Chapter 5
Instagram Poetry and the Logic of Media Platforms: Sabina Store-Ashkari, Alexander Fallo and Trygve Skaug

Fig. 9: Screenshot of a poem by the Norwegian Instagram poet Sabina Store-Ashkari: "one day / I decided / that from now on / I will forgive / myself / for everything/ I accepted / because I thought / it should be like that" (my translation).

The poem above (Fig. 9) is by the Norwegian Instagram poet Sabina Store-Ashkari. It is an Instagram poem and was published on Store-Ashkari's Instagram profile, @ingentingusagt on 12 November 2020.[1] By now, the post has received 561 likes and 31 comments, a response somewhat higher than what Store-Ashkari usually receives.[2]

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1 https://www.instagram.com/p/CHgM8k6LnsQ/ (5 December 2022).

2 Per 5 December 2022.

The comments contain emojis with hearts and clapping hands, as well as affirmative phrases like "Åh. Sukk. Ja" ("Oh. Sigh. Yes"), "Akkurat sånn!" ("Just like that!") and "Helt riktig" ("Absolutely right"). The responses confirm that the poem is appreciated, that its motif and message are familiar and representative to many and that it is useful: it can provide comfort and hope and even offer a solution.

Instagram poems are poems written with the intention of being published and distributed on the platform Instagram. In a relatively short time span, Instagram poetry has become a popular form of poetry; and, given the number of followers, it is a type of literature that has become impossible to ignore. For example, Instagram writer Rupi Kaur, who I referred to in Chapter 1, has nearly four and a half million followers on Instagram.[3] R.M. Drake has just over two and a half million,[4] while Atticus has more than one and a half million,[5] and Yrsa Daley-Ward just over two hundred thousand.[6] In Norway, Trygve Skaug, Alexander Fallo and Sabina Store-Ashkari have about two hundred thousand, twenty-two thousand and seven thousand followers, respectively.[7] Compared to the first group of poets, the Norwegian poets' number of followers is relatively small. However, given the fact that Norwegian has far fewer speakers than English and that most Norwegian readers of Instagram poetry likely also follow and read English-language poems on Instagram, these numbers are high. These three poets can therefore be said to be representative in the Norwegian context.

In this chapter, I discuss some aspects of the interaction between Instagram poems and the platform Instagram as well as between the literary form and the medium of distribution, Moreover, I show how the content, form and function of Instagram poems are, to a great extent, determined by the logic of the media platform, that is, by the way the platform functions. In this context, I trace some key media-technological aspects that frame the poetic activity on the platform. This discussion is then followed by close readings of a small selection of poems by Norway's most popular Instagram poet, Trygve Skaug. By calling attention to Norwegian Instagram poetry in this way, I also briefly mention how this poetry differs from better-known Instagram poetry in English, a difference that is all the more striking since Instagram as such is typically thought of as a global platform with few national differences.

As elsewhere in this book, my approach is based on an understanding of the medium, in this case Instagram, as a non-neutral platform. José van Dijck and Thomas Poell advance this perspective in an article from 2013, arguing for the need to examine

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3 https://www.instagram.com/rupikaur_/ (13 December 2022).

4 https://www.instagram.com/rmdrk/ (13 December 2022).

5 https://www.instagram.com/atticuspoetry/ (13 December 2022).

6 https://www.instagram.com/yrsadaleyward/ (13 December 2022).

7 https://www.instagram.com/trygveskaug/?hl=nb, https://www.instagram.com/alexanderfallo/?hl=nb, https://www.instagram.com/ingentingusagt/?hl=nb (13 December 2022).

the logic that governs platforms: "Far from being neutral platforms, social media are affecting the conditions and rules of social interaction. Therefore, their sustaining logic deserves to be scrutinized in detail to better understand its impact in various domains." (van Dijck and Poell 2013, 5) If it is true that the logic of Instagram, as they claim, influences the social interaction that takes place on the platform, and thus does not merely function as a neutral channel for sharing content, then it is also reasonable to assume that this logic affects the poems that are written to be published, distributed and read on Instagram. Previous research has shown how, to varying degrees, both analogue and digital media affect or interact with the form and distribution of a poem. This observation also applies to Instagram. The platform's logic, including actions by its owners and programmers (such as redefining algorithms and the platform's interfaces), thus influences how it is used; in other words, the platform's logic affects how Instagram poets write, what they write about and when they publish.

Reception and research – the situation in Norway

In recent years, Instagram poems have, with increasing frequency and intensity, been discussed in the daily press, on podcasts and in popular science journals (Thomas 2020, 88). Admittedly, the reception has been diverse. Generally, the poems are considered to be of poor poetic quality. Some critics even claim that these texts are worthless as poetry. One well-known example of such a critique is by the British poet Rebecca Watts, who, in an essay in the journal *Poetry Nation Review*, describes Instagram poems as "artless poetry" and as an expression of "the complete stagnation of the poet's mind." (Watts 2018; also see Korecka 2021) A similar critique has been made by the Norwegian literary critic and scholar Frode Helmich Pedersen, who, in the *Morgenbladet* on 31 January 2020, writes rather bluntly that "Trygve Skaug's enormously popular poems are not good." (Pedersen 2020a)[8] In a dispute in *Bokvennen litterære avis* from 24 February 2020, Pederson furthers his initial claim: "If anyone can show me an Instagram poem of high-quality, I am all ears." (Pedersen 2020b)[9] These reviews, though, neither reflect on the role of the played by the media platform, on media conditions, nor on how media actually function. In contradistinction to these writers, the Norwegian literary critic Ingunn Økland alerts readers to these perspectives in a review of another Norwegian Instagram poet, Alexander Fallo and his print collection of

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8 My translation. The original Norwegian reads: "Trygve Skaugs enormt populære dikt er ikke gode."

9 My translation. The original Norwegian reads: "Hvis noen kan vise meg et instadikt av høy kvalitet, er jeg lutter øre."

poems *du fucker med hjertet mitt nå* (2020). In the review, Økland highlights the vulnerability that occurs as a consequence of transferring Instagram poems to a book format: "Alexander Fallo falls for the temptation to include single sentences that have a certain charm on Instagram but that are far too flimsy on a white book page." (Økland 2020)[10] Økland suggests that poems that are appreciated on Instagram are not necessarily as easily cherished when they are printed in a book. There are many possible reasons for this difference in reception. We read and write differently in different media (Hayles 2012; Mangen, Walgermo and Brønnick 2013) and in different situations (Drucker 2020). Moreover, media are used for different purposes. Different media logics work differently. This is also true of poetry. Consequently, the media environment, the way media work and the logic of media are all important for our understanding and evaluation of Instagram poems.

For the last years, research on Instagram poetry has accelerated as the poems have grown in number and popularity. A few years ago, hardly any academic attention was given to Instagram poetry. Similarly, few literary critics showed interest. This should not come as a surprise if we account for the fact that this poetic media genre is still in a relatively early phase: Instagram was first launched in 2010, primarily as a photo-sharing program. Only later did users begin to publish poetry on the platform. Still, it is probably fair to claim, as do Magdalena Korecka and creative writing researcher Lili Pâquet, that Instagram poetry has long been considered to belong to a popular cultural field with "little literary merit." (Pâquet 2019, 296; Korecka 2021, 8) This evaluation may also explain why many of the researchers who have taken an interest in the genre are relatively young and come from research fields other than traditional literary studies. Examples of research conducted on Instagram poetry include Bronwen Thomas' book, *Literature and Social Media* (Thomas 2020). Here, Thomas incorporates Instagram poetry as a significant part of the material. Further on, in her overview of the research, Korecka mentions among others analyzes of Instagram poetry's pedagogical potential for literacy across media (Kovalik and Curwood 2019; Korecka 2019); Pâquet, who argues for the influence of self-help literature on Instagram poetry (Pâquet 2019); and Shweta Khilnani who focuses on affective and aesthetic aspects of Instagram poetry (Khilnani 2021). Jeneen Naji approaches Instagram poetry from the perspective of posthumanism (Naji 2021). Camilla Holm Soelseth has researched the genre with methods developed from digital

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10 My translation. In Norwegian, the quote reads: "Alexander Fallo faller for fristelsen til å inkludere enkeltsetninger som har en viss sjarm på Instagram, men som blir altfor spinkle på en hvit bokside."

humanities (Soelseth 2022). Kathi Inman Berens discusses Instagram poetry as a form of electronic literature (Berens 2019). Both Kristin L. Matthews and Magdalena Korecka explore Instagram poetry within the framework of political and activist literature, in particular struggles against racism and oppression (Matthews 2019; Korecka 2021). Korecka investigates contemporary audio-visual poetry on social media platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, TikTok and YouTube.[11] She highlights political and activist dimensions of this poetry, dimensions that give legitimacy to these genres. In this regard, Korecka expands on Rosa Crepax's notion that Instagram poetry is essentially digital feminist activism, written by young female feminists (Crepax 2020, 75; Korecka 2021, 4). In addition, some research on Instagram poetry has focused on particular authors. Due to Rupi Kaur's enormous popularity, it is not surprising that she has received significant attention from researchers. Several of the publications already mentioned draw attention to Kaur's poems.

In light of this brief overview, two features in particular should be emphasized. First, we find that the research has explored Instagram poetry along three main lines: Instagram poetry has been examined as a media phenomenon, as a genre and as a cultural-political phenomenon. To varying degrees, this research engages with the question of the relationship between Instagram poetry and the rest of the literary field, including literary genres and the history of poetry. In this respect, the research is divided between those who regard Instagram poetry as more "popular" than other poetry (Penke 2019, 451) and those who, like Matthews, emphasize the innovative aspects of the poems and how these aspects contribute to making us question literary conventions and reading habits in other media. Thomas also touches on these innovative aspects. She points to the crucial interaction between Instagram poetry and its respective platform, claiming that Instagram poems share two common features: first, Instagram poems are a form of platform poetry; and second, that readers' participation in a community is established in the intersection between the platform and the poems (Thomas 2020, 87). Other scholars define Instagram poetry through repetitive motifs, whether they emphasize the poems' orientation towards everyday motifs or pursue the hypothesis that the poems function as literary activism (Korecka 2021).

The second key feature that emerges from this review of the research literature is that scholarship on Instagram poetry is, to a certain extent, colored by fascination and enthusiasm. This research has arisen from a number of academic fields, including literary studies, media studies, sociology, anthropology and creative

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11 https://www.poetry-digital-age.uni-hamburg.de/en/forschung/laufend/social-media-poetry. html (5 December 2022).

writing, and it has tended to be conducted by young researchers in an early stage of their academic careers. This latter characterization is not a devaluation of either the researchers or their publications but is rather meant as an observation that provides insight into who these researchers are. In other words, it is important to understand who contributes to knowledge in the field and hence sets the premises for many of the discussions that have taken place so far. To a certain extent, one might say that the lack of interest from more established poetry researchers underscores the point made by both Pâquet and Korecka, that the field of Instagram poetry has been regarded as "popular culture." (see Pâquet 2019, 296; Korecka 2021, 8) Nevertheless, a potential methodological challenge needs to be mentioned in this respect. The lack of temporal distance, i.e. the short timespan between the publication of the poems and the research conducted on them, makes it difficult to identify significant trends and patterns. Moreover, enthusiasm and temporal proximity can lead to overly simplistic claims about what Instagram poetry can do. Crepax, for example, writes that poetry on social media such as Instagram is suitable for thematizing the exploration and negotiation of identities among marginalized subjects (Crepax 2020, 79). Apart from the fact that one can claim that literature and art in general open spaces for negotiating marginalized identities, Crepax's characterization is simply too schematic. It is by no means given that the community that provides the context of Instagram poetry is representative of those with a particular marginalized identity. Social media is as likely to limit as to open negotiations about marginalized identities.

Another example of how some of the research on Instagram poetry jumps to conclusions that are not representative or is based on limited material, is Thomas' claim that critics and academics have rejected Instagram poetry because the poems are largely by young female poets of color (also see Korecka 2021, 6). She reads the reception of the poems into a tradition where young female writers are considered too private and melodramatic (Thomas 2020, 90), which from a sociological perspective is an interesting contextualization. Still, Thomas fails to examine the extent to which the poems themselves might be at least part of the reason why literary studies in Europe and the US has, until recently, taken little interest in Instagram poetry. For example, it is by no means obvious how a well-known poet like Rupi Kaur could be considered a victim of negligence. Further, regarding Instagram poetry in languages other than English, the situation might be quite different. In Norway, for instance, the two most well-known Instagram poets are men, Trygve Skaug and Alexander Fallo. It is these male poets, and not young female poets, who have been criticized for writing bad poetry.

As far as I can tell, little attention has been paid to the function that Instagram as a media platform might have in the encounter between poetry and the poems' "what" and "how," that is, what the poems are about and how the poets

write them. One crucial exception is Korecka, who points out that Instagram poetry is "a kind of poetry that connects social media affordances (e.g., the use of hyperlinks), visual strategies and aesthetics with socio-political issues." (Korecka 2021, 1) Furthermore, Korecka investigates social media poetry with a media-specific approach. For example, she includes platform studies and analyzes social media affordances in relation to hashtags and algorithms (Korecka, *forthcoming*).[12] However, how such strategies and socio-political thematizations are related to the media conditions of Instagram, as well as what these media conditions consist of, must still be further clarified. In the following, I discuss three key components relevant for Instagram as a social media platform. I argue that these three components are important for understanding the role of the platform and Instagram poetry as a media-specific form of poetry.

Programmability, connectivity and popularity

All forms of communication on social media are characterized by norms, strategies, mechanisms and economic conditions that are partly outside and partly revealed on the social media platforms. The function and dominance of these platforms in many areas of communication lead van Dijck and Poell to claim that social media have "changed the conditions and rules of social interaction." (van Dijck and Poell 2013, 2) In "Understanding Social Media Logic" (2013), van Dijk and Poell explore some of the key conditions that are manifested on social media platforms in order to describe how social media works and to identify what they term social media logic. According to van Dijck and Poell, "social media logic refers to the processes, principles, and practices through which these platforms process information, news, and communication, and more generally, how they channel social traffic." (van Dijck and Poell 2013, 5) These key conditions for social media logic are defined as programmability, connectivity, popularity and datafication. In what follows, I will be most concerned with the first three of these conditions.

"Programmability" refers to social media as code-based and computational in the sense that it includes both arithmetical and non-arithmetical processes, both algorithmic and non-algorithmic events. Because digital media are based on codes, they can easily be modified. Likewise, the form and content on the surface of the media platform can also be easily amended. Therefore, the term deals with

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12 It should be mentioned that Korecka takes a more media-specific approach in her ongoing dissertation on social media poetry, "Visual Poetry on Social Media Platforms: New Media Aesthetic" (working title) within the context of the ERC project "Poetry in the Digital Age" at Universität Hamburg.

computers and its software facilities and includes codes, background data, algorithms, protocols and interfaces. These aspects of social media constitute various functions on a platform. For instance, they might motivate and control what users write and publish. Additionally, as van Dijck and Poell write, these aspects outline "how social media platforms shape all kinds of relational activities, such as liking, favoring, recommending, sharing and so on." (van Dijck and Poell 2013, 5) Programmability allows human and non-human actors to suggest posts, content, networks and users that you may know or that the algorithms think you want to know because you like the same things or have common connections on social media. As I will return to later, it is reasonable to claim that programmability also affects Instagram poems, including how they are shaped and what they represent.

A second aspect of social media logic is "connectivity". The concept of connectivity describes how social media is networked: users are connected to other users, machines and platforms are connected to other machines and platforms, and users are connected to machines. In a sense, network connectivity can be regarded as the meaning of social media. According to Mark B. Hansen, what is mediated in social media is first and foremost connectivity on a large scale: "[W]hat is mediated by Web 2.0 is less the content that users upload than the sheer connectivity, the simple capacity to reach myriad like-minded users, that is afforded by the act of uploading content." (Hansen 2010, 180) Similarly, Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford and Joshua Green emphasize the affiliation between connectivity and dissemination (2013). They put forward how interconnection and distribution work together and strengthen each other, even in cases in which this is not in itself an intention or goal. On the one hand, the individual user has the freedom to choose "friends" and to create networks. On the other hand, connections and, consequently, the distribution of content, are generated automatically. The former, according to van Dijck and Poell, typically reflects an individual and private initiative; the latter is often motivated by commercial intentions: "a strategic tactic that effectively enables human connectedness while pushing automated connectivity." (van Dijck and Poell 2013, 5) In this manner, connectivity depends on and reaches its full potential because of programmability.

In research on Instagram poetry, scholars often emphasize that the poems contribute to establishing or confirming online communities because they highlight topics that appeal to many users and that can easily be engaged with. This strategy, in turn, generates likes, comments and regramming. These responses can be considered as both communicative and phatic, that is, communicative actions that are ritualistic and perform the function of establishing or maintaining social contact (Jakobson 2014, 238–242). Likes, comments and regramming that have a phatic function can occur in both small, private networks and in large,

commercially based communities on social media. Van Dijck and Poell argue that connectivity should be considered as an "advanced strategy of algorithmically connecting users to content, users to users, platforms to users, users to advertisers, and platforms to platforms." (van Dijck and Poell 2013, 5) Media technology gives users the ability to search for and select whom they want to follow and be connected to, while algorithms highlight and recommend users, content and networks based on a variety of criteria. This process entails what van Dijck and Poell call "automated personalization" and implies that content that is presented on platforms is calibrated for specific users. The users know some of the criteria for the automated pairing, while other criteria are not accessible. This means that processes concerning sociological community-building on platforms are doubled and that they are configured and distorted by algorithm-driven processes, processes that are conditioned both by users' preferences and needs and by the platform owners' interests and commercial purposes.

In addition to programmability and connectivity, van Dijck and Poell discuss "popularity". Popularity is perceived in sociological research as a complex concept. To simplify somewhat, popularity can be explained as processes concerning different practices of ranking based on criteria for hierarchies and status. The number of followers, likes and regramming can quantify popularity on social media, while positive comments reflect popularity in a qualitative manner. They both signify what Instagram users think is important. Still, according to van Dijck and Poell, popularity is determined by both algorithmic and socioeconomic mechanisms. This means that an Instagram user's background affects the number of followers and that popularity will vary depending on the extent to which algorithms can direct users to a specific Instagram account (van Dijck and Poell 2013, 7). In this sense, the logic of Instagram highlights some users and content over others.

Parameters for popularity such as likes, regramming and comments are part of a "like economy". Caroline Gerlitz and Anne Helmond describe this economy as an infrastructure for the exchange of data, traffic, affects, contacts and money. The exchange of these commodities has been facilitated and strengthened as a result of features that make it possible to like, comment, share and save posts, to access an Instagram group via a link from a web page or from an email or to upload an Instagram post, photo or video to a web page and link it to the relevant Instagram account. Of these social plugins, Gerlitz and Helmond highlight the "likes" button as the most important for the like economy (Gerlitz and Helmond 2013, 1353). Likewise, van Dijck and Poell point out that likes are regarded as the strongest indicator of popularity.

It should come as no surprise that Instagram poems are part of a larger popularity context and contest, a like economy, as described above. Instagram is programmed to reward those users who have many followers. Instagram poetry is no exception. It is characterized by this environment, from which it gets its fuel,

engagement and political potential. Because of popularity, poets with many followers dominate the field. Indeed, the platform gives Instagram poets an opportunity to actively attract more readers. In addition to the poets' effort to write poems that are similar in form or content to the type of poems that previously received many likes, were extensively shared and received many comments, they can also choose to create a business account and access services that provide information about their readers and that even recognizes the readers' patterns on Instagram. By analyzing this information, Instagram poets can target the literary form as well as the time the poems are publish in order both to satisfy established followers and to reach new readers through networks.

With regard to popularity, it is also necessary to mention how Instagram promotes popularity through rankings. For example, hashtags like #poetry and #poems are used to draw attention to the most read or popular poems.[13] Thus, Instagram leads the flow of readers in the direction of the poems and poets with the highest rankings. In other words, Instagram is programmed to reward popularity and, obviously, many of the poets on Instagram want to reach as many readers as possible. Therefore, it is fair to say that the poets not only seek connectivity but also popularity. In this sense, popularity becomes a goal that Instagram poets relate to, whether that goal is to create a greater impact or to earn money within a "like-economy". Poets choose Instagram as a platform for their poems because the platform has proven to be well suited to their poetry, but in terms of the argument sketched above, we can also assume that they choose Instagram because it is the most adequate platform for satisfying personal ambitions. If you do not become famous, then you can at least increase the possibility of being read and seen. The latter is a further example of the importance of the phatic function of Instagram poetry. Indeed, we should not lose sight of the fact that with this kind of poetry, we are dealing with a particular aesthetic dimension that is linked to the specific interface of Instagram. This is an interface that Instagram poets may want to explore and use for purposes other than reaching a wide audience and gaining popularity.

The last aspect of social media logic that van Dijck and Poell elaborate on is "datafication". This term denotes the possibilities that a platform have for collecting information about its users and for converting this information into data and new (commercial and financial) value. This is information that, in turn, can be used to make predictions and estimates and to control and anticipate what users prefer to read, as well as to direct personalized advertising. Datafication is part of

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13 See e.g. https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/poets/. This overview contains poems that have been marked #poets. This means that it includes both Instagram poets and other poets (such as e.g. Robert Frost). The latter group cannot be considered Instagram poets since they do not write poems that fall under the definition of Instagram poetry given at the beginning of this chapter.

what Shoshana Zuboff describes as a relatively new global-social economy where users are put under massive surveillance (Zuboff 2019). Even though this aspect is crucial in all activities online, I consider it to be less relevant in the discussion of the media conditions for Instagram poetry. Still, I briefly mention datafication here because the concept is reminiscent of an aspect and economy of social media. Instagram poems are inevitably a part of this economy. Furthermore, the concept emphasizes that such a seemingly simple act as "liking" a poem on Instagram contributes to a larger economy that goes far beyond the popularity of a poem and poet. This is the reason behind Berens rhetorical statement:

> Perhaps we could agree that a "like" is "trivial" engagement. But what about the terabytes of data shed by and then harvested from Instapoetry fans? It cannot be "trivial" when 160,000 people "touching" just one Instapoem leave behind so much information that is quite literally out of their hands – is, in fact, a loss they can neither feel nor tally? (Berens 2019)

The discussion of van Dijckand Poell's model shows how the logic of social media is part of the media situation of Instagram poetry. Social media matters – even for Instagram poetry; it affects the production and the development of Instagram poetry. Social media also affects how the poems are distributed, read and responded to. For example, algorithms and hashtags are central to connectivity and popularity because they enable the poems to reach a larger network of readers. The poets write their poems, but they do so in a resonant space where the aspects I have been discussing play a crucial role because the logic of social media influences what poets write, how they write, how the poems reach an audience and how they are received. The various processes that take place "below" the surface of the platform, that is, the deeper layers that constitute important premises for the production, distribution and reading of Instagram poems, make it challenging but no less imperative, to understand the relationship between the poems, the publishing platform and the readers' response to the poems.

Instagram poetry and its technological situation

So far in this chapter, I have claimed that Instagram's poets and poems are, to some extent, subordinate to the media-technical affordances of the platform. With its logic, Instagram is the situation of and the environment for the poems, a partly deterministic situation and environment which are reflected in the fact that the poet, by publishing his or hers poetry on Instagram, accepts both the technical affordances and the context that constitute the platform and the way it works. To publish a poem on Instagram does not require much technical skill. It is easy to publish a poem, and it is almost impossible for the poet to change or to have an impact on the technical

conditions that predispose publications. The poems are usually written in a writing and text-editing program and then published on Instagram. They can appear solely as a written poem, with no visual framework other than the platform's interface, from which the poet cannot escape. Furthermore, they can appear together with il-lustrations, where the illustrations are part of the poems' visual expression as the example below from @trygveskaug show (see Fig. 10). Finally, a poem can appear on
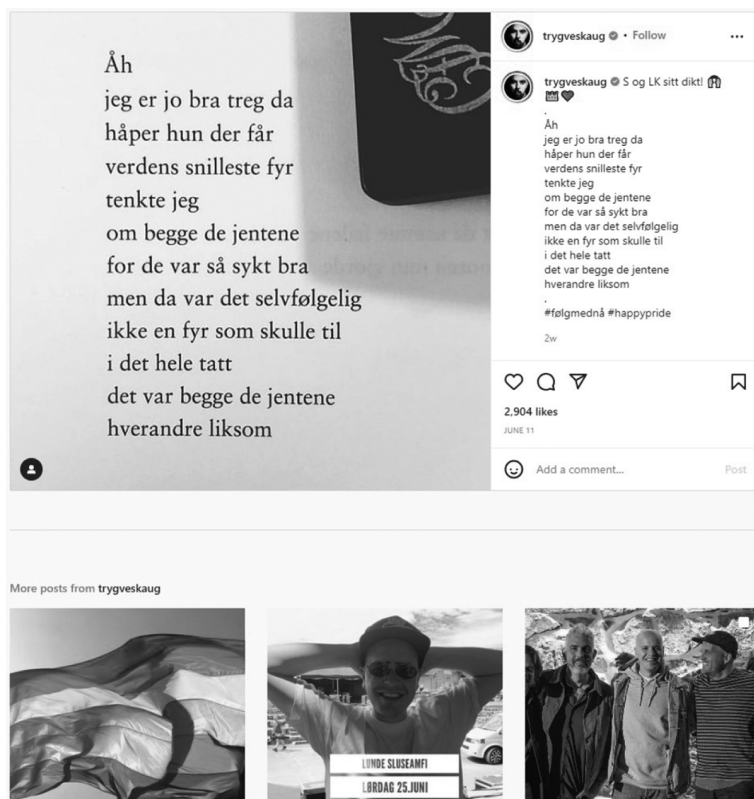

Fig. 10: The poem by Trygve Skaug was published on 11 June 2022, during Pride month. The photograph contains more information than the poem alone, including a shadow text that is partly present but impossible to read. "Oh / I am pretty slow then / hope she catches / the kindest guy in the world / I thought / about both of the girls / because they were so good / but then it was of course / not at all a guy / it was both the girls / like, each other" (my translation).[14]

14 https://www.instagram.com/p/CeqJotbMgdW/ (5 December 2022).

Instagram as a photographed book page or as a text written in the field that is reserved for comments. The variation and combination of these strategies for publication may be regarded with both aesthetic and media technology reasons. Either way, the different strategies represent a variety of ways that the poems become visible, readable and searchable.

The relationship between Instagram poetry and its platform technology is different from how many digital-poetic genres are related to their platforms. In other genres, media technology is often used in a surprising and frequently experimental way. The poet develops and challenges media-technological solutions, adapting the media platform to the poetic expression, or, alone or in collaboration with a programmer, makes conscious choices about which code language the digital poem should emerge through. The latter is, for instance, the case with code poetry where code language and poetic language are often thought of as a whole (see e.g. Marino 2020; Vorrath 2022). Such a holistic approach means that programming codes are being included in the idea of the poems. For Instagram poetry, the media and the poems also must be regarded as intimately related but the table has been turned. Rather than adapting the medium and its interface to the poetic idea and expression, as we saw was the case in Johannes Heldén and Håkan Jonson's *Evolution* and in Heldén's *Astroecology* (see Chapters 3 and 4), the poems are adapted to the platform's interface, to the mobile media and their small display and to the logic of the platform. As mentioned above, the poet chooses to publish her poems on Instagram and thereby accepts the possibilities and limitations of Instagram.

The fact that Instagram poetry does not represent an aesthetic whose goal is to change the platform through literary and technological experiments, does not necessarily suggest that poets are indifferent to the medium. Rather, they are engaged in the medium in a different way than authors of most other kinds of digital poetry. They take advantage of the functionality and infrastructure offered by the platform, including social plugins that condition the interactions with readers, like comments and other forms of feeback, and broad distribution in networks. The information that readers leave in form of likes, regramming and comments is part of a feedback loop that poets can use to evaluate whether the poems work and, if they work, how they work. Consequently, this feedback might have an impact on how poets write and what they write about.

Most obviously, Instagram affects the visual form of the poems since the visual aesthetic of an Instagram profile becomes part of the visual expression of the poems. This implies, as Naji also contends, that the poetics of Instagram poetry includes the interface of the platform. Naji claims that both the visual design of Instagram and the functions associated with the interface are part of the poems' form. Moreover, these aspects have a productive impact on the way the poems work. The

interface of Instagram comprises the poems' visual framework and includes information like the time of publication and the number of likes and comments. With regard to connectivity and popularity, the interface is designed to encourage participation by leaving a comment, thereby creating a sense of community. By considering the interface as part of the poetics of Instagram poetry, I reinforce the claim that the platform matters. As a result, in order to understand Instagram poetry as a genre, one must explore the media conditions that determine the poems, that provide them with a function and that make them work the way they do.

Fig. 11: Screenshot of a poem by the Norwegian Instagram poet Alexander Fallo: "the Uber Driver / knows where we are going / I have no clue / your head on my lap / just follow the gut feeling" (my translation).

The poem above (Fig. 11) is by the Norwegian Instagram poet Alexander Fallo and is entitled "ubersjåføren" ("the Uber Driver"). It lacks punctuation, and it is written without the use of capital letters. The absence of punctuation and capital letters are well known from modernism and can, for this poem, be considered both as a marker of modernism, i.e. as a graphic cliché, and as an example of how a media platform partly influences how one writes. This is the language of Instagram poetry, i.e. where basic grammar rules are broken or ignored in order to give the impression that the

poem is an "instant" expression of a subjective experience. Furthermore, the group of lines is formed in a way that creates a smooth diagonal line on the right margin. However, this graphic element does not turn the poem into a figurative poem where the poem's visual shape is imitating that which it represents. The visual shape does not contribute to the poem's interpretative potential, which is the case for visual and figurative poetry. Regarding the question of the role of social media logic, the above-mentioned features in the poem represent choices made and techniques performed by the poet Fallo. Likewise, Store-Ashkari, whose poem I referred to in the beginning of this chapter, uses italics in her poem, a choice that is obviously hers and not Instagram's. Nevertheless, both of these poems can serve as examples of how Instagram poems, although they vary in content and form, have a number of similarities due to the media platform and its logic.

The poems by Fallo and Store-Ashkari are typical Instagram poems: short texts, most often only one stanza per slide, with short lines, usually a few words or less on each line, and with uneven line breaks. In this manner, they look like any print poem that could have been published in a book. For this reason, they can easily be adapted into print. Thus, these poems differ from much digital poetry, such as the kinetic poetry of which bpNichol and Ottar Ormstad are two prominent exponents, Jason Nelson's "game poetry" or Johannes Heldén's algorithm-based poems. These examples of poetry in digital media are more experimental in form, and they challenge the understanding of what poetry can be and what it can look like. This is not typically the case for Instagram poetry. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that Instagram poems can also be more experimental in form. Tyler Knott Gregson (@tylerknott) publishes video recordings of himself reading his poems. One reading per day.[15] Gregson follows a ritual where he greets his audience in a way that establishes an imagined community: "This is one of my favorites, ever, so please listen up. I love this one." The greetings usually include humorous comments: "What's up you beefcake pantyhose?" He continues by holding up the written poem he will read to the camera, i.e. "here's typewriter series 55". The poem simultaneously appears on the screen. Most of Nikita Gill's (@nikita_gill) Instagram poems appear as photographs of print poems, but she also posts poems that are handwritten and that include drawings.[16] This way of combining several layers of media is also common for the poems on @kaitdoes, who also applies a technique of erasure poetry in some of her poems.[17] While Gregson makes use of his Instagram account in order to perform and distribute his poems in a form of poetry reading, @kaitdoes is, I claim, one of the most interesting contemporary

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15 https://www.instagram.com/tylerknott/ (13 December 2022).

16 https://www.instagram.com/nikita_gill/?hl=en (5 December 2022).

17 https://www.instagram.com/p/CUupTwWrA82/ (5 December 2022).

Instagram poets because her poems appear as an amalgam of poetry and visual media arts and, therefore, challenges established distinctions between the two art forms.[18]

Still, it is fair to say that neither the three examples given above nor the poems by Fallo and Store-Ashkari make substantial use of poetic techniques associated with poetry as an art form. For example, the potential of enjambment as a poetic technique that creates ambiguities, delays perception and meaning making and directs the reader's attention to metapoetic qualities are largely absent. Although enjambments in the poems break up the sentences, they do not create extra meaning or open space for ambiguous readings. Of course, for other poems, and for other Instagram poets, the enjambment can provide the poem with meaning. The term "Instagram poetry" does not denote dysfunctional line breaks. However, as I will return to later in the chapter, some of the characteristics of the poems, including the lack of ambiguity, can be linked to the logic of Instagram, as well as to the medium on which and the situations in which the poems are often read.

Platform-specific poetry

The claim made above touches upon a crucial aspect regarding the meaning of Instagram and its logic for Instagram poetry as a genre, that is, its form, content and function. Instagram poetry is platform poetry because of the poems' special affiliation with one or more platforms.[19] As platform poetry, the poems are adapted to the technical media on which they are primarily read, including the possibilities for connectivity and network distribution that are offered by the platform. Matthew Kirschenbaum writes that literature on social media is oriented towards what the platforms can offer in terms of functionality and infrastructure. Furthermore, he claims that this literature is characterized by the fact that it is designed to be shared and read on a medium with a small reading surface, such as a mobile phone or tablet (Kirschenbaum 2018, 34). Furthermore, both Magdalena Korecka and Niels Penke point out that the poems need to be adapted to the photo format of Instagram (Penke 2019, 461; Korecka 2021, 7). Penke even states that short Instagram poems often get more likes and are shared more often than longer poems, and he argues that this is due to the fact that short poems are better adapted to the platform and to the mobile medium on which the poems are

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18 See Chapter 2 for a brief discussion of poetry and media art.

19 Obviously, Instagram poetry can also be published on other media platforms, such as on Facebook, on a coffee mug or on a t-shirt. An exploration of how Instagram poems wander across media and materializations is interesting, but will not be pursued further in this chapter.

often read (Penke 2019, 473; 303). In other words, because of the media platform and because the poems must be readable on a small screen, the poems contain a limited number of words and characters.

Moreover, the situation in which the poems are most often read might also affect the length of the poems. In fact, when Gregson reads one of his longer poems on @tylerknott, he prepares his listeners and emphasizes that this is an exception: "It's a long one. Let's go." According to Johanna Drucker, the place where one reads will affect how one reads. She highlights the concept of "sight-reading" and writes that *"where* we read is as fundamental to the way the meaning of written language is produced and contributes materially to how we understand *what* we are reading." (Drucker 2020, 167) In this respect, in a discussion on the relationships between media and the form, content and function of Instagram poetry, one should include the places where the mobile medium and the application are used and where the poems are read. It is reasonable to assume that Instagram poems are read in other places and in other situations than one usually reads print poetry. A possible reading situation for Instagram poetry could be as follows: one reads a poem quickly, clicks on the like button and perhaps leaves an emoji with a short comment, before one scroll through one's feed, likes another poem, checks the latest news on the phone and reads a Facebook post. This could take place during a lunch break or while one is waiting in a station of the metro.[20] Drucker's concept of sight-reading is useful for understanding how we read Instagram poems. She includes the role of the medium in her model. By adding medium to the concept of sight-reading, she highlights that reading and meaning making are also media-sensitive events. With regard to the definition of Instagram poetry as poetry written to be published, distributed and read on Instagram, the logic of the platform, such as popularity, and where and in which situations the poems are read will have an effect on the poems. In other words, the poems not only need to be adapted to the application and the screen of the mobile device but also to the place and situation of reading. In this sense, we might slightly revise Drucker's claim and argue that '*where* we read and on which *medium* or *media* we read are as fundamental to the way the meaning of written language is produced and contributes materially to how we understand *what* we are reading.'

The reading situation of Instagram poetry is "unclean." It is a mixture where the reader performs a sight-reading of texts in different genres, applying both aesthetic and efferent reading. The reader's feed and the Instagram poets' account are

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20 The description serves as a point of reference to Ezra Pound's imagist poem "In a Station of a Metro," "The apparition of these faces in the crowd: / Petals on a wet, black bough.", to emphasize my claim that Instagram poetry uses some of the trappings of a modernist aesthetic without actually doing anything of substance or transforming it in any way.

also not "pure" but might contain a combination of poems, photographs, videos and self-promotion. Daley-Ward, for instance, acts as a poet, model and actor on her Instagram account. Her profile includes both poems and photographs of herself. The photographs look like fashion photographs in which Daley-Ward appears posed and well dressed, and most of the photographs are of high visual and technical quality. Thus, it is fair to say that the poems are part of a broader visual culture of self-presentation. She and other Instagram poets demonstrate how poets' profiles appear as hybrid where the boundaries between poetry, self-promotion and influential material are blurred and where the common feature is that the various posts serve purposes that, in light of van Dijck and Poell's observations, can be understood as part of Instagram's logic. The different genres and discourses that the poems are part of are entwined and feed each other, increasing popularity and connectivity across diverse networks.

The fact that the poems are written in order to be read on an application on a mobile phone is relevant for understanding Instagram poetry as platform-specific. On the one hand, both the application and the technical medium affect individual poems. Obviously, long poems would not adapt well to the platform, a mobile screen or the various reading situations. On the other hand, the application and its design are of importance in the organization of the poems. A book, with its principle of organization and its conventions for writing and reading, encourages a poet to explore a theme or a motif in a linear or sequential order and to let a story unfold through several poems. In contrast, Instagram serves as a publishing platform and archive that invites and facilitates a different organization of the poems and, hence, a different relationship between the poems. Because of the logic of the feed on Instagram, single poems without any coherence to other poems by the same poet, appear frequently. The network organization – the connectivity of Instagram – makes it just as easy and conventional to link one's poem to a poem by another Instagram poet. Further, a poet can mark a coherence between poems by using specific hashtags, by collecting several poems under one entry, so that readers have to scroll left or right in order to read them, or, as many Instagram poets do, by creating a narrative sequence between poems. Nevertheless, the poems do not necessarily appear in the readers' Instagram feed in the order in which the poet publishes the poems, which they (most often) do as print poems in a book.

Gebrauchslyrik and application technology

Because the platform is part of the poems' poetics, and because it offers functionality and infrastructure that make literature on social media designed to be shared, I will stress the practical dimension of Instagram poetry and the genre as

a form of contemporary *Gebrauchslyrik*. The term *Gebrauchslyrik* was coined by Bertolt Brecht in 1927 and is a genre that according to Fabian Otto can relate both to choices of everyday subject matter and the poems' style of language. Elaborating on *Gebrauchslyrik*, Otto continues: "vorrangig die beim Lesen leicht zugängliche und vielfach in irgendeiner Weise (gesellschafts-)politisch ambitionierte Lyrik gemeint." (Otto 2003, 4)[21] In Scandinavia, the term has been associated in particular with the political poetry of the 1960s and 1970s.

The practical and everyday dimensions of Instagram poetry are reflected both in the platform and poems. The poems are written to be read on a platform where connectivity and popularity serve, among other things, as governing mechanisms; the poems are predisposed to use, response and popularity markers. Kirschenbaum too suggests that there is an obvious connection between social media as a platform used in everyday life and Instagram poems as utility poetry with everyday themes. He claims that literature in social media prioritizes "the ordinary, the everyday, and the plain as opposed to the exceptional or the surprising or the dense." (Kirschenbaum 2018, 34) As I described in the beginning of this chapter, Instagram poetry is often political. The poems use motifs from everyday life to describe, in an accessible language, identity and exclusion, to overcome the feeling of shame and to strengthen self-esteem. In fact, these topics are considered so important that many researchers include them in the definition of Instagram poetry. Kathi Berens claims that Instagram poems are sentimental and ordinary (Berens 2019), while Thomas suggests that social media such as Instagram offer the opportunity to observe other people's everyday lives, "getting closer to the dailiness of life." Thomas 2020, 19) She emphasizes with precision how poems dealing with the topic of self-care coincide with the poems' linguistic everyday language: "The tone and vocabulary of this poetry is distinctive, reminiscent of the language of self-help and self-improvement that provides such an important outlet for young people struggling with issues of identity and self-worth." (Thomas 2020, 91) Poems about identity, love and feelings of vulnerability are attractive to many readers. These topics engage readers; and readers express this sense of engagement through likes, comments and regramming. In this way, the emotional aspects of everyday life in Instagram poems reflect an orientation towards popularity. Moreover, van Dijck and Poell point out that social media algorithms are set up to detect and reinforce trends by distributing posts to many:

> [P]latforms claim they can track instantaneous movements of individual user behavior, aggregate these data, analyze them, and subsequently translate the results into valuable

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21 "primarily meant for poetry that is easily accessible and that often in some way has (societally) politically ambitious" (my translation).

> information about individuals, groups, or society at large. Social media logic of detecting representative trends based on real-time analytics is increasingly mingling with polling strategies established by mass media logic. (van Dijck and Poell 2013, 10)

Instagram can collect information about how Instagram poetry is used as well as about popular trends and the topics that attract the most readers. Following van Dijck and Poell, moreover, we might claim that the platform's mechanisms not only "measure" expressions and opinions but actually help to shape them. In this way, the platform significantly contributes to the mediation of the poems and their meaning – despite the fact that the poems often give the impression that they are expressions of spontaneous feelings and opinions

The platform – including readerly feedback facilitated by the platform's social plugins – contains structures and information that helps form the poems. In this respect, Instagram poetry can be regarded as part of what Fredrik Tygstrup has called the "Culture Industry 2.0." Tygstrup describes how twenty-first-century digital media have changed the production of culture: "An insight into the users' concrete purchase and consumption behavior – what is emphasized, shared, skipped, returned to, etc. – opens up for a new microengineering of market-oriented works." (Tygstrup 2016, 24)[22] According to Tygstrup, this means that the experimentation that structures the experience of surprise and defamiliarization is replaced by products and works that are familiar and easily recognizable.

Tygstrup's analysis is useful for understanding the relationship between Instagram and its poetry. Moreover, Tygstrup helps us understand how the poems, whether intentional or unintentional, are written to meet expectations from readers and a market. The poems function within a sphere that no longer resembles the traditional literary industry. The popularity of the poems, whether they work or not, is measured in the number of likes. At the same time, algorithms affect how the poems are distributed, where and how they are read, as well as which poems are liked. Thus, the algorithms help to create and mediate feedback. Therefore, it is also reasonable to claim that, rather than advanced technological expertise, Instagram poets need to know how to build a network of "followers" through Instagram and other social media. To gain popularity, they must write poems that meet the expectations of old and new followers. They should not write poems that surprise their readers, because such poems do not fit the market economy and the media logic of Instagram. Rather, the poems must be adapted to the conditions set by the platform's interface, algoritms and the platform owners.

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22 "Indsigt i brugernes konkrete konsumvaner – hvad der understreges, deles, springes over, vendes tilbage til osv. – åbner for en ny microengineering af markedsrættede værker" (my translation from Danish).

A short reading: Everyday life, sentimental formula poetry and familiarization

Topics explored in Instagram poetry are, as I have pointed out, taken from everyday life. The poems participate in the construction of the contemporary situation, in which classic themes in the lyric tradition are inscribed. In one of the examples mentioned above, Fallo refers to an American company that provides services for mobility and uses the situation as a motif in order to encourage readers to follow their desires and, in a clichéd register of "carpe diem", to risk something in order to experience romance and love. In the example from Store-Ashkari that I referred to at the beginning of this chapter, the poem stages a speaker who frees herself from feelings of guilt and shame. This poem too includes an encouragement meant to inspire others to do the same, that is, to no longer be controlled and oppressed by expectations from others. Likewise, in the poems by the most prominent Instagram poet in Norway, Trygve Skaug, these topics and strategies are easily recognizable.

Many of Skaug's poems can be described as formula poetry. He makes a claim, followed by a twist where the claim is anchored to a speaker's or addressee's concrete quotidian situation. This might come in the form of a couplet, such as "Grip dagen / (og hold den nede til jeg kommer)" ("Seize the day / (and hold it down until I arrive))",[23] or in the form of a standard poem about the relationship between an "I" and a "you":

> Du vet
> hvor du har meg
> for det var du
> som satte meg
> her
>
> You know
> where you got me
> because it was you
> who put me
> here[24]

This poem was published on 26 February 2019. It is organized into short lines.[25] The line breaks in the poem are, as in the other poems I have referred to, frequent but

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23 20 May 2020. Here: https://www.instagram.com/p/CHNvYPTlT6j/c/18071067946245105/ (5 December 2022).

24 My translation.

25 https://www.instagram.com/p/BR_2OIpAW9w/ (5 December 2022).

do not provide the poem with extra meaning. They function only insofar as they adapt the poem to the interface of the platform and medium on which it most likely is to be read – a mobile phone. The line breaks do create short pauses, i.e. perceptual breaks that make the reader turn her gaze from one line to the next. However, such strategies of postponement do not establish tension or ambiguity in the poems. Polemically, we might say that the line breaks make the texts look like poems even though they could just as well be prose or aphorisms.

The responses to the poems quoted above are, as is typically the case with the responses to Skaug's poetry on Instagram, positive. The latter poem, "Du vet" ("You know"), has received 3693 likes, while the two-line poem has received 2191.[26] It is easy to see why Skaug's poems reach so many readers. The poems are affirmative: they include topics that affirm and confirm a sense of a community.

Skaug's poems are often interpersonal, and they are, with very few exceptions, sentimental. They are sensitive and convey the thoughts and feelings associated with love, the loss of love and the sense of falling in love.

> Når du oppdager
> at du er så slepphendt
> at du klarer
> å miste
> noe du aldri
> har hatt
>
> When you discover
> that you are so sloppy
> that you manage
> to lose
> the thing you never
> had[27]

This poem, published on 6 July 2018, has received 4179 likes.[28] It consists of a single adverbial clause and pretends to work as a slightly long hashtag à la "#that-feeling". Skaug himself has put "#densiste" ("#thefinalone") as a hashtag on the poem, a hashtag that could serve as a title for the poem and that potentially gives an indication as to how the poem should be interpreted.

Poems with temporal clause-linking constructions are well known in the history of poetry. In this sense, Skaug places himself in a long tradition of poetry that uses this technique. The temporal adverbial clause functions by modifying

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26 1 June 2021.

27 My translation.

28 https://www.instagram.com/p/Bk5TO1ZlKYF/?hl=nb (1 June 2021).

something or by expressing a relation to something or someone. The temporal adverbial clause in Skaug's poem cannot reach its semantic meaning as a grammatical whole unless the meaning is fulfilled by a subsequent verb and sentence. The "when" correlates with a "then", but this "then" is absent. The feeling that the temporal adverbial clause hints at is made present through this absence.

The poem is syntactically incomplete. Likewise, as a correlation, it reflects the sense of being incomplete when one is lacking or missing something or someone. Yet the lines "å miste / noe du aldri / har hatt" ("to lose / the thing you never / had") become nothing more than a seemingly paradoxical comment on being sloppy. The poem is affirmative. As an aphorism, it contains words to which everyone can relate. The paradox does not invite a more in-depth interpretation. The insight is immediate, thus it adapts to the reading on a mobile phone in situations that do not invite wonder or lingering.

Like other Instagram poets, Skaug too engages with specific political issues. In the context of the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020, he published several activist poems that reflect the power of love and community:[29]

> Ingen flodbølge
> er bare
> de få dråpene i front alene
> derfor er det akkurat vi
> som ikke kjenner ham personlig
> som ikke bor i det landet
> som ikke føler det kneet rett på kroppen
> som skal være alle de dråpene bak
> vi er milliarder av liter
> med kraft og kjærlighet
> som skyller inn
> og knuser rasismen til pinneved
> hvis vi en og en og en dytter sammen
>
> No tidal wave
> is just
> the few drops alone in front
> therefore it is us
> who do not know him personally
> who do not live in that country
> who do not feel that knee on the body
> who shall be all those drops behind
> we are billions of liters
> with power and love

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29 https://www.instagram.com/p/CBEITHgFkNB/ (5 December 2022).

that washes over
and smashes racism to pieces
if we one and one and one push together[30]

The poem appears as an inscription on a photograph that shows turbulent seas and waves crashing against land, not unlike the photograph used by Nikita Gill for one of her activist poems.[31] The photograph in Skaug's poem has a redundant effect and serves a purely illustrative function. Compared to the other poems by Skaug that I have commented on here, this is a somewhat longer poem, a poem where superfluous words and lines are not eradicated in the editing process. One could argue that the poem should have stopped with the line "which should be all the drops behind" and that the pronoun "de" ("they") in this line could have been omitted. This would have made the address to a "we" even more open, and the drops would have gained a non-specific reference. The poem is an encouragement based on causality. The subjunctive "derfor" ("therefore") acts as an initiator for this encouragement, but the temporal form of the verb in line eight, "som skal være" ("which shall be"), does not follow in a logical way. Rather, the line should follow up on the verb "er" ("is") in the second line, so that "we", as consequence, are the drops behind. This temporal coincidence would have created a double activist performance: the poem as an event creates an event.

Skaug has tagged the poem with the hashtags "equality", "justiceforgeorgefloyd," "blacklivesmatter" and "antirasisme" ("anti-racism"). Thus, he connects the poem to a network of poems with the same theme and engagement, an interconnection that increases the number of potential readers. It has received 5056 likes and 113 comments, all positive responses with emojis and thanks, expressed in verbal text such as "FLOTT!" ("GREAT!") and "Du setter så fint ord på det de fleste av oss ikke klarer og [sic] uttrykke" ("You put it so nicely what most of us can't express").[32] Some tag the response by others or comment on comments, and several of the comments have received likes. The readers' actions express a sense of community; their comments represent a consensus regarding both the importance of the poem's theme and the poem's quality as *Gebrauchslyrik*. The number of likes and the many comments tell us that this, in terms of the logic of what Tygstrup calls the Culture Industry 2.0, is a good poem. It works for the readers, in the readers' situation and in the political context in which it is published.[33]

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30 My translation.

31 https://www.instagram.com/p/CXJTQPho6O4/ (5 December 2022).

32 1 June 2021.

33 The poem is also published on Facebook, where it has received 1300 likes and 24 comments and where it has been shared 372 times (21 September 2021).

The poems are how they are due to the way Skaug wanted them to be and to his assessments and poetic abilities. However, the poems also are a product, as I have argued, of the logic of Instagram. It is obvious that the media platform, the technical medium on which the poem is typically read and the reading situation do not facilitate poems that require a greater degree of cognitive work to be "decoded" or enjoyed. The simple message of the poems indicates that as many readers as possible should immediately understand them and equally immediately like and share them. In addition, perhaps the poems are meant to create good feelings and therefore invite forms of communication that serve a phatic function and reflect a sense of community rather than critical reflection. Here, Skaug's poems differ from, for example, Yrsa Daley-Ward, who also publishes anti-racist poems in connection to Black Lives Matter. One of her poems is short and is written over a photograph of a branch: "I do not see a problem // wait am I the problem?"[34] The poem was published on 5 June 2020, the same day that Skaug published his poem. Where Skaug's poem somewhat naively is oriented towards a "we", Daley-Ward draws attention to the speaker, and she questions the position of this speaker and herself. In contrast to this self-reflective poem, the collective "we" that Skaug tries to establish, appears without critical self-reflection.

The differences between the two poems are many and reflect both strategic choices and dissimilarities in the two poets' individual styles. Also, it is fair to say that Instagram poems that are self-reflective appear less frequently. Therefore, it is relevant to ask why and how Instagram's logic and the reading situation of Instagram poems invite or are adapted to such a poetic orientation. It might be more uncomfortable to read a line where readers are forced to look at and think of themselves and their position and where they are forced to ask themselves if they are part of the problem. Van Dijck and Poell argue that social media algorithms provide the users with more of what they have already enjoyed. Skaug does the same. He writes poems in which the quality is measured in terms of recognition and through which the readers can feel a sense of unity. In this respect, Skaug's collective "we" fails to take notice of the individual, religious, cultural or socio-economic differences. Still, Skaug's poems express something readers can relate to. This is the poem in the Culture Industry 2.0, where Instagram establishes the conditions for the poems, including how they are written, what they are about, how they are distributed and how they are received.

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34 https://www.instagram.com/p/CBDyzf1nSGm (5 December 2022).

The poems, the situation and the media logic

Instagram is not a neutral medium: there is nothing to suggest that Instagram poetry is not touched by the logic of Instagram. Instagram poems, like all other poems, can in principle be about anything, and they can take a variety of forms. Nevertheless, both the previous reception of Instagram poetry and the analyses in this chapter show that Instagram poems largely deal with only a few topics, that they are oriented towards everyday life, that they are made to be used or immediately useful and that the most popular Instagram poets in Norway refrain from experimenting with poetic forms. One reason for this is that the poems work within the framework of media conditions that are set among others by Instagram.[35]

That the poems are written to be read on an application on a mobile phone is part of the understanding of Instagram poems as platform-specific. In this chapter, the ways in which Instagram poems are media-specific has been discussed through a conceptual framework developed by van Dijck and Poell. This framework contributes in substantiating how Instagram affects the poems form, content and function, the distribution of the poems and the interaction between the poems and the readers, including activities such as likes and regramming. Furthermore, the research shows that some topics are prioritized by algorithms while other topics are less visible and less distributed, and that activities on social media are part of a media culture partly controlled by popularity and "like-economy".

The dimension of everyday life in Instagram poems fits well with Instagram, a platform that long since and independent of its content, according to van Dijck and Poell, has "penetrated deeply into the mechanics of everyday life." (van Dijck and Poell 2013, 3) Among others, van Dijck and Poell aim at how the media platform is used in a number of quotidian situations and that this use have an impact on the contents that are produced, contents that in various ways are adapted to the situations where the platform is often used. Instagram poetry is one example of this adaptation of a genre. The poems refer to a recognizable everyday life situation, in which familiarity is confirmed by comments such as "Så sant," "Amen" and "Tror det blir slik etter hvert som livet leves" ("So true," "Amen" and "Think

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35 Here, it is important to remember that Instagram is a network medium connected to other platforms in a network. This implies that the platform is continually under pressure from other social media platforms and, consequently, that it follows trends and gains new technological features through such platforms as Snapchat and TikTok. In this way, it can offer many of the same possibilities as other platforms. In other words, it is not only Instagram that dictates its own terms.

it will be so as life goes on").[36] Furthermore, the everyday motifs emphasize the nature of the use of Instagram poems, i.e. the poems are written to be used on certain occasions, whether it is for a political cause, for comfort or to create a sense of community – or all at once. The everyday dimension represents some of the qualities of the poems in a more conventional sense. That is, the poems, despite their poetic limitations, have an aesthetic and efferent value for the readers. This value has to do with recognition and repetition: the poems give more of what the readers have already read. Still, the usefulness of the poems goes beyond this. The poems are not necessarily singular, beautiful and original, but they have an effect on a specific media platform in specific situations.

As a form of *Gebrauchslyrik*, Instagram poems are most often without ambiguity; they do not offer interpretative resistance but are, nevertheless, or perhaps precisely because of this reason, poems that reach many people. In addition, with connectivity and popularity, including the like-economy, as some of the driving forces, Instagram poetry is to be regarded as a kind of market-oriented, media-specific poetry. In this respect, it is tempting to recall the distinction established by Roland Barthes between "readable texts" (*texte lisible*) and "writable texts" (*texte scriptible*) (Barthes 1974). Readable texts are easily accessible and do not require a particular effort or interpretation to be understood. Contrary to writable texts, readable texts lack ambiguous meaning, and they do not engage readers as cocreators (Barthes 1974, 5). According to Barthes, readable texts evade joy, diversity of opinion, delay and uncertainty that lie in interpretations and in re-readings. The texts are closed and do not open up for other performances and moments through new readings. Therefore, according to Barthes, readers become consumers and, more than that, they are products not producers of texts.

It might be the case that ambiguous or less accessible texts counteract interconnection and popularity and intimidate rather than attract new readers. If so, Instagram is barely made for "writable texts", that is, complex and ambiguous poems. Rather, Instagram's feed, hashtags, algorithms, networks, the reading situation and the implied mode of reading fast all require poems that one does not have to dwell on, which do not have to be read several times to be understood and enjoyed. Moreover, Instagram poems are not the kind of texts where one discovers new meaning through the process of rereading. In short, the poems are not made for rereading. Many of the poems are characterized by empty phrases, and they try to evoke certain emotions in the reader, emotions that seem to optimize interconnection, whether the

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36 These three examples are found in comment fields related to Trygve Skaug's calendar poems in 2021. See https://www.instagram.com/p/CW7oUm2sYsj/?utm_medium=copy_link and https://www.instagram.com/p/CW97H0vqIFE/?utm_medium=copy_link (5 December 2022).

interconnection occurs because readers express opinions about the poem or because they ritually push the like icon in order to create a sense of contact with the poet and a community.

Still, even though readers are made for consumers, they also partly fill the function as producers. To like a poem and to regram it increases the value of the poem. Van Dijck and Poell point out that many users of social media have an interest in maintaining a large number of followers for the sake of market value and, we might add, to increase the possibility of publishing the poems in print at a publishing house (van Dijck and Poell 2013). Likewise, both Berens and Thomas highlight Instagram as a commercialized system where literature is included. Thomas states that this type of literature is "already always implicated in commercial systems," (Thomas 2020, 2) while Berens writes that "[r]eposts, likes and comments are the currency of social media." (Berens 2019) The like-economy is part of a larger ecology and economy. For example, Skaug, on his Instagram account, promotes his own shop and sells tickets to his own concerts. This is, of course, not surprising, but it is one of many examples of how Instagram poets are engaged in different activities, where poems are mixed with the seemingly private and the commercial, a mixture that implies that different networks and environments on social media are intertwined.

With its orientation towards interconnection and popularity, Instagram facilitates a type of commercial consumer culture reminiscent of what Barthes once described as a culture "which would have us 'throw away' the story once it has been consumed ('devoured'), so that we can move on to another story, buy another book." (Barthes 1974, 16) Barthes developed his concepts in relation to print literature. Still, in the contemporary literary environment that I have called the computational network environment, Instagram and print books cannot be kept separate. The logic of Instagram also affects print literature. Instagram can have a direct impact, for instance by the fact that an Instagram poem is published in a print collection of poems, or the impact can be indirectly, as in how the Instagram style of writing affects the writing of print poetry. All the Instagram poets that I have referred to in this chapter have published print poems after they became popular as Instagram poets. In this way, the logic of Instagram directly affects literary institutions and the book market, as well as the understanding of what poetry can be. In this literary media environment, literary institutions cannot ignore the way social media work and what social media represent. Literary institutions are already involved in the literary media culture in which Instagram plays a part. It is a culture in which the distinctions between analogue and digital are becoming more and more blurred and where books of poetry, publishers and readers are infiltrated by a media logic that is still relatively new and that we must assume is still evolving.