

# 5

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## Changing Topographies, New Feminisms, and Women Poets

Following second-wave feminism and the emergence of new communication technologies, American women's poetry diversified and proliferated during the 1990s. It included critical framings such as Rachel Blau DuPlessis's *The Pink Guitar: Writing As Feminist Practice* (1990); new magazines like *Chain* (with its first issue on gender and editing); new women-run presses like Kore Press, Tinfish, Perugia Press, a+bend Press, and Tender Buttons Press; and anthologies like *Moving Borders: Three Decades of Innovative Writing by Women* (1998), *Out of Everywhere: Linguistically Innovative Poetry by Women in North America and the UK* (1996), and *The New Fuck You: Adventures in Lesbian Reading* (1995). *Chain* and *Out of Everywhere* considered transnational constellations. There was a shift away from poetry movements and camps to more dispersed networks and affiliations, heralded by volumes like *Writing from the New Coast* (1993). A critique of the nation-state and colonialism would also intensify. The year 1999 would see the publication of *Through the Eye of the Deer: An Anthology of Native American Women Writers* and Haunani-Kay Trask's *Light in the Crevice Never Seen*, the first collection of poetry by an indigenous Hawai'iian to be published in the mainland. The latter appeared alongside Trask's critical volume on the Indigenous sovereignty movement, *From a Native Daughter: Colonialism and Sovereignty in Hawai'i* (1993). As Myung Mi Kim stated in "Anacrusis," the new millennium was set to begin with "A valence of first and further tongues. A fluctuating topography, a ringing of verve or nerve – transpiring" (n. pag.).

### Gurlesque and Third-Wave Feminism

Prefigured by experimentally perverse works like Lee Ann Brown's *Polyverse* (1999) and Dodie Bellamy's *Cunt-Ups* (2001) and correlating with third-wave feminism, Arielle Greenberg would coin the term "gurlesque" to identify a new trajectory in women's poetry. Unlike the "earnestness, sensitivity, or self-seriousness that marked many . . . poems stemming from second

wave feminism” (Greenberg, “Notes” 4), third-wave feminist writers “have the privilege to be more playful with and brash about their relationship to the markers of traditionally feminine identity, as well as sexuality” (Greenberg, “Feminist Poetics” 39). Sexual agency and pleasure are central elements of gurlisque poetics, with gender understood as social construction rather than essence. Citing Judith Butler, Greenberg notes that the girl as a subject position is particularly laden with “myth, fantasy, glamour, danger, fragility, mortality, immortality, sexuality and wholesomeness” that “comes to stand in for a wealth of ‘gender trouble’” (“Feminist Poetics” 39).

In its stress on artifice and performance, gurlisque poetry incorporates a sense of burlesque in a heightened, sometimes ironic, attention to the gendered body on display. It also considers the body through a grotesque lens as being “open, protruding, irregular, secreting, multiple and changing” (Russo 8). While gurlisque poetics has “fun with the feminine,” it can sometimes “be almost shockingly straightforward about the dark areas of sexuality” (Greenberg, “On the Gurlisque”). This is evident in Chelsey Minnis’s “Wench”: “It is rough to be a seafoam wench. Like cocksucker. Like kissing someone and then spitting into their mouth” (120). In “celebrating the same cultural trappings it seeks to critique” (Greenberg, “On the Gurlisque”), gurlisque poetry questions or reverses gendered power relations. Danielle Pafunda, for instance, writes, “When he was mine, I’d milk him” (128). Politically, gurlisque can appear ambivalent. After writing a poem entitled “The Enormous Cock,” Tina Brown Celona’s speaker in “Sunday Morning Cunt Poem” “started up again about my cunt.” Exploring the challenges in reappropriating traditionally derogatory terms, “Some said it was a vicious swipe at feminism. Others said it was a vicious feminist swipe” (277).

In invoking Butler’s concept of gender as contingent and performative, Greenberg suggests a capacity of gurlisque poetics to break taboos. Yet a number of poets associated with gurlisque explore the continuing power of social narratives through fantasy. Cathy Park Hong’s poetry often features women characters who struggle with subjugation and silencing. Invoking the casual freedom of white, teenage boys in the sitcom of the same title, “Happy Days” notes the desire to be “ensorcelling” (n. pag.). The poetic speaker, however, is “always a meter maid, never a mermaid” (n. pag.). Catherine Wagner reconceptualizes the sexualized female body as an alien-like reproductive space in “This is a fucking poem.” Extending Kafka’s metamorphosis, the girl-insect is potentially self-consuming as she is vulnerable to abuse by others.

While gurlisque reworked grrl-culture and girly kitsch, Morgan Myers was critical of nostalgia for a stylized object culture endangered by

twenty-first-century technology. A key critique of gurllesque was its heteronormativity. Although Lara Glenum promoted gurllesque as queering heterosexuality (n. pag.), Amy King argued that its anthology *Gurllesque: The New Grrly, Grotesque, Burlesque Poetics* (2010) failed to acknowledge origins in lesbian burlesque and to extend its scope to queer writers. Others also critiqued its selection of predominantly white and middle-class contributors. Working on an expanded edition, Greenberg admitted that the collection was limited and that “part of the idea of third wave feminism is . . . a more complex notion of gender, one which intersects more thoughtfully with queer, working-class, non-white and other identity politics” (“Some (of My) Problems with the Gurllesque”).

### Performing Resistance and Fourth-Wave Feminism

Much of gurllesque’s emphasis on the cultural fashioning of gender can also be found in hip-hop and performance poetry. As Angela Aguirre states of Chingona Fire, a Chicana feminist poetry collective: “It is as much about the lipstick as it is about fighting the patriarchy” (n. pag.). While still largely elided critically, hip-hop and performance poetics are widely circulated and have immense democratic potential and immediacy in an era of social media, smartphones, and YouTube. Whereas gurllesque focuses on the *artifice* of gender performance, hip-hop and performance poetics focus on *authenticity* and forms of truth-telling. Susan Somers-Willett discerns that the poet’s “speech, dress, gestures, voice, body, and so on all reflect in some ways on the poem at hand and these various aspects of embodiment convey nuances of cultural difference that the page cannot” (18). Maria Damon argues that such poetics require “close listening” for “some transmission/recognition of resonant difference . . . a gestalt that effects a ‘felt change of consciousness’ on the part of the listener” (330). Even though popular genres and modes “have often been positioned as counter to feminist politics and feminist subjects” (McBean 15), they are a primary vehicle of what has been termed fourth-wave feminism. According to Prudence Chamberlain, fourth-wave feminism emerged around the mid-2000s and is characterized by “online activism, rape culture, humour, and intersectionality and inclusion” (2).

Third- and fourth-wave feminism are not discrete and there are similarities in an attention to self-agency and the use of humor. Yet fourth-wave feminism is often more overtly political. In “What It’s Like to Be a Mixed Girl (For Those of You Who Aren’t),” Tara Betts writes: “it’s brothers blurting / damn I thought you was white / then asking for your phone number / it’s being painted with zebra stripes / with brushes that assume you’re confused” (33). Writing of a girl found in a drainage ditch, she states, “Brown skin / turned

ash and bone. / She could have been me” (Betts 47). With both foregrounding acts of violence on the female body of color, Betts and Patricia Smith would post mug shots of the alleged assailants of Megan Williams on the Harriet blog of Poetry Foundation with the statement: “This is where poetry comes from” (Reyes, “On Feminism” 341).

As with gurlisque poets, slam poets like Imani Cezanne rework aspects of feminine identity that second-wave feminism excoriated. Critiquing social pressures on women to make themselves small, she promotes high heels as a means to walk tall. Lily Myers also considers the “circular obsession” carried intergenerationally by women to make space for others in “Shrinking Women.” Slam poets like Yesika Salgado and Rachel Wiley critique social alignments of desirability with slimness in “How Not to Make Love to a Fat Girl” and “10 Honest Thoughts on Being Loved by a Skinny Boy” respectively. Performance poet and artist Petra Kuppers also considers how gender and ableist attitudes intersect in *PearlStitch* (2016), advocating bodily mutability: “Change gender / Change genus / Change somatic structure / Change your mind / just keep in motion” (99). In “trail mix,” hip-hop poet La Tasha N. Nevada Diggs ridicules right-wing movements to restrict bodily self-determination by giving zygotes the same rights as American citizens. Like other performance poets, Diggs shifts across colloquial registers, her work riffing off the sounds, rhythms, and rhymes of the inner urban diasporic neighborhood. Coming out of the #MeToo movement, Khadijah Queen’s *I’m So Fine: A List of Famous Men & What I Had On* (2017) critiques the constant surveillance of the male gaze, celebrity culture, and toxic masculinity. In her penultimate poem, Queen marks turning forty as “the accumulation of bliss & survival” (68). She only divulges her name in the postscript poem, declaring “My mother said I should keep some things to myself” (Queen 69).

### Reconceptualizing Belonging and the Public

While Jeffrey Gray and Ann Keniston suggest that the millennium has seen a resurgence of public poetry (1), what constitutes the “public” has been reconceptualized through feminist and queer theorizations of materiality and intimacy. As Heather Milne notes, twenty-first-century America is marked by continuing economic inequity, sexual violence, and conservative attempts “to remove the right to bodily self-determination” (2). Neoliberal regimes of power have reinforced ideologies of gender, heteronormativity, racism, and nationalism, with processes of imperialism, militarization, and globalization leading to those culturally marginalized even more vulnerable to the conditions of precarity.

Following Steve Evans's identification of survival as a major trope in the 1990s for American poetry, a sense of precarity would be heightened in the new millennium through man-made crises and natural disasters (90). The events of 9/11 signaled a new era of Terror and suspended agency. As Juliana Spahr writes in *This Connection of Everyone with Lungs* (2005), "While we want to believe that we all live in one bed / of the earth's atmosphere, our bed is just our bed and no one else's / and we can't figure out how to stop it from being that way" (30). In "First Writing Since," Palestinian-born poet Suheir Hammad declared amidst all the uncertainty:

But i know for sure who will pay  
in the world, it will be women, mostly coloured and poor. Women will  
have to bury children, and support themselves through grief. (n. pag.)

Nicole Cooley foregrounds breaches of trust and questions of responsibility in the wake of 9/11 but also Hurricane Katrina and the Gulf Coast Disaster in *Breach* (2010). In "Old Gulf Postcards," she remembers "driving to Gulfport with my mother, / beaches my daughter will never see . . . Between the gone and the not-recovered, no one / steps out of their house to wave" (Cooley 53). In this changed landscape, "Nothing could keep any girl safe from the levee's edge. / Nothing I write could make a clean river of light" (Cooley 71-72). Evelyn Reilly wonders whether "we are in a moment of amplification" regarding the ecological, such that in an "inverse of 'no poetry after Auschwitz,' we are in a moment of 'all poetry after Katrina' . . . or whatever it is that comes next" (n. pag.).

Resonating with the work of Cecilia Vicuña, poets like Jen Hofer have turned to site-specific poetry in critiquing the long-term cultural and environmental impact of colonial, military, and industrial activities. Using donated and foraged materials from Wendover, Utah to construct a paper quilt in "Uncovering," Hofer selected "The Road to California" quilt pattern as one developed during the Western Expansion of white people into indigenous and Mexican territories. Presenting a fragmented, multi-perspectival counter-history, the quilt became a way of "thinking about what a poem can be or do. About how persons relate to place, and about what we choose to remember" (n. pag.).

Kaia Sand's "She Had Her Own Reason for Participating" would be culled through the Portland Police surveillance files kept on activist groups, newspaper articles, and materials by the activists themselves. Focusing on sentences and phrases that began with "she," the resulting poem would be stamped on copper index plates as a means of reworking information and to bring to the surface what police investigators feared about women. In *Landscapes of Dissent: Guerilla Poetry and Public*

*Space* (2008), she and Jules Boykoff identify a wave of activist poets who generate locational conflict in reclaiming public spaces. Kristin Prevallet's *Shadow Evidence Intelligence* (2006) not only reproduces signs, posters, and business cards from public protests over the Iraq War but also questions the way authorities might read information during war. As she notes of an aerial surveillance photograph, "There are many ways to define proof" (Prevallet 23). Jena Osman's *Public Figures* (2012) juxtaposes homeland memorial statues with incoming texts about drone attacks in Iraq, raising questions about perspective and meaning-making. Joseph Harrington suggests that such work "is not about presenting documentation so much as it is about the process of documenting and the documenting of process" (77).

### Legacies of Colonial and Racial Violence: Writing As Resilience

As Arif Dirlik suggests, the local becomes a "site of both promise and predicament" (22). Globalization of the English language and the imperial reach of American culture saw the local either elided or commodified (a latter example is the Coca-Cola ad that had "America the Beautiful" sung by bilingual Americans in seven different languages). This would be countered by a rise in decolonizing poetics, with particular attention given to the discursive and material subjection of the female body of color and modes of resilience. Having earlier published *Eros and Power: The Promise of Feminist Theory* (1984), Haunani-Kay Trask would denounce feminism as "just another haole intrusion into a besieged Hawaiian world" ("Feminism" 909). Not only "too white," feminism tended to be "aggressively American": "Any exclusive focus on women neglected the historical oppression of all Hawaiians and the large force field of imperialism" ("Feminism" 909). Demonstrating the linguistic structures of power, Hawai'ian Filipino poet Kathy Dee Kaleolkealoha Kaloloahilani Banggo codeswitches between standard English and Hawai'ian Creole to describe being raped in "Fly, Da Mo'ō & Me": "Befo time, I wuz bright" but now "I stay stink. I stay ugly" (13). With the violation represented in Creole, Morris Young suggests that "[l]anguage becomes the means for creating knowledge and seeking social justice" (115).

Layli Long Soldier's *Whereas* (2017) engages with the Congressional Apology to Native Americans in 2009, an event that was largely unknown to Native Americans. While directing the poem to Barack Obama's delivery and the document's language, Long Soldier's repetition of the term "whereas" enacts the linguistic and lived effects of occupation. While another would say "*at least* there was an Apology," she draws attention to

its inadequacy as an occupied body on occupied land: “Whereas I have spent my life in unholding” (n. pag.). Long Soldier notes the challenges of being a dual citizen of the United States and the Oglala Sioux Tribe, framing the collection with the imperative: “I must work, I must eat, I must art, I must mother, I must friend, I must listen, I must observe, constantly I must live” (“The Freedom” n. pag.). Like Long Soldier, Cheryl Savageau mobilizes storytelling as a decolonizing mode. While presenting both women and land as under siege in *Mother/Land*, she de-privileges European point of contact narratives and celebrates a Native American understanding of the New England environment. In “America, I Sing You Back,” Allison Adelle Hedge Coke takes a maternal stance. She vows to “sing you home into yourself, and back to reason.” Her repetition of “My song” and a guiding “I” denote strong presence in a lullaby-like ritual of care after damage.

The focus on maternal legacies can also be found in the work of poets like Kimiko Hahn. In “Foreign Body,” Hahn explores intergenerational support in writing “on my other’s body, / I mean, my mother’s body.” It is, she declares, the “one body I write on” and “can lean against- / against not in resistance” (n. pag.). She, in turn, must make way as “my own daughter turns sovereign” (Hahn n. pag.). Recognizing this paradox between plenty and empty in *The Bounty* (1996), Myung Mi Kim navigates “the mental, emotive, and psychic space in which one’s family of origin crossed with whatever families we make and build otherwise” (Keller, “Interview” 342). In *Commons* (2002), she asks: “What is English now, in the face of mass global migration, ecological degradation, shifts and upheavals in identification of gender and labor? . . . What are the implications of writing at this moment, in precisely this ‘America?’” (110). Whereas *Commons* turned to “ideas of translation, translatability, transliteration, transcription,” her later work *Penury* (2009) questions the possibility of ever articulating authentic subjectivity. Fragmentation foregrounds forced loss and violence as transcription becomes increasingly problematic. Reduced, at certain points, to a series of slashes, the reader is left to “contemplate the generative power of the designation ‘illegible’ coming into speech” (*Commons* 110).

Tracie Morris notes that she “teases apart the meaning that is embedded with sound and separates that from literal meaning” (“Artist to Artist” n. pag.). Suffering is conveyed in her late 1990s sound poems like “The Mrs Gets Her Ass Kicked” and “A Little,” the voice breaking from song to stutter, slur, screech, or splutter. Resisting colonial legacies, stereotypes, and rhythms in “Chain Gang” and “Slave Sho to Video aka Black But Beautiful,” Morris slides from negating to questioning to affirming the black female body through phonemic repetition and improvisation. Invoking Jyoti Singh Pandey who was gang-raped and murdered on a Delhi bus in 2012, Bhanu

Kapil also explores the limits of representation in *Ban en Balieue* (2015). Writing of Ban, a young girl caught in a race riot, Kapil blurs Ban with Bhanu and raises questions around what is narratable and why certain bodies are abused. Dawn Lundy Martin considers how the black female body is repeatedly violated and reduced in both language and daily life in *Life in a Box Is a Pretty Life* (2014). She reflects on how racial and sexual boxes of identity overlap to frame and isolate: “almost everything we’ve ever desired is diminished when enclosed” (Martin 29). Demonstrating a limited agency, Martin’s speaker nevertheless declares resistance: “I refuse to sing to you” (68). In *Citizen: An American Lyric* (2014), Claudia Rankine sees identity manifesting “as if skin and bone were public places” (144), yet argues that the black female body “can’t hold / the content it is living” (143). While the media has focused on the loss of black male lives, she finds the continuing “invisibility of black women [...] astounding” (Cocozza n. pag.).

In “I Do,” Filipina-American poet Eileen Tabios lists the limited range of identities available for migrant women in the United States and how they reinforce an underclass: “Because I do know English, I have been variously called Miss Slanted Vagina, The Mail Order Bride, The One With The Shoe Fetish, The Squat Brunette Who Wears a Plaid Blazer Over a Polka-Dot Blouse, The Maid” (n. pag.). Countering the dominance of English poetic forms, Tabios reworks the Japanese haiku and haibun in inventing the hay(na)ku, a six-word tercet, and “haybun,” a hay(na)ku tercet of prose. Alternatively, Barbara Jane Reyes mixes English with Spanish and Tagalog in *Invocation to Daughters* (2017) to resist religious, capitalist, and patriarchal discourse. Noting how language has been used to consume, strip, and “control our bodies, redact consent from our tongues,” she impels, “Daughters, let us create a language so that we know ourselves, so that we may sing, and tell, and pray” (8). As her final poem declares, “I am not the polite little colored girl you are looking for. You did not fashion me in your image . . . I am not your ethnic spectacle. I am not your cultural poverty . . . I do not ask for your permission to speak . . . I am not your object lesson. I don’t need your absolution” (Reyes, *Invocation* 71).

### Post-Language Poetics and a New Lyric

The new millennium is perhaps best characterized by writing that is linguistically innovative and embodied. Known variously as post-language poetics, a new lyricism, or hybrid poetry, it seeks, as Cole Swensen suggests, “to renew the forms and expand the boundaries of poetry – thereby increasing the expressive potential of language itself – while also remaining committed to the emotional spectra of lived experience” (xxi). Of this more inclusive



poetics, she adds that, “While political issues may or may not be the ostensible subject of hybrid work, the political is always there” (xxi).

Introducing *American Women Poets in the 21st Century* (2002), Juliana Spahr discerns: “Lyric is not and never has been a simplistic genre, despite its seeming innocence.” While lyric has had a “troubled history of relation with women,” form was “no longer the clear marker of intention or meaning that it was thirty years ago” (10). Emerging out of the “Where Lyric Meets Language” conference, the volume gathered Language writers but also those with a history of critical exclusion from movements or groups. It also included those who worked between art and poetry like Barbara Guest and Mei-mei Berssenbrugge. Seeking to move “away from too easily separated and too easily declarative identities,” it foregrounded “how the social and the cultural keep intruding” (Spahr, “Introduction” 2–3).

Elizabeth Willis notes that the new lyric “is not self-expressive except to the extent that ideas of self or voice are never entirely absent from the tonal shadings of language” (228). Linked to this is the difficulty of naming psychic states. Nick Selby points out that poets like Lisa Jarnot question the ethical reach of lyric while deconstructing assumptions of nation (203). For Jarnot, lyric cannot be transcendent or autonomous. Her poem “The Bridge” explores the continuum of the history of war (from Greek to American Independence to contemporary) and how we might think about the continuum between the poet of such history and the poet of everyday intimacies, in particular what does or does not survive. Jarnot often deploys repetition, such as in “Right View,” which deconstructs a privileging of the human through the term’s adjectival excess: “human city,” “human cars,” “human confusion” (86). The poem speculates on the capacity of human as animal and the challenges of imagining what might be beyond the limits of the poem or environment impacted by the human: “The view that I have is of / the human animal that I am / in the human room” (Jarnot 86).

In *From Dame Quickly* (2009), Jennifer Scappettone takes the forked tongue and bodily excess (as “neither fish nor flesh”) of Shakespeare’s character to subvert commerce and perhaps signal a new revolutionary class. Others explore lyric’s capacity for contemporary intimacy. Harryette Mullen’s “Any Lit” riffs off the division between “blackness” and “humanity” but also the “you” and “I”: “You are a union beyond my meiosis / You are a unicycle beyond my migration” (6–7). Parodying Shakespeare’s sonnet 130 and the dark lady muse, Mullen writes playfully in “Dim Lady”: “If Liquid paper is white, her racks are institutional beige . . . And in some minty-fresh mouthwashes, there is more sweetness than in the garlic breeze my main squeeze wheezes” (20). Commodity fetishism is defused through colloquial improvisation, which draws attention to other processes of making meaning.

Coining her poem a “son-not” (Thaggert 46), Evie Shockley’s “my last modernist poem #4 (or re-re-birth of a nation)” critiques calls of a post-race Obama-led America in *the new black* (2011). Karen Volkman also brings a rhythmic and linguistic playfulness to the sonnet in *Nomina* (2008). Exploring refusal and nameless freedoms, she concludes in “Sonnet (Nothing was ever what it claimed to be),” “sheen that bleeds blue beauty we are taught / drowns and booms and vowels. I will not” (n. pag.). Laynie Browne extends the sonnet’s scope for intimacy to the everyday in *Daily Sonnets* (2007).

The reconceptualization of the lyric has gone hand in hand with a reconceptualization of elegy, or perhaps more accurately anti-elegy, as poets dismiss poetic consolation and attempt to articulate a present absence that may be only registered bodily. Each grieving over the loss of a son, Akilah Oliver crosses genres and the borderlands of memory in *A Toast in the House of Friends* (2009) while Mary Jo Bang explores forms of afterwardness in *Elegy* (2007). Maggie Nelson foregrounds the limits of representation in approaching both romantic loss and physical loss in *Bluets* (2009) while Lisa Samuels concludes with the word “live” (122) after navigating childhood discontinuity, absence, and lack of connection in *Anti-M* (2013).

### Digital Platforms and Networking

While the twenty-first-century continued to see the proliferation of micro-publishing focused on noncommercial material objects for select audiences, digital technologies brought paradigmatic shifts to the ways in how poetry circulated and who could write it. The Internet enables immediately downloadable versions while social media platforms like Instagram and Twitter have created new poetic forms and audiences. With 440,000 followers, Instagram poet Cleo Wade, who has been dubbed the “millennial Oprah” (Goodman), quotes Coretta Scott King that “Freedom is never really won / that / We must earn it / And win it / In / Every generation” in “Who We Are Right Now” (“Tribute”). Wade’s *Heart Talk: Poetic Wisdom for a Better Life* (2018) promotes female solidarity, self-empowerment, kindness, and well-being mantras in broad-stroke terms: “Our hearts are warm when we are able to show with generosity, patience, and compassion for the ones we love, but we must remember that it is impossible to be truly there for others without taking care of ourselves first” (96).

Within hours of being posted on a general-interest website *The Awl*, Patricia Lockwood’s “Rape Joke” attracted 10,000 Facebook likes and rapidly went viral. It would, according to *The Guardian*, “casually reawaken[...] a generation’s interest in poetry” (Groskop n. pag.). Lockwood takes a

tragi-comedic approach: “The rape joke is if you write a poem called Rape Joke, you’re asking for it to become the only thing people remember about you” (“Rape Joke” 301). Her “sexts” on Twitter revel in the absurd and internet slang: “I am FWB with Scrooge McDuck. He asks me to pretend to rob him. ‘IS IT A BEAGLE BOY,’ he gasps, as I break into his money bin” (“Sexts” n. pag.).

A burgeoning number of listservs, online journals, and blogs would host new writing and generate new reading networks. Listservs like Poet-Moms provided a support space who might have lessened access to communities. Wom-Po was a broad base for informal conversation around women’s poetry. As Lesley Wheeler notes, its egalitarian openness was imperfect but valuable (55). Pussipo, a listserv specifically for experimental women’s poetry, also enabled women, according to Danielle Pafunda, to “find the numbers to make an impact on the larger scene, celebrate each other’s successes, and cast off many of those patriarchal conventions which can promptly diffuse one’s participation in mixed-gender forums” (qtd. in Wagner, “Post-Marginal” n. pag.). Both Mendi Obadike and Evie Shockley commented on the listservs’ unspoken white references and frameworks (Wheeler 64; Wagner “Post-Marginal”). Wheeler accedes that while Wom-Po sought to be transnational, it tended to be American-centric. Alternatively, Annie Finch points out how online communities have helped raise awareness and solidarity around gender transnationally, citing the response to poet Nadia Anjuman’s murder in 2005. The Internet also increasingly houses digital libraries and archives. An example of the latter is the timeline of *Mezzo Cammin*, an online journal on formal poetry by women.

### Numbers Trouble

In 2007, Jennifer Ashton claimed that “on a numerical level the problem of underrepresentation [of women’s poetry] has been corrected” (213). In response, Juliana Spahr and Stephanie Young analyzed rates of publishing, reviewing, and academic tenure and concluded that there still existed a marked gender imbalance. This would be reinforced by VIDA: Women in Literary Arts, a feminist organization that began in 2009 by tabulating reviews of books by men and women. Spahr and Young cautioned against numerical parity: “our fear is that when we lean too heavily on the numbers, we end up arguing for our share of the American privilege pie and doing little else” (“Numbers Trouble” 100–101). They argued that feminist activism is required to change contemporary writing communities that often parallel a “larger cultural dismissal of feminism” (Spahr and Young, “Numbers

Trouble” 89). This dismissal extended from expressions that “feminism is irrelevant and outdated or just plain over or boring or pathetic or whiny” (Spahr and Young, “Numbers Trouble” 90) to moments of aggression. They would also note a sense of exhaustion that Jennifer Scappettone diagnoses as a result of bearing the persistent weight of social inequities. She contends that younger experimentalists use different tactics “from those of the eighties or the nineties” (“Bachelorettes” 180). These are emblemized in Spahr and Young’s own “Foulipo,” which deploys the female body strategically through enacting simultaneously generative and restrictive processes. Eliding the “r” (are) foregrounds both absence and presence, while linguistically announcing “the messy body” in the context of patriarchal dominance: “one that still lets us deal with the I AM HEE . . . ” (Spahr and Young, “Foulipo” 42).

Spahr and Young staged a call-out to poets around the world through the “Tell US Poets” project, collecting responses in *A Megaphone: Some Enactments, Some Numbers, and Some Essays about the Continued Usefulness of Crotchless-pants-and-a-machine-gun Feminism* (2011). They included Reyes’s critique of their call-out as a command from a site of privilege and their assumption that ‘other’ communities deemphasize feminism due to an “inherent or essential misogyny” (“On Feminism” 336).

Beginning with the Women of Color Count in 2014 and extending their intersectional count the following year, VIDA would track disparities such as discovering that 73 percent of women who published in *Poetry* in 2014 were white. One strategy of countering gender imbalance in reception was feminist scholarship that included important volumes by Linda Kinnahan, Elisabeth Frost, Lynn Keller, Nicky Marsh, Deborah Mix, and Heather Milne. Rachel Blau DuPlessis extended a feminist focus to critiquing poetic navigations of masculinity in *Purple Passages: Pound, Eliot, Zukofsky, Olson, Creeley, and the Ends of Patriarchal Poetry* (2012). *Nests and Strangers: On Asian American Women Poets* (2015) celebrated the heterogeneity of Asian American women’s poetry. *Women Poets on Mentorship: Efforts and Affections* (2008) collected responses from writers who had grown up with second-wave feminism and were able to benefit from the influence of a previous generation of women poets.

The new millennium would see continuing growth in feminist and women-run journals and presses. There has also been a proliferation of women’s poetry anthologies, including sequels (*Eleven More American Women Poets in the Twenty-First-Century* [2012] and *Out of Everywhere 2: Linguistically Innovative Poetry by Women in North America and the United Kingdom* [2015]) and anthologies with a renewed sense of activism and urgency like

*Women of Resistance: Poems for a New Feminism* (2018) and *Letters to the Future: Black Women/Radical Writing* (2018).

### Conceptual Writing

An anthology that is transnational in scope, *I'll Drown My Book: Conceptual Writing by Women* (2012), would be partly motivated, according to one of its editors Laynie Browne, by a potential underrepresentation of women ("Conceptual" 14). While another of its editors, Caroline Bergvall, notes the "initial propensity for exclusionary models" (20), she views conceptual writing as "a way out of a societal status quo that must silence or symptomatize the female, minoritarian or differential writer" (18). Bergvall adds that "conceptual methods paired with psychoanalytic and specifically feminine investigations have provided an ideal combination to seek out the somatic, cognitive and symbolic bases for language and gender development" (20).

In "Conceptualism is Feminism," Vanessa Place argues that "woman only exists contextually – one can only be woman relative to man" (8) yet "[c]onceptualism, like feminism, asks one equally to consider the '='" (9). Characterizing Place as a "contemporary Echo," Naomi Toth distinguishes Place from Echo in the "level of choice in what she hears." These choices are deliberately controversial in order to create "unease and discomfort among audiences" (n. pag.). An example is Place's recital of rape jokes in "If I Wanted Your Opinion, I'd Remove the Duct Tape" (collected in "Rape Jokes"). The use of her female body and voice mediates distance from the bodies they channel as the vast majority of sexual crimes are committed by men. Place's redirection deploys what Bergvall identifies as an Irigarayan tactic of female mimicry, creating friction rather than equation (18). Jeff Dolven argues that Place's performance stages "the urgency of a consent that is public and inclusive" (276) while Place herself calls it "a response to an unbearable call" ("Rape Jokes" 260).<sup>1</sup>

### Conclusion

As evident in this chapter, much poetry of the twenty-first-century is marked by a poetics of refusal and resistance. Anne Boyer notes that, "Refusal which is only sometimes a kind of poetry, does not have to be limited to poetry, and turning the world upside down, which is often a kind of poetry, doesn't have to be limited to words" (n. pag.). In *Hardly War* (2016), Don Mee Choi matches five repeated lines in Korean with conclusion of five repeated lines in English: "I refuse to translate." While speaking of "disobeying history,

severing its ties to power,” she also attempts to “string together the faintly remembered, faintly imagined, faintly discarded” (Choi 4). Michael Davidson notes that, “Critical negativity is not a simple reverse of humanist categories of self and identity into their opposites but an attempt to make new art out of rupture and refusal” (604). It is worth dwelling on his emphasis on remaking and movement. In *Memory Cards: Simone Weil Series* (2017), Susan M. Schultz cautions against a no that “stays still-in-movement like snapchat” (90). She suggests that “Kindness, like trauma, repeats itself. But it needs first to pierce the skin” (Schultz 90). This register of a poetics of care and resilience requires what Myung Mi Kim termed “verve and nerve,” force and embodied impact. Against the backdrop of feminist waves, new technologies, and increasing precarity, twenty-first-century poetry by women demonstrates a multiplicity of perspectives, connection and loss, and continuing revolutions across the borders of gender and genre.

### Notes

1. For a discussion of the controversy surrounding another work of Place’s, in which she tweeted selections from *Gone with the Wind*, see Chapter 9 by Sueyeun Juliette Lee in this collection.

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