

## 29. Forms and formats

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### **Panel description**

The deliberately non-lyrical Merriam-Webster defines *between* as an adverb meaning “in an indeterminate space or interval,” but, more interestingly, also as an aporetic preposition that evokes sharing (“by the common action of, jointly engaging,” “in common to, shared by”), splitting (“in the time, space, or interval that separates”), accumulation (“taking together the combined effect of”), precise situatedness (“from one to another of,” “serving to connect or unite in a relationship [such as difference, likeness, or proportion]”), aesthetic inclinations in taste (“in preference for one or another of”), and even strict confinement (“in confidence restricted to”). This panel sets out to situate some of lyric’s states, conditions, qualities, and degrees of alternation between indetermination and deliberation, of dwelling in-between historical, generic, plurilingual, transnational, and transmedial discourses. True to *between*’s indeterminate polysemia, the four individual reflections gathered here situate the undecidable decidability of the *between-ness* of lyric across, on the one hand, “the use of a radical plurilingualistic aesthetic” (Nykivist) and “the poetic predominance of the vowel over the consonant” (elhariry) in contemporary poetry performance. On the other hand, lyric *between-ness* lies in the turn within world poetic practice toward the epic—“poetry which is ‘narrative’ but dependent on versification,” “built upon a profound generic *between-ness*” (Friis)—and, by extension, what may at first glance appear to be an “anachronistic” (Giorgio Agamben, *Che cos’è il contemporaneo?*, 2008) and temporally deregulated usage and “preservation of [...] differentiated linguistic system[s] of address” that are not “rooted in everyday language use” (Rath). The four papers thus raise pressing questions concerning the tensions between lyric’s many modes: forms (sonnet, epic, sound poetry, performance), formats (page, line, stage, cassette tape), and specific sociopolitical histories and geographies of poetic culture (Early Modern and Victorian sonnets, Baudelaire and Rimbaud/Verlaine, the United States and Scandinavia, France and Norway). We engage poetry performance, general discourses on

theories of lyric, and the fraught history of lyric's enunciated modes of address in order to demonstrate between us how the betweenness that indeed seems to characterize lyric materializes in specific poetic texts, and to suggest that this between-ness might be situated in specific poetic modes.

Yasser Elhariry (Dartmouth, USA)

## Holes

In this paper, I draw on recent scholarship on Verlaine and Rimbaud to argue for holes as definitional constituents in the situating of contemporary French lyric's between-ness. From their coauthored "Sonnet du trou du cul" (1872) to the erotic poems collected in Verlaine's *Hombres* (1891), Verlaine and Rimbaud repeatedly drew on and punned the innovative metric irregularities and jokes contained in the Baudelairean sonnet (for example, the *cæsuraed* holes in "Le Chat" [1857]). In the contemporary period, this tradition has been pursued by such poet-performers as Serge Pey and Christophe Tarkos. The reemergence of the hole—which I am here equating with the lingual vowel—recuperates an original sonic absence: in the spirit of Michel Chion drawing on Jacques Derrida drawing on Roman Jakobson to show that perceptive listening through the earhole begins not with vowels but with consonants (*Le Son*, 1998), I head in the opposite direction to demonstrate that Baudelaire, Verlaine, Rimbaud, Pey, and Tarkos redirect lyric to the vowelizing (mouth)hole. Pey insists that "poetry is a hole, the hole of a mouth, the hole of being, a hole that wants to put words and things back together again," that "it's around this hole that poetry will say and rewrite itself," a kind of "fracture where words and things drift and unite, [where] the poet watches his tongue constantly passing, flying through the bloody hole where his poem gushes out," that "the word will force out the real, put a hole in it to see, or the real will put a hole in words to see" (*La Main & le couteau*, 1997). For, as Jacques Rancière observes: "The world provides consonants. One thinks of the tusks; one thinks of the bone. The world provides the hard consonants, and then language, language will provide the vowels, and 'Vowels,' the elements of language, will 'musicate' the 'holes of the flute'; the flute's holes will ask for 'some fingers,' the fingers will ask for 'a mouth'" (*Le Sillon du poème: en lisant Philippe Beck* [The Groove of the Poem: Reading Philippe Beck], 2016) Hol(low)ing out lyric, creating a groove, fingering the hole: all produce the requisite indeterminate space of between-ness, and this is what Tarkos does with the hollow hole. He structures his poetics around a resuscitation, in performance and through sound recordings, of the poetic predominance of the vowel over the consonant. For example, the sound poem "Le rouet" [The Spinning Wheel (1992–93)] insists on poetic modulations between i, o, u, and ou. This poetic process finds its apogee in *Processe* (1991–92) with Tarkos's major gloss of Serge Gainsbourg's line from the song "Ce mortel ennui": "Mais on ne trouve plus rien à se dire / À la verticale / Alors pour tuer le temps / Entre l'amour et l'amour / J'prends l'journal et mon stylo / Et je remplis / Et les a et les o" [But we find nothing to say anymore / When vertical / So to kill time / Between love and love / I snatch the papers and my pen / And I fill / The a's and o's]. Filling the hole situates lyric between-ness.

Elisabeth Friis (Lund U., SE)

### **Between Poetry & Prose : An Epic Turn in Contemporary Poetry ?**

In the U.S. and in Scandinavia—and quite possibly elsewhere—a turn towards what perhaps is best described as The Epic is noticeable in the broad field of contemporary poetry. The radical reinvention of the epic as a feminist genre represented by the work of Alice Notley stands out here, but also other American works such as Joshua Clover's *Red Epic* and Juliana Spahr's *That Winter The Wolf Came* can be described as epic poetry: that is, poetry which is "narrative" but dependent on versification. In Scandinavia we find an abundance of such examples from the epic poetry of Norwegian poet Øivind Rimbereid to Swedish poet Gabriella Axelsson's recent writing of a "foundational" epic on the history of the Sami People. What these attempts at the epic share is some kind of strong political motivation concerning feminism, geopolitical issues, the environmental crisis, or giving a voice to the history of a repressed minority group. My question is of course why the poets turn to the epic genre to deal with matters such as these, and my tentative answer will be that they turn to the epic exactly because the epic places itself between poetry and prose. The epic is a mode that can contain both the historical (temporal) boundedness of narrative, and the temporal open-endedness of the lyric, understood as the openendedness of versification as defined by Henri Meschonnic. The difference between poetry and prose has either been viewed as a difference of degree or as a difference of kind.

The stances towards this difference are of course manifold, but to Meschonnic the case is certainly the latter, and this he grounds on poetic rhythm. Poetic rhythm "place le poème dans un inaccompli." There can be no closure, no teleological drive in versified text, as the rhythm can always be continued (as versus) while prose (or the novel) will always stride towards an end: "En quoi il y a une tristesse du roman. Qui mime celle de la vie: du non-retour. Qui fait son prix. Et un bonheur du poème. Le poème continue même le révolu" (*Critique du rythme* 88). It could certainly be argued that his definition of the novel is way too narrow. Open-endedness is at work in many modernist texts which are usually described as "novels." But it seems nonetheless to be true that versification has a continuous quality. Verse is built on our expectation of its repetition, and this also implies that a new beat could always be waiting ahead of us. Something which has not yet shown itself, but is promised to us, simply by the projective character of rhythm. This means that the epic genre does have an open-ended quality, and at the same time contains narrative components. The epic genre will tell us something about what came before and what might lie ahead of us. It will also try to establish a communal or collective position of enunciation. The epic—which is perhaps the oldest literary genre known to us—is in this respect built upon a profound generic between-ness. A between-ness which might explain why contemporary poets apparently have decided to give the epic another go, in our time of global crisis where both attention to history (how did we end up here?), the establishment of an enunciative "we" (we are not alone in this mess), and, last but not least in importance, an openness towards new possibilities are all certainly called for.

Karin Nykvist (Lund, SE)

### **Drifting In-Between : Situatedness Resisted in the Work of Caroline Bergvall**

The practice of French/Norwegian multilingual poet Caroline Bergvall (b. 1962) can be read as an inventive and theoretically charged metapoetic quest in order to capture and situate lyrical betweenness. More often than not, it is done through the use of a radical plurilingualist aesthetic; Bergvall has stated that her work “takes place across and between languages.” Her deceptively simple statement is the starting point of this paper. How and where is lyrical between-ness situated? What lyrical strategies—and what theoretical language—can be used to capture it? Drawing on theories by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari on deterritorialization and Édouard Glissant on nomadisation, the paper addresses these questions through a reading of Bergvall’s *Drift* (2014). Over the years, Bergvall’s work has consistently resisted any sense of stability, giving testament to the human experience of ephemerality: existentially, linguistically, geographically, historically and semantically. In *Drift*, this resistance becomes acutely prominent through the very design of the work, as Bergvall juxtaposes the current reportings on refugee drownings in the Mediterranean with the 10th-century Old English poem *The Seafarer* as well as with the old Norse mythic verses of *Hávamál*. Through imagery, sound, photography, performance, and music, the work weaves a multilayered and multilingual tale of a ship, a world, a narrative, and a scope of languages that are all adrift. In her exploration of between-ness and drifting, Bergvall repeatedly makes use of spatial imagery, thus situating her work somewhere, giving it a vantage point and a spatial orientation. At the same time, her notion of drift resists situated-ness.

Brigitte Rath (Innsbruck, AT)

### **Between You & Thou : Address in the English Sonnet**

Two famous first lines of sonnets—Shakespeare’s “Shall I compare thee to a Summer’s day?” and Elisabeth Barrett Browning’s “How do I love thee? Let me count the ways”—both directly address the beloved with thee. The two lines are, however, separated by more than two centuries and a significant language change: in Shakespeare’s Early Modern English, you and thou offer alternative forms of address to modulate, for example, intimacy and social status in interpersonal relationships; in Modern English, and certainly by Elisabeth Barrett Browning’s time, thou has vanished from everyday use. Elisabeth Barrett Browning’s thee thus points to a curious between-ness: for about 250 years after its demise in standard language, thou remains a frequent form of address in poetry, especially in the sonnet.

This paper argues that the long-lasting linguistic between-ness of thou in the sonnet is linked to the pragmatic between-ness of address in poetry. As Keniston (2006) claims, “the terms ‘I’ and ‘you’ are unstable, partly because they shift according to who speaks them in what context. Similarly, apostrophe reveals that ‘I’ and ‘you’ are ultimately constructs not merely of language but of lyric itself” (138). The second person pronoun’s shiftiness allows the reader to slip into and out of the utterance situation evoked by the poem, contributing to the fragile instability of what structuralist approaches would like to separate as external and internal levels. The resulting ambiguity of the second person pronoun may be characteristic for poetry, and deserves, as Waters (2003) proposes, more attention: “But a comparative study of address must also register multiple addressees within a single poem and must concede uncertainty in the plentiful cases where a you eludes simple categorization” (7). Weaving these two strands together, this paper claims that the preservation of a more differentiated linguistic system of address—with both thou and you—in the sonnet is connected to the high interpretative burden that the second person pronoun bears in poetry. With close readings supported by a statistical analysis of the distribution of you and thou in a large number of English sonnets, this paper will show that the appearance of thou in 18th- and 19th-century sonnets constitutes not merely an archaic-poetic use otherwise synonymous with you, but allows for a fine-tuned modulation of address. Precisely because Elisabeth Barrett Browning’s thee is not, as Shakespeare’s, rooted in everyday language use, it follows conventions specific to its poetic genre that, when made explicit, may contribute to better understanding the complexities of address in the sonnet.