

ESI Project Description

My project is rooted in an appreciation for the diverse people who make poems. My project takes its inspiration after a couple of different sources: PennSound's extensive archive of poetic voices, both historical and contemporary; the Poetry Foundation's several audio projects, including [PoetryNow](#) and [Poem Talk](#); and current Poet Laureate Tracy K. Smith's podcast, [The Slowdown](#). Each of these audio projects has at its core a deep concern for the importance of sounds in poetry, and for the voices behind the poems: these are outlets for people to *experience* a poem in a different way—to listen to it deeply, to feel it spoken into being—as opposed to simply reading it. Experiencing a poem in this manner brings to life the subtle mechanisms of the poem that insist on being heard or experienced (for example, a poem slipping in and out of iambs, the echo of an internal rhyme).

I want to provide a similar outlet, an accessible place that provides audiences a means to experience poetry. I've noticed, though, that many of these outlets and resources mostly feature already-established poets. For this reason, I'd like to create an audio-visual archive of recordings of young and/or early-career poets (not all early poets are young!) in our local community. I want to draw from the diverse voices we have on campus and in the Austin area: queer poets, poets of color, differently-abled poets. Poets with these backgrounds are often marginalized: their language and speechways have been—and still are—surveilled, policed, or deemed illegitimate, not “real” or “proper” language. The idiosyncratic and unique ways that poets read or sign their work is a critical part of how to understand their poetics—in other words, poems come to us *through* people. (Perhaps we shouldn't really frame a poet's “voice” as being *behind* a poem, but rather, *enmeshed* in it, part of its constitution.) To have this repository honoring different ways creating poetry and honoring the varieties of poetic expression, then, is part of a project of combatting dominant linguistic ideologies that have long oppressed, erased, and marginalized these poets and their modes of expression. This archive will interrogate and challenge conventional notions of how poets should sound or look.

In this interview with [Poetry Magazine](#), Jim Ferris, poet and scholar of disability studies, captures the feeling of experiencing a poem that relates to people, that gets us into the life of another person:

What a robust reminder that my job is to make these little paper airplanes as well and as beautifully as I can and then sail them out into the breeze. How far they fly, where they land, what happens after they land — this is none of my business, except as it helps me to make the next airplanes better. My work is to make them and sail them — and then make more.

We already have a fleet of paper airplanes in our community—what I want to do is help others to sail them out and see them fly.