

Abstract Martina Pfeiler

(Post-)Covid Intermissions: Live-Streaming Poetry Slams in the UK in the “New Digital ‘Public’ Sphere”

The outbreak of the global coronavirus pandemic in the early 2020s put a devastating hold on live performance events across all cultural sectors, not only canceling and pausing public engagements of spoken word poets but limiting a range of social and cultural activities that many “poet-performers” (Novak 2011) experienced when engaging with live audiences. While live-performances are back, it does not come as a surprise that a range of systemic issues have since then come to surface. In his article, “Performance Poetry, Covid-19 and the New ‘Public Sphere’” Tom Kew draws attention to the creation of a “new digital public sphere” (33). He provocatively asks: “If the genre has historically existed in opposition to ‘bourgeois’ or ‘good culture’ by creating its own fluid, independent spaces, how can these spaces be re-mapped to champion autonomous creative expression in a literary landscape which increasingly incorporates digital as well as physical arenas?” (33) This paper argues that by live-streaming poetry slams as one of the most popular forms of contemporary poetry events (Benthien and Prange 517), a new digital public sphere for poetry in performance has emerged, expanding the “live-ness” of the slam event format and remapping it for a wider audience. Investigating the *Hammer & Tongue National Slam Final 2021* and the *Roundhouse Poetry Slam Final 2022*, I examine the media specificity of these growing digital spheres as communal spaces. I will draw attention to the audiovisual transmission of performance poetry events in the UK by highlighting the mediatization processes (Auslander 2022) that speak to the popularity of the format. In short, I will reflect on the creative and social potential of live-streaming poetry as well as the mounting critique against main-streaming poetry slams in the digital age.

Bio

PD Dr. Martina Pfeiler currently holds the position of senior researcher in the Poetry Off the Page Project (ERC/FWF) at the University of Vienna. She is the author of *Sounds of Poetry: Contemporary American Performance Poets* (Narr Verlag, 2003), *Poetry Goes Intermedia: U.S.-amerikanische Lyrik des 20. und 21. Jahrhunderts aus kultur-und medienwissenschaftlicher Perspektive* (Francke Verlag, 2010) and co-editor of *Pott Meets Poetry. Die erste illustrierte Slam-Anthologie des Ruhrgebiets* (Lektora Verlag, 2014). From 2016 to 2021 she taught as interim commissioner chair of American Studies at Ruhr-University Bochum. In 2017 she completed her *Habilitation* at TU Dortmund University with a thesis titled *Ahab in Love. The Creative Reception of Moby-Dick in Popular Culture*. She is particularly interested in the intersections of literature, media, and the arts from the 19th to the 21st centuries, including digital spaces. For additional infos, please see: <https://martinapfeilercrossroads.com>