



Curatorial > INTERRUPTIONS

This section consists of a line of programmes that explore the complex map of sound art from different points of view in the form of a curatorial series.

With **INTERRUPTIONS** we make the most of the vast musical knowledge of the artists and curators involved in the **Ràdio Web MACBA** project in a series of 'breaks' or interruptions of our Curatorial programming. In *à-la-carte-music* format, our regular curators have carte blanche to create a purely musical experience with only one only one guiding parameter: the thread that runs through each session must be original and surprising. In this latest instalment, we capture some of the infinite instances of voice and repetition in Eduard Escoffet's sound poetry collection.

Curated by Eduard Escoffet

PDF Contents:

- [01. Summary](#)
- [02. Playlist](#)
- [03. Related links](#)
- [04. Credits](#)
- [05. Copyright note](#)

Eduard Escoffet is a poet whose work spans several disciplines: sound, visual, and textual poetry and performance. Through Propost, which he founded in 1993, he has produced numerous events and festivals linked to poetry.

INTERRUPTIONS #18

Vox et repetitio

Actual recording was not an option until the twentieth century, when technology made it possible to record, play back, process and multiply the voice of the poet. One source, infinite layers. A machine for expressing the multiplicity that exists in every voice, in every person. This led to the birth of a new genre, a new path that is in reality simply a revival of the original poetry which existed before print: voice and repetition.

01. Summary

'Repetition is a form of change.'

Brian Eno and Peter Schmidt, *Oblique Strategies*

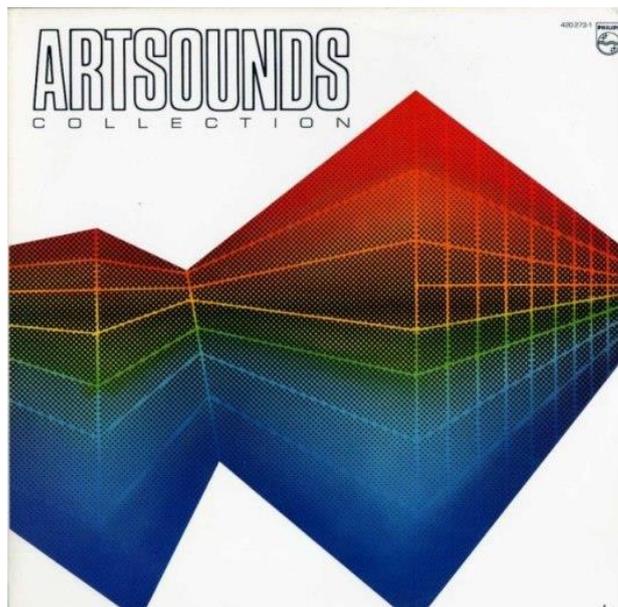
Repetition is one of the core elements of poetry; it is engraved into the DNA of what poetry is or what it has tried to be. The idea of repetition (and reproduction) can be traced back to its origins: poetry was born because of its capacity to capture and conserve a story or a thought –in the absence of writing, rhymed verse aids in the memorisation and reproduction of a text– and the capacity of the spoken word to transport both speaker and listener, to transcend the moment thanks to repetition, which is the foundation of trance rituals –the most spiritual aspect of poetry.

And from that point on, we can detect the idea of repetition in various aspects of poetry throughout history, from the most basic –rhyme, meter– to formal strategies such as refrains and rhyming words in sestinas. In the twentieth century repetition became more complex and pervasive –we shouldn't forget that this period saw the birth of pop and of mass cultural communication: nothing requires repetition and variations on a single element as much as a message that aspires to spreading everywhere and reaching everybody–, and new experimental genres began to emerge, such as echoes, in which the poet's voice is repeated. It was the start of a desire to push repetition further: to repeat the voice, the sound of the poet, and create a vocal canon with oneself.

Throughout the ages, poetry has ultimately always been a kind of voice recording machine. But actual recording was not an option until the twentieth century, when technology made it possible to record, play back, process and multiply the voice of the poet. One source, infinite layers. A machine for expressing the multiplicity that exists in every voice, in every person. This led to the birth of a new genre, a new path that is in reality simply a revival of the original poetry which existed before print: voice and repetition.

In my own case, the idea of repetition has always accompanied me to the point where I can say it almost obsessed me. I see repetition in the origins of poetry, and also in the melody that weaves over a constant loop during an endless dawn at a club, and in the infinite variations of baroque music –everything is already invented, there is only variation, as Baltasar Gracián said. And repetition is also the noise that makes it possible to climb the ladder of escape, and absence, and the death instinct, and a change, and the door that indicates that there is a way out of here. To me, all of this –sound poetry, repetition– maps out a zone of convergence between technological innovation, the return to original poetry and the avant-garde in the sense of the transformation of reading and writing systems. Repeating a word over and over strips it of its ordinary definition and reveals an unexpected sound and meaning, freed from the word's accumulated history. And repeating the same voice over itself makes it possible to add layers of meaning that a univocal poem cannot transmit. That's what poetry is: to speak again, to silence words, to rediscover, repeat and feel the variations.

These ideas are the basis on which I've put together this selection. All the pieces date from the period after the use of the tape recorder became widespread, in



[Artsounds Collection, 1986]

other words from the fifties up until the present. Much of the selection is personal: authors who I consider important and who have opened up new panoramas for me. There are also some pieces that stand out for their particular use of repetition or their historical value. They all use the possibilities of sound to add complexity to a text rather than simply decorate it. The fact that it can attain meanings that cannot be achieved by the plain text, without the tape recorder, is what sets sound poetry apart from recitals over a backdrop of sound. The selection also includes three musical pieces based on repetition that I've used to mark the beginning, middle and end. There are many classic names missing, and authors from some parts of the world are missing too, but this selection is simply a somewhat accidental reading of my collection based on the idea of repetition.

The selection kicks off with a piece by Llorenç Barber that shifts from spoken text that goes back on itself through repetition, to song. It was part of *Polipoesía: primera antología*, an anthology edited by Xavier Sabater in 1992 that also included the pieces by Enric Casasses and Xavier Sabater in this selection. Although by no means complete, I think it is a good sample of the Barcelona scene of the nineties, and it allows me to draw attention to material included in this anthology that remains both an essential document and impossible to find.

Another essential –and hard to get hold of– anthology in the history of sound poetry in Barcelona is *Audiopoesía* sampler, released in 1987, which includes the piece by Victor Nubla that closes this selection. The classic poets I have included are only a very small sample, but a very personal one: Bernard Heidsieck, Paul de Vree, Brion Gysin and bpNichol. All four use repetition in very different ways, from long pieces to very brief ones, but always with the intention of getting as much as possible out of the elements of the text and resignifying them through repetition. There are also some authors who could be described as voice researchers, working in the open field between sound poetry and experimental music: Joan La Barbara, Meredith Monk, Connie Beckley, Demetrio Stratos, Fátima Miranda and Pamela Z. And also Jaap Blonk and Arnaldo Antunes, two poets who work closely with music, and who carry out parallel investigations from opposite extremes. Lastly, there is a reasonably diverse sample from the newer generations: Amanda Stewart (*Machine for Making Sense*), David Moss, Mark Sutherland, Ide Hintze and Anne-James Chaton.

Welcome to a utopia.

02. Playlist

1. Llorenç Barber, 'Esta frase es una melodía'

Our first artist, Llorenç Barber, was also first up on the cassette *Polipoesía: primera antología*, released by Sedicions (Xavier Sabater), with two pieces that revolved around the idea of the sentence. I have selected the second of the two, in which there is a shift from a statement that gradually grows through repetition to the freedom of vocal singing, which, along with bells, has been the main focus of Barber's research.

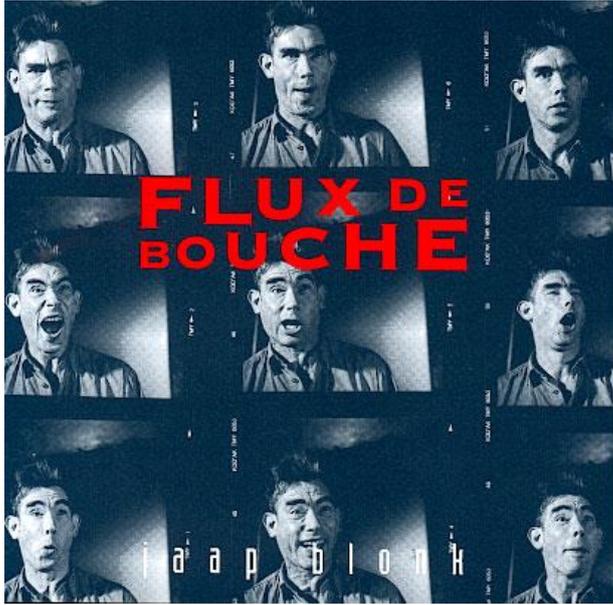
2. Faust, 'It's a Rainy Day'

3. Enric Casasses, 'Dóna'm corda'

This poem was also included in the *Audiopoesía sampler* (1987), and Pascal Comelade participated in the recording. It takes an old fashioned, contrived genre and transposes into a contemporary format. Although Casasses is an important figure on Barcelona's polypoetry scene, few of his poems explore sound and he seldom goes beyond traditional readings – which is a world that he cultivates better than most.

4. Fátima Miranda, 'Desasosiego'

Along with Llorenç Barber and Bartomeu Ferrando, Fátima Miranda formed part of Spain's most important sound poetry group, Flatus Vocis Trío, which was also one of the most solid vocal projects of the eighties together with *Voicetracks* by Carles Santos. Fátima has done extensive research on the possibilities of the voice, using all the effects of her own voice. There are no external effects, only the superimposition of tracks.



[Jaap Blonk, *Flux de Bouche*, 1993]

5. Connie Beckley, 'To Faust: a Footnote'

I've been in love with this sensitive, personal piece ever since Ramuntcho Matta introduced me to it. It is one of only a few pieces that I'm familiar with by Connie Beckley, a rather unprolific artist who became known early on for her participation in works such as *Einstein on the Beach* (1976), by Robert Wilson and Philip Glass. I'm very interested in the contrast between the simple, melodious treatment of the singing voice and the more analytical tone of the speaking voice that reads out excerpts from a text by Isaac Newton. The piece is included in the *Artsounds Collection* released in 1986, but it dates from 1982 or earlier.

6. Machine for Making Sense, 'tb cc rr > cm as'

Machine for Making Sense is an Australian sound improvisation collective founded by Amanda Stewart and Chris Mann (voice), and Stevie Wishart, Jim Denley and Rik Rue (instruments and electronics). This piece is from the album *Consciousness* (1999), which also included the participation of Tony Buck, Carolyn Connors and Greg Kingston. The titles of the pieces are the initials of the members who participated in each of track. This particular piece begins with a musical section leading into the voices of Amanda Stewart and Chris Mann, who are two of the most interesting Australian voice artists working today, particularly Stewart, who has an enviable capacity to work with text and sound simultaneously, without reducing the intensity of either.

7. Jaap Blonk, 'Der Minister I'

Jaap Blonk is another must. An artist whose main focus is improvisation and exploring the extreme possibilities of the voice –neither of which are directly linked to repetition–, Blonk is also author of pieces such as this classic *Der Minister* (available in several languages) in which he uses repetition to force pronunciation to the limit in an amusing and compelling play on political declarations. Another reason I'm interested in Jaap Blonk is that he, like other artists such as Paul de Vree and Sten Hanson, uses the 'limitations' of a minority language as a springboard to generate (sound) poetry that can cross all boundaries based on the sound roots of language itself. I think this is something that lies at the heart of sound poetry: working with language to overcome linguistic boundaries. This piece was included in his essential album *Flux de Bouche* (1993).

8. bpNichol, 'Pome Poem'

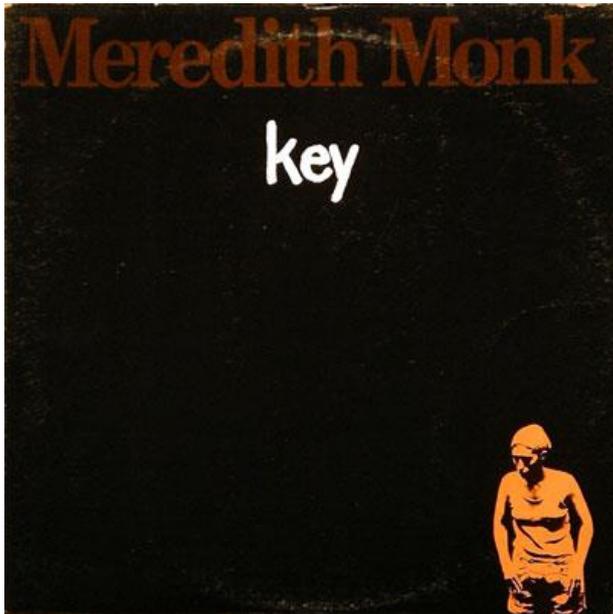
A classic. A piece that that I keep coming back to. Although it is in the potentially misleading form of a song, it is actually an investigation into the meaning of poetry. bpNichol (always written with the initials in lower case and without spaces) was a key figure in Canada's avant-garde, and, along with Rafael Barreto-Rivera, Paul Dutton and Steve McCaffery, a member of one of the country's most important sound poetry groups, active from 1972 to 1988, the year of bpNichol's death. 'Poetry is dead... we are free to live the poem... the poem will live again', he wrote in one of his most memorable books, *ABC: the Aleph Beth Book*. And that's a good description of what happens in this piece: bpNichols takes the poem –which is conceptual rather than narrative– into a space that is full of life. He creates an ode without sacrificing the fragility of the poem.

9. Joan La Barbara, 'Circular Song'

Joan La Barbara is one of the leading names in twentieth century vocal experimentation. Aside from producing a considerable body of her own work, she has also performed the works of others, many of which were written specifically for her by artists such as John Cage, Morton Feldman and Morton Subotnick. This is perhaps one of La Barbara's most famous works, in which she uses circular breathing to produce a continuous voice that is constantly reborn.

10. Demetrio Stratos, 'Metrodora'

It's no accident that Demetrio Stratos and Joan La Barbara are side by side in this selection: both are unquestionably major figures, and they worked quite closely together. In fact, there is a lovely photo of Joan La Barbara that was used on the 2003 re-release of *Voice Is the Original Instrument*, in which Demetrio Stratos appears behind her. It was taken in Milan in 1976, when the Greek-born Italian singer was leaving the progressive rock band Area in order to follow John Cage into the most radical voice exploration that has ever been heard. As it happens, *Metrodora*, his first solo record which includes the homonymous track



[Meredith Monk, *Key*, 1971]

11. Mark Sutherland, 'Hiroshima'

Mark Sutherland is one of the artists who keep the flame of sound poetry burning brightly in Canada. Solo or accompanied by friends such as sound poet Nobuo Kubota, he uses minimum verbal strategies to create highly expressive poems that often resemble phonetic poetry and jazz rhythms. In this example, he portrays the horror of Hiroshima through the repetition of a few words which sometimes overlap, creating a landscape full of angst, ending in a scream, which is a form that Sutherland often uses.

12. Meredith Monk, 'Understreet'

Another artist who had to be in this selection is Meredith Monk, who is also a key figure in twentieth century vocal experimentation. This particular piece comes from her debut album *Key* (1971), a first –and marvellous!– engagement with the expressive possibilities of the voice, beyond words: in each piece on this album, Monk tries to convey an emotional landscape, a description based on a few musical elements and the power and subtleties of her voice. What I like about Monk's work is the fact that it is mysterious and wild, primitive in a sense: a kind of contemporary folk music that predates cultural constructs and is universal and radical at the same time.

13. Steve Reich, 'Music for 18 Musicians: Pulses'

14. Arnaldo Antunes, 'nem'

Arnaldo Antunes is the son of concrete poetry and of the musical boom in Brazil. I like his ability to move between experimental poetry and popular music; I think it allows him to bring lightness and rhythm into poetic pieces that are based on a profound investigation of the sound architecture of text. Antunes draws on concrete forms –breaking down sentences into their constituent elements– and transposes them to the world of sound, a realm almost totally unknown to the founders of concrete poetry, the De Campos brothers and Décio Pignatari. It immediately becomes clear that Antunes has a great capacity to construct verbal structures through repetitions and simple but highly effective games. Although he is better known as a musician, particularly in Madrid, I think that as a poet he takes concrete architectures further than most.

15. Paul de Vree, 'Vertigo Gli'

Paul de Vree is one of the classic figures of sound poetry who has always fascinated me. Unlike many of his contemporaries from the French *poésie sonore* and the Swedish text/sound scenes, his sound poems are short and concise, with a very clear structure. He does not investigate phonetically, but takes short elements, pronounced in a flat manner and repeats and manipulates them. This 1963 piece is actually a sound version of an existing poem by De Vree, developed in collaboration with the composer Jan Bruyndonckx and the actor Julien Schoenaerts, who lends his voice.

16. Pamela Z, 'The MUNI Section'

Even though Pamela Z comes from the music world, the voice and technological manipulation –which are two key elements of sound poetry– always play a major role in her work. Her album *A Delay Is Better* (2004) is a key work in its field. Pamela Z takes the technique used by Joan La Barbara and Meredith Monk and combines it with the operatic energy of Diamanda Galás and the technological coldness of Laurie Anderson. And the result is an unmistakable voice.

17. Ide Hintze, 'Schnee'

Ide Hintze was a twentieth century poet who flirted with pop more than most. The recently deceased Austrian poet was able to easily swing between phonetic abstraction, sound collage, verse, and easy rhythm. Like Arnaldo Antunes, I find him very inspiring because of that link between poetic experimentation and popular music, although Hintze sometimes veered dangerously close to simple song. The interesting thing about this particular piece is the way he repeats, recomposes and manipulates the four initial lines in various ways to create a very broad landscape. It was included in his first sound poetry album, *30 Rufe* (1992), which, like his second, was notable for the large number and diversity of mostly brief pieces (in this case 30).

18. Xavier Sabater, 'Treb-ball'

Sabater is an important figure when it comes to understanding sound poetry and



[Anne-James Chaton & Andy Moor, *Transfer*, 2013]

and polypoetry in Spain, both as poet and organiser. He was the first to create sound poetry in the strict sense of the term –poetry that works with the structure of the text and electronic processing of the voice– and he also led the way in inviting leading names from the sound poetry scene to Barcelona on a regular basis (Enzo Minarelli, Henri Chopin, Bernard Heidsieck). He is the author of a brief but compact and coherent oeuvre within the sphere of polypoetry, particularly from the nineties onwards. I have selected one of these pieces, which is probably less known than others such as ‘Saba-Sanyo-Casio’, for example, but which works with the potential of voice manipulation to add complexity to the meaning of the poem, against a noticeable political backdrop. And if there’s one thing that Xavier Sabater has never given up on, it’s giving a political sense to his work. He is also the author of the piece that, in 1993, predicted a crisis in global capitalism like the one we are now living through.

19. Christian Prigent, ‘Liste des langues que je parle’

Although I don’t consider Prigent to be among the most interesting French poets, I’ve always found this piece by him fascinating because of its destruction of the text through the repetition of breath. A simple, effective strategy that adds another dimension to the poem.

20. David Moss, ‘Conjure’

David Moss is not famous for using repetition. On the contrary, he is known for his ability to surprise the listener with unexpected turns, effects and sounds. I like the playful feeling that he brings to his pieces without sacrificing experimentation, and the energy he gives off in public. In this fragment, repetition allows him to unfold a splendid inventory of the possibilities of the voice. David Moss is an inexhaustible source.

21. Brion Gysin, ‘I Am’

A classic among classics. This is one of the first poems to use the technique of sound cut-ups, which is the foundation of many of the poems in this selection. Permutation as a step beyond repetition, and magnetic tape as the medium that makes it possible. A machine-poem from 1960, like ‘Pistol Poem’.

22. Anne-James Chaton & Andy Moor, ‘Metro’

Anne-James Chaton is one of the key figures in the generation of French sound poets that started to emerge in the late nineties. I met her in 2001, soon after the release of *Événements 1999*, an album in which she superbly updated Bernard Heidsieck’s legacy. She then went on to collaborate with musicians such as Alva Noto and Andy Moor, the co-author of this piece. Found texts, urban environments and repetition in the form of lists or litanies are the distinctive elements of a poetics that has brought a contemporary flavour to sound poetry.

23. Verbomotorhead, ‘Fat Summer’

I’ve included Verbomotorhead because I wanted to draw attention to the peculiarity of sound poetry groups and the possibilities that become available with a diverse vocal group, which is worlds away from the repetition of the voice of a single poet.

24. Bernard Heidsieck, ‘Vaduz’

I don’t want to leave out Bernard Heidsieck, who I consider to be the most important sound poet (and one of the fathers of the genre, of course). One of the pieces that I find most exciting is ‘Vaduz’, which uses a simple mechanism –an exhaustive, centripetal listing of the ethnic groups living around the town of Vaduz– to talk about the capital of Liechtenstein without ever mentioning its name. It is a neutral, descriptive poem conceived for several tracks, but with the power to actually take us back to the ancestors that the list invokes. Heidsieck once told me an anecdote related to this poem: he had been invited to give a recital in a concert hall in Paris as the opener for a rock group. When the audience found out they were going to hear poetry, they started to get restless and complain. He started to read ‘Vaduz’: and he won the battle. The people went crazy with that music that they couldn’t stop: it changed their way of understanding poetry and rock for ever. *‘Il y a autour de Vaduz...’*

25. Manuel Götsching, E2-E4



[Eduard Escoffet. Photo: Balbini]

26. Victor Nubla, 'La voz y el oído'

We finish up like we began: with a piece from Barcelona's fertile scene from the nineties. Aside from being a musician, Victor Nubla is also a writer and a poet who deserves to be considered both as a benchmark and a parallel universe. This playful piece that I discovered when I was a teenager makes the perfect farewell for this journey through repetition in poetry.

If you've come this far, thank you. I hope you've enjoyed listening to the selection as much as I have preparing it. And thank you to Matías and Anna for getting me into this and for their patience. Fade out.

03. Related links

Eduard Escoffet
www.propost.org/escoffet/
www.twitter.com/escoffet

Eduard Escoffet at Ràdio Web MACBA
http://rwm.macba.cat/eduard_escoffet_tag

04. Credits

By Eduard Escoffet. Mixed with Ableton Live.

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