

SoundEffects



An Interdisciplinary Journal of Sound and Sound Experience

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Editorial

Poetry and sound

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Poetry and sound

Poetry and sound could in some respects be considered a rather well-studied research field. However, when dealing with literature, literary scholars, teachers and critics usually do not *listen* – they *read*. They move their eyes across the page or the screen receiving visual information through light in the visible spectrum reflected by the objects. If literary scholars, teachers and critics listen to literature, it is most likely the inaudible, *metaphorical* voice of the author of the written text they are listening to – with great competence and sensibility; and *that* sound of poetry is indeed well-researched. However, this kind of listening is not something they need the ears for – the sense organ specialised in registering acoustic waves; the ears can easily be plugged throughout.

Today, a literary deafness of this kind is probably less appropriate than ever before. As we all know, literature, including poetry, is not only a written enterprise, and this fact has only become more evident, again, over the last decades. Poets do not just write, they also send out audible sound waves in a number of different ways – ways that literary scholars, teachers and critics should neither overlook nor disregard. For at least two reasons, these actual sounds should not be ignored.

First, they can be of great artistic interest: There is a considerable amount of innovative poetic work taking place only in and as sound. Second, when practices concerning the consumption of poetry outside the academic world are considered, the widespread neglect of audible poetry appears relatively absurd. Whereas written poetry, which receives plenty of scholarly attention, generally reaches a rather narrow audience, audible poetry – especially in the form of song and rap lyrics – is appreciated by millions of people all over the world on a daily basis. With this special volume of *SoundEffects* we to some extent try to rectify this asymmetrical relationship. It is time to take out the ear plugs ...

Claudia Benthien and Wiebke Vorrath's article 'German sound poetry from the neo-avant-garde to the digital age' contains both a brief historical introduction to German-language sound poetry since the 1950s and theoretical reflections on sound poetry within the avant-garde movements of the early 20th century. The article discusses works by Ernst Jandl and Gerhard Rühm as examples of verbal poetry of the post-war neo-avant-garde and investigates contemporary sound poetry.

Lea Wierød Borčak in the article 'The sound of nonsense – on the function of nonsense words in pop songs' studies how nonsense words in songs challenge the common assumption that song meaning resides in song texts. Songs containing verbal nonsense are examined as an emerging negotiation between the different medialities involved: music, text, the visual and the aural.

Martin Glaz Serup in his article 'Poetry Readings' deals with the increasing number of reading series and events, poetry festivals, poetry reading sites etc. The

article methodologically investigates: How do we approach the poetry reading from an analytical and a theoretical perspective? What is a poetry reading? How does the performance and reading of a poem relate to the poem on the printed page? And how can we analyse a poetry reading?

Jakob Schweppenhäuser and Birgitte Stougaard Pedersen in the article ‘Performing poetry slam – and listening closely to slam poetry’ address poetry slam as an example of an oral turn captured in contemporary poetry practices that mediates between at least two rather different (audio) language cultures – namely the contemporary Western literary poetry reading and a literary network, on the one hand, and the rap battle connected to hip hop, on the other. The article builds on a generalised perspective negotiating poetry slam as an aesthetic and cultural phenomenon in between hip hop culture and literary culture, but it also includes a close reading/listening aspect deriving from a specific example, namely a performance by the 2012 poetry slam world champion Harry Baker.

Together and separately these articles are examples of different aspects of sound and poetry brought together to describe, analyse and discuss the importance of the sonic character of poetry.

Finally, the issue contains one review. Vadim Keylin reviews Jordan Lacey: *Sonic Rupture. A Practice-led Approach to Urban Soundscape Design*, Bloomsbury, 2016.

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Welcome to this special issue of *SoundEffects*!

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