

Paratext in Performance: Live Poetry as a Direct Encounter between Poet and “Reader”

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Like its primary medium, language, poetry exists in two distinct forms: as written text and in oral performance. Nowadays, live poetry—poetry performed or “read” by the poet to a live audience, for instance at poetry readings, open mics, or poetry slams—constitutes an important mode of publication for poets, as well as a prominent mode of experiencing poetry for the “reader.” As such, live poetry entails a direct encounter and the physical co-presence of the poet—now cast in the double role of “poet-performer”—and the audience. This encounter takes place in a specific spatio-temporal situation, that is, as an “event,” a fact largely neglected in the methodologies traditionally applied to the study of poetry.

Poet-performers present their work as spoken word and the “audiotext” (Bernstein 12) they produce during a live appearance usually exceeds the “poem proper.” They will often introduce their poems, or themselves, at the beginning of a performance, or explain the origin of a piece or certain allusions, for instance, during or after a performance, in what is commonly referred to as “ad-lib.”¹

This essay starts from a conception of oral performance as a basic manifestation of the art of poetry rather than a mere presentation of an essentially written text. Drawing on Gérard Genette’s notion of paratext and on recordings of recent live poetry events in Vienna and London, it reflects upon the ways in which ad-libbing is employed to establish a direct connection with the audience and to guide their reception.

Paratext and Live Poetry

Originally, Gérard Genette coined the term “paratext” with reference to books: it accompanies the literary text proper in the form of “a certain number of verbal or other productions, such as an author’s name, a title, a preface, illustrations. And although we do not always know whether these productions are to be regarded as belonging to the text, in any case they surround it and extend it, precisely in order to *present it*” (1). Genette envisions paratext as an “undefined zone” between “text and off-text,” lacking “any hard and fast boundary on either the inward side (turned toward the text) or the outward side (turned toward the world’s discourse about the text)” (2).² This notion of paratext—as elements accompanying a literary text to form a kind of transitional zone between the inside and outside of a literary work—can also be applied to the audiotext of a live literature performance. It is a useful concept, implying an influence exerted “at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it (more pertinent, of course, in the eyes of the author and

his allies)” (Genette 2). That poet-performers are often very conscious of the effects of paratext is made clear by poet Nathan Penlington:

Last year I took a one-man spoken-word show to the Edinburgh Festival, an hour’s show, but the poems I had written were just written as poems, separate from each other, so then the difficulty was to combine them to make sense as an hour’s worth of show. So, the bits in between became as important as the poems themselves, just to carry the audience through.

For an analysis of paratext in live poetry performances, the elements in question should be studied as to their position in relation to the poem and/or the whole event, their originator, and their perceived function. The most common position is before a poem, as in Brian Patten’s introduction to “Hair Today, No Her Tomorrow” at the Vienna Lit Festival 2008. Patten announces his piece as “a conversation poem in homage to e.e. cummings,” spelling the title out for the audience so they can appreciate the wordplay of “hair” and “her.” He then adds: “anybody sitting here thinking of committing adultery, you know, leaving their partner for somebody else tonight—this is a warning, this poem. It has a purpose in life. Unlike most poems” (Patten, “Hair Today, No Her Tomorrow”). He takes a sip from his glass, puts it down, positions himself in front of the microphone and—after a short pause in which his gaze is focused on the manuscript in his hands—he begins to read the poem. Interestingly, he announces the title before delivering these comments and does not repeat it later. Patten’s introduction is thus inserted between the poem and its title but marked off from the “text proper” through his body behaviour.

Kenneth Sherwood discusses a similar constellation in his analysis of Amiri Baraka’s performance of a poem called “In the Funk World.”³ He points out that it is by no means clear whether the additional material (which does not appear in the book publication) is to be considered “an intervening ‘commentary’” or “part of the poem” (Sherwood 126), echoing Genette’s notion of the “transitional zone.” Sherwood transcribes Baraka’s performance as follows:

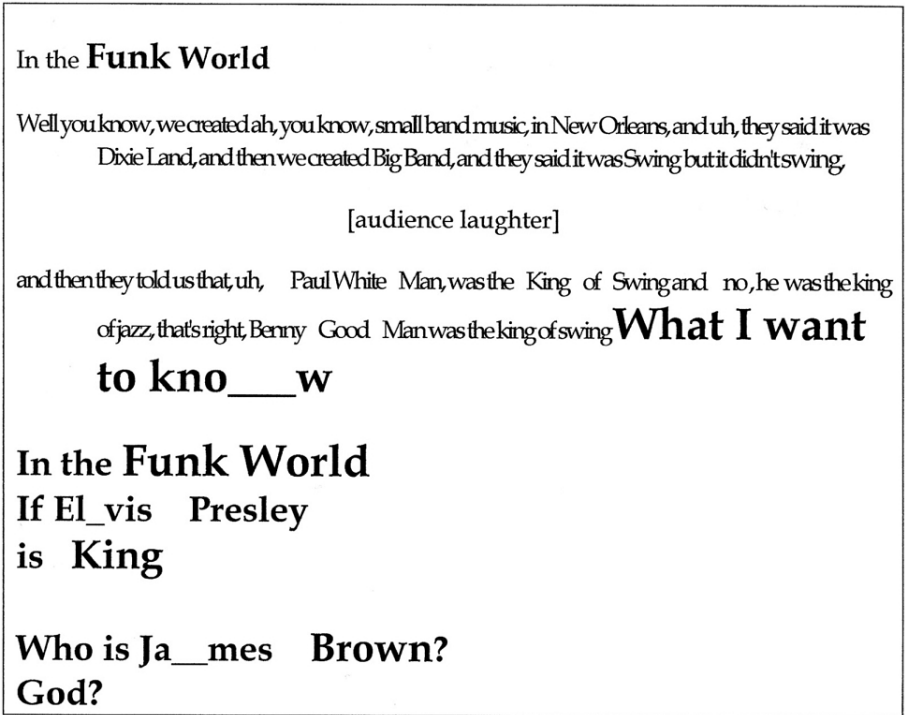


Fig. 1: Transcription of “In the Funk World” (Sherwood 125).

Paratext may also be delivered after a poem or a set of poems, for instance in a “question & answer” session, or as an afterthought to a poem.

Genette refers to paratext as “this fringe, always the conveyor of a commentary that is authorial or more or less legitimated by the author” (2). He draws attention to the fact that the originator of a book’s paratext must not necessarily be the author. The same is true for live poetry, where MCs, for example, may introduce poets, make comments about their work and influence audience expectations and the reception of the poet’s work. A fine example is provided by John Hegley, who introduced the legendary poet and singer-songwriter Fran Landesman at London’s Soho Theatre in February 2007 with the following words:

So our first performer . . . what she would suggest is that you shut your eyes, open your ears. So the . . . in answer to the question ‘where are you from,’ the simple answer was ‘New York,’ and her favourite vegetable is marihuana. Could you please welcome . . . with her young son in tow . . . could you please welcome Fran Landesman, Ladies and Gentlemen. (*Landesman*)

For audience members not familiar with Landesman's work, the announcement of her favourite vegetable must have seemed a somewhat remarkable introduction and raised certain expectations. Hegley's introduction is also exemplary for the fact that it is based on answers to questions he posed to the performer earlier, which certainly renders it "legitimated by the author," in Genette's sense. In an instance of "authorial" paratext, Landesman introduces her second poem that night, a humorous elegy to the freedom smokers used to enjoy, with the words "Loudon Wainwright sings 'in heaven all the angels have ashtrays.' This is called 'The Last Smoker'". Landesman's poem contrasts this idea of a heaven where smoking is accepted to the point that angels themselves possess ashtrays to an apocalyptic future when smoking will be severely persecuted in a society that will eventually bury the last smoker "along with the very last joke" ("The Last Smoker")—a horror vision for Landesman.

A definition of paratext as that part of the "authorised" audiotext that is not the "poem proper" becomes problematic when we take into account the role of the audience. Audience reactions such as clapping or laughing can be taken as audible commentary that influences other audience members in a way the poet may well have intended. In this sense, they may form an "authorised" part of the audiotext. However, audience reactions on the whole cannot be entirely controlled. At the 2006 UK Poetry Slam Championships Final (Theatre Stratford East, London, 11 March 2006) one contestant, who was prone to over-emote, was judged rather harshly by the audience but scored well with the professional jury in the first round. When he delivered a similar piece in a hysterical shouting tone for the final round, he received catcalls from the audience and someone even shouted "Judges, be honest!" Such a critical audible comment must be regarded as "unauthorised," yet it accompanies the actual poems as part of the overall acoustic event and influences the experience of other audience members. Since an audience has the power to contribute to the shaping of a live event, the concept of paratext becomes difficult to delimit with regard to unexpected audience input. The audience take on the role of co-author, as it were, which makes the entire production process of a live poetry event considerably less predictable than the production of a book.

Paratext can have various functions in live poetry. Its function is often informational, recounting the motive or manner of composition, explaining certain references, or providing an interpretation. Anthony Joseph's performance of "Aranguetz" at the Vienna Lit Festival 2006 contains some phrases that are not included in the print publication *Excerpts from The African Origins of UFOs*:

You see in those days
 the jammette, as they called my mum,
 she wasn't even allowed in the yard.
 It was for what they called her jezebel ways.

Joseph adds “as they called my mum” to shed light on the identity of the “jammette” for his Viennese audience. This explanatory comment roots the poem in the context of Joseph’s life experience⁴ and thus leads the audience to ‘read’ it as an autobiographical piece. Since it is inserted in the middle of “Aranguez” it is not identifiable as a paratextual comment but appears to be an integral part of the poem to anyone not in possession of the written version.

Paratext can also have a social function, as British poet Jay Bernard’s introduction to her poem “Underground” in Vienna demonstrates:

So I’m gonna start off by just talking about London, which is where I come from, and it’s crazy because here there’s a sense of trust . . . they trust you to buy a ticket for the underground, and for the bus, and for everything else. In London they don’t. In London you have a barrier on either end of every single line in the city. . . . So it’s kind of crazy and I’m gonna begin with this one which is called “Underground.” (*VLF 2006*)

This introduction, comparing public transport regulations in two different cities, is Bernard’s way of making contact with her audience. By pointing out the “sense of trust” she believes to prevail in Vienna, she expresses her appreciation of this foreign city, the home of her audience that she is visiting as a guest. At the same time she manages to tie this verbal salutation in with the poem she is going to recite—“Underground”—by pointing out that the experience it describes is one that she shares with her audience despite their different nationalities.

Paratext can further involve the dedication of a poem to a person present in the audience. John Siddique dedicated his performance of “Yes” at the Vienna Lit Festival 2006 to a woman called “Iga” whom he had just met in Vienna. These last two examples also highlight the great flexibility of audio-paratext at live events: it is a convenient means of reacting to circumstances quickly and involving an audience by paying attention to one’s surroundings or relating poems to current events—something which cannot easily be carried out in print with the same degree of spontaneity.

Finally, paratext can also have a promotional function. Gabriele Pötscher and Walter Hölbling have co-published a collection of poetry, which Pötscher introduces at the Vienna Lit Festival 2008 after recounting how they teamed up as writers:

and our first book that we’ve brought is called ‘Love, Lust and Loss,’ which we are going to read a little bit from. And we thought we would start with the sad things so that we can get that over with—because it’s called ‘Love, Lust and Loss,’ so we’ll start at the back and do the loss first. (*VLF 2008*)

Not only does Pötscher mention the name of the book twice, which the two poets will be reading from, Hölbling—in the background—also picks up a copy of *Love Lust Loss* and holds it up for the audience to see. After all, they will be able to buy it at the

festival book stand later. While Pötscher's introduction is certainly informational, it clearly also serves the purpose of increasing book sales.

Paratextual comments should by no means be regarded as a mere add-on to a poem, as they can have considerable effects on the audience's experience of live poetry. An illuminating example is provided by John Siddique, who frequently performs his poetry in public. On the page, many of his poems are serious, contemplative, even melancholy. In performance, however, his framing efforts run counter to the gravitas of the poetry on the page: he talks to his audience in a chatty, approachable voice, makes jokes and relates anecdotes that help people understand his poems and turn them into something inter-personal, an attempt to connect with his audience. The paratextual lead-in to his poem "90 Day Theory" at the Vienna Lit Festival 2006 demonstrates this:

This poem is called "90 Day Theory." I guess if you're sexually active already then you may understand. [*audience laugh*] But, I have this theory that . . . [*smiles and picks up his drink*] . . . sorry, I'm just getting very nervous and thirsty. [*audience laugh*]. You know you meet somebody, right, and . . . for the first three months . . . you know you've got something that kind of [*swings his arm*] propels you through the relationship, you know what I mean? [*smiles & clenches his fist in a suggestive way*] . . . and I reckon this period lasts for 90 days where you're completely infatuated and you can't get enough of each other and it's all kind of . . . you know, bodily fluid and all that sort of thing. And this poem is about what happens on the 91st day. [*audience laugh—JS turns to one of the laughers, points at her and says with a grin:*] Ah, this lady knows the 91st day. [*big high-pitched audience giggle*] Would you like to come and share your experiences . . . No. . . . So, if you don't know it then this is it, and if you do know it, well, it's for you. This is for this lady now here [*again points towards her, audience laugh*]. (*VLF 2006*)

"90 Day Theory" is a thoughtful, erotic poem about the transitoriness of love. Siddique recites it in a quiet, serious tone. It can hardly be described as comic, but after his set the audience will probably have remembered his performance as entertaining and amusing, which goes to show how important it is to evaluate live poetry in its context, of which paratext forms a crucial part.

Different poet-performers have different views about audiotext, however. Peter Waugh, head of the international writers group "Labyrinth Poets" in Vienna, objects to chatty introductions and lengthy anecdotes, holding the view that a poem should be allowed to speak for itself. This is in line with a view of poetry as a self-sufficient art no way in need of explanation. Accordingly, the group was introduced briefly at the Vienna Lit Festival 2008, with the MC asking the audience not to clap in between poems. The group then went through their set without interruption, their performance being "undisturbed" by paratextual insertions. Thus, a poet's choice of (not) including

paratext in their performance is also revealing as to his/her view of what poetry is and how it is best presented.

A recent performance by British poet Kat Francois will be analysed in more detail so as to demonstrate the interplay of text and paratext in a concrete example. As a performer, Francois consciously exploits the social and informational functions of paratext. Her performance demonstrates the liminal nature of paratext remarkably as well as the audience's power to influence the direction a poet-performer's paratext is taking.

Kat Francois in Performance: Vienna, 28 October 2010

On the evening of 28 October 2010, spoken-word artist Kat Francois performed at the University of Vienna's English Department to an audience of about 70, most of whom were students. The MC introduced her as World Poetry Slam Champion of 2005, noting that she also won the BBC Poetry Slam in 2004, that her one-woman show *Seven Times Me* sold out at the Edinburgh International Festival, and that she has performed her work nationally and internationally.

As a performance poet who has taken part in many slams, Kat Francois regards poetry performances as a chance to enter into a dialogue with her audience, which she makes clear at the very beginning:

First of all, can I say Good Evening – thank you all for coming this evening. It's really nice to see so many people turn up for good old me, you know, I'm very pleased. . . . There's gonna be a question and answer at the end. But—you know—feel free, if there's a burning question as I'm going through or . . . you know, you don't have to sit there . . . you know, if you're in London at a poetry event and you like something you let the poet know, alright? [*audience laugh*] I like feedback [*audience laugh*].

After her first piece—which Francois performs, as with most of her poems, without any form of written aid—she informs the audience of her background and family:

I'm born and bred in London. My family are from a tiny island called Grenada in the Caribbean. Anyone heard of Grenada before? [*audience: "Yes!"*] Yes? That's good. We're really tiny. We grow things like nutmeg, spices, and so forth . . . probably well-known for being invaded by America in the 1980s. Not that there's much to invade [*audience laugh*]*—it's a very tiny island. Grandmother came to England, early 1950s after the Second World War, when a lot of people from the Caribbean were invited over to help to rebuild English . . . er . . . England. Mum came up when she was about 12. And me and my seven brothers and sisters were born in English, so . . . [corrects herself] England. So, I'm British born and bred—as British born and bred as you can be with brown skin. That is my story.*

This paratextual introduction already hints at many of the themes Francois' performance will address: her Caribbean family ties, the island of Grenada, life with her seven brothers and sisters in the UK, and what it means to be "as British born and bred as you can be with brown skin." It contains a wealth of information that guides the audience's reception of the poems that follow. Its function is also social, however, as Francois poses a question to her audience ("Anyone heard of Grenada before?"), signaling that she takes notice of their presence and wants to ensure they are following her speech.

She introduces her next piece as being "about when I went back home to Grenada with my mum for the very first time," thus establishing a direct connection to her earlier explanation. In her collection *Rhyme & Reason*, the poem features as "English Gal," but in her Vienna performance Francois does not announce the title. Instead, she plunges right into the first line, speaking in a louder voice—probably to mark the beginning of the poem. In the book, "English Gal" opens with the words "Mum was right," uttered by a first-person speaker. In performance, however, this is changed into "My mum was right":

My mum was right
 my cousin had the same crooked gap sitting
 right in the middle of her two front teeth.

Together with the omission of the title, this produces an interesting effect with regard to the introduction. Continuing with "My mum was right" straight after "when I went back home to Grenada with my mum for the very first time," Francois achieves a near-seamless transition from paratext to "poem proper," suggesting that they are really part of the same autobiographical tale of belonging and kinship. The poem's title would have produced a disruption between Francois' introductory account of her personal experience on the one hand and the poem on the other, as though the text proper were being framed off from the introduction by way of its "label." Three further title omissions occur during the poet's performance, and to similar effect, from which we can conclude that Francois works consciously with her paratext, making deliberate use of the flexibility the medium of performance affords.

The end of "English Gal" can again be understood in the light of Francois' autobiographical revelations:

Smiling, family gap on display
 ignoring the amused stares
 I soon became a familiar figure
 embracing the calls of
 "Hey English gal."

While the trip to Grenada is experienced by her mother as a homecoming, as the poem suggests (“her bare feet greedily grabbed the soil”), it is a journey into a strange other world for the girl Kat, who, as the audience are told in the introduction, is “British born and bred.” Although the girl speaker may feel quite at home in this other world, she is labelled as an outsider by the natives’ calls of “Hey English gal” because she has been brought up elsewhere.

Kat Francois’s life-story and her account of the generations of her family do not feature in her collection *Rhyme & Reason*. The paratextual information she provides in performance thus enables the audience to understand “English Gal” in the wider context of the poet’s personal experience, which a silent reading of the poem on paper would not have permitted to the same extent. “In the same vein,” Francois announces, “I would like to read a piece called ‘Mother’s Mother’s Land’.” While “English Gal” dealt with the poet’s first journey to Grenada, “Mother’s Mother’s Land” conjures the pervasive presence of the Caribbean in the child speaker’s everyday life in England:

Mother’s mother’s land,
stared out from curiously coloured pictures
which sat regally on the mantelpiece
of folk we did not recognize.

...

It snuck into our English house
slipped ghost-like into our dreams
reminding us of where we really belonged.

...

Mother’s mother’s land
grew up in the house right beside us
an invisible eighth sibling.

Thus, the two poems form a thematic unit with Francois’s paratextual introduction, addressing her sense of belonging to two distinct cultural spaces, each of which is experienced as leaving traces on the other. Linking them explicitly to her personal experience and obliterating the divide between text and paratext in performance, with its direct audience address, has the additional effect of rendering the poems more personal to the audience.

Francois’ next paratextual utterance after the applause effects a transition to a set of poems dealing with love and the relation of the sexes: “Okay, you know that . . . first moment when you see your ex, with their new partner? Yeah? You don’t have to admit, just indicate you know what I’m talking about [*audience laugh*] . . . alright, this is that moment.”

“Joy Joy Joy” revolves around a woman’s first encounter with her ex-lover’s new girlfriend, as the ad-lib announces. It is another first-person piece, and with the poet standing before the audience “in the flesh,” herself uttering the pronoun “I,” it

may be tempting to read the poem as another autobiographical outpouring, though nothing in Francois' paratext suggests that this must necessarily be the case. Again, no title is stated, which makes for a closer connection of paratext—with its attempt to establish a dialogue with the audience—and poem. Francois indicates that although the unpleasant experience described in the poem may be of a very personal nature, she also considers it universal and expects the piece to resonate with most of her listeners. Her paratext thus invites the audience to compare her poetic account with their own experiences: to actively probe its relevance to their lives.

While "Joy Joy Joy" features in Francois' collection *Rhyme & Reason*, her next piece does not. It is connected to "Joy Joy Joy" in the following manner

With that in mind, I wrote my own manifesto. But it's not a political manifesto—it's a man . . . ifesto. In terms of what I want in a man. Because I believe if you want something, write it down. So here is what I want. Anyone feel so they can tick their list. Come check . . . [*audience laugh*]

Francois' manifesto poem is highly interesting with regard to the function and positioning of paratext. Again the poet points out its (assumed) universality to women in her introduction to the poem, inviting (part of) her audience to examine its relevance to their own wishes and views of man/woman love relationships. The poem begins:

I'm the kind of woman who knows my own mind
I refuse to be dominated and
if I have an itch I scratch it
I pay my own way but that doesn't mean to say
that I don't want to be wined and dined, protected and respected.
I want someone who knows what it means to walk in a woman's shoes,
understands my idiosyncrasies and attunes to my blues.
And who won't constantly come before me. [*audience giggle*]

She later states,

I don't need my rent or my bills paid,
Cash to restitch my weave or refill my nails,
Nor do I need for him to own some slick slick car
to fit into some unreasonable 'perfect man' dream
—Ladies are you with me? [*audience: "Yes!", laughter*]

Francois poses a question to her audience in the middle of the poem, making sure they are following her text and that she has their consent. The function of this paratextual audience address is clearly social, expressing the poet's assumption of shared views, and consequently, of her connection with her listeners. She continues,

I want someone who's got my back even when I'm down
 Who'll listen to me when I'm fed up
 and forgive me when I mess up.
 Not someone who causes me so much stress I constantly
 eat chicken, act like I want to buy shares in Häagen Dazs
 and end up becoming a life-long member of Weight Watchers.
 [*shouts:*] Is that too much to ask? [*audience cheers & claps*]

In this case, the status of the inserted question, which is promptly answered by the audience, is unclear: the near-rhyme of Dazs/ask suggests that it is a set part of the poem, although Francois utters it as a direct address of her audience, in line with her earlier “ladies are you with me?”, which was clearly ad-lib. Furthermore, the same question is repeated at the end of the poem:

And when our relationship is emotionally ready
 he will wrap himself around me
 ‘cause he so wants to be a part of me.
 Not someone—unintended or otherwise—
 who doesn't have the want or ability
 to even try and create unity—
 Is that too much to ask?
 Ladies, is that too much to ask? [*audience: “No!”, claps*]

This repetition indicates that the question “Is that too much to ask?” may well be a “scripted” utterance, which she specifically “built in” with the live performance in mind, as an opportunity to enter into a dialogue with her audience. However, this need not necessarily be the case with its very last occurrence, “Ladies, is that too much to ask?”, which altogether seems a more spontaneous exclamation, as does her earlier “Ladies, are you with me?”. The uncertain status of some of the poet’s utterances thus confirms Genette’s view of paratext as a kind of “undefined zone” between “text and off-text” (2). This liminal nature of paratext becomes even more obvious in live poetry, where the fluidity and flexibility of an audiotext in performance may render it even more difficult to discern any definite boundaries between “text” and “off-text”—a fact of which Kat Francois seems very much aware and which she underscores by performing her pieces by heart rather than “reading” them out.

Post-Performance Paratext: Q&A

After Francois’ performance the floor is opened to questions from the audience. Apart from the usual questions about writing habits and influences (“How did you begin with poetry?”, “Do you have a writing routine?”, “Are there times when you cannot write and what do you do?”, “Who are your favourite poets?” etc), a number of

questions are asked which relate to particular poems. For example, Francois dedicates a poem to her younger sister without providing any further background information at the time of its performance. It begins thus:

My sister's disobedient legs
 cement her to the ground.
 Her body does not obey her mind which
 flies freely, unencumbered by weak muscles
 struggling struggling struggling
 struggling to take a single step.

Later in the Q&A, an audience member asks, "What was it that happened to your sister?", prompting Francois to explain her sister's condition—muscular dystrophy—and how she deteriorated over the years, which sheds new light on some of the references in the poem. On a less personal note, Francois performs a poem which she introduces with the following words:

Statistics show that if you are black and you live in England you are treated differently. In fact, there was a report that came out the other day that said that you—as a black person, especially as a black male—are 27 times more likely to be arrested than a white male. . . . We have deaths in police custody, unfortunately, and you are more likely to die in police custody if you are black. And recently, there's been a few cases like that, and this was my concern, and my response.

The refrain of her piece is:

Does my anger scare you?
 Does my truth annoy and irritate you?
 Does the blackness of my skin make you feel uncomfortable
 because of the safety of the whiteness that you sit in?

During the Q&A, an audience member asks Francois whether she would perform the poem differently—or leave it out—with particular audiences, as it seems addressed exclusively to a white audience, to which she responds, "if it was a black audience I would still do the piece, but what would happen a lot of the time, the black audience would be like 'yes, I recognize that, mhm, amen?'" She then notes that "the only strange thing today was the fact that it wasn't a London audience," conceding that she does regard the poem as culturally specific:

During the 1980s, when we had the SUS law,⁵ which is something like, when you know any of Linton Kwesi Johnson's work, he wrote a lot about that so . . . people would maybe have uncles or their dads or their great uncles and

grandfathers may well have gone through that kind of stuff in the 1980s when it was quite prevalent back then. Yes, I specifically wrote that piece with a white audience in mind, 'cause there's a thing in London that if someone gets in trouble with the police they must have done something wrong. It must have been . . . you know it's like, for people in authority it can be very hard to accept that sometimes they don't always behave correctly.

In this stretch of paratext Kat Francois not only places the experience described in her poem in its cultural and historical context, she also establishes an intertextual link between her piece and the work of Linton Kwesi Johnson, another renowned black British poet (one of Johnson's most famous dub pieces "Sonny's Lettah," for instance, is a declared "Anti-Sus Poem," relating a young black man's experience of unprovoked police brutality and its tragic outcome). For her Vienna audience, Francois thus locates her work in a line of politically active black British poetry. The originator of this contextualization is, at least in part, the audience itself—whose question prompted that particular paratextual utterance.

In conclusion, the examples discussed have demonstrated the context-dependence of live performance: its emergence through spatially and temporally defined performer-audience relations. As a live poetry event constitutes a direct encounter of poet and audience, the poet's ad-lib, or paratext, may play a crucial role in performance in terms of its social and informational function. It permits a poet-performer to address the audience directly and to guide their reception. Conversely, through the live encounter the audience may have an opportunity to ask specific questions about the poet's work and consequently to influence the production of paratext and enter into a dialogue with the poet. Thus, paratext is a highly flexible device in live poetry and can be regarded as a central factor to account for the vastly different experience a live performance affords in comparison to a silent reading of a poetry book.

Notes

- 1 While the term "ad libitum" points to the improvised nature of these comments, they are often not as spontaneous and improvised as they may seem. Many performers will have set introductory phrases for certain poems which they use repeatedly.
- 2 Genette further distinguishes between "peritext"—a "spatial category" of elements to be found "within the same volume" (4), such as titles or a preface—and "epitext," which is "any paratextual element not materially appended to the text within the same volume but circulating, as it were, freely, in a virtually limitless physical and social space" (344), such as author interviews in newspapers. This paper shall not follow this distinction. While the general concept of paratext can be usefully applied to live poetry, the different paratextual elements of a live poetry event are not materially separable from each other in the same way as elements inside and

- outside of a book. This also goes to show the onesidedness of Genette's concept: its predication on print.
- 3 Published in Baraka's collection *Funk Lore* (72); the recording Sherwood analyses is published online at <http://journal.oraltradition.org/issues/21i/sherwood#audio1> (date of access: 16 Nov 2010).
 - 4 In an e-mail interview with the author, Joseph mentioned that "Aranguéz" is "a very autobiographical poem about my grandmother's relationship to my mother."
 - 5 A vagrancy law dating back to Victorian times which, up to the early 1980s, permitted the British police to stop, search, and even arrest people on mere suspicion, and which was used to criminalise ethnic minorities. See DiNovella for an interview with Linton Kwesi Johnson on his experiences with the "Sus law."

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