuous in their juxtaposition with the rich, steady timbres and textures of much of the work.

The figure of the pitch-bend also links to the “wow and flutter” signatures of the recorded medium – those irregular fluctuations in pitch that result from the material movement and/or slippage of magnetic tape. As suggested above, the tape medium is central to the identity of the work, and the detunings, *glissandi*, and microtonal dissonances of the string ensemble represent mimetic manifestations of the warp of degraded magnetic tape. Cooper’s decision to imitate the sounds of magnetic tape even before planting the master in the ground speaks to the productive, iterative cyclicity of his “collaboration” with the natural world: he foreshadows the impact of the natural world on the recording in his own musicalized mimicry of the wow and flutter of the tape, even though when initially composing the music he was several steps “behind” the eventual mediation of the work by magnetic tape. In this way, Cooper not only imitates the sounds of both nature (e.g., birdsong) and technology (e.g., ships’ horns) in the work but also their natural–technological interaction (i.e., the eventual sonic results of edaphic decomposition on the tape). In certain cases, then, a listener may be unable to perceive whether the pitch-bends they hear result from the impact of the soil on the material of the master tape or from Cooper’s own compositional decisions and directions in the score. The outcome, then, is one in which the work’s authorship is artfully blurred between the (human) composer and (nonhuman) collaborators, namely the recording mediums and their interaction with the Orkney soil.

The “planting” of the *Runes* master tape, then, has an important impact on its sonic character. However, as we have shown, this is just one dimension of the work’s identity that accentuates its (inter)mediality. Magnetic tape is also crucial to the genesis of the work in other ways: Brown’s poetry recordings were initially made using a four-speed tape machine (cf. Bevan in The Poetry Archive 2025, n.p.) before being mastered to vinyl. This vinyl was then digitized, with Cooper mixing the digital recordings into *Runes* before mastering it to tape and burying it. Later, Cooper digitized the unearthed tape for it to be uploaded to DSPs (or, in some

cases, mastered to vinyl). The chains of remediation (cf. Bolter and Grusin 1998) involved in Cooper's integration of Brown's poetry into *Runes* – from tape to vinyl to digital before Cooper, then from digital to tape to digital to vinyl in his own work – point to the knotty, hypermediated nature of the final digitized artifact. Accounting for the “remedial” genealogy of *Runes* serves to uncover the rich, complex archaeology of such intermedial works in the digital age, which draw upon layers of mediated meaning to produce new entanglements that straddle past and present, analog and digital, real and imagined.

Conclusion

In interpreting the intermediality of *Runes*, it is vital to consider how it binds together and problematizes all manner of structural binaries: the natural and cultural worlds of Orkney, musical and non-musical sounds, human and nonhuman agency, the present and the historic, and so on. Recall Cooper's own statement of intent cited in this chapter's opening: that *Runes* represents “a collaboration with time and the natural world” (Cooper, in Barbican Centre 2022, n.p.). We would suggest that the “sounding out” of the recording's materiality – just one aspect of its complex mediality – situates Orkney in a partly real, partly imagined past in a manner which draws attention to temporalities both human and geological in scale, as so vividly symbolized in the human–earth co-composition of the “planted” master tape. In this way, it is difficult not to read environmentalist import into the work's reverie on time, especially when attending closely to the intricate mediation of meaning in the interplay of Brown's poetry, his voice recordings, and the musico-sonic tapestry of Cooper's work. Emerging from the intermedial integration of poetry, music, and sound technology, together with the visual and promotional materials accompanying the release, is an environmental aesthetics that multiply underscores the close relationship between human cultures and the natural world while foregrounding the impact of analog technology on our experiences of music and poetry in the twenty-first century.

All media are multimodal, and the shared aspects of poetry–music relationships are well established. However, we have argued here that Cooper's *Runes* is noteworthy for its intermediality: it draws attention to and employs the material and spatiotemporal modalities of recorded poetry and music to an aesthetic that invites listeners to reflect on ideas about historical authenticity, human–nature relationships, and the passage of time. By focusing on the mediation of meaning by the inclusion of archival poetry recordings and the foregrounding of sound-technological mediality, we have suggested that Cooper's use of poetry in his crafting of an intermedial artwork appears fairly unusual; while it can be seen as

rooted in established practices of incorporating spoken-word recordings into music, what distinguishes Cooper's creative practice is that these are specifically recordings of *poetry*. As a consequence, the voice and identity of the speaker and the community they represent are foregrounded, evoking place through accent as well as poetic content. Moreover, in *Runes*, the compositional techniques outlined above harness the material and spatiotemporal modalities of recorded music and poetry to specific aesthetic ends: the human-scale temporality of individual lives whose existence spans a specific moment in time are presented alongside the geological-scale temporality of the natural landscape. One interpretation of these intertextual relationships is their signification of an individual, finite, lived experience of a specific (Orkadian) natural and cultural landscape which is framed by a beyond-the-human timescale. The sonic worlds of *Runes*, then, may encourage listeners to contemplate temporality both in terms of, and beyond the realms of, human subjectivity, with the potential to induce critical reflection on place-based environmental themes.

Beyond its relevance to the environmental crisis, the inclusion of poetry in *Runes* has particular significance in its twenty-first-century context. Notably, *Runes* draws attention to certain aspects of the mediatedness of the intermedial artifact while trying to hide others: for example, the foregrounding of the analog in the self-conscious presentation of vintage equipment on stage and in sound sits alongside the not-so-staged use of digital technologies for the production and dissemination of Cooper's music. Moreover, this twenty-first-century intermedial practice sits uncomfortably within the mainstream modes of digital dissemination via DSPs. For example, Cooper's music appears in two forms on Spotify: one with the poetic recitations included, and one without, as this allows Cooper's instrumental versions to occupy the functional niches which characterize DSPs (in this case, tailored for editorially curated playlists that invite background, ambient listening). So, while from a critical perspective one might argue that the poetry is fundamental to the music, it is also easily removed to produce instrumental, ambient backdrops that fit into the mainstream consumption practices curated by DSPs.

In addition, Cooper's creative practice harnesses anachronistic tendencies of traditional poetic recitation as part of an aesthetic bound up with time and retrospection. In *Runes*, recorded recited poetry is framed as an "antiquated" medium in the digital age. From this perspective, the "anachronism" of recited poetry in the twenty-first century, particularly in the form of recordings recited by a now-deceased poet, forms part of a vintage aesthetic but one which also brings with it the "authority" and "authenticity" associated with the recorded voice (Lane 2006, 9). Yet from another perspective, it presents this poetry as still "relevant" to listeners of contemporary digital musics and connects such apparently outdated media

forms with contemporary poetic recitation practices. As noted, Cooper can be regarded as bringing poetry to audiences via DSPs, but there exists a tension between the analog live performances which present the intermediality of poetry and music together and what is required for discoverability on DSPs. In this respect, Cooper is one of a generation of composers adapting to the ever-increased digitization of the music industry.

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Beata Kornatowska

Chopins Musik in der zeitgenössischen polnischen Lyrik: zwischen Mythos und Medien

Die bloße Nennung des Namens Chopin ruft nicht nur ein vielfältiges Spektrum an Assoziationen und affektiven Konnotationen hervor, sondern markiert zugleich das, was Burdorf als „poetischen Stich“ (2019, 169) bezeichnet – einen Moment, der die fiktionale Ordnung des Gedichts unterläuft. Als realer Eigenname wirkt *Chopin* im literarischen Kontext als „Signal der Nichtfiktionalität“ (Burdorf 2019, 166) und aktiviert ein dichtes Netz kultureller Bedeutungen und Erinnerungen, das sich um die biografischen, ästhetischen und rezeptionsgeschichtlichen Dimensionen von Chopins Leben und Werk entfaltet. In diesem Spannungsfeld überlagern sich historische Fakten und mythisierende Zuschreibungen, wodurch eine intertextuelle Dynamik entsteht, in der die Grenze zwischen Wirklichkeit und dichterischer Konstruktion zunehmend porös erscheint (vgl. Samson 1992, 1–8).

Die Präsenz Frédéric Chopins in der polnischen Poesie ist eng mit seiner kulturhistorischen Bedeutung für Polen verknüpft. Der alle fünf Jahre ausgetragene Internationale Chopin-Wettbewerb in Warschau zieht ein großes Publikum an, sowohl vor Ort als auch über digitale Plattformen. Sein Geburtstag wird jährlich vom 22. Februar bis zum 1. März mit Konzerten, Ausstellungen und Festivals begangen – sowohl in Warschau als auch in seinem Geburtsort Żelazowa Wola. Chopins Werk ist zudem integraler Bestandteil der schulischen Bildung in Polen und wird insbesondere in den Fächern Polnisch, Musik und Geschichte behandelt. Auch über den Bildungsbereich hinaus ist Chopins Musik präsent: Sie findet Verwendung in Film- und Dokumentarfilm-Soundtracks, in Werbespots sowie bei staatlichen Feierlichkeiten. Zahlreiche Institutionen und öffentliche Einrichtungen tragen seinen Namen, darunter der Warschauer Flughafen, die Danziger Philharmonie, Schulen, Straßen, Wohnsiedlungen, ein Hochgeschwindigkeitszug, ein Segelschiff, eine Wodkamarke sowie der wichtigste polnische Musikpreis. Die filmischen Repräsentationen Chopins unterliegen einer kontinuierlichen Aktualisierung, etwa im Dokumentarfilm *Pianoforte* (2023), in der Anime-Serie *Forest of Piano* (2018–2019) oder im angekündigten Biopic *Chopin, Chopin!* (2025). Außerdem erfährt Chopins Musik auch auf digitalen Plattformen wie Spotify und YouTube große Aufmerksamkeit und erscheint dort häufig in thematisch kuratierten oder stimmungsbezogenen Playlists, etwa zur Entspannung oder Konzentration.

Diese vielgestaltige Präsenz Chopins im kulturellen Alltag spiegelt sich nicht zuletzt in aktuellen literarischen Auseinandersetzungen wider – insbesondere in der zeitgenössischen Lyrik. Moderne Lyriker:innen greifen dabei nicht nur auf vertraute Deutungsmuster seiner Musik zurück – etwa auf die mit seinen Werken assoziierte Melancholie oder die Polonaise als heroisch-patriotisches Musikstück –, sondern nutzen Chopins Werk und seine kulturelle Symbolik zunehmend auch als Ausgangspunkt für neue poetische Reflexionen. Diese reichen von lyrischen Spiegelungen individueller Gefühlslagen wie Trauer, Fremdheit oder Identitätssuche, in denen Chopins Musik als Projektionsfläche fungiert, bis hin zu zeitkritischen Kommentaren zur Rolle klassischer Musik im digitalen Alltag. In solchen Kontexten erscheint Chopins Musik etwa als Gegenentwurf zur Reizüberflutung oder als imaginierter Raum innerer Sammlung. Die jüngsten lyrischen Annäherungen an Chopin sind daher nicht nur als Fortsetzung einer langen literarischen Tradition zu verstehen, sondern vor allem als Ausdruck einer gegenwärtigen Neuverhandlung der Beziehung zwischen Musik, Poesie und kultureller Erfahrung.

Künstlerische Werke zu Chopin entstehen oft als „result of specific external stimuli, such as a competition for a monument, painting, poster or screenplay“ (Tomaszewski 2015, 818). Ein solcher Impuls war der fünfte landesweite Chopin-Poesiewettbewerb, der 2019 anlässlich von Chopins 210. Geburtstag vom *Wielkopolskie Centrum Chopinowskie – Antonin* (Chopin-Zentrum Großpolen – Antonin) und dem *Instytut Literatry* (Institut für Literatur) in Polen ausgerichtet wurde und eine außergewöhnlich hohe Zahl an Einsendungen verzeichnete. Ein Kommentar von einem Jurymitglied, Wojciech Gawłowski, nach der Lektüre der 460 Texte gibt Einblick in deren thematische Vielfalt und die Herausforderungen, die bei der Auswahl der Preisträger:innen auftraten:

Fortbestehende Stereotype und Szenarien mit Trauerweiden, der Masowischen Ebene und ihrer Melancholie bleiben weiterhin lebendig. Auch die Vorstellung des genialen kleinen Frédéric, der sich mit dem Volk verbrüdert, ist nach wie vor präsent. Hinzu kommt die Topografie der Orte, die mit Chopins Leben und Wirken in Verbindung stehen [...]. Dabei lässt sich beobachten, dass patriotische Überhöhung und unverhohlene Anspielungen auf nationalen Pathos mitunter mit einem Mangel an historischer Sensibilität, oberflächlicher Symbolverwendung oder fehlender Kontextkenntnis einhergehen. Das ist genau das, was ich als Juror dieses Wettbewerbs nicht ausstehen kann und dennoch durchstehen muss, um jene Gedichte auszuwählen und auszuzeichnen, die zwischen dem Phänomen der Musik und der Poesie oszillieren – Gedichte, die von Metaphysik oder gar Eschatologie geprägt sind. (Gawłowski 2020, 39)¹

1 Alle Übersetzungen aus dem Polnischen stammen von der Autorin des Beitrags.

Die folgenden Überlegungen basieren auf dreizehn prämierten Gedichten, von denen neun aus dem Wettbewerbsjahrgang 2020 und vier aus den Jahren 2016 bis 2019 stammen. Während der Chopin-Nacht am 22. Februar 2020 in Warschau wurden sie von den Preisträger:innen vorgetragen, zu denen sowohl etablierte als auch jüngere, aufstrebende Lyriker:innen gehörten. An fünf parallelen Veranstaltungsorten in der Stadt vereinte das Programm unterschiedliche Formate – von der Bekanntgabe der Wettbewerbsergebnisse über Lyriklesungen bis hin zu Chopin-Recitals. Da die Aufzeichnungen von Lesungen mit musikalischer Begleitung während des Festivalabends entstanden und nicht vollständig einstudiert waren, zeichnen sie sich durch eine besondere Unmittelbarkeit aus. Die preisgekrönten Texte wurden zwischen dem 19. März und dem 11. Juni 2020 im polnischen Online-Kulturmagazin *Nowy Napis Co Tydzień*² veröffentlicht. Sie erschienen in schriftlicher Form sowie als audiovisuelle Lesungen mit direkter Verlinkung zu YouTube.

Im Mittelpunkt dieses Aufsatzes steht die Frage, auf welche Weise zeitgenössische Lyrik mit der Musik Chopins intermediale Verbindungen eingeht. Dabei werden zwei zentrale Aspekte untersucht: Zum einen, wie die neuen Chopin-Gedichte Bezüge zu seiner Musik herstellen, zum Beispiel indem sie tradierte Semantisierungen und kulturelle Codes aufgreifen. Zum anderen, wie die Kombination aus Autor:innenlesungen dieser Gedichte und der musikalischen Begleitung die Interpretation der Texte beeinflusst. Diese Aspekte werden anhand ausgewählter Gedichte beleuchtet, die sowohl die Rezeption von Chopins Musik als auch die Verbindung zwischen Musik, Identität und zeitgenössischen Erfahrungen greifbar machen.

Die audiovisuellen Aufzeichnungen lassen eine Ästhetik erkennen, die an die von Charles Bernstein beschriebene Nähe zum „Armen Theater“ Jerzy Grotowskis erinnert (vgl. Bernstein 1998, 10; siehe auch Grotowski 1994 [1968]). Die Inszenierung ist bewusst minimalistisch gehalten: Aufwändige Kulissen, visuelle Effekte und selbst das mit Lyriklesungen assoziierte Wasserglas fehlen. Die Kameraarbeit bleibt statisch und der visuelle Rahmen wird durch ein Werbebanner bestimmt, das eine städtische Silhouette bei Nacht unter einem sternenbedeckten Himmel und den Schriftzug „CHOPIN 210“ auf einem Flügeldeckel zeigt. Diese Reduktion lenkt den Fokus auf den sprachlichen Ausdruck und die Feinheiten der stimmlichen

2 Der Titel lässt sich nicht exakt ins Deutsche übersetzen: „Napis“ verweist auf Zbigniew Herberts Gedichtband *Inschrift*, während „Co Tydzień“ die wöchentliche Erscheinungsweise der Online-Ausgabe gegenüber dem gedruckten Quartalsheft kennzeichnet. Das digitale Magazin *Nowy Napis Co Tydzień* war Teil des Online-Portals *NowyNapis.eu*, das bis zum 31. Mai 2024 vom Institut Literatury herausgegeben wurde. Nach der Einstellung bleibt das Archiv des Portals mit allen veröffentlichten Materialien aus den Jahren 2019–2024 weiterhin zugänglich.

Darbietung. Ähnlich wie es Henrik Wehmeier in Bezug auf die technische Qualität von Poetry Slam-Aufnahmen auf YouTube beschreibt, steigert ästhetische Beschränkung die Intensität der medialen Erfahrung (vgl. 2024, 243). So entsteht eine Atmosphäre, die die auditive Wahrnehmung in den Mittelpunkt rückt und das gesprochene Wort besonders intensiv erfahrbar macht.

Wie Anja Utler hervorhebt, ist „das Hören von Texten [...] etwas, das Verstehensbedingung und Verstehenshindernis zugleich ist“ (2016, 12). Vor diesem Hintergrund bildet die Lektüre der Gedichttexte die wesentliche Grundlage dieser Analyse. Gleichzeitig bietet *Nowy Napis* die Möglichkeit, den Text und „die Klarheit des gesprochenen Gedichts [zu] erleben“ (Utler 2016, 14). Für die Untersuchung stellt sich somit die Frage, wie sich das geschriebene und das gesprochene Gedicht zueinander verhalten und welche spezifischen Qualitäten das Gesprochene hervorbringt (vgl. Utler 2016, 14). Beide Formate – das schriftliche wie das mündliche Gedicht – sind als gleichwertig zu betrachten (vgl. Bernstein 1998, 10–11), da sie unterschiedliche und einander ergänzende Perspektiven auf die intermedialen Verknüpfungen zwischen Lyrik und Musik eröffnen.

Das Format der Chopin-Nacht stellt eine Form der Medienkombination dar, definiert als „punktuelle oder durchgehende Kombination mindestens zweier, konventionell als distinkt wahrgenommener Medien“ (Rajewsky 2002, 157), bei der Musik und Gedichtvortrag in einem gemeinsamen ästhetischen Rahmen interagieren. Während der Lesungen erklingt Chopins „Ballade As-Dur“, die – live gespielt – sämtliche Gedichte begleitet, mit Ausnahme von Łukasz Pawłowskis „Sonata“. Die Komposition vereint zwei prägende Themen: ein gesanglich-erzählendes erstes Thema, durchzogen von subtiler Vorahnung, und ein tänzerisch-verspieltes zweites Thema, das sich durch kokette Leichtigkeit und synkopierte Rhythmen auszeichnet (vgl. Tomaszewski 2025a [2000]). Der zweite Themenkomplex wird häufig mit literarischen Stoffen wie der Loreley-Sage oder Mickiewiczs Ballade „Świtezianka“ [Die Wassernixe vom Switez-See] assoziiert, in denen mythische Figuren durch ihren Gesang als Auslöser schicksalhafter Verführungen erscheinen. Trotz solcher dunklen Anklänge erzeugt die Ballade eine lichte, atmosphärisch dichte Klangwelt und wird häufig als exemplarisches Werk romantischer musikalischer Erzählkunst und emotionaler Nuanciertheit bezeichnet (vgl. Tomaszewski 2025a [2000]). Sie bleibt überwiegend im Hintergrund und dient als diskreter Verweis auf Chopins Werk, kann jedoch die emotionalen Nuancen der Texte verstärken, hervorheben oder konterkarieren (vgl. Berndt und Tonger-Erk 2013, 192). Die Analysen der Gedichte „Sonata“, „Sonet w b-moll“ [Sonett b-Moll], „Fryderyk: słuchanie świata“ [Frédéric: Lauschen der Welt] und „Open Space Music“ in diesem Aufsatz gehen insbesondere der Frage nach, inwiefern zwischen Textvortrag und Musik „ein semantischer

Mehrwert“ oder „eine gegenseitige Intensivierung [...], die über ein reines Nebeneinander der Medien hinausgeht“, entsteht (Berndt und Tonger-Erk 2013, 191).

Chopins Werke in Gedichten

Die meisten Chopin-Gedichte nutzen „die kürzeste Form der Thematisierung von Musik, [...] die Erwähnung eines bestimmten Komponisten oder Musikers, eines musikalischen Stücks oder Songs“ (Berndt und Tonger-Erk 2013, 195). Diese Form der intertextuellen Einzelreferenz knüpft an eine lange Tradition der Literarisierung von Werktiteln und der Semantisierung von Chopins Musik an – ein Prozess, der bereits zu seinen Lebzeiten einsetzte. So versah George Sand alle Präludien Chopins für private Zwecke mit poetischen Titeln, während sich Chopin selbst ausdrücklich gegen solche Zuschreibungen wehrte und seinen Londoner Verleger für „stupid titles [...] in spite of my forbidding“ kritisierte (Brief an Fontana, Nohant, 9. Oktober 1841, zit. nach Tomaszewski 2015, 719). Dennoch wurden in der zweiten Hälfte des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts „semantic readings of Chopin’s music [...] quite simply fashionable“ (Tomaszewski 2015, 721), da der postromantische und positivistische Kunstansatz verlangte, expressive Interpretationen durch Bedeutungsanalysen zu ergänzen. Die von Robert Schumann, Heinrich Heine und Franz Liszt angestoßene Rezeption von Chopins Musik fand in Polen ihre Fortsetzung durch die frühen Monografien von Marceli Antoni Szulc (1873), Moritz Karasowski (1877) und Jan Kleczyński (1879). Diese Texte, so Tomaszewski, „slipped undetected – for better or for worse – into cultural circulation“ (2015, 721) und prägten das kollektive Verständnis von Chopins Werk nachhaltig. Wie Małgorzata Sokalska betont, spielte die Literatur, insbesondere die Poesie, eine zentrale Rolle bei der Herausbildung des Mythos Chopin als „einer der wichtigsten Faktoren, der den populären, kollektiven Aspekt der Rezeption des Komponisten und seines künstlerischen Schaffens prägt“ (2014, 168). Viele Chopin-Gedichte greifen dabei tradierte Semantisierungen seiner Musik auf. Die bloße Erwähnung von Werktiteln oder Gattungen aktiviert kulturelle Codes und historische Konnotationen (vgl. Berndt und Tonger-Erk 2013, 192). Im polnischen Kontext spielen dabei insbesondere die melancholischen und heroischen Dimensionen von Chopins Musik eine zentrale Rolle (vgl. Tomaszewski 2011, 18). Sie wird entweder als Ausdruck „der elegischen Betrachtung des persönlichen und nationalen Unglücks“ (Tomaszewski 2011, 18) oder als musikalische Entsprechung eines heroischen Aufstands verstanden: „Dem nachdenklichen Grübeln steht der Wille zum Handeln gegenüber“ (Tomaszewski 2011, 18). Eng mit der melancholischen Dimension verbunden ist das unübersetzbare, Chopins Schaffen

prägende Wort *żał*, das Liszt – offenbar in Anlehnung an Chopins eigene Erklärung – als untröstlichen Kummer nach einem unwiederbringlichen Verlust beschreibt (vgl. Tomaszewski 2011, 20).

Wie Frauke Berndt und Lily Tonger-Erk erläutern, dienen Medienzitate dazu, „eine bestimmte Atmosphäre zu erzeugen oder eine Figur zu charakterisieren – ebenso wie Musik zu reflektieren, zu kommentieren, zu kritisieren oder zu parodieren“ (2013, 195). In Chopin-Gedichten wird der Komponist häufig als romantisches Genie stilisiert, das sich nach der Heimat sehnt, in seiner Kunst nach Vollkommenheit strebt und als (bisweilen überstrapazierter) Inbegriff des Polnischen gilt (vgl. Cieśla-Korytowska 2009, 193). Gleichzeitig gibt es auch Gedichte, die „Chopins Diskretion, seine Abneigung gegen kunsttheoretische Erörterungen und seinen Widerwillen gegen romantische Exaltation“ (Cieśla-Korytowska 2009, 194) thematisieren.

Das deutlichste Kriterium für die Systematisierung scheinen die Bezüge der Gedichte zu den von Chopin praktizierten musikalischen Formen zu sein. Dies nutzt beispielsweise Irena Poniatowska in ihrer umfassenden Monografie *Chopin w poezji* [Chopin in der Poesie] (2020), in der das ausführlichste analytische Kapitel den Titel „Gatunki i formy muzyczne Chopina w poetyckich ujęciach“ [Gattungen und Formen Chopins in poetischen Darstellungen] trägt. Es widmet sich jenen Werken, die auf Mazurken, Polonaisen, Préludes, Nocturnes, Balladen sowie Fantasien und Scherzi, Walzer sowie Impromptus und Lieder, Konzerte und Etüden Bezug nehmen. Die folgende Übersicht dient dazu, die in den neuen Gedichten erkennbaren musikalischen Bezüge systematisch darzustellen und in ihrer Relation zu den jeweiligen Formen kurz zu analysieren.

Die Mazurken, evozieren mit ihrem „ludowy ton“ [volkstümlichen Ton] (Poniatowska 2020, 165) sowie rhythmischen und melodischen Elementen eine klangliche Erinnerung an die polnische Identität und assoziieren sich mit „patriotic duty“ (Tomaszewski 2015, 388). Eine solche Verknüpfung von Musik mit biografischen Erfahrungen und nationalen Bezugsebenen zeigt sich in mehreren Gedichten, die sich auf Chopins Mazurken beziehen. Zum Beispiel inszeniert Przemysław Krajewskis Gedicht „Peregrynacja“ [Peregrination] (2020) Chopins Musik als Alternative zu Realität und Trost nach einer enttäuschenden Reise auf den Spuren des Komponisten in Paris. Mazurken und Walzer erscheinen dabei als Stationen einer existenziellen Reise: „Peregrination | von der Mazurka zum Walzer | von der Mutter zur Heimat“ (Krajewski 2020, o. S.).³ Während die Mazurka in Krajewskis Gedicht symbolisch für polnische Identität steht, wird der Walzer in der Rezeption häufig mit Eigenschaften wie „lightness, airiness, ethe-

3 „peregrynacja / od mazura do walca / od matki do Ojczyzny“.

reality, intensified motion“ (Tomaszewski 2015, 401) assoziiert – eine ästhetische Aufladung, die in Anna Piliszewskas Gedicht „niedopałek“ [Zigarettenstummel] eine andere Wendung nimmt: Dort verstärken Walzer die emotionale Intensität des Brandes der Krakauer Philharmonie (vgl. 2020b).

Zwei Gedichte befassen sich mit Chopins Etüden, die allgemein als paradigmatische Verbindung von technischer Virtuosität und künstlerischem Ausdruck gelten. Jedes Stück stellt ein spezifisches pianistisch-technisches Problem in den Mittelpunkt, das – „enhanced, sublimated and rendered more complex“ (Tomaszewski 2015, 432) – zugleich Träger musikalischer Aussage wird. Dadurch entsteht ein charakteristisches Ausdrucksprofil, das weit über die Funktion bloßer Übungswerke hinausreicht. Tomaszewski beschreibt sie als in sich geschlossene lyrische Formen von hoher Dichte und Konzentration – Stücke, in denen sich technische Raffinesse und expressive Gestaltung auf kleinstem Raum vereinen (vgl. 2015, 431–432). Auch Poniatowska hebt hervor, dass diese Werke in der Rezeptionsgeschichte sowohl als Übungsformen wie auch als poetisch aufgeladene Miniaturen gelesen wurden – als Musterbeispiele für die Verbindung von virtuoser Gestaltung und musikalischer Ausdruckskraft (vgl. 2020, 313). In Wojciech Roszkowskis Gedicht „Nella Miseria“ (2020), in dem Chopin kurz vor seinem Tod Etüden für Delfina Potocka spielt, erscheinen diese Stücke als Ausdruck künstlerischer Beharrlichkeit und technischer Brillanz. Thematisiert werden Chopins Bemühen, sein pianistisches Können und seine technische Meisterschaft trotz körperlicher Schwäche und des nahenden Lebensendes zu bewahren. Mariusz Baryła „Chopin II“ (2020) verweist implizit auf die „Etüde c-Moll“ Op. 10 Nr. 12 („Revolutionsetüde“), die mit der ungewissen Zukunft nach dem gescheiterten Novemberaufstand 1830/31 assoziiert wird. Die Szene, in der Chopin „ze szkicem etiudy“ [mit dem Entwurf der Etüde] (Baryła 2020, o. S.) seinen Vater und die Offiziere begleitet, verknüpft Chopins Musik mit der kollektiven Tragödie seiner Heimat.

Małgorzata Tomczyk-Jadachs Gedicht „Preludium e-moll“ [Präludium in e-Moll] (2020) knüpft an den Charakter des referenzierten Werkes an, das durch „dark, even sombre colours“ (Tomaszewski 2025c [2000]) geprägt ist. Es greift „the insistent repetition of a ‘seconds’ motif (in this instance a minor second)“ (Tomaszewski 2025c [2000]) auf und verweist in Systemreferenz auf das westliche Dur-Moll-System. Dabei dienen die reine Quinte und die kleine Sekunde als Metaphern für das menschliche Leben: Die Quinte symbolisiert harmonische und ausgewogene Momente, während die dissonante kleine Sekunde die Spannungen und Konflikte des Daseins widerspiegelt: „das Leben ist keine Explosion der Har-

monie | wenn die Quinte in unerreichbarer Ferne liegt | wenn jede Sekunde zu klein verrinnt | zwischen zu kurzen Versen“ (Tomczyk-Jadach 2020, o. S.).⁴

Auf ähnliche Weise knüpft Paweł Podlipniak im Gedicht „Państwo Łazienkowsy – latem“ [Familie Łazienkowski⁵ – im Sommer] (2020) an die Merkmale des Nocturnes an, wo Chopins „chłodny nokturn“ [kühles Nocturne] und „oszoŕniony nokturn“ [bereiftes Nocturne] (2020, o. S.) synästhetisch⁶ für Abkühlung an einem heißen Warschauer Sommertag, während einer Chopin-Matinee im Freien, stehen. Chopins Nocturnes werden in literarischen und musikwissenschaftlichen Deutungen meistens mit Nachtstimmungen assoziiert (vgl. Poniatowska 2020, 229–258; Tomaszewski 2015, 482). Podlipniaks Text greift diese Assoziationskette von Nocturne – Nacht – Kühle auf und transformiert sie in einen sommerlichen Kontext, indem er die metaphorische Kühle der Musik als Kontrast zur Hitze des Tages und als Symbol für Erfrischung einsetzt.

In diesen Gedichten wird der Mythos des überhöhten Nationalkomponisten und leidenden Exilanten nicht vollständig aufgelöst, sondern mit subjektiven Perspektiven überblendet, die individuelle Erfahrung inszenieren und zugleich kollektive Vorstellungen variieren. So entsteht eine Spannung zwischen Tradition und Gegenwart, zwischen institutionalisiertem Kulturerbe und urbaner Realität. Chopins Musik wird dabei zu einer Projektionsfläche für poetische Auseinandersetzungen mit Vergangenheit und Gegenwart – einem Ort, an dem vertraute Bedeutungen aufgenommen, umgeformt und in zeitgenössische Lebenszusammenhänge überführt werden.

Verbal Music

Zwei der untersuchten Gedichte beziehen sich bereits in ihren Titeln auf Chopins Sonate Nr. 2 in b-Moll, Op. 35 – seine bekannteste Klaviersonate –, indem sie den musikalischen Intertext wie Werktitel, Gattungsbezeichnung oder Tonart explizit

⁴ „życie nie jest eksplozją harmonii / gdy do kwinty niedosiężnie daleko / kiedy każda sekunda przecieka za małą / między zbyt krótkimi wersami“.

⁵ Der Name im Titel des Gedichts ist eine Anspielung auf den Łazienki-Park in Warschau, wo seit 1959 von Mai bis September die Chopin-Sonntagskonzerte am Denkmal des Komponisten stattfinden.

⁶ Synästhesie wird hier aus literaturwissenschaftlicher Perspektive verstanden, wobei es sich um „die Verdichtung und Kontamination zweier Wahrnehmungen zu einer Metapher“ (Kremer 2007, 557) handelt.

angeben. Sie repräsentieren unterschiedliche Formen von *verbal music*,⁷ bei denen literarische Texte musikalische Werke oder das Musikerlebnis selbst reflektieren. Christine Lubkoll betont in diesem Zusammenhang, dass solche Texte oft zeigen, „wie das Subjekt das musikalische Kunstwerk wahrnimmt und was es in ihm auslöst“ (2017, 85) – ein Zugang, der auch den beiden hier analysierten Gedichten zugrunde liegt. Es resultiert daraus ein fließender „Übergang von telling zu showing, vom Erzählen zur Evokation“ (vgl. Lubkoll 2017, 85). Berndt und Tonger-Erk verorten *verbal music* zwischen Referenz – verstanden als expliziter Verweis auf ein Musikstück, etwa durch Nennung von Komponist, Titel oder formalen Merkmalen – und Performanz, also der literarischen Inszenierung musikalischer Strukturen, Wirkungen oder Stimmungen im Text selbst (vgl. 2013, 194).

Łukasz Pawłowskis „Sonata“ (2020) besteht aus vier Strophen mit jeweils drei Versen und knüpft damit formal an die vier Sätze von Chopins „Klaviersonate b-Moll“ an. Das Gedicht semantisiert das Werk als musikalische Umsetzung von Chopins Todesahnung und inszeniert es als Ausdruck eines existenziellen Pulses. Rhythmische Elemente werden dabei mit der Metaphorik von Herzschlag, Blutfluss und musikalischem Takt verknüpft: „rytm gonią palce ślepe a jednak bezbłędne“ [der Rhythmus, den die Finger jagen, blind und doch fehlerfrei], „puls pomyłony serca“ [der verwirrte Puls des Herzens], „metronom krwi“ [das Metronom des Blutes] und „tętni życiem“ [er pulsiert mit Leben] (Pawłowski 2020, o. S.). In dieser *verbal music* wird Chopins Werk als unmittelbarer Ausdruck des Lebens des Komponisten in seiner Fragilität und Intensität erlebt.

Die Fragen „Co to za rytm“ [Was ist das für ein Rhythmus?] zu Beginn der ersten Strophe und „Co to za puls“ [Was ist das für ein Puls?] (Pawłowski 2020, o. S.) zu Beginn der zweiten Strophe erzeugen einen rhythmischen Effekt. In den Zeilen „Tętni życiem i tęskni chorobą choć za życiem | tęskni a chorobą tętni“ [Er pulsiert vor Leben und sehnt sich nach Krankheit, obwohl er sich nach Leben | sehnt und mit Krankheit pulsiert] (Pawłowski 2020, o. S.) entstehen durch die Alliteration der Silbe „tę-“ sowie durch die spiegelbildliche Anordnung der Verben „tętni“ [pulsiert] und „tęskni“ [sehnt sich] klangliche Echos und rhythmische Strukturen. Die sprachliche Gestaltung hebt die thematische Reflexion von Leben, Krankheit und Vergänglichkeit akustisch hervor. Es ist ein Beispiel für eine „doppelte Intermedialität“ (Lubkoll 2017, 85), durch welche beschrieben wird, wie beim Musikhören innere Bilder entstehen, die dazu beitragen, die Wirkung der Musik zu erfassen. Das

7 Der Begriff *verbal music* wurde von Steven Paul Scher (1968) geprägt und hat sich auch in der deutschsprachigen intermedialitätsbezogenen Forschungsliteratur etabliert. Eine adäquate deutsche Übersetzung hat sich nicht durchgesetzt.

Gedicht strebt nicht nur danach, die Musik darzustellen, sondern versucht, das subjektive Hörerlebnis sowie die emotionale Resonanz zu rekonstruieren, die die Musik im Inneren der Rezipient:innen auslöst. Diese Kombination aus Beschreibung und emotionaler Nachbildung reflektiert die transformative Wirkung der Musik auf die Wahrnehmung und das Empfinden der Hörer:innen.

Im Vortrag des Gedichts schwingen Entschlossenheit und ein Aufbegehren gegen die thematisierte Vergänglichkeit mit, was den Text zusätzlich als ein Beispiel auf subjektive Empfindungen ausgerichteter *verbal music* legitimiert. Pawłowski präsentiert ihn mit tiefer Stimme, geringer Modulation und einem etwas harten, unnachgiebigen Timbre, was seiner Darbietung stellenweise eine kantige, abgehackt wirkende Klangstruktur verleiht. Dies steht im auffälligen Kontrast zur musikalischen Untermalung: Im Hintergrund erklingt ein Ausschnitt aus Chopins „Mazurka in e-Moll“ Op. 41 Nr. 1,⁸ deren nostalgischer Tonfall (vgl. Tomaszewski 2025b [2000]) eine klangliche Gegenbewegung zum Vortrag schafft. Das Zusammenspiel von *verbal music* und gespielter Musik basiert auf einem Wechselspiel von Kontrast und Ergänzung. Während Pawłowskis Vortrag durch rhythmische Strenge und ein beschleunigtes Tempo geprägt ist – besonders in der Passage „rytm gonią palce ślepe a jednak bezbłędne“ [der Rhythmus, den die Finger jagen, blind und doch fehlerfrei] (Pawłowski 2020, o. S.) –, entfaltet sich die Mazurka im gemessenen Fluss des *Andantino*. Dieser Gegensatz verstärkt die innere Spannung des Vortrags, indem er die Dringlichkeit der sprachlichen Gestaltung mit der melancholisch fließenden Bewegung der Musik konfrontiert. Darüber hinaus evoziert das Gedicht durch die explizite Nennung von Chopins Sonate und deren berühmtestem Satz, dem Trauermarsch, eine bestimmte musikalische Erwartung. Doch stattdessen erklingt im Hintergrund eine Mazurka – ein Werk, das sich sowohl von der Sonate als auch von der expressiven Direktheit des Vortrags klanglich abhebt und die Schwere des poetischen Vortrags aufricht.

Der Titel von Andriej Kotins Gedicht „Sonet w b-moll“ [Sonett b-Moll] (2020) verweist direkt auf Chopins „Sonate b-Moll“ Op. 35 Nr. 2. Durch die Ersetzung der „Sonate“ durch das „Sonett“ signalisiert der Autor, dass sein Text nicht die musikalische Struktur von Chopins Komposition nachahmen möchte. Stattdessen ordnet er jeder Strophe seines Gedichts einen Satz der Sonate zu, übernimmt deren Bezeichnungen und überführt sie in eine erzählende Struktur, wobei sich die Assoziationen zu den einzelnen Teilen der Sonate an populären Vorstellungen von Chopins Persönlichkeit und Musik orientieren. Dadurch wirkt diese *verbal music* zugleich als literarische Hommage an den Komponisten, poetische Auseinander-

8 Die Mazurka trägt die Nr. 1 in der Pariser Edition, die Tomaszewski in seiner Beschreibung referenziert, in der Leipziger Edition steht sie unter Nr. 2 (vgl. 2025b [2000]).

setzung mit seinem Leben und persönliche Impression über seine „Sonate b-Moll“. Die Wahl der Sonettform ist dabei bemerkenswert, da traditionelle Gedichtformen in der zeitgenössischen polnischen Lyrik nur noch selten verwendet werden.

Die Strophen reflektieren verschiedene Aspekte von Chopins Existenz: von der jugendlichen Entdeckung der Musik und der Vaterlandsliebe im „Grave; Doppio movimento“, über die Suche nach einem individuellen Stil und die Rückbesinnung auf die Volksmusik als Inspirationsquelle im „Scherzo“, bis hin zur kreativen Reife, dem Widerstand gegen Schicksalsschläge und der Trostfindung in der Musik im „Marche funèbre“. Schließlich thematisiert das „Finale: Presto“ die Hoffnung auf die Unsterblichkeit seines künstlerischen Erbes. Kotins Gedicht ist eine assoziative Interpretation von Chopins Werk, das die musikalischen Stimmungen aufgreift und sie literarisch transformiert.

Das Sonett erzeugt durch sein abab-Reimschema und den gleichmäßigen Silbenfluss einen volksliedhaften Effekt. Dessen Form wird variiert: Es besteht aus vierzehn Versen, die in drei vierzeilige und eine abschließende zweizeilige Strophe gegliedert sind, wobei die aus Chopins Werk übernommenen Satzbezeichnungen nicht in die Verszählung einbezogen werden. Der Text nutzt klangbezogene Bilder wie „kakofonię chmur“ [Kakofonie der Wolken], „rozbite echo dawnych pieśni“ [zerbrochenes Echo alter Lieder] und „wiosenny ch wiatrów dobra wola zaśpiewa“ [die gute Absicht des Frühlingswindes wird singen] (Kotin 2020, o. S.). Auf diese Weise überträgt er Assoziationen mit der Sonate in drei der vier Strophen auf die auditive Vorstellungsebene.

Der Vortrag des Gedichts durch den Lyriker selbst ist von einem sanften russischen Akzent geprägt, der zur melodischen Kontinuität beiträgt. Diese wird durch Kotins tiefe Stimme verstärkt, die sich durch ein weiches Timbre und einen vokalreichen Klang auszeichnet, wodurch die Nähe zum volksliedhaften Charakter des Textes betont wird. Der regelmäßige, wenn auch unvollkommene Rhythmus des Gedichts wird hervorgehoben, wobei die fallende Intonation am Ende jedes Verses die metrische Struktur des Textes klar markiert. Eine Ausnahme bilden die ersten beiden Verse der dritten Strophe, die durch melodische Variationen auffallen und den Vortrag abwechslungsreicher gestalten. Der im Hintergrund leise erklingende Beginn der „Ballade As-Dur“ (Takte 1–20), gehalten in *Allegretto*, fungiert als subtile musikalische Begleitung. Ihre Klangfarbe ist von hellen, leuchtenden Sonoritäten geprägt, die als „full of lustre, even sparkling“ (Tomaszewski 2025a [2000] o. S.) wirken und damit einen Kontrast zum existentiell ernsten Charakter der von Kotin referenzierten Sonate bilden. Gleichzeitig fügt sich die Ballade in die Vortragsweise des Lyrikers ein, da ihre melodische Führung die weiche, rhythmisch ausgeglichene Gestaltung des gesprochenen Textes spiegelt. Auch ihr „tone of epic narration“ (Tomaszewski 2025a [2000] o. S.),

der sich bereits in den eröffnenden Takten des ersten Themas entfaltet, verstärkt die narrativen Elemente des Gedichts, ohne es in seiner Eigenständigkeit zu überlagern. Die Ballade kommentiert und erweitert die klangliche Dimension des Vortrags, ohne eine direkte semantische Verbindung zum Gedicht herzustellen.

Chopins Lauschen und Chopin lauschen

Zuhören ist in der Lyrik nicht nur ein rezeptiver, sondern ein aktiver Prozess der Bedeutungsbildung. Um es analytisch einzuordnen, bietet der französische Philosoph Jean-Luc Nancy mit seiner Theorie des Zuhörens einen geeigneten Rahmen. Er unterscheidet zwischen dem „Vernehmen“, einem intellektuellen Erfassen von Klang und dem „Zuhören“, einer offenen, intuitiven Wahrnehmung, wobei das Lauschen als gesteigerte, leiblich-räumliche Form des Zuhörens verstanden werden kann (vgl. Nancy 2022, 14–15). Lauschen beschreibt eine offene, prozessuale Wahrnehmung, die zugleich rezeptiv und konstitutiv ist: „Ganz Ohr sein, Lauschen, das ist gleichzeitig draußen und drinnen sein, von außen und von innen offen sein, vom einen zum anderen also, und vom einen im anderen“ (Nancy 2022, 27). Zoë Skoulding betont, dass es dabei nicht allein um die Wahrnehmung von Klang geht, sondern um eine Praxis, die neue Formen lyrischer Subjektivität sowie Beziehungsgeflechte zwischen Körpern und Umwelten hervorbringen kann (vgl. 2020, 1). Hören prägt nicht nur die Rezeption von Gedichten, sondern auch deren Entstehung und ihre formale Struktur. Skoulding argumentiert, dass die musikalischen Aspekte der Poesie nicht isoliert betrachtet werden sollten, sondern im umfassenderen „material context of listening“ (2020, 4) verankert sind. Diese Perspektive erweitert die traditionelle Reduktion poetischer Musikalität auf Metrik und Rhythmus hin zu einem Verständnis, das soziale, technologische und ökologische Hörpraktiken einbezieht. Die innere Stimme, mit der Poesie komponiert wird, sei zunehmend als eine zu begreifen, die durch Prozesse des Zuhörens geformt wird – durch Wiederholung, Echo und Resonanz (vgl. Skoulding 2020, 1). In diesem Sinne kann das Gedicht als akustischer Raum verstanden werden, in dem sich Stimmen, Geräusche und Nachklänge überlagern und eine mehrdimensionale Wahrnehmungsebene schaffen.

Der folgende Abschnitt untersucht, wie das Lauschen als künstlerische Praxis in Gedichten reflektiert wird, die sich mit Chopins Musik und ihrer Wahrnehmung auseinandersetzen. Dabei geht es darum, zu analysieren, wie sich das Lauschen als poetisches Prinzip manifestiert – sei es durch die Darstellung des jungen Chopin, der seine Umgebung akustisch erkundet oder durch das Hörerlebnis eines jungen Menschen, der Chopins Musik in der digitalen Gegenwart rezipiert. Die beiden Ge-

dichte fungieren selbst als ein akustischer Raum, in dem sich unterschiedliche Zeiten, Hörweisen und Technologien manifestieren.

Das Gedicht „Fryderyk: słuchanie świata“ [Frédéric: Lauschen der Welt] (2020) von Łukasz Barys verankert die Ursprünge von Chopins musikalischem Schaffen in einer elementaren Hörerfahrung – seinem Lauschen auf die Klänge der Natur während seiner ländlichen Ferienaufenthalte. Es zeigt sich als eine unvoreingenommene Offenheit gegenüber Klängen, die noch nicht mit Bedeutungen überlagert sind: „Er lauscht: das Gekrächze der Krähen, das Zittern | des Glases, das Krächzen“⁹ sowie „man lauschte, ob auf dem Ast | ein Rabe landete oder ein Specht sich an die Eiche machte“ (2020, o. S.).¹⁰ Nancy beschreibt diesen Vorgang als ein Lauschen auf „[das] nicht-Kodierte, [das,] was noch nicht in ein System von Bedeutungsverweisen eingepasst ist“, während das Vernehmen nur „das bereits Kodierte, das man dekodiert“ umfasst (2022, 58). Fryderyks Lauschen wird so zu einem Akt der Hingabe an das Unbekannte und Unstrukturierte – einer Vorstufe des künstlerischen Schaffens. Es beschreibt einen Zustand reiner Offenheit, ungetrübt von späteren kulturellen oder biografischen Konnotationen, die mit Chopins Werk verknüpft sind: „damals kannte man nicht die Worte: | Fesseln, Fremdherrschaft und die Pflichten des Künstlers, damals kannte man nicht die Worte: Wien, | Paris, Emigration und Straßenpflaster. Man kannte sie nicht, sondern lauschte nur“ (Barys 2020, o. S.).¹¹

Darüber hinaus verschränkt das Gedicht Hören und Sehen zu einer synästhetischen Erfahrung, wobei es auf Codierungen und Formprinzipien der Musik Bezug nimmt: „Er sieht eine Spinne, | die eine Fünflinie webt, er sieht die Melodie des Stammes und der Äste, winziger Äderchen – der Saiten des Waldes, | die ihm die Welt erzählen“ (Barys 2020, o. S.).¹² Die beschriebenen Bilder verbinden die visuelle und auditive Wahrnehmung, indem das Sehen metaphorisch als Hören interpretiert wird. Im Sinne von Nancy „könnte man von einem visuellen Geräusch sprechen“ (2022, 11), das die beiden Sinneseindrücke zu einer Einheit verschmelzen lässt.

Fryderyk erscheint im Gedicht als eine Figur des Lauschens: in einem Zustand offener Wahrnehmung nimmt er die Welt klanglich auf, um sie später in Musik zu überführen. Seine Finger „wachsen über die Klaviertasten hinaus, um Zeugnis | zu geben: vom Dreschen, dem Webstuhl, dem Korn, der Wiese und dem

9 „On słucha: skrzek wron, drżenie / szkła, krakanie“.

10 „słuchało, czy na gałęzi / przysiadł kruk, czy dzięcioł dobrał się do dębu“.

11 „nie znało się wtedy słów: / kajdany, niewola i powinności artysty, nie znało się wtedy słów: Wiedeń, / Paryż, emigracja i bruk. Nie znało się, tylko słuchało“.

12 „On widzi pająka snującego / pięciolinię, widzi melodię pnia i gałęzi, maleńkich żyłek – strun lasu, / które opowiadają mu świat“.

Kuckuck“ (Barys 2020, o. S.).¹³ Das Gedicht kündigt an, dass das Gehörte durch Musik neu erfahrbar gemacht werden soll – ein Prozess, der eine Wechselwirkung zwischen Hören und Schaffen voraussetzt und sich mit Peter Szendys Konzept des „doppelten Hörens“ interpretieren lässt. Dieses bezeichnet das bewusste Offenlegen des Gehörten in einer veränderten Gestalt, etwa durch ein Arrangement oder eine Transkription. Szendy beschreibt dies als eine Praxis, bei der Hören nicht nur Wahrnehmung, sondern zugleich eine aktive Umformung ist (vgl. 2008, 36). Indem das Gedicht diesen Transformationsprozess ins Zentrum rückt, verweist es darauf, dass Lauschen nicht nur ein rezeptiver, sondern auch ein kreativer Akt ist, der eine neue, erweiterte Erfahrung des Ursprünglichen ermöglicht.

In Barys' Gedicht findet die Idee „des doppelten Hörens“ auch in der performativen Umsetzung Ausdruck, in seinem Vortrag mit Musikbegleitung. Aleksandra Kremer beschreibt den Stil, den der Lyriker verfolgt, als eine Haltung, „to foreground the fragile and accidental nature of performance, to limit its melodicty, and to incorporate the poet's physical state into the poetry“ (2021, 264). Diese Zurücknahme des Autors hinter dem Text spiegelt sich in Barys' gebeugter Körperhaltung und seiner entspannten, mittleren Sprechstimmlage wider. Die subtile Präsentation bringt selbst kleinste Veränderungen in Intensität, Tonhöhe und Dynamik zur Geltung, verlangt jedoch eine gesteigerte Aufmerksamkeit seitens der Hörer:innen. Der im Vergleich relativ laut erklingende Abschnitt der „Ballade As-Dur“ bildet durch seinen abwechslungsreichen Charakter und die expressive Interpretation einen Kontrast zum konstanten Tempo und zur gemäßigten Lautstärke des Vortrags. Die im Gedicht bloß angekündigte Musik ist im Rahmen der Chopin-Nacht intensiv präsent und zwingt durch ihre Intensität und Vielschichtigkeit zum aktiven Lauschen. Dadurch manifestiert sich in der Aufführung eine zusätzliche Variante des „doppelten Hörens“, bei der die Kombination aus Text, Vortrag und Musikbegleitung das Gedicht in einer neuartigen Form erfahrbar macht.

Gegen Ende des Gedichts wird deutlich, wie vielschichtig Barys Chopins Musik konnotiert: „die Menschen kamen von den Feldern herab, legten | auf ihre Gesichter ein Lied“ (Barys 2020, o. S.).¹⁴ Musik wird hier zur Ausdrucksform, die Landschaft und kulturelle Erfahrung nicht nur einfängt, sondern auch transformiert: „Etwas atmet. Ist es Polen? Was atmet es? Des Jungen Musik – naht | von den Feldern“ (Barys 2020, o. S.).¹⁵ Wie Jim Samson schreibt, „symbolised [Chopin] the national struggle, helping to cement the Polish spirit at a time when the coun-

13 „rosną nad klawiszami pianina, by dać / świadectwo: młócenia, krosna, ziarna, łąki i kukłki“.

14 „ludzie zesłi z pól, przybrali / na twarze pieśń“.

15 „Coś oddycha. To Polska? Czyż oddycha? To chłopca właśnie – zbliża się / od pól muzyka“.

try was without political status“ (1992, 7). Musik erscheint bei Barys nicht als bloß subjektiver künstlerischer Ausdruck, sondern als Medium, das die Verbindung von Natur, Mensch und Nation artikuliert. In dieser Verschmelzung wird sie zur universellen Sprache, die kollektive Identität trägt und persönliche wie kulturelle Erfahrungen miteinander verwebt.

Daniel Orzadowskis Gedicht „Open Space Music“ (2020) beleuchtet die Spannungen zwischen dem technologisierten Arbeitsalltag und der Sehnsucht nach künstlerischer Tiefe, die in der Musik von Frédéric Chopin ihren Ausdruck findet. Musik wird dabei als ein Medium der Selbstregulation, Identitätsbildung und Reflexion dargestellt, wie es Tia DeNora in ihrem Konzept von „Music as a Technology of Self“ (vgl. 2000, 46–74) beschreibt. Das Gedicht hinterfragt zugleich kritisch die Rolle von Plattformen wie Spotify, die zwar den Zugang zu Musik demokratisieren, jedoch gleichzeitig Konsummuster fördern, die sie auf ein Produkt reduzieren.

Die Sprechfigur des Gedichts, ein Büroangestellter, wendet sich in der hektischen Umgebung des Open-Space-Büros Chopins Musik zu, um Konzentration und innere Ruhe zu finden. Dieses Verhalten entspricht DeNoras These, dass Musik „a device or resource to which people turn in order to regulate themselves as aesthetic agents, as feeling, thinking and acting beings in their day-to-day lives“ ist (2000, 62). Doch die ständigen Unterbrechungen durch berufliche Anforderungen untergraben diesen Prozess: „Ivan Bessonov Skype | Verbindung mit Großbritannien | ich wählte in den Einstellungen, dass Spotify während Anrufen stummgeschaltet wird“ (Orzadowski 2020).¹⁶ „Vertraute Klänge“ können zwar kurzzeitig in den Vordergrund treten, doch werden sie unmittelbar von neuen Anforderungen überlagert: „Ich lausche, doch es dringt hindurch | der nächste Anruf eine Großanfrage nach Mikrotik-Routern“ (Orzadowski 2020, o. S.).¹⁷

Steven Brown argumentiert, dass Plattformen wie Spotify nur dann zur musikalischen Bildung beitragen können, wenn Nutzer:innen „a greater ability to sort, choose and evaluate“ (2015, 98) entwickeln. Die Sprechfigur enthüllt die Oberflächlichkeit der eigenen Annäherung an Chopins Musik: „Auf Spotify wählte ich aus Millionen von Künstlern | Chopin aus Dutzenden seiner Werke erkannte ich | die Etüde“, die als „die bekannteste sein Werbespot“ (Orzadowski 2020, o. S.)¹⁸ bezeichnet wird. Das auf die Kenntnisse des Chopin-Werks bezogene Pareto-

16 „Ivan Bessonov Skype / połączenie z UK / w ustawieniach wybrałem aby Spotify wyszczał się podczas połączeń“.

17 „Znajome dźwięki [...] wsłuchuję się ale przebija się / kolejne połączenie duże zapytanie o rutery Mikrotik“.

18 „Spotify spośród milionów artystów wybrałem / Chopina spośród dziesiątek jego utworów rozpoznałem / Etiudę [...] najbardziej znana jego spot reklamowy“.

Prinzip (80/20-Regel) verdeutlicht das Effizienzdenken, das die Musikwahl der Sprechfigur vorhersehbar macht.

In Orzadowskis Gedicht dient das Hören von Chopins Werken neben der Selbstregulation auch der Selbstreflexion und Identitätsbildung. DeNora beschreibt Musik als „a device for the reflexive process of remembering/constructing who one is, a technology for spinning the apparently continuous tale of who one is“ (2000, 62). Zu Beginn projiziert die Sprechfigur persönliche Vorstellungen von harter Arbeit und Lebenswidrigkeiten auf einen Pianisten: „Für Cristian Budu entscheidend war sein Gesicht auf dem Cover [...] er hatte es nicht leicht im Leben“ (Orzadowski 2020, o. S.).¹⁹ Diese Projektion ermöglicht eine vorübergehende Identifikation mit der Künstlerfigur. Doch mit zunehmender Reflexion verstärkt sich das Gefühl der unüberwindbaren Distanz zur Welt der großen Chopin-Interpret:innen, wie es an Ivan Bessonov deutlich wird: „Open Space, ich bin bei der Arbeit, was macht jetzt dieser Ivan Bessonov? [...] Er ist | ein freier Mensch und wird gleich | tun, was er will?“ (Orzadowski 2020, o. S.).²⁰ Schließlich verdichtet sich die Barriere zwischen der Sprechfigur und der Kunst in der kafkaesken Gestalt des Wächters: „Chopin und das Talent des jungen Ivan schöpfen aus einer Quelle, | zu der mich der Wächter nicht zulassen würde“ (Orzadowski 2020, o. S.).²¹

Dennoch erfüllt Chopins Musik ihre Funktion als Unterstützung bei der Identitätsbildung im Sinne DeNoras: „The sense of ‘self’ is locatable in music. Musical materials provide terms and templates for elaborating self-identity – for identity’s identification“ (2000, 67). Indem die Sprechfigur die Existenz des Wächters anerkennt, schafft sie Raum für einen subtilen Akt der Selbstbehauptung. Die Entscheidung, ein Gedicht in einer E-Mail an sich selbst zu verstecken, um nicht beim Verfassen im Open Space entdeckt zu werden, symbolisiert die subversive Kraft der Kreativität. Musik inspiriert den Büroangestellten dazu, sich trotz widriger Umstände einen Raum für Authentizität zu bewahren im Sinne von DeNoras Konzept: „Music provides a virtual reality within which respondents are able to express themselves“ (2000, 56).

Orzadowskis Vortrag des Gedichts „Open Space Music“ verdeutlicht die zentrale Thematik der Entfremdung von Musik und der Fragmentierung der Musikerfahrung in einer beschleunigten Welt. Der Text wird in einem hektischen, fast atemlosen Stil vorgetragen, geprägt durch verschluckte Silben und ein konstant hohes Tempo. Diese Präsentation greift den Rhythmus der modernen Arbeitswelt

19 „Cristian Budu zdecydowała twarz z okładki płyty [...] nie miał łatwo w życiu“.

20 „Open space jestem w pracy co robi teraz ten Ivan Bessonov? [...] Jest / człowiekiem wolnym i zaraz / uczyni co zechce?“.

21 „Chopin i talent młodego Ivana czerpią ze źródła / do którego nie dopuściłby mnie Strażnik“.

auf: rastlos, unterbrochen und ohne Raum für Besinnung. Monoton wiederholt werden Schlagworte wie „Spotify“ (sechsmal), „Chopin“ (zwölfmal), „Open Space“ (viermal) und „Skype“ (zweimal), die fast wie Elemente einer automatisierten Sprache wirken und das Multitasking im Büroalltag spürbar machen. Begleitet wird die Darbietung von Chopins „Ballade As-Dur“, deren lyrischer Charakter und komplexe Struktur einen deutlichen Kontrast zur gehetzt wirkenden Sprache bilden. Während der Vortrag die Rastlosigkeit und Zersplitterung der modernen Arbeitswelt betont, evoziert Chopins Musik Ruhe und Besinnung. Doch ihre leise, zurückgenommene Präsenz lässt sie zu einem kaum wahrnehmbaren Hintergrund werden. Die Kombination aus Vortrag und Musik verdeutlicht interpretatorisch die Botschaft des Gedichts: Chopins Musik, die eine Chance zur Entschleunigung bieten könnte, wird durch die Dynamik des beschleunigten Alltags zunehmend verdrängt. Gegen Ende der Präsentation verändert sich das Tempo des Sprechers: Die Worte folgen langsamer aufeinander, gewinnen an Gewicht, und Chopins Musik tritt deutlicher in den Vordergrund. Dieser kurze Moment der Annäherung zwischen Sprache und Musik erzeugt eine flüchtige Atmosphäre von Ruhe und Tiefe, die jedoch nicht von Dauer ist.

Fazit

Die Präsenz Chopins in der polnischen Lyrik bleibt unverändert, doch die Art und Weise, wie sich zeitgenössische Lyriker:innen auf ihn beziehen, hat sich gewandelt. Während ältere Gedichte oft von einem pathetischen Ton und nationaler Symbolik geprägt waren (vgl. Cieśla-Korytowska 2009, 203), zeigt sich in jüngeren Werken eine stärkere Nähe zum Alltäglichen und eine Reflexion individueller Erfahrungen. Chopins Musik wird zunehmend als Ausdruck universeller menschlicher Erfahrungen eingesetzt – sei es im Zusammenhang mit der Selbstreflexion, Trauer oder der Auseinandersetzung mit der Vergänglichkeit. Der Komponist selbst erscheint in den neueren Gedichten als vielschichtige Figur, in der sich überlieferte Topoi mit einer subjektiven Sensibilität verbinden. Während die ältere Chopin-Lyrik den Klaviervisionär oft mit einer heroischen oder elegischen Aura überhöhte, wagen es heutige Lyriker:innen, seinen Klanghorizont in Bereiche scheinbar prosaischer Erfahrung zu verlegen – sei es in die Bürowelt, an Schauplätze von Naturkatastrophen oder in Orte großstädtischer Freizeitgestaltung.

Die Vielfalt der Herangehensweise an das Phänomen Chopins Musik geht über bloße Nennungen von Musikformen und Werken hinaus: Die meisten Texte knüpfen an Stimmungen und tradierte Semantisierungen seiner bekannten Stü-

cke an – etwa an Anklänge an die polnische Volksmusik in den Mazurken oder die nächtliche Stimmung der Nocturnes. Nur noch wenige suchen nach Analogien zu musikalischen Strukturen, während andere Klangräume entwerfen, in denen Naturgeräusche der mit Chopin assoziierten Landschaften erklingen. Wiederum andere beleuchten Chopins musikalische Qualität, indem sie Alltagspraktiken mit der Tiefe seiner Kompositionen kontrastieren. Viele bauen auf der Überzeugung auf, dass Chopins Musik weiterhin zur kritischen Selbsterkundung und Reflexion über die menschliche Vergänglichkeit anregen kann.

Die zunehmende Subjektivierung der Chopin-Gedichte – also ihre stärkere Fokussierung auf individuelle Wahrnehmungen und Erfahrungen – lässt die auktoriale Lesung zu einer wesentlichen performativen und verständnisfördernden Ergänzung des Textes werden. In Verbindung mit der meistens subtil im Hintergrund erklingenden Klaviermusik entsteht eine wechselseitige Beziehung zwischen dem Chopin-Gedicht und Chopins Musik. Da diese Musik in den Texten häufig als Alternative zur modernen Wirklichkeit erscheint – als Gegenpol zu Hektik, Lärm und gesellschaftlichen Problemen –, ergibt sich im digitalen Raum eine Ambivalenz. Einerseits ermöglichen digitale Medien eine breite Rezeption von Chopins Musik und einen leichteren Zugang zu poetischen Werken, die sich mit ihr auseinandersetzen. Andererseits führen sie zu einer Kontextverschiebung: In sozialen Netzwerken oder auf Streaming-Plattformen erscheinen Chopins Werke oft in fragmentierter, kommerzialisierter oder gar trivialisierter Form – sei es als Hintergrundmusik für alltägliche Inhalte oder als algorithmisch kuratierte Entspannungsmusik. Die durch digitale Plattformen geprägte Form der Verbreitung steht im Widerspruch zu der in den Gedichten evozierten Idee von Musik als Reflexionsraum und Gegenpol zur Schnellebigkeit der Gegenwart.

Diese Dynamik zeigt sich deutlich im urbanen Raum: Projekte wie die Chopin-Bänke in Warschau oder der Chopin-Spot am Warschauer Flughafen veranschaulichen die Ambivalenz zwischen Zugänglichkeit und dem Risiko ästhetischer Trivialisierung. Einerseits bringen sie sein Werk einem breiten, oft zufälligen Publikum näher und integrieren es in den öffentlichen Raum. Andererseits droht durch diese Offenlegung eine Entkontextualisierung: Die Musik wird nicht mehr als Kunstwerk wahrgenommen, sondern verkümmert zur akustischen Kulisse, die inmitten urbaner Hektik ihre ursprüngliche Ausdruckskraft verliert.

Die Chopin-Bänke in Warschau sind multimediale Denkmäler, die es ermöglichen, Chopins Musik an verschiedenen Orten der Stadt zu hören. Doch der Straßenlärm stört den Musikgenuss. Auch technische Verbesserungen wie leistungsstärkere Lautsprecher und eine erhöhte Lautstärke konnten die akustische Qualität in dieser Umgebung nur bedingt verbessern. Der Geräuschpegel der Stadt bleibt eine Herausforderung, sodass die Musik trotz technischer Aufrüstung nicht in ihrer vollen Klangqualität wahrgenommen werden kann. Dieses Phäno-

men wird auch im Chopin-Spot des Warschauer Flughafens deutlich, wo sowohl menschliche Pianist:innen als auch ein selbstspielender Konzertflügel Chopins Werke inmitten eines der lautesten und geschäftigsten Orte der Stadt erklingen lassen. Der Lärm der Umgebung und die Geschäftigkeit des Alltags schmälern die Wirkung dieser musikalischen Interventionen und machen die in den Gedichten thematisierte Fragilität von Chopins Musik erfahrbar.

Die digitale Welt eröffnet der Chopin-Poesie neue Möglichkeiten: Über Online-Plattformen erreichen Gedichte, die von seiner Musik inspiriert sind, ein Publikum, das nie zu einer gedruckten Fassung greifen würde. Nicht nur der Zugang, sondern auch die Wahrnehmung verändert sich: Chopins Musik und ihre poetischen Spiegelungen tauchen in immer wieder neuen Zusammenhängen auf – zwischen Tradition und Gegenwart, zwischen persönlicher Erfahrung und öffentlicher Inszenierung. Die Präsenz im digitalen Raum verleiht der Chopin-Poesie eine neue Dynamik: Sie bleibt lebendig und wandlungsfähig und wird zugleich Teil eines offenen, sich weiterentwickelnden Diskurses über Chopins Erbe und seine Bedeutung für die Gegenwart.

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Part III: **Time and Space in Poetic Sound Art**

Holger Schulze

How to Remember, Sonically? Affective Situated Listening in Audioliterary Docupoetry: *Memory Loops* (2010) and *Audio.Space.Machine* (2019)

What do you and I remember? I don't mean your or my personal history as we commute to work, socialize with friends and acquaintances, or meet a romantic partner; but how do we remember in a larger social and historiographical framework? In other words, what do you or I remember about the past of the societies in which we live? We learn about it from school textbooks, from media productions of various formats and qualities, but also from other people who tell us about it, and from public sites and events of remembrance: our cultural memory in this sense, following Jan Assmann, clearly transcends our everyday experience (cf. 1988)

These acts of remembrance seem to require stability, permanence, and grandeur. Monuments are built of stone, erected and unveiled, decorated and greeted with ceremonial rituals at regular intervals. They imply eternity as their minimum lifespan. Or so we think. Some readers of this chapter might be inclined to add: isn't sound – and, for that matter, poetry – necessarily ephemeral, transitory, purely subjective, and rather unpredictable? Can't it only be understood in a personal context and may not even be suitable for more general and long-term acts of memory? However, these assumptions about monuments and sound are indeed mainly a kind of cliché. On the one hand, we can clearly recognize here the old *audiovisual litany* (cf. Sterne 2003, 15–16; 2012, 9–10) of what sound should really be and how it should be distributed across gender roles, forms of interaction, ascribed meanings and material qualities, and, on the other hand, what I would like to call the *monumentalist litany* of how a society should reasonably remember historical events. I wonder: perhaps it is actually the other way around?

Sound has been recorded and preserved for about 160 years, as have the sounds of spoken words, political speeches, and poetry readings. In recent decades, since the 1980s, a growing movement of anti-monumentalism has proposed and installed a series of alternative monuments and alternative monumental practices, accompanied by a series of investigations and reflections to understand how the traditions of building monuments can, perhaps even must, be transformed into a radically different and more adequate practice of remembrance. These new anti-monuments reject the self-congratulatory and rather obsessive at-

tempt to erect yet another massive edifice in praise or mourning of historical events; they operate in some cases not vertically but horizontally, sometimes even digging into the ground and exhibiting relics underground; and in many cases these anti-monuments leave the act of remembering solely to those who visit the anti-monument and can even contribute to it. It is crucial to note that these new practices have usually grown out of a desire to mark a break, a rupture with imperialist, nationalist, colonialist, racist, sexist and homophobic traditions of the past: Be it Jochen Gerz and Esther Shalev-Gerz's *Monument Against Fascism* (1986), be it Do-Ho Suh's *Public Figures* (1998) or Nicholas Galanin's *Shadow on the Land* (2020) or the *I Am Queen Mary* statue in Copenhagen, designed and installed by La Vaughn Belle and Jeannette Ehlers (2018): all these anti-monuments were born out of a desire to propose significantly different commemorative practices as a material documentation of this break with past traditions. Their alternative practices of commemoration intend to contribute to a different way of living together in a society – also by remembering differently (cf. Stevens et al. 2018).

However, even if one accepts that sonic forms of remembrance can be understood as a kind of alternative or anti-monument, a very pragmatic and almost craft-oriented question remains: is it at all possible to create and offer to the public a sound artwork that can really serve as a kind of memorial, anchor or vehicle for national memory? And if so, how do sound works that aspire to this goal succeed? What are the production techniques and rhetorical means that make this possible? And if language in the poetic sense is employed in such a sound artwork, what are the poetic strategies and means of poetry that can be meaningfully employed?

Two Works of Audioliterary Docupoetry

In this chapter, I will focus on a particular use of poetic strategies that is situated within a form of artistic practice that uses the rewriting of existing documents, testimonies, and documented recordings. This poetics of collecting, arranging, re-arranging, and re-presenting existing historical material clearly continues a larger tradition of documentary poetry (cf. Metres 2007; Harrington 2011; Wazzan 2023) and documentary theater (cf. Lehmann 2006; Logge 2012) – or, in our case, experimental sound pieces. This thread of tension between preserving or reworking of historical material will guide us through the following sections of this chapter.

In the recent history of sound and media art, there are two striking examples of the use of these poetic strategies within sound and radio productions with the

purpose of contributing to memory culture: *Memory Loops* (2010) by the artist and performer Michaela Melián and *Audio.Space.Machine – Ein Bauhaus-Konzeptalbum* (2019) by author and actor Christian Wittmann and composer and performer Georg Zeitblom. Both works take historical texts and stage them with different goals in mind, be it an affective depth in Melián's *Memory Loops* or ironic affects in Zeitblom and Wittmann's *Audio.Space.Machine*. The production strategies used to create these affects will be at the centre of my analysis of both pieces.

Memory Loops won the art competition "Victims of National Socialism – New Forms of Remembrance and Commemoration" by the city of Munich. It was produced over a period of 18 months in close collaboration with the public radio station Bayerischer Rundfunk and the City of Munich. It consists of 24 hours of spoken word recordings with musical accompaniment based on archival testimonies of the Holocaust victims: 16 hours in German and 8 hours in English, covering 300 locations in Munich. They were all accessible by dialing a number on a mobile phone at a time when internet access in public spaces was usually impossible or cumbersome for most mobile devices – before the age of the ubiquitous smartphone. On September 23, 2010, this work was publicly presented to the city at the Munich City Hall. The second piece I want to address in this chapter, *Audio.Space.Machine*, was commissioned by the Deutschlandfunk Köln in 2018, in collaboration with two other German public radio stations, NDR and SWR. It was developed over a period of about a year. In the so-called *Bauhausjahr* 2019, it was the contribution of the national radio to the centennial of the founding of the Bauhaus School of Art and Design in Weimar in 1919. On January 12, 2019, it was first broadcast in a 60-minute version, and a little later it was presented in a 12-track binaural version at the "100 Jahre Bauhaus" in the Akademie der Künste Berlin.

In late 2023 and early 2024, I conducted studio visits and interviews with the producers, artists and authors of these works (cf. Melián 2023, 2024; Zeitblom 2024). Both works of sonic docupoetry were produced for radio and commissioned by a radio station – and both of them were at the same time accessible for a public audience. In the following, I wish to show how these works contribute to memory culture through their audioliterary practices in a sense that they are *digital poetic sound artworks*. They are clearly *sound artworks* by virtue of the production medium, the artistic techniques, and the presentation format chosen by their authors, composers, and performers. They are *poetic* in the sense of docupoetry (cf. Wazzan 2023), because the textual basis of these pieces was not an existing score, but the authors created the acoustically presented texts in a writing process based on existing documents (cf. Benthien et al. 2018). Last but not least, they are also *digital*, because on the one hand they both explicitly and extensively use digital post-production techniques, and on the other hand they are both pre-

sented in a distinctive way that allows the listener to access them in the public sphere: in the streets and public squares of the city of Munich, as in the case of *Memory Loops*, or in various exhibition spaces of a cultural institution, as in the case of *Audio.Space.Machine*.

Memory Loops: Affective Depth through Archival Transcription and Musical Layering

The production of *Memory Loops* underwent various stages; it was, needless to say, not produced solely by the one person that is listed as its author and creator. In my first conversation with Michaela Melián she stressed how this piece was grounded in the work of mainly two groups of people: the first working group being a sort of core team: Michaela Melián as the driving force, conceptual director and main performer worked together with her production assistant Kirsten Böttcher. Mario Thaler, a long-term collaborator with her band F.S.K., did the studio production with her; the website was designed and programmed by Stefan Ammon, also a familiar colleague and working partner of hers; and the mobile app was again produced by another team member. Casting of the 19 voices, among them also those of children, was done externally and so was the voice recording and the translation of all texts into English. The second group of people consisted of experts and colleagues who contributed their perspectives and knowledge in regard of the specific topic of this piece: the deportations and the everyday violence against citizens in Munich during the Third Reich.

Melián's basic idea was to create a piece starting from original footage. However, as the original archival sources of around 8 prisoners at the concentration camp in Dachau proved not to be of sufficient quality for a radio production, these statements, reports, confessions had to be transcribed, reorganized, adapted and partly rewritten to form a consistent series of monologues: texts that one would be able to listen to after a more serendipitous selection. On top of this, 8 additional persons were then recorded for this piece. This decision regarding the lack of audio quality of the original recordings was clearly an effect of Melián's reflection upon the specific listening situation in the public sphere: people would be calling a phone number (and later accessing a mobile website), in order to listen to this digital sound artwork. This situation of a public sphere requires a much better audio production, especially a more distinct and clear separation of the different tracks and voices within one audio file. Moreover, with the audio quality of phone calls still following earlier standards, only the frequency range

of 300–3,400 Hertz was transmitted – a small subset of the bandwidth in which human speech is mainly situated (100 to 17,000 Hertz).

After this sound work was presented publicly for the first time on September 23, 2010, I listened to it as a radio piece and in its online version. Listening to this work about a decade later only documents and confirms the aesthetic rigor of the production as well as the attention to detail and staging when working with all of the voice actors and musicians. I will now take a closer look at the production of this work in order to explain these qualities.

Some of the tracks in this work were staged in a loose sequence: they can be listened to as singular narrations and sound pieces; but listened to in a sequence, they work as a larger piece, telling a more comprehensive story from the perspective of their speaker. This modular composition makes open connections between all the tracks and stories easy, while allowing larger stories to be told. An example of is found on tracks 84–93, in which Beate Siegel a.k.a. B. Green talks about instances of antisemitic aggression and microaggression in Munich between 1933 and 1945. In school and on the street, in shops and everyday life in general:

The first time I came across antisemitism was at school. I needed a new exercise book or pencil or something that one got from the teacher. So, I asked Fräulein Fellner and she said, can't you Jew kids get your own? I told her that I thought we could. When I recounted this to my mother, she became very indignant. It was then that I realized that my teacher shouldn't have said that to me. I was seven years old. (quoted in Melián 2010, track 85)

At this point I must add a personal note about the affective burden and impact that this work still has. As a professional listener and sound scholar, who listens, enjoys, questions, and discusses all sorts of sound pieces, radio productions and media sound artworks on every single day of my work life, I have to confess an experience that occurred to me while listening again to all of the 293 files. This experience is not a common one in my professional listening: I could not bear to listen to more than just a handful at a time. Each of the recordings left me with nausea, vertigo, and the painful sense of a lethal danger, the threat of a death sentence. I had to stop and had to pause. Sometimes I could continue listening several minutes later; sometimes it took me several hours or even the next day before I could continue. For me, my reaction to listening is indeed proof of the lasting impact of Melián's work. As an example of sonic docupoetry, it succeeds in every respect.

Now, since 2010, when this work was first released, the production techniques and styles have clearly developed on many levels. But those texts and their inherent voices, confessing the horrors, the crimes and the threats, the constant fear and violence they narrate, still instill in me a sense of unsettling and disturbing presence. All of the spoken texts signal their historical context of the 1930s

and 1940s; but they are performed so painstakingly present and intimate, as if a close friend or some acquaintance speaks to me (cf. Simecek 2019; Schulze 2020a, 2021). It is too close and too painful to listen to. This is the effect of the attunement that Robert Jan van Pelt writes about in *PRISM – a Journal for Holocaust Educators*, when he writes about this piece: “the music [. . .] ‘attunes’ the listener to the story” (2012, 132). What might sound pretty general and not very remarkable at first, has its roots in distinct material and explicit artistic decisions that Michaela Melián and her team made. Let us look a bit closer how their editing, their voice recording, and their music production was affected by these decisions.

The editing of the archival texts was, as Melián describes it in our conversations, a heavy job (cf. 2023, 2024). It took around six months to complete a series of rather complex and conflicting tasks. First, they selected the recordings of people who experienced the Nazi terror in Munich at that time. Then they transcribed them to text and cleaned all of the selected texts very carefully to remove any stuttering or breathing that would hinder them from being understood by listeners to the radio piece – or those who would listen to it on their phone, on a public square. Also, some heavy local dialects had to be evened out and redacted to be understood. This was all done with support from and intensive discussions with 12 students studying Jewish History and Culture at Munich’s Ludwig-Maximilians Universität. They indeed questioned the editing practices, the selection of texts, and the status of the resulting texts: can they still be regarded as original statements when they had been so heavily edited? At the end there were ten thick folders that were the result of a sort of literary practice of transforming documented statements into poetic texts that could be staged and presented within a professional production. The refinement of the selection then continued, however, as out of these ten folders a smaller group of texts had to be chosen to be those that would be actually recorded and produced. This group of texts was limited to two large folders.

This practice alters the original texts to such an extent that it became clear to many of those involved in the project that the adaptation of spoken language to an artistic work is a process that requires more craft and intervention, more selection and adaptation than one might expect. This aspect became tangible in the discussions Melián had with historians from the Ludwig-Maximilian University in Munich. The historians clearly preferred documentary accuracy and source criticism, whereas the limitations of a radio production and the bandwidth of the mobile devices for which this work was created set firm limits on what kind of spoken language could be used or had to be re-recorded. Melián’s role as the author of this piece was then to find and negotiate a viable path between these two extremes of documentary accuracy and poetic alteration, also in terms of media-specific usage. In the end, these ongoing, and at times apparently heated, discus-

sions resulted in a process of poetic staging that lies at the heart of the concerns and challenges of creating works of documentary poetry and theatre in general.

After this initial process of editing and selecting meaningful texts, which had already taken six months, it took another six months to record all the voices and the music in a private studio and in a studio at Bayerischer Rundfunk. It did not end there, however. As this work should be accessible from mobile online platforms, there were another six months needed to adapt the whole project, and especially the audio quality of the individual files to the technological restraints of mobile phones at the time – before the advent of smartphones. All in all, these 18 months were a gigantic and unimaginable production time for a radio work – and would be almost impossible to do today as harsh and substantial budget cuts are taking place in all public radio stations, all over this planet; usually directed towards the custom quality control processes of producing programmes in the area of the experimental arts.

Returning to the process of voice recording more specifically, Melián addressed in our conversation one core principle: “Do not put too much emphasis and drama into the voice!” (2023b, n.p.). This guiding principle of a strong detachment, of less emphasis and less drama was even the reason why children and their rather untrained voices were asked to read the official documents by the city and by state institutions, official laws, school textbooks or newspaper clippings. As a consequence, the reading they performed was even more alienated and detached. A result that clearly was desired by Melián and her team. To withhold the affect when the texts were performed – and to open up other routes for all the affects later in the production process.

These affects clearly came into play, when Melián worked on the music for this sound artwork. As a first step, she pre-produced samples and beats with Carl Oesterhelt of her band F.S.K./Freiwillige Selbstkontrolle. Melián played all the instruments, including piano and cello, and Mario Thaler produced and mixed the music. Melián’s intention with these samples was to represent a broad, metropolitan and modern, seemingly safe lifestyle, sometimes with a touch of domestic privacy. More specifically, she chose motifs by Kurt Weill, the jazz and swing composer, Coco Schumann, Fanny and Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, and Karl Amadeus Hartmann: a composer whose works were not allowed to be performed during the Third Reich. All these piano motifs form the basis of a safe and modern environment – including all the wide variety of music that would be banned under Nazi rule, all the Jewish culture that would later be annihilated: metropolitan and bourgeois life, especially for assimilated German Jews – before the Nazi onslaught. From the foundation of these samples, Michaela Melián then improvised clustering cello passages as well as passages with xylophone, guitar, bass and glass harp. Piano and cello were the instruments of choice for the musical

education of the children of the upper bourgeoisie in the nineteenth century – and for many German and European listeners in the twenty-first century they still evoke a sense of security and homely warmth. Melián's improvisations quite clearly, and not only metaphorically, brought in the fragility, the instability, and aspects of anxiety and approaching threat into these musical pieces. Still today, this ambiguity of affects in the piece is the fundamental reason for the lasting effect it had on me as a dedicated listener.

While the original texts in their heavily edited form are read rather coldly, even technically at times, matter-of-factly and unaffectedly, their surrounding sonic environment in this sound artwork, the music and sounds, provide actual affective interpretation: We are close to the words of the speakers. We can understand what they tell us very clearly and we can imagine the situations they describe, the acts of terror and the moments when a threat becomes real and felt. The underlying sounds of the music, however, only provide the interpretation of what is going on here – affectively. This effect can be analyzed by employing Julian Henriques' concept of *sonic dominance* (cf. 2011, 17). Though the words and narrations dominate on first listening, the accompanying and underlying music and sounds clearly dominate the listening experience in a deeper sense. As listeners, we experience the narrative and the sonic traces of these past events as accordant. This occurs while we are (or as if we were) standing in the actual places where these events took place, on a square or street, in a house or some institution in Munich. The poetic content is affectively shaped by the music, and experientially and spatially situated by the location where we are listening. Therefore, the listening experience of this sound artwork, though a digital one, is clearly corporeal, situated and sonic, through and through.

In 2012 *Memory Loops* won the Grimme Online Award – one of the most prestigious awards for cultural projects on the web in Germany. The jury argued that in this piece:

Individual lives do not disappear into the statistics here. The everyday nature of violence and repression is given an unsettling closeness and authenticity by the newly spoken audio documents, their harmonious background music and their precise location on the city map. [. . .] Not in the artificial environment of a museum, but in the place of suffering and violence itself, the past becomes tangible. (Grimme Online Award 2012, n.p.; trans. HS)

Following my sonic interpretation, I propose here, I would add that this “unsettling closeness” is a clear effect of the manifold layered working stages on the text sources in combination with the compositional detachment of affect between a cold reading and an affectively loaded musical performance. This specific artistic practice by Michaela Melián and her surprisingly large team of collaborators and researchers allowed for the creation a consistent stream of poetic narration and

sonic affect through all the 293 files, the separate modules out of which this impressive digital sound artwork consists. They created a suggestive *sonic fiction* (Schulze 2020b) of Nazi terror in Munich, so to speak, relaying and evocating historical and personal events at that time. As a sonic fiction, Melián's docupoetry operates not only by presenting the "voices of individuals and actions that mass media has inclined to overlook or misrepresent" (Wazzan 2023, 1430) – but also through "sounding artefacts and imaginations the inherent potential to alter precisely these areas of the epistemological, the sensory, and the political" (Schulze 2020b, 143). By staging the rewritten testimonies within her sound artworks, their presentation becomes a vivid and suggestive sonic intervention in a historical and political discourse. The sound production is not just added value here – it alters the substance of the testimonies and lends them an impressive impact.

Audio.Space.Machine: Ironic Affects through Restaging Archival Sources and Highly Detailed Postproduction

The digital sound artwork *Audio.Space.Machine* written, produced and performed by Christian Wittmann and Georg Zeitblom together with a range of performers, has been presented in two forms: as a work for radio, 65 minutes long – and as an assortment of modules that could be accessed and listened to at an exhibition, 40 minutes in total. Some modules are included in both versions, others only in one. In 2019, when this production came out, I listened to it and I enjoyed it deeply, sonically, with its humor and its playful approach to restaging historical events, artistic manifestos and aesthetic approaches: the Bauhaus and its protagonists are meaningfully dislocated in the digital culture of the twenty-first century – and this allowed me to encounter this historical avant-garde movement anew. In 2024, I listened to this piece in its entirety again. The pervasive intensity of this work struck me again, its cockiness and radical sonic impact is stunning and breathtaking, five years after. I could listen to *Audio.Space.Machine* as an album – on par with the most brilliantly produced and ambitious contemporary recordings in popular music. This sound artwork actually achieves a goal that many productions today aim for but rarely succeed: historical documents of a long-gone period in the arts, the aesthetics of the historical avantgardes in the early twentieth century, become present again. Its audioliterary strategies make this example of docupoetry work. One can sense the avantgardes' transgressive humor and their excessive ambition, their infighting and their mocking of each

other, the ridiculousness of some of their pathetic actions – but also the legitimate and noble goals they bring together here. Zeitblom and Christian Wittmann manage to let me, as a listener, experience and enjoy, even agree with the pathetic and radically gargantuan, aesthetic and revolutionary goals of the Bauhaus activists and artists – and still I can also enjoy the deep irony and often the laughable character of all these endeavors. This ironic affect is a grounding tone in this work. It allows for ambiguity and complexity of affects in understanding these radical modernists of the early twentieth century – from a distance of one century later into the future. Ironic affects work here much better than a musealization and unambiguous praise that often frame celebrations of historical avant-garde movements.

But how was this intensity achieved? In the production of this sound artwork, the authors, composers, performers and producers worked with original voice recordings and original writings, for instance, by László Moholy-Nagy, Walter Gropius, or John Cage, mostly retrieved from the archives of the Bauhaus. As Melián with *Memory Loops*, also Wittmann and Zeitblom, the producers' duo, did not leave any recording, any source, any audio sample untouched. They have reorganized, rewritten, recontextualized, and restaged them in the various sections and versions of this sound artwork, as is customary in docupoetry – and they have even heavily post-produced every single minute of this piece in a mode and with a level of detail that is more common in contemporary studio work with popular music. In this section I will explain in greater detail how this production style differs significantly from the production of *Memory Loops*.

Detailed and time-critical postproduction might seem trivial. It is a common practice in contemporary popular music, especially if the focus is on a versatile and dynamic mixing of the various instrument groups and tracks. However, in the studio work for contemporary radio content, this is actually highly unusual. As a general practice, outside of experimental radio art, the music or the soundtrack are pre-produced and then put underneath or to the side of the vocal recordings. In the particular case of *Audio.Space.Machine*, the various tracks and voices were accurately staged through spatial distribution, with particular filters, distortions and all sorts of additional effects on literally all the voices and all the sounds in, as a matter of fact, real time. It is a practice of audioliterary writing (cf. Jäger 2020; Wehmeier and Wolf 2024; Matter 2025) that is here employed to produce sonic docupoetry with an intense staging through particular sound effects and the placement of voices and sounds within the sound space of the production. Zeitblom and Wittmann clearly benefited from their years of collaboration with professional studio engineer Boris Wilsdorf and his Andere Baustelle studio, and the professional studio albums they produced together. Wilsdorf had previously produced the studio albums of the German band Einstürzende Neu-

bauten, and members of the *Audio.Space.Machine* production team had also been involved in these earlier productions.

All in all, the producer duo did work for ten months on this sound artwork. In the first five months both authors and producers selected the texts of Bauhaus thinkers, designers and artists; they took selected passages from manifestos and speeches of Bauhaus artists, and they developed them into new scenarios and sonic environments, where these text passages could be staged for a contemporary audience. The original texts were not dealt with in the sense of philology or historiography: they were mere starting points for new imaginations that were made to suit contemporary technologies, cultural forms, and obsessions and fears of the twenty-first century. The following passage makes clear how the authors took the original Bauhaus-material and transformed it into a contemporary poetic text, which was then sonically staged in the production. It is a performative irony in action here:

ZITATOR MOHOLY-N. *mit Radioeffekt 1920*

Wir müssen alle räumlichen Mittel mobilisieren, um den Zuschauer aus seiner intellektuellen Apathie zu reißen, ihn angreifen, überwältigen und ihn zur Teilnahme am Spielgeschehen zwingen.

Walter Gropius zitiert aus: *Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, ein Totalexperiment*, (Seite 56), Verlag Florian Kupferberg Mainz 1972

WITTMANN *rhythmisch auf die Musik, Sprechmaschine*

This is not about a few of your favorite things

This is not about comedy

This is not about drama

This is not about a moral institution

This is not about being someone

This is not about being another one

WITTMANN *rhythmisch auf die Musik, Sprechmaschine*

This is not about all is none

This is not about ghosts

This is not about cubism

DWYER

“Totales Theater / Total Experiment”

(Wittmann and Zeitblom 2018, 13–14)¹

¹ The excerpt is quoted from the unpublished script for *Audio.Space.Machine* that Wittmann and Zeitblom have kindly shared with the author.

This reworking of the original material had the clear and explicit goal to produce not a historically accurate and philologically grounded praise of the Bauhaus. A hagiography was to be avoided at all costs. This task was radically different than the task of editing the texts for *Memory Loops*. In this case working with existing texts had the main goal to provide an interpretation that would recontextualize it and look at it from a different angle. Wittmann and Zeitblom chose an angle of a radical contemporaneity of the late 2010s. As if the Bauhaus were not some institution of the past, but as if it had generated Pokémon, if it were a driving force of the Metaverse and contributing to all sorts of social media platforms, AI apps, and even to mobile casual gaming. All of these technological frameworks are not only alluded to in their text – but they are explicitly mentioned and introduced. Walter Gropius is a Pokémon that a boy plays with on his smartphone. Buckminster Fuller is a protagonist of the Metaverse and is actually an AI. During this first stage of the docupoetic reworking of the text, Zeitblom also developed first audioliterary and sonic production ideas around the selected passages. At this early stage, a bass line for example was developed, also a sort of spatial arrangement for the voices, sound environments, for the music and other sound effects. Further, a sequence was outlined for the dialogues and how they might follow each other.

These ideas and sketches could then, in the next step of six more weeks, be tested out in a professional recording studio by Boris Wilsdorf. Zeitblom composed a range of modules to work with when finally putting the whole sound work together. During these sessions, all the pre-produced music material was mixed with the voice recordings and additional instrumental passages were added directly in the studio, for example a harmonium, drums, bass clarinet. As part of this production process, the artists also employed detailed work on various intended glitches of voice actors and a consistent sonic deformation of selected voices and tracks, similar to the audioliterary writing techniques of contemporary sound poetry (cf. Matter 2025). Some passages were strongly distorted, others were simply spatialized in the digital listening space, others were technologically shifted in tone or accelerated. While Melián's main artistic work was in the long pre-production of the spoken and reworked texts and the composition and recording of the musical contributions, Wittmann and Zeitblom's work was in the studio, when mixing and mastering the whole production.

In the final working phase of four additional weeks, after the radio piece was already completed, this production then had to be prepared anew for its exhibition in a large German cultural institution, the national Akademie der Künste in Berlin. The radio version had to be suitable for a range of listening situations, loudspeakers or headphones, and could not be mastered only for a particular set of listening devices. No one could know, and no one will ever know, how a ran-

dom radio listener might listen to a given radio piece. The version for the exhibition, however, had the advantage of a precisely defined listening device of advanced headphones (Bose QuietComfort 35 with noise cancellation). This allowed the production duo to rework and remix their sound piece specifically for this listening hardware and this public presentation environment. The producers were faced with new aesthetic challenges, as the spatial staging of produced music in the sound artwork required a very different approach to that required for dialogue and action. Vocal snippets and actions can be placed quite precisely within a binaural space, whereas finding the right place for produced music is a trickier task: it could have been placed anywhere, depending on aesthetic preferences as well as the requirements of the particular section of the piece.

All of this production, pre-production as well as post-production took place during the entire year of 2018. Therefore, Zeitblom and Wittmann chose to pre-produce and produce this sound artwork at home and in production studios other than those offered by the public radio station. This was also, in part, a choice Melián had made. The biggest contrast to Melián's piece, however, is that the affect addressed and evoked is not a historically triggered sonic trace of past events and their effects. This could have been a choice if they had been working towards philological and historical accuracy with archive material from the Bauhaus. Wittmann and Zeitblom, however, chose to work with ironic affects that are generated by an opposite artistic strategy: an imaginary Gropémon-App ("Gotta catch 'em all!") allowing kids to get access to the work and heritage of Walter Gropius, a Tamagotchi allowing us to care for the afterlife of all the Bauhaus-artists, and many of whom are, obviously, present in the Metaverse, some even co-created this online platform. With these staging frameworks in their radio piece, the authors distance themselves and their material from their original historical context by working with the source material in the style of a radical and provocative playfulness that might even be off-putting to any hagiographic approach to the Bauhaus. This playfulness extends to all aspects of the source material: particular quotes and manifestos, artistic endeavors and projects, personal relations of the Bauhaus-artists and their biography and artistic activities on all levels.

Through this manifold, imaginary presence of the Bauhaus in the accelerated digital culture of the early twenty-first century, we as listeners can encounter anew this historical period of revolutionary approaches to the arts and design. It is a means of comedic distancing, no doubt about that. It rejects any strong and tragic and deep identification with the Bauhaus protagonists. However, it is precisely this non-identification that might lead listeners into an even more intense closeness to past historical events. When listening to this piece, our affects to the Bauhaus are distinctly different than if we encountered them, as usual, through

large black-and-white photographs in expensive coffee table books or academic reflections about their heritage. But in a paradoxical, dialectical move, as a listener to this sound artwork I can, through this comedic distancing, relate much more to the Bauhaus actions and artists. The sonic affects of production and distortion occupy my sensibilities so much, I indulge in them, I enjoy them so deeply that another sonic dominance, as mentioned earlier, can take root through this detachment. I find myself smiling and laughing, inspired and invigorated by this piece's dynamics and sound production that I even forget that its protagonists are not of present times. They become contemporaries of mine, living and designing, demanding and imagining in the early twenty-first century. The Bauhaus is now: "Und wo ist die Gegenwart? Hier ist die Gegenwart!" (Wittmann and Zeitblom 2019).

In 2020 *Audio.Space.Machine* was awarded the *Hörspielpreis der Kriegsblinden* [Radio Play Award of the War-Blinded]: an award that marked the most advanced aesthetic innovations in German radio art since 1952. Its jury writes:

Acoustically, the concept album is held together, driven and carried by rhythm and composition, which act as equitable agents of analysis throughout. With humor and without petrifying in an authoritative didactic perspective, the artists consistently make it possible to experience how much of the elevated Bauhaus concept can be found today. (quoted in Wagner 2020, n.p.; trans. HS)

With these words, the jury actually acknowledges the sophisticated production techniques and the heavy and highly detailed post-production. Following my analysis of the work process and the sonic affects involved, I claim that Zeitblom and Wittmann succeed in creating a continuous stream of sonic and poetic traces through all the tracks and modules, leading the listener through the Bauhaus thought and its history – especially and primarily by ironically distancing themselves and their production from this history, in a dialectical manner. Their sonic fiction re-imagines the historical events in Dessau, at the Bauhaus, as contemporary events in the early twenty-first century: also their "sounding artefacts and imaginations [unleash; HS] the inherent potential to alter precisely these areas of the epistemological, the sensory, and the political." (Schulze 2020b, 143) This transposition and transformation of affects created a much more meaningful relationship with these artists and their activities.

How to Remember, Sonically?

Both sound works remind their listeners of historical events. Michaela Melian's work reminds us, as shown in this chapter, through the *affective depth* of every-

day terror, atrocities and crimes in Munich during the Third Reich. Georg Zeitblom and Christian Wittmann's calls to attention, as also shown in this chapter, all of the thinking, aesthetic goals, practices and craft of the Bauhaus-movement in Germany and beyond – through its *ironic affects*. The affective realm is clearly radically different in both cases. One cannot compare the two pieces in respect of the more particular affects they activate: one leads its listeners to question their own knowledge about the rule of the national socialists and the events of the Holocaust, while the other may lead to an altered and refreshed perspective of the Bauhaus. The dark and existential issues in Melian's piece require a thoroughly different approach than the ironic and playful staging in Zeitblom and Wittmann's piece. We are entering two completely incomparable worlds.

However, aside from these distinct profiles these two pieces present, they operate with affects in a surprisingly parallel manner. Both pieces work with *sonic traces* (cf. Schulze 2018, 111–113) of a particular location that are engraved into a listener's memory and impression of this piece and its protagonists, its actions, its rationale or narration. They also both convey their affective depth or ironic affects through a form of *sonic dominance* (cf. Henriques 2011) in their production rather than through their textual editing, which is either neutral or playful. Both of these means are employed, maybe needless to say, in a consistent manner through all the tracks and modules, in composition and sound design: this consistency keeps listeners close to its figures and its actions. This consistency is then achieved through the imagination and the creation of a sonic fiction. As audioliterary works of docupoetry, both sound pieces operate through the sonic staging of their material, which allows their authors and producers to convey worlds of affective experience that they recognise in these texts and that they intend us to experience – whether as affective depth or ironic affect. The sonic traces of these works imply fictions that, while grounded in historical events, take us elsewhere, into their sonic affects in general. Affective and situated listening in these works is achieved precisely through their sound production. They affect me and you because they place us in a fictional and sonic environment; we feel the traces of and we experience this dominant and consistent sound production. Perhaps this is how these historical events can be remembered, sonically: through affective, situated listening.

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Birgitte Stougaard Pedersen

Tuning in to the *East Village Poetry Walk* (2012)

In 2016, together with colleagues from Centre for Literature Between Media, Aarhus University, I visited New York's East Village. We walked with poet and producer Pejk Malinovsky for a couple of hours. With our minds, bodies, and ears we experienced the *East Village Poetry Walk* (EVPW), an audio tour of poetry-related sites in New York City's East Village. My chapter will address this experience as well as the general phenomenon of the poetry audio walk from the following angles:

Firstly, I will discuss how this audio phenomenon can be characterized and framed across audio media genres, analyzing the poetry walk regarding its use of voices, speech, and montage principles. In this section I will include a theoretical framework dealing with audio walks as a field of practice using the narrative or aesthetic characteristics of audio formats in between different domains such as art exhibitions, literary sound production, radio montages, and cultural heritage museums. Soundwalks, a predecessor for audio walks, were developed as an ethnographic method creating "an attentive concentration on listening" (Drever 2020, 1).

Secondly, the chapter will intersect these methods with the sensory ethnography approach proposed by Sarah Pink (cf. 2015), addressing how the EVPW engages or attunes the minds and bodies of its participants. Malinovsky himself positions his work as an interactive documentary experience (cf. 2012), but my chapter will ask whether it could also be framed as poetic to some degree, outlining here a multisensory experience designed to attune the body, the mind, and the imaginative power of walking while listening.

The first part of this chapter will primarily focus on outlining the phenomenon of poetry walk as such and how it builds on and expands earlier related concepts of audio walks as well as radio documentaries, creating a genre of its own. In the second part I will re-describe how the walking body attunes to the phenomenological experience of walking in East Village.

Introducing *East Village Poetry Walk*

We meet Pejk Malinovsky on October 10, 2016 outside Veselka, a Ukrainian diner in East Village at the corner of 144 2nd Avenue between St. Parks Place and 9th Street. The tour Pejk has prepared lasts around two hours. We are a group of 16



Fig. 1: Pejk Malinovsky and colleagues from Aarhus University, New York, 2016. © Steen Bille Jørgensen.

people taking part in the walk. The tour begins with a visit to St Mark's Church, and from here we walk slowly and concentrated, listening to the voices of dead poets, the researcher Daniel Kane, and the voice-over done by Jim Jarmusch. Pejk has instructed us in advance in possible focus points and changes along the route. Occasionally, we stop for a while, listening to specific stories addressing the concrete places in East Village that we wander through. The pace is rather slow. At some point, we enter a tattoo shop. The continuous walking in silence seems to stretch out or disrupt time. It blurs the sense of present time of the East Village streets. Blocking out the busy sounds of the streets, we create our own time and space while walking. Moving ahead together in silence creates a weird simultaneous feeling of presence and distance. When we stop and listen, we feel the warmth of the October sun cutting through the moderately tall buildings of East Village.

Pejk Malinovski, the producer of *Passing Stranger – East Village Poetry Walk* (2012), is both a poet and a radio producer. Both formats are engaged in creating a strong sense of presence, and the idea of a montage consists of several elements that are layered and combined, and can be said to display a multi-stable, poetic space. The *East Village Poetry Walk* combines physical participation with the use of digital



Fig. 2: Participants walking and listening, New York, 2016; © Birgitte Stougaard Pedersen.

technologies. The MP3-file format and the use of smartphone make it possible to walk around while listening in the site-specific imaginary space that is audially described (Fig. 1–3). As a phenomenon, the poetry walk forms a mixture of the contemporary, the here-and-now, the present, the historical, the journalistic, and the aesthetics of poetry readings. According to the website, the experience is

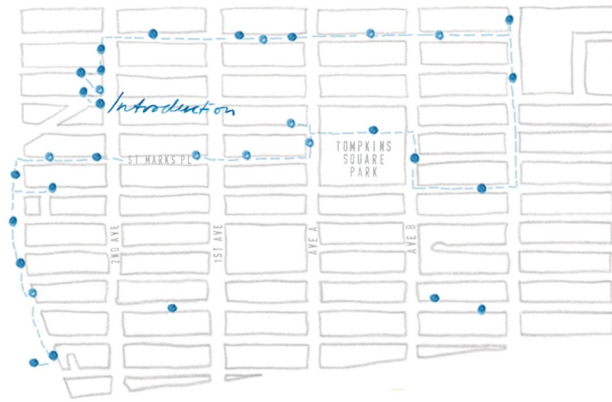
an audio tour of poetry related sites in New York City's East Village. It is produced by Pejk Malinowski, with support from The Poetry Foundation. The interactive documentary experience was created in collaboration with Zeega. The audio file [. . .] and map outlining the route [. . .] allow the user to take the tour using their own mp3 player. The tour is about 2 miles and 95 minutes long. The main focus is on poetry and poets from the 1950s to the present. The tour does not provide a linear or concise history, but rather, like a walk, an anecdotal, digressive tapestry of the poetry that lived and continues to live in the neighborhood. (Malinovsky 2012, n.p.)

The first part of my chapter will be dedicated to framing this audio object with regard to different formats – the audio walk, the radio montage – with an eye to analyzing the use of voices, speech, and montage principles. For a complementary perspective on EWPW as a public poetry phenomenon, please consult Claudia Benthien and Norbert Gestring thorough analysis on this matter (cf. 2023, 102–108).

PASSING STRANGER THE EAST VILLAGE POETRY WALK

Passing Stranger is a sound-rich chronicle of poets and poetry associated with the East Village. Narrated by filmmaker Jim Jarmusch, it contains site-specific poetry, interviews with poets, archival recordings and music by John Zorn.

Click on the blue dots to explore the virtual version or download the walking tour and go to the East Village for the ultimate experience.



about

[click here](#) to download the walking tour

Fig. 3: Pejk Malinovsky. Map of the *East Village Poetry Walk* (2012). Screenshot from Webpage. © Pejk Malinovsky.

Walking with Audio

The idea of *soundwalks*, the precursor of audio walks, originates from acoustic ecology and soundscape studies. Acoustic ecology or ecoacoustics emerged in Canada in the 1970s as a sonic methodology, an exploration of auditory interactions with environments, often leading to new perceptions and understandings of space (cf. Drever, 2020). The soundwalk entails specific value connotations in terms of promoting certain notions of qualitatively good versus bad sound aspects of environments. Soundscape theories, with R. Murray Schaefer as a key figure, thus emphasize our ability to listen as “an exercise of ‘ear cleaning’” (Drever 2020, 6); that is, a method designed to open the listener’s ears to sounds that they do not normally pay attention to. Soundwalks understood as a special listening activity to the prevailing sound environment are still used as a method in fields such as acoustic engineering, architecture, city planning, artistic practice, and social sciences (cf. Drever 2020, 1; see also Westerkamp 2007; McCartney 2014). Acoustic ecology soundwalks are characterized by a genuine openness to the serendipity of the surroundings – an open yet qualitatively normative methodological approach. The EVPW is not a soundwalk in this strict sense; it is an audio

walk using mp3 technology, replacing the sound of the surroundings with the sound of voices, music, and sound effects in your in-ear headphones.

The audio walk as a genre thus originates in the practices of soundwalking. The term *audio walks* has historically been used to describe narrative or aesthetic experiences designed for a specific space or along a predetermined route (cf. Bradley 2012, 100). In cities or museums, audio guides often serve a supporting role, or, as the name suggests, a guiding role for a person whose attention is primarily directed toward the objects and buildings in the vicinity. Audio guides are thus produced for knowledge dissemination where aesthetic means can support communication but are not the primary focus of attention. Audio walks, however, appear in several contexts and with different stated purposes, and they are also used outside museums as part of site-specific artworks or to perform oral history (cf. Bradley 2012). Thus, audio walks can be considered a subgenre within the arts that integrates elements of performance art and locative media technology, bringing forth “perceptual re-tuning, via the deployment of a dramaturgy of situated attentiveness” (Abrantes 2021, 31).

Simon Bradley, in his article “History to Go: Oral History, Audio Walks and Mobile Media” (2012), analyzes some of the production techniques of two specific history audio walks, underscoring that “[t]he short history of oral history audio walks is intimately bound up with a parallel history of technological development” (2012, 99). This point about technology’s importance for the development of combining audio with walking is also emphasized by Toby Butler in his article on memoryscapes (cf. 2007). Memoryscape is a soundwalk concept that invites one to experience the history of a place by listening to the memories of inhabitants, both historical and contemporary, while walking through it (cf. Butler 2007), and in that sense has a lot in common with the EVPW. In the article, Butler writes:

The popularity of MP3 players and a crash in the price of the equipment and software necessary to record and edit professional quality sound and voice has opened up new realms of opportunity for people to narrate, layer and intervene in the experience of moving through places. (2007, 361)

Bradley’s approach to audio walks combines technology with the use of fragmented narrative techniques and the intersection with the affordances of complex layering of audio material – language, sound effects, music. He defines an audio walk as “a series of sound files designed to be listened to through headphones at various points or sections along a pre-defined route” (Bradley 2012, 100). Audio walks perform oral history in a way that involves the listeners’ mobility, often supported by the technological possibilities of the MP3 audio format and portable players, like the iPod, or smartphones as well as, sometimes, locative media’s option of using GPS-based technology. Bradley points to the potential of the

audio walk as a “deepening of sense of place,” revealing the “transitory and flux-like nature of memory, identity, and place” (2012, 105).

This place, consisting of the combination of audio input and mobility through walking, makes the audio walk as an object of analysis hard to conceptualize and retain. The sense of mobility has preoccupied cultural geographers when analyzing places. According to Butler,

many geographers have been exploring more active, sensory, self-reflective and embodied methodologies. These ideas can be used in progressive and liberating ways, although as Cresswell suggests, the metaphors of mobility are not without their own limitations and politics. (2007, 367)

This is in keeping with Sarah Pink, to whom I will return in the second part of this article to further explore how to employ walking as a sensory, analytical ethnographic method. The present chapter argues the need to develop methods to combine audio walks with sensory ethnography from an aesthetic point of view; however, I build on and evolve Bradley’s as well as Butler’s arguments of framing audio walks as genuinely technology-driven. It does not make sense to leave out the technological perspective. I am therefore aligned with Bradley in enhancing the technology-driven aspect of the development of the audio walk, while the analysis, in continuation of a post-phenomenological approach (cf. Ihde 2012, Ch. 10), appears phenomenological – focusing in particular on how walking in combination with technologically mediated sound brings history and poetic experiences to life.

Playing with Genre

The *East Village Poetry Walk* has the character of an assemblage in its use of recordings from poetry readings, both historical and contemporary, including Frank O’Hara, T. S. Eliot, Walt Whitman, Diana Di Prima, John Ashbery, and many more. These recordings are used to create a patchwork of voices, making the genre of the radio montage present as the auditive role model and conceptual grid of the audio walk. Malinovsky appears to be hugely inspired by the Danish radio pioneers in this field. The Danish Broadcast Radio of the 1960s and 1970s, which Ib Poulsen has analyzed thoroughly, developed the radio montage as a highly esteemed genre. The montage creates an imaginary space for the listener, using sound to produce a mix of aesthetic and semiotic means of communication (cf. Poulsen 2006, 127). The radio montage’s auditory semiotic aspects relate to its indexical use of, for instance, documentary sounds. Radio montage analysis inevi-

tably also addresses the role of the speaker's voice, and how voices both create relations to the listener and create an aesthetic space for listening. Historically, due to its popularity in a Danish context, according to sound studies scholar Jacob Kreutzfeldt, the radio montage to some extent developed a genre-specific auditory idiom, or auditive grammar, that derives from a documentary, mostly urban, genre-specific point of view (cf. Kreutzfeldt 2015, 45).¹

The use of the montage principle has had a great impact on a number of art forms, including sound poetry and spoken word albums, where both the use of multiple sound layers and the assemblage character are prevalent features (cf. Matter 2025; Stougaard Pedersen 2025). The montage principles are present in the EVPW, combining several different historical times, voices, sounds, and music, however not very often using sound indexically via, for instance, documentary recordings pointing to specific places. The poetry walk, in contrast to the radio montage, adds the walking activity as an interactive mode of perception inherent in the objects' affordances. The walking activity attunes the body as well as the mind, which genuinely changes the object of analysis to include the activity of the listener. It creates what Tim Edensor would conceptualize as a *mobile sense of place*, produced by "regular rhythms of mobility" (2010, 6) which form a certain non-stationary feeling of a place in itself.

The *East Village Poetry Walk* thus mixes previously known genres. According to Malinovsky, the poetry walk is aesthetically inspired by the assemblage style of Radiolab – a broadcast program and podcast produced by the public radio station WNYC. It is multilayered, fading elegantly in and out of the historical material and present speakers. The journalistic aspects consist of recordings of historical persons, audio clips from poetry reading events, and the literary historical insights into the poetic identity of East Village.

Voices of the *East Village Poetry Walk*

The voiceover of the EVPW is done by the famous independent film director Jim Jarmusch, which colors the walk with a certain atmosphere, adding a contemporary voice to the documentary material. The slow and minimalist style of Jar-

¹ "Auditory grammar thus denotes the rules governing meaningful auditory communication. We know from everyday speech the idea of a *figurative language*, expressed in the way in which elements in a picture surface or a sequence of pictures is organized. The interest in an auditory grammar can similarly focus on the auditory language that operates in sound productions" (Kreutzfeldt 2015, 53).

musch's voice acting creates a certain contemplative tone and not least adds a sense of authenticity to the experience. Doubtlessly, to the listeners familiar with Jarmusch, his voice will also refer to his oeuvre as a film director, and this will affect the experience in a different way, possibly adding an aesthetic "Jarmusch feel" to the overall atmosphere of the walking activity. The music by John Zorn, an important figure for the music scene and record label history of East Village, is used to create an ambient atmosphere and bridge different parts of the walk, for instance, the interruptions, during which the gentle female voice of Kaari Pitkin guides listeners through the walking instructions. "Watch out for cars, they come in two directions here," she says, all the way through taking care of the person walking. This feature, the deictic function of the concrete guiding instructions, creates a bond between past and present, between imaginaries and the walking body. "Are you there?", she asks, suddenly reaching out for you, the walking listener, echoing the phatic language function in Jakobson's sense (cf. 1960, 53–57).

The literary researcher Daniel Kane has written and presents several academic texts that introduce us to the historical aspects of the different schools and poetic practices that were born created in East Village. We learn that both the New York school and the Beat Poets thought that "poetry should be funny and immediate" (Kane in Malinowski 2012). We also learn that the writing cultures of the 1950s and the 1960s had very different practices and habits of writing, the Beat Poets writing solitarily but working with musicians while the New York School poets turned writing into a collective act.

These historical sections are regularly interspersed by poetry performances, all of which have different roles in the montage and feature highly diverse reading styles. Some poets are reading in a calm and measured way, others are screaming. Some poems are recited in a vocal manner that aspires to singing while others are performed in a quiet voice; however, all poetry readings appear rhythmically distinct. Most voices belong to men, although of different ethnicities and different generations. The technical quality of the poetry readings varies due to their historical age. A voice tapestry could sound as follows:

Pejk Malinovsky says welcome in a light tone of voice, congenially introducing the walk and taking care of the walking listener. Jim Jarmusch takes over in a deep, sonorous, and slightly guttural tone, presenting himself as a big fan of poetry and welcoming us to the East Village universe. "Let us go then, you and I," T. S. Eliot interrupts, reciting his poem in a nearly song-like style and fades out again. Kaari Pitkin, speaking in a friendly voice, interjects frequently – "are you on the top of the stairs?", trying to stay close to the walking listener.

As this description shows, the audio walk is constructed within an extremely complex structure that is far easier to experience and take part in than to describe.

One of the central audio clips deals with the nineteenth-century American national poet Walt Whitman. We hear Whitman himself reading the poem that has inspired the EVPW's name. The poem is called "To a stranger" and must be the oldest sound recording of the walk. I call it central to the EVPW because this is the only instance when Malinovsky uses technological doubling of voices. While Whitman is heard reciting his poem, Jarmusch is suddenly reciting synchronously with him, followed by several amateurs reading one line each. Whitman fades out, the amateurs take over. These lines are rhythmically displaced, appearing cacophonous and polyphonic.

This vocal polyphony of the *East Village Poetry Walk* as a whole, the poetry readings, the interviews, as well as Jim Jarmusch's voiceover and Pitkin's instructive voice create an oral attention toward the environment – a vocal tapestry that attunes the movements and thoughts of the listener to a general poetic mode. At a traditional poetry reading event, you will know who the poetic voice belongs to and only hear one voice reciting. Conversely, in the EVPW, the frequent change of voices speaking can make it a bit hard to orientate – to know who is presently speaking. It might, however, be the deliberate communicative strategy of the piece. We do not necessarily know who speaks, but we meet and traverse the neighborhood through a patchwork of voices that together takes us into East Village as a poetic place.

Apart from the voices, the EVPW also makes use of ambient sounds, Zorn's background music, and indexical signs like, for instance, the sounds of church bells when we pass a church. However, compared to a more classic radio documentary montage, ambient sounds are downplayed. The ongoing use of music clips serves both to underpin the general atmosphere of the pieces and to conjure up a historical, period-specific acoustic context – for instance Charlie Parker's saxophone solo, or the musical use of bongo drums, or historical recordings of 1950s Puerto Rican salsa – supporting the story *and* providing it with continuity from one passage to the next.

The walk also introduces a more metaphorical concept of voice, for instance when an interviewed resident of the neighborhood talks about the "voice" of the village and how it has changed from a more industrial atmosphere, where the smell from the factory producing bird seed dominated, through gentrification toward a more well-off group of inhabitants and a different, gentrified, atmosphere. You could call the aim of the entire piece EVPW an effort to create a metaphorical documentation of the voice belonging to East Village.

Before I move on to the analytical framework of the sensory walking experience of the EVPW, I will sum up my observations so far that were based on the audio production combined with the framework of audio walks, oral history, and radio montage with a view to what characterizes this piece. One central question

is whether this specific composition of voices, background sound, and music – obviously leaving out the actual walking – communicates primarily via aesthetic or documentary means. Both, I would suggest, to fully grasp the complexity of the EVPW. To expand this argument: the audio walk produces oral history while performing a sound portrait of a neighbourhood. This is done via the montage genre features. The title “Passing strangers” – strangers who become known to us through their locality – refers both to a poem by Whitman, “To a stranger,” and to a popular song performed by Billy Eckstine, Hal Mooney, and Sarah Vaughan in 1957. It is thus a poetry memorial, giving both a documentary and an aesthetic voice to past nameless inhabitants and to poets living or having lived in East Village. The ephemeral experience of voices of the past is reinscribed in the specific buildings and streets, evoking the atmosphere of the neighborhood.

This, furthermore, raises the question: Which communicative strategies does the audio walk use to create this affect? Once again, I will point to the complexity of the enunciation: Which and whose perspective is prevalent in this piece? The audio walk produces sociological encounters when presenting cultural history knowledge, situating poetry as an important player in the development and atmosphere of East Village. It also represents political voices in dealing with the social roles of the poetry and artists in the neighbourhood’s life, as well as the social conditions and gentrification of East Village. The walk portrays the social situation people were living in.

Relational encounters occur when the walk builds a certain shared identity between the past and present inhabitants of East Village. The poetry and different voices create a community-building link between past and present, for instance via the interplay between the recorded speaking voices and the contemporary listener, whose walking body attunes to the surroundings through listening to the voices. In that sense, the piece significantly resembles a radio documentary, however filtered through refined aesthetic modes of communication. Listening to poetry, mediated and sometimes doubled voices, background sound design, and music continuously experienced through the embodied activity of walking – a kind of sensory ethnography or imaginative encounter – produces a meeting between history, poetry, body, and movement (cf. Pink 2015). As such, the EVPW can be seen as part of what has been termed a return of the oral aspects of storytelling – something which the audiobook as well as podcast culture are part of (cf. Have and Stougaard Pedersen 2016, 129). It renegotiates the established boundaries between aesthetic and journalistic communication at the same time as it nudges sensory hierarchies in new directions, to some degree maybe even questioning the unequivocally dominant status of language connected to writing by juxtaposing writing with writing for sound. By walking this tour, a poetic auditory grammar is created, an auditory sensitivity, sensory attention, to one’s surround-

ings. The audio file creates immersive environments by guiding participants through physical spaces with synchronized audio narratives, often provoking deeper emotional and intellectual responses to the surroundings. As the next part of this chapter will show, the *activity of walking* adds to this deepening of response.

Toward a Multisensory Poetic Experience

The second part of this chapter addresses how the *East Village Poetry Walk* engages or attunes the minds and bodies of its participants. Malinovsky himself positions his work as an interactive documentary experience, but I approach it rather as a poetic experience, outlining a multisensory reading practice designed to attune the body as a whole.

According to Steven High, the audio tour as an oral history format forces us to confront the singular historical event in a listening mode that is driven by fixating or slowing down the pace of experiencing via pre-designed soundtrack, in addition to its capacity to present a co-existence of different times and places (cf. 2013). In EVPW, the interplay between the time-bound soundtrack and the ongoing orientation taking place while walking creates a walking-listening activity that can be framed as a certain kind of meaning production – or what Sarah Pink denotes “sensory ethnography” (2015). Pink’s notion of sensory ethnography deals with how humans enter into relations and experience their surroundings in ongoing processes between presence, past, and future. To Pink, ethnography “is a reflexive and experiential process through which academic and applied understanding, knowing and knowledge are produced” (2015, 4). This type of knowledge might not be presented in established academic forms – Pink herself uses video documentation or walking as knowledge-producing formats. What I take from Pink’s approach is primarily a profound attention to the senses and the importance of embodiment in ethnographic work: “that the researcher learns and knows through her or his whole experiencing body” (2015, 27). The body takes part in and becomes itself a producer of meaning. Not only hearing or seeing, not involving one sense hierarchically positioned above the other, but the body as a whole, and, in this example, a body on the move. As Tim Ingold puts it, “the eyes and ears should not be understood as separate keyboards for the registration of sensation but as organs of the body as a whole, in whose movement, within an environment, the activity of perception consists” (2000, 268).

Combining this situated body with the place – as in this case East Village – Ingold talks about the environment as a “zone of entanglement” (2008, 1797). This

notion emphasizes how places are never simply places, but also ways of living in relation to environments. What interests me here, calling for a methodology that takes the interplay of factors into account, is how Ingold's ideas are embedded in Pink's sensory ethnography. I propose the audio walking activity as a concrete way to conceptualize such a zone of entanglement – displaying an interplay between the poetic voices of the EVPW and the experience of the surrounding city (cf. Pink 2015, 37). This forms a triadic analytical position that is genuinely both multisensory and multistable, to borrow a concept from Don Ihde (cf. 2012, 17). Multistability points to singular situations in which technology and relations to technology form our experience of the world, transforming “this immediately experienced environment” (Ihde 2012, 17). In dialogue with Pink's processual and situated concept of knowledge in her sensory ethnography, the notion of multistability might be what we need to develop: a vocabulary to theorize the complex meaning-making processes across time, mobile place, and individual experiences of walking in East Village.

According to Pink, sensory ethnography is project-specific. Walking in East Village means combining the stories of the voices in your ear and the movements of your body while maybe occasionally losing your sense of direction and needing reorientation. Analyzing this requires a process-oriented approach focusing on the complex grid of cognitive and physical movements working together in a multisensory manner, hereby creating the poetic attunement (cf. Koldkær Højlund 2017, 49) toward the surroundings, combining listening via technology and following the instructions of the guiding voice. The tour takes about an hour and a half, which also affects the interplay between listening, body movements, technology, and urban environment: the listeners have to stay tuned and concentrated for quite some time, which may present a challenge to the experience. You can become tired, you can get lost, the surroundings might have changed, etc. My point is that the distribution of body movements and time becomes a crucial part of creating the poetic experience.

Following Pink, I obviously should have documented the textures of the actual experience to meet the criteria for a sensory ethnographic analysis. How can I recall and recap across oceans and an eight-year timespan? I have tried to reenact the walk in my Danish environment, walking not in East Village but in suburban Denmark. Thus, for this analysis I have only listened on the move in order to encounter the bodily experience of moving while listening, creating a mobile sense of place which, of course, is not comparable to the original experience but has acted as a substitute for the analytic purposes. When I walk in a different landscape, listening to the poetic voices of Ron Padget, T. S. Eliot, and Jim Jarmusch, a different kind of mobile sense of place is produced. The walk is dis-

placed from its origin, but I can still experience an interplay between my body walking, poetic voices, and the surroundings.

When I walk, following the edges of the fields in suburban Denmark, I see a winter-green landscape in front of me instead of the vibrant East Village. I do not have to watch out for pedestrians or cars but can establish my own walking rhythm while listening to stories of poets, poetry, and buildings in New York. The instructions for walking are missing their indexical meaning, in a sense they become fictive, as if I am wandering around the landscape of a dream or a novel. However, I still get the sense of poetry, of a poetic mode or atmosphere. In a way, the poems are left hanging in the trees around my neighborhood. The context for walking and listening is changed, but they still activate poetic engagement.

In that sense, the EVPW creates a context-dependent multistability (Verbeek 2000, 118). Every walk becomes new by creating a displaced poetic situation that offers situation-specific relations between technology, place, and the person walking, emphasizing the situational aspect of experiencing literature that becomes increasingly important when discussing a digital literary landscape (cf. Engberg and Stougaard Pedersen 2023).

A Poetic Sense of Place

Toby Butler and Simon Bradley both emphasize the audio walk's capacity to evoke a deepened sense of place. My contribution to this is stretching their argument to ask how the EVPW not only gives us access to knowledge on the literary history and enhances our understanding of cultural and historical contexts, but also attunes us to East Village as a poetic place: the act of walking produces a poetic sense of place.

To recall Kane's statement in the EVPW, "poetry should be funny and immediate." As a recapitulation this could be linked to how Jonathan Culler describes poetry as part of our reality – not being "the creation of a fictional world but the simple event of establishing itself, constituting itself as a lyric" (2015, 131). Culler conceptualizes poetry performance by its ability to convince, move, and grab our attention (cf. 2015, 130), and this performative, poetic mode of language can, according to Louise Mønster in continuation of Culler, "persuade and move us, [. . .] make us act" (2022, 19; trans. BSP). This is, I argue, what takes place during the poetry walk. The listeners adopt a different mood in relation to our surroundings, direct their attention toward the buildings, streets, smells, and people around them in new manners. They move and are moved. The poetic walk facilitates an

encounter between the audio production and the walking listener, forming a certain poetic mode of language via the voices used, and by maintaining the listener's attention when walking through the city. This takes place via the participation of the moving body and is enabled through digital technology, although always caught in a singular, situated event – not only by being a route representing a place but also via the relationality producing this place (cf. Saunders and Moles 2016).

The *East Village Poetry Walk* can be seen as an example of poetry dissemination in the era of podcasts, where reading experiences are shifted from books to site-specific and corporeally engaging sonic poetic situations, displaying a strong bodily materiality as well as a fragile, immaterial ephemerality (cf. Stougaard Pedersen 2023). By fragile, I mean that digital formats are sensitive to obsolescence, for instance due to updates in operating systems, meaning that digital literary formats have limited operational time. Ephemeral should also be understood in the sense that cities change and that you can listen to the audio file somewhere other than NYC. When we walked the tour in 2016, several buildings had already changed – for instance, a specific place during the walk where there used to be a church was now a construction field.

All these different aspects affect the experience of the space created by the poetry walk. It is a space of imaginative force, using the embodied experience to create resonance with the historical and physical space – as Malinovsky himself calls it, a digressive tapestry of the poetry that lived and continues to live in the neighborhood – also when we walk through it today taking into account the co-existence of different times and places. I argue that this imaginative force gives rise to a poetic attunement toward the environment across historical distances, forming East Village as a poetic, eternally emergent place. It develops a poetic way of knowing that emerges through the process of listening and walking. The senses are thus part of this production of space that exceeds the notion of audio walks as representing oral history in the way Bradley and others have described it. Not only does the poetry audio walk represent historical knowledge, it also generates a poetic mode. We are being moved while moving physically or mentally through East Village.

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Zoë Skoulding

The Sound of Contagion: Poetry and Community in the Online Performance Series *Language is à Virus* (2020–2021)

Technologies, in mediating spatial relationships, change the physical character of voice and sound in poetry through altering modes of contact, proximity, intimacy and distance. While this tendency is as old as poetry, which may itself be regarded as a technology of the voice, the acceleration of digital technologies and increased reliance on virtual spaces, especially since the Covid-19 pandemic, make this a striking aspect of contemporary poetry, and especially of sound poetry. This chapter concerns an example of how new technological affordances combined with the circumstances of the pandemic enabled the formation of a collaborative network of poets, musicians and artists through the *Language is à Virus* series co-hosted by Felipe Cussen and Martín Bakero. Jean-Luc Nancy's work on listening and community provides a framework in which it is possible to observe how new ways of being together emerge through sound poetry and improvisation, and why they are worth sustaining as the pandemic fades into collective memory. As technologies shift and change, poetry's orality takes on renewed significance, not as a retreat to its history as a primarily oral form, but as a catalyst for contemporary developments.

Claudia Benthien and Wiebke Vorrath observe that the meaning of the term *sound poetry* shifts in translation:

Contrary to the German usage of the term *Lautdichtung* the English equivalent 'sound poetry' seems to cover, in general, a somewhat larger spectrum of acoustic poetry types. Whereas the German term is more closely associated with extreme variants of experimental poetry that overcomes words and sentence structures altogether – and therefore fundamentally provokes and questions understandability – the English term also incorporates forms of acoustic poetry that still rely on grammar and conventionalised meaning. (2017, 6)

I will refer to sound poetry in this broader sense, while exploring what Benthien and Vorrath notice as an “aesthetic tension or shift between materiality and

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meaning” (2017, 6), as well as the possibilities offered by this “performance inter-medium” (Higgins 1993, 1182), in which sound is the most important element in a configuration of performance approaches.

In a time of rapid technological adaptation, how do the sonic spaces of poetry react to or shape ideas of community? Jean-Luc Nancy’s theorizing of community in *Being Singular Plural* (2000) is connected with his subsequent work in *Listening* (2007), where listening and community are linked in the idea of timbre. Timbre is described in terms of colour and texture of sound; it is informed by the other senses; it is what creates the unique character of a sound, but that character is plural, infected by something else:

[T]imbre resounds with and in the totality of perceptible registers. In this resonance, the mutual *mimesis* of the senses, if there is one, is not distinguished from the already evoked *methexis*: participation, contagion (contact), contamination, metonymic contiguity rather than metaphoric transference. (Nancy 2007, 42)

Μέθεξις, or *methexis*, a term rooted in participatory forms of Ancient Greek drama, relates to both performance and performativity, the formation of community through contagious plural subjectivity. Nancy places sonic transmission at the heart of this process, and his note to the passage above shows him thinking about sound in spaces:

More generally, we should examine those contagious referrals of timbre to the register of physical sounds (liquid, flow, rustling, banging, tearing), to that of animal voices (howling, growling, chirping, mooing), to that of materials (brassy, wooden), then to all the registers that the description of listening to instruments or voices seeks (what plucks or slides, what strikes, what vibrates) [. . .]. (2007, 84)

The social participation of *methexis* is grounded in its physical and material contexts; the self is imagined in terms of the “singular plural,” which is a plurality that includes non-human animals and materialities as well as human others. Sound poetry, in its typical context of co-present live performance, emphasizes the sonic aspects of language so that the poet’s voice is “contaminated” with these other registers. Extended vocal techniques may be used to produce sounds that are no longer tied to semantic meaning at all, but which explore the vast repertoire of vocal sound beyond language. The development of sound poetry alongside techniques of free improvisation in music has led to collaborations with musicians as well as other poets, since the abandonment of a singular lyric voice with a centralized locus of expression creates a space for more plural forms. Vadim Keylin foregrounds this plurality in the context of sound art, emphasizing the connection between “the sociality of sonic interactions and the material specificity of the sound medium in which they are realised” (2023, 3). His approach to

the “doing” or practice of sound-making, interpreted through pragmatism, brings these related aspects into focus, prioritizing collectivity over the boundary between subject and object, or between human and non-human actors (Keylin 2023, 3). A focus on practice similarly frames my argument here, since it is situated within my own participation in the events I will describe, which arose from effects caused by an extremely significant non-human actor, the Covid-19 virus. Under its influence, spaces, sounds and ways of being together were revealed and radically altered.

The genre of poetry reading or performance has proved highly adaptable to Zoom, and such events proliferated during the Covid-19 pandemic, connecting poets and audiences suddenly and globally in ways that would previously have required funding applications, substantial air travel and complex organization. However, this raises the question of what happens to communities in the flattened space of virtual communication, when embodied sound, with all the timbral richness of different physical spaces, is translated into digital signals. The apparent collapse of contexts not only challenges habitual frames of listening but demands a new understanding of poetry’s relation to the world, of the materiality of its circulation and of its role in forming communities. Specifically, I am interested here in the circulation of sound poetry in experimental, avant-garde networks, rather than the concerns of mainstream publishing and performance, and in the cross-contamination of artistic forms, technological possibilities and multilingual practices that emerges most strongly in the intermedial traditions described by Higgins (1993, 1186).

As a language-based form, however far it departs from conventional uses of language, the performance of sound poetry raises questions about the self, voice, presence and meaning. For Nancy, the self is not a self-sufficient individual, but a singularity within a context that is always plural. His phrase “being-singular-plural” insists on the difference at the heart of togetherness, and on the space between singularities which is the common ground of community. If this space disappears in the complete fusion of beings, then so does the possibility of community. It is often distance, rather than proximity, that enables new understandings of community. In contrast to the closed or “immanent” communities defined by nationalism, in which poetry as individual expression is often seen as an articulation of essential identity, the “singular plural” enables us to think about the poem as inhabited by its others. In considering the distant, interrupted form of the online gathering, it takes on particular relevance. “There is no meaning if meaning is not shared,” Nancy writes, suggesting, in *partagé*, both sharing as what is held in common and sharing as what is divided (2000, 2). He continues: “Meaning begins where presence is not pure presence but where presence comes apart [*se disjoint*] in order to be itself *as such*” (Nancy 2000, 2). The flicker and delay of the Zoom

meeting are literal reminders of the person-to-person distances that communities already inhabit, just as translation can be a reminder of the distances traversed in reading. Technology is already intrinsic to sound poetry, before the development of these virtual possibilities, since it is the awareness of recorded sound, the “secondary orality, founded on a graphism” that enables it to exist in its contemporary form (McCaffery and bpNichol 1978, 10).

Poetry’s migratory evolution between orality, literature and the secondary orality of technology means that it shifts between contexts, often inhabiting several at the same time. Nancy’s notion of community may appear to be in sharp contrast to the one outlined by Benedict Anderson, who shows how a national imagination is constructed through cultural forms (cf. 1983). Comparing the two, Pieter Vermeulen argues that they are complementary, because “the formal capacities of literature exceed its ability to formulate an ideological affirmation of the nation; rather, literature also offers a space where a different, non-national form of community can be imagined” (2009, 103). Vermeulen is referring to literature, and specifically the novel, because it can resist abstractions, but performance and exchange in poetry give even more concrete forms to cultural imaginings and alternative forms of non-national community. Sound poetry as it is known today, shaped by the sociality of the performance space as much as by concrete visual forms of the avant-garde and neo-avant-garde, has long produced alternative networks in resistance to national structures, although they have not been as intentional, structured or cohesive as traditional usage of the word “community” might suggest. As Jed Rasula has shown in his narrative history of Dada and its aftermath, these have frequently occurred through a pattern of accident, fracture and collision, from the wartime coincidence of the short-lived Cabaret Voltaire to subsequent eruptions of Dada in Berlin, Paris and New York (cf. 2015, Ch. 1). For example, the theatrical performance of Hugo Ball’s sound poetry, multilingually fragmented and devoid of semantic meaning within any given language, responded to the international and mixed art-form context of the Cabaret; while distinct and original, it relied on the collective situation, which it, in turn helped to produce (cf. Rasula 2015, 18–27).

More recently social media networks have not only opened up the promise of global community, but also profoundly altered the individual’s sense of self, as Roberto Simanowski argues, by encouraging an unreflective sharing of content and an outsourcing of memory that, as he sees it, results in losses for the self and society (cf. 2018, Ch. 2). While online “sharing” is part of everyday life, the word has taken on a new meaning in connection with distribution and promotion, as in the frequent request “please share widely in your networks.” It does not refer to what is genuinely held in common; it is a mimetic duplication in place of the opening to otherness suggested by the contagion of *methexis*. Tony D. Sampson

revisits Gabriel Tarde's late nineteenth-century monadological vision of social relations via Deleuze and Latour in order to theorize contagion in an age of networks; rather than seeing contagion as a biological metaphor and a means of representation, he presents it in terms of the assemblage, which is relational at every scale (cf. Sampson, 2012, 3). Recognition of contagion's inevitability is contained in the idea of the singular plural, which is a relationality that cannot be reduced to the singular; all boundaries imposed by language, whether those of the individual or the nation, are sites of encounter and potential transformation. A discourse of fear surrounding physical or virtual contagion leads to an idea of "sharing" that is instead predicated on the replication of sameness.

Drawing on Nancy, Simanowski observes that much of the communication that takes place in the context of social networking is phatic, a means of "being-with" that is necessarily superficial, leading to a sense of community in which difficulties or differences are left unchallenged because it is not tethered to the material spaces of daily existence, and seems to transcend the political realities of living in a demarcated national space (cf. 2018, 131–149). In the sound poem, by contrast, the phatic function plays a different role as a commentary on its own construction. As G. M. Lang notes, "All agree that we are phatic when we confirm that a linguistic channel of communication is open with the um-hum's and and-uh's which so punctuate our speech" (1979, 104), and sound poetry often develops from this point. The metapoetic reflexivity of the sound poem inserts a distance in communicative channels, which are the same channels through which community is established. The performance of sound poetry online, particularly in collaboration with others, is therefore a means of "being-with" that can be distinguished from the phatic communication of social media. The recontextualization of voice as poetry demonstrates relationality down to the level of speech particles, where contagion rules and meanings multiply.

In the example I will discuss here, a community is framed and enabled by social media, but the imaginative misuse of Zoom videoconferencing enables a distinct form of *methexis* to take place. Language is à Virus began as an international group of poets, predominantly with an interest in sound, orchestrated by two Chilean poets, Felipe Cussen in Santiago de Chile and Martín Bakero in Paris. For 52 weeks, from March 2020, every Wednesday evening, an invited poet or artist presented their work on Zoom, either giving a live performance of recent or current poetry or sound art, or offering a retrospective gathering of previous work via recording. A discussion was led by Cussen and Bakero, and the final part of the session was dedicated to a sound improvisation, which enabled a more immersive experience. 2020 was significant for being the point at which new technological affordances, combined with the effects of previous decades of international contact, enabled up to forty sound poets to improvise virtually

across continents on a regular basis. Digital technology alone would not have produced these circumstances, or the commitment that kept the event running. Different networks of poetry and sound festivals across Europe and Latin America had enabled friendships and collaborations to develop over many years, and the sudden suspension of these activities in the pandemic created the time for them to combine and coalesce. Recordings of the events were made available on YouTube, creating a record of spontaneous conversation located in the problematics of practice and collaboration.

Cussen and Bakero share an interest in collective forms of art-making, which in Cussen's case extends to forms of conceptual and citational poetics that break down distinctions between poet and reader while relying on critical distance, irony, and often humour in the act of reading or listening. This critical element is further supported by Cussen's dual role of poet and academic, and his public persona, which self-consciously enacts the role of "el poeta Felipe Cussen" in Chilean political life, particularly through a series of provocative letters to newspapers; his doubled Felipe Cussen is a "singular-plural" position that addresses a critical collective in the public sphere through humorous yet purposeful confrontation. As curator or co-curator of numerous poetry events and exhibitions, he creates collective works in which his role is supportive, but critically framed and with an emphasis on dialogue. He is also a DJ with an interest in the poetics of sampling, which locates creativity in an organizational and recombinatory rather than expressive mode. Bakero's emphasis in sound performance is on the drone, on trance states that embrace performer and listeners in an embodied response to – and participation in – aleatory sound. His career as a sound poet in Paris, influenced by figures such as Ghérasim Luca and Henry Chopin, has gone hand in hand with his work as a therapist, where boundaries between the real and imaginary, or between sound and meaning, may similarly be explored. The dissociation of semantic meaning from sound takes on a psychoanalytical significance in his work, as in his immersive sound piece that morphs the word "problema" into "poema" (Bakero 2015). For Cussen and Bakero, curating is a necessary part of a creative act, and the making of a collective space is integral to the practice of being a poet. By combining their different approaches, the series was able to connect theoretical reflection, situated response and improvisational practice, revealing and transcending the limitations of the lecture room or the public performance as spaces in which poetry and its communities are formed. There was a sustained interest in wider contemporary politics: Carlos Soto Román presented work that addressed Chile's 1973 coup through his documental work *11* (2023), in which musical performance and erasure poetry were combined, bringing experimental techniques to bear on Chilean communal memory (cf. Bakero and Cussen 2020f). The meetings made reference to the Chilean constitutional referendum of

2020, the attack on the Capitol in 2021, and the final unravellings of the UK's membership of the EU.

The reference to William Burroughs in the name's guiding image is not accidental: to imagine language as a viral form is to see a non-human agency at work in its movement and spread, and to reframe human creativity in collective rather than individual terms. It draws on and develops a previous history of group interactions in and around poetry, particularly those linking Chile and Europe, as well as emerging landscapes of publication and performance in which the lines between authorship, curation and participation are blurred. The virus is a non-human entity that exposes the frailty of human bodies, as does technology, as the non-human presence through which virtual experience is filtered. The Austrian poet Jörg Piringer reminded the third session that new technology does not in itself necessarily lead to new poetic production (cf. Bakero and Cussen 2020b), but the series became a space for artists and poets to develop the creative possibilities of Zoom, often exploring the subtleties of an audio interface for live sound or the use of digital backdrops to layer visual effects. Most events were in English because of the mixed linguistic assemblage of the group, which included contributors from Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Mexico, UK, USA, France, Belgium, Germany, Austria and Slovakia. In embracing Zoom, which was built for business, it made the limitations of the platform visible, turning its affordances to creative use but also critiquing the illusion of immateriality created by virtual environments. Jennifer Scappettone, tracing links between copper mines and transatlantic connectivity, reminded her listeners of the "material substrate of the wireless imagination" (in Bakero and Cussen 2021b). Meetings included film, dance, installation art and music, expanding the reach of poetry but always coming back to the physicality of voice mediated by screen.

The different languages of the participants meant that elements of translation were integral to the proceedings, creating opacity as well as porous connection. Often the recordings reveal a tension between closeness and distance, a frustrated yearning to bridge geographical separation, but also a surprise at the possibilities of the virtual medium. The Nuyorican poet Edwin Torres begins his performance by reciting a cut-up of a review, disrupting his own presence on the screen by shining a torch on his face, then covering his head in wires. As a poet working between the two main languages of the group, Spanish and English, he performs an acrobatic Spanglish, using sound poetry as a resistance to settling in one language or another, the notion of "settling" itself unsettled by decolonial practices of translanguaging (cf. Dowling 2018). In the ensuing conversation, Welsh poet Rhys Trimble draws out comparisons with his own bilingual practice. Performing bilingually in the context of Wales, where Welsh is a minority language, Trimble refers to his own sound-driven performances, in which a "vis-

ceral” sense of presence compensates for different levels of understanding on the part of the audience. How can this embodiment be transferred to a screen? Torres suggests that words can produce haptic affect if the performer can “believe in the microphone’s ability to transmit words as touch” (in Bakero and Cussen 2020c). He relates this to “writing with the ear”, suggesting that since sound and touch are on the same continuum of vibratory experience, the power of words to “touch” is not figured in terms of semantic meaning, but the point at which meaning between languages is disrupted into sound. Iranian-Canadian poet Ghazal Mosadeq reminds the group that on a screen, the primary sense is visual, while the UK-based Chilean poet Luna Montenegro points out that there is no eye contact on Zoom, which changes the body’s response to others. Cussen notes that silence is also changed; whereas in person it might signal thoughtful reflection on the other’s speech, the potential for digital delay and glitches makes this uncertain. This conversation, early on in the series, highlights the significance of these meetings as a context for discussing the channels of communication that were being used and the ways in which these were mediating interpersonal relationships as well as creating artistic possibilities.

The situation invited translanguaging, not only because of the two dominant languages but because many, if not most of the participants foregrounded the presence of different languages as an aspect of intermedial creation. New York-based Puerto Rican poet Urayoán Noel’s presentation is explicit in this respect, maintaining a rhythmical switching between Spanish and English. Code switching is usually subject to the subtle pressures of communities inhabiting embodied spaces but in the decontextualization of the Zoom meeting it takes on a more deliberate pattern. His performance begins with a series of anagrams on the screen from “RACIAL CAPITALISM” and “CAPITALISMO RACIAL,” such as “CARPAL SAC MILITIA” and “OCCIPITAL MALARIAS.” He announces that he is going to improvise: “You don’t have to pay attention to the screen – why is attention something that has to be paid, anyway?” (Noel in Bakero and Cussen 2020h). His self-translations contribute to the reflexivity of a performance in which communicative modes and languages are multiplied, creating a distance from semantic meaning. Consequently, homophonic slippages of interpretation enter the monologue, for example: “digitality, by which I mean a digital tally of poetic actions” (Noel in Bakero and Cussen 2020h). As he continues, he comments on how digital space problematizes the idea of a community that, for a poet with a background in the Nuyorican performance scene, emerges from copresence. Referring to a Deleuzian poetics of digital folds and the porosity of the screen, he explains that his work is “digitally born,” and that that his improvised online performance reflects the generative use of technology in its composition. He explains that he uses digital sound to add “texture and complexity” to embodied practice, aiming

to “complicate the immediacy and translatability of the body” (Noel in Bakero and Cussen 2020h). Building on his critical work on the poetics of diaspora (cf. Noel 2014), he proposes a poetics of porosity and of the diaspora, a “queer elsewhere” that is “diasporous.”

Through a performance that, in the vein of David Antin, explores the sociality of “talk”, Noel critiques ideas of community that come from too simple an identification between voice, presence and belonging. Rather than amplifying an individual marginalized identity and extrapolating community from that, he grounds his performance in a plurality that includes technologies and spaces, both virtual and physical. The mediations of the screen and self-translation become a means of reflecting on presence, refusing what Nancy describes as “immanence” (2000, 32), an undivided community in which a collective thinks as one. In Noel’s work, digital layers and refractions create a space for otherness and nuanced difference. These improvised theorizations are put into practice through an enactment of Noel’s “Wokitokiteki”¹ methodology, a series of improvised walking poems in which he speaks to camera. Rain disrupts his planned excursion around the South Bronx, so he speaks from his back garden, commenting on the autumnal leaves and their strangeness to a person from the tropics, the plastic umbrella produced and sold through migrant labour, and the “stereotypical suburban gringo” flamingos which were a gift from his mother. The props of an expressive diasporic poetics, such as “nature” and family memories, are playfully satirized. He plays percussion on a bird feeder and speaks through a loud hailer, decrying the “phony megaphone of magnified voices” typical of identity-based poetry (Noel in Bakero and Cussen 2020h). While his communication is a heightened form of sociality, a freewheeling chat and tour of his garden, its foregrounded relationship with materials and technology enables a depth of critical reflection and reveals unequal racialized structures of capitalism.

Translation between languages, as an embodied act, parallels the mediations of technology, making bodies paradoxically present in different ways. German-Swiss sound poet Heike Fiedler’s work is, like Noel’s, concerned with technical mediation and the self-reflexive effects of speech in performance. While the uses of video back-projection as well as the precision of the electronic composition reveal this as a highly constructed and prepared performance, it is adapted to the social and conversational space of the Zoom series in revealing ways. The beginning of her presentation, segueing out of unrecorded conversation with the meeting hosts, shows the merging of a phatic communicative context into that of the performance. She begins: “May I start? Do you hear me?”, which is a ritual, prepa-

1 <https://www.wokitokiteki.com/ke-kosa.html>

ratory statement, not requesting information as much as signalling that the speaker is relying on the attention of others; it establishes a relationship without taking it for granted. “May I start to do something? I don’t know yet what what what [. . .]” She presents a short statement reflecting on her process: “Language is a challenge; it is a real challenge for me”, which breaks down into stuttering phonemes as she brings in electronic sound with repetition of “dis-le” and “say it” (Fiedler in Bakero and Cussen 2020e). Layering different languages over each other, she creates a textured surface in which referential aspects of language are still present, but secondary to sound. These layers are complicated and developed by the use of video projection. The apparent indecision of the beginning creates a relationship with the listener, a frame that is broken and shifted as the performance continues. In the disembodied space of the virtual performance, fragmented images of a naked woman’s body underscore the apparent vulnerability of the opening and its staging of hesitation, and draw attention to gendered expectations of language use. The images of a woman’s upper body, overlaid by text, foreground the relationship between a body and the statements it can utter: the imperative “say it,” in this context, suggests that gender, as well as translanguaging, can create challenges for language and for speaking. The following section opens with a recording of acoustic guitar and a series of questions beginning “should she,” which is the title of the piece in French available on her YouTube channel (cf. Fiedler 2019). The alliteration of “should she” is sonically effective, but the fact that the piece can be performed in French as “devrait-elle” shows that what is important here is the staging of gendered uncertainty; the phrase sounds inconsequential at first, but as it builds up, questions like “should she take a taxi?” expose the potential harm that can affect everyday decision-making for certain bodies more than others. The video, a close-up of a woman’s shoulder as she stretches on the floor, underscores the blend of fragility and strength that typifies Fiedler’s work. The gentleness of her vocal style contrasts with the more “visceral” translingual performances of Trimble and Torres, yet asserts its own politics through nuanced grammatical experimentation across languages and media.

A different approach to gendered spaces emerges in Zuzana Husárová’s presentation, which begins with a piece that samples a child crying and what sounds like variants on a lullaby. We were all, at this time, used to inhabiting each other’s domestic spaces, and the cry of a child has its own particularly piercing timbre; it is a demand that cuts through the communal space of the performance. Later in the conversation, Husárová elaborates on her choice of song: “Kom-kom-kominar,” is a Slovak nursery rhyme that her daughter was demanding at the time on a regular basis. Husárová explains that what it means is, approximately “Chim-chim-chimneysweep,” but that her daughter would mishear it as “konieja,” which has no

meaning (in Bakero and Cussen 2020g). In Husárová's repetitions, the sound becomes *nie ja*, or "no me" – her response to her role as human jukebox, an erasure of the self in maternal labour. The intimate embodiment of a family relationship is sharply contrasted with the technological reproducibility of both the nursery rhyme itself and the technology Husárová uses to loop and repeat it. The contrast between the closeness of family relations and the distance of technological mediation is a source of humour in her presentation, but it also touches on the wider implications for gender equality of the collapse of boundaries between work and domestic contexts. The exploration of mishearing and misunderstanding in language learning as poetic resources aligns this work with Husárová's experiments in AI, also discussed during her presentation, and which are more connected with parenthood than may initially appear. Liza Gennart is a neural network she co-created with Lubomír Panák, given the persona of "a young intellectual woman in her 20s, who is a feminist, perhaps even a cyberfeminist, living in Vienna, of Slovak heritage" (Husárová 2022, 71). For the creators, it was an identity game in which Husárová was the "father" and Panák the "mother" (Husárová 2022, 72), a defamiliarizing inversion of the sentence investigated by Katherine Hayles in her book of that title, *My Mother was a Computer* (2014). As Hayles points out, language that extends kinship to computers through this kind of anthropomorphic projection obscures the way they function and carries the risk of "bring[ing] into question the extent to which human beings can be understood as computer programs" (Hayles 2014, 5). However, the increasing complexity of contemporary biological and technological relationships make explorations such as Husárová's all the more necessary in drawing attention to proximities and boundaries between different forms of subjectivity and embodiment, and these concerns reverberated throughout the series.

In the case of several presenters, a recording of a live event layered another space and time into that of the Zoom meeting, recollection of past shared in-person events reinforcing the sense of online belonging. The Chilean artist Anamaria Briede presented a 2018 recording from Festival PM (cf. SÓNEC 2021), where she is kneeling on a darkened stage and holding a sketchbook that is projected behind her. She performs the drawings and fragments of text, whispering over looped vocals. Then she grinds ink and paints with it, becoming the *voz de la tinta* or "voice of ink" (Briede in Bakero and Cussen 2020a). A pattern of words and phrases referring to face, mouth and mother tongue connect the embodiment of sound-making with the embodiment of mark-making, the fragility of the vocals echoed in tentative visual gestures. It is a performance of intimacy; the softness of the vocals and projection of the sketchbook give the sense of being admitted into a private space of kinship or friendship. At the same time, there is a clear gender politics at work: the presence of the body in her work is both resistant

and resilient; language is maternal but also estranged in such a way that its relation to the body becomes visible. The body asserts itself as the point at which signification dissolves, but in this performance it is also refracted through looped recording and projected image; its further recording for the online event only intensifies the technological mediation that is already present in the live performance. In several of the *Language is à Virus* meetings, Briede translated sound works into drawings, which themselves work on the cusp between writing and image. They mark the time of attention given to sound, making a responsive, interactive record of listening. This is an example of *methexis* in the sense of a contagion between art works as one gives form to another; the semantic openness of sound poetry is given a response that honours an open listening or *écoute*, in Nancy's terms, which does not settle into semantic interpretation (cf. 2007, 5–7). Rather, by accepting the range of impressions and timbral possibilities, her drawings respond by multiplying them further.

In a sound poetry improvisation, the singular voice, in reacting to others, takes on a viral, contagious multiplicity that disassociates structures, much as Burroughs' cut-ups do, whether on tape or in printed text. Each week, the speaker was invited to suggest a starting point for improvising, often in a way that emerged from their own presentation, for example working with the sonorities of different languages. Sometimes it erupted as a drone, led by sound rather than language; at others the emphasis was more visual. The Zoom improvisation promises the closeness of shared physical experience, but the thinness of sound and the acousmatic loss of reference reinforces distance. The promised fusion or closeness through sound is always at a remove, literally so in the latency of Zoom, but the performative action of making sound opens a communal space that allows for the cohabitation of languages and bodies. The US-based Chilean artist and poet Cecilia Vicuña invited participants to lean into the screen, to "disappear into each other electronically" and breathe (in Bakero and Cussen 2020d). As frequently in the series, the absence of bodies was what made the body central, since all the usual cues of live improvisation – sensing the room and the action of other performers – were absent. Zoom, designed to foreground the individual voice in a conversation, reacts to the loudest contribution, but it was otherwise difficult to gauge relative volume, or to sense the point at which sounds coalesced. The sound-making begins tentatively with body sounds that would normally be filtered out by Zoom's privileging of language, as all the instinctive aspects of "being together" in sound become conscious and dislocated. Looking back at the recording of this session is an entirely different experience from participating in it, even though the live experience was mediated through the same screen and digital technology as the recording. What was powerful in the moment, but missing from the recording, was the potential for interaction. Looking back with the

eye of the outside observer, no longer in pandemic isolation, the technical limitations are more evident. The sense of being surrounded by others, as if in a room with them despite being on either side of the Atlantic, was created not by immersion in the sound, which was thin and flat, but by the anticipation of response. The feeling generated by the communal space was in this sense a communicative rather than vibratory effect, but because the uses of sound were not governed by communicative language structures, they were unpredictable and defamiliarizing.

Bakero and Cussen comment on the unusual combination of individual, personal expression and collective potential that emerged in the improvisations:

The improvisations of more than ten or twenty people that close almost all of the sessions were often described as a cathartic experience, evidently related to the conditions of isolation that we were experiencing at the time. But they also prove, on the other hand, the extreme flexibility that this form of interaction allows, where roles are often exchanged, different textures and forms of intervention are combined, and there is room for more pointed and intermittent interventions. (Bakero Carrasco et al. 2023, 10; trans. ZS)

In emphasizing the flexibility of roles and forms, they articulate the affordance offered to the individual participant, as well as the “singular-plural” composition of the sound-making community. While the global experience of the pandemic revealed the indifference of the biological virus, it focused attention on human relationships, illuminating the need for community, physical proximity, and being with others. Against isolation and isolationism, the improvisations often felt like a new way of listening to each other, and the improvisations were what set the series apart from other online meetings in social, artistic or academic contexts, as well as from social media.

While sessions of *Language is à Virus* were often framed by what seemed like phatic communication, enquiries after each other’s health were, in the beginning, not necessarily purely phatic: the sudden fragility of health that is normally taken for granted creates a different relationship between embodiment and language. The virtual environment is often imagined as disembodied, as contrasting expressions like “in person” and “IRL” suggest, but the lack of “real life” contact in the pandemic accentuated the degree to which between virtual contact is mediated by time, space and non-human materialities. Nancy writes:

If one can put it like this, there is no other meaning than the meaning of circulation. But this circulation goes in all directions at once, in all the directions of all the space-times [*les espace-temps*] opened by presence to presence: all things, all beings, all entities, everything past and future, alive, dead, inanimate, stones, plants, nails, gods—and “humans,” that is, those who expose sharing and circulation as such by saying “we,” by saying we to themselves in all possible senses of that expression, and by saying we for the totality of all being. (2007, 3)

In sound poetry, meaning is not conveyed through communicative statements that are meaningful; in that sense the sound poetry improvisations could be considered phatic, as an announcement of presence and togetherness. However, what emerges in Nancy's "meaning of circulation" is a performativity of meaning that connects the human with the non-human. In sound poetry, the extent to which language "loses itself" in the world is pronounced since it is, first and foremost, sound that emerges through interaction between body, air and spaces; it does not (or does not only) describe the world, but becomes part of it. The point at which semantic meaning gives way to sound is the point at which the boundaries between speaker and world become blurred.

Because it took place in a Zoom meeting, the circulation of the improvisations was quite different from the sharing described by Simanowski, even though it shared some phatic qualities. Firstly, and importantly, the meetings were intentional and prearranged, taking place in a virtual room set apart from the general flux of social media. Secondly, they involved a group of people who had decided to be present together for a certain period of time. Thirdly, technical limitations, like dropped internet connections, never being quite sure whose sound one would hear, or how one's own sound would balance with others in the group, were ever-present considerations that brought the physicality of the space into focus. Far from being disembodied, these improvisations were consciously and deliberately in dialogue with the material constructions that made them possible.

During the pandemic, it seemed that sound poetry, always so reliant on the closeness of bodies, had become a changed medium that had incorporated new dimensions of the technological potential that initially gave birth to it. There were some intentions to continue a second online series, but these did not materialize. What became obvious was that time was as much a barrier to collaboration as space, and that as soon as travel was possible, schedules resumed and the commitment of regular online meetings was harder to sustain. The group continued to communicate on WhatsApp and then Signal, sharing events, publications and news of its dispersed members, while a series of in-person events took place in various locations. The first of these was A Chile-Wales Sound Poetry Contagion in Bangor, Wales in March 2023, which echoed the form of the online meetings through a series of individual and paired performances, followed by a group improvisation in which the drone-based aesthetic of the online meetings was still clearly present (cf. "Language is à Virus" 2023). A collaboration with Poésie is Not Dead and the multimedia poetry journal DOC(K)S in Paris led to a second event in April 2024, this time a succession of short performances that revealed dynamic contrasts between sound in performance that had sometimes been muted online (cf. DOC(K)S 2024). In the variety of approaches and sounds, both of these events demonstrate the singular plurality that emerged from the series. At the same

time, they now exist on YouTube in the same online format as the Zoom series; an online video recording of a live event takes on the same mediated character as an event that was originally virtual.

A live event is one in which participation unfolds in real time, but the slight digital delay on Zoom means that “being-with” is never truly live, in the implied sense of being among live bodies, as opposed to material technologies. A live music event brings the possibility of human touch and breath as well as sound, these things often seeming intertwined, but on Zoom, social liveness is tempered by the absence of living bodies; even as it happens, it is already dead. Simanowski accurately describes the availability of recording as a deferral of the present, and it is deferred into a future that never arrives. “Une communauté se revant éternelle, instantanée et infinie est une communauté délirante,” or in my translation: “A community that dreams of being eternal, instantaneous, and infinite is a delusional community,” writes Francois J. Bonnet, warning of the ‘synchronous community’ that dangerously offers a means of forgetting our own mortality, the mortal body on which any viable politics must be based (2017, 64). The fragility of technology creates both a heightened desire for physical presence and an awareness of the inevitable loss of everything we make. Mexican digital artist Eugenio Tisselli remarks that Western cultures are not good at letting go of the past, commenting: “Because digital technologies are very unstable, they present an opportunity for learning how to let go” (in Bakero and Cussen 2021a). The limitations of technology, made audible in sound poetry, insert delay, distance and loss into collective interactions, creating new circulations of meaning and new forms of material connection. These limitations are themselves timbral; they create the sound through which we hear each other, becoming part of the “we,” as a mesh of human and non-human interactions that constitutes a singular-plural community. At a time when the relationship between human creativity and technology is increasingly complex, sound poetry’s emphasis on the materiality of voice allows a refocused awareness of the limitations of bodies and the different ways in which physical experience is situated. *Language is à Virus* showed how curation, with its etymological links to care and cure, can create sustained attention to artistic practice, making a space in which, to echo Bakero, problems might lead to poems, and in which the question of how to live with each other in changing technological contexts can be explored through ongoing poesis.

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Alison Maggart

“Listening Through the Light”: Posthuman Feminism in the Poetry Sound Assemblage *Bioluminescent Baby* (2019)

Bioluminescent Baby is one installment of *In the Company of Insects*, a three-part “collection of poetry sound pieces” collaboratively made by poet Fiona Benson, radio producers and sound artists Mair Bosworth and Eliza Lomas, community poetry workshop participants, and adolescents (Arts and Culture Exeter 2020, n. p.).¹ Funded by the University of Exeter’s 2020 Urgency Arts Commissions for projects focused on climate and the environment, *Bioluminescent Baby*’s assemblage of fourteen expert entomologist interviews, poetry, field recordings, soundscape composition, and Creative Commons music samples explores existential questions of life, transspecies communication, and ecological responsibility. Carrying its listeners across a vast terrain from England to Appalachia to Africa and Polynesia and juxtaposing meditations on insect reproduction and maternal care against observations of CRISPR-fueled gene drive and population collapse,² the work connects “the urgency inherent in an insect’s short lifespan” to “the urgency of the environmental crisis and shrinking biodiversity” (Arts and Culture Exeter 2020, n. p.).

1 In total there are three parts of *In the Company of Insects*: *Bioluminescent Baby*, *Insect Love Songs*, and *Insect Chimeras*. *Insect Love Songs* is a public anthology created by attendees of Benson’s 2019/20 poetry workshops at the Eden Project, Thorverton Arts Exchange, and Malika’s Poetry Kitchen. *Insect Chimeras* includes artwork and poetry by students at Thorverton C of E and Stoke Hill Primary Schools.

2 CRISPR (“clustered regularly interspaced short palindromic repeats”) is a gene-editing technology with applications in biomedicine, agriculture, and animal sciences. One use of CRISPR has been to engineer gene drives, or genetic modifications that are inherited by offspring with a higher probability (in some cases with 100% certainty) than through natural selection. These forced inheritable traits can have beneficial or harmful effects. Because gene drives can both modify, reduce, or eradicate species, many scientists have explored genetically engineered gene drives to regulate insects, like mosquitoes, that transmit disease. For instance, scientists at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health’s Research Institute have modified mosquitos to make them more resistant to malaria, while researchers at the University of California, San Diego have used CRISPR to modify sex genes in mosquitoes, effectively killing female mosquitoes (the carriers of malaria, yellow fever, Zika, and Dengue fever) and sterilizing male mosquitoes. Sterilization methods using synthetic gene drives lead to sudden declines in modified species populations (cf. Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health 2018; Scudellari 2019; Wang et al. 2021; Spahich 2022; Naidoo and Oliver 2024).

In grappling with these issues – both intimate and expansive – *Bioluminescent Baby* unfolds a posthuman feminist sensibility that is rooted in specific geographies and unique bodies as well as flows through diffuse and relational networks. Making audible human and more-than-human, visible and invisible, gifts and threats to the environment, *Bioluminescent Baby* aims to “inspire wonder and kinship [. . .] with other inhabitants of this planet” (Benson in Haywood 2020). And, in guiding attention to the resonant spaces *in between* various nodes of connection, it works to “attune” us “differently,” in the words of cultural theorist Astrida Neimanis, “to a world in which we are implicated” so that we might “experiment in modes of worlding *otherwise*” (2017, 64).

The “Firefly Suite” is one of the more pronounced appeals in *Bioluminescent Baby* for such a knotted, multisensory, and relational ethics. “We are all connected,” entomologist Lynn Faust states in her discussion of the *Photinus carolinus*; “and if their little lights go out, we may be next. [. . .] It’s got to ultimately reflect on us.” Yet, by “listening through the light,” she proposes, we might come to see what really matters (Faust in Benson and Bosworth 2021).

The conversation begins with Faust describing the unique flash pattern of the East Tennessee bugs during their mating season – the males’ intermittent synchronized flares. “The scientific term for what you’ll see tomorrow night in the Smokies is ‘discontinuous synchrony’: dark and light, alternating, periods of dark and periods of light,” she explains (Faust in Benson and Bosworth 2021). During the predictable period of darkness – approximately three seconds after the male flashes have ceased – the females rapidly blink their lanterns. It is thus “all about the communication with light,” she summarizes. But “how much emphasis that puts on listening!” Benson rejoins; “that synchrony is not all about making noise; it’s this space of listening” (in Benson and Bosworth 2021). Blurring light and sound, firefly and human, Faust then expands on Benson’s insight while also emphasizing the imperative of embracing difference and singularity in love:

Yes, it’s listening through the light. Yes, it is. You have to have that quiet time. Just like often, if your life is so busy, you feel like you hadn’t had time to think. [. . .] You need that dark time, or that calm time, to answer. And then they can see you among all the flashing lights. If everybody goes dark at once, you can see better that one light. And that’s the light that matters. (in Benson and Bosworth 2021)

In her discussion of the East Tennessee fireflies’ perennial reproductive blink, Faust thus forwards an ecological mode of listening that blurs the boundaries of visibility and aurality. Consonant with recent work in sound studies, which theorizes sound as a “way of knowing” (Feld 2015, 12) or stresses the importance of “tactile, spatial, physical, material, and vibrational sensations” for musical and sonic interpretation (Eidsheim 2015, 8), she suggests that a dynamic, multisensory

“listening through the light,” through the dark *in-between*, can inspire clarity of thought and the flash of new insight. But how exactly does one listen through the light (one of the stranger phenomena of the world)? What does it mean to confound and transgress the senses of sight and hearing? How might such a synesthetic blurring, which points to a vibratory flux that surpasses the human auditory threshold, decenter anthropocentric modes of sensing and interpreting the world’s varied forms of articulation and communication? In short, how might such an approach to listening inform our relations with the world?

To begin to answer these questions, I offer an interpretation of the “Firefly Suite” that considers the Appalachian fireflies in *Bioluminescent Baby* as emblems of “vibrant matter” (cf. Bennett 2010), which encourage a unique, ecological sensibility. Drawing from feminist posthumanism, new materialism, environmental humanities, voice studies, and sound studies, I first outline how a posthuman feminist ethics and ontological orientation are expressed through the figurations of music, motherhood, and *becoming-insect* that connect *Bioluminescent Baby*’s different movements. By adopting scales and perspectives that exceed the human, Benson and her collaborators, I argue, invite their listeners to reconceive their relationship to the environment in a way that appreciates the inextricable entanglement of human corporeality and the more-than-human world. Furthermore, in coaxing listeners to attend to correspondences not just across scientific discourse and poetry, looking and listening, humans and more-than-humans, but also across the temporal, generational divides of mother and child and the spatial divides of place, Benson and her collaborators underscore the need to think cross-modally in our approaches to and solutions for today’s environmental concerns.

Then, attending to the spectra of sonorous materials that make up the suite, I show how Benson’s poetic traversals are reflected in the movement’s formal composition. Dichotomies assumed between scientific and poetic disciplines, didactic and confessional languages, soundscape and recording studio, objective and subjective modes of expression are blurred by the speakers’ distinct intonations and accents; synthesized drones seep into the natural soundscape; and insects dialog alongside Benson and Faust. Ultimately, I argue that in content and form, *Bioluminescent Baby* not only expresses an enchantment with the world’s alluring “shimmer” (cf. Rose 2017, 51), but also recommends an ideal figuration for resonant liminality, the *in-betweenness* of posthuman subjects always in the process of becoming and harmonizing the “multiple and internally differentiated time zones that compose our embedded and embodied selves in advanced capitalism” (Braidotti 2006, 139): the synchronous firefly.

Music, Motherhood, and Becoming-Insect in the *Firefly Suite*

In Benson's poetry, the intimacy and rawness of pregnancy and motherhood and the bonds between female bodies, human and animal, are common themes (cf. Thacker 2016, 175). Meditations on menstruation, childbirth, and other feminine cycles are considered alongside their cultural and historical associations to lunar, tidal, and other natural phases. Through the "deeply personal," Benson thus draws "connections to other bodies across space and time" (Thacker 2016, 75).

In her debut collection *Bright Travellers* (2014), for instance, "Sheep" links Benson's miscarriage to the bloody birth of a lamb; "Milk Fever" describes the involuntary leakiness of women's bodies and the fluid connections between mother, child, and ocean; and in "Breastfeeding" Benson's breastmilk locates her within a lineage of past and future women: "A long line of women | sitting and kneeling, | out of their skins | with love and exhaustion" (Benson 2014, 56). This image of infinite regression, woman after woman, connected by the milky "passage from body of water to body of water (always as body of water)," gestures not only to the female labor that powers human life, but also "provides a vector," according to Neimanis, for "mapping" human and non-human social and ecological "responsibilities" (2017, 17). Because water flows from single human body through ocean and atmospheric currents, gathering on its journey different threats and gifts to be deposited in specific locations and absorbed by specific bodies, it reveals the intimate connections between humans, non-human organic lifeforms, and inorganic entities (cf. Neimanis 2017, 40).

In *Bioluminescent Baby*, Benson chooses more alien kin – insects – that inspire both fascination and "revulsion," love (born of her mother's interest in zoology) and concern (originating in her father's bee allergy; cf. Klein 2023). In specific, the collection focuses on insect sexuality and maternal care in the face of violence and loss. Each of its fourteen movements is dedicated to an insect's erotic song: the trilling and rubbed harps of British and Polynesian field crickets, the caring cockroach's purrs, the ecstatic chirps of cicadas. All caring mothers, the female Mozambican mosquito sips human blood "to ripen her eggs," the rice-sized Blue Ghost firefly cradles her hatch from the aggression of a feather, the cockroach nurses her live-born brood with secretions "like milk" from anus and armpit, and Benson (and other hopeful human mothers) erect barriers between hostile environments and their skin to safeguard their ova.

The symbiotic and hostile meetings of humans and insects across the world, Benson makes clear, are not just matters of nature; they are conducted along lines of technology, class, and politics. Reflecting on the inextricable conjunction

of maternal care and harm in mosquito-human relations, “Mozambican Mosquito” turns toward water, blood, and the politics of location:

In the malaria ward the beds are pushed so close
 The sleepers share the same bad dream: a female mosquito
 Filling her soft bulb, dipping her beak for a drop of blood
 To ripen her eggs; how her abdomen’s rosé flush
 Deepens to ruby as she siphons out water as waste.
 [. . .]
 And in London a woman splices a mosquito egg to corrupt the gene
 That defines male sex; there will be infertile males
 And in eight generations (a matter of days?) the brood
 Will collapse.
 (Benson and Bosworth 2020)

Later in the poem, Benson, likening her body to a “crystal glass, full to the brim,” resembles the female mosquito as much as the mosquito, who uses “two serrated needles | to cut through your tissues,” operates like the London scientist. Yet, as much as Benson connects humans to mosquitoes – both threatening to the other for the sake of their offspring – she also insists upon differences not just between human and insect, but also between Mozambican and English mothers. The mosquitoes discriminate – “some of us smell sweeter” – while the humans’ electric rackets “zap fruit flies, crane flies, moths, beetles on the wing.” And while across the world, though predominantly in Africa, a child dies of malaria every two minutes, on her “privileged Northern isle [. . .] [her] babies will be inoculated against most ills” (Benson and Bosworth 2020). Thus, rather than forward attachment as the basis of a relational ethics or as the primary means by which human-animal kinship should unfold, Benson recognizes the value of *detachment* and distance in human and more-than-human encounters. She also acknowledges intraspecies inequities. Although relations may be contingent, they are not necessarily reciprocal. As posthuman feminist Rosi Braidotti would say, “We-are-in-*this-together-but-we-are-not-one-and-the-same*” (2018b, 20).

These themes tap into larger feminist and posthuman flows pertaining to new and complex forms of subjectivity that frequently adopt transgressive, grotesque creatures – cyborgs, trans-genetic mice, regenerative, cloned, and metamorphizing animals – as models for critiquing the ideological binaries and naturalized hierarchical structures established under western liberal humanism. This is in part because such hybrids, and insects in particular, meet women always on the “side of ‘Otherness’” (Braidotti 2006, 130). “Tiny miniatures,” insects “exercise the same immense sense of estrangement as dinosaurs, dragons or other gigantic monsters” (Braidotti 2002, 149). They are not only compelling figurations for

thinking against established epistemological frameworks, but also for affirming difference within a monistic frame (cf. Gruen 1993).

Dismantling notions of bodily autonomy and ontological fixity through parasitism, swarming behavior, and metamorphosis, insects are a locus of both intrigue and disgust. The potential for harm in insect-human encounters has made bugs fruitful figurations for revealing the “undervalued importance of distance and detachment in more-than-human ethics;” and their multitudinousness has encouraged a thinking *otherwise* “with the many” (Giraud 2018, 119). Insects illustrate how dynamic affective forces in the world “emanate from a spatio-temporal configuration rather than from any particular element within it” (Bennett 2010, 35). Perhaps most importantly, however, insects underscore a fluid ontology of becoming through metamorphosis: “[Insect life] dwells between different states of in-between-ness, arousing the same spasmodic reactions in humans as the monstrous, the sacred, the alien;” they are thus “hybrid *par excellence*” (Braidotti 2002, 149), full of “non-binary and non-heteronormative behavior” (Benson in Klein 2023). For Benson, it is this aspect of insect life that is most bewitching: “there’s something so mystical about the transformations they undergo. [. . .] They’re beyond anything we can invent” (in Klein 2023). And it is this propensity that ties them to maternal care.

Motherhood, maternity, and a host of associated substances – breast milk, amniotic fluid, the placenta – are also figurations that evidence the material body as a site of ontological becoming (cf. Neimanis 2017; Braidotti 2018a; Van der Waal 2018). Not only do they gesture toward grander transcorporeal spatial and temporal extensions – generation following generation – but they also construct an ethics based on relationality and care. For instance, gestational fecundity – “the giving over of one’s own materiality for this proliferation of further life, different to one’s own” (Neimanis 2017, 92) – points toward virtuality because it reveals the body as site of multiplicity and connection as well as stresses the *yet to come*. Similarly, because the pregnant posthuman experiences “intuitively and intimately the shifting borders of otherness within themselves” (Braidotti 2018a, 170–171), they also recognize their own “being with the always not-yet of the world” (Van der Waal 2018, 269). The liberal autonomous subject is thus decentered not only because the pregnant posthuman experiences their body as simultaneously self and other, but also (and more importantly) because the pregnant posthuman, in materializing the *potential* of the *yet to come*, recognizes the extension of their embodiment into the future and past (cf. Braidotti 2018b, 30). Because the placenta is the organ that allows for the material flow between different entities within a body, it is, for Braidotti, “the perfect figuration for thinking both unity and diversity, specificity and difference within a monistic frame” (2018a, 316). Encouraging an understanding of subjectivity as a relational process that is mate-

rial, embodied, and shaped by human and non-human encounters, these maternal figurations further compel an expansive reconsideration of broader societal and political interactions (cf. Braidotti 2018a, 316). Grounded in a shared *in-between-ness*, then, insects and maternity contest liberal conceptions of individual autonomy and fixedness, and instead forward an ontology of interconnection and dynamic unfolding.

In the “Firefly Suite,” the synesthetic convergence of “listening through the light” also signals an epistemological shift away from dialectical opposition toward relational monism. All three poems in the suite explore liminal spaces and times between light and dark, interiority and exteriority, human and beetle co-existence at scales that exceed the human. While a mythological dragon, small as a rice grain, sets the scale in the central poem, the cosmos is the measure in two bookending poems. And, just as Faust look-listens to the beetles’ pulses across the Appalachian sound milieu, we, too, are encouraged to listen through *Bioluminescent Baby*’s structural rhythms, beyond the self.

The Audio Pamphlet

In the Company of Insects – an “audio pamphlet,” published online to “restore [poetry] to its oral roots” – exemplifies Benson’s frequent emphasis on poetry’s musicality: poetry is “music on a word level,” she says, composed of “word sounds” (in Haywood 2020). In *Bioluminescent Baby* she establishes loose associations within and across the poems through the sonorous elements of poetry, through poetic alliteration, assonance, rhythm, and meter; she also revels in the unique sounds of unfamiliar words (what entomo-artist Barrett Klein describes as the “etymology of entomology,” such as “instar” and “crypsis”; 2023). Uniquely, in the “Firefly Suite,” possibly to balance the beetles’ *un*noisy communication, Benson explores music–poetry resonances by alluding to the musical form of the instrumental suite, a cross-cultural genre that evolved from stylized sets of loosely connected dances on light themes, not uncommonly with titles descriptive of nature, and paired by alternating affects or tempi.³ In counterpoint to the beetles’ flickering,

3 Late seventeenth-century and early eighteenth-century instrumental suites, for example J.C.F. Fischer’s *Le journal de printems* (1695) and *Musicalisches Blum-Büschlein* (1696), G.F. Handel’s *Water Music* (1717), and François Couperin’s *Le Rossignol en amour* (1722), might have descriptive titles or include figurations and ornaments that imitate nature (such as birdsong). Twentieth-century characteristic suites, like Debussy’s *Suite bergamasque* (1905), might also include movements with titles evocative of nature, such as “Clair de lune.”

the structure of the “Firefly Suite” is built on an alternation between conversational interviews with Faust and formal readings of Benson’s reflective poetry on three firefly species found in East Tennessee: Big Dipper Fireflies, Blue Ghost Fireflies, and Synchronous Fireflies (Tab. 1). In this manner, the three distinct beetle species’ courting dances, performed in flight and flash and elaborated through different textures of the voice, adhere to the structure of an instrumental suite.

Tab. 1: Formal Structure of the “Firefly Suite”.

Time	Topic	Speaker	Soundscape
00:15–00:55	Intro: Big Dipper Fireflies Discussion	Faust	Guitar to Environmental Soundscape
00:56–05:19	Big Dipper Fireflies Discussion	Faust	Natural Soundscape
05:20–07:24	“Big Dipper Fireflies” Poem	Benson	Guitar with Wildlife Intrusions and Footsteps leading into . . .
07:25–11:10	Blue Ghost Fireflies Discussion	Faust	Environmental Soundscape
11:11–12:05	“Blue Ghost Fireflies” Poem	Benson	Drone and Footsteps leading into . . .
12:06–15:00	Synchronous Fireflies Discussion	Faust	Environmental Soundscape to Drones
15:01–16:22	“Synchronous Fireflies” Poem	Benson	Pulsing Drone and Footsteps leading into . . .
16:23–19:35	Coda: Fireflies in Knoxville, TN	Faust	Environmental Soundscape, Ending with Drone

At first, the alternation between Faust and Benson seems to establish dichotomies between scientific and poetic discourse, informal and formal expression, expansive soundscape and intimate immediacy. Faust’s informal, scientific and autoethnographic commentaries are generally placed in natural (albeit amplified) sonic environments that include crickets’ trills and chirps, grasshoppers’ buzzy clicks, and owls’ hoots alongside the sounds of car door alarms, tires on gravel and rolling through a creek, and human footsteps. In contrast, Benson’s recitations are closely miked and preceded by a transition from soundscape recording to music (a gentle guitar accompaniment), synthesized drones, or rhythmic pulses. This clear sonic shift frames Benson’s poetic readings outside the landscapes she details, thus divorcing these sections from spatio-temporal specificity. Chronicling the passages from one mode of inquiry to another, Bosworth filters in footsteps

that bring listeners from Benson's readings back into Faust's environment; just as in early radio drama, they play an important role in (re)constructing the work's localized context: they provide a sense of three-dimensional space, ground the narrative in a virtual body, and bid listeners to follow.

Faust and Benson also have distinct accents, prosodies, and expressive registers that divulge their paralinguistic contexts. When Faust educates or describes the scientific field's current understanding of firefly behavior, she speaks authoritatively; and when she reflects upon her experiences with fireflies, she conveys personal sentiments of nostalgia, amazement, and concern for the creatures. In contrast, Benson recites composed poetry in a neutral and reserved style of elocution that conforms to what voice studies scholar Marit MacArthur describes as "poet voice" (2016, 44). Characterized by "(1) the repetition of a falling cadence within a narrow range of pitch; (2) a flattened affect that suppresses idiosyncratic expression of subject matter in favor of a restrained, earnest tone; and (3) the subordination of conventional intonation patterns dictated by syntax, and of the poetic effects of line length and line breaks, to the prevailing cadence and a slow, steady pace," poet voice is a kind of "monotonous incantation" that, by limiting theatricality, is intended to signal sincerity or intellectual detachment (MacArthur 2016, 44). As a mode of performance that regularly patterns intonation and cadence, monotonous incantation can also create a hypnotic effect, not unlike that of ritualistic chant, imbuing the poetry with a sense of formality even if the poem is free verse (cf. MacArthur 2016, 39–58).

As indicated by calculations performed by Voxit (Tab. 2), an open-source program for the analysis of prosodic measures developed by neurobiologist Lee Miller, programmer Robert Ochshorn, and MacArthur at the University of California, Davis, Faust speaks more quickly than Benson and with a patterning of pauses (or "rhythmic complexity") that is also more predictable and regular. What differentiates the two speakers the most, however, are the aspects of their prosody tied to pitch. Faust's pitch speed ("velocity"), lilt ("acceleration"), and the predictability of her pitch patterning ("entropy") are greater than Benson's, capturing Faust's East Tennessee accent and conveying a heightened expressivity.⁴

4 For a detailed discussion of the twelve prosodic measures that MacArthur and her collaborators examine to distinguish Formal and Conversational intonation patterns, Expressive and Dramatic styles, as well as their combinations (Formal-Expressive, Conversational-Expressive, Formal-Expressive-Dramatic, Conversational-Expressive-Dramatic, Formal-Inexpressive, and Conversational-Inexpressive) see MacArthur et. al (2018, 29–33). Benson's slow rate of speaking as well as her narrow pitch range are congruent with what MacArthur describes as a Formal-Inexpressive style.

Tab. 2: Prosodic Measures Calculated by Voxit.

Time	Topic	Speaker	WPM	Rhythmic Complexity	F0 mean velocity (8ves/s)	F0 mean accel. (8ves/s2)	F0 entropy
00:15–00:55	Introduction	Faust	119	7.7	1.1	0.6	3.0
00:56–05:19	Big Dipper	Faust	110	7.8	1.4	0.7	3.1
05:20–07:24	Fireflies	Benson	94	8.5	0.8	0.5	3.0
07:25–11:10	Blue Ghost	Faust	175	5.3	1.8	0.8	3.7
11:11–12:05	Fireflies	Benson	93	6.8	0.7	0.4	2.8
12:06–15:00	Synchronous	Faust	153	5.6	1.8	0.8	3.7
15:01–16:22	Fireflies	Benson	115	6.7	0.5	0.3	2.4
16:23–19:35	Coda	Faust	173	5.1	2.0	0.9	3.7
AVERAGE		Faust	146	6.3	1.6	0.8	3.4
AVERAGE		Benson	100	7.3	0.7	0.4	2.7

Despite these seeming oppositions, however, listening closely to the “Firefly Suite” reveals a more porous relationship between scientific and poetic modes of speech and understanding. Indeed, by fusing scientific and affective modes of inquiry in their assemblage, Benson and Bosworth affirm the complex ways in which knowledge is made by natural and cultural, material and discursive forces. The different prosodies undermine common perceptions that scientific language is more cold, inexpressive, and objective than poetry, or that poetic language is more effusive and unrestrained than scientific language. Words and images introduced in the scientific discourse are echoed in Benson’s poetry; and sentiments in Benson’s poems are elaborated in Faust’s musings. Faust, for instance, introduces the Blue Ghosts as small as “a grain of rice, no wings,” which Benson restates in her poem. And while it is the wingless Blue Ghosts whom Faust describes as “little prisoners,” in Benson’s “Big Dipper Fireflies,” it is the humans who are “strangers to ourselves | in multiple prisons” (Benson and Bosworth 2021). Synthesizers intrude into Faust’s discussions, and cricket trills sometimes bleed from Faust’s background into Benson’s readings. These sonic traversals, which also include mimetic vocal gestures and word painting of the soundscape, importantly, do not simply glue dance to dance, but instigate dialogs and metamorphoses; they also aestheticize *becoming-insect* and portend the possibility of interspecies communication and improvisation.

Through the Lights of the *Firefly Suite*

In *Bioluminescent Baby*'s "Firefly Suite," Benson and Bosworth poeticize childhood wonder, motherly devotion, and lovers' quiet knowing. The opening section of "Big Dipper Fireflies" sets the Appalachian scene with a relaxed flatpicking guitar, car noise, and Faust's description of a river and deer. Later, a gentle, arpeggiated guitar loop underscores Benson's recitation, during which she recalls memories of catching the beetles: "cupping them up, | holding them close." Her imagery sets up a contrast between the fireflies, "rising up from the grass – | green and upward cinders, | gentle wandering stars –" and the humans, who "on our knees" have become "strangers to ourselves," "unskyed," and "ready to lie down." In this state of opposition, both are prisoners: the beetles are imprisoned by human hands, and the humans are imprisoned by their own disenchantment (Benson and Bosworth 2021).

In Benson's monotonous incantation subjective expression is minimized, seemingly capturing the initial disaffection of the humans in the poem. Her voice is almost exclusively limited to the range of a minor third (E3–G3), and each line is patterned by either pitch repetition or a falling cadence of a major or minor second. Yet, these restrictions, by sacrificing theatrical elocution, accentuate the subtle sonic and musical features of the poetry: the local alliterations, assonances, internal rhymes, and other phonological and syntactical parallelisms; they also draw attention to miniscule aberrations from the overriding pattern. In such formal readings of poetry, literary scholar Charles Bernstein describes, "the project [. . .] is to find the sound in the words," without relying on theatricality and without "eclips[ing] the ragged music the poem" with excessive "eloquence" (1998, 11). Moreover, "this monovalent, minimally inflected, and in any case unaugmented, mode," he continues, "[touches] on the essence of the medium" (Bernstein 1998, 11). This is because in focusing attention on the *sound* of words, such audiotexts "[re]materialize] language" and thus synthesize speech modes of perception (which involve cognitive interpretation) and nonspeech modes of perception (which do not attend to meaning but which can be a source of pleasure; cf. Bernstein 1998, 18). There is an animality to this transformation and to the pleasure we might take in tuning in to language as material sound. Hence, Bernstein concludes not only that such poetry readings are "a performance of the carnality of language – its material, sensuous embodiment," but also and moreover that "the most resonant possibilities for poetry [. . .] can be realized only when the performance of language moves from human speech to animate, but transhuman, sound: that is, when we stop listening and begin to hear; which is to say, stop decoding and begin to get a nose for the sheer noise of language" (1998, 22).

Despite the human-insect polarity that Benson establishes in the poem's imagery, a sonic affiliation is suggested in the poetry. With no apparent rhyme or metrical scheme, the poem is sonically held together by numerous sibilations. Originating from the opening "Silently" and often elongated at line ends, these noisy sounds link Benson's voice to the buzzing and trills of nature:

Silently at dusk
the big dippers
rising from the grass –

green and upwards cinders,
gentle, wandering stars –
and we two on our knees

cupping them up,
holding them close,
like something we lost.
(Benson and Bosworth 2021)

In fact, throughout "Big Dipper Fireflies," when Benson intimates a connection between humans and insects, the bugs seem to light up in joyous response. For instance, the tree crickets first trill when Benson likens their "emerald electric pulse" to tree sap (Fig. 1). And, in the last tercet of the Big Dipper section, the buzz of a grasshopper sets the "tremble" of Benson's inner child (Fig. 2).

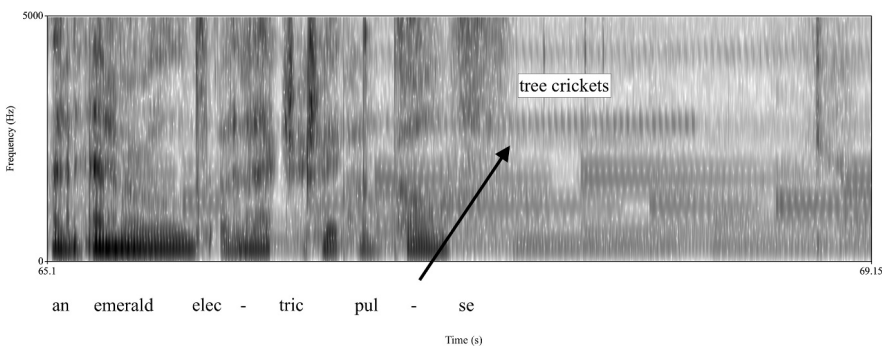


Fig. 1: Cricket "Pulse" in Response to Benson's Poetry. Spectrogram created in Praat.

As Lomas explains, the sound design throughout *Bioluminescent Baby* was dedicated to such attention to detail: "I'm really, really deep in the poem and thinking about every specific line and word and how to best represent it in sound" (in Haywood 2020). *Bioluminescent Baby* is therefore not a traditional soundscape compo-

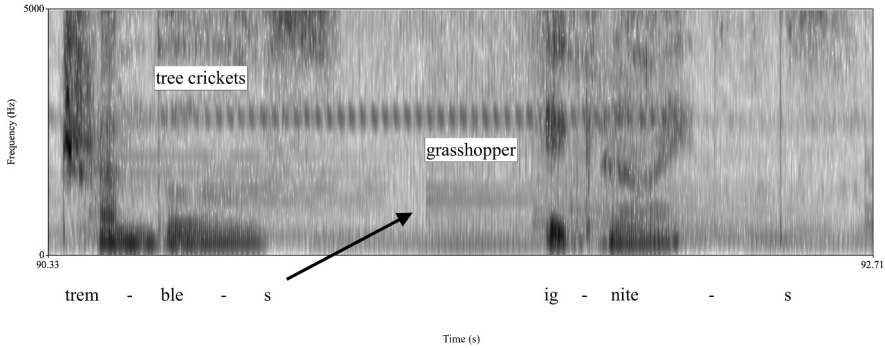


Fig. 2: Grasshopper “Tremble” in Response to Benson’s Poetry. Spectrogram created in Praat.

sition, because it does not present (or purport to present) an objective or documentarian sonic environment. Rather, the insects’ songs play an important part commenting on and painting the poetry.

Line 7 – “cupping them up” – is the first instance that does not end with a sibilant speech sound. It is also the first (and only) line that Benson speaks with a rising tone (F#-G). This inflection mirrors the gesture of cupping described in the poem, of course. But perhaps less obviously, it also accentuates parallelisms between lines 7 and 8 (“holding them close”), both of which are composed of four syllables and strong assonances. Furthermore, this subtle sonic and structural repetition echoes line 2, which introduces the colloquial name of the species at the center of the poem (“the big dippers”); it finally also foreshadows the repetition of “cupped” and “held” in the third poem of the suite, “Synchronous Fireflies” (as I discuss in more detail below).

In “Blue Ghost Firefly,” Benson ruminates on the species’ capacity for maternal care. Despite their appearing less developed than other fireflies, Faust describes how the wingless Blue Ghost females protect their eggs, even in the face of danger. Unlike Big Dipper females, which have evolved to have wings and are thus capable of flight, the Blue Ghost females expend their energy solely on safeguarding their clutches. When threatened with a feather or paintbrush, for instance, Blue Ghost fireflies shield their eggs by curling their bodies around them. For Faust, this behavior – unusual among insects⁵ – reveals a highly evolved behavior from which humans can learn:

⁵ Another exception would be the female glow-worms of the species *Lamprigera* found in Thailand.

I had always thought, oh, well, they're the primitive ones [. . .] because they don't have wings, and they don't look like the males, and they can't really move very well. But in the end, they might be the most highly developed, because they're showing maternal care. They [the Blue Ghost and Big Dipper female fireflies] have gone two completely different directions [. . .] on how to best get the next generation on the ground. But it's just different strategies. And again, that reminds me of humans. You know, we do the same thing. Some stay home with the babies. Some work, some try to do everything, and it's different, and it works different ways for different people. (Faust in Benson and Bosworth 2021)

In this passage Faust implies not only that biological and social factors are inextricable from one another, but also that they equally advance evolutionary development. The species' divergent evolutions do not indicate a linear or progressive improvement, she emphasizes, but rather share a goal of lively proliferation. Like new materialist philosopher Elizabeth Grosz's re-assessment of Darwin, Faust's conception of evolution also prizes and naturalizes difference, excess, and open process; she recognizes that life is "a kind of opening up of matter to indeterminacy, a qualitative transformation of matter into the unexpected. [. . .] It adds to the contained and structured material universe the openness of the virtual, the potential to be otherwise" (Grosz 2005, 41). Crucially, such an understanding of the world is also political, Grosz argues, because it shows not only how unfixed and unstable the world is, but also how consequential circumstance and contingency are in *becoming-other*.

In complement to Benson's sections, in which the insects paint the poetry, in Faust's sections, vocal gesture often mimics the insects. When she describes the Blue Ghosts' waist-high flight, for instance, she elongates and pitches the diphthong /ou/ in "they float" higher than the surrounding phonemes, creating a gently suspended arc in her voice. Similarly, she pitches "wings" higher than all other words in its locale. And when she describes the Ghosts' maternal care – how they will "curl their little body around [their clutch of eggs]" – her inflection pitches "body" higher and "around" lower than "curl," creating a sonic gesture of embrace (Faust in Benson and Bosworth 2021). These acoustic analogies, likely performed unintentionally, express and elicit a subtle kind of physical empathy that sensitizes and extends human experience into unfamiliar territory. Such embodied attunement, Neimanis argues, allows humans to imagine and make sense of that which otherwise is beyond our grasp (cf. 2017, 53–59). It is the first step in developing a posthuman phenomenology.

In her poem "Blue Ghost Firefly," Benson further muddies the line not only between beetle and human, but also virtues, mythological beings, and inanimate objects. Just as the beetle metamorphizes through simile and metaphor into a dragon and a roof, Benson too undergoes a *becoming-other*, *becoming-dragon*, *be-*

coming-insect, recognizing not only the maternal care that she and the Blue Ghost share, but also the incalculable value of their cache, the embryonic *not-yet*:

The female is small
and larviform,
like a grimy rice grain.

Up close you see
her reticulated,
transparent back,

its epaulets of light.
Sweet love
coiled round your eggs,

like a diminutive dragon
guarding your hoard,
its wet, nested glow.

It's the rest
of your life's work
to make yourself a lid,

a shield, a reinforced roof.
I too keep guard –
my daughters

the softest part of me –
and will die
at my post.

(Benson and Bosworth 2021)

Musically, Bosworth abandons the guitar accompaniment of the “Big Dipper Fireflies,” and instead introduces a more alien, sustained drone. Approximating Faust’s vocal frequency when she describes how “it works different ways for different people” (the last phrase Faust speaks, leading into the poem), the drone’s fundamental drifts around C4. Periodically intensifying so that overtones on D#5 and F#5 gleam through the insects’ susurrations and murmurs, it evokes the ethereal timbre of a crystal singing bowl. The drone cushions Benson’s poetry and sonically displaces her commentary from the Appalachian soundscape and the critical reflections of the scientist; yet at the same time, as audible substitute for the Blue Ghosts’ uniquely continuously glow, it performs and foreshadows the sensory conversion that underpins the final poem.

In “Synchronous Fireflies” Benson contemplates what might become. Like in “Blue Ghost Firefly,” drones – six G-major triads followed by six F#-major triads – now pulsing, articulate the flash train of six lights emitted by the *Photinus caroli-*

nus and establish the lulling rhythm – the “soft pace” and “quiet spell” – of the darkness that envelops the Appalachian valley at dusk when the fireflies emerge. The gentle minor descent of the drones also captures Benson’s falling cadence in the poem’s introduction – when she announces, “Synchronous fireflies | *Photinus carolinus* | For James,” she pronounces “Synchronous” at approximately 196.29 Hz (G3 – 2.58 cents) and “James” at 184.49 Hz (F#3 + 4.75 cents). Throughout the poem, her incantation continues to hover around G3 and F#3. In its hypnotic rhythms, constructed by the drones and Benson’s recitation style, in its echoes of previous poems in the suite, and in the synthesized drones’ sonic materialization of the fundamental frequencies of Benson’s speaking voice, “Synchronous Fireflies” most closely realizes the ritualistic tenor of MacArthur’s “formal-inexpressive” style and Bernstein’s transhuman carnality.

Like in “Big Dipper Fireflies,” the crickets are vocal respondents. At Benson’s mention of “speaking,” a lower-frequency chirp is initiated, only to suddenly drop out on the word “darkness” (Fig. 3).

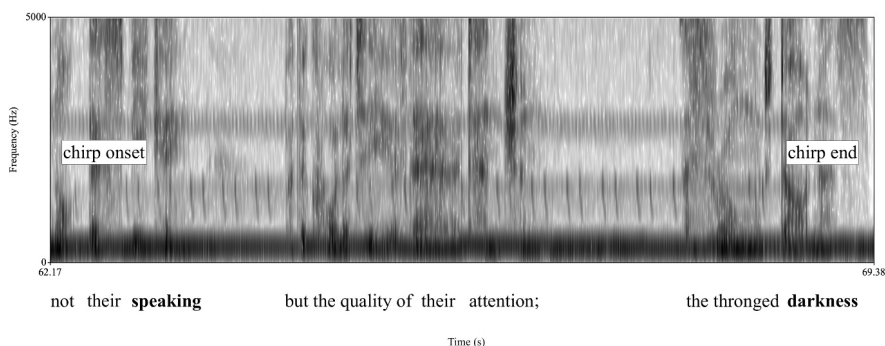


Fig. 3: Cricket “Speaking” and “Attention” to the “Darkness” in Response to Benson’s Poetry. Spectrogram created in Praat.

Unlike in “Big Dipper Fireflies,” however, rather than imprison, the dark night embraces; it provides the curtain for the “two lovers in a drawn bedroom” and buoys their quiet “attention;” it is “a thronged darkness into which you might send | any thought, and find it cupped and held.” In this inverted echo of “Big Dipper Fireflies,” wherein Benson and Bosworth cup the fireflies close, Benson suggests that humanity and nature are mutually encompassing, both capable of holding the other. Human and beetle acknowledge difference – “there was more of a distance, a fourth wall, | as the fireflies displayed at the far side of the world in a complicated language I couldn’t understand | and wasn’t meant for me, and I felt selfish and estranged” – and the necessity of balance and reciprocity – “though

I came for the light, it was the dark that kept me safe” (Benson and Bosworth 2021). Indeed, in the end it was the dark’s quiet listening to the *in-between* that captured Benson’s attention: “It was the dark that was synchronous,” she states in her interview with Klein, “and it was this lovely thing that the dark is listening [. . .] and there was that kind of unexpected beauty of the dark being a kind of listening” (Benson in Klein 2023).

Shimmering in Southern Appalachia

What the dark listens to and participates in is what anthropologist Deborah Bird Rose describes as the land’s “shimmering.” Drawing from the Australian Aboriginal concept of *bir̪yun*, the “shimmer of the biosphere” is a “temporal pattern,” an “iridescence,” or ecological “pulse” from “dull to brilliant, and then back to dull, and then back to brilliant.” The dark is thus of crucial import – “for shimmer to capture the eye, there must be absence of shimmer” – and should therefore be “understood not as lack but as potential,” ushering forth excess, pleasure, and beauty (Rose 2017, 54–55). Often playing out in sexual display – the blooms, light shows, and plumage that plants, animals, and inorganic matter deploy to “lure others” to themselves – shimmering “assumes shared desires not only to coexist with other species within a territory, but also to take care of them and draw pleasure and joy from such love” (Braidotti 2022, 181). In Southern Appalachia, the Big Dippers’ swoops, Blue Ghosts’ hued glow, and Synchronous Fireflies’ blinks – species-specific flash patterns – are coded courtship dances that compose a small part of the place’s unique kinetic polyrhythm. Attracting insect mates and human spectators, the beetles’ pulsing, procreative, perennial shimmer portends the “possibility of becoming,” the perpetual change, transformation, and metamorphosis that connects us to “ancestral and future generations” (Malone et al. 2020, 132). Yet, at the same time that it sparks new life, its dimming also reflects past droughts, housing developments, demolitions, and light pollution. Just as “shimmering comes into play as the light of life,” it is also extinguished by extinction (Malone et al. 2020, 132). Perhaps for this reason, the beetles’ bioluminescence has long inspired meditations on life’s ephemerality; in folklore around the world, they often symbolize “a new beginning, the souls of the dead, passionate love, and the beauty of the skies” (Faust 2017, 13). In material and discursive ways, then, they make up, or partake in the worlding of, the place.

In all these ways, the “Firefly Suite” expresses the shimmering vitality and heritage of Southern Appalachia. But how can such enchantment not only inspire an ethical orientation toward our more-than-human kin but also advance our

worlding otherwise? Reading *Bioluminescent Baby* from a posthuman perspective, I argue, suggests a new figuration for such issues. The *Photinus carolinus*' synchronicity – sonified by the pulsing rhythms of the final poem – points to the synchronization of multiple extensions of the posthuman subject through time and space that Braidotti, drawing on Deleuze, argues is key to a posthuman affirmative ethics. Because the posthuman subject is always actualizing the virtual, they are acutely attuned to the liminality and processual nature of the present. “Approaching the present,” she writes, “produces a multi-faceted effect: on the one hand the sharp awareness of *what we are ceasing to be* (the end of the actual) and on the other the perception – in different degrees of clarity – of *what we are in the process of becoming* (the actualization of the virtual)” (Braidotti 2019, 36–37). While the actual is limited by the restrictions that political and societal institutions impose on an entity [*potestas*], the virtual is dynamic, fluid, and expansive [*potentia*]. Both *potestas* and *potentia* structure consciousness insofar as the “interplay between the present as actual and the present as virtual spells the rhythms of subject formation” (Braidotti 2019, 37). Synchronizing the actual and virtual is thus necessary for thinking new possibilities. And, although synchronicity can only ever be fleeting, it is nevertheless the very “task of philosophy” to “track the different modes of synchronization and bring them into adequate conceptual representation. [. . .] [This is] about the creation of alternative thinkable and shareable subject positions” (Braidotti 2006, 94–95).

Listening through the light and other natural articulations is therefore an invitation to think ecologically and relationally, to resist eye/ear, object/subject, and other dichotomies, to be affected by the world's shimmer, to recognize how we affect it, and to imagine new ways of interaction. Behaving as wave and particle, light, the paradigm of Karen Barad's onto-epistemology, illuminates the entanglement of meaning and matter (cf. 2007). By transposing sonic vibration onto a visual scale that exceeds human auditory perception, listening through the fireflies' light decenters the human. Yet, at the same time it does not seek to erase the differences between human and nature in some transcendent fashion; nor does it remove human accountability. The lights are not *for* us, but nevertheless “reflect on us.” Rather, as a form of vibrant enchantment, listening through the light compels an investment in and ethical comportment toward a particular place. In Southern Appalachia, Faust reminds, the fireflies are not just fireflies; they “represent a canary in the coal mine, they're an indicator species of the health of that particular place” (in Benson and Bosworth 2021). Listening *through* moreover suggests a listening practice that is all-enveloping and interactive; when listening *through* we listen not simply to the source, but *through* a host of objects and mediums that influence sound as it travels through space and time, through the echoing Smoky Mountains, through the buzzing fluctuations of air. By focusing

attention on this *in-between*, toward the “thronged darkness into which you might send | any thought, and find it cupped and held” (Benson and Bosworth 2021), listening through also highlights virtuality, becoming, and the process of synchronization. Attuning to the shimmer, voice, and memories of place – lightening bugs and Southern drawls – thus helps to illuminate new forms of alignment between past and present, humans and more-than-humans, living and non-living entities, politics and ethical care.

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Part IV: **Poetics of the Voice**

Valentina Colonna

Poetry Audio Recordings and Interdisciplinary Phonetic Study

The *Voices of Spanish Poets* Project: Challenges and Two Case Studies

Is it possible to distinguish and separate poetry from its voice? The history of literature has passed down a tradition of poets who sing, who “intonate” their voices in ways that make them recognizable. In fact, when we talk about authors (whether poets or writers, as well as singers), we often refer to them as “voices,” using a metonymy that ended up identifying them universally. On the one hand, voice, as a physical phenomenon, can be explored acoustically, focusing on its sonic substance, and perceptually, looking at its effects on the audience. On the other hand, literature has been considered a written medium for a long time, often without particular attention to its original vocal and reading dimension. Voice, by contrast, has been more prominently considered in oral poetry – performative and rooted in oral communities – especially since the 1960s (cf. Ong 1967; Zumthor 1983), when scholars began to delve more deeply into the vocality and orality studies, moving beyond the confines of the written page. But yet, if we combine and relate these two axes – voice and text – that have long been kept separate from each other, what benefits might we gain?

The intricate relationship between poetry and voice is delicate and essential: its research has been addressed from various perspectives which, in most cases, have in practice kept these two levels of observation and composition separate. However, in more recent time, besides poetry studies, psycho- and neurolinguistic, phonetic, musicological and anthropological approaches, among others, have approached this liminal terrain of research, combining knowledge to offer new insights (see Ong 1967; Cardilli and Lombardi Vallauri 2021; Tsur and Gafni 2022; Blohm et al. 2022; Colonna 2022). The main goal of this study is to approach poetry voice from an interdisciplinary and phonetic perspective, aimed at observing the relationship between written text and the resulting prosodic text in reading

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aloud. More specifically, in fact, this paper will consider the vocality of written poetry read aloud, mediated by the recording medium and preserved, and will not examine the equally interesting case of oral poetry, which would, however, require a separate study.

Interdisciplinarity is certainly a necessary interpretive key for an area of study such as this one. For this reason, diverse viewpoints and methodologies will be firstly introduced and then combined in this work, enabling a main dialogue between linguistics and literature, also rooted in archival, digital humanities, and music. After a brief theoretical overview, this essay will introduce *Voices of Spanish Poets: Vocal Archive and Experimental Study on Poetry Reading* (VSP), the first research project dedicated to the experimental and interdisciplinary study of Spanish poetic voices, as well as committed to conservation, enhancement and exploration of Spanish poetry recordings through a dynamic digital archive. In fact, the project involves an online platform¹ which enables users to listen to contemporary poets reading their own poems and, in many cases, reading a selection of poems by Federico García Lorca, one of the greatest Spanish poets, and a member of the *Generación del 27* [generation of 1927], whose voice, however, has not been preserved. It also provides phonetic support to guide users through a first history of Spanish poetry reading. This is the result of part of the experimental studies on poetry recordings of the project, which adopt instrumental phonetics and psycholinguistic approaches to examine, on one hand, how Spanish poetry reading is characterized and has evolved over time, and on the other hand, to consider the perception and representation of the text through listening. Combining qualitative, quantitative, and comparative approaches, VSP aims to fill the gap in this research area in the Spanish context, providing new instruments and knowledge at an interdisciplinary level. The foundation of the VSP project was the previous experience of the *Voices of Italian Poets* (VIP) project. Indeed, thanks to previous experience with Italian poetry and language, VSP has been possible. Funded by the European Union, the project is hosted at the University of Granada (UGR) in collaboration with the Department of General Linguistics and Theory of Literature and Comparative Literature, and the Research Centre Mind, Brain and Behaviour (CIMCYC).

Following the introduction of the VSP-project, I will showcase two case studies, namely the voices of two prominent contemporary Spanish poets, Paca Aguirre (Francisca Aguirre Benito) and Ángeles Mora, to explore and describe, through the VIP-VSP analysis model, their main prosodic features as a practical sample of the valuable information which poetic speech can provide. In conclu-

¹ <https://voicesofspanishpoets.ugr.es/>.

sion, a final discussion will allow the most salient findings, benefits, and perspectives of such an approach to poetic vocality to be highlighted as a contribution and starting point for new transdisciplinary research.

Voice and Poetry: An Interdisciplinary View

Voice in poetry is a point of departure and a point of arrival. It involves perceiving the world and listening to it, as well as encountering it. A poetic text cannot be considered without taking into account the dimension of oral thought that precedes it as well as all the memory of encounters that it involves and brings to orality. In fact, an author's voice is permeable to what it comes across, which in a certain way influences and changes it. It can be said that an overlap of voices defines an author's voice. Its wideness draws on an *acoustic substratum*, as well as a "*metric substratum of the poetic ear*" (Colonna 2022, 73; trans. VC), providing fertile ground for the present voice to evolve, be influenced, and continuously change. It embraces not only the linguistic input from the environment surrounding the author, but all the wider sound stimuli encountered, with their features that, inevitably, enters into the author's listening and voice, leaving traces. It may include, for example, the voices of people from the linguistic community in which the poet lives, or sounds and voices from radio and video media; the sounds and noises of nature or of the city in which the author is immersed in; the murmurs of an audience awaiting a performance or sitting in semi-religious silence; or even the reverberation of poet's own voice amplified through a microphone. Continuously, the encounter of the present voice with the previous ones and the previous stimuli, generates a recognizable and always renewed voice (cf., among others, Mussapi 2015, 7–8; Skoulding 2020, 1–21). In this light, listening represents a starting point not only for writing but also for molding and generating the original and overlapped voice (cf. Eidsheim 2019, 1–38). In fact, voice reveals itself in its intimacy, processes, and uniqueness when reading aloud, and the listener will never return to reading that author without remembering or unconsciously seeking that voice.

In this view, voice in poetry has to be considered also in its bodily and sensual essence. It is possible to talk about a *body of poetry* and a *poetry of body*, as theorized by Gasparini in her book *Poesia come corpo-voce* [Poetry as body-voice] (2009). She argues that crucial elements like rhythm give body to poetry, providing it with form and physicality. The nature of rhythm, described in multiple ways, originates from the body of the creator and reflects on that of the listener. In its very essence, the *body of poetry* coincides with and is assimilated into po-

etry of the body, meaning poetry that finds its realization in the resonating bodies of both the speaker and the listener.

The body's integral role in poetic performance and voice has been explored by relevant scholars who especially address the issue of orality, such as Paul Zumthor (cf. 1983), Giancarlo Sessa (cf. 2018), and Roland Barthes (cf. 1985), showing how poetry can be considered widely performative in its nature. As Zumthor suggests, oral poetry becomes an embodied experience that fully engages the performer, in an active relationship with the listener (cf. 1983, 128). Moreover, only a "physical relationship through voice" can help recover and understand its original rhythm and cadence (Sessa 2018, 14). Voice, though its physicality and its "grain," reveals also the materiality of the body and takes shape in the relationship between bodies – between "vocal bodies" – rooted in a continuous interplay of presence and absence (Barthes 1985, 260).

The bodily nature of poetic voice also materializes the memories of both performer and listener, shaped through rhythm – an artistic rhythm, distinct from biological or physical rhythms, as well theorized by Kiparsky (cf. 2016). Unlike the latter, which are based on identical repetition, the rhythm in language and art is based on the alternation of different elements, between prominent and non-prominent beats, strong and weak (cf. Kiparsky 2016, 2). This rhythm absorbs and transforms the rhythms encountered before. More particularly, it is possible also to speak about a "rhythmic memory," as defined by Brunella Antomarini (2013, 37), which connects body and rhythm in poetry, as is evident in children (for example when they tend to move to the rhythm while memorizing poems). The converging theories on a rhythmic principle of movement at the origin of poetry and music – often linked to footsteps, as theorized by Aristoxenus of Tarentum, and already mentioned by Plato and Aristotle – are also supported in more recent times by poets engaged in performance, like Artaud (cf. 2004, 961) and Majakovskij (cf. 1973, 130), reinforcing this concept (see also the contemporary poet Claudio Pozzani, cf. Colonna 2016). This rhythmic origin, specifically a rhythm defined as melodic due to the functional role of tone in its scansion (cf. Colonna 2022, 53), reaches its climax in voice and unites prosody and poetry, from their seminal roots.

In poetry read aloud, voice enables the sharing of this rhythmic form through re-interpretation, establishing a relationship with the audience. The external, shared, voice engages in three relational levels: with the written text, achieving acoustic realization; with the performer's body and other resonant spaces; and, finally, with the audience, the ultimate destination and protagonist in its reception, generating a new voice. Concerning this last level, a physical and active dimension of listening emerges as a fundamental aspect of the physicality of the poetic voice. As Alfred Tomatis (cf. 2005) argues, listening involves the whole body (beyond merely cochlear perception), contributing to the development of a

strong relationship and facilitating a deeper, inner understanding and connection with poetry and reality.

All these aspects concerning the physicality of the voice and the effects of listening have been the subject of various scholarly inquiries across multiple disciplines and different approaches, including linguistics, neuroscience, and vocal studies, as in the work of Shewell (cf. 2020) and Tsur and Gafni (cf. 2022). Shewell's study shows how voice deeply engages both the embodied and cognitive dimensions of poetic recitation, highlighting the role of the body in vocal performance and the brain in the processes of poetic creation and reception (cf. 2020, 163).² A sensory and cognitive impact on the listener has been proved, revealing the importance of intonation, rhythm, and prosody in conveying the meaning of the poetic text, and confirming the earlier theory by David Jackson (cf. 1986), who emphasized the impact of the spoken voice on the interpretation and emotional resonance of poetry. Also, Tsur and Gafni explore the relevant relationship between sound and reception, highlighting how different prosodic elements (including voice quality) shape the emotional meaning of the poetic text and response in listeners, evoking specific emotions (cf. 2022).

However, the physical presence of the poet's voice must be reconsidered and adapted in light of modern technologies, which not only help preserve this unique physical essence of poetry but also influence, alter and enhance the transmission and reception of the poem. In fact, today, the voice is often amplified, recorded and mediated by technologies: when presented to an audience outside a live context, the previously mentioned physicality of listening, including the bodily dialogue between the speaker and the listener, becomes different, not simultaneous, more unilateral, yet still valuable. Nowadays, voice mediatization, with its potential for expanded diffusion across space and time, can be seen as a pivotal element in the evolution of reading and reception.³ However, when considering the audience relationship from live and mediated perspectives, physicality involves presence and the possibility of an interactive audience that plays a role in shap-

² More in detail, the scholar draws upon the Triune brain model (cf. McLean 1990) to illustrate how different levels of the brain engage in poetry performance, and focuses on the concept of free-voicing, as a natural approach to spontaneity in linguistic expression as well as in poetry reading for a better communication of the meaning and a wider multisensorial experience for the audience (cf. Shewell 2022, 156–160).

³ Wehmeier and Wolff discuss the need to address the challenges and transformations that digital platforms pose to poetry performance, reflecting on how the digital age brings both new opportunities and limitations in audience interaction and interpretation (cf. 2024). For a diachronic and phonetic overview of mediated poetry voice in Italian context, see Colonna (cf. 2021).

ing the poem's reception, as shown by Julia Novak (cf. 2024),⁴ also influenced by the performer's skill (cf. Zumthor 1983). Expanding to an interaction that is also spatial, Skoulding connects verse segmentation with the segmentation of sound in space, where stimuli transform the listener's experience of the poem, shaping the space and being shaped by space (cf. 2016).

In the exploration of live performance, additional elements such as gestures, widely studied by linguistics in various kinds of speech, particularly regarding its impact and connection with prosody in multimodal communication (see, for example, Valbonesi et al. 2002; Lin and Chen 2020; Moneglia 2020) could also be taken into account. This aspect, examined in poetry from its origins, such as in the case of Homeric poetry (cf. Purves 2019), can reveal its multifaceted contributions at various levels (cf. Lempert 2018). As David Nowell Smith suggests, given the interplay of various components that shape voice – including linguistic and rhetorical elements, gestures, and prosodic features – discussing voice requires reconceptualizing it as inherently ecstatic and mediating; it becomes “voice” only when it transcends itself and exists in relation to something beyond itself (cf. 2015, Ch. 5). This theory can also be compared with Simecek's, who highlights the relational dimension and intimacy of contemporary live performance poetry (cf. 2023, Ch. 1).

Considering the intimate relationship between voice and poetry, as well as between poet and listener, described and discussed in various contexts, as those presented in this chapter, experimental works that build on these theoretical approaches and aim to examine these aspects at an instrumental level could represent the next major perspective in this field. Such integration is essential for contemporary studies on poetry and voice. Within this framework, the project *Voices of Spanish Poets: Vocal Archive and Experimental Study on Poetry Reading* (VSP) is one such initiative. It aligns with these theoretical views as a preliminary and necessary axis of comparison, investigating, through an experimental approach, the vocal production and reception in poetry.

The value offered by the authors' original interpretations provides numerous opportunities for study, enabling an in-depth exploration of all the mentioned aspects – and beyond – with significant proximity and instrumental detail. It offers the chance to delve into the depth of the voice and its relationships, while also uncovering the intimacy of poetic thought itself. Furthermore, the ability to preserve recordings, combined with the opportunity to explore them, particularly in-

⁴ Julia Novak explains how the poet's physical presence plays a key role, merging the author's voice with the performer's body. The bodily presence impacts how the poem's narrator (a fictional persona) relates to the real life performer (Novak 2024, Ch. 1).

volving interdisciplinary approaches, provides a solid foundation for a growing research area. This serves as the starting point for the VSP project, which integrates disciplines such as phonetics, literature, cognitive sciences, and digital humanities. Through these approaches, it examines the physical substance of the *body-voice*, aiming both to preserve it as part of cultural heritage and to investigate its multifaceted role in poetry and communication.

The *Voices of Spanish Poets* Project: Aims and Contributions

The instrumental study of the voice of poetry has developed over time in different modes and approaches, which are being refined in recent years thanks to advancements not only in recording techniques but also in interdisciplinary research methodologies.⁵ Today the possibility of integrating diverse approaches in the study of poetic vocality as well as its preservation and valorization on one hand allows us to continue a previous tradition and, on the other hand, to exploit it in a new approach, wider and able to investigate materials and perspectives still not sufficiently investigated. Recordings serve as the primary sources in this field, just as they do in musicology and performance studies.

For this reason, since 2023, the *Voices of Spanish Poets* (VSP) project, founded on the previous experience of the Italian *Voices of Italian Poets* project and aimed at going beyond it, has been dedicated to the preservation, enhancement, and experimental study of the voices of Spanish poets. VSP addresses this goal with four key objectives: to create a dynamic digital platform for studying and listening to readings of Spanish poetry; to conduct an experimental phonetic study on the VSP archive; to approach poetry reading from experimental psycholinguistic, cognitive, and psychophysiological perspectives, considering text perception and representation through listening; and to integrate these research approaches to-

5 Theoretical studies of voice in poetry have spread widely in the last century – parallel to the development and growth of vocal archives. However, the experimental research of the acoustic materials of poetry has only become established more recently, despite its seminal origins dating back to the early twentieth century, when the preservation and phonetic exploration of the poetic voice marked the starting point of this line of inquiry (cf. Mustazza 2019). The promising interdisciplinary nature of this theme, bridging linguistics and literary studies, was recognized by linguists such as Roman Jakobson (cf. 1966) and Iván Fónagy (cf. 1983). From a literary perspective, Charles Bernstein marked a new role for poetic recordings in literary and sound studies (cf. 1999). Since its origins, the close link between vocal archiving and research is a defining feature of this tradition.

gether in the platform. In the research area of phonetics, various projects in Europe have developed that either collaborated with vocal archives or incorporated the creation of such archives into their mission. Among these, I mention the *Voices of Italian Poets* (VIP) project at the University of Turin (Laboratory of Experimental Phonetics “Arturo Genre”) and the University of Genoa, which in 2017 initiated the creation of the first online digital archive of recordings of Italian poets and conducted the first phonetic study of these materials (cf. Lo Iacono et al. 2024). This project has developed a model for qualitatively describing poetic voice, starting with Romance languages, which continues to this day. The research within this project not only led to the creation of the establishment of the first entirely online digital archive dedicated to the voices of Italian poets, allowing for multiple interpretations of selected twentieth-century poems, but also provided an initial qualitative methodology applied to many languages, revealing new elements that characterize poetry recordings in all their musical dimension. The main findings of VIP highlighted an evolution in the Italian poets reading styles over time, as well as a rich stylistic variety, challenging the notion of a monotonous style often observed and theorized in other areas and approaches (cf. Colonna 2022). Moreover, comparative studies of different readings of the same texts, interpreted by contemporary poets – especially focusing on the figure of enjambment – showed the interpretive potential of poetic texts during readings, revealing both consistent variety and common strategies (cf. Colonna and Romano 2019, 2022).

On the one hand, phonetic and interdisciplinary studies of the poetic voice have not yet been conducted on Spanish material (exceptions are Colonna 2022 and the literary approach by Mistrorigo 2018): the VSP project aims to fill this gap, providing the first experimental interdisciplinary study on Spanish poetry reading, involving Digital Humanities tools and exploring the musical dimension of recordings of Spanish poets from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. On the other hand, archival work in the Spanish-speaking world has a strong and established tradition. Among the first archives that laid the historical foundations for Spanish archiving are the Archive of Hispanic Literature on Tape (AHLT) at the Library of Congress in Washington and Voz Viva de México; among the more recent ones is the Fonoteca de Poesía. However, an archive for experimental study and teaching purposes was lacking. In this contribution, I will specifically focus on the objective of phonetic analysis, following a brief introduction to the archive involved.

At present, the VSP archive includes nearly 900 entries, of which 439 feature contemporary poets reading a selection of Lorca’s poems, and 411 consist of original readings by living Spanish poets. The remaining entries are twentieth-century recordings preserved in other archives, which are referenced as they have been

analyzed to provide a historical, evolutionary trajectory of poetry reading. The archive is not only a database of readings but also the first platform that offers listening support for poetry listening, through the descriptive phonetic guidance provided alongside the recordings, enabling a more conscious listening experience of poetry. Multiple criteria for consulting are combined into the archive: it not only allows recordings to be grouped according to their evolution over time and metadata search criteria like performer, work, and subgroups (such as Lorca's poems or Voices of Granada, in collaboration with the Federico García Lorca Center and Granada City of Literature UNESCO), but it also enables filtering readings by stylistic parameters that have proven significant in poetic reading. The goal of the VSP archive is to provide an innovative digital resource that distinguishes readings as musical interpretations.

Behind the phonetic information provided by the archive lies the phonetic study of selected data. This has been made possible through the application and updating of the VIP study model, adapted within the VSP framework. This methodology is primarily based on an experimental phonetic approach that combines Digital Humanities tools and musicological theories, applying them to poetry reading. More specifically, one of the core tools of this framework is a radar chart (cf. Colonna and Romano 2023), which allows for a qualitative description of poetic voice, irrespective of language, resulting from annotation, data extraction, and interpretation of poetry recordings. It includes 20 parameters identified or created specifically for the description of poetry reading aloud and concerning prosodic organization of the text, acoustic parameters and prosodic style. This includes, for example, indices related to the type of segmentation of the melodic curve in comparison with the text (four kinds), as well as acoustic parameters (a total of five) such as speech rate, mean frequency, and pitch span. Particularly, the organizational parameters include four types: verse-curve, hemi-verse curve, inter-verse curve, and bi-/poli-verse curve, which describe the total correspondence between the length of the melodic unit (inter-pausal unit) and the verse, or its reorganization into smaller or larger units. They detect the contrast between prosodic and textual fragmentation. Additionally, there are indices that capture typical aspects of poetry reading style, including rhetorical features of intonation, the prosodic realization of textual rhetoric, the relationship between speech and silence, specific intonation patterns, types of stress parameters, and the detection of interrupted style through silence (a total of eleven indices).⁶

The VSP framework sits at the intersection of multiple disciplines, such as phonetics, literature, and music, with terminology drawn from all three fields.

6 Further indices have been considered in the VIP and VSP projects, besides the radar tool.

Central to its development is the relationship between written and oral texts, the dynamics between these two axes, and the primary prosodic features that define this style. The benefits of this interdisciplinary study include the ability to examine different levels of analysis in such material: this approach makes it possible to measure various aspects of poetry recordings, compare readings to distinguish key traits, and identify commonalities, as well as to organize readings by shared characteristics. Furthermore, this enables scholars to outline stylistic clusters and trace shifts in reading practices over time, thus sketching a historical trajectory of reading styles. This type of study, incorporating additional methodological tools, also provides comparative insights, such as examining multiple readings by contemporary authors interpreting the same texts, which can reveal distinct and common patterns (cf. Colonna and Román Montes de Oca 2024). A simplified version of the VIP-VSP-radar chart is provided for use in the VSP archive to aid in understanding the musical features of poetry reading. Certainly, in this phonetic research, the combination of quantitative and comparative descriptions offers a further and broader overview of poetry reading.

In what follows, I will present a concrete example of interdisciplinary phonetic analysis by qualitatively comparing two readings of different texts by their authors, specifically two well-known contemporary Spanish women poets from different generations. The study highlights the types of research questions that can be investigated by using the archives, which offer valuable insights for teaching literature, linguistics, and the performing arts from new perspectives.

Two Case Studies: Francisca Aguirre and Ángeles Mora

The poets presented in this article are Francisca Aguirre (Paca Aguirre; Alicante 1930 – Madrid 2019) and Ángeles Mora (Rute, Córdoba 1952). They come from different regions of Spain, corresponding to the Madrilenian and Andalusian dialectal areas respectively. Furthermore, both write in Spanish and belong to different generations. For each author, I considered only one recording for study to provide an initial overview and comparison. The main metadata for both recordings is presented in Tab. 1.

Following multilevel manual annotation in the phonetic software PRAAT⁷ (designed by Paul Boersma and David Weenink) and data extraction using a custom

⁷ www.praat.org.

Tab. 1: Audio Recordings Metadata.

Data	Poet1: Francisca Aguirre	Poet2: Ángeles Mora
Recording Poem Title	“Qué difícil” (“How difficult”), <i>Ítaca</i> , Ediciones Cultura Hispánica, 1973	“Dime” (“Tell me”), <i>La canción del olvido</i> , Diputación Provincial, 1982
Recording Date	2010s	13/11/2023
Source	Fonoteca de Poesía (Poetry Phonotheque) ⁸	VSP ⁹
Audio Duration	1:28	00:37
Poetry Length and Structure	24 vv., 4 stanzas	13 vv., 5 stanzas

script based on the study model used in the project and developed in collaboration with Domingo Román Montes de Oca, I conducted a qualitative analysis of the two recordings. This analysis focused on the organization of the prosodic text in relation to the written text and provided significant descriptions of the main acoustic features.

Before describing and comparing both recordings, I will introduce the corresponding poems by the two authors at a structural and metrical level, as this is necessary to frame the relationship between the two levels. In terms of its poetic content, Francisca Aguirre’s poem “Qué difícil” (2016) explores the inevitability of hatred, which, like the thin and inseparable layers of an onion, clings to the heart, causing suffering and tears, with no possibility of separation, while fate seems destined to destroy and bring pain. In turn, Ángeles Mora’s poem “Dime” (2023) deals with the theme of abandonment, which fills the soul with rain to the point of making a house a house of water, of tears.

The two texts differ not only in the number of stanzas and overall length (greater in Aguirre’s work) but also in the length of the verses, all within a free verse composition which, however, makes repeated use of verses with the same metrical type. Both poets use internal punctuation. Furthermore, Aguirre’s lines are noticeably longer, ranging between 9 and 16 syllables and preferring units of 11 syllables, with frequent use of enjambments. In contrast, Mora combines shorter and longer lines, particularly involving verses of 7 syllables and two of 11 syllables.

⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RyN3H3N46Wo>.

⁹ <https://voicesofspanishpoets.ugr.es/grabacion/angeles-mora-dime-1982-angeles-mora-13-11-2023/>.

Listening to these readings, we find two mature female voices, who speak in a calm manner that is not declamatory, as we often encounter in previous generations, generally included into the “first radio-television” group (cf. Colonna et al. 2024, 7), but rather closer to the spontaneous speech. Their timbres reveal vocal maturity, and the close reading to the microphone results in an overall medium-low average intensity. Focusing on their behavior at a phonetic level, we are presented with two different performance styles in poetry reading. I will first introduce the organizational strategies of the text at the prosodic level, and then I will consider further phonetic (acoustic and stylistic) parameters, describing the main features of these readings.

In terms of prosodic organization, a preliminary note is necessary: every oral reading of a poetic text involves its reconfiguration in terms of division and distribution into internal prosodic units. Previous studies show that alignment between line and prosodic contour is not always the most frequent or preferred approach (cf., e.g., Colonna 2022). Poetic reading generally consists of multiple units that form part of a prosodic architecture, only partially corresponding to the layout of the written text. The poetic line is often restructured metrically in oral reading through several approaches, prominently including the reshuffling of the text into prosodic units. These may encompass segments of a line, combine parts of one line and the following line, or include entire verses or multiple lines. Key components of this architecture are *prosodic curves*, which are melodic units framed by pauses. These melodic units include lines or portions of them. For example, in Ángeles Mora’s reading of the verse “Y alguien ha dicho adiós” [And someone said goodbye], she divides it into two separate units – “Y alguien” and “ha dicho adiós” – while the following line is delivered as a single prosodic curve, “al aire.” I refer to the latter as a *verse-curve*, faithful to the verse, and to the former as two *hemi-verse curves*, defining units that encompass only portions of the line.

In analyzing the two readings, I observed that both authors generally adhere to the verse’s measure or its internal units, producing prosodic units that correspond either to the entire verse line (*verse-curve*) or to a portion of it (*hemi-verse curve*). Particularly, Aguirre employs the latter kind of structure most frequently. In Mora’s case, whose poem is also characterized by shorter lines, she also combines three consecutive lines within a single breath at one point, creating what can be described as a *poly-verse curve*. These organizational styles indicate that both readings employ, a *metrical* approach, reflecting an adherence to the unity of the verse – however, this happens to varying extents. While Mora shows a clear preference for this approach, Aguirre’s reading style is dominated by a structure that can globally be classified as *syntagmatic-syntactic* (cf. Colonna 2022, 33). This means her readings closely follow the syntax, punctuation, and minor

syntactic units (syntagms), while also reflecting a metrical awareness of the verse's unity. These approaches highlight a key difference between the two styles, illustrating distinct features of prosodic organization. Notably, prosodic structures often blend multiple types of prosodic curves, with one type typically emerging as dominant. Quantifying the pronounced prosodic syllables and their organization into prosodic curves of different or corresponding meters from the poem is important for continuing the comparison between oral and written text. In Aguirre's readings, the segmentation of long lines through pauses is the most frequent strategy: her curves predominantly encompass 4, 7 or 9 syllables, while her overall prosodic range spans curves from 1 to 12 syllables. This means that only some of Aguirre's long lines are retained in her reading; they are mostly reproduced as divided into internal prosodic curves, separated by pauses that reorganize the text. With Mora, the most frequent prosodic length is 3 syllables, followed by 4-syllable units and, on the other hand, significantly larger units: she often renders lines of 10–12 syllables as uninterrupted *verse-curves*.

The use of pauses, which in both cases structures the reading, generally follows the logical-syntactic flow and punctuation, while also serving to highlight specific syntagmatic units or the end of a verse. However, the types and uses of pauses also differ between the two authors and depends on the specific textual context. Thus, the use of silence is purposeful and functional in highlighting the meanings of the prosodic curves. More specifically, I identify different types of pauses based on the presence or absence of textual punctuation at the end of the preceding unit. Both authors employ longer pauses when punctuation marks are present, while their average pause duration tends to be shorter when the interruption occurs between logically connected units without punctuation (although variation is markedly higher in Mora's case). This confirms that silence management in reading not only differs between authors (with Mora displaying a more pronounced contrast between pause types) but also shows considerable variation within a single author, evidencing different functions (as illustrated in Fig. 1).

Furthermore, pauses can serve multiple functions and have multiple effects (cf. Barbosa 2023), and their duration relative to the total speech time (i.e., the recited portion without pauses) offers a broader perspective on a reading style. Specifically, the ratio of melodic to pausal duration, that is, the ratio between the total duration of speech, excluding pauses, and the pauses themselves – measured by the index known as *Plenus* (cf. Colonna 2022, 36) – falls within the complex medium range for both authors, though it is higher for Aguirre, indicating a greater presence of speech relative to pause duration, despite a somewhat fragmented style (as partially illustrated in Fig. 1). It can be said that this type of speech appears denser, with a limited presence and extent of pauses.

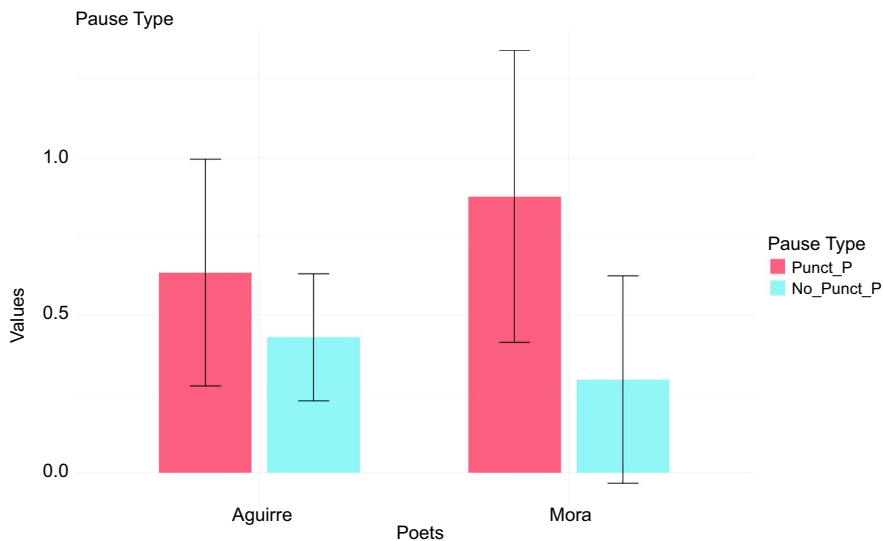


Fig. 1: Histogram of the pause type.

Duration of pauses (in seconds) in contexts without punctuation (No_Punct_P); Duration of pauses (in seconds) preceded by punctuation (Punct_P)

At the level of prosodic curve as the main element of line reorganization, two additional levels can be added – one major and one minor (cf. Colonna 2022, 45) – to consider the prosodic organization architecture from different perspectives. The major units of logical-prosodic sense, which I call *poetic utterances*, usually encompass multiple prosodic curves but can also correspond to only one: it is perceived as an independent linguistic act with a terminal boundary and a unified prosodic signification. It is usually found followed by pauses and ends in correspondence of a full stop in the written text.¹⁰ The minor units are *rhythmic words*, marking the rhythmic scansion of the prosodic curves. These are tonal-accentual units, identified at a perceptual level, where the rhythmic cadence occurs, segmenting the prosodic continuum. These units may encompass one or more orthographical words, phonetically realized as a single accented unit.

¹⁰ An example can be found in Aguirre in the second utterance, which includes lines 2–3: “Se adhieren entre sí con una fina telilla que las unifica y conjunta de manera tenaz.” Alternatively, the fourth utterance corresponds to the entire second stanza, including lines 6–9: “Así el odio se pega de manera indeleble a ciertos corazones y resulta imposible retirar esa membrana pegajosa del órgano que la genera y hace de ella un vínculo con los enamorados de la muerte.”

For this study, taking into account these three levels of organization, I coined an index for a general description of prosodic structure in relation to textual structure, called *poetic prosodic structure*. This index allows us to observe the relationship between prosodic units and an author's textual verse. In this case, comparing poetic utterances, prosodic curves, and rhythmic words with verses highlights a strong divergence between the two readings. This indicates that the strategies of the two poets depend not only on the different structures of their poetic texts, as previously discussed, but also on their personal stylistic prosodic choices, which diverge markedly. As shown in the graph in Fig. 2, the two authors strongly differ in the rhythmic scansion of their reading, as indicated by the level of rhythmic words. Aguirre accentuates her prosodic curves (overall longer but not homogeneously) with a higher number of internal rhythmic words characterizing her reading style as *appoggiato*, to borrow a term from music (cf. Colonna 2022, 63). In other words, her reading emphasizes the internal stress units of prosodic melodies.¹¹ Furthermore, Aguirre's approach, as previously noted, tends to fragment her verses into

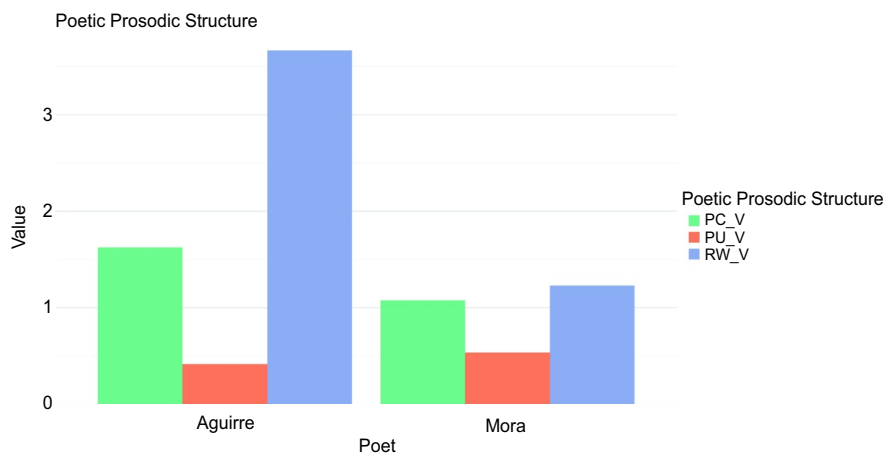


Fig. 2: Histogram of the Poetic Prosodic Structure.

Ratios between Prosodic Curve and Verse (PC_V); Prosodic Utterance and Verse (PU_V); Rhythmic Words and Verse (RW_V)¹²

¹¹ Similarly, in musical agogics, we can find a “stressed” note (Scholes and Ward 1964, 27), or the synonymous *appoggiando*, defined as “a style of playing in which succeeding notes are closely connected and stressed” (Latham 2011, n.p.) or a “drawing out, lengthening, leaning upon” style (Stainer and Barrett 1876, 33). In the same way, melodic units in poetry can be considered “appoggiate” when perceived as stressed, lengthened, and leaning toward the following element.

¹² These indices are calculated as ratios, respectively between the total number of Prosodic Curves and Verses, Prosodic Utterances and Verses, Rhythmical Words and Verse.

hemi-verse curves, resulting in a reading that is more segmented overall than the written text.

Regarding the major structure of prosodic organization, namely the poetic utterance, I found that the reading styles of both poets generally exhibit the same ratio of poetic utterances per verse, suggesting a stable relationship between these features regardless of the number of verses.

Much more can be said about poetic reading from a qualitative perspective and comparing two distinct readings. Key indices include average pitch, mean intensity, pitch span, voice setting changes and speech rate, as mentioned before, as well as specific intonations patterns, often frequent in poetry reading, like the *poetic declarative intonation* – an assertive intonation, which does not fall as sharply as in everyday speech, but remains suspended on an open ending (acoustically, ending on a mid-level pitch) – and rhetorical repetitions of melodic contours. Here, I will focus on these parameters.

Both authors employ a similar speech rate, averaging around five syllables per second, a medium value compared to the authors of the “second radio-television” phase in the phonetic history of Spanish poetry reading, as discussed by Colonna et al. (2024, 17) and in the VSP online vocal archive (Colonna 2024). This corresponds to a more recent approach to reading, as seen, for example, in the recordings by Luis Cernuda, Carmen Conde, and Pedro Salinas. Aguirre and Mora also share similar average pitch (mean relative frequency in Hz, which indicates the average pitch height of the entire reading, comparable to the pitch of a musical note prevailing in the reading) and intensity levels (mean value, measured in decibels, corresponding to the level of sound energy or the strength with which the voice is emitted throughout the entire reading) with Aguirre’s values being slightly higher. On the other hand, regarding melody, both readings display internal variety: each voice covers a wide pitch span, with Ángeles Mora reaching nearly two octaves and Paca Aguirre an octave and a half. However, the degree of tonal and register variation (Voice Setting Changes; cf. Colonna, 2022, 63) differs between the two. Mora frequently shifts levels, avoiding any monotony, while Aguirre introduces fewer internal changes, achieving a more homogeneous yet still varied style. Although this study does not address the effects of reading reception and perception, other research has explored how different uses of prosody influences processing. Studies such as those by Raithel et al. (cf. 2004), Sander et al. (cf. 2005, 848–858), Truckenbrodt (cf. 2012), Nakamura et al. (cf. 2020), as well as Bolinger (cf. 1989), show how a different intonational approach generates different processing effects. We could say that in the case of poetry readings with frequent tonal changes, according to psycholinguistic studies conducted so far, we can also expect the perception and reception of the poem to be more engaged compared to a more tonally homogeneous stimulus. Several studies in fact con-

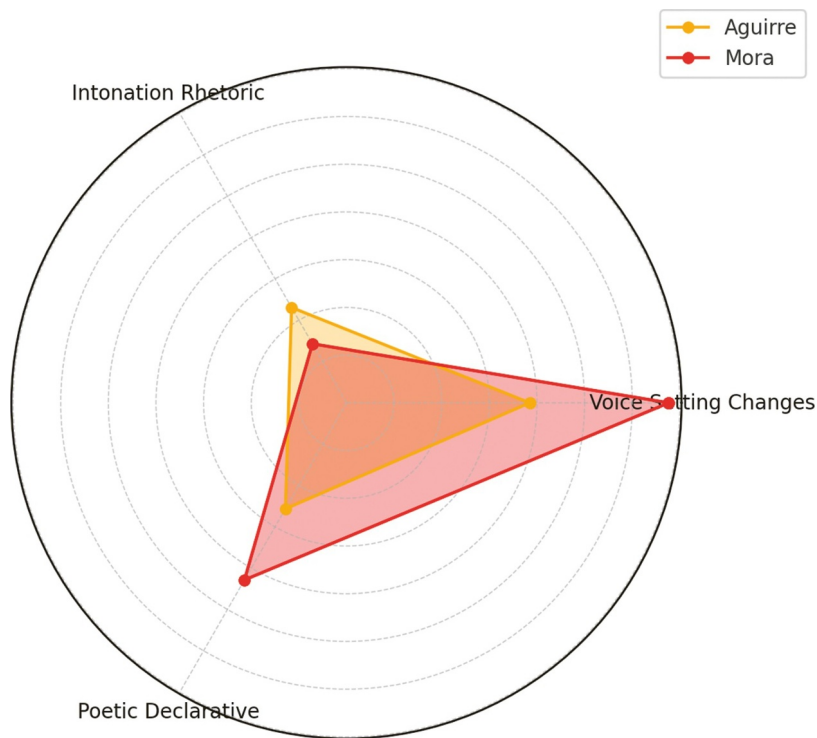


Fig. 3: Synthetic melodic VIP-VSP-Radar.

verge in the theory of higher levels of intelligibility and attention with internally varied reading.

Furthermore, both readings globally exhibit a melodic dynamism in intonation, avoiding frequent rhetoric repetition of specific patterns. Instead, each reading remains varied, even though Ángeles Mora often adopts more poetic declarative intonations. Fig. 3, a reduction and simplification of the VIP-VSP-Radar, visually supports this analysis, connecting the indicators of tone and intonation features (Voice Setting Changes, Intonation Rhetoric, Poetic Declarative).

In light of the initial studies on the history of poetry reading (cf. Colonna 2024; Colonna et al. 2024), these two readings can be seen as an example of a possible natural continuation of the evolution in of the contemporary Spanish poets' reading styles, even though the sample size is limited for defining a long-term

trend.¹³ For example, the more spontaneous approach to reading replacing a more emphasized earlier declamation is characteristic of the evolutionary trajectory observed so far. Furthermore, several features align Aguirre's and Mora's readings with a broader shift that appears to be emerging over time. For instance, their *Plenus* levels are lower compared to recordings of the first radio-television phase in the history of Spanish poetry reading by Colonna 2024 (e.g. by Dámaso Alonso, Vicente Aleixandre, or Rafael Alberti). They are more similar to recent reading styles, indicating that the pausal duration in contemporary Spanish poetry readings has been continuously increasing. Additionally, the increased speech rate aligns with the historical trend observed in poetic speech and other spoken forms, such as radio and television, for both Italian and Spanish. Furthermore, based on a prior study that compared the readings of same texts by speakers of different genders and showed significant differences in tonal range (cf. Colonna and Montes de Oca 2024), the pitch and tone features found in Aguirre's and Mora's readings also seem to suggest a tendency towards a broad tonal and pitch range in women's voices. This could provide valuable insights into gender differences in poetry reading, which may reflect broader gender differences in spontaneous and other forms of speech; further investigation will be needed in this regard.

Conclusion

In this work, I have presented a general phonetic description of the readings of two Spanish poets, considering three levels of analysis: the prosodic organization of the written text (with a focus on the use of pauses), the use of specific phonetic parameters, and the characteristics of certain stylistic indices typical of poetic speech.

Aguirre's and Mora's voices are a sign of their time, offering a "sound photograph" of contemporary poetry and the historical-cultural moment in a country. They carry not only the history of poetry and sound but also the unique qualities of their individual voices. The data reveal key prosodic features that help us appreciate the distinctiveness of each reading, showing how these voices are similar in some ways and diverge in others. This study demonstrated that poets' voices constitute a distinct form of "sound art," with specific description criteria, con-

¹³ The VSP project aims to explore the contemporaneity of poetry reading in greater depth and on a larger scale through its archive, as the next step in its research, in order to continue the history of Spanish poetry reading in our present time.

tributing to the same composition and serving as phonetically analyzable musical material. An intersection of this knowledge makes it possible to see the complexity of these materials as a whole and to see their recent correlations.

Poetry is voice, and voice is memory. Conserving and exploring the recorded voices of the poets through suitable technologies allows connecting intimately with the body-voice of poetry and accessing that memory, while also revealing the main prosodic features of the reading. This opportunity offers valuable insights not only into poetry reading behaviors as a linguistic form of speech and a performative art but also into the understanding of the authors, the texts and the surrounding cultural contexts.

Furthermore, this approach not only provides valuable insights for linguistic, literary/metrical, and sound studies – fostering an interdisciplinary understanding – but also allows us to consider the three-dimensionality of the word, which encompasses text, orality, and time. This is made possible through mediation of digital sources and technologies.

This chapter offers a preliminary overview aimed at highlighting the potential of poetry recordings. Further comparisons of the results between different contemporary authors and larger analyzed corpora for each poet, involving both qualitative and quantitative analyses, will help identify possible trends and variations in readings by the same author and within the cultural panorama. These comparisons will also propose groupings already identified in Colonna (2024) and explore additional potential clusters (e.g., gender). Such analyses are essential for tracking the contemporary state of poetry reading and providing a comprehensive picture of a poet's reading style. This study serves as an initial introduction to contemporary Spanish poetry reading styles, establishing a foundation for further investigations into the evolution of poetry reading today.

Studies focused on categorizing poetic voices and identifying prosodic styles, with the aim of creating a phonetic history of poetic reading, can bridge literary criticism, linguistic analysis and archive conservation, offering valuable tools for understanding poetry and exploring this unique form of speech. Moreover, by delineating and defining a global cultural framework, this approach contributes to various fields, including anthropology, sociology, and sound studies. By leveraging the heritage of mediated voices as an integral and essential element of literary, linguistic, and sound studies, this approach not only opens new avenues for the exploration, listening, and transmission of poetry but also ensures the preservation of contemporary poetry's sound memory.

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Rebecka Dürr und Vadim Keylin

Künstliche Intelligenz, menschliche Stimme: Monika Rinck liest *Monika Rinck* (2020)

Einleitung

Im Rahmen des Schweizer Poesiefestivals Neonfische 2022 las die Lyrikerin Monika Rinck ein Gedicht, dass „von [ihr] und gleichzeitig nicht von [ihr]“ (2023, 22) stammt: Es wurde von einer auf Rincks Gedichte trainierten künstlichen Intelligenz generiert. Die Verwendung einer KI zur Nachahmung von Sprach- und Schreibstil einzelner Lyriker:innen ist ein derzeit gängiger Ansatz für computergestützte Kreativität und wurde bereits unterschiedlich diskutiert (vgl. Bajohr 2020, 3–4; Zylinska 2020; Stephensen 2022, 2024). Rincks Lesung stellt insofern einen Sonderfall dar, als der generierte Text von jener Autorin dargeboten wird, deren Texte durch die KI nachgeahmt wurden. Ebendiese Koinzidenz unterstreicht zugleich die Mehrdeutigkeit von Rincks Beziehung zum KI-Gedicht. Lyriker:innen, die ihre eigenen Gedichte lesen, geben in der Art und Weise des Vortrags oftmals zu erkennen, dass sie auch die Autor:innen der Texte sind, wohingegen in Lesungen von Schauspieler:innen oder Sprecher:innen stets eine gewisse Distanz zum Text betont wird (vgl. Novak 2017). Rinck ist jedoch weder die unmittelbare Autorin des KI-Gedichts, noch komplett unbeteiligt an dessen Entstehung, wodurch ihre Lesung in einer mehrdimensionalen Überlagerung von Autor:innenschaft und Distanz resultiert. Der vorliegende Aufsatz untersucht die stimmlichen und performativen Manifestationen dieser Ambiguität und analysiert am Beispiel Monika Rinck die Beziehung zwischen Stimme und Autor:innenschaft, insbesondere in Bezug auf KI-Gedichte.

Anknüpfend an eine frühere gemeinsame Publikation der Verfasser:innen (vgl. Dürr und Keylin 2024) führt dieses Kapitel mit *close listening* (vgl. Bernstein 1998) und *thick listening* (vgl. Schulze 2018, 156; Keylin 2025) zwei Methoden zusammen, welche die Analyse von Rincks Lesung sowohl aus akustischer als auch phänomenologischer Perspektive erlauben. In Analogie zum literaturwissenschaftlichen Konzept des *close reading* definiert der Dichter und Theoretiker Charles Bernstein *close listening* als „critical interpretation of the performance style of individual poets“ auf Grundlage der Analyse von Aufnahmen und Aufführungen (1998, 4). In Anlehnung an Bernsteins Konzept des *close listening* sowie Rudolf Helmstetters Begriff der „poetischen Lektüre“ (1995, 37) entwickelt die Literaturwissenschaftlerin Wiebke Vorrath den Ansatz der *poetischen Audition*. Diesen versteht sie als „eine Methode des Zuhörens beziehungsweise Hörverstehens

[...], durch die verschiedene Parameter der Klanglichkeit herausgehört werden, denen im Zusammenhang mit dem Gedichtinhalt Bedeutungen zugeschrieben werden können“ (2019, 195). Der analytische Ansatz des vorliegenden Aufsatzes stützt sich auf die literaturwissenschaftliche Methode des *close listening* und verbindet diese mit der sprechwissenschaftlichen Methode des ‚funktionellen Hörens‘.

Die Sprechwissenschaft operiert mit einem terminologisch-methodischen Inventar, welches sich explizit auf gesprochene Sprache bezieht und daher eine differenzierte Beschreibung lautsprachlicher Äußerungen ermöglicht. Die (Sprech-) Stimme wird in diesem Kontext nicht als Material aufgefasst, sondern als Verbindung von sprachlicher Formulierung und stimmlich-artikulatorischen Merkmalen, welche sich im Vorgang des Sprechens, als Sprechausdruck realisiert (vgl. Dürr 2026). Der Sprechausdruck bezeichnet „an sprachliche Formulierungen gebundene beziehungsweise sie komplettierende sprecherische Ausdrucksformen, die zwar individuell ausgeführt, aber situations- und stimmadäquat konventionalisiert gestaltet werden“ (Bose 2003, 28). Die auditive Analyse von Rincks Lesung erfolgt unter Rückgriff auf die sprechwissenschaftlich etablierte Methode des ‚funktionellen Hörens‘. Im Rahmen des funktionellen Hörens werden lediglich tatsächlich wahrgenommene und sequenziell erlebte Merkmale des Sprechausdrucks berücksichtigt, welche folglich einen Einfluss auf das Sprechhandeln nehmen. Das Vorgehen kann somit als wissenschaftliche Auseinandersetzung mit der Alltagspraxis des Miteinandersprechens verstanden werden (vgl. Gutenberg 1998, 112; Bose 2003, 91). Hierfür wird mit Hilfe des Gehörs zunächst ein allgemeiner Klangeindruck gewonnen sowie weitergehend die Identifikation unterschiedlicher sequenziell auftretender klanglicher Ereignisse fokussiert (vgl. Heilmann 2022, 119). Durch Beurteilung und Skalierung können ebendiese klanglichen Ereignisse segmental und suprasegmental in Merkmale und Merkmalskomplexe, beispielsweise Sprechtonhöhe, Lautheit und Sprechrhythmus, zerlegt werden. Das auditiv wahrgenommene Sprechereignis wird anhand einer fünfstufigen verbalen Intervallskala beschrieben (vgl. Bose 2001, 301–302). Die resultierenden Ergebnisse erlauben schließlich Aussagen über spezifische beziehungsweise charakteristische Merkmale des Sprechausdrucks sowie über mögliche Unterschiede der stimmlich-sprecherischen Gestaltung vor dem Hintergrund unterschiedlich konzipierter Texte (vgl. Dürr 2026). Auf Grundlage dieses methodischen Vorgehens sowie im Kontext des *close listening* ermöglichen die angestellten Analysen eine präzise Differenzierung der Art und Weise wie Rinck ihr eigenes und das KI-generierte Gedicht liest. Hierdurch wird einerseits die Beziehung der Lyrikerin zu beiden Texten interpretierbar und können andererseits Fragen der Autor:innenschaft analysiert werden.

Gegenüber der Methode des *close listening* schlägt der Kultur- und Medienwissenschaftler Holger Schulze im Kontext der Klanganthropologie den Begriff

des *thick listening* vor. Diesen versteht er als eine klangwissenschaftliche Erweiterung des ethnografischen Konzeptes der *thick description* [Dichte Beschreibung] „in which the researcher makes explicit the patterns of cultural and social relationships and puts them in context“ (Geertz 1973, 6). Nach Schulze ist *thick listening* als Zuhören „immersed in the substance and the historical as well as sensational, fictional, and obsessive layers coating and entwining any sonic experience“ (2018, 156) zu verstehen. Die mit Hilfe des *close listening* gewonnene, unmittelbare klangliche Erfahrung wird folglich durch *thick listening* um historische, sensorische, fiktionale und obsessive Kontextebenen erweitert. Die in diesem Kapitel verwendete Methode des *thick listening* ist insbesondere von einer ‚postphänomenologischen‘ Perspektive beeinflusst. Mit dem Begriff der ‚Postphänomenologie‘ schlägt der Philosoph Don Ihde eine Erweiterung der phänomenologischen Untersuchung der unmittelbaren Erfahrung vor, die die technische Vermittlung der Erfahrung berücksichtigt, das heißt die Art und Weise wie sowohl Wahrnehmung als auch Verständnis und Konzeptualisierung verschiedener Phänomene von Technologien und Medien geprägt werden (vgl. 2009). Vor diesem Hintergrund können nicht nur die sich wechselseitig beeinflussenden und transformierenden, netzwerkähnlichen Verknüpfungen zwischen Stimme, Text und Technologie, welche sich in Rincks Lesung des KI-Gedichts überlagern, aufgezeigt, sondern ebenfalls ihre Auswirkungen auf die Phänomene Stimme und Autor:innenschaft beschrieben werden.

Die Frage der Autor:innenschaft gilt, wenig überraschend, als eine der umstrittensten im Diskurs der Computerkreativität. Nicht zuletzt, da KI – selbst im Vergleich zu traditioneller generativer Poesie – einen Paradigmenwechsel darstellt: Während in letztgenanntem Fall die generierten Werke von den Dichter-Programmierer:innen kontrolliert werden können, da sie Algorithmen und Daten direkt vorgeben, sind die Erzeugnisse der KI weitestgehend unvorhersehbar und die Prinzipien der Generierung undurchsichtig (vgl. Bajohr 2020, 2023). Vor diesem Hintergrund kann zwischen vier Arten der KI-Autor:innenschaft unterschieden werden: (a) die KI kann tatsächliche:r und alleinige:r Autor:in des Gedichts sein, (b) ihr kann jegliche kreative Handlungsfähigkeit abgesprochen werden, wobei die Autor:innenschaft vollständig den Dichter-Programmierer:innen zugeschrieben wird; (c) Generative Poesie kann das Ergebnis einer Mensch-Maschinen-Kollaboration sein oder (d) als ‚gefundenere‘ Text, ohne Autor:in im eigentlichen Sinn, erst im Vorgang des Lesens eine poetische Bedeutung erlangen (vgl. Schwartz 2018; Keylin und Vorrath 2025). In einem früheren Artikel hat Keylin bereits ausführlich dargestellt, wie sich diese zugrundeliegenden Vorstellungen von KI-Autor:innenschaft in Lyrikperformances manifestieren (vgl. 2024). Der vorliegende Aufsatz erweitert diese Diskussion, indem er die spezifische Bedeutung der Performativität der Stimme (vgl. Eidsheim 2012, 2019) ergänzt, welche sowohl

den Anspruch der Vortragenden auf Autor:innenschaft als auch ihre Distanzierung davon zum Ausdruck bringt. Als Antwort auf den „vocal essentialism“ (Eidsheim 2019, 23) der traditionellen westlichen Denkweise, welcher die Stimme mit Identität und Subjektivität gleichsetzt und sie ferner als unmittelbaren Ausdruck des inneren Selbst betrachtet (vgl. Weidman 2015, 233; Eidsheim 2019, 23), konzentriert sich das performative Verständnis der Stimme darauf, „what voices *do*, how they *create* and *disturb* meaning and ‘identity’ rather than just conveying or expressing it“ (Neumark 2010, 96). Ausgehend von diesem Ansatz interessiert nachfolgend, auf welche Art und Weise Monika Rinck ihre Stimme beim Lesen des KI-generierten Gedichts einsetzt und inwiefern sie dabei sowohl ihre implizite Autorinnenschaft verkörpert als auch die Lücken zwischen beiden Identitäten – der Lyrikerin Monika Rinck und der impliziten Autorin des KI-Gedichts – hervorhebt.

Obwohl die postphänomenologischen Überlegungen (*thick listening*) in diesem Aufsatz auf den sprechwissenschaftlichen Analysen (funktionelles Hören/*close listening*) basieren, folgt er einem umgekehrten Aufbau, um die Nachvollziehbarkeit des Argumentes zu unterstützen: Im ersten Teil des Aufsatzes werden sowohl allgemeine Fragen der KI-Autor:innenschaft im Projekt *Poetisch denken* adressiert als auch die Komplexität ebendieser Fragen im Kontext von Rincks Lesung diskutiert. Der zweite Teil widmet sich schließlich der vergleichenden Analyse von Rincks Sprechgestaltung bei der Lesung eines eigenen sowie eines KI-generierten Gedichts und setzt die Gestaltungsansätze in Bezug zu den theoretischen Ausführungen.

Das lyrische Subjekt als Datensubjekt

Unter dem Titel *Poetisch denken* veröffentlichte das Textkollektiv 0x0a, bestehend aus den Schriftstellern Hannes Bajohr und Gregor Weichbrodt, im Jahr 2021 eine Reihe von vier Büchern. Der Titel des Projekts lehnt sich an das einflussreiche gleichnamige Buch des Literaturkritikers und -wissenschaftlers Christian Metz (2018) an, in welchem er die Werke von vier Dichter:innen bespricht, die ihm zufolge das Feld der zeitgenössischen deutschen Lyrik bestimmen: Monika Rinck, Jan Wagner, Ann Cotten und Steffen Popp. Die von Metz besprochenen Werke ebendieser vier Lyriker:innen nutzte das Textkollektiv 0x0a um das Sprachmodell GPT-2 zu trainieren. Die hieraus hervorgegangenen KI generierten Gedichte publizierten Bajohr und Weichbrodt in vier Bänden – jeweils einen Band pro Autor:in. Auf den ersten Blick ist das Projekt ein klassisches Beispiel für die Verwendung von KI-Kreativität als Nachahmung menschlicher Kreativität (vgl. Schwartz 2018). Für jeden Band wurde das neuronale Netzwerk auf das Korpus einer Autorin oder

eines Autors trainiert, um den jeweils typischen Stil zu imitieren. Die Gestaltung der Titelseite der einzelnen Publikationen unterstreicht diese Imitation zusätzlich, da die Namen der einzelnen Lyriker:innen aufgrund der gewählten Schriftgröße und der prominenten Platzierung betont werden. Dieser Aufbau erweckt den Eindruck, als ob es sich bei den Lyriker:innen tatsächlich um die Autor:innen der Bücher handelt, während 0x0a lediglich als Herausgeber erscheint.

Im Vergleich zu typischen Beispielen von KI-Anthropomorphismus zeichnet sich *Poetisch denken* durch eine ungewöhnliche Herangehensweise aus: Das Textkollektiv trainierte die KI auf Werke lebender Lyriker:innen und ermöglicht diesen somit die Konfrontation und Auseinandersetzung mit ihren KI-generierten Doppelgänger:innen. Ebendiese Gegenüberstellung war in Monika Rincks Poetikvorlesung mit dem Titel „Das Gespenst der Maschine, die mich schreibt“ zu beobachten, welche während des Poesiefestivals Neonfische 2022 im Aargauer Literaturhaus in Lenzburg (Schweiz) stattfand.¹ In ihrer Vorlesung reflektierte Rinck sowohl Fragen der KI-Autor:innenschaft als auch die Erfahrung der Lektüre von Gedichten, die aus ihrem eigenen Werk hervorgegangen sind. Nicht zuletzt – und für die vorliegende Diskussion von besonderer Relevanz – las die Lyrikerin unter anderem das KI-generierte Gedicht „des bodenuren herausendbands“:

hört ihr das, so höhnen honigprotokolle, semantisize
schwere primatover. es ist sicher bald ein gramsfürbter praktz tun?
so keine großem einisisters, es ist die verkraft, ein maschine.
kaum als einists ein kommando, es ist verkraft.
nur ich schnell oder ein schlimmer
nichts mehr übrig. (0x0a 2020, 54)

Durch die Verlautbarung des Gedichts entsteht eine Überlagerung poetischer Identitäten: Ein Gedicht, das nach Rincks eigener Beschreibung „von [ihr] und gleichzeitig nicht von [ihr]“ (2023, 22) stammt, wird von seiner Autorin und gleichzeitig nicht von seiner Autorin gelesen. Wie bereits erwähnt, ist die Aufführung eines Gedichts stets auch die Aufführung seiner Autor:innenschaft. Indem Rinck den KI-generierten Text liest und hierdurch zugleich verkörpert, tragen die mit der poetischen Stimme verbundenen Authentizitätseffekte (vgl. Neumark 2010, 95; Novak 2017) sowie der „vocal essentialism“ (Eidsheim 2019, 23) dazu bei, den Eindruck zu stärken, dass es sich bei dem KI-generierten Gedicht um ein Gedicht

¹ Die Vorlesung wurde 2023 mit einigen Änderungen als Artikel in der Zeitschrift *Merkur* veröffentlicht (Rinck 2023). Die Zitate in diesem Artikel sind, mit einer Ausnahme, genannter Publikation entnommen. Das Zitat auf Seite 300 orientiert sich an der verwendeten Videoaufzeichnung, da es im veröffentlichten Text nicht berücksichtigt wurde.

von Monika Rinck handelt, während zugleich die maschinelle Herkunft des Textes verschleiert wird. Eine Anekdote, welche die Lyrikerin in ihrem Vortrag erzählt, verleiht diesem Effekt besonderes Gewicht:

Es sind Texte, die eine interessante Zwischenstellung einnehmen, die von mir und gleichzeitig nicht von mir sind, sind mir nah und fremd. Menschen, die mich kennen und lesen finden sie eigenartigerweise viel fremder und unzugänglicher als ich, die sich an vielen Stellen darin erkennt oder zumindest annimmt, es zu tun. Doch Moment, gerade gestern Abend, im Wintergarten, las mir ein alter Freund daraus vor und in der Verkörperung seiner vertrauten Stimme, da verstand ich sie auch nicht mehr. (Rinck 2022, 13:29–14:05)

Anders formuliert: In der stimmlichen und körperlichen Darbietung nimmt die Lyrikerin zumindest teilweise die Autorinnenposition der generierten Gedichte ein – dies gilt gleichermaßen für ein stilles, inneres Lesen. Doch zerfällt diese Identifikation sofort, wenn die Gedichte von einer anderen, ‚fremden‘ Stimme gelesen werden. In ähnlicher Weise könnte diese Koinzidenz auch für Rincks Publikum von Bedeutung sein: In gedruckter Form mögen die KI-Gedichte nur schwer zuzuordnen sein, obwohl sie einige stilistische Elemente von Rincks Gedichten reproduzieren (vgl. Benthien 2025). Im Moment der Lesung jedoch, könnten die Zuhörer:innen einzelne Merkmale wiedererkennen, welche insbesondere im Zusammenhang mit Rincks Stimme auf ihre Autorinnenschaft verweisen und das Gedicht somit potenziell als ein von Monika Rinck verfasstes Gedicht wahrnehmbar machen – eine Hypothese, die einer empirischen Überprüfung bedarf.²

Während Rinck in der Verlautbarung des KI-Gedichts ihre Autorinnenschaft verkörpert, distanziert sie sich zugleich deutlich von „des bodenuren herausendbands“. Einerseits da sie das Gedicht eher in den Kontext eines Vortrags, denn einer Dichterlesung stellt und andererseits um eine ausführliche Reflexion der Urhebererschaft, poetische Identität sowie wissenschaftliche Erläuterungen des Textes ergänzt. So widmet sie sich systematisch der Poetik von *Poetisch denken 1: Monika Rinck* (2020), indem sie spezifische Passagen und allgemeine stilistische Merkmale identifiziert, welche die KI aus ihren Gedichtbänden übernommen hat.

2 Die Bedeutung der Stimme für die Wahrnehmung von KI-Gedichten als von einem Menschen verfasst, wurde von dem Computerwissenschaftler Ray Kurzweil festgestellt, der in den 1990er Jahren eine Art „Turing-Test“ für Gedichte durchführte (vgl. 1990, 374). Hierfür gab er 16 Personen eine Liste von 28 Gedichten – 12 von Menschen geschrieben, die übrigen von Ray Kurzweil’s Cybernetic Poet (RKCP) – und bat sie die Autor:innenschaft zuzuweisen. Im Durchschnitt lag die Gruppe in etwa 60 % der Fälle richtig. 1999 wiederholte Kurzweil den Test mit einer fortgeschrittenen Version der Software und ließ die Gedichte diesmal von einem Sprecher vorlesen. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass die korrekte Zuordnung der Autor:innenschaft in dieser Testreihe deutlich erschwert war und die Studienteilnehmer:innen häufiger falsche Zuweisungen vorgenommen haben (vgl. Kurzweil 2000).

Darunter beispielsweise die Zeile „hört ihr das, so höhnen honigprotokolle“ (0x0a 2020, 54), ein wörtliches Zitat aus Rincks Gedichtband *Honigprotokolle* (2012). In diesem dient der Vers als Eröffnung für die meisten Gedichte, während sich die Wortneuschöpfung „verkraft“ auf den Titel eines anderen Gedichts zu beziehen scheint, „Hossa – du sollst an der Verkraftung stehn“ (Rinck 2009, 15). Ferner benennt sie einige typische Merkmale ihrer Lyrik, die sie in den KI-generierten Texten wiedererkennt: „Die Energie des Springens vom ganz Persönlichen zum Redensartlichen“; die „[dislozierende] Zusammenfassung am Ende des Gedichtes“ (Rinck 2023, 29–30), die dem Vorangegangenen nicht völlig entspricht; die starke Präsenz von Fragen, welche die dialogische Rede in Gang setzen und so weiter. Gleichzeitig verweist sie auf die im KI-Gedicht vorherrschende starke Präsenz von Neologismen, Nonsense-Wörtern und grammatikalischen Strukturen, die den Sinn verschleiern – Elemente, die, zumindest in dieser Dichte, nicht charakteristisch für ihre Poesie sind und folglich den maschinellen Ursprung der Texte enttarnen (vgl. Benthien 2025). Letztlich sind es diese Elemente, welche bei der Autorin ein „amüsiertes Unverständnis“ und „leichte Avantgarde-Migräne“ auslösen, insbesondere wenn sie sich „nicht an einzelnen Findungen vergnüg[t], sondern versuch[t], einen ganzen Text zu begreifen“ (Rinck 2023, 32).

Rinck betont ebendiese Distanz deutlich, da sie ihren Vortrag mit einem Disclaimer eröffnet, welcher die gesamte Prämisse einer erkennbaren poetischen Handschrift ablehnt: „Eine Sache, die ich mir, seit ich veröffentliche, vorgenommen habe: nicht *more of the same*. Kein Selbstimitat produzieren, auch nicht unter Druck. Nicht in Serie gehen“ (Rinck 2023, 21). Anders ausgedrückt: Indem die KI schreibt wie Monika Rinck (genauer gesagt, wie Monika Rinck im Jahr 2018, da das Trainingskorpus durch die in Metz Buch erwähnten Gedichtbände begrenzt ist), schreibt sie am wenigsten wie Monika Rinck. Die auf Nachahmung basierende Konzeption von KI-Autor:innenschaft stößt an ihre eigenen Grenzen und unterläuft sich selbst, wenn sie mit einer Poetik konfrontiert wird, die eine permanente Selbsterfindung fordert.

Diese Dialektik von Identität und Distanz, in der sich Rinck einerseits in der abstrakten Autorin der Gedichte wiedererkennt und andererseits von ebendieser distanziert, lässt eine Nähe zu Olga Goriunovas Begriff des ‚digitalen Subjekts‘ erkennen (vgl. 2019a, 2019b). Aufbauend auf dem juristischen Konzept des Daten-subjekts, das heißt auf der Gesamtheit personenbezogener Daten einer natürlichen Person, beschreibt Goriunova das digitale Subjekt als ein Subjekt, welches anhand von Daten menschlicher Nutzer:innen konstruiert wird. Es agiert anstelle des menschlichen Subjektes in der algorithmischen Ebene unterschiedlicher Medien (vgl. 2019a, 2). Dies umfasst „a subject of a data profile or of a Facebook stream, a history of browsing or search engine queries, mobile phone positioning records, bank transactions, sensor data, facial recognition data, biometric move-

ment recognition data, or email inboxes, among other things” (Goriunova 2019b, 126). Zwar dienen die menschlichen Nutzer:innen als notwendige Quelle des digitalen Subjekts, da es erst durch ihre Daten definiert wird, jedoch betont Goriunova „it is not the human being per se who is the subject of their data. It is instead an abstraction of themselves [...] that acts as their data subject, standing in for the person” (2019a, 2). In diesem Sinn nimmt das digitale Subjekt eine vermittelnde Position ein: Es ist an die menschlichen Nutzer:innen gebunden und wird von ihnen insofern definiert, als es sich selbst aus dem von diesen Nutzer:innen generierten Material konstituiert. Dennoch ist es nicht mit einem Menschen vergleichbar und verfügt über ein gewisses Maß an autonomer Handlungsfähigkeit, auch gegenüber den Nutzer:innen selbst. Goriunova weist darauf hin, dass die politischen Implikationen dieser Handlungsfähigkeit mehrdeutig sind. Das digitale Subjekt kann ein Mittel zur Beeinflussung sein, zum Beispiel durch gezielte Werbung, Desinformationskampagnen, Überwachungs- und Data-Mining-Praktiken; gleichermaßen bietet es „sites of reinvention, liberation and play. Fake accounts and performed identities testify to that” (2019b, 127).

Die mit Hilfe von KI nachgeahmte Lyrik einer menschlichen Autorin, beispielsweise Monika Rincks, erzeugt zugleich eine implizite Autorin, welche als eine Art digitales Subjekt fungiert: Sie ist eine Rekonstruktion der Lyrikerin – im Sinn der „Autorfunktion” (Foucault 2000 [1969], 216), das heißt der Figur, die ein Textkorpus mit einem Namen und einer Biografie zusammenfügt – aus einer Art von ‚persönlichen Daten‘³ der poetischen Äußerungen. Ähnlich wie sich das digitale Subjekt in den digitalen Medien als Stellvertreter der menschlichen Nutzer:innen entfaltet, geben die KI-Lyriker:innen vor, im literarischen Diskurs stellvertretend für jene menschlichen Lyriker:innen zu handeln, an deren Texten die KI trainiert wurde. Jedoch ist die Verbindung zwischen Mensch und digitalem Subjekt im Fall der KI unterbrochen: Da das Trainingskorpus statisch und endlich ist, gibt es für die menschlichen Autor:innen der Korpora nach Abschluss des Trai-

3 In der Datenschutz-Grundverordnung (DSGVO) werden persönliche Daten als „alle Informationen, die sich auf eine identifizierte oder identifizierbare natürliche Person [...] beziehen“ definiert. „Als identifizierbar wird eine natürliche Person angesehen, die direkt oder indirekt, insbesondere mittels Zuordnung zu einer Kennung wie einem Namen, zu einer Kennnummer, zu Standortdaten, zu einer Online-Kennung oder zu einem oder mehreren besonderen Merkmalen, die Ausdruck der physischen, physiologischen, genetischen, psychischen, wirtschaftlichen, kulturellen oder sozialen Identität dieser natürlichen Person sind, identifiziert werden kann“ (Europäische Union 2016, 33).

Gedichte können im übertragenen Sinn als ‚persönliche Daten‘ verstanden werden, da sie mit ihren Autor:innen in ähnlicher – wenn auch oft komplizierterer und mehrdeutigerer – Beziehung stehen, als dies zwischen natürlicher Person und ihren Daten der Fall ist (vgl. Zymner 2009).

nings keine Möglichkeit, die poetische Identität ihrer KI-Doppelgänger:innen zu beeinflussen. Folglich kann Rincks Lesung des generierten Gedichts als Wiederherstellung dieser Verbindung sowie als Rückgewinnung ihrer Handlungsmacht über das digitale lyrische Subjekt betrachtet werden. Obwohl sie den Inhalt des Gedichts nicht beeinflussen kann, hebt Rinck mit der mündlichen Darbietung die Merkmale ihre Autor:innenschaft im KI-Gedicht hervor und schreibt sich mit ihrer Stimme wieder in den Text ein.

Diese performative Interpretation wird nicht nur durch die starke Verbindung zwischen Stimme und Identität ermöglicht (vgl. Weidman 2015), sondern auch durch die Art und Weise mit der Bajohr und Weichbrodt ihre Autorschaft als Schöpfer der KI, des Trainingskorpus und des konzeptionellen Rahmens von *Poetisch denken* indirekt ausüben. Auch an dieser Stelle bietet sich die räumliche Metapher der Distanz an, denn Bajohr beschreibt seine Methode der generativen Literatur als „Schreiben in Distanz“ beziehungsweise als „Literatur zweiten Grades oder [...] indirekte Literatur. Das meint zunächst ganz einfach: Statt einen Text zu schreiben, baut sie eine Maschine, die einen Text schreibt“ (2023, 27). Nach Bajohr operiert KI-Literatur mit einer größeren Distanz als traditionelle generative Literatur (letztgenannte bezeichnet er als „sequentiell“):

Der Bruch zwischen den Paradigmen berührt auch die Autorschaftsfrage, deren menschliche Seite im Mensch-Maschine-Gefüge eine zunehmende Distanzierung durchläuft: Konnte man im sequenziellen Paradigma noch plausibel von *sekundärer* Autorschaft sprechen, die in der Formulierung einer Regelfolge besteht, deren Ausführung das Werk produziert – hier ergibt die Idee eines „writer of writer“ durchaus Sinn –, steht man bei KNNs vor einer *tertiären* Autorschaft: Es bleiben allein der Datensatz für das Training zu definieren, aus dem das KNN selbständig das Modell bildet, und die Parameter zu bestimmen, mittels derer das Modell schließlich den Output hervorbringt. (2022, 198)

Es ist ebendiese Distanz zwischen dem *Akt der Autorschaft* von Bajohr und Weichbrodt und den von der KI reproduzierten *Markern der Autor:innenschaft*, die einen interpretativen Raum eröffnet, in welchem Autor:innenschaft mehrdeutig zugeschrieben werden kann. Indem Rinck diesen Raum mit der stimmlichen Verkörperung des Textes einnimmt, wird sie gewissermaßen als implizite Autorin des Gedichts identifizierbar. Demgegenüber lehnen Bajohr und Weichbrodt eine solche Identifizierung ausdrücklich ab: Beispielsweise erscheinen sie – wie schon erwähnt – auf der Titelseite des Buchs lediglich als Herausgeber und nicht als Autoren. Dies ist auf die Intention der generativen Literatur zurückzuführen, welche in der Distanzierung von einer unmittelbaren Autor:innenschaft besteht.

Stimme zwischen Nähe und Distanz

Wie entfaltet sich nun diese Dialektik der Identifikation mit dem digitalen lyrischen Subjekt und der Distanzierung von ebendiesem auf stimmlich-sprecherischer Ebene? Für die Beantwortung dieser Frage dient Rincks Lesung als perfektes Beispiel, da sie im Anschluss an die Darbietung des KI-Gedichts ebenfalls ein eigenes Gedicht mit dem Titel „Hossa – du sollst an der Verkraftung stehn“ präsentiert und ferner in beiden Texten sowohl das Wort „Verkraft[ung]“ als auch das Bild der Maschine präsent ist:

mexikanische gitarrenslacker toben sich mit ihren rasseln aus.
 wer soll das denn verkraften? bestickte westen. vom see her:
 die insektenpest. sie sind überall. sie beißen zu.
 ich sticke einen heimatgroßen caravan. ich webe die abwehr.
 ich sticke perlen auf die säue, auf die seelen. ich liebe.
 die verkraftung ist mit anderen sachen verklammert.
 darin fusioniert handwarme müdigkeit mit betrügerei.
 die verkraftung ist also halb pumpe, halb presse,
 so dass man hochgepumptes sofort pressen kann.
 presssaft der quitte: wer den trinkt, muss weiterleben.
 hörst du die melodie? sie kriecht über die hänge ins loch.
 es gibt camper in der kuhle, am tiefsten punkt des wingerts,
 wohin zwei steile wege führen, und ein verschnaufen wie im schlaf,
 nur so viel schwerer ists, wenn man wach ist währenddessen.
 (Rinck 2009, 15)

Im Hinblick auf die Autor:innenschaft des Gedichts ermöglicht diese Gegenüberstellung einen direkten Vergleich der spezifischen stimmlich-sprecherischen Realisierungen der unterschiedlichen Positionen der Sprecherin. Einerseits bleiben Rincks stimmliches Timbre und einige allgemeine Merkmale ihres Sprechausdrucks in beiden Lesungen konstant. Die Lyrikerin nutzt überwiegend den mittleren Bereich ihrer Sprechstimmlage und artikuliert in moderatem Sprechtempo. Die Tonhöhenverläufe sind bewegt und weisen an einigen Stellen fallende beziehungsweise steigende Intervalle auf, wie bei der Formulierung von Aussagen und Fragen üblich (was auf bereits genannte Merkmale ihrer Poetik – eine starke Präsenz von Fragen und dialogischer Rede – verweist, welche ebenfalls von der KI übernommen wurden). Eine solche nahezu identische melodische Gestaltung zeigt sich in beiden Lesungen beispielsweise in den Versen „hörst du die melodie?“ und „hört ihr das?“. So erklingen die einzelnen Wörter der Fragen aneinandergebunden, wobei der Tonhöhenverlauf am Ende in einem großen Intervall nach oben steigt. Durch diese melodische Gestaltung erhalten die auf inhaltlicher Ebene gestellten Fragen, die Klang und Hören thematisieren, auf sprecherischer Ebene

eine performative Umsetzung. Die oben genannten Merkmale des Sprechausdrucks zeigen sich nicht nur in den Lesungen der Gedichte, sondern gleichermaßen, wenn auch in abgeschwächter Form, in den übrigen, kontextualisierenden Ausführungen Rincks. Die für die Lyrikerin typischen rhythmischen und klanglichen Strukturen sind somit in ähnlicher Form sowohl in den Vorlesungstexten als auch in den Lesungen von „des bodenuren herausendbands“ und „Hossa – du sollst an der Verkräftung stehn“ erkennbar. Mit anderen Worten, in der Lesung des KI-Gedichts wird kein fundamental anderer „vocalic body“ (Connor 2000, 35) erzeugt – auf Ebene der Sprechgestaltung erscheinen die KI „Monika Rinck“ und die Lyrikerin Monika Rinck nicht als voneinander getrennte Personae.

Trotz der Vielzahl von Neologismen und Nonsens-Wörtern sowie einer mangelnden syntaktischen Konsistenz des KI-Gedichts, lässt Ricks Intonation darauf schließen, dass sie für sich und das Publikum eine vermeintliche Bedeutung zu erzeugen versucht. Dies wird unter anderem aufgrund steigender und fallender Tonhöhenverläufe am Ende von (möglichen) Sätzen oder Verszeilen deutlich, wie bei der Formulierung von Fragen und Aussagen üblich. Die Intonation strukturiert den Text folglich in syntaktische Segmente, in welchen die Nonsens-Wörter äquivalent zu bedeutungstragenden Wörtern eingefügt werden. Der Versuch die Undurchdringbarkeit des KI-Gedichts aufzulösen, wird insofern verstärkt, als Rinck die semantisierbaren Teile der erfundenen Wörter betont, etwa „kraft“ in „verkraft“ oder „tun“ in „gramsfürbter praktz tun“. Wie im vorangegangenen Abschnitt erwähnt, verzichtet Rinck in ihren eigenen Texten überwiegend auf Nonsens-Wörter. Dass die Lyrikerin mit Hilfe der Intonation einzelnen Wörtern zumindest teilweise eine Bedeutung zuweist, kann als Minimierung jener Aspekte des KI-Gedichts angesehen werden, welche am meisten mit Rincks Poetik im Widerspruch stehen. Darüber hinaus ist die Art und Weise ihrer Sprechgestaltung bestrebt, dem generierten Text nicht nur semantisch, sondern auch poetisch eine Bedeutung zuzumessen, indem sie die für poetische Sprache typischen parallelen Strukturen auch in Passagen mit Nonsens-Wörtern und Neologismen sprecherisch hervorhebt und zudem ‚künstlich‘ erzeugt. So spricht sie beispielsweise die Wörter „honigprotokolle“ (aus Rincks eigenen Gedichten entlehnt) und „semantize“ (von der KI erfunden) in ähnlicher Weise: Sie betont im Fall von „Honig-“ die erste bzw. in „seman-“ die zweite Silbe und lässt eine Zäsur folgen, bevor sie die übrigen Silben des Wortes anschließt. In Verbindung mit der intonatorischen Segmentierung entsteht klanglich eine Art ‚Singsang‘.

Andererseits gibt es deutliche, wenn auch subtile Unterschiede in der Art, wie Rinck „des bodenuren herausendbands“ und „Hossa – du sollst an der Verkräftung stehn“ liest. Während erstgenanntes Gedicht in etwas erhöhter Tonlage gesprochen wird, senkt sie bei letzterem ihre Stimme in den unteren bis mittleren Bereich ihrer Sprechstimmlage, wodurch der gesprochene Text entspannter und

kolloquialer klingt. Auch die Lesung ihres eigenen Gedichts weist eine deutlich größere Variation in Tempo, Tonhöhe und Artikulation auf. Die Unterschiede in der Sprechgeschwindigkeit gehen insbesondere mit einer Veränderung der inhaltlichen Perspektivierung von „objektiven“ Aussagen zu ich-Aussagen einher. Während nach der Beschreibung von Szenarien und Zuständen, welche sich durch den oben beschriebenen und für Rinck typischen Sprechausdruck im Lesen auszeichnen, das artikulierte Ich in „ich sticke einen heimatgroßen caravan. ich webe die abwehr“ erstmals zu Wort kommt, erhöht Rinck zugleich sukzessiv sowohl die Sprechgeschwindigkeit und Lautheit als auch den Sprechdruck. Die hieraus resultierende Nachdrücklichkeit im Sprechen bedingt gleichermaßen eine Emotionalisierung des Abschnitts. Folglich wird nicht nur inhaltlich zwischen Situationsbeschreibung und handelndem Subjekt differenziert, sondern auch sprecherisch zwischen beiden Perspektiven unterschieden. Demgegenüber ist eine solche Kontrastierung in „des bodenuren herausendbands“ nicht erkennbar: Für die Zeile „nur ich schnell oder ein schlimmer“ nutzt Rinck dieselbe Gestaltung wie für die übrigen Verse des Textes. Diese fehlende Unterscheidung zwischen Ich-Rede und objektiver Rede ist unter Umständen darauf zurückzuführen, dass sich die Lyrikerin mit dem artikulierten Ich im KI-Gedicht weniger identifizieren kann, als dies bei ihrem eigenen Gedicht der Fall ist.

Die vielfältigere sprechkünstlerische Gestaltung in Rincks Lesung von „Hossa – du sollst an der Verkraftung stehn“ zeigt sich ebenfalls auf phonetischer Ebene, zum Beispiel im Kontext einiger Konsonanten, konkret in der Erzeugung klangvoller und perkussiver Laute. Hierfür lässt die Lyrikerin beispielsweise das stimmhafte „s“ in „Säue“ und „Seelen“ etwas länger klingen, wodurch die Sonorität des Lautes verstärkt wird. An anderer Stelle ändert sie die Lautqualität von stimmhaft zu stimmlos, von „b“ zu „p“ in „halb pumpe, halb presse“ resultierend in der Betonung der Perkussivität. Wenngleich klangliche Verdichtung per se einer poetischen Sprachverwendung entspricht, wird sie von Rinck im Gesprochenen nicht nur explizit gemacht, sondern mittels beschriebener Gestaltung zugleich intensiviert.

Rincks Lesung von „Hossa – du sollst an der Verkraftung stehn“ ist aufgrund vorausgehend beschriebener Gestaltung emotional ausdrucksstärker – paradoxerweise sogar expressiver – als das vergleichsweise monotone und neutrale KI-Gedicht, in welchem die Intonation sowie die regelmäßige Setzung von Pausen primär der Gliederung des Textes dienen. Die Ausdruckskraft von „Hossa – du sollst an der Verkraftung stehn“ wird zusätzlich durch den Einsatz von Gesten und körperlichen Ausdrucksbewegungen verstärkt, welche in Rincks Lesung des KI-Gedichts merklich fehlen. Anders formuliert: Im Vortrag von „des bodenuren herausendbands“ dienen einzelne Stilmittel lediglich dazu, strukturelle Zusammenhänge anzudeuten beziehungsweise zu betonen. Dagegen ist die Lesung von

„Hossa – du sollst an der Verkraftung stehn“ aufwändiger konzipiert und das Zusammenspiel verschiedener Stilelemente resultiert nicht nur in einer Strukturierung des Textes, sondern zugleich in seiner Affizierung. Die größere stilistische Vielfalt unterstreicht zudem, dass die Autorin über eine genaue Kenntnis der Gedichtinhalte verfügt, welche es ihr ermöglicht, die Ausdruckskraft im Sprechen ebenfalls auf die intendierte Bedeutung abzustimmen. Demgegenüber führt die Hermetik des KI-Gedichts zu einem weniger präzisen und vergleichsweise weniger facettenreichen Vortrag, wodurch die Distanz zwischen der Lyrikerin und dem digitalen lyrischen Subjekt des Gedichts erneut deutlich wird.

Im Hinblick auf die Beschreibung von gelesenen Gedichten unterscheidet die Kommunikationswissenschaftlerin Marit MacArthur zwischen zwei umfassenden Ansätzen. Ihr zufolge ist „monotonous incantation“ typisch für hochkulturelle Lyrik:

[It] is characterized by three qualities: (1) the repetition of a falling cadence within a narrow range of pitch; (2) a flattened affect that suppresses idiosyncratic expression of subject matter in favor of a restrained, earnest tone; and (3) the subordination of conventional intonation patterns dictated by particular syntax, and of the poetic effects of line length and line breaks, to the prevailing cadence and slow, steady pace. (MacArthur 2016, 44)

MacArthur stellt diesem Sprechausdruck, der so allgegenwärtig geworden ist, dass er etwas abwertend als „poet voice“ (2016, 44) bezeichnet wird, den ausdrucksvollen und gesprächsähnlichen Ausdruck von Spoken-Word-Künstler:innen und einer Minderheit hochkultureller Lyriker:innen gegenüber. Trotz formeller Unterschiede beruhen beide Ausdrucksformen weitestgehend auf denselben Werten der Aufrichtigkeit und Authentizität sowie auf der Ablehnung von theatraler Künstlichkeit. Die Ursprünge der „poet voice“ sind laut MacArthur in religiösen Predigten zu finden, deren Vortrag die Autorität der heiligen Texte nicht untergraben durfte (vgl. 2016). In ähnlicher Weise soll die Monotonie und Ausdruckslosigkeit der Gedichtlesung dazu dienen, den Text in den Mittelpunkt zu stellen und für sich selbst sprechen zu lassen. Umgekehrt dient der Konversationsstil des Spoken-Word der originalgetreuen Wiedergabe des Gedichts, als imitativer Ausdruck seines emotionalen Inhalts, als authentische Darbietung der Sprechenden (vgl. Ailes 2021).

Innerhalb dieses Paradigmas lassen sich Rincks Lesungen von „Hossa – du sollst an der Verkraftung stehn“ und „des bodenuren herausendbands“ aufgrund der jeweiligen Sprechgestaltung eindeutig den genannten Aufführungsstilen zuordnen: So liest Rinck das KI-Gedicht weniger ausdrucksstark, sodass der Klang des Gesprochenen der „poet voice“ näherkommt, während sich die Lyrikerin bei der Lesung ihres eigenen Textes eine größere Expressivität erlaubt – wenngleich diese nicht mit einer typischen Spoken-Word-Performance vergleichbar ist. Dies ist insofern ungewöhnlich, als ein dramatischer Gestus in experimenteller Poesie

vielmehr dazu dient, den Text zu verfremden und sich von ihm zu distanzieren, wie etwa der konzeptuelle Dichter Kenneth Goldsmith in seinen Darbietungen der „found poetry“ (vgl. MacArthur 2016, 49–51). Da KI-generierten Gedichten im traditionellen Sinn ein:e Autor:in fehlt, werden diese manchmal ebenfalls als ‚found‘ beziehungsweise ‚gefunden‘ bezeichnet (vgl. Schober 2022, 154; Husárová 2022, 75–76). Daher können Autor:innen von KI-Gedichtgeneratoren wie Zuzana Husárová (vgl. 2022; Keylin 2024) oder David Jhave Johnston (vgl. 2018) in ihren Performances gestalterische Elemente einsetzen, welche das „Schreiben in Distanz“ (Bajohr 2023), die Kluft zwischen dem auktorialen Akt und den Strukturen der Autor:innenschaft im Text, betonen. Im Vergleich zu Husárová und Johnston ist Rincks Beziehung zu dem von ihr gelesenen KI-Gedicht eine andere, da sie nicht die Schöpferin der KI ist, sondern ihre Gedichte das Material für das Training der KI bilden. Dies fordert ebenfalls eine abweichende sprechkünstlerische Strategie – verstärkt durch das Format der Poetikvorlesung, welches eine gewisse Neutralität und fachliche Distanz im Moment der Präsentation verlangt: Anstatt den Text zu verfremden, präsentiert sie ihn „wie er ist“ und lässt die Mehrdeutigkeit des Gedichts, das „von [ihr] und gleichzeitig nicht von [ihr]“ (Rinck 2023, 22) ist, für sich selbst sprechen. Die Klangcharakteristik der „poet voice“ dient folglich als Gestaltungsmittel, um Identität und Distanz zu überlagern.

Fazit

Bei dem hier untersuchten Beispiel handelt es sich um den singulären Fall einer ‚KI-Lyriklesung‘, welcher nur wenige übergreifende Schlussfolgerungen zulässt. Es rückt jedoch die oftmals vernachlässigte Frage der KI-Autor:innenschaft im Paradigma der Nachahmung in den Vordergrund: Die Relation zwischen den generierten Texten und den Autor:innen, an deren Werken die KI trainiert wurde sowie die Rolle der vortragenden Stimme bei der Herstellung ebendieser Beziehung. Im Gegensatz zu populäreren KI-Schreib-Experimenten, zum Beispiel Gedichten im Stil von Shakespeare oder Musik im Stil von Bach, verfolgt der Band *Poetisch denken 1: Monika Rinck* nicht das Ziel, die darin versammelten Gedichte als tatsächlich von Monika Rinck geschrieben auszuweisen. Wie Bajohr anmerkt, ging es dem Textkollektiv 0x0a nicht um die Nachahmung von Rincks Stil mittels KI, sondern um Brüche und Fehler im technischen Prozess sowie die daraus resultierenden poetisch interessanten Ergebnisse (vgl. 2023, 55). Gleichzeitig weisen die KI-generierten Gedichte unterschiedliche Merkmale auf, welche es den Rezipient:innen erlauben – so sie mit dem Werk der Autorin vertraut sind – die Gedichte mit Rinck in Verbindung zu bringen. Für Rinck selbst eröffnet diese Zwei-

deutigkeit die Möglichkeit, sich die KI-Gedichte in gewisser Weise anzueignen und diese Verbindung durch ihre Lesung hervorzuheben.

Dies ist jedoch ausschließlich im Rahmen einer Aufführung zu erreichen: Da das Urheberrecht der KI-generierten Gedichte nicht bei Rinck liegt, können diese nicht in das gedruckte Werk der Autorin übernommen werden. Die mündliche Darbietung ermöglicht es der Lyrikerin jedoch, die Kontinuität zwischen KI-generierten und ihren eigenen Gedichten durch die konstanten und erkennbaren Merkmale ihres Stimmklangs und ihres Sprechausdrucks aufrechtzuerhalten, wodurch sich auch die Merkmale ihrer Autor:innenschaft verdeutlichen. Gleichzeitig bleibt diese Kontinuität unvollständig, da Rinck für die Lesung des KI-Gedichts im Vergleich zu ihrem eigenen Werk, ein geringeres Spektrum stimmlich-sprecherischer Gestaltungsmittel verwendet. Diese Gestaltung verweist auf eine ambivalente Funktion: Der neutrale und leicht monotone Sprechausdruck („poet voice“) signalisiert zum einen die Authentifikation mit dem geschriebenen Text und zum anderen eine Distanz zum lyrischen Subjekt, dessen Äußerungen lediglich wiedergegeben, jedoch nicht verkörpert werden. Die Distanz zwischen beiden Identitäten wird zudem durch die Einbindung der Lesung in das Format der Vorlesung verstärkt. Abläufe und zusätzliche Erläuterungen, aber auch die mündliche Darbietung eigener Gedichte können somit als umfassender „performativer Epitext“ (Döring 2018) der KI-Gedichtlesung verstanden werden.

Das hier besprochene Beispiel dient ferner als Beleg für einen *sonic turn* in der Forschung im Bereich elektronischer und postdigitaler Literatur. Die Bedeutung der Stimme für die Wahrnehmung von KI-Texten konnte bereits in Kurzweils Experimenten mit Hilfe des ‚Turing-Test‘ aufgezeigt werden: Die generierten Texte wurden weitaus häufiger als von einem Menschen verfasst identifiziert, wenn ihre Rezeption akustisch, als Lesung, anstatt visuell, in gedruckter Form, erfolgte (vgl. 2000). Darüber hinaus sind Aufnahmen von Gedichten im digitalen Zeitalter mittlerweile allgegenwärtig, sodass, wie Zoë Skoulding anmerkt, selbst die stille Lektüre eines gedruckten Gedichts bereits stark von der Stimme der Autor:innen beeinflusst ist (vgl. 2020, 20). Gleiches gilt für digitale und postdigitale Poesie – und zwar nicht nur für jene Werke, welche von vornherein klangliche oder akustische Elemente enthalten, wie John Cayleys „Aurature“ (2017), sondern auch für jene Formen elektronischer Literatur, die für den Druck bestimmt sind.⁴ Das vorliegende Beispiel zeigt, dass die verstärkte Betrachtung der klanglichen Gestaltung sowohl entscheidende Einsichten offenbaren als auch innovative Perspektiven auf die zentralen Fragen der elektronischen Literatur hervorbringen kann, die bei einem rein textzentrierten Ansatz leicht übersehen werden und verloren gehen.

4 Siehe z. B. Chris Kerrs und Daniel Holdens Artikel zur Aufführung von Code Poetry (2023).

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Eleonora Fisco

Italian Spoken Music: Intermediality and Medium Specificity in the Work of Poetry Collective Mezzopalco

Introduction

It is the fourteenth of December 2018 in Milan at Cox18, an occupied and self-managed social space since 1976, with a strong political commitment against any form of domination. The *Premio Dubito di poesia con musica* [Dubito Prize for Poetry with Music], in its sixth edition, offers a competition between groups of artists with a jury composed partly of experts and partly of audience members. Among the four finalists that night, the three artists of the Mezzopalco collective are facing the audience, standing in a triangle: the poet-narrator Riccardo Iachini front and center, the poet-singer Tommaso Giordani and the beatboxer MolloBeat just a step behind. There are no musical instruments on stage – voices are the only input to their project. Mollo has already warmed up the audience, who are ready to dance to the rhythm of the verses that will lead them to win the prize of two thousand euros and enable them to produce their album. Giordani asks the technicians for some reverb for his microphone to begin with the ritual of a sung epiclesis: the practice in ancient Greece of invoking the gods for inspiration. The pantheon that he invokes through this literary *topos* is not composed of literal gods, however, but rather of historical figures who shaped the group's artistic research. In a sort of preamble, he then guides the audience on a trip that begins on May 26, 2011, when “Ratko Mladić, the executioner of Srebrenica, has just been arrested after years on the run, Miles Davis would have turned 83, and in 17 hours Gil Scott Heron will be dead” (Mezzopalco 2019a).¹ “A memoir” is the title of their first piece: a tribute to Heron as a pioneer of hip-hop and spoken word genres. At this point, Giordani disappears into the darkness; the spectators will hear his voice during the refrain, and in sync with Iachini's, who starts chanting the narrative of Heron's last night, his speaking voice supported by the vibrant hip-hop base of beatbox. Both the percussive rhythm and the pace of his speech accelerate as they build towards a climax – the acme of the death narrated in the text – until the last stanza, when the beatboxer falls silent.

¹ Unless otherwise specified, all translations from Italian are mine.

The Olympus to which Mezzopalco makes their initial plea is made up of models for a history of Western oral poetry, the “essentials” who have contributed to the emergence of the artistic form that in the Italian scene is called *spoken music*. This label can be read as a reduction of the extended expression “spoken-word music” and has blurred boundaries that are still being defined by the poets’ practices. In the English-speaking scene, to identify the work of nowadays famous artists such as Kae Tempest, Saul Williams and Moor Mother, the term ‘spoken word’ is more common, regardless of whether the piece is presented with music or a cappella. For protagonists of the Francophone scene such as Grands Corps Malade, who fills concert halls and arenas on his tours, the most widespread umbrella term is “slam.” In contrast, a terminological distinction exists within the Italian movement, which categorizes contemporary performance poetry into three main different forms: slam poetry, spoken word, and spoken music.

The definition of slam poetry is still much debated, but broadly refers to poetry performed using only the artist’s voice and body in the context of a poetry slam competition, where any type of poetry is accepted, from sonnets to haiku to narrative speech. However, the creation of a “slam style” is increasingly observable in the collective imagery, as can also be witnessed by the proliferation of slam poetry workshops and video tutorials (cf. Fisco 2022, 95–112). According to Helen Gregory, slam may in fact be considered a “for(u)m” in its dual nature as both poetic form and artistic forum (2008, 204). Outside of the competitive dimension, a slam performance can sometimes become part of a one (wo)man show of *spoken word poetry*, a label denoting poetry created for an oral performance (cf. Lemire 2021, 4; Ailes 2020, 21). A further step in a poet-performer’s career occurs when spoken word artists initiate collaborations with musicians by interweaving text with music, a practice which the Italian scene identifies as spoken music; in the last twelve years, the main promoters of this concept have been the Dubito Prize I mentioned above, and the publishing house Agenzia X. Moving between the three forms described, a poem can sometimes change a great deal, stretching beyond the maximum time limit of three minutes allowed by the competitive framework, adding repetitions, refrains and adjusting the pauses, rhythm, timbre, and breath of the performance to the music.

The growing popularity of oral poetry has prompted the attention of international scholarship, which is beginning to question the hermeneutic tools needed to study the works of these artists. Lello Voce, founder of the Italian slam scene and pioneer of the practice of spoken music in Europe, laments a still predominantly philological perspective of literary criticism in Italy and argues the need for a “poetic criticism” that highlights performative and musical aspects, alongside those that are more explicitly textual (2023, 351). Just as it has been claimed that music is not reducible to the score and that theater is something more than

the dramaturgical text (cf. Fischer-Lichte 2008; Cook 2013), an analysis of oral and performance poetry that disregards the vocal and musical aspects would inevitably neglect the complexity of spoken music.

Among the most important reflections on live poetry are those of Julia Novak, leader of the *Poetry Off The Page* project at the University of Vienna, who has proposed an analytical toolkit that includes paying as much attention to the context in which the performance takes place as to the articulatory parameters of audio-text, body communication, and the relationship established with the audience (2011). For pieces with music, some musicological analyses have been proposed. In his volume *Poesia per musica e musica per poesia*, Stefano La Via (2017) suggests a taxonomy of the possible interconnections between poetry and music, while Chantal Lemire (2021) explores the musical properties of spoken poetry in her dissertation, focusing on three macro examples of Tom Waits' songwriting, Marc Smith's slam poems, and Kurt Schwitters sound poetry. Although these three forms have greatly influenced spoken music, this contribution will investigate its specificity in the Italian scene as poetry "tempered with" music, meaning that the two components hold equal importance in the creative process.² They are fused in a kind of counterpoint, where the music is not simply played as an accompaniment. Following recent studies that have spread light on the medial dimension of performance poetry (Schaefer 2015; Voce 2016, 2023; Vorger 2017; Ben-thien 2021), special emphasis will be placed on the intermedia creative process, as well as the artists' choices concerning how to distribute their works.

This chapter draws on semi-structured interviews with some artists belonging to the Zoopalco collective,³ which from its beginning has taken a stance against publishing oral poetry on paper.⁴ In 2022 they founded the first Italian oral poetry and spoken music label, ZPL (Zoopalco Poetry Label), to produce works "of poetry and music or poetry as music" (Zoopalco 2023, 35–36), as well as experimental voice research. Born from the initiative of poet Nicolò Gugliuzza, since 2015 the collective has included a number of members. Today the associa-

2 Some of the contents of this article have already appeared in Italian in my essay *Sulla spoken music in Italia: I progetti del collettivo Zoopalco*, see Fisco 2023.

3 Between 2023 and 2025 I interviewed Riccardo Iachini, Tommaso Giordani, Eugenia Galli and Vittorio Zollo. The interviews were conducted via a confidential relationship with the artists.

4 An example of this is the 2018 project *Via dalla carta*, in which the collective's poems were made available through a QR code on a forex sign that was graphically designed to look like a street sign. In Italian, the word "via" indicates both the street of an address and an invitation to leave ("vai via" means "go away"), which also served as an explicit statement of poetics to publish poetry off the page.

tion's board includes Eugenia Galli, Tommaso Giordani, Riccardo Iachini, Vittorio Zollo, Alessandro Minnucci and Gabriele Stera.

In the first section, I will examine the relationship between poetry and music in order to define the specificity of Italian spoken music. I will then focus on the case of the project *IMPRE* by Mezzopalco, which offers a pantheon of models of oral poetry, including musicians, tragedians, poets and singers over all time periods. In particular, I will delve into the example piece *A memoir* with which I opened this chapter. My purpose is to use the artists' narratives to understand how poetry, music, video, and live performances intersect with each other. Their responses have enabled me to attempt a definition of spoken music, based on the main elements of interest that emerged from the dialogue: the focus on the process rather than the final product, the intermedial dimension of their research, and the medium specificity of their works, as well as the differences between their live performances and their record. Other questions pertinent to the investigation concern the target frames of their performances and media publications. On what stages do they perform? What are their models, and how do they position themselves in relation to other musical genres? What are the possibilities for distributing these artistic objects?

Defining spoken music

From my position as an inside observer of the Italian poetry slam and spoken word movement, which I have been attending as a scholar and artist since 2017, I first encountered the term spoken music in association with the work of the Dubito Prize for poetry with music. For more than a decade the award has been dedicated to scouting for poets and musicians under 35, in memory of Alberto Dubito Feltrin, a poet and rapper who committed suicide in 2012. A scene took shape around the prize to exhibit the work of artists interested in this particular combination of poetry and music, today mainly represented by the collectives Disturbat! Altr! and Zoopalco. The former gathers more than twenty artists, including those so far produced in Zoopalco's label ZPL: "a generation of poets and musicians who knead words and verse with various genres and the most diverse musical languages, from rap to drum-and-bass, from noise to art music to techno" (Disturbat! Altr! 2024, liner notes, n.p.). From this statement, it seems clear that the artists do not think in terms of only one way of making spoken music; rather, music presents itself as a practice with various possibilities and filiations.

Gabriele Stera, winner of two editions of the Dubito Prize and a member of both Zoopalco and Disturbat! Altr!, clearly writes in this regard about the creation of a scene, not a genre:

If a scene has been generated around this Prize, it is certainly not a “genre scene”, because it is the very echoes of Alberto’s work that appear to intersect with hybrid and evolving musical and performative worlds. [...] this variety of competing proposals does not coalesce to form successful mythologies. On the contrary, it seems to me to be increasingly oriented toward producing a network of relationships, friendships, collaborations and respective encroachments that generate a community of mutual listening and collective reflection [...]. (Stera 2022, 49–50)

However, the way music and poetry interact in spoken music remains a subject of inquiry. Specifically, does a hierarchical relationship exist between these two elements during the compositional process?

Luca Zuliani has sketched a history of the relationship between text and poetry, which noted a downgrading in status of the figure of the poet. Whereas, until the advent of tonal music, the poet had maintained a greater importance than the various composers who put the same text to music, in the eighteenth century the poet became a librettist in service of the composer, who began to strongly intervene in the text. In 1730, the Italian historian Ludovico Muratori stated in this regard: “there where music once was the servant and waited on poetry, now poetry is the servant of music” (Collins 1984, 16). With the rise of light music, the hierarchical relationship confirmed music’s priority as the starting point of the composition, and the author of the text descended another rung, assuming the role of lyricist: “the one who is in charge of adding the words to the music” (Zuliani 2020, 110). In songs, the melody precedes the words – this is why, according to Zuliani, for song analysis the separation of melody and lyrics does not consider the totality of the formal elements; a silent reading of the text ignores a fundamental part of the work. The lyrics, while important for any piece of music, are in fact secondary to the melody.

Camille Vorger, an expert on the French slam scene, while studying the example of Grands Corps Malade, groups slam and song together because of the brevity of their compositions, from which derives the search for expressive density. In a slam poem with music, the presence of a refrain is not as codified as in the song form but is nonetheless observable as a repetition of structures tending to a “poésie mémorielle” (Vorger 2017, n.p.), designed to aid the poet’s memorization and enhance its memorability for the audience. Instead, Vorger distinguishes slam and song by how the text is spoken, and frames the former in what Paul Zumthor, among the leading theorists of oral poetry, calls “*récitatif scandé*”, in English a “measured recitation”.

Through this relationship of opposition between the said and the sung, then, I can define the mode of performance. [. . .] Empirically the existence not of two but of three modalities is accepted: spoken voice (in French, *dit*), measured recitation or psalmody (in English, *to chant*), and melodic song (in English, *to sing*). (Zumthor 1990, 142)

However, Vorger points out that this chanting mode is immersed in a continuum, within which it is difficult to situate the slam. Similarly, Rebecka Dürr has highlighted that smooth transitions between the different modes of phonation that are perceived as singing or speaking are frequent in the artistic context of spoken-word poetry, resulting in an oscillation to create various emotional and aesthetic effects (cf. 2024, 36).

Expanding Vorger's point from his perspective as a practitioner, Lello Voce, who has been the coordinator of the Dubito Prize until 2023 and one of the first Italian artists to use the expression spoken music as an artistic label for his productions,⁵ reflects on the practice of *messa in voce* or *oratura*, meaning a transcoding of the written poem for the voice. Voce argues that what places poetry with music at the opposite pole of opera and melodrama is precisely the fact that the text should not be entirely sung, "but said, paced, performed, adhering to poetic prosody, thus to its metric-formal laws" (2023, 348). Moreover, the voice cannot simply *pronounce* the written text but must *perform* it as if it were a score – an exercise that is quite different even from the expressive reading and staging of the text that is more typical of actors (cf. Voce 2016, 60).

The Dubito Prize proposes, for artists who wish to participate in their call, the wording "poetry with music", in which the preposition "with" is not accidental. Stefano La Via has developed an interesting taxonomy in this regard. He speaks of "poesia *per* musica" [poetry *for* music], when the poet considers the interweaving of words with music from its inception. This would generally be characterized by isometry of verses and a certain regularity of stanzas as in the aria form of the opera. Poetry *set to* music ("poesia pura *in* musica"), on the other hand, is distinguished by its autonomy from instrumental accompaniment: it "arises more freely as a function of itself, [. . .] that is, it finds a *raison d'être* in its own formal and expressive values" (La Via 2017, 136–137). Poems written on paper for publication and later read with a musical accompaniment are one example. Finally, poetry *with* music ("poesia *con* musica") would involve a total interpenetration of the two languages in a simultaneous conception of the composi-

⁵ The identity of the first artist(s) to use the expression "spoken music" is unclear. The earliest indexing that I found online concerns the show *Philip Glass Buys a Loaf of Bread* and dates from 1990 (cf. Gussow 1990).

tional approach (La Via 2017, 197). According to La Via (2014), this is the case with Lello Voce's poem *Lai del ragionare lento* [Lai of the slow thinking]: a spoken music example in which the vocal performance does not consist in a "melodic 'intonation', nor in a mere spoken 'recitation'" (La Via 2014, 179), but in a verbal score enhanced by the electronic sounds of Frank Nemola and the flugelhorn of Michael Gross. For Lello Voce, "the decision to integrate music directly influences, upstream, the composition of the text, as much in terms of its structure as its linguistic and poetic choices and its 'sonorities'" (2023, 347). It is not a question of hierarchy or chronological order of what comes first, but rather of agreement, of rhythmic and melodic direction and interweaving between poetry and music, which goes far beyond mere accompaniment (cf. Voce 2023, 349). Within this tempering action the preposition *with*, proposed to analyze the modes of interaction between poetry and music, takes its place. In short, in spoken music the poet is certainly not content to be a lyricist and, as opposed to singers, who are often performers but not authors, the fact that spoken music is usually performed by the poet(s) who composed it may be taken as evidence.

The artists of the Zoopalco collective that I interviewed testify to the different creative modes in their processes, ranging from a long and entirely mixed genesis starting "from a sound, a refrain, a few words or a rhythm" (Zollo 2023, n.p.) to the composition of lyrics and music independently, sometimes starting from the part composed by the poet, and sometimes by the musician: "our work is very solitary [. . .], when the genesis is from the music I write already knowing where the structures of the song are. It's a song that's already done and I speak on it" (Galli 2023, n.p.). Mezzopalco, the spoken music project that I will analyze in more detail within the next paragraphs, creates using the voice as the only input, with no instrumental music, and the idea that "poetry is music in the search for the voice, in poetry for the voice, in writing for the voice, in writing for sound environments" (Giordani 2023, n.p.).

In Zoopalco's spoken music projects, the boundaries between arts are blurred and shaped by highly diverse influences ranging from sound poetry to slam poetry, from rap to electronic, from songwriting to pop songs, from popular music to beatbox. The text is sung, spoken and/or chanted, but most importantly "tempered" *with* music so that neither element dominates the other.

IMPRE: An Olympus for oral poetry

As I already mentioned in the introduction, Mezzopalco's first project *IMPRE* is a voice concert by poets Tommaso Giordani and Riccardo Iachini in collaboration

with beatboxer MolloBeat, which won the 2018 Dubito Prize. In the current group, the beatboxer is Ninjoh Beats (aka Giovanni Di Matteo), who took over immediately after the victory. This is a particularly interesting example of spoken music, because the voice is the project's only protagonist, present in three different forms: as singing (Giordani), as the already mentioned *récitatif scandé*/chanting (Iachini), and as beatbox (Mollo/Ninjoh). Tommaso Giordani recounts performing with his eyes closed, often singing. The melodic line usually comes to his mind before the lyrics, and he composes by fixing a bpm that provides a rhythmic pulse as a reference (cf. 2023, n.p.). Riccardo Iachini (2023) improvises his poems from memory; the text is thus a sort of *canovaccio*⁶ and he does not feel the need to fix the lyrics by writing the lines (cf. 2023, n.p.). Ninjoh's approach to beatboxing includes producing sounds both on inhalation and on exhalation, giving the illusion of a musical continuum and a multiplicity of instruments. The roles of the three voices are defined from the beginning and are maintained for the entire performance, both live and on the recording, the only exception being Giordani oscillating between singing and chanting, often in sync with Iachini.

The title *IMPRE* stands for “essentials,” *imprescindibili* in Italian, and the entire project is intended as a tribute to certain models of Western oral poetry that, according to the group, should not be ignored. The idea of creating a pantheon of essentials came about in 2017 at the *Mitilanza* poetry festival in La Spezia, where the debate concerning the absence of poetic masters to inspire the new generation of young Italian poets had been central. Mezzopalco's response was a transdisciplinary search for the crucial artists who combined their interests, “drawing on the dump of History like needle seekers in immense haystacks and sewing, with those needles, alternative and imaginative stories” (2019b, 93). Their previously mentioned “Olympus of oral poetry” is composed by Muses “prêt-à-porter,” by which they mean potentially available to everyone, rather than popular. Indeed, Mezzopalco's members feel no reverential awe towards the models they invoke: they directly address the Olympus, calling it “pompous” (“borioso”). Asking for a muse should not be a big deal (“che ti costa?”), since these models are part of everyday life in the books they read and lend each other, in the music they listen to in their smartphones. Their intention is not so much a dissemination of these characters' stories as an attempt to measure themselves against their art, to transcode it.

⁶ In theater, and particularly in the Italian genre of *commedia dell'arte*, this expression means a rough outline of a play or narrative, often used as a preparatory structure leaving some space to the actors for improvisation.

Glorious Olympus
give me a Muse
prêt-à-porter

Pompous Olympus
give me a Muse
what's the big deal?
(Mezzopalco 2019b, 95)⁷

The project exists in several forms. The starting point was the live set-up: in fact, the name of the project recalls being in the middle of the stage, communicating through the stage, as well as the composition formed by half of the Zoopalco collective. The pieces were then recorded in order to participate in the Dubito Prize, but in a draft version. Likewise, the written texts were set for the annual prize publication, but continued to change in subsequent performances. After four years of experience and around forty live dates, in locations ranging from village squares to theaters, from the Auditorium Parco della musica in Rome to rap and indie music clubs, in 2022 ZPL produced their first album as a vinyl, which was also distributed on all major online streaming platforms. Mezzopalco released two videos as well, available on YouTube, intertwining their work with that of collaborators from the Zoopalco collective and other visual artists.

The professed goal of both the live show and the record is to take the listener on a non-linear journey through places and characters. As will be detailed below, the live performance has a modular structure, with the exact setlist decided in interactions with the audience. In the recorded album, the order in which the characters appear is fixed, but does not reflect the chronology of the historical periods they lived in. As the narrative voice states in the last skit, their journey does not proceed in a straight line, but is more like the string on a wall with which an investigator picks up traces to gain perspective on a bigger picture.

A journey does not always provide a plot. Sometimes it gets lost, returns, moves of an hour of a year from century to century, does not always remember, a journey. It speaks to the

⁷ “Olimpo glorioso | dammi una Musa | prêt-à-porter | Olimpo borioso | dammi una Musa | che ti costa?” The quoted texts, not published elsewhere in this version, were kindly provided by the authors.

past, sometimes, to the future. It is not a straight line running on a plane, it is more like a thread of string woven into a wall.⁸ (Mezzopalco 2022c, Tr. 6)

While temporal order is not the deciding criterion, the beatbox determines the sonic atmosphere of each piece, guiding the listener through different locations and musical genres, including hip-hop, flamenco, blues, and drum and bass, though the latter predominates due to Ninjoh's roots as a DJ. Apart from adding beats to the spoken-word poems, as it happens in hip-hop culture, the beatbox functions as a poetic device,⁹ with a rhythm choice that metaphorically embodies the character represented, suggesting different moods, places and atmospheres, and imitating the instruments used within a certain music genre.

The first piece on their album, *Maratona*, starts with ambient sounds; the genre of drum and bass is then chosen to imitate the sounds of the battle of Marathon between Athens and the Persian Empire in 490 B.C., in the ancient Greece of the tragedian Aeschylus (ca. 525 B.C. – 456 B.C.), to whom the track is dedicated. Aeschylus witnessed and fought in key battles in the history of Athens and is the first of the tragic poets whose complete works are preserved; among the most famous are *The Persians*, *Prometheus bound*, and *The Oresteia*. The spatial-musical nexus may be clearer in the delta blues reference of the second piece on the album, "A memoir", dedicated to bluesman Gil Scott-Heron. Born in Chicago in 1949, he is remembered as an activist, a poet and a pioneer of the spoken word genre. Mezzopalco then guides the audience to Tangier to meet the audiovisual and performance poet Patrizia Vicinelli (1943–1991). From Bologna, the same Italian hometown as Iachini and Giordani, Vicinelli had a tormented life, escaping from prison to the African coasts.

The next city is Paris, where the French painter Jeanne Hébuterne (1898–1920) died. The poem is a letter to her better-known partner, the Italian painter Amedeo Modigliani. Within the album, she is the only character who did not directly work with poetry. In a pantheon of masters of oral art, this serves as a bridge towards a subsequent project for a B-side of the record, narrating the walk-ons of oral history, of those who have not found their voice to tell their own story. The 12/8 tempo of flamenco evoked by the beatbox percussive sounds in the track "Baci di madre" brings listeners to Andalusia (Spain), in honor of the most important female flamenco singer of the XX century: Pastora Pavón Cruz (1890–

⁸ "Un viaggio non sempre dà corda a una trama. A volte si perde, ritorna, si sposta di un'ora di un anno di secoli in secoli, non sempre ricorda, un viaggio. Parla al passato, a volte, al futuro. Non è una retta che scorre su un piano è più un filo di spago intrecciato in un muro."

⁹ The potential of beatbox as a literary device was explored in Dürr and Keylin, focusing on its use in spoken-word poetry (cf. 2024, 240).

1969). The last stop on the trip is contemporary Athens to tell the story of Demetrio Stratos (1945–1979), the Greek-Italian vocalist, experimenter with the limits of the spoken language, and frontman of the politically engaged progressive rock band Area. The track dedicated to him is a re-writing of one of their most famous songs: “Cometa rossa” which opens the album *Caution Radiation Area* (1974), and where Stratos showcases his virtuosic vocal abilities while singing an apparently simple, yet cryptic text in Greek, urging disobedience.

In between tracks, with a role that lies somewhere between the prose parts of a prosimetrum and a slam introduction serving as peritext,¹⁰ six skits – in hip-hop culture, short spoken word sketches within an album – introduce Mezzopalco’s pieces. The voice of Iachini, poet-narrator, accompanies listeners on the journey, specifying the new space-time frame and the character to whom each track is dedicated.

This overview of oral art, including singers, poets, musicians, and tragedians, is not meant to be an exhaustive list of models, but rather a pantheon of masters – not only from what is strictly defined as literature – who have informed the group’s research.

Mezzopalco conceives their art as an ongoing creative process that is constantly exposed to change, and which has not reached the pinnacle of their research or a final, fixed form through the album’s release. The record was rather conceived as a snapshot of a specific moment of the process.

We tried to record the show several times, but it was NEVER convincing. What was happening on stage, in the performance, as written for the stage and for the performance, did not work in audio form. Due to the research within Zoopalco, we applied that method that is now transversal to all the collective’s productions: *medium specificity* [. . .]. Our poetry depends on the medium it inhabits, and if the medium changes it must change altogether. (Giordani 2022, 68)

Just as performance studies scholars argue that recording a live performance to document it “is something other than performance” (Phelan 1993, 146), the members of Mezzopalco are keen to point out that the live, recorded and video versions of their pieces have very different artistic processes, and are thus different aesthetic objects. First, the live performance is sparser, relying solely on the bare vocals, which are superimposed, and post-produced on the record in several suc-

10 In Genette’s conceptualization, paratext is given by verbal or other productions, such as the title, illustrations, and preface, which surround the text and serve to present it. Paratext is divided into peritext, which concerns everything within the volume, and epitext, such as interviews given by the author. The use of paratext in live poetry has been addressed by Novak (2011, 138–144).

cessive layers. Their studio work lasted about a year and a half and involved multi-track recording, meaning that everyone performed at the same time, as in a live show; they then built a mosaic of voices by successive additions, always starting with the beatbox as the first layer and then overdubbing the spoken and sung verses, other beatbox parts, and the backing vocals.

Second, the lyrics undergo sometimes significant changes between the record and the live show, which can even create confusion during the performance: “they are different but not completely. When it’s time for the musical attack or for that word that should change, if you say the right one everything goes fine, but if you say the one that is in the record it’s over, because you need to continue the other version which is not the right one” (Iachini 2023, n.p.).

Finally, the live version is site-specific, based on interaction with the audience, with whom they aim to create a dialogue. The performers change their posture depending on whether the audience is close or far from them, but also on the type of context: “the challenge becomes bringing what we have to whoever we have in front of us, which can be middle-school kids or the jacked-up audience at the Auditorium Parco della Musica in Rome” (Iachini 2023, n.p.). Mezzopalco’s setlist does not follow the same dramaturgy as in the album, but rather has a modular structure. Taking advantage of the spatial-musical research described above, the performers sometimes ask the audience from which city they want the journey to start, and accordingly choose the order of the characters and therefore of the pieces. As a result of the interactivity of the live show, the spectators are not restricted to a passive role, but “become one of the factors of the intermedial network” (Giordani 2023, n.p.). From this brief introduction to the group’s work, it is already clear that spoken music should not be understood as a fixed poetic genre or musical form, but rather as an evolving, holistic language that questions mediums and platforms to explore the potential of the connection between poetry and music. In the next section, I will delve into a specific example.

Intermediality and Medium Specificity

Given the connections between rap and slam/spoken word, frequently highlighted by international scholarship (Price-Style 2015; Vorger 2017; Lemire 2017, 7–10), I will now focus on the piece “A memoir” (cf. Mezzopalco 2022a), dedicated to Gil Scott Heron, with the objective of highlighting the medial relationship between text, music, and images in the live show, the recorded version, and the photo-clip published on YouTube.

The title takes its cues from Scott-Heron's autobiography about that "last vacation," which was the artist's final European tour before his death in May 2011 in New York. An early version of Mezzopalco's text, composed by Iachini, led to a successful initial public a cappella performance in slam poetry competitions.

Compared to the live performances – both the one in 2018 with Mollo described at the beginning of this contribution, and the more recent one with Nin-joh, recorded in 2021 (cf. Mezzopalco 2022b) – the album version has partially different lyrics: with substantial cuts and shifts in some verses, and hooks that recall the refrain inserted into some stanzas. There is also a slower tempo compared to the live version, which has an old-school hip-hop rhythm, while the album track tends towards a blues ballad, with a regular beat and an intensity shaped by the melodic arrangement. The interplay between the voices is also different. In the live version, Iachini's narrating voice is freer to develop the chant independent of the beatbox, which remains in the background. At certain points – which are not always the same points, and which do not necessarily correspond to the end of the stanzas of the text – the narrative voice pauses, the beatbox stops, and then explicitly indicates the tempo with percussive sounds to resume the next stanza. This expedient creates breaks in the sequencing of the narration: cuts of cinematic darkness that would later also be represented in the photo-clip. On the album, the beatbox and spoken voice are more aligned. In the live performance, Giordani only sings the refrain and chants certain words and verses in sync with Iachini, while in the recorded version he sings a vocal motif that alternates with more frequent hooks from the refrain for the entire duration of the track. During the interview, he explained me the intention behind this choice:

For *A memoir* it was a sort of recreation of the musical roots of the black American context: the idea of the singing and the beat that builds up in that way comes from the delta blues and work songs, arranged in a gospel key, therefore with the structure of a melodic trend borrowed from the delta blues. The guiding idea was that of an overlapping of voices to recreate the chorality of black music as gospel music and the idea of the beat that becomes blues – very posed, melancholic, to keep Gil Scott-Heron together with his musical roots. (Giordani 2023, n.p.)

While what Giordani describes are "intramedial references" (Rajewsky 2005, 54) within the same medium of music, in the text and video of *A Memoir*, it is possible to identify the translation operations that Irina Rajewsky called "media transposition," "media combination," and "intermedial references" at the medial level (2025, 51–52). Media transposition is defined as "the transformation of a given media product (a text, film, etc.) or its substratum into another medium" (Rajewsky 2005, 51). In the case of "*A memoir*," it begins with Heron's autobiography, which is used to create the text of the poem, set to music, and from which a video is then

created. The intermedial references¹¹ to the cinematic medium are fundamental to the narrative dimension of the poem, which aims to work as a sequence shot. The text starts with a close-up on the character:

He is wearing an American trench coat
dark grey and a Cuban punch
in his hand, an unlit cigarette in his mouth
waiting to spit out
smoke from the shadows. Above the shelf
the remains of a French toast and from the dark corners
dust rises from the Rhodes piano and breaks
the patterns of feng shui
(Mezzopalco 2022a)¹²

The frame then widens to show his room and continues the long take outside the apartment in a zoom out towards the city of New York, where history unfolds, shaping the political situation:

As he turns it [the cigarette] on he prays. He knows he can step aside
now that his art is an anthem and the government if gone to Obama
from Reagan, much to the dismay of the Black Panther.
That living room is a waiting room.
All is silent in the alleys of the Big Apple.
(Mezzopalco 2022a)¹³

The video, which combines text, music and images, was also planned as a one-shot sequence, but later became a photo-clip: a series of shots edited one after the other that testify to the “making of” a video clip that was never realized. The plot was written, but there were two problems, as Tommaso Giordani and Riccardo Iachini reported in the interview. One was a medium problem: Gil Scott-Heron is the singer of “The Revolution Will Not Be Televised”, a call to realize that when

11 Rajewsky describes them as “for example references in a literary text to a film through, for instance, the evocation or imitation of certain filmic techniques such as zoom shots, fades, dissolves, and montage editing. [. . .] Intermedial references are thus to be understood as meaning-constitutional strategies that contribute to the media product’s overall signification” (2005, 52).

12 “Ha addosso un trench americano | fumo-di-Londra e un punch cubano | nella mano, ha una sigaretta spenta in bocca | aspetta di poter sputare fuori | fumo dall’ombra. Sopra il ripiano | i resti di un french toast e dagli angoli bui | la polvere si alza dal piano Rhodes e rompe | gli schemi del feng shui.”

13 “Mentre l’accende prega. Sa che può farsi da parte | ora che la sua arte è un anthem e si è passati a Obama | da Reagan, con buona pace delle Black Panther. | Quel salotto è una sala d’attesa. | Tutto tace tra i vicoli della grande mela.”

the revolution comes, people will not be able to take a passive attitude, only participate live (cf. Scott-Heron 1971). Therefore “the idea is that if the revolution will not be televised then it doesn’t happen on video either” (Iachini 2023, n.p.). The other problem was political: “there was the problem of shooting the video of a group of three white guys dedicating a song to an African American activist” (Giordani 2023, n.p.). They then chose to involve thirty people, fifteen black and fifteen white, anti-racist activists and collaborators of the Zoopalco collective, who they asked to reflect on self-representation by wearing two outfits: one capable of describing the perception of oneself, the other saying something about how one should dress to represent the expectations of the outside gaze. Roman activist Kwanza Musi Dos Santos portrayed Gil Scott-Heron, while everyone else represented moments from his life and political speeches. A preparatory process of about five hours culminated – when everything was ready to shoot – in the act of turning off the camera and sending everyone home, offering the viewer only the process, which is witnessed in around six thousand shots. The collective work also involved the participants selecting the words to compose a visual poem that overlays the video. Everyone was invited to choose the two most significant words from the lyrics, which were then edited to accompany the voice, drawing a semantic field of Gil Scott-Heron’s story through the piece.

Rather than producing a video clip along the lines of those usually released for songs, Mezzopalco thematizes the choice *not* to make a video, instead showing the process in order to honor Heron’s poetics and political engagement. In this way, the group offers a medium-specific product whose aesthetic choices show an intense reflection on the medial, alongside the political, dimension of their work.

To describe their research, Giordani formulates the idea of a poetry that “in output is medium specific and in research is intermedial” (2023, n.p.), which starts from the word but is fluid and non-hierarchical. From the outset, it is designed to confront multiple forms of media, but is realized under different conditions that clearly differentiate listening to the record from the live performance, and watching the video from the sequence of backstage pictures. Mezzopalco’s spoken music research is like a “suspended platform” (Giordani 2023, n.p.) between different media in which a specific channeling of the creative approach changes in terms of its output.

Similarly, the other projects produced by ZPL showcase a distinct poetic and aesthetic identity for each actualization. In Italian spoken music, characterized by underground independent productions, experimentation is the strong point of the practice, and the homogenization of the styles that is sometimes apparent in slam poetry is not yet noticeable.

Conclusions

The aim of this contribution was to propose a definition of the spoken music form in the Italian scene, through an analysis of one example. Determining the boundaries of contemporary art, in its porous tension toward the inter-/multi-/trans-media form offered by digital tools, is increasingly difficult nowadays. It is even more complex for poetry, which Lello Voce defines as “constitutionally ‘liquid’”:

[. . .] from the language it articulates the voice drips onto the page, and from the page, after soaking it, it drips back up to the ears (and eyes) of the world. Being liquid has always allowed it to mix and merge with the other arts. [. . .] It indifferently ploughs through various media (aural, visual, multimedia), but its identity is linguistic [. . .]. (Voce 2023, 346)

The Zoopalco collective’s works produced by ZPL are available on popular online streaming platforms, have been released on vinyl, and have become music video or photo-clips and on-demand video poetry series, as well as art installations. When I asked them whether spoken music was a poetic or musical genre, they all convincingly spoke of a movement or scene that instead identifies its practice as a tag to be used to orient listeners and place themselves within some of the models that have been mentioned here. Even though Demetrio Stratos, Pastora Pavón Cruz, and Gil Scott-Heron (to name just a few) may seem very different and distant from one another, their artistic exploration aimed at enhancing poetry through music serves as the common denominator that unites them as exemplary models for Mezzopalco’s spoken music. The interviews revealed that for the artists the process is more important than the result, and the medial dimension is crucial. Questions about how to define their practice, however, came after the experimental phase, which runs through what Schäfer called the different “medial constellations” that draw from the contemporary literary field (2015, 178). The “liquidity” of poetry also poses interesting questions about shared authorship in the collaborations between artists for the creation of an aesthetic object, which is medium-specific in the output, but intermedial in its conception.

As Mezzopalco’s example has shown, the work of directing and tempering is not merely limited to the relationship between text and music as explained by Voce, but expands to a consideration of the physical and digital means used to distribute and publish collective works. The poet thus has the directorial role of coordinating and tempering the arts with each other. In spoken music, the poetic word – in its various declinations that explore the limits between spoken, beat-boxed, chanted, and sung – remains a constant at the center of the mix created by this artistic practice.

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