

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.¹ 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*).² 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.”³ 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.⁴ 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.⁵ 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.⁶ 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.⁷ *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*.⁸ 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.⁹ 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.¹⁰ 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.¹¹ 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.¹² 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.¹³ 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.”¹⁴

Itō is one of the most written-about contemporary poets in Japan, and one of the few to be extensively translated into English.¹⁵ 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.’”¹⁶ 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.¹⁷ “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.”¹⁸ This project, however, is against any unified idea of “women’s experience”; instead, it is about gender, and about “‘femininity’ within a societal framework.”¹⁹ 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.”²⁰

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?²¹ Or write two books of self-illustrated humorous essays on child rearing, in full explicit detail—one called *Good Breasts, Bad Breasts*,²² the other *Belly, Cheeks, Bottom*?²³ Or would star in an independent documentary film centered around her recounting a story about plucking hairs from her body?²⁴ 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”?²⁵ 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* (*Teritori-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.²⁶

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.²⁷ 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 shisshin 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*)²⁸

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."²⁹ 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."³⁰

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).³¹ 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, orality 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 Hiroimi'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 Hiroimi” in hiragana in the dialogue bubble versus the kanji Itō Hiroimi 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.”³² 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*.”³³ 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*].³⁴

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 lips³⁵

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 *Hiroimi—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."³⁶ 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 "I" 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.'"³⁷ 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).³⁸ 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.”³⁹ 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.”⁴⁰ 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.”⁴¹ 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.⁴²

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.⁴³ 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.”⁴⁴ 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.⁴⁵ 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.⁴⁶

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.⁴⁷ 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 phenomenon⁴⁸

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 hakkān 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 Hysterics” “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.⁴⁹ 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 Hysterics.” 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.⁵⁰ 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.⁵¹

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).⁵²

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."⁵³

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.”⁵⁴ 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."⁵⁵ 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.⁵⁶ 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."⁵⁷ 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 violence⁵⁸

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.⁵⁹ 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.”⁶⁰ Togawa notes that the title of the song came from another poem, by the Scottish psychiatrist and writer R. D. Laing.⁶¹ 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.”⁶² 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.)”⁶³

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?”⁶⁴

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."⁶⁵ 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."⁶⁶

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."⁶⁷ 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."⁶⁸ 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.”⁶⁹

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).”⁷⁰

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.⁷¹ 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!⁷²

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.⁷³ 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.”⁷⁴ 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.