

# THE POETS SOUNDS

Creating and Presenting  
New Works of Speech-Music Literature

**poetssounds.lettretage.de**

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## **Literary Speech Concerts**

June-September 2022

A Project of

*lettretage*

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# Concept

**The Poets' Sounds** – *Creating and Presenting New Works of Speech-Music Literature* emerges from the boundary between literary language and music. In cooperation with the Cologne-based speech art trio [sprechbohrer](#), the Lettrétage literary center commissioned six international authors to explore this intersection. During the project, each author will compose one speech-music piece for three voices, which will be musically interpreted and performed by the sprechbohrer ensemble. This artistic work is supported by three production workshops in which the authors and musicians explore their respective approaches and impulses, the potential of the voice as an instrument, the tonal spectrum of speech, and questions of notation. The newly created pieces, performed by the sprechbohrer ensemble, will premiere at a concert in Berlin, before being presented to audiences at literary festivals within Germany and abroad.

The question of how literature can be produced and presented in a transdisciplinary way is one that Lettrétage has pursued through various projects in recent years. The Literaturlabor (2011-13), the international SOUNDOUT Festival (2014), the CON\_TEXT event series (2017), and the PoetryAudio-Lab (2019) invited authors and artists from different disciplines to develop new forms and formats. The projects often featured collaborative settings and offered the artists involved the opportunity to reflect on and newly define their work, concepts of author-

ship, audience, reception, participation, and not least their own role as producers of art and literature. The concept of "literature" – what it is, what it can or should be – was made permeable in the process.

*The Poets' Sounds* asks: what aesthetic possibilities can be opened up for the creation of contemporary literature when the boundary between poetic language and music is deliberately crossed and blurred? At what point does conventional language limit poetry, which is not only rhythmic but also polyphonic? Through what artistic languages, notation systems, etc., can these limits be overcome and unimagined potentials be unlocked? How is authorship transformed when it changes register? Does the separation of authorship and artistic interpretation on the one hand, and the subsequent linking to the moment of performance on the other, affect the ways in which literature, the work, or the role of author and reader are considered? And what are the practical consequences for artistic production and presentation?

# The Poets' Sounds

## Introduction

Translated from German by Mark Kanak

Sigrid Sachse, Harald Muenz, and Georg Sachse, who with their phonetic voices form the **sprechbohrer** speech art trio, are neither actors nor singers. The three musicians are the only ensemble of their kind working at the interface between music and language – in a realm where experimental vocal music and literature, sound poetry and the compositional exploration of linguistic mechanisms converge. Hans G Helms referred to this as an “intermediate realm” – his advanced language composition *Fa:m' Ahniesgwow* from 1959 is also part of the **sprechbohrer** repertoire, along with Kurt Schwitters' *Ursonate*, works by John Cage, Gerhard Rühm and Dieter Schnebel.

This form of “auditive poetry” (Gerhard Rühm), which focuses on the sound of the spoken word, breaks this language into sounds and tones. In the process, the boundaries between the languages become permeable. It was phonetic poets who, as part of the literary post-war avant-garde, were an international movement that exchanged ideas across linguistic borders and could appreciate each other without the mediation work of translators. Ernst Jandl's legendary performance at the Royal Albert Hall in London in 1965 is only one of the best-known examples of the cross-language effectiveness of acoustic linguistics. This kind of literature can reach listeners in a direct way as, usually, only music is capable of.

After a number of poets from the German-speaking world – including Crauss, Barbara Köhler, Christian Filips, Karin Spielhofer, and Christian Steinbacher – had already composed for the Cologne ensemble, taking the next step into multilingualism was an obvious choice. Together with six European authors – from Scandinavia to Serbia – **sprechbohrer** were able to collaborate with Berlin's Literaturhaus Lettrétage, partly with the support of the German Federal Cultural Foundation, to develop new pieces based on several workshops, which are now being performed as a spoken word concert in the program “The Poets' Sounds.” These new pieces are as varied and multifaceted as the poetics of the participants, among them Katalin Ladik, who has been an integral part of the international sound poetry scene since the 1970s. Eduard Escoffet may be regarded as the heir of this tradition, while Tone Avenstroup and Morten Søndergaard have brought diverse experiences with interdisciplinary work between literature, visual arts, theatre, and music. As they all usually perform and interpret their own work, they now had to think about how to write down their linguistic music and present scores to **sprechbohrer** – a challenge even for form-conscious lyricists such as Miia Toivio and Elisabeth Wandeler-Deck, who also works as an improvising musician. Last but not least, The Poets' Sounds demonstrates that cross-

border artistic collaborations that deserve this name also require innovative, interdisciplinary approaches. The “intermediate realm” of linguistic music can help show the way there.

**Florian Neuner**  
Artistic Director

# Events

**11. June 2022, 7pm:** [Premiere](#)  
at Collegium Hungaricum, [Berlin \(DE\)](#)  
Dorotheenstraße 12, 10117 Berlin

**12. June 2022, 8pm**  
Loft, [Cologne \(DE\)](#)  
Loft, Wissmannstr. 30, 50823 Cologne

**19. June 2022, 8pm**  
KROKODIL Literary Festival, [Belgrade \(RS\)](#)  
Center for Cultural Decontamination, Birčaninova 21, 11000 Belgrade

**9. July 2022, 7:30pm**  
FORUM STADTPARK, [Graz \(AT\)](#)  
Forum Stadtpark, Stadtpark 1, 8010 Graz

**11. July 2022, 8pm**  
Hausacher LeseLenz, Literary Festival, [Hausach \(DE\)](#)  
Stadthalle Hausach, Gustav-Rivinius-Platz 3, 77756 Hausach

**24. August 2022, 5pm**  
POETRY MOON Festival, [Helsinki \(FI\)](#)  
Tiivistämo, Sörnäisten rantatie 22, 00350 Helsinki

**25. September 2022, 7:30pm**  
SARDAM-literature festival, [Limassol \(CY\)](#)  
Art Studio 55, Andrea Drousioti 23A, Limassol

[Free admission to all events.](#) Further information at [www.poetssounds.lettretage.de](http://www.poetssounds.lettretage.de)

# The Poets' Sounds – Literary Speech Concert Programme

## Part I

Introduction by [Florian Neuner](#)  
Readings by the authors

## Part II

Speech concert by the [sprechbohrer](#) Ensemble  
Sigrid Sachse – Harald Muenz – Georg Sachse

<b>Miia Toivio</b>	Rakas hupsu
<b>Tone Avenstroup</b>	Mare Monstrum
<b>Elisabeth Wandeler-Deck</b>	ricochet rikoschett / an approximate passacaglia, possibly
<b>Eduard Escoffet</b>	Ode to the Walking Class
<b>Morten Søndergaard</b>	They
<b>Katalin Ladik</b>	three eggs

# The Poets' Sounds

## Handouts for the Speech Concert

Translated from German by Mark Kanak

In Dieter Schnebel's *Glossolalie for speaker and instrumentalists* from 1959, a key work of the experimental post-war avant-garde, one passage reads: "Speaking is taken as music in this piece." The composer suggests: "Listen to the speech progressions as you would otherwise listen to music, to the instrumental sequences as if they were spoken!" Perceiving linguistic similarities between music and the tonal qualities of language did not require the impulses of the avant-garde of the 20th century. Sound and rhythm have played a role in the poetry of all eras, and even the explicit focus on the sound of speech, which has been articulated as sound poetry since the early 20th century, starting with Christian Morgenstern and Hugo Ball, can be traced back to Baroque poetry and even further. Concurrently, terms such as "Tonsprache" (the language of sound) and "Klangrede" (sound speech) refer to the rhetorical aspects of music. Nikolaus Harnoncourt sees the music of the 16th to 18th centuries as a "music in speech," but the attention to the rhetorical can hardly be overestimated for the analytical understanding of later compositions. Theodor W. Adorno writes: "Traditional musical theory of form recognizes sentence, half-sentence, period, punctuation; questions, exclamations, subordinate clauses are found everywhere, voices rise and fall, and in all this, the gesture of music is appropriated from the voice that speaks. – Which, it should be well-noted, is speaking and not singing!"

Adorno describes a gray area: "Music is language-like. Expressions such as musical idiom, musical tone, these are not metaphors. But music is not language. Their linguistic similarity suggests the way inward, but also into the vague. If you take music literally as your language, it leads you astray."

The musical and literary postwar avant-garde had planned to explore this gray area with advanced means. Hans G. Helms, who created a groundbreaking language composition with *Fa:m' Ahniesgwo* (1959), but also composed experimental vocal music, refers to the "intermediate realm of language and music." Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, the great baritone who never disliked anything new, entitled a 1985 book on the "History and Interpretation of Singing": *Töne sprechen, Worte klingen* (Sounds speak, words sound). The singer takes a critical view of the fact that the "separation of text and musical effect" is "declared abolished" in new vocal music: "The human voice is not allowed to articulate language (for example in Ligeti's "Clocks and Clouds"). It is deprived of its previous rights and rank and is integrated into the sound structure as an instrumental part." Whereas Fischer-Dieskau laments the loss of "vocal" conceptions against the backdrop of 19th-century lieder, the literary scholar Reinhard Meyer-Kalkus regards the voice experiments of the post-war avant-gardes as nothing less than the "second great flowering of a

productive clash between music and poetry or performance art" following the Schubert era. In the program guide of the Witten Days for New Chamber Music, which in 2007 was devoted to the theme of "voice," Meyer-Kalkus writes: "How else can one understand that Boulez referred to Antonin Artaud's treatment of word and scream, Stockhausen took up suggestions from his academic teacher, the phonetician Werner Meyer-Eppler, Berio composed to the polyphony of texts by James Joyce, and Ligeti referred to the Belgian lettrists Françoise Dufrêne and Henri Chopin?" These "composed voices" in new music could be contrasted with the sound poetry of the 1950s and 60s: in the German-speaking world, the "auditive poetry" of a Gerhard Rühm, sound poems by Ernst Jandl or Franz Mon, but also of a musician like Josef Anton Riedl. On the basis of the aural results, it is obvious that sound poetry and experimental vocal music are closely related to each other in the "intermediate realm." However, they differ considerably in terms of production and reception conditions. While a composer such as Georges Aperghis utilizes elaborate vocal notation, and Dieter Schnebel – for all the freedom he sometimes grants the performers – also works with ensembles, sound poets generally perform as their own interpreters and usually do not develop any consistent notation or scoring concepts for their sound poems. For the time being, this doesn't appear to be necessary, since these authors know how to articulate their language compositions and have no need to write down performance instructions. For the international movement of sound poetry/poésie sonore, (vinyl) records were more important than (musical) texts; the acoustic art of Carlfriedrich Claus, for example, has survived exclusively on tapes recorded by

the author. The great majority of sound poems were unable to be incorporated into musical practice beyond the performances given by the performers, and they are therefore not part of the repertoire of experimental vocal music to which specialized singers and ensembles devote themselves.

According to Michael Lentz, "sound poetry/music is a genre of acoustic art in the inter-medial intersections of poetry and music." His definition encompasses both experimental vocal music and auditory poetry. "Especially after 1945, the various manifestations of this genre provide a vocal-compositional functionalization of all speech organs and tools involved in articulatory processes and of the respiratory apparatus, thus making it possible to experience the entire human sound and noise potential." Whether composers or writers write and/or produce sound music makes a difference, especially in the practice of writing and performing. Reinhard Meyer-Kalkus points out: "The decisive defining feature of sound poetry is (...) not the distinction between performative presence and a sound subject conveyed on sound media, nor the question of whether this has been previously notated in writing or is improvised in the moment, but rather the dimension of what is audible. Sound poetry relies on vocal sound in a different way than most other literary genres that can also be absorbed with silent reading – but thus relies on staging or performance, as only vocal and instrumental music does."

The dividing line between speech music conceived by composers and that conceived by literati follows along the question of notation. For the difference between phonetic poetry

and vocal music is that the latter is usually more or less precisely fixed in writing, whereas in the case of phonetic poems there are often written text foundations which, of course, as a rule do not provide clear/sufficient performance instructions without additional information or audible impressions from performances. It's not only philology, musicology, or literary studies that encounter difficulties when they are not provided with (notated) texts. In contrast to scored music, works of speech music, which are solely available with the performance of their authors, cannot be included in a repertoire. Seen in this light, the experimental language music of the 1950s and beyond is divided into two separate performance and reception traditions – a split that the Cologne-based ensemble **sprechbohrer** is actively working to resolve by drawing on its expertise and perspective in both spheres.

Probably the most famous piece of sound poetry from the 20th century is Kurt Schwitters' 1921 *Sonata in Urlauten* (Sonata in Primal Sounds). Unlike with Carlfriedrich Claus, who had a tape recorder at his disposal in the 1950s, for Schwitters, who certainly hoped that his sound poems would continue to be performed in the future, the production-aesthetic dilemma that culminated in the question of notation could not be solved. He believed that "only in one case is sound poetry consistent, and that is when it's created at the same time as the artistic performance, and not written down." This is not a plea for spontaneous improvisations. Schwitters' statement sheds more light on the poetological aspects of his phonetic poem: from the perspective of the poet-performer, the physical form of phonetic poems is notation. From this point of view,

the text on paper is not the result of a writing process, but an attempt to write down what the poet had previously *articulated*. Although it seemed difficult for Schwitters to imagine that his sound-poetic works could even survive without him (the interpreter) – he also considered the *Ursonate* to be "lost" without him as the person performing it – he nevertheless was concerned with the question of notation. The basis of his "writings" are characters common in the written form of German, which are also to be articulated according to the common pronunciation rules. In a commentary on the *Ursonate*, Schwitters writes: "Naturally, the written text can indicate only partially how the sonata should be spoken. As with every form of notation, many interpretations are possible." Despite everything, this work is the only linguistic composition of a poet who can now look back on a veritable history of interpretation. To this day, the authors of *sound poetry* have not tried to discover more precise methods of notation (or writing) and – like Schwitters in the past – still have to designate for themselves what they mean. If, for example, you haven't heard Gerhard Rühm's early sound poems as interpreted by their author, you won't learn anything about the intended dynamics or tempo from their written form.

The members of the **sprechbohrer** trio are neither singers nor actors – even if vocal passages and theatrical elements are often included in the pieces they perform. They interpret linguistic works with the means of musicians. Since authors working in the field of spoken music and sound poetry usually appear as performers of their own works, at first it tended to be composers who wrote new pieces for the Cologne ensemble; in addition to

these were the three ensemble members' own spoken compositions. Further, they adapted works by authors from the field of New Poetry such as Elfriede Czurda, Helmut Heissenbüttel, and Oskar Pastior by arranging texts for three voices. Beyond this, however, the desire arose to also commission pieces from literary authors and to overcome the obstacles outlined above. First and foremost, the notation problem inevitably proved to be a hurdle. Writers are not used to writing down their sound pieces (exactly): either because they perform themselves as interpreters of their own work or because they're not familiar with musical notation. In two instances, *Autorenmusik* was able to launch a "Project Repertoire Extension," which, for the reasons mentioned above, included an intensive exchange with the artists in advance, in addition to the mere commissioning of the work. In 2017, new pieces were premiered in Linz and Cologne, mainly by Austrian and Swiss authors, including Karin Spielhofer, Robert Stähr, Christian Steinbacher, and Elisabeth Wandeler-Deck; in 2018, a program followed, which was performed in Berlin, Cologne, and Kassel and which was prepared by a workshop with the participants, including Christian Filips, Neo Hülcker, and Barbara Köhler.

The title *Autorenmusik* is a term borrowed from Helmut Heissenbüttel. Günter Peters, who in 1993, in collaboration with Heinz-Klaus Metzger and Rainer Riehn, edited a volume on "Autoren-Musik" in the *Musik-Konzepte* series, writes: "Where writers no longer 'compose' texts only within the boundaries of literary poetry, and where composers no longer merely 'interpret' texts within the boundaries of setting to music, they write *author-music*." "Autoren-Musik" is also an essay by Helmut Heissenbüttel published in 1977. In it, he speaks of "abrasive phenomena" between "phonetic and musical areas of articulation" and also examines the area of "anti-music," as it was practiced in the 1970s, for example, by Dieter Roth and his friends under the moniker of *Selten gehörte Musik* (Rarely heard music) as free improvisation under the influence of alcohol: "In this context, language also plays an increasing role, in the form of interludes, in incomprehensible babbling, in interludes, groans, laughter, etc."

*The Poets' Sounds* project has a direct connection to *Autorenmusik*. The step into the international, multilingual, and linguistically transcending realm is a logical one, since this European literary cooperation can indeed take place – in contrast to what would be possible with conventional poetry and prose – without the mediating work of translators. Viewed in this way, the undertaking, which transcends not only media but also real boundaries, also ties in with the utopias of concrete poetry, which was still a decidedly international movement without our present-day communication options, especially in the forms of visual and phonetic poetry, for which even the Iron Curtain could not prove an insurmountable obstacle.



**Miia Toivio's** spoken piece **Rakas hupsu** is divided into six parts, plus an introduction and a coda. Sound poems are usually concise and short. Wherever the binding force of syntax and formal schemes known from the canon of lyrical tradition are abandoned, and language is broken down into smaller units right down to its sounds and tones, the question of structural



Tiedän, että suut syövät aivosumun, / pusikot, lepikot, vesaikot  
ja runo sulaa lujaa jonkun suussa / ja toisaalta joku toinen kutsuu  
suuta

the fact that this sea has become a mass grave for boat refugees. “Welle” (German), “wave” (English), and “bølge” (Norwegian) form the basic linguistic material for the surging wave movements, and the ten sections are assigned wind strengths according to the Beaufort scale, ranging from a “light breeze” (2 BFT) to a “hurricane” (12 BFT). In addition to the weather data (“a stiff wind sets in”), there are location data (“between Bodrum and the island of Kos”) and fragments of reports that indicate shipwrecks and drownings (“water penetrates the boat”). The material comes from the most part from the compendium *Todesursache: Flucht. Eine unvollständige Liste* (Cause of Death: Flight. An Incomplete List). The accidents are similar and repeated; only in one place is the image of the Syrian boy who was found dead on the Turkish beach called “the boy on the beach,” which has been burned into the collective memory. The fact that the water metaphor is also often used to portray the movement of refugees across the Mediterranean into the EU as threatening – there is talk of waves or flows of refugees, of a flood – makes Avenstroup’s surging textual fabric even more compelling and oppressive. The author refers to her piece as a “Mahnruf” (admonition). It does not specifically accuse individuals or institutions – but who in the countries that are the target of life-threatening escapes could consider themselves completely unimplicated? A Norwegian organization that reports on the incidents in the Mediterranean is called “Messenger from Hell.” The sea has not calmed down by the end of Tone Avenstroup’s piece: In a “stiff wind” (7 BFT) the talk is of pushbacks; “we expect new messages.”

**Elisabeth Wandeler-Deck** bases her new piece, [ricochet rikoschett/ an approximate passacaglia, possibly](#) on an underlying musical form. A “passacaglia” is a series of variations developed over a bass ostinato in a three-meter range. Originally a Spanish folk dance, the passacaglia established itself in Italian music in the 17th century and has been repeatedly taken up to the present day. As references, Wandeler-Deck also cites György Ligeti’s *Passacaglia ungherese* for harpsichord and Robert Pinget’s book *Passacaille*, which – with its refrain-like structure – already represented an attempt to adapt this musical form in literature. However, the attribute “approximately” and the trailing “possibly” in the title also suggest that the rendering into the medium of literature cannot be a direct, unbroken one. Wandeler-Deck picks up on the triple rhythm by underlaying the piece with a pulse of steps/passi, which works with “language quanta” (Wolfram Malte Fues) consisting of a maximum of three letters extracted from poems. “Passacaglia” is derived from the Spanish “pasar la calle” (crossing the street). The attempt to create linguistic echoes, as can be heard in the streets of Venice, is another structural approach in *ricochet / rikoschett*. The author sees the challenge in not simply repeating texts in an echo, but “bringing them into a different resonance.” With her first piece for [sprechbohrer](#) entitled *Das a. Das i. Was kann der Umlaut.* (2017), she emphatically noted: “Not a radio play!! Not a theatre text!!! But a speaking score.” Three parameters are noted: pitch (dynamics and expression), sound formation (for example, “sighing”) and speech posture (for example, “hopeless, even?”). At one point, the slowly progressing linguistic music is interrupted by contrasting,

## Minute 2.1

Allg. wenn nichts anderes vermerkt, generell **mf**; neutral, nicht aufeinander bezogen (siehe ausführli

(Textebene 1)	tell? elle-----o tt ----x	tell---x ll---an-- d-- o-----o	sehe niemanden kontaminiere
(Parameter 1)	<b>mf</b> fragend	<b>p</b> beinah singend	<b>mf</b> bestätigend
(Parameter 2)	eher triefere Stimmlage	Stimme etwas höher	mittlere Stimmlage
(Parameter 3)			

(Textebenene 2)	Φ Φ Φ	wo wo geht geht ach salto sehe nie--- m--anden	Φ Φ Φ
(Parameter 1)		<b>p</b> leichtes < <b>mp</b> Text sehr rasch: Puls!	
(Parameter 2)			
(Parameter 3)		Lass dich nicht verwirrend!	

(Textebeneme 3)	saltellando wo wo geht geht ach salto sehe niemand	Φ Φ Φ	eh----x e-----h h h x ch-- ach-----x h h h-x
(Parameter 1)	scharfes <b>p</b>		<b>mf</b> verhauchend
(Parameter 2)	geflüstert		tiefere Stimmlage
(Parameter 3)			

### Elisabeth Wandeler-Deck:

Extract from score [ricochet rikoschett / an approximate passacaglia, possibly](#)

unstructured “talk.” Hans-Wolfgang Schaffnit writes in his book *Das Gerede. Zum Problem der Krise unseres Redens* (Speech. On the problem of the crisis of our speech), which inspired Wandeler-Deck: “We have generated speech, we’re keeping it going.” Composed linguistic music, as becomes clear here, can

and seeks to counteract “speech,” or “talk,” with something else. Like a composer working with her own texts, Elisabeth Wandeler-Deck uses textual material from her poems in her passacaglia, invoking the story of Echo and Narcissus.



## 2. la velocitat del capital, la velocitat d'una persona / the speed of capital, the speed of a person

If possible, S2 and S1 look each other; it's a kind of competition. Playful, stressful and painful at the same time—high speed and tone. S3 in a down tempo, one sentence every 4 steps.

4/4, 105 bpm

--	--

S1	S2	S3
X_	_X	X_
Cúcuta	Táchira	die geschwindigkeit des kapitals
Cácata	Táchara	—
Cícita	Téchere	—
Cécuta	Táchere	—
Céceta	Tíchara	die geschwindigkeit eines menschen
Céceca	Chíchara	—
Cícita	Chítara	—
Cétaca	Chírete	—
Cúceta	Tóchara	die geschwindigkeit des kapitals
Cátaca	Tóreta	—
Cúteca	Chóchira	—
Cécica	Táricha	—
Cétaca	Chi	die geschwindigkeit eines menschen
Cúcucu	Chi	—
Cecice	Ta	—
Ce	Chi	—
Ce	Chi	die geschwindigkeit einer email
Ce	Ta	—
Ce	Ti	—
Cu	Chi	—

Eduard Escoffet: Extract from the score of *Ode to the Walking Class*

The score of **Eduard Escoffet's *Ode to the Walking Class*** is clearly structured, but also contains sections with graphical notation that provide the performers with greater freedom. English is predominant in the five-part piece, but there are also German, Italian, and French passages; Catalan is only present in headings in the score and in an exposed place. In *Walking Class*, Escoffet refers to escape and migration movements, which are often covered as footpaths. In the first section, hikes through the Americas are first hinted at ("I've been walking through Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador"), followed by an agitational section – "like a demonstration" – with the slogan "Save the Walking Class." In the score, the author mentions Åke Hodells *Where is Eldrige Cleaver?* as a model – a piece with which the Swedish sound poet was reacting in 1969 to the disappearance of the writer and Black Panther activist. The live, phonetic voices of **sprech-bohrer** are augmented by recordings made by the ensemble with cassette recorders and played on stage: sound improvisations based on Escoffet's graphic notations. In addition, there are litany-like enumerations of South American place names and distances, and the slowness of pedestrians is contrasted with other speeds ("the speed of capital"). Escoffet juxtaposes the lists of place names and proper names with asemantic sound music, which is graphically notated and charged expressively; the score contains performance instructions such as "starts phonetic sounds, painful, high" and "keeps doing wild sounds, almost to the limit." At the beginning of the 4th section, the two Catalan words "son" (sleep) and "fam" (hunger) are contrasted, and their repetition creates a walking rhythm. At the end, you can hear the exclamation "Save the Walking Class"

again in energetic unison. In an essay written for the Berlin Poetry Festival, Eduard Escoffet once formulated his aesthetic point of view as follows: "I've always believed that one cannot achieve a revolution or make a break as long as one imitates the given or sounds like the whole world." You can also read this as a plea for a linguistic music that leaves literary conventions and genre boundaries behind.



In his six-part language composition **They, Morten Søndergaard** works with greatly reduced language material from pronouns of several languages (English, German, Danish, Finnish, and Italian). The material is musicalized with the help of repetitive structures and by modeling out individual syllables and sounds. Dialogic and polyphonic passages alternate, but the three voices repeatedly come together in unison. Thus, Søndergaard explores the tension between collective and individual, and the question always hangs in the air: for whom do the pronouns act as placeholders? Søndergaard speaks of having based his composition on the swarm behavior of bees; a volume of poetry from 1998 already bore the title *Bees die in their sleep*. What happens when a swarm of bees starts looking for a new home? Scouts are sent out: after all, a decision is made collectively. The six parts of the language composition span an arc from thinking about a departure to the search, a "democratic" bee dance for decision-making and to the departure to the new hive. The individuals unite to form a swarm, which represents a kind of "superorganism." Morten Søndergaard, for whom the *Ursonate*

(01) *pp* *p* *mp*

S	de		de	they		sie	se	es	niitaniitä		sie	ne	se	si	se	essi	si!	essi	
H		dem		dem	them	}	ihnen	ne	niitaniitä	}	se	de	es	se	poe	si	si!	essa	}
G		den		it			siehnenn		niitaniitä		essi		se	es	se		sie	si!	esso

(02) *p* *A* *ritardando* *A tempo* *cresc.* *mp*

S	niitä	essssssi	de	esssssaessssssa	they?	us?	de?	den	dem	desi	den	de	si	densie	essssssa?	
H	niitä	essssssa	dem	esssssiessssssi	them?	dem?	wir?	sie?	se	se	slees	siese	se	sie	si	essssssi?
G	niitä	essssso	den	esssssoessssso	we?	noi?	sie?	de	sie	sesi	dees	desensisie				essssso?

(03) *mp* *cresc* *f*

S	niitaniitä	sie	sie	esse	siede	sie	de	sie	it	it	it	the	niitä	se	niitä	them	it	it	it	it	ihnen!		
H	ihnenihnen	es	esso	es	esso	es	esso	de	dem	den	de	dem	den	it	it	they	niitä	se	niitä	them	it	it	ihnen!
G	loroloroloroloroloro	suo	essisuo	essi	suo	den	dem	den	they	them	niitä	se	niitä	them	it	it	it	it	it	it	it	ihnen!	

(04) *mp* *dem* *ne* *ne* *ne* *ne* *decresc.*

S		<i>mp</i>	dem		ne		ne		ne		ne										
H		<i>mp</i>	dem		niitä		niitä		niitä		niitä				<i>cresc.</i>						<i>decresc.</i>
G	<i>mf</i>	they	dem	they	dem	they	they	dem	they	dem	loro	they	loro	dem	loro	they	loro	dem	loroloroloroo	niitaniitä	niitaniitä

(05) *accelerando* *decellerando*

S	<i>p</i>	they	dem	dem	dem	ne	ne	ne	ne	ne	niitä	de	de	essi	esse	essi	es	esso	essesa	es	esso	es!							
H	<i>mp</i>	it	ne	it	ne	den	dem				esso	essi	suo	suo	niitä		de	de	esse	es	esso	es	essi	es	esso	es!			
G	<i>p</i>	dem	them	ne	dem	ne	se				niitä	ne	loro	de	de	niitä		niitä	de	de	essi	es	essa	es	essa	essi	es	esso	es!

by Kurt Schwitters provided an important reference point in his artistic development, also regards the **sprechbohrer** ensemble as such an organism. In his accompanying text to *They*, he writes that repetitive structures can serve to put listeners in a pre-linguistic state, as it were, in which sounds and inflections come to the fore and semantics take a back seat – just as infants perceive their linguistic environment before acquiring a language. Søndergaard sees an analogy between the departure of the swarm of bees into the unknown and the departure of the assured language into the

linguistic “intermediate realm.” In the end, a “nostro” emerges from the flock of pronouns, taking possession of the new territory.

**Katalin Ladik** has been performing her sound poetry on stage for decades, a performer displaying a great use of voice and body. Her first book of poems, *Ballada az ezüstbicikliről* (Ballad of the Silver Bicycle), published in 1969, included a record. This was an attempt to

III Teil cca 03'00"

3X {

adagio  
vivace

jó jó jó jó nekem jó \* nekem jó \* nekem jó \* nekem jó \* nekem jó \*

akkor jó \* akkor jó \* akkor jó \* akkor jó \* akkor jó \*

neki jó \* neki jó \* neki jó \* neki jó \* neki jó \*

---

3X {

crescendo

jaj nekem jaj jaaaaaj \* jaj nekem jaj jaaaaaj \* oda a hajam ajajaj a hajam \*

mi a baj? \* hű ez baj! \* Z = behr(ö)

mi van? mi? V = W

---

3X {

forte cantabile

óóóó óóó \* óóó \* óóó \* óóó \* óóó \* óóó \* óóó \*

hűűűű! hűűűű! \* hűűűű! \* hűűűű! \* hűűűű! \* hűűűű! \*

na nel ne már! hűlye hűlye

a: habe  
a: ja  
ly: ja

---

3X {

forte fortissimo

itt itt itt \* itt itt itt \* itt itt itt \* itt itt itt \* itt itt itt \* itt itt itt \*

óóó \* óóó \*

tojás tojás tojás! tojás!

a: habe  
a: ja  
s: sch

**Katalin Ladik:** Extract from the score of *three eggs*

develop a kind of “meta-language” to convey its poetic message, because the Hungarian minority in Yugoslavia at the time had little hope of finding translators. Based on graphic scores or conventional poems (on paper), Ladik gives brilliant speaking concerts in which improvisation also finds its space. Thus it is an unusual step for her to let a piece out of her sight, as it were, and to notate or score it for performers. The piece **three eggs** (three eggs) consists of three sections in which the greatly reduced linguistic material is drawn from one each of the three languages German, Serbian, and Hungarian, featuring short words, syllables, and exclamations that are constantly repeated. Ladik, who also performs as an actress, directs this speech opera and encourages the ensemble to engage in theatrical gestures to an unusual extent (and beyond what is noted in the score) – something that proves a balancing act for non-actors. In her accompanying text she writes that she conceived the three speaking voices as “characters”: The female voice is “curious, enthusiastic, sensitive, and extroverted,” the high male voice she imagines as that of an “understanding and just” teacher or judge who cannot always control “his strong emotions,” whereas the deep male voice stands for sarcasm and irony. The egg is of course symbolically charged, and for Ladik represents a “humorous metaphor.” With respect to the artist active across media,

Marta Dziewańska writes: “Movement is the basis of Katalin Ladik’s work. All of the artist’s works are in motion, in flux, in change; imitation, representation and narratives are completely absent. Even the direction of the movement remains open (every specification would be the equivalent of a fetter), and it changes dynamically and conquers everything on its way.” In her *three eggs* piece, she successfully transfers this energy to the **sprechbohrer** ensemble.

**Florian Neuner**

Artistic Director

# Artistic

## sprechbohrer Ensemble



left to right: **Georg Sachse, Sigrid Sachse, Harald Muenz** © Natalia Reich 2021

The Cologne-based speech art trio **sprechbohrer** (Sigrid Sachse, Harald Muenz, and Georg Sachse) was founded in 2004 to perform texts from a musical perspective, situated between music, phoneticism, and literature. All three members of the ensemble are established musicians. Their diverse experiences in the areas of composing and interpreting, literature and phonetics, flow together in **sprechbohrer's** ensemble work and complement each other into a singular, transgressive, multilingual approach. The ensemble has been working in consultation with authors on works at the threshold of language and music for many years. Through such a direct co-operation, an interpretational authenticity can be reached. As an example one can name the integral overall execution and CD production

of Hans G Helms' *Fa:m' Ahniesgwow*, made possible by Art Foundation NRW and Hesse Broadcasting (Hessischer Rundfunk), its release was among others even awarded the German Record Critics' Award. 2014 the ensemble put forward a CD with works by Kurt Schwitters (*Ursonate and other consequential poetry*). **sprechbohrer** worked with many composers of various generations, such as Stefan Streich, hans w. koch, Hans Peter Reuter, Peter Behrendsen, and often Gerhard Rühm.



# Direction

## Florian Neuner



**Florian Neuner** © Jörg Gruneberg 2021

**Florian Neuner**, born in 1972 in Wels, Upper Austria, lives as a writer and journalist in Berlin and is this year's Writer of the City of Graz. Together with Ralph Klever, he edits the journal *Idiome. Hefte für Neue Prosa*. As a radio writer, he works primarily for *Deutschlandfunk Kultur*. Collaborations with composers such as Christoph Herndler and Harald Muenz. Literary urban research in the Ruhr area and elsewhere. Curator of the series *maerz\_sprachkunst* for the MAERZ artists' association in Linz. Outstanding Artist Award for Literature 2022. Latest books: *Rost. Eine psychogeographische Expedition* (Klagenfurt: Ritter Verlag 2021), *Ramsch* (Berlin: Distillery Press 2019), *Drei Tote* (Ostheim/Rhön: Verlag Peter Engstler 2017). In autumn, Klever Verlag will publish the volume *Für eine andere Literatur. Reaktionen, Rezensionen, Interventionen*.



# **The Authors** on their Works



# Miia Toivio



**Miia Toivio** at the project's second production workshop

© Sina Lynn Sachse 2022

**Miia Toivio**, born in 1974 in Ilmajoki, Finland, is an author living in Helsinki. She co-founded the publishing house Poesia, is active as a literary critic, columnist, editor of the poetry magazine *Tuli & Savu*, and a creative writing teacher. Her fourth poetry volume *Sukupuu* (Teos 2019) won the Nihil Interit Prize for the best poetry volume. She was awarded the Eino Leino Prize in 2021. Her poems have been translated into Lithuanian, Estonian, Russian, Italian, and Norwegian.

[poetssounds.lettretage.de/en/miia-toivio-2/](https://poetssounds.lettretage.de/en/miia-toivio-2/)



Miia Toivio

## You are an oral Poem

Translated from Finnish by Kasper Salonen

Dear silly,

You are an oral poem, you are a poem that fits well in my mouth and you are a completely kissable poem. Smooch. Kissability, I mean out-loud verbal traditions usually refer to poetry that is born without literacy, orally sung, told, and remembered. You are not oral in that sense because you have been written via a word processor and sent to another country through digital technology and an invisible web, and no anonymous author has invented you and you haven't been sung in the corner of a cottage or listened or repeated or assimilated and walked over to the neighbors' house and re-sung there, but as something different and yet memorable; and on another night you would have been tasted and some third party would have been enamored by you and made you their own and taken you home and said, shall we sing a bit and then there would be more singing and listening and assimilation and otherwise-remembrance, but no, you haven't traveled in that way, you have not circulated from mouth to mouth, ear to ear, gradually changing your form, and so you have not tripped through centuries in the bodies of your singers and listeners from one place to another; instead you have emigrated in a matter of seconds, from person to person, in this case from Helsinki, Finland to Cologne and Berlin, Germany, and there you have been read by eyes and encountered in the hollows of mouths, and during spring 2022 you have come to be practiced by mouths, embraced by mouths, carried and performed by mouths. You are a written poem that mouths adopt.

Your origins are in my yearning to that cultural experience where singers carry poems in their mouths like animals carry their young. I have pined for the contact with that Fenno-Ugric poem-singing tradition that I have missed as a textual poet. Such a culture has not existed for at least a hundred years. The place of writing has moved, changed. Poem-singing as an oral skill has disappeared, poetry has made its nest in written culture and contemporary poetry has grown from the textual tradition. Poem-singing is still taught at the folk music faculty of the Sibelius Academy, but the teachers and students are not called poets, they are musicians instead. As I understand it, they also do not actively produce original poetry, opting to study and sing the tradition recorded in the folk poetry archives.

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You, however, dear silly, silly-billy, are an oral poem, which to me as your writer means: a poem wherein the vocal and rhythmic qualities of language, the crystallized bodily sensations

created by a poem, have guided the writing. You are not a Kalevala poem, but an experimental and multidisciplinary one. Your roots are in the historical avant garde of the early 20th century, especially in sound poetry. I have always enjoyed your kind of poetry the most: poetry where the musicality of language engulfs the text and catches expression in its embrace. Ja spins around! It's poetry whose vocal and rhythmic forms emerge, attracting the reader's attention and making them move. Poetry that is born foremost as a phonetic creature, listening to and munching on language. Not much poetry in this vein is currently written in Finnish, which is a shame. That is another reason I am glad you exist.

Oral writing has also taken a backseat in my own work for some years. It is ten years since the poetry collection *Suut* (Mouths, Poesia 2012) by myself and poet Marko Niemi was published. The phonetic nature of poetry in *Suut* was highlighted by both methodological and, pardon the phrase, traditional writing. The poems and their subjects were born using computer programs developed by Marko, through which masses of text were run creating certain "results" that we then honed. We also relied on various restrictions to aid in our work. In addition, we wrote from our personal perspectives, using the tangible feel of writing to our benefit to bring forth phonetically and rhythmically highlighted poems. Marko was chiefly in charge of the texts brought out via computer-assisted, methodological, and often tightly restricted means, and I wrote more freely, with only some constraints.

During the years surrounding *Suut* we performed together on numerous occasions as the duo Miia & Marko, investigating the possibilities of oral poetry, performance, and dialogical expression. Then, suddenly and heartbreakingly, Marko passed away in autumn 2019; I lost a close friend and collaborator, and my work with poetic orality was interrupted. The project spurred by Lettrétage and sprechbohrer provided me with a renewed, collaborative opportunity and approach (including the inspiration!) to question and test my own skills in writing oral poetry.

My first creative idea concerning you, Dear silly, was therefore the desire to invite the oral back home. To call it back into my own mouth for the purpose of creating poetry. So I relied on personification, an "enlivening," and imagined the mouth to be a sentient being that I could invoke in the same way that cows are keened back to the byre from pasture. I had the chance as a child to witness old-fashioned country life, composed of small farms and villages, since my grandparents kept about twenty cows in a stanchion barn. In the summer the cattle spent their days on the pasturage near the house, from whence they were called back in for their evening milking. My memories of my grandparents' vocalized summonings are dim, but I know that herding calls [Translator's note: sometimes called *kulning*, *lalning*, or *kauking* across Scandinavia] are an integral part of Fenno-Ugric traditions of oral poetry. In my mind I connected the start of my own process to this same tradition, and that is how the first poem in the series *Rakas hupsu* (Dear silly) was born.

The newest and hardest part in writing you has been that I've had to compose you as a musical score, and for three voices. Writing you has been an extended learning experience, because I haven't been able to bring you into existence using my old familiar methods. You are the first poem that I am writing with the main intention of being performed and heard. And yes: three voices, wow! It feels to me like those voices are like three characters stepping along their own paths in a shared garden, tossing a ball to each other, calling out to one another, listening and echoing. As for the space (or garden) that this three-way team play will create, I can't know that yet. When I do hear you out loud for the first time, you will be a surprise to me as well, foreign and familiar all at once.

Thematically you embody important things to me, which I want to take a closer look at presently. But first and foremost I want you to remind your listeners of what language feels like, what words feel like, what vowels and consonants feel like; so that your listeners will remember the mouth, their own mouths, and the things mouths can do. How incredible is the being that we carry in our mouths and in our minds, and the delight that it can bring. And how that creature exists in poetry especially, and what power it carries within it.

It is worth remembering and probing the poem "Sydämeni laulu" by national author Aleksis Kivi, from his seminal novel *Seven Brothers* from 1870. When read aloud in Finnish, its soundful visionary fragments – such as *hietakehto*, *kellahdella*, *kuullella kehääjälintuu* – as well as its dark, dank ending phrase all bounce and sway. Recite it, and comprehend with awe that all the effects of this poem are composed of vowels and consonants, the way they organize themselves and are felt in the mouth. [Translator's note: Keith Boswell's English rendition is commendable, but delivers a different oral world perforce].

That is the vibrant verbal mouthfeel that I want to discover and arouse in my own writing. It is quite hard to describe, and I've actually tried to do so multiple times in my notes. Below I will exhibit some of these attempts to wrangle and cuddle that experience of writing.

\* \* \*

So what sort of writing am I pursuing? Momentary surges of emotion that transports the poem, and myself within the poem; I follow along; and yet I know myself, I hold onto myself, in this unfamiliar ride where my feeling of myself is present in the words and phonemes that carry strange meanings. That is the emotion I am searching for, I reach for it and yearn for it, and I don't know how I will attain it, but by writing it happens and suddenly I notice I am once again in that mesmerizing moment.

When it happens, this this this feeling, this grasping onto language that makes poetry poetry, that truly separates poetry from other writing and other ways that people use to turn toward

the world, to experience and parse one's existence and relationship toward others – then I am exceedingly happy.

For this reason, I notice that in my own writing I've not been particularly interested in what my poems look like. The visuality and typography of poetry have not drawn me in quite like tasting the poems themselves in my mouth. Sight is a sense of distances, and I feel that it alone cannot awaken the entire body. A poem as the subject of a gaze does not literally touch and move me in the same way as a poem as a audible and tangible creature. I also imagine that it is different to write from the mouth than to write from the eye, based more on hearing and touch than by relying on visual patterns and rhythms. I may of course be mistaken in this, and I may need to think about this again, even more.

But it is precisely that emotion, welling up through vocal repetition that is the onus and objective of my writing: feel, pressure, rhythm, sounds, and movement. This is about a kind of murmuring, as poet Vladimir Mayakovsky described the onset of the writing process in his work *A Cloud in Trousers*. I believe that, at its best, writing poetry is a bend toward this murmuring, toward the boundaries of understanding, and that at its best a poem balances on that boundary, almost letting go of the reader's hand.

As per Mayakovsky's description, writing a poem begins when words begin to cleave themselves away from the murmur. But for me the best experience in poetry writing is quite the opposite: words begin to melt around the edges, meanings dissolve, falling back first into formlessness and nonsense – all while remaining within the bounds of sense.

Writing poetry, to me, should always be about a return to murmuring. I don't know why, but that's how I feel. I barely concern myself with meanings, preferring the emotion of welling up that thoroughly rinses the formation of meaning. That is what I want out of writing; a wave that flips my insides upside down and back again; or perhaps that is reality itself that is opening, relinquishing and fracturing, morphing, and I don't even know which I'm addressing. But I know that I cannot help but being awed in the presence of these elements.

\* \* \*

You, dear dear silly, are mindless, you murmur and sigh and echo, and I hope you are bumpity, lumpity, and plumbable, and everything that I want to bring back to poetry, revert, recreate, that humhumhum feeling, the thing that feels so good in all those U's.

U is an ice cream scopp, a hollow, a soft gelato.

Hold on a minute while I eat it up.

\* \* \*

And finally, as some kind of conclusion, a final impression that I hope is also an emotable image. The mouth is a kind of cathedral, an echoing space where sounds tremble in waves and gather meanings around them. The more often one visits this cathedral, the stronger its effects become. The feeling grows. Your sounds scoop me again and again. That is why you, Dear silly, include so many mouths (Fin. *suu*). That home of the tongue. That closeness.

As my last remark I would like to say, I want to be like you, just as glad and energetic, enjoying life. After all, you were born out of my desire to rejoice and savor words and rhythms. To be cheerful and silly, even laughable. Tongue-happy! Then again I have also wanted to write out the sadness that the absence of a mouth that jibbers and jabbars out of sheer glee can produce.

I hope you bring joy to those who hear you, and give them reasons to rejoice and riot; and I hope the mouth returns to many mouths through you.

# Tone Avenstroup

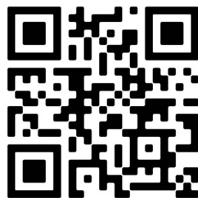


**Tone Avenstroup** at the project's first production workshop

© Natalia Reich 2021

**Tone Avenstroup** (born in 1963 in Oslo) is a Norwegian poet, translator, theatrical director, and performance artist living in Berlin. She co-founded the theatre and performance collective BAK-TRUPPEN in Bergen, Norway in 1986. Between 1997 and 2000, she was a member of the performance group Akt. She edited the journal *Gegner* from 2005 to 2017. Most of her books have been published in Norwegian and German by Peter Engstler (Ostheim/Rhön): *durch blanke landschaften* (2013), *silene* (2016), and *november im schlaf* (2019), amongst others.

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Tone Avenstroup

**Mare Monstrum**

a wave-work for sprechbohrer

Text about the score

Translated from Norwegian by B.L. Crook

Always the sound of wind, it is not often silent here on the coast, on the southern coast of Norway, at Skagerak. Whether one approaches from this or that side of the river, from the islands beyond or from the mainland; one needs not travel farther than Mosby to detect a different dialect. It is possible to hear where one comes from, but one cannot hear the screams issued from the Mediterranean.

A picture does not render the screams. Every day we are informed of the newly dead. As well as those who were saved: colorful faces, red vests, blue sea. We rarely witness the horror of a drowning death, and we've grown so used to these images that they no longer disturb our everyday lives.

The wave of refugees is not a natural disaster. The media reports on a storm of refugees that is washing over us. Overwhelming. These are water metaphors. The score touches on these very real events, but at present the war in Ukraine and our willingness to do something for those fleeing this catastrophe, has become the dominate topic.

Mass death in the Mediterranean is a constant nightmare. The Norwegian word for this, "mare," mirrors the English (night)"mare" and the German "märe." In Norwegian and Anglo-Saxon etymology, a mare is a creature that sits atop a person's chest at night plaguing them while they sleep. In modern English, a mare is a female horse, "merr" in Norwegian and "Stute" or "eine Mähre" in German, but here the mare is without the h, as in the German word "Märchen," meaning fairytale. This, however, is not a fairytale; it is a nightmare.

This piece is dedicated to those who have died, those who did not survive the waves, who went under, who never survived to tell their stories, who never became problematic to our economy, who never threatened to "take our jobs," those who never made it far enough "to mooch off of our welfare state." (There is apparently no lack of damning expressions with which to cast suspicion on the motives of people forced to flee their lands). This piece has been written in memory of those who lost their lives in the Mediterranean Sea – which is now a grave of sorts, a churchyard, a shipping route without *Stolpersteins*.



Arian Leka, an Albanian poet born in Durrës, writes in remembrance of his father and other Albanian sailors who lost their lives at sea. He refers to *Mare Nostrum* (our sea) as a *Mare Monstrum*. In the long poem *Auschwitz Detar* (Auschwitz Ocean) he imagines the swaths of the Mediterranean Sea as various barracks (*Abwärts!* 3/2021: "Barracks II - The coast of Lampedusa"). The poem has a provocative title in German: *Das Auschwitz der Meere*. It has been translated from Albanian by Zuzana Finger: "We have a word for what happened to people at Auschwitz, but we do not have a word for what happened at sea." (*Lifeboat for the drowned souls*, "17.03.21)

\*

I have never learned to play an instrument, but I know the sea. I've learned to see the way it ripples, curves and breaks, forming sea spray and foam flecks, I know the effects of the wind on the water. Starting with the Norwegian/German/English words "bølge," "Welle," "wave," I created a diagram based on the letters of these words. Three words, five letters. The Beaufort scale of wind force has thirteen levels for measuring wind speed. "Leiser Zug" (*light air*), wind speed 1 with wind up to 1.5 meters/second translates to the Norwegian equivalent of "embarrassing wind" (Norwegian: *flau vind*) with a slightly rippling sea, however "leichte Brise" (*light breeze*), the German wind speed 2 cannot be translated directly into the Norwegian as "lett bris" because this is Norwegian for wind speed 3, "Sturm," "storm," "storm" "is also a false friend," I created six approximate levels.

It is never brilliantly calm in *Mare Monstrum*, but the gusts gradually become a hurricane. Of course, no one wants to climb into a boat in such terrible weather – constant chaos, white noise, the image white with sea spray, foaming white.

The wave-variations were at the outset a material; in the diagram I found a structure, a pattern. The piece is written for sprechbohrer and the trio is German, I work most often from German and used the German terminology for wind speeds. Norwegian text dominates the highest tones, the bass is primarily German, and the middle layers are primarily in English. These three languages were each given a designated color, so that I was able to see the interplay of the languages.

\*

The other bits of information, excerpts from news reports, have been inserted into the wave-variations: "N.N....drowned...10...unknown...unknown..." *Todesursache: Flucht. Eine unvollständige Liste*. (Cause of death: Seeking refuge. An incomplete list) is the main source that I have drawn from. Over 400 dense pages, over 35,000 souls, where they came from, how they died, as much as we can tell, on their way to Europe, a database that has been kept since 1993. Published by Kristina Milz and Anja Tuckermann on Hirnkost KG in Berlin, for the first time in 2018. There is no

translation or publication of this list in Norwegian, which was originally compiled and published by the pan-European network and organization UNITED for Intercultural Action.

Place names, numbers, and narrative fragments, without elucidating individual fates. Swaths of information reduced down, the fragments are almost poetic, but none of them are contrived. They are extracts, text bites pulled from the ocean of information that already exists.

Only one case appears familiar – the boy on the beach. Alan Kurdi, the three-year-old Syrian boy who was found dead on the beach near the Turkish seaside town Bodrum. The photo of the drowned boy in the arms of a coastguard quickly became a symbol of the catastrophe. He was photographed by Nilüfer Demir one September morning in 2015. "September 2: The world wakes up," (from: *Gutten på Stranden*, Quintano Forlag, 2021). The escape route through the Balkans had been shut down weeks earlier, and Angela Merkel repeated her words "We can do this" (*wir schaffen das*) to the German people. The boy's mother, Rehab (35 years old) and his brother Galip (5 years) died too, somewhere between Bodrum and Kos.

\*

The Norwegian language is contrived and in constant flux. It is not one single language, officially it is two, *bokmål* and *nynorsk*, based on the development of local and federal tongues. Following a series of comprehensive orthographic reforms in the first half of the previous century, the Norwegian Language Board was established in 1952, which became the Norwegian Language Council in 1972, and later, in 2005, simply The Language Council, a federal agency with standardizing authority. The Council regularly proposes changes to both recognized language forms, approves new words, Norwegianizes words from English, and decides on gender-correct designations. Variations in both official languages are approached equally; in 2005, the distinction between standard and non-standard word forms in *bokmål* was abolished, and the non-standard forms in *nynorsk* based on the equilibrium rule were made so in 2012.

Dialectal variation is at its richest in the spoken forms of Norwegian, which can be divided into two branches and encompass four dialects, or five, depending on how one sees it. In Norwegian, there are several options for how to say the word "I," "jeg" in *bokmål* or "eg" in *nynorsk*. For example, one may choose to pronounce the word [æ], [e:] [e:g] [jæI] [jei] or [i:]. And one can often choose which gender a substantive takes: *ei* or *ein sol* (a sun), *ei* or *en jord* (an earth), but *et menneske* (a person).

My dialect is from the south (*sørlandsk*) but it is categorized under *vestlandsk*, even though it is closer to Danish or southern Swedish. The familiar "downward lilt" is typical of the southern dialect, and stands in stark contrast to the lighter, freer eastern and Trøndelag tonalities, which tend to turn upward at the end of the sentence. I use a rough guttural "r" and some of the soft



consonants, but my spoken Norwegian is not what one would call typical Norwegian. Thus, I run into problems when I am required to standardize my articulation.

At the start of the project, we were given an introduction to IPA (the International Phonetic Alphabet) and I got stuck pondering the differences between the many Norwegian dialects; I ran into problems that were neither semantic nor experimental. Should “dag” (day) be pronounced with a silent g, [da:] or a soft g [da:g<sup>h</sup>], at all; which r should I choose? A purely eastern Norwegian r (an Oslo dialect) that almost fits into the standard IPA, felt foreign to me, but a purely southern dialect r wasn’t correct either, because I knew it would come across strangely; I could hardly avoid that the German pronunciation of r would influence the sprechbohrer performance. And I wanted the construction to be clear, so that the foreign sound would not come across as flawed. The end result was two types of Norwegian. Sigrid who has the most Norwegian passages in the piece was given the eastern Norwegian, rolling r sound, [r], as was Harald, whereas Georg was given the southern Norwegian guttural r [ʀ]. The IPA transcription was not completely consistent; it is, like Norwegian, full of exceptions and choices.

\*

What was new for me was the particularization of the language, stripping it down into individual letters, new symbols; the text looked foreign written in IPA. Categorizing the different text fragments by color helped with this; I was able to see the different colors in stripes in an editing program. In working with the audio pieces, much of the composition takes place with finished sound material, and here I had to do it on paper. I spread the various “wind speeds” out across the floor to get a visual overview, the material apart from the machine. Three voices and three languages; this became a progression of ten sequences.

Also new to me was thinking about placing sound anatomically. To concentrate on where the sound is localized within the mouth, a new experience; I am used to a situational or spatial presentation. In earlier pieces I have worked with the reciprocal effects between recording and speech, between live and archived, voice with and without amplification, digital vs. analog sound. In this instance it was also new that I would not be participating in the presentation.

Speech as sound, *grammelot* or *grummelot*, that the language vanishes in the noise, an abstraction, that the semantic is brought forth with repetition. That the text drowns in the music, or is not the dominant meaning-bearing element in a presentation, theatre, but is in matched, syntonetic, in relation to the other elements in the room: light, movement, figure. That it is an interaction between the scenic elements; I recognize this from theatre forms with equal dramaturgy.

\*

The score is an exhortation, not a solution, not an analysis; in that way it is not political. It also does not accuse anyone; no one is directly indicted, neither those who have something to gain by being a loser or those who make their living from the “refugee industry.” Frontex’s brutal pushbacks are not directly criticized, they are only named, as words floating on the waves. The accusations are open.

Kristiansand/Berlin, February–April 2022

# Elisabeth Wandeler-Deck



Elisabeth Wandeler-Deck at the project's second production workshop  
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**Elisabeth Wandeler-Deck** was born in Zurich in 1939, where she lives as a writer and musician. Trained as an architect and sociologist, she also worked as a Gestalt analyst and founded the Zurich Office for Gender Issues in 1999. She is a member of the performance group Interco and the improvisation group bunte hörschlaufen and active in DamenDramenLabor. She won the Basel Poetry Prize 2013. Most recently Wandeler-Deck has published the volumes *attacca holdrio* (edition sacré, Zurich 2018) and *Visby infra-ordinaire* (edition taberna kritika, Bern 2018). Ritter Verlag will publish *Antigone Blässhuhn Alphabet so nebenher* in autumn.

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Elisabeth Wandeler-Deck

## **ricochet rikoschett / an approximate passacaglia<sup>1</sup>, possibly**

On a passacaglia "lines and syllables" / "melody and its Echo" against "pulse and insistence"<sup>2</sup>

Translated from German by Mark Kanak

*Search for a conception of form*

Searching for a concept of form, fleeting thoughts, penetrating keywords,  
(text or sound) architecture, fleeting, precise, in spaces, going, going ahead, talking, what would  
if, now, sprechbohrer-like

Want to continue dealing with Passacaglia (György Ligeti / "Passacaglia ungherese"; Robert Pinget / "Passacaille" or in English translation "passacaglia," with an afterword by Reto Hännny) or Passacaglia – Wikipedia<sup>3</sup>

Change movements → Passa calle changing the side of the road, see also Wikipedia.

Density levels → Ligeti's Passacaglia for harpsichord features three expressions of sound / event densities, thus creating the impression of acceleration

Here also, the intertwining of the creeping through the voices with the "free" sound movements is interesting.

*Fundamentals of the composition: Text / Passacaglia / ECHO*

It quickly became clear to me that I wanted to deal with the musical form of the passacaglia. This had fascinated me in several senses, on the one hand in a literary sense for a long time, and here I would mention Robert Pinget, "Passacaille," Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris 1969, German translation by Reto Hännny published as "Passacaglia," Bibliothek Suhrkamp 1991. Reto Hännny supplemented the volume with an illuminating afterword, in which he also discussed the passacaglia as a musical happening. In this context, I quote the jacket blurb, which seems to me to clarify my composition in several respects and inspired me to do something of my own:

In music, a passacaglia is a piece based on a recurring bass theme (*pulse*, EWD). In his text...

Robert Pinget... evokes, by linkage and variation, a complex refrain effect that suspends the passage of time and death for the duration of the enigmatic story about a dead person.

On the one hand Passacaglia / Puls, chorus: the going and at the same time faltering time comes

<sup>1</sup> Certain ECHO fragments can always be heard in Venetian alleys or between container stacks

<sup>2</sup> see sketches for the development of the composition

<sup>3</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Passacaglia>

to the sound. Time is suspended, simultaneously, and in one. Sound stands and drives forward. To imagine the sound of footsteps in the narrow streets of Venice, their echoes mingling with the echoes of voices.

On the other hand, I wanted to further explore ECHO, that is, an echo that is initially familiar as a mechanical reverberation, as a bouncing of sound (acoustic) energy off resistance, similar to that of a projectile off an obstacle, thus generating a ricochet.

ECHO, however, also serves as a formulated and formative answer. Very far away you can hear the sad story of Echo and Narcissus, of Echo, who was punished for her eloquence by only repeating what she heard, and of Narcissus, who was not adept at love and despaired of Echo's (non-)answers, resounded in the poetic material.

Echo for me as a musical challenge, namely to not simply repeat the text mimetically, but to set this text (off), in whatever way, shifted, (in)to a different sound, (in)to a phonetic quality alien to everyday speech. In contrast to the myth, ECHO is to be understood<sup>4</sup> as an active instance, as a shaper, as a transformer of the accused.

Thirdly, the three voices that intertwine, contrasting, form an invitation to the slow dance of the passacaglia.

These thoughts and finding suitable language material, an intricate matter, with the following results:

*Language material 1, the text and its echo – Narcissus and Echo – the desire for answer, for speech*  
Echo material from "ricochet," this is the headline of a series of poems in "versionenlustECHO," Edition Howeg, Zurich 2022 as well as variants of this cycle with the addition of "silent poems" for the artist Marion Strunk.

The poems consist of stanzas, from whose word-material small echo passages spring forth repeatedly, joining the stanzas in the form of short lines or small groups of words in a disturbing way, so that a sound tendency suitable for my composition is already apparent in the text.

#### *Speech material 2 the steps, Passi of the passage of time*

First or intermediate or final syllables, taken from the basic text, ordered according to the vowels that determine them; these pass / slide through all voices. Unlike a sliding of the signifiers, which may apply to the ECHO or ricochet events, these involve a very slow bouncing, pacing

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4 Myth can be understood as a narrative that transmits what has been fixed, in order to set it in motion again, at some point.

and stepping of short sounds. Speech quanta separated from each other, each set at approximately regular time intervals at the edges of speech. On the question of language quanta, see also Wolfram Malte Fues, "buchstäblich buchstieblisch," Edition Howeg 2021.

#### *Speech material 3 Talk, speech*

The flow of the passacaglia, its movement, is interrupted at a suitable point by a standstill, which I make sound with talk, or speech. The network of voices and *passi* (steps) breaks off, and a tangle of voices results in a kind of untimeliness. See also Hans Wolfgang Schaffnit, "Das Gerede – Zum Problem der Krise unseres Redens," Passagen, Vienna 1996

#### *Time material/ gradients / sequences / forms of movement and other parameters*

To speak slowly and hesitantly, to speak gently, to make the pores of speech sound (out)

Speaking Poros, what does Poros think, how Poroses also think musically, why an interest in Poroses

Poros embodies the way out, the fullness; father of Eros

In the porous limestone mountains, in the karst, that is, abruptions, collapses, the subsoil decayed, unstable, brittle, hard, meager

Speech quanta percolate through appropriate matter and generate words, terms, text, word sounds, murmur a process, percolation happens, sound(ing) happens

The murmur between the gurgling; "Passacaglia" / Robert Pinget, quoted in the epilogue by Reto Hänni, as also a reference to Samuel Beckett (p. 121)

talk into a sleep, through three voices, mumbling in sleep, chuckling, throbbing, walking, moving, through times, in time, stopping time in sleep, stopping ECHO time, running ECHO in time

Chronic transduction in Clemens Gadenstätter: "sediment – reflections on a compositional phenomenon" – Musik unserer Zeit – SRF<sup>5</sup>

#### *Presentation of gradients in the score*

In *Das a. Das i. was kann der Umlaut.*, my first composition for sprechbohrer, time goes/moves in the horizontal (abscissa), the voices and the associated parameters in the vertical (ordinate). That is, time goes from left to right.

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5 <https://www.srf.ch/audio/musik-unserer-zeit/bodensatz-ueberlegungen-zu-einem-kompositorischen-phaenomen?id=11887554>

The question to be investigated was whether time could run from top to bottom, thereby assigning the speaking voices (text and parameters) as columns in the horizontal: No.

From these considerations, the movements of the Passi (steps, pulses) had been preserved by the three voices.

#### *Vocal setup*

Light female voice / light male voice / dark male voice = S / G / H

#### *Presentation of text and speech parameters in the score*

What is the musical performance of the notation? enable? prevent? What can it do, what does the notation achieve in the resulting composition?

#### *The realization of a passacaglia from ricochet / Rikoschett*

The realization of a passacaglia from ricochet / Rikoschett is subject to the basic idea that even text forms contain forms of movement, that already inside/withing the texts, loopings/abrasions/ stagnations /accelerations must/should/can be investigated and explored.

#### *First idea of a passacaglia of speaking*

The text elements

1. make poems out of Echo / ricochet → imagine something airy: garlands in the wind? A movement of its own; how to create it?
2. To do this: in ECHO, ricochet → from the text, elements bounce off / back / form echo elements
3. To this end: the going, walking, passing, going out, namely the sounding, echoing steps of syllables, understood as speech quanta, formed by the above, dark, quasi regular (as this produces only quasi regular (ity), no marching of the tones/sounds!); perhaps also use additional material.

→ Three forms of movement emerge from three forms of text.

#### *Second idea of a passacaglia of speaking*

1. A murmur of ricochet material from three voices
2. Gently pushing the echo elements into the murmur or developing the murmur from the echo elements, with the idea: the echo gives rise to its – tonal – origin.
3. The ricochet material spreads out, the voices develop their independence until they possibly intertwine again.
4. Echo: the time that an echo takes to sound, then to fade away, longer → time, ≠ pause / = pause → work with it, → tension.
5. the going, walking, passing, going out, namely the vocal steps of syllables, understood as

speech quanta, formed by the above, dark, quasi regular, bell-like, wandering between the three voices, ringing into the murmur (as this only produces quasi regular (ity), no marching of the tones!) → the deep voice, G, begins with it and lasts for a long time. In the gaps between the individual strokes, gradually different text. Hereinafter referred to as passacaglia pulse, or pulse.

6. The interruption, the standstill: the passacaglia is once interrupted by talk of a still to be determined duration → div. Ovid-Echo passages, other language from ricochet, possibly individual Latin words.
7. Again the passacaglia starts, the “steps” are initially clearly taken over by the light male voice. It continues.

#### *Notation like an ECHO*

lein ein-----x /lein ein-----o /r---ant

#### *Compose like a pulse of language → language quanta Wolfram Malte Fues<sup>6</sup>*

Extract speech quanta, i.e. groups of max. three letters, which at the same time (do not) mean this and that other, from ricochet poems and from the ECHO-related Ovid passages and indicate the vowel (not) contained in them by means of a symbol, in order to lend the pulse, the stride, the step its variability in its sequence.

#### *Compose as in chit-chat/chatter/talk → Kagel? An experiment with sprechbohrer!*

To compose chatter from inexpressive speaking, that is, not chanting at any time.

(The possibility of speech taken from word fragments, laughs, grimaces, etc. of the series of word quanta. No phonetic poetry!!! Voice stream from another chapter of the above-mentioned volume of poetry (not followed further.)

Talk → from a piece of prose that's basically the same for all of the voices, but the beginning of which is set to be shifted by one word group. The voices start at the same time, creating a jumble of voices. ≠ canon!

#### *Performance terminology*

List of musical performance terms – Wikipedia<sup>7</sup>

Or basic mood “**andante pensieroso e vaporoso**,” “**mf to mp**”

Volume change not with **cresc./decresc.**, but **stepwise**

“Talking” continuous **mf**

6 Wolfram Malte Fues, *buchstäblich buchstieblisch*, Edition Howeg 2021

7 [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liste\\_musikalischer\\_Vortragsbezeichnungen](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liste_musikalischer_Vortragsbezeichnungen)

### The composition

1 page = 30", divided into 6 x 5" sections; this grid is subdivided again for the passacaglia pulse so that on 30", 12 "steps" come. Has to be tried.

#### 1. Part A (see sketch)

The composition starts with echo elements made of ricochet: light male voice and with the passacaglia pulse: deep male voice, **mp to mf**, slightly fluctuating in volume and pitch to prevent chanting.

Pause of the ricochet voices/passacaglia pulse (hereinafter referred to as "pulse") throughout

#### 2. Part B (drafted in the sketch under A)

Insertion of "murmur" from ricochet material: light and dark male voice; female voice takes over pulse → development of events in writing the score ...

see also part B in the sketch, i.e. pulse is assumed alternately by all three voices, as a small interruption of ricochet-passage.

#### 3. Part C ("Chit-chat/chatter/talk," see sketch; separate attempt with sprechbohrer based on a short text)

→ Duration 45" / employs quasi attacca according to Part B

#### 4. Part D takes up form of A / B again

Immediately following Part C ("Chit-chat/chatter/talk," 5" general pause, in which the pulse resumes.)

Elisabeth Wandeler-Deck

ricochet-varianten für sprechbohrer

14.10.2021

Stimmen  
**ricochet rikoschett**  
(ungefähre passacaglia möglicherweise)

*andante cantabile*  
*— für die Musik*

01 var 1

saltellando

verbrannt cinefile geistlein

lein ein rannt

my film seh ein dass du mir nahtest

eh ach test test

kontaminiere evaluiere

feixte springe in bresche

ihn esche esche ringe in niere

wo wo geht geht ach salto sehe niemanden

*Hoffe:*

Hier, hier! antwortete Echo zur  
Verwunderung des Narziss, der nie  
jemanden sehen konnte (Ovid<sup>1</sup>)

*die Sprechbohrer / das  
Sprechbohrer  
klingt nicht aber  
keine Kontrolle*

*ECHO bzw. ricochet*

<sup>1</sup> Publius Ovidius Naso, Metamorphosen, übersetzt von Michael von Albrecht, Reclam, S. 153

Elisabeth Wandeler-Deck:

Sketch from score *ricochet rikoschett* / an approximate passacaglia, possibly



# Eduard Escoffet



**Eduard Escoffet** at the project's first production workshop

© Natalia Reich 2021

**Eduard Escoffet**, born in Barcelona in 1979, is a poet and cultural agitator. He has worked in different facets of poetry (visual and written poetry, installations, oral poetry, poetic action), but he has focused his interests on sound poetry and poetry readings. He is a co-founder of the platform projectes poètics sense títol – propost.org. He was co-director of Barcelona Poesia (Barcelona International Poetry Festival) between 2010 and 2012, and director of PROPOSTA, a festival of sound poetry and contemporary poetry at the Center of Contemporary Culture of Barcelona (2000-2004). He has published the poetry collections *Gaire* (2012) and *El terra i el cel* (2013), as well as the artist's book *Estramps with Evru* (2011). Has published two records with the electronic music band Bradien, *Pols* (2012) and *Escala* (2015).

[poetssounds.lettretage.de/en/eduard-escoffet-2/](http://poetssounds.lettretage.de/en/eduard-escoffet-2/)



Eduard Escoffet

## Ode to the Walking Class

Translated from Catalan by Timothy James Morris

The Atacama Desert, in Chile, is home to a giant dump that now contains over 100,000 tons of discarded clothing. Unwanted and, above all, unsold garments undertake a journey that transports them from Asian factories to clothes shops in America and Europe, before finally bringing them to the free port of Iquique, Chile, where any items that can still be sold are sorted out from clothes no longer judged to have any market value. It is this “useless clothing” that ends up in the vast illegal landfill in the Atacama Desert: amid the arid mountains and dusty tracks, discarded clothes pile up relentlessly into dunes and hills that are occasionally beaten down by raging fires but never held back for long.

Under the unrelenting gaze of the desert sun – and far from prying eyes – these garish mounds rise ever skywards, towering testaments to a consumer society that never ceases to grow at the expense of an exhausted planet. Global trade dynamics and the voracious demands of fast fashion are what drive this unsustainable system: items of clothing travel the planet without ever once being worn, and natural resources are squandered simply to keep the cogs turning. And all this in the context of a looming climate crisis – to which the fashion industry is one of the main contributors – and a major migrant crisis.

Right through this very dump, in fact, pass some of the walkers on an 8,000 km journey from Venezuela to Santiago de Chile, crossing Colombia, Ecuador, and Peru. They stop here to pick up new clothes and shoes to replace the worn-out items they are wearing, which are practically all they possess. The desert welcomes two influxes of rejects: surplus goods transported along international trade routes, and migrants forced by the system of global inequalities to set off on foot in search of a better life. When they meet, they expose a glaring operating system error: the laws of global capitalism make it easier for clothes to travel across the globe than people, whose way is all too often barred by barriers and borders.

Since 2015, more than 5.5 million people have fled Venezuela. According to the Organization of American States (OAS), between 4,000 and 5,000 Venezuelans leave the country every day, most of them on foot, having run out of options for survival at home and with no other resources available to them. This is one of the biggest migrant crises in recent years, larger in scale than the Syrian crisis. Making their way across the Americas right now are two great pilgrimages of despair: one heading north – through Central America – and one heading south. As Venezuelans flee their country in droves, migrants from other countries in the Americas, as well as from Africa and even as far as Asia, arrive in search of the American dream.

On 1 December 2021, after a brief stop in Bogotá, I arrived in Cúcuta, a Colombian border town that is the first port of call for many Venezuelan walkers. I had been invited by the Fundación El Pilar to take part in the closing session at the third edition of Juntos Aparte International Meeting of Art, Thought, and Borders and would then stay on for ten days as an artist-in-residence. While I was there, I went to the border crossing on the Simón Bolívar Bridge linking Cúcuta with San Antonio del Táchira, across the River Táchira in Venezuela, where I could see for myself the great swathes of walkers streaming down the highway towards Bogotá; there are even road signs warning drivers to watch out for walkers at the side of the road.

To reach the Colombian capital, they have to walk some 600 km, including crossing the Andes and the Páramo de Berlin highland plateau, whose high attitude and near-freezing temperatures make it one of the most dangerous stages of the journey – it was given its name by a German traveler who was reminded of the weather back home. It was during my stay in Cúcuta that the concept of the walking class began to take shape in my head. After several years exploring issues such as degrowth and the act of walking as a form of resistance to the dictatorship of speed and the thirst for petrol, my eyes were suddenly opened to a situation that made me see the act of walking in a completely new light.

Great migrations invade our reality now more than ever: from walkers in the Americas – both those heading north and those making for South American metropolises – and migrants undertaking perilous crossings of the Mediterranean in flimsy, unseaworthy vessels to refugees from Syria and other conflict zones. Not to mention those now fleeing Ukraine. Behind the screens of our world there are millions of people walking, fleeing, leaving everything behind, even though they might have little idea of where they are going. In the meantime, surplus goods from the other side of the world travel with the greatest of ease and scant regard for the health of the planet. Global capital maps out the routes with a simple plan: bewitch part of the planet with the thrill of novelty, while condemning the rest to poverty. From the comfort of our own homes, at minimal cost, we can summon almost anything to be delivered from the other side of the world, yet we are not quite so happy when it is people on the move seeking a decent life: we are turning part of the planet and our own homes into impenetrable bunkers built on the despair of the rest of the world.

At the same time that class consciousness and working people's hard-won rights are being steadily eroded in Europe and America, a new class has emerged fueled by desperation: the walking class. This piece is dedicated to all those who have turned the civic act of walking into an act of resistance and an act of faith. If the thing about walking that had always interested me in the past was its independent, non-polluting character – an activity free of any ties to capital that was also a means of challenging a world that worshipped at the altar of speed – my experience in Cúcuta made me look at it anew. This was the starting point for *Ode to the Walking Class*.

In this piece I have combined recited text and precise instructions with other, more abstract parts and have left room for the performers to improvise. I have also relished the opportunity to once again use cassettes. In total, then, this is a piece for six voices: three live and three recorded. I should also say that this is the first work I have written to be performed by someone other than myself. The fact that in this case the performers are sprechbohrer, a group I have keenly followed for many years, has only made the challenge even greater. For a poet like me whose work is rooted in performance and body, stepping outside my own voice to forge a dialogue with others, such as the members of sprechbohrer, is never easy, but the different paths that have led me to create this piece have been an undeniably powerful experience. I should like to thank sprechbohrer and Lettrétage for this unique opportunity to explore such a delicate subject from a space of complete creative freedom, halfway between music and poetry. All that remains now is to start walking and see where our feet take us.

# Morten Søndergaard



**Morten Søndergaard** at the project's second production workshop

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**Morten Søndergaard**, born in Copenhagen in 1964, is a writer, translator, and editor living in Pietrasanta in Tuscany. He moves between the disciplines of literature, visual art, and sound art. From 2002 to 2007, he edited the magazine *hvedekorn* together with Tomas Thøfner. The Munich literaturverlag roland hoffmann has published Søndergaard's poetry collection *Bienen sterben im Schlaf* (2007) and the language art object *Die Wortapotheke* (2012) in German translation. The most recent poetry collection in Danish is *Døden er en del af mit navn* (Gyldendal 2016).

[poetssounds.lettretage.de/en/morten-sondergaard-2/](http://poetssounds.lettretage.de/en/morten-sondergaard-2/)



Morten Søndergaard

**They**

to the sprechbohrer

Translated from Danish by Paul Russell Garrett

They are a small swarm, consisting of three bodies, three voices. The voices make the air move and the sound waves swarm our ears and we soon find ourselves in an acoustic trance. Are they singing or speaking? What are they saying and how are they saying it? They move between music and speech, non-music and non-speech. They resonate. They.

That small word is the starting point for my work *They*. Or rather the swarm of words which in language we call pronouns. As ever, a poem comes from many places, but I am able to pinpoint precisely one source of the poem *They*. It was a spring day during the pandemic, and I was with my girlfriend, watching a swarm of bees hanging from an olive tree. I've always dreamed of keeping bees and for the past five years I've kept five hives. But bees are given to swarming. It's something they like to do. For bees, swarming is a sign of strength and great joy. They want to go out and pollinate the entire world. That day, we stood watching this remarkable natural phenomenon that is a humming swarm of bees. My girlfriend pointed up at the swarm and said: there it is. The swarm was in the singular. Suddenly it was clear that it was one animal, a superorganism.

When we work with bees we usually refer to them as *them*. Now they had become an *it*. The swarm, it hung from the olive tree: all the bees had gathered into one big warm clump of coruscating wings and bees with bellies full of honey. *It*. They sang with one voice. The transformation from *they* to *it* was magical for me. Because I've always been particularly preoccupied with pronouns. They're difficult and heavily laden. And they often fly out of my sentences, so that I have to check the sentences to see if I've put them in the right places. When I created my Word Pharmacy – a concrete poem combining medicine and grammar – I based the various word classes on existing pharmaceutical preparations. For pronouns I used Prozac. Pronouns have the strongest side effects in language:

*Fainting fits. Cramps. Can be serious. Awareness disorders. Loss of place. Loss of self. Dilated pupils. Ischuria (urine retention). This can be, or can become, serious. Speak to a poet. Edema (fluid retention), hypersensitivity. Hair loss. Increased sensitivity to sunlight, photosensitivity. Minor haemorrhages in skin and mucous membranes. Panic attacks. Teeth grinding. Namelessness. Heightened risk of bone fractures. Aggressiveness. Sense of personal unreality or personal alienation. Loss of place. Loss of self. Loss. Pathological euphoria. Mania. Retarded ejaculation. Impotence. Orgasmic difficulties. Diminished sexual desire. Anxiety, confusion, indifference. Increased sexual desire. Lengthy, painful erections. Male lactation.*

I've carved pronouns in marble and I've cast them in beeswax. For they are strangely hard yet simultaneously melting, incorporeal words. We encounter them every day in many different ways. Politicians warn: "It's us or them!" or "We must stand together." But who are *we*? Who are *they*? Billboards whisper smugly to us: "Because you're worth it." or "We work for you." Some groups resist language's predominant pronouns and ask to be referred to as *they* instead of *he* or *she*. In poetry you are used to address *everybody*, and poems can be weighed down by excessive use of the word *I*. Pop songs deal almost exclusively with the interchange of pronouns.

In grammatical hierarchy, pronouns are lieutenant in the etymological sense of the word: *lieutenant*, one who holds the space. They hold the place of names. They're there instead of the name, the person, the body. But the question is: what is left when we only have the word we remaining? What do we do when we only have a pronoun to go by? As if we were what remained after all other language melted away. We're left with the sound of the pronoun *we*. We have to start again.

*Where did we come from?*

When it comes to language, we come from the side of sound. We are born without pronouns and without language, and we crawl our way to language through repetition. Walking home from school as a child, I would often start repeating words. I no longer remember the words I repeated, but they might have been hard words like "seismograph," or "disestablishmentarianism" – difficult words we would learn in school. Or else small words I considered my own: "sun" or "chair" or "tree" or "smile." But the result of the repetitions was that the words were transformed into a warm sound in my mouth. The word became a piece of chewing gum I could blow speech bubbles with.

The neighborhood I lived in consisted of virtually identical houses, which perhaps inspired the repetitions. When I repeated words they sometimes lost their meaning. The content of the words was lost in the maelstrom of repetition, I moved from sign to sound. The uniformity of the neighborhood was underscored by the virtually identical street names: Blueberry Way, Raspberry Way, Mulberry Way; it was called the marmalade neighborhood. And so there I walked, in an attempt to delay or master the act of coming home from school, making my own acoustic jam.

Was this not a strange activity to take up? Talking to yourself is at best suspicious. Repeating yourself moves you to the world of the senile and the insane. The ghosts and shadows whisper the same few eerie sentences to us. They repeat us. Did I not want to go home? Were the repetitions meant to keep something all too familiar at bay? Whatever the case, the act of repeating words has had a strong influence on me ever since. Perhaps it's because they have a soothing effect, like hearing the same song, the same story before you can fall asleep.

In more recent years, when I perform readings, I create two samplers that function as follows: I read poems into a sound machine, creating samples of words or lines of poetry that I can then repeat and vary. The loops that are produced are transformed into rhythmic structures that can be treated and I can then read new words and lines of poetry over them. The voice is a remarkable instrument, and in harmony with the samplers it can create an acoustic texture comparable to music. I don't consider myself a musician, but I like to let my voice explore sonorous acoustic landscapes through repetition and treatment. I consider these readings to be more dissipations than recitations.

When you dissipate words through repetition and machines, it's as though moving toward a pre-linguistic state. A state somewhere outside of language. Is this the way to think of it? That you were outside language, and the others, the language bearers, were inside? If so, I want to go back out again, out of the house of language and into the surrounding language-less landscape.

In any case, we come to language from the side of sound. We are most likely born with some linguistic structures and a pre-programmed disposition for language, but we are language-less from birth and language is something that must be learned. As babies we can only communicate with sounds and tears. We hear and understand our first sounds as intonations, melodies, and sequences that we slowly learn to master. But we start somewhere outside of language. We fumble our way along the borders of language and only after many stuttering stops and starts are we inside the warmth of language. And once we're inside, we can't go out again. We enter the house of language through repetition. Testing and repeating we come closer, we babble and sing nonsense and loudly repeat our NO. We are corrected and we learn to pronounce the words. We make mistakes and we correct ourselves. *Fail. Fail better.*

Our brains most likely have a kind of linguistic inclination that makes us strong receptors for language. Yes, we are expected to learn to speak. It is expected for pronouns to settle in us, to end up inside us and hang in our brains like a linguistic bee swarm.

We come from the side of sound. And maybe that's why the sprechbohrer and the way they treat language feels so intuitively right. They move us back to a state of prelinguistic existence. Once again we stand on the border of language, listening to it from the outside. What was word is now sound. It is the sound of language we hear when we listen to the sprechbohrer. In the same way as the bees move out of their safe and familiar hive, language is now out in the open. It has been exposed and made visible. It takes courage. It takes the courage that is necessary.

When bee swarms are out in the open, a remarkable negotiation takes place. The bees have to choose a new home and it is chosen democratically. A number of scouts fly out to search the area and return to dance excitedly for the rest of the swarm, each trying to sway their fellow sisters to choose their new dream home. It can be a hollow tree or a cavity in a wall. Other bees

fly out to examine and inspect the places that have been campaigned for, then return and dance their assessment. The choice of a new home can last several days. But when two thirds of the swarm agree and dance their agreement, the hive flies off and moves to the new home. This is the narrative structure I have made as the starting point for my work *They*. This compositional principal follows the swarm structure of the bees. I draw upon Italian, Finnish, English, German and Danish in linguistic material that is made up exclusively of pronouns.

I remember the first time I had to read a bee comb. It was like looking at a sign system I'd never before seen. It was a map of time. A map showing time in its waxy consistency. But I also thought of the comb as music. A sheet of music noting tempos and pitches and the landscape outside of the hive. A shared rhythm and a breathing shared by every individual in the hive. Because the bee family is one and many at the same time. Bees may have no ears, but they have incredibly sensitive legs that translate every oscillation and vibration into bee language.

In many ways what makes the bees' swarming unique is their shared goal. They want the same thing. They need the same thing. They are unified in their *it*. They search the landscape to find what's best for the survival of the entire family. Humans could learn from this mutual and unified endeavor. The colony is one united in listening to its surroundings. It wants the common good. We too listen to signals and vibrations. But listening is something altogether different from exchanging information. Listening does not immediately involve an exchange. To listen is to wait. Without listening no community can be created. To commune is to listen. It is this endeavor we are confronted with in the company of the superorganism the sprechbohrer. For they generate a sound as yet unknown to us. Not song and not word. It is a strange – an ethical sound – that may be the sound of language at its truest.



# Katalin Ladik



**Katalin Ladik** at the project's second production workshop

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**Katalin Ladik**, born in 1942 in Novi Sad, Yugoslavia, now lives in Budapest, Novi Sad, and on the island of Hvar. The author, actress, and performer publishes poetry and prose, exhibits visual poetry, and performs her sound poetry. Her first volume of poetry, *Ballada az ezüstbicikliről* (Ballad of the Silver Bicycle), was published in 1969. Ladik has been present internationally at festivals since the 1970s and participated in documenta 14 in 2017. A retrospective was dedicated to her in Novi Sad in 2010. In 2016, the volume *A víz emlékezete* (The Memory of Water) was published by Kalligram in Budapest.

[poetssounds.lettretage.de/en/katalin-ladik-2/](https://poetssounds.lettretage.de/en/katalin-ladik-2/)



Katalin Ladik

## three eggs

Translated from Hungarian by Josef Schreiner

I do not consider myself a singer, musician, or composer. I am first and foremost a poet. I have acting experience in the theatre and in front of the radio microphone. I am also considered a visual artist in a certain sense beyond traditional poetry. My creative fields are: written poetry (linear poems), visual poetry, sound poetry, movement poetry, scriptwriting, and realization of conceptual works, creation of audio drama and radio plays, performance and creation of experimental music, happening, mail art.

I was born in a multicultural and multiethnic city in the former Yugoslavia and lived there until I was fifty, when I moved to Hungary in the early nineties due to the war between Serbs and Croats. Although my mother tongue is Hungarian and I write my poems and novels in Hungarian, Serbian is the second language I use, as I completed my schooling in Serbian. The other Slavic languages are not far from me. In primary school I studied German as a foreign language. Later I learned German and English on my own initiative. This diverse cultural influence has been a major inspiration for me in writing my poetry, but especially in my sound poetry.

In Serbia I had the opportunity to experience Serbian folk traditional rites "live." One summer, as a child, I saw a figure dressed in green leaves marching down the street singing and dancing. It was said that this figure – according to Serbian folklore it was presumably a girl – called for rain, because there was a great drought that summer. She or he was praying for rain, she or he was the Dodole. She sang and danced to a strange unison rhythm. As we lived close to the Serbian cemetery, we children used to accompany the mourning family and listened to the singing of wailers. When the grieving family was gone, they left delicious food and cakes at the gravesite, which we hungry children devoured with gusto. The lamenters' singing had a great effect on me. I later used their motifs several times in the performance of my sound poems.

As a poet, I realized early on what a cruel fate awaited my poems, as there was no one to translate them into Serbian or other foreign languages. Therefore, I was looking for a way to express my poetry and convey my poetic message in a meta-language and with archaic symbols. I thought that for this purpose, sound poetry and poetic performance would be the most appropriate. These were based on my own poems and texts, performed live or recorded by myself.

The musical sounds of Hungarian words and other spoken languages have a major role to play in my sound poems. I also pay attention to the semantic meaning of words. I am particularly interested in the meaning of the same word in different languages, e.g. the word "ja."

My very first book of poems, published in 1969, contains all the artistic genres which I later dealt with as separate media in their own right: the written/linear poems that people traditionally read and the visual poems that I later produced in larger numbers as collages, which are exhibited in galleries and museums. The book also featured performance scripts. An audio recording of my early sound poems was also included on a vinyl disk with the poetry book.

Even in my early poems, there were poems that I wrote for live performance because I could feel and hear how they should sound while I was writing them. What happened was that I did not have to notate the melody musically because even if I wanted to, I couldn't, because I had no musical training.

In fact, it was not a real melody, just a melody motif, a fragment of a melody. It was mostly the *Sprechgesang* (spoken singing) style that dominated, as in the melodies of lamentations, children's nursery rhymes, magic spells, sleep lullabies. I was delighted to discover that the young French poet Rimbaud had already discovered that voices have color and wrote his "Sonnet of Phonemes" (*Les Voyelles*). My later sound poems were already accompanied by certain notes so that I could perform them approximately, but much of it was improvised. I loved improvising because it always resulted in a new work, a new variation on an old theme. In this, too, I gave in to my vocation, to freedom, to change. I never hoped that my sound poems would be performed by someone else, because at the international sound poetry festivals, everyone performed their own work live or from recordings. This has not changed to this day.

Whatever my artistic genre, I always try to push the boundaries of poetry. Whatever the material I use in my work, I always convey a poetic message through it: sound poetry with my voice, image poetry with my visual works and collages, and multimedia poetic performance with my body. Creation, creativity, transformation and constant change are the very essence of my life. I draw most of my inspiration from myself and my environment, my multicultural and multi-ethnic environment, i.e. from my roots. The struggle of gender with itself and with the opposite sex is also often reflected in my work.

I also need to get into my own subconscious and into the hell of the creative process. Travelling in space-time commonly called descent to the underworld, immersion in a labyrinth, an inner journey. Serious, dramatic experiences in my life have often been reflected in my work. I try to alleviate these painful experiences with grotesque humor for myself and my readers or audience.

All my poems, performances and sound poems are based on the metaphor of sinking into the underworld. The connecting and recurring elements in these poems and performances can be colors, the melody of words, the naming of objects and objects, music, my own distorted face, an androgynous motif, or a recognizable movement sequence. Each poem is a story in itself. All my written/linear poems, visual poems, collages, and sound poems have titles, because titles

play a very important role in understanding my works. The titles are poetic lines of verse, keys to a broader interpretation of the work, but they are also works in their own right.

When I perform my sound poetry, I don't only use exhalation techniques in the formation of the sound, but also inhalation, the sound produced when inhaling. I realized that there is a direct connection between my voice and the way my muscles respond. My body reacts to the sound waves; it resonates like a string; the sound transforms my body movements. A physical sensation like sneezing or coughing moves my muscles. This everyday experience came spontaneously, which I later used in my vocal verses. I invented the poetic expression "sound-movement." The connection between visibility, between objects and sound and movement, is the essence of the unity of my written poetry and my extended poetry.

My art is based on change. I am very curious and open. In the seventies I admired the instruments in the sound studio of Radio Novi Sad, especially the integrated circuits (ICs), for the secret, mysterious information and knowledge they contained. From these circuit boards I made artworks and set them to music, which I sang in the seventies. In the same way, I was filled with awe and a little horror at the appearance of barcodes and QR codes in our lives. I have been using these barcodes and QR codes as musical scores and singing them for the last eight years. I was the first and only poet in Yugoslavia and Hungary in the seventies to recite my own poems in a non-traditional way. Studying the Serbian and Hungarian folk music traditions, lamentations and children's songs and listening to the original recordings, I tried to use certain motifs from them in my sound poetry.

Since my life was full of dramatic, painful events and memories, I have condensed them into my works, and in my work you can hear screaming, crying, and wailing, as in the Greek tragedies. I have tried to lighten up this dark, dramatic theme, sometimes with humor, to make it lighter and more bearable. This often took the form of grotesque humor.

When I came across the ingenious performances and working methods of the members of the sprechbohrer trio, I thought of writing down for them a score for a three-part sound poem in three languages, based on a charming and humorous wordplay. This is a big challenge for me, because I have never designed a sound poem to be performed by others. Notating this work, written in three languages and based on wordplay, seems to me to be a difficult task. This difficult task is also a pleasure because I learn while doing it. The feedback from the members of sprechbohrer ensemble on the work means a lot to me, I learn a lot from them and I am grateful to them for that.

I mentioned that the title of my works plays an important role. The egg has many symbolic meanings; just look at the lexicon of symbols. I think the egg is also a humorous metaphor. I like metaphor and humor in art.

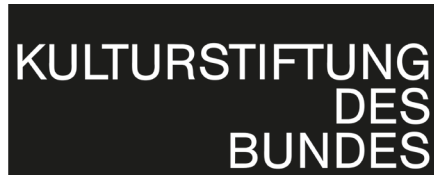
My intention is to create a musically meaningful score by transforming the written text into a visual poem. I first wrote the text of the score in German, the first part: *I. Teil*. My aim was to combine the words *three eggs* with other words in a logical way: *ich, ja, aha, nur, habe gesagt, jaja, da, šta kažeš, good, jaj, I've lost my hair, wow, that's a problem*, etc., so that by including new words, i.e. new vowels and new consonants, colors, and rhythms, a new melody and rhythm is created musically.

In my works, there is often a dialogue between the poetic subject and an imaginary alter ego. It is an important dramaturgical method for me that the elements that make up the work are connected to each other, that they influence each other, that a dialogue develops between them.

*three eggs* is a sound poem with three different stories, in which the three performers retain the character of the role I have invented for them throughout, but react to the story at hand and the dialogue that develops in a way that is specific to them. Sigrid-S is basically curious, enthusiastic, sensitive and extroverted. Harald-H, like an educated teacher or judge, is understanding and just. Sometimes he cannot control his strong emotions. Georg-G He tries to be calm, sometimes sarcastic, ironic, wise. He has a sense of humor.

Finally, we witness the birth of a very challenging and enjoyable performance for all of us: the sprechbohrer create and sing the first alchemical singing egg!

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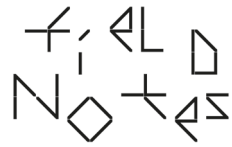
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The Poets' Sounds come from a no-man's-land that knows no borders. They are literature and music combined; they don't just switch from one language to another in the same breath, but reinvent language itself.

In short: they are an experiment which six international authors and the SpeechArtTrio **sprechbohrer** dare to undertake together.

**Miia Toivio** (Finland),  
**Tone Avenstroup** (Norway),  
**Morten Søndergaard** (Denmark),  
**Katalin Ladik** (Hungary),  
**Eduard Escoffet** (Spain/Catalonia),  
and  
**Elisabeth Wandeler-Deck** (Switzerland)

will each compose a piece for three speaking voices that will be interpreted by the **sprechbohrer** trio. These new sounds can be experienced at concerts and literary festivals around Europe throughout Summer 2022.

SpeechArtTrio **sprechbohrer**  
Sigrid Sachse – Harald Muenz – Georg Sachse