

In recent years, poetry has cast off its image as an elitist form savoured in private by a niche readership to become increasingly recognised as an art of and in public spaces, addressing mass audiences in urban environments as well as on the world-wide web. These developments have gone hand in hand with an expansion of the forms and functions of poetry. The two lectures – on contemporary poetry in urban spaces and spoken word poetry performances respectively – will illuminate what it means for poetry to be performed or installed, to be read or heard, in public spaces. From Vienna's "Zettelpoet" Helmut Seethaler to poetry "bombings" in Berlin to anti-racist poetry performed in British football stadiums and feminist poetic interventions on the internet, the two lectures will interrogate the link between the poetics and politics of public poetics.

The Young Academy Distinguished Lecture Series brings cutting-edge scholarship to the public, presented by distinguished experts and members or recent alumni of the Young Academy. This twin set of lectures marks the intersection of two largescale international research projects on "Poetry in the Digital Age" and "Poetry Off the Page".

ORGANISER

Young Academy of the
Austrian Academy of Sciences

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REGISTRATION

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Young Academy Distinguished Lecture Series

Poetry / Publics / Politics

The Uses of Poetry in Public Spaces

Claudia Benthien

University of Hamburg

Julia Lajta-Novak

University of Vienna & Alumna of the Young Academy, OeAW



November 3, 2025
Start: 5:00 p.m. CET

Austrian Academy of Sciences
Sitzungssaal
Dr. Ignaz Seipel-Platz 2
1010 Vienna



[Claudia Benthien](#) is Professor for German literature at the University of Hamburg. Among other grants, she has held visiting fellowships at New York University; Internationales Forschungszentrum Kulturwissenschaften, Vienna; Maison des sciences de l'homme, Paris; Herzog August Library, Wolfenbüttel; and The Warburg Institute, London. She was a visiting professor at Rutgers University, New Brunswick; The University of Washington, Seattle; The University of California, Berkeley; and Emory University, Atlanta. Claudia Benthien has received third-party funding for numerous research projects. Presently she is the principal investigator of Poetry in the Digital Age, funded through an ERC Advanced Grant. Her five monographs to date include *Skin: On the Cultural Border between Self and the World* (Columbia UP, 2002), *The Literariness of Media Art* (co-authored; Routledge, 2019), and *Public Poetry. Lyrik im urbanen Raum* [Public Poetry. The Lyric in Urban Space] (co-authored; De Gruyter, 2023).



[Julia Lajta-Novak](#) is Associate Professor for Anglophone literature and mediality at the University of Vienna and a published poet. She has been a research fellow at the University of Salzburg, where she was awarded the university's Prize for Excellence in Teaching, and a visiting fellow at the IES, University of London; King's College University of London; and the English Faculty, University of Oxford. In 2020 she was awarded the START Prize of the Austrian Science Fund FWF as well as an ERC Consolidator Grant for her latest project "Poetry Off the Page: Literary History and the Spoken Word, 1965-2020", in which she develops the work begun in her monograph *Live Poetry: An Integrated Approach to Poetry in Performance* (Rodopi, 2011). She was elected to the Young Academy of the Austrian Academy of Sciences in 2017. Since 2025 she has been a member of the alumni association of the Young Academy.

Programme

5:00 PM

Welcome Address

5:05 PM

Distinguished Lectures

[Claudia Benthien](#)

[Contemporary Poetry in Urban Spaces](#)

This talk will be dedicated to current poetry projects in urban spaces. It will examine the aesthetics and socio-poetic practices of very different works, such as a large-scale poetry festival in Miami, a LED treadmill in Cologne, billboard poems in London, or light projections on a museum façade in Bilbao. Public poetry can be "site-specific" in more than one way: in its thematic connection to specific urban spaces and through its foregrounding of situated acts of aesthetic perception. The immediate address in the here and now is particularly significant because it may both surprise and unsettle. Poetry in urban spaces relies on the disruptive element of poetic language – in contrast to texts such as advertisements or signage. As disruption, it may be directed against neoliberal urban policies and gentrification. However, poetry can also be utilised to create a peaceful atmosphere or to beautify "problematic" neighbourhoods.

6:00 PM

Panel Discussion, followed by Q&A

The discussion will be moderated by [Anne Sophie Meincke](#), Elise Richter Research Fellow in Philosophy at the University of Vienna, member of the Young Academy and practicing slam poet.

6:20 PM

Reception

[Julia Lajta-Novak](#)

[Autobiographical Spoken Word Poetry: Private Poems, Public Action](#)

In the 21st century, we often encounter poetry not in books but as spoken word: on the radio, at public ceremonies, festivals, open mics and poetry slams, or on social media. Events such as Amanda Gorman's much-noted performance at Joe Biden's presidential inauguration in 2021 demonstrate that poetry has very much become an art of the voice again. Paradoxically, spoken word poetry has the image of being both intensely personal, revealing the poet's innermost thoughts and experiences, and fiercely political, aligning itself with movements for gender equality, racial equality, and climate activism, for instance. This lecture interrogates the ways in which spoken word poets effectively embrace a politics of public self-presentation that connects their lived experience to larger socio-political issues.