

# DIALOGUES ON POETRY

Mediatization  
and  
New Sensibilities

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*DIALOGUES ON POETRY*

*Mediatization and New Sensibilities*

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# 'AUDIO-POETRY' Lyrical Speech in the Digital Age<sup>1</sup>

CLAUDIA BENTHIEN

## **The Mediatization of Live Poetry**

Poetry that is presented orally, whether it is simply read aloud or embodied and performed vocally, has gained in popularity in past decades. Poems are generally read aloud by the authors themselves, who therefore fulfill the double role of "poet-performer" (Novak 2011, 62). Alongside poetry readings by the author, which exist in various formats – book tour readings in book stores, readings on theater stages, poetry festivals, radio presentations, audio books – it is poetry slam in particular that has become a mainstream event since the 1990s in many countries. This new genre has promoted a presentation mode of lyric poetry (as well as for other genres of literary and essayistic texts) that consciously differs from traditional poetry readings: There is no book to read from, there is no table with a reading lamp at which the author sits, there is no passive audience and no book-signing at the end. In exchange, there is an empty stage, sometimes a piece of paper (or a cellular phone) with the text, a standing microphone and an active audience that applauds, cheers, laughs, and makes loud noises of approval or disapproval, and afterwards, there is an evaluation by an amateur jury. At the core of it lies the live performance by the poet in front of an audience; the 'poetic work' is the singular and situational performance.

According to the literary scholar Paul Zumthor, the performance of literature receives its 'originality' not through the singularity of the poetic words spoken alone but also through the performer's specific and partly contingent interaction with the audience (cf. Zumthor 1990, 117-164). In particular with regard to poetry slam, the subsequent release of video clips on media platforms such as *youtube.com*, *myslam.net* or the poets' homepages, can be considered desituated and decontextualized excerpts of the event. In the vast majority of cases, there are no complete events with their competitive dramaturgy to be found on the Internet but rather single performances that have been extracted – 'slam clips', in the 5-minute for-

mat of an individual stage appearance. Therefore, the online presentation of video files fulfills both a documentary and a promotional function. Portrayed in a close-up or knee-shot by the camera, the focus is on the poet, which involves the conscious elimination of the audience and the specific stage situation from the frame. These camera angles are 'translations' of live performances into an audio-visual format that generates its own 'aesthetics of presence' – e.g. through a heightened proximity to the performer, his or her face, mimics and gestures. The same can be said, though to a lesser degree, about the mediatization of traditional poetry readings. Here, what is 'lost' in its medial translation (into a video or audio file) is less obvious, since the role of the audience as well as the ritual character of the event is not as distinct (although it is, of course, still present).

Zumthor defines the literary performance as "a creative social event, one irreducible to its components alone and during which particular properties are effectuated" (ibid., 118) and that takes place at a concrete time and in a concrete place. Through these singular and situational conditions, the performance "projects the poetic work into a *setting*" (ibid., 124). These cultural and medial framings conditioning the performance situation transform the poetic work into an aesthetic event and make it perceivable and interpretable through the activity of the audience (cf. ibid., 183). For this reason, the "performance and delivery features are [...] intrinsic to the poetic meaning, form and artistry" (Finnegan 2003, 387). The evanescent performance situation is constitutive of live performances: "After it ends the performance is irretrievably lost; it can never be repeated as the very same performance. The materiality of the presentation is brought forth performatively and appears only for a limited time span" (Fischer-Lichte 2004, 14).<sup>2</sup> It is this aesthetics of presence that even recordings of live performances make use of, which may explain the popularity of live oral formats in a culture of virtuality and online communication.

Contrary to theater scholars such as Erika Fischer-Lichte, however, one should consider not only stage events with the co-presence of poet-performers and audience as literary performances but rather any kind of presentation and appropriation – be it through participation at a live performance (poetry reading, recitals of poetry by actors, poetry slam), be it through the reception of sound recordings (audio books, audio files on the Internet) or audio-visual media products such as videos of poetry readings, poetry

slams, or 'poetry clips' (which work with specific settings, costumes, props and, in part, with co-actors). Even the silent reading of a book by a single person can be considered a specific situational setting. The theater scholar Doris Kolesch has rightly claimed that "language exists only in its concrete and situated spatial and temporal execution, as a vocal, scriptural or gestural articulation"; it should therefore be conceptualized as "embodied language, although 'embodiment' does not mark an apriori of the body, but rather a specific materiality and mediality" (Kolesch 2005, 320). It is helpful to refer to the categories of "situationality" (Beaugrande and Dressler 1981, 12 and 169-187) or "situativity" (Heinemann and Heinemann 2002, 99 and 134) here, which were developed in the field of text linguistics. With these terms one denotes the "situative, interactional and discursive embedding" of a text (*ibid.*, 134). It is only within the respective "situational, operational frames of reference" (Ong 1982, 49) established by a concrete cultural and medial setting that the 'poetic work' as an aesthetic event takes place. One may also refer to Erving Goffman's concept of 'keys' as a "set of conventions by which a given activity, one already meaningful in terms of some primary framework, is transformed into something patterned on this activity but seen by the participants to be something quite else" (Goffman 1974, 43-44). This "process of transcription" (*ibid.*, 44) takes place regardless of whether the simple speaking of a poetry text by its author is conceived as a competition entry or as an artistic solo performance. Such 'keyings' may simply consist of (medial) paratexts (cf. Genette 1997; Kreimeier and Stanitzek 2004; Gray 2010) that contextualize a poem, through its organization within a cycle, an oeuvre, an anthology, a genre on a media platform or a certain type of event. In live performance, the performance setting – the moderation, applause, lighting, and musical intro – creates an additional medial and site-specific paratextual and paramedial framing. Contrary to these techniques of oral performance, processes of mediatization and remediatization take place whenever a live poetry performance is transformed into another situative context. Recording processes involve techniques of "recontextualization" that follow those of "decontextualisation", as "two aspects of the same process, though time and other factors may mediate between the two phases" (Baumann and Briggs 1990, 75). A fundamental aspect of the decontextualization of oral language (discourse) is the necessity to transform it into a 'text' in the first place:

At the heart of the process of decentering discourse is the more fundamental process – *entextualization*. In simple terms [...] it is the process of rendering discourse extractable, of making a stretch of linguistic production into a unit – a *text* – that can be lifted out of its interactional setting. A text, then, from this vantage point, is discourse rendered decontextualizable. (ibid., 73)

For such translations the media linguist Ludwig Jäger has developed the concept of “transcriptivity”. Jäger understands “transcription” as a process that “restores the *legibility* of text excerpts [...] that have become illegible” (Jäger 2004, 72) and defines transcriptions as being “in the mode of intra- and intermedial referentiality of signs to signs, or of media to media” (Jäger 2010, 82). According to Jäger, the transmission of ‘content’ into another medium requires transcription, for “[u]nder [the] conditions of transcriptivity the identical replication of a ‘cognitive original’ cannot be achieved in different sign formats” (ibid., 79) – if anything it has to do with continuous transitions:

Transcription then could be described as the respective transition from *disruption* to *transparency*, of de- and recontextualization of the signs/media in focus. While disruption as the starting point of transcriptive procedures implements remediation, thereby focusing on the sign/medium as the (disrupted) operator of meaning, transparency can be looked at as that state in the process of media performance in which the respective sign/medium disappears, becoming transparent regarding the contents it mediates. (ibid., 82)

Given these assumptions, it can be asserted that all of the medial transformations poetry is subjected to in the digital age, explicitly or implicitly, refer to each other and that these transformations are never fully concluded, so that meaning is established only ‘in between’ media, embodiments and modalities. Therefore, even a silent reading by an individual reader relates to other existing forms of poetry presentation.

### **The medium of the voice**

“The voice is a paradigm of the event, because it comes to an end. All events must end; texts can live on indefinitely.” (Peters 2004, 99) Eventfulness and intensity are both attributed to the human voice, especially in live situations. If a voice is recorded, it loses these characteristics in a phenomenal respect although they persist conceptually. The recorded voice is not performative in the strict sense of the word, i.e. as something that renders perceivable the ‘here and now’ and the tension and fragility of the physical co-presence of speaker and listener – the “specific sonosphere, that arises in the speaking and hearing that takes place between humans” (Kolesch 2004, 36). Notwithstanding, a recorded voice retains this eventfulness as a characteristic. Qualities of an individual voice such as its affective and atmospheric qualities are not lost but rather desituated and decontextualized. The recorded voice may therefore be considered as a “bodily trace” and as “a residue that refers both to a presence and an absence of the performative process of vocal articulation” (Pinto 2012, 11).

Specific features are attributed to the voices of poets performing their own texts, above all that of authenticity: “Traditionally the vocal sound as an aura around a body, whose truth is its word, promised nothing less than the subjective, and in the double sense of the word ‘certain’ identity of a human being” (Lehmann 2004, 58-59). This notion of the voice can be described by key words such as auratization and embodiment and is closely related to the “myth of uttered language as ‘original’ sound” and “authentic vivification” (Bickenbach 2007, 193). Paradoxically, however, it is only the possibility of technical recording that brought about the concept of ‘original sound’ (in German: ‘O-Ton’), which means that only a sound “that is long gone” becomes the “original of a documentary function” (ibid., 194). Other theorists have shared this skeptical view on originality and authenticity in audio-visual media, even with regard to ‘media of presence’ such as the theater. Philipp Auslander, for instance, considers the concept of ‘liveness’ nothing more than an effect of mediatization: “In many instances, live performances are produced either as replications of mediatized representations or as raw materials for subsequent mediatization” (Auslander 1999, 162). It is therefore helpful to consider them as (aesthetic or ideological) strategies rather than as claims to the authenticity

or originality of a given voice: “[W]e might focus not so much on the digital voice as somehow post-authentic, but rather ask how in digital media and art there is an *authenticity effect* through voice and in voice. ‘[A]uthenticity’ itself may be heard as performative” (Neumark 2010, 95) – which is particularly the case in a mediatized culture.

Here one might also mention the paradoxical phenomenon whereby the voice creates a strong intimacy with the recipient, especially through the use of technology – nothing sounds as physically close as a telephone partner at the other end of the line! Obviously, this has to do with the factual proximity of the telephone receiver or headphones to the ear, through which ambient noise is eliminated; of course, it also has to do with the sole concentration on auditory perception while using the telephone. In audio-visual media such as film, intimacy with the recipient can also be established when the visual body is absent from the screen altogether but the voice appears throughout as an off-voice –, “in the scene’s ‘here and now,’ but outside the frame” (Chion 1999, 18). With regard to film, Michel Chion has called this phenomenon ‘acousmatic’ sound. This term stands for a dislocated voice that becomes part of the invisible and therefore limitless space in which the audience is also situated when the film begins. The implications of *acousmètre* can be summarized under four notions that are particularly strong when the speaking body is not represented on the screen at all: “ubiquity, panopticism, omniscience, omnipotence” (ibid., 24).

In the case of poetry readings or poetry slams, one seldom hears the voice of the speaker without technical amplification, even in live situations. Because of this, a paradoxical acoustic space is produced: an increased auditory proximity that stands in opposition to a certain visual and kinetic distance (e.g. in large theater spaces). Especially in the poetry slam setting, the microphone as an “amputation and extension of [the poet-performer’s] own being” (McLuhan 1964, 11) is as important as, e.g., the erect position of the poet standing on the stage. Through the use of microphone and amplification technology, however, a second dispositive is created: that of recording and repeatability:

The voice in an age of electronic media becomes removable from the body, from a world of ostensive reference, from the

limits of singularity, from its original spatial signature, tempo, intonation – with all kinds of uncanny results. [...] Recording technology makes possible the paradox of an identically repeatable performance.

Every performance is unique and unrepeatably in some ways, just as every signature is both unique and identical. The aura of uniqueness clings to performance. Performance is singular and recording is multiple. (Peters 2004, 91-92)

The repeatability of performance through recording technologies does not release it from its 'singularity'. Not only does the aura of uniqueness (of the past moment) cling to it, but each iteration every time an audio or video recording is replayed is, strictly speaking, likewise non-repeatable, as it can also be considered a 'unique performance': It is situational and bound to a specific attitude of reception that is never identical to the time before.

### **Exemplary Mediatizations of Performed Poetry by Thomas Kling and Nora Gomringer**

Following these theoretical remarks on the topic of the oral performance of poetry, two exemplary works by well-known contemporary German poets, Thomas Kling and Nora Gomringer, will now be discussed, both prominent due to their interest in 'spoken word poetry' and live performance. In a poetry reading or a poetry slam performance, textual parameters specific to lyric poetry, such as verse, stanza or punctuation are translated into 'media of presence', namely the body and the voice. Oral language retains the literariness typical of written poetry and it may even intensify it, for example in the ostentatious foregrounding of tonal correspondences or semantic ambiguities (cf. Mukařovský 2007, 19-20). "Articulatory parameters" such as rhythm, pitch, volume, articulation and timbre (cf. Novak 2011, 85-125) work as "paralinguistic features" (ibid., 86) that may provide spoken texts with additional semantic signification. This intensification through verbalization is the case with both Kling and Gomringer, who consider the oral presentation of their work to be crucial – be it in a live situation or in a recording. A helpful category for analyzing their performance is that of the "audiotext" as the "audible acoustic text" or "the poet's acoustic performance" (Bernstein 1998, 12).

The media platform *lyrikline.org*, an initiative of several German literary institutions, presents poetry from all over the world. Poems are available in their original languages, accompanied by translations into German as well as other tongues. Below the written texts one finds publishing and translation references and next to them the author's photographic portrait, some brief biographical information as well as, if they exist, the audio files of readings of the respective poem by the author. The latter is a specificity of this web platform although it is of course to be found elsewhere as well (e.g. on *lyrikzeitung.com* – a German Internet platform whose name translates as 'poetry newspaper'). The concept of *lyrikline* as a modular media platform is, therefore, to present language as multimodal and heteroglossic, as a typical feature of the Web 2.0 era environment (cf. Androutsopoulos 2010; Kress and Van Leeuwen 2010). The written poem and the poet's voice may be either received simultaneously or separately. One may also listen and read the text in different languages at the same time.

Thomas Kling's long poem *Bildprogramme* (1993), available as an audiotext at *lyrikline*, will serve as an example for the present discussion. Until his early death in 2005, Kling was considered one of the most important poets of his generation. As far back as 1983, he began presenting his poems in public readings that often had a performance character; additionally, he frequently appeared together with a jazz drummer. In their composition, Kling's poems are characterized by performative elements in that sound, rhythm and melody play a constitutive role. However, the poet distanced himself with his concept of readings from that of (more spontaneous and contingent) performances, e.g. those of the Vienna Group, and he decisively considered it to be what he called a "Sprachinstallation" ('language installation'). Even though this seems to indicate that he put the oral performance at the center of his poetics, Kling, at the same time, emphasized that the "plural semantic chargings" of his texts "only become evident through repetitive readings, which nothing but the written text can accommodate" (Kling quoted in Lenz and Pütz 2002, 2). One may decipher in these self-statements a tension between the written text and the verbal performance. Both modalities transcriptively refer to each other and to their respective abilities and lacks. Kling once remarked with regard to one of his poetry volumes:

In *Fernhandel*, which is a collection of poetry with a CD, it becomes obvious that the audience uses both at once, and I consider this an important matter. That the oral experience obviously functions as an introductory aid into the linear form of the text, not as a supplement; they are two literary products that both have their own history, also separate histories. (Kling quoted in Balmes 2000, 14)

On the one hand, the concept of 'language installation' implies a certain spatiality that is significant, e.g. for a stage setting – as in technical installations or recent forms of installation art – but, on the other hand, it refers to the process of constellating different layers of language and text types, which is constitutive of Kling's poetics:

His poems perform media changes of all kinds. They mix historical and contemporary productions, be it forms of language, letters, photographs or live reportages; they use the language of filmic or digital image and sound directing. The poetry reading as a lecture is therefore closely related to the intermediality of the texts themselves. (Bickenbach 2007, 200)

*Bildprogramme* consists of three parts and the focus here will primarily be on the first part (for an English translation, please see the appendix). Its literariness is dense and it utilizes, among other things, an irregular orthography that builds upon certain graphic-visual procedures. Specific features of this very artistic poem are: the elimination of vowels that are not spoken – e.g. in the heading of this first part: "ZWISCHNBERICHT" ('interim report'), whose second syllable is missing an 'E', which could be considered a peculiar transcription of dialect or an insertion of orality into script (cf. Vorrath 2017); the capitalization of striking and pictorial terms and phrases – e.g. "SPRACHINSTALLATION" in line 4, or "ALLEGORIEN" in line 9; and syllabification presented as line breaks in strange places, which cannot be considered a traditional technique of enjambment but rather produces confusing caesuras and ruptures, creating 'stumbling blocks' of memory (see for the latter Bickenbach 2007, 202-203). This poem's complication of form

and content may be related to what Marjorie Perloff calls *Radical Artifice* in her book about poetry in the age of media. She remarks that in the postmodern era a significant body of poetry has been produced that is “unnaturally *difficult*”: “eccentric in its syntax, obscure in its language, and mathematical rather than musical in its form” (Perloff 1994, xi). She argues convincingly that this development is related to electronic media – on the one hand as a counter-reaction (a heightened artificiality in opposition to mass culture), on the other as the integration of digital paradigms, e.g. in digital poetry. Kling can be considered an artist of the first group, relating strongly, as I will show, to traditional media and the ‘pre-postmodern’ idea of the divide between high art and mass culture (cf. Perloff, xii).

In hermetic diction, Kling’s poem describes the optical features and materiality of several related artworks. In literary and art history, such a linguistic technique can be described using the term *ekphrasis* (“the verbal representation of visual representation”; Heffernan 1993). “Bildprogramm” is likewise a term that originated in German art theory; the English equivalent would be ‘iconographic program’. The existence of a ‘Bildprogramm’ implies the thematic subordination of the individual images of a cycle under a complex *leitmotif* or *sujet* – for instance the life of an important personality, an historic event or an allegorical theme (virtues, vices, seasons etc.). The relationship to the respective iconographic program is a decisive key to understanding each individual image. Since the literary rhetoric also features the category of ‘images’ – figurative speech, tropes etc. – Kling’s title is semantically polyvalent (not to mention that nowadays in German the term ‘Bildprogramm’ denotes specific software for picture editing, which was, however, not as prominent in the early 1990s). A further tension is created in that we are dealing here with a poem that ‘speaks’ about visual phenomena, that makes them audible and can therefore – in the habitus of ‘surpassing’ – be related to the topos and impulse of the *paragone* (‘competition’) between the arts. In Jäger’s terms, Kling works with a “recursive self-processing” (Jäger 2010, 80), where the arts refer to themselves as well as to each other. Lyric poetry here functions as an “intermedium, as a repository and an effect of intermedial, namely tonal, textual and visual evocations” (Bickenbach 2007, 201).

The recording of Kling reciting his *Bildprogramme* is not based on a live performance by the poet but on a production by the German public

radio channel 'Deutschlandradio' from 1999. For this reason, the 'performative and delivery features' (Finnegan) are not that of a live performance but were rather produced by the author for an exclusive acoustic reception and therefore with an emphasis on the paralinguistic features of the audiotext. Kling, a former choir pupil who enjoyed professional voice training, speaks his poem in both a highly articulate as well as artificial manner. On the one hand, the poet tries to translate the specificities of his script into voice, for instance when he pauses while speaking the line-transcending adjective "pro-tzigste" ('swanky' or 'pretentious', line 1) or through a verbal emphasis on the term "ALLEGORIEN" ('allegories', line 9), likewise important for the visual arts and literature as a signifier of figurative forms of artistic representation. In Kling's oral performance, these features are not necessarily understood as script-specific but merely as poetic deviations, as disruptions within the continuous flow of speech. On the other hand, the poet-performer subdivides his monumental poem into several characters by strongly altering his voice's pitch, timbre and volume – from a loud declamation to a mere whisper. One gets the impression that several fictitious characters are engaged in a dialogue here (e.g. an art historian, a radio reporter, an astonished viewer), whose contributions are partly underlain by irony. Kling calls this practice "polyphony" (Kling quoted in Balmes 2000, 22) and one may stress that his oral performance of *Bildprogramme* illuminates a level of control over the linguistic material that corresponds to the ubiquity, panoptism, omniscience, and omnipotence that Chion stated as features of the acousmatic voice.

In fact, the possibility of a synchronic reception of script and voice allows a fuller understanding of this complex poem, its syntax and pictorial language. Correspondingly, as quoted earlier, Kling called the oral experience an 'introductory aid' into the 'linear form' of the text and emphasized that he is generally interested in the "making audible of texts, in the performance, in the *actio* of language that takes place at all, in the first instance, within the poem itself" (Kling quoted in Balmes 2000, 15). In contrast to this bimodal approach, in poetry readings in front of an audience, one also hears the author verbalize his or her own words but usually does not read the text at the same time (which would be considered impolite in the presence of the poet). Through the invisibility of the speaker, the remediatization on the poetry platform *lyrikline* eliminates one semiotic code

– the visibility of the speech act – while at the same time adding another through the availability of the script. According to Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, this falls into variant two of their category of remediatization, where “the electronic version is offered as an improvement, although the new is still justified in terms of the old and seeks to remain faithful to the older medium’s character” (Bolter and Grusin 1999, 46).

In contrast to the conceptualization of live ‘language installations’ by the poet-performer Kling as singular ‘events’ that the recipients experience passively as a collective, requiring constant concentration – and also to the original radio event of 1999 with its evanescent character and contingent reception situation – the acoustic language material offered online is permanently available and may be paused and repeated as desired. Because of this, the tension and concentration that both the live performance and the “‘radiophonic’ situation” (Pinto 2012, 12) demand are overcome. The online voice of this long-dead poet produces, however, an unsettling “fiction of immediacy” (Zumthor 1988, 708). In the present example, with the combined text and audio presentation, Kling’s voice uttering words from some kind of afterlife not only revives the ‘dead’ script but also fundamentally adds to its plasticity and comprehension.

Nora Gomringer refers to herself as both an author of poetry and a slam poet. She has published several poetry collections combined with audio CDs. These are based on live performances of her texts as well as studio recordings. On stage she recites her own poetry as well as that of others and she performs both solo and in ‘teams’. For the present context, her audio-poem *Mia, bring mia was mit, | wenn du wieder kommst, | falls du wieder kommst* has been chosen (the English title would be ‘*Mia, bring me something | when you come back | if you come back*’; see the poem with an English translation in the appendix). In contrast to Kling’s *Bildprogramme*, when searching the Internet, one finds the poem as an audio file only – there is no video recording of a recitation by the poet available and the text can only be read at [googlebooks.com](http://googlebooks.com). This presentation mode corresponds to the concept of “Sprechtex-te” (‘spoken texts’) that Gomringer has established for her poetry works. It can be considered an acoustic counter-strategy to the traditional modality of poetry as printed in a book – as presented for example on the Internet platform *spokenwordberlin*, which asserts that

it is the 'mouthpiece' of the Berlin poetry scene. Gomringer's *Mia, bring mia was mit* can be found as an audio file on this website<sup>3</sup> and, until very recently, it was available on her personal website as well. The audio file of the poem originated in Gomringer's bi-medial publication *Sag doch mal was zur Nacht* ('Say something about the night', 2006), an anthology with lyric 'spoken texts' accompanied by a CD containing some of these texts in an additional audio version. Hence, the reduction to the acoustic level, to the audiotext, is a specific reception situation that can only be found on the Internet. The phenomenon in general may be related to the promotion and growing popularity of the medium of the audio book – especially prominent in German-speaking countries – usually offered in book stores as CDs without a printed text and therefore explicitly constituting an alternative to the reception mode of reading. Most audio books on sale are narrative texts; poetry publications on the contrary are usually available as bimodal products (printed poems plus audio file, as is the case in Gomringer's publications).

*Mia, bring mia was mit* is a prose poem that achieves its effect mostly through its timbre and its dense semantic composition. The poet, who, like Kling, underwent professional vocal training, speaks all of her texts in a highly expressive manner and with a sonorous and strongly modulated voice. The poem is full of alliteration, assonance and onomatopoeic elements as well as word play, relying on pop songs and idiomatic expressions – for instance "deine geregnete Rose" (line 10), which refers to the song "Für mich soll's rote Rosen regnen" ('for me it should rain red roses') – the Hildegard Knef rendition of which became famous in German-speaking countries – or "alles an Suppe wie Hecht vorbeizog" (lines 13-14) – which refers to the German saying "es zieht wie Hechtsuppe", meaning, 'there is a terrible draft here!' Even though these rhetoric means can be found in the written text as well, their point or punch line, however, is more fully developed in the verbal realization. The title itself programmatically refers to a tension between oral and written language, for example in the word play "Mia"/"mia" (with capital vs. small first letter), where the first word is a female name and the second is the Bavarian variant of the German pronoun *mir* ('me').

The name in the title refers most likely to the slam poet and cabaret artist Mia Pitroff, with whom Gomringer won the German team poetry slam championship in 2005. The poem is a call to her absent friend –

whose lonely “Stroh-witwer” (‘grass widower’, line 20) the speaker has to console – to bring back feelings, objects, souvenirs from the faraway place. Gomringer’s performance consists of a long and nearly ceaseless address, in which the speaker talks about her own life, both in the form of complaint and praise, and imagines Mia’s simultaneous life in the metropolis Berlin. The poet-performer also uses her voice mimetically: for vocal articulations such as “jaulen” (‘yowl’, line 18) und “gurren” (‘coo’, line 30), she does not just speak these verbs but also performs them as animal-like sounds. Due to her both sensitive and slightly accentuated diction, which varies in pace and dynamics, Gomringer creates a dense web of sound and meaning. Formal features of the typography and layout of the printed version – for instance the presentation of the title as a miniature poem in three lines and italics, although the poem is presented as a justified running text like a prose text – are translated by prosodic and articulatory means into the acoustic sphere. In her mode of speaking, the poet-performer transforms the written text into a continuous and intense sound carpet. With reference to Jäger, this mediatization is self-sufficient and therefore highly transparent.

At the same time, however, the medium of script remains thematically present – not only because the text refers to media of written communication (message in a bottle, letters that are bridled onto the falling stars, a quill) – but also through recourse to intertexts, most prominently the fairy tale “Die Gänsemagd” (“The Goose Girl”) by the Brothers Grimm (lines 39-41; the head of a horse named Fallada on the Brandenburg gate, the combing of hair, tending to the geese). With the use of this intertext, Mia is turned into a princess who is denied her crown in the place faraway. The poem interweaves several layers of poetic style as well as history: on the one hand, there is the dominant present tense in the messages to Mia in Berlin, on the other hand, Gomringer alludes to several violent incidences, both on the level of history (the second world war, the German invasion of Poland) and on the level of fairy tales and children’s as well as adolescent imagology. She combines these spheres in her modulate voice that sounds both youthful and grown up at the same time.

It is only at the end, that this audio performance is marked as ‘live’ through Gomringer’s “Thank you!” and the audience’s brief applause. The place and time of the performance nevertheless remain indefinite (which is one of the most important differences to slam poetry, which is documented

on the Internet with a concrete place, time and poetry slam event). The aim is to produce a universally receivable audio file of the poet-performer speaking her text rather than to document a specific performance. This audio-poem is therefore desituated and decontextualized, as is the case with Kling's *Bildprogramme*. It receives its framing through Gomringer's poetry collections published as books plus CDs.

### Résumé

The two examples presented in this paper, in which poetry is given a voice by the authors themselves, adhere to the contemporary trend of listening to literature being performed (on a stage or in audio data formats) rather than reading it on the basis of the traditional medium of the poetry book. The processes of mediatizing and remediatizing poetry are 'translations' of the sensual perceptibility of the literature being performed live. Mediated poetry performances make use of strategies of producing 'presence' through voice, address, camera shots (close-up) or the direct gaze of the performer into the camera. The audiotexts by Kling and Gomringer contain many features of classical poetry – independent of the fact that the poets consider them to be 'language installations' (Kling; *Sprachinstallationen*) or 'spoken texts' (Gomringer; *Sprechtexte*) to mark their difference from this traditional literary genre:

*The specific practice of poetry consists, in particular, in the activation of primary and secondary linguistic forms (phonetic and rhythmic-prosodic forms, grammar – that is morphological and lexical-semantic forms – as well as phraseology, tropes and figures of speech), to uncover them, to make them productive, to densify, to re-shape and to expose them [...].*  
(Helmstetter 1995, 30)

It is precisely the 'practice of poetry' described here that these two contemporary German poetry texts execute. The authors' oral interpretations put into effect and emphasize poetic means (for instance rhyme, alliterations, and repetition) using differentiated vocal modulation and appropriation.

Due to the development within the field of performance poetry and its mediatization, the dichotomic opposition of orality and scripturality

that theorists like Ong, Zumthor and several scholars from performance studies have established, must be questioned (cf. Furniss 2004, 131-141). As has become evident in the two examples discussed, both modalities are strongly interwoven, which is why they should not be conceptualized as “two different types of literature each with its own characteristics [...]”, but rather [as] a spectrum of variations along multiple dimensions” (Finnegan 2003, 395). It is therefore useful, as the linguists Peter Koch and Wulf Oesterreicher have suggested, to differentiate between orality and literaricity not ontologically but merely “conceptually”. They have developed the notions of “conceptual orality” and “conceptual literaricity”, which are not necessarily congruent with the factual orality or literaricity of a given text: the former utilizes a “language of proximity” while the latter utilizes a “language of distance” (cf. Koch and Oesterreicher 1985, 23). Whereas the differentiation between the “phonic” versus the “graphic code” supposes a “strict dichotomy”, the concepts of the spoken and the written offer a huge spectrum of possible conceptualizations (cf. *ibid.*, p. 17). As a consequence, a written text may be ‘conceptually oral’ if it contains dominant features of a ‘language of proximity’, for instance of spontaneity or expressivity (cf. *ibid.*, 21). Correspondingly, the audiotexts by Kling and Gomringer remain ‘conceptually scriptural’, which becomes evident, for instance, when comparing them to slam poetry. Those texts contain many more elements of a ‘conceptual orality’, for instance involvement, situational entanglement, expressivity, processuality (cf. *ibid.*, 23) or the necessity of the structural elements of rhythm, rhyme, prosodic rules etc. to increase memorability (cf. Ong 1982, 33-41). The audio versions of Kling’s *Bildprogramme* and Gomringer’s *Mia, bring mia was mit* spoken by the poet-performers are conceptually scriptural, not because they are based on pre-written texts but because they consist of many features of a ‘language of distance’, such as elaborateness, compactness, theme fixation etc. (cf. Koch and Oesterreicher 1985, 23).

In this context, Jäger’s recent concept of ‘audioliterality’ may also be useful, which he conceives as follows:

In general, all productions of linguistic meaning should be called autoliteral, in which scriptural and vocal-audial elements of communication are interwoven or related to each

other in different regards, to the extent that the process of the construction of meaning can be understood as the result of intermedial movements. (Jäger 2014, 245)

As Jäger emphasizes, audioliterality is a concept that considers both modalities as closely related. This is especially obvious when language as a medium is self-reflexively thematized, as is the case with both Gomringer and Kling. The “poetic language stages ‘the word as word’” and guides the listener’s or reader’s attention “to the material, structural and relational qualities of the words themselves” (Helmstetter 1995, 34). With regard to Jäger, this literary technique can be considered as ‘intramedial recursivity’, that is, as the self-thematizing of the medium of language and its different modalities within the act of uttering, within the performative execution. The fact that such phenomena can be found more frequently in the digital age refers to the persistency of ‘old’ medialities and modalities of language that become visible as a trace in their changing modes of presentation. This reflexivity is likewise marked by the intermedial recourses that both audio-texts perform – for instance, in Gomringer, in the medium of the letter, and, in Kling, in the medium of painting or, more generally, the visual arts.

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### Notes

- 1 This publication originated in the context of the research project *Performing Poetry: Medial Translations and Situational Framings of Contemporary Poetry* within the collaborative research group *Translating and Framing: Practices of Medial Transformations*, funded by the Authority of Science and Research Hamburg, Germany. It adopts ideas and formulations from three previous German articles on this topic, one of which is still in print; cf. Benthien (2013), Benthien (2016), Benthien and Prange (2017).
- 2 All quotations of texts that appear in German texts in the bibliography have been translated into English by the author, who would like to thank Lydia White and Amy Jones for her proofreading and assistance with the English manuscript.
- 3 Cf. [http://www.epoet.de/spokenwordberlin/mp3/april\\_04/mia\\_n\\_MP3%20standard%20128k.mp3](http://www.epoet.de/spokenwordberlin/mp3/april_04/mia_n_MP3%20standard%20128k.mp3).

## Appendix

THOMAS KLING

### *Bildprogramme*

1.

#### *Zwischenbericht*

gegenüber. eingelassene plattn; pro-  
tzigste heraldik. weißestn marmors  
parade: di superfette SPRACH-  
INSTALLATION.

(innenan-

sicht außñvor: hat sichsn fürstbi-  
schof feingemacht, getäfelt, drin. drauf-  
sicht intarsienspielchn; draufsicht turm-  
ofn ALLEGORIEN; nix wi mädels  
mit blankn möpsn auffe reliefkacheln,  
hübsch glasierte ofnwärme.)

geblendet. kellen, kehrbleche. aus-  
gräbersound. DIE GESCHICHTE  
HERBRETTERND AUF SACKKARREN.

der ganze weggeächzte schutt, durch-  
gesiebte sprache. dies asservieren auf  
knien; kratzen geschieht, gekratz, bürstn,  
abgepinselt. knien, nebnnander, an  
irgend (kloster)mauer bei rasselnm,  
heiser schlüpfendm INDUSTRIESTAUB-  
SAUGER. so landn, schürf-schürf, schä-  
del in obstkistn marke "papa clemente";  
säuberlich schädeldeckn (caput mortuum),  
sargbrettchn (pestbeständig, siena): in  
cellophantütñ, auf geflattertm, windgezerr-  
tm zeitungspapier. gotisch und durch-  
numeriert. durchnumerierter  
grabungsbericht.

[...]

(Kling 2006, 635-636)

### *Iconographic Programs*

1.

#### *Interm report*

1 opposite, embedded plates, most pre-  
tentious heraldry. whitest marble's  
parade: the superphat LANGUAGE  
INSTALLATION.

5 (interior

view outside: a prince bi-  
shop has dressed up, paneled, inside. top  
view little intarsia game; top view tower  
oven ALLEGORIES; nothing like girls  
with bare tits on the relief tiles,  
nicely glazed oven heat.)

und vor-

15 imposed. trowels. dustpans. ex-  
cavator-sound. HISTORY  
HURLING UP ON SACK TRUCKS.

all this moaned off rubble, sifted  
language. this storing on  
knees; scratching happens, scrapings, scrubbing,  
brushed off. kneeling next to each other, at  
any (cloister) wall with rattling,

20 hoarsely slurping INDUSTRIAL VACUUM  
CLEANER. so they land, dig-dig, skulls  
in fruit boxes brand "papa clemente";  
neat skullcaps (caput mortuum),

25 coffin lids (plague resistant, siena) in  
cellophane bags, on fluttered, wind-wren-  
ched newsprint. gothic and serially  
numbered. serially numbered  
excavation report.

[...]

(a rather literal translation by C.B.)

*Mia, bring mia was mit,  
wenn du wieder kommst,  
falls du wiederkommst*

*Mia, bring me something,  
when you return,  
if you return.*

Bringst mir ein Herz. Ein Herzerl. Für das rechte Fleckerl.  
Zur Blutstillung für das leckgeschlagene. Bring einen  
Baustein, einen Chemiebaukasten. Eine Streubombe. Bring  
eine Absicht und einen Willen und vielleicht einen  
Wunsch. Bring ein HeileHeileGänschen und ein Pusten  
in einer kleinen Flasche. Saug mich an durch Vakuum.  
Um Fidibum. Um Fidibum. Saug mich an durch Vakuum.

1 Bring me a heart. A little heart. For the right spot.  
To stop the bleeding of the leaking one. Bring a  
building block, a chemistry set. A cluster bomb. Bring  
an intention and a will and perhaps a  
5 wish. Bring a HealHealLittleGoose and a puff  
in a small bottle. Suck me in through a vacuum.  
Um fidibum. Um fidibum. Suck me in through a vacuum.

Mia, bring mia was mit, wenn du wieder kommst,  
falls Du wieder kommst. Lass mich hier sein. Dein Koffer  
in Berlin, deine geregnete Rose, dein Lugosi-Sarg. Lass  
mich hier sein was du willst, von mir wolltest. Lass mich.

10 Mia, bring me something when you return,  
if you return. Let me be here. Your suitcase  
in Berlin, your rained rose, your Lugosi coffin. Let  
me be here what you want, wanted from me. Let me.

Für den Moment, an dem alles an Lichtern ausging,  
alles an Flaschen poppte, alles an Suppen wie Hecht  
vorbeizog. Lass mich in deinem Maoampapier warten,  
geschmiegt an die Kaumasse. Bringst mir ein Nikotinfilerl.  
Ein Papierl. Wickelst mich nicht a wengerl ein in deine  
Zigarette, dunkles Mädchen.

15 For that moment when all the lights went out.  
all the bottles popped, all the soups passed by  
like pike. Let me wait in your Maoam candy wrapper,  
snuggled up at the chewy mass. You bring me a nicotine filter.  
A paper. You wrap me not just little into your  
cigarette, dark girl.

Schlosshundjauuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuln für die Daheim-  
gebliebenen. Wie ein Meerschweinchen frag ich dich nach  
dem Heu-te und Stroh-witwer, den du mir dalässt. Dessen  
Wunden ich lecke. Dessen Wirbel ich entheddern muss,  
damit sie wieder Sprossen auf der Kopfleiter werden. Der  
arme Kerl kann nicht mehr denken, seit du sagtest, heute  
und morgen nicht mehr. Ehrlich gar nicht mehr. Amen.

20 Yooooooooowling like a castle dog for those who re-  
mained at home. Like a guinea pig I ask you for  
the to-day and grass widower, who you leave to me. Whose  
wounds I lick. Whose vertebrae I have to detangle,  
so that they become rungs on the head ladder again. The  
poor guy can't think since you said, not today  
and tomorrow no longer. Honestly, no more at all. Amen.

Lieben war, wie jemanden im Schrank eingesperrt fest-  
halten und auf Lösegeld warten. Lieben ist wie Einbuch-  
tungen auf Mohnsamen mit der Zunge ertasten. Mit  
He-Man und She-Ra Tretboot fahren und Skeletors Boot  
rammen. Wie Meerschweinbeinchen sachte ziehen und  
ein Gurren hervorrufen. Brauseufos lutschen. Wenn wir  
uns abends über Polen hermachten, über Landstriche und  
Geschichten. War Mias Oma mia auch immer nahe. In dem  
Birkenwäldchen leg ich oft mein Herz in ein Kuckucksloch.  
Mia in Berlin. Wird wohl jonglieren, parlieren und irri-  
tieren mit dem Zigeunerblick und der spitzegesäumten  
Unterwäsche. Wird wohl, wird wohl. Wirf eine Flaschen-  
post in die Spree. Schreib den Ara[nora]namen darauf. Und für  
die Nächte fern, zäume Briefe den Schnuppen auf. Lass  
den Wind sie jagen, bis ich mich geflochten und fertig ge-  
kämmt. Weh, weh, Windchen. Sieh den Fallada, wie er  
dort hängt. Am Brandenburger Tor. Der Pferdekopf. Mia  
hüt eine Gans und schick eine Feder vom Bauch und eine  
mit einem dicken Kiel. Falls du wiederkommst. Alles merk ich  
mir. Naja, viel.

25 Loving was, like keeping someone locked up in a  
closet and waiting for the ransom. Loving is like feeling out inde-  
tations on poppy seeds with your tongue. Riding on  
a pedal boat with He-Man and She-Ra and ramming Skeletor's  
boat. Pulling gently like little guinea pig legs and  
30 evoking a coo. Sucking on sherbet wafers. When we  
pounced on Poland in the evening, over stretches of land and  
stories. Mia's grandma was always close to me. In the  
little birch tree forest I often put my heart in a cuckoo's hole.  
Mia in Berlin. Will probably juggle, converse, irri-  
35 tate with her gipsy gaze and her lace-edged  
underwear. Probably will, probably will. Throw a message  
in a bottle into the Spree. Write the Ara[nora] name on it. And f  
the faraway nights far, bridle letters onto the falling stars. Let  
the wind chase them, 'til I have braided and finished com-  
bing myself. Blow, blow, little wind. Look at Fallada, how he  
40 hangs there. At the Brandenburg Gate. The horse's head. Mia  
tend to a goose und send a feather from its belly and one  
with a thick quill. If you come back. I will remember everything  
Well, a lot.

# Appendix

THOMAS KLING

## *Bildprogramme*

1.

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Wunsch. Bring ein HeileHeileGänschen und ein Pusten  
in einer kleinen Flasche. Saug mich an durch Vakuum.  
Um Fidibum. Um Fidibum. Saug mich an durch Vakuum.

Mia, bring mia was mit, wenn du wieder kommst,  
falls Du wieder kommst. Lass mich hier sein. Dein Koffer  
in Berlin, deine geregnete Rose, dein Lugosi-Sarg. Lass  
mich hier sein was du willst, von mir wolltest. Lass mich.

Für den Moment, an dem alles an Lichtern ausging,  
alles an Flaschen poppte, alles an Suppen wie Hecht  
vorbeizog. Lass mich in deinem Maoampapier warten,  
geschmiegt an die Kaumasse. Bringst mir ein Nikotinfiterl.  
Ein Papierl. Wickelst mich nicht a wengerl ein in deine  
Zigarette, dunkles Mädchen.

Schlosshundjauuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuln für die Daheim-  
gebliebenen. Wie ein Meerschweinchen frag ich dich nach  
dem Heu-te und Stroh-witwer, den du mir dalässt. Dessen  
Wunden ich lecke. Dessen Wirbel ich entheddern muss,  
damit sie wieder Sprossen auf der Kopfleiter werden. Der  
arme Kerl kann nicht mehr denken, seit du sagtest, heute  
und morgen nicht mehr. Ehrlich gar nicht mehr. Amen.  
Lieben war, wie jemanden im Schrank eingesperrt fest-  
halten und auf Lösegeld warten. Lieben ist wie Einbuch-  
rungen auf Mohnsamen mit der Zunge ertasten. Mit  
He-Man und She-Ra Tretboot fahren und Skeletors Boot  
rammen. Wie Meerschweinbeinchen sachte ziehen und  
ein Gurren hervorrufen. Brauseufos lutschen. Wenn wir  
uns abends über Polen hermachten, über Landstriche und  
Geschichten. War Mias Oma mia auch immer nahe. In dem  
Birkenwäldchen leg ich oft mein Herz in ein Kuckucksloch.  
Mia in Berlin. Wird wohl jonglieren, parlieren und irri-  
tieren mit dem Zigeunerblick und der spitzegeäumten  
Unterwäsche. Wird wohl, wird wohl. Wirf eine Flaschen-  
post in die Spree. Schreib den Ara[nora]namen darauf. Und für  
die Nächte fern, zäume Briefe den Schnuppen auf. Lass  
den Wind sie jagen, bis ich mich geflochten und fertig ge-  
kämmt. Weh, weh, Windchen. Sieh den Fallada, wie er  
dort hängt. Am Brandenburger Tor. Der Pferdekopf. Mia  
hüt eine Gans und schick eine Feder vom Bauch und eine  
mit einem dicken Kiel. Falls du wiederkommst. Alles merk ich  
mir. Naja, viel.

*Mia, bring me something,  
when you return,  
if you return.*

1 Bring me a heart. A little heart. For the right spot.  
To stop the bleeding of the leaking one. Bring a  
building block, a chemistry set. A cluster bomb. Bring  
an intention and a will and perhaps a  
5 wish. Bring a HealHealLittleGoose and a puff  
in a small bottle. Suck me in through a vacuum.  
Um fidibum. Um fidibum. Suck me in through a vacuum.  
Mia, bring me something when you return,  
if you return. Let me be here. Your suitcase  
10 in Berlin, your rained rose, your Lugosi coffin. Let  
me be here what you want, wanted from me. Let me.  
For that moment when all the lights went out.  
all the bottles popped, all the soups passed by  
like pike. Let me wait in your Maoam candy wrapper,  
15 snuggled up at the chewy mass. You bring me a nicotine filter.  
A paper. You wrap me not just little into your  
cigarette, dark girl.  
Yooooooooowling like a castle dog for those who re-  
mained at home. Like a guinea pig I ask you for  
20 the to-day and grass widower, who you leave to me. Whose  
wounds I lick. Whose vertebrae I have to detangle,  
so that they become rungs on the head ladder again. The  
poor guy can't think since you said, not today  
and tomorrow no longer. Honestly, no more at all. Amen.  
25 Loving was, like keeping someone locked up in a  
closet and waiting for the ransom. Loving is like feeling out inde-  
tations on poppy seeds with your tongue. Riding on  
a pedal boat with He-Man and She-Ra and ramming Skeletor's  
boat. Pulling gently like little guinea pig legs and  
30 evoking a coo. Sucking on sherbet wafers. When we  
pounced on Poland in the evening, over stretches of land and  
stories. Mia's grandma was always close to me. In the  
little birch tree forest I often put my heart in a cuckoo's hole.  
Mia in Berlin. Will probably juggle, converse, irri-  
35 tate with her gipsy gaze and her lace-edged  
underwear. Probably will, probably will. Throw a message  
in a bottle into the Spree. Write the Ara[nora] name on it. And f  
the faraway nights far, bridle letters onto the falling stars. Let  
the wind chase them, 'til I have braided and finished com-  
bing myself. Blow, blow, little wind. Look at Fallada, how he  
40 hangs there. At the Brandenburg Gate. The horse's head. Mia  
tend to a goose und send a feather from its belly and one  
with a thick quill. If you come back. I will remember everything  
Well, a lot.