

Contents

Acknowledgments.....	7
INTRODUCTION	9
PART I: BACK TO THE ROOTS	13
Oral Art and Literature	13
Orality and Literacy	16
<i>Medial and Conceptional Orality</i>	16
<i>Medial and Conceptional Literacy</i>	18
Primary Orality and Oral Poetry.....	22
<i>Native American Oral Poems</i>	23
Secondary Orality and New Oral Poems.....	28
“ <i>Words from the Edge</i> ”	31
PART II: LISTEN UP!	39
The Performing Voices of Poetry	39
<i>Narrative Poetry</i>	40
<i>Dramatic Poetry</i>	43
<i>Lyric Poetry</i>	47
The Performing Sounds of Poetry	51
<i>Phonetic Intensifiers and Onomatopoeia</i>	53
<i>Cacophony and Euphony</i>	56
<i>Rhyme and Repetition</i>	57
<i>Rhythm and Meter</i>	61
<i>Tone and Pitch</i>	66
<i>Volume and Pause</i>	69
PART III: THE PAGE VERSUS THE STAGE	73
“ <i>The Pagers</i> ” : The Writing Poet	73
“ <i>The Page-Stager</i> ” : The Writing and Reading Poet	77
“ <i>The Stagers</i> ” : The Performing Poet	79
“ <i>The On-Stager</i> ” : The Performance Poet	83
<i>Dada and Surrealism</i>	86
<i>African American Performance Poets</i>	89
<i>Beat Performance Poets</i>	92
<i>Performance Art</i>	95
<i>Feminist Performance Poets</i>	97
<i>Poetry Slams</i>	100
Performance Chart.....	105

PART IV: OFF THE PAGE IN THE USA	107
James Whitcomb Riley.....	107
Jerome Rothenberg.....	112
Gil Scott-Heron	120
Allen Ginsberg	124
Laurie Anderson.....	135
Ntozake Shange.....	140
Patricia Smith	145
CONCLUSION	151
BIBLIOGRAPHY	155
Encyclopedias, Glossaries, Anthologies	160
Soundography	161
Videography.....	161
Internet and Infotrac.....	161
Soundfiles on the Internet	163
Hypertext.....	164
INDEX OF POETS	165
INDEX OF POEMS	167

Acknowledgments

This book is based on my M.A. thesis of the same title, which was handed in at the Karl-Franzens-University of Graz, Austria, in May 2001. Parts of the book were revised in 2002 at the University of Dortmund, Germany, where I taught a proseminar on contemporary American performance poetry. Thanks are due to my students, who not only engaged in stimulating discussions on many parts of this book, but also took part in a poetry jam at the 'Subrosa' in Dortmund, where students and local poets from Dortmund and guest students from the USA experienced poetry as a social and cultural event.

At the University of Graz I am especially grateful to Univ. Prof. Dr. Walter Hölbling for tuning and fine-tuning me in poetry and for his friendly encouragement to publish this book. I would also like to thank Univ. Prof. Dr. Arno Heller for his letter of recommendation for financial support from the University of Graz toward the publication of this book. I also wish to express my thanks to Dr. Martina Elicker for having been a very inspiring scholar and teacher throughout my studies in Graz.

At SUNY New Paltz I would like to thank Assistant Professor, freelance writer and poet Pauline Uchmanowicz for inviting me to do research at the Sojourner Truth Library, for which I had been given a grant from the University of Graz. During my stay in the USA, I had the chance to attend several readings and performances in Woodstock, NY, by the poets Hetti Jones, Ed Sanders, Ishmael Rodriguez, Phillip Levine and Carl Welden, among others. Without these experiences, I would not have been able to gain insight into a genre of poetry that is based on live performance.

I also owe many thanks to Tom McLean from the University of Iowa, and to Josh Kavaloski and Richard Gallant from the University of Virginia for proof-reading the book and making valuable suggestions.

Last but not least, I would like to thank my parents for their emotional and financial support.

Introduction

Performance poetry has three decisive characteristics: it exists in performance; it has its major roots in orality; and it is perceived aurally by those who attend the performance event. Thus, Part I, “Back to the Roots”, traces the origins of poetry from a time when it belonged to oral cultures until it made its alphabetic appearance on the page. Its main focus lies on comparing what Walter Ong calls “primary orality” and “secondary orality” (Ong 1991, 11) and George Economou labels “oral poetry” and “new oral poetry” (Economou 1975, 645).

By discussing various characteristics and stages in the development of purely oral poetry and poetry that is written to be performed off the page, I will argue that both concepts bear similarities in terms of form and expression. This serves a later analysis of contemporary performance poetry, which is almost exclusively a product of secondary orality. Through live performance, poetry becomes a cultural reality with social significance beyond the margins of the printed book. In that respect, the subject of this book is discussed in the line of Taft-Kaufman’s argument that “studies which associate performance with cultural context normally understand ‘performance’ to be verbal art, as opposed to traditional written literature” (Corey 1989).

The shift in focus becomes clear: instead of working with poems on the level of silent reader reception, or as an oral articulation by the reader, I analyze poetry as verbal art performed by the poet, whose main artistic tools are real sounds of spoken language. Therefore, Part II, “Listen Up!”, is dedicated to the voices and equally to the sounds of poetry. Since this book is an introduction to aural perception of poetry, I discuss different audiotexts that reveal the three basic poetic voices, the narrative, the dramatic and the lyric. I then analyze aural poems in terms of general constituents of poetry that fuel the soundscape of many performance poems: phonetic intensifiers and onomatopoeia, cacophony and euphony, rhyme and repetition, rhythm and meter, tone and pitch, and volume and pause. Among the poems discussed in this part are Etheridge Knight’s “Hard Rock Returns to Prison from the Hospital for the Criminal Insane”, Quincy Troupe’s “Poem For Magic”, Gertrude Stein’s “If I Told Him: A Completed Portrait of Picasso”, Wanda Coleman’s “I Live For My Car”, and Hal Sirowitz’s “Chopped-Off Arm”.

Part III, “The Page versus the Stage”, has one important objective. In order to find out distinct characteristics of performance poetry as opposed to silent reader reception, loud reading, and performing of poems, I examine the poet, the poem and the recipient in each of these literary interactions. Since the term performance is a very broad term, one may argue that it takes place on all levels where literature is the main focus of

human action and interaction. James McCorkle, for example, argues that there is a “still performance” involved in the writing of the five post-modern American poets Elizabeth Bishop, John Ashberry, Adrienne Rich, W.S. Merwin, and Charles Wright. He uses the term *performance* in order to call attention to the “mirroring or composition of the self through writing” (McCorkle 1989, 3). In their thorough engagement in the act of writing, McCorkle argues, “they explore writing as the gesture, or body, of and the interpretation of observation, memory, materiality, presence, and energy” (6). Likewise, if one considers a reader’s reception and response to a poem, one is equally confronted with the idea that what happens in the mind of the reader is a *performance* depending on the reading skills of the recipient, whose auditory, visual and cognitive imagination may vary considerably. As Frank Cioffi points out: “a reader’s response to a work will vary with what he knows” (quoted in Hawthorn 1987, 35). The point I would like to make is that a subtle change takes place in performance poetry, which is based on what Charles Bernstein sees happening already with the live reading of a poem:

[live] poetry is constituted dialogically through recognition and exchange with an audience of peers, where the poet is not performing to invisible readers or listeners but actively exchanging work with other performers and participants. (Bernstein 1998, 23)

This implies that at many poetry readings or performances, not only the poet himself or herself may be present, but other poets as well; this is most evident in poetry slams, where poets compete with each other, while simultaneously engaging with the audience. As such performances of poetry become an interactive and participatory social event in American cultural life. Thus, the purpose of the preceding sections of Part III is to show which movements in the United States are most strongly associated with performance poetry. These movements speak for an enormous cultural space for performance poetry ever since the origins of performing poets like James Whitcomb Riley and William Carleton at the end of the nineteenth century. As I will show, contemporary performance poetry in the USA is strongly associated with Dada and Surrealism, African American poetry, the Beat Generation, Feminist poetry, Performance Art and – the most recent phenomenon – poetry slams. I conclude this part with a “Performance Chart” (cf. page 105), which points out characteristics of different types of poems, poets and recipients, ranging from the “writing poet”, to the “writing and reading poet”, to the “performing poet” and the “performance poet”.

Part IV focuses on practical listening or viewing examples of performance poetry which may be seen as representative for the previously discussed poetry movements in the USA. I start with the work of James Whitcomb Riley, to provide the reader with a thorough examination of a

late nineteenth century poem that was meant to be *performed*. The spirit and poetic style of this exceptional performing poet (and many others) seems to connect with that of contemporary performance movements in the USA. After that, I analyze poems by Jerome Rothenberg from a tape-recording of his performance in Graz in 1982, in order to trace his much cited Native American- and Dada influence.

The next analysis focuses on a performance of Allen Ginsberg in Santa Monica in 1989, where he was accompanied by the musician Donald Was. Allen Ginsberg, as perhaps *the* representative of the Beat Generation, is discussed in regard to his approach to composing poetry for an oral performance. Central to the analysis of the funk poem “The Revolution Will Not Be Televised”, by Gil Scott-Heron, is the close relationship between music and poetry in African American poetics; a further aspect that I will consider is the political stance that Gil Scott-Heron takes and conveys in his performance. Laurie Anderson’s concert film *Home of the Brave* promises much insight into 1980s multi-media performance art. Her poem “White Lily” is analyzed in this section as a vocal poem that merges with acoustic beats, computer graphics, and light and shadow. Ntozake Shange’s poem “Rise Up Fallen Fighters” is analyzed under two premises: firstly, as a feminist poem unleashing its social message; and, secondly, as a reggae poem that reveals its continuation of the African American oral tradition. The last – and currently most popular – type of performance poetry in the USA, slam poetry, is explored in Patricia Smith’s poem “Undertaker”, in particular as regards sound effects that enhance the meaning of the poem.

I analyze all poems in regard to orality in terms of secondary oral features that the poems contain on the level of content and form. “New oral poetry”, which is based on secondary orality, reflects a style of composition that is often not very complex, but speaks directly to the audience. My thesis is that because these poems are written in order to be communicated in a live situation, they will contain many characteristics that are inherent to oral poetry and even the oral tradition in order to be understood by the recipient at a first and often only listening. Among these features would be repetition, anaphora, parallelism, and every-day-diction (i.e. colloquialism, idiom, proverbs, dialect, slang).

At the back of the book I have included a soundography as well as a concise compilation of Internet addresses that contain audio and multi-media files. Most of the poems that are discussed in this book may be obtained from these resources.

PART I: Back to the Roots

Oral Art and Literature

Before that [the European conquest] we had many long, long stories, myths, very rich myths, but not in letters. It's written nowhere.

(Memchoubi, Meitei poet, Graz 2000)

Tracing poetry back to its roots is not an easy task. Yet, Albert Bates Lord and Milman Parry, Ruth Finnegan, Walter Ong, John Miles Foley, Paul Zolbrod, Egbert J. Bakker, to name just a few, have all taken up that task and their results, though varying from each other, do not only prove that “literature” is as old as first communal societies; with their results they have also thrown light on how “literature” in our postmodern culture is still indebted to a large oral heritage.

What are the fundamental forms of verbal artifacts? Boas, quoted by Zolbrod, names the song and tale, which “are found among all the people of the world and must be considered the primary forms of literary activity”. They are connected to primitive, ritual poetry “which does not occur without music, and is frequently accompanied by expressive motions or by dance” (Zolbrod 1995, 37).

According to the *Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, the term *literature* can be traced “through French to the Latin *literatura*, meaning alphabetic letters, linguistic science, grammar and learning” (5). We have become so used to the word literature, with its implicitly confining reference to the individual letters of the alphabet, that we have become unaware of the possibility that poetry might exist aurally, beyond the margins of the printed page, which, according to Zolbrod, merely “utilizes an elaborate network of symbols as a graphic representation of the human voice” (6).

Yet, at least since Parry, the term has been opened up to include literature as something that is either written or oral. Bakker points out that “‘oral’ and ‘literate’ in the conceptual sense can be considered prototypes, or opposite end points on a continuum: as properties come in degrees, they need not exclude each other” (Bakker 1997, 9). Thus, if the term were to remain very much associated with print, it would preclude “thoughtful reference to orally composed and transmitted poetry, whether in live performance or stored electronically” (Zolbrod 1995, 127). Lord probably comes closest to a definition when he says that “words heard, when set in

the forms of art, are oral literature; words seen, when set in the forms of art, are written literature” (Lord 1999, 16). Yet, even with written literature, for example when reading a piece of literary work silently, one has to convert letters to sounds in one’s mind (i.e. graphemes into phonemes), and by doing so, one imagines a voice that seems to have been locked into the text, just as one is able to internalize voices of people and thus to “hear” the voice of a friend when reading his/her letter, or more recently, through the text of an e-mail. Another characteristic function of our mind’s ear is that it occasionally triggers off the mentally stored, resonating melody of a familiar song in the singer’s voice when we read ear-catching phrases of song lyrics somewhere in an independent and separate text. Even though itself is peculiarly tied to sound, mentally reflecting one’s own voice that may sound somewhat different if acutally recorded on tape and afterwards listened to.

In our literate Western society, which has been dominated by the written word ever since Romanticism, we tend to forget how much we are indebted to the world of orality, which

gave us anaphora, the use of the same word at the end of each of a series of lines, alliteration, assonance, rhyme, both internal, medial and final, and the sense of balanced structure as typified by parallelism in sentences and other forms of parataxis. In short, our poetics is derived from the world of orality, with some later additions and modifications introduced by the world of literacy. (Lord 1999, 32)

This corresponds to what Janko implies by saying that “written literature is an outgrowth of oral literature” (Janko 1998; see infotrac). Ong confirms this by saying that “oral formulaic thought and expression ride deep in the consciousness and the unconsciousness, and they do not vanish as soon as one used to them takes pen in the hand” (Ong 1991, 26). Yet, he also states that “it takes only a moderate degree of literacy to make a tremendous difference in thought processes” (50). The characteristics of orality and literacy shall shortly be examined in detail.

Meanwhile, it is necessary to point out that the main problem as regards oral literature and written literature, is only a matter of finding the right terminology for two concepts, two forms of art which are related to each other: the one spoken and heard, the other written and read. I believe that only if we perceive oral art as something that stands on an equal level as written literature, can we use the term *oral art* for works of verbal art and *literature* for written art. These terms then refer to two concepts, each endowed with its corresponding cultural value. Moreover, it provides for critics a position from which one can proceed to analyze verbal art forms as audiotexts, as Charles Bernstein radically suggests in his introduction to *Close Listening. Poetry and the Performed Word* (cf. Bernstein 1998, 3-

23). This further analytic step – from orality to aurality – will be practically carried out in Part II and IV.

The discussions around orality and literacy have been controversial during the last few decades. Since we are part of a society that is dominated by the written word, we naturally do not directly have access to what it means to be part of an oral society, which depends and relies heavily on the spoken word, its oral tradition and verbal art, as well as their communal value. Yet our own cultural life is full of different genres of the performing arts that make use of the spoken word, as well as genres of written literature. Therefore, it is essential to become aware of characteristics of orality and literacy per se in order to understand the aural texture of a performance poem. Otherwise we will lack a formal understanding of performance poetry and its skillful patterns of sounds that have been composed on the written page with an awareness of a live audience in mind. As such, performance poetry, just as in pre-print times, becomes the center of social gatherings where people participate because of a common interest in the aural pleasure of poetry, as for example at poetry readings, poetry slams and poetry jams that take place in many countries all around the globe.

By contrast, written literature – at first sight – seems to have lost these particular cultural qualities. Silently reading a novel or a collection of poetry does not exhibit any potential for fostering social interaction. Only if a passage of a book, or a poem, is read out aloud to someone else or to a group of people, do we become aware of the additional social frame that surrounds the moment. I am not suggesting that all poems are meant to be read out; there are many poems, such as T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land", which need to remain on the page to be fully conceived, although it is also interesting to listen to a recording of T.S. Eliot reading it. In fact, at a considerable number of poetry readings, not even the sharp listener may comprehend much of the poems that are read, although they may *sound* beautiful. These poems would need a closer reading in silence, when one has the chance to re-read certain lines in order to grasp its full message.

It is essential to note here that the basic component of an oral poem, sound, has a unifying quality regardless of whether it is the basic constituent of the orality of a culture untouched by any knowledge of writing or print, which Ong labels "primary orality", or of the "secondary orality" (Ong 1991, 11) of a culture. This secondary orality depends on the written word and has been fostered by electronic technology, such as the telephone, radio, television, cassettes and compact discs, or most recently, sound files on the Internet. Ong argues that it has a

striking resemblance to the old in its participatory mystique, its fostering of a communal sense, its concentration on the present moment, and even its use of

formulas. But it is essentially a more deliberate and self-conscious orality, based permanently on the use of writing and print [...]. (Ong 1991, 136)

As regards the literary works of primary and secondary orality cultures, Ong distinguishes between “‘purely oral art’ and ‘verbal art forms’ (which would include both oral forms and those composed in writing, and everything in between)” (Ong 1991, 14). These terms correspond to what Economou – in regard to poetry – calls “oral poetry” and “new oral poetry” (645).

The following section aims at giving an overview of the characteristics of medial and conceptional orality as well as their consequences for the creation, performance, and perception of poems.

Orality and Literacy

Medial and Conceptional Orality

Bakker defines orality as “language in the spoken, phonic medium along with the conceptual process that it implies” (Bakker 1997, 17). The basic foundations which underlie orality are linked to strains of thought and the vocal expression of these thoughts. Yet, in what way does orality differ from speech? Bakker answers this by saying (writing) that there is a difference between “medial orality” (speech) and “conceptional orality” (oral art) (cf. 8). To make this clear, one could argue that speech and orality are on the same opposite ends of a continuum as writing and literature are. And, taking this one step further, then ‘oral’ has equally corresponding connotations as ‘literary’, ‘conceptional orality’ the same as ‘conceptional literacy’ and medial orality (speaking) the same as medial literacy (writing). Again, it has to be mentioned that neither term needs to exclude the other. Therefore I support Bakker’s view that

[...] societies as a whole may be oral or literate in various degrees, and since the transition from a preliterate society in which writing is institutionalized is never an abrupt one, the notions of orality and literacy, though distinct, do not exclude each other, either diachronically or synchronically. (Bakker 1997, 9)

Before the invention of writing, primary oral cultures had to find strategies to be able to memorize their knowledge, experience and law, in order to have valuable information available and to be able to pass it on to following generations. Orality was used to constitute and possess one’s collective past. Knowledge and ideas had to be memorized so they would not be lost, since they could not simply be looked up somewhere. But what mnemonic devices can you use when you have to rely on such ephemeral medium as sound? Ong sums up the basic possibilities by saying that:

Your thoughts must come into being in heavily rhythmic, balanced patterns, in repetitions or antitheses, in alliterations and assonances, epiphetic and other formulaic expressions, in standard thematic settings (the assembly, the meal, the duel, the hero's 'helper' and so on), in proverbs which are constantly heard by everyone so that they come in mind readily and which themselves are patterned for retention and ready recall, or in mnemonic form. Serious thought is intertwined with memory systems. Mnemonic needs determine even syntax. (Ong 1991, 34)

These techniques depend heavily on rhythm (which aids recall) as well as on the tonal nature of sound, since "in speaking, everything that is said must be said in some way: at some pitch, in some tone of voice, at some rate of speed, with some expression or lack of expression in the voice and on the face" (Tannen 1982, 41).

It seems obvious that all oral techniques, if used for every day communication and some communal purposes, did not develop artificially but always as a reflection of the needs of a society. Individuals and groups who had accumulated and cultivated some helpful and precious knowledge and who were able to express and pass it on in an artful way, were sure to be respected by their community.

Homer's poems the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* already work on a different level. His diction was artificial before it became oral or traditional, as he invented certain words in his poems, using what is called a *Kunstsprache*, which means that he invented words that no one would understand but which facilitated his oral composition in performance (cf. Bakker 1997, 13).

In order to keep the audience on track, oral narratives, for example, are less analytic and therefore avoid reasoned subordinate clauses beginning with 'but', 'because', 'while', 'whereas', 'therefore', 'although', etc. Instead, and this is the point that Ong makes, oral narratives are structured in an additive way by the use of 'and' (cf. Ong 1991, 37). While Ong suggests that primary orality cultures use language in a far less analytic way, I would argue in addition that these cultures have never had these concepts to express analytic thinking and causality. That may have been based on the practicability that it is much more confusing as well as difficult to understand and recall a storyline that puts greater emphasis on telling the relation of various pieces of information, rather than on a linear sequence of events. This relation would not be lost, but is likely to have been expressed through a common understanding of proverbs and through emphasis and repetition of important narrative moments.

In fact, redundancy, repetition of the just-said, is another strategy to keep both speaker and hearer on track. The greater the audience, the higher is the level of redundancy, which is not least because of acoustical problems when a larger number of people assemble (cf. Ong, 1991, 40). Above all, repetition is necessary because of the ephemeral quality of spoken language in general. Another characteristic of oral creations is their

“more or less close reference to the human lifeworld, assimilating the alien, objective world to the more immediate, familiar interaction of human beings” (Ong 1991, 42). Close to human lifeworld also means referring to concrete, visual objects which the inner eye can easily imagine once the object is said or described. Such mental participation is also linked to an overt challenging of the audience to participate. This is inevitable in an oral culture, for which “learning or knowing means achieving close, empathetic, communal identification with the known” (Havelock quoted in Ong 1991, 45-46).

The last of a series of significant characteristics that I would like to mention is labeled by Ong as “agonistically toned”. He argues that an abstract, distant level of thought disintegrates human beings from “the arena where humans struggle with one another” (43). Thus, such struggles are still expressed vehemently in cultures which are exposed to physical hardships of life, such as war and oppression, as Apirana Taylor reports:

In English or in Maori - in my culture it [poetry] has always been very important. But we don't put it aside as a different part of life. It's your part of your life and as your part of life you have to be able to sing it as well. And all their attitude is recorded in their poetry and in their song. So when I do my poetry in English, coming from my Maori world into the English world, I try to bring all the oppression of my country with me – that's why I often rage my poetry out because we think in our culture that if you're angry you should shout and say it. (Apirana Taylor, 2000)

Medial and Conceptional Literacy

Using Bakker's definition of orality, literacy then could be defined as language in the written, graphic medium along with the conceptual process that it implies.

But just as with orality, this definition only applies to conceptional literacy. By contrast, writing in the sense of medial literacy is a very late technology in human history (*homo sapiens* dates back more than 50 000 years); it was developed among the Sumerians in Mesopotamia around 3500 BC and consisted only of consonants and some semivowels. Well-known are the Egyptian hieroglyphics around 3000 BC. Further milestones in the independent development of writing were the Indus Valley script 3000–2400 BC, Chinese Script 1500 BC, Minoan or Mycenaean Linear B around 1200 BC, Mayan Script AD 50 and Aztec AD 1400 script (cf. Ong 1991, 85).

Preceding the invention of writing, human beings had been drawing pictures for countless millennia. Additionally, societies used various sorts of recording devices to aid their memory, such as “a notched stick, rows of pebbles, [...] and the winter count calendar of the Native American Plains Indians [...]” (84). These aids and pictures represent objects and thus are

decisively different from what script, decoded by humans, contains as “a representation of human utterances, as words that someone says or is imagined to say” (Ong 1991, 84). Interestingly, “every alphabet in the world – Hebrew, Ugaritic, Greek, Roman, Cyrillic, Arab, Tamil, Malayalam, Korean – derives one way or another from the original Semitic development though, [...] the letters may not always be related to the Semitic design” (89). This implies that few cultures have developed writing from within their own society. The ancient Greeks, for example, first presumably devised a script called Linear B, which was probably adapted from one called Linear A, in the second millennium BC; and in the eighth century BC they borrowed and modified the Phoenician alphabet to visually represent the Greek language, its articulated sound.

More decisively, other languages are indebted to the Greek script for being the first alphabet complete with vowels and thus indicating with surprising accuracy the sounds of spoken language. With that the Greeks achieved a breakthrough in producing words that could be written and read even if one did not know the language; words became complete, sound-corresponding visual items. This raises the question as to what caused the Greeks to make these changes. Ong plausibly suggests as an answer that the Greek phonetic alphabet began to operate on a more analytic level that went beyond the unit of syllables. Yet, even until today, Semitic languages, such as Arabic, do not represent vowels in their scripts. (cf. Ong 1991, 89-91).

Another noteworthy fact about Linear B is that it seems not to have been used for writing down Mycenaean oral literature or even for creating a written Mycenaean literature. The pragmatic purpose of Mycenaean writing was reserved for trade and religion, which means that to be literate had no literary implications in Mycenaean times (cf. Lord 1999, 38).

The Greeks themselves then developed a literary culture from within their own ranks, which does not mean that Greek oral art had not already been formed when it was first written down. In fact, “what we call oral literature precedes its written counterpart by thousands of years.” (Niles 1999, 28). At the transition from orality to literacy, medial literacy existed side by side with oral art, was sometimes used to dictate oral poems, and later became a means of its own to produce texts which were psychologically fostered by conceptional literacy. Oesterreicher, quoted by Bakker, points out that “texts may be oral to a greater or lesser degree, depending on the nature of the conception underlying them” (Bakker 1997, 9). This points to the possibility to consciously imitate speech in written texts.

The most famous and most often discussed examples of Greek oral literature are Homer’s oral traditional poems *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, which are considered to have come into being as written texts during the time of

transition from orality to literacy. According to Albert Bates Lord, “[b]ehind him lie centuries of oral performance, largely improvised, with all its wealth of formulae adapted to an exacting metre; these he knows and uses fully” (Lord 1999, 38). Early written poetry after him was at first necessarily a “mimicking in script of oral performance” (Ong 1991, 26). Not only poetry reflected the gradual shift from orality to literacy. Most genres of verbal art (e.g. drama, narrative, descriptive discourse, oratory, philosophical and scientific works, historiography, and biography) were affected by this new technology (cf. 139).

When discussing the technology of writing, one cannot neglect print, which seems to have developed parallel to writing, since this invention already dates back thousands of years, when humans first printed designs from variously carved surfaces. Ong, referring to Carter, further explains: “[s]ince the seventh and eighth century Chinese, Koreans and Japanese have been printing verbal texts, at first from wood blocks in relief” (Ong 1991, 118). The most important breakthrough in the development of print, the invention of moveable letters, was achieved by Johannes Gutenberg and others in the 15th century. Furthermore, auditory processing of words in print, such as by using larger letters for words that one wants to emphasize, was common in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, but eventually print was “replaced by the lingering hearing dominance in the world of thought and expression with sight-dominance” (121), which clearly reflects in typographic poetry. Concrete poetry¹, such as for example by e.e. cummings, “climaxes in a certain way the interaction of sounded words and typographic space” and

plays with the dialectic of the word locked into space as opposed to the sounded, oral word which can never be locked into space (every text is pretext), that is, it plays with the absolute limitations of textuality which paradoxically reveal the built-in limitations of the spoken word, too. (Ong 1989, 129)

The typewriter in concrete poetry is used in a very conscious way that becomes part of the writing process and reflects in the form of a poem.

Alphabetic letter press printing has been widely in use for the last centuries now, and the computer (preceded by the typewriter), which serves to compose and preserve many poems today, has been in use for the past twenty years. Most recently, computer software tools are used to create hypertext poetry. Robert Kendall’s “A Life Set For Two” (1996), for example, makes use of alternate display of letters on screen to engage in word plays, as well as an alternate replacement of whole words. More

¹ For examples of concrete poetry see: Williams, Emmett. *An Anthology of Concrete Poetry*. New York: Something Else Press Inc, 1967.

precisely, Kendall calls this technique “cyclic variables”. That way the poet is not forced to decide on a particular word in the writing process and can work with “ambiguous meanings to increase the resonance of a poem” (<http://www.wordcircuits.com/kendall/essays/ht96.htm>).

As there are many different and constantly changing tools available for writing, I would just like to briefly point out some of the basic effects of writing itself. As already mentioned before, writing sharpens analysis. This is not only because we write ten times more slowly than we speak, and therefore have more time to think ahead, plan, structure and correct our thoughts (cf. Tannen 1982, 36); to a large extent it is also because we have to put much more effort into explaining what we are getting at, as we have no other means but words to describe what we mean: no facial expression, no gesture, no intonation, and no real interaction with the receiver of our message (cf. Ong 1991, 104). As for the finished text itself, it can indirectly function as a source of someone’s voice, if the person who is reading the text substitutes his or her own mental voice with a remembered voice of the person who wrote the text. Therefore it is not the text itself that captures the particular voice of a person but our acoustic memory; neither is the voice that we remember a real voice. This explains why the somatic quality of a poem can never be felt to its full extent in one’s acoustic mind and calls for those poems with a decided emphasis on the spoken word to be read out or performed. In this way we locate poetry not in the “printed icon of metrically regular line length and the like but rather in the alternation of sound and silence that can be phenomenologically realized only in performance (and in experience of that performance)” (Foley 1995, 20).

Another characteristic of literacy is that texts are written in isolation from the person that one addresses, and, as such, “the writer’s audience is always a fiction” (Ong 1991, 177). Moreover, composing a poem on a piece of paper, or on the computer, opens up highly introspective realms, familiar to everyone who writes poetry. Additionally, one can search for a word in a dictionary if one lacks the correct expression, or the word that one would like to choose does not fit the rhyme scheme (aurally or visually), or the meter of the poem. One can rearrange stanzas and correct them endlessly, and thereby create a poem that appears and even sounds highly spontaneous, even though (or because) it was written in the most unspontaneous way. Writing in the 21st century influences speech as much as speech influences writing, which makes it all the more interesting to analyze performance poems that are written to be performed in a live situation.

Primary Orality and Oral Poetry

Basically, Sami poetry comes from yoik and yoik was the singing, so it is very connected.

(Marry Ailonieida Somby, Sami poet, Graz 2000)

In ‘Making Connections’, the first part of his book *Homo Narrans*, John D. Niles, too, connects early English poetry to the Anglo-Saxon *giedd*, which denotes song² of all kinds endowed with special wisdom or power, but can also denote speech, especially heroic poetry (cf. Niles 1999, 16). Oral epic song is, according to Parry, “narrative poetry composed in a manner evolved over many generations by singers of tales who did not know how to write” (Economou 1975, 659). Without going into detail as to their composition, I would like to mention that one of the primary characteristics of oral poems is their composition in performance, demanding from the poet to draw from a mental collection of formulae, proverbs, traditional expressions and sets of phrases which are compiled in a metrically resounding way and, according to Janko, are an “aid to composition, not memorization” (Janko 1998). I would argue, though, that many phrases that the poet draws from have been stored mentally because they contain some mnemonic quality. The poet then chooses from a large pool of poetic knowledge and does not perform a fixed piece that he or she has in mind. Ong explains:

[...] oral poets do not normally work from verbatim memorization of their verse. Now, it is obvious that metrical needs in one way or another determine the selection of words by any poet composing in meter. But the general presumption had been that proper metrical terms somehow suggested themselves to the poetic imagination in a fluid and largely unpredictable way, correlated only with ‘genius’ (that is with an ability essentially inexplicable). (Ong 1991, 21)

For the congenial poet, oral poetic performances could provide the occasion for magnificent displays of technical skills. Moreover, poetry was a profoundly social medium, performed in public spaces where people gathered together for common purposes and took part in an intense interplay with the speaker. It always served a purpose, usually to encode themes such as war, praise, love, the sacred, the supernatural, as well as healing practices, ceremonies and rituals, which were essential to the functioning of any social community.

² Drabble, cited in Zolbrod 1995, points out that after the European Renaissance, the link between poetry and music was gradually broken, and the term ‘lyric’ came to be applied to short poems expressive of a poet’s thought and feeling. (37)

Oral poems still flourish as an essential and an integral part of native American societies today. Paul G. Zolbrod cites two examples of poetic recitations in oral, communal setting, one of a medicine man at a traditional girl's puberty ceremony in New Mexico, the other at a graduation ceremony. In the first case, the medicine man recited a series of standard chants and prayers out of the Navajo creation story; in the second, each relative of the graduate student made up an eloquent speech in praise of the student. Whereas the medicine man had used lyrics that were not his own but from the Navajo creation story, the relatives adopted parts of the same lyrics to fit their personal oral laudations of the student (cf. Zolbrod 1995, 9-10).

Native American Oral Poems

Hymes, quoted by Zolbrod, defines Native American oral poetry as "America's first literature" (Zolbrod 1995, 1), which is only true to the extent that many Native American oral poems and narratives were written down and, transcribed, found their way into print. That way they could outlive their originally oral, communal, ceremonial setting. Their transcriptions cannot fully convey, but still reflect (especially if sounded out by an interpreter) what began with the sound of a human voice and was reconstituted on the printed page – "the performance being ultimately richer" (Zolbrod 1995, 48).

What is called Native American Poetry can be categorized into poetry from various existing nations, such as the Zuni, Aztec, Inuit, Hopi, Apache, Lacota, or Iroquois (each reflecting its own characteristics of poetry), which is often anthologized by their geographic region.³ In all oral communities, poetry is "usually chanted or sung, usually to the accompaniment of drums or melodic instruments; and the composers made use of certain stylistic devices recognized as poetic [...]" (Day 1951, 4). It would be a challenging task to present a detailed analysis of indigenous, tribal poetry. In this book, though, I approach this vast topic from the performance aspect in respect to primary orality and oral poems.

The following selection of oral poems aims at giving the reader an idea of poems that originally belonged to a ceremonial, ritual setting in which they were actualized by singing and chanting and performing and often have circulated orally for hundreds of years. The first poem that I have chosen is a Pima Indian healing song, collected and translated by Russell Frank in the 26th annual report about Pima Indians, 1908 (cf. Day 1951, 195). It is a " 'medicine song' used to bring success in a deer hunt, but was

³ cf. Cronyn, George, ed. *American Indian Poetry. The Standard Anthology of Song and Chant*. New York: Liveright, 1962.

also supposed to be valuable in cases of sickness accompanied by vomiting and dizziness” (Day 1951, 88).

DATURA SONG

At the time of the White Dawn
At the time of the White Dawn,
I arouse and went away.
At the blue Nightfall I went away.

I ate the thornapple leaves
And the leaves made me dizzy.
I drank the thornapple flowers
And the drink made me stagger.

The hunter, Bow-Remaining,
He overtook and killed me,
Cut and threw my horns away.
The hunter, Reed-Remaining,
overtook and killed me,
Cut and threw my feet away.

Now the flies become crazy
And they drop with flapping wings,
The drunken butterflies sit
With opening and shutting wings.

The title of the song refers to a plant, *Datura*, which is poisonous to animals and human beings. It is the song from the anthropomorphic perspective of two deer, which is suggested by the semantic double-structure and repetitive description of how each deer eats the poisonous plant. Weakened by the poison, they each get killed by a different Indian hunter (cf. ll. 10 and 13). The flies and butterflies, too, it is implied, are affected by the poisonous plant, and it becomes clear that the song can serve either as a hunting song, as a healing song, or as a warning not to eat the poisonous thornapple leaves.

On a formal level, the poem consists of four stanzas of four lines each, except for the third stanza which consists of six lines. Such divisions on the printed page are only of secondary importance, trying to represent what one hears when one puts the poem into sound either by speaking or an attempted singing. The gap between the stanzas reflects the pauses between the thematic units of the setting, the eating of the plant, the killing and the morbid atmosphere of the poisoned insects. I am certain that the original poem voiced in performance would have presented a clearer division of the

voices of the anthropomorphized deer, as well as a more dramatic switch from the active “I” in stanza one and two to the killing of the passive “me” in stanza three.

In order to keep the analysis of the poem short and to make the reader feel the poem’s orality, I would like to ask him or her to read the poem aloud and try to listen to the sound parallelism created by repeated lines (cf. ll. 1-2), anaphora and structural parallelism (especially in stanza three), which are characteristics of oral poetry; noticeable is also the sound and the echoing effect of the repetitive, additive “and-structure” in quite a few of the lines. All these elements give the poem, even in its careful translation, its inherent melodious rhythm and tone.

The second poem that I would like to analyze has the title “Invocation to Dsilyi N’eyani”. It was part of a Navaho ceremony and first published in its English translation by Matthew Washington in 1887. Its original composer remains anonymous, which is due to the fact that most tribal poets of the last few centuries (especially of religious poets), shared their poems with the community and thus were rather possessed by a community than by an individual; although, the debate over private ownership and communal ownership of oral poetry is still a heated one (cf. Day, 1951, 75).

The reason why I chose this poem is that I would like to point out its ritualistic formulas. Deborah Tannen explains that “rituals are performed and listened to over and over again. As a result they contain language that has been formalized and polished, even over many centuries [...]” (Tannen 1982, 50).

INVOCATION TO DSILYI N’EYANI

Reared Within the Mountains!
Lord of the Mountains!
Young Man!
Chieftain!
I have made your sacrifice.
I have prepared a smoke for you.
My feet restore thou for me.
My legs restore thou for me.
My body restore thou for me.
My mind restore thou for me.
My voice restore thou for me.
Restore all for me in beauty.
Make beautiful all that is before me.
Make beautiful all that is behind me.
It is done in beauty.
It is done in beauty.

It is done in beauty.
It is done in beauty.

The structure of the poem immediately reveals the ritualistic practices that are involved in the ceremony, whose real performance acts can only be guessed and vaguely imagined. Lines one to four are an invocation of Dsily N'eyani, who gets apostrophized as "Lord of the Mountains", "Young Man", and "Chieftain" (ll. 2-4). The invocation is followed by presenting him with ritualistic gifts: a sacrifice and the making of smoke (cf. ll. 5-6), which have been prepared. In return, whoever takes part in the ceremony asks for a restoration of his or her feet, legs, body, mind and voice in beauty – the voice being an essential medium in oral cultures that is honored for its beauty. The pledge for beauty is constantly repeated and thus particularly emphasized in the last seven lines (ll. 12-18). The last four lines repeat the same phrase "It is done in beauty." (ll. 15-18). These last lines, which are an exact repetition on a content level, might have had a varied intonation and incantation. Thus, the performed poem, an invocation for beauty, most certainly had a resounding quality that served to express the wish for a recreation of beauty. Since the poem had to be learned together with the ritualistic practices involved, a short poem like this is more fixed than Greek oral formulaic poetry, which is characterized by a freer use of formulas due to its greater length.

The last example that I would like to discuss is an extract from a long narrative poem of the Zuni Indians "The Boy and the Deer", which is about a boy who grows up among deer, since his mother, the daughter of a priest, has abandoned him, and later in life is confronted by her and his uncle (cf. Tedlock 1978, 3-30), Dennis Tedlock, who translated the poem, includes a "Guide to Reading Aloud" in his book *Finding the Center. Narrative Poetry of the Zuni Indians*, which is "still the only book devoted to detailed scores for oral narrative performances, complete with the original pauses, shouts, whispers, and chanting tones of voice" (xi). It helps the reader who interprets the poem aloud to approximate the intonation of the original poem in performance: e.g. pauses of half a second for half lines, two seconds for dots separating the lines, capital letters for using a loud voice, very small letters for a soft voice, dashes in between letters of a word for holding vowels, change from lower case to capital to produce a crescendo, ascending or descending vowels to produce a glissando (cf. Tedlock 1978, xxxiii-xxxv).

The extract on the following page is the beginning of the Zuni poem, which "was narrated by Andrew Peynetsa on the evening of January 1965; the narration took half an hour" (30).

SON'AHCHI

(audience) Ee-----so.

LO-----NG A
GO.

SONTI

(audience) Ee-----so.

VIL

HE' SHOKTA

THERE WERE LAGERS AT

and

up at the Prairie-Dog Hills

the deer had their home.

The daughter of a priest.

Was sit room fourth down
ting in a on the story weaving
Bas

ket plaques

Such typographic transcription is certainly a help for the reader, as it contains information of audience involvement and presents, like notes in a musical composition, rise and fall of syllables. Interesting to note, the last four lines of this extract, additionally, seem to imitate the movements that are involved in the weaving of baskets. The poem continues with passages to be invoiced *forte* and *piano*. At moments of suspense and violence Tedlock uses capital letters, as for example in the following passage (21):

And ALL THE PEOPLE WHO HAD COME

KILLED THE DEER

Killed the deer

Killed the deer.

The capitalization above indicates how to orally perform the text in terms of intonation (emphasis) and volume. As such, more of the performance can be conveyed than the mere text, even though it can never be fully conveyed. The whole narrative contains characteristic features of primary orality, such as repetition of certain lines (cf. "killed the deer"), and has generally an additive "and-structure". The poet concludes the story with the formulaic words: "THIS WAS LIVED LONG AGO. LEE \----- SEMKONIKYA" (30), which implies simultaneously that it has also been passed on orally for a long time.

Secondary Orality and New Oral Poems

The previous discussion dealt with oral poetry as performed by cultures with a decided emphasis on originally communal and ceremonial performances of poetry. Here I want to point out the most relevant aspects of a poetry which is still rooted in orality, and, since it is composed on the written page, is regarded by a growing number of poets as a “temporal analogue in space for the actual performance in time of the poem” (Economou 1975, 658). As such it is written with an awareness of a live-audience in mind. This idea is nothing new in the history of poetry, since “from antiquity well through the eighteenth century many literary texts, even when composed in writing, were commonly for public recitation, originally by the author himself” (Ong 1991, 137).

Poets felt that they were publishing their poems when they performed them in front of an audience for the first time. Yet, gradually poetry moved from the authentically oral to the written and orally performed, and from there to the written, printed, bought and read which – according to Charles Olson – French critics call “closed verse,” and he himself describes as “print-bred” (Olson 1951, 15). The questions that arise out of this are why this shift was brought about and, second, which will be dealt with in Part IV, why there has been a revival of poetry that is meant to be spoken, a phenomenon recurring all over the literate globe, and of great popularity in the USA.

As to the first question, the answer can be found directly in the changes that literacy brought about, which culminated in a growing tendency of the Romanticists’ idea of turning inside oneself. As Ong puts it: “[t]he Romantic quest for ‘pure poetry’, sealed off from real-life concerns, derives from the feel for autonomous utterance created by writing and, even more, the feel for closure created by print” (Ong 1991, 161).

Much of the notion of poetry as something highly introspective still prevails in our society, which sees poetry predominantly as something private, something that (almost like a love-letter) is not meant to be read, for it shares the innermost feelings of a person. Dadaist, Beat and Confessional poets vehemently reacted against this notion and shocked the reading and listening audience with very intimate and explicitly sexual subject matter. And currently, slam poets can be seen as the most vivid example of poets who share much of their personal experience with the audience. In particular teenagers seem to draw from their personal experiences in their poetry (cf. National Youth Poetry Slam in Albuquerque, New Mexico in 1999).

Generally, the shift back to spoken poetry is found in what Economou calls “new oral poetry,” which is the

poetic work made specifically, but obviously in varying degrees, with an awareness of a *live* audience to whom that work could be read aloud, or of a reader-audience who could interpret that poetry in print in such a way as to approximate in the mind's ear an oral performance of it in any voice the reader-audience chooses but ideally in the voice of the poet him/herself. (Economou 1975, 654)

I would not go so far as to call poetry that is approximated in the mind's ear new oral poetry because that way it lacks the full physical realization and would stay too much in the area of "written to be read". Poems that were composed on the page with a sharp ear and voice for orality certainly evoke much of its tone and rhythm in one's mind. Yet, in order to feel and hear the poem's full capacity, "the trick is to move the poem off the printed page" (Zolbrod 1995, 20).

This calls for two considerations: first, in what way did the poem get on the page in order to keep its orality and, second, what is it that is stored on the page? The first question applies to the possibilities of the technical side of writing (typing) poetry, and much that I will refer to has been discussed by Charles Olson, who states in his essay "Projective Verse":

It is the advantage of the typewriter that, due to its rigidity and its space precisions, it can, for the poet, indicate exactly the breath, the pauses, the suspension even of syllables, the juxtapositions even of parts of phrase, which he intends. (Olson 1951, 22)

This idea goes back to Olson's urging to become again aware of the two foundations of poetry as *speech* and its basic constituent, *breath*, with its life-giving effect in the production of sound through the vocal chords. Olson's request, is based on his observation that much of the poetry up to the 1950s had lost this basic quality, with the result that the words had been reduced to numb, visual items, lacking any physical quality but sight whose corresponding meaning was decoded mentally. Yet, many written performance poems by the Dadaists and by Harlem Renaissance poets would have shown quite the contrary because they existed as verbal art in an oral performance and were therefore meant to be listened to and not silently read.

The second basic constituent of spoken poetry, after the breath, is the syllable, which Olson calls "the king pin of versification, what rules and holds together the lines, the larger forms, of a poem". More important, syllables are "particles of sound", which are "born from the union of mind and the ear" (Olson 1951, 17-18), reflecting what we graphically encounter on the page as the line and understand as a mental production of thought or speech units.

Although Olson points out highly important aspects of the orality of poetry and the possibilities that typing opens up in terms of storing words in a way that approximates the physiology of speech, one has to bear in

mind that typing a poem for an oral performance is largely a means to an end. It is a medium that is used to express and to store poetry for a later oral performance; by contrast, in concrete poetry the expression through the writing tool itself is used to participate in the creation of the poem, giving it a certain shape that not only “speaks” through its content, but also through the semiotics of its graphic layout.

What remains one of the greatest advantages of writing poems, instead of speaking them, is that once a poem is stored on the page, it can be multiplied and – dislocated from the poet and untied from time – it can be read all over the world, even in centuries ahead. It seems that typing a poem in order to reflect the breath and natural voice of the poet is only a tool for interpreters and readers. If the poet is a good poet, and the poem is meant to be performed, he or she will not essentially need all writing tools that the typewriter or computer may provide. Performing the poem, taking it off the page, demands a greater spontaneity and improvisation of the poet than the words on the page can graphically project.

The second question has so far remained unanswered: what is it that is stored on the page? Much has been spoken about oral poetry as a carrier of communal knowledge that was passed on to the next generation and was performed in ceremonies and through rituals. Yet, what happens to poetry once writing has been introduced in these communities? In what way does it affect their oral heritage? Pursuing these questions, one immediately enters Economou’s line of argument

that it is an important step towards realizing that ‘the new oral poetry’ is in fact oral, that we have the theoretical and practical tools to study the relationship between the performed poem and its tradition, which I believe connects with that of the older poetry in addition to initiating its own, as well as between the more familiar printed poem and its tradition. (Economou 1975, 658)

The following analysis of a performance by indigenous poets in Graz 2000 tries to give some insight into cultures that are still heavily endowed with oral knowledge and produce secondary orality poems, often in a foreign language that reveals their foreign cultural influence.

“Words from the Edge”

We put this tour together to make an indigenous statement of how close we still are to our mythology. The poems we heard tonight are right out of our mythology – not our theology – because our mythology prevails our theology. It’s basically a statement about how our mythologies are still alive.

(Lance Henson, Cheyenne poet, Graz 2000)

Lance Henson is one of four indigenous poets from different parts of the globe, who – under his initiative – were on a European tour titled “Words from the edge” from 12 October until 15 December, 2000, visiting places in Austria, Italy, Switzerland and Germany. The poets, Marry Ailonieida Somby (a Sami poet), Memchoubi (a Meitei poet), Apirana Taylor (a Maori poet) and Lance Henson (a Cheyenne poet) read and performed some of their poems and held talks in schools, ethno-museums, bookshops, at universities, and other public places. Their aim was, and still is, to call attention to the fact that their individual cultures have long been threatened (and continue to be threatened) by existing political systems and economic colonialism. The poets pursue important questions such as, for example, where the indigenous voice comes from, how it exists, how poetry is seen as tribal prophecy, as evolution and revolution. Currently, experiences of the tour are being discussed and further activities planned (cf. <http://www.indigenouspoets.ch>).

I was present at the poets’ reading and performance on 25 October, 2000, in Graz, Austria. The event took place at the Afro-Asian Institute in a room with a tiny arena-like auditorium that surrounded a small stage.

Lance Henson, who opened the reading, is a member of the Cheyenne Dog Soldier Society, the Native American Church and the American Indian Movement. He has published seventeen books of poetry (cf. <http://www.hanksville.org/storytellers/henson>). Henson began his reading with the words “I do not have enough time to give you the historical content of these poems, so they were taken to stand on their own”. All of his twelve poems spoke right out of his Cheyenne background. They were marked by a haiku-like brevity, contained poignant imagery, were partly spoken in the Cheyenne language and closely related to his tribal life. After each poem the audience heard its German translation by an interpreter. Lance Henson concluded his reading with a greeting from his Cheyenne

people “in the spirit of peace and humanity” and with the emphatic words: “We are alive.” Lance Henson’s reading distinguished itself from many European poetry readings as it conveyed its particular closeness to his tribal life, to his mythology and oral tradition.

The means of writing and its characteristics plays a minor role in the writing of the poems we heard, as they appear to be a recording of his orality, which expresses and reflects the poet’s communal life. The following three poems shall illustrate this thought.

The first poem, which remained untitled, reveals a characteristic ritual language that would accompany the religious rite of burning certain plants in order to produce “the smoke of life” (l. 4). It has a repetitive structure, a characteristic formal element of primary orality. If it was performed in its tribal setting, including the real ritual actions, it would lose any notion of *poem* as one may have learned to understand a poem at school; instead, it represents a verbal ceremonial act of a tribe.

I burn this leaf shape.
I burn this silver sage.
I burn this red cedar.
in a sacred way.

The smoke
is made
of life.

The second poem, too, is part of the communal life of the Dog Soldier Society: it can be categorized as a medicine song, similarly to the “Datura Song” of the Pima Indians discussed in Part I of this book. Again, there is a dramatic immediacy within the poem which resonates with its healing purpose.

DOG SOLDIERS’ SONG

My medicine has grown strange and wild.
Let me pass.
I am taking care
of you.

The third poem is a disclosure of primary orality in a secondary orality text – the latter being the graphic representation of what in aural, communal life conveys something of highest significance: oral tradition.

Little Fingernail said it
now we remember
we remember.

Simplistic as these three lines at a first glance may seem for the reader, Lance Henson's emphatic oral articulation of the poem revealed the enormous importance of the concept and frame of oral tradition. Here the oral message is passed on by a communal member, "Little Fingernail", whose perhaps prophetic words (which remain unmentioned here) are remembered by a collective "we", i.e. members of the Cheyenne people.

Duane Niatum sums up what I feel lives within poems written by Lance Henson. Within them

the human voice [...] is insistent, animating, animated [...] the direct descendent, or literary equivalent, of the language of song and chant used to communicate with (and largely derived from) the world of spirit, the language of the fullest life of being itself. (Niatum 1988, xxvii)

The second contribution in the course of the evening was a performance by Marry Ailonieida Somby, who has published the first book for children in the Sami language, as well as collections of her poems, and theater plays. She was accompanied by Apirana Taylor on a drum and introduced her performance with a song, after which a short sequence of drum beats was heard. From that point onwards she was accompanied by the drum through all of her chants, which can be characterized by significantly long-stretched vowels. The drum beats did not stop during the voiceless intervals between the individual poems. Moreover, the beats did not meet the rhythm of the poems, yet gave the performance poems a second rhythmic property, occasionally coinciding with the rhythm produced by the sound of accented and unaccented syllables.

The first poem by Marry Ailonieida Somby dealt with the fundamental question for her indigenous Sami tribe: "Who are we?" – In the line of this thought, most of the following poems addressed the Sami tribe's oppressors, or referred to the tribe itself and its relation to Mother Earth. Marry Ailonieida Somby, who is also closely connected to tribes in South America, chanted the following poem, which was preceded by the same poem in its Sami version, giving a sample of the Sami language in performance. The performance of the English version afterwards revealed that the expressive quality of the original language has largely been transferred and therefore remained within the English chant. The actual performance slightly differs from its written (fixed) version on page 68 of *Words from the edge*, the collection of poems published by the four indigenous poets on tour.

THE WARRIOR

My warrior shouts ijoho the war cry paints his face has heavy pistols buried in the jungle mixes Molotov cocktails on bottles gasoline with the clown rolls in the dirt laughs at the crows laughs at Patchamama, Mother Earth calls her a star	My warrior shouts ijoho the war cry paints his face has heavy pistols buried in the jungle mixes Molotov cocktails on gasoline bottles while the clown rolls in the dirt laughs at the crows laughs at Patchamama ⁴ , Mother Earth sings her a star
--	---

(68)

(transcript of the performance)

The poem – taken off the page of a notebook – is performed in a loud voice; the war cry *ijoho* is shouted out in a way that the written page cannot possibly convey. Marry Ailonieida Somby, though a literate university graduate, reveals through her voice and chanting a close relation to orality. Her voice has been cultivated through her performances with and for her tribe. In the poem she draws lively images: Her “warrior” and the “clown”, whose activities (military preparations for war, rolling in the dirt, and mocking crows and Mother Earth) sharply contrast with each other and produce an unusual tension in the poem.

The performance was followed by a reading of Memchoubi, a Meitei poet from India, which was requested not to be recorded out of political reasons. Memchoubi has published eight books and is very much involved in fighting for the rights of indigenous women. I would like to analyze one of her published poems called “I will sing”, which was translated into English by L. Joychandra Singh (cf. *Words from the Edge*, 86).

SHAK’KANI EIDI

I will sing
My song, the song of my life

⁴ The South American word *Patchamama* is synonymous with Mother Earth (cf. *Words from the edge*, 71).

The song of my heart's desire;
 The crumbling wall
 The rusted iron bars
 At the touch of the wild wind of early spring
 At the sound of the first thunder of the rains
 Will crumble themselves
 Why should I be afraid of it,
 The dirty heaps
 Running obedient to the stream
 Why should I obstruct their courses,
 I will sing ever –
 My song, the song of my life
 The song of my hearts desire.

The poem's sound quality is achieved through a repetition of the opening three lines at the end of the poem, giving it a melodious and thematic frame; the "ever" in line thirteen emphasizes the optimism that the lyric I will be able to sing forever. Furthermore, the poem reveals a repetitive structure in lines four and five. Lines six and seven, too, sound similar because both lines start off with "At the" (ll. 6 and 7), followed by a similar object-structure linked to words referring to the senses (cf. "touch" and "sound"). The word "crumble" in line eight echoes the word "crumbling" of line four, and lines nine and twelve equally pose a question, introduced with the words "why should I". Much of the poem refers to a river, possibly the Ninghti-river (cf. *Words from the edge*, 101), which is a recurrent theme in Memchoubi's poetry. What is striking is the mixture of a metaphoric, yet vivid description of nature interwoven with the metaphysical and spiritual voice of the lyric I, which contrasts to the autonomous destruction of the imprisoned self. In that respect, the poem, if it is taken off the written page, or passed on orally, simultaneously attempts to achieve what it predicts on a content level.

The last poet that we heard at the poetry reading and performance in Graz in October 2000, was the Maori poet Apirana Taylor (the percussionist of Marry Ailonieida Somby's chants), who presented the audience with a performance of some of his poems, accompanying himself on a flute (with which he imitated a bird's song), two laments, as well as a *haka*, which is a lively tribal dance, often a war dance. Apirana Taylor, an actor and poet, descends from the tribes Maori and Pakeha. He has published several books, theater plays, and a recording of stories for young children on tape, as well as a collection of poems on his CD *Whakapapa*. (BRS 2000)

Apirana Taylor began his reading with the voicing of the words *Tihei Mauriora*, which refers to the first breath of a new born baby, being the most famous words in his Maori culture. If one hears the words voiced out

aloud, one feels the aspiration of the words – the breath being synonymous with life. Apirana Taylor says: “Whenever you get up to speak in Maori, you have to say *Tihei Mauriora*. If you don’t say that they think you are nobody and not worth listening to” (Apirana Taylor, Graz 2000). What followed were a presentation of the situation of the Maori people from New Zealand, and a lament for their children, played on the flute. He continued with the persona poem “Sad Jokes on a Marae”, which speaks of the significance of the words *Tihei Mauriora*. Apirana Taylor explains the background of the poem:

The poem is about a young man who has been in and out of jail and drinking a lot throughout his life and he took off the law about his Maori culture, but he sure remembered two words, the two most important words in our culture, *Tihei Mauriora*. (Apirana Taylor, Graz 2000)

SAD JOKES ON A MARAE ⁵

Tihei Mauriora I called
Kupe Paikea Te Kooti
Rewi and Te Rauparaha
I saw them
grim death and wooden ghosts
carved on the meeting house wall

in the only Maori I knew
I called
Tihei Mauriora
Above me the tekoteko raged
he ripped his tongue from his mouth
And threw it at my feet

Then I spoke
my name is Tu, the freezing worker
Ngati D.B. is my tribe
The pub is my taiaha
Jail is my home

⁵ A *Marae* is the place where Maori people meet for sacred ceremonies and other public assembling; *Kupe, Paikea, Te Kooti* and *Te Rauparaha* are famous ancestors; *tekoteko* is a wooden figure, decorating the top of the houses of the sacred ancestors; *Ngati* is a prefix that is attributed to most Maori tribes; *D.B.* are the initials of a brewery; *Tu* is a war god and *Taiha* is a traditional Maori weapon (cf. *Words from the edge*, 39).

Tihei Mauriora I cried
They understood
the tekoteko and the ghosts
though I said nothing but
Tihei Mauriora
For that's all I knew.

The performance of the poem by Apirana Taylor conveyed an enormous desperation and rage of the young man, the “freezing worker”, who seems to have lost his connection to his tribal traditions. He calls on famous ancestors with the words *Tihei Mauriora*. Enraged the *tekoteko* forces him to speak by symbolically throwing his tongue at the feet of the young man. In a provocative tone he announces that the pub and the jail have become substitutes for his traditional weapon and his home. The dramatic tension heightens, but when the words “Tihei Mauriora” are invoiced in despair, the gods seem to respond in silent understanding of the young man’s situation.

Apart from the striking vocal elements that Taylor made use of, the performance poem was also rich in theatrical gestures: for example, the movements of raged *tekoteko* ripping out his tongue and throwing it on the floor were imitated (cf. ll. 10-12).

For the audience (approximately sixty people) the reading and performance of the indigenous poets Apirana Taylor, Marry Ailonieida Somy, Memchoubi and Lance Henson was an emotionally stirring event. It gave an impressive insight into their communal life by raising their poems’ full somatic potential through live performance, partly accompanied by music and dance, and followed by an open discussion that concluded the event. Their poems, though stored on a piece of paper, are meant to be heard and performed and take us back to the roots of poetry. In that respect I would like to quote Jerome Rothenberg who points out the fact

that the domain of poetry includes both oral and written forms, that poetry goes back to pre-literate situation & would survive a post-literate situation, that human speech is a near-endless source of poetic forms, that there has *always* been more oral than written poetry, & that we can no longer pretend to a knowledge of poetry if we deny its oral dimension. (Rothenberg 1981, 11)

Moreover, by tuning in their performance, the literary mind of the audience is exposed to the sounds of poetry, or even, as Charles Bernstein puts it: “to the sheer noise of language” (Bernstein 1998, 22).

PART II: Listen Up!

The Performing Voices of Poetry

This part of the book deals with aspects of different kinds of voices that one may encounter in a poetic audiotext whose sounds are heard and decoded as meaning in the mind of the listener.

The acoustic web of a particular poem reveals a different texture and quality than when it is read silently, where we need to fill in intonational features of spoken language ourselves. The analysis of a spoken word poem therefore needs to be approached in a different way than a written poem, where we can dwell over its static appearance on paper. Apart from a different formal approach, the most distinctive feature between a read poem and a spoken poem is that they differ in their acoustic quality, when actually heard as a voice that is orally performed by the poet. M. L. Rosenthal argues in *Exploring Poetry* that

[e]very true poem has its voice. Sometimes it is the poet's own voice. More often, it is the voice of someone in a dramatic or fictional situation. And though we usually think of a voice as speaking, it may also sing, whisper, shout, plead or cry. (Rosenthal, 1973, 1)

This brief statement points to the expressive quality of the voice in a live performance, as well as in a live recording or a studio recording. The voice becomes an instrument that is used to give the poem its individual acoustic soundscape for the moment that it has been taken off the page. Each single oral performance of it would be different – just as each single act of silent reading would present a different impression in one's acoustic mind.

Since the ephemeral quality of sound in general would not allow a detailed investigation during a single reception of a spoken poem, I will make use of technologically stored poems that are available on CD or as sound files on the Internet. Taking a sample of one-hundred poems would be enough to reveal that they differ in at least four ways. Some of the poems would most certainly be narrative poems, in which “the actions and speech of characters are presented through a narrator”. Others would be dramatic poems, in which “the story is presented through the actions and speech of characters” (Furniss 1996, 164); and a third category would be lyrical poems, in which the speaker of the poem is a first-person-narrator that may be related to the poet's self, but it may also be an invented, fictional “I”. All three categories, the narrative, the dramatic, and the lyric designate the three general categories of poetic literature, more closely defined in Aristotle's *Ars poetica* (cf. Fyfe 1966).

In a fourth type of poetic expression one could group poems that reveal a considerable amount of overlap between specific characteristics of narr-

ative, dramatic and lyrical elements. For example, Marjorie Perloff points out that Frank O' Hara's poem "Poem" has absorbed a "wonderfully absurd event [...] into the lyric fabric of [his] dramatic discourse" (Perloff 1985, 160). In a much more fragmented way, for example, "The Cantos" by Ezra Pound, or T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" exhibit lyric, narrative and dramatic voices by multiple protagonists. Regarding modernist poetry in particular, this has led to heated debates about poetry as either "lyric or collage, mediation or encyclopedia, the still moment or the jagged fragment" (23), which is "[a] corollary, equally important for postmodernism" (183).

Narrative Poetry

As mentioned above, in narrative poetry actions and speech of characters are presented through a narrator who recounts certain events happening to someone else in a similar way as a prose narrator. It demands from the poet to "draw characters briefly, to engage attention, to shape a plot" (Kennedy 1974, 8). According to the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*,

a narrative poem is one that tells a story. The two basic types are the epic and the ballad. [...] Both epic and ballad have a long history as oral literature before they are recorded and literary forms of each emerge. (PEPP 1974, 542)

In Western literature, narrative poems date back to the "Babylonian epic of Gilgamesch (composed before 2000 BC) and Homer's epic *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (composed before 700 BC)" (Kennedy 1974, 8). Although narrative poetry is less frequent in modern poetry, since "our own age has felt that the genius of poetry was lyric, or fashionably dramatic" (PEPP 1974, 550), there are still plenty of narrative poems which clearly reflect that narratives composed in verse are an essential part of contemporary poetry. For example, in 2000 Ed Sanders published a book of about 300 pages on "*The Poetry and Life of Allen Ginsberg. A Narrative Poem*" (NY, 2000). He presented the book at the Fletcher's Gallery in Woodstock, where he talked about his friendship with Allen Ginsberg, performed some parts of the long narrative poem, and half-chanted, half-sang the song "You Are My Hero". Ed Sanders' impulse for writing the narrative poem was his close friendship with Allen Ginsberg, with whom he had been in touch until Ginsberg's death in 1997. The poem is full of memories and anecdotes, such as the very personal comment that Ginsberg made once in hospital, where he exclaimed: "Great! I'm dying and no one can say no!" With this narrative poem, Ed Sanders has made use of a genre of poetry that is conventionally used to "honor or remember great men" (PEPP 1974, 543), which explicitly points to the communal function that the performance had.

A modern narrative poem about a hero of a different kind is Etheridge Knight's "Hard Rock Returns to Prison From the Hospital For the Criminal

Insane”, recorded at a live-reading by Etheridge Knight and compiled with other poems by African American poets on the double CD *Our Souls Have Grown Deep Like The Rivers* (REC 2000).

Etheridge Knight (1933–1991), whose collection *Belly Song and Other Poems* was nominated for the National Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize in 1973, had been sentenced to twenty years in Indiana State Prison for robbery but was paroled after eight years. In prison he re-discovered poetry, and his first collection of poems, *Poems from Prison 1968*, was published one year before he was released. After his imprisonment he was strongly associated with the Black Arts Movement. Knight's books and oral performances drew both popular and critical acclaim, and he has received honors from the *Guggenheim Foundation*, the *National Endowment for the Arts*, and the *Poetry Society of America* (cf. <http://www.poets.org/poets/poets.cfm?prmID=159>).

The following narrative poem speaks directly from Knight's experience in prison. According to J. Paul Hunter, “the picture of Hard Rock as a kind of hero to other prison inmates is established early in the poem through a retelling of the legends that circulated about him” (ibid.).

HARD ROCK RETURNS TO PRISON FROM THE HOSPITAL FOR THE CRIMINAL INSANE

Hard Rock was “known not to take no shit
From nobody”, and he had the scars to prove it:
Split purple lips, lumped ears, welts above
His yellow eyes, and one long scar that cut
Across his temple and ploughed through a thick
Canopy of kinky hair.

The WORD was that Hard Rock wasn't a mean nigger
Anymore, that the doctors had bored a hole in his head,
Cut out part of his brain, and shot electricity
Through the rest. When they brought Hard Rock back,
Handcuffed and chained, he was turned loose,
Like a freshly gelded stallion, to try his new status.
And we all waited and watched, like Indians at a corral,
To see if the WORD was true.

As we waited we wrapped ourselves in the cloak
Of his exploits: “Man, the last time, it took eight
Screws to put him in the Hole.” “Yeah, remember when he
smacked the captain with his dinner tray?” “He set
The record for time in the Hole-67 straight days!”
“Ol Hard Rock! man, that's one crazy nigger.”

And then the jewel of a myth that Hard Rock had once bit
A screw on the thumb and poisoned him with syphilitic spit.

The testing came, to see if Hard Rock was really tame.
A hillbilly called him a black son of a bitch
and didn't lose his teeth, a screw who knew Hard Rock
From before shook him down and barked in his face.
And Hard Rock did nothing. Just grinned and looked silly,
His eyes empty like knot holes in a fence.

And even after we discovered that it took Hard Rock
Exactly 3 minutes to tell you his first name,
We told ourselves that he had just wised up,
Was being cool; but we could not fool ourselves for long,
And we turned away, our eyes on the ground. Crushed.
He had been our Destroyer, the doer of things
We dreamed of doing but could not bring ourselves to do,
The fears of years, like a biting whip,
Had cut grooves too deeply across our backs

(<http://athena.louisville.edu/as/english/subcultures/afamprisoners/knighthardrock.html>,
cf. also: *Our Souls Have Grown Deep Like the Rivers*, CD 2, RR 2000)

The poem's most characteristic stylistic element is that the whole narration is guided by one speaker, a prisoner, presumably a vocal self-portrait of Etheridge Knight himself. As common in storytelling, the narrator throws in remarks of other prisoners about "Hard Rock", their fellow prisoner, who was transferred to the "Hospital for the Criminal Insane". The prisoners cannot be identified as individual characters, but the direct speech fragments, the voices with which the poem is interspersed, produce an additional verbal effect which lets the characters behind the imitated voices come to life in the listener's mind. The often-voiced opinion about Hard Rock's character trait that he was "known not to take no shit from nobody" (ll. 1-2) differs from these voices in the sense that here the voice cannot be traced back to coming from a single person but rather summarizes a general – thus frequently voiced – opinion. In stanza one the narrator presents a clear picture of Hard Rock's physical appearance, focusing on the injuries on his head, which in figurative terms is hard like a rock that does not break.

Stanza two presents the listener with a report of oral comments that have been made by prisoners about Hard Rock, as the "WORD was" that "Hard Rock [lobotomized by doctors] wasn't a mean nigger \ Anymore" (ll. 7-8). In the following part of the narration the speaker interjects voices of other prisoners who reminisce about certain deeds of their hero, who had been admired because of his resistance to the prison authorities. He creates

a report of the conversation that was held by the prisoners who were waiting for Hard Rock's return. These imitated voices become an integral and lively part of the story. At the reading, Etheridge Knight's voice clearly sets off from the rest of the narration. It is an imitation of voices, a discussion by prisoners, who praise Hard Rock's deeds. The narrator concludes these glorifying narrative moments by telling the audience "the jewel of a myth that Hard Rock had once bit \ A screw on the thumb and poisoned him with syphilitic spit" (ll. 21-22); this "jewel of myth" triggers off a short wave of laughter in the audience, which definitely releases some tension, caused by the tragically serious, yet painfully ironic, undertone in Knight's voice.

The poem then climaxes in short episodic reports of provocation that Hard Rock resisted to because of his *Clockwork Orange*-like treatment in the "Hospital for the Criminal Insane". Only gradually could the prisoners admit to themselves that Hard Rock, their epitome of freedom, was no longer able to live up to their idealistic view of him (cf. ll. 32-36).

Reading the poem aloud takes two minutes, during which the speaker establishes a realistic setting furnished with episodes from prison. He presents a clear picture of Hard Rock in colloquial language (slang) that contributes to the poem's straightforwardness. Knight's poem illustrates how the voice performs in narrative poetry. It is a vivid example of a story in which the writer "speaks in his own person while setting the scene or giving exposition, but he puts on varied personalities and adopts different voices as the episodes require" (*PEPP* 197, 200)⁶.

Dramatic Poetry

According to X.J. Kennedy, dramatic poetry "presents the voice of an imaginary character (or characters) speaking directly, without any additional narration by the author" (Kennedy 1974, 11). In performance poetry, as for example in slam poetry, the oral articulation of an imaginary character's lines has to be carried out by the writer who composed the poem, which curiously links the author of the poem with his or her characters. This relationship is not only established through the poet's voice, but also as a live performance that is carried out by body movements, gestures, or facial expressions, which simultaneously embody the speaking voice (or voices) of the poem. Other than in acting, the emphasis is not so much put on a credible enacting of a particular character, where the performer totally merges with a particular role of a

⁶ As a further example of contemporary narrative poetry, I suggest listening to Wanda Coleman's part four of "Nigger Rhythm Rhymes from The Blues Part of Town". (cf. *Our Souls Have Grown Deep Like the Rivers*. Rhino Entertainment Company, 2000).

character, but rather on the voice presented by the poet. In other words, the poet on stage still will be seen as a poet, not as a character in a play, even if the content of the poem may lend itself to present a particular character. It has to be mentioned that since performance slams have only come into being in 1986, it is no surprise that Kennedy argued in 1974 that one of the main characteristics of dramatic poetry is its emphasis to show, rather than tell, since the “bare narration fades away, and a group of characters embodied by actors remains” (Kennedy 1974, 200). Interestingly, Kennedy mentions that dramatic poetry existed before plays as part of the rites, which gives some insight into the development of drama.

It seems crucial to note in this context that today there is a heated debate among scholars who are faced with difficulties when it comes to the term *verse drama* and its relation to poetry. Quite a few American poets, such as e.e. cummings, William Carlos Williams, T.S. Eliot, Robert Lowell, Wallace Stevens, and Archibald MacLeish have entered the domain of theater, which offers a special kind of setting for performance poetry (cf. Hinchliffe 1977, *Modern Verse Drama*). Examples of poetry in the theater (a combination that was common-place in antiquity) is Archibald MacLeish’s play in verse *J.B.* (McLeish 1956) and Ntozake Shange’s choreopoem “for colored girls, who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf” (1975). From a broader view, problems as regards definitions of poetry *in* performance, or poetry *as* performance, reveal that poetry lends itself as much to performance as performance lends itself to poetry.

For example, poems can be presented as dramatic monologues in which an imaginative character (who is not physically present on stage) is addressed by the speaker⁷. Such dramatic tension is, for instance, felt in Gwendolyn Brooks’ poem, “The Mother”.

THE MOTHER

Abortions will not let you forget.
You remember the children you got that you did not get.
The damp small pulps with a little or with no hair.
The singers and workers that never handled the air.
You will never neglect or beat
them, or silence or buy with sweet.
You will never wind up the sucking-thumb
Or scuttle off ghosts that come.
You will never leave them, controlling your luscious sigh,

⁷ One of the most famous persona poems of the twentieth century is T.S. Eliot’s “The Love-Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” (1915), in which Eliot speaks with the voice of the fictional Alfred Prufrock.

Return for a snack of them, with gobbling mother-eye.
 I have heard in the voices of the wind the voices of my dim
 killed children.
 I have contracted. I have eased
 my dim dears at the breasts they could never suck.
 Your luck
 And your lives from the unfinished reach,
 If I stole your births, and your names,
 Your stilted or lovely loves, your tumults, your marriages, aches,
 and your deaths,
 If I poisoned the beginnings of your breaths,
 Believe that even in my deliberateness I was not deliberate.
 Though why should I whine,
 whine that the crime was other than mine? –
 Since anyhow you are dead.
 Or rather, or instead.
 You were never made.
 But that too, I am afraid,
 Is faulty: oh, what shall I say, how is the truth to be said?
 You were born, you had body, you died.
 It is just that you never giggled or planned or cried.
 Believe me, I loved you all.
 Believe me, I knew you, though faintly, and loved you,
 I loved you
 All.

(cf. *Our Souls Have Grown Deep Like the Rivers*, CD 1, RR 2000; *HA* Vol. 2, 2343)

In the introductory lines of the poem the female voice seems to address a highly ambiguous and unidentified “you”, which appears to scold women who have had an abortion. She confronts them with unfulfilled chances of raising their children. Yet, this scolding is followed by a subtle shift in addressee from a general perspective to a personal one, as she expresses twinges of remorse because of the unfulfilled motherly care for her aborted children. This shift in perspective can be attributed to the fact that the speaker tries to employ strategies of how to overcome her own guilt. A third shift takes place in line 21 where she attempts to free herself from feelings of guilt by saying that “even in her deliberateness, she was not deliberate”. The distress that she suffers from is evident, and she desperately searches for some consolation in her mind, which seems impossible. The question she asks herself about how “the truth is to be said” (l. 28) does not take her far; all she can do is emphasize the fact that she loves all her children, even though she decided to abort them (ll. 31-33).

The dramatic impact of the poem is evident, and although the persona in the poem seems to talk to herself while simultaneously addressing her aborted children in her mind's eye, the theatrical tone of Gwendolyn Brooks' voice hints at the possibility that she is indirectly addressing all women. What comes across on a discourse level, is a female speaker who is in moral turmoil and tries to justify the act of abortion, while simultaneously presenting her case as an issue that concerns all women who may be in a similar situation. According to Furniss, (self-) critique is a likely feature of dramatic poetry, in which "[t]he speaker's utterances reveals his or her character to the reader" (Furniss 1996, 175). In that respect, Geiger points out:

In so far as the composing poet intends his poem as a dramatized realization of value in experience, as readers we shall discover this value as it emerges from the verbal representation of particulars of the experience in their variety of interrelations in the finished poem. (Geiger 1967, 41)

Such discovery may imply that a dramatic poem has usually some kind of didactic impulse, but in performance poetry in particular, the dramatic potential of a any kind of value in experience is used to confront the audience with emotionally evocative material in order to gain audience reactions as well as to make a direct or indirect social statement. This can be strongly felt in Maggie Estep's self-praising poem "Sex Goddess of the Western Hemisphere", which she performed at the National Poetry Slam in 1993 (cf. CD *Grand Slam!*). Compared to the imagined and therefore rather abstract "you" in Gwendolyn Brooks' poem "The Mother", a decisive shift in the communicative situation is noticeable. In the poem, Maggie Estep overtly addresses the audience as a collective "you", and, thereby evokes immediate audience reactions, in particular considering the highly ironic and slightly provocative tone and content of her poem, in which the speaking voice, after having been "a mere mortal woman", claims to be the "Sex Goddess of the Western Hemisphere" (cf. *Grand Slam!*).

The same accounts for Edward Thomas Herrera's poem "My Pain Keeps Me Regular", which is a highly entertaining parody of a self-absorbed, suffering person, who basically blames the whole world for his torment, including the audience, as he states:

you have all been party to my torment, if not directly then indirectly; if you don't belief me, just give me a little time. [...] my pain makes me the most important person in this room and if you don't agree and if you don't understand then there is something horribly wrong with you. (cf. *Grand Slam!* 1996)

In that respect, dramatic poems that directly address the audience and thereby make it a part of the performance piece, are most engaging and instantaneous to experience in a live performance.

Lyric Poetry

Originally, a lyric was a poem sung to the music of a *lyra*, a musical instrument in the Greek language, yet gradually it has lost its close connection to music (cf. Kennedy, 6). For many, only the word *lyrics*, when referred to the text of pop songs, reminds them of the deeply rooted relation of music and poetry. Lyrics of popular songs can, of course, be narrative, dramatic or lyric, whereas historically only “narrative and nondramatic poetry genres were intended to be sung” (Stewart 1998, 29).

Today, a lyric poem is one whose voice overtly expresses a single perception or feeling. More broadly, it can also refer to “any song or short subjective poem with songlike qualities” (GLC 1983, 180); and, as such, it still reflects its origin. This strongly urges for lyric poems to be orally performed, but according to Amy Lowell, is generally true for all kinds of poetry as it distinguishes itself from prose writing:

The ‘beat’ of poetry, its musical quality, is exactly which differentiates it from prose, and it is this musical quality which bears in it the stress of emotion without which no true poetry can exist. [...] No art has suffered from print as poetry did. [...] Poetry is as much art to be heard as is music. (Lowell 1971, 10-11)

Yet, the musicality of a lyric poem may not be overestimated, as Susan Stewart argues by saying that “[m]usical conventions proper have been applied to our sense of lyric’s ‘musicality’ and yet do not overlap with lyric’s meter even within the domain of spoken lyric” (Stewart 1998, 33).

The idea of poetry as an introverted expression of feelings and thoughts may raise the question of a possible loss of poetry and its original communal function. Yet, Herrnstein Smith argues that although the poet’s intentions are “specific, personal and can only be surmised, [...] his assumption are general, communal, and are therefore more likely to be recoverable” (Herrnstein Smith 1977, 38). Loss Pequeño Glazier also sets the ‘I’ as an entity in relation with other entities and thus makes the ‘I’ “one facet of a collective whole”. (cf. Glazier 2002, 53). Both statements, can only apply to poems that are shared with a reader or listener, despite their private content, as there are many poems that forever remain unheard and unseen as they are hidden by the hands of their composers.

Another interesting aspect is Robert Creeley’s assertion in his *Poem 294*: “As soon as I speak, I/speaks” (Glazier 2002, 48). This reflects the general idea of New Criticism, which assumes that the “speaker is always someone other than the poet himself”. In other words, even “a first-person

lyric poem is thought of as a kind of dramatic soliloquy spoken by a speaker who is analogous to a character in a play” (Furniss 1996, 168).

The poet has every possibility to fictionalize his or her experience and even thoughts when composing a poem. Therefore the problem which the literary critic faces when trying to identify the first person speaker as the poet, may be equally present with a third person narrative poem. One can never be sure behind which persona the poet may be “hiding”, or, if any. Moreover, Furniss claims that

[it] is important to maintain the distinction between the voice in the poem and the human being who wrote it, because the sense of a human voice speaking a poem is an effect created by the poem: written poems, for the most part, are not recordings of actual speech acts but fictional utterances in which the utterance itself is part of the fiction. This last point aims to stress that poems are not the written records of actual speech acts, but fictional representations of utterances. (Furniss 1996, 170)

In poetry the utterance of a lyric poem may create a “subtle change in the relationship of the reader to his audience”, which puts the oral interpreter in a decisively different situation, as he or she is not addressing the audience but an “imaginary individual, possibly ‘in his minds eye”” (Crocker 1967, 19). As long as there is some addressee within the poem, the interpreter or poet can rely on some sort of communicative effect. Yet, since lyric poetry is very subjective, introspective, and personal in mood, a different approach is required. Crocker believes that it “presents spoken reading at its highest spiritual and intellectual pitch” (20).

In Robert Frost’s poem “The Road Not Taken” (Greenberg 1965, 271), a person reflects upon himself and seemingly speaks to himself, conveying his mood and his perception of life at a specific moment, at which he – in a metaphoric way – is faced with a choice of two possible directions to follow. Interestingly, Frost says in an interview that “the funny thing is that this mood you’re writing in foretells the end product” (Barry 1973, 157). Furthermore, in a letter to Sidney Cox he says: “[t]he living part of a poem is the intonation entangled somehow in the syntax idiom and meaning of a sentence. It is only there for those who have previously heard it in conversation.” (61). This statement calls immediately for the term “sentence sound” that was coined by Robert Frost, who argues that “a sentence is a sound in itself on which other sounds called words may be strung” (Barry 1973, 63); it reflects the “abstract [acoustic] vitality of our language” (59). This special sound may appear to be difficult to imagine in the mind’s ear, for without words, there is no sentence. But, whatever holds the words together in a sentence reveals its own separate sound.

When listening to Frost reading his poem “The Road Not Taken” it becomes obvious what he means by *sentence sound*. Contrary to the listening sample, the printed page will not convey the sentence sound for

the silent reader (whom I invite to read the poem aloud) if he or she concentrates too much on the meter and rhyme and lets himself be taken in by the rhyme to stop at the end of each line. Instead, a listening version conveys a different soundscape in which the mood of the 'lyrical I' dominates the intonation of the poem.

THE ROAD NOT TAKEN

Two Roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in the wood, and I –
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

(cf. *The Caedmon Poetry Collection*; or: <http://www.factoryschool.org>)

As the reader may have noticed, the poem's layout in four stanzas of five lines each and their carefully measured, predominantly regular iambic tetrameter, as well as their *abaab* rhyme scheme, calls for "breaking the sounds of sense with all their irregularity of accent across the regular beat of the metre" (Barry 1973, 60). This refers to what the *poet laureate*, Robert Pinsky, means by saying that "[...] the rhythmical unit (the line) does not always coincide with the syntactical unit (the grammatical phrase)" (Pinsky 2000, 34).

In his reading, Robert Frost sticks to this sentence rhythm, especially noticeable in lines two and three, through the "run-on-line" ten, as well as

by not stopping at the end of line fourteen but continuing the word “I” (l. 15) with the same aspiration as the word “way” (l. 14). A charming effect is achieved by the hesitating repetition of the “I” (ll. 18 and 19), which provides the ‘lyrical I’ with a very human quality. Read that way, the lyric voice in Frost’s poem projects the speaker’s indecisive mood and self-confessional tone, which almost excludes the ear-witnessing audience.

As one might assume that the lyric voice is less suitable for the stage, I would like to give an example where the contemplative voice works well in performance poetry. In “Dead Presidents”, which was performed by “The Invisible Man” at the National Poetry Slam in 1993, the lyric voice articulates thought-streams that are triggered off by the picture of Abraham Lincoln on an American penny coin that he finds on the ground and picks up. This seems to allude to the frequent saying “a penny for your thoughts.” The speaking voice reflects on the “picture of the ancestors of those who did [his] in”, and then reflects on God and Jesus, who he sees forced upon him and his people, as he states: “You’ve got my people praying to a dead white man” (cf. CD *Grand Slam!*). Throughout the poem, the audience is seemingly excluded as it is not directly addressed and listens into the absorbed, thoughtful and critical utterance of the speaking voice. Compared to dramatic poems by Maggie Estep and Edward Thomas Herrera, the audience only occasionally responds to certain lines of the poem, as for example to the provocative line: “it seems that I’m addicted to the hats [heads] of dead white man”; nevertheless, he is equally rewarded with great applause which may also be due to the effect of the song-like quality of the lyric poem that is sustained by its frequent end-rhymes as well as an alternating use of pitch. The success of the lyric poem in performance poetry confidentially relies on the captivating quality of the poet’s voice (and vice versa), which Burrows views as the “most intimate and powerful human exploitation of sound, a means of displaying mood and attitude” (Burrows 1990, 12). More generally, but equally insightful is David Hall’s view that “in literature much that passes for technique really derives from the structure of the psyche” (Hall 1976, 53).

Psychology plays a major role not only in the creation of poems but also in their perception, because much of how we perceive poems is related to the feelings and associations that are evoked in the listener. Sounds have an enormous potential to arouse feelings, a fact that is more obvious in music than in poetry.

The Performing Sounds of Poetry

Sound is language's flesh, its opacity as meaning marks its material embeddedness in the world of things. Sound brings writing back from its metaphysical and symbolic functions to where it is at home, in performance.

(Charles Bernstein in: *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word*, 21)

There are many books which explain the vocal nature of poetry and analyze the sounds of poetry, such as *Sound and Poetry* edited by Northrop Frye, *Sound and Sense* by Laurence Perrine, or *The Sounds of Poetry* by Robert Pinsky, which provide a list of the possible effects of certain sounds, or sound techniques, in the composition of poetry.

Many of the sound effects that the poet employs in order to convey or enhance the meaning of a poem, originate from the poet's acquired feeling for poetic language. It is an observation of language in social and fictional contexts that enables the writer to create voices in the text that resemble speech and fuel the poem with orality in a performance. Acoustic layers of sound become a playground for the poet to express meaning. Yet, very often it is only afterwards that the poet him- or herself is surprised about the striking meaning-enhancing effects that have been achieved. The art of poetry is not a miraculously self-creating output of poetic language. "Art, ultimately, is organization" (Perrine 1956, 183). This applies also to writing poetry. Nevertheless, much of what the literary critic detects in a poem, such as alliteration, assonance, repetition, or sound symbolism etc., is not something to be employed according to a technical manual but rather arises out of the poet's sharp ear for sounds and voices that the poet has cultivated. This includes the fact that "there may be a conscious or quasi-conscious selection and arrangement of syntactic and phonological linear elements of form, in which case a 'poetic function' is operating" (Epstein quoted by Herrnstein Smith 1977, 163).

Since much of the nature and appeal of performance poetry is indebted to *how* the poems sound and *how* they mean (in addition to what they mean), it is necessary to explore the close relation between sound and meaning. Perrine presents a holistic view of poetry when he says that "[g]reat poetry engages the whole man in his response – senses, imagination, emotion, intellect; [...]" (Perrine 1956, 216). The way a poem sounds and its physical realization of meaning contribute much to a full

perception of the poem. Robert Frost points out in a letter to John T. Bartlett:

The best place to get the abstract sound of sense is from voices behind a door that cuts off the words [...]. Those sounds are summoned by the audile (audial) imagination and they must be positive, strong and definitely unmistakably indicated by the context. (Barry, 1973, 59)

From what can be deferred from the quotation above, Robert Frost, one of the great poets in the last century who had an *ear* for poetry, was well aware of the close relationship between sound and sense. What Frost calls “the abstract sound of sense” refers to what “T.S. Eliot was relying on when he said that poetry could communicate before it was understood” (Kenner 1984, 38). This “sound value” has long been debated from two opposing views, one of which holds that “each vowel and each consonant contains in itself some musical property, some magical essence that it distills into the words and lines of a poem”; the other view is that “sound has virtually no effect on our experience of a poem” (Collins 1970, 115). My impression is that there can be certain meaning-enhancing effects that sounds create within a poem – depending on the degree of phonetic iconicity of individual sound segments in relation to its semantic value. These effects are difficult to measure, as it depends largely on the awareness of the listener and his or her ability to associate certain additional semiotic properties with what the sound quality of a particular word or line can evoke. Moreover, it not only depends on the poet to choose whether to consciously pepper his or her poem with phonetic intensifiers, but also on the poem. This is based on the fact that there is a certain degree of possible interpretation also on a sound level that text of the poem offers independent from what the poet instilled into the text. These three approaches to sound make up the relationship between the poet, the poem, and the recipient, and are equally important to consider in the interpretation of the meaning of a particular poem.⁸

⁸ There is an established “branch” of poetry called *sound poetry*, which “is any acoustic pattern of speech independent of grammar or meaning. It may or may not be reinforced, acoustically, by meaningful text, or instrumental music, or by environmental noise.” (Robson 1981, 11). Sound in *sound poetry* is exploited to the extent of creating phonetic music at the expense of meaning. This accounts for Hugo Ball’s poems, for example, in which words were abandoned entirely, “together with their cerebral content, concerning himself with the basic elements of language – sound, intonation, rhythm” (Biggsby 1972, 27). L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry, by contrast, such as by Charles Bernstein, works with the intellectual tone of language. Bernstein’s poem “The Sheds of our Webs”, for example, sounds as though it was meaningful, but in fact are arbitrary semantic “dances of the intellect” and take poetry “almost to the point of unintelligibility” (Perloff 1985, 215-216).

In the following section I will analyze and discuss practical examples of the striking and appealing effects of sounds that one can indulge in when listening to poetry.

Phonetic Intensifiers and Onomatopoeia

As indicated above, there are certain sounds that may evoke associations in the mind of the listener and intensify the meaning and ultimately understanding of the poem. Not all poems overtly reflect this sound-meaning relationship, but there is a continuum of possible interpretations that allow the recipient to argue for it. Furthermore, this special sonic-semantic relationship that the recipient listens to depends highly on the vocal quality of the spoken poem. In that respect, it makes a difference whether one actually hears the sound of a real voice, or just reads the poem silently and hears its corresponding sound in one's mind.

The question as to what lies behind this relationship (other than the Saussurean arbitrariness of the *signifier* and *signified*) is answered by Wimsatt, who argues that “[t]he sound patterns of poetry and the verbal meaning have a symbiotic relationship of mutual dependence and independent semiotic value” (Wimsatt 1996, 189-194). This symbiotic relationship, which Peter Middleton calls “sound symbolism” (Middleton 1998, 285) varies in relation to the degree of phonetic iconicity of a certain word or sound unit. According to Charles Bernstein,

[i]conicity refers to the ability of language to present, rather than represent or designate, its meaning. [...] One of the primary features of poetry as a medium is to foreground the various iconic features of language – to perform the verbalness of language. (Bernstein 1998, 17)

Perrine has compiled a list of words with phonetic intensifiers, “whose sound, by a process as yet obscure, to some degree suggests their meaning” (Perrine 1956, 168). I do not want to go too much into the detail of these individual sounds, because I believe that most English speakers will associate similar ideas with individual sounds; yet, to increase the reader's awareness of this associative meaning of sounds, I give a short overview of certain sounds and their meaning enhancing value.⁹

One of the most famous examples of the use of sound to convey meaning is Edgar Allen Poe's use of the “long o as the most sonorous vowel” in his poem “The Raven” in order to produce an intended melancholy tone. In his “Philosophy of Composition” (HA 1529-1537) he sets about to “select a word embodying this sound, and at the same time in the fullest possible keeping with that melancholy which [he] had pre-

⁹ cf. Christopher Collins' “A Chart of Verbal Sound Values” in: *The Act of Poetry. A practical introduction to the Reading of Poems*. N.Y.: Random House, 1970.

determined as the tone of the poem.” (HA 1532). This he achieves by choosing the word “nevermore” in his refrain, the melancholic tone being the more intensified as it echoes the repetitive words and end-sounds of the preceding two lines in each stanza. Perrine confirms the tonal quality of the long *o*, by saying that it “may suggest melancholy or sorrow” (Perrine 1956, 169). In fact, there is quite a range of words that express this state of feeling and contain the emphatic sound of the long *o*, such as gloom, doom, forlorn or mourn. Christopher Collins’ “Traditional English Meaning-Association” of long vowels, in general, attributes to them the sound value “[r]esonance, completion, solemnity” (Collins 1970, 114).

Perrine also lists the equivalent sounds of, for example, the grapheme *fl-* that is associated with the idea of moving light, as in flame, flare, flash and flicker [...], *sl-* as a sound introducing words meaning ‘smoothly wet’, as in slippery, slick, slide, slime [...], or medial – *-att-* to suggest some kind of particled movement as in spatter, shatter or clatter (cf. Perrine 1954, 169). As to a possible underlying principle of such word groups that share a phonetic intensification of meaning, Peter Middleton argues that

[t]he link between meaning (not reference) and sound is conventional, but the sound itself may also have formed an associative network with other words that share the same sounds, and so may share semantic links as well. (Middleton 1998, 285)

Rather than presenting the reader with a long list of phonetic intensifiers, I would like to describe the effect created by the frequent use of the short –*i* in the beginning of Sylvia Plath’s poem “The Thin People” (Plath 1967, 30).

THE THIN PEOPLE

They are always with us, the thin people
Meagre of dimension as the grey people

On a movie-screen. They
Are unreal, we say:

It was only in a movie, it was only
In a war making evil headlines when we

Were small that they famished and
Grew so lean and would not round

Out their stalky limbs again though peace
Plumped the bellies of mice
Under the meanest table.

[...]

As the reader may have felt, the *-i* sounds in the poem, which, according to Perrine often goes with smallness and, according to Collins, reflects “sharpness, narrowness, precision” (Collins 1970, 114), has a certain capacity to enhance the meaning of the poem, and the presentation of “thin people”. A silent reading may (or may not) have given that impression, but it is extremely felt when one hears Sylvia Plath reading these lines, as for example on the CD *The Caedmon Poetry Collection*. This cannot only be attributed to the fact that certain words such as “lean” (l. 8) and “peace” (l. 9) when heard, rather than graphically seen on the page, reveal further *-i* sounds, but also to the stretching of these vowel sounds, which echo themselves through their assonance. This curious effect contributes to the idea of length, which – optically speaking – is always part of narrowness.

All these effects are heightened by the tone in Sylvia Plath’s voice and the sharp pronunciation of words containing *-i* sounds (in particular the word thin itself), as opposed to the “fuller” sounding words “plumped” and “bellies” in line ten. It is the overall effect of the sounds working together which leads me to conclude that much of the ghostly imagery of starved people and famished Nazi victims, whom Plath alludes to in her poem, are not evoked by the “inner eye” alone, but also by the sounds that are created by her voice.

Equally, in Laurie Anderson’s poem “One Beautiful Garden of Eden” fricative sounds contribute to the mental shaping of the liveliness of the snake in her narration. The following lines will confirm that observation most convincingly, if actually heard (cf. CD *Talk Normal*, WB 2000).

ONE BEAUTIFUL EVENING

One Beautiful Evening in the Garden of Eden
A snake came walking in the twilight
He was leaning on his ivory cane
And he said, let me tell you a little secret about life
There is a certain sharpness to a knife or a diamond
Come here, watch it glitter.

The lines above are simultaneously an example for onomatopoeia, which refers to the “formation or use of words which imitates sounds” (PEPP 1974, 590). It can also be defined as the “sound-effect of sounds that sound like what they describe” (GLC 201). In Laurie Anderson’s poem the aural texture portrays the hissing of the tongue of a snake through the fricative sounds in the words “snake”, “his”, “said”, “secret”, “certain”, “sharpness”, and “watch”. This is an overall effect that is achieved through the dominant fricative sounds in these few lines, rather than of one word.

An example for a word that sounds like what it describes is “buzz” in Emily Dickinson’s poem “I Heard a Fly Buzz” (Koch 1981, 39). But here too it is more the voiced pronunciation of the consonant ‘z’ that effectively imitates the sound produced by the wings of flies, rather than the sound of the whole word. Thus, the pronunciation of “buzz” in the poem, evokes a lively picture of the fly that ironically sets itself off from the dying voice, but it also triggers feelings of irritation in the hearer, who is familiar with the annoying sound of a fly buzzing close to one’s ear.

The use of onomatopoeia in poetry, especially when heard, can create such special effects, although its use by the poet is limited.

Cacophony and Euphony

If one listens carefully to a few poems, one realizes that there are certain words and lines that sound euphonious while other lines may stick out as cacophonous. Interestingly, but not surprisingly, the impression that one gets on an acoustic level often effects the semantic unit of a particular instance in the poem.

In *A Glossary of Literature & Composition*, euphony is defined as “the pleasing combination of the sounds of language” (110), and cacophony as “the result of a disagreeable combination of sounds [...], which is often employed deliberately to emphasize a discordant idea or unpleasant image” (*GLC*, 46). In short, euphony “arises from an ease of articulation” (*PEPP* 1974, 250) and cacophony from a greater effort, or difficulty, of articulation. If one observes oneself speaking, one will realize that vowels and semi-vowels are generally smoother to pronounce than consonant clusters. I would like to briefly explain these effects by means of the sound recording of a poem, rather than by providing a list of vowels and consonants and their corresponding acoustic characteristics.

The following lines are the beginning of Wallace Stevens’ poem “The Idea of Order at Key West”, which expresses the modernists’ dilemma of how to make sense of the outer world. (cf. <http://www.factoryschool.org>)

THE IDEA OF ORDER AT KEY WEST

She sang beyond the genius of the sea.
The water never formed to mind or voice,
like a body wholly body, fluttering
Its empty sleeves; and yet its mimic motion
Made constant cry, caused constantly a cry,
That was not ours although we understood,
Inhuman, of the veritable ocean.

Most of the lines have a euphonious, if not melodious impact, on the listener, which is achieved not only through the wave-like iambic patterns but also through their rise containing a long-stretched vowel sound. By contrast, though, the vowels in the words “mimic motion” (l. 4) are contracted by the poet, and the consonance of the bilabial sound *m*, resounding also with “Made” in line five, almost crushes on the following repetitive alliteration in the words “constant cry, caused constantly a cry” (l. 5). The result, if simultaneously linked to the content of the poem, cannot be overheard: lines four and five produce a cacophonous effect, which is well achieved as it is embedded in a harmonious sound-environment. The unpleasant sounds of lines four and five echo their lamenting content, just as the more melodious touch and oral utterance of the first line give credit to the inexplicable quality of the undefineable spirit or the singing voice by the sea.

These few lines of the poem, when read aloud or heard, show extremely well that euphony and cacophony are not only achieved by a well-placed use of vowels and consonants, but also through “repetitions of sounds, as well as a harmonious variety of them” (GLC 1983, 110). Moreover, all sorts of echoing devices such as onomatopoeia, alliteration, assonance, and consonance are integral components in the creation of euphonious and cacophonous effects that can also be intensified by particular rhythms and intonations in an oral performance of a poem.

Rhyme and Repetition

Repetition helps the participants collaborate with the progress of the piece, sometimes so deeply they may feel that they and the piece are two aspects of one process.

(Burrows 1990, 77)

Glenn W. Most argues that “[p]oetry tends to privilege structures based on easily recognizable repetitive units in which similarities and differences can be played against one another” (Most 1993, 545-553). For example, alliteration, such as the phonetic repetition of the consonant *c* in Wallace Stevens’ “The Idea of Order at Key West”, plays an important role in terms of achieving a cacophonous effect that reflects an incomprehensible crying.

Repetition can occur on the level of “sound, syllable, phrase, line, stanza, or metrical pattern” (PEPP 1974, 699). As regards sound and syllable, phonetic repetitions can be organized in various ways: either in

metrical systems based upon the lengths of vowels, number of syllables, or stress in pronunciation. Of all phonetic possibilities of achieving a repetitive sound effect, rhyme is the most obvious one. Rhyme, whether as internal rhyme or end rhyme (masculine or feminine), plays with the highest possible degree of a “concordance of segmental phones” (Wimsatt 1996, 189-194).

As regards the connection between sound, created by rhyme, and meaning, Glenn Most points out that “[a]ll words have sounds but rhyme creates the illusion of meaningful relations of similarity and opposition between words and related sounds” (Most 1993, 546-553). Similarly, W.K. Wimsatt explains: “[t]hey impose upon the logical pattern of expressed argument a kind of fixative counterpattern of alogical implication.” (Wimsatt 1954, 153) This also accounts for the fact that rhyme raises the recipient’s expectation of a meaningful or clever connection between the two rhyming words; an expectation that is introduced by the sound of the first word and has to be fulfilled by the meaning and sound of the second word. It is due to this expected or implicit sonic-semantic relationship that we perceive rhyme as either dull or interesting. In performance poetry rhyme is occasionally used to aid rhythm, as in most spoken word poetry that is influenced by hip hop; it can also be used to create a humorous effect that works with certain rhyme clichés.

There are other ways of building repetitive units: syntactic repetitions (e.g. parallelism, anaphora, refrain) are used in a great number of poems. To name but two: Allen Ginsberg’s poem “Howl” or Walt Whitman’s “Leaves of Grass” contain an abundance of anaphora, “the repetition of the same word or words at the beginning of several successive sentences” (*PEPP*, 37) and parallelism, which can be defined as “the state of correspondence between one phrase, line or verse with another” (599). The following extract from “Leaves of Grass” (Book I, 21) illustrates this:

I am the poet of the woman the same as the man,
And I say it is as great to be a woman as to be a man
And I say there is nothing greater than the mother of men.
[...]
Smile O voluptuous coolbreathed earth!
Earth of the slumbering and liquid trees!
Earth of departed sunsets! Earth of the mountains misty- top!
Earth of the vitreous pour of the full moon just tinged with blue!
Earth of shine and dark mottling the tide of the river!
Earth of the limpid gray of clouds brighter and clearer for my
sake!

The comparative “as-structure” in the lines above reflects a state of correspondence through parallelism, which produces an emphatic effect

that the speaking voice makes use of in order to express his equal relatedness to men and women as a poet. Further on in the stanza, a sequence of highly picturesque apostrophes of the earth follows, which is initially addressed in an exhortative way: “Smile O voluptuous cool-breathed earth!” In addition, the anaphoric structure creates a chanting, rhythmic effect that sustains the consecutive apostrophized painting of the Earth. Both constantly repeated techniques, parallelism and anaphora, are typical of rhetoric and songs of praise.

A further unique example of repetition is Gertrude Stein’s poetry. Kenneth Koch points this out in his anthology of modern poetry, *Sleeping on Wings*: “Because words are used mainly to ‘make sense’, it seems strange to use them in a completely different way, as Gertrude Stein did” (95). Just one imitation of her style, best known by her endless repetitions, would reveal its music-like charm and “hypnotic technique” (Robson 1981, 12). According to Lynn C. Miller,

Stein developed a method of written description from her observations of what people revealed about themselves in the repetitions of everyday speech. Built on conversation, Stein’s writing is innately oral and is most clearly apprehended in performance. [...] It demands to be heard. (Lynn C. Miller, 1993, 154)

The curious effect of Stein’s poetry is that her poems gradually develop meaning through repetition and the “subsequent creation of connotative meanings” (Miller 160). The meaning of her poems unfolds itself much better when heard than read.

This shall be conveyed by a discussion of the following lines, read by Gertrude Stein, which are a short extract of her poem “If I Told Him: A Completed Portrait of Picasso” (1923). The poem has an interesting history which is worth investigating, since it follows a portrait of Gertrude Stein, painted in 1906 by Picasso (cf. Stein 1970, 25). Both artists were well acquainted with each other, but their long friendship was marked by a few breaks (cf. Rodenbeck 1995, <http://www.showgate.com/tots/picasso/picstein/html>).

IF I TOLD HIM: A COMPLETED PORTRAIT OF PICASSO

[...]
As presently.
As exactitude.
As trains.
Has trains.
Has trains.
As trains.
As trains.
Presently.

Proportions.
Presently.
As proportions as presently.
[...]
One.
I land.
Two.
I land.
Three.
The land.
Three.
The land.
Three the land.
Two.
I land.
Two
I land.
One.
I land.
Two island.
As a so.

Although one might mistake the words “I land” for a deviant pronunciation of the word “island” at a first listening, some background information about the portrait is enough to reveal in an epiphany-like way that in this extract “Stein’s language rhythmically and verbally imitates the physical movement of training for the ring” (Rodenbeck 1995). In fact, Pablo Picasso was very fond of boxing, which may explain why Gertrude Stein made use of this topic in this poem. Just like Picasso focuses on a particular posture and facial expression of Gertrude Stein from a cubist perspective, Stein portrays the self-motivating thoughts of a boxer, who is mentally involved in his physical training, using repetitive lines. The imagined hits of the opponent come across as though they are virtually being carried out. This effect is achieved by the timed repetition, the exact counting of the three-, two-, and one-time hits and by what the listener associates with these repetitive lines. The speaking voice in the poem comes across as highly motivated, concentrating on tactics and precision, which reflects in the intonation and a focused use of language. The motivation seems to be based on the dynamics between training and bodily proportions, as the “result of physical exercise” (Rodenbeck 1995), that can only be achieved through hard and repeated training.

The idea of this extract, a portrait of boxing movements serves to illustrate that repetition is not only used to emphasize meaning, or to deduce meaning; it can also be used to create a particular rhythm that would be

achieved through a repetition of stress put on particular recurring syllables. This rhythm in turn corresponds to movements, such as, for example, boxing movements. As the following section will show, even basketball movements can be imitated orally, this time largely through the rhythm and words linked to this sports game. Thus, sounds of words and their associations which they evoke do not only enhance meaning, but have the potential to *create* meaning.

Rhythm and Meter

*The rhythm
The rhythm
The rhythm
Must be on
A mission.*

Tracie Morris (*Listen
Up!* 1999, 89)

Poetic language, static as it may appear on the piece of paper, often produces a remarkable effect when we listen to it, or when we read it with a sharp ear for rhythm: it releases its kinetic tension and evokes in the listener the feeling of music or movement, or both. This raises the question about how this effect is achieved. The basic rhythmic unit of a poem is the syllable. Robert Pinsky points this out by saying: “a syllable is stressed or unstressed only in relation to the syllables around it” (Pinsky 2000, 12). In other words, stressed syllables stick out acoustically more than unstressed syllables. The more syllables there are accented in a regular way, the higher the level of meter. The basic metrical unit, the foot, consists normally of one accented syllable plus one or two unaccented syllables (cf. Perrine 1956, 149). Consequently, differences in rhythm, depend on how many feet there are in a line (e.g. ten in a pentameter, twelve in a hexameter etc.) and which of the syllables are accentuated. Hence, in traditional, metric poetry a poet strictly focuses on a conventionalized number and accentuation of syllables in order to achieve an equally conventionalized rhythmic pattern. To name just a few: the iamb (first syllable unstressed, second stressed), the trochee (first syllable stressed, the second unstressed) as compared to a spondee (with an equal distribution of accent over both syllables), or anapest (two unstressed, one stressed) (cf. Perrine 1956, 150).

As already pointed out, the difference between rhythm and meter is a matter of degree: “[i]f meter is regarded as the ideal rhythmical pattern, then rhythm becomes meter, the closer it approaches regularity” (*PEPP* quoted in Perrine 1956, 496). This corresponds to Robert Pinsky’s aural

close-up of rhythm, as he states: “rhythm is the sound of an actual line, while meter is the abstract pattern behind the rhythm” (Pinsky 2000, 52). Unfortunately, meter has become a term which, especially for pupils and students, evokes the act of silently counting accented and unaccented syllables in all the lines of a poem on a page. Yet, one should not forget that “in reality, metrical verse grew out of oral traditions and still connects us with those traditions” (Steel 1994, 222). Therefore, meter should be seen as something that “augments, extends, and organizes our hearing of speech rhythm in such a way as to intensify our experience [...]” (Stewart 1998, 34).

Furthermore, the potential of the individual foot to enhance meaning is fairly small. Its impact in a poem may be compared to the effect of individual bars in a song which are only important in relation to the overall effect, creating a specific melody and rhythm. The effect when two unstressed syllables come together is to “speed up the pace of the line” (Perrine 1956, 171) and, conversely, two stressed syllables that come together slow down the line. This is always an effect that is felt in relation to other syllables.

Regarding the number of syllables in a line, though, Abbe points out that “a regular tetrameter (four feet to the line) [...] can drive home emotion and color with greater efficacy than the pentameter (since the pentameter, more sober, is better fitted for the contemplative and cerebral)” (Abbe, 1965, 38). Preferences in the choice of meter vary. Blank verse (unrhymed lines based on a norm of five iambic feet) has had a predominant role in English poetry (cf. Pinsky 2000, 98). This can be attributed to its likeness to ordinary speech which frequently contains an iambic pattern.

Furthermore, rhythm works as an emotional stimulus and raises our attention about what is going on in a poem. Occasionally rhythm has also the power to distract us from the content of the poem, if we let ourselves be intrigued by it, which is a phenomenon that we are more familiar with in pop music, for example.

In 1912 Ezra Pound, who defined rhythm as “a form cut into TIME” (*ABC of Reading*, 198), decided in “A Retrospect”, together with Hilda Doolittle and Richard Aldington, on three principles, of which the last one was “to compose in the sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome” (Pound 1973, 36). This marked a decisive shift of poetry back into the field of music, which is analyzed in detail by Timothy Steele in his book *Missing Measures, Modern Poetry and the Revolt Against Meter* (1994). To my perception, there are, strictly speaking, at least three diverging “disciplines” as regards meter and rhythm of a poem in the USA: first, poems with a traditionally metrical rhyme from Colonialism until the beginning of the 19th century, such as those by Edward Taylor and Anne Bradstreet (both writing predominantly in iambic pentameter) and, al-

though more experimental and musical, for example Edgar Allen Poe's poetry; second, free verse, established in US poetry by Walt Whitman's poem "Leaves of Grass", which is characterized by rhythmic units created by repetitions, such as parallelism and anaphora, natural speech patterns, and the unusually long line, which blurred all restricting, traditional metrical conventions; and, third, the modernist poetics of Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot, for whom "No verse is *libre* for the man who wants to do a good job" [...] and "the best free verse comes from an attempt to get back to quantitative meter" (Hall, 1978, 224). This may sound confusing, but the crucial difference between traditional metric poetry and Pound's poetics is that Pound postulates: "[d]on't make each line stop dead at the end, and then begin the next line with a heave. Let the beginning of the next line catch the rise of the rhythm wave, unless you want a definite longish pause" (Pound 1973, 40). This corresponds to Olson's theory of "Projective Verse" (1951) and the role of breath in poetry.

In the twentieth century free-verse has largely been considered to be *the* characteristic verse form of the age. This explains why conventionally rhymed poetry is nowadays often considered as dated, although a revival of rhyme (as near rhyme, end rhyme or internal rhyme) is strongly noticeable in hip hop music, which is due to the fact that rhyme usually aids rhythm. Regarding how poetry might change if it is written in free-verse, the poet Amy Lowell points out:

That it [*verse libre*] may dispense with rhyme, and that it must dispense with metre, does not affect its substance in the least. For no matter with what it dispenses, it retains that essential to all poetry: Rhythm. (Lowell 1971, 23)

Yet, what is free verse and how does it contribute to a poem's meaning? According to the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*,

free verse is based not on the recurrence of stress accent in a regular, strictly measurable pattern, but rather on the irregular cadence of the recurrence, with variations, of significant phrases, image patterns, and the like. Free verse treats the device of rhyme with similar freedom and irregularity. (PEPP 1974, 288)

The two essential characteristics of free verse can be summarized as being more speech-like, "more natural than regular meter, [...] innately democratic or even revolutionary". Secondly, it "suggests that measure varies with the idiom by which it is employed and the tonality of the individual poem" (289). This corresponds to what Easthope calls "intonational meter" and Perloff calls "mimesis of actual speech" (Perloff 1990, 138).

Thus, one could say that poetry in the USA today has, broadly speaking, developed its own free verse (or rather freely-voiced) poetic language that has many affinities with the rhythm of every-day speech, but also with jazz, blues, and hip hop. A free verse that is open to these

influences (music- and otherwise) allows a considerable freedom in accurately using rhythm as a meaning-enhancing device, since any kind of rhythmic pattern in our life can be vocally imitated – at least to a certain degree.

After this short discussion of rhythm, meter and tempo, I would now like to analyze a short extract of Quincy Troupe performing his “Poem for Magic”. Quincy Troupe has written several collections of poetry, such as *Choruses: Poems*, and he also ghost-wrote the Miles Davis autobiography. He has released several spoken word CDs and has received two American Book awards, a *Peabody Award* and the *Heavy Weight Champion of Poetry* Title (cf. <http://www.oshkoshnews.com>).

POEM FOR MAGIC

Take it to the hoop, “magic” johnson
Take that ball dazzling down the open lane
Herk and jerk and raise your six foot nine inch
Frame into the air sweating screams of your neon name
magic “johnson, nicknamed “windex” way back in high school
‘cause you wiped glass backboards so clean
where you first jucked and shook
and willed you way to glory
a new styled fusion of shake and bake energy
using everything possible you created your own space
to fly through-any moment now we expect your wings
to spread feathers for that spooky take-off of yours
then shake and glide till you hammer home
a clothesline duce off glass
now, come back down with a reserve hoodoo gem
off the spin, and stick it in sweet popping nets
clean from twenty eight feet right side
put the ball on the floor “magic”
slide the dribble behind you back, ease it deftly
between your bony stork legs, head boobin
everywhichway.
Up and down, you see everything on the court, off the high
Yoyo patter, stop and go dribble, you shoot
A threading needle rope past sweet home to kareem
Cutting through the lane, his skyhook pops the cords

[...]

(from: <http://www.angelfire.com/ak/goldenstarshine/troupe.html>; cf. also:
<http://www.factoryschool.org>)

In the extract above, the beginning of the poem “Poem for Magic”, Quincy Troupe makes use of sounds and rhythm, in order to imitate the dribbling and scoring in basketball. In particular, the collision of sharply accented plosives *t*, *b*, *p*, and *k* contributes to the imitation of the very sound of playing basketball, which is characterized by very rapid movements, fast tempo but also slower intervals that leave time for quick considerations about how to trick the opponent. The variations of slow and fast movements in basketball – in other words, shifts in tempo – are projected into the language of the poem through rhythm. Perhaps it should be mentioned here that Quincy Troupe was one of the best basketball players in his highschool (cf. <http://www.sandiego-online.com>). Everyone who plays basketball knows how quickly one internalizes the rhythm of the game. Much of the effects achieved in the poem will have come naturally to Quincy Troupe by transferring the rhythm of the game onto the page, as well as by activating them in his oral performance.

To give a few examples, the first line, evokes the rhythm of dribbling the ball, including a short interplay of dribbling the ball with one hand, then shortly with the other; a change of the ball could take place at the word “magic” and “johnson” (l. 1). On the CD, the stress in the first line is equally strong and dynamically distributed over each syllable, which would call for the term spondaic, even though there is audibly a slightly stronger stress on the word “take” and “hoop”. The long vowels in the “trochaic” patterned line “take that ball dazzling down the free way” evoke the picture of the “Magic Johnson” running with large steps toward the basket, where he swiftly tricks players from the other team, and is told to “herk and jerk” which are two onomatopoeic words that by its sound suggest physical contact and friction. Furthermore, the vowels in the words “and raise your six foot nine inch” (l. 3) are particularly stretched in Troupe’s reading, which contributes to the wishful effect of the audience that Johnson may raise his long body and score. This expectation is heightened by the effect that the vowels in this line slow down the rhythm of the poem.

The following lines reveal even more the style of a live sports report, a mixture of encouragement, a telling of “insiders” about the legend Johnson, and a quick observation of a game. The comments about the basketball star when he was at school are spoken in the same rhythm as the description of the sports movements. The speaker is so much involved in the (imagined) game that the rhythm of the game has entirely taken over his speech rhythm. The extract of the poem climaxes in the description of a score by Johnson: “his skyhook pops the chords” which sharply echoes the scoring (l. 25).

The poem, if it remained on the paper, would miss much of its rhythmic quality. Thus, just as it would be boring to read sports commentaries,

instead of listening to them, the recipient has to hear this poem in order to fully appreciate its rhythm and meaning. As Quincy Troupe explains in an interview about the composition of poems to be read out aloud:

[The] poet is not thinking about crafting the poem for the page. At the same time, performing is altogether a separate issue from crafting a poem for the page. You can draft a poem for the page and when you go to *read* that poem, then the whole challenge is, whether it's a sestina or it's a sonnet, whatever it is, you want to make that poem *live in the air*. (<http://sandiego-online.com/entertainment/sdwm/novdec96/inter.stm>)

Tone and Pitch

Tone and pitch play a decisive role in what Quincy Troupe calls making the poem *live in the air*. The following two definitions will explain why:

Tone - or intonation - is used specifically to refer to those modulations of voice which we use to convey certain emotions or meanings above and beyond those denoted by the actual words used. [...]. [T]one can convey meaning which may modify or even contradict the literal meaning of what is said. (Furniss 1996, 184)

Pitch, according to the *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, is "highness and lowness of tone" [...]. It is sometimes roughly described by the terms acute (high) and grave (low), and is often indicated by musical notation." It is "one of the characteristics of spoken sound, the others being duration, loudness, and quality" (*PEPP* 618-619). Pitch, ranging from high to low on a vertical continuum, has also a horizontal quality that would reflect a certain expression of tone, since for example a lower pitch expresses emotions such as sadness, seriousness, or sincerity. In the same way a higher pitch can express hysteria, insecurity, or *angst*, to name just a few. This is linked to the fact that many ways of expressing our feelings through the tone and pitch of our voice come to us either as culturally or naturally acquired. For instance, the feeling of happiness, sadness, illness, discomfort, have their basis in some kind of biological adjustment which influences our voice. In poetry, though, very often other tones are used which are "primarily intellectual, [...] less instinctive and more literary in their construction" (Belooof 1966, 150). Thus, tone betrays the poet's attitude "toward the material or audience" and is "directly or indirectly tied to the author's purpose – to inform or instruct; to entertain, delight, or amuse; to convince or persuade, to inspire etc." (*GLC* 1983, 293). In this respect, the tone in performance poetry is a constructed tone that matches an imaginative emotional state of mind of the speaker in the poem. It is the task of the performance poet to use his or her ability to identify with this speaker and convincingly enact what the voice in the poem demands. Since this fictitious voice in the poem is subject to the interpretation of the

performer, it is one of the most important aspects of performance poetry that the performer is usually the poet him- or herself who gives voice to the poem's speakers. It is essential to note that especially as regards tone, the audience plays an active role in the perception of a poem. A contemplative tone of a poem, such as Robert Frost's poem "The Road Not Taken," may evoke similar reflections in the hearer. The dramatic, devastated tone of the speaker in "Undertaker" (cf. CD *Grand Slam!*) by Patricia Smith, has a shocking impact; a highly ironic and mocking tone, such as "My Pain Keeps Me Regular" by Edward Thomas Herrera (cf. CD *Grand Slam!*) has a very humorous effect.

Moreover the tight sound package consisting of tone and pitch can be wrapped in a rhythmic and melodious structure. Kohl explains that "[r]hythm can be sounded on a monotone, a single pitch; melody is the result of pitch patterns combined with rhythmic patterns" (Kohl 1999, 71). Although Burrows argues that the distinction between music and speech is "rooted in two different ways we have of making and shaping vocal sounds", spoken poetry makes use of pitch-patterns combined with rhythm, and "draws from a contradictory mix of these features typical of actual vocal performances" (Burrows 1991, 61-62).

The following extract of the poem "I Live For My Car", by Wanda Coleman, makes use of irony through an exaggerated voice full of overstatements by the speaker. Wanda Coleman has published several books of poetry, such as *Native in a Strange Land* (1993) and *Heavy Daughter Blues: Poems & Stories 1968-1988* (1988). She has received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Guggenheim Foundation (cf. <http://www.poets.org>).

I LIVE FOR MY CAR

[intro]

I live for my car.
Can't let go of it!
To live is to drive!
To have its functions move flawless.
To rise with morning and have it start.
I pray to the mechanic for heat again -
and air-conditioning.
When I meet people I used to know I'm glad to see
them until I remember what I'm driving and
I am afraid they'll go outside and see me
climbing into their struggle-buggy
and laugh loud deep long.
I've become very proficient in keeping my car running.

I visit service stations and repair shops often -
 which is why I haven't a coat to wear or nice clothes;
 or enough money each month to pay the rent.
 I don't like my car to be dirty.
 I spend Saturday mornings scrubbing it down.
 I promised it a new bumper and a paint job.
 Luckily, this year I was able to pay registration.
 I dreamt that my car is transformed into a stylish-
 convertible
 and I'm riding along happily beneath sunglasses,
 the desert wind kissing my face,
 my man beside me,
 we smile, we're very beautiful.
 Sometimes the dreams become nightmares
 I'm careening into an intersection.
 The kids in the back seats scream "Mama!"
 I mash down on the break.
 The petal goes to the floor.
 I have frequent fantasies about running over people
 I don't like with my car.
 [...]

Ah, to drive is to live!

(cf. *Our Souls Have Grown Deep Like the Rivers*, CD 2 Vol. 2, RR 2000)

In her performance Wanda Coleman slips into the persona of a woman from LA, who seriously praises her car and does not realize how ridiculous she appears. The tone of her voice reveals how much the car means to her and how much it attributes to her life-style. In fact, it seems to be the center of her life. Her enthusiasm affects the pitch in her voice, for example, when she describes her efforts of keeping her car running (cf. ll. 13-20). Furthermore, line 21 is interesting, as Coleman's emphatic intonation of the phrase "I dreamt that my car is transformed into a stylish-convertible" seems to imitate Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech.

In short, the poem, when listened to, conveys how extremely obsessed the woman from Los Angeles is with her car, which is predominantly conveyed through the tone and pitch in her voice and makes the audience perceive the piece as an entertaining parody. In addition, certain exclamatory lines (cf. ll. 2, 3, 29) stick out acoustically as they bring an exaggerated tone to the fore that is also expressed through a considerable pitch range within a certain sequence of words or even within one word, such as "Mama!" These words do not only alternate in their pitch range from high to low, but, also in their degree of volume.

When the poetically untrained mind reads the poem silently, it can easily happen that one reads it in a monotonous tone, as one may search for

“content-only” without being aware of the possible ironic tone and pitch of the voice in the poem. Of all sound components, tone, pitch and rhythm are probably the most difficult ones to imagine. Yet, only one single listening to the poem makes a tremendous difference in being able to hear the skillful vocal realization by Wanda Coleman, even if it is re-read silently.

Volume and Pause

A last characteristic of sounds in terms of meaning-enhancing effects is volume. Burrows points out that “the sound of the voice, its timbre and volume, can be read as an index of the vocalizer’s state of mind” (Burrows 1990, 12). In other words, a speaker who is angry will shout, a speaker who talks to a lover in an intimate situation will speak in a soft voice. Moreover, volume comes in degrees and can be used to emphasize important words, in particular with the help of a microphone that can be used in a playful way to catch and keep the attention from the audience.

A pause is not only the absence of volume, but the sound of silence produced by someone who does not talk. Pauses in performance poetry can be used effectively in various ways. Most basically, they are used to breathe and, in further consequence, to produce the friction in the vocal chords for the production of sounds. Pauses can create suspense before releasing a punch-line, or a highly amusing sentence; they can create a meditative atmosphere, introduce a new theme, or a change of thought. On the written page, a pause can be indicated by a particular line where the poet has left a considerable space at its end, or a space may be left within the line, or at its beginning. It is also frequently indicated by a dash or a comma. Most obvious, a pause is suggested between individual stanzas if they do not end with a run-on-line.

In performance poetry pauses are often made even though they were not planned originally, which is due to audience reactions (e.g. laughter, supportive or non-supportive comments, cheering, and applause). Sometimes a baby may cry, or someone may cough, or the poet may cough. Situations like that ask for a pause. If a pause takes too long, it may even result in a short break.

The following poem will be analyzed in terms of pauses that are infused by audience reactions and vice versa. It is called “Chopped-Off Arm” and was performed by its author, Hal Sirowitz, at the Fourth Annual National Poetry Slam in San Francisco in 1993. The information in the brackets below indicate a pause.

CHOPPED-OFF ARM

“Don’t stick your arm out of the window”, Mother said. [*clapping, laughter; the audience joins into Sirowitz’s predictable “Mother said”*]
“Another car can sneak up behind [*laughter*] and chop it off.
Then your father will have to stop, [*laughter*] stick the severed
Piece in the trunk, [*pause, suspense*] and drive you to the hospital.
[*laughter*]
It’s not like the parts of your telescope that snaps back on. [*laughter*]
A doctor will have to sew it. [*laughter*]
You won’t be able to wear short sleeve in the summer. [*laughter*]
You don’t want anyone to see the stitches.
And according to Jewish law, if your arm gets chopped off, you can’t just
throw it away, [*laughter*] but you have to bury it in a
cemetery because it’s considered a part of you.
And you can’t have a tomb-stone for your arm in New York,
[*long laughter! Pause*]
And then another one for your body in New Jersey. [*laughter*]
All the parts of you are supposed to be buried in the same place.
So if lost your arm when you lived in New York,
and then you happened to die in San Francisco,
your relatives can’t bury you there but
Have to fly you all the way back to New York.
So you’ll be reunited with your arm.
And just because you are dead, doesn’t mean
The airline will let you fly for free.” [*laughter, applause*].

(cf. *Grand Slam*. Vol. 1, 1996)

Hal Sirowitz well handles the audience-reactions in the poem, as he adapts his performance to the laughter of the audience, which means that the laughter and applause do not interfere with the voice. In this respect, pauses do not so much enhance the meaning of the poem but rather help it not to lose meaning because of very loud audience-reactions. In the performance, a certain recurrent pattern is recognizable that alternates between punch-lines, laughter, pauses. As such, pauses contribute to the interaction between the audience and the poet, especially in slam poetry. Volume, or rather, change of volume, plays a minor part in the poem, but a certain degree of loudness and the use of a microphone are necessary in order to be understood by a large slam audience of up to 1 500 people.

A performance poet who immediately comes to my mind because of his adept use of pitch and volume of his voice, is Carl Welden from Ulster County, New York. I saw his performance at the *Arts For Peace Festival* in New Paltz, NY, on 5 August, 2000, where he and other artists commemorated the anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima with poetry, dance and

music. The first poem at the occasion was “Find Your Voice” (his “warm-up piece” before every performance) which gave a listening sample of a wide range of possibilities of dynamic voice changes: from high to low, from loud to voiceless, as well as a consistent change of tone. The quality of his voice, as indicated in brackets, shall illustrate his variability in tone and volume.

FIND YOUR VOICE

Bababa bababa baba [*soft babbling, hardly audibly*]
Speak up, speak up! [*very loud voice*]
Don't strain my ears. [*very loud voice*]
Find your voice! [*very loud voice*]
HA HA HA HA HA HA [*laughter-changing pitch from loud to silent*]
The laughter in the grand-hall shakes inside the chest. [*loud voice*]
It rattles the ribs, rattles the ribs! [*loud voice*]
All the words I hear - [*changing pitch and volume with the rise and fall of syllables, slows down*]
sounds like they are turning off the turbine. [*slowing down, voice deepens*]
Does your brain connect to your spine? [*rise in voice, change of tone*]
Memories on a stick. That's all it is! [*alternating high pitch*]
Self-torturous [*coughing*]
The laughter in the grand-hall shakes inside the chest. [*loud voice*]
It rattles the ribs, rattles the ribs! [*loud voice*]
The voice may sound twice as strong but they can only talk for half as long. [*coughing*]
The laughter in the grand-hall shakes inside the chest. [*loud voice*]
It rattles the ribs, rattles the ribs! [*loud voice*]
Between every RISE and FALL. [*ascending, descending voice*]
There is a piece -
What have I told it is: a way to speak. [*singing voice*]
Because I better find a way to come speak [*singing voice, speaking*]
against things like television and video games [*stretched, vibrating voice, alternating pitch*]
A struggle with the language a struggle with the words. [*deep, loud voice, raising and descending voice*]
I pray to God. [*high pitch, loud voice*]
You understand. [*very deep voice*]
Why did I talk this way. [*medium volume*]
So don't give me this. [*medium volume*]
Bababa bababa bababa [*babbling, hardly audibly*]
Speak up! Speak up! [*loud voice, high pitch*]
The laughter in the grand-hall shakes the chest, shakes the chest. [*deep voice, medium volume*]
It rattles the ribs, rattles the ribs. [*medium volume*]
Find your voice. [*medium volume, affirmative voice*]

Listening to Carl Welden's poem "Find Your Voice" opens up one's ears to the importance of the potential and quality of the voice in performance poetry. Upon asking him about the importance of his voice in connection with the poem, he stated:

[t]his piece is like a request going out to the 'poets, etc.' in the audience who read without expression. It offers an explanation as to why I need to speak using dynamic voice changes. We performers have to compete with television and video games, otherwise what good is our message if no one pays attention. It's about the energy! Voice is my instrument and I must master the use of it. When I hear somebody read in an unlively manner, it almost hurts. I am trying to motivate them to really push themselves and brat out their bland style and be heard. (Carl Welden, 2001).

Most of his performance pieces require a very well-trained, strong voice, especially in solo performances, which often last more than an hour. The spoken word performances which followed his "warm-up piece", as for example "The Union", "Hooray For Our Side" or "A Short Essay on the Nature of Evil" show how much his poems depend on the great variability of sound changes produced by his voice.

Lionel Crocker comments on the variability of the voice and its training by saying quite emphatically:

the voice is like an orchestra. It ranges high up, can shriek betimes like the scream of an eagle; or it is low as a lion's tone; and at every intermediate point is some peculiar quality. [...] It has in it warning and alarm. It has in it sweetness. It is full of mirth and full of gaiety. [...] It ranges high, intermediate, or low, in obedience to the will, unconsciously to him who uses it; and men listen through the long hour, wondering that it is so short, and quite unaware that they have been bewitched out of their weariness by the charm of a voice but by assiduous training made to his second nature. Such a voice answers the soul, and it is its beating. (Crocker 1962, 15).

Further aspects of performance other than the voice and its sounds will be discussed in Part III of this book, "The Page versus the Stage". With this current part I hope to have given some insight into the most relevant aspects of the aural nature of poems, in particular as to how their voices and sounds come to *live in the air*.

PART III: The Page versus the Stage

“The Pagers” : The Writing Poet

In the publishing world of cyberspace and hypertext it is not surprising that there are millions of pages written and read whose words have never been spoken or heard at all. In addition, the number of sound files of poetry keeps rising, and there are electronic poetry archives, such as the *Electronic Poetry Center* at SUNY Buffalo that contains an incredible collection of sound poetry and visual poetry. There are also radio and TV stations that broadcast poetry on the Internet, as well as video clips of performances that may be viewed (e.g. <http://www.e-poets.net>). Yet, much poetry on the Internet is still predominantly published in a silent medium that curiously illustrates how a written voice from all over the globe come to life in a text by reading it. In addition to the Internet, traditional forms of publishing poetry are constantly rising too. In each case, the reader's auditory imagination is challenged by providing a suitable voice for the speaker, or speakers, in the poem. What I would like to point out is that there are many poets who never personally interact with the recipient of their works other than by writing a poem, storing/ publishing it in an appropriate medium (e.g. a book, magazine, e-zine, or on a personal homepage).

Still, when characterizing the writing poet, one needs to locate him or her in an interaction between the poem and the recipient. Since theoretical approaches to literature differ considerably, I will refer only to some basic yet important features. First, most poets use writing as a means of storing and exploring poetic language. Even slam poets who want to stage their poems, need to write in what Amiri Baraka calls “longhand” (Packard 1987, 305) on the page; frequently the type-writer, or the computer is used. Second, the crucial difference between the “stager” and the “pager” is that the latter has no intention or choice of facing the audience in person, and sometimes not even through the published page. Third, just as the author becomes a fictional writer through the means of writing as well as through the dynamics of language in the text, the reader, too, can only be seen as a fictional reader that encounters the writer in a world of writing. This process is easier to follow when reading a newspaper article. In “real” fiction, the picture is somewhat different, as the writer becomes a less transparent agent in the whole process of writing to fuel the imagination of the reader through the text.

Poets whose primary intention is the exploration of the world and the self through writing have a tendency to write in a highly elaborate, often descriptive, abstract, contemplative, or self-reflective “literary” style. This idea is confirmed by James McCorkle in *The Still Performance* (McCorkle

1989), where he draws attention to the possibilities of an articulation of the self through writing and an exploration of the written language. Obviously, “the written form of language is not a simple transcript of its spoken form” (Hawthorn 1987, 62), but rather a written version of what can be put into speech. Furthermore, as has been pointed out in Part I of this book, writing sharpens our analysis, because we are constantly visually confronted with what we have brought to paper so far. This all adds up to the important activity of people to explore and manifest themselves (or rather, a fiction of themselves) as well as imagined ‘others’ in writing. Taking this one step further, I would argue that because of the fact that these writers have no primary concern in communicating their poems orally and personally to other people in a live situation, their interactive role is “restricted” to letting the reader explore a fictional speaker’s view, action and experience by decoding the poet’s writing. Such mental exploration is very much subject to the power of the reader’s auditory, visual and cognitive imagination, which varies from reader to reader, and even from reading to reading.

This makes it clear why it is not always possible or necessary to equate the speaking voice in the poem with the poet as a real person. Johanna Drucker points out:

[w]ritten work is always a remove from the writer, cast into an autonomous form, not dependent on the presence of the author as a performance. In fact, there is every possibility of hiding, eclipsing, effacing, or disguising the writer through writing. One of the great virtues of the print form has been its capacity to conceal gender and other aspects of physically apparent identity – all those characteristics that contributes to the aurarctic whole of the poet as persona in a real-life performance. (Drucker 1998, 131)

A direct communication with the live audience may not necessarily present a more “authentic” picture of the poet. In other words, the speaker *in* the poem cannot be directly linked to the speaker *of* the poem. Yet, on a formal level a decisive change takes place, which is based on the fact that the poet presents the audience with an audiotext that can only be heard once. Interestingly, Charles Altieri observed that whereas the traditional modernist emphasis was on impersonality (i.e. formalism, overtly mythical themes and constructs, the use of persona, and a stress on complex and paradoxical statements), the contemporary aesthetic asks for participation and prefers the direct; the local, the anti-formal (cf. Altieri 1973, 605). This is particularly noticeable in slam poetry in which poets make use of colloquial language, repetitions (the most common stylistic device in oral poetry), short sentences and additive structures. The use of these formal devices goes hand in hand with the fact that the audience has only a limited amount of time to engross in the meaning of a certain poem.

The complexity that is involved in the reading or hearing of a text in relation to understanding it, is described by Birch as follows:

[a]nalyzing how a text means involves a much more dynamic activity, whose underlying theory suggests that meanings aren't simply 'put into' a text by a writer/speaker, but are constructed by the reader/hearer. That does not mean that the writer/speaker has nothing to do with the text – what it means is that the only way of constructing a reading for a text is through our own socially determined language as reader/hearer. (Birch 1987, 21)

Although we all decode writing as the sounds of a real voice, I believe that not all readers are trained in being able to decode the rhythm or the tonal quality of a poem which, if not actually heard by the poet, is subject to personal interpretation. People who have a well-trained auditory imagination alongside a visual and cognitive imagination, experience poetry as a

[w]riting that seduces, persuades, argues, comforts, contradicts – [a] writing resembling speech but speech with impact: poetry can display all these tones in its register. It aims to throw a charge between two points: one, the subject, topic, piece of the world, and the other the reader's responsive imagination: the space in the mind that responds to sound and image. It persuades, comforts, argues, finds a voice, makes use of rhythm, rhyme and forms of sound-quality with that imagination primarily in view. (Mills 1996, 70)

Poetry can display all these tones in its register only if they are created by the reader, and this does not only account for intonation, but also for rhythm, pitch, stress, duration, and vocal intensity. Thus reading a poem engages the recipient differently compared to listening to it. Reading is often seen as an activity as opposed to listening, which is arguably passive. One equally has to train one's listening skills of poetry in order to be able to experience and respond to it, if not "coparticipate in its creation" (Nick Piombino 1998, 68). This response is equally a subjective one as a reading response, because "[t]he listener tends to 'fill in' or weave into any elliptical speech act his or her internal experience" (54). A print-bred society will have more difficulties really listening to a poem than an oral society. In that respect, Amy Lowell states that "we moderns read so much more than we listen, that perhaps it is no wonder if we get into the habit of using our minds more than our ears [...] with the result that our imaginative, mental ear becomes absolutely atrophied" (Lowell 1971, 10).

Further basic characteristics of reading versus listening are summed up by Paul Mills, who states:

If the poem is read silently on the page, the reader can read at his own pace; he or she controls the reading and can repeat it or go back over passages within the poem. Most reading is this backtracking of that sort, and many writers would probably hold that if this is the case then something vital is missing: the link that connects poetry with the sound of a speaking voice. If the reading is controlled by an outside source – the actor or speaker reading to an audience –

then the audience is subjected to that control and must listen or lose out. (Mills 1996, 67)

Taking this one step further, one might argue, as Anthony Easthope does, that the reader “in fact produces the poem in a present reading, just as actors and technicians produce a play from a script” (Easthope 1983, 47); the comparison does not seem quite justified, though, because silent reading lacks something of the real-life of a person speaking the poem aloud.

Furthermore, the written poem *when read* does not reveal on the outside what is being received introspectively in the reader, namely, a communicative situation. Since “poetry is always *a* poetic discourse” between the author’s speaker in the poem, and the reader, this silent situation, too, is a “social fact” (Easthope 1983, 19). Or, as the poet Diane Wakoski states: “[t]he poem must speak to someone or it is silly. It is like talking to yourself in the kitchen. But if it speaks to one person, then it is a poem. We all hope, of course, that many others will be listening in” (Wakoski 1999, 154). The crucial difference between a silent discourse in the world of reading and a live performance is that it lacks something of a communal atmosphere that surrounds poetry events. One’s own attendance takes the perception of poetry to a different level. In a simple way, this means that we engage with poetry individually as well as with other people’s receptions to the poem by joining in their laughter or applause; we also experience the poet as a living artist.

Nevertheless, I support Easthope’s statement that poetry is *always* a poetic discourse with the argument that poetry preceded the invention of writing, and although we gained new ways of expressing ourselves through the technology of writing, whatever is expressed in a poem still resembles language in its spoken form; language has always been used for the purpose of communication. The only exception are perhaps poems that are written for oneself under the same psychological premise as the singing of a song can ease one’s mind, or the painting of a picture can have equally “therapeutic” effects. Here the discursive effect is more placed between the process of writing the poem, the finished product, and the poet. Yet art, always, is expression and therefore communication.

Moreover, Easthope points out that “English poetic discourse is constructed to offer an absolute position to the reader as transcendental ego”; yet, whether this effect will be achieved depends very much on the reader’s mental construction of the voice in the poem. In other words, “however much a poem claims to be the property of a speaker represented in it, the poem finally belongs to the reader producing it in a reading” (47).

On a psychological and cultural level, what happens in this interaction between the poet and the reader through the poem is

a way of exploring states of mind unavailable to us in day-to-day living, and this has been one of the traditional justifications of the reading of literature: it expands our sympathy for other people and our understanding of the world by encouraging the free (or freer) play of the imagination. (Hawthorn 1987, 112)

As will be seen in the course of Part III and Part IV, there are poems where the social interaction between the author, poem, and recipient change dramatically. At present it will, I hope, suffice to say that poets who do not want to establish a personal interaction with a live audience are more likely to produce stylistically elaborate, descriptive, abstract, contemplative, or self-reflective poems; yet the message (and the way the message is expressed) may come to the fore with all its impact in the reading recipient. If we read with a powerful visual, cognitive and auditory imagination, we experience that “[r]eading a poem is like walking on silence – on volcanic silence. We feel the historic ground; the buried life of words” (Hartman, quoted in Birch 1993, 87).

“The Page-Stager” : The Writing and Reading Poet

With this category of poets I aim at referring to a large group of poets who are more or less equally engaged in writing their poems as well as reading them to an audience, but who do not, as Charles Bernstein puts it, understand the poem as a “performative event” (Bernstein 1998, 9). This refers not only to the way that the poet presents him- or herself to the audience, but also to a lower potential and degree of performative articulation of the poem.

As to the nature of poetry readings it is difficult to define what exactly happens at poetry readings which have institutionalized themselves in the cultural life of European and US societies. Peter Middleton sketches an ordinary reading by saying quite ironically:

A person stands alone in front of an audience, holding a text and speaking in an odd voice, too regular to be conversation, too intimate and too lacking in orotundity to be a speech or a lecture, too rough and personal to be theatre. (Middleton 1998, 262)

There are many poets who write poetry and need to have poetry readings in order to promote their books and foster their career. Established poets are often public celebrities and they enjoy reading their poems to an audience. When Middleton characterizes the poet in the above situation, it seems to me that the oral articulation of the poem by the poet remains in a certain frame that does not transgress the idea of doing anything with the poem but read it out aloud. Even if the poet is a magnet for the audience, the poem itself would not be affected, which is to say that poetry readings may stage the poet but not the poem.

The *New York Quarterly* points out in the introduction to an interview with Allen Ginsberg that

[e]ach time a poet stands in front of an audience, there is an unconscious theatrical element which comes into play. And because of this theatrical element, poetry readings tend to spotlight the poet, not the poem. (*NYQ* Spring 1991/Nr.6, 2)

For example, Ezra Pound, who has made major postulations in the first decades of the twentieth century as regards language as a “means of communication” and “inducing emotional correlations by the sound and rhythm of speech” (Pound 1934, 63), “did not read his poems but his scholarship” (Hall 1991, 58). And bard Walt Whitman, grand father of the Beat Generation, according to David Hall, “lectured on Abraham Lincoln more often than he read ‘Lilacs’”(ibid.).

Today, just as in pre-print times, for many poets “readings have become the primary form of publications. Reading is a making-public, an utterance which is far more immediate than any other form” (Hall 1976, 189). One obvious reason for the growing number of readings, in particular since the early 1950s and Dylan Thomas, has been financial. Dylan Thomas, whose three American tours between 1950 and 1953, according to Brinnin, “were to bring to America a whole new conception of poetry readings”, too, claimed ostensibly that his motive for reading was simply financial; this may be true, but it sounds like an understatement regarding his talent that made it difficult for the listener “to know which gave greater pleasure, the music or the meaning” (Gentile 1989, 181). Listening to Dylan Thomas, therefore, makes it difficult to distinguish between a *read* poem and a *performed* poem. On his American tours, Thomas *performed* his poems, even though he never seems to have had the pure intention of writing his poems in order to perform them. Yet, the oral realization of his poems had a high emphasis on the articulation of the sounds of his poems, even if, to him, reading/performing them was only one part (art) of his job as a poet.

Poets who were, or are, fairly equally engaged in writing and reading their poems, are Sylvia Plath, Robert Creeley, X.J. Kennedy, Galway Kinnell, Seamus Heaney, Robert Lowell, Donald Hall, Louise Glück, or e.e. cummings. Although these poets present their poems in a well-articulated way, which brings much of the meaning to the fore, or adds meaning in the total perception of the poem, their poems work also well for the silent recipient whose auditory imagination is well trained. This is, of course, not to say that the original voice of the poet, or of any other person who would orally interpret the poem, can be mentally constructed with the same sound quality. T.S. Eliot, who was an intensive public reader, had an interesting career, as Don Cusic points out:

As a “performer”, Eliot lacked the necessary dramatic skills to project his personality – or a facet of his personality – from the stage to an audience

success for most of his life. Only in his final years, when he had become a public figure and realized that people came to see him as a celebrity and institution rather than a poet, critic, playwright, or anything else he had accomplished, was he effective from the stage. (Cusic 1991, 64)

A differentiation between an *orally read* and a *performed* poem can be made in terms of the artistic intention of “staging the page”, and, since this may be debateable, on a formal level. Yet, if one considers such motivation or intention, those poets who fairly equally value writing a poem and reading it publicly could be called “page-stager”; those poets whose primary goal is to write for the stage – “stagers”. Therefore, poems heard from “page-stagers” may contain the same complex imagery, diction, self-reflective mode and all other features that are inherent to the poem of a writing poet; after all, this poet *is* a writing poet who makes his or her poems audibly available to the public, either in a live-reading or as a sound recording. Nevertheless, each poet’s career has its own dynamics; therefore individual styles in the composition of poems may vary considerably. In other words, not all poems that are not primarily “written-to-be-read” will reflect a highly analytic diction. Nevertheless, Altieri points out that “the custom of poetry readings has become very influential and has led away from complex meditative poetry to a more oral, communal style” (Altieri 1973, 605).

Once again, it should be stressed that it makes a considerable, though varying, difference whether a poem is heard or read before it enters the mind of the recipient – in particular on a sensual, psychological, and social level.

“The Stagers” : The Performing Poet

In his essay, “Preparing for Popularity: Origins of the Poet-Performer Movement”, Paul H. Gray points out two decisive forces that were responsible for the rise of the performer-movement in the second half of the nineteenth century in the United States.

First, he attributes the creation of an audience (though predominantly a reading one) for poetry to a number of poets, among them Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, James Russell, John Greenleaf Whittier, and Edgar Allan Poe as the most influential one whose poetry was recited and sold all over the country (cf. Gray 1986, 35). Among these poets, only Poe would have liked to have a performing career and yet, according to Paul H. Gray, he was “constitutionally incapable of mastering the organizational details that such a career required” (37).

All of the poets above can be seen as forerunners of the later performer-poets in terms of using every-day subject matter in many of their poems. Descriptions of rural and social life continued to be highly popular among

the poet-performers James Whitcomb Riley, William Carleton, Vachel Lindsay, Robert Frost, and many others, who all set out as performing poets very early in their career (cf. Gray 1985, 36). The reason for the choice of rural topics may be attributed to the fact that these poets wrote for an audience that had predominantly a rural background. In other words, writing for their target group of lower and middle-class listeners meant writing about instances that reflected their every-day-life concerns. Gray points out that between 1870 and 1930, “the petite bourgeoisie - farmers, merchants, salesman, and housewives - [...] flocked by thousands to hear these poets perform” (Gray 1985, 1).

The first poet to attract a national audience off the page was William Carleton from Detroit, who was very much in touch with people from all ranks, but especially with rural people in the neighboring towns. The public taste, it appears, asked for “Carleton’s creative energy of the unrelenting realism of his subject matter, such as divorce, financial failure, old age destitution” (5).

William Carleton, one could argue, was the forerunner poet of what soon would be acknowledged as popular culture, the precursor of the mainstream-poet of the twentieth century. He had a potential to reach an audience through his physical presence, through his voice, direct appeal and diction, which was deeply rooted in orality. It does not come as a surprise that today his poems, stuck on the written page, no longer get their original acclaim. Paul H. Gray points out that “[w]hat continues to go unappreciated are those qualities of Carleton’s verse which derive from its orality: its didacticism, its strong narrative, its frequent recourse to local diction and dialect” (Gray 1985, 7). The same characteristics apply to James Whitcomb Riley’s poems, whose exceptional performing career will be discussed in Part IV of this book.

The second important factor that helped the poet-performer movement was “the development of a profitable system for delivering public entertainment to American cities across the continent” (34). If one thinks back to the last few decades of the nineteenth century, it becomes clear that at this time a system of transportation was only just being established to bring audience and performer together. As Peter Revell points out, “it was a period of phenomenal growth of railroad mileage, so that countless little towns and villages in far-scattered rural regions were linked to the great cities and with one another” (Revell 1970, 146).

Another influential person in the shaping of a performance-poetry-scene was, according to Gray, James Redpath, who opened the Boston Lyceum Bureau at 35 Bromfield Street (cf. Gray 1985, 39). This lyceum and many others, in particular in New York or Chicago, were used to book “comedians, elocutionists, public curiosities, and most significant for this study, poets who could delight audiences with their skills as performers”

(Gray 1985, 40). No less a person than Ralph Waldo Emerson was managed by James Redpath. Gray stresses Redpath's importance in helping the performer-movement develop by saying: "[h]is involvement with the lyceum movement [...] had altered fundamentally the cultural life of the American middle class and paved the way for the poet-performer movement" (40).

Today, the organized reading, performing and performance of poems, which Donald Hall calls "poëbuisness" (Hall 1991, 64), is highly institutionalized in the United States. Hall states that in 1976 there were more than one hundred and twenty-five centers that sponsored poetry readings. The centers included the United States Poetry Forum in Pittsburgh, up-town poetry centers in Manhattan, or coffee houses in Berkeley. Especially city-readings, such as in New York City, LA., San Francisco or Detroit, thrive (cf. 61). Moreover, "[i]n New York City, according to the *Times Book Review*, 'in a given month there might be over three hundred [readings] at seventy sites – ranging from churches, to bars, small halls or college auditoriums'" (62). Zoë Anglesey, the editor of the anthology of spoken word poetry, *Listen Up!*, too, points out an enormous interest of large cities in live poetry events.

Today, the poetry scene flourishes at New York open-mic spots like the Nuyorican Poets Café, Brooklyn's YWCA Tea Party and Harlem's Sugar Shack. Progeny of hip poets – the Beats of the 50s and protest poets of the 60s and 70s – these and up-coming literati cast their diverse spells of word beats inspiring young contemporaries in Cleveland, Ohio, Los Angeles, Washington D.C., and Atlanta; later branching out internationally to poetry circuit venues in Tokyo, Rio de Janeiro, London, Paris, Berlin, Amsterdam, and Istanbul. (Anglesey, 1999)

Apart from a concentration of poetry readings and performances in urban environments, there are also small communities, as for example Woodstock NY, where – traditionally – poetry has always played an important role. For example, poetry readings and performances take place every week at "The Colony Arts Café" (hosted by Phillip Levine), as well as at "Joshua's" (hosted by Shiv Mirabito). Both venues attract performance poets from within the community but also from all over New York State. Moreover, since the year 2001 the Woodstock Poetry Festival takes place each August, where internationally celebrated poets like Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Billy Collins, Kate Barnes, Robert Kelly, and Anne Waldman, just to name a few, attract a large audience from all over the country (cf. <http://www.woodstockpoetryfestival.com>).

What these contemporary live poets can be credited with most is their high engagement in reclaiming poetry as spoken art that is fulfilled in a cultural context. As Garber points out:

The oral recovery involves a poetics deeply rooted in the powers of song and speech, breath and body, as brought forward across time by the living presence of poet-performers. (Garber 1995, 53)

Historically, performing poets like William Carleton, James Whitcomb Riley, Carl Sandburg, or Vachel Lindsay were not only performing out of a deliberate decision. Although their time paved the way for what became a mass culture that needed popular figures (cf. Cusic 1991, 11), it was rather that at the end of the nineteenth century

people listened then, partly because they could not read, and even if they could, there were so few books. With the age of printing, with the advent of a reading populace, poetry ceased to be chanted, ceased to be read aloud for the most part (Lowell 1971, 14).

What may be essential to note is that a poet-performer predominantly sees himself more as a performer who writes poetry than as a poet who performs, or at least as someone who is equally skilled in both ways. Cusic points out that James Whitcomb Riley, for example, “had always wanted to be a performer, playing for a short while with a medicine show, writing songs, playing his guitar, banjo and violin wherever he could [...]” (Cusic 1991, 2). As will be seen in Part IV, his poems spoke directly to the masses and appealed to them because of his many talents with which he performed his poems.

Later, in particular in the 1950s, with a revival of poetry readings, one of the main attractions of the poem was that it was spoken in an every-day-diction. In that respect, Mills points to the following:

[w]riting in dialect is one of the methods of drawing attention to the texture, and away from the abstractable meaning or message of a poem. Instead of the usual question: what does it mean? The preferred question should be: how does it speak? (Mills 1996, 68)

This question was pursued by the Beat poets who wanted to speak directly to the people. It is not so much the use of dialect, but other features linked to orality, such as use of repetitions, colloquialism, slang and idioms that were effective. The underlying aesthetics called for “participation far more than interpretation” (Altieri 1973, 605). Poets wanted to connect with people, and with the rise of the Beat movement there was a dramatic shift summarized by Donald Hall, who states that: American poets became “public lovers and private haters” (Hall 1976, 51).

As regards the use of *traditional* oral features by the Beat poets, Carl Thayer points out that he is skeptic about “claims by writers and critics of the movement’s debt to orality”. He expresses this skepticism by stressing that he doubts how “highly literate writers can participate in an oral tradition” (Thayer 1981, 101). The only poem which to him, on the surface at least, exhibits traditional oral features is “Howl”, which is rich in

mnemonic devices, has its share of redundancy, is additive, situational rather than abstract, emphatic and participatory and close to the human life-world (cf. 101-102).

In Part IV I will deal with the question of orality in detail by analyzing Allen Ginsberg's poem "America" at a performance in Santa Monica 1989. Meanwhile, I would like to point out the following: since spoken language is a very dynamic and changing medium for communication, it does not come to me as a surprise that we cannot find *all* traditional oral features in a contemporary performing or performance poem; needless to say, this is because most poets are literate. Yet, there is much evidence that a revived contemporary secondary orality culture has, for example, fueled the poems by the Beats and vice versa; just as new developments in performance poetry exhibit a continuation of an artistic oral and cultural spirit in a poetry of the twenty-first century in the United States.

"The On-Stage" : The Performance Poet

Since there are many different definitions of performance, I would like to point out Poirier's definition first, who states that performance "is an energy in motion, an energy which is its own shape [...]" (Poirier 1971, xv). This energy is made up of sounds, body movements, gesticulations, eye-contact, visual images (e.g. of the setting, graphics, videos, as well as of the poem itself in the mind of the performer and as the audience), and feelings triggered off by the rhythm. Theoretically this energy is in motion until the performance is over; yet even long after the performance has ended, this energy sticks in the minds of the audience and the poet in form of memories. As Robin Murray states:

the only memory which one can preserve is that of the spectator's more or less distracted perception, or the more or less coherent and concentrated system of its reprises and allusions. The work, once performed, disappears forever. (Murray quoted in Connor, 1992, 134-135)

Evidently, this phenomenon is based on the simple fact that there is a social gathering of people who watch – and often interact with – the poet in performance for a certain amount of time, until the poet stages a new poem or leaves the stage. This implies that the term performance may refer to a single performance of a piece or to the whole event. Jerome Hawthorn comments on the restricted time and space level of performance in which artists exert control over the audience by saying that performance artists "are limited by the constraints of an audience's ability to be in one particular place for a certain length of time, and by other physical constraints" (Hawthorn 1987, 109). The same applies to the poetry reading and the performing of a poem. But, as restrictive as this may sound, there is

much to gain out of poetry performance events with their multi-layered acoustic, visual and social dynamism triggered off by the presence of the poet. Moreover, it stresses the fact that the poet is physically, in particular vocally, challenged to present the performance piece that is judged in poetry slams by the audience. This asks from the poet decisively different skills than from a writing poet who does not physically stage the poem. For example, when the performance poet writes a poem he or she has to consider various performance aspects, as well as rehearse the piece before its performance. If the poet writes for a performance slam, the length of the poem must not exceed a certain time-limit of 3 minutes and 10 seconds. Moreover, the performance poet often needs to find an interesting sentence or two to introduce the poem. This may be a dedication, a serious introduction to the poem, or may even culminate in a spontaneous and funny rambling about circumstances in which the poem was written.

In this respect the poet transgresses a certain point in his or her articulation that moves from a loud reading of the poem to a highly expressive, performative articulation of the written piece. Apparently, the expressiveness of a poem in performance needs to match its content level.

Carbon points out important characteristics of the expressive nature of performance art which equally account for all kinds of performance poetry, exhibiting:

a dense web of interconnections that exists between it and the many intellectual, cultural, and social concerns that are raised by almost any contemporary performance project. Among them are what it means to be post-modern, the quest for a contemporary subjectivity and identity, the relation of art to structures of power, the varying challenges of gender, race, and ethnicity, to name only some of the most visible of these. (Carbon 1996, 7)

This calls for a further aspect of performance as a unifying activity that connects not only the above mentioned concerns of life but also, through the staging of these concerns, the artist with the audience. This thought is supported by Michel Benamou, who states that *performance*, “ ‘the unifying mode of the postmodern’, is by definition, an art form that involves [Aristotle’s] *opsis* [*spectacle*]; it establishes a unique relationship between artist and audience” (Benamou quoted in Perloff 1981, 289). Naturally, this relationship is not only established between the poet and the individual person in the audience, but “such performance is experienced by an individual who is also part of a group, so that social relations are built into the experience itself” (Carbon 1996, 199). Again these ties may be similarly felt at readings, or at the performing of a poem. Yet, apparently, the viewer and listener of a competitive performance poem is much more engaged with his or her senses at a poetry slam than at an ordinary reading. At a regular poetry slam or poetry jam, audience participation is guaranteed, as Maria Damon points out: “[t]hey marshall audience partici-

pation, ensuring the poet that there will be an audience right through to the end”, as compared to open mic-readings, which are often “attended only by the reading poets and their friends” (Damon 1998, 333).

Moreover, performance poets, such as Carl Welden from Upstate New York, make the audience an integral part of their performances, either by walking among them and establishing direct contact with them, or by making them co-poets when he asks volunteers to read sentences from cue cards, as for example in his “I’m So Sorry About What Happened To Your Mind” piece. In this poem two volunteers from the audience by turns read apologetic sentences from cue cards, while Carl Welden stages his poem, demonstrating an outrage against the apologies that are verbally fired off from his left and from his right.

As will be mentioned in more detail in the section about African American performance poets, the written poem in performance poetry often works as a score. Lorenzo Thomas goes so far as to see the written version as a pre-text to the audiotext of an oral performance of *all* kinds of poetry. He states:

[a]ll poetry is incomplete until it is read aloud. The idea that sophisticated readers can simulate this experience mentally, is of course, a longstanding article of faith that has been systematically assaulted by subsequent technological efforts to construct ‘virtual’ realities. Nevertheless, the poem printed on the page is effective when it functions as a memorandum to excite the reader’s recall of a previous performance, or serves as a score for future vocal reproduction. If the poet has done the job of preparing that alphabetic transcription well, she can be sure that the poem will live. (Thomas 1998, 320)

As argued in the section on “The Writing Poet”, I would not go so far as to say that all poetry is incomplete until it is read aloud; yet, there is an incredible number of poems that are written for the stage and therefore the written text represents a score that finds its vocal and physical realization in performance only.

In concluding this section on the characteristics of performance poetry and the relation between the page and the stage, I would like to add that a “pure stager” may not even *have* a written script that he or she works from in a performance. David Antin, for example, who has been influenced by the surrealists’ spontaneity, records his poems that are orally composed during his performance and only later transcribes and publishes them (cf. Garber 1995, 81). Such a poem would theoretically qualify as a primary oral poem or, as Antin calls it, “talk-poem” (cf. Perloff 1981, 289). Antin’s type of poetry, a poetry of no more margins, has been criticized as becoming pure content.

The following sections gives a survey of particular characteristics and poetics of different performance poetry movements in the USA – including some of their European influences.

Dada and Surrealism

At the heart of any attempt to characterize and understand Dada performance lies the need to articulate the notion of theatricality: the relationship among text, voice, and body, the nature of the extended space that binds stage and gallery, actor/player, and spectator/audience.

(John Erickson in *Dada: Performance, Poetry, and Art*, 65)

The development of modern performance art in the USA, if viewed on a larger scale, can be traced through various movements,

beginning with futurism, then proceeding to experimental theatre of the Russian Revolution, dada and surrealism, the Bauhaus, Cage, and Cunningham, happenings, Ann Halprin and the new dance, Yves Klein, Piero Manzoni, and Joseph Beuys, to body art and modern performance. (Carbon 1996, 79)

Rather than giving a broad historic and artistic survey of all these movements, I will just point out key-elements of Dada and Surrealism, which are essential to an understanding of the development of performance art in the 1970s, as well as other poetry movements in general.

Prior to the official beginning of Dada in 1916 with the opening of Hugo Ball's "Cabaret Voltaire", much of a (pre-) Dada spirit had already been transferred to the United States. According to Bigsby,

America had never really been in the vanguard of art nor even fully aware of European developments, until the photographer Alfred Stieglitz organized a number of exhibitions at 291 Fifth Avenue in 1913. It was here that the first American exhibitions of Matisse, Cézanne, Rousseau, Picasso and Picabia were held. (Bigsby 1972, 13)

The avant-garde movement Dada has to be viewed in the line of an "artistic re-examination which spawned such schools as impressionism, cubism, futurism and, more exotically, suprematism, rayonism, plasticism, vorticism and synchronism" (Bigsby 1972, 10). This re-examination resulted in

a total nihilism of art, which can best be illustrated by Tristan Tzara's recipe of how to compose a poem:

Take one newspaper. Choose from that newspaper an article of the length desired for the poem you intend to write. Cut out the article. Next cut out with care each of the words forming that article. Next put them in a bag. Mix gently. Take out one by one each excision in the order they fall from the bag. Copy carefully. The poem will resemble you. *Voilà*, there you are, an infinitely original poet of a seductive sensibility, even if still not understood by the vulgar. (Poggioli 1971, 190)

In this respect what Dada aimed at was "to suppress ordinary logical relationships between thought and expression" (*DWLT* 1970, 75). Furthermore, poetry was reduced to phonetics, and music to elemental sound, which was practiced by Hugo Ball, Tristan Tzara and Kurt Schwitters, among others. The center of their performances was, as Carbon points out, the cabaret:

[e]merging from bohemian haunts, the cabaret was the earliest podium for the expressionists, the DADAists, the futurists; it was a congenial forum for experiments in shadowgraphy, puppetry, free-form skits, jazz rhythms, literary parody, "naturalistic" songs, "bruitistic" litanies, agitprop, dance-pantomime, and political satire. (Carbon 1996, 87)

Moreover, similarly to the Beat poets in the United States in the 1950s, Dadaists felt that "live-reading and performance was the key to rediscovering pleasure in the art" (Goldberg 1988, 58).

As regards the exploitation of the expressive qualities of non-musical sound, Hugo Ball insisted:

We should withdraw into the inner alchemy of the word, and even surrender the word; in this way conserving for poetry its most sacred domain. We should stop making poems second-hand; we should no longer be content to achieve poetic effects with means which in the final analysis are but the echoes of inspiration; we should no longer take over words (not even to speak of sentences) which we did not invent absolutely anew, for our own use. (Bigsby 1972, 27)

The result was a new evaluation of sound poetry, which Hugo Ball claimed to have invented, but according to John Erickson can already be found in Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll's nonsense rhyme, as well as in Paul Sheerbaart's poem "Kikakoku" (Erickson 1984, 97). Ball's poetry was to influence experimental poetry of the American Walter Conrad Arenberg, the ethno-poetry of Jerome Rothenberg (cf. Part IV), the sound poetry of Bob Cobbing, or the acoustic cut-up pieces by William S. Burroughs (cf. <http://www.ubu.com>).

The technique employed by the poet was to "abandon words entirely, together with cerebral content, concerning himself with the basic elements of language – sound, intonation, rhythm" (Bigsby 1972, 27). Kurt

Schwitters has been credited with inventing the “Merz art” of sound poetry, which is a type of poetry performance that performs variations upon a limited range of materials. His poem “Wand” (“Wall”), for example, is constructed of thirty seven repetitions of the word *Wand* or its plural. Through these subtle sound variations, one is able to find form and symbolism that may be triggered by a constant attempt to search for meaning beyond the conventional meaning of the word. Moreover, his idea and realization of performance art is characterized by performing artists (poets, painters, sculptors, musicians, and actors) on the stage. Controlled by a leader, the so-called Merzer, the individual materials of performance produced by the artists are shaped into an art performance that was based on what Marcel Duchamp called conceptual art (cf. <http://www-camil.music.uiuc.edu>). According to Marcel Duchamp, in concept art “the artist is one who selects material or experience for aesthetic consideration rather than forming something from the traditional raw materials of art” (Carbon 1996, 101).

This Dadaist concept of language was also brought into relation with John Cage’s exploitation of “sound as a sense of the multiplicity of simultaneous experience which was the essence of life” (Bigsby 1972, 29). This concept found its expression in performances by Tristan Tzara, Richard Huelsenbeck, and Marcel Janco, who recited what they called ‘simultaneous poems’. These poems were to be spoken, sung, screamed or whistled simultaneously by several voices, creating at times unnerving and bizarre cacophonies.

Moreover, provocation, maybe the most aggressive form of audience involvement, was another key-element of the Dadaists’ performances, which “kept an edge on the audience’s temper, fueling a slowly rising exacerbation that, when threatening to erupt too soon, was cooled by an intermission” (Erickson 1984, 73). Such behavior grounds in what Tristan Tzara announces in his *Lecture on Dada* by saying: “I destroy the drawers of the brain and social organizations: spread demoralization where ever I go” (Tzara, 1922).

The movement officially died in 1922, to some extent because of “[w]hat had once shocked and stimulated now merely amused, while internecine struggles provided evidence of a growing introversion” (Bigsby 1972, 22). Yet, despite the movement’s official death, Tristan Tzara was aware of its influential and transformative quality:

Dada is state of mind. That is why it transforms itself according to races and events. Dada applies itself to everything, and yet it is nothing, it is the point where the yes and the no and all the opposites meet, not solemnly in the castles of human philosophers, but very simply at street corners, like dogs and grasshoppers. [...] It penetrates with the insistence of air into all the spaces that reason has not been able to fill with words or conventions. (Tzara, 1922)

The movement which succeeded Dada about 1924 was Surrealism, whose leading figure André Breton postulated two concepts regarding the composition of poems that were of influence to subsequent movements. First: *automatic writing* (cf. Poggioli 1971, 192). This term is applied to “pure psychic automatism by which it is intended to express, either verbally or in writing, the true function of thought”. (“Manifeste du Surréalisme”, Bigsby 1972, 38). André Breton himself also called it “a true photograph of thought” (Poggioli 1971, 192). A similar technique of writing poetry is found in Allen Ginsberg’s ideas “catch yourself thinking”, “notice what you notice”, and “vividness is self-selective”.

Moreover, as will be seen in Part IV of this book, Allen Ginsberg credits his use of interesting word combinations of “apparently unrelated objects, ideas” partly to surrealist poetry (Bigsby 1972, 60).

African American Performance Poets

*Nikki Giovanni was influenced by jazz ...
Amiri Baraka has been influenced by
jazz and blues. It's just that hip-hop is the
music of the day, and so, we're influ-
enced by it.*

(Jessica Care Moore in *Listen Up!* 1999,
xxi).

African American Poets, as for example Jean Toomer, Don Lee, Langston Hughes, Ntozake Shange, and Gil Scott-Heron, were and are building on a rich oral culture, song- and speechwise, that continues to be lived in a public and private performance sphere. According to Amiri Baraka, for these poets the printed version is treated as secondary, the oral tradition as principal (cf. Knight 1987, 135). This implies that composing the poem on a piece of paper is predominantly seen as a means to an end, a score that finds its realization only in live performance. Poets that apply the written poem as a performance score or chart with notable success are Nikki Giovanni, Sonia Sanchez, Jayne Cortez, Don Lee, Ntozake Shange and Amiri Baraka, among others (cf. Patterson 1991, 145). It is interesting to note that poems by these poets, as for example “Niggers” by Don Lee, are often peppered with performance directions, which are included in the margins, on how to vocally perform the piece. An analysis of such a performance poem needs to be carried out by focusing on how the text comes across in performance, rather than by reading it. According to William Cook, Lee’s popularity is “linked to his brilliant performance of

his poems, his close attention to black music, and his flawless ear for black speech” (Cook 1993, 661). His poems are usually not intended for a reader who would not be able to mentally perform what even its composer achieves only in live-performance.

Poems that blur the boundaries between poetry and music, reading and performance, make use of typography as a guide to performance, as for example “[t]he distribution of lines is used to create the rhythms and asymmetrical moves of jazz performance” (693). The mere idea of producing a highly literate text in the conventional sense would run counter to the rich oral culture that most African Americans are part of; they aim at expressing “their authentic voice of their own unique cultural experience” (675). This voice is at the center of song, chant and poetry. Linked to the argument above is the fact that a score usually works in many ways since it is very much subject to individual interpretation and improvisation. It can be replayed in a different register, altered in rhythmic patterns or with a changed voice (cf. Nielsen 1997, 39). In other words, the poem, taken as a score, cannot be limited to one mode of performance; the flexible nature of the voice in such poem cannot be fixed on a graphic level but has to be orated from the written score.

Because of the innovative typographic look of poetry on the page, as well as the difficult reading of slang words, Nielsen points out that African American poetry had often been viewed as “*outlantis*” (38) and therefore did not find its way into many anthologies. Apparently any dialect such as Harlemese slang, is written down in the vernacular that makes it hard to read for people who are accustomed to reading standard American English poetry. An example of a poem that uses repetition, a jazzy rhythm, slang and “hardbound idiom”, is Leroy McLucas’ “Graph” poem, which contains lines like “jackass jackknife jackoff jackscrew / jailbird jaywalker jazzer jeer jesse/” (113).

According to Williams Stewart, it took critics a while to realize that “African Americans who revealed the prosody of the language of their ancestors were not conceptionally deprived, only linguistically different” (Stewart 1970, 140); and above all, highly talented. Viewed from a historic point, it is essential to note that what had long been considered as unpoetic gained unprecedented approval in literary history in the 1920s when free verse began to be acknowledged as a new mode of writing. Although the mode of writing of many African American poets was different from what the free-verse of T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound was to bring about, the pure fact that writing became more speech-like and less bound to traditional meter gave African American poets a new certainty and acknowledgment. Although they had always worked largely within the African American oral tradition on all artistic levels, this artistic outburst was unprecedented, even if they were still separated from much of the rest

of the literary world in the USA. The success of the “New Negro Movement”, which later became the Harlem Renaissance, encouraged African American artists to celebrate their heritage and to become “The New Negro”, a term coined in 1925 by sociologist and critic Allan Leroy Lock. Poets that were associated with this movement were, among many others, Langston Hughes, Countie Cullen, Claude McKay, Angelina W. Grimke, Jessie Redmon Fauset, Nella Larsen, Jean Toomer, and Zora Neale Hurston (cf. Watson 1995, 8-10). Jazz and blues, it cannot be stated too often, were almost always an integral part of poetry performances in the 1920s and 1930s.

According to Nielsen, in the 1950s the cultural context of what had been an interracial and intertextual phenomenon, had much been forgotten (cf. Nielsen 1996, 176). Still, it is no surprise that the second major movement in African American Poetry, the Black Arts Movement in the 1950s and 1960s, which took on a firm political stance, was also a movement that was again fueled by jazz and blues. The crucial point is that although the Beats and African American artists both made extensive use of music, Langston Hughes, for example, criticizes Kenneth Rexroth, Ferlinghetti, and Kerouac, among others, for their lack of aestheticism. Meltzer, for example, states: “[...] Ferlinghetti and Rexroth were separate from the music, the jazz only background to the poem, not interactive with it” (177).

What is also important to note is that while the Beat poets had their individual, idiosyncratic public appearance despite their democratic and communal intentions, the Black Arts Movement was characterized by a more outspokenly collective art that consisted of striking diversity within unity (cf. Cook 1993, 676). The leading figure in the movement was Amiri Baraka, who adhered to his principle that “poetry is not, as art form, separate from the violent struggles of the people; it is and must be a weapon in that struggle” (687). Like the feminists in the 1970s, African American poets could take a political stance in public performance. This statement by Baraka cannot be viewed out of its cultural context, if one considers that the efforts and the struggle for equal rights in the first years of the 1960s culminated in the Civil Rights Movement (cf. Lapsansky 1970, 3). Furthermore, Raymond R. Patterson, partly quoting Henderson, points out:

The best poets of the 1960s, although influenced by those of the Harlem Renaissance, moved beyond them in challenging their community to view itself ‘in the larger political and spiritual context of Blackness’. Much better informed about their African heritage and no longer interested in writing protest poetry or proving their humanity through their performance in the arts, the poets of the 1960s attempted to speak directly, if not exclusively ‘to people about themselves in order to move them toward self-knowledge and collective freedom’. (Patterson 1991, 144)

Today, more than thirty years later, according to Yusef Komunyakaa, performances of Saul Williams, Patricia Smith, Tish Benson, Carl Hancock Rux or Tracie Morris seem to have been “directly transfused from the Black Arts Movement”. Yet, he also points out that although “the aesthetics are similar [...] the ideological conceits and transparent rage are less on the surface of the poetry of the 1990s”. Today performance poetry by African Americans continues to be political, colloquial as well as influenced by musical rhythms. Yet, rather than jazz and blues it now tends to be “free-styling á la hip-hop” (Anglesey 1999, xi–xviii). In other words, the poems would work as lyrics for any hip-hop production in a studio. Conversely, at poetry jams and slams, a poem that clearly sticks out as hip-hop through its rhythm as well as abundance of pair-rhymes often comes across as an *a cappella* version of a hip-hop song.

Beat Performance Poets

*Maximum information – minimum
number of syllables / Syntax-condensed
– sound is isolated / Condensed frag-
ments of spoken idiom best / Move with
rhythm, roll with vowels / Consonants
around vowels make sense / Semivowels
appreciate consonants / First thought,
best thought / Observe what’s vivid /
Notice what you notice / Catch yourself
thinking / Vividness is self-selecting.*

(Allen Ginsberg, from: “Cosmopolitan Greetings”, 1989)

These one-liners from Allen Ginsberg’s performance in Santa Monica on 25 February in 1989, sum up many of the basic ideas of the Beat poetics regarding the composition of poems. They reveal a close connection to the oral nature of poetry that has to come to life either by being performed or in performance. No other movement after World War II until the emergence of slam poetry in 1986 has brought poetry back to the platform and stage with more public success than the Beat Generation, reviving poetry as a cultural, social, and oral event.

The lines from above, “observe what’s vivid / notice what you notice / catch yourself thinking / vividness is self-selecting”, correspond to what Jack Kerouac saw as “undisturbed flow from the mind of personal secret idea-words” (Alfonso 1992 8). They recall André Breton’s first *Manifesto* from 1924, as has been pointed out in the previous section. This technique

of writing, coded in liberating free-verse, reflected the beat attitude that “every impulse of the soul, the psyche, and the heart was one of holiness” (Merrill 1988, 5), which is at the root of the concept of holiness of personal impulse in Zen Buddhism. More basically relating to the concept of orality:

[f]rom the Beats’ insistence on talking to each other came the revival of our recognition that poetry is not primarily something that exists flatly, two-dimensionally on a printed page, but is projected from within human organisms, within a human community. It can be, as Ginsberg maintained, ‘composed’ on the tongue. (Ball 1999, 244)

The movement originated in Greenwich Village, New York, but soon linked up with poets who had a similar “BEATtitude”, “beat” meaning “a shortened version of beatific or beat down” (*GLC*, 34) in San Francisco. Thus the Beats poets, most prominently, Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs, Jack Kerouac and Gregory Corso, and those who were involved in the San Francisco Renaissance (Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Gary Snyder), can be highly credited with spreading the awareness among a large audience in the United States that poetry, again, belonged to the people. In that respect, one should not forget earlier forerunners of the popular poet like Charles Whitcomb Riley or William Carleton; neither William Blake, Herman Melville, Walt Whitman, and William Carlos Williams, who all had a significant influence on the poetry of the Beats.

Allen Ginsberg saw himself as “a poet who specializes in oral recitation and performance”, as he explains: “we wrote in the tradition of William Carlos Williams’ spoken vernacular, comprehensible common language anyone could understand, coming from Whitman through Williams through bebop” (Rothschild 1994). In an other interview Ginsberg says:

I like to stick to something that is grounded in anything I could say to somebody, that they wouldn’t notice I was really saying it as poetry – intense fragments of spoken idiom, which is more musical than most poetry. Most poetry by amateurs is limited to a couple of tones, a couple pitches, instead of an entire range. The poetry I do fits with music because it has its pitch consciousness – the tone reading the vowels up and down. (Kubernik 1999, 259)

Not only the democratic American diction of Whitman and Williams can be found in Ginsberg’s poetry; also Whitman’s long sentence structure is used, including its frequent parallelism and anaphora, which are inherent to oral poetry. Furthermore, what is characteristic for the Beat Poets is their close connection to music, in particular blues and (bebop-) jazz, and even more so, their rebellious stance in society.

Regarding the affinity of poetry and music, it comes across as no surprise that poets would also make use of the more musical sounds of language in the composition of their poems. Ginsberg attributes the musicality of his poems to the vowel, “the musical assonance, the tone

leading the vowel, as Pounds calls it, that Kerouac gets from Thomas Wolfe and from Melville, and that I get from Kerouac and Hart Crane and Blake” (Holly 1999, 255). Ginsberg characterized the orality and musicality of the Beat Generation’s poetry as follows:

Instead of straight square metronomic arithmetic beat there’s the infinitely more musical and varied rhythmic sequences of conversation as well as the tones. ‘Cause if you notice, most academic poetry is spoken in a single solitary moan tone. [...] I think what happened is that we followed an older tradition, a lineage, as the modernists at the turn of the century continued their work into idiomatic talk and musical cadences and returned poetry back to its original sources and actual communication between people. (267-268)

Thus, not only the vocal sound itself is made use of, but also its tonal quality, its pitch range, as well as its particular accentuation in order to create a particular rhythm of the poem. A greater variability of aesthetic and interesting sound effects almost certainly guarantee that the listener is attracted to the sounds of a poem and will listen to the content more willingly, almost being lured into its soundscape. That way the Beat poets achieved two things simultaneously in their performances: on the one hand, a lively, often ironic, expressive atmosphere that was taken in as an enjoyable, entertaining event; on the other hand, a critique of the Cold War situation and a conformist, conventional America.

Important to note, the first public upheaval in the history of American poetry “as voice not as printing” (Charters 1993, 584) after World War II marked Ginsberg’s reading of “Howl” at the event “Six Poets at the Six Gallery” in October 1955, organized by the “neo-surrealist” Lawrence Ferlinghetti. It was not only the manner of speaking employed by Ginsberg at this public reading that caused a scandal, but also the outspoken subject matter of the poem, which was even taken to court as being obscene, but eventually protected by the Constitution of the United States.

William Burroughs’ prose readings, too, fueled the popularity of the Beats. When he read from *Naked Lunch* and “scabrous opuses, he performed them in character to hilarious effect” (Austin 1992, 8).

I would like to conclude this section by saying that the Beats, who are credited with re-popularizing poetry readings in the United States, further developed the spirit of writing poems in order to perform them or, accompanied with music, to stage them in performances. Interesting to note, Jack Kerouac was the first Beat poet who tried reading to jazz accompaniment at live performance in 1957.

Apart from jazz and blues accompaniment (which was a direct consequence of the African American influence) they were also known for reciting with combos; not to forget, Allen Ginsberg made the harmonium his legendary trademark.

As to the continuation of an enormous interest in the Beat Generation by the public throughout the 1980s and even until up today, Ginsberg speculated:

maybe it's the actual expression of emotion that interests people who have been deprived of emotion, and not really able to express their erotic joy or grief for a long time, under the Reagan and Bush repression era. (Ginsberg in Kubernik 1999, 268)

Part IV of this book will focus on a performance of Allen Ginsberg in Santa Monica in 1989, where more about his poetics will be viewed in the light of this event.

Performance Art

In performance art, a piece isn't performed; the performance is the piece. The work of art is whatever happens within a set of conditions the artist has laid down. (Menand 1999)

The statement above recalls Marcel Duchamp's idea of conceptual art as discussed in the section on Dada and Surrealism. In fact, the early twentieth century's interest in "developing the expressive qualities of the body, especially in opposition to logical and discursive thought and speech, and in seeking the celebration of form and process over content and product" (Carbon 1996, 80), has re-emerged largely in the performance art movement of the 1970s. Therefore, performance art is often viewed as belonging in the traditions of the European avant-garde; its heritage is traced from "futurism through dada, surrealism, happenings, and the poem-paintings of Norman Blum and Frank O'Hara" (Carbon 1996, 80).

If one looks at early performances in the 1970s, it becomes evident that in its first manifestations, as for example by Chris Burden or Vito Acconci, performance art was almost exclusively linked to "operations of the body" (102), and was therefore body art. This focus on the physicality of the artist gave the whole performance movement, if viewed in its historic line, a new direction because of its unprecedented elaborate dimension. Still, the bodily had already been used by Futurists, Dadaists and Surrealists as a provocative means to shock the public. It became an integral part of the "Living Art" scene in the United States (Black Mountainists, Live Art, Happenings, The New Dance) between the 1930s and 1970s, the European artists Yves Klein and Piero Manzoni in the 1960s, and later Herman Nitsch in Austria, too, marked a change, using bodies as living art objects, as "affirmation of the body itself as a valid art material" (Goldberg 1988, 147). As regards poetry, the body was turned into a medium, as for

example by Vito Acconci, whose “body poetry” (Goldberg 1988, 159) could be described as the expression of a poetic statement that is achieved by means of his body. In his “Following Piece”, he followed people on the street until they disappeared into a building. On a conceptual level this type of poetry recalls Yoko Ono’s poem “Imagining Flowers”, which she creates by lining up a series of empty flower pots (cf. Hall 1976, 56). Secondly, apart from the strong focus on the body, performance art in the 1970s took also a different direction, or further development, by its use of a multi-media texture that found its realization through technological developments that had been achieved around that time. Marvin Carbon sums up the basic characteristics that were inherent to many different kinds of performance art since the 1970s, such as

being provocative, unconventional, a multi-media texture, drawing for its material not only upon the live bodies of the performers but upon media images, television monitors, projected images, visual images, film, poetry, autobiographical material, narrative, dance, architecture, and music; an interest in the principles of collage, open-endedness or undecidability of form. (Carbon 1996, 80)

In the late 1970s the term performance art became more and more restricted to “[p]erformances that have little or no linear narrative, particular those that involve mixed media (such as film and video)” (Gaar 2000, 9). It is interesting to note that maybe because of the unprecedented use of technological devices in the late 1970s and 1980s, many performance artists, as for example Laurie Anderson, initially were not aware that what they were doing had a rich and complex history (cf. Goldberg 1998). In fact, in 1981 Laurie Anderson, who came out of an avant-garde tradition, performing for a small audience, “led the way across the invisible divide between high art and popular culture” (Goldberg 1998). In 1974 Anderson performed “‘Duets on Ice’ on the streets of New York, standing in skates with blades frozen in ice, playing cowboy songs on the Self-Playing Violin – an instrument whose music unwinds from magnetic tape loops” (McKenzie 1997). Today, almost thirty years later, she has produced numerous multi-media shows that have entered the domain of mainstream popular art through Warner Brothers. As Goldberg states: “[h]er highly produced concerts of the ‘80s radically changed expectations about the quality of performance for audience and artists alike” (Goldberg 1998, cf. also Part IV). More important, Goldberg states that by 1979, performance art had

lost its conceptual framework and became money-oriented media-art in a media-driven world, an avant-garde art for the masses. [...] the move of performance toward popular culture was reflected in the art world in general [...] and a quite different mood of pragmatism, entrepreneurship and profes-

nalism, utterly foreign to the history of the avant garde began to make itself apparent. (Goldberg 1988, 190)

Feminist Performance Poets

Once literature begins to serve as a forum, illuminating female experience, it can assist in humanizing and equilibrating the culture's value system, which has historically served predominantly male interests.

(Cheri Register in: *Feminist Literary Criticism*, 19)

In feminist performance poetry, the “forum” that is mentioned in the quote above, can be regarded not only in abstract terms, but rather historically as a real cultural public space that is used for performances and poetry readings. These usually take place in cafés or bars, in parks, book shops, lecture halls, public libraries, schools, market squares, and various other locations that host poetry. Through her public appearance, the feminist poet can directly establish contact with her audience, which is fundamentally necessary in order to create a visibility of the feminist poet and her concerns.

Stephan Z. Athanases points out, “feminist poetics have likewise contributed to a lessening of the distance between poet [speaker] and reader [listener] and likewise suggest reasons why performance may serve as an integral feature of some poems” (Athanases 1991, 123).

Apparently, the female voice did not exclusively gain an audience through poetry alone; rather, feminist poets were part of a larger movement that spoke out for a women’s liberation in the 1960s and 1970s. According to the *Glossary of Literature & Composition*, women's liberation was “begun over a century ago to free women from social, sexual, political, and economic discrimination.” (GLC 310). Since it is not possible to come up with one single definition of *feminist*, I would like to refer to what seems to be at the core of all feminist ideologies, namely, “women [...] turning their loyalties, sympathies, and affections to themselves and to each other in their mutual interest”; correspondingly, feminist poets have committed themselves to “changing the ways in which they function in society” (cf. Oles 1991, 175). Although I presume that the reader will be familiar with the general history of the Women’s Movement in the USA, I would like to point out that the efforts of the Black Feminist Movement, having probably the most difficult stance in liberation politics, grew out of, and in response

to, the Black Liberation Movement and the lesbian/non-lesbian Women's Movement in the United States.

Despite this division between the Black Feminist Movement and the (predominately white) Women's Movement, there are two tendencies to be found in all feminist poets. On the one hand, they "express an intimacy characterized by mutuality, continuity, connection, identification, touch", on the other hand, feminist poems often "point to the nature of drama, experience, confrontation" (Athaneses 1991, 123-126). Athaneses characterizes Adrienne Rich's poetry by the use of a:

multi-inflected speaking voice together with the loosening of traditional poetic form [that] adds a degree of dramatic immediacy to the reading experience, giving the reader a feeling of involvement in an actual discursive event happening in the present. (Athaneses 1991, 123)

My thesis is that because feminist poets want to establish this intimate and direct link between a potential reader as well as a recipient in performance, there is great effort involved in writing poetry in a dramatic mode to convey feminist ideas and emotions. This thought is supported by Ntozake Shange, who sees poetry as

a collective experience it's the closest thing to the voice of the people you can get outside of the national anthem there's a lot of subterfuge where poetry is concerned we are forced to read it by ourselves poems shared by a lot of people change the entire ambiance of a group, but the audience is still themselves in fact they are closer to themselves writing poetry is more satisfying than writing theatre the beauty of words their sound can be heard and then read on the page [...] poetry works in books and on stage (Ntozake Shange quoted in an interview by E.K. Brown 1993).

Athaneses argues that if the poems are only read silently, the creation, or unfolding, of these poem in the reader's mind would run counter to the "notion of poetry as crafted and complete" (Athaneses 1991, 124). Although, this argument is debatable, it is true from the following perspective: a performance of these poems *adds* an essential dimension to their existence that cannot be experienced in a private reading, because what is achieved in performance by the feminist poet is "a phenomenological realization, a *living-through*, of the poem" (ibid., italics MP). Thus, this living-through is experienced both in the listener and in the live-speaker of the poem. Although a feminist poet can establish an intimate relationship with her reader who reads the book in private, the social and political message of a feminist poem comes across as a more directly social reality if the poet is seen and heard in a real life, communal setting.

Maybe because of the subtle psychology and the attempt to "evoke empathy between performer and audience" (Goldberg 1988, 74) that is involved in the whole issue of women's liberation, live-performance plays a major role in the movement. Garlington concludes that this effect is

achieved because “sounds of meaning are unleashed in performance thereby allowing mind, body, soul and psyche to revel in an altered, intensified state of appreciation” (Garlington 1999, 341). Therefore performances by the feminist poets serve as a subtle way of calling attention to all dimensions of the poem: the literary, activist, social and political; or, as explained by RoseLee Goldberg:

Performance became the most effective means for conveying ideas that emerged during consciousness-raising sessions-group discussions in which highly personal material was presented and discussed, and which became a continuing source for the feminist debate. (Goldberg 1998, introduction)

Although the cultural context of performance well serves the needs of feminists to express and convey their ideas, one should by no means forget the literary aspects of the poem, as Jerome Hawthorn points out: “[t]he recent development of the women’s movement offers us a useful illustration of the extremely complex interlinking of socio-historical and political forces on the one hand, and literary appreciation on the other” (Hawthorn 1987, 120).

Traditionally, poets who were or are labeled ‘feminist’ are, amongst many others: Edith Sitwell, Marge Piercy, Audre Lorde, Alice Walker, Gertrude Stein, Sylvia Plath, Adrienne Rich, Gwendolyn Brooks, Anne Sexton, Denise Levertov, Nikki Giovanni, Maya Angelou, and Ntozake Shange. (cf. Segnitz et al. 1973).

More recently though, with young poets like Alix Olson (National Slam Champion 1998), Rose Tully, Samiya Eving, Maggie Estep, and Karen Lee Osborne, it is important to note that in contemporary American performance poetry of the past few years, a new rise of feminist poets has begun to emerge that speak out more explicitly about their (sexual) experiences. This can be directly attributed to what slam poetry in 1986 began to achieve by providing many unestablished poets a platform to speak more openly and dramatically about personal experiences as representatives of what is still considered a fringe society.

Apart from slams in which the feminist poet can address the general public that consists of those who are interested in poetry slams, organized readings and performances by and for lesbian, gay and transsexual poets have taken place in the recent years, such as the annual “Pride reading for Chicago” that was first organized in 1997. Kurt Heintz points out that the two main purposes of these readings were

to introduce the lesbigaytrans community to its own writers, to affirm the connection between a tribe and the keepers of its sagas. The other purpose, as old as gay reading circles themselves, is to give people a place to meet each other and share their feelings freely, and to discover that they are not alone. An open-mike section has always been part of the program. (Kurt Heintz, <http://voices.e-poets.net/Pride2K/index.html>)

Last but not least I would also like to point out that the feminist voice in performance poetry is in the first place a *female* voice that offers the listener its characteristically different – because female – aesthetic soundscape; thus, not only the feminist’s language is gendered but also her voice. This is largely due to a generally higher pitch and a different sonorous quality of her voice. In full realization, and often accompanied by jazz, blues, soul or hip-hop rhythms, it becomes a *real* female voice, rather than an unknown female voice in a text on the page that is subject to our auditory imagination. No doubt, sounds produced by a female poet are unconsciously charged with cultural and social implications, just as a male voice is charged with different associations than a female voice. This simple fact, should again stress the importance of a live performance of feminist poetry.

Poetry Slams

In an age of technological change, slams and sounds are influencing the way we communicate with one another, the way we act out, and especially the way we write poetry.

(Jerry Ward, *The Washington Post*, August 1, 1999)

What is known as slam poetry in the USA originated in 1985 when construction worker Marc Smith began to sharpen the Chicago poets’ awareness of the competitive potential of poetry. More than anyone else, it was him that took organizational initiatives that were soon to create poetry’s most *living expression* in performance and changed the poetry scene in the United States. As Alan Kaufman points out: “[f]rom that point onward, the people’s poetry in Chicago – and then the world – had two distinct paths, one toward the stage and the other toward the page” (Kaufman 1999, 236). Despite the “newness” of this poetry movement, it has to be mentioned that “poetic competition [...] is a typical feature of oral societies” (Damon 1998, 335).

After the first poetry slam was staged in July 1986 at the Green Mill Club in Chicago, poetry slams began to spread to most major cities on the East and West coast, initially from Chicago to Boston, to San Francisco and to New York, where the first four annual National Poetry Slams were hosted. Four years later, Hermann Berlandt and Jack Mueller of the National Poetry Association organized a festival on a national scale in San Francisco, which, for the first time, included slam. At these annual

gatherings more than several dozen teams fight for the championship title, which is also given to individuals. In 2001, for example, 56 teams and 238 people competed against each other in Seattle – with approximately 1,500 people attending the event (cf. www.poetryslam.com). As to the nature of these social events, Lisa Martinovic points out:

slam is movement, reminiscent of its Beat movement predecessor, but one that has more deeply permeated the culture. It is a social phenomenon that – not coincidentally – embodies one of the most diverse communities on the planet. People from all ages, races and sexual persuasion come together to compete on a level playing field. (Martinovic, *San Francisco Chronicle*, 24 February 2000)

Poetry slams highly depend on and live from the dynamic interaction between performer and audience, between reciter and hearer. This interaction is fostered by the dependence of the poet on the audience and five judges, which are drawn on random from those who are assembled at the particular slam session. Thus, the situation does not only get more competitive than at normal open-mic readings, but also more spectacular. The poet may not use props or costumes and he or she is usually not seen as a character in a play. Each poet has three minutes and ten seconds to perform his or her poem and the score ranges from 0.0 – 10.0, of which the lowest and highest number gets dropped and the other three scores get added up for a final result that ranges between 0 and 30. The tension among the audience, the judges and the poets can get fierce, as John Waters states: “[b]y including the audience – by making them judges – slam readings replace a delicate conversation between poets and readers with an edgier dialogue between speakers and listeners” (Waters 1999).

Even more fierce, at heavyweight competitions, as for example between Patricia Smith and Sherman Alexie, the poets are asked to invent a poem in front of the audience. According to the rule, each poet must pick a slip of paper out of a hat – then improvise around the word chance has dealt them. After drawing the slip, the poet has thirty seconds to begin with the performance of the piece (cf. Molarsky 1999). This, no doubt, evokes Dadaists’ practices.

In order to fuel positive audience reactions, the slam poet must evoke a strong emotional response from the audience. Thus, Bacon concludes quite radically that “every performer knows that an audience makes a difference. Some performers make the audience the primary part of the event, choosing material only with the audience in mind, altering and emphasizing things ‘to make it work’ for the audience” (Bacon 1980, 6).

This accounts for the fact that “slam poems tend toward the controversial (sex, race, and politics figure in many) and range in tone from heartbreaking to hilarious” (Molarsky 1999). A survey of the subject matter of the final poems in performance at the National Poetry Slam in San Francisco in 1993 confirms this, as the content of the poems ranges

from the victimization genre of slam poetry, as for example “My Pain Keeps me Regular” by Edward Thomas Herrera, to (homo)sexuality with “Sex Goddess of the Western Hemisphere” by Maggie Estep and “Game Boy” by Regie Cabico as well as racial politics with “Dead Presidents” by The Invisible Man and “Takin’ The Train: The Blue Line” by Daniel Gray Kontar.

Others, such as X.J. Kennedy, maintain that the success of a slam poem does not so much depend on the poem but on the actual performance, the acting that is involved:

Slam poetry, it’s true, often does a healthy business nowadays. I deeply admire the efforts of slam to popularize their work beyond the college campus, but let’s make a crucial distinction: much slam poetry depends not on its text, as poetry that merely sees print, but on sheer acting ability. (Kennedy 1997, 75)

To my perception this seems far too critical as the main focus of poetry slams is at any rate put on what the audience hears and responds to, and usually not so much on what it sees. What Kennedy labels “acting ability” should rather be seen as a physical performance of poets that matches with the content of the poem; as such, the poems become “products of bodies and move through the air to other bodies – through voice out of stomach, chest, and mouth; out of foot-tapping, out of hand-gesturing” (Hall 1991, 74). The reason why Kennedy may regard the performance poem as a less elaborate poem, may simply be grounded in the fact that performance poems need to speak directly to the audience in order to be understood.

Furthermore, it is also interesting to note that each larger city, especially New York, Boston, and San Francisco with their long literary traditions, has created its own local color of slam poetry which derives from each community’s established writing prior to the advent of the slam (cf. <http://www.e-poets.net/library/slam>). Whereas the Nuyorican Poets Café in Manhattan, for example, has “gained a reputation for fierce competitions soaked in radical politics” (Waters 1999), slams in San Francisco seem to foreground the poem as an art piece rather than a political statement or activist’s work.

Last but not least I would like to mention that slam poetry has influenced both the underground literary scene and mass media, producing effects in cinema, television, the Internet and the press. One exceptional type of performance poetry, *spoken word poetry*, is often an integral part of poetry slams. There is a notion that spoken word poets, similarly to rap artists of the last decades of the twentieth century, will be the new “pop-stars” of this Millennium. In fact, “poetry is emerging as one of the fastest-growing niche markets for spoken-word audio” (Block 1996).

Saul Stacey Williams, who earned his M.F.A in drama from the New York University Graduate Program (cf. Anglesey 1999, 164), is probably *the* spoken word artist. He had a well-received performance on 5 May,

2001, at the Flex in Vienna, when he was on his tour through Europe to present his first solo album “Amethyst Rock Star” that was soon afterwards released in the USA. Interesting to note, in an FM4 radio interview in Austria on 5 May, 2001, Saul Stacey Williams states:

because music could be commercialized through MTV and all that it changed for a while but now people are getting hungry for meaningful, substantial art. People are hungry for substance – artists that *say* something and expose their true selves. (Saul Williams 5 May, 2001)

He sees that happening as a generation-movement in every aspect of culture in the United States, not just in hip-hop; concerning the poetry scene, he explains:

I come from this poetry thing, right, this spoken word scene, this poetry slam thing in the States – that is definitely a movement [...] and what that movement was about was basically about the lyrical evolution of hip-hop where a bunch of us started thinking about ourselves as poets. We took away the music and just focused on writing lyrics, amazing lyrics – and now we come back to music and add music and take it to the next level – lyrically, you know. So there is that – there definitely has been a movement, but you have to realize that the poetry scene, which is humongous, is not a black thing, you know, it’s cross-cultural, cross-gender – there is much more women involved in poetry than involved in hip-hop; and that’s where the movement is, especially in America where you have propaganda, where people keep telling you *just do it*, wear this, think this, buy this, do this – all of a sudden the poetry scene is the place where young people say: You know what, I can think for myself. I can decide for myself beyond what MTV tells me, beyond what CNN tells me, beyond what my parents tell me, beyond what the Billboards tell me, I can think for myself and that’s the movement, that’s bigger than hip-hop.

One more quote from the radio interview will explain the creation of spoken word poetry which Williams, having given a sample of his spoken word poetry, describes as the following:

So basically, what that does is, it puts spoken poetry like hip-hop, emceeing in a literary context as well. So that it is a mixture between what you would write as a poet and what you would say as an emcee. So that it has a life on the page in a book, or on the stage in the microphone, or on vinyl. It’s basically like a multi-media type of poetry in a sense, it’s the evolution of poetry, basically, you know, but it’s nothing new. I mean, poetry has always been recited. Most ancient poets have recited their poetry. That’s nothing new. What’s new is the microphone. And then what is also new is the influence of hip-hop.

Apart from his exceptional spoken word career, Williams’ largest project so far was the film *Slam*, in which he played the poet and prisoner Ray Joshua in the award winning film *Slam* (Cannes Film Festivals 1998; Sundance Film Festival), directed by Marc Levin. As stated in the *San Francisco Chronicle* “poetry shows up everywhere in this film [...] and turns it into an exhilarating and moving experience” (Graham 1998).

This part now leaves me to conclude with my personal view that slam poetry and spoken word poetry have taken an exceptional stance in the history of contemporary American poetry, and I remain curious to hear its future developments. It has largely reclaimed spoken language – fueled by hip-hop rhythms – as the basic constituent of poetry; it uses life performance to stage “words that are playful, experimental, artful, calculated, charged. Words that rhyme, tease and alliterate or smash up against each other in dissonance” (Molarsky 1999). And more than that, it is “a poetry of engagement and discourse – it celebrates and confronts” (Komunyakaa quoted in Anglesey, xiii).

Concluding Part III of this book, the chart on the next page is a short summary of various features of individual types of poems – from the written poem to the performance poem, each in relation to the poet, the audience, as well as in regard to its degree of orality and literacy. I adapted the chart largely from Gentile 1989, 190.

Performance Chart

	“The Pagers”	“The Page-Stagers”	“Stagers”	“The On-Stagers”
	High Value Placed on Literacy ←		→	High Value Placed on Orality
poet ↓ ↑	the writing poet writes to publish; no live interaction with an audience; contemplative, self- reflective	the writing and reading poet writes but occasionally presents the written work at live readings in front of an audience; studio recordings	the performing poet writes to perform in front of a live audience; historically a touring poet; works with his or her physical presence in performance; props and music possible	the performance poet writes for the stage and views text as a score; participates in a slam / jam; creates a physical / multi- media performance; no props or musical instruments in a poetry slam
poem ↓ ↑	the written poem exists as a graphic text; thematic density, elaborate, complex imagery and diction; exists as a silent performance in the mind of the reader	the written and read poem exists as a graphic text or audio text; same features as written poem; if heard, rather complex and difficult to understand at a first listening	the performed poem exists as a performative audio text; use of every-day language, dialect, idiom, slang; close to human life-world, situational, additive, repetitive, emphatic; use of phonetic iconicity, appeals directly	the performance poem exists as a performance text that is based on a score; socio-critical; expressive, idioms, slang, different voices, additive, repetitive, emotionally charged, appeals directly; rhythmic (hip hop);
recipient	reader reception subject to auditory/visual cognitive imagination; (re-)creates the poem; backtracking	reader reception or aural reception if heard, then interpretation, rather than participation; a “listening-into” the poem	aural reception of an orally performed poem by the poet; participates and engages in poetry as a social event	aural/visual/cultural experience of a poem as a performance; participates; judges the poet; decodes multi-media performance

PART IV: Off the Page in the USA

James Whitcomb Riley

Riley was, to his age, the entertainer par excellence; and in the last twenty years of his life, his work and his personality were exploited with great commercial acumen – but he was more than an entertainer. He expressed the spirit of the era in a way which made him increasingly 'beloved' by that age, and he expressed for it the [...] qualities of universal humanity, of solicitude and respect for the poor and the meek [...].

(Revell 1970, 21)

James Whitcomb Riley is considered to be one of the most popular performing poets of the late 19th century. During his life-time he was a popular attraction throughout America, and his reputation became international when he was asked to perform in England with Bram Stoker in 1891.

His exceptional national success as a performer is reflected in his life as a touring poet. Riley appeared in New York, Washington, Virginia, Georgia, Ohio, Kentucky, even on the West Coast and eventually in Canada, being on the road for several months a year. Initially he toured alone, and on his first six-month-tour in 1888 he was booked every single day. Yet, Riley always suffered on long tours, and he fell into depression and developed an alcohol problem. For a while he toured with his friend Bill Nye, whose health failed him after several years of touring, and Riley, who was personally affected by this, was no longer able to control his drinking. When his volumes of poetry matched the income of his performances, he was less dependent on going on tour to support himself (cf. Gray 1984, 7-9). Important to note, Riley reflected the spirit of his age to engage in poetry as a growing mass attraction that was based on an interest to see and hear a poet in a lively and entertaining situation.

Riley occasionally continued performing in the 1890s and 1900s when, according to Clinton-Baddley, the first sound recordings were already made; yet, technologically it was not possible to record poets at live-performances. Robert Browning and Alfred Lord Tennyson, whose voices had been recorded around that time, revealed the period's manner of

reading poetry. According to Clinton-Baddley, “[n]o one had thought for a moment of doing anything but capture the voices” (Clinton-Baddley 1965, 73). What the author implies in his narration about the historic sound recordings is that these poets were “paggers” – in other words, poets who had no intention to read their poems in a performative way.

By contrast, Riley’s poetry can be characterized by a style that lives upon and lends itself to live-performance. His success can be highly attributed to the colloquial style and rural diction of his poems, as well as their composer’s performing skills. The performing voice of James Whitcomb Riley, if it had been recorded in a live-situation, would have revealed what I can only attempt at showing by analyzing one of Riley’s most popular poems, “Little Orphant Annie” (*American Poetry. The Nineteenth Century*. 1993, 474-475). It was first published on 15 November 1885, originally as “The Elf Child”. Since there are no sound recordings of the performed poem available, I will aim at presenting the poem viewed from the perspective of being a secondary-orality-poem that was written to be performed.

LITTLE ORPHANT ANNIE

Inscribed with all Faith and Affection

To all the little children: -- The happy ones; and sad ones;
The sober and the silent ones; the boisterous and glad ones;
The good ones – Yes, the good ones, too; and all the lovely bad ones.

Little Orphant Annie’s come to our house to stay,
An’ wash the cups an’ saucers up, an’ brush the crumbs away,
An’ shoo the chickens off the porch, an’ dust the hearth, an’ sweep,
An’ make the fire, an’ bake the bread, an’ earn her board-an’-keep;
An’ all us other children, when the supper-things is done,
We set around the kitchen fire an’ has the mostest fun
A-list’nin’ to the witch-tales ‘at Annie tells about,
An’ the Gobble-uns ‘at gits you

Ef you

Don’t

Watch

Out!

Wunst they wuz a little boy wouldn’t say his prayers, --
An’ when he went to bed at night, away up-stairs,
His Mammy heerd him holler, an’ his Daddy heerd him baws,
An’ when they turn’t the kivvers down, he wuzn’t there at all!
An’ they seeked him in the rafter-room, an’ cubby-hole, an’ press,
An’ seeked him up the chimbly-flue, an’ ever-where, I guess;

But all they ever found wuz thist his pants an' roundabout:--
An' the Gobble-uns 'at gits you
 Ef you
 Don't
 Watch
 Out!

An' one time a little girl 'ud allus laugh an' grin,
An' make fun of ever' one, an' all her blood-an'-kin;
An' wunst, when they was 'company,' an' ole folks wuz there,
She mocked 'em an' shocked 'em, an' said she didn't care!
An' thist as she kicked her heels, an' turn't to run an' hide,
They wuz two great big Black Things a-standing' by her side,
They snatched through the ceiling' fore she knowed wahs she's about!
An' the Gobble-uns'll git you
 Ef you
 Don't
 Watch
 Out!

And little Orphant Annie says, when the blaze is blue,
An' the lamp-wick sputters, an' the wind goes woo-oo!
An' you hear the crickets quit, an' the moon is gray,
An the lightnin'-bugs in dew is all squenched away, –
You better mind yer parunts, an' yer teachers fond an' dear
An' churish them, an loves you, an dry the orphant's tear,
An he'p the pore an' needy one 'at clusters all about,
Er the Gobble-uns'll get you
 Ef you
 Don't
 Watch
 Out!

On a formal level, the poem consists of four stanzas of twelve lines each, with the consistent rhyme scheme: aabbccdeefgd. It begins with a dedication to children that was most certainly written as an oral introduction to the poem, preparing the often young and curious audience for what was to follow.

The repetitive sound of “ones” in this introduction, combined with the adjectives “little, happy, sad, sober, silent, boisterous, glad, good, and lovely bad” in the dedication, has an ironic undertone, which certainly bemused the adults in the audience and raised expectations among the little children, who felt directly addressed. Riley, who is famous for writing and performing children’s literature (cf. Revell 1970, 144), must have known the sensational longings of his young audience who still believed in

“Gobble-uns” (l. 8), meaning the ones who gobble/eat us. The first-person narrative poem, written in a fairly regular iambic meter (though with a varying number of syllables in each line), must have especially appealed to young children who probably felt a mixture of fear and pleasure induced by the poem. The exclamatory refrain at the end of each stanza contains some dramatic tension not through the words alone, as Riley would have certainly addressed the children, emphasizing the threat of the “Gobble-uns” with his body language as well as the tone of his voice. Although this is mere speculation, it seems to me the most natural way of performing these stanzas. Moreover, the fact that the written text triggers off a mental visualization and theatrical imagination of a possible performance in the reader’s mind, seems to be based on its language that encapsulates a lively performing voice.

The narrative frame of the poem, too, lends itself to performing the piece. In stanza one the performer tells the audience about “Little Orphant Annie”, who is of great help in the house. Lines five to seven introduce the exciting atmosphere when the other children “set around the kitchen fire an’ has the mostest fun / A-listenin’ to the witch-tales ‘at Annie tells about” (ll. 5-7). Stanza two and three take the listener directly into medias res of the stories that “Annie” used to tell. In other words, although the narrative situation stays the same, it becomes clear that these stories are those which “Annie” used to tell the children. The didacticism in these two stanzas, as well as in stanza four, is overt. Stanza two tells the audience about a “little boy [who] wouldn’t say his prayers” (l. 13), and therefore the “Gobble-uns” “seeked him” (ll. 17-18) in and up all sorts of places. Then the young audience is informed about that “a little girl [who] ‘ud allus laugh an’ grin” (l. 25) and did all sorts of nasty things was snatched through the ceiling by “two great big Black Things” (l. 30) as a consequence for her misbehaving. Stanza four continues the narration of Annie, retold by the narrator to behave in an almost fear-inducing manner (cf. ll. 38-40). Apart from being affected by a culturally induced superstition, many children are generally afraid of these supernatural powers; or, at least, believe in their existence. The implicit didacticism of stanzas two and three, just as the outspoken warning to the young children in stanza four to “better mind yer parunts, an’ yer teachers fond an’ dear” (l. 41), must have had a very entertaining and yet pedagogic impact on young children for whom oral poems and stories very much contribute to their orientation in life.

Moreover, the poem is spiked with alliteration, parallelism, an occasional internal rhyme, phonetic intensifiers and onomatopoeia, which produce a lively and spectacular effect if performed aloud. An example for onomatopoeia is the word “shoo” (l. 3), which lends itself to imitating the sound of frightening chicken off the porch.

The effect of liveliness is also achieved by Riley's use of dialect (the Hoosier dialect of Indiana), which is difficult to read in its written form. Speaking in the vernacular was a direct way of being accepted and understood by his large audience, which predominately consisted of farmers, their wives and their children. Its use contributed to what Revell points out by saying: "[e]stablishing the relationship of artist and audience is also a useful preliminary to the critical assessment of this poet's work" (Revell 1970, 24). Despite his reputation of being a popular poet, Riley was also well received in literary circles such as the Boston literary society. In that respect, Revell concludes:

In considering the work of James Whitcomb Riley, we are clearly involved with the question of 'popular' and 'élite' art – or with a 'popular' art which was also acceptable to an élite audience – at a time which may be regarded as the beginning of the modern period of mass audiences and the manipulation of popular taste by publishing techniques. (Revell 1970, 20)

Moreover, Paul H. Grey points out that what Riley's career reveals is that it had "aesthetic dimensions, [...] fundamentally shaped by performance." (Grey 1984, 11). His poems were written to be performed orally. Thus the poems would have worked almost similarly if, for example, parents had used the written poem as a score to read to their children, which was often the case with Riley's poems. This can largely be attributed to its every day diction and lively content that every enthusiastic mother or father could have performed with more or less equal success. Taking into account the didactic and social context of the performance, it is evident that the poem cannot work as effectively when reading it silently; not to forget, children would not even have been able to read it themselves.

The last three decades of the 19th century were thriving times for performing poets whose primary goal as performers was to publish their poems in front of their audience, sometimes consisting of up to 2,500 people at a single evening (cf. Gray 1984, 8). Only later, when Riley had established considerable fame as a performing-poet, were his poems, which would not lose their emphasis on oral diction, published in books and magazines.

With this analysis I hope to have shown that James Whitcomb Riley's poem "Little Orphant Annie", if viewed in its social context as well as formal composition on paper, reveals a secondary oral texture that finds its most vivid realization only in a live performance.

Jerome Rothenberg

No one writing poetry today has dug deeper into the roots of poetry.

(Kenneth Rexroth about Jerome Rothenberg. <http://www.spress.de>)

The scope of my discussion of the American ethno-poet, translator, anthologist, and teacher Jerome Rothenberg will deal with an analysis of a tape-recording of his live performance in Graz, Austria, in 1982, which poignantly demonstrates the singularity of his performance work. As to his life as a poet, I will restrict myself to the following biographical notes that are important in an overall perception of Rothenberg's poems at the Graz performance.

Jerome Rothenberg, born in New York City in 1931, received a Master's Degree in Literature from the University of Michigan. In his autobiography, which was published as the "Pre-face" to his anthology *Revolution of the Word* (Rothenberg 1974, xi-xxvii), he names his major early influences, all of which ground their poetics in orality: Gertrude Stein, e.e. cummings, William Carlos Williams, Ezra Pound, the French Surrealists, the Dada poets, who "made pure sound", and his teacher David Antin, well-known for his "talking-poems" (cf. Rothenberg 1974, xi-xiii). Although all of these poets left their traces in Rothenberg's poetic and phonetic mind, the poets which have influenced him most are, without doubt, Tristan Tzara, Kurt Schwitters and Hugo Ball, not only regarding the use of sound but also through (what became) his ethno-poetic use of collage. Rothenberg, who from his mid-twenties on translated poems from European poets into English and "totally translated" (a term I will discuss later) Native American poems, makes use of the basic organizing principle that underlies his translations, which David Antin describes as: "not history but the dramatic juxtaposition of disparate materials without commitment to explicit syntactical relations between elements" (Rothenberg 1974, xvii). His work reflects his skill as a total translator, as well as the influence of the Dada movement; and, not to forget, his physical presence at the occasion shows that his life as a poet largely depends on being able to unfold itself in performance.

Jerome Rothenberg opened his performance and reading with two of the "12 Songs to Welcome the Society of The Mystic Animals" from *Songs & Other Circumstances From the Society of the Mystic Animals* in the English version of the Senecan Indian ceremony called "Shaking the Pumpkin", published in the equally named collection of "totally" translated poems and songs from traditional poetry of the Indian North Americans into English (cf. Rothenberg 1972^a).

T	HEHEHHEH
h	
e	HEHEHHEH
The animals are coming	HEHUHHEH
a	HEHEHHEH
n	
i	HEHEHHEH
m	
a	
l	
s	
T	HEY EYHEY
h	
e	HEY EYHEY
The caw caw the crow comes at us	HEYUYHEY
a	HEY EYHEY
n	
i	HEY EYHEY
m	
a	
l	
s	

(from: Rothenberg 1972^b, 20 -21)

The extract above is the written score that Rothenberg used for the performance of the two song-poems, shaking a Senecan Indian cow-bone-rattle. This rattle replaced what is “a large gourd rattle, not really a pumpkin rattle” (Rothenberg 1982), used in the Senecan ceremony by the medicine society for calling the guardians of the Senecan people, the mystical animals, into presence. As one might be misled to believe that the poems are only an English translation of a Senecan poem, Rothenberg explains that “the translations themselves may create new forms and shapes-of-poems with their own energies and interests” which become an “expansion or invention for his [the poet’s] own time and place” (Rothenberg 1972^b, 247-248). This implies that by translating the sounds of the original, Rothenberg creates a poem out of his own making, which requires the work of a poet in the first place, and only in the second place the skills of a translator. In the translation, therefore, Rothenberg does not restrict

himself to reshaping the meaning of the Senecan sounds into English but sees “total translation” as “carry-over”, as “a means of delivery and of bringing to life” (Rothenberg 1972^b, 273), but also essentially as a “poetry of changes” (Garber 1995, 51). In short, “the words are translated, the *vocables* largely retained, and the melody transposed from the original; even the music isn’t free from changes” (Rothenberg 1972^b, 254).

Probably the most striking oral aspect of the song-poems is that Rothenberg uses meaningless sounds as an integral part of the song-poems’ composite “soundscape”. While shaking the rattle, Rothenberg alternates with his voice and intonation between the sentence “the animals are coming” and “H E H E H H E H”, the “extensive use of a restricted number of non-semantic *vocables*” (249), which are repeated two to three times after each singing of the English semantic line. The letters in bold print below get a special vocal emphasis in the performance.

The same repetitive and vocal performance accounts also for the stanza that followed after a short sequence of shaking the rattle more slowly than during the previous percussion of the song-poem. Stanza two presents interesting sound features, as the crowing of the animal is imitated by the sounds represented graphically as “caw caw”. Furthermore, the alliteration in this line produces a cacophonous effect that matches the content level, the invocation of the crow.

After the performance of these two pieces, Rothenberg explained the interaction between sounds and words to the audience:

What you have in there is a play between words and other sounds. So I became very interested in that partly because it was already a part of the poetry of our own time in the work of poets some of whom I’ll speak about when I’ll do my own poems later, who have tried to develop a kind of sound poetry, sometimes a poetry dispensing with words entirely; so [...] about ten or a dozen years ago, we were trying to do versions of Navajo Indian poems in which many more words were used than in the Senecan – and also more complicated sound play. And with the ethnomusicologist we began to do a series of experimental translations from Navajo that became poems themselves [...] which as translation I was trying to translate all I could be made aware of, so not only the words, but all these meaningless sounds and the ways in which words were distorted, finally also translating the melody in the songs. So what emerges in the singing is something that’s, I would accept, totally translated - and therefore totally transformed from the original. (Rothenberg 1982, Graz)

Rothenberg “oral-strates” these experimental total translations in his performance of the “Thirteenth Horse Song by Frank Mitchell”, which is part of a series of “Seventeen horse-songs in the blessingway of Frank Mitchell (1881–1967)” (Rothenberg 1972b, 254). Before he presented the actual performance version, he read the semantic lines for the non-English audience so they could be more easily aware of the words and their meaning, between the sounds. Some of the lines were:

Because I was the boy inside the dawn
 And going from the house the whiteshell home
 And going from the house the darkened home
 And going from the swollen house my breath has blown
 And going from the holy house
 And going from the place of jewels we walk upon
 With prayer sticks that are white with my feathers
 That are white with my spirit
 Horses that are white with my spirit
 Horses that are white and dawn
 With those spirit horses that are white shell
 With those horses that are white shell
 With jewels of every kind
 With cloth of every kind
 With sheep of every kind
 With horses of every kind
 With cattle of every kind
 With men of every kind

In order to grasp the overall meaning and underlying story of the 13th horse-song, Rothenberg explains: “The hero God our Enemy Slayer has gone to his father The Sun to bring back horses for The People to return them to the home to his Mother Earth, called Changing Woman” (Rothenberg 1982). In the first song, for example, the Enemy Slayer “asserts the existence of the horses and his own claim to them” (Rothenberg 1972^b, 254). In the thirteenth song, “having been by the horses, he imagines how beautiful they will be in the future time when they are transformed from the spirit horses, from the seeds of horses, into real horses” (Rothenberg 1982).

It is necessary to note here that generally and also regarding these songs, “the power of the Navajo poetry is directed toward blessing and curing” (Rothenberg 1972^b, 254). Even more interesting, the creation of the myth was shaped by the circumstance that the Navajos had no horses before the coming of the Spaniards (cf. <http://www.durationpress.com/archives/.../alcheringa/issue1/issue1mitchell.html>).

THE THIRTEENTH HORSE-SONG OF FRANK MITCHELL

Onebgwing some are lovely now nnnn but some are & are at my house
 now Nnnnn bgwing bgwing some are gwing now
 Because I was nnnn gahn I was thnboyinside the dawn & nnnn
 some are at my house now one & one gwing and by
 & going from theyouse the whiteshell home & nnnn some are at my house
 now Nnnn wnn gwing and by

& going from the house the darknd home & some are at my house
wvnn gwing and by going from the house the hoNloly home &
mmmmm but some are at my house

(Rothenberg 1982, transcript)

This short extract, the beginning of the unaccompanied horse-song, illustrates his interspersing of the sentence with non-semantic vocables that equally carry the repetitive sequence of the melody of the song on a tonal level, just as the English words do, only that the English words reveal some meaning – given the fact that one understands the English language. Although such interwoven soundscape (consisting of the sounds of poetry and the sounds of non-specific language) seems unfamiliar to us, there are many songs that make use of similar experiments, especially in pop music, folk, jazz and in scat songs as, for example, “Bang! Zoom” by Bobby McFerrin, which consists of non-semantic sounds only. Even though a direct comparison is not justified, as the interspersing of the non-semantic vocables is usually not as radically placed between the words, there is still some similarity on the tonal surface. Yet, in most cases, as with the cited example above, these non-semantic vocables are used as word-substitutes in order to accompany the instrumental melody of the song.

In Rothenberg’s songs these two entities are curiously linked with each other, and both are equally charged language, the first revealing meaning, the other subversively refraining from meaning in order to fuel the soundscape of the poem-song. As Rothenberg puts it, “it is all poetry, all poet’s work, just as the Navajo is all poetry, where poetry & music haven’t suffered separation” (cf. <http://www.durationpress.com>).

After this demonstration, Rothenberg read the mainly descriptive poems “Chicago”, “Vienna Blood 1-5”, and “Hunger” from his book *Vienna Blood*. I am not going much into an analysis of the reading of these poems, but I want to stress the fact that with these poems, at the occasion, Rothenberg bridges the gap between the artist and his life by explaining to the audience in detail the circumstances in which the poems were written. Before reading parts one to five of “Vienna Blood” he tells the audience about his visit in Austria, where he was hosted by Ernst Jandl and Georg Trakl, and attended an artists conference in Vienna.

“Chicago” is spoken in a highly reflective tone which invites the audience to become ear-witnesses or, at the most, to share what sounds like a recording of conceptional thoughts of the poet.

CHICAGO POEM

The bridges of Chicago
are not the bridges of Paris,
or the bridges of Amsterdam,
except they are a definition
almost no one bothers to define
like life full of surprise of what
now looks to be the oldest
American city.

[...]

The beginning of the poem can be characterized by its fairly complicated syntactic and semantic structures that express an attempt at defining what the bridges of Chicago are by actually defining what they are not. It escapes a definition by the use of the simile “like life full of surprise”, and then describes what it appears to be, “the oldest American city”. In the remaining part of the poem the listener is confronted with many more dense images and stream-of-consciousness definitions about Chicago to follow. “The Danube Waltz”, Part Two of his *Vienna Blood* poems, is characterized by a kind of stream of consciousness technique that comes in an even greater immediacy, as Jerome Rothenberg verbally (re-)collects the “dancing” river and encompassing pictures that almost throw themselves on his mind on his way to the airport. The rhythm of the poem, which in a latent way imitates a waltz and the floating verbal images contribute much to the poem’s emphasis on being orally performed rather than being read.

The “Hunger poem” (written in two parts), according to Rothenberg reflects much of the outspoken Dada spirit, its state of mind, its sense of war and destruction; it expresses a ghostly vision of a “hungry” Mexico in the ‘70s when the country “was going into a Third World situation” (Rothenberg 1982).

After the *Vienna Blood* part of the reading, Jerome Rothenberg read from his book *That Dada Strain*, paying a poetic homage to Hugo Ball, Kurt Schwitters, and Tristan Tzara, whom he humorously called his “muse.” The title itself, as Rothenberg points out, refers to an old jazz standard in America of the 1920s, rather than to the Dada movement.

Furthermore, in his third-person account of “Hugo Ball performing”, Rothenberg starts off with lines describing how peculiarly Hugo Ball was dressed “for that evening reading”, and then accompanies himself with a rattle when he verbally raises “A Glass To Ecstasy”, a toast to Hugo Ball. As Rothenberg states, he began to imitate Hugo Ball’s custom of per-

forming, as Ball was usually accompanied by a great bassist and drums, “drumming literature back into the ground” (Rothenberg 1982).

In his homage to Kurt Schwitters, he also uses the Merz-mode of performance for which Schwitters’ performances were well-known. In his poem “Merz Sonata”, “a kind of translation”, dedicated to Schwitters, the poem encapsulates “Merz moments” in Schwitters’ life as a Dada poet and ends with Schwitters’ famous effects achieved by a phonetic play with words, producing sound poetry similar to Kurt Schwitters’ poem “Wand” (“Wall”).

Rothenberg’s final contributions on the occasion were two poems that honored Tristan Tzara, first by poetically imitating Tzara in his short poem “A poem in Yellow – after Tristan Tzara”, written in a humorous, and implicitly sexual way, such as for example the line “Angel slide your hands into my basket”. Apparently, sexual connotations were frequent in Dadaist poetry, which was “decidedly sexual in nature” (Erickson 1984, 93).

Secondly, he performed the longer poem “The Holy Words of Tristan Tzara”, in which Rothenberg alternates between a poem with surrealist imagery, presented in a resounding way, as for example “a wax angel stands on his tongue” or “his horse eats colored snakes”; and reveals a spontaneous soundscape produced by a simplistic, but highly evocative, repetitive structure of a long list of word combination with dada, as for example, “dada-a-cappella”, “dada-pharmacy”, “dada-didactic”, or the here + noun structure, such as in “here kings of Sansibar”, “here April nuns”, which evokes Tzara’s “Lecture on Dada”. (cf. Part III, *Dada and Surrealism*)

On the whole, the physical impact produced by his vocal organs is so strong that the poem cannot but be performed in order to be truly felt and experienced in its completion. As such, the poems reflect their Dada heritage and need the presence of the poet more than, for example, the “Chicago” poem.

Moreover, Jerome Rothenberg’s poems, such as the Navajo and Senecan total translations, highly depend on his presence as a poet, but also he himself depends on the social realization of his life as a poet. Frederik Garber argues and speculates that “[t]he life that unfolds in the performance unfolds because of the performance; that is, the self (subject) is not only performative but maybe, itself, performance” (Garber 1995, 52). In tribal societies, the performance of a poem belongs to a special register of life that is usually spiritual or medical, which attributes great significance to the poet. As Rothenberg puts it: “[t]he person, the personality, the presence of the poet, like the shaman, is extremely important [...]” (Garber 1995, 53). Performances that are set in the social context of Western societies will more likely be viewed as a separate entity, detached from life, even if they are an integral part of our cultural

life. As has been pointed out in the section on “Performance Art” (cf. Part III), Dadaist’s and Live Art’s attempts to replace an elaborate artificiality of art with conceptual art, have likewise been replaced by expensive multimedia performances since 1979 (cf. Goldberg 1988, 190). The ethno-poems of Jerome Rothenberg, by contrast, constitute a special category of performance poems that carry deep roots of “totally translated” tribal oral history within their unusual audiotext.

Gil Scott-Heron

In 1970, as the fight for civil rights gave way to the demands for Black Power, Gil Scott-Heron presented a voice both literate and street.

(<http://www.interlog.com/~mushroom/gil.html>)

In this short section I will analyze extracts of the song-poem “The Revolution Will Not Be Televised” by Gil Scott-Heron, an African American poet and musician born in 1949. In its live performance the poem is accompanied by funk music, which is a merging of jazz and rock and blues, weaving in the roots of African American pop music and African, Caribbean and Jamaican rhythms (cf. <http://www.interlog.com>).

THE REVOLUTION WILL NOT BE TELEVISED

You will not be able to stay home, brother.
You will not be able to plug in, turn on and drop out.
You will not be able to lose yourself on skag and
Skip out for beer during commercials,
Because the revolution will not be televised.

The revolution will not be televised.

The revolution will not be brought to you by Xerox
In 4 parts without commercial interruption.
The revolution will not show you pictures of Nixon
Blowing a bugle and leading a charge by John
Mitchell, General Abrams and Spiro Agnew to eat
hog maws confiscated from a Harlem sanctuary.

The revolution will not be televised, brother.
[...]
There will be no pictures of pigs shooting down
Brothers on the instant replay.
There will be no pictures of pigs shooting down
Brothers on the instant replay.
There will be no pictures of young being
Run out of Harlem on a rail with a brand new process-
There'll be no slow motion or still life of Roy

Wilkens strolling through Watts in a red, black
And Green liberation jumpsuit that he had been saving
For just the right occasion.

Green Acres, The Beverly Hillbillies, and Hooterville
Junction will no longer be so damned relevant, and
Women will not care if Dick finally got down with
Jane on Search for Tomorrow because Black people
Will be in the street looking for a brighter day.

The revolution will not be televised
[...]
The revolution will not be right back after a message
About a white tornado, white lightning, or white people.
You will not have to worry about a germ on your
Bedroom, a tiger in your tank, or the giant in your toilet bowl.

The revolution will not go better with Coke.
The revolution will not fight the germs that cause bad breath.
The revolution WILL put you in the driver's seat.
The revolution will not be televised, WILL not be televised

Will not be televised.
Will not be televised.
There will be no re-run brothers;
The revolution will be live.

(Transcript from: *Our Souls Have Grown Deep Like the Rivers*. RR 2000)

The performance piece begins with the confident, repetitive beats of drums, a bass, and the intriguing melody of a flute, which together begin to rhythmically fuel the verbal soundscape of the text spoken by Gil Scott-Heron. Contrary to the fast, melodic musical pattern produced by the percussionists, the intonation of Gil Scott-Heron does not exhibit many musical pitch variations. Nevertheless, there is an interesting collaboration of music and speech sounds, which produces an emphatic effect, or adds to the meaning of the poem. For example, the recurrent phrase “The Revolution Will Not Be Televised” is imbedded in equally recurrent tunes of the drum beats and the melody of the flute that occasionally echoes particular words, such as for example “brother”, addressing the potential co-revolutionist on a speech level and, perhaps in a more subversive way, on a musical level.

Noticeable too are the pauses that Scott-Heron leaves between each new stanza that – bridged by the tunes of a stirring funk music – consciously delay the delivery of a further political message and therefore

may create suspense in the recipient. This also means that the funk music as percussion has its own expressive quality and evokes separate feelings in the recipient, apart from the critical message and argumentative tone of the poem. Among some of these feelings that may be evoked, I would list the feeling of strength, of being “cool”, of being provocative and the subtle feeling of something revolutionary that is going on. These activist expressions work against the seemingly artificial world of a white middle and upper class in the United States. Thus, by combining the funk music, which is an integral part in the lives of many African Americans, with the message of the poem, the poem’s performance comes to full realization by announcing a revolution not only on a content level but also on an instrumental level. This message is of “strength and survival, protest and empowerment, freedom and revolution, delivered in a plaintive, affecting croon, cushioned in a laid-back jazzsoul groove” (<http://www.interlog.com>).

Similar to repetitive motifs on a musical level, the poem too is spiked with repetitive structures, such as anaphoric recurrence of the sentences beginning with “You will not be able to”, “The revolution will not be” and “there will be no”. Such rhetoric and mnemonic devices stress and support the urgency of the speaker’s message and make it radically clear that a revolution of Black Americans will happen quite separately from the artificiality of white people whose pretentious life is daily mirrored on TV. For that purpose he cites politicians and leaders in American history with whom one automatically associates scandals or war (Watergate affair, Vietnam War; War of Independence, cf. ll. 9-11). In lines 27-30 he indirectly refers to street clashes between African Americans and the police; simultaneously, for the contemporary recipient, they may evoke the Rodney King case and the ensuing LA. riots in 1992, when a black man was beaten by the police and its private video-recording was re-played all over the virtual globe (cf. Kureishi 1995, 755). Interesting to note, the repetition of these lines verbally imitates the visual replay of the “pictures of pigs shooting down Brothers on the instant replay.”

In the following lines from the transcript above, Scott-Heron criticizes the blunt life of people for whom characters starring in the soaps “The Beverly Hillbillies” and “Search for Tomorrow” are “so damned relevant” (cf. ll. 37-40). He suggests that the soap stars will no longer be of relevance because “[b]lack people will be in the street looking for a brighter day” (ll. 41-42). This presents an essentially brighter picture than what aurally seems to allude to the opening lines of the poem “Howl” by Allen Ginsberg: “I saw the best minds of my generation / [...] dragging themselves through the Negro street at dawn looking for / an angry fix” (*HA* Vol. 2 1998, 2443).

In the last lines of the poem Scott-Heron stresses again what he sees as the hypocrisy of white people who indulge in all-cleanliness and he mixes these images with the ridiculous consumerism that is fostered by commercials on TV (cf. ll. 55-56). After once again stressing what the revolution *will not be*, the poem culminates in the subversively aggressive and assertive articulation of the punch-line “The revolution will be live” (l. 60). In that respect one has to point out that

[by] 1970, there was a profound shift in the struggle for equality as the fight for civil rights gave way to the demands for Black Power. The Civil Rights Movement had lost its function, being ripped apart by differing interest groups and ignored by a wartime US government. The voices of its leaders were silenced by jail or bullets. Black popular music reflected this change. The voice on the radio stopped preaching brotherhood and togetherness and started reporting facts, and the music got more aggressive. Leading the new attack was a new voice. The voice held the light up to the country’s missteps and shook up an apathetic audience. (<http://www.globaldarkness.com>)

In fact, the song-poem has received regular airplay on radio stations (cf. *RR* 2000, 24). Thus, Gil Scott-Heron does not only spread his highly ironic, if not sarcastic and aggressive political message in his life-performance, but he can equally rely on the radio as an agent to address a large number of possible co-revolutionists.

Allen Ginsberg

*The lines are the results of long thought
and experiment as to what unit con-
stitutes one speech-breath-thought...*

(Allen Ginsberg quoted in Miles 1995,
153)

The following “off-the-pages” on Allen Ginsberg will focus on an analysis of a video of his performance at McCabin’s Guitar Shop in Santa Monica, California on the 25th of February in 1989, where he was partly accompanied by Donald Was on a 1915 Gibbon “Mandobass” (cf. The Lannan Foundation, 1989).

Allen Ginsberg performed fifteen of his poems and blues songs in a room that was dimly lit by three lamps. The room was packed with people sitting on chairs, while Ginsberg sat on a chair on a small stage which was illuminated by a spot-light throwing a round light on Ginsberg from the left. Donald Was (from the band *Was Not Was*) sat mostly in the fairly dark background on the right side from the audience’s point of view; dressed in black, he was hardly visible. Furthermore, the setting consisted of a small table on stage where Ginsberg stored his books and sheets of paper from which he would read.

At the occasion Ginsberg did not use his harmonium, with which he often accompanied his “Harmonium Songs” (cf. Ginsberg 1975). He began the performance with the song “When I Died, Love”, and then explained the procedure of the performance with the words: “[w]hat I’ll do is I’ll begin with a short set of songs, some duet, some *a cappella* – the ones we didn’t have time to rehearse or I wasn’t musician enough to figure out how to tell him [David Was] what to do.” The very first song was actually rehearsed as a duet, but at the performance Ginsberg decided to sing it *a cappella*. Those pieces that were performed as duets, such as “Meditation Blues”, “Cigarette Rag” and “Father Death Blues”, worked well with Ginsberg’s expressive voice accompanied by the bassist.

As regards poetry or songs performed together with played instruments, one can most basically distinguish between two different types of poems that are performed with music. On the one hand there is spoken word poetry whose rhythmic nature is projected in the rhythm of the accompanying instruments, like those produced by bass grips in the “Cigarette Rag”, or the drum beats in “The Warrior” by Marry Ailonieida Somby; conversely, the musical rhythm influences the verbal rhythm. On the other hand, there are poems, such as by Bob Dylan or Leonard Cohen, which are set to music and thereby reflect a different vocal nature which

makes us perceive the piece as music. As Richard Kostelanetz points out: “[o]nce musical pitches are introduced, or musical instruments added [...] and once words are tailored to a preexisting melody or rhythm, the results are music and are experienced as such [...]” (Kostelanetz 1981, 168). In performance poetry, if we strictly remain in the fields of poetry and do not venture into the field of music, the first category of poems stay in the realms of what we have heard in Marry A. Somby’s poems, which were accompanied by Apirana Taylor on a drum (cf. Part I, 31-37). As to what happens when the beat or the music collides with his words and voice, Ginsberg explains that the bassist “is not there to beat out the vocalist. He’s there to put a floor under them. He’s there to support and encourage, and give a place for the vocal to come in, not to compete with the vocal, but to provide a ground for it” (Kubernik 1999, 261). That way he adjusts the rhythmic pattern and the intonation to the musician’s idea of what is there. The additional performing sounds do not alter the meaning of the text, as Ginsberg points out: “[t]he beat of the accompanied instrument widens it into a slightly different trip, but the words are pretty stable, they mean what they mean, so there is no problem [...]” (ibid.).

Ginsberg’s songs “Meditation Blues”, and what he calls the Buddhist version of “The Old Communist International”, are worth noting in this context, as Ginsberg uses melodies of songs that are more or less known to the American audience. Ginsberg states about the first song: “Well, I’m conscious that if I do ‘Meditation Blues’ I’m using the tune from ‘I Fought the Law’. I’ve adapted it to ‘I found the dharma and the dharma won.’ I use some form of music, but I change it a bit” (Ginsberg quoted in Alfonso 1999, 256). In that respect, one could point out that those people who have orally acquired the song lyrics of “I Fought the Law”, or have heard the tune and lyrics before, will certainly be bemused by Ginsberg’s ironic version of it.

In regard to the “The Old Communist International”, Ginsberg, after having asked the audience if they know the song and realizing that hardly anyone knows it, sings both versions. That way, the mock version of “The Old Communist International” becomes fully understood when Ginsberg sings in the Buddhist version, for example, “Arise you prisoner of your mind-set” instead of “Arise you prisoners of starvation”.

Regarding the poems that were unaccompanied, one still hears the broad use of sound as regards pitch, volume, tone and rhythm in Ginsberg’s poems. In my analysis of the performance, I will confine myself to two poems that Allen Ginsberg *performed*. Interestingly, Allen Ginsberg introduces the poems, which were part of a set of poems in chronological order, with the words: “[w]hat I’m gonna do is read chronologically poems that are familiar for those of you who are familiar with my poetry at the suggestion of Lewis McAdams, who is a poet who is

here” (Allen Ginsberg 1989). This not only implies that there is a certain amount of popularity of the poems, which was confirmed by the applause with which the audience responded when they heard the titles. It is also clear that many people in the audience will have come to the performing of the poems because these popular poems were performed *live* by Allen Ginsberg. Important to note, Ginsberg felt that because of the fact that his audience is literate, they may not actually be able to *hear* his sound variations in the oral performance of his poems, written in the open form:

The aim of open form in poetry is liberation from the epistemological constraints of ‘literacy’. ‘It’s very crucial today to be sure that you stay illiterate’, Olson once said, simply because literacy is wholly dangerous, so dangerous that I’m involved every time I read poetry, in the fact that I’m reading to people who are literate – and they are *not hearing*. They may be listening with all their minds, but they don’t hear. (Allen Ginsberg quoted in Merrill 1988, 138)

Nevertheless, I am certain that many of the lines will already have resounded in the minds of most of the people that came to the performance; thus the pieces that Ginsberg performed or sang on the occasion would have been refreshed or newly “stored” in a different version in the minds of the listeners. Perhaps some tunes and lines were recited orally in exchange with friends. At any rate, the audience had the experience of live art (although not subject to the rules of concept art) by an artist who could experiment with his performance pieces in front of a new audience. Once again the mutual interaction between the audience and performer can be stated by the basic fact “that the centrality of sound and music suggest the importance of live performance, and the emphasis on spontaneity points to the need of performance to complete the poem’s composition” (Athanases 1991, 123).

Taking this thought one step further implies that – as regards the secondary orality of the poems – there are not only Ginsberg’s visible pages but also invisible pages between the literate audience and the literate poet. Obviously, the page or book that Ginsberg reads from would disappear visually if he performed his songs and poems off-by-heart, yet in an interview Ginsberg stated:

I rarely read from memory. I can sing “Father Death Blues” and “Amazing Grace” from memory, but I don’t know what lines are coming, so I have to refresh myself. I’m not particularly interested in memorizing perfectly ‘cause I think it distracts from interpreting the text differently each time. I think you have to have all the dimensions at once, the book thing, the poetry thing, plus the performance, plus the musical accompaniment, and if you have all of them, and they’re all in a good place, that’s fine. Certain cadences are recurrent and certain intonations are recurrent, but on the other hand, if I don’t memorize it, there’s always the chance that putting it a little differently will bring out a

meaning that I didn't realize before. So I prefer to have the text in front of me and interpret it new each time. (AG in Holly 1999, 258).

This is a very significant aspect that Ginsberg points out about the aural, performative similarity between the reading, performing and performance of a poem in relation to literacy and orality. Primary oral poems too were not memorized verbatim (Part I, 22). Ginsberg's poems, which too have a decided emphasis on orality can be characterized as "close to the human lifeworld, empathetic and participatory, and situational rather than abstract" (Thayler 1981, 101); they were composed on a piece of paper that assisted him in his performance; thus, the page as a score leaves him with enough scope for improvisation. I would argue that even a word-by-word memorization of an oral poem would not necessarily restrict the oral poet to present the very version of the memorized poem. In other words, the oral poet, who only knows this form of performing, is probably equally flexible in his or her degree of improvisation and often has to rely on improvisation even if a poem was memorized verbatim.

For further aspects of sounds and secondary orality in Ginsberg's poetry, I have chosen for my analysis the first of the three stanzas of the poem "America" (1956), which was performed very much off the page. Ginsberg introduced "America" as "a poem which I hope is now absolute – a kind of time capsule of the early days of the Cold War, or mid-days of the Cold War". It is performed in a partly angry, semi-serious, sulky tone, in which he questions America's role in the Cold War.

AMERICA

America I've given you all and now I'm nothing.
America two dollars and twenty-seven cents January 17, 1956.
I can't stand my own mind.
America when will we end the human war?
Go fuck yourself with your atombomb.
I don't feel good don't bother me.
I won't write my poem till I'm in my right mind.
America when will you be angelic?
When will you take off your clothes?
When will you look at yourself through the grave?
When will you be worthy of your million Trotskyites?
America why are your libraries full of tears?
America when will you send your eggs to India?
I'm sick of your insane demands.
When can I go into the supermarket and buy what I need with my
good looks?
America after all it is you and I who are perfect not the next world.

America you made me want to be a saint.
 I don't want to be a saint. You only get crucified.
 Your machinery is too much for me.
 There must be some other way to settle this argument.
 Burroughs is in Tangiers I don't think
 he'll come back it's sinister.
 Are you being sinister or is this some sort of practical joke?
 I'm trying to come to the point.
 I refuse to give up my obsession.
 America stop pushing I know what I'm doing.
 America the plum blossoms are falling.
 I haven't read the newspaper for months, everyday somebody goes on
 trial for murder.
 America I feel sentimental about the Industrial Workers of the World
 They used to call them Wobblies before World War Two.
 America I used to be a communist when I was a kid I'm not sorry.
 I smoke marijuana every chance I get.
 I sit in my house for days on end and stare at the roses in the closet.
 When I go to Chinatown I get drunk and never get laid.
 My mind is made up there's gonna be trouble.
 You should have seen me reading Marx.
 My psychoanalyst thinks I'm perfectly right.
 I won't say your Lord's Prayer.
 I have mystical visions and cosmic vibrations.
 America I still haven't told you what you did to Uncle Max after
 he came over from Russia.

(Transcript from the video *Allen Ginsberg*. The Lannan Foundation, 1989. The transcript of the performance varies slightly in several lines compared to the version published in the *HA* Vol. 2, 2452-2454 and in *The Penguin Modern Poets*. Gregory Corso, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Allen Ginsberg).

If one hears the poem in which Allen Ginsberg verbally creates a personal confrontation with America, one cannot ignore the apostrophized, additive, repetitive, anaphoric structure. In fact, the lines predominantly begin with "America", "When", and "I + verb-structure". Equally characteristic of the poem is that many of the lines end with a subversive question (cf. ll. 8-13), which gives the poem a special recurrent sound through the intonation inherent to the posing of questions in the English language. In addition, the sulky and angry tone of various sentences gives the poem a special sound feature that enhances the overt expression of Ginsberg's dissatisfaction with himself and America (cf. ll. 3, 6, 14, 25, 37). A closer listening reveals that the repetitive structure of the poem creates the rhythm of the poem, which is also characterized by almost every foot and line beginning with a stressed syllable. Ginsberg also makes use of a fairly broad variation

of volume, pitch, and tempo. Of aural significance is the dense, angry and considerably louder voice of Ginsberg in the line “I can’t stand my own mind” (l. 3), and the use of pitch variation when he poses rhetoric questions, as in the line “America when will you be angelic?” (l. 8). Furthermore noticeable is the change of tempo and expression between the rapidly spoken lines “I refuse go give up my obsession” (l. 27) to the slow and considerate tempo in “America stop pushing I know what I’m doing.” (l. 28).

If one listened to the poem being performed behind a closed door, as Robert Frost suggested, one would not be able to understand what is being said, yet one could easily deduce from hearing it in what mood the speaker is and that he keeps addressing and questioning somebody. At the performance, where one could hear and understand the poet, content and voicing of the poem matched extremely well. After all, the poem was performed *for* an audience. If viewed in a more subversive way, the American audience became the direct addressee of the poem.

A final characteristic that I want to point out about the performed poem is its every-day-diction, which is a crucial and deliberate element of Ginsberg’s poetry and poetics. This every-day-diction culminates in the use of dialect forms in the last half of the third stanza, as, for example, in phrases like “them Russians” (l. 92), or “That no good. Ugh. Him make Indians learn read” (l. 100). These lines, no doubt, come out of Ginsberg’s poetics of “condensed fragments of spoken idiom best.” (cf. one-liners from “Cosmopolitan Greetings”). As has been pointed out in Part III of this book (cf. 89), Allen Ginsberg likes to stick to something that is grounded in anything he could say to somebody (cf. Kubernik 1999, 259). Since that “somebody” in the poem is “America” he, in fact, addresses every single person in the United States, which unmistakably recalls Walt Whitman, who - just as Ginsberg - *is* America (*HA* 2452, l. 56), even if Ginsberg’s America is, as Dennis Brown states, “less an empirical place than a mind zone” (Brown 1994, 32).

Talking about Walt Whitman, Allen Ginsberg’s second poem that I would like to analyze, “A Supermarket in California” (*HA*, 2442-2443), reveals further postulations of his poetics: the speech-breath-thought (cf. Miles 1995). In the poem, the poet vividly thinks back to an imagined personal encounter of himself, Walt Whitman, and Garcia Lorca in a supermarket in California. It becomes clear that the mere sound of breath in the performance contributes to our experience of hearing the abstract sound of a thinking voice that reminisces on the highly imaginative, almost surrealist situation.

Note: The circles before certain words ‘°’ indicate Allen Ginsberg’s *inspiration*¹⁰ when reading the poem.

A SUPERMARKET IN CALIFORNIA

° What thoughts I have of you tonight, Walt Whitman, for
° I walked down the sidestreets under the trees with a head-
ache self-conscious looking at the full moon.
° In my hungry fatigue, and shopping for images, I went
into the neon fruit supermarket, ° dreaming of your enu-
merations!
° What peaches and what penumbras! ° Whole families
shopping at night! ° Aisles full of husbands! ° Wives in
the avocados, babies in the tomatoes! – ° and you, Garcia
Lorca, ° what were you doing down by the watermelons?
° I saw you, Walt Whitman, childless, lonely old grubber,
looking among the meats in the refrigerator and eyeing the
grocery boys.
° I heard you asking questions of each: Who killed the
pork chops? What price Honduran Nicaraguan bananas? ° Are you my
Angel?
° I wandered in and out of the brilliant stacks of cans
following you, ° and followed in my imagination by the store
detective.
° We strode down the open corridors together in our
solitary fancy tasting artichokes, possessing every frozen
delicacy, and never passing the cashier.

° Where are we going, Walt Whitman? The doors
close in an hour. Which way does your beard point tonight?
° (I touch your book and dream of our odyssey in the
supermarket and feel absurd.)
° Will we walk all night through solitary streets? ° The trees
add shade to shade, lights out in the houses, ° we’ll both be
lonely.
Will we stroll dreaming of the lost America of love
past blue automobiles in driveways, home to our silent
cottage?

¹⁰ Inspiration comes from the word *spiritus*. *Spiritus* means breathing. Inspiration means taking in breath. Expiration means letting breath out. So inspiration is just a feeling of heightened breath or slightly exalted breath, when the body feels like a hoolow reed in the wind of breath. (Ginsberg cited in Pacernick 1996)

°°Ah, dear father, graybeard, lonely courage-teacher,
°what America did you have when Charon quit pulling his
ferry and you got out on a smoking bank and stood watch-
ing the boat disappear on the black waters of Lethe?

If this poem is read silently, breath does not play a role in decoding the meaning of the poem in one's mind; it is not needed to articulate sounds, and although one has to breathe while reading it, it will be a different kind of breathing than one that is required in the physiological pronunciation of words. Yet, probably the most fundamental unit in writing poems that are meant to be performed orally, is the breath unit. According to Allen Ginsberg,

a breath unit as a measure of the verse line is one breath, and then continuing with the sentence is another breath. [...] So you arrange the verse line on the page according to where you have your breath stop, and the number of words within one breath, whether it's long or short, as this long breath has just begun. (AG in Pacernick 1997)

This seems to correspond to Charles Olson's idea that

the line (I swear) comes from the breath, from the breathing of the man who writes, at the moment that he writes and thus is, it is here that, the daily work, the WORK, gets in, for only he, the man who writes, can declare, at every moment, the line its metric and its ending – where its breathing shall come to, termination. (Olson 1951, 19)

Yet, although in theory each new line should, according to these poets, begin with a breath, the realization of this cannot easily be achieved. Breathing in composition and recitation of poems is a technique that developed out of a natural activity. The poet – just as a story-teller – breathes in as much air as he or she needs for the articulation of the poem. If a poet who composes a poem on the written page now wants to indicate breath units with the beginning of a new line, one has to bear in mind that a static fixation of breath probably defies the nature of breath; even though the poet can determine to a certain extent where the breathing within a poem should come through its graphic layout on the page. A live performance may change the situation and as such, the graphic layout would be “a deceptive score at best” (Ron Silliman 1998, 370).

Coming back to Allen Ginsberg's “A Supermarket in California” and my indication of breath ‘°’, the transcribed example shows that although a predominant number of lines begin with a breath, there are others which do not (and cannot) begin with a breath, for it would sound unnatural (cf. ll. 5, 14). Also, Ginsberg often takes an audible breath within the lines which mark the beginnings of one of the most distinctively pronounced words of the poems, such as “°and you, Garcia Lorca” (l. 9) and “°are you my angel” (l. 15). Furthermore, line 33, “°°Ah, dear father, graybeard, lonely

courage-teacher”, is interesting because Ginsberg inhales and exhales in order to articulate the onomatopoetic word “Ah” (l. 33).

One could argue that the rather long verse line in Allen Ginsberg’s poem “A Supermarket in California” forces him to breathe in more often than only at the beginning of each line; yet two statements by Allen Ginsberg speak against this. Decades of performing had provided him with much a well-trained voice and breath, as he explains: “The older I get, it gets more interesting with more and more tones, and more and more breath, and deeper and deeper voice and higher and higher voice” (Kubernik 1999, 263). His deep breath is challenged even more in his poems “Howl” and “Kaddish”, which both consist of longer “Whitmanian” lines than in “A Supermarket in California”. Also, the long verse line was intentionally chosen by him, letting a long sequence of speech-sounds glide through the vocal chords with unobstructed breath, as Ginsberg states:

that long verse line with many nouns and adjectives and interesting combination of words, like “fried shoes” or “hydrogen jukebox” – that was a genre drawn from Whitman, from Surrealism, from European Poetry of the Twentieth Century, from the Dadaist poets, from the Russian poets, from Lorca. Sort of an international style of unobstructed breath. (AG quoted in Alfonso 1999, 255)

There seems to be some discrepancy in what Ginsberg and Olson postulate in terms of the line coming from the breath and the way the poem was pronounced in the performance, even though Ginsberg sticks predominantly to the breath as the basic constituent of the line. This discrepancy is most certainly the result of Ginsberg’s careful approach when writing poems, which he explains as follows:

I have learned more toward capturing the inside-mind-thought rather than the verbalized speech. [...] Given a mental release which is not mentally blocked, the breath of verbal intercourse will come with excellent rhythm which is perhaps unimprovable. (AG quoted in Miles 1995, 153)

The logical premise is that writing, whether for the stage or for the page, begins with a thought. This also accounts for the fact why Allen Ginsberg’s poem starts with the line: “What thoughts I have of you tonight, Walt Whitman, [...]” (cf. l.1). What Allen Ginsberg succeeded with his poetry was to find a way to adapt the technique of writing to the expression of his poetic thoughts. The problem one faces in that process is stated by Ginsberg as follows:

The technique of writing both prose and poetry, the technical problem of the present day, is the problem of Transcription of the natural flow of the mind, the transcription of actual thought and speech. (Mills 1995, 153)

Concluding this formal analysis of the poem above, apart from the fact that the secondary oral poem is subject to the technique of writing, the performance too, in which the written text is used as a score, is subject to improvisation. This includes the act of breathing, which can even be integrated into the content of the poem.

After this discussion I would like to add a few thoughts that are important in order to understand the concept of Ginsberg's live performance as a cultural realization in contemporary American poetry. As regards the Beat Generation as a whole, as well as African American Poets or many contemporary slam poets, one could even say that they work in the line of a countercultural realization.

First of all, it is important to note that many of the poems that Allen Ginsberg performed in Santa Monica in 1989 can be considered as verbal time-capsules of the 1950s. His poem "America" is even dated as "January 17, 1956", which alludes to what one would find as a diary entry or a letter. In performance it becomes the oral expression of a written record of a state of mind that Allen Ginsberg was in at a crucial period in American political history, the Cold War and the McCarthyian era; or, as Allen Ginsberg puts it, it is

trying to observe the naked activity of my own mind. Then transcribing that activity down on paper. [...] The subject matter is the action of my mind. [...] My interest in poetry is in representing my own mind as distinct from the official party line of the media. (AG in *The New York Quarterly* 1991/6)

Although Allen Ginsberg during his life time resisted being labeled as a "political poet" (cf. Rothschild 1994), the political and social message of many of his poems like "America" or "Howl" are more than overt. Throughout his life-time he criticized America's war politics, as for example in his poem "After the Big Parade", which describes the American public's reactions to George Bush's Iraq war. The poem is based on a personal experience that Ginsberg made when he was

down in the parade with a tiny group of people protesting in front of City Hall. There was a group of maybe ten people amid the millions that were out there under the confetti, and the bunting and the bands, and the police. (AG quoted in Rothschild 1994)

Thus the reason why Ginsberg did not regard himself a political poet is that his writing is about what he thought privately, which includes emotional as well as intellectual thoughts and goes hand in hand with the argument that he did not want to "serve the nation" with his poetry. Instead, he wanted to make people conscious of themselves as "individuals as distinct from members of a mass under hypnotic mass control" (ibid.). Contrary to feminist poets, for him, the private was not political, which is obviously a matter of perception, as Adrienne Rich states quite the opposite by saying:

“I think I began [...] to feel that politics was not something ‘out there’ but something ‘in here’ and of the essence of my condition” (Rich 1986, 61).

Allen Ginsberg’s live performance – apart from posing the frame for a celebration and enjoyment of hearing and seeing the poet in person – served as personal expression of his thoughts in order to encourage people in the USA to form a counterculture made up of equally self-conscious individuals.

Laurie Anderson

Anderson's performance are sample elements from such genres of cultural performance as storytelling, theatre, ritual, dance, music, popular entertainment, and sports. Over her career, she has mixed the autobiographical with historical and, using one to filter the other, has built an idiosyncratic collection of words, sounds, gestures, and images downloaded from various social archives [...].

(McKenzie 1997)

In the quote above, John McKenzie points to the highly multi-dimensional nature of Laurie Anderson's performances. It also reveals her ability of making use of various genres and blending them with various acoustic, visual and other expressive media of the performing arts.

Born in Chicago in 1947, she grew up with seven siblings who all were encouraged by their parents to be artistic, staging plays and participating in a family orchestra. Laurie Anderson graduated with a MFA in sculpture from Columbia University in 1972, and from then onwards her biography reveals one performance project after the other, including the 8 mm film "Dearreader", "Anarchitecture", "Duets on Ice", "Night Flight", (an installation in Graz, Austria), "Dark Dogs/American Dreams" (an interactive installation of photographs and audiotape) "United States" (an eight-hour-performance), shooting "Home of the Brave", recording "Strange Angels", touring "Empty Places", "Stories from the Nerve Bible", Songs and Stories from Moby Dick, and, most recently, "Happiness". (cf. <http://www.cc.gatech.edu/~jimmyd/laurie-andersonbiography/wb.html>).

It has to be noted that her mass appeal was not exactly a well-planned ascendancy, as Jamie Diamond points out:

[u]ntil 1980 Anderson was a cult phenomenon – each one of her idiosyncratic, multimedia presentations would bedazzle small audiences, and then pass into avant-garde history. But that year she recorded one of her songs "O Superman" (in which an answering machine receives a message of doom) and she became a mainstream performance artist icon. (Diamond 1990)

Interestingly, during her early years of performance, Laurie Anderson was part of the creation of performance art of the 70s: "[...] living in Soho as an artist when painting had been declared dead and the 'happenings' of the '60s had just happened, she found herself present at the creation of per-

formance art' (Diamond 1990). Crucial to note, Laurie Anderson had an early awareness of the role of sound in relation to other media, as she states in an interview:

[s]ound has never become a distinct or discrete area of art practice such as other manifestations and activities were to become in the 1960s and 1970s. [...] The failure of sound to construct a distinct category for itself has in fact proved an advantage, given that categories in the end become restrictive and the work circumscribed and marginalised. [...]. Sound has in fact provided an additional ingredient and strategy for the artist with the potential of addressing and informing senses other than visual. [...]. [S]ound became an integral part of performance, mixed media and installation works. (LA quoted in Furlong 1994, 128-130)

Sound is exploited with unprecedented technological possibilities in her performances, either through her well-known manipulated authoritative voice or as a release of speech sounds through her "viophonograph" (cf. Goldberg 1988, 171), "suggesting the dadaist devices of such contemporary British performance groups as The People Show" (Carbon 1996, 115). In her first concert film, *Home of the Brave* (WB 1984), sound is only an integral part, mediating as music or speech between the body of the dancing performers, and also computer graphics, video clips and photos that are projected on a large screen. In her diverse use of performance genres (i.e. stand-up comedy, the quiz show, popular music, body art, or the lecture), sound functions as a communicator between the other media constituents that make up the single performances. This becomes most evident when Laurie Anderson amplifies her body from skull to foot and turns herself into a drum, or by the striking effect that is achieved when William Burroughs is reduced to his voice by speaking through the receiver of a white telephone hanging from the ceiling. In an other part of the film the flapping of the wings of the graphic images of a bird is acoustically supplemented with sticks by a performer. The individual pieces are only marginally (or at least not linearly) linked with each other except for the pieces that circle around Burrough's "Language is a Virus". Yet, Laurie Anderson gives the performance a certain frame by referring back to the beginning of her performance, which she starts with a critique of the binary system 0 and 1, as the building blocks of the modern computer age.

As Laurie Anderson came from a very different direction than performing poets whose medium is restricted to the use of their own voice, one could argue that her multimedia background has shaped her performances under wholly different objectives. The film is a production that was made out of the material of several of her *Home of the Brave* live performances. Laurie Anderson defines it as a high-tech opera, in which she performs with a multicultural cast of several musicians and artists in

front of a live audience. Kostelanetz defines high-tech opera as “a mixed medium since the spectator can readily perceive the separation of the musical from the visual aspects of the work, and these two from the literary aspect” (166). In relation to *Home of the Brave*, I would argue that the term has to be expanded to what Jerome Rothenberg calls an “intermedia situation” (Rothenberg 1972, 246). This aspect will be discussed by analyzing the performance of the poem “White Lily”.

What is striking, and what makes this poem a performance poem rather than a performed poem, is the fact that it is highly dependent on sound, color, moving images and light/shadows in order to produce its impact on the recipient in the audience. The performance piece starts with electric sounds of a fast but regular melody played on a keyboard, interspersed by strikes of a clock tower. Onto a black screen the large light blue graphic of a running person is projected. After a few seconds Laurie Anderson, dressed in a white suite, walks backwards, passing the large moving picture on the screen and stops at a certain point, where she gets caught by a round, white spotlight that simultaneously throws her (black) shadow image onto a further “screen”. Then Laurie Anderson, holding a microphone in her left hand, speaks the poem in a soft but clear voice, leaving out its title:

WHITE LILY

What Fassbinder film is it? The one-armed
man walks into a flower shop and says:
What flower expresses
days go by
and they just keep going by endlessly
pulling you
into the future.
days go by

endlessly
endlessly pulling you
into the future.
And the florist says:
White Lily.

The narrative poem begins with the question “What Fassbinder film is it?”, a question which is not further pursued, but nevertheless pulls the recipient into the poem through its phonetically interesting sound combinations of the fricative *f* and *s* in “Fassbinder”, “film” and “is” (l. 1). This line collides with the peculiar picture of the “one-armed man” in one’s mind who “walks into the flower shop and says:” (ll. 2-3); the sentence’s tone and diction evoke conventional joke-telling, and theoretically arouses some

expectation that a joke would follow, especially through Anderson's use of the present-tense; yet on a visual and auditory level the screens, the electronic sounds, as well as the gestures and in particular her facial expression suggests something dramatic, not humorous.

The subsequent lines explore the subject matter death and the infinite existence after death into which one is pulled through fast, daily progressions in one's life. The repetition of the words "flower" (ll. 2-3), "go/ing by" (ll. 4, 5, 8), "endlessly" (ll. 5, 9, 10), "pulling" (ll. 6, 10) and the repetition of line 7, produce a very reflective tone. Additionally, the meaning of the poem as a whole gets emphasized by the mechanic movements of the person running on its place on the screen, but seemingly running forward. From this metaphoric images we may deduce that although we are all trying to get forward in our lives, we are, in fact pulled into the future by our confining death, traditionally symbolized by the white lily. This idea gets also emphasized by Laurie Anderson's body language, in particular when she speaks the phrase "into the future" and points backwards over her shoulder with her right thumb.

The words of the florist, "White Lily", are imitated by Laurie Anderson and set themselves off from the voice of the narrator, as they are spoken in a ghostly, highly aspirated manner. As soon as she has spoken the words, she steps backwards and, covered by darkness, remains invisible; also the black shadow disappears. Within the same second another image of her, a "white shadow" (an exact copy of the image of her body) is produced on a visual layer behind the place where she stood only a second before, except for that in the projected, white image of her whole body she does not only hold a microphone in her left hand, but also a white lily in her right hand. In this very moment, Laurie Anderson plays with the metaphoric meaning of "white versus black" as "life versus death", since her black shadow that she produced as a living person gets now substituted by a white shadow.

The unexpected effect created at the end of the performance poem triggers off a short wave of dramatic tension in the audience. The poem which was written by Laurie Anderson with the intention of a multimedia performance in mind, achieves its full dramatic realization only in performance, yet, reduced to words, it can also exist on the written page, or as a sound file, and still convey its basic meaning. Nevertheless, the poem is only complete in its multimedia existence; no doubt, the performance has been rehearsed many times. This returns us to the point that Laurie Anderson's production does not adhere to the principles of concept art which was at the core of performance art before 1979, when performance began to turn towards popular culture (cf. Goldberg 1988, 190).

Moreover, the performance can be viewed under two aspects: once as a poem that finds its visual interpretation on screen but focuses on Laurie Anderson's voice and presence. Secondly, if one does not let him- or

herself be drawn into what her physical presence may suggest but opens oneself up to experiencing the performance piece as a whole, in other words, as an inter-media situation between visual arts, sounds and poetry, then the focus shifts from centering on Laurie Anderson to a complete poetic, moving “sound-picture” in which she plays an integral role, but not the main part.

Another aspect in regard to Laurie Anderson’s performance in *Home of the Brave* is what appears to be some link to dadaist and surrealist intentions. Although Anderson’s performance is postmodern and very commercial and in itself depends very much on computer technologies, she emphasizes the following aspects in her characteristic male, authoritative voice, which is produced by a technological device:

I’m not a mathematician but I want to talk about just a couple of numbers that have been bothering me lately, and they are zero and one. To be a zero means to be a nobody, a has-been, a zilch. On the other hand, just about everyone wants to be number one. To be number one means to be a winner, top of the heap, the acme. And there seems to be this strange kind of national obsession with this particular number. I think we should get rid of the value judgments attached to these numbers and recognize that to be a zero is no better, no worse, than to be number one. Because what we are really looking at here are the building blocks of the Modern Computer Age. (transcript from *Home of the Brave*, Warner Brothers 1985)

This recalls Dada’s apparent lack of values, “its refusal to acknowledge terms such as ‘good’ and ‘bad’, [which] was neither an indication of nihilism nor proof of anarchism but a sensitive reflection of an age which had no trust in the old dogmas [...]” (Bigsby 1972, 25).

Additionally, although Laurie Anderson, in the age of postmodernism, calls attention to getting rid of the value judgments attached to the numbers by subversively mocking the voice and character of an intellectual man, the message of her lecture as well as of “White Lily” seems to be also rooted in the Surrealist second manifesto that “[t]here is a certain point for the mind from which life and death, the real and unreal and the imaginary, the past and the future, the communicable and the incommunicable, the high and the low cease being perceived as contradictions” (Fowlie 1966, 107).

Ntozake Shange

I write this way because I hear the words. It's as if somebody were talking to me. I don't mean to sound as if I'm out of my mind but I do hear my characters. It's really very peculiar because sometimes I'll hear very particular rhythms underneath whatever I'm typing, and this rhythm affects the structure of the piece.

(Ntozake Shange, in Athanases 1991, 122)

Ntozake Shange, born in 1948, is an African American novelist, playwright, performer and teacher of feminist aesthetics. As the quote above implies, her writing and performance art is very much influenced by voices that are produced by her sharp auditory imagination. Ntozake Shange experimented much with a mix of poetry, dance, and music and developed a series of dramatic free-verse monologues in the 1970s. She writes her personal poems in African American English, which make them “honey to the ear and hell to decipher on the page” (Molarsky 1999). Thus, grounded in secondary orality and oral tradition, it “invites performance as a means of fully realizing poetry” (Athanases 1991, 122).

Ntozake Shange is probably best-known for her choreopoem “for colored girls, who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf”, which was first staged in 1975 and experienced a landmark run on Broadway. Other than Gil Scott-Heron, she does not only fight against white supremacy, but expresses her personal oppression as a woman in a society dominated by men in the first place, and only secondary by *white* men. In fact, she changed her name from Paulette Williams to the Zulu-African name Ntozake Shange, “Ntozake means ‘she who comes with her own things’ and Shange means ‘who walks like a lion’” (<http://www.bridgesweb.com/shange.html>). Changing one’s name if it reflected “man” was common in the seventies’ feminists movement and thus she could remove herself from a first name that was derived from a male name, and from her second name which was inherited from the time of slavery in the US. Moreover, by getting rid of an Anglo-Saxon name, and choosing the Zulu-African name, she is able to express her general cultural origin and identity.

I want to analyze her poem “Rise up Fallen Fighters” from the CD *Our Souls Have Grown Deep Like the Rivers* in regard to orality, which is mostly reflected by her use of idiom and slang on the level of enunciation,

its realization in performance with music, and its feminist message. The performance poem is accompanied by a refreshing basic reggae rhythm whose effect is similar to the funk percussion of Gil Scott-Heron's poem "The Revolution Will Not be Televised". The Jamaican Reggae rhythm and beat work well together in relation to the meaning of the poem, which can be summarized by the following idea: "[u]nderstanding of meaning is transmitted when words and music come together in performance, preferably live performance, whereby another kind of entity is created by means of audible sensory perception" (Garlington 1999, 339). Taking this thought one step further, there are in fact at least *three* entities that come together in a performance like the one by Ntozake Shange: *sounds of music* (including their associations that they may evoke), *sounds of words* and, third, their corresponding *meaning*, which may reflect to a varying degree in the sounds of the poem as phonetic iconicity. The second entity, though, can only be acoustically and aesthetically experienced as a separate entity by someone who does not understand the language that the poems is spoken in; or, most radically, as in Kurt Schwitters' *Ursonate*, we are still subject to the aesthetic pleasure of sounds in poetry, regardless of how much or how little we understand of the meaning of the poem. Nevertheless, for a full perception of Ntozake Shange's type of performance poem, all three entities are inevitable, especially as regards sounds and meaning, since the recipient needs to decode the sounds for an appreciation of the meaning. In the performance of "Rise up Fallen Fighters", the percussionists open the performance and find the rhythm that Shange needs for her performance; at a certain point Shange says "that's it" to the musicians and tunes into the rhythm of the percussionists which aid her verbal rhythm.

RISE UP FALLEN FIGHTERS

I been married to Bob Marley for at least 17 years
but I used to call him Smokey Robinson.
It's hard to remember
I was under age at the time of our union
and changed my birthday so much
I can't count the years
only the satisfaction
Now Bob Marley is my husband and
whether our marriage is legal
has to do with where you live
And if you think highly of highly Celessi,
the lion of Judah
My children are hiding in tropical forests

They swing on their rasta-red hair
 Climbing jungle Jims of lapels
 Under the supervision from a good colored man from Uranus
 Where all colored men are kindergarten teachers
 Where they sing me husband song
 [...]

Bob Marley
 He take care of me
 He wanna give me some joy
 He be knocking on my door three year
 And he still there for sure
 He jump
 He shout
 He scream
 He shake his head
 He close the eye
 He be in the promised land
 He wait for me on stars
 He plays
 He sing
 he wanna jam it with me
 and he don't wait in vain
 [...]

Rise up on fallen fighters and
 Show me around the promised land
 Show me around the universe, our father's land
 Rise up announce the coming of the kingdom's rightful heirs
 I'm climbing to the moon on a rasta-true way
 [...]

Rise up fallen fighters on feathers and stars
 Dance with the universe and make it
 Oh make it
 Dance with the universe and make it, make it
 Dance with the universe and make it
 ours.

(Transcript of *Ours Souls Have Grown Deep Like the Rivers*, RR 2000, Vol. 2)

In my analysis I will restrict myself to a few points that seem relevant in the overall discussion of the performance and the oral nature of the poem. First of all, the reggae rhythm, sustained by the percussionists, mirrors the spirit of the content of the poem, in which a woman imagines finding true love in Jamaica with Bob Marley. The rhythm and the poem both reflect an African American, multicultural continuation of (secondary) oral tradition on a musical level and on a speech level.

Secondly, the poem is a record of African American dialect and idiom. It seems obvious that the poem would not reflect its ties to the African American community if it were written in standard American English. Since the poem was written for a performance, it is only natural that Ntozake Shange would never have attempted to write the poem in standard American English. And, considering what she says about hearing the voice of her characters (see quote above), there would have been no logic in re-writing of what she hears in any other way than in a more or less exact graphic representation of speech. In that respect, the following quote shall illustrate how closely Ntozake Shange pays attention to spoken language in general:

I go in and out of formal English and various regional black dialects because there are a whole lot of them. I try to tune my ears carefully so that I don't Carolinese with people from Chicago or mix people from South Central L.A. with people in Dallas. I can hear, and when you read [aloud] what I have written you can hear. These are still black people, but they don't speak the same as black people before. I really enjoy that, that kind of specificity (NS quoted in an interview by Edward K. Brown II, 1993)

The use of vernacular speech in her poem "Rise Up Fallen Fighters" reflects also in a fairly simplistic syntax and repetitive beginnings of most of the lines as well as in repetitive phrases, as for example "dance with the universe and make it", which contributes to the floating rhythm of the poem.

On a content level, the poem conveys her feminist attitude as she dreams up an ideal, or rather, fantastical situation for the speaking voice in the poem and her children. With lines like "He wanna jam it with me" she responds to songs by Bob Marley and thus creates an audio-intertextuality. Contrary to the tone in Gil Scott-Heron's poem "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised", which is more radical, Shange's tone of voice is highly optimistic and her vision is conveyed in an almost ecstatic way.

Ntozake Shange expresses the idea behind her feminist poetics as follows:

I create poems about Black women
which help us grow strong.
I create stories about Black women
which make our daydreams as real as life.
I create plays about Black women
Which tell histories of our
Pleasure and pain
Struggle and triumph
Joy and anger
Fear and strength.
I create dances about Black women

whose rhythms remind us of our African roots.
When I create
poems, stories, plays, characters and dances
Hear the voices of
Black women.
See the beauty of
 Black women.
Taste the sweat of
 Black women.
Feel the strength of
 Black women.

(from: <http://members.aol.com/HarambeeCo/shange.htm>)

In this passage she makes clear that in order to achieve her goal, she invents voices of fictional women that should serve as an encouragement for women in their struggle against male oppression. One can deduce from this piece of writing that her poems, stories, plays and dances can be effectively realized only in a live performance, in which all senses can be addressed. Although one may argue that feminist poetry or plays can be equally revealing in a silent reading, in which the reader response is fueled by an intimacy shared by the speaking voices in the text, live performance has a greater potential to stage social concerns of women in a community.

Patricia Smith

It is my contention here that those ephemeral and uncomodifiable aspects of live performance – the voice, the body on stage, the intimacy between the poet and her audience – infuse the poem [“The Undertaker”] with an immediacy and urgency that cannot be captured on the page.

(Julie Schmid in: “What’s Going On: Poetics, Performance, and Patricia Smith’s Close to Death”)

The last performance poem that I would like to analyze in relation to performance, sounds and orality is “Undertaker” by Pulitzer price nominee for Journalism and four time National Grand Slam champion Patricia Smith. Originally a Chicago-school-poet and a member of Chicago’s first national champion slam team, Smith performs regularly at the *Nuyorican Poets Café* on New York City’s Lower East Side; the *Cantab Lounge* in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and *The Green Mill* in Chicago.

The poem “Undertaker” was staged at the National Grand Slam in San Francisco in 1993, where she won the individuals. The persona poem was “inspired by interviews that Smith conducted while working on ‘Voices of the Endangered Black Male’, an article that Smith wrote for the Boston Globe [...]” (<http://english.rutgers.edu/schmid.htm>). In fact, in her poetry Patricia Smith collapses the distinction between the historical and the personal, news and lived experience, drawing on her experience as a performance poet and her work as a journalist over the last two decades (cf. *ibid.*). She introduced the poem with the words: “[t]his is for all the young black men who have lost their lives violently and for the men and women who have to bury them. It’s called: ‘Undertaker’”

UNDERTAKER

When a bullet enters the brain, the head explodes.
I can think of no softer warning for the young mothers
Who sit doubled before my desk,
knotting their smooth brown hands,
and begging, “fix my boy, fix my boy!
Here is his high school picture.”
And the mildly mustachachioed player
In the crinkled snapshot
looks nothing like the plastic bag of boy

stored and dated in the cold room downstairs.
In the picture he is cocky and chiseled
clutching the world by the balls
I know the look.
Now he is flaps of cheek,
slivers of jawbone, assorted teeth,
a surprised eye, bloody tufts of napped hair.
The building blocks of my business.

So I turn the photo face down
to talk numbers instead. The high price
of miracles startles the young woman,
but she is prepared. I know that she has sold
everything she owns, that cousins and uncles
have emptied their empty bank accounts,
that she dreams of her baby
in tuxedoed satin, flawless in an open casket,
a cross or blood red rose tacked to his fingers,
his halo set at a cocky angle.
So I write a figure on a piece of paper
She stares at the number: "Jesus."

But Jesus isn't on my payroll. I work alone
until the dim insistence of morning,
gluing stitching, creating a chin with a brushstroke,
I plump shattered skulls, and paint the skin
To suggest warmth, and impending breath.
I plop glass eyes into rigid sockets,
then carve eyelids from a forearm, an inner thigh,
I reach into collapsed cavities to rescue
a tongue, an ear. Lips are never easy to recreate.

I have explored the jagged gaps
in the boy's body, smoothed the angry edges
of bulletholes. I have touched him in places
No mother knows, and I have birthed his
new face. I know that he believed himself

invincible, that he most likely hissed
"Fuck you, man" before the bullets lifted him
off his feet. I try not to remember
his swagger, his lizard-lidded gaze,
his young mother screaming on the phone.

She says that she will find the money, and I know
That is the truth that fuels her, forces her

To place one foot in front of the other.
Suddenly, I wanna take her down
To the chilly room, open the bag
And shake its terrible bounty onto the
gleaming steel table. I want her to see him,
to touch him, to press her lips to the flap of cheek.
Because the woman needs to wither, finally, and move on.

We both jump as the phone rattles in its hook.
I pray that it's my wife, a bill collector, a wrong number.
But the wide, questioning silence on the other end
is too familiar. It's another mother needing a miracle.
Another homeboy, coming home.

(Transcript of Patricia Smith's performance at the National Poetry Slam in San Francisco 1993. The poem varies considerably from the version in *Close to Death*, 71-73. Various lines are in a different order and a complete stanza is "missing"; Smith needs to stick to the 3 minutes and 10 seconds time-limit, which she slightly overdraws - at line 57 the slam stopwatch goes off - which explains why she used the already shorter, adapted version in the performance.)

In this vocal performance Patricia Smith conveys an enormous tension as she does not only speak in the voice of the undertaker but also in the voice of the anguished mother and the young black man who lost his life in a violent street clash. Such extreme narrative tension can never be created and felt by reading the poem silently. When listening to and seeing the poem in performance, it is the meaning of the poem that enters the mind through the dramatic tone, varying pitch and loud volume of Smith's voice, who credibly turns into a distressed undertaker for 3 minutes and 20 seconds. Smith speaks for a real undertaker who experiences situations with family members of the dead people who he restores. The frustration about the frequent killing of young black men in particular has added up to the great emotional burden that he now releases as a verbal account. In this respect, Patricia Smith, having interviewed an undertaker, functions as a vocal witness. Julie Schmid points out:

Smith's witnessing relies not only on the graphic descriptions of the young man's dead body [...] The performance of this poem also articulates another language (a metaphorical witnessing), one that exists in the pitch and volume of Smith's voice [...] ([http:// www.rutgers.edu/schmid.htm](http://www.rutgers.edu/schmid.htm)).

The acoustic web is not only woven by pitch and volume, but in a more detailed way also on the phonetic level. For example, the meaning of the first line, a factual remark about what happens when someone gets shot in the head, is phonetically intensified by the plosives that are inherent to the words (cf. "bullet", "enters", "brain", "explode"). The precise description

of the body language of the imagined mother, if visualized in the mind's eye, culminates with the voice of the anguished mother who shouts in distress "Fix my boy. Fix my boy. / Here is his high school picture" (l. 5). The soundscape of lines 5-17 is peppered with cacophonous sounds and plosives that sustain the alternating rhythm in these lines.

In stanza two of the poem the imagery of the poem changes from the description of the mutilated body to the imagery of the wishful thinking of a restored young man. Euphonious, or at least positively connoted words like "dreams", "baby" (l. 24), "tuxedoed satin", and "flawless" suffocate in the surrounding imagery and cacophonous sounds of words like "open casket" (l. 25), "cross" and "blood red rose tacked to his fingers" (l. 26). Also the tone does not change much in this stanza, at least not until the articulation of the word "Jesus" (l. 29), which is pronounced in an outraged tone and shatters both the imagery and tone of this articulated stanza. Important to note is also the suspense created by the long pause that Smith makes before the word *Jesus*, leaving the mother enough time to check the number who then bursts out the word, shocked by the high price that she has to pay for the undertaker's artful work .

In the next line the word "Jesus" is taken up again in a dry remark about the exceptionally hard job that the caretaker has to do in order to receive the money. The fricative sounds of this stanza create the real impression of the movements of the manual work involved in restoring corpses for burials; the "-ing" sound of the progressive verb structure (cf. l. 32) suggests the repetitiveness of the job and so does the imagery, combined with the almost furious tone of the four anaphoric sentences (cf. ll. 30-38). The dry fact that "Lips are never easy to recreate" suggests how mechanical the job is, but the tone reveals how much the undertaker is overpowered by the emotional side of his job (l. 38).

In stanza four, further techniques by the undertaker are described in a striking way. The consonance of "jagged gaps" (l. 39) and alliteration of "boy's body" (l.40) has a certain aesthetic sound quality; particularly noticeable is also the sound level and the corresponding imagery of the words by the undertaker, who "smoothed the angry edges of bulletholes" (ll. 40-41). "Smooth" is, without doubt, phonetically intensified through the fricative *s* gliding over the semi-vowel *m* that is leading into the long vowel sound of *oo*, and finally to the aspirated dental sound of the *th*.

Furthermore, in stanza four, the voice of the narrator is cut through by the angry, seemingly invincible voice of the young black American which is imitated by the caretaker in the slang phrase "Fuck you Man" in line 45. Line 47, juxtaposed with line 48, again reveals a powerful relation between the poignant imagery and effective phonetic wordplay, as the picture and sound of "lizard-lidded gaze" of the young man, just being shot and lying

on the grounds (l. 46), almost overlaps with the picture and sound of “his mother screaming on the phone” (l. 47).

Stanza five shows the deep level of introspection into the undertaker’s psyche, as it seems that while the mother tells him “that she will find the money” (l. 49), a horrid scenario is running through the undertaker’s mind: to “take her down/to the chilly room, open the bag/and shake its terrible bounty on the gleaming steel table” (ll. 52-55). Again, the imagery would not be quite so effective without the sound and the tone, volume and pitch of Smith’s voice. The imagined scenario of the undertaker is shattered by the phone that “rattles” (note the onomatopoeia of the word) and taken back to reality, he has to face another “homeboy, coming home” (l. 62). These last three words of the poem are spoken in a very aspirated and highly dramatic tone of voice upon which the audience, which was taken aback by the performance and (contrary to other performances by the poets at the National Poetry Slam) remained silent for a while and then appreciated the oral performance with great applause, contributing to the score and – eventually – to Patricia Smith’s winning of the National Poetry Slam title. Jerry Wards points out:

The power of orality is quite obvious in the ceremony of the “slam”, a poetic ritual, that can easily become gladiatorial [...]. As prophets for a new day of genuinely multicultural poetries, these writers test our cultural literacy and perform subtle shifts and transitions often found in the hypertextual world of cyberspace. (Ward 1999, <http://proquest.umi.com>)

No doubt, her performance spoke out for the fact that orality, or as much of it as is possible in a time of yet another technological revolution of the mediated word, is again being used to fuel communication in a live situation.

Conclusion

The scope of this book was to investigate contemporary performance poetry in the USA in the light of orality and literacy, as well as the poetic use of sounds in general. Further parts dealt with a survey of performance poetry movements as well as an analysis of sound and video examples of poems by representative poets of these movements.

Part I, “Back to the Roots” pointed out that relevant aspects of what is understood as oral art, or *wordpower*, preceded our concept of literature by thousands of years. Since writing was invented to represent human speech, and since the artful use of human speech has always played an important role in communal settings, one cannot disregard the fact that – even today – one finds a strong link between oral art and what we understand as literature. An analysis of primary oral poems (i.e. originally untouched by the technique of writing) by American Indian poets and secondary oral poems (i.e. written for an oral performance) by contemporary indigenous poets, revealed the following: mentally stored and written poems performed orally in a communal and social context contain not only ritualistic, performative speech acts, but also bear many other similarities on a formal level (e.g. repetition, anaphers, a strong rhythmic quality, additive structures, vocal exploitation of sounds in terms of tone and pitch etc.).

Part II, “Listen Up”, focused on the three different types of voices in poetry: the narrative, the dramatic and the lyric. It shows that what is locked into the text has a close mimetic resemblance to the speech utterance of a real human being, even though the content is a fictional one. In narrative poetry the poet’s skills depend on shaping a plot and relating its narrative moments. The audiotext is occasionally interspersed with representations of the speech fragments of characters who participated in the past event that the narrator relates to the audience (cf. Etheridge Knight’s poem “Hard Rock Returns to Prison from the Hospital for the Criminal Insane”). In dramatic poetry the narrative emphasis shifts towards an exchange of direct speech utterances of various characters. In dramatic monologues, a seemingly communicative frame is established by the character and his or her imagined addressee, such as in Gwendolyn Brooks’ poem “The Mother”. In performance poetry, the addressee in dramatic poetry is often the audience itself, which helps to achieve direct audience reactions. Lyric poetry can be characterized by a high degree of self-reflexivity as the speaking voice reflects upon a situation that he or she is confronted with, as for example in the poem “The Road Not Taken” by Robert Frost and “Dead Presidents” by “The Invisible Man”. The interaction with the audience in these poems seems lower than in narrative or dramatic poetry. Nevertheless, it is one of the many challenging tasks in performance poetry to vocally perform the written voice in the poem,

whether narrative, dramatic or lyric, and thus to model it into the voice of a fictional character. Yet, this character remains frequently a transparent expression of the poet, contrary to a character in a theater play who (except for in epic drama) usually completely merges with his or her actor. Because of that, I believe that performance poetry lends itself particularly well to parody (cf. “Sex Goddess of the Western Hemisphere” by Maggie Estep and “I Live for My Car” by Wanda Coleman).

Furthermore, I focused on the soundscape of the voice. By means of listening examples, I carried out a practical aural close-up on certain techniques that not even the well-trained acoustic mind of the reader is able to imagine to full extent. Such soundscape becomes an essential part of the analysis of a performance poem. Among the techniques discussed were phonetic intensifiers (which contain a certain degree of phonetic iconicity and sound symbolism), rhyme and repetition, rhythm and meter, tone and pitch, and volume and pause. These are the most common features of the voice of a speaking person, with the difference that they are created in the poem more consciously to produce aesthetic or otherwise interesting sound effects. These basic constituents of poetry are grounded in orality and are not only used as stylistic devices, but also to overcome the ephemeral nature of sound.

Part III, “The Page versus the Stage”, had two objectives: first, I pointed out some characteristics of different kinds of poets as to how they interact with their reading or listening audience. Such categorization helps to locate the performance poet in relation to the writing poet, the writing and reading poet, and the performing poet. It also serves to illustrate that there is a close connection between the fact that a poem exhibits a higher degree of features of orality if it is meant for the stage. Among the characteristics of performance poems are: use of dialect, idiom, slang, a socio-critical content, a multimedia texture, musical rhythm, and clarity of diction. The recipient encounters the poem as an aural texture in performance that becomes a social and cultural experience based on the live performance skills of the poet. The poet and the recipient may interact in many ways, for example by personally addressing each other before, after or during the performance, by making the audience co-creators of the poem, or by participating in a poetry competition that depends on direct audience reactions. This explains why slam poets often perform entertaining or controversial texts that are emotionally stirring.

By contrast, a poem that is meant for a silent reader reception may contain more features of literacy, such as ambivalent or complex imagery, thematic density, and self-reflexivity, on which the reader can dwell. Moreover, the silent reader re-creates the poem in his or her mind and provides the poem with a personal soundscape, in addition to what the

conventional intonation of a given language suggests (cf. Performance Chart on page 105).

The second focus of Part III of this book was an investigation of poetry movements in the USA that are closely associated with performances of poetry. Historically, an important milestone in the development of performance poetry are the popular reception of performing poets, among them William Carleton, Vachel Lindsay, and James Whitcomb Riley, who toured the country at the end of the nineteenth century. The beginning of the twentieth century was marked by a growing influence of Dada and Surrealism on later poetry movements in the USA and on the works of individual poets, such as Walter Conrad Arsenberg, Bob Cobbing, John Cage, and in particular on Jerome Rothenberg. Moreover, in the 1920s poets of the Harlem Renaissance played an important role in the fusion of poetry with live performances of jazz and blues, which would find its revival in the 1950s and the Beat Generation.

The Beat poets marked a new phase in the development of performance poetry as they achieved a fairly broad public interest (and partly disapproval) of live performances of poems that contained a social and political critique of the USA. In the 1970s, performance art often used spoken word poetry as an integral part of a type of avant-garde performances. In the late 1970s and 1980s the spirit of performance art merged with advances that were made in technology and soon grew into multimedia performances that would attract a mass audience. Feminist poetry in the 1970s used performances of poetry in order to achieve a visibility of their concerns in what they view as a patriarchal society, which continues to be an issue in the twenty-first century. The latest poetry movement, slam poetry seems to merge many of the aspects of twentieth century performance poetry, in addition to creating its own characteristic, competitive spirit that has caught people from a large demographic spectrum.

In Part IV, “Off the Page in the USA”, I analyzed poems by poets of the previously discussed poetry movements. Charles Whitcomb Riley’s poem reveals an abundance of speech-like features as, for example, his use of dialect, idiom, an additive structure, and every-day diction that is meant to be heard, not read, even though some of the liveliness of this poem is still retained in the written version of the poem. Rothenberg’s ethno-poems add an important dimension to the discussion of the communal functions of poems. His poems cross-culturally translate the nature of poetry as performance. Moreover, his poems dedicated to Kurt Schwitters, Tristan Tzara and Hugo Ball, evidently, show his Dada performance influence. Allen Ginsberg’s poems that he performed in Santa Monica partly accompanied by David Was show his close connection to blues and music in general. The poem “America” exhibits features of the oral tradition, such

as anaphora, repetitions and every-day-diction. The overt social and political critique of the poem, sharpened with Ginsberg's ironic tone and personal charisma, make it particularly suitable for a live performance. The focus of the analysis of the performance of "A Supermarket in California" was Ginsberg's poetics of the "*speech-breath-thought*"; it points out the complex process of writing for the stage. Gil Scott-Heron's funk poem "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised" is an artistic and political expression of African-Americanism, a continuation of an oral tradition on a musical level and on an artistic speech level. Laurie Anderson's multimedia poem "White Lily", staged as an integral part of her performance in the film *Home of the Brave*, is filled with music, visual images, sound, light and shadow. It proves a first-rate example of the high product-orientation of performance art in the 1980s and places poetry in an intermedia situation that plays with the semiotic relationship between sound, visual effects and the physical performance of the artist. Ntozake Shange's reggae poem "Rise Up Fallen Fighters" unleashes the highly optimistic feminist voice of a woman who dreams up an ideal marriage with Bob Marley. Using reggae beats and vernacular speech, Ntozake Shange's performance reflects the oral tradition and culture of her African American heritage. It shows that performance poetry and social concerns are inseparable. Equally, Patricia Smith's poem "The Undertaker" can find its full realization only in a live-performance, as the idea of poetry slams calls for a close connection between the performance poet, the poem and the audience/jury. The poem's success is based on a highly interesting soundscape that is spiked with phonetic intensifiers, voice imitations, a realistic setting and an emotionally stirring content.

With all analyzed poems, I showed that contemporary American performance poetry is largely an expression of social awareness and thus culture-bound. In that respect, I would like to call attention to the necessity of performance poems to be heard and, whenever possible or essential, to be seen, in order to be capable of a full experience and response. It would be highly valuable if teachers and professors at high school and university level offer their students listening examples of poems that are meant to be heard in a social setting, more often than it is the case at present.

Bibliography

- Abbe, George. *You and Contemporary Poetry. An aid-to-appreciation.* Petersborough: Richard R. Smith Noone House, 1965.
- Alfonso, Barry. "Elder Statesman, Unrepentant Rebel. A Chat with Allen Ginsberg". In: *The Rolling Stone Book of the Beat Generation and the Beats.* Edited by George-Warren Holly. New York: Rolling Stone Press, 1999.
- Altieri, Charles. "From Symbolist Thought to Immanence: The Ground of Postmodern American Poetry." In: *Boundary 2.* Vol. 1, Nr. 3, Spring 1973. 605-637.
- Athanases, Stephan Z. "When Print Alone Fails Poetry. Performance as a Contingency of Literary Value." In: TPQ 11, 1991. 116-127.
- Bakker, Egbert J. *Poetry in Speech. Orality and Homeric Discourse.* London: Cornell University Press, 1997.
- Ball, Gordon. "A One-Man Generation". In: *The Rolling Stone Book of the Beat Generation and the Beats.* Edited by George-Warren Holly. New York: Rolling Stone Press, 1999.
- Barry, Elaine. *Robert Frost on Writing.* New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1973.
- Beloof, Robert. *The Performing Voice in Literature.* Boston: Little, 1996.
- Bernstein, Charles, ed. *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Bigsby, C.W.E. *Dada & Surrealism.* The Critical Idiom 23. Gen. Ed. John D. Dump. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1972.
- Burrows, David. *Sound, Speech, and Music.* Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1990.
- Carbon, Marvin. *Performance. A Critical Introduction.* New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Charters, Ann. "Beat Poetry and the San Francisco Poetry Renaissance". In: *The Columbia History Of American Poetry.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1993. 581-604.
- Clinton-Baddeley, V.C. "The Written and the Spoken Word." In: *Essays and Studies.* Ed. by Sybil Rosenfield. London: Cox & Wyman. Ltd.
- Collins, Christopher. *The Act of Poetry.* A Practical Introduction to the Reading of Poems. New York: Random University, 1970.
- Connor, Steven. *Postmodernist Culture. An Introduction to Theories of the Contemporary.* Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1989. Rpt. 1992.
- Cook, William W. "The Black Arts Poets". In: *The Columbia History Of American Poetry.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1993. 675-705.
- Crocker, Lionel. *Oral Reading. Discussion and Principles and an Anthology of Practice Material from Literature Classical and Modern.* New York: Prentice Hall Inc., 1967.
- Cusic, Don. *The Poet as Performer.* New York: University Press of America, 1991.
- Damon, Maria. "Was That 'Different', 'Dissitant' or 'Dissonant'? Poetry (n) the Public Spear: Slams, Open Readings, and Dissident Traditions." In: *Close*

- Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word*. Ed. by Charles Bernstein. New York: Oxford University Press. 324-342.
- Davis, Miles / Quincy Troupe. *Miles. The Autobiography*. London: Macmillan. 1989. Rpt.1999.
- Day, Grove A. *The Sky Clears. Poetry of American Indians*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1951.
- Donovan, Josephine, ed. *Feminist Literary Criticism. Exploration in Theory*. USA: The University Press of Kentucky, 1989. First Published in 1975.
- Drucker, Johanna. "Visual Performance of the Poetic Text". In: *Close Listening. Poetry and the Performed Word*. Ed. by Charles Bernstein. New York: Oxford University Press, 1998. 131-161.
- Economou, George. "Some Notes Toward Finding a View of the New Oral Poetry." In: *Boundary 2*, Vol. 3. Durham: Duke University Press, 1975. 653-663.
- Erickson, John D. *Dada: Performance, Poetry, and Art*. Massachusetts: Twayne's World Authors Series, 1984.
- Foley, John M. *The Singer of Tales in Performance*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.
- Fowlie, Wallace. *Age of Surrealism*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1950. Rpt. 1966.
- Frye, Northrop, ed. *Sound and Poetry*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1967. Third Printing.
- Furniss, Tom and Michael Barth. *Reading Poetry. An Introduction*. Harlow: Prentice Hall, 1996.
- Fyfe, W. Hamilton. *Aristotle's Art of Poetry. A Greek View of Poetry and Drama*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966.
- Garber, Frederick. *Repositionings, Readings of Contemporary Poetry, Photography, and Performance Art*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995.
- Garlington, Aubery. "Music, Word, Performance. Sounds of Meaning". In: *Word and Music Studies*. Series Eds. Walter Bernhart, Sieglind Bruhn, Lawrence Kramer et. al. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999.
- Gentile, John G. *Cast of One. One-Person Show from Chautauqua Platform to the Broadway Stage*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989.
- Gerber, Phillip. *Robert Frost. Revised Edition*. Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1966. Rpt.1982.
- Ginsberg, Allen. *First Blues, Rags, Ballads & Harmonium Songs*. New York: Full Court Press, 1975.
- Ginsberg, Allen. "America", "Supermarket in California." In: *The Penguin Modern Poets. Gregory Corso, Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Allen Ginsberg*. Hammonds-worth: Penguin Press, 1963. Rpt. 1971.
- Glazier, Loss Pequeño. *Digital Poetics. The Making of E-Poetries*. Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2002.
- Goldberg, RoseLee. *Performance Art. From Futurism to the Present*. New York: Abrahams Inc., 1988.
- Goldberg, RoseLee. *Performance / life art since 1960*. New York: Abrahams Inc., 1998.

- Gray, Paul H. "Poet as Entertainer: Will Carleton, James Whitcomb Riley, and the Rise of the Poet Performer Movement". In: *Literature in Performance* 5.1. (1984): 1-13.
- Gray, Paul H. "Preparing for Popularity: *Origins of the Poet Performer Movement*". In: *Literature in Performance* 6.1 (1985): 34-41.
- Hall, David. *Goatfoot Milktongue Twinbird*. Interview, Essays, and Notes on Poetry. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1970-1976.
- Hall, David. *Remembering Poets. Reminiscences and Opinion. Dylan Thomas, Robert Frost, T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound*. New York: Harper-Row, 1978.
- Hall, David. *Poetry and Ambition. Essays 1982-1988*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press. Rpt. 1991.
- Hawthorn, Jerome. *Unlocking the Text. Fundamental Issues in Literary Theory*. London: Edward Arnold, 1987.
- Hayden, Robert. *Kaleidoscope. Poems by American Negro Poets*. Edited with an introduction by Robert Hayden. New York: Harcourt, 1962. xix-xxiv.
- Herrnstein Smith, Barbara. *On the Margins of Discourse. The Relation of Literature to Language*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977.
- Hinchcliffe, Arnold P. *Modern Verse Drama*. The Critical Idiom 32. Gen. Ed. John D. Dump. London: Methuen&Co., 1977.
- Holman, C. Hugh and W. Harmon. *A Handbook to Literature*. New York: Macmillian, 1986. 5th edition.
- Greenberg, Robert A. and James G. Hebburn. *Robert Frost. An Introduction*. N.Y: Holt, 1961. Rpt. 1965.
- Kennedy, X.J. *An Introduction to Poetry*. New York: Harper Collins College Publishers, 1994. Eighth Edition.
- Knight, Arthur. *The Beat Vision*. New York: A Primary House Publishers, 1987.
- Kohl, Herbert. *How to read poetry and make them a part of your life*. New York: Harper Flamingo, 1999.
- Kostelanetz, Richard. *The Old Poetries and the New*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1981.
- Kubernik, Harvey R. "Innerview". In: *The Rolling Stone Book of the Beat Generation and the Beats*. Ed. George-Warren Holly. New York: Rolling Stone Press, 1999.
- Kureishi, Hanif and Jon Savage, ed. *The Faber Book of Pop*. London: Faber and Faber, 1995.
- Lapansky, Jones Emma. "Black Power is my Mental Health: Accomplishments of the Civil Rights Movement". In: *Black Americans*. Edited by John J. Szwed. Washington D.C: Voice of America Forum Lectures, 1970. 3-15.
- Lord, Albert Bates. *Epic Singers and Oral Tradition*. Ithaka: Cornell University Press, 1991.
- Lowell, Amy. "Poetry as Spoken Art". In: *Poetry and Poets*. New York: Biblio and Tannen, 1971. 10-23.
- MacLeish, Archibald. *J.B. A Play in Verse*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1958.
- McCorkle, James. *The Still Performance. Writing, Self, and Interconnection in Five Postmodern American Poets*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1989.

- Merrill, Thomas F. *Allen Ginsberg. Revised edition.* Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1988.
- Middleton, Peter. "Contemporary Poetry Readings". In: *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word.* Ed. by Charles Bernstein. New York: Oxford University Press. 262-300.
- Miles, Barry. *Howl. Original Draft Facsimile, Transcript & Variant Versions, fully annotated by the author with contemporaneous correspondence account of first public reading, legal skirmishes, precursor texts & Bibliography.* New York: Harper, 1995. Rpt. 1999.
- Miller, J. ed. *The Arts & The Public.* Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1967.
- Miller, Lynne C. "Writing is Hearing and Saying: Gertrude Stein on Language and in Performance." In: *TPQ* 13 (1993): 154-167.
- Mills, Paul. *Writing in Action.* London: Routledge, 1996.
- Niatum, Duane ed., *Harpers Anthology of 20th Century Native American Poetry.* San Francisco: Harper&Row, 1988.
- Nielsen, Aldon Lynn. *Black Chant. Languages of African-American Postmodernism.* USA: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Niles, John D. *Homo Narrans. The Poetics and Anthropology of Oral Literature.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999.
- New York Quarterly. *Introduction.* 1991/6.
- Oles, Carole and Hilda Raz. "The Feminist Literary Movement." In: *Poetry After Modernism.* Oregon: Story Line Press, 1991.
- Olson, Charles. "Projective Verse". In: *Selected Writings of Charles Olson.* ed. by Robert Creeley. New York: New Directions, 1951. 15-30.
- Ong, Walter J. *Interfaces of the Word. Studies in the Evolution of Consciousness and Culture.* London: Cornell University Press, 1977.
- Ong, Walter J. *Orality and Literacy. The Technologizing of the Word.* Cornwall: T.J. Press, 1982. Rpt. 1991.
- Packard, William, ed. *The Poet's Craft.* Interviews from *The New York Quarterly.* With Amiri Baraka. New York: Paragon Publishers, 1987.
- Patterson, Raymond R. "What's Happening in Black Poetry?" In: *A Gift of Tongues. Critical Challenges in Contemporary American Poetry.* Edited by Marie Harries and Kathleen Aguero. Athen: The University of Georgia Press, 1987.
- Perrine, Laurence. *Perrine's Sound and Sense. An Introduction to Poetry.* New York: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1956. Rpt. 1997.
- Perloff, Marjorie. *The dance of the intellect. Studies in the Poetry of the Pound tradition.* New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- Perloff, Marjorie. *Poetry On & Off the Page. Essays for Emergent Occasions.* Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998.
- Pinsky, Robert. *The Sounds of Poetry: A Brief Guide.* New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux. 1998. Rpt. 2000.
- Piombino, Nick. "The Aural Ellipsis and the Nature of Listening in Contemporary Poetry". In: *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word.* Ed. by Charles Bernstein. New York: Oxford University Press. 53-72.
- Plath, Sylvia. *The Colossus.* London: Faber and Faber, 1960.

- Poggioli, Renato. *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*. New York: Harper & Row Editions, 1971. Translated from the Italian by Gerald Fitzgerald.
- Poirier, Richard. *The Performing Self*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1971.
- Pound, Ezra. *ABC of Reading*. New York: A New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1934. 24th Printing.
- Pound, Ezra. "A Retrospect". In: *The Poetics of New American Poetry*. Ed. by Allen D.M. and W. Tallman. New York: Grove Press, 1973.
- Pound, Louise. *Poetic Origins and the Ballad*. New York: Russel & Russel, 1962.
- Revell, Peter. *James Whitcomb Riley*. New York: Twayne Publishers Inc., 1970.
- Robson, Ernest. *Phonetic Music*. USA: Primary Press, 1981.
- Rosenthal M.L. and A.J. Smith. *Exploring Poetry*. New York: The Macmillian Company, 1973.
- Rothenberg, Jerome, ed. *Shaking The Pumpkin. Traditional Poetry of the Indian North Americas*. New York: Doubleday & Company, 1972^a.
- Rothenberg, Jerome. "Total and Minimal Translations of American Indian Poetry". In: *Open Poetry. Four Anthologies of Expanded Poems*. Editors: Ronald Gross and George Quasha. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972^b.
- Rothenberg, Jerome and George Quasha, eds. *America a Prophecy. A New Reading of American Poetry From Pre-Columbian Times to the Present*. New York: Vintage Books, 1972^c.
- Rothenberg, Jerome, ed. *The Revolution of the Word. A New Gathering of American Avant Garde Poetry. 1914-1945*. New York: A Continuum Book, 1974.
- Rothenberg, Jerome. *Pre-faces & other Writings*. New York: New Directions Publishing Cooperation, 1981.
- Sanders, Ed. *The Life and Death of Allen Ginsberg. A Narrative Poem*. New York: The Overlook Press, 2000.
- Silliman, Ron. "Afterword: Who Speaks: Ventriloquism and the Self in the Poetry Reading." In: *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word*. Ed. by Charles Bernstein. New York: Oxford University Press. 360-378.
- Steel, Timothy. *Missing Measures, Modern Poetry and the Revolt against Meter*. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1990. Rpt. 1994.
- Stein, Gertrude. *Gertrude Stein on Picasso*. New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 1970.
- Stevens, Wallace. *Collected Poetry & Prose*. New York: The Library of America, 1997.
- Stewart, Susan. "Letter on Sound". In: *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word*. Ed. by Charles Bernstein. New York: Oxford University Press. 29-52.
- Stewart, Williams A. "Understanding Black Language". In: *Black Americans*. Editor: John J. Szwed. Washington D.C.: Voice of America Forum Lectures, 1970. 131-141.
- Tannen, Deborah. "Spoken and Written Language. Exploring Orality and Literacy." In the series: *Advances in Discourse Process*. Vol. IX. Norwood, N.J.: ABLEX Publishing Corporation, 1982.
- Tedlock, Dennis, transl. *Finding the Center. Narrative Poetry of the Zuni Indians*. From Performances in the Zuni by Andrew Peynetsa and Walter Sanchez. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1972. Rpt. 1978.

- Thayler, Carl. "The Oral Foundation of Post-Modern American Poets." In: *Mid American Review*. Bowling Green: Popular Press, 1981. 101-108.
- Troupe, Quincy. *Choruses: Poems*. New York: Coffee House Publishers, 1999.
- Watson, Steven. *The Harlem Renaissance. Hub of African American Culture. 1920-1930*. N.Y.: Pantheon Books, 1995.
- Whitman, Walt. *Leaves of Grass*. New York: Norton & Company, 1973. (first published in 1891-1892).
- Wimsatt, W.K. *Verbal Icon. Studies in the Meaning of Poetry*. Lexington: Kentucky University Paper Press, 1954.
- Wakoski, Diane. "Poetry as the Dialogue. We all Hope Someone is Listening To." In: *Written in Water, Written in Stone. Twenty Years of Poets on Poetry*. Ed. Martin Lammon. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1996. Rpt. 1999. 147-154.
- Zolbrod, Paul G. *Reading the Voice: Native American Oral Poetry on the Page*. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1995.

ENCYCLOPEDIAS, GLOSSARIES, ANTHOLOGIES

- An Anthology of Concrete Poetry*. Ed. Emmett Williams. New York: Something Else Press Inc., 1967.
- American Indian Poetry. The Standard Anthology of Song and Chant*. Ed. George Cronyn. New York: Liveright, 1962.
- American Poetry. The Nineteenth Century*. Vol. 2. Ed. John Hollander. USA: The Library of America, 1993.
- A Glossary of Literature & Composition*. Arnold Lazarus and H. Wendell Smith. USA: National Council of Teachers, 1983. (cited in the text as *GLC*)
- Dictionary of World Literary Terms*. Shipley, Joseph, ed. London: Allen&Unwin, 1970. (cited in the text as *DWLT*)
- Listen Up! Spoken Word Poetry*. Ed. Zoë Anglesey. New York: One World: The Ballantine Publishing Group, 1999.
- Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Prose*. Ed. Alex Preminger. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973. (cited in the text as *PEPP*)
- Psyche. The Feminine Poetic Consciousness. An Anthology of Modern American Women Poets*. Eds. Barbara Segnitz and Carol Rainey. New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1973.
- Sleeping On the Wings. An Anthology of Modern Poetry with Essays on Reading and Writing*. Kenneth Koch and Kate Farrell. New York: Vintage Books, 1982.
- The Heath Anthology of American Literature*. Gen. Ed. Paul Lauter. Vols. 1 and 2. Third edition. MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998. (cited in the text as *HA*)
- The Norton Anthology. English Literature*. Ed. M.H. Abrams et al., 6th edition. Vol. 2. London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1993.
- The Outlaw Bible of American Poetry*. Ed Alan Kaufmann. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press, 1999.
- Women Romantic Poets 1785-1832*. Ed. J Breen. London: Everyman, 1992. Rpt. 1995.

Words from the edge – Stimmen vom Rand. Eine poetische Sammlung: Cheyenne – Meitei – Sami – Maori. Lance Henson et. al. Böblingen: Danka Services GmbH, 2000.

SOUNDOGRAPHY

- Grand Slam! The Best of the National Poetry Slam.* Bill Adler and Bob Holman, prod. 1996. 697124134-2. (cited as *GS*)
- Home of the Brave.* Laurie Anderson. Warner Bros. Records. 1986. (cited as *WB*)
- Howl and other poems.* Allen Ginsberg. Fantasy Records. 1998. FCD-7713-2.
- Jerome Rothenberg.* A recording of *Shaking the Pumpkin, Vienna Blood, That Dada Strain.* Graz, 1982. Rec. by Walter Hölbling.
- Our Souls Have Grown Deep Like The Rivers. Black Poets Read Their Work.* 2 CD Volumes. Rhino Entertainment Company. 2000. R2 78012. (cited as *REC*)
- Spoken Word Performance at the Arts For Peace Festival.* With Carl Welden. Rec. by Martina Pfeiler. New Paltz, August 5, 2000.
- Talk Normal. The Laurie Anderson Anthology.* 2 CD. Vol. 2000. Warner Bros. R2 76648.
- The Amethyst Rock Star.* Album presentation on FM4. With Saul Stacey Williams. May 05, 2001.
- The Beat Generation.* 3 CD Volumes. Rhino Records. 1992. R2 70281.
- The Caedmon Poetry Collection. A Century of Poets Reading their Work.* David Nolan, prod. 3 CD Volumes. Harper Audio. CD 2895 (3).
- Whakapapa.* Apirana Taylor. Braebura Rec. Studio. 2000. (cites as *BRS*)
- Words from the edge.* A reading and performance by the indigenous poets Lance Henson, Marry Ailonieida Somby, Memchoubi (Thounaojam Chanu Ibemhal), Apirana Taylor. Rec. by Martina Pfeiler. Graz, October 25, 2000.

VIDEOGRAPHY

- Allen Ginsberg in concert with Donald Was.* With an interview by Lewis McAdams. Eds. John Door and Lewis McAdams, Lannan Foundation. Literary Series. (USA. 1989)
- CT National Youth Poetry Slam Team.* (Alberquerque, NM. 1999)
- Home of the Brave.* A concert film produced by Paula Mazir and shot by John Lindley. With Laurie Anderson. Warner Brothers. (USA. 1985)
- Slam.* Directed by Marc Levin. With Saul Stacey Williams and Sonja Sohn. Sony Music Entertainment. (USA. 1998)

INTERNET AND INFOTRAC

- “A Biography of Etheridge Knight.” <<http://www.poets.org/poets/poets.cfm?prmID=159>> (December 2000)
- Brown, Edward K. 1993. <<http://www.multifest.com/poetry/shange.htm>> “Ntozake Shange: Portrait of a Literary Feminist” (August 2002)

- Carter, Nick. <wysisys://100/http://www.oshkoshnews.com/enter/books/aug00/quincy06080500.asp> "Miles' author maps out his writing journey." (August 2000).
- Corey, Frederick.C. and C.T. Motoyama. <http://web6.infotrac.galegroup.com> "Toward cultural awareness through the performance of literary texts." In: *MELUS* 16.4 (1989): 75–87. (August 2000)
- Diamond, Jamie. <http://web6infotrac.galegroup.com> "Laurie Anderson." In: *People Weekly*. May 7, Vol. 33, n. 18, p. 137. (August 2000)
- Davis, Jimmy. <http://www.cc.gatech.edu/~jimmyd/laurie-andersonbiography/wb.htm> "The Laurie Anderson Biography" (August 2000)
- Duchamp, Marcel. <http://www-camil.music.uiuc.edu> "Conceptual Art." (November 2000)
- Graham, Bob. <http://proquest.umi.com> (August 2000) "Slam is Poetry in Vibrant Motion/Powerful performances by genius talents." In: *San Francisco Chronicle*. Oct. 23, 1998.
- "Harlem Renaissance" <http://www.nku.edu/~diemanj/harlemintro.html> (August 2000)
- Heintz, Kurt. <http://www.e-poets.net/library/slam> "An Incomplete History of the Slam." (August 2000)
- Janko, R. <http://web6.infotrac.galegroup.com> "The Homeric Poems as oral dictated texts." In: *The Classical Quarterly* 48.1 (1998): 1–13. (August 2000)
- Kendall, Robert. <www.wordcircuits.com/kendall/essays/ht96.htm> "Hypertextual Dynamics in *A Life Set For Two*". The Association for Computing Machinery, 1996. (September 2002)
- Martinovic, Lisa. <http://proquest.umi.com> "Slam Mania. Got something to say and a competitive spirit? Try Slam." In: *San Francisco Chronicle*. 24 February, 2000. (August 2000)
- McKenzie, John. <http://web6infotrac.galegroup.com> "Laurie Anderson for dummies." In: *TDR* 41.2 (1997): 30–32. (August 2000)
- Menand, Louis. <http://web6.infotrac.galegroup.com> "Laurie Anderson: United States 1983." In: *Artforum* 1999, March, v. 17, i.7, 96–98. (August 2000)
- Molarsky, Monica. <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?...id=1&ldx=2?Deli=1&RQT=309&Dtp=1> "Word Fever" In: *American Theatre*. New York, Nov. 1999. (August 2000)
- Most, Glenn W. *The Languages of Poetry*. In: *New Literary History* 24.3 (1993): 545–553. <http://web6.infotrac.galegroup.com> (August 2000)
- Ntozake, Shange. <http://members.aol.com/HarambeeCo/shange.htm> (May 2001)
- Pacermick, Gary. <http://web2.infotrac.galegroup.com> "Allen Ginsberg: an interview by G. Pacermick." In: *The American Poetry Review* 26.4 (1997): 23–28. (August 2000)
- Riley, James Whitcomb. <http://prod.library.utoronto.ca/utel/rp/poems/riley.html> (August 2000) "Little Orphant Annie"
- Rodenbeck, Judith. <http://www.shogate.com/tots/picasso/picstein.html> "Insistent Presence in Picasso's Portrait of Gertrude Stein." Columbia University, Fall 1995. (April 2001)
- Rothenberg, Jerome. <http://www.durationpress.com/archives/.../alcheringa /issue1 /issue1mitchell.html> (April 2001)

- Rothschild, Matthew. "Allen Ginsberg: I'm banned from the market place of ideas in my own country." An Interview. In: *The Progressive* 58.8 (1994): 3440. <http://web2.infotrac.galegroup.com> (August 2000)
- Schmid, Julie. <<http://www.rutgers.edu/schmid.htm>> "What's Going On: Poetics, Performance, and Patricia Smith's Close to Death." (August 2000)
- Scott-Heron, Gil. <<http://www.interlog.com/~mushroom/gil.html>> (March 2001)
- Subrosa Poetry Jam <http://www.donews.de/bereiche/Lebens-ART/Poetry_Jam/poetry_jam.html> "Dortmunder Poeten üben sich in Kulturkritik". Tobias Frank, 26 June 2002. (September 2002)
- The Woodstock Poetry Festival <www.woodstockpoetryfestival.com> (September 2002)
- Troupe, Quincy. <<http://www.sandiego-online.com/entertainment/sdwm/novdec96/inter.stm>> "Monthly Interview with Quincy Troupe". In: *Nonfiction San Diego Writers' Monthly*: (February 2001)
- Troupe, Quincy. <<http://www.angelfire.com/ak/goldenstarshinetroupe/troupe.htm>> "Poem for Magic" (February 2001)
- Tzara, Tristan 1922. <<http://english.upenn.edu>> "Lecture on Dada." (April 2001)
- Tzara, Tristan. <<http://www.english.upenn.edu/~jenglish/English104/tzara.html>> "Lecture on Dada" (1922) (April 2001)
- Ward, Jerry. <<http://proquest.umi.com>> "Poetry". In: *The Washington Post*. August 1, 1999. (August 2000)
- Waters, John K. <<http://web6infotrac.galegroup.com>> "Slam – Bang Poetry. (poetry slams)". In: *Biblio*, April 1999. Vol. 4. i. 4, p. 30 (1). (August 2000)
- Wimsatt, J. I. "Rhyme, the icons of sound, and the Middle English 'Pearl'". In: *Style* 30.2 (1996): 185 (25). <<http://web2.infotrac.galegroup.com>> (August 2000)

SOUNDFILES ON THE INTERNET

The following poems which have been discussed in this book may be accessed at: <<http://www.factoryschool.org>> (January 2003)

- Gwendolyn Brooks: "The Mother"
- Wanda Coleman: "I Live For My Car"
- Robert Frost: "The Road Not Taken"
- Allen Ginsberg: "A Supermarket in California"
- Gil Scott-Heron: "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised"
- Etheridge Knight: "Hard Rock Returns to Prison from the Hospital for the Criminal Insane"
- Ntozake Shange: "Rise Up Fallen Fighters"
- Gertrude Stein: "If I told Him: A Completed Portrait of Picasso"
- Wallace Stevens: "The Idea of Order at Key West"
- Quincy Troupe: "Poem For Magic"

Other highly recommended multi-media poetry files:

<<http://wings.buffalo.edu/epc/sound/links.html>>
<<http://www.e-poets.net> >
<<http://www.ubu.com>>
<<http://www.counterbalancepoetry.org/thepoets.htm>>
<<http://www.bbc.co.uk/nature/poetry/audio.shtml>>
<<http://www.wwnorton.com/trade/multimedia.htm>>
<http://www.salon.com/directory/topics/poetry_audio/index.html>
<<http://www.poets.org>>
<<http://www.theatlantic.com/unbound/poetry/antholog/aaindx.htm>>
<<http://poetry.about.com>>
<<http://www.sfgate.com>>
<<http://laslam.netfirms.com/>>
<<http://www.poetryslam.com/multimedia/>>
<<http://www.freshpoetry.com/>>
<<http://www.slampapi.com>>
<<http://www.worldofpoetry.com>>
<<http://www.anthology.org>>
<<http://www.bobholman.com>>

HYPERTEXT

Kendall, Robert. "A Life Set For Two." Published on Floppy Disks in the *Eastgate Quarterly Review of Hypertext*. Vol. 2. Number 4, Fall 1996. Eastgate Systems.

INDEX OF POETS

- Acconci, Vito 96
Anderson, Laurie 11, 96, 135-139, 154
Angelou, Maya 99
Antin, David 85, 112
Arsenberg, Walter Conrad 87, 153
Ashberry, John 10
- Ball, Hugo 52, 86, 87, 93, 112, 117, 118, 153
Baraka, Amiri
 (LeRoi Jones) 73, 89, 91
Benson, Tish 92
Bernstein, Charles 10, 14, 37, 51, 53, 77
Bishop, Elizabeth 10
Blake, William 93, 94
Blum, Norman 95
Bradstreet, Anne 62
Breton, André 89, 92
Brooks, Gwendolyn 44-46, 99
Burden, Chris 95
Burroughs, William S. 87, 93, 94, 128, 136
- Cabico, Regie 102
Cage, John 88, 153
Carleton, William 10, 80, 82
Cobbing, Bob 87, 153
Cohen, Leonard 124
Coleman, Wanda 9, 43, 67-69, 152
Corso, Gregory 93
Cortez, Jayne 89
Creeley, Robert 48, 78
Cullen, Countie 91
cummings, e.e. 20, 44, 78, 112
- Drucker, Johanna 74
Dylan, Bob 124
- Eliot, T.S. 15, 44, 52, 63, 78, 90
- Emerson, Ralph Waldo 80
Estep, Maggie 46, 50, 99, 102, 152
Eving, Samiya 99
- Fauset, Jessie Redmon 91
Ferlinghetti, Lawrence 91, 93, 94,
Frost, Robert 48, 49, 50, 52, 67, 80, 129, 151
- Ginsberg, Allen 11, 40, 58, 78, 83, 89, 92, 93, 94, 95, 122, 124-133, 153, 154
Giovanni, Nikki 89, 99
Glazier, Loss Pequeño 47
Glück, Louise 78
Grimke, Angelina W. 91
- Hall, David 50, 63, 78, 81, 82, 96, 102
Heaney, Seamus 78
Henson, Lance 31, 32, 37
Herrera, Edward Thomas 46, 50, 67, 102
Huelsenbeck, Richard 88
Hughes, Langston 91
Hurston, Zora Neale 91
- Janco, Marcel 88
Jandl, Ernst 116
- Kendall, Robert 20
Kennedy, X.J. 40, 43, 44, 47, 78, 102
Kerouac, Jack 91, 92, 93, 94
Knight, Etheridge 9, 41-43
Koch, Kenneth 56, 59
Komunyakaa, Yusef 92
Kontar, Daniel Gray 102
- Larsen, Nella 91
Lee, Don 89

Levertov, Denise 99
 Levine, Phillip 81
 Lindsay, Vachel 79, 80, 82
 Lorde, Audre 99
 Lowell, Amy 47, 63, 75, 82
 Lowell, Robert 44, 78

 McAdams, Lewis 125
 McLeish, Archibald 44
 McLucas, Leroy 90
 Melville, Herman 93, 94
 Memchoubi
 (Thounaojam Chanu Ibemhal)
 13, 31, 34, 35, 37
 Merwin, W.S. 10
 Morris, Tracie 61, 92

 O'Hara, Frank 40, 95
 Olson, Alix 99
 Olson, Charles 28, 29, 63, 126,
 131, 132

 Piercy, Marge 99
 Piombino, Nick 75
 Pinsky, Robert 50, 51, 61, 62
 Plath, Sylvia 54-55, 78, 99
 Poe, Edgar Allen 53, 62, 79
 Pound, Ezra 40, 62, 63, 78, 90,
 112

 Rexroth, Kenneth 91, 112
 Rich, Adrienne 10, 98, 99, 133,
 134
 Riley, James Whitcomb 10, 80,
 82, 93, 107- 111
 Rothenberg, Jerome 11, 37, 87,
 112-119, 137, 153
 Rux, Carl Hancock 92

 Sanchez, Sonia 89
 Sandburg, Carl 82

 Sanders, Ed 40
 Schwitters, Kurt 87, 88, 112, 117,
 118, 141, 153
 Scott-Heron, Gil 11, 120-123,
 140, 141, 143
 Sexton, Anne 99
 Shange, Ntozake 11, 89, 99, 140-
 144, 154
 Sirowitz, Hal 9, 69, 70
 Sitwell, Edith 99
 Smith, Marc 100
 Smith, Patricia 11, 67, 101,
 145-149, 154
 Snyder, Gary 93
 Somby, Marry Ailonieida 22, 31-
 35, 37, 124, 125
 Stein, Gertrude 59, 60, 112
 Stevens, Wallace 44, 56

 Taylor, Apirana 18, 31, 35-37,
 125
 Taylor, Edward 62
 Tennyson, Alfred Lord 107
 Thomas, Dylan 78
 Trakl, Georg 116
 Troupe, Quincy 64, 65, 66
 Tully, Rose 99
 Tzara, Tristan 87, 88, 112, 117,
 118, 153

 Wakoski, Diana 76
 Welden, Carl 70-72, 85
 Whitman, Walt 58, 63, 78, 93,
 129, 130, 132
 Williams, Saul Stacey 92, 103-
 104
 Williams, William Carlos 44, 93,
 112
 Wolfe, Thomas 94
 Wright, Charles 10

INDEX OF POEMS

- “America” 127-129
“Cigarette Rag” 124
“Chicago Poem” 117
“Chopped-Off Arm” 9, 69-70
“Datura Song” 24-25, 32
“Dead Presidents” 50, 102, 151
“Dog Soldiers’ Song” 32
“Find Your Voice” 71-72
“Father Death Blues” 124
“Hard Rock Returns To The Hospital For the Criminal Insane” 9, 41-43, 151
“Howl” 94, 82, 122, 132-133
“Hunger Poem” 116-117
“I Heard A Fly Buzz” 56
“I Live For My Car” 67-68
“If I Told Him: A Completed Portrait of Picasso” 59-61
“Invocation to Dsilyi N’eyani” 25-26
“Leaves of Grass” 58, 63
“Little Orphant Annie” 108-111
“Meditation Blues” 124-125
“Merz Sonata” 118
“My Pain Keeps Me Regular” 46, 67, 102
“One Beautiful Evening” 55
“Poem For Magic” 9, 64-65
“Rise Up Fallen Fighters” 140-143, 154
“Son’ahchi ” 27
“Shak’kani eidi” 34
“Sad Jokes on a Marae” 36-37
“Sex Goddess of the Western Hemisphere” 46, 102, 152
“The Danube Waltz” 117
“The Idea of Order at Key West” 56-57
“The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” 44
“The Mother” 44-45
“The Old Communist International” 125
“The Thin People” 54-55
“The Warrior” 34, 124
“The Road Not Taken” 49-50, 67, 151
“The Thirteenth Horse-Song of Frank Mitchell” 114-116
“The Waste Land” 15, 40
“Undertaker” 145-149
“Wand” 88, 118
“When I Died, Love” 124
“White Lily” 11, 137-139, 154
“12 Songs to Welcome the Society of the Mystic Animals” 112-114

