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Here, There, Everywhere: Situating Contemporary Multimodal Poetry

Introduction

Here, *there*, and *everywhere*. Those are the words that linger when Paul McCartney sings, in the beautiful Beatles song about love invading every little space of the world: the specific here, the distant there, and the ungraspable everywhere.

As we all know, love and poetry have lots in common. One thing is that while they are both eternal, they never stay the same. Another is that poetry really can be found here, there, and everywhere. This observation may seem corny, and of course it oversimplifies things – but McCartney's simple and so very singable triad of settings can be useful in helping us to remember the importance of situatedness, of place, space, and time when it comes to how poetry is written, performed, perceived and experienced. And it could help us study it, too.

In this chapter I study these three basic ways of situating poetry, with a special regard to the visual properties of the genre as they come across in different media. I explore and reflect on how the lyric aesthetic as well as the interpretation potential of the poem changes with the way its situatedness is dominated by the *here*, the *there*, and the *everywhere*. While I am aware of the bluntness of this triad when regarded as a theory about the situatedness of the poetic genre, I aim to show its advantages when used pragmatically in a discussion on actual poetic practice. If I start with the notions of *here, there*, and *everywhere* when studying a poetic event, the way that poetry works differently in various settings becomes more visible.

In order to discuss this research question with any precision, I will therefore turn to the art of poetry itself. The transmedial and multimedial poetic and artistic practices of Caroline Bergvall provide excellent material to study this phenomenon in depth. As an artist, Bergvall is always mindful of the visual aspect of experiencing art: both in regard to the way her art works with visual media such as film, photography, and computer images, and in the way her art investigates the ontology and epistemology of seeing, observing, perceiving. This attention to seeing brings the question of embodied orientation and situatedness to the fore. Before delving into some of Bergvall's work I will, however, offer a brief discussion on my terminology.

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The *where* of the poem

The poetry taught at European universities in the twentieth century – where and when, incidentally, I started studying it – was almost exclusively presented in print. Sometimes it was to be found in books, sometimes in magazines and periodicals, but the main materiality of poetry as presented to the reader was the physical paper, the page. Poetry was found in artefacts that were to be handled, studied, stowed away, and taken back out. It was *there,* to be looked at, touched, weighed in my hand: in his study on how technology and its different materialities inform how we read, Andrew Piper talks about the "graspability" of the book (Piper 2012, 2). If it was not new, it was stored between dusty covers in the basement of libraries. Along with all this language in print came the theories to go with it: in the version of Roland Barthes (1977, 158–160), for example, the *there* poetry on the page was to be seen as a work that became a text when the mind of the reader took it in.

Bearing this in mind, I would suggest that while poetry has never had a moment when it has been exclusively constricted to print – consider Paul McCartney's song lyrics, for example! – in Western literary tradition, however, there has been a clearly discernible parenthesis of a *there* paradigm: a short era of a few hundred years, from Romanticism and onwards, when poetry in print was clearly its dominant form – to critics, historians, and readers. I borrow the notion of a dominant form of the art event from Philip Auslander, who in his study on the relationship between live and mediatised events of art writes that "at any given historical moment, there are dominant forms that enjoy much greater cultural presence, prestige, and power than other forms" (Auslander 1999, 162). Auslander goes on to say that nondominant forms "will tend to become more like the dominant ones but not the other way around" (Auslander 1999, 162). One result of the *there* paradigm of poetry is visible in the stage performances of poetry, which, in the twentieth century often were referred to as 'readings.' Poetry found in other art forms than literature was studied elsewhere – in art, theatre studies or perhaps in anthropology.

The dominance of the printed poetry collection works well with a culture that promotes monolingualism. It is therefore worth noting that the era of the *there* poetry coincides with what Germanist Yasmine Yildiz has named the monolingual paradigm. She uses the term to describe those few hundred years mentioned above when literature played an important part in the imaginary that knitted nation, language, and national literature closely together in a unit that was nearly impossible to unthink (cf. Yildiz 2012, 6–10). The printed poetry collection was produced in a print culture that, by the twentieth century, was part of a national literary system with clear boundaries made up by copyright laws as well

as the boundaries of the imagined national community in Benedict Anderson's sense of the word. In his seminal work *Imagined Communities*, Anderson points out that "national print-languages" were of central ideological and political importance to the rise of what he calls Old-world nationalism from the early 1800s and onwards (cf. Anderson 2006, 67). Even though the literary arts are not his main focus, his argument holds for them as well. This imagined collective was experienced as natural and self-evident, and relied on as well as it was built through the existence of literature's national distribution and monolingual readership. It was not until the rights of literary texts were sold and properly translated that they officially crossed any international borders and entered another nation's literary system.

In this paradigm of the monolingual, printed volume, the visual aspects of poetry would become important in the early twentieth century, when poets such as Guillaume Apollinaire and e.e. cummings played with the iconographic possibilities of the printed page. The dominance of the printed poetry collection waned around the end of the twentieth century, much due to the rise of poetry slam and the newly re-awakened interest for spoken word. In their book on poetry in performance around the turn of the millennium, Mark Eleveld and Marc Smith – the latter being the Chicago-based inventor of the poetry slam – regarded this movement as no less than a revolution, as can be understood from the title, *The Spoken Word Revolution (Slam, Hip Hop & the Poetry of a New Generation)* (2003). The very alive body of the author made a comeback, confusing everyone who, after reading Michel Foucault, Roland Barthes and others, thought the author had been dead for decades (on the discussion on the death of the author see Burke 1998). The live event of poetry performance has been with poetry from its very start, although, as Philip Auslander (1999, 57) points out, the idea of "live" needs the mediatised variety as its binary and therefore did not exist as a concept before the age of reproduction. The reawakened interest in live poetry brought embodied performance and reception of poetry back into focus and made the fallacies that had been central to the teachings of new criticism outdated and obsolete. Today, poetry performances are not always called readings anymore. The book is no longer the obvious centre of poetry, which has made it possible for other aspects of the poetic genre and other media to come to the fore.

As I see it, *here* poetry does not always have to be a poem performed live on a stage. It does not always require the artist to be present while being performed; its quality of *hereness* may be evoked even if it is mediatised, for example when the poem is physically placed in the world and specifically situated in one place and time. A very illustrative example of how important setting can be is the piece "Heaven Is A Place Where Nothing Ever Happens" (2008) by the Scottish artist Nathan Coley. He chose it when he was commissioned to place a work of art next to

the cathedral of Lund in southern Sweden for a few months in 2017. One could argue that it was placed *there*, by the cathedral, but in the experience of the work, its *here* quality gave it its potential: to experience the work one had to place one's body between the cathedral and the artwork, with the back to the former while still experiencing its shadow on the latter. As the cathedral in Lund is dense with symbolic value, the importance of the setting for the production of meaning of the artwork cannot be exaggerated. Dating from the eleventh century, it was once the seat of the archdiocese of all of Scandinavia (cf. Carelli 2012, 130–132), and has as such been important to the christening of the Nordic region. Today it is an active and powerful administrative and theological centre for the Swedish Church in southern Sweden. Coley's large work measures six times six metres and consists of an illuminated quote from the Talking Heads' song "Heaven" from 1979 on a piece of aluminium scaffolding. The placement of the work next to this iconic and important cathedral informed the meaning of the piece – as well as the meaning of the church placed next to it. Locals found that it talked back to the church and were surprised to find that it was commissioned by the church itself, whose leaders wanted to initiate a conversation about the role of the church in the city (cf. Lunds domkyrka 2017).

The acute setting of the *here* poetry places it not only in space but in time as well. It is poetry that often appears and then disappears: the performance of poetry has an evanescent quality and installations such as the Nathan Coley piece visiting Lund often occur within a timeframe. This ephemerality gives them a processual quality and underlines their being events rather than artefacts – even if they are, as in this case, built around artefacts which in different ways can be seen as undermining their liveness. In her influential study on the aesthetics of the performance, Erika Fischer-Lichte writes about art as a process and event:

> Be it in art music, literature, or theatre, the creative process tends to be realized in and as performance. Instead of creating works of art, artists increasingly produce events which involve not just themselves but also the observers, listeners, and spectators. Thus, the conditions for art production and reception [have] changed in a crucial aspect. The pivotal point of these processes is no longer the work of art, detached from and independent of its creator and recipient, which arises as an object from the activities of the creator-subject and is entrusted to the perception of the recipient-subject. Instead, we are dealing with an event, set in motion and terminated by the actions of all the subjects involved – artists and spectators. (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 22)

An important idea to Fischer-Lichte is how the performative event of art breaks down the imagined binary of art and reality, art/artist and spectator. Willmar Sauter expresses similar thoughts in his study *The Theatrical Event. Dynamics of Performance and Perception* (2000) when he discusses the importance of the where and when of the cultural artefact or event (Sauter 2000, 95–107). To him,

communication in time and space is a key concept. To both Fischer-Lichte and Sauter, theatre is the example, but the theories are valid in many art forms.

As seen from the performative perspective proposed by Fischer-Lichte and Sauter, the Nathan Coley piece cannot be discussed outside of its setting, i.e., outside of its placement, its viewers, and how viewers and passers-by interacted with the piece while it was placed outside of the cathedral: by taking pictures, talking about Christian doctrines of the afterlife, personal beliefs, and by reflecting on the field of energy that was experienced in the space between the piece and the outer medieval walls of the cathedral. After it was gone, that space was somewhat changed – at least for a time (cf. Anjou 2017). Thus, while the scholar of printed poetry can choose to ignore the processual and temporal aspects of the collection at hand, that option is not possible when analysing and studying the poetry of the *here.* Perhaps it is no coincidence that the comeback of the *here* poetry coincided with a theoretical movement that turned to performance studies – even though the discussion on literature as performative often stayed within the book and explored the performative qualities of the printed text (cf. Culler 2000, 506–512). In literary studies, there was an obvious rise in both the interest of the performative and the visual aspects of literature at the turn of the millennium (cf. Bachman-Medick 2016, 86–88, 264). A vivid discussion on the advent of the performative and pictorial turns in the discipline was led and inspired by theorists such as Jonathan Culler (2000), Erika Fischer-Lichte (2000), and W. J. T. Mitchell (1994).

The ephemeral quality of the *here* poetry can be discussed and problematised: scholars such as Peggy Phelan have argued that the one quality that singles out the live performance is the fact that it cannot be saved (cf. Phelan 1993, 146) while others, such as Philip Auslander, point out that there are almost always aspects of the live performance that use remediation or mediatisation in one way or another (cf. Auslander 1999). Auslander also argues that the idea of the purely live performance is just an idea. It is nevertheless fruitful to consider *here* and *there* from the perspective of dominance. While both aspects can be at work at once, the receiver's attention and thus their experience can be radically different based on the situation and what is deemed to be more important. What happens when we experience the *there* – the printed matter – to be the basis of our study, and thus the event of reading our main source of information, or the multisensorial *here* of the performance, and thus the audiovisual, acutely embodied, and situated experience as our main object of interest? And perhaps more interesting – what happens when we experience that the two are combined and their borders are blurred – as they almost always turn out to be? The Coley piece can be taken down and erected somewhere else and a poem may also be performed in different venues, a fact that seems to underline the *there* of the works – but their apparitions are in a *here* that will always be new.

With the advent of the World Wide Web and the tsunami-like rise of social media, literary scholars have been challenged further to consider the situatedness of poetry – and the experience of poetry. The implicit possibility of poetry to be experienced more or less simultaneously in different places was of course always there with printed poetry and became even more acute with radio and television programming. The Internet, however, and its vast possibilities of text, image, and sound being stored, spread, and manipulated digitally at a very low cost and often without the necessary requirement of any special skills – as well as the humming of servers in places we might know of, if we have a special interest, but really do not think about in our every day – all enable poetry to exist in every pocket at once, in a paradoxical mashup of the *here, there*, and *everywhere*. "Digital texts are somewhere, but *where* they are has become increasingly complicated, abstract, even forbidden," Andrew Piper writes (2012, 15). Furthermore, the webpage allows for new possibilities for how poetry looks and sounds. Radically new ways for the poem to be "written," "read," and even to exist have opened up (cf. Morris 2006, 19–31).

In short, the ontology of poetry has changed, becoming more multimodal in the process, with audial and visual layers often at its centre. New forms of poetry range from the often quite easily digested poetry spread through platforms such as Instapoetry and TikTok and experienced on a planetary scale by millions of users (cf. Miller 2021, 161–171; Saxena 2022, 83–85), many of whom take on the role of *produsers* (as suggested by Axel Bruns, 2005), to the avantgarde digital poetry mapped by scholars such as Christopher Funkhouser (2007), Marjorie Perloff (2006), N. Katherine Hayles (2006) and others. Because of the Internet, poetry can be eerily experienced as detached from space and time (even though, of course, from a technical, material perspective, it is situated in very material servers in geographical places) – as being *nowhere* and *everywhere* at the same time, while it in its immediacy and intimacy – the AirPods in your ears placing the voice of the poet almost inside your body, the moving image of her body and face always there, in the phone in your pocket that is always exactly located through its GPS function – evoke an eerie notion of the *here*.

And paradoxically enough, this rise of the *everywhere* and *anytime* poetry has spurred an interest in its opposite: the poetry of the more commonly understood notion of *here*. Ephemeral live readings, poetry happenings, and poetry performances are becoming more common in the twenty-first century and as the example of German shows, they are beginning to gather quite large audiences (cf. Benthien 2021, 1). This tension between the contemporary dissolution of situatedness and the rise of the specific place has been discussed more generally by Doris Bachmann-Medick in her above-mentioned study on cultural turns. To her, what is new in the spatial turn of contemporary culture is that the two inform one an-

other: "the rediscovery of the local, for instance, is not identical with the securing of safe havens from the demands of globalization" (Bachmann-Medick 2016, 214). To put it in the terms and scope of this chapter: the *here* of contemporary poetry is different, changed by the *everywhere*.

But what about the poetry of the *there*? Books of poetry are clearly still being written, manufactured, stored, and sold. But they are not the centre of the poetry world anymore. Today's landscape of poetry has a much more complex make up. To sum it all up, contemporary poetry exists in a landscape of here, there, *and* everywhere poetry. All is connected in different ways, and poetry travels between these three spheres, changing while doing so, borrowing the interface of one form while travelling into another. If a poet or book publisher works exclusively with published poetry collections, that is a conscious choice in a way it was not just a few decades ago. In short, today's poetry aesthetic is informed and altered through the changes in the situatedness of poetry. But how? How are the *here*, *there*, and *everywhere* poetries connected? How is the *there* poetry of the book connected to the *here* poetry of the performance? And how is the *here* quality of the performance transformed, when it is connected to or turned into files of sights and sounds on the Internet, thus connecting to the *everywhere* quality of the World Wide Web? It may be useful here to consider the suggestion that Heike Schaefer makes regarding contemporary literature:

> Rather than think of intermediality as a relation between distinct media and focus mainly on questions of media change, media borders and media specificity [. . .] intermedial literary studies should conceive of literature as a transmedial practice and make it a priority to study *the media of literature*. (Schaefer 2015, 178)

Or differently put: the aim of this exploration is to follow the literature to its different spatialities rather than to consider in depth the different media where the literary text appears. Seen this way, the processuality of the literary text becomes more evident; it moves through different media, bringing the aesthetics from one category to another as it goes, blending and enriching all of them along the way. How this processuality works and how it, in turn, changes and opens new possibilities to the genre of poetry, are questions that the contemporary poetry scholar must consider. In the remainder of this text, I will turn to the work of French–Norwegian multimodal and multimedial poet Caroline Bergvall, in order to address them.

The example of Caroline Bergvall

Caroline Bergvall was born in Hamburg in 1962 but grew up in different locations in Europe and North America. She made London her base in the early 1990s but continues to publish, collaborate, and perform internationally. Her very biography then, belies the fundamentals of national print poetry, a fact that becomes visible in the very aesthetics of her work. Early on, her poetry, performance work, installations, films, and drawings started to focus on the concept of plurilingualism and migration. Her interest in the practices of transit and movement across borders, across time and space, extends to that of human beings as well as to that of information and languages. Bergvall's keen interest in processual work, in movement and collaboration, and her presence on the Internet – she has a homepage that is continually up to date and curated, as well as Instagram, Twitter, Vimeo, and Facebook accounts that are continously being updated – makes her understand the challenges and the possibilities of the notion of the *everywhere* well. But she works across the whole spectrum: she makes performances that are centred on poetic text, and she regularly publishes collections of poetry. These very different practices inform one another in interesting ways and here I will just discuss a few different examples. During the Covid lockdown of 2020–2021, Bergvall initiated two co-writing sessions over the Internet that were in part performances, in part creative workshops, and in part visually powerful art installations. The sessions were streamed in real time and were open for everyone everywhere. Bergvall called the sessions "Night and Refuge."

The "Night and Refuge" sessions

The first "Night and Refuge" session was put together quickly during the very first lockdown and was intended to be a singular event. On the evening of 21 May 2020, Bergvall met up digitally with four other poets: Vahni Capildeo, Will Harris, Leo Boix and Nisha Ramayya for a creative session that was streamed live, openly, on the Internet. While UK-based, the session's poets were all multilingual and part of minoritised groups in different ways; thus, they all explore special relationships with the English language in their work in one way or another: Trinidadian-Scottish Capildeo writes across many languages – Spanish, French, Portuguese, and Old Norse – while Leo Boix is Argentinian-British and writes in Spanish and English. Poet and critic Will Harris as well as poet and scholar Nisha Ramayya both use dictionaries in their work that in different ways interrogate the English that they have grown up talking. Together, these five poets and their

multitude of languages and different geographical heritages as well as positions made for a deterritorialising experience of English poetry writing.[1] Although frequent performers of their own poetry at *here* poetry events such as readings and festivals, the four invited poets are more known for their printed poetry collections, their *there* poetry. One might suggest that these forms were brought into play in the *everywhere* "Night and Refuge" poetry session and steered the visuality of the work in certain directions – a question I will return to shortly in my analysis.

The second session was put together after a commission from the Oslo International Poetry Festival. It followed the pattern of the first and was organised during the second lockdown later that year, on 28 November. For that event, Bergvall invited Norwegian multimedial poet Gunnar Waerness, British-Zimbabwean poet Mandla Rae, Greenlandic-Danish poet Jessie Kleemann, Canadian-Galician poet Erín Moure and the Nuyorican-British poet Edwin Torres. While still all multilingual in different ways, these poets are also all known for writing across media in more diverse ways than the poets of the first session. Bergvall's curation of the event also bore witness to a more apparent translingual, transmedial, and transcultural ambition and intention than the first, because of the more quickly curated initial session following the pandemic outbreak. For this second session, the process and its output were even more thoroughly deterritorialised: instead of writing a stanza each, all poets wrote simultaneously in the main document, editing and changing each other's lines as they went, adding words and phrases in several languages, thus underlining the processual quality and in turn changing how the created poetry was visually presented on the digital screen.

Both sessions were deeply collaborative, not only between the poets' writing but also in inviting people following the live stream to contribute via the hashtag #nightandrefuge on Twitter. Bergvall read from the feed intermittently during the session, and although the writings of the viewers were not written down in the shared document on the screen, their contributions were discussed. They thus became an important part of the event, influencing the poetic writing that took place. Later, the Twitter feeds were saved; the first one can be accessed through Caroline Bergvall's homepage.[2] Thus, the events combined the temporal ephemerality of the *here*, the live writing and performance event, with the situatedness of the *everywhere* that the Internet brings. But the poetry of the *there* was also present, through the writing that appeared to the left on the screen, a live process that was later finalized in a written poem that, albeit published on the Internet,

1 Many scholars have found the terminology and theory of Deleuze and Guattari useful when discussing Bergvall's work – and I agree with them. See, for example, McMurtry 2018, 814–817.
2 https://carolinebergvall.com/.

bears the visual resemblance of the finality and stability of poetry in print. The fact that all of the poets in the project have published poetry collections, furthers the *there* quality of the event and informs how it is received. And since the live stream is stored digitally in the *there* of a server and can be accessed again, this additional layer further adds to the poetry being out *there*.

At both events, Bergvall collaborated with Palestinian interdisciplinary artist Mays Albaik. Like Bergvall, Albaik works in different media and modes: film, text, performance, sculpture, and image. On her homepage her work is presented as an "interdisciplinary visual practice," which "investigates how a sense of placehood is formed, reflected and refracted by that which mediates it – the body, language, and their various intersections."[3] This investigative poetics is quite apparent in her work for "Night and Refuge," for which she designed the visual layout. The first time around, the interference with the interface of the Zoom application was kept to a minimum so that the event looked like most streamed events at the time of the pandemic – perhaps mirroring the shock of the world transitioning to Zoom and Microsoft Teams and to how the experience of zooming was still new to many people.

For this live stream session, a major part of the screen was taken up by a shared grey screen, on which seven open Google documents were posted, all in different colours. The largest one was white and thus resembled a white sheet of paper. It was on there that the collective poem was to be written during the session. The use of the Times New Roman font made the connection to printed poetry even stronger. On a smaller, bright blue document called "brief," the rules for the evening were written down: the poem should be written in five parts, each consisting of four stanzas, and the poets would take turns in writing tercets or couplets. Following the layout of the Zoom application's interface, the poets, along with Albaik, could be seen on the right-hand side of the screen throughout, as they were talking, reading, and reacting to what was written – much like a Zoom seminar of the time. Although simple, the effect was quite strong. The viewer of the event could see and hear the poets, as well as curiously study the rooms that they were sitting in – with book cases, art objects, and changing light, emanating from windows and or lamps – as well as the screen and the documents that they too were watching and interacting with – a double point of view that is rare in film and television, for example, and that underlined the *everywhere* quality of the session. At the same time, the live cams answered to the name of the event: from the refuge of where they were watching, the viewers followed the writers in their places of refuge, into the darkness of the night.

3 https://maysalbaik.com/.

For the second session, more work had been put into the visual design from the beginning onwards: instead of on a white paper-like document that for the first session had been filled with Times New Roman text, the poem was written in white on a blue background in an internet-friendly sans serif font, a change that weakened the session's echo of the *there* poetry aesthetics of the printed page, and made the *everywhere* quality of the screen stronger. While all poets had their cameras on, only the poet that happened to be speaking would appear on screen: instead of the first sessions' small squares of streams from live cams, blocks of poetry, written by the participating poets, showed up and disappeared on the screen's right-hand side. They did so along with images from live cams placed in and operated from different locations, possibly reproducing the poets' points of view, showing different times of day, from bright daylight to the pitch black of night. These live images – which also came and went – made the writing collaboration paradoxically situated in a multitude of specific places, while still focused on the *everywhere* of the globally shared streamed live session. The viewer got the impression of watching what the poets saw when they were writing: cars passing by, the night falling.

All in all, the visual make up of this second session was much busier, with images and documents appearing and disappearing while the speaking poet was shown in the top right corner and the live document of the poem being written took up the left half of the screen. Sometimes lines from Bergvall's earlier writings appeared and disappeared on the dark blue screen as well. There was lots of visual information to take in, but as the session lasted three hours, the changes to the screen were happening at a slow pace – mirroring the pace of the reflections and interventions that were brought forth by the contributors on screen.

Afterwards, both three-hour events were uploaded to the Internet, where they can be re-experienced until taken down (cf. Bergvall 2020a; Bergvall 2020c). The first event also lives on in a nineteen-minute-long edited version that can be viewed on Vimeo (cf. Bergvall 2020b). Bergvall calls this shorter film a "documentary" on her own website, and on Vimeo the word "experience" is used. This latter version has been edited by the film-maker Andrew Delaney, with sound design by Jamie Hamilton.

In the nineteen-minute film version of the first session, the visual design was quite reworked and the three-hour session heavily edited, even new film material was added. In the film, the recorded sequences of the poets are enlarged, doubled, shown in the negative as well as in their original colour. The discussions are edited as well, with voices often overlapping, underlining the processual quality of the work. A new backdrop has also been added: the different film clips and text documents are shown against an image of an apartment building at night, with silhouettes of people visible in the apartments and on the balconies. The pic-

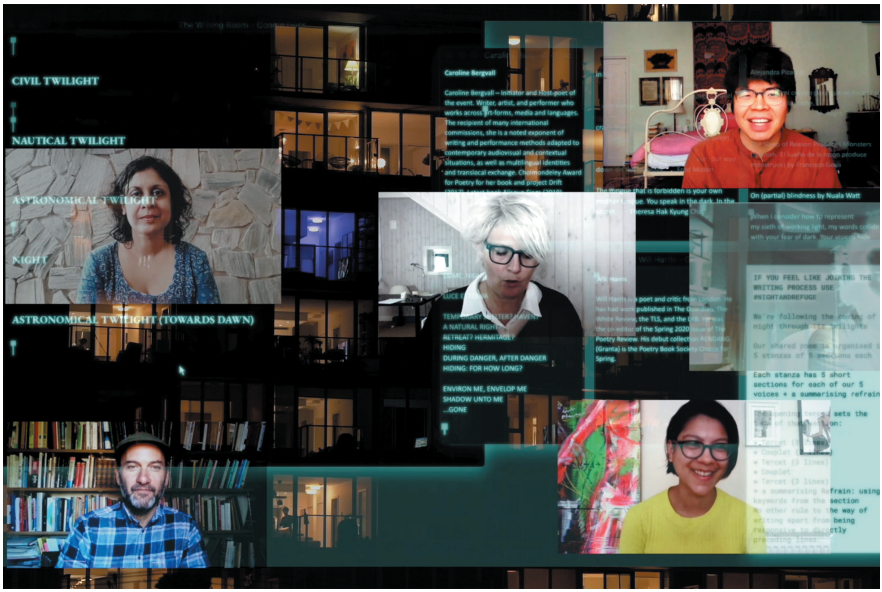

Fig. 1: Still from "Night and Refuge" [edited film version] by Caroline Bergvall. May 21, 2020.

ture aptly captures the Covid moment: people alone in their apartments because of the Covid lockdown but still in proximity of each other and belonging to the same structures and networks (Fig. 1).

The whole design of the screen underlines the sense of collaboration, of messy processual work, of co-presence but also the acute embodied experience of being apart. This excitingly busy film sequence, where lots of things are happening at once, is, however, tidily framed, starting (and ending) with sans serif white titles on a black background, which presents the title of the work as well as Bergvall's name, along with an additional paratext, an excerpt from the Brazilian thinker Paolo Freire:

> This shock between a yesterday which is losing relevance but still seeking to survive, and a tomorrow which is gaining substance, characterises the phase of transition as a time of announcement and a time of decision. Its potential force would depend upon our capacity to participate in the dynamism of the transitional epoch. (Bergvall 2020b)

The chosen motto underlines the implicit ambition of the project: to interact with the world during a time of change and transition. The film ends with the finished (though unedited) poem being read by the writers of each stanza while headings of the different stanzas appear in white against a background that goes from light grey to black. This gradual transition follows the five astronomical phases of twi-

light and night that make up the subheadings of the poem. In addition to these visual add-ons, new sound designs are added by sound artist Jamie Hamilton. Thus, this edited documentary leans heavily on both its visual and auditive aspects, even in the section that makes up the reading of the poem.

The two streaming events of "Night and Refuge" focused specifically on transition, movement, and process while underlining exactly where the poets were situated in the world: when the session started, each poet was asked to state the exact position from where they were streaming. Thus, the specific *here and now* of their performances was combined with the *everywhere* of the media they were using. Through this working method, the session managed to thoroughly blur not only borders between countries but those between artists and viewers as well. In the first session, a spontaneous discussion broke out between the poets about the fact that instead of working together around a table in a closed room, they were creating poetry on a global stage, along with social media users. Later, when the session was uploaded to YouTube, this *everywhere* event also became an *anytime* event, at least partly: the possibility of interacting was, of course, lost.

The "Night and Refuge" sessions are illustrative examples of poetry that combines the *now* of the *here* with the *always* of the *everywhere*. I would argue that the *there* quality of the printed book is also implicitly present in the sessions because of the finished work. This is especially apparent in the first session where the finished poem is read from the screen's Google doc that echoes the printed page with its bold headings and Times New Roman font.

Bergvall's practice abounds with examples that combine the *there* of the book with the *here* of the performance and the *everywhere* of the Internet. One project where this happens is her work "Drift" (cf. 2014–ongoing), which will be examined in the following section.

The multifaceted work of "Drift"

"Drift" itself is a multimodal, multimedial process-oriented work that is probably finished – as is often the case with Bergvall's work, there is no clear end to the process of it, no definite version, and on her homepage, she dates the work as "2014–ongoing."[4] So far, the work has consisted of art installations and exhibitions, as well as performances, a book, and theoretical writings. The exhibitions themselves have consisted of drawings, sound files or audiotexts, electronic text masses, photographs, and murals. This multi-layering is an important characteris-

4 https://carolinebergvall.com/work/drift-performance/.

tic of the *Drift* book as well as of its performance. In addition to the book, the performances and the exhibitions, there are also video clips from the performances published online, clips that Bergvall herself calls "performance edits." These can also be regarded as being part of the work.

The act of thinking in categories and with boundaries is examined and put into question in the work in many ways. On an aesthetic level, it questions and opens up the boundaries between art forms, and on a thematic and philosophical level, it interrogates the idea of boundaries between people and countries. Therefore, it is congenial with the aesthetic of the work that it is the fruit of many collaborations with other artists, thus also putting the romantic notion of the single and brilliant artist and author as the poetic work's originator and creator into question. Although this notion was contested by many, it has been of great influence since Romanticism (cf. Boym 1991, 5). In the performance, Bergvall cooperates with the Norwegian percussionist Ingar Zach and the Swiss digital artist Thomas Köppel, turning the performance into an event that combines song, music, sound art as well as visual art and lighting, and the book combines poetry with drawings and artwork by Bergvall as well as other artists.

All of these different expressions in different modes and media – some stable, some ephemeral – point in different directions and give "Drift" a centrifugal force. The many intertexts that are activated in the work – ranging from the medieval *Völuspa* and the old English poem "The Seafarer" to the songs of Iggy Pop and David Bowie – also give the work its deterritorialised quality. It does not belong in one place or one time. But the different parts also communicate with each other, making the porosity of its different sources, their times, and their places of origin visible. The fact that it originates in a translation project that has taken on a life of its own, where Bergvall has abandoned her dictionary and started to pseudo-translate through sound play and connotations (cf. Bergvall 2014a, 130–132) rhymes well with the very theme at the core of the work, which is about tearing down borders, drifting, losing control while making and finding something new: a constant movement between deterritorialising and reterritorialising forces. It is apparent that the work makes use of the many possibilities of the *there*, the *here*, and the *everywhere*. Its aesthetic shows that the boundaries between these categories should be regarded more like a helpful model in order to interrogate poetic works rather than stable empirical categories.

Already the name "Drift" points to the work's status as a constantly evolving, processual work that is changing as it moves through time and space. Considering that it is a multilingual work, the title can be read in different ways: in English it points toward the verb "to drift," to be carried aimlessly by wind or water, or to move with no goal in mind. In Norwegian, one of Bergvall's many languages, it would rather be read as a noun, meaning drive, as in sex drive, or death drive, or

the drive to live, to survive, to reproduce. The act of drifting helplessly at sea is at the centre of "Drift" but the work also depicts and reflects temporal, linguistic and spatial drifting, as well as the experience of being adrift more existentially. An important and recurring word is the Old Norse word *hafville*, which means lost at sea: the book contains songs called "Hafville 1," "Hafville 2," et cetera, and the word is repeatedly used in the verses (cf. Bergvall 2014a, 36–45).

Thematically, *Drift* expresses deep sorrow as well as anger in regarding the failure of the international community to deal with some of the main problems of our time. Ultimately, one understands that the whole world is adrift, in its overexploitation of goods, materials, and people, which leads to climate change, pollution, involuntary migration as well as political and financial injustice. In the foreground, however, is the event that has come to be known as the "left-to-die-boat" case, where in March and April of 2011, seventy-two migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa, after being forced to leave Libya by the local military, drifted for two weeks on the Mediterranean without food or fuel in a rubber boat that was built to carry twenty-five people. Although the boat was observed and photographed by fishing boats, aircraft, and satellites, it did not receive any aid and drifted back to the Libyan shore. Only nine people survived (cf. Heller et al. 2014, 17–23). The incident is at the centre of the book, both thematically and literally: the poems all concern drifting in different ways, and the middle pages are taken up by a chapter called "Report," which stands out as it is printed in white letters on black pages, as if draped in sorrow.

The fact that the forced migrants were observed but not really seen, in any ethical sense, turns visuality and visual representation into one of the book's most important themes. In the opening poems, which are reworkings of the anonymous "Seafarer" poem, the loss of visuality at sea is the main theme. Later in the "Hafville"-suite, the loss of visuality at sea is expressed in the very form of the poem, where sounds and letters are dropped until only one letter remains: the letter "t," which stutteringly takes up more than two pages. For the person lost at sea, to lose one's sight is akin to losing one's mind – after that, death awaits. In the performance of the work, the iteration of the letter "t" is performed with a quiet calm, while a sea of "t"s are shown behind the performing Bergvall (Fig. 2) – reminding the viewer both of an armada of ships without sails, and of the many crosses of a Christian graveyard (cf. Bergvall 2018).

The fact that visuality as well as visual representation is at the heart of the "Drift" project, is underlined by the opening of its *there* project, the book. Instead of lines of poetry, the reader is presented with sixteen drawings on as many pages. In a study of these sketches, Catherine Humble has suggested that they invite the reader to consider the act of seeing, witnessing, and that they bring the role played by the image in the current crisis on the Mediterranean into question: as Humble points out, the people on the "left-to-die-boat" were both "dreadfully hyper-seen

Fig. 2: Photo from "Drift" [performance] by Caroline Bergvall. 2014.

and unseen" (Humble 2021, 109) while they themselves were watching those who were watching them. Humble also brings up the role of the visual in the (impossible) representing of trauma, and the ethically difficult act of bearing witness and representing the trauma of the other (cf. Humble 2021, 119).

The act of watching interrogated

Central to *Drift* is a photograph taken by a French reconnaissance plane on March 27, 2011, believed to be of the "left-to-die-boat." To a contemporary Western consumer of news media, the image of a boat of refugees on the Mediterranean is not a rare occurrence (cf. Heller and Pezzani 2017) but what Bergvall seems to ask us, is if we really *see* these images. Such an interrogation is much in the vein of visual studies theorist Nicholas Mirzoeff, who with the term "persistent looking" asks that people take on a "strategy of engagement: going back, and going back, and staying with it" (Mirzoeff and Szcześniak 2015, 6). Working on the photograph, Bergvall collaborated with artist and photographer Tom Martin, who explored it through macro enlargements of details, and made enlargements that are so blown up that all that the viewer really sees are pixels (Fig. 3).

The image is reprinted in the *Drift* book in black and white and was included in colour in the "Drift" exhibition at Callicoon Gallery in New York in 2015. The uncannily beautiful blue colour of the original artwork makes a clearer connection to

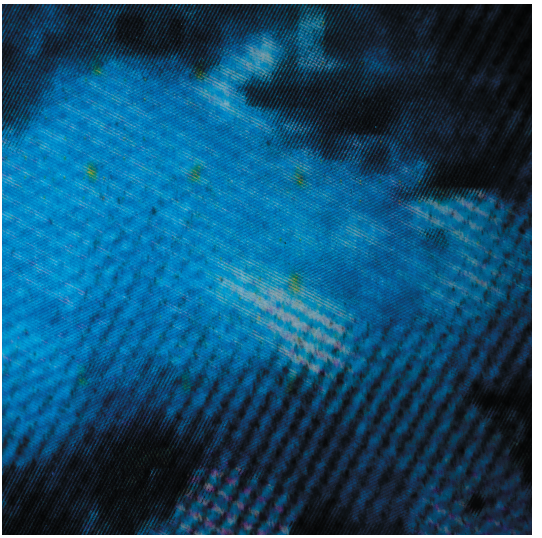

Fig. 3: Tom Martin. *Passenger*. 2014.

the Mediterranean, while the black and white of the *Drift* publication further remove the image from its motif. In neither case it is, however, possible to decode the image and see the human beings that are visible in the original photograph. On his homepage, Martin writes about the underlying idea of these images: "In this way, the macro processing of the image does not de-sensitise the content by making it abstract, but activates it beyond its original purpose – beyond the dossiers and official reports, beyond the consumed and discarded newspapers and on-line articles." (Martin 2014) It is obvious that the hyperbolic enlargements of this image have many layers, ethical, aesthetical, and political. The fact that the viewer cannot discern what the image portrays, adds a meta-reflection to it and seems to call out the blindness of the world community. The leaders of the world observe but do not seem to fully understand or act upon what they see. The failure to do so is a catastrophe and deeply unethical, perhaps even criminal: the research group "Forensic Architecture," based at Goldsmith College, has used the photograph in order to call out how international law was broken when the boat was being observed but not given assistance (cf. Heller et al. 2014, 52).

In a theoretical article, Bergvall has commented on her discussion about the photograph with Tom Martin and what she wanted to achieve:

> How one might imagine and hold visually the memory and the reality of these passengers beyond morbid voyeurism. How one might activate both inquisitiveness and empathetic connection not only in a forensic but also in an experiential way. So that seeing can be radi-

> cally slowed down and the viewing of the news item can be experienced as a material, opaque, inescapable trace of observed and shared life. (Bergvall 2017, 17)

The call for a slowing down of seeing that Bergvall discusses, can be compared to the interventions into contemporary visual culture made in the work by the above-mentioned Nicholas Mirzoeff. He talks about how the "banality of images" (Mirzoeff 2005, 67), due to the huge flow of images circulating in different media takes away the effect of the image – among his examples are the pictures taken in the Abu Ghraib prison in 2004 that had no impact on the US election that year.

Shake that megavoice

The way that "Drift" uses visual representation changes with its different settings: the book, the performance, and the art show all echo one another but are not at all identical in their use of visuality. But it is obvious that the blurring of borders is an important part of its foundation. Bergvall activates the *there* of the book in her performance, for example, with the artwork of Thomas Köppel filling the wall behind her, where words from the printed book are moving on a large black screen.

How this blurring of borders between the *here, there*, and *everywhere* is achieved, becomes apparent when we follow the poem "Shake" from the book to the webpage. In the book, the poem follows directly after the chapter "Report." There, it consists of fourteen stanzas spread out over fourteen pages. Each stanza consists of five to six lines of about the same length, and the layout of the poem – which expresses an intense but controlled rage – follows the aesthetic of the traditional poetry collection. The stanzas are centred, tidily arranged on the pages, and stand in stark contrast to the affect that the lines express. In the performance, the poem was preceded not only by the "Report," but also by a low-key performance of the Tim Buckley song "Song to the Siren." The performance of "Shake" that follows, unleashes the affect that is being held in in the book version: the performance is quite dramatic, and the words spoken by Bergvall are underlined by the intense work of the percussionist Ingar Zach and the text masses that Thomas Köppel projects on the black screen behind the performers. They move faster and faster – shake, one could say – all the while reiterating words from the book.

In the version uploaded to the virtual *everywhere* or *nowhere* of the Internet, the "Shake" poem is quite changed. Bergvall calls the five-minute-long video clip a *Performance edit* (see Bergvall 2014b). The voice in the clip is Bergvall's, and the sound is a recording from the live performance. But the sound fades out after half of the fourteen stanzas: the viewer will not experience the climax, which was an important part of the performance. The most critical change, however, is that the

screen is made up by the moving electronic text masses only. That stands in stark contrast to the performance of "Drift," where Bergvall took centre stage, anchoring the poem, and the percussionist Zach was visible to the right, on the stage as well. But in the film clip, only her disembodied voice is present, along with Ingar's sound effects. Her body could be anywhere. Percussionist Ingar Zach cannot be seen either. Instead of watching them perform, the viewer is drawn to watch the digital art of Thomas Köppel: words in white and blue, moving across a dark background on the screen, suggesting an archipelago of words.

This archipelago of words turns the theme of drifting into a powerful image while the words are drifting too: between English and Old Norse, between the sensical and the non-sensical. This suggests a theory behind the work – or at least that a theory can be drawn from it. In his article "Thinking with the archipelago," Jonathan Pugh suggests a productive way of thinking about art as archipelago, as "fluid tropes of assemblages, mobilities, and multiplicities" (Pugh 2013, 10). I would suggest that this aesthetic can be found at the heart of Bergvall's work, but that Pugh's line of thought also aptly describes the world view that is expressed through her practice: in its form as well as in its major themes. The fact that Bergvall writes about reading Édouard Glissant while working on "Drift," makes the archipelago as a productive image even more plausible (cf. Bergvall 2014a, 154–155).

The viewer of the "Shake" video listens to the voice and sound performances while taking in this archipelago of moving words on the screen. The words keep growing larger and larger, as if they are shouting the viewer in the face – all up until the end when the screen and the sound of Bergvall's voice and Zach's sound effects suddenly go mute. This moment is just about when they were starting to really pick up volume and tempo in the performance. Instead, the words from the poem can be read, silently, on the screen:

> Bang that pan rig that sail
> Shake that megavoice
> Wake the intergang
> Dont go back in hold the game
> With our softness with our give

The words are taken from the eighth stanza of the book's poem, but the stanza is shorter. This variation is in line with the processual character of Bergvall's work; the book version is not to be regarded as the original in any way. The lines are performative, addressing the viewer wherever they may be, urging them to act. The words reach beyond the screen out into the here and now of the world: do something, make some noise of your own, do not go back in. And this is where the border between the *everywhere* of the Internet and the *here* of the performance is overcome.

Conclusion

"What is a poem's mode of existence?" Derek Attridge (2019, 1) opens his study on experience with this question. Already in their ground-breaking *Theory of Literature*, published in 1949, René Wellek and Austin Warren asked pretty much the same: "Where is the 'real' poem, where should we look for it; how does it exist?" (Wellek and Warren 1956, 129). I would suggest that the question needs to be asked again and again: poetry is never still; its ontology can never be pinpointed once and for all.

This fact becomes even more obvious when one considers contemporary work like that of Caroline Bergvall. Her processual oeuvre shows that poetic practice can never be securely placed in the *there* of the book, the *here* of the performance, or the *everywhere* of the World Wide Web. The different evocations of a poetic work may stand alone – but, when placed together, one can see that they are all informed by one another. The book is changed by the Internet, and the poetry video borrows its aesthetic from the printed book. In the "Night and Refuge" sessions, the poets were carefully and outspokenly situated in exact places on the planet. But at the same time, they were part of something that happened everywhere. In the work of Nathan Coley, a Talking Heads' piece of music, which can be experienced *here* or *everywhere*, is turned into material text, a *there* artefact. But then it is placed *here* – next to a church in the medieval centre of a town in the northern periphery of Europe. And all those places, spaces, modes, and media make it into the work.

In her study on cultural turns, Doris Bachmann-Medick points out that space "is now no longer seen as a physical territorial concept but as a relational one" (Bachmann-Medick 2016, 216). My point and main suggestion, then, is that we should be careful not to study the *there* poetry without considering the *here* or the *everywhere*. The three categories are all present in one another. In this chapter I have shown how these different qualities inform the practice and experience of poetry while exploring how the visual aesthetic changes when the work moves across different media and settings – as for example in the "Shake" poem of "Drift," where different strategies are used in the performance, the printed poem, and the short digital video. In the "Night and Refuge" sessions, it is obvious that the visual set up informs the (sometimes interactive) viewers' as well as the performers' experience of the poem in becoming: through streams from live cams, poetry is connected to specific humans and geographic places while at the same time becoming global: with the *everywhere* of the Google Document format it becomes part of the poem's production of meaning. The "Night and Refuge" sessions also show that the visual aesthetic of the book can become part of the visual set up of a digital screen – but that the digital image of the white, printed page is something other than the white page itself. Through the "Drift"

project and its use of Tom Martin's *Passenger* image, the ethical problems of seeing and watching, of the arbitrary lines between the visible and invisible are brought to the fore. When a digital surveillance image makes the transition into the *here* of the art show, and the *there* of the poetry collection, something happens to it. Through the artist's and audience's acts of what Mirzoeff calls "persistent watching," the visual object of surveillance remains what it is but also turns into a political object of counter visibility.

It has become apparent that although simple, the notions of the *here,* the *there*, and the *everywhere* offer a fruitful way to think about contemporary poetic practice, even though – or rather, since – these practices in many ways always override the imagined borders of the triad. As all users of models know, reality and poetry are always more complex and multi-layered than any model would suggest. But in this case, the triad becomes a tool that makes it possible to study how different aesthetics, theories, and poetic strategies bleed into one another as the situatedness of the poem changes. This way it becomes apparent how the aesthetic of one situation informs the other. I suggest that contemporary poetry should always be considered as situated, in the *here*, the *there* as well as in the *everywhere*. To concentrate on just the one would be to miss out on all the ways that poetic meaning is produced. As always, it turns out that the Beatles were worth a listen.

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