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Contemporary Lyric Poetry in Transitions between Genres and Media

More than any other literary form, contemporary poetry is in transition: interspersed with narrative and dramatic genres, combining prose and verse, and even incorporating other media, such as visual arts, music, film, and digital technology. It shifts the borders between public and private spheres, aesthetic and discursive approaches, and producer and recipient. On the basis of case studies, this issue addresses the challenges of poetry in transition and stimulates new approaches in lyric theory and methodology.

Keywords: poetry, transition, intermediality, genre hybridity

According to the conception of poetry that is still widespread today, a poem is monolingual, printed in a fine booklet with left-aligned lines, and appears in a complete and inalterable form. Recent lyric poetry, however, especially since the turn of the millennium, is increasingly exploring previously unfamiliar publication formats and breaking away from conventional modes of publication. Continuing the innovations of the historical avant-gardes, some poetry has left the page¹ altogether and found new spaces for presentation, such as installation art²; micropoetry appears in public space or, conversely, billboard

¹ Perloff (1998) speaks about “poetry on and off page.”

² See, for example, Lisa Oppenheim’s “Cathay” and other projects, such as “Text Rain,” “text.curtain,” or “Still Standing”: <https://www.guggenheim.org/artwork/27425> (“Cathay”); <http://camilleutterback.com/projects/text-rain/> (“Text Rain”); <https://elmcip.net/creative->

poetry incorporates urban or rural spaces that were not associated with poetic experiences before;³ and poems on buildings, objects, and even on bodies as tattoos explore new vehicles for texts. Oral performance has also become more important again: public reading and performance⁴ have gained momentum worldwide – even beyond the slam movement – and have developed original forms with specific authorial styles among poets as diverse as the ‘new classic’ Thomas Kling, or younger poets such as Maren Kames, Roman Osminkin, and Neil Hilborn.⁵ These phenomena may not be entirely new in themselves – the first poem recording dates from 1889; however, they are more readily available thanks to digital transmission.⁶ Last but not least, the internet plays a prominent role: poetry beyond the format of the book is written, read, and heard or watched on a wide variety of digital platforms.⁷ Poetry has a special digital reach: not only on dedicated poetry sites and portals but also on blogs, social media platforms like Facebook, YouTube, and Instagram, and authors’ personal sites.

With such sites and formats of publication, poetry changes its forms and functions and attains new qualities. For instance, in digital poetry,⁸ the borders between production and reception are blurred by forms of co- or collective production. The poem is presented as an object in progress, it becomes entangled in communicative action, and is increasingly characterized by temporality and mutability. This necessitates a redefinition of terms such as ‘poem’ resp. ‘work’ or ‘author’ resp. ‘poet.’ At the same time, this development affects reception, insofar as poems are not only more easily distributed, but their critical framing and mediation also happens digitally.⁹ As a result, not only the idea of ‘author’ may change but the entire process of canonizing poetry.

work/textcurtain (“text.curtain”); <https://elmcip.net/creative-work/still-standing> (“Still Standing”). See on this topic, e.g., Pfeiler (2010).

³ The term ‘micropoetry’ is derived from W.G. Sebald’s “micro poems,” see Schütte (2014: 113). See also Englund (2016), furthermore: Damon / Livingston (2009: 12).

⁴ On lyric performance, see, for example, concerning the American developments in the 20th century, Pfeiler (2003), and the recent studies Bers / Trilcke (eds., 2017) and essays in Benthien / Klein (eds., 2017). For ‘aural poetry’ (‘Hörlyrik’), see Utler (2016), Ammon (2018) Meyer-Sickendiek (2020), Vorrath (2016; 2020).

⁵ For example, see on Kling: Meyer-Kalkus (2020: 1000-1015), on Osminkin: Stahl (2020c), on Hilborn: Starre (2015).

⁶ Robert Browning declaiming a poem of his own, see: “Robert Browning Recites His Poem (1889 Edison Cylinder)”, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OYot5-WuAjE> [12/04/2021].

⁷ See Lang / Murat / Pardo (eds., 2019).

⁸ See on digital poetry, e.g., Perloff (2004); Funkhouser (2012); Rustad (2012), Block (2015), Correa-Díaz (2020); Benthien et al. (2019, ch. 4.1), Kjerkegaard/Ringgaard (eds., 2017).

⁹ This journal “Internationale Zeitschrift für Kulturkomparatistik” is merely an example of the scientific side. Poetry mediation takes place to an important extent on the internet, even if its financial basis still appears precarious at times, as the example of the German site “Fixpoetry” shows, which was discontinued in 2020, <https://www.fixpoetry.com/> [12/04/2021].

These new modes of publication coincide with an increased hybridization of poetry with other media.¹⁰ For example, on some internet platforms such as *lyrik-line.org*, poems are made available in both written and audible form. “PennSound” has a vast archive of spoken poetry recordings. On video platforms such as YouTube, various kinds of poetry clips, readings and performance formats are available for viewing. Not all of the poems on the internet are digitally native (e.g., the archive of avant-garde poetry of “UbuWeb”¹¹). Nonetheless, and most obviously, the internet promotes new forms of digital poetry.¹² These developments are accompanied by a significant expansion of the media channels of poetic representation with respect to an increased multimodality of lyric poetry that is not restricted to digital media. In recent years, hybrid genres have also developed beyond the internet, building upon established combinations of poetry with music (e.g., lyrics in rock, hip-hop, or rap¹³) or film (e.g., poetry films¹⁴ or cinematic interpretations of poems). These new forms include, for example, developments in ‘poetry music,’ such as those of the Chilean Poetry Orchestra, Roman Osminkin, Ulrike Almut Sandig, or the neo-shamanistic poet-singer Vera Sažina; or, in film and animations, such as the Bulgarian “Mark and Verse” [«Щрих и стих»],¹⁵ or Delépine and Kervern’s “Near Death Experience,” with poems by Michel Houellebecq, who incidentally also played the leading role. In addition, there are complex hybrids, such as Keti Čuchrov’s play “Love Machines” (2013),¹⁶ which combines poem, song, play and film, and permeates the entire film-theater piece with lyrical devices. Multimodal poetry tends to hybridize cultural, stylistic, intertextual and intermedial references, but

¹⁰ Cf., e.g., Pardo / Reverseau / Cohen / Depoux (eds.) (2010) or Benthien / Lau / Marxsen (2019).

¹¹ See Kenneth Goldsmith’s “UbuWeb,”: <https://www.ubu.com/> [26/03/2021].

¹² Block (2015: 7) believes that although new forms continue to emerge, “digital poetry has come to the time of retrospective.” („Es steht fest, dass die digitale Poesie in die Zeit der Retrospektive gekommen ist.“) For – relatively – new forms see, for instance, Hannes Bajohr, who hybridizes documentary, ready-made, and digital poetry ‘on the page’: „Mich interessiert also die Bedeutung, die sich in der Reflektion auf das Schreiben unter digitalen Bedingungen findet. Dazu gehören dann im Weiteren auch Fragen wie Urheberschaft, Transkodierung, Konzeptualität und so weiter.“ (Bajohr im Interview: Aust 2019).

¹³ On lyrics see, e.g., Ammon / Petersdorff (eds., 2019). On rap in Europe, see, e.g., Miszczyński/Helbig (eds., 2017); on theoretical issues about voice and lyrics in rock and pop, see, e.g., Achermann (2019).

¹⁴ See, e.g., <http://www.poetryfilm.de/> [14/04/2021].

¹⁵ The television serial contains 12 films. See: <https://toest.bg/stih-ot-shtrih/> [25/03/2021]. See also examples on the platform <https://www.motionpoems.org/> [06/03/2021].

¹⁶ See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MVDkt0NKvo0> [06/03/2021]. On Chukhrov see Bozovic (2019).

also to introduce dialogic and participatory processes. Furthermore, it de-hierarchizes social relations and builds up polyphonic forms of the subject.¹⁷

Behind such rather spectacular forms, more conventional literary poetic hybrids may seem to recede into the background, although these too have developed with comparable intensity and diversity in recent decades. By using epic verse, montaging different generic modes of verse and prose, and extending cycles of poems, various literary works find new ways to introduce forms of narrativization and even dramatic devices into lyric poetry. Conversely, drawing on the literary-historical traditions of generic blending in their respective literatures, more and more large genre hybrids (epic, novel, drama, etc.) display salient features of lyric or even use lyric poems.

Meanwhile, contemporary poems explore diverse forms of combination with dramatic formats (for example, Sasha Dugdale's "Joy," 2017) or narrative (Anne Carson's "Autobiography of Red," 1998).¹⁸ In addition to complexly structured books of poetry that may vaguely suggest or reconstruct a plot, such as Rita Dove's "Thomas and Beulah" (1986),¹⁹ there are verse novels that, following the example of Ted Hughes ("Gaudette," 1977) or Raymond Federman ("Double or Nothing: A Real Fictitious Discourse," 1971), combine verse with prose passages and various types and forms of more or less autonomous poems, as well as, where appropriate, other media, such as graphical images, photographs, etc. (for example, Claudia Rankine's "Citizen. An American Lyric," 2015; Kurt Drawert's „Der Körper meiner Zeit,“ 2016; or Alice Notley's "For the Ride," 2020²⁰).

¹⁷ See on the subject in recent lyric theory: Hillebrandt / Klimek / Müller / Zymner (eds., 2019), Geist / Reents / Stahl (eds., 2021 [forthcoming]).

¹⁸ On forms of verse epics in recent European literatures Bremer / Elit (eds., 2020), on Russian literature: Stahl (2020b).

¹⁹ The poems in this book by Dove have previously appeared individually in various journals, but the book is specifically prefaced with the comment that the poems are to be read as a "sequence" with a storyline, each captured from the perspective of the two main characters and speakers of the poems: "These poems tell two sides of a story and are meant to be read in a sequence" (Dove 1986: 59). However, there is no progressive plot in the narrower sense, which goes beyond selected stations of the biography. See the book review by Shoptaw (1987).

²⁰ Notley's book, which is divided into chapters that combine different forms, including visual poetry and stanzas in another language (French), begins with a preface that provides a summary of the story, which can hardly be extracted from the text itself: an "apocalypse," in which characters ultimately become poems, though the author herself does not quite seem to want to know what actually happened. The author explains: "each of the poem's characters finally becomes poems – nothing else left to one. I mean I don't know exactly what happened; I might even have to tell this story again sometime" (Notley 2020: xi). Sections from this book have been published separately in advance, although not as individual poems. The chapters, some of which are longer and vary in verse and stanza forms, do not constitute autonomous poems.

Prose texts are also combined with lyric and/or poetic passages that merge into them, or prose is embedded in poems. Examples of prose genre hybrids with dominant lyric features include, for instance, Polina Barskova's "Living Pictures" [«ЖИВЫЕ КАРТИНЫ», 2014] or Sergei Zav'jalov's pseudo-documentary "Advent Fast" [«РОЖДЕСТВЕНСКИЙ ПОСТ», 2010], the latter of which combines dramatic, epic, and poetic-lyrical features as well as individual poems with the use of montage techniques. In addition, long poems and so-called 'mixed poems' are enjoying a rise in popularity. 'Mixed poems' variously combine prose with prosimetric forms and/or with different verse, stanza or poem formats, graphic-visual and/or musical forms, etc. The Polish author Dorota Masłowska, for example, writes verse novels that take on new qualities through the use of hip-hop features (see "Inni ludzie" ["Other People"], 2018).

Contemporary conditions of migration, mobility, and digitalization are also increasingly pushing poetry out of national fields and into a transnational space. Authors such as Arthur Binard, Yōko Tawada or Uljana Wolf are often simultaneously anchored in two or more national literary fields with which they share characteristics but which they also transcend. Poems by transnational authors often draw from multilingualism and multiple writing systems, which in recent poetry as a whole have developed with an intensity perhaps unique in literary history.²¹ Some poets create their own idiolect by mixing a multiplicity of languages and their cultural implications (e.g., Chris McCabe in "Lockedowne Aventure"²²). Poetry translations and play with diverse forms of translation show an increased evolution in recent years.²³

As the borders between literatures and languages blur, borders between cultures and societies are also crossed, shifted, or dissolved.²⁴

However, poetry that emerges transnationally does not appear everywhere in a globally uniform fashion, even if the trend towards lyric hybrids can be seen worldwide and international transfers are visible in emerging hybrid genres. These hybrid genres may refer to well-known examples of prototypical relevance; however, their forms and their functions nevertheless develop quite dif-

²¹ On 'linguistic heterogeneity' in literature and 'polyglot poetry', see Helmich (2016), Binder et al. (eds., 2016), Hitzke (2019).

²² https://poesia.world/storage/upload_pdf/w6z5REUFck05NiislLuB4Gi4kvciZevJPhdy1EjW.pdf [14/04/2021].

²³ See, e.g., Telge (2019) on 'surface translations' by Cotton, Tawada, and Wolf.

²⁴ As language boundaries become more fluid, so do other boundaries; see Walburg (2019: 94): „Die Überlegungen anhand der Gedichte Damjanovas und Bodrožićs zeigen, dass mit der Aufhebung der Sprachgrenzen eine Aufhebung der Grenzen zwischen den einzelnen Wissenschaftsdisziplinen einhergeht, will man dem speziellen metaliterarischen Charakter der Glottaliteratur gerecht werden. Für die Analyse der Texte ergeben sich aus der Tatsache, dass es sich bei den Texten um auffällig selbstreflexive Texte handelt, besondere Herausforderungen, die auch darin liegen, dass sich die Grenzen zwischen dem wissenschaftlichen und dem ästhetischen Schreiben vermischen“.

ferently. Languages, on the one hand, and regionally specific literary fields and their social contexts, on the other hand, play a differentiating role. As in the case of hybrid genres, manifestations of multilingualism in poetry vary considerably from region to region and from one linguistic area to another. The ‘literary memory’ of languages stimulates the continuation of certain traditions across national borders, while regional literary fields, represented by the interactions of institutions and persons in specific political and social contexts, constitute frameworks that have a steering influence on the realization of the creative potential as well as on processes of reception and transfer.

The forms of poetry outlined above have one thing in common: they are in transition. In this issue, essays on recent poetry reveal these transitional features in terms of publication formats, genres, and media. The examples presented in these case studies display new characteristics and/or functions in the context of literary history, which demand investigation and the (further) development of theoretical concepts and methodologies.

Lyric in Transition

In this issue, ‘transition’ is understood as a form-giving principle that shifts and transforms borders or moves across them: for example, between genres, media, publication formats, languages, aesthetic and pragmatic functions, as well as communication contexts.²⁵ First, we will define the term ‘transition’ and distinguish it from related concepts, such as ‘liminality,’ ‘hybridity,’ ‘transgression,’ or ‘the third space.’

‘Transition,’ from Latin *transire*, presupposes the existence of different entities or states, and therefore implies at least two different viewpoints: on the one hand, transition refers to a physical or metaphorical transition of something from one entity to another (i.e., by crossing a border or a boundary), and, on the other hand, it denotes an entity’s transformation from one state of being to another. In the latter sense, the term ‘transition’ is used in political science to describe the transition from a dictatorship to a democracy.²⁶ In common usage, the term refers to a variety of forms of transformation, ranging from the change of gender identity to any kind of replacement in administrative practices. From a literary perspective, ‘transition’ refers to dynamic processes that reveal boundaries established by societal, linguistic, cultural, pragmatic (e.g., generic), and/or theoretical rules. Events of transition make such boundaries visible and demonstrate that such boundaries are not only rooted in socially negotiated rules but also permeable or transformable. Their permeability or transformability can be used to achieve

²⁵ See Korte / Stahl (2016: 35-36), Stahl (2020a).

²⁶ On the concept of transition in relation to the transformation of political systems, see Schmäddeke (2012).

remarkable aesthetic effect. In a broader perspective of cultural studies, transition implies that not only the boundaries of genre, media, and style are social constructions that may be transformed but also that these extend to the construction of spaces, languages, affiliations, etc., hence including all forms of critical questioning, shifting, dissolution, or even reconstitution of such boundaries.

In fact, the notion of ‘transition’ also has a literary history that is reflected in the titles of journals, anthologies, book series, or even in research topics.²⁷ For instance, in 1927, the Americans Eugene Jolas and Elliot Paul founded the English-language magazine “Transition” in Paris. The journal’s aim was to “offer American writers an opportunity to express themselves freely, to experiment,” but the editors also extended this invitation to writers of all other nationalities “to appear, side by side, in a language that Americans can read and understand.”²⁸ In fact, the journal highlighted various phenomena of transition such as a space to experiment free from “rigid artistic formulae,”²⁹ whereby avant-gardist authors of various backgrounds, languages and cultures, such as James Joyce, Carl Sternberg, Gertrude Stein, André Gide or Philippe Soupault, could form a kind of international community.³⁰ Another journal, “Transition. A Journal of the Arts, Culture and Society,” reflects a different context for the term, as it was founded in Kampala, Uganda in 1961, in an early period of decolonization, when “East Africa [was] undergoing various and exciting changes.”³¹ The journal published political essays alongside literary texts, including poems. Soon, the journal had to leave Uganda and was published in Ghana until the mid-1970s (featuring the eventual Nobel Prize winner, Wole Soyinka, as editor). In this case, ‘transition’ seems to emphasize political and cultural transformations that may also be reflected in literary texts.

Furthermore, ‘transition’ is a name often used by anthologies, book series,³² and literary histories. Here, the term ‘transition’ focuses on paradigm shifts and structural change in literature. In this sense, Victor Erlich, for example, uses ‘transition’ in the title of his monograph “Modernism and Revolution. Russian Literature in Transition” (1994). Similar to the above-mentioned journals, Erlich refers by this term to modernist and avant-garde breaks with and transformations

²⁷ See Korte / Stahl (2016: 36, Fn. 70). For further uses of the term, see *ibid.*

²⁸ Jolas / Paul (1927: 137). The issues of the journal have also been published together in a book: Fitch (1990).

²⁹ Jolas / Paul (1927: 137).

³⁰ The journal “English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920” (since 1957; 63 issues published to date) also focuses on modernity.

³¹ Neogy (1961).

³² Ten volumes have been published thus far of the journal “American Literature in Transition.” ‘Transition’ also appears in the title of some literary works (e.g., Albinia Gwynn’s “The rencontre: or, transition of a moment. A novel, in a series of letters”, 1785). We owe this information to Nikolas Immer.

of previous literary norms. At the same time, however, the social and political use of the term also plays a role in Erlich's work, for these shifting literary paradigms are placed in relation to political and social upheaval.

Thus, the term 'transition' combines societal and political transformation and cultural negotiation with an experimental approach to literature and language. The multiple meanings of 'transition' also make it suitable to describe the literary situation at the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the Iron Curtain brought about social and political transformations in Europe, the effects of which are still felt today and will continue to be felt in the future. In addition, there are worldwide effective transformations of societies through digitality, mobility, and globalization that are causing changes in literature with regard not only to its themes but also to its genre system, its functions, and its publications forms.

Transition is not only an important topic with regard to the political and cultural meaning of the term but also, and above all, as a central structural principle of recent poetry.³³ This is particularly evident in the way poems deal with other genres and media, with layers of language and other languages (multilingualism³⁴), with different cultures, and last but not least with changes in function of poetry in society. Transition in poetry, however, is different from region to region in terms of its forms and functions as well as its degrees of intensity.

Compared to related terms, such as 'transgression' or 'liminality,' the term 'transition' has the advantage that it can be used to describe not only rupture in and transgression of boundaries but also, and more importantly, transformation resulting in the emergence of new forms. Unlike 'transition,' 'transgression' is associated with a deliberate violation of norms. In this respect, 'transgression' refers to rather rigid oppositions that cannot or should not be crossed.³⁵ In contrast, we think of 'transition' as covering a larger number of playful interactions between boundaries and changing states. As opposed to the historical avant-garde, contemporary transitional forms are less focused on breaking with norms and taboos than on testing and exploring possibilities. At the same time, however, many contemporary poetic practices revisit the avant-garde's drive for innovation.

The emphasis on transformation and border-crossing also places the term 'transition' in relation to the concept of 'liminality' that was originally developed in the field of anthropology.³⁶ Victor Turner, following Arnold van Gennep's study "Les rites de passage,"³⁷ examined rites of passage as three-

³³ See already Stahl (2020a: 10).

³⁴ For further information on multilingual poetry, see Forster (1970), Schmitz-Emans / Schmeling (eds., 2002), Schmitz-Emans (ed., 2004), Bürger-Koftis et al. (eds., 2010), Knauth (ed., 2011), Binder et al. (eds., 2016), Helmich (ed., 2016), Dembeck/Parr (eds., 2017).

³⁵ See Mahler (2019: 4-5).

³⁶ See already Stahl (2020a).

³⁷ Gennep (1981).

phase rituals, emphasizing the middle phase, which is “betwixt and between” the old and the new state. Here, ‘liminality’ refers to a compulsory transitional phase in which a group member is ritually separated from the group, preparing for re-entry in a new social role. Turner puts this “threshold phase” under the “ethnological magnifying glass” („ethnologische Vergrößerungsglas“³⁸):

The attributes of liminality or of liminal personae (‘threshold people’) are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial.³⁹

Later, Turner extended his reflections on liminality to the *communitas* between liminal subjects,⁴⁰ thus providing an approach for studying enduring states of liminality in modern societies. At the same time, the examination of literary liminality implies a dynamic understanding of boundaries.⁴¹

The application of ‘liminality’ in literary studies appears to be influenced by its use in the context of the historical-political issues of modern society.⁴² In this respect, liminality is not necessarily a transitional phase but rather describes a more or less permanent ‘space,’ characterized by hybridity and, as Homi Bhabha emphasized in his definition of the ‘third space,’ by the negotiation of meaning and cultural differences.⁴³ Poets such as Yōko Tawada or Uljana Wolf⁴⁴ make use of the “betwixt and between” as a space for the encounter between two or more languages and literatures or cultures in order to create surprising meanings and aesthetic effects. In doing so, they not only shape liminal subject constructs but also use interlingual relations of similarity and errors of interference as well as various forms of hybridization and language montage to break down conventional perceptions, e.g., of cultural, political or gender identity, and to imagine hybrid forms of existence. Multilingualism and transculturality of the poem are used to shift the perspective from the self to the other, destabilizing dichotomies and opening up a community in the ‘in-between.’ Such poetic and linguistic techniques of transition also demand a change of perspectives in terms of reception aesthetics.

In summary, ‘liminality’ is used in literary studies to cover a wide range of phenomena that also fall within the scope of ‘transition,’ but it is mostly used to

³⁸ Bräunlein (2012: 53).

³⁹ Turner (1977: 95).

⁴⁰ See Turner (2005).

⁴¹ See Borgards (2012: 9): „In Frage steht *erstens* das Verhältnis von Grenze und Norm, komplementär dazu das Verhältnis von Grenzüberschreitung und Denormierung, das die anthropologische Bestimmung des Menschen selbst betrifft. [...] Die Grenze und ihre Überschreitung sind also in einer wechselseitigen Dynamik von Normierung/Denormierung aufeinander bezogen.“

⁴² See Schilling (2018: 3-4).

⁴³ Bhabha (1994).

⁴⁴ See Tawada (2002), Wolf (2009).

refer to a more or less permanent state of being-in-a-third-space, whereas we believe that ‘transition’ allows us to emphasize dynamics and process. For exactly this reason, the DFG-Centre for Advanced Studies “Russian-language Poetry in Transition” has also chosen ‘transition’ as its key term. This volume is a result of research done under its aegis.

To that end, we have identified four main sites of ‘transition’ in recent poetry: namely, between genres and/or media; between multiple languages and/or cultures; between modes and/or technologies of presentation or dissemination (e.g., digitalization, monumentalism); and, finally, between the social roles and functions assigned to lyric in given literatures, periods, and cultures. The present volume focuses on the first of these: transition between genres and media.

Overview of the contributions

The essays in this volume deal with the interactions and play between various generic and medial boundaries in poetry. In and of itself, this somewhat elusive form of transition challenges a narrow understanding of genre. Moreover, in the particular case of lyric, there is actually an ongoing debate as to whether it can be sufficiently distinguished from the two macro-genres of narrative and drama. In lyric theory, one finds conscious and categorical definitions of lyric poetry, such as Dieter Lamping’s delimitation of the genre as “monologue in verse,”⁴⁵ as well as the view that the objects gathered together under the name of lyric are too diverse to be grasped in a single genre.⁴⁶ By the same token, the theory of lyric has proposed both transhistorical definitions of it as a genre⁴⁷ and the view that lyric is not a genre at all but a romantic invention.⁴⁸ We do not need to decide upon a specific concept of lyric at this point, but even if the majority of research literature considers lyric a definable form, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that challenging its own boundaries is a widespread feature of the genre. Certainly, since the era of postmodernism, we are observing an increase in such challenges in lyric poetry. The characteristics once considered fundamental to lyric – for instance, the criterion of versification – seem to have permanently lost their validity.

This volume takes examples from recent poetry that question the boundaries and traditional concepts of the genre from various linguistic and literary perspectives yet do not dismiss the central features of the lyric. What these case studies have in common is that they challenge established concepts of genre and call for the further development of theory, terminology, and methods for the analysis and

⁴⁵ Lamping (2017: 84), for an extended explanation of Lamping’s definition of lyric poetry as „Einzelrede in Versen,“ see Lamping (1989).

⁴⁶ See Wellek (2014).

⁴⁷ E.g., Culler (2015), Hempfer (2014).

⁴⁸ See Jackson (2012).

description of such phenomena. The contributions to this volume are grouped into three sections: (1) *Transitions between Genres*; (2) *Transitions between Reading and Performance*; and (3) *Transitions between Lyric and Other Media*.

The first section, *Transitions between Genres*, opens with an essay by Rüdiger Zymner. His contribution demonstrates a strong trend in recent poetry to transcend the boundaries of national literatures, along with their languages, writing systems, and cultural-historical backgrounds. Such poetry is ‘in transition’ in several respects and opens up a transnational space of encounter and of cultural diversity. In this space, conflicts of difference or their abolition are not at the centre of attention but rather the play with continuities and contrasts that form individual configurations, such as Cassar’s polyglot mosaic poems, which Zymner considers “globomemorial.” Yōko Tawada is another prominent example of a transnational author whose writing moves between different languages (especially Japanese, German, and English) and literary or cultural spaces. In her case, writing “from the in-between” goes hand-in-hand with transition between generic divisions. As Jasmin Böhm demonstrates, using the example of parallel versions of a work by Tawada written in two languages, transition is carried out differently depending on the language and literary space in play. This comparative reading illustrates how transnational and transcultural literature can remain determined by its orientation towards a primary and (still) national linguistic and literary space.

Notions of essential features of genres are established through literary practice and are culturally and historically in flux. When such established expectations of genres are put in play, the literary text becomes generically transitory. The play with generic boundaries can, in turn, produce forms with prototypical relevance and a model-building function and, in this way, give rise to new genres. Thus, genre transitions are to be considered relationally in their respective contexts – be they national or transnational.

Ralph Müller uses the example of Monika Rinck to show how she transcends the still dominant expectations of lyric poetry in Europe by combining typical features of lyric poetry and prose: for example, by weakening the verse criterion of her texts and employing discursive procedures and terms, which are simultaneously combined with poetic devices in a language of reference to philosophical and literary-historical traditions. Henrieke Stahl demonstrates how, in recent decades, a certain combination of distinct genre features has led to the emergence of a new form of the novel: the ‘novel in poems.’ Thus far, the ‘novel in poems’ as an independent genre has been largely confined to the Anglophone world; at the same time, however, the ‘novel in poems’ can be considered a subsegment of a broad spectrum of large-format hybrid poetry whose diversity of form has not developed uniformly or prototypicality. Peter Hühn examines such occasional hybrid formations of poetry in novel, drama, and film. One and the same text can be considered both in relation to the newly existent genre of the ‘novel in poems’ and in terms of its individual specificity by combining generic hybrid features. Stahl, for example, analyzes Maxwell’s “Sugar Mile” as a

subtype of the ‘novel in poems,’ while Hühn examines the same novel as an occasional hybrid.

As Hühn points out, when lyric merges with film, drama, and theatre by combining multiple voices, it leads to a further dissolution of the single, delimitable subjectivity once considered constitutive to lyric poetry. This trend can be observed in greater detail with regard to the spread of performance forms in contemporary lyric poetry, to which the second section, *Transitions between Reading and Performance*, is dedicated.

Poetic performance and the performance of poetry lend poems new qualities: for example, by generating rhythmic structures that are not textually manifest. Through embodied, ‘theatrical’ forms, lyric poetry may even acquire ironic or subversive meanings that conflict with the explicit meaning of the text.⁴⁹ The indirect, retroactive effect of the performance on the poem might be used politically in some contexts.⁵⁰ The poets’ reading, singing, and bodily-plastic performance styles are to be considered in the context of nationally specific literary traditions.

Thomas Austenfeld claims that every reading of a poem performs its speaking, whether silently or aloud – or even its singing – but that each case represents an individual performative instance. Each reading thus leads to a performative “impersonation” – imaginative or acted out – of the poem. The performance is at the same time always an interaction, because the text-implicit control procedures are only carried out in their interpretation by the performer: through activation, fading out, transformation, and substitution. Accordingly, Anna Bers emphasizes the difference between the poem as a written text, which potentially offers a multiplicity of possibilities for interpretation and performance, and the singularity of one particular performance. Bers makes it clear that the analysis of performed poetry cannot be carried out without methods borrowed from other performance arts; however, such analysis also requires the development of specific theoretical and methodological concepts that take into account the particularities of poetic performance.

Poetry further interacts with other performative media. The intermedial interaction of poetry with music in collaborative performance has its own tradition, which has developed differently in various languages and cultures. In Russia, this interaction is a relatively new phenomenon, as Ilya Kukulkin points out. He emphasizes that the interaction of poetry and music is used, in this case, in order to disengage poetry from the lyric subject: to perform the de-centering, disintegration, and, at the same time, multiplication of the lyric subject as distinct, interacting persons or voices as well as media. In its intermedial expansion,

⁴⁹ Following the ‘performative turn’ in recent years, poetic performance and the performance of poetry (e.g., Bers/Trilcke [eds., 2017], or essays in Benthien/Klein [eds., 2017]), as well as ‘aural poetry’ (‘Hörlyrik’: essays in Bung / Schrödl [eds., 2016], Meyer-Sickendiek [2020]) have received increased attention.

⁵⁰ See, for instance, Fechner (2019).

poetry becomes a “joint, collective work” that is momentary and singular in performance and also gains political significance as a new form of social communication. According to Justyna Jaguścik, multimodality, the singular spontaneity of performance, and a plurality of subjectivity also characterize the phenomenon of women’s poetry theatre in the People’s Republic of China. Here, poems are transformed into theatre pieces through staging with a focus on embodiment. Poets of the women’s poetry movement work together with actors and theatre directors, as well as artists, musicians, dancers, etc. Poetry theatre is thus developing as an independent art form, which combines the generic languages of both poetry and theatre and represents a socially relevant and collaborative cultural activity emanating from individuals rather than institutions.

Collaboration, fluidity, and the concept of the event are also particularly important for reproducible intermedial and multimodal poetry. Hence, the contributions in the third section, *Transitions between the Lyric and Other Media*, address the play between boundaries of established media forms in new poetry.

According to Rajewsky’s differentiation of ‘intermediality’ (in a broad sense),⁵¹ lyric poetry is not only full of intermedial references (to books, films, or the capacity of sight and speech); we can also observe a multiplication of possible combinations of lyric texts with other, typically distinct forms of media. This concerns in particular the multifaceted development of digital poetry.⁵² However, lyric is also shifting between text and art, music and poetry, or even film. Photography has become a faithful companion of lyric poetry. Moreover, lyric poetry appears in other medial forms, such as billboards or installations in urban environments, and challenges the boundaries of everyday life and art.⁵³

Poetry research and theory has already registered an increase in such lyric “differential texts”⁵⁴ in the last decades. However, within intermediality research,⁵⁵ lyric poetry often recedes behind other genres, and it hardly plays a role even among the text types considered in research on multimodality.⁵⁶ Whereas intermediality research⁵⁷ is dedicated to forms and procedures for crossing the boundaries of distinct media and works mainly in terms of literary, media, and cultural studies, multimodality research focuses on the expressive specificity of the medial or semiotic channels involved therein and makes fruitful use of linguistic

⁵¹ See Rajewsky (2002).

⁵² See footnote 8.

⁵³ See, for example: “Poetry in Motion® places poetry in the transit systems of cities throughout the [North American] country exposing it to millions of viewers every day.” <https://poetrysociety.org/poetry-in-motion> [31/03/2021].

⁵⁴ Perloff (2004).

⁵⁵ See e.g. Wolf (2018).

⁵⁶ See e.g. Schmitz (2016).

⁵⁷ On the problematic of the term see Schmidt (2015).

approaches.⁵⁸ However, theoretical modelling of the specificity and functions of multimodal poetry is still in its infancy for many of these forms.⁵⁹

Intermedial and multimodal poetry challenges the foundations of lyric theory and makes it necessary to expand our analytical toolkit. Poetry in transition, which contests the traditional notions of poetic boundaries with other media and genres, can only to a limited extent be described with the use of theory, terminology, and methodology designed on the basis of poetic tradition, because hybridization gives rise to the expression of new qualities and functions that so far lack a corresponding conceptual vocabulary. The approach to poetic analysis needs re-evaluation and expansion with respect to the adaptation and transformation of tools developed in multimodal analysis and media studies.

However, multimodal and digital poetry also develops upon the appropriation and transformation of devices already present in text-based poetry, as Marjorie Perloff has shown.⁶⁰ Peter Stein Larsen elaborates on this idea. For instance, digital poetry takes up the analogue techniques of avant-garde poetry and develops them further in a transformative way. Similarly, Jacob Edmond shows that even the seemingly unusual transitions between poetry and news media in different literatures – in this case, Russia, America, and China – can each be linked to nationally specific predecessors. Regardless of the national-specific traditions and their continuing effect, however, the comparison shows that the same transnational trends exist: for instance, in the recent turn towards the use of documentary montage. What these examples have in common is not only a similar trend towards overcoming the conventional notions of boundaries belonging to poetic genres but also the negotiation of individual versus collective forms of subjectivity or identity.⁶¹

The trend of posting poetry clips on the internet also transcends national fields and combines different genre characteristics, media, and modalities. The clips form their own subgenres with transnational implications. One of these is the authorial poetry clip. As Sonja Klimek points out, this type of poetry clip places a new emphasis on authorial subjectivity and (pseudo) authenticity, in which author and performer appear in personal union. The authorial poetry clip has recently emerged as a new hybrid genre for which theoretical modelling and

⁵⁸ E.g. the *Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis*: Mayr (2016).

⁵⁹ On the research situation, see, for example, Benthien/Klein (ed., 2017); Benthien et al. (ed., 2019).

⁶⁰ See, for instance: “Such concretist texts – texts in which letteristic or morphemic form is inextricable from meaning – anticipate contemporary digital poetics, where letter, font, size, spacing, and color are used to generate complex verbo-visual configurations” (Perloff 2010: 13).

⁶¹ Edmond alludes with the title of his essay to Perloff’s phrase “Make It (Not) New” (Perloff 2010: 21) which in turn draws on Ezra Pound’s “Make it new!” (Pound 1934). Perloff characterized poetry based on non-original forms of production like copying, appropriation, work with documentary or found texts as “unoriginal genius” (ibid., 23).

the development of an analytical toolkit are only beginning to emerge. Other poetry clips, however, pursue the already long-established genre of the poetry video. Such clips, once again, break down the category of subjectivity – for instance, through forms of duplication and montage or forms of blurring subject-object relations, as Klavdia Smola shows with examples from Russian poetry. The poetry clip is also often politically engaged. It can be used in social media as a communication strategy for political participation processes or for public opinion formation.⁶² Such forms of poetry require cultural, political, and/or social science approaches beyond intermedial and multimodal concepts and methods.

This also applies to the forms of public poetry, which is another worldwide trend. This poetry acts off the page and is often designed as ‘micropoetry.’ Not only does such poetry occur in the media; it also penetrates public and urban spaces. In this case, poetry merges with various cultural and communicative practices, as Heike Paul explains using the example of billboard poetry as a typically American phenomenon. It appears, for example, as a public art project, a site of protest and political intervention, or as advertising, which can, in turn, be used or cited in other media such as film. Poetry in urban space is also increasingly widespread in Europe. Claudia Benthien illustrates how posters, flyers, and free postcards or oral forms, such as megaphone poetry readings, expose the lyric and/or poetic quality of the poem as a marker of difference in order to become perceptible in the urban space as an artistic intervention. The ‘poetic function’ thereby becomes the starting point for the generation of further communicative functions depending on specific contexts and situations.

Poetry in urban spaces literally puts the poem in transition by re-contextualizing it situationally and momentarily, creating an encounter that is simultaneously personal and anonymous. Poetry here occurs with fleeting contact and produces partial contaminations between text, context, author(s), and recipients, who can, however, be re-incorporated as co-authors and co-agents. In such cases, the focus on transition is thus turned back upon the medium of the poem itself. The poem is used as a virtual site of encounter and passage between times, cultures, and languages: that is, as a place of transit. In this sense, Enrique Foffani characterizes Jaime Luis Huenún’s book “La calle Mandelstam” as:

[...] una calle, un espacio peatonal, un lugar de tránsito permanente, un espacio común a todos y de todos, ámbito en el cual irrumpe sin embargo la precariedad de la nuda vida.⁶³

Thus, it is precisely the versatility of the term ‘transition’ that makes it suitable for describing various forms of border crossing, displacement and transformation in recent poetry. Even if transition is a general category for defining historical change, it also represents a time-specific feature of the last decades, in which poetry has demonstrated a paradigmatic capacity for taking on new mani-

⁶² See, e.g., Fees (2020).

⁶³ Foffani (2017).

festations. Transition happens today not only as a change of state or in the form of a ‘static’ hybrid space; it has taken on a quality of permanent dynamic transformation. As recent poetry displays, transition releases individuality, understood as the capacity of self-evolution and self-determination.

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