Coda

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

FIGURE 23. Screenshot from Iino Emi's Japanese Sign Language poem "Dream" ("Yume") (shuwaemon, "Shuwa-shi: Yume" [Sign language poem: Dream], August 30, 2011, YouTube video, 1:26, www.youtu.be /BI7_c8yRUb4).

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

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

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

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