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**BECOMING-IN/FANT IN THE ZONE OF
INDISTINCTION: SOUND POETRY**

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APPROVAL

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In addition, I acknowledge that any claim of irregularity that may arise in relation to this work will result in a disciplinary action in accordance with the university legislation.

Bengisu Yağışan

Date (01/10/2024)



*To my dearest cat Puik,
who invited me to an outlandish region beyond words*

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ABSTRACT

The main subject of this study is to examine the genre of sound poetry, which presents itself in the zone of indistinction between poetry and performance on a historical, conceptual, and propositional level. The thesis reveals the paradoxical structure of the sound poetry genre, which resists conceptual determinations and categorization efforts and questions the linguistic and bodily possibilities opened by the genre. The thesis argues that voice, as the main component of this linguistic/bodily continuum, allows sound poetry becoming-in/fant in language and body. Conceptualized as a becoming-in/fant in the zone of indistinction, sound poetry opens up a radical field of experimentation through the limits of language and the body to a potential already inherent in language itself.

Keywords: Language, Performance, Sound Poetry, A Zone of Indistinction, Voice, Becoming, In-fancy

BELİRSİZLİK BÖLGESİNDE BEBEK/KONUŞAMAYAN-OLUŞ: SES ŞİİRİ

ÖZET

Bu çalışmanın ana konusu, tarihsel, kavramsal ve önermesel düzeyde şiir ve performans arasında bir belirsizlik bölgesinde kendini gösteren ses şiiri türünü incelemektir. Tez, ses şiiri türünün kavramsal saptamalara ve kategorileştirme çabalarına direnen paradoksal yapısını ortaya koymakta ve türün açtığı dilsel ve bedensel imkânları sorgulamaktadır. Tez, bu dilsel/bedensel sürekliliğin ana bileşeni olarak sesin, ses şiirinin dilde ve bedende bir bebek/ konuşamayan-oluşa olanak tanıdığını savunuyor. Bir belirsizlik bölgesinde bebek/konuşamayan oluş olarak kavramsallaştırılan ses şiiri, dilin ve bedenin sınırları aracılığıyla dilin kendisinde zaten var olan bir potansiyele doğru radikal bir deney alanı açıyor.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Dil, Performans, Ses Şiiri, Belirsizlik Bölgesi, Ses, Oluş

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1. INTRODUCTION

What is a poem capable of? This research began with this broadest question. Like Gérard Genette's words about Sartre's book *What is Literature*, although *perhaps the real wisdom is not to ask such questions*, it is necessary to at least show the foresight to leave the question unanswered with a Sartrean gesture (Rancière & Swenson, 2011, p. 29). The research aims to shed a small light on such a vast terrain, poetry, by addressing a genre with very loose boundaries, perhaps located at the very edge and threshold of that terrain. The sound poetry genre problematizes the notions of language and body at its core through the legacy of the avant-garde. The notions of language and body are the two main pillars that inspire this genre and establish the structure on which it will be built, encounter or collide with the notion of 'voice', which is the most problematic bridge between the two. This research attempts to probe sound poetry as a zone of indistinction between poetry and performance. Through the very characteristics of voice which oscillates between body and language, sound poetry genre finds itself in a zone of indistinction between poetry and performance.

The term "a zone of indistinction" is actually a term that encompasses the entire main premise of the thesis. This ambivalence that sound poetry establishes between poetry and performance actually begins to express the ambiguity that these two categories themselves flourished in their intersection with and immanence in everyday life. It is precisely the zone of indistinction itself that reveals a dual use of language that is always transforming and feeding on each other in the very space where sound poetry exists. Sound poetry is precisely a genre with ambiguous boundaries that puts aestheticized language, which is the product of art practice, and the everyday use of language on a line of tension.

The thesis begins precisely with the uncovering of the characteristics of sound poetry which resist the clear boundaries. In its oscillation between poetry and performance,

sound poetry actually reveals its own ambiguous boundaries in its structure that resists taking it into a proper history, recognizing it as a genre, and categorizing it.

In the first phase, the thesis will focus on the outputs of this dynamic characteristic of sound poetry, rather than trying to draw its boundaries by shedding light on its history without history, its very nature that cannot be fully contained within the boundaries of a genre, and its existence that always resists a process of categorization.

In its third chapter, the thesis proposes a conceptual mapping of this genre, which resists categorization and is difficult to address within a bounded historical framework. This conceptual mapping is based on the zone of indistinction created by sound poetry between poetry and performance. Step by step, the thesis creates a conceptual mapping of this zone of indistinction as different and mutually revealing modes. The first step in reevaluating the historical outputs of the second part of the thesis on a conceptual ground is to question the relationship between poetry and sound poetry. The concept of sense, which is taken as the output of this questioning, is opened to question its relationship with sound poetry with the help of Gilles Deleuze's conceptualization of sense in chapter four. In this zone of indistinction created by sound poetry, the thesis elucidates the relationship of sound poetry with language and body through the concept of sense, which opens the space for a shared thought on language and body without erasing their differences. In the fifth chapter, as an outcome of the concept of sense, the thesis opens the fundamental bridge between language and body, namely the concept of voice, to questioning. This questioning of voice leads the thesis to its main premise, namely that sound poetry enables becoming-in/fant in the zone of indistinction. In the second part of the fifth chapter, the thesis returns to the conceptual grounds of the zone of indistinction, which is elucidated step by step with the concepts of sense and voice and presents an integrative summary of the mapping it has created. In the sixth and seventh chapters, the thesis opens the outcomes of this conceptual and historical ground to questioning through two artworks, Hugo Ball's 1916 sound poetry performance and bpNichol's Appendix.

1.1. The Purpose of Research

The fundamental aim of this thesis is to develop research in a historical, conceptual and propositional level on a genre that has inadequately found a place for itself in the literature. Sound poetry stands out as a neglected field of research, especially after the 1980s, on which only a handful of articles have been published, and theses are too few and far between. This research aims to bring sound poetry to the present and to think about the possibilities of a research on it, addressing the emphasis on its very nature which opens itself to the future. This is the point that both opens the thesis to a new scope and renders difficult the systemic research that could inspire to think about different points of view for writing about it. Fundamentally, though, this research is an attempt as a researcher to develop a theoretical approach to a genre whose boundaries remain indefinite.

The thesis is essentially an attempt to turn sound poetry, which I, as a researcher, find it difficult to draw the boundaries of and make sense of it as I enter into it, but which draws its own existence precisely with this character, into a field of investigation. The main difficulty of this research was the fact that it was not possible to have a direct contact or experience with many artworks, even through a recording or video, which requires an affective relationship with the performance in a way that is inherent to its very nature. Despite the very characteristics of performance that necessitate contact and coming together, I had the opportunity to examine/think about many of the art movements that are dealt with in the historical section through *someone's words* and the recordings that were found here and there. For this reason, bpNichol's Appendix, which constitutes the closing moment of the thesis, constitutes the most fleshed out part of the research as a space where I can enter into a zone of affection and contemplation through the artwork itself even though not as a live encounter but through a recording.

2. (UN)CATEGORIES OF SOUND POETRY

Sound Poetry as an art practice was born under the influence of the avant-garde as an alternative to traditional poetry and has sprouted by incorporating many possibilities. It has taken its place in art history as a performative movement that problematizes the possibilities and thresholds of language and has expanded this performative perspective with many visual and auditory means. This obscure genre, which sometimes problematizes concepts such as rhythm and resonance, sometimes the vocal apparatus itself, and commonly the sound substance in language, has also expanded the possibilities it inherited from the avant-garde with technological advancements. With Steve McCaffery's words, sound poetry as a "new way to blow out candles" (bpNichol & McCaffery, 1978, p. 18). has become extremely difficult to handle and categorize in classification due to the linguistic, artistic, and technological possibilities it includes, and a few art theorists have made attempts to create a new taxonomy.

Dick Higgins (1980) probes sound poetry in his article A Taxonomy of Sound Poetry through three main typologies and five classes. Higgins exemplifies these categories through diverse and extremely broad perspectives within vague boundaries, from written texts to written collages to performative poems. The artworks included in Higgins' categorization are not subject to a formal limitation; as long as the work conceptually reflects on sound or poetry, it can be considered as an example within these categories, regardless of its form. In his typologies, these three general types are termed as folk varieties, onomatopoetic or mimetic types, and nonsense poetry. Folk varieties are tied to folk roots and certain folk songs. As for onomatopoetic or mimetic typing, onomatopoetic imitations of natural or other sounds can be given as examples of short vocal passages that we encounter in Aristophanes' dramas in written literature - the sounds of frogs 'Brekekex ko-ax ko-ax' (Higgins, 1980, para. 3). For the third typology, he gives the example of Lewis Carroll's famous Jabberwocky -*twas brillig in the slithy toves* - and says that the novelty of such works lies precisely in the possible interaction they try to establish between nonsense and sense (Higgins, 1980, para. 5).

Higgins (1980) declares that by the early 1900s, sound poetry began to recognize itself as a genre, with the works of the futurists and the Dadaists naming this genre as a gift, and with the artistic paradigm shift of time that prioritizes experience, sound poetry gradually began to think about the relationship of poetry with established concepts of meaning and communication, as well as how to dissect and undermine these relationships (para. 8).

Higgins (1980) states that from the point when sound poetry recognized itself as a genre, it was divided into five separate categories, although its boundaries were still loose. The first category consists of artworks that pursue a created artificial language. In fact, this tendency does not remain within the boundaries of the sound poetry genre. Hugo Ball's poem *Gadji bera bimba*, Stefan George's *lingua romana*, an artificial language combining Spanish and Latin words with German syntax, and Otto Neurath's universal painting language, created with utopian desires that go beyond the boundaries of sound poetry, can be given as examples of this category (para. 8).

The second category is called near-sense works. According to Higgins (1980), these works live in a limbo between sense and nonsense and frequently problematize the notion of found materials. The state of oscillation between sense and nonsense seems to be related to the concepts of familiarity and alienation. Higgins (1980) states that in works using found materials, one gets either a shock of recognition or a momentarily heightened sense of immediate, concrete reality. Kurt Schwitters' poem *Anna Blume* can be cited as an example of this category (para. 9).

The third category is called phatic poems. This category is closely tied to intonation if the work contains a semantic meaning. Thus, yielding a new emotional meaning that is relatively remote from any semiotic significance on the part of words that happen to be included (Higgins, 1980, para. 10). As Higgins (1980) declared, most of the works from Artaud's oeuvre, especially his broadcast titled "To Have Done with the Judgment of God," with their elements that create new emotional meanings through word repetitions, whispering, wheezing, and howling, can be cited as an example of this category (para. 10).

The fourth category, closely related to vocal/audio recording, is called un-written-out poems. They may have a rough notation or schema or some general rules as drafts, and they are actualized as a performance (Higgins, 1980, para. 11). However, this genre, which has a looser relationship with written material than other categories, is shaped through voice and sound and establishes a relationship with mediums such as broadcast and performance art. As with many works of art that consist of the intersection of many categories, François Dûfrène's *crirhythmes* series exist in a relational position between phatic poems and un-written-out poems.

The fifth and last category is called notated poems. The term notation indicates the normative sort of musical notation, in which there is some kind of correspondence between space, time, word, and sound and some form of graphic or textual indicator of these elements. The scores and the structures in these artworks highly resemble the musical notations. For example, Ludwig Harig's broadcast *Soccer Game* is *hear-play*, and notation consists of three choruses working in unison (Higgins, 1980, para. 12).

Dick Higgins' attempt stands out as one of the only attempts in the sound poetry literature to propose a taxonomy for it, and it is precisely the vagueness of this taxonomy that emphasizes the futility of this effort. Within the three typologies, nonsense poetry, onomatopoetic types and folk varieties that it presents at its core, it is unclear why and exactly how it distinguishes nonsense poetry from them. The categories that sound poetry, which has recognized itself as a genre since the 1900s, presents as the five main trajectories into which it is divided, reveal a field that is not exactly divisible and where it is impossible to reduce a single work of art to a single category.

2.1. Genre Beyond Genre

Steve McCaffery declares that writing a proper history of sound poetry is nothing but a futile effort and suggests that the history of sound poetry is always being “invented” due to its very relation to language, meaning production, and history (McCaffery, 1978). The futility of the effort comes from the very nature of sound poetry itself; searching the history of language without words brings us to a time when sound poetry is not yet conscious of itself, so searching for a time that includes all sound poetry practices

within itself opens obscure pasts and futures, and hence leads us to a history without history (bpNichol & McCaffery, 1978, p. 18). Even in the times when sound poetry is conscious of itself as an art practice, this consciousness again draws its boundaries too loosely. Despite this being the case, this chapter tries to offer a brief history of sound poetry gathered from various cornerstones of this obscure genre, which will provide the historical background for this research.

2.2. History Without History

An international word. Just a word, and the word as movement. With the Opening Manifesto delivered by Hugo Ball on July 14, the “*Dada soir  e*” in Zurich presented their new artistic tendency against linguistics and aesthetics dimensions of art. Mingling poetry and performance within a new obscure genre, this emerging tendency in poetry called *Lautgedichte* (sound poetry/loud poetry) or *Verse ohne Worte* (poems without words) inherits its inspiration from a wide range spectrum from the artistic journey of Kandinsky, one of Hugo Ball's heroes, to discover the most abstract expression of sound in language, from the phonetic rhapsody of Christian Morgenstern, whose poems were also read in Cabaret Voltaire, to the futurist poets Khlebnikov and Kruchenykh, who wrote poems through ‘trans-sense’ language called *zaum* (Artun et al., 2018). The experimental poetic attempt that Hugo Ball calls poems without words essentially consists of a balance of the vowels weighed and distributed solely according to the values of the beginning sequence (Ball et al., 1996, p. 70).

Before Dadaist ventures, with the particular inspiration of Mallarm  ’s sound-based poetic attempts and the invention of the phonograph in 1877, experimental poets contemplated the concept of noise and the phonic matter in poetry and began to explore the potential of modern recording devices. In addition to his poems called phonetic rhapsody, Christian Morgenstern produced vocal recorded artwork based on glottal and labial distortions inspired by the gulping and slurping sound of fish in his work “*Fisches Nachtgesang*” in 1905 (Noland, 2005, p. 110).

Velimir Khlebnikov, one of the pioneers of the Cubo-Futurist movement that contemplated a language based on intuition and chance with the problematization of

rationalism, launched the agenda of phonowriting with his 'Bobeobi' in 1908 (Artun et al., 2018, Noland, 2015). With his work *Battaglia* produced in 1912 and his other poetic attempts, Marinetti called this poetic approach *parole in liberta* (words in freedom). Marinetti's use of onomatopoeic words and his works based on visualizing the text with typographic designs, which he tried to keep free from the syntactic structure of a text, gave his works an interdisciplinary structure with elements of both visual art, literature, and performance art. In 1915, Ball wrote in his diary about Marinetti's *Parole in Libertà*: "There is no such thing as language anymore [...] it has to be reinvented" (Ball et al., 1996, p. 25). Thus, the futurists were gifting the Dadaists with the inspiration to create a language that began to be cleared of its burdens, a magical language that was liberated (Jones, 2014, pp. 28-29). Thanks to the privileged role of the Dada movement in art history and Hugo Ball, who gave an initiating name to many performative poetry practices and allowed them to transform and flourish within a so-called genre, the sonological advances of the futurist movement thus remain in the shadow of Dada in art history.

Raoul Hausmann, one of the members of the Dada movement who most influenced future practices in the field of sound poetry, turned the texts he called optophonetic or poster poems, which problematized the function of language as a tool of expression, into short performances by varying the components such as speed and volume (Artun et al., 2018, p. 343). These poster poems became a source of inspiration for Kurt Schwitters' Primeval Sonata *Ursonate*, who himself can almost be considered a one-man movement in the history of Dada. *Ursonate*, which accompanies Schwitters' poetry journey that began with his collage poem *Anna Blume* published in 1919, is shaped by the concept of found objects, which also inspires Schwitters' paintings. *Ursonate*, which consists of a prelude and 4 parts in which the found object gives itself to found sounds in the form of sound poetry, contemplates pre-linguistic sounds and the rhythm they create (Artun et al., p. 517).

de Stijl's founder, Theo Van Doesburg, published three 'letter-sound images' under the pseudonym I.K. Bonset in 1921, and Arthur Petronio tried to harmonize phonetic

rhythms with instrumental sounds with his attempts called verbophonie (bpNichol & McCaffery, 1978, p. 7).

In the 1940s, the Lettrisme group, founded by Isidore Isou and Maurice Lemaitre, gave the alphabet a new face and turned it into a lexicon to pave the way for a creative linguistic experience. This lexicon, with its nonphonetic values and paralinguistic features, was presented with vocal pairings of letters such as A for hard inhalation, B for exhalation, and O for coughing, and clearing the throat (Bernstein, 1998, p. 166). As the Manifesto of Letterist Poetry declares, this lexical mutiny seeks to create an architecture of lettric rhythms not for mixing words or terms to open up a space for 'more meaning' but to fulfill the duty of the poet to progress toward disruptive sources (Foster, 1983).

François Dufrène (as shown in Figure 2.1), who was also a part of the Lettrisme movement and later left the group to establish his own 'ultra-lettrism' movement, tries to combine sonic performance with a paralinguistic and uncontrollable intensity in order to let out the poem from textual character. The paralinguistic and uncontrollable intensity actually refers to the very characteristic of the voice. Lettrism and ultra-lettrism now seek the inherent power of poetry in that space detached from words. This detachment is precisely the stage of poetry's letting itself to the uncontrollable intensity of the voice. Yet this detachment is not complete, from the perspective of lettrism and ultra-lettrism, language now exists only at the level of letters and phonemes, and in the initial gestures that condition language, in those gestures that Wundt would call articulatory gestures, those gestures that are so-called paralinguistic but immanent to language.¹ Consequently, Dufrène searches for the possibilities of a poem that tries to strip itself of a purely semantic contexture, ranging from its function as a bridge between human and animal sounds to vocal experiments on breath and larynx.

¹ Wundt's conceptualization will be discussed in the conceptual section.



Figure 2.1 Dufrène, Lettrist Recital at Odéon Theatre, Paris (1964)

As this historical progress shows, until 1950, sound poetry still refrained from taking the final step of the absence of words, which would take its connection with language and the word to its extreme. Even the efforts of the Dadaists, Futurists, and Lettrists served to free the word from its semantic function, redistributing the notions of communication, message, and sense to the affect and nonsense it nevertheless persisted in a morphological patterning that still suggested the presence of the word (bpNichol & McCaffery, 1978, p. 8). By 1950, the use of tape recorders opened the floodgates to rethinking the possibilities of the genre. Sound poetry, which considered poetry within the boundaries of the body and voice until the 1950s, removed the body from being a final parameter, and turned it into a starting point, with the opportunities that the tape machine provides. The most fundamental possibility that the tape recorder brings to sound poetry is that it changes the time parameter of the performance by liberating the performance from the present in which the body operates. This also allows changing the time parameter in the performance through the mediation of a sound that can divide this present into time segments that can be bent, cut, and articulated as it wishes.

In pursuit of these possibilities, Henri Chopin (b. 1922) thinks and realizes his sound poetry performances entirely depending on the possibilities of the tape recorder. In Chopin's works, although the technological possibilities of sound poetry have taken a step toward liberation from the voice, his early works of the 1950s were composed of the separation and rearrangement of vowels and consonants that retained their connection to the word (bpNichol & McCaffery, 1978, p. 9) In Chopin's late works, word and its connotations are completely erased from his performance. Thus, the effects he achieved by superimposing words, speeding up and slowing down, are replaced by contemplation on the processes of larynx and respiration, and phonemes cease to be the most fundamental component as in '*poesie phonetique*', heralding the birth of what he called '*poesie sonore*' (bpNichol & McCaffery, 1978, p. 10).

When Dufrene and Chopin undermine the act of signification and verbal sign in the space in which they carry sound poetry, they do so in order to achieve a pure orality. Although the starting point of this endeavor is language, it is no longer the possibilities of a language they seek, but the possibilities of voice. At the final point of the fracturing of language into words, words into phonemes and phonemes into the gestures that now constitute language, poetry transforms voice into its basic gestures such as the larynx and respiratory processes, that is, into pure orality. But whereas Dufrene sees tape recording as detrimental and rejects it as a mediation that would take away from this pure orality, Chopin sees it as a possibility that would no longer equate the limits of sound poetry with the limits of the human body (Noland, 2005, p. 112).

By the 1960s, it was becoming increasingly apparent that there was a roughly dual course of action in sound poetry that would carry itself into the future (Noland, 2005, p. 111). The first group, which includes works such as Dufrène's '*crirhythmes*' and Chopin's '*synthesized expirations*', is one in which the semantic structure disappears completely, and the main focus becomes the vocal apparatus itself. Along the line from the avant-garde to Hiedsieck, the second group wanders on the edge of a semantic structure where linguistic forms, phonemes, and words are still discernible. From the 1960s onwards, Bernard Hiedsieck began to take steps towards combining sound poetry with a sonic map of everyday life. In what he called action poems, he began to incorporate the

everyday sounds of street, subway, and transportation sounds into his poetry. Superimposing his lived performance (as shown in Figure 2.2) with his own recorded voice on tape, Hiedsieck plays with the speed, vocal range, and pause times of these superimpositions, cut-up and attach them with the background sounds of everyday life. For example, Hiedsieck's sound poetry performance *Canal Street* allows for a thematic interpretation through its content and use of language (Noland, 2005, pp. 114-115).



Figure 1.2 Bernard Heidsieck, École Supérieure d'Art et de Design, Marseille (n.d.)

Around the Flykingen Group for Linguistic Arts, which emerged in the 1960s, names like Bengt Emil Johnson, Lars-Gunnar Bodin, Åke Björnsson Hodell, and Christer Hennix Lille began to form the center of a genre called Swedish technical-acoustic sound poetry. Christer Hennix Lille was one of the first artists to operate synthetic speech in a text-sound composition ('Still Life, Q') in which the synthesizer's computer unit is programmed to generate reshaped oscillations, mutation frequencies and deliberate distortions in syntax and pronunciation (bpNichol & McCaffery, 1978, p. 20).

Around the same period, a few names that went beyond the possibilities of the avant-garde stood out among the examples of sound poetry produced with a post-futurist influence in Italy. Produced in 1968 by P. Fogliatti and Arrigo-Lora Totino,

Idromegafono (the assemblage of alpaca tubes) allowed Totino to present his sound poetry to the listener in a 360-degree circle, both in his live performances and in his use of tape recorder (bpNichol & McCaffery, 1978, p. 20).



Figure 2.3 Steve McCaffery and bpNichol, First West Coast International Sound Poetry Festival San Francisco (1977)

In 1970, four Canadian poets/theorists/writers bpNichol, Steve McCaffery, Paul Dutton, and Rafael Barreto-Rivera (as shown in Figure 2.3) founded the first sound poetry ensemble called Four Horsemen. The ensemble produces numerous improvised performances that experiment with collective communication, rejecting the technological possibilities of the age in favor of pure voice. Around the same time, the Italian poet Adriano Spatola transformed sound poetry into a kind of fluid art practice with undefined boundaries, following new forms of expression. The theory of Total Poetry developed by Spatola combines traditional poetry with visual possibilities while still retaining the characteristic of existing itself as a sound. His sound poetry is inspired by Greek, Kabuki, and Balinese theater and the rhythmic characteristics of Indian epics (“Adriano Spatola’s Total Poetry,” n.d.). Katalin Ladik, a poet member of the Bosch + Bosch group in Novi Sad in Yugoslavia, created Phonopoetics, which is the collage of graphic scores transformed into sound poetry performance. Ladik's performances

emphasized the instinctual qualities of language, from high-pitched screams to orgasmic moans (Crowley & Muzyczuk, 2013, pp. 69-75).

Since the 1970s, Pierre-André Arcand, Caroline Bergvall, Jérôme Game, ADACHI Tomomi, Steven J Fowler, and many others have reconfigured the genre of sound poetry. The concept of poetry itself, which can easily create a space of escape from any conceptualization with a new conceptualization, has found itself in close encounters with other artistic practices with each reconsideration of this concept. At this point where the genre of sound poetry meets today, this historical perspective can be concluded with three inspiring names.

ADACHI Tomomi, Kanazawa-born sound poet and performer, is one of the few performers of sound poetry in Japan and the first artist to perform Kurt Schwitters' "Ursonate" in Japan. ADACHI, who bridges the gap between the genre of sound poetry and music with his self-made instruments, works on the productions of the Fluxus movement with the Ensemble for Experimental Music and Theater, which he founded with his students in addition to his personal works ("performances | Adachi Tomomi", n.d.).

Caroline Bergvall is a poet who has received numerous awards, such as the Cholmondeley Award, the Prix Littéraire Bernard Heidsieck-Centre Pompidou, and her cross-disciplinary works in collective as well as solo works ("About 2020", 2024). Bergvall, who carries many possibilities of poetry, such as visual, auditory, site-specific, performative, etc., to her works, approaches critical thinking about language through the notion of experience. Her works contemplate historical documents and traces, intertwined languages and identities on the verge of formation, transformation, and extinction. Bergvall's sound poetry performances include *After Gysin*, a performance inspired by Bryon Gysin's *I AM THAT I AM*, and *More Pets* (DJ Rupture mix), a rhythmic poem composed of cheerful and nonsensical phrasings about animals, which becomes a rhythmic poem with its timbre and mixing.

Steven J Fowler is the founder and curator of Poem Brut and The Enemies Project and has actualized more than 400 performances in more than 40 countries and has been commissioned by Tate Modern, The National Gallery, Science Museum, and others. Together with Phil Minton, Fowler produces duo sound poetry performances based on improvised vocalization, enriching the genre with collaborative poetry, asemic writing, and neuopoetics (“About”, n.d.).

In the output of the historical part and the indeterminate taxonomy intertwined with it, it becomes apparent that the basic gesture of sound poetry is a dissolution of language in a field that resists all definitions and limitations. In essence, the (un)categories of sound poetry demonstrate sound poetry as spanning the entire continuum from everyday language to performances in which linguistic units almost disappear. So, since the avant-garde, the fundamental gesture of sound poetry has been to dissolve language in performativity through the mediation of voice and to find itself in a zone of indistinction between poetry and performance. At the basis of this gesture lies a reflection on language and its structures. In that place where words are crumbles, it is seen that the most fundamental notion produced linguistically by sound poetry, which thinks poetry with the possibilities of the human voice, is nonsense.

In the second part of the thesis, a conceptual mapping of the dissolution of the linguistic structure, which emerged in the un(history) of sound poetry and is common to every movement with its transformations, will be presented.

*since feeling is first
who pays attention
to the syntax of things
will never wholly kiss you;
—e e cummings*

3. RETHINKING WHAT SPROUTS FROM ITSELF: POETRY VS SOUND POETRY

The analysis in the historical part confronts us with a fundamental question. Sound poetry undergoes many metamorphoses that we can characterize as the dissolution of language. This metamorphosis presents a heterogeneous history, branches of which leads to many a place, some that of pure sound/voice where words are no longer visible or sensible, some where the semantic structure is still visible, and some where the presence of words still reigns in the poem itself. Why do we still call sound poetry *poetry* when it no longer relates to words, when it only pursues phonemes, and when, perhaps in the zone of indistinction it has established from the very beginning, between poetry and performance, it has given up words in favor of performance?

In spite of the very volatility of giving a definition of poetry that would soon elude us, a possibility of an explanation can be created from the potentiality where poetry creates itself through that single point that still prevails in sound poetry despite all its metamorphoses. We can start with Agamben's statement that the definition of poetry can only resist this volatility through the concept of *enjambement*. Enjambement, in its commonsensical meaning, indicates that poetry is shaped based on the continuation of a syntactic unit from one line to another. Based on the possibilities of this concept, Agamben proposes the following definition for poetry: "the discourse in which it is possible to set a metrical limit against a syntactic one" (Agamben, 1995, p. 39). To elaborate on this definition, Agamben sees poetry, contrary to the common view, not as the realm where the harmony between sound and sense is captured, but rather as the product of the internal dissonance created by this duality. The breaking of the syntactic

bond reveals what has the potential to catch us, as ee cummings' poem suggests. Breaking the syntactic bond and capturing what is thrown out of itself gives rise to a particular reckoning with meaning.

At this futile point where we are trying to beclothe the poem, what the poem actually reveals is a *versura*. Versura is basically an act of turning around, indicating the place and the moment when the plow makes one turn and then returns (Agamben, 1995, p. 40). Sound poetry becomes precisely that game that plays with the degrees of presence of versura and enjambment in poetry.

As in Valéry's famous verse *le poème, hésitation prolongée entre le son et le sens*, sound poetry carries this sublime hesitation between sense and sound, which is the very legacy of poetry, at the point where words give up on themselves. But sound poetry opens this hesitation to the space where sense blossoms in a line of tension. Sound poetry interacts with Valéry's formula and Deleuze's quotation from Bergson. "One does not proceed from sounds to images and from images to sense; rather, one is established "from the outset" within sense" (Deleuze et al., 1990, p. 28).

The tension between sense and sound, which Agamben sees as a very legacy of poetry itself, is precisely where sound poetry addresses this pure legacy of poetry. In fact, the thesis pursues this very tension at all its stops. For now, let us leave its elaboration to other parts of the thesis and borrow Pascal's quote to ask the fundamental question of the thesis that will lead us to this elaboration.

"I had a thought. I have forgotten it. In its place I write that I've forgotten it" (Valéry & Gilbert, 1980). Could it be that the place of sound poetry serves precisely as Pascal's forgotten thought for poetry? I claim that sound poetry began to be shaped precisely through the dissolution of language and its transformation into a search for sound substances/voice in this dissolution, and that this search is the pure experience of poetry and a search for *becoming-infant* in language. The main focus of this thesis is to examine language and voice as the two main pillars of flourishing this very characteristic of the *becoming-infant* in language. In sound poetry, in which language and voice undergo a dissolution both in and of themselves, we encounter the concept of nonsense as the first step in this dissolution of language. This chapter begins by

addressing this notion of sense and nonsense as the first trace of this dissolution of language.

The analysis of the structures that constitute meaning, which can be placed in a semantic framework that enables communication in everyday life, constitutes the first step of the potential opened to poetry and voice by the relationship sound poetry establishes with the notion of nonsense that emerges at the point where sound poetry tears to pieces of language. As a first stop in examining the linguistic structures that constitute sound poetry, the thesis follows Gilles Deleuze's analysis of the concept of nonsense in *The Logic of Sense* to examine how notions of sense and nonsense reveal a potential beyond the notion of meaning as a guarantee of communication in everyday life.

4. PROBLEMS OF LINGUISTICS AND EMERGENCE OF SENSE

We can start by shedding light on a fundamental question in the analysis of the structures that stand out as carriers of meaning. How does a word convey meaning? Linguistics approaches the issue through three possibilities. In the third series of Logic of Sense, Deleuze examines these three primary dimensions of propositions in general. The first dimension is denotation/indication or designation. Denotation is essentially pointing at; “it is that” or “it is not that” and operates through the association of the words themselves with *particular* images *that ought to* “represent” the state of affairs (*datum*) (Deleuze et al., 1990). This is basically the correspondence of reference, for example, ‘that book is green’, which determines the truth value of the proposition.

The second dimension is manifestation, some philosophers like to call ‘propositional attitudes’, which refers to the relation of the proposition with the speaking/ expressing subject through the subject’s beliefs and desires (Smith, 2022, p. 6). Like the sentence ‘I believe that it is snowing outside’, the attitude does not determine the truth value of the proposition; its logical value occurs as veracity and illusion (Deleuze et al., 1990, p. 14). The nature of this proposition, shaped through beliefs and desires, does not make it secondary to denotation; manifestation is precisely what makes denotation possible. As Descartes shows through his famous example of wax, the ‘I’ manifest in the Cogito grounds the judgment of denotation by which the wax is identified. Fundamentally, there is no possibility of a proposition that can separate itself from desires and beliefs. A proposition that is free from desires and beliefs so that inferences from one proposition to another, cannot be drawn from the denotation itself, even if the proposition refers to something or has a referent. Thus, the manifestation becomes the principle of all possible denotations (Deleuze et al., 1990).

The third dimension is signification. The process of signification refers to the relation of a proposition to other propositions. Deleuze states that connectors like ‘therefore’ are the sign of assertion, which defines the possibility of affirming the conclusion itself as the

outcome of implications (Deleuze et al., 1990). As the hypothetical mode of implications (if/then) shows, the logical value of signification is no longer truth, but truth condition. So, these three concepts constitute a theory of meaning; propositions indicate a relation to the objects within the world, basically, its states of affairs, and the presence of the subject as the principle of manifestation, ascribed to an ego, and signification for an element of proposition's cohesion. The construction of meaning through this tripartite structure is, in fact, the presentation of meaning as a fixed and established structure belonging to the domain of common sense, which remains inadequate. Primarily, the relation of this tripartite structure to the concepts of meaning and sense is that the meaning it produces is a *doxa* and is, in fact, closely related to the distinction between *bon sens* (good sense) and *sens commun* (common sense) (Lecercle, 2002).

The function of common sense is to serve unity and coherence, common sense, which has a deep historical functioning from Aristotle onwards, is, in fact, what ensures the perceptual unity of the five senses (Lecercle, 2002). Precisely for this reason, in this tripartite structure of proposition to the emergence of meaning, the concepts of denotation and manifestation, which refer to the coherence of the objects of perception within this world (the unity of the Ego and the World), inscribe common sense. Language does not seem possible without this ascribed Ego, which expresses and manifests itself in it, and which says what it does.

With commonsensical, or religious, or, more specifically, the Kantian perspective, the self becomes the principle of manifestation, the world becomes the principle of denotation, and God becomes the principle of signification. Good sense indicates, for Deleuzian thought, a principle for the distribution of any possible object (Williams, 2008). In this perspective, signification inscribes good sense. As the French word '*sens*' means both 'meaning' and 'direction,' thanks to God's gift, we can have the right direction of thinking and the ultimate principle of the unity of the Ego and the World. So, we can complete this tripartite structure. Everything seems to be in place to express our thoughts and ideas and to relate them to meaning. But it is precisely at this point that Deleuze sees two fundamental problems arise. The first problem is the problem of

circularity. As explained above, manifestation makes denotation possible, but if we are looking for a foundation for meaning, we need to take into account the perspective from which we are looking.

In the classical distinction of language (*langue*) and speech (*parole*), we see that if we are looking for a foundation in the domain of speech, it is manifestation. It is only in the domain of speech the I is the primary in relation to denotation and significations. But in the domain of language, the primacy belongs to significations. Through the theoretical construct of language, the relation of the word to universal or general concepts, and of syntactic connections to the implications of the concept, conditions the denotation and manifestation (Deleuze et al., 1990, p. 14). But this account still preserves a problem. Implications in significations never succeed in grounding denotation except by giving itself a ready-made denotation (Deleuze et al., 1990, p. 16). Thus, we are trapped in a circle, hoping to find a foundation from which we try to reach meaning itself. Because attaining the fundamental role for meaning/sense-making, these three dimensions become inadequate, constantly returning themselves through the perspective of *langue* and *parole*. So, as a fourth dimension, Deleuze introduces the concept of sense. The concept of sense is closely related to the dimension of expression in proposition, sense is what is expressed under the skin of proposition. But how can we determine the relation of this notion of sense to denotation, signification, and manifestation, which always lead us to each other, and at which point in this triple circle can we look for the sense of the proposition?

Firstly, the sense of proposition cannot be identified with denotation because denotation is fundamentally the correspondence of reference, so it basically determines the truth value. So, whether or not the words of proposition correspond to the referent, they can still convey something more or less. The manifestation of a proposition cannot be identified with the notion of sense either. The ascribed Ego or I is primary only inasmuch as it envelops significations. We can understand this relationship in the following lines by Olga Tokarczuk, precisely by the difference between the senseless sound and the moment when this sound signifies something.

There is no one else here, they've left, they're gone, though you can still hear their voices dying down, that shuffling, the echoes of their footsteps, some distant laughter. Out of the window the courtyard is empty. (Tokarczuk & Croft, 2018, p. 1)

We find ourselves in a circle again because we have no choice but to identify sense with signification, but as we already know, signification necessitates an irreducible denotation. So, we cannot identify the notion of sense to any element of this tripartite structure. But we should note that this approach does not account itself through a rejection of this tripartite structure vis-à-vis sense but instead consists of tracing the missing part that relates to and complements them.

The first step in explaining the emergence of the concept of meaning is the paradox of *future contingents*, which we inherited from the Stoics, or the paradox of *pure becoming*, as Deleuze calls it. When we say, Chomsky gets older, we mean that he becomes older than he was, but likewise, he becomes younger than he is now. So the statement becomes both possible and impossible at the same time. So, by unfolding and breaking upon the circle of proposition, the sense appears for itself as the pure metaphysical concept and the event itself.

Deleuze (1990) introduces two aspects of sense: sense as the *effect* of proposition and sense as an incorporeal, impassive entity that is positioned at the genesis of it. To evaluate the concept of sense as the effect of the proposition, Deleuze introduces Stoic concepts of *corporeal states of affairs* and *incorporeal events*. Incorporeal events are the sense itself as the result of the corporeal domain, actions, and passions of bodies, in other words, the material world.

To put it more simply, For Deleuze, the duality between body and language is not sufficient (Deleuze et al., 1990, p. 24). Deleuze approaches the concept of sense in relation to the concept of event. The Deleuzian concept of sense is an event itself. The event and sense insist and subsist in language, but it occurs to things. So, Deleuzian event is not the mere actualisation or happening of something but something that is intertwined with becoming, which can only be captured in language through the characteristic of infinitive verbs (Lecerle, 2002). So, the event is not what explicitly happening as *the coal becomes black* but rather '*the coal blacks*'. "*To black*" as a

dynamic attribution of the predicate, an incorporeality distinct from both the coal and the black-ness which captures still the dynamism of the event's actualization (Parr, 2005).

To understand the relationality of these concepts with sense/event, we can consider the notion of 'battle', which Deleuze contemplates in the fifteenth series of Logic of Sense. For instance, if we attribute a battle through the state of affairs and ask the question where is the battle, we come across in that state of affairs are bodies mixing with one another: bullets thrown into the air, bodies covered in blood piled on top of each other, spears stuck somewhere. So actually, the battle itself only 'insists' or 'subsists' in the proposition (Smith, 2022, p. 8). We have necessarily dual aspects; on one side, the state of affairs, bodies, things, and matters and on the other side, language and the propositions themselves. For this very reason, Deleuze introduces the term surface; sense is what lies at the surface between states of affairs and propositions (Smith, 2022, p. 8). So, the articulation of sense, actually articulates the difference between body and language, the physical qualities and what is expressed in proposition and becomes the mirror and the frontier between them. As Deleuze declares,

To pass to the other side of the mirror is to pass from the relation of denotation to the relation of expression— without pausing at the intermediaries, namely, at manifestation and signification. It is to reach a region where language no longer has any relation to that which it denotes, but only to that which it expresses, that is, to sense. This is the final displacement of the duality: it has now moved inside the proposition. (Deleuze et al., 1990, p. 25)

Deleuze elaborates on the frontier characteristic of sense through the word Snark, Lewis Carroll's famous fictional animal from the poem The Hunting of the Snark. The strange word "Snark" is the frontier which is stretched as it is drawn by both series (Deleuze et al., 1990, p. 26). This separation that takes place on the surface produces what Deleuze calls series. This articulation of series is, in fact, closely related to the formation of a *structure* and brings us one step closer to unpacking the very place from which sound poetry sprouted. As a next step in the examination of the place of the notion of meaning in a proposition, we need to look at the logic of series and its relation to a linguistic structure.

4.1. Rethinking the Structure and the Paradox of Sign

The structuralist methodology is constructed fundamentally based on the distinction between *langue* and *parole* and tries to describe the organization of the overall sign-system or 'structure'. Structuralist theory of language fundamentally begins to establish itself with the relationship between word, concept, and referent. Words does not refer to specific phenomena in the material world, according to this assumption that there is a natural, organic relation between words and what they represent (Homer, 2005). The word 'apple' refers to not a real or a specific apple in the material world but a concept of an apple. So, the word apple does not refer to a specific referent, so the relation of word and concept is established as a basic unit of linguistic sign. On the one hand, the signifier as a sound pattern or word image, and on the other hand of this linguistic sign there is signified, the concept. So, the structure of language is based on a sign-system composed of two heterogenous series: signifier and signified.

In the Eight Series of Logic of Sense, Deleuze discusses this well-known disequilibrium or paradox of the sign indicated by Lévi-Strauss and as well as Jacques Lacan. Paradox simply begins with the signifier, which has a 'pointing towards' function and always indicates an excess, and the signified, which has a 'pointing to' function and always indicates a lack (Deleuze et al., 1990, p. 48). As Lévi-Strauss (1950, as cited in Deleuze, 1990) declares,

The Universe signified long before we began to know what is signifying... Man, since his origin, has had at his disposal a completeness of signifier which he is obstructed from allocating to a signified, given as such without being any better known. There is always an inadequacy between the two.

Opposing the scheme of orthodox structuralism, Deleuze uses the terms sign, signifier, and signified through their function, but these functions are not pointing to or pointing towards, they have no natural states for themselves, the sign is neither the signifier nor the structural sign. For Deleuze, this relationship between signifier and signified, which oscillates between extreme openness and limitation, actually offers affordance to productivity. Thus, the perceived insufficiency in current social structures, indicated by the lack, and the emergence of new signs demanding revolution, indicated by the

excess, present a fertile ground for innovative experiments with novel signs and events, transcending any totality of forms of knowledge (Williams, 2008, p. 64).

4.2. The Notion of Nonsense

The hypothesis produced by Deleuze on the notion of nonsense does not indicate that the scope of nonsense is not to have a sense; sense and nonsense have a specific relation that nonsense does not take place by an absence of sense; on the contrary, it refers to a different presence of sense. Nonsense has a dual code, breaking with the demands of denotation, manifestation, and signification, and opening up an additional realm of sense (Williams, 2008, p. 68). What does it mean that the notion of nonsense does not establish itself in a relation of mere exclusion with sense? What does this intrinsic relation, this mode of co-presence, mean to approach nonsensical words? The process by which a 'normal' or 'standard' word gains meaning is itself the process by which it gains it by differentiating from one another through always denoting another word, i.e. it is constituted by the determinations of signification. Nonsensical words create a break in the process of signification that gives them meaning. So, they have no referent, and essentially they produce their own sense.

“Show me the Snark

— I cannot, so we must look at its sense

—What is its sense?

—Well, I cannot give you another word, it's 'Snark'.” (Williams, 2008, p. 69)

As we already see, the word snark has a *frontier* characteristic. It has no referent, it functions as a connector of two series, signifier and signified, as a placeless occupant. Nonsensical words always run through an excess in the expressed and the lack in the expression. But at this point, we seem to be in danger of losing the distance or the distinction we have established between the concept of meaning and sense, and it seems as if this approach that we have built on nonsense equates sense with meaning underneath. By shedding light on this objection, we can explain the point at which such an approach of nonsense flourishes, including its inherent possibilities in sound poetry, as follows. When nonsense no longer indicates the absence of a sense, but a 'donation of

sense', and when, in its relation to the notion of event, the concepts of sense and nonsense are distinguished from the processes of signification and denotation that secure a meaning, the uniformity and repetitiveness of the same meanings and references are lost (Williams, 2008, p. 72).

Within language, nonsense emerges as a possibility still inherent in language and opens beyond the order of meaning, which is fixated and identified in futile efforts and placed in a law-like structure. This reception of nonsense opens up a possibility for sound poetry in which sense is reproduced rather than exchanged each time through the vocal possibilities of performance.



5. TREMBLING VOICES

you have a voice
the galleries go clear

to the sky
you must use it

& then after a cautionary note to the reader

listen closely
to the dialogue / you
will know an aspect
of what is

he goes on to say

the truth is
the man does not
have the voice
the voice has him

Bill Bissett

*There is no such thing as a neutral voice, a voice
without desire, a voice that does not desire me.
If there was, it would be an experience of absolute terror.*

Régis Durand

The nonsense, which is one of the most frequent linguistic haunt that sound poetry incorporates with the dissolution of language, had appeared as a frontier between the body and language, between things and propositions, at the two points of oscillation that constitute this concept. Let us now return to the most fundamental point of the relationship between language and the human body, to the fundamental possibility of voice itself, which gives very flesh to the sound substance that has been poetry's most fundamental relationship since the day it came into being and enables poetry to rethink its relationship with this sound substance through a body.

Voice is the foremost element that sustains sound poetry, this genre that resists all definitions and limitations. Whether poetry is called process poetry, concrete poetry, or visual poetry, at all stages, it is sound accompanied by the eye and the ear preceded by the eye, but sound poetry uses this formulation in favor of voice. Whether a certain notation is defined as a score or a paper of symbols or syllables that will lead it into actualization as a performance (as shown in Figure 5.1), sound poetry shifts the poem to the body itself, from a paper led by the eye or the medium that will carry the letters. None of the sound poets arriving point is the mere actualization of a notation, and this idea already embodies its own impossibility. Performing a notation always invites sound poetry, albeit to varying degrees, to an element of improvisation, to unleash through the voice itself a potentiality that is not revealed in the linguistic sketch of the notation alone. As McCaffery declares “Sound poetry is *the* poetry of direct emotional confrontation: there is no repeating of emotional content, each performance is unequalled” (McCaffery & Kostelanetz, 1980).

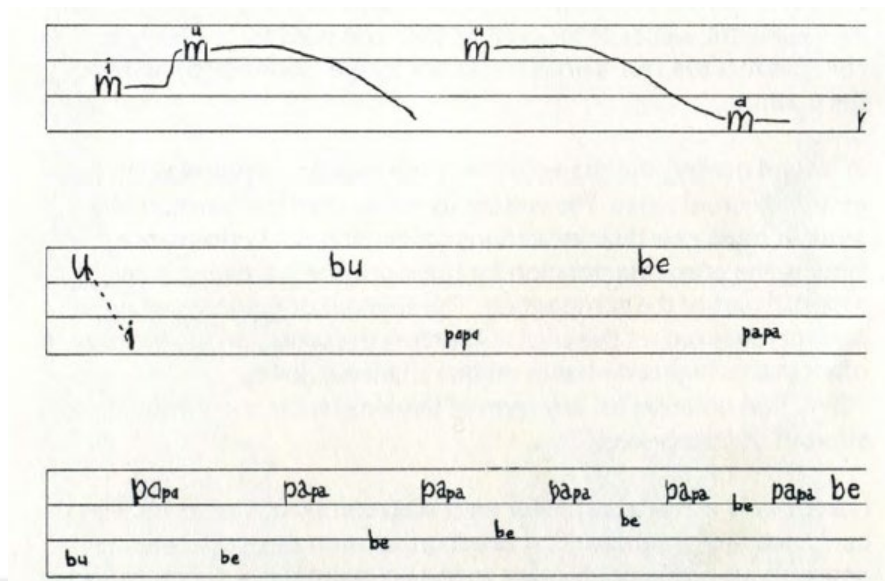


Figure 5.1 Greta Monach, Notation from her sound poetry series *Fonerga* (n. d.)

Thus, poetry is now for the ears, perhaps in its most intense form in its history. As, Michel de Certeau declares that “the ear is the delicate skin caressed or irritated by sound: an erogenous zone, exacerbated, so to speak, by the interdictions which banish from language and good manners, coarseness, vulgarity and finally passions” (Ahearne, 1995, p. 140). What can be said in the context of sound poetry about the voice that must be reborn as it were through a hole to reach de Certeau's erogenous zone?

Even in our daily experiences, the voice seems to have a subsidiary side, something chameleonesque against meaning. With half an eye, a voice, as an instrument, has a volatile and versatile side that seems to provide only a mediation to *making sense*, is opaque, and disappears into the background for the sake of the meaning. Despite this very characteristic of volatility, a possibility of presence seems to be hidden in the voice itself. The guarantee of a subject's presence is hidden almost above all in that first scream. Yet it also carries that intangible ephemerality, that ephemerality that is no longer clear where it disappears at the end of an utterance.

Treating the voice as something that acts only as a mediator in the creation of meaning and does not actually contribute to meaning puts us in an important opposition: an opposition between voice and signifier (Dolar & Žižek, 2006, p. 16). We have already

discussed that the signifier is insufficient unto itself, which gains its identity only through the differences through the other signifiers and can only contribute positively to meaning within its very characteristic of a negative entity. A reciprocal exploration of this negative nature of the signifier, as opposed to the positive, as if the presence-holding nature of the voice, constitutes the next step in approaching the zone of indistinction that sound poetry establishes between poetry and performance.

5.1. Sound Poetry as Pure Potentiality

Feeding on the rift opened by language in the field of meaning, sound poetry goes beyond the scope of language with bodily possibilities where the voice is the center. Sound poetry, which tries to overcome this gap opened by language with possibilities such as exclamations and emotional intonations, actually reveals the gesture in language and body.

As Tobias Wilke indicates, since the second half of the 19th century the emerging discipline of phonetics, or *Lautphysiologie*, began investigating the sounds of human language by experimental means (Wilke, 2013, p. 644). Focusing on the physical and physiological properties of sounds on the basis of the question of how different sounds are produced, phonetics shifted the main focus of linguistics to the reconsideration of spoken language as *movement*. In parallel with these developments, speech production increasingly became an object of attention in the early 1900s. The conceptualization of '*expressive movements*' in Wilhelm Wundt's *Wölkerpsychologie* referred to two inseparable parts of the psychological and physiological process: psychological affect and physical motion (Wilke, 2013, p. 646).

On the basis of Wundt's conceptualization, it focuses on the sensorily perceptible signs and vocal utterances that each language contains and that are produced by muscular effects. The most rudimentary example of this co-determination is the infant crying. The cry of an infant is an example of a vocal gesture that does not contain the articulative sounds of speech in the true sense but is still an expressive movement of the body that indicates sensorily perceptible signs such as perturbation. As Wundt declares, the first movements that the body expresses, these fundamental vocal gestures such as a baby

crying, are the origins of the formation of linguistic sound. The earliest articulatory sounds emerge when numerous undifferentiated "articulatory gestures" that contain emotive content, such as infant crying and babbling, begin to distinguish themselves phonetically as separate units like da-da and pa-pa (Wilke, 2013, p. 647). From the perspective of semiotics, these initial indicative gestures have an indexical character. Indexical character indicates that there is a natural connection between expression and content. So, these initial indicative gestures are not yet symbolic but rather "indexical" in kind, they work through the coupling and pointing with another bodily mode of designation (Wilke, 2013, p. 649). The effects of this perspective on the Dada movement will be discussed in more detail in the next section, where we discuss Hugo Ball's performance at Cabaret Voltaire.

Let's go back to that unfinished circle that we have not yet closed. At the first point where we discussed voice, we mentioned that it basically leads us to a dichotomy. These sounds, which Wundt calls articulatory gestures, which seem to be outside the linguistic structure, from babbling to crying, which we can call pre-symbolic in the narrative established on the basis of infancy on the construction of language and meaning, actually become the signifying gesture itself by not signifying anything in particular (Dolar & Žižek, 2006, p. 28). If we reformulate the Lacanian term for the sake of this re-flourishing of the structure, these articulatory gestures give rise precisely to "*extimacy*", the "excluded interior". Precisely by being outside the structure, they actually constitute its core, the pure process of enunciation that precedes any words or propositions.

Let us continue with the expansions of that point, which Wundt showed in a fundamental level and which is a declaration of the obvious: "*As everyone knows, children at first do not speak*" (Heller-Roazen, 2008, p. 9). The fact that human beings have a period of infancy, which can basically be considered as a chronological site, a psychosomatic state, indicates a kind of floundering, ambivalent state, the point where human beings are capable of speech but cannot yet possess it. While this ambivalence indicates a deficiency, it also tips potentiality the wink. From cries to screams, from phonetic sounds to murmurs, the phase that constitutes this primary order of speech is

essentially a paradise of potentiality. As Heller-Roazen declares, “No limits can be set on the phonic powers of the prattling child” (Heller-Roazen, 2008, p. 9). Infancy indicates precisely the ambivalent phase in which linguistic capacity actualizes itself while an undifferentiated potentiality is left behind. As Heller-Roazen declares in *Echolalias: On the Forgetting of Language* about this connection,

It is as if the acquisition of language were possible only through an act of oblivion, a kind of linguistic/ phonic infantile amnesia... Perhaps the loss of a limitless phonetic arsenal is the price a child must pay for the papers that grant him citizenship in the community of a single tongue. (Heller-Roazen, 2008, p. 11)

This idea of potentiality as a pure process of enunciation that Heller-Roazen, Agamben's student, takes up, and this notion of infancy, which is always rooted in a tension between lack and excess, between deprivation and potentiality, is related to Agamben's notion of *in-fancy*, which now transcends its scope by including the potentiality of a psychosomatic state in human development. In his book *Infancy and History*, Agamben probes the notion of *experience* through the notions of language and voice as an extension of the Structuralist distinctions of *langue* and *parole* and Benveniste's notions of *semiotics* and *semantics*. The fundamental ground of Agamben's approach to infancy is associated with the notion of *experimentum linguae*, that is, what is experienced is language itself (Agamben & Heron, 1993, p. 4). Agamben's concept of in-fancy is precisely a reference to the thresholds that emerge in language and are already inherent in language. Agamben's book basically pursues two questions: what does it actually mean to say '*there is language*'; what is the meaning of 'I speak'? This is a very fundamental gesture that merges with the efforts of sound poetry. Language no longer indicates an *essence*, but a radical experimentation.

For Agamben, where language “ends”, it is not the “unsayable” but the “matter of language” that begins (de la Durantaye, 2009, p. 133). The possibility opened in this place where the issue of language begins is, for Agamben, exactly what reveals that notion of *poiesis* in the interaction of poetry and language. To clarify the narrative full of these concepts, poetry is an act that essentially connected a Greek term *poiesis*; that is, it contains the meanings of “making” or “bringing forth.” Sound poetry germinate the very legacy of poetry; it undermines the structures that enable communication in

everyday language and what produces the potential of communication, revealing a space where language communicating itself has the potential to overcome the semantic and semiotic rift very characteristics of language.

In other words, at the point where sound poetry considers this productive potential at the core of poetry together with the scope of voice, it reveals the point that takes the language back to its own potential. Sound poetry is precisely the act that brings poetry and performance into communication within a zone of indistinction, that is, it actually traverses linguistic and bodily/performative possibilities within poetry.

5.2. Sound poetry as a Zone of Indistinction

Let us illuminate the bifurcating conceptual line of the thesis by taking one step further the relationship of the narrative with the term 'zone of indistinction,' which crosses all paths in the narrative that is traced in a fragmented state. With the term 'zone of indistinction,' Agamben problematizes precisely the state in which structures or categories that appear distinct and oppositional are intertwined (Gilson, 2007). In this view, these structures or categories are no longer dichotomies but begin to problematize the zone where no clear boundary can be drawn within a line of tension. In this context, sound poetry begins to problematize dichotomies and separate structures. The outermost frame of this tension is between poetry and performance. Sound poetry opens language to becoming immanent to itself, to a spectrum, with its other and its outside, in the field where voice includes bodily gestures through *becoming-infant*. Sound poet de-forms and de-organizes the language in such a way that it can go beyond the scope of language's law-like structures. The concept *experimentum linguae*, introduced in the previous section, is precisely how poetry reveals the productive forces already inherent in the poetry as its linked to the *poiesis*. The sound poet is precisely the figure who tries to reveal the potential in Agamben's *experimentum linguae*; at this point, language becomes a field of experimentation with all that it excludes and includes.

In light of this historical and conceptual background, we will begin examining two artworks in the following chapters of the thesis. Hugo Ball's performance is chosen to

shed light on the place of the genesis of sound poetry, while bpNichol's Appendix is chosen because it embodies the various linguistic potentials of the historical path of sound poetry.



6. PLAYGROUND FOR AFFECTIVE RESONANCES: HUGO BALL'S SOUND POEM ON JUNE 13, 1916



Figure 6.1 Hugo Ball, Cabaret Voltaire (1916)

Deleuze asks in his March 1986 seminar on Foucault: What did Dada do? As he declares, Dada operates itself through the limits of language, and all language, the being of language —language unites in approaching Dada (Deleuze, 2024). So, with what sort

of moves does Dada bring poetry closer to the concept of a limit? To examine the tension between the concept of the limit their use of language carries and the limits of language that Dada's political agenda aims to reach, let's consider the text of the sound poetry performed by Hugo Ball (as shown in Figure 6.1) at the Cabaret Voltaire on June 23, 1916, wearing a cardboard costume he designed himself.

gadji beri bimba glandridi laula lonni cadori
gadjama gramma berida bimbala glandri galassassa laulitalomini
gadji beri bin blassa glassala laula lonni cadorsu sassala bim
gadjama tuffm i zimzalla binban gligla wowolimai bin beri ban
o katalominai rhinozerossola hopsamen laulitalomini hoooo
gadjama rhinozerossola hopsamen
bluku terullala blaulala loooo

zimzim urullala zimzim urullala zimzim zanzibar zimzalla zam
elifantolim brussala bulomen brussala bulomen tromtata
velo da bang bang affalo purzamai affalo purzamai lengado tor
gadjama bimbalo glandridi glassala zingtata pimpalo ögrögööö
viola laxato viola zimbrabim viola uli paluji malooo

tuffm im zimbrabim negramai bumbalo negramai bumbalo tuffm i zim
gadjama bimbala oo beri gadjama gaga di gadjama affalo pinx
gaga di bumbalo bumbalo gadjamen
gaga di bling blong
gaga blung²

(Ball & Faul, 2007, p. 67)

As Tobias Wilke declares (2013), the poem, which at first glance appears to be a text that does not include any elements that preserve the semantic structure of the language, reveals upon in-depth research that it contains various elements of natural languages. Ball not only sets free words from command of syntax and established use of reference, but he also registers that nonsense has its own dimension of sense, which is an inherent form of possibility. At a closer look, we notice references in the German language to various parts of some of the words reconstructed in the poem. Just like the word *Rhinozeros* means dinosaur, *blau* means blue, and *affe* means monkey in German. With the line "... zambibar zimzalla zam," and the linguistic references of the reconstructed

² The poem was originally published in De Stijl 8, no 85/86 1982

words, it becomes possible to say that the poem tries to evoke the scenery of Zanzibar (Wilke, 2013, p. 657). Even if this tendency draws people in so quickly, thinking of Dada's productions from the perspective of primitive or exotic only opens the door to one of the possibilities.

The text also hosts a highly complex sound flow, with restructured words, repetitions, the use of basic syllables, and their deduplicated forms. For example, Erdmute Wenzel White comments on the possibilities of this sonic flow: The repetition of the phrase gadji at the beginning of the line and the pauses before the new line evokes spatial, visual, and auditory sensations by evoking the phrase's oscillation up and down like a ringing bell (White, 1989, p. 110).

The repetition of the gadji sound at the beginning of lines, which Wenzel likens to the ringing of a bell, is related to Agamben's use of the term *versura* to conceptualize poetry. The points where the gadji phrase makes a tour and returns are accompanied by randomly distributed basic syllables that are attached to selectable words in the text. Poetry's tension between the form of expression and form of content, as the dynamic of words, remains precisely on the line of tension between aestheticized language and everyday language, which drives words into a dynamic of becoming and vanishing into thin air, of acquisition and loss.

The name Da-da and the presence of pure articulated sounds randomly scattered in the text appear as moves to overcome the paradox of sign in Dada's cultural agenda. In Deleuzian perspective, the signifier is the thing that presents itself in the domain of sense, that is, expression itself, whereas the signified can be the concept, denoted thing, or manifested subject. Dada places the problematic signified in front of the expression that presents itself in the domain of sense. The basic syllables attached to these recognizable words, and the performance of the poem with different intonations, make the poem suspend the sign regime and put signification in a paradox.

*I knew that 'H' comes after 'G' and that 'I' was next,
so that if I was at 'I'
I had gone too far.
— bpNichol*

7. PERFORMING CRUMBLING WORDS: bpNichol'S APPENDIX



Figure 7.1 bpNichol, Sound&Syntax International Festival of Sound Poetry (1978)

bpNichol (as shown in Figure 7.1) rejects technological potentials in his practice of sound poetry, claiming that these potentials mechanize sound, and calls for us to rethink the body and poetry at the borders of language through voice manipulations. Appendix, as a product of such effort, created with seven sound poem pieces by Barry Phillip Nichol, was published in 1978 as a part of Sean O'Huigin's book *Poe-Tree: A Simple Introduction to Experimental Poetry*.

With the recordings presenting a selection of previously published performances, the album consists of seven performances ranging between seventeen seconds and three minutes that travel the paths of language and its thresholds, from guttural sounds to

repeated consonants, from words distorted by timbre to *meaningless* sentences. The first piece is called The Child in Me. This work, in which the larynx sound comes to the fore, can be read as a dissolution of the word “milk” by prolonging the pronunciation of the letters in the larynx and emphasizing the syllables in the larynx with different variations. The second piece is called Winwood’s Hum. The piece, which begins with the repetitions of the 'kk' sound, turns into a murmur with the repeated articulations of the syllables ‘rah’ and ‘ta’ after the syllable ‘tra’ and ends by fading out. Again, with the sound level, repetitions, and transitions between syllables, we vaguely seem to hear the word “extra”. As indicated by these variations, bpNichol establishes the relationship of the pieces with language and meaning, almost like a montage relationship. As Pudovkin's famous experiment on the melodic unity of films shows us, just as a film is not the sum of images but a temporal gestalt, bpNichol makes us realize that the succession of intonations, syllable variations, and repetitions create linguistic possibilities beyond only the sum of these (Merleau- Ponty & Kul-Want, 2019).

The third piece is called Flower Eyes. The transcribed form of the lullaby-like piece is as follows.

lonely but gone, yah,

lonely but gone, yah,

loony petunia, loony petunia,

lonely begonia, loony petunia,

grows rose, grows rose,

wistful wisteria, wistful wisteria,

bleeding heart, bleeding heart,

sweet pea, daffodil, I was leaning on my windowsill

Flower Eyes, one of his rare pieces with a recognizable semantic structure, seems at first glance to create a topography with the repetition of words with similar pronunciations.

However, the piece goes beyond this, establishing relationships not only between words with similar pronunciation but also between various phrases and words through pronunciation. The timbral synthesis that emerges between the phrase 'but gone, yah' and the word 'begonia' is reminiscent of the expression 'y'reince', which Lewis Carroll named as the 'Unpronounceable Monosyllable' and replaced the phrase 'Your royal highness' in his work *Sylvie and Bruno*.

The fourth piece is called *M.L.'s Dream*. This piece also has characteristics similar to *Child in Me* and *Winwood's Hum*. The piece centers the repeating rhyming words (mouse/house). The multiplication of rhyming words with similar sounding words (who's/mousse) and the constant repetition of these words also cause expressions such as "how smooth" to be distinguishable.

The 5th work, *War and Peace*, with a duration of 17 seconds, consists of the repetition of the syllable *ba* and ending with an interruption and the use of an onomatopoeia resembling the sound of a siren.

In the 6th piece, *I'd Love Just Once to See You in the Nude*, bpNichol plays with random letters of the alphabet and phonemes. He excretes the vowels and connects them with guttural sounds. He creates a rhythm with different intonations from similar vowel phonemes. After a point in the piece based on the repetition of the sounds *u* and *w*, all these phonemes and guttural sounds give way to words, and the piece embarks on a random analysis of the differences that make up the linguistic structure of the language. Phonemes and guttural sounds, sounds that rise and fall and are connected to each other are replaced by phrases such as "sky is not blue", "the trees are not black", "a is not b" "c is not a and b, a or b," which become a linguistic analysis of the differences that construct their own sonic structure and the language itself, as if they were a linguistic analysis of what the piece was performing at the beginning and becomes a parody of a well-known phrase of Saussure " *in a language there are only differences, and no positive terms*" (de Saussure et al., 2004, p. 70).

if a then b not a not b, a considered to be a sufficient condition for b, b necessarily a prior to it, a, b blue or black or a sky against which no tree is seen [...] m and n the coincident, tangent of the j the k the l or c, d, h, i, j, p, r ...

One of the key moments in this work, and in many of Nichol's performances of sound poetry, is the endless and uncanny insistence on the possibilities opened up by the realization of vowels in the larynx, a key moment in language's attempt to reclaim what it has discarded in its own country. bpNichol attempts a narrative that will shed light on this insistence in his article titled *Sound and the Lung Wage*, which he wrote in 1973.

The wild wolves are almost gone.

This may not immediately strike you as tragic. You may believe — as so many do — that wolves kill human beings. And yet there is no authenticated report of a human killed by a nonrabid wolf in the North American continents ...

Our terror of the wolf is superstitious and magical. It comes from his seeming invisibility; we know he is there because we hear him and see his tracks and his kill. But we seldom see him because he avoids us.

And it comes because his wolf howl sends chills of fright through our minds. We feel threatened ...

If we are killing them off not for what they are but for what we, in our fear, imagine them to be, then perhaps what we fear is something in ourselves. (bpNichol & Miki, 2002, p. 99)

Based on this narrative, bpNichol attempts to explain the feeling of uncanniness that people feel towards vowels. The one point of this uncanniness is the sound of that breath coming out of the body. But fundamentally, this insistence on vowels is closely related to the desire to bring the disembodied voice back to the body, to the rejection of technological possibilities, the path chosen by bpNichol and many other poets of the sound poetry genre. The insistence on vowels is in fact connected to an insistence on pure voice of the body without any technological interruptions, coming out of this specificity on vowels. The fear of wolves becomes precisely a haunt of the disembodied voice that resides in that disembodied sound and that bpNichol linguistically seeks in the vowel itself. To further clarify this point, we can look at the notion of the *acousmatic voice*.

The acousmatic voice is basically a voice in search of a body, which cannot be attributed to a body. Looking at the *Larousse Dictionnaire* for the most precise technical meaning of the term, acousmatic refers to the noise we hear without seeing what is

causing it (Dolar & Žižek, 2006, p. 61). From which body does this sound emanate? This is the question that the acousmatic voice confronts us with. Whether the source of it is the telephone, the sound that is one of the elements of cinema's mere existence, or the sound that many sound poets reject, which is the sound that turns into a recording at the end of the day and can be manipulated/ transformed with technological possibilities, the acousmatic sound body is the lost sound.

What the microphone actually produces, says bpNichol, is the elimination of the necessity for the whole body and, through it, the voice to assert itself; according to him, the microphone shadows the inherent nuance and tone of the voice. To summarize, as much as sound has become an inseparable part of our lives with technology, it is, in fact, the product of a fear of the body, of the voice, and it is precisely what distances us from that voice of the body (bpNichol & Miki, 2002).

7.1. bpNichol's Appendix and Notion of Sense

In the conceptual part of the questioning that we initiated through voice, we had addressed sound poetry as a field that problematizes language as a performance, flourishing as becoming-performance of language, that is, precisely inquiry on the linguistic potential. In *LONGER FORMS*, bpNichol speaks of the energy left unused between the poet and the final realization of his craft, precisely in language itself (bpNichol & Miki, 2002). This narrative crosses the bridge between the notion of sense, with which we began our conceptual groundwork, and the pure potentiality that emerges in language through infancy. Deleuze illuminates the relationship between the body and language in the notion of sense as an event without erasing their differences. Events are changes, and it is precisely at the crossroads between language and body that they emerge as real internal possibilities inherent in them. What bpNichol sees in the act of sound poetry is precisely what is inherent in the event. It is the unlimited becoming itself that is only distinguished when it occurs in the actualization of performance. As Deleuze declares, the event is coextensive with becoming, and becoming is itself coextensive with language (Deleuze et al., 1990, p. 8).

At the point where we aim to reveal the link between sound poetry and poetry, we declared that sound poetry lies in the tension between sense and sound, which is the very legacy of poetry. As Bergson declares, “one does not proceed from sounds to images and from images to sense”; sense is like a sphere and always presupposed as soon as *I* begin to speak (Deleuze et al., 1990, p. 28).

To shed a further light on the issue, in the fifth series of *Logic of Sense*, Deleuze introduces the paradox of regress, or of indefinite proliferation. The main example that will reveal these concepts is actually the slips of the tongue, also known in the literature as Freudian slips, which get worse the more you try to correct them.

bpNichol's poems also show how sense establishes the paradox of regression and indefinite proliferation in a proposition or through a word that is vaguely there. In the works, it is as if the poet finds himself in a position where he cannot or will not say what he means on the way to sense, and in every attempt, he finds himself in an infinite regression of language in the domain of sense, unable to capture the presupposed sense. This tension and withdrawal between what he says and what he means becomes precisely what gives sense to the possibility of an indefinite proliferation.

For example, as we examine the first piece *Child in Me*, bpNichol never directly says the word *milk* but he constantly turns around the phrases like *miuk*, *miulk*. In addition, the second piece *Winwood's Hum*, the repetitions of the 'kk' sound, turns into a murmur with the repeated articulations of the syllables 'rah' and 'ta' after the syllable 'tra' and ends by fading out. Again, with the sound level, repetitions, and transitions between syllables, we vaguely seem to hear the word, or we feel that bpNichol *meant* the word “extra”. It is precisely by referring to infancy in language that we witness the interaction of the concepts of lack and excess in language with the context of sense. On the basis of a lack, this paradox can lead us to the following: *we never get to what we mean* but we also witness the proliferation of sense in the opposite direction, which is precisely characteristic of the paradox: *we always have more sense than we think* (Williams, 2008).

This paradox also reveals a very fundamental character of sense: the impossibility of saying anything definitive about it. Sense itself is precisely what resists any linguistic

fixation, and perhaps what makes this whole thesis a futile endeavor. It is precisely at the point of its linguistic rupture that sound poetry reveals that aspect of the works that resist interpretation.



8. CONCLUSION

In the first chapter of the thesis, which deals with the (un)categories of sound poetry, its historicity as a genre is questioned. With this historical research, it is revealed that poetry beyond words, as a possibility opened by the avant-garde, gradually became the very characteristic of sound poetry. The possibilities of poetry beyond words are revealed to be the possibility of contemplation of language and the body in a dynamic structure in sound poetry. It is shown that words transform into phonemes, and phonemes into pure articulatory gestures in the course of history, but this transformation is not a step-by-step or linear process. Nevertheless, it constitutes the history of sound poetry with its different and transforming faces. Through the (un)history of sound poetry, as the history of the transposition of all the thresholds of language, onto a performance ground, sound poetry finds itself in a zone of indistinction between poetry and performance.

After revealing the scope of sound poetry, which resists taking into the proper historical approach with its unclear boundaries, the thesis begins to formulate its conceptual mapping to reveal the modes of this zone of indistinction. As an outcome of this (un)history and (un)categories of sound poetry, the thesis questions the relationship between poetry and sound poetry at the point where words dissolve into performance. The tension between sound and sense as what constitutes poetry, borrowed from Valéry's definition, is taken up by sound poetry as their common legacy and the thesis carries itself to the next chapter that problematizes the notion of sense itself.

In chapter 4, through Deleuze's notion of sense, the zone of indistinction between poetry and performance is explored, revealing that sense is now the immanent notion of sound poetry that seeks itself outside the structures of language that seem to guarantee meaning. At this point, we have seen that the notion of sense is a conceptualization of the possibility of their interaction without erasing their differences, which no longer reveals itself only in a linguistic structure, but now moves beyond the duality between body and language.

In this way, we see that the fundamental issue of sound poetry actually opens up a questioning of sense through a notion of nonsense. The notion of nonsense that we encounter in the place where words crumble, and these crumbs are mixed together, becomes precisely what shows the productive potential of the dynamic structures (body/language) from which it sprouts.

The research then turns to the concept of voice itself, which is the fundamental mode of the zone of indistinction of sound poetry. The notion of voice, which stands in the interaction of these structures, body, and language, becomes the underlying notion of sound poetry despite all its transformations in its (un)history. Our investigation of voice itself leads us to the fundamental proposition of this thesis, which is the becoming-in/fant in language.

The expression that the thesis conceptualizes with becoming-in/fant is double-sided. In the first direction, when the sound poets make language itself a field of experimentation, they open sound poetry up to a field that includes both bodily gestures and the earliest articulatory sounds of the body that precede the process of enunciation as conceptualized by Wundt. In other words, the sound poet takes language back to the very process of acquiring that language, to the potential left behind by a child, as conceptualized by Heller-Roazen, to become able to express herself in language, to speak and communicate in a single tongue. The second direction opens through Agamben's conceptualization of in-fancy in relation to this narrative. In Agamben's terms, the point where language opens up to its own potentiality constitutes the core of the connection between language and poetry. In this intersection, language opens up a radical field of experimentation through its own limits to a potentiality that already resides within itself, to a productive power inherent to itself.

In other words, the sound poet carries its act beyond the body and language dichotomy through the possibilities of voice, it opens up the potentiality of traversing the continuum of body and language through the thresholds of language as a zone of indistinction. Thus, in the domain of sense, we witness the sound poet discovering the

notion of what Deleuze calls *sliding all the length of the surface*. As Deleuze declares, it is difficult to respond to those who wish to be satisfied with words, things, images, and ideas” (Deleuze et al., 1990, p. 20). At the point where the sound poet contemplates the possibilities of a space that frees their act from words and signifying regimes, the dialog between our research and sound poetry becomes similar to the dialog between Alice and the Duchess in *Alice in Wonderland*. Whenever Alice opens her mouth, the Duchess replies with the lesson to be learned from this is, and adds that you take care of the sense, and the sounds will take care of themselves (Carroll, 2003, p. 77). In sound poetry we find the Duchess' formula reversed, you take care of the sounds, and the sense will take care of itself.

Finally, the thesis opens its narrative with the question of what a poem is capable of. In the zone of indistinction, it creates, sound poetry turns this question into the question of what a body and language are capable of. With the potential it opens up in the thresholds of language and body that it traverses through phonemes, guttural sounds, intonations, articulatory gestures, and so on, sound poetry still carries this question into its future: future to which we are always one step closer, but to which we can never give a final answer.

8.1. Further Research

As Deleuze declares, nothing is more fragile than the surface (Deleuze et al., 1990, p. 82) In the last two sections of the thesis, I address the two artworks that remain attached to the surface organization of sense, which are basically words, and phonemes that are still recognizable in these artworks. The distinction between the two notions of nonsense, that which distributes sense between series or that which swallows the sense itself, also reveals another visage of the potentiality that sound poetry brings forth, as it slides all the length of the surface. For example, even though they have profound differences according to their respective problems, through consonantal, guttural, and respiratory processes, we can find breath-words or howl-words of Artaud and also Dufrêne's *Cri-rythmes* or Phil Minton and Steven J Fowler's performances full of guttural labors. Through their relation with the central notions of the Logic of Sense, depth, and surface, we witness the lopsidedness of the zone of indistinction between poetry and performance for the sake of corporeality and the notion of the body itself. Through this perspective, the contemplation of the relation of the notions of depth and surface between the artworks that *almost* ripped their bonds with language for the sake of the flow of the body, or the particular case of Artaud, flooded beyond the scope of this thesis.

In addition to that, the thesis only covers periods or artworks that mainly deal with the notion of voice in their center, excluding itself from technological opportunities of sound poetry, which overflows the capability of voice through the more encompassing term sound. The thesis already refers to the concepts of enjambment and versura, and one can find a link between those poetic terms with the notions of loop and repetition as discernible tendencies of sound poetry using the technological possibilities of sound within the scope of Agambenian and Deleuzian thought.

These aforementioned areas, while partially elucidated, were not fully explored due to the limitations and the scope of this thesis. Nevertheless, further research may extend on these points for a more comprehensive contemplation on this subject matter.

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