

Annegret Märten (King's College London/Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin)

Voicing vulnerability: mediating violence, victimisation, and female subjectivity in Nora Gomringer's monster poetry

This talk engages with contemporary discussions around the policing of women's bodies, sexual violence, and reproductive justice, as explored in the poetry by the Swiss-German performer and poet Nora-Eugenie Gomringer. In her work cycle *Monster Morbus Moden* (2013–2017), with its initial collection *Monster Poems* (2013), the poet explores the construction of vulnerable subjects, and female subjects in particular, in the interplay of textual and media surfaces, institutional logics and intersubjective power imbalances. Her intervention engages with how the symbolic order constructs concepts of normality from which women supposedly deviate. Gomringer's multimodal approach not only exploits linguistic ambiguity within texts but also aspects of embodied speech in performance, visual arts and audio-visual recording technology. Gomringer employs these intermedial monstrous poetics to account for the harmful culturally iterative nature of such vulnerable subject construction and puts emphasis on visualising and voicing structural victimisation. She engages with the phenomenon of voice as a way to refigure the vulnerable self and as a tool which might act as an alternative to fixed identities when confronting established scripts of female passivity and victimhood. Drawing on recent conceptualisations of 'mediating vulnerability' (Masschelein, 2021) I explore how Gomringer's works can be seen to probe whether a redefinition of vulnerability, from reductive notions of 'injurability' towards an ethical resource, might offer viable modes of resistance in the face of prevalent mechanisms of violence.

In my analysis of Gomringer's intermedial poetic practice I focus on three areas I consider particularly pertinent in artistic engagements with vulnerable subjectivity: the embodied nature of subjects involved in meaning making, how such meaning making manifests as an intersubjective process and how intermedial poetic practice might destabilise texts as stable objects. In formal terms, as Gabrielle Rippl argues, 'intermedial artifacts and phenomena aim at dissolving and transcending media borders' and media must be understood 'as relational constellations and culture-specific incidences'. It is this relationality of media that underpins Gomringer's practice and which accentuates the many ways in which poetry as an unstable, and itself vulnerable form can reflect on contemporary dynamics of subjectivity.

References:

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Biographical note:

Annegret Märten is an Early Career Researcher and a cultural practitioner working in theatre and digital games. She holds an M.A. in Medienkulturanalyse from the Heinrich-Heine-Universität Düsseldorf and has recently submitted her PhD as part of a cotutelle programme between the German Department at King's College London and the Institut für Kulturwissenschaft at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. Her research is concerned with contemporary monstrous poetics and in 2020 she published the chapter 'From the Linguistic Mother to the Salt Water Mother: Poetics of Catastrophe in Tawada Yōko's Eco-critical Writing' in the collected edition *Tawada Yoko: On Writing and Rewriting*, edited by Doug Slaymaker. Annegret has lectured on contemporary German culture and cultural theory at the HU Berlin, King's College London and MetFilm School (University of West London). She is winner of the 2022 Women in German Studies Essay Prize.