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T H E M E S S

#instapoetry. Popular poetry on Instagram and its affordances

Niels Penke

Summary This article deals with poetry published via the social media platform Instagram. This *instapoetry* is attracting a great deal of attention worldwide and is one of the most popular contemporary literary phenomena, which is discussed theoretically against the background of the boom in small forms. The focus is on the production and presentation methods of the lyricists in connection with the affordances, possibilities and functional logics of the platform, as well as the specific communication and self-presentation strategies, which are examined in more detail using the example of Rupi Kaur and R.M. Drake.

Keywords Instagram - poetry - digital poetry - mediality - digitality - platform poetics - account aesthetics - hashtags - influencers - Rupi Kaur

#instapoetry. Popular Poetry on Instagram and its Affordances

Abstract This paper examines a popular phenomenon of contemporary poetry which is circulated via Instagram. The global recognition of Instapoetry is to be reflected against the background of trending small forms. The affordances of social media platforms that gave rise to new practices of producing and presenting poetry, but also for the communication and self-staging of authors get theoretically discussed. In addition to this general approach, the accounts of poets Rupi Kaur and R.M. Drake are explored more specifically.

Keywords Instagram - Poetry - Digital Poetry - Mediality - Digitality - Accounts Aesthetics - Hashtags - Platform Poetics - Influencer - Rupi Kaur

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1 Popular poetry

When over two million copies of a book of poetry are sold, it is an extraordinary event. The fact that its author Rupi Kaur has over three million followers on Instagram and that her readings are sold-out major events, when she appears like a pop star on red carpets, in talk shows and on the covers of fashion magazines, these are indications of a popularity that has never before existed in this form for a poet. And alongside Rupi Kaur, there are other poets known as *Instapoets* whose primary publication and communication medium is the social media platform Instagram and whose popularity is evidenced by high numbers. This puts them in striking contrast to the response of poets who use conventional means of communication to reach the public and publish. In contrast, poetry published via Instagram would be part of popular cultures. Popular is "what many people pay attention to", and the popular culture that develops around this, according to Thomas Hecken, "is characterized by the fact that it constantly determines this [the success of attention, N.P.]. Charts, opinion polls and elections are used to determine what is popular and what is not. "[1] One consequence of digitization is the increase in "valorization technologies "[2] such as charts, lists and rankings, which automatically evaluate the results of the "addition of election files "[3] and communicate them in real time.[4] Instagram displays the relevant figures openly for all to see at all times, thus diversifying the process of the classic, institutionally maintained bestseller list.[5] It is therefore not only the sales figures, but primarily the follower numbers, likes, shares, comments and other forms of reaction that contribute significantly to the popularity of *Instapoets.* This is based on lyrical posts, which can now be found in their millions under the corresponding hashtags. To the extent that such a large amount of text can be typologized at all, they are determined on the one hand by an interplay of text and image elements, which is strongly de-termined by the platform's format specifications, whereby they also tend towards absolute brevity. *Instapoetry* contributions thus follow "*the* communicative imperative "[6] of modernity par excellence.

This complex is virtually unexplored. There are neither explanations for this exorbitant success of lyrical texts on social media platforms nor analyses

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[1] Hecken, Thomas: *Popular culture. With an appendix 'Girl and pop culture'.* Bochum 2006, p. 85.

[2] Reckwitz, Andreas: *The society of singularities. On the structural change of modernity.* Berlin 2017, S. 20.

[3] Hecken: *Popular Culture (*see note 1), p. 87.

[4] For further information, see the introduction by Penke, Niels/Schaffrick, Matthias: *Populäre Kulturen zur Einfüh- rung.* Hamburg 2018, pp. 9-22.

[5] On various forms of lists and their logics, see Schaffrick, Matthias: "Listen als populä- re Paradigmen. On the distinction between pop and popular culture". In: *KulturPoetik* 16 (2016), issue 1, p. 109-125.

[6] Jäger, Maren: "Die Kürzemaxime im 21. Jahrhundert vor dem Hintergrund der brevitas-Diskussion in der Antike". In: Claudia Öhlschläger/Sabiene Autsch (eds.): *Kulturen des Kleinen. Microformats in literature, media and art.* Paderborn 2014, pp. 21-40, here p. 21.

forms and processes, which depend heavily on the possibilities and affordances of the respective platforms. The (distinctive) relationship between *instapoetry* and other, historically earlier forms of digital literature as well as practices on other platforms such as Facebook, Twitter etc. must also be taken into account.

This boom in poetry[7] was neither foreseen nor registered. "Never since antiquity has poetry had fewer readers than today, "[8] wrote Hans-Ulrich Gumbrecht in 2013. But while some players in the book market causally link the decline in book sales to a decrease in reading activity[9] and a general decline in the importance of literature as a whole[10], new media formations are emerging in other places that not only steal attention away from established phenomena, but can also open up new audiences that have paid little attention to printed literature, especially poetry. This also applies to the publication of literary texts, which, in addition to costly forms of *self-publishing, is* primarily carried out by publishers who, as gatekeepers, decide what can reach the market and the public at all. This constellation is particularly challenged by social media platforms and their networks. It is not only Instagram that enables anyone with a smartphone and internet access to publish content free of charge thanks to its low access and usage hurdles. Anyone who wants to can transfer their texts from private to public visibility in just a few seconds. This means that Instagram not only allows established processes to be continued under changed media conditions, but also creates new opportunities for literary communication. These are expressed in new practices of production, distribution, reception, reciprocal criticism and networking, but also in the interaction of authors with their audience, all of which are co-determined by the affordances of the medium. For no literary genre are the consequences of this as revolutionary as for poetry. Seemingly having become a highly cultural niche product outside of schools and universities, poetry has become a highly cultural niche product outside of the biblionomically oriented, institutionally cultivated

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[7] For other conjunctures of contemporary poetry that have little or no connection with the practices of *instapoetry,* see Metz, Christian: *Poetisch denken. The poetry of the present*. Frankfurt/Main 2018. Bers, Anna/Trilcke, Peer (eds.): *Phänomene des Performativen in der Lyrik. Systematic designs and historical case studies*. Göttingen 2017. In connection with live performances see also the article by Nora Manz in this issue.

[8] Gumbrecht, Hans Ulrich: "Lyrik als Form für die Gegenwart". In: *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 17.05.2013. (Online at: https://blogs.faz.net/digital/2013/05/17/lyrik-als-form-fur-die-gegenwart-257 - accessed 16.05.2019).

[9] Cf. the symptomatic study "Buchkäufer - quo vadis?" by the *Börsenverein des Deutschen Buchhandels (German Publishers and Booksellers Association)* from June 2018, which surveyed reading and literature exclusively in connection with the medium of books and recorded falling numbers, especially among younger readers. Reading digitally mediated literature and exchanges in forums, literary blogs, platforms and their (offline and online) reading circles are not included. The core results are available at: http://www.boersenverein.de/sixcms/
media.php/976/Buchkäufer_quo_vadis_Bericht_Juni_2018_Kernergebnisse.pdf - accessed 10.05.2019.

[10] Cf. Wolters, Dierk: "Fewer and fewer people are reading books". In: *Frankfurter Neue Presse*, 16.01.2018. (Online at: https://www.fnp.de/hessen/immer-weniger-menschen-lesen-buecher-10423486.html - accessed 10.05.2019).

literary industry, new, extremely resonant forms of literary communication have emerged. While *social* [reading11], new methods of literary criticism, book presentism and transmedia storytelling have already become the focus of academic research, poetry in social media contexts has so far received little attention from literary scholars.[12] However, there is no shortage of (particularly English-language) feature articles on *instapoetry* and other forms of digital poetry.[13]

This article is therefore intended as an initial approach to the forms and processes that have been tested in millions of poems since 2010. However, this cannot be done without also taking into account the possibilities and affordances of the platform, because Instagram, unlike most poetry forums or even Facebook, is first and foremost a world of images. Instagram seems to confirm the trend that "the aesthetics of the short and concise often [manifest] itself in the media shift from word to image", because images are "so much more suitable than writing for capturing the here and now in a compact condensate. "[14] Nevertheless, t h e r e a r e also texts in the image world of Instagram, but these play a *subordinate* or secondary role as captions.

2 Poetry and research on digital literature

Research on electronic or digital literature, as it has been organized via forums, news groups and chats since the 1990s, can be used to investigate this, but only to a limited extent. For one thing, the main focus of research into digital literature was not on poetry, but on the novel and other, often collaborative co-writing projects in prose and their narrative techniques, which were observed with the expectation that the hypertext structures would finally make those 'sympoetic' processes possible.

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[11] For an overview: Böck, Sebastian/Ingelmann, Julian/Matuszkiewicz, Kai/Schruhl, Friederike (eds.): *Reading X.0. Reception processes in the digital present*. Göttingen 2017.

[12] Exceptions to this are: Kovalik, Kate/Curwood, Jen Scott: "#poetryisnotdead: under- standing Instagram poetry within a transliteracies framework". In: *Literacy*, 10.03.2019. https://doi.org/ 10.1111/lit.12186 Kovalik and Curwood focus primarily on the interactions of *peers* and the importance of feedback. For an analysis of productive interactions with other social media platforms, see Döring, Jörg/Paßmann, Johannes: "Lyrik auf Youtube. Clemens J. Setz reads 'Die Nordsee' (2014)". In: *Journal for German Studies* N. F. XXVII 2 (2017), pp. 329-347, as well as Philipp Böttcher, who used the example of the commentary platform *genius.com to* show how lyrics are also receiving increased attention as a result of digitalization. See Böttcher, Philipp: "Gelesener Gesang. Lyrics in the context of media change". In: Steffen Martus/Carlos Spoerhase (eds.): *Gelesene Literatur. Popular reading in the era of media change* (= *Text + Kritik-Sonderband*). Munich 2018, pp. 73-82. Metz: *Poetisch denken*, pp. 408- 409, who discusses the poetic nature of Stefanie Sargnagel's Facebook *posts.*

[13] See McElwee, Molly: "INSTAPOETRY - The age of scrolling literature" as a representative example of similar overviews. In: *The Gibralter Magazine*, 01.10.2017. (Online: https://thegibraltarmagazine. com/instapoetry-age-scrolling-literature - accessed 19.05.2019).

[14] Gamper, Michael/Mayer, Ruth: "Narration, knowledge and small forms. An introduction". In: This (ed.): *Kurz & Knapp. On the media history of small forms from the 17th century to the present*. Bielefeld 2017, pp. 7-22, here p. 15.

which have been dreamt of time and again since Friedrich Schlegel.[15] Poetry, on the other hand, has hardly been in focus, as confirmed by overviews in which lyrical texts have only been given peripheral consideration.[16] This also applies to research on cell phone and smartphone literature, which is also predominantly prose-focused.[17] In addition to the increasing attention paid to storytelling as a result of the *narrative turn,* other possible reasons must be considered, such as the participation of well-known authors and promotion through competitions - such as the *Pegasus literature competition,* which the weekly newspaper *Die Zeit* organized from 1996 to 1998 and presented in a media-effective manner.

On the other hand, communication and distribution services have changed dramatically in recent years. Poetry has been published and read online since the 1990s and, as far as the figures can be reconstructed over a period of twenty years or more, to a considerable extent. As early as 1995, *The Albany Poetry Workshop. An Interactive Forum for Poets and Writers,* which was followed by other similar projects (e.g. *Poetropolis*, 1999), some of which offered the opportunity to publish and exchange poetry for decades.

The participatory possibilities have increased in the course of Web 2.0[18] and have greatly simplified the publication of *user-generated content,* thus also shifting the relationship between producers and recipients. In the course of this, the hybrid form of the *prosumer* has emerged, which initially defined digital literary communication in forums - users became recipients and producers at the same time. Technical innovations meant that it was no longer just the (literary) text that found its way onto the screen, but that it could also be designed more simply without programming knowledge and supplemented by pictorial elements, depicted in photos or finally integrated visually or performatively in short video clips. With the smartphone, the telephone became the "relevant operative element" of literary communication "that it had not been before".[19] With the switch from the desktop PC to the

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[15] Cf. Gamper, Michael: "Collective authorship / collective intelligence: 1800-2000". In: *Jahrbuch der deutschen Schillergesellschaft* XLV (2001), pp. 380-403; Heibach, Christiane: *Literatur im Internet. Theo- rie und Praxis einer kooperativen Ästhetik*. Berlin 2000.

[16] Cf. Schäfer, Jörgen: "Netzliteratur". In: Natalie Binczek/Till Dembeck/Jörgen Schäfer (eds.): *Hand-buch Medien der Literatur*. Berlin/Boston 2013, pp. 481-501. Schmidt, Siegfried J.: "Computerlyrik - eine verlorene Chance?" (Computer poetry - a lost opportunity?) is also almost prophetic about the disdain for non-biblionomic poetry. In: Manfred S. Fischer (ed.): *Man and Technology. Literary imagination and text machine*. Aachen 1989, pp. 139-152.

[17] For an overview, see Wirth, Uwe: "Telefon-/Handyliteratur". In: Natalie Binczek/Till Dembeck/Jörgen Schäfer (eds.): *Handbuch Medien der Literatur*. Berlin/Boston 2013, pp. 475-480.

[18] Cf. fundamentally O'Reilly, Tim: "What Is Web 2.0. Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software". 30.09.2005. (Online: http://www.oreillynet.com/pub/a/oreilly/tim/news/2005/09/30/what-is-web-20.html - accessed 02.05.2019). Taddicken, Monika/Schmidt, Jan- Hinrik: "Entwicklung und Verbreitung sozialer Medien". In: This (ed.): *Handbuch Soziale Medien*, Wies- baden 2017, pp. 4-22, i.b. 6-9. However, literary practices are not addressed anywhere in this handbook .

[19] Cf. Stanitzek, Georg: "Telephoning with friends. Alexander Kluge's 'networks'". In: Natalie Binc-zek/Georg Stanitzek (eds*.): Strong ties/Weak ties. Friendship semantics and network theory*. Heidelberg 2010, pp. 233-266, here p. 233.

mobile vademecum is accompanied by a dissolution of boundaries promoted by the *popc status* - permanently online, per- manently connected[20]. With a smartphone, it is possible to access or publish content at any time and (almost) anywhere. Without the caesura of logging in and out, there is hardly any noticeable separation between real and virtual space for many users, and the "tele-literary[ ] public sphere "[21] becomes boundless, as is expressed not least by the omnipresence of the smartphone in many areas of life.[22] Even though it is possible to access Instagram on a computer via a web browser, the platform is primarily used by around 80%[23] of users as an *app* on mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets, which are sometimes carried around permanently by the predominantly young[24] users.

The ease of use of the platforms and the status of being permanently online have helped to determine the constitution of roles in social media contexts in the dual function of *prosumer*. However, the outstanding popularity of some users nevertheless creates hierarchies that are expressed in the relations of follower numbers, but are also reflected in their perceptibility. Nevertheless, Instagram is the platform on which most users are also *content creators* - the camera on every smartphone makes this possible.

These increased interactive possibilities have led to a popularity of lyrical texts in the social media context that has not only produced the highest-circulation and most economically lucrative poetry publications ever, but has also generated attention via Instagram that is not inferior to the previous *peaks of* lyrical mass production - especially during the First World War as the previous peak phase[25] - but even surpasses them quantitatively. The relevant hashtags indicate that we are dealing with an analogously unmanageable amount of text that enables global circulation and communication thanks to English as the *lingua franca.* The hashtag #poetry alone contains over 31 million posts, which are contributed to a #poetrycommunity (8.5 million entries) by over 15 million #writers- ofinstagram.

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[20] See first Vorderer, Peter: "Der mediatisierte Lebenswandel: Permanently online, permanently connected". In: *Publizistik* 60, 2015, pp. 259-276, DOI https://doi.org/10.1007/s11616-015-0239-3 F u r t h e r : Vorderer, Peter/Hefner, Dorothée/Reinecke, Leonard/Klimmt, Christoph (eds.): *Permanently online, permanently connected. Living and communicating in a POPC world*. New York 2018.

[21] Wirth: "Telefon-/Handyliteratur" (see note 17), p. 478.

[22] Cf. on the ubiquity of the smartphone: Barnes, Stuart J./Pressey, Andrew D./Scornavaccac, Eusebio: "Mobile ubiquity. Understanding the relationship between cognitive absorption, smartphone addiction and social network services". In: *Computers in Human Behavior*, Vol. 90 (2019), pp. 246-258. DOI https://doi. org/10.1016/j.chb.2018.09.013.

[23] See the survey on media use in 2018: https://www.adzine.de/2019/03/device-nutzungs analyse-mobile-schlaegt-desktop/ - accessed 08.05.2019.

[24] For the age structure of users: over 70% are under 34 years old, see "Number of Instagram u s e r s by age group and gender worldwide in January 2019 (in millions)." In: *Statista - The statistics portal*. (Online: de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/809703/umfrage/instagram-nutzer-nach-alter- und-geschlecht-weltweit/ - accessed 29.05.2019).

[25] Cf. Detering, Nicolas/Fischer, Michael/Gerdes, Aibe-Marlene (eds.): *Populäre Kriegslyrik im Ersten Weltkrieg*. Münster/New York/Munich/Berlin 2013.

However, not every *#poet* (9.7 million) is an *#instapoet* (2.7 million) - or in plural *#poets* (2.8 million) compared to *#instapoets* (286,000) - because compared to the general 31.1 million *#poetry contributions,* there are 'only' 2.5 million contributions to a specific *#instapoetry*.[26] These figures should therefore be differentiated below.

3 *Instagram*: A brief history of the medium and its affordances

Instagram, a portmanteau of Instant Camera and *Telegram*, already carries the immediacy of visual communication in its name. Since its launch in October 2010, the platform has undergone numerous changes that have successively expanded the range of options for designing and distributing images. The platform's affordances have therefore changed repeatedly. By affordances, I mean on the one hand the offer character[27], which opens up "situationally measured [...] possibilities for action "[28] . In the context of social media, this primarily means the offer of participation, in the case of Instagram the opportunity to publish one's own photos and the prospect of dissemination and resonance. If you participate, you expose yourself to t h e affordances of the technical possibilities and ultimately also the functional logic of the medium. On the other hand, affordance also refers to the nature of the invitation: to act in accordance with the media possibilities and to enter the battle for attention, *likes* and *followers* with your *content* through ideal-typical behavior. In this way, users not only enter networks in order to benefit from these contacts in whatever way, but it is also always about "making these networks visible to others "[29]. Instagram therefore also means constant mutual observation in permanent connectivity. However, the number of "shared and also viewed, commented on and rated reading activities" increases "the probability of being noticed. "[30] Every technical innovation on Instagram has expanded the spectrum of these affordances - mostly as an extension - and instantly led to changes in user practices. One major innovation was the introduction of *hashtags* in the

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[26] Other relevant hashtags in the environment - which are increasing in quantity every day - are: #insta-poem (1.5 million), #poetryporn (1.5 million), #lyrik (143k), #instapoetrycommunity (15.9k), #instapoetssociety (15.6k), #instapoesie (13.1k), #instapoeten (3.3k). (For all hashtags as of 05/2019).

[27] Cf. fundamentally Gibson, James J.: *The Senses Considered as Perceptual Systems*. On the potential for media studies perspectives, see Zillien, Nicole: "Die (Wieder-)Entde- ckung der Medien. The Affordance Concept in Media Sociology". In: *Sociologia Internationalis* 46 (December 2008), issue 2, pp. 161-181.

[28] Contzen, Eva von: "The Affordances of the List." In: *Journal for Literary Studies and Linguistics* 3 (2017), pp. 317-26, here p. 320.

[29] Cf. Porombka, Stephan: "In search of new figures of movement. On reading on the net". In: Steffen Martus/Carlos Spoerhase (eds.): *Gelesene Literatur. Popular reading in the context of media change* (= *Text + Kritik-Sonderband*). dels. Munich 2018, pp. 137-148, here p. 140.

[30] Ibid, p. 144.

As with *Twitter,* these tags immediately became the most important way of organizing content in a network-like manner. This is because hashtags "bundle "[31] attention and make it possible t o gain an "overview of a certain photographic interplay "[32] . At the same time, they make a significant contribution to group formation, "independent of administrative con- structs [...] joining a larger context "[33], opening up (micro) discourses[34] and making it easier to participate in them. In this way, it is possible,

'parasitic'[35] to participate in the popularity of certain attention-grabbing successes of other users. This also applies to all hashtags associated with literary content. In addition to products of individual *self-publishing,* general hashtags such as *#literature* or *#poetry also include* posts that showcase third-party texts, ranging from Shakespeare and Margaret Atwood to film quotes, in a special design.

Later, the functions of linking other users or their accounts to photos (in July 2013) and the *direct feature* (a forwarding function, in December 2013) were added. In August 2016, the Snapchat-inspired function for posting short videos, known as *stories,* was introduced, which in turn was supplemented by the live video function for direct transmission from November 2016. Finally, in February 2017, the *slideshow* feature was added, which makes it possible to post several photos at the same time under a post, which can be viewed one after the other by scrolling sideways. In June 2018, Instagram stated that there were over one billion active accounts in use worldwide.[36]

Instagram has been primarily visually oriented from the outset (later audiovisual in the *stories* and videos) and is still stable today in terms of its organizational pattern (adopted from Twitter): there are user profiles with the function to '*follow*' other accounts and thus get their content into your own individual *feed* and finally the possibility of cross-linking via hashtags. In all of this, images are the "universal language "[37] of Instagram, as they not only create (apparent) "privacy", but also promote the democratic effect "that each of their participants and each photograph can be seen and heard".

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[31] Schmidt, Jan-Hinrik/Taddicken, Monika: "Soziale Medien: Funktionen, Praktiken, Formationen". In: Dies. (ed.): *Handbuch Soziale Medien*, pp. 23-37, here p. 35.

[32] Bieling, Simon: *Showing consumption. The new public sphere of consumer products on Flickr, Instagram and Tumblr.* Bielefeld 2018, p. 44.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Cf. Glanz, Berit: "Rhetoric of the hashtag". In: *Pop-Zeitschrift*, 18.09.2018. (Online at http://www. pop-zeitschrift.de/2018/09/18/social-media-september-von-berit-glanz - accessed 16.05.2019).

[35] On the logic of parasitic popularity, see Werber, Niels: "Trumps Twittern. The popular Donald Trump (II)". In: *POP. Culture and Critique*. H. 11 (2017), pp. 39-44, i.b. pp. 41, 44.

[36] See "Number of monthly active Instagram users worldwide in selected months from January 2013 to June 2018 (in millions)". In: *Statista - The statistics portal*. (Online: https://de.statista.com/ statistik/daten/studie/300347/umfrage/monatlich-aktive-nutzer-mau-von-instagram-weltweit/ - accessed 29. May 2019).

[37] Bieling: *Showing consumption* (see note 32), p. 45.

The effect of always having the same sequence of square photographs is that every unknown appears in a familiar form and therefore promotes the impression of "sameness and comparability "[39] , which reinforces the appearance of an egalitarian platform. In view of these equal conditions set by the medium, subtle differences are therefore all the more decisive for success and non-success, i.e. the desired attention, which is expressed in *likes* and *follower numbers.* All accounts are equally affected by this logic, regardless of their content and objectives. The symbolic and social chapter is acquired through interaction with other users, by following their accounts, by commenting on their content, by linking and reposting, all with the aim of drawing attention to oneself and one's own account. If you want to increase the visibility of yourself and your content more quickly, you can also buy *sponsored* posts or likes and in this way increase your apparent popularity, which in turn affects the suggestions for other users.

The ways in which literature is staged on Instagram and how different forms of literature can be discussed are diverse. Even before the publication and presentation of one's own literary texts, the texts of others, especially literature published in book form,   a r e   d i s p l a y e d , commented on and discussed. These contributions are articulated above all in connection with new literary publications or the users' own book collections, which are presented in elaborately arranged settings - in the midst of well-lit and often diversely decorated bookshelves (*shelfies*), bedside tables or sofa corners - and used for "self-placements of the readers "[40] . Even before the individual evaluation - whether the book was liked, whether a reading recommendation can be given, sometimes also a specific score based on a 5-, 10- or 100-point scale - the focus is o n the staging, as the review is an optional component of a posting; the image, on the other hand, is the absolutely necessary basis. Erika Thomalla describes the scene of these social media reviewers as "frequent readers" who compete for "quantitatively measurable results "[41] via challenges, piles of unread books (SuB) in a friendly, yet "competitive atmosphere" and in doing so achieve a

"improbable conservatism "[42] . Reading a lot appears to be an unreservedly positive value and is almost exclusively focused on the printed book, whose sensuality - haptics, olfactory qualities, color combinations in bookshelves and shelf arrangements - plays a major role. Also, "the analog book with

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[38] Ibid.

[39] Ibid, p. 42.

[40] Cf. Schneider, Ute: "Bücher zeigen und Leseatmosphären inszenieren - vom Habitus enthusiastischer Leserinnen und Leser". In: Steffen Martus/Carlos Spoerhase (eds.): *Gelesene Literatur. Popular reading im Zeichen des Medienwandels* (= *Text + Kritik-Sonderband*). Munich 2018, pp. 113-123, here p. 117.

[41] Thomalla, Erika: "Bücheremphase. Popular literary criticism and social reading on the net". In: Steffen Martus/Carlos Spoerhase (eds.): *Gelesene Literatur. Popular reading in the context of media change* (= *Text + Kritik-Sonderband*). Munich 2018, pp. 124-136, here p. 124.

[42] Ibid, p. 127.

tangible, visually perceptible, physical properties, with an attractively designed cover and visible reading marks "[43] is easier to capture in an image than the eBook. The "representation of the reading experience "[44] is easier to show on the physical object.

The book as a highly charged symbol guarantees reliability, deceleration and slowness in a fleeting (digital) world. By linking it with other organic materials, a 'cozy' and natural way of life is to be expressed.[45] These ideas and their images are anchored in "traditional educational ideals and reading practices "[46]: Only the book, according to the premise of the *bookstagrammers,* enables "empathic, holistic reading", which in turn becomes the condition for identification and emotional involvement, "empathy, emotion, consternation".[47] This gives rise to the normative pressure not only to consciously choose what to read, but also to read books unconditionally to the end.[48] The "empathy chain "[49] that develops between *bookstagrammers*, their followers or even entire networks, which include authors as well as other like-minded people, plays an important role here. In the context of these practices of staging and reviewing books, which in the vast majority of cases are novels, the catalog of relevant hashtags also looks different; *#instapoetry* plays only a subordinate role in these contexts, as far as this can be qualitatively verified via random samples. While these practices and the value system they incorporate, which communicates itself via reliability, consistency and physical material arrangements, may run counter to that of the *instapoetry scene*, some of these observations can nevertheless be transferred.

The aesthetic conservatism can be confirmed. This can also be seen in the visual language of (primarily professional) *Instapoets,* which often refers back to analog media and materials. The 'empathy chain', which promotes benevolent and identificatory readings and therefore places value on 'likeable' authors plays a role, as will be shown later on. Decisive deviations can be identified with regard to the tendency towards multiple reading as well as in relation to genre and genre, because while the extensive novel in a photogenic hardcover with dust jacket is primarily central to book presentations in *Shelfies*, the *Instapoems are* mostly characterized by their brevity. In the vast majority of cases, they are not part of any conscious formal tradition, at least not one that is explicitly exhibited para- and/or metatextually. Formal irritations are far removed from *instapoetry* - its

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[43] Hobrack, Marlen: "Social Media February: #bookstagram." In: www.pop-zeitschrift.de, 11.02.2019. (Online: http://www.pop-zeitschrift.de/2019/02/11/social-media-februarvon-marlen-hobrack11-02-2019/ - accessed 29.05.2019).

[44] Ibid.

[45] Cf. Schneider: "Showing books" (see note 40), pp. 118-119.

[46] Thomalla: "Bücheremphase" (see note 41), p. 128.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid, p. 131.

[49] Ibid, p. 134.

Contributions should be readable and consumable without presuppositions, like the saying that is related to the calendar slogan, the slogan on stickers and T-shirts.

Another difference can be drawn in monetary terms: *Bookstagrammers* are not only frequent readers, but also frequent buyers, who in turn want to encourage others to read and thus implicitly to buy books and thematically related goods. This also happens beyond the current demand; the pile of unread books is not only a self-commitment, but also a financial investment in the future.

Under this comparative parameter, Instapoetry is *initially* a counter-pro- gram: those who post their texts on Instagram also buy pens, paper and craft supplies, but initially not a book published by a publisher that could be presented. These forms of ownership presentism are only possible when the first *Instapoets* publish books that can be materially acquired and displayed. The necessary localization of the content outside the medium, which precedes every contribution, raises the question of the extent to which *Instapoetry* is a continuation of earlier forms of digital literature or net literature or whether it is something fundamentally new. If one assumes a broad concept of net literature, which describes all texts that are accessible in "electronic communication networks "[50] , then this would be an argument in favor of the continuation thesis. If, on the other hand, a narrower concept is applied that only includes "projects that can be realized *exclusively* in computer-based media "[51] , then *instapoetry* would not be net literature because the texts that generate it all have a prior material basis: the sheet of paper, the Post-It, the notebook, a set of individual letters arranged on the floor, the display of a laptop or tablet.

Due to the platform's requirement that all main content of all post formats *must* be written in a photo format in order t o be posted at all, there must be a prior text carrier medium that can be photographed - or generate an image format such as *JPEG* or *PNG* - in the first place. The platform logic of Instagram follows an aesthetic economy, the purpose of which is not the satisfaction of needs, but of desires that can be constantly reinvented and repeatedly served without knowing a natural degree of saturation.[52] The value underlying this economy is therefore the "staging value "[53] that determines the success or failure of an object or product; in the case of Instagram, this would be the range of visibility and attention as well as the response in the form of likes, comments and followers. As there are "no natural limits" to "features, glamour and visibility", these can potentially be increased without limit.[54] However, this internal logic of the platform also correlates with economic capital formation, as once an account has reached a certain reach, it can be monetized through the placement of advertising.

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[50] Schäfer: "Netzliteratur" (see note 16), p. 481.

[51] Ibid.

[52] Cf. Böhme, Gernot: *Aesthetic capitalism*. Berlin 2016, p. 25.

[53] Ibid, p. 27.

[54] Ibid, p. 29.

become economically harmonious. In addition to advertisers who have already become prominent outside of Instagram (footballers, singers, actors and politicians), influencers, i.e. high-reach account holders who promote products in a specific segment, such as food, sportswear or dog accessories, now make up a large part of the platform. *Bookstagrammers* take over parts of publishing advertising, while the most popular *Instapoets advertise* for fashion companies and hotels.

4 Media-related writing

Unlike the *bookstagrammers,* however, *instapoetry* is less about "possessive modernism "[55] and "possessive presentism "[56] and more about the presentation of individually designed texts. What has already been established for telephone and cell phone literature therefore applies to *Instapoetry, namely* that the texts are written under the
"[The] requirement of a 'display-compatible' style of writing "[57] . For smartphone displays with an average screen diagonal of 4 to 6 inches, this means a specific space economy and, consequently, a character economy in order to make the content as visible and legible as possible. Due to its image fixation, Instagram poses a particular challenge for texts to be read at all. The brevity of the texts is therefore partly determined by the conditions of the presentation medium. It is *also determined by the* fact that there is also a reason on the reception side for the absolute brevity of the articles: in order to be promising in the battle for attention, they should be able to be read en passant at a glance while scrolling and understood in a matter of seconds. In his studies, brain researcher Ernst Pöppel found that information units that can be received within a three-second interval have great advantages.[58] The speed with which content on Instagram is usually moved across the display is very much in line with this interval. "Shorter is better online",[59] is the maxim of online communication. The competition for attention obliges *brevitas*, brevity.[60] It is astonishing how naturally this "imperative of brevity" is accepted, which thus "appears 'naturalized' as it were".[61] It appears naturalized above all by the fact that this dictate is neither included in the texts designed for the medium nor in the content itself.

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[55] Bieling: *Showing consumption* (see note 32), p. 59.

[56] Ibid, p. 77.

[57] Wirth: "Telefon-/Handyliteratur" (see note 17), p. 479.

[58] Cf. Pöppel, Ernst: *Grenzen des Bewußtseins*. 2nd ed. Frankfurt/Main 2000. See also Jäger: "Kürze-maxime" (see note 6), p. 23.

[59] See "Principles of good writing: Allan Little". In: *BBC Academy*, https://www.bbc.co.uk/academy/en/articles/art20130702112133594. Cited in Gamper/Mayer: "Introduction" (see note 14), p. 18.

[60] Cf. Jäger: "Kürzemaxime" (see note 6).

[61] Ibid, p. 22.

is explicated in the accompanying paratexts. With a few exceptions, it is only mentioned in metatexts, e.g. in interviews.[62]

At least if an account is designed to increase reach, posts that can be received quickly, at a glance and evaluated immediately are advantageous: I like or I don't like, whereby only in the first case is the *like button* pressed and visible attention registered. It thus seems to apply to Instagram that "people not only read differently there, but also judge differently. "[63] The 'peripatetic' [reading64] characterized by discursive digressions is replaced by the registration of potentially endless images that appear in the feed at the same intervals. Short lyrical texts in particular can therefore be shown to advantage far better than other literary genres. Texts should be able to be displayed on an image so that they are easy to read without the need to zoom in. This dictate of attention economy in turn severely restricts the actually unlimited possibilities in terms of size, the selection of available font types and the design of manuscripts. However, photography makes it possible to put almost anything in the picture and thus - at least tentatively - to overcome the format and typeface specifications of other platforms and conventional media that depict writing. A "tendency towards calligraphy", which has already been confirmed for film, which in competition with digital production processes is also partly turning back to "manual work",[65] can also be confirmed for many *Instapoets*. They are characterized by a "Refinement dynamic",[66] which can also be observed where it is not a question of staging original lyrical texts. This is because the majority of poems posted on *Instapoetry are* not exclusively about the 'naked' lyrical text, but its integration into various visual formations. These can take the form of handwritten manuscripts, photographs or picture frames, drawings and *cut-ups*, which not only frame the text but can also illustrate, comment on or clarify it in terms of its reception. Many of the poems therefore correspond to methods of visual poetry without being completely absorbed by visuality. Without explicitly referring to models and placing itself in corresponding lines of tradition, Instapoetry owes more to the image-text experiments than to the many failed hypertext projects.

Although biblionome forms of publication are also simulated - e.g. old, leather-bound books with correspondingly designed notebooks - there is a far stronger tendency towards imitation or the reproduction of material forms of writing, which

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[62] Cf. Arora, Kim: "There is resistance to Instapoetry only because it is new: Rupi Kaur". In: *Times of India*, 27.01.2018. (Online at: https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/life-style/books/interviews/ there-is-resistance-to-insta-poetry-only-because-it-is-new-rupi-kaur/articleshow/62669403.cms - accessed 02.05.2019).

[63] Porombka: "Bewegungsfiguren" (see note 29), p. 146.

[64] Cf. Wirth, Uwe: "Literature on the Internet. Or: Who cares who reads?" In: Stefan Münker/ Alexander Roesler (eds.): *Mythos Internet*. Frankfurt a.M. 1997, pp. 319-337.

[65] Cf. Zorns, Alexander: "Digital types". In: Natalie Binczek/Till Dembeck/Jörgen Schäfer (eds.): *Handbook Media of Literature*. Berlin/Boston 2013, pp. 139-144, here p. 143.

[66] Bieling: *Showing consumption* (see note 32), p. 251.

reveal the writing process and exhibit the manuscript: The craftsmanship of this poetry is emphasized via the individual page, sometimes (apparently) marked by use, the personal notebook in which the photographed poem is written down in the author's own handwriting, and via the supplementary drawings and artistic arrangements. The effort that precedes the short forms and the loving arrangement are exhibited as sympathetic factors.[67] Each of these components serves to singularize, to prove the uniqueness of the products of creative work, as exhibited by the account *@thetypewriterdaily,* for example. These materials that promise permanence stand in contrast to the fleeting and temporary nature of the platform content. Instagram is a precarious on-demand medium, as its content appears with an indefinite availability period - photos can be restricted or deleted at any time by the author or provider, as can the entire account. Screenshots therefore play an important role for communication as well as for the individual handling of relevant content, with which each piece of content can in turn be stored indefinitely.

The question of whether *Instapoet* is more than a mere term of difference, namely a pejorative term, has already been raised several times.[68] I understand and use it neutrally to describe those poets who publish via Instagram - especially since the term has no negative connotation as a self-description in a large community. The *Instapoetry* network should initially be understood as a "kind of closed ecosystem" that has its own resonance space before book publication, "in which readers show each other what they are doing and recognize each other by reading, commenting and linking. "[69] There is little interference with the Shelfie and *Bookstagram community*; *Instapoetry* is strongly influenced by influencers in their own field, who initially published their texts outside the official literary scene. However, they have not only inspired numerous followers with their work, but have also made the leap from the image interface into printed books and the literary scene with readings, festivals and autograph sessions. A few prominent[70] *Instapoets illustrate* how supposed hobby poets have become professionals with influencer status.

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[67] See the selection of material-rich contributions in: Holstrom, Ashley: "12 More of Our Favorite Instagram Poets". In: *Bookriot* 01.10.2018. (Online: https://bookriot.com/2018/01/10/more-of-our-favorite- instagram-poets/ - accessed 29.05.2019).

[68] Most recently by Leszkiewicz, Anna: "Why are we so worried about 'Instapoetry'"? In: *NewStatesman*, 6.03.2019 (online https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/books/2019/03/instapoetry-rupi-kaur-genre-rm-drake-rh-sin-atticus-hollie-mcnish - accessed 29.05.2019).

[69] Porombka: "Bewegungsfiguren" (see note 29), p. 145.

[70] Cf. the overview Powerpoetry: "9 Inspiring Instagram Poets to Follow in 2019". (Online: https:// www.powerpoetry.org/actions/9-inspiring-instagram-poets-follow-2019 - accessed 29.05.2019).

5 Media potentials and account aesthetics: Rupi Kaur and R.M. Drake

Of all the female lyricists on Instagram, none is as much of an influencer as Rupi Kaur, who has proven to be a style-setter with her texts. Having been active on the Tumblr platform for some time, the author has been publishing on Instagram under her *@rupikaur_* account since May 2013. Initially, however, she only had an unsystematic photo account that collected photos she had taken herself, portraits of Kaur and some pictures she had painted. A drawn "self-portrait" on 14.11.2013 marks the boundary between this unsystematic, but typical posting behavior for the platform and the henceforth systematically maintained account of a now self- and form-conscious poet. On November 18, 2013, Kaur began posting her literary texts. The five-stanza poem "you trace the bruises on your ribs "[71] (see Fig. 1, which deals with the themes of abuse, family and domestic violence and alcoholism, which are central to Kaur's future work, from the perspective of a female text subject.

The beginning of their authorship is exhibited just as openly as the change of medium: without a hashtag, the poem in the caption is marked with the words "November 18 12:21 am", the date that can be read as the hour or minute of birth of the public poet Rupi Kaur. The mediality of this a c t is also enforced, as the poem is photographed from a word processing program on a computer screen, as the function bar at the top of the picture shows. However, it is not just any program; a s c a n b e s e e n from the specific design of the toolbar, it is *Scrivener*, a writing program founded by Keith Blount and specially designed to meet the needs of authors.[72] Rupi Kaur's very first publication indicates her ambition to be a professional author. All poems published later, however, give no indication of the material basis on which they were written. The first poem is also marked with the abbreviation (rk); this short form is only used once. From the second poem on 06.12.2013, she signs with 'rupi kaur' and has retained this signature to this day (as of 05/2019).

After the opening poem, Kaur regularly posts her own poems on a white background. From January 9, 2014, combinations of poem-text and drawings were also added. This sometimes close interweaving of text and image became Kaur's dominant method of representation. Like R.M. Drake, she writes the texts in consistently lower case, but with explicit reference to the Gurmukhi script, which is also characterized by consistently lower case and uses the period as the only punctuation mark. Her intention

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[71] Kaur, Rupi: "you trace the bruises on your rips". In: *Instagram*, 18.11.2013. Online: https://www.instagram.com/p/g2BHhhAHAyL/ - accessed 19.05.2019).

[72] Cf. Cordella, Francesco: "'I wasn't a programmer, but I created Scrivener'. My interview with Keith Blount". In: www.avventuretestuali.com, May 2013. (At: https://medium.com/@timetolose/my-interview-with-keith-blount-a49c7764f26 f - accessed 17.05.2019).

**Fig. 1** Rupi Kaur: "you trace the bruises on your rips"

is to establish equality and also to force their family biographical background ("tying in my history and heritage").[73]

Not only did Kaur's authorship begin on November 18, 2013, with her first poem she also launched a posting process that she has maintained as the *corporate identity of* her account to this day. Since then, poems and (self-)portraits of the author have been posted in constant alternation (with slight variations in the form of back views or hand portraits, which, however, never do without the author's body) (see Fig. 2).

When accessed via a web browser as well as via the app, this creates a pattern that is a genuine hallmark of Kaur's account.

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[73] Cf. Bhasin, Simar: "Greater case in point: Rupi Kaur's new-age poetry for Gurmukhi". In: *The New Indian Express INDULGE*. 17.10.2017. (Online: https://www.indulgexpress.com/culture/books/2017/oct/17/greater-case-in-point-rupi-kaurs-new-age-poetry-for-gurmukhi-4027.html - accessed 01.05.2019).

Fig. 2 Screenshot @rupi_kaur
(view of posts from 16.11.2018
to 25.10.2018)
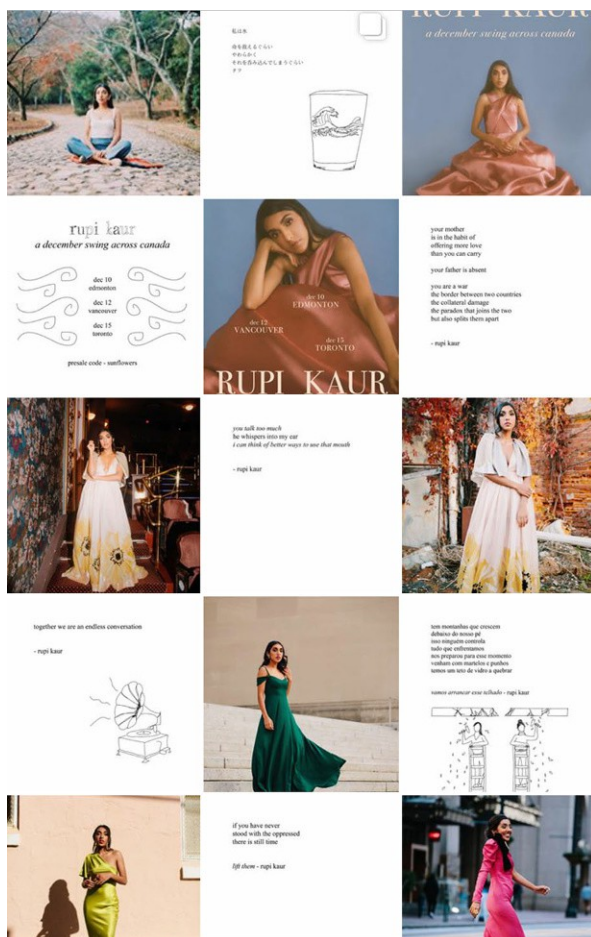
has become. The Instagram account itself is thus elevated to the status of a work of art, which can be emphasized through a certain aesthetic - in contrast to other accounts, but also other social media presences on Facebook[74] and Tumblr. This alternating posting practice has been strictly adhered to without exception for over five years, starting with the first full post (November 2013). Of the 837 posts currently posted (as of 16.05.2019), 820 are within this photo-poem-photo pattern and thus establish an equal status of author and text. These include several posts in which Kaur uses her analog writing materials (e.g 21.04./01.06./06.10.2014, 13.01.2017) - notebooks, pens,

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[74] Kaur's Facebook profile is operated unsystematically. Content is also published there that does not fit into her strict Instagram process. *@rupikaurpoetry* also has 'only' 559,000 subscribers there (as of 05/2019).

flying leaves - and herself and her manuscripts in writing scenes (e.g. 14.02./11.12.2014).

With regard to her literary texts, no consistent publication strategy can be recognized. Short poems, rarely of several stanzas, dominate, along with a few prose pieces, also of shorter length, and sentence-like two-liners. Kaur's follower numbers have risen steadily since her beginnings. In the fall of 2014, Kaur self-published a selection of her poems under the title *milk and honey*. It is not possible to trace Rupi Kaur's entire popularization history here, but two particularly resonant events should be mentioned. The first is a "menstruation-themed photo series "[75] in March 2015, which initially led to conflicts with the platform's censorship regulations, triggered a [net-feminist][76] debate and attracted a great deal of international attention. Kaur's posts were particularly popular in terms of numbers, reaching over 100,000 likes for the first time. Now that more than 15,000 copies of *milk and honey* have been sold, she announces that her first volume of poetry will be published in a revised version by *Andrews McMeel Publishing* (from 10/2015) and distributed internationally. At the same time, a Spanish translation (*leche y miel*) was created and published. On 7 October 2015, Kaur reported in an article that the first edition was already out of print in many places and thanked her for this "power of the people" with a text-image combination: "It took a community to get here - thank you "[77], in the middle of which a (honey) bee is depicted.

For the printed book, the poems, which had been published chronologically and continuously until then, were transferred into a fixed form and visually fixed. To this end, they are arranged for the first time and divided into four thematic chapters. This creates new connections between individual texts and coherence on a macro level, as it establishes a narrative scheme (*the hurting - the loving - the breaking - the healing*)[78] that describes the development of an ego. Her very first Instagram poem has not been included in this volume. The collected poems can be assigned to three different types. Of primary importance are confessional "I" poems, in which an "I" always speaks of humiliations suffered, of love and hope. In addition, there are numerous appellative "you" poems, in which a mostly undefined "you" calls for imagination or identification. A third type consists of particularly short, sentence-like pieces. These short pieces in particular have a lasting effect, as the book is linked to merchandise products that depict the texts. Kaur offers canvas prints.

[75] Saul, Heather: "Menstruation-themed photo series artist 'censored by Instagram' says images are to de-mystify taboos around periods". In: *Independent*, 30.03.2015. (Online at https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/menstruation-themed-photo-series-artist-censored-by-instagram-says-images- are-to-demystify-taboos-10144331.html - accessed 18.05.2019).

[76] On the logic and function of such discourses, see Kohout, Annekathrin: *Netzfeminismus*. Berlin 2019, in prep.
S. 19-28.

[77] https://www.instagram.com/p/8hcf3YnA_U/ - retrieved 18.05.2019.

[78] Kaur, Rupi: *Milk and Honey*. Kansas City 2015, p. 7.

screen prints (the cheaper option at 300$) or handwritten prints (the exclusive option at 3000$). New desires that are aroused by secondary products and are intended to generate additional income. If successful, *Instapoets*, like other influencers, are also about marketing products. However, the canvas also requires an economy of space and characters appropriate to the form in order to make the text easy to read and the product decorative. Brevity is also the top priority here.

As the first peak of *Instapoetry*'s popularity, the book publication is also a media turning point that transfers the poems from the virtuality of images to the materiality of the book. The print performs a reverse remediation[79] that overcomes the smartphone as a "first-order work medium "[80] and moves the book into the second order. This in turn is overridden by the fact that poems are photographed from the book and posted again, whereby they reach a third level of utilization. Kaur, and other poets published in print after her, pursue a strategy of a potentially eternal feedback loop: the digitally disseminated poem becomes a print product, which in turn is digitized until this form of play for attention is exhausted one day. At the end of the initially intra-medial popularity, however, the most successful poets will end up with a book as proof of a quality that owes itself to social capital.

The fact that milk and *honey* has become the most successful poetry book of the 21st century to date, with 2.5 million copies sold (as of 03/2019), has a lot to do with the attention and dissemination mechanisms of social media, especially the practices of online reading circles and book clubs. On the Goodreads platform alone, *milk and honey* has received over 22,000 reviews and has been *added to* the virtual bookshelf by over 500,000 users.[81] The algorithmized recommendations (*Readers also enjoyed*) contribute to the fact that attention-grabbing successes are amplified and made known to other, still unsuspecting users. Actress Emma Watson (Hermione Granger in the *Harry Potter films*), who invited Kaur to the 'Intersectional Feminist Bi-monthly Book Club' *Our Shared Shelf, which* she founded in August 2018, to talk to her about literature and feminism, also played a particularly important role. Kaur's short video contribution to this event alone was viewed over 1.3 million times on Instagram.[82]

Other *Instapoets* try to explicitly build on these successes. This extends to book design, as in the case of Caroline Kaufman's (*@poe- ticpoison*) *Light filters in* (2018), who and her publisher are in a relationship of

The 'parasitic' popularity of Rupi Kaur is a reference to her role model, but does not come close to Kaur's attention-grabbing success and high numbers. Her Instagram

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[79] Cf. Gunkel, Katja: *The Instagram effect. How iconic communication in social media shapes our visual culture*. Bielefeld 2018, p. 211 ff.

[80] Cf. Wirth: "Telefonliteratur" (see note 17), p. 479.

[81] See https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/23513349-milk-and-honey - accessed 18.05.2019.

[82] https://www.instagram.com/p/BmtOsO3g39s/ - Retrieved 16.05.2019.

performance and its resonance remain unaffected by such imitations. Their numbers continue to rise.

This is all the more remarkable in view of Rupi Kaur's forms of communication. First of all, it looks as if she is practising an exclusively strong[83], purely monologue-based authorship model that is geared solely towards broadcasting. The account currently has 3.69 million followers (as of 16.05.2019) and gains an average of 500 new followers every day,[84] while she herself does not follow a single account. Even for accounts of footballers, politicians and influencers with a large number of followers, it is extremely rare[85] that no other accounts are followed at all and their content is subscribed to, as interaction beyond their own content plays a major role in the logic of the platform. On the surface of the account, this is a genuine Kaur practice that not only deviates from the medium's logic, which is fundamentally geared towards interactivity, but also from the presentation and communication forms of other authors and *Instapoets*. If you don't *like* the posts of others, comment on them and follow their accounts, it is actually difficult to generate visibility and commandeer your own followers. However, Kaur interacts in two ways that do not affect the surface aesthetics of the account and only become visible on subordinate levels. Firstly, she communicates via the comments section under her poems, where she sometimes demonstrates a high level of interactivity. With an *engagement rate* of 4.28%[86], she achieves an above-average value[87] compared to other A-level accounts. On the other hand, Kaur also addresses her followers via the *stories*, i.e. the photos and short video clips available for 24 hours, which are displayed in a separate category.

The fact that Kaur has achieved a comparatively high number of followers is therefore surprising, as the primary reason is not the communication, but the content. Many far more interactive authors on Instagram lag far behind Kaur's response. Other profiles declared and verified as *official accounts*, i.e. not created and operated by fans, are nowhere near Rupi Kaur's follower and *engagement figures*. Popular authors such as Stephen King (1.1 million), Krysten Ritter (1 million) Neil Gaiman (315,000), J.K. Rowling (186,000, inactive since 2016) and Miranda July (143,000) are for the most part far outside the A-level accounts. The German bestselling author Sebastian Fitzek has 72,400 followers (as of 16.05.2019) - just one fiftieth of Rupi Kaur.

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[83] On the distinction between strong and weak authorship, see Hermann, Britta: "'So could this be poetry in the end without my knowledge and belief?' On 'weak' and 'strong' authorships". In: Heinrich Detering (ed.): *Autorschaft. Positions and Revisions*. Stuttgart/Weimar 2002, pp. 479-500.

[84] See https://socialblade.com/instagram/user/rupikaur_ (as at 16.05.2019).

[85] Cf. the follower and following figures of the 100 quantitatively strongest accounts at https://socialblade.com/instagram/top/100/followers (accessed 16.05.2019), not a single one of which does not follow any other account. The company Chanel represents the lowest value with 1.

[86] Cf. https://socialblade.com/instagram/user/rupikaur_ (accessed 16.05.2019) The engagement rate be-measures the interactivity rate of an account.

[87] See https://phlanx.com/engagement-calculator, where it can be seen that most A-Level accounts are in the range of 1 to 3% (accessed 16/05/2019).

On average, Kaur's posts achieve 156,749 [likes88] - there are significant downward deviations, especially for announcements of her reading dates and longer texts, some of which are written in prose. Upward deviations seem to correlate with the absolute brevity of the posts. Kaur's most successful post to date is a text from 4 February 2019, which has over 352,000 likes and consists of just six words: "fall / in love / with your solitude "[89], signed 'rupi kaur' and accompanied by an illustration showing a presumably female figure from behind in front of a stylized mountain range.

The fact that Kaur's shortest post of all has received the greatest response seems to confirm the assumption that absolute brevity succeeds on Instagram - and that the visual elements generate additional added value that contributes to the attention and positive evaluation of a text, which in turn manifests itself in the openly visible *Like.* So far, Kaur is the one who has handled this heteronomous pragmatism most confidently, fully aware of the platform's affordances. In an interview, she confesses that she is driven by the question of the greatest or best possible brevity: "How do I minimize it to the very core? "[90] The emphasis on her lyrical role models - Sharon Olds, Maya Angelou and Khalil Gibran, whose poetry cycle *The Prophet* she published for *Penguin Classics in* 2019 with an emphatic [foreword91] - is also set in the context of brevity and laconicism. At the same time, the reference to tradition establishes legitimacy for her own short forms.

However, this tendency towards extreme brevity can also be seen in other *Instapoets.* Alongside Rupi Kaur, Robert Marcias aka R.M. Drake is one of the next most popular. He has 2 million followers based on 4,937 posts (as of 16.05.2019). His account *@rmdrk* has been active since 13.10.2013. After two *selfies,* he posted his first poem on November 9, 2013 - nine days before Rupi Kaur. Drake's performance also shows that he has been pursuing a planned publication strategy right from the start. The first text ("if you tell me we"), also written in small print, is already numbered with a hash (#1). In the initial phase, he still regularly used the color filter options, so that his contributions had a heterogeneous color scheme until December 2013.[92] Otherwise, it is already clear from the first published texts that they were written on a typewriter and photographed. Drake also exhibits his writing instrument several times: a *Royal* typewriter from the 1940s is at the center of his postings on 29.11.2013, 10.12. and 11.12.2013. Finally, on 20.01.2014, he shows a Rover 5000 Comfort Matic from the 1970s. After

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[88] Cf. https://socialblade.com/instagram/user/rupikaur_ - accessed 16.05.2019.

[89] Kaur, Rupi: "fall". In: *Instagram*, 04.02.2019. (Online: https://www.instagram.com/p/BtcYE9YHVrx/ - accessed 16.05.2019).

[90] Arora, Kim: "There is resistance to Instapoetry only because it is new: Rupi Kaur". In: *Times of India*, 27.01.2018. (Online at: https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/life-style/books/interviews/ there-is-resistance-to-insta-poetry-only-because-it-is-new-rupi-kaur/articleshow/62669403.cms - accessed 02.05.2019).

[91] See the article from 16.01.2019. https://www.instagram.com/p/BsrggIPnmDY/ - accessed 18.05.2019.

[92] Drake, R.M.: "If you tell me we". In: *Instagram*, 09.11.2013. (Online: https://www.instagram.com/p/ggnnkyDyA7/ - 29.05.2019).

Since he has abandoned the use of color filters, his short texts are often framed with drawings, especially of human faces and bodies, some single, some in pairs. In addition, his photos repeatedly contain 'organic' elements such as roses, tea and coffee cups, cookies and cakes, floorboards, pets (rabbits, cats, dogs) or beach and garden scenes. Drake's motifs tie in with the visual language of the *bookstagrammer* and [shelfie] *community93* , whose aesthetic affinity with the non-digital is shared by his photos. This is particularly evident when the proximity to analog photography is sought or imitated. Drake repeatedly makes (medially broken) references to the aesthetics of Polaroid photos; he also repeatedly posts photos of Polaroid cameras (e.g. on May 30, 2018). Unlike Rupi Kaur, Drake constantly strives for non-digital objects of this kind, which he stages for his *community of followers* in combination with his texts. This strategy of using forced "'artless[]' representations "[94] not only to achieve authenticity effects, but also to keep the distance between himself and his audience small, seems to be successful. It harmonizes with his texts, which are initially categorized as *#poems* and *#poetry*, but the strong focus on the quote makes them readable as Drake's first-person statements and, as the reactions of his followers confirm, are also read as such. Initially, his texts are also tagged as *#inspirationalquotes*, *#sadquote* or simply *#quote*.[95] Hashtags such as #sadquote, #emotional or [#pain96] imply reading instructions as to what mood is to be read from a particular text - albeit out loud, as the hashtag *#spokenword* suggests. At the same time, this mood is turned towards its author, who appears as a sensitive, often melancholic poet who confesses his fluctuating moods to a constantly growing audience. With these texts, Drake in turn participates in another resonant practice, mood pictures, which are one of the most popular categories via the hashtag *#instamood*.[97] However, individual moods are not exhibited as an end in themselves, but rather as a source of inspiration (*#inspirationalquotes,* *#happyquotes)* for himself and others.[98] In this context, the focus is on the message of the well-formulated motivational quote, rather than on trying out lyrical forms, which is why it is sometimes difficult to determine the genre of his texts. Drake himself

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[93] Cf. Schneider: "Showing books" (see note 28).

[94] Cf. Gamper/Mayer: "Introduction" (see note 14), p. 16.

[95] Until May 2014, Drake adhered to this procedure; from the post of 25.05.2014 onwards, hardly any hashtags were used and no uniform strategy could be identified.

[96] The poem number #1 is tagged with the following hashtags: #poem #quote #quotes #lovequotes #lovequotes #life #sayings #sadquotes #emotional #instadaily #pain #inspirationalquotes #happyquotes #followme #hope #mistakes #typewriter #poems #poetry #writer #writing #pinquotes #relationships #instaquote #quoteoftheday #freaky #inspired #inspirational #rmdrake #spokenword #truth.

[97] See the chapter "#instamood - tunability as a guiding concept of mobile iconic communication". In: Gunkel: *The Instagram effect* (see note 79), pp. 305-336.

[98] Samantha Edwards also describes the inspiring or 'empowering' power of *Instapoetry* using the example of the poet Atticus. See Edwards, Samantha: "How Instapoetry is Changing the Way We Read Look at Poems". In: *Fashion*, 18.12.2017. (Online: https://fashionmagazine.com/culture/instapoetry/ - accessed 12.05.2019).
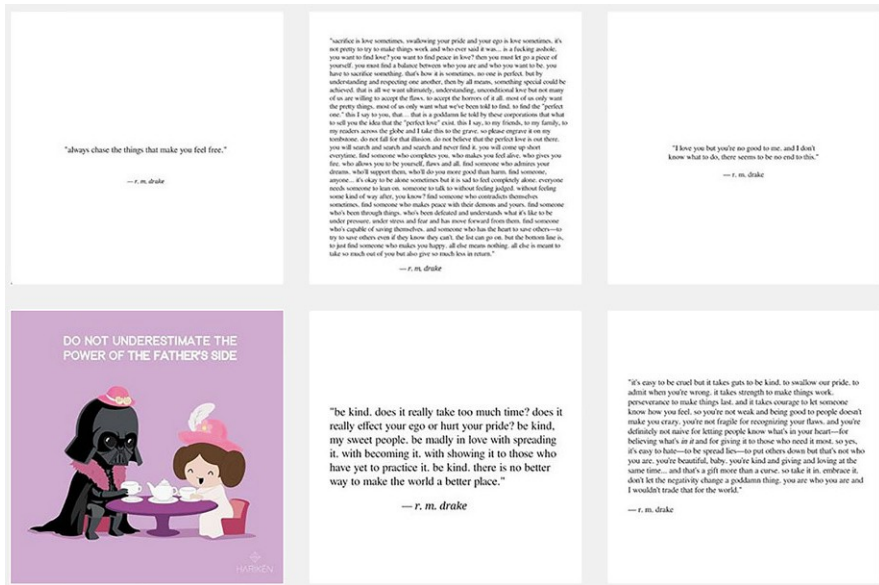
Fig. 3 Screenshot R.M. Drake (posts 19.06.218 to 16.06.2018)

no longer uses hashtags to paratextualize his texts.

Although Drake is one of the most popular *Instapoets* with two million followers, he still maintains an emphatically friendly communication with his followers and often places the personal relationship with his readers at the center of his posts: He opens the accompanying texts of his posts with the salutation "Hi loves", often interacts with the commenters on his texts and thanks them for their appreciation. His posts also include numerous *re-posts* of photos of readers who have had Drake quotes tattooed on them.[99] His *inspirational quotes* have thus actually become an object of inspiration and consolation. The [ridiculed100] motivational slogan has become a life motto for members of the target group. These forms of communication are part of the platform-specific procedures, which Drake handles very differently from Rupi Kaur. He also does not pursue a strictly uniform publishing strategy with his account. New and republished texts alternate with advertising for his own books, which will be published from 2013, and the aforementioned re-posts. Here, too, it can be seen that the shortest, epigrammatic posts receive the greatest response. This can be seen, for example, in a series of posts from the period from 16/06/2018 to 19/06/2018

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[99] See the articles from 14.07.2018, 15.07.2018, 02.08.2018, 06.08.2018, 08.08.2018, 16.10.2018 and many more.

[100] For parodies of Drake and other Instapoets, see Flock, Elizabeth: "Why this poet is posting meaningless verse on Instagram". In: *PBS News Hour*, 12.06.2017. (Online: https://www.pbs.org/newshour/arts/poetry/poet-trolling-everyone-instagram-show-social-media-glorifies-pop-poetry - accessed 12.05.2019).

(see Fig. 3). In the direction of reading (top left to bottom right), the six posts, five texts and a *Star Wars fan art meme* for Father's Day (bottom left) received 38,500 / 12,600 / 31,900 / 15,700 / 19,300 / 12,700 likes. The two shortest texts (top left and top right) received the most positive feedback with over thirty thousand likes, while the longest post by far (top center) received the least with 12,600.[101]

This logic confirms a trend on Instagram that has been observed for years. According to a thesis that has been repeatedly put forward, poetry is no longer read primarily, but rather heard[102] or "seen "[103] by most recipients. Instagram as a platform for the visual is thus one of the central places where the "rise of a different reading culture "[104] manifests itself, which is characterized by a new, largely still unrestricted, non-canonized "oversupply "[105] among the relevant hashtags. Selecting from the unmanageable supply is not only a constantly challenging task, it is also determined by chance as to what current or popular posts are recommended and ultimately displayed at the time of retrieval. In this respect, following certain accounts and subscribing to their posts fulfills the function of pre-selection. If reading on the Internet is generally characterized by the fact that it is becoming more "dynamic" and "complex" due to the hypertextual dissolution of boundaries, then *Instapoetry* reacts to this with the greatest possible brevity. The most successful contributions to this medium-specific, extremely short form of literature can be received correspondingly quickly. Kaur's and Drake's texts are the most resonant experiments to date with these forms of lyrical production, their presentation and reading by their *followers*. Nevertheless, they are only experiments under the conditions of Instagram, as the text-only practices of scarcity have been around far longer than the internet and the platform discussed here.[106]

This article is a first approach to a recent phenomenon in the history of poetry, which should be supplemented by further empirical studies. On the basis of a broader data set, it could be clarified where this global trend comes from, which events have promoted its upswing and how the practices of *Instapoets* relate to the affordances of the various platforms such as Twitter, Tumblr and others. Where do the many *Instapoets* come from and where were their former fields of activity? In terms of literary sociology, we should ask where the willingness of millions of users to

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[101] However, the length has no discernible influence on the willingness to comment. In the same le-direction, 186 / 196 / 426 / 92 / 82 / 105 comments were made on the posts.

[102] On listening, see Herrmann, Britta (ed.): *Dichtung für die Ohren. Literature as tonal art in the modern age*. Berlin 2015; and also Fockel, Henrik: *Literarische Resonanzen. Studies on voice and space*. Berlin 2014.

[103] Cf. Mesch, Stefan: "Lyrik im Netz: Where poets get loud". In: *ZEIT Online*, 17.09.2009. (Online at: https://www.zeit.de/kultur/literatur/2009-09/lyrik-im-netz - accessed 12.05.2019). See also Metz: *Poetisch denken* and the article by Nora Manz in this issue.

[104] Porombka: "Bewegungsfiguren" (see note 29), p. 138.

[105] Ibid, p. 139.

[106] Cf. Jäger: "Kürzemaxime" (see note 6).

in new environments with lyrical texts and in what relationship the subgroups of producers, who are also recipients, overlap.

Has Instagram simply become the platform on which it is comparatively easy to post content, so that because everything finds its way into the image library over time anyway, poetry inevitably had to find its way in too? Just as sunsets, old town houses and river landscapes photographed millions of times are transferred from the sphere of private photo albums to potentially unlimited public visibility, Instagram could also remove many texts from the privacy of intimate contexts of creation and storage - bedside tables and desk drawers, poetry albums and diaries with no prior intention of publication. Many Instapoetry *contributions* give the impression of occasional and sentimental poetry, as it was written before, mostly limited to the private sphere, and, if at all, published in small editions. The difference would then lie in the overcoming and/or removal of the thresholds of the 'old', pre-digital public sphere in a new, digital one, in whose scope of possibility texts can be published and made visible that failed under the conditions of the traditional literary and publishing industry due to the *gatekeeper instances*. In this respect, does Instagram only make visible what has b e e n practised in many places in the past, but has never reached beyond the boundaries of family and friend circles, i.e. limited intimate communication? In short: is there also a culture of publishing 'private writing' analogous to the culture of "publishing private reading "[107]? It would therefore have to be empirically examined whether *Instapoetry* is a literature that has "migrated to the net "[108] , i.e. has merely *become digitally visible*; or, as I see it in connection with the affordances of the platform and its communities, a literature "of the net "[109] that was only motivated in the context of these new publication possibilities and thus *emerged* "on the net"? This does not affect the observation that *Instapoetry* is the most successful "digital microformats of the present day "[110] in terms of numbers to date, with more people currently participating in its production, distribution and reception than in any previous form of lyrical literature.

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[107] Porombka: "Bewegungsfiguren" (see note 29), p. 142.

[108] Simanowski, Roberto: "Authorships in digital media. Introduction". In: Ders. (ed.): *Digitale Lite- ratur* (= *Text + Kritik*, Heft 152). Munich 2001, pp. 3-21, here p. 3.

[109] Ibid, p. 4.

[110] Gamper/Mayer: "Introduction" (see note 14), p. 18.