



Compose Your Words

**Leigh
Landy**

COMPOSE YOUR WORDS

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Intelligent Arts

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Fore word

This publication is about creativity in *text-sound*.

What do we mean by text-sound? Think of a poem that is meant to be spoken, not intended to be read. Think of the wide range of vocal sounds, including words, that we can use in a spoken poem. Imagine what we can do with our voice as an instrument of performance.

Text-sound creativity is at a wonderful junction between poetry, literature, drama, and music. Anyone, any age, anywhere, can enjoy it. It's about organising words and sounds. It's playing with the fine line between the content of a text and the music of a composition.

I'd like to guide you through the process of composing in a text-sound medium by walking you through a simple progressive approach in levels of exercises.

My approach progresses from simplicity to complexity in 26 steps labelled from A to Z. I'll start with the recitation of simple words in rhythmic patterns and end with technology and space. Along the way, I'll present examples, some of them that I created, many of them by well-known sound artists, a number of them historically important, of how words and sounds can be organised in compositions.

Text-sound composition is an experimental yet accessible interdisciplinary art form. I don't want to put words in your mouths, take my words for it. I do want you to enjoy this and create with words and vocal sounds in your own way from the start.



As I move in my lessons along the path from the simple to the complex, I'm calling on historical examples to illustrate my points. Here's a summary, in a very brief historical context, of the artists whose works I'll mention.

What we know today as phonetic poetry, sound poetry, text-sound poetry, and text-sound composition has emerged in two major waves of interest, the first in the early 20th century, the second from the 1950s to the late 1970s. But it's also true that many artists with roots in poetry, literature, drama, and music have been consistently active creating text-sound works since the early 20th century and throughout the world. It is my belief that a third wave is well overdue.

The first wave included, amongst others, the Italian Futurist poet Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and the Dadaist artist Kurt Schwitters. The American writer and poet Gertrude Stein has also been of enormous inspiration to me as a sound-based artist.

Inspired by John Cage and certainly the beat poets, the second wave was focused largely in Paris and Stockholm along with a group of composers in the United States and the UK. I am choosing Bernard Heidsieck and Henri Chopin as excellent examples of the second wave, as is the group of mainly French writers called Oulipo. The movement known as lettrism (including visual works that are known as concrete poetry) was also important during the second wave. Much of it was based in Paris, and in this case poetry was made to be seen, not heard. I'll use lettrist ideas when discussing writing scores for some of the works we'll discuss. Stockholm became important through initiatives at Fylkingen, a major Swedish arts center, and the Swedish Radio who put on several festivals and produced numerous excellent recordings during the later years of the second wave.

The American composer Charles Amirkhanian offers a lively early example of text-sound, and poet and performance artist John Giorno another one. American composers Steve Reich, Charles Dodge, and Paul Lansky have worked with text-sound, as has UK composer Trevor Wishart. The French-Greek artist Georges Aperghis uses extended vocal techniques combined with theatre.

All of these artists provide excellent examples of text-sound creativity and I'm sure you'll find their works interesting and inspiring.

Let's begin ...

Section 1: Getting started

A

Start with something simple using just a few words

It is amazing what you can do with just a few words especially if they share some of the same sounds. Charles Amirkhanian offers a great example with Church Car, composed in 1980. In its first minute, it uses only those two words before adding other ones. In this recording where the score can also be found, the composer's voice performs both parts:

[http://www.lyrikline.org/de/gedichte/church-car-4660#.UvjzP0J_tws]

Here is the first of two examples of what you might make using a few possibly familiar words. The hyphen means pause a beat (a beat is the length of time it takes to say the three syllables):

One voice:

Sam I am
Sam I am
I am Sam I am Sam
Sam I am
I am?
I am?
I am Sam I am Sam
Am Sam am Sam
Am I?

This is the second example for two voices or one voice live and one recorded, interpreted in the style of cheerleaders, both keeping to the beat (in this example equal to one syllable).

Voice one:

Eat beets and carrots
Eat beets and carrots
beets and beets
Carrots
 Carrots
Beetroot carrot
Car

Voice 2:

< > Eat Beets and carrots
Beets, beets and beetsBeets,
Eat beets and beets
 Carrots
Beetroots
Carrot beet-rot
Car

Of course both of these examples could easily be extended, and you could make versions for more voices performing together and/or pre-recorded.

You will be surprised to discover how much variation and dynamic you can achieve with a minimum of materials, and how quickly you can gain confidence once things start to evolve from 'just words' to something poetic *and* musical.

B

Rhyme sequences with syncopated rhythms

This second approach has been influenced by a group of mainly French writers called *Oulipo*. The name is an abbreviation for *Ouvroir de littérature potentielle*, which means *Workshop for potential literature* in English. It was founded in 1960.

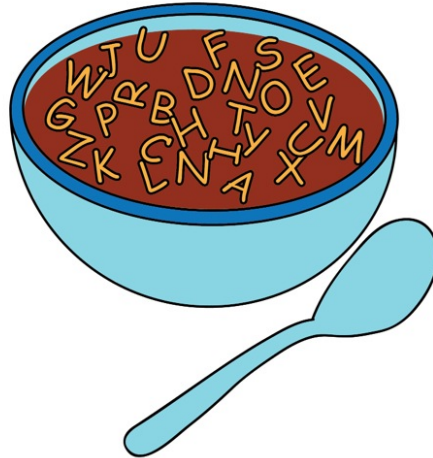
In this case, the approach called *haikuisation* is the inspiration. This calls for a new text to be created using only the final word of a poem's lines, thus rhyming words only in certain cases. In *Oo, Li Po* (1991), my own composition, I included a short section using this technique. Here is that short section, based on *The Maid and the Moor* by Anonymous:

lay, lay, full, full, lay, lay, day;
meat, meat? the the meat, meat? violet;
dring, dring? the the dring, dring? wellèspring.

Arranging this information for a single voice or multiple voices is easy and fun. Even a simple canon for two voices would end up creating something very pleasing.

A next step is to take this as 'raw material' and rearrange it rhythmically in such a way that the addition of syncopations or polyrhythms adds to the flavour of the piece and its complexity.

If using several voices, it might get very crowded if each voice were to be given its own independent part. An alternative to this is to distribute the words among several voices so that the performance changes its sound depending on where the sound is coming from.



C

Alphabet soup that a-z of content

Reading through this getting-started A F group of pages, it may be surprising how much contrast one can gain with simple materials. In this exercise, we shall use only the letters of the alphabet. There are many ways of doing this, but I am proposing one that allows a literal example of *lettrism* to be used as a score. The picture below can be interpreted in any way by as many voices as one would like to present for as long a time as is musically sensible. One can simply articulate the letter names in time, all in the same manner, or change pitch, dynamic or colour in any combination allowing for many forms of interpretation.

For those who speak more languages than one, you can pronounce the letters interchangeably between the languages. Etc. Musical aspects including rhythm, flow, gesture, surprise, in fact anything can be used. If working in a group or making multiple recordings, chords of letters can be created. The piece you make is as free as your imagination. For those who don't like to improvise, write out your part and use that as an aid. If your performance involves multiple voices, the change of vocal timbre and density can play an extra role.

D

Back to the future depicting a war scene with words and phonemes

The artists group called the Futurists worked together at the beginning of the previous century. They looked towards the future with its technology and machines. For better or worse, one of their interests was war (no surprise as they evolved at about the same time as the First World War). The group's founder was Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, who in 1912 published a book called *Zang Tumb Tumb* in which a text was included that was partially prose, partially words and phonemes that portray the sounds of war, and certainly one of the first examples of text-sound poetry.

[<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u1Yld7wGWEI>]

Although war need not be the theme of your creation here (and it wouldn't be mine), the idea here is to choose something clearly identifiable and represent it by words and phonemes only. For a single voice, this could be a musical 'story'. For multiple voices, live and/or recorded, this can give the impression of a complete score of a war (or what your chosen theme might be). You will most likely discover that it is not very difficult to find vocal sounds and words that represent sounds from the real world. Perhaps even from your daily life.

E

The art of repetition and slight variation

Loops suggest repetition and repetition can be used very effectively in music. Indeed, repetition with interpretation and variation can provide an effective tool for composition, including text-sound creativity.

In my related compositions *Telenovela* (2000) and *Soap Opera* (2002), I created a sequence that was inspired by John Giorno. Here is the first part of it:

I really don't think		
I really don't		
I really don't think		
I really don't think		
	we should be meeting	
I really don't think	we should be meeting	
I really don't		
I really don't think	we should be meeting	
	we should be meeting	
I really don't think	we should be meeting	
	we should be meeting	
		like this
		like this
	we should be meeting	like this
	we should be meeting	like this
I really don't think	we should be meeting	like this
	we should be meeting	like this
		like this

This is performed live over a sentence from the original version of my piece in Brazilian Portuguese that has been time-stretched and acts as this section's sonic foundation. The performance of this piece is highly rhythmic and dramatic. It allows listeners to follow the piece referentially, that is, following the text, or following its sonic development, something relevant to all of these

exercises. One could perform it with a slightly dissimilar score by more than one person or recordings.

John Giorno, performance poet, based his work on the repetition-and-variation principle. In this example, he uses a delay unit so that his voice is heard more than once to add to the repetition. It is a recording that was made from an often-played LP and therefore there are quite a few sounds of cracks on the recording, titled *Vajra Kisses* (recorded in 1972):

[http://johngiorno.net/audio/Dial-A-Poem_1972/The-Dial-A-Poem-Poets_05_giorno.mp3]

Create a short text with segments that can be repeated and see how you can vary it effectively to tell a story and create something musical at the same time. Try it with multiple voices.

F

She will rock you working with Gertrude Stein's almost repetitive texts

Now let's take repetition to the next level. John Giorno was writing during a time that repetitive music (also known as minimal music) was growing in importance, including the works using speed variation by Steve Reich such as *It's Gonna Rain* (1965) and *Come Out* (1966) in which voices were the focus.

Repetition can be found in many forms in a variety of genres of music around the globe. In more experimental writing, one pioneer who was well ahead of her time was Gertrude Stein. Some of the texts she wrote in the early decades of the previous century were highly repetitive, but with very quirky and fascinating variations, and they were certainly better heard than just read. In fact, she wrote some of these prior to the first wave of activities in text-sound poetry, but she was never directly associated with it despite the fact that her work has been hugely influential and was, in fact, an excellent example of it.

Whilst composing my most performed piece, *Rock's Music* (1988), which involves amplified live voice and recordings of the same voice, one on stage and one in an unexpected place, I took three Gertrude Stein (Stein = rock in German) texts and completely recomposed them. One of the texts that I used, and one of my favourites, is called *As a Wife Has a Cow: A Love Story* (1926). It can be seen in full at:

[<http://poetx.tripod.com/x/stein.html>]

For the final exercise within this first group, use one of the texts that Gertrude Stein wrote, chop it up into pieces and create something of your own. Many people have set these texts to music, but I hope you will agree that the music is actually already in the texts when you read them out loud or recompose them as I did. Alternatively you can write a text in the style of Gertrude Stein for live performance or, as always, for multiple voices, voice and recording (as I did), or voices on a recording.

Section 2: Some techniques

G

Interpreting words

In this second section of this publication, we start to use simple techniques to play with texts creatively. Think of them as material to mould or deconstruct-and-reconstruct.

Although the word 'interpret' has already appeared, it is the focus of the first challenge of this part. To start and get used to the idea, first take a single word. You could possibly make a score of it in the same fashion as we did with alphabet soup.



Then take the word and pronounce it in different ways, on different pitches, at different levels of loudness, with a different interpretation. Granted this may seem embarrassing if others are nearby when you start, but once you get the hang of it, an entire theatre piece presented musically will evolve.

Gradually add only a few words, never many, and approach them in the same manner. If you are multilingual, you could use a few in one or more other languages in the same manner as with this in your mother tongue.

If working with several people or with multi-tracking, try to avoid independence between parts as the result can become too dense or muddy for the listener. Therefore coordination is needed within which improvisation can help achieve exciting and unexpected results. At the end of the day, it's finding the music in the words that this is all about. This is a challenge that combines poetry, theatre and music.

H

Expansion/contraction of texts

This exercise is, in a way, related to E and F above as it involves repetition and variation, although the method here has to do with adding words or letters to texts or taking them away. (Adding words or letters is also known as accumulation in the dance world.) One of my very first compositions involved two requests from the French artist Michel Jaffrennou. He wanted something that I composed for a gallery performance to include the sentence 'une manière de faire le-que faire', which more or less means 'a way of doing that which needs to be done'; and he also wanted something to involve the notion of deconstruction.

I dealt with deconstruction by extracting (and later adding) vowels from the sentence. Further, the score below was repeated with reverberation (added colour), ring modulation (a rough timbre was created) and playing my voice backwards (loss of the content) as another form of slow deconstruction.

UNE MANIÈRE DE FAIRE LE-QUE FAIRE?
UNE MANIÈRE DE FIRE LE-QUE FAIRE?
UNE MANIÈRE D FIRE LE-QUE FAIRE?
UN MANIÈRE D FIRE LE-QUE FAIRE?
N MANIÈRE D FIRE LE-QUE FAIRE?
N MANIÈRE D FIR LE-QUE FAIRE?
N MNIÈRE D FIR LE-QUE FAIRE?
N MNIÈRE D FIR LE-QUE FIRE?
N MNIÈRE D FR LE-QUE FIRE?
N MNIÈRE D FR LE-QUE FIR?
N MNIÈR D FR LE-QUE FIR?
N MNIR D FR LE-QUE FIR?
N MNIR D FR LE-QU FIR?
N MNIR D FR L-QU FIR?
N MNIR D FR L-Q FIR?

N MNR D FR L-Q FIR?
 N MNR D FR L-Q FR?
 N MNR D FR L-Q FIR?
 N MNIR D FR L-Q FIR?
 N MNIR D FR L-QU FIR?
 N MNIR D FR LE-QU FIR?
 N MNIR D FR LE-QUE FIR?
 N MNIÈR D FR LE-QUE FIR?
 N MNIÈRE D FR LE-QUE FIR?
 N MNIÈRE D FR LE-QUE FIRE?
 N MNIÈRE D FIR LE-QUE FIRE?
 N MNIÈRE D FIR LE-QUE FAIRE?
 N MANIÈRE D FIR LE-QUE FAIRE?
 N MANIÈRE D FIRE LE-QUE FAIRE?
 UN MANIÈRE D FIRE LE-QUE FAIRE?
 UNE MANIÈRE D FIRE LE-QUE FAIRE?
 UNE MANIÈRE DE FIRE LE-QUE FAIRE?
 UNE MANIÈRE DE FAIRE LE-QUE FAIRE?

OÙ L'OEUVRE EST EN DÉCONSTRUCTION^o_N

STRUCTURE: X SECO / X REVERB / X RING MOD / X REVERSE
 NYC 9/74

Here's an exercise. Take a text and add words after a couple of repetitions, at the beginning, somewhere in the middle or at the end. Keep doing this, adding words at unexpected places until the sentence reaches a desired length and, if you like, end there or work your way backwards, perhaps to the point that nothing is left.

If you use multiple voices, it is probably not a good idea to do this with more than one text at a time, but instead pass the words around amongst the players (or, when using a recording, between the loudspeakers) and attempt to: (a) keep up the required speed and precision, and (b) allow for specific interpretation of

specific words within the sentence so that the growing and shrinking sentence has different 'characters' within it.

Oulipo had a particular approach to contraction that they called "the nothing which is all the method". In their case, they liked to take a known text and extract all of the important words in it. Here is an example that I used in *Oo, Li Po*:

In the . . . the . and the . Now the . . . and . . . the . . .
of the . and the . of . . . over the . And there . .

If you haven't guessed, it's the beginning of Genesis. Performing this can be great fun.

I

Replacement

Replacement can lead towards rather absurd yet musical results.

To start, taking an example from Oulipo, the S+2 (S = substantive or noun) approach works as follows: take a text, underline a few key words, and replace them with the second noun that follows the words in your dictionary. This can be repeated as many times as you like.

The use of S+2 (or any other parts of speech, such as verb) is fun, but not necessarily musical unless the text that you start with is musical already. How you deal with S+2 can be as simple as rapidly repeating a phrase with its replacements; or having a longer text to start with that has a musical structure to it and working in longer sweeps; or interspersing this approach with other material, thus delaying the evolution of the text.

Another Oulipo approach, which is less musical but can lead towards a virtuosic performance, is called semo-definitional literature. In this case, it is usually best to start with a short text. In *Oo, Li Po* I started with 'power to the people' and subsequently replaced 'power' and 'people' by one of the definitions of each word in my dictionary. This led to a longer sentence. Do this one or more times, choosing which words to replace with one of their definitions (and you can choose a definition that doesn't quite fit the use in the sentence), the sentence expands in length to a point of being ridiculous. If performed with authority, a piece containing rapid vocalisation and drama is the result.

There are hundreds of means of replacement that one could apply. This is simply a form of variation that is very likely to allow people to laugh, both those making or performing it and those listening to it. Again, finding and working with the musicality of the result are of paramount importance. Oulipo was looking to create formalised means with which to generate 'potential literature'. The goal here is to apply their techniques, and ones of your own making, to

compose with texts while keeping music and other goals in mind beyond the literary quality of the result.

If you are interested in multiple voices, this is another approach where having more than one text involved at a given moment may take away from the comprehension and enjoyment of the exercise. Instead, it might be useful to pass the replaced words around amongst performers, or pre-recorded voices, to add other elements of virtuosity, timing, and accuracy into the equation. How this is performed can play a major role.

J

Juggling words

The idea that you can juggle words around is the second of three nonsense themes in this list of ways to compose your words. Oulipo included one form of juggling words that it named the *permutational poem*. In *Oo, Li Po* this was applied with a Shakespeare text (for three voices):

Truth / left him / cold		
Wealth / made her / glad		
Work / turned you / sour		
Love / kept me / free		
		<i><u>Truth</u></i>
kept me		
	<i>sour</i>	
		<i><u>Wealth</u></i>
left him		
	<i>free</i>	
		<i><u>Work</u></i>
made her		
	<i>cold</i>	
		<i><u>Love?</u></i>
turned you? ...		
	<i>glad?</i>	

It is nice to see how sixteen syllables broken up in four groups of 1+2+1 syllables can be juggled to provide such a comical result. Of course, juggling can play with word order within the lines themselves. If one commences with poetry where there is an internal metre, and more or less sticks with this, there are numerous ways that one can juggle words around to gain quirky, and sometimes silly, effect. It's all about theme and variations. The above example is fairly simple, but more sophisticated forms of juggling are easy to discover.

K

Modular approach

The exercise using a modular approach is in juggling with larger chunks. If we look at our example in J, let's take the single or two-syllable items and replace them with full lines.

For example, there may be a text consisting of three mini-tales, each of which is three lines long. This version of a permutational text involves line 2 from the first text followed by line 2 from the 2nd and line 3 from the third followed by line 1 from the 2nd, line 2 from the 3rd and line 3 from the 1st followed by the remaining three lines in a similar fashion. In this way, three reasonably coherent stories, all of which have approximately the same length in each line, can become completely surreal.

Try it out with some traditional poetry and see what happens, or take the big step and make one up of your own. When involving multiple voices, they can play the role of the different lines in the sequence.

L

Take a (musical) structure and fill it with vocal sounds

The artist Kurt Schwitters was responsible for creating what may be considered the true tour de force of the first surge of text-sound works, namely his *Sonate in Urlauten* (1922-1932, *Sonata in Primeval Noises*). The poem/score can be found online at:

[<http://www.merzmail.net/ursonatepdf.pdf>]

There are many recordings of this very lengthy work on YouTube, but Schwitters himself can be heard performing a fragment at

[<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6X7E2i0KMqM>]

This phonetic work is written following the structure of a classical sonata in several movements. In fact, Schwitters has created a bizarre, sometimes humorous work using German phonetics only. Listening to Schwitters (and others) performing this, there are musical aspects, such as intonation, that creep in, for example on long-held notes, but the basis of it is the spoken word.

We should perhaps start with something more modest, for example, taking a physical structure such as a building or a bridge, or patterns from nature such as leaves or rivers, or even an abstract painting, and fill in the chosen structure, which will primarily be used for time relationships, with words and phonemes.

This could be a challenge because it offers you the greatest amount of freedom. Start with very simple structures and work your way up to more sophisticated ones. Structures can be applied in different ways. One application, for example, may be how to distribute words and phonemes to the different voices of a multi-voice work. You can also use the structure to determine aspects of the sound, such as loudness or timbre.

Section 3: Looking elsewhere for materials

M

Music of words

This third section offers us the opportunity either to find materials and reuse them in text-sound works or to find sources for materials that we can translate into text-sound works. **M** **O** are about translating information into words. **P** **R** focus on using things that already exist as material.

In music history there has been a tradition to adapt certain works for instruments other than the ones for which a composition was originally written, such as piano arrangements of orchestral works. Here the goal is to take the original music, ideally a well-known work so that it can be identified, and translate one voice of the music or various parts of the music into words and phonemes.

Although you might not have sufficient voices at your disposal to perform all of the parts of *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*, for example, there's a large literature of pieces that use just a few instruments. If the piece isn't entirely abstract, words can be used that relate to the piece's programme. Works that already have lyrics might not lead to genuinely interesting results as the goal is not to sing them, but to replace the notes with a particular interpretation of words and somehow keep the music familiar through, for example, its rhythms.

Any aspect of the score for which the voice has an equivalent should be interpreted. The voice is extremely flexible, so you will be surprised how many articulation symbols have a vocal equivalent.

N

Music of ???

Marcel Duchamp, one of the most controversial artists of the previous century, was known for many things, among them for his notion of 'found objects'. He wrote: "Art is what happens when you take an object out of context and give it a new thought".

What I propose here is to take this to the next level by translating the found object into words as we did in **M** with music as the found object. To take one example that provided a base for one of my compositions, Bernard Heidsieck, one of the important figures at the forefront of the second wave of text-sound poetry, wrote *Poème Partition A (Poem Score A)* in 1958. The story goes that, in order to write this piece, Heidsieck was handed a number of records by a cardiologist with recordings of a healthy and many unhealthy hearts. The healthy heart beat was translated into words and phonemes (in French) into, for example *QUi bat* which in English means *Who's knocking*. The unhealthy heart beat was translated into other words and phonemes, for example:

bing BANG bille bulle

and

est fut est fut est fut est fut est fut / gicle tape tape gicle

The subject of sonorisation is attracting a good deal of attention in today's contemporary music. The idea is to take something existent and translate the information, for example stock market data, into musical information, either with notes or sounds.

Although my composition called for sounds to contrast the voice, many passages offered one or more recorded voices that acted as other parts along with the live performance. Similarly, you can take your found object and create either a solo work or a work involving more than one voice.

O

Other found objects

In this exercise, we are looking for different types of found objects that can be seen as text-sound scores. One of my favourite types of found objects for this purpose is classified advertisements.

The reason for this, besides the fact that they relate to so many aspects of our daily lives, is that each line of text leads to all sorts of abbreviations. When performed, these abbreviations, difficult to decipher at the best of times, become even more unusual because they are linguistically odd, if not absurd, and because reciting them musically is like performing a free improvisation. I am including one in English and one in Dutch, both used in a version of my composition *Do It Yourself* (1990), to show that it can work with the known and the unknown.

SW20 RAYNES PK unfurn 2 dbd gr
flr flt CH gdn WM Well dec Cpts
Fam/shrs £158 pw

Aantr. gedist. sl. j.vr. zkt. Discr.
gener. rijk HEER 50+. Br. o. nr. ...
v.d. bld.

Classified advertisements are one of many kinds of found objects. They can be used in combination with many of the methods for composing with vocal sounds that have been introduced throughout this guide to creating text-sound art. Because what is being treated is known, it allows for both types of listening focusing on the content and on the musical result.

P

Foreign languages

Our creations might involve poetry or any kind of text and, of course, the texts can be cut and pasted in any manner you choose.

In *Do It Yourself*, mentioned in O, two poems were also performed, one in old English and another in Frisian (the second language of The Netherlands), in both cases languages in which I was able to guess what the sounds were but wasn't certain. Here are excerpts from the two poems.

If any persoun wolde upon hem pleyne.
Ther myghte asterte hym no pecunyal peyne.
For smale tithes and for small offrynge
He made the peple pitously to synge.
(Chaucer, The Canterbury Tales, "The Friar's Tale")

and

Do bleauwen de boer en boerinne by honk
En soargen dat tydeis de búter net stonk;
Do gyng in boer yette klaeid as in boer;
Do wierne de frouljue fort 't wirk net to swak,
De boerebern stiene for boaden yn 't plak.
(Walingom)

It is clear, unless you are a scholar, that reading these out loud is going to lead you to a Charlie Chaplin or Woody Allen moment. But what can be amazing in such circumstances is the combination of our attempting to make sense out of what we are reading as, at the same time, we are intoning the text whilst we don't really know what we're saying or only to an extent. Indeed there is a fine line between content and pure sound, which is exactly what text-sound composition is about.

There are also contemporary poets who created their own languages. An excellent example is from the work of the *lettrists*. One example I particularly recommend, written by the French lettrist Isadore Isou, is called *Larmes de jeune fille*, in English *Tears of the young girl*. Its first line is:

M dngoun, m diahl Өhna îou

This takes the notion of unknown foreign language to new heights! It also invites those interested in text-sound creativity to create texts like Isou's once you have mastered the ritual of reading languages you hardly or don't know as a start.

Q

Recorded vocal samples

This is not an invitation to go eavesdropping, but there are a lot of vocal samples out there that, when assembled and re-composed, can lead us towards a very rich result. This idea is about looking for sound samples and deciding how they are to be used in the finished product.

To start, I propose assembling a wide variety of voice samples and putting them together into a coherent or less coherent sequence. All of the structural ideas that we have introduced thus far can be used. The fact that the voice sequence changes as we listen to it, possibly often, means that our listening experience has an extra dimension of focus. The more changes there are, the more likely one is to switch at one point from following the text to following the sound.

There are archives of spoken text online and, indeed, you can use anything from your mobile phone to a good microphone and recorder to grab your own voice samples, and there are many free software programs to assemble them or put them in a sequence.

The idea of taking these found vocal samples out of their context and placing them in a recomposed context is yet another gratifying way to compose with words. Obviously multiple languages can be used if you like phonemes.

R

The odd one out the voice and any samples

The focus and basic procedure here is identical to **Q**. The new dimension is to continue working with found sound objects, in this case any sound that will become interwoven with your vocal sound sequence.

Yes, even the singing voice is allowed, as what is sought is a counterpoint between text-sound composition and sound-based composition in general (a.k.a. electroacoustic music, electronic music, sonic art, or sound art). Create a text-sound soundscape or text-sound imaginary world or text-sound radio piece or installation.

Perhaps some of your chosen sounds will not be as easily identified as most. This will add a level of abstraction and can be easily used towards musical goals. The more referential your sounds, the more they will lend themselves towards creating a contextual ambiance or helping to tell a story if that is your goal.

Section 4: Onward beyond the word

S

Phonemes

In this fourth section, the amount of possible material that we can use is radically expanded. New horizons will open with the sound worlds that will be added to our ideas.

To start, we move from the word to the phoneme. We have had the opportunity to include phonemes in some of the earlier exercises, but here we shall now restrict ourselves to the phoneme to move away from content.

The goal is to create texts for one or more voices using phonemes with which you are comfortable. Create a score for them in any way that seems easy to follow. You might use an approach similar to the alphabet-soup or the interpreting-words example, as this is, in fact, similar to those approaches.

Composing is only the first step, however, as with phonemes the key is finding the best way to make them musical. It is as if you are creating a new language and a new musical language at the same time.

Text-sound artists from both periods have often worked with phonemes. The *Ursonate* is but one example. Marinetti's war sounds are based on phonemes. Heidsieck combined words with phonemes in his heart-based poem score. Scat singing is based on the same principle. For the multi-linguists, here is a chance to add to your arsenal of phonemes. How many 'r' sounds can you make? How many vowel sounds? This is your material.

The next step is putting them together and, after that, turning them into a dramatic musical event (even when no acting is involved).

T

Non-linguistic utterances

Non-linguistic utterances take us beyond language and into vocal sounds that are not directly related to spoken language.

Non-linguistic vocal sounds are anything from a scream to an absent-minded 'uh' to multifarious vocal sounds that can be used as potential material in our context. Trevor Wishart, in his book *On Sonic Art* speaks of a wide variety of non-linguistic utterances and includes recordings with his book of a vast array of vocal sounds. The late text-sound poet Henri Chopin made a career of creating very unusual vocal sounds, often amplified by way of a microphone. I've heard works taken from radio broadcasts in which all that is heard is the occasional breath or clearing of the throat, very odd. But these sounds, when composed in a more sophisticated manner, demonstrate Wishart's credo that the voice is the most flexible of all known instruments.

By focusing on non-linguistic sounds we have delineated one space with words, one with phonemes that share characteristics with words, and this separate, richer space of vocal sounds that go well beyond language. This means that the only thing that we can add, beyond more performers, is technology.

But let's make the ultimate mix first. That can be found in the next exercise.

U

The 'mouth orchestra'

The notion of the *mouth orchestra* is the summit, the highest point of our journey in making music with the voice. We are now entitled to work with any vocal sound, in any combination of words, phonemes and non-linguistic utterances – ideally not just singing, as that's not terribly innovative – and we can work with any number of live and/or pre-recorded voices.

This high point is the easiest to describe. As you have been introduced to a number of approaches and have probably come up with a few more, you now know about all of the materials that you can use and you have tried out various forms of composing and interpretation. Before examining how working with technology can enhance these possibilities even further and, in the final section, how spatialising your results can add an important dimension to your composition, let's focus on the vast space that you have in which to work.

Create a piece for as many voices as you like in which you combine the three basic types of material in a musical manner.

A few tips. Work with techniques that you have already proven that you can use to advantage. Combine things that you wouldn't normally combine to see whether new sounds and gestures evolve. Don't make things too dense, complicated or abstract, as both you and your listener will get lost. Conversely, don't make things too simple, as, you may run out of ideas very quickly and repeat yourself too often. You don't need to make long pieces – miniatures can be great.

Your mouth is an entire orchestra in the sounds that it can produce. With one person you can achieve amazing results; with many you have the orchestra of mouth orchestras.

V

The studio: montage of vocal recordings

Challenges V – X take us into the studio, whether it is your laptop or other forms of technology.

Thus far, the montage work that has been proposed has been simply placing vocal tracks onto one channel of a recording or, such as the case of vocal samples, placing single samples into a sequence. Further techniques at this stage without any electronic transformation of sounds might be:

- editing sounds so that parts of them can be discarded;
- playing with a sound's dynamics;
- playing with a sound's position in space;
- looping sounds, so that a segment is heard repetitively; and
- playing sounds backwards.

These simple techniques can have an enormous effect on the final composition by adding new means of interpretation. In a sense this is part of the performance that occurs in the studio prior to a recording being heard.

Take one of your pieces composed prior to reaching this point and re-compose it adding these montage techniques, thereby creating a new version of your piece.

W

The studio: sound (voice) manipulation

In the studio, students learning the techniques of electroacoustic composition or other forms of music in which studio-based work forms a part, one speaks of sound production and manipulation. In **X** we will focus on sound production. Here we take the next step from the techniques introduced in **V** and start playing with sounds using typical well-known and understood manipulation techniques. Here is a brief selection:

Filtering/low-, high-, band-pass, -reject, multiple filters

Delay/asymmetric delay

Reverberation

Modulation: frequency, amplitude, ring

Chorus and flanging effects

And so on – there are many more. In fact, most of the techniques mentioned here are fairly ubiquitous. These techniques can add colour to your sounds, perhaps make them more abstract, emphasise certain components of sound and shift the emphasis from linguistic to musical content. Although all of the above-mentioned types of sound manipulation were originally created for general music use, they can all be used to great effect with the vocal material that we have been discussing throughout these pages, adding, so to speak, many strings to your bow.

Trevor Wishart, perhaps more than all others, takes recordings of voices, often his own, and using sophisticated techniques turns those recordings into text-sound compositions.

Take a piece that you have made already and, if you have the ability to access some of the means of sound manipulation, apply them to your sounds and to your composition to make a new version employing at least some of these techniques. Yet another universe of sound will open up.

X

The studio: voice synthesis and granulation

After manipulation comes synthesis. As you know, industries have been competing to come up with the first realistic synthetic voice. But we are not talking about replacing people with computers. We are talking about artistic endeavour.

Charles Dodge's *Speech Songs* (1973) are indeed songs that artistically take advantage of the fact that speech synthesis in the 1970s was not perfect. He seems to accentuate the glitches in technology to musical advantage.

[<http://vimeo.com/9720588>]

Many other artists have created work with synthetic voices. Another form of sound synthesis, known as granular synthesis, is worthy of mention here. Grains of sound, often too short for the ear to hear in isolation, are combined in great density to create sonic continuities. These can be based on electronically generated sound or sampled sounds. Again used in a musical context, Paul Lansky created works in a series called *Idle Chatter* starting in 1985.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NKMmwq1Iy_8]

Different synthesis techniques have different functions. Dodge and Lansky illustrate two means to create vocal sounds synthetically. There are others. If you have access to these technologies, take a simple text and play it through either form of synthesis as a first step on a fascinating journey of moulding synthetic vocal sounds.

Section 5: Spacing out

Y

A new dimension – spatialisation

We have spanned the space of making music with the non-singing voice. Yet there is one subject that we have not discussed, actually one of the most important innovations in musical composition from the second half of the previous century. It is the inclusion of space as part of composition.

Yes, Giovanni Gabrieli did separate his choirs all of those centuries ago, just as there were text-sound examples dating before the 20th century. The important jump forward, however, is the distribution of loudspeakers around spaces, such as surround sound, that has led to recent developments in sonic spatialisation.

Monaural recordings were the only game in town for many decades and, for most people, stereo has been the only option in the decades that followed. But now, surround sound is a norm in the cinema, at home for those with the means to have a surround system, and there are concert halls today that have an adjustable acoustic, some that have surround sound in the full sense, which is around and above/below the audience. This will, in time, become the norm as the term 'immersive' is increasingly in use and will increasingly be expected.

This is the context. If you have access to multi-channel sound projection, placing voice recordings in a space, moving them around, creating spatial patterns or breaking up expectations are all wonderful compositional tools. A speaking voice is what is known in the jargon as a 'point source', that is, a sound emanating from a single point. Unless you would like to create physically schizophrenic vocalists, the point source approach can be useful. But these points can move about, within a single segment or between them. This spatial choreography literally adds a dimension (or two if height is involved) to your work. Give it a try if you can.

Z

Perform it anywhere site-specific performance

As discussed in Y, space means a concert space. But there are other options. The notions of site-specific art and public art have become increasingly commonplace. Today we can make art anywhere and, when focusing on specific sites, we can project sounds from specially chosen points.

Site-specific works break a tradition. They are ephemeral. They cannot be recreated elsewhere. However, if you have ever been to a site-specific performance or have had the chance to make one, you realise how gratifying this can be. It can also be documented which is not the same as being there thus allowing for a less ephemeral recording to live on afterwards.

Today sound art and sound installations are quite common. The former often takes context into account and the latter takes place in gallery, open or public spaces. Text-sound installations have been created using loudspeakers in specific locations, so there are analogues to be made with these as well once we leave the traditional performance space.

The 20th century opened many doors to new artistic materials and possibilities and the 21st century will draw it all together together and develop it further. It seems certain that the internet is also going to play an increasingly important role. The idea is 'perform it anywhere', and the internet seems to be the greatest anywhere place to be at the moment. So don't shun taking your compositions with words there. Or perhaps create a platform where people online can collectively compose with words. Now there's an idea.

Back word

Given its modest size, no extensive lists of publications or recordings have been included. But there is a considerable amount of work online. For further reading and listening, here are several starting points:

Charles Amirkhanian. (1976) *The History of Sound Poetry: An Introduction*
<https://archive.org/details/HistoryOfSoundPoetry>

Bill Brunson. (2009) *Text-Sound Composition - The Second Generation*
<http://www.ems-network.org/ems09/papers/brunson.pdf>

Electronic Poetry Center - Sound Poetry
<http://epc.buffalo.edu/sound/soundpoetry.html>

Richard Kostelanetz. (1980) *Text-sound Art: A Survey*
<http://www.ubu.com/papers/kostelanetz.html>

Harry Matthews, Alastair Brotchie, eds. (2005) *Oulipo Compendium*
London: Atlas Press, 2nd ed.

Steve McCaffery. (1978) *Sound Poetry - A Survey*
<http://www.ubu.com/papers/mccaffery.html>

Warren Motte, Noel Arnaud. eds. (1998) *Oulipo: A Primer of Potential Literature*
Normal, IL: Dalkey Archive Press
Originally published 1986 by Nebraska University Press

Textsound
<http://www.textsound.org>

Ubuweb
<http://www.ubuweb.com>
The greatest collection of information and recordings of text-sound works.

I hope that this book has helped you discover the potential of text-sound creativity. I hope that you will join in the creation of a third wave of text-sound activity. And I hope you enjoyed this short book.

One final exercise: use any of the techniques in this book or any combination of them. Your source material is: "That's all folks".