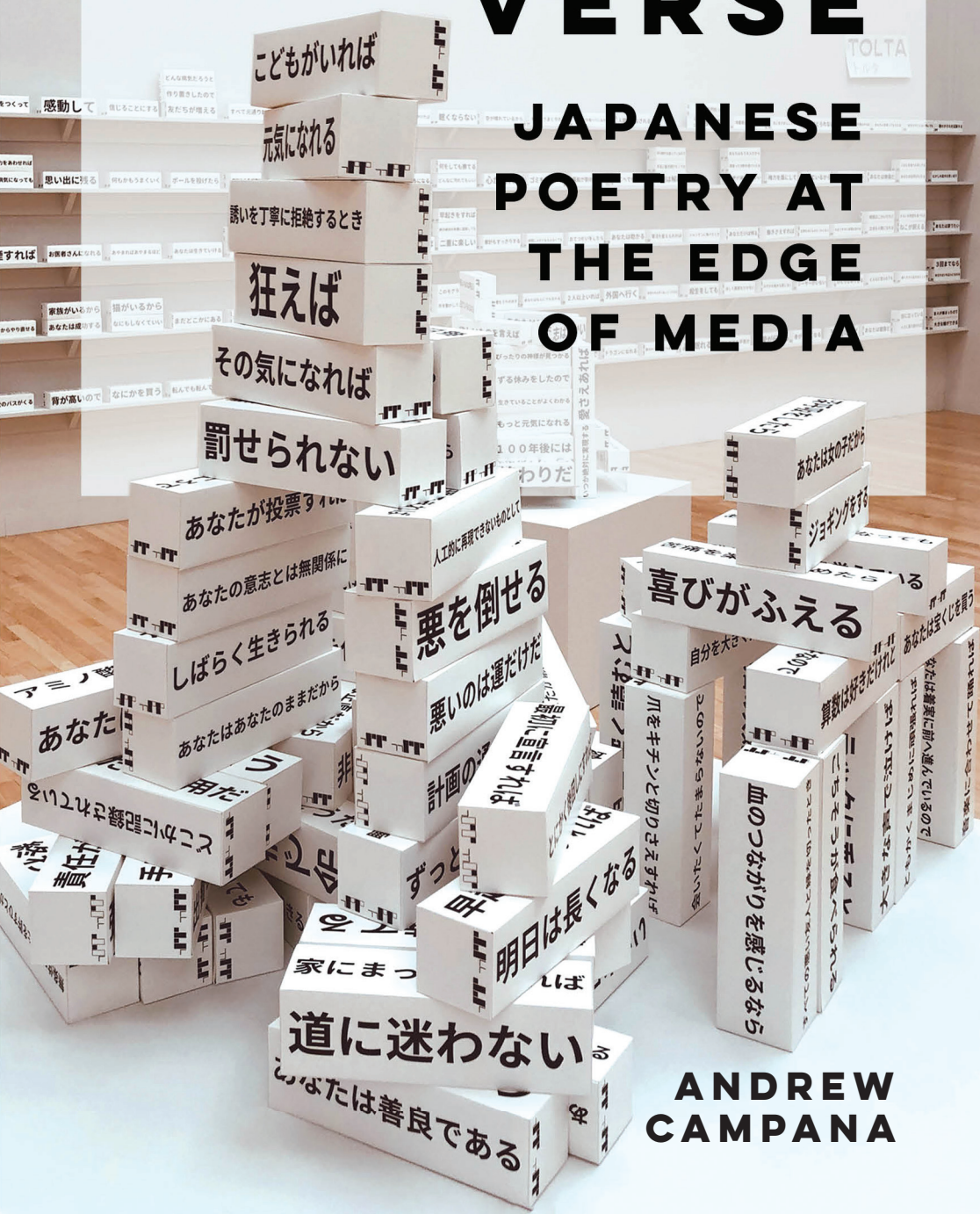


# EXPANDING VERSE

## JAPANESE POETRY AT THE EDGE OF MEDIA



ANDREW  
CAMPANA

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# Expanding Verse

*Japanese Poetry at the Edge of Media*

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Andrew Campana



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*For my parents, John and Sujata, with all my love*





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In Tokyo, almost ten years ago, I was waiting on a station platform for a late-night subway to arrive. An obviously tipsy couple struck up a conversation with me, asking what I was doing in Japan. I said I was doing academic research; they asked what about, and I said modern Japanese poetry. After a pause, one of them spoke up. “That is so *boring*,” she cried. “You are a *boring person*.”

While I won’t argue with the latter sentiment, I don’t think she was right about poetry. Such feelings are not uncommon, though, in Japan or elsewhere—poetry is often associated with memorizing “correct” interpretations of language that ranges from the archaic to the arcane in middle school and high school literature classes. The popular imaginary of poetry, especially modern poetry, is of something cut off from the world and from other media, concerned only with itself. But I hope that this book might be at least a bit successful in showing how unborring modern Japanese poetry can be, and not just in terms of how many forms it can take, or how many types of people become poets, or how wild or weird or exciting some examples of it have been. Most of all, I want to show how much it can matter not just to be able to express something in a different way, but to *make expression itself into something different*.

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# Introduction

A cinematic script that could not possibly be filmed; a set of voices, chopped up and multiplied on a tape recorder; a declaration in front of a train station by an activist with cerebral palsy; a pop song about menstruation performed on live TV by a woman wearing giant dragonfly wings; hundreds of augmented reality roses floating above the streets of Tokyo. All of these were called poems by their creators at different points over the last hundred years in Japan. They were, however, at the margins of conventional poetic practice. The majority were not even considered to be poetry by the literary establishment of their time; they were largely ignored, regarded as minor works or even dismissed as frivolous. Yet these poets made radical interventions not just in literature but also in the media cultures of each era. Their works existed at the outer edges of both poetry making and media making, and they used this position to rethink the possibilities of each.

*Expanding Verse* explores the role of experimental poetic practice in Japan from the 1920s to the present, focusing on key moments of media transition. In it, I argue that experimental poetry did not just engage with different forms of media, but was a primary mode of thinking about and creating media *otherwise*, in opposition to dominant modes of composition and reception. Sometimes this meant experimenting with forms of media more traditionally associated with the literary: the book, the journal, the page, the typeface. Sometimes this meant manipulating media technologies, newly emerging or at crucial points of inflection: film, tape recording, pop music albums, online video, smartphone apps. But all of these were different paths toward a more fundamental goal: using poetry not just to evoke but to *create* new ways of being and experiencing the world that pushed up against dominant media ideologies, technologies, and practices. Poetry became an

alternative to systems of media that threatened to control, capture, and set limits on bodies and voices. Poetry, in other words, was not just a subcategory of literature but a site in which poets in Japan attempted to remake the relationship between media, language, technology, and the body.

The poets in this book were silent film actresses, socialites, composers, bloggers, disability activists, feminist self-help authors, and pop stars, all of whom aimed to create new forms of writing across different media and modes of embodiment, resulting in works that continue to resonate today. Their poems took the form not just of printed text but of films, audio recordings, visual art, magazine spreads, collages, photographs, performances, protests, and staged events; they were written on concrete, vibrated through the air, and were assembled from ink, paper, light, voices, bodies, and reels of magnetic tape. Poetry in print, of course, played a key role—it continues to be the dominant form of poetry in Japan and will remain a central concern in this book. But what happens when we treat “other” poetic practices like those described above *not* as exceptional or one-off experiments but instead as key to how we think about poetry? Literature is largely conflated with certain forms of print media, and poetry, especially modern poetry, is often simply treated as a category within that medium. Poetry is, in fact, often held up as the paragon of literary expression, untainted by the concerns of capital, technology, and popular media: backward looking, bound to strict tradition, unpopular among the masses, mostly found in (text)books, journals, and, perhaps, live readings at coffee shops. But what if poetry is not just a short type of literature littered with line breaks but is instead something that always exists at the edges of media, a mode of media practice? What happens when we understand poetry not as a medium or a submedium but rather as something that comes into being when the borders of media are expanded, transgressed, and reconfigured?

Modern Japanese poetry is strikingly underresearched and undertaught in both English- and Japanese-language academia when compared to fiction, art, and film. Yet poetry, historically, does what other forms of expression do *not*, almost as a *modus operandi*. Due to its tendency to be at the forefront of literary experimentation and its relative economy of form, poetry has a special capacity to be incorporated more agilely and intensely into a variety of media and social formations. It is not only particularly open to changes in media technology but can also change how we think about and use those media. Criticism and histories of modern Japanese literature, however, if they include poetry at all, rarely touch upon these capacities, and they almost exclusively privilege a certain narrow subsection of poetic works. There is a conventional history based completely on poetry in print in certain venues: poems that were published in a handful of esteemed literary journals and then gathered into books, despite the vast array of other forms of poetry that flourished throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. But to focus in *Expanding Verse* on these “other forms”—treating poetic experiments across media as central and not just fringe phenomena—is to foreground an

expanded approach to poetic composition where not just words but embodiment and sensation itself could be rethought. Bodies, viewpoints, and voices that were historically excluded or rendered invisible could, through poetic experiment, be made central. The common narrative of new media forms and technologies influencing poetry—"opening it up" to new modes of expression—obfuscates the perhaps more crucial practice of poets trying to make media itself anew. Over and over, poetic practice was used as a way to think each medium *otherwise*, and to find new possibilities at media's edge.

#### WHAT ELSE WAS POETRY?

The vast majority of the works in this volume were called *shi* by their creators, a Japanese term that now usually refers to modern poetry written in free verse. Japan's twentieth century saw the rapid proliferation and transformation of this modern free verse poetry as an alternative to older fixed poetic practices such as *waka* (referring to a variety of forms, especially what were later called *tanka*) and haiku, the former dominant since at least the early eighth century, the latter gaining purchase starting in the seventeenth century. It was also distinguished from *kanshi*, "Chinese-language" poems written by poets in Japan, the most common association with the term *shi* before it became firmly attached to modern free verse.<sup>1</sup> Free verse poetry in Japanese is generally accepted to begin with the publication of *A Collection of New-Style Poems* (*Shintaishishō*) in 1882, a group effort by three scholars—the sociologist Toyama Masakazu, the botanist Yatabe Ryōkichi, and the philosopher Inoue Tetsujirō—that consisted largely of translations of English poems by figures such as Shakespeare, Tennyson, and Longfellow, as well as five original free verse works in Japanese. The general consensus on this compilation is that, although it inspired many younger poets, it was more impactful than successful.<sup>2</sup> As Lucy Lower notes, despite even the anticipation of intense criticism of this new type of poetry—with the three scholars expecting the anthology to be called "freakish and vulgar" by the general public—it was met with "derision beyond the compilers' wildest fears."<sup>3</sup>

Yet this rough start was certainly not the end of the free verse poem. Over the course of the next three decades, the "new-style poem" (*shintaiishi*) rapidly grew in popularity and acceptance and loosened its remaining strictures, eventually becoming referred to as just the "poem" (*shi*). If we were to continue this conventional history of modern Japanese poetry (*kindaishi* and *gendaishi*), we would usually then point to the publication of the first highly recognized and lauded free verse collections written in literary Japanese, such as Shimazaki Tōson's *A Collection of Young Herbs* (*Wakanashū*) in 1897, followed by the first major works written in colloquial Japanese such as Kawaji Ryūkō's *Flowers of the Roadside* (*Robō no hana*) in 1910 and Hagiwara Sakutarō's *Howling at the Moon* (*Tsuki ni hoeru*) in 1917.<sup>4</sup> Accounts usually then turn to the highly compressed introduction of a variety of

avant-garde movements in poetry to Japan: the 1920s and 1930s saw the proliferation of Futurist, Dada, and Surrealist as well as proletarian poetry, with the innumerable poetry journals of the era publishing experimental poems translated from European languages alongside original Japanese-language works. Like earlier free verse poems in Japanese, these modernist poems often continued to be unfairly characterized—even at the time, and even within Japan itself—as merely Japanese “imitations” of Western poetry, a reputation of unoriginality that has hindered the study of modern Japanese poetry in both English- and Japanese-language scholarship ever since. World War II is usually portrayed as a major turning point, during which the vast majority of prominent publishing poets either stopped writing or wrote propagandistic poetry supporting the Japanese empire. After Japan’s defeat and subsequent occupation, the story usually goes, came a resurgence in poetry’s popularity and the establishment of an enormous number of new journals, associations, and awards in the 1950s; the rise of a second avant-garde in the 1960s and of performance poetry in the 1970s; a “women’s poetry boom” in the 1980s; a wave of young and disillusioned poets in Japan’s “lost decades” of the 1990s and 2000s; and a turn to more grounded, activist, and environmentally conscious work in the 2010s in the wake of the triple disasters in northeastern Japan on March 11, 2011.

The comprehensive histories and surveys of modern Japanese poetry that are out there—a very small handful in English, many in Japanese—tend to have a structure that matches this general framework. While they differ in the specific poets favored by the author or editor, each usually consists of chapters or sections ordered chronologically and dedicated to different literary movements within poetry (e.g., Romanticism, Futurism, naturalism, lyricism, “women’s poetry”), with an account of the main journals and poets associated with each, followed by a few examples of famous works. This kind of format allows for a wide range of poets to be presented and makes perfect sense considering the scope of the task at hand. It is undeniable, after all, that the majority of well-known modern Japanese poems were published in a select few prominent journals, or in certain poets’ individual poetry collections, though the latter only tended to be published by the most famous (or wealthy) poets. This remains a useful heuristic when the aim is to give a broad sense of what kind of poetry was being read and talked about most widely in each era.

This kind of approach, however, structurally elides poetry that was not published in prominent journals or by prominent poets, works that did not fall neatly under existing movements, and works that were not in print, or where printed text was just one element among many. There is another crucial story not represented here, one at the center of this book: of poetry intimately engaged with multiple media beyond printed literature, and, by virtue of this, being powerfully connected to artistic and social practices that extend far beyond the page. This is a phenomenon that cannot, of course, be completely contained to the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, though this is the time period focused upon in this



volume. Asserting that poetry is something that inherently exists across and in engagement with multiple forms of media is, of course, old news to any aficionado of ancient, classical, medieval, or early modern Japanese poetry—including *waka*, *renga*, *chōka*, *haikai* (now called *haiku*), *bussokusekika*, and *shi* (in the older sense of poems written solely in “Chinese”). The distinction between “poem” and “song” (*uta*), for example, was never a given, and it was drawn differently in different eras. For much of the history of Japanese poetry, poems were composed to be chanted or sung, often with instrumental accompaniment, and were woven into ceremonial and theatrical performances; they were thus not solely a textual, but first and foremost a musical and oral, practice.<sup>5</sup> There was also no such thing as a “neutral” written form: written poetry was inextricable from calligraphy, embodiment (and the gendering of different forms of writing), the choice of characters (particularly significant before the standardization of written Japanese), the opacity and viscosity of ink, and the patterns and textures of paper, and it was often accompanied by all manner of illustration.<sup>6</sup> Poems were also a part of material culture—they were inscribed, painted, and carved onto scrolls, folding screens, fans, cups, vases, swords, statues, and landscape models.<sup>7</sup> Poets were attentive to entanglements of word, form, material, sound, image, and memory in a way that often centered their embodiment: embedded within their works are implicit and explicit reflections on processes of composition in the head, through the hand, before the eyes, on the tongue, and by the ear.

Again: pointing out the inherent intermediality of premodern Japanese poetry is to state something obvious. Yet a similar assertion for *modern* Japanese poetry is harder to come by. There are several reasons for this. One is a shift in the dominant ways poetry came to be composed and consumed in the Meiji era (the commonly accepted beginning of the “modern,” after the Tokugawa period’s “early modern”). The creation of free verse “new-style poetry” mentioned earlier is inextricable from the context of Meiji print culture, in which poems and other literary works came to be published with moveable type in books and the newer media of journals and newspapers.<sup>8</sup> These often had limited or no illustration, and less emphasis was placed on complex visual elements (specialized paper, unusual character choices, unique handwriting, different inks, and so on) compared to early modern and premodern works. This might be called a “printification” of poetry, deemphasizing its visual, embodied, and handwritten aspects, as well as its connection to nonprint media. This also applies to sound: as Maeda Ai argues, the uniformity of modern print lent itself to silent reading at great speed, with “the sound of the voice thus naturally disappear[ing]”; he notes how poets must “rely on devices” like lineation or the extensive use of kana syllabaries in order to preserve a sense of voice in print.<sup>9</sup> Another reason for the suppression of the intermediality of modern Japanese poetry is the conventional understanding in both Japan and elsewhere of modern Japanese free verse as an imported “Western” mode, actively unmoored from “traditional” Japanese poetic forms of centuries

past. This becomes recapitulated in much writing about modern Japanese poetry, which focuses on the texts alone and deemphasizes their connection both to other media and to older poetic forms and artistic practices.

In other words, while there were certainly changes happening to how poetry was composed and circulated at the beginning of the modern era—which led to much poetry becoming less spectacularly intermedial than it was before—this often becomes conflated as the story of the entirety of modern Japanese poetry. There were, of course, vast amounts of poetic work that did not fit this schema and were actively engaged with embodiment, orality, musicality, visuality, and multiple media forms, continuing throughout the Meiji era and into the present.<sup>10</sup> But these were deemphasized in the construction of the category of “modern Japanese poetry,” within which poetry was rebound to print culture alone. In their task to draw the contours of modern Japanese poetry, many scholars, critics, and editors have consistently focused solely on printed poetry anthologies, certain journals, and sole-authored collections, excluding works in engagement with other media that do not easily fit, or reprinting and reframing them so they did.

The aim of this book is not to step in and “expand” modern and contemporary Japanese poetry to include lesser-known works and works in “other media,” but rather to use these to recenter poetry’s always-present capacity to expand past fossilizing norms of mediation, and to bring that capacity to other forms of practice. I thus do not want to give the impression that the largely twentieth-century poetic works under consideration represent an entirely new relationship of poetry to media, categorically different from everything that came before it. This is not an argument about the “evolution” of poetry, a rupture, or a total shift. Rather, in choosing a handful of extraordinarily vivid modern and contemporary poetic works that spectacularized their status at the edge of media, I want to foreground poetry’s intense engagement with media and mediation writ large: the complex and often fraught relationship it has always had to embodiment, orality, visuality, and technology.

In order to do so, the question of what “poetry” is or was thus cannot be limited only to examples of what happened to be typeset texts in certain venues without bracketing out a vast amount of significant poetic practice. The works that did not take the form of print, or were relegated to obscure corners of the amateur publishing world, were often the most powerfully experimental and held major importance to those communities marginalized from mainstream literary spheres. Alongside the narrative at the beginning of this section, Japan’s long twentieth century also offers us a particularly striking example of the significance of thinking of poetry *across, in relation to, and as a site of critique of media*, which will be the focus of this book. Extraordinarily compressed changes in poetic form and language occurred concurrently with vast social, political, and technological transformations—including developments in media technology—over the course of the century. These factors make “modern Japanese poetry” a particularly rich lens through which to

consider the shifting and entangled relationship of media technology, conceptions of the body, and artistic expression, and one that is not captured by the conventional account of its literary history sketched out above. Poetry can be all too easily flattened out by considering it only to be a subcategory of a printed medium called “literature”; indeed, this formulation misrepresents the capaciousness of literary practice as well. “Literature is more than just texts or just words on a page, more than printed books or manuscripts,” as Ingo Berensmeyer puts it. “It comes in many different material—and sometimes apparently immaterial—forms, different sensory environments, and transient media configurations.”<sup>11</sup>

By focusing on poetic works in an emphatically broad sense—looking at poems in journals and books, but also on film, on tape, in performance, in galleries, on websites, and created by those not conventionally deemed poets—I hope to present an alternative exploration of modern Japanese poetry that is in conversation with disciplines and movements in relation to which it is rarely discussed. Literary studies’ privileging of works of printed fiction means that most investigations of literature’s relation to media focus largely on questions of adaptation and book history. Media studies, on the other hand, still has an overwhelming focus on visual media, especially screen media. This occurs to the extent that literary works are rarely considered “media objects” in the same way as films, television programs, and installation art pieces, leaving them out of most conversations in the field. In expanding the scope of poetry under consideration in this book beyond what are conventionally considered literary works, I do not wish to dilute or diminish literature’s role within a broader network of media practices, but the opposite: I aim to highlight the forces of literariness even in places we are not conditioned to look for them. As the poet and literary critic Kitagawa Tōru argues, “poetic media” (*shiteki media*) is not just the constellation of print genres associated with poetry—“poems, poetic theory, or poetry criticism”—but is any type of work that follows “the vision called poetry” (*shi to iu vijn*); “poetry,” he argues, “never simply indicated only the entity called a ‘poem.’”<sup>12</sup> Along these lines, throughout this book I emphasize the diversity of encounters between “poetry” and “media”: not poetry as a medium, but the poetic as a literary mode, stance, or approach to composition and sensation that allows media to be rewritten. For more concrete examples of what these encounters might look like, let us turn to what will be covered in each of the chapters of this book.

#### THE CHAPTERS OF *EXPANDING VERSE*

This book does not aim to be a comprehensive history, but rather focuses on specific experimental poetic practices at moments of media transition and social change, when the fossilized norms of media and embodiment came into question. At each of these moments we find radical hybrid poetic forms—like the cine-poem, the tape recorder poem, the protest performance poem, the music video

poem, the internet sign language poem, and the augmented reality poem—at the edges of literature and media alike. These will form the focus of each of the five chapters of this volume, in which I combine methods from literary, media, and disability studies to attempt to do justice to these poetic interventions into normative modes of reading, writing, sensing, and being. This approach has necessitated an enormously diverse range of topics, eras, and foci. At its core, each chapter has its own time period; its own particular medium or grouping of media; and its own central type of embodiment and sensation (vision, sound, movement, bodily functions, and a sense of place respectively). Each chapter also has a different structure depending on what best fit its subject matter, the first focusing on a wide range of poets, the second on just one poem, the third on one poet, and the fourth and fifth each comparing two poets. In juxtaposing this broad range of works from over the course of about a hundred years, I hope to foreground recurrent aspects of what poetry's approach to media can *do*, inflected differently in each era but instructive in the concerns, strategies, and ethos they share.

Chapter 1 looks at poems that rethought the medium of cinema, a phenomenon that flourished in Japan in the 1920s and 1930s more than anywhere else in the world. These poems—some called “film-poems” (*eigashi*), others “cinemoems” (*shinemoemu*)—often took the form of musings on Western film stars, or experimental short scenarios for films that did not, or could not, exist. They peaked in popularity just as “talkie films” threatened to forever change the medium into something far more homogeneous and less experimental than what came before. In the face of rapidly fossilizing norms of filmic production, poets created new kinds of film through their poetry, films that needed neither camera nor screen. They did this to reimagine the possibilities of cinema beyond its technological capabilities, market pressures, and social norms—questioning the primacy of vision to the medium, centering the relationship between cinema and the body, and challenging the gendered limitations of who was allowed to be a filmmaker at a time in which no woman in Japan had yet directed a feature-length film.

Moving to the period after World War II and the wake of the Allied occupation of Japan, chapter 2 is a deep dive into a “Poem for Tape Recorder” (“Tēpu rekōdā no tame no shi”). Composed by Akiyama Kuniharu in 1953, this work prefigures by almost a decade the better-known experimental “intermedia” practices of the 1960s. His tape recorder poems were the world's first of their kind, using newly invented recording technology not yet accessible to the general public in order to manipulate and recompose the voices speaking the poetic text. Their audio, however, is now lost, and just one of these poems exists in the form of a thirty-page script/score—provided to me by the world-renowned experimental concert pianist Aki Takahashi, the late Akiyama's wife—which will be extensively analyzed here for the first time. Produced at a time of major political and social transition, these tape recorder poems were first performed in a concert hall housed in the same building that had housed the occupation headquarters just

two years earlier. Yet poetry readings were at this point closely associated with the Japanese empire's propaganda—live reading events and radio broadcasts during the war. Akiyama's tape recorder poems not only challenged this association, but they also used poetry as a way to reshape and reclaim the voice as raw sonic material that could be endlessly remade into new types of expression through cutting-edge media technologies.

Chapter 3 centers poetry's relationship to nonnormative embodiment and sensation by exploring the work of Yokota Hiroshi, a poet with cerebral palsy who was a leader in Japan's disability rights movement from the 1960s to the 2010s. He is best known for being the main subject of Hara Kazuo's controversial 1972 documentary *Goodbye CP* (*Sayōnara CP*), yet his poetic work is rarely discussed, with this chapter (and its earlier article form) serving as the first introduction to it in English. Like in much of the world, Japan's 1970s saw the emergence of disability movements that aimed to challenge the inaccessibility and cruelty of a society made by and for nondisabled people. At and leading up to this time, Yokota published multiple books about the ideologies that justified killing disabled people, the construction of disabled society and culture, as well as several books of poetry. In his poems, as well as his poetic performances in *Goodbye CP*, he aimed not only to shed light on the oppression and dehumanization of disabled people, but also to rethink dominant conceptions of embodiment and "able-bodiedness" promulgated by mass media and mediation.

Moving to the 1980s, chapter 4 focuses on gender and the realm of pop culture, and how two poets used popular media forms to create feminist poetry about the body. The two core figures in this section are poet/performers who were also public media figures: one poetry superstar, Itō Hiromi, and one alternative pop star and poet, Togawa Jun. Rejecting the limitations of the "women's poetry" movement and the trend of pop "idols" dominating the music charts respectively, each created a kind of feminist poetic practice centered around a shocking and unconventional portrayal of bodies and mental illness, with graphic depictions of menstruation, sex, and pregnancy. Above all, they used popular media forms like music videos, television appearances, magazines, photo books, and self-help guides as tools for radical poetic expression and critique, using poetry to reimagine "women's media" against the stylized and hyperfeminine norms leading into Japan's economic bubble era.

Finally, chapter 5 explores two forms of internet poetry in Japan in the 2000s and 2010s: augmented reality (AR) poetry (*AR-shi*), in which poetic texts and images float in the air when looking through one's smartphone at specific locations, and Japanese Sign Language poetry (*Nihon shuwa shi*), a form of literature that cohered in the age of online video sharing. Drawing from disability media studies, I explore how poets used these forms to challenge digital media's prevalent ideology of perfect communication and access. The feminist poet and artist ni\_ka did so by using AR apps in a way that made their utility completely break down,

creating poems that made screens unusable in order to express the impossibility of mourning after the triple disaster in northeastern Japan in March 2011, aiming to draw attention to the culpability of Tokyo-based power structures in the disasters and their aftermath. Tanada Shigeru, a Deaf activist and Japanese Sign Language poet, created Deaf spaces on an internet made by and for the hearing, with poems that highlighted the inadequacies and frustrations of media technologies that assume “able-bodiedness” and recreate audist, anti-Deaf ideologies. Both of these poets have in common a desire not just to use the internet to share their work, but to rethink the platforms from which they had been excluded, including “literature” itself.

“WELL, LET’S JUST CALL IT POETRY, SHALL WE?”

So, if all of these works are poems, then what even is poetry? The questions of “what is a poem” or “what is poetry”—as well as, in this case, “what is *shi*” or “*shi to wa nani ka*”—have been written about extensively by poets, critics, and philosophers both inside and outside of Japan. These definitional questions are seemingly even more pertinent in a project such as this one, where even some of the base assumptions of the “poem”—that it is, say, a written text, or that it is a work of language art—do not always hold in the face of works declared to be poems by their creators that may not fall under any of those categories. As a way into *Expanding Verse*’s approach to these questions, I wish to turn to a recent book by Yoshimasu Gōzō (1939–), titled—conveniently enough for our purposes—*What Is Poetry?* (*Shi to wa nani ka*). Yoshimasu, while not one of the figures focused on in this volume, embodies its viewpoint like few others. He has been one of Japan’s best-known poets for nearly six decades, and his poetic work across media refuses easy categorization, ranging from electrifying live performances (as one of the early pioneers of performance poetry in the 1960s), poetry collections encased in metal sculptures, short poem-films he calls gozoCine, and thousands of startling handwritten manuscript pages where tiny lines of poetic text in tens of colors intertwine across the page like tapestry threads.<sup>13</sup>

*What Is Poetry?*, published in 2021, is a tour-de-force exploration of the titular question and Yoshimasu’s views on poetics, which resonate strongly with this book’s central approach. For him, poetry is expression made otherwise—“delayed” (*oso*i), “warped” (*magatta*), “distorted” (*yuganda*)—but not just for the sake of doing so. There is a dominant idea, he says, that “expression can only be achieved through ‘well-worn’ words that are already in circulation and used by everyone,” but he argues that poetry has a unique ability to create new kinds of expression and communication, capturing “that which has not yet taken a proper shape, or that is still in the process of taking some kind of ‘form,’ as ugly as it may be.”<sup>14</sup> He locates poetry at the edges of conventional modes of expression, as well as underneath, on the other side of, and hidden within them: it is the “reverberations

of the world below the surface of a sheet of paper.”<sup>15</sup> Crucially, poetry also inherently exists across media: it is the thing that “leaks out” (*moreeru*) of conventional expression, and it is precisely within that leakage that “pathways might suddenly appear that can reach towards music, art, or even thought itself,” often beginning with language but impossible to contain within it or conflate with it.<sup>16</sup> For this reason, he says, any discussion of what “poetry” is cannot limit itself to things that are conventionally considered “poetry” alone, or even only to writing: we must “go beyond written works to look deeper into ‘poetry’s’ essential touch within broader artistic expression more generally,” and in doing so take care to not overemphasize “dead specimens,” in other words, poems printed on paper that are deemed “finished works.”<sup>17</sup>

Over the course of the book, he gives an astonishingly diverse range of examples of this expansive approach to poetry. He points to Emily Dickinson’s dashes that startlingly break up her verse, and to the expressive force of her handwriting; to the modernist poet Nakahara Chūya’s theory that to make poetry was to “make wrinkles” (*shiwa o tsukuru koto*); to the postwar poet and critic Yoshimoto Takaki’s assertion that “poetry is expression gone wrong” (*shi wa machigatta hyōgen nano da*); to the poet, novelist and environmental activist Ishimure Michiko’s childhood stories about her blind and mad grandmother, “O-Moka-sama”; to the distorted temporality of the work of the eighth-century Tang dynasty poet Li Bai; to the films of his friend Jonas Mekas, Francis Bacon’s paintings, Jimi Hendrix’s use of noise, and Dylan Thomas’s “muddled voice” in his poetry readings.<sup>18</sup> Poetry for Yoshimasu is also something inextricable from the body. He uses Yoshimoto’s idea of “visceral language” (*naizō gengo*) to link together Ishimure’s grandmother’s feeling of speaking from a “sea inside her body,” Dylan Thomas’s vocal texture that made his body palpable in his poems, and Yoshimasu’s own poetry readings in which he searches for “some kind of deep ‘voice’ that comes from within [his] own body, at internal organ-level.”<sup>19</sup>

He ends by pushing back against systematic definitions or theorizations of poetry—ones that would pin it down and neatly inscribe its boundaries—saying we must get away from limiting ourselves to “poetry-y poetry” (*shi-rashii shi*) or making declarations like “This is poetry!” (*Kore ga shi da!*). Instead of this declarative stance, he proposes something much more open, flexible, and subtle—not “This is poetry!,” but “Well, let’s just call it poetry, shall we?” (*Maa, shi to itte oite ii kana?*).<sup>20</sup> This is not to say that the definitional question of “What is poetry?” is already a lost cause, but that it must be recast to do justice to these materials and to constitute a useful frame of analysis. Throughout *Expanding Verse*, then, this question emerges in a handful of other forms: What definition of poetry is being used by this practitioner? What did it mean to create a “poem” in or about the medium at hand? How did poetry-as-thought differ from dominant theorizations of media and the body at the time? Why did these poets call their creations poems, and what work was the term doing for them?



The approach of this volume, however, is not to take up certain works of media and deem them “poems” solely based on my own judgment, or even—like Yoshimasu—to identify a kind of poetic impulse that runs through a range of expressive practice, regardless of medium, and to call that “poetry.” Without exception, every work that will be analyzed was at some point *explicitly* called a “poem” (*shi* or *poemu*) by its creator. It has been crucial for the aims of this book to take someone at their word when they identify themselves as a poet, and their creations as poetry. In other words, rather than starting off in a place of skepticism—about whether a given figure was “really” a poet, for example, or if what they created was “really” poetry—I instead use this act of naming something as a “poem” as an entryway into how a poet understood the nature and stakes of their practice. Munechika Shin’ichirō argues in his “transmedia poetics” (*toransu media no shigaku*) that “the more acute the contingent nature of choosing poetry amidst the multiplicity of media becomes, the more the givenness of poetry [*shi no jimeisei*] fades away before our eyes.”<sup>21</sup> Yet it is precisely when that happens—when “poetry” is still chosen by name, even as its self-evident characteristics come into question—that the potential of poetry as a capacious approach to thinking media otherwise becomes clear. Poetry, says Munechika, becomes able to “harbor all other dominant media within itself as contradictions” (*igai no subete no yūsei media o hairi toshite haramiuru*), exposing not just its own contingent nature but that of all media.<sup>22</sup>

Like the poets highlighted in this book, I thus continue to insist on the word “poetry.” By doing so, I aim to center a kind of chiasmus: what the “literary” might offer to the study of media, and what “media” might bring to the study of literature. This does not, however, necessarily imply a symmetrical two-way relationship. Part of poetry’s potential lies in how vivid it can make *asymmetries*—of representation, of mediation, of power—in its commitment to “to come from wrinkles,” in Nakahara Chūya’s words, or to “Tell all the Truth but tell it slant,” in Emily Dickinson’s.<sup>23</sup> “Literature’s relation to media,” writes David Trotter, “has often most instructively been a relation to the relation established, at a given historical moment, by the unceasing rivalry between media technologies and institutions.”<sup>24</sup> It is onto this “relation to the relation” that a focus on poetry gives us a particularly powerful lens. Poetry in each era under consideration took on the task not just of capturing but creating shifts in the relations—and the relations to the relations—between expression, sensation, and imagination, as crystallized in media.

#### THINKING POETRY FROM THE MARGINS

“Poetry is always an act of crossing over a border into an unknown world” (*shi wa tsune ni michi no sekai ni mukete no ekkyō kōi de aru*), wrote Oda Kyūrō.<sup>25</sup> The critic Shimaoka Shin expanded upon this statement, arguing that poetry’s border-crossing nature means that to do justice to it as a critic, “it may be necessary to return to a past that might seem anachronistic”—to not be “submissive to what

our predecessors have decided” and to acknowledge that just because a work or poet “was highly regarded in a certain historical stream at a certain time” does not make that into an absolute.<sup>26</sup> The reverse is also true—that is, just because a work was *not* regarded as important or even regarded at all in its time by the poetry establishment does not mean it is not worth considering.

Along these lines, this book’s task of centering crucial capacities of poetic practice in relation to media and embodiment has meant that the vast majority of poets in these pages were not part of the institutionalized or organized poetry world in Japan (sometimes called the *shidan*). With few exceptions, their works were either published in obscure journals, not published at all, or took forms other than written text. While there are certainly a few “canonical” poets that will be considered (Tak-enaka Iku and a few other “cinapoets” of chapter 1, and Itō Hiromi in chapter 4), the bulk of the poets do not fall into this category. As seen in the chapter summaries, the focus will be on—to name a few examples—reader submissions by female film fans; works by socialites better known for their fashion than their skill at writing; tech demos by early twentysomethings who had never seriously written poetry before; works by disabled activists publishing in journals by and for those with cerebral palsy; lyrics by eccentric pop stars; sign language works by Deaf poets uploaded to their personal homepages; and installations by a blogger better known for her floods of Hello Kitty imagery than for being the radical poet she is. Many of these were and are not considered poetry even by the relatively open and expansive poetic establishment in Japan, by which I mean the still-thriving network of local and national poetry associations, journals, award-giving bodies, publishers, critics, and scholars. If the works discussed have received critical attention at all, they are largely relegated to being treated as one-off novelties—or perhaps important to the history of Japanese art, music, disability rights activism, new media, and so on—but not as significant literary practice.

*Expanding Verse* analyzes poetic practices firmly within a broader context of other practices—medial, artistic, social, political, and otherwise—and focuses on what might be considered the eccentric margins of an already marginal form. In doing so, my approach takes cues from two ideas proposed by Isabelle Stengers that strongly resonate with Yoshimasu’s take on poetry: an “ecology of practices” and “thinking in the minor key.” Stengers writes of practices—scientific, artistic, and so on—not in terms of solitary examples, but within “an ecology of practices” that “function[s] in a minor key.”<sup>27</sup> This is opposed to “major key” thinking, which might entail producing a theoretical vision around an identified “center stage”—or, conversely, putting the disavowal and critique of the center stage itself on center stage—with an implied aim of an antihegemonic “critical and deconstructive enlightenment.”<sup>28</sup> The “minor key” thinking of ecologies of practices, on the other hand, rejects such “either/or” notions, and even the possibility of critique from the “outside.” Minor key thinking is an *immanent* and not a transcendent critique, one that recognizes that “there is no identity of a practice independent of its environment” and rejects “grounding

definitions or an ideal horizon.”<sup>29</sup> Practices are often thought of in terms of a kind of progression that naturally leads to current and future states—a kind of teleology that accounts of scientific practice are especially prone to falling into, but which also certainly applies to histories of poetry focusing on its “development” or even “evolution.” Stengers, however, instead focuses on practices “as they may become,” on connections and divergences and “the etho-ecological difference between a practice and its outside” within a specific environment.<sup>30</sup> She emphasizes that this approach to a practice—in the case of this book, poetic practice—means “approaching it as it diverges, that is, feeling its borders, experimenting with the questions which practitioners may accept as relevant, even if they are not their own questions.”<sup>31</sup>

Stengers realized the need for these approaches when working with experimental physicists. The title of this book, *Expanding Verse*, was inspired by my own long jaunt of reading books by and about astronomers and astrophysicists, grappling with understanding our expanding universe, endlessly hurtling outward.<sup>32</sup> Though they were of course working in a dramatically different context, I was struck by resonances between those scientists and the poets in this book, all of whom were pursuing their own experiments with poetry, media, and the body. Some of these poets were recognized as experimental artists in their time. Just as often, however, this book seeks experimentality in places and from communities where it is not often recognized—highlighting, for example, the cultural pioneering of young women and girls, and the innovative approaches to writing and corporeality foregrounded by Deaf and disabled activists.

This focus means that my aim in this book is not to compile a comprehensive lineage of poets in Japan who actively engaged with nonliterary media. To do so in a book like this one that covers the 1920s to the 2010s would necessitate many hundreds more pages. Yet there were indeed countless other poets who participated in such practices and debates. Many of the most prominent “canonical” modern Japanese poets were also curious about the “edge of media”—fascinated by the media of their time, often writing about or critiquing them, and creating poetic works about or through those media. Hagiwara Sakutarō, for example—perhaps the figure most firmly in the center of the modern Japanese poetic canon—was an enormous fan of photography, especially stereoscopic photography, going so far as to call his stereoscope his “one and only companion.”<sup>33</sup> He was also fascinated with cinema, and in this was joined by such prewar poetic juggernauts as Ishikawa Takuboku, Kitahara Hakushu, Horiguchi Daigaku, Miyazawa Kenji, and Yosano Akiko.<sup>34</sup> The 1950s and especially the 1960s saw an even more significant explosion of poets working across media forms and questioning the borders of those media. As will be touched on in chapter 2, there were innumerable works of poetic “inter-media” from that time that remain enormously influential today, by figures such as Yoko Ono, Niikuni Seiichi, Kanno Seiko, Matsumoto Toshio, Takemitsu Tōru, Abe Kōbō, Shiomi Mieko, Terayama Shūji, Kitazono Katsue, and many more. Poets like Shiraishi Kazuko and Yoshimasu Gōzō created sprawling performance

poems in the 1960s and onward, bringing their poetry into jazz clubs and concert spaces. And Tanikawa Shuntarō, perhaps the most famous living Japanese poet—active from the 1950s to the present and ninety-two years old at the time of writing—is another consummate poet across media, someone who has collaborated with experimental animators and composers; has written over a hundred picture books, lyrics for Studio Ghibli, and screenplays for Ichikawa Kon; translated all of Charles Schulz’s *Peanuts* comics; exchanged avant-garde “video letters” with Terayama; hosted a radio show and countless live poetry readings; and somehow found the time to create a Twitter account and an email newsletter.

There is certainly a book yet to be written that rereads the modern Japanese poetic canon through the lens of media—indeed, even the “canonical” figures of modern Japanese poetry remain largely un- or underexamined in English-language scholarship due to the field’s overwhelming focus on fiction. *Expanding Verse*, however, is not that book, and I have instead opted to look at figures who are largely marginal even within the already-marginal realm of modern Japanese poetry. There are several reasons for this. One is that the force of poetry can often be felt even more strongly outside the conventional contexts where one would expect to find it: the innovations allowed for by a poetic approach might be unremarkable within the norms of “literature,” but are especially potent in the realms of cinema, experimental art, disability activism, and pop stardom. In other words, it is precisely *because* most of these poets exist outside the poetic establishment that their interventions are so striking. They were less beholden to the conventions, tastes, and expectations of their times in ways that freed them to make poetry and media differently both from the poetic mainstream (often a tenuous idea in the first place) and from those who were commonly recognized as experimental and cutting-edge; they functioned in a mode of “minor key thinking,” to use Stengers’s term. Another reason I focus largely on marginalized figures is not to create a new or alternative canon of modern Japanese poetry, but rather to underline how the agility and fluidity of poetic practice lends itself to a more capacious, playful, and malleable conception of “canonicity,” one that can take the cultural force and prestige afforded to poetry while remaining open to multiple types of bodies and perspectives. What might a “canon” look like in which the most award-winning books of poetry in print can exist alongside experimental blog poems by teenage girls, and in which Japanese Sign Language literature is just as important as Japanese literature?

#### POETRY AS MEDIA OTHERWISE

*Expanding Verse* is not just about poetry in connection to different media, or composed through different media, but how poetry *thinks* media. I argue that poetry in an expanded field, both within and outside of the literary world, consistently acted as both a theory and practice of media and mediation that took an alternative, more minor, more capacious, and even actively oppositional route toward

rethinking the technologies of expression. When I say that poetry consistently functioned as a kind of media theory, I do not wish to reduce poetry to a poor imitation of philosophical writing, only shorter and stranger. Poetry as a form of thought did what other kinds of thought did not, and highlighted different things than criticism or theoretical essays did or could. The media theoretical force of poetry was deliberately unsystematized and contingent. It was often from marginalized or lesser-heard perspectives, ones that might not have otherwise been able to have their works respected as criticism or philosophy. Along the lines of Vilém Flusser's formulation that "poetry produces models of experience," it was particularly attentive to the composition of the experience of media and mediation, and had a special focus on nonnormative embodiment and sensation.<sup>35</sup> Finally, connected to this last point, it resisted treating the "body" as a given, framing it as something vulnerable to media and reclaimed and rearticulated through poetry.

These aspects are also at the heart of poetry's political potential. Jacques Rancière sees artistic practices—including poetry—as interventions, not only in the political and social problems of a given time, but into the ways members of a society have been conditioned to see, hear, move, and even think. He uses the phrase "the distribution of the sensible" in his explorations of the relationship between politics and aesthetics, and the role of artistic practices within this framework.<sup>36</sup> He proposes that aesthetics is the system that "determin[es] what presents itself to sense experience," "a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise." Politics and artistic practices are intertwined in their restructuring of experience: "Politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time."<sup>37</sup> In other words, there is an aesthetics central to both art and politics, one that allows for certain things to be known to the senses but also makes others remain invisible or inaudible. To him, artistic practices are "ways of doing and making" that "intervene" in this; in other words, they challenge dominant "modes of being and forms of visibility."<sup>38</sup>

If artistic practices are interventions, what kinds of interventions did poetry make, and how were they specifically linked to their status as "poetry"? Poetry—in this case, *shi*—is certainly a literary form, but it is also a mode of literary practice, an approach to both the act of literary composition and to composing literarily, across the media landscape and its sensorium. Poetry is enormously self-reflexive and self-critical about its usual material—that is, language. Of course, poetry is not alone in this: self-reflexivity and experimentalism are hallmarks of all kinds of modernist and postmodernist fiction, film, music, visual art, design, dance, and theater. But poetry has a unique capacity to work across and against media, coming from its being consistently short, transmutable, prioritizing of innovation, not market-driven, and—particularly in Japan—widely accessible, with casual poetry composition being a regular feature of public life. Even the most conventional poetry takes the stuff of which it is made—words, typography,

lineation, and arrangement—and makes it otherwise. In Japan's twentieth century and up to the present, this aspect of poetry, again and again, became applied as a mode of composition not just within printed text on a page but in a variety of media, especially at moments of media transition. As argued by the feminist digital poet *ni\_ka*—one of the main subjects of chapter 5—poetry does not only reflect changes in the media environment (*media kankyō no henka*), but it can also use the changing media environment as a methodology (*hōhōron*) in its creation.<sup>39</sup>

Following from this, we can see as each form of media emerged, came to dominate, and crystallized (or fossilized) into a “standard” mode, the poetic was repeatedly held up as the experimental “other” that differed from the dominant mode in many of the same ways as poetry differed from the novel. The “poetic” version of a medium tended to be more compact; more experimental (or more difficult, or even just weirder); more self-reflexive and ready to critique its own form, genre, or medium specificity; more focused on the body (whether that of the composer/performer or the audience); more about nonnormative experience and sensation rather than plot or characters; more open to a variety of creators; and more agnostic or even actively transgressive of the boundaries between media. Along these lines, practitioners and critics alike created or identified poetic others to each dominant media practice: poetry was to the novel what the avant-garde short film was to long-form narrative cinema; what the manipulated audio recording was to the live reading; what performance art was to the concert or play; what a pasted-together collage of headlines was to the newspaper or mass media; or what the personal webpage was to the massive social media network. Poetry didn't just happen to exist at the edges of media, but was actively used for its special capacity for remaking and reimagination, with an aim to expand what the edges of each medium encompassed. The creators of these kinds of works, notes Moriyasu Toshihisa, “traversed media [*media o ōdan*]; and while they were on the precarious dance floor of media disintegration [*media kaitai*], they were taking up the challenge of the comprehensive innovation of expression.”<sup>40</sup>

Finally, disability plays a key role throughout this book—not just as a main subject of two of its chapters, but in fundamentally informing and structuring my approach to poetry and media, and to poetry's interventions in media practice. Countless critics, philosophers, novelists, and poets have used disability as an easy metaphor, abstracting it into an “alternative” mode of being without any recognition of the lived experiences of disabled people.<sup>41</sup> What better way to think about embodiment and sensation differently—about mediation, writing, reading, speaking, cognition, and movement—than to think about bodies that do these things “differently,” and to use this as a starting off point to “open up” our preconceived notions to other possibilities? Yet all too often an approach like this, rather than centering disabled people, becomes another act of marginalization, making disability into just another artistic or theoretical tool in the toolkit. This temptation is particularly strong when looking at poetry—after all, modern poetry, especially

experimental poetry, favors the inarticulable, silenced, strange, unspeakable, contradictory, and impossible; it strives for, or strives to be, that which cannot be easily defined, claimed, pinned down, recovered, expressed, categorized, repeated, commodified, understood, contained, seen, heard, touched, thought, or felt. I take a cue from Legacy Russell, who proposes that the “glitch”—that, I argue, poetry so often aims to be—is at once error and erratum, a “correction to the ‘machine’” that can become “a vehicle of refusal” and “a strategy of nonperformance.”<sup>42</sup> But as Mara Mills and Jonathan Sterne stress, we cannot resort to an “easy celebration of glitch, error, noise, jamming, or hacking” that simplistically holds up literal and metaphorical disabling as the “most convenient Other to the smooth functioning of contemporary corporatized media.”<sup>43</sup>

In this book, I will attempt to avoid the traps of this kind of approach, though I will not always be successful in doing so. I take seriously the fact that “disability and media are co-constituted,” as Mills and Sterne argue, the core of their concept of “dismediation.”<sup>44</sup> By dismediation they mean centering disability—the processes of disabling, nonnormative embodiment and the “presumption of communicative and medial difference and variety”—in the analysis of media. In its intertwined explorations of poetry and media, *Expanding Verse* combines a dismediation-informed perspective with insights from the growing body of work on disability poetics, which, as articulated by Christina Scheuer, “critique[s] stereotypical or banal representations of disability as a sign of loss, pity, or fear” and instead focuses on how disabled poets “write disability from inside the body.”<sup>45</sup> From its earliest stages, this book was informed by disability studies. This is reflected both in its consistent highlighting of disabled thinkers, poets, and media practitioners throughout, and in how it centers embodiment and sensation outside of or actively against the norms or givens of how bodies, poetry, and mediation “should” function—focusing not only on the “otherwise” but also on the constructedness of the “normal” against which that otherwise comes to be.

## Against the Screen

### *Poets Rewriting Cinema in 1920s and 1930s Japan*

“There were shadows in the cinema” (*shinema ni wa kage ga ita*)—this statement both begins and ends “Cinema” (“Shinema”), a 1929 poem by Iijima Tadashi.<sup>1</sup> These shadows descend from the stage at every film screening, the poem says, in search of empty seats; if a seat already has someone in it, the shadows crouch beside them, giving each spectator an unshakeable sense that they’re watching *with someone*. Eventually, the shadows assemble onstage again, “quietly greet the characters on screen, and withdraw.”

Poetry related to cinema seems to have first emerged in Japan in the 1910s—not long after film’s arrival in 1896—and began to flourish in the 1920s, becoming a regular fixture of poetry journals, film magazines, and newspapers.<sup>2</sup> Hundreds of poems took on movie theaters, spectatorship, specific films, movie stars, and cinematic techniques and technologies as their main subject. Many poets went beyond this and presented their works not just as poems *about* cinema but as a new kind of hybrid between poetry and cinema, calling them “film-poems” (*eigashi*), “cinemoems” (*shinepoemu*), “poems by camera” (*kamera ni yoru shi*), “poems in scenario” (*poemu in shinario*), or, using Latin letters, the German term *Kinodichtung* or the French term *poésie cinématographique*. Many of these poems—though by no means all—fit into Christophe Wall-Romana’s definition of cinepoetry as “a writing practice whose basic process is homological: it consists of envisioning a specific component or aspect of poetry as if it were a specific component of cinema, or vice versa, but always in writing.”<sup>3</sup> Poets also drew inspiration not only from films themselves, but from the full range of cinematic paratexts: shooting scripts, continuity scripts, programs, advertisements, intertitles, subtitles, captioned photographs of stars, live *benshi* narrations, and more.



There is an almost bewilderingly diverse range of these explicitly and implicitly “cinapoetic” works from Japan’s 1920s and 1930s. They span almost every literary movement popular at the time, including Romanticism, naturalism, Dada, Futurism, Surrealism, and proletarian literature. There are poems that take the form of conventional verse, of numbered shot lists that served as film scenarios for imaginary films, of odes to celebrities, of dreamlike prose poems, and of globe-spanning catalogs of objects and scenes, just to name a few. Yet there is a common tension that underlies all of these works, a familiar one at the emergence or transition of any media technology. Poets were quick to recognize the potential of the cinema as a form of expression, and as a site of inspiration to reimagine poetic language, tropes, and structure. At the same time, however, they saw the medium’s inadequacies or even pernicious qualities: the ways technological, societal, and institutional limitations made film fall short of its potential, or made it into something that cut off or fossilized expression and perception. Cinematic poetry was far from a unified form or genre, but what the works under this umbrella had in common was how they aimed not just to remake poetry using cinematic structure and imagery, but to make a *new kind of cinema*, one that used the possibilities of language to go beyond what was afforded by film at the time.

Poetry, here and throughout this volume, was a way of thinking media otherwise. In the case of this chapter, poetry prioritized alternative modes of engagement with the “cinematic” in order to highlight experiences that were difficult to articulate but were nevertheless key to what made cinema what it was, or pointed toward what else it could be. There are other sources, of course, through which we might understand early filmgoing and filmmaking. There are the films themselves, or at least the tiny portion of them from this era that have survived. There are movie programs and leaflets, reviews, critical essays, memoirs, attendance statistics, and promotional materials.<sup>4</sup> But this chapter will look at what was often literally in the margins: the poems that jostled for room with advertisements on the back pages of film magazines, acted as space fillers in newspapers, and which were dismissed as novelties even in their time (as were, in some cases, the poets who wrote them). Among all cinema-related writing, these poems are unique in their attempts to remake the medium anew, in ways that center the body, the audience, and the aspects of cinema that—like the “shadows” of Iijima’s poem—fluidly move between the film world and “real” world, on and off screen, and within and beyond the space of the movie theater.

It is no coincidence that there was a blossoming of cinapoetic writing around the late 1920s and early 1930s in Japan, a time of enormous transition in cinema. The medium was changing, inarguably, rapidly, and fundamentally, and for one main reason: the emergence of the “talkie” and its subsequent dominance over global filmmaking over the course of the 1930s. The shift from silent films to talkies was profoundly transformative in many ways beyond the addition of prerecorded sound, and not all of those transformations were viewed positively by

those who watched, wrote about, and made movies. As we will see in this chapter, for many, sound film was first and foremost a threat, and it was against this threat that they aimed to use their poems to demonstrate the full potential of a new cinema both on the screen and on the page. The main fear was of homogenization. On the level of a single film, suddenly the experience of viewing would largely be the same every time, unlike “silent” films, which always had live music and sometimes live sound effects, and in Japan usually a *benshi* (live narrator), who was as much or more of a draw than the film itself and a core part of every filmgoing experience.<sup>5</sup> On a broader level, there were fears that films would become far more similar to one another, with the new requirements of voiced dialogue, certain narrative structures, and so on inevitably placing rigid frameworks on what a movie “should” be like. Those fears were indeed well founded. As Charles O’Brien notes, “By the mid-1930s, the majority of the world’s films, regardless of where they had been made, came to exhibit the same basic convention of film narration and style—the same sort of character-driven plots; linear, cause-and-effect successions of scenes; and continuity editing.”<sup>6</sup> To most cinapoets, poetry became the radical alternative they were looking for: not just another way to make film, but to make film better.

We can thus also understand cinapoems and cinematic poems as a site of critique of cinema—what might be called poetry *against* the screen. By this I do not only mean poems as imagined films, metaphorically projected against a “screen” in the mind’s eye. I also mean poetry against, *in opposition to*, the screen: the works of poets who saw inadequacies in the capabilities of moving image media of the time, and saw poetry as the solution. Poems about cinema, in Japan as elsewhere, were not straightforwardly an example of a media technology being remediated into the form of a poetic text. They were a site in which poets, film critics, and film critic-poets engaged directly with both the potential and the impossibilities of cinema, not beholden to the state of film technology, the industry, tastes, or practices of the time, or even by visibility itself. Many cinematic poems, while seeming at first to take the form of imagined films, deliberately undermine themselves by being populated with contradictory, abstract, and sometimes unvisualizable “imagery”—they challenge the dominance of opticality precisely through manipulating forms associated with technologies of vision.

For many, of course, experimental writing practices like these were the *only* way to make films, excluded as they were from a highly insular industry—one in which no woman, for example, had yet directed a feature film in Japan, and the burgeoning amateur film scene was largely restricted to the wealthy. To focus on poetry is thus to also center accounts and perspectives often left out of conversations about film theory, cinematic history, and media—in particular, as we will see in this chapter, those of women; of fans; and of those who engaged with film through nonnormative modes of embodiment and sensation. These poets did not only use the cinema—its filmic and written texts, its institutions, its figures—as a rich collection of tropes to draw from in their work. They also used poetry

to rethink what cinema was and could be; what poetry could become in light of the ways of seeing, hearing, and so on afforded by cinematic forms; and how a “poem” could be thought of as an emergence across and between different media and thus could become a site of contestation at a time when those media were being actively remade. Poetry was—and, as we will see throughout this book, continues to be—a site where the edges of media could be redrawn, where the relation between text, media, and the body was made central, and made different.

This chapter is divided into three sections, each representing a different thread or strategy among cinepoets in early twentieth-century Japan. In the first section, “The Haunted Spectator,” I look at four women poets—an experimental film critic, a movie star, a movie fan, and a “modern girl,” respectively—and how they used their work to think about the space of the theater, Western film celebrities, and what might be lost in the transition to the talkie. In the second, “The Unfilmable Script,” I will focus on the genre of the “cinepoem,” an ostensibly hybrid work that was both a poem and a film, and look at poetic compositions—often actively aligned with the avant-garde movements of the time, particularly Surrealism and Futurism—that were not just about cinema but attempted to themselves be a new kind of cinema on the page. Finally, the third section, “The Broken Projector,” looks at an unusual selection of poems that asked what it might mean to go beyond the walls of the theater and cinematize the *world itself*.

### THE HAUNTED SPECTATOR

I will begin by focusing on four women writers in the interwar period—Osaki Midori, Hanabusa Yuriko, MIZUHO, and Ōi Sachiko—who used poetry to think through their relationship to cinema. Osaki Midori (1896–1971)—poet, fiction writer, and essayist—was not only perhaps “the first woman to try her hand at film criticism” in Japan, but she was someone who aimed to fundamentally remake film criticism to suit her own poetic preoccupations.<sup>7</sup> In 1930 she published a series of essays entitled “Eiga mansō”: *eiga* means “film,” and *mansō* is a term she coined that has often been translated as “random jottings” or “wandering thoughts.”<sup>8</sup> What Osaki aimed to create was a kind of “sensorial criticism,” as Aaron Gerow puts it, a queered *doing* of criticism whose critical purview included the act of criticism itself.<sup>9</sup> In their focus, her *eiga mansō* are a kind of “minor key thinking,” to use Isabelle Stenger’s term—they were attuned to individual events, screenings, and manifestations but intentionally resisted grand proclamations on cinema as a whole.<sup>10</sup> They centered not what was on screen but what was *around* the screen: the bodies in seats, the haptic experience of the darkened theater, and the way audiences and spaces alike might become “cinematized.” When her eye turned back to the screen itself, she was usually not paying attention to the narrative or the characters or even the cinematography of the films she watched but to the bodies of the actors, the world constructed in the space of the cinema, and the imperfections

of the projection—the more imperfect the better. In doing so, she continuously reminded the reader to think of cinema not as a single, totalized form of media technology but as an open mode of encounter, imagination, and composition; she offers us a model for engagement with media from the edges, one that will be instructive not only in this section but throughout this book. She posited bodies, the medium of film, and even her own writing as ghostly, as a haunting encounter in the space of the screening and on the page. Like the spectators in Iijima's shadow-filled theater, she and the other poets in this section are haunted, not just by what they can see on screen but by what they *cannot*: by the specters of larger-than-life figures called "movie stars" who they cannot touch; by an industry that shut them out in countless ways, large and small, while still wanting their money as moviegoers; and by the fear that the possibilities of cinema were being rapidly closed off around them.

In other words, what Osaki valued in her writing—and what she saw as missing in both film and film criticism at the time—resonates with what cinepoetic works tended to have at their core: a rejection of cinema as a purely visual experience in favor of thinking of it as a fully corporeal encounter between bodies of spectators, actors, and even ghosts, as well as a deliberate turning away from the conventional emphasis on narrative, script, and, eventually, prerecorded sound. Saitō Ayako describes *mansō* as "neither criticism nor reviews, but rather a fascinating record of free-associated images of movie theaters, actors' bodies, hair, and shadows," as well as a valuable historical record of how audiences of the time experienced the shift to talkies.<sup>11</sup> Osaki "flaunted her position as spectator," Miriam Silverberg also observed, "and moreover, as eroticized woman spectator."<sup>12</sup> Hitomi Yoshio stresses that the *mansōka*—the one who does *mansō*, which she translates as "the rambling thinker"—is a performed persona of "an amateur spectator of film concerned only with the world unfolded on the screen" and the highly bodily "encounters with the actors on screen," the spectator "so incorporated into the cinematic experience that he becomes part of the film itself."<sup>13</sup> Osaki called this process "cinematization," or *eigaka*: not only does the spectator become cinematized, Thomas LaMarre argues, but so does the world.<sup>14</sup> The boundaries of the film are not limited to the edges of the screen nor the walls of the theater in Osaki's writings, but they are eroded in a way that the spectator emerges into a world made film-like, the outcome of a *mansō* way of watching film where the eye slips across the screen, into the shadows, and then goes farther still.

Though she was and remains better known as a fiction writer and critic, Osaki "saw herself first as a poet."<sup>15</sup> One of her few extant poems, 1933's "Charlie Chaplin" ("Chāri Chappurin") is a second-person address to the world's most famous film star, one of her two poems under the heading "Poems Dedicated to the Gods" ("Kamigami ni sasaguru shi"). There are enormous numbers of poems about Charlie Chaplin—in Japan and elsewhere—to the extent that Wall-Romana, in his exhaustive exploration of cinema and the French poetic avant-garde, argues that

“it is no overstatement to say that cinepoetry rode to prominence on the Little Tramp’s tattered coattails.”<sup>16</sup> Yet Osaki’s poem is also a concentrated form of *mansō* in its own right:

Your shoulders  
are one with the autumn wind  
Your cane  
is one with the autumn wind  
Your fake moustache  
is one with the autumn wind  
Your bowler hat  
And oversized shoes  
are one with the autumn wind.  
Walking with the wind  
Talking with the wind  
You were born in the autumn wind  
Blown this way and that by the autumn wind  
All by your lonesome  
A man of the autumn wind who doesn’t say a thing<sup>17</sup>

This poem, despite being about the ultimate “silent” film star, is filled with sound—namely, the “autumn wind” (*akikaze*) that blows through nearly every single line. In the long history of Japanese poetics, the autumn wind is the cold wind of loneliness, eating away at the lingering warmth of summer and filling the atmosphere with the melancholy that is the proper emotion of the season. The autumn wind stands not only for solitude, however, but also for an active longing for another: as Haruo Shirane points out, the convention from the Heian period onward is that “*akikaze* also implies unrequited love” due to its incorporation of “the homophone *aki* 飽き, ‘to grow weary,’” pointing to the beloved figure’s “loss of interest” in the poet.<sup>18</sup> Chaplin—reimagined as a “man of the autumn wind” (*akikaze no otoko*)—thus becomes both the ultimate lonesome fellow and the ultimate object of longing, the godlike actor who blows through the cinematic space and ignores the audience’s adoration. His “not saying a thing” (*mono iwanu*) is here not just the norm of a silent film actor before the era of prerecorded sound, but instead becomes a vibrant, deliberate silence, an active not-saying that produces the aching loneliness that Osaki’s narrator revels in. Chaplin’s saying something would perhaps shatter the relationship or cause his descent from “godhood”; Osaki does not *want* to hear what he says, but instead wants to let herself ignore the film, narrative, and even the character he plays in favor of gazing directly at the actor himself.

Adrienne Gibb calls this central aspect of Osaki’s film writing her “poetics of distraction,” which, she argues, “dialectically run aground on the shoals of sound film”: sound film demands a certain kind of attention that would break the spell.<sup>19</sup> Osaki, indeed, was deeply worried about the effect the talkie would have on

cinema. Writing in 1930, she was already nostalgic about silent film, even though it would be several years before Japan's first feature-length sound films and several years more before talkies overtook silent films in Japan; she knew, however, the writing was on the wall (and on the screen, and in the shadows next to the seats). In a portion of one of her *mansō* called "The Suicide of Sound Film," she says that "film used to be just a quiet shadow; it was a quiet world told through rich language, without the need for a raw-smelling voice."<sup>20</sup> The word she uses to describe the prerecorded voice that I rendered here literally as "raw-smelling" is *namagusai*, which usually refers to uncooked fish, meat, or blood but also to carnality, lust, corruption, or vulgarity. Sound film threatened to make the experience of filmgoing narrow, single-minded, and overbearing, without any mental space afforded to the wandering fantasies and encounters with the spectral bodies on screen. In this light, her longing for Charlie Chaplin and his silence is not just for the celebrity himself but for the way of cinematic being he represented, one that was about to be blown away by another wind entirely.

Osaki's poem on Charlie Chaplin is part of a subgenre of poetry that had become popular in Japan starting over a decade earlier, in the late 1910s and throughout the 1920s: the *eigashi*, literally meaning "film-poem," frequently appeared in newspapers and film magazines. Despite the generic name, the usage tended to be quite specific, almost always referring to poems about Western film stars, usually from the perspective of the author as fan; at the time, *eiga* was a term that tended to refer to Western films in particular before it came to refer to the medium as a whole. These film-poems give us insight into the more ephemeral aspects of sensation and affect involved in early twentieth-century spectatorship, emphasizing not just films themselves but a broader film culture: globally situated, deeply gendered, and tightly linked to the moment-to-moment fluctuations of celebrity.

One of the most striking examples of this form is 1922's "Sennett Girls—Film-Poem" ("Sennetto no musume-san—eigashi") by Hanabusa Yuriko (1900–1970), the only extant film-poem from prewar Japan by a poet who was herself a film actress.

Dancing! Waves, waves, waves!! Summer, summer, summer!!! With a blue sky, and a silver ocean.

It's your world, so puff out your chests, to the music of the eyes of spring, of spring.

Dance! Beautiful Sennett girls!!!<sup>21</sup>

This short poem was part of an anthology of written works by actresses, Hanabusa being by far one of the most famous among them. Indeed, she is often considered one of the first full-fledged female movie stars in Japan, if not the very first, eventually appearing in almost fifty films over the course of the 1920s.<sup>22</sup> Before the 1920s, female roles in Japanese films were played almost exclusively by *oyama*, male actors who specialized in female roles; indeed, the presence of

women on screen was an unmistakable mark of “modern cinema” in Japan long before the shock of prerecorded sound.<sup>23</sup> But Hanabusa was a phenomenon, not just “Japan’s Mary Pickford” but often literally taking on Pickford’s roles. Daisuke Miyao notes how in the 1921 film *Souls on the Road* (*Rojō no reikon*), for example, Hanabusa, as the heroine, “imitates Mary Pickford in hairstyle, costume, and acting style,” which Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano calls a clear example of “the early pure film emphasis on direct imitation of Hollywood.”<sup>24</sup>

The titular Sennett girls are a reference to the Canadian American comedy director Mack Sennett’s *Bathing Beauties*, a cadre of young women who appeared in his films, promotional events, and photographic campaigns starting in the 1910s. Hanabusa’s poem takes the form of an entreaty, using the imperative forms of verbs and escalating exclamation points to address the bathing beauties directly in the second-person mode favored by most movie star-centered *eigashi*. But while later film-poems were usually *about* the experience of watching a film, this one seems to approach the hybrid form implied by term: it is a written poem, but also a virtual film, gesturing to a space beyond both page and screen. In these short lines, the reader is quickly captured and immersed in a sequence of moments with increasingly heightened affect, exulting in the scenery and the bodies on screen. There is an eroticism here too, manifested in the poem’s repetition of bodies and words, but in a way that differs from other modernist experiments by male poets and artists, in which women’s bodies are continually fragmented and abstracted. Orito Horio’s 1933 cinepoem “Woman and the Ocean” (“Onna to umi”) is an example of this tendency, with a subject matter similar to that of Hanabusa’s poem but far more detached and uneasy, disturbing in its relentless objectification and fragmentation of women’s bodies: “cutting the waves    a woman’s arm                    a woman’s arm                    a woman’s springtime                    a woman’s legs.”<sup>25</sup> The fact that Hanabusa’s poem was written by a film actress, however, is intimately tied to how it frames the figures on “screen.” Hanabusa not only vicariously experiences the glory and glamour of the Sennett girls, but she does so as someone intimately familiar with seeing her own body enlarged on screen: she actively directs the bathing beauties to strut and dance in much the same way that she would have been directed, creating a film-poem that becomes a fantasized film of her own creation.

Hanabusa Yuriko’s poem, like Osaki’s and most other film-poems by women at this time, centers the encounter of the poet-as-spectator with the celebrity bodies on-screen. They are nuanced explorations of the nature of stardom, fandom, agency, and desire—a stark contrast to the many works *about* women filmgoers by several male poets throughout these decades, which return again and again to the trope of women audience members weeping, enraptured by the scenes before them, or hypnotized by the romances on-screen. We see an early example of this trope in the 1920 poem “Usherette Song” (“Gaido no uta”) by a poet with the



nom de plume Seichō, in which the main object of fantasy is the *gaido*, the female ushers working at the movie theater.

A love scene projected on the screen  
 Wings of treachery whispering in the darker-than-dark  
 In the impulsive reflected light on the screen  
 The floating brilliance of virginity!  
 Shine for eternity, the young light that is women's pride, reality is women's sorrow  
 .....  
 When the illusion breaks to no avail and we return to ourselves  
 The roar of the crowd approaching an avalanche  
 Is that the shape of one of the great beasts that resides in this world?  
 Engulfed in shouts penetrating the darkness  
 Red lips and slender hands and irresolute struggles  
 Sweat and oil running along with worn-off white face powder  
 .....  
 The flash of the arc light leaking from the projection room  
 White within the purple, the usherettes' room on the terrace  
 The dearness of a room filled with the scent of women within the narrowness and  
 the clutter<sup>26</sup>

The screen (*gamen*) appears repeatedly here, as the poet fantasizes an interpolation of the usherettes within the films, aligning their imagined virginity with the brilliance of the projector's arc light, rendering them near-divine in their break room elevated literally and figuratively above the audience. Repeatedly and fetishistically returning to the usherette's physical attributes, Seichō renders the movie theater as a place that inflames desire, but he turns the focus from the screen to the women waiting in the wings. Nearly two decades later, in 1937, women audience members are viewed with undisguised disgust in the poem "Movie Theater" ("Eigakan") by Horai Ryūji (1909–95). It was not until 1931 that the practice of segregating movie theater seating by gender was ceased in Tokyo, and in Horai's poem we can see his outsized reaction to having to share the space of the screening.<sup>27</sup> His misogynist screed in the form of verse decries the "incessant sobbing that can be heard from the women's seats" (*onnaseki ni susurinaku koe ga shikiri ni kikoeru*) and speculates that movies take over women's weak constitutions and leave them with an insatiable need for "men's faces," "storefront windows," and "ornaments and makeup"; he portrays them as leaving the theater suddenly filled with both sexual and consumerist desire.<sup>28</sup>

But female film fans—even ones who were not critics like Osaki, or themselves film stars like Hanabusa—captured the complexities of their own engagement with the medium, often anonymously or pseudonymously, by publishing poems in the reader submission pages of popular film magazines like *Film World* (*Eiga Sekai*). In its August 1929 issue, for example, a woman writing under the name MIZUHO



(written in capitalized roman letters) starts a long sequence of film-poems with one called “Clive Brook” (“Kuraivu Burukku”), which is about the British actor:

At night on the street the flowers I buy  
 Are heliotropes  
 An evening dress is silk even in the dark  
 Unsmiling eyes stared  
 But  
 Look—on a moonlit night  
 His purple cigar smoke  
 How sorrowful that smoke  
 Ah—isn't that the scent of heliotropes?  
 MY IDOL is  
 Heliotrope Harry.  
  
 Clive. Why  
 Does he trouble my heart so?  
 When dawn breaks  
 His melancholy heart  
 Is recalled in loneliness.  
 And there— heliotropes  
 In my bed I think of that gentleman<sup>29</sup>

MIZUHO's work goes beyond the subtle eroticism of Hanabusa's description of the Sennett girls toward a more explicit expression of passion. She weaves herself into the proto-film noir world of Heliotrope Harry, the gentleman thief protagonist Brook played the year before in the 1928 crime drama *Forgotten Faces* (released in Japan as *Wasurerareta kao*), absorbing its (helio)tropes as she walks down the street: a silk evening dress, moonlight, cigars. The visuals are but one element, with the olfactory force of the heliotrope-scented cigar smoke perfuming the scene, her words evoking nonvisual senses that conventional cinema could not.

Eventually, she shifts from describing the character Harry in roman letters as “MY • IDOL” toward talking about Clive Brook, his actor, directly, as is usually the case in film-poems: “Clive. Why/ Does he trouble my heart so?” (*Kuraivu. Naze/ atashi no kokoro o sawagasu no*). She ruminates over their shared emotional torment while she lies in bed, using the concentrated language of the free verse poem as a site for a potent and complex depiction of fandom and fantasy. There is a play, too, with the multimedia format of the film magazine itself. Right in the middle of the poem floats a photograph of Clive Brook's face with a smoldering expression, looking almost as if it were crudely cut out of another magazine and pasted there, nearly as big as the first two verses combined, his gaze seemingly looking at the beginning of the poem itself. In order to read MIZUHO's poem, one must do as she does and move one's eyes lovingly across Brook's face, over and over. Like in Osaki and Hanabusa's poems about Charlie Chaplin and the Sennett

Bathing Beauties respectively, MIZUHO's work goes far beyond celebrity worship, favoring instead a complex depiction of yearning in which the narrator imbricates herself into the films. In doing so, however, she reveals the inevitable limits of such an act: Chaplin remains silent, the Sennett girls revel in their own dance with one another but not with the spectator, and fantasies of Clive Brook dissipate in the light of day.

Each of the previously discussed poems was, in many ways, not only about their titular movie stars—Chaplin, the Bathing Beauties, and Brook—but was also a fantasy of *directing* films on the space of the page at a time when no woman in Japan had yet directed a feature film. The final poem in this section also falls into this category, but rather than hinging on an encounter with specific Western celebrities within the space of the movie theater, it instead takes on a paradigm-changing technological shift. Within this poem are three imagined films, each of which highlights a different kind of sonic norm at the emergence of the sound film.

This poem, “Three Talkies” (“Tōkī sanpen”), appeared on January 23, 1930, in the newspaper *Yomiuri shimbun*. Written by a poet named Ōi Sachiko (1904–unknown), it was an unusual work, divided into three parts, each with its own subtitle.

#### SOUND EFFECTS

The harbor's red bricks  
Tire of looking at ships  
From an alley emerges a house mouse  
A black cat with a skinny tail  
Even so, the ladies' cheerful overskirts are  
Treasury doors.  
Gorgeous liquor for unruly hearts  
Makes abandoned children.

#### PART TALKIE

.....  
a single moment, a single ray  
Oh, how the joy of us youth could shine . . .  
.....  
.....

#### 100 PERCENT TALKIE

A purple  
*Purple* iris flower  
Fell in love a few times.  
The manipulations of love,  
Gentlemen's gestures of delight.<sup>30</sup>

This is not a famous poem by any means. It was buried somewhere on the third page of the Thursday morning edition in a recurring section called “Celebrity Poetry Selection” (*meiryū shishō*)—for reasons that will soon become clear—and was eventually reprinted in an anthology of women poets later the same year.

“Three Talkies” was written at an early stage of sound film in Japan, published a year before Japan’s first successful full-sound feature-length film, 1931’s *The Neighbor’s Wife and Mine* (*Madamu to nyōbō*). In Japan as elsewhere, the shift to sound film was not, of course, an immediate switch from “silent film” to films with pre-recorded audio. As Michael Raine notes, it is far from the case that the conversion happened all at once. Certain theaters were wired for Western talkies, some were not, and there was a diverse set of possible filmgoing experiences of recorded sound.<sup>31</sup> Some films would have fully recorded music and dialogue but live sound effects; some would just have recorded music and sound effects, with the dialogue left to the *benshi*; some would have a partially recorded *benshi* commentary; some would have certain lines of dialogue prerecorded and some remaining silent. In Ōi’s “Sound Effects” (“Saundo efekuto”), “Part Talkie” (“Pāto tōki”), and “100 Percent Talkie” (“Hyaku pāsento tōki”), she captures this diversity by presenting three very different versions of “talkie” films. “Sound Effects” brings to mind the sounds of the harbor, cats, mice, gates, and other types of urban clamor that might have been prerecorded, but it has no quoted dialogue. “Part Talkie” gives us only snatches of an emotional monologue or dialogue, with the majority of the poem taken up by the silence of long ellipses. Finally, the text of “100 Percent Talkie” could pass as a flowery piece of dialogue intoned in a mannered romance. This is *not* a representation of progression or evolution, however, with one type of film overtaking the others; it is something more intriguing, and less easy to sum up.

Despite being the only verse here representing a film without any recorded dialogue, “Sound Effects” is inarguably the most substantial—and wordy—of the three. Here we get the most detailed account of a scene, and not just sonically. The thickness of description is intensely visual, describing a scene in a harbor; like a film camera, the “viewpoint” constantly shifts both in terms of where it’s coming from and what it’s looking at, but it seems to begin with the perspective of the harbor itself, moving from the ships to the alley to a mouse to a cat to women passing by. Compared to the other two parts of the poem, the “lack” of prerecorded dialogue seems to allow for a richer combination of imagined visuality and sonic texture. “Part Talkie” is dramatically different. One could read it as almost a parody—a half-functioning half poem, more dots than words. But the lines that float in the middle of these ellipses are striking, cutting through the silence with musings on youth and radiance. “Part Talkie” in this sense could be read not as evidence of the limitations of this transitional form of halfway-to-sound-cinema, but rather of its affordances: it is in the space of the ellipses that the spectator, like Osaki in front of the flickering screen, can enter, filling in the blanks. The poem “100 Percent Talkie” is even more opaque; while it certainly seems to be a piece of dialogue or narration, it is oblique

and ornate—somewhere between courtship and passion, romance and deception. Recorded sound becomes linked with a focus on the “manipulations of love” (*koi no terentekuda*) and “gestures of delight” (*yorokobu shigusa*). This could be read as echoing the fear of critics like Osaki who saw this kind of manipulation of emotion—artificial, sterile, but effective—as one of the central and potentially most pernicious features of prerecorded sound in film. But there is, at the same time, a kind of luxuriating in the sounds of language more prominent in this section than in the others—the repeated “purple” (*murasaki/murasaki*), the four-character compound for “manipulations” (*te-ren-te-kuda*).<sup>32</sup> There is also the pairing of those “gestures” and “manipulations” with the ideas of “love” and “delight.” This “100 Percent Talkie” might be more effective in coaxing certain feelings from the audience, but that coaxing in and of itself becomes a pleasure.

Ōi’s poem serves as a fascinating condensation of the stakes of the multifarious encounters between poetry and film at this time. In the space of a few lines, she captures the particularities, limits, and charms of three forms of “talkie,” rendering the monolithic idea of the “sound film” into something more varied, more uneven, and more meaningful in its specificities. Again, she does not take as a given the move into sound film as a progression or evolution of cinema, nor does she, like many critics at the time, necessarily see it as a degradation.<sup>33</sup> As we see throughout Japan’s twentieth century, poems like hers are not only something that engage with different media forms, but they became a site of critique and reinvention—of disruptive alternative media practice—just when those forms came into being or were about to fossilize. Like Osaki, Hanabusa, and MIZUHO, Ōi foregrounds a kind of haunting in her work, a ghostly quality that centers less what film is and more about what it is *not* or what it cannot be. In her poem, film is something in transition: it is not something transformed from “silent” to “sound” like the flipping of a switch, but instead, like the ellipses in “Part Talkie” so vividly show, an active reconfiguration of the modern sensorium through an uneasy choreography of speaking and not-speaking, hearing and not-hearing, seeing and not-seeing.

As remarkable as “Three Talkies” is, Ōi Sachiko was certainly *not* known for her poetry: it was her appearance, lifestyle, and attitude that shocked the cultural establishment in Tokyo. Ōi represents a type of poet—a type that will see several examples of throughout this book—whose poetic work was one part of a broader experimental project centered around her own body and persona, so it will be instructive to linger for a moment here on precisely who she was and what this persona entailed. This is because Ōi Sachiko was known not only as a poet or a socialite or a socialite-poet but as both the first and the ultimate “modern girl” (*modan gāru*, or *moga* for short), one of the most dominant tropes of this era in Japan. It is commonly noted, in fact, that even the term itself was coined in the mid-1920s by the critic Nii Itaru (1888–1951) specifically to describe Ōi.<sup>34</sup> *Modan gāru* eventually came to denote a whole category of young women in Japan who (as journalists and essayists breathlessly reported) rejected societal norms and conventions, sported short haircuts and

outrageous fashions, slept around, spoke their minds, and ostensibly cared more about consumption than politics. In his essay “One Hundred Percent Modern Girl” (“Hyaku pāsento moga”)—published in 1929, a few months before Ōi’s poem—Ōya Sōichi (1900–1970), another cultural critic at the time, dedicated the entire first section to a misogynistic tirade about Ōi, referring to her only under the pseudonym “Madam A” and calling her “the original modern girl in Japan.”<sup>35</sup> It is far from a flattering profile, and one that makes no mention of Ōi as a poet or a writer of any kind. He describes her makeup as “terrifyingly elaborate,” and it is not just on her face: her “techniques” (*gikō*) extend so far that it is as if, he says, “she has applied her own unique makeup from the corners of her mind to the edges of her words,” with equally great care applied to “meticulously designing her facial expressions, movements, and even the vibrations of her vocal cords.” She seemingly has extraordinary control over every aspect of her appearance, behavior, and lifestyle, but to Ōya she is not, in the end, an agent at all: to him, Ōi in particular, and the modern girl more generally, is “a mannequin-like being who advertises herself with her own body.” Ōi’s contemporary Kawase Miko described her in much more positive terms than Ōya Sōichi, as “the sensation-causing Modern Girl” with “glass shard–like beauty,” though this too underlines how she was engaged with first and foremost as a spectacle, as a figure who stepped out of nowhere into the society of the time and left its conventions shattered through her appearance alone.<sup>36</sup>

But before she was the modern girl par excellence, Ōi Sachiko was born Yamazaki Sachiko in June 1904 in a beach villa in what is now Kanagawa Prefecture, near Kamakura and south of Yokohama and Tokyo. While there are few extant details about her upbringing, Ōi’s family was far from conventional. In her immediate family alone was a range of characters that spanned the political spectrum and seemed to unfailingly cause disarray. Ōi’s father, Yamazaki Mitsuaki, was a military man and collaborator with right-wing nationalists like Tōyama Mitsuru.<sup>37</sup> Her older sister (or perhaps her mother, according to other sources) was Kogure Reiko, who—far from collaborating with the right wing—was an infamous *left-wing* activist. At seventeen years old, Kogure gained notoriety for her role in the Red Flag Incident (*Aka-hata jiken*) of June 22, 1908, where she was one of a group of socialists who gathered at the Kinki-kan movie theater (which happened to be the site of Tokyo’s first-ever film screening, in 1897) to celebrate the release of one of their fellow activists from prison. She was promptly arrested and became known as one of the “anarchist beauties,” written about in the mass media with a combination of awe and lurid glee.<sup>38</sup> Ōi’s younger brother—or perhaps nephew (sources again differ)—was Yamazaki Shindō, an anarchist and member of Japan’s Black Youth League.<sup>39</sup> Also at seventeen years old, he was the ringleader of yet another incident in January 1926, in which he and dozens of other anarchist teenagers poured out onto the streets of Tokyo’s swanky neighborhood of Ginza and proceeded to break as many shop windows as they could.<sup>40</sup> He was also promptly arrested, later writing an account of his time in prison, “The Diary of the Beautiful Boy Behind Bars” (“*Bishōnen gokuchūki*”).<sup>41</sup>

As for Ōi Sachiko herself, she was not arrested as Kogure Reiko and Yamazaki Shindō were at the age of seventeen, and she didn't cause chaos in the streets of Tokyo (though that time would come during the shockwaves she later caused as a "modern girl"). She was seventeen, however, when she published her first poem. She was the youngest contributor to the women's literary magazine *Virgin Soil* (*Shojochi*), which was founded in 1922 by Shimazaki Tōson, a literary giant who "may fairly be called the creator of modern Japanese poetry."<sup>42</sup> After more conventional early poems and stories, notes Nagafuchi Tomoe, Ōi "began to produce works that expressed a modern sensibility," taking on the novel sensations of the contemporary era as the main subject of her literary work as she published in a wide variety of journals.<sup>43</sup> Her work was neither widely read nor respected. Gotō Yūkō points out how critics like Ōya dismissed completely any revolutionary quality Ōi might have had and called her simply "bourgeois" and "insane" in her desire for novelty.<sup>44</sup> The figure of the "modern girl" more generally was dismissed as well, often through their relation to film, with which they were always associated; Barbara Sato notes that in 1929 a female tanka poet, Takayasu Yasuko (1883–1969), described modern girls as "shallow 'bean brains' infatuated with American motion pictures."<sup>45</sup>

But far from the stereotype of the "modern girl" as a socialite totally sheltered from or deliberately oblivious to any politics at all—let alone the radical politics that those around her actively participated in—her poetic work consistently intervened in the politics and aesthetics of her time, centering the defamiliarization of the contemporary media environment and the modes of seeing and hearing engendered within it. Ōi was consistently experimental, not just in her poetry but also in her body, her way of presenting herself, her playing with celebrity, and her lifestyle, all of which were intertwined. This experimentality took a form that was unrecognized or thought of as frivolous, unproductive, or even vulgar, turning her astonishing rewriting of the transition of sound film into just a "celebrity poem" by a famous-for-being-famous socialite, and her complete self-reimagining—of what makeup, fashion, conversation, and even relationships could and should be—as something pathological. She was ostensibly the "100 percent modern girl" who wrote about "100 percent talkies," yet in reality the details of her life and work have been so forgotten that there is barely anything we can say about her with 100 percent certainty. But her "Three Talkies" points toward an alternate retelling of cinema from the edges, even if it might be one that, like the lines of dialogue in "Part Talkie," comes through only in fragments, cutting through a sea of silence.

#### THE UNFILMABLE SCRIPT

The previous section focused on a handful of poems by women that doubled as a kind of "wandering thought," to use Osaki Midori's term. Understanding their film-poems (*eigashi*) and related works not only as literary novelties of cinematic fandom, but also as a kind of alternative to the dominant theories of film and media of the era, is an important step toward understanding the stakes of a conception

of cinema in which the camera and screen and (eventually) recorded sound play only a small role, if at all. What those poets pointed to instead is a cinema on the page that folded in the gaps and frustrations of cinematic form, technologies, and prescribed modes of spectatorship, highlighting instead cinema's capacity as a springboard of fantasy and novel articulations of visuality and embodiment.

At the same time—beginning in the pages of Surrealist poetry journals at the end of the 1920s—another very different kind of poetry as “cinema on the page” emerged and exploded in popularity. This was known as the “cinépoe,” a term usually rendered in Japanese publications at the time using the French term “cinépoème” in roman letters; in the katakana syllabary as *shinépoe*mu, *shine-poemu*, or *shine-poëmu*; or in kanji using the previously discussed older term *eigashi* (film-poem), often with one of the above terms as a pronunciation gloss. Whatever version of the term was used, the cinépoe in Japan was an expansion of a handful of relatively obscure French literary experiments—which will be discussed shortly—into a full-fledged poetic movement dedicated to the reimagining of cinema, most often associated with poems that took the form of shot lists or unfilmable scripts. This section will explore the emergence of this form not just as an obscure sub-subgenre of poetry that boomed in popularity, but also in its capacity as an example of poetry rethinking media at a time of rapid technological transition, establishing a kind of model that has continued to resonate in the nearly hundred years since. Like the film-poems discussed in the previous section that preceded and continued to flourish alongside them, cinépoes were less about what was projected on the screen, and more about how to position themselves *against* the screen and what it stood for.

“Rugby—cinépoème” (“Ragubi—cinépoème”), a 1929 work by Takenaka Iku (1904–82), was published in *Poetry and Poetics* (*Shi to shiron*), the preeminent Surrealist journal at the time; it had an enormous impact on modern Japanese poetry and remains the best-known example of the cinépoe in Japan. The first few lines follow:

1. Waves and foam coming in along with their beautiful reflections.
2. A sea of caps.
3. *Kick off!* It begins. There are studs on the bottom of shoes.
4. The ball dissolves into water and air. Ellipse. The sadness of savon.
5. “Ah, where the hell did you go?!”
6. Feet. Stocking-wrapped feet are dreaming of factories.
7. Upward-facing chimney burns coal en masse. It's setting up for a magnificent morning.
8. A downward-facing young man. A young man is thinking. A young man with beads of sweat on his forehead. A young man is screaming. Young men. Young men. Young men in the rain of all their passion. Delighted young men. Young men playing in the sun.<sup>46</sup>



Takenaka was born and raised in Kobe, and in 1928, at twenty-four years old, he moved to France. There he met avant-garde figures like the poet and filmmaker Jean Cocteau (1889–1963) and the photographer and filmmaker Man Ray (1890–1976), among others, and he became absorbed in the new art movements centered around Paris, which were characterized by a interplay between the worlds of cinema, literature, and visual art.<sup>47</sup> He moved to Tokyo three years later but published several works in Japanese poetry journals while he was abroad, including this one. Like a growing number of poems at the time, “Rugby” had the subtitle of “cinépoème.” This was a portmanteau of the French words for cinema and poem, first used by Man Ray to subtitle his 1926 short film “Emak Bakia.” Here, however, it refers to a poem in the form of a film scenario / shooting script of a nonexistent silent film, each line—thirty in total—numbered and representing a different shot or intertitle in an imaginary shot list.

It was an immediate critical success in its time and has remained one of the most discussed works of modern Japanese poetry. In 1930, Nakagawa Yoichi (1897–1994), a prominent experimental novelist, called it “the poetry of tomorrow,” rejecting the narrow focus on the “beauty of spirit” of earlier poetry in favor of “the lucid beauty of matter” and “the pure combination of formats.”<sup>48</sup> Postwar poet and theorist Ayukawa Nobuo (1920–86) notes that the scenario-form cinépoem had a “highly refreshing impact” on the poetry world of the time, and that “Rugby” was perhaps the most successful of these works. He saw in “Rugby” an effortlessness and lightness to its experimentation that distinguished Takenaka from other avant-garde poets in the interwar period who worked in different modes, and emphasized the clarity and approachability of his cinépoems, which no doubt contributed to the sudden and widespread popularity of the form.<sup>49</sup> In this way, Takenaka’s cinépoems stand out as perhaps the most emblematic examples of what Hosea Hirata describes as *Shi to shiron*’s central aims: the creation of new kinds of Japanese poetry through formal and methodological experimentation, along with the introduction and incorporation of poetics from abroad.<sup>50</sup>

At the core of “Rugby” is a push and pull with the bodies of young men (*shōnen*) at the center. On the one hand is their mechanization and dehumanization, both in the factory and within the workings of the team: they are described as “weary workers” (*hirō suru rōdōsha*), “tight-packed gears starting to devour each other” (*gacchiri to kuiatte yuku haguruma*), a “bursting flow of released workers” (*watto hanatareta rōdōsha no nagare*), and “young men getting devoured in the machine” (*kikai no naka e kuwarete yuku shōnen*). On the other hand is a more than slightly homoerotic glorification of their bodies in action. The poem’s “camera” lingers on every aspect of them, whether they are “downward-facing,” “standing on tip-toes” “with beads of sweat,” or “in the rain of all their passion,” with further attention drawn to the “teeth of beautiful young men” and “young men only below the waist.” Takenaka himself was one of these “beautiful young men”: not only was he a former rugby player, but he was known for his good looks and even worked as a



model.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, wearing his rugby uniform, he was the subject of Koiso Ryōhei's 1927 painting "His Rest" ("Kare no kyūsoku"), which shows him sitting down, his bare legs wide apart, his feet in thick rugby socks falling half out of his slippers. Like with Hanabusa Yuriko's film-poem on the Sennett Bathing Beauties, the viewpoint of "Rugby" is thus shaped by Takenaka's own embodied experience. It is not purely in the spectatorial mode, with the poet and reader serving as an audience member of the imagined film, but it also steps into the role of the actors/players, the director directing the action, and the cameraperson capturing it, and often all at once.

This type of poem in the form of a numbered shooting script was usually referred to as a "scenario-style" poem. Yet "Rugby," as well as most other cine-poems that took this form, only *seems* to take the form of an actual film scenario or shooting script. In reality it would be extremely difficult to shoot a film that accurately matched it or, more to the point, to easily imagine a film while reading it. While each of the thirty numbered lines ostensibly represents a shot or an intertitle, the images are far from coherent, shifting from the rugby field to the ocean to a factory, with many lines ambiguously encapsulating several scenes at the same time. Where a conventional film scenario's shot-by-shot progression would be as clear as possible—"5) close-up on a hand," "6) long shot of a field," and so on—the imagery of "Rugby" is in a constant process of transformation clearly inspired by *but also exceeding* the potential of avant-garde films at the time. One can of course speculate about "shots" of "Rugby" like the "plume of white steam, becoming a flower," "3 p.m. hearts," and "a moss-like human landscape" being created through clever uses of fades, overlays, cross-cutting, and so on. Nevertheless, we no longer have a straightforward process in which the reader reads a scenario and imagines each shot of the film in order. What we have instead are a sequence of thirty seeds of undetermined cinematic potential, not a subservience to or remediation of the filmic medium, but a conception of the cinematic that is *only* possible through poetic text. What becomes central is not a certain mode of fragmented or montage-form visuality, but rather the entanglement of bodies and perspectives—starting with the audience member, director, actor, and camera, but then expanding to include nonhuman types of embodiment, dreamlike transformations, and impossible points of "view."

"Rugby" remains one of the most famous poetic works of its time, held up as a representative example of prewar Japanese modernist literature and its intimate relationship with novel cultural, technological, and media forms. Yet the cinepoem is largely a footnote in histories of Japanese literature. The whole genre or form is usually depicted in those histories as consisting of few one-off experiments inspired by French works in the late 1920s and early 1930s by some poets associated with the Japanese Surrealist movement, with the assumption that all cinepoetic works used this scenario form. But this is not accurate. Well over

a hundred works explicitly called “cinemoems” (or *ciné-poèmes*, *shinemoemu*, *shine-poemu*, or *shine-poēmu*) were published between 1928 and the early 1940s by a wide range of poets in Japan, some but by no means all of which were in the form of the numbered film scenario. There was also a flourishing of work *about* cinemoems: at least forty critical essays on the cinemoem were published in the 1920s and 1930s. Cinemoems and cinemoetic works were written across the full range of free verse poetic production in Japan, and not just in the modernist avant-garde, including by unknown amateurs and old masters, self-described romantics and New Perceptionists, Dadaists, Futurists, anarchists, lyric poets, and proletarian poets.

A common genre in many magazines starting in the 1910s was *eiga shosetsu* (film stories), short story adaptations of popular films, which were often illustrated with stills from the film itself. Scripts and scenarios of actual films were also regularly published in magazines. All of these functioned, in a way, as virtual films, allowing readers to use the text to let imagined versions of the film play out in their heads. Scenario-form cinemoems, however, were *not* bound to existing films nor to their conventions and thus had more freedom to play with the idea of the imagined film itself. Film offered to these poets not just a new set of tropes and images but something more profound—what James Lastra calls a “spatial, temporal, and sensual restructuring.”<sup>52</sup>

Wall-Romana traces the course of cinemoems from the nineteenth century to the present in France, where they originated: from Stéphane Mallarmé’s pioneering visual poetry experiments, to some of the first poems explicitly referring to cinema by Guillaume Apollinaire in 1902, to the “first explicit cinemoem” in 1918 (Philippe Soupault’s “Indifference, A Cinematographic Poem”), the coining of the term “ciné-poème” by Man Ray in 1926 with his film “Emak Bakia, ciné-poème,” the poem-scenarios of the same decade by Robert Desnos and Benjamin Fondane, and to the cinemoetic theories of experimental poet-filmmakers like Jean Epstein.<sup>53</sup> Kitagawa Fuyuhiko (1900–1990)—avant-garde poet and film critic—drew on his knowledge of many of the above French works as well as the cinemoetry being produced in his own literary and filmic circles in order to provide in 1929 (the same year as “Rugby”) what is perhaps the clearest definition of the term cinemoem as it was used in Japan at the time:

What on earth is a cinemoem? I believe there are two things that can be called cinemoems. One is a thing created from a series of letters [*moji no raretsu ni yoru mono*]. The second is a sequence of projected images / film frames [*eizo (firumu) no renzoku ni yoru mono*]. Within the former category, there are A) poems that borrow the form of the scenario, and B) cinematic poems; within the latter category, there can be A) pure films, B) absolute films, and other such categories. . . . Needless to say, the “thing created from a series of letters” is a literary work, and the “sequence of projected images” is a film. The word *cinemoem* is thus something that names two different genres of art.<sup>54</sup>

While there was a common acknowledgement in Japan in essays like these that cinepoems could be in filmic rather than written form—much like the short avant-garde films by Man Ray that originated the term in the latter half of the 1920s—there does not seem to have been any film created in Japan that was referred to as such in the prewar period, and there was an overall agreement from critics at the time that there were none.<sup>55</sup> Kitagawa's take on cinepoems as a type of poem that simply "borrow[ed] the form of the scenario" was more in line with the general consensus: that they were a poetic variation on a textual form usually associated with film production. But the writings of many other cinepoets made their larger ambitions clearer: they intended their writings not to be merely *about* cinema but to *be* films themselves. They intended that readers not only imagine a virtual film while reading but also reconceptualize cinema as a practice, stance, or mode of perception that could exist entirely on the page and had no inherent need for camera, projector, or screen.

Perhaps the most important point of origin of Japanese cinepoems was the work of Benjamin Fondane (1898–1944). Fondane was a Jewish Romanian-French poet associated with the Surrealists who declared his poems to be "unfilmable scenarios," and in 1928 he was the first in the world to apply the term "ciné-poème" to written texts, using the phrase coined by Man Ray in his film two years earlier. In his article in the second issue of *Shi to shiron* introducing Benjamin Fondane's poetry collection *Trois scénarii: ciné-poèmes*, the poet and film critic Iijima Tadashi is skeptical, wondering why the potential of the film lens is packed in and closed off by Fondane into compact scenarios, and noting that the end effect is "no different than lyric poetry that emerges from small feelings."<sup>56</sup> Nevertheless, he goes on to create the first example of a cinepoem in Japanese by translating the first twelve numbered lines of Fondane's "Mtasi poi," crystallizing the dominant subgenre of poem-as-numbered film scenario.

One year before this, Kondō Azuma (1904–88) was the first to use the term "cinepoem" in Japanese, in his 1927 essay of that name ("Shine-poemu") in *Kindai fūkei*.<sup>57</sup> In it he described how he saw the term was generally used (in French), and again he lamented that no films that fit that description were produced locally:

The term "film-poem" seems to be used in two ways—in other words, poems expressed through screenplays, and situations where films themselves are poems. However, I think the latter is the pure meaning. Film-poems in the latter sense do not seem to have been made in Japan yet. If forced to find some, I could probably only come up with two or three sections of *Page of Madness*, and the scenes like those in the Nikkatsu film *Ring of the Sun* that depict the present day. But it seems that they're appearing one after another in other countries. Pure film, absolute film, color music, machine film—these are all certainly attempts of this sort.<sup>58</sup>

As mentioned before, there seems to have been a consensus that no *filmed* cinepoems were created in prewar Japan, though in a 1936 essay, "On Film-Poems"

("Eigashi ni tsuite"), Baba Eitarō had an optimistic take that written cinepoems would have a rejuvenating effect on Japanese film itself: "Poetry always leads other art forms. This is because we are the first to suggest processes of recognition of the newest realities. . . . Excellent cinepoems will help filmmakers with dried-up senses to see film with new eyes."<sup>59</sup>

The first poem written originally in Japanese that was explicitly called a "cin-poem" was Takenaka Iku's "Department Store" ("Hyakkaten"), published in the fourth issue of *Shi to shiron* in 1929, which begins as follows:

1. It's an *ascenseur*, opening and closing. No one is inside of it.
2. There are flowers lying on the floor, there are flowers without petals.
3. Shoes shoes shoes galloping up the stairs. Women's shoes.
4. In the middle, a shoe, its heel having come off.
5. Try holding up a jeweled necklace bending back and forth in the surface of a mirror. The beautiful jewels have a tenacity, like beautiful snakes.  
(It's as deep as the sharp light rays looking inside a well.)
6. A nimble calculator sticks out its tongue, sticks out its tongue, sticks out its tongue.
7. White tongue.
8. It's a woman's slender, manicured hand.<sup>60</sup>

The setting of the department store had a special resonance with the Surrealist movement in Japan, in which Takenaka was an active participant. Miryam Sas points out that department store art galleries at the time were a key site for the exhibition of Surrealist art; in other words, far from being an underground phenomenon, activities associated with the Surrealist movement were "squarely within the realm of commercial mass media," with swanky department stores becoming key factors in the institutional recognition of Surrealist aesthetics and artistic practices.<sup>61</sup> Each "shot" within this poem is a vivid depiction of something within the titular store itself but with a decidedly Surrealist bent. As Majella Munro notes, "The sudden transformation and deformation of imagery, specific to the Surrealists' cinematic experiments, were translated by Takenaka into a poetic technique."<sup>62</sup> Petal-less flowers become women's shoes, a necklace becomes jeweled snakes, and a calculating machine sticks out its paper "tongue": the glittering spectacle of a still-novel form of consumerism runs up against the uneasiness of the products themselves becoming animated.

Takenaka had long had an interest in the work of the Paris-based American artist Man Ray; he saw "L'Étoile de Mer," one of Ray's short filmed cinepoems, shortly after he arrived in Paris.<sup>63</sup> In Takenaka's 1929 essay "On Man Ray" ("Man Rei ni tsuite"), he describes Ray's film as a "cin-poem" that is "very pure," "penetrating like music," and which fulfills cinema's potential as the "eighth art"; two stills from the film are included in the article. He also describes meeting Man Ray himself in his apartment, but Ray was decidedly surly and uncommunicative.<sup>64</sup> Nevertheless, "Department Store"—which Takenaka wrote shortly after this meeting—was

dedicated to Ray and shows clear formal influences from both “L’Étoile de Mer” and the poet Robert Desnos’s film scenario for it (later published in Japanese translation in the January 1930 edition of *Eiga ōrai*), successfully capturing the energy of the interplay between the literary and the cinematic that so characterized the Paris scene. The pop culture critic Ōtsuka Eiji uses “Department Store” as a key example to illustrate this idea of a “cinematic” (*eigateki*) not necessarily bound to cinema. Using this poem as evidence, he goes so far as to argue that the cinematic “had the most vigorous impression not in visual media but in the field of literature.”<sup>65</sup> Indeed, the novelty of Takenaka’s cinepoem had an immediate impact on the poetry world in Japan at the time, an impact that was captured by Nakano Kaichi: “When Takenaka from his distant lodging house in Paris first published ‘Department Store,’ a prototype of this poetic form, in *Shi to shiron*, it caused a kind of sensation among younger poets in Japan.”<sup>66</sup>

These early works led to a flood of other cinepoems in Japanese poetry and film journals, which were clustered in the late 1920s and early 1930s but continued until the early 1940s. In 1929, for his seminal collection *War (Sensō)*, Kitagawa Fuyuhiko rewrote an earlier version of his poem “How Abundant Is Autumn” (“Aki wa yutakanaru kana”) into a cinepoem, now with numbers at the beginning of each of its twenty-four lines: “1 A city park that smells of osmanthus. / 2 Tree. Tree. / 3 A mantis-like old woman.”<sup>67</sup> This began a long string of cinepoetic works written by him, and he quickly became the second best known poet to work in this form. William Gardner—one of the few scholars to have written in depth in English about what he calls the “Cine-texts” of Japanese modernism—focuses especially on the poems of Kitagawa Fuyuhiko and the novels of Yokomitsu Riichi, as well as the operative logic of “fragment” and “flow” that characterize much cinepoetic and cinetextual work.<sup>68</sup> As Gardner notes, Kitagawa was particularly interested in the technique of montage and how it might be rendered in poetry.<sup>69</sup> This logic can be clearly seen in his many cinepoems set in the Japan-colonized Manchuria in which he was raised. “Autumn—ciné-poème” (“Aki—shine-poemu”), from 1930, is set in the Fushun Coal Mine in Dalian City (“8 No strength left, his neck sinks down into his chest / 9 A pickaxe holding up a dislocated shoulder”).<sup>70</sup> In his last cinepoem, 1939’s “Memories of Manchuria (Ciné-poème)” (“Manshū no omoide—[ciné-poème]”), the line numbers beginning each “shot” have once again fallen away in favor of a more conventional collage of nostalgic imagery (“street after street / overnight / have been transformed into a skating rink / we jump for joy”).<sup>71</sup> Also based in Manchuria, Miyoshi Hiromitsu wrote parodies of the cinepoetic form itself, including frazzled directors, shoots gone wrong, and shots that are left accidentally unshot: “1 Mr. Director, I’m asking you / 2 Blank / 3 Blank (The sound of the camera seems loud.) / 4 Blank blank blan—.”<sup>72</sup>

It is no coincidence that many cinepoets, like Kitagawa and Miyoshi, were from settler families in Manchuria. It is impossible, of course, to divorce modernist

artistic and literary production in interwar Japan from Japan's colonialism. The same qualities that made cinempoetry so exciting to poets at the time—the promise of both a new poetic form and a new type of cinema; of a viewpoint that went beyond the limits of the human eye; of the possibilities of juxtaposition, montage, and other techniques of cinematography and editing remediated on the page—made it extraordinarily well suited to be a poetry of imperialism. As with many of the examples just discussed, a large number of cinempoems exulted in the mechanistic perspectives of war and of surveillance: the “eye” of the poems became not just the eye of the camera lens but also the eye of the warplane cockpit or plantation overseer or the crosshairs of a rifle. Kambara Tai (1889–1997), founding figure of Futurism in Japan, called his own cinempoetic works “poems by camera” (*kamera ni yoru shi*), often focusing on the mechanism of the camera itself in precise detail, like in 1929's “A City Corner Will Be Thus Adorned (Study for Poem By Camera)” (“Tokai no ikkaku wa kakute kazararete iku [*kamera ni yoru shi no shūsaku*]”): “A riveted steel plate rushes past, filling up the screen. / The camera runs parallel to the steel plate, but its movement speed is 4/5ths of the plate.”<sup>73</sup> Other Futurist works like Mizumachi Hyakusō's “Cinempoem—Street Beyond Speed” (“Shinepoemu—Sokudo no ue no machi”) from 1932 explored the potential of the form to create ideal imagined works of Futurist cinema, heavily featuring military technology in their core aesthetic language: “Muzzle of a gun aimed at the mirror's vertigo / A street with wavelike unfoldings of velocity / Towards the focal point, star shell ammunitions roar out.”<sup>74</sup> This can also be seen in the works of Orito Horio (1903–90), who wrote extensively on the potential of the cinempoem and whose 1933 “Him/Me and the Junkers Plane (Cinempoem)” (“Yunkerusu-ki to kare = boku [*shinepoemu*]”) makes extensive use of dashes and fragmentation to create a scene of an aerial dogfight: “white wings tilted upwards—tilting bow ascending and descending—white incline—tilted black NO. 130 / climbing—climbing—climbing—climbing.”<sup>75</sup>

Tsukihara Tōichirō (1902–89)—the son of a telegraph engineer—takes the wide-ranging cinempoetic view from above to an extreme in 1930's expansive, 114-line-long “Bird's Eye Diagram of Earth” (“Chōkan chikyū-zu”). The poem has the subtitle “cinempoem style” (*shinepoemu-chō*), a term that, just a year after “Rugby,” had already become trendy enough to make this a useful appellation. “What's being typed up by the young typist sitting by a Marunouchi Building window is an order form for Cuban sugar” it begins. “Even though there's a bumper crop in Brazil's coffee plantations / Men are drinking a single cup of coffee for 15 sen / Putting a foot on the gas in a car sent to pick up the chief director / In a Singapore rubber plantation / A native's foot is bitten off by a fierce tiger.”<sup>76</sup> It offers a vast vision of global networks of trade, politics, and industry with its long lists of moments, objects, and places punctuated by startling events like tiger attacks and shipwrecks. If this “cinempoem style” is meant to evoke a film, it is less a narrative film than it is a documentary film or newsreel, assembling the titular bird's-eye

view of the world through snippets of both everyday and spectacular happenings. Its ostensibly “neutral” stance, however, belies a vision in which colonial exploitation and Indigenous suffering are accepted as natural parts of the contemporary world, reduced to a source of thrilling imagery and entertainment.

While some cinepoets such as Takenaka Iku used the cinepoem as a form to critique the dehumanizing effect of this “objective” camera eye, the vast majority of debates around cinepoems tended not to be about their radical potential—positive or pernicious—but about questions of form. In “On Cinepoems” (“Shine-poemu no koto”), an essay written the year after he published “Rugby,” Takenaka decries how the form has already become a formula. Although he says the fact that they have become so widely written and talked about is a “delightful thing,” he admits that he “can’t stand the poems written so far.” He lambastes them as “half-finished scenarios, split up into lines with numbers just nonchalantly stuck onto them, and then shown off saying—it’s a cinepoem!” and he worries that cinepoets will become a “public laughingstock.”<sup>77</sup> He goes on to specify that he is speaking of cinepoems on paper and not on film and is criticizing cinepoets who were overly dependent on the concept of the camera. In reality, says Takenaka, when reading a cinepoem on the page the reader is more than primed to chain together cinematic images in their head by means of the experience they have already had viewing several films.<sup>78</sup> Takenaka Kyūshichi (1907–62) of Osaka (unrelated to Iku), the lead editor of the influential Kansai-area avant-garde journal *Rian* (a katakana rendition of the French word *rien*, “nothing”), was perhaps the most outspoken critic of cinepoems, for different reasons than a jaded Takenaka Iku. In an essay also from 1930—with the no-punches-pulled title “Why Are Cinepoems Meaningless?” (“Shine-poemu wa naze muimi ka?”)—he goes on an amusingly catty tirade against how “poets who have no knowledge or understanding, or are frivolous and stupid, are starting to create works based on the idea of the so-called ‘cinepoem.’”<sup>79</sup> Takenaka Kyūshichi’s concern seems to be with preserving the novelty and innovation of the filmic medium; while poets of all kinds tried to use poetry to remake film anew, Takenaka sees this as yet another example of film being held back by older art forms instead of being allowed to flourish in its own medium specificity.

That specificity, however, would itself soon change. Sound film emerged globally in the late 1920s, as did the form of the written cinepoem, although talkies took a longer time to take hold in Japan than in just about any other context and did not dominate the film landscape until the end of the 1930s.<sup>80</sup> But it is no coincidence that the cinepoem peaked in popularity precisely at this time. The numbered film scenario or shooting script was the core textual form of silent film production; with the shift to prerecorded sound came new regimes of scriptwriting.<sup>81</sup> But this gave the scenario-form cinepoems even more power. They became explorations in a phantom future of cinema—another way forward that, even at the time, would obviously not come to pass. It was a path that was more experimental, stranger, and still “silent,” not giving in to the homogenizing force of the talkie. The “*Kick*



off!" at the beginning of Takenaka Iku's "Rugby," in other words, was called out knowing that the match had already been lost, at least in terms of what film would become. Yet there remained for these poets a hope that their own cinematic games had just begun, if not in the theater, then on the page.

### THE BROKEN PROJECTOR

In his 1933 essay "The Poetic Construction of the Cinepoem" ("Shinepoemu no shigakuteki kensetsu"), Orito Horio argued that the poetics of cinepoetry might initially draw from filmic images, scenarios, and so on, but, in the end, must become something different: "The idea of the poesy of the cinepoem exists precisely within the linking and fragmentation of images on screen. Nevertheless, in the end, *the cinepoem negates the screen* [*shinepoemu wa sukurin o hitei*] and leaps into an original world."<sup>82</sup> For many poets, this meant using the filmic medium or the movie theater only as a starting point for asking how the world itself becomes *cinematized*, to use Osaki Midori's term: in the light of a flame, in the play of shadows, in a lightning storm, on a city street covered in flower petals, or on the shores of a remote island. LaMarre notes how, for the writer Tanizaki Jun'ichirō, "the experience of moving pictures became one in which images constantly threatened (or promised) to overflow the limits of the screen, to seep into all aspects of everyday life, and to efface the difference between reality and fantasy."<sup>83</sup> Similarly, the poets in this section used poetry to recast the "cinematic" as an experiential mode that exists apart from the apparatus of film. As opposed to the embodied grappling with film as spectatorial fantasy in the first part of this chapter, and the experiments with film scenarios as textual form in the second, this final section turns to a handful of works at the edges of poetic practice at this time. They reflect, however, a larger trend in poetry that sometimes included works called "film-poems" and "cinepoems" but also extended well beyond them: a blossoming of writings in which the cinematic and the poetic were used in concert to reflect upon how the media of modernity generate new ways of knowing and seeing the world.

The "Three Ciné-poèmes" ("Shine-poēmu sanpen") of Kawaji Ryūkō (1888–1959) were some of the first to bear that name in Japanese—they were published in 1929, the same year as "Rugby"—but they have largely been forgotten, perhaps due to their not following the conventional idea that poems with numbered lines are cinepoems, and cinepoems have numbered lines. But in both form and motivation, Kawaji's works differ from the scenario-form cinepoems of the previous section.

#### STILL LIFE

Left behind on a corner of the table  
A single empty bottle  
Pleasure already gone  
Reflecting the time when corpses transition—



Inspid space. Woman puttering around the kitchen,  
 Distorted window frame, clouds in the sky outside.  
 Midday clouds of nothing.

## SHADOW

Countless feet pass,  
 And climb the stairs.  
 They disappear.  
 The cinema is inside the curtains.  
 An usherette even more tedious  
 Than a pocket flashlight illuminating a seat.

## FIRE

Darkness.  
 A struck match  
 Lights up each other's faces. Hands. Chests.  
 Lips hold a burning cigarette—  
 The sound of waves is quiet  
 The offshore lighthouse, the ship lights, also quiet . . .  
 Flames separate like fireflies  
 Lips join together.  
 Darkness. A sailor's song by the handrail.<sup>84</sup>

Long before this, Kawaji was a key figure in the development of modern Japanese poetry; his 1910 book *Flowers of the Roadside* (*Robō no hana*) is widely accepted as one of the first—if not *the* first—poetry collections written in colloquial Japanese.<sup>85</sup> He remained an influential art and literary critic, and in his 1931 essay “Ciné-poèmes (film-poems)” (“Shine-poēmu [eigashi]”), Kawaji notes that film's relationship to literature until that point had been largely centered on adapting the plots of written works. He explores the “cinepoem” as a new and diverse development: to him, any kind of poem (from haiku to scenario-form) might be a cinepoem if it embraces a kind of filmic vision, and he also encouraged the creation of short poetic amateur films with a Pathé Baby camera, one of the few mentions by a poet of the growing amateur film practices of the time.<sup>86</sup> Above all, however, he defines the cinepoem oppositionally: “the ciné-poème,” whether filmed or written, “runs counter to popular trends in cinema.”<sup>87</sup>

He goes even further than this in his 1933 essay “A Postscript on Ciné-poèmes,” in which he criticizes cinepoems as “meaningless” if they are “just a speedy list of images or impressions” that limit themselves to “anticipating the effects of the camera or the screen” instead of aspiring to be “independent creations.”<sup>88</sup> The three poems above were one of his few attempts at creating cinepoetry of his own. He self-deprecatingly calls them “extremely shoddy attempts in anticipation of the emergence of an actually good cinepoet,” but they are striking in just how deliberately different they are from many “scenario-form” works.<sup>89</sup> The title “Still Life” itself, of course, immediately presents a contradiction: a still life is the antithesis

of a moving-image medium like cinema, a winking signal that Kawaji is taking a different approach toward film (and one appropriate for someone who came to be best known as an art critic). The poem is an unsettling domestic scene, with elements that specifically gesture toward the cinematic while *not* explicitly taking place in a film—a bottle “reflecting the time when corpses transition” (*nakigara no utsuriyuku toki o utsusu*, the verb *utsusu* meaning both “reflect” and “project”) and a “distorted window frame” (*mado no yugamu madowaku*). “Shadow,” the second poem, seems to take a cinematic eye and turn it toward a movie theater itself, with images of feet, stairs, curtains, an usherette, and a flashlight. “Fire” is the most abstract: the images are even more fragmentary than those in the poems that precede it, emphasizing the ambiguity of whether what is described is on-screen, in the theater, or both. The focus, again, seems to be on evoking cinematic moments beyond cinematic technologies—the dramatic lighting of matches, the interplay of light and shadow, a handrail of either a theater balcony or a ship, and the sound of waves that ambiguously exist between real, imagined, and sound effect.

Kawaji’s poems are an example of a much larger group of works from this time in which certain types of light produced by artificial or natural phenomena serve to cinematize the landscape—in his case, a struck match, fireflies, and the lights of a ship. But the most common version of this trope was centered around the flashes of lightning in a thunderstorm. To give just one example, the 1924 poem “Lightning Flicks” (literally, “Motion Picture of Lightning,” “*Inazuma no katsudō shashin*”) was written by Matsumoto Junzō (1895–1950) and published in the October 19 issue of *Yorozu chōhō*, a newspaper that had the simultaneous reputation of being a left-wing tabloid and a home for a particularly romantic strain of intellectualism.

Even on a lonely suburban night  
flashes of lightning are a Futurist  
motion picture

In the bright, pale light  
mountains, plains, bamboo groves, telephone poles  
a bathhouse chimney  
paths through the rice fields  
hills, slopes, a man in Western clothes  
a woman walking, coquettishly leaning into him  
obi, hips, pure white  
cheeks  
and following after them  
a dog, a dog, —stars  
everything distinctly  
projected  
everything strangely  
flickering

Even on a lonely suburban night  
 flashes of lightning are a Futurist  
 motion picture.<sup>90</sup>

This poem depicts a moment of cinematization, to once again use Osaki Midori's term. Osaki focused on the spectators themselves going through that process, but here it is happening to a landscape or, perhaps more accurately, a landscape as seen by the already-cinematized narrator, who has become so imbricated in film's structures of perception that a lightning storm is enough to turn the world around them into a movie. Not only that, but the film is explicitly called an avant-garde "Futurist motion picture" (*miraiha no katsudō shashin*). Although the flicker effect between frames had been minimized since the 1900s by developments in filmic technology, in this poem it returns in full force. It is not something concealed by the shutter in order to allow for smooth projection but is instead made into a natural spectacle: the lightning makes it so that "everything is strangely flickering" (*subete wa kikai ni chirachira suru*). As Charles Musser argues, it was the suppression of the flicker effect that was one of the major conditions for the transition from short-form films about spectacle toward longer-form story films—"reduced flicker," he notes, "certainly facilitates the kinds of pleasures associated with fantasy and fiction."<sup>91</sup> Yet by bringing back this earlier, flicker-filled mode, Matsumoto's poem becomes another example of cinepoetry's pushing against the rapidly crystallizing conventions of narrative film, even well before the talkie. Instead of a trite story, we have a mode of cinematized sensation that envelops the entire visual field.

Matsumoto, born in the rural prefecture of Shimane, later became a socialist politician and was known for his explicitly left-wing works; indeed, in 1923 (a year before this poem was published) he was one of the founders of Japan's first proletarian poetry journal, *Chain* (*Kusari*). Keeping this in mind, a few aspects of the poem come into focus. Those aligned with proletarian literary movements in Japan often made use of avant-garde aesthetics and formal experimentation, but they just as often critiqued such works for being apolitical and out of touch with the common man. Along these lines, "Lightning Flicks" may very well be tongue in cheek, asking what the need for radical Futurist cinema might be when a thunderstorm is enough to remake how we experience the world. And that world was already being rapidly, materially remade. The "suburban night" (*kōgai no yoru*) setting of this poem highlights a space in transition at a time in which suburbs were only beginning to be widely established in the wake of the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923 (the year before this poem was published) and the resultant need for housing. The suburbs were a site of rejuvenation and potential but also of precarity and painfully felt class differences, as can be seen in any number of *shoshimin eiga* (films focused on the lower middle class), like Ozu Yasujiro's *I Was Born, But . . .*, which became the dominant genre of the next decade of cinema.<sup>92</sup>

Whatever the intended effect, “Lightning Flicks” is a fantasy of a new regime of cinematized sensation in which the stuff of theater and screen are no longer necessary. Even the drab everyday surroundings of the “lonely suburbs” are something “distinctly projected” within the momentary medium of lightning’s illumination. This creates a sequence of dramatically lit tableaux in each flash instead of still images on a celluloid reel. The literally electrifying excitement of a “Futurist motion picture” has left the realm of the movie theater and has become a way of viewing the landscape, at once romantic and uneasy, “distinctly projected” and “strangely flickering.”

Sagawa Chika (1911–36) took a similarly radically altered vision of the urban and natural world and made it the center of her work throughout her all-too-brief career as a poet. One of the few prominent modernist women poets in interwar Japan, Sagawa published the short poem “Promenade” in 1934 in the third issue of the Kobe-based poetry journal *Cockfight* (*Tōkei*), one of the key publications in the “Kobe modernism” movement in which Takenaka Iku was also a central figure.<sup>93</sup>

The season changes its gloves  
At 3 in the afternoon  
The day fades  
Petals burying pavement  
A black and white screen  
Eyes covered by clouds  
A day without promises falls into night.<sup>94</sup>

The film-poems, cinemoems, and other film-related poetry explored in this chapter often use the trappings of the cinematic not to center but to challenge the primacy of vision and normative modes of visibility. This can be thought of as the creation of a kind of poetic visibility not *inherently* linked to sight. What might visibility “look like” if it is not tied to an optical regime of the interplay of human vision and machine vision, of organic and inorganic lenses and the production and reception of images? This was precisely the regime associated with the medium of cinema: in Japan, as in the rest of the world, film was seen as the emblematic practice of a new, modern way of seeing, of arranging visual information, and of understanding the world through new logics of montage and mechanism. Sawako Nakayasu highlights the cinematic structure of sensation in Sagawa’s poems as well, how they “operate in a fashion similar to a tableau or montage, placing images one after the other in the reader’s eye.”<sup>95</sup>

“Promenade,” however, contains what seems to be the only explicit reference to cinema in any of Sagawa’s works, with its mention of the “black and white screen” (*shiro to kuro to no sukurin*). Yet as tends to be the case in her poetry and that of most Surrealists, the image is deliberately ambiguous: is the “screen” a movie screen, showing a “black and white” film? Or is the screen the “pavement”

buried in flower petals from the previous line—white petals on black pavement, or perhaps dark petals on white? Could it be that the eyes “covered by clouds” are themselves the screen, perceiving the world around them as “black and white” due to their occlusion? The presence of the cinematic, however, is unmistakable and cannot be disentangled from the three realms of nature, urban space, and the body that constantly intersect in Sagawa’s work. In Matsumoto’s “Lightning Flicks,” flashes of lightning cinematized the landscape into a “Futurist motion picture”; in Sagawa’s “Promenade,” the cinematization happens not through dramatic and intermittent lighting, but through the implied interplay of shadows at a time of transition between seasons and times of day.

Most striking is how these “images” operate for Sagawa: in this poem and in her poetry more generally, the narrator tends to be first and foremost a spectator, though not in a way that can be completely reduced to the optical. “Vision” for her is a full-body experience—often a painful one—in which the eye may or may not play a part, and imagery fluidly moves across multiple sensorial modes. This is not only an aesthetic preference but is linked to the embodied experience of Sagawa herself. A significant aspect of her poetry is its disability poetics (a concept that will be explored in depth in chapter 3). Disability poetry is characterized by Jim Ferris as “foregrounding of the perspective of people with disabilities; [with] an emphasis on embodiment, especially atypical embodiment; and alternative techniques and poetics.”<sup>96</sup> This becomes especially relevant near the very end of the poem, where, as mentioned, we are told that there are “eyes covered by clouds” (*hitomi wa kumo ni oowarete*); indeed, this is a repeated image in Sagawa’s poetry, with “cloud-covered eyes gaz[ing] at the black specks darting through the air” featured in 1931’s “Blemish on the Grape.”<sup>97</sup> Sagawa had low vision and also lived with chronic illness since her childhood; seeing bright daylight was often painful for her.<sup>98</sup>

I point this out not to position Sagawa in a way that resembles so many other depictions of blind and low vision people by sighted writers and artists as “mysterious, mournful, and tragic” and as “emblem[s] of loss,” as put by Georgina Kleege.<sup>99</sup> Rather, I want to center how Sagawa’s poetry can be thought through the poetics of “cloud-covered eyes.” The dominant framings of both poetry and cinema have in common an overwhelming focus on “imagery” as their central building block, whether on screen or in the mind’s eye. Yet throughout Sagawa’s work, we are given different versions of what “seeing” could be: light and shadow have color and texture, weight and pressure. Eyes might be “covered” by clouds, but this does not mean, or only mean, blindness. The “clouds” in Sagawa’s work are simultaneously cumulus and cataract, suspended in the sky and descending toward earth, both massive natural forms and tiny bodily inflections. The whole body becomes a receptacle of feeling, where the senses converge into one and vision becomes touch, taste, scent, sound, and motion. The “cinematic” here is a moment of dramatic transition that resists being reduced to spectacle or even to the image: a

shudder of light and dark, of softness and hardness, decontextualized from the space of the theater but findable in flowers on top of concrete, or even within the “low vision” eye itself.

I wish to conclude with Maruyama Yutaka’s (1915–89) “Grass Cinema—Iki Islands” (“Kusa shinema—Iki”) from 1938, a poem that depicts an experience of film viewership that is strikingly different from most of those touched on to this point, one that is far removed from the grand cinemas of the cities. Set in the small islands of Iki in Nagasaki Prefecture, the poem describes a rural audience outdoors, watching a film brought to them by a government-sent mobile projection unit.

Even the glow of the sunlight is gone  
 In the blue darkness of the seaside village  
 Here the cinema corps at the end of their journey  
 Raise up an empty screen  
 And gather the people of the island  
 With the sound of a crude saxophone  
 But the old projector breaks halfway through  
 The torn film rendered useless  
 Before the sad-looking cinema corps  
 And the abuse-shouting audience  
 The sea silently rises up  
 The sea of the screen’s surface ripples  
 Luminescent fish in the flickering waves  
 Ships gathering tiger lily bulbs  
 Drifting towards the core of cinema<sup>100</sup>

Although the poem was published only a few years after many of the others in this chapter, cinema was in a dramatically different state nearing the end of the 1930s, and it was about to change even more. Here I refer not only to the ascendance of sound film, though the percentage of Japanese films produced that were talkies increased from less than a fifth of all films in 1933 to a full two-thirds in 1938.<sup>101</sup> With Japan’s imperial expansion and its shift toward a militarist and totalitarian government over the course of the 1930s, there was an enormous increase in the censorship of all artistic production—including, of course, film and poetry—as well as the introduction of the “Film Law” in 1939, which made the government’s control over film production even tighter. Film became especially important as propaganda, with government-sponsored movie screenings sent to every edge of the rapidly expanding Japanese empire. This is reflected by the term cinema corps (*shinema-tai*), which refers to the mobile projection units that were sent to rural locations for this purpose, which was necessary as, even in 1940, only 10 percent of cities, towns, and villages in Japan had movie theaters.<sup>102</sup>

The title of this poem—“Kusa shinema,” or “Grass Cinema”—is a pun on the most famous Tokyo movie theater district at the time, Asakusa. Highlighting how

far away from the norm of theater screenings this scenario is, the “asa” of Asakusa is lopped off, leaving only *kusa*, “grass,” reflecting the remote seaside village on Iki Island in which the poem is set. The propaganda film—ostensibly meant to awe and placate these remote island audiences, who were still unused to cinema—is “torn” and “rendered useless,” with its projector breaking halfway through the screening. The audience becomes unruly and “abuse shouting,” berating the hapless cinema corps. Yet the cinematic still returns, more powerful and expansive than ever—not despite but *because* of the actual projection ending in abject failure. In the last few lines our attention shifts from the failed screening to the landscape, which has itself become cinematic. The poem combines the water and the “empty screen” (*munashii maku*) into one image, “the sea of the screen’s surface” (*maku no omote no umi*); the “blue darkness” of the village after sunset stands in for the darkness of the theater, and instead of the light of the projector we have the evocation of ship lanterns, “luminescent fish,” and “flickering waves.”

Named explicitly in Maruyama’s poem is something that poets throughout this chapter have attempted to capture: the “core of cinema” (*shinema no kakushin*). For these poets, this was something that not only could exist without a working projector but could be even more forcefully expressed through poetry than through film. For Iijima, the core of cinema is present in the shadows that watch films alongside us and eventually join the world on screen; for Osaki, in Charlie Chaplin’s silence; for Hanabusa, in the freedom of the dancing bodies of the Sennett girls; for Ōi, in the ellipses between words; for Takenaka, in a shooting script without a camera; for Sagawa, in cloud-covered eyes; and for Maruyama, in the glow of marine life, the movement of the water and the ships upon it, the gathered audience, and the rippling expanse of sea and screen. Through poetry, the medium of cinema could be freed from the crude materiality of celluloid, the projector, the eye, and, eventually, prerecorded sound, and it could be taken far beyond the confines of the theater walls. The core of cinema, to these poets, was its ability to create new forms of thinking, feeling, and embodiment, resulting in their creation of work that aimed to expand upon film’s capacities—not just to capture, but to rewrite imagination and sensation themselves.

## The Voice Recomposed

### *A Lost Tape-Recorder Poem of Postwar Japan*

On September 30, 1953, a new kind of poetry premiered on an empty stage in the heart of Tokyo. A grand piano, keys covered, sat next to a speaker, rectangular wooden lattices seemingly floating before them; spotlights and floodlights created stark geometries of illumination and shadow.<sup>1</sup> From the speaker, and others like it positioned throughout the concert hall, came two voices—a woman’s and a man’s—which began to read surreal, hypnotic phrases in a precise rhythm: “*shōjo wa pin o otoshita/yoru no suna no naka no kuroi ke/yoru no suna no naka no kuroi ke/yoru no suna no naka no kuroi ke*” (the girl dropped a pin/black hair in the sand of night/black hair in the sand of night/black hair in the sand of night).<sup>2</sup> Over the course of the poem’s thirty-six parts, these voices were multiplied and fragmented, echoed and reversed, layered, amplified, and finally silenced.

This was the first and only performance of “Poem for Tape Recorder: Composition B—Imprisoned Woman” (“Tēpu rekōdā no tame no shi: Sakuhin B—Torawareta onna”), by the poet, composer, and music critic Akiyama Kuni-haru (1929–96). It was held in the middle of the Experimental Workshop’s 5th Exhibition (Jikken Kōbō daigokai happyōkai), an event held at Dai-ichi Seimei Hall, a concert venue established just the year before on the sixth floor of the building that had housed the headquarters of the Allied occupation of Japan from Japan’s defeat in World War II until 1951. Jikken Kōbō, or the Experimental Workshop, was a Tokyo-based collective of fourteen young visual artists, composers, engineers, lighting designers, and poets, including Akiyama. They came together near the end of the occupation, with their artistic activities spanning from 1951 to 1957. Though the term “intermedia” did not come into use until the latter half of the 1960s, their events—which combined recitals, gallery exhibitions, screenings,



poetry readings, and theatrical productions—embodied that ethos, freely mingling highly experimental works across multiple disciplines and taking full advantage of cutting-edge developments in media technology.

The 5th Exhibition was perhaps Jikken Kōbō's fullest expression of their point of view. Several experimental compositions premiered at the same event, including Matsuura Tomiaki performing Takemitsu Tōru's piano piece "La Pause Interrompue," based on a poem by the surrealist poet Takiguchi Shūzō; Takiguchi himself wrote an essay introducing the concert in the program. Four "Auto-Slide Works" ("Ōto-suraido sakuhin"), the first of their kind in the world, used the titular new technology—an automated slide projector synced up to a magnetic tape recorder, which was provided to them by Tōkyō Tsūshin Kōgyō (now called Sony) for demo purposes—to combine photographs of abstract sculptures, sets, and paintings with recordings of music (chamber and concrete) and readings of poems written by Fukushima Hideko and the Venezuelan writer Robert Ganzo. In the midst of these was another world first, this one using Japan's first magnetic tape recorder, Tōkyō Tsūshin Kōgyō's "G-Type" (created less than three years earlier): the premiere of two "Poems for Tape Recorder" by Akiyama Kuniharu. "Composition B: Imprisoned Woman" now exists only in the form of a script; "Composition A" is entirely lost.

Though they are now better known for their works of visual art, what lay at the heart of the 5th Exhibition and much of Jikken Kōbō's output more generally was the intersection of poetry with sound, or, more accurately, with a variety of sonic practices: reading aloud, recording, composition, and scoring. In fact, this can be taken beyond Jikken Kōbō: in the avant-garde of Japan's postwar and particularly the 1950s and '60s, poetic practices consistently drew from sonic practices to remake the media landscape through the logics of composition and performance, using an expanded notion of writing in which bodies, materials, and sensations could themselves be "scored." As a description of the poems for tape recorder from the 5th Exhibition program—likely written by Akiyama himself—put it, "The poetry of today is all print poetry [*insatsu-shi*], but here we have sought tools of poetic expression [*shiteki hyōgen no dōgu*] within the sonic properties of language in an attempt to consider these new mechanisms as processes of *poésie*."<sup>3</sup>

This chapter will be an intensive look at Akiyama Kuniharu's second tape-recorder poem as a case study of how poets in postwar Japan used sonic forms, practices, and technologies in order to rethink expressive media in an expanded field and recompose the poetic "voice" in an extraordinarily fraught era. Some poets, like Akiyama, made full use of the cutting-edge media technologies of this time, taking advantage of dramatic new developments in personal audio recording. Some created poetic works that evoked sound in open-ended, nondeterministic ways that ran directly counter to the tape recorder's promises of perfect capture

and playback, particularly of the human voice. But this relationship to *the sonic* remained central. I say “the sonic” instead of “sound” deliberately, in a way that parallels the last chapter’s use of “the cinematic.” The sonic encompasses not just sound—which is itself far from an uncomplicated, given phenomenon, as will be discussed—but also the practices, institutions, cultures, and technologies associated with its production, composition, reception, inscription, and circulation.

The conventional history of poetry in postwar Japan tends to be some variation on the following: During the Pacific War, many poets were imprisoned for reasons such as communist sympathies (real or imagined) or membership in anarchist groups; poets either stopped writing or, more commonly, wrote propagandistic pieces in support of the Japanese empire, which were often read aloud in massive poetry reading events and on radio broadcasts. After Japan’s defeat in 1945, and during and subsequent to its occupation by largely American forces until 1952, many poets—the ones who survived, that is—either reemerged after a long silence or expressed regret for their role in the war, though of course some did not. The first prominent postwar poetry journal and coterie was *Wasteland* (*Arechi*), which was formed in the late 1940s with poets such as Tamura Ryūichi, who wrote grim, unadorned poems in the wake of brutality and suffering. “Atomic bomb poems” by poet survivors like Tōge Sankichi were also highly influential. The 1950s saw the emergence of journals like the lyrical *Oar* (*Kai*), which featured still-famous poets like Tanikawa Shuntarō and the late Ōoka Makoto, as well as what is often called a neo-Surrealist movement centered around the journal *Crocodile* (*Wani*), which featured poets such as Yoshioka Minoru, Iijima Kōichi and Ōoka.<sup>4</sup> The 1950s and ’60s also saw women poets become more prominent than ever before in the modern era, with collections by Ibaragi Noriko (who cofounded *Kai*), Ishigaki Rin, Tomioka Taeko, and Yoshihara Sachiko gaining widespread acclaim for their poetic depictions of daily life, a critical box within which women poets were largely placed until the 1970s.

None of this is inaccurate, but there is another story of poetic practice at this time, one that goes far beyond the poems that happened to be published in poetry journals and then collected into books. Starting in the 1950s—and flourishing in the 1960s—what we find within and outside Japan is a dramatically expanded field of poetic practice that consisted of works both on and off the page. Many of these works might not be immediately recognizable as poems at first, despite all of them being explicitly called poems, using either the Japanese term *shi* or sometimes *poemu* (the Japanese rendition of the English “poem” or the French “poème”). Yet more significant than the definitional question of whether or not these works are “really” poems is the task of capturing how poetry enabled the active questioning of norms, boundaries, and forms that these poets and their works engaged in. In other words, not “what is poetry?” but “why were these called poems?” Not “is this literature?” but “what are the implications of a literariness that looks like this?” In this chapter we will focus on this version of literariness, intimately engaged

with technology and the body, decentering printed text, and developed first and foremost in conversation with sonic practices.

The context in which Akiyama composed these “Poems for Tape Recorder” was this worldwide postwar movement toward boundary-breaking artistic works. Emerging across the globe in the 1950s and reaching full bloom in the 1960s, the neo-avant-garde was an unfolding of experimental artistic practices, often centered around collectives of practitioners. There was a return to the movements, modes, and aesthetics of the modernisms of the early twentieth century, with many figures and groups drawing direct inspiration from Dada, Futurism, Surrealism, and so on. But there was also an intense dedication to creating entirely new types of art—to not just working across different disciplines and media, but also to questioning the ontological bases of those media themselves, as well as the distinctions between them. Unlike in the prewar era, however, poets from Japan were now active and recognized participants in these global experimental movements, often using multiple languages in their work. Art collectives and institutions—such as Jikken Kōbō, Hi-Red Center, Gutai, the Sōgetsu Art Center, VOU, Provoke, ASA, and Fluxus, in the case of Japan—continuously rejected the traditional boundaries between media and disciplines, the professional and the amateur, the national and the global, and even between the art world and the everyday in favor of something more fluid and unruly. Within this context, “poems” were often composed not just beyond the page but even beyond language, with poetic practice pushing against and through the boundaries of media forms and technologies, giving rise to a flourishing of film poems, concrete poems, sound poems, instrumental poems, sculpture poems, action poems, movement poems, photographic poems, and theater poems. The poetic became not a literary subgenre but *a stance toward composition*, an indication of a heightened focus on cross-media creation and sensorial experimentation.

It is difficult to overstate the enormous density of this kind of poetic practice from the 1950s and 1960s avant-garde, and the profligacy of interconnections and collaborations by writers, composers, artists, performers, filmmakers, and so on within and beyond Japan. In these two decades alone, one might have encountered works like Jikken Kōbō’s aforementioned auto-slide poems (1953); Yoko Ono’s instructional poems and expanded compositions, such as those in the bilingual English and Japanese book *Grapefruit* (1964); Niikuni Seiichi’s book of “phonetic poems” (*onseishi*) and music-inspired concrete poems (*gutaishi*), *Zero-on* (1963); Matsumoto Toshio’s three documentary shorts, “Poem of a Stone” (“Ishi no uta,” 1963, with a soundtrack by Akiyama), “Nishijin” (1961), and “Mothers” (“Haha-tachi,” 1967), which were regularly referred to as film-poems (*eigashi*); the poet Tanikawa Shuntarō and the composer Takemitsu Tōru’s collaboration “Vocalism A•I” (1956), which was later made into an experimental animation by Kuri Yōji (1963); Kanno Seiko’s “semiotic poems” (*kigōshi*) of dueling abstract shapes

(1965–66); Moroi Makoto and Abe Kōbō's musical poetic drama (*ongaku shigeki*) "Red Cocoon" ("Akai mayu"), which was both performed live and broadcast on radio (1960); Hayashi Hikaru's chamber music pieces based on poems by Kaneko Mitsuharu (1960); the jazz poems (*jazu shi*) of Tanikawa, Terayama Shūji, and Iwata Hiroshi (early '60s); Shiomi Mieko's "Spatial Poems," which involved people across the world performing tasks based on scores she mailed to them (starting in 1965); Kusano Shimpei's 1955 "Poetry Collection for Microphone" ("Maikurofon no tame no shishū"), recorded on tape (now lost); Kitasono Katue's arrangements of photographed objects he called "plastic poems" (*purasutikku poemu*), beginning in 1966; and Ichiyanagi Toshi's experimental graphic music scores arranged in poetic stanzas (1961).

"Intermedia" later came to be a keyword used to describe this shared ethos of avant-garde artistic production. Dick Higgins, an American poet and one of the founders of Fluxus—the international experimental art network with several members from Japan—first coined the term in a 1965 essay of the same name, and he elaborated on the concept in his 1966 "Statement on Intermedia":

For the last ten years or so, artists have changed their media to suit this situation, to the point where the media have broken down in their traditional forms, and have become merely puristic points of reference. The idea has arisen, as if by spontaneous combustion throughout the entire world, that these points are arbitrary and only useful as critical tools, *in saying that such-and-such a work is basically musical, but also poetry*. This is the intermedial approach, to emphasize the dialectic between the media. A composer is a dead man unless he composes for all the media and for his world.<sup>5</sup>

Expanding upon this, Shiomi Mieko, artist, composer, and member of Fluxus, also placed the intertwining of poetry and the sonic at the center of the phenomenon, describing her understanding of intermedia as "the form of expression which falls between the existing genres such as poetry and music, for example, vocal poem or visual poem."<sup>6</sup> Again, we see that at the core of the flourishing of intermedia works is an expanded conception of "writing" emerging at the intersection of poetry with sonic practices such as composition, music, sound art, scoring, vocal performance, and recording.

This intersection, which at first seems to be a minor aspect of the maelstrom of artistic movements at this time—and which has been treated as such in the ensuing decades—strikes at the heart of postwar innovations within expressive culture whose impact can be felt to this day. Each of the works mentioned not only staged an encounter between poetry and multiple media but also used the poetic as a tool to rethink media and the relation between them, specifically through sonic materials and practices. In other words, in an era when intermedia works explored and exploded the boundaries between conventional artistic

disciplines, the sonic and the poetic regularly played a central role, intertwined as if in a double helix. With that said, let us return to the extant “Poem for Tape Recorder”—a composition that simultaneously spectacularized its existence as a work of literature and a sonic media object, and which must be analyzed as both—as well as its creator Akiyama Kuniharu and the collective Jikken Kōbō, in which he played a central role.

#### AKIYAMA KUNIHARU AND THE EXPERIMENTAL WORKSHOP

With a performance at Tokyo’s Picasso Festival of the elaborate avant-garde ballet *The Joy of Life* (*Ikiru yorokobi*), the pioneering artistic group Jikken Kōbō (Experimental Workshop) was founded in Tokyo in 1951, a year before the end of the postwar Allied occupation of Japan. Despite the name, they were a collective of practitioners—not a physical institution—and they remained a named entity until 1957. Most of the group’s members continued to be active and influential within Japan’s cutting-edge art and music scenes well into the 1960s, 1970s, and beyond. Ishida Kazushi describes them as “a group of young artists [who] came together to carry out poetic experiments with a creative spirit, crossing the lines between music, art, and literature.”<sup>7</sup> Unlike most established artistic organizations in Japan at the time, which were highly hierarchical and focused on single artistic disciplines, Jikken Kōbō was a true collective, endlessly collaborating inside and outside of the group to create ambitious gallery exhibitions, recitals, and performances that aimed to dismantle the boundaries between conventional media.<sup>8</sup> After Akiyama rediscovered a letter he had written to John Cage in 1952—in self-described poor English, asking him for sheet music to perform at Jikken Kōbō’s 4th Exhibition—he reflected on his time as part of the group, when he and the other members actively aimed to open up Japan and its art scene to global artistic movements: “Thinking back, there was almost no exchange between Japan and the outside world during that period [the immediate postwar era]. Experimental Workshop opened a ventilating hole in the closed Japanese art world of the time by its own efforts, and attempted by any means possible to make direct contact with new movements of the period. All the members were young, just barely turned twenty. And they were all bound closely together in the task of seeking this new spirit.”<sup>9</sup>

The Surrealist poet and art critic Takiguchi Shūzō—who, like the figures discussed in chapter 1, also wrote works of cinempoetry—took on a new role in the postwar era as an enormously influential impresario and hub around which experimental artistic practice flourished. He gave Jikken Kōbō their name—echoing his own prewar *shiteki jikken*, “poetic experiments”—and served as the group’s spiritual godfather.<sup>10</sup> The group itself consisted of fourteen members with a variety of highly nonrigid specializations, almost all of whom were Tokyoites

in their twenties: the painter/sculptor/photographer Kitadai Shōzō (1921–2001), the painter/costume designer/poet Fukushima Hideko (1927–97), and the painter/sculptor Yamaguchi Katsuhiro (1928–2018); the composers Yuasa Jōji (1929–2024), Satō Keijirō (1927–2009), Suzuki Hiroyoshi (1930–2006), Fukushima Kazuo (1930–2023), and Takemitsu Tōru (1930–1996), who remains Japan’s most renowned modern composer; the pianist Sonoda Takahiro (1928–2004); the photographer Ōtsuji Kiyoji (1923–2001); the lighting designer Imai Naoji (1928–); the engineer Yamazaki Hideo (1920–1979); and, finally, Akiyama Kuniharu (1929–96).<sup>11</sup>

Akiyama Kuniharu is now largely known for having been one of the most prominent and influential music critics in postwar Japan, particularly in his introduction of modern and avant-garde classical music to a wider audience with books like 1973’s *How Should One Listen to Contemporary Music?* and his works on postwar Japanese composition such as *A History of Japanese Film Music* in 1974 and the two-volume *Japan’s Composers: From the Postwar to a True Postwar Future* in 1978.<sup>12</sup> At the time of Jikken Kōbō’s founding, however, Akiyama was twenty-two years old and enrolled in Waseda University’s program in French literature, focusing on Surrealist poetry. Soon after the end of the Second World War, the Allied occupation General Headquarters (GHQ) opened the Civilian Information and Education (CIE) Library in the Hibiya area of Tokyo, which held well-attended weekly “record concerts” where the staff played new (largely classical, and often avant-garde) music releases on a turntable.<sup>13</sup> Akiyama was an assistant at the library—as well as for its concerts and lecture series—which proved to be the central location where most of the members of what was to become Jikken Kōbō first met.<sup>14</sup> He continued to play a key role within Jikken Kōbō throughout its existence, regularly serving as a go-between among Jikken Kōbō’s visual artists and composers and weaving together disparate visions into coherent productions.

Yet unlike the other members of the group, Akiyama did not consider himself as a visual artist, designer, or composer. Within and outside the activities of Jikken Kōbō, he consistently described himself in one way—as a poet. While this might not seem especially remarkable, Akiyama differed from other poets in one very significant way: he did not write any poems. None, at least, that were recognized as such by the poetic communities of the time; not a single one of his poems was ever published in a poetry journal, book, or anthology during his lifetime. Yet—highly inspired by his mentor Takiguchi—Akiyama considered being a poet the central part of his identity, and all of his activities were inflected by it.<sup>15</sup> He, more than anyone, embraced Takiguchi’s idea that poetry is a form of experimentation in an expanded media field, *including but not limited to* literary expression. This central tenet of Jikken Kōbō’s activities was recounted several decades later by the group member and experimental visual artist Yamaguchi Katsuhiro in his consideration of the relationship between Takiguchi’s self-described prewar

“poetic experiments” and the postwar Experimental Workshop that he named and guided:

This name [Jikken Kōbō/Experimental Workshop], picked by Takiguchi for a group of young people just over twenty years of age forty years ago, was significant because it expressed his own position of denying the commonsense realm of linguistic expression in poetry. Actually, he seems to imply that one of the territories of the experimental spirit is the territory of poetry. Verbal expression was naturally very important for Takiguchi, but the territory which he was targeting for experimental action included a wide variety of artistic activities. Each of these activities could be taken beyond its own area of specialization through new methods and approaches to interact with other activities. Considered [*sic*] the matter in this way, it is easy to understand why Takiguchi selected the word poetic. It is even easier to understand why he selected the name “Experimental Workshop,” and in retrospect we see what great expectations he placed on these words.<sup>16</sup>

Takiguchi, then, envisioned Jikken Kōbō as a collaborative poetic project in an expanded sense; and if poetry was the artistic and spiritual tool by which the group could break down conventional divisions between disciplines and media, Akiyama was its main proponent. While he defined himself as a “poet,” Akiyama was also often identified as a composer, though again, not in a traditional sense; unlike the other composers in the group, he did not write pieces for conventional instruments nor did he produce a single page of sheet music. Akiyama’s unconventional activities as both poet and composer were referenced in a later interview with composer and fellow Jikken Kōbō member Yuasa Jōji:

*Matsui Shigeru:* Did [Akiyama] often publish poems at the time?

*Yuasa:* It’s not that he published a lot as a poet, but he wrote poems every now and then. When we were using the auto-slide, he wrote a poem about “the egg of the moon” or something like that. The egg of the moon might have come from Takiguchi.

*Matsui:* Akiyama composed things like sound poems for tape recorders, but did he ever write anything with traditional staff notation?

*Yuasa:* No, nothing like that. He wasn’t that kind of composer.<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, in almost every Jikken Kōbō production Akiyama could be found actively infusing the proceedings with a poetic sensibility, providing lyrics to performances and poetic notes for programs along with composing his own intermedia poetic works. Mizusawa Tsutomu, for example, notes that an untitled poem of Akiyama’s was used in Jikken Kōbō’s very first event, *The Joy of Life* ballet, during which, at one point, the music stopped and his text was read aloud. The text of the poem was highly marked up for specific effects in its performance: “The original Japanese features phonetic annotations telling readers how to pronounce a few of the words, which seem unnecessary in some cases,” says Mizusawa, “but we can conclude that they are a device to help regulate the rhythm of the reading.”<sup>18</sup>



From the group's inception, Akiyama thus put thoughtfully performed poetic text figuratively and literally on center stage.

#### JIKKEN KÔBÔ'S 5TH EXHIBITION AND THE "G-TYPE" TAPE RECORDER

This was never clearer than in Jikken Kôbô's 5th Exhibition, at which Akiyama debuted two "Poems for Tape Recorder," "Composition A" ("Sakuhin A") and "Composition B: Imprisoned Woman" ("Sakuhin B: Torawareta onna"). As described above, the work premiered upon an empty stage (but with a packed audience) and consisted of sounds coming out of speakers arranged around Dai-ichi Seimei Hall. Unfortunately, despite all we know about these works, there is just as much we do not. "Composition A" is completely lost; the tape itself and the script, if there was one, have disappeared, leaving only the knowledge that it may have been twenty-three minutes long and may have involved two narrators, the actors Akutagawa Hiroshi and Wakayama Asaka.<sup>19</sup> According to the event's program, those two actors certainly provided the narration for the *second* work, "Composition B: Imprisoned Woman," though no recording remains. Two of Akiyama's handwritten scripts, however, each twenty pages in length and divided into thirty-six parts, are still extant. According to Miwako Tezuka, the narrated text was recorded in advance, after which Akiyama manipulated the tape(s), editing it (or them) and adding effects like reversal, layering, and fast-forwarding.<sup>20</sup> During the live performance, she says, Akiyama "controlled the switchboard of the speakers" offstage, "as if conducting a mechanical orchestra playing polyphonic music from behind the scene."<sup>21</sup>

This was a startling and novel experience for the Tokyo audience, as these kinds of manipulated tape experiments only became technologically feasible with the introduction of consumer tape recorders just a short while before in the late 1940s, at which point they were not yet available in Japan. It was around that time that the French composer Pierre Schaeffer first created what he called *musique concrète*, which was made through the manipulation of various sounds recorded onto tape, the Egyptian composer Halim El-Dabh created original works using tape recordings of local ceremonies as raw material, and the American composer John Cage performed his own tape music experiments. Among the very earliest of tape compositions in Japan were these poems by Akiyama, which were pioneering not only because they were the first poems composed specifically for tape recorder (and its capacities for sonic manipulation) in Japan, but also because they were quite possibly the first such poems in the world. Steve McCaffery, experimental poet and one of the foremost historians of sonic and visual poetry, points toward the French poet Henri Chopin's experiments with *poésie sonore* and *audio-poèmes* starting in 1955 as "the first ever poetry to be entirely dependent on the tape," yet Akiyama's works premiered two years earlier.<sup>22</sup>

Although vinyl phonographic records were widespread in the mid-twentieth century, the equipment for recording them was prohibitively expensive and out of the reach of most consumers. In the mid-1950s, however, tape recording not only



became a relatively inexpensive way to capture sound, allowing for consumers to become producers of recordings, but it also provided the new functionalities of easy manipulation: splicing, erasure, rerecording, and more.<sup>23</sup> The availability of consumer magnetic tape recorders meant that poets became able to hear their own voices, most for the first time, offering new possibilities to reemphasize the orality of poetry.

At the beginning or even slightly preceding this trend in Japan was the “G-Type” tape recorder created in 1950 by Sony (then known as Tōkyō Tsūshin Kōgyō), the first tape recorder made in Japan. It was about two feet wide and quite heavy—at about eighty pounds, it took two people to lift—but it was portable, with handles on each side, a speaker in the front for playback, three dials for volume and tape speed adjustment, and two magnetic tape reels on top. Although plastic-based magnetic tape was more conventional, the lack of development of Japan’s plastics industries at the time meant that the G-Type’s magnetic tape was made of magnetite dust painted onto paper. The “G” stood for “government”; the technology was not intended for personal use but for courts and various government agencies.<sup>24</sup> Following the recommendation of Takiguchi, these tape recorders (along with the auto-slide machines mentioned earlier) were entrusted by Sony to the young members of Jikken Kōbō to use in their works earlier than the general population had access to them, the company hoping that their innovative performances would showcase the capabilities of the new technologies to a wider audience before their release as consumer products.

Akiyama’s fellow Jikken Kōbō member Yuasa Jōji sheds some light on how these works came to be, with an emphasis on the shock of hearing the capabilities of tape recorders for the first time:

After being introduced by someone from Yomiuri, we went to the studio of Tōkyō Tsūshin Kōgyō in Gotanda. At that time there wasn’t anything but monoaural tape, so we borrowed three tape recorders. . . . With tape it was easy to play things in reverse, and there we heard that for the first time in our lives. It was a huge shock—an amazing new experience. We wanted to use them and didn’t have any of the equipment. At that time, tape recorders could slow things down to half speed. If you did that, it would lower it down an octave. But only half speed was boring, so using different sizes of spindles we could drop it down to a third. Of course, you could also reverse things and wrap the tape around the spindles to distort it, creating fluctuations (“wow”). It began as a very rudimentary thing.<sup>25</sup>

#### AKIYAMA’S “POEM FOR TAPE RECORDER”

The first artistic works to make full use of these “shocking” capacities of the G-Type tape recorder were Akiyama’s two 1953 “Poems for Tape Recorder.” As mentioned before, however, little remains of them—nothing at all in the case of “Composition A,” and two nearly identical handwritten scripts, but no recording, for “Composition B: Imprisoned Woman.” The scripts include a lengthy poetic text along

with sparse penciled-in notes with minutes and seconds (likely indicating the time elapsed at that point on the tape), large capital letters seemingly partitioning the text into different roles, and instructions to speed up or slow down the tempo, use echo effects, reverse the recording, and so on.

There are some, albeit few, descriptions of the premiere of these poems at Jikken Kōbō's 5th Exhibition. Akiyama himself, for example, reflected on the works several decades later: "I manipulated the functions of this recording device to create 'Sound Poem for Tape Recorder,' Composition A, and Composition B, 'Imprisoned Woman.' In this world-first attempt at joining together of electronic technology and poetry, fierce sound poems were made to resound throughout the space of the hall."<sup>26</sup> He, perhaps only retroactively, recognized his achievement as a "world first," not just in combining poetry and tape recording but also in the very "joining together of electronic technology and poetry" (*denshi tekunoroji to shi no ketsugō*).<sup>27</sup> He also refers to his works as "sound poems" (*onkyōshi*), a term he did not use at the time of their composition but which gained purchase in the subsequent decade with sound poetry works in Japan by figures such as Niikuni Seiichi and the increasing attention paid to pioneering prewar sound poetry compositions such as those by the German Dadaist poet Kurt Schwitters, an exhibition of whose work was held in Tokyo in the Nihonbashi Minami Garō gallery in 1960.<sup>28</sup>

Tagiguchi Shūzō wrote an essay in the 5th Exhibition's program describing the works to be premiered, including Akiyama's poems for tape recorder: "It goes without saying that the tape recorder presents us with new possibilities for the conception and expression of music, but I also think these 'Poems for Tape Recorder' are experiments to which we should pay attention. In short, we should not be cowardly about new statements, machines, and so on—we must make the hands and voices of the 'human' permeate them in all respects. Is this not one of the biggest challenges for artists as we head into the latter half of the twentieth century?"<sup>29</sup> Here Tagiguchi emphasizes the experimental nature of these poems, not just in their use of technology in combination with literary practice, but in the way they infuse new technologies with a firmly human subjectivity, something he clearly sees as an urgent project.

The sole contemporary description of the poems for tape recorder other than in the event's program, however, comes from an unattributed article in the newspaper *Yorozu chōhō*, "Performance of 'Imprisoned Woman': Poem through Tape Recorder—Jikken Kōbō's New Experiment."<sup>30</sup> The article is a preview and not a review of the 5th Exhibition, published on September 29, 1953, the day before the exhibition; it is unclear whether the author actually heard a preview of the piece or if they used descriptions of what the piece *would* be like provided by Akiyama himself. Nevertheless, it is a striking description:

The "Poems for Tape Recorder" and "Projective Art through Slides and Sounds"—to be presented at Dai-ichi Seimei Hall tomorrow, September 30 (6:30 p.m.)—are

drawing attention from figures in the arts, music, and theater as the first experiments in Japan to bring in modern mechanisms into the field of audio-visual arts. . . . Of the previously mentioned poems for tape recorder, Akiyama Kuniharu's "Imprisoned Woman" will be delivered through the readings of Akutagawa Hiroshi, Wakayama Asaka, Tamura Toshio, and others. The work has the aim of playing back recorded tape with purely musical effects achieved through reversals, technical adjustments of rotation speed, and so on; with Akutagawa's voice as the main element, just three or four people reading aloud gradually become motifs layered upon one another like in Ravel's "Boléro," creating polyphonic harmonies like in symphonic music.<sup>31</sup>

This article does not shed any light on the mysterious "Composition A," focusing entirely on "Composition B: Imprisoned Woman." It is the only document to describe three narrators—only the first two are credited in the 5th Exhibition's program—and, as evident by the comparison to Maurice Ravel's "Boléro," it indicates a structure in which more and more voices are layered on top of one another in a long march towards increasing intensity.

At the same time, even though the significance of these poems for tape recorder was recognized early on, there is much we do not know about the actual experience of the works in Dai-ichi Seimei Hall. An English-language timeline of electronic music history published in 1968, for example, contains the following entry: "A group of composers establishes 'Jikken Kobo' (Experimental Laboratory), using equipment furnished by the Sony Corporation. Works included *Toraware no onna* [sic] (*Imprisoned Woman*, tape poem, 1951, 23') and *Piece B* (tape poem, 1951, 10') by Kuniharu Akiyama (b. Japan, 1929—both his works are lost)."<sup>32</sup> In this entry, Akiyama's works are already deemed "lost," their date of creation is listed as 1951 instead of 1953, and a single piece is mistakenly represented as two: "Torawareta onna" is separated from "Piece B," with no mention of a Piece/Composition A. There are also several quite basic facts we do not know about Akiyama's poems: Was there one tape recorder involved, or multiple? Did the multiple speakers each play a single recording, or did different voices and sounds come out of each speaker? How much of the work was premanipulated, and how many of the effects were added in live by Akiyama? Which portions of the text were easily understandable to the audience, and which, due to layering of several voices, fast-forwarding, distortion, and so on, were not? Does the *Yorozu chōhō* article describing the work as achieving "purely musical effects" (*jun'ongaku-teki na kōka*) indicate that the majority of the piece was (mis)understood by the audience not as a composition of language but of wordless sound? We also do not know how the text was read aloud, such as which parts were read by which of the two (or more) actors, what the tempo was, what the emotional tone was (what made Akiyama describe the poems as *shiretsu*, "fierce?"), and—with few exceptions—at what volume or with what rhythm it was performed.

Yet it is precisely this lack of information that makes "Composition B" an intriguing case study, one that sheds light on trends within postwar Japanese poetry that also apply to works that never took audio form. To use a term of Seth Kim-Cohen,

which I will return to later, this piece, as it exists now, is a firmly “non-cochlear” work of sonic poetry.<sup>33</sup> It is “silent” in that it only exists on the page and not as an audio recording; nor is there enough information for it to be easily recreated in performance, at least in a way closely resembling its original form (as there would be, for example, if it were sheet music for a piano composition). Yet it is also a work that is unquestionably “for tape recorder”—a poem that could only have been made possible in its engagement with the form and capacities of the new media technology of the G-Type recorder. On top of this, as we shall see, it incorporates structures and notation from the sonic practice of instrumental classical music, making it a hybrid of poem, script, and score. This allows for the contemporary reader to have an imagined sonic experience while reading it on the page, one that goes beyond an evocation of a voice reading aloud. In the previous chapter we saw how cinematic techniques—cuts, zooms, overlapping images, and so on—became techniques of *imagination* as well, with “cinapoets” making full use of them in their textual poetic works. Similarly, “audio” elements here become “non-cochlear,” divorced from the ear and the experience of hearing them, entering them into the realm of the imagined or conceptual; the emergence of the magnetic tape recorder introduced or crystallized sonic techniques like the fast forward, reverse audio, and echo, techniques that poets could then also evoke in written work.

These tendencies become clear as we turn to the poem itself. The title page for one of two handwritten manuscripts for “Composition B” can be seen in figure 1. In the upper right-hand corner is written the year of composition and performance, 1953. The first line is a subtitle in small text: “Tēpu rekōdā no tame no shi sakuhin B” (“Poem for Tape Recorder: Composition B”). This describes first the form of the work and then its numbering within the context of the rest of Akiyama’s works of the same type. With the use of *sakuhin*, which is also the usual Japanese rendering of “opus,” we already see a deliberate use of the conventions of musical composition, in this case the way in which classic pieces are titled—this, again, immediately signals that what follows is not just a poem or script but also a *score*. In large text at the center of the page is the name of the poem: “Torawareta onna,” which means “imprisoned woman.”<sup>34</sup> Finally, Akiyama’s own name is written in graphic, angular characters.

The piece is divided into thirty-six numbered sections, each page divided into four rows by horizontal lines. The thin upper row has the section numbers; the second row, a bit larger, is usually used for instructions for performance or recording manipulation, either scribbled in pencil or more permanently written in ink. The remainder of the page is taken up by two large rows of equal width where the poetic text is written. Each row seemingly indicates that one of two actors is to speak, though the actor is not specified. Although throughout most of the poem the text is usually in one of these rows, there are also pages where both rows are taken up by text, seeming to indicate that the actors are to read at the same time. As for the text itself, it is a lost Surrealist epic, quite unlike any other poems in

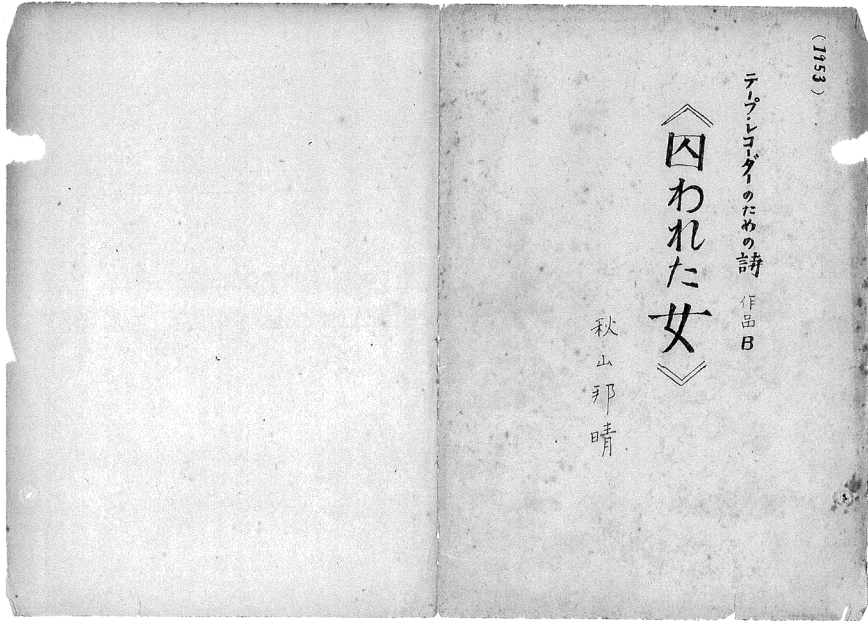


FIGURE 1. Title page for Akiyama Kuniharu's 1953 script for "Poem for Tape Recorder: Composition B—Imprisoned Woman" ("Tēpu rekōda no tame no shi: Sakuhin B—Torawareta onna"). Private collection.

Japanese written before this point; the titular "imprisoned woman" travels through and is caught within impossible landscapes where bodies, nature, and man-made structures continually fragment and mutate, with a hypnotic and obsessive repetition of certain images (mirrors, hair, stones, night, walls, wind).

Section 5—which, according to Akiyama's penciled-in notes in the upper right, begins 1 minute and 35 seconds into the tape—starts with two short lines, "walls of night/ sea of night" (*yoru no kabe/ yoru no umi*), above which is written a rhythmic gloss (figure 2). Three eighth notes are followed by a down arrow—likely representing a rest—one more eighth note, and a quarter note. This seems to indicate to the reader how these lines should be read—not with equal weight given to all five syllables, but with a pause after each "*yoru no*" (of night) and a lingering on the final syllable. The unusually large gap after each "*no*" in the text might also cause this reader to pause, consciously or subconsciously, while reading the poem aloud or in their head; in this hybrid poem-score, however, Akiyama has the freedom to make these implicit rhythmic gestures explicit by incorporating conventionally "musical" notation. This is combined with his own unique notation, visible in the crosshatched square in the upper left containing the characters for "breath sound"; this seems to be an instruction to layer the sound of someone breathing over the line of dialogue below.



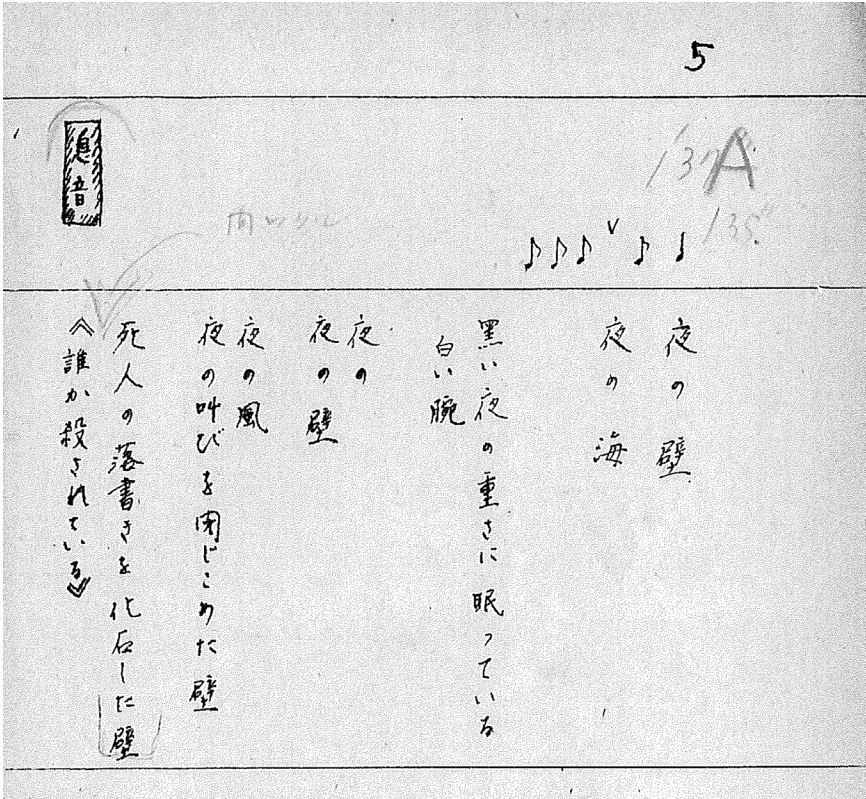


FIGURE 2. Rhythmic guide for spoken syllables from Akiyama Kuniharu's 1953 script for "Poem for Tape Recorder: Composition B—Imprisoned Woman." Private collection.

The poetic text within figure 2 is also representative—in tone, structure, and imagery—of the majority of the work:

walls of night  
sea of night

sleeping in the weight of the black night  
a white arm

of night  
walls of night

wind of night  
wall that held in the screams of night  
walls that fossilized the graffiti of the dead  
"someone is being killed"

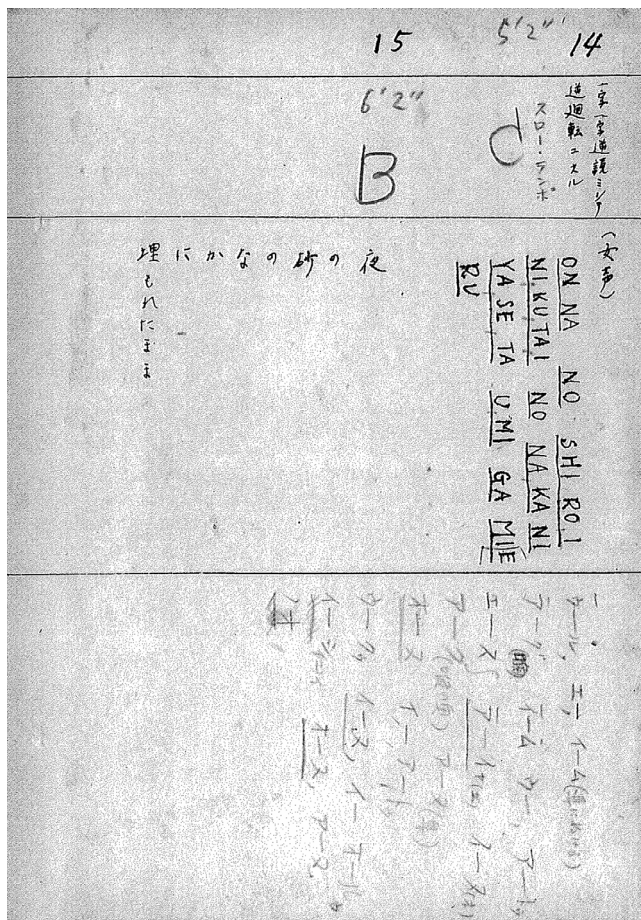


FIGURE 3. Romaji and katakana section to be spoken backward and then played in reverse, from Akiyama Kuniharu's 1953 script for "Poem for Tape Recorder: Composition B—Imprisoned Woman." Private collection.

The words are rhythmic and repetitive, with “*yoru*” (night or evening) appearing seven times in this short passage alone, giving the overall work a chant-like, incantatory quality. The images are vivid, with frequent references to colors and objects, but in true Surrealist fashion they are usually not in a logical sequence; whatever imagined scene is being created is dreamlike, contradictory, and constantly shifting. The overall feeling throughout the poem—befitting the title of “Imprisoned Woman”—is dark and oppressive, with endless evocations of containing walls, mirrors reflecting inward, and bodies broken up into pieces, losing their integrity and melding with the landscapes around them.

In section 14, around five minutes into the piece, something startling happens (figure 3). In pen, in the central row, an underlined stanza is written in capital roman letters (the only time this happens in the poem), with exaggerated spaces between each syllable and an indication that the passage is to be read by the actress: “ON NA NO SHI RO I NI KU TA I NO NA KA NI YA SE TA U MI GA MI E RU” (IN SIDE THE WHITE FLESH OF A WO MAN A THIN O CEAN COMES IN TO VIEW). Why is it written this way instead of using a Japanese syllabary like the rest of the poem? What makes this line different?

The answer lies in the instructions in the row above: “read each character backwards, one by one, and then reverse it” (*ichiji ichiji gyaku-yomi shite, gyaku kaiten ni suru*). In faint pencil on the bottom row, we see a pronunciation guide in the katakana syllabary to achieve this: the end of the underlined phrase above, “*yaseta umi ga mieru*,” becomes the beginning of this katakana section below with the syllables reversed: “*ūru ē imu āgu imu ū ātu ēsu āi*.” It seems the actress was to read this backward pronunciation gloss aloud, and then the tape was reversed, creating a distorted, uncanny version of forward speech, linking her voice to the nonlinear temporalities allowed for by the capacities of magnetic tape—a vivid example of what Friedrich Kittler, writing about the phonograph, calls “Time Axis Manipulation as poetry—but poetry that transgresses its customary boundaries.”<sup>35</sup>

So far we have only seen examples of monophony within this poem, but frequently two or more voices were layered on top of one another, with text in both the upper and lower main rows. In one example near the very end of the poem, on the upper main row—likely the one to be read aloud by the female actor—we see a single line of text stretched out in a horizontal line across the page instead of written in the usual columns: “*omae wa ittai doko e itta*” (Where on earth did you go?!). This choice of formatting seems to be tied to tempo and temporality, indicating that this line is to be read very slowly and heard at great volume (a penciled-in note above says “*ōkiku dasu koto*,” to play loudly). On the lower row—likely meant for the male actor—there is a condensed grid of five columns of characters that aligns with five of the syllables near the end of the horizontal line of text above. Each column of ten characters—like the first, “*kaze to kaze to kaze to kaze to kaze to*” (wind and wind and wind and wind and wind and)—is thus seemingly meant to be read in the time it takes for the other voice to read one syllable.

wind and wind and wind and wind and  
wind and wind and stone and stone and  
wind and stone and wind and wind and  
stone and wind and stone and stone and  
stone and stone and stone and stone do  
not hear her voice



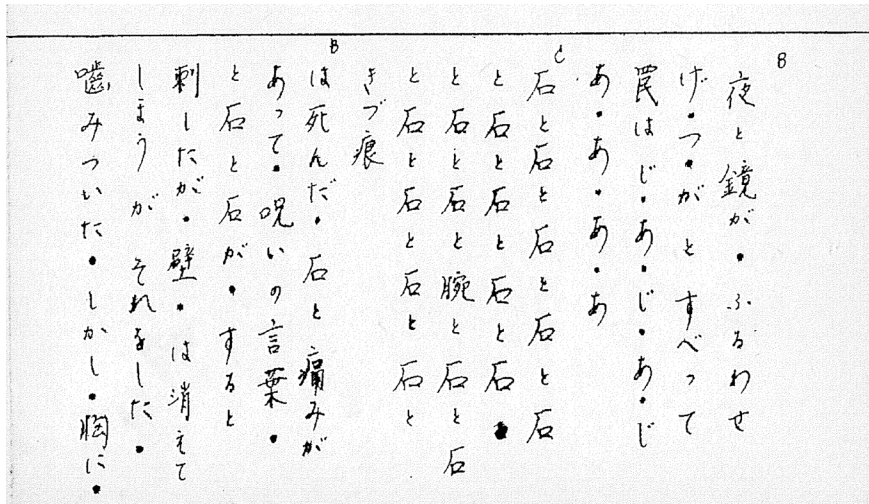


FIGURE 4. “Fugue-like” section from Akiyama Kuniharu’s 1953 script for “Poem for Tape Recorder: Composition B—Imprisoned Woman.” Private collection.

A penciled-in note next to this grid of characters provides another clue: “Increase more—speed up the turning” (*motto fuyashite kaiten hayameru*). This likely means that the recording of this passage is not meant to be played at the same speed at which it was spoken but is to be sped up (either live or in advance during editing) by turning one of the dials in the front of the G-Type tape recorder, quickening the progress of the magnetic tape reel around the spindles and through the machine. The abundance of passages in the poem like this one, where words are repeated almost to tedium—indeed, this is one of the shorter examples—in combination with this penciled instruction thus further indicates the tight imbrication of text and sonic manipulation.

Right before this section of the poem, and providing something of a climax, polyphony is reintroduced in a more elaborate form. Another penciled instruction, right before one voice (on the lower main row) takes over from the other (on the upper): “layered like a fugue (at a slow tempo).” A fugue is a term Akiyama took from classical music, referring to a form in which two or more melody lines or “voices” are played simultaneously in counterpoint—at times harmonizing, at times in dissonance with one another. The next page, section 29, begins the poetic “fugue” proper, in different voices marked “B” and “C” (figure 4):

B  
 the moon and the mirror • shook  
 lu • nar • gliding  
 a trap is    ji • a • ji • a • ji  
 a • a • a • a

## C

stone and stone and stone and stone and stone  
 and stone and stone and stone and stone  
 and stone and stone and arm and stone and stone  
 and stone and stone and stone and stone and  
 scars

## B

all dead • there is stone and  
 hurt • words of cursing •  
 and stones and stone are • when  
 stabbed but • walls • have  
 disappeared • but did it •  
 bit it • however • in the chest •

While the “C” voice consists of repeated words connected by “and,” a new element is introduced in the “B” voice passages: black dots interrupt the text after every few characters, fragmenting words and phrases and reducing comprehensibility. These may be meant for the narrator—indications to speaking haltingly, pausing at each dot—or for Akiyama himself, as reminders to chop up the syllables while editing the tape. The by-now familiar images of stones, mirrors, arms, walls, and so on return, but language seems to struggle to express anything. Two voices are joined in a “fugue-like” counterpoint, but unlike instrumental sounds, which can easily be layered on top of each other, overlapping voices speaking different words render each less comprehensible.

To give one last example of the use of classical music notation combined with poetic text, we find a long diminuendo marking penciled in above one of the final passages—that is, an instruction to gradually decrease volume (figure 5). Again, this may be meant for the narrators of the piece to indicate that they should speaking increasingly softly, but it is more likely a note for Akiyama himself—either for the tape mixing or the live performance—as a reminder to slowly turn down the volume in this portion. Whatever the case, the hybridity of the form Akiyama has created allows for amplitude to become an integral and specified aspect of the poem.

Once again, we have evidence of the capacities of the tape recorder both as it was used to manipulate poetic text, and also as an influence on how that text was composed. The “B” voice’s endless repetitions and the “C” voice’s fragmentation both serve to diminish the importance of intelligible speech and the referential meaning of the words involved in favor of making them into sonic materials of composition; a detailed understanding of what the poetic text is “saying” is not the focus of the piece, as would be the case in a conventional poetry reading or recording. Instead, flashes of intermittent comprehensibility serve to contribute to

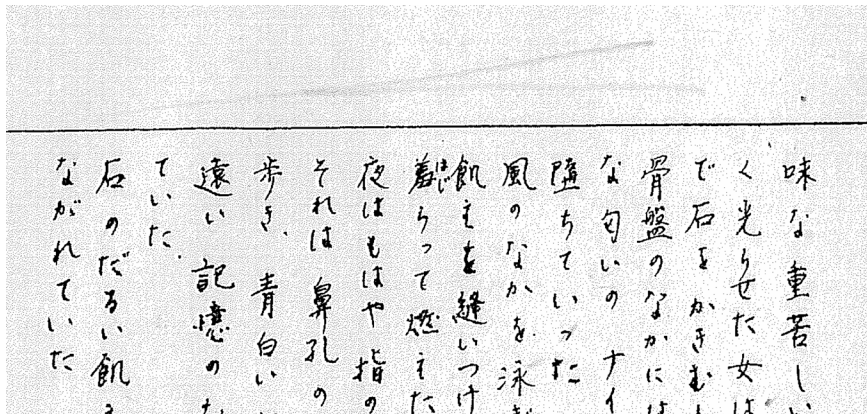


FIGURE 5. Diminuendo marking above text from Akiyama Kuniharu's 1953 script for "Poem for Tape Recorder: Composition B—Imprisoned Woman." Private collection.

an overall emotional effect. As written in the 5th Exhibition's program, instead of the "printed poetry" of the day, what we have here are new kinds of "tools of poetic expression within the sonic properties of language, in an attempt to consider these new mechanisms as processes of *poésie*."<sup>36</sup>

#### RECOMPOSING THE POSTWAR VOICE

The links between poetry, sound, live performance, and recording in postwar Japan were fraught, to say the least. During the war itself, the opportunities for poetry readings—both at state-sponsored reading events and on radio broadcasts—increased massively. This, Tsuboi Hideto argues, "changed the consciousness of poetry production" in Japan: poetry became something that was written with the expectation that it not be read by the eye but read aloud, whether live and in person or transmitted via radio.<sup>37</sup> Another effect of this, however, is that poetry performance had become inextricably linked to propaganda, to support for the Japanese empire and the military. Postwar poetry in the anglophone world took a firm turn toward the "voice," that is, away from a text-only focus and toward live poetry readings and increased sonic expressivity, something that Michael Davidson credits to the spread of the tape recorder in the 1950s and the emergence of what he calls a "tapevoice" in poetry.<sup>38</sup> In Japan, however, there was a distinct turning *away* from live poetry events and broadcasts for several years after the end of the war. Like poetry readings, the burgeoning technology of the recorded and/or loudspeaker-amplified voice was also still deeply entwined in the popular imaginary with authoritarianism and war—with mechanically amplified voices at rallies, General Tōjō Hideki's frequent broadcasts, Hitler's

Magnetophone-recorded speeches, the “singing trees” of propaganda-blaring speakers installed by Japan in Southeast Asia, and, of course, the “Jewel Voice Broadcast” of Emperor Hirohito’s surrender, to name just a few examples. The tape recorder was also linked to surveillance, with constant depictions in both mass media and popular culture, for example, of rooms being bugged by secret police with hidden recording devices.<sup>39</sup>

As seen in the prior section, “Poem for Tape Recorder: Composition B—Imprisoned Woman” is a long and complicated work, with thirty-six distinct sections, multiple instructions for both performance and playback manipulation, and at least two distinct voices that often overlap, fugue-like. While difficult to sum up, it is, in a word, harrowing, filled with nightmarish imagery and a deeply unsettling atmosphere; the tape manipulations of the voices involved must have been at least as disturbing as they were impressive. In other words, it was intentionally as divergent as possible from the wartime poetry readings and broadcasts of the preceding decade—or the loudspeaker-amplified instructions of the just-departed Allied occupation—in its deliberately confusing use of language, its use of an empty stage with prerecorded voices in lieu of live presences, and in its active reshaping and distortion of the voice through mechanical means. Although undoubtedly an experiment in the expansion of the possibilities of writing and the human voice using novel media technology, it is hard to pin down as liberatory, critical, or even oblivious in its aims. The bulk of the poetic text itself is undoubtedly grim: the titular “imprisoned woman,” the sole human figure, seems to be mostly powerless within an uncaring dreamscape, and her voice is combined with a machine that renders human speech into just another sound, often distorted beyond recognition or understanding. Is the potential of a human voice to be freed from the strictures of the flesh—able to wildly transform and even be combined with other voices—enough to become a way out of her psychic incarceration, or is this just a nightmarish sonic phantasmagoria that revels in a woman’s torment?

The text itself answers these questions differently, even from moment to moment. The first several sections set up the titular prison through poetic imagery of enclosure: the first voice, likely that of the female actor, constantly repeats phrases like “walls of night,” “walls holding in the screams of night,” and “walls of night and gates of night.” The other voice, likely that of the male actor, speaks a constant mantra of “black hair in the sand of night” (*yoru no naka no kuroi ke*), initially repeated fifteen times, with “black hair” eventually becoming a recurrent motif throughout the poem. The woman, however, is not simply a passive figure, bound and besieged throughout the length of the poem. Eventually, her hair becomes a recalcitrant sonic force in and of itself, an expansive mass of organic matter that at times overtakes the “walls,” “night,” and “stones” that fill the poem, and it becomes something that makes its own sound against the ceaseless wind, harnessing the “screaming night” itself: “the night entangled in the hair of the woman / is / making a sound / like stinging dead leaves / opening the overlapping

gates.” Near the end of the poem, as mentioned earlier, the second voice—likely in rapid fire, as indicated by the density of text on the page and the penciled-in instructions to “speed up the turning of the dials”—repeats the words “wind and wind and stone and stone” in varying permutations, fifty-eight times in total, at one point noting that “stone and stone and stone do not hear her voice” (*ishi to ishi to ishi to wa kanojo no koe o kikanai*), while the first voice, to be “played loudly” and drawn out at great length on the page, says, “Where on earth did you go?!” (*omae wa ittai doko e itta*). Sometimes the experience of the work evokes not just hearing but the *overhearing* characteristic of taped surveillance, even to the extent that it feels like we ourselves are the psychic wardens listening in to the woman’s thoughts in real time. Just as often, however, the poem—while not fully leaning into being straightforwardly “liberatory”—seems to center the woman as larger than her imprisonment, her body and consciousness overtaking the landscapes around her, her voice amplified and stretched out in a way that must have overtaken all other sounds in the piece, becoming a voice that no longer needs the audience of the wind and stones that “do not hear” her.

Akiyama’s intense thoughtfulness and self-reflexivity—both at the time of this work’s creation and throughout his long career as a music critic—lend themselves easily to understanding his use of sound media as a site of critique, not despite but because of their popular association with both wartime and occupation-era regimes of control. “Poem for Tape Recorder” aimed to force the audience to rethink the capabilities of language and the primacy of the human voice in a harrowing and unsettling way, in a performance literally within the headquarters of the just-departed occupation using a “Government-Type” tape recorder. Yet one could just as easily argue that this work’s radical potential was diminished from the beginning by its being first and foremost a tech demo, in which the massive corporation now known as Sony lent Jikken Kōbō—a group of young people with elite connections—some enormously expensive gadgets as a way to achieve some viral word of mouth about their products before their release on the consumer market. Of course avant-garde artistic practice has always had a fraught relationship to wider recognition and access to logistical and financial backing. Looking at the context of postwar Japan, Miryam Sas notes “the odd question of the acceptance of experimental work: in order to survive, it needs a certain degree of support and access; but at the moment of achieving that support, success, and (seeming) intelligibility there is a way in which it ceases to be ‘underground.’”<sup>40</sup> Far from being “underground,” many threads within experimental media in Japan, especially those works that made use of new media technologies, are strongly associated with the “postwar economic miracle,” a period of rapid growth beginning with occupation-era reconstruction at the end of the 1940s and peaking (in the popular imaginary, at least) in the 1960s. There was certainly a widespread optimism about the possibility of a peaceful future and a utopian attitude toward new consumer tech, culminating in the outrageous innovations of the 1970 Osaka

Expo (in which Akiyama was also deeply involved).<sup>41</sup> It would be straightforward to argue that this poem was a direct predecessor to these “utopic” media experiments, an alliance between the corporate and the avant-garde that, intentionally or not, made cutting-edge technologies with even the most alarming potential implications palatable and normal. Yet this “Poem for Tape Recorder”—with its core of horror and despair, dissonances between its content and form, and healthy doses of skepticism at the changing relationship between technology and the human—is difficult to sum up in this way.

While many of the works in this volume are explicitly political in their subject matter—seemingly far more so than the rather abstract “Poem for Tape Recorder”—it would be a mistake to treat Akiyama’s piece as apolitical. As discussed in the introduction, Jacques Rancière argues that artistic practices are inherently political in that they are interventions in the “distribution of the sensible” shared by both politics and aesthetics, reconfiguring what is visible and invisible, who is able to speak, and to what we are able to listen.<sup>42</sup> This is a useful way in to thinking about this and other experimental poetic works in postwar Japan, particularly in their manipulations of the sensorium through mediated vision, listening, and speaking. Akiyama’s “Poem for Tape Recorder” especially resonates with Rancière’s formulation of “politics as a form of experience,” one of the important delimitations of which is the boundary between “speech and noise.”<sup>43</sup> By using speech—in the form of a spoken poetic text—as raw material for sonic manipulation, Akiyama engaged directly with this division in the postwar “distribution of the sensible.” If speech is ostensibly meant to be first and foremost for the purposes of human communication, what happens if voices are distorted, reversed, fragmented, and layered in ways that make them partially or completely incomprehensible? Akiyama, working in a deliberately obscure neo-Surrealist mode of evoking dreamlike landscapes, does not offer us clear answers but seems to aim above all to transgress any distinctions between speech, music, and noise, refusing to prioritize one mode of sonic meaning making over the others.

The other distinction that is being transgressed here—in a way that prefigures the “intermedia” of the 1960s—is between types of practice. The complexity of an experimental work like this one resists a formulation in which “literary practices” were one thing, “sonic practices” were another, and works like Akiyama’s merely “combined” the two. Isabelle Stengers encourages us to think through an “ecology of practices” in which seemingly disparate acts are fundamentally intertwined. Within this ecology, poetic and sonic practices were deeply interlinked, both with each other—within the context of the postwar avant-garde in Japan as well as globally—and with the political, technological, and media environments of the time. “Poem for Tape Recorder” reminds us that poetry was not simply a “form of literature,” and it did not “evolve” in response to postwar political activism or new media technologies like the tape recorder. Rather, poetry emerged within a



dense and co-constitutive ecology of literary, sonic, technological, and political practices, constantly in flux and difficult to reduce to models of influence, linear development, or through the conventional framing of an artistic work and its “context.” Akiyama and Jikken Kōbō did not use poetry to “comment” on the postwar political, social, and technological environment as if they were outside it, but they actively attempted to shape it from within.

### RECOMPOSING “SOUND”

The question of “sound” and its role in this piece is also an uneasy one. If the recording of “Poem for Tape Recorder” still existed, it would be impossible to deny it as a pioneering work of “sound art” or “sound poetry,” but all that remains of it are two nearly identical handwritten scores and a handful of accounts that were explored at the beginning of this chapter. “Sound” and “the sonic,” however, cannot be reduced to “things one hears” in the same way that the “cinematic” constitutes much more than “what you see on screen.” “Poem for Tape Recorder”—not only as a poetic experiment but also precisely in its current existence as a work that only exists on the page—is a way into thinking about “sound,” “sonic media,” and “composition” in a more expansive sense.

Seth Kim-Cohen advocates for thinking about “non-cochlear sound art,” echoing Marcel Duchamp’s advocacy of a “‘non-retinal’ visual art” that resisted a conflation of artistic practice with concerns of taste and beauty.<sup>44</sup> Kim-Cohen’s move toward “non-cochlear sound art” is a move toward a “conceptual turn” within sound studies aiming at a “nonessentialist perspective” about what sound and sonic arts are or could be.<sup>45</sup> This is not a rejection, he stresses, of the “eye and the ear” but “necessarily engage[s] both the non-cochlear and the cochlear” in a way that remains “skeptical” toward the notion of *sound-in-itself* and “not restricted to the realm of the sonic.”<sup>46</sup> Kakinuma Toshie argues that this kind of “non-cochlear art” was key to postwar experimental practice in Japan and abroad, particularly the works of Shiomi Mieko, Yoko Ono, and Takehisa Kosugi as part of the Fluxus collective. She points to John Cage’s visit to Japan in 1962 as a catalyst for artistic approaches that engaged with sound obliquely or by other means: they “took sound as their starting point and circumvented it to move toward ‘hearing,’ and then shifted their focus to types of sensation that differed from that of the everyday.”<sup>47</sup> Originating almost a decade before this, Akiyama’s “Poem for Tape Recorder” has become an example of “non-cochlear sound art” after the fact in its current “silent” state as poetic text/script/score and as lost recording, still completely shaped even in written form by sonic practices and modes of meaning making.

There is also a strong resonance between Akiyama’s work and the works of the contemporary Deaf sound artist Christine Sun Kim. Kim reimagines the borders of both sound and sound art through a culturally Deaf perspective, foregrounding

how sound can act as an equivalent to “money, power, [and] control,” though it is rarely recognized as such in hearing-dominant culture.<sup>48</sup> In her work, she too asks us to reimagine sound outside the cochlear and takes a playful yet fiercely critical stance toward its rigid conventions of signification—particularly in terms of who they exclude—with the goal of creating her “own information system and new theories of what sound should or could be, using new forms.”<sup>49</sup> She reframes sign language visibility as aurality, for example, and manipulates the elements of musical notation (scores, notes, rests, staves, clefs, and so on) in unexpected and jarring ways. While Deaf poetics will be a major focus of chapter 5 of this book, there is much in common between Deaf poetry and art and Akiyama’s refusal to take the sound or voice as a “given.” The “voice” becomes something that unfurls across the world of “Poem for Tape Recorder” in ways that echo Davidson’s description of the voice in Kim’s work as “neither inside nor outside but in a state of continual reinvention and re-direction, complicating boundaries between sound and silence, deaf and hearing, language, and space.”<sup>50</sup>

Finally, when it comes to sound and music, “composition” is usually a term that brings to mind a composer who creates a score by writing musical notes on a staff, which is then performed by musicians and singers. As discussed before, Akiyama was known as a poet and a composer despite never publishing a poem and never composing a piece using formal musical notation, at least at this point. Luc Döbereiner foregrounds an expanded approach to composition, one that is especially useful when considering postwar Japanese intermedia works like Akiyama’s.<sup>51</sup> This is not composition as an abstracted practice, reducing inherently nonrepresentational sound into a written symbolic system like musical notes. Rather, he describes a kind of formalism that is also nonrepresentational, “constituted by drawing a border in compositional practice.”<sup>52</sup> What is stressed here is not the role of a human composer in arranging “sound in itself,” but rather, drawing on the work of Karen Barad, the mutual constitution and active reconfiguration of “subject” and “object”—in this case, composers and sonic materials, through the conceptual and material apparatus of composition.<sup>53</sup> Though it might be the case that sound is something that exists outside symbolic systems of representation, both sound and composer *are constituted by the act of composition itself*. In this view, Akiyama is firmly a composer, as his contemporaries asserted, despite his not writing music on a five-line staff. Indeed, his “Composition B” spectacularizes Döbereiner’s conception of composition as a far broader process in which “composer” and “composed” are entangled, whether through the scripts handwritten in ink and pencil, the physically manipulated magnetite paper tape, or the empty stage where neither composer nor performer is present. Poetry writing is transmuted into composition, where what is “composed” is not just a “work” but several intertwined bodies, materials, and experiences. Akiyama’s “Composition B” is not a single distinct object but a cluster of texts, voices and other sonic materials, tape reels, performers, audience members, machines, and memories,



and which ones of these are and are not extant at any given moment cannot but change through time.

The manuscripts for “Poem for Tape Recorder” reflect their complex status as “compositions,” sometimes quite literally. They use some symbols commonly associated with sheet music, as discussed earlier—markings to indicate rhythm, diminuendo, and so on—highlighting a renewed focus on a conception of *poem as score*. This has been a characteristic of poetry as long as it has taken written form: “poems” from around the premodern world in particular were certainly written first and foremost for the purpose of reading or singing aloud, with various kinds of annotation used to aid in proper rhythmic, tonal, and dynamic interpretation. Modern poetry at first moved away from this—away from musicality and orality as central to the experience of a poem and toward a private, silent communion of a solitary reader with a printed text. Yet in works like Akiyama’s in postwar Japan and in the broader global postwar avant-garde, this aspect of poetry reemerged with force, albeit in ways that deliberately differentiated themselves from the association between poetry performance and war. The poem—having long existed at the intersection of text, visuality, and sound—became central as a tool in inter-media through which not only could sound be composed, but experiences, sensations, and affects of all kinds could be “scored.” The “poetic” became a way to refer to an expanded conception of writing across media—in this case, writing through voices, pens, pencils, and magnetic tape—in the form of language-centric composition, using sonic practices associated with sound recording and music to create scores both for performance and for the imagination.

#### RECREATING “IMPRISONED WOMAN” AFTER SIXTY YEARS

At a 2016 recital held in Tokyo by Aki Takahashi—the renowned avant-garde pianist and widow of Akiyama Kuniharu—in the large concert hall of Tokyo Opera City, I sat, by coincidence, next to a pianist and composer named Kawai Takuji. Takahashi introduced the two of us, noting that Kawai might have already been familiar to me for one very specific reason: he played the role of the male narrator in a 2013 version of Akiyama’s poem for tape recorder, “Imprisoned Woman.”

The full title of this recreation of Akiyama’s “lost” work is “Imprisoned Woman ~ Based on Akiyama Kuniharu’s Poem for Tape Recorder” (“Torawareta onna ~ Akiyama Kuniharu no tēpu rekōda no tame no shi ni yoru”). It was composed by the Nara-based electroacoustic composer Higaki Tomonari based on Akiyama’s original scripts/scores. With vocal performances by Kawai and Ōta Maki, it premiered in November 2014 at a concert held in honor of a major exhibition of Jikken Kōbō’s works in Fukuoka, just over six decades after the premiere of Akiyama’s work in 1953. It later became the titular and opening track on Higaki’s 2015 CD *Torawareta Onna (Imprisoned Woman)*, with a length of 16 minutes and 9 seconds.<sup>54</sup>

The “based on” in its title is significant; this recording was not a relatively straightforward matter of performing a preexisting work, like a pianist playing from sheet music. Higaki, engaging with the extant sparse script/score—and the vague and often baffling penciled-in directions discussed earlier—necessarily created a composition that is both Akiyama’s and his own, at once harrowing and beautiful, mercurially shifting mood and timbre from section to section. All of the words in Akiyama’s poem are present, performed in the same order, largely by Kawai. But long after the days of the monaural G-Type tape recorder, Higaki takes full advantage of the stereo capabilities of contemporary recording technologies, creating a vast aural space that seemingly comes from all directions. Voices are echoed, slowed down, distorted, echoed, layered, looped, and fragmented. Ōta, playing the role of the “woman,” appears only rarely but strikingly, her voice manipulated and drawn out into a spectral drone or cutting in with operatic wails. At one point, where dialogue lines are set off by quotation marks in Akiyama’s script, Kawai is clearly outside, with what sounds like a pedestrian crossing signal beeping in the background. At other points Kawai multiplies, some of his voices sounding as if they are right next to the listener’s left ear, others to the right, and still others barely audible from a distant imagined horizon. With very few indications of what the original soundscape was like, Higaki had full freedom to create an original sonic background, with rumbles, chimes, and other metallic sounds appearing at spare but dramatic moments.

Taken altogether, Higaki’s 2013 reimagination of Akiyama’s work still sounds novel—quite unlike any poetry, music, or sound art from the last several decades. It is innovative, challenging, and a powerfully literary work while still remaining difficult to effectively describe or interpret using existing techniques of literary analysis. More than anything, however, it reemphasizes that in 1953—well before the vast majority of well-known experimental poetic, artistic, and musical creations from the postwar era—Akiyama Kuniharu’s original “Poem for Tape Recorder—Composition B: Imprisoned Woman” was a new kind of poem. Strikingly and deliberately distant from the “printed poetry” that the 5th Exhibition’s program asserted was the only other poetry extant at that point, “Imprisoned Woman” was a poem that existed as manipulated sound, as magnetic tape, as plural voices, as tech demo, as script, as score, as empty stage—and now, as lost media. Sound recording made it possible to decouple the voice not just from the presence of the person speaking—something also key to telephony and radio broadcasting—but from the event of its production, allowing it to be heard and reheard on later occasions. With the development and spread of the consumer magnetic tape recorder in the postwar era, not only did this capacity become available to a much broader audience, many of whom could now listen to their own voice for the first time, but it made all recorded sounds into elements that could be arranged and rearranged into different configurations. Voices, instruments, sound effects, and electronically generated tones, once inscribed on magnetic

tape, could all be spliced, layered, reversed, amplified, fragmented, and otherwise manipulated in an expanded form of writing. A “poem” became a mode of composition across media in which language played a central role. In the case of Akiyama’s “Poem for Tape Recorder,” language was made first and foremost into sonic material, redefining the borders of poetic practice and recomposing the poetic voice in ways that continue to echo today.

## You Forbid Me to Walk

### *Yokota Hiroshi's Disability Poetics*

In a scene near the end of Hara Kazuo's 1972 documentary film *Goodbye CP* (*Sayōnara CP*), Yokota Hiroshi kneels on the ground outside Shinjuku station in Tokyo. Yokota has cerebral palsy, a term that refers to a group of permanent neurological conditions that affect movement, coordination, muscle tone, and balance. His head and arms are in constant motion; his feet, wearing only black socks, are splayed out to his sides; his elbows and wrists are at sharp angles. The dolly-mounted camera rapidly moves forward across a concrete plaza toward him, coming to a stop when he fills the frame. He slowly and carefully writes something with a piece of chalk on the concrete ground, in reverse order starting with the rightmost character: "Yokota Hiroshi poem" (*Yokota Hiroshi shi* 横田弘 詩) (figure 6).

The constant motion of his hands and arms makes this a laborious process; the chalk fractures under the pressure he applies to the pavement. As he finishes writing his name, he begins to draw a large circle around himself and the words he has just written, one small segment at a time (figure 7). While he draws this circle—at once stage, altar, and protective barrier—he begins to speak: "Please listen to my poem."<sup>1</sup> His voice is heavily shaped by his condition's effects on the muscles of his jaw, lips, tongue, and throat. "This is 'Legs,'" he says. The camera tilts up to the large crowd of pedestrians surrounding him at a distance, and he recites the beginning of his poem (figure 8).

Crowds of people gathered around me  
 You all have legs  
 You all—you all—I—you all forbid me to walk  
 And only through this do you keep your legs.



FIGURE 6. Yokota Hiroshi writing the character for “poem” followed by his name in a still from *Goodbye CP* (*Sayonara CP*), directed by Hara Kazuo, 1972.



FIGURE 7. Yokota Hiroshi drawing a chalk circle around himself and his words in *Goodbye CP* (*Sayonara CP*), directed by Hara Kazuo, 1972.



FIGURE 8. Yokota Hiroshi begins to recite his poem “Legs” to a gathered crowd in *Goodbye CP* (*Sayonara CP*), directed by Hara Kazuo, 1972.

Crowds of people!  
Gathered legs!  
You—on what basis do you all forbid me to walk?²

The camera tilts from the crowd up toward the buildings behind them, and then to the sky; the frame freezes and another voice suddenly cuts into the poetry reading from off-screen. Two police officers ask who’s in charge; Yokota says he is. “What are you recording? You’re bothering everyone,” says one officer. “This has become a freak show. Please stop,” says the other. Abruptly, the scene ends.

Yokota Hiroshi (1933–2013) was a poet and one of Japan’s most prominent disability activists, who in a more than six-decade career of writing and political organization has left behind a legacy that extends far beyond his appearance in this film. Yet *Goodbye CP*, the first feature film by the now-famous documentarian Hara Kazuo, introduced the disability movement in Japan to many for the first time. Hara, who was an assistant at the Tokyo Kōmei Metropolitan School—the most prominent public school in Japan for children with physical disabilities, founded in 1932 and still active—later described the central concept for *Goodbye CP* as the “dichotomy between ‘the healthy vs. the disabled,’” and the necessarily “antagonistic relationship” between the two groups that results from that division.<sup>3</sup>

This chapter will focus not on Hara's depiction of Yokota but on the works of Yokota himself as a crucial rethinking of poetry, media, and embodiment. This includes the filmed performance described above along with a wide variety of his printed poems, especially those published in literary magazines, anthologies, and nonfiction books throughout the 1950s, '60s, and '70s. Yokota was a major figure within the broader context of disability culture and activism in postwar Japan, especially as a member of Shinonome (Daybreak)—the amateur literary coterie (*dōjin*) and magazine for poets with cerebral palsy—and as a leader of the disability activist group Aoi Shiba no Kai (The Green Lawn Association). In his work with these groups and throughout his poetic career, Yokota's poems made the disabled body itself into his central medium of expression and site of experimentality. Focusing on Yokota's "disability poetics"—how his poetic acts function through and in relation to the body, and questions of ability and disability—I will consider the ways in which he explored how a body otherwise can make poetry otherwise. Yokota used form and language in his poetic work in order to challenge conventional conceptions of what it means to be disabled, what it means to have and be a body, and finally, what it means to mediate that body through text, image, and assistive technologies.

There are certainly plentiful examples of, say, blindness, deafness, prostheses, immobility, muteness, and so on that are repeatedly returned to in the broader poetic sphere by "disabled" and "able-bodied" poets alike as motif or metaphor. There is also no shortage of artistic works in Japan and elsewhere portraying people with various disabilities as characters or subjects. But Yokota and many of the other Shinonome poets rejected the use of disability as only a metaphor or topic to represent. They actively aimed to make works that differed from those made with conventionally abled bodies by means of carefully self-reflexive acts of composition and publication, and by experimenting with poetic form and modes of narration and sensation. Yokota's poems—live performances of poems, cinematic performances of poems, poetry collections, and poetry magazines—also consistently question not just what it means to be disabled in the world but also how a world can make a body disabled. They consider what a body can do in assemblage with a wheelchair and typewriter and limbs that work nonnormatively, often of their own accord; they shed light on what it means to recast disability as generative, as a remaking of dominant literary, medial, corporeal, and legislative modes.

First, a return to "Legs."

#### "LEGS" AND DISABILITY

"Legs" ("Ashi"), the poem Yokota performs to the gathered crowd in *Goodbye CP*, is a new version of a poem that was published two years earlier, the first version addressed not to spectators but to the legs themselves.

Legs  
 Passing before my eyes  
 Wearing miniskirts  
 Pleated pants  
 White canvas shoes  
 Little sandals  
 You vast crowd of legs!  
 Look back at me

That's right all of you  
 Are called legs  
 Only because you do not let me walk  
 Only by forbidding me to walk about the streets on my knees  
 Are you recognized as legs  
 Only through this  
 Can you sing, work, laugh,  
 Arrogantly sprawl out  
 And so I  
 Set up my four-and-a-half tatami-sized altar

Legs  
 Now passing before my eyes  
 You vast crowd of legs!  
 Look back at this man  
 Today I will get off the altar myself  
 Because here I am alive<sup>4</sup>

In both the filmed and printed versions of the poem, one sentiment is especially striking: in the former, “You forbid me to walk” (*anatagata wa watashi ga aruku koto o kinzuru*); in the latter, “You do not let me walk” (*omaetachi wa watashi ga aruku no o yurusanai*). It is not “I am not able to walk,” as might be expected from a conventional understanding of disability, but *you forbid* me to walk. Yokota, addressing the nondisabled spectators and readers, frames his words as an accusation. The question of ability and disability thus departs from being about the capacities of any one disabled body and shifts the focus onto the process of *enabling* and *disabling*. Who is disabled? Who makes whom disabled, and how?

“You forbid me to walk.” The line can be understood in several ways, each of which sheds light on a different mode of thinking about disability. The first and most straightforward is tied to disability rights movements’ language of accessibility, focused on the improvement of policy: in an inaccessible place like the train station at the time of Yokota’s performance, infrastructure designed by and for people with normative mobility—without ramps or elevators—does not give access to those without.



But the last verb in this line is also far from straightforward: “You forbid me to walk.” How might we understand this argument that he is not *allowed* or *permitted* to walk, rather than the more conventional understanding that due to the form of his body and its condition that he is not *able* to walk? It is significant here to note again that Yokota is not performing this poem from his wheelchair but rather is kneeling, and writing, on the ground. Indeed, throughout *Goodbye CP* Yokota drags himself across spaces on his hands and knees, often with bare feet, after a lifetime of either using a wheelchair or being carried by others, at least in public. The critic Takasugi Shingo highlighted the centrality of this act to the film in an article that came out the same year. “The act of a person walking,” says the first line of the article; “A documentary film that records this head-on. This is *Goodbye CP*. A person walking was filmed.”<sup>5</sup>

Yokota deliberately spectacularizes his way of walking on his knees, his body constantly shaking and staggering—an unusual and strenuous mode of travel—as a way to emphasize the roads, stairs, and other infrastructure built without someone like him in mind. Even further than that, he defamiliarizes the act of “walking” itself by engaging in it by means of an entirely different use of limbs, moving in unexpected ways. In this light, “you forbid me to walk” becomes less a question of policy than one of redefinition, a rethinking of what it means to perform an act like “walking” that is normally not questioned by those who have no reason to—that is, the non-disabled. Using his body otherwise, Yokota challenges an act as common as walking and refuses to take its conventions as a given when those conventions serve to marginalize him and people who move like him. “You do not let me walk”: you do not let my modes of travel be considered “walking,” to be considered normal.

“Normality,” of course, can only be produced alongside “abnormality.” There is a “normal” way of walking, and everything else is “abnormal”; certain bodies are deemed “normal,” and any bodies that diverge from this are not. Only by preventing him from walking, says Yokota, can nondisabled people “keep your legs” (*ashi wa kakuho sarete iru*), “are you [legs] recognized as legs” (*ashi to mitomerareru*). On a fundamental level, an aim of this poetry reading, this film, and many disability activists’ protest actions around the world was to make disabled people visible. People with disabilities—physical, cognitive, sensory, intellectual—were often shut away in institutions and homes, and they certainly were not thought of by nondisabled society as having a collective identity that could be mobilized into political action. In the context of Japan’s postwar high-growth economy, disabled people who could not work could not “contribute,” were left out of decision-making and pushed out of public spaces. Recall the police officers who halt Yokota’s performance, calling his poetry reading a “freak show” (*misemono*), unable to see the significance of the deliberate public spectacle. But making disabled bodies visible in public like in those actions documented by *Goodbye CP* made the structures that allow certain people to be considered “normal,” “able-bodied,” “healthy,” or “productive”—and others not—more visible as well.

“You forbid me to walk.” This short statement, and the poem it came from, thus takes us through several distinct approaches to disability. One might think about

this accusation as a question of rights, as a statement in favor of the improvement of current societies, infrastructures, and policies to make them more accessible to disabled people. Or the focus might be placed instead on disability as a social construct, one that *disables* certain bodies within a society designed for bodies with a set of assumed “normal” characteristics and capacities. Finally, it might be thought of in terms of what might be called a critical disability studies, where even the givenness of the body itself (and its everyday tasks like walking) is brought into question, a stance that refuses any norm to which bodies are made to cleave.

#### DISABILITY POETICS

The definition of disability is a main site of contention within disability studies and disability communities. One of the best-known contributions of disability activism that was later developed in certain branches of disability studies is, as mentioned before, the idea of disability as a social construct. A woman who uses a wheelchair, for example, is not *inherently* “disabled” but *becomes* disabled when she encounters an inaccessible environment, like a building with a staircase but no ramp or elevator. This notion of disability is often contrasted with “impairment,” which is a state of having a lack/loss or abnormality in a limb, organ, or bodily system. Impairments are real characteristics of bodies and lived experiences, but disability is the product of societies and infrastructures that do not take nonnormative bodies into account.

More recently, however, what is often called a “critical disability studies” has emerged. This is an approach that rejects the neat categories separating “disabled” and “nondisabled” people—and even “disability” and “ability”—in favor of a refusal to recognize the “givenness” of any body, stressing how disability is an intersectional and multivalent phenomenon. Some strands within critical disability studies also take issue with the above distinction between disability and impairment. In proposing a “radical model” of disability, for example, A. J. Withers calls this distinction a “false binary” between bodies and culture that was once useful but is a tool of “continued oppression”; impairment itself, they point out, is also created through a constructed social meaning.<sup>6</sup> Others such as Margrit Shildrick and Petra Kuppers emphasize the potential of disability to reveal how *all* bodies are constantly in the process of becoming, always in assemblage with other bodies and machines and environments, thus disrupting the norms of corporeality. Critical disability studies itself, of course, is not without its critiques. This kind of deconstructive approach toward the categories and ideologies of disability often stresses a kind of all-encompassing diversity of bodies that smooths over the differences between those bodies at the same time it purports to extol the singular characteristics of each. In other words, an approach that stresses that *all* bodies are different, porous, and contingent can all too easily ignore the lived experiences of impairment and the realities of uneven access, recognition, and power.

It is against this unevenness perpetrated by “able-bodied” society that Yokota writes much of his poetry. One consistent inflection of Yokota’s work over several

decades is what Arai Yūki—the pathbreaking disability studies scholar, who has written extensively on Yokota’s work—refers to as Yokota’s “poetics of accusation” (*kokuhatsu no shigaku*).<sup>7</sup> The word “accusation” (*kokuhatsu*) comes up yet again in the subtitle of the abovementioned review of *Goodbye CP*, which described the film as an “accusatory thing” (*kokuhatsu suru mono*).<sup>8</sup> Far from the shame, pity, or “inspirational” hopefulness that often characterizes writing about disabled people (and also much autobiographical writing on disability at this time in Japan), what we tend to see in Yokota’s poems is indeed a stance of indictment, of anger at a society that treats him and other disabled people in a violent and dehumanizing way. This is a key aspect of Yokota’s poetics, but not the only one. More broadly, Yokota’s approach to disability in his work is complex and often oblique, without many of the expected tropes of literary works that take up disability as their subject. His poems are certainly often accusatory, but just as often they are elegiac, sardonic, or hermetic, each mode expressing a different facet of his politics.

One way of bringing together these threads is through the concept of “disability poetics,” a framework for understanding how poetry and other media engage with and evoke nonnormative embodiment, sensation, and cognition. Christina Scheuer describes how disability poetics centers the “body’s experiences and ways of knowing” in their form and language, linking the somatic and linguistic to “express a diversity of bodily practices and encounters.”<sup>9</sup> Disability poetics also places the emphasis on poets who themselves have disabilities—who create poems that depict disability from the inside, “necessarily structured by the poet’s daily lived experience, with its attendant political and social contexts.”<sup>10</sup> The disabled body within disability poetics is not a “vehicle for metaphor,” as is so often the case in works that depict disabled subjects, but rather is *co-expressed* with poetic language. The poet foregrounds a multifarious connectedness between the body and the forces, objects, environments, and institutions that are conventionally considered to be outside the “body” but are in fact crucial to its being and expression.<sup>11</sup> Along these lines, Yokota’s poetry deliberately incorporates a diverse set of ways of thinking about disability—focused on rights, socially constructed, and critically expanded—in its form and content, with the possible implications of “Legs” above being just one example. There are poems where his own disabled body is described in excruciating detail, but just as many where the body is seemingly not present, with disability evoked through unusual approaches to sensation or in playing with the “body” of the poem itself. Indeed, throughout his poetic practice there is a commitment to experimentality that rivals that of far better-known figures of Japan’s illustrious avant-garde, yet creations by disabled practitioners have historically been left out of such movements except in certain narrow categories like “outsider art.”

In exploring Yokota Hiroshi’s disability poetics, we find an idiosyncratic theorization of disability, the body, and language that does not quite fit neatly into any one of the strands within disability thinking and activism described above. Not only that, his work anticipates by several decades many of these approaches in disability

studies today, a field that is still largely dominated by the English-speaking world with the vast majority of cited theorists and texts coming from the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada. One unique feature of the disability movements in Japan—and something that makes them particularly relevant to increasingly prevalent discussions on the intersections of disability, literary, and media studies—is that many of their leaders, including Yokota, were poets. Their disability poetics manifested across their literary writings, theoretical writings, and political actions, with poetic practice leading directly to their later activism.

#### YOKOTA HIROSHI AND DISABILITY MOVEMENTS

Yokota Hiroshi was born in Yokohama to a working-class family in 1933. Showing symptoms of severe cerebral palsy from birth, he was not accommodated to participate in obligatory schooling and never received a formal education. His older brother helped him learn how to read and write with the help of wooden block toys.<sup>12</sup> He started writing poetry in 1955, joining the Kanagawa-area amateur literary coterie Katachi after reading about them in a newspaper; the group helped him self-publish his first poetry collection, *Walking (Ayumi)*, shortly afterward in 1958. He actively followed the publications of the disability activist group Aoi Shiba no Kai, which published its first magazine in 1957, and he also started submitting to *Shinonome*, an associated amateur literary magazine by and for poets with cerebral palsy, starting with its forty-second issue in 1960.<sup>13</sup> Yokota was unhappy with his living situation, which required him to be confined to various relatives' homes. Hanada Shunchō, the head of the Shinonome coterie, introduced Yokota to Maharaba Village (Maharaba mura), a radical independent living colony for people with cerebral palsy that existed from 1964 to 1969 around Ganjōji Temple on Mount Kankyo in Ibaraki Prefecture; Yokota moved there in its first year. There he met and married his wife, Nagayama Yoshiko, who also had cerebral palsy; in 1968, she gave birth to their son, Satoru, and Yokota moved out of the colony, a fraught decision that resulted from his desire not to isolate his nondisabled son from wider society.<sup>14</sup>

It was around this time he began to participate fully in disability activism, forming the Japanese People with Cerebral Palsy Association “Aoi Shiba no Kai” Kanagawa Prefectural Organization (Nihon nōsei mahi-sha kyōkai “Aoi shiba no kai” Kanagawa-ken rengōkai) along with several friends who also used to live at Maharaba Village. As the head of this subgroup of Aoi Shiba no Kai for several decades, Yokota spearheaded an activist strategy that first gained prominence in 1970, when members of the group protested the decision of the Kanagawa courts to treat a woman who killed her child with cerebral palsy with more leniency than if the child had been nondisabled. He published several books of essays in this decade alone, including *The Ideology of Killing the Disabled (Shōgaisha-goroshi no shisō)* in 1974 and *Fallen Grass: The Emergence and Collapse of Communal Living for People with Cerebral Palsy (Korobi-gusa: Nōsei mahi-sha no aru kyōdō seikatsu*

*no shōsei to hōkai*) in 1975. He also published four more poetry collections: *Flower Core* (*Hanashibe*) in 1969, *The Day the Sea Roars* (*Umi no naru hi*) in 1985, *And, Now* (*Soshite, ima*) in 1993, and *On Phantoms* (*Maboroshi o*) in 2010, his last work before his death at age eighty in 2013.

As it sheds light on much of Yokota's poetic and activist work, his four-point platform for Aoi Shiba no Kai, published in 1970, is worth quoting in its entirety:

- *We identify ourselves as people with Cerebral Palsy (CP).* We recognize our position as “an existence which should not exist” in the modern society. We believe that this recognition should be the starting point of our whole movement, and we act on this belief.
- *We assert ourselves aggressively.* When we identify ourselves as people with CP, we have a will to protect ourselves. We believe that a strong self-assertion is the only way to achieve self-protection, and we act on this belief.
- *We deny love and justice.* We condemn egoism held by love and justice. We believe that mutual understanding, accompanying the human observation which arises from the denial of love and justice, means the true well-being, and we act on this belief.
- *We do not choose the way of problem solving.* We have learnt from our personal experiences that easy solutions to problems lead to dangerous compromises. We believe that an endless confrontation is the only course of action possible for us, and we act on this belief.<sup>15</sup>

A fifth point he added at a later date ties more directly to Yokota's vision of a cerebral palsy culture:

- *We deny able-bodied civilization.* We recognize that modern civilization has managed to sustain itself only by excluding us, people with CP. We believe that creation of our own culture through our movement and daily life leads to the condemnation of modern civilization, and we act on this belief.<sup>16</sup>

In his poetry and essays—themselves a kind of “endless confrontation,” as articulated in the above platform—each of these points is repeatedly articulated, sometimes explicitly, sometimes implicitly, as recurrent images, motifs, and arguments. This begins with his very first published work, fifteen years earlier.

### THE LIMITS OF THE MIND'S EYE

In Yokota Hiroshi's afterword to his first poetry collection, 1958's *Walking* (*Ayumi*), he reflects upon the role poetry plays in his life:

What is poetry? I don't have a definitive answer yet. But for me, at least, it has become the light for me to live by. I am more grateful than words can say to my parents, who raised me after I was diagnosed with infant cerebral palsy shortly after birth, still more to my older sister and brother-in-law who cared for me after my mother passed away when I was eighteen. But since I am a living human being, sometimes I am attacked by a loneliness that such love

cannot compensate for. It is at those times that poetry is my only consolation. It might be a bad thing to write poems with thoughts such as these, and that might be the limitation of my poetry. But I find it difficult now to escape from such ideas. This book is a little signpost toward the road of how I will live from now on. It is on this foundation that I want to keep walking steadily, whatever life I have remaining.<sup>17</sup>

Here Yokota centers the idea of “walking”—the thing that, more than a decade later, he would frame as the thing dominant society “forbids” him to do—and renders it otherwise, not as conventional ambulation but as a way out of the potential “limitations of [his] poetry” (*shi no genkai*). It is also limitation itself—of poetry, expression, imagination, and the body—that became one of his central concerns from the very beginning of his poetic career.

In “Square Sky” (“*Shikakui sora*”), Yokota’s first published poem—which appeared in the second issue of the amateur literary journal *Katachi* in 1955, when he was twenty-two years old, and reprinted as the first poem in *Ayumi*—many elements of his poetry have already emerged fully formed. In his approach to language, imagery, and representations of his body and his relationship to the world, we can find a starting point for the particular disability poetics that Yokota develops over the next five and a half decades.

I do not know the extent of the sky  
 The sky is always fitted into a frame of black wood  
 A square thing  
 Through this square sky  
 Sometimes clouds glide listlessly from right to left  
 Sometimes birds fly diagonally across it  
 And sometimes  
 Multicolored laundry  
 Looking like it smells of soap  
 Takes up most of the square sky  
 When this square sky  
 Becomes faintly misty I rejoice that spring has come  
 When it is deeply cleansed I grieve at the arrival of autumn  
 This is me that people call a cripple<sup>18</sup>

When Yokota wrote this poem he was spending the vast majority of his time in his room—Japanese cities in 1955 were hardly accessible environments for a wheelchair user. “Square Sky” is heavy with the sense of claustrophobia and confinement brought on by his living situation and his body’s lack of mobility in its environment. Within his one-room universe, the “sky” is only the view from a single square, wood-framed window, a mediated “thing” only accessible through vision from the distance, the exterior completely folded into the interior. As Arai notes, all of his senses, from scent (soap) to sound (birds), are collapsed into sight.<sup>19</sup> There is a distinct feeling that there is a “real” world outside the window that Yokota has only limited, virtual access

to, and it is this *limited experience of the world* that, Yokota says in the last line, makes people call him “a cripple” (*katawamono*, a pejorative term).

This is an important reversal of the expectations surrounding disability and identity, and one we can find throughout his work. In this poem from the mid-1950s—written well before the emergence of global disability movements and the emphasis on disability as a construct created by an unaccommodating society and not the “failure” of an individual body—Yokota already shows more than a glimmer of his later activist consciousness. In this final line, it is not he who considers himself a “cripple,” and it is not the way his body is that makes him such; rather, it is something he is *called* by other people. Furthermore, the reason they call him that seems not because of the way his body looks but because of the way *he looks*—in other words, because of the way “*sonna boku*” (literally “that I” or “I who is like that”) can only experience the sky (and the rest of the world) through narrow mediation.

These themes are expanded upon further and made even more explicit in a later poem, “Cold Heart” (“Hieru kokoro”), from his 1969 collection, *Hanashibe* (*Flower Core*).

“Today was so nice out  
 I could see Mount Fuji, clear as day”  
 said my aunt, who just came back from an outing  
 “Oh, it’s not just today!  
 You can see it all the time around the end of fall.”  
 It was in the mid-afternoon  
 with a late November chill

I do not know the real Fuji  
 so when someone says Fuji  
 the prints of Hokusai are what immediately come to mind  
 but in my head  
 even though there’s Fuji through Hokusai’s careful eye  
 there is no form left to its own nature  
 even though there’s the beauty of his deformed ridges  
 there is no joy in following smooth slopes with a naked eye  
 and I  
 came to believe that was the real thing  
 convinced that this was the real Fuji  
 my heart  
 is always full  
 of these deformed things

“I want to climb Mount Fuji, even just once”  
 said my cousin  
 me too even just once  
 I think I want to see the real Mount Fuji  
 I think I want to know the real world<sup>20</sup>



Again, Yokota here considers the gaps between the experiences in which he is able or allowed to participate and those of the nondisabled family around him. His aunt's story about seeing Mount Fuji, and his cousin's exclamation of her desire to climb it one day, set off a series of introspections about his own desires and fears surrounding his relationship to the world. Once more, there is an anxiety around his own experiences, which he sees as virtual, as opposed to what he imagines as an encounter with the "real." While for his aunt, seeing Mount Fuji is a somewhat noteworthy experience, it is implied to be a regular one; it is implied that for Yokota, however, due to the limits set on his mobility, even *seeing* Fuji is something he can only dream about. In the last stanza, his cousin expresses her desire to, "even just once," climb Mount Fuji. Her fantasy is hardly out of reach; hundreds of thousands of people do this every year, and her body seemingly has the capacity to do so. "Me too," thinks Yokota, but he is not referring to climbing Mount Fuji; to do this is so far outside the realm of possibility he does not even allow himself the thought. Rather, he expresses his desire to *see* the real Fuji (*hontō no Fuji-san o mitai to omou*). Just seeing Fuji might be something trivial for people with normative mobility, but for Yokota, the seeing itself becomes the fantasy, the impossible act that he longs for.

Even more striking is another collapse of all experience into the visual/virtual in the middle section of the poem: like the sky in "Square Sky," which becomes only the view outside one window, "Mount Fuji" to Yokota is only Fuji as mediated through the famous woodblock prints of Katsushika Hokusai, known for works like the "Thirty-six Views of Mount Fuji" (including "The Great Wave Off Kanagawa"). Again, like in the previous poem, it is not his own body but that mediated experience *itself* that Yokota portrays as disabling. In this poem, Hokusai's version of Mount Fuji's ridges, while beautiful, are described as *henkei*, a word that when applied to a body means "deformed"; Yokota is rueful that the image of Fuji that he convinced himself was "real" is instead just one among the many "deformed things" (*henkei sareta mono*) filling up his heart and mind. His body itself, instead, is made implicitly present through the description of his "naked eye," which in Japanese is *nikugan*—literally meaning "flesh-eye" or "meat-eye." Rather than the convention of a poetic vision that is separate from the body, free to virtually roam the world and cosmos, Yokota's vision in these early poems is firmly enfleshed, with both physical sight and virtual sight—the vision of the mind's eye—being subject to the limitations imposed upon his body.

#### YOKOTA'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO SHINONOME

Yokota's blossoming as a poet largely occurred across the 1960s in the pages of *Shinonome* (which means "dawn" or "daybreak"). Shinonome was an amateur literary coterie (*dōjin*) with its own literary magazine, published from 1947 to 2012, written by and for people with cerebral palsy. It was also eventually a parent body of Aoi Shiba no Kai, which eventually became the most influential group of disability



activists in Japan, of which Yokota became one of its leaders. The birthplace of Shinonome was the Tokyo Kōmei Metropolitan School for physically disabled children (the same school in which Hara Kazuo, the director of *Goodbye CP*, later worked as an assistant). Although there were public schools for the blind and deaf in the 1890s, there were none for children with physical disabilities until the Kōmei school was founded in June 1932.<sup>21</sup> The coterie was launched by the graduates of the Kōmei school's "postgraduate course," who received an especially deep and broad education in Japanese literature—indeed, the longtime head of Shinonome, the poet Hanada Shunchō (1922–2017), repeatedly emphasized the central role of literature in the development of disability culture and consciousness.<sup>22</sup> Shinonome's literary magazine was first published in May 1947; in its first years, it was a handwritten circular (most of the issues of which are now lost) with the idiosyncratic handwriting characteristic of many people with cerebral palsy.<sup>23</sup> Each issue featured a wide variety of work but was largely centered around poetry—haiku, tanka, and free verse. There were also many essays, responses to current events, reviews of books and films, advertisements, art, and short biographies of contributors (which will be touched on again later). By and large, especially in the first few decades of its existence, it was one of the few sites for public self-expression by and for disabled people—especially those confined to their homes or institutions—and, as Arai emphasizes, we can find in its pages many of the structures of thinking and networks of relationships that formed the foundation of later disability movements in Japan.<sup>24</sup>

In *Shinonome* as before, Yokota's body continued to be a central image in his poetic works, but always in a way that resisted conventional depictions of the "disabled body" in literature and elsewhere. It is those external forces—particularly medical institutions and professionals—that actively tried to define his body as disabled and which are the focus in Yokota's first poem published in *Shinonome* magazine in 1960 (and thus his first actively aimed at a disabled audience): "Patient's Chart" ("Karute").

"It's a real pity,  
but you're not going to get any better than this, you knoww?"

Name of Disease:  
Spastic paralysis due to infant cerebral palsy

"This isn't something  
You can cure with a single injection, you knoww?"

Right shoulder elevation about 40°  
Hand and finger movements sluggish

"Try stretching your leg out more  
Ahaa, just what I thought, your knees have gotten crooked, haven't they?"

A pronounced curvature  
In both knee joints

"If you're touched by other people there  
Your joints are going to get completely stiff, you knoww?"

Second degree of severity confirmed  
On the statistical table for laws concerning those with physical disabilities

"Well, take care of yourself  
And try moving on your own, even if you have to gasp for breath, okayy?"<sup>25</sup>

Yokota's body, which is at the center of this poem, is described in extreme detail; unlike most of his other poems written around this time, however, it is not explicitly written in the first person. Each of the poem's two-line stanzas alternates between two types of speech: quoted speech from what seems to be a doctor or nurse, and descriptions of Yokota's bodily characteristics in highly medicalized language, as if they were written on the titular patient's chart. The person who is speaking has a bedside manner that is far from gentle or compassionate; using everyday language instead of medical terminology, the figure instructs, chastises, and diagnoses the reader (as a young Yokota) in a curt and casual way. There is also an extreme sense of condescension, which is evoked in the original by ending each of that voice's couplets with extended *nees* and *naas*, rendered here by doubled final letters. The other stanzas, in the disembodied "diagnostic" voice, are replete with dense, specialized kanji and vocabulary that describe Yokota's "spastic paralysis" and label him as having a "second-degree" disability according to governmental regulations. The focus again is on the *external* definition of him and his body as disabled, both within the medical and health policy systems and through the voice of a healthcare professional who gruffly points out the failures, lacks, and grim future of Yokota's body.<sup>26</sup>

The fact that this was published as part of Yokota's first set of poems for *Shinonome* is itself significant. A key part of the structure of *Shinonome* is its use of autobiography and biography. Apart from the poems themselves—some, but not all, of which speak about personal experiences of the poet—every issue ends with a series of short biographical notes on each poet. In itself this is not unusual for a literary journal, but what is striking is the addition of one element to the usual date and place of birth, educational background, and so on: a self-identification of the poet's "condition," usually some form of cerebral palsy, but occasionally other type of paralysis, like those stemming from a spinal injury.

Why is this the case? Certainly, the journal is the product of a coterie of poets with physical disabilities, almost all of whom can be described as having cerebral palsy. Judging by the essays, editorial introductions, and targeted advertisements, the expected audience of the journal, too, is other disabled people. The presence of the specific nature of the poets' disabilities in their profiles can be

considered in several ways. One is related to identity: the specific nature of a poet's disability is included as a self-description in a way analogous to the biographical elements of age, hometown, and schooling that precede it; including their specific disability gives a fuller view of them as a person, pushing against assumptions of "able-bodiedness."

Another way this can be thought of is as a form of resistance to the medical model of disability, one replete with nomenclature for every specific form of physical variance—a model of naming, and then of "rehabilitation" or "cure." The extremely specific, medicalized terminology used by the poets in these autobiographic or biographic blurbs might at first seem to fit right into this model, making *Shinonome's* bio page read like a series of patient charts like the one in Yokota's poem above. Most of these poets met each other in specific educational and rehabilitative institutions for children and youth with physical disabilities, where the language of such diagnoses would be inescapable. One way to think about this relationship to diagnosis and classification is described by the disability theorist and poet with cerebral palsy, Eli Clare: "I want to consider diagnosis as just another system of classification, and cerebral palsy as a single category within that system. As such, diagnosis defines which bodymind conditions are pathological, names them, charts the connections between them. It sometimes provides us access to vital medical technology and treatment and other times pathologizes our entire beings. All too often it is brandished as authority, our bodyminds bent to match diagnostic criteria rather than vice versa."<sup>27</sup>

It is this complex and fraught relationship to diagnosis that these biographies play with in their using and reusing this kind of language. The specificity of these terms reflects the enormous diversity of these poets' bodies, a diversity that is all too easily smoothed over by a society that often thinks of "disabled people" as a monolithic group. In this context, the naming of particular conditions by the poets themselves—rather than by doctors or government agencies—becomes an act of self-identification. The gesture of using the words that were used to define them in the context of their autobiographies as writers strikes one as simultaneously empowering, rueful, and tongue-in-cheek.

Yokota's "Deep-Sea Fish" ("Shinkaigyo"), published in the same issue, is strikingly different from any of his other work up until this point:

eyes searching for  
lost light  
are no more

enduring  
silent water pressure  
the whole body became antenna

today too poisoned wine  
has sharply soaked through<sup>28</sup>

Completely divorced from any conventional idea of life writing, “Deep-Sea Fish” instead is almost Surrealist in its language, presenting the reader with an imagined landscape of the deep ocean. Yet this poem, too, is an exploration at the edges of Yokota’s disability poetics, focusing on embodiment, sensation, and mediation *otherwise*: each section, in turn, considers blindness, sensation, and injury. No humans nor animals explicitly appear, but an organismic presence is implied. The beginning has disembodied “eyes” that are instantly negated out of existence, an act of “seeing” that occurs without either light or sight organs. In the next stanza, some unspecified “whole body” (*zenshin*) is “antenna-fied” (*shok-kaku-ka shita*), becoming a sensory appendage characteristic of nonhuman animals. In the last stanza—“today too    poisoned wine / has sharply soaked through” (*dokushu wa kyō mo / surudoku shimitooru*)—not much is clear besides a feeling of chronic hurt: “poisoned wine” has “sharply” penetrated something (perhaps the “whole body” of the previous stanza), and, what’s more, this is seemingly a regular occurrence (“today too”).

#### YOKOTA AND MASS MEDIA

One of Yokota’s most reprinted works is “Pinwheel” (“Kazaguruma”), another seemingly autobiographical work that uses startlingly surreal imagery to complicate conventional tropes.

Since my childhood days  
it had been weakly spinning

On a quiet night with the nonstop chirping of crickets  
in the mystery of the transparent colors  
revolving in my mother’s eyes  
I came to bear a little longing  
and a faint fear  
with my whole body

For the first time  
wind blew through my heart  
in the sunlight of a languid autumn afternoon  
It was only the red enamel  
adorning the surface  
that brittlely    went up in flames<sup>29</sup>

The poem focuses on a particular moment between the narrator (again, seemingly Yokota himself) and his mother, likely in his early childhood. The “whole body” (*zenshin*) of “Deep-Sea Fish” returns here, only this time as a vessel of affect, depicted as something that “came to bear” (*uketometa*) longing and fear from his mother’s eyes. “For the first time,” a wind blows through the narrator’s heart—the titular pinwheel—which was until that point only “weakly spinning.” Finally, “red

enamel” covering his heart, or perhaps his entire body, suddenly bursts into flame (*moe agaru*).

It is certainly a cryptic work, but before delving into the specifics of its imagery, it is important to consider where the poem eventually ended up: as the frontispiece of Yokota’s first nonfiction book, 1974’s *The Ideology of Killing the Disabled* (*Shōgaisha-goroshi no shisō*), later updated in 1979. This book was written in response to numerous high-profile incidents in the 1970s in Japan of caregivers—especially mothers—killing their young children who had cerebral palsy, and the feeling of rage and helplessness that disabled people felt in the face of a public outpouring of sympathy for those caregivers, whose actions were framed as tragic but inevitable.

At this time Aoi Shiba no Kai and the burgeoning radical feminist movement *ūman ribu* (women’s lib) worked together on a range of issues, most notably uniting against 1972’s Eugenic Protection Law Amendment Bill, which simultaneously aimed to reduce access to abortion and to promote selective abortion of disabled fetuses.<sup>30</sup> There were, however, significant conflicts between the two groups. Radical feminist movements worldwide pushed for easy access to safe abortions with few restrictions, while global disability movements pushed back against selective abortion in particular, bringing up fears of eugenics and the disproportionate aborting of fetuses that were likely to have disabilities. Radical feminists argued that their aim was to create a society in which disabled and nondisabled children alike could be raised without discrimination; disability rights activists were skeptical of any approach that did not foreground the specific dangers faced by disabled people in the present and the future. Another point of conflict involved *kogoroshi onna*, women who killed their children; many *ribu* activists repeatedly expressed solidarity with these mothers as part of their overall ideological project of exposing and destroying societal conceptions and policies of gender roles, motherhood, and family as inherently oppressive to women. Tanaka Mitsu, a core member of the *ribu* movement and its most prominent mouthpiece, expressed this succinctly in 1972: “*ribu* and the child-killing women are nothing but two extreme branches coming from the same root.”<sup>31</sup> This and similar statements, however, elided the fact that a large proportion of children killed this way were killed due to their being disabled.<sup>32</sup>

In light of Yokota’s decision to put this poem on the first page of *The Ideology of Killing the Disabled*—seemingly the only poem in the entire book—five years after its first appearance in *Hanashibe*, certain nuances of “Pinwheel” become more apparent. Like in his other poems, Yokota does not describe his own body as disabled, yet his body absorbs “fear” and “longing” from his mother’s eyes, and any surface armor he has burns up in her presence. There is a porosity between their bodies, but also an atmosphere of potential violence, the narrator becoming more and more vulnerable as the poem progresses, with even the flames consuming him being described as “brittle” (*moroi*). Yokota’s favored motifs within his disability poetics return in this poem—alternative modes of feeling and sensation, bodies otherwise, the presence of relatives, natural environments combined with a sense of distance and lack—but here, in the face of several horrific murders of disabled

children, they are used to convey a feeling of threat within the context of a familial tableau. What is also centered here is the intensely fraught and often disturbing role of women within Yokota's work—which often touches on family, caregiving, and birth—with his female figures often serving as little more than stand-ins for the cruelty and violence of the “able-bodied” world.

As mentioned earlier, “Pinwheel” is ostensibly the only poem that appears in Yokota's first nonfiction book, despite his being known first and foremost as a poet. Yet this is not entirely true. At the end of the third section of the first chapter, “The ‘Criminality’ of Mass Media” (“Masukomi no ‘hanzaisei’”), are two pages that look nothing like the rest of the book—indented, loosely and irregularly lineated, with ample blank space:

On a Rainy Street, Wandering through the Nighttime  
 A Mother, Following in Suicide      Kills Her Beloved Disabled Child  
*Yomiuri Shimbun*

Mother Who Kills Her Paralytic Child  
 Suicide “Settlement”  
 A Year of Caregiving, Total Exhaustion  
 One More “Disabled Children's Home” Tragedy  
*Mainichi Shimbun*

Tragic    “Suicide Conclusion”  
 Killing Son with Cerebral Palsy      Mother Leaps to Death  
*Tokyo Shimbun*

Unidentified Mother Commits Suicide  
 Kills Disabled Child  
 A Tragic Conclusion    Near a Custodial Care School  
*Kanagawa Shimbun*

Mother Strangles Severely Disabled Eldest Son  
 Leaps from Building  
 Seeking Death  
 Body Soaked by Rain      Overnight  
*Sankei Shimbun*

Mother Jumps Too      Kills Mentally Retarded Child and Leaves Home  
*Tokyo Shimbun*

Jumping to Her Death Near Her Child's School  
 The Mother Who Killed Her Disabled Child  
*Asahi Shimbun*<sup>33</sup>

Yokota highlights the language, often pejorative and cruel, used by the mass media to describe disabled people and their murders by selecting and arranging a series of eight newspaper headlines from February 11, 1978, concerning one of the incidents that became the catalyst for the update and rerelease of his book: a woman in Kanagawa killing her twelve-year-old son who had cerebral palsy, and then leaping to her own death. The victim is alternately described as a “beloved physically disabled child” (*shinshō no aiji*), a “paralytic child” (*mahi no ko*), a “son with cerebral palsy” (*nōsei mahi no musuko*), a “physically disabled child” (*shinshōji*), a “mentally retarded child” (*chie okure no ko*), and a “severely disabled eldest son” (*jūdo shinshō no chōnan*). The overall tone is melodramatic, touching on the mother’s love and exhaustion, the rainy street, and the tragic “conclusion” attained by the act of murder.

Yet beyond the specific language used in these headlines, what is most striking is their *poeticization*. This is most obvious, again, from the visual arrangement of words, which stand out from the rest of the book with creative indentation, lineation, and use of space. Beyond that, the first line contributes to the effect: “On a Rainy Street, Wandering through the Nighttime” (*ame no machi, ichiya sasurai*).<sup>34</sup> In other words, it is a phrase of five syllables followed by a phrase of seven syllables, like the first two lines of a haiku or tanka.<sup>35</sup> While the rest of the headlines do not follow this pattern, Yokota’s decision to put this particular quotation first, along with the formatting, serves as a subtle signal to the reader to read this sequence as *lyric*.

What is the effect of this decision? Jahan Ramazani points out a consistent trope of positioning poetry as an “antigenre to the news,” held up for its resistance to the urgent pressure of immediacy and simplification inherent to journalism.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, he says, poetry across the globe in the twentieth century has consistently incorporated the news while still defining itself against it dialogically.<sup>37</sup> In a way akin to this, Yokota uses the language of journalism against itself by taking headlines and arranging them in a sequence and in a way to make them look “poetic.” He thus asks the reader, even if subconsciously, to read these headlines—ubiquitous, designed to be graspable and to convey information in an instant—as a poem. In other words, he asks us to read them *intensively* instead of *extensively*—carefully, with a heightened attention to the choice of words used by mainstream society to describe disability as a tragedy, and the murder of a disabled child as an understandable and inevitable conclusion. Again, in Yokota’s disability poetics there is a consistent spotlight on the cultural formation of disability and the power imbalance inherent to the act of deeming something or someone disabled. This poem-that-is-not-a-poem gains force precisely due to its being a poem across media, in this case mass media. The journalistic depictions that were the main source of both the information about and the framing of these incidents for the vast majority of people become, in Yokota’s act of poeticization, removed from a context in which they can purport to be a neutral and objective account of events, the ideology behind their language made apparent.

The final Yokota poem that I wish to consider is “Thoughts on a Hot Night” (“*Atsui yoru no omoi*”), which touches upon each of the motifs and particularities of his disability poetics explored earlier.

now  
 one feeling  
 flows through my heart  
 it is the feeling of a dark sea  
 it is the feeling of the pupils of dead children floating on that sea

the world which must have inhaled the august heat and turned clear  
 at some point became a purified landscape, towering around me  
 with limbs that have nothing but uncertain thoughts  
 announcing the secret yet grim fact of the advent of its weathering away

I must consider  
 the reason that I am me  
 I must consider  
 the reason for the existence of a person who has limbs that announced their  
 weathering away  
 the reason for the fact of the existence of limbs that have nothing but  
 uncertain thoughts

I must consider  
 I must keep considering  
 that feelings are nothing but feelings

now  
 there flows within my heart  
 one feeling  
 it is the feeling of a dark sea

ripping through the thoughts of a hot night  
 the work of the birth of a golden beast  
 is conveying like an arrow  
 a definite whistling sound but<sup>38</sup>

In the wake of the number of high-profile cases of children with cerebral palsy murdered in 1972, the year this work was first published, Yokota grapples with a nebulous “feeling” (*jōnetsu*) in his heart, the feeling of a “dark sea” (*kurai umi*), a recurring motif in his work (most prominently in but not limited to “Deep-Sea Fish”). In this poem he represents his body as “otherwise” in a way much that is more direct than usual for him. He questions the value of his own existence as a person whose limbs “announced their weathering away” (*teashi ni fūka o tsugeta*) and that “have nothing but uncertain thoughts” (*futashika-na shisō shika motenai*). His cerebral palsy is thus depicted through a portrayal of a kind of embodied cognition, where his limbs themselves think but are as “uncertain” as he himself feels.



Like “Legs,” which is addressed both on the page and in person to a nondisabled audience, “Thoughts on a Hot Night” also engages in what Arai calls a poetics of accusation (*kokuhatsu no shigaku*), which he locates specifically in the “pupils of dead children” (*shiji no hitomi*).<sup>39</sup> In this reading, the spirits of these children are the accusers, implicitly denouncing a society that would allow for their deaths, but also Yokota himself as inextricable from that society. Another striking feature of this poem is its repetitive, obsessive structure befitting the title, resembling cyclical thoughts during a bout of insomnia; Yokota’s body, wracked with heat and guilt and involuntary movement, creates a poem that does the same. It is this connection of the poet’s body and the form of the text, even if lightly drawn, that I wish to consider at the conclusion of this chapter; let us briefly return, then, to *Shinonome* magazine.

### THE EXPERIMENTATION OF THE DISABLED BODY

Looking through issues of *Shinonome*, it is hard not to be struck by its visuality. The earliest issues, as mentioned before, were handwritten, highlighting the idiosyncratic movements of a body with cerebral palsy through the materiality of writing. Yet in *Shinonome*’s printed era, its cover art becomes particularly striking. Starting in the early 1970s, the majority of its covers featured a particular type of illustration, such as the one from the eightieth issue (see figure 9).

From a distance, *Shinonome*’s cover illustrations look like they’ve been drawn by hand, perhaps with an unusual printing technique. The subjects range from flowers to a man in uniform, from a building to a snowman to a monkey. Yet a closer look reveals that the images have been created using a typewriter, everything composed of typographic symbols. In the case of this uncredited cover, a flower is made out of the hiragana letters あさがお, spelling “morning glory” (*asagao*); the leaves are made of the syllable “ha” は, which means “leaf” (figure 9).

In this era of *Shinonome*, each issue is filled with advertisements for Japanese-language electric typewriters, often with modifications like specialized key layouts or guide plates for those with motor disabilities, who of course made up the majority of the journal’s audience. The ad copy, however, was usually aimed at a teacher or caregiver who would set up the machine, and not at disabled users themselves. Furthermore, none of these companies seemed to have been aware of the potential usefulness of their product as tool of art making accessible to a wide variety of bodies, making this a use of the technology not intended by its creators. One might say that the choice of these *Shinonome* artists to create typewriter art in this way was out of necessity; many people with cerebral palsy find it difficult to draw or write with a pencil, pen, or brush by hand, especially if precision is required.



FIGURE 9. Detail of the typewritten morning glory adorning a portion of the cover of the journal *Shinonome*'s eightieth issue, January 1975.

But this would not do justice to what is most interesting here—or, even worse, it might fall into the overused trope in which disabled people are represented as inspirational figures who create art despite their hardships. What is highlighted by these cover images is an *art otherwise*, spectacularizing the fact that it was created by a *body otherwise* by means of its experimental use of the media technology of the electric typewriter. Not only that, these artists' typeset flowers, figures, and landscapes veer firmly into the realm of the poetic, emerging at the confluence of visual art, writing technology, and text.

The commonplace notion of printed text hiding the specificity of a body—privileging the capacity of handwriting and calligraphy as a record or an index of a particular body’s act of creation—is challenged here. *Shinonome* centered the act of unconventional bodies writing not just through its text art covers, but also with regular articles and special issues on themes like “the electric typewriter” in which poets with cerebral palsy reflected on the act of using novel writing technologies, sometimes entirely written in the kana syllabaries to show that they were direct transcriptions of the typewritten output. These articles and the typed poetic cover artworks are self-consciously performative engagements between diverse bodies and new media technologies. They reveal the potential of these technologies to be rethought and used in ways distinct from their original intended uses. While the mimeographs of unconventional handwriting that made up the earliest issues of *Shinonome* showed the presence of disabled bodies in their creation more explicitly, those bodies are no less present in the authorship of these (or any) typeset works: the technology itself is made visible in specific ways that do not let it remain body-agnostic.

Yokota, as well as the many other poets within Japan’s disability movements, took up disability and the lives of disabled people not just in their poems’ content, but also in their striving to think of poems themselves otherwise. In Yokota’s case, this took the form of his highly personal and specific use of imagery, unusual poetic sources like patient charts and headlines, and his dedication to making his disabled body visible in performance and articulation. While not as ostentatious as some other works of poetry and art usually considered to be part of Japan’s avant-garde, the *Shinonome* cover artists’ careful overlap of typewritten symbols to create gradients, color fields, solid blocks of ink, cross-hatching, and so on evoked the experimental concrete poems that grew in popularity in Japan and across the world in the postwar era, created by poets like Niikuni Seiichi, who usually used phototypesetters to change the size, shape, and orientation of each character.<sup>40</sup> The *Shinonome* poets’ work was no less innovative than the much-heralded experimental art of Japan’s 1950s and 1960s that was featured in the previous chapter, but its innovation firmly centered on the day-to-day lived experiences of disabled people, and on those with cerebral palsy in particular. They aimed not to reduce disability to a metaphor, as is so often the case, but to consistently challenge the *body of the poem* in a way that refuses to take it as a given, much like the disability movements of this time refused to accept a “norm” that only allowed certain bodies within it.<sup>41</sup>

Consider once more Yokota, sitting on the ground outside Shinjuku station, writing in chalk and reciting his poem out loud. In the scene of *Good-bye CP* that precedes this, we hear a conversation between the director, Hara Kazuo, and Yokota; Hara points out to him that Yokota once said that people don’t understand what he says, and Hara wonders how that will work in the poetry reading. “I think they will understand something,” says Yokota.

“Even if they don’t understand every single word . . . if they’re really listening, they’ll understand.”<sup>42</sup>

His speech is, indeed, difficult to understand entirely. A review of the film from the time by the critic Satō Shigechika notes the film’s “largely unintelligible dialogue.”<sup>43</sup> This is because the Japanese release of the film did not have any subtitles to aid the audience in understanding the words of the subjects with cerebral palsy (though transcripts were distributed in programs for people to read later). “If the protagonists of the film had not been Japanese, there’s no question that I would have added subtitles,” said Hara in a later essay.<sup>44</sup>

I also might have used subtitles if they had been from far-off areas with strong regional accents—for example, if people living in Tokyo would have had a hard time understanding their local dialect. But the difficulty an audience is confronted with when people with cerebral palsy talk doesn’t have to do with dialect. I think an audience has to become accustomed to how people with cerebral palsy speak. That is, if the audience gets used to this, if they spend some time with them, they’ll come to understand them.<sup>45</sup>

Indeed, Hara says that although most of the crowd remained silent, audience members with cerebral palsy laughed and reacted throughout: they were able to understand all the dialogue.<sup>46</sup> In the Takasugi Shingo article about *Goodbye CP* published earlier, however, Hara claimed that “none of the people that were crowded around recognized what Yokota was saying in his squeezed-out voice as a poem.”<sup>47</sup> Even disregarding the fact that Yokota wrote “Yokota Hiroshi Poem” on the ground in front of him before the reading, this is a pessimistic view, and one that reduces the multifaceted encounter between poet, voice, body, audience, and poem solely to a question of intelligibility.

Whether or not the audience around Yokota or of *Goodbye CP* could understand the words of his poem at first is a debate that itself highlights the other yet no less important elements of the poetic encounter recorded in this scene. Yokota’s performance of “Legs” is also a performance of a poem across media, of a body otherwise, of writing otherwise, of speaking otherwise, and—on the part of the audience of both the reading and the film—of listening otherwise, of attempting to come to a different kind of understanding. This process can never be perfect, but in itself it continually articulates different modes of sensation and relation to others. “Disability is a word cut in the landscape of bodies,” says Petra Kuppers. “Experimental poetry is not only stuff that is unintelligible on the page. It is also poems that become unintelligible as they are performed, as their familiar words enter a machine that sticks and shudders with aching gears.”<sup>48</sup> While many of Yokota’s poems might not fit what is conventionally thought of as avant-garde or experimental, by centering their disability poetics, he and the other poets of Japan’s disability movements achieved experimentality through other means: by handwriting their poems on pages or pavement in a way that made visible the

unconventional movements made by their hands; by reading their poems aloud, even or especially when their voices were not easily understandable to those outside their communities; and by rethinking how embodiment can be expressed through language when their own bodies were made invisible or deemed expendable. Put another way, through these poems, bodies otherwise, though forbidden to walk, were able to speak—and what's more, to make speaking new.

## As a Piece of Flesh

### *Feminist Poetic Stardom and the Body*

Itō Hiromi's *On Territory 1* (*Teritori-ron 1*), released in 1987, is filled with poems and black-and-white photographs, spreading out to the very edges of its unnumbered pages.<sup>1</sup> The poems are chaotic, long, and fluid, shifting into and out of different modes of diction—terse, formal, prayerful, rough, casual, medical—and speak of murder and childbirth, food and sex, menstruation, excretion, and suicide. The photographs jostle with the poems, at times matching their subject matter, at times contradicting them, and sometimes even obscuring the text entirely. At one point there is a photograph of a nude woman bound in rope, the text overlaid onto her flesh; turn the page and another woman, or perhaps the same one, lifts her shirt to breastfeed her child. There are pictures of stir-fries, schoolchildren, streetscapes, roadkill, snowmen, smokestacks, desserts, withered flowers, rivet-filled shoes, families, couples, nurses, and newspaper obituaries. One photo spread interrupts a long poem called “Shamanic” midstream: on the left page is a close-up of an erect penis, whited out; on the right, two diners are seated at a table in a crowded restaurant. One of those diners is a woman in a polka-dot dress, pearls, and black lace gloves, looking straight into the camera: Togawa Jun.

At the heart of this chapter is the juxtaposition of these two figures, both of whom gained fame in the 1980s: Itō Hiromi (1955–), perhaps the most influential poet born in Japan's postwar generation, and Togawa Jun (1961–), the avant-garde pop star who over the course of the decade achieved major success in the alternative mainstream. While both wrote and published poetry, each gained prominence in areas of the media landscape with few points of overlap—Itō in the realm of poetry and the broader literary world, Togawa in film, television, and the new wave music scene. There is a commonality to their work, however, which

is relevant to thinking poetry at the edge of media: each articulates a kind of feminist cross-media poetics centered around bodies, especially their own, in three major ways. First, they created poetic works about women's bodies and sexuality in frank, explicit, or even deliberately horrifying or shocking terms. Second, they prioritized the performance of their own poems using their own bodies as the medium—Itō through experimental poetry readings, and Togawa in song, fusing poetic composition with pop music. Finally, their work extended across multiple platforms within the media environment of Japan's 1980s, each using the tools available to them in an expanded poetic practice that was in active engagement with the forms and structures of popular culture.

Although in the pre- and immediate postwar eras in Japan one can perhaps have a coherent sense of the general contours of poetic practice by focusing solely on the literary and art worlds, with the arrival of the 1970s and especially the 1980s, this basically became impossible. Of course, there were still poetry journals and collections being published—indeed, more than ever before—but this remained an increasingly marginal practice within an intense maelstrom of magazines, TV shows, movies, manga, department stores, and pop idols. It is within this context that Itō and Togawa created their work. Itō reimagined what it meant to be a poet and public figure through mixed-media books, self-help guides, magazine features, audio recordings, television appearances, and films, centering her own feminist conceptions of the body and embodiment. Togawa similarly used the structures and elements of the dense media strategy of pop idolhood at the time—with the requisite albums, singles, lyric booklets, music videos, variety show performances, photo books, outfits, and interviews—but she twisted and mutated them for her own purposes until they resembled conventional popular media products but were replete with figurations of abject femininities and corporealities.

Itō and Togawa were reacting to, pushing against, and actively playing around with dominant trends and discourses relating to women that were prominent in Japan's mass media in the 1980s, three of which I will highlight here. The first was the trope that Japan was entering its “era of women” (*onna no jidai*).<sup>2</sup> This phrase—heavily promoted by politicians, journalists, and department store chains like Seibu—was less a promise of liberation and more of a parallel to the idea of women “having it all.”<sup>3</sup> Both pointed to the idea that women could have individual success in all aspects of their lives—there was nothing stopping them from being both part of the workforce and having fulfilling family lives.<sup>4</sup> After all, the Equal Employment Opportunity Law (*danjo koyō kikai kintōhō*) had just passed in 1985, ostensibly prohibiting employment discrimination on the basis of sex, though of course in reality there continued (and continues) to be massive oppression of women on the individual and structural levels that these laws did little to address.

The second was in the realm of popular music. Some of the most prominent women artists of the 1970s were singer-songwriters like Matsutōya Yumi (better known as Yuming) and Nakajima Miyuki, whose appeal was centered in their



distinctive lyrical points of view.<sup>5</sup> The 1980s, however, saw the fading popularity of singer-songwriters amidst the explosion of the pop “idol,” with artists like Matsuda Seiko dominating the charts; these idols tended to perform songs written for them, often by the singer-songwriters popular in previous decades. Matsuda’s flavor of glamorous, perfected girlishness and performed cuteness (or *burikko*) became the dominant form of normative femininity on screen, the radio, and the pages of magazines.

The third discourse I wish to highlight regards the existence of a “women’s poetry boom” (*josei shi būmu*) in Japan, an idea largely promulgated, as Joanne Quimby points out, by the male literary establishment and male-dominated publishing industry, and one that Itō herself criticized on several occasions.<sup>6</sup> As the pioneering feminist performance poet Shiraishi Kazuko argued, the term “women’s poetry” (*josei shi*) can itself be discriminatory, and she noted that terms like “male poets” or “white poets” are not used to refer to poets in dominant groups, whose writing of poetry is taken to be natural or neutral; the use of the term “women’s poetry” itself makes women poets into a minority.<sup>7</sup> *Josei* as a term describing literary works by women gained popularity in the 1980s as a more neutral alternative to the previously dominant term *joryū*, or “women’s-style” literature; the idea was that *josei* indicated the gender of the writer but not a specific “feminine” type or genre of writing like *joryū*.<sup>8</sup> Yet the way *josei* was used as marketing tool, Itō and others argued, also implied a specific kind of poetic work, one that included certain kinds of “women’s writing” and excluded others: the “proper” kind of woman poet wrote in specific acceptable ways about love, sex, and the household, and her poems were assumed to be diaristic or confessional, with a speaker who was the same as the poet herself. To be categorized as a “woman poet” or “woman artist”—implying that gender or sex should be the genre, precondition, or horizon of interpretation of their work—was anathema to both Itō and Togawa (as well as many others deemed “women poets”), despite Itō in particular constantly being included in that category.

Both Itō and Togawa implicitly and explicitly pushed against these and related discourses by means of expanded poetic practices across the media landscape of the time. One of their main tools for doing so was to place their own bodies at the very center of these practices in three major ways: thematized within the poetic text, engaged in poetic performance, and captured and circulated through a variety of popular media. In order to do justice to both the complexity of embodiment within their poetry and to its cross-media articulations, then, we must engage with these poets on their own terms and not treat their poetry exclusively in the form of written, published text (as is usually the case with work on Itō) or printed lyrics (for Togawa). Focusing on performance and poetic manifestations across media—alongside but not subordinate to written poetic text in books, journals, and lyric booklets—not only aids our understanding of Itō and Togawa’s work, but it is a crucial step in engaging with other realms of poetic and literary studies.



Itō Hiromi emphasizes the performance and recording of her work more than most other poets in Japan at the time, but the vast majority of prominent poets, then and now, also participated in frequent poetry reading events of various kinds.<sup>9</sup> Togawa Jun's lyrics are extraordinarily complex, innovative, and densely referential to world literature, philosophy, psychology, and art, making them well suited to involved exegeses; but the lyrics of even the simplest and most conventional popular songs are not only poetic texts under all but the most conservative definitions of poetry, but they are in fact the best-known and most frequently consumed form of poetry. In this chapter I will focus on how Itō and Togawa articulated gender, sex, femininity, and the body within their poetic work across media, but in using their expanded poetic fields as case studies, I also aim to show a variety of approaches to access these kinds of literary practice—mediatized, performed, popularized—that remain largely sidelined as minor topics of inquiry.

#### ITŌ HIROMI'S STYLE AND POETICS

In a 1991 essay, Shiraishi Kazuko looks back at the decade that had just passed and considers the broad trends of so-called “women's poetry” (*josei-shi*) in relation to feminism.<sup>10</sup> She claims that in the 1960s, when she first gained real fame as a poet, there was not yet a feminist awakening in Japan, and many topics were forbidden to women poets due to a societal taboo. She uses the scandal following her own use of the word “penis” (*dankon*) as an example.<sup>11</sup> Looking back at the 1980s, however, she sees something different as having emerged—an unprecedented boom in “women's poetry,” this time with poets writing bluntly and openly about genitals, sex, pregnancy, and childbirth, all from a woman's standpoint and inspired by the feminist movements of the time and of the decade before.<sup>12</sup> At the forefront of this phenomenon in the Japanese context, she says, was Itō Hiromi, a “radical shamaness” who “without using decorative language or metaphor . . . directly used sexual terms, and conveyed the details of sexual acts” in a “concrete and frank” way unlike any poet before her.<sup>13</sup> Itō wrote about not only sex in this way, but also “pregnancy, childbirth, and excretion”; in the wake of her work, she argues, feminism and poetry became “linked together with physiology and oriented toward the body as a single phenomenon.”<sup>14</sup>

Itō is one of the most written-about contemporary poets in Japan, and one of the few to be extensively translated into English.<sup>15</sup> She is also one of the most prolific, having published more than fifty solo authored and twenty coauthored books in a variety of genres between 1978 and 2022. She achieved fame through the closest thing to a conventional route for a poet in postwar Japan: she published her work in amateur and then professional literary magazines, won a major award in 1978, and then released several book-length collections. Jeffrey Angles notes that due to her constant and explicit depictions of women's bodies, bodily processes,

pregnancy, and childcare, “many people, both inside and outside the literary world, began calling her by the sobriquet *shussan shijin*, or ‘poet of childbirth.’”<sup>16</sup> As Shiraishi argued, she was also the most prominent member of the so-called “women’s poetry boom” of the 1980s, during which several young women poets gained media attention and saw high sales for their books. Her poetry consistently evokes polyvocality, often using several concurrent paragraphs of text, leading to the aforementioned characterization of her as a poetic “shamaness” or channeler of voices, a designation she embraced in her 1991 collaboration with Japan’s best-known feminist critic, Ueno Chizuko, *The Shamaness and Her Interpreter* (*Noro to saniwa to*).

Having become a prominent poet, Itō participated in the poetry world in the expected ways, engaging in endless interviews, roundtable discussions, and essays in special issues of poetry journals; her works were reviewed, praised, criticized, and analyzed by her fellow poets and critics, and she did the same with theirs. By the mid-1980s, despite never embracing the category, she was at the forefront of “women’s poetry” in Japan. As Quimby points out, however, Itō’s opposition to the category of women’s poetry in favor of *feminist* poetry was an explicit and central feature of her poetics.<sup>17</sup> “To express briefly the nearly thirty-year-long publication history of Itō Hiromi,” she says, “would be to say that it focuses on the problem of the embodiment of women in what might be called a performative project.”<sup>18</sup> This project, however, is against any unified idea of “women’s experience”; instead, it is about gender, and about “‘femininity’ within a societal framework.”<sup>19</sup> As she notes, all of Itō’s various forms of creative activities and collaborations are a further “visual layer” to her work, and her entire public persona became part of this same “performative text.”<sup>20</sup>

This is one significant way among many that Itō’s path differed from that of the “poet” or “woman poet” as it was commonly understood. Which other poet in that decade would write a book about sexuality in collaboration with a porn star?<sup>21</sup> Or write two books of self-illustrated humorous essays on child rearing, in full explicit detail—one called *Good Breasts, Bad Breasts*,<sup>22</sup> the other *Belly, Cheeks, Bottom*?<sup>23</sup> Or would star in an independent documentary film centered around her recounting a story about plucking hairs from her body?<sup>24</sup> Or, in the mid-1990s, would put out a poetry collection featuring photos of intimate nude portraits of herself, focusing on every small detail of her skin and its “imperfections”?<sup>25</sup> She also differed from the poetic mainstream in that she was also highly focused on performance, reading her poems live in multiple venues—sometimes accompanied by a tape recorder in order to layer her own voice upon itself—releasing CD recordings of her poetry readings, and appearing on television, video, and film.

Within Itō’s enormous diversity of work, there are several recognizable hallmarks of her style, many of which are evident in this short excerpt of a long

poem, “Peristalsis” (“Zendō”), from her fourth poetry collection, *On Territory 2* (*Teritorī-ron 2*):

I am having the ongoing realization, however, that the thing in my center, behind my belly button and connected to my uterus by an umbilical cord, is a foreign object and not a fetus.

Entering week 19, that foreign object began to move inside my tummy. In other words, I am coming to feel that it is less a foreign object than it is a life-form.<sup>26</sup>

One element common to much of her poetry is a mixing of registers: linguistic, visual, symbolic, medial. Here, the title of the poem is a specialized medical term, referring to the muscle contractions that move food through the digestive system; the fragment is in more of a personal mode, still detached emotionally, though not quite clinical. A diary-like use of language, written in prose paragraphs, is mixed in the rest of the poem with more conventional “poetic” text. We see also a shift in typography, from small to large, with the large text continuing past this fragment. This does not seem to be a matter of emphasizing the large text—there seems to be no rhyme or reason throughout the poem in relation to these changes in size—but rather a matter of highlighting the combination of visual styles itself, lending the poem a collage-like feel that characterizes much of her work.<sup>27</sup> The subject matter, too, is *Itō* par excellence: she writes about maternity, childbirth, and women’s bodies and bodily processes in brazen, sometimes explicit terms. Unlike the conventional expectations of women’s personal writing, however, her tone here is low in affect, almost clinical. In other words, what seems at first to be a personal account of pregnancy, a not-uncommon subgenre of popular women’s writing, veers away from the personal in both diction (the use of medical terms) and imagery (the fetus is presented not as a potential baby but as something alien—a “foreign object” or parasite-like “life-form”).

Another poem from the same collection, “Healing Kanoko’s Rash” (“Kanoko no shishshin o naosu”), shows even more extreme tendencies common to her work:

Kanoko becomes wet from my gushing breasts  
 Kanoko’s cheek gets wet  
 Kanoko’s lips get wet  
 Kanoko’s chin gets wet  
 The bruise on Kanoko’s chin gets wet and my milk drips  
 .....  
 The standing oil from the oily rash on Kanoko’s forehead stands and walks off  
 Walks off  
 The oil from the oily rash on Kanoko’s forehead congeals, dries, and stands up  
 Stands up and walks off  
 The oil from the oily rash on Kanoko’s cheek congeals  
 The oil from the oily rash on Kanoko’s cheek . . . (*Abbreviated from here onward*)<sup>28</sup>

Like in “Peristalsis,” Itō once again plays with the autobiographical mode that is expected of women’s writing: Kanoko is indeed the name of Itō’s eldest daughter. She is also the main subject of Itō’s most infamous poem by far, which is also in this collection: “Kanoko-goroshi,” or “Killing Kanoko,” a long, polyvocal experimental poem that describes the narrator (also named Hiromi) killing her daughter Kanoko in explicit detail, set in parallel to another story in which a woman named Hiromi kills herself. These incidents obviously never happened, and they immediately signal to the reader not to accept the narrator of these poems—the “I,” or even the “Hiromi”—as necessarily equivalent to the “real” Itō Hiromi.

“Healing Kanoko’s Rash,” however, may very well be based on a “real” story of Itō and her daughter, albeit a type of story that is not usually told—not in polite company, or even within the family; not in popular media, and certainly not in poetry. In these excerpts from near the beginning and end of the poem, we see one of Itō’s signature moves, of shifting the poem toward the deliberate provocation of disgust. We see hints of this in the first stanza, where breastfeeding (not, of course, a disgusting act) is depicted as realistically *messy*; Kanoko has not latched onto her mother’s breast, and milk sprays all over her face. What makes the poem “disgusting” is the shift from one bodily fluid to another: from breast milk at the beginning of the poem to the oil coagulating on Kanoko’s rashes, or from a “regular” (if often taboo) fluid to a suppuration symptomatic of infection or disease. Throughout this collection, and indeed her entire oeuvre, Itō takes the common poetic trope of confusion of images—the standard haiku move, for example, of mistaking snow for cherry blossoms or vice versa—and applies them to parts, processes, and excretions of the body. Itō’s body flows into Kanoko’s, which flows into Itō’s; in other poems, excrement becomes urine which becomes vomit which becomes saliva, and these bodily products in turn are likened to poetry and/or childbirth. An optimistic view of intercorporeality, where bodies overlap and lead us to a visceral, somatic understanding of one another—the fabled bond between mother and child, for example—is rarely found in her poems. Instead we find endless processes of abjection, where the body is at times fragmented, at times fused with other bodies, but always in an uneasy or even alien or horrific relation with itself and others.

Once again we also see the mixing of medical and colloquial registers, with the consistent use throughout the poem of the word “seborrheic” (脂漏性 *shirōsei*, rendered in the above translation as “oily”), the sole word consistently written in dense Chinese characters among the hiragana and katakana syllabaries that mark the rest of the poem as conversational in tone. The fluidity of Itō’s lines catches on this strange repeated word; the “flow” of language prioritized in much poetry, stream-of-consciousness writing, and rap repeatedly falters. Her common moniker of “shamaness” also becomes clearer when considered in relation to her poetic style, not just in terms of the channeling of different voices, which is not so present here, but in the incantatory quality of constant repetition, expansion,

and variation of lines, at times taking the form of a litany (of Kanoko's facial features becoming wet, for example) or an endless elaboration (like of the behavior of the oil on Kanoko's rash). "Healing Kanoko's Rash" takes this aspect of Itō's poetics to an extreme, where the poem does not "end" at all except in the phrase *ika shōryaku*, "abbreviated from here onward," indicating that the repeated lines and their variations continue on ad infinitum, like a fade-out at the end of a pop song. In general, Itō Hiromi revels in complexity; she relishes writing poems that tend toward the long and convoluted, with constant shifts in perspective, tone, visuality, and subject matter that sidestep assumptions and then pirouette to avoid the new assumptions created after that first sidestep.

#### ITŌ'S GUIDEBOOKS

There are many Itōs, each with distinct approaches to the core themes of her work. She was a popular media figure not only as a poet at the forefront of a "women's poetry boom," but also as an honest and entertaining writer on the subjects of childbirth and maternity, authoring essays in women's magazines and illustrated guidebooks. Through these books we see another one of Itō's modes of self-representation: not the fraught textualities of her poetry collections, but something still very much in line with her broader poetics of intense bodily-ness, performance, and a careful negotiation between complete directness and self-obfuscation. Amanda Seaman describes Itō's first popular book on maternity, 1984's *Good Breasts, Bad Breasts (Yoi oppai, warui oppai)*, as an "autobiographical manual for women like [Itō]—that is, intellectual women who are having children," filled with "pen and ink drawings of the protagonist, assumed to be Itō."<sup>29</sup> It is "marked by an attention to the physicality of childbirth," she says, "depicted in visceral and often graphic detail," and it strives "to create a new language for describing pain."<sup>30</sup>

The design of the second of her books in this genre—1987's *Belly, Cheeks, Bottom (Onaka hoppe oshiri)*—provides a striking example of her weaving together her work in "poetry" and "popular media" into a kind of poetic media. On the book's front cover, Itō appears in one of her own pen-and-ink drawings (figure 10).<sup>31</sup> She is naked, pregnant, and pictured from the waist up, with freckles across her nose and a mole under her right breast; flourishes in charcoal, distinct from the ink pen of the main figure, provide a rough texture to her areolas, ruddiness to her cheeks, and frizziness to her hair. While her name as author appears in the upper right-hand corner—her formal name in kanji, 伊藤比呂美—an orange speech bubble also has her illustrated self giving a casual self-introduction, orally that is further emphasized by rendering the words in handwritten hiragana (いとうひろみです, "I am Itō Hiromi"). On the inside front cover is a matching illustration by Itō of her daughter Kanoko, now a toddler, standing and smiling, naked; a similar illustration adorns the inside back cover, this time of Kanoko from the back. Above each, two cartoon birds hold up an orange banner with the



FIGURE 10. The cover of Itō Hiromi's *Onaka hoppe oshiri* (Tokyo: Fujin seikatsusha, 1987).

title of the image: “An Illustrated Reference of Kanoko’s Body” (*Kanoko no nikutai zukan*). In a humorous take on a scientific guidebook, there are arrows pointing to different body parts, with short explanations of each. Her daughter’s shoulders are described as “white like strawberry mochi,” her earlobes “like Dumbo’s,” and other labels refer to her head, hair, cheeks, eyes, thighs, belly, bottom, elbows, and so on. In a way, these descriptions formally echo the often-disturbing corporeal portrayal of her daughter in her poems, but here they are made “cute” for easy mass consumption.

Even from these covers and inside covers we can see familiar Itō-esque motifs repurposed into a different genre, for a different audience, and in different media. Like her poetry collections, her essays in this book deal with themes of the body, childbirth, femininity, and sexuality in a frank manner, though with a far lighter tone than in most of her poems. Yet even the illustrations and their captions within this “nonpoetic” work are deeply concordant with her works that are conventionally deemed “poetic.” This text—its design, illustrations, essay text, and captions—is one striking example among many from the 1980s of Itō’s development of a *cross-media poetics*, hinging around her identity as a feminist poet and public figure. The front cover, for example, makes full use of mixed registers, in this case both textual (the “I am Itō Hiromi” in hiragana in the dialogue bubble versus the kanji Itō Hiromi as the author name) and pictorial (the clean linework of the pen-and-ink drawings versus the deliberately unruly charcoal details around the hair and nipples). Itō splits herself into several Itōs. Her “autobiographical” drawings are at

once intimate—hand-drawn by her, with specific details like the mole under her breast—and distancing, rendering her into a simple cartoon figure, like a character in a newspaper comic, exaggerated, flexible, and polymorphous.

At the core of these works of essays and illustration—and indeed, of Itō's poetic work across media in general—is a specificity that actively pushes against the universalization of experiences, especially those of women, those of the body, and those of women's bodies. As Seaman argues about Itō's first such guidebook, "The poetic and visual devices that [she] employs, in particular vivid metaphors, are meant to represent bodily experiences (conventionally treated as ineffable or universal) in their individual and idiosyncratic variety."<sup>32</sup> Even—or *especially*—in popular works that at first glance seem separate from her written "poetic" work, Itō infuses her feminist poetics, which gains force in its multiplicity as it expands across media.

#### ITŌ AS FILM(ED) POET IN *HIROMI—A HAIR-PLUCKING STORY*

Shortly after her emergence in the poetry world, Itō Hiromi could be seen in another medium that was unusual for poets at the time: film. In 1981—a few years before writing her first guidebook, and indeed before she had her first child—the poet and filmmaker Suzuki Shirōyasu (1935–2022) created in collaboration with her a feature-length 16mm independent film centered on Itō, *Hiromi—A Hair-Plucking Story* (*Hiromi—Ke o nuku hanashi*). It is divided into several sections, each with a dated handwritten title card—"Hiromi's First Hair-Plucking Story," "Hiromi's Story of Finding a Corpse," and so on. Each of these is followed by a long scene of Itō chatting about the topic, her figure filling the frame, with regular close-ups on her face as she speaks and Suzuki asking her questions from off-screen. These are interspersed with shots of floating weeds, Itō among hydrangeas in a garden, scenes of her interacting with other poets and artists who were in the same circles as her and Suzuki, and, in the middle of the film, a poetry reading by the well-known performance poet Nejime Shōichi (sitting on a toilet and wearing only a painted loincloth) followed by a reading by Itō herself.

Itō references the impact that participating in this film had on her in the afterword to her 1982 poetry collection, *Unripe Plum* (*Aoume*): "I am indebted to Mr. Suzuki Shirōyasu, through and through," she says. "Being filmed as part of his movie called *Hiromi—A Hair-Plucking Story*, I realized the pleasures of being *seen*, of having something *done with me*."<sup>33</sup> Suzuki gave his own account of the making of the film on his personal website: "While talking with Ms. Hiromi several times, I heard her say, 'I love plucking my hair'; the contents of what she was saying touched on a real sense of life. I decided to film her while she was telling this story. When she plucks out her own hairs, she is excited to become aware of both the self that plucks, and the self that is plucked. The skin is a problem, she says.



While filming this, I was surprised at how this story of hers became an excellent theory of the body [*shintairon*].”<sup>34</sup>

Itō begins with a self-introduction: she provides her name, says that she was born in Itabashi in Tokyo in 1955, and gives her educational history starting with elementary school. She says she started writing poetry at university and eventually won the Gendaishi Techō prize in the first year she started publishing. She holds up her first major collection of poetry, which had just come out the year before, 1980’s *Itō Hiromi Poetry Collection* (*Itō Hiromi shishū*), and she mentions that it costs 1400 yen. After some shots of her holding a cat in a hydrangea garden, she begins to talk about plucking hair.

The topic is interspersed throughout the film, but it is returned to over and over, always with her sitting body filling the frame and the camera frequently zooming in on her face as she speaks. She begins by talking about plants: she never cared for trees but loved grass and rice plants. She has loved plucking hairs from her body for a long time, and to her it’s a feeling like pulling grass or weeds. When she was at university, she began a habit of plucking at her eyebrows, as well as her breasts, forearms, and armpits. She doesn’t pluck hair from her feet or legs because it hurts too much; same with her fingers and toes. She’s interested in skin, too, and how oil gathers on it; she loves the feeling when blood or pus emerges after plucking an ingrown hair. She doesn’t collect the hair she plucks, she says—that would be perverse—but sometimes she likes to eat the tips of them, where the root is coated with a fatty sheath. She likes to pluck in front of a mirror and watch her own body while she does it; it’s almost like she enters a trance (*muchū*). There’s a sensation, she says, when you pluck a hair—both the feeling of pulling it out as well of it being pulled out of your skin. The *being plucked* (*nukareteru*) feels good; there’s also the feeling of both squeezing and being squeezed, of touching and being touched. There’s pain, she says, but the experience of it changes whether you’re looking at what you’re doing or not.

Itō’s face and body here are intimately tied to her words in a different mode than in a written poem, or in an illustrated or even photographic book; the viewer directly experiences her producing language through her body, inflecting it with gesture, expression, stance, and style. She and Suzuki take full advantage of this capacity of film; after describing her interest in skin and how oil collects on its surface, for example, there is a sudden cut to an extreme close-up of her face looking into the camera, its very slight oily sheen suddenly noticeable in context (figure 11).

The viewer, however, is not only looking at Itō: in the context of her accounts of obsessively looking at her own body directly and in a mirror, we suddenly have the powerful sense that in some way *we are Itō looking, fascinated, at herself*. Itō’s “theory of the body” (*shintairon*), as Suzuki put it—of the fascination it holds, of its trance-inducing qualities, of its microfeatures and processes, of its ability to act on itself and have one simultaneously be the subject and object of their own action—is explored through the capacities of film itself: its ability to record the





FIGURE 11. An extreme close-up of Itō Hiromi's face from *Hiromi—A Hair-Plucking Story* (*Hiromi—ke o nuku hanashi*), the 1981 film by Suzuki Shirōyasu, complete with slight sheen.

skin's surface, to capture limbs and facial features in motion, and to magnify and enhance vision.

In the middle of film—between two scenes of Itō talking about hair plucking—is the aforementioned poetry reading. The director's clapperboard snaps shut, and Itō—seemingly in someone's kitchen, perhaps Suzuki's—holds a hardbound copy of *Itō Hiromi Poetry Collection*, opened to a page in the middle. Any assumption that this might be a shift away from the previous topic of the film—hair plucking—is shattered as soon as she begins to read "Sky of Plants" ("Kusaki no sora") into a handheld microphone.

If you pluck out your eyebrows they'll become sparse but still      hey, mom  
 If you pluck out your eyebrows  
 Will your eyebrows disappear?  
 Will lots of little holes open up  
 With white bald spots in the shape of eyebrows?  
 Hey, mom, will lots of little holes open up and  
 Short hairs come out  
 And could they maybe become a pure blue?  
 If you look from far away maybe they'll be hazy eyebrows of blue mist, licking  
 their lips<sup>35</sup>

The earlier "stories" about hair plucking are thus explicitly linked to her poetic practice. Her poetry is revealed here to touch on the same motifs, problems, and

imagery as her “stories”—they are two of her modes of expression within the same poetic world, as are the film and her performance within it. “Sky of Plants” also ties together Itō’s body with natural forms: plants, mist, and the sky. The “trance”-like state during her plucking is evoked by the constant repetition of certain lines and phrases as she ruminates over the same questions. Like in the other poems we have seen, she is at once firmly embodied—hairs and skin exquisitely detailed to the point of discomfort—and distanced from her own body through an expansion and contraction of viewpoint and imagery, from the most minute details of her eyebrows toward a fog of hypothetical questions and blue mist. Her delivery of the poem in the reading also obliterates its line breaks. Line breaks are, of course, conventionally required by most poetry on the page as one of the clearest ways to mark a text as distinctly “poetic,” but here she seems to try to get through as many lines as she can without taking a breath, running them all into a single sentence; within that breath, however, she modulates the tone of her voice to each phrase, becoming petulant and insistent during the repeated inquiries to the speaker’s mother, and more quietly contemplative when her imagery shifts from the body toward gently surreal landscapes.

The expression of her poetics is also enhanced—like in *Belly*, *Cheeks*, *Bottom*—by Itō’s pen-and-ink drawings. Itō also designed the main title card for the film: “Hiromi” is in large characters, under which is “A Hair-Plucking Story.” The words seem to emerge from amidst a thicket of trees, drawn in delicate ink pen, while two nude cartoon figures seen from the front and back—judging from the identical short bowl cut, they are Itō herself—pluck at their armpit hairs determinedly. The body flows again into the landscape; lines are plants are hairs, all equally ripe for the plucking. A later card credits Itō for the title letters themselves and features only a large red dot low on the page; the paper, perhaps, has become Itō’s skin, with a spot of blood coming to the surface after an extracted ingrown hair. Shots of Itō in a hydrangea garden are also interspersed throughout the film, in between each of her “stories.” After her first description of her fascination with hair plucking, however, they become imbued with a particular intensity, as the viewer is newly primed for a different type of vision: focused, close-up, and searching for the “pluckable.” It thus seems highly intentional that, unlike the most common form of hydrangeas shown earlier—which take the form of a full, ball-like head of petals—the shot selected to be directly after her monologue is of a *Hydrangea aspera*, which is characterized by several blossoms sticking out of a dense core on long, thin stems (figure 12). The camera then pans upward to behind the flower and lingers on an old tree’s roots driving deep into the soil, with some root tips emerging from it. The world of the film—filmed landscapes, drawings, handwriting, and the words of her stories and poems—has become a pluckable correlative to Itō’s body, and part of her cross-media poetics.



FIGURE 12. The pluckable landscapes of *Hiromi*—*A Hair-Plucking Story*: a *Hydrangea aspera*.

#### TEXT/PHOTOGRAPH/COMPOSITION: ON TERRITORY 1

The work described at the beginning of this chapter, one Itō's most radical and best-known creations, is an exemplar of poetry across media: her sixth poetry collection, the 1987 collaborative textual/photographic book *On Territory 1* (*Teritori-ron 1*). As Leith Morton points out, in an interview Itō explicitly spells out one of her main goals in its production: "I want to give a sadistic kick to the words born from within me. . . . I see language as just one element in art. I want to make my art purely visual. I want to eliminate the meaning contained in the words, the flow, the story: I am possessed by this masochistic desire."<sup>36</sup> But how does Itō attempt to achieve the degradation of linguistic meaning and the creation of pure visuality through a poetry collection—something that is conventionally tied so strongly to being a paradigmatic example of the expressive power of language above all else? How does this work tie into those already discussed within Itō's overall cross-media poetics, as well as Itō's particular feminist approach to questions of the body, femininity, and the relationship between women artists and their work?

As mentioned before, the poetic texts in the book tend to be long; they do not fit neatly into straight lines but are often skewed in their printing, with some portions growing larger and smaller in font size. Every one or two pages contains one or more photographs, most by Araki Nobuyoshi: the subjects range from nude women to families, food, places, and objects, all in gritty black and white. Most importantly, for the most part the photographs do *not* illustrate the text, nor vice versa; at times they seem to match, only to later reveal some kind of contradiction; at other times they seem unrelated, or even completely oppositional

in tone. The photograph on the cover is unmistakably Itō herself, holding her infant daughter Kanoko. It is a casual, charming image, cropped close onto both of their faces; Itō's looks down and to the right toward her daughter, who has taken her mother's thumb into her mouth, sucking on it happily. In a column of pink text separating the two figures is the title, *On Territory*, with the "1" to the right, perched on the fingers of the poet's hand. We are thus primed to believe that, similar to *Belly, Cheeks, Bottom*, which was released the same year, the main thrust of this work will be autobiographical: poems by Itō Hiromi about Itō Hiromi, her body, her child, and her own private experiences, complete with photographic portraits of her.

Yet this is not the case. As Lee Evans Friederich argues, "Itō invites us to reconsider the boundaries of 'personal writing.'"<sup>37</sup> In *On Territory 1*, expectations of a more straightforwardly confessional tone are undercut by ambiguity, by texts collaged from other texts, through the use of personae, and through the interplay between text and photographs. We find a manipulation of autobiography in a later poem in the collection, "Logical Like a Baby." The poem is long and explicit; it starts with what seems to be Itō reminiscing about her school song, then shifts to a chant-like repetition of lines about poetry writing and masturbation, lines that immediately and systematically contradict themselves ("On days where I can write poems, I masturbate / On days where I can write poems, I do not masturbate," and so on).<sup>38</sup> She then describes in excruciating detail a long bout of diarrhea suffered by her as a child, and then one experienced by her infant daughter, Kanoko, a discussion that fluidly moves into considerations of infection, the production of language, ejaculation, writing, and lactation. In a row beneath the poem are photographs from the Itō family album; as is noted in the credits at the end of the book, they are largely of the poet as a child. On one hand, this textual/photographic combination does in some ways what is conventionally expected of a work like this: the photographs are of the poet, both the text and the photographs engage with her family history, and the "I" of the poem seems to be equivalent to Itō Hiromi, the poet who is also the figure in the images. But the juxtaposition is deeply uncomfortable. While the photographs depict a happy, "normal" childhood, the text is an experimental screed on childhood sadness and disease, on sexuality and even incest, of bodies falling apart and together, expelling a variety of fluids all the while. The two registers of text and photographs are less of a unified expression than they are a representation of id and superego, respectively: under the normative family and childhood photographs, the poetic text is a roiling current of unhinged, unvarnished thoughts and emotions unable to be contained through the symbolic structures of maternity, family, and femininity.

In some of the poems the photographs and text are separated on the page: the text is beside, above, under, or around the images. In the majority of works in this collection, however, this is not the case: the book designer Kikuchi Nobuyoshi laid out the text directly on top of the photographs. This is not unusual in itself—indeed,

it was the norm in most magazines of the time—but what is striking is how often the text is difficult or even impossible to read, with black text overlaid on the black parts of the photographs. Segments of the text are thus often effectively blacked out by being placed on top of the border between tatami mats, or a shadow, or a dark wooden plank, or a woman's hair. That is to say, the unruly relationship between text and photograph lies not only in the subject matter of each but also in the work's structuring of visibility: reading the poetic text is deliberately made into a struggle. This was not always the case; in the earlier versions of these poems and photographs serialized in the journal *Gendaishi techō*, there was not much layering of image or text, so all the text was legible. But in the construction of *On Territory 1*, this is jettisoned in favor of something more in line, perhaps, with the sadomasochistic desire Itō mentioned that she had toward her text: to make it into something visual, something free from meaning and flow, something negated and thus made anew in its fragmentation, layering, and contradiction. When robbed of its legibility, text becomes *texture*—the ink of the black letters on a black background are indeed ever so slightly raised from the rest of the page, but not far enough to be read. Again, the expectation that illustrations—in this case, photographs—are subservient to and descriptive of poetic text are challenged by combinations of text and images that are uneasy, incongruent, or even antagonistic, with many of the words rendered literally unreadable by their underlying images.

We have seen, then, several aspects of what might be called Itō Hiromi's cross-media poetics, in other words, her approach toward the interactions between language, artistic forms, and the body (including but not confined to her "own" body). The body is a central force thematically, with its elements and processes explicitly and even gruesomely featured in the majority of her works. It is also centered performatively, as the site of production of the works themselves—in poetry readings, in photographs and drawings of and by Itō, and in her consistent depiction of poetry itself as first and foremost another kind of bodily excretion. Tied together by her public persona as a poet, her works in the 1980s—solo and coauthored—unfurled across media in the form of poetry collections, magazine articles, guidebooks to pregnancy and childcare, film and television appearances, photo books, live performances, and audio recordings. While the unifying force among these works may at first seem to fall in line with the expectations of a "woman poet" at the time—that is to say, of a confessional mode, in which the female writer or artist uses everyday life, her family, and her relationships as the material for her poems—Itō actively plays against these expectations as part of her feminist project. Honesty and explicitness in her language, especially in relation to "taboo" aspects of women's bodies, is coupled with a stance that aims to subvert the norms of autobiography and "personal" writing. Itō extends her identity, flesh, and life history across multiple characters (often also named Itō Hiromi), voices, and body images that consistently contradict one another. Put another way, Itō's poetry across media is a disruptive manifestation of the body, especially the female body,

across media. Yet the body is far from a “given” in her poetic production. The way it is sexed or gendered, the way language is used to describe it and how it is used to create language, the way it is captured in visual media, the way it becomes tied to a person(a), the way it interfaces with other bodies, its boundaries, its limitations, its extremes: all of these become the raw material from which Itō creates her work. Using the diversity of forms, media, approaches, and audiences itself as a way to illuminate the multiplicity of women’s identities and bodies—a multiplicity often bracketed by the dominant modes of the time in writing and media creation “by” and/or “for” women—she puts herself at the center of her creations in a way that is not monolithic or authoritative but mercurial, subversive, and contested.

#### INTERLUDE: FEMINISM, LEAKY BODIES, AND CORPOREOGRAPHY

The role that the body does or should play in feminist theory and philosophy has been fraught. On the one hand, the bodies of women—a majority of human bodies, though a minoritized one—face a heightened level of scrutiny, legislation, and violence. Much feminist writing has thus historically argued that women’s bodies should be reclaimed by women themselves, liberating them from the societal, cultural, and political restrictions placed upon them; that women’s bodies should become a site for activism and something from which new ways of thinking and even modes of being must be generated. Other feminist writers have pointed out the dangers of a simplistic application of this idea. To center the given idea of a “woman’s body” in feminist thinking risks falling into unbridled essentialism: if women’s experiences are somehow unified by their bodies, then this could easily translate into a philosophy and politics of feminism that necessarily and forcibly *unifies those bodies* across cultural, geographical, and temporal contexts, making some bodily features and practices equivalent to womanhood and excluding others. This risk applies, too, to concepts like sexual difference itself. Does differentiating women as a distinct category for the purposes of articulating a feminism always necessitate an exclusionary definition of womanhood? Could there be a philosophical and ethical use for that kind of exclusion, or will it always lead to definitions of “woman” that oppress trans, disabled, or racialized women? If the category of “human” is deconstructed or moved past—such as in much “posthumanist” thinking—does that also apply to the category of “woman”? What does a feminist approach not rooted in the specificities of human bodies and societies then look like?

In the thickets of these recurring questions about feminism and the body, certain trends can be identified in recent English-language academic feminism. One is the move *back* to the body; a common narrative is that body-focused feminist theories in the 1960s and ’70s gave way in the 1980s to approaches influenced by gender and queer theory, approaches that focus on the cultural, linguistic, and

representational construction of womanhood, femininity, and the body itself. The body returned in the mid-1990s and again in the late 2000s as a central force in feminist theory, according to this account. Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman see an “emerging group of feminist theorists of the body” asserting the importance of talking about “the materiality of the body as itself an active, sometimes recalcitrant force” and rejecting an exclusive focus on “representations, ideology, and discourse” in favor of an approach that incorporates “lived experience, corporeal practice, and biological substance.”<sup>39</sup> In the case of recent work, the body is treated neither as the site from which a single womanhood emerges, nor as something solely constructed through networks of representation and language, nor even as something categorically distinct from mind, spirit, culture, or language: the *materiality* of the body has taken center stage, just as a focus on matter and materialism has gained purchase within humanistic theory more generally.

Which of these concepts from feminist theory can better shed light on the complex, fluid, and even contradictory approaches to femininity, womanhood, and the body present in the work of Itō Hiromi, and—as we shall see—Togawa Jun? Perhaps the reversal of this question is a better one to ask: which concepts within Itō and Togawa’s work were later (and perhaps more straightforwardly) articulated in the context of feminist theory, and which of those theories can then bring us to a closer understanding of their interventions? By asking this question *in between* the considerations of the two main figures of this chapter, I aim not to “apply” them to Itō and Togawa’s work, but rather to highlight how these theoretical concepts effectively coarticulate certain moves already present within Itō and Togawa’s poetry at the edges of media. Two ideas I wish to highlight here are Margrit Shildrick’s conception of the “leaky body” and Vicki Kirby’s of “corporeography.”

In her work bridging feminist theory and disability studies, Margrit Shildrick stresses the dominant conception of the female body as inherently “leaky” in many senses of the term—“especial[ly] immanent,” fluid (and filled with/excreting fluids), boundary breaching, threatening the distinctions between “mind/body, self/other, inner/outer”—which, in the “male cultural imaginary,” becomes a sort of “unease, even horror.”<sup>40</sup> To Shildrick, however, it is a crucial ethical move to accept this “leakiness of bodies and boundaries” as part of an “ethical affirmation of the feminine” leading not to chaos but to “an elaboration of differences and a sensitivity to change.”<sup>41</sup> Itō’s poetry in particular articulates a similar conception of the body—first of women’s bodies, then of bodies in general (child, male, human, animal, and even plant). Bodies in Itō’s poetry—her “own” and others—are nothing if not “leaky,” constantly depicted as both excreting and absorbing fluids (breast milk, oil, menstrual blood, vomit, and so on). These fluids are not represented, however, as somehow separate from the bodies they “come from.” Rather, it is an overall porous or leaky “bodily-ness” that blurs the distinctions not only between bodies, but also between the body and its environment (like Itō within the pluckable landscapes of floating weeds and hydrangeas in *Hiromi—A Hair-Plucking*



*Story*), the body and language (*On Territory 1*'s repeated motif of making bleeding, excreting, childbirth, and writing/speaking poetic language all into equivalent acts), and the body and thought (through Itō's relentlessly embodied poetic and intellectual output more generally). Perhaps most relevant to this chapter, a "leaky" poetics of the body like Itō's also opens up a space for "leakiness" *between media*—within Itō's poetic production, the body is not something that "creates," "is depicted in," "recorded by," or "interacts with" media, but it is a fluid, expansive, and variably sexed nexus of matter and force active across multiple media forms. If the body is a medium, Itō's poetic theory of the body is a *dismediated* one, refusing to center any idea(l) of the body based on wholeness, healthiness, ability, or purity.<sup>42</sup>

This ties into another concept that is especially useful in talking about these works: the idea of "corporeography," coined by the feminist theorist Vicki Kirby, a particularly powerful tool when it comes to doing justice to diverse poetic practices centered on the body. Corporeography is the *writing of the body*, in all senses of the term: it is the body *in* the act of writing, and *through* the act of writing, and *as* the act of writing. This expanded notion of writing does not reduce the relationship between writing and the body to autobiography—in other words, to a writer writing about their own body—though this is one possibility. A corporeographic understanding allows for meaning making through the body and its mattering itself, including but *not* limited to linguistic and medial representations of it. Indeed, the ability to abstractly "represent" the/a body comes into question under this framework. "How is the body itself a scene of writing, subject to a sentence that is never quite legible, because to read it is to write it, again, yet differently?" Kirby asks.<sup>43</sup> Acts of writing, reading, performance, listening, and recording are all constantly shifting encounters between different bodies that cannot be easily subsumed into the roles of "writer," "reader," "performer," or "audience." With this in mind, let us turn to the work of Togawa Jun.

#### TOGAWA JUN'S ALTERNATIVE POP STAR POETICS

Togawa Jun is an alternative pop star from the 1980s who shocked audiences with her outrageous costumes and edgy lyrics about menstruation, sex, and body horror. Togawa Jun is an actress particularly known for playing eccentric women, like the troubled neighbor in *Family Game*. Togawa Jun is a minor celebrity, best known as the spokeswoman of a series of toilet commercials. Togawa Jun is a cyborg in a summer dress; Togawa Jun is an insect woman; Togawa Jun is a lobster princess. Togawa Jun is and was all of these things, but she is also a poet: she wrote and published poems, performed them as lyrics to her songs, and infused their motifs and imagery throughout the constellation of media associated with the pop stars of the era. Singers formed the center of an ever-shifting ecology of records, music videos, concerts, television and magazine appearances, photo books, and more, through which Togawa developed a kind of cross-media poetics in which



her verse and body were inextricably linked in video, audio, live performance, and on the page. By treating Togawa seriously as a poet, I wish not only to emphasize her lyrics as poetry, but also to show how *all* elements of media practice associated with “pop stardom” could also be made into poetic practices, and specifically feminist poetic practices.

By expanding what is conventionally considered poetic practice to include Togawa’s work across disciplines, we are vividly confronted with a kind of literariness deliberately conveyed by and through an embattled and mutating woman’s body, embedded within and pushing the boundaries of the media environment of the time. In the early 1980s the prominent poet and critic Tomioka Taeko wrote an essay exploring the potential for “women’s language”; as the modern Japanese nation-state developed, she argues, “poetry became difficult, and for the masses, what was left over was the poetic debris of a ‘commodity’ like the lyrics to a popular song,” what she later deems to be the “dregs of poetry.”<sup>44</sup> In this chapter, I will focus on Togawa’s work that is at once “debris”—popular commodity—and “difficult”: complex, experimental, and in conversation with the art and literary worlds of the time.

Togawa first gained mainstream recognition not from her music, writing, or film acting but from an advertisement: a 1982 television commercial for Toto’s Washlet, a toilet with a built-in bidet functionality.<sup>45</sup> In this commercial Togawa looks into the camera while wearing a pink dress and flowers in her hair; her hairstyle, however, is frizzy and unkempt. If your hand got dirty, she says, you wouldn’t just wipe it with a piece of paper; you’d wash it with water. She puts blue paint on her hand and rubs it with toilet paper to make her point; much of the paint remains on her palm. Your rear end is the same, she says, before a close-up shot of the Washlet’s bidet nozzle spurting water from below the rim of the toilet bowl. She turns so that her behind is facing the camera and hikes up her dress to reveal white, frilly bloomers as she says the slogan aloud and it simultaneously appears in white text on screen: “*Oshiri datte, aratte hoshii*” (I want to wash my bottom too!). While audiences were a little shocked by the campaign, Matsutani Sōichirō notes, it was extremely successful; Washlets are now a ubiquitous product in Japan, but it was only after these commercials that they became a hit. It is important to underline just how much the blunt and wry persona Togawa took on in these commercials differed from what was expected at the time. Though she wore flowers in her hair like a “pop idol,” Matsutani argues, her behavior was anything but “idol-like,” not at all resembling the usual figures in these sorts of commercials.<sup>46</sup>

Two years later saw the release of Togawa’s first solo album, *Tamahime-sama*, in 1984, and her career as an alternative pop star took off, with her releasing album after album of edgy, unusual new wave pop music, with complex lyrics and her trademark chameleonic singing voice—girlish and nasal at one moment, then fully operatic at another, before swooping into a shout or a roar. One of the few

consistencies about Togawa was her inconsistency: she could not be pinned down or condensed into a single behavior or style. She might perform in the outfit of a *miko* (a Shinto shrine maiden), or in a red backpack and yellow hat like an elementary schoolchild, or sometimes in regular “idol”-style outfits but with markedly un-idol-like movements and lyrics, speaking of menstruation and sex. For one song she would wear a pink dress with dragonfly wings; for another, a robot arm; for yet another, she would be dressed as a (tom)boy in military clothes. Simultaneous to her solo career was her role as the lead singer of two dramatically different bands: Guernica, a Brechtian cabaret-style group that subverted the imperialist aesthetics of Japan’s 1930s and 1940s, and YAPOOS, a punk band with sci-fi and postapocalyptic stylings. The genres of her own work often changed completely from song to song, with new wave synth pop abutting rockabilly, folk song, Okinawan-style ballads, and chamber music.

A pop star—particularly a female pop star—constantly reinventing herself is of course nothing new, and in fact it is de rigueur for many artists. There is a long global history of female musical artists who foregrounded weirdness or eccentricity as a central part of their image: Kate Bush, Björk, Nina Hagen, Tori Amos, Grace Jones, Lady Gaga, FKA Twigs, Doja Cat, and—in a Japanese context—Shinohara Tomoe, Shiina Ringo, YUKI, and Kyary Pamyu Pamyu all come to mind. But while pop stars both in Japan and elsewhere regularly changed their appearance, musical styles, and overall image, what stands out looking at the arc of Togawa’s development is the *kind* of “feminine” figures and tropes she chose to embody. She was in constant state of both struggle and play with conventional femininity, and she often chose to recreate herself as figures of “womanhood” that were abject, horrific, dangerous, hybrid, or mutant. Feminist thinkers and creators have for a long time reclaimed many of the same figures as Togawa does—gorgons and maenads, *yuki-onna* and child-eating goddesses, cyborgs, and insects. But more so than any specific figure, it is the mutations or transformations *themselves* that seemed to be the point: Togawa relentlessly performed a kind of precarity that seemed to exhaust her, and this was part of her act. She seemed to have a death drive to constantly one-up herself, and to do so in a firmly nonlinear fashion. As the lead singer of several bands on top of being a solo artist, actress, and creator of books of photos and essays, she did not go through “eras” or “stages” in sequential development, instead existing as many “Togawas” across media, simultaneously and in constant flux.

Yet the most consistent of these “selves” within the Togawa Jun media ecology—one that recurs over and over in a variety of contexts and across media—is not Togawa as a singer or an actress but Togawa *as poet*. Within the expanded sense of poetry and of writing centered throughout this book, it might convincingly be argued that *all* singers might be considered poets too, performing verse and composing lyrics anew in each performance through their vocal cords, faces, teeth, tongues, and the choreography of their bodies. But Togawa was also a poet

in the more conventional sense. In 1984, at the very beginning of her solo career, she published a book, *Slurping Sap, I Am a Bug Woman* (*Jueki susuru, watashi wa mushi no onna*), which was filled with her writings that were in various forms but were mostly poems.<sup>47</sup> This book served as a poetic blueprint for much of the next stage of her musical career: songs with lyrics based on these poems, or songs with these poems used virtually unchanged as their lyrics, appear on her albums one, two, three, five, even ten years later. The themes, motifs, and characters laid out in this collection—bugs, mutation, fruit, conflicting femininities, uninnocent childhoods, and most of all the body, with all of its fluids and odors—became central to everything she did.

In other words, even if one might be skeptical of treating all pop stars as poets and all lyrics as poetry, Togawa Jun's lyrics are inarguably linked to even the most conventional idea of poetry, and many began their life as printed poems well before they were made into songs. Her words are completely distinct from conventional idol lyrics of the time, or most lyrics in general. They are dense, ambiguous, heavy on kanji, and often impenetrable—but when they are performed to the accessible and catchy music she composed in collaboration with a constellation of band-mates and songwriters, they become unforgettable. There is no better example of this than one of the best-known songs from her solo career, an exemplar of poetry and corporeography across multiple media: 1984's "Tamahime-sama."

#### TAMAHIME-SAMA

"Tamahime-sama" was the lead and titular single of Togawa Jun's first solo album. Here is an excerpt of its lyrics:

Once a month deep inside an asylum cell Tamahime-sama begins to convulse  
 Her skin five-colored her black hair, snakes  
 Unable to contain her radiating aura  
 Central nerve uterine movement  
 A destructive energy of one hundred thousand horsepower  
 Lady Hysterical Tamahime-sama going mad  
  
 She can no longer see anything no longer hear  
 She can't understand what you're saying  
 Amid abnormal sweating and vomiting  
 Her sixth sense becomes clear  
  
 A mystery a mystery once a month  
 A mystery a mystery a mysterious phenomenon<sup>48</sup>

The core image of the text, of course, is the "once a month" bodily process of menstruation, which is described as a "mysterious phenomenon" (*shinpi no genshō*) and a "backflow of blood" (*gyakuryū suru ketsueki*). Menstruation is linked to

sickness and madness, associated with “abnormal sweating and vomiting” (*ijō-na hakkan to ōto*), “convulsions” (*hossa*), a “destructive energy” (*hakai chikara*), and a “bestial body temperature” (*kemono nami no taion*). Togawa evokes a history of medicine in which regular bodily functions associated with women were deemed dangerous and taboo, and where any number of emotions or mental states were deemed to be the imagined “female condition” of hysteria—originally thought to be brought on by a womb traveling around the body, hence Togawa’s nod to “Lady Hysteric’s” “uterine movement” (*shikyū ni utsuri*). She also links menstruation to the shamaness, witch, or woman possessed, another type of cultural figure with a long history: as she gains power through her body’s turmoil, her regular vision and hearing have disappeared, but her “sixth sense becomes clear” (*rokkan wa saewataru*) while she emanates an uncontrollable “radiating aura” (*hōsha suru ōra*). An earlier version of “Tamahime-sama” was included in the “poetry” section of the aforementioned *Slurping Sap, I Am a Bug Woman*, with only minor changes in the diction and structure of the version that was later sung.<sup>49</sup> The key difference in the lyrics is the addition of the refrain: “a mystery, a mystery, once a month; a mystery, a mystery, a mysterious phenomenon.” But this is not merely a poetic prototype that later blossomed into a song. Both versions are better considered coarticulations of a poetic expression adapted to multiple media forms. The printed poem has less repetition from verse to verse, and the lyric version includes a chorus that can serve as vocal hook, but both are elements in a network of composition that can usefully be thought of as one “work,” an expanded poem across media called “Tamahime-sama.”

Her use of language is different from Itō Hiromi’s: Togawa’s poetry and lyrics are dense with kanji and historical and technical terminology, and they only sparingly make use of the colloquial or conversational style that Itō often opts for. While she sings, many of her words are not immediately comprehensible, being so far out of the realm of common usage. Also of note is the framing: the persona she takes on in this song is described through the words of an external narrator, not in the first person; she is given two names, “Tamahime-sama” and “Lady Hysteric.” Togawa’s songs often had an associated character like Tamahime-sama, named or not, with its own aesthetics and costuming consistent across album art, single art, magazine photo spreads, music videos, concerts, and televised performances. The poem/song thus becomes the core element of its own cloud of media beyond only audio recording or printed text: a photo of Togawa in this character’s outfit or Togawa wearing the outfit live—as well as the song on the radio and the words on the page, of course—are all cross-media articulations of the same “work.”

The visual identity for Tamahime-sama, crafted as always by Togawa herself, began with the titular album cover, which centered the main motif of this song and album: dragonfly wings (figure 13). Throughout Togawa’s early work is recurring imagery of insects, pupation, and metamorphosis, images that are fused with the human body and its own processes of growth and pubescence. But this is not



FIGURE 13. Detail from the cover art for Togawa Jun's 1984 album *Tamahime-sama*.

a photograph of Togawa standing in front of the camera wearing a dragonfly costume; the shadow of her body, the suspended wings, and the spotlight-illuminated fabric are all layered into a single, unstable, and not immediately comprehensible image. Togawa later explained how this effect was achieved: in front of a white cyclorama (a curved backdrop for photo shoots), the dragonfly wings were burned onto an upright glass panel.<sup>50</sup> Several photographs were taken of her in front of the wings, but after shooting was finished and she was about to go home, she went behind the backdrop and bent over to pick something off the ground. Kuru Sachiko—a groundbreaking female photographer—took this shot spontaneously at that moment. This became the cover image: Togawa's multiple overlapping shadows on the different layers of the back and foreground create a mysterious, dark, floating shape between the wings, her human silhouette rendered into a ghostly figure, far more insect-like than what had been achieved earlier in the shoot.<sup>51</sup>

The dragonfly motif carried through to the televisual manifestations of “Tamahime-sama,” one of which lingers on video-sharing platforms like YouTube and Nico Nico Douga: a still-famous live performance on Fuji TV's *Evening Hit Studio* (*Yoru no hitto sutajio*) on February 6, 1984, less than two weeks after the album's release (figure 14).<sup>52</sup>

*Evening Hit Studio* was a highly popular live music variety show that began in the late 1970s; it was particularly well known for its blending of mainstream and alternative acts, as well as its creative use of lighting and camerawork. Togawa first appears in one of the show's signature “relays,” in which a singer performs a song by the previous guest—in this case, she sings Tahara Toshihiko's “Bugi-ugi I Love You” while sporting a fashionable striped sweater and a white hat. After a brief commercial break advertising a facial serum, however, Togawa appears in her full,



FIGURE 14. Stills from Togawa Jun's February 6, 1984, performance of "Tamahime-sama" on *Evening Hit Studio* (*Yoru no hitto sutajio*).

eccentric glory and launches into a performance that cemented her status as a full-fledged alternative pop star.

At first a blurry pink figure in the distance is doing a jerky, chaotic dance, with blue text fading in at the bottom of the screen: "Tamahime-sama, Togawa Jun—Lyrics by Togawa Jun, Music by Hosono Haruomi," the latter being a founding member of the pioneering 1970s rock band Happy End. Togawa comes into focus, as does her outfit: an exaggeratedly stylish combination of a pink polka-dotted dress and fascinator is accessorized with black gloves, a black belt, a multistrand pearl necklace, and, of course, giant dragonfly wings emerging from her back. The camera pans out to reveal the set: a fog-filled forest with a full moon looming over the proceedings. She sings the song live, more frantically and energetically than in the album recording, using her jerky movements to emphasize the beats of the song; throughout is a kind of performed precarity, where it constantly seems like she is about to topple to the ground. This expectation is eventually fulfilled: after she sings the last line ("a mysterious phenomenon," *shinpi no genshō*), she begins to yelp and shriek as if she were doing so involuntarily, her eyes rolling back into her head as her movements become even more exaggerated, the "convulsions" in the song brought to life. The lighting turns red, with petals or leaves raining from above, and finally she collapses to the floor as the camera zooms out, her body becoming a small figure in a field of red.

This televised performance of something that looks like a breakdown or possession links to another key aspect of the wider Togawa Jun media ecology—her constant strategic use of her own personal history, with the same elements brought up over and over in magazine, newspaper, and TV interviews, essays, and so on. Here is her explanation of her use of the archaic word *zashikirō* (asylum cell), which she had added to the song version of "Tamahime-sama," for example: "Speaking of the word 'asylum cell'—when I was eighteen years old I was taken to a psychiatric hospital, you know? I think it was a panic attack, but an argument emerged among my relatives about whether I should be hospitalized or put into an asylum! It's not that I was violently struggling or anything, but they said that that might happen."<sup>53</sup>



Indeed, Togawa was institutionalized for a panic disorder that year, something she regularly talks about in the broader context of her childhood, growing up in a strict and abusive family situation with parents that forbade her from leaving the house or having friends. Like with Yokota Hiroshi in the previous chapter, institutionalization and the strictures of family became strongly thematized in her work, marking this as another example of disability poetics. Here, in this television performance, her involuntary commitment to a hospital is transmuted into a hybrid dragonfly-woman figure encased in the cage-like structure of an archaic asylum cell, every month both falling “ill” and becoming something new.

Togawa’s preoccupation with insect bodies throughout this album (which also features a song called “Pupating Woman”) and her first book (which, in addition to “Tamahime-sama,” included poems with titles like “Insect Army”) ties into a broader context of feminist and queer depictions of them. As Rosi Braidotti points out, insect bodies loom large in queer and feminist theory as conduits to a firmly non- or posthuman conception of corporeality and sexuality: they are “generative,” “relentlessly reproduce themselves,” “display a whole array of possible alternative morphologies and ‘other’ sexual and reproductive systems,” and thus “feed into the most insidious anxieties about unnatural copulations and births.”<sup>54</sup> Along these lines, Togawa’s decision to make dragonfly wings key to the televised, performed, and photographic identity of the song frames the lyrical conceits about a human woman’s body reaching and exceeding its physical limits, and it lets her own body do exactly that through multiple visual media. Tamahime-sama becomes a menstruating, “hysterical” figure who trespasses on the limits of the human and instead unfurls across a host of marginal or alien female identities: witch, shaman, beast, goddess, bug woman. Her poetics and personas resist earlier feminist narratives of fully reclaiming such figures as empowered, yet her strategy of spectacularizing their fraught relationship to agency remains enormously effective. Like the eerie and difficult-to-parse album cover of *Tamahime-sama* featuring her as a ghostly dragonfly, Togawa makes it deliberately tricky to tell if she’s pinned down or in midflight.

#### TOGAWA JUN’S PROLIFERATION OF PERSONAS

This seemingly endless multiplication of personas through a variety of modes of creation and media forms did not end, or begin, with Tamahime-sama’s “bug woman.” In the final section of this chapter I will consider a wide variety of photo books, songs, music videos, and interviews in order to explore how Togawa’s poetics lent themselves to the proliferation of feminine identities and characters tied to her texts, necessitating a conception of poetic work as composed across popular media. I will end by considering how her performed identity as a poet was articulated throughout this decade.

A unifying thread in Togawa’s accounts of the beginning of her career was her feeling of a total loss of control, and her efforts to fully regain control as an artist

in charge of her own image. She first entered the entertainment world in elementary school as a child actress in several theater troupes along with her sister. Starting in 1980, she caught the eye of the mainstream public in TV commercials (such as the Washlet commercial), on multiple television dramas, and eventually on film—perhaps most famously in her debut role as a disturbed neighbor in *Family Game*, Morita Yoshimitsu's 1983 seminal black comedy. She came to loathe acting, however. "An actress is only a raw material, the director's servant," she said in a recollection of that time, noting that she was constantly "forced to be naked," required to participate in frantic, last-minute productions, and "treated like a maggot," receiving letters that told her to "die quickly."<sup>55</sup> Around this time she was also transitioning from being a singer for avant-garde new wave groups (like Halmens and the neo-cabaret duo Guernica) toward being a solo act who wrote her own songs. But the record companies, she says, pushed her toward being an "idol"—that towering figure of pop music that dominated the musical landscape of early 1980s Japan—which she had no desire to become.<sup>56</sup> Taking control over her lyrics, her image, and her visual branding, along with her sound, she was able to carve out a niche for herself not in mainstream pop, but in the emerging alternative scene.

As seen with Tamahime-sama, her costumes were a key element in her self-expression. Many of her song texts were linked to a specific persona, each with their own character, appearance, and mode of behavior. This chameleon-like capacity, coupled with her powerful voice—she was able to take on wildly different styles and timbres even in the course of a single verse (opera, punk screaming, idol-like pop)—came to define her as much as her "strangeness" or "darkness." In this, too, she insisted on full control, cheekily aligning herself with the most legendary of poets: "Of course, I thought up the costumes for 'Tamahime-sama' and 'Teinen Pushiganga' on my own," she said, "but just for the sake of my 'Modern Collection' concert tour, I put on a costume of hakama and a wig like I was from the *Hyakunin isshu* anthology of classical poets."<sup>57</sup> For her live concerts she spared nothing in her pursuit of relentless transformation, drawing inspiration from across the range of conventional and unconventional femininity (shrine maiden, schoolgirl, cyborg, yakuza, nurse) and purchasing most of her costumes at her own expense.

Perhaps the most paradigmatic example of Togawa's poetics of proliferating femininities—which infused the majority of her texts at this time with imagery of metamorphosis and sudden shifts in emotion and identity—is the titular track from her 1985 album *Suki suki daisuki* (*I Like You, I Like You, I Love You*):

Gathering feelings far exceeding common sense  
 Rose-colored love breaking out mutationally  
 A pure love you could even call violent  
 A vigorous "je t'aime" already carved into Showa history



Kiss me like you're hitting me, until the blood smears on my lips  
 Hold me until you can hear my ribs break  
 I like you, I like you, I love you I like you, I like you, I love you  
 I like you, I like you, I love you  
 If you don't say you love me too, I'll kill you

An eros that materializes and shatters the everyday  
 A love affair overlapping with instinct an endless hell  
 The intuitive awareness of anti-nihilism  
 Induces a tendency toward latent infant-like violence<sup>58</sup>

This song is a striking patchwork of diction, emotion, and musical style. The lyrics at first seem to resemble the works of modernist Japanese poets like Hagiwara Sakutarō or occult thinkers like Shibusawa Tatsuhiko, bursting at the seams with unusual phrases and imagery that veer from the concrete and visceral to the abstract and opaque. Togawa speaks of love that grows “mutationally” (*totsuzenhen'i-teki*), that is “carved into Showa history” (*Shōwa-shi ni kizamu*), that is an “endless hell” (*mugen jigoku*), and of course is somehow connected to an “intuitive awareness of anti-nihilism” (*anchinihirizumu no chokkan ninshiki*). In the move to something that approaches a “chorus” beginning with “Kiss me” (in English), Togawa shifts registers dramatically in her vocal performance, from “pop”-style singing to full-on opera in a bel canto-style contralto. Every cute, poppy sentiment immediately descends into violence: in a masochistic entreaty, the narrator desires to be kissed like she is being struck, and held until her ribs are broken. The repeated refrain of “I like you, I like you, I love you” suddenly switches into a vocal style popular at the time among girl idols, but after nine repetitions of the sentiment (verging on the obsessive), the words suddenly explode into the full potential of their “latent infant-like violence” (*senzai-teki yōjisei bōryoku*), with Togawa roaring that she will kill the narratee if they do not return her affections.

The music video for this song expresses this multiplicity of styles and tones in full force, Togawa taking on eight different personas in under three minutes, each seemingly from a different era, genre, or film: high school student, little girl, nurse, geisha, model, yakuza, jazz singer, and a woman wrapped in a towel, hair wet.<sup>59</sup> She performs endless variations on conventional femininity, each saying “I like you” (*suki*) directly to the viewer—the little girl gleefully, the nurse shyly, the model coyly, the geisha exaggeratedly. As Asa Roast argues, the black-and-white-toweled Togawa, ostensibly the stripped-down “true self,” is revealed to be just as constructed and performed as all the other roles that she (and, it is implied, women in general) is pressured to play: “Togawa appears without makeup, her hair unkempt, her expression uneasy, performing the role of herself.”<sup>60</sup> Togawa notes that the title of the song came from another poem, by the Scottish psychiatrist and writer R. D. Laing.<sup>61</sup> Even though she claims she laughed at she wrote the complicated lyrics—asking herself, “What am I even

saying?”—she insisted on singing them completely seriously, “as if these were straightforward explanations of my own emotions.”<sup>62</sup> Although Togawa was usually straightforwardly confessional in interviews and essays about her personal life and history, through works and statements like these we can see her subverting another form of “personal writing,” that of the female singer-songwriter. The conventional assumption that the artist herself is equivalent to the “I” in her lyrics, and that she is singing about her own experiences (especially romantic ones), is dissolved by the proliferation of exaggerated personas (including the ostensible “self”) and her often impenetrable lyrics.

This tendency continued several years later in Togawa’s 1988 photo book, *Jun Togawa as a Piece of Flesh* (later reprinted and expanded as *Jun Togawa as Only a Lump of Meat*). Photo books were an important part of the idol media strategy of the time, usually featuring elaborate portraits and beauty shots of the singer in a variety of outfits and situations. To Togawa, however, this became another way to use the structures of idolism and musical celebrity as outlets for her poetic production. *Jun Togawa as a Piece of Flesh* is something akin to a performance art piece of her taking on a bewildering variety of personas even exceeding those of “Suki suki daisuki,” with short poems scattered throughout and different photos linked thematically to her songs from the preceding half decade. In the afterword to the reprinted edition, as is a theme in her writing, she stresses her control over the entire proceedings: “At that time I drew a storyboard myself and created this photography collection based on it. So the image creation, lighting, and studio sets were also planned by me. (I intentionally lit myself from above, in pursuit of a sense of reality—the detail was exquisite enough to see my pores. I made this symbolic image into the cover.)”<sup>63</sup>

Blood and implied violence recur throughout the book: here, she glares into the camera, smeared in gore, holding up a butcher knife; there, she sits in a tatami room with a knife held to her belly, seemingly about to commit seppuku; here, she is dressed in military clothes, smoking, in a bombed-out urban area reminiscent of Japan’s immediate postwar era (accompanied by a quote from a postwar novel by Ishikawa Jun); there, she is a feminine Oedipus or Saint Sebastian-like figure, with bandaged bloody eyes and roses piercing her body. This motif takes a different turn in another spread, with Togawa dressed as a schoolgirl eating a bowl of rice with chopsticks. In a clear evocation of puberty and the beginning of menstruation, she sits on the ground, her legs akimbo, in a massive pool of blood. The next page is a black-and-white photograph of her as the same character, looking at the camera, one of her short poems underneath. Like “Tamahime-sama,” it once again links the processes of menstruation and birth with otherworldliness: “Where life is born—the womb. / How is it connected / To the other world, or to the universe?”<sup>64</sup>

Another book from the same year as *Tamahime-sama*—1984’s *Togawa Jun’s Feelings* (*Togawa Jun no kimochi*)—took on yet another subgenre characteristic of the marketing strategy surrounding a pop star: an anthology of interviews, newspaper

and magazine articles, along with photographs. Here, the impact of Togawa's cross-media poetics becomes especially explicit through the textual framing of her by the volume's editors. They signal this strategy in a headline at the beginning of its first main section, declaring that Togawa is a "new wave princess" who "sends out mysterious waves of fascination" through "TV dramas, music, film, commercials, cross-media, and more."<sup>65</sup> This continues in a piece also seemingly written by the editors, later in the book, heralding the beginning of a section of photographic portraits: "On a live stage, a street corner, a television, a film . . . There are any number of Togawa Juns that can be experienced through media. In the same way, the Togawa Jun seen through the camera's viewfinder is also the Togawa Jun as sensed by those looking at her. Just as a single photo evokes multiple impressions, all the images of Togawa Jun achieved through the camera, every single one of them, is Togawa Jun just as she is."<sup>66</sup>

This preface essentially articulates an implicit manifesto throughout her cross-media practice. In a way, however, the editors come to an opposite conclusion as Togawa. For them, every manifestation is still intensely "Togawa," her true self "just as she is," immediately legible through all media forms and contexts. Togawa's works themselves, however, seem to move the other way. Her multiple personas and media manifestations are themselves comments upon the pressures of a conventional femininity that necessitates multiple exaggerated roles rather than expressions of a "true" self. In the difficulty of her lyrics and the patched-togetherness of her visual branding, she not only resists being graspable by others in any coherent way, but she also aims to reveal "Togawa Jun" herself as yet another slippery construction.

There is, however, one consistent aspect to her self-presentation—one aspect or persona that Togawa emphasizes throughout her career, even as she seems to disavow it. That is of her as a writer, a user of words, and specifically as a poet. "I love print media," she proclaims in one interview in *Togawa Jun's Feelings*. "Being just letters, there's no way they can transmit reality. But exactly for that reason, [printed media] are like a window to a world of another dimension. I like what you might call the world of letters."<sup>67</sup> In the afterword to the aforementioned *Slurping Sap, I Am a Bug Woman*, she expresses her firm desire to express herself through her writing in a way that was not expected for the conventional celebrity "talent book" of the time (which ends, tongue in cheek, with her measurements, as if that were the main point of interest for her readers all along): "I was really thinking that to have a talent book that suited me, it would be better to be able to write it myself—this was my honest feeling. Last but not least, I will write down my measurements. Bust 86 cm Waist 56 cm Hips 88 cm."<sup>68</sup> In another interview she again stresses the necessity of writing to her self-identity, in particular the act of writing poetry collections, even if they are not shared with others: "I wrote poetry collections myself, and then read them over and over. . . . By immersing yourself

in the narcissism of writing and then reading what you write, you make yourself necessary to yourself.”<sup>69</sup>

Yet despite her passionate feelings on the subject of writing and self-expression, and her extensive experience as a poet, she sheepishly denies herself an identity as a writer or poet as soon as she enters into more conventional literary spaces. For example, she appeared twice in *Gendaishi La Mer*, the foremost feminist poetry journal of the time; each time, however, she became self-deprecating, positioning herself as a trespasser into an elite realm, someone only known as a bidet commercial spokesperson: “Because I don’t think the readers of *La Mer* know who I am, where this suspicious person came from and what she’s doing here (since the commercial where I said ‘I want to wash my bottom too!’ was very well known at some point, I should start off by saying I was the model in that), while I’m coming onto the stage I want to introduce myself. Though I’m shy about doing so, I want to continue from this point speaking about my lyrics (ah yes, I also do music and such).”<sup>70</sup>

In a later roundtable discussion between her, Yoshihara Sachiko—one of the editors of *Gendaishi La Mer* and one of the best-known poets of postwar Japan—and the essayist and illustrator Miyasako Chizuru, she speaks of her father, her teenage years, and her fear of moths; her lyrics are printed in a row right above the interview itself, but she tends to change the subject when either interlocutor brings them up.<sup>71</sup> In the associated photos she is dressed in a far cry from her usual whimsical style, opting for a black skirt suit, glasses, and a ponytail.

This tendency of disavowing herself as a literary figure is perhaps most striking in precisely the site where one would expect her to, at least some level, extoll her own writing: her retrospective 207-page book from 2016 called *Collected Explanations of All of Togawa Jun’s Lyrics* (*Togawa Jun zenkashi kaisetsushū*). “At first, I didn’t think my lyrics were avant-garde; I thought they were very pop and easy to understand,” she says in the book’s afterword; she felt a need to publish a book like this, however, due to both her fans’ desire and their tendency to misunderstand many of her words. She continues:

Lastly, there’s just one thing I want to say loud and clear. These are not poems, they are lyrics. It’s only as part of a track that you can see them in their completed form for the first time. In that sense, I think that lyrics have the fate of being unfinished by themselves. So, somehow or another, I’d like you to listen to these lyrics along with their songs, and to hear them as a complete thing called a musical composition. There certainly should be a lot of impressions of them that will suddenly change. So, all the more so, I believe that while listening, true interpretations will arise. And I’m not just saying this to make you buy CDs!<sup>72</sup>

Togawa strongly asserts that her lyrics are “not poems,” despite the fact that many of them began in print as poems and were labeled as such in earlier collections. And, in a way, she is right: conventional definitions—and analyses—of

poetry tend to be confined to a specific elite literary practice that consists of certain kinds of text, usually published in journals and then collected into anthologies, neither of which Togawa chose to do with her work after her first collection. What she is stressing instead is that her writing is something that can only exist across media, as one element of a broader composition of words, music, performance, and recording, each of which have a potentially dramatically different experience on the “reader” if encountered on their own. She asserts that it is as part of a “track” that you see her words in their “completed form,” but this is only the beginning: her poems across media are tightly linked not just to background music but also to the specificities of each and every one of her live performances, vocal takes, in-character photographs, music videos, and interviews.

Through these “tracks” and beyond, within the calculated and perfected media environment surrounding idolhood in Japan’s 1980s, Togawa actively played with her status as “a piece of flesh.” In doing so, she recentered corporeality and non-normative femininities within a cross-media poetics, creating poetry through her rewriting of the conventions of pop stardom. The body she centered in her expansive “Togawa Jun” media practice was her “own,” but, to use Shildrick’s term, it was a “leaky” one—a feminist conception of the body that emphasized its porosity both in terms of its materiality (menstruating, metamorphosing, multiplying) and its articulation over multiple media forms in a way aimed to disrupt the strictures surrounding women’s bodies at the time. More generally, if lyrics—and her lyrics in particular—are poems, then televised live performances and music videos are examples of poetic practices, ones in which words, the body, and media technology are deeply interlinked. To use Kirby’s term from earlier, all these are facets of Togawa’s “corporeography,” her writing of and through the body: Togawa Jun’s body as she wrote the words; her body and those of others represented within those words; her body performing the words live; and her body performing the words, captured on video.

## CONCLUSION

The analysis of poetry often happens at the level of the line, a basic poetic unit that is divided by the line breaks that give most poetry its unmistakable look on the page and its intensity of expression. In an expansive cross-media poetics like Itō’s or Togawa’s, however, a “line” is not just a handful of words in a printed poem but is better thought of as a through line, a thread that moves from medium to medium. A poetic line within Togawa’s work might indeed be a collection of words from one of her songs, which proliferate across medial contexts. When read as part of a poem in one of her printed anthologies, a line suggests certain approaches and analyses—a focus, perhaps, on its textual choices, literary devices, font sizes, and characters. The line might also be read in a lyric booklet, perhaps rewritten to better suit performance to music. The line is also something

performed on the recording—on every recording, in fact, whether audio, video, or filmed. There is the line as performed in a music video, inextricable from how she uses her body corporeographically to inflect and create meaning, indeed to *write*. Or the line might be live: how she performs it at a concert you attend, certain words spit out with extra force. The line might be extended to photos in magazines, where she portrays the song's character, taking on other nuances in how she poses, what she wears, and what she says in the accompanying interview. The poetic line, in other words, can be drawn across the media ecology of pop stardom through its manifestation as lyric. This is a conception of a poetic line that is still an act of language art and of writing, but one that can go from book to booklet to record sleeve, from tape to video to CD, from YouTube to gossip blog to Twitter feed, from T-shirt slogan to idol photo book.

It is just as illuminating, however, to pay attention to when other “lines” are crossed. Rather than taking the figure of the “woman writer” as something self-evident, Sara Ahmed argues that focusing instead on “the literary production of ‘woman’ as a site of meaning (woman-as-text)” leads us to a more nuanced position.<sup>73</sup> What is required is a “historicization and contextualization of the author as an *embodied* subject” in which “the border between work and life,” between text and context, is unstable. “The relation between the literary, the embodied subject and the social becomes an issue that troubles the demarcation of one text from another.”<sup>74</sup> This troubling of the lines between texts, media, life, and work is precisely what occurs in the cross-media poetics of Itō and Togawa in a way we have not yet seen in our considerations of poetry and media until this point. Each created a cross-media poetics across multiple platforms in which poetic texts were linked not just to an abstract theme of “the body” but to their own bodies both as women and as public figures—as “poet” in the case of Itō, and “musical artist” in the case of Togawa. Their “life histories” and personal experiences are consistently told across multiple platforms with a contradictory mixture of complete frankness and total obfuscation, which remains central to their poetry.

Togawa Jun appeared in photographic form squarely in the middle of one of Itō Hiromi's poems in her 1987 collection *On Territory 1*. Two women—both expanding the boundaries of poetic production across media and centering women's bodies within this expansion—encountered each other on the platform of the printed page. This, perhaps, was their symbolic meeting in the middle of a tricky tightrope walk in the public eye in Japan's 1980s, as they both attempted to articulate “womanhood” as something fraught, multiple, both transforming and transformative, allowing both parts of the phrase “woman poet” to collide and endeavoring to find what possibilities might lie in the resulting fragments.

## World Webs

### *Augmented Reality Poetry and Japanese Sign Language Poetry Online*

There have always been other worlds on the web. We can glimpse one of them in a video file uploaded to a personal web page over two decades ago in which a Deaf poet, Tanada Shigeru, used Japanese Sign Language (*nihon shuwa*) to capture a moment where he drove past a mountain in the autumn. In this poem he renders into sign the colors of the leaves that once intermingled and the harsh lines of transplanted pine trees separating them now; he is haunted by a landscape that no longer exists, one that cannot help but remind him of a Deaf world in danger of receding. We can catch sight of other worlds, too, in the hundreds of digital roses that were suspended in the air above the streets of some neighborhoods of Tokyo on the chilly evenings of March 2011 by the poet with the pen name *ni\_ka*. This was one of her “augmented reality poems” (*AR-shi*), tributes to the thousands of victims of the earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear meltdown in northeastern Japan that occurred just a few days earlier in a catastrophe now called “3/11.” They were her attempt to use an AR app called Sekai Camera (World Camera) to find a new way to mourn, overlaying the world of the dead onto the world of the living, creating poems that were themselves ghosts, invisible to the naked eye.

This chapter is centered on these two forms of internet poetry in Japan: *ni\_ka*’s augmented reality (AR) poems, in which poetic text and images float in the air when viewed through a smartphone app at particular geographical locations, and Tanada Shigeru’s Japanese Sign Language (JSL) poems, an example of a form of literature largely by Deaf poets that has intensified in the age of video-sharing services like YouTube. It is also about digitality itself, and how both AR poetry and JSL poetry challenge digital media’s prevailing ideology of perfect communication and access. We will see how the poet *ni\_ka* used AR apps in ways that made their



utility break down, making screens unusable in order to express the impossibility of mourning after 3/11, and how sign language poets in Japan's Deaf community have used their work to grapple with an internet, and broader media environment, largely designed without them in mind.

Why consider these seemingly disparate phenomena—ni\_ka's augmented reality poetry and Tanada's Japanese Sign Language poetry—together? Both of the types of poetry they created center otherwise marginalized perspectives while underlining how technologies of communication themselves are structured in a way that keeps certain voices dominant and others erased, inaccessible, or silenced. These poets also shared a desire not just to use the internet to share their work, but to rethink the platforms from which they had been excluded, including the conventional idea of literature itself. Finally, like many of the other works examined so far in this book, both AR poetry and JSL poetry also foreground experimentality from people and communities that are conventionally kept outside of who gets to count as being "experimental." In ni\_ka's case, this takes the form of her use of girls' web language and aesthetics and in her engaging with platforms that rely on user-generated content like blogs and the Sekai Camera app; in Tanada's case, it is the creation of a space for sign literature by Deaf poets to thrive as *literature* within a digital world dominated by hearing perspectives.

We have considered in previous chapters how poets use their work to rethink media from the edges—cinema, tape recording, the news, magazines, pop music—and how by doing so they posit new forms that those media might take. Digital media is no exception to these kinds of poetic intervention. The internet has, in many ways, been invited to the literary party in Japan. This was not always the case, but after more than two decades of debates about poetry being under threat by the free-for-all of online publishing—a 1999 essay by Inoue Toshio, for example, expressed fear that the lack of quality control for internet poetry meant that "once you take a look, you'll never want to go to [a poetry site] ever again," implying that it would eventually shrink the readership of poetry as a whole even further—few within today's poetry circles take inherent issue with poetry on the internet, especially online poetry journals and anthologies.<sup>1</sup> Yet the acceptance by the poetic establishment of one narrow kind of internet poetry—poems that closely resemble print poetry in form and circulation—is a kind of acceptance that is predicated on an exclusion of works like ni\_ka's and Tanada's, forms of internet literature that fit neither the conventional ideas of how the internet should function nor of what "literature" should look like. Sign language literature is largely excluded not only from literary history in Japan and elsewhere, but also from counting as literature at all, a perspective rooted in hearing people's prejudices of sign languages as not being "real languages." Tanada pushes back against this through a firmly literary framing of his web page, which he calls a "sign language poetry collection" (*shuwa-shi shishū*), using the same term generally applied to print anthologies. Similarly,

ni\_ka has written of being rejected by the literary establishment, particularly by poetry circles: while her work gained much critical attention from critics and theorists of art and media, she is almost completely absent from the hundreds of books and journals published in Japan each year on poetry. Yet her digital-born poetic work achieves things that would be impossible without this expanded version of literary practice, which is uniquely emplaced in specific locations while also being displaced, haunted by the disasters while themselves haunting the streets of the capital.

As for understanding how JSL poetry and AR poetry challenge the norms of the internet and digital mediation, it is important, as seen in several previous chapters, to think through the lens of disability and how ableism implicitly and explicitly shapes not just how we think bodies should behave but also how media technologies should function. Disability poetics, explored in depth in chapter 3, is a mode of inquiry that asks how a body otherwise might make poetry otherwise, and how nonnormative embodiment and cognition might generate new forms of expression. Dismediation—a term coined by Mara Mills and Jonathan Sterne—makes a parallel argument about media.<sup>2</sup> Media—media forms, media technologies, and so on—are often talked about in certain ways with certain closely held assumptions about the types of people who use them and how they do so, each with a “normal,” generalizable body. This body is of a certain shape, with four limbs that move in specific ways; it can carry this amount, see this well, hear this much, speak in this way. It holds a smartphone like this, types like that, uses some functions over and over and others only rarely, if ever. The dreamed-of goal of these media technologies is to put these bodies in perfect communication, with instant access, infinite information at one’s fingertips, and so on—a kind of language that still suffuses the marketing of web services, applications, smartphones, and computers in what Imar de Vries calls “the communication sublime.”<sup>3</sup> Of course, we know that these are promises and exaggerations, not reflections of how technology actually functions in the real world. But these ideologies of perfect communication and access—and they are ideologies—continue to shape how we imagine what digital media should be. An approach informed by dismediation questions this. What do our base assumptions about how digital media could and should work elide the “for whoms” and “for whats”—work for whom? For what configuration of sensorium? For what modes of hearing, of engagement with texts, and so on?

These questions resonate with what Wendy Hui Kyong Chun describes as the “habitual new media” of the internet, and how it—or our imaginary of it—“grounds and fosters habits of using,” habits that “remain by disappearing from consciousness.”<sup>4</sup> Analyzing digital media is not always about the new and the disruptive, she argues: it is just as much about how “so-called obsolescent media remain in users’ bodies” through layers and layers of habituation. It is this habituation to the internet in all of its eras—its interfaces, its modes of reading and writing, its use of image and text and link and algorithm and location and sound and touch—that

some internet poetry, as is poetry's wont, aims to break, make stranger, and make otherwise, and not always in the way that new media, under the pressures of capitalism, also tend to "seek to undermine the habits they establish" in order to continually appear "new."<sup>5</sup> Drawing on the florid aesthetics of Japanese girls' internet culture, ni\_ka's work highlights a long and often-dismissed history of how girls and young women creatively disrupted digital habituation through their experimentations in excess. Deaf poets like Tanada Shigeru often use their work to directly challenge hearing society's habituations to those technologies that inscribe and reinscribe being hearing as the "default." They push against dominant ideas of what it means to live a good life; what constitutes literature or even language itself; and what "poetry" is, what it should look like, and how it might be shared.

The "world" of the World Wide Web has been a key part of how the internet has been imagined from its early stages: as a system of networks that connect everyone across the globe—instantly, evenly, freely—and have themselves become a world parallel to our own. But of course there is not, and never was, just "the internet," but myriad internets, each with its own histories, practices, communities, and desires. In this chapter we will consider a few of these—Japanese internets, girls' internets, Deaf internets, and, of course, poetic internets—each of which asks what online worlds might look like that do not center certain privileged modes of writing, speaking, looking, hearing, and being to the exclusion of all others, and how these worlds might exist together: a world wide web rewoven.

#### NI\_KA'S AUGMENTED REALITY POETRY

The Tokyo-based poet and artist ni\_ka first became known for her "monitor poems" (*monita shi*) starting in 2009. These were poems in the form of blog posts with text in a wild range of fonts, colors, and sizes, each interlaced with hundreds or even thousands of emoji, icons, and animated images.<sup>6</sup> Words flowed across the screen, bounced up and down, phased in and out of sight, jittered, and spun, Japanese scripts often becoming combined with many other languages. Her text is opaque and difficult, with an often manifesto-like diction that declares truths about her poetics. In one poem—with the characteristically complex title of "W E B h a l l e l u j a h 'a"—blood/arch (WEB • Hemal Hallelujah)"—she tells the reader to "scream through the Web through your heart/so you don't have to use your THROAT."<sup>7</sup> On top of this, as soon as you entered her website something startling happened: roses, bubbles, hearts, stars, butterflies, and Hello Kitties bloomed across the screen like fireworks, sometimes reacting to the movements of your cursor, sometimes blithely ignoring them. No matter how advanced your hardware, your computer heated up under the strain of rendering such excess. Eventually, the text itself often became entirely obscured. Monitor poems, as their name indicates, were specifically designed for the screen—but the actual experience deliberately *worked against* the act of simply reading the text from your

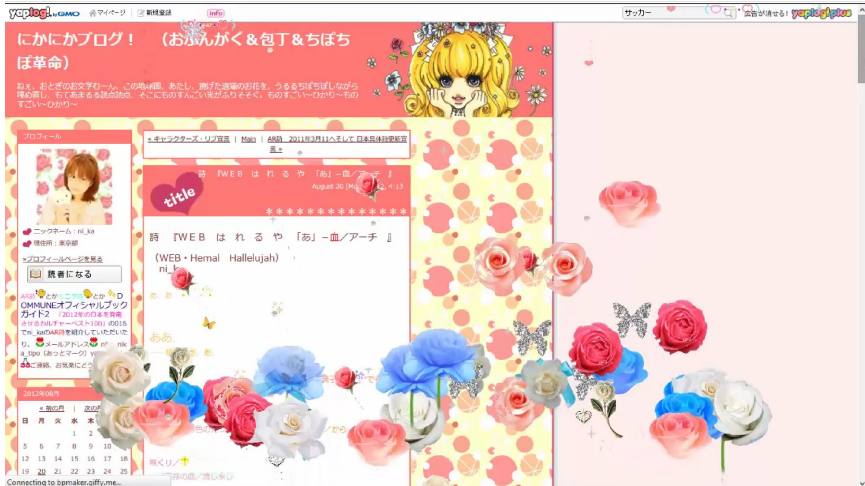


FIGURE 15. A screen capture of one of *ni\_ka*'s monitor poems, “WEB hallelujah ‘a’—blood/arch (WEB • Hemal Hallelujah)” (2011).

monitor, or the idea of the screen as a transparent vessel for information. Eventually, there were times in which you could only catch glimpses of the poems in the gaps before the next barrage of bubbles and flowers (figure 15).

A core inspiration to *ni\_ka* was the experimentality of girls' web language: the literary practices of teenage girls on their computers and phones is a foundational impetus for her work.<sup>8</sup> As Larissa Hjorth observed in 2003, it was “the keitai [cell-phone], adorned with a plethora of kawaii characters, that ha[d] become the main portal for Internet access” in Japan, a highly decorated cute aesthetic spearheaded by young women and girls that became inextricable from the mobile internet.<sup>9</sup> These media practices were and still are marginalized, with blog and social media-based poems by middle and high school girls, for example, not taken seriously as either literature or art, despite their often radical formal experimentation and consistent use of cutting-edge communication technologies. Emoji, to give just one more example, remain a key part of global digital textuality, but they simply would not exist as we know them today without the underrecognized influence and innovation of Japanese girls using mobile pagers in the 1990s.<sup>10</sup> A dominant preconception of new technologies is that they aim—or should aim—for a “futuristic” aesthetic of clean lines and smooth surfaces, often coded as masculine or gender-neutral. On the other hand, *ni\_ka*'s work centers technology's impact on communication while simultaneously being aggressively, garishly, exultantly feminine and cute, actively challenging the common view of girlish things as frivolous, unserious, or nontechnical. In her vision, intensely “girly” aesthetics create a radically intimate connection with digital media in ways unintended by the corporate creators of given platforms and technologies. She makes conventional poetic text



FIGURE 16. A screen capture from the Sekai Camera demo showing a cluster of air tags viewed through a smartphone screen (tonchidot, “Introduction of Sekai Camera,” YouTube video, 3:57, November 10, 2010, <https://youtu.be/oxnKOQkWwF8>).

into something more like *texture*, just one element of an expanded poetic form that rejects new media’s ostensible promises of efficiency and improved apprehensibility and plays against the expectations of how a website should look and behave.

These tendencies continue in *ni\_ka*’s AR, or augmented reality, poems (*AR-shi*), another screen-based poetic form of which she is the best-known practitioner and originator. While virtual reality largely aims to create an immersive, seamless virtual world with a helmet or goggles, augmented reality tends to be an overlay on the “real world.” This might be through specialized glasses or lenses, or, more commonly, through the screen of a smartphone or tablet. To make her poems, *ni\_ka* used the AR smartphone app Sekai Camera (World Camera), which allowed users to “air tag” real-world locations with notes, photographs, and audio or video clips. In this app you looked at the space around you through the screen and could see what tags other people had left in the area floating in the air in front of you—café and restaurant recommendations, photos taken there, messages, audio notes, and so on (figure 16).

Sekai Camera’s debut in 2009 was highly anticipated after impactful demonstrations that year and the year before showcasing what Japan might look like with augmented reality elegantly woven into the experience of walking around its cities, providing content generated by users themselves. Iguchi Takahito—the founder of the company behind Sekai Camera—memorably declared that it would cause people to “look up, not down” at their phones, reorienting their gazes to the world around them and allowing them to gain information about their surroundings through a new content platform literally floating in the air.<sup>11</sup>

The approach to the app that ni\_ka took, however, was dramatically different. At first, in early experiments in 2010, she used it as a tool to create location-based poetry, bringing her distinct aesthetic to the realm of augmented reality. But, in response to the events of 3/11, she used it to find a new way to mourn. Almost 20,000 people perished and more than 2,500 went missing, including several of ni\_ka's family members, in the triple disaster—earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear meltdown—of March 11, 2011, in the Tohoku region of Japan. Many things, she says, made it difficult to grieve properly: her distance, as someone born and raised in Tokyo; the complicity of the Tokyo-based power structures in allowing the Tohoku region to become so marginalized, and the Fukushima meltdown to be so severe; and the fact that so many of the victims' bodies could never be recovered, contributing to a lingering sense of unreality. Recalling when she saw the meager bouquet on a relative's makeshift coffin, she wrote, "The colors of the flowers were a representation of the colors of life—but having been already plucked, they were also embodiments of death. There seemed to be something like an ephemeral augmented reality suspended there, a poetic sensation of aliveness and death."<sup>12</sup>

In other words, to ni\_ka, augmented reality is not something limited to an app or device: it is instead a poetic sensation of contradictory overlay, of worlds coexisting in a kind of suspended impossibility. This impossibility itself became for her a poetic tool to express the impossibility of mourning—to use an app largely meant for photo sharing and restaurant recommendations and make it into something overwhelming (figure 17).

When seen through the screen, ni\_ka's location-specific poems seemed to fill the skies of Tokyo, taking up every centimeter of the smartphone's surface, as seen in the screen captures of various AR poems in figure 17. As in her monitor poems, we see an overall aesthetic of excess and of girliness; Hello Kitties continue to jostle for screen space with her text and more conventional images of mourning, but here they also become a haunting echo of the toys often left on the graves of children. There are some legible bits of text: "toward 3/11" (3/11 e); "cannot mourn" (*tomuraenai*); "inexhaustible regrets" (*tsukinai kui*); "I'm sorry" (*gomen nasai*). But these words are only a small portion of the work, and they seem to actively draw attention to their own *lack* of power to articulate the magnitude of the disaster. As Jeffrey Angles notes, accompanying the influx of poetry after 3/11 were broader debates related precisely to this concern: "3.11 brought about not just a crisis on the ground; it brought about a crisis in representation and language as well."<sup>13</sup> Along these lines, even more important than the words in ni\_ka's AR poetry is the sense of language *exhausting* itself. Alongside the text are symbols of mourning, like paper cranes, roses, and candles. Sometimes they exist alongside scenes of the "real world" underneath, and sometimes they cover them up entirely. She thus takes an AR app designed for helpful commentary and uses it otherwise to evoke the impossibility of expression.





FIGURE 17. ni\_ka, screencaps of various AR poems in the “Poetr-I Float to March 11, 2011—From Tokyo” (“AR-shi—mo no genkai e, wata-shi wa fuyū suru”) series, 2011–12.

Her AR poems left an immediate impression, one that lingered to the extent that—even several years later—they are still used as a point of comparison with other AR works. Kotani Mari, the feminist science fiction scholar, noted that their impact “was enormous, most dramatically in the post-3/11 world,” and wondered if ni\_ka’s work prefigured 2016’s wildly successful *Pokémon GO* AR app and its popularization of a “Sekai Camera-esque sense of augmented reality.”<sup>14</sup>



A Twitter user, doniakatu, remarked that whenever they saw depictions of augmented reality, they couldn't help but "compare them to the shock of seeing ni\_ka's AR poems for the first time."<sup>15</sup> In order to capture in a small way what these shocking poetic encounters were like, let us turn to a few of them in detail.

#### FLOATING THROUGH NI\_KA'S POEMS

The post-3/11 AR poems by ni\_ka are deliberately overwhelming—in scale, in length, in their fury, and in their grief. In their original form they existed within the Sekai Camera iPhone app, but they were also thoroughly documented in a series of her blog posts. These blog posts—the first posted a week after the disasters and the last about a year after—became, in effect, the work itself, and the way that most people experienced her poems. They consisted of documentary images of each AR installation in the form of screen captures of the Sekai Camera app, preceded or followed by a blog post in the form of an often-lengthy poetic text, ranging from brief statements of mourning and prayer to sprawling manifestos.

The first of her post-3/11 AR poems, captured in a post just a week after the disasters, was called "Poetr-I Float to March 11, 2011—From Tokyo, Floating #1" ("2011-nen 3-gatsu 11-nichi e mukete, wata-shi wa fuyū suru—From Tokyo, dai-ichi fuyū"); this came to be the name for this series as a whole, each blog post becoming a numbered installment called a "floating" (*fuyū*). There are nine screen captures in total in this post, all seemingly of nondescript Tokyo streets at night with brightly colored air tags floating over them. Looking at them, we can imagine ni\_ka walking aimlessly through the city, leaving these air tags all the while. The first image is of two pink air tags with bubbled edges, floating above the street in front of a Lawson convenience store; "To March 11th, 2011—ni\_ka" is split across the two tags in white text. The second image is of a plush Hello Kitty, seemingly in a store window; each tag floating in front of it contains a fragment of text: "want to live" (*de ikitai*); "is." (*masu.*); "here/tokyo" (*koko/tokyo*); "overflowing life" (*koboreru life*); "poetr-I am" (*wata-shi wa*); "I am a poem" (*watashi wa shi desu*). More photos: an underground walkway, a train platform, a darkened station, several shadowed crosswalks. The air tags multiply, image by image—eight of them, twenty-seven of them, forty-three of them—sometimes cohering into readable phrases or sentences by color, and just as often not. "Memory," one reads in Japanese, alongside "LIFE"; "swept away by the waves"; "for a requiem"; "turning towards life"; "with images"; "north country/the hometown returning"; "actual bodies not shown"; "this is a poem of 2011"; "turning emptiness"; "on the retina"; "overwhelmingly dropped" "air tags" "on our home." Below the photos there is a short piece of poetic blog text in which ni\_ka hints at her personal connection to the disasters and literally identifies herself as one and the same as her poetry, using the invented first-person pronoun "wata-shi," わた詩 (which I translate here

as “poetr-I” or “poe-me,” being a hybrid form of the most common word for “I” and the kanji for “poem”).

To the parts of poe-me who loved the sea of Miyagi, and were swept away by it.  
 To everything that has no blood/earth connection.  
 Poetr-I float to Tokyo again.  
 I am a poem. Nika. March 18, 2011.<sup>16</sup>

The next AR poem blog post, “Floating #2”—posted five days later, on March 23, 2011—is longer, with seventeen images. Countless numbers of colorful air tags are scattered all over photos of concrete staircases, glowing vending machines, street-light-drenched crosswalks, train station turnstiles, railroad tracks, and fences. Some of these tags seem to be ni\_ka’s family photos, and some have fragments of Japanese text with phrases like “there are waves / tears (*namida* / *namida*)”; “a metrical void”; “drip, drop”; “accumulation of the past”; “unarrivingness” (*tadoritisukanasa*). The underlying photographs lose their integrity as the post progresses, with the previous images becoming tags in and of themselves, eventually all floating in a disorienting white void. This is followed by another intensely grief-filled text that speaks directly about the deaths in her family and the vast numbers of dead and missing who could not and would not be recovered, and it laments her inability to project the “images on her retina.”

Many of my relatives, including young children, died in the seas of Tōhoku.  
 Many, many people are dying who are not my relatives.  
 Those who are being buried without anyone knowing, those whose bodies/  
 emptinesses/remains will never be found.  
 Those who have family and friends waiting for them.  
 Those who have no one waiting for them.  
 Although poetr-I was only thinking of how inexcusable it is that even the images  
 on my retina are not being projected,  
 I am endlessly grateful to those who are searching for remains and are saving lives.  
 Nika.<sup>17</sup>

The third post, uploaded about a week later (April 1), is dramatically longer than the previous two, with thirty-five images and twenty-four short paragraphs of text.<sup>18</sup> The screen captures are of a walk through a public garden, air tags floating in front of pink camellia bushes, cherry trees, pansies, and verbena in full bloom, decorative ponds, and groups of people gathering. At first the tags are mainly text based and point toward the impossible-feeling coexistence of the beautiful spring day and the horrors that had happened three weeks before: “Phantomuniverse” (*maborouchū*); “flower buds”; “spring”; “blossoming facts and falsehoods” (*saku kyojitsu*); “veils of the unknown” (*michi no tobari*); “burials”; “some day’s spring”; “scrawls in the air” (*kūki no rakugaki*); “helplessness” (*yarusenasa*); “lived”; “that distant river”; “living space.” In later photos these text tags too fall away and are

replaced by photo tags of candles—hundreds of candles hovering in the air in front of the cherry blossoms, fields, and streets, an augmented reality version of a candlelight vigil. Once more the images are followed by a long stream-of-consciousness poetic text, for the first time reflecting on the work she was creating itself as a response to the impossibility of mourning. A brief excerpt:

In Tohoku, the facility in which dead bodies are gathered and burned has been  
totally destroyed,  
And the baseball stadium, in Ishinomaki where my older cousin got married and  
had children, a place where balls are supposed to be thrown and hit,  
Has now become a burial ground, and my cousin and her small children and the  
accumulated remains/pains of so many others are burned

.....

There are no flowers on the coffin of someone whose identity is unknown, no  
mourners, no one weeping.

.....

Before being buried in the soil, some meager flowers were placed on the caskets of  
my cousin and her children.

I wonder, in which land's soil did the flowers placed on caskets grow? . . .

The flowers that bloomed in the soil of another land, somehow, send a poem of  
spring to the lands that were birthed in Tohoku.

I am gently floating in the space of augmented reality, even though it might be  
really idiotic, every aspect of it meaningless,

though it may not even be poetry, not be visible to the naked eye, not be anything  
but just graffiti of the air.

But I don't care about that, within my fears, because I must mourn my cousins,  
and aunt, and uncle, and cousin's children, and tens of thousands of other people  
who had to die, their bodies covered in soil, and holding soil in their mouths.

She ends by addressing her poems to those “who continue to embrace the endless regrets and wounds that still grow moment by moment,” saying that she is creating “layers and layers of AR-like veils,” and she ends with a vow: “Even if the app called Sekai Camera disappears, even if my iPhone breaks, I think that I will continue to float in this Tokyo from now on.”

The fifth post, on July 30, consisted of thirty-one image captures of the AR poems and a text beginning with an epigraph from the poet and critic Iijima Kōichi pithily encapsulating ni\_ka's approach: “Those who are tired of language can only be comforted by that same language (but with its circuits rearranged).”<sup>19</sup> In this poem, her text tags—“in fabricated dreams” (*kyokō no yume ni*); “the clouded stream of language” (*gengo no dakuryū*); “lived” (written in English); “goodbye” (*sayōnara*); “gates of blame” (*kashaku no mon*); and so on—give way to images of hearts, the earth, and, in more traditional associations with mourning, candles and origami paper cranes. In the blog text, she decries how in the wake of the disaster, “many existences were declared by language to be symbols of nothingness,” and how “Tokyo, left out

from the obvious signs of invisible radiation contamination, grew accustomed to its numbness,” living “side by side with these dark atrocities.” She describes language as something that “wounds” her, as something that “emerges unceasingly like agitated snakes from the thickets of the plum trees of Twitter and the media,” as a “muddy stream” disintegrating “in the traps of contradiction.” She longs for “the end of the hell of language [*gengo no jigoku*] woven by the web, by the media, and by people,” and to one day “forgive it,” but she cannot help but see language itself as akin to the turbid waters that cruelly overtook her father’s hometown. To her, “the thing that is called poetry” is “floundering in that muddy stream.”

The seventh post—and the final in this series—is the first with a subtitle: “Manifesto for a Japanese Concrete Poetry Update.”<sup>20</sup> It features not only the longest text of the series (almost eight thousand characters long), but also an astonishing 132 AR poem photographs taken over the course of a day, requiring the reader to scroll down seemingly endlessly: if copied and pasted into a Microsoft Word document, this single post is nearly a hundred pages long. It was posted just over a year after the disasters—on March 16, 2012—but is by far the most emotionally raw of her poems, a powerful indictment of Tokyo’s apathy toward the victims and survivors, and once more a cry of desperation at the impossibility of language to capture what happened. “What happens when this floating and wandering reaches ‘the limits of mourning’ [*mo no genkai*]?” she asks, in the face of mass death and disappearance. She likens her floating AR poems to the temporary makeshift burials of both identified and unidentified bodies and criticizes the common terms to describe the disasters—“FUKUSHIMA,” “The Great East Japan Earthquake,” “Tohoku,” and “3/11”—as wholly inadequate “zombie maquettes produced by the living.” She spells TOKYO in capitalized Latin letters instead of the usual kanji, and she calls it “TOKYO, which is not really anywhere” (*hontō wa doko ni mo nai TOKYO*), a place that conveniently pretends to be a nonplace, free to ignore the horrors happening in other places.

unable to find the things that can't be found in those works of language aimed at  
 only the living, I weep, I cry out,  
 and try to anticipate how language can't express—with our existing zombie  
 words—the uncertainty of those who have become the dead and those of us  
 who are still alive,  
 brimming over with tears of blood, I pry open unprecedented dimensions  
 of language  
 and pray and pray and pray and pray and pray and pray and pray and pray and  
 pray and pray until language is annihilated  
 and pray and pray and pray and pray and pray and pray and pray and pray and  
 pray and pray until its arrival  
 and pray and pray and pray and pray and pray and pray and pray and pray and  
 pray and pray until it's broken

.....

I can't mourn without risking my life reaching toward or bringing into being  
 the rifts within the space called AR, or the computer monitor, paper, the body,  
 all media, and all spaces; without making my fundamentally floating experience  
 itself come into being as words of mourning

I can't mourn I can't mourn I can't mourn!

The 132 photos in the post are taken from the Tokyo City View observation deck in Roppongi Hills, looking down from a vantage point more than eight hundred feet above sea level. There is some daylight left in the first few photos, and a few air tags floating—text fragments, candles, screenshots of her prior AR poems. As the images progress, the daylight quickly fades into a pitch-black night. Nighttime is when Tokyo becomes its most iconic self, lights glimmering from its thousands of towering buildings; many come up to these observation decks at night precisely to see this spectacle. She takes a photo of the darkened view in front of her, perhaps with a few flickering city lights visible, or the orange glow of the Tokyo tower. She takes another photo like this, then another, then another, rapidly walking around the observation deck; by the wavy lines and smearing lights, you can tell she is moving quickly, her hands trembling. She then takes each of these photos and makes *them* into air tags, obscuring the actual view of the city with dark, confusing blurs. Once again, she takes a screenshot of this AR scene, of the hundreds of the photographs she has just taken floating in front of the dark Tokyo landscape, ghostly white frames holding swaths of blackness and faint light blurs. She makes an air tag of these images, too, each air tag containing hundreds of floating frames, and then in turn used to make an even denser cloud of air tags visible from the deck, with even less of the landscape visible, and so on, and so on, and so on, in seemingly endless repetition, a *mise en abyme* (figure 18).

We thus see even the words and images fall away, leaving only nighttime pictures of a screen where barely any of the city is visible, which are in turn filled with more frames of screens where barely any of the city is visible, on and on into blankness, darkness, foginess, and silence. Finally, some text tags start to appear again, above the darkness and chaos: “cannot mourn,” “to 3/11,” “I’m sorry,” “I’m sorry,” “I’m sorry.”

In this, as in the rest of her work, *ni\_ka* twists and even arrests the communicative powers of the internet, of the screen, of language. Here she places the user in a physical site meant to provide the best possible view of the city but makes it impossible to see much of anything, making Tokyo absent to Tokyo in the way that it was absent to Tohoku. It takes the location-based nature of AR and makes it into to a delocation, a contradictory viewing-deck-made-unviewable. Her poems are seemingly meant for an audience of Tokyoites. They were startling reminders to anyone who opened the *Sekai Camera* app at certain locations, or who saw the blog- or gallery-based versions of these works—not just of the unignorable tragedy of thousands dead and missing, but also of the selfishness of those who

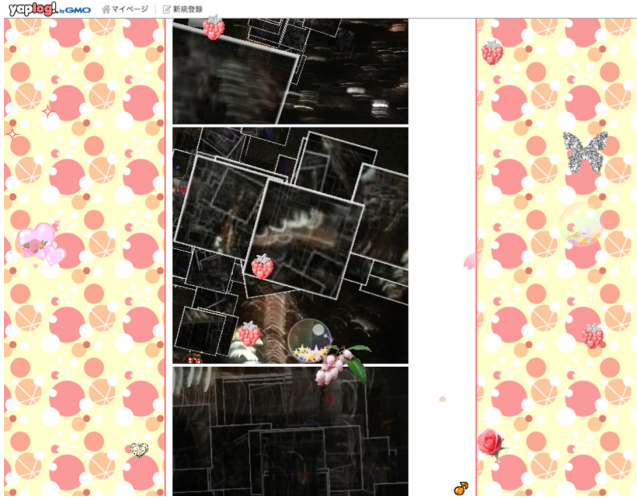


FIGURE 18. A portion of the blog post of ni\_ka's "Floating #7" AR poem with images captured at the Tokyo City View observation deck (March 16, 2012).

only worried about the potential effects on their own city and not the poorer regions hardest hit by the disaster. Underlying all of these poems are critiques of the Tokyo-based centers of power that made a natural disaster into a man-made one through decades of corruption, resource deprivation, and actively ignoring repeated warnings about a lack of proper safeguards.

In the time after the disaster, the airwaves were thick with platitudes: reminders that all of Japan should work hard together (*ganbarou Nihon*), of the bonds (*kizuna*) between all Japanese people, and so on, all of which rang hollow to many of those affected in Tohoku.<sup>21</sup> These AR poems not only reject language like this but eventually come to reject language almost entirely, ni\_ka moving from more conventional text-based air tags in her first AR works, to poems in which these are crowded out or fully replaced by other symbols of mourning and healing: flowers, candles, and paper cranes bloom across the AR view in much the same way they do across ni\_ka's blog, images stepping in when words fail. By the final "Floating," in fact, both have broken down—the blog post format is stretched to its limits by a hundred pages' worth of text and images, the text constantly repeating itself and changing sizes and colors, the images cancelling themselves out amidst the reader's scrolling descent down ni\_ka's page, or the AR viewer's blocked sightseeing panorama. This is poetry pushing the edges of both online publishing and augmented reality, and of user-generated "content" more generally. Both are made unusable by ni\_ka's deliberate orchestrations of excess: the impossibly long posts, the CPU-scorching screen blossomings, and the AR app crowded out by

thousands of her tags all in one location, all of which require enormous amounts of processing power and smartphone battery drain, her poems not just hosted on the platform but devouring it.

Although almost entirely ignored by the poetic establishment, ni\_ka's AR poems drew the attention of several critics of art, culture, literature, and media. The media scholar Kadobayashi Takeshi saw her earliest AR poetic experiments from before the 3/11 disasters as something of a failure, with the urban environment not particularly contributing to the experience of the "world of her work" (*sakuhin sekai*).<sup>22</sup> This changed when he encountered her poems created in the wake of 3/11, which he said "greatly transformed the nature of ni\_ka's work," now far more intensely woven into the experience of being in the city. Sugita Shunsuke called "Poetr-I drift towards March 11, 2011 from Tokyo" "magnificent" and "overwhelming," "a work that 'made Tokyo drift toward and confront the disaster areas and victims of 3/11' and 'a 'landscape' where the living, the dead, characters, language, and the internet form a unified entity.'"<sup>23</sup> He argued that "ni\_ka confronts in a true-to-life way the absolute disconnection between Tokyo and the disaster-stricken area, its living and its dead," and said the experience of the work is "a feeling of powerlessness that penetrates one's entire body."<sup>24</sup> Later the same year, the critic Nakata Kentarō asked, "Where do words go that did not reach their destination?"<sup>25</sup> He saw ni\_ka's AR poems as the answer, seeing her works as messages that never arrived at their recipient—that never could—and remained as ghosts drifting through the skies of Ochanomizu and Shinjuku. "The thoughts of loss that must not be summed up into sentences float without any proper reading order," he noted: "'Abducted by the waves,' 'tears unshed,' 'unarrivingness.' Candle lights, origami cranes, photos of roses, and so on whirl around as air tags. These things have not become words but seem to be *language itself as loss* [*sōshitsu toshite no gengo sonomono*]."<sup>26</sup> The literary critic Nakazawa Tadayuki saw ni\_ka's AR poems not just as a "requiem" but as a "critique of the hypocritical message of 'Let's connect, Japan!' [*Tsunagarou, Nihon*] that the media all too carelessly disgorged" in the wake of 3/11; he sees her work as trying to grapple with the fundamental question of "how to connect what cannot be connected." He describes a general attempt at this time to fumble for words to "seek a childlike, ephemeral connection," one that kept running up against the impossibility of "sharing the disaster" (*hisai o kyōyū*).<sup>27</sup>

Along with these accounts from essays and blog posts, there was Twitter, which is the most extensive record of engagement with ni\_ka's work.<sup>28</sup> The platform, although already somewhat popular in Japan, rapidly gained in popularity and attention in the wake of the 3/11 disasters; as Chun notes, crises like this are often what make new media into mass media, suddenly valuable and even crucial.<sup>29</sup> Twitter saw vast numbers of written accounts of experiences of ni\_ka's work by published critics and "amateurs" alike, both before and after 3/11. Several were energized about the new artistic possibilities pointed to by ni\_ka's use of AR



technology to rethink literary practice. Matsudaira Kōichi tweeted that “ni\_ka’s AR poems engage with the internet . . . and through that ask multilayered questions about what reality is. I want all of humanity to experience what is truly a prototype for a new literariness.”<sup>30</sup> Nakazato Shōhei noted with a shock just how visceral the encounter with ni\_ka’s work was, one that “really lifted the scales off [his] eyes to the fact that AR poems and monitor poems are really bodily expressions!”<sup>31</sup> Nakazawa noted how at its core AR poetry was an “alternative use of AR technologies” that “expanded the genre of poetry itself,” pointing out how one’s mode of interaction with them—holding the smartphone up, going through the information displayed on the screen—reinforces their literary qualities by making it into an act of “not just ‘seeing’ or ‘experiencing’ but also ‘reading.’”<sup>32</sup> Another common thread running through these tweeted reactions was to point out the haunting, phantom-like aspect of her work. Even a few days *before* the 3/11 disasters, Nakazawa highlighted how ni\_ka’s AR poems captured the “ghostly and interesting aspects” (*yūreiteki na omoishiroi bubun*) of poetry.<sup>33</sup> The artist Nitō Kento called her work “mysterious” (*fushigi*), referring to the fact that the words placed in space through AR technology “are invisible, but they’re there, even though they seem like they’re not.”<sup>34</sup>

As previously argued, ni\_ka directly grappled with the frustrations of digital media to the extent that she made them key to her work, which consistently goes against simplistic ideas of “ease of use” and “straightforward communication” in order to make visible the ideologies that underlie such givens when it comes to media technologies. But some accounts of her AR poems point toward things outside ni\_ka’s control and what seemed to be the intended experience, and the difficulty of engaging with her poetry. A user named Takekura tweeted about their experience of seeing AR poems in person, instead of just screen captures, for the first time. “As seen through the Sekai Camera app, AR poems overlap with the scenery of Tokyo. Before, my aim was to set out to read AR poems that had been arranged in space, but I didn’t really understand the method of seeing them. But this time, I came to realize that the *space itself* where the AR poems are arranged was actually the work.”<sup>35</sup> Suzuki Koji called her AR poetry a “state of chaos in AR space” and a “must-see,” though he noted an element of friction to her poems’ consumption: “each and every time, the battery of my smartphone ran out.”<sup>36</sup> And the Twitter user sana captured another potentially exclusionary aspect of ni\_ka’s poems: “I was sorry that I couldn’t experience ni\_ka’s AR poems because I do not have a smartphone,” she tweeted, “but I created a mental image of them from the photographs.”<sup>37</sup>

In a Twitter thread from December 2013, ni\_ka gave her own account of the development of her experiments with AR poetry before and after 3/11, including how she chose to present her works in an art installation that year called “Floating View.”

My father is from Kesennuma city, and I have many relatives there, in Ishinomaki, Sendai, and other places in that region. When I saw the devastation on TV that day and the next, I couldn't get in touch with them. So I started making AR poems the day after the earthquake as if I were praying.<sup>38</sup>

Until that point, my AR poetry on Sekai Camera had just been a fun way to play around with legally hacking different places, and transforming the air into a notebook on which you could write poems. But the day after the earthquake, it became a way to release prayers into the air, the sky, and the heavens leading to Tōhoku. It might have been self-indulgent, but I believed it, and desperately created these AR poems.<sup>39</sup>

I later found out many of my relatives went missing or died as a result of the earthquake and the tsunami, and I began to have a powerful feeling that my AR poetry and prayers, floating around Tokyo like ghosts, were at the intersection of the world of the dead and the world of the living.<sup>40</sup>

At the time, I was furious with the people of Tokyo, people who were so focused on the nuclear power plant that they forgot to care about the dead and mourn.<sup>41</sup>

When I was looking through Sekai Camera at the ephemeral AR roses in full bloom, invisible to the naked eye, I saw pedestrians going past the roses and was so grateful that I wept. I felt like the souls of the dead and of the living had crossed paths. So I continued to create AR poems.<sup>42</sup>

Much of the work of the poet and disability activist Yokota Hiroshi (the focus of chapter 3) was characterized by what Arai Yūki calls his poetics of accusation or indictment (*kokuhatsu no shigaku*)—using poetic language in order to accuse the reader and society of playing a role in the oppression of disabled people, and to self-reflexively make the limits of language visible in a way that parallels the structures of that oppression. As made clear in her Twitter thread above, ni\_ka's AR works on 3/11 function through their own kind of poetics of indictment; here, the accusations are aimed toward Tokyo and Tokyoites, including the Tokyo-based national government, the headquarters of massive national energy corporations like TEPCO (the Tokyo Electric Power Company), and even herself. Her works are certainly works of mourning, but it is a mourning that is itself an indictment—a mourning that explores what it means to not be able to mourn, when those who must be mourned cannot be recovered, or when public mourning is tamped down, redirected, or dominated by those in power who have released themselves from accountability. “Which bodies are made to pay for ‘progress’?” asks Jasbir K. Puar; “Which debilitated bodies can be reinvigorated for neoliberalism, available and valuable enough for rehabilitation, and which cannot be?”<sup>43</sup> We can see debility in both the effects of the disasters themselves on the bodies of the survivors, and in the effects of the marginalization on those regions of Japan in the decades leading up to those disasters. There were not just the missing and the dead, but also the health problems induced by the effects of radiation, countless injuries,

post-traumatic stress disorder, diabetes, and other chronic conditions, as well as a whole host of psychological, social, and medical-related issues for mandatory evacuees, especially disabled people, the elderly, the hospitalized, and children.<sup>44</sup>

As a key strategy to address these injustices, ni\_ka's AR poems center dismediation. Her works are not simply examples of taking a media technology and subjecting it to error or glitch or overwhelm for aesthetic purposes alone. She instead uses these techniques to explore underlying structures of unequal access, and the marginalization of certain bodies central to processes of disabling and debilitation. Who is allowed to have a voice, and who is not? Who can be mourned, and who cannot? Which parts of Japan and Japanese society "matter," and which do not? Her poems arrest the communicative powers of augmented reality in order to lay bare the ideologies behind mediation at a time of crisis. She rethinks the media technologies involved completely, using smartphone technologies to create augmented reality compositions that worked against themselves in a way that revealed the rupture between dominant society and the ghost worlds left behind by the disasters. In her hands, Sekai Camera stops being a platform for messages from Tokyoites to other Tokyoites—an intensified experience of their own city—and instead becomes a way to talk to ghosts, and for them to make their presence known, in a floating digital space between the worlds of the living and the dead. Instead of focus, she creates distraction; instead of helpful bits of information, she breaks down meaning in an information overload; instead of an app that lends itself to a blithe everydayness, she creates a lens through which the ignored becomes the unignorable.

In the next section we will consider another type of poetry that is often excluded from conventional definitions of literature and aimed not just to take advantage of new media but to actively reshape them. Over a decade before ni\_ka's works, Japanese Sign Language poets took advantage of the capacities of the World Wide Web in order to share their work in the form of digital videos. As we will see, however, this work was a critique in both form and content of the ideologies that informed the creation and development of digital media. In the wake of unimaginable tragedy, ni\_ka asked us to imagine an internet that was not just by and for the living; Deaf poets used digital technologies to imagine an internet that was not just by and for the hearing.

#### TANADA SHIGERU'S JAPANESE SIGN LANGUAGE POETRY: "MOUNT AKAGI"

"Mount Akagi" ("Akagi-san") is a 1997 Japanese Sign Language (JSL, or *nihon shuwa*) poem by Tanada Shigeru, the best-known practitioner of the form and the leader of Japan's foremost radical Deaf association, D PRO.<sup>45</sup> It is short, around only twenty-five seconds in length; a video of it was posted alongside several other poems on a page of Tanada's personal website, Sign Language Poetry Collection

(Shuwa-shi shishū), in 2000 and then reposted to his YouTube account eleven years later.<sup>46</sup> It at first seems to be a fairly straightforward work, capturing a moment experienced by the narrator out on a drive, the titular mountain in Gunma Prefecture passing by his window. The following is a translation of Tanada's written Japanese summary of his own poem:

Driving down the highway at a comfortable speed  
 I saw Mount Akagi out of the right side window  
 It looked like fabric of different colors, stiffly overlapping one another  
 As if each were a piece of cloth sewn together  
 I thought back to the old days—  
 Red, yellow, orange  
 All of them gently intermingled  
 Vividly getting along with one another—  
 That's what I thought  
 And as I was thinking this, Mount Akagi  
 Passed by.<sup>47</sup>

But some details about the poem and its performance—not just the base meaning of each sign, but how they are inflected, transformed, and combined with facial expressions and other nonmanual indicators—point to something else happening. The same sign is used to represent the overlapping colors of the mountain in the present and in the past, for example, but the first time the movements are stiff and awkward, the second time gentle and floating. As Tanada “sews” together the metaphorical cloth pieces in the former, he does so as he frowns and shakes his head; in latter, with the colors more freely intermingling, he smiles and nods. But why is it better that the colors of the autumn leaves were mixed together before, and undesirable that they are in distinctive groupings now? Why is this the crux of the poem?

In a written explanation from a few years later, Tanada answers these questions, delving into the meaning of the central image of “Mount Akagi”—one that would be apparent to many Deaf viewers, especially those familiar with his previous poetic, scholarly, and activist work.<sup>48</sup> The many species of trees on Mount Akagi indeed intermingled freely in decades past, but a new policy of transplanting coniferous evergreen trees resulted in separated patches of colors divided by the stark, artificial lines of these dark green pines. In the poem, Tanada says, this is an allegory for the history of Deaf education in Japan. Whereas Japanese and Japanese Sign Language were once allowed to exist separately, like the colors of Mount Akagi past, the Ministry of Education in the 1990s continued to ban JSL as a medium of instruction for Deaf students. They mandated an oralist focus on mouthing spoken Japanese, and, if any signing was used at all, it was to be Manually Signed Japanese (*Nihongo taiō shuwa*)—in other words, signing each Japanese word in a sentence according to Japanese syntax, unlike the distinct language that is JSL.<sup>49</sup> This is reflected in the transplanted pine trees, which are artificially

inserted into the landscape, forcibly “sewing together” two distinct languages. Just like the crude seams produced by the harsh lines of green amidst the red, yellow, and orange threaten to obliterate the autumn colors once and for all, oralist (normative hearing-centric) educational practices threatened the extinction of JSL.

In chapter 1 I discussed how cinemoems in prewar Japan were not just a type of poem influenced by the forms and aesthetics of film, but also experiments in reimagining the medium in a way that did not require a camera, projector, or screen. There is a similar move with the remediations of cinema in Tanada’s JSL poetry and sign language poetry more generally: signs are often used to create shifts in perspective, scale, time, and place, paralleling cinema’s language of shots, the traffic of gazes, and both moment-to-moment editing (“cuts” between two figures, for example) and structural editing (like flashbacks). “Nearly as long as there has been formal analysis of ASL grammar, it has been described as cinematic,” Rebecca Sanchez notes.<sup>50</sup> In an essay, Tanada also discusses the long history of Deaf people recreating movies for one another through sign language, and he posits sign language, especially sign language poetry, as something inherently cinematic—or, more accurately, as a form of expression that achieves some of the same things as cinema, and more.<sup>51</sup> He points to André Bazin’s conception of film as the preeminent medium of reproducing reality and argues that sign language has a similar effect on the Deaf viewer, creating a mind’s-eye manifestation of scenes through the logic of montage: “through fusing the language of images and the language of signs,” he writes, a “new world of images [*arata-na eizo no sekai*] becomes visible.”<sup>52</sup>

The centrality of worlds coexisting and overlapping with one another—sometimes uneasily, sometimes generatively—becomes particularly clear near the end of the poem, in the “flashback” sequence to Mount Akagi’s past. Tanada renders this moment in his written summary of the poem as “I thought back to the old days,” but what is really happening in the original sign language is the sign equivalent of a “reverse iris,” a type of cinematic transition where a circular preview of the next scene, beginning with a pinhole, expands until it takes up the whole frame. He begins with both hands clasped together and then expands them outward until his hands are wide apart on either side of his head, opening them up until all fingers are extended, each in what is known as a “five” handshape. In JSL, both hands being in this shape signify the concept of “world”; in this way, we are cued to the fact that this is not only a flashback but also an entry into another world. In this case, we shift to the Deaf world of the past, in which JSL and Japanese could coexist, the different colors on the mountain gently intermingling. But this is soon reversed by another “iris,” the wide circle made by “five” handshapes compressing into a tiny circle again like the black aperture that closes at the end of many older films, “a return from another world to the real world” of the present.<sup>53</sup>

We are thus presented with two different visions of worlds whose overlap is made possible only within the spatiotemporal structure of the sign language poem itself: in the past, a Deaf world and hearing world coexisting organically;

in the present, a Deaf world and hearing world forcibly sutured together. As in *ni\_ka*'s augmented reality poetry, there is a brief suspension of overlapping worlds within the space of the poem. In her poems, those are the worlds of the living and of the dead. In Tanada's poem, there are actually four: the worlds of the Deaf and of the hearing, and of the past and present, all simultaneously existing within each other in the poem's twenty-five seconds. One is left not with the sense that what has happened to the Deaf world—like what has happened to the mountain—is irrevocable, but rather that there remains the potential for recurrence. The colorful trees can cross the line of pines again one day; Deaf education in Japan can and must change.

#### PROCLAIMING "DEAF IDENTITY"

The particular intersection of the radical Deaf politics of Tanada's JSL poetry and the presence and absence of Deaf worlds becomes particularly clear when looking at another one of his poems, "Deaf Identity" ("Rō no aidentiti"), composed in 1998, published, like "Mount Akagi," on his web page in 2000, and reposted on his YouTube account in 2007.<sup>54</sup> In this poem, however, there is one more layer: an exploration of the edges and limitations of digitality itself, questioning in form and content the stakes of the encounter between Deafness and media technologies.

##### SIGN LANGUAGE POEM: DEAF IDENTITY

by Tanada Shigeru

This is the story of a certain person  
 He was surrounded by hearing people  
 But he could not hear  
 Hearing aids were put in both his ears  
 And he began to walk a difficult life path  
 And then . . .  
 When he saw the world of speaking with one's hands  
 He resolved to do something  
 That's it—he took out his hearing aids  
 And began to speak in sign language  
 This is  
 His identity

This is a translation of the subtitles that Tanada added to his online video of "Deaf Identity"; it is the only one of his poems subtitled in this way. In terms of content, the poem is very much in line with the vision promoted by radical Deaf groups in Japan and across the world. As Karen Nakamura notes, "when the youngest generation of deaf activists emerged in the 1990s, they introduced a totally new frame, one that advocated a cultural deaf identity and recognition

of a Japanese sign *language*.”<sup>55</sup> Three years earlier, for example, saw the publication of the pioneering manifesto by Kimura Harumi and Ichida Yasuhiro (like Tanada, members of D PRO), “Deaf Culture Manifesto: Deaf People as a Linguistic Minority,” which begins as follows: “Deaf people are a linguistic minority who speak Japanese Sign Language, a language different from Japanese’—this is our definition of ‘Deaf people’ [*rōsha*]. This is a shift from ‘Deaf people’ as equivalent to ‘people who cannot hear’ (a pathological perspective), towards ‘Deaf people are people who use JSL as everyday language,’ and who are thus a linguistic minority (a shift towards a sociocultural perspective). This shift in viewpoint became possible for the first time upon the recognition of sign languages used by Deaf people as ‘complete’ languages, fully equivalent to spoken languages.”<sup>56</sup>

It is precisely within this radical new vision of a Deaf identity in Japan that signed literary practice, like this poem, emerged and continues to grow as a central part of Deaf culture. It is also a vision that resonates with the concept of “Deaf Gain” (as opposed to “hearing loss”), a term coined by H-Dirksen L. Bauman and Joseph J. Murray referring to “the unique cognitive, creative, and cultural gains manifested through deaf ways of being in the world,” pushing against the reduction of Deafness to mere lack and instead shifting the focus to the worlds, communities, and cultural spheres of Deaf people.<sup>57</sup>

Like with “Mount Akagi,” the textual rendition of the poem above—I would hesitate to call it a translation—captures little of what makes “Deaf Identity” poetic. Just reading the few lines of the “translation” in written Japanese (or in my English version), this might not be immediately apparent. But the subtitles are, in fact, just a summary of a type of poem—a sign language poem—that is impossible to fully render into text. One hearing-centric misconception of sign languages is that they are no different from orally spoken or written languages, and that to “translate” from Japanese into Japanese Sign Language, for example, means to sign the Japanese language word by word, with Japanese syntax, particles, and so on. This does happen sometimes, in the previously discussed practice called Signed Japanese or Manually Coded Japanese (as opposed to Japanese Sign Language), but, as we saw with “Mount Akagi,” that is a source of controversy and trauma among many parts of the Deaf community since it was and is often used as an educational tool to circumvent or actively deprive Deaf people in Japan from being taught JSL.

As with other forms of poetry performance, part of what marks a sign language poem as poetic is the rhythm and pacing, usually with ample pauses after each line, akin to the line breaks on a page that characterize most verse. But even more important to Tanada’s JSL poems (and sign language poems more generally) are their creative rethinking of common signs, movements, facial expressions, and three-dimensional space in ways that often differ from conventional signed speech. In this poem, for example, a sign for “hearing person” is made with five





FIGURE 19. A sequence of screen captures from Tanada Shigeru's Japanese Sign Language poem "Deaf Identity" ("Rō no aidentiti").

fingers instead of one to convey the overwhelmingness of the hearing world; the crooked finger handshapes used in the sign for "hearing aid" become two legs, agonizingly trudging forward amid an environment that makes devices like those compulsory; a single index finger representing the protagonist is made at first by the left hand and at the end of the poem by the right, a movement symbolizing rebirth or self-actualization; and the sign language technique of "role shifting," in which the signer assumes different characters in a scene or recounted anecdote, is used in elaborate and complex ways that allow Tanada to take on the role both of the central Deaf figure and of the hearing communities around him. As an attempt to capture just some of these nuances, what follows is a translation into English of Tanada's own transcription of the signs of his poem, using one of the many systems for rendering sign language into text.<sup>58</sup> Each line of transcription is followed by my expanded description of what is happening moment by moment in the one minute and one second of the poem.

SIGN LANGUAGE POEM: DEAF IDENTITY

JSL: [/CL(L) /1/: BIRTH [/CL(R) 78: HEARING PEOPLE]]

→ *This is the story of a certain person. He was surrounded by hearing people.*

The "one" handshape, an index finger held up by the left hand, is used as a "classifier" to represent the main character; it comes up from below, representing his birth. Normally the sign for "hearing people" consists of both index fingers held upright, one in front of the speaker's chin, one next to their right ear; here, it is combined with the sign for "surrounded," using a "five" handshape (all five fingers spread out) to represent not just a single "hearing person" but all hearing people—the hearing world—moving back and forth in a semicircle around the main character; the poet mouths the vowels "aiai" to further represent the world of orality surrounding the central Deaf figure.<sup>59</sup>

JSL: [/CL(L) /1/: [/CL /1/:EAR /5/:CANNOT HEAR]]

→ *But he could not hear.*

The left hand maintains the index finger position; the right hand moves to the ear and switches to the same handshape, the two together being the conventional sign for “hearing person,” before it switches to a “five” handshape and shakes in negation, meaning “cannot hear,” with the solitary index finger on the left hand continuing to represent the main character as the poet’s gaze links the two signs by remaining on the index finger.<sup>60</sup> The main character’s status as “hearing person” is thus briefly presented and then canceled out, as the hearing world realizes he cannot hear.

JSL: [/CL(L) /1/: [/CL(R) /1/:[BENT]:PUT IN HEARING AID] [/CL(L) /1/:[BENT]:  
PUT IN HEARING AID] ]

→ *Hearing aids were put in both of his ears.*

The conventional sign for “hearing aid” is to crook an outstretched index finger and make the motion of putting it in your ear. Here instead both hands have their index fingers bent, and the motion is not the poet putting hearing aids in his own ears, but rather into the ears of an imagined head in front of him at chest level—an example of a “role shift” where the poet, who had until this point been playing the main character, takes on the role of the hearing world. The motion of the hearing aids being stuck in is sudden and violent; the poet’s facial expression is both determined and almost horrified. The “bent one” handshape used for “hearing aids” is also a variation of the “one” index finger used to represent the main character, visually evoking how mandatory hearing aids are literally forcing him into a different shape, a different type of body.

JSL: [/CL(LR)/1/:[BENT]:WALK [gaze(up)(NOTICING SOMETHING)]]/[(L,R)  
/5/:SIGN LANGUAGE/]

→ *And he began to walk a difficult life path. And then . . . When he saw the world of speaking with one’s hands.*

The poet role shifts again, taking the role of the main character. He performs a variation of the sign to walk forward, but with great difficulty and a pained look on his face. Instead of the conventional handshapes (with the fingers looking like “walking legs”), however, the “hearing aid” handshape with a bent index finger is used instead, distorting the act of “walking forward” and literally becoming the obstacle to his progress.<sup>61</sup> Then, he looks up, above the viewer’s head, noticing something: at a position above him, the poet does the sign for “sign language” itself, a vigorous movement of two hands in conversation, but with all five fingers fully extended representing a “world” instead of the conventional index finger-only sign. Above and beyond the difficult life path he is on, the main character has seen the “world of sign language” for the first time.

JSL: [/CL(LR)/1/:[BENT]:TAKE OUT HEARING AID]/[CL(R)/1/:[BENT]:  
TAKE OUT HEARING AID/]

→ *That’s it—he took out his hearing aids, and . . .*

With a triumphant and determined expression, and a slight smile, he forcefully signs taking off his hearing aids, one by one—a sharp downward movement from each ear, almost as if he is casting each hearing aid to the ground. Each line, the poet’s gaze has been moving gradually upward, to indicate the situation improving over time.<sup>62</sup>

JSL: [/CL(L,R) /5/:SPEAK SIGN LANGUAGE][gaze(look)(ENLIGHTENMENT)]  
 [/CL(R) /1/:EXISTENCE]

→ . . . began to speak in sign language. This is his identity.

The poet does the sign for “sign language” once more, this time in front of himself rather than above his head—a sign that the main character is now himself speaking in sign rather than just glimpsing it from afar. His facial expression is happy and peaceful as he looks directly into the camera and at the viewer. The forward circles of the “sign language” sign begin to slow—in the last of these cycles, his right hand comes to a pause, now in the “one” sign from the beginning of the poem, a single index finger held up. As before, this is a classifier representing the main character, now firmly within the “world of sign language.” This time, Tanada notes, it is the right hand making this sign instead of the left hand at the beginning of the poem, showing the transition of the main figure from infancy to adulthood, or birth to rebirth.<sup>63</sup> The screen fades to black and the words “This is his identity” [*kore ga kare no aidentiti de aru*] appear in Japanese text.

Where “Mount Akagi” ended on a somber note with just the glimmer of possibility for a Deaf world to thrive again, “Deaf Identity” ends in triumph. The protagonist has rejected the hearing aids binding him to the world of the hearing and of orality and is reborn in the world of the Deaf, the “world of sign language” (*shuwa no sekai*).<sup>64</sup> Once again, this “worldness” is represented by a handshake with every finger on both hands extended, combining the concepts of “sign language” and “world” and realizing them in this way through sign language itself. He is not just describing but *enacting* this world.

#### JSL POETRY AND HEARING PLATFORMS

Both of these poems—“Mount Akagi” and “Deaf Identity”—were uploaded alongside several others on Tanada’s personal website, Sign Language Poetry Collection (*Shuwa-shi shishū*), in 2000 (figure 20). Unlike most personal websites from that time, Tanada’s was still online and carefully maintained all the way up to 2019.

The video of “Deaf Identity” is a two-megabyte MOV file, created using iMovie, a program that had come out just the year before. At the average internet speed of the time, it would have taken somewhere between eleven and twenty minutes to download, after which the viewer would finally be able to watch it in their browser, or in QuickTime or RealPlayer. Yet the majority of this poem is taken up by intermittent *blankness*: due to the inadequacies of the software of the time, the easiest way to create captions for Tanada was as scene titles, with accompanying freeze frames and fades to black (figure 21).

Tanada’s decision to make this one among his videos accessible to those who do not speak JSL thus resulted in making the video somewhat *less* accessible to sign language speakers, chopping up his fluid signing with freeze frames and fade-outs every few seconds, and with the final line expressed completely in another language, written Japanese text. The triumphant protagonist of the poem finds his own Deaf identity by rejecting hearing aids and the hearing world in favor of sign

**手話詩 詩集**

※注意 手話詩ムービーを見るためにはQuickTime4.0以上が必要です。Appleサイト (<http://www.apple.com/jp>) からQuickTimeをダウンロードしてください。

「手話詩」と聴いて、あなたはどんなイメージを浮かべますか。多くの人は日本語の詩を手話に置き換えたものとする人が多いようです。しかし、これは本来の意味での手話詩ではなく、日本語の詩を手話に翻訳しただけにすぎず、日本語におけるリズムが壊された状態、もしくは本来の手話が持つリズムが生かされないものになってしまっています。

筆者は1997年にDプロ主催オータムスクール97においてアメリカから招聘したVali博士によって、本来あるべき手話詩について確信を持つに至りました。Vali博士はアメリカ手話詩の詩人であり、博士論文でも手話詩の分析を試みています。彼の手話詩に対する分析と言語学的手法を学び、日本においても手話詩の創作が可能であることを確信しました。あれから4年。手話詩の創作活動並びに、日本においても明治時代からすでに多くのろう者によって創作発表されていることを確認するまでに至りました。多くのろう者はそれが手話詩であることをただ知らなかっただけにすぎないのです。

今回は、拙作ですが、筆者の作品とフィンランドの手話詩人Kimmo氏による作品を紹介します。これらの手話詩の解説は修士論文を書き終えた後に発表したいと思っています。まずは、生の手話詩をご覧ください。(2000.11.22)

現在、工事中。お待ちあれ。

手話詩 By 棚田		
ろうのアイデンティティ	赤城山	天地創造と結婚
噴水	田園風景	雨

手話詩 By Kimmo Leinonen	
<a href="#">言葉・・・奪われた言葉</a>	<a href="#">林檎の家</a>

Kimmo氏の手話詩のタイトルは筆者が付けたものである。

手話詩にはリズムが必要であるが、メタファーにおいてもポジティブ・ネガティブの繰り返しが重要である。上記に挙げた手話詩の多くは自然謳歌が表面的であるのに対し、内面的にはろう者の世界を表現している。

FIGURE 20. Tanada Shigeru's personal website, Sign Language Poetry Collection (Shuwa-shishū), created in 2000; screenshot of an archived version of the page from July 15, 2001.



FIGURE 21. Two stills from Tanada Shigeru's Japanese Sign Language poem "Deaf Identity," showing one instance of the video fading to black after a line.

language and the Deaf world. But these constant fades to black underline how the "certain person" of the poem, almost certainly Tanada himself, is surrounded not just by hearing people but by digital video technology designed by and for hearing people as well.

In 1998—the same year as this poem's composition—Tani Chiharu noted in an article about Japanese Sign Language poetry that there were not many opportunities for these poems to be seen by the public at large. Not only that, he added, "there is almost no academic literature on Japanese sign language poems or

the criticism thereof. As of now, it seems that it is too early to talk about a field centered on ‘original’ sign language poems, that is, created and published in sign language—there is simply no material.”<sup>65</sup> The lack of scholarship, unfortunately, is still the case more than a quarter century later, but the accessibility of JSL poetry by the general public has certainly changed due to advances in online video sharing like those taken advantage of by Tanada, first on his personal web page, and later on YouTube.

The capacities of the internet have allowed for sign language literature to be distributed with a speed and ease akin to written literature, solidifying and cohering it as a literary practice. Brenda Jo Brueggemann observed this phenomenon in 2009, noting that with online technologies, “the potential is vast for the further development of sign language literatures” beyond the “limited degree and quantity on videotape and DVD/CD-ROM” available up to that point.<sup>66</sup> This is an intensification of a long history of sign languages’ intimate relationship with technologies of moving image reproduction since the early twentieth century. Even as early as 1913, the president of the National Association of the Deaf in America, for example, said that film was the key element in their campaign to preserve and pass on sign language.<sup>67</sup> But this effect becomes particularly marked in the case of sign language literature. Christopher B. Krentz argues—and he is not alone in doing so—that the impact of film on ASL literature in many ways parallels that of the printing press on oral European culture, with all of the concomitant effects associated with that transformation: the standardization and stabilization of texts, freeing them from performance in a particular time and place, preservation, separation of performers from audiences, commodification, massification, experimentation, the emergence of finer textual interpretation, and so on.<sup>68</sup> Rachel Sutton-Spence briefly touches on a similar dynamic concerning the relationship between sign language poetry and video. She notes that “sign language poetry, as we know it today, can be seen as a phenomenon made possible by the videotape,” pointing to scholars like Heidi Rose, who have “divided ASL literature into the eras of ‘pre-videotape’ and ‘post-videotape’ because of the importance of videotape to the preservation and distribution of sign language compositions.”<sup>69</sup>

Since the 1990s, Japan’s national broadcaster, NHK, has shown multiple weekly programs in sign language education; other channels have broadcast a wide variety of TV dramas that involve signing Deaf and hard of hearing characters, including *Orange Days*, *Tell Me You Love Me* (*Aishiteru to itte kure*), and *Love Letter*. A hit manga and animated film featuring a Deaf character and dialogue in JSL, *A Silent Voice* (*Koe no katachi*), was released to widespread acclaim in 2016; *A Sign of Affection* (*Yubisaki to renren*), a romantic anime series based on an earlier manga and starring a Deaf main character, premiered in January 2024. There are sign language dictionary websites, sign language-learning smartphone apps and mobile games, and so on. Something that all of these have in common, however, is that they are largely created by and for hearing audiences, with varying levels

of involvement—and sometimes none at all—of Deaf consultants, writers, actors, animators, and programmers, leading to overly simplistic or flat-out inaccurate portrayals of Deaf life and Deaf culture. This is not to say, of course, that there is no screen media made by and for the Deaf in Japan. There is a long history of Deaf films in Japan, like those made by the Deaf director Fukagawa Katsuzō in the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>70</sup> Deaf Movie Entertainment PRODIA is an association of Deaf filmmakers who have released several feature-length films in a variety of genres over the last two decades in which the main language is JSL. A few contemporary Deaf directors like Makihara Eri, DAKI, and Imamura Ayako also make independent films, many of which are shown on national television and at global film festivals, including the annual Tokyo International Deaf Film Festival, inaugurated in 2019. Content by and for the Deaf, of course, has also proliferated in the age of social media. With stable high-speed internet, computers and smartphones with high-quality built-in cameras, and so on, the opportunities for Deaf people worldwide to share digital video online—whether in the form of chat, streaming, or videos on platforms like YouTube, Nico Nico Douga, or TikTok—are more widespread than ever before.

But there was, and is, a price to uploading videos of sign language literature like Tanada's JSL poems on major video-sharing networks. In cases like these, the creation of a Deaf world online through such platforms is also something that incidentally makes these poets just some among many millions of bodies "doing things" on video-sharing websites, where they are often viewed by largely hearing audiences. These poems are put in a position where they can be and are easily viewed or stumbled upon by those who do not know sign language and thus often only apprehend the poem as a body acting out a series of gestures, caught between interpretive dance and unintelligible speech. This is attested to by endless comments on any video that features sign language like "Sign language is so beautiful!" eliding the semantic completely in favor of the aesthetic. "For me, ASL is not *just* a beautiful language, a mere aesthetic adornment," writes Rachel Kolb. "It is also a language that has given me access to a world otherwise governed by assumptions of sound and hearing. 'Your signing is so beautiful': with this expression, followed by nothing else, my communicative process, history, and richer sense of self all disappear."<sup>71</sup> It is a justified anxiety about misrecognition or miscirculation that Brueggemann notes as well: "ASL authors (and critics too) may still be a bit unsure about the shape-shifting nature of audience here in the dawn of the digital age."<sup>72</sup>

There are easy narratives of new media "opening up" literature and the arts to new forms of expression and enabling ever-expanding modes of communication. But these narratives elide feelings of media *frustration*, exemplified by many Deaf poets like Tanada, who in the form and content of their works repeatedly push up against the inadequacies of "new media" and its cultures. Like most media technologies, the internet was and continues to be largely by and for the hearing. The vast majority of videos online do not have human-written captions, for

example, compared to much of television in Japan and all television broadcasts in the United States; automatic captions generated on platforms such as YouTube are often poor substitutes. An apparent solution like free video-sharing services also place Deaf author/performers into the modes of spectacularization, consumption, and commodification of these hearing-dominated platforms. Any sign language poetic content by Deaf poets is also largely drowned out by another phenomenon: the vast majority of creative sign language works on YouTube and Japanese video-sharing services like Nico Nico Douga tend to be sign language interpretations of pop songs—an interesting practice in their own right, but, again, one largely by and for the hearing.

There continues to be a desire for Deaf spaces on the internet, including Deaf literary spaces, ones that exist apart from hearing platforms. We can see this desire manifesting itself in the many existences of Tanada's "Deaf Identity": its original composition in 1998, performed live by him on many different occasions; the specific performance captured on video in what seems to be a noisy restaurant, Tanada wearing a white shirt and fleece vest; the MOV file of that video, uploaded to his website in 2000; the subtitles for that video, summarizing the poem in written Japanese; the YouTube upload of the same movie file in 2007; the extensive transcription and gloss in his article from 2006; and my English translation of the subtitles and extensive summary/explanation above. The internet's "eras" are often framed as subsequent: the Web 1.0 of personal pages like Tanada's and the Web 2.0 of social media platforms like YouTube, with one totally taking over the other. The fact is, of course, that different "stages" of technology coexist, linger, and intermingle to such an extent that it makes it clear that this model—that media "evolve" and totally replace one another—is misleading. Tanada's act of maintaining his personal web page from the year 2000 as long as he could, even while posting some of the same decade-old poem videos on YouTube as well, shows the value of a diverse internet ecology. The capabilities of the "web" have, of course, changed since the year 2000. But many poets like Tanada were and are willing to maintain web pages that largely function as they did then, rejecting the "efficiencies" of new platforms in favor of a smaller internet space dictated by them, frustrations and all—not only continuing to embrace the lingerings of a "Web 1.0" for nostalgia's sake, but also imagining an internet that is more customizable, variable, capacious, and perhaps poetic, its many colors intermingling like the autumn leaves of Mount Akagi's past.

## CONCLUSION

Tanada's sign language poems and ni\_ka's AR poems share a poetics of overlapping worlds that are suspended in impossible coexistence through their work. But they also resonate with one another in how they use this poetics to expose the processes by which that coexistence itself was made impossible. The blossoms in ni\_ka's poetry became a spectacle of the kind of mourning that *wasn't* happening;



Tanada's brocade of autumn colors was not just a melancholic seasonal image, but through sign became a way to articulate the trauma of oralist forms of Deaf education that undermined sign language itself. The impossibly coexisting worlds—the worlds of the living and the dead, of Tokyo and disaster-struck Tohoku, of oralism and Deaf thriving—become reflected in the failures of language itself: the clichéd postdisaster platitudes falling away in the face of an overwhelm of text, image, and emotion in ni\_ka's work, and the dramatizations of failed attempts to make Deaf people speak only Japanese and not JSL in Tanada's. These tensions also become spectacularized in the generative failures of digital platforms, with the constant fades to black upon each subtitle appearance in "Deaf Identity" and ni\_ka's rendering Sekai Camera nigh unfunctional for its original purpose.

But despite the common sentiment that once something is on the internet it's out there forever, works of digital media are extraordinarily fragile. "Silent" cinema remained to many an important respite from sound cinema; vinyl records can still be played, and so can old magnetic tape recordings with a bit more effort; vintage magazines might be yellowed but are readable; and any number of cinephiles will tell you exactly how to tweak vintage projectors to play even the most questionable 8mm films. "Cloud-based" computing and storage suggests an image of something floating above our world, heedless to its complications, unaffected by any turmoil below, infinitely accessible, ever expanding. But when the underlying structures break down, or go defunct or unsupported, there is often no equivalent of a yellowed magazine page or degraded celluloid to fall back on. YouTube still exists—for now—and one can see Japanese sign language poems by Tanada and many others there with the right search terms. Yet Tanada's personal web page is no more; it vanished in early 2019 as its hosting service shuttered, and it only exists as an Internet Archive snapshot from July 15, 2001.

At least there's that—but sometimes, there isn't. Though Sekai Camera, the augmented reality app that ni\_ka used to create her AR poems, was continually updated, many of its functions started to disappear. She noticed that audio tags, for example, were the first to go, erasing all the clips she left of her voice reading parts of the poems out loud. Even back in October of 2011, right in the middle of ni\_ka's series of post-3/11 AR poems, the filmmaker Sasaki Yusuke noticed that Sekai Camera had already ceased some its functions: though he wanted to capture ni\_ka's poetry, the ability to take high-quality screenshots had suddenly vanished.<sup>73</sup> Finally, Sekai Camera itself was completely shut down in 2013, less than two years after ni\_ka's series of works began. A few screenshots of these poems remain, but these only offer glimpses of what was once a three-dimensional experience tied to a specific location, ever changing as the air tags left by other users floated in the air alongside ni\_ka's.

When the shutdown was announced, many immediately thought of its implications for ni\_ka's work. "I've been anxious about what will happen to the AR poems after Sekai Camera shuts down—can they be saved somehow?" asked one

Twitter user who went by Purin Zeroshiki. “I hope they can linger on in some other form.”<sup>74</sup> She “went to try to get one last look at ni\_ka’s AR poems on Sekai Camera before the application shuts down,” she added later.<sup>75</sup> In 2019, Yaplog—the service that hosted ni\_ka’s blog, including all of her monitor poems and posts of her AR poems—also announced it would be shutting down completely on January 31, 2020, leading to a desperate scramble (on my part and others’) to save her work on the Internet Archive’s Wayback Machine. A couple of years before that, the hundreds of roses, stars, and Hello Kitties that once bloomed across her blog had suddenly stopped working as well, with the external sites that hosted the extensions that produced those effects having shut down; now only the oldest of her archived pages still contains these floral explosions that were once so key to the original experience of her work.

Tanada’s and ni\_ka’s works are not alone in this. We are at a moment in which countless marginalized spaces of digital media practices and their histories have either disappeared or are on the verge of doing so. Influential Shockwave-based poem generators like exonemo’s “BM394—biomorphpoet” from 1997, for example, result now only in garbled text (*mojibake*, “transformed characters”) instead of the original Japanese.<sup>76</sup> Many of the blog services (like Yaplog) and website hosts that held the bulk of poetic activity in Japan have shut down long ago, taking thousands of pages with them. Even GeoCities Japan—a longtime holdout—finally shut down in 2019, ten years after its US counterpart, along with its own massive corner of internet poetry.

I mention how easily these poems have been lost in their original forms not as a call to lamentation, or to fossilize these works, often deliberately ephemeral, in amber—indeed, much of what is striking about the materiality of digital poetry emerges in repeated encounters and makes itself felt in loss. As José Esteban Muñoz wrote, ephemerality “is linked to alternate modes of textuality and narrativity like memory and performance. . . . It does not rest on epistemological foundations but is instead interested in following traces, glimmers, residues, and specks of things.”<sup>77</sup> Instead, I want to point to an urgency of maintaining an openness in what we deem valuable, and what we deem poetic, so that some of these encounters with other online worlds can still happen in the first place, and—like the Mount Akagi of the past being brought back into the present, or the floating digital roses haunting Tokyo’s streets—continue to happen, in some form or another.

The “www” in many internet addresses, of course, stands for “World Wide Web.” The web of online worlds in this chapter, however, is more akin to the one in Clayton Valli’s “Dew on a Spiderweb,” one of the best-known sign language poems, in which the speaker glimpses dew glittering on the threads of a web and quickly takes several pictures of it, only to later discover that they had not wound the film properly and that the images have disappeared forever. Yet as Rebecca Sanchez argues, “The web’s image *has* been preserved, made present on

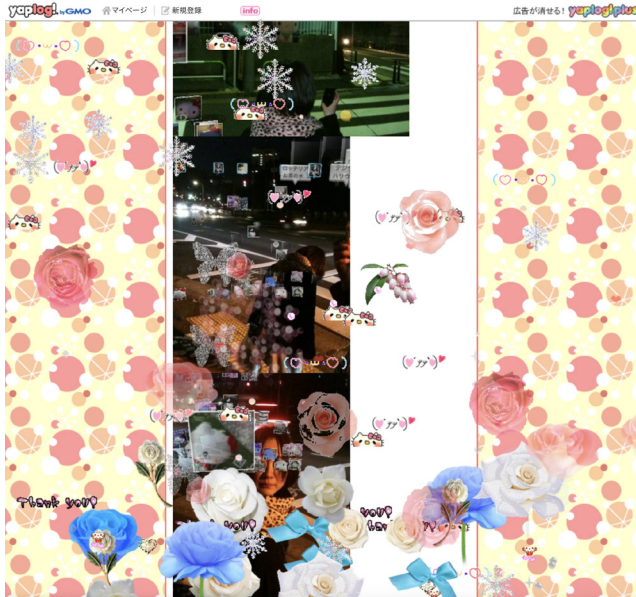


FIGURE 22. Images of ni\_ka's final walk to capture images of her AR poems before the shutting down of the Sekai Camera app, from her December 23, 2013, blog post "hello! AR poetry."

the signer's hands. More than just describing how the web looks, the signer has created a thing in the air—not identical to the web but nevertheless physically, tangibly present, no more ephemeral than the web itself.<sup>78</sup> In a December 23, 2013, post called "hello! AR poetry"—which was, in fact, a goodbye—ni\_ka reflected on her work just a month before the Sekai Camera service was scheduled to end, taking her poems with them (figure 22).<sup>79</sup> She recalls the lonely process of creating these poems, walking furiously around Tokyo with hands numb from the cold almost every day for a year and a half, the 3/11 disasters happening shortly after her initial experiments and changing the direction of her work entirely. In the days before the final shutdown, ni\_ka walked through the streets of Tokyo, capturing her poems before they too became ghosts. "My AR poetry," she wrote, "will quietly drift from now on only at the edges of memory and of record." This was, she mused, perhaps an appropriate conclusion.

## Coda

This book project initially began how it ended here: with my first encounters with Japanese Sign Language poetry and *ni\_ka*'s augmented reality poetry, encounters that completely reshaped my understanding of what poetry could be. These were works completely unrepresented in Japanese literary and media studies yet intimately tied to questions of language, the body, gender, and disability, as well as both the possibilities and frustrations that must be grappled with when considering emerging media technologies. They challenged normative approaches to reading, writing, embodiment, hardware, sound, visibility, code, text, and interface, and they pointed toward other, more open directions that media and literature can take. I set out to write something that would, even in a small way, capture the impact these works had on my understanding of why and how poetry mattered. Setting out, then, I expected to tell new stories about both poetry and media: to expand Japanese literary studies to works not normally considered within its purview, and to put the blossoming study of media in Japan back into conversation with the literary in order to uncover overlooked modes of practice. I aimed to tell an alternate story about modern Japanese poetry; to highlight poetic works that made use of the new and popular media of their time, that existed across media forms, and that used emerging media technologies to create new kinds of poetry.

Each chapter did indeed spotlight such work. Chapter 1 explored written poetry that was informed by the cinema, and it focused especially on the hybrid forms of the film-poem and cinepoem, which were far more diverse and wide ranging than they are usually portrayed. Chapter 2 took an in-depth look at a single piece—Akiyama Kuniharu's "Poem for Tape Recorder—Composition B: Imprisoned Woman"—that prefigured the "intermedia" of the subsequent decade and existed

at the intersection of a dizzying number of forms, spanning the tape recorder reel, the tech demo, the page, the live event, the performance, the script, the score, and lost media. Chapter 3 considered the work of the poet Yokota Hiroshi, who used his own disabled body to trouble conventions of poetry, writing, walking, and mass media. Chapter 4 looked at two women—Itō Hiromi and Togawa Jun—who unfurled their feminist and body-centric poetic practice across multiple media forms, both “popular” and “elite.” And finally, chapter 5 took to the realm of seemingly constant digital innovation, of the creation of Deaf poetic spaces online and poetic spaces of mourning through AR and smartphone technology.

Yet just as much did *not* fit. While I expected to find poems that made use of, were inspired by, or even exulted in emerging media, just as often—and even within the same work—there was an alternate, if not opposite, tendency. What I found repeatedly alongside the diverse examples of poetic media practice and mediatized poetic practice in twentieth- and twenty-first-century Japan was a proliferation of works that seemed to communicate a desire for something *other* than media as they were. In multiple eras poetry became a site and tool of the critique, rerouting, or even negation of media, whether that media was new, old, popular, or elite. Another thread linking these works that I did not expect was the importance of the body and embodiment to each of these figures: how the body was central to their poetic reimaginations of media, and how the fears they were addressing with their work were often linked to the potential of media technologies to control the body and make normative a narrow kind of embodiment and sensation.

These other tendencies informed each chapter just as much as the desire to find how poetry changed amid shifting media landscapes. From this perspective, then, interwar cinempoetry was not just poetry about cinema, or poetry that mimicked the form of cinema, but it was an attempt to think and make a new kind of cinema by means of text in the face of rapidly fossilizing norms of filmic production. The collision of poetry and sonic practices in the postwar era—and their subsequent untethering from either language or sound—resulted in a vastly expanded idea of composition, one that rejected not just the boundaries between media but also those between media and nonmedia, in ways that reacted against the strictures of the preceding wartime and postwar regimes. Itō Hiromi, at first glance a poet who had taken the conventional route to literary acclaim, equated her poems to bodily functions, visceral acts beholden neither to language (which was always fraught and often illegible) nor to noncorporeal abstraction. Yokota Hiroshi aimed to create not just poetry that spoke to the concerns of disabled people, but a *disability poetics* that challenged normative (and ableist) modes of seeing, movement, writing, and the kind of cultural power that determines who and who is not a poet.

While each of the poets under consideration did indeed engage with the media of their time, it would be misleading to take an approach that focuses exclusively on the possibilities afforded to “literature” by “new media.” It is crucial to consider

what emerging media allow for in various expressive practices, but it is equally important to look at how poets dealt with what did *not* work. We have seen, for example, how poets took issue with cinema's tendency to fossilize hegemonic modes of vision; audio recording's promise as a site of freedom for the voice, while still capturing it and opening up new avenues for surveillance; popular magazines' narrow dictation of desirable femininity; and mass media's capacity to disempower disabled people by exclusion of disabled bodies on the one hand and inclusion of eugenicist rhetoric on the other. In each historical moment considered in this volume, poetry became a way not just to use media differently but also to think about its failures, its frustrations, and its inadequacies, and, sometimes, to offer an alternative. In this light poetry does not just tell us different stories of media technology and literary history, but it can step in when *telling stories is not enough*: poetry becomes a way of thinking, sensing, and making media and literature otherwise, one that highlights that which cannot be narrativized, and that which is minor, stranger, inadequate, or silenced.

The phenomenon of poetry flourishing at the edge of media, of course, continues. Yet in many contemporary cases, the poets and their works are far from marginal—poetic trends have moved toward, not away from, the experiments featured in this book. Figures like Saihate Tahi and her digital “poetry hacks” have increasingly moved from the fringes toward the center of the poetry world; like *ni\_ka*, she was once a blogger-poet in middle school and has achieved astonishing success, including a feature-length film based on one of her poetry collections.<sup>1</sup> Video-sharing platforms have allowed for enormous possibilities to create and view poetic works—live or home-recorded poetry readings, more elaborate poetry performances, and countless poetic short films that often resemble the avant-garde cinemoems of the 1920s far more than mainstream cinema or television. Poets and songwriters—often directly inspired by feminist figures of the 1980s—continue to question the foundations of gendered expression. In 2021, for example, Utada Hikaru, one of Japan's biggest pop stars, became the first prominent Japanese person to come out as non-binary (*nonbainari*). “When I came across the idea of it . . . in Japanese, there's this expression, ‘fish scales fall off of your eyeballs’ (‘*Me kara uroko ga ochiru*’),” they said in an interview at the time. “It's a weird expression, but that's exactly what I felt. It's a moment of ‘eureka,’ or shock, almost.”<sup>2</sup> Like Itō and Togawa's, Utada's lyrics have always had a fraught relationship with gender and refused the expected confessional mode of the “female” singer-songwriter in which the narrator of the songs is always assumed to be one and the same with the singer. Utada's fans were quick to find new meaning in the lyrics to their songs, especially in the tour de force “My Girlfriend” (“*Ore no kanojo*”), in which they switch between the “male” and “female” roles within one failing relationship, but the “female” narrator sings lines like “The person next to you/Is me, but is not really me/It's tough being a girl” (*anata no tonari ni iru no wa/watashi da keredo watashi ja nai/onna wa tsurai yo*).<sup>3</sup> The community of self-identified Deaf and disabled poets also continues to grow. Prominent recent



FIGURE 23. Screenshot from Iino Emi's Japanese Sign Language poem "Dream" ("Yume") (shuwaemon, "Shuwa-shi: Yume" [Sign language poem: Dream], August 30, 2011, YouTube video, 1:26, [www.youtube.be/BI7\\_c8yRUB4](http://www.youtube.be/BI7_c8yRUB4)).

works spotlighting these communities have gained widespread recognition within and beyond Japan, like the 2016 art documentary *LISTEN*, a completely silent film that centers sign language poetry and signed music, made by two Deaf filmmakers, Makihara Eri and DAKEL.<sup>4</sup> And even the live poetry practices in Japan that once were most resistant to technologized mediation—readings, open mics, and poetry slams—have, in the pandemic era, incorporated hybrid or fully online events and have become fascinating sites of debate about the meaning of poetry and performance on digital platforms.<sup>5</sup>

I wish to end with one last poem: Iino Emi's Japanese Sign Language poem "Dream" ("Yume"), which was uploaded in 2011 to the YouTube channel of Shuwaemon, an organization aimed at the education of Deaf youth in Japan.<sup>6</sup> It is a simple poem—just a minute and a half in length, and clearly meant for children—yet it still manages to poignantly touch on media, the body, sign language, and the transformative power of poetry. Iino begins by proclaiming how much she loves to sleep, and she describes a few of the dreams she often has. In the sign for "dream," all of the fingers of her right hand are opened wide, palm facing upward; the thumb begins at the right temple, and the whole hand moves upward and forward in two arches (figure 23).

The logic of transformation enabled by dreaming is key to this poem, where the end of several signs is drawn out into an extended sequence as another type of being. When she is asleep, she says, she can fly through the sky, which feels



wonderful; “flight” in this line, for example, could be indicated by just one or two flaps of wings, but Iino lets the image linger, flapping slowly several times as if she were moving through the air. Sometimes, she says, she also dreams she turns into a cat. “Cat,” too, might have been indicated only by her hand shapes and position, but the sign again serves to herald a temporary transformation on the part of the poet as she mimes hopping around with catlike grace. The poem then shifts to talking about dreaming more generally. “Before, when television was in black and white, our dreams were the same: a black and white world. Mysterious, isn’t it?” Here she highlights the potential of media to shape even the realm of dreams and imagination, referencing how dreaming without color was far more common in the age of black-and-white television. She ends with a reminder to her young audience that sleep is the time when they can grow, and she suggests that they not stay up late but go to bed early, so they can have as many dreams as possible. “I wonder what kind of dreams we’ll have tonight?” she asks, having just used poetry to create one of her own on-screen.

## NOTES

### INTRODUCTION

1. *Kanshi* continued to be composed in the modern era, though it has remained perhaps the least-recognized form of modern Japanese literature; for vital recenterings of this practice, see Matthew Fraleigh's *Plucking Chrysanthemums: Narushima Ryūhoku and Sin-itic Literary Traditions in Modern Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2016), and Matthew Mewhinney's *Form and Feeling in Japanese Literati Culture* (New York: Springer 2022).

2. The situation is, of course, more complex than this. See Scott Mehl's recent book *The Ends of Meter in Modern Japanese Poetry* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2022), especially its first chapter, "New Styles of Criticism for a New Style of Poetry."

3. Lucy Lower, "Poetorii and New-Style Poetry in the Shintaishishō," in *Comparative Literature East and West: Traditions and Trends: Selected Conference Papers, Vol. 1*, ed. Cornelia N. Moore and Raymond A. Moody (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1989), 175.

4. *Kindaishi* refers to late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century works, and *gendai-shi* usually refers to poems composed after World War II but often to modernist prewar works as well, making "contemporary poetry" an uneasily fitting translation of the latter at best.

5. One of the most important premodern poetic anthologies, for example, was the eleventh-century *Wakan rōeishū*, literally meaning "A Collection of Japanese and Chinese Poems to Sing."

6. For more on premodern Japanese poetic writing and its intimate connection to materiality and the selection of characters, see Thomas LaMarre's *Uncovering Heian Japan: An Archaeology of Sensation and Inscription* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000); for its connections to calligraphy and performance, see Reginald Jackson, *Textures of Mourning: Calligraphy, Mortality, and The Tale of Genji Scrolls* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2018).

7. For more on this crucial aspect of *waka*, see Edward Kamens, *Waka and Things, Waka as Things* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018). For more on the Heian-era innovations of screen poetry (*byōbu-uta*) and poetry matches (*uta-awase*), see Gustav Heldt, *The Pursuit of Harmony: Poetry and Power in Early Heian Japan* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell East Asia Series, 2010).

8. For an important exploration of the diversity of Meiji poetic practice in relation to print culture, see Robert Tuck, *Idly Scribbling Rhymers: Poetry, Print, and Community in Nineteenth-Century Japan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

9. Maeda Ai, “Modern Literature and the World of Printing,” trans. Richard Okada, in Maeda Ai, *Text and the City: Essays on Japanese Modernity*, ed. James A. Fujii (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 260.

10. See Seth Jacobowitz’s important exploration of the Meiji era’s enormously complex interconnected systems of new media, technology, visuality, orality, and print in *Writing Technology in Meiji Japan: A Media History of Japanese Literature and Print Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2015).

11. Ingo Berensmeyer, *A Short Media History of English Literature* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2022), 1.

12. Quoted in Kondō Yōta, “Shiteki media’ no kanōsei” [The possibilities of “poetic media”], *Gendaishi techō* 35, no. 9 (1992): 198. This and all translations in this book are mine unless otherwise noted.

13. For an excellent English-language introduction to the diversity of his poetic work, see Yoshimasu Gōzō, *Alice Iris Red Horse: Selected Poems*, ed. Forrest Gander (New York: New Directions, 2016); for my brief video exploration of his collaborative poetry book/metal sculpture, see Andrew Campana, “A Video Introduction to ‘Livre-Object’ by Yoshimasu Gōzō and Wakabayashi Isamu, 1971,” April 27, 2015, Vimeo video, 5:54, <https://vimeo.com/126094387>.

14. Yoshimasu Gōzō, *Shi to wa nani ka* [What is poetry?] (Tokyo: Kōdansha, 2021), 170.

15. Yoshimasu, *Shi to wa nani ka*, 170.

16. Yoshimasu, *Shi to wa nani ka*, 9.

17. Yoshimasu, *Shi to wa nani ka*, 93, 170.

18. Yoshimasu, *Shi to wa nani ka*, 118, 12, 98, 107, 119, 163, 164, 161.

19. Yoshimasu, *Shi to wa nani ka*, 101, 161.

20. Yoshimasu, *Shi to wa nani ka*, 238.

21. Munechika Shin’ichirō, “Ishu kōhai (toransu media) no shigaku—go sendai shijin no meimiyaku ni tsuite” [The poetics of crossbreeding (transmedia)—On the lifeblood of ’90s poets], *Gendaishi techō* 33, no. 8 (1990): 155.

22. Munechika, “Ishu kōhai (toransu media) no shigaku,” 162.

23. Nakahara Chūya, “Shōshiron” [A little theory of poetry], *Aozora Bunko*, November 25, 2003, [www.aozora.gr.jp/cards/000026/card50245.html](http://www.aozora.gr.jp/cards/000026/card50245.html) (originally published in 1927).

24. David Trotter, “Literature between Media,” in *The Cambridge History of Modernism*, ed. Vincent Sherry (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 392 (emphasis mine).

25. Oda Kyūrō, *Sengo shidan shishi* [A personal history of the postwar poetry establishment] (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1995). Oda was the founder of Shichōsha and *Gendaishi techō* (*Contemporary Poetry Handbook*), the most significant publisher and journal of Japanese contemporary poetry respectively.

26. Shimaoka Shin, *Shi to wa nani ka* [What is poetry?] (Tokyo: Shinchōsha, 1998), 312–13.
27. Isabelle Stengers, “Introductory Notes on an Ecology of Practices,” *Cultural Studies Review* 11, no. 1 (2005): 186.
28. Stengers, “Introductory Notes,” 186.
29. Stengers, “Introductory Notes,” 187–88.
30. Stengers, “Introductory Notes,” 186, 189.
31. Stengers, “Introductory Notes,” 184.
32. Particularly impactful were Chanda Prescod-Weinstein’s *The Disordered Cosmos: A Journey into Dark Matter, Spacetime, & Dreams Deferred* (New York: Bold Type Books, 2021); Janet Vertesi’s *Shaping Science: Organizations, Decisions, and Culture on NASA’s Teams* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020); and Harry Collins’s *Gravity’s Kiss: The Detection of Gravitational Waves* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2017).
33. See Jonathan Abel, “Stereomimesis: Stereograph, Panoramic Parallax, and the 3D Printing of Nostalgia,” in *The New Real: Media and Mimesis in Japan from Stereographs to Emoji* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2023), <https://manifold.umn.edu/projects/the-new-real>.
34. For an analysis of cinema-related poems by Takuboku, Kitahara, Miyazawa, and Yosano, see my article “Projected on the Dusk: Seeking Cinema in 1910s and 1920s Japanese Poetry,” *Literature* 3, no. 1 (2023): 133–44, doi: <https://doi.org/10.3390/literature3010011>.
35. Vilém Flusser, *Does Writing Have a Future?*, trans. Nancy Ann Roth (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2011), 72.
36. Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004), 12.
37. Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 13.
38. Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 13. Resonating with the concerns of this volume, Rancière sees the challenging of dominant modes most vividly in the interfaces between media—“in the connections forged between poems and their typography or their illustrations, between the theater and its set designers or poster designers, between decorative objects and poems” (16–17). These hybrid artistic practices have historically overturned conventional hierarchies of media (for example, the text’s primacy over illustration, the poem over the piece of furniture, and so on), he argues, and thus upended “an entire well-ordered distribution of sensory experience” in what is necessarily a political act, elevating the conventionally “low” to the level of the “high” and embracing a kind of “egalitarian intertwining” (17).
39. ni\_ka, “AR-shi, kotoba no genkai e, Harō Kiti totomo ni wata-shi fuyū suru—Shijin de aru tame no jōken-ron” [AR poetry, towards the limits of language, poet-I floating along with Hello Kitty—A conditional theory of being a poet], *Bungaku+*, no. 2 (2020): n.p.
40. Moriyasu Toshihisa, *Media o ōdan geijutsu ron* [Theory of cross-media art] (Tokyo: Kokusho kankōkai, 2011), 11.
41. For some critiques of this phenomenon, see Sami Schalk, “Metaphorically Speaking: Ableist Metaphors in Feminist Writing,” *Disability Studies Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (2013), <https://dsq-sds.org/article/view/3874/3410>; David T. Mitchell and Sharon L. Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis: Disability and the Dependencies of Discourse* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001); and David Bolt, *The Metanarrative of Blindness: A Re-reading of Twentieth-Century Anglophone Writing* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013).

42. Legacy Russell, "Digital Dualism and the Glitch Feminism Manifesto," *The Society Pages* (December 10, 2012), <https://thesocietypages.org/cyborgology/2012/12/10/digital-dualism-and-the-glitch-feminism-manifesto/>; Legacy Russell, *Glitch Feminism: A Manifesto* (New York: Verso Books, 2020), 7.
43. Mara Mills and Jonathan Sterne, "Dismediation: Three Proposals, Six Tactics," in *Disability Media Studies*, ed. Elizabeth Ellcessor and William Kirkpatrick (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 366–67.
44. Mills and Sterne, "Dismediation," 365.
45. Christina Scheuer, "Bodily Compositions: The Disability Poetics of Karen Fiser and Laurie Clements Lambeth," *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* 5, no. 2 (2011): 157.

# 1. AGAINST THE SCREEN: POETS REWRITING CINEMA IN 1920S AND 1930S JAPAN

1. Iijima Tadashi, "Shinema" [Cinema], *Shi to shiron* 3 (1929): 141.
2. For a more in-depth exploration of poetry's engagement with cinema in Japan in an earlier era than is the focus of this chapter, see my article "Projected on the Dusk: Seeking Cinema in 1910s and 1920s Japanese Poetry," *Literature* 3, no. 1 (2023): 133–44, <https://doi.org/10.3390/literature3010011>.
3. Christophe Wall-Romana, *Cinepoetry: Imaginary Cinemas in French Poetry* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 3.
4. Of particular interest to the "off screen"/page-based approach to prewar Japanese cinema is Kondō Kazuto's recent and monumental volume *Eigakan to kankyaku no media-ron—Senzenki Nihon no 'eiga o yomu/kaku' to iu keiken* [Media theory of the movie theater and the audience—The experience of "reading/writing film" in prewar Japan] (Tokyo: Seikyūsha, 2020), which is centered largely on the printed film program.
5. For more on the *benshi* and their use of poetic language in their narration, see Jeffrey A. Dym, *Benshi, Japanese Silent Film Narrators, and their Forgotten Narrative Art of Setsu-me: A History of Japanese Silent Film Narration* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2003).
6. Charles O'Brien, *Cinema's Conversion to Sound: Technology and Film Style in France and the U.S.* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 5.
7. Kyoko Selden and Alisa Freedman, "Introduction: *Wanderings in the Realm of the Seventh Sense* by Osaki Midori," *Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* 14, issue 16, no. 5 (August 15, 2016), <https://apjff.org/2016/16/Osaki.html>.
8. Osaki's six "eiga mansō" were originally published in the journal *Nyonin geijutsu* [Women's arts], issues 4 to 9, in 1930. The versions cited here are in *Osaki Midori zenshū* [The complete works of Osaki Midori] (Tokyo: Sōjusha, 1979), 305–8.
9. Aaron Gerow, "Osaki Midori and the Film Theory Complex in Japan," *Light Industry*, May 10, 2021, [www.lightindustry.org/gerow](http://www.lightindustry.org/gerow).
10. Isabelle Stengers, "Introductory Notes on an Ecology of Practices," *Cultural Studies Review* 11, no. 1 (2005): 183–96.
11. Saitō Ayako, "Dai 8 shō—Fūzoku, bunka, kankyaku: Kaisetsu" [Part 8—Customs, cultures, spectators: Commentary], in *Nihon senzen eiga ronshū: Eiga riron no saihakken* [Rediscovering classical Japanese film theory: An anthology], ed. Aaron Gerow, Iwamoto Kenji, and Markus Nornes (Tokyo: Yumani shobō, 2018), 408–13.

12. Miriam Silverberg, *Erotic Grotesque Nonsense: The Mass Culture of Japanese Modern Times* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 200.
13. Hitomi Yoshio, "Envisioning Women Writers: Female Authorship and the Cultures of Publishing and Translation in Early 20th Century Japan," Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2012, 238–39.
14. Thomas LaMarre, "Eigaka sareta sekai—1920 nendai no eiga taiken to Osaki Midori no eiga mansō" [The cinematized world—Osaki Midori's eiga mansō and the experience of film in the 1920s], in *Osaki Midori o yomu—kōen-en 1* [Reading Osaki Midori—Lecture compilation 1] (Tottori: Osaki Midori fōramu jikkō iinkai, 2016), 72.
15. Nathen Clerici, "Performance and Nonsense: Osaki Midori's 'Strange Love,'" *Japanese Language and Literature* 51, no. 2 (2017): 271.
16. Wall-Romana, *Cinepoetry*, 158.
17. Osaki Midori, "Chārī Chappurin" [Charlie Chaplin], in *Osaki Midori zenshū* [The complete works of Osaki Midori] (Tokyo: Sōjusha, 1979), 365–66. Originally published in *Arano* (November 1933).
18. Haruo Shirane, "Lyricism and Intertextuality: An Approach to Shunzei's Poetics," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 50, no. 1 (June 1990): 74.
19. Adrienne Gibb, "Poetics of Distraction: Ozaki Midori's Writings on Film," M.A. thesis, McGill University, 2004, 52.
20. Osaki, "Chārī Chappurin," 435–36.
21. Hanabusa Yuriko, "Sennetto no musume-san—eigashi" [Sennett girls—film-poem], in *Benibake no butō: Joyū bunshū* [Dance of the crimson brush: Actress anthology], ed. Koike Mubō (Tokyo: Katsudō kurabusha, 1922), 82.
22. Hideaki Fujiki, *Making Personas: Transnational Film Stardom in Modern Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2013), 210.
23. James Reichert argues that part of the eventual backlash against *oyama* was from male critics upset with the "troublesome impact" of the "vocal female fanbase" of these male actors playing female roles. James Reichert, "Oyama and Anxieties about the Feminization of Japanese Film," *positions: asia critique* 22, no. 2 (2014): 371–402.
24. Daisuke Miyao, *The Aesthetics of Shadow: Lighting and Japanese Cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 22; Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano, *Nippon Modern: Japanese Cinema of the 1920s and 1930s* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2008), 82.
25. Orito Horio, "Onna to umi (shinepoemu)" [Woman and the sea (cinemoem)], *Kajiki* 15 (1933): 17–19.
26. Seichō, "Gaido no uta" [Usherette song], *Katsudō shashin zasshi* 2, no. 5 (1920): 143.
27. Chie Niita, "Modernity in Film Exhibition: The Rise of Modern Movie Theaters in Tokyo, 1920s–1930s," in *A Companion to Japanese Cinema*, ed. David Desser (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2022), 309.
28. Horai Ryūji, "Eigakan" [Movie theater], *Nihon shidan* 5, no. 6 (1937): 33.
29. MIZUHO, "Kuraivu Burukku" [Clive Brook], *Eiga sekai* 7, no. 8 (1929): 88.
30. Ōi Sachiko, "Tōki sanpen" [Three talkies], first printed in *Yomiuri shimbun*, January 23, 1930, morning edition, page 3; reprinted in *Gendai shinsen joryū shikashū* [New selections of contemporary women's verse] (Tokyo: Taihakusha, 1930), 162–64 (ellipses in original).
31. Michael Raine, "Adaptation as 'Transcultural Mimesis,'" in *The Oxford Handbook of Japanese Cinema*, ed. Daisuke Miyao (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 107.

32. So-called “black-and-white” films in the early twentieth century were actually more often than not tinted or toned; purple was a frequently used color. See Itakura Fumiaki, “Reimei-ki kara musei eiga-ki ni okeru shikisai no yakuwari—Saishoku, senshoku, chōshoku” [From the dawn of a new era to the silent film era: Coloring, tinting, toning], in *Nihon eiga no tanjō* [The birth of Japanese film], ed. Iwamoto Kenji (Tokyo: Shinwasha, 2011), 367–91.

33. For an important exploration of the work of another “outsider” critic who grappled with the potential of sound film, see Kerim Yasar’s analysis of the musician Nakane Hiroshi’s 1931 essay “Tōkī ongakuron” [Talkie music theory] in his *Electrified Voices: How the Telephone, Phonograph, and Radio Shaped Modern Japan, 1868–1945* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 202–9.

34. “Shōsetsu moderu no bakuro” [Revealing the model of the novel], *Yomiuri shimbun*, March 12, 1931, morning edition, 4.

35. Ōya Sōichi, “Hyaku pasento moga” [One hundred percent modern girl], in *Modan sō to modan sō* [Modern social strata and modern mores] (Tokyo: Daihōkaku shobō, 1930), 8, <https://dl.ndl.go.jp/info:ndljp/pid/1269475>.

36. Nagafuchi Tomoe, *Mumei sakka kara miru nihon kindai bungaku—Shimazaki Tōson to ‘Shojochi’ no joseitachi* [Modern Japanese literature from the perspective of unknown authors—Shimazaki Tōson and the women of *Shojochi* magazine] (Osaka: Izumi shoin, 2020), 170.

37. He was referred to in a newspaper article from the time as a “so-called Great Man of the East,” who “held hidden, behind-the-scenes influence on the political world,” and “together with Baron Ōi Shigemoto once lead a group of mounted bandits to seize Siberia’s Zeya gold mine, the largest on earth” (“Shōsetsu moderu no bakuro,” 4). It is unclear whether Sachiko’s rarely mentioned husband, Mr. Ōi, was a member of the baron’s family, or even what his first name was.

38. With the others, Kogure ran into the streets of Tokyo holding red flags, with messages in white promoting socialism and anarchism; fourteen of the group, including her, were arrested and imprisoned. For more on this incident and its associated reportage, see Tomoko Seto, “‘Anarchist Beauties’ in Late Meiji Japan: Media Narratives of Police Violence in the Red Flag Incident,” *Radical History Review* 126 (2016): 30–49.

39. Nagafuchi, *Mumei sakka kara miru nihon kindai bungaku*, 326.

40. John Crump, *Hatta Shūzō and Pure Anarchism in Interwar Japan* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993), 70.

41. Published in the January 1930 volume of *Sokoku*.

42. Donald Keene, *Dawn to the West: Japanese Literature in the Modern Era*, vol. 4, *Poetry, Drama, Criticism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 204.

43. Nagafuchi, *Mumei sakka kara miru nihon kindai bungaku*, 115.

44. Gotō Yūko, “Monogatari o tatsu ‘shi’ no 20 seiki shotō seishin—Seinen ni okeru anāki to amachua no kyōshin” [The narrative-breaking “vision” of the early twentieth-century spirit—Resonances among youth between anarchy and amateurism], Ph.D. diss., Hitotsubashi University, 2018, 83.

45. Barbara Sato, *The New Japanese Woman: Modernity, Media, and Women in Interwar Japan* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 71.



46. Takenaka Iku, "Ragubī cinépoème" [Rugby cinépoème], *Shi to shiron* 6 (1929): 109–13.
47. Nakano Kaichi, *Modanizumu shi no jidai* [The age of modernist poetry] (Tokyo: Hōbunkan shuppan, 1986), 169.
48. Nakagawa Yoichi, "Nembutsu o yokyū shinai geppyo" [A monthly review that doesn't call for a prayer], *Shinchō* 27, no. 3 (1930): 107.
49. Ayukawa Nobuo, *Shi no mikata: Kindaishi kara gendaishi e* [The viewpoint of poetry: From modern poetry to contemporary poetry] (Tokyo: Shichōsha, 1970), 170.
50. Hosea Hirata, *The Poetry and Poetics of Nishiwaki Junzaburō: Modernism in Translation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 142.
51. Yasuhiro Yotsumoto, "Iku Takenaka," *Poetry International*, [www.poetryinternational.com/en/poets-poems/poets/poet/102-28688-Takenaka](http://www.poetryinternational.com/en/poets-poems/poets/poet/102-28688-Takenaka).
52. James Lastra, *Sound Technology and the American Cinema: Perception, Representation, Modernity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 4.
53. Wall-Romana, *Cinepoetry*.
54. Kitagawa Fuyuhiko, "Shine-poemu ni tsuite—Kawaji Ryūkō-shi ni" [On cinepoems—For Mr. Kawaji Ryūkō], *Shi to shiron* 6 (1929): 301.
55. There is, however, at least one in the postwar era: Manabe Hiroshi's experimental animated short film from 1962, "Shinepoemu sakuhin no. 1" [Cinepoem composition no. 1].
56. Iijima Tadashi, "Fondanu no shine-poēmu—3 shenarī o yomu" [Fondane's cinepoems—Reading "Trois scenarii"], *Shi to shiron* 2 (1928): 208.
57. Suyama Daiichirō, "Jishō to no kaigō—Takenaka Iku no shoki shihen ni okeru kankaku ni tsuite no danpen-teki oboegaki" [The event and its encounter: Fragmentary notes on sensation within Takenaka Iku's early poems], *Sōgō bunka kenkyū* 17 (2013): 73.
58. Kondō Azuma, "Shine-poemu" [Cinepoems], *Kindai fūkei* 2, no. 6 (1927): 73.
59. Baba Eitarō, "Eigashi ni tsuite" [On film-poems], *Eiga shūdan* 2, no. 5 (1936): 30–31.
60. Takenaka Iku, "Hyakkaten Cinépoème" [Department store Cinépoème], *Shi to shiron* 4 (1929): 65–68.
61. Miryam Sas, *Fault Lines: Cultural Memory and Japanese Surrealism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 25.
62. Majella Munro, *Communicating Vessels: The Surrealist Movement in Japan 1923–1970* (Cambridge: Enzo Arts and Publishing, 2012), 221.
63. Adachi Ken'ichi, *Hyoden Takenaka Iku: Sono seishun to shi no shuppatsu* [A critical biography of Takenaka Iku: His youth and the outset of his poetry] (Tokyo: Rironsha, 1986), 303.
64. Takenaka Iku, "Man Rei ni tsuite" [On Man Ray], *Shi to shiron* 3 (1929): 209–10.
65. Ōtsuka Eiji, *Manga wa ika ni shite eiga ni narō to shita ka—Eigateki shuhō no kenkyū* [How did manga attempt to become film?—A study of the cinematic approach] (Tokyo: NTT shuppan, 2012), 17–18.
66. Nakano, *Modanizumu shi no jidai*, 166.
67. Kitagawa Fuyuhiko, "Aki wa yutaka-naru kana" [How abundant is autumn], in *Sensō [War]* (Tokyo: Kōseikaku shoten 1929), 55–58.
68. William O. Gardner, "Japanese Modernism and 'Cine-text': Fragments and Flows at Empire's Edge in Kitagawa Fuyuhiko and Yokomitsu Riichi," in *The Oxford Handbook of*

*Global Modernisms*, ed. Mark Wollaeger and Matt Eatough (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 571–97.

69. William O. Gardner, *Advertising Tower: Japanese Modernism and Modernity in the 1920s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006), 297–98. See also, in the same book, his analysis of montage-like techniques in the works of modernist poet and novelist Hayashi Fumiko (120–21).

70. Kitagawa Fuyuhiko, “Aki—shine-poemu” [Autumn—ciné-poème], *Eiga ôrai* 6, no. 1 (1930): 137–38.

71. Kitagawa Fuyuhiko, “Manshū no omoide” [Memories of Manchuria], *Shinario kenkyū* 7 (1939): 168–69.

72. Miyoshi Hiromitsu, “Shinepoemu—Kamera anguru” [Cinepoem: Camera angles], *Manshū eiga* 2, no. 5 (1938): 44–45.

73. Kambara Tai, “Tokai no ikkaku wa kakute kazararete iku (kamera ni yoru shi no shūsaku)” [A city corner will be thus adorned (study for poem by camera)], originally in *Eiga ôrai* (May 1929), collected in Kambara Tai, *Teihon Kambara Tai shishū* [Revised edition: Kambara Tai poetry collection] (Tokyo: Shōshinsha, 1961), 94–117.

74. Mizumachi Hyakusō, “Shinepoemu—Sokudo no ue no machi” [Cinepoem: Street beyond speed], in *Seikatsu no isshō* [A chapter of life] (Kawasaki: Shi no iede hanbu, 1932), 77–78.

75. Orito Horio, “Yunkerusu-ki to kare = boku (shinepoemu)” [Him/me and the Junkers plane (cinepoem)], *Kajiki* 15 (1933): 14–17.

76. Tsukihara Tōichirō, “Chōkan chikyū-zu—shinepoemu-chō—” [Bird’s eye diagram of earth—cinepoem style—], *Chijō rakuen* 5, no. 6 (1930): 5–7.

77. Takenaka Iku, “Shine-poemu no koto” [On cinepoems], *Shishin* 6, no. 12 (1930): 51.

78. Takenaka, “Shine-poemu no koto,” 51.

79. Takenaka Kyūshichi, “Shine-poemu wa naze muimi ka” [Why are cinepoems meaningless?], *Rian* 7 (1930): 31.

80. Most point to the importance of the *benshi*, the live film narrators that were key to the majority of moviegoing experiences in Japan, as the most important factor.

81. See Lauri Kitsnik, “Gosho and the Gagman: Scriptwriting at the Time of the Talkie Crisis,” in *A Companion to Japanese Cinema*, ed. David Desser (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2022), 493–509.

82. Orito Horio, “Shinepoemu no shigakuteki kensetsu (jō)—danpen toshite—” [Cinepoem’s poetic construction (part 1)—as fragments—], *Kajiki* 15 (1933): 40 (emphasis mine).

83. Thomas LaMarre, *Shadows on the Screen: Tanizaki Jun’ichirō on Cinema & “Oriental” Aesthetics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 1.

84. Kawaji Ryūkō, “Shine-poème sanpen” [Three ciné-poèmes], *Aishō* 4, no. 12 (1929): 10–11.

85. See Scott Mehl, “The Beginnings of Japanese Free-Verse Poetry and the Dynamics of Cultural Change,” *Japan Review* (2015): 103–32.

86. Kawaji Ryūkō, “Shine-poème (eigashi)” [Ciné-poèmes (film-poems)], in *Shigaku* (Tokyo: Kōshinsha, 1935), 379–87.

87. Kawaji, “Shine-poème (eigashi),” 383.

88. Kawaji Ryūkō, “Shine-poème kōron” [A postscript on ciné-poèmes], in *Shigaku* (Tokyo: Kōshinsha, 1935), 392, 390–91.

89. Kawaji, "Shine-poēmu (eigashi)," 387.
90. Matsumoto Junzō, "Inazuma no katsudō shashin" [Lightning flicks], *Yorozu chōhō*, October 19, 1924, 8. Credit for the clever title translation goes to my husband.
91. Charles Musser, "When Did Cinema Become Cinema? Technology, History, and the Moving Pictures," in *Technology and Film Scholarship: Experience, Study, Theory*, ed. Santiago Hidalgo (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2017), 41.
92. See Alastair Phillips, "The Salaryman's Panic Time: Ozu Yasujiro's *I Was Born, But . . .* (1932)," in *Japanese Cinema: Texts and Contexts*, ed. Alastair Phillips and Julian Stringer (London: Routledge, 2007), 25–36.
93. Shimada Ryū, "Sagawa Chika kenkyū shiron" [A historiography of Sagawa Chika studies], *Ritsumeikan daigaku jinbun kagaku kenkyūjo kiyō* 115 (2018): 109–10.
94. Sagawa Chika, *Sagawa Chika zenshū* [Sagawa Chika complete collection], ed. Shimada Ryū (Fukuoka: Shoshi kankanbō, 2022), 85–86.
95. Chika Sagawa and Sawako Nakayasu, "Backside," *Poetry* 194, no. 1 (2009): 7.
96. Jim Ferris, "Crip Poetry, or How I Learned to Love the Limp," *Wordgathering: A Journal of Disability Poetry* 1, no. 2 (2007), [https://wordgathering.syr.edu/past\\_issues/issue2/essay/ferris.html](https://wordgathering.syr.edu/past_issues/issue2/essay/ferris.html).
97. Chika Sagawa, *The Collected Poems of Chika Sagawa*, trans. Sawako Nakayasu (Ann Arbor: Canarium Books, 2015), 52.
98. Toshiko Ellis, "Woman and the Body in Modern Japanese Poetry," *Lectora* 16 (2010): 88.
99. Georgina Kleege, *More Than Meets the Eye: What Blindness Brings to Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 51.
100. Maruyama Yutaka, "Kusa shinema—Iki" [Grass cinema—Iki islands], in *Hakuchō* (Tokyo: Shōshinsha, 1938), 40–41.
101. Freda Freiberg, "The Transition to Sound in Japan," in *History on/and/in Film*, ed. Tom O'Regan & Brian Shoesmith (Perth: History & Film Association of Australia, 1987), 76–80, <http://filmsound.org/film-sound-history/sound-in-japan.htm>.
102. Aaron Gerow, "Narrating the Nation-ality of a Cinema: The Case of Japanese Prewar Film," in *The Culture of Japanese Fascism*, ed. Alan Tansman (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 194–95.

## 2. THE VOICE RECOMPOSED: A LOST TAPE-RECORDER POEM OF POSTWAR JAPAN

1. For a photograph of the stage setup, see *Jikken Kōbō-ten: Sengo geijutsu o kirihiraku* [Experimental Workshop exhibit: Cutting through postwar art] (Tokyo: Yomiuri shinbun-sha, bijutsukan renkaku kyōgikai, 2013), 85.
2. From Akiyama Kuniharu's unpublished "Tēpu rekōdā no tame no shi: Sakuhin B—Torawareta onna" [Poem for tape recorder: Composition B—Imprisoned woman], 1953.
3. "Ōto suraido" to 'tēpu rekōdā no tame no shi' ni tsuite" [On the "auto-slide" and "poems for tape recorder"], in the unpublished program for Experimental Workshop's 5th Exhibition, September 30, 1953.
4. Ōoka's membership in two wildly disparate poetic coteries was very much in line with his *modus operandi* of actively aiming to draw together different poets and types of poetry from across Japan, a goal he pursued tirelessly until his death on April 12, 2017.

For an important introduction to Ōoka as a curator of poetic diversity, see his *A Poet's Anthology: The Range of Japanese Poetry*, trans. Janine Beichman (Rochester, MI: Katydid Books, 2006).

5. Dick Higgins, "Statement on Intermedia," reproduced on *Artpool*, [www.artpool.hu/Fluxus/Higgins/intermedia2.html](http://www.artpool.hu/Fluxus/Higgins/intermedia2.html) (accessed April 2017). Originally published in *Dé-collage (décollage)* \* 6, ed. Wolf Vostell (Frankfurt: Typos Verlag/New York: Something Else Press, 1967), 33 (emphasis mine).

6. Shiomi Mieko, "Intermedia/Transmedia," talk at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, April 29, 2012, trans. Midori Yoshimoto, Post MoMA, July 11, 2013, [http://post.at.moma.org/content\\_items/241-intermedia-transmedia](http://post.at.moma.org/content_items/241-intermedia-transmedia).

7. Ishida Kazushi, "Musical Activities of the Experimental Workshop," trans. Stan Anderson, in *Jikken Kōbō-ten: Sengo geijutsu o kirihiraku* [Experimental Workshop exhibit: Cutting through postwar art] (Tokyo: Yomiuri shimbunsha, bijutsukan renkaku kyōgikai, 2013), 318.

8. Miwako Tezuka, "Jikken Kōbō (Experimental Workshop): Avant-Garde Experiments in Japanese Art of the 1950s," Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 2005, 17–18.

9. "Kuniharu AKIYAMA," trans. Tom Spilliaert, in *Dai 11-kai omāju Takiguchi Shūzō—Jikken Kōbō to Takiguchi Shūzō* [The 11th Exhibition homage to Shuzo Takiguchi: Experimental Workshop] (Tokyo: Satani Gallery, 1991), 94.

10. For more on Takiguchi's pioneering prewar poetic experiments, see Miryam Sas's book *Fault Lines: Cultural Memory and Japanese Surrealism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), especially its fourth chapter, "Poetry and Visuality, Poetry and Actuality."

11. Tezuka, "Jikken Kōbō (Experimental Workshop)," 16.

12. Akiyama Kuniharu, *Gendai ongaku o dō kiku ka* [How do you listen to contemporary music?] (Tokyo: Shōbunsha, 1973); Akiyama Kuniharu, *Nihon no eiga ongaku-shi* [A history of Japanese film music] (Tokyo: Tabata shoten, 1974); Akiyama Kuniharu, *Nihon no sakkyokuka-tachi: Sengo kara shin no sengoteki-na mirai e* [Japan's composers: From the postwar to a true postwar future], 2 vols. (Tokyo: Ongaku no tomo-sha, 1978).

13. Ishida, "Musical Activities of the Experimental Workshop," 320.

14. Ishida, "Musical Activities of the Experimental Workshop," 320.

15. Akiyama's widow, the renowned experimental pianist Takahashi Aki, emphasized this in a personal conversation.

16. Yamaguchi Katsuhiro, "Experimental Workshop and the Deterritorialization of Art," Stanley N. Anderson, in *Dai 11-kai omāju Takiguchi Shūzō—Jikken Kōbō to Takiguchi Shūzō* [The 11th Exhibition Homage to Shuzo Takiguchi: Experimental Workshop] (Tokyo: Satani Gallery, 1991), 22.

17. Yuasa Jōji, Matsui Shigeru, et al., "Intabyū Yuasa Jōji: Jikken Kōbō no seishin—Sōzō no bakufu 1950 → 1970" [Yuasa Jōji interview: The spirit of Jikken Kōbō—Cascade of creation 1950 → 1970], *Kōzui: Shi to ongaku no tame no 7* (2011): 59.

18. Mizusawa Tsutomu, "Experimental Workshop: A Seeding and a Sign," trans. Polly Barton, in *Kōbō-ten: sengo geijutsu o kirihiraku* [Experimental Workshop exhibit: Cutting through postwar art] (Tokyo: Yomiuri shinbunsha, bijutsukan renkaku kyōgikai, 2013), 313.

19. Kawasaki Kōji, *Nihon no denshi ongaku* [Japanese electronic music] (Tokyo: Aiikusha, 2006), 611.

20. Tezuka, "Jikken Kōbō (Experimental Workshop)," 140–41.
21. Tezuka, "Jikken Kōbō (Experimental Workshop)," 141.
22. Steve McCaffery, "From Phonic to Sonic: The Emergence of the Audio-Poem," in *Sound States: Innovative Poetics and Acoustical Technologies*, ed. Adalaide Morris (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 158.
23. N. Katherine Hayles, "Voices Out of Bodies, Bodies Out of Voices: Audiotape and the Production of Subjectivity," in *Sound States: Innovative Poetics and Acoustical Technologies*, ed. Adalaide Morris (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 76–77.
24. Sony Corporation, "Sony Global—Product & Technology Milestones-Home Audio," [www.sony.net/SonyInfo/CorporateInfo/History/sonyhistory-a.html](http://www.sony.net/SonyInfo/CorporateInfo/History/sonyhistory-a.html) (accessed May 2023).
25. Yuasa Jōji, Matsui Shigeru, et al., "Intabyū Yuasa Jōji," 55–56.s
26. Akiyama Kuniharu, "Jikken Kōbō ni yoru kakumei to ongaku no kakuchō" [Revolutions and expansions of music by Jikken Kōbō], in *Dai 11-kai omāju Takiguchi Shūzō—Jikken Kōbō to Takiguchi Shūzō* [The 11th Exhibition homage to Shuzo Takiguchi: Experimental Workshop] (Tokyo: Satani Gallery, 1991), 34.
27. Akiyama, "Jikken Kōbō ni yoru kakumei to ongaku no kakuchō," 34.
28. Akiyama, "Jikken Kōbō ni yoru kakumei to ongaku no kakuchō," 34. Also see Tōno Yoshiaki's article in the Sōgetsu Art Center's journal, "Dadaisuto Shuvittāsu no e to oto no tenrankai" [Picture and sound exhibition of the Dadaist Schwitters], *SAC Journal* 9 (December 1960).
29. Takiguchi Shūzō, "Tomodachi no kotoba" [Words for my friends], unpublished program for Experimental Workshop's 5th Exhibition, September 30, 1953, reprinted in *Dai 11-kai omāju Takiguchi Shūzō—Jikken Kōbō to Takiguchi Shūzō* (Tokyo: Satani Gallery, 1991), 20.
30. "'Torawareta onna' no jōen: Tēpu rekōdā ni yoru shi—Jikken Kōbō no atarashii kokoromi" [Performance of "Imprisoned woman": Poem through tape recorder—Jikken Kōbō's new experiment], *Yorozuchōhō*, September 29, 1953, evening edition, 4, reprinted in *Dokumento Jikken Kōbō* [Experimental Workshop documents] (Tokyo: Tokyo Publishing House, 2010), 50–51.
31. "'Torawareta onna' no jōen," 50–51.
32. Lowell Cross, "Electronic Music, 1948–1953," *Perspectives of New Music* 7, no. 1 (1968): 60.
33. Seth Kim-Cohen, *In the Blink of an Ear: Toward a Non-Cochlear Sonic Art* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), xxii.
34. In the English section of the 5th Exhibition's program, however, the title is rendered in French as *Prisonnière*, a possible reference to the fifth volume of Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu* of the same name. This work would certainly have been familiar to Akiyama, who specialized in French literature at Waseda University.
35. Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 35.
36. "'Ōto suraidō' to 'tēpu rekōdā no tame no shi' ni tsuite."
37. Tsuboi Hideto, "Sensō shi to sono rōdoku: 'Wangan' kara 'Shinjūwan' e" [Wartime poetry and poetry readings: From the Gulf War to Pearl Harbor], *Kanazawa bijutsu kōgei daigaku kiyō* 36 (1992): 78.
38. Michael Davidson, *Ghostlier Demarcations: Modern Poetry and the Material World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 197–98.

39. Davidson, *Ghostlier Demarcations*, 199–203.
40. Miryam Sas, *Experimental Arts in Postwar Japan: Moments of Encounter, Engagement, and Imagined Return* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2011), 73.
41. For just one important critique of this common narrative, see Yuriko Furuhashi's recent *Climatic Media: Transpacific Experiments in Atmospheric Control* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022).
42. Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill (London: Continuum, 2004), 12.
43. Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 13.
44. Kim-Cohen, *In the Blink of an Ear*, xxii.
45. Kim-Cohen, *In the Blink of an Ear*, xx.
46. Kim-Cohen, *In the Blink of an Ear*, xxi–xxii.
47. Kakinuma Toshie, “Kankaku no āto—Furukusasu no jissen kara” [Art of the senses—From the practices of Fluxus], in *Oto to mimi kara kangaeru: Rekishi, shintai, tekunoroji* [Reflecting on an ear for sound: History, embodiment, and technology], ed. Hosokawa Shūhei (Tokyo: ARTES, 2021), 507.
48. Christine Sun Kim, “The Enchanting Music of Sign Language,” filmed at the TED Fellows Retreat in 2015, TED Video, 15:08, [www.ted.com/talks/christine\\_sun\\_kim\\_the\\_enchanting\\_music\\_of\\_sign\\_language/transcript](http://www.ted.com/talks/christine_sun_kim_the_enchanting_music_of_sign_language/transcript).
49. Karen Frances Eng, “I Am a Deaf Artist Redefining ‘Sound,’” TED Fellows, February 26, 2015, <https://fellowsblog.ted.com/i-am-a-deaf-artist-redefining-sound-4437f20297a3>.
50. Michael Davidson, “Siting Sound: Redistributing the Senses in Christine Sun Kim,” *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* 15, no. 2 (2021): 224–25.
51. Luc Döbereiner, “How to Think Sound in Itself? Towards a Materialist Dialectic of Sound,” *Proceedings of the Electroacoustic Music Studies Network Conference* (2014): 1.
52. Döbereiner, “How to Think Sound in Itself?,” 5.
53. Döbereiner, “How to Think Sound in Itself?,” 5.
54. Higaki Tomonari, *Torawareta onna* [Imprisoned woman] (Kyoto: engine music, 2015), CD.

### 3. YOU FORBID ME TO WALK: YOKOTA HIROSHI'S DISABILITY POETICS

1. Hara Kazuo, dir., *Sayōnara CP* [Goodbye CP] (1972; Tokyo: Dimension, 2015), DVD.
2. This translation is based in part on the transcript of the film in the expanded edition of Yokozuka Kōichi's *Haha yo! Korosu-na* [Hey mom! Don't kill me] (Tokyo: Seikatsu shoin, 2008), 373–75.
3. Hara Kazuo, *Camera Obtrusa: The Action Documentaries of Hara Kazuo*, trans. Pat Noonan and Takuo Yasuda (Los Angeles: Kaya Press, 2009), 74. Originally published in Japan as *Fumikoeru kamera: Waga hōhō, akushon dokyumentari* (Tokyo: Film Art, 1987).
4. Yokota Hiroshi, “Saidan” [Altar], *Ayumi: Aoi shiba Kanagawa-ken kaihō* 10 (1970): 10.
5. Takasugi Shingo, “Machi o yurugashita ‘hitori aruki’—Dokyumento eiga ‘Sayonara CP’ ga kokuhatsu suru mono” [One man's walk that shook the city—The documentary film “Goodbye CP” is an accusatory thing], *Asahi jōnaru* (May 19, 1972): 31.
6. A. J. Withers, *Disability Politics and Theory* (Halifax & Winnipeg: Fernwood Publishing, 2012), 5.

7. Arai Yūki, *Shōgai to bungaku: "Shinonome" kara "Aoi shiba no kai" e* [Disability and literature: From "Shinonome" to "Aoi shiba no kai"] (Tokyo: Gendai shokan, 2011), 194.
8. Takasugi, "Machi o yurugashita 'hitori aruki,'" 31.
9. Christina Scheuer, "Bodily Compositions: The Disability Poetics of Karen Fiser and Laurie Clements Lambeth," *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* 5, no. 2 (2011): 156–57.
10. Scheuer, "Bodily Compositions," 157.
11. Scheuer, "Bodily Compositions," 162, 172.
12. Arai, *Shōgai to bungaku*, 165.
13. Arai, *Shōgai to bungaku*, 168.
14. Arai, *Shōgai to bungaku*, 168.
15. Osamu Nagase, "Aoi shiba no kai," Research Center for Ars Vivendi, Ritsumeikan University, 2008, [www.arsvi.com/o/ao1-e.htm](http://www.arsvi.com/o/ao1-e.htm).
16. Nagase, "Aoi shiba no kai."
17. Yokota Hiroshi, *Ayumi: Yokota Hiroshi shishū* [Walking: Yokota Hiroshi poetry collection] (Self-published, 1958), 40.
18. Reprinted in full in Arai, *Shōgai to bungaku*, 171–72. First published in *Katachi* 2 (1955): 17; then in *Ayumi: Yokota Hiroshi shishū* (1958); then in *Shinonome* 44 (1961): 9.
19. Arai, *Shōgai to bungaku*, 173.
20. Yokota Hiroshi, *Hanashibe: Yokota Hiroshi shishū* [Flower core: Yokota Hiroshi poetry collection] (Tokyo: Shinonome hakkōsho, 1969), 14–15.
21. Arai, *Shōgai to bungaku*, 28.
22. Arai, *Shōgai to bungaku*, 28. Hanada, a close friend of Yokota, also had cerebral palsy; unlike Yokota, he grew up in a rich household and received an excellent literary education before the war in the Tokyo Kōmei Metropolitan School for children with physical disabilities. He was a haiku poet and critic who published several books on the representation of disabled people in literature.
23. Arai, *Shōgai to bungaku*, 34–35.
24. Arai, *Shōgai to bungaku*, 27.
25. Yokota Hiroshi, "Karute" [Patient's chart], *Shinonome* 42 (1960): 47. Later reprinted in *Hanashibe*, 10–11.
26. For more on the concept of grim futures in relation to disability, see Alison Kafer's *Feminist, Queer, Crip* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013).
27. Eli Clare, "Creating Categories," in *Narrative Art and the Politics of Health*, ed. Neil Brooks and Sarah Blanchette (London: Anthem Press, 2021), 86.
28. Yokota Hiroshi, "Shinkaigyo" [Deep-sea fish], *Shinonome* 42 (1960): 48.
29. Yokota Hiroshi, *Zōho shinsōban—Shōgaisha-goroshi no shisō* [New expanded edition—The ideology of killing the disabled] (Tokyo: Gendai shokan, 2015) [Tokyo: Shinonome hakkōsho, 1974], 1. It appeared in 1969 in Yokota, *Hanashibe*.
30. See Masahiro Morioka's "Feminism, Disability, and Brain Death: Alternative Voices from Japanese Bioethics," *Journal of Philosophy of Life* 5, no. 1 (July 2015): 19–41.
31. Tanaka Mitsu, *Inochi no onnatachi e—Torimidashi ūman ribu ron* [To the women of life—A disorderly theory of women's liberation] (Tokyo: Tabata shoten, 1972), 207.
32. *Haha yo! Korosu-na* [Hey mom! Don't kill me], a 1975 book by Yokozuka Kōichi—a photographer as well as a writer, and the other main subject of *Goodbye CP*—was reprinted



as an expanded edition in 2007. It is the other major text that represents the conventional stance taken by Japan's disability movement at the time on these killings, and also on the disproportionate abortion of fetuses deemed to be disabled.

33. Yokozuka, *Haha yo! Korosu-na*, 20–21.
34. Rendered by me in an admittedly awkward translation to preserve the syllable count.
35. I use “syllables” here to refer to Japanese *on*, which are not quite syllables but a reasonable equivalent.
36. Jahan Ramazani, *Poetry and Its Others: News, Prayer, Song, and the Dialogue of Genres* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 63–64.
37. Ramazani, *Poetry and Its Others*, 66.
38. Yokota Hiroshi, “Atsui yoru no omoi (kojinteki-na shisaku toshite)” [Thoughts on a hot night (as a personal meditation)], *Ayumi* 18 (1972): 11. Reprinted in *Korobi-gusa: Nōsei mahi-sha no aru kyōdō seikatsu no shōsei to hōkai* (Tokyo: Jiritsusha, 1975), 248–50; and in *Umi no naru hi* (Tokyo: Shinonome hakkōsho, 1985), 58.
39. Arai, *Shōgai to bungaku*, 194.
40. See Niikuni Seiichi, *niikuni seiichi works 1952–1977* (Tokyo: Shichōsha, 2008). For resonant examples of similar work from Canada and the United Kingdom, see Lori Emerson's chapter, “Typewriter Concrete Poetry as Activist Media Poetics,” in *Reading Writing Interfaces: From the Digital to the Bookbound* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 87–127.
41. For more on the historical constructedness of the “normal” body, see Lennard J. Davis, *Enforcing Normalcy: Disability, Deafness, and the Body* (New York: Verso, 1995).
42. Hara, dir., *Sayōnara CP*.
43. Satō Shigechika, “Arawaredeta nyū shinema gundan—Hara Kazuo kantoku ‘Sayōnara CP’” [Hara Kazuo's “Goodbye CP”: A new cinema group has appeared], *Eiga hyōron* 31, no. 4 (1972): 52.
44. Hara, *Camera Obtrusa*, 74.
45. Hara, *Camera Obtrusa*, 74–75.
46. Hara, *Camera Obtrusa*, 92.
47. Takasugi, “Machi o yurugashita ‘hito aruki,’” 33.
48. Petra Kuppers, “Toward a Rhizomatic Model of Disability: Poetry, Performance, and Touch,” *Journal of Literary & Cultural Disability Studies* 3, no. 3 (2009): 238.

#### 4. AS A PIECE OF FLESH: FEMINIST POETIC STARDOM AND THE BODY

1. Itō Hiromi, Araki Nobuyoshi, and Kikuchi Nobuyoshi, *Teritori-ron 1* [On territory 1] (Tokyo: Shichōsha, 1987).
2. See Ueno Chizuko, “‘Onna no jidai’ to imēji no shihonshugi—Hitotsu no kēsu sutadi” [The “age of women” and image capitalism—A case study], in *Karuchuaru sutadizu to no taiwa* [A dialogue with cultural studies], ed. Hanada Tatsurō, Yoshimi Shun'ya, and Colin Sparks (Tokyo: Kōmeisha, 1999), 167–85.
3. This phrase was popularized around the same time by Helen Gurley Brown in *Having It All: Love, Success, Sex, Money, Even If You're Starting with Nothing* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982).

4. Kumiko Fujimura-Fanselow, "Introduction," in *Transforming Japan: How Feminism and Diversity Are Making a Difference*, ed. Kumiko Fujimura-Fanselow (New York: The Feminist Press at CUNY, 2011), xvii.

5. See the recent article by Lasse Lehtonen, "Japanese Women Singer-Songwriters of the 1970s: Female Agency, Musical Impact, and Social Change," *Popular Music* 40, no. 1 (2021): 114–38.

6. Joanne Quimby, "How to Write 'Women's Poetry' without Being a 'Woman Poet': Public Persona in Itō Hiromi's Early Poetry," *U.S.-Japan Women's Journal* 32 (2007): 17–18.

7. Shiraishi Kazuko, "80 nendai to josei-shi—Feminizumu undō to heikō shite" [The 1980s and women's poetry—Paralleling the feminist movement], *Gendaishi techō* 34, no. 9 (1991): 64.

8. For more on the debates leading to this shift in terminology, see Joan E. Ericson, *Be a Woman: Hayashi Fumiko and Modern Japanese Women's Literature* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), 29–33.

9. Indeed, for many amateur poets, performances at poetry open mics are the main or *only* way they share their work, and—particularly since the 1990s—several poetry scenes and practices in Japan and elsewhere (such as "poetry boxing," performance poetry, slam poetry, and poetic storytelling) are exclusively live.

10. Shiraishi, "80 nendai to josei-shi," 64–69.

11. Shiraishi, "80 nendai to josei-shi," 65–66.

12. Shiraishi, "80 nendai to josei-shi," 65.

13. Shiraishi, "80 nendai to josei-shi," 66.

14. Shiraishi, "80 nendai to josei-shi," 66–67.

15. This is thanks in large part to the efforts of Jeffrey Angles, who has translated multiple book-length works and collections of Itō's.

16. Jeffrey Angles, "Preface," in *Killing Kanoko: Selected Poems of Hiromi Itō*, trans. Jeffrey Angles (Notre Dame, IN: Action Books, 2009), x.

17. Joanne Quimby, "80-nendai no Itō Hiromi 'josei-shi' tai 'feminisuto-shi'—Onna noshintai/pafōmansu/ekurichūru feminine" [Itō Hiromi's 1980s "feminist poetry" against "women's poetry"—Women's bodies, performance, and *écriture féminine*], *Ritsumeikan gengo bunka kenkyū* 19, no. 3 (2008).

18. Quimby, "80-nendai no Itō Hiromi 'josei-shi,'" 123.

19. Quimby, "80-nendai no Itō Hiromi 'josei-shi,'" 123.

20. Quimby, "80-nendai no Itō Hiromi 'josei-shi,'" 123.

21. Itō and the feminist porn star and media personality Kuroki Kaoru published *Sei no kōzō—ureshii hentai tanoshii inran* [The structure of sex—Happy perversion, fun lechery] (Tokyo: Sakuhinsha, 1987) in 1987.

22. Itō Hiromi, *Yoi oppai warui oppai* [Good breasts, bad breasts] (Tokyo: Fuyukisha, 1985).

23. Itō Hiromi, *Onaka, hoppe, oshiri* [Belly, cheeks, bottom] (Tokyo: Fujin seikatsusha, 1987).

24. Suzuki Shirōyasu, dir., *Hiromi—Ke o nuku hanashi* [Hiromi—A hair-plucking story], 1981.

25. Itō Hiromi and Ishiuchi Miyako, *Te • ashi • niku • karada—Hiromi 1955* [Hands • feet • flesh • body—Hiromi 1955] (Tokyo: Chikuma shobō, 1995).

26. Itō Hiromi, *Teritorī-ron 2* [On territory 2] (Tokyo: Shichōsha, 1985), 95.
27. As Leith Morton notes, the next poem in *Teritorī-ron 2*, “Aa to tamagiru” [“A startled ‘ah!’”] is a “found poem”-esque assemblage of multiple preexisting texts that makes this tendency even clearer. According to Itō’s notes, these include “manuals on childbirth and Caesarean sections, books on seppuku, guides to the Lamaze method of childbirth, nineteenth-century novels, scholarly studies of eighteenth-century law, and so on.” Leith Morton, *Modernism in Practice: An Introduction to Postwar Japanese Poetry* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2004), 102.
28. Itō Hiromi, “Healing Kanoko’s Rash,” in *Killing Kanoko: Selected Poems of Hiromi Itō*, trans. Jeffrey Angles, 30–32. Original Japanese version published in Itō Hiromi, *Teritorī-ron 2* [On territory 2] (Tokyo: Shichōsha, 1985), 135, 140.
29. Amanda C. Seaman, *Writing Pregnancy in Low-Fertility Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2017), 109, 113.
30. Seaman, *Writing Pregnancy in Low-Fertility Japan*, 109, 111.
31. Itō, *Onaka hoppe oshiri*.
32. Seaman, *Writing Pregnancy in Low-Fertility Japan*, 111.
33. Itō Hiromi, *Aoume* [Unripe plum] (Tokyo: Shichōsha, 1982), 163.
34. Suzuki Shiroyasu, “Suzuki Shiroyasu sakuhin ‘Hiromi—Ke o nuku hanashi”” [Suzuki Shiroyasu’s work, “Hiromi—A hair-plucking story”], <https://web.archive.org/web/20000930014214/http://www.catnet.ne.jp/srys/films/hiromi/hiromi.html>.
35. Itō Hiromi, *Itō Hiromi shishū* [Itō Hiromi poetry collection] (Tokyo: Shichōsha, 1980), 72.
36. Quoted in Tsuboi Hideto, “Itō Hiromi ron (chū)—Teritorī-ron 1” [Itō Hiromi theory, pt. 2—On territory 1], *Nihon bungaku* 39, no. 2 (1990): 49. Quoted and translated by Leith Morton in *Modernism in Practice*, 107.
37. Lee Evans Friederich, “In the Voices of Men, Beasts, and Gods: Unmasking the Abject Persona in Postwar and Contemporary Japanese Women’s Poetry,” Ph.D. diss., Washington University in St. Louis, 2009, 72.
38. Itō, Araki, and Kikuchi, *Teritorī-ron 1*, n.p.
39. Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman, “Introduction: Emerging Models of Materiality in Feminist Theory,” in *Material Feminisms*, ed. Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 3–4.
40. Margrit Shildrick, *Leaky Bodies and Boundaries: Feminism, Postmodernism, and (Bio)ethics* (London: Routledge, 1997), 17.
41. Shildrick, *Leaky Bodies and Boundaries*, 217.
42. See the discussion of dismediation in the introduction of Mara Mills and Jonathan Sterne, “Dismediation: Three Proposals, Six Tactics,” in *Disability Media Studies*, ed. Elizabeth Ellcessor and William Kirkpatrick (New York: New York University Press, 2017).
43. Vicki Kirby, *Telling Flesh: The Substance of the Corporeal* (London: Routledge, 1997), 56.
44. Tomioka Taeko, “Women’s Language and the National Language,” trans. Joan E. Ericson and Yoshiko Nagaoka, in *Woman Critiqued: Translated Essays on Japanese Women’s Writing*, ed. Rebecca L. Copeland (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2006), 142. Originally published as “Onna no kotoba’ to ‘kuni no kotoba,’” in *Fujin kōron* 7 (1983): 470–79.

45. The commercial is viewable at Togawa Fan, “30s Togawa Jun CM 1982-nen TOTO washuretto oshiri datte aratte hoshii” [30-second Togawa Jun commercial, 1982 Toto washlet—I want to wash my bottom too], July 10, 2016, YouTube video, 0:30, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=xi-r2AqDasQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xi-r2AqDasQ).
46. Matsutani Sōichirō, *Gyaru to fushigi-chan ron: Onnanoko-tachi no sanjūnen sensō* [Gyaru and fushigi-chan theory: Thirty-year girls’ war] (Tokyo: Hara shobō, 2012), 92.
47. Togawa Jun, *Jueki susuru, watashi wa mushi no onna* [Slurping sap, I am a bug woman] (Tokyo: Keibunsha, 1984).
48. Togawa Jun, *Tamahime-sama*, GT Music 38XA-22, 1984, CD.
49. Togawa Jun, *Jueki susuru, watashi wa mushi no onna*, 198–99.
50. Togawa Jun, *Togawa Jun zenkashi kaisetsushū—Shippū dotō tokidoki hare* [Collected explanations of all of Togawa Jun’s lyrics—Sturm und Drang sometimes clearing] (Tokyo: ele-king books, 2016), 8.
51. Togawa, *Togawa Jun zenkashi kaisetsushū*, 8.
52. The performance can be viewed at pure jun., “jun togawa — (tamahime sama),” March 3, 2022, YouTube video, 4:10, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=ynTvHCl7afQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ynTvHCl7afQ).
53. Togawa, *Togawa Jun zenkashi kaisetsushū*, 22.
54. Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Theory: The Portable Rosi Braidotti* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 110–11.
55. Togawa, *Togawa Jun zenkashi kaisetsushū*, 14–16.
56. Togawa, *Togawa Jun zenkashi kaisetsushū*, 14.
57. Togawa, *Togawa Jun zenkashi kaisetsushū*, 22.
58. Togawa Jun, *Suki suki daisuki* [I like you, I like you, I love you], GT Music 32XA-49, 1985, CD.
59. The music video is viewable at oirahome, “Togawa Jun—Suki suki daisuki,” October 1, 2007, YouTube video, 4:36, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=VQkG-5Moqd8](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VQkG-5Moqd8).
60. Asa Roast, “Memory and Gender in the Music of Jun Togawa,” *GRoUND ZERo MoNGKoK*, December 23, 2010, <https://web.archive.org/web/20161206004919/http://groundzeromongkok.blogspot.ca/2010/12/memory-and-gender-in-music-of-jun.html>.
61. Togawa, *Togawa Jun zenkashi kaisetsushū*, 44. R. D. Laing was also the namesake of the titular main character in the influential techno-horror anime series *Serial Experiments Lain* from 1999.
62. Togawa, *Togawa Jun zenkashi kaisetsushū*, 45.
63. Togawa Jun, *Jun Togawa as Only a Lump of Meat* (Tokyo: BOOK-ING, 2005), n.p. The book is an expanded reprint of Togawa Jun, *Jun Togawa as a Piece of Flesh* (Tokyo: Keibunsha, 1988).
64. Togawa, *Jun Togawa as Only a Lump of Meat*, n.p.
65. *Togawa Jun no kimochi* [Togawa Jun’s feelings] (Tokyo: Gekkan takarajima henshūbun, 1984), 22.
66. *Togawa Jun no kimochi*, 116.
67. *Togawa Jun no kimochi*, 146.
68. Togawa, *Jueki susuru*, 204.
69. Togawa Jun, “EMOTIONAL RESCUE,” *Asahi jōnaru* 29, no. 17 (April 20, 1987): 86.

70. Togawa Jun, "Hareta hi ni, junjō ga mieru—Taikenteki shōjo-ron" [On a clear day, you can see true feelings—A theory of girls from self-experience], *Gendaishi La Mer* 8 (1985): 26.
71. Miyasako Chizuru, Togawa Jun, and Yoshihara Sachiko, "Chichi to ga to munage ga kowai" [Afraid of fathers, moths, and chest hair], *Gendaishi La Mer* 21 (1988): 98–113.
72. Togawa, *Togawa Jun zenkashi kaisetsushū*, 207.
73. Sara Ahmed, *Differences That Matter: Feminist Theory and Postmodernism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 122.
74. Ahmed, *Differences That Matter*, 123.

##### 5. WORLD WEBS: AUGMENTED REALITY POETRY AND JAPANESE SIGN LANGUAGE POETRY ONLINE

1. Inoue Toshio, "Okurete iru nihon no 'intānetto shidan'—intānetto de shi wa kawaru ka" [Japan's overdue "internet poetry establishment"—Is poetry changing on the internet?], *Shin nihon bungaku* 54, no. 6 (1999): 51–57.
2. Mara Mills and Jonathan Sterne, "Dismediation: Three Proposals, Six Tactics," in *Disability Media Studies*, ed. Elizabeth Ellcessor and William Kirkpatrick (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 366–67.
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