

## **Networks of intimacy: The lyric “you” of ASMR poetry**

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### **Abstract**

At first glance, the practices of lyric poetry and ASMR videos are nothing alike: one is ancient, the other is digitally native; one is a product of elitist high culture, the other, of popular and participatory media. Yet a cursory YouTube search for “ASMR poetry” brings about over half a million results, suggesting some sort of commonality between the two running under the surface. Both poetry and ASMR videos can be regarded as forms of engendering intimacy and closeness at a distance. In poetry, this is achieved through the lyric address oscillating between the specific and the universal, allowing the reader and the (implied) author to share an affective space. This effect is particularly strong in audio recordings of poetry owing to the austere and minimalistic staging of the poet’s voice speaking right into the listener’s ear. On the other hand, ASMR, sometimes referred to as “auditory massage”, is a practice of intimacy at a distance par excellence as it employs a variety of acoustic and visual triggers to provoke a gentle tactile reaction that induces relaxation and euphoria in the listener. Here the voice also plays a central role, as the characteristic close-miked soft whisper has become emblematic of the practice.

This paper analyses artistic practices that bring together lyric poetry and ASMR, and their respective vocal stylings, to engender and/or interrogate intimate experiences. The Singaporean ASMR artist Melinda Lauw’s reading of Paula Mendoza’s poetry at the 2020 Singapore Literature Festival in NYC, which took place online under the COVID restrictions, explores how intimacy and closeness projected by ASMR can invoke a sense of embodied co-presence in a virtual poetry reading. The video performance ASMR Poetry by the German artists Anne Munka, Kinga Toth and Dagmara Kraus brings a New Materialist aesthetic to ASMR, extending this co-presence to non-human agents and suggesting lyric intimacy as a mode of being-together in the posthuman world. Conversely, the record Malignant by the French experimental spoken word artist Ronce joins ASMR with glitch and noise music, foregrounding the darker aspects of intimacy and framing the ASMR whisper as a form of trauma speech.

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Poetry, sound art, ASMR, intimacy, lyric address

**Bio**

**Vadim Keylin** is a sound art scholar and poet. He holds a PhD in Aesthetics & Culture from Aarhus University and is currently a research associate in the ERC-funded project Poetry in the Digital Age, University of Hamburg, working on a book on new forms of oral poetry in digital culture. Keylin’s monograph *Participatory Sound Art: Technologies, Aesthetics, Politics* was published in Palgrave Macmillan’s *Studies in Sound* series in 2023. In addition to his research activities, he is the author of two poetry books.

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