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*Contemporary Lyric Poetry in Transitions  
between Genres and Media*

Herausgegeben von Ralph Müller und Henrieke Stahl

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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 page<sup>1</sup> altogether and found new spaces for presentation, such as installation art<sup>2</sup>; micropoetry appears in public space or, conversely, billboard

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<sup>1</sup> Perloff (1998) speaks about “poetry on and off page.”

<sup>2</sup> 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;<sup>3</sup> 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 performance<sup>4</sup> 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.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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.<sup>7</sup> 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,<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup> As a result, not only the idea of ‘author’ may change but the entire process of canonizing poetry.

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

<sup>3</sup> 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).

<sup>4</sup> On lyric performance, see, for example, concerning the American developments in the 20<sup>th</sup> 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).

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

<sup>6</sup> 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].

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

<sup>8</sup> 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).

<sup>9</sup> 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.<sup>10</sup> 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”<sup>11</sup>). Nonetheless, and most obviously, the internet promotes new forms of digital poetry.<sup>12</sup> 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 rap<sup>13</sup>) or film (e.g., poetry films<sup>14</sup> 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»],<sup>15</sup> 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),<sup>16</sup> 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

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

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

<sup>12</sup> 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).

<sup>13</sup> 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).

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

<sup>15</sup> 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].

<sup>16</sup> 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.<sup>17</sup>

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).<sup>18</sup> 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),<sup>19</sup> 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," 2020<sup>20</sup>).

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

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

<sup>19</sup> 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).

<sup>20</sup> 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.<sup>21</sup> Some poets create their own idiolect by mixing a multiplicity of languages and their cultural implications (e.g., Chris McCabe in "Lockedowne Aventure"<sup>22</sup>). Poetry translations and play with diverse forms of translation show an increased evolution in recent years.<sup>23</sup>

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

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-

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

<sup>22</sup> [https://poesia.world/storage/upload\\_pdf/w6z5REUFck05NiislLuB4Gi4kvciZevJPhdy1EjW.pdf](https://poesia.world/storage/upload_pdf/w6z5REUFck05NiislLuB4Gi4kvciZevJPhdy1EjW.pdf) [14/04/2021].

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

<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup> 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.<sup>26</sup> 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

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

<sup>26</sup> 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.<sup>27</sup> 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.”<sup>28</sup> In fact, the journal highlighted various phenomena of transition such as a space to experiment free from “rigid artistic formulae,”<sup>29</sup> 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.<sup>30</sup> 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.”<sup>31</sup> 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,<sup>32</sup> 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

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

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

<sup>29</sup> Jolas / Paul (1927: 137).

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

<sup>31</sup> Neogy (1961).

<sup>32</sup> 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 20<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> 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.<sup>33</sup> This is particularly evident in the way poems deal with other genres and media, with layers of language and other languages (multilingualism<sup>34</sup>), 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.<sup>35</sup> 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.<sup>36</sup> Victor Turner, following Arnold van Gennep's study "Les rites de passage,"<sup>37</sup> examined rites of passage as three-

<sup>33</sup> See already Stahl (2020a: 10).

<sup>34</sup> 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).

<sup>35</sup> See Mahler (2019: 4-5).

<sup>36</sup> See already Stahl (2020a).

<sup>37</sup> 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“<sup>38</sup>):

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.<sup>39</sup>

Later, Turner extended his reflections on liminality to the *communitas* between liminal subjects,<sup>40</sup> 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.<sup>41</sup>

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.<sup>42</sup> 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.<sup>43</sup> Poets such as Yōko Tawada or Uljana Wolf<sup>44</sup> 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

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<sup>38</sup> Bräunlein (2012: 53).

<sup>39</sup> Turner (1977: 95).

<sup>40</sup> See Turner (2005).

<sup>41</sup> 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.“

<sup>42</sup> See Schilling (2018: 3-4).

<sup>43</sup> Bhabha (1994).

<sup>44</sup> 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,”<sup>45</sup> 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.<sup>46</sup> By the same token, the theory of lyric has proposed both transhistorical definitions of it as a genre<sup>47</sup> and the view that lyric is not a genre at all but a romantic invention.<sup>48</sup> 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

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

<sup>46</sup> See Wellek (2014).

<sup>47</sup> E.g., Culler (2015), Hempfer (2014).

<sup>48</sup> 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.<sup>49</sup> The indirect, retroactive effect of the performance on the poem might be used politically in some contexts.<sup>50</sup> 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,

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<sup>49</sup> 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.

<sup>50</sup> 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),<sup>51</sup> 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.<sup>52</sup> 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.<sup>53</sup>

Poetry research and theory has already registered an increase in such lyric “differential texts”<sup>54</sup> in the last decades. However, within intermediality research,<sup>55</sup> lyric poetry often recedes behind other genres, and it hardly plays a role even among the text types considered in research on multimodality.<sup>56</sup> Whereas intermediality research<sup>57</sup> 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

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<sup>51</sup> See Rajewsky (2002).

<sup>52</sup> See footnote 8.

<sup>53</sup> 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].

<sup>54</sup> Perloff (2004).

<sup>55</sup> See e.g. Wolf (2018).

<sup>56</sup> See e.g. Schmitz (2016).

<sup>57</sup> On the problematic of the term see Schmidt (2015).

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

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.<sup>60</sup> 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.<sup>61</sup>

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

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<sup>58</sup> E.g. the *Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis*: Mayr (2016).

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

<sup>60</sup> 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).

<sup>61</sup> 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.<sup>62</sup> 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.<sup>63</sup>

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-

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<sup>62</sup> See, e.g., Fees (2020).

<sup>63</sup> 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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*Transitions between the Genres*





## **Internationale Zeitschrift für Kulturkomparatistik**

Band 2 (2021): *Contemporary Lyric Poetry in Transitions between Genres and Media*

Herausgegeben von Ralph Müller und Henrieke Stahl

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### **Was heißt ‚Weltlyrik in Transition‘?**

*What is “World Lyric in Transition”?*

This article asks what “world lyric in transition” could mean to literary scholarship by clarifying the terms “lyric,” “world lyric,” and “transition.”

*Keywords: lyric, world lyric, linguistic sign construction, literature, literature besides literature: poeirie, multilingualism, multiscripturality, translation.*

Die Frage, was mit dem Ausdruck ‚Weltlyrik in Transition‘ literaturwissenschaftlich bezeichnet werden soll, kann man beantworten, indem man die beiden Aspekte der Frage, nämlich ‚Transition‘ einerseits und ‚Weltlyrik‘ andererseits expliziert und in ein Verhältnis zueinander setzt.

Die Beantwortung kann vielleicht ihren Ausgangspunkt bei der Beobachtung nehmen, dass viele Beispiele für Gegenwartlyrik im Hinblick auf Produktion, Distribution und Rezeption weltweit nicht auf einen eng umrissenen und nicht auf einen einzigen semiotisch stabilen Bereich bezogen zu sein scheinen. So handelt es sich bei vielen Fällen der ‚Lyrik von Jetzt‘ um Sprachzeichengebilde, die in einem internationalen Handlungsraum produziert und rezipiert werden und beispielsweise durch Multilingualität und auch durch Multiskripturalität die Zeichenordnung eines einzigen Kulturraumes überschreiten.

Nicht allein Europa, wie Federico Italiano und Jan Wagner in ihrer Anthologie mit dem Titel „Grand Tour“ meinen, ist ein herrliches Lyrik-Babel<sup>1</sup>, sondern die globalisierte ‚Welt der Lyrik‘ ist es – die globalisierte ‚Welt der Lyrik‘, in der,

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<sup>1</sup> Italiano / Wagner (2019: 10).

wie Italiano und Wagner festhalten, es sich von selbst verstehe, dass es beispielsweise auf Französisch schreibende österreichische Dichter kongolesischer Herkunft gebe ebenso wie schottische Dichter mit amerikanischen und spanische Dichter mit englischen Wurzeln, aus Rumänien stammende französische Lyrikerinnen und schwedische Poetinnen mit persischem Hintergrund sowie in Marokko geborene niederländische Dichter, in Japan geborene serbische Dichterinnen, die kyrillographe serbische Gedichte wie auch japanographe japanische Gedichte schreiben und in Deutschland lebende russische Dichter oder maltesische Dichter, die auf Baskisch, Französisch, Englisch, Deutsch und weiteren Sprachen zugleich und konzentriert in einem einzigen Sprachzeichengebilde dichten.

Drei konkrete Beispiele sollen dieses herrliche Lyrikbabel der ‚Lyrik von Jetzt‘ illustrieren. Mein erstes Beispiel wäre die japanische Dichterin Kayoko Yamasaki (geb. 1956). Kayoko Yamasaki lebt seit 1981 in Belgrad und ist dort als Professorin für Japanische Sprache und Literatur tätig. Sie hat mehrere Bücher mit japanischsprachiger Lyrik vorgelegt („Torino tameni“, 1995; „Ubusuna, rodina“, 1999; „Bara: mishiranu kuni“, 2001, „Hisoyakana asa“, 2004; „Atosu, shizukana tabibito“, 2008), aber auch mehrere Bände kyrillographer, serbischsprachiger Lyrik („Скривено јутро“, 2001; „Родина, ubusuna“, 2004; „Сановник, река“, 2005; „Олујни брег“, 2008) und kyrillographe lyrische Sprachzeichengebilde, die sie selbst ins Japanische überträgt – wie im Fall von „ЈУТРЕЊЕ, МАЈ“ / いのりのあさ (Morgendienst, Mai)<sup>2</sup>:

ЈУТРЕЊЕ, МАЈ

Овде птице

зобљу

небо.

Високо под сводом,

ниско над ливадом.

Сазвучјем гласова

различтих боја

радују се

свакидашњој

храни.

Цвркутом скоро

као молитвом,

птице кљуцају

плави застор,

да у њему отворе

безброј ситних

рупа,

да ноћу

туда сипи

<sup>2</sup> Serbischer Text, englische und japanische Übersetzung auf <http://lyrikline.org/> [08.02.2018]. Serbische und japanische Fassung von der Verfasserin, englische Übersetzung von Zoran Paunović.

рајска  
светлост.  
На дну долине  
птице зобљу  
мајско  
небо,  
рај.

いのりのあさ  
ここでは鳥たちが  
空を啄ばむ  
たかくひくく  
ひくくたかく  
さまざまな声を  
あわせ  
日々の糧を  
よろこび  
いのりのことばを  
さえずりながら  
やすみなく  
啄ばみ  
数え切れないほどたくさん  
空にあなをあける  
夜がきて  
青い闇の小さなあなから  
天の光が  
地にふりそそぐため  
鳥たちは啄ばむ  
深い谷間の天国を

MORNING SERVICE, MAY

Here the birds  
peck at  
the sky.  
High under the vault,  
Low above the field.  
Harmony of voices  
of different colours  
rejoice in  
their everyday  
food.  
With their twitter almost  
like with prayer,  
the birds peck at  
the blue curtain,  
in order to open  
myriads of tiny  
holes,

so that at night  
 heavenly light  
 can spray  
 through them.  
 At the bottom of the valley  
 the birds peck  
 at the May  
 sky,  
 Paradise.

Bei ihren serbischen und japanischen Sprachzeichengebilden handelt es sich vielfach um ‚Überseezungen im Meer der Mehrsprachigkeit<sup>3</sup>‘ im Sinne der japanisch-deutsch-englischen Lyrikerin Yoko Tawada (Tawada Yōko), um Sprachzeichengebilde, die die serbische Lyrik ‚japonisieren‘ und die japanische ‚serbisieren‘ und dadurch als japanoserbische oder serbojapanische Sprachzeichengebilde beide Lyriken internationalisieren. Kayoko Yamasaki repräsentiert dabei den Typus von Lyrik, bei der Produktion und Distribution, also die lyrikspezifischen Handlungen nicht auf ein einziges, sprachlich oder auch politisch begrenztes oder umrissenes Handlungsfeld konzentriert werden, sondern gewissermaßen grenzüberschreitend in zwei unterschiedlichen Handlungsfeldern stattfinden und dabei die Grenzen zwischen diesen Handlungsfeldern perforieren oder sogar wenigstens für diesen Fall lyrischer Produktion und Distribution auflösen. Dies lässt sich auch über meine beiden anderen Beispiele für ‚Lyrik von Jetzt‘ sagen.

Mein zweites illustrierendes Beispiel für ‚Lyrik von Jetzt‘ sind Yoko Tawadas Sprachzeichengebilde – etwa die in dem Gedichtband mit dem deutschsprachigen Titel „Abenteuer der deutschen Grammatik“.<sup>4</sup> Der Gedichtband bietet nicht allein deutschsprachige Texte in latinographischer Schrift, die allesamt die Sprache am exemplarischen Fall der deutschen Sprache und im Vergleich mit der japanischen Sprache thematisieren, sondern auch

- latinograph-sinograph bzw. japanograph gemischte Texte in deutscher Sprache<sup>5</sup>,
- sinographie Lautgedichte mit latinographem deutschsprachigem Titel<sup>6</sup> sowie
- latinograph-sinographie bzw. japanographie, deutsch-japanische Sprachzeichengebilde

wie beispielsweise und besonders das Gedicht mit dem Titel „TIK“<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Tawada (2002).

<sup>4</sup> Dies. (2011).

<sup>5</sup> Die „Transkription des Gedichts ‚Die Flucht des Mondes‘“ in: Dies., 41.

<sup>6</sup> „MusikMaschineLärm“, in: Dies., 52.

<sup>7</sup> Dies., 51.



dabei aber vor allem die Wörter ‚Krieg‘, ‚Zeit‘, ‚Messen‘ und ‚Kunst‘ bzw. die Semantik der Komposita konstituieren. Und ein japanischsprachiger Leser wird ebenso japanische Wörter (in Verbindung mit womöglich ‚fremden‘ latinschriftlichen Zeichen) und die sich hier ergebenden Kompositaoptionen wahrnehmen und verstehen.

Ein Leser, der beide Schriftsysteme beherrscht, wird nun die semiotischen Informationsoptionen der japanischen und der deutschen Semiosphäre auf komplexe Weise miteinander kreuzen können. Auch das kann hier nicht im Detail erläutert werden. Deutlich werden sollte immerhin, auf wie komplizierte und zugleich semantisch prägnante Weise bereits in der ersten, so simpel erscheinenden Sprachzeichengruppe des Gedichtes unterschiedliche Sprach- und Schriftsphären (um dies einmal vereinfachend so zu nennen) verstehensrelevant miteinander in Beziehung gesetzt werden.

Zugleich kann man am Beispiel dieses Gedichtes feststellen, dass Yoko Tawada eine Lyrikerin ist, die ihre Sprachzeichengebilde nicht ausschließlich für einen nationalen deutschen oder japanischen Markt produziert. Vielmehr bewegt sie sich grundsätzlich in einem internationalen Handlungsfeld, das literarische Feld ist für sie und für viele andere Lyrikerinnen und Lyriker von Jetzt kein nationales, sondern eben ein internationales. Die adressierten Leserinnen und Leser ihrer Gedichte gehören sozusagen prinzipiell unterschiedlichen Semiosphären an, und ebenso sind die weiteren Positionen des literarischen Feldes international besetzt, eben weil es sich nun um ein internationalisiertes literarisches Feld handelt, in dem Yoko Tawada sich bewegt: Die Verlage ihrer Lyrik agieren in unterschiedlichen Ländern und sogar auf unterschiedlichen Kontinenten, die Kritik ihrer Lyrik findet ebenso weltweit statt – und sie findet ihre Rezipienten weltweit.

Ich komme damit zu meinem dritten Beispiel für Weltlyrik von Jetzt, das Gedicht „Gonbidapena“ des maltesischen Dichters Antoine Cassar. Dieses Sprachzeichengebilde zieht fünf Schriftformen (lateinisch, altägyptisch, altsumerisch, prähebräisch und griechisch) und in seinen latinskripturalen Teilen fünf Varietäten heran, nämlich die anglographe, die baskographe, die maltesische, die französischschriftliche oder frankographe, die hispanographe und die deutsche / germanographe. Es werden auf diese Weise neun Einzelsprachen in hybridisierender, die Sprachigkeit herausstellender Weise miteinander gemischt, nämlich Baskisch, Englisch, Maltesisch, Altägyptisch, Altsumerisch, Protohebräisch, Griechisch, Kastilisch und Französisch.<sup>8</sup> Interessant erscheint hierbei weiter die Information, dass Maltesisch, die einzige semitische Sprache in Westeuropa, eine arabischstämmige Sprache ist und der einzige – wenn man so will – arabische Dialekt, der eben nicht araboskriptural, sondern latinskriptural repräsentiert wird.

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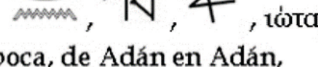
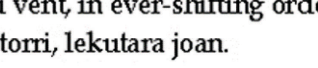
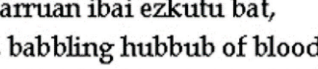
<sup>8</sup> Bei der Zeichenfolge „elf“ in der dritten Zeile handelt es sich möglicherweise außerdem um ein latinschriftliches deutsches Wort.



### Gonbidapena

My great grand mother tongue was wing, or wind, or water.

Txori txiki-txikiak, orain hemen, gero han,  
mogħnija b'għerf arkan, b'mużga ta' mitt elf nota  
tressant des formes parfaites dans le bleu des savanes,

eta izan zen hitza.  ,  ,  ,  ,  
del pecho a la boca, de Adán en Adán,  
les mille voyelles du vent, in ever-shifting order,  
lekutatik etorri, lekutara joan.

Denok dugu barruan ibai ezkutu bat,  
manantial matinal, babbling hubbub of blood,  
ħamla ta' nar u nida tġkaxkar u tintradd.

Edan, erdaldunak, hau da zuen herria,  
f'kull ħamrija l-għeruq, f'nifs ir-riħ kull żerriegħa,  
et avant tout vignoble ce vin du mot nomade.

Bei dem Gedicht handelt es sich um eines der von Cas- sar so genannten Mosaikge- dichte, die sich, wie eben ein Mosaik aus den Mosaik- steinchen, aus unterschied- lichen Schriften und Spra- chen zusammensetzen und von denen man sicherlich sagen könnte, dass sie gera- dezu mit poetischer Vir- tuosität ihren Anspruch de- monstrieren, transgressive, die Grenzen von Einzelspra- chen, Einzelschriften und auch Nationalstaaten über- schreitende Weltlyrik zu sein.

Es handelt sich bei „Gon- bidapena“ um ein auf die Mittelachse gesetztes Sonett. Die Positionierung des Sprachzeichengebildes auf der Mittelachse stellt einen Bezug zu den fakturiellen Neuerungen in der Lyrik der Klassischen Moderne her, die Sonettstruktur ver- weist auf eine der ältesten europäischen Gedichtformatierungen, die weltweit zu einem Hauptexperimentierfeld der außereuropäischen modernen Lyriken seit dem ausgehenden 19. Jahrhundert geworden ist und die mit ihren vierzehn Zeilen den prototypischen vertikalen Umfang des abendländischen Gedichtes verkörpert.

Das Gedicht wird nicht allein durch die Gestaltung der Schriftbildfläche und der Schriften in ein globales literarisches Feld eingespeist, wir können es ebenso über das Internet abrufen<sup>9</sup>.

Das Titelstichwort „Gonbidapena“ ist ein baskisches Wort, es bedeutet „Ein- ladung“. In einer hilfswisen Paraphrase ist die Information des Sprachzeichen- gebildes ungefähr folgende:

#### *Invitation*

My great grand mother tongue was wing, or wind, or water. The smallest of birds, now here, then there, gifted with an arcane knowledge, with the music of a hun- dred thousand notes, braiding perfect forms in the blue of the savannahs, and thus was the word. Name, bird, ‘āleph, iota,\* from chest to mouth, from Ad- am to Adam, the thousand vowels of the wind, in ever-shifting order, coming from afar, going afar.

Within each one of us a concealed river, morning spring, babbling hubbub of blood, torrent of fire and dew dragged out and given back.

<sup>9</sup> <https://antoinecassar.net/muzajk/gonbidapena/> [22.02.2020].

Drink, foreigners, for this is your land, in every soil the roots, in the breath of the wind every seed, and before all vineyards this wine of the nomad word.<sup>10</sup>

Wichtig erscheint mir nicht zuletzt der Hinweis darauf, dass „Gonbidapena“ eine deutliche Tendenz der zeitgenössischen Lyrik der Welt exemplifiziert – eine Tendenz, die man vielleicht als globohistorisch oder globomemorial bezeichnen könnte. Sie besteht darin, auf die Geschichte der Dichtung und der Lyrik der Welt Bezug zu nehmen und diese in gewisser Weise zu bewahren. Im Fall von „Gonbidapena“ geschieht dies durch die Verwendung einer der ältesten Gedichtformierungen italienischen Ursprungs, des Sonettes, sowie durch die Mischung von Schriftzeichen aus verschiedenen historischen und aktuellen Semiosphären.

Die genannten Lyrikerinnen, der genannte Lyriker und alle illustrierend angeführten Sprachzeichengebilde scheinen mir beinahe überdeutliche Beispiele für ‚Lyrik von Jetzt‘ zu sein und mehr noch für Weltlyrik, die sich in Transition befindet. An ihnen lässt sich in einer rationalen Rekonstruktion literaturwissenschaftlich präzisieren und literaturtheoretisch bestimmen, was *Weltlyrik* und was *Transition* von Weltlyrik genau bedeuten können.

Für eine genauere Bestimmung scheint es hilfreich, Konzeptualisierungen von ‚Literatur‘ heranzuziehen, wie sie seit einigen Jahrzehnten in gesellschaftswissenschaftlich orientierten Richtungen der Literaturwissenschaft erörtert werden, und ‚Lyrik von Jetzt‘ ganz allgemein im Rahmen von zwei *Dimensionen von Literatur* zu beschreiben – nämlich zum einen *Literatur als Handlungszusammenhang* (oder Sozialsystem) und zum anderen *Literatur als Zeichenzusammenhang* (oder Symbolsystem).

Literatur als Handlungszusammenhang, das ‚Sozialsystem Literatur‘, hat sich nach verbreiteter Auffassung erst in mehreren ‚Modernisierungsschüben‘ in westlichen (europäischen) Kulturen ungefähr seit dem 18. Jahrhundert etabliert (in Frankreich und England schon etwas früher, in Deutschland seit ungefähr dem ausgehenden 18. Jahrhundert) und wurde von hier aus als Handlungskonzept oder pragmatische Form im Wesentlichen ungefähr seit dem 19. Jahrhundert in andere Kulturen als die europäisch-westlichen, okzidentalen Einzelkulturen exportiert.<sup>11</sup> Für das historisch in seiner Extension schwankende Sozialsystem Literatur sind folgende Züge charakteristisch:

- (1) die Tendenz zur pragmatischen Autonomisierung (also vor allem zur Ablösung von Funktionen in sozialen Mikrobereichen) von graphisch repräsentierter Sprache,

<sup>10</sup> Englischsprachige Paraphrase von Antoine Cassar (<https://antoinecassar.net/muzajk/gonbidapena/> [22.02.2020]).

<sup>11</sup> Siehe hierzu z.B. Kaikkonen (2006: 1,36-69); Svensson Ekström (2006: 1,70-110); Lindberg-Wada (2006: 1,111-134); Pohl (2009: 584-607); Gupte (2009: 608-620).

- (2) die Angleichung schriftstellerischer Arbeit an die Praxis der arbeitsteiligen und technisierten Welt (Spezialisierung und/oder Kombination von Teiltätigkeiten),
- (3) die Professionalisierung des Autors als ‚Unternehmer‘ (Autor als ökonomisches Subjekt, als juristisches Subjekt, als organisiertes<sup>12</sup> Subjekt),
- (4) die Massenproduktion von graphischen Repräsentationen von Sprache,
- (5) der Warencharakter von graphischen Repräsentationen von Sprache,
- (6) die von engen Handlungsräumen entkoppelte anonyme Distribution sowie
- (7) die Konstellation von professionellen Akteuren in einem auf die graphische Repräsentation von Sprache fokussierten sozialen ‚Feld‘ (‚Selektionsinstanzen‘, ‚Konsekrationsinstanzen‘, spezifische ‚Habitus‘ etc.<sup>13</sup>).

Im Hinblick auf Charakteristika der Literatur hat bereits Robert Escarpit gezeigt, wie sehr graphische Repräsentationen von Sprache im Sozialsystem Literatur in Herstellungs- und Distributionsverfahren, Auflagenzahlen und Verbreitungsgraden den Anpassungserfordernissen an Marktgesetze unterworfen sind. Adornistisch könnte man auch feststellen, dass die literarische Produktion des Sozialsystems Literatur Teil einer beschleunigten Kulturindustrie ist (des ‚Literaturbetriebes‘). Brauchte Dantes ‚Göttliche Komödie‘ noch rund 400 Jahre, bis sie in ganz Europa bekannt war, waren es bei Goethes ‚Werther‘ nur noch fünf.<sup>14</sup> Und Goethes ‚Zueignung‘ markiert wie vielleicht kein zweiter Text der Weltliteratur mit seiner Beschwörung des längst verschwundenen Freundeskreises und der Bangigkeit angesichts des Beifalls einer anonymen Menge die Wende von der ‚Poetrie‘, der alten Dichtkunst des Abendlandes, zur modernen Literatur.

Im Hinblick auf die ‚Literatur von Jetzt‘ und besonders im Hinblick auf die ‚Lyrik von Jetzt‘ wird man nun weiter feststellen müssen, dass Literatur als Handlungszusammenhang, das Sozialsystem Literatur, heute eine *kulturen- und kontinenteübergreifende (und dabei vielleicht kulturell homogenisierende) Institution* ist. Das soziale Feld der ‚Literatur von Jetzt‘ und der ‚Lyrik von Jetzt‘ ist eben ein internationalisiertes, globalisiertes Feld. Die Konstellation der professionellen Akteure in diesem Feld ist ebenso von Internationalität gekennzeichnet wie deren Handlungen und Verhaltensweisen, bei denen Literatur wie Lyrik im Prinzip als weltweit zirkulierende Ware behandelt wird.

Der Ausdruck *Lyrik in Transition* kann denn auch vor allem diese Zirkulation von Lyrik in einem globalisierten internationalen Handlungsfeld/Sozialsystem

<sup>12</sup> Siehe hierzu Türk / Lemle / Bruch (2002).

<sup>13</sup> Siehe hierzu vor allem Bourdieu (1999); Jurt (1995); Joch / Wolf (2005). Siehe hierzu auch Warneken (1973: 79-115); Rarisch (1976); Neuschäfer (1981: 27-87); Anz (1989: 71-88); Bräutigam (1990: 244-259); Parr (2008).

<sup>14</sup> Escarpit (1967: 18).

Literatur bezeichnen, bei der bloße lokale Bezüge systematisch – und der Logik des globalen Systems der modernen Literatur folgend – überschritten werden.

Dies kann gewiss nicht für die gesamte ‚Lyrik von Jetzt‘ gesagt werden – es gibt sicherlich Lyrikerinnen und Lyriker, die sich im Umgang mit ihren lyrischen Sprachzeichengebilden dem *Handlungsfeld* der modernen Literatur entziehen. Hier hätten wir es dann aber mit Lyrik (als ‚*Sozialsystem*‘) zu tun, die sich nicht in Transition befindet, die nicht zu den Konstellationen und Zirkulationen eines globalisierten Handlungsfeldes beiträgt oder an ihnen partizipiert. Diese Lyrik ist ein Handlungszusammenhang außerhalb oder jenseits des sozialen Handlungsfeldes der modernen Literatur – ich spreche hier zur Unterscheidung und zur Verdeutlichung von dem Handlungsfeld der Poetrie.

Kennzeichnend für Poetrie als Sozialsystem ist vor allem, dass sie auf enge bzw. distinkte Handlungsräume konzentriert ist bzw. sich in engen sozialen Handlungsräumen entfaltet (dies wären zum Beispiel die Horde, der Stamm oder der Freundeskreis, die lokale Sprachgemeinschaft, die Handwerkergruppe, die Stadt, die Universität, der Hof, die Kirche, die Ritualgemeinschaft, die Sodalität oder auch die ‚Sprachgesellschaft‘ und interessanterweise heute auch das Internet) und dass ihre besonderen phonischen und/oder graphischen Repräsentationen von Sprache in diesem Handlungszusammenhang typischerweise dominierend heteronom bestimmt sind (z.B. als magische oder Zauberdichtung, als Lobdichtung, in Ritualkontexten, zur Wissensspeicherung, als Form des Lebensvollzuges z.B. bei literarischen ‚Blogs‘ usw.).<sup>15</sup> Kennzeichnend ist außerdem die fehlende oder schwache Ökonomisierung der phonischen und/oder graphischen Repräsentationen von Sprache in Produktion und Distribution sowie die fehlende Professionalisierung der Autoren. Charakteristisch für das Sozialsystem Poetrie sind also

- (1) die Tendenz zur pragmatischen Heteronomisierung von graphisch oder phonisch repräsentierter Sprache,
- (2) der nichtprofessionelle und nicht arbeitsteilig spezialisierte ‚Dichter‘ (Dichter keine juristischen Subjekte, keine ökonomischen Subjekte, keine Subjekte in Organisationen),
- (3) die Einzelproduktion graphischer oder phonischer Repräsentationen von Sprache,

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<sup>15</sup> Vgl. hiermit auch Schrott (2009: 11): „Am Anfang jedoch steht eine Lyrik, deren Legitimation eine andere war als heute. Die Skalden und Skops, der keltische fili, der arabische sha’ir oder der griechische aoidos sind nur verschiedene archaische Namen für die zentrale Rolle, die der Dichter in einem Kulturkreis hatte, der auf oralen Traditionen aufbaute. Als Poet und Sänger verstand man ihn nur insofern, als er Prophet und Seher, zugleich aber auch Richter, Geschichtsschreiber oder Heilkundiger war. Seine Funktion war sozial an den Stamm und den Fürsten und sakral an den Glauben gebunden; was er übermittelte, waren Arbeitslieder, Sprichwörter und Zaubersprüche; Genealogien, Annalen, Legenden, Gesetze und Lob- und Spottgesänge, und in einem religiösen Kontext Mythen, Invokationen, Inkantationen und Divinationen.“

- (4) die tendenzielle oder vollständige Unabhängigkeit der Dichtung von ökonomischer Wertschöpfung,
- (5) die auf enge Handlungsräume bezogene Präsentation oder Distribution,
- (6) die fehlende professionalisierte Feldstruktur.

Dass es im Bereich der Poetrie an professionellen Selektions- und Konsekrationsinstanzen fehlt, bedeutet freilich nicht, dass es hier keine entsprechenden (nicht-professionellen) Akteure und keine entsprechenden Handlungsformen geben kann – man denke z.B. schon an den Merker im Meistersang.

Zusammenfassend könnte man also sagen, dass sich ‚Poetrie‘ und ‚Literatur‘ grob und vor allem durch die fehlende oder aber gegebene Ökonomisierung von Produktion und Distribution einerseits sowie durch die pragmatische Heteronomie oder aber die pragmatische Autonomie andererseits voneinander unterscheiden. Festgehalten werden soll hier: Wir können grundsätzlich Lyrik in Transition und Lyrik, die sich nicht in Transition befindet, als zwei *pragmatische Möglichkeiten* voneinander unterscheiden. ‚Lyrik in Transition‘ ist diejenige Lyrik, die an den Handlungs- und Verhaltensmöglichkeiten eines globalisierten Sozialsystems ‚Literatur‘ partizipiert bzw. in die Praxis eines globalisierten Sozialsystems ‚Literatur‘ eingespeist wird; Lyrik, die nicht in Transition ist, partizipiert hingegen nicht an der Praxis eines globalisierten Sozialsystems Literatur – und das heißt bei genauerer Unterscheidung: *Lyrik in Transition* meint 1.) eine Verhaltens- oder Handlungsform von Lyrikerinnen und Lyrikern in einem globalen literarischen Feld – und 2.) eine Umgangsform mit lyrischen Sprachzeichengebilden in einem globalen literarischen Feld.

Was die Umgangsform betrifft so gehören die medial pluralisierte Distribution lyrischer Sprachzeichengebilde und ihre Vermittlung als medial differenzierte Instantiierungen des Gedichtes zu den wichtigsten Aspekten der Transition von Lyrik. Lyrik in Transition bleibt in vielen Fällen nicht mehr an das Printmedium und an Schriftlichkeit gebunden, sondern wird beispielsweise auch über verschiedene elektronische Medien vermittelt – und hier ist insbesondere das Internet so etwas wie ein *Globalisierungs-Booster* von Lyrik.

Diese Lyrik in Transition muss dabei aber nicht zwangsläufig auch Weltlyrik sein. Der Ausdruck ‚Weltlyrik‘ ist bislang vor allem eine anthologistische und noch keine geklärte literaturwissenschaftliche Kategorie. Bei einer Untersuchung von anthologistischen Bestimmungen stellt sich nun heraus, dass jeweils schwankende oder vage Lyrik-Begriffe eine Rolle spielen und dass wiederkehrende Aspekte oder unterscheidbare Kriterien für die Aufnahme von Sprachzeichengebilden in Anthologien von ‚Weltlyrik‘ ausgewiesen werden. Dies sind in einem zusammenfassenden Überblick vor allem

- (1) geographische Aspekte (‚von allen Kontinenten‘), sodann
- (2) sprachliche Aspekte (alle –wichtigen – Sprachen) und
- (3) politische Aspekte (alle Nationen/Staaten/Völker).

Für manche Anthologien spielen außerdem

- (4) das Kriterium der zeitlichen Positionierung (Lyrik des 20./21. Jahrhunderts als Weltlyrik) sowie
- (5) die Funktion als Exemplifizierung einer bestimmten fakturiellen oder informationellen Ausrichtung von Lyrik (nämlich der ‚modernen‘ Lyrik) eine Rolle.

Häufig werden diese Kriterien miteinander in unterschiedlicher Weise kombiniert und insbesondere mit einem

- (6) evaluativen Kriterium verbunden.

Diese Kriterien kann ich hier nicht eingehend diskutieren, möchte aber insbesondere an dem sprachlichen Aspekt anknüpfen und für eine literaturwissenschaftliche Rekonstruktion festsetzen, dass es sich bei Weltlyrik zunächst einmal um einen besonderen Typus von Lyrik (als ‚Symbolsystem‘) handelt, der sich von anderen Typen wie möglicherweise der interkulturellen Lyrik oder auch der Heimatlyrik, der Nationallyrik ebenso wie von dem der Europäischen Lyrik oder auch der Asiatischen Lyrik unterscheiden lässt. Weltlyrik lässt sich dabei genauer als derjenige Typus von Lyrik bestimmen, in oder bei dem Einzelsprachen und/oder Schriften in ein globales Verhältnis zueinander gebracht werden. Dies kann auf mehrerlei Weise geschehen, nämlich: erstens durch die Mischung von Sprachen, die aus unterschiedlichen Semiosphären (also aus unterschiedlichen ‚Kulturen als Zeichenordnungen‘) stammen, in einem lyrischen Sprachzeichengebilde: also durch sogenannte Multilingualität. Zweitens durch die Mischung von Schriftsystemen (unterschieden nach Schrifttyp, z.B. alphabetisch, nicht-alphabetisch, und Schriftart, z.B. lateinisch, griechisch, hebräisch, arabisch) in einem lyrischen Sprachzeichengebilde, die aus unterschiedlichen Semiosphären stammen: also durch sogenannte Multiskripturalität. Und drittens dadurch, dass sich an ein lyrisches Sprachzeichengebilde lingual/oder skriptural transponierte Instantiierungen oder Versionen (vor allem wären dies ‚Übersetzungen‘; Nachdichtungen‘ etc.) in verschiedenen Semiosphären anschließen.

Ich möchte daher vorschlagen, ‚Weltlyrik‘ zu definieren als

- (1) Lyrik,
- (2a) in deren Faktur Sprachen oder auch Schriftsysteme aus unterschiedlichen Semiosphären miteinander verbunden sind, oder
- (2b) an die sich semiotisch transponierte Instantiierungen in weiteren Semiosphären neben derjenigen des originalen Sprachzeichengebilde anlagern.

Der erste Typus der so definierten Weltlyrik (2a) lässt sich als statischer Typus auffassen, da hier die Bedingungen der Zuordnung des Sprachzeichengebilde zur Kategorie der Weltlyrik schon in dem statischen Artefakt selbst erfüllt sein müssen. Der zweite Typus (2b) lässt sich als dynamischer Typus auffassen, insofern ein lyrisches Sprachzeichengebilde als Originalartefakt noch nicht der

Kategorie Weltlyrik zugeordnet werden können muss, sich aber durch die Entstehung von lingual und/oder skriptural transponierten Instantiierungen – verkürzt gesagt: durch Übersetzungshandlungen und Übersetzungen – gewissermaßen zur Weltlyrik entwickelt.

Hierbei könnte man eventuell noch weitere beschränkende oder zuspitzende Bedingungen formulieren, etwa im Hinblick auf die Anzahl der semiotisch transponierten Instantiierungen eines Gedichtes oder im Hinblick auf die Entfernung der involvierten Sprachen und der jeweiligen Schriften voneinander.<sup>16</sup> Solche beschränkenden oder zuspitzenden Bedingungen scheinen mir allerdings eher problematisch, weil sie auf mehr oder weniger verdeckte evaluative Zusatzelemente hinauslaufen, die literaturwissenschaftlich nur schwer kontrollierbar und nur schwer plausibilisierbar sind. Ebenso wenig halte ich die Nationalität oder die Staatsangehörigkeit der Autorinnen und Autoren von Lyrik für ein belastbares Kriterium für die literaturwissenschaftliche Kategorie ‚Weltlyrik‘ – wie auch dasjenige ihres Wohnortes, ihrer ethnischen Zugehörigkeit, ihrer Hautfarbe oder ihres Geschlechtes und sogar ihrer tatsächlichen Mehrsprachigkeit. Das alles erscheint mir belanglos und jedenfalls nicht hinreichend philologisch abbildbar – anders als die Verbindung von global repräsentierten Zeichenordnungen in oder bei dem lyrischen Sprachzeichengebilde selbst.

‚Weltlyrik in Transition‘ wären nach diesem Vorschlag also

- (1) solche zur Gattung Lyrik zu rechnenden Sprachzeichengebilde,
- (2) in deren Faktur (a) Sprachen oder auch Schriftsysteme aus unterschiedlichen Semiosphären miteinander verbunden sind, oder (b) an die sich semiotisch transponierte Instantiierungen in weiteren Semiosphären neben derjenigen des originalen Sprachzeichengebildes anlagern

und die

- (3) als Objekte an den Handlungs- und Verhaltensmöglichkeiten eines globalisierten Sozialsystems Literatur partizipieren – sei es als Objekte (a) an einer spezifischen Handlungs- oder Verhaltensform von Lyrikerinnen und Lyrikern in einem globalen literarischen Feld – sei es (b) als Objekte an einer Umgangsform mit lyrischen Sprachzeichengebilden in einem globalen literarischen Feld.

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<sup>16</sup> Man könnte also eventuell weiter festlegen, dass nur solche lyrischen Sprachzeichengebilde als ‚Weltlyrik‘ bezeichnet werden sollen, die beispielsweise in mindestens drei andere Sprachen und/oder Schrifttypen oder in die wichtigsten Sprachen des globalen literarischen Marktes übersetzt worden sind. Oder man könnte festlegen, dass es sich bei den Übersetzungen um solche zwischen Makrosemiosphären handeln müsse, nicht jedoch zwischen Meso- oder gar Mikrosemiosphären. Dann wären solche lyrischen Sprachzeichengebilde als Weltlyrik zu betrachten, die in der Relation zwischen Original und Instantiierungen etwa zwischen dem lateinischen Schriftkulturenkreis und dem kyrillischen oder dem chinesischen Schriftkulturenkreis vermitteln, nicht aber solche, die etwa zwischen der germanographen und der frankographen oder polonographen Mesosemiosphäre vermitteln.

Yoko Tawadas Sprachzeichengebilde „TIK“ ebenso wie die eingeführten Sprachzeichengebilde von Antoine Cassar und auch dasjenige von Kayoko Yamasaki wären hier also Beispiele für Weltlyrik in Transition in einem konzeptionell geklärten Sinn.

Mit den vorgeschlagenen Konzepten können schließlich vier Typen von Lyrik voneinander unterschieden werden, nämlich

- (1) Weltlyrik in Transition;
- (2) Weltlyrik, die sich nicht in Transition befindet;
- (3) Lyrik in Transition, die keine Weltlyrik ist;
- (4) Lyrik, die weder Weltlyrik ist noch sich in Transition befindet.

Ein illustrierendes Beispiel für den Typus (2) wäre etwa das berühmte Gedicht „Eras quan vey verdeyar“ des aus der Provence stammenden und besonders in Oberitalien tätigen Raimbaut de Vaqueiras (ca. 1180-ca.1207). Jede der fünf Strophen dieses ‚Descorts‘ ist in einer anderen Sprache verfasst, in der abschließenden ‚tornada‘ werden diese fünf Sprachen oder vielleicht besser ‚romantischen Dialekte‘ (Okzitanisch, Altfranzösisch, Galicisch-Portugiesisch, Gascognisch und vernakulares Italic) noch einmal zusammenfassend aufgerufen. Zugleich bewegt sich Raimbaut de Vaqueiras natürlich noch nicht in einem modernen, globalisierten Sozialsystem der Literatur, sondern in einem der Poetrie.

Beispiele für den Typus (3) bieten die lyrischen Sprachzeichengebilde solcher Autorinnen und Autoren, welche zwar in einem globalisierten Handlungssystem der Literatur agieren, deren Sprachzeichengebilde selbst aber keine Kennzeichen der Weltlyrik aufweisen – wie etwa Fälle konkreter Poesie oder auch oulipistischer Lyrik (nehmen wir Döhls ‚Apfel“-Gedicht, von dem ich annehme, dass es nicht übersetzt worden ist).

Beispiele für den Typus (4) finden wir am ehesten im Bereich der zeitgenössischen vernakularen Gelegenheitsdichtung, private Geburtstags-, Hochzeits- oder auch Muttertagsgedichte etwa.

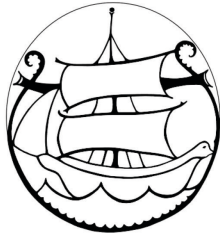
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Herausgegeben von Ralph Müller und Henrieke Stahl.

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**Jasmin Böhm (Trier)**

### **A Gap in(to) the Dictionary: The In-between Lyric of Tawada Yōko**

The work of Japanese-German writer Yoko Tawada (Tawada Yōko) stands out as an example of ‘in-between’ writing. Instead of simply ‘translating’ Japanese into German and vice versa, Tawada blends both languages and cultures, often self-reflexively. As a result, poetic in-between spaces emerge, in which creative work, cultural translation, and social criticism can take place. The texts also construct in-between spaces on a formal level. For instance, the verse novels “Kasa no shitai to watashi no tsuma” (『傘の死体とわたしの妻』, 2006) and “Ein Balkonplatz für flüchtige Abende” (2016) feature both narrative progression and poetic devices (vivid imagery, association, and wordplay), defying categorization either as volumes of poetry or as novels. In addition, the in-between space of genres becomes visible in Tawada’s self-translations, which often amount to rewritings and lead to a change in genre – travel essay to novella, novel to drama, or poem to prose text. An example of this genre-transcending bilingualism as entryway to an in-between space are the texts „Die Orangerie“ (1997) and “Orenji-en nite” (「オレンジ園にて」, 1997/1998), which initially appear as a poem and its (apparently) prose translation. However, a number of textual peculiarities of both pieces point to the mutual influences between versions. Thus, I read all four examples as hybrid forms of poetry, which perform the mixing of genres, languages, and cultures that occurs in today’s world. In their cultural hybridity especially, the poems point to underlying social issues of homo- and xenophobia.

*Keywords: in-between space, cultural translation, hybridity, genre transition, bilingualism, exophony*

## Introduction

The peculiar style of the multi-genre author Yoko Tawada (多和田葉子, Tawada Yōko), who was born in Japan but now lives in Germany, self-reflexively blends the phonetic, metaphoric, and grammatical particularities of German and Japanese. This paper discusses elements of genre-transition in two verse novels, “Kasa no shitai to watashi no tsuma” (『傘の死体と私の妻』 [“The Corpse of the Umbrella and my Wife”] (2006) and „Ein Balkonplatz für flüchtige Abende“ [“A Balcony Space for Fleeting Evenings”] (2016). I also examine elements of language-transition in a poem with a version in each language, „Die Orangerie“ [“The Orangery”] and “Orenji-en nite” (「オレンジ園にて」 [“In the Orange Garden”]), both first published in 1997. All these texts are hybrids, and their transitions of genre and language boundaries open up new avenues of thought, create spaces of cultural exchange, and perhaps even spur social change. After an outline of my chief findings regarding Tawada’s poetics of the in-between, I justify my classification of the first two texts as verse novels and analyse one excerpt of each before examining the language-transgressing texts. In each instance, I point out the hybridizations used and discuss their effects.

Tawada takes an iconoclastic stance towards binary categorization and instead develops a poetics of the in-between. She expresses this impulse in the German prose poem „Ich wollte keine Brücke schlagen“ [“I did not want to built a bridge”]<sup>1</sup> from which I take the title of this paper. Instead of merely ‘bridging’ languages and thus cultures, the poem’s speaker is interested in the in-between space, here represented by a river. This space is where the transformation of language begins: „Wollen wir uns ans Ufer setzen und eine Lücke ins Wörterbuch schlagen? Wollen wir eine Lücke aufschlagen wie ein Buch?“ [“Shall we sit down at the riverbank and strike a gap into the dictionary? Shall we open up the gap like a book?”].<sup>2</sup>

The transformation of language opens up a gap in entrenched thought patterns and may lead to a transformation of thought and thus of culture. The next step in this process is the creation of hybrid forms, and Tawada performs this creation constantly. As verse novels, the first two texts discussed here are genre hybrids. Regarding the second pair of texts, the Japanese version of the “Orangery”-poem is also a prose/poetry hybrid. In addition, both versions of “Orangery” show the influence of the other language, which makes them linguistic hybrids as well. Through their hybridity, the four texts I discuss establish a ‘Third

<sup>1</sup> From the volume “But the Mandarins Must Be Robbed Tonight” („Aber die Mandarinen müssen heute abend noch geraubt werden“, Tawada 1997: 65-66). Whenever I quote a language other than English, I provide my own translation. To my knowledge, none of the poems I discuss has previously been translated into English.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 65.

Space’ of social criticism and cultural encounter, which entails a potential for social change appropriate for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### *Poems as Third Spaces*

In cases of transcultural writers such as Tawada, Homi Bhabha’s concept of the ‘Third Space’ proves a useful tool for analysis. Understood as the process of utterance and understanding, the ‘Third Space’ links the culture(s) of origin and the culture(s) of the language(s) used (e.g. in a translation), as well as the culture of the content depicted in the work and the situation of reception. Because these conditions vary with each work and individual reception context, “the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; [...] even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew”.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the ‘Third Space’ emerges as a room for the renegotiation of cultural meaning and thus culture and society itself. The various in-between spaces of Tawada’s writing perform exactly this function.

Tawada is, of course, not the first to portray literature of and as a ‘Third space’. In cultural studies, Doris Bachmann already suggested a concept of literature functioning as a ‘Third Space’ (“dritte Welt”, lit., third world), where the familiar is alienated through distancing and estrangement techniques, in 1979.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, professor of German Studies Norbert Mecklenburg establishes poetry specifically as an “exterritorial” space, which can establish communication beyond intercultural contact in the binary sense.<sup>5</sup> However, Bhabha associates another term with ‘Third space’, hybridity, which is also applicable to Tawada’s work.

For Bhabha, ‘Third Spaces’ ultimately enable the establishment of a new type of culture, “based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the *diversity* of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture’s *hybridity*”.<sup>6</sup> Instead of forcing equivalence through the erasure of untranslatable differences, the alien is acknowledged as such.<sup>7</sup> The result is a hybrid: an overt construct, which does not resolve the underlying differences and is therefore non-homogenous. In Bhabha’s view, this heterogenous construct emancipates the hybrid from dichotomous hierarchies of self/other, and thus unleashes the potential for political commentary and resistance. This effect is especially potent if the hybrid person is conscious of their own hybridity, and consciously employs it to resist.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Bhabha (2012: 55).

<sup>4</sup> Bachmann (1979: 31).

<sup>5</sup> Mecklenburg (1990: 9).

<sup>6</sup> Bhabha (2012: 56).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 321.

<sup>8</sup> Bhabha (1985: 154-5; 2012: 159-160).

Tawada's texts are such deliberate hybrids with political potential, as I will demonstrate below. She expressly designs her texts as hybrids and claims:

Die meisten Formen sind Mischwesen. Darin findet man verschiedene Sprachen und Gattungen: Ich schreibe auf Japanisch und auf Deutsch, Prosa und Theaterstücke, Literarisches und Theoretisches gleichzeitig.<sup>9</sup>

Most forms are composite creatures. You find different languages and genres in them: I write in Japanese and in German, prose and drama, literature and theory, at the same time.

Tawada's decision to mix genres means her works are hybrid due to conscious choice, in accordance with Bhabha's criteria for political potential.

However, Bhabha focuses on cultures (and takes his literary examples from prose), whereas I consider poems. I contend that Bhabha's concept of hybridity and its implications are applicable to these texts because poetry is equally as capable as prose narrative to portray hybridity. Norbert Mecklenburg even claims that the complexity of the world can be better expressed through the layers of polysemy prevalent in poetic writing. Concurrently, he criticizes the tendency of plot-based narratives to develop (and be understood) in a rather linear fashion.<sup>10</sup> Tawada's choice of verse forms avoids this problem. In addition, the potential ambiguity of poetry makes poetic forms suited to hybrid content, and the poem itself can be a hybrid of different poetic forms or even literary genres.

### *Verse Novels*

One version of this latter type of genre-hybridity is the verse novel.<sup>11</sup> The 1998 "Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory" defines verse novels as extended poems with a novel-like plot. Therefore, on the prose-side of its hybridity, a verse novel "deals with the substance of everyday modern life in much the same way as a work of prose fiction".<sup>12</sup> This substance includes discussion of present issues,<sup>13</sup> and the examples below demonstrate how Tawada draws on and responds to controversies of contemporary culture. Author and educator Gabriela Pereira adds the aspect of character development to the novel-like features of verse novels.<sup>14</sup> In "Kasa", the speaker partially regresses to a child-like character, whereas in „Balkonplatz“, the speaker's commitment to a

<sup>9</sup> She states this in her essay "The Body of Writing and Writing on the Body" („Der Schriftkörper und der beschriftete Körper“, in: "At first, I am always a reader" („Zuerst bin ich immer Leser“, edited by Krupp / Janssen)), Tawada (2000: 71).

<sup>10</sup> Mecklenburg (2008: 117).

<sup>11</sup> As an alternative to both typical novels and poetry, women writers seem to have a significant interest in the verse novel form (cf. Kroll 2017).

<sup>12</sup> Penguin Dictionary (1998: 965-966).

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 966.

<sup>14</sup> Pereira (2012).

queer family structure, which a heterosexual affair had disrupted, is re-established in the final poem.

Consequently, if the novel-like aspects of the two texts are ascertained, their poeticity is in question. I argue that “Kasa” and “Balkonplatz”, despite their novel-like scope and their representation of current society and its problems, qualify as poetry, so that the term ‘verse novel’ remains appropriate. Regarding the lyrical qualities of verse novels, Pereira stresses the slightly outdated<sup>15</sup> criterion of self-expression, but also mentions poetic imagery and the musicality of language as factors.<sup>16</sup> Both “Kasa” and „Balkonplatz“ fit this description. Furthermore, they have the “single speaker express[ing] thought and emotion” characteristic of lyrical poetry.<sup>17</sup>

Hempfer elaborates on this speaking position to define lyrical speech as a “performativity fiction”, which results from the simultaneity of speaking and situation: „Ein lyrisches Sprechen erzählt also nicht, was geschehen ist, sondern konstituiert im Sprechen, worüber gerade gesprochen wird“ [“Lyrical speech does not narrate what has happened, but it constitutes through speaking that which is spoken about”].<sup>18</sup> This definition applies to both works in their entirety, even to otherwise prose-like passages of „Balkonplatz“, as the singular speaking voice evokes the situation it describes, usually in present tense.

In addition, poems work with wordplay and misunderstandings to foreground the materiality and mediality of language. This aspect – the reference to the mediality of language – may be the two texts’ best claim to poeticity. According to professor of Literary Studies Rüdiger Zymner, poetry is constituted through its illumination of the meaning-constituting role of language and its function as a catalyst of aesthetic experience. “[W]e now can define lyric as *a (graphic or vocal) manifestation of the cognitive tool ‘language’ – a manifestation, which is essentially a display of lingual mediality by constituting aesthetic evidence.*”<sup>19</sup>

The use of free verse does not necessarily forbid a classification as verse novel, but Williams and Zymner both name metered verse as a feature of verse novels.<sup>20</sup> Yet, as Zymner himself points out, the repetition of form, such as stanzas with fixed meter and rhyme scheme, over the course of a long narrative poem may diminish the poeticity of these formal features, to the point of irrelevance.<sup>21</sup> Thus, to remain high on the lyrical scale, a long narrative poem (such as a verse novel) needs to “direct [...] attention to language as medium of procedural gener-

<sup>15</sup> Williams (2019: 22).

<sup>16</sup> Pereira (2012), cf. Penguin Dictionary (1998: 966).

<sup>17</sup> Williams (2019: 19).

<sup>18</sup> Hempfer (2014: 34, 32).

<sup>19</sup> Zymner (2017: 152, original emphasis), see also idem (2009a: 139-140, 151).

<sup>20</sup> Williams (2019: 145), cf. Zymner (2009a: 157-158).

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 164.

ation of meaning” („die Sprache als Medium prozessuraler Sinn-genese“, my translation).<sup>22</sup> Passages of sound-focused playing with language in both of Tawada’s verse novels demonstrate exactly this awareness for language, especially the introductory passages of poems 6 and 7 in „Balkonplatz“<sup>23</sup> as well as the first line of the “Kasa” excerpt discussed below. In this context, the versification of novels, even if it is “only” free verse, may function as a signpost for such phonetic qualities of the text,<sup>24</sup> and therefore strengthen their poeticity, more than regular, metered verse would. In “Kasa”, this lyrical speaking mode of subjective emotional expression and language play is more relevant than the narration of the plot. Nevertheless, a close reading of the text can bring the story to light.

*“Kasa no shitai to watashi no tsuma”: A Lesbian Verse Novel*

“Kasa no shitai to watashi no tsuma” [『傘の死体とわたしの妻』, “The Umbrella’s Corpse and My Wife”] (2006) was the Tawada’s first publication of Japanese poems in Japan. As a hybrid text, the verse novel performs the tasks of prose (plot narration and character development) by means of poetry. In addition, it uses its hybridity to deliver social criticism. This hybridity emerges from a contrast of prose-like or narrative and poetic (even lyrical) elements.

The text’s hybridity immediately confronts the reader. On the one hand, there are strong narrative elements. Judging by its table of contents, “Kasa” appears as a romance novel, as its chapters list relationship stages, from meeting and honeymoon to child rearing. A voice in the first person speaks (narrates) the entire work (except for the prologue), but it also quotes other voices, directly or indirectly (a dramatic element, but also common in prose). The main characters appear in each chapter-poem and their story moves chronologically forward (as in a novel), displaying the speaker’s evolving relationship with the wife-character. While the poems were published individually in the magazine “Gendaishi techō” (現代詩手帳), they were contextualized as chapters of a serialized novel.<sup>25</sup>

On the other hand, “Kasa” is an intensely lyrical text. The speaking voice expresses its emotional state, experiences, and worldview, and evokes the situation and itself as this situation unfolds, correlating with Hempfer’s definition of lyrical poetry. The text is set with the unjustified margin typical of lyrical layout; some phrases are even arranged on the page, approaching visual poetry. Moreover, the poems feature metaphoric language, wordplay, and meaning-altering line

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>23</sup> Tawada (2016: 51, 65).

<sup>24</sup> As suggested by Zymner (2009a: 170).

<sup>25</sup> Because of these two points, the overarching plot and the manner of publication, I consider the text a verse novel, rather than a novel-in-poems (where the individual texts are independent enough to be published as a stand-alone poem). For a definition of the genre of verse novel featuring this distinction, especially in an anglophone context, see Stahl (2021).



breaks as well as pauses. Since the images flow in an associative rather than narrative manner, and each poem has its own theme(s), the individual ‘chapters’ are to some degree self-contained as poems, despite their function in the overarching narrative.

The verse novel is a rather new genre in Japanese literature and has strong transcultural ties. While classical and modern texts often embed poems in prose narratives, the term “verse novel” (韻文小説, *inbun shōsetsu*) is closely tied to translations of Pushkin’s “Onegin”, the prime example of the metric verse novel.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, the free verse form Tawada uses in “Kasa” owes more to the Anglophone verse novel boom than to Japanese literary history. Tellingly, before “Kasa” was serialized in “Gendaishi techō”, the journal published another verse novel, “Kawara arekusa” (『河原荒草』). The author of that work, Itō Hiromi, has for many years resided alternately in America and Japan before permanently moving to California. Thus, she inhabits a transcultural position similar to Tawada.

In broad terms, the most striking features of “Kasa” are its use of language, its reader involvement and its transcendence of genre. Each chapter-poem features generous amounts of language play. In her discussion of “Kasa”, the poet Arai Toyomi notes that prose becomes boring for poets used to experimenting with language. She suggests that this is why Tawada uses her lyric techniques of word de[con]struction and separation of sound and meaning in “Kasa” to deconstruct narrative coherence in the process of narration.<sup>27</sup>

Readers must deduce the plot from the text by interpretation, since direct statements regarding the development of the main characters’ relationship are rare. Thus, the work uses the devices of poetry to deliver a plot with developing characters (as is typical of prose). This is what makes the text a verse novel. Although she does not use the term, Arai also describes “Kasa” as such: on the one hand, she stresses the use of experimental, poetic language; on the other, she describes the text as a “family narrative” (『家族物語』, *kazoku monogatari*) and “vulgar family drama” (『家族猥雑劇』, *kazoku waizatsugeki*) as well as a “novel” (『小説』, *shōsetsu*).<sup>28</sup>

These different terms show the genre transgression of the text. The relationship to the “wife” and the discussions of conception (poem 6, 8, 9) and child-rearing (poem 5, 10, 11, 12) explains the description as a “family narrative”. At the same time, the depiction of female bodies, of sex, fertilization treatment, and

<sup>26</sup> Although verse narratives have existed since antiquity, the narrative element in verse tales has changed with times and cultures. While the antique verse epics as well as the verse romances of the Middle Ages belong in the same broad genre of ‘narratives in verse’ as the verse novel, this particular genre’s combination of the modern narrative structure of the *novel* with (metric) verse has “Onegin” as its basis.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Arai (2007: 83).

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 82 ff.

miscarriage may justify the characterization as “vulgar”. The use of different voices points to influences of drama (even if the setting of any scene is often vague). These voices are indicated by the script used (p. 52-54), by the use of quotation marks (p. 64), through gender- (p. 53) or region-specific dialect (p. 61), or by putting the character name at the beginning of the line (p. 52), as in a drama script. Such hybridity of themes and genres is unusual for Japanese poetry, though Itō Hiromi’s 2005 novel, again, was a likely influence.

To illustrate the functioning of “Kasa” as a hybrid text, I will analyse the beginning of the third poem in the cycle, “Omiai” (「お見合い」 [“A Meeting to Initiate an Arranged Marriage”]).

はっけ よった のこった  
 と、かけても、声、むすばない  
 ころころ逃げて  
 妻は電気技師  
 切れた電球から切れた電球へと  
 めまぐるしくコウカンしている  
 ちょっととまってください、この見積書を  
 ははっ 妻 (の束ねられた髪先端) 笑って 逃げる  
 こちらはこちらで乾いた乳孔から 目球 掻き出して  
 こ (ろん) んなものよよかったらどうぞとところで国際保証書は  
 ははっ 妻が わら  
 ところで、趣味は？  
 ホ・ネです  
 ハ・ネですか  
 いいえ 髑髏ですとか  
 とか とか  
 ほら  
 目と芽が合って誘われ<sup>29</sup>

Having put spirit into it you remain in the ring  
 this, [my] voice, calls [to you], but doesn't connect  
 one by one they flee  
 the wife is an electrical engineer  
 from burned-out lightbulb to burned-out lightbulb  
 hectically she replaces them, sympathy and good feelings  
 Please wait, this cost estimate  
 Haha, the wife (the tips of her tied-together hair) laughs and flees  
 Here is here, out of the dried-up milk-hole I scratch eyeballs  
 Would this (collapsed) one be all right with you, by the way, what about an  
 international warranty card  
 Haha, the wife laughs  
 By the way, what is your hobby?  
 Bone-minton.  
 You mean Badminton?  
 No, skulls and such

<sup>29</sup> Tawada (2006: 27-38, 28).

and such    and such  
 Hey!  
 Eye and eye (seed) meet and [you] are seduced

The poem opens with a sense of disconnection, as the speaker's voice cannot reach the addressee. The terms in the first line are written in hiragana and thus appear initially as sound, rather than meaning. This function is intensified by the rhythm that develops through the repeated use of gemination (「はっけ よったのこった」, *hakke yotta nokotta*, l. 1). The word *hakke-yoi* (はっけよい) is even warped, against custom, to a past tense form (「はっけ よった」, *hakke yotta*, l. 1) to strengthen this effect. The resulting disconnection of sound and meaning then transforms into personal disconnection in the second line, where the speaker's voice, fractured by commas, fails to reach the addressee (the speaker's (future) wife). *Koe o kakeru*, lit. “hang one's voice on someone”, signifies calling for or addressing someone, while the verb *musubu* (結ぶ) means to tie together or connect. With the phrase “*kaketemo, koe, musubanai*” (「かけても、声、むすばない」, l. 2, “[my] voice, calls [to you], but doesn't connect”) the speaker expresses that despite calling to the other character (*koe o kakete*), their voice does not reach them (*musubanai*). This line clarifies on the content level the disconnection expressed on the sound and punctuation levels in ll. 1-2.

The words used in these first two lines are from a sumo context. Thus, the speaker is comparing the one-on-one meetings intended to facilitate marriage (*omiai*) to wrestling matches. In detail, the first line's *hakke-yoi* is a sumo referee's call, used to urge wrestlers to put in more effort when they have come to a stop, while *nokotta* means a wrestler remains in the ring (i.e. he has not yet lost). *Kake-goe* (掛け声) is a term for calls (often encouraging or criticizing ones) to actors or athletes, to which Tawada alludes with the phrase “*kaketemo, koe*” (「かけても、声」, l. 2). Similarly, *musubi* (*no ichiban*) is the last sumo match of the day and this term echoes in the negation *musubanai* at the end of l. 2.<sup>30</sup> This line of sporting references resurfaces later in the excerpt with the mention of badminton, emphasizing the competitive nature of the event. Using the sumo vocabulary, the speaker positions herself as the referee. She stands apart and cannot reach her (future) wife.<sup>31</sup> The fact that sumo is a men's sport also points to another gap between the speaker and the wife – if the wife is (at this time) only looking for men as partners, the chances of the speaker to win her affections are slim.

The excerpt shows how a narrative sequence develops beneath the stream of associations of the lyrical text. The speaker's (future) wife is introduced as an

<sup>30</sup> *Musubi*, however, is a very versatile term and can also mean an emotional connection, marriage, or joining in an economic sense. I have listed dictionary entries for all these terms at the end of the bibliography. Where available, I provide the links to both a Japanese dictionary entry and an English explanation from a Sumo fan website.

<sup>31</sup> The verse novel's main speaker is assigned female at birth (her female reproductive anatomy features prominently in poem 8) and identifies as a woman (she introduces herself and her wife as two women who are married in poem 7).

electrical engineer, which may be an actual description of her job, as the couple first meet at a construction site in the first poem of the verse novel. However, the term also offers a metaphorical interpretation: as an electrical engineer, the wife-character hurries from one man to another, but they are all “burned-out lightbulbs” (「切れた電球」, *kireta denkyū*, l. 5), meaning they are of no use to her, and she can only replace them. The metaphor transports narrative development: the wife tries out different men and finds them wanting – until she meets the (female) speaker.

In addition to the lyrically presented plot, the quoted section of “Omiai” criticizes the capitalist logic of love as a marketplace. Human beings are reduced to (mass-produced) objects (lightbulbs), to be used until they are “burned-out” (or fixed by an attractive woman?). Furthermore, the poem frames relationships in economic terms; for instance, one man offers “cost estimates” (「見積書」, *mitsumori sho*, l. 7) and “international warranty cards” (「国際保証書」, *kokusai hoshō sho*, l. 10) to convince the wife to stay. The speaker, who stands aloof in a ‘Third Space’, as the referee-comparison shows, uses the business-related terms to reveal the absurdity of the situation through these ironic word choices.

In the capitalist environment portrayed, feelings are seemingly absent, but bodies feature repeatedly as part of the speaker’s criticism. The phrase “out of the dried-up milkhole I scratch eyeballs” (「乾いた乳孔から 目球 掻き出して」, *kawaita chikō kara medama kakida shite* l. 9) could suggest that the men stare at the wife’s breasts, and this makes her feel uncomfortable.<sup>32</sup> Finally, she retaliates by claiming her hobby is bones; a wordplay on badminton (*hane*), which sounds similar to bone (*hone*). The man voices an enraged “Hey!” (「ほら」, *hora*, l. 17), as he is presumably unaccustomed to being reduced to body parts. Alternatively, the speaker may call “Hey” to her (future) wife to initiate the meeting of their eyes in the next line (l. 18).

Thus, the poetic representation of the plot enables Tawada to include social criticism in the images used – she takes advantage of the opportunities of hybridity in Bhabha’s sense. In the next section, I want to consider how Tawada’s German verse novel performs similar feats.

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<sup>32</sup> A later poem positions the speaker and the wife in their forties and discusses problems of the climacteric; it also mentions that the wife has raised a child in her first marriage. Thus, her milk-flow has dried up both actually (she no longer breastfeeds a child) and figuratively (she has begun to transition into menopause).

## „Ein Balkonplatz für flüchtige Abende“: Voice of a Queer Social Consciousness

Ten years after the publication of “Kasa”, Tawada released a similar text in German, „Ein Balkonplatz für flüchtige Abende“ [“A balcony space for fleeting evenings”] (2016). Whereas “Kasa” is a verse novel on the lyrical end of the spectrum, „Balkonplatz“ rather stresses the plot. Nevertheless, it too employs its generic hybridity: Firstly, to tell a story with poetic means (as “a poetic novel”, according to the blurb), and secondly, to convey resistance to sexist aspects of society. The use of the word “fleeting” in the title indicates the transitory and in-between nature of the spaces – and people – portrayed within, which host the novel’s critical voice.

“Balkonplatz” is much more direct than “Kasa” in describing the setting and expressing events external to the speaker, although it remains a lyrical text. After the first poem, entitled „Vorspiel“ [“performance/prelude/foreplay”], the narrative structure emerges through references in the poems to earlier events, as well as expository passages. This feature, as well as the reappearances of named characters, increases the coherence of the whole and mark the text more clearly than “Kasa” as a verse novel, rather than a novel-in-poems.<sup>33</sup>

While the term verse novel (,Versroman’) appears mostly in the context of medieval chivalric romances,<sup>34</sup> German literature is currently witnessing an increase in verse novels, possibly in response to the boom in the English-speaking world.<sup>35</sup> Translations of English-language verse novels into German have won critical acclaim<sup>36</sup> and established German-language poets have also published works that can be considered verse novels in recent years, such as Durs Grünbein’s „Vom Schnee“ (2003) and Ann Cotton’s „Verbannt!“ (2016). Thus, Tawada takes part in a transcultural literary movement with both verse novels discussed here, although her Japanese contribution probably has more relevance due to the smaller number of verse novels available in Japanese.

However, the similarities of „Balkonplatz“ to “Kasa” do not end with the genre, as is also an overtly hybrid text. The speaker of „Balkonplatz“ also interacts with a number of characters, whose speech they<sup>37</sup> sometimes quote. Despite this

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<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, Tawada has read single poems from „Balkonplatz“ in isolation, such as the 12<sup>th</sup> poem „Wer mich gebar“ at the Institute for Japanese Culture Cologne, 30/09/2019. However, this poem is focused on Elsa and her relationship with her mother and thus to a degree separate from the verse novel’s main narrative.

<sup>34</sup> For instance, see Schmolke-Hasselmann (1980).

<sup>35</sup> Stahl (2021: 89-90), see also Zymner (2009b).

<sup>36</sup> For instance, a verse novel won the title „Jugendbuch des Jahres“ (“Adolescent Book of the Year”) at the Frankfurt book fair 2019. See MDR Kultur (undated).

<sup>37</sup> This character voices discomfort with being perceived as a woman several times, without affirming a masculine identity, which speaks for a non-binary identification. The speaker is

dramatic element, like in “Kasa”, the poems are still ripe with wordplay and poetic misunderstandings. In addition, “Balkonplatz” makes use of transformations, as well as literary and artistic allusions, stressing the artistic, if not narrowly poetic, aspirations of the text. Moreover, the element of self-expression typical of the lyrical mode also manifests itself in the discussions of social and political issues typical of the novel (such as gender, sexuality, religion, literature, social class and disability). The following excerpt from the ninth poem, „Mit spitzen Ohren“ [“With Alert (literally, pointy) Ears”] exhibits most of the typical features of „Balkonplatz“.

Wäre ich ein kranker Ast der Buddenbrooks,  
 wäre ich hier zu Hause,  
 in der Künstlergarderobe.  
 Ein Sex ohne Organe,  
 Leidenschaft ohne Familiennamen.  
 Zwei Frauen tanzen miteinander  
 in der zweiten Postkarte.  
 Elsa im türkisen Kleid,  
 ich in Granatapfel gekleidet.  
 [...] Adoptiere mich!  
 Leider kann ich nicht, du kleines  
 Kätzchen, hör zu: Die Adoptionsrechte  
 sind einer Ehe vorbehalten,  
 bei der ein Teil als Mann  
 und der andere als Frau registriert sind.  
 Dann heirate mich!  
 Aus dem Kätzchen wird ein Kater,  
 durch seine Schnauze lächelt Chris.  
 Der Schreck öffnet meine Augen und  
 ich liege im Bett, neben mir Elsa mit einem  
 Kätzchen in den Armen.  
 Eine dunkelrote Insel auf dem Bettlaken.  
 Du hast einen Kater geboren,  
 das ist unser Kind,  
 sagt sie.<sup>38</sup>

If I were a sick branch of the Buddenbrooks  
 I would be at home here,  
 in the performers' dressing room.  
 An intercourse without organs,  
 passion without a family name.  
 Two women dancing together  
 in the second postcard.  
 Elsa in a turquoise dress,

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also initially considered male by some observers, suggesting a gender-neutral performance. Therefore, I use ‘singular they’ to refer to them as a non-binary character.

<sup>38</sup> Tawada (2016: 81-92, 90-2).

me dressed in pomegranate.  
[...] Adopt me!  
Sadly I can't do that, you little  
kitten, listen: The rights of adoption  
are reserved for a marriage  
in which the one part is registered as man  
and the other as woman.  
Then marry me!  
The kitten becomes a tomcat,  
through his snout, Chris smiles.  
The shock opens my eyes and  
I lie in bed, Elsa beside me with a  
kitten in her arms.  
A dark red island on the bedsheet.  
You gave birth to a tomcat,  
he is our child,  
she says.

This excerpt demonstrates both the intermediality and genre hybridity of the text. Intermediality is already present in the first line, where the speaker alludes to Thomas Mann's 1901 novel „Buddenbrooks“, which describes the decline of a 19<sup>th</sup> century German merchant family. The “sick branch” mentioned in the poem is probably the Buddenbrook's second son Christian, whose character flaws the speaker of „Balkonplatz“ and other characters have discussed previously.<sup>39</sup> In addition, the speaker references paintings by Jeanne Mammen: the first, “Before the Performance” (1928), the speaker had described (ekphrasis) in the immediately preceding passage of the poem; the second (reproduced on a picture postcard) features in ll. 6-9 of the excerpt.<sup>40</sup>

The passage also exemplifies the genre hybridity of “Balkonplatz”. The chain of associations in the first section of the quotation contrasts with the dialogue between speaker and cat, and the explanatory passage at the end of the excerpt. The scene of waking up still uses enjambments to enhance the strangeness of the situation and stress its lyrical quality. By contrast, the last four lines coincide with syntactic units. Thus, the end of the excerpt is stylistically similar to Tawada's prose narratives and only recognizable as poetry through the line breaks. The text is therefore a genre hybrid.

Like in “Kasa”, the speaker uses the hybridity of the text for criticism. In the excerpt, the speaker identifies with the female performers in Mammen's painting and reflects on their own pathologized (“sick branch”) identity. This may

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 68-70.

<sup>40</sup> Several paintings, including Mammen's, are included in the volume. In his description of the anglophone verse novel, Zymner (2009b: 153-154) mentions both playful intertextual references and the use of illustrations. The fact that Tawada's German verse novel conforms to this supports Zymner's thesis that the verse novel genre is transnational, translingual, and cannot be adequately analyzed by treating national literatures in isolation.

refer to the speaker's rejection of the female role, and of gender identity and sexuality as categories in general. They describe themselves in an earlier poem of the verse novel as follows: „Homo / sapiens und / Hetero- / lingual und / keine Frau, kein Mann, dafür eine / Stereoanlage: von links und rechts / möchte ich hören das Geflüster / der Hormone jeder Art.“ [“Homo / sapiens and / hetero- / lingual and / no woman, no man, but a / stereo: from left and right / I want to hear the whispers / of hormones of any kind.”]<sup>41</sup>

Alternatively, the expression “sick” may refer to the narrator's queer<sup>42</sup> relationship with Elsa. The fact that the speaker sees themselves in the shorter, black-haired woman of Mammen's “Two Women Dancing” (c. 1928), supports this reading of the sequence. As a reflection on the pathologization of queer relationships, this extract of the verse novel functions as social criticism.

The verse novel achieves this criticism through the display of one result of pathologization, which is the discrimination against non-heterosexual couples when it comes to relationship status and child rearing. In a heteronormative, phallogocentric society, women's sexuality is made invisible<sup>43</sup> – generally assumed non-existent. For most of recorded history, moreover, two women could not marry, much less have a family together. Hence, the poem describes such love as “without organs” or “a family name”. This extends into the present: until same-sex marriage became equivalent to heterosexual marriage in Germany in 2017, homosexual couples could not be married in the literal sense, and were thus unable to adopt a child together.<sup>44</sup> The speaker's rejection of the kitten's request to adopt him points to this fact.

Moreover, the poem also calls attention to the pressure to conform to heteronormativity, and mocks the patriarchal family model. In the beginning of the poem, the speaker's male lover Chris is about to move to another city when he (apparently) transforms into a tomcat. This cat reappears in the quoted section. When the cat demands that the speaker marry it/him, this causes sudden horror: the male lover threatens to re-absorb the queer speaker into the heteronormative family system. As a form of poetic resistance, the poem presents the fantastic idea of adopting him as a pet. This mockery, and the criticism of heteronormative society and its thought patterns, reaches its maximum with the idea of the speaker giving birth to the kitten (the male figure is thus twice demoted from its hegemonial position, as infant and as animal). In other words, the poetic image-

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<sup>41</sup> Tawada (2016: 54).

<sup>42</sup> Since the speaker does not identify as cis-female, I decided to avoid the terms ‘lesbian’ or ‘homosexual’ to describe the speaker's relationship with Elsa, and use ‘queer’ instead; but to observers they would probably appear as lesbian.

<sup>43</sup> Irigaray (1979: 22-26). Although the speaker does not seem to identify as a cis-woman, they have female body and would therefore be read as a lesbian couple when in public with Elsa.

<sup>44</sup> Ambros (ed.).



ry serves the purpose of social criticism (which is more commonly expressed in prose) in this hybrid text.

*In the “Orange Garden” between Languages*

Finally, I consider the poems „Die Orangerie“ [“The Orangery”] and 「オレンジ園にて」 [“In the Orange Garden”]. The first publication of both texts falls into the same year (1997),<sup>45</sup> and their content is near identical. Despite their differences, I want to make a case that this is not a mere self-translation, but that the two versions constitute two poetic approaches to the same in-between space.

In formal terms, the German poem is transformed in translation to create a Japanese prose poem. Whereas the German text is printed as a long poem, with six numbered parts in verse, the Japanese version’s layout is that of a prose text. In addition, the Japanese text represents wordplay that hinges on German homophones with a focus on meaning, rather than on sound, which strengthens the impression that the Japanese version is a prose translation of the German poem. However, the Japanese text retains elements of alliteration and assonance. It also focuses on the lyrical speaker’s emotive chain of associations, rather than on plot. Thus, I consider it a prose poem. Yet, the relationship between the texts is more complex than the linear “original and translation” view allows.

Both texts are hybrids in several ways. In contrast to the excerpt from „Balkonplatz“, which incorporated prosaic sections into a poetic form, the Japanese “Orange Garden” presents poetic, associative language in prose form. Thus, this Japanese version also is a hybrid, but of a different type, of poetry and prose. In addition, both versions of the text are language hybrids: they performatively connect the cultural spheres of Europe and Asia that they portray through mixing features of German and Japanese syntactic styles. Here is the beginning of first the German, then the Japanese version, with my translations.

Woher kenne ich diese Farbe?  
 An einem Dezembertag  
 Nach einer Reise durch Südostasien  
 Als ich wieder nach Hamburg kam  
 Vor meinem Fenster  
 Die Straße, eine durch Schnee korrigierte Linie  
 Die lange Nacht kam mit pfeifenden Schiffen  
 Und dann sah ich  
 Den Müllwagen  
 Mit drei Männern auf dem Rücken

<sup>45</sup> The first publication of the 1997 collection “But the Mandarins Must Be Robbed Tonight” („Aber die Mandarinern müssen heute abend noch geraubt werden“) contains the German version, whereas the Japanese appeared first in the August 1997 edition of the magazine “Voyage of Discovery” (大航海) before its inclusion in the 1998 prose collection “Fox-moon-possession“ (『きつね月』).

Ihre Uniform hatte genau die gleiche Farbe  
Wie das Mönchsgewand in Thailand<sup>46</sup>

How do I know this colour?  
One day in December  
After a journey through South-East Asia  
When I came back to Hamburg  
In front of my window  
The street, a line corrected by snow  
The long night came with whistling ships  
And then I saw  
The garbage truck  
With three men on its back  
Their uniform had exactly the same colour  
As the monk's robe in Thailand

この色、どこかで見たことある、と思ったのは、十二月のある日、東南アジアから、ハンブルクにもどって、机、窓、そのすぐ前の遊歩道は、雪に軌道を修正されて、その向こうの花壇の、そのまた向こうのエルベ川の、向こう岸で、なかなか明けない冬の夜、船の汽笛に貫かれる灰色の午前に見た、廃品回収車、背中に三人の男たちを乗せている、かれらの制服は、タイの僧衣と同じ色をしていた。<sup>47</sup>

Kono iro, doko de mita koto aru, to omotta no wa, jūnigatsu no aru hi, tōnan Ajia kara, Hanburuku ni modotte, tsukue, mado, sono sugu mae no yūhodō wa, yuki ni kidō o shūsei sarete, sono mukō no kadan no, sono mata mukō no Erebe-gawa no, mukōgishi de, nakanaka akenai fuyu no yoru, fune no kiteki ni tsuranukareru haiiro no gozen ni mita, haihin kaishū sha, senaka ni sannin no otoko-tachi o nosete iru, kare-ra no seifuku wa, Tai no sōi to onaji iro o shite ita.

This colour, I have seen it somewhere before, I thought, on a day in December, returned to Hamburg from Southeast Asia, the desk, the window, the sidewalk directly in front of it, [its] orbit corrected by the snow, opposite the flower bed, opposite the river Elbe, on the opposite shore, [in] the winter night refusing dawn, in the ash-coloured morning pierced by the steam pipes of the ships, I saw a garbage truck that had three men riding on its back, their clothes the same colour as Thai monk's robes.

Both texts are alienating translations in the tradition of Walter Benjamin, who is an important influence on Tawada's stance on translation.<sup>48</sup> With their sound and rhythm rather than their words, they imitate the 'style' of the other language. An unusual sentence structure, which imitates Japanese syntax, characterizes the German version. In addition, sentences are incomplete, creating a fragmented stream of images. Whereas the Japanese text follows the German line-by-line, the sentence structure appears more natural in this version. Tawada strengthens this effect by supplying verbs and creating grammatically complete sentences.

<sup>46</sup> Tawada (1997: 29-39, 29).

<sup>47</sup> Tawada (1998: 188).

<sup>48</sup> Benjamin (1972: 18). For Tawada's references to Benjamin's "The Task of the Translator", cf. Pogatschnigg (2004: 47-48), Tobias (2015: 177-178).

However, while the Japanese prose layout eliminates the ‘look’ of poetry, grammatically unnecessary commas mark German parts-of-speech and line breaks. These interruptions of the flow of the sentence create an unusual rhythm, reminiscent of the stress-rhythm of German. To sum up, the German version exhibits Japanese-style sentence patterns, and the Japanese version a German-style rhythm. Thus, both versions are language hybrids.

Considering that these texts were published in close succession, it is highly likely that they influenced each other, perhaps even that they were written in parallel.<sup>49</sup> In any case, they qualify as hybrids of language, of genre, and of original and translation. Thus, the poems function as a „Bindeglied zwischen unterschiedlichen Kulturräumen“ [“link between different cultural spaces”].<sup>50</sup> They represent a ‘Third Space’ of cultural translation, and a place of meeting for the marginal(ized). The orangery/ orange garden functions as such an in-between space that links Asia and Europa, where Thai monks and German garbage men come together.

### *Closing Remarks*

In the same manner, the texts discussed here are themselves in-between spaces: As poetic orangeries, they are hybrid spaces that link languages and genres. The four poems I have discussed illustrate how Tawada’s work is an impressive example of multi-faceted, multi-transitory writing. Her dissertation advisor Prof. Sigrid Weigel notes:

[...] dass in ihrem Schreiben die Übergänge zwischen Poesie und Theorie fließend sind, dass beide sich gegenseitig befeuern – ähnlich jener Funken, die sie aus dem Zusammentreffen verschiedener Kulturen, verschiedener Sprachen und Schriftsysteme schlägt.<sup>51</sup>

[...] in [Tawada’s] writing, the transitions between poetry and theory are fluid, [they] both inspire the other – similar to the sparks she strikes from the encounter of different cultures, different languages and systems of writing.

In this way, Tawada’s texts express the mode of living of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, where global migration and global capitalism have destabilized many of the borders once used to make sense of human experiences. Her hybrid poetry performs the mixing of languages and cultures that occurs today, but it also points to issues

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<sup>49</sup> I have asked Tawada about the order of writing, but she stated only that she had different ways of translating and adapting texts from one language to another, and did not elaborate on the chronology.

<sup>50</sup> Bergmann (2016: 665).

<sup>51</sup> See Weigel’s essay “Searching for the Email for Japanese Ghosts. Yoko Tawada’s Poetics at the Transition Point of Different Writing Systems” („Suche nach dem E-mail für japanische Geister. Yoko Tawadas Poetik am Übergang differenter Schriftsysteme“; in “Foreign Waters” / “Fremde Wasser”, the collection of Tawada’s guest lectures at Hamburg and various scholarly comments, edited by Ortrud Gutjahr), Weigel (2012: 129).

that persist and need addressing. She calls out gender discrimination, heteronormativity and homophobia in the verse novels, and addresses differences in custom and religion in the orangery poems. In doing so, Tawada disrupts the usual patterns of thought and points to the transitory, the hybrid, and the ‘Third Space’ as a middle ground, where discourses can merge and meaning be created anew. If her readers accept the invitation, and step through the gap in(to) the dictionary, they may find a new perspective on their culture and society in the in-between.

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## **Internationale Zeitschrift für Kulturkomparatistik**

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### **Gedichte zwischen lyrischer Poesie und diskursiver Prosa? Zum Beispiel Monika Rinck**

*Poems between Lyric Poetry and Discursive Prose. The Example of Monika Rinck*

This contribution examines the question of how contemporary lyric poetry expands upon established generic concepts by considering the work of Monika Rinck, one of the most striking voices among a generation of exceedingly talented poets who made their debut in the 2000s. In her poetry, we find numerous examples of how the expectations of lyric are deliberately undermined: among them, formal features reminiscent of prose, such as her tendency to use extremely long lines and prose-typical abbreviations, as well as her explicit interest in the discursive exploration of ‘concepts.’ As her essays suggest, this interest manifests itself most readily in Rinck’s efforts to avoid the totalizing economization of society (as well as art and language) and has, as a result, motivated the development of her own style within experimental language poetry. However, while Rinck has played a leading role in expanding the contemporary concept of poetry, the poetic principles to which she refers in her theoretical writings and poems are by no means new. In this article, her poem „Augenfühlerfisch“ (“eye-tentacle fish”) serves not only to illustrate her tendency to expand poetry into discursive prose but demonstrates how it is rooted in a long-standing philosophical tradition. The terminology used in the poem can be traced back to early modern epistemology and particularly to the foundation of scientific aesthetics by Alexander Gottlieb Baumgarten. In referring to Baumgarten’s definition of poetry as “fully sensuous speech” [„vollkommen sinnliche Rede“] (as well as the specific deployment of this definition by Johann Adolf Schlegel), it becomes clear that Rinck reactivates an epistemological potential in lyric that had been hidden by the paradigm of *Erlebnislyrik* [experiential lyric]. Moreover, Rinck is able to relax the *Erlebnislyrik*’s pretense to sincerity in part thanks to the same prose features, such as the multiplication of voices, already mentioned above.

*Keywords: Monika Rinck, prose, lyric poetry, sensual knowledge / sensuous knowledge*

Kann man heute von einer Renaissance der Lyriktheorie sprechen? Die Voraussetzung für eine solche Aussage wäre meines Erachtens, dass ein Bewusstsein bezüglich der Ausdrucksmöglichkeiten dieser Gattung – insbesondere der Möglichkeiten von spezifischen Ausdrucksformen und Haltungen der Lyrik gegenüber der Wirklichkeit und der Sprache – in weiteren Kreisen der Literaturwissenschaft und -kritik entstanden ist. Immerhin gibt es Anzeichen einer Dynamisierung der Lyriktheorie. Ihre Intensivierung wird greifbar in Forschungsverbänden und -projekten,<sup>1</sup> in der Profilierung der Lyrik gegenüber anderen ‚Makrogattungen‘ wie Drama und Erzählen,<sup>2</sup> im produktiven Hinterfragen des Verskriteriums,<sup>3</sup> in der Untersuchung von performativen,<sup>4</sup> medialen<sup>5</sup> und öffentlichkeitswirksamen Praktiken der Lyrik und nicht zuletzt in der kritischen Diskussion des Fiktionalitätskriteriums<sup>6</sup>. Solche Entwicklungen stehen im größeren Zusammenhang einer neuen Wertschätzung der Gattung Lyrik überhaupt, die sich medienwirksam in hochdotierten Literaturpreisen niederschlägt (z.B. Büchner-Preis 2020 für Elke Erb und 2017 für Jan Wagner). Als weiteren Beleg hierfür kann man zudem ein gewachsenes Selbstbewusstsein von Lyrikerinnen und Lyrikern nennen. In Selbstkommentaren legen sie den Eindruck einer neuen Blütezeit der Lyrik nahe. Für die deutschsprachige Lyrik sei diesbezüglich Steffen Popp aus seiner Anthologie „Spitzen“ zitiert:

Seit Ende der 1990er Jahre ist eine spannende, produktive und *en passant* diverse Grenzen sprengende Entwicklung im Gang, die das Verständnis davon, was alles

<sup>1</sup> Vgl. bspw. das DFG-Netzwerk „Lyrikologie. Konturen eines Forschungsfeldes“ (2016-2019), [https://www.glw.uni-jena.de/Netzwerk+\\_Lyrikologie+\\_Konturen+eines+Forschungsfeldes\\_.html](https://www.glw.uni-jena.de/Netzwerk+_Lyrikologie+_Konturen+eines+Forschungsfeldes_.html) [04.09.2019]; aber insbesondere das „International Network for the Study of Lyric“, <http://www.lyricology.org> [04.09.2019], sowie das vom SNF-finanzierte Sinergia-Projekt für ein internationales Glossar der Lyriktheorie (vgl. „Critical Online Compendium of Lyric Poetry“). Ebenso die DFG-Kollegforschungsgruppe FOR 2603 „Russischsprachige Lyrik in Transition – Poetische Formen des Umgangs mit Grenzen der Gattung, Sprache, Kultur und Gesellschaft zwischen Europa, Asien und Amerika“ (2017-2021). <https://lyrik-in-transition.uni-trier.de/> [04.09.2019], in deren Forschungskontext und mit deren Unterstützung dieser Beitrag entstanden ist.

<sup>2</sup> Hillebrandt et al. (2017), Hempfer (2014), Culler (2015).

<sup>3</sup> Zymner (2009: 59-72). Verskriterium im Sinne eines notwendigen Merkmals der Gattung, mit entsprechenden Herausforderungen für die Definition der Gattung.

<sup>4</sup> Novak (2011), Bers / Trilcke (2017).

<sup>5</sup> Benthien et al. (2019: 113-145).

<sup>6</sup> Vgl. die Beiträge in Hillebrandt et al. (2019).



ein Gedicht sein kann und was im poetischen Text möglich ist, gründlich verändert hat – und die vermutlich auch noch lange nicht abgeschlossen ist.<sup>7</sup>

Nun ist das Erkennen von Blütezeiten, oder überhaupt das Ermitteln von literarhistorischen Perioden und Dichtergenerationen, aus der Sicht der Germanistik ein eher schwieriges und umstrittenes Geschäft.<sup>8</sup> Bei Pops hoffnungsvollen Aussagen über die Gegenwartsliteratur kommt die Problematik einer mangelnden Distanz hinzu, nicht nur in historischer Hinsicht. Er schreibt sein zitiertes Urteil über die eigene Generation von Autorinnen und Autoren. Gemeinsam mit Ann Cotten, Daniel Falb, Hendrik Jackson und Monika Rinck, die prominent in Pops Anthologie vertreten sind, hat Popp beispielsweise ein umfangreiches Theorie-Traktat mit dem Titel „Helm aus Phlox“<sup>9</sup> verfasst. In seiner Monografie „Poetisch denken“<sup>10</sup> hat Christian Metz Popp sowie auch Cotten und Rinck als exemplarische Vertreterinnen und Vertreter der neuen Generation der Poesie behandelt. Popp schreibt also (auch wenn er seine eigenen Gedichte nicht im Band „Spitzen“ aufgenommen hat) *pro domo*, und es gilt diese Selbstaussagen mit der nötigen Vorsicht zu behandeln, selbst wenn eine Blütezeit der Lyrik auch für die Lyrikologie zweifellos günstig kommt.

Betrachtet man die Autorinnen und Autoren, die sich in den frühen 2000er-Jahren erstmals mit Gedichtpublikationen gemeldet haben, dann ergibt sich tatsächlich eine eindruckliche Reihe. Dieser Reihe können, abgesehen von den bereits genannten, weitere Lyrikerinnen und Lyriker hinzugefügt werden: etwa Nico Bleutge (\*1972, erster Gedichtband 2006), Marion Poschmann (\*1969, erster Gedichtband 2002), Sabine Scho (\*1970, erster Gedichtband 2001), Silke Scheuermann (\*1973, erster Lyrikband 2001), Jan Wagner (\*1971, erster Gedichtband 2001), Uljana Wolf (\*1979, Debüt-Band 2005), Nora Gomringer (\*1980, erste Verlagspublikation 2002). Wie man in Michael Brauns Übersicht, der schon 2006 den Puls dieser Gruppe gefühlt hat, nachlesen kann, ist diese Generation keineswegs von einer homogenen Lyrikproduktion geprägt. Nicht zuletzt zeichnet sie sich durch Abgrenzungen und Koalitionen aus.<sup>11</sup> Und doch verbindet diese Generation die von Popp ausgewiesene Zielrichtung, das Verständnis auszuweiten, „was alles ein Gedicht sein kann“.<sup>12</sup> Diese Ausweitung nutzt Strategien wie Gattungshybridisierung, die beispielsweise die Abgrenzung

<sup>7</sup> Popp (2018: 6).

<sup>8</sup> Was nicht ausschließt, dass Epochenbegriffe von der Germanistik nicht nur eifrig verwendet werden, sondern ebenso verteidigt. Vgl. die Analyse des Begriffs ‚Epoche‘ als ‚merkmalscharakterisierter Name‘ bei Kindt (2015: 13-15).

<sup>9</sup> Cotten et al. (2011).

<sup>10</sup> Metz (2018).

<sup>11</sup> Die älteren, immer noch produktiven Generationen sind vertreten. Auffällig ist bspw. das Fehlen von Nora Gomringer im Band von Popp (2018).

<sup>12</sup> Ders., 6.

von Prosa und Lyrik herausfordern. Beispielhaft für solche Strategien ist das Werk Monika Rincks.

### *Monika Rinck*

Monika Rincks erste Gedicht-Publikationen in Zeitschriften gehen auf das Jahr 2003 zurück, 2004 folgte ihr lyrischer Debüt-Band.<sup>13</sup> Tendenziell lässt sich ihr Stil der sprachexperimentellen Linie zuordnen. So sind ihre Texte mehr an der Untersuchung von Wortmaterial als an der Präsentation kohärenter Textwelten oder der Entwicklung kühner Metaphern interessiert. Gleichzeitig zeichnen sich ihre Gedichte, wie noch zu zeigen ist, insbesondere durch eine Tendenz zur Überschreitung von Gattungsgrenzen aus.

Rinck reflektiert (mit viel Kapitalismuskritik, aber ohne elegisches Gemüt oder Klage über den Sprachzerfall) die Bedingungen von Sprache im Zeitalter der gesteigerten ökonomischen Verwertung. Der Kapitalismus vermag ja sogar die Sprachverwendungen selbst in der Form von ‚big data‘ als Ertragsquelle zu erschließen. Dabei verhält sich Rinck keineswegs ablehnend gegenüber den digitalen Medien. Rincks „Begriffsstudio“<sup>14</sup> ist ein kontinuierlich wachsendes Blog bzw. ein literarischer Nachrichtendienst, der über das Internet und per Mailversand sprachliche Trouvaillen verbreitet. Zudem war sie bei „Helm aus Phlox“ an einem poetologischen Selbsterkundungsprojekt beteiligt, bei dem die Autorschaft durch kollaborative Mitarbeit verwischt wurde.<sup>15</sup>

So ist das Werk von Monika Rinck auf eine ganz eigene Weise exemplarisch für Entwicklungen der Lyrik seit der Jahrtausendwende. Eine dieser Entwicklungen betrifft die Überschreitung der üblichen Formatierung von Gedichten. An Freie Verse hat man sich ja längst gewöhnt, immerhin sind diese Verse in der Regel als solche leicht erkennbar: linksbündig mit unregelmäßigen Längen und viel weißem Raum darum herum. Rincks Verse sind demgegenüber überraschend lang und als Verse dadurch auf den ersten Blick kaum noch zu identifizieren. So umfassen etwa die Zeilen im Gedichtband „Honigprotokolle“ zwischen vierzehn und achtzehn Silben.<sup>16</sup> Auch im Gedichtband „Helle Verwirrung“<sup>17</sup> findet sich ebendiese Verlängerung der Verse, die Texte im Band „Rincks Ding- & Tierleben“ verzichten überhaupt auf eine Versanlage.<sup>18</sup> Rincks jüngeres Werk ist insofern ein gutes Beispiel, wie das Verskriterium in Frage gestellt werden kann, indem auch das moderne Residuum des Verses, die

<sup>13</sup> Metz (2018).

<sup>14</sup> Rinck (1996ff.). „Begriffsstudio“ ist teilweise in einer Buchpublikation erschienen.

<sup>15</sup> Cotten et al. (2011).

<sup>16</sup> Rinck (2014).

<sup>17</sup> Dies. (2009a).

<sup>18</sup> Dies. (2009b).

rhythmische Gliederung der Rede, nur noch in Ansätzen vorliegt und der Vers kaum noch anhand der Linksbündigkeit wahrnehmbar ist.

„Honigprotokolle“

Monika Rincks „Honigprotokolle. Sieben Skizzen zu Gedichten, welche sehr gut sind“ haben unter ihren bisherigen Gedichtbänden vermutlich die größte Aufmerksamkeit erhalten. Metz hat sogar behauptet, dass ihr Schreiben mit diesem Band auf einem „neuen Level angekommen“<sup>19</sup> sei. Dass Titel und Untertitel rätselhaft sind, wurde bereits von Metz angemerkt: „Wie das Verhältnis zwischen Protokollen, Skizzen und Gedichten zu verstehen sein soll, bleibt unklar.“<sup>20</sup> Dabei ist der Untertitel schon insofern unklar, als man gar nicht erfährt, welche sieben Skizzen gemeint sind. Der Untertitel irritiert überhaupt durch die Selbstpreisung.<sup>21</sup> Die Formulierung „welche sehr gut sind“ ist weder im herkömmlichen Sinne poetisch, noch klingt sie wie ein eingängiger Werbeslogan. Der Werbediskurs operiert kaum mit so schwerfälligen Satzkonstruktionen und unspezifischen Wertzuschreibungen. Sogar Literaturwissenschaft und -kritik gehen in der Regel subtiler vor. Überzeugender sind die diskursiven Vorbilder der umständlichen Wertzuschreibung „welche sehr gut sind“ in den Beurteilungen im Internet zu suchen, die sich auf gängigen Verkaufsplattformen für Bücher als Para-Literaturkritik etabliert haben.

Was genau die Protokolle sein könnten, wird ebenso wenig klar, obwohl (oder auch weil) die meisten Gedichte textintern motivisch Bezug auf die „Honigprotokolle“ nehmen. Dieser Bezug wird in der Regel durch eine minimal abgewandelte Einleitungsformel hergestellt: „Hört ihr das, so höhnen Honigprotokolle“.<sup>22</sup> Syntaktisch kann die Struktur als Interrogativsatz betrachtet werden. Gegebenenfalls kann man es auch als Konditionalsatz lesen: ‚Wenn ihr das hört, dann höhnen Honigprotokolle‘. Die Frageform wird in einem Gedicht durch ein Fragezeichen bekräftigt: „Hört ihr das? So höhnen Honigprotokolle, [...]“.<sup>23</sup> Diese explizite Frageform findet sich übrigens im Gedicht „Honighohn“, das durch den deutlichen Bezug zum Haupttitel eine Sonderstellung im Band einnimmt. Das Wort „Honighohn“ zieht anschaulich die alliterierenden Lautäquivalenzen („hört“, „höhnen“, „Honig“), aber auch die antithetischen Bezüge auf die satirische

<sup>19</sup> Metz (2018: 142).

<sup>20</sup> Ders., 143f.

<sup>21</sup> Dass Selbstlob in den Titeln von Lyrikbänden störend ist, lässt sich vielleicht auch mit einem weiteren, ironischen Beleg aufzeigen, nämlich „The Beautiful Poetry of Donald Trump“, vgl. Sears (2017).

<sup>22</sup> Rinck (2014: 33). Einmal auch auf Englisch in der Übersetzung von Nicholas Grindell: „Hark! Hear how honey chronicles mock.“

<sup>23</sup> Dies., 6, V. 1.

bzw. liebeliche Dichtung („Hohn“ und „Honig“)<sup>24</sup> in einem einzigen Wort zusammen. Diese vielfältige Bezüglichkeit der Einleitungsformel erscheint in weiteren Gedichten in Variationen (die gegebenenfalls auch Fragen enthalten können):

- „Hört ihr das, so kötteln Honigprotokolle, [...]“.<sup>25</sup>
- „Das Unmögliche ist, was wollt ihr wissen? Hohn!“<sup>26</sup>
- „Das hier ist ein Protokoll für die, die in meinem Alter sind. / Das ist Honig für die *Alten*.“<sup>27</sup>
- „Der reine Hohn solventer Honigprotokolle: Hör zu, das ist die teure Zeit.“<sup>28</sup>
- „Die Honigprotokolle haben frei. Doch wir sind Riesen.“<sup>29</sup>
- „Kampfansage: Unmut in Wellen und kein Entkommen. Es folgt / Prügelei mit Protokollanten.“<sup>30</sup>
- „Zuletzt: das Protokoll der honigströmenden Quellen gewisser Gärten.“<sup>31</sup>

Und schließlich gibt es einzelne Gedichte, die eine Einleitung aufweisen, die keinen offensichtlichen Bezug zu dieser Formel haben. Zunächst wären hier die Gedichte zu erwähnen, die mit Musikbegleitung (gesetzt von Bo Wiget) versehen wurden und dadurch meines Erachtens überhaupt eine besondere Stellung einnehmen. Immerhin zeigen die liedartigen Texte, die in der Liste gar nicht aufgeführt wurden, wie „Ma dignité (Vierstimmiger Kanon)“, „Kaloagathie (Karnevalslied)“ und „Lied der undankbaren Partygäste“, „Ich leg mich hin (Vierstimmiger Kanon)“,<sup>32</sup> dass nicht unbedingt alle Texte in diesem Band als „Honigprotokolle“ verstanden werden müssen.

Einige Gedichte sehen zwar ähnlich wie die „Honigprotokolle“ aus, lassen sich aber im Eingang nicht explizit auf die „Honigprotokolle“ beziehen. Metz begründet dies damit, dass in diesen Fällen die erste Zeile wegfallt.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Als Einzelbeleg für eine anhaltende Diskussion über den Platz des Satirischen in der Dichtung sei hier auf ein programmatisch poetologisches Gedicht verwiesen, mit dem Johann Gottfried Herder (1796: 28) in Schillers Zeitschrift „Die Horen“ für das unpointierte und nicht-satirische Epigramm Position bezog und zugleich das Bienen-Motiv bediente: „Dir ist das Epigramm die kleine geschäftige Biene, / Die auf Blumen umher flieget und sauset und sticht. / Mir ist das Epigramm die kleine knospende Rose, / [...] / Laß uns beyde sie dann in Einem Garten versammeln; / Hier sind Blumen, o Freund; sende die Bienen dazu.“

<sup>25</sup> In: „Kippen“, Rinck (2014: 34, V. 1).

<sup>26</sup> In: „Das Unmögliche“, dies., 26, V. 1.

<sup>27</sup> In: „Tasche mit Fell“, dies., 39, V. 1.

<sup>28</sup> In: „Geld“, dies., 49, V. 1.

<sup>29</sup> In: „Die die die“, dies., 65, V. 1.

<sup>30</sup> In: „Fahrerlaubnis“, dies., 75, V. 1.

<sup>31</sup> In: „Honig“, dies., 76, V. 1.

<sup>32</sup> Dies., 37, 53-55, 58-61, 70.

<sup>33</sup> Metz (2018: 153). Metz erwähnt dabei explizit das Protokoll „Der Irrtum“, zählt allerdings insgesamt nur sechs Fälle, bei denen die erste Zeile entfällt, wohingegen zwölf Gedichte zu dieser Gruppe zählen würden, wie hier im Folgenden gezeigt werden soll.

- „Anfangs irgendwas mit Wittgenstein: [...]“.<sup>34</sup>
- „Andere Funktionen beobachten wir. Andre Rochaden.“<sup>35</sup>
- „*Erreur. Terreur.* Ich hab die ganze Zeit nur das Verweissystem gelöscht.“<sup>36</sup>
- „Mit dem Wagenheber läufst du mitten in die Schattenpflanzen.“<sup>37</sup>
- „Auf Kelchhöhe wittere ich einen Mandelton.“<sup>38</sup>
- „Zwergkaninchen, deine Hitzigkeit!“<sup>39</sup>
- „Denke, dass ich verwarlost bin, wo mich nur Stimmen treffen, [...]“.<sup>40</sup>
- „Oh ich linksgemachter Atlas. Ich sehe schwankend unterm Erdenball [...]“.<sup>41</sup>
- „Dealer! Die Diva wirft mit Zinngeschirr.“<sup>42</sup>
- „Ich schaue hier in irgendwelche Puppenaugen.“<sup>43</sup>
- „An der Weiche zur Epoche der Verfleißigung: Bienen, Bienen, Bienen.“<sup>44</sup>

Auch in diesen Fällen gibt es zum Teil mehr oder weniger offensichtliche lautliche oder thematische Bezüge zu den anderen Protokollen (etwa „Der Bien“, aber auch „Kelchhöhe“ und sogar „Puppenaugen“).

Die Auflistung von Gedichtanfängen mag ein bisschen pedantisch wirken, aber Rinck selbst hat in ihren Selbstaussagen anlässlich ihrer Poetikvorlesung in Münster die Durchbrechung der „Routine“, des wiederholten sprachlichen Eingangs, thematisiert.<sup>45</sup> Das Interesse für die genaue Form der Redeeinleitung ist insbesondere dadurch gerechtfertigt, dass in den „Honigprotokollen“ eine Unklarheit besteht, wer welche Worte an wen richtet. Rinck führt dazu aus:

Eine Stimme möchte sich der Aufmerksamkeit des Publikums versichern: „Hört ihr das?“ – aber vielleicht möchte sie auch herausfinden, ob das, was zu hören ist, sich wirklich außerhalb ihres eignen Kopfes befindet. Und, falls keine Antwort kommt, ob überhaupt ein Publikum anwesend ist. Es wird ein vages Kollektiv adressiert, und zwar mit einer gewissen Distanzlosigkeit, denn es wird offensicht-

<sup>34</sup> In: „Berg“, Rinck (2014: 25, V. 1).

<sup>35</sup> In: „Freundschaft“, dies., 35, V. 1.

<sup>36</sup> In: „Der Irrtum“, dies., 38, V. 1.

<sup>37</sup> In: „Schattenpflanzen“, dies., 67, V. 1.

<sup>38</sup> In: „Haydn“, dies., 68, V. 1.

<sup>39</sup> In: „Pappeln“, dies., 69, V. 1.

<sup>40</sup> In: „Alleine weinen“, dies., 70, V. 1.

<sup>41</sup> In: „Atlas“, dies., 71, V. 1.

<sup>42</sup> In: „Diva und Dealer“, dies., 72, V. 1.

<sup>43</sup> In: „Falle“, dies., 73, V. 1.

<sup>44</sup> In: „Der Bien [sic]“, dies., 74, V. 1.

<sup>45</sup> Dies. (2019a: 29).

lich nicht gesiezt. Handelt es sich dabei um die Leserler [sic]<sup>46</sup> oder um ein fiktionales Kollektiv, das den Binnenraum des Gedichtes nicht verlässt?<sup>47</sup>

Das entsprechende Kapitel ist in der Publikation der Poetikvorlesung mit dem bedeutungsreichen Titel „Ansprache“ überschrieben. Die Frage der Formulierung führt nicht zuletzt tief in die Frage der Instanzen eines Gedichts bzw. der Gedichte von den „Honigprotokollen“:

Im strengen Sinn setzt Ansprache eine körperliche Präsenz voraus – oder spielt zumindest auf metaphorische oder metonymische Weise auf sie an. Ansprechbarkeit ist situativ. So entstehen Appelle, aber auch Geschmacksurteile: „Das spricht mich nicht an“, lautet eine recht herkömmliche Einschätzung auf ästhetischem Terrain.<sup>48</sup>

Das intrikate Verhältnis von Anrede und Aussprache stellt eine Herausforderung für sich dar. In dieser Hinsicht ist es sinnvoll mit William Waters die Adressanten (die durch Pronomen im Gedicht Angesprochenen) und die eigentlich intendierten Empfänger der Aussage („target“) in Erinnerung zu rufen.<sup>49</sup> Die vagen Beziehungen zwischen Adressanten und Adressaten sind aber nicht die einzige Herausforderung, wie das folgende Beispiel zeigt:

Hört ihr das, so höhnen Honigprotokolle, es ist ja nicht gesagt, dass das Klare stets hell, sich mit Deutungswucht verdunkeln ebensogut auch könnte, ohne Einbuße an: was einmal klar. Wie es für Fische ist. Die den Unterschied sehen, aber nicht aussagen können. Bspw. für den Augenföhlerfisch, der blind für den eigenen Nuppsi ist. Aber wer ist das unter uns nicht? Wobei beim Augenföhlerfisch der Nuppsi unblind für den Fisch. Er nutzt das Außenaug, um genau zu unterscheiden, was klar zwar, aber dunkel, und was dunkel zwar, aber zudem unklar ist. Mit seinem Augenarm, dem angebauten Teleskop, ist ihm das klar. Schau, ein als veralgter Stein getarnter Augenföhlerfisch. In irrer, viel zu heller Beleuchtung. Mit diesem Auge sieht er nur Dunkles, mit dem anderen Auge sich selbst, wenn er hell ist. Mit beiden sieht er das Klare im Dunkeln aufflackern, aber da er getarnt ist, sieht er sich nicht. Und noch was: Das Wasser dürfte nicht brennen.<sup>50</sup>

Das Gedicht der „Augenföhlerfisch“, dem im Band eine englische Übersetzung von Nicholas Grindell beigelegt wurde, folgt im engeren Sinne dem Modell der „Honigprotokolle“. Auch hier sind die Verhältnisse zwischen Adressanten und Adressaten nicht eindeutig gesichert. Es entsteht eingangs der Eindruck, dass die

<sup>46</sup> Dies. (2019b: 10, Fußnote). Die ungewohnten „ler / lar“-Endungen sind Rincks Variante inklusiver Sprache und stützen sich auf türkische Wortbildung.

<sup>47</sup> Dies. (2019a: 29).

<sup>48</sup> Dies., 30.

<sup>49</sup> Waters (2003: 19, Anm. 2). Paradebeispiel wäre Goethes „Prometheus“, denn die Existenz des angesprochenen Zeus ist in diesem Fall sogar zweifelhaft (kein göttliches Zeichen straft die aufmüpfige Rede), womit die Frage aufgeworfen ist, an wen sich die Rede tatsächlich richtet.

<sup>50</sup> Rinck (2014: 32).

„Honigprotokolle“ der Adressant sind, aber die *inquit*-Formel „so höhnen...“ verweist auf die Präsenz einer weiteren Stimme. Neben der Anrede an die zweite Person Plural („Hört ihr das“, V. 1) findet sich auch die bemerkenswerte Aufforderung „Schau“ an einen individuellen Adressaten (V. 11). Die Verszeilen weisen die charakteristische Überlänge der „Honigprotokolle“ auf und zählen zwischen vierzehn (V. 2) und achtzehn Silben (V. 5), wobei die Zählung im fünften Vers voraussetzt, dass man die ‚unlyrische‘ Abkürzung „bspw.“ ausspricht, wie dies Rinck übrigens auch in einer Aufnahme ihrer Lesung tut.<sup>51</sup> Mit ‚Abkürzung‘ sind hier nicht die vertrauten Lizenzen des lyrischen Ausdrucks gemeint, Laute auszulassen wie Apokope oder Elision, sondern konventionelle Abbrüchungen der prosatypischen Zeichenökonomie wie ‚usw.‘ oder ‚z.B.‘. Wenn Abkürzungen in der Lyrik vorkommen, dann sind sie dort nicht nur aufgrund ihrer Seltenheit auffällig, sie heben auch die Differenz von Schriftbild und Laut hervor. Ein ‚klassisches‘ Beispiel ist Morgensterns „Zwei Trichter“: Dort reimt sich die abschließende Abkürzung „u.s.w.“ nur bei Aktualisierung des abgekürzten Texts auf „heiter“, macht aber den verengten Trichterschacht im Schriftbild des Gedichts sichtbar.<sup>52</sup> Im Titel von Thomas Klings Gedicht „ratinghof, zettbeh“ wird der Gegensatz von Abkürzung und Lautbestand sichtbar gemacht.<sup>53</sup> Solche metrischen oder graphemischen Funktionen sind allerdings in Rincks Gedicht nicht ersichtlich. Allenfalls bewirkt die Abkürzung „bspw.“, dass die Überlänge des Verses nicht anhand der gedruckten Zeichen auffällt. Diese ästhetische Einstellung zum Raum ist aber kaum von der pragmatischen Zeichenökonomie der Gebrauchsprosa zu unterscheiden. Immerhin legt „bspw.“ also nahe, dass die sichtbare Länge der Zeilen nicht völlig außer Acht gelassen wurde. Und es gibt weitere Hinweise, dass die Zeilen nicht nur dann enden, wenn sie aufgrund des Seitenspiegels sowieso hätten gebrochen werden müssen. Zwar variiert die Zeilenlänge, aber der optische Eindruck bestätigt, dass die Zeilen gefüllt werden – anders als in der Prosa, wo beispielsweise die letzte Zeile eines Abschnitts im Verhältnis zu den vorangegangenen Zeilen charakteristisch verkürzt ist. Zudem werden die Umbrüche teilweise für lautliche und semantische Effekte genutzt. Das wird deutlich, wenn die Fügung „klar / zwar“ durch ein Enjambement getrennt wird (V. 8f.) oder das auffällige Adjektiv „klar“ zuverlässig am Versende erscheint (V. 3, V. 8, V. 10).

Die auffälligsten Eigenheiten des Texts finden sich vielleicht in der Wortwahl und in den lautlichen Äquivalenzen. Die Wortwahl hebt kein hohes Register an. Über das „Dunkle“ wird gesprochen, ohne beispielsweise die rhetorisch-gelehrte *obscuritas* zu bemühen. Das „Dunkle“ und das „Klare“ beziehen sich auf Eigenschaften von Sachverhalten und sind in diesem Sinne sogar etwas konkreter als

<sup>51</sup> Vgl. die Lesung des Gedichts auf „Lyrikline“: Monika Rinck: „Augenföhlerfisch“. <https://www.lyrikline.org/de/gedichte/augenfoehlerfisch-8150> [25.05.2019].

<sup>52</sup> „Das ästhetische Wiesel“, vgl. Morgenstern (1972: 41).

<sup>53</sup> Vgl. „ratinghof, zettbeh (3)“, Kling (2015: 9f.).

die Abstrakta „Dunkelheit“ oder „Klarheit“. Trotzdem, der Text ist nicht wirklich leicht verständlich. Verständnisprobleme bereiten etwa die Komposita „Augenfühlerfisch“ oder „Augenarm“. „Augenfühler“ klingt wie eine synästhetische Verrücktheit, aber der Ausdruck wird tatsächlich zur Beschreibung der Sinnesorgane von Schnecken verwendet. Zwar gibt es meines Wissens keinen Augenfühlerfisch, aber immerhin ist ein Mischwesen von Schnecke und Fisch denkbar. Das Gedicht bietet zudem Ausdrücke, die umgangssprachlich dialektal markiert sind. „Nuppsi“ (V. 6 und 7) ist insofern ein rares Wort in der Lyrik, als es schon der Form nach der familiären Alltagssprache entlehnt und – zumindest für einen Sprecher südlicher Varietäten des Deutschen wie mich – nicht unmittelbar verständlich ist, kurz: ein Regionalismus. In volksetymologischer Hinsicht gibt es Quellen, die „Nuppsi“ als Bezeichnung für nicht näher zu bezeichnende, weiche Ausbuchtungen oder Noppen betrachten.<sup>54</sup> Die größte Herausforderung bieten aber vermutlich die paradoxalen Aussagen, mit denen über eine Voraussetzung jeglichen Verständnisses, genauer das ‚Klare / Dunkle‘ gesprochen wird. Der zweite Vers legt nahe, dass „Deutungswucht“ (V. 2) als Kraft der ‚Verdunkelung‘ ins Spiel kommt – und eine Reflexion über unser eigenes sprachliches Handeln als Interpretieren ist hier naheliegend. Vers zwei könnte man als eine kaum verschlüsselte Warnung verstehen, dieses Gedicht überhaupt zu interpretieren; davon wollen wir uns aber – zumindest vorerst – nicht abschrecken lassen. Die gewählten Ausdrücke sind an sich nicht einmal schwierig; aber unklar bleibt, was sie im Kontext des Gedichts bedeuten. Was ist darunter zu verstehen, dass „der Nuppsi unblind für den Fisch“ (V. 7) ist? Wenn der „Nuppsi“ das Auge eines sich selbst wahrnehmenden Fisches bezeichnet, dann ist immerhin nachvollziehbar, warum der Fisch sein Auge nicht sehen kann, ein Auge am Ende eines Fühlers aber den Fisch sehen könnte. Nur: Was soll das Ganze? Eine These vorweg: In dem Gedicht geht es nur vordergründig um einen fantastischen Fisch.

### *Prosa vs. Lyrik als Prinzip*

Es mag ja typisch für Lyrik sein, dass eine kohärente Lesart des Gedichts nicht ohne Weiteres hergestellt werden kann. Allerdings zeigen sich verschiedene Marker des Prosaischen, die, wie die unelegante Abkürzung „bspw.“, sogar an pragmatische Textsorten erinnern. Eine größere Affinität zur Prosa zeigt sich auch schon in früheren Werken von Rinck. Das kleine Heft „neues von der phasenfront“ wird als „theoriecomic“ ausgegeben, der sich mit der „unproduktiven

<sup>54</sup> „Das kleine Ding“. <https://www.srf.ch/sendungen/schwiiz-und-duetlich/das-kleine-ding?fbclid=IwAR0BIWXAPvas8UFgICSeZNY9xZHmrXYUuQIDMpIDI73v1RD4EypmEQE40vE> [04.09.2019]. Die Tatsache, dass ein nunmehr zu poetischen Ehren gekommenes Wort wie „Nuppsi“ nicht gründlich nachgeschlagen werden kann, lässt tief in die normative Konzeption der Wörterbücher (auch der Varietäten) blicken. Daher mein besonderer Dank an das Recherche-team von SRF-„Schnabelweid“.



Phase“ beschäftigt und sich gemäß Klappentext an diejenigen richtet, „die sich selbst Chef/in und Angestellte sind“<sup>55</sup>. Das Buch ist aber kein Ratgeber, eher eine spielerische (wenn man will: produktive) Auseinandersetzung mit Kreativität. Auch „Rincks Ding- & Tierleben“<sup>56</sup> besteht hauptsächlich aus einer Skizze und einem Text im Blocksatz, der sich inhaltlich teilweise auf Texte in den Skizzen bezieht. Noch stärker als in „neues von der phasenfront“ wird hier das Illustrationsverhältnis zwischen Bild und Text insofern untergraben, als der Text nicht nur mit poetischer Freiheit Aussagen über eine dazugehörige Skizze anführt, sondern der Text das angeschlagene Thema poetisch fortführt, wie zum Beispiel in „*quallen im kommen*“:

das war die kommende qualle. das war die *qualia*. *qualia* figuriert hier als phänomenologen-vorname. das heißt, es sind phänomenologen, die ihn geben, und ihre kinder, die ihn bekommen. Damit kann man sie dann ein lebtage herbeirufen, ohne zu wissen, wie sich das für die herbeigerufenen anfühlt. dennoch folgt auf den ruf häufig das herkommen. das bedeutet, es gibt etwas, das funktioniert.<sup>57</sup>

Der Text ist in diesem Fall im Querformat in prosaischer Form gedruckt. Trennungen gibt es bei diesem Layout keine. Daher finden sich auch keine belastbaren Hinweise, dass Anfang und Ende der Zeilen in einer spezifischen Weise vorgesehen sind (allerdings finden sich bei den Texten, die im Hochformat gesetzt sind, nur Trennungen, die bedeutungstragende Einheiten markieren). Die Satzkonstruktionen erinnern an einfache Thema-Rhema-Strukturen, das heißt, eine bekannte Information wird durch eine neue Information ergänzt: „das war die *qualia*. *qualia* figuriert hier als phänomenologen-vorname“. Zudem werden präzisierende Satzeinleitungen verwendet wie „das heißt“ oder „das bedeutet“. Der Text ahmt die Form eines argumentativen Texts nach, der Inhalt ist aber lautlich-assoziativ aufgebaut. Anstatt von ‚kommenden Qualen‘ ist die Rede von ‚kommenden Quallen‘ und dann von dem philosophischen Begriff der ‚Qualia‘ – dem subjektiven Gehalt von Erfahrungen. Wenn im Text die Frage aufgeworfen wird, wie sich das ‚herbeirufen‘ für die ‚herbeigerufenen anfühlt‘, dann wird auch inhaltlich Bezug genommen auf die phänomenologische Qualia-Debatte über subjektive Erlebnisgehalte.

„Rincks Ding- & Tierleben“<sup>58</sup> belegt ein anhaltendes poetisches Interesse für Stil und Register von prosaformatierten Texten. Die Strategien prosaischer Argumentation werden nachgeahmt und dabei zugleich subvertiert. Der Versuch, den Text einem tieferen Verständnis zuzuführen, stößt einerseits auf vertraute Marker von Kohärenz und kausaler Erklärung, andererseits auf Widerstände, da die Zusammenhänge eher im Stil der Lyrik durch lautliche Beziehungen und assoziative Verknüpfungen hergestellt werden.

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<sup>55</sup> Rinck (1998).

<sup>56</sup> Dies. (2009b).

<sup>57</sup> Dies., 27.

<sup>58</sup> Vgl. dies. (2009b).

*Lyrische Prinzipien*

In einem gewissen Sinn entwickeln Rincks Texte auf diese Weise eine doppelte Teilhabe am Stil der Prosa und der Lyrik. Wie das Beispiel von „kommende[n] Quallen“<sup>59</sup> zeigt, sind die Texte insbesondere durch lautliche Anspielungen geprägt: etwa das Wortspiel „Quallen“ auf „Qualen“ (in absentia) oder auf „Qualia“ (in praesentia). Dass Rinck bei semantischen Assoziationen gern auf die Erkenntnistheorie zurückgreift, ist im Übrigen auch aufschlussreich für das Gedicht „Augenfühlerfisch“. Der Bezug zur Erkenntnistheorie ergibt sich dort oberflächlich aus der Rede über das Sehen, insbesondere aus der Art und Weise, wie das „Außenaugen“ verwendet werden kann, „um genau zu unterscheiden, was klar / zwar, aber dunkel, und was dunkel zwar, aber zudem unklar ist.“ Rincks Wortwahl ist an dieser Stelle in einem großen Ausmaß der historischen Erkenntnistheorie entlehnt. In ähnlicher Weise unterscheidet die Leibniz-Wolffsche Philosophie Erkenntnis- und Vorstellungsqualitäten. Die Typologie von „dunklen“ bzw. „verworrenen“ und „klaren“ bzw. „deutlichen“ Vorstellungen oder Gedanken findet sich in vielen Abhandlungen wieder, unter anderem in Baumgartens „Metaphysik“:

§ 522 Ich stelle mir bestimmte Dinge so vor, daß einige ihrer Merkmale klar, andere dunkel sind. Eine Vorstellung [perceptio] dieser Art ist, soweit sie klare Merkmale hat, deutlich soweit sie dunkle hat, sinnlich [sensitiva]. Und so diejenige Vorstellung deutlich, der etwas Verworrenheit und Dunkelheit beigemischt ist, diejenige sinnlich, der etwas Deutlichkeit innewohnt.<sup>60</sup>

Baumgartens Theorie ist insofern von Interesse, als sich nicht nur ein Bezug zur Erkenntnistheorie, sondern auch zur Theorie der Ästhetik – und zwar im Moment ihrer Grundlegung – ergibt. Aus der Sicht eines rationalen Konzepts von Erkenntnis, das nach Klarheit und Deutlichkeit strebt, könnten Vorstellungen, die (noch) dunkel und verworren sind, als unzureichend erscheinen. Mit Baumgartens Überlegungen kann man Vorstellungen, die nicht deutlich sind, insofern etwas abgewinnen, als ihnen eine höhere Sinnlichkeit oder ‚Sensitivität‘ zukommt.

Angesichts der zentralen Position von Baumgarten für die Theorie der Ästhetik erübrigt sich eigentlich der Nachweis, dass Monika Rinck die Bezüge zur früh-aufklärerischen Ästhetik kennt. Es wird aber auch nicht überraschen, dass im poetologischen Traktat „Ein Helm aus Phlox“, an dem Rinck mitgewirkt hat, auf die Baumgartensche „Ästhetik“ Bezug genommen wird. Schon im dritten Abschnitt wird Baumgartens „Ästhetik“ unter direktem Bezug auf Leibniz’

<sup>59</sup> Dies., 27.

<sup>60</sup> Baumgarten (1983b: 11). „Repraesento mihi quaedam ita, ut aliqui eorum characteri clari sint, aliqui obscuri. Eiusmodi perceptio, qua notas claras, distinctas est, qua obscuras sensitiva (§ 521). Hinc est distincta, cui aliquid admixtum est confusionis et obscuritatis, et sensitiva, cui aliquid distinctionis inest.“

„Schema der Erkenntnisstufen“ behandelt.<sup>61</sup> Und offenbar hat diese Theorie ästhetischer Erkenntnis auch im 21. Jahrhundert noch etwas zu sagen – ich zitiere die Schlussfolgerung ohne die umfangreiche Rekonstruktion der frühaufklärerischen Prämissen:

Man findet also bei Baumgarten ein Paradigma der Fülle und Komplexität der sensitiven Vorstellungen zur Bestimmung der Poetizität des Gedichts, das aber zwei entscheidenden Beschränkungen unterliegt: [...]. Dichtung wird demnach zwar als Form des Denkens zugelassen, aber sie wird als wesentlich *begriffsloses* Denken gefasst. Das ist grundsätzlich in Ordnung, ist doch Denken zunächst nichts anderes als Prozessieren: Das Gedicht ist dann eben eine Prozedur sensitiver Vorstellung. Aber wir haben den Verdacht, dass auf dem Wege dieser Beschränkung doch etwas auseinandergerissen wird, was immer schon und überall zusammengehört, nämlich der Prozess einerseits und die Entelechie und der Begriff als dessen Explikation andererseits.<sup>62</sup>

Auch wenn nicht offengelegt ist, ob Rinck gerade an diesem Abschnitt mitgewirkt hat, belegt der Ausschnitt eine Vertrautheit mit Baumgartens Grundlegung der Ästhetik. Wenn man jedoch hofft, hiermit einen Universalschlüssel zum Gedicht „Augenfühlerfisch“ gefunden zu haben, sieht man sich enttäuscht. Im Prinzip wird ja der Erkenntnisgehalt von sensitiven Vorstellungen, beispielsweise aus der visuellen Wahrnehmung, eher problematisiert. Auch ist „Augenfühlerfisch“ nicht vollständig im Rahmen der Leibniz-Wolffschen Terminologie entschlüsselbar. Vermutlich wäre aber auch die komplette Kodierung eines Gedichts mit Leibniz-Wolffscher Terminologie ein etwas manieristischer und vermutlich langweiliger poetischer Trick. Vielmehr stellt das Gedicht selbst die Möglichkeit von Erkenntnis – oder jedenfalls von Selbsterkenntnis – in Frage. Denn der Augenfühlerfisch sieht „[m]it beiden [Augen]“ „das Klare im Dunkeln aufflackern, aber da er getarnt ist, / sieht er sich nicht“<sup>63</sup>.

„Nach der Poesie“

Der Bezug auf die Erkenntnistheorie der Baumgartenschen „Ästhetik“ ist nicht offensichtlich und gehört für viele Leserinnen und Leser – auch wenn die Wichtigkeit von Baumgartens „Ästhetik“ unbestritten ist – schwerlich zu den naheliegenden Assoziationszusammenhängen. Die ‚Scharfsinnigkeit‘, die etwa Metz in Rincks Werk wiederholt wahrnimmt,<sup>64</sup> ist auf diese Weise im Rezeptionsprozess nicht leicht zu erfassen. Damit stellt sich doch die Frage, welche Funktionen ein solches Spiel mit Sprach- und Wissensbeständen erfüllen kann.

<sup>61</sup> Cotten et al. (2011: 12).

<sup>62</sup> Dies., 14.

<sup>63</sup> Rinck (2014a: 32, V. 13-15).

<sup>64</sup> Metz (2018: 91, 93, 155).

Metz stellt Rincks Arbeit dezidiert in den Zusammenhang von öffentlicher Kommunikation, eigentlich ein Reden über den Gebrauch von Rede unter den Kommunikationsbedingungen der Gegenwart. In einem engeren Sinne lässt sich dieses Interesse an den Kommunikationsbedingungen der Gegenwart als eine gesellschaftspolitische Mission verstehen. Das legt Rinck unter anderem in ihrem Essay „Nach der Poesie“ dar:<sup>65</sup> Die Frage „Wo sind wir?“ beantwortet sie mit der Zustandsbeschreibung einer Welt der „marktförmigen Identität“. Das ist, in anderen Worten, eine Welt der umsichgreifenden kapitalistischen Verwertung, die – im Zeitalter der ausklingenden Postmoderne – alle Ressourcen ausbeutet, nicht zuletzt die Fiktionen und die Künste.<sup>66</sup> Kunst ist nunmehr keine zweckfreie, autonome Domäne, die sich kapitalistischen Interessen entziehen kann. Angesichts dieser Ausgangssituation lautet die Frage für Rinck „Wohin kann ich fliehen?“:

Darauf muss die Sprache nicht nur ästhetisch, sondern auch sozialwissenschaftlich reagieren. Oder Ästhetik ist in dieser Hinsicht als Sozialwissenschaft zu verstehen.<sup>67</sup>

Das klingt gut, erreicht aber in der Gleichsetzung von Sozialwissenschaften und Ästhetik eine schwindelerregende theoretische Flughöhe. Die gegebenenfalls bodenständige Praxis einer solchen Kombination droht aus dem Blickfeld zu geraten. Eine solche Praxis würde man wohl am besten in der Poesie suchen, und sie wird bei Rinck an der Arbeit am Begriff ausgerichtet. Wenn man ‚Begriff‘ spontan eher mit der begrifflichen Arbeit der Wissenschaft assoziiert, ist dies eine überraschende Aussage, die Haltung ist aber keineswegs ungewöhnlich für Rincks Generation. Vielmehr ergibt sich der Eindruck einer Gruppenbildung im Umfeld poetischer Begriffsarbeit. Im sichtbaren Spagat zwischen Literatur und Wissenschaft greift beispielsweise der Sammelband „Poesie und Begriff“<sup>68</sup> diese nicht gerade naheliegende Verbindung auf. In diesem Band findet man neben Rinck und den hier bereits mehrmals erwähnten Steffen Popp, Daniel Falb und Ann Cotten zudem Beiträge von Franz Josef Czernin, Oswald Egger und Ulf Stolterfoht,<sup>69</sup> die jeweils in ihren Darstellungen mit Lust poetologische Reflexion und wissenschaftlichen Diskurs vermischen. Dass die Verbindung von ‚Begriff‘ und ‚Poesie‘ nicht selbstverständlich ist, spricht auch Rinck in ihrem Beitrag insofern an, als es „ja doch recht selten ist, dass begriffliches und poetisches Denken im besten Sinne zueinanderkommen und dabei weiter für sich bestehen“<sup>70</sup>. Dennoch wird in dem ein Jahr zuvor erschienenen Aufsatz „Nach der Poesie“ der Begriff selbst überraschend positiv charakterisiert, da er

<sup>65</sup> Rinck (2013). Der Beitrag wurde leicht überarbeitet abgedruckt in: dies. (2019b).

<sup>66</sup> Dies. (2013: 132).

<sup>67</sup> Dies., 133.

<sup>68</sup> Vgl. Avanesian / Hennig / Popp (2014, Hgg.).

<sup>69</sup> Elke Erb ist mit vier Gedichten „in kommentierten Fassungen“ beteiligt, vgl. dies., 163.

<sup>70</sup> Rinck (2014b: 35). Rinck diskutiert in diesem Aufsatz ihr Gedicht „Der Berg“, vgl. dies. (2014a: 25).

(zumindest als vorübergehende terminologische Festlegung) eine „Rast“ in rastloser Zeit bietet.

Was wäre demnach ein Begriff? Eine Rast, für einen Moment das Ende der Eile – bevor das unablässig aus- und umdeutende Geschehen der skeptischen Vorstellungskraft, der Widerstand von unbewussten Szenerien, die verstandesgemäße Korrektur, die affektuelle Intervention aufgrund von Erfüllung oder Enttäuschung, das Eindringen des noch Formlosen, die Ablenkung von außen, die Erfahrung, die Rede der anderen Menschen und so weiter und so fort ..... erneut verändernd eingreifen und die Fügung durch andere sprachliche Beispiele (der Gegenwarts-lage) ablösen.<sup>71</sup>

Diese positive Charakterisierung des Begriffs ist insofern überraschend, als semantische Festlegung, nicht zuletzt nach einigen Jahrzehnten poststrukturalistischer Infragestellung, keine Selbstverständlichkeit mehr ist. Sie wird in der Folge auch ein bisschen relativiert, denn „auf der anderen Seite wird es sich als günstig erweisen, genauso das Eintreten einer begrifflichen Rast so weit wie möglich herauszuzögern“<sup>72</sup>. Dennoch wird der Begriff als Gegengewicht zur fluktuierenden ‚Bewusstseinsindustrie‘<sup>73</sup> stark gemacht. Unter dieser Perspektive wird er zu einer Möglichkeit der poetischen Intervention und Widerstandskraft, durchaus mit sozialem Impetus. Das Gedicht wird zur Begriffsarbeit als „sprachliche Versammlung“ (wobei die Doppeldeutigkeit der sammelnden Tätigkeit der Poesie und des gesellschaftlichen Zusammenfindens zu bedenken ist):

Lass uns das Sammeln fortsetzen, bevor wir allen sagen, worum es sich handelt – im Gedicht ist jede begriffliche Setzung eine These, die verteidigt werden muss. Kein Kontext, keine Narration ist da, und kein Charakter sie zu stützen.<sup>74</sup>

Damit zeichnet sich eine gesellschaftlich-engagierte Verortung von Rincks Poesie ab. In einem gewissen Sinne liegt hier auch die begriffliche Auseinandersetzung damit vor, was die „Honigprotokolle“ leisten sollen. Das Stichwort „Sammeln“ stellt ja nicht zuletzt eine Analogie zwischen der Tätigkeit der Bienen und Poeten her. Oder wie es im letzten „Honigprotokoll“ mit dem programmatischen Titel „Honig“ heißt:<sup>75</sup> „Es gibt die Klebrigkeit der inneren Fixierung, einen Kitt, der niemals / trocken wird“:

[...] Es bleibt wie eine winzige Flagge inmitten  
tosender Pollen und Bienen die Frage, ob man nicht klug sein müsse,  
um so großer Torheit fähig zu sein. Nicht bei vernünftigem Bewusstsein  
dichten sich diese herrlichen Lieder. Es sammeln die einen für die andern,  
und keiner tut etwas für sich ganz alleine. [...] <sup>76</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Dies. (2013: 134).

<sup>72</sup> Ebd.

<sup>73</sup> Dies., 132.

<sup>74</sup> Dies., 134.

<sup>75</sup> Dies. (2014a: 76). Es ist in mancherlei Hinsicht eine Antwort auf das Protokoll „Honighohn“, vgl. dies. (2014a: 6).

<sup>76</sup> Dies. 76, V. 8-12.

Die Biene ist ein altehrwürdiges Symbol der lyrischen Poesie. Die „Honigprotokolle“ stehen aber für ein bestimmtes Verfahren. Sie sind poetische Sammelstätten für Sprachmaterial, und das Sammeln ist eine soziale Aufgabe. In Analogie zum Blütenstaub wird das Wortmaterial mit subversiver Absicht quasi zu einer klebrig-süßen Masse verarbeitet – und stellt sich zugleich in den Dienst der Gemeinschaft.

In diesem „Honigprotokoll“ ist zudem die Rede von „herrlichen Lieder[n]“. Nun ist Liedhaftigkeit im traditionellen lyrischen Sinne nicht gerade diejenige Qualität, die mir als erstes einfällt, wenn ich an Rincks „Honigprotokolle“ denke. Dennoch ist es in einem gewissen Sinne gebundene Rede. Die traditionellen Bindemittel der Lyrik sind aber wenig ausgeprägt. Die Versform ist noch sichtbar, wenn auch schwach, jedenfalls ist der Vers als Prinzip hier noch weiter gelockert, als man es ohnehin in der Poesie der Freien Verse gewohnt ist. Ebenso wenig werden die Protokolle – wie weiter oben ausgeführt wurde – durch Narration, Plot oder fiktionale Figuren zusammengehalten. Nimmt man die Metapher des Honigs ernst, dann bringt allenfalls die sammelnde Tätigkeit die bindende Kraft. Bleibt die Frage, wieviel das noch mit Lyrik im herkömmlichen Sinn zu tun hat.

### *Lyrik und begriffliche Fixierung*

Aus theoretischer Sicht stellen Strategien der Gattungshybridisierung insofern theoretische Herausforderungen dar, als Literaturwissenschaft – im Gegensatz zur Poesie – auf ein gewisses Maß an Begriffsfixierung angewiesen ist, und zwar Fixierung in dem Sinne, dass Vieldeutigkeit reduziert wird. Zwei Herausforderungen kann man dabei in der Lyrik meines Erachtens hervorheben. Erstens – die Hybridisierungen betreffen Merkmale, die die Integrität der Lyrik als eigenständige Gattung gegenüber anderen Makrogattungen (insbesondere Prosa, aber auch Erzählen) in Frage stellen. Zweitens – diese Differenzierungsprobleme wiegen umso schwerer, als die Abgrenzung von Lyrik gegenüber den Makrogattungen Drama und Erzählen sowieso häufig in Frage gestellt wurde.<sup>77</sup>

Die letztgenannte Herausforderung stellt den allgemeinen Hintergrund der Hybridisierungsproblematik dar, sie ist aber kein Ergebnis der Entwicklungen der Gegenwartslyrik. Sie lässt sich vielmehr seit dem Beginn poetologischer Reflexion über die Makrogattung Lyrik beobachten. In historischer Hinsicht blickt die Lyrik auf keine vergleichbare theoretische Anciennität wie die Dramenpoetik zurück. Die grundlegende Einteilung der Gattungstrias von Epik, Lyrik und Drama setzt sich im deutschen Sprachraum erst mit dem Beginn des 19. Jahrhunderts durch und steht daher hartnäckig im Ruf, eine romantische oder

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<sup>77</sup> Es geht hier nicht um die wohlfeile Annahme, dass zu einem Phänomen keine konsensuelle Definition möglich sei, sondern dass ein Begriff überhaupt aufgegeben werden sollte. Als Beispiel für diese Position vgl. das Zitat von Wellek in Fußnote 78.

postromantische Erfindung zu sein.<sup>78</sup> Die Gültigkeit des historischen Arguments gegen die Lyrik wäre jedoch in Frage zu stellen, scheint es doch zu implizieren, dass es bei der Einteilung literarischer Gattungen keinen Fortschritt geben könne oder die aristotelische Poetik – die die Lyrik vernachlässigt<sup>79</sup> – der Weisheit letzter Schluss darstelle. Während nämlich die Verfestigung der Trias in eine mittlere historische Perspektive fällt, geht die Diskussion über eine Erweiterung des von Aristoteles behandelten Gattungsspektrums historisch weiter zurück. Schon in der italienischen Renaissance ergab sich bei der Rezeption von Aristoteles das Problem, dass den beliebten volkssprachlichen Formen des Sonetts bei Petrarca usf., rückblickend aber auch Werken von Horaz und anderer antiker Dichter, kein richtiger Platz im aristotelischen System der Dichtkunst zugewiesen werden konnte.<sup>80</sup> Eine Erweiterung schlug beispielsweise Minturno vor. In „L’Arte Poetica“ unterscheidet er drei Formen bzw. Modi der poetischen Nachahmung („modi del la poetica imitatione“): die Epik („Epica“), die Dramatische („Scenica“) und die ‚Melische Gattung‘, für die er auch den Ausdruck Lyrik verwendet („Melica ò Lyrica“).<sup>81</sup> Die Lyrik versteht Minturno als eine direkte Erzählung, und zwar diejenige des Poeten. Das ist in einem gewissen Sinne eine Neudefinition des Erzählens, die auch Minturno erklären muss: Man sage, der Poet erzähle, wenn er seine Persönlichkeit behält und nicht in jemanden sich verwandelt – Minturno findet dies vor allem in den Gedichten von Petrarca wieder.<sup>82</sup> Klaus W. Hempfer spezifiziert diese Art der Rede als ‚in eigener Person sprechen‘<sup>83</sup>. Mit Häufigkeitsaussagen wie „meistens“ signalisiert auch Minturno, dass es ihm schwerfällt, klare Abgrenzungen vorzunehmen. Zudem nimmt er, zumindest aus heutiger Sicht, bei der Behandlung der drei Makrogattungen keine zuverlässige Zuordnung von Subgattungen wie Sonett oder Ekloge vor.<sup>84</sup> Ungeachtet der Definitionsprobleme, die offenbar die Lyriktheorie seit ih-

<sup>78</sup> Vgl. die im Ton polemische Kritik von Wellek (2014: 51) an Hamburger und der idealistischen Lyriktheorie, die mit dem Verdikt endet: “One must abandon attempts to define the general nature of the lyric or the lyrical. Nothing beyond generalities of the tritest kind can result from it. It seems more profitable to turn to a study of the variety of poetry and to the history of traditions.”

<sup>79</sup> Vgl. Hempfer (2014: 10, Fn. 5), Culler (2015: 1, 72).

<sup>80</sup> Vgl. Huss et al. (2012).

<sup>81</sup> Minturno (1564: 3).

<sup>82</sup> Ders., 6. “l’uno de’ quali si fà semplicemente narrando: l’altro propriamente imitando: il terzo dell’uno e l’altro è composto. Perche narrar ueramente si dice il poeta, quando ritiene la sua persona, nè in altrui si transfigura: il che fà le più uolte il Melico, sicome il Petracha [sic] nelle canzone, e ne sonetti.” Vgl. zu dieser Stelle auch Huss et al. (2012: 80f.).

<sup>83</sup> Hempfer (2014: 13), Huss et al. (2012: 67).

<sup>84</sup> Dies., 66f. Mit einem Interesse für die Mittel der Dichtung entwickelt Minturno allerdings gerade in diesem Zusammenhang eine rhetorische Verankerung der lyrischen Poesie, genauer in der epideiktischen Rede und dem *genus demonstrativum*; vgl. hierzu dies., 55-77. In der

ren Anfängen plagen, belegen Minturnos Reflexionen, dass seit geraumer Zeit über die Existenz einer Gattung zwischen Erzählen und Drama nachgedacht wird.

In jüngerer Zeit stellt man sich der Herausforderung, der Lyrik ähnlich fundierte begriffliche Grundlagen zu geben, wie sie bereits für die Erzählforschung bzw. die Narratologie vorliegen. Es ist keine anderthalb Jahrzehnte her, dass Margarete Rubik und Eva Zettelmann eine neue Theoretisierung der Lyrik mithilfe der Narratologie gefordert haben, um die Lyrikanalyse aus der, wie sie sagen, Sackgasse einer subjektiven und engen formalistischen Betrachtung hinauszuführen.<sup>85</sup> Ein vergleichbares Projekt der Narratologisierung der Lyrik wurde auch von Schönert und Hühn vorgestellt.<sup>86</sup> Diese Theorieimporte aus der Erzählforschung, teilweise auch aus der Dramentheorie,<sup>87</sup> versprechen systematischere Analyseinstrumente. Zugleich aber ist kritisch zu fragen, ob mit narratologischen oder dramatischen Konzepten angemessene Fragen an lyrische Texte herangetragen werden. Kritisch betrachtet wurde beispielsweise der Import eines narratologischen Kommunikationsmodells.<sup>88</sup> Eine narratologisch inspirierte Terminologie könnte auch zu einer Neigung führen, Effekte wie ‚Illusion‘ oder ‚Ereignishaftigkeit‘ zu fokussieren, für die Lyrik typischerweise keine guten Beispiele liefert<sup>89</sup> und die letztlich defizitorientierte Herangehensweisen aufdrängen. In jüngerer Zeit hat insbesondere die Verknüpfung der Lyrik mit einer allgemeinen Fiktionalitätsannahme Diskussionen ausgelöst.<sup>90</sup> In einer bemerkenswerten Konvergenz von theoretischen und praktischen Interessen an der Lyrik hat Monika Rinck ähnliche Bedenken im Hinblick auf die Fiktion in der Lyrik geäußert, die sie übrigens im expliziten Anschluss an Käte Hamburger<sup>91</sup> formuliert:

Ich denke schon seit einiger Zeit darüber nach, wie sich die Unterscheidung von Fiktion und Non-Fiction zum Gedicht verhält, ob sie überhaupt zutrifft auf die Gattung Lyrik und die Gedichte der Gegenwart, die mich begeistern.<sup>92</sup>

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jüngeren Lyriktheorie wurde dieser Zusammenhang beispielsweise von Culler wiederaufgegriffen; vgl. Culler (2015).

<sup>85</sup> Müller-Zettelmann / Rubik (2005: 8). “‘theorise’ the lyric to overcome the impasse of an impressionistic and narrowly formalistic debate on the genre”.

<sup>86</sup> Müller-Zettelmann (2002), Hühn / Schönert (2007b), Schönert (2004).

<sup>87</sup> Zur Kritik solcher Anleihen an die Dramentheorie in der englischsprachigen Theorie vgl. Culler (2015: 109f.).

<sup>88</sup> Zur Diskussion vgl. Hillebrandt et al. (2019). Zur Kritik des narratologischen Kommunikationsmodells vgl. Müller (im Druck).

<sup>89</sup> Zu einer narratologisch orientierten, aber kritischen Sichtung vgl. Hühn / Schönert (2007a).

<sup>90</sup> Vgl. hierzu Hillebrandt et al. (2019), mit weniger systematischem Anspruch, aber überzeugender Verve Culler (2015).

<sup>91</sup> Rinck (2019c: 38), Hamburger (1977).

<sup>92</sup> Rinck (2019c: 5).



Während es aber wichtig ist, Lyrik von einer generellen Fiktionalitätsanforderung zu befreien, gibt es keinen Grund, die Gattung auf neue Weise einzuschränken. Die greifbare Tendenz zur Gattungshybridisierung lässt jede dichotomische Behandlung der Lyrik in ihrem Gattungsumfeld problematisch erscheinen. Gerade eine Mischung von Lyrik mit Prosa-Merkmalen, wie sie am Beispiel von Rinck beobachtet werden kann, ist ein Grund, die Gattungsprofilierung von Lyrik von neuem kritisch zu reflektieren. Rincks Texte sind ein weiteres Beispiel dafür, dass nicht unerhebliche Segmente der Lyrik die Innovationserwartung dadurch erfüllen, dass sie Gattungsgrenzen herausfordern. Angesichts verschiedener Versuche, Literatur – und speziell die Lyrik – durch das Abweichungsprinzip zu definieren, mag eine solche Aussage banal wirken.<sup>93</sup> Es geht hier jedoch um eine besondere Art der Abweichung, die zwar nicht von aller Lyrik erfüllt wird, aber das Gattungskonzept dadurch beeinflusst, dass essentialistische Aussagen über die Gattung (z.B. aufgrund modifizierter Vers- oder Redekriterien) kaum länger Bestand haben als bis zur nächsten Avantgarde. Konsequenterweise müsste sich die Definition der Lyrik essentialistischer Aussagen über die Merkmale der Texte enthalten. Vielmehr sollten die Praktiken betrachtet werden, durch die Vorstellungen von Lyrik etabliert werden, zu denen beispielsweise die forcierte Herausforderung der Gattungsgrenzen zu gehören scheint.

### *Lyrik und sinnlicher Ausdruck*

Monika Rincks „Augenfühlerfisch“ weist überraschende historische Referenzen auf und bietet eine Gelegenheit, die Praktiken der Erkundung ästhetischer Grenzen in einen breiteren Kontext zu stellen. Mit Baumgarten, der, wie oben dargelegt, auch in dem von Rinck mitverfassten Traktat „Helm aus Phlox“ prominent behandelt wird, reicht die poetologische Reflexion in die Zeit vor der romantischen und idealistischen Lyriktheorie zurück. Im „Augenfühlerfisch“ wird Baumgartens Idee angespielt, dass Erkenntnis nicht nur auf den klaren und distinkten Vorstellungen beruht, sondern auch auf der Grundlage der ‚niederen Erkenntnisvermögen‘ gewonnen werden kann, wobei gerade den Künsten und der Dichtung eine besondere Rolle zukommt. Die Vorstellungen, die durch den niederen Teil des Erkenntnisvermögens erworben werden, nennt Baumgarten „sensitiv“,<sup>94</sup> und als sensitive Rede gilt diejenige, deren Bestandteile zur Erkenntnis sensitiver Vorstellungen streben. Damit ist gemäß Baumgarten das Gedicht definiert:

<sup>93</sup> An dieser Stelle kann man bspw. Fricke (1981: 115f.) Definition der Lyrik als grammatische Abweichung nennen. Man könnte aber auch Hempfers Vorwurf an Zymner (2009), dessen Definition reformuliere lediglich ein „transgenerisches Poetizitätskonzept“, so verstehen, dass Zymner Lyrik als sprachliche Abweichung definiere, vgl. Hempfer (2014: 28).

<sup>94</sup> Baumgarten (1983a: 8-9). „§ III. REPRAESENTATIONES *per partem facultatis cognoscitivae inferiorem comparatae* sint SENSITIVAE.“

§ IX. Eine vollkommene sensitive Rede ist ein Gedicht. Der Inbegriff der Regeln, denen ein Gedicht entsprechen muß, heißt Poetik. Die Wissenschaft der Poetik ist die philosophische Poetik. Die Fähigkeit des Gedichtemachens ist die Dichtung, und wer sich dieser Fähigkeit erfreut, ist ein Dichter.<sup>95</sup>

Mit der Formel des Gedichts als vollkommene sensitive oder auch sinnliche Rede – der *oratio sensitiva perfecta* – schreibt Baumgarten besonders dem Gedicht die Fähigkeit zu, auf ganz eigene Weise Zugang zur Erkenntnis zu eröffnen. Mit Gedicht („poema“) ist aber in dieser Zeit nicht nur das lyrische Gedicht gemeint. ‚Poesis‘ bzw. ‚Dichtung‘ betreffen das Versemachen überhaupt, umfassen also die dramatische, epische und lyrische Poesie. Johann Adolf Schlegel, der wenige Jahrzehnte später die Poesie als „sinnlichste[n] Ausdruck des Schönen, oder des Guten oder des Schönen und Guten zugleich, durch die Sprache“<sup>96</sup> definiert, scheint die Definition von Baumgarten weitgehend zu übernehmen. Und doch steht bei ihm diese Verwendung bereits im spezifischen Kontext seiner Kritik von Charles Batteux’ Versuch, die Nachahmungspoetik auf die lyrische Dichtung zu übertragen. Zugleich etabliert Schlegel durch die Batteux-Kritik eine lyrische Eigenheit: Batteux kam bei seinem Versuch, eine Nachahmungstheorie der « poésie lyrique » zu entwerfen, zum Schluss, dass man bei der lyrischen Poesie – im Gegensatz zur Epik und zum Drama – schwerlich von einer Nachahmung von Handlung sprechen könne. Sein Lösungsvorschlag war, dass Lyrik Empfindungen nachahmt.<sup>97</sup> Es ist Schlegels Verdienst, auf die Problematik dieser aus systematischer Sicht eleganten Lösung hinzuweisen. Warum sollte man bei mentalen Zuständen von Nachahmung sprechen? Es wäre jedenfalls seltsam zu sagen, dass ein Liebesbrief in gelungener Weise die Gedanken und Empfindungen des Verfassers nachahmt. Bei diesem Problem hakt Johann Adolf Schlegel ein, wenn er festhält, dass „die Oden oft die Ausdrücke der wirklichen Empfindungen unsers Herzens sind“<sup>98</sup>. Schlegels Auffassung, dass das Gedicht auf diese Weise Schönes oder Gutes ausdrücke, ist aus heutiger Sicht eine unangemessene sittliche und funktionale Einschränkung der Lyrik. Wenn man aber seine Auffassung auf ein wirkungspoetisches Ethos bezieht, das auch Rinck gelegentlich einfordert, ist es nicht mehr so fremd. Das bedeutet nicht, dass es Rinck – analog zu Schlegel – um den aufrichtigen Ausdruck innerer Zustände geht. Indem aber Begriff und Nonfiction als mögliche Mittel der Dichtung ernsthaft erwogen werden, gewinnen auch Semantik und Referenz auf Sachverhalte an Gewicht. Lyrik hat in diesem Sinne das Potenzial zur ethisch grun-

<sup>95</sup> Ders., 10-11: „§ IX. Oratio sensitiva perfecta est Poema, complexus regularum ad quas conformandum poema poetice, scientia poetices Philosophia Poetica, habitus conficiendi poematis Poesis, eoque habitu gaudens Poeta“.

<sup>96</sup> Schlegel (1976: 217). Im Original hervorgehoben.

<sup>97</sup> Batteux (1976: 380). In der Übersetzung von Schlegel: „Die anderen Dichtungsarten haben die Handlungen zum Hauptgegenstande. Die lyrische Poesie ist ganz den Empfindungen geheiligt; [...]“

<sup>98</sup> Schlegel (1976: 193).

dierten Einladung, einen diskursiven Austausch einzugehen. Man muss allerdings auch die Grenzen einer zur starren Orientierung an Referenz beachten. Lyrik als diskursiver Austausch würde einen Aufrichtigkeitsanspruch in die Poesie hineinbringen. Ein Aufrichtigkeitsanspruch ist zwar in politischer oder anderer Bekenntnislyrik durchaus denkbar, in der avancierten Lyrik aber eher ungewohnt. So scheint auch Rincks Lyrik den autoritären Gestus eines festen begrifflichen Orts zu vermeiden. Man sollte dabei nicht vergessen, dass ihre Gedichte keine stabile Adressanten-Persönlichkeit etablieren. Die ausgestellte Vielstimmigkeit ihrer Lyrik verhindert dies und erlaubt auch kein autoritäres Sprechen. Es widerspricht auch Rincks Vorstellung des Rezeptionsprozesses.

Tatsächlich schließt sich Rinck in ihren theoretischen Aussagen auch einer literaturtheoretischen Reflexionslinie an, die eine grundlegend bewegliche Referenz des Adressanten bzw. des lyrischen Ichs in der Lyrik reklamiert. „So ist es“, sagt Rinck zu Käthe Hamburgers These vom lyrischen Ich als einem ‚realen Aussagesubjekt‘ und bestätigt damit zunächst das Verständnis einer Verankerung des Adressanten in seiner Welt. Rincks weitere Ausführungen entfernen sich allerdings von Hamburger. Abgesehen davon, dass Rincks Gedichte nicht dem Erlebnislyrik-Typ entsprechen, den Hamburger behandelt, setzt Rinck eher Auffassungen des lyrischen Ichs fort, die von einer freien Übernahme des deiktischen Zentrums im Rezeptionsprozess<sup>99</sup> ausgehen:

Zumal das Erlebnisfeld des aussagenden Ichs, sobald ich das Gedicht lese und deute, auch mein Erlebnisfeld als Leserin ist – eine sehr großzügige Geste, ein offener Austausch, eine Einladung. [...] und es wäre schön, wenn Sie dann auch alle mitkämen, auf das Erlebnisfeld, dort, wo über die Bedeutung von Sprache entschieden und vielleicht auch damit gespielt wird.<sup>100</sup>

Mit den offenkundigen Baumgarten-Bezügen reaktiviert Rinck ein sinnliches Erkenntnispotenzial von Lyrik. Verlängert man Baumgartens Überlegungen zu Johann Adolf Schlegel könnte sich daraus ein Bezug zu einer Ausdruckspoetik mit Aufrichtigkeitsanspruch ergeben. Ein solcher Aufrichtigkeitsanspruch wäre mit einigen von Rincks theoretischen Äußerungen vereinbar, er wird in ihrer Dichtung aber durch zwei Merkmale abgelenkt: Zum einen sind ihre Gedichte von einer schwer durchschaubaren Vervielfältigung der Stimmen geprägt, die kein eindeutiges ‚Aussagesubjekt‘ ermitteln lassen. Zum andern widerspricht eine verbindliche Festlegung Rincks Vorstellungen einer beweglichen poetischen Sprache. Das Ergebnis ist eine ‚dunkle‘, enigmatische Schreibweise, die (im Gegensatz zur essayartigen Prosa) vielfältige Adressantenpositionen und keine kohärente Welt entwirft. Diese Frustration einer reibungslosen Lektüre bietet auch Freiheit und ist als Einladung zur Erkundung der assoziativ angerissenen Diskurse verstehbar.

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<sup>99</sup> Fricke / Stocker (2000).

<sup>100</sup> Rinck (2019c: 39).

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Herausgegeben von Ralph Müller und Henrieke Stahl

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### **The 'Novel in Poems' – An Emerging Genre**

A new genre has emerged in contemporary literature: the 'novel in poems.' This genre hybridizes the novel and poetry in order to construct characters and a plot through relatively autonomous poems in series. The 'novel in poems' appears in different subtypes, which can be categorized according to the following criteria: (1) the presence of one speaker versus several speakers, (2) the presence of a speaker as lyric protagonist and/or narrator, and (3) the presence of a blend of distinct modes of lyric, narrative, and dramatic representation in various forms of combination. Specific characteristics of the 'novel in poems' are: 1) variation of constituent poetic forms with different degrees of semantic autonomy and brevity; 2) hyper-structuring through symmetries, holism, and equivalences; 3) a tendency to differentiate mediating instances within the text; 4) the reduction or elimination of the narrator or of narrative principles and the use of an omnipresent textual subject; 5) the presence of metapoetic reflections on topics such as poetry and creativity; 6) an emphasis on voice, person, and subjectivity; 7) episodic plot construction through montage techniques and a tendency toward chronological order; 8) the predominance of present speech and action; 9) contradictions between the speaker as subject and addresser, via the lyric fiction of performativity, and the function of narration; 10) a necessity imposed upon the reader to reconstruct the plot and characters. This essay establishes three subtypes within the proposed genre: a lyric 'novel in poems' with one speaker (Irina Ermakova), a polyphonically narrative 'novel in poems' that combines third-person narration with several anterior speakers (Lana Hechtman Ayers), and, finally, a dramatic 'novel in poems' with shifting primary speakers (Glyn Maxwell).

*Keywords: verse novel, poetry book, novel in poems, Irina Ermakova, Lana Hechtman Ayers, Glyn Maxwell*

Over the last decades, poetry has shown a prominent tendency towards long forms, in which poems are combined with genuinely narrative and/or dramatic features and generic elements.<sup>1</sup> This is particularly true of newer Anglophone literature, in which one finds a “boom”<sup>2</sup> in verse novels, as well as other larger hybrid forms of poetry. One example of this is “The Monkey’s Mask” (1994), a detective novel by Australian author Dorothy Porter. The film adaptation of the novel, produced in 2000 under the same title, has brought Porter global fame. Few people recognize, however, the novel’s rather unusual form, composed entirely of poems.<sup>3</sup> Porter explains in an interview that she was inspired to develop this technique by a prison inmate whom she instructed in a creative writing course:

The title of my book comes from a late Basho haiku, and I got the idea of writing *The Monkey’s Mask* when I was doing creative writing workshops in prisons, in Long Bay gaol. I was teaching haiku, and one guy said “You could write a detective novel in haiku.” At first I thought he was just taking the mickey, but later I thought he was absolutely right! Those moments of revelation, in the present tense with the senses working moment to moment, that acute awareness, are when detective fiction is at its most interesting. This is very close to poetry. [...] Of course I didn’t attempt to write *The Monkey’s Mask* in haiku, although I think linked haiku can go on forever and do all sorts of things, but it gave me the idea that each poem could be very, very intense, and the reader would feel physically in a particular moment.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See brief adaptations of this article in Japanese and French: Stahl (2019c, 2020). Another version of this article in German is forthcoming under the title „Der Gedichtroman: Prototyp und seine Erscheinungsformen in der Gegenwart“ (Stahl forthcoming a).

I would like to thank Peter Hühn and David Malcolm for consultation and many important ideas, and Matthias Fechner, Andrew Wildermuth and David Hock for precious hints and proofreading!

<sup>2</sup> Detmer (2007: 198). See also Cadden (2011: 21): “The revival of the verse novel began tentatively in the 1990s with works for adults by writers such as Derek Walcott, Dorothy Porter, and Fred D’Aguiar, and for young adults at roughly the same time with novels by Virginia Euwer Wolff and Karen Hesse. The form for young adults has become an important publishing trend since the turn of this century.”

<sup>3</sup> In this very interview, Porter describes her book as a postmodernist genre hybrid: “The genre crossing of *The Monkey’s Mask* is a postmodern cliché, as was its non-privileging of high culture over pop” (in: Minter 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Dorothy Porter in: Minter (2008). Yet Porter’s previous novel “Akhenaten” (1992) has already been composed of poems; cf. Kempton (2018: 161-167). Porter later wrote other novels consisting of poems: “What a Piece of Work” (1999), “Wild Surmise” (2002), “El Dorado” (2007). The last novel, also a crime novel, is more complex: while the earlier novels were tied to a protagonist who is responsible for all the poems in the first person and is at best relativized by paratexts and symptoms, for example as mentally ill, as in “Wild Surmise”, in “El Dorado” the speakers of the poems change, whereby neither the assignment to the persons involved nor the situation of the poems in the plot are made explicit. In terms of receptive aesthetics, this novel aims at reconstruction by the reader, who has to deduce events and surprising turns of the plot from the poems, which in turn do little more than outline the figures’ state of mind. The exciting plot motivates the reader to a kind of detective work, in which the reconstruction



The 'novel in poems' has become popular in the English-speaking world during the last 20 years, in both 'high' and 'low' markets, and – most astonishingly from a European perspective – particularly in young adult literature<sup>5</sup>.

In contemporary European literatures, comparable texts are relatively rare and have emerged to a large extent independently of the new English-language movement, as seen in Russian-language examples of the last twenty years, which have also developed a notable trend towards narrative poetry and the use of narrative devices in lyric genres.<sup>6</sup> However, the verse novel, with its decidedly novelistic character in the Anglophone world, still remains an exception in Russian literature. What is more, only a few examples of the 'novel in poems' exist in Russian, and they show striking differences from the trends found in Anglophone literature. The Russian examples are generally much closer to the "poetry book"<sup>7</sup> than to the novel. In German-language literature, which has also recently developed a narrative trend towards the 'long poem,'<sup>8</sup> or even new forms of epic poetry (Cotten, Grünbein, Schrott, et al.),<sup>9</sup> the 'novel in poems' has hitherto

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of the plot and the uncovering of the criminal case are brought to coincidence through the use of episodic narration in the form of lyrical poems that concentrate on a current state of mind of changing speakers and through reduced paratextual information.

<sup>5</sup> Cadden points out in 2011 that in the public library of Edmonton/Alberta alone, out of 125 entries on the newer verse novel, only 5 were published in the 20th century – telling proof of the immense upswing of this form (Cadden 2001: 21). Already in 2005 Joy Alexander spoke of a "new genre" especially in the field of children's and teenager literature of the last ten years (Alexander 2005: 269).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Kukulin (2015); Stahl (2019b).

<sup>7</sup> In Russian literature, the 'book of poetry' or 'poetry book' exists as a special form that has been developed since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and constitutes not a collection but a whole composition constituted by the poems. See on the 'poetry book' in Russian and Belorussian literatures: Barkovskaja / Verina / Gutrina (2015).

<sup>8</sup> The term „Langgedicht“ goes back to Walter Höllerer (1965). More recent long poems have been published by Paulus Böhmer, Kurt Drawert, Alban Nikolai Herbst, and others.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. for instance: Raoul Schrott: *Erste Erde*. Epos. München 2016; Ann Cotten: *Verbannt! Versepos*. Berlin 2016; Durs Grünbein: *Vom Schnee oder Descartes in Deutschland*. Frankfurt am Main 2003. In Germany, a trend towards lyric-epic hybrids has only recently emerged, but is comparable to the Russian case, with a focus less on plot and more on the impressions of a single speaker. Hence, Heinz Schlaffer still notices in 2016: "Erzählen in Versen erscheint heute als eine seltsame, weit zurückliegende Art zu dichten." "Dreihundert Seiten in Versen erschrecken einen ungeduldigen, an rasche Lektüre gewohnten Leser, dreißig erträgt er – gegenwärtig auch sie nicht mehr" (Schlaffer 2016: 243, 246). It is no coincidence that Rüdiger Zymner places Ransmayr's novel „Der fliegende Berg“ ("The Flying Mountain"), written in flutter-sentences – which nonetheless represent free verses – in the context of Anglophone literature: „Es erscheint nun vor diesem Hintergrund plausibel, auch die jüngeren deutschsprachigen Erzähldichtungen in den Kontext des von Detmers angesprochenen ‚Booms‘ zu rücken, der sein Zentrum insbesondere in den anglophonen Literaturen hat. Christoph Ransmayrs ‚Der fliegende Berg‘ wäre somit als Glied einer globalisierten Genrebildung zu betrachten, denn im Zusammenhang einer allein deutschsprachigen Geschichte der Erzähl-

existed merely in the form of translations of popular titles from English literature, such as Dorothy Porter's aforementioned novel, or, more recently, a slam novel by Elizabeth Acevedo.<sup>10</sup>

In the English-speaking world, the 'novel in poems' is generally subsumed under the term 'verse novel,' or 'novel in verse,' and is largely classified as narrative poetry.<sup>11</sup> However, such categorizations obscure the specificity of this phenomenon. This is because these novels, being made up of individual poems, seem closer to poetry than to the novel. Yet, they are not poetry cycles nor poetry volumes. The specificity of the 'novel in poems,' therefore, can only be understood if a genre of its own is assumed, located *between* the poles of a poetry volume and the novel.

Hybridization, however, does not signify an accretion but rather a fusion of genre characteristics, which thereby leads to a transformation of those characteristics borrowed from the blended genres. The resulting form thus develops its own qualities, which neither the poem nor the novel, nor the verse novel, nor any of its experimental or even epic forms, demonstrate in the same ways. The presence of these distinct qualities is one reason why I propose to consider the 'novel in poems' as a new genre. This assumption is further supported by the fact that this form has evolved with distinct breadth and already functions as a model used by authors, who, in turn, produce a range of genre interpretations.

The traditional verse novel occupies a place on the scale between the poles of the poetry volume and the novel that is closer to the novel than to the 'novel in

dichtung müsste Ransmayrs Text lediglich wie ein beinahe unfassbarer Solitär erscheinen“ (Zymner 2009: 153).

<sup>10</sup> So far only Porter's "The Monkey Mask" (German: 1997, 2001) has been translated. Elizabeth Acevedo's "Poet X" (2018), a popular youth novel in poems, about a slammer, was published in German in 2019.

<sup>11</sup> Although more recent publications on the verse novel by Addison (2017) and Kempton (2018) deal with works of this form, they do not notice the generic specificity which sets them apart from verse novels that do not consist of poems, nor that this form has developed particularly intensively since the end of the 20th century. Their publications do not classify the verse novel according to formal and functional aspects, but rather according to epochs (Addison 2017, Kempton 2018: Part 1) and the more recent publications according to thematic aspects (Kempton 2018: Part 2). The difference between a novel form made up of lines and / or stanzas, i.e. a verse novel, and a novel as a series of independent poems is not considered. Nor does Zymner (2009) address a specificity of the novel in poems that distinguishes it from the novel in verse or a particular stanzaic form.

Other terms for related phenomena are, for example, 'novelized poem,' 'novel-poem,' 'novelistic poem,' 'poetical novel,' 'novelized poem,' 'poeticized novel'; a terminologically concise differentiation of the terms has not (yet) been given. Cf.: Hughes (2010: 97); cf. also the title of Nick Bujak's doctoral thesis: "The Novelistic Poem and the Poetical Novel: Towards a Theory of Generic Interrelation in the Romantic Period" (Bujak 2014) or Richard Lansdown's essay: "The Novelized Poem and the Poeticized Novel: Byron's Don Juan and Victorian Fiction" (Lansdown 1999).

poems,' because it is not, like the latter, composed of individual poems. Furthermore, the verse novel frequently features a narrator, most often in the third person, and is usually written in the past tense, while the poem is generally characterized by a speaker and the imaginative presence of the speech act. In addition, the chapters – or even stanzas – of a verse novel fail to fulfill the criteria of a poem because they are not marked by short and autonomous units of text as poems, by and large, do.

The 'novel in poems,' unlike the verse novel, thus represents a "series of poems"<sup>12</sup> that is used to depict a plot with characters and their external and internal worlds. The relative autonomy of the constituent poems, which makes their individual reading and publication possible, can indeed vary by degree. On the scale between the poetry volume and the novel, the 'novel in poems' merges with the verse novel when, on the one hand, the autonomy of the poems is greatly weakened or disappears in favor of contiguity,<sup>13</sup> and, on the other hand, when the textual forms that constitute the novel hardly or no longer correspond to the characteristics of a poem. Conversely, the 'novel in poems' turns into a poetry book, or even a collection, when the plot is greatly weakened or absent and vice versa: a cycle or book of poems becomes a 'novel in poems' when individual poems are linked to form a sequence that constitutes, or at least presupposes, a plot.

In the literary tradition, the most likely examples of this phenomenon are those which, beginning from the form of the poetry cycle, ultimately approach the novel; more recent literature, in contrast, moves bilaterally between both poles as established genres, proceeding from either one towards the form of the other.<sup>14</sup> Here, different tendencies can be observed. In the Anglophone world, proximity to the novel dominates, while Russophone literature is beginning to develop its own 'novel in poems,' which hardly existed until recently, via the lyric cycle and the poetry book.

This article thus proposes to critically distinguish the 'novel in poems' from the verse novel in order to introduce it as a new generic category. First, the new genre will be theoretically modelled. Then, tendencies in the development of this new genre will be shown through three representative examples: Irina Ermakova's book "With Red Ink on Black Silk", which is composed of lyric

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<sup>12</sup> Karen Hesse describes her novel in poems "Witness" (2000) on the cover as a "series of poems" and divides it, at the same time, into five "acts," according to the classical dramatic model.

<sup>13</sup> Mariko Nagai's "Dust of Eden" (2014), for example, borders on the verse novel. Although it consists of individual poems that are summarized in parts (on the cover the book is explicitly called a "novel-in-poems"), they function as diary entries and show little autonomy.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. for instance in Addison (2017), Chapter III, the section "Sonnets. George Meredith, Modern Love" (Addison 2017: 147-153), also Kempton (2018: 86-94). "Meredith further subverts, or expands, the form by devoting a cycle of fifty sonnets to the dissection of a failed marriage" (Kempton 2018: 89).

tankas that develop a single tragic plot; Lana Hechtman Ayers' "Red Riding Hood's Real Life", which constructs a polyphonic form with a narrator and several speakers; and, finally, Glyn Maxwell's "The Sugar Mile", which demonstrates the dramatic potential of this new genre.

*The 'Novel in Poems': Ideotype, Phenotype, Phenomena*

Literary genres are historically and culturally variable groups of texts and are theoretically modelled in different ways depending on their assumed preconditions and objectives.<sup>15</sup> Three approaches in particular are currently in use for their study.

(1) The definition of genre can be made by classification, with the help of a set of characteristics abstracted from phenomena.<sup>16</sup> This classification is problematic in the case of hybrid phenomena, as they are devalued as marginal or transitional, insofar as they are positioned between taxa. Therefore, an exclusively classificatory approach is not suitable for the description of the 'novel in poems,' as its manifestations range on a scale between the poetry volume and the (verse) novel.

(2) The problem of localizing the transitional phenomena between such taxa is attempted by approaches that, starting from Ludwig Wittgenstein, order texts according to family resemblance.<sup>17</sup> Such an approach starts from phenomena arranged according to similar relations. Generic fields can thus be determined. These fields form a structured spectrum of relations of aesthetic similarity with respect to selected features.<sup>18</sup> In turn, these features are abstracted from representatives. In this way, the representative phenomena obtain a prototypical function insofar as they are established as centers, around which the generic fields are formed according to graduated similarities on the basis of their distinct features.

(3) The disadvantage of a model using prototypes is that concrete phenomena are regarded as a benchmark against which other concrete phenomena are measured. Such axiological judgements are avoided by a vertically dominant model that works with invariants. The invariants form a transhistorical abstract concept that cannot be represented by the phenomena themselves but rather allow them to be

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. the surveys of genre theories with further literature in: Lamping (ed., 2009), Zymner (ed., 2010), Anz (ed., 2013, vol. 1, especially chapter 2). An introduction to the generic term, which was transferred from logic to biology and literature: Baumgartner / Krafft / Nobis (1972).

<sup>16</sup> Dieter Lamping (2000) and Volker Klotz (2011), for example, use a classifying approach to the poem.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. for more detail on this matter, for instance, Wittbrodt (1998).

<sup>18</sup> Cf. the concept of the generic field in Bourdieu's sense: Trilecke (2016). See on the transfer of the field concept to relations of aesthetic features: Stahl / Rutz (2013).

ordered.<sup>19</sup> For this approach, a problem arises in which the relations of cultural-historically-based phenomena are neglected. For this reason, integral approaches are generally preferred today.<sup>20</sup>

This paper proposes an integral approach. It works with invariants of a constitutive principle of construction as well as with relations of similarity, which refer to the expression of variable principles of representation in concrete phenomena. These principles of representation are, in turn, considered transhistorical invariants, but some of them hold, at least in the case of European literature, prototypical genre meaning. Both the constitutive principle of construction and the variable principles of representation are understood as concepts in the sense of mental representations that guide cognition.<sup>21</sup>

The distinction between a constitutive principle of construction and its combination with variable principles of representation can be illustrated with two terms borrowed from genetics. The principle of construction functions like an idiom, which cannot be found paradigmatically present in a phenomenon, but which nevertheless constitutes it and underlies it as an invariant. The combination of the idiom with the variable principles of its articulation forms the phenotypes; the latter are closer to the concrete phenomena than the former, but likewise are not realized in a single phenomenon. Idioms and phenotypes both serve as a classification grid, which enables an ordering and correlation of concrete phenomena.

The idiom of the 'novel in poems,' which I propose in this article as the conceptual core for determining the new genre, is quite simple: a hybrid of the invariant principles of construction of the poem and the novel as they are established in the modern European literatures. These characteristics are opposed to each other with gradations of manifestation possible in each case (see Table 1):

	<i>Poem</i>	<i>Novel</i>
<b>Size</b>	Brevity	Length
<b>Poetic facture</b>	Distinct	Not Distinct
<b>Plot</b>	Not Distinct	Distinct

The poem represents a self-contained, autonomous, and short text unit with a poetic facture, which is often supported by verse and/or stanza forms and instates (itself in) the special treatment of language material by applying equivalences. The brevity of the poem restricts itself to one or two pages as a standard measure, and the poem also tends to employ shorter lines and include prominent white

<sup>19</sup> Cf. for example Hempfer (2010: 22-23).

<sup>20</sup> Cf. the approach of Hempfer (2010) or the suggestion of Fricke et al. (2010: 18).

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Zymner (2013: 32).

space on the page. The novel, on the other hand, has a length that allows for the development of a plot. According to its structuralist (and Aristotelian) definition, a plot consists of at least two events or changes of state that relate to each other, this relation being usually causal or resultative.<sup>22</sup> The minimal length of a novel depends on the literary tradition. There are different standard measures for distinguishing the novel from longer stories with a strong plot: thus, there indeed exist short novels or short stories in poems. The chapters (in epic poetry, also stanzas or songs) and, if applicable, parts of a novel, are usually much longer than the short poem and do not typically possess any relative autonomy from each other.

The difference between the ‘novel in poems’ and the verse novel is thus that the former is not divided into stanzas or songs but is rather composed of more or less autonomous and relatively short poems that can be separated and read individually, even if they form a plot or are summarized in chapters and parts. In contrast to the ‘novel in poems,’ the book of poems and the cycle of poems do not develop a plot in the strict sense, and the coherence of the whole is mostly created by equivalences, central themes, and, sometimes, their development and variation.<sup>23</sup> The speaker in such poems also frequently remains the same in order to guarantee their coherence. Sometimes an action – a love story, for example – forms the background to a book of poems and gives rise to the creation of the poems, which, however, does not so much allow the reader to reconstruct a plot as to observe transformations of the speaker’s state of mind (as, for example, in Aleksandr Blok’s “trilogy” of “books of poems,” which, in his 1911 preface, he called “a novel in verse”<sup>24</sup>).

The ‘novel in poems,’ taken as an idiom, thus stands between a collection of poems – which as a cycle or book arranges poems paradigmatically according to a dominant thematic concern – and a (verse) novel – which develops a plot in a dominantly syntagmatic way. The ‘novel in poems’ can also be characterized as a kind of serial narrative, which uses poems as units for the construction of a plot and thus bears some relation to episodic narrative forms or even the experimental novel.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Cf. in particular Veldhues (1997: 67).

<sup>23</sup> On the cycle of poems and narrative texts cf. El-Hassan (1981).

<sup>24</sup> Blok (1911: 179).

<sup>25</sup> Precursors of the ‘novel in poems’ can also be found among the experimental forms of the novel – although here the poetry format used is also experimental and multimodal, for example as a novel assembled from fragments of concrete poetry, such as Raymond Federman’s “Double or Nothing – a real fictitious Discourse” (1971). Cf. on the types of the American experimental novel: Ernst (1992; on Federman: 278). The contemporary ‘novel in poems,’ on the other hand, is rarely experimental and/or hermetic; the reasons for its creation are to be found less in literary experiment than in the focus on moment, subject, (illusory) authenticity, de-hierarchically rendered storytelling with the replacement of the narrator by polyperspectiv-

The manifestations of the 'novel in poems' are to be placed on a scale between the poetry collection or book of poetry and the verse novel, depending, on the one hand, on the poems' brevity and relative autonomy, and, on the other, on how the plot is articulated.

Genres are also determined by the constellations of variable principles of representation that form their respective phenotypes. The phenotypes of the 'novel in poems' can be ordered according to combinations of two categories of principles of representation in particular, which occur in both the poetry book and the novel, but which can manifest themselves in different ways. Here, we will differentiate between subject forms<sup>26</sup> – such as figures, speakers,<sup>27</sup> composition, or textual subject – and their relation to the author outside the text (I), and, on the other hand, prototypical modes of representation or ways of speaking (II)<sup>28</sup>.

Thus, according to the subject models that I have theoretically outlined in previous publications,<sup>29</sup> the following forms of the subject are distinguished (I): the explicitly marked – fictional or factual – speaker or producer of the enunciation, which is created by the composition of the text and its intertextual and contextual relations. The producer of the composition can be identical with the speaker (in this case, the speaker is also the addresser) or not; for this reason, I assume a textual or 'aesthetic subject.' Its relation to the speaker must be analyzed. The construction of the 'aesthetic subject of the text' is based on the presupposition of a 'transcendental subject' or 'type' as a hermeneutic point of reference, while the author as an 'empirical subject' remains ungraspable per se. The author's forms of expression, whether they exist in texts or other forms, can

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ity and montage as principles of (post-)postmodernist narrative, as well as in new trends towards voice, orality, and even performance, which are typical of the digital age.

<sup>26</sup> On this subject, see in detail Geist / Reents / Stahl (forthcoming).

<sup>27</sup> In the newer theory of poetry, the term 'addresser' is often preferred (cf. Zymner 2019, 26-27; for a critical discussion of the term: Stahl, forthcoming b). The term 'speaker' refers to the imagined person, pronouncing the speech, while 'addresser' means the person or instance producing the text. Even if it is typical for the lyrical poem to expose his/her identity, in some cases – and this tendency is currently becoming more common – the addresser deviates from the speaker and is used to designate the instance responsible for the construction of the speaker and the composition of the whole poem. I name this instance the textual subject, or more precisely, the 'aesthetic subject of the text' (cf. Stahl forthcoming b).

<sup>28</sup> „[...] ‚Schreibweisen‘ [sind] selbst keine literarischen Gattungen oder Texttypen [...], aber [können] Texttypen und Gattungen oder aber doch wenigstens einzelne Texte prägen [...]. Schreibweisen sind die medienspezifischen – auf Schrifttexte bezogenen – Ausprägungen allgemeiner, gestaltgebender oder prägender Verfahren, die an und für sich auch in anderen medialen Kontexten vorkommen können“ (Zymner 2013: 25). Zymner also differentiates the three modes of “the narrative, the dramatic and the lyrical.” I prefer to speak more generally of modes of representation.

<sup>29</sup> Stahl (2017), Stahl (forthcoming b). On the discussion concerning the implied author and the textual subject cf. Stahl / Geist / Reents (forthcoming) and Stahl (forthcoming b).

in turn be analyzed and related to each other. They represent the ‘aesthetic subject of the author.’ The ‘aesthetic subject of the text’ can also be an invented instance, which can stand more precisely distinguished from not only the subject of enunciation but also the ‘aesthetic subject of the author.’ These three forms of the subject can merge and diverge to variable degrees. The intensity of the development of the ‘aesthetic subject of the text’ and its relation to the ‘subject of the enunciation,’ as well as to ‘aesthetic subject of the author,’ have to be discovered in each text:<sup>30</sup>

<i>Transcendental subject (type)</i>
<i>Subject of enunciation (producer of the enunciation)</i>
<i>Aesthetic subject</i>
- <i>of the text (producer of the composition)</i>
- <i>of the author (forms of expression of the author)</i>
<i>Empirical subject (real author)</i>

Here, a fundamental question arises as to the constitution of the subject of the enunciation: that is, whether there are one or more speakers throughout the entire text and whether they also act as figures, i.e., as part of the represented world.<sup>31</sup>

The characterization of the subject of enunciation is also connected with three generic modes of representation: the lyric, narrative, and dramatic (II). One of these modes may dominate, or they may appear in various combinations.

I understand the lyric with Klaus Hempfer as the fiction of performativity. In his book “Lyric – An Outline of a Systematic Theory”,<sup>32</sup> Hempfer projects Austin’s definition of the performative speech act: “There is something which is *at the moment of uttering being done by the person uttering*”<sup>33</sup> onto “a sequence of speech acts, which in the act of speaking create the situation that they are discussing at the same time.” Here, the speaker does not “tell” a “story,” but rather “does or experiences what he is talking about at the same time. Lyric speaking, therefore, does not tell what has happened, but rather constitutes in speaking what is being spoken about, or formulated differently: lyric speaking is based on the simultaneity or coincidence of the spoken situation and the discussed situa-

<sup>30</sup> Cf. in more detail: Stahl (forthcoming b).

<sup>31</sup> Additionally, it is necessary to analyze the constitution of the subject of enunciation concerning the use of personal pronouns, montage of anonymous fragments of speech, etc., as well as their state of being (factual or fictional; perhaps neither).

<sup>32</sup> Hempfer (2014).

<sup>33</sup> Austin (2018: 60; his italics). Cf. also Hempfer (2014: 31).



tion.”<sup>34</sup> The specific feature of the fiction of performativity is the constitution of the object of speech by the act of speaking (performativity), whereby the object is not reported as given but is instead imagined as/in the present. As this act is only semiotic (i.e., it produces meaning) and not situationally pragmatic, it is therefore fictional – even if its content is understood as factual.<sup>35</sup> Characteristic for the fiction of performativity is the use of the present tense, or at least an imagination of the speech act's immediacy, since the object of speech is not presented as preceding the act of speech but as being produced by it.

Epic and narrative are modes of representation in which an object is presented as existing outside of speech itself, regardless of whether it precedes in the past or follows in the future. If the present tense is employed, it is generally historical. The temporal and spatial distance between the speaker and the object thus allows for focalization. This is the central difference between the narrative and the lyric modes of representation. Instead of extending reference to a given object, the latter performs the imaginative reality of the object by the act of speech itself.

Finally, the dramatic mode of representation may be said to model itself on the forms of communication in direct speech, which are localized in a space-time-continuum that is assumed as present in a fictional but given reality – not in an imaginative one – that may be staged and not only told. In contrast to the fiction of performativity present in lyric, dramatic speech acts do not imaginatively construct an object or reality through the act itself but merely refer to it.

The manifestation of the three forms of representation in the 'novel in poems' and the verse novel have also been recognized by other critics. Cadden, for example, has described the genre as a transitory phenomenon situated between novel, drama, and poem in overlapping circles;<sup>36</sup> and he considers the new verse novel to possess a fundamental affinity with drama in particular.<sup>37</sup> However, I

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<sup>34</sup> My translation, H.S. Cf. the original: „Im Unterschied zu Austin beziehe ich die Performativitätsfiktion jedoch nicht auf einen einzelnen Sprechakt, der eine spezifische Handlung konstituiert, sondern auf eine Abfolge von Sprechakten, die im Akt des Sprechens die Situation entwerfen, die sie zeitgleich besprechen. Nun konstituiert jeder fiktionale Text ‚Welt‘. Das spezifisch Lyrische scheint im Unterschied zum Erzählen gerade darin zu liegen, dass nicht eine Instanz – sei sie nun hetero- oder homodiegetisch – eine Geschichte vermittelt, sondern dass ein Sprecher im Akt des Sprechens das tut bzw. erfährt, worüber er zeitgleich spricht. Ein lyrisches Sprechen erzählt also nicht, was geschehen ist, sondern konstituiert im Sprechen, worüber gerade gesprochen wird, oder anders formuliert: Lyrisches Sprechen basiert auf der Simultaneität bzw. Koinzidenz von Sprechsituation und besprochener Situation“ (Hempfer 2014: 31-32).

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Hempfer: „Missverstanden wurde auch mein Konzept der ‚Performativitätsfiktion‘, insofern es mir gerade nicht um die Fiktivität des Geäußerten, sondern um die Fiktionalität der Äußerungssituation geht“ (Hempfer 2019: 56).

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Cadden (2011: 26).

<sup>37</sup> Cf.: “offer some claims about the genre’s use of voice and its affinity to drama as a form” (Cadden 2011: 2).

suggest it makes more sense to categorize this form as a hybrid of the novel and poetry, as staged performance is generally not fundamental to the actualization of the text. In the literary tradition, moreover, the dramatic mode of representation is by no means restricted to drama alone. Dramatic passages exist in the novel, for instance, and the dramatic monologue is a genre of poetry of its own that has been most extensively cultivated in the English literary tradition. The ‘novel in poems,’ which uses poems in the style of or as a dramatic monologue is indeed a phenotypic variation. Thus, the ‘novel in poems’ can be further defined by combining the three modes of representation along different relations and degrees of intensity, including that of the dramatic.

The phenotypes of the ‘novel in poems’ can be determined by combining the principles of the two classes outlined (I/II). I propose a matrix which is limited to the basic forms of the subject of enunciation (a more elaborated form might also take into account the ‘aesthetic subject of the text’ and the relations to the “aesthetic subject of the author”):

I Subject of enunciation	1 speaker = figure	1 speaker ≠ figure	Several speakers = figures
<i>II Modes of representation</i>			
<i>Lyric</i>			
<i>Narrative</i>			
<i>Dramatic</i>			

Consequently, the texts are to be analyzed, on the one hand, in relation to the idiom (i.e., to be located between the poles of the collection of poems and the novel on the scale) and, on the other hand, in relation to a combination of the forms of the subject of enunciation and its modes of representation, whereby the degree of their respective expression is to be determined.

Let us now apply this model to the three textual examples.

*A Lyric ‘Novel in Poems’: Irina Ermakova: “With Red Ink on Black Silk” (1991/2011)*

Poems from Irina Ermakova’s book «Алой тушью по черному шелку» (“With Red Ink on Black Silk”) first appeared in 1991 in a mystified manner: the text was presented as a translation of the tanka of a fictional 12<sup>th</sup> century Japanese poet, Yoko Irinati, whose name is constructed by selecting and changing the let-

ters of Ermakova's name.<sup>38</sup> The Japanese poetic form of the tanka, a predecessor of the haiku, consists of thirty-one morae, or syllables, and breaks down into two sections: 5-7-5 / 7-7. However, the poems do not strictly follow the tanka form. The free interpretation of the tanka form is explained by the fact that, within the logics of book, the poems are understood as Russian translations.

In her preface, the author points out that the book is a "novel in tanka," i.e., on the one hand it consists of tanka as individual poems claiming autonomous validity, but on the other hand it is a novel with a distinct subject, meant in a double sense derived from the Russian word «роман»: a novel about a love affair.<sup>39</sup>

But the speaker of the poems does not narrate the novel: the plot with its central events rather remains unmentioned. Instead, using the lyric's fiction of performativity, the poems reflect the speaker's state of mind, the cause of which is a condition or event that is presupposed. The plot must therefore be reconstructed: the 108 tanka are based on a love story which progresses in phases toward a centrally situated climax (tanka 54), the sexual act of love, and the peripeteia (tanka 55), which immediately follows and initiates the second phase, bringing alienation, the death of the baby, the resurgence of love, and, finally, the announcement of the samurai beloved's seppuku.<sup>40</sup>

The individual poems are arranged in chronological order. The linearity of time and the logic of action is counteracted in the text by the secondary ordering principle of multilateral connections through a network of equivalences: poetically generated relations of similarity that are a basic feature of poetry cycles.

The book thus shows a contradiction that is characteristic of the 'novel in poems': that is, it compensates for missing narration with lyric speech acts, resulting in a double perspective that causes conflict between an experiencing subject, speaking in the present via the fiction of performativity, and a subject who retrospectively composes the poem with an orientation towards narrative. The first dactylic poem demonstrates this clearly:

Розовой пятки  
 коснулась волна  
 и зашипела, вздымаясь ...  
 Сто восемь раз напишу знак ЛЮБОВЬ  
 на воде.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Ermakova, Irina: *Алой тушью по черному шелку*. Moscow, 2011. Here, the preface: (Ermakova 2011: 10); in the epilogue, Ermakova reports on mystification (ibid., 152-167).

<sup>39</sup> Cf. ibid., 11-12.

<sup>40</sup> In the preface (cf. ibid., 10), he is called Fujiwara no Taifu (a combination of well-known Japanese poets' names, for example Sarumaru no Taifu, and one of the many poets named Fujiwara).

<sup>41</sup> Ermakova (2011: 19).

A wave  
 touched the rose heel  
 and hissed, surging...  
 A hundred and eight times I will write the sign for LOVE  
 on the water.

On the one hand, the poem reflects the state of the sensing subject, the young woman, at the beginning of the plot, signalling through classic poetic motifs such as [small] feet, the color of roses, and waves, her youthful readiness for love and erotic experience. This is described through a lyric fiction of performativity, but, at the same time, it takes place in the past tense and thus temporally precedes the act of speaking. The present of the speaker who announces a future act of writing (“I will write”) is, however, at the same time determined from the perspective of the narrative already completed in the future: “A hundred and eight times” the speaker will have written the (Japanese) sign for love on the water. The novel will have 108 poems.

In the Buddhist tradition, 108 is the number of vices to be overcome in the ascent to Buddha-nature.<sup>42</sup> At the center of the poem, in the third line, are two verbs that predict “surging” emotions, ominous conflicts, and betrayal (the wave “hisses” as a snake would)<sup>43</sup> – the actual goal is thus shifted by the poetic construction from the readiness for love and sex to their sublimation (catharsis).

In this way, the lyric fiction of performativity is narratively functionalized – for it is not imagination that constitutes its content in speech but rather a reference to stations of the plot both preceding and succeeding the present speech act. The future that the speaker reserves for the act of writing (“I will write”) is simultaneously determined from the perspective of the plot already completed in that future: the figure only pretends to perform the speech act and imaginatively produce the present, whereas, in fact, she retroactively comments upon and evaluates her earlier experiences. The lyric fiction of performativity thus enters into a paradoxical confrontation with narrative perspective. However, this narrative employment of the lyric fiction of performativity can only be recognized if the poem is read not in isolation but rather sequentially – that is, as the first of the book’s 108 poems. The poem can, however, also be read as an autonomous tanka – in which case, the narrative function, which is only implicit in the poem itself due to its temporality (the past and future tenses of the verbs in the presence of their being uttered), remains inactivate. This tension between lyric and narrative attitudes goes hand-in-hand with the distinction between the speaker, who is shown as present, and a textual subject who portrays that speaker retroactively and manifests itself only in the fact of the larger composition.

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<sup>42</sup> Ermakova specifically refers to this in the commentary to her poem (Ermakova 2011: 133).

<sup>43</sup> As David Hock pointed out in a conversation, the last line might function as an allusion to Catullus’s “Carmen 70”. However, in Ermakova’s text the reference is reversed – here the woman talks about the man.

The numerical center of the novel is the climax of the love affair in tanka 54, which is depicted as erotic ecstasy, both aurally and visually iconic. Aurally, the poem's lines consist of a rhythmically successive "O" interrupted by accelerating pauses; visually, it consists of the round, erotic image of the "O" in conjunction with phallic exclamation marks and spermatic dots:

O! .....  
 O! .....  
 O! .....  
 O, извержение вулкана!  
 O, извер.....!<sup>44</sup>

O! .....  
 O! .....  
 O! .....  
 O, Erupting Volcano!  
 O, Er.....!

This poem, composed in the present tense, contains a premonition of the alienation to come. The "volcanic eruption" is continued in the last verse with the breaking off of the word «извержение» to «извер,» associatively also as «изверг,» i.e., a "cruel man." Moreover, the insertion of commas that distance the "O" from its exclamation mark and the scission of «извержение» prefigure a force of separation. In the next poem (tanka 55), the spermatic dots metamorphose into a grain of rice that the speaker imagines to be resting upon the mouth of the beloved – an image connoting that she has become meaningless for him but is herself still deeply affected by him:

Светильник погас.  
 Снова уснул ты.  
 Хотела быть зёрнышком риса,  
 прилипшим  
 к твоей губе.<sup>45</sup>

The light died out.  
 Again you had fallen asleep.  
 I'd like to be a grain of rice,  
 sticking  
 at your lip.

The final poem, 108, announces, on the one hand, the *seppuku* of the beloved: "a jagged red lightning bolt slits the pale sky" (the commentary of the real author and fictional translator in the appendix leaves no doubt as to this<sup>46</sup>), but, on the

<sup>44</sup> Ermakova (2011: 72).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 148.

other hand, it also refers to the novel itself – for it has been written with “red ink,” with blood as a medium of both love and death:

Кривая алая молния  
вспорола бледное небо  
там, на Юго-востоке ...  
Улыбайся,  
уходя по-японски.<sup>47</sup>

A jagged red lightning bolt  
slits the pale sky  
there, in the south-east...  
Smile,  
parting in Japanese.

The center – the in-between state – of the rising and falling action is especially marked. In tanka 27, for instance, the entrance of moonlight and the love songs of cats into the bedroom indicates that the affair is becoming intimate; while in tanka 80 a moment of ‘regression’ and revival of the erotic relationship is depicted: “again the source of the dried up well beats.”<sup>48</sup>

The manner of speaking in Ermakova’s tanka novel is thus predominantly lyric, yet it extends to a whole plot that follows the tragic model<sup>49</sup> and is presented indirectly. Few poems demonstrate the latent narrative mode found in the example of the first poem. The reconstruction of the plot behind the poems is rather consciously stimulated by paratexts. The preface, for instance, refers to the symmetrically constructed plot triangle; the commentary, which contains an entry for each poem, not only explains expressions but also gives clues to events and characters hidden behind the poem and suggests interpretative perspectives; the epilogue, meanwhile, provides the story of the book’s genesis, which, in turn, gives some clear indications for its interpretation. These paratexts replace not only a narrator, but also the mediating instance (a subject) located beyond the speaker: in this case, “Yoko Irinati,” the supposed author who is responsible for the original composition. That is, Irinati functions within the main text as the speaker and also as the subject who composes, and thus reflects upon and evaluates her experiences retroactively. She is the “aesthetic subject of the text.” Hence, there is no place available within this construction itself for a further mediating instance that could transcend and relativize the textual subject. That

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 98 (Russ.: «Снова забил ключ, иссякший / в замшелом колодце»).

<sup>49</sup> The symmetrical, often pyramidal plot structure can be noticed in many verse novels and novels in poems, also and especially when they have several speakers and show dramatic features; cf.: “Two polyphonic verse novels – Karen Hesse’s *Witness* and Ron Koertge’s *The Brimstone Journals* – are written in five parts, and it’s easy to see that they follow a five-act play’s structure: set up, rising action, crisis and confrontation, climax, and conclusion” (Cadden 2011: 25).

instance is rather constructed by the paratexts, explicitly produced by and identified with the author (Irina Ermakova) herself.

Thus, the two principles – poem and novel – are both present in Ermakova's book. However, insofar as the plot is not presented but only presupposed, and as the poems are dominated by the lyric mode, the work remains closer to the cycle or book of poems than to the novel.

*A Polyphonic "Novel in Poems": Lana Hechtman Ayers's "Red Riding Hood's Real Life" (2017)*

Lana Hechtman Ayers has called her book "Red Riding Hood's Real Life" (2017) "a novel in *verse*," although the text is composed entirely of *poems*. While many of the book's poems demonstrate semantic autonomy, they can also be understood in relation to the novel's plot. Ayers hybridizes Slavic and German fairy-tale material around the witch Baba Yaga and Little Red Riding Hood, combining this with American social realism. Baba Yaga stands for the emancipation of women through the release of artistic creativity.<sup>50</sup>

The book is a *Künstlerroman*: it is about a thirty-year-old woman who breaks out of her patriarchal marriage when she meets an artist, the Wolf. After a miscarriage, she also leaves the Wolf, the love of her life and her artistic mentor, in order to find herself. And yet, Eve Riding, who calls herself Red Riding Hood, returns to her great love in the end – after many years, aged and with grey hair, she once again becomes the Wolf's partner, now on equal footing and "forever" (see "Epilogue: Happily Ever After"<sup>51</sup>).

The book's ten chapters (which is, not by chance, the number of perfection) consist of poems that form a progressive, chronologically constructed plot. At the same time, each poem establishes its validity in and of itself. In contrast to Ermakova, Ayers does not focus on a single speaker but works in a multivalent manner through a host of different speakers: Red's husband, the Hunter; the Wolf; Baba Yaga; minor characters; and even anonymous voices. Furthermore, some of the poems are written in the third person and belong to an extradiegetic narrator.

In the poem, "Red Riding Hood and the Wolf Discuss Rothko,"<sup>52</sup> the third-person narrator frames a scene of dialogue with stage directions. The epigraph "Time is white / mosquitoes bite / I've spent my life on nothing" from Lorine Niedecker's poem "What Horror to Awake at Night" provides a perspective for interpreting the protagonist's psychological situation, which she herself will only later reflect on (in the poem "Red Riding Hood Conquers Another

<sup>50</sup> Cf. on this novel more precisely: Stahl (2019a).

<sup>51</sup> Ayers (2017: 209-213).

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

Myth”<sup>53</sup>). Mark Rothko’s painting, in front of which both stand, is also a symbolically significant intertext – White, the Wolf, is currently still standing “above” Red, which is why she will later have to leave him. But first they will become a couple. Accordingly, the lines of the poem are written in pairs.

The book also contains poems, however, in a decidedly lyric mode, such as “Red Riding Hood Embraces Her Artist Animus,”<sup>54</sup> in which Red magically conjures up the goal of her self-discovery: the “artist animus,” who is both Baba Yaga and Wolf inside her.<sup>55</sup> The hymn that Red sings here is the poem itself, as a performative expression of her creative release. In a symbolic way, Red’s lyric poetry thus represents her narrated visual art: she is not a poet, but a painter.

Many poems hybridize the narrative and lyric functions. The lyric function comes to the fore when a poem is read separately, excommunicated from the plot’s context. Understood autonomously, each poem generalizes the state of a figure. In this case, the act of present speech and its content appear as the speaker’s imagination, presented through a lyric fiction of performativity. The title situates the poem in the plot and actualizes its narrative function by establishing reference to a concrete state or event imposed upon the figure. Thus, a narrative functionalization of lyric poems can also be observed in Ayers’s work. Unlike Ermakova, however, Ayers emphasizes narrative functionalization through the use of titles and epigraphs that point to a narrative instance beyond the speaker and figure, as well as through narrative and/or dramatic passages within the poems themselves.

An example of the narrative functionalization of a lyric poem is “Red Riding Hood Diaries about Sex with Husband Hunter.” The title explains the role of the characters, the subject matter, and the form of presentation within the plot, while the epigraph points to the upcoming divorce and its motivation<sup>56</sup>:

RED RIDING HOOD DIARIES ABOUT SEX WITH HUSBAND HUNTER

*Husband, mad hammer, man of force.*  
(Anne Sexton)

Is this what passion is?  
More like tearing  
the knot I tied.  
Woods of uncertainty.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, on the unfulfilled nature of her life as a housewife and spouse of a man who is not erotically attractive to her: “I can be sweeper no more, weeper no more, / Let the broom loom over me no more. / I claim myself as moon” (*Ibid.*, 134).

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 163-164.

<sup>55</sup> Cf.: “I’ll fashion passionate / conflagrations of bones, / spark bones into // wolf-woman configurations. / Harrow every bone, and by this / know myself to the marrow” (*Ibid.*).

<sup>56</sup> The line is from Sexton’s poem “February 21<sup>st</sup>”, the following line is “This last week had been our divorce” (Sexton 1988: 264).



Black time.  
Subordination.  
Silence with no clothes on.

Night's bedrock,  
mattress creaking.  
Soft moonlight on his cheek,  
a disguise.

When you marry an oak,  
the body agrees to  
lady slippers in shadows.

Conversation dependent on weather,  
whether dependent.  
The abrupt, unpregnant  
pause.<sup>57</sup>

The poem is figured as a diary entry, whereby it remains open regardless of whether the poetic form of the text is attributed to the speaker herself or rather to the narrative instance that employs this form as a medium of expression for the prosaic diary entry of the protagonist.<sup>58</sup> This is because Red is not addressed anywhere in the book as a poet but exclusively as a painter. The lyric mode and poetic structure imbue the poem with meaning, which maintains explanatory significance for both the characters' psychologies as well as the plot (such as her desire to have children when her husband is sterile: "The abrupt, unpregnant / pause"). Additionally, this enables the reader's own concurrent meaning making, which extends beyond the plot and the book itself (especially through the use of metaphor), as is typical for lyric texts. Separated from the plot, the position of the I opens up to the reader; the subject of the poem thus functions simultaneously as both a 'Leerdeixis' / 'blank deixis'<sup>59</sup> (lyric) and as a concrete figure in the plot (narrative).

All poems, even those that predominantly utilize the epic or dramatic modes, emphasize – more or less strongly – a poetic facture. For example, the poem "Sticks & Stones"<sup>60</sup> consists of one-word verses of invective with which various members of society express their contempt for the adulterous Red. Different voices are to be imagined accordingly. Sound play and phonetic transformations link the words. In the end, the protagonist's voice emerges from the chorus: it is

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<sup>57</sup> Ayers (2017: 39).

<sup>58</sup> In Porter's "The Monkey's Mask" there is also no explanation as to why the lesbian detective records her experiences in poems – the poem is a way of writing which Porter chooses in order to be close to the subject's point of view, on the one hand, and to be able to focus the narrative on central moments, on the other hand.

<sup>59</sup> Spinner (1975).

<sup>60</sup> Ayers (2017: 117-118).

she who is now “free” (“free” being the only word written in lower case, connected with “finally” to form a sentence). The poem can be read autonomously as a miniature, depicting the ostracization of a woman who disregards social norms. At the same time, it is connected with the whole of the novel in discreet ways and through equivalences: “Witch” refers to the Baba Yaga, the verb “fallen” to Red’s actual first name, “Eve,” etc.

In Ayers’s novel, in addition to lyric and dramatic passages, narrative traits are evident, both in the poems themselves and in the relatively high degree of coherence between poems. These procedures connect the poems more clearly than is the case in Ermakova’s book, and thus allow the plot to be directly present in the poems themselves. While Ermakova claims that her protagonist is the author of the poems and only locates herself in the paratexts (preface, epilogue, commentary), Ayers also injects her authorship within the poems. The titles and epigraphs are designed such that they do not refer to the speakers of the poems but rather to a mediating instance that provides a framework addressed to the reader that explains the occasion or topic. This instance appears to be identical with the third-person narrator that appears in some of the poems. Through the epigraphs of poems and chapters, as well as the prologue and epilogue, she sets interpretative impulses that complement, or even correct, the views<sup>61</sup> of the poems’ various speakers<sup>62</sup>. These procedures make Ayers’s ‘novel in poems’ polyphonic and multi-perspectival, underlining its narrative qualities and thus bringing it closer to the verse novel on our scale.

### *The Dramatic “Novel in Poems”: Glyn Maxwell’s “The Sugar Mile” (2005)*

In English-language literature, a variety of ‘novels in poems’ demonstrate close affinities to the genre of the dramatic monologue, which is especially prominent in the Anglophone tradition. Examples of this are “New Found Land” by Allan Wolf (2004), Karen Hesse’s “Witness”<sup>63</sup> (2000), and Terri Field’s “After the

<sup>61</sup> For example, the epigraph (from the song by Warren Zevon “Searching for a Heart”) in the poem “Hunter Insists on Having His Say” has such a function (Ayers 2017: 36-37). The epigraph suggests that Red will leave her husband Hunter and follow her love, the Wolf, while Hunter, the speaker in this poem, sings of his supposedly so well-behaved housewife whom he wrongly thinks he owns – the motto functions as a tragic irony.

<sup>62</sup> Cadden rightly points out that in verse novels the sequence of different speakers is often semantically determined – main characters take their turn with their poems or speeches before secondary characters (cf. Cadden 2011: 23).

<sup>63</sup> “In *Witness*, Hesse discovers new possibilities for the verse-novel. The book is divided into five Acts and each ‘verse’ has as its title the name of one of the eleven characters featured in the story, so that it is as though they take turns to speak. This is verse-novel becoming drama; it could be performed as a radio play” (Alexander 2005: 277). Zymner notes with regard to this example that here the verse make it possible “to reproduce paralinguistic aspects of ‘natural’ language use (such as pauses in breathing or hesitant speaking), so that one could speak

Death of Anna Gonzales” (2002). Field describes her book as “poems written in the voices of forty-seven people”; Hesse divides her book into “acts” and calls it a “series of poems” (as indicated on the book’s cover); while Wolf describes his book, which is composed of (more or less dramatic) monologue poems, as a “novel.” British author Glyn Maxwell develops what can be regarded as an experimental variation of this phenotype that places high demands on its reader.

In contrast to Ermakova and Ayers’s books, Maxwell’s “The Sugar Mile” manages without either a typical lyric speaker or narrator. The special feature of the book lies in the fact that its poems consist mainly of dramatic speeches. As with Ayers’s work, the poems are delivered by different characters. The titles indeed contain information about places, times, and people, but in contrast to the poems of Ayers, the reader here must conduct further research in order to point more clearly to the speaker or setting of the poem. The poems additionally withhold interpretative strategies from the reader. It is left to the reader to reconstruct what exactly the poem is about, who is actually speaking<sup>64</sup> and in what situation, what kind of person that speaker is, and what relation he or she bears to other figures. To be able to understand and classify an individual poem, the recipient must read the book in its entirety and take into consideration the novel as a whole. Proceeding in hermeneutical spirals, the reader must reconstruct the plot and the function of its characters, taking on tasks traditionally performed by the narrator or realized through the ‘aesthetic subject of the text’ and/or ‘of the author’ as constructed by paratexts.

The reconstruction of the plot is complicated, as the poems alternate in sudden leaps between two far-flung locations and times, connected by only a single person and the theme of an aerial attack. One plot takes place on the first days of the Blitz on 7<sup>th</sup> September 1940 in London, the other exactly 61 years later on the Saturday evening of September 8<sup>th</sup>, 2001, a few days before the attack on the Twin Towers, in a bar on Broadway. Two of the protagonists are affected by these attacks: Joey Stone experienced the Blitz as a boy and lost his young love, with whom he became romantic on the very night of the bombing; in 2001, he is a regular at Raul’s bar. The other one is Raul, who, three days later, on September 11<sup>th</sup>, will begin a

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of an intensification or increase in the scenic or dramatic potential of the novel in verse compared to the prose novel” (“[...] paralinguistische Aspekte ‚natürlicher‘ Sprachverwendung (wie Atempausen oder zögerndes Sprechen) nachzubilden, so dass man von einer Intensivierung oder Steigerung des szenischen oder dramatischen Potentials der novel in verse im Vergleich zum Prosaroman sprechen könnte”; Zymner 2009b: 161; my translation, H.S.).

<sup>64</sup> Often the speakers are mentioned by their name in the title of the poems, however, in several poems, the reader must figure out who is the person speaking (for instance: “Man in a Little Flower Bed” or “Man Getting off a Bike”; italics – mine).

new job at the Twin Towers, and, as the reader can gather from allusions, he is imagined to be among those who will soon leap to their deaths.<sup>65</sup>

The isolation of the poems from each other is emphasized insofar as, speaking cinematically, one switches in sharp cuts from one person's perspective to another and possibly also between places and times. The coherence of the poems and the background of the events and contexts must be reconstructed on the basis of references in other poems. But the specific situations in which the poems take place – i.e., are spoken – must be reconstructed as well. Thus, the poems usually contain the speech of only one person, with characteristically loud or soft voices, often talking to themselves; or, even, perhaps, internally spoken or reproduced imaginatively in a single stream of consciousness. Differences between addressed and unaddressed speech are signalled by italic or capital print, brackets, and also by the arrangement of lines and stanzas modelling the flow of speech. But what they refer to in concrete terms must be reconstructed according to the context. No fixed system of signs is established: the brackets sometimes signal an aside, at other times an internal soliloquy, etc.

Action, reaction, and the speech of other characters are not reproduced by inserting direct speech, as in a drama or narrative text, but instead presented within the speech of only one figure at a time, who possibly repeats fragments from the words of another but only in the decontextualized form of reported speech. This procedure can be understood alongside the tradition of the dramatic monologue.<sup>66</sup> Due to this emphatically oral gesture, the impression of a multi-layered audio “recording” is created, which, however, reproduces only one “track” (one voice).<sup>67</sup> This is clear in “Granny’s” speech, for example, which presupposes that Joey did not drink his tea and told her that he wanted to “have a look”: “Don’t let your tea go cold, / Joey [...] Where are you going, dear? What do you mean ‘to look’?” (“Granny May on the Stairs”).<sup>68</sup> A later poem continues

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<sup>65</sup> On the reconstruction of the plot, cf. Peter Hühn’s essay in this volume: “Generic Extensions in Contemporary British Poetry” (Hühn 2021). With good reason, Hühn understands some aspects differently from Kempton (2018: 172-176).

<sup>66</sup> Cadden writes about the proximity of the new novel to the dramatic monologue: “Browning’s dramatic monologue is a close poetic parallel to the feel of the verse novel, for he provides us personal, natural voice and a sense of the scenic, but unlike Browning’s characters, the verse novel’s speakers do not tend to address directly within the poem a character ‘narratee’ – or person addressed in the context of the poem” (Cadden 2011: 22). Maxwell, however, is an example of the fact that an addressee may well be directly involved in the speech act; here Cadden wrongly criticizes Alexander, who has pointed out that the new verse novel develops analogues to the “dramatic monologue” (which does not mean that every verse novel or ‘novel in poems’ does this; moreover, if it does, it can happen in very different ways), cf. Alexander (2005: 271).

<sup>67</sup> The cover text points out the technique of storytelling through voices (“Told through the alternating voices of adult and child”).

<sup>68</sup> Maxwell (2005: 12).

where this leaves off, allowing the reader to reconstruct what Joey was looking for: he knew from the location of the bombing that the family of the girl he loves could be affected. In this poem, a brother of Joey's girlfriend speaks about the night they were bombed ("Harry Pray in His Coat"):

[...] But where?  
I suppose we're 'refugees'.  
World's our oyster, Joey. Here,  
Help me with these.<sup>69</sup>

This poem shows how the figure's sometimes very colloquial speech is poetically re-formed. Line and stanzaic forms vary, but they do not serve merely to structure the flow of speech but are also used to create poetic effects in combination with other stylistic devices. Rhyme (approximate cross rhyme), alliteration ("When"- "where"- "World's"), wordplay ("mind"- "mound") and metaphor (hidden in the fixed idiom and underpinning an additional, even contradictory meaning: "oyster") are used here to symbolize and underscore the character's experience.<sup>70</sup>

The elimination of mediating instances and procedures guiding the reader, as it were, turns Maxwell's book into a puzzle. These techniques are meta-poetically reflected upon in the first and last poems of the book. The latter repeats and scrambles the text of the former; they function, we might say, as prologue and epilogue, even though they are each assigned to one of the three parts of the book and not explicitly juxtaposed to the other. With these framing poems, Maxwell stages the 'death of the author.' The "author,"<sup>71</sup> referred to as such in the text, says here: "There can be no first person"<sup>72</sup> and "The poet is any stranger / seen today, whose past is an empty notebook [...] whose past is an empty *moleskine*."<sup>73</sup> Within the book, the "author" is degraded to an eyewitness who simply notes down the speech of others. Thus, he is mentioned several times in the poems of the other characters as being present in the bar – he writes there constantly. Joey accordingly calls him a writer and says to him, turning Maxwell's own first name, Glyn, into Glenn:

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>70</sup> Other poems also use experimental visual and phonetic forms of poetry, see for example "Julie Pray Looking at Her Fingers," which, as the context demonstrates, expresses the girl's traumatic disturbance and even mental instability (ibid., 22-23).

<sup>71</sup> The "author" is a fictional character (therefore he is put in quotation marks) but refers to the real author of the book. He is also presented as weak in decision making for those passages that do not come from the characters but from himself – through blackouts (cf. ibid., 4, 140 in the framing poems).

<sup>72</sup> Maxwell (2005: 3, 139).

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 139-140. Cf. the first poem (ibid., 3-4): "The poet is any stranger / seen today, whose past is an empty *moleskine* [...] nothing in his notebook / but this."

And yes, we lovers of poems

must stick together. Don't mind me. Pardon? Glenn?  
Glenn? Glenn. It is nice to meet you, Glenn.

[...]

You came here to write, my friend.<sup>74</sup>

[...] Look at him, pen at the ready, like I could say  
some poetry.<sup>75</sup>

Moreover, the author in the book receives the “yellow envelope” that contains the story of Joey’s youth in poems, which Joey and other people in his circle speak of from time to time, as well as Julie’s prose notes. The staged author is thus understood as a protocol writer and arranger of the text, but not as its inventor.

Maxwell’s enacted dethronement of the author and the elimination of explicitly guiding instances paradoxically leads to the installation of an all-the-more-powerful, even omnipresent, ‘textual subject’: that is, a mediating instance to which the intentional structuring of the text’s cosmos can be ascribed. This is because the actual coherence of the overall composition is necessary in order to make a reconstruction of the plot possible. The form of the poems thus serves as a principle of fragmentation, montage, and polyphonic perspectivization. Due to the widespread interconnectivity across the text – as well as the situational embedding of the speech acts, which retain only limited forms of the fiction of performativity – the poems demonstrate a significantly lower degree of autonomy than is the case with Ermakova’s, or even Ayers’s, work. The book thus tends still more clearly towards the novel than the previous example by Ayers.

### *Specifics of the “Novel in Poems”*

The three examples analysed above are manifestations of the ‘novel in poems’ with different constellations of lyric, narrative, and dramatic modes. They are also each located differently on the scale we have established between the poetry volume and the verse novel.

In Ermakova’s decidedly lyric poems, the plot is not explicitly presented but is rather presupposed. Therefore, the text is closer to the book of poems than to the novel. Ayers’s book, on the other hand, is positioned closer to the novel, because it develops a stringent plot over a longer period of time and employs narrative procedures as well as dramatic modes of representation. The poems, too, are considerably longer – in some cases more than two pages – just as the book is more extensive and divided into chapters. Maxwell’s book, on the other hand, is much closer to the novel than Ayers’s, even while, unlike Ayers, he avoids the construction of an overarching narrative through paratexts and only

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 27. Raul, however, calls the “author” “Clint” (ibid., 9).

sparingly uses narrative procedures. In his book, poems can be read autonomously only in rare instances; they are largely tied into the respective strands of the double plot that is left to the reader to be reconstructed. Additionally, the dominant dramatic mode and the characters' direct speech are subtly superimposed over the lyric fiction of performativity to the point of its imperceptibility. To an even greater extent than we find in Ayers's book, Maxwell functionalizes poetry as a medium of expression in which poetic characteristics are placed in the service of the dramatic mode. Nevertheless, the book indeed remains a novel. It could not be called a 'drama in poems,' for instance, as its many passages of direct speech are not spoken but instead represent fragments of interior speech or even stream of consciousness. The text, that is, does not require or even permit for staging.

With regard to subject forms and modes of representation, the following may be remarked in summary. Ermakova's book is a romance novel with a single lyric speaker who acts as the addresser, protagonist, and (fictive) poet across all of its constituent poems. This fictive author also co-acts with the 'aesthetic subject of the text.' The real author explicitly sets herself apart from the fictive one through paratexts. The book dominantly uses the lyric mode and only becomes narrative, and rudimentarily so, when individual poems are read in the context of the book as a whole.

The other two books, in contrast, demonstrate complex plots featuring shifting speakers and combine all three modes of representation, but do so in unique ways.

Ayers's *Künstlerroman* utilizes a predominantly narrative structure, while its poems show a combination of lyric, poetic, and dramatic modes – sometimes relying on one mode alone, usually the lyric. In contrast to Ermakova's work, the novel's plot is rarely presupposed; rather, in most poems, the plot is narrated or presented directly as a combination of narrative and dramatic dialogue. The third-person narrator and textual subject act together and distinguish themselves from the first-person speakers of the poems. The difference between figures as speakers, on the one hand, and the narrator and 'aesthetic subject of the text,' on the other, develops perspectives of interpretation and evaluation that deviate from those of the book's characters.

Maxwell's experimental historical novel largely follows the dramatic mode while combining it with other modes of representation. There is no narrator who acts explicitly through paratext; rather, it is precisely such a superordinate subject that is dethroned by the staging of the "author's" farewell in favor of the voices he records. However, a superordinate subject returns, as it were, through the back door at an implicit structural level, as the entire text proves to be planned out down to the last detail. The closely interlocked montage of the fragments forms a narrative ensemble, in which every fragment has its place, and, in the end, produces a coherent mosaic of the double plot, thus referring to a single mediating instance that has composed or arranged the totality of the text: an omnipresent and strongly developed 'aesthetic subject of the text' that

points not to the fictional “author” Maxwell in the text, but to the real Maxwell outside the book – merging with the ‘aesthetic subject of the author.’

For the three texts, the forms of the subject of enunciation can be combined with the three modes of representation as follows (the dominant mode of representation is highlighted in bold, and decreasing degrees of dominance are designated by normal type and brackets, respectively):

Subject of enunciation	1 speaker = figure	1 speaker ≠ figure	Several speakers = figures
<i>Modes of representation</i>			
<i>Lyric</i>	<b>IE</b>		<b>LHA</b> GM
<i>Narrative</i>	[IE]	<b>LHA</b>	<b>LHA</b> [GM]
<i>Dramatic</i>			LHA <b>GM</b>

*IE = Irina Ermakova; LHA = Lena Hechtman Ayers; GM = Glyn Maxwell*

Despite phenotypical differences, these three examples display common tendencies in terms of form and function that are characteristic of the ‘novel in poems’ as a genre in its own right.

One such attribute is that ‘novel in poems’ tends towards imbuing its poems with different and varying degrees of formal and semantic autonomy. It generally features shorter poems that, when read together, build a single, co-extensive text – here, each over 100 pages – and, in doing so, employs different combinations of lyric, narrative, and dramatic modes of representation. The ‘novel in poems’ is thus characterized by hyper-structuring through symmetries, holistic interconnectivity, and montage. Its guiding principle is that *the higher the fragmentation and reduction of narration, the higher the formal condensation through equivalences*.

Furthermore, the ‘novel in poems’ demonstrates a tendency to differentiate between mediating instances in order to construct multifocal textual presentations, distinguishing, for instance, between one or several speakers versus a narrator, who, in turn, may or may not coincide with the ‘aesthetic subject of the text’ or the ‘aesthetic subject of the author.’ A de-hierarchizing style is distinctive here, reducing instances of order and making the positions of the narrator and textual subject marked rather than implicit, as in the case of Ayers, whose narrator speaks alongside her characters. Alternatively, the absence of a narrator may be equally emphasized or marked and compensated for by the use of characters, composition, and/or paratext. However, as Maxwell’s example shows, such a radical de-hierarchization can turn into an even stronger emphasis on the text’s composition and thus establish an omnipresent ‘aesthetic subject of the text.’



Thematically, the 'novel in poems' often includes a meta-poetic reflection on poetry, or at least on art and creativity. Poetry and poems are thematized by the protagonists themselves, who often appear as poets. The poems thus function like a kind of diary or record. Novels like Ayers's also show how poems can be used as a medium of representation even when neither the speaker nor the protagonist are designated as poets.

The poetic form serves to underscore voice and person. Ultimately, by emphasizing subjectivity and polyvalent perspective, the 'novel in poems' demands the active reconstruction of its plot, which is usually not narrated in the normal sense.<sup>76</sup> Thus, the popularity of the 'novel in poems' could be read as a harbinger of the reawakening of poetry as a medium for expression of the subject.

Nevertheless, the 'novel in poems' also exhibits fundamental characteristics of the novel: namely, an extensive body of text read sequentially to depict a complex plot featuring multiple characters and focalization from various perspectives. However, the plot becomes necessarily episodic due to the compositional employment of individual poems and thus requires effort on behalf of the reader to assist in its reconstruction. Although typically fragmented, the plot does, however, tend to be ordered chronologically. In the poem, as in the drama, due to the absence or weakening of a mediating instance and the dominance of speech and action in the present tense, deviation from chronology is more difficult to convey, even if it is not impossible in principle. The 'novel in poems' often develops, for instance, an internal conflict between the speaker's imagined present, typical of poems, and the retrospective presentation of the speaker's experience, characteristic of a narrative. This conflict of perspectives is analogous to the dissociation between the speaker and the textual subject in poems. This also has consequences for the lyric fiction of performativity: the poems often make use of such performativity in a traditional form, but, in the context of the novel as a whole, it is subsumed in the function of a historical present-tense narration.<sup>77</sup> In these cases, imagined and performatively constituted content refers to a narrated object beyond, or besides, the speech act, which is not narrated but merely implied.

The reward of the 'novel in poems' lies in the fact that its constituent parts allow for a higher degree of focalization on singular moments as well as the individual and his or her own inner life. Furthermore, the lyric means of doing

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<sup>76</sup> However, this formulation is not without exceptions – especially in the segment of entertainment literature, or even youth literature, there is a high tendency towards first-person narration with a strong plot flow, as shown by Acevedo's "The Poet X," Nagai's "Under the Broken Sky," Porter's "The Monkey's Mask," and many more. But there are also multi-perspective forms in the youth segment with the use of visual poetry formats; see, for instance, David Elliott's 'novel in poems' for young people, "Voices" (2019).

<sup>77</sup> In some texts, the fiction of performativity transforms into present-tense narration, as, for instance, in many poems of Acevedo's novel "The Poet X".

so produce an additional hermeneutic level for the construction of meaning and increase the expressive potential of the text. The ‘novel in poems’ is thus a genre suitable for both the poetically well-versed and discerning market of ‘high’ literature as well as for popular entertainment.

Finally, this genre performs two parallel functions that make it attractive to a reader. On the one hand, it is a poetry book that offers its reader an opening for identification, as the individual poems can be extracted and read such that their subject functions as a ‘blank deixis’ to be appropriated by its reader for his or her own semantic needs. On the other hand, it is a novel, which often features exciting stories, plots, and character psychologies.

The rising development of the ‘novel in poems’ should thus be situated in the larger context of transcending boundaries between genres and media that is characteristic of much of recent literature. However, for many contemporary global literatures, the ‘novel in poems’ remains a genre yet to be discovered as, so far, only Anglophone literature has developed a full application of its forms.

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## **Internationale Zeitschrift für Kulturkomparatistik**

Band 2 (2021): *Contemporary Lyric Poetry in Transitions between Genres and Media*

Herausgegeben von Ralph Müller und Henrieke Stahl

Hühn, Peter: Generic Extensions in Contemporary British Poetry. In: IZfK 2 (2021). 119-131.

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### **Generic Extensions in Contemporary British Poetry**

This contribution analyses two complex examples of the generic extension of lyric poetry in recent British literature. Tony Harrison's film poem "The Shadow of Hiroshima" (1995) expands the lyric text into the visual dimension; Glyn Maxwell's collection "The Sugar Mile" (2005) arranges a large number of individual lyric poems into a dramatic scenario. In both cases the generic transition is coupled with a further generic extension – the elaboration of a distinctly narrative sequentiality. In two important aspects the generic extension of these examples affects the rendering of a particular experience, namely the perception of and reaction to massive violence and destruction. One aspect concerns the organization of speech situation and perspective, especially the relation between a superordinate authorial voice and possible subordinate voices, the other aspect pertains to the status of the represented experience in the ambiguity between factuality and fictionality, characteristic of the stance of the lyric utterance in various periods throughout the history of poetry. In both respects the generic expansion in Harrison's "The Shadow of Hiroshima" and in Maxwell's "The Sugar Mile" can be shown to utilize the representational potentials of lyric poetry in distinctly alternative directions.

*Keywords: lyric poetry, drama, narrativity, film poem, sequentiality, generic transgression, generic extension, speaker, speech situation, voice, multi-perspectivity, novel in poems, visual narration, fictionality, factuality*

I would like to discuss two very diverse examples of generic transition or extension of lyric poetry in recent British writing, which in different ways combine distinctly lyrical features with structural elements of other genres: with film and its extended narrative in Tony Harrison's "The Shadow of Hiroshima" (1995) and with drama and novelistic narrative in Glyn Maxwell's "The Sugar Mile" (2005).

Both are exceptional specimens indicative of sporadic, but in recent years slowly spreading transgeneric tendencies within the contemporary poetry scene in Great Britain (and more extensively in the United States). These two examples can be seen to stand in the context of different loosely defined hybrid sub-genres or quasi-generic conventions. In Harrison's case this is the spectrum of various modes of coupling a poetic text with moving pictures in what is termed a "poetry film" or a "film poem."<sup>1</sup> In Maxwell's case this concerns the conventions of mediating an extended story either specifically through a sequence of separate individual poems in what may be called a "novel in poems"<sup>2</sup> or, more broadly, conveying an extended story through a continuous narrative text in verse form or in stanzas in what is usually classified as a "verse novel."<sup>3</sup> Generic transitions of lyric poetry within these two variants of that hybrid sub-genre have a long tradition.<sup>4</sup> On the one hand, this is the tradition of the narrative or quasi-narrative arrangement of individual poems in poetry collections, primarily sonnets, which can be traced from Petrarca's "Canzoniere," Sidney's "Astrophel and Stella," Shakespeare's "Sonnets" to Barrett Browning's "Sonnets from the Portuguese," Meredith's "Modern Love," Tennyson's "Maud" and Seth's "The Golden Gate." On the other hand, there is the tradition of verse narratives,<sup>5</sup> which stretches from Chaucer's "Troilus and Criseyde," Spenser's "Faerie Queene," Milton's "Paradise Lost," Byron's "Don Juan," Barrett Browning's "Aurora Leigh," Browning's "Ring and the Book" to Walcott's "Omeros" and Maxwell's "Time's Fool." Maxwell's "Sugar Mile" is transitional even to a higher degree in that it widens the transgeneric scope to comprise also dramatic features.

The following analyses of the two hybrid works are based on the premise that a lyric poem is generally characterized by two prototypical features: brevity together with prosodical overstructuring (which foregrounds the artifice of the text and causes self-reflexivity) and a monological speech situation<sup>6</sup> (which tends to blur the speaker-author-distinction and may be perceived either fictionally or

<sup>1</sup> See Wees / Dorland (1984); see also Ieropoulos. <http://www.studycollection.co.uk/poetry.html> [29/10/2019].

<sup>2</sup> This is the specific term suggested by Henrieke Stahl in her comprehensive and systematic presentation and analysis of this genre in "The 'Novel in Poems' – an Emerging Genre" (Stahl 2021). See Adrian Kempton's more loosely defined concept of this genre in "The Verse Novel in English: Origins, Growth and Expansion" (2018: 9-24).

<sup>3</sup> See the comprehensive overview in *ibid.* (2018); see Cadden (2011: 21-27).

<sup>4</sup> Kempton (2018: 29-98).

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion of the Romantic and Victorian verse novel, its status as a genre and the history of this genre see Detmers (2007: 185-203); see Fischer (1964); Bose (1976).

<sup>6</sup> See, e.g., Lamping (1989: 21-22); Müller-Zettelmann (2000: 64-138); Hempfer (2014: 30-45). Hempfer adds further prototypical aspects but considers the monological speech situation („Äußerungsstruktur“) as fundamental (*ibid.*, 68-69).



factually<sup>7</sup>), but the two recent examples analyzed here are more radical in their generic extension.

*Tony Harrison's "The Shadow of Hiroshima"*

Tony Harrison's "The Shadow of Hiroshima"<sup>8</sup> (1995) is a "film/poem" – as he calls it –, the coupling of an extended poetic text on a sound track with a visual track, on the commemoration of the atomic bomb attack on Hiroshima on August 6<sup>th</sup>, 1945, broadcast by the BBC on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of that event in 1995. The poetic sequence – not a continuous narrative but a succession of longer or shorter separate passages of couplets subdivided, in print, by asterisks and made up of self-contained utterances or observations – is presented by an authorial speaker, the voice of the poet Tony Harrison himself, who leads through the preparations for the annual ceremony commemorating the nuclear destruction of Hiroshima, starting on August 5<sup>th</sup> and ending on the morning of August 6<sup>th</sup>, when immediately after the precise moment of the atomic blast, at 8.15h, the peace doves are released. The voice of Tony Harrison introduces – as a guide through part of the day – the subordinate speaker Shadow San ("Mister Shadow"), the imaginary figure of an anonymous man with a fan, whose shadowy outline had been stamped onto the ground by the blast and who functions as a representative of all victims of the blast. Shadow San is on "one day's parole,"<sup>9</sup> as it were, and accompanies the narrative of the anniversary up to the recurrence of the moment when, exactly fifty years earlier, he had been incinerated by the bomb, what he calls his "burning time."<sup>10</sup> The sequence consists of his recollections of the past and his thwarted longings for an ordinary life, especially his love for a girl, interwoven with the build-up for the annual ceremony of releasing the peace doves beneath the A-Bomb Peace Dome in the center of the city. Thus the progression of the poem is determined by the contrast between the details about the horrible deaths of the victims in the past, recollected and drastically described, and the present preparations by several keepers of the pigeons for the commemoration as well as the current activities of the present-day inhabitants of the city, such as performing the gymnastic exercises after instructions broadcast on the radio, practicing for a baseball match, visiting a Shinto shrine, playing pinball games, painting pictures of the Peace Dome, and making love in a "love hotel." The narrative ends, on the morning of A-Bomb Day, with the commemorative ceremony and with the release and flight of the peace-doves and their return, during which some of them fall victim to the attack of hungry hawks. In his concluding comments the authorial speaker then associates the

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<sup>7</sup> Hühn (2014: 155-168).

<sup>8</sup> "The Shadow of Hiroshima and Other Film/Poems," Harrison (1995).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 4, 15.

hawks' attacks with Japan's aggressive and brutal behavior against other nations before and during the war, pointing out that the threat of violence and war will persist in spite of these peace rituals:

Is the world at peace tonight?  
Or are we all like Shadow San  
facing inferno with a fan?<sup>11</sup>

This attack can be classified as the *event* in the narrative progression of the poem – the unexpected significant turn in the happenings. The appeal and hope for peace as the reaction to the experience of a devastating war is suddenly undermined by disturbing prospects for the future.

The specifically lyrical quality of this quasi-narrative lengthy sequence consists *formally* in the conspicuous use of the brilliantly rhymed iambic tetrameter, the classical verse of narrative poetry in English, e.g. “Hiroshima hawks are glad to glut / and gorge themselves on peace-dove gut,”<sup>12</sup> and it consists *structurally* in the differentiated use of the subjective perspective, confronting and relating two different subjective views in the sequence of individual utterances, that of the superordinate authorial instance, Tony Harrison's own voice, and in the voice of the sadly deprived anonymous victim (Shadow San), who cannot speak for himself and is imaginatively, poetically re-created by the poet lending him his voice and his eyes. The re-created victim can thus address his creator:

“This voice comes from the shadow cast  
by Hiroshima's A-bomb-blast.  
The sound you hear inside this case  
is of a man who fans his face  
he used to have before the flash  
turned face and body into ash.  
I am the nameless fanning man  
you may address as Shadow San.  
The inferno flayed me as I fanned,  
gold fan with cranes on in my hand.  
In that fierce force but one degree  
of quicker combustibility  
separated fan and me,  
but that one degree mean that the man  
was stamped on stone and not the fan.  
My shadow's fading and I fear  
I may not make centenary year,  
And so before I finally fade  
Give one last outing to this shade,  
And you will be my eyes to see  
This fiftieth anniversary.”<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 3.

The authorial voice, on the one hand, impersonates Shadow San, emphatically and memorably rendering the past experience of loss and destruction with great emotional intensity up to moment, where the shadow has to depart, re-living the moment of his nuclear incineration: “I saw the saddened shade retire / to face again the flash and fire.”<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, the authorial voice describes and comments on the superficial and trivial present-day activities forgetful of the past inferno (such as breeding and looking after pigeons or visiting pinball arcades). The sound track corroborates the intensive emotionally suggestive impact of the text through the sonorous emphatic voice of Tony Harrison himself and intermittently through emotionally intensifying music. The authentic presentation of the poet’s own voice, endorsing the *factual* stance of the utterance, is a particularly intensive – sensual – reinforcement of a feature pervasively characteristic of lyric poetry, the association of the speaker with the author, which cannot be rendered on the printed page and relies on the acoustic mediation of the poem. This particular feature is even more prominent in another of Tony Harrison’s film/poems, “The Blasphemers’ Banquet” (1989), the passionate polemic defense of Salman Rushdie against the Islamic fatwa, where the acoustic presentation of the poet’s original voice is corroborated by the visual presentation, on the visual track, of Tony Harrison in person acting as the host of the banquet in honor of Salman Rushdie.

The visual track of “The Shadow of Hiroshima” serves two functions: On the one hand, the pictures illustrate what is being described or mentioned in the text (Shadow San’s silhouette burned into the pavement, details of the city of Hiroshima and its buildings, people’s activities such as morning gymnastics and baseball training, the flight of the doves and later of the hawks); on the other hand, these illustrations function as a mundane and trivial contrast to the remembrance of the devastating blast and the complete destruction of the city and its inhabitants. The double medial extension – both acoustic and visual – of the poem thus corroborates the effect of the poetic text in two ways: The sound track (voice and music) intensifies and thus supports the effect, the attitude and the meaning of the poem *directly*; the visual track serves this effect *indirectly*, by offering pictures of present-day phenomena which are in blatant contrast to and deliberately forgetful of the past catastrophe. Strictly speaking, the transmedial extension of the text does not noticeably transcend the meaning of the poem but underpins it and intensifies its impression, authenticating the narrative with respect to the mediated subject matter as well as to the mediating instance. The transmedial extension thus serves to deepen the impact of the poem.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 17.

## Glyn Maxwell's "The Sugar Mile"

Glyn Maxwell's "The Sugar Mile"<sup>15</sup> (2005) deals with two historical scenes of massive urban destruction by interlinking them via monthly date and extent of destructiveness: the terrorist suicide attack on the Twin Towers in New York on September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 and the German air raid of London on September 7<sup>th</sup>, 1940, which is known as *Black Saturday* or the beginning of the Blitz. Both aerial attacks on cities happened in early September, 61 years apart.<sup>16</sup> These two incidents are further linked by the presence of one identical witness in both scenes, Joseph (Joey) Stone, an adolescent in London in 1940 and an old man in New York in 2001. The two situations are conveyed via 59 poems, monologues (or soliloquies) spoken by characters present in the respective scenes, in New York *before* and in London *after* the attack. The scene in New York is set in a bar on Broadway on September 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> (i.e. the weekend before the attack), where three characters meet: the barkeeper Raul, the regular customer ("bar-fly") Joey Stone and the author, who himself does not speak and who is only seen writing, addressed by the other two as Glenn or Clint (inaccurately for Glyn, Maxwell's first name).<sup>17</sup> The scene in London, set in an area just devastated by bombs, is represented by young Joey Stone together with his grandmother (Granny May), by members of the Pray family, mother Betsy and her five children Harry, Robby, Sally, Julie and the baby Lily as well as by diverse officers of the city administration. The Prays have been bombed out and are later evacuated to a school in a neighboring area of London, together with other victims. These areas are close to the Tate & Lyle sugar factory in the East End of London, to which the title "The Sugar Mile" refers.

The individual monologues and soliloquies are composed as elaborately structured lyric poems, displaying a great variety of forms and devices, some traditional (like *sestina* and *terza rima*), others (the great majority) newly invented, all distinctly rhythmic and with a broad spectrum of sound devices, such as pure rhymes, identical rhymes, pararhymes (assonances and consonances), internal rhymes, different stanzaic forms and varying line lengths, interspersed with rhymeless verses and sometimes even prose. Stylistically the poems deliberately avoid conventional poetic diction, extensively employing colloquial speech, both English and American, to various degrees. One example, in colloquial speech and, almost exclusively, with identical rhymes is Joey's first attempt to start a conversation with Glenn in the bar, having observed him write in a notebook:

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<sup>15</sup> Maxwell (2005).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Kempton's discussion of "The Sugar Mile" (2018: 172-176), which in some – few – points differs from the one presented here.

<sup>17</sup> Another oblique reference to the actual author is Joey's garbled repetition of Glenn's answer to the question "where do you come from": "Well-in-the-Garden", for Welwyn Garden City, Maxwell's birth-place (Maxwell 2005: 29).

Some poems,  
Right some poems.

I'm a lover of poems.  
And yes, we lovers of poems

Must stick together. Don't mind me. Pardon? Glenn?  
Glenn? Glenn. It is nice to meet you, Glenn.

You are thinking you are in luck.  
Because look,

a strange old man has joined you at the bar.  
How fortunate you are

This fine day. I beg your pardon? Indeed.  
The secret's out. I am indeed

a man with English, how do you say Raul, *issues*,  
Exactly, English *issues*.

No, not for fifty years.  
Hoboken Italian now for fifty years.

I'm English when there are wars,  
I was English when there were wars.<sup>18</sup>

Stanzaic forms are specifically used to differentiate the various characters: Joey speaks couplets (as in this example), Raul sestinas, Harry quatrains, Robby free verse. Among the monologues only one dialogue poem stands out – spoken by Joey and Julie<sup>19</sup>, indicative of the central importance of their relationship for the plot of the collection. What these various prosodic devices achieve is imposing a foregrounding poetic superstructure on the realistic experiences and utterances in a historically, regionally and socially specific setting. The poems (with that one significant exception) are unified by another common lyric feature, the *monological* speech situation.

While thus the individual monologues and soliloquies are conspicuously lyrical in their prosodic and rhetorical set-up, the overall arrangement of these poems is both *dramatic* and *narrative* (quasi novelistic). On the one hand, the collection is *dramatic* – or, more precisely, *quasi-dramatic*. Two different groupings of monologues – specifically in the form of *dramatic monologues* (in Robert Browning's sense) – convey the situation of 2001 and that of 1940, with the respective constellation and interactions of the two sets of characters. The dramatic set-up is stressed by the headings of most of the poems, which function like stage direc-

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 86-91.

tions: “Raul Chalking up Specials,” “Joey Awake Now,” “Robby Biting His Nails,” “Chief Warden Atop a Piano.” The dramatic dimension also shows in the speech-situation of the poems, which shifts between silent self-reflection and spoken or mute address to another character, e.g. in “Raul Emptying Ashtrays:”

The guy’s asleep, are you done, you British guys?  
 Are you done contributing?  
 Do we what, do we go alone?  
 Is it time now?

I’m kidding. Give us a signal, give us a sign!  
 Give us the thumbs up, Joey.  
 He’s out of it, I tell you.  
 Hey Brits,

You want us to save your ass again? You guys  
 You nap, we’ll take the watch.  
 We’ll wake you for the next one,  
 Are you in?

I’m kidding with you Clint. Clint can take it,  
 Clint’s smiling in his beer.  
 He’s thinking *this dumb ass!*  
 Or is it *arse?*

He’s thinking *this silly arse!* Hey Joe you with us?  
 It’s the middle of next week!  
 Easy now, it’s okay,  
 It’s Saturday

Still, and it’s still, or it was, an awesome day.  
 The ladies are gone though, Joey.  
 Clint scared them off with some poems,  
 You missed it all!<sup>20</sup>

In addition, one poem is dialogic (as mentioned), with two speakers talking to each other, “Joey and Julie at the Picnic Table.”<sup>21</sup>

On the other hand, the collection is *narrative*, in the form of a “novel in poems” or “Gedichtroman” (Henrieke Stahl).<sup>22</sup> In a particularly complex manner the monologues are ordered by two chronologies constituting two different narrative sequences, one set in New York in 2001, the other in London in 1940. The primary time level is September 2001, with the meeting of Raul, Joey and the author in the bar on Broadway, from which the situation in London 61 years earlier with the experiences of the Pray family, Joey and his grandmother together

<sup>20</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 24.

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 86-91.

<sup>22</sup> See footnote 2. Stahl (2021).

with the occasional appearance of other bomb victims and of representatives of the city administration (chief warden, home guard man) is recollected or imaginatively recreated (by Joey) and inserted likewise in the form of monologues or soliloquies. The second sequence (London 1940) is intertwined or intercalated with the first (New York 2001).

The combination of the three generic dimensions of the collection – lyrical, dramatic, narrative or novelistic – provides a complex overview of these two historical and national situations. And their interrelation creates imaginative extensions in various respects. The texts of the individual lyrical poems present a subjective focus in each case at one specific moment separating and isolating it both from its relation to other personal perspectives, those of the other characters involved or present at the scene, as well as from its own further development in time. The effect consists in a slowing down of the reading process and in the detailed imaginative recreation of a particular experience from a specific personal perspective. The dramatic constellation of these moments then extends the individual point of view to a wider inter-personal angle, establishing the condition of *multi-perspectivity*, which allows for the contrasting and relativizing of each individual view but also for the highlighting of its specificity. The temporal succession of these momentary experiences constitutes a *narrative* of the changes of the situation and of the development of the various characters over time, more precisely in the form of two narratives, one set in 2001, the other in 1940 – the latter re-constructed from within the narrative of 2001.

The narrative of the past development in *1940* concerns the bombing out of the Pray family in London's East End, their temporary accommodation in a school building, their announced but never accomplished evacuation to the country on buses provided by the city government and their total extinction by a direct bomb hit on the school. The central phase inside that sequence, however, is the developing friendship and intimacy between the paper boy Joey Stone and the highly imaginative Pray daughter Julie (once called the "ghost girl"<sup>23</sup>), whom he first met during the preceding winter of 1939/40, with whom he had one intimate conversation, presented in the dialogue poem,<sup>24</sup> and whose secret diary with indications of her affection for him he dug up in the garden after the first raid and then copied out. This discovery counts as the happy *eventful turn* within the narrative sequence, happy for Joey, who as an old man in New York is apparently the actual narrator of this past story or, rather, the self-effaced ultimate purveyor of the imagined monologues. The positive event is, however, almost immediately followed by the *negative event* of Julie's annihilation – together with that of her entire family – in the bomb blast. Joey alone had been spared because he had gone back to the Prays' garden to dig for the buried heir-

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. Maxwell (2005: 15).

<sup>24</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 86-91.

loom – tragically refusing to take Julie with him because it was too “dangerous.”<sup>25</sup>

The primary narrative sequence, set in *2001*, features two different *events*, one foreseeable for the immediate future: the death of Raul, who – as he proudly announces – will begin his new job in a restaurant in one of the Twin Towers on September 11<sup>th</sup>, the other happening at the end of the collection, the handing over of the “yellow envelope.”<sup>26</sup>

Maxwell’s collection “The Sugar Mile” thus tells two stories in the medium of poems: the (subordinate) story of two families affected by the Blitz attack in 1940, the Prays and the Stones, and the (superordinate) story of how the narration of this story, by a witness and victim, comes about in 2001. One further aspect concerns the composition of the poems as well as of the entire collection, on one level further up, as it were. The two chronological sequences together are framed – that is, opened as well as closed – by the same poem of almost identical wording spoken by – or rather: attributed to – the author in his own person, functioning as the prologue and epilogue to the quasi-dramatic presentation of the novel in poems. This poem is the only manifestation in the collection of the poet’s voice. However, the poet as the superordinate recording and composing instance is present throughout the collection in that he is being observed while writing and even spoken to by the other two characters in the Broadway bar, Joey and Raul. The precise information about date and place, “September 8<sup>th</sup>, Broadway & 86<sup>th</sup>”<sup>27</sup>, preceding the untitled opening poem defines the scene: Manhattan three days prior to the attack on the Twin Towers in 2001. A proleptic reference to the future attack is contained in this poem, when the speaker – the poet – describes people jumping and falling (in a desperate attempt to escape from the burning tower), among whom will also be the barkeeper Raul. Thus, the opening poem establishes a wider temporal perspective for the reader, who – unlike the characters – is therefore aware of the impending catastrophe, which makes the two situations in 1940 and 2001 directly comparable.

The other *event* on this level is the handing over of the *yellow envelope* from Joey to “Glenn, Poet and Gentleman” (136), apparently to the author Glyn Maxwell himself, from one writer to another, as it were, presumably Joey’s recollections and imaginary reconstructions of his experience of the Blitz in London and of his acquaintance with the Pray family, especially Julie, and thus the source for all the monologues set in 1940 that we have been reading.<sup>28</sup> This interpretation is indirectly corroborated by the closing poem, which almost ver-

<sup>25</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 112.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 108, 136.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 3.

<sup>28</sup> This attribution is implied by Joey, when he first mentions the “yellow envelope:” “it’s just something // committed to paper, you know / my element, the paper boy” (108). Kempton, wrongly, I think, attributes the poems to Julie (Kempton 2018: 175).



batim repeats the untitled opening poem but is now given the title “The Sugar Mile” and is dedicated to Joseph Stone<sup>29</sup>. The implied affinity between author and Joey is also underlined by the fact that the opening and closing poem is composed in couplets like all of Joey’s monologues. Both (almost identical) poems thus implicitly refer to the composition of the entire collection of poems, naming its source and inspiration.

This overall setup and the specific wording of the poet’s opening and closing poem point to one significant feature of Maxwell’s collection: the absence or, more precisely, the withdrawal of the authorial voice, generally considered to be a potent feature of lyric poetry. This absence is expressed – somewhat enigmatically and obliquely – in several phrases in the opening and closing poem:

I wrote at the top of breath  
not having reached it. At the top of breath  
the skyline is a shoreline  
seen from high above. Buildings are sand  
and peter out. All land  
is a ledge, all space is a drop, all steps have a nerve.

There can be no first person.  
I fill my lungs to go and the first person’s  
yards ahead. Then he jumps.  
Then I look and he falls and falls until my lungs  
are veal and I’m alone.  
I write *I* and it leaks like a first inkpen.  
The poet is any stranger  
seen today, whose past is an empty notebook  
[...]  
whose past is an empty *moleskine*.<sup>30</sup>

In both cases the text is followed by a number of lines crossed out, implying that the author attempted to continue and complete the poem but finally abandoned the attempt. The poet withdraws and delegates perception and utterance to the characters, like in a drama, indicating that *vis à vis* such experiences the superior position of a superordinate voice is no longer possible.

### Conclusion

In different ways the two examples, Harrison’s “The Shadow of Hiroshima” and Maxwell’s “The Sugar Mile,” can be said to transcend the limits of individual, single lyrical poems. What is achieved by the generic transitions of poetry in “The Sugar Mile” is the *temporal* expansion of the isolated lyric utterance into a longer – *narrative* – sequence and the *interpersonal* expansion of the isolated

<sup>29</sup> Cf. Maxwell (2005: 139).

<sup>30</sup> Cf. *ibid.*, 139-140.

voice into a broader – *dramatic* – constellation and dynamic progression together with the foregrounding of the act of poetic imagination and composition. In this respect there is a remarkable contrast to Tony Harrison’s “The Shadow of Hiroshima.” While Harrison emphasizes both the presence and the creative activity of himself as the author, Maxwell explicitly denies any active participation in the composition of the poems, at the same time, however, repeatedly and conspicuously (and ironically) drawing attention to his presence at the scene and to his fruitless attempts at writing as well as his final decision to abandon the attempt altogether (“empty notebook”, “empty *moleskine*”, 3, 4, 139, 140). Although, ultimately, he still remains the author, of course, fully responsible for the composition in every detail, he effaces his presence and his attitude completely behind the reality of the characters and their situation – in the interest of heightening the intersubjective relevance of the experiences he mediates. This interest is connected with the suggested *factuality* of the details of the depicted situations.<sup>31</sup> In that respect Maxwell concurs with Harrison, who also stresses the factuality of the presented happenings, specifically by means of the visual extension of the poetic text, pictures of the atomic blast, details of the city of Hiroshima and of the annual commemoration of the catastrophe.

Finally, the transgeneric extensions of the lyric poem make different demands on the activity of the recipient: Tony Harrison uses the transmedial – acoustic and visual – extensions of his text to intensify the immediate, sensual impact, while Maxwell requires the reader actively and pertinaciously to puzzle out – from the indications contained in the isolated quasi-dramatic subjective utterances – what actually happened and to understand the hidden driving force and motivation behind people’s behavior. This difference is directly conditioned by the presence and absence, respectively, of the authorial voice and its central perspective, prototypically characteristic of lyric poetry. This difference extends also to the problem of the source and the authority of what is being presented in the two texts: While the problem is not thematized at all in “The Shadow of Hiroshima,” this question is explicitly raised in “The Sugar Mile” (both in the two identical “authorial” poems opening and closing the collection and in the reference to the “yellow envelope”) without providing a clear answer.

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<sup>31</sup> The factuality is also stressed by Maxwell in an interview he gave to Jennie Renton about the collection (Renton 2005).

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*Transitions between Reading and Performance*





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Herausgegeben von Ralph Müller und Henrieke Stahl

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### *Qui chante? The Lyric's Voice as Impersonation*

Starting from the imperative to not just read, but to speak lyric poems out loud, this paper considers ways in which poems change depending on who utters them. Beyond the familiar distinction between the poem's author and the lyrical 'I' – the voice in which the poet chooses to utter the poem – any performer who speaks a poem also *impersonates* the text. Reading is the first act of interpretation; others follow. Sound is an indispensable constitutive aspect of the lyric poem, too often neglected. Each reading of a poem can turn into a momentary *ec-stasis*.

*Keywords: lyric, song, performance, voicing, Diotima, ventriloquism, impersonation, charm*

In the December 2017 thirtieth anniversary issue of « Qui Parle? » Marjorie Perloff reminds us of the abiding human self that speaks when a human being utters words. She acknowledges that “[a] belief in the individual – in difference – is currently taboo; indeed, it is suspect today to differentiate the human from the animal or, for that matter, from the life of growing plants. [...] As for me, I proudly embrace my individuality.”<sup>1</sup> Perloff makes clear that current taboos don't touch her. Her biography is unique, her experiences are her own, and even her name is self-chosen. Perloff's scholarship over many decades has accordingly been a humanist exploration of poetic voices and their unique utterances. In this paper, taking Perloff's proud defense of self and individuality as inspiration, I want to consider one particular, constitutive quality of the lyric poem which constitutes part of its human situatedness and which can be described provision-

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<sup>1</sup> Perloff (2017: 339).

ally as the lyric's mutable voice. I propose to investigate the origin, the constitution, and the durability of the particular voice in which the lyric poem sounds. When a poem is spoken or performed, it is inevitably rendered in the voice of its speaker, the speaker of that particular moment. The customary 'I' of the lyric poem, which we habitually and conventionally distinguish from the poem's author, makes the momentary appropriation of a lyric text by a performer even more significant. Performance by a speaker changes the poem, perhaps not existentially, but certainly in its effect; it completes the poem. The speaker, whoever she or he may be, contributes to the poem's coming into being in the moment of its performance, in the moment of its *impersonation*. This ineradicable mutability of the poem, contingent upon the voice which speaks it, asks to be explored more fully in its relationship with the poem's semantic meaning, its address and affect, and its potential for intervening into our human world. The key feature added in the poem's performance is the embodied, living voice, with its unique tone, timbre, sonority, and breathing. That voice belongs to a speaker who is not interchangeable, whose particularity matters. The question *qui chante?* needs to be asked – and answered – with some urgency in each performance of a lyric poem.

In asking the question *qui chante?* in this way, I am taking certain things for granted: when I say 'lyric', I am here speaking about short poems that I imagine being read out loud, whether to oneself or to an audience that either listens or simply 'overhears' (in John Stuart Mill's much-debated term) the voicing.<sup>2</sup> I do not concern myself with silent reading, although any silent reading involves a specific voice, namely the reader's own, that he or she hears internally in the act of reading. In addition, I take the 'lyric' in lyric poetry – it's after all a musical term – seriously by considering a poem as a song in the widest sense, as a *carmen* (in its Latin root), from which the word 'charm' both in the simple sense of magic and bewitching and also in the extended bewitching 'charm' of the erotic derives. Lyrics and the erotic have been related from the beginning. In Plato's "Symposium", as we will see a little later, Diotima develops an entire philosophy of Eros out of an analogy with poetry, which she says is the creation of something out of nothing. By refusing to remain with the speaker, lyrics, in reaching out, kindle a desire that is present but as yet undirected. The lyric must be uttered and this utterance gives the desire direction. In conceptualizing the act of speaking a poem or reading it out loud, we should always think of the 'reader' as simultaneously being a 'speaker'. The German lan-

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<sup>2</sup> Mill (1833) wrote in "Poetry and its Varieties": "Poetry and eloquence are both alike the expression or utterance of feeling: but, if we may be excused the antithesis, we should say that eloquence is *heard*; poetry is *overheard*." This is the conventional manner of quoting the passage. A different critical edition published by Duisburg-Essen University renders the text as follows: "But if we may be excused the seeming affectation of the antithesis, we should say that eloquence is *heard*; poetry is *overheard*." Compare Paragraph 14 at: [https://www.uni-due.de/lyriktheorie/texte/1833\\_mill1.html#edition](https://www.uni-due.de/lyriktheorie/texte/1833_mill1.html#edition) [27/06/2019]. By qualifying his antithesis as a "seeming affectation", Mill relegates it from a philosophical argument to the realm of play.



guage insists on the difference between the *Leser* ('reader') and the *Vorleser* ('one who reads aloud'); in English, a welcome oscillation between the concepts means that we do not have to contend with the difference: the reader can be both *Leser* and *Sprecher*.

My choice of *chanter* as the verb describing the performance of the lyric inscribes itself into the centuries-old tradition of considering lyric poetry as part of a musical practice. Our age's fixation on writing makes this reminder oddly necessary. Yet writing came to poetry pretty late in the history of human civilization. Only remember that Virgil 'sings' of arms and the man, that Milton exhorts the heavenly muse to 'sing' and not to write, that Whitman wrote not "Book of Myself" but "Song of Myself", and that Pound wrote few manifestos but many "Cantos".<sup>3</sup> This continuing poetic practice is not some helpless sentimental memory, as Winfried Eckel apparently asserts.<sup>4</sup> In those oral cultures in which poetry originated – unlike ours at present – poems would have been generically close to prayer and incantation and would always have been a performance of some kind. In other words, every lyric would have had an original or even originary voice, and since at every performance a different speaker might have lent his voice to the lyric, the voice of the lyric would have been mutable. A full historical account of a lyric poem would include the history of its performances. This task is obviously impossible to achieve. But the fact that the performance history of a poem is irrecoverable does not mean it is irrelevant: it becomes part of the poem's largely undocumented interpretation.

The poetry slams of recent decades have done much to bring orality and performance back into consciousness. They foreground the event-character of a poem, privileging its ontology over its meaning; they require an audience that feels addressed and lets the performer know by responding that it has been touched, and they bring new prominence to the person of the performer who, like the ancient bard or rhapsode, is recognized in connection with the text. The intimate connection of an artefact not just with its author but also with its interpreter is a matter of course in the field of music. Let's attempt an analogy: When we listen to a recording of a Beethoven symphony, we listen for the mutable performance; in this case, for the style of individual conductors and orchestras. Classical music lovers, I among them, can hear and appreciate, without being told explicitly, whether Karajan, Haitink or Celibidache is conducting. Professional musicians, I not among them, can read the score of the symphony and sound it in their minds.

We behave in our reading of lyric poetry, by contrast, as if we were all trained conductors as well as readers and as if every reading of the 'score' – the text of

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<sup>3</sup> These examples are taken from Gioia (2016: 11).

<sup>4</sup> Eckel (2016: 204) speaks of a „sentimentalische Erinnerung an etwas, auf das in einer reinen Schriftkultur verzichtet werden muss.“ Cf. also Bers / Trilcke (2007: 16, FN 36). The ductus of renunciation [„Verzicht“] seems to me needlessly defeatist.

the poem – were exhaustive and exclusive. Well, it is not. The time has come to rethink that particular act of hubris. We need training in sounding poems, listening to them, and trying out the interpretations that the score – that is, the scripted text – offers us.<sup>5</sup> A sonnet (originally a musical form), a ghazal, a free-verse poem in long and short lines – all of them offer us markers for vocal interpretation as part of their genre and contained in their poetic structure. If we disregard them and consider the lyric poem as simply an assembly of words printed on a page, we act as if the score of the symphony in the library were enough and its performance in the concert hall were secondary. Performing the lyric is essential, but it is never its own excuse. Poor Ion, the rhapsode, is proof of what can happen if skilled performance is mistaken for expert subject knowledge. When Socrates leads Ion into the quandary of having overestimated his abilities, Ion must lose. While I've always felt a bit sorry for Ion – naturally I root for him rather than for Socrates – I must acknowledge that he loses his debate because his hubris leads him into claiming expertise in all sorts of fields beyond poetic performance. Had he claimed only what was properly his, the skill of rhapsody, he would have won the debate. Let us, as readers of lyric, at least aspire to being good rhapsodes, too.

What, then, are some of the formal and performative features of lyric that constitutes the 'score' and that direct it towards the 'event' of its vocalizing? To begin with, the first person is by far the most frequent fictitious speaking situation in which lyrics are rendered. Bonnie Costello has recently enlarged our horizons by calling attention to the less frequent but significant occurrences of the plural pronoun 'we' in lyric poetry, but the 'I' remains by far the most frequent subject position that lyricists adopt.<sup>6</sup> Except for multi-person-voice poems like T.S. Eliot's "The Waste Land," which gestures towards the epic in its composite whole, poems generally want that single 'I' to voice them.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, lyric poems speak overwhelmingly in the present tense. If even narrative fiction, most often told in the past tense, still can make us feel to us as if it happened only at the moment of its reading, in an eternal present, how much more does the lyric insist upon its being here with us right now! The lyric's form on the page, as we conventionally encounter it, is reminiscent of a script for performance: its lineation, syntax, stanzaic shape, repetition, emphatic punctuation – all these mark potentialities for performance. The poem is shaped for breathing and speaking. The lyric poem finally emerges as an assembly of multiple acts of potential impersonation.

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<sup>5</sup> Rüdiger Zymner insists that "written language [...] has neither rhythm, nor sound, nor actual musicality", and that these are merely "perceptual constructs by the reader" (cf. Zymner 2009: 47 [Translation mine, T.A.]), but this assertion creates a distinction without a difference. Unless a reader constructs a text in his or her mind or mouth – and that can only be done by employing rhythm, sound, etc., no communication has taken place and the text has never become a text that acts in the world; it has remained a potential text, or simply a 'pre-text' in all senses of that term. Cf. also Bers / Trilcke (2017: 15).

<sup>6</sup> Costello (2017).

<sup>7</sup> Eliot (1971: 37-55).

Where is the mysterious, mutable voice located? The poem's voice seems to me to be latent in the text. It can be activated by a competent reader (or rhapsode, if you will), and it will last, much like a concert or a recital, probably only as long as the performance lasts. It is fully alive only in that rhapsodic performance, when it becomes, in T.S. Eliot's words, "music heard so deeply / That it is not heard at all, but you are the music / While the music lasts."<sup>8</sup> How interesting, by the way, that Eliot chooses the semantic field of music to illustrate what "The point of intersection of the timeless / With time" might be like.

The potentially powerful voice of the poem is therefore also subject to immense change. Every performer will articulate it differently; the human dimension is part of the interpretation. For a counterfactual moment of horror, just imagine a poem read by a computerized voice: the poem, *qua* poem, is dead on arrival. A poem read in this manner would probably feel shorn of its essence. Hearing the computerized voice uttering, in a merely phonically correct recitation, the words that compose it, would eviscerate the poem, leaving the corpse of a text. The words of the lyric poem are, instead, akin in character to the words spoken by an actor in a stage drama, though drama frequently contains performance instructions in its paratexts. Unlike in a lyric poem which is open to highly individualized interpretation, the playwright has imagined a character in full, and the jobs of the actor and director consist in bringing a credible character to life. Stage directions often give specific orders for how a word, a line, a scene is to be voiced. Drama, for all its sparseness, can thus be a fairly prescriptive literary genre, even if we obviously are accustomed to paying attention to the ways in which individual performers give life to characters. Laurence Olivier's Hamlet is different from Ralph Fiennes'. Yet there is universal consensus that acting is a highly specialized art and that it requires training. Have we forgotten that performing poems might be just as challenging? At the other end of the textual spectrum, in narrative fiction, the reader silently constructs a world inside her brain as she puts the events narrated into motion. For all of its many words, narrative fiction may still be the least prescriptive of all major textual genres because our individual readerly imaginations can do with the text what we please. Witness the disappointment so many imaginative readers feel when their favorite novel has been put on screen and has thus been pictorially determined. Narrative fiction enables the reader to be her own director and performer in ways that drama and the lyric appear to discourage.

Lyric poetry, because of its brevity and its absence of stage directions and its continuity of voice – conventionally, at least – from beginning to end, thus shares a portion of prescriptiveness with drama but its sense of potentiality with prose fiction. Once spoken by a person, the poem's potentiality becomes reality. Relying on competent readers to unpack that potential and to give the poem a voice and a character, the poem wants and waits to be *im-personated*. As the

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<sup>8</sup> "The Dry Salvages." In: *Ibid.*, 136.

readers of lyric, we are both its principal actor and its conductor; with our bodies and voices, we even become its instrument(s). That's why we speak of performing a poem, not of staging it. A 'staging' implies a particular script that is repeated night after night (in German: *eine Inszenierung*). A 'performance' is a one-time unrepeatable occurrence with unique characteristics (in German: *eine Aufführung*). Poems are performed.

The latent and mutable voice of the poem is related to, but not identical with, the notion of the poem's address. Will Waters has written what may well be the definitive study on poetry's address with his 2003 book "Poetry's Touch." In investigating the long and varied tradition of poems that say 'you' in various degrees of explicitness, Waters references lyric poetry's versatility, or perhaps even promiscuity, in speaking in various and shifting contexts and in addressing those who would hear. Waters even considers the possibility that hearers would not feel addressed by a poem but would instead want to "enter" the poem as its "utterer": here, Waters draws on terms used by Helen Vendler and concludes, with full justification, "But this is the very stuff of imaginative reading."<sup>9</sup> In thus giving agency to the poem's potential functions, Waters comes close to suggesting that the poem, its addressee, and the reader – and we can imagine this group either as a twosome or a threesome, depending on who feels addressed – constitute an interactive set of agents who give life to the event of a poem's being spoken. So readers impersonate poems, but poems also impersonate: the text is always there waiting to be adopted, as it were. Whenever a lyric poem is spoken or performed by a reader, that reader lends her voice temporarily to the words written by the author. At the same time, this same reader is the first audience of the words; hearing them, however, spoken in her own voice. As both messenger and addressee, the reader/speaker is positioned *between* the author and any other potential listener, while the lyric poem itself mediates – or is positioned between – the author and the speaker/audience. At least two acts of "impersonation" take place: the reader/speaker of the lyric impersonates the poem by giving voice, face, and expression to words on the page, and the poem impersonates its author by standing in for his absence.

Both impersonations described here constitute far more than acts of mere ventriloquism because they are at once interpretive. The rhetoric scholar Stephen Sutherland has compared the process of revising one's writing – scholarly writing, that is – to an act of ventriloquism: "the metaphor of revision as ventriloquism – which acknowledges how revision is shaped not only by a writer's intentions but also by convention, audience, and language itself – can become a heuristic."<sup>10</sup> Sutherland writes in the context of teaching student writers to revise their work, and he quotes poets hesitatingly. But what he says applies to the performance of the lyric: when we read that poem, it directs our voice even as we

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<sup>9</sup> Waters (2003: 14).

<sup>10</sup> Sutherland (2014: 28).

employ our voice. As performers, we are standing beside ourselves, we are *ec-static*, in rhetorical terms. Sutherland quotes Jean-Luc Nancy in support of the idea that “every spoken word is the simultaneity of at least two different modes of that spoken word; even when I am by myself, there is the one that is said and the one that is heard.”<sup>11</sup> Sutherland further adduces the terms Judith Butler employs in “Giving an Account of Oneself” where she explains that “in self-recognition, [societal] norms ‘orchestrate’ the ‘forms that a subject may take.’”<sup>12</sup> Again, like T.S. Eliot, Butler resorts to the semantic field of music and the notion of ‘orchestrating’ a self. The root meaning of *orchesis* is dance, a kinetic performance in ancient Greek culture that was, like the rhapsodic performance of poetry, executed in public and with expressive movement. Poetry in its fullness is inextricably inserted in the social space in which it occurs.

Whether solitary or before an audience, the reader of the lyric lends herself to the totality of the emotional moment evoked by the lyric. Readers ‘perform’ a poem not just to sound the words but to feel their sense and to alter their own emotional state – and perhaps that of the audience – for the duration of the lyrical event. Unlike actors on stage, readers of lyric don neither costume nor mask. The voice alone is foregrounded. Unprotected and willingly, as they read or perform, readers abandon their quotidian selves in favor of impersonating the poem’s ontological being, a being which, in turn, comes into existence – and in an original manner – during each lyric event.<sup>13</sup> Each reading is a kinetic performance of *ec-stasis*, a practice that Sutherland also illuminates through his reading of Adrienne Rich’s essay “When We Dead Awaken.”<sup>14</sup>

In an important recent essay collection, Anna Bers and Peer Trilcke discuss not so much how to perform lyrics, but focus instead on the „Phänomene des Performativen in der Lyrik“: they choose a phenomenological approach and insist on nominalizing the act of performing into „das Performative“ which grants, at least implicitly, that performance might be a categorical or constitutive quality of the lyric. I applaud their approach and the essays, but I take issue nonetheless with the insistence on „Phänomene“ because I doubt that an account of phenomena alone can capture the charm of performance. As Robert Lowell insisted, a poem “*is* an event, not a record of an event.”<sup>15</sup>

The event-character of the lyric poem constitutes its potential for impersonation. Much as the score of the poem stands between writer and performer, so poetry is always becoming. The lyric hovers in a mid-position akin to that described by Diotima in a dialogue that Socrates recounts more than midway

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> I restrict this claim to a first reading, not including subsequent readings.

<sup>14</sup> Sutherland (2014: 38).

<sup>15</sup> Vendler (1988: 291).

through the “Symposium.” In deciding the question of whether love is a god who has the qualities of beauty and goodness, Diotima first negates love’s divinity and in its stead establishes the category of the ‘in-between’. Love, in Diotima’s view, is one of several qualities that partake of two worlds. Just as correct judgment, which we can exercise even in partial ignorance, lies between ignorance and knowledge, so love is not static at all but instead fully dynamic, between mortal and immortal, between human and god, serving as messenger.<sup>16</sup> In her subsequent speech, Diotima then shows how “everything that is responsible for creating something out of nothing is a kind of poetry.”<sup>17</sup> If we read this portion of the “Symposium,” which is about the desire of love, the desire to be in the presence of the beautiful and to possess it, as applying to poetry – as Diotima models for us – we realize that the female speaker drives the argument towards the precedence of reproduction over possession. “All of us are pregnant,” says Diotima, and “whenever pregnant animals or persons draw near to beauty, they become gentle and joyfully disposed and give birth and reproduce.”<sup>18</sup> Therefore, love does not want beauty, but reproduction and birth in beauty.<sup>19</sup> Socrates is not convinced; he says “Maybe” at this point.

Guided by Diotima, I conclude by offering the notion that performing a poem, voicing it, impersonating it, is somehow like the occasion of being pregnant and wanting to deliver. As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “language is fossil poetry,”<sup>20</sup> and surely it is no accident that, in English, delivering a baby and delivering a speech use the same verb for the action of bringing something out of oneself into the world. The delivery of a letter is somewhat more prosaic than all that, but ‘deliverance’, another cognate, has decided overtones of salvation. The lyric poem, in being delivered, acts as that messenger that brings a potentiality unto actuality.

The concept of the messenger also bring us back to the root meaning of ‘impersonation.’ A messenger is he or she who lends his person to the message that is communicated. In daily usage, ‘impersonation’ may initially suggest deceit, but in more positive terms, it also suggests the transportation of a message, perhaps even the ‘transport’ that the addressee may experience. Wallace Stevens articulates that transport convincingly in the concluding lines of « Esthétique du Mal, » the key poem in his 1947 volume “Transport to Summer,” in which he foregrounds the physicality of life, the sound heard by real ears privileged over the mere shadowy existence of metaphysical beings who, in a final musical metaphor, experience only “the minor” of what we, the hearers of the “right chorale,” feel. Marjorie Perloff’s response to « Qui Parle? » has mutated, in Stevens’s poem, to a response to the question, « *Qui chante?* »:

<sup>16</sup> See Plato (1989) Symposium 203 A.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. 205 C.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 206 C-D.

<sup>19</sup> See *ibid.*, 206 E.

<sup>20</sup> Emerson (1983: 457).

The greatest poverty is not to live  
In a physical world, to feel that one's desire  
Is too difficult to tell from despair. Perhaps,  
After death, the non-physical people, in paradise,  
Itself non-physical, may, by chance, observe  
The green corn gleaming and experience  
The minor of what we feel.  
[...]  
This is the thesis scrivined in delight,  
The reverberating psalm, the right chorale.  
[...]  
As if the air, the mid-day air, was swarming  
With the metaphysical changes that occur,  
Merely in living as and where we live.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Stevens (1996: 286-287).







## **Internationale Zeitschrift für Kulturkomparatistik**

Band 2 (2021): *Contemporary Lyric Poetry in Transitions between Genres and Media*

Herausgegeben von Ralph Müller und Henrieke Stahl

Bers, Anna: Ein spannungsreicher Normalfall: Lyrik-Performance und Schrifttextgedicht als verschiedene Aggregatzustände. In: IZfK 2 (2021). 145-169.

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### **Ein spannungsreicher Normalfall: Lyrik-Performance und Schrifttextgedicht als verschiedene Aggregatzustände**

*(No) Ordinary Tension: Text and Performance as Two Aggregate States of the Poem*

The following contribution seeks to understand poetry as a genre situated between written text and performance. First, it presents instances of the systematic differences between performed and written poems, defining ‘performed poetry’ in a decidedly broad sense. The metaphor of ‘aggregate states’ is tested and critically discussed in order to describe poetry as a genre that not only is received in a state of exception but that in its very essence plays between substantially different media and forms. Due to the dearth of critical work addressing poetry as a performative art, a set of terms and tools for the analysis of performed poetry is proposed. After these brief theoretical remarks, two poems are examined, both of which are accessible as performance and as a written text. Their differences are considered in order to show the potential value of separating and comparing performative and written elements for individual analysis as well as for further conceptual discussion.

Nora Gomringer’s „Dichtertreffen“ is presented by the author in the style of a classical reading (,Wasserglaslesung‘), in which the artist, however, utilizes a full repertoire of performative channels and codes. As a result, the semantics of this performed variant differ significantly from those of the written text. The use of the body, objects, space, and voice alter the meaning of the poem even in a reading that, at first glance, does not conspicuously refer to performative art forms at all.

Martina Hefter’s poem about the physical condition of lying („liegen“) focuses on the dance-like handling of body and space in its performed version, which has little in common with a classical reading.

The discussion of two poems, written and performed, reveals the importance of considering both ‘aggregate states’ of the poem when working with texts and engaging in the recent debates of lyricology.

*Keywords: performance, performed poetry, written poetry, mediality, dance*

### *Zwei Aggregatzustände der Lyrik*

Der folgende Beitrag möchte die Lyrik als ein Genre zwischen Schrifttext und Performance beschreiben. Zunächst werden dazu ausgewählte systematische Unterschiede zwischen performten und geschriebenen Gedichten vorgestellt. Der Begriff ‚performte Lyrik‘ wird dabei dezidiert weit gefasst und bezieht auch einzelne Gedichtlesungen ein.<sup>1</sup> Zur Veranschaulichung medialer Instanzierungen von Lyrik<sup>2</sup> wird hier die Metapher des ‚Aggregatzustands‘ kritisch diskutiert,<sup>3</sup> um die Lyrik als eine Gattung zu beschreiben, die nicht nur ausnahmsweise, sondern ganz wesentlich in verschiedenen Formen existiert. Da die Lyrik als performative Kunst in der Forschungsdiskussion immer noch unterrepräsentiert ist, wird außerdem ein analytisches Toolkit zur Analyse performter Lyrik vorgeschlagen. Anschließend werden zwei Gedichte untersucht, die sowohl als Performance als auch als schriftlicher Text existieren. Sie werden auf relevante Unterschiede untersucht, um das Potenzial des Vergleichs zwischen lyrischer Performance und schriftlicher Lyrik für die individuelle Analyse sowie für die weitere konzeptionelle Diskussion aufzuzeigen.

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<sup>1</sup> Jede Art von Lyrik-Performance – von der klassischen Lesung bis zur vieldimensionalen Darbietung, die z.B. eine Nähe zu Theater, Musik oder Performancekunst aufweist – ist ein einmaliges und nicht konservierbares Kunstwerk im Hier und Jetzt. Die vorliegende Analyse benutzt hilfsweise und einzig zur Gewährleistung wissenschaftlicher Beleg- und der Überprüfbarkeit speicherbare Stellvertreter zweier konkreter Performances, nämlich Filmaufnahmen und Einzelbilder aus den Filmen. Wichtig ist jedoch, dass ein Film, ebenso, wie z.B. der Audio-Mitschnitt einer Performance, gerade nicht mit einem performativen Kunstwerk gleichzusetzen ist, dass jede Form der Konservierung die Anzahl der Codes reduziert und bestimmte konstitutive Dimensionen der Performance nicht transportieren kann.

<sup>2</sup> Zymner (2019: 25-50) unterscheidet zuletzt in seinem aufschlussreichen Glossar zwischen „skriptural-visuelle[r]“ und „vokal-auditiv[e]“ (37) Lyrik, die er auch „graphisch repräsentierte“ / „graphisch manifeste“ (34) und „phonisch repräsentierte“ / „phonisch manifeste“ (41) Lyrik nennt. Diese Dichotomie ist nicht deckungsgleich mit der Unterscheidung Schrifttext-lyrik/performte Lyrik, denn jedes performte Gedicht ist phonisch manifest, aber nicht jede phonische Manifestation ist eine Performance (s.u. Hinweise zu aufgezeichneten Gedicht-Sprechungen). Dennoch werde ich im Folgenden, von diesen Begrifflichkeiten ausgehend, den Unterschied zwischen Schrifttext und Performance konturieren.

<sup>3</sup> Vgl. exemplarisch für punktuell auftauchende Verwendungen dieser Metapher Prange (2018: 107) in Bezug auf die mediale Differenz zwischen Schrifttextgedichten und Lyrik auf Audio-CD oder in Bezug auf ein weiteres Spektrum von Instanzierungen desselben Gedichts Böttcher (2003).

Noch immer wird die Lyrik nicht als schrifttextliche und gleichermaßen performative (Novak: „Bi-Medial“;<sup>4</sup> Zymner: ‚bipolare‘<sup>5</sup>) Gattung wahrgenommen; die Forschung zur Lyrik-Performance wird zwar zunehmend relevanter, jedoch sind Synthesen zwischen beiden Arten, Gedichte zu konzeptionalisieren, weiterhin selten.<sup>6</sup> Daher seien im Folgenden zwei Erscheinungsformen der Lyrik dargestellt, die ich ‚Aggregatzustände‘ nennen möchte, um einerseits zu zeigen, dass keine kategoriale Grenze besteht zwischen einem Gedicht, das performt wird, und einem, das aufgeschrieben wurde.<sup>7</sup> Andererseits sind die Zustände dennoch deutlich unterscheidbar (wie Eis, Wasser und Dampf), sie werden unterschiedlich verwendet und behandelt und es ist selten, dass sich der ephemere Übergang zwischen den Aggregatzuständen konkret fassen lässt. In dieser Metaphorik liegt außerdem die Vorstellung, dass die Manifestationen unterschiedliche Grade von Flüchtigkeit und Stabilität aufweisen und dass zur Veränderung des Aggregatzustandes so etwas wie ‚energetische‘ Prozesse notwendig werden (etwa mediale Übertragungen vom graphischen ins lautliche Zeichensystem). Abschließend sei erwähnt, dass die Metapher bestimmte relevante Eigenschaften der Unterscheidung gerade nicht erfasst: Besonders wichtig ist etwa der deutliche quantitative Unterschied zwischen der Zahl der medialen und sinnlichen Kanäle, die eine Performance gegenüber dem Medium Text auszeichnet.

### *Graphisch repräsentierte Lyrik*<sup>8</sup>

Der vertrautere ‚Aggregatzustand‘ des Gedichts ist der des graphisch repräsentierten Schriftzeichengebildes. In der Pragmatik des Lesens ist es aufgrund dieser Konvention heute in vielen Fällen und in verschiedenen Sprachgemeinschaften mit einem Blick möglich, ein Gedicht aufgrund seiner graphischen Eigenschaften als solches zu identifizieren (ein kurzer Text mit viel weißem Rand darum<sup>9</sup>).

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<sup>4</sup> Novak (2011: 49).

<sup>5</sup> Vgl. Zymner (2009: 47).

<sup>6</sup> Ebd.: „Bei graphischer und phonischer Repräsentation von Lyrik handelt es sich [...] um kategorial differenzierte Konstitutionsmöglichkeiten von (lyrischem) Sinn – eben durch opake Schriftbildflächen oder aber durch opake Performanzereignisse. Diese ‚Bipolarität‘ der Lyrik fordert eine angemessene lyriktheoretische und lyrikanalytische Berücksichtigung – von der man freilich bislang in der Lyrikologie allenfalls Ansätze erkennen konnte.“

<sup>7</sup> Vgl. Novak (2011: 51), die als Bindeglied Video-Lyrik vorschlägt. Die Frage, ob es sinnvoll oder gar geboten ist, bei der Darbietung eines bestimmten Gedichts in zwei verschiedenen Aggregatzuständen vom selben (etwa: idealen) Kunstwerk zu sprechen, oder ob es sich um zwei verschiedene Kunstwerke handelt, möchte diese Metapher bewusst offen halten. Bei der Wahrnehmung eines Unterschieds zwischen Eis, Wasser und Dampf kann man sich deren gleiche molekulare Zusammensetzung vor Augen führen, man muss es jedoch nicht, um mit ihnen kompetent umzugehen.

<sup>8</sup> Zymner (2019: 34f.).

<sup>9</sup> Vgl. etwa Lauer (2003: 545).

Bestimmte wirkmächtige Konventionen der graphischen Darstellung von Versen durch Umbrüche oder der relativen Kürze von Gedichten sind in diesem pragmatischen Konsens enthalten. Zu schriftlich konzeptionalisierten Gedichten gehören bestimmte Eigenschaften, die an die Schrift, Schriftlichkeit und Textualität gebunden sind. Mit Bezug auf Schrift sind dies graphische Repräsentation und daher Visualität, Bindung an einen Schriftträger, Linearität, Codierung bestimmter phonetischer Informationen; Auslassung/Nicht-Festlegung anderer phonetischer Informationen, aber auch das Potential von Komplexitätssteigerung, Speicherung großer Informationsmengen, „exkarnierte Rede“<sup>10</sup> und hegemoniale Homogenisierung von Wissen.<sup>11</sup> Mit Bezug auf Schriftlichkeit sind dies graphische Speicherung und Distanz, also: Öffentlichkeit, Fremdheit, keine Emotionalität, Situations- und Handlungsentbindung, physische Distanz, Monologizität, Reflektiertheit, Präferenz für sprachliche Kontexte, hoher Planungsaufwand, Endgültigkeit, Integration etc.<sup>12</sup> Mit Bezug auf Textualität sind dies lineare Folge von Zeichen, Begrenztheit, Kohärenz, kommunikative Funktion.<sup>13</sup> Dazu treten die Merkmale, die mit lyrischen Schrifttexten assoziiert werden können (besonders starke Verdichtung, hohe Relevanz schriftlich codierter Lautphänomene, nicht-sprachliche graphische Spezifika usw.).<sup>14</sup>

### *Instrumentarien der Analyse von Schrifttextlyrik*

Für die Analyse von Lyrik als Schrifttextgebilde stehen literaturwissenschaftliche Instrumentarien bereit, die hier nicht vertieft untersucht werden müssen, weil über ihre Potenz ein Konsens und über ihre Grenzen ein notorischer und literaturtheoretisch begründeter Dissens bestehen dürfte.<sup>15</sup> Wissen darüber, wie man ein Gedicht als Schrifttext adäquat analysiert, sei also vorausgesetzt. Dennoch kann angedeutet werden, dass auch die technische Analyse von Schrifttext-Lyrik kein

<sup>10</sup> Assmann / Assmann (2003: 394).

<sup>11</sup> Vgl. dies., 394 & 398.

<sup>12</sup> Vgl. Koch / Oesterreicher (2011: 13).

<sup>13</sup> Vgl. Brinker / Cölfen / Pappert (2018: 17). Bestimmte Aspekte von Textualität sind nicht an Schriftlichkeit gebunden und tauchen auch in performter Lyrik auf. In vielen Fällen ist es sicher sinnvoll, performte Lyrik als mündlichen Text zu fassen.

<sup>14</sup> Diese Liste ist bewusst offen konzipiert, weil sie schematisch einen der Pole fassen soll, von denen im folgenden Verlauf deutlich werden dürfte, dass er ein Hilfskonstrukt und keine trennscharfe Klassifikation von Schrifttextlyrik sein kann.

<sup>15</sup> Als Indiz für diese Tatsache sei angeführt, dass etwa das „Handbuch Lyrik“ sehr wohl die Interpretation von Lyrik theoretisch problematisiert, nicht aber die (vorgängige) Analyse, die es im Untertitel trägt („Theorie, Analyse, Geschichte“). Dieses Kompendium scheint also die vorauszusetzen, dass die Analysekriterien klar sind (vgl. etwa den ebenfalls begründungslosen Artikel „Rhetorische Lyrikanalyse: Formen und Funktionen von Klang- und Bildfiguren“), dass aber die interpretatorische Auswertung zur literaturtheoretischen Disposition steht, vgl. dort Lamping (2016) und Rudek (2016).

spannungsfreies Feld ist. Sowohl Fragen der inner-literarischen Gattungszugehörigkeit als auch solche intermedialer Zusammenhänge verlangen – jenseits jeder Performance – erweiterte analytische Zugänge: So lassen sich (bestimmte) Gedichte z.B. auch als narrative oder dramatische Texte<sup>16</sup> oder auch als graphische Kunst<sup>17</sup> interpretieren. Und auch wenn nur besondere Gedichte (Balladen und Konkrete Poesie etwa) diese Zugänge konstitutiv fordern, um überhaupt verstehbar zu sein, so besteht die Möglichkeit narratologischer, dramenanalytischer und kunstwissenschaftlicher Analysen für jedes Gedicht.

### *Phonisch repräsentierte Lyrik in der Performance*

Der zweite Aggregatzustand umfasst ‚phonisch repräsentierte‘<sup>18</sup> Lyrik. Performte Lyrik bildet aber nur einen Teilbereich der phonisch repräsentierten Lyrik. Gedicht-sprechungen, die mit Audio-Recordern konserviert und später unbegrenzt wiederholt abgespielt werden können, sind definitiv phonisch repräsentierte Lyrik. Jedoch handelt es sich bei der auf einem Speichermedium gesicherten Sprechung nicht um performte Lyrik. Diese Art von Gedichten ist in ihrem Aggregatzustand nicht flüchtig,<sup>19</sup> bedient sich eines Trägermediums, ist fixiert, erlaubt zeitlich entzerrte Kommunikation usw. – in diesen Eigenschaften ähnelt sie der graphisch repräsentierten Lyrik. Performte Lyrik ist zwar ebenfalls an die Stimme und damit phonetische Kanäle gebunden, sie ist jedoch einmalig, ereignishaft, unwiederholbar, geschieht in körperlicher Ko-Präsenz von Sprecher\*in und Publikum und – das ist vielleicht der wichtigste Unterschied – bezieht weitere semiotische Systeme ein: Räume, Körper, Dinge etc.<sup>20</sup> Das performte Gedicht verhält sich zum schriftlichen Gedichttext wie die konkrete Aufführung zum Dramentext.

In der lyrikologischen Diskussion wird jedoch weniger an Konzepte der Aufführung als an solche der Mündlichkeit angeknüpft, indem die Geschichte der Lyrik (auch) als Geschichte mündlicher Gedichttraditionen erzählt wird.<sup>21</sup> Dieser historische Rekurs kann bestimmte Eigenschaften performter Lyrik besonders gut

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<sup>16</sup> Vgl. z.B. Schönert / Hühn / Stein (2007) und Stahl (2020).

<sup>17</sup> Vgl. z.B. Bradford (2011).

<sup>18</sup> Zymner (2019: 41).

<sup>19</sup> Um die eingangs gewählte Metapher zu bedienen, müsste geklärt werden, ob konservierte Sprechungen ein dritter Aggregatzustand zwischen Schrifttext und Performance sind oder ein Phänomen im Übergang und auch, ob es sinnvoll ist, die drei Formen als Kontinuum oder sogar als drei Pole zu konzeptualisieren. Da konservierte Sprechtexte hier aber nur am Rande eine Rolle spielen werden, bleiben diese Fragen im Folgenden unbeantwortet.

<sup>20</sup> Vgl. dazu die „Aspekte der Aufführung“ von Fischer-Lichte (2012: 54-68).

<sup>21</sup> Vgl. von Ammon (2018: 25-46), der aufgrund seines spezifischen Zugangs ‚Re-Musikalisierung‘ und ‚Re-Performatisierung‘ immer gleichzeitig behandelt, ohne genuin nicht-musikalische Traditionslinien auszumachen, sodass Musik integraler Bestandteil einer Geschichte von Lyrik-Performance wird, die Aufführung dagegen eher Beigabe.

fassen: etwa die unmittelbare und distanz-arme Kommunikation oder Aspekte der (tatsächlichen oder metaphorischen) Musikalität von Lyrik. Bestimmte Aspekte von Mündlichkeit werden in der Lyrik (in performter und in schriftlicher) aber gerade nicht notwendigerweise adaptiert: So kann man mit dem Rekurs auf Mündlichkeit auch Spontaneität, Vorläufigkeit und geringere sprachliche Komplexität verbinden, dies geschieht jedoch in einer Gattung, die für sprachliche Überstrukturiertheit bekannt ist, nur ausnahmsweise. Auch performte Lyrik kann ein sorgfältig gemachtes Artefakt sein, das z.B. auf vorgängige Notationsformen (z.B. Schrifttexte) zurückgreift.

Mit ‚performt‘ und ‚Performance‘ sei also ein möglichst großer Phänomenbereich umfasst, der jede Art des aufgeführten Gedichts vom spontanen Vorlesen bis zur durchorchestrierten multimedialen Performance umfasst. Dieser weite Performance-Begriff hat den Vorteil, Lyrik systematisch mit den Mitteln etwa theaterwissenschaftlicher Zugänge verstehbar zu machen und so vielfach unbeachtete Eigenschaften wie körperliche Aspekte zu fokussieren. Der Nachteil eines derart weiten Performance-Begriffs ist seine Unvereinbarkeit mit den Eigenschaften von und Theorien zu Kunst-Performances im engeren Sinne. Zwar teilen die beiden Phänomenbereiche bestimmte Charakteristika, allerdings besitzt eine pauschale Begriffserweiterung keine Sensibilität für die sehr spezifischen Eigenschaften von Kunstperformances i.e.S. Dieser Einwand ist systematisch nicht schwerwiegend, schließlich lassen sich die Begriffe ja interdisziplinär verhandeln. Er sei jedoch auch deshalb genannt, weil eine der hier untersuchten Künstlerinnen, Martina Hefter, ihn nachdrücklich vorbringt und ihre Gedicht-Aufführungen dezidiert (und wertend) von den aus ihrer Sicht elaborierteren Kunst-Performances unterschieden wissen will.<sup>22</sup>

### *Instrumentarien der Analyse von performter Lyrik*

Im Folgenden schlage ich zur Analyse von performter Lyrik ein Instrumentarium vor, das sich unter punktuellen Ergänzungen aus einer theaterwissenschaftlichen Einführung in die Aufführungsanalyse<sup>23</sup> und Novaks *live-poetry*-Parametern<sup>24</sup> zusammensetzt. Selbstverständlich lassen sich in Performances auch die sprachlichen Kanäle auf die meisten der Kriterien hin auswerten, die auch Schrifttexte auszeichnen, etwa semantische, lexikalische, syntaktische Spezifika der Sprache; Bildsprache; Figurenkonstruktion; Handlung etc. Diese müssen nicht nur isoliert, sondern auch in Spannungs- und Passungsverhältnissen mit den nicht-sprachlichen Parametern verhandelt werden. Hier stellen sich Fragen wie: Welcher sinnliche

<sup>22</sup> Diese Position vertrat Hefter in einem Mailverkehr mit mir aus dem Februar 2019.

<sup>23</sup> Vgl. Weiler / Roselt (2017).

<sup>24</sup> Vgl. Novak (2011: 234-235). Die Kombination dieser beiden Analyseraster empfiehlt sich, weil sie die die Expertise aus zwei disziplinären Blickwinkeln verbinden kann und überdies hinreichend differenziert und konkret ist.

Kanal dominiert die Wahrnehmung? Ist die Syntax überhaupt noch differenziert wahrnehmbar, wenn ein Text gesprochen wird oder wird diese vielleicht im selben Moment von der Mimik des\*r Performenden überlagert? Ist der Klang Ausdruck der lexikalischen Bedeutung oder verändert sich die Bedeutung durch klangliche Spezifika?

Für die Analyse der Lyrik-Performance treten daher zu den als gegeben vorausgesetzten schrifttextbasierten Analyseinstrumentarien mindestens die folgenden Aspekte hinzu:

1. Raum, und zwar als:
  - 1.1 institutioneller Ort mit sozialen, ökonomischen, kulturellen Spezifika und
  - 1.2 als konkreter dreidimensionaler Raum, in dem sich
  - 1.3 Performende\*r und Publikum gemeinsam befinden (relationaler Raum, leibliche Ko-Präsenz).
2. Dinge, etwa:
  - 2.1 Feste Einrichtung, Raumausstattung, technisches Equipment, ‚Bühnenbild‘ und
  - 2.2 Requisiten, bewegliche Gegenstände.
3. Personen, und zwar:
  - 3.1 Publikum in seiner Größe und Zusammensetzung mit Eigenschaften und
  - 3.2 Performende, an denen weitere Eigenschaften untersucht werden wie etwa
    - 3.2.1 Kostüm,
    - 3.2.2 körperliche Individualeigenschaften (Physis, Physiognomie),
    - 3.2.3 körperliche Eigenschaften mit zusätzlichem sozialem Status (Geschlecht, Alter etc.),
    - 3.2.4 spontane oder intendierte körperliche Aspekte (Bewegung, Gestik, Mimik).
4. Klänge, und zwar:
  - 4.1 Klänge des\*r Performenden, die sich analysieren lassen als
    - 4.1.1 Stimme
    - 4.1.2 Akzent
    - 4.1.3 artikulatorische Parameter (Rhythmus, Tonhöhe, Lautstärke, Artikulation, Timbre),
  - 4.2 weitere Klänge.

### *Zur Corpus-Wahl und zum Vorgehen*

Während es systematisch unverzichtbar ist, die angeführten Dimensionen der Performance in einer umfassenden Analyse sämtlich mitzudenken, um den performativen Aspekten einer Gedicht-Aufführung gegenüber einem Text gerecht zu

werden, sollen im Folgenden nur Aspekte beschrieben werden, die signifikante Befunde aufweisen. Genauer: Es werden solche Bestandteile der Performance bzw. des Gedichttextes analysiert, in denen eine Erklärungsdifferenz gegenüber der jeweils anderen Erscheinungsform besteht. Welche performativen Elemente sind dafür verantwortlich, dass das Gedicht als performtes Kunstwerk anders verstanden werden kann denn als gelesenes? Diese Analyse erfolgt jeweils in zwei Schritten: Zunächst stehen solche Aspekte im Fokus, die die vorliegende Performance insgesamt auszeichnen, um dann ein konkretes Gedicht zu betrachten. Dieser Blick trägt auch einem Charakteristikum performter Lyrik Rechnung: Die Aufführung mehrerer Gedichte sorgt medial für eine Annäherung aller Texte aneinander. Das bedeutet, dass in einer Performance durch die dominierenden Rahmenbedingungen (Stimme, Raum etc.) heterogene Texte zu einem Ganzen verschmolzen werden. Jedes Artefakt verliert so seine distinkten Grenzen und die (vor allem wissenschaftliche) Lektürepraxis von lyrischen Schrifttexten, die auf das Unverwechselbare, Singuläre, Einzelne setzt, wird fragwürdig.<sup>25</sup>

Für eine wissenschaftliche Auseinandersetzung mit Lyrik-Performance besteht dasselbe Problem wie für die Debatte über andere performative Künste: das Problem der Konservierung von Nicht-Konservierbarem und der intersubjektiven Kommunikation über einmalige, situative Rezeptionsereignisse. Die Eigenschaften, die eine Performance konstitutiv auszeichnen, sind genau diejenigen, die man nicht durch Filme,<sup>26</sup> Transkriptionen und Bildzeugnisse wiedergeben kann: leibliche-Ko-Präsenz, Bindung an einen konkreten Ort und eine konkrete Zeit, situative Interaktionen etc. Aus diesem Grund wurden Performances ausgewählt, bei denen ich persönlich zugegen war (um die situativen Eigenschaften berücksichtigen zu können) und von denen es zusätzlich Film- und Tonaufnahmen gibt, die den Status von Belegen, nicht aber denjenigen von Kunstwerken haben. Die gewählten Performances wurden danach ausgesucht, dass sie in bestimmten Eigenschaften vergleichbar und in anderen möglichst unterschiedlich sind.

Zunächst soll eine Performance von Nora Gomringer im „Literarischen Zentrum Göttingen“ am 1. Juli 2014 vorgestellt werden, indem sowohl eine kurze Passage überblicksartig als auch ein einzelnes Gedicht in der Tiefe analysiert

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<sup>25</sup> Diese Art von Zusammenhang kann auch in Schrift-Lyrik gestiftet werden, indem Gedichte etwa zu Zyklen, Kapiteln oder Konzept-Bänden geordnet werden (vgl. etwa Hefters Kapitel „BEWEGUNGEN“ in: Hefter (2013a: 5-38), aus dem das hier untersuchte Gedicht stammt). Für konsensuell verbreitete Lektürekonventionen gegenüber Lyrik ist diese Art von Zusammenhang jedoch eher ungewöhnlich: Gedichte werden als einzelne anthologisiert, kanonisiert, unterrichtet und dann auch aufgeführt.

<sup>26</sup> Im zugrundeliegenden Vortrag, Lausanne Juni 2019, wurden filmische Mitschnitte der Performances präsentiert, die hier nur durch Screenshots und Texttranskriptionen wiedergegeben werden können. Die dazugehörigen Filmaufnahmen sind – auf Anfrage und mit Erlaubnis der Autorinnen – im Archiv des „Literarischen Zentrums Göttingen“ zugänglich, die Timecodes werden nach den Dateien der Filmaufzeichnungen zitiert, vgl. Gomringer (2014) und Hefter (2013b).



wird.<sup>27</sup> Die zweite Performance ist Teil einer Gruppenveranstaltung zum zehnten Geburtstag des Verlags „kookbooks“, bei dem Steffen Popp, Martina Hefter und Tristan Marquardt ebenfalls im „Literarischen Zentrum Göttingen“ auftraten (6. September 2013).<sup>28</sup> Aus dem Programm des Abends beschränke ich mich auf den Auftritt von Martina Hefter, weil er besonders auf körperliche Aspekte setzt, indem er tänzerisch geprägte Elemente integriert. Gomringers Kunstwerke werden etwas ausführlicher dargestellt als Hefters, von denen nur zur Systematisierung erforderliche Beobachtungen ergänzend referiert werden.

Gemeinsam ist beiden Veranstaltungen der Auftritt einer deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsautorin am selben Veranstaltungsort. Räumliche und institutionelle Aspekte (s.u.) verhalten sich also für beide Abende ähnlich. Unterschiede liegen in der Art der Performance: Gomringers Tun zeigt viele Aspekte einer klassischen ‚Wasserglaslesung‘,<sup>29</sup> die Autorin befindet sich für ca. 75 Minuten an einem Tisch sitzend allein auf dem Podium; Hefter bewegt sich dagegen frei im Raum. Ohne dass Lyrik-Performance-Genres in gleicher Weise wie Gedicht-Genres konventionalisiert sind, kann man nicht nur in der Performance, sondern sogar an den Bildausschnitten der Kameraaufzeichnung so etwas wie zwei Typen oder auch Auftrittsgenres erkennen, weshalb die aufschlussreichen Codes der Aufzeichnung, die ja eine sekundäre (und defizitäre) Speicherung der Performance ist, zunächst kurz beschrieben werden sollen.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Vgl. Literarisches Zentrum (2014).

<sup>28</sup> Vgl. Literarisches Zentrum (2013).

<sup>29</sup> Dieses Performancegenre ist so konventionalisiert, dass es – anders als jede andere (nicht-dramatische) Literatur- und Lyrik-Performance – einen Namen hat: ‚Wasserglaslesung‘. Als ungewollte Zusammenstellung der konstituierenden Merkmale ließe sich Ernst Jandls Text „Hinweise für eine Veranstaltung mit Ernst Jandl“ verstehen: „Der Autor bittet um einen großen Tisch und einen angenehmen Stuhl. Achten Sie auf gutes Leselicht, doch vermeiden Sie Leselampen, die das Gesicht des Autors für das Publikum verdecken. Scheinwerfer, die den Lesetisch anstrahlen, den Vortragenden aber blenden, sind zu vermeiden. [...] Bitte stellen Sie Mineralwasser (stilles, temperiertes Wasser), Trinkglas und Aschenbecher im Aufenthaltsraum bereit (dies bitte auch für den Lesetisch im Saal!). Sollte das Rauchen im Lesesaal strikt verboten sein, sagen Sie es dem Autor“ (Jandl 2017: 10f.). Vgl. dazu auch: Leuschner (2016: 271).

<sup>30</sup> Veranstaltungen des „Literarischen Zentrums“ werden nicht nur zur Archivierung aufgezeichnet, sondern auch, weil der Veranstaltungsort bestimmte Sitzflächen aufweist, die keinen sehr guten Blick auf die in der Mitte eines schlauchartigen Raumes befindliche Bühne preisgeben. Daher sind rechts und links von der Bühne Monitore angebracht, die das Geschehen vergrößert wiedergeben. Dieses Setting stellt nicht nur eine gewisse Qualität, sondern auch eine Vergleichbarkeit der Filmaufnahmen sicher, da es das Anliegen der Filmenden immer sein muss, möglichst wenig Informationsverlust zu gewährleisten. Deshalb lässt sich an den Aufnahmen gut ablesen, welche semiotischen Kanäle überhaupt als relevant für die Informationsvermittlung betrachtet werden. Dasselbe gilt für die Tonaufzeichnungen, die parallel zur üblichen Verstärkung der Stimmen durch Mikrofone und Lautsprecher stattfindet.

*Nora Gomringer: Aspekte ihrer Performance*

Gomringers Lesung wird überwiegend als nahe Einstellung/Talking-Head-Format (oder kunsthistorisch: als Bruststück, Abb. 1<sup>31</sup>) aufgezeichnet, in einigen Sequenzen zoomt die filmende Person auch in die Großaufnahme, das Close-Up des Gesichts (oder Kopfbild, Abb. 2). Bei der Präsentation eines kurzen Filmausschnitts, den Gomringer mitgebracht hat (1:01:12-1:02:21), schwenkt die Kamera mit einiger Unsicherheit zwischen Autorin und Projektion hin und her. Diese filmische Behandlung der Performance zeigt, dass hier eine Kunstform wahrgenommen wird, die auf den Oberkörper der Performenden fokussiert ist. Bewegung im Raum ist keine relevante Dimension und bereits die Kameraschwenks zu zusätzlichen Bildflächen stellen die filmende Person vor technische Schwierigkeiten (44:29). Wichtig sind zur Rezeption dieser Kunst offenbar Gesicht, Hände und Stimme, Requisiten in Format und Gewicht, die sich einer Behandlung am Tisch nicht versperren (hier Bücher) und eine gleichmäßige, klare und zugleich unauffällige Beleuchtung.



Abb. 1: Gomringer (2014: 31:44):  
Nahe Einstellung.



Abb. 2: Gomringer (2014: 33:24):  
Großaufnahme.

Die selbstgewählten und die vorgegebenen physischen Faktoren der Performance unterwerfen sich der zurückgenommenen Ästhetik des Performance-Genres ‚Lesung‘ nur zum Teil. Es gehört zu Gomringers Habitus, auffällige Kleidung zu tragen.<sup>32</sup> In der vorliegenden Performance bedient sie mit einer pinkfarbenen Bluse und auffälligem Schmuck dezidiert also nicht den Habitus eines\*r Autoren\*in, dessen\*deren Erscheinung als irrelevant markiert wird, um seine Kunst in den Vordergrund zu rücken und auch keine zurückgenommene Form von Weiblichkeit. Sie inszeniert vielmehr genau die körperliche Präsenz der Autorin, die das Format ‚Lesung‘ auf eine spezifisch unentschiedene Art zugleich fordert und negiert, indem es dem\*r Künstler\*in die untere Körperhälfte und die Mobilität

<sup>31</sup> Alle Abbildungen in diesem Aufsatz werden mit freundlicher Genehmigung der Autorinnen und des Literarischen Zentrums Göttingen unter der Lizenz CCBY abgedruckt.

<sup>32</sup> Vgl. dazu etwa ihre Social-Media-Auftritte auf „Instagram“ und „Facebook“.

nimmt. Gomringers Antwort auf diese Bedingungen ist, die Körperlichkeit in der oberen Hälfte durch Gestik, Mimik und Stimme maximal einzusetzen und dadurch den performativen Aspekten der Aufführung Bedeutung zuzumessen.

Ehe ein konkretes Gedicht analysiert werden soll, sei zur Illustration dieser Tendenz auf eine kurze Sequenz aus einer der behandelten Performances verwiesen. Etwa in der Mitte ihres dramaturgisch durchdachten Programms kommentiert Gomringer das vermeintliche oder tatsächliche Klingeln eines Telefons im Publikum durch eine elegante (weil deeskalierende) und kommunikativ daher besonders zielführende Überleitung. Raumordnung und Soundfaktoren, aber auch Hierarchien, Rollenverteilung, Interaktionspotential, Sympathie lenkung und viele Aspekte mehr, die eine Performance ausmachen, sind schon in der kurzen Vorrede präsent:

[Blickt sich verwundert hinter sich an der Wand um] Z! Is' da irgendwo so ein Geräusch? Wie so ein Handy, das irgendwo liegt und unbedingt erhört werden will, so [Geste mit der rechten Hand] ‚düd, düd, düd‘ – nee? Gut! [Pause] Quatsch. [Pause] Ich hör' schon Handys, tja [lachendes Ausatmen]. (26:40-26:53)<sup>33</sup>

Ohne eine weitere Atempause kommt Gomringer dann zur Anmoderation, die „zwei Märchentexte“ (26:56) ankündigt. In dieser Passage zeigt sich, wie Gomringer die Brücke zwischen Rollenlyrik (einem Text aus der Perspektive aller Figuren des Froschkönig-Märchens und einer in Apostrophe an Rumpelstilzchen) und ihrer eigenen Person schlägt. Sie beschreibt in der für ihr Bühnenhandeln konstitutiven Moderationsphase eine autobiographische Tatsache, ihre Märchensozialisation durch die Mutter, und ergänzt diese mit persönlichen und individuellen Erinnerungen. Dann geht sie – erneut völlig unvermittelt – zu den Märchengedichten über, in denen sie das gesamte Repertoire der ihr zur Verfügung stehenden Stimm- und Performance-Qualitäten ausbreitet: Sie singt ein Gedicht, sie mimt den Froschkönig mit einer extremen Stimmlage. Sie imitiert mit ihrem Gesicht das Aussehen des Frosches und schlägt mit der flachen Hand gegen ihr Pult. Sie verweist auf eine imaginäre Lichtregie („grün, grün anstrahlen“, 28:46-28:48<sup>34</sup>) und kehrt immer wieder zu ihrer eigenen (Bühnen-)Stimme und Persona zurück.

Bereits in dieser sehr kurzen Passage ihrer Performance werden also besonders viele Aspekte genuin performativer Kunst aktualisiert. Dieser Befund kann einerseits Gomringers Performance-Kunst beschreiben, die besonders elaboriert die Möglichkeiten des Situativen, der Interaktion, der Stimme,<sup>35</sup> des Körpers,<sup>36</sup> des

<sup>33</sup> Transkription AB. Diese Art der Transkription gibt nur einige ausgewählte Aspekte der Moderation und ihrer Beschaffenheit wieder, wie Wortlaut, Pausen und untermalende Gestik.

<sup>34</sup> Wenn Gomringer hier verbal eine nicht-existierende Lichtregie kommentiert, dann markiert diese Abweichung von der Norm, dass das Genre ‚Lesung‘ sich üblicherweise die bedeutungstragende Dimension von Licht – analog etwa zu der von Körpern – konstitutiv zu Nutze macht und dennoch ausblendet.

<sup>35</sup> Vgl. zu Gomringers professionell ausgebildetem stimmlichem Potential Benthien (2017: 121).

<sup>36</sup> Vgl. Studer (2017).

Klangs und des Raums ausnutzt. Dadurch wird die Hierarchisierung oder auch die Chronologie von Schrifttext und Performance bei Gomringer fragwürdig: Ihre Schrifttexte können wie stillgestellte oder reduzierte Performances wirken. Andererseits wird hier systematisch deutlich, wie viele Besonderheiten einer Performance in unwiederholbaren und auch ungeplanten Zusammenhängen begründet liegen, auf die eine Beschreibung unbedingt eingehen muss.

*Nora Gomringer: „Dichtertreffen“ als performativ repräsentierte Lyrik*

Der Text, dessen Performance es nun isoliert zu analysieren gilt, trägt den Titel „Dichtertreffen“ und wird unter diesem Namen auch verbal angekündigt (25:44). Der Vortrag erfolgt zusammen mit einer Reihe anderer Gedichte aus Gomringers frühen Lyrikbänden<sup>37</sup> in den ersten 45 Minuten der ca. 75 Minuten dauernden Veranstaltung. Auf ihre früheren Texte (insbesondere diejenigen aus „Sag doch mal was zur Nacht“, 2006) rekurriert Gomringer mit dem Label „Sprechtexte“ (7:00-7:30)<sup>38</sup> – „Dichtertreffen“ reiht sich, obwohl es in „Klimaforschung“ (2010) erschienen ist, durch die Dramaturgie des Abends recht nahtlos in die Reihe der Sprechtexte ein: Die Performance aller Texte aus diesen ersten 45 Minuten (bis zur zusätzlich graphischen Darbietung der zu diesem Zeitpunkt neuen „Monster Poems“ in einer Art Diavortrag) wirkt zusammenhängend und geschlossen. Anders als bei vielen anderen Texten des Abends rahmt Gomringer diese Aufführung nicht durch frei gesprochene Erklärungen vor oder nach dem Text. „Dichtertreffen“ folgt auf „Nussbaumederlob“ und wird abgelöst von der zuvor beschriebenen Märchen-Sequenz, die mit dem Klingeln eines Mobiltelefons beginnt.

Der Text des Gedichts lautet, in einer Fassung, die 2015 „derzeit ihre Gültigkeit“<sup>39</sup> für Gomringer besitzt:

<sup>37</sup> Es handelt sich um Gedichte aus „Silbentrennung“ (Gomringer 2002); „Sag doch mal was zur Nacht“ (dies. 2006) und „Klimaforschung“ (dies. 2010a). Diese Bände wurden zunächst in „Mein Gedicht fragt nicht lange“ (dies. 2011) und dann unter Austausch von „Gedichte, Poems“ (dies. 2000) gegen „Nachrichten aus der Luft“ (dies. 2010b) in „Mein Gedicht fragt nicht lange. Reloaded“ (dies. 2015a) zusammengeführt. Im Folgenden zitiere ich nach: dies. (2015a).

<sup>38</sup> Sie verbindet dieses Label mit dem Autor Bodo Hell und dessen Verwendung des Begriffs (7:23), vgl. dazu auch Benthien (2017: 121) und Brehm (2013: 234).

<sup>39</sup> Gomringer (2015a: [Angabe auf dem Frontispiz]), die Autorin betont also schon im Paratext, dass ihre Schrifttexte nur zeitlich begrenzt ‚gültig‘ seien und macht sie damit zum Gegenstand performativer Aushandlungs- und Verschiebungsprozesse, vgl. dazu auch Benthien (2017: 120). Zu Mündlichkeit und Schriftlichkeit bei Gomringer vgl. auch Assmann (2018), Brehm (2013: 234f.) und Dumschat[-Rehfeldt] (2005: 207).

*Dichtertreffen*

Wir standen beisammen, dichter  
 Sekt in den gespaltenen Hufen  
 Wie die Tiere zur Heiligen Nacht  
 Gegenseitig erstaunt über unsere Sprache  
 Das Schwein ungläubig an die Lippen der Kuh  
 Gehängt, der Hahn am Schnabel der Ente  
 Die Lesungen, die folgten, waren ein Abtasten  
 Der Kehlköpfe, die bewegt durch fremde Beben  
 Gebäude rissen, wie die Löwen Antilopen  
 Die Presse blinzelte und hörte nicht, was wirklich  
 Gesagt wurde, es war mittlerweile der erste Feiertag  
 Und längst schwiegen wir wieder<sup>40</sup>

In den ersten Sekunden der Aufführung verstellt Gomringer ihre Stimme zweimal, bis sie schließlich bei der Stimme ankommt, die sie in den meisten Aufführungen verwendet und die (mit Varianz in Höhen und Tiefen) als ihr Komfortbereich für die Performance betrachtet werden darf.<sup>41</sup> Zunächst arbeitet Gomringer beim Wort „Dichtertreffen“ mit einem starken Vibrato und einer sehr tiefen Stimme.<sup>42</sup> Beides wird untermalt von mimischen Extrema (Augen halb geschlossen, aber zum Publikum gewandt, anschließend geöffnet, aber zum Tisch blickend; Kinn vorgereckt, anschließend stark gesenkt) und einem signifikanten Einsatz von Requisiten: Gomringer benutzt das Glas, das auf ihrem Tisch steht und in Lesungen üblicherweise zwar namensgebend, aber performativ sekundär ist, und macht es zum Teil der dargestellten Szene. Sie schwenkt es im Stil eines\*r geübten Redners\*in wie ein Rotwein- oder Whiskyglas vor ihrem Gesicht und verweist durch diese selbstverständliche Geste auf bestimmte soziale Kontexte. Durch den Einsatz des Glases, das dem sonst ausgeblendeten Kommunikationssystem ‚Autor\*in vs. Publikum‘ entstammt, wird aber auch die Ähnlichkeit des institutionellen Kontextes mit der Performance selbst betont: Das Dichtertreffen im Text (die Textsituation) hat Ähnlichkeiten mit der Performance im „Literarischen Zentrum“ (der Performancesituation). Die Frage ‚Wer spricht hier über wen zu wem?‘ taucht auf und bleibt in der Schwebelage.

Den ersten Vers „Wir standen beisammen“ spricht Gomringer nun in einer tiefen Tonlage, die keine zusätzlichen Elemente der Verstellung aufweist, aber

<sup>40</sup> Gomringer (2015a: 186).

<sup>41</sup> Novak (2011: 120-125) analysiert folgende Dimensionen des mehrdimensionalen Aspekts „Timbre“: „Tense/Lax“; „Rough/Smooth“; „Breathiness“; „Vibrato/Plain“; „Resonance“.

<sup>42</sup> Zuvor, beim Gedicht „Nussbaumederlob“ hatte sie ebenfalls eine Rollen-Stimme gewählt, indem sie tief, kehlig, mit rollendem ‚R‘ und in bayerischem Akzent vortrug. Das als hochdeutsch markierte und durch Vibrato untermalte Stimmregister, das sie nun wählt, setzt also auf einen maximalen Kontrast zweier Rollen – die beide wiederum in einem Spannungsverhältnis zur durchschnittlichen Figur stehen, die die Autorin darstellt. Darüber hinaus verhandeln beide Texte inhaltlich die Relation von Autoren (m.) zum Publikum und spiegeln damit auch eine solche zwischen Autorin und Publikum.

durch zwei starke Wortakzente („ständen“ und „beisammen“) ein initiales Pathos hervorkehrt, das die Tendenzen des betonten Titels fortsetzt, aber sich von der Möglichkeit einer Rollenfiktion entfernt. Gleichzeitig markiert das Präteritum Distanz zwischen der Situation der Performance im Hier und Jetzt und der dargestellten Szene.

Das Wort ‚D/dichter‘ [diçtə], das in der gedruckten Form als Adjektiv markiert ist, gesprochen aber in der Ambivalenz der Homophone „dichter“ und „Dichter“ verharren muss, spricht Gomringer nun erstens mit einer kehligen Stimme und zweitens erneut mit starkem Einsatz von Gestik, Mimik und Requisite (vgl. Abb. 3). Sie suggeriert durch zusammengezogene Schultern, ein erhobenes Glas (als würde sie es im Gedränge sichern), verdrehte Augen und die Kehlstimme eine Beengung, die das Adjektiv „dicht“ überhaupt erst ins Spiel bringt, da das Wort „Dichter“ noch aus der Titelnennung („Dichtertreffen“) nachklingt.



Abb. 3: Gomringer (2014: 25:52): „Dichter/dichter“

Bei der Aufführung des Titels und des ersten Verses treten also bereits drei verschiedene Rollen (Stimmen) und mindestens zwei Sprechsituationen (gegenwärtige Aufführung/Performancesituation und dargestelltes Treffen/Textsituation) zutage, die so unterschiedlich sind und zugleich so nah beieinander liegen, dass Fragen zum Verhältnis zwischen „Wir“ und Performender aufkommen: Ist dies ein kritisches Gedicht? Eine Parodie? Welche Geschlechter haben die „Dichter“ und/oder das „Wir“, wenn sie mal kehlig, mal rau, mal mehr und mal weniger tief sprechen? Spricht hier eine Dichterin *über* Dichter oder *als* Dichter?

Diese artifizielle *Situationsspaltung* (um einen umstrittenen, aber hier passenden mediävistischen Terminus zwanglos auf diese Performance zu übertragen<sup>43</sup>)

<sup>43</sup> Vgl. dazu Warning (1979: 122). Benthien (2017) diskutiert in ihrem Beitrag die relevante Frage, inwiefern Gomringer als Performerin eines Hör-Gedichts aus der Perspektive einer\*s Auschwitz-Häftlings durch ihre Stimme eine aneignende Perspektive nahelegt. Im Rahmen einer Performance wie der vorliegenden muss diese Frage zusätzlich im Lichte von Situations-spaltung, Polyphonie, Ambivalenzen und Rollenwechsel diskutiert werden, die die Bühnenkunst Gomringers auszeichnen. Zur Stimme, an der Benthien die „mimetische Aneignung“

wird verdoppelt, indem eine weitere Ambivalenz inszeniert wird: Die Verse „Sekt in den gespaltenen Hufen / Wie die Tiere zur Heiligen Nacht“ beschreiben ein Treffen von Tieren, die wie auf einem Empfang agieren. Diese Tiere werden nun aber explizit mit Tieren verglichen, was keinen Sinn zu ergeben scheint, sodass das Bild kippt und die Richtung der Übertragung sich erneut umkehren muss: Nicht die Tiere verhalten sich wie Menschen, sondern die Dichter wie Tiere. Dieses schnelle Hin- und Her-Wechseln zwischen den Übertragungen wird in der Performance dadurch verstärkt, dass Gomringer ungelentk und vom Glasboden aus mit dem Requisite hantiert, ohne jedoch mit ihren Händen mimetisch „gespaltene[] Hufe“ nachzuahmen. Was sie ausführt, entspricht damit sowohl einer Nachahmung von imaginierten Tieren mit so etwas Filigranem wie Sektgläsern als auch von den dicht gedrängt stehenden und von der Feierlichkeit des Treffens („Wie [...] zur Heiligen Nacht“) in ein Unwohlsein gebrachten Dichtern/Menschen.

Zugleich tritt aber auch Gomringer zutage, die vielleicht *ein* oder auch *kein* Dichter ist, die aber definitiv ein Glas, jedoch *kein* Sektklas in Händen hält. In der Gegenwärtigkeit der Performance muss ausgerechnet diese Ebene sich – obwohl ihre Semantik irrelevant ist – performativ in den Vordergrund drängen, weil der wackelige Umgang mit dem gefüllten Wasserglas genau diejenigen einmaligen und unwiederholbaren Effekte des Spontanen in Performances betont, die das Medium prägen. Die Frage danach, ob nun Dichter wie Tiere oder Tiere wie Dichter sind, wird performativ konterkariert von der Ahnung, dass Wasser flüssig und die Schwerkraft nicht aufzuhalten ist: Das drohende Umkippen des Glases beherrscht die situative Wahrnehmung und überlagert die Semantiken des Textes. Der Körper der Performenden und das prekäre Requisite bestimmen die Rezeption und verweisen auf den unhintergebar offenen Ausgang des Balanceakts mit dem Glas. Die *Performanz*<sup>44</sup> dominiert vor jeder fraglichen *Mimesis* (Tier/Dichter) und *Poiesis* (Gemachtheit der Spannung zwischen Dichter und Tier).

Die dominante Botschaft dieses Textes ist also in der Performance ein rapider Wechsel und ein konstitutives Schweben zwischen Performance- und Bildebenen. Diese Lesart kommt beim Text nicht in derselben Stärke auf, da die Stimmwechsel, die Ambivalenz des Wortes „Dichter“, die Requisite und die doppeldeutige Gestik fehlen.

Die nächsten sechs Verse (13 Sekunden) lösen die Spannung der ersten nun vorübergehend sukzessive auf. Dies geschieht nicht durch eine semantische Klärung, sondern durch eine quantitative Entscheidung. Im Folgenden zeigen Text und Performance ein Ensemble von mehreren Tierpaaren: Schwein/Kuh,

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(130) festmacht, treten die synchronen Effekte von Körper und Raum und die diachronen ständigen Rollenwechsel. Die vorliegende Performance enthält ebenfalls das diskutierte Gedicht „Und es war ein Tag“ (Gomringer 2014: 40:22). Zu Identitätsaspekten bei Gomringer vgl. weiter auch Brehm (2013: 235-246) und Dumschat[-Rehfeldt] (2005).

<sup>44</sup> Zu diesem Begriff und seinem Verhältnis zu ‚Performance‘, ‚Performbarkeit‘ und ‚Performativität‘ vgl. Bers / Trilcke (2017: 40-48).

Hahn/Ente, Löwe/Antilope. Gomringer betont den Stellenwert dieser Akteure, indem sie die Stammvokale betonter Silben durch Längen hervorhebt und die Sprechstimme vereinheitlicht. Sie inszeniert in dieser Passage kein unklares Verhältnis zwischen Ich/Dichter; Dichter/Tier; Hier-und-Jetzt/dargestellter Welt also: Performancesituation/Textsituation, sondern sie geht in einen quasi narrativen Modus der Distanz über, der die Situation vereinfacht. Gomringer spricht über die dargestellten Tiere, von denen nur klar ist, *dass* sie sonderbarerweise, nicht aber *was* sie sprechen.

Eine einzelne Besonderheit weist diese Passage stimmlich auf: Die Wörter „Abtasten / Der Kehlköpfe“ spricht Gomringer langsamer, leiser und von Atemluft getragen. Sie imitiert also den Umgang mit oder das Tun von empfindlichen Kehlköpfen, indem sie die Atemluft hörbar macht. Sowohl Menschen als auch Säugetiere besitzen Kehlköpfe (Vögel, also Ente und Hahn, dagegen nicht). Menschen jedoch nutzen ihn zum Sprechen, Tiere zum Lauten. Die physische Präsenz der Luft durch das Atemgeräusch verbindet alle Kehlkopfbesitzer\*innen, ebenso wie die letzten Verse: „Die Presse blinzelte und hörte nicht, was wirklich / Gesagt wurde, es war mittlerweile der erste Feiertag / Und längst schwiegen wir wieder“. Auch hier arbeitet Gomringer mit der Hörbarkeit des Atemstroms und untermalt die Präsenz des aufkommenden Schweigens zusätzlich mit einer starken Verlangsamung und Absenkung von Tonhöhe und Lautstärke bis zum Flüstern.

Das performte Gedicht legt seinen Fokus also auf die Spannungsfelder Autorin /Figuren; Menschen/Tiere; Sprache/Laute; Darstellen/Dargestellt-Werden; Textsituation/Performancesituation und lässt die Performance zwischen den Polen hin und her kippen. Dazu wird die Frequenz solcher Brüche immer wieder verändert.

### *Nora Gomringer: „Dichtertreffen“ als graphisch repräsentierte Lyrik*

Die graphisch repräsentierte Version von „Dichtertreffen“ hat Eigenschaften, die bei der Lesung nicht oder nicht stark zum Vorschein treten. Die Ambivalenz des Wortes „dichter“ geht durch die Kleinschreibung verloren; gleichzeitig ist die fehlende Bezugsgröße des Komparativs („Dichter als wer oder was?“, möchte man fragen) in der Schriftfassung möglicherweise genau so auffällig, dass das Wortspiel mit dem Substantiv „Dichter“, das zuvor im Titel auftaucht, auch hier evoziert wird und zudem Assoziationen mit dem für die Lyrik so relevanten Konzept der Verdichtung auftreten können. Die Tatsache, dass die graphische Repräsentation eine Anpassung des Lesetempos an den Verstehensprozess erlaubt und dass keine weiteren semiotischen Codes bespielt werden, begünstigt einen fokussierten Rezeptionsmodus. Formsemantische Pointen (wie das Enjambement „an die Lippen der Kuh / Gehängt“, das das Hängen verbildlicht) werden, durch langsames Lesen unterstützt, nur im graphischen Text sichtbar. Dasselbe gilt für die spezifische Syntax- und Bildverschachtelung: „Die Lesungen, die folgten, waren ein Abtasten / Der Kehlköpfe, die bewegt durch fremde Beben / Gebäude rissen, wie die Löwen Antilopen“. Der Text evoziert – stärker als die Performance – die



Frage: Was bedeutet dieser Bilderschwarm? Schlüsselte man die Zeichenfolge und die Syntax im langsamen Modus einer stillen und mehrfachen Gedichtlektüre auf, dann zeigt sich: Die Lesungen sind ein Abtasten der Kehlköpfe. Diese Kehlköpfe ihrerseits sind erstens bewegt durch fremde Beben – ein erstaunliches Bild, denn was sind „fremde Beben“? Und zweitens reißen diese Kehlköpfe Gebäude ein, was wiederum dem Tun von Löwen an Antilopen ähnelt.

Dieses komplexe Bildgewebe, das eine immense sprachliche Tempoverschärfung, *Verdichtung* (mehr und heterogenere *Seme pro Vers*) gegenüber den paarweise und auch noch per zoologischer Klassifikation (Paarhufer gegen Vögel) zusammengestellten Nutztieren und ihrem statischen Tun darstellt, kann in der Performance nur als Häufung von Bildern wahrgenommen werden, von dem einzig Löwen und Antilopen als Dichter-Tiere übrig bleiben, weil sie den Vers und die Satzkonstruktion abschließen und weil Gomringer hier zusätzlich das Sprechtempo drosselt.

Darüber hinaus werden durch die Betonung bestimmter Spannungsfelder (Ich/Dichter; Dichter/Tier; Textsituation/Performancesituation) in der Performance andere Bedeutungsebenen in den Hintergrund gerückt, die bei der individuellen Lektüre durch mediale Spezifika (Fokus, Tempoadaptation in der Rezeption) und die entzerrte Kommunikationssituation möglich sind: Kein Element von Gomringers Performance – im Monat Juli – zielt etwa auf die Weihnachts-Semantik ab, die der Text an zwei Stellen enthält („Wie die Tiere zur Heiligen Nacht“, „es war mittlerweile der erste Feiertag / Und längst schwiegen wir wieder“). Hier wird auf volkstümliche Narrative angespielt, nach denen in den Nächten vor und nach Weihnachten die Tiere sprechen und weissagen können.<sup>45</sup> Setzt man diese Semantik voraus, entscheidet sich die Frage, ob hier Tiere mit Dichtern oder Dichter mit Tieren verglichen werden, tendenziell zugunsten der ersten Variante: Die Tiere können an den Feiertagen sprechen und fühlen sich wie eine Gruppe von Sprachkünstler\*innen.

Der Text erlaubt überdies auch eine gegenteilige biographische Lesart, die ebenfalls durch die stimmlich verfremdende Performance nicht zutage treten kann: Weihnachten dürfte in der Literaten\*innen-Familie Gomringer in der Tat ein ‚Dichtertreffen‘ sein und der Text verweist dann ggf. auf die Tatsache, dass Zusammenkünfte in der Familie zu Feiertagen bemerkenswerte Kommunikationssituationen, aber auch Schweigen verursachen können. In der graphisch repräsentierten Variante des Gedichts sind erstens die beiden Weihnachts-Semantiken (Tiere und Familie) weniger unwahrscheinlich, weil es zur Logik entzerrter Kommunikation gehört, dass jeder Zeitpunkt (z.B. im Jahresverlauf) im Text aktuell sein kann. Diese Möglichkeit wird in der Performance durch das Spiel mit dem Hier-und-Jetzt (im Hochsommer) und durch die Betonung anderer Semantiken als der weihnachtlichen durch die beschriebenen Stimm- und Gestik-Phänomene nicht in gleichem Maße genutzt. Einzig das narrative Präteritum verweist auf eine Distanz zur (dann) dargestellten Welt. Die familiär-biographische Lesart dürfte

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<sup>45</sup> Vgl. Weiser-Aall (1938/41: Sp. 926).

– so sei vermutet – in der Performance ganz und gar nicht evoziert werden: Gomringer gibt durch ihre Rahmenbemerkungen zu den meisten Gedichten ein Interpretationsspektrum vor und etikettiert in der untersuchten Lesung ostentativ nur ein einziges Gedicht als „in der Tat de[n] einzige[n] autobiographische[n] Text, für den ich mich verbürge, in der ganzen Lesung heute“ (29:25-29:27). „Dichtertreffen“ wird andernorts durch ähnliche, jedoch schriftliche Rahmungen durchaus als autobiographisch markiert und erhält eine weitere Bedeutungsebene, die weder die Text-Fassung noch die Performance akzentuiert:

Mein Leben auf Festivals, den Ideentauschplätzen, auf denen am häufigsten Texte vor nicht-deutschsprachigem Publikum vorgetragen werden, habe ich einmal in dem Gedicht „Dichtertreffen“ zusammengefasst.<sup>46</sup>

Während die Performance Ambivalenzen produziert und aushält, bietet der graphisch repräsentierte Text mehr Angebote zur Bedeutungszuweisung. Die Performance bedient viele Codes gleichzeitig, die einander widersprechen. Die Textfassung lässt trotz – oder wegen – ihrer einschlägigen Verdichtungstechniken verschiedene kohärente Lesarten zu, die sie durch konsequente Mehrfachcodierung *nebeneinander* bedient – eine Dichter-Allegorie, die Literaten\*innen mit Tieren vergleicht, eine Weihnachtssage, in der Tiere sprechen, als wären sie Dichter, und zwei autobiographische Lesarten: Familie Gomringer als Dichter-Tiere an Weihnachten und Reflexionen auf internationale Autoren\*innen-Begegnungen. Viele dieser Möglichkeiten werden in der Performance durch pragmatische Aspekte (etwa die Jahreszeit) oder Akzente nicht aktualisiert. Dieser Aggregatzustand verengt also die Möglichkeiten des Textes auf einen mehrfachen und selbstreferenziellen Schwebezustand im Hier-und-Jetzt. Dass dieser Aggregatzustand aber dem Schrifttext nicht unbedingt nachgeordnet ist, zeigt einerseits Gomringers Hinweis auf die begrenzte Gültigkeit einer Textfassung und andererseits eine textlich nicht ebenso wirkungsvolle und damit der *Performbarkeit*<sup>47</sup> zuzuordnende Strategie wie die allein phonetische Doppeldeutigkeit von [diçtɐ].

### *Martina Hefter: Aspekte ihrer Performance*

Hefters Performance<sup>48</sup> ist – wie angedeutet – Teil einer kleinen Revue, die der Verlag „kookbooks“ anlässlich seines Firmenjubiläums in wechselnder Besetzung auf Tour schickte. Martina Hefter (geb. 1965) wird begleitet von Tristan Marquardt (geb. 1987) und Steffen Popp (geb. 1978), die nicht nur beide deutlich

<sup>46</sup> Gomringer (2015b: 118).

<sup>47</sup> Zu diesem Begriff und seinem Verhältnis zu ‚Performance‘, ‚Performanz‘ und ‚Performativität‘ vgl. Bers / Trilcke (2017).

<sup>48</sup> Ich verwende hier weiterhin einen weiten Performance-Begriff, der Hefters eigener Terminologie dezidiert nicht entspricht (s.o.). Sie nennt ihr künstlerisches Tun mit Gedichten nicht Performance und reserviert dieses Wort für Kunst-Performances i.e.S.

jüngere und männliche Autoren sind, sondern auch in der Performance ähnlich und zwar im Genre ‚Wasserglaslesung‘ operieren. Hefter wird deshalb in der Gestaltung des Abends deutlich als Abweichung markiert. Auch sie liest am Pult, steht aber bei jedem zweiten Gedicht auf und bewegt sich frei im Raum. Wie ungewöhnlich dieses Tun für eine Lesung in einem Literaturhaus ist, kann man erneut anhand der filmischen Aufzeichnung erkennen, die nur schlecht mit den Ortswechseln und vor allem mit der Entfernung vom Mikrofon zurechtkommt.



Abb. 4: Hefter (2013b: 07:42):  
Nahe Einstellung

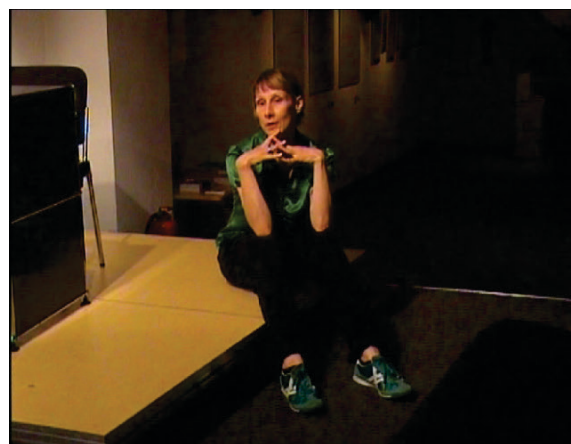


Abb. 5: Hefter (2013b: 11:22):  
Halbtotale

Hefter benutzt keine Requisiten. Ihre Kleidung und ihre performte Körperlichkeit scheinen mit beiden Arten ihrer Darbietung zu korrespondieren: Einerseits trägt sie, Gomringer gar nicht unähnlich und sich darin von den Jersey-Shirts ihrer Kollegen absetzend, eine farbige (grüne) Seidenbluse, die im Sinne von Abendgarderobe für eine Aufwertung des institutionellen Settings durch Eleganz stehen mag und die in den Phasen am Pult durch Lichtreflexe den Oberkörper zum Akteur macht. Andererseits wählt sie dunkle Hosen und Sportschuhe, die der tänzerischen Performance angemessen sind.

Interessanterweise sind ihre leise, nicht-theatrale Sprechstimme, ihre zurückgenommene Gestik, Mimik und Körperhaltung beim Lesen und ihre beinahe ganz fehlende explizite Interaktion mit dem Publikum an dem Modus literarischer Performance orientiert, der den Text in den Vordergrund und den\*die Autor\*in in den Hintergrund rückt: an der ‚Lesung‘. Gleichzeitig artikulieren nicht nur die Texte thematisch, sondern auch ihre tänzerischen Performances selbst ein Interesse an Körpern. Zwischen diesen beiden Kunstwerken, textaffiner Lesung und körperbetonter Performance, tritt die Autorin als reale und/oder (Bühnen-)Person in den Hintergrund. Hier liegt ein wichtiger Unterschied zur Performance Gomringers, die die Texte durch ihre Individualisierungstechniken (Körper, Stimme, Kostüm, Requisite) durchaus an die (Bühnen-)Persona Nora Gomringer koppelt. Eine für dieses Spannungsfeld symptomatische Passage von Hefters Performance ist die Verabschiedung. Im Stil all ihrer zuvor vorgetragenen Gedichttitel formuliert sie den Satz „Wie geht sich bedanken?“ (16:07) und steht auf, um einen ballettartigen Knicks auszuführen, sie bleibt keine Sekunde länger auf der Bühne, als der Knicks

dauert und verkürzt so den Applaus. Die einzige mögliche Interaktion zwischen realer Autorin und realem Publikum wird damit zur Text- und Körperperformance. Die Autorin ist Medium dieser beiden Kunststarten, exponiert sich aber nicht als Verfasserin, Interpretin, Moderatorin, Regisseurin ihres Tuns auf einer externen Ebene, wie Gomringer es tut.

*Martina Hefter: „liegen“ als graphisch repräsentierte Lyrik*

Das Gedicht, das zunächst in der gedruckten Form beschrieben werden soll, heißt dort „liegen“, wird aber in der Aufführung als „Wie geht liegen?“ angekündigt. In beiden Aggregatzuständen ist der Text Teil einer Reihe von Gedichten, die Bewegungen thematisieren, und in beiden Zusammenhängen wird deutlich, dass der Sprechakt der Thematisierung eine Art Anleitung oder Definition ist.<sup>49</sup> Da die beiden Texte sich signifikant unterscheiden, sei ihre sprachliche Oberfläche im Folgenden einander gegenübergestellt, um anschließend auch die nicht-sprachlichen Codes berücksichtigen zu können.<sup>50</sup>

<i>liegen</i>	Wie geht liegen ↑
auf dem Rücken, Liege- wiese im Freibad	Liegen auf der [ <i>Stocken</i> ] Liegewiese im Freibad ↑
Als wäre mein Körper mit Stan- dards bewachen.	Als wäre mein Körper ↑ Mit Standards bewachen ↓
Er ist nicht hingefallen, badet im Gegenteil von Alarm.	Er ist nicht hingefallen ↓ Er badet ↑ Im Gegenteil ↑
Die tastbaren Quaddel im Rasen besagen: Es bleibt spannend.	Von Alarm ↑
Ich übe zappeln beim Atmen, mein Drang nach Haltung, Gestalt eines antiken Kriegers, am Knie erwischt,	Die [ <i>Stocken</i> ] tastbaren ↑ Quaddel ↑ Im Rasen ↑ Besagen ↑ [ <i>Stimmänderung</i> ] Es bleibt span- nend ↓
aber lebend, Wellen winziger Be- ben huschen als Zucken in die Grube	Mein Drang nach Haltung →

<sup>49</sup> Im gedruckten Band (Hefter 2013a) geschieht dies paratextuell durch den Untertitel „Vom Gehen und Stehen. Ein Handbuch“, in der Performance auf anderen Wegen, s.u.

<sup>50</sup> Diese reduzierte Notation dient allein der Sichtbarmachung von lexikalischen Unterschieden. Die Zeilenumbrüche geben kurze Pausen unterschiedlicher Länge wieder, die Leerzeilen deutlich längere Pausen. Besonders signifikante Stimmereignisse, etwa die verstellte Stimme im Quasi-Zitat „Es bleibt spannend“, wurden in eckigen Klammern eingefügt. Die interessante Melodieführung am Ende eines Sprechabschnitts wird durch die Pfeile wiedergegeben, die zeigen, ob die Stimme gesenkt oder gehoben wird oder ob sie in etwa das Niveau behält. Auch hier können gleiche Zeichen nur ein Spektrum von Erscheinungen abbilden: Hefter geht z.B. bei den ersten beiden Phrasen stärker und fragender mit der Stimme nach oben als in den restlichen.

unterhalb meines Munds.

Ich schlage mich herum  
mit Bucheckern.<sup>51</sup>

Gestalt ↑  
Eines antiken Kriegers ↑  
Am Knie erwischt ↑  
Aber lebend ↑

Mein Drang nach Haltung →  
Wellen winziger Beben ↑  
Huschen ↑  
Als Zucken ↑  
In die Grube →  
Unterhalb meines Munds →  
Ich schlage mich herum ↑  
Mit Bucheckern →

Der Schrifttext gibt wieder, wie die Sensorik des Rückens auf die Unebenheiten des Bodens „Quaddel[n]“ und „Bucheckern“ reagiert und wie gleichzeitig soziale Normen die Körperlichkeit affizieren. Die Sprechinstanz verschwindet als Stimme hinter Körperteilen und Anforderungen an Körperteile. Liegen ist in diesem besonderen Fall also keineswegs passives Liegen, sondern ein Akt, der von äußeren Faktoren bestimmt wird und in der statischen Haltung eine Reihe von Dynamiken inkludiert.

Dennoch liegt diese Figur; das bedeutet, sie ist in diesem Akt zwar aktiv, aber als Zentrum der an ihr vorkommenden Bewegungen „zappeln“, „Wellen“, „Beben“ und „Zucken“ sowie der ihr zugeschriebenen Standards und Normen („Gestalt eines antiken Kriegers“) statisch und ruhend. Das wird auch durch die Versumbrüche deutlich, die den Text in gleichmäßige Abschnitte aus drei Versen teilen. Der Text zeigt also, wie ein scheinbar passiver und unbewegter Körper sich aufgrund der äußeren Normierung in Aufruhr befindet. Liegen ist hier keine basale Körperhaltung, sondern dieses Liegen „auf dem Rücken, Liegewiese im Freibad“ ist ein besonderer Fall, der über spezifische soziale Normen determiniert wird.

*Martina Hefter: „Wie geht liegen?“ als phonisch und performativ repräsentierte Lyrik*

Wenn Hefter in der Performance den Titel (und alle anderen Titel) zur Wie-Frage ‚Wie geht X?‘ umformuliert, dann reagiert diese Veränderung auf die Performanz. Der Titel ist die Einleitung zu einer konkreten Vorführung und Handlung, nicht zu einer reinen Beschreibung der Tätigkeit. Hefter dichtet nicht über ‚liegen‘, sondern sie liegt tatsächlich und zwar in einem durch eine kleine Treppe separierten Teil des Veranstaltungsraums, der hier die Bühne ersetzt (vgl. Abb. 6). In der Schriftfassung tragen dagegen alle Bewegungs-Gedichte Untertitel, die jedes ‚Lemma‘ des ‚Handbuchs‘ begleiten und spezifizieren. In der Performance wird

<sup>51</sup> Hefter (2013a: 12), Hervorhebung des Titels dort.

dieser Textteil mit allen anderen Sätzen homogenisiert und verliert so die Funktion der genauen Spezifikation; einzig die Frage-ähnliche Hebung der Stimme markiert eine gewisse Differenz.

In der phonischen Repräsentation gerät überdies, durch das Fehlen der typographischen Differenzmarkierungen, genau jene Information in den Hintergrund, dass das hier performte Liegen ein besonderes ist: das Liegen im Freibad. Die fragende Intonation und die Tatsache, dass auch einige der anderen Performance-Teile auf basale Bewegungsarten rekurren („Wie geht tanzen?“ 8:49), machen das Freibadliegen nur zu einem von mehreren möglichen Exempeln. Die Performance zeigt, wie liegen geht, zum Beispiel im Freibad. Das Interessante an Hefters Performance ist aber nun, dass sie gerade nicht liegt: Ihr Körper berührt den Boden in mehreren Passagen der Darbietung nur mit wenigen Punkten, etwa dem Schultergürtel und den Zehenspitzen (vgl. Abb. 6).

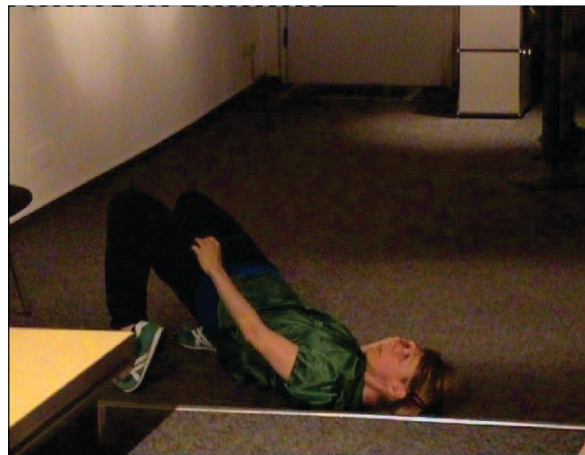


Abb. 6: Martina Hefter (2013b: 13:16): „Wie geht liegen?“

Dieses Spannungsverhältnis zwischen der scheinbaren Definition von Liegen an und für sich und einer alles andere als selbstvergessen und entspannt wirkenden Tanzszene wird verdoppelt durch die Nutzung der Stimme: Der erste Teil des Gedichts behauptet, der Körper sei in einem Zustand, der das „Gegenteil / Von Alarm“ bedeute, „er badet“. Gleichzeitig geht aber die Stimme vor den Pausen so gut wie nie nach unten, sondern verharrt im fragenden Modus der Hebung. Der jeweils folgende Vers beginnt dann etwas tiefer, sodass zumindest die mittlere Höhe im Gedicht meist gleichbleiben kann. Dieser Sprechrhythmus verhält sich konträr zur Vorstellung einer auf der Wiese entspannt liegenden Stellung und diese Tatsache wird durch die verstellte Stimme im Zitat der „Quaddel / im Rasen“ deutlich, die artikulieren: „Es bleibt spannend“. Die Performance zeigt, was den (anders als im Schriftlichen) doppelt genannten „Drang nach Haltung“ ausmacht: eine innere Disposition, sogar im Liegen nicht loszulassen.

Das Spannungsverhältnis, das die Performance in den Vordergrund rückt, ist also nicht so sehr der Unterschied zwischen der sozialen Anforderung an einen liegenden Körper und seiner dadurch erweckten Regungen, sondern sind allein die situativen Ergebnisse dieser aufgeladenen Situation. Hier werden eine Psyche

und ein Körper in der Schwebelage zwischen aktiver und passiver, bewegter und ruhiger, gespannter und entspannter Haltung dargestellt. Liegen und insbesondere Liegen im Schwimmbad sind nur der exemplarische Fall für diese psychosomatische Grundsituation.

### Fazit

Gomringers Schrifttext erlaubt (oder fordert) eine Reihe von möglichen Ausdeutungen, die „Dichtertreffen“ als Allegorie für literarische Gruppen, Tiere an Weihnachten oder familiäre Dynamiken lesbar machen. Die Performance von „Dichtertreffen“ setzt eher auf unauflösbare Spannungsfelder zwischen Mensch und Tier, Textsituation und Performancesituation. Gomringers Auffassung von der Vorläufigkeit des Gedichts selbst hat eine Affinität dazu, performative Aktualisierungen einzubeziehen.

Hefters Gedicht und seine Performance zielen auf Semantiken ab, die nicht weit voneinander entfernt sind, jedoch entstehen in den verschiedenen Aggregatzuständen relevante Differenzen: „liegen“ beschreibt eine spezifische Situation normativ determinierter Körperlichkeit, „Wie geht liegen?“ führt einen Körper in einer Spannung vor, die zugleich im Hier-und-Jetzt tatsächlich stattfindet und damit auf eine nicht-spezifische Art des angespannten Liegens insgesamt verweist.

Gedicht-Text und -Performance bedeuten demnach nicht immer und nicht nur *Unterschiedliches*, sondern sie *bedeuten* vor allem unterschiedlich: Die Codes und Kanäle, die rezeptionellen Vorgaben, die zufälligen und geplanten Kontextbedingungen machen eine Performance zu einer wahrnehmbar anderen Erscheinungsform von Lyrik als den Gedichtstext. Um einerseits Gedichten in beiden Aggregatzuständen analytisch gerecht zu werden und um sich andererseits etwa den aktuellen Boom von performativer Literaturvermittlung (die sog. *Eventisierung* der Literatur) begreifbar zu machen, müssen neue Blickwinkel eingenommen und an den Phänomenen des Performativen geschulte Analysetechniken berücksichtigt werden.

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Band 2 (2021): *Contemporary Lyric Poetry in Transitions between Genres and Media*

Herausgegeben von Ralph Müller und Henrieke Stahl

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**Ilya Kukulin (HSE<sup>1</sup>, Moscow)**

### **Contemporary Russian Poetry and the Musical Avant-Garde: Performative Intersections<sup>2</sup>**

*Dedicated to the memory of  
Elizaveta Arkadieвна Mnatsakanova (Netzkowa)*

This paper is focused on a relatively new phenomenon: joint performances by poets and avant-garde (primarily electronic) musicians in contemporary Russia. In part, these performances are reminiscent of performances by American and Western European poets with jazz ensembles in the 1960s and 1970s. At that time in the Soviet Union, this practice was almost unheard of: when intermedial experiments did take place, poets – particularly the so-called “official” poets – turned not to music but to theatre. The most important elements of these performances were their emphases on virtuosic improvisation, the theatrical immediacy of what was taking place, and creating a community around the performer. In contrast, contemporary collaborations between poets and musicians largely demonstrate the non-self-sufficiency of their respective media and, in doing so, deconstruct the

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very premise of the poetic (lyric) subject. My contention is that intermediality as such – in this case, the interaction between music and poetry – could thus be the most important tool available for creating a “poetry without a subject.” Moreover, in practice, it has acquired a salient social and political meaning in modern Russia: depicting culture as a space of individualized dialogues and polylogues.

*Keywords: Russian poetry of the 2010s, intermedial poetry, poetry and music, Stanislav Lvovsky, Dina Gatina, deconstruction of the poetic subject.*

## 1

In today’s Russia, joint performances of poets and musicians are gradually becoming more and more commonly encountered, most often with representatives of jazz or contemporary electronic music. In the United States, such practices are already widespread. There, they have obviously been helped along by the intensive development of rock music and improvised forms of folk poetry that can be traced back to African-American sources.<sup>3</sup> Some poets of the “sound wave” of the 1960s and 1970s were also musicians, like Clark Coolidge. Even today, Coolidge from time to time reads his poems accompanied by a jazz ensemble, or he drums with other jazz musicians. Analogous performances by Allen Ginsberg, Amiri Baraka and other American poets are also well-known. However, since the end of the 1990s, such practices seem to be becoming even more in demand: thus, in 1999, poet and songwriter Leonard Cohen performed the poem “Villanelle for Our Time” by Canadian Frank Scott (1899-1985) accompanied by a jazz orchestra. The track was included on his 2004 album “Dear Heather” (Columbia Records); until that time, his albums had only featured ‘songs’ in the more conventional sense.

In Germany, a similar practice most likely stems from the tradition of *Sprechstimme*, a recitative reading accompanied by music that was developed by Engelbert Humperdink, Arnold Schönberg, and other composers at the beginning of the 20th century. The most famous example of music composed for *Sprechstimme* is Schönberg’s “Pierrot Lunaire,” set to the verses of the francophone Belgian poet Albert Giraud. However, in employing this technique, composers assumed that the words would be read not by the poet him / herself but by a specialized singer or reciter. In today’s Germany, the combination of music and original poetry is more often encountered in the form of ‘slam poets,’ such as Jessy James LaFleur,<sup>4</sup> who strike a balance between poetry ‘proper’ and rap.

<sup>3</sup> Gates Jr. (1988).

<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, recordings of her performance on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ymL4sxz-I6c> [06/07/2020].

In Russia, slam is relatively widespread but nonetheless not as popular as in Germany or the United States. Experiments on the border of ‘pure’ poetry and rap have only recently taken hold among Russian audiences. Throughout the 2010s, poet, playwright, and art manager Andrei Rodionov (b. 1971) practiced exactly this manner of reading when performing with the electronic group “Christmas Tree Toys.”<sup>5</sup> In 2020, high-profile journalist Sergey Yakovlev (b. 1966), who previously had published a collection of poems, recorded an album of poems to trip-hop accompaniment by Dmitry Shumilov “My Legions.”<sup>6</sup> On the album, Yakovlev chants his poems with an emphatic or exaggerated rhythm – a declamatory manner common enough to Russian poets to be unsurprising were it not for the trip-hop in the background. This action by Yakovlev shows that practices of poetic performance in the spirit of Rodionov are becoming more fashionable and influential.

On the whole, practices combining poetry and music in Russia are not associated with slam and are more broadly distributed across styles. Rodionov and Yakovlev’s practices, for instance, differ quite strongly from songs in which lyrics and music are synthesized; rather, in performances of this kind, poetry and music remain partially independent and are engaged in dialogue. This kind of interaction could also be defined as a form of *intermedial poetry*.<sup>7</sup> Here, my understanding of intermediality is in agreement with that of Aage A. Hansen-Löve – i.e., the interaction of distinct artistic media within the frame of a single work or intermedial system<sup>8</sup> – and Dirk Uffelmann, who observes that elements of different artistic media in such a system coexist but do not combine. In the case of a synthetic union of media or the imitation of the hallmarks of one art by means of another, we should talk about other types of cross-mediality.<sup>9</sup>

In other words, intermedial poetry is fundamentally different from songwriting. The 1960s marked the blossoming of the Soviet ‘songwriters’ and the genre of ‘bard songs,’ which were often intellectualized and based on contemporary trends in literature.<sup>10</sup> Since the 2010s, Russian culture has seen an increase in the

<sup>5</sup> See, for instance, “Architecture” (2010), one of their best collaborations, available on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8EdiJ7ehztU> [06/07/2020].

<sup>6</sup> The title track to the album can be viewed on YouTube as of this writing: [https://youtu.be/wGc\\_Ze9-HZs](https://youtu.be/wGc_Ze9-HZs) [06/07/2020].

<sup>7</sup> Mikhail Rodin writes that a new field is currently emerging that he proposes to designate as media poetry [Родин (2016)]: it embraces video poetry, sound poetry and other new practices, like flurf poetry – verses based on results of accidental Web search queries when the search line of a browser gives hilarious or strange ‘hints.’ All of these forms, especially video poetry and ‘sound-music’ poetry, have grown and developed quite quickly in Russophone poetry.

<sup>8</sup> Hansen-Löve (2008).

<sup>9</sup> Uffelmann (2011; 2014).

<sup>10</sup> Djagalov (2013).

importance of intermedial poetry, which interacts with other art forms but, crucially, ‘does not combine’ with them.

It begs mention that in contemporary Russian culture, the popularity not only of poetic-musical performances but of all forms of intermedial practices is growing. Since 2006, a festival of video-poetry, «Пятая нога» (“The Fifth Leg”), has been held every two years in Moscow.<sup>11</sup> Since 2008, the “Poetronica” festival («Поэтроника») has been organized annually in Moscow by poet, composer, electronic musician, and producer Pavel Zhagun, and his wife and co-author, Elvira Zhagun. During this festival, poets, predominantly innovative and anti-traditionalist, present their works accompanied by electronic music and the video improvisations of VJs. In 2019, Russian artist Alexandra Sukhareva presented, in Venice, her new installation “Ligeia,” based on the distiches of poet and artist Evgenia Suslova, written specifically for this installation. It consisted of four wells or huge vessels, whose inner walls were covered with Suslova’s two-line poems.<sup>12</sup>

Beginning in 2012, well-known Russian poet Andrei Sen-Senkov has regularly been recording albums on which his poems are accompanied by musical works, usually written by up-and-coming or prominent avant-garde composers. Sen-Senkov recorded two such CDs in collaboration with Kirill Shirokov, in 2012 and 2013, respectively; a third disk was recorded in 2015 with Andrei Kireev, Alexei Borisov, Olga Nosova, and Italian composer Alessandro Bosetti. Here, Sen-Senkov’s works were recited by an ensemble of female voices, predominantly young poets themselves; this CD is ironically entitled “Boys Are the Majority.” A fourth disk, “Snow,” was issued in 2017, with music by Aleksei Sysoev; Sen-Senkov’s poems were read in Russian by the author and in Serbian translation by Mirjana Petrovich. Sen-Senkov regularly performs at the “Poetronica” festival<sup>13</sup> and generally endeavors to include his poems in intermedial contexts: thus, he has several cycles in which poetic texts are presented as captions to photographs; at live readings, Sen-Senkov projects these images on a wall like slides. However, his collaborations extended to include composers in the 2010s.

In 2012, the same year in which Sen-Senkov recorded his first record, Moscow hosted “From Zero to One,” the first big joint evening of young poets and composers. The director of the poetry program was poet and publisher Dmitry Kuzmin, and composer Kirill Shirokov was responsible for the musical program. The evening consisted of alternating performances by musicians, poets, and translators, but twice during the event, composers Denis Khorov and Kirill Shirokov

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<sup>11</sup> The best videos of this contest are regularly screened at the annual Moscow International Film Festival. The organizer of this festival was and now is Andrei Rodionov, mentioned above as a poet.

<sup>12</sup> Contessanally (2019).

<sup>13</sup> His performance (3.54-4.45) at the festival in 2018 was recorded by Elvira Zhagun and is accessible on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UZSElFDTjr0> [06/07/2020].

accompanied poets Aleksandr Skidan and Dina Gatina with improvisational music (Figure 1).



*Figure 1: Dina Gatina and Kirill Shirokov.*

*Joint performance at the event “From Zero to One.”*

*Conference Hall of the Moscow Conservatory, March 22, 2012. Photo: Dmitry Kuzmin.*

Soon afterwards, Gatina wrote the poem “Silk” specifically for Shirokov to respond to in music. Shirokov’s resulting composition was intended to be performed not by Gatina but by a professional singer<sup>14</sup> with a capella accompaniment. “The intonational structure of the composition, its inner space, is inspired by the author’s way of reading and, of course, is somehow connected with collaboration but is not a direct result of the performance of ‘Silk’,” commented Shirokov in a personal communication. The “direct result of the performance,” it seems, was further collaboration with Dina Gatina.

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<sup>14</sup> A recording of Sasha Elina’s performance of this work is available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9VRKSAw35rc> [06/07/2020].

In the mid-2010s, poet, prose writer, historian, and political analyst Stanislav Lvovsky, now living in the UK, began creating electronic compositions for his own poems, recording them at home and publishing them on Soundcloud.<sup>15</sup> In April 2020, during the COVID-19 epidemic, Lvovsky published his own 14-minute musical composition in the ‘ambient’ genre, composed of fragments from the sermons of three American Evangelicals (one of whom was the famous Billy Graham), over which he set electronic music.<sup>16</sup> For this remix, Lvovsky selected fragments in which the preachers warn that the End of Days is already upon us and that their listeners should choose sides between good and evil. One of the leitmotifs of his composition is the rhythmic repetition of the word “righteous.” Clearly, his work is aimed at calling into question the manifold examples of apocalyptic rhetoric employed in public speech during the period of March to April 2020 – the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemics.

All of these publications demonstrate that collaborative projects between poets and musicians – and, perhaps, poets and video artists – in contemporary Russia are definitional to intermedial aesthetics. In this article, fundamental attention will be paid to clarifying why the collaboration between poets and musicians is currently enjoying such a particular vogue in Russia and why, moreover, from a theoretical standpoint, such a social-cultural trend appears so paradoxical.

The theorists of postmodernism indicate that “monologic” (to use the term of Mikhail Bakhtin) discourses are in decline and that the spoken word is becoming less culturally significant than the written one – but also that writing itself is less important than the visual image. Today, according to researchers, we are witnessing “the displacement of symbolic and linguistic verbliness by new multimedia technologies (radio, television, video, internet, etc.)” and “the transformation of medial genres into artistic works or, more precisely, aesthetic processes”.<sup>17</sup> However, the spoken word in contemporary poetry is hardly monologic – it is either drawn into dialogue (e.g., with music) or itself becomes a polylogue of several voices (on this, see below). This performative verbliness extends to its dialogue with the performative deployment of music. We can say that in contemporary Russian poetry, intermediality is, for the most part, connected with performativity.

Existing studies of intermediality in literature focus on the interaction between literature and spatial or visual arts<sup>18</sup> or literature and film.<sup>19</sup> Efim Etkind’s study<sup>20</sup> applies exclusively to poetic texts that are clearly – in one way or another –

<sup>15</sup> His Soundcloud recordings are available at:  
<https://soundcloud.com/search?q=stanislav%20lvovsky> [06/07/2020].

<sup>16</sup> See <https://soundcloud.com/semio-1/14-eschatological-minutes-with-two-american-evangelicals-preaching-on-11730-khz-255-meter-band> [06/07/2020].

<sup>17</sup> Hansen-Löve (2001: 35-36).

<sup>18</sup> Ders. (1983; 2008).

<sup>19</sup> Witte (1999); Корчагин (2019).

<sup>20</sup> ЭТКИНД (1978: 367-492).



already close to music (rather than the interaction of poetry and music) and is limited to poems written up to and including 1947. The question as to the forms of interaction between poetry and music is also discussed in the section “Poetry and Music” of the collective work “Poetry. A Textbook.”<sup>21</sup> However, this section is forced – due to limitations of volume and scope – to be a general sketch. The collective monograph edited by Gabriele Rippl includes chapters on the parallels between poetry and music, such as where poetic form recalls music and other important issues<sup>22</sup>, but not on intermedial systems that include both poetic and musical elements. It seems that exploring such systems in contemporary culture requires the creation of new methodological tools.

I believe that the most important of these would require a shift in emphasis from the semiotic aspects of poetry and music to their communicative and performative properties. Poetry, just like music, can be understood as a performative model of communication or auto-communication unfolding in time. The intermedial interaction between the two can thus be described as a second-order model of the same.

## 2

In 2007, poet and essayist Aleksei Parshchikov claimed that the interaction of poetry with other arts is becoming an internationally recognized cultural practice that allows authors who write in different languages to communicate – and that even those authors fluent in this cosmopolitan language within Russia were alienated from the general development of Russian culture.

На западных фестивалях – и музыкальных (джазовых, саунд-арта), и поэтических – можно встретить поющих или подыгрывающих поэтов; они обычно пользуются особым расположением аудитории и не нуждаются в переводчиках. Наверняка на памяти у всех Аллен Гинсберг, аккомпанирующий на пенджабской пианоле. А может быть, поющий и пританцовывающий Кларк Кулидж? Это “фестивальное” общество перманентного всемирного мероприятия, где все находится в обмене со всем (языки и гендерные различия, музыка и поэзия, религиозные практики), кажется, постепенно приходит и на российские площадки. И если это так, то Д.А. был одним из создателей этой новой артистической сцены.<sup>23</sup>

In Western festivals dedicated to music (jazz, sound art) as well as to poetry, one can find poets singing or performing; they usually enjoy a special stage and do not need interpreters. No one can forget an Allen Ginsberg accompaniment on the Punjabi piano. Or perhaps a singing and dancing Clark Coolidge? This ‘festival’

<sup>21</sup> Азарова / Корчагин / Кузьмин и др. (2016: 655-665).

<sup>22</sup> The chapter by Werner Wolf (2015) included in this book contains an extensive bibliography on the topic of ‘Literature and Music,’ but new forms of intermediality such as those discussed in this article are not present in these works. Cf. Rippl (2015); Scher (1984).

<sup>23</sup> Парщикова (2007).

society of the permanent global event, where everything is exchanged (languages and gender differences, music and poetry, religious practices) seems to be gradually coming to Russia as well. And if that is true, then D.A. Prigov was one of the creators of this new artistic scene.

It seems, then, that in the 2000s and 2010s, this cosmopolitan language began to exert increasing influence even on the less radical forms of poetry – at least in Russia. Even those poets who are more conventional in their aesthetics can participate in intermedial poetic performances.

Intermedial poetic performances arise at the intersection of two evolutionary lines of cultural development: sound poetry and musical-oral performances, which imply a dialogue between poet and musician-performer. These two traditions are connected with different aesthetic tasks: sound poetry is aimed at undermining ready-made meanings and transgressing (or transcending) pure linguistic forms, while musical-oral performances are aimed at strengthening the emotional expressiveness and suggestiveness of a poetic work.

Before discussing what happens as a result of connecting these two lines, I will briefly describe them separately.

Steve McCaffery describes the tradition of sound poetry in his excellent essay of 1978, that seems to have retained its academic relevance even today. According to McCaffery, sound poetry was a new kind of poetry emerging in the late 19th century, and using “language’s non-semantic, acoustic properties” as well as the “phonematic aspect of language.”<sup>24</sup> In other words, this type of poetic utterance consists not of sequences of grammatically and rhythmically ordered meanings, but of intentionally deconstructed elements of language: particular words or even sounds, the clash of grammatical constructions, presented at an author’s (or at an actor’s) live performance, embodied by an author or an actor. However, this new type of poem could also include elements of common language or could consist only of ‘transrational’ (that is, using a term of the Russian Futurists: «заумные») elements. In any case, the foremost element of sound poetry is the author’s reading. McCaffery separates the contemporary stage of the development of sound poetry (represented by such authors as Henri Chopin, Bernard Heidsieck, Paula Claire, and others) from groups working with sound recordings, collages, artificially transformed voices, mixtures of words and non-human natural sounds, etc., in that the authors of the first group act as performers and vehicles for a physical vocalization – as was the case of the Dadaists.

Melodeclamation, in contrast, was a fashionable form of art in early 20th century Russia<sup>25</sup>; however, this practice was based on an actor’s / actress’s reading of a poem or prose fragment accompanied by a chamber orchestra or a piano, similar to the *Sprechstimme* developing in Germany at the same time. In the 1920s,

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<sup>24</sup> McCaffery (1978).

<sup>25</sup> Ольшевская (2015).

melodeclamation was ‘sovietized’ in the practice of so-called «ритмодекламация» [‘rhythm-declamation’], but gradually faded later in the same decade.<sup>26</sup>

In the 1950-60s, ‘official’ («подцензурные» or ‘censored’) poets frequently performed in public, but rarely collaborated with musicians. These legally sanctioned poets were more interested in working with the theatre. The most vivid example of such collaborations was the play “Anti-Worlds,” staged at Moscow’s Taganka Theatre in 1965 and based on poems by the then very fashionable poet Andrei Voznesenskii; the play was directed by Iurii Liubimov, and the production was designed by Enar Stenberg.

The emergence of truly intermedial forms combining poetry and music became possible first of all due to the development of independent – or, as Russianists say, ‘unofficial’ («неподцензурная» or ‘uncensored’ and therefore illegal) – poetry.

At the end of the 1960s to the beginning of the 1970s, sound poetry first took hold in Moscow through the practice of the repetition and transformation of words. Here, one could mention the unofficial poets Elizaveta Mnatsakanova (1922-2019) and Andrei Monastyrskii (b. 1949), the latter of whom would also become a well-known conceptual artist but began essentially as the disciple of the former.<sup>27</sup> Later, collaboration with musicians became a significant part of Mnatsakanova’s art – she was a pianist herself – and of the Moscow conceptualists. This applies especially to one of the leaders of Russian conceptualism Dmitrii Aleksandrovich Prigov, who performed many times with avant-garde jazz bands like «Три О» (“The Three Os”) or «Поп-механика» (“Pop Mechanics”). Jazz trumpeter Sergei Letov performed throughout the 1990s-2000s with an astonishing number poets from the same milieu, including: Nina Iskrenko (1951-1995), Dmitrii Aleksandrovich Prigov (resulting in two joint albums),<sup>28</sup> Lev Rubinstein, Andrei Bitov, Viacheslav Kupriianov, Andrei Bychkov,<sup>29</sup> Anna Al’chuk, Vladimir Druk, Nikolai Baitov and Sveta Litvak, Erkki Lappalainen (Finland-Sweden), Valère Novarina (France), Michel Houellebecq (France), Marina Kniazeva, Sergei Biriukov (with whom Letov also recorded a joint CD),<sup>30</sup> Maksim Amelin, and others. For her part, Mnatsakanova emigrated to Vienna in 1975, where she jointly recorded an album with avant-garde musicians Martina Cizek

<sup>26</sup> Presently, ‘rhythm-declamation’ is also being revived (not accidentally, in my opinion, but rather in keeping with the trend described in this paper) and is considered a useful means of ‘aesthetic education’ in Russian kindergartens (propagated as a ‘new’ practice on professional pedagogical websites).

<sup>27</sup> Kalinsky (2018).

<sup>28</sup> Prigov and Letov’s joint recordings are available at: <http://conceptualism.letov.ru/Prigov.html> [06/07/2020].

<sup>29</sup> Bychkov and Letov’s joint performance is available at: <https://youtu.be/fqJF52BH0YE> [06/07/2020].

<sup>30</sup> Letov and Biriukov’s joint performance is available at: <https://youtu.be/hTZGr4LmrYs> [06/07/2020].

and Wolfgang Musil in the early 2000s. However, in Russia such collaborations were not widespread outside unofficial avant-garde circles.

Intermedial poetic performance has remained one of the main idioms of the group “Orbita,” based in Riga, Latvia.<sup>31</sup> They have performed their (mostly Russian-language) poems with DJs and VJs and have at many festivals in Europe very successfully presented their performance “FM Slow Show,” where the members of the group recite their works interspersed with electronic sounds emanating from antique radio sets. Since the late 1990s, they have performed many similar experiments.

These practices have been developed and received primarily in Latvia. Experts and visitors from Russia to such literary evenings generally perceived these experiments to be elements of an avant-garde show rather than a manifestation of a new form of poetic expression. Despite Sergei Letov’s impressive energy, in Russia of the 1990s, his numerous experiments were ‘read’ as an element of his personal musical style. One would often hear that “Letov can play with anyone,” but today, such forms of collaboration have rightfully earned recognition as a harbinger of a more general and universal spirit in aesthetic trends.

In 1997, Lesia Tyshkovskaia, a Russian-speaking poet from Kiev, performed in Moscow. During her performance, she alternated between reading and singing, accompanying herself on piano and guitar and performing her poems together with Sergei Letov. In a review of her performance published in “The Literary Life of Moscow,” the author asks: “Does verbal art, so comprehensively integrated into a musical and theatrical complex, retain the possibility of its autonomous existence and, thus, the status of literature?”<sup>32</sup> Today, the very formulation of the question would be revised. Intermedial poetry is both autonomous – because it “does not combine” with other media – and non-autonomous – because it is included in a broader medial context.

In the current culture, intermedial forms of poetry tend to emerge from experimentation in local and well-established aesthetic forums. At the “Poetronica” festival, for example, a good number of poets have presented works representing a broad stylistic – and musical – range. In the early 2000s, comparable forms of collaboration existed in Russia but would have been considered contrary to the status quo. Thus, when in 2003, the “May Poetic Opera” festival was organized in Moscow, it included an evening of poetry and music. Critic Aleksander Privalov later commented in his review:

[...] в большинстве выступлений, надо сказать, идея музыкально-поэтического диалога была предъявлена сугубо формально — вплоть до

<sup>31</sup> Platt (2014); Маурицио (2019).

<sup>32</sup> Text available at: <http://www.vavilon.ru/lit/nov97.html#611> [06/07/2020]. Author anonymous.

умудрившегося сыронизировать над заданной рамкой Константина Рубахина, читавшего стихи с не издавшим ни одного звука аккордеоном на шее.<sup>33</sup>

[...] in the majority of presentations, the idea of dialogue between poetry and music was presented very formally, right up to point when poet Konstantin Rubakhin contrived to make a mockery of the theme and recited his poems with an accordion hanging from his neck without emitting a sound.

This sort of rejection of musical collaboration on behalf of a poet would be unthinkable in today's poetic scene, at least in Moscow.

All of the works mentioned above could be said to aim at a rather sophisticated audience. However, one can find equivalents in Russian pop culture. One of the brightest examples is Vera Polozkova, a pop poet and one of the very few authors in contemporary Russian poetry who can easily fill a hall of approximately 1,000-2,000 people in almost any major city. Usually, she recites her poems accompanied by a chamber orchestra, or a piano, or a rock group.<sup>34</sup> We can assume that Polozkova presents herself as a pop star – and the status of a ‘star’ in contemporary mass culture is much higher than that of a poet, who is a rather marginal figure unless he or she can write satirical or erotic poems that are easily converted into Internet memes. In the past, pop poetry in Russia – such as Evgenii Evtushenko, Dmitrii Bykov, or Andrei “Orlusha” Orlov – did not collaborate with musicians to enhance contact with their audience; the main form of intermediality available to them was some variant of poetic theater, which situated the figure of the subject or subjects of poetic speech on stage, front and center. In the case of Dmitrii Bykov and Andrei Orlov, such a theatricalized project found its apotheosis in the television program “Citizen Poet” and its successor “Citizen Good.”<sup>35</sup> Through these broadcasts, one can see the cross-medial theatrical development of official poets in the 1960s. The musical component of Polozkova's work can likewise be read as an element of a larger theatrical project; however, I find it important to place it in a different context – the intermediality associated with music. It seems that Polozkova, although a poet, also associates herself with rap, a practice that is intermediate in status between poetry and music. On November 26, 2018, the Moscow club “Glavklub” held a large concert of rappers in solidarity with the rapper Husky shortly after he was arrested in Krasnodar for *de facto* political reasons. For the finale of the concert, leading Russian rappers came on stage in support with Polozkova among them.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Привалов (2003).

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, her poetic-musical video:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1GVIDslpLBA&t=54s> [16/04/2020].

<sup>35</sup> For more on “Citizen Poet” see Barkovskaya (2014); Hodgson / Smith (2017).

<sup>36</sup> For a full recording of the concert, see YouTube:  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wR7nQc4BJII> [06/07/2020]. Polozkova is on stage at 2:36:18 in the center of the frame.

Consequently, the question arises as to why poetry and music in Russia should meet precisely in the first two decades of the millennium. One might suppose that the aesthetic and social goals undertaken by poets and composers, or the interaction between poetic and musical works (in Lvovsky's case), have been covertly changed.

## 3

In the period before the millennium, poets collaborated with musicians primarily in the mode of performative estrangement («остранение») of the established concept of poetry. Dmitrii Aleksandrovich Prigov or Lev Rubinstein reading with a jazz band could be perceived as 'singers and non-singers' at the same time. Their performance and their very poems were a form of transgression; namely, the deconstruction of clichés of Soviet consciousness, as well as the consciousness of their contemporaries who believed in the authenticity and uniqueness of the self.

In 1990s Latvia, the members of the "Orbita" group presented their poems in an atmosphere in which the mutual distrust between Latvian-language and Russian-language communities was on the rise, if not at the levels seen today. The "Orbita" poets have never associated themselves with the Soviet past or with Russian nationalism; they style themselves as representatives of westernized culture who have elaborated different versions of *minor writing*, to use the term of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari.<sup>37</sup> In a case of intermedial performances of "Orbita," minor writing transfers the burden of meaning from a text as an autonomous semantic system to a text in a musical environment, a text as an element of a complex cultural 'force field' that includes non-linguistic elements. Even in non-literary circles, this form of poetry can be perceived as 'contemporary,' as opposed to 'traditionally Russian,' in spite of its multithreaded connection with Russian modernist (*not* Soviet) poetic tradition.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, the poetry of "Orbita" is highly medialized in its distribution and therefore transgresses every habitual context of state-supported Russian literature.

I believe that a breaking point in the development of dialogue between Russian poetry and music took place in 2003 – not in Moscow but in Berlin. In that year, a new work by the Russian-German composer Sergej Newski was performed in the Staatsoper as one of a series of location events. This 'music play,' called "Invasion," included a reading by poet Kirill Medvedev. Sergej Newski was one of the first contemporary composers – if not the very first – who brought Russian poetry of today onto a stage hitherto reserved for music and, hence, to the

<sup>37</sup> Deleuze / Guattari (1986).

<sup>38</sup> For example, in one of the early poems of Sergei Timofeev, «Приходил человек, его костюм измят...» ("A man is coming, his suit is wrinkled..."), one can discern the references to poetry of the unofficial, semi-underground writers Konstantin Vaginov (1899-1934) and Alexander Vvedensky (1904-1941).

attention of contemporary musicians. Henceforth, diverse forms of collaboration and interaction have developed quite quickly; however, in the late 2000s, and later, this evolution would become even more intense. (Kirill Medvedev later performed songs of the left by forming his own rock band, “Arkadii Kots,” named after the first translator of “The Internationale” into Russian<sup>39</sup>.) Thus, all of these features can enjoy a high demand in the contemporary poetry of Russia, but for reasons other than those found in the works of the “Orbita” group.

A key aspect of the transition to properly intermedial forms later in the 2000s and 2010s, however, is that the poetic elements in the compositions of Lvovsky, or Sen-Senkov, or even Vera Polozkova are represented as *non-self-sufficient*. Polozkova comes closest to traditional melodeclamation, but the music accompanying its reading does not underscore its dominant affect – these are jazz compositions in which there is no such emotional dominant. The voice of Polozkova, reading the poems, is perceived in such compositions as a figure emerging from a musical background (to recall the terminology of Gestalt psychology) and perceived in relation to this background.

This non-self-sufficiency is slightly different in more experimental intermedial systems, such as readings performed at the “Poetronica” festival or the musical-poetic works of Sen-Senkov and Lvovsky. Scholarship shows that in contemporary Russian poetry – as in majority of other European literatures – the most important elements of experimental aesthetics are the dissociation of discourses and the disintegration of the poetic subject, which has become fragmented and divided between several voices.<sup>40</sup> In complete contradiction of Bakhtin’s theory, today’s poetry is polyphonic no less – and perhaps *far more* – than its novels, at least of the ‘traditional’ narrative variety. This is certainly true of poets such as Lvovsky and Sen-Senkov, in whose works the authoritative ‘ego’ of the speaking subject is minimized. Sen-Senkov’s poems often look like narrative, although this narrativity is fictive: as Mikhail Iampolski has suggested, the most important element of Sen-Senkov’s poetry is its use of “prefiguration,”<sup>41</sup> which anticipates future events, and many of his poems consist of a series of such “pre-figurations.” The texts of Lvovsky are also most often deprived of a single, consistently acting ‘subject of speech’<sup>42</sup> – rather, they are constructed as a complex collage of statements belonging to different voices.<sup>43</sup>

The dialogical nature of Russian intermedial poetry is also noticeable if we take into account the multiplicity of speakers in Sen-Senkov’s albums. In “Boys

<sup>39</sup> See, for instance, this performance of a poem by Briton Adrian Mitchell in Medvedev’s translation: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2VhB2ICK21g> [06/07/2020].

<sup>40</sup> Лехциер (2013); Бочавер (2019); Кузьмин (2019); Шталь (2019); Житенев (2019) etc.

<sup>41</sup> Ямпольский (2003).

<sup>42</sup> Regarding terminology see Вестстейн (2019).

<sup>43</sup> Kukulin (2010); Бочавер (2019).

are the Majority” («Мальчиков больше», 2015), each poem is recited by a different voice, and in “Snow,” the author is recorded in dialogue with Melina Panaotović, who reads Sen-Senkov’s poems in Serbian.

From 1958 to 1962, Umberto Eco wrote the essay “The Open Work.”<sup>44</sup> According to Eco, works of art contemporary to his time leave much more room open for the reaction and ‘reflection’ of the reader. Many of the poetic works with which we are concerned can also be described as ‘open,’ but in a sense different from that intended by Eco: a very large role in them is played by intentionality, or the idea of turning the poem outwards – towards external world and to a reader. Sen-Senkov’s “prefigurations” can be understood as a thematicization of this intentionality, its transformation into an element of plot in the poem.

Dmitry Kuzmin suggests a trend in which contemporary poetry is undertaking a “restoration of the subject,” possible only after its preliminary destruction. Thus, he considers the most important feature of Aleksander Skidan’s poems to be the “multivalent disintegration of the text as an active practice aimed at restoring the subject to its rights”<sup>45</sup> and concludes that one of the central strategies for working with subjectivity in the poetry of the 2010s is “gathering oneself in the act of dissemination.”<sup>46</sup>

I beg to differ with this interpretation. In my opinion, the “restoration of the subject” did indeed take place in postconceptualism, which Kuzmin aptly described in 2001,<sup>47</sup> but, in the poetry of today, a different process is underway: the separation of intentionality from the individual subject, which in lyric until now had been united ‘by default.’ The single subject is not restored, but *its intention*, the ability of the text to address and be addressed, is restored. However, it addresses itself outward not as a monological voice but as a chorus in which none of the constituent ‘participants’ are privileged. The collaboration of contemporary poets with musicians or their own musical experiments give one form to this intentionality, announcing it aesthetically.

An example of such ‘intentionality without a subject’ is a recent poem by Stanislav Lvovsky, to which he composed his own electronic music:

всё что понял понимает-человек  
всё забудет забывает-человек

Отцветает ветхий человек

*Не введи себя во человек  
Если ты неловкий человек*

<sup>44</sup> Eco (1989).

<sup>45</sup> Кузьмин (2019: 210).

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 213.

<sup>47</sup> Кузьмин (2001).



Заступает новый человек

Истекает ветхий человек

*Не ходи вагонный человек  
Стороной бессонных человек*

Прицветает новый человек

Уезжает ветхий человек

*Отходи уже не человек  
Отводи своих нечеловек*

Припадает новый человек

Ничего не понимает человек.  
Ничего не забывает человек<sup>48</sup>.

everything he understood understands-a-person  
everything will be forgotten forgets-a-person

A frail old person is fading

*Don't introduce yourself into a person  
If you're a clumsy person*

A new person is on the rise

A frail old person is dying

*Don't walk, wagon person,  
To the side of sleepless persons*

A new person is in bloom

A frail old person is departing

*Step away already not a person  
Lead away your unpersons*

A new person is coming

A person understands nothing.  
A person forgets nothing.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Text available at: <https://snob.ru/entry/153276/> [06/07/2020].

<sup>49</sup> Trans. David Hock.

The music in this intermedial composition consists of the hissing noise produced by old radios searching for the right frequency, a rhythmic ‘ringing’ motif, again without any pronounced affective coloring, and then quickly appearing and disappearing excerpts from jazz works from the first half of the twentieth century. I would remind the reader that radio receivers are also used in the performances of the “Orbita” group. It is tempting to believe that the noise and crackling, which arise from the inaccurate choice of wavelength, could be understood as a sound metaphor for the poem’s immersion in a modern medial and cultural context and the incomplete autonomy of the work, as opposed to the emphasized autonomy and insularity of the modernist work.

This music is set to the author’s reading. Some lines are recorded by Lvovsky in a ‘natural’ voice, while others are quietly intoned and repeated as if by another voice and its echo. The single character of the poem – “person” («человек») – breaks down into a series of images by the same name but with different epithets: “new person,” “frail old person,” “clumsy person,” and man as a space of temptation (here, Lvovsky transforms the Church Slavonic text of the “Our Father”: “Do not lead us into temptation,” as adopted in the Russian Orthodox Church). However, from the very start, the single “person” mutates into separate personae under the names “understands-a-person” and “forgets-a-person,” and later – into an “unperson / non-person,” who as such threatens other “persons.”<sup>50</sup>

For all its fragmentation, however, the poem has a single intention, underscored by reflexive repetition (as in the monorhyme “person” [«человек»] on which every line ends in Russian) as well as a single pattern in the accompanying musical composition. This intention constructs a fragmented and simultaneously unified image of the “person.” This “person” is not an allegory, but rather an analogue of “someone,” a generalized contemporary consciousness that “understands nothing” and “forgets nothing.” Variation in the compulsive repetition dematerializes the very possibility of building such a unified image. However, the voices speaking in the poem do not “complete” this image, do not say “the last word” about it (again, to use Bakhtin’s terminology), but address it directly without knowing the outcome of that address. It is as if the inchoate image of the “person” were a real addressee: “*Step away already not a person / Lead away your unpersons.*” In such appeals, the image of the addressee is constructed as a possible interlocutor; procedurally – and performatively – it is affirmed as ‘half-existing.’

In his ‘apocalyptic’ composition of 2020, Lvovsky estranges (*остраняет*) not his own word but the word of another: the speech of radio preachers, threatening the end of the world. In general, in modern culture, electronic remixes can

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<sup>50</sup> Similar language experiments in the creation of new words by combining existing ones with a hyphen have been previously undertaken by Andrei Poliakov in the 2000s; the similarity and differences between his strategy and the work of Lvovsky requires a separate discussion. On Polyakov, see: Кукулин (2002); Бочавер (2019).

be used to defame and ridicule authoritative discourse. In 2015, the Russian postmodern rap band “Krovostok” (“The Blood Groove”) recorded a remix of the extremely right-wing and highly aggressive preacher, Father Dmitrii Smirnov (1951–2020), presenting his sermon as a purely artistic phenomenon in the spirit of the aestheticized aggression of the group itself.<sup>51</sup> It should be mentioned that the band members seemingly have more or less liberal views (at least they performed at the liberal opposition rally in Moscow in 2019) and therefore position themselves as political opponents of Smirnov. But Lvovsky, unlike the members of the “Krovostok” group, does not select ridiculous quotes from his sources but rather the most characteristic ones. For this reason, his composition does not seem to satirize a particular person or worldview but rather ambiguously distorts and estranges apocalyptic rhetoric as such.

I already cited the example of Kirill Shirokov’s collaboration with Dina Gatina. Here, it deserves further analysis. Commenting on their joint performance at “From Zero to One” in 2012, Dmitry Kuzmin writes in the journal “Vozdukh”:

[...] фрагментарная структура гатинской поэзии, акцентированная ускользающим, угасающим авторским интонированием, находилась в гармоническом резонансе с пуантилизмом широковского аккомпанемента [...] однако за этим фасадом был совершенно явственен устойчивый лирический субъект с отчётливым месседжем.<sup>52</sup>

[...] the fragmentary structure of Gatina’s poetry, accentuated by the author’s elusive, withering intonation, harmonized with the pointilism of Shirokov’s accompaniment [...] but behind this facade was a completely explicit, stable lyrical subject with a lucid message.

The recording of that performance was not available to me at the time of work on this article, so I cannot say whether I could agree with Kuzmin’s idea of a “stable lyrical subject.” However, the poem “Silk,” which followed from that performance, as well as the way it was interpreted by Shirokov, clearly demonstrates the lessons both authors learned from their first, improvisational experience of collaboration. There is no “I” in this text. Its composition draws precisely upon the tension between the deconstruction of the subject and the unity of its intonation. This work consists of short melodic phrases: fragments that the singer half-declains, half-sings, largely reproducing the intonation of Gatina herself. The individual fragments are separated by very long pauses, noticeably longer than the intervals of singing and reading. As a result of these pauses, the resumption of musical movement is always perceived as a surprise.

Несколько вперед  
некролог  
хвостик

<sup>51</sup> See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zek9F1CqVvM&t=3s> [06/07/2020].

<sup>52</sup> Text available at: <http://www.litkarta.ru/projects/vozdukh/news/2012-03-21-0-1/> [22/04/2021].

[...]  
 Это история  
 истерика  
 вся в белых стихах  
 по мышинному следу  
 день серый  
 например  
 на этикетку  
 в глубь серого  
 где прошли  
 ли  
 на воде  
 и остальных продуктах.<sup>53</sup>

A little way ahead  
 obituary  
 rat tail  
 [...]  
 This is history  
 hysteria  
 everything in blank verse  
 across the track of a mouse  
 a grey day  
 for example  
 on the label  
 into the deep of the grey  
 whether  
 they walked through  
 on water  
 and on other products.<sup>54</sup>

“Silk” is not intermedial poetry in the strict sense of the word, but we can consider it *in the context* of intermedial poetry, as it was written under the influence of collaboration between Shirokov and Gatina. In this work, we can see the interaction of two factors: the deconstruction of the self and the musical reconstruction of its vocal intonation, which supplants the displaced subject.

We should not forget to mention the composers who are involved in these projects, who could be considered “dialogical” as well. Pavel Zhagun and Kirill Shirokov are not only composers but also poets themselves. Most of the other musicians involved in media poetry projects are interested either in contempo-

<sup>53</sup> I was unable to find this text in a published version, so this represents a transcription of the performance on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9VRKSAw35rc&t=274s> [05/04/2021].

<sup>54</sup> Trans. David Hock.

rary poetry or in combinations of music and spoken words, like Olga Nosova<sup>55</sup> or Alessandro Bosetti.<sup>56</sup> In 2005, soon after the project with Medvedev had been performed, Sergej Newski presented his work „Und dass der Tod nicht fern bleibt“ (for speaker and string quartet), performed together with German poet, composer, and artist Michael Lentz.<sup>57</sup> Today’s Russian composers have become increasingly dialogue-oriented, relative to musicians of the previous generation.

The reasons for the intermedial interaction between poets and musicians becoming so widespread in the 2010s deserve a separate discussion. The cultural and medial foundations of this new practice are obvious. First of all, in the 2010s, technological access allowed even non-specialists to write music on a computer and overlay poetic readings, and the convenience of digital communication made it easy for authors living and working in different cities and even countries to collaborate. In addition, multimedia narratives – for example, in media itself – have become very common in the last decade, and multimedia performances have become an important art form. All these innovations encourage poets to collaborate with musicians and lend the practice more and more culturally legitimacy.

However, there is probably another reason that is socio-cultural. The collaboration of poets and musicians, or the interaction of poetry and music within one work (as in Lvovsky) opens spaces for unpredictable creative interplay. A poetic word in such a space becomes unfinished, open to new meanings and associations – precisely because musicians select or compose music that is not affective and does not enhance the dominant emotive tendency of a text but rather problematizes it. Music here ‘shakes down’ the conventional flow of affect and emotional expectation – to an even greater extent than poetry does – but also preserves and even enhances our understanding of the poem as a communicative act addressed to an interlocutor. Performances by poets at the “Poetronica” festival are organized in an emphatically ‘collaborative manner’: participants are seated next to each other and pass on the microphone. Paradoxically, this multimedia performance visually acquires the features of joint, collective work.

The first to import this approach to Russia were poets and DJs Igor Davletshin (1967-2002) and Dmitrii Kravchuk (b. 1967), who then lived in the city of Kemerovo in southern Siberia. Their experiments were part of the collective project “Siberia Nova Kultura” [sic!]. Like the members of “Orbita,” they read poems to their own DJ music, and the poems were printed not only in the

<sup>55</sup> See <https://polymus.ru/ru/events/exhibitions/ian-douglas-moorepaul-rothaleksey-borisov-i-olga-nosova/> [06/07/2020].

<sup>56</sup> See <http://www.melgun.net/about/> [06/07/2020].

<sup>57</sup> A recording of this quartet is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B20iL2T7cbY> [06.07.2020]. References to Lentz’s audio-plays (Hörspielen) and CDs could be found here: <http://www.michaellentz.com/audio/> [06/07/2020].

form of traditional books or booklets, but also in the form of unusual visual compositions (Figure 2). All of these experiments in the works of Davletshin and Kravchuk, I believe, were connected with the experience of non-self-sufficiency and openness of the poetic word.



Figure 2: Igor Davletshin. The visual-poetic composition “Solidarity” (late 1990s).  
From the personal archive of the author.

Since 2005, the “Festival of Spoken Verse” has been held in Moscow every two years as part of the “Moscow Poetry Biennale.” According to this anonymously authored description available on the “Literary Map of Russia” website:

[...] [участников фестиваля] объединяет их отношение к поэзии не только как к письменному слову, но и как к слову устному: произносимому, декламируемому. Исполнение стихотворения предстает своего рода новым произведением, не тождественным письменному тексту, – в нем, благодаря тембру, высоте, силе голоса, манере авторского исполнения, интонирования, аранжировки, возникают дополнительные эстетические измерения.<sup>58</sup>

[...] [Festival participants] are united in their attitude towards poetry not only as written word but also as oral: spoken, recited. Each performance of a poem represents a new work that is not identical to the written text – in it, new aesthetic dimensions emerge through the timbre, height, and power of the voice, the manner of the author’s execution, the intonation, and the arrangement.

From the point of view of Hansen-Löve or Uffelmann, the performances presented at the Festival of Spoken Verse are not intermedial but synthetic. But even in

<sup>58</sup> <http://www.litkarta.ru/projects/msk-biennale/programs/golos/> [22/04/2021].

these performances, sustainable meanings and sustainable forms of representation are undermined, and the subjectivity represented in the works is obviously performative: it is created and maintained only in the moment of its execution.

In contemporary culture, such practices collectively take on the meaning of *utopian projects*. Private communication is increasingly concentrated in social media and, in this sense, ‘devoid of physicality,’ while public communication is colored by the influence of ‘ready-made genres’ born from the fields of politics, media, or corporate relations. New examples of public communication are emerging, aimed at undermining these ready-made genres, ranging from inter-medial poetry to the experimental stand-up comedy showcased on the series “The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel” (Prime Video, written and produced by Amy Sherman-Palladino, 2017-present). In Russia, such “utopian collaborations” are even more important because of the alienation of intellectuals from the social majority and the highly developed ritualization of public life.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Дубин (2006).

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## Internationale Zeitschrift für Kulturkomparatistik

Band 2 (2021): *Contemporary Lyric Poetry in Transitions between Genres and Media*

Herausgegeben von Ralph Müller und Henrieke Stahl

Jaguścik, Justyna: New Dynamics: Chinese Women's Poetry Enacted. In: IZfK 2 (2021). 195-224.

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**Justyna Jaguścik (Zürich)**

### **New Dynamics: Chinese Women's Poetry Enacted**

The article offers a preliminary investigation of the phenomenon of female-authored 'poetry theater' (*shige juchang*)<sup>1</sup> in the People's Republic of China. It discusses cross-genre explorations by a group of female poets, theater directors and artists who are all associated with the movement of 'women's poetry' (*nüxing shige*) that emerged in the 1980s in China. The discussion focuses on two performances based on female-authored poems, "Riding a Roller Coaster Flying Toward the Future" (2011) and "Roaming the Fuchun Mountains with Huang Gongwang" (2016), which resulted from the joint efforts of four women: the poet Zhai Yongming, the poet-scholar Zhou Zan, and the theater directors Cao Kefei and Chen Si'an. Their avant-garde experiments with poetical theater document the different ways in which poetry is being translated into images, sounds, or bodily movements on stage. The paper argues that poetic exploration of writing and reciting practices has gained new momentum from emerging intermedial, visual-verbal experiments. Furthermore, it claims that interest in 'poetry theater' is also driven by the search for new forms of cross-genre stage performances that could be different from the previously politicized or commercialized ones.

*Keywords: Chinese poetry, women's poetry, intermediality, avant-garde theatre, performance art*

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<sup>1</sup> 'Poetry theater' is a concept that is not precisely defined. All female writers and artists discussed in this essay refer to the term when discussing their experiments with mixing various genres on stage. In a recent interview in the journal "Shanghai Yishu Pinglun" 《上海艺术评论》 (2020) the poet Zhou Zan emphasized the impact of Hans-Thies Lehmann's concept of 'postdramatic theater' on her understanding of 'poetry theatre.'

A number of newer publications on contemporary Chinese poetry emphasize phenomena such as visuality,<sup>2</sup> musicalization and performativity,<sup>3</sup> and the ‘life scene’ approach.<sup>4</sup> Similarly, more recent companions to Chinese literature acknowledge Chinese poets’ strong interest in disseminating poetry using different media – for example, the Internet.<sup>5</sup> “Verse going viral”<sup>6</sup> represents only one of the many aesthetic currents present in the phenomenon of intentional and spontaneous actualizations of poetry in the digital age. These developments encompass intermediality in the broad sense, or the crossing of media borders by poetical texts that are, for example, inscribed on paintings, adapted for the stage as performances, shared across cyberspace or appropriated by the advertising industry. At the same time, conventional modes of literary expression and communication persist; traditional publishing houses in the People’s Republic of China (PRC) continue selling prestigious poetry anthologies and the alternative ‘unofficial’ (*fei guanfang* 非官方) poetry scene distributes a large number of independent journals. Despite the origin of these unofficial publications in the underground literature of the Maoist era (1949-1976), they must not be automatically identified with political dissidence today. They represent much more the rising tide of vivid, do-it-yourself forms of cultural production by independent authors who prefer crowdfunding and online publishing to courting cultural gatekeepers.<sup>7</sup>

This paper aims to shed light on one aspect of contemporary poetry in China – its presence in (mainly independent) theaters and artistic spaces. It discusses cross-genre exploration by a group of female poets, theater directors, and artists who are all associated with the movement of ‘women’s poetry’ (*nüxing shige* 女性诗歌) in the PRC. Even though the discussion is limited to performances based on female-authored texts, the examples chosen represent some general trends within Chinese-language poetry, regardless of the gender of the author. Following a short introduction to the status of ‘women’s poetry’ within the Chinese poetry scene, the article provides an overview of collaborations between poets, theater directors and visual artists which have, so far, resulted in the production of several performances based on female-authored poetry that were staged across the PRC and Taiwan. The closing section of the paper sketches out the main differences and commonalities in the theatrical visions by authors

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<sup>2</sup> Manfredi (2014).

<sup>3</sup> Crevel (2003, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> Inwood (2014).

<sup>5</sup> Denton (2016); Wang (2017).

<sup>6</sup> Inwood (2014).

<sup>7</sup> Terms such as ‘underground’ (地下 *dixia*), ‘unofficial’ (非官方 *fei guanfang*), ‘independent’ (独立 *duli*) or ‘popular’ (民间 *minjian*) must be understood within the context of Chinese history. In the broadest sense all these attributes point to texts created outside of mainstream (orthodox) cultural production and state-sponsored institutions. They do not exclude industrial or private financial sponsorship, be it local or foreign.

engaged in these productions in an effort to illuminate their understandings of the multimedia phenomenon of 'poetry theater' (*shige juchang* 诗歌剧场).

### *The 'Women's Poetry' Movement in China*

In premodern China, writing poetry was not an exclusively male domain and with regard to numbers alone, "no nation has produced more women poets than China."<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, scholars emphasize that women poets remained bound by literary conventions and, no less important, moral constraints. As a consequence, the large majority of women writers occupied positions on the peripheries of the literary canon.<sup>9</sup> Female participation in the vast literary conversation was contested and, in contrast to men for whom literary skills often paved the way to official careers, women's voices remained confined in the inner quarters. The situation changed in the late Qing dynasty and modern period, when the reformist' critique of the position of women in China helped to amplify the voices of female authors. Popularization of ideas of women's liberation and education finally led to the emergence of a whole group of female writers who enjoyed unprecedented public visibility. Among them were the poets Bing Xin 冰心 (1900-1999), Lin Huiyin 林徽因 (1904-1955), Chen Jingrong 陈敬容 (1917-1989), and Zheng Min 郑敏 (1920-).

The situation of female authors changed again under the rule of Mao Zedong (1949-1976).<sup>10</sup> The collective as the agent of emancipation replaced the individual of the Republican era and the recently discovered female gendered self had to subordinate herself to the socialist women's movement that was orchestrated top-down by the ruling Communist Party. In this ideological environment women poets ceased writing and publishing. Some of them chose translation or study of foreign literature (Zheng Min), others kept their writing private (Lin Zi 林子).<sup>11</sup> The Maoist subsumption of feminist thought and literature to politics explains why the notion of *nüxing shige*, most commonly translated into English as 'women's poetry,' emerged in the PRC as a critical term only in the latter half of the 1980s. The concept surfaced in 1986 in reaction to the debut of a young poet, Zhai Yongming 翟永明 (1955-). Literary critics<sup>12</sup> argue that Zhai's early writing should be regarded as the point of origin of a gender-aware female voice

<sup>8</sup> Chang (2002: 21).

<sup>9</sup> For more on marginalization of female-authored poetry see Yeh (1992), Chang / Saussy (1999). On moral constraints and women's writing in China see Mann (1997: 76-120) and Larson (1998: 44-83).

<sup>10</sup> The same could be said about all poets and writers, regardless of gender. For a short discussion of PRC's orthodox poetry in the 1950s and 1960s see Crevel (1996: 16-20).

<sup>11</sup> For a brief summary of the history of modern female-authored poetry in China see Zhang (2004: 30-34).

<sup>12</sup> Tang (1987); Zhou (2014).

in contemporary Chinese poetry.<sup>13</sup> Accordingly, ‘women’s poetry’ must not be confused with the entire corpus of Chinese-language female-authored poetry, but rather, the term *nüxing shige* applies to female-authored poetry from the PRC written from a distinctly gendered point of view and often offering a feminist critique of social power relations. In general, authors associated with the trend explore how gender experience can be translated into writing. More specifically, today’s scholars emphasize two key characteristics of the movement. First, they argue that the concept of ‘women’s poetry’ should be approached from a historical perspective as the literary phenomenon that mirrored but also shaped the language of the post-Maoist female intellectuals as they turned to a feminism of gender difference.<sup>14</sup> This academic and literary trend emerged as a critical reaction to the imposition of socialist gender sameness by the state under Mao Zedong. Second, but equally important, scholars argue that attention should be paid to the socio-cultural context of ‘women’s poetry’ as a “discourse” that involves “authors, readers, critics, publishers, and relevant government bodies.”<sup>15</sup>

In 1986, when Zhai Yongming’s first poems appeared in print, the recourse to gendered, individual experience was perceived by numerous female authors and intellectuals as a self-empowering strategy that would help women to distance themselves from the predominant androcentric worldview and masculine language. Many women from Zhai’s generation felt increasingly alienated from the iconic revolutionary view on gender, nor could they relate in a positive way to pre-revolutionary, traditional representations of femininity. Texts from the so-called ‘golden age’ of ‘women’s poetry’ (1986-1989) document their search for a language of their own. Many of female poets who were active in the 1980s were inspired by modernist confessional poetry and they often explored private spaces and the female body as a new site of empowerment.<sup>16</sup> Cui Weiping 崔卫平, the editor of the first collection of female-authored poetry to be published in the PRC in 1993, wrote in her preface to the volume that “flash” was the last resort for women poets in their search for a language of their own, because they had “no other place to go.”<sup>17</sup> In the late 1980s this new poetics of the female body allowed women’s writing to gain momentum and sent a strong message against patriarchal constraints. For example, in Zhai’s early poem

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<sup>13</sup> It is important to note that the generation of female poets who came of age during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), including Zhai Yongming, was not really familiar with the writings of their predecessors from the Republican period. The main reason behind this rupture in the trajectory of modernist poetry in Chinese language was of a political nature. Generations of writers who grew up under Mao had only, if at all, a very limited knowledge of the feminine and cosmopolitan voices that were an important part of the Chinese-language literary modernity.

<sup>14</sup> Zhang (2003); Chen et al. (2019).

<sup>15</sup> Zhang (2004).

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 59-69.

<sup>17</sup> Cui (1993: 7).

series, phenomena such as menstruation and childbearing, followed by the decay of flesh and death, figure prominently as representations of experiences through which women confront the materiality of their bodies in the most direct way.<sup>18</sup> In her early works, Zhai most often depicts the female body as constituted of the flows and pulsations of blood and water.<sup>19</sup>

The entanglement of 'women's poetry' with gendered body experience, together with the introspective focus of the discourse, prompted largely reductionist and essentializing readings by critics, who often neglected original features of individual poetic languages and in their interpretations reduced texts associated with 'women's poetry' to a set of clichés.<sup>20</sup> Such dismissive readings had a negative impact; by the end of 1980s, the first wave of budding poetical feminism in China came to a close. In contrast to other informal groupings associated with contemporary Chinese avant-garde poetry,<sup>21</sup> the first wave of 'women's poetry' did not produce a representative poetry journal or generate a collective identity as an informal group. Additionally, many poets associated with the trend viewed the notion of 'women's poetry' as much more of a curse than a blessing. To some, the abandonment of the label seemed the only way to rescue their writings from critics who had increasingly scrutinized their works through the lens of a fixed set of images and metaphors.

Given the lack of identification with the label on the part of the poets associated with it, it is not surprising that nearly another ten years passed before the 'women's poetry' movement gained new momentum. At the same time, the 1990s saw tectonic shifts within the poetry scene: the deconstruction of the 1980s "cult of poetry,"<sup>22</sup> the exile of some established poets for political reasons, and the emergence of the first online discussion forums dedicated to poetry.<sup>23</sup> Amidst these changes, the notion of 'women's poetry' surfaced again in the latter half of the 1990s – this time, however, in a more organized form. In the late 1990s, young scholars of Chinese literature and poets rooted in informal poetry groups active in Beijing decided that more space was needed for a systematic exploration of 'women's poetry' and writing. The ongoing post-socialist transformation engendered a diversification of the cultural landscape that, together with the rise of feminist scholarship, formed the sociocultural background

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<sup>18</sup> In the decade of the 1980s, Zhai completed three poem series that may be regarded as documenting the consolidation of her female consciousness: "Women" ("Nüren" 《女人》, 1984), "Jing'an Village" ("Jing'an Zhuang" 《静安庄》, 1985) and "The Patterns of Death" ("Siwang de tu'an" 《死亡的图案》, 1987).

<sup>19</sup> On blood and childbirth in the series "Women," see Zhang (2004: 92-98).

<sup>20</sup> The critical questioning of the relationship between female bodily experience and literary creativity is not limited to the Chinese-language context. For more, see Gill (2007: 111-137).

<sup>21</sup> For an introduction to avant-garde poetry in China, see the first chapter in Crevel (2008).

<sup>22</sup> Yeh (1996).

<sup>23</sup> Day (2008).

against which the reemergence of ‘women’s poetry’ took place. Zhou Zan 周瓚 (1968-), then a doctoral student in Chinese literature and today a poet and scholar, became the main driving force behind the inception of an unofficial journal focused exclusively on the discourse of ‘women’s poetry.’ Zhou was able to win Zhai Yongming’s substantial support for the idea of an informal publication devoted to women’s poetry as well as gender-aware theory and translation. From the beginning, Zhai served as a coeditor of the journal and to date she has remained the most prominent regular contributor of poems. In May 1998, the editors distributed a few hundred copies of the first issue of the journal in Beijing, mainly around the Peking University campus. The journal, which in 2018 celebrated its twentieth anniversary, was named “Yi 翼” (“Wings”).

The editorial team of the journal is a good example of creative cooperation across generational and genre boundaries: its third and youngest member, next to Zhai Yongming and Zhou Zan, is the poet, novelist, and theater director Chen Si’an 陈思安 (1986-), who is also the driving force behind the journal’s venture into the realms of social media and the Internet. Today, the editorial team of “Wings” does much of its publishing online, and they even maintain a website ([www.wingwomenpress.com](http://www.wingwomenpress.com)), which describes their enterprise as an independent women’s press. Besides e-publishing and open access publishing, the Internet provides a space for the instant exchange of opinions; the one-thousand-plus followers of “Wings” occasionally leave comments on the journal’s social media account on the popular platform WeChat. New media have helped independent publishers of ‘women’s poetry’ to move beyond the circle of a few hundred friends in their local environment and become part of virtual world literature. In addition to embracing the possibilities inherent in new technologies, poets associated with “Wings” have been experimenting with the performative and dramatic qualities of poetry.

This short introduction to the discourse of ‘women’s poetry’ makes it clear that, since its inception thirty years ago, the subgenre has been reinvented. In particular, the emergence of the journal “Wings” attracted younger female authors, because it provided a platform for publishing and discussing female-authored poetry independently of critical trends in the literary mainstream. Nevertheless, because Zhai Yongming and Zhou Zan are among the most well-known contemporary poets in the PRC, ‘women’s poetry’ cannot be described as simply residing on the margins of the masculine literary field. When tackling issues of marginalization and prominence of respective authors and genres in the PRC, one should not only inquire into the impact of gender but first ask about the place of modern free verse poetry in sinophone communities and cultures. The popularity of other literary and visual genres is not the only challenge modern poetry faces; readers typically perceive contemporary poetry as inferior to traditional verse



written in classical Chinese.<sup>24</sup> From the perspective of gender, it is important to recognize that the traditional poetic canon was almost exclusively male. Thus, although China is often referred to as a ‘nation of poetry’ (*shi guo* 诗国), there is no doubt that the notion points to the long-standing classical tradition of male literati poetry, expressing little pride in the hundred-year-old genre of vernacular poetry.<sup>25</sup> The “online revival of classical-style poetry writing”<sup>26</sup> bespeaks the endurance of the classical canon and, at the same time, the lack of a ‘natural’ link between modern technology and literary modernity. The Internet has influenced neo-classical and avant-garde poetry alike, and contemporary poets actively pursue more open modes of practicing poetry that can reach beyond written text. Particularly since the turn of the century, Chinese poets have actively explored intermedial connections among different artistic genres. The creative undertakings discussed in the following sections exemplify poets’ search for an updated poetics that resonates with audiences surrounded by omnipresent image-based and interactive media.

### *Chinese Poetry and the Crossing of Boundaries*

From a historical perspective, the crossing of genre boundaries is nothing new in Chinese poetry. The golden age of Chinese poetry, the Tang dynasty (618-907), has, indeed, been described as a “dynamically mobile world of multimedia performances.”<sup>27</sup> The Chinese writing system is the ultimate root of poetry’s entanglement with visuality; the most obvious expression of this is found in the art of calligraphy.<sup>28</sup> Closely related to calligraphy and painting, but ranked as superior by the elites of the time, classical poetry was regarded as the most refined art and one of the most prestigious forms of writing.

Literature could be also created in and transmitted by different media, as a prominent example from the female tradition in Chinese poetry, Su Hui’s 苏蕙 fourth-century palindrome “Picture of the Turning Sphere” (“Xuanji tu” 《璇玑图》), demonstrates. Su’s palindrome of 841 characters is a cross-genre masterpiece of writing and embroidery, as she originally stitched her composition out of extracts of classical poems in brocade.<sup>29</sup> This historical double act of writing and stitching a piece of art, which defied conventional reading habits and concur-

<sup>24</sup> For more on marginalization of modern poetry and the continuing presence of classical poetry, as well as the prevalence of the “male gaze” in the Chinese poetry scene, see Crevel (2017).

<sup>25</sup> Yeh (2008: 13-16).

<sup>26</sup> Hockx (2015: 190).

<sup>27</sup> Tian (2017: 28).

<sup>28</sup> Manfredi (2014).

<sup>29</sup> Idema / Grant (2004: 127-131).

rently dissolved the boundaries between elite culture and handicraft, has much in common with current-day literary experiments.

Furthermore, poetry's relationship to sound and performative bodily movements is also pertinent to understanding the meanings attached to the genre in China. One of the best-known of ancient poetics, the "Great Preface" (first century BC) to the canonical "Book of Poetry" ("Shijing" 《诗经》), delivers not only the first authoritative definition of poetry but also describes a "spatialization of poetic process"<sup>30</sup> that involves gesticulation and vocalization. Throughout the ages, features inherent to musical forms (odes, songs, etc.), with which the genre had originally been associated, determined the structure of the poetic line. Rigid rules, which applied to rhyme, fixed tone sequences, and rhythm, were important formal characteristics of traditional poetry.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, modernist poetry began to challenge these rules altogether, countering the well-established reading habits of the educated public. Modern poets have introduced their own ways of experimenting with crossing genre boundaries. Perhaps the most well-known examples of such experiments in sinophone poetry, combining visual and aural effects, come from the Taiwanese concrete poetry movement, which began in the 1930s,<sup>31</sup> and more recent 'sound poetry.'<sup>32</sup> In the PRC, on the other hand, the perception of poetic soundscapes has been influenced by the affiliation of recitation with patriotic literary activities during the War of Resistance (1937-1945) and mainstream Mao-era culture.<sup>33</sup>

### *Avant-Garde Poetry and Theater*

The history of experiments with bringing poetry to the theater in the PRC goes back to the early 1990s. In the short history of the genre, the most influential production remains the groundbreaking performance "File Zero" ("Ling dang'an" 《零档案》) by the avant-garde director Mou Sen 牟森 (1963-) from the year 1994. He created this play, based on a long poem by Yu Jian 于坚 (1954-), for an art festival in Brussels.<sup>34</sup> At the beginning of the 1990s, Mou not only began to question the significance of the dramatic text for theatrical performance but also granted more agency to actors, who became co-authors of their lines, which were based on the poetic text but also supplemented by their per-

<sup>30</sup> Owen (1992: 41-42).

<sup>31</sup> Yeh (2008: 21-24).

<sup>32</sup> Bruno (2017).

<sup>33</sup> Crespi (2009).

<sup>34</sup> For a detailed discussion of Yu Jian's poem, see Crevel (2008: 223-46). Mou Sen's theater experiments are discussed, for example, in Huot (1999: 198-215); and Erin B. Mee, Kevin J. Wetmore, and Siyuan Liu (2014: 120-22).

sonal memories. Mou preferred to work with performers who were not professionally trained, but the majority of these amateurs were not strangers to the creative industries; among them were, for example, film directors, authors, and professional dancers.

In terms of the commercial success and popularization of experimental theater among educated urban audiences, the laurels belong to Meng Jinghui 孟京辉 (1965-), who has become a household name not only in China but also abroad.<sup>35</sup> Meng first ventured into the field of poetry in 2006, when he based his work “Flowers in the Mirror, Moon on the Water” (“Jing hua shui yue” 《镜花水月》) on two series of poems by the contemporary poet Xi Chuan 西川 (1963-). The original poetic text played a secondary, inspirational role in the completed production, which bore some of the trademark features of Meng’s theatrical method: heavily made-up actors recited verses in a studied manner, the stage design emanated coldness and distance, and the play focused on the search for love among middle-class urbanites.<sup>36</sup> Xi Chuan’s texts were merely vehicles for setting into motion Meng’s theatrical machine with all its signature elements. In contrast to Mou’s earliest experiment, Meng did not forego storytelling in his plays; rather, he formulated his own plot before rearranging his poetic sources into dramatic texts.

### *Two Performances Based on ‘Women’s Poetry’*

The two examples from the previous section are important for mapping the very brief history of contemporary avant-garde poetry’s presence on theatrical stages, and also for identifying the main features of this emerging hybrid genre. Certainly, they make it clear that the initial performance based on ‘women’s poetry,’ in 2009 was breaking new ground. On the one hand, it could be located on the already existing trajectory of experimental theater, much closer to Mou Sen’s tradition than Meng’s professional avant-gardism; nevertheless, all previous attempts at bringing poetry to the stage had involved prominent male voices from the poetical avant-garde – an unintended result of the predominance of the male perspective in poetry and the performing arts.

Thus, a theater performance based on ‘women’s poetry’ that promotes a distinct female, or feminist, vision was something quite new. Although this novelty makes no claims about the artistic quality of these performances, they nevertheless created an unprecedented opportunity to reclaim the stage as a forum for women’s voices. Consequently, they altered the contours of the discussion of female literary authority and, furthermore, broadened it with questions regarding

<sup>35</sup> A detailed discussion of Meng Jinghui’s theater may be found in part 2 of Rossella Ferrari’s “Pop Goes the Avant-Garde: Experimental Theatre in Contemporary China” (2013). Since his first guest performance in Berlin in 1993, Meng has presented other plays in the German-speaking theater world.

<sup>36</sup> Rossella Ferrari discusses the play in detail in Li Ruru (2016: 123-40).

directorial power. Moreover, due to its focus on gendered body experiences, ‘women’s poetry’ seemed a suitable departure point in the search for a more physical presence of poetry on the stage than that of the already well-established, rather narrative and voice-oriented format of poetry recitals. It can ultimately be said that the first theater experiments of director Cao Kefei 曹克非 and “Wings” coeditor Zhou Zan helped ‘women’s poetry’ to transgress the exclusive space of an unofficial journal and installed the subgenre within the actual space of the theater stage. The latter space is less independent of intrusions by the state and market; nevertheless, it allows for reach beyond a close circle of friends.

By 2019, three independent theater productions based on ‘women’s poetry’ were performed in the PRC.<sup>37</sup> The first two were directed by Cao Kefei and staged for the first time in 2009 and 2010, respectively; the most recent was staged in 2016 by Chen Si’an, co-editor of “Wings.” The following sections discuss Cao’s second production and the only performance directed by Chen. Works by these two directors exemplify two different approaches to poetry theater and propose different answers to questions of the translatability of poetry into staged performances. Cao creates a physical impressionist theater, whereas Chen’s cross-genre experiments focus on text and the dramatic form.

### *“Riding a Roller Coaster Flying toward the Future”*

In 2008, the independent theater group Ladybird Theater (Piaochong jushe 瓢虫剧社) was established in Beijing. The founding director, Cao Kefei, imagined it as a lively space beyond the limits of official theater production, and more specifically as an experimental stage on which artistic encounters that seek to transgress genre boundaries could take place. Distancing herself from the rather solemn official tone of theater art, she wrote in a short introduction published online: “It is the moment of our encounter! It is our celebration!”<sup>38</sup> Since its inception, Ladybird has stood outside of the local theater mainstream, primarily due to its unique focus on gender and poetry. In her own work as director, Cao has remained on the side of avant-garde art, which is highly intellectual and critical of the commercialization and marketization of cultural production. In 1998, in Cao’s first Beijing production,<sup>39</sup> she experimented with sound and vision in a way that inspired one critic to describe the performance as “a drama to be watched, and not

<sup>37</sup> In May 2020, Cao Kefei announced on WeChat that she had already begun with the dramatization of Zhai Yongming’s poetry series “Fourteen Plainsongs” (“Shisi shou sùgē” 《十四首素歌》).

<sup>38</sup> See the English text from the group’s space on the platform Douban: <https://site.douban.com/118044/> [20/08/2020].

<sup>39</sup> Cao Kefei studied German in Shanghai before she moved to Bern in Switzerland to study theater arts. Throughout the years she has become one of the important cultural brokers between the German-speaking and mainland Chinese theater worlds. In 2006, she was awarded the German-Chinese Friendship Award for her contribution to cultural exchange between the two countries.

to be listened to.”<sup>40</sup> That was the first expression of a theatrical aesthetic that would recur in later Ladybird stage appearances, which were also impressionistic, fragmented performances that foregrounded visual perception instead of a coherent dramatic narrative. In short, Cao's philosophy of theater is aptly summarized in an article from 2002, in which she states, “I have never liked telling stories on stage. Because it is not the right space to unfold stories, it is one open to a lyrical imaginary (*shiyi* 诗意) and physical form (*xingti* 形体).”<sup>41</sup>

In 2009, the Ladybird Theater staged the first play based on Chinese female-authored poetry. It was directed by Cao, Zhou Zan was responsible for the dramatization of poetical texts and Zhai Yongming oversaw the production. In keeping with the experimental spirit of the Ladybird Troupe, the play combined poetry, drama, performance, and contemporary dance with experimental music or noise art. Among the performers were trained dancers and professional artists but also amateurs – for example, the poet Zhou Zan, who permanently joined the group. That first performance delivered a testing ground for Cao and Zhou's ideas behind the maneuver of juxtaposing poetry and drama. In their own words, it “aimed at an exploration of the possibility of poetry converging with the stage.” The troupe searched for answers to questions such as “Is poetry only suitable for recitation? How can poetry find soul mates (*zhiyin* 知音) among other artistic fields? How do words and the body meet? How does poetry move?”<sup>42</sup> The members of Ladybird Theater found the initial results of their first stage experiment with poetry-based performance encouraging. Their ongoing exploration of the new possibilities inherent to translating poetry into theater soon resulted in the staging of their second play, “Riding a Roller Coaster Flying Toward the Future” (“Chengzuo guoshanche fei xiang weilai” 《乘坐过山车飞向未来》), in 2010. It was first shown in southern China, in Chengdu<sup>43</sup> and Shenzhen, followed by a performance in Taipei.

The first step that Cao and Zhou undertook in the process of translation of ‘women's poetry’ into a theater performance was to identify some keywords that would be central to the play. The director took these keywords from the texts of

<sup>40</sup> Cao quoted in the anonymous “Overview of Plays Staged in 1998 by Chinese and Visiting Western Theater Groups” (“98 nian Zhong xi guoji xiju yaoqingzhan saomiao” 《'98 年中西国际戏剧邀请展扫描》), published in the journal “Xiju 戏剧” (“Drama”).

<sup>41</sup> Wang (2002).

<sup>42</sup> See the booklet titled “The Woman Attempting to Disrupt the Ritual” (“Qitu pohuai yishi de nüren” 《企图破坏仪式的女人》), which was produced by the Ladybird Theater for the performance of their first play in Beijing's Penghao Theater in 2010.

<sup>43</sup> In Chengdu, the play was performed on the evenings of June 11 and 12, 2011. I attended both performances. On the first evening, the troupe performed in the official space of the monumental Home of Arts and on the second evening, in the tiny courtyard of the bar-gallery “White Nights” which was established by the poet Zhai Yongming. The Ladybird troupe usually performs outside the formal setting of theater stages and the troupe is used to adjusting to different physical environments.

the poems she chose, and they helped her to establish a direct link between the stage performance and ‘women’s poetry.’ The keywords that the 2011 performances centered around were: ‘women’s poetry,’ ‘roller coaster,’ ‘verbs,’ and ‘dolls.’ Female-authored poetry by authors associated with the movement of ‘women’s poetry,’ whose texts had been published by the journal “Wings,” formed the only textual basis for the performance. These authors do not only write from a gendered, sometimes feminist, point of view but they are also known for a distinct poetics of the body that investigates the body’s relationship with gender and sexuality.<sup>44</sup> The abundance of powerful body metaphors in Chinese ‘women’s poetry’ of the 1980s has long defined the critical reception of the subgenre and, to date, many female poets perceive this identification as a valuable, even if sometimes troublesome, legacy. Today’s ‘women’s poetry’ proposes different textual strategies when dealing with the theme of embodiment. For instance, it has abandoned the narrow, introspective focus on individual emotions and instead investigates the sociolinguistic construction of gendered embodiments in the current world. Due to their focus on the ways in which femininity is individually or collectively enacted, these poems delivered a suitable departure point for Cao’s inquiry into the relationship between poetry, embodiment, and performance.

The second keyword, ‘roller coaster,’ as well as the title of the play, originate from a poem by Ma Yan 马雁 (1979-2010), who was born in Chengdu and also actively participated in the unofficial poetry scene in the city.<sup>45</sup> Even if the outline of the performance was adjusted each time that the troupe moved to the next location, one thing remained constant: Ma Yan’s poem provided the frame for the four different stage versions of the play. Cao Kefei also made this text the point of departure for rehearsing the project when she assigned it as an individual performance practice to all actors involved. The ride on the roller coaster from Ma’s poem not only became the central metaphor in the play, pointing to the perils of human existence in the contemporary world but equally defined its formal character as a collage of rapidly alternating images, some of which passed too quickly to be grasped by the audience:

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<sup>44</sup> For more on ‘body poetics’ and ‘women’s poetry,’ see Chapter 3 and 4 in Zhang (2004).

<sup>45</sup> During her school years in Chengdu, Ma Yan became a member of the local poetry association, Lucky Troup, and she contributed to the group’s unofficial journal. She returned to Chengdu after she had completed her studies at Peking University. Her poetry was published in the fourth, fifth, and sixth issues of “Wings,” among other venues. Ma, who had already gained much praise for her literary talent, suffered from severe depression. She committed suicide by jumping from a building in Shanghai in December 2010. In 2012, Ma was commemorated by the editors of the journal “Jintian 今天” (“Today”), which published a special section dedicated to Ma Yan, with an essay by Zhou Zan and a poem by Zhai Yongming. This section also included photos from Ladybird’s performances in Chengdu, Shenzhen, and Taipei. See Jintian (2012: 106-93).

我们乘坐过山车飞向未来，  
 他和我的手里各捏着一张票，  
 那是飞向未来的小舢板，  
 起伏的波浪是我无畏的想象力。  
 乘坐我的想象力，他们尽情蹂躏  
 这些无辜的女孩和男孩，  
 这些无辜的小狗和小猫。  
 在波浪之下，在波浪的下面  
 一直匍匐着衰弱的故事人，  
 他曾经是最伟大的创造者，  
 匍匐在最下面的飞得最高。  
 那些与我耳语者，个个聪明无比，  
 他们说智慧来自痛苦，他们说：  
 来，给你智慧之路。

[...]

如果存在一个空间，漂浮着  
 无数列过山车，痛苦的过山车<sup>46</sup>

(2012)

We are riding on a roller coaster flying toward the future,  
 his and my hand each clutching a ticket,  
 that is a small sampan that flies into the future,  
 the rolling wave is my fearless imagination.  
 Riding my imagination, they can suffer to their hearts' content  
 these innocent girls and boys,  
 these innocent puppies and kittens.  
 Under the waves, underneath the waves  
 crawls a vulnerable storyteller,  
 in the past he was the greatest inventor,  
 [those] crawling on the bottom fly the highest,  
 all is pain, everything is pain.  
 Those who whisper in my ear, one smarter than another,  
 They say wisdom comes with pain, they say:  
 Come, here is the way of wisdom for you.

[...]

If this one space exists, drifting  
 countless roller coasters, roller coasters of pain

The movements and emotions described in Ma Yan's poem, such as riding, crawling, suffering, are also linked to the next keyword, 'verbs.' It emphasizes the importance of motion in Cao Kefei's dramatic vision and also helps to construct a relation between poetic texts and bodily expressions. When rehearsing the play, Cao asked the performers to limit themselves exclusively to movements that occur as verbs in the poetic texts they had chosen. The actors were encouraged to pick out movements described in the poems and turn them into physical expressions of feeling, moods and emotions, again with their bodies.

<sup>46</sup> See Ma Yan: "Riding a Roller Coaster Flying toward the Future" ("Chengzuo guoshanche fei xiang weilai" 《乘坐过山车飞向未来》); Ma (2012: 135-36).

Later, Zhou Zan reflected in one of her essays on the importance of movement for turning poetry into a genuinely contemporary experience and, furthermore, for exploring its multiple meanings. Accordingly, the aim of their poetic theater was not to adequately represent a text on stage but to release the energy hidden in poems through individually embodied interpretations. Because there were no professional actors involved in Ladybird's productions, their performances would never be permanently fixed in an accomplished, perfected form; they would also change when someone else took over the role, or even if the same person was in a different mood on another day. According to Zhou Zan, no rupture exists between poetry and 'reality,' because neither of them can be experienced in a strictly 'objective' way. Furthermore, from the point of view of the history of the genre, individual bodily movements establish a new performance practice by which contemporary poetry can reach and interact with the social context; it is also a practice which, in contrast to recitation, is free from the historical and political overtones of the Maoist era.<sup>47</sup> According to articles published on Ladybird's Douban platform,<sup>48</sup> an enacted bodily poetics should know no limitations and should be able to transgress all closed spaces and borders.

The last keyword, 'dolls,' brings back the question of the role of a gendered perspective – profoundly present in all of the female-authored poems that inspired the play – in Ladybird's performance. In general, a doll is a common motif in women's poetry, be it Chinese-language or foreign. Furthermore, in the local context, the genealogy of the discourse of Chinese feminism inevitably evokes one association, namely that of Nora – the woman who fled from Ibsen's "doll's house."<sup>49</sup> The texts dramatized for "Riding a Roller Coaster" either mention dolls and puppetry explicitly – for example, Zhai Yongming's "Dolls" or, from the only foreign material in the play, "Five Poems for Dolls" by Margaret Atwood<sup>50</sup> – or implicitly, for instance by introducing the figure of a prostitute and evoking stereotypical associations of women as passive playthings.

The play engaged with Zhai's poem "Dolls" on multiple levels and the text is essential to deciphering the play, secondary only to Ma Yan's "Riding the Rollercoaster." The first stanza of Zhai's poem reads as follows:

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<sup>47</sup> Zhou (2014: 25).

<sup>48</sup> See: <https://site.douban.com/118044/> [20/08/2020].

<sup>49</sup> On the Nora figure in China see Chang (2004).

<sup>50</sup> Zhou Zan's translation of a collection of Atwood's poems, "Eating Fire," was published in 2015 as "Chi huo" 《吃火》; works by Atwood have appeared regularly in "Wings" as well. In the same year, Zhou Zan dramatized some of Atwood's poems in a play, also called "Eating Fire," that was directed by Chen Si'an and performed that summer in two locations in Beijing.



当我厌倦了黑夜  
 常常从梦里坐起 开口说话  
 小小的玩偶闪着褐光  
 我说话 带着一种不真切的口吻  
 我说着一直想说的胡言乱语<sup>51</sup>

(2011)

Weary of the black night  
 I often emerge from a dream to sit upright open my mouth and speak  
 Little doll gleaming brown  
 I talk but the words aren't making sense  
 I say the crazy things I've always wanted to say<sup>52</sup>

The dreamlike atmosphere of the poem was mirrored in the performance of the play. In Chengdu, the eerie feeling was reinforced by the natural humidity of the Sichuan summer evening in which the contours of the actors' silhouettes naturally dissolved. In addition, one of the few requisites on stage was a pair of big electric fans that blew air on the performers and contributed to their ghost-like appearances. The images on 'stage' alternated quickly, oscillating between dream visions and nightmares. The latter were adapted from the recurrent scenes of violence and suffering occurring in the poems dramatized for the play. The poetic texts were never recited but rather muttered, chanted, sometimes sung, or screamed in a fragmented, disjointed manner. As in Zhai's poem, the words did not necessarily make sense, but the stage appeared as a realm of freedom in which all hidden fears and 'crazy things' that one had always wanted to say could be shared.

When the troupe began rehearsing the play, the director asked all participants to think about – and, eventually, to bring along – the dolls that accompanied them in childhood. The keyword 'doll' introduced by Cao and Zhou was thus intended to evoke the performers' memories, and again, to enable them to transcend the individual poetic voice and put the text into motion on stage as a shared 'bodily memory.' Finally, one of the dolls that several of the performers mentioned, a Barbie, was chosen to appear in the play. The choice was symptomatic of the young age of the troupe members, whose childhood was contemporaneous with the economic and cultural opening toward the West and the ensuing influx of Western goods and popular aesthetics into Chinese cities. The choice of a Barbie also seems natural with regard to the groups' interest in images of female bodies and the meanings attached to them in the global mediascape – a theme that had already been at the core of Ladybird's first project, staged in the previous year. The Barbie doll first appeared in the play as an art installation, hanging above the performance space on a wire attached to a fishing rod. While the doll with its blond hair was clearly visible in the bright stage lights, the person holding the rod hid in darkness somewhere in the audience.

<sup>51</sup> See Zhai Yongming, "Dolls" ("Wan'ou" 《玩偶》); Zhai 2011: 34).

<sup>52</sup> English translation by Andrea Lingenfelter in Zhai (2011: 35).

The Barbie, which became a marionette, evoked a lack of agency or freedom to decide for oneself, as well as ideological constraints and social control executed upon individuals, and the abuse and objectification of the other. In another sequence in the play, the doll returned, this time impersonated by one of the performers, dressed in a miniskirt and a platinum blond wig, who strode past in catwalk style while blowing kisses to the audience. Shortly afterward, other performers approached, encircled “Barbie,” and began hatefully pushing her around while the young woman, totally at their mercy and unable to escape the violent attacks, responded to the humiliation with verses from Cao Shuying’s 曹疏影 (1979-) poem, “Hey Girl, What Happened with Your Ocean?”:

它的海藻起了灰斑  
 它的宝石有些发暗  
 它的碎浪吞吞吐吐  
 它的不贞被你一再盘问  
 它想给自己换一个女妖  
 它把各种调料往巨浪里倒  
 它偷偷羡慕蓝色意外的  
 它骂月亮她妈  
 它说在公共厕所染上性病  
 他夜里跑进厨房吃了好几块肉  
 它把小鲸鱼撵上码头  
 它的海水发烫  
 它的泡沫摔碎了摔碎了<sup>53</sup>

(2010)

its red algae stained grey  
 its jewels tarnished  
 its broken weaves humming and hawing  
 its unfaithfulness interrogated by you time and again  
 it wants to give itself a new enchantress  
 it throws all kinds of spices into rising waves  
 it secretly envies all that is not blue  
 it calls names at the moon  
 it says it has contracted a venereal disease in the latrine  
 it ran into the kitchen at night and swallowed some chunks of meat  
 it drives small whales out straight to the wharfs  
 its seawater is boiling  
 its foam smashed into pieces smashed into pieces

Violence, particularly gendered violence in contemporary societies – be it symbolic, in the form of normative body regimes, or realized in a scene of actual bodily terror – represents an important theme in both of Ladybird’s productions discussed here. In these performances, living and staying alive turn into acts of courage, which is what the last keyword, ‘roller coaster,’ hints at. The perfor-

<sup>53</sup> See Cao Shuying, “Hey Girl, What Happened with Your Ocean?” (“Guniang guniang ni de hai zenme le” 《姑娘姑娘你的海怎么了》). From the booklet “The Woman Attempting to Disrupt the Ritual,” 12.

mance pays homage to Ma Yan, who chose to disembark from the train, but it also wants to ask, as the booklet explains, “Why do people buy tickets, queue, and finally even enjoy the ride on a roller coaster?”

As with their first play, female-authored poetry formed the only textual basis for the performance, but this time Cao and Zhou pushed themselves and others to depart from the poetic texts to a greater extent than in the prior play in order to move further in exploring a visual poetics of embodiment. The inclusion of a short performance by the artist Li Xinmo 李心沫 (1976-) in the play marked the manifestation of this idea in its most extreme form, as written or spoken text was entirely abandoned and replaced by an improvised performance act inspired by Zhai Yongming's poem “Dolls,” as well as by the artist's personal experience.

Li Xinmo, who joined Ladybird for the first time in Chengdu, has continued to collaborate with the troupe. Li, who is a painter and calligrapher by training, shifted to performance art after the turn of the century and is one of the most courageous and outspoken feminist artists in the PRC today.<sup>54</sup> Her own works focus on female body experiences and issues related to body politics, interests which, next to her admiration for poetry, allowed her to connect instantly with Ladybird's philosophy. Li's performance pushed the troupe's exploration of bodily poetics beyond theater's reliance on spoken words. In Chengdu, she chose to perform an act inspired by Zhai Yongming's poem, during which she revisited her experiences of abortion. In silence, she tore strips of cloth from the plain white dress she was wearing and made dolls out of them – five in total, each one representing an aborted fetus. At some point, the lights turned red and Li started to crawl on the ground toward the chairs occupied by the audience, finally to disappear among people's legs.

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<sup>54</sup> For an overview of her works, see Li's personal English-language website: <http://li-xinmo.com> [20.08.2020].



*Li Xinmo's performance. Photographs courtesy of the artist. © Li Xinmo<sup>55</sup>*

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<sup>55</sup> Li repeated her performance in 2013 in Sweden. A short description with photographs is available on her website: <http://li-xinmo.com/works/performance/memory.html> [23/04/2018]. Her original performance in Chengdu is documented in a short film accessible via Ladybird's Douban platform: <https://site.douban.com/118044/widget/videos/3178623/video/107263/> [23/04/2019].

Li's stunning performance explored the idea of embodied poetics like any other scene in the play. It also brought Cao and Zhou's translation of poetry into motion in its most extreme form, as written or spoken text was entirely abandoned and replaced by an improvised performance act. The performance marked a formal extension of Ladybird's endeavor, but it remained closely related to themes that often appear in 'women's poetry,' such as motherhood, pregnancy, and coming-of-age. These themes figure prominently in 'women's poetry,' both as metaphors and as accounts of individual experiences that are embedded in the biographies of the poets.

The play concluded with a collective performance of Ma Yan's poem. All members of the troupe appeared on stage wearing different masks, some of which resembled animals, others more abstract. They stared steadily at the audience as they recited the poem in elevated, excited voices accompanied by contemporary electronic music. The scene was carnivalesque, and the performers oscillated between madness and joy as they brought the audience with them for a ride on the emotional roller coaster. Again, as in other scenes, no obvious mimetic relationship existed between the masks, music, vocal pitch and manner of recitation, and, finally, the text of Ma Yan's poem.

Arts critics and scholars have acknowledged Ladybird Theater's exploration of visual and performative qualities of 'women's poetry.' In 2014, Ladybird was asked for a video recording of their performance of "Riding on a Roller Coaster,"<sup>56</sup> and the group was invited by the Art Museum at the University of Toronto to participate in the exhibition "Through the Body: Lens-Based Works by Contemporary Chinese Women Artists."<sup>57</sup> The museum's website introduced the event as "the largest exhibition of lens-based work by contemporary Chinese women artists to be mounted outside China." Works were selected for their ability to shed light on the new gendered subject positionalities that have emerged in the course of the rapid socioeconomic changes in post-Mao China. The exhibition focused on photography and video art and was guided by the concept of *tishi*, which may be translated as "learning from bodily experience" or "embodied learning."<sup>58</sup>

The Ladybird Theater was invited to the exhibition as performance artists who represent a distinct bodily aesthetics. Thus, it can be said that the ensemble has successfully realized some of their preliminary ideas and reflections concerning the

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<sup>56</sup> A video clip showing fragments of the group's video that was exhibited in Toronto and which also features women's poetry in English translation is available from the platform Tudou: <http://video.tudou.com/v/XMjI3MTQ5NTk4NA==.html> [23/04/2019]. As in the case of the other clips from performances of "Riding the Roller Coaster," the fragments from poems on the screen do not correspond exactly to the sequences performed in the background.

<sup>57</sup> The exhibition took place from April 29 to June 28, 2014. See the exhibition website: <http://artmuseum.utoronto.ca/exhibition/body-lens-based-works-contemporary-chinese-women-artists/> [23/04/2019].

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

possibilities of a poetic theater and an embodied poetics. Curators acknowledged the importance of the visual and performative dimensions in Ladybird's endeavor, alongside the female perspective implied in their plays. As stated above, this female perspective originated from the discourse of 'women's poetry,' with its particular emphasis on gendered embodiment. The various texts of the play – written and recited poems, images, performances, stage design, and music – were not simply translations of each other into the languages of different artistic disciplines; to a much greater degree they participated in a new web of meanings in which they either amplified or undermined each other, commented upon each other or searched for closeness to or distance from each other. Ladybird's performance, for which Zhou Zan proposed the name of 'poetry theater' (*shige juchang*), reached beyond texts and established itself as a sovereign aesthetic experience.

*“Roaming the Fuchun Mountains with Huang Gongwang”*

In 2012, Chen Si'an,<sup>59</sup> the youngest co-editor of “Wings,” read Zhai Yongming's new work in progress, the long poem “Roaming the Fuchun Mountains with Huang Gongwang” (“Sui Huang Gongwang you Fuchun Shan” 《随黄公望游富春山》) for the first time. In the same year, Chen began directing short theater works and poetry readings in independent theaters around Beijing. In 2013, Zhai Yongming finally completed the first draft of her poem, which consisted of twenty-six sections in total, and asked Zhou Zan and Chen Si'an to comment on her work. On that occasion, the idea of bringing Zhai's work to the stage came to Chen for the first time. In 2014, she began rehearsing a play based on the text and presented some fragments of it during the Fringe Festival in Beijing the same year. Zhai's poem was published the following year in its final version of thirty sections.<sup>60</sup> The reason behind the difference in length between the initial and final versions of the text can be found in the poet's incorporation of feedback gathered during the rehearsals of Chen's play. The added sections start with the verse line “They don't read any poetry the director says”:

他们都不读诗 导演说  
 他们都不读诗 但是  
 他们互相拉扯进诗歌内部  
 上天入地  
 胡乱抛出那些正待起飞的诗行<sup>61</sup>  
 (2015)

They don't read any poetry the director says  
 They don't read any poetry but

<sup>59</sup> Besides editing “Wings,” Chen is a novelist, poet, playwright and translator. For more information see her personal website, <http://www.chensi-an.com> [20/08/2020].

<sup>60</sup> Zhai (2015).

<sup>61</sup> See Zhai Yongming: “Roaming the Fuchun Mountains with Huang Gongwang” (“Sui Huang Gongwang you Fuchun Shan” 《随黄公望游富春山》); Zhai 2015: 64).

they drag each other into the space of the poem  
 search heaven and earth  
 and recklessly toss away verse that awaits to fly

Chen worked with young performers who lacked experience with reading modern poetry and who also occasionally complained about the obscure text with which they had to cope.<sup>62</sup> However, the four additional sections of the final version of Zhai's poems go beyond a simple description of these difficulties. They dissolve the boundaries between the two texts, the poem and the performance, since they also reflect upon stage design, the multimediality of the play, and the role of the audience.

But even the first, shorter version of Zhai's poem is an intermedial work from the very outset in a way that brings back a vital Chinese poetic tradition. In the title of the poem, Zhai invokes the aesthetic tradition of 游 *you*, or the experiencing of landscape through imaginary or actual wandering. Her text is a landscape poem that documents the spiritual as well as physical journeys that the poet undertook through the scenery captured in Huang Gongwang's 黄公望 (1269-1354) famous painting of the Fuchun Mountains (completed between 1347 and 1350).<sup>63</sup> Chen adapted the liquid-like motion of *you* (roam, float, walk, saunter and swim) as a leading movement in her play. Throughout the performance, we see the dancers passing from one end of the stage to the other while they try to enter the scroll, which is represented by a plain elastic cloth. Whereas in the poem, the lyrical subject can only suggest her entering the painting through descriptions of the changing environment, on stage, her metamorphosis gains a visual, palpable dimension as dancers struggle with the cloth, and, finally, the performer who represents the poet becomes knotted by the scroll / cloth.

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<sup>62</sup> Personal conversation with Chen Si'an, Beijing 2016. In 2016, I participated in the rehearsals of the play. My discussion is also based on video recordings of the performances from that year.

<sup>63</sup> "Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains" by Huang Gongwang is among the most influential artworks in Chinese history. The handscroll, the classic artistic medium of literati aesthetics, was inspired by the landscape of the Fuchun Mountains, south of the Yangtze River. On the history of the painting, see Cahill (1976: 111-12).



*Stills from the 2016 video recording of the play, courtesy Chen Si'an. © Chen Si'an*

Chen's main consideration when working on the dramatization of the poem was how to transcend the formula of poetry recitation, a well-established performance practice in the PRC, and, in doing so, transgress poetic as well as dramatic limitations in her play.<sup>64</sup> Accordingly, she did not follow the text of the poem closely. While the opening section of the play begins with the recitation of the first parts of Zhai's work, the next section departs from the text and starts to deconstruct the poem with the help of visual media. It begins with the projection of elements from Huang Gongwang's painting on a screen behind the stage. The images move fast, and, soon, brushstrokes turn into Chinese characters, white on black background, which initially add up to verse from Zhai's poem but only shortly thereafter begin to move in an erratic way. Some of them fall to the ground, others disappear, and, finally, the remains of the poetic landscape resemble ruins

<sup>64</sup> Chen / Fu (2017).



– a reminder of past glory. At the same time, in front of the screen, dancers move and recite fragments of the poem, but, following the progressive disintegration of verse, they also gradually fall into silence.

While the first act of the play focuses on the multimedia exploration of the visual dimension of the poetic text that had been inspired by a painting, the second and central act of the play experiments with various techniques of performance. Chen's cross-genre translation of poetry is based on performance practices that originate in Chinese dramatic tradition. These dramatic techniques are generally rooted in so-called 'prosimetric literature' (*shuochang wenxue* 说唱文学), or literally, 'literature that is both spoken and sung.'<sup>65</sup> This tradition goes back to the phenomenon of professional storytelling in premodern China, which, significantly, addressed illiterate or modestly literate audiences, while elites doted on the drama.<sup>66</sup> Thus, the popular art can be understood as representing the common, widespread 'little' tradition or even counterculture, as versus the 'great' tradition of the elites. According to the director's statement, she was particularly interested in the effects created by the clash of the highly sophisticated, elegant text of Zhai's poem with these popular modes of presentation. In the middle of the play, when two performers improvise a *xiangsheng* 相声 based on the poem, the comedic effects of this cross-genre transposition become most clear. *Xiangsheng*, the genre of comic cross-talk, has long provided "bawdy and often politically satirical entertainment in village marketplaces, city streets, teahouses, theaters."<sup>67</sup> The genre originates in the north of China and, not surprisingly, one of the actors adapts a heavy Beijing accent in this scene. This detail creates an additional tension between the play and the original text, which is written by a Southerner<sup>68</sup> and dedicated to the landscape of the Chinese south. The comic effect escalates when one of the actors recites fragments of the poem and his interlocutor pokes fun at him and his "impossible" story. Shortly thereafter, the history of the painting, which is also reiterated in the poem, is presented in the form of a shadow play, another subgenre traditionally favored by the illiterate masses. Here again, the audience occasionally bursts into laughter when the 'figures' (played by actual performers who hide themselves behind the cloth) begin to 'fight' for the scroll. The performed action is the sole source of amusement, however, since the matching poetic verse is not in any way funny. The following, closing scene contrasts with the middle scene in its focus on modern cosmopolitan performance genres, such as contemporary dance, electronic music and popular music. The performance ends with a repetition of the opening section of the poem, which was also recited at the beginning of the play:

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<sup>65</sup> West (1986: 14).

<sup>66</sup> Idema (1986: 84).

<sup>67</sup> Rea (2015: 7).

<sup>68</sup> During the play we also hear the record of Zhai Yongming, the author of the poem, reading her work aloud in her heavy Sichuan accent.

从来没有生过、何来死？  
 一直赤脚、何来袜？  
 在天上迈步、何来地？  
 在地上飞翔、何来道？  
 五十年后我将变成谁？  
 一百年后谁又变成我？  
 撑筋拔骨的躯体置换了  
 守住一口气 变成人生赝品<sup>69</sup>  
 (2015)

You have never lived, how do you die?  
 A bare foot, how do you cover it?  
 You walk in the sky, how do you come to earth?  
 You hover on the ground, how do find your Way [*Dao*]?  
 Who will I become in fifty years?  
 Who will become me again in one hundred years?  
 The body held up by muscles exchanges,  
 holds on breaths            it turns into a forgery of life

The reiteration of this fragment mirrors the circular experience of looking at a handscroll, in which the end does not necessarily represent a conclusion but, on the contrary, could be a new opening. This impression is also grounded by the content of these two stanzas – with their open-ended questions and allusions to the cycle of reincarnation.

In general, a landscape poem dedicated to a handscroll is already a multi-dimensional, intermedial work of art and, as such, is particularly suitable as a source of inspiration for visual performances. It is a textual representation of a visual representation, the Yuan dynasty scroll, which already provided its own visual narrative. And not least, the traditional way of viewing a handscroll<sup>70</sup> creates its own time-space and involves a sequence of actions, since the painting was unfurled portion by portion by a small group of connoisseurs whose eyes moved from one scene to the next. In her poem, Zhai Yongming proposes a modern equivalent of this aesthetic experience when she compares looking at a handscroll with watching a movie,<sup>71</sup> and Chen Si'an recreated this experience for the stage. In some scenes, moving fragments from Huang Gongwang's painting were projected on the screen in the background of the stage; in others, the scroll itself was turned into a projection screen. Accordingly, as in traditional landscape painting in Huang's time, the painting did not simply represent the landscape in a mimetic way but was also understood to be the artist's medium of symbolic self-expression. The poet Zhai Yongming had already added new layers to the paint-

<sup>69</sup> See Zhai Yongming: "Roaming the Fuchun Mountains with Huang Gongwang." Zhai (2015: 4).

<sup>70</sup> Today, handscrolls decorate museum walls, and the modern way of exhibiting them does not differ from a conventional painting.

<sup>71</sup> Zhai (2015: 6).

ing with her writing and Chen further enriched it with her own dramatic vision and stage design. Consequently, the three works of art – the painting, the poem, and the play – are palimpsests created out of different texts, genres, and genders. They share ambiguous and entangled identities: as images, calligraphic works, material objects, subjects, and extensions of the authors' selves and bodies.

*Conclusion: Two Different 'Poetry Theaters' (shige juchang)*

Cao Kefei directed "Riding a Roller Coaster Flying Toward the Future" in a way that is partially reminiscent of Mou Sen's experiments and her own early productions. As mentioned above, from the beginning of her career, Cao has been particularly interested in the visual and physical dimensions of theater performances. This has resulted in a dramatic investigation into the possibilities of bringing poetry to the stage – not in the usual manner of recitation but as a visualization of poetical images through the embodied presence of the performer in front of an audience. The 'text' of her play was a collage of poems that appeared in fragmented or disjointed form, or with verses rearranged, and, thus, the bodily movements of actors and props were equally important for making sense of it.<sup>72</sup> The two leading metaphors of the spectacle – the roller coaster and the doll's crazy talk – were represented by the kaleidoscope of changing images and disarranged poems. In comparison to Chen's play, Cai's theatrical work was far less structured, physical, and associative.

Consequently, on the metatextual level this play was the Ladybird Theater's second attempt to investigate the relationship between poetry and gendered embodiment, and, furthermore, to search for a way in which poetry could indeed take material shape on stage. Chinese 'women's poetry' seemed particularly suited to this exercise due to its pronounced poetics of the body. Bringing poetry to the stage added a new spatial dimension to prior critical discussions: poetry was almost palpable when embodied by performers who were not simply reciting verses but becoming one with the text and, at the same time, releasing the text from its origin as an utterly individual and personal confession through interactions with other members of the group and the audience. This corporeal focus allows the linkage of Cao's theater with other independent ensembles that participate in the current little theater movement in the PRC and that stress the importance of

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<sup>72</sup> Cao emphasizes that she was influenced by traditional Chinese theater and thus prefers to use only a few props – simple, affordable objects that are in daily use and may be easily deciphered by the audience. In this respect her productions differ significantly from those of other avant-garde directors – for example, Meng Jinghui – who often create elaborate multimedia spectacles.

the physical body on stage. Typically, these troupes practice documentary, leftist theater that opposes all forms of commercialization of the human body.<sup>73</sup>

Chen Si'an's dramatized version of Zhai Yongming's recent work differs from Ladybird Theater's performances in many respects. Her play was carefully structured and, in contrast to Cao's, rather text-guided and narrative. Accordingly, Chen was aware of the two pitfalls that she wanted to avoid: simply turning the poem into a modern spoken drama (*huaju* 话剧) or creating a poetry recital (*langsonghui* 朗诵会). These considerations were the departure point for Chen and Zhou Zan's investigation into the possibility of a different kind of poetry theater. Besides dramatic and lyric genre conventions and established practices of recitation, these two authors also have been questioning the ways in which poetry becomes part of the public space when it enters into theater.

Questions related to the manner of recitation and the process of staging are crucial for the inception of a poetry theater that would differ substantially from previously established aesthetic conventions and, consequently, could be considered a new art of performance. Not long ago, under the domination of the Maoist 'logic of the stage,' public recital of poetry became one means of mobilizing the audience with "revolutionary enthusiasm."<sup>74</sup> Thus, contemporary poetry theater will always need to define itself as separate from that popular practice of professional poetry recitation.<sup>75</sup> In addition, since the turn of the century, the PRC has experienced a largely commercially driven "recitation renaissance."<sup>76</sup> No wonder that recent publications on Chinese poetry pay so much attention to "face-to-face poetry events,"<sup>77</sup> by which, however, they mean any kind of recital, meeting, or slam that involves reading poetry aloud on stage in front of an audience but not poetry theater per se.

Zhou Zan is the first author who systematically explores the notion of poetry theater as an independent art form. Since her first publication on the topic, which was inspired by her cooperation with the Ladybird Theatre, Zhou has been struggling with the notion of intermediality (*kuajie* 跨界). The reason for her uneasiness with the concept is, according to Zhou, the fact that Chinese aesthetics were never much concerned with genre boundaries; only with the arrival of modernity have they become cognizant of such divisions. Thus, according to Zhou, the transgression of media boundaries is in itself unremarkable; more important ques-

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<sup>73</sup> The most important examples of this trend are Wen Hui 文慧 and Wu Wenguang's 吴文光 Living Dance Studio (Shenghuo wudao 生活舞蹈) in Beijing and Zhao Chuan's 赵川 Grass Stage Theater (Caotai ban 草台班) in Shanghai. For more, see Huber / Zhao (2013).

<sup>74</sup> Crespi (2009: 142-67).

<sup>75</sup> When Chen Si'an's play was performed in Taiwan, one of the actors intentionally used this style of recitation. Again, the effect was humorous, as if he were telling a political joke.

<sup>76</sup> Crespi (2009: 172).

<sup>77</sup> Inwood (2014: 115).

tions concern the ways in which transgression takes place and for what reasons.<sup>78</sup> Similarly to director Cao Kefei, the poet Zhou pays attention to the physical body of the performer, who gives a materiality and a voice to “silent, sleeping”<sup>79</sup> verse. In her opinion, the poem primarily presents itself as a task for the performer, who has to work herself through every character, every verse, and every stanza in order to find the corresponding bodily expression.

Physicality is, according to Zhou, closely related to the discourse of *xianchang* 现场, which Inwood translates as “live scene”<sup>80</sup> – but a more literal translation of the term could be “on the spot” or “on site.” This expression can refer to what is actually happening on the spot (as in live broadcasting), and, with regard to poetry, it means an orientation toward places where life and poetry actually happen, as well as connoting a kind of raw, edgy authenticity. Zhou argues that, in the poetry theater, the poem first becomes attached to reality through the physical body of a performer, but, already in the next step, the performing collective creates an abstraction out of the poetic text.<sup>81</sup> Cao’s directorial verb-oriented theater practice illustrates this process well: verbs from the poems become movements on stage and finally are translated into a collective stage language of its own. Furthermore, Zhou argues that, on stage, poetry not only materializes in an embodied form and thereby gains a visual dimension but also enters a space that is political and contested.<sup>82</sup>

Among the three theater authors discussed here, Chen is the least interested in the performing body, but she pays the most attention to the performance space. Her aim is not to translate poetry for stage but to create a new work of art that depends equally on literary text and the theater space. What these three authors’ explorations of the concept of poetry theater have in common is their wish to bring poetry and theater out of the confines of their own separate generic languages.

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<sup>78</sup> Zhou / Shi Jia (2016).

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Inwood (2014: 12-19).

<sup>81</sup> Even though the discussion of poetry theatre in this paper is dedicated to performances based on ‘women’s poetry’ and Zhou Zan refers to these examples in her texts as well, her understanding of the concept is not limited to works by women authors or performers.

<sup>82</sup> Zhou / Shi Jia (2016).

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*Transitions between the Lyric and Media*





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### **From Book Poetry to Digital Poetry**

In the article, I will discuss the relationship between ‘book poetry’ and ‘digital poetry.’ I examine the differences, as well as the similarities, between poetry as presented in these two media. Research on the transition from book poetry to digital poetry has mainly focussed on the significant changes in genre and work concepts as well as in the author and reader roles. However, several trends within the tradition of poetry have intensified and have further developed since the emergence of the digital media. The focus in this paper will thus be on four key features, which were founded in book poetry as far back as early Modernism and the avant-garde movements, but, to a great extent, those features have unfolded in digital poetry. The four features are the multimodality, the montage form, the network structure, and the serial form. The artistic opportunities offered by digital poetry are not only due to technological opportunities in the new media. Such opportunities are just as much due to the innovations in multimodality, montages, network structures, and seriality realized by avant-garde and symbolist poets like Mallarmé, Apollinaire, Schwitters, Eliot, and Pound in early modernism. My article concludes with an example of how the four features form the basis for a work of digital poetry, namely Johannes Heldén’s “The Primary Directive” (2008).

*Keywords: digital poetry, multimodality, montage form, network structure, serial form, Apollinaire, Pound, Mallarmé, Eliot, Heldén*

In this article, I will discuss the relationship between book poetry and digital poetry. I will examine the differences, as well as the similarities, between poetry as presented in these two media. Research in the transition from book poetry to digital poetry has mainly been focused on the significant changes in genre and

work concepts as well as in author and reader roles<sup>1</sup>. However, several trends within the tradition of poetry have become intensified and further developed since the emergence of the Internet. The focus in this article will be on four key features which connect book poetry to digital poetry. The four features are the multimodality, the montage form, the network structure, and the serial form.<sup>2</sup> These four features were founded in book poetry as far back as early modernism and the avant-garde movements, but, to a great extent, the features have unfolded in digital poetry.

### *Poetry as a historical and a dialogical genre*

Unlike other genres such as the novel, poetry seems only lightly bound to the book medium. Poetry seems to have an excellent ability to interact with other genres, art forms, and media. Poetry today is ubiquitous, if one considers its countless manifestations such as song lyrics, slogans, performance poetry, and digital poetry. The role of poetry today suggests that it is far from being an isolated aesthetical phenomenon, but that poetry has an important role in the context of other genres and historical developments.

When we talk about poetry and the development of poetry, there are two main positions in poetry research: namely one that emphasises the notion of poetry as an universal and ahistorical genre, and one that emphasises the historical development within the poetic genre and the interaction of the poetic genre with other literary and non-literary genres.

Within the first trend, a prominent example is Jonathan Culler's "Theory of the Lyric" (2015), which presents four characteristics which are fundamental to the lyrical genre as a whole. The first is the effect of a voice ("enunciative apparatus", "aurality", or "impression of the distinctive voice of a speaker"<sup>3</sup>). The second is the "effect of presence" or "the impression of something happening now."<sup>4</sup> The third is the ritual element, elicited by rhythmic and metric forms and repetitive effects ("everything that recalls song"<sup>5</sup>). The fourth effect is the hyperbolic, in relation to which Culler states: "Lyrics seek to remake the universe as a

<sup>1</sup> Morris / Swiss (eds., 2006), Engberg (2007), Hayles (2008), Rustad (2012), Larsen (2015).

<sup>2</sup> Other discussions of modernist and avant-garde poetry have focused on other features than the four features this article have explored. Among other features and concepts one could mention Hugo Friedrich's (1956) „Depersonalisierung“ and „leere Transzendenz“, R. N. Maier's „tragische Abstraktion“ and „reine Abstraktion“ (1964), Helmuth Kiesel's (2004) „Entgrenzung“ and „Ästhetik der Hässlichkeit“, and Kjell Espmark's (1975) orientation towards the universal human being ("orientering mot den universella människan").

<sup>3</sup> Culler (2015: 34-35).

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

world, giving a spiritual dimension to matter.”<sup>6</sup> The four features are, according to Culler, the means by which poetry distances itself from two other dominant modes of literature: the mimetic and the narrative. The features are illustrated by nine canonised poems from the Western poetry tradition by the poets Sappho, Horace, Petrarca, Goethe, Leopardi, Baudelaire, Lorca, Williams, and Ashbery.

Culler’s linking of the nine poems can be problematized, as relations between them are, to a high degree, family resemblance. The differences between Sappho’s ode to Aphrodite, Baudelaire’s satanic-decadent sonnet, Williams’ minimalist-Imagist poem, and Ashbery’s polyphonic free speech poem are significant. A similar attempt to identify “a transhistorically valid theory of the lyric” is found in Klaus W. Hempfer’s “Theory of the Lyric: a Prototypical Approach.”<sup>7</sup>

Contrary to the ahistorical understanding of the lyrical genre is the dialogic and historical approach. In “The Lyrical Impulse” (2017), Charles Altieri points out that modern poetry, in particular, does not attempt to meet traditional genre conventions, but attempts to break with these conventions and find new ways. Altieri states that his interest lies in investigating how poets are “interested in displaying individual genius by disrupting and mixing generic expectations.”<sup>8</sup> A striking formulation of Altieri’s goes: “Modernist self-consciousness is a desire not simply to adapt generic conventions but to display how the poem deploys its generic identity.”<sup>9</sup>

A similar approach is used by Jahan Ramazani, who states that “there are no lyric exclusive characteristics.”<sup>10</sup> Ramazani discusses a number of the so-called ‘prototypical’ poetic features mentioned by Culler and Hempfer et al: namely the address to a ‘you,’ the expression of feelings and thoughts of an ‘I’, brevity, and self-reflexivity. Ramazani states that none of these features are sufficient to clearly determine lyric, as all the features mentioned can also be found in other genres. For Ramazani, the lyrical genre is dialogically determined and may only be defined in the context of other genres:

Lyric is a changing set of conventions or schemas sometimes unconsciously brought to works by writers and audiences – works that summon, resist, remix, defy, and remake those encoded presuppositions, or what we might call, after Hans Robert Jauß [...] horizons of lyric expectation.<sup>11</sup>

In “Poetry and Its Others: News, Prayer, Song, and the Dialogue of Genres” (2013) and other works, Ramazani argues that

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>7</sup> Hempfer (2017: 55).

<sup>8</sup> Altieri (2017: 13).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>10</sup> Ramazani (2017: 100).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 99.

we should trace how often implicitly poetry defines itself in its affiliate and contentious relationship with the genres and discourses it both draws on and resists, such as news, prayer, and song, philosophy, the novel, the law, and tourism.<sup>12</sup>

I agree with Ramazani's arguments in my "Drømme og dialoger. To poetiske traditioner omkring 2000" [Dreams and dialogues. Two poetic traditions around 2000] (2009) and a number of my other works. In the dissertation, I distinguish between two literary historical main trends or forms of poetry, namely "central-poetry" and "interaction-poetry." By "central-poetry", I understand poetic texts with a monologic mode of enunciation and stylistic homogeneity. In central-poetry, the speaking subject acts as an unequivocal centre of the poetic universe. Furthermore, the text possesses a distinct autonomous quality. The antithesis to central-poetry, "interaction-poetry", are poetic texts in which the poetic subject interacts with a number of social contexts. That is, texts in which the monologic enunciation are infringed upon and in which we find a distinct stylistic heterogeneity. Finally, works pertaining to this type of poetry do not possess the same level of autonomy as central-poetry. In "Drømme og dialoger", it is shown that interaction-poetry has been a significant trend throughout the twentieth century. On the contrary, I would like to emphasise that the opposition between central-poetry and interaction-poetry or monologic and multivoiced tendencies should not be seen as a manifestation of a rigid either-or position but as a continuum between extremes.

One reason why it is important to emphasise that an approach to modern poetry – in book format as well as electronic format – must be based on a dialogic and intergeneric poetics is that the features that link book poetry to digital poetry are not the prototypical lyrical features which Culler, Hempfer, and others describe. Poetry is a constantly evolving genre, and new features are included in the genre after contagion from other genres. However, before we look at these four features: multimodality, the montage form, the network structure, and the serial form, we have to state that there are features that separate digital poetry from book poetry.

### *Differences Between Book Poetry and Digital Poetry*

I would like to highlight three features of digital poetry which distinguish it from what we have previously seen in literary history. Firstly, there has been a change in the production, distribution, and consumption conditions of digital poetry in relation to printed poetry since, in the former, the strong linking of the literary work to a publisher has disappeared. In addition, the power balance between the author and the reader in digital poetry is obviously changed compared to what we find in printed texts, since the reader often carries a part of the

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 102.

responsibility with regard to the way in which the work is perceived and that, in some cases, the reader is also included as a co-producer of the text.

Secondly, digital works differ from the printed literature by being far less definite. The paradigm shift that Roland Barthes announces with his statement “From Work to Text” (1968) is truly realised in digital poetry, as most book poetry has the character of delimited works, while the opposite is true in the case of digital literature. Hans Kristian Rustad (2012) describes how the work as a stable object has been replaced by the text as an event. We are dealing with a new interactive aesthetics in which the poem appears as a floating unit. Third, digital poetry is difficult to determine by genre, as it often involves complex mixes of writing, speech, images, graphics, film, and sound effects. This hybrid character, in which many genres, art forms, and media are mixed in the same work, makes it reasonable to point out that every work is a genre in itself in digital literature.

I will return to examples of digital poetic works later in this article. In the following, however, the focus will be on a number of features in book poetry which prejudice the way in which digital media use the poetic genre.

#### *Four Common Features Between Book Poetry and Digital Poetry*

##### *The multimodality*

The question of whether art forms have something in common and should be mixed is as old as art itself. The classic texts used in aesthetic theory as arguments for or against the question of interaction between literature and the visual arts are Horace’s “Ars Poetica” (approx. 18 BC) and G.E. Lessing’s “Laokoon. Oder über die Grenzen der Malerei und Poesie” (1766). While Horace with the formula “ut pictura poesis” sees relationships between the art forms, Lessing criticises the notion that visual and linguistic artworks should resemble one another. Lessing’s basic argument is that visual art is determined by the spatial medium and, therefore, it should produce objects that appear at the same time, whereas literature should produce objects that follow one another in time, i.e. actions. In general, this polarization between the two views on the relationship between visual art and literature has been evident throughout history up to the 21st century. While a major trend in symbolism and parts of early modernism has been to defend the purity of genres and art forms, the agenda for the past half century in postmodernism, post-structuralism, and avant-garde has been to merge genres, art forms, and media.

The interaction between the art forms could be seen as an essential aspect of the development of all art forms in the last two centuries. Peter Dayan states in “Art as Music, Music as Poetry, Poetry as Art, from Whistler to Stravinsky and Beyond” (2011) that a dominant driving force in modern art is simply the inter-artial and intermedial orientation:

The key to their expression is the description as of each art as if it were one of the others: poetry as music, music as painting, painting as poetry, and so on.<sup>13</sup>

In Joseph M. Conte's "Den multimodale ikon: Syn, lyd og forståelse i den nyeste poesi" [The Multimodal Icon: Sight, Sound and Intellection in Recent Poetries] (2013), the development of poetry is outlined based on the thesis that a shift has taken place in the way we decipher poetry. While we before Modernism basically perceived poetry as an art form that only expressed itself in one code, namely the letters on the page of a book, the poem has apparently become a multimodal icon in which text and image interact and in which text and image cannot be separated from each other. This requires, Conte claims, new approaches and competences by the interpreter, if he or she wants to be able to understand modern poetry.<sup>14</sup>

Important examples of multimodal poetry – although we have precedents in e.g. a number of Baroque poems and William Blake's poems – appear around the First World War in the avant-garde movements Futurism, Cubism, and Dadaism. Significant is Apollinaire's « Calligrammes » (1913-16), among which is a text, « Il pleut », where diagonal verse lines on the paper resemble the falling rain, while the text tells about the rain in the city:

Il pleut des voix de femmes comme si elles étaient mortes même dans le souvenir  
c'est vous aussi qu'il pleut, merveilleuses rencontres de ma vie ô gouttelettes  
et ces nuages cabrés se prennent à hennir tout un univers de villes auriculaires  
écoute s'il pleut tandis que le regret et le dédain pleurent une ancienne musique  
écoute tomber les liens qui te retiennent en haut et en bas

It's raining women's voices as if they had died even in memory  
And it's raining you as well marvellous encounters of my life O little drops  
Those rearing clouds begin to neigh a whole universe of auricular cities  
Listen if it rains while regret and disdain weep to an ancient music  
Listen to the bonds fall off which hold you above and below<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Dayan (2011: 1).

<sup>14</sup> Conte (2016).

<sup>15</sup> Apollinaire (1971: 85). Translated by Roger Shattuck.



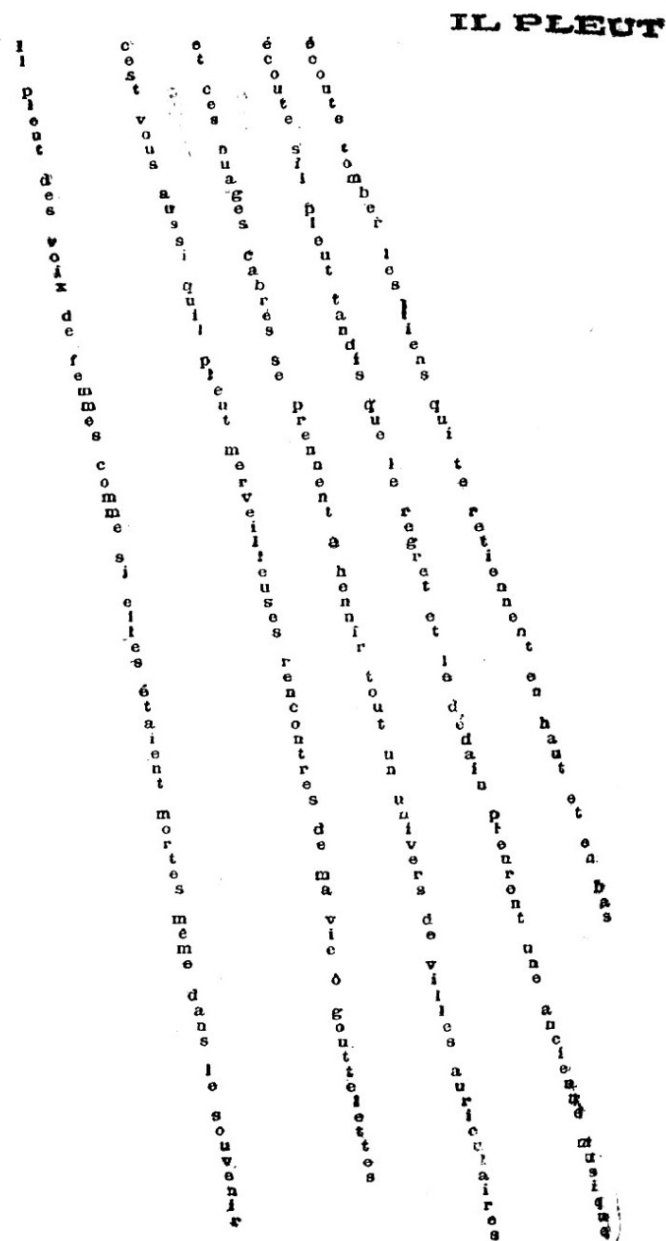


Figure 1: Apollinaire: « Il pleut »<sup>16</sup>

The poem differs from another famous French ‘rain-poem,’ Verlaine’s melancholy-symbolist and self-reflecting « Il pleure dans mon cœur » (1874), as there is no Weltschmerz in Apollinaire’s poem. The poem expresses a shift from the introverted melancholy and decadence (« Il pleut des voix de femmes comme si elles étaient mortes même dans le souvenir ») to an extrovert, ecstatic, and triumphant experience of expansion (« tout un univers de villes auriculaires »),

<sup>16</sup> Apollinaire (1977: 24).

« tomber les liens qui te retiennent en haut et en bas »). It is a synesthetic holistic experience, where the sound of the rain calls for a universal opening of the world – in accordance with Apollinaire’s « calligrammes », opening the poem to new formal horizons with its graphic experiments.

Another example of multimodal poetry relates to the interaction between poetry and music, where a similar breakthrough takes place in modernist poetry during the inter-war period. Famous is the multi-artist and poet Kurt Schwitters’ thirty page long „Ursonate“ or „Sonate in Urlauten“, written between 1922 and 1932. Schwitters seeks a new language of primordial sound and thus a completely new concept of poetry, as we can sense in the opening line of „Ursonate“: „Fumms bö wö tää zää Uu, pögiff, kwii Ee.“<sup>17</sup> The poem’s composition resembles the musical genre symphony or sonata with its division into four parts, „Erster Teil“, „Largo“, „Scherzo“, and „Presto“, and the poem’s instructions about how the words should be pronounced and how a reading should be performed. Schwitters’ „Ursonate“ has been performed countless times in the post-war era – and the work was, not surprisingly, banned as „Entartete Kunst“ by the Nazis.

### *The Montage Form*

One of the most important works that discusses montage as an aesthetic category is Peter Bürger’s „Theorie der Avantgarde“ (1974). Bürger operates with two types of artworks, namely the bourgeois, autonomous, “organic” work of art, and the avant-garde, “non-organic” work of art:

The organic work of art seeks to make unrecognizable the fact that it has been made. The opposite holds true for the avant-gardist work: it proclaims itself an artificial construct, an artifact. To this extent, montage may be considered the fundamental principle of avant-gardiste art.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, while the organic work of art implies a whole by virtue of its unique linguistic nature and its aura of something eternal, it is contrary to the avant-garde work of art, Bürger claims. The avant-garde work shows itself as a construction. The nature of the work as construction and artefact is the reason why Bürger perceives the montage as the most genuine example of avant-garde art.

Montage works are composed of heterogeneous elements with reference to different societal contexts. The elements included in the montage partly have their stylistic characteristics – which refer to their origin – and partly co-operate in a common effect. Montage appears far back in the history of art and literature, but the concept is of particular importance in Sergei Eisenstein’s film aesthetics of around 1920. As a cross-aesthetic phenomenon, the film offers a distinctive medium for the many different aesthetic techniques that are present in the montage. Later, the concept of montage has become widespread in literature, music,

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<sup>17</sup> Schwitters (1986: 74).

<sup>18</sup> Bürger (1984: 72).

and visual art. In the context of visual art, the montage, as it manifests itself in Cubism, is a construction of photographs, drawings, letters, and other visual material in a composition while, in the literary montage, different styles and different genre concepts are confronted and cooperating within the work.

Literary montages often appear in the inter-war avant-garde poetry related to movements such as Futurism, Dadaism, Surrealism, and Imagism. The two main Imagist works, T. S. Eliot's "The Waste Land" (1922) and Ezra Pound's "Cantos" (1915-62), are among the most influential. In these large montage texts, we experience compositions in which quotes and situations with widely different subjects and times and places interact. The second part of "The Waste Land", "A Game of Chess" is a montage whose frame is a piece of dramatic impressionism in which we overhear a conversation in an English pub interrupted by the closing announcement: "HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME." In addition, this conversation is interrupted by the speech of the mad Ophelia from Shakespeare's "Hamlet", "Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night, good night":

When Lil's husband got demobbed, I said—  
 I didn't mince my words, I said to her myself,  
 HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME  
 Now Albert's coming back, make yourself a bit smart.  
 He'll want to know what you done with that money he gave you  
 To get yourself some teeth. He did, I was there.  
 You have them all out, Lil, and get a nice set,  
 He said, I swear, I can't bear to look at you.  
 And no more can't I, I said, and think of poor Albert,  
 He's been in the army four years, he wants a good time,  
 And if you don't give it him, there's others will, I said.  
 Oh is there, she said. Something o' that, I said.  
 Then I'll know who to thank, she said, and give me a straight look.  
 HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME  
 If you don't like it you can get on with it, I said.  
 Others can pick and choose if you can't.  
 But if Albert makes off, it won't be for lack of telling.  
 You ought to be ashamed, I said, to look so antique  
 (And her only thirty-one.)  
 I can't help it, she said, pulling a long face,  
 It's them pills I took, to bring it off, she said.  
 (She's had five already, and nearly died of young George.)  
 The chemist said it would be all right, but I've never been the same.  
 You are a proper fool, I said.  
 Well, if Albert won't leave you alone, there it is, I said,  
 What you get married for if you don't want children?  
 HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME  
 Well, that Sunday Albert was home, they had a hot gammon,  
 And they asked me in to dinner, to get the beauty of it hot—  
 HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME  
 HURRY UP PLEASE ITS TIME

Goonight Bill. Goonight Lou. Goonight May. Goonight.  
 Ta ta. Goonight. Goonight.  
 Good night, ladies, good night, sweet ladies, good night, good night.<sup>19</sup>

In the poem, we hear the petty, injurious, and vicious unmarried sister talking about her sister who has been physically destroyed by abortion pills and has rotten teeth at an early age. The jealous sister explains that she certainly understands and would find it fair if her sister's husband does not want a woman who looks like the broken sister ("if Albert makes off, it won't be for lack of telling. / You ought to be ashamed, I said, to look so antique").

The montage is evident in the way in which quotes from the absent sister and brother-in-law are selected and composed from numerous situations, as the voice of the unmarried sister changes with the voices of the pub guests and the bartender. In addition, the bar monologue clashes with Ophelia's speech as a confrontation between high-literary style ("Good night, ladies") and low-social language ("It's them pills I took, to bring it off"). At the same time, the similarity between the two quotes is evident since, in both cases, we hear about situations of extreme poverty, torment, and degradation. In this way, Eliot's simultaneous technique of montage fulfils its purpose, namely to show the total loss of all illusions of intimacy, meaning, and cohesion in modern civilisation's "waste land".

With Eliot's "The Waste Land", the stylistically homogeneous poem is contested. The montage is the basic feature of Eliot's text, and the notion of a monological mode is replaced by multivoicedness and Bakhtinian "heteroglossia." In "The Waste Land", an everyday-language style appears in parallel with classical, romantic, symbolist, or biblical style, with references to works from world literature.

### *The Network Structure*

Network poetics is described one of the first times in Umberto Eco's "Poetics of the Open Work" (1962). In the twentieth century, an increasing number of "open works" have been created, and the culmination of this trend has come in the new millennium with the Internet. The hyperlink structure of the Internet corresponds to the idea of "the open work." With "open works", Eco understands that a work has a structure that gives the reader a large number of possible ways in which he or she can read the work. Contrary to this, the 'closed works' are tightly composed and contain a pre-given "plan" for how the work should be conceived. Eco outlines in his essay by examples from literature, music, and visual art "the open work" as "a field of opportunity," a "structural polyphony," and "a network of communication effects." The open work, in Eco's ecstatic avant-garde rhetoric,

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<sup>19</sup> Eliot (2001: 12).

“constitutes a continually changing world that is constantly renewed to the eyes of the reader by showing still new aspects in the many ramifications”<sup>20</sup>.

Eco’s idea that a network structure in a work of art constitutes an emancipatory potential, however, has also been met with scepticism in later aesthetic and media theory. In “Cybertext” (1997), Espen Aarseth pointed out that network-structured texts, referred to as hypertexts in digital media, usually only offer a limited number of possibilities for the reader, as the work presents a series of reading routes which are strictly controlled by the author<sup>21</sup>. Nevertheless, the network structure is a tendency which has gained great importance within poetry since early modernism. A crucial network-structured poem is Mallarmé’s late work « Un coup de dés jamais n’abolira le hasard » (1897). A part of the twenty-page long poem’s second goes:

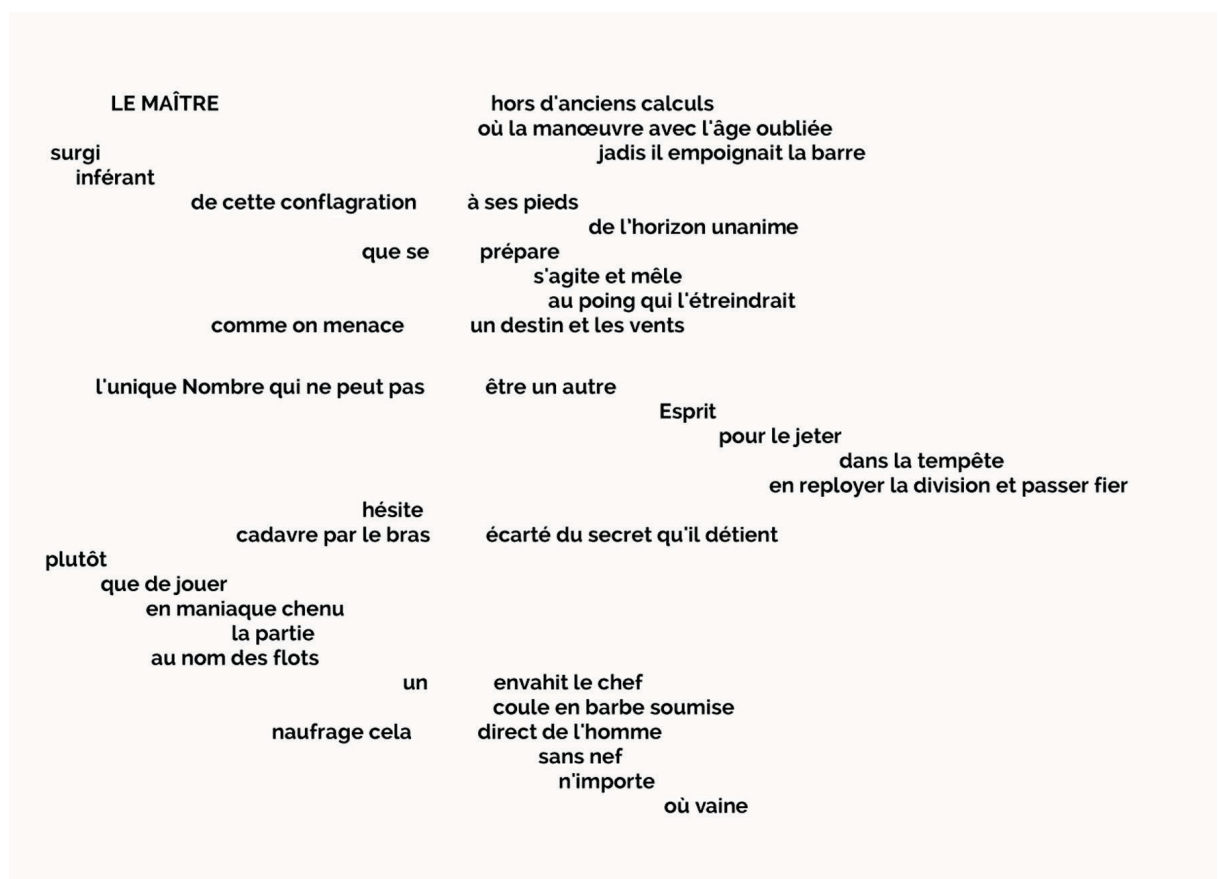


Figure 2: Mallarmé: « Un coup de dés jamais n’abolira le hasard »<sup>22</sup>

LE MAÎTRE hors d’anciens calculs où la manœuvre avec l’âge oubliée surgi jadis il empoignait la barre inférant de cette conflagration à ses pieds de l’horizon unanime,

<sup>20</sup> Eco (1989: 101, 102, 103, 113).

<sup>21</sup> Aarseth (1997: 63).

<sup>22</sup> Mallarmé (1965: 218-219)

que se prépare s'agite et mêle au poing qui l'étreindrait, comme on menace un destin et les vents l'unique Nombre qui ne peut pas être un autre Esprit, pour le jeter dans la tempête en reployer la division et passer fier; hésite cadavre par le bras écarté du secret qu'il détient plutôt que de jouer, en maniaque chenu la partie au nom des flots un envahit le chef, coule en barbe soumise naufrage cela direct de l'homme sans nef, n'importe où vaine

THE MASTER, beyond former calculations, where the lost manoeuvre with the age rose implying that formerly he grasped the helm of this conflagration of the concerted horizon at his feet, that readies itself; moves; and merges with the blow that grips it, as one threatens fate and the winds, the unique Number, which cannot be another Spirit, to hurl it into the storm, relinquish the cleaving there, and pass proudly; hesitates, a corpse pushed back by the arm from the secret, rather than taking sides, a hoary madman, on behalf of the waves: one overwhelms the head, flows through the submissive beard, straight shipwreck that, of the man without a vessel, empty no matter where<sup>23</sup>

Like Apollinaire's, Schwitters', and Eliot's poems, Mallarmé's poem has no 'prototypical' address to a 'you,' and no expression of the feelings and thoughts of an 'I,' but only « LE MAÎTRE », around whom there seems to be a maritime universe with a shipwreck. In Mallarmé's poem, we can see literary allusions to Coleridge's "The Ancient Mariner" (1797-1799), especially regarding the casting of dice on the deck of the ship, to Melville's "Moby Dick" (1851) with regard to the mad, fanatic, and lonely captain Ahab, and to the legends of the Flying Dutchman. As in symbolism, however, all mythological and literary matter is used in an entirely personal and visionary way in Mallarmé's poem. In the maritime universe, we can identify a probing ship with waves and a captain (« Maître ») in the centre (« de l'horizon unanime », « les vents », « la tempête », « des flots », « naufrage », « nef »).

However, it is obvious that Mallarmé's text opposes a reading of a narrative discourse, as the syntax of the poem is a long hypotactic structure in which it is deliberately intended to make the connections between the prepositions, pronouns, and conjugations unclear. What we sense are the positive and negative values of the text. The poem expresses the personal experienced Mallarmé version of the < poètes maudits > theme. On the one hand, the poem describes the lost and cursed skipper and his ship as outcast (« inférant »), lost (« n'importe où vaine »), and deviant (« jouer en maniaque chenu ») in relation to the mob and its attitude to life (« de l'horizon unanime »). On the other hand, as in Mallarmé's « Sonnet en X » (1887) and other poems, we meet a proud and heroic suffering poet (« a reployer la division a passer fier »), « Le Maître », who creates his poetic visions and his unique poetic style despite suffering, loss, and meaninglessness in the prosaic world.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. Translated by Anthony Hartley.

The question, however, is why Mallarmé has set up « Un coup de dés » in a way that deviates so significantly from tradition. In the foreword to his work, Mallarmé states:

This print-less distance which mentally separates groups of words or words themselves, is to periodically accelerate or slow the movement, the scansion, the sequence even, given one's simultaneous sight of the page [...] Imagination flows and vanishes, swiftly, following the flow of the writing, round the fragmentary stations of a capitalised phrase introduced by and extended from the title. Everything takes place, in sections, by supposition; narrative is avoided.<sup>24</sup>

In other words, Mallarmé introduces nothing less than a new way of reading poems, in which the successively progressive and narrative reading strategy is rejected. Rather than a referential structure with time, space, and characters, the specific word groups and expressions must be sensed. The large graphical spaces between the word groups thus function as a means for sabotaging a narrative reading. Instead, the text consists of explosive fields of significance between which links can be created after the reader's own choice. As an example of this, we can read the above text partly as one horizontal track, and partly as two vertical tracks on the page.

However, the dynamics and interaction between the two tracks is also clear. While the left track articulates the disillusioned and decadent side of the « poètes maudits » state with expressions such as « conflagration », « menace », « cadavre », and « naufrage », the right expresses a visionary and self-conscious attitude with words such as « destin », « Esprit », « secret » and « fit fier ».

In this way, Mallarmé's poem has a network structure which gives the reader the choice between different reading routes. If the reader chooses a vertical and a horizontal reading respectively, he or she gets different reading experiences. While the horizontal represents an unresolved stage in a crisis where things are entangled and all outward force is paralysed, the vertical reading represents a move from apathetic sadness to outward expansion. And when the poem is sealed with the Mallarmésian signature « Le Maître », it also points prophetically to the fact that « Un coup de dés » is the beginning of the revolution of poetry, where the monologic “central-poetry” is replaced by a “structural polyphonic” “interaction-poetry”.

### *The Serial Form*

The idea of a network structure leads to the equality of many opportunities. We are dealing with a phenomenon called “lists” or the serial. The essence of the serial principle is that there is no overall ideological principle or conceptual framework for the various parts of the work, but that the parts should appear in an arbitrary order.

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<sup>24</sup> Mallarmé (2004-2009: 77).

A discussion of the phenomenon of the serial form is unfolded in Joseph M. Conte's "Unending Design. The Forms of Postmodern Poetry" (1991), which claims that the poetry of recent years breaks with romantic and modernist poetics where a thematically motivated organic composition occurs:

The discontinuous elements of the series [...] are rather more atomistic or molecular than plantlike in their behavior. It would be impossible to dispense with continuity among the parts of an organic structure [...] The sections of a series are not hierarchical. There is no initiation, climax, or terminus precisely because there can be no development. In the sequence, the reader must, so to speak, enter through the front door and exit through the rear; but in a series, such as Robert Duncan's "Passages", the reader is encouraged to select any of these "passages" as an entrance.<sup>25</sup>

In addition, in "The Infinity of Lists" (2009), Umberto Eco discusses the serial as a dominant compositional principle in modern literature. Eco distinguishes between what he calls conjunctive lists, where the elements in the list have a common character, and disjunctive lists, where a dissonance between the elements in the list occurs. Eco's reasoning has a more pessimistic tone than Conte's, as the list is perceived as a mode of representation that expresses man's inability to understand great orders. On the contrary, Jan Kjørstad in "Oppramsningens mystikk" [The Mystery of Enumeration] (1989) is unequivocally positive in terms of lists. Kjørstad thinks that "the list reveals a hidden connection between the elements in the list. [...] As fireworks, the list can explode in many directions."<sup>26</sup>

The trend with serial structure begins as do the three previous tendencies – the multimodal, the montage strategy, and the network structure – in the avant-garde around the First World War. Throughout the twentieth century, the trend advances with a culmination around the turn of the millennium with the breakthrough of digital poetry. A crucial poet in the invention of the modern serial form is Ezra Pound.

Pound's "Cantos" are montage-like works which are often serially structured. Pound denotes his "Cantos" as "rucksack" texts, as the texts are collections of a large, complex, and heterogeneous material that are linked together by the repetition of certain formulations. The 116 "Cantos" were written between 1915 and 1962 and constitute an arbitrary and infinite number of works with a variety of genres and styles and a myriad of motives.

In "Canto XLV" (1936), the Latin key term, "usura", is repeated twenty-five times in 50 lines. In English the word "usury" refers to the practice of lending out money with very high interest rates. The raw guttural sound of the word "usura" corresponds to the meaning of the expression, as in each line we encounter new explanations of the destructive and evil concept:

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<sup>25</sup> Conte (1991: 22-23).

<sup>26</sup> Kjørstad (1989: 44).



*With Usura*

With usura hath no man a house of good stone  
each block cut smooth and well fitting  
that design might cover their face,  
with usura  
hath no man a painted paradise on his church wall  
harpes et luz  
or where virgin receiveth message  
and halo projects from incision,  
with usura  
seeth no man Gonzaga his heirs and his concubines  
no picture is made to endure nor to live with  
but it is made to sell and sell quickly  
with usura, sin against nature,  
is thy bread ever more of stale rags  
is thy bread dry as paper,  
with no mountain wheat, no strong flour  
with usura the line grows thick  
with usura is no clear demarcation  
and no man can find site for his dwelling.  
Stonecutter is kept from his tone  
weaver is kept from his loom  
WITH USURA  
wool comes not to market  
sheep bringeth no gain with usura  
Usura is a murrain, usura  
blunteth the needle in the maid's hand  
and stoppeth the spinner's cunning. Pietro Lombardo  
came not by usura  
Duccio came not by usura  
nor Pier della Francesca; Zuan Bellin' not by usura  
nor was 'La Calunnia' painted.  
Came not by usura Angelico; came not Ambrogio Praedis,  
Came no church of cut stone signed: Adamo me fecit.  
Not by usura St. Trophime  
Not by usura Saint Hilaire,  
Usura rusteth the chisel  
It rusteth the craft and the craftsman  
It gnaweth the thread in the loom  
None learneth to weave gold in her pattern;  
Azure hath a canker by usura; cramoisi is unbroidered  
Emerald findeth no Memling  
Usura slayeth the child in the womb  
It stayeth the young man's courting  
It hath brought palsey to bed, lyeth  
between the young bride and her bridegroom  
CONTRA NATURAM  
They have brought whores for Eleusis

Corpses are set to banquet  
at behest of usura.<sup>27</sup>

The poem shows Pound's programmatic statements from the Imagist movement with the program article "A Retrospect" (1918) in the journal "Poetry." Pound's article proclaims that the poet must adhere to three conditions, namely:

1. Direct treatment of the "thing", whether subjective or objective; 2. To use absolutely no word that does not contribute to the presentation; 3. As regards rhythm: to compose in sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of the metronome.<sup>28</sup>

With regard to the first two conditions, the poem is extremely concentrated as Pound releases all of his cultural-historical knowledge without giving any explanations. The reader is expected to know Andrea Mantegna's "Gonzaga, His Heirs and His Concubines", as well as a number of other painters and sculptors from the Italian Renaissance: Pietro Lombardo, Agostino di Duccio, Piero della Francesca, Fra Angelico, Giovanni Bellini, and Sandro Botticelli, plus the Flemish artist Hans Memling. Also mentioned are the churches of San Zeno, St. Trophime, and Saint Hilaire. In all cases, Pound claims, these works were not created for profit or "usura", and therefore they possess real value and artistic quality. Pound longs for a time of ideals before modern materialism and capitalism.

With regard to the rhythmic, the poem incarnates Pound's intention to "compose in sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of the metronome." Pound's uses an accented rhythm with three stresses in each verse line, as is known from the old English poems like "Beowulf." In this way, the verse lines are constantly given a varying organic rhythm. In addition, as a rhythmic technique, the repeated expression "usura" is used – not as an ordinary anaphor – but as an irregularly recurring mantra which constantly breaks the rhythm by appearing in the middle of a sentence:

sheep bringeth no gain with usura  
Usura is a murrain, usura  
blunteth the needle in the maid's hand  
[...]  
Not by usura Saint Hilaire  
Usura rusteth the chisel  
[...]  
Azure has a canker by usura  
[...]  
Usura slayeth the child in the womb  
[...]  
Corpses are set to banquet  
at behest of usura

<sup>27</sup> Pound (1999: 88).

<sup>28</sup> Pound (1968: 7).

The recurring “usura” destroys the organic rhythm of the poem, just as the poem tells about the destruction of culture because of the concept of “usura.”

From the beginning of the poem, “With usura hath no man a house of good stone / each block cut smooth and well fitting / that design might cover their face,” we get a description of what this negative concept means: namely the poor craftsmanship of a building which is not made with passion. Pound describes a culture that has lost its sense of craftsmanship, whether it is stonework, bakery, or weaving.

However, it is not just the craftsmanship that has fallen into disrepair, but also the artistic quality that has been destroyed: “with usura / hath no man a painted paradise on his church wall” etc. The explanation of the misery, according to the poem, is that modern capitalism with its unscrupulous hunger for profit: “no picture is made to endure nor to live with / but it is made to sell and sell quickly.” This materialism and utilitarianism also has consequences for human relations, destroying fertility and love between man and woman: “It stayeth the young man’s courting / It hath brought palsey to bed, lyeth / between the young bride and her bridegroom.” The poem concludes by making a parallel between the modern perverted culture and the ancient fertility cults described as a staging of prostitutes and corpses at a banquet.

Pound’s serial poem presents an all-embracing criticism of capitalism and modern civilisation. As for other modernists of the early twentieth century – e.g. Eliot, Benn, and Hamsun – Pound’s critique has a strongly regressive tendency, so that modern industrialisation and capitalism are seen as purely destructive forces. Unfortunately, the inter-war political parties had little sense of understanding of the loss of identity and meaning that industrialisation had brought, so that only fascism and Nazism were ready to embrace those feelings.

### *Digital Poetry in a Historical Perspective*

Even though the four features – the multimodality, the montage form, the network structure, and the serial form – are the basics of digital poetry, they are all anticipated by poets of early modernism and avant-garde such as Apollinaire, Schwitters, Eliot, Mallarmé, and Pound. My initial thesis was that, although there were a number of specific features of digital poetry, namely the interaction with the reader, the difficulty in determining the genre, and the difficulty in determining the boundaries of the work, the four above mentioned features – carried over from book poetry – are at least equally significant.

Digital poetic works have been created since the early 1990s all over the world. Among such digital works are Ottar Ormstad’s “Poetry floating in the air” [Svevedikt] (2006), Monica Aasprong’s “Soldiers’ Market” [Soldatmarkedet] (2007), Cia Rinne’s “Archives Zaroum” (2008), and Johannes Heldén’s

“The Prime Directive” [Primärdirektivet] (2006) – all of them published at the Danish author Christian Yde Frostholm’s net site “Afsnit P.”

Let us take a closer look at a work from digital poetry regarding the above thesis, namely the Swedish poet and multi-artist Johannes Heldén’s “The Prime Directive.”<sup>29</sup> “The Prime Directive” consists of two parts which can be activated by clicking on two icons which represent two books. In the “book” that has the same title of the work, “The Prime Directive”, – the second “book” is called “The Path of the Fragment” [Fragmentets flyktväg] – we find a graphic, depicting a monstrous science fiction-like machine space universe, reminiscent of “Star Trek” (1966-), “2001” (1968), “Alien (1978-)” and “Blade Runner” (1982).

The title “The Primary Directive” refers to Star Trek, where the “primary directive” is presented as a law of a symbiotic balance between man and technology. The “primary directive” is, in practice, a law for spaceships moving between different civilizations in the future space, not subjecting other civilizations to the technology the spaceships bring. Heldén’s science-fiction-like universe depicts a world in which the balance between man and technology is threatening and anxiety-provoking. The graphics, sound and text allude to an apocalyptic perspective at the world. The proportions of the graphics cannot be compared to anything humanly known, as it can represent both a small technical device and a monstrous spaceship. The colours and shapes are similarly in a limbo between a biological green colour and a black machine colour, and between round organic shapes and geometric technical shapes.

The work is interactive. When the reader clicks on specific areas of the image, audio files and movies are played with poetic texts which slide down the screen. In addition, we can observe how the work is a complex hybrid of genres, and it is far more difficult to conceive of “The Prime Directive” as a work like ordinary literary works.

“The Prime Directive” is a serial and network-structured work in which the reader can choose his or her ‘reading route.’ One can argue that the work is created when the viewer activates the work by touching the screen. The work is a montage, with text fragments that the reader must combine himself. There is no logic or instruction regarding the order in which you read the texts that are activated on the screen.

Finally, the work is multimodal, as sound, graphics, text, music, and movies act as a unit. The experience when activating the various text fields is complex, as dark and fragmented Brian Eno-like ambient music is heard, while dissonant text fragments slide down the screen. The texts describe feelings of anxiety, claustrophobia, and alienation but at the same time the sound is soothing in its slow melancholic monotony.

Three fragments go:

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<sup>29</sup> Heldén (2006).

you have a great idea, you  
stumble  
will it fall into place  
afterwards because  
a set of rules mostly  
unknown  
get your time, your life back

And:

rattles, shudders when they  
cross the bridge.  
mattress in the morninglight  
the wooden floorboards the  
dust  
dense low between houses.  
October and the rain  
after my arrival.  
I understand, I am slow to  
understand

And:

Forestwall swirls  
comes  
compact towards us of  
leaves and branches  
torn apart

The dissonant state of mind expressed by the work is the result of the interaction between alienating poetic fragments, the dystopic-futuristic sound, and the apocalyptic-technological graphics. Heldén's work points to the enormous possibilities that lie in the future of poetry as it moves beyond the area of the classic central-poetry of the book.

However, it is obvious that the artistic opportunities offered by digital poetry are not only due to technological opportunities in new media. The opportunities are just as much due to the innovations in multimodality, montages, network structures, and seriality, as poets such as Mallarmé, Apollinaire, Schwitters, Eliot, and Pound did in early modernism and avant-garde. In this way, poetry of the new millennium is given much more interesting perspectives than referring to 'prototypical' notions of something called 'lyric.'

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## Internationale Zeitschrift für Kulturkomparatistik

Band 2 (2021): *Contemporary Lyric Poetry in Transitions between Genres and Media*

Herausgegeben von Ralph Müller und Henrieke Stahl

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### Making it News in Contemporary Poetry

This essay identifies a shared response to news media in poetry written over the past three decades by writers working in Chinese, Russian, and English. These poets often directly incorporate texts and images from news media into their work. Some scholars have argued that this tendency towards the collaging of texts derived from news and social media reflects a shift in poetic subjectivity. However, when seen from a comparative perspective, these and other cut-ups of news and social media are better understood as, on the one hand, an extension of a much longer tradition of literary and artistic responses to the news and, on the other, a renewal of that tradition in response to the intensification of the intertwined pressures of new media and globalization since the end of the Cold War and the rise of the Internet. The article identifies this shared response to media and globalization among a variety of examples in Chinese, Russian, and English, including Kirill Medvedev's «Текст, посвященный трагическим событиям 11 сентября в Нью-Йорке» (“Text Devoted to the Tragic Events of September 11 in New York”); Stanislav Lvovsky's «Чужими словами» (“In Other Words”); Dmitri Prigov's «По материалам прессы» (“Based on Material from the Press”) and “ru.sofob (50 x 50)”; Lin Yaode's 林耀德 “Er erba” 《二二八》 (“February 28”), Hsia Yü 夏宇 and her collaborators' group project “Huadiao huadiao huadiao” 《劃掉劃掉劃掉》 (“Cross It Out, Cross It Out, Cross It Out”), Yan Jun's 顏峻 2003 multi-media video performance “Fan dui yiqie you zuzhi de qipian” 《反对一切有组织的欺骗》 (“Against All Organized Deception”); online video poetry produced in response to the 2008 Sichuan earthquake; and Brian Kim Stefans's mashup of “New York Times” articles with texts from the Situationist International. On the one hand, these texts operate between various media and art forms: between poetry and contemporary art, music, journalism, and social media, between the print newspaper and digital file, between the webpage and live performance, and between image and text. But on the other hand, and inextricably, they also operate within global information networks. They are better understood as addressing not the transformation of the poetic subject but

the undoing of the boundaries of poetry and of the concept of a nationally defined literature.

*Keywords: poetry, news, media, globalization, China, Russia, Taiwan, United States*

Poets have for centuries responded to the news. Early examples of poetic uses of the news range from broadside ballads that conveyed the news of the day in verse to the late eighteenth-century poems created by reading across the columns to highlight, in the words of Caleb Whitefoord, the inventor of this satirical “cross-reading” genre, the “hodge-podge, or mess-medley” that “is a London news-paper!”<sup>1</sup> Over the past century in particular, writers have frequently defined their work in relation to the news.<sup>2</sup> In their responses, poets have also engaged the new media through which news media have developed from the telegraph and rotary press that spawned the information revolution and mass-circulation newspapers of the late nineteenth century to the newsfeeds of social media enabled by today’s digital networks.<sup>3</sup>

Already in the eighteenth century, writers like Whitefoord deployed not just the contents of the news but also its form, namely, the cut-up, collage, montage, or juxtaposition of various discrete news items and advertisements. Although pioneered in the eighteenth century by Whitefoord, Georg Christoph Lichtenberg, and others,<sup>4</sup> such literary uses of the news became increasingly common in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in the work of writers such as Stéphane Mallarmé, Bian Zhilin 卞之琳, James Joyce, Tristan Tzara, Kurt Schwitters, Walter Benjamin, William Carlos Williams, and John Dos Passos. These and other writers produced texts that mimicked the juxtaposed articles of a newspaper, as in the “Aeolus” episode of Joyce’s “Ulysses”; that drew directly on those newspaper sources, as in Bian Zhilin’s “Juli de zuzhi” 《距離的組織》 (“The Composition of Distance”), which weaves together two news articles amongst other sources in a mere ten lines; or that simply treated the newspaper itself as a literary text, as in

<sup>1</sup> Whitefoord (1770).

<sup>2</sup> “Under modernity the news is one of the major discursive others with and against which it [poetry] defines itself” (Ramazani 2014: 81). Similarly, Collier (2006: 1) argues that the newspaper is “the most controversial medium of the age of modernism.” On Russian literary and artistic responses to the newspaper at the beginning and end of the Soviet periods, see Edmond (2016).

<sup>3</sup> On the impact of the nineteenth-century information revolution and its parallels with the digital revolution, see Bayly (2001).

<sup>4</sup> Lichtenberg borrowed the technique from Whitefoord in „Nachahmung der englischen Cross-readings,“ which he wrote in the 1770s but which was only published posthumously. Lichtenberg (1853: 63-65). For a discussion of the links between cross-reading and twentieth-century collage, see Riha (1971).

Tzara's 1920 Dadaist debut in Paris, in which he stood on stage and read a newspaper aloud to the outrage of the audience.<sup>5</sup> A few years later Sergei Tretyakov would repurpose Tzara's avant-garde gesture to promote what he termed "the literature of fact," hailing the newspaper as the "epic" and "Tolstoy" of the twentieth century.<sup>6</sup>

This essay identifies a renewed interest in responding to news and new media among contemporary poets working in Chinese, Russian, and English. While the long history of literary and artistic uses of the news should cause us to be wary of overemphasizing the novelty of these poets' work, their use of the news nevertheless points to the ongoing importance of news media to literature and art.<sup>7</sup> In encountering the news today across multiple media and platforms, contemporary writers must negotiate a far more bewildering "hodge-podge, or mess-medley" of competing voices, words, and images than that of the eighteenth-century or even twentieth-century newspaper. Today's global information networks make available copious snippets of information from around the world nearly instantaneously. The collage-like structure of these news snippets produces our experience of the world as both instantly accessible and overwhelmingly complex. In response, poets working in China, Russia, Taiwan, and elsewhere around the world have in recent years developed modes of writing that draw on the news to highlight and negotiate the fragmentary, multi-media, and global nature of our contemporary news-inflected experience of the world.

In the first decade of the new millennium, Russian poetry began increasingly to respond to news and social media whether as a prompt to reflection, as in Maria Stepanova's «Свадьба принца Чарльза и Камиллы Паркер-Боулз в прямой трансляции немецкого канала RTL» ("The Wedding of Prince Charles and Camilla Parker Bowles Live Broadcast on the German Station RTL"), through direct repetition of media reports, as in Stanislav Lvovsky's «Чужими словами» ("In Other Words"), or through a combination of the two, as in Dmitri Prigov's «По материалам прессы» ("Based on Material from the Press") and "ru.sofob (50 x 50)."<sup>8</sup>

This tendency in Russian poetry was already recognized in 2008, when Dmitri Kuzmin claimed that Lvovsky's just published work "In Other Words" bookended a crucial era in Russian poetry that had begun with Kirill Medvedev's «Текст, посвященный трагическим событиям 11 сентября в Нью-Йорке» ("Text Devoted to the Tragic Events of September 11 in New York"), published in his 2002 collection «Вторжение» ("Invasion").<sup>9</sup> These works exemplify what Ilya Kukul'in has called "documentalist" poetry, or what, extending Kukul'in's

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<sup>5</sup> On Bian Zhilin's newspaper sources for "The Composition of Distance," see Klein (2018: 31-32). On Tzara's Paris performance, see Banash (2013: 81-82).

<sup>6</sup> Tret'jakov (1927: 35).

<sup>7</sup> For examples of the vast range of artistic uses of the newspaper over the past century, see Brodie (2012).

<sup>8</sup> Stepanova (2006), Lvovskij (2008), Prigov (2006), *ibid.* (2007).

<sup>9</sup> Kuz'min (2008). Medvedev (2002).

analysis, Kirill Korchagin terms «МОНТАЖНАЯ „ДОКУМЕНТАЛЬНАЯ“ ПОЭЗИЯ» (“montage ‘documentary’ poetry”).<sup>10</sup>

As Kukulin’s terminology suggests, the use of montage and collage techniques was hardly new to Russian art and literature. Montage was key to the Soviet avant-gardes of the 1920s, as well as to many unofficial artists and writers of the late-Soviet period.<sup>11</sup> These and other writers and artists responded to the news by using collage or montage techniques that themselves arguably derive from news media and especially from the juxtaposed articles of the newspaper.<sup>12</sup> The collage and montage of the newspaper, photojournalism, newsreels, and later television inspired and shaped the turn to collage, montage, and juxtaposition in twentieth-century art and literature around the world from Dada and Soviet photomontage to William Burroughs and Brion Gysin’s cut-ups, and the “technological poetry” of Lamberto Pignotti and Gruppo 70.

A similarly international upswing in the use of cut-up news media accompanied the digital news revolution of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. To illustrate the international nature of this upswing, I will here compare the turn in Russian poetry to news-based documentary montage poetry – and its implications for what Korchagin has analyzed as the consequent «„ДИФФУЗНЫЙ“ ХАРАКТЕР СУБЪЕКТИВНОСТИ» (“‘diffuse’ character of subjectivity”) – to similar uses of the device of documentary montage in Chinese-language poetry of a similar period.<sup>13</sup> For instance, like Prigov, Taiwanese poet Hsia Yü 夏宇 produced poetic texts by writing directly onto, or erasing text from, print newspapers. In the group project “Huadiao huadiao huadiao” 《劃掉劃掉劃掉》 (“Cross It Out, Cross It Out, Cross It Out”), Hsia Yü and her collaborators produced lyric poems by crossing out texts from newspaper articles, advertisements, and other print media, leaving only a few words remaining. Similarly, the mainland Chinese poet Yan Jun 顏峻 combined poetry with the news and multimedia in works such as his video of a 2003 performance of his poem “Fan dui yiqie you zuzhi de qipian” 《反对一切有组织的欺骗》 (“Against All Organized Deception”), a performance that combined audio recordings and live poetry reading with news media images.<sup>14</sup>

While I will concentrate here on the comparison with these and other Chinese examples, I also wish to note at the outset the broader nature of this turn to documentary montage techniques. We see, for instance, a similar turn in Anglo-American poetry of the period.<sup>15</sup> For example, in “The Vaneigem Series” (2002),

<sup>10</sup> Kukulin (2010); Korčagin (2013).

<sup>11</sup> Kukulin (2015).

<sup>12</sup> Banash (2004).

<sup>13</sup> Korčagin (2013).

<sup>14</sup> Yan (2003a).

<sup>15</sup> On the renewed interest in responding to the news in early twenty-first-century US poetry, see Galvin (2018: 306-326).

Brian Kim Stefans copied the webpage template of the “New York Times” and replaced parts of some articles with extracts from English translations of Raoul Vaneigem’s « *Traité de savoir-vivre à l’usage des jeunes générations* » (1967; published in English under the title “The Revolution of Everyday Life”) and « *De la grève sauvage à l’autogestion généralisée* » (1974; published in English under the title “Contributions to the Revolutionary Struggle”).<sup>16</sup> In one piece from the series, for instance, Stefans has UK Prime Minister Tony Blair speak in the words of Vaneigem’s treatise “The Revolution of Everyday Life”:

Seeking to sway the opinions of the many critics in Britain who agree that Mr. Hussein is dangerous but believe he has been effectively contained and question the need to attack him now, Mr. Blair said:

“If the element of boredom it cost me to write it comes through when you read it, this will only be one more argument demonstrating our failure to live.

“For the rest, the gravity of the times must excuse the gravity of my tone. Levity always falls short of the written words or overshoots them. The irony in this case will consist in never forgetting that.”

“This book is part of a current of agitation of which the world has not heard the last,” he told Parliament. “It sets forth a simple contribution, among others, to the recreation of the international revolutionary movement. Its importance had better not escape anybody, for nobody, in time, will be able to escape its conclusions.”<sup>17</sup>

In this passage, the first paragraph comes from the “New York Times” article “Blair Presents Dossier on Iraq’s Biological Weapons” and the following three paragraphs come from Vaneigem’s introduction to “The Revolution of Everyday Life” in Ken Knabb’s English translation.<sup>18</sup> Here Stefans deploys the technique of *détournement* advocated by Vaneigem and other members of the Situationist International. Following Debord, Stefans uses documentary montage to engage in the “construction of situations” that are intended to produce a “revolutionary movement” by highlighting and upsetting our normal expectations of an everyday cultural form – in this case, a newspaper article.<sup>19</sup> Stefans achieved at least some limited success in his attempt to disrupt everyday life. His articles appeared, at first glance, so like the originals that the “New York Times” threatened Stefans with legal action.<sup>20</sup> By contrast, in his 2010 work “Suicide in an Airplane (1919),” Stefans does not attempt to reproduce the look of the “New York Times” article that he appropriates. Instead, he mixes an article on civilian deaths caused by US airstrikes in Afghanistan with allusions to the futurist celebration of war. Stefans combines text from the article with Leo Ornstein’s futurist score of the same name. He uses Adobe Flash to animate the text as a series of exploding

<sup>16</sup> Stefans (2002a). The English translations that Stefans uses are Vaneigem (2009) and *ibid.* (2000).

<sup>17</sup> Stefans (2002b).

<sup>18</sup> Hoge (2002); Vaneigem (2009: 6)

<sup>19</sup> Debord (2002); Vaneigem (2009: 6).

<sup>20</sup> Stefans (2006: 248).

letters, so underscoring the relation of the journalistic text and futurist aesthetics to the atrocities of US bombing.<sup>21</sup>

The key purpose of this paper is not to interrogate examples such as those of Stefans, Medvedev, and Hsia Yü in detail but is instead to offer a provisional argument as to why we see a similar turn across these literatures. Why is this trend observable in different literatures with different cultural and political backgrounds and contexts? Scholars such as Korchagin argue that the use of documentary montage in Russian poetry primarily relates to a shift in poetic subjectivity. However, this emphasis on the lyric subject downplays the collective and public texts of news and social media that constitute the source of these poems. By placing the documentary montage turn in Russian poetry in a global context and emphasizing the importance of new and new media and globalization to these changes, this essay questions the privileging of the lyric subject.

To read contemporary news poems solely as expressions of lyric subjectivity, however dispersed, is to ignore or downplay their emphasis on public and often traumatic events whose significance is hotly contested in the multi-authored texts of news and social media. While the global capitalist system and politics in the age of social media might seem to promote the individual over the collective subject, these poems suggest an alternative view: they map how the intertwining forces of news media, digital networks, and competing nationalisms and internationalisms produce and negotiate forms of collective and contested identity.

Equally, to approach such poems as the expression of a lyric subject, however diffuse or conflicted, is arguably to misunderstand the long tradition of lyric uses of found text. Such approaches project a lyric hero onto utterances that overtly display the absence of a single voice or speaking subject.<sup>22</sup> In the found poem, subjectivity is not produced in the act of composition but is, if at all, produced through a work's publication and its encounter with its readers: "The lyric, lying on the ground like a leaf or a feather [...] finds its speakers, who are its readers."<sup>23</sup> From this perspective and from a view that encompasses oral traditions and the longer history of written literature, the found or collage poem is the norm, and the lyric as container for an expressive subject is the aberration: "lyric subjectivity [...] becomes the anomaly in need of explanation."<sup>24</sup> The modern reassertion of this norm, of the poem as collage, comes arguably with the "ur-medium of twentieth-century collage": the newspaper.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Stefans (2010). For a detailed discussion of these two works by Stefans, see Tierney (2013: 65-70, 89-119).

<sup>22</sup> Reed (2011: 772-773).

<sup>23</sup> Saussy (2017: 120).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>25</sup> Banash (2013: 30).

Building on these arguments, I want to suggest that rather than simply trying to pinpoint a new kind of lyric subject, we might attend to other conditions and transitions that are equally pertinent in such texts and that have less to do with poetic subjectivity and more to do with the combined forces of new media, competing nationalisms, and globalization as they coalesce in often traumatic and contested public events. Korchagin has argued that texts like Medvedev's and Lvovsky's present either the diffusion of the subject or the establishment of a new kind of subject that coheres around its very condition of diffusion: «субъект распылен, но однороден в своей распыленности» (“the subject is dispersed but is homogeneous in its dispersal”).<sup>26</sup> But we might equally understand this process of diffusion and of fusion-through-diffusion as being not about the poetic subject but about the diffusion of the boundaries of poetry and of the concept of a nationally defined literature. Such work highlights poetry's transition from a largely text-based art form demarcated by language and national borders to an art form defined by movements across national and media boundaries. It also suggests the need for a transformation in our approach to poetic analysis – a conceptual shift from subjectivity to media.

Texts made through the verbatim reproduction of other texts, frequently from mass or social media, challenge the understanding of poetry on which the search for the poetic subject was founded in the first place. Instead of seeing such poems as staging the lyric subject as a battle between what Korchagin terms «„чужая“ и „своя“ речь» (“the other's' and 'one's own' speech”), we might better understand these poems as being about the battle over what and where poetry might be located in an age of global information networks.<sup>27</sup> Pavel Arseniev's more recent “ready-written” poems, for instance, frequently merely reproduce verbatim part or all of an existing online news or magazine text.<sup>28</sup> They eschew the complex negotiation of different texts found in poems like Lvovsky's “In Other Words” and thereby further undermine readings that seek to attribute to such texts lyric subjectivity. Such poems seem fundamentally to reject the basic assumptions about the lyric and how it should be read that have dominated, particularly in the Russian literary tradition, right up until the present.

We can see this privileging of the lyric subject by noting the limits of what has generally been included within the concept of documentary montage poetry in Russia. Many insightful and important writers about contemporary Russian poetry – including Kukulín, Korchagin, and Kuzmin – have identified the use of others' words, often taken from online media, as marking a new tendency in Russian poetry of the 1990s and the first decade of the new millennium. In fact, however, we can find many earlier cases where Russian writers and artists have presented mass media texts as art. Examples range from a 1963 issue of the samizdat journal

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<sup>26</sup> Korčagin (2013).

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Arsen'ev (2015), *ibid.* (2018).

«Искусство коммуны» (“Art of the Commune”) that includes a speech from the chairman of the Ideological Commission, L. F. Ilichev, cut and pasted from an official Soviet newspaper; to Komar and Melamid’s 1972 «Идеальный лозунг» (“Ideal Slogan”) series, which simply reproduces Soviet slogans as art.<sup>29</sup> It is just that works such as Komar and Melamid’s are more commonly approached as visual art rather than as poetry.

Take, for example, Prigov’s 1989 «Видеоперформанс с газетами» (“Video Performance with Newspapers;” figure 1; video 1). I have, elsewhere, offered the following description and analysis of the performance:

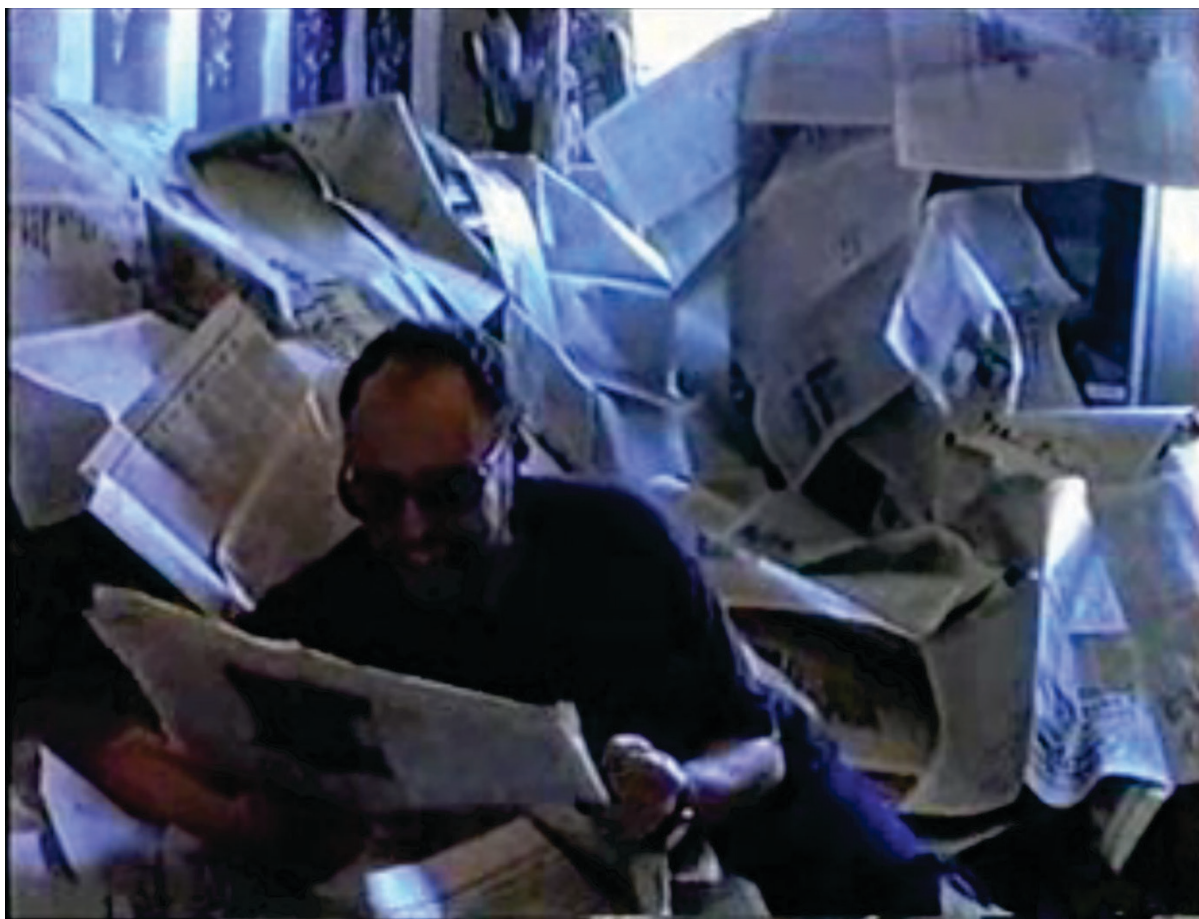
Prigov’s performance begins with a close up of his face. He appears to be lying on a pile of newspapers with an edition of “Pravda” carefully arranged behind his head. For the first minute or so, Prigov silently mouths words apparently read from the newspaper. Then he begins to read aloud as the camera pans out to reveal him lying on a couch of newspapers with further sheets of newsprint engulfing what appears to be an apartment. Prigov then rolls about in the papers, picking up, seemingly at random, various items of news, including an article about Gorbachev speaking on perestroika, which Prigov reads with rising volume and agitation.

By placing his performance piece in the interior of an apartment, Prigov emphasizes the newspaper’s role as a liminal object between the domestic realm and the outside social and political world, [...]. After reading the article on perestroika, Prigov spends several minutes searching through deep piles of newspapers that at one point threaten to submerge him completely. [...] Prigov’s body touches, is seemingly soothed then roused by the newspapers, whose crinkling white noise matches the confusing and overwhelming verbal noise produced by glasnost and by the rise of previously suppressed nationalisms. Prigov registers these competing nationalisms and their challenge to Soviet [...] unity by reading, in an increasingly hysterical voice, the Central Committee’s condemnation of the August 23, 1989 protests in the Baltic States as “nationalist hysteria.” The disordered newspapers and seemingly disordered mind of the speaker produce a sense of proliferating fracture and dispersion that matches the diverse opinions found in perestroika-era newspapers and the confusion of Prigov’s newspaper-strewn apartment.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>29</sup> On the former work, see Komaromi (2008: 652-654). On the “Ideal Slogan” series and US conceptual poetry, see Edmond (2017).

<sup>30</sup> Ibid. (2016: 320-322).





*Figure 1: Still image from Prigov (1989)*

Like Medvedev's poem, Prigov uses direct quotation to give voice to extremism (in this case Soviet anti-separatist nationalism).<sup>31</sup> But unlike Medvedev, Prigov embodies the text without ever even offering an alternative viewpoint, just as he gives voice to the official party line rather than the confusion of Internet babble. One might impute a lyric hero to Medvedev or Lvovsky's poems: the subject who struggles to negotiate between the words of others and one's own words. Prigov's work would seem to offer no such possibility.

Of course, not everyone would recognize Prigov's performance as a poem, though his strategy of simply repeating newspaper text verbatim recalls Tzara's 1920 Dadaist performance in Paris and anticipates such works of US conceptual poetry as Kenneth Goldsmith's 2003 book "Day," a retyping of an entire issue of the "New York Times." Yet the rise of poems made out of mass and social media texts and the now common genre of the video poem make it increasingly possible to recognize a work like Prigov's "Video Performance with Newspapers" as poetry. Such citational poems put pressure on the boundaries of poetry not simply in relation to other forms of language and discourse but also in relation to other art forms and media (print newspaper, video, contemporary art). We can see this pressure, for instance, in Anton Ochirov's «Израиль» ("Israel"), where animated

<sup>31</sup> Prigov reads from Central'nyj komitet KPSS (1989).

text and images compete for attention with the regular text, forcing the reader to reconsider where poetry ends and video art begins.<sup>32</sup>

We can register the kinds of pressures that these poems put on the boundaries of poetry through their paratexts. Medvedev's book "Invasion" is presented as containing «стихи» ("poems") and «тексты» ("texts"), with the title of his September 11 work clearly signaling it to be a text rather than a poem. Likewise, the editors introduced the publication of Lvovsky's 2008 work "In Other Words" by noting the difficulty of classifying it: «В нашем рубрикаторе не было формата, под который подошел бы этот текст Станислава Львовского» ("In our list of headings there was no category under which Stanislav Lvovsky's text would fit").<sup>33</sup> In fact, they had to create a new category on OpenSpace.ru especially for the work. The title of this category, «Вещь» ("Thing"), itself signals the difficulty of categorization. Nevertheless, the editors presented the text as an artistic work: an attempt to address Russia's invasion of Georgia through art: «одна из первых попыток осмыслить ситуацию средствами искусства» ("one of the first attempts to make sense of the situation through art").<sup>34</sup>

Of course, as Kuzmin first pointed out, Lvovsky's text does quite clearly signal its location within a literary tradition through its citations of Goethe, Hölderlin, and others.<sup>35</sup> Kukulin argues that Lvovsky's text differs from Medvedev's because of its invocation of literary tradition and history – the Spanish Civil War, the expulsion of the Sudetenland Germans and, between these events, the Second World War.<sup>36</sup> For Kukulin, "it is precisely this quality of history that allows the narrator to break out of the isolation of the contemporary world."<sup>37</sup> However, it is equally important to note that this refusal of isolation involves a transnational and transmedia appeal: to a variety of different places as well as times (albeit with a European orientation) and to various art forms and media.

Writing in 2003, Prigov noted the challenge to traditional concepts of poetry posed by works that occupy a liminal position between media and art forms, and between national traditions:

Попытки выхода в пограничные зоны – типа перформанса или визуализации – которые могли бы стать сильными возможностями расширения аудитории – так и не были приняты литературной средой (все-таки неотвратимо укорененной в культуре XIX века) и были попросту абсорбированы музыкальным и визуальным сообществами – по причине их нынешней доминирующей массы и влияния.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Očirov (2010).

<sup>33</sup> L'vovskij (2008).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Kuz'min (2008).

<sup>36</sup> Kukulin (2010: 613)

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 614.

<sup>38</sup> Prigov (2003).

Attempts to withdraw into boundary zones – of performance or visualization – which could provide feasible possibilities for expanding the audience – have never been accepted by the literary milieu (still inevitably rooted in the culture of the nineteenth century) and have simply been absorbed by the musical and visual communities because of their current dominant size and influence.

Documentary poems not only absorb other non-literary discourses and speech acts; they also – like the visual and performance works to which Prigov refers – contest the nature of poetry itself. Is, for instance, Prigov’s short film – or so-called “media opera” – «Россия» (“Russia”) a work of contemporary art, music, or video? Or could we treat it as a poem that channels other voices, particularly those of Russian nationalism, through a single word: «Россия» (“Russia”)?<sup>39</sup>

In a work published in 2007, the year prior to Lvovsky’s “In Other Words,” Prigov makes explicit this attempt to challenge the boundary of what is considered poetry. In “ru.sofob (50x50),” Prigov begins by asserting that «всякие слова» (“any words”) can form a poem, including «простые и прямые выдержки из ежедневной прессы» (“simple and direct extracts from the daily press”), extracts that he uses in the work.<sup>40</sup> Prigov’s “ru.sofob (50x50)” comprises fifty of Prigov’s columns for polit.ru and fifty poems from his serial poetic work “Based on Material from the Press” with one poem integrated with each column and often one or both rewritten in the process. Begun, like Medvedev’s text, just after September 11, 2001, “Based on Material from the Press” presents a series of poems based on contemporary newspaper articles.<sup>41</sup> In this respect, the work highlights the other lives of the poet as a journalist, a feature also, as Kukulin has noted, of Sukhotin’s «Стихи о первой чеченской кампании» (“Verses on the First Chechen Campaign”) which could be seen as “born out of Sukhotin’s experience as a journalist rather than a poet.”<sup>42</sup>

If such texts are located in an uncertain position between art forms and media, they equally occupy an in-between position in relation to nation. It is no accident that the texts of Medvedev and Lvovsky repeatedly cited as key examples of the documentary tendency in 2000s Russian poetry each engage perspectives from different nations and concern cross-border conflicts with global geopolitical implications.

Published just the year after Prigov’s “Performance with Newspapers,” Taiwanese writer Lin Yaode’s 林耀德 “Er erba” 《二二八》 (“February 28”)<sup>43</sup> similarly involves the verbatim reproduction of text from a newspaper and similarly uses this device to link the collage-like confusion of texts in a newspaper to the confusion of competing nationalisms and the contested history of traumatic public

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. (2004).

<sup>40</sup> Ibid. (2007: 122). For more on this work, see Edmond (2014: 298-300).

<sup>41</sup> Prigov (2006).

<sup>42</sup> Kukulin (2010: 598).

<sup>43</sup> Lin Yaode (1990).

events. Like the Soviet Union, Taiwan underwent political, social, and media liberalization in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and in both countries the lifting of political repression brought a confusion of competing voices and nationalisms and battles over historical memory that had, potentially, global consequences. Like Prigov, Lin Yaode stages this confusion through the verbatim reproduction of the news.

“February 28” highlights the tension between the newspaper as a vehicle for national collectives – what Benedict Anderson terms “imagined communities” – and as an embodiment of confusing and competing information and voices.<sup>44</sup> The poem comprises 21 sections, with all these texts taken entirely from the February 28, 1947 edition of the Taiwanese newspaper “Xin Sheng Bao” 《新生報》 (“New Life News”; figure 2). This edition includes a brief article about an incident of police brutality that was to spark violent unrest across Taiwan and a bloody crackdown by the Chinese Republican forces of Chiang Kai-shek’s 蔣介石 Nationalist Party (the KMT or Kuomintang). The incident, which has come to be known as “2/28” or February 28, has become an historical touchstone and source of ongoing dispute between Taiwanese and Chinese nationalists in Taiwan. Public commemoration of the incident was suppressed until the mid-1980s, when the KMT government finally lifted martial law. Published just a year after Hou Hsiahsien’s 侯孝賢 landmark film “Beiqing chengshi” 《悲情城市》 (“A City of Sadness”), Lin Yaode’s work was part of the “post-martial law boom” in artistic and public commemorations of this dark chapter in modern Taiwanese history. But Lin Yaode’s approach differs from other more partisan and emotive artistic representations: he uses the newspaper as both a historical document and a collage form to stage the event as a confusion of contemporaneous voices rather than as a key chapter in a retrospective and univocal nationalist history.

If the newspaper can allow people to imagine themselves as part of a national community – as the demonstrations sparked by the article in “New Life News” illustrate – it can also serve to undermine single national narratives through its collage-like juxtapositions. While citing a key moment in Taiwanese nationalist narratives, “February 28” deploys the collage-like structure of the newspaper in a way that highlights the limits of simplistic nationalist narratives and of the opposition between those aligned with the then KMT government, who see Taiwan as a province of China, and those now associated with the opposition Democratic Progressive Party (DPP), who view Taiwan as an independent nation.

The framing of the February 28 incident in these binary nationalist terms, for instance, obscures a more complex history of colonialism as experienced by Taiwan’s indigenous peoples: “the period from the seventeenth to early-twentieth centuries witnessed numerous, often bloody, confrontations between the aborigines and Dutch colonisers, Han migrants, Qing dynasty troops, and finally the Japanese.”<sup>45</sup> Lin Yaode highlights this more complex history in his novel “1947 Lilium

<sup>44</sup> Anderson (2006).

<sup>45</sup> Vickers (2009: 90).

Formosanum”, which also addresses the February 28 incident through a snapshot in time: the entire novel takes place in the afternoon and evening of February 27, 1947. The novel disrupts the Han-centric views of Taiwan shared by both Chinese and Taiwanese nationalists by emphasizing indigenous Atayal voices alongside Dutch, Japanese, and Han colonists. It challenges a “univocal interpretation” of Taiwanese history by attempting to “deconstruct the Han-centered history with Atayal myth.”<sup>46</sup> By highlighting the position of indigenous Taiwanese in “Lilium Formosanum,” Lin Yaode emphasizes the aporia at the heart of the opposition between Han Chinese nationalists and Han settler Taiwanese nationalists. Both sides tend to take for granted the centrality of Han language and culture to Taiwan and to ignore the plight of Taiwanese aboriginals, who continue to struggle against the colonialism of both sides.

In “February 28,” Lin Yaode does not address this complex history directly but instead deploys features of the newspaper to disrupt the competing Han Taiwanese and Chinese narratives. The poem interrupts these linear narratives and narrow nationalisms through the non-linear collage structure of the newspaper and its international reach. Lin Yaode reproduces advertisements, notices, and news articles that are seemingly unconnected to the incident and that situate Taiwan within a larger international context. The poem, for instance, includes references to Hong Kong and Hollywood movies, American soldiers, and a smallpox outbreak that was local but nevertheless linked with the ongoing global struggle against smallpox after the Second World War, marked, for instance, by a smallpox outbreak in New York City in March and April 1947. After a range of such newspaper extracts, numbered consecutively from 1 to 20, the poem concludes with the brief article that allowed news of the incident to spread and led to the beginning of mass demonstrations against the Republican government. By numbering this final section “0,” Lin Yaode emphasizes the non-linear structure of this collage of newspaper texts, from which readers must draw their own conclusions. The opening part of the poem, for instance, is an advertisement for a martial arts film starring Wu Lizhu 鄔麗珠. The accompanying teaser promises bloody action so inviting the reader to link this seemingly innocuous advertisement to the final text and the real-life slaughter that it presages. Yet by presenting this collage of news items and advertisements without comment, Lin Yaode refuses to make such connections explicit and so offers an alternative to emotive memorialisation of the incident. In this way, “February 28” counters monolithic history and the clarity of a nationalist agenda – be it Chinese or Taiwanese – with the multiplicity and confusion of the newspaper.

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<sup>46</sup> Lin Pei-Yin (2010: 76, 70).

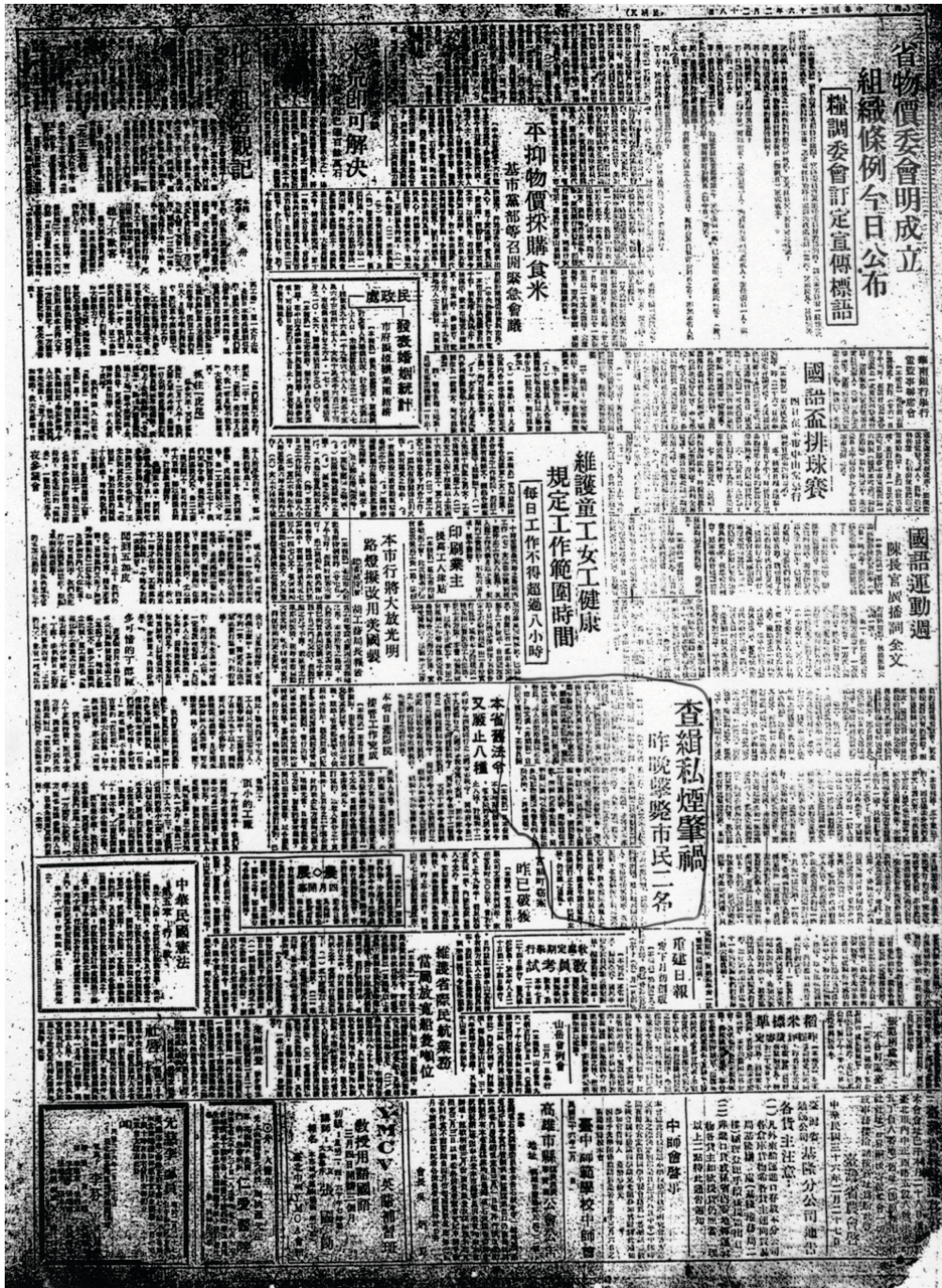


Figure 2: Page 2 of “Xin Sheng Bao” 《新生報》 (“New Life News”) from February 28, 1947, with the article that helped spark widespread demonstrations circled.

One might be tempted to read “February 28” as Korchagin reads similar Russian documentary montage poetry, that is, as staging a diffuse subjectivity that emerges in the struggle with others’ words and texts. A number of critics take a similar approach to Korchagin. They cite Lin Yaode’s poem as a form of ironic, post-modern pastiche that is avant-garde in its collaging of different forms of language.<sup>47</sup> Such readings attribute agency to the avant-garde writer who, as

<sup>47</sup> Chen Zhongyi (2003); Zhu Shuang (1996: 63); Zhang Weizhong (2013: 95).

Korchagin would have it, engages in a struggle between “one’s own” and “others’ language.” Thus even a critic who recognizes that Lin Yaode’s poem “does not contain an assertion of feeling, leaving it to the reader to decipher” (不帶情感的陳述，端看讀者的解讀) still attributes to the poem an expression of the author’s subjectivity: the poem might appear to be a “game” but in fact “hides Lin Yaode’s concern with politics” (隱含了林耀德對政治的關注).<sup>48</sup>

But to frame the poem only in terms of subjectivity would be to downplay its engagement with media, traumatic public events, and geopolitics through the form of the newspaper. The pressure on readers to sift through the various kinds of language and to reach their own conclusions is a quality of the “collage logic” of newspaper itself, rather than of an expressive subjectivity.<sup>49</sup> In this sense, any account of an expressive or subjective quality of Lin Yaode’s selection of language needs to be tempered by a recognition of how the work opposes understandings of the lyric as the expression of an individual subject by turning instead to the public and collective form of the newspaper. “February 28” uses the form of the newspaper to pinpoint and enact a key tension in global modernity: between the imagined communities of nations that the modern newspaper has done so much to construct and perpetuate and the proliferating and fracturing confusion of voices and interests that the newspaper’s collage-like form also embodies.<sup>50</sup>

Published in 1990, Lin Yaode’s “February 28” also has a more historically immediate if only implicit referent: the bloody repression of protests in the People’s Republic of China on June 4, 1989. This event not only echoed the violent government repression of protesters in Taiwan in 1947 but also heightened tensions over Taiwan’s disputed relationship to China. Equally, it highlighted the role of the news media in conveying or suppressing information about a government massacre and so in perpetuating or questioning these competing nationalisms.

The mainland Chinese poet Liao Yiwu 廖亦武 also responded to the June 4 massacre by turning to news collage. Liao Yiwu collaged diverse news sources to connect the bewildering juxtapositions of the news to the difficulty of coming to terms with the enormity of a traumatic historical event. In March 1990, he produced a video poem that combined a montage of footage culled from the news, past and present, with voice-over poetic text. Although Liao Yiwu’s video work was censored and apparently destroyed, “various reports indicate that the film was a collage of scenes featuring newsreel footage of notorious world leaders, such as Stalin and Hitler, Mao Zedong reviewing Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution, TV news footage of demonstrations in China during May–June 1989, and

<sup>48</sup> Xu (2004); Chen Weiren (2001: 237-239).

<sup>49</sup> Banash (2013: 30).

<sup>50</sup> On how the daily ritual of reading the newspaper helps produced the imagined community of the nation, see Anderson (2006: 62). On the tension between the newspaper’s collective temporal rhythm and its fragmented mapping of global space, see Edmond (2016).

new footage shot on the streets of Chongqing using amateur actors. The soundtrack is said to have consisted of dramatic readings of ‘Requiem’ and a part of ‘Slaughter’ by Liao Yiwu, and readings of avant-garde poetry by other poets.”<sup>51</sup> Liao Yiwu’s poem “Tusha” 《屠杀》 (“Slaughter”), later renamed “Datusha” 《大屠杀》 (“Massacre”), was itself partly composed in direct response to the news. On the night of June 3 and the morning of June 4, 1989, Liao listened to news reports from the BBC about the shooting of unarmed Chinese civilians by the People’s Liberation Army.<sup>52</sup> He wrote the final two parts of the poem in response, as this extract from the penultimate part illustrates:

扫射！扫射！扫射！多好玩啊！人类和星星一起倒下。一起逃跑。分不出彼此。追到云上去！追到地缝和皮肉里去扫射！把灵魂再打一个洞！把星星再打一个洞！穿红裙子的灵魂！系白腰带的灵魂！穿球鞋做广播体操的灵魂！往哪里跑！我们要把你从泥土里挖出来，从肉上扯下来。从空气和水中捞起来。扫射！扫射！好过瘾！好过瘾啊！<sup>53</sup>

Machinegun them! Machinegun them! Machinegun them! It’s so much fun! Mankind and stars fall together. Flee together. Can’t make one out from the other. Chase them up to the clouds! Chase them into the cracks of the earth and into their flesh and machinegun them! Blow another hole in the soul! Blow another hole in the stars! Souls dressed in red shirts! souls with white belts! Souls wearing running shoes doing gymnastics to radio! Where can you run to? We will dig you out of the earth, tear you from your flesh. Scoop you out of the air and water. Machinegun them! Machinegun them! It feels so good! It feels so good!<sup>54</sup>

Liao Yiwu’s assault of words with its sarcastic condemnation via celebration of the massacre differs from Prigov’s or Lin Yaode’s use of text culled directly from the newspaper. And yet while the text of the poem is far more direct, Liao Yiwu’s juxtaposition of news collage with voice-over from multiple poems and poets likewise shifts the onus from the poet to the viewer to negotiate its multiple texts, images, and media.

As the examples discussed so far illustrate, the presentation of material from the news in contemporary poetry can serve very different political purposes and can range from politically engaged works to works that seemingly eschew any political position. I will illustrate the different directions that the news poem might take with two further examples from mainland China, both of which mix video collage of news images with voice-over. Despite their formal and ideological differences, they both illustrate the problems that such news poems pose for approaches to contemporary poetry that privilege lyric subjectivity.

First, consider the 2003 performance of Yan Jun’s “Against All Organized Deception” as it was staged in Beijing and subsequently released as a video

<sup>51</sup> Day (2005: 355-356).

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 351-352.

<sup>53</sup> Liao Yiwu (2010).

<sup>54</sup> Translation adapted from Liao Yiwu (2004).



recording.<sup>55</sup> Yan Jun's poem is dated December 2000. However, the Beijing performance took place in the aftermath of the 2003 US invasion of Iraq and just as the seriousness of the SARS outbreak was becoming clear. In the performance, Yan Jun, well known as a DJ, read the poem accompanied by music and by a video montage. As with Liao Yiwu, it is the video montage that makes the work a documentary montage piece, since the text itself is not made of citations. By overlaying some of the lines of the poem with images, however, Yan Jun entangles his own words with the news, so staging an encounter between poetry and mass media that is simultaneously an encounter between the poetic text and contemporary music and video and performance art.



Figure 3: Still image from Yan Jun (2003)

The opening lines of the poem, for instance, are superimposed over news footage of Donald Rumsfeld, US Secretary of Defense, speaking at the Pentagon (figure 3; video 2):

昨夜 我梦见了酱油  
last night, i dreamed of soy sauce<sup>56</sup>

What the translation does not capture is that in the context of the US invasion of Iraq and this image, “jiangyou” 酱油 (“soy sauce”) also alludes to “shiyou” 石油

<sup>55</sup> Yan Jun (2003a).

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. (2003b).

(“petroleum”), since both share the word “you” 油 (“oil”). Yan Jun points to the unspoken greed – the US desire for oil – that motivated the invasion of Iraq, even as he transforms such political analysis into a culinary absurdity.

In Yan Jun’s poem, we can see both the utility and limits of a lyric framing of such a poetic event. Yan Jun’s poem is built from a series of refusals, which begin: “against all organized deception! // against meetings at dusk, stars twinkling. against yelling my name from a tree-top.” And it continues with lines like “against entertainment journalists and their twisted grins,” before ending:

反对。反对一切。  
 反对我们自己。反对我们反对的一切。  
 反对我们没有反对的一切。  
 反对我们自己的一切。  
 反对一切不可以反对的和不可能反对的。  
 反对  
 against. against everything.  
 against ourselves. against everything we are against.  
 against everything we are not against.  
 against everything about ourselves.  
 against everything we must not be against and cannot be against.  
 against.<sup>57</sup>

Yan Jun here presents a series of contradictory viewpoints that undermine the notion of a single subject position. His approach resembles the use of contradiction and negation analyzed by Kukulin and Korchagin in Medvedev’s and Lvovsky’s works of documentary montage.<sup>58</sup>

However, Yan Jun’s refusal also has a specifically Chinese poetic lineage. It echoes, in particular, Bei Dao’s famous poem “Huida” 回答 (“The Answer”), which was penned in the 1970s, became an emblem youth rebellion in the 1980s, and which is built on a similar anaphoric structure of refusal:

我不相信天是蓝的；  
 我不相信雷的回声；  
 我不相信梦是假的；  
 我不相信死无报应。  
 I don’t believe the sky is blue;  
 I don’t believe in thunder’s echoes;  
 I don’t believe that dreams are false;  
 I don’t believe that death has no revenge.<sup>59</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Kukulin (2010: 601) describes the “solidarity with comments that completely contradict one another” in Medvedev’s text, while Korčagin (2013) similarly notes «противоречащие друг другу высказывания» in Lvovsky’s poem.

<sup>59</sup> Bei Dao (1987: 25-26). Ibid. (1990: 33).

Bei Dao's poem was widely read as an assertion of the individual subject against the collective voice of socialist realism and the Cultural Revolution.<sup>60</sup> Yan Jun mobilizes the same rhetoric of rejection, but turns back to a collective subject, "we" (我们), only to insist on the refusal of any position whatsoever. This difference between the two poets is marked by their differing use of anaphora. Whereas Bei Dao stresses the individual subject by having each line begin with the word "I" (我), Yan Jun begins not with a subject but with a negation: "against" (反对).

In Yan Jun's work, negation is no longer a means of individual self-definition against the collective, or against official discourse. Instead, what Kukulin says of Medvedev's September 11 text and other Russian documentary montage poems is equally true of Yan Jun. Yan Jun presents, in Kukulin's words, "an image of a world torn apart by interminable hostility without adopting the standpoint of any of the opposing camps."<sup>61</sup>

In his performance, Yan Jun uses a montage of video images and the collision of various media and art forms – electronic music, experimental film, and poetry reading – to emphasize this poetics of refusal in the face of a myriad of equally unacceptable positions. The video montage includes news footage of the recent US invasion of Iraq, of the concurrent SARS outbreak, and of the toppling of Lenin statues in the Soviet Bloc.<sup>62</sup> By combining this news media footage with his poetic text, Yan Jun emphasizes that the opposition to "all organized deception" encompasses everything from Soviet ideology to the lies justifying the US invasion of Iraq and to the initial failure of the Chinese government to publicize and address the SARS outbreak. Thus, while on the one hand some images and text might seem to toe the Chinese government's official line (for example, in opposing the US invasion of Iraq), the collage of images and the opposition to "all organized deception" stages a more critical relationship to government positions and reflects the confusion of voices and opinions found in the online bulletin boards through which news was shared and debated in China in the early 2000s.<sup>63</sup>

However, one would be wrong to assume that there is any essential link between the use of news collage and resistance to political propaganda, as we can see from another example of a mainland Chinese poem that responded to a major news event and that circulated widely in the form of a video news collage. In the aftermath of the May 12, 2008 Sichuan earthquake, a large number of poems commemorating its victims circulated widely on the Chinese internet. For example, the poem "Haizi, kuai zhua jin mama de shou" 《孩子快抓紧妈妈的手》 ("Child, Quickly Grab Hold of Mama's Hand") went viral within days of being posted on May 13 and was rapidly "adapted into multimedia versions that were

<sup>60</sup> Van Crevel (2008: 26).

<sup>61</sup> Kukulin (2010: 601).

<sup>62</sup> This account of the video montage used in the performance is based on Yan Jun (2003a), Yan Jun (2003b), and Van Crevel (2008: 465-467).

<sup>63</sup> Woon (2011).

uploaded to the Internet and broadcast on television.”<sup>64</sup> These videos often included background music, and they were frequently accompanied by subtitles carrying the poetic text and image collages of often graphic news media images of victims of the earthquake.<sup>65</sup>



Figure 4: Still images from YouTube video poem version of “Haizi, kuai zhua jin mama de shou” 《孩子快抓紧妈妈的手》 (“Child, Quickly Grab Hold of Mama’s Hand”) posted May 19, 2008 by bibiex, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GeibnWyQfc8>

Most of these earthquake texts were, like “Child, Quickly Grab Hold of Mama’s Hand,” amateur poems expressing a sincere sense of loss and so seemingly far away from the overt avant-gardism of some of the examples discussed here. However, the adaptation of these earthquake poems as video news collages illustrate the same onus on the reader or viewer to negotiate a myriad of news images and texts. For example, one of the video versions of “Child, Quickly Grab Hold of Mama’s Hand” presents images of body bags, dead children, and grieving parents (figure 4). The poem’s text takes the form largely of a dialogue between a dying child and the child’s mother. The poem concludes with the child urging the mother not to cry and to let her dead child go. Accompanied by this poetic text, the news montage could be read as highlighting the tragic results of the failings of officials, who were criticized for not enforcing safe building construction, particularly of the schools in which thousands of children perished.

<sup>64</sup> Inwood (2014: 172).

<sup>65</sup> Ibid. 173.

However, the poem's expression of acceptance and stoicism in the face of loss also allowed it to be swiftly mobilized by official media outlets to enforce a nationalist message of collective struggle in the face of the catastrophe and in the run-up to the Beijing Olympics, through which the government sought to showcase China's successes.<sup>66</sup> Mobilized by state media in support of nationalistic ends, video news montage versions of the poem demonstrate another more propagandistic use to which the texts and images extracted from the news are put in contemporary poetry. And yet their openness to differing, more critical interpretations also illustrates how such works are best read not as the expression of a lyric subjectivity but rather as staging a collective and conflicted negotiation of the often traumatic public events that we encounter through the news.

We can see a similar cut-and-paste negotiation of the news in a Taiwanese poetic project undertaken in the same year as the Sichuan earthquake and the Beijing Olympics. In "Cross It Out, Cross It Out, Cross It Out," the poet Hsia Yü and her collaborators produced lyric poems by crossing out texts from newspaper articles, advertisements, and other print media, leaving only a few words remaining. The "Cross It Out" project again demonstrates the different kinds of relation and transformation at stake in news poems that reproduce text verbatim from mass and social media. We might read the act of crossing out parts or all of a newspaper's text as an expression of the search for one's own words amidst the bombardment of others' words – as an expression of just the kind of conflicted or fragmented subject identified by Korchagin in Medvedev's and Lvovsky's texts. In doing so, we would follow Mikhail Martynov's argument that particular kinds of deletion practice can be associated with the expression of particular kinds of poetic subjectivity.<sup>67</sup> However, the Taiwanese project highlights the equal importance to such works of public and often contested experiences and desires that frequently emerge out of moments of crisis and that occupy a space between media and art forms and between national and global contexts.

The "Cross It Out" project connects the liminal space between private and public discourse to the liminal space between poetry and contemporary art and between the local or national and the global. The initial 2008 exhibition project, for instance, appears much more easily connected to the contemporary art context of "relational aesthetics" – in which the audience is invited to participate in the art making – than to poetry.<sup>68</sup> Hsia Yü and her collaborators, however, then placed the project in the context of poetry by publishing a selection of work from the project as an issue of "Xianzai shi" 《现在诗》 ("Contemporary Poetry"; issue 9) in January 2012, and again in the April 2012 issue of "Asymptote," an online international journal dedicated to literary translation into English.<sup>69</sup> They also

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 175, 178.

<sup>67</sup> Martynov (2018).

<sup>68</sup> Bourriaud (1998); Bishop (2004).

<sup>69</sup> Hsia Yü (2012); Hsia Yü et al. (2012).

highlighted the tension between lyric poem and journalism and between verbal and visual media by presenting the works both as photographic reproductions of the crossed-out newspaper pages and as typeset lyric poems.



整天未進食 / 寫字  
 倒頭就睡，但翻來覆去，睡得不安穩。  
 吃個中午餐  
 沒有吃飽，喝半杯繼續睡覺  
 轉個  
 繼續睡覺。  
 穿自己的衣服  
 拿了那件新的長袖居家休閒服，以及那雙襪子  
 倒頭就睡  
 翻來覆去  
 起來吃飯  
 再入睡。  
 這天睡得很沉，  
 下午4時醒  
 吃飽  
 繼續睡覺。

Go straight to bed, but toss and turn, can't sleep soundly./Wake up to have lunch./  
 Didn't eat, continue to sleep after having some water/wake up/turn off the light, sleep.

Figure 5: From Hsia Yü et al. (2012).

Hsia Yü uses crossing-out to highlight and question the newspaper format in “Zheng tian wei jin shi” 《整天未進食》 (“Hasn’t Had a Meal All Day”), her deletion of and transcription from a newspaper article on former Taiwanese president Chen Shui-bian’s 陳水扁 first day in prison. Chen Shui-bian had been detained late on November 11, 2008 on charges of corruption, and the article appeared on the November 13, 2008 front page of “Pingguo ribao” 《蘋果日報》 (“Apple Daily”). Chen Shui-bian’s jailing came during an ongoing and heated political struggle between Chen Shui-bian’s Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) and the Chinese Nationalist Party (the KMT or Kuomintang). The KMT had been returned to power in both parliamentary and presidential elections earlier that year and sought to exploit the charges against Chen Shui-bian for political gain. This political conflict took place in the wider context of the economic downturn generated by the global financial crisis and shortly after the 2008 Beijing Olympics, which functioned as a symbolic assertion of China’s rise to the position of a major global power. All these contexts were very immediate when Hsia Yü’s work was first presented as part of an exhibition in Taipei that opened on November 22, 2008.

In her cross-out work, Hsia Yü reduces the layered repetition and juxtaposed words and images of the newspaper article to a bare, linear account of a day. She presents both the original newspaper page with her cross outs and the poem she has extracted from the remaining undeleted text (figure 5). Hsia Yü crosses out almost all the text, aside from part of the large headline and a few words describing the spare factual outline of Chen Shui-bian's first day in prison:

整天未進食

倒頭就睡，但翻來覆去，睡得不安穩。

叫醒用中餐

沒有吃飯，喝水後繼續睡覺

睡醒

熄燈睡覺。

穿自己的便服

拿了 3 套共 6 件的長短居家休閒服，以及 3 顆橘子

倒頭就睡

翻來覆去

起來吃飯

再入睡。

這回睡得比較沉，

下午 4 時醒

晚餐

9 時熄燈。

*Hasn't Had a Meal All Day*

Goes straight to sleep, but tosses and turns, can't sleep soundly.

Is woken to have lunch

does not eat, after a drink of water, continues to sleep

wakes up

switches off the light, sleeps.

Wears own everyday clothes

took three sets of altogether six pieces of long and short casual home clothing, as  
well as three mandarins

goes straight to sleep

tosses and turns

gets up to eat food

goes to sleep again.

This time sleeps relatively deeply

wakes at 4pm

dinner  
at 9 switches off the light.<sup>70</sup>

Here one might connect Hsia Yü's repetition of the newspaper text to Anderson's account of the newspaper as a vehicle for the imagined community of the nation.<sup>71</sup> The newspaper article emphasizes this national imaginary through its presentation of Chen Shui-bian, a symbolic figure for the Taiwanese nation and its claim to independence. This position within a national context was further emphasized in the exhibition of which Hsia Yü's cross-out work was a part. In the exhibition, members of the public were invited to create works by crossing out old newspapers and other texts supplied for the purpose, so openly inviting a focus on highly politicized acts of deletion and on media censorship. Hsia Yü's choice of text also focuses attention on the connection that Anderson stresses between the daily (the newspaper is called "Pingguo ribao" or "Apple Daily") and a day in the life of its readers. Hsia Yü's repetition of the newspaper text emphasizes the sense of shared daily repetition on which the temporality of the newspaper and the imagined community of the nation depend.<sup>72</sup> By conveying the entire story of the front page in fourteen spare lines, she also highlights the wordy, repetitious nature of the original article, which effectively gives the same banal description of Chen Shui-bian's day twice.

Like Lin Yaode, Hsia Yü explores political tensions between Chinese and Taiwanese nationalisms through the banality of the everyday and the dailiness of the newspaper. And like "February 28," her poem stages the tension between the newspaper as a vehicle for nationalism and as a vehicle for dissolving national collectives. The poem's bare description of a day in a human life evokes the shared daily experience of reading the news, which allows people who will never meet to imagine themselves as part of a national community. And yet Hsia Yü deletion work eliminates the newspaper article's national context, shifting the terrain of the piece towards a universal depiction of the basic human activities of sleeping, drinking, and eating – a banal description of daily human existence. In her deletions, Hsia Yü removes the identifying name of the former president, the references to the prison officials, and indeed the entire situation of imprisonment. She thus erases both the political context and the newspaper article's emotive description of how Chen Shui-bian was unable to eat because "he had not slept all night" after being taken into custody. At the same time, this universalizing by negation also highlights the global geopolitical importance of what might appear at first to concern only the imagined community of one nation and the life of one man. Chen Shui-bian's DPP party and his KMT opponents were divided over what imagined community they belonged to: Taiwan or China. And that question in turn is not just one about the Taiwanese or Chinese nation but is the focal point for tension involving

<sup>70</sup> Hsia Yü (2012: 60-61). My translation.

<sup>71</sup> Anderson (2006).

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 33-35.



China, the United States, Japan, and other North-East Asian powers, including Russia. The question therefore has serious global geopolitical implications.

Just as Lin Yaode's verbatim reproduction of newspaper texts refuses to assert the author's view of a contentious national trauma, so Hsia Yü's banal description of a day in the life of one man stands in implicitly absurd relation to the same competing nationalisms. Her text poses the problem of speaking of a life, of individual – and indeed of national – experience in a world in which our news of the globe is already mapped out and determined by forces beyond our control.

To pick up a print newspaper today, let alone to turn it into a work of literature, is increasingly an act of nostalgia, a reference to a time long gone. And yet, as I have argued here, poets and writers continue to turn to the texts and collage-like structure of the news because they provide a vital means for negotiating a world of proliferating media. While the collaging of the news is a centuries-old practice and one that was already substantially explored in the first half of the twentieth century, it has taken on renewed resonance in recent decades as writers negotiate increasingly complex and global media contexts, rising nationalisms, political polarization, and news events with worldwide repercussions from the global financial crisis to Covid-19. The ability to negotiate multiple juxtaposed sources of information from around the world has become more, not less, relevant in our current era of globalization and digital networks. Evincing this ongoing relevance, the year that the global financial crisis reached its peak was also the year that the Sichuan earthquake video poems circulated virally and that the "Cross It Out" project took place. That same year, Lvovsky published "In Other Words," and, citing the poem, Kuzmin hailed a new tendency in Russian poetry.

We could treat these contemporary poetic negotiations of the news as an extension of the modernist turn to new forms of fragmented subjectivity in response to the impossibility of comprehending an increasingly complex world. We can, for instance, read Hsia Yü's text as staging a lyric subject whose own words are visible only in the repetition, selection, or negation of the words of others. Such a lyric reading for poetic subjectivity remains possible for all the works mentioned here, including those by Hsia Yü, Lin Yaode, Yan Jun, Lvovsky, Medvedev, Prigov, Goldsmith, and Stefans.

Yet, as I have argued, any inward-looking focus on the lyric subject, however diffuse, must be tempered by an outward-looking recognition of how the poetry of the news presents the lyric as collectively constructed by multiple authors and readers and from various media, genres, and art forms, including poetry, contemporary art, filmmaking, music, journalism, digital and social media, and live performance. For Fredric Jameson, the modernist artist responded to the overwhelming complexity of global networks by turning to the subjective: to "a tiny corner of the social world" and the inner life of the individual.<sup>73</sup> Jameson can

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<sup>73</sup> Jameson (1988: 349).

only make this claim by sidelining modernist engagements with the collage-like structure of the news. Contemporary poets, by contrast, extend this engagement, decoupling their poetic texts from lyric subjectivity so that they become instead a means of negotiating the multiple texts and global networks of contemporary media. Contemporary news poems show another side of modernism, one that is still with us today: the turn not inwards but outwards to the myriad news stories and feeds that constitute the collective text of our time.

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## **Internationale Zeitschrift für Kulturkomparatistik**

Band 2 (2021): *Contemporary Lyric Poetry in Transitions between Genres and Media*

Herausgegeben von Ralph Müller und Henrieke Stahl

Klimek, Sonja: Internet Poetry Clips: Multimodale und multimediale Hybridformen als Herausforderung für die Lyrikologie. In: IZfK 2 (2021). 279-300.

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**Sonja Klimek (Kiel)**

### **Internet Poetry Clips: Multimodale und multimediale Hybridformen als Herausforderung für die Lyrikologie**

*Internet Poetry Clips: Challenging Lyric Theory with Multimodal and Multimedial Hybrid Forms of Poetry*

Internet poetry clips are a multimedial hybrid form that combines features of different literary genres, such as lyric, epic, and drama; different modal categories, such as spoken language, writing, gestures, and facial expressions; and medial modes, such as text, performance, video clip, and documentary. This paper deals with the central features of three selected internet poetry clips: “A Brown Girl’s Guide to Gender” by Aranya Johar, “Water” by Koleka Putuma, and „Ohne mich“ by Sandra Da Vina. The focus is on the media-specific forms of personal union between author and performer in each of these works.

*Keywords: internet poetry clips, lyric poetry, performance, authorship, poetry slam, digital poetry, poetry of engagement*

Internet Poetry Clips haben sich in den letzten Jahren als eine neue, multimediale Hybridform etabliert, die traditionelle Gattungsgrenzen zwischen Lyrik, Epik und Dramatik überschreitet, aber auch modale Kategorien wie gesprochene Sprache und Schrift, Gestik, Mimik und andere Zeichenkanäle, die Trennung zwischen distinkten medialen Darbietungsformaten wie gedrucktem Text und inszenierter Performance, und schließlich auch zwischen Videoclip und dokumentarischem Filmmaterial (z.B. Mitschnitte einer Live Performance) zunehmend verwischt. Poetry Clips, wie man sie im 21. Jahrhundert auf Internet-Plattformen wie YouTube und Vimeo oder den privaten Webseiten und Blogs vieler Künst-

ler\*innen findet, schließen an die vom TV in der zweiten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts geprägten Rezeptionsgewohnheiten an. Aufgrund ihrer Kürze und der zentralen Stellung eines von einer konkreten Person akustisch vorgetragenen Textes haben sie jedoch auch viele Gemeinsamkeiten zum Format der Music Video Clips. Diese stellen wiederum ursprünglich eine aus Opern- und Konzert-Mitschnitten hervorgegangene Hybridform dar und liefen vor allem seit den 1980er Jahren im Fernsehen.<sup>1</sup> Wie schon Music Video Clips die traditionelle Filmanalyse vor neue Aufgaben stellten, so ist auch die heute relativ neue Hybridform des Internet Poetry Clips eine Herausforderung für die literaturwissenschaftliche Lyrikologie, die sie nur in Zusammenarbeit mit anderen medienwissenschaftlichen Disziplinen wird meistern können, da Internet Poetry Clips zwar zu einem wichtigen Teil aus Lyrik bestehen, aber gleichzeitig medial wie modal weit über die literarische Gattung hinausgehen.<sup>2</sup>

Internet Poetry Clips sind nicht einfach online gestellte Film-Mitschnitte von Poetry Slam Sessions.<sup>3</sup> Auch solche Mitschnitte finden sich natürlich gelegentlich. Wichtiger als die Abgrenzung eines filmisch inszenierten und digital nachbearbeiteten Clips von einem reinen Mitschnitt ist mir hier jedoch die Abgrenzung solcher Kurzfilme, die einen einzelnen lyrischen Text einer singulären Person präsentieren, von anderen, nicht auf die Person des Autors bzw. der Autorin zentrierten lyrischen Text-Bild-Ton-Produktionen. Unter 'Internet Poetry Clips' verstehe ich also im Folgenden sowohl Ausschnitte aus gefilmten Poetry Slams (die jeweils einen einzelnen Text präsentieren) als auch extra für die Internet-Veröffentlichung produzierte Video Clips. In jedem Fall muss eine Person einen Text, für den sie selbst als Urheber\*in figuriert, vortragen (d.h. sprechen, aber möglicherweise auch [stellenweise] singen, rappen, flüstern, schreien etc., wobei im Kontext von 'Deaf Slams' auch Vortrag durch Gebärden möglich ist). Im Unterschied zum klassischen Poetry Slam, der musikalische Begleitung häufig dezidiert von seinen Regularien her ausschließt, ist im Internet Poetry Clip auch diese Dimension des Multimedialen anzutreffen. Ferner wird, durch die technischen Möglichkeiten des Mediums, der Text gelegentlich ganz oder zumindest in Auszügen mit ins ‚Bild‘ hineinprojiziert – sozusagen aus dem 'Off' digital eingeblendet. Und auch Geräusche können, ähnlich wie in einem Hörspiel und im Unterschied zum Poetry Slam, als klangliche Zitate aus der Außenwelt digital in den Poetry Clip hineinmontiert werden. Anders als eine Live Performance an einem Poetry Slam Event ist zudem der Internet Poetry Clip aus dem pragmati-

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<sup>1</sup> Keazor (2011).

<sup>2</sup> Vgl. Prange (2018: 105).

<sup>3</sup> Holzheimer (2014: 66-70). Durch die Möglichkeit, einen Slam zu filmen, entfällt das „Reproduktionsproblem“ für den Live-Auftritt als ‚Gesamtkunstwerk‘ ohnehin nur teilweise. Viele Aspekte eines Live-Auftritts, wie Umgebung des sichtbaren Aufführungsraumes, Gerüche, aber auch eventuelle Besonderheiten des gewählten Datums oder der Tageszeit etc., lassen sich filmisch nicht abbilden.



schen Kontext des Events herausgelöst. An die Stelle der „physischen Präsenz von Vortragendem beziehungsweise Vortragender und Publikum“<sup>4</sup> tritt im Internet die digitale Umgebung: die Plattform oder Webseite, auf der man den Video Clip anklicken kann, mit den dort enthaltenen Informationen im entsprechenden Design. Dabei fördert die Webseiten-Gestaltung oft gerade nicht die für die Rezeption gedruckter Lyrik so wichtige „deep attention“, sondern stimuliert mit ihren aufblinkenden Werbebannern und Angeboten zum Weiterklicken in Randspalten und als Popups eher eine Form von „hyper attention“, zielt also gerade nicht auf ein Vertiefen in die Lektüre oder einen „störungsfreien Konsum“.<sup>5</sup> Es handelt sich daher beim Internet Poetry Clip meist um eine bestimmte Form von Artefakt, das für die Kamera inszeniert und auf die Präsentation in wechselnden Webseiten-Designs hin konzipiert und für die orts- und zeitunabhängige Rezeption durch nicht vorhersehbare einzelne Internet-User in ganz verschiedenen soziokulturellen Umgebungen produziert wurde.

Die Texte von Internet Poetry Clips sind dabei, wie auch bei herkömmlichen Gedichten üblich, eher kurz: Clips haben – bei deutlich variierendem Vortragstempo – fast immer eine Länge zwischen einer und zehn Minuten.<sup>6</sup> Manchmal wird der inszenierte Text vorab, parallel oder später auch in einer gedruckten Fassung in einem Gedichtband, einer Zeitschrift oder auf einer Webseite veröffentlicht. Dies ist aber nicht immer so. Wie beim Rap, so gibt es auch beim Poetry Clip Künstler\*innen, die nicht erst einen schriftlichen Text verfassen und dann ihren Vortrag proben, sondern die den Text im Vortragen erarbeiten und niemals schriftlich fixieren (oder zumindest keine schriftlich fixierte Variante zur Publikation freigeben). Dies unterscheidet die im Poetry Clip erklingenden Texte also von Formaten wie etwa der Gedichtvertonung, z.B. im Kunstlied oder in der Kantate für liturgische Zwecke, bei der der schriftlich fixierte Gedichttext der musikalischen Bearbeitung zu späteren Aufführungszwecken vorausgeht.

Im Folgenden möchte ich einige weit verbreitete Merkmale von Internet Poetry Clips als neuem Hybrid-Genre identifizieren, anhand von drei Beispielanalysen mögliche Unterformen beschreiben und seine generische Verwandtschaft mit anderen künstlerischen und / oder medialen Formaten beleuchten. Dabei wird geprüft, welche Analyseinstrumente man aus den entsprechenden Fachrichtungen übernehmen kann. Hierzu bieten sich Musikvideo-Analyse (die selbst wiederum viele Anleihen bei der Filmanalyse gemacht hat), Gedichtanalyse sowie Dramenanalyse / Performanz-Theorie etc. an. Die Prüfung der bereits vorhandenen Analyseinstrumente wird deutlich machen, wo das neue Format

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<sup>4</sup> Novak (2017: 148). Vgl. auch den Performance-Begriff von Fischer-Lichte (2005).

<sup>5</sup> Orphal (2014: 142).

<sup>6</sup> Vgl. auch Böttcher / Hogeckamp (2005): „In der Regel sind Poetry Clips nicht länger als Popsongs.“

aber auch nach neuen, eigens für den Internet Poetry Clip entwickelten Beschreibungskategorien verlangt.<sup>7</sup>

*Von der Slam Poetry zum Internet Poetry Clip.*

*Entwicklungszusammenhänge und medial-generische Besonderheiten*

Internet Poetry Clips sind ein Produkt des „post-mechanischen“ (also digitalen) Zeitalters.<sup>8</sup> Sie können als mediale Weiterentwicklung durch Kreuzung aus Slam Poetry und ‚Poesiefilm‘<sup>9</sup> aufgefasst werden. Die Slam Poetry wird an so genannten Poetry Slams („interaktive[n] Performance-Wettbewerb[en] von Künstler\*innen mit ihren selbstgeschriebenen Texten“)<sup>10</sup> auf die Bühne gebracht. Wie für den Poetry Slam Auftritt, so ist es auch für den Internet Poetry Clip notwendige Bedingung, dass die vortragende Person selbst als Urheber\*in des vorgetragenen Textes verantwortlich zeichnet. Poetry Slam mit von anderen Personen als der vortragenden Künstlerin bzw. dem vortragenden Künstler verfassten Texten würde in der Szene als Affront und Regelwidrigkeit empfunden. Poetry Slam ist per definitionem keine pure Rezitation, eher eine der Dichterlesung verwandte Form, allerdings mit dem oder der Textproduzent\*in in einer etwas anderen Rolle:

Sie sind Dichter, Geschichtenerzähler, Soundpoeten, Lebenskünstler oder Performer. Beim Poetry Slam geht es also neben dem Vortragen selbstgeschriebener Texte vor allem um die Selbstinszenierung des vortragenden Slammers. Auf der Bühne erschafft er ein Bild von sich als Person, welches für das Publikum unheimlich wichtig ist, da es beim Poetry Slam von der Fülle an Auftritten und Informationen auch überfordert werden kann.<sup>11</sup>

Dieses inszenierte Selbstbild unterscheidet sich jedoch deutlich vom Bild einer Figur, wie es ein Schauspieler auf einer Bühne entwirft: Es handelt sich vielmehr um das Phänomen der „Performativität der Autorschaft“, das den Live Performances beim Poetry Slam eigen ist:

Vom Publikum wird eine *Performance* in der Regel allein durch die physische Anwesenheit der Erschafferin eines Textes, durch deren Körper er wieder neu hervorgebracht wird, als authentisch wahrgenommen – als die eigene Meinung / der eigene Ausdruck der vortragenden Person<sup>12</sup>

– mindestens jedoch als ihr eigenes Werk. Seit den 1990er Jahren hatte sich die Praxis des Poetry Slams international von einem subkulturellen Nischenphänomen in Kneipen und Hinterzimmern zu einem „feste[n] Bestandteil des [...]“

<sup>7</sup> Hille / Schönleber (2009: 47f.).

<sup>8</sup> Pfeiler (2010: 114).

<sup>9</sup> Dies., 112.

<sup>10</sup> Felis (2013: 7).

<sup>11</sup> Kanzler (2016).

<sup>12</sup> Novak (2017: 156).

Kulturbetriebs“ ausgewachsen.<sup>13</sup> Im Zeitalter der ‚Erlebnisgesellschaft‘ und damit einhergehend auch der „Eventisierung des Literaturbetriebs“<sup>14</sup> erwecken solche „Literatur-Events“<sup>15</sup> seit einigen Jahren regeres Interesse als die traditionelle Form einer Buchpublikation. Die Entwicklung ging von den USA aus und hat dort dieselben Wurzeln wie Beat, Rap und Hip-Hop: Seine ursprünglichen Träger entstammten den afro- und lateinamerikanischen Bevölkerungsminoritäten urbaner Zentren, die sich durch Performance in ihrer jeweiligen Teil-Öffentlichkeit mit für sie relevanten sozialen Themen, vor allem problemorientiert, auseinandersetzten. Doch wurde diese subkulturelle Praxisform bald schon begleitet, befördert und dadurch überlagert und mitgesteuert von einem (vornehmlich weißen), eher gebildeten Mittelklasse-Publikum. So entstand ein charakteristisches Ineinander von ‚high and low culture‘, von politischem Appell und ästhetischem Genuss, in dem das Konzept einer grundsätzlich für alle ‚offenen Bühne‘, auf der auch und gerade Widerständiges behandelt werden konnte, bei näherem Hinsehen nicht immer seinen proklamierten Ansprüchen genügte.<sup>16</sup>

Mit dem Fortschritt der technischen Entwicklung (d.h. der zunehmenden Verfügbarkeit von digitalen Aufzeichnungsgeräten) und der global gesteigerten Nutzung des Internets wurden diese Live-Auftritte der Slam Poet\*innen immer häufiger gefilmt und dann entweder auf der persönlichen Webseite der Spoken Word Artists oder der Veranstalter online gestellt oder auch auf Plattformen wie YouTube hochgeladen. Es bedurfte also nicht mehr unbedingt der modalen Transformation des ‚gesprochenen Wortes‘ in die Modalität der Schrift, um das ‚Artefakt‘ zu verbreiten.<sup>17</sup> Der Veranstaltungscharakter fiel dabei allerdings weg. Der Aspekt des Wettbewerbs (bei einem Poetry Slam treten gewöhnlich mehrere Künstler\*innen gegeneinander an und buhlen um die Gunst des Publikums) wird im Internet, auf eine andere Ebene verschoben, jedoch durchaus weitergeführt: Hier zählt nicht die unmittelbare Abstimmung durch Akklamation am Ende einer Session, sondern die eher abstrakte Bewertung durch Klicks, ‚likes‘ und gepostete Kommentare. Bisher wird das Format des Internet Poetry Clips eher als eine Sekundärkunstform gesehen: als „Fortsetzung“ der immer noch im Zentrum ihrer Selbstinszenierungen stehenden Live-„Bühnenperformance“, wobei der Clip den eigentlichen „Bühnenraum“ lediglich in „den virtuellen Raum erweiter[e]“. <sup>18</sup> Da Internet Poetry Clips als eigenes, neues Hybrid-Genre theoretisch noch nicht hinreichend beschrieben sind, fehlt bislang eine theoretische Reflexion auf diese relativ neue Kunstform sowie eine kritische und systematische Prüfung der zu ihrer Analyse nötigen Instrumentarien.

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<sup>13</sup> Kanzler (2016).

<sup>14</sup> Bers / Trilcke (2017: 9).

<sup>15</sup> Ditschke (2008: 169).

<sup>16</sup> Vgl. für diese gesamte Darstellung Felis (2013: 26-34), Baier (2012: 41-68), Novak (2017).

<sup>17</sup> Felis (2013: 30).

<sup>18</sup> Kanzler (2016).

Der zusätzlichen medialen Vermittlung durch ‚Filmung‘ und anschließende Verbreitung im Internet wird bei denjenigen Internet Poetry Clips, die auf Slam-Mitschnitte zurückgehen, ästhetisch oft kaum oder gar keine Aufmerksamkeit gewidmet. Viele dieser Clips scheinen mit nur sehr wenig ‚Post-Production‘ auszukommen. Durch den sparsamen Einsatz von filmischer ‚Montage‘ entsteht in diesen Fällen der Eindruck einer gewissen ‚zeitlichen Unmittelbarkeit‘: die Kamera scheint ‚in der diegetischen Welt verankert[...]‘<sup>19</sup> zu sein; der Mitschnitt wirkt wie ein nicht-fiktionales Bild-Ton-Dokument, durch dessen Rezeption die Internet-Nutzer\*innen ‚Zugang‘ zur zeitlich vorgelagerten Situation des Live-Auftritts bekommen. Dennoch ist ein Internet Poetry Clip, den man orts- und zeitunabhängig über das Internet anschauen kann, etwas ganz anderes als ein Live-Event, das man an einem konkreten Ort zu einem einmaligen Zeitpunkt besuchen kann. Die Wirkung von ‚Unmittelbarkeit‘, die von einem solchen Internet Poetry Clip dennoch ausgehen kann, wird jedoch durch genau beschreibbare filmische Mittel erzeugt, wie das folgende Beispiel zeigen wird.

*Aranya Johar: Gefilmte, dezent nachbearbeitete Bühnenperformance mit politischem Engagement*

Ein Beispiel für einen solchen äußerst dezent nachbearbeiteten Poetry Clip in der Optik eines Live-Mitschnitts ist das mittlerweile über 2,5 Millionen Mal auf YouTube geklickte Video „A Brown Girl’s Guide to Gender“ der indischen Studentin und Aktivistin Aranya Johar.<sup>20</sup> Wie bei einem Spielfilm wird der Clip gerahmt durch einen Vor- und Nachspann, bei dem in Schriftzügen die Namen der vortragenden Künstlerin, der Produktionsfirma und des Aufnahmeortes eingeblendet werden. Aus dem Off hört man bereits das Räuspern eines unsichtbaren Publikums, ehe mit einem harten Schnitt der Auftritt der Slammerin ohne Anmoderation direkt beginnt. Im Hintergrund hört man leise Gitarrenklänge. Die Kamera fokussiert die unmittelbar mit ihrem Vortrag beginnende junge, gepflegte Frau mit dem hellbraunen Hautton und langen, dunklen, offenen Haaren im Brustportrait halbseitlich von vorne. Die Sprache ist drastisch. Es geht um die Festschreibung von Weiblichkeit auf das, was Männern sexuelle Lust bereitet. Gesprochen wird aus der Perspektive einer Betroffenen. Das Personalpronomen ‚Ich‘ soll dabei offenkundig auf die Künstlerin selbst referieren. Die Markierung einer Rollenfiktion ist für mich nicht feststellbar.<sup>21</sup> Vielmehr beginnt der ‚Audiotext‘<sup>22</sup> mit der Erzählung einer sehr persönlichen Erfahrung der Sprecherin:

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<sup>19</sup> Kuhn (2013: 246).

<sup>20</sup> Johar (2017).

<sup>21</sup> Wie Novak (2017: 160) in einem solchen Fall von einer ‚Verwischung‘ der ‚Grenze zwischen der innerfiktionalen Welt ihres Textes und der Realität [...] im 21. Jahrhundert‘ zu sprechen, halte ich für eine lyriktheoretisch nicht begründete Verkomplizierung der Analyse-kategorien, da der vorgetragene Text offenkundig kein fiktionaler ist.

The first boy who held my hand told me ‘Boys don’t want to hear about vaginas bleeding.’ [...] vaginas only meant to be fucked, breasts only meant to be sucked, mouths only meant to blow.<sup>23</sup>

Wie in jeder Performance, so gibt es auch hier sehr viel mehr Codes zu entziffern als nur die ausgesprochenen Wörter. Für die “Live Poetry”, die auf Events wie Poetry Slams vorgetragen wird, gibt es beispielsweise ein recht elaboriertes Analyse-Raster, das – selbst wiederum in Übertragung und Anpassung von Kategorien aus der Theaterwissenschaft – die unterschiedlichen Dimensionen einer Lyrik-Performance systematisiert.<sup>24</sup> Danach soll zunächst das Event genauer beschrieben werden (“1. General information concerning the event”): Wann und an welchem Ort findet die Performance statt? Ist es ein Einzelauftritt (Format ‚Dichterlesung mit Wasserglas‘), ein Wettkampf, eine Poesie-Einlage in einem sonstigen Show-Format etc.? Handelt es sich um eine Reihe oder eine Einzelveranstaltung? Wer ist das Publikum? Was kann man zur Reihenfolge der präsentierten Stücke sagen? – All diese, für jede Live Performance zentralen, Informationen liegen für den Online Poetry Clip aber häufig gerade nicht vor. Eventuell geben eingblendete Texte im Vorspann oder Nachspann hierzu rudimentär Auskunft. Da der Poetry Clip die einzelne Gedichtperformance aber aus ihrem situativen Kontext löst und als vereinzelt Artefakt ins Internet stellt, ersetzt hier die Form der Webseite oder der Plattform den raumzeitlichen ‚Sitz‘ in der Wirklichkeit. Im Falle von Aranya Johars “A Brown Girl’s Guide to Gender” sieht man im Hintergrund ein Logo mit der Aufschrift “Unerase Poetry”. Dieses ist der Name, der sich via Twitter, Facebook und Google als Markenname einer Internet-“Platform for millennial poets” identifizieren lässt. Diese Plattform wurde 2016 von einem indischen Schüler und Kurzfilmemacher gegründet und macht es sich zur Aufgabe, “open mic events” (auf Deutsch: „Offene Bühne“, die unregulierte Variante des Poetry Slams) auszurichten und gleichzeitig auch Raum im Internet zu bieten, damit junge Wortkünstler\*innen der Geburtsjahrgänge um 2000 ihr Talent zeigen und durch Rückmeldungen aus dem Publikum weiterentwickeln können.<sup>25</sup> Die Clip-Unterschrift auf der YouTube-Seite liefert zudem die Information, dass der gefilmte Auftritt am 6. März 2017 an einer Veranstaltung namens “Tuning Fork” (auf Deutsch: „Stimmgabel“) stattgefunden habe. Was dies für ein Event-Format ist, steht nicht dabei und lässt sich im

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<sup>22</sup> Bernstein (1998: 12). Prange (2018: 107) möchte diesen Begriff nur für gesprochene Gedichte auf Audio-CDs reservieren und schlägt für Poetry Clips den etwas umständlichen Neologismus „Poetry-Clip-Text“ vor. Der Mehrwert dieser Unterscheidung wird jedoch nicht ersichtlich. Dass es sich bei einem gedruckten Gedicht, einem Vortrag dieses Gedichtes und einer Adaptation dieses Gedichtes in einem Poetry Clip um denselben Text „sozusagen in verschiedenen ‚Aggregatzuständen‘“ handle (ebd.), ist zwar sehr poetisch ausgedrückt, bringt aber ebenfalls keinen Mehrwert für die Analyse der entsprechenden Artefakte.

<sup>23</sup> Johar (2017: 0:07-0:18).

<sup>24</sup> Novak (2011: 234f.).

<sup>25</sup> Vgl. z.B. <https://www.instagram.com/unerasepoetry/> [16.04.2021].

Internet auch nicht ohne weiteres recherchieren. Der Poetry Clip ist mithin als ein von dem Live-Auftritt, auf dessen Mitschnitt er beruht, weitgehend losgelöstes, eigenes Artefakt zu betrachten.

Als zweite Analysekategorie für Live Poetry identifiziert Novak den Raum (“2. Performance space”): Handelt es sich um einen für Aufführungen gestalteten Raum oder um einen für die Performance zweckentfremdeten “borrowed space” (wie etwa eine Industriehalle, einen Schlachthof, eine ehemalige Raketenstation oder Ähnliches)? Wie ist der Raum strukturiert? Gibt es eine klare Aufteilung in Bühnenraum und Zuschauerraum? Wie sind Licht- und Tonverhältnisse?<sup>26</sup> Im Falle von Aranya Johars “A Brown Girl’s Guide to Gender” gibt auch diese zweite Analysekategorie nicht viel her: Zwar ist aufgrund von Nebengeräuschen, Applaus am Anfang und Ende des Clips und dem ausgeleuchteten kleinen Bühnenraum anzunehmen, dass es sich um ein vermutlich kleines, konventionelles Zimmertheater oder eine ähnliche Location handelt. Das Publikum scheint im Dunkeln vor der Bühne zu sitzen, auf der sich die Künstlerin produziert. Eine Interaktion zwischen Publikum und Künstlerin wird jedoch nicht gezeigt. Der situative Rahmen ‘Poetry Slam’ oder ‘Offene Bühne’ wird somit zwar vage aufgerufen, aber nicht weiter semantisiert.

Die dritte, in vier Untergruppen gegliederte Analysekategorie wird bei Novak “Poet’s performance” genannt und gliedert sich in die Dimensionen “3a. Information on the poet-performer”, “3b. Audiotext”, “3c. Body communication” und “3d. Relation of actual to fictive speech situation”.<sup>27</sup>

Für Aranya Johars “A Brown Girl’s Guide to Gender” ist dies eine zentrale Analysekategorie, in der sich allerdings auch die Grenzen der Übertragbarkeit eines solchen Analysemodells von Live Poetry auf Internet Poetry Clips zeigen: Eine beim Live-Auftritt wahrscheinlich erfolgende Anmoderation ist in diesem Clip weggeschnitten. Wer also Informationen zur Person der Künstlerin sucht, muss sich diese aktiv selbst recherchieren. Auf den ersten Blick fällt jedoch auf, dass schon allein ihre sichtbare und hörbare Erscheinung im Clip in direktem Bezug zum Audiotext stehen: Es geht um Frauenrechte im Schwellenland Indien, und die Sprecherin ist offenkundig von ihrer Biographie her (“age, gender, ethnicity”)<sup>28</sup> direkt von der Thematik betroffen. Diesen Eindruck unterstützen auch die „Körper-Sprache“ und der „Kleidungs-Code“, die man laut Bers und Trilcke bei jeder performanztheoretisch fundierten Analyse zu berücksichtigen habe:<sup>29</sup> Während sich die Slammerin gegen Sexualisierung ausspricht, ist ihr Oberteil

<sup>26</sup> Novak (2011: 234).

<sup>27</sup> Dies., 234f.

<sup>28</sup> Dies., 234.

<sup>29</sup> Bers / Trilcke (2017: 34). Der dritte dort genannte Kanal der Zeichenvermittlung ist die „Bild-Sprache als Handlung“. Diesem kommt auf Grund der Bühnenperformance aber in Aranya Johars Poetry Clip nur eine sehr kleine Rolle zu. In ‘Poetry Film’-artigen Clips dagegen wäre auch dieser Code sehr gründlich zu ‘lesen’ (vgl. das folgende Beispiel von Koleka Putuma).

tief dekolletiert. Hier inszeniert sich die Künstlerin also in offener Opposition zur – laut Audiotext – von ihrer Mutter empfohlenen Verhaltensweise, immer nur züchtige Kleidung zu tragen, damit ‚hinterher‘ (gemeint ist hier wahrscheinlich: nach einer sexuellen Belästigung oder gar Vergewaltigung) niemand sagen könne, ‚sie habe es ja so gewollt‘. Unterstrichen wird die Performance von vielen Gesten. Neben „Körper-Sprache“ und „Kleidungs-Code“ wäre aber auch dem Aspekt der Stimme eine nähere Betrachtung geschuldet. Der Tonfall der jungen Frau ist in diesem Fallbeispiel – entsprechend der für sie existentiell wichtigen Thematik – ganz offenkundig aufgeregt. Die Künstlerin lässt ihren Blick vor sich durch den Raum wandern, während sie spricht. Auch die Mimik ist intensiv. So entsteht der Eindruck, als richte eine Betroffene ihre Worte direkt an die im Publikum Sitzenden (obwohl es zu keinerlei echter ‚Interaktion‘ mit dem Publikum kommt). Die gesamte „Poet’s performance“ wirkt sehr engagiert, die Künstlerin spricht hier aus der Position einer offenkundig von Rassen- und Gender-Diskriminierung in Indien selbst Betroffenen. Hier – wie Novak es tut – von einer (aller Lyrik inhärenten) Aufspaltung in den empirischen „poet“ und die „persona“, die dieser auf der Bühne bei der Live Poetry spiele, auszugehen und die Sprechinstanz des Audiotextes per definitionem als einen „fictive speaker“ zu theoretisieren,<sup>30</sup> geht meiner Einschätzung nach an der direkten politischen Wirkabsicht von Poetry Clips wie Aranya Johars „A Brown Girl’s Guide to Gender“ vorbei: In solchen Clips wird die Rolle der Künstlerin nicht verdoppelt. Eine fiktionale Ebene (und sei sie auch nur als analytisches Hilfskonstrukt) ist hier für mich nicht sichtbar, sondern entsteht höchstens durch Theorietransfer aus anderen Disziplinen, deren Gegenstände anders gelagert sind und als Artefakte anders funktionieren. Ähnlich war in der literaturwissenschaftlichen Lyriktheorie die Begrifflichkeit des ‚lyrischen Ichs‘, das als fiktives Konstrukt immer und per se vom empirischen Autor zu unterscheiden sei, Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts durch eine Übertragung von dramenanalytischen Begriffen auf die Gattung der Lyrik entstanden.<sup>31</sup> Für das Theater machte die kategorische Trennung zwischen realer Person des Schauspielers und von ihr auf der Bühne verkörperter fiktiver Figur natürlich Sinn. Für die Lyrik war das Konzept des ‚lyrischen Ichs‘ dagegen phasenweise höchst umstritten.<sup>32</sup> Obwohl Poetry Clips dem Theater sicherlich näher stehen als gedruckte Gedichte, scheint mir die Rückübertragung der dramenanalytischen Begrifflichkeit hier dennoch problematisch: Engagierte Poetry Clips wie Aranya Johars Beitrag zu Gender, Ethnicity und Körperrnormen scheinen mir der politischen Rede näher zu stehen als einer Theateraufführung: Hier *spielt* niemand eine farbige indische junge Frau, sondern eine farbige indische junge Frau tritt *als sie selbst* auf (‘as herself’) und spricht in eigener Person, über eigene Erfahrungen und aus der Betroffenen-Perspektive.

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<sup>30</sup> Novak (2011: 235).

<sup>31</sup> Klimek (2018: 185f.).

<sup>32</sup> Vgl. etwa Hillebrandt / Klimek / Müller / Zymner (2019).

Novak spricht in einem solchen Fall von einem „Authentizitätseffekt“, den „die Lyrik-*Performance* durch ihre Körperlichkeit und Präsenz viel stärker nahelegt als das geschriebene Gedicht.“<sup>33</sup> In diesem Fall plädiert eine bewusst sexy gekleidete junge Frau dafür, junge Frauen nicht länger nur auf ihre sexuellen Reize zu reduzieren (der Gender-Aspekt) und andererseits Schönheit nicht vom Farbton der Haut abhängig zu machen (der Ethnicity-Aspekt). Für diese politische Botschaft tritt die Künstlerin durch die körperliche Performance auf der Bühne mit ihrer ganzen Person, ihrem Körper und dessen Geschichte ein. Ihr Auftritt ist kein Rollenspiel, sondern eine ernst gemeinte politische Anklage, die die ästhetischen Mittel in den Dienst des Engagements für die Sache stellt.

Natürlich ist auch diese Rede in eigener Person (,in persona propria‘) eine rhetorische Strategie: Der Video-Clip ist nur ein Teil von Aranya Johars multimedial realisierter Gesamt-Inszenierungsstrategie, zu der auch Interviews, ein eigener Blog, Fernsehauftritte in Talkshows und andere öffentlichkeitsbezogene Aktivitäten zählen. Wie in der aristotelischen Rhetorik, in der ein guter Redner nicht nur durch ‚logos‘ (das logische Argumentieren in seiner Rede) und ‚pathos‘ (das geschickte Erwecken von Emotionen bei seinen Zuhörern) überzeugt, sondern eben auch durch ‚ethos‘ (d.h. die Integrität seiner Person und seines ganzen bekannten Lebenswandels),<sup>34</sup> so wird in den Medienformaten auch hier das Bild einer Frau erzeugt, die eine Botschaft transportiert, die mit ihr selbst etwas zu tun hat, die sie selbst in ihrer sozio-politischen Reichweite existentiell betrifft. Es geht um die Emanzipation junger Frauen in Indien. Wie an der Aussprache zu hören, spricht die Künstlerin selbst indisches Englisch. Im Internet erreichte ihr Clip binnen zwei Tagen über 1 Million Klicks, wobei aus den Kommentarspalten zu entnehmen ist, dass vor allem junge Menschen ihrer ‚message‘ zustimmen.

Novaks vierte Analysekategorie „Audience“ kommt in diesem Clip – zumindest als Publikum der primären Poetry Performance – immerhin am Rande vor: Nach 18 Sekunden erfolgt der erste Schnitt. Die Kameraeinstellung ist noch gleich groß, der Blick der Kamera erfolgt aber nun frontal von vorne, während der Vortrag ungebremst weitergeht. Im Folgenden wechselt die Perspektive noch mehrmals, aber nie ruckartig, zwischen diesen beiden Kamera-Standpunkten, wobei sich in der frontalen Einstellung gelegentlich von der Seite her ein Kopf als dunkler Schemen ins Bild schiebt – der Eindruck, man sitze als Rezipient\*in mitten im Publikum, wird hierdurch auch für das sekundäre Publikum (die Nutzer an ihren Endgeräten mit Internetanschluss, die räumlich und zeitlich weit vom eigentlichen Ort der Performance sein können) verstärkt. Die Rezipient\*innen des Internet Poetry Clips können jedoch auf eine ganz andere Art aktiv werden und auf den Clip reagieren, als dies während eines Poetry Slams oder eines ‚open mic events‘ möglich wäre: Sie können unter dem Video ein ‚like‘ (,Daumen hoch‘) oder ‚dislike‘ (,Daumen runter‘) hinterlassen, einen Kommentar

<sup>33</sup> Novak (2017: 158).

<sup>34</sup> Robling (1994).



posten oder auf einen bestehenden Kommentar antworten. Im Falle von Aranya Johars “A Brown Girl’s Guide to Gender” ist diese Kommentarfunktion auch häufig genutzt worden: 2997 Kommentare (Stand: 27.07.2020) wurden bisher hinterlassen, mit jeweils bis zu knapp 1000 ‘likes’. Wie für solche Kommentarspalten in Internetforen üblich, haben sich aus einzelnen Posts durch Antworten ganze Unterhaltungen zwischen bei YouTube angemeldeten Usern ergeben. Liest man die Kommentare quer, so wird schnell deutlich, dass sie nicht auf die ästhetische Gemachtheit des Internet Poetry Clips reagieren. Sie alle diskutieren Aranya Johars politisches Statement, die Berechtigung der von ihr im Audiotext vertretenen Position und eine eventuelle Übertragbarkeit der für Indien beschriebenen Situation auf andere Schwellenländer und Industrienationen. Novaks postulierte kategorische Unterscheidung von empirischer Person und durch die Performance hergestellter „persona“ (im Audiotext als “fictive speaker” präsent) wirkt also für dieses Beispiel politisch engagierter Poetry unpassend.

Novaks für die “Poetry performance” erarbeitete Kategorien können nicht eins zu eins für die Analyse von Internet Poetry Clips übernommen werden. Die Schnitte im gewählten Beispiel sind sehr diskret und stellen die Nachbearbeitung der gefilmten Performance nie explizit in den Fokus der Aufmerksamkeit. Allerdings zeigt die Existenz solcher (unauffälligen) Schnitte und die Zuschauerlenkung durch die jeweils gewählte Kameraperspektive, dass es sich um ein Artefakt handelt, für dessen möglichst umfassende Beschreibung man über die Analyse-kategorien der “Lyric performance” hinaus weitere Anleihen bei Disziplinen machen muss, die sich mit ähnlichen Medienformaten beschäftigen, so etwa bei der Filmanalyse. Nach beendetem Vortrag spricht die Künstlerin noch einen Dank (“Thank you”) ins Mikrofon, lässt die Arme verschämt baumeln und bewegt sich seitlich in Richtung der ersten Sitzreihe, wie um die Bühne möglichst rasch zu räumen. Man sieht gerade noch, wie sich aus dem Publikum ein Mann – vermutlich der Moderator – erhebt und ihr entgegengeht. Dann erscheint auf dem Bildschirm ein kurzer Abspann mit eingeblendeten Produktionsangaben. Hier kommt also ganz am Rande Novaks fünfte und letzte Analyse-kategorie ins Spiel: “Other participants: – Role of MC in event – Role of producer in event” (hier besser: ‘in post-production’).<sup>35</sup> In diesem letztlich auf einer realen Poetry Performance beruhenden Poetry Clip ist die Rolle des Regisseurs und / oder Produzenten noch eine relativ zurückgenommene. Dennoch wird der Clip durch diesen Abspann klar als Produkt einer gemeinschaftlichen Arbeit ausgezeichnet, was das Bild einer emphatischen Autor\*innen-Persönlichkeit, die der Clip selbst in Bild und Ton inszeniert, dann doch wieder etwas relativiert.

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<sup>35</sup> Novak (2011: 235).

*Koleka Putuma: Aufwändig inszenierter, szenischer Kurzfilm mit politischem Engagement*

Der engagiert-politische Modus ist in den internationalen, zumal englischsprachigen Poetry Szenen sehr verbreitet. Zahlreiche (meist weibliche) Künstler\*innen treten als Betroffene in eigener Sache ans Mikrophon (oder vor die Kamera) und nutzen die mediale Bühne des Poetry Slams oder des Internets, um ihre jeweilige Botschaft in Umlauf zu bringen. Eine engagiert-politische, ebenfalls die Aspekte ‘Gender’, ‘Ethnicity’ und ‘Body’ betreffende Performance findet sich im Internet Poetry Clip “Water” der Südafrikanerin Koleka Putuma. Anders als Aranya Johar tritt Putuma aber auch als Autorin von Gedichten, die in Buchform erscheinen, hervor. “Water” ist allerdings zuerst als Poetry Clip (u.a. auf YouTube) 2016 veröffentlicht worden, ehe der Audiotext noch einmal in schriftliche Form überführt in Putumas Gedichtband “Collective Amnesia” (2017) erschien. Der auffälligste Unterschied zum oben analysierten Clip von Aranya Johar ist jedoch, dass Putumas Internet Poetry Clip keinen minimal nachbearbeiteten Mitschnitt einer Live Performance darstellt, sondern einen Poesiefilm, d.h. eine mündliche Performance eines lyrischen Gebildes, die für die Kamera szenisch inszeniert und an wechselnden Schauplätzen aufgenommen wurde, wobei bei dieser Dreh-Performance auch kein Publikum zugegen gewesen zu sein scheint.<sup>36</sup>

Auch dieser Poetry Clip beginnt mit einem kurzen Vorspann, der die Logos der Produktionsfirmen zeigt, während auf der Tonspur bereits das Rauschen von Wellen zu hören ist. Nach etwa fünf Sekunden erscheint eine Strandszene auf dem Bildschirm. Man sieht eine junge dunkelhäutige Frau halb von hinten, wie sie allein auf einem Felsen sitzt. Man hört Meeresrauschen. Ihr Blick ist von der Kamera weg in die Ferne gerichtet. Bereits an dieser Eröffnung merkt man, dass Novaks Analyseraster nicht greift: Da dem Poetry Clip kein Event zugrunde liegt, fällt Novaks erste Kategorie komplett aus. Stattdessen könnten sich die Internet-Zuschauer\*innen des Clips fragen, ob der Strand, den sie auf der Leinwand sehen, sich in Südafrika befindet, da es sich bei Koleka Putuma ja um eine südafrikanische Künstlerin handelt. Tatsache ist jedoch, dass es hierzu keine belastbaren Informationen gibt. Das genaue raumzeitliche Setting bleibt vage, wird – völlig anders als bei einer Bühnenperformance – lediglich in spielfilmhafter Form ‚vor Augen geführt‘ (‘showing’), nicht jedoch erklärt (‘telling’).

Nach 23 Sekunden dreht sich die Künstlerin im Clip plötzlich um und blickt kurz direkt in die Kamera, während rechts im freien Raum (am Übergang zwischen Wasser und Himmel) neben ihrem Gesicht ihr Name in Druckschrift eingeblendet wird. Dann erscheint dort der Gedichttitel, “Water”, woraufhin die Künstlerin, jetzt wieder den Blick in unbestimmte Ferne gerichtet, zu sprechen beginnt. Im Vergleich mit Aranya Johar ist ihr Vortragsstil ruhiger und eindringlicher. Auch sie adressiert in ihrer Rede jemanden direkt, doch wird hier – im Unterschied zu einem

<sup>36</sup> Zur Abgrenzung des Poesiefilms vom „Poetryvideo-Clip“, vgl. Orphal (2014: 31-33).

von einer Slam Session ausgehenden Clip – nicht der Eindruck erweckt, es sei außer ihr noch jemand am Strand anwesend oder sie richte sich direkt an ein Publikum. Die Referenz des Personalpronomens “you”, im linguistischen Sinne eines angesprochenen ‚Adressaten‘, ist also sehr viel unbestimmter, muss aus dem Audiotext heraus erschlossen werden und wird nicht durch die filmische Inszenierung als Adressierung des realen Publikums der Performance ersichtlich.

Kameraschnitte zeigen die erste Szene des Clips aus verschiedenen Blickwinkeln. Knapp eine Minute lang hält dieser spielfilmhafte ‚realistische‘ Modus an, ehe plötzlich die Stimme der Sprecherin durch Technikeinsatz verzerrt wird und verschiedene Bilder sich übereinanderlegen. Der Eindruck von etwas Gespenstischem entsteht. Einmal steht das Bild der Kamera sogar kurz auf dem Kopf. Inhaltlich korreliert diese ins Magische driftende Filmtechnik mit der Stelle, als die Sprecherin beginnt, von der alptraumhaften ‚kollektiven Erinnerung‘ an die untergegangenen Sklavenschiffe zu erzählen. Der Ozean wird nun vom reinen ‚Wasser‘ zu einem belebten Objekt mit mentalen Zuständen und Absichten:

the water, restless, wishes it could spew all of the slaves and ships onto shore,  
[...] our skin re-traumatizes the sea.<sup>37</sup>

Dann folgt auf der Textebene der Adressaten-Wechsel. Wurde bisher von einer ‚kollektiven Erinnerung‘ (“we”) gesprochen, so geht es nun nach der Erwähnung einer Gruppe Dritter (“They mock us /”) über zu einer direkten Anrede (“you”),<sup>38</sup> die eine Reihe von Anklagen formuliert und mit dem Erleben der eigenen Gruppe (“we”) kontrastiert. Der Ton wird litaneihaft und beschwörend, was auf der syntaktischen Ebene des Audiotextes durch anaphorische Wiederholungsstrukturen entsteht:

But we,  
we have come to be baptised here.  
We have come to stir the other world here.  
We have come to cleanse ourselves here.  
We have come to connect our living to the dead here.<sup>39</sup>

Im Bild beginnt nun eine Wanderung der barfüßigen Künstlerin im locker fallenden Sommerkleid entlang einer Mauer. Während die Kamera in der rechten Bildhälfte die tastende Hand in Groß und in der linken die gehende Künstlerin zeigt, verändert sich die Tonspur. Mit dem Thema der Religion kommt der Klang einer Kirchenglocke im Hintergrund dazu:

To beg God to save us from a war we never started.  
[...]  
Raise our hands so we don’t get shot.  
Raise our hands in church to pray for protection,

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<sup>37</sup> Putuma (2017: 96f.).

<sup>38</sup> Dies., 97.

<sup>39</sup> Ebd.

and we still get shot there, too,  
with our hands raised.<sup>40</sup>

Die Stimme kommt dabei aus dem Off. Die an der Mauer entlanggehende Künstlerin im Bild bewegt die Lippen dagegen nicht mehr, sondern blickt in dieser Kameraeinstellung vielmehr nachdenklich oder beobachtend auf die Mauer und auf ihre eigene Hand. So entsteht der Eindruck, man befinde sich als Zuschauer\*in direkt in ihrem Kopf: Der Audiotext wirkt wie ein innerer Monolog. Mit den Worten “with our hands raised” wechselt die Sprechweise zu einem eindringlichen Flüstern. Die Bilder werden mit einer weichen Überblendung verändert. Nun haben wir eine fixe Kameraeinstellung, die von oben auf der Orgeltribüne herab den Blick in ein Kirchenschiff Richtung Altar zeigt (ab 3:41), vor den eine Gestalt tritt und niederkniet. Die flüsternde Stimme klagt nun die “white people” an, ihr Volk nicht nur kolonialisiert, sondern auch ihrer eigenen Kultstätten beraubt zu haben (“rob us of our places of worship”). An dieser Stelle wechselt – mit der Kameraeinstellung – das Ziel der Kritik. Ging es bisher um den Gegensatz “we” (Farbige) – “you” / “they” (Weiße), so kommt nun die Kritik am Patriarchat dazu. Die christliche Religion, die mit den Kolonialisatoren nach Südafrika kam, wird mit diesem Patriarchat identifiziert. Die Kamera zeigt nun in einem harten Schnitt das Gesicht der Künstlerin, die die kniende Person ist. Die Stimme auf der Tonspur wird jetzt wieder ihren sich bewegenden Lippen als Quelle zugeordnet. Die Situation der vor dem Altar Knienden erinnert an ein Gebet, eine Zwiesprache mit Gott. Doch die Adressatinnen und Adressaten der Rede sind weiterhin “you” (die Weißen).

Him [i.e. God] and I have always had a complicated relationship.  
This blue-eyed and blond-haired Jesus I followed in Sunday school  
has had my kind bowing to a white and patriarchal heaven,  
bowing to a Christ, his son, and 12 disciples.  
For all we know, the disciples could have been queer,  
the Holy Trinity some weird, twisted love triangle,  
and the Holy Ghost transgender.  
But you will only choose to understand the scriptures that suit your agenda.  
You have taken the liberty to colonise the concept of God;  
gave God a gender, a skin colour,  
and a name in a language we had to whist our mouths around.

[...]

Because whoever wrote the Bible did not include us.<sup>41</sup>

Mit einem harten Cut wird als nächstes eine belebte Straßenszene gezeigt: Viele ‘persons of colour’ gehen an der Kamera vorbei, ohne direkt hineinzublicken. Es entsteht die Perspektive eines stillstehenden Beobachters. Der letzte Teil des Audiotextes thematisiert dazu die beiden Emotionen, die die Sprecherin dominieren: “grief and rage”<sup>42</sup>. Mit diesen Worten erfolgt ein neuer Schnitt. Noch immer

<sup>40</sup> Dies., 98.

<sup>41</sup> Dies., 98f.

<sup>42</sup> Dies., 99.

ist das Setting die Straßenszene im Sonnenschein, doch nun steht die Künstlerin mitten im Blickfeld und schaut direkt in die Kamera hinein, während sie spricht. Ein direkter Blick in die Kamera erzeugt für die Zuschauer\*innen immer den Eindruck, direkt angesprochen zu werden. „Trauer und Wut“ werden begründet durch die als Zumutung erlebte Aufforderung, den einstigen Unterdrückern “forgiveness” zu servieren, obwohl die Ungerechtigkeiten noch immer weitergehen:

Another one (who looks like me) died today.  
Another one (who looks like me) was murdered today.

May that be the conversation at the table  
and we can all thereafter wash this bitter meal with amnesia.

And go for a swim after that.  
Just for fun.  
Just for fun.<sup>43</sup>

Bei dem mit leichtem technischen Nachhall erklingenden Wort “amnesia” (6:08), das als Zitat aus dem Titel des gesamten Gedichtbandes die zentrale Stellung des Gedichtes “Water” unterstreicht, wechselt das Setting erneut zurück zu dem der Eingangsszene: ans Meer. Am Schluss steht die Künstlerin mit ihren Füßen im Wasser, man sieht Seegrass und wird somit an die “chaines” der Sklaven vom Gedichtanfang erinnert, ehe der Nachspann mit den eingeblendeten Credits beginnt. Da es sich nicht um einen relativ einfach gefilmten Live-Auftritt-Mitschnitt handelt, sondern um einen extra zu diesem Zweck konzipierten Poesiefilm, kommt Novaks fünfte Kategorie “Other participants”<sup>44</sup> (nicht an der Performance, sondern bei der Herstellung des Artefakts) eine größere Bedeutung zu. Aus der Beschreibung unter dem Poetry Clip geht hervor, dass “InZync” den Clip auf YouTube hochgeladen hat. Über eine Google-Recherche können sich interessierte Rezipient\*innen informieren, dass es sich bei “InZync” um eine studentische Initiative am English Department der Stellenbosch University in Südafrika handelt, deren Ziel es ist, regionale Lyrik in neuen Formaten zu promoten.<sup>45</sup> Die Beschreibung des “Official Videos” macht den Poetry Clip explizit als Produkt einer Gruppenarbeit sichtbar, indem es namentlich den ‘Director’ (José Cardoso) sowie den ‘Director of Photography’ (Allison Claire Hoskins) sowie die Produktionsfirma (InZync Poetry) nennt und den Rezipient\*innen die entsprechenden Links liefert, um sich bei Interesse mit “InZync”

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<sup>43</sup> Dies., 100.

<sup>44</sup> Novak (2011: 235).

<sup>45</sup> “InZync is a registered non-profit organisation dedicated to the expansion of multilingual and multimodal poetry platforms in the Cape region” (<https://www0.sun.ac.za/english/social-impact/inzync/> [16.04.2021]).

auf Facebook, Twitter oder Instagram zu vernetzen oder den YouTube-Kanal von “InZync” zu abonnieren.<sup>46</sup>

Putumas zentrale Themen sind “blackness, womxnhood [sic! S.K.] and history”<sup>47</sup>. Die autobiographische Inszenierung ihrer Lyrik steht denn auch im Zentrum der öffentlichen Wahrnehmung dieser Künstlerin: „Putuma, Jahrgang 1993, ist schwarz, weiblich und queer – und schreibt über ebendieses Lebensgefühl, als schwarze lesbische Frau noch immer marginalisiert zu sein in einer nach wie vor von Weißen dominierten Gesellschaft“, so heißt es beispielsweise in einer Besprechung des Gedichtbandes „Collective Amnesia“ in der NZZ.<sup>48</sup> Auch der Internet Poetry Clip “Water” inszeniert die Lyrikerin und Slammerin in genau dieser Rolle: Ihre Kleidung ist eher unauffällig als figurbetont, den heißen Temperaturen angemessen, aber in keiner Weise auf erotische Wirkung ausgerichtet. Ihre Frisur ist wild und eigenwillig. Auch ihr Körpergewicht liegt allem Anschein nach leicht über der von Hollywood verbreiteten Schlankheitsnorm. Mit ihrer ganzen Person unterstreicht Putuma in diesem Auftritt ihr politisches Anliegen von Stolz und Emanzipation. Dass dieses klar im Vordergrund der Performance und des Artefakts steht, zeigt auch ein Blick in die (im Verhältnis zu Aranya Johar um ein Vielfaches kürzere) Kommentarspalte unter dem Video auf YouTube. Diskutiert wird dort, neben knappen, meist positiven Geschmacksurteilen, ob eine südafrikanische Künstlerin, die offenbar ebenso wenig wie ihre Vorfahren von der transatlantischen Deportation farbiger Menschen als Sklaven im Zeitalter des Kolonialismus betroffen war, das Recht habe, über diese Thematik zu sprechen.<sup>49</sup> Offenbar wird die Thematik der Apartheid im postkolonialen Südafrika der Gegenwart problemlos akzeptiert, aber dort, wo Koleka Putuma sich von ihren eigenen Erfahrungen und den Erfahrungen ihrer eigenen Familie entfernt und die Sklaverei als solche anprangert, wird sie bereits wieder als zu wenig glaubhaft (da nur indirekt selbst betroffen) wahrgenommen.<sup>50</sup> Kommentare wie diese belegen, dass es eine für das Genre dominante Erwartungshaltung auf Seiten des Publikums gibt, aus der umgehend Sanktionen folgen, wenn jemand der rhetorischen Norm der Selbstbetroffenheit nicht ganz entspricht.

<sup>46</sup> Alles auf der YouTube Seite mit Koleka Putumas “Official Video: Water” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8dfq3C8GNrE> [03.06.2019].

<sup>47</sup> So der Klappentext von Putuma (2017).

<sup>48</sup> Kramatschek (2018).

<sup>49</sup> Vgl. den Kommentar von “changestrangers” (um 2018): “A South African poet, speaking about the Transatlantic Slave Trade that neither she nor her ancestors had any involvement in. Right.”

<sup>50</sup> Zum Vergleich: Bei Aranya Johar enthielten die Kommentarspalten auch viele abschätzige Äußerungen. Diese betrafen jedoch nicht grundsätzlich ihr Recht, über dieses Thema zu sprechen, sondern lediglich einzelne der von ihr vertretenen Positionen, die überwiegend inhaltlich-sachlich diskutiert wurden.

Sozialkritik, politisches Engagement, aber gelegentlich auch Religionskritik sind im internationalen Internet Poetry Clip gegenwärtig stark vertreten. Die Sujets variieren entsprechend der in der jeweiligen Kultur als dominant und ‚dringlich‘ wahrgenommenen Themen (z.B. Gender, Ethnicity und Body in postkolonialen Gesellschaften, Religion in traditionellen sozialen Strukturen, Ökologie in Industrienationen). Die multimediale Selbstinszenierung der performenden Künstler\*in steht dann im Dienst einer den ‚ethos‘-Aspekt betreffenden rhetorischen Überzeugungsstrategie: Nur wenn das öffentliche ‚Bild‘ der Person zu ihrer Botschaft passt, wird diese als stimmig und glaubhaft aufgenommen.

Doch soll hier durchaus nicht der Eindruck erweckt werden, das neue Hybridgenre bewege sich vollständig in den Funktionen jener Traditionen, aus denen seine Vorläufer Beat, Hip-Hop und Poetry Slam ursprünglich einmal erwachsen waren, nämlich die der populären Protest-Kulturen afro- und latino-amerikanischer Minderheiten in den USA. Längst hat sich neben der Tradition des engagierten Dichters, der sein Publikum für Missstände sensibilisieren will, auch die des weltabgewandten, vor allem selbstbezogenen, grüblerischen Dichters bzw. entsprechend der Dichterin auch im Feld des Poetry Slams und des Internet Poetry Clips etabliert. Allerdings scheint diese häufig selbstironische Tendenz zur Metaisierung<sup>51</sup> der dichterischen Selbstdarstellung in diesen Genres vor allem in Deutschland verbreitet zu sein und international momentan keine derart große Rolle zu spielen.

### *Sandra Da Vina: Sentimentale Selbstinszenierung versus ironische Metaisierung im deutschen Poetry Clip*

Um den Unterschied zu den auf Betroffenheit und politischem Engagement basierenden internationalen Poetry Clips zu demonstrieren, stelle ich im Folgenden einen Clip aus der deutschen Szene vor: Sandra Da Vinas „Ohne mich“. Sandra Da Vina gewann 2014 als erste Frau die NRW-Landesmeisterschaften im Poetry Slam. Die junge Deutsche, die inzwischen auch mit Buchpublikationen wie „Die Leiden der jungen Wörter“ (2016) hervorgetreten ist, verleugnet ihr abgeschlossenes Germanistikstudium in ihren künstlerischen Produktionen offenkundig nicht.

Ihr auf YouTube hochgeladener Internet Poetry Clip „Ohne mich“<sup>52</sup> beginnt mit rhythmischen Hintergrundgeräuschen und einem schwarzen Bildschirm ohne Vorspann, ehe (bei 0:07) unvermittelt und gleichzeitig Bild und Stimme aus dem Off einsetzen. Man sieht die Künstlerin auf einem Stuhl sitzen, einen Schreibblock auf den Knien, wie sie ihre Brille zurechtrückt. Der Text beginnt mit den Sätzen „Ich steh mir oft selbst im Weg. Manchmal liege oder sitze ich mir auch im Weg. Das ist sehr ärgerlich, denn sitzende oder liegende Menschen kann man

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<sup>51</sup> Vgl. Wolf (2007).

<sup>52</sup> Da Vina (2016).

nur schlecht zur Seite schupsen“ und erzeugt dadurch von vorne herein den Eindruck eines sprachwitzigen, aber auch nachdenklichen Monologs. Die interessierte, teils überrascht-verwunderte, starke Mimik der Frau mit dem Schreibblock auf den Knien macht deutlich, dass diese Person der sprechenden Frau zuhört. Es handelt sich offenbar um die parodistisch überspitzte Darstellung einer Konsultation bei einer Psychologin, wobei die Patientin nicht ins Bild kommt. Der Clip präsentiert nur ihre Stimme. Wer sich die Mühe macht, andere Präsentationen von Sandra da Vina zu googeln, wird aber unschwer erkennen, dass auch die Psychologin von ihr selbst gespielt wird. Es handelt sich also um eine ironische Rollenfiktion, bei der sich die empirische Künstlerin aufspaltet in einerseits Therapeutin (im Bild sichtbar) und andererseits Patientin (überwiegend bloß als Stimme akustisch präsent). So wird die Inszenierung einer authentischen Sprecherin ‚in persona propria‘, auf der die Internet Poetry Clips von Aranya Johar und Koleka Putuma aufbauten, als ästhetische Illusion entlarvt und somit gebrochen. Der Audiotext, der im Poetry Clip von Sandra Da Vina erklingt, ist nur eine Rollenrede. Ob er tatsächlich mit dem korreliert, was die empirische Künstlerin über ihr eigenes Innenleben sagen würde, bleibt durch die ästhetische Verfremdung in der Schweben. Der Poetry Clip verweigert sich einer referentialisierenden ‚Lesart‘, die bei Clips wie den beiden oben analysierten im Zentrum der gesamten Inszenierung stand.

Erst nachdem dieses Setting klar ist, folgt mit einem geheimnisvollen Piepton ein weiterer schwarzer Bildschirm, auf den dann Cliptitel und Künstlerin eingeblendet werden: ein in den Film hineinverschobener ‚Vorspann‘. Der schwarze Hintergrund wechselt zu einem weißen. Im Filmmodus der Handkamera, einer sehr wackeligen Kameraführung, die ohne Stativ gefilmt ist und die klar der Perspektive ‚einer Figur der Handlung zugeordnet‘ werden kann<sup>53</sup> – in diesem Fall der Sprecherin/Patientin – , wird nun der Gang durch eine Wohnung bildlich gezeigt, während die Stimme von ihrem morgendlichen Aufstehen berichtet. Man kann dies als Binnenerzählung verstehen: Während die Patientin noch immer bei ihrer Psychologin auf der Couch liegt und sich erinnert, zeigt die ‚visuelle Erzählinstanz‘<sup>54</sup> des Clips den Rezipient\*innen das, wovon diese versprachlichte Erinnerung handelt. Während die Geräusche auf der Tonspur im Hintergrund lauter, rhythmischer und psychodelischer werden, wird auch das von der Handkamera Gezeigte unrealistischer, z.T. mit Blaufilter farblich verändert, z.T. in kleinen, irritierenden Ausschnitten mit merkwürdigem Blickwinkel. So entsteht auf der filmischen Ebene der Eindruck der Wahrnehmungsperspektive eines Menschen mit psychischen Problemen, während die Stimme weiter über ihr schwieriges Verhältnis zu sich selbst und über ihre inneren Monologe spricht. Einmal erwähnt sie: ‚Ich sitze im Wäschekorb‘, was man für eine Metapher halten könnte, wenn die ‚visuelle Erzählinstanz‘ diese Aussage nicht bildlich über-

<sup>53</sup> Kuhn (2013: 246).

<sup>54</sup> Ders., 87.



nehmen würde: Eine junge Frau (erneut Sandra Da Vina) wird gezeigt, wie sie in einem Sammelbehälter für schmutzige Wäsche sitzt, den Deckel von unten leicht mit ihrem Kopf anhebt und herauschaut. Erneut wird die Situation bei der Psychologin vom Beginn des Films gezeigt, wie sie interessiert schaut und immer wieder Notizen auf ihrem Block macht, während die Stimme der unsichtbaren Patientin unaufhörlich weitermonologisiert. Ganz am Schluss werden anstelle eines Nachspans die wichtigsten Informationen über Kameramann, Idee, Musik, Copyright und Texturheberin auf Post-Its geschrieben abgefilmt – immer noch im nervös-schwankenden Modus der Handkamera. Die letzte Einstellung zeigt das Buch „Sag es in Leuchtbuchstaben“ von Sandra Da Vina, aus dem der Text für diesen Poetry Clip stammt. Der ganze Clip wird somit rückwirkend zu einem Sekundärkunstwerk zu Werbezwecken für das Buch der Autorin – oder bestenfalls noch zu einem Teil eines größeren Medienverbundsystems.<sup>55</sup>

Politisches Engagement ist hier genauso abwesend wie gesellschaftliches. Man könnte sich fragen, ob die Darstellung von psychischen Störungen vielleicht doch eine im weitesten Sinne ‚engagierte‘ Botschaft des Clips darstellen könnte, nach dem Motto aktueller Werbekampagnen, die Menschen auffordern, über ihre psychischen Probleme offener zu sprechen und diese zu enttabuisieren.<sup>56</sup> Ein Hinweis auf eine solche mögliche Wirkabsicht lässt sich im Clip aber nirgendwo finden. Die selbstironische Inszenierung und die Aufspaltung der persona der Künstlerin in einerseits Patientin (mit offenen Haaren, u.a. im Wäschekorb) und andererseits Psychologin (mit strenger Hochsteckfrisur und Brille) spricht aber wohl eher dagegen.

### Fazit

So vielfältig wie die medialen Besonderheiten der drei hier exemplarisch ausgewählten Internet Poetry Clips, so zahlreich müssten auch die wissenschaftlichen Analyseinstrumente sein, mit denen man solchen multimodalen und multimedialen neuen Hybridformaten beikommen könnte. Inhaltlich lassen sich *zwei Grundtypen der Künstlerinnen-Inszenierung* identifizieren: der einer Betroffenenperspektive, aus der der Poetry Clip als dezidiert politisch-engagiertes Statement erscheint, sowie der eines ästhetizistischen Spiels mit der Rolle des Dichters bzw. der Dichterin als Grübler\*in und Wortartist\*in. Zur ersten Gruppe gehören Aranya Johar und Koleka Putuma, zur zweiten Sandra Da Vina. Von Künstlerinnen der ersten Gruppe wird offenbar, so ging aus einer ersten Sichtung der Kommentarspalten hervor, eine Beschränkung auf Themen, mit denen sie aus eigener Betroffenheit vertraut sind, erwartet. Die Nutzung von ‘Social Media’ macht es darüber hinaus

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<sup>55</sup> Kurwinkel (2013: 1). Zum Konzept der Medienverbundsysteme.

<sup>56</sup> Auch im Internet präsent, beispielsweise unter <https://www.wie-gehts-dir.ch>.

möglich, „ein neues Publikum“ zu erreichen<sup>57</sup> und deren Aufmerksamkeit auf das (nicht selten politisch oder sozial motivierte) Engagement der Poetry Clip Künstlerinnen zu lenken. In diesem Fall erscheint die Rede von einem „fiktionalen“ Text lyrikologisch unangemessen. Sofern keine Signale für fiktionale Rollenrede vorliegen,<sup>58</sup> sind Texte wie die von Johar und Putuma nicht-fiktionale Lyrik. Ob die Internet Poetry Clips als Ganze, in denen diese Texte vorkommen, als fiktionale oder faktuale Artefakte zu klassifizieren sind, müsste dagegen in einer filmtheoretisch informierten Debatte geklärt werden.

Rein *formal* lassen sich Internet Poetry Clips unterscheiden in solche, die sich eher als (mehr oder weniger stark nachbearbeitete) Mitschnitte einer Live Performance präsentieren, und solche, die eine extra für den Film inszenierte, mit Spielfilm-Elementen durchsetzte Darbietung präsentieren. Unter den oben analysierten Beispielen zählen dann Koleka Putumas Clip „Water“ und Sandra Da Vinas „Ohne mich“ zur letzteren Gruppe, während Aranya Johars „A Brown Girl’s Guide to Gender“ zur ersteren Gruppe gehört. Für Internet Poetry Clips genügen die traditionellen Verfahren der Gedichtanalyse (Metrik, Rhetorik, Gedichtform) nicht, um die wichtigsten verstehensrelevanten Dimensionen der betreffenden Artefakte erfassen zu können. Je nach Format müssen diese Verfahren durch Instrumente aus der Film-, Videoclip-, Theater- und Live-Performance-Analyse ergänzt werden. Wie bei jedem Theorietransfer, so ist auch hier Umsicht geboten. Eventuell müssen Kategorien angepasst, Vorannahmen explizit gemacht und abweichende Produktions- und Distributionswege sowie unterschiedliche Rezeptionsgewohnheiten und Erwartungshaltungen, die sich aus dem Anschluss an andere Gattungen und Funktionsweisen ergeben, berücksichtigt werden. Der vorliegende Aufsatz kann hier nur exemplarisch einige Anregungen zu weiteren Forschungen bieten.

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<sup>57</sup> Vgl. Prange (2018: 123) in Bezug auf Nora Gomringer. Die These lässt sich jedoch auch verallgemeinern: Internet Poetry Clips auf Social Media Plattformen „forder[n] und förder[n] auf diesem Wege zugleich einen interaktiven Zugang zu[r] [...] Lyrik, der für den künftigen Umgang und die Auseinandersetzung mit (digitaler) zeitgenössischer Dichtung und Literatur im Allgemeinen wegweisend sein könnte.“

<sup>58</sup> Etwas anders liegt der Fall natürlich im von Novak (2017) analysierten Beispiel, bei dem Text „Skinhead“ (aus der Sicht eines weißen, männlichen Rassisten gesprochen) der farbigen Künstlerin Patricia Smith. Hier sind zwar die Sätze der Performance fiktional, die Intention des gesamten Auftritts ist jedoch trotzdem klar politisch engagiert: Durch die erkennbare Ironie gibt die Künstlerin deutlich zu erkennen, was ihre eigene Position ist.

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## **Internationale Zeitschrift für Kulturkomparatistik**

Band 2 (2021): *Contemporary Lyric Poetry in Transitions between Genres and Media*

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Smola, Klavdia: Political Video Poetry in Russia: Eco-Social Turn and Biopoetics. In: IZfK 2 (2021). 301-316.

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### **Political Video Poetry in Russia: Eco-Social Turn and Biopoetics**

In this article, I analyze the most recent Russian video poetry as an amplification and semantic enrichment of the classic literature paradigm. My thesis is that new visual poetry produces a subtle, polysemous – but at the same time striking – political message within a synthetic artistic framework. I show how recent Russian social (also to be called political) poetry is developing what I call the aesthetics of environmental non-division. I focus on the art collective “The Group of Esfir’ Shub,” which was founded in 2017 by the artist and designer Polina Zaslavskaia. The group’s synthetic method of working with poems generates a “tropic connection between the text and the video,” which correlates or even confronts direct and figurative sign meanings of different media with each other. “Esfir’ Shub” emphasizes one of the essential features of new social poetry – the problematization of corporeality as a phenomenon belonging to organic, living material, which affects the very character of subjectivity. The project “Esfir’ Shub” is situated on the border between visual eco-art and social poetry. What is more important, it represents new trends in Russian engaged aesthetics, which I call *biopoetics* – a notion which has been intensely discussed in the last two decades.

*Keywords: video poetry, Russia, biopoetics, biopolitics, social poetry, anthropocene*

In the years 2000-2010, a rapid development of technical devices created to engender a synthetic, but first of all visual, perception of literary texts can be observed in Russia. In 2016, the literary critic Mark Lipovetsky claimed:

Visuality [...] has not completely replaced verbal art but rather absorbed it. However, I believe that internet media underscore and ‘lay bare’ those features of poetic and dramaturgic texts that facilitate the political functioning of their form.<sup>1</sup>

To quote the term coined by the media theorist Marshall McLuhan, recent politically engaged Russian poetry uses medial “extension”<sup>2</sup> of lyrical text to transgress the boundaries of textuality. Yet, it often draws not only on cyber aesthetics,<sup>3</sup> but also on the older medium of *video poetry*, in order to convey political meaning.

In this article, I analyze the most recent video poetry as an amplification and semantic enrichment of the classic literature paradigm, which by no means causes a revolution of form, but rather makes already distinct trends in new poetry even more visible. It literally visualizes certain poetical devices and “lays them bare,” to seize Lipovetsky’s update of Viktor Shklovskii’s famous expression.<sup>4</sup> My thesis is that new visual poetry produces a subtle, polysemous – but at the same time striking – political message within a synthetic artistic framework. I will also show how recent Russian social (also to be called political) poetry<sup>5</sup> is elaborating on the legacy of the unofficial Soviet culture and literature and is at the same time developing what I call the aesthetics of *environmental non-division*. In this respect, my subject is the aesthetics of (bio-)politics in a multimedia artefact.

Visually enhanced poetry has increasingly been institutionalized in Russia over the last few years. As a result of its new popularity, the growing variety of its genres and the fact that video poetry contests have been organized in numerous cities, it has become the subject of a dozen of significant research works.<sup>6</sup> Among comparable Russian platforms, the “Piataia noga” (“Fifth leg”)<sup>7</sup> festival (2007-2016), curated by Andrei Rodionov and Ekaterina Troepol’skaia, was

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<sup>1</sup> Lipovetsky (2016).

<sup>2</sup> McLuhan (1964).

<sup>3</sup> Like, for example, the “101” festival of media poetry which has been held in Saint Petersburg since 2015: (<http://101.ru.com>).

<sup>4</sup> «Обнажение приема» (literally “strip of device”): cf. ШКЛОВСКИЙ (1925).

<sup>5</sup> The notions of ‘social poetry’ and ‘political poetry’ do not pretend to be exact designations of the literary phenomena I explore in this essay. Moreover, the terms cover a range of different styles, topics and authors of the 2000s and 2010s. Literary critics have nevertheless established these terms to analyze important trends of social and political engagement in recent Russian poetry (cf. the section “New Social Poetry” [«Новая социальная поэзия»] in the journal “New Literary Observer” [«Новое литературное обозрение»]; cf. also essays mentioned in footn. 30 and 32). Ecology, biopoetics, anthropocene and corporeality are but a few concepts that fall within this framework.

<sup>6</sup> About the history of video poetry in Russia, its single artists, artistic contests and different multimedia aesthetics cf.: Гольинко-Вольфсон (2012); Семьян / Смышляев (2017); Давыдов (2011); Родионов / Троепольская (2012); Даниленко / Федоров (2018); Пога (2018); Исаев (2015); Житенев (2010); Осипова (2019).

<sup>7</sup> All Russian translations are mine.

probably the best-known. The webpage *videonoga.ru*, which documents the competition, comments:

Video poetry is a synthetic genre that exposes the techniques of poetry and video art. It combines the work of contemporary film directors with that of contemporary poets. The format is short and ultra-short films.<sup>8</sup>

The videos that are featured at this and other festivals of media poetry are highly diverse, not always experimental and certainly not always political. It can be said that the technical media serve as a pool of possibilities, which themselves do not contain any ideological, aesthetic or even semantic implication; still, various messages, poetics or traditions can be revived or reinvented with their help. Within the “Piataia noga,” a strikingly large number of lyrical video-works process political content in an aesthetic way.

Among the poets, artists and groups who presented their video poetry at “Piataia noga,” I focus on the art collective “The Group of Esfir’ Shub” («Группа Эсфирь Шуб»). It was founded in 2017 by the artist and designer Polina Zaslavskaja:

Арт-группа «Эсфирь Шуб» родилась спонтанно – из необходимости как-то обозначить стихийно возникший интерес нескольких художников, поэтов и кинематографистов к созданию коллективных экспериментальных работ, сделанных на стыке современного искусства, поэзии и кинематографа.<sup>9</sup>

The art group came to life incidentally – out of the necessity to somehow indicate the spontaneous interest of several painters, poets and cinematographers in collectively creating experimental works of art at the intersection of modern art, poetry and cinematography.

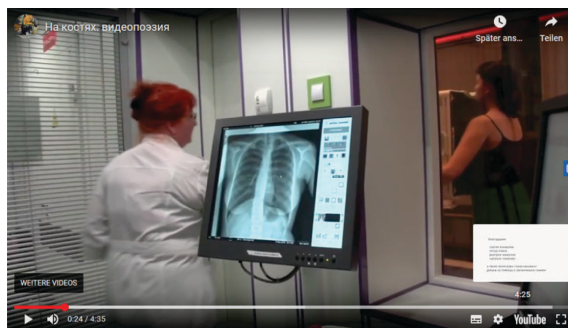
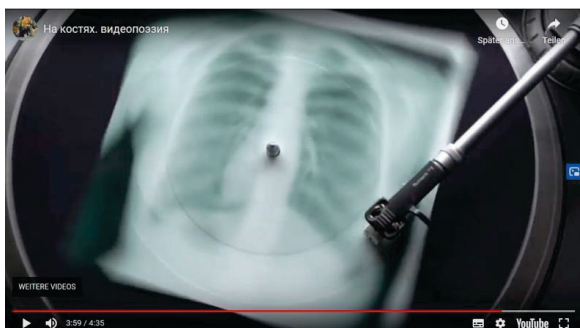
The group is named after Esfir’ Shub, the female director of early Soviet montage films, who pieced together old and partly neglected archive material from the time before the October revolution into a documentary film. She replaced material that could no longer be used with new scenes; in this way, she made compilation films like “The Great Road” («Великий путь», 1927) and “Nikolai II’s Russia and Lev Tolstoi” («Россия Николая и Лев Толстой», 1928). By referring to her in the title, the collective seemingly tries to reanimate the politically charged aesthetic experiment of the early Soviet era. Moreover, this reference may underline the female perspective and – as a result – gender agency, which is pronounced in all three videos of the collective: “Experience” («Опыт», 2017, with poems by Ida Börjel and Aleksandr Averbukh), “On the Bones” («На костях», 2016, with a poem by Galina Rymbu) and “Forgive Me, Soldier” («Прости меня солдат», 2016, with a poem by Viktor Lisin).

<sup>8</sup> «Видеопэзия – синтетический жанр, обнажающий приёмы поэзии и видео-арта, соединяя работу современного режиссёра и современного поэта. Формат – короткий и ультракороткий метр.» (О проекте. <http://videonoga.ru/about-us/>).

<sup>9</sup> Полина Заславская. Группа Эсфирь Шуб. (<https://polinazaslavskaya.wordpress.com/группа-эсфирь-шуб/>).

I will preface the analysis of the above-mentioned video works with a preliminary remark on the aesthetic appeal of “Esfir’ Shub”’s approach to multimedia art. The group’s synthetic method of working with poems generates a “tropic connection between the text and the video,”<sup>10</sup> which correlates or even confronts direct and figurative sign meanings of different media with each other. This is precisely the case when the concrete, material nature of visual images on one side, and the symbolic nature (i.e., the abstractness of a language sign) on the other side, both interact – thus creating new semantics.<sup>11</sup> In doing so, “Esfir’ Shub” emphasizes one of the essential features of new social poetry – the problematization of corporeality as a phenomenon belonging to organic, living material, which affects the very character of subjectivity. Could this be considered as a specific genre input of the visual “extension”? Perhaps. Pertaining to video poetry as a genre, Iulia Danilenko and Vasiliï Fedorov write about “new possibilities of semiotization of corporeality.”<sup>12</sup>

In the video “On the Bones” (authored by Polina Zaslavskaia, Konstantin Shavlovskii, Anton Gromov, Mikhail Zraichenko, and Sesil’ Gabeskiria),<sup>13</sup> Galina Rymbu reads her poem «мы двигались в тесноту возраста...» (“We Moved into the Narrowness of the Age...”):



*Video 1.*

In an interview with her English translator, Jonathan Brooks Platt, Galina Rymbu commented on her poetic and political language:

It can seem like the oppressed have a simple language, that we should employ a series of reductions to work with this language in order to be comprehensible as

<sup>10</sup> ЖИТЕНЕВ (2010: 79).

<sup>11</sup> Cf. the answer of the poet Pavel Arseniev’s to the question “Which of the creators of video poetry are close to you?” – “Those who are engaged in the film adaptation of the signifier, rather than arranging costume performances “based on motifs” (“Кто из создателей видеопозии вам близок?”) — «Те, кто занимается экранизацией означающего, а не устраивает ряженные постановки “по мотивам”»). (Лаборатория поэтического акционизма. Интервью «Московским новостям»; <https://poetryactionism.wordpress.com/2013/03/03/интервью-московским-новостям/>).

<sup>12</sup> Даниленко / Федоров (2018: 167).

<sup>13</sup> Полина Заславская. Группа Эсфирь Шуб.

(<https://polinazaslavskaya.wordpress.com/группа-эсфирь-шуб/>).



poets and artists. But there is no such thing as a simple language, just as there are no simple emotions. Here everything is even more complex – a real rat’s nest of complexity made up of the languages of violence, ideological pressures, propaganda, biopolitical manipulations, survivals of the past, fantasies, hopes, and even certain seeds of “emancipation” – meaning, partially violent concepts that provide an intuition of what might lead the “simple people” to freedom. In this sense, *the idea of “simple language” is really just a total syntactic, lexical, and discursive collapse, and it’s very hard to work with it, almost impossible.*<sup>14</sup>

The poem unfolds a complex poetics of corporeality with connotations that form a circle of death, destruction of the body and physical love. Here, physical life and organic material merge with objects and urban locations, which themselves turn into bodies and can therefore experience suffering. The earth is dug with the lover’s body («ВОТ ОНО ЗЕМЛЮ РОЕТ ТЕЛОМ ТВОИМ» / “it [the movement] is digging the earth with your body”); the hands that touch each other transform into nails («МЫ ВЗЯЛИСЬ ЗА РУКИ, НО ОНИ ПРЕВРАТИЛИСЬ В ГВОЗДИ» / “we held hands, but they turned into nails”); “the podium is woven out of blood vessels and eyeballs” («на кафедре, свитую из сосудов и глазных яблок»).<sup>15</sup> The line «ПИСЬМО ТЕМНЕЕТ, КАК НОГТИ ГОЛОДНЫХ» (“the letter darkens like the fingernails of the starving”) turns the writing itself into a performative, suffering, dying body. Before Rymbu begins to recite her poem on video, we see how an x-ray image is taken of a young woman’s skeleton at the hospital, then a spinning record of “music on bones” appears, and we see the poet herself sitting next to the record player and reading her text aloud. Throughout the video, we hear her reciting the poem. At the end of the video, one can spot how a man’s hands form a record out of x-ray images (one of the man’s fingers is half cut off). These episodes evoke the illegal distribution of prohibited music in the Soviet Union, and are reminiscent of the practice of underground resistance under a dictatorship. Famously, in the archives of the Soviet hospitals, there were old x-ray images that were of no use: images of broken hands, feet, ribs, skulls and hip bones – medical film material that was used in the Soviet-era practice of magnitizdat to record forbidden music.<sup>16</sup> In the video, an unexpected literalization, or an “archaeological” unfolding of the metaphor “music on bones” or “x-ray rock” is undertaken – i.e., an unfolding of the trope, which has become conventional in the niche of the underground and beyond, today a sort of cultural myth. The spectator experiences a “re-embodiment” of resistant, clandestine political and cultural activity here. The “insignificant” and “recycled” construction material (bones) – a biological, organic medium that was quasi *flattened* by the recording medium (disc) – are semantically brought to the surface and rethought. In this video poem, the traces of the damaged skeletons become the object of performative and aesthetic exploration. This shift – a kind of reversed movement, from cultural representation

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<sup>14</sup> Platt (2016). My italics.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted here and below from: РЫМБУ (эл. ресурс).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Glanc (2015).

(music) to the body (organic material) – turns poetry itself into a biopolitical event, where the memory of the Soviet underground is also reconceptualized. The word “underground” is no longer only a metaphor, since it “excavates” the bio-material and at the same time brings the soil and the body together in the poem: «ВОТ ОНО ЗЕМЛЮ РОЕТ ТЕЛОМ ТВОИМ» (“it is digging the earth with your body”). Cultural politics of repression and taboo in the Soviet Union blend with the remembrance of bygone corporeal life.

Biopolitics of extinction and destruction is the topic guiding the works of the “Esfir’ Shub” group. In a further video, authored by Polina Zaslavskaja, Konstantin Shavlovskii and Mariia Shchadrina, the young poet Viktor Lisin reads his poem «Прости меня солдат» (“Forgive Me, Soldier”). We only hear the poet’s voice; we do not see him.



Video 2.

In 2014, Lisin was named on the longlist of the Arkady Dragomoshchenko Prize; on this occasion, the poet and literary critic Evgenii Proshchin wrote about Lisin’s poetry:

Очень часто за основу берется некий природный, как кажется, феномен, но в пределах текста он живет двойной жизнью, функционирует по закону сложно устроенной метафоры, инверсированной от внутреннего к внешнему. Эта перемена слагаемых позволяет говорить и об учете традиции метареализма с его сложным механизмом *«мерцания» культурного в природном как художественной онтологии объекта*. [...] Иными словами, дело не только и не столько в интериоризации или, наоборот, объективации, но совмещении этих, обычно противоположных друг другу процессов [...].<sup>17</sup>

Very frequently, for the basis a seemingly natural phenomenon is taken, however within the boundaries of text it lives a double life and functions according to the laws of a complex metaphor that is inverted from the interior to the exterior. This change of the components allows us to speak of a complex mechanism, when *the cultural is “glimmering” in the natural as an artistic ontology of the object*. In other words, it is not so much about the internalisation or externalisation, but rather about merging both otherwise opposing processes.

<sup>17</sup> Прошин (2014). My italics.

In the video, meatballs are fried in a pan. However, they do not visually change during the video: they are being fried, but remain raw. Thus, the moment at which the real substance of meat is still visible is prolonged: meat is the body and the blood. The meat balls are labelled with scraps of paper featuring single lines of the poem we hear: «солдат встал и ушел в насекомое» (“the soldier got up and left into an insect”), «сидели за столом солдаты медали их» (“the soldier’s medals sat around the table”), «ревели насекомое старело» (“the ageing insect they roared”), «Из Николая смотрит Анатолий» (“out of Nicolai, Anatolii is looking out”), «взгляд коровы перед сном» (“the look of the cow before it falls asleep”), «убежала» (“it ran away”). And this again, as in the video with Galina Rymbu, creates a spatial, non-textual contiguity between the organic and the text, which is about mutilation, consumption of the body and death. This war poem was written in 2014, at the beginning of the war in Ukraine. The suggested formula ‘flesh=meat’ refers to the animal and human body – it is ‘processed’ – utilized by war and by the food industry. Visually, the poem’s text is also dismembered and fragmented into individual lines. The intertwined tropes of the living and the inanimate, of the organic and the object, which constitute Lisin’s text, are transferred into one relatively static visual image. This image becomes nothing but a literal ‘realization’ of these tropes: The meat remains raw, yet the lines on the pieces of paper are folded and erased. *The ‘body’ of the text is thus transient, mortal and spatially merged with the food.*

In Lisin’s poetical ontology, a human being, an insect, medals, light, a dog, a cow and water are identified and they are changing places – the soldier transforms into an insect and flies to his family; the cow stares at the water and the tree; the horse kills its owner so that he doesn’t have to suffer anymore; out of the soldier’s torso, the missing limbs regrow in spring; the plant eats the cow. Lisin does not use commas or full stops, and through this the words, syntactical items and sentences all melt into one – just like plants, animals and humans. Proshchin speaks of the “flickering of the cultural in the natural”<sup>18</sup> in Lisin’s poetry. In this poem, the semantics are supplemented by the fact that the machine, the animal and the human are utterly and tragically equated: the objects we are accustomed to in every-day life become the subject of action. And all this in a poem about war: «Растение в огороде ест корову» (“the plant in the garden eats the cow”) and «и танк чистит ружье» (“and the tank cleans the gun”).

In the past few years, many significant Russian poets have alluded to the image of living meat/flesh, where the meat industry and human death are direct neighbors or metonymically adjacent identities. The pseudonym of the social poet Elena Mikhailik – «молчаливая тварь антрекот» (“the taciturn beast entrecôte”) – is a reinterpretation of a line of poetry by Mikhail Svetlov: “entrecôte – the taciturn beast.” Mikhailik reminds the reader of the dead (silent, taciturn) animal that

<sup>18</sup> See footnote 17.

becomes a meat dish. Very similar to Lisin's text is the imagery of Iulii Gugolev's poem «Всякий раз пытаюсь рассмеяться...» ("Every Time I Try to Laugh..."):

Мама просит прокрутить ей мясо,  
жарить собирается котлеты. [...]

Жир скворчит, скворчит на сковородке,  
в нём котлет безропотные тушки. [...]

Эх, вы мои трупы-трупы-трупики.  
В животах всё бинтики да трубки.  
На котлетах ромбики да кубики.  
Капельки воды на мясорубке.<sup>19</sup>

Mom asks to mince the meat for her,  
She wants to fry the meat balls [...]

The fat is sizzling, sizzling in the frying pan,  
In it are cutlet small corpses that do not complain [...]

Oh, my dearest corpses, corpses, tiny corpses.  
In the bellies nothing but bandages and tubes.  
On the outlets all rhombuses and cubes.  
Droplets of water on the meat grinder.

When discussing the results of the festival «Пятая нога» in 2017, Dmitrii Kuz'min noted that a large number of works submitted for the competition were "about soldiers," including the ones dealing with the topic of death.<sup>20</sup> In his recent article, Kirill Korchagin connects "cinematic optics" in avant-garde poetry of the First World War with the emergence of montage techniques, "which in a sense also dismembers the sequence of images similar to how new methods of mass destruction dismember the bodies, constantly subjecting them to various painful modifications."<sup>21</sup> This is where Korchagin analyzes the development of such film optics and the striking presence of severed bodies in contemporary Russian poetry as well. In our case, both videos work with the performative exploration of tropes such as "cannon fodder" and "music on the bones," i.e., with the given cultural, symbolic transformation of concrete, object-like meanings in the language. The multi-media artefacts make literal meanings of some seminal word signs 'clash' with their metaphorical metamorphosis in order to *lay bare 'buried,' forgotten or blurred corporeal semantics*. As Stephanie Sandler phrased it concerning the genre of video poetry in general: "materiality and the inner form [of words] come to the forefront," whereas "words themselves become visual objects."<sup>22</sup> The poetical

<sup>19</sup> Гуголев (2020).

<sup>20</sup> Фанайлова (2017).

<sup>21</sup> Корчагин (2019: 241).

<sup>22</sup> Сандлер (2013: 156).

work with language and visuality becomes political by transferring complex associative chains in poems onto one or several simple, even allegorical, image situations and objects (a young woman's skeleton, a spinning record, meat balls in the pan). The video amplifies and reinforces the performativity of the poetry, but also reduces the complexity of the poetical texture. Moreover, the videos medially expand what is already characteristic of both poems: their focus on the environment and objects as an emotional unity with the text.

“Esfir’ Shub”’s first and longest video, «Опыт» (“Experience,” authored by Anastasiia Braiko, Anastasiia Veber, Polina Zaslavskaiia and Konstantin Shavlovskii), consists of two lyrical parts. In the first, we hear the Swedish poet Ida Börjel read from her book “Ma,” with the Russian translation by Nadezhda Voinova and Alesha Prokop’ev in the subtitles. In the second, Aleksandr Averbukh’s voice recites fragments of his lyrical cycle «Временные, но исправимые неудачи» (“Temporary but Reparable Calamities”). The texts are accompanied chiefly by a video recording, «Движение крови» (“Blood Movement”), made in 1970 by the Institute of Experimental Medicine in Petersburg, and a piece of music, “Deta,” by the experimental Petersburg musician Kluge. Börjel’s reading of the poem begins after the famous black and white video of the crashing, flaming zeppelin. Afterward, an enlarged image appears of a pulsating heart and blood vessels through which blood flows.

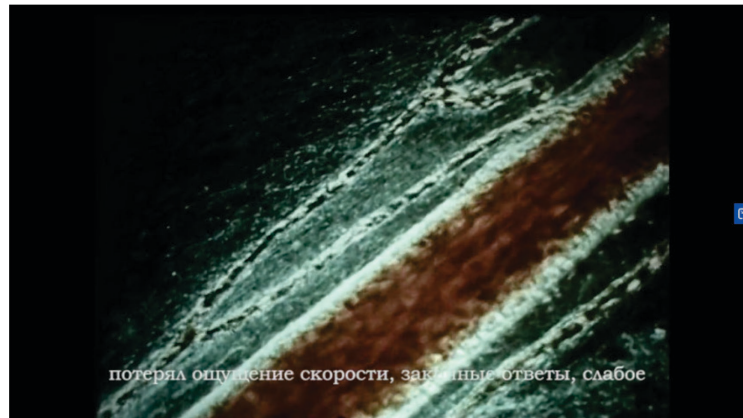
Из Пангеи – Лавразия  
 Ма всё распалось на части  
 Пангея была  
 И Гондвана отошла от Пангеи  
 вселенная раздвинулась  
 условная  
 пустота, замкнутая  
 во времени, ввинченное в  
 человеческую меру одиночество  
 землі, пустота, сиротливое  
 одинокое безумие земли  
 время, человеческая цивилизация антропоцен<sup>23</sup>

from Pangaea Laurasia  
 Ma all was broken into pieces  
 Pangea was  
 and Gondwana was broken from Pangaea  
 the universe expands  
 the conditional  
 void, locked  
 in time, twisted in  
 the human measurement earth’s  
 loneliness, emptiness, earth’s

<sup>23</sup> Бёржел (2017).

abandoned lonely lunacy  
time, the human era

the anthropocene<sup>24</sup>



*Video 3.*

Börjel’s apocalyptic poetry stages the view from space. Her reading aloud – monotonous, enraptured, sometimes quiet, sometimes whispering – is reminiscent of shamanic speech or the encrypted prophecies of a Cassandra. In an interview with Galina Rymbu, translator Nadezhda Voinova talked about Börjel’s verse novel, the fragments of which are read in the video:

Это такая энциклопедия катастроф от сотворения мира до наших дней. [...] Само название «Ма» — многозначно. Это и японский иероглиф, означающий негативную пустоту [...]. И имя древней каппадокийской богини, требующей кровавых человеческих жертв [...]. «Ма» — это одновременно и космогония, начинающаяся с движения земных пластов, и политическая история недалёкого прошлого [...] — от [...] аварии на АЭС в Фукусиме до современной работорговли и сирийских детей, поставленных живым щитом вокруг танков.<sup>25</sup>

This is a kind of encyclopedia of catastrophes from the creation of the world to the present. Even the title “Ma” is ambiguous: It is a Japanese hieroglyph that denotes a negative emptiness [...]. And also the name of an ancient Cappadocian goddess who demanded human blood sacrifices. [...] “Ma” is at once the cosmogony that begins with the movement of the earth’s layers, and political history of the recent past and present [...] – from the accident of the nuclear power plant in Fukushima to the contemporary slave trade and the Syrian children who are placed around the tanks like a living shield.

In “Experience,” the image of blood flowing through vessels and veins, magnified several times, is transformed into an almost earthly landscape with rivers crossing, flowing into each other or branching off. Brown, black or grey colors, and also the past tense, which is continuously used throughout the text (распалось, была, отошла), convey the finished state of the catastrophe. Through this parallelization of the microscopically small within the human body on the one hand, and the macro world (geography and cosmos) on the other hand, the otherwise imperceptible – because so immense – differences in the dimensions of existence

<sup>24</sup> Börjel (s.a.).

<sup>25</sup> Рымбу (2019).

disappear. At the same time, the poem mourns the lost unity of Pangaea and “orchestrates” a series of semantic and acoustic equivalences between the existence of the earth, man, animals and plants:

матрица в отливочной форме  
в материнском звере материнское древо  
бабочки были  
тяжелая вода<sup>26</sup>

in the mould the matrix  
in the mother animal mother tree  
butterflies were, heavy water<sup>27</sup>

As in the other two video texts, yet different, «эхо-камеры» (“echo chambers”) are created here between diverse types and stages of life. The boundaries between organic life forms are blurred, with the inanimate (earth, stone, water) also becoming part of this life. Here, too, images of war and death appear, which, as it were, continue the leading metaphor of separation and secession, and transfer it from the cosmogonic to social reality:

сирийские соединения знали, как поднять  
боеготовность использовали  
человеческие щиты и расставляли  
детей вокруг танка чтобы не  
расстреливали в упор<sup>28</sup>

the Syrian troop’s human shields  
a fine wreath of children  
clinging to the tanks to not  
be shot into the head<sup>29</sup>

The video shows connections invisible to the human eye: the Anthropocene manifests itself in the globality of the fragile.

A lot has been written about the dispersion and plurality of the subject in social poetry of the 2010s.<sup>30</sup> This subject frequently gives up the center of poetic speech in favor of the objective and the natural environment’s ‘voices.’ This lyric can be (inexactly) designated as poetry of the Anthropocene, vegetarianism, or

<sup>26</sup> Полина Заславская. Группа Эсфирь Шуб.

(<https://polinazaslavskaya.wordpress.com/группа-эсфирь-шуб/>).

<sup>27</sup> Börjel (2018). In the Russian translation, the number of lines does not correspond to the Swedish original and its English translation, since the third line has been broken, creating two new lines.

<sup>28</sup> Ида Бёржел «Ма.» Полина Заславская. Группа Эсфирь Шуб.

(<https://polinazaslavskaya.wordpress.com/группа-эсфирь-шуб/>).

<sup>29</sup> Börjel (s.a.). In the Russian translation, the number of lines does not correspond to the Swedish original and its English translation.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. for example: Кузьмин (2002); Корчагин (2013).

pacifism. In the case of poems that emphasize the subject of gender, the difference between male and female is often also blurred, or simply no longer existent. It is the poetry of fusion, or, in other words, of transformation. These tendencies have been reflected on in several articles: Aleksandr Zhitenev observes “becoming-thing and reduction of subjectivity” as well as constant changeability of the subject in poetry in the 2000s and 2010s.<sup>31</sup> At a recent roundtable discussion organized by the «Знамя» (“Banner”) magazine on the topic of “Sociality in Literature: A New Turn?,” Vitalii Lekhtsier observed that social poetry had substantially changed by the mid-2010s: “[...] the figure of the poet as a political subject is giving way to new – object-oriented – pursuits in writing.”<sup>32</sup> In recent years, there has also been an increased scholarly interest in the phenomenon of amalgamation and/or inversion of the subject and object in Russian poetry.<sup>33</sup>

“The novel pragma-/eco-/media poetics”<sup>34</sup> of Russian political poetry, which for several years has been manifested and analyzed in, among others, the «Транслит» (“Translit”) journal,<sup>35</sup> obtains an additional dimension in video poetry. It engenders a new, *environmental political mediality*, which “Translit” theorists and poets call “symmetrical anthropology,” following Bruno Latour and Donna Haraway – theoreticians who are widely-read and vividly discussed in Russian intellectual milieus of the 2000s and 2010s: «[...] после долгого спора между внутренним устройством и внешними факторами литературы заключается экологическое перемирие» (“[...] after a long dispute between the internal realm and external factors of literature, an environmental truce is put in place”).<sup>36</sup> Indeed, a paradigm shift in poetic thinking, as well as in thinking *by means* of poetry, is directly related to similar trends in philosophy, the arts and research. Moreover, poetry has been strongly nourished by disciplines that benefit from synergetic effects of different areas of knowledge (such as biology, cultural anthropology, literary studies and medicine) in the last decades. When I speak of a biopoetics of new Russian poetry, I mean the above-mentioned literary poetics of fusion, of the subject-becoming of the non-human and of animation. At the same time, this term evokes the hybrid (semi-)science called biopoetics of the last 30 or so years, which has been working on very heterogeneous discourses on the line of encounter between the humanities and natural sciences.<sup>37</sup> Interestingly, the Russian philosopher Mikhail Epstein puts forward the notion of “bio-

<sup>31</sup> Житенев (2019: 96).

<sup>32</sup> Лехциер (2019).

<sup>33</sup> Liudmila Zubova offers a masterful linguistic analysis of cases of such inversions – on the grammar and syntax level – in poetry of the second half of the 20th century: Зубова (2018).

<sup>34</sup> Арсеньев (2018: 3).

<sup>35</sup> Cf. in particular: Арсеньев (2018: 3-6).

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>37</sup> On biopoetics in literary studies see Cooke (2001: 1-8).



poetics,”<sup>38</sup> which he lists alongside “cosmo-poetics” and “techno-poetics.” However, Epstein rather conventionally places the human individual at the center of “poetic” transformation of the world. In the same year (2016), the book “Biopoetics Towards an Existential Ecology” by the philosopher and Andreas Weber’s was published, which asserts:

Meaning, feeling and expression – the experience of inwardness – matter most in human existence. The perspective of biopoetics shows that this experience is shared by all organisms. Being alive means to exist through relations that have existential concern, and to express these dimensions through the body and its gestures. All life takes place within one poetic space which is shared between all beings [...].<sup>39</sup>

Although Weber first used the term ‘biopoetics’ in the title of a major study only a few years ago, he has been researching and popularizing the phenomenon for a decade and a half. In Russia, especially since the 2010s, the number of art projects which analytically re-use designations of biology (such as bioArt), the Anthropocene and ecology in aesthetic actions has grown strongly.<sup>40</sup> Compared to both Russian visual art and non-artistic activism since 2000, ecological reflection in Russian poetry remains conspicuously rare. But even in this niche status, environmental topics and what we might call anthropocene poetics have nevertheless managed to account for some of the most striking elements of this period’s socio-poetical agenda. In other words, ecology has become a seminal trope in performing contemporary crises of subject, policy, body and gender.

The project “Esfir’ Shub” is situated on the border between visual eco-art and social poetry. Here, ecology, war, the Anthropocene and hunger are *inscribed into the human, animal, plant or object body of the literary text* and are at the same time indexically present in the video. From this perspective, eco-social (video-) literature *no longer represents, but rather presents, materiality, and thus becomes its medium*. In this way, artefacts virtually become signifier and signified of the new global political message. In a broader sense, this art project realizes the transfer “from biopolitics to biopoetics,” which Julieta Yelin describes as an intervention in the dominant (also literary) modes of representation of power over life:

The work we envision as biopoetics, whether materialized in literary writings or in critiques, could be identified with what Foucault called “counter-conducts”: forms of resistance to biopolitical regulation that guide the search for unique ways to lead one’s life. [...] Biopoetics [...] consid[er] all artistic work as an exploration of the links between the human and the animal or, in other words, as an investigation of the living away from the classifications imposed by the anthropocentric discourses. It is an investigation based on the premise that the artist is not a subject that has been superimposed onto its animal condition but rather an animal that is capable of creating, in spite of the process of humanization which is always disci-

<sup>38</sup> Эпштейн (2016: 382).

<sup>39</sup> Weber (2016; cf. the text included in the annotation).

<sup>40</sup> Cf. over ten exhibitions on the Anthropocene and ecology that took place in Moscow in 2019: Афиша (2019).

plining – naming, individualizing, organizing hierarchies – their particular way of life. [...] In this sense, Biopoetics represents the conscious or unconscious strategies of resistance to the knowledge that a society has about life.<sup>41</sup>

Undoubtedly, neither these object-like poetics nor video poetics are quite new. These traditions go back to the American objectivism of the 1920s and 1930s, or to the concrete poetry of the Soviet underground of the 1950s-1970s (as acted for example by the members of the legendary Lianozovo group Vsevolod Nekrasov, Genrikh Sapgir or Ian Satunovskii). Video-poetic experiments in Russian, but also Czech and Polish, underground culture of the Communist era may certainly also serve as a multi-media pretext and inspiration for recent socially engaged visual poetry. Today, these traditions are being updated and applied to the current social and political reality, as well as revived within a new political agenda. The poetry of Galina Rymbu, Viktor Lisin, Oksana Vasiakina and Elena Mikhailik reinvents performativity, which becomes a hallmark of posthumanism.

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<sup>41</sup> Yelin (2018).

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### **A Trajectory of Billboard Poetry in America: From “Burma-Shave”-Roadside Advertisement to “Three Billboards outside Ebbing, Missouri”<sup>1</sup>**

This essay applies a Cultural Studies-approach to the multi-faceted relationship between poetry and advertisement as it emerged in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the United States and as it became visible on billboards by the roadside. Somewhat paradoxically, public poetry in advertising appeared all across the United States (predominantly along highways in rural areas) around the time that much of modernist American poetry was being declared a highly elitist and urban centric affair in the orbit of new criticism-scholarship at universities. My first case study addresses the iconic Burma-Shave Billboard Poetry Campaign (1929-1963) and its long-lasting influence on American (popular) culture – in literature, music, visual art. Prior to this campaign as well as on the heels of it, billboards and billboard poetry were taken up to a minor extent in poetry circles and literary criticism (where they continued to be mostly viewed with disdain) and to a larger extent by conceptual artists who used billboard aesthetics, slogans, and short (poetic) texts in installations mimicking and critiquing consumer culture. One of the most aesthetically innovative recent ‘returns’ of billboard poetry, however, is the one employed intra-diegetically in the Hollywood film “Three Billboards Outside of Ebbing, Missouri” (2017), my second case study. Here, the writing on the billboard-walls make those aspects explicit that have been submerged in the earlier rhymes by the roadside: While the playful, optimistic lines of advertisement imply, time and again, a happy white middle-class American family with a sober and well-shaved patriarch behind the wheel and thus gloss over the disavowed underside of mobility, the film makes the latent manifest and points to systemic /

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<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Marius Henderson for helping with the research for this essay and for sharing his expertise on American poetry.

structural violence, such as a pervasive American rape ‘culture’ which is linked to the car and the mobility it offers. The film uses the billboard and its inscription as foil and as catalyst to address and to protest this and other forms of violence and thus presents an activist intervention in order to ask for more than merely poetic justice.

*Keywords: Burma-Shave, billboard, rural America, conceptual art, advertisement, Three Billboards outside Ebbing, Missouri, consumer culture*

## 1. Introduction

A vaguely promotional quality is inherent in much of American cultural production. Either because it implicitly or explicitly promotes America and aspects of “Americanness” and the “American way of life” (in the much-contested logic of American exceptionalism) and / or because it is, for better or worse, generated by and embedded in the dynamics of the marketplace geared toward commodification. American poetry is no exception here, in fact “[a]dvertising and poetry share a secret affinity, so much so that advertising is often held up as an example of what poetry becomes when rendered entirely mercenary.”<sup>2</sup> Based on formal similarities, advertising slogans can be – and have been – read as poetry in the widest sense – and vice versa. And yet, the marketplace is also part of the public sphere, and the (mass)circulation and advertisement of poetic texts have also found appraisal among critics as part of processes of democratizing access to cultural productions in a consumer society. Poetry has been and still is the focus of scholarship that has put the idea of reading as consumption *and* as a social (rather than as a solitary) practice at its center and that has re-evaluated public space as a site for the advertising and the dissemination of poetic texts of different kinds.<sup>3</sup>

The billboard clearly is such a space where poetry and advertising can come together in complicated and problematic ways, and it can be viewed in the light of both, as the place of advertising and, perhaps less obviously, as the site of public poetry. As such, it begs the question how the very medium of mass consumer culture and the icon of PR-work in the early days of affluent society can be the place of poetic articulation. How does the public display of poetry on billboards by the roadside alter the way we engage with poetic texts and (other)

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<sup>2</sup> Bernes (2017: 40).

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Elizabeth Long’s argument for the priority of social rather than solitary reading (2003: 27-28). Mike Chasar’s (2012) “Everyday Reading” and Joan Shelley Rubin’s (2007) “Songs of Ourselves” have revisited the role of poetry in American public life in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and beyond. In her work on “micropoetry” and some of its political implications, Maria Damon (2011: 125) draws on Nancy Fraser’s (1990) notion of “counter-publics” to re-address the cultural work of poetry in America.

consumer goods? How do their seemingly random places as sites of enunciation (often merely transitional non-places, so to speak) matter? And how is all of this represented in other media and analyzed in scholarship?

The history of the billboard in the US dates back to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and to its function as a display of advertisement in the entertainment industry (circus and vaudeville), announcing and promoting upcoming shows. It achieved its iconic status in the 20<sup>th</sup> century when it became “almost a piece of architecture.”<sup>4</sup> The emergence of American car culture and the building of the US Interstate Highway System made it the ubiquitous form of advertising across the country. It created new attention regimes for the American driver and was specifically geared toward promotional entertainment during long-distance car travel. Billboards supposedly brightened up monotonous landscapes and sparsely settled areas in rural America – and they did so with messages mostly suggestive of consumption. Often, these messages came in a serial fashion and these serial installments added up to a narrative, a rhyme, a poem.<sup>5</sup>

During the rise of the billboard, there was a tendency in the US to champion American poetry, especially in its distinctly high modernist variations, as the highest form of verbal art among freshly established and elitist new criticism-scholars and to define it in a hierarchical contradistinction to popular or mass culture.<sup>6</sup> Within this framework, ‘billboard poetry’ must appear as somewhat of an oxymoron if not a ‘desacralization.’ However, this (canonical) angle excludes the multitudinous poetic production at the time and thus overlooks much of the poetry (in its widest sense) of the age, including the poetic repertoires in popular and mass culture in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and their ongoing relevance that recent literary histories<sup>7</sup> have claimed. It is these literary histories that I am drawing on in this essay and that I seek to extend when reading a contemporary example of billboard poetry. Thus, first of all, a turn toward ‘billboard poetry’ sidelines institutionalized formalistic elite criticism and its mid-century moment of domination, and it also turns away from firmly entrenched, though somewhat stereotypical discourses of decline and cultural pessimism when it comes to the artistic in popular registers. Rather, it follows the work of Sianne Ngai and others reiterating “the loss of the antithesis between the work of art and the commodity

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<sup>4</sup> Corn (1999: 211).

<sup>5</sup> For a historical overview of US billboard culture, see Catherine Gudis’s “Buyways: Billboards, Automobiles, and the American Landscape” (2004) and for the beginnings of “outdoor advertising” more specifically, see Frank Presbrey (1929: 497-511).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. the classical textbook of new criticism’s approach to poetry, Brooks and Warren’s “Understanding Poetry” (1938). Looking back, Mark Morrisson and others have pointed to the “narrowing” of the canon of American poetry in the heyday of new criticism with its formalist approach in the name of an “American literary nationalism” (Morrisson 2005: 31, 14).

<sup>7</sup> Chasar (2012); Rubin (2007).

form,”<sup>8</sup> itself a theme in modern art, in an otherwise “hyperaestheticized post-war society of the United States.”<sup>9</sup> Pushing back somewhat against Marjorie Perloff’s 2006 MLA presidential address, which called for a return to the study of literature and poetry in a more established sense, scholars have further reconceptualized poetry as “not just an aesthetic act, but a site of and for social and aesthetic activities”<sup>10</sup> that cannot be isolated and do not exist apart from processes of commodification. Second, ‘billboard poetry’ redirects our gaze in yet another way as it may privilege a rural over an urban setting. In that sense, I am advocating to move beyond what J. Halberstam, in a different context, has diagnosed as the “metronormativity” of aesthetic and literary discourses that are generated and positioned in the urban and metropolitan centers of the nation.<sup>11</sup> Instead, studying “billboard poetry” resonates with the tenets of a critical regionalist approach.<sup>12</sup> And third, the reading of ‘billboard poetry’ demands an engagement with poetry in a cultural studies-framework. I am here following the authors and editors of the volume “Poetry and Cultural Studies” and Maria Damon’s programmatic claim to study what she calls “micropoetries” – “verbal art that flies under the radar of the acknowledged ‘poetic.’”<sup>13</sup> ‘Billboard poetry’ certainly belongs in that realm as well since it questions prescriptive ideas of what a poem ‘is’ and starts from its most rudimentary description as a “thing made of rhythm and language.”<sup>14</sup> At the same time, it also makes note of the materiality of the poem’s medium (not being paper, but a signboard or a wall) and the role this plays in reception processes.

In what follows, I briefly examine the history of ‘billboard poetry’ and indicate a few exemplary cases of its wavering affiliations with advertisement, art, and politics. After acknowledging voices of cultural pessimism in a modern(ist) discourse on poetry in the US as the backdrop for my own argument, this essay goes on to unfold several instances of ‘billboard poetry’ – from poetry used in roadside-advertisement (the most prominent and most often revisited billboard poetry-campaign has been the “Burma-Shave”-promotion of shaving cream) and its lasting legacy to the use of a billboard aesthetics in modern and text-based conceptual art and, lastly, to an appropriation of the genre billboard poetry for political purposes in the film “Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri” (2017). Here, the poetics and politics of the billboard unfold as a powerful intervention into the lives of the people in a small-town community and points to the

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<sup>8</sup> Ngai (2012: 17).

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>10</sup> Bean / Chasar (2011: 5).

<sup>11</sup> Halberstam (2005: 36-37).

<sup>12</sup> Herr (1996); Powell (2007).

<sup>13</sup> Damon / Livingston (2009: 12).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Smith’s definition of poetry in the 2005-“PMLA” special issue on poetry, qtd. in Damon / Livingston (2009: 3).



function of poetry as protest. In concluding, I suggest that an examination of poetry in unexpected places can help us promote not only the elasticity of generic definitions along with a broad sense of what poetry is but also come to an appreciation of micropoetry's (daily) cultural work, past and present.

Clearly, the interdependence of art and advertisement has often been addressed as an impending danger of cultural decline in the vein of cultural pessimism when both are viewed as largely irreconcilable – contrary to what we know from a myriad of cultural practices that have performed and still are performing what Herbert Gans has called “cultural straddling”<sup>15</sup> and contrary to what Andreas Huyssen<sup>16</sup> has announced as the hallmark of postmodernism – the overcoming of “the Great Divide” between high and mass culture. The billboard has certainly been dubbed a prime example for the negative impact of consumer culture on public life. Advertisement, often symbolized in billboard ads, seemed to be the very opposite of art and self-described artistic, highbrow poetry, and a stark contrast between them has been claimed many times.<sup>17</sup> A case in point is offered by American poet Charles Olson:

By ear, he sd.  
But that which matters, that which insists, that which will last,  
that! o my people, where shall you find it, how, where, where shall you listen  
when all is become billboards, when, all, even silence, is spray-gunned?

when even our bird, my roofs,  
cannot be heard

when even you, when sound itself is neoned in?<sup>18</sup>

Olson's Whitmanesque lines clearly suggest commercial culture and alienating commodification to be opposed to and even a threat to artistic creativity and authentic expression. What “matters” and “will last” is contrasted with the superficial spectacle of the “billboards.” The spray-gun pairs a sense of violence and violation with the process of shallow writing – even writing as vandalism in the vein of graffiti art. The billboard is considered the epitome of a mindless, vulgar culture that alienates “my people” (Americans, his readers, supposedly) and prevents them from hearing at all, let alone perceive the nuances in nature and the sound of birds. Similarly, Marjorie Perloff has used the expression of the “billboard discourse” for the ways in which she sees language instrumentalized in a capitalist consumer mode.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Gans (1974: 136).

<sup>16</sup> Huyssen (1986: viii-x).

<sup>17</sup> Taking an exception to such claims of opposition, for instance, is poet Frank O'Hara of the “New York School of Poets” whose “Lunch Poems” (1964) explicitly and even enthusiastically engage with advertisement, branding, and commodity aesthetics. Bernes (2017: 40-46).

<sup>18</sup> “I, Maximus of Gloucester, to You” (Olson 1983: 6).

<sup>19</sup> Perloff (1992: 129).

On a lighter note, humorist Ogden Nash has captured the contrast manifested in billboards on the roadside against art / nature. Punning on Joyce Kilmer's iconic and hugely popular 1913-poem "Trees" and its first two lines "I think that I shall never see / A poem lovely as a tree,"<sup>20</sup> Nash rhymes:

I think that I shall never see  
a billboard lovely as a tree.  
Perhaps, unless the billboards fall,  
I'll never see a tree at all.<sup>21</sup>

Whereas Kilmer's nature poem addresses the nature-culture divide and problematizes the power and the limits of representation, Nash's version removes the self-consciousness and self-reflectiveness of the speaker and contrasts the billboard (emblematic of mass culture on the road) with the tree (as a shorthand to refer to a romantic / pastoral scenery during travel). For Nash, the billboard represents a mundane item proliferated to such an intent that the forest of signboards, quite literally, obstructs the view while driving.<sup>22</sup>

Against Olson's, Perloff's, and Nash's pronounced skepticism and disdain for the popular in consumer culture as lacking sophistication (embodied in the billboard-format), the studies by Chasar, Rubin, Damon, and others have revisited popular poetry, including the lines on billboards, along with the materiality that it is made of and part of. Chasar suggests to closely examine "poetry's intersections with commercial America"<sup>23</sup> and to develop an alternative approach to the elitist and sniffish diagnosis, as it were, that "proximity to certain aspects of the marketplace" renders poetry "to be inadequate and intellectually unsatisfying."<sup>24</sup> Rather, billboards and poems on billboards reveal the ways in which a majority of Americans have taken to the road and to art as part of an unfolding infrastructure of mobility and consumption and how they engage in poetry as a shared social and cultural practice – even if this poetry may come with strings (and walls) attached and is used to arouse desires that do not qualify as intellectual or aesthetically refined.

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<sup>20</sup> Kilmer's (1913) popular but also often ridiculed and parodied poem was suggested 78 times in the course of Robert Pinsky's (1997) "Favorite Poem Project" but did not become part of the anthology in the end, cf. Rubin (2007: 336-339, 387).

<sup>21</sup> Nash (1932).

<sup>22</sup> With this criticism Ogden Nash was not alone. A powerful initiative, led by the then first lady of the United States, Lady Bird Johnson, pushed and eventually helped pass the so-called "Highway Beautification Act" (1965), i.e. "An Act to provide for scenic development and road beautification of the Federal-aid highway systems." Johnson campaigned against billboards and junkyards and for flowers and benches by the roadside.

<sup>23</sup> Chasar (2012: 13).

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

## 2. *Billboard Poetry I: The Case of “Burma-Shave”-Advertisement Poetry (1929-1963)*

Among those companies and corporations which have used billboard poetry as part of their advertising scheme, one certainly stands out: the Burma-Vita Company from Minneapolis. In the United States, the Burma-Shave-Poetry has become and still is a household name. It is a phenomenon of Americana, however, that is virtually unknown abroad. Burma-Shave, a shaving cream and a liniment supposedly with ingredients brought in all the way from Burma (and, according to family lore, based on a secret recipe from “an old sea captain”<sup>25</sup>), hence the name, was produced and marketed by the family-owned Burma-Vita Company. After only modest success in the beginning, company owner Clinton Odell introduced a new marketing strategy (based on an idea by Allan Odell, the sales manager and C. Odell’s son): short poems on billboards that were displayed with increasing success on the roadside in most of the United States from 1926 until 1963 (when the company was sold and the campaign was discontinued). In Rowsome’s account, “[i]t all started in 1927, during the early years of America’s romance with the automobile and the open road [...] all the way to 1963 when the powerful lure of television and radio advertising finally forced Burma-Shave off the road.”<sup>26</sup> The billboards were fitted to be 40 inches long and 12 inches high.<sup>27</sup> Each billboard contained one line of a poem in capital letters and thus they (usually six in a row) were displayed in serial fashion one after the other. To read the entire poem, one had to drive by a set of billboards. The roadside billboards were deployed in predominantly rural regions. Almost seven thousand sets (or forty thousand individual signs) would be installed between Maine and Texas at any given time, with twenty to twenty-five new poems to be installed regularly to replace older ones.<sup>28</sup> “By 1935,” Gudis writes, “the company had 42.000 signs dotting the landscape, and had captured the public imagination.”<sup>29</sup> From all of those signs or rather sets of signs, many have survived in museums and historical societies (the Smithsonian Museum of American History houses one); a few have gone back up again as nostalgic relics to the past, and even new ones have been created in Burma-Shave-style. All the verses of all the billboards have been collected by Frank Rowsome in “The Verse by the Side of the Road,” and Garrison Keillor includes a few in his poetry anthology “Good Poems for Hard Times,”<sup>30</sup> not giving any author’s name but labelling them “traditional.”

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<sup>25</sup> Rowsome (1965: 10).

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, vii.

<sup>27</sup> Gudis describes them slightly smaller as 36 by 10 inches. Cf. Gudis (2004: 77).

<sup>28</sup> Rowsome (1965: 38).

<sup>29</sup> Gudis (2004: 77).

<sup>30</sup> Keillor (2005). It seems that Keillor has made those up himself.

The Burma-Shave-campaign accompanied American drivers through several decades, through the Depression years, World War II on the home front, change and restoration of gender regimes, debates about racial segregation and desegregation, increasing economic prosperity of the middle-class in a new corporate culture, and, of course, the further rise of American car culture in tandem with suburbanization. Some of these developments were referenced directly in the Burma-Shave micropoems, others were addressed sideways, yet others were ignored. In a time when African Americans and other minorities could not by a long shot enjoy the mobility or infrastructure of travel and leisure, white middle-class Americans did, the prototypical consumer driving on American roads was – without further reflection – imagined as white, male (sometimes female), and heterosexual.

With its increasing popularity, a dialogic quality was introduced to the poetry-campaign, and it became more and more participatory – within the confinement of the message to be conveyed: readers / consumers would respond to the lines by the roadside, sending in comments and suggestions. Picking up on those poetic talents and energies of their customers, the company initiated competitions and rhyming contests to ask Americans to contribute their verses for the billboards. At one point, the company received 65,000 responses from customers.<sup>31</sup> Thus, in a highly controlled setting shaped by the company's agenda and gatekeeping, the campaign was not only a communication of 'one to many' but one of 'many to many.' Many a memoir recalls childhood experiences of driving by the Burma-Shave-signs playing family games in the car, and autotourist travel narratives would also make frequent mention of it.<sup>32</sup> Mike Chasar's work contextualizes the billboard poetry within a larger cultural trend that reveals the ubiquity of poetry in the lives of Americans in large parts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century:

[...] Americans living in the first half of the century [...] lived in a world saturated by poetry of all types and sizes, ranging from clever, two-line advertising jingles to full-length collections [...]. Poetry appeared in books, daily newspapers, and magazines. It was preserved in scrapbooks and photograph and autograph albums, and it was included in classroom readers, comic books, song books, farmers' almanacs, church services, civic events, citizenship handbooks, nature field guides, propaganda, and in a wide variety of advertising media. It was on the radio, *billboards*, broadsides, drug store window and trolley card placards, Chautauqua circuits, picket lines, wax cylinder and other recording formats, magic lantern slides, and stereoview cards. And it decorated many ephemeral, commemorative, value-added, and / or commercial goods, ranging from postcards to greeting cards, calling cards, playing cards, business cards, bookmarks, matchbooks, posters and wall hangings, stickers, calendars, event tickets, notepads, menus, fans, trivets, thermometers, milk bottles, pinup girly posters, bird-food and breath-mint

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<sup>31</sup> Gudis (2004: 78).

<sup>32</sup> Vossler (1997).

tins, packages for drafting tools, candy boxes, souvenir plates, handkerchiefs, pillows, and table runners.<sup>33</sup>

Mike Chasar's enumerations reveal quite an excessive presence of popular poetry in American culture that existed in consumer culture – apart from an aesthetic avant-garde art and apart from institutional spheres of higher learning. Rather, it highlights the everyday pleasures of rhyming and language play, of a kitschy, often sentimental quotidian poetics, and of the cultivation of a particular kind of poetic surplus value residing in the poetic packaging and display of consumer goods. There is no single interpretation or overarching narrative to make sense of the Burma-Shave poetry-phenomenon and the success of what Jonathan Culler calls this kind of “bastardized form”<sup>34</sup> of the lyric. Overall, the campaign played on various notions of progress and modernity about its product guaranteeing new physical comforts to the customer, as this early straightforward example demonstrates: “A Shave / That’s Real / No Cuts to Heal / A Soothing / Velvet After-Feel / Burma-Shave.”<sup>35</sup> Or: “Tho Tough / And Rough / From Wind and Wave / Your Cheek Grows / Sleek / with / Burma-Shave.”<sup>36</sup> Looking more closely at the poems and their presentation by the road, a few trends and developments can be identified over time. First, the micropoems by the roadside picked up on the serial quality and form audiences would already be familiar with from other contexts and media (such as journals and literary magazines). They would find this seriality of the six signs in a row making up one poem not only intelligible but also pleasurable. Second, at the same time, the poems demanded only a beginner’s literacy as the letters were large and capitalized and the language was rather simple. In fact, the poems at times read as if straight out of a primer. Chasar points out that they had been used that way on family outings.<sup>37</sup> The American primer has often been addressed regarding its formative ideological function. Most famously, the opening of Toni Morrison’s novel “The Bluest Eye” (1970) reveals the normative power of such texts that cannot possibly be innocent or free from ideological content.<sup>38</sup> It is in light of this function that the Burma-Shave poems seem to have been extremely effective in ‘naturalizing’ a particular habit and way of life, thereby producing and stabilizing, time and again, consumer identification with heteronormative, middle-class norms. Third, the spatial practice of the billboard poems generates a visual regime as it was only in driving by in a car that the text would become intelligible (mostly, the roads did not have a sidewalk / pavement) in the rural and less peopled land-

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<sup>33</sup> Chasar (2012: 4-5, my emphasis).

<sup>34</sup> Culler (2008: 205).

<sup>35</sup> Rowsome (1965: 76).

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>37</sup> Bill Vossler qtd. in Chasar (2012: 133).

<sup>38</sup> Morrison (1970/2004: 3-4). The company would even publish Burma-Shave-Jingle Books for Children. Cf. Rowsome (1965).

scapes of the nation.<sup>39</sup> The campaign is intimately connected to automobility as part of processes of consumption – of the billboards and the products they advertise. At the same time, for drivers it was hard to overlook or escape the micropoems literally lining their path. Fourth, the micropoems started out with clear reference to the product and the process of shaving: the shaving cream that needed no brush, saved time, and stood for progress, modernity, and a better time management for those who were active in corporate America. Many early poems pun on the similarity of ‘shaving’ and ‘saving’ – saving time mostly.<sup>40</sup> As the campaign continues, the billboard poems become more self-reflexive<sup>41</sup> and more detached from the product they advertise. In fact, a whole range of poems center on the topic of traffic education (see Figure 1 and 2), and it is in these lines that the disciplining function of the billboards becomes most obvious and most explicit. However, with the explicit advice for (male) drivers (not to drive too fast, not to drive drunk, etc.), the ads not only disconnected from the benefits of their product, which is only mentioned at the end of each poem, they also blurred the lines between traffic signs proper and advertising space creating some sort of overarching educational cosmos by the roadside. Fifth, the entertainment value of the billboard poems certainly was their humor and their tongue-in-cheek commentary on matters of every-day life modelled on the style of funny papers and slapstick film.<sup>42</sup> Partially ironic, partially silly, partially self-reflexive, and always with a punchline, they offer an optimistic view of the manageability of modern life sharing and affirming “structures of feeling” of success in a capitalist system<sup>43</sup> along with “moments of oppressive optimism in normal national culture,”<sup>44</sup> i.e. making light of the prize that was to be paid for this success. The ads reveal “what kinds of domination are being imagined as forms of social good”<sup>45</sup> in the shape of seemingly small and unimportant instances of mass communication that turn into “sites of intense ideological coding and negotiation as well as aesthetic activity or innovation.”<sup>46</sup> Sixth, with increasing sophistication, the poems would also offer intertextual references – to classical

<sup>39</sup> The billboard campaign shares the widening of consumer spaces beyond the urban centers with other forms of corporate ‘outreach,’ such as the mail-order catalogue.

<sup>40</sup> For instance: “Every shaver / Now can snore / Six more minutes / Than before / By using / Burma-Shave” (1929, qtd. in Rowsome 1965: 72).

Or: “Shaving brushes / You’ll soon see ’em / On the shelf / In some / Museum / Burma-Shave” (1930, qtd. in Rowsome 1965: 73).

<sup>41</sup> For instance: “Our fortune / Is your / Shaven face / It’s our best / Advertising space / Burma-Shave” (1953 and again 1963, qtd. in Rowsome 1965: 114).

<sup>42</sup> Gudis (2004: 78).

<sup>43</sup> Williams (1977: 128-135).

<sup>44</sup> Berlant (1997: 13).

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>46</sup> Chasar (2012: 16).

American poetry (Longfellow), to classic tales and stories (Washington Irving's "Rip Van Winkle"), to forms of vernacular culture (even Spirituals: "My Job is / Keeping faces clean / And nobody knows / De stubble / I've Seen"<sup>47</sup>), to biblical stories (in single instances even scandalizing their audience, for instance with this one: "The whale / Put Jonah / Down the hatch / But coughed him up / Because he scratched / Burma-Shave"), and to other aphoristic lines (such as those of Benjamin Franklin, "Early to bed / Early to rise / [...]"). These references often were in bad taste; yet, they revealed that such simple advertisements could rely on its readers to understand these allusions as part of a national cultural archive and can also be read as selectively iconoclastic, mildly probing cultural taboos. Seventh, the role of women deserves special mention. Most of the time, men are interpellated by the Burma-Shave poems to adjust their behavior (mostly in terms of shaving) to be and to remain attractive for wives and girlfriends.<sup>48</sup> Smooth male skin was marketed as attractive as no woman wanted to go out with a 'porcupine.' This seemingly women-friendly point of view turns out to be another affirmation of the traditional notion of women's civilizing influence on men. It can be credited to women actually participating in the campaign and contributing rhymes and poems and to the company's secretary, Fidelity M. Dearlove, who for more than thirty years seems to have been keeping track of the incoming suggestions and the outgoing signs.<sup>49</sup> On the other hand, it refers to the changing cultural significance of beards and mustaches in American history. The poems of the Burma-Shave campaign pick up on a paradigm shift that saw the decline of the "patriarchal beard" still in fashion in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the rise of a new masculine ideal in corporate culture, a "white collar manhood"<sup>50</sup> that was incompatible with an unshaven face or facial hair. Instead, the beardless face was being encoded as suggestive of positive attributes such as sociability and reliability and those were attributed to corporate team players (as well as team players in sports as a new athleticism had emerged). While bearded men were now seen as overtly individualistic, wild, unpredictable, and somewhat excessive in their rugged masculinity, beardless men were considered to embody "youthfulness, energy and uniformity."<sup>51</sup> Overall, the scholarship on the cultural history of male facial hair in the US in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century points to a bit of an overlap in the concern of women and the concern of corpo-

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<sup>47</sup> This rhyme makes light of one of the most powerful indictments of the experience of slavery, a song, which has been recorded by Marian Anderson and, most famously, by Mahalia Jackson. Turning "trouble" (the suffering in slavery) into "stubble" suggests a profound insensitivity and callous ignorance on the part of the rhyming subject.

<sup>48</sup> See, for instance: "He Had the Ring / He Had the Flat / But She Felt His Chin / And That / Was That / Burma-Shave" [Rowsome (1965: 79)]. Or: "Dewhiskered / Kisses / Defrost / the / Misses / Burma-Shave" (Ibid., 81).

<sup>49</sup> Rowsome (1965: 38).

<sup>50</sup> Oldstone-Moore (2011: 51); Kimmel (1996).

<sup>51</sup> Oldstone-Moore (2011: 52).

rations to get rid of idiosyncratic patriarchs (as evidenced by full and largely undisciplined beards) and this also shows in some of the Burma-Shave poems.



Figure 1: Public Domain, Photo: Ken Koehler.

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=686507> [22.07.2020].



Figure 2: With permission from Division of Work and Industry, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution;

[https://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah\\_1313589](https://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah_1313589) [22.07.2020].<sup>52</sup>

### 3. Literary Intertextuality and the Afterlives of Burma-Shave Billboard Poems in Popular Culture

Even though I have earlier reconstructed a rather sharp dichotomy between high modernist American poetry and popular public poetry for the sake of argument, transitions and hybridization between both can be and have been observed. On the one hand, some Burma-Shave billboards engaged in literary intertextuality

<sup>52</sup> The optical arrangement is somewhat misleading here as the poem would originally have been displayed on several billboards in a serial fashion.



referencing classical Americans poems. A case in point is this text: “Hardly a driver / Is now alive / Who passed / On hills / At 75 / Burma-Shave” which presents a pun on Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s “Paul Revere’s Ride” (1860) and its first lines where 75 refers to the year 1775 and not to the speed of a car.<sup>53</sup> On the other hand, some modernist poets also engaged with Burma-Shave slogans or at least found them memorable. As Chasar points out, even Gertrude Stein notes down her interest and fascination.<sup>54</sup> Chasar quotes her from “Everybody’s Autobiography”:

And it was there I first saw the shaving advertisements that delighted me one little piece on one board and further on two more words and then further on two more words a whole lively poem.<sup>55</sup>

In “Gertrude Stein: The Language That Rises, 1923-1934,” Ulla E. Dydo and William Rice have even found that “[a]mong her papers is a copy of Number Five of the Burma-Shave Jingle Book with eighteen jingles.”<sup>56</sup> Given Stein’s own use, mimicry, and appropriation of the language of advertisement in “Tender Buttons” (1914), it is hardly surprising that she would show interest in the Burma-Shave jingles.

The afterlives of the iconic Burma-Shave Poetry are manifold, and one can follow around its remnants and frequent references to it – in literature, film, and music. A few exemplary cases will be singled out here:

First, Tom Waits recorded a song title “Burma-Shave” on his 1977-album “Foreign Affairs.” In this song, he picks up on the Orientalist quality of the name of the product and its exoticizing ring. The lyrics evoke “Burma Shave” as some kind of mystical place rendering explicit a misreading that disconnects the name from the brand and the product. Waits sings of a male protagonist being “on [his] way to Burma-Shave,” of a woman wanting to take her “chances out in Burma-Shave,” and of a fatal car accident both have at the end of the song leaving them dead “this side of Burma-Shave.” The ballad-like song puns on the traffic education poems by the company as it narrates reckless driving (“knees up on the glove compartment”) and risky maneuvers (“pass that car if you’re so brave”) eventually leading to the car wreck. It is the undoing of all the disciplining effort in a kind of loosely counterpunctal reading of the ads. The disconnect between signifier and signified which detaches “Burma-Shave” from the brand and the product it seeks to sell (shaving cream) and re-imagines “Burma-Shave” as fairy-tale territory may have added to the success and the iconicity of the campaign, even if in the end it could not lastingly secure the economic survival

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<sup>53</sup> This is not the only poem playing on Longfellow’s classic. Another one (that easily could be mistaken for a contemporary text) is: “The Midnight Ride / of Paul / For beer / Led to a / Warmer Hemisphere / Burma-Shave” (Rowsome 1965: 104).

<sup>54</sup> Chasar (2012: 123, 133).

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 225-226.

<sup>56</sup> Dydo / Rice (2003: 618).

of the company. In Waits's song, "Burma Shave" acquires a mysterious quality and evokes a road sign indicating direction or the name of the next town. Driving along any route one would be reminded of this special "place" without ever getting there. This perpetual delay in getting to "Burma Shave" is dramatized as producing a mythic dimension and a utopian sense of place. Waits may also have been familiar with the appearance of "Burma-Shave" billboards in the film "Bonnie and Clyde" that appeared ten years earlier.

Second, in fact, several films have used the "Burma-Shave"-signs to authenticate their setting. In "Bonnie and Clyde" (1967) the Burma Shave-billboards appear very briefly and fleetingly when the protagonists make one of their escapes after a robbery (in minute 54, viewers glimpse: "Feel your face / Burma-Shave"). They are barely legible but clearly recognizable because of their shape and color.<sup>57</sup> As an authenticating device, they place the setting of the film in the 1930s (Bonnie Parker and Clyde Barrow were killed on May 23, 1934). The film narrates their spree of robberies and killings in the Depression era – a series of violent transgressions against norms and laws of which traffic violations seem to be the least problematic. Next to merely displaying the Burma-Shave signs as a historical background for the action, some films refer to the actual poems. For instance, "A River Runs through It" (1992), set in Montana, has a group of adolescent male characters recite a Burma Shave-poem in order to mock one of the protagonists. The scene clearly relies on the audience's familiarity with the advertisement.

Third, as a homage to the advertising campaign, the underground tunnel and transfer corridor from 42<sup>nd</sup> Street to the Times Square subway station in New York City today displays Norman B. Colp's poem "The Commuter's Lament / A Close Shave" (1991). The short poem is modelled on the "Burma Shave"-micropoems:

Overslept. So tired.  
If late, Get fired.  
Why bother?  
Why the pain?  
Just go home.  
Do it again.<sup>58</sup>

Contrary to the original road signs, the seriality of the poem is adapted here to the pace of pedestrians walking by – or rather passing under it. Colp's title presents a pun on the double meaning of the "close shave" in literal and metaphorical terms and suggests a sense of resignation and repetitiveness of the mundane everyday routine the commuter has to manage and to endure. Colp's lines imi-

<sup>57</sup> Readable is: "feel your face / Burma-Shave." This may add up to "If Honey Shuns / Your Fond Embrace / Don't Shoot the Milkman / Feel Your Face / Burma-Shave." It is a rhyme we find in Keillor's (2005) anthology but that is not listed in Rowsome's (1965) collection.

<sup>58</sup> For more information and images, see: [https://www.nycsubway.org/wiki/Artwork:\\_The\\_Commuter's\\_Lament-A\\_Close\\_Shave\\_\(Norman\\_B.\\_Colp\)](https://www.nycsubway.org/wiki/Artwork:_The_Commuter's_Lament-A_Close_Shave_(Norman_B._Colp)) [02.06.2020]; Colp (1991).

tate the Burma Shave-style of rhyming without actually infusing the poem with the “cruel optimism”<sup>59</sup> of its predecessors. Having the poem underground at a place where the world-famous billboards are shining above ground at Times Square may be seen as quite an irony. The intersections of popular poetry and avant-garde aesthetics reveal themselves also in broad daylight and in a broader view on the fate of the billboard in American art production.

#### *4. Billboard Poetry II: Advertisement and Avant-Garde Aesthetics in Visual Art*

Early on, billboards and billboard poetry were taken up by visual artists and became an influence on and a presence in conceptual art: At least since the 1920s artists had been experimenting with what Wanda Corn analyzes as “billboard aesthetics.”<sup>60</sup> For the purpose of this essay, I can only briefly indicate the range of such artistic endeavors in order to show that the unadorned Burma-Shave campaign flourished in a context in which the large and lighted billboard and its advertising style were also entering and even shaping avant-garde aesthetics. Corn identifies a sophisticated kind of “billboard cubism,”<sup>61</sup> namely

a style that [...] brings together cubo-futurist compositional devices and the bluntness, scale, modern typography, and legibility of 1920s posters and billboards. Billboard cubism self-consciously fused the high principles of modernism with the lowbrow practice of street usage.<sup>62</sup>

Corn finds this style embodied in the works of Charles Demuth (1883-1935) and she singles out his painting “I Saw the Figure 5 in Gold” (1928), a work dedicated to William Carlos Williams, whose poem “The Great Figure” had inspired it<sup>63</sup>. For Demuth and his peers, the billboard stood for the modern, American style:

For a short while in the 1920s, not only Demuth but a much wider circle of American avant-garde writers and artists became students of, and apologists for, the billboard and advertising arts, seeing in them, as in the skyscraper, jazz, and Broadway lights, a national expression.<sup>64</sup>

Its modernity was seen as anti-sentimental, cool, and – viewed through the eyes of European visitors / artists – as uniquely American. However, soon the notion that “billboards were unquestionably the enemy of art”<sup>65</sup> became dominant. It is evidenced in prototypical fashion in the billboard in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s novel “The Great Gatsby” (first published in 1925), where the big and piercing eyes of

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<sup>59</sup> This concept is Lauren Berlant’s and elaborated in her study of the same title.

<sup>60</sup> Corn (1999: 209).

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Gudis (2004: 84).

<sup>64</sup> Corn (1999: 210).

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 212.

Doctor T.J. Eckleburg gaze out from a fading billboard ad at those coming through the valley of ashes.<sup>66</sup>

The work of Demuth and others coincided with the beginning of the Burma-Shave campaign and drew on similar available cultural forms and media of communication for different purposes; other artists have picked up on the legacy of billboard aesthetics and billboard micropoems long after the Burma Shave specimen had disappeared from the roadside. Billboard aesthetics and poetry have remained a presence in community work, photography, film, and art projects, while billboard advertisement proper went into decline, particularly in rural areas of America. With the emergence of urban pop art, of course, billboard aesthetics have been used affirmatively regarding the role of advertisement, commodity aesthetics, and visual art, most famously by Andy Warhol or Ed Ruscha offering new perspectives on mass culture, even crediting it, in Warhol's case with "utopian potentiality."<sup>67</sup> Billboard poetry has been at the center of much conceptual and neo-conceptual artwork since the 1970s and 80s with a base in metropolitan regions, Los Angeles and New York City. Jenny Holzer, whose work comes to mind here as both exemplary and exceptional, has since the 1970s engaged in text-based public art projects relating to popular and mass culture. Holzer's installation art or story art addresses oppression and violence, power and abuse, women and feminism. Holzer displayed the line "Protect Me From What I Want" in 1982 in huge illuminated letters on Times Square and suggested for it to be read as a critique of the rhetoric and power of advertising and consumer culture, ironically undercutting the logic of desire leading to wish fulfillment – and satisfaction – in the imagined consumer's world. Holzer works with this kind of double-voiced discourse in her "Truisms" (1977-1979), in "Inflammatory Essays" (1979-1982), in "The Living Series" (1980-1982), in "Laments" (1988-1989), and in many of her other installations. Her use of micropoems on billboards resonates with earlier advertising campaigns, including the Burma Shave-campaign, I want to suggest. Holzer, in fact, has referred to the "roadside garbage" of billboards as a point of departure for her work. Her texts frequently make use of imperatives and deal in "mock clichés"<sup>68</sup> on the verge of seeming parodistic, but not quite: "I want them [the lines] to be accessible, but not so

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<sup>66</sup> Fitzgerald (1925/2004: 23-24). In his classic dystopian novel "Fahrenheit 451" (first published in 1953), Ray Bradbury would later describe the development billboards underwent in the future (not counting on the invention of the internet): "Have you seen the two-hundred-foot-long billboards in the country beyond town? Did you know that once billboards were only twenty feet long? But cars started rushing by so quickly they had to stretch the advertising out so it would last" (Bradbury 1996: 8-9). Another critical billboard-theme is at the center of the Hollywood film "It Should Happen to You" (1954), in which Gladys Glover, craving fame, rents a billboard space just to display her name.

<sup>67</sup> Muñoz (2009: 7).

<sup>68</sup> Graevenitz (1993: 230).

easy that you throw them away after a second or two.”<sup>69</sup> Hence, the somewhat paradoxical status of Holzer’s texts may seem to waver between “dark meditations about the human condition,”<sup>70</sup> dark humor, cynicism, and deliberate senselessness or absurdity, yet they still struggle for a more sophisticated meaning and a political impact. As a subversion or “infiltration of public life,”<sup>71</sup> her installations use existing structures (such as scoreboards) and formulas “mixed with advertisement, or sports results or news”<sup>72</sup> to call attention to the ways in which corporations, politicians, and all of us in everyday communication use language in standardized and objectified / thingified and potentially oppressive ways. Katrin Ströbel concedes that at times „[e]rst durch ihren Inhalt, der konträr zu den Heilsverkündungen der Werbewelt steht, offenbaren die Texte ihren konsum- oder gesellschaftskritischen Charakter und lassen Schlüsse auf ihre eigentliche Herkunft zu“<sup>73</sup>. This was particularly true, when, early on, Holzer would plaster her work anonymously and without any indication of it being ‘art’ in New York City-subway stations and other similarly crowded places.

Conceptual billboard art-cum-poetry from a range of artists has found recognition in exhibitions such as the 1999 “Billboard Art on the Road” at the MASS MoCA (which included Holzer’s work) and art shows such as the 2010 “How Many Billboards” in Los Angeles. The latter awkwardly proclaims to celebrate “the conquest of art over billboards,”<sup>74</sup> if only momentarily, and refers to the project as “misappropriating its medium.”<sup>75</sup> One may well ask: Can the medium be severed and fully emancipated from the message? From which position of authority and with what kind of engagement is the selective nobilitation of billboards as art conducted? And where does this dichotomy leave practices of hybridization and works that deliberately cross over distinct taste cultures? Few would draw the line between art and commerce as strictly as the opening lines from the 2010 exhibition catalogue nowadays. Marjorie Perloff has voiced a different kind of skepticism toward attempts to work against the practices and the sign language of consumerism on a conceptual level. Singling out the work of artist Barbara Kruger, who also works with text and design in her artwork, she warns that “the deconstruction of billboard discourse is subject to its own simplifications,”<sup>76</sup> espe-

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<sup>69</sup> Holzer qtd. in von Graevenitz (1993: 231).

<sup>70</sup> Glueck (1989: 42).

<sup>71</sup> Ströbel (2013: 148).

<sup>72</sup> Holzer in an interview, see Domesle (1998: 197).

<sup>73</sup> Ströbel (2013: 149).

<sup>74</sup> Noever / Meyer (2010: 6).

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Perloff (1992: 192).

cially when it is hard to distinguish one from the other and “the alleged deconstruction of the stereotype [...] seems just as stereotypical as its object.”<sup>77</sup>

This brief excursus on billboard art provides yet another critical context for billboard poetry, one that engages with mass cultural phenomena at a distance. It is an art of the metropolis, well-received in international art shows around the world. At the same time, it suggests the billboard to be the site of protest and political intervention and hence it serves as a kind of intertext connecting the advertisement form to the lyrical and the political. In my next case study, I will return to representations of the original practice, i.e. to the space of roadside advertisement in rural America as depicted in a recent Hollywood film, yet I will also examine the potential of public protest and political activism the film addresses.

### 5. *Billboard Poetry III: Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri*

In the award-winning 2017 film “Three Billboards Outside Ebbing, Missouri” we encounter a different kind of legacy of billboard advertising-cum-poetry. It returns us to the original site of billboard poetry – along some old country road hardly anyone uses anymore and with three old billboards standing like “tombstones”<sup>78</sup> by the roadside.

As the film starts, three dilapidated billboards come into view (Figure 3). They are shot in a foggy and, by association, depressing atmosphere, and it is obvious that they have not been used in a long time. The viewer can glimpse remnants of what had been advertised earlier: a baby’s face (from an earlier advertisement for diapers) is still discernable as well as a poster attempting to spark touristic interest in the town one is about to enter: Ebbing, Missouri. These initial shots preemptively deconstruct any notion of the stereotypically American optimism against all odds (what Lauren Berlant has called “cruel optimism”) and the way it harks back to sentimental family values (the baby) and the narrative of family travel connected to the earlier history of the billboard (the family road trip) by highlighting a setting that seems anything but prosperous, cozy, and picturesque.

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>78</sup> McDonagh (2017: 3).



*Figure 3: The opening sequence of the film introduces the billboards in a state of disrepair and neglect cast in a foggy atmosphere. As the screenplay has it: “Whatever advert was on it is long since faded and torn” (McDonaugh 3).*

This road running by the billboards is the road to Mildred Hayes’s house and, as we will learn later, the crime scene where her daughter, Angela Hayes, was brutally raped and killed seven months ago<sup>79</sup> when hitching a ride home. Mildred, driving by the billboard ruins, decides to rent them for her own personal message. At the Ebbing Advertising Company, she inquires: “What’s the law on what you can and cannot say on a billboard?” and adds: “I suppose you can’t say nothing defamatory, and you can’t say “fuck,” “piss” or “cunt.” Is that right?” And she concludes that her text will not get her in trouble then (she could not be more wrong). The three posters she orders and that are put up on the billboards a few days later read:

Raped While Dying  
And Still No Arrests?  
How Come, Chief Willoughby?<sup>80</sup>

It is around these three lines, a Haiku-like poem in fact, that the rest of the film unfolds. Mildred Hayes produces a scandal as she engages in public shaming of the police chief (who is dying of pancreatic cancer) and the billboards become an issue of public attention and contention with considerable repercussions. So, first, Mildred, in fact, seems to be able to activate and tap into an (older) attention regime that once had made billboards successful advertisement media and sites of public poetry, and she receives threats and much pushback. On a formal level, Mildred’s poetic accusation comes in serial installments adding up to what Maria Damon calls a micropoem. It begins with the description of a brutal crime (without giving up the name of the victim), goes on to indict the failure of police

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>80</sup> McDonagh (2017: 5, 6, 8). When the billboards with those lines first come into view, it is in reverse order creating suspense. Later, the film repeatedly, almost excessively, shows them in the order placed here, adding the lines up visually to constitute a short poem. See also figure 4.

procedure, and culminates in a final accusatory question. Posing her question to Willoughby, Mildred's lines call into question not only the competence but also the interest of the local police force in solving the case. Chief Willoughby visits her and reproaches her: "I don't think those billboards is very fair"<sup>81</sup> indicating that he is doing everything he can to catch Angela's murderer. He also tells her of his own medical condition to get her sympathy, which she, at this point, withholds. Father Montgomery visits her as well and lets her know that "the town is dead set against these billboards of yours."<sup>82</sup> She is threatened by a customer who comes by her workplace, a gift shop selling souvenirs from Missouri, and who insinuates that he perhaps has raped and killed her daughter. Even her ex-husband Charlie, with whom she has a history of domestic violence, growls: "And what the fuck's going on with these fucking billboards, Mildred?"<sup>83</sup> To which Mildred calmly replies: "I guess I wanted certain people's minds kept on certain people's jobs, is all. I hadn't heard a word from 'em in seven goddam months, but I tell ya this, I heard an awful lot from 'em since I put those billboards up."<sup>84</sup> "Them" is not only Chief Willoughby, but also refers to other members of the Ebbing police force, such as his assistant Dixon, a racist who, as local gossip has it, was once accused of torturing an African American suspect and who is prone to violence and to loss of temper.

Second, the billboards not only trigger verbal reactions but physical ones as well. Racism and discrimination are as much part of life in Ebbing as are domestic violence, rape, and homophobia; in fact, violence seems to be simmering just below the surface at all times. Dixon severely injures Red at the advertising company for renting the billboards to Mildred in the first place. The local dentist attacks Mildred with his drill. Even if the billboard explicitly addresses one person in particular, the entire town of Ebbing finds itself interpellated and takes sides. Only her colleague / boss Denise at the "Missouri Charms Gift Shop" supports her – and is temporarily arrested on a minor drug charge as a form of punishment for her loyalty. Perhaps not surprisingly, her colleague is an African American woman who seems to have had her own share of arbitrary encounters with the Ebbing police force. Set in Missouri, the film at various points obviously references the police shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014 and the "Black Lives Matter"-protests and protest-signs, more specifically. The billboards in the film acknowledge not primarily the nexus of art and consumer culture (as seems to be the focus of much conceptual art), rather they point to the

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.



nexus of the spaces of consumer culture and its new usage for political protest and activism.<sup>85</sup>

Overnight, Mildred Hayes turns into ‘a counter-public of one’ in Ebbing, Missouri. In town, she becomes stigmatized as “the billboard lady,”<sup>86</sup> stubborn and unforgiving. Thus, third, Mildred literally creates a space for her mourning she attends to. Rather than relenting and taking the billboard lines down, Mildred decorates the billboard grounds with flower bouquets, as if adorning a grave or a memorial, a memorial to her daughter and her brutal and senseless killing for the whole town to see. In an awkwardly pastoral scene, a fawn appears and briefly lingers at Mildred’s side as she arranges the pots on a beautiful sunny day.<sup>87</sup> It looks up at the billboards as if also wondering about the state of the investigation and then it disappears. Mildred talks to the fawn half-jokingly in a soft and kind way, a way she never talks to any human being in the entire film. In an act of arson, the billboards are lightened up one night,<sup>88</sup> and as they burn, they almost look like burning crosses in lynchings, another cruel Southern legacy the film refers to in passing. Even as Mildred and Robert, her son, happen to drive by and attempt to extinguish the flames, they cannot preserve the posters. The “burnt-out, blackened billboards”<sup>89</sup> look even more like uncanny ruins. Critics of the film have commented on a missed opportunity as the film fails to spell out the intersections of various forms of violence more fully.

Chief Willoughby dies halfway through the film (taking his own life before the cancer does) and leaves three personal letters for his wife as well as for Mildred and Dixon.<sup>90</sup> He had previously paid anonymously for another month of rent for Mildred’s billboards (knowing that his suicide will be partially blamed on her and the accusation on the billboards) and so she puts them back up after they have been burned down. Willoughby even in absentia seems to care for the people of Ebbing, and the film sets him up as one of the “good white people”<sup>91</sup> in a way that appears to be a little overdone. His successor is African American chief of police Abercrombie, and he fires Dixon for his abuse of office on his first day at work. A kind of conversion we are hard-pressed to believe at the end of the film puts Dixon in league with Mildred and her search for her daughter’s murderer thus offering a highly sentimentalized conversion and closure that

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<sup>85</sup> More could be said about forms of billboard activism outdoors (such as the Billboard Liberation front) and in social media or about “matrix activism” (Ardizzoni) more generally, yet, this phenomenon is beyond the scope of this essay.

<sup>86</sup> McDonagh (2017: 39).

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 43-44.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>90</sup> The three letters mirror the three billboards. They are read out by Willoughby’s voice in the off and also affirm the power of texts as both testimony and call to action.

<sup>91</sup> Sullivan (2014).

comes with a number of dubious assumptions in tow that in turn mitigate its indictment of violence and people turning a blind eye.<sup>92</sup>

In terms of plot, it has to be noted that the film is driven forward entirely by the lines on the billboards and the reactions that billboard-poem elicits. Hence, fourth, the billboards serve as a catalyst of sorts and trigger all kinds of new interactions among the inhabitants of Ebbing – more of the harmful kind, yet also some indicating a better understanding of interpersonal differences and shared concerns. One of the stories behind the billboards, as it were, is Mildred’s own sense of guilt regarding her daughter’s rape and murder. We learn that after a particularly painful domestic fight, she had refused to let Angela use her car or to give her money for a cab. Angela stormed out of the house screaming “I hope I get raped on the way” to which Mildred retorted, still angry: “I hope you get raped on the way too.”<sup>93</sup> They will not see each other again. Mildred’s billboard poem, thus, is also a way to externalize her own guilt and to partly atone for it. It is her attempt to make up for her own failure to care.



*Figure 4: The display of the three billboards is striking in terms of color effect and choice of wording. It clearly shows their aesthetic play on both, the older form of roadside-advertisement and the more recent practices of conceptual art.*

Fifth, on a formal level, the billboards in the film have to be read in the light of the history of the billboard in American culture and need to be contextualized in the larger narrative of billboard aesthetics I have sketched above. They clearly evoke the roadside advertisement of a by-gone era. As repurposed postindustrial

<sup>92</sup> Abdurraqib (2017). Dixon (whose name echoes “Dixie”, a nickname for the old South) is somehow redeemed in the logic of the film due to a particular sacrificial deed: he lets himself get beaten up badly in a bar in order to procure DNA-evidence from a suspect – all the while “The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down” is playing loudly confirming Dixon’s transformation, it seems, turning him almost into a kind of martyr for the just cause.

<sup>93</sup> McDonagh (2017: 33).

ruins, as it were, and relics of an earlier and supposedly brighter phase of US consumer culture (i.e., in the hey-day of Burma-Shave advertising), they are reminders of the economic downfall of the region while at the same time suggesting that not everything in the past had been that ‘great’ anyway since violence has a long history in America. The sad state of the billboards at the beginning of the film also echoes the dysfunctional state of social relations in Ebbing (and perhaps elsewhere in America), characterized by violence and neglect, racism and misogyny. In some ways, the billboards bring to the fore, it seems, everything that is wrong in Ebbing, Missouri, reaching way beyond Angela’s murder and its circumstances and the questionable police work around it. This is the scandal of the billboards, a scandal with a political dimension. It is somewhat ironic that Mildred is at first belittled for renting the billboards on a road where supposedly nobody drives by anymore, only to find that obviously people go by there all the time, if only to see the billboards, which even receive local media attention. Mildred’s billboards thus become the spectacle of Ebbing, Missouri.

The film came out as the “#MeToo”-movement gained traction and it was in this context that it was originally viewed. Frances McDormand, who stars as Mildred Hayes, was awarded an “Oscar for Best Female Actress” for her performance in the film. Upon receiving it, she spoke out in criticism of the film industry and its treatment of women, on and off the screen. “#MeToo” (and the investigations against Harvey Weinstein) quickly became the discursive framework within which the film was interpreted, with little room for the consideration of the billboard politics and poetics in problematizing questions of representation, retribution, and justice. Yet, sixth, the film not only resonates with ongoing violence against and discrimination of women in contemporary America, it also revisits such instances in the past. Clearly, the family as a site of violence and neglect and the car as an intimate site of power abuse also make us reconsider the subtext of earlier billboard advertising. “Three Billboards,” on one level, speaks back to the playful Burma-Shave poetry in insisting that by producing an image of the family-friendly father and corporate man it has disavowed the violence of patriarchal car culture and rape culture all along: Traffic violations are not the most pertinent problem. The representation of the Ebbing rape and murder sever the ties between the imagery of the car culture and family values and reveal the car culture’s complicity with rape culture and other systemic forms of violence. Rereading the Burma Shave-poems with Mildred’s poem in mind produces an uncanny lacuna of sorts.

Visually, the billboards speak in the sign language of conceptual art rather than advertisements in the film. It does not take much to see resemblances between some of Holzer’s installations and the design of Mildred’s lines (Figure 4). The optics of the billboards are striking for their departure from all conventions of the missing people billboards and other forms of search orders that could have provided a model for Mildred’s project. The billboards do not display a photo of the victim, for one thing, nor do they claim authorship or authority:

they don't deal in imperatives at all and simply pose questions – to an individual addressee. Hence, the criticism is not merely self-reflexive language play, it has a very concrete object: the local police chief. In fact, Mildred's lines reconfigure the nature of the speech act on a billboard. "What's the law on what you can and cannot say on a billboard?" may be the crucial question after all.

In sum, the "three billboards" break with the tendency to generic abstraction of both, the Burma Shave poetry ads projecting the cliched fantasy of the All-American family (husband and wife) and much of conceptual text-based art mimicking in order to deconstruct and critique hegemonic discourses of gender, family, and sexuality. Lastly, "Three Billboards outside Ebbing, Missouri" is a powerful mediation on American billboard culture and representations of pain and grief and calls for heeding the writing on the wall, so to speak. In the film, the billboards are also, it seems, a didactic tool, and the pedagogical impetus of the film appears at times a bit heavy-handed. Mildred's crusade against injustice in one particular case (and by implication many others are addressed) echoes with the periodic debates in US society about systemic racism and misogyny and about the urgent need of reforming institutions of the state, such as the police, in order to battle these problems. At one point, Chief Willoughby tells his sidekick: "Looks like we got a war on our hands." Yet, Mildred's 'declaration of war' through her billboards is a non-violent wake-up call to the civil society of Ebbing, Missouri. When it comes to the murder of her daughter, Mildred, it seems, is finally prepared to take matters into her own hands in "the strange saga of the three billboards outside Ebbing, Missouri."<sup>94</sup>

In her work at the Venice Biennale in 1990, Holzer, whose work I have read earlier as a kind of intertext linking consumer culture, poetry, and activism, produced a text on black marble on the floor in the American pavilion bespeaking the willingness to kill if something would happen to her child. Her "Venice Text" on mother and child is a work about her feelings and thoughts – a kind of primal anxiety or fear – following the birth of her daughter.<sup>95</sup> Holzer evokes a kind of archaic "revenge fantasy,"<sup>96</sup> a fantasy that we see enacted in Mildred Hayes's quest in "Three Billboards."

In August 2020, in an instance of life imitating art, i.e. the kind of billboard protest art McDonagh's film displays, "O, The Oprah Magazine" commissioned 26 billboards in the city of Louisville, Kentucky, asking for arrests to be made in the case of the killing of Breonna Taylor by police officers on March 13, 2020 (cf. Wise). The number 26 symbolizes Taylor's age: one billboard for every year she was alive. The billboard artwork is part of the Black Lives Matter protests across the country.

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>95</sup> Holzer (1990).

<sup>96</sup> Graevenitz (1993: 225).

## 6. Conclusion

Billboard poetry in America has an archive of its own, found not only in libraries but also on the roadside, in museums, in photography, and in film, and a cultural studies-perspective can shed light on its history and ongoing relevance in cultural practices and representations. This essay has sketched a trajectory of public poetry on billboards – from Burma Shave-poetry advertisement to the Hollywood film “Three Billboards outside Ebbing, Missouri” – and established a critical relation of a culture-specific intertextuality and intermediality among different kinds of billboard poetics since the 1920s, including conceptual text-based art. Billboards appear in different contexts and serve different functions: from advertisement to cultural critique to political activism and protest. They appear as road-signs and as “tombstones,”<sup>97</sup> as memorials and as playful entertainment, and they are the site of public poetry. In processes of critical cross-mapping, the various cultural functions and symbolisms, also those at odds with each other, become legible.

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<sup>97</sup> McDonagh (2017: 3).

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## **Internationale Zeitschrift für Kulturkomparatistik**

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### **Public Poetry: Encountering the Lyric in Urban Space<sup>1</sup>**

This paper explores the presence of the poetic word in contemporary urban settings: from “Poetry in Motion,” displayed in the New York City subway at the very place where one usually finds ads, to fluid xenon light projections of huge verse on the exterior of buildings in Basel or Zurich by visual artist Jenny Holzer, who presents poems of the Nobel Laureate Wisława Szymborska together with her own short “Truisms.” Or from single poems permanently written on walls – e.g. a much-discussed concrete poem by Eugen Gomringer at the facade of a Berlin college of education – to the technically enhanced spoken word, audible from far away as a side effect of gigantic poetry slam events in stadiums, e.g. the Trabrennbahn (race-course) in Hamburg and even performative events such as Ulrike Almut Sandig’s „augenpost“ in which poems are ‘published’ on posters, flyers and free postcards in the urban space of Leipzig or declaimed on public squares in Indian metropolises through a megaphone. Such presentations of poetry in urban space are still uncommon, thus creating an aesthetic experience that differs strongly from reception in private settings or even in readings or public poetry festivals, as the poem relates to its urban surroundings.

*Keywords: contemporary poetry, public space, urban sociology, Jenny Holzer, Ulrike Almut Sandig, Eugen Gomringer, Barbara Köhler*

In the introduction to his “Literary Theory,” Terry Eagleton examines (and thereby questions) various attempts to define literature, occasionally giving examples of poetic language in public space:

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<sup>1</sup> The author is indebted to Norbert Gestring for his insights into urban sociology.

Perhaps literature is definable not according to whether it is fictional or ‘imaginative,’ but because it uses language in peculiar ways. [...] Literature transforms and intensifies ordinary language, deviates systematically from everyday speech. If you approach me at a bus stop and murmur ‘Thou still unravished bride of quietness,’ then I am instantly aware that I am in the presence of the literary. I know this because the texture, rhythm and resonance of your words are in excess of their abstractable meaning – or, as the linguists might more technically put it, there is a disproportion between the signifiers and the signifieds. Your language draws attention to itself, flaunts its material being, as statements like ‘Don’t you know the drivers are on strike?’ do not.<sup>2</sup>

The arguments to follow will be twofold: on the one hand, the paper will rely on concepts of Russian Formalism and Prague Structuralism, which distinguish ‘poetic’ from ‘prosaic’ language by its application of literary devices as well as its dependency on context. At the same time, it will argue that it is the unexpected literariness of poetic language in the public realm that permits words, lines, or stanzas to appear as ‘lyric.’<sup>3</sup>

Urban sociology defines ‘public space’ according to three basic features: accessibility, anonymity and openness to different kinds of actions.<sup>4</sup> Public space is opposed to private space, the second basic spatial realm of the city. Private space is the *locus* of intimacy and subjectivity, where the literary genre of poetry in particular was situated for centuries: poetry published in books and read on one’s own in a domestic setting.



Figure 1: Waste Bin in Hamburg (2009).

<sup>2</sup> Eagleton (1983: 2).

<sup>3</sup> My use of the term ‘lyric’ is related to Jonathan Culler’s notion, who defines it as “a Western tradition of short, nonnarrative, highly rhythmical productions, often stanzaic, whose aural dimension is crucial” (Culler 2015: 89). Contrary to Culler I will also refer to ‘poetry’ and ‘the poetic word’ in a broader sense.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Gestring et al. (2005: 225-226).

Alienated proverbs displayed on German waste bins urging inhabitants to use them may serve as an example here (Figure 1). Such consciously applied poetic devices attract the pedestrian's attention by creating what Roman Jakobson called the "palpability of signs." In Jakobson's view, literature is distinct from non-literary texts because it activates the "aesthetic" or "poetic function" of language, a "focus on the message for its own sake,"<sup>5</sup> or in Victor Shklovsky's well-known words: literature exists "in order to make us feel objects, to make a stone feel stony."<sup>6</sup> Thus, the recipient 'stumbles' over the words, much like over a stone, and pays close attention to them. The resulting slowdown of perception offers the chance of "observing language at work":

Indem die poetische Rede ‚das Wort als Wort‘ inszeniert, lenkt sie die Aufmerksamkeit auf die materiellen, strukturalen und relationalen Qualitäten der Worte selbst: die Wörter tragen ihre Bedeutungen nicht in sich, sie werden ihnen in der Rede aufgetragen. Wenn in der poetischen Sprache also zu sich kommt, verliert sie ihre Transparenz auf die gemeinten Gegenstände (Gefühle etc.), der Automatismus der Bedeutungen wird irritiert.<sup>7</sup>

Poetic language is perceived as such if it creates deviations, a heightened awareness of its materiality and structure – an 'aesthetic surplus' that exceeds the communicative function dominating the public sphere with its cacophony of street signs, ads, sirens, acoustic signals, people talking, screaming, etc. The unexpected language play that appears on waste bins – which changes an idiomatic phrase such as *selten so wohl gefühlt* ('rarely felt so well') to *selten so wohl gefüllt* ('rarely filled so well') – is an example of the sudden 'dominance' of the poetic function. In other words, experiential phenomena such as standing at a bus stop and unexpectedly hearing or reading words like "Thou still unravished bride of quietness" – a line from John Keats's "Ode on a Grecian Urn" (1820) – is what this paper is about: it will explore the surprising, stimulating, even unsettling presence of the poetic word in contemporary urban space. At the same time, it will examine the 'in-betweenness' of poetry encountered in the city: shifting not only between the oral and the written mode, between communicative message and aesthetic experience, but also between distance and proximity, public and private discourse, thus corresponding to the two contrasting social spheres of action mentioned above. How does a subject encounter the sudden presence of the lyric in urban space and how are poetry and city related?

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<sup>5</sup> Jakobson (1960: 356).

<sup>6</sup> He claims that "the device of art makes perception long and 'laborious'" and it does so "[b]y 'estranging' objects and complicating form" (Shklovsky 1990: 5-6).

<sup>7</sup> Helmstetter (1995: 34). "By staging 'the word as word,' poetic language draws our attention to the material, structural and relational qualities of the words themselves: the words do not carry their meaning within them; their meanings are assigned to them in speech. When language comes around to itself in poetic form, it loses its transparency with regard to the objects being signified (feelings etc.); it confounds the automatism of signification." (English translation by Claudia Benthien).

Recent debates on the ‘politics’ of the communal space are relevant here. For instance, one might ask if the public sphere is diminished by means of privatization and commercialization or if genuine anonymity, previously one of the defining characteristics of urban life, still exists in an era of heightened video surveillance, security services and police presence. These critical issues have been addressed through numerous acts of public assembly in the recent past.<sup>8</sup>

### 1. “Poetry in Motion”

This paper consists of five case studies of written or oral poetry in urban space. The first example is the popular project “Poetry in Motion” in the New York City Subway. Poems for this series were (and are) selected by representatives of the Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) and the Poetry Society of America.<sup>9</sup> The subway can be considered a *non-lieu* (‘non-place’), a term coined by the anthropologist Marc Augé to describe public spaces that “cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity.”<sup>10</sup> Non-places are sites of transit, “of anonymous transportation, consumption and entertainment”<sup>11</sup>: airports, train stations, hotels, shopping malls, and supermarkets, for instance. As Augé notes, such non-places have one common feature, namely “that they are defined partly by the words and texts they offer us: their ‘instructions for use’, which may be prescriptive (‘Take right-hand lane’), prohibitive (‘No smoking’) or informative (‘You are now entering the Beaujolais region’).”<sup>12</sup> Humans, Augé emphasizes, “are supposed to interact only with texts, whose proponents are not individuals but ‘moral entities’ or institutions.” He further comments this “peculiarity” as follows:

All the remarks that emanate from our roads and commercial centres, from the streetcorner sites of the vanguard of the banking system (“Thank you for your cus-

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<sup>8</sup> They also form the central topic of Judith Butler’s “Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly,” which investigates new forms of democracy, collectivity, and participation in the public sphere. Butler mentions i.a. the Arab Spring, Occupy Wallstreet, and the anti-precarity demonstrations. Cf. Butler (2015: 7).

<sup>9</sup> Submissions were/are not accepted, so even though poems are publicly displayed, the project is not ‘democratic.’ The first four poems to appear were “Crossing Brooklyn Ferry” by Walt Whitman, “Hope is the Thing with Feathers” by Emily Dickinson, “When You Are Old” by William Butler Yeats, and “Let There Be New Flowering” by Lucille Clifton. Within this selection, Whitman’s long, extravagant poem stands out, as it self-reflexively thematizes both the city it is ‘riding in’ and the movement itself. The MTA website uses this theme for promotional purposes, stating that “It would have pleased Walt Whitman, that poet of urban motion, to envision his words coursing by electrified rail through a diverse, global city of 8 million souls.” Cf. <http://web.mta.info/mta/aft/poetry/> [18/08/2020].

<sup>10</sup> Augé (2006: 77-78).

<sup>11</sup> Joselit (1998: 55).

<sup>12</sup> Augé (2006: 96).

tom,” “Bon voyage,” “We apologize for any inconvenience”) are addressed simultaneously and indiscriminately to each and any of us: they fabricate the “average man,” defined as the user of the road, retail or banking system. [...]

[A] person entering the space of non-place is relieved of his usual determinants. He becomes no more than what he does or experiences in the role of passenger, customer or driver. [...]

The space of non-place creates neither singular identity nor relations; only solitude, and similitude.<sup>13</sup>

Augé explicitly refers to the transportation system and to highways – non-places, it seems, are often characterized by mobility. Thus, the subway is an example of a non-place in that it facilitates mobility, issues instructions, confronts with ads, and necessitates orientation via maps all while granting passengers a degree of anonymity.



Figure 2: Subway Poem “Train Rising out of the Sea” by John Ashbery with artwork by Monika Bravo from her mosaic installation “Duration” (New York City, 2019).

In the first phase of “Poetry in Motion” (1992-2008), poems appeared on overhead ‘car cards’ at the very spot where one expects to find ads (or next to them). They were placed “under a [...] masthead featuring mosaic tile art from a number of

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 100-103.

subway stations,” below the title “SubTalk” and the MTA logo. After a hiatus of four years, the program was relaunched in 2012 under the patronage of the MTA’s Arts & Design section. The poems now appear on larger, “‘premium square’ car cards,” paired with a visual artwork and placed on window level in the cars (Figure 2).<sup>14</sup> It is obvious that the new format not only features a different aesthetic, but also changes the mode of perception. From now on, passengers are confronted with ‘framed’ and visually adorned poetry, which is further de-contextualized from its surroundings. When a passenger sits in front of a poem, others cannot read it. What is more, the presentation resembles a picture on the wall – poetry as decoration, it seems.

One of the recently displayed poems is “Notes On Longing” by Tina Chang:

It smells of after-rain tonight.  
 Duck bones, a wounded egg on rice.  
 On the corner, there is a shop,  
 that makes keys, keys that open  
 human doors, doors that lead  
 to rooms that hold families  
 of four or seven that sit at a table.  
 There is a mother who brings  
 sizzling flounder on a wide platter  
 for the family whose ordinary  
 mouths have been made to sing.<sup>15</sup>

Chang’s text is exemplary for “Poetry in Motion”: it is short, easy to grasp, and contains an imagery loosely related to riding the subway, for instance, the reference to a street corner shop making keys or the fact that many commuters on the train go home after work for dinner. At the same time, the poem’s title pointedly evokes a sense of longing and nostalgia, particularly where traditional gender roles are concerned, thereby presenting the mother’s role as something ‘unreal,’ something of a bygone era – or an imaginary past, perhaps in an Asian country such as Taiwan, where a part of the author’s family lives. Reading a poem like this one in public, even silently, causes contradictory emotions, not only because it is slightly kitschy, but also because it thematizes personal emotions. From the perspective of social psychology, ‘longing’ is a state of mind subway passengers try to avoid, as the habitus in such situations of anonymity and proximity demands distance and reserve.

At this juncture, it is helpful to refer to Georg Simmel’s notion of the “metropolitan type.”<sup>16</sup> Even though he wrote his article “The Metropolis and Mental Life” more than a century ago, it still offers a valid description of the urban social character. The public space of the city is characterized by a “heterogeneity of

<sup>14</sup> <http://web.mta.info/mta/aft/poetry/history.html> [18/08/2020].

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/culture-desk/the-poems-in-the-subway-get-an-exhibit-of-their-own> [18/08/2020].

<sup>16</sup> Simmel (2002: 12).

actors,” by frequent encounters with strangers and by a “spatial density of interactions.”<sup>17</sup> Simmel claims that the urban character “creates a protective organ [...] against the profound disruption with which the fluctuations and discontinuities of the external milieu threaten it.”<sup>18</sup> The reactions of the ‘metropolitan type’ are primarily rational, his or her responses are “moved to a sphere of mental activity which is least sensitive and which is furthest removed from the depth of the personality.”<sup>19</sup> According to Simmel, social relations in big cities are functional and segmented. Urbanity, on the one hand, enables individualization but on the other strongly affects human behavior by creating physical and mental distance between urban dwellers.<sup>20</sup> Simmel calls this mental state a “protection of the inner life against the domination of the metropolis.”<sup>21</sup> His characterization of the urban character has recently been applied in particular to the habitus of New Yorkers by Donna Stonecipher, who claims that they “donned their blasé attitudes along with their coats as they left their apartments.”<sup>22</sup>



Figure 3: Subway rider in front of “Notes on Longing” by Tina Chang (New York City, 2019).

Poetry in the subway creates disruption, precisely by calling into question this intellectual, distanced persona which is so typical for a global metropolis like New

<sup>17</sup> Häußermann (2005: 238).

<sup>18</sup> Simmel (2002: 12).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Häußermann (2005: 238).

<sup>21</sup> Simmel (2002: 12).

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Stonecipher (2018: 24).

York City. One might even feel caught or embarrassed when being observed while reading a poem that deals with longing, smell, taste and private life.<sup>23</sup> Correspondingly, one might experience the same when seeing others read the poem – or simply sit in front of it with a bunch of flowers like this melancholic woman (Figure 3). However, most subway riders overlook the poems which reflects the reserve and “blasé attitude” of the *citoyen* described by Simmel: an “incapacity” (or unwillingness) “to react to new stimulations,” as he puts it.<sup>24</sup>

## 2. Open Air Poetry Slam

The second example is “Best of Poetry Slam Open Air” (2015). Even though researchers of spoken word and poetry slams apply the notion of ‘public sphere’ to these events,<sup>25</sup> one has to admit that a show with an entrance fee of 28 Euros is not accessible to everybody, while the other two features of public space – anonymity and openness – remain, at least to a certain degree. With more than 5,000 visitors, supposedly the largest poetry slam event in history, it took place at the Trabrennbahn (racecourse) in the Bahrenfeld district of Hamburg. The slam was audible far beyond the racecourse within the urban space. During the event, prominent German-language slam poets performed their works, amplified by huge loud speakers. As anyone who has attended a pop concert or a reading of literature in an auditorium knows, it is a paradoxical phenomenon that the human voice evokes intimacy and closeness particularly through electroacoustic technology. The use of microphones de-spatializes and disembodies the voice, which is no longer perceived as emanating from the site of its enunciation, the performer’s body, but rather appears in the form of an “acoustic close-up”<sup>26</sup> due to the loudspeakers spread across the stage. This amplification creates a particular kind of acoustic intimacy that may be experienced even outside of the performance space.

One example will suffice in order to illustrate this point, namely Julia Engelmann’s performance of “One Day / Reckoning Text,” a very well-known slam text that is easily recognized as poetry as it contains verse, rhyme and iteration. It deals with *carpe diem*, a popular topic in both Early Modern and contemporary poetry – here an excerpt of this rather long spoken word poem:

„Ach, das mach ich später“  
 ist die Baseline meines Alltags  
 Ich bin so furchtbar faul  
 wie ein Kieselstein am Meeresgrund.  
 Ich bin so furchtbar faul,

<sup>23</sup> In sociology, ‘public’ and ‘private’ spaces are distinguished on the functional, juridical, social and symbolic level. Cf. Gestring et al. (2005: 224).

<sup>24</sup> Simmel (2002: 14).

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Damon (1998: 326-327).

<sup>26</sup> „[A]kustische Großaufnahme“ (Pinto 2012: 25; English translation by Claudia Benthien).



mein Patronus ist ein Schweinehund.  
 Mein Leben ist ein Wartezimmer,  
 niemand ruft mich auf.  
 Mein Dopamin – das spar ich immer,  
 falls ich's noch mal brauch.<sup>27</sup>

Hearing these lines, for instance while strolling through the Hamburg Volkspark, elicits once again an unsettling sense of intimacy and subjectivity, a connection with a human voice far away and yet so close. Engelmann's performance evokes a seemingly 'embodied subjectivity' due to similar character traits of the first-person speaker within the text and the visible and audible poet, which leads to a melting of these two levels of subjectivity and creates an 'authenticity effect.'<sup>28</sup> In her performance, she employs "numerous emphases"<sup>29</sup> that communicate emotional involvement. In the quoted excerpt of this spoken word poem, Engelmann's equation of her life with a *Wartezimmer* ('waiting room') where no one is calling her is particularly significant, as it describes a state of in-betweenness that resonates with the idea of a 'non-place:' a space and state where one waits for a train, a bus, an airplane – or a medical consultation. It is not a space of habitation, but of transit.

### 3. Jenny Holzer: Light Projections

From the beginning, Jenny Holzer's linguistic involvement in the urban space has produced a strong sense of disruption by presenting seemingly subjective and personal messages in unexpected places, more precisely by adapting their visual presentational mode.<sup>30</sup> Holzer began writing and using her "Truisms" in the 1970s, and she continues to exhibit them in various contexts and media – in museums, but frequently also in the public space of large cities. Her texts are not poetry in the strict sense but short phrases or aphorisms whose content and message range from popular, even banal knowledge to reflexive wisdom and political activism. Among the most famous are "PROTECT ME FROM WHAT I WANT" which was displayed at Times Square and "RAISE BOYS AND GIRLS THE SAME WAY" printed e.g., on the hood of a taxi during her exhibition at the Venice Biennale.<sup>31</sup> Using specific linguistic devices, these short phrases reveal

<sup>27</sup> "“Oh, I'll do that later' / is the baseline of my daily routine / I am so terribly lazy / like a pebble stone at the bottom of the sea. / I am so terribly lazy, / My weaker self is my Patronus. / My life is a waiting room, / nobody calls me. / I'll save my dopamine for later, / in case I might need it at some point.” (Engelmann: “One Day / Reckoning Text”, in: Engelmann 2014: 25; English translation by Claudia Benthien).

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Novak (2017: 157-158); also see Benthien / Prange (2020).

<sup>29</sup> Novak (2017: 155; English translation by Claudia Benthien).

<sup>30</sup> The Holzer passage is an adapted and reworked version taken from Benthien / Lau / Marxsen (2019: 96-98).

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Joselit (1998: 57 and 63).

“the discursive structure of public signs, advertising and popular media.”<sup>32</sup> Holzer often chooses either highly significant places or landmarks of a city, or, on the contrary, non-places in the Augéan sense – e.g. in a Las Vegas show where exhibitions were held at the McCarran International Airport, the Caesars Palace Hotel and the Fashion Show Mall.<sup>33</sup>

As stated before, one of the issues this paper is dealing with is the ‘publication’ of poetry (or poetry-like language) as a way of both evoking and questioning notions of ‘lyric subjectivity’. Lyric poetry has traditionally been understood as the ‘subjective genre’ of emotions and sentiments, a persisting view strongly influenced by Hegel,<sup>34</sup> who claimed that poetry does not represent “the thing itself” but its “*inner* vision and feeling.”<sup>35</sup> According to Hegel, the poet’s “individual subjective life”<sup>36</sup> constitutes the theme of the poem and “what he [...] manifests in his portrayal of this material is only the inherent and independent life of his feelings and meditations.”<sup>37</sup> Such a “lyricization of poetry” resulted from the “historical transformation of many varied poetic genres into the single abstraction of the post-Romantic lyric.”<sup>38</sup> Even though the majority of poems do not fit this characterization, associating poetry with subjectivity remained popular until the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in particular for a general audience. When Holzer presents speech acts of seeming ‘lyric subjectivity’ in the urban space of contemporary metropolises, this unexpected aesthetic experience induces a moment of disruption: who is, for instance, the ‘I’ speaking about “LOSING TIME” (Figure 4)?



Figure 4: Jenny Holzer: *Arno, Xenon projektion* (Florence, 1996).

<sup>32</sup> Hughes (2006: 421-422).

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Joselit (1998: 57).

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Culler (2015: 92-101); Benthien / Lau / Marxsen (2019: 119-120).

<sup>35</sup> Hegel (1998: 1111).

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 1114.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 1118.

<sup>38</sup> Jackson (2008: 183).

Most of Holzer's xenon light projections display texts or single lines written in simple, white, bold, sans-serif, capital letters on buildings and landmarks. During a show at Fondation Beyeler, for example, xenon light projections in German and English were installed in different locations in and around Basel and Zurich. On the opening day of the exhibition, Holzer's work could be experienced on the facade of the Basel city hall. A later projection was set up in the Zurich neighborhood of Lindenhof, illuminating the Limmat River, a water sports club and part of the old city wall (Figure 5). Thus, the gigantic light script embraced different elements of the city, creating new performative meaning that was constantly in motion and perceivable only in the present tense. Presenting her work at the market place, at the city hall and in the proximity of the main church, Holzer chose significant locations, emblematic of the socio-spatial organization of the traditional European city with its medieval origins.<sup>39</sup> Contrary to this, her signature U.S. location, Times Square in New York City, is a hotspot of advertisements, news and turbo capitalism.<sup>40</sup> Whereas in 'old' European cities, the projections add a strong element of alienation and contrast, in the U.S. metropolises, the modern and fleeting aesthetic of Holzer's script-based artworks is easily integrated into the existing sign culture and thus rather creates a sensation of alienation on the level of content.



Figure 5: Jenny Holzer: "For Zurich," Xenon projection (Zurich, 2009).

<sup>39</sup> Cf. Siebel (2004: 11-50).

<sup>40</sup> On the sociological distinctions between European and U.S.-American cities, see Häußermann (2005).

For the Swiss installations, Holzer combines “Truisms” with poetry written by the Nobel Laureate Wisława Szymborska and the poet Henry Cole. The “Truisms” ambiguity creates a literary effect by using a language that is “by careful design, already unstable – [...] a language that is free-floating, polysemous and inherently ambiguous.”<sup>41</sup> Language acquires an even more ambiguous nature when Holzer’s texts are combined with poetry. Both text types are presented in the same font; there is no visual distinction. One of the poems projected in the Zurich installation, for instance, is Szymborska’s “In Praise of Feeling Bad about Yourself” (“Pochwała złęgo o sobie mniemania”, 1976):

The buzzard never says it is to blame.  
The panther wouldn’t know what scruples mean.  
When the piranha strikes, it feels no shame.  
If snakes had hands, they’d claim their hands were clean.

A jackal doesn’t understand remorse.  
Lions and lice don’t waver in their course.  
Why should they, when they know they’re right?

Though hearts of killer whales may weigh a ton,  
in every other way they’re light.

On this third planet of the sun  
among the signs of bestiality  
a clear conscience is Number One.<sup>42</sup>

While Holzer’s conceptual art creates disruption and a perplexing ‘personal appeal’ through her frequent use of the first and second person singular, Szymborska’s poem evokes the opposite effect through the author’s deliberate avoidance of those pronouns in favor of an anonymous ‘they.’ Moreover, this poem refers to numerous exotic animals which form a stark contrast to what is factually there in the city center. At the same time, it speaks about fundamental, yet uncomfortable, human feelings: guilt, scruples, shame and remorse.

When projected on elements of the cityscape, Holzer’s and Szymborska’s interlaced lines aestheticize their surroundings, both commenting on and appropriating them. Whatever the light touches instantly becomes part of the public artwork, only to disappear from sight again when the projection moves on. Projection and city enter into a mutual exchange, an interplay of the illuminated and illuminating script, the spatial surrounding, the situative context, the use of media, and the performative reception processes.<sup>43</sup> Words are literally ‘projected’ on objects, exposing the arbitrary connection between signifiers and signified. Instead of ‘attaching’ meaning to

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<sup>41</sup> Hughes (2006: 426).

<sup>42</sup> Szymborska (2010: 114). Holzer used this poem both in a project in Frankfurt/Main, Germany, and in the Swiss project discussed here.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Lehmann (2002: 265).

things by naming them, the script itself is blurred and becomes difficult or even impossible to read when projected on uneven surfaces or, as in Zurich, on water:

Thus presented, the image unfolds its own attraction, as though the word were its concern alone. [...] The question of perception focuses us on the content, and the search for a message confronts us with the form.<sup>44</sup>

This aesthetic experience is heightened due to the public display of poetic language whose source and authorship remain ambiguous.

#### 4. The “avenidas” debate

The fourth case study concerns a debate on a ‘concrete poem’ in the double meaning of the word: Eugen Gomringer’s “avenidas,” visible until recently on a building of the Alice Salomon Hochschule, a Berlin college of education. In 2011, Gomringer’s Spanish poem was painted in giant letters on the southern front of the college, in order to honor one of the founders of concrete poetry and recipient of the school’s annual poetics prize<sup>45</sup>:

avenidas  
avenidas y flores

flores  
flores y mujeres

avenidas  
avenidas y mujeres

avenidas y flores y mujeres y  
un admirador<sup>46</sup>

In 2016, the college’s student organization (AStA) complained that those eight plain lines, written in 1953 as the first so-called ‘Konstellationsgedicht’ (‘constellation poem’) by the Bolivian-Swiss poet, represented an outdated image of women and did not correspond to the college’s present-day self-understanding. The school administration’s response to invite student suggestions for a new exterior design resulted in a heated, even absurd debate in the German features section on sexism and the freedom of artistic expression. The German State Min-

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<sup>44</sup> Werner (2010: 24).

<sup>45</sup> It is an award for “artists who have contributed to the further development of the literary, visual or acoustic arts through special stylistic idioms and diversity while working in an interdisciplinary manner and having an interdisciplinary effect”.  
<https://www.ash-berlin.eu/en/about-ash-berlin/profile/awards/> [18/08/2020].

<sup>46</sup> “avenues / avenues and flowers // flowers / flowers and women // avenues / avenues and women // avenues and flowers and women and / an admirer” (English translation by Claudia Benthien).

ister for Culture Monika Grütters spoke of an „erschreckenden Akt der Kulturbarbarei“<sup>47</sup> (a ‘shocking act of cultural barbarism’). Political correctness, Grütters argued, should never undermine the freedom of art and culture. By calling this „eine der wichtigsten Lehren aus der Geschichte“ (‘one of the most important lessons from history’), she implicitly associated the school’s administration with the Nazi regime in its exclusion of ‘degenerated’ art.<sup>48</sup>

The poet Esther Dischereit argued against Grütters’ claim, stating that the freedom of art was granted through the initial act of publication. „Jetzt aber“, she writes, „will die Hochschule [...] das Gedicht zuklappen, wegtun von der Fassade, gewissermaßen zurück ins Buch“ – in a figurative sense, the college wants to ‘close’ the poem, to put it back into the book. Dischereit further elaborates the book-wall analogy by arguing that the ‘wall poem,’ contrary to the ‘book poem,’ is part of public space – a space of change where some simply do not want to read such a text on a daily basis or accept the “gesture of this gentlemen, his jovial attitude towards women” any longer. She emphasizes the changing self-image of women, of people in general who “neither relate to women or men” in such a way and concludes by contrasting “the freedom of art” with the “freedom of opinion and of writing in public space” by asking: “Why should only the poet write on the public space? To whom does this space belong?”<sup>49</sup>

After a long debate and notwithstanding the ongoing polemics, the college reached a compromise: the southern front of the building was to be redesigned every five years with a different poem by a poetics prize laureate. Gomringer’s work, however, was to be engraved on a small steel plate on the wall.<sup>50</sup> This change was implemented in late 2018. Now, Gomringer’s poem is set in steel at

<sup>47</sup> Cf. <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/fassadenstreit-in-berlin-gruetters-bezeichnet-uebermalung-von-gedicht-als-kulturbarbarei/20885268.html> [18/08/2020].

<sup>48</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> „Die Freiheit der Kunst, die ist ja gegeben. Der Dichter konnte schreiben, was er wollte. Er konnte es publizieren, und es hat keiner verboten. [...] Jetzt aber will die Hochschule für Soziale Arbeit das Gedicht zuklappen, wegtun von der Fassade, gewissermaßen zurück ins Buch. Das ist eigentlich nichts Schlimmes. Die Bücher sind handlicher und man kann in dem Lesefluß bleiben, der für den oder die Lesenden der richtige ist. [...] Mit der Fassade verhält es sich anders. Hier steht das Gedicht im öffentlichen Raum. Andere wollen davon jetzt nicht mehr gespielt werden. Sie wollen diesen Text nicht täglich lesen. Manche spricht er nicht an, oder nicht mehr, andere fühlen hier diese Geste des Herrn, dessen joviale Art gegenüber der Frau. Da hat sich das Selbstbild der Frauen inzwischen geändert, bis hin in den Sprachgebrauch hinein. Und nicht nur der Frauen, auch aller Menschen, die sich in dieser Weise weder ihnen noch den Männern zuordnen. [...] Von diesen Dingen hat die sich aufregende Kunstwelt offenbar entweder nichts gehört oder es interessiert sie nicht oder es wird als übertriebener Quatsch empfunden. | Die Freiheit der Kunst gegenüber der Freiheit der Meinung und des Schreibens im öffentlichen Raum. Warum sollte überhaupt nur der oder die Dichtende den öffentlichen Raum beschreiben? Wem gehört dieser Raum?“ (Dischereit 2018; English translation by Claudia Benthien).

<sup>50</sup> Cf. <https://www.ash-berlin.eu/hochschule/organisation/referat-hochschulkommunikation/pressespiegel-fassadendebatte/> [18/08/2020].

the bottom of the wall, together with a comment by Gomringer and a note by Barbara Köhler, whose poem written for this occasion was the first to replace Gomringer's (Figure 6), as well as a link to a website documenting the debate. Köhler's poem also contains eight lines in four short stanzas, thus overwriting that of Gomringer in a spatial notion too, as the title of her note, „Überschreibung“ also emphasizes:

SIE BEWUNDERN SIE  
BEZWEIFELN SIE ENTSCHIEDEN:

SIE WIRD ODER WERDEN GROSS  
ODER KLEIN GESCHRIEBEN SO

STEHEN SIE VOR IHNEN  
IN IHRER SPRACHE

WÜNSCHEN SIE IHNEN  
BON DIA GOOD LUCK



Figure 6: Southern front of Alice Salomon Hochschule with Barbara Köhler's poem (2018).

Köhler stressed that the poem she ‘donated’ to the college was written “to move the debate possibly in another direction” and, at the same time, to “lead it *ad absurdum*.”<sup>51</sup> She furthermore claimed to have woven individual letters of “avenidas” into her poem. In her public note at the bottom of the wall, the poet comments:

Ein Gedicht mit Vorgeschichte: ein Gedicht an einem Ort, an dem davor ein anderes Gedicht stand, um das eine Geschichte entstand, die sehr verschieden erzählt wurde – als öffentliche Debatte. Was eigentlich passt, weil auch der Ort ein öffentlicher ist. Das neue Gedicht ist ein Teil dieser Geschichte, es macht nicht Schluss damit, nur eine weitere Schicht: aus dem Gedicht davor ist ein Gedicht dahinter geworden. Durch die Schrift lässt sich in die Zeit sehen: das Aktuelle erinnert das Vorherige, nimmt es auf, löscht es nicht aus. An einem Ort, sagt das Gedicht so, kann’s mehr als eines geben oder einen; möglich ist vieles – Wohin erinnern Sie sich? Wofür und wem geben Sie Raum? Und wer, sagen Sie, hätte nichts zu sagen? Das Gedicht wendet sich an die Öffentlichkeit, an die Vielen, die den Ort täglich passieren: es begrüßt sie ausdrücklich, es gäbe ihnen gern Verschiedenes zu denken. Und sollte Ihnen daran etwas Spanisch vorkommen und so nicht korrekt, könnte es sich vielleicht auch um eine andere Sprache handeln – Katalanisch z. B.<sup>52</sup>

In this comment, Köhler plays with the verb *sagen*, in her poem likewise with the ambiguity of the German word *Sie/sie* (both formal address and pronoun, both singular and plural). She also grants subjectivity to the poem as an entity, which seems to be speaking in the same manner as its readers. The meaning of the line „SIE BEWUNDERN SIE / BEZWEIFELN SIE ENTSCHIEDEN:“ (‘you admire you doubt you decide’) remains ambiguous since the second *sie* could either be the object of the verb *bewundern* (to admire) or the subject of the verb *bezweifeln* (to doubt). In the following stanza, „SIE WIRD ODER WERDEN GROSS / ODER KLEIN GESCHRIEBEN SO“ (‘she will [singular] or will [plural] be written in capital or lower case letters like this’), the *Sie/sie* suddenly turns from singular to plural and, in another twist, refers to the poem’s letters and to the fact that this poem, contrary to Gomringer’s lower case, uses exclusively capital letters. Köhler’s poem even claims about its own letters, „STEHEN SIE VOR IHNEN / IN IHRER SPRACHE“ (‘they stand before you in their/your language’), wishing you “BON DIA GOOD LUCK”. Thus, the poem receives agency, directly addressing the reader in the urban

<sup>51</sup> „Ich habe den Vorschlag gemacht, der Hochschule ein Gedicht zu schenken, um eine Debatte, die nach meinem Dafürhalten gründlich schief lief, womöglich in eine andere Richtung zu bewegen, sie vielleicht ein bisschen *ad absurdum* zu führen.“ (Köhler 2018).

<sup>52</sup> <https://www.ash-berlin.eu/hochschule/presse-und-newsroom/news/news/barbara-koehlers-gedicht-auf-suedfassade-der-alice-salomon-hochschule-berlin/> [18/08/2020] (“A poem with a history: a poem at a site where another poem once stood, around which a story unfolded, which was told in very different ways – as a public debate. [...] [T]he poem in front has turned into a poem behind. Through the script, one may perceive time: the present commemorates what was before, it incorporates but does not extinguish it. At one place, the poem likewise says, there can be more than one [thing or person]; many things are possible. – What do you remember? For what and whom do you give room [*Raum geben*, implying both a literal and a figurative sense]? And who, do you say, would have nothing to say?”; English translation by Claudia Benthien).



space of Berlin in its final stanza, and concluding in two foreign languages. However, in Köhler's intervention, as multi-layered as it is, the controversial feminist debate initiated by Gomringer's poem is latent: it is neither there nor fully absent. Nevertheless, one must conclude that Köhler enabled a thought-provoking encounter with 'public poetry' and its negotiations in an urban setting.

### 5. From „augenpost“ to “#audiblepoetry”

The final case study focuses on the poet and performer Ulrike Almut Sandig, who executed an urban poetry intervention in Leipzig called „augenpost“ ('eye-mail') from 2001 to 2004. Once a month, Sandig, together two peers, Marlen Pelný and Dorit Horn, walked through the city, hung poetry on lamp posts, walls, traffic lights, electrical boxes and doors, and also handed them out as flyers and postcards to passers-by.<sup>53</sup> The women also gave readings in the streets of Leipzig, which they called „ohrenpost“ ('ear-mail').<sup>54</sup> In addition, Sandig posted two texts with questions such as the following:

Bleibst du stehen oder gehst du weiter? Und weißt du, wie du stehst? Kennst du den Ort, wo du jetzt hingehst und willst du dahin? Bist du entschlossen? Und warst du schon alt? Bist du online und kannst du mich riechen? Hast du gesehen, wie Spinnen aus den Stromkästen kriechen und Netze in die Ampeln spannen? Und quer über die Brücken im Park? Was tust du, wenn die Ampel auf grau springt?<sup>55</sup>

Readers took these questions seriously and wrote their answers next to the poems (Figure 7) – or posted them on the project's website. Although it is, strictly speaking, not poetry, this set of questions is remarkable in two ways: first, the reader is addressed as a perceiving, singular subject by questions articulated from a first-person perspective. Even though it asks such personal questions, the speaker or writer remains intangible. Second, the final question undoubtedly turns this text into literature, even poetry, due to its unexpected poetic deviation from the well-known German phrase *die Ampel springt auf grün*. Since the color adjectives *grau* and *grün* obviously share formal features, the shift is minimal but effective: contrary to green, grey is a non-color; it symbolizes boredom, monotony, an emotionless state.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. Johnson (2018: 279).

<sup>54</sup> They also extended the publicly displayed works into the digital realm by creating an interactive Flash website, which allowed for online encounters – the site as well as the poet's name was written on the bottom of the poem posters. Cf. Johnson (2018: 280).

<sup>55</sup> Sandig (2002). (“Do you stop or walk on? And do you know how you stand [or, figuratively: do you know what your opinion is]? Do you know the place you are heading to and do you want to go there? Are you determined? And were you already old? Are you online and can you smell me? Have you seen how spiders crawl out of the junction boxes and weave nets in the traffic lights? And across the bridges in the park? What do you do if the traffic light turns grey?”; English translation by Claudia Benthien).



Figure 7: Ulrike Almut Sandig:  
„Territorium“ from „augenpost“ (Leipzig, 2001-2004).

According to Rebecca May Johnson, „augenpost“ followed a tradition of anti-establishment artistic practices aimed at reaching an audience that usually did not read or listen to poetry. Johnson remarks that Sandig’s intervention

calls on residents to reflect on the urban environment and materials, opening up spaces for reflection on the relationship between nature and pollution, as well as love and urban alienation at the traffic lights while waiting to cross the road. As *Der Spiegel* reports, members of the public also interacted critically with the work, correcting grammar, adding insults and writing poems in response on the paper posters.<sup>56</sup>

In Johnson’s view, „augenpost“ can be traced back to the artistic-political practices of 1968, for instance the Situationist International movement and publications such as Henri Lefebvre’s manifesto “The Right to the City.” Lefebvre insists on the right of city inhabitants to create urban life and thus to transform themselves politically.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, he writes that

[t]he city historically constructed is no longer lived and understood practically. It is only an object of cultural consumption for tourists, for aestheticism, avid for spectacles and the picturesque. [...] Yet, the *urban* remains in a state of dispersed and alienated actuality, as kernel and virtuality.<sup>58</sup>

Lefebvre understood this “crisis of the traditional city”<sup>59</sup> as a chance for renewal and activism, as a utopian site.<sup>60</sup> In the 1960s, sociologists such as Jürgen Habermas developed an emphatic notion of *bürgerliche Öffentlichkeit* (bourgeois public sphere) as a democratic space free from economic and political control.<sup>61</sup> “[A]ugenpost” reflects this notion. One should also highlight the fact that the poems were placed precisely in locations where one expects to find public announcements (or

<sup>56</sup> Johnson (2018: 280).

<sup>57</sup> Cf. Johnson (2018: 284).

<sup>58</sup> Lefebvre (2000: 148).

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>60</sup> “To exercise a right to the city is also to politically de-alienate the urban subject who necessarily reshapes the urban environment as part of that de-alienation.” (Johnson 2018: 284).

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Häußermann / Siebel (2004: 62).

private housing requests). Distributing flyers and postcards also refers both to practices of advertising and political activity. The actions taken by Sandig and her peers were situated between the realms of consumer culture and politics. Once again, the “presence of the literary,” as Eagleton puts it, became dominant in and through an unexpected context.

In 2019, Sandig performed what she calls *#hörbardichtung* (or *#audiblepoetry*), an urban poetry intervention, in two Indian metropolises of the so-called “Global South,”<sup>62</sup> Delhi and Calcutta. The events included poetry readings at street corners and subway exits and in front of food stalls. Apart from Sandig, participants of a workshop she gave at the Goethe Institute (Max Mueller Bhavan) and Indian German language students read poetry and other short texts. Sandig informed the participants beforehand about the three most important points in her opinion for her: that ‘words create reality;’ that a suitable text would be a poem or story they believe to be strong enough ‘to add something’ that is missing to the city; and that the text should be short, audible, and preferably in a language spoken in India.<sup>63</sup>

With these remarks, the poet conceptualizes her work in public space as a form of healing the city of its lacking poeticity, a quality of language that not only sounds artistic but also needs to be understood by larger groups of inhabitants. Here is an excerpt of “from the wings,” one of the poems read by Sandig herself in English translated by Karen Leeder:

[...] in the beginning there’s no one.  
 in the land of beginning I lay  
 screaming. in the end I lie silent,  
 bearing a ribbon with white writing  
 that streams behind me. what’s on it?  
 in the beginning, the end, the same  
 vowel and always, always lying  
 you hear my beginning. [...]  
 I am made wholly of language  
 I am this wild vowel of origin  
 the defining feature of  
 my lost kind that must speak  
 to understand themselves. [...]<sup>64</sup>

Sandig performed “from the wings” and other poems using a megaphone for instance at Connaught Place, New Delhi’s central shopping square and one of the largest financial, commercial and business centers in India, which was established in the colonial era (Figure 8). The sound volume does not fit the words, just as the words do not fit the anonymous urban surrounding; they are enigmatic, subjective, even physical. As emphasized by Dieter Burdorf, a distinctive feature of poetry is that it is “addressing the reader directly” because of “the structural dominance of

<sup>62</sup> Sennett (2017: 428).

<sup>63</sup> Cf. Ulrike Almut Sandig, e-mail to Claudia Benthien, March 4, 2019.

<sup>64</sup> Sandig (ca. 2018).

personal pronouns, especially those of first and second person.”<sup>65</sup> In Sandig’s case, this seeming subjectivity is further emphasized through a text that equates the speaker with the words spoken, leading to the poetological claim that the self is “made wholly of language” and that the addressed “you” is able to hear its “beginning.” It is through this verbal interchange between speaker and audience that the ‘poetic function’ dominates in Sandig’s lines.<sup>66</sup> The fact that a poem like hers was not only read aloud, but also proclaimed in high volume and thus ‘published,’ like a political protest, causes a strong sense of disruption.



Figure 8: Ulrike Almut Sandig: #audiblepoetry (New Delhi, 2019).

## 6. Conclusion

This paper has examined different forms of ‘public poetry’ in urban space – some meant to be read, others to be heard. Such a performative use of poetry is unsettling, calling for attention and allowing the recipient to pause and reflect, if only for a moment. It is the literariness of poetic language that causes deautomatization as it is presented in places and formats where one would expect advertisements, information or the expression of political protest. As an aesthetic intervention, public poetry either appears in significant sites of cities – a town hall, the riverside of a specific city, a racecourse and its surrounding public park, a college entrance – or, on the contrary, in non-places, sites of transit, such as the subway, a shopping area or a street corner. In all these urban places and sites, passers-by, characterized by a mental habitus of distance and self-protection, expect to read pragmatic texts.

<sup>65</sup> Burdorf (1997: 21; English translation by Claudia Benthien).

<sup>66</sup> “[A] poetic work cannot be defined as a work fulfilling neither an exclusively aesthetic function nor an aesthetic function along with other functions; rather, a poetic work is defined as a verbal message whose aesthetic function is its dominant.” (Jakobson 1987: 43).

Encountering the lyric in urban space questions this *persona* by means of ambiguous language and in particular by directly addressing the reader or listener. It allows one to stumble over the words and to reflect on one's relationship to contemporary city life, its anonymity and practicality, its demand for indifference and reserve.<sup>67</sup>

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