

22. Beyond boundaries

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The Ghost of Poetic Form – (Re)Thinking the Lyric within the Context of New Formalism

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Jenseits von *dazwischen* : Afrodeutsche Lyrik und das Konzept des Afropolitanismus

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In my paper I will try to situate current negotiations of the role and function of poetry within the theoretical framework constituted by what is most commonly referred to as ‘New Formalism’. This still nascent and, it needs to be said, hotly contested development claims, broadly speaking, that literary and cultural criticism has been occupied too much with questions of historical and socio-political contextualisation of late and therefore suggests ‘a return to form’. Inspired by the work of Derek Attridge, Angela Leighton and Caroline Levine, proponents of this New Formalist approach advocate that reinstating formal analysis at the centre and core of cultural criticism can provide a new lease of life to a discipline still suffering from postmodern fatigue and the loss of its own grand narratives. The actual effects envisioned in this context vary significantly, from Attridge’s figuration of literature as a readerly ‘event’ (2004) to Leighton’s aestheticist celebration of the opaque epistemology of literary form as an autonomous principle (2007) to Levine’s more ‘practical’ attempt to realign cultural texts with socio-political processes and configuration by conceiving of both of them as either ‘wholes, rhythms, hierarchies or networks’, as the subtitle of her influential book *Forms* (2015) suggests.

In my talk I would like to inquire into the specific validity of New Formalist paradigms for the study of poetry. Trying to bring together the different strands of theory just outlined, but mainly taking my cue from Leighton, I will argue that the lyric mode, due to its inbuilt ‘between-ness’ (as evoked in the title of your conference), is particularly suited for an aesthetic reappraisal of literary form as an interstitial phenomenon, which in the words of Roland Barthes is always “*between* the thing and the name” (1986: 234). To illustrate this claim, I will avail myself of another theoretical intervention which has attempted to explore new epistemological grounds for cultural criticism – Derrida’s notion of ‘hauntology’ as delineated in his *Spectres of Marx* (1994). According to Derrida, the ghost (dis)embodies and necessitates an “other *thinking of knowledge*” (1994: 34), which transcends traditional binary

categorical ascriptions such as presence/absence, life/death or – more pertinent for my talk – form/matter, and instead subscribes to an epistemology of the interstice, the oscillatory and the iridescent. I will argue that this Derridean model of haunting as a constitutive cultural practice displays many similarities with certain New Formalist re-conceptions of literary form. Both ultimately aim to investigate new epistemological territory by productively embracing what Leighton calls “the sense of nothing” (2007: 267); poetry, I will argue, which according to Alain Badiou represents a “procedure of truth” as well as “an exercise in intransigence” (2014: 4; 23), can and indeed should take precedence in this investigation.

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Jenseits von *dazwischen* : Afrodeutsche Lyrik und das Konzept des Afropolitanismus

Das Konzept des *Afropolitanism* wird seit seiner Entstehung im Jahr 2005 stetig diskutiert und durch neue, auch kritische Perspektiven, weiterentwickelt. Seit 2011 lässt sich beobachten, wie sich der *Afropolitanism* zu einem Diskurs entwickelt, der immer stärker literaturwissenschaftlich geprägt ist. Mittlerweile kursieren Ideen zu einer literarischen Ästhetik sogenannter afropolitane Literatur. Bisher beschränken sich diese Ideen jedoch ausschließlich auf Prosatexte. Der Vortrag soll Möglichkeiten und Grenzen des Konzepts aufzeigen sowie diskutieren, wie es für die Analyse von lyrischen Texten genutzt werden kann. Dabei wird argumentiert, dass sich die ausgewählten afrodeutschen Gedichte, im Sinne einer Ästhetik afropolitane Literatur, nicht in einem *Dazwischen* verorten lassen, sondern Grenzen überschreiten. Es soll aufgezeigt werden, wie lyrische Stimmen aus dem *Dazwischen* heraustreten, einem Raum, der ihnen als Deutsche mit afrikanischem und deutschem Erbe zugewiesen wurde. Sie gestalten selbstbewusst neue Räume und Identitäten mit dem Bewusstsein über die Verwobenheit von Vergangenheit, Gegenwart und Zukunft. Thematisch zentral ist hierbei häufig die Frage, was Heimat für ein grenzenloses Ich ist, das sich mehrfach verortet – sowohl lokal als auch global. Es wird deutlich, dass die afrodeutsche Gegenwartsliteratur Teil einer globalisierten, hochvernetzten Welt ist und diese thematisch wie stilistisch widerspiegelt.

Since its inception in 2005, the concept of Afropolitanism has been constantly discussed and further developed through new and critical perspectives. Since 2011 it has been possible to observe how Afropolitanism is developing into a discourse that is increasingly shaped by literary studies. In the meantime, ideas on the literary aesthetics of so-called Afropolitan literature are circulating. So far, however, these ideas have been limited exclusively to prose texts. The lecture will show the possibilities and limitations of the concept and discuss how it can be used for the analysis of lyrical texts. It will be argued that the selected Afro-German poems, in the sense of an aesthetic of Afropolitan literature, cannot be located in an in-between, but cross borders. The aim is to show how lyrical voices emerge from the in-between, a space assigned to them as Germans with African and German heritage. They confidently create new spaces and identities with an awareness of the interweaving of past, present and future. The central issue here is often the question of what home is for a *boundless I* that locates itself several times - both locally and globally. It becomes clear that Afro-German contemporary poetry is part of a globalized, highly networked world and reflects it both thematically and stylistically.