

## Poetry in the Digital Age

A recent issue of the European cultural journal *Lettre Internationale* published an essay by the German linguist and poet Dorothea Franck entitled, “Do we still need poems in the digital age?”<sup>1</sup> Her diagnosis is both idealistic and defensive. She argues that poetry addresses not only cognitive but also sensory intelligence. That it opens up new horizons of understanding by way of its formal and linguistic density. That it is the only art characterized by “economic irrelevance” and by its defiance of today’s commercialization of the arts. That it could be used to counter digitalization and the extensive availability of storage media if we were to employ traditional techniques such as memorization (to improve our increasingly diminishing ability to concentrate). That it reminds us of our “irreducible subjectivity” and enables introspection (again, as a reaction against the digital age and its culture of dissipation); and, finally, that poetry is resilient, which is why great poems will endure for millennia. The poems she quotes range from Goethe’s *Wanderer’s Nightsong* to the postwar poetry of Paul Celan. She does not mention, however, a single work written in the digital age.

The notion of the ‘digital age’ is not uncontested in cultural and media studies. It is used here as a heuristic category to denote the present day, where most information is available on computers and in digital form. Obviously, digitalization has not ‘changed everything’ and most forms, including poetry, continue to exist as they did before. Moreover, some of the popular contemporary forms of producing, performing and distributing poetry were developed long before the introduction of the computer (for instance, poets performing to music or poetry books being published with images). However, digitalization has had a significant transformative effect, exemplified in practices of communication and social interaction in general, particularly since the establishment of the standard of web 2.0 environments. Even today, literature is quite popular in its established, valued form of printed books. But many new intermedial genres have emerged in the digital age, meaning that, as in any other cultural realms, there is more diverse range of opportunities for the production and reception of literature. The fact that Franck’s backward-looking article won the first prize of an essay competition of the same title reveals the cultural urge to reflect upon the role of poetry as a literary genre in the digital era. It also reveals the tendency, to stick to established values and traditions, to defend literary culture as it was and should remain. What is at stake, however, is a decisively different approach: It seems necessary to inquire the relevance of poetry in the digital age by investigating its new multifaceted forms and manifestations, while acknowledging its history and genre theory.

### *The ‘Renaissance’ of Poetry in the Digital Age*

One needs to take into account the fact that the page and the printed book no longer constitute the sole focus of a poem’s presentation and reception. In many countries, poetry in its most popular form – the poetry slam – fills large theaters, even. Because poems can be performed on stage, they are available on CDs – spoken by the poets themselves or by professional speakers,

accompanied by music or beats –, are available as audio recordings in the internet on sites such as *lyrikline.org* or as video recordings, at YouTube or other social media platforms. Poetry can be found in installations in art museums and in public, urban space. Poetry also exists in the format of entertaining ‘poetry clips’ (resembling pop music clips) and as artistic ‘video poems’ or ‘poetry films’. Finally, there is a wide range of new experimental media poetry that employs kinetic script or natural or manipulated human voices, thus translating visual and sound poetry into the digital realm.

This broadening of poetry as a genre can be explained as a response to digitalization and social media in the “postprint era”<sup>2</sup>, calling for aesthetic experiences that deviate significantly from traditional script and book culture. Poets react by employing one of two strategies: Either they affirm such developments by adapting media technology and new event formats, or they remain in their established domain and present their works of dense language as exclusive and exquisite. Both strategies appear to be successful. For example, there are esteemed classic poets like Jan Wagner, who publishes one poetry book every two to three years and has been a recipient of Germany’s most prestigious literary awards. A counterexample is the award-winning German-language poet Nora Gomringer, who started in poetry slam and is now renowned for her high-quality and popular spoken-word poetry, which is disseminated on CDs, on the internet and at live events. The current popularity of poetry in these two variants – conventional vs. media-oriented – requires a thorough explanation. In an age that has repeatedly proclaimed the death of the book, the significance of literature is often negotiated on the basis of poetry, which is considered the ‘heart’ of literature, not least due to its “high density of meaning”, which requires a lot of philological effort, meaning that “it has come to epitomize literary interpretation itself”.<sup>3</sup>

Poetry as a literary genre has often been viewed as marginal, esoteric and anachronistic. However, over the course of the last few years, it has undergone a noticeable renaissance: Poetry and ‘the poetic’ seem to be ubiquitous in contemporary literary practice as well as in the arts and aesthetic discourse. Moreover, the awarding of the Nobel Prize in Literature to musician Bob Dylan sparked a heated debate – not just in the feature pages but in academia as well – about what counts as poetry and what does not. A visit to contemporary art exhibitions, e.g. the Venice Biennale or the Documenta, frequently leads to encounters with attributions of a ‘poetic’ or ‘lyric’ quality or content in visual artworks. These adjectives are used to refer to images, sounds and artistic spaces that are especially beautiful, elegiac or complex. In international art criticism, the categories of the poetic and the lyric have, in fact, become master topoi of aesthetic value. It is likely that this tendency reflects back onto poetry itself.

### *Revitalizing Poetry’s Intermedial Tradition*

These recent developments have drawn some attention to the intermedial history of the presentation of poetry, which has long been overlooked. However, new theories are required to analyze today’s multimodal and intermedial forms of poetry. Another factor that has not been considered up until now is the reciprocal entanglement of ‘high art’ and ‘pop culture’, which is particularly significant for contemporary poetry. Most literary scholars still shy away from this task and remain fixed to their established fields, which means that popular poetry “has garnered relatively little attention from intellectuals and virtually none from established poetry critics”<sup>4</sup>. This remark from an early book on ‘poetry at the end of print culture’ is even more relevant today, as

there is a growing public interest in, e.g., fast-moving digital formats in social media, such as InstaPoetry. Such easy-to-grasp poems question established norms of poetry as a literary form, as they tend to lack the complexity, thickness and literariness that has adhered to this genre. It is therefore no coincidence that contemporary poets with artistic ambitions are distancing themselves from the consumable ‘language of advertising’ in their poetics (e.g. Marion Poschmann or Durs Grünbein).

Even poets who continue to publish their poetry in print are inevitably reacting to the pluralization of the genre in one way or another, e.g. by following recent trends in publishing houses to provide supplementary audio CDs with recordings of the spoken poems. Older and recent forms exist side by side but are tightly interwoven, which researchers have described in interdisciplinary media studies concepts like ‘remediation’<sup>5</sup>, ‘transcription’<sup>6</sup>, ‘framing’<sup>7</sup> and ‘translation’<sup>8</sup>. Some new – or recently popularized – poetry formats, such as readings and spoken-word events, seem to be a response to a digital culture that emphasizes the ‘here and now’ and the collective character of the shared aesthetic experience. At the same time, it must be noted that liveness and mediatization are fundamentally intertwined and that most spoken-word poets, for example, carefully conceptualize and design their personal websites and online presence. It is time for research to reflect systematically the significance of these various digital dimensions for the genre of poetry.

Of course, the task is not simply to affirm these new forms of producing and presenting poetry in relation to its tradition but to critically analyze their aesthetics. A promising way to structure the disparate field of new forms and medial formats is to focus on the three most relevant intermedial (and interart) constellations of contemporary poetry: poetry and performance, poetry and music, poetry and audiovisual art. To investigate these different but closely related topic areas, approaches from other disciplines need to become part of the theoretical framework and research methodology. Literary studies and, in particular, poetry research, which have customarily dealt with printed texts and literary genre theory, will need to integrate methods from related disciplines such as media and performance studies, art theory, musicology and linguistics. It seems necessary to reformulate and develop an extended ‘contemporary’ philology that acknowledges new poetry formats and “the whole variegated media landscape in which the literary experience unfolds”<sup>9</sup>.

Even though the phenomena in question are global, they carry national or local characteristics and need to be approached from different cultural perspectives. Such a research endeavor has yet to be carried out, mainly due to the fact that there are currently two different groups of scholars, one of which investigates popular forms of poetry, while the other examines elaborate artistic poetry. It is necessary to bridge the gap between these fields of entertainment and mainstream culture on the one hand and high-culture aesthetics on the other. Furthermore, one needs to emphasize the medial dimension of poetry, an undertaking that seems especially necessary with view to this genre, which is still largely based on the narrow, established book-culture concept of literature. The future lies in interdisciplinary research that assumes a broad perspective while undertaking in-depth analyses and providing theoretical insights. Although cultural studies have had a huge transformative impact on literary studies, this inevitable turn has not yet taken place in poetry research.

### *Poetry and Performance*

One popular format is the oral performance of poetry at poetry readings, spoken-word events and poetry slams. Spoken-word literature and slam poetry stand in close proximity to poetry's origins in orality. The focal point is the poet's live performance in front of an audience and his or her text performance. A performance is a "genuine manifestation of poetry"<sup>10</sup>, not a derivative version of a written poem. It occurs in a particular place, and the situational conditions frame the poem and send it forth as an aesthetic happening<sup>11</sup>: a "soundpoetic event"<sup>12</sup>. Although poetry readings have a long tradition, e.g. in the avant-gardes and Beat poetry, the growing popularity of poets performing their texts at live events or in front of a recording device is a response to digitalization that counters virtualization. The physical and auditory presence of the performers embodying their own texts generates "authenticity effects"<sup>13</sup> and the participants' 'co-presence' creates an "intersubjectivity"<sup>14</sup> not experienced by quiet reading of books or in digital communication.

Recordings of spoken-word poems can be found in CD format, supplementing poetry books, or as audio or video files on the internet. 'Audio poetry' is produced in sound studios and specifically for auditory reception.<sup>15</sup> It ranges from conventional poems being spoken by the author to experimental sound-poetic works (e.g. by Gerhard Rühm, Elke Schipper). "Audio-literariness" (*Audioliteralität*) denotes texts in which written and auditory content is related in such a way that its intermedial movement creates meaning.<sup>16</sup> It seems necessary to investigate interactions between writing, live performance, recording and the way that poetry-specific parameters such as versification are translated into "secondary orality"<sup>17</sup> by means of corporeal and vocal presence (and vice versa). Liveness and mediatization are not opposing *dispositifs* but rather fundamentally intertwined and related.<sup>18</sup>

To analyze live poetry by literary studies parameters alone does not suffice. Methods from e.g. theater and performance studies will be essential – concepts like 'performativity', 'embodiment', 'co-presence' and 'eventfulness'.<sup>19</sup> Julia Novak's analytical categories, in particular her "articulatory parameters" and features of "bodily communication" are highly useful tools.<sup>20</sup> For audio poetry, one needs to adapt relevant notions such as those of the "audiotext"<sup>21</sup> and the "poet-performer"<sup>22</sup>. It is also helpful to take Ludwig Jäger's already mentioned notion of 'transcription' into account, which considers the medial connections between the visual-scriptural and the auditive-vocal text.<sup>23</sup> Audiobook research<sup>24</sup> must be considered, while theories of mediatization<sup>25</sup> need to be expanded in order to analyze audiotapes and videos of poetry performances on multimodal online platforms. For audiopoetry research, the detailed "manual for the analysis of audio poetry" developed by Wiebke Vorrath, is most helpful.<sup>26</sup>

The task is not only „to map the 'literary' as a mode in between page and screen technologies"<sup>27</sup> but to investigate the full spectrum of poetic forms and formats. In order to develop tools to analyze transcriptive movements between book, live and mediatized poetry, an interdisciplinary approach will have to be configured that integrates research on the processes of contextualization that take place when a text is transformed into another situative or medial context.<sup>28</sup> The notion of 'situatedness' can be applied both to cultural events and to mediated content, in order to describe processes of framing, perception and reception of poetry. Paul Zumthor, for instance, views poetry performance as "a creative social event, one irreducible to its components alone and during which particular properties are effectuated", which comes about at a

specific time and place; due to these singular situational conditions, the performance “projects the poetic work into a *setting*”.<sup>29</sup> The same holds true, however, if an audio poem or a video of a poetry performance is perceived. Two short exemplary case studies will illuminate this topic area: a mediatization of a slam poem and an audio poem.

Franziska Holzheimer’s slam poem “Früchtetee” (‘Fruit Tea’) employs the poetic device of parataxis, repeating the particle ‘eigentlich’ (‘actually’ or ‘in fact’) again and again.<sup>30</sup> Her slam text deals with what the female speaker should do: be stronger, more straight forward, empathic, self-assured, etc. These qualities are illustrated by drastic body images. Today, the German spoken-word poet does not perform “Früchtetee” any longer, but at YouTube, there are two video clips from 2009 and 2010 (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TaWI4uXWklk>; [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BwxZS\\_WOfHQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BwxZS_WOfHQ)). The hypermedial internet platform presents those clips in an embedded web 2.0 format, for instance by suggesting to watch further poetry slam clips on a bar at the right. Once a clip runs, however, this framing and contextualization is eliminated and an experience of closeness and intimacy towards the performer is suggested: a medial state evoking the impression of a “transparent, perceptual immediacy, experience without mediation”, a simulacrum of “unmediated presentation”.<sup>31</sup> The video files are provided with dates and location, which attribute to each performance the character of a singular event. When comparing both Holzheimer videos it becomes obvious that there are differences in clothing, stage and the respective moderation. The actual text performance, however, features strong correspondences. For example, the poet-performer lifts her arm at the same instant, makes similar gestures and adds identical pauses. The fact that these bodily or paraverbal means are identical in different performances indicates that they factually belong to the spoken text,<sup>32</sup> which would, therefore, be incomplete, e.g. in written form. Holzheimer’s performance carries the attitude as if she was speaking about herself; at times, she acts angry, at other sad or disappointed. The audience’s response is anticipated, in that punchlines are consciously spoken or pauses are inserted after a particularly drastic line (e.g. “Eigentlich müsste ich mir ’nen Stock bis zum Anschlag in den Arsch rammen, um aber auch wirklich in jeder Situation noch Haltung zu bewahren”<sup>33</sup>). The slammer’s body, explicitly thematized within the spoken lines and visually exposed on stage, is only partly visible in the video. Likewise, the performance space and the audience are not visually represented (the latter only audible at times). In this regard, the medial framing of the camera perspective creates a decisive view.

The second example is by Nora Gomringer, a prominent German spoken-word poet, who denotes her poems as ‘Sprechttexte’ (‘speech texts’<sup>34</sup>). Her poetry collections contain CDs with recordings of spoken poems. The poem “Dich aus dem Leben lösen” stands out in its written as well as spoken versions and may function as an example of a ‘transcriptive relation’ between modalities.<sup>35</sup> In Gomringer’s book *Mein Gedicht fragt nicht lange* it is the only piece printed in landscape format, covering the center part of a double page, with bold vertical bars that start above the poem, separating the verses, and end underneath it. When listening to the spoken version, it becomes clear, however, that the vertical bars divide the poem into two parts which are juxtaposed on the page, and which we hear simultaneously as stereophonic sound. While the left part, emitted by the left loudspeaker, can be described as a listing or enumeration of things to be done after a beloved one has passed, the right text contains common phrases of comfort and intimate thoughts.<sup>36</sup> Gomringer’s articulation of the left part is steady and spoken

like a mantra; all verses are pronounced with the same pitch movement and rhythm, which relates to the theme of enumeration. The vocal performance of the right part is more dynamic; the loudness of the first line is articulated in crescendo, whereas the following two are uttered more quietly, in a fast and legato rhythm. Despite the overlapping of the lines, one can understand most of the words. Two different sound tracks with individual rhythms and tonalities are heard at once, which produces a chaotic sensation. The last two confronted lines mirror each other: “Du aus dem Leben: ab jetzt | mein ich: schade, ab jetzt du aus dem Leben”<sup>37</sup>. Different from the written version, the left verse is repeated three times by the poet-performer, so that the third “ab jetzt” is uttered simultaneously to the right side’s utterance of these words and thereby reinforced.

### *Poetry and Music*

A current debate deals with the question whether music and poetry should be strictly separated – an argument based on a relatively new notion of poetry, as ‘the lyric’ (originating from the *lyra*, a string instrument) has long been related to music.<sup>38</sup> Music and poetry were separated in the eighteenth century due to the “lyricization of poetry”<sup>39</sup> and the privileging of poetry meant to be read (silently). However, the musical side has remained, and the repertoire of rhythmic forms – from strict meter to no meter at all, from bound to free verse, from rhythmic repetition to variation – exists to this day. Moreover, poetic-musical genres like ballads and folksongs have been joined by interart genres such as rap.<sup>40</sup>

The impact of new media and digitalization are having on musical poetry needs to be investigated. Phenomena such as poets performing together with musicians and sound designers (e.g. Thomas Kling, Ulrike Almut Sandig and Kate Tempest) or producing beats, and manipulating and estranging their voices using loop pads on stage (e.g. Jörg Piringer) are of interest. Other poets add sounds or beats to their audio *poetry*, which thus exhibits a likeness to musical forms (e.g. recitative), or pick up rap-styles (e.g. Dalibor Marković, Yugan Blakrok). In spoken poetry, the voice must be analyzed together with the poem’s content, with musical features and technical aspects such as the high-fidelity standard. If voices are recorded, concepts like ‘eventfulness’ and ‘elusiveness’ still adhere to them. Vocal authentication links the poem’s content to the performer’s personality, a strategy that unites spoken-word poets and pop singers. Further topics of investigation are audiovisual ‘poetry clips’, their relationship to music clips and their distribution as a pop-cultural phenomenon. The influence of contemporary poetry on popular music is also of interest, exemplified by the formerly unknown poet Warsan Shire, who instantly became famous when her work was included on the visual album *Lemonade* by pop-megastar Beyoncé, who had encountered her verse on Twitter.<sup>41</sup>

One of the features of popular poetry is its return to formal elements, in particular, to rhyme and meter, long considered outdated, in both poetry theory and poetic practice.<sup>42</sup> Research needs to make use of publications that have adapted the concepts and analytical methods of musicology and sound studies: for instance the application of basic musical parameters from musicology to poetry, such as timbre/tone color, tone duration, pitch and volume.<sup>43</sup> For the analysis of the mediated voice, terms and methods from speech science such as Ines Bose’s parameters of „vocal-articulatory expression”<sup>44</sup> need to be combined with reflections on sound shapes and listening habits from sound studies. Research can also benefit from speech science

by applying the concept of the melodizing of speech to poetry.<sup>45</sup> Both contemporary poets and singers portray themselves as postmodern troubadour figures. They cross the boundaries between art and pop culture, between poetry and music, which is why studies on embodiment and authenticity in pop music (e.g. on German-language hip-hop<sup>46</sup>) are relevant. Again, two case studies will function as examples for this topic area: one poem featured with music and one poetry clip published on YouTube that resembles music videos.

Albert Ostermaier's recording of „leitkultur“ was produced in a studio exclusively for an audio-CD and its listeners.<sup>47</sup> As in Gomringer's case, this audio poem is not a documentation of a transient event, but a self-contained artistic work, added by electronic beats and guitar by the musician Bert Wrede. The pieces of the collection *Autokino*, a book with CD, are reminiscent of musical genres like hip-hop, as they consist of rhythmical tunes and lyrical speech, but Ostermaier's intonation presents stylistic differences to rap. The prosodic performance structures the context, while the voice offers information about the speaker's attitude – the effect or impression can be highly controlled.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, the influence on the listener's interpretation is stronger here than it would be if the written text was received. Ostermaier's performance reveals his Bavarian accent and imitates a conversational tone. The utterance exhibits dynamics in pitch, volume and rhythm; at the same time, there is a strong regularity in the intonation structure. After the end of the poem, the text is repeated once more, now in a lethargic undertone. Wrede's sound and impelling beat consists of a slow and looped rhythm but is at times overlaid with sharp guitar riffs that are intensified by an echo effect. In the first version, the voice dominates the recording, as it has a higher loudness than the beat. In the second version the guitar riffs are dominant, they appear more strident and overpower the voice. The combination of the conversational, later more lethargic vocal performance and the constant beat with the high-pitched guitar riffs constitutes a disharmonic and oppressive acoustic mood, which can be seen as a commentary on the reactionary structures of habitual language, consolidated through constant repetition.<sup>49</sup>

The second example is a so-called 'poetry clip', a genre closely related to poetry slam. However, poetry clips do not document a stage event, as they are artistic performances exclusively produced and distributed on videotape. Poetry clips are edited in a way reminiscent of music videos, setting, personnel and camera perspectives are chosen to fit the text. Generally, the author speaks his or her text him- or herself and looks directly into the camera – into the eyes of the viewer –; the text is presented exclusively for the camera (no visible microphones, books, manuscripts); therefore, the clip thus suggests a direct, seemingly non-mediated communication with the audience.<sup>50</sup> Maximilian Humpert's German poetry clip "Phoenix" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QS574FelFNY>) presents the poet-performer in two roles: He is split into voice (poet) and bodily representation (performer). Whenever he is depicted with casual clothes – an open checkered flannel shirt – in medium close-up in front of a green wall, he speaks his own verse and looks openly into the camera. Whenever he is depicted in a darker outfit in the urban space of a large city (Cologne), we hear his voice from the off. The standing, moving, watching performer remains mute, introverted and melancholic. Humpert 'embodies' himself in these moving images. The subjective, moody text is turned into a narcissistic mirroring in which the performer addresses himself in the grammatical form of the lyrical second-person. The dramaturgy of the clip contains an acceleration of speed and movement, emphasized

through a transition from melancholic piano tunes to drums and guitar added later when the protagonist runs through the street at night (and both personas melt in short cuts and counter-cuts). The poet-performer speaks his text in a structured, rhythmic mode, typical for poetry slam. For the return to rhyme and meter in popular poetry, Humbert's text is a prime example (contrary to, for instance Albert Ostermaier's text that has the visual shape of a poem in print but is spoken like prose).

### *Poetry and Visual Culture*

New media poetry adapts literary techniques developed by the avant-gardes and can be described in the tradition of concrete and visual poetry. After initial enthusiasm about the possibilities afforded to literature by the net, research has stagnated to a certain extent. One needs to conceptualize them in light of, on the one hand, iconic and kinetic script – including different linguistic systems – and, on the other, coded poetry (e.g. the work of Mez Breeze).

In terms of digital poetry, one important task will be adapting international research,<sup>51</sup> another to investigate its potential as a medial transformation of concrete poetry.<sup>52</sup> A new feature of digital concrete poetry is its time-basedness, which can be seen as a transition “from object to event”<sup>53</sup>. In the age of “scrolling literature”<sup>54</sup>, phenomena of digitalization in popular culture, such as InstaPoetry or poems on Twitter and Facebook, are also relevant, as these short, simple, often kitschy poems designed for smartphones are adorned with visual elements, such as handwriting, drawings, photos and adorned script. Book publications of celebrated global ‘InstaPoets,’ such as Rupi Kaur, Atticus and Yrsa Daley-Ward have even led to an increase in the sale of poetry books.

In the past, poetry has often been linked to experimental and art film, due to formal devices (in particular, their “excess structuring,”<sup>55</sup>) and similarities between in terms of perception and articulation: their ‘subjectivity’. Unlike poetry clips as a pop-cultural genre, ‘poetic films’ or ‘video poems’ are considered more abstract, artistic realizations that reference poetry on a conceptual level, without speakers performing on the screen and by using elegiac combinations of image and sound that pick up on and transform poetic devices. The most comprehensive work on poetry films to date is Orphal's *Poesiefilme*,<sup>56</sup> which differentiates between video poetry, poetic film and poetry film. However, there needs to be further research into the difference between poetry adapted by audiovisual means as opposed to script-based or verbal poetry films. Contemporary theory on film and poetry<sup>57</sup> has also to be reviewed, not least with regard to its metaphorical use of the notion of poetry.

A related field is research on writing in the visual arts<sup>58</sup> and on kinetic script.<sup>59</sup> It needs to be expanded not only regarding online practices but also when it comes to poetry in the urban space, a topic which has not been researched yet. The visual presence of poetry in the urban space is also a recent mutual phenomenon of poetry and visual culture: poems posted in subways, projected onto the exteriors of buildings, permanently written on walls or published on flyers.<sup>60</sup> The general aim has to be integrating adaptations and compositions of poetry into the visual arts and to develop tools for their analysis. In the following, two short examples for this topic area – the relation of poetry and visual culture – will be presented: a poetry film and an online project with visual poetry.



Matthias Müller's found footage film *nebel (mist; 2000)* takes on a German poem cycle by Austrian poet Ernst Jandl, titled „gedichte an die kindheit” [poems to childhood] (1980).<sup>61</sup> It presents the poems as voice-over recitation and combines the spoken text with filmic sequences. While the adaptation is rather experimental regarding images and montage, the voice-over and the use of script follows the conventions of audio books and feature films. The voice-over is spoken by professional speaker Ernst-August Schepman in a solemn, classical manner, attentive to pauses and the pronunciation of syllables and letters. The footage shifts between color and black and white; tramlines – scratches that appear black after a film has been copied – and other marks of deterioration and damage highlight the materiality of analog film. Müller integrates excerpts of home movies from his childhood, shots from the Hollywood classic *The Wizard of Oz* as well as other footage. The footage accompanying the poems „die spuren” [traces], and „ein roman” [a novel], are particularly interesting. Both sequences show a close-up of hands holding an opened book, the images have a sepia color fog and are partly damaged with tramlines. „die spuren” opens with the lines dealing with traces, the lyrical I has left behind, written and printed ‘in some kind of script’, while we see the yellowed pages of an old book being turned in slow motion, crumbling between the left hand. In the poem, Jandl both refers to the *vanitas* trope of the ‘eternity of script,’ i.e. of the poet leaving something of himself in his printed works after his death, a notion that the filmmaker Müller deconstructs with the images. „ein roman” („a novel”) consists of only four ironic lines. Here a poem reflects another literary genre from a child's perspective: The rudimentary definition of a novel is only based on its length, which is performatively contrasted with the poem's brevity. As Schepmann utters the words, we see the hands again, now holding a closed book that falls into pieces. Books and analog film are storage media that can record thoughts and moments, and although they are prone to decomposition, they potentially preserve them indefinitely. In the digital age, paper and celluloid are often regarded obsolete when it comes to production and distribution, yet when it comes to archiving, the longevity of film is (still) regarded as better compared to digital data.<sup>62</sup>

A final example of how new media reflect and transform concrete poetry is Cia Rinne's *archives zaroum*, an internet project that the Finnish-Swedish poet developed with the visual artist Christian Yde Frostholm.<sup>63</sup> The work is presented on a virtual internet platform for visual poetry and intermedia art ([www.afsnitp.dk/galleri/archiveszaroum/](http://www.afsnitp.dk/galleri/archiveszaroum/)). The interactive animation is based on Rinne's book of poetry, *zaroum*, its poetic language influenced by Fluxus, Dada, and Wittgensteinian language play. In *archives zaroum*, users click through different units of content that are organized by the device of folder cards. On a vertical level, the user scrolls down to complete a section of the artwork and move to the next. Similar to concrete poetry, Rinne exposes the materiality of written signs – or, rather: the correspondences and tensions between materiality and meaning. The digital version adds animated signs. For instance, if one clicks on the phrase ‘to get her,’ it collapses when the two brackets around the words move, pushing in from both sides, so the three words literally appear ‘together’ and are transformed into syllables. Such linguistic relationships of equivalence are mirrored, even amplified, by the visual layout. Similarity here refers to proximity in a physical sense; the words ‘nestle’ up against each other. It is Roman Jakobson's notion of the ‘palpability of signs’ that Rinne's digital poetry explores. The dominance of the poetic function, which Jakobson defines as a “focus on the message for its own sake”<sup>64</sup>, creates literariness. The multiplication of layers is created both by linguistic means and

the visual design. Rinne uses devices such as a sudden exchange that eliminates or adds letters; simulated 'typing' or words moving across the screen; black and red 'typewriter ribbon' to highlight certain words, thus emphasizing both the writing and the reading processes. She also employs typewriter script or handwriting, using capital or lowercase letters, and combines script with drawings. The multilingual work also shifts between languages, among them English, French, and German. Often the same word could be pronounced differently, depending on the choice of language, creating ambiguity and alienation that is fundamentally confusing to the recipient.

### *Summary*

As the examples presented and the remarks to the three topic areas have shown, research on contemporary poetry in media cultures is situated at the intersection between literary, cultural, and interart studies. By focusing mainly on German examples, the article argued in favor of the development of new tools for the analysis of such contemporary poetry formats, ranging from pop cultural to high-art works. A transmedial study of the diversity and medial spectrum of contemporary poetry, including recent poetry printed in books will, in the end, lead to a new definition of poetry as a genre – a definition that goes beyond its printed norm and written manifestation and takes into account its oral, musical, visual, kinetic, technical, medial, multimodal and interart dimensions. By writing such a 'poetics of new forms', research will acknowledge poetry's significantly broadened artistic, cultural, social and perhaps even political functions in the digital age. It will develop tools for the analysis of contemporary poetry formats, ranging from entertainment to 'high' culture, from visual to acoustic and multimodal forms. Only by taking such an encompassing view of poetry as an aesthetic and cultural practice will it be possible to explain the current relevance of a seemingly anachronistic genre. Not by arguing in favor of its 'remaining value' and its cultural tradition as a literary art – as Franck does – but by acknowledging its potential for innovation and renewal, its creative capacity both to take up and to shape medial settings and social conditions.

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Dorothea Franck. "Brauchen wir noch Gedichte im digitalen Zeitalter?" *Lettre International* 116 (2017): 11-14.
- <sup>2</sup> N. Katherine Hayles and Jessica Pressman (eds.). *Comparative Textual Media: Transforming the Humanities in the Postprint Era*. Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2013.
- <sup>3</sup> Dieter Lamping. "Some Prospects for the Theory of Lyric Poetry." *Journal of Literary Theory* 11.1 (2017): 83-88, here 84.
- <sup>4</sup> Dana Gioia. *Disappearing Ink: Poetry at the End of Print Culture*. Saint Paul: Graywolf, 2004, 7.
- <sup>5</sup> Cf. Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin. *Remediation. Understanding New Media*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000.
- <sup>6</sup> Cf. Ludwig Jäger. "Epistemology of Disruptions. Thoughts on the Operative Logic of Media Semantics." Transl. by Brigitte Pichon and Dorian Rudnytsky. *Beyond the Screen: Transformations of Literary Structures, Interfaces and Genres*. Ed. by Jörgen Schäfer and Peter Gendolla. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2010. 71-94.
- <sup>7</sup> Cf. Erving Goffman. *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1974; Walter Bernhardt and Werner Wolf (eds.). *Framing Borders in Literature and Other Media*. Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2006; Jonathan Gray. *Show Sold Separately. Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts*. New York: New York Univ. Press, 2010; Uwe Wirth (ed.). *Rahmenbrüche – Rahmenwechsel*. Berlin: Kadmos, 2013; Claudia Benthien and Gabriele Klein (eds.). *Übersetzen und Rahmen. Praktiken medialer Transformationen*. Paderborn: Fink, 2017.
- <sup>8</sup> Cf. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. "More Thoughts on Cultural Translation" [2008]. <http://eipcp.net/transversal/0608/spivak/en/print> [accessed Nov. 2019]; Christina Marinetti. „Transnational, Multilingual and Post-dramatic. Rethinking the Location of Translation in Contemporary Theater". *Theater Translation in Performance*. Ed. by Silvia Bigliuzzi, Peter Koffler and Paola Ambrosi. New York and London: Routledge, 2013. 27-37; Johannes C. P. Schmid, Andreas Veits, and Wiebke Vorrath. *Praktiken medialer Transformationen. Übersetzungen in und aus dem digitalen Raum*. Paderborn: Transcript, 2018; Michaela Ott and Thomas Weber (eds.) *Situated in Translations: Cultural Communities and Media Practices*. Bielefeld: Transcript 2019.
- <sup>9</sup> Heike Schäfer. "Poetry in Transmedial Perspective: Rethinking Intermedial Literary Studies in the Digital Age." *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae. Film and Media Studies* 10 (2015): 169-182, here 178.
- <sup>10</sup> Julia Novak. "Live-Lyrik. Körperbedeutung und Performativität in Lyrik-Performances." *Phänomene des Performativen in der Lyrik. Systematische Entwürfe und historische Fallbeispiele*. Ed. by Anna Bers and Peer Trilcke. Göttingen: Wallstein, 2017. 147-162, here 148.
- <sup>11</sup> Cf. Claudia Benthien. "'Performed Poetry'. Situationale Rahmungen und mediale 'Über-Setzungen' zeitgenössischer Lyrik." *Rahmenbrüche – Rahmenwechsel*. Ed. by Uwe Wirth. Berlin: Kadmos, 2013. 287-309.
- <sup>12</sup> Hannah Lutz. "Cia Rinne and the Soundpoetic Event. Listening for Other Languages [2012]." <http://balticworlds.com/listening-for-other-languages/> [accessed Nov. 2019].
- <sup>13</sup> Novak 2017, 158.
- <sup>14</sup> Cf. Peter Middleton. "The Contemporary Poetry Reading." *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word*. Ed. by Charles Bernstein. New York, NY: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998. 262-299, here 290-295.
- <sup>15</sup> Cf. Wiebke Vorrath. *Hörlyrik der Gegenwart. Auditive Poesie in digitalen Medien*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2019.
- <sup>16</sup> Ludwig Jäger. "Audioliteralität. Skizze zur Transkriptivität des Hörbuchs." *Das Hörbuch. Audioliterale Rezeptions- und Schreibformen*. Ed. by Natalie Binczek and Cornelia Epping-Jäger. Munich: Fink, 2014. 231-253, here 246.
- <sup>17</sup> Cf. Walter J Ong. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. London and New York: Routledge, 1982.
- <sup>18</sup> Cf. Philip Auslander. *Liveness. Performance in a Mediatized Culture*. New York and London: Routledge, 1996.
- <sup>19</sup> Cf. Erika Fischer-Lichte. *The Transformative Power of Performance. A New Aesthetics*. Transl. by Saskya Jain. London and New York: Routledge, 2008; also see Lino Wirag. "Die Geburt des Poetry Slams aus dem Geist des Theaters." *KulturPoetik. Zeitschrift für kulturgeschichtliche Literaturwissenschaft* 14.2 (2014): 269-281.

- <sup>20</sup> Julia Novak. *Live Poetry. An Integrated Approach to Poetry in Performance*. Amsterdam and New York, NY: Rodopi, 2011, 85-125 and 158-167.
- <sup>21</sup> Charles Bernstein. "Introduction". *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word*. Ed. by Charles Bernstein. New York, NY: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998. 1-26, here 12.
- <sup>22</sup> Novak 2011, 62.
- <sup>23</sup> Cf. Jäger 2014.
- <sup>24</sup> E.g. Birgitte Stougaard Pedersen and Iben Have (eds.). *The Digital Audiobook: New Media, Users, and Experiences*. London and New York: Routledge, 2016; Stephanie Bung and Jenny Schrödl (eds.). *Phänomen Hörbuch. Interdisziplinäre Perspektiven und medialer Wandel*. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2016.
- <sup>25</sup> Cf. Kjerkegaard, Stefan and Dan Ringgaard (eds.). *Dialogues on Poetry: Mediatization and New Sensibilities*. Aalborg: Aalborg Univ. Press, 2017.
- <sup>26</sup> Cf. Vorrath 2019, 187-201.
- <sup>27</sup> Kiene Brillenburg Wurth (ed.) (2012). *Between Page and Screen: Remaking Literature Through Cinema and Cyberspace*. New York, NY: Fordham Univ. Press, 1.
- <sup>28</sup> Cf. Richard Bauman and Charles L. Briggs. "Poetics and Performance as Critical Perspectives on Language and Social Life." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 19 (1990): 59-88, here 75.
- <sup>29</sup> Paul Zumthor. *Oral Poetry: An Introduction*. Transl. by Kathryn Murphy-Judy. Minneapolis, MN: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1990, 118 and 124.
- <sup>30</sup> A longer version of this example is discussed in Benthien 2013, 298-301.
- <sup>31</sup> Bolter and Grusin 2000, 22f. and 30.
- <sup>32</sup> Cf. Novak 2017.
- <sup>33</sup> 'Actually, I would need to ram a stick into my ass up to the stop, to keep posture in but any situation.'
- <sup>34</sup> Nora Gomringer. „Lyrik und Larynx: die Sprechdichtung“. *Ich werde etwas mit der Sprache machen*. Dresden, Leipzig: Voland & Quist, 2011. 97-117, here 99.
- <sup>35</sup> A longer version of this example is discussed in an online article containing the audio file as well. Cf. Claudia Benthien and Wiebke Vorrath. "German Sound Poetry from the Neo-Avant-garde to the Digital Age". *SoundEffects. An Interdisciplinary Journal of Sound and Sound Experience* 7.1; (2017): 4-26, here 17-19; <http://www.soundeffects.dk/article/view/97176/145961>.
- <sup>36</sup> Nora Gomringer: "Dich aus dem Leben lösen." *Mein Gedicht fragt nicht lange*. Dresden, Leipzig: Voland & Quist, 2015, 228f. and track 33.
- <sup>37</sup> Due to their ambiguity, translating these lines is difficult; it would read something like: 'You out of life: from now on | I mean: pity, from now on you no longer in life'.
- <sup>38</sup> Many arguments in this paper – but in particular regarding the present section on 'poetry and music' – were developed together with Wiebke Vorrath in the context of the research project "Performing Poetry. Mediale Übersetzungen und situationale Rahmungen zeitgenössischer Lyrik" (2015-2017) at Universität Hamburg; cf. <https://www.slm.uni-hamburg.de/germanistik/forschung/forschungsprojekte/performing-poetry.html>.
- <sup>39</sup> Virginia Jackson. "Who Reads Poetry?" *Publications of the Modern Language Association* 123.1 (2008): 181-187, here 183.
- <sup>40</sup> Cf. Johannes Gruber. *Performative Lyrik und lyrische Performance. Profilbildung im deutschen Rap*. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2017; Paula Wojcik. "Staging Identity. Zum performativen Potential von Balladen in der Hoch- und Popkultur." *Phänomene des Performativen in der Lyrik. Systematische Entwürfe und historische Fallbeispiele*. Ed. by Anna Bers and Peer Trilcke. Göttingen: Wallstein, 2017. 193-211.
- <sup>41</sup> Cf. Elisa Ronzheimer. "In Formation. Recasting Poetry in Beyoncé's Visual Album *Lemonade*." Paper at the Conference *The Between-ness of Lyric / L'entre-deux lyrique / Lyrik im Dazwischen* at Université de Lausanne, 2019.
- <sup>42</sup> Cf. Gioia 2004, 13f.
- <sup>43</sup> Cf. Frieder von Ammon. *Fülle des Lauts. Aufführung und Musik in der deutschsprachigen Lyrik seit 1945: Das Werk Ernst Jandls in seinen Kontexten*. Stuttgart: Metzler, 2018.
- <sup>44</sup> Ines Bose. "Stimmlich-artikulatorischer Ausdruck und Sprache." *Sprache intermedial. Stimme und Schrift, Bild und Ton*. Ed. by Arnulf Deppermann and Angelika Linke. Berlin and New York: De Gruyter, 2010. 29-68; Ines Bose. *Einführung in die Sprechwissenschaft. Phonetik, Rhetorik, Sprechkunst*. Tübingen: Narr, 2013.

- <sup>45</sup> Cf. Yvonne Anders. *Merkmale der Melodisierung und des Sprechausdrucks ausgewählter Dichtungsinterpretationen im Urteil von Hörern*. Frankfurt/Main i.a.: Lang, 2001.
- <sup>46</sup> Cf. Angelika Baier. *‘Ich muss meinen Namen in den Himmel schreiben’*. *Narration und Selbstkonstitution im deutschsprachigen Rap*. Tübingen: Francke, 2012; Christoph Jacke. “Inszenierte Authentizität vs. authentische Inszenierung: ein Ordnungsversuch zum Konzept Authentizität in Medienkultur und Popmusik.” *Ware Inszenierung. Performance, Vermarktung und Authentizität in der populären Musik*. Bielefeld: Transcript, 2013. 71-95.
- <sup>47</sup> A longer version of this example is discussed in an online article containing also the audio file. Cf. Benthien/Vorrath 2017, 19-21. <http://www.soundeffects.dk/article/view/97176/145961>.
- <sup>48</sup> Cf. Ruth Finnegan. “Where is The Meaning? The Complexities of Oral Poetry and Beyond.” *Regeln der Bedeutung. Zur Theorie der Bedeutung literarischer Texte*. Ed. by Fotis Jannidis, Gerhard Lauer, Matias Martínez and Simone Winko. Berlin and New York: De Gruyter. 384-400, here 385.
- <sup>49</sup> Cf. Wiebke Vorrath. “Visualität und Sonalität in Albert Ostermaiers Hörgedicht ‘fernsehend’.” *Dis-kurse des Sonalen*. Ed. by Britta Herrmann and Lars Kortén. Berlin: Vorwerk 88, 2019..
- <sup>50</sup> Cf. Stephan Porombka. “Clip-Art, literarisch. Erkundungen eines neuen Formats [...]“ *Autorinszenierungen. Autorschaft und literarisches Werk im Kontext der Medien*. Ed. by Christine Künzel and Jörg Schönert. Würzburg 2007. 223-243.
- <sup>51</sup> E.g. Norbert Bachleitner. “The Virtual Muse. Forms and Theory of Digital Poetry.” *Theory into Poetry. New Approaches to the Lyric*. Ed. by Eva Müller-Zettelmann and Margarete Rubik. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005. 303-340. Hans Kristian Rustad. “Digital poesi og materialitet.” *Passage* 69 (2013): 21-34; Dietrich Scholler. *Transitorische Texte. Hypertextuelle Sinnbildung in der italienischen und französischen Literatur*. Mainz: V&R and Mainz Univ. Press, 2017.
- <sup>52</sup> Cf. Jacques Dougy. *Poésies expérimentales. Zone numérique (1953-2007)*. Dijon: Les presses du reel, 2007.
- <sup>53</sup> N. Katherine Hayles. “The Time of Digital Poetry: From Object to Event.” *New Media Poetics: Contexts, Technotexts, and Theories*. Ed. by Adelaide Morris and Thomas Swiss. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006. 181-209.
- <sup>54</sup> Molly McElwee. “INSTAPOETRY – The age of scrolling literature.” <https://thegibraltarmagazine.com/instapoetry-age-scrolling-literature/> [accessed Nov. 2019].
- <sup>55</sup> Cf. Link, Jürgen. “Das lyrische Gedicht als Paradigma des überstrukturierten Textes.” *Funk-Kolleg Literatur* 1. Ed. by Helmut Brackert and Eberhard Lämmert. Frankfurt: Fischer, 1977. 234-256.
- <sup>56</sup> Stephanie Orphal. *Poesiefilme. Lyrik im audiovisuellen Medium*. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2014.
- <sup>57</sup> E.g. P. Adams Sitney. *The Cinema of Poetry*. Oxford and New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2015.
- <sup>58</sup> E.g. Jessica Prinz. “Words in Visual Arts.” *The Routledge Companion to Experimental Literature*. Ed. by Joe Brax, Alison Gibbons and Brian McHale. London and New York: Routledge, 2012. 323-337.
- <sup>59</sup> E.g. Roberto Simanowski. *Digital Art and Meaning. Reading Kinetic Poetry, Text Machines, Mapping Art, and Interactive Installations*. Minneapolis, MN: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 2011; Kim Knowles. “Performing Language, Animating Poetry: Kinetic Text in Experimental Cinema.” *Journal of Film and Video* 67.1 (2015): 46-59; Barbara Brownie. *Transforming Type: New Directions in Kinetic Typography*. London and New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2015.
- <sup>60</sup> Cf. Rebecca May Johnson. “Ulrike Almut Sandig’s Urban Interventions. From ‘Augenpost’ in Leipzig to a Posthuman Epic of Berlin.” *Oxford German Studies* 47.3 (2018): 278-297; Claudia Benthien. “Public Poetry: Encountering the Lyric in Urban Space.” *Internationale Zeitschrift für Kulturkomparatistik / International Journal for Comparative Cultural Studies* 2 (2020); Volume ‘Lyric Genres in Transition’ [in press].
- <sup>61</sup> For a comprehensive analysis of this work see: Scott MacDonald. “Poetry and Avant-Garde Film: Three Recent Contributions.” *Poetics Today* 28.1 (2007): 1-41; here 23-28; Claudia Benthien, Jordis Lau and Maraike M. Marxsen. *The Literariness of Media Art*. London and New York: Routledge, 2019, 219-222.
- <sup>62</sup> Cf. Giovanna Fossati. *From Grain to Pixel: The Archival Life of Film in Transition*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam Univ. Press, 2009, 64f.
- <sup>63</sup> For a comprehensive analysis of this work see: Claudia Benthien. „Visuelle Polyphonie: Cia Rinnes *archives zaroum* als mediale Transformation Konkreter Poesie“. *Übersetzen und Rahmen. Praktiken medialer Transformationen*. Ed. by Claudia Benthien and Gabriele Klein. Paderborn: Fink, 2017. 123-139; an English excerpt has also been published in Benthien/Lau/Marxsen 2019, 126-128.
- <sup>64</sup> Roman Jakobson. “Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics.” *Style in Language*. Edited by Thomas A. Sebeok. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960. 350-377, here 356.