

ERC Advanced Grant „Poetry in the Digital Age”

Principal Investigator: Prof. Dr. Claudia Benthien

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Contemporary modes of poetry presentation are often located beyond the book, e.g. on stages or the internet. Such performative forms, supplementing poetic language by music or visual components as well as the physical presence of the poet, are opening up access to a genre that has frequently been considered abstract and elitist. Sophisticated ‘book poetry’ is being enhanced by popular formats and vice versa. Poetry is also gaining new functions, creating communities characterized by physical or virtual co-presence. Popular poetry formats and online practices promote the self-staging of the poet. Poetry may also serve as a tool for political activism, the expression of opinions and the playful negotiation of transculturality and multilingualism.

This project is situated between literary, cultural and interart studies. It will develop tools to analyze today’s multifaceted poetry formats, ranging from pop culture to works of ‘high’ art, by scrutinizing their forms and sites of presentation and performance – ranging from the theater stage to social media, from the written page to the urban space. It will answer the following questions: What factors have contributed to poetry’s current popularity? What is the best way to systemize its sub-genres? What new methods and theories are required to analyze them? How do entertainment and ‘high’ culture oppose one another, interact or mix? Which are the functions (aesthetic, cultural, social, political) of these new forms and modes of presentation?

Research will be structured into three sub-projects, focusing on (1) poetry and performance, (2) poetry and music, and (3) poetry and visual culture. An interdisciplinary team comprising scholars from the fields of literary studies, media and film studies, performance studies, sound studies, speech science and visual culture studies will work together to map this field.

By writing a ‘poetics of new forms,’ this project will be the first to study the great diversity, medial spectrum and dissemination of contemporary poetry. Its results will modify and extend the definition of poetry, changing the way that scholars, poets and the general public view this literary genre.

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