**Workshop with Joanna Orska, March 20, 2021, Akademie für Lyrikkritik**

2. Please write a short critical statement (1-1,5 pages) in which you take a part in the "**Kaputzenjackendebatte**" (started with the **Andrzej Franaszek's** article about young poetry) on classical vs. politically committed verse referring (also) to contemporary poetry in German. Please include **Maja Staśko's text** in your thinking (it is published in a poetry and criticism anthology of young politically committed verse in Poland).

The question asks us to take part in the “Kaputzenjackendebatte … on classical vs. politically committed verse,” and to include in this debate Maja Staśko's text. I am puzzled by the question. I do see that Andrzej Franaszek calls for a conservative type of poetry that you call “classical,” which has, however, many Romantic traits, such as the expression of authentic emotion, and the goal to incite those same emotions in the reader. With “classicism,” I associate the period known under this name in Germany, which did not anymore embrace subjective and emotional literature, but literature emulating Ancient Greek, in that sense classical, ideas, or making Ancient Greece its subject (such as Goethe’s play *Iphigenie*, or Schiller’s poem “Die Götter Griechenlands”). Franaszek’s idea of poetry combines Romantic and classical ideas with nationalism and anti-modernism and anti-intellectualism. It seems right-wing to me. But that does not make the view of poetry laid out by Staśko, or Maciejs Taranek, politically committed. This view seems to combine aspects of language poetry from the 1950s and 1960s, like the Wiener Schule (with the focus on grammar) with aspects of what is known as Postmodernism (with categories like “play” and “repetition”). In fact, Staśko's view of poetry also has Romantic aspects, by focusing on the process and play over the product (if we think of Early German Romanticism around Friedrich Schlegel). I am not sure what is political about either Staśko, or Maciej Taranek’s view of poetry, besides their resistance against the clearly conservative and nationalist view of Franaszek. Alas, their view of poetry, with their emphasis on play, repetition and simulation also seems to support Franaszek’s criticism that the poetry they envision is without materiality, despite claims to the contrary (Staśko claims that there is no binary – computer – language without language in the mouth (without providing an argument for that claim). I recognize an antagonism between the positions of Franaszek, in the one hand, and Maciej Taranek and Maja Staśko, on the other, that is not terribly productive.

Questions that I have, for instance, for Taranek and Staśko, include what they mean by “grammar,” when they embrace a poetry based on grammar, rather than an outdated poetics (Taranek). Both seem to use the term freely, if not metaphorically, without obvious connection to contemporary research about grammar. They seem to refer to sentence structures, but even of that, I cannot be sure. Staśko also seems to disregard the fact that different languages have different grammars, when she claims that the new media have created a “linguistically truly global web a living grammar, engagement in a common room, which can be created.” I was wondering, for instance, what the function of the reflexive pronoun is Polish as opposed to other languages. Taranek uses the reflexive pronoun (translated by Ricarda Feit as “sich”) a lot. I just happen to have read a children’s book to my 7-year-old son in which a Polish immigrant to Germany uses a lot of “sich” in his sentences, making verbs reflexive that are not reflexive in German. Does that mean that Polish has more, or other, reflexive verbs than German, and how would that impact his claims about poetry and grammar?

I am worried that the view of poetry embraced by Taranek and Staśko is an easy target for critics like Franaszek who calls for a poetry rooted in the nation and in reality, as it does not seem politically or socially engaged, interested in grammar play, without talking about linguistic differences across languages, or even social strata, regions,

How is Maciej Taranek’s poetry politically committed? By not being conservative? Does it talk about politics at all? Is language already political in itself. This lack of commitment becomes especially clear in the poem “coming out.” The term usually refers to people identifying as sexually queer, not heterosexual, which is still the norm around the world, and who “come out” to tell the world about their sexual orientation, often at a high personal cost. In some countries they still pay for such a coming out with their lives. According to the news media that I consume, homophobia is strong in Poland and in the current Polish government. Taranek’s poem describes a separation between body and gender. His lyrical speaker imagines how he/she/they imagine gender as a small street or alley along which he walks, and how the body can leave behind place (the street? Gender?). The poem seems to imagine the separability between gender and body. That might mean that any gender can reside in any body, but that is precisely not what a lot of queer people want to think. In particular trans people want to have a body that matches their felt gender. And many queer people want to live in harmony with their physical desires and their felt gender, no matter what that may be (Hirschfeld thought to be gay meant having a “third sex”). But I may have misunderstood. – Also: I do not call for the opposite kind of poetry that can be reduced to a political statement. There must be other ways, and the poems that we read by Mueller, for instance, escape, in my view, the binary between conservative, emotional, physically grounded poetry and grammar play, that I find in the positions by Taranek and Staśko, on the one hand, and Franaszek on the other. – But I am happy to be convinced otherwise!