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Poetry is Not a Luxury: Re-inventing Poetic Genre through Feminist Revision

Marzia D'Amico

Abstract • This article explores the revolutionary role of women's authorship in re-defining poetry through feminist revisionism and experimental forms such as verbivocovisual poetry. Traditionally, the poetic canon has been shaped by patriarchal structures, with the poet cast in a 'quasi-priestly role' (Gilbert, Gubar, 1979). Women's reclamation of poetic authority thus constitutes an act of resistance. By embracing unconventional forms – collage, visual poetry, and conceptual works – they simultaneously challenge genre constraints and assert their creative agency. Contemporary voices, including Marjorie Perloff and Susan Stanford Friedman, highlight how these redefinitions destabilise traditional hierarchies of authorship and genre. Italian verbivocovisual poets such as Lucia Marcucci, Ketty La Rocca, Giulia Niccolai, Mirella Bentivoglio, and Tomaso Binga have reshaped poetry through multimedia experimentation. By integrating linguistic, visual, and performative elements, they dismantle the exclusivity of the lyric tradition, transforming poetry into a multisensory and politically charged medium. Their works challenge rigid separations between word and image, poetry and visual art, written text and embodied expression, undermining the dominance of a singular, monologic voice. Through appropriation, fragmentation, and conceptual play (including references to mass media and advertising) they expose and resist patriarchal structures embedded in poetic and social discourse. Recognising these experimental works as poetry reconfigures the genre itself, contesting canonical elitism and affirming the plurality of women's experiences. As Audre Lorde asserted, "poetry is not a luxury"; it is a necessity for survival and transformation, one that women actively reclaim and redefine.

Keywords • Poetry; Revision; Experimentalism; Gender Theory; Genre Theory

Abstract • Questo articolo esplora il ruolo rivoluzionario delle autrici donne nella ridefinizione della poesia attraverso il revisionismo femminista e le forme sperimentali come la poesia verbivocovisuale. Tradizionalmente, il canone poetico è stato plasmato da strutture patriarcali, con il poeta che ricopriva un "ruolo quasi sacerdotale" (Gilbert, Gubar, 1979). La rivendicazione dell'autorialità poetica da parte delle donne

costituisce quindi un atto di resistenza. Abbracciando forme non convenzionali – collage, poesia visiva e opere concettuali – esse sfidano contemporaneamente i vincoli di genere e affermano la loro capacità creativa. Voci contemporanee, tra cui Marjorie Perloff e Susan Stanford Friedman, sottolineano come queste ridefinizioni destabilizzino le gerarchie tradizionali della scrittura e del genere. Poetesse verbivocovisuali italiane come Lucia Marcucci, Ketty La Rocca, Giulia Niccolai, Mirella Bentivoglio e Tomaso Binga hanno ridefinito la poesia attraverso la sperimentazione multimediale. Integrando elementi linguistici, visivi e performativi, smantellano l'esclusività della tradizione lirica, trasformando la poesia in un mezzo multisensoriale e politicamente carico. Le loro opere sfidano le rigide separazioni tra parola e immagine, poesia e arte visiva, testo scritto ed espressione incarnata, minando il predominio di una voce singolare e monologica. Attraverso l'appropriazione, la frammentazione e il gioco concettuale (compresi i riferimenti ai mass media e alla pubblicità), esse smascherano e resistono alle strutture patriarcali radicate nel discorso poetico e sociale. Riconoscere queste opere sperimentali come poesia riconfigura il genere stesso, contestando l'elitarismo canonico e affermando la pluralità delle esperienze femminili. Come ha affermato Audre Lorde, "la poesia non è un lusso"; è una necessità per la sopravvivenza e la trasformazione, che le donne rivendicano e ridefiniscono attivamente.

Parole chiave • Poesia; Revisione; Sperimentalismo; Teoria di genere; Teoria dei generi

Poetry is Not a Luxury: Re-inventing Poetic Genre through Feminist Revision

Marzia D'Amico¹

I. The Validity and Controversial Existence of Literary Genres

The concept of literary genre has long been central to the study and classification of literature. However, its relevance in contemporary academic discussions, particularly in the field of comparative studies, is increasingly debated. As the boundaries between genres blur in the wake of postmodernism, globalization, and the rise of interdisciplinary methodologies, the literary genre as a fixed category faces critical scrutiny. Aristotle's foundational taxonomy in *Poetics* established genres as naturalized forms of expression, each with its inherent rules and characteristics. For Aristotle, genres like tragedy and epic served specific cultural and aesthetic functions, delineated by form and content. This prescriptive approach dominated Western literary theory for centuries. However, as Tzvetan Todorov later argued in *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (1970), genre is not a static entity but a dynamic and historically contingent phenomenon; this view underscores the mutable nature of genres, aligning with structuralist and post-structuralist critiques of essentialism. Postmodernist theorists such as Linda Hutcheon in *A Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988) challenged traditional genre boundaries by emphasizing parody, pastiche, and intertextuality: the blending of genres in contemporary works, from hybrid texts (e.g. Maggie Nelson) to the autofictional narratives of writers (e.g. Annie Ernaux), destabilizes classical genre categories. Hutcheon suggests that postmodernism questions the epistemological and ideological assumptions underlying traditional genre hierarchies, reflecting a broader scepticism toward rigid taxonomies in an era of fluid identities and narratives.

Globalization further complicates genre classification, as texts from non-Western traditions resist or subvert Eurocentric genre norms. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, in *Decolonising the Mind* (1986), argues for a reevaluation of literary forms rooted in indigenous traditions, highlighting how colonial frameworks imposed artificial boundaries on non-Western literatures. Comparative studies, in this context, must interrogate how genre perpetuates hegemonic discourses while simultaneously serving as a tool for cultural expression and resistance. In queer and decolonial frameworks, genre becomes a site of subversion and reimagining. José Esteban Muñoz, in *Cruising Utopia* (2009), critiques the normative temporalities of traditional genres, advocating for "queer utopian" modes that transcend linear narratives and genre constraints. Similarly, Gloria Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera* (1987) exemplifies a genre-defying text that merges poetry, autobiography, and critical theory, embodying the liminal spaces of her Chicana identity. From a decolonial perspective, Walter D. Mignolo's *The Darker Side of Western Modernity* (2011) underscores the role of genre in maintaining epistemic hierarchies. He posits that decolonial thinkers must "de-link" from Western paradigms, including rigid genre classifications, to embrace pluriver-sality and alternative knowledge systems.

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Despite these critiques, genre persists as a heuristic tool in academic and pedagogical contexts. As David Duff notes in *Modern Genre Theory* (2000) and as expanded by John Frow and John Drakakis (*Genre*, 2nd ed., 2015), genre provides a framework for the production and reception of texts, shaping both creative practice and critical interpretation. While its categories may be provisional or porous, genre still facilitates meaningful dialogues across cultures, periods, and disciplines. Evidently then, in the field of comparative studies, the validity of genre lies not in its fixity but in its adaptability, continuously moving toward a reconceptualization of the same. Despite ongoing efforts towards hybridity and descriptivism, prescriptive and Eurocentric frameworks continue to marginalise authorial experiences that do not conform to established codifications. While literary genres have undergone significant expansion and redefinition, feminist, queer, and decolonial perspectives and practices still struggle to gain recognition within the (often unwitting) regulatory structures of mainstream literature. It is therefore crucial to acknowledge that defying genre is not merely an aesthetic choice in feminist writing but a political act. By resisting the constraints of traditional literary forms, feminist revisionism exposes and dismantles the patriarchal hierarchies embedded within genre, creating new discursive spaces in which alternative narratives and epistemologies can emerge. Through this disruption, genre itself becomes a site of feminist resistance, reinvention, and radical possibility.

2. Poetry as a Genre: A Western Overview

The term “poetry” has been a site of both veneration and contention within literary studies, its application evolving from classical traditions to avant-garde experiments that stretch and sometimes dissolve its boundaries. In comparative literary studies, poetry epitomizes the fluidity of genre, oscillating between a historically rooted form and a dynamic space for innovation and conceptual exploration. Aristotle’s *Poetics* provided an early framework for understanding poetry as a mimesis of human action, distinguished by meter and elevated language. For Aristotle, poetry, including epic and lyric, served specific cultural and ethical purposes, offering catharsis and moral instruction. These principles shaped the Western conception of poetry as a distinct and hierarchical genre.

The Romantic period marked a pivotal shift in the conceptualization of poetry, with theorists such as William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge advocating for its democratization. Wordsworth, in his preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), famously defined poetry as “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings”, emphasizing individual emotion over rigid formal constraints, a redefinition resonating with Romantic ideals of creativity and individualism. At the same time, German philosopher Friedrich Schlegel’s writings on Romantic irony and genre theory (*Fragments*, 1800-1801) highlighted poetry’s self-reflective and protean nature. For Schlegel, poetry could transcend its formal limits, embodying a universal creative force. This philosophical turn reinforced poetry’s conceptual flexibility, paving the way for its transformation in modernist and postmodernist contexts.

Modernist poets such as T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and Marianne Moore revolutionized the genre by rejecting traditional meters and embracing fragmentation, intertextuality, and experimentation. In *Tradition and the Individual Talent* (1919), Eliot argued that poetry must engage with the literary past while innovating its forms to reflect contemporary realities. Similarly, Pound’s *Cantos* (1925) epitomized the modernist ethos of eclecticism, blending historical references with lyrical abstraction. This period also saw a growing interest in poetry as a conceptual practice. The emergence of free verse, popularized by Walt Whitman’s *Leaves of Grass* (1855), challenged the primacy of meter and rhyme, emphasizing the organic rhythms of thought and speech. Whitman’s radical redefinition of poetic

form inspired subsequent generations to explore new possibilities for poetic expression. In the 20th and 21st centuries, the avant-garde pushed the boundaries of poetry to its conceptual limits. Movements such as Dada, Surrealism, and concrete poetry questioned the materiality and function of poetic language. For example, Tristan Tzara's Dadaist poems and Stéphane Mallarmé's *Un Coup de Dés Jamais N'Abolira le Hasard* (1897) dismantled linear structures, prioritizing visual and typographical experimentation.

Contemporary theorists such as Marjorie Perloff and Kenneth Goldsmith have further questioned the boundaries of poetry. For example, Goldsmith's *Uncreative Writing: Managing Language in the Digital Age* (2011) champions "conceptual poetry", where the act of appropriation and curation replaces traditional notions of authorship. For Goldsmith, poetry transcends its linguistic and formal constraints, becoming a critical tool for engaging with digital and cultural environments. Comparative studies problematize the application of "poetry" as a stable genre by highlighting its cultural, temporal, and linguistic variability. As Susan Bassnett notes in *Comparative Literature: A Critical Introduction* (1993), genres are culturally and historically specific constructs, and poetry, in particular, defies universal categorization. This perspective challenges the Eurocentric definitions of poetry, urging scholars to engage with diverse traditions, from Japanese haiku to African oral epics, as equally valid poetic expressions.

3. The Death of the (Male) Author: Feminist Authorship reinventing Genre

Kenneth Goldsmith's *Uncreative Writing* (2011) articulates a provocative challenge to traditional poetic values. Goldsmith argues that in an era inundated with information, the act of creating original content is less significant than the curation, appropriation, and reframing of existing texts. For Goldsmith, poetry need not be a product of spontaneous inspiration or personal expression but can instead emerge from the deliberate repurposing of language found in the world. Goldsmith's own works exemplify this ethos. In *Day* (2003), he transcribed every word of a single day's New York Times, transforming the mundane and journalistic into a poetic artifact. Similarly, *Traffic* (2007) consists of transcriptions of traffic reports from a radio broadcast. These projects subvert traditional expectations of poetry by elevating seemingly banal and impersonal material into art through the act of selection and presentation. In Goldsmith's framework, the role of the poet shifts from creator to editor or archivist, reflecting broader cultural trends in the digital age, where information is abundant, and remix culture thrives. This approach aligns with Roland Barthes's concept of the "death of the author" (*Image-Music-Text*, 1977), which emphasizes the reader's active role in generating meaning from a text rather than relying on authorial intention. It must be noted, however, that the debate on the "death of the author", advanced experimentally by Goldsmith and primarily promoted through Barthes and Foucault, fails to take into account – except within feminist criticism – the non-authorial position historically imposed on the female subject.

In 1967, Barthes famously declared the "death of the author". In his essay, he contended that in "primitive societies", the significance of the discourse took precedence over the author, who was perceived as a kind of shaman, mediator, or spokesperson (Barthes, 1977). In 1969, just two years later, Michel Foucault penned his essay "What is an Author?", which is commonly interpreted as a response to Barthes' earlier work. Foucault continues along a similar line of thought and argues that the author's figure has undergone a process of sublimation, being transformed into another component of the discourse. He contends that the "author-function" is intricately linked to the legal and institutional frameworks that define, regulate, and shape the realm of discourses (1996). Towards the conclusion of his

essay, Foucault poses a series of questions, some of which are highly relevant to this subject of inquiry; the final one serving this article perfectly: “What matter who’s speaking?”. For Rosi Braidotti, it surely does, from a socio-cultural and political thinking perspective:

Predichino pure i sommi sacerdoti del postmodernismo la decostruzione e frammentazione del soggetto, il fluire di tutte le identità basate su premesse fallologocentriche [...] La verità è che non si può decostruire una soggettività che non è mai stata concessa a pieno (Braidotti, 2002, p. 136).

How, then, can an authorial subjectivity die or be erased when it has never achieved full recognition of its own authorship? Women’s authorship in the poetic genre holds profound relevance, as it not only enriches the literary canon but also challenges historically entrenched systems of exclusion and marginalization. Through poetry, women have expressed their unique experiences, subverted traditional narratives, and reshaped the boundaries of what poetry can encompass. The significance of women’s poetic voices lies in their chance to articulate the personal as political, offer diverse perspectives, and push the genre into new territories. For centuries, women’s voices in literature, particularly poetry, were stifled by patriarchal norms that relegated them to domestic or ancillary roles. The exclusion of women from education and literary circles led to their erasure from the canon, a reality Virginia Woolf famously highlighted in *A Room of One’s Own* (1929). Woolf argued that systemic barriers deprived women of the resources needed to create art, positing that a gifted female poet, like the imagined “Judith Shakespeare”, would have been denied the opportunity to fulfil her potential. Women’s authorship in poetry, then, represents a reclamation of space and agency. By writing, women assert their presence and challenge the historical silencing of their experiences.

The work of poets like Emily Dickinson, Christina Rossetti, and Elizabeth Barrett Browning broke through these barriers, setting the stage for subsequent generations to find their voices in a literary world that often sought to exclude them. Poetry written by women often intertwines the personal with the political, reflecting the feminist maxim that “the personal is political”. This blending of the singular experience and the collective is exemplified in the work of Adrienne Rich, whose poems confront issues of gender, sexuality, and power dynamics. In her groundbreaking collection *Diving into the Wreck* (1973), Rich explores themes of feminist awakening and systemic inequality, demonstrating how personal narratives can illuminate broader societal structures. Similarly, Audre Lorde’s poetry, including works like *The Black Unicorn* (1978), bridges the personal and political, drawing on her experiences as a Black, queer woman to address issues of identity, racism, and sexism. Lorde’s declaration that “poetry is not a luxury” underscores the urgency of women’s authorship in poetry, framing it as a vital tool for survival and resistance.

Women’s poetry is essential for observing genre not as a taxonomy but rather a living ongoing experiment, and it shines for its capacity to reflect diverse perspectives, particularly those shaped by intersecting identities. Intersectional feminism, a concept articulated by Kimberlé Crenshaw, emphasizes how systems of oppression overlap and interact. Women poets from marginalized communities have used poetry to address the complexity of these experiences, offering insights that enrich the genre and expand its horizons. As per the given example of Gloria Anzaldúa, Warsan Shire, a Somali-British poet, uses her work to articulate the trauma of displacement and the resilience of diasporic communities, as seen in her collection *Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth* (2011). These voices challenge monolithic representations of womanhood and demonstrate the genre’s capacity to embrace multifaceted identities. Women poets have also pushed the boundaries of poetic

form and content, challenging traditional conventions and introducing innovative approaches. Emily Dickinson's unconventional punctuation and syntax, H.D. (Hilda Doolittle)'s imagist precision, and Anne Carson's hybrid texts are just a few examples of how women have expanded the possibilities of the poetic genre. Meanwhile, contemporary poets continue this tradition of experimentation: Claudia Rankine's *Citizen: An American Lyric* (2014) blends poetry, essay, and visual art to address issues of race and identity, while Rupi Kaur's Instagram poetry has redefined the accessibility and reach of the genre.

Susan Stanford Friedman, a prominent feminist scholar, has extensively explored the intersection of gender, authorship, and literary genres, emphasizing the importance of revising traditional frameworks to account for women's contributions and perspectives. In her influential works, such as *Mappings: Feminism and the Cultural Geographies of Encounter* (1998) and *Planetary Modernisms: Provocations on Modernity Across Time* (2015), Friedman argues for the necessity of rethinking genre classifications and literary history to include and celebrate female authorship. Friedman critiques the Western traditional literary canon for its historical marginalization of women's voices and calls for a more inclusive understanding of literary production. She argues that the exclusion of women from canonical genres is not a reflection of their lack of contribution but rather the result of systemic patriarchal structures that have devalued or ignored their work.

For Friedman, revising the canon involves not only recovering the works of women writers but also reinterpreting literary genres in ways that account for the gendered dynamics of their creation and reception. She emphasizes that genre classifications have often been constructed around male-dominated forms, sidelining those that reflect women's experiences or innovative approaches. Friedman's work highlights the fluid and dynamic nature of literary genres, which she sees as historically contingent and culturally constructed. She critiques rigid definitions of genre that exclude experimental or hybrid works, many of which have been pioneered by women writers. For example, autobiographical and confessional modes of poetry, often associated with female authors, challenge the boundaries between personal and public discourse, pushing the limits of traditional lyric and narrative forms.

Friedman's approach aligns with feminist efforts to redefine genre as a more inclusive and evolving concept. She draws attention to how women writers, by working within and against conventional genres, have expanded their possibilities and subverted their limitations. In *Planetary Modernisms*, Friedman explores how women authors have engaged with and contributed to modernist genres, often through innovative and intersectional approaches. She argues that women's literary production has been central to modernist experimentation but has been overshadowed by dominant male figures in the field. By focusing on cross-cultural and transnational dimensions of modernism, Friedman challenges Eurocentric and androcentric narratives, advocating for a more diverse understanding of genre development. Building on Adrienne Rich's concept of "re-vision," Friedman underscores the importance of rereading and reinterpreting genres from a feminist perspective. She argues that such an approach allows us to uncover how women authors have resisted and reshaped genre conventions to reflect their own experiences and perspectives. For instance, women poets like H.D. and Gertrude Stein redefined the boundaries of imagism and experimental prose, demonstrating how gendered experiences influence and enrich genre innovation.

Friedman's scholarship also explores the role of narrative genres, such as epic and autobiography, in feminist literary criticism. She argues that these genres, traditionally dominated by male authors, have been reinterpreted and repurposed by women to challenge

patriarchal structures. For example, the feminist reclamation of the epic genre often involves re-centring women's experiences, the creation of a subjectivity rather than a collectivity (as exemplary action, the formation of a heroine), and the formal hybridisation of genres as practical tool for revolutionary attempts at subverting the concept of epic genre itself.²

Susan Stanford Friedman's scholarship emphasizes the necessity of revising genre studies to foreground women's authorship and challenge exclusionary literary frameworks. By advocating for a fluid and inclusive understanding of genre, Friedman highlights the transformative power of women's writing in reshaping literary traditions. Her work underscores the vital role of feminist criticism in ensuring that literary history reflects the diversity of voices and experiences that have shaped it.

4. Experimentalism and Concrete Poetry

Marjorie Perloff, one of the most prominent voices in contemporary literary criticism, has consistently championed experimental poetry, particularly in its multimedia and interdisciplinary manifestations. For Perloff, the avant-garde is not merely a historical movement confined to early twentieth-century modernism; it is a dynamic, ongoing practice that challenges conventional notions of authorship, form, and the boundaries of literary genres. Her critical work explores how experimental poetry interrogates the relationship between text, context, and technology, pushing poetry into new realms of creativity and cultural relevance.

In her book *Radical Artifice: Writing Poetry in the Age of Media* (1991), Perloff examines how technological and cultural shifts have altered the ways in which poetry is produced and consumed. She argues that the rise of mass media has transformed poetic language, necessitating new forms of expression that reflect the fragmented, hyper-mediated nature of modern life. This perspective places experimental poetry as a response to, and critique of, the ubiquity of mass communication. For Perloff, poets working within multimedia formats – those who incorporate visual art, sound, and performance – are at the forefront of this evolution, as they reject the traditional confines of the printed page and embrace the possibilities of the digital and performative.

Perloff's interest in multimedia poetry extends to visual and concrete poetry, where words and images merge into a single artistic gesture. She regards figures like Augusto de Campos and Jenny Holzer as exemplars of how poetry can transcend its linguistic roots, becoming a fully sensorial and conceptual experience. For Perloff, these practices are not merely artistic experiments but critical engagements with how language operates in a media-saturated world.

Ultimately, Perloff's work underscores the necessity of experimental poetry in expanding our understanding of what literature can do. She argues that multimedia approaches not only rejuvenate poetic practice but also enable it to confront and critique the cultural and technological realities of our time. Far from being a marginal or esoteric pursuit, experimental poetry, in Perloff's view, represents the cutting edge of literary innovation and intellectual engagement.

² For an analysis of the case of the modern epic genre written by women in the Italian language, see D'Amico, 2023.

Haroldo de Campos and Augusto de Campos,³ born on in 1929 and in 1931, respectively, in São Paulo, Brazil, were celebrated poets and literary critics. They are most renowned for their pivotal role in shaping Brazilian concrete poetry during the 1950s. Together with fellow poets Décio Pignatari⁴ and Ferreira Gullar,⁵ the Campos brothers initiated the first exhibition of concrete poetry in 1956 and established avant-garde art and poetry magazines known as *Noigandres* and *Invenção*.

Concrete poetry aimed to transcend the conventional constraints of verbal verse by embracing what they termed “verbivocovisual expression”, which mostly integrated geometric and graphic elements into the poetic medium. Their innovative endeavors encompassed the use of ideograms as substitutes for verbal constructs, the conception of a poem as a visual “layout” of black and white elements (or vice versa), and the aspiration to craft poems as tangible objects meant for both visual and tactile engagement, in addition to being spoken or read. In 1965, the Campos brothers and Pignatari jointly authored *Teoria da poesia concreta* (*Theory of Concrete Poetry*): this is a seminal text in the realm of concrete poetry. Concrete poetry, as championed by these authors, is a poetic movement that seeks to break away from traditional forms of verse and embrace a more visual and experimental approach to language. It places a strong emphasis on the visual and graphic aspects of poetry, treating words as visual elements and exploring the interplay between text and space on the page. In concrete poetry, the arrangement of words, letters, and even shapes on the page are just as crucial as the meaning of the words themselves.

Teoria da poesia concreta serves as a foundational text that outlines the principles and concepts underlying concrete poetry. In this book, the authors articulate their ideas about the nature of language, communication, and artistic expression. They discuss the role of typography, layout, and spatial arrangement in conveying meaning and emotion in poetry. They also delve into the use of non-traditional poetic elements, such as ideograms and symbols, to create a new and dynamic form of poetic expression. The book has had a profound influence on the development of concrete poetry not only in Brazil but also internationally. It provided a theoretical framework for poets and artists to explore the possibilities of visual and experimental poetry. Additionally, it contributed to broader discussions about the relationship between language and art in the 20th century. For this reason, it is useful to consider concrete poetry temporally from these initiatives of reflection and practice, despite the origins of a movement always confirm themselves to be polygeneticals.

The Italian reception of concrete poetry, also known as “Poesia Concreta” in Italian, was marked by significant interest and influence. Concrete poetry, with its emphasis on the visual and graphic aspects of language, found resonance among Italian poets and artists

³ Notably, both Haroldo and Augusto were distinguished translators, collectively translating works by Ezra Pound, E.E. Cummings, James Joyce, Stéphane Mallarmé, and Vladimir Mayakovsky into Portuguese. Haroldo de Campos also contributed to the field of literary criticism, publishing select essays in *Metalinguagem* (1967) and *A arte no horizonte do provável* (1969). His critical works further include books such as *Ideograma* (1977). Haroldo also authored his own poetry, including the prose poem *Galáxias* (1984), with some of his poetry being compiled in *Os melhores poemas de Haroldo de Campos* (1992). Augusto’s poetic collections encompass *Linguaviagem* (1967), *Poemóviles* (1974), *Caixa preta* (1975), and *Ex poemas* (1985).

⁴ Décio Pignatari (1927–2012) was a renowned Brazilian poet, critic, and theorist whose influential writings, both as a poet and critic, made a lasting impact on the Brazilian literary scene and played a significant role in advancing the global understanding of concrete poetry.

⁵ Ferreira Gullar (1930–2016) was a prominent Brazilian poet, playwright, essayist, and art critic. Born José Ribamar Ferreira, he adopted the pseudonym Ferreira Gullar. He was a central figure in Brazil’s literary and cultural landscape; his contributions left a lasting mark on Brazilian literature and cultural discourse, and he is celebrated for his innovation and artistic exploration.

during the mid-20th century, whose experiments found fertile elaboration in a national tradition that had already embraced the visual, vocal and performative experience of the Futurists at the beginning of the century. Only a few instances of historical Futurism, however, are relevant to the later experiments that would develop the sound-visual practice of poetry in various ramifications and, taking into account the caution adopted by Luigi Ballerini⁶ and, even more specifically, by Luciano Caruso and Stelio M. Martini,⁷ a crucial moment of the trans-poetic tension, which would develop throughout the century, can certainly be traced in the *parolibere* tables. As it is known, Marinetti's experiments operated directly on signifiers and, in parallel with other, less radical forms of modernism, contributed to adding cognitive weight to the signs that industrial typography had by then standardised. Observing them and juxtaposing them with some of the proposals contained in the Manifesto, it is possible to identify in their morphology one of the first examples of the use of type in a performative perspective, mixing the Marinettian manner with the lesson of concretism, would use the possibilities offered by typography (size, design, arrangement, reproducible chirographical additions) to provide indications on how linear texts should be performed vocally. The experimental antecedent for the Italian case resides then in Futurism and not in other previous graphic experiments such as by Mallarmé,⁸ because the paroliberal technique intends to make signs capable of going beyond the cognitive level of reading on the page and to make it – so to speak – exist as a potential action, to be realised and substantiated according to categories inexpressible in only two dimensions.

The presence of an autonomous Italian tradition allowed for the early adoption of the practice of concretism by the more experimental groups of poets, especially from the 1950s and 1960s onwards. The Brazilian imprimatur is to be considered fundamental, as is the lively international exchange that was carried out by the likes of Adriano Spatola, Lamberto Pignotti, and Eugenio Miccini. The publications that developed from and for the sharing of concretism as a practice and a theory were for example *Il Gesto*, *TamTam* and partly *Alfabeta*, which provided platforms for concrete poets to showcase their work and engage in discussions about the movement.

However, the case of concretism is also the case of cross-pollination: the experiences of visual and sound poetry, for example, together with kinetic art, which had already begun to spring, converged in the polymateric density of Italian concrete poetry. This multiversality enriched Italy's concretist experience, as did the underground dialogue that took place with foreign countries, whose influences were continually being received and to which Italian artists and theorists were constantly asserting their own research instances.

Adriano Spatola's *Verso la poesia totale* (Towards Total Poetry) is a text that maps the conceptual and practical evolution of poetry in the mid-twentieth century, particularly as it intersects with experimental and interdisciplinary approaches. Published in 1969, Spatola's work stands as both a manifesto and a critical analysis of the poetic avant-garde, advocating for a radical redefinition of poetry that transcends the traditional boundaries of the written

⁶ Ballerini, 1976. See in particular Chapter: *Futurismo parolibero e oggettigrafico*.

⁷ Caruso, Martini, 1974. Also, Caruso, Martini, 1976.

⁸ I refer to the famous poem *Un coup des dés jamais n'abolira le hasard* of 1897, one of the first typographic experiments on poetry. Unlike the futurist *tavole* – to which it is also related – Mallarmé's poem does not intend to make words act by alluding to their possible performance beyond the page, but rather makes them part of a drawing with an autonomous meaning, in the manner of figured cartoons and calligrams. The possibilities of typography do not allude to the rhythm and volume or timbre of the enunciation of the words they compose, but use the characters to draw.

word. His vision of “total poetry” encompasses a convergence of visual, auditory, and performative elements, challenging the notion of poetry as a purely textual or linguistic art form.

One of the central themes of *Verso la poesia totale* is the critique of conventional poetic forms, which Spatola saw as increasingly inadequate for expressing the complexities of contemporary experience. He argues that poetry must embrace new media and modes of expression, integrating elements from visual arts, sound, and performance to achieve a holistic artistic experience. Drawing inspiration from international movements such as concrete poetry, Lettrism, and Fluxus, Spatola situates Italian experimentalism within a global network of artistic innovation. He aligns himself with figures such as the Brazilian Noigandres group, as well as European pioneers like Henri Chopin and Pierre Garnier, whose work similarly reimagines the poetic act as a multimedia and multisensory endeavour.

Spatola's concept of “total poetry” is not merely an artistic aspiration but a philosophical position on the nature of language and communication. He challenges the primacy of semantic meaning, arguing that the materiality of language—its sounds, shapes, and spatial arrangements—possesses its own poetic significance. This approach foregrounds the physical and visual presence of words, a practice that resonates with concrete poetry's emphasis on the poem as a visual object. For Spatola, poetry becomes an open field of experimentation, where text merges with image and sound to create new possibilities for meaning and aesthetic engagement.

The influence of *Verso la poesia totale* extends far beyond the Italian avant-garde. Spatola's insistence on interdisciplinarity and his challenge to the hierarchical separation of artistic disciplines have profoundly shaped the trajectory of contemporary experimental poetry. His work has inspired generations of poets and artists to explore the intersections of language, sound, and image, and his theoretical framework continues to inform debates on the nature of genre and authorship. By advocating for a poetry that is “total” in its scope and ambition, Spatola not only expanded the boundaries of the poetic but also redefined its role in a rapidly changing cultural landscape.

5. A feminist take (on an Italian case): *Materializzazione del linguaggio*

As observed through this initial survey of the state of the art, the theorisation and practice of concrete experimentalism, both in Italy and internationally, have predominantly been attributed to founding fathers. While these men are indeed the putative progenitors of such movements, they did not operate in isolation from the rest of the gender spectrum. Rather, the invisibilisation of women remains a persistent issue affecting both the canonisation of normative poetry and the countercultural sphere. The marginalisation of the feminist movement and the artistic contributions of women—both within and beyond the major avant-garde currents—appear to be deeply intertwined. As Carla Lonzi pointedly argued, feminism did not emerge thanks to 1968 but rather despite it.⁹ Similarly, in the field of poetic art, there remains a prevailing tendency to name a single woman as a rare exception within a practice otherwise framed as entirely male-dominated.¹⁰ This marginalisation of women's artistic contributions is both recognised and overturned by the bold yet deliberate feminist

⁹ Boccia, 2015.

¹⁰ Among the many “only woman” associated with the Neo-avant-garde, particularly the *Gruppo 63*, we can recall Amelia Rosselli, Carla Vasio, Rossana Ombres, Alice Ceresa, and Patrizia Vicinelli.

intervention of Mirella Bentivoglio, a verbo-visual and concrete artist as well as a meticulous curator.

Materializzazione del linguaggio, curated by Bentivoglio, presented at the 1978 Venice Biennale, was a landmark exhibition that foregrounded the intersection of language, visual art, and feminist discourse. Showcasing the work of over eighty women artists, the exhibition sought to challenge the male-dominated history of experimental poetry and concrete art by highlighting female contributions to verbo-visual and conceptual practices. Bentivoglio's curatorial approach emphasised the materiality of language, exploring how women artists engaged with textual deconstruction, asemic writing, and performative poetics as tools of both artistic innovation and socio-political critique. By reclaiming language as a site of resistance and transformation, *Materializzazione del linguaggio* played a crucial role in redefining the boundaries of poetic expression from a feminist perspective, positioning women's verbo-visual experimentation as central rather than peripheral to the avant-garde. The remaining part of this essay presents the work of five of the most significant Italian artists who featured in the exhibition, navigating some of the most relevant experiences produced through a specific chosen lens of investigation for the sake of exemplarity, in the attempt to nonetheless demonstrate the profound connections between the multiple strategies adopted as per the constellation they managed to create.

Lucia Marcucci: Collages Critiquing Commodification of Femininity

Lucia Marcucci, a pivotal figure in the Italian neo-avant-garde and verbo-visual poetry, has long challenged the dominant narratives of mass media through her striking collages. Emerging in the 1960s within the context of Italy's flourishing experimental art scene, her work stands as a powerful critique of the commodification of femininity, exposing the ways in which advertising, cinema, and print media construct and exploit female identity.¹¹ By repurposing mass media imagery and text, Marcucci subverts the patriarchal structures embedded in visual culture, offering a feminist counter-narrative that continues to resonate in contemporary discourses on representation and gender. Marcucci's collages, often composed of advertisements, magazine clippings, and slogans, demonstrate a sophisticated engagement with the aesthetics of Pop Art while maintaining a distinctly critical stance. Unlike the celebratory embrace of consumer culture seen in the works of artists like Andy Warhol or Richard Hamilton, Marcucci's practice exposes the mechanisms of desire and manipulation at play within the visual economy of the post-war period. Her compositions juxtapose fragmented female bodies with bold, commanding textual elements, highlighting the reduction of women to objects of consumption. This visual strategy forces the viewer to confront the artificiality of gendered imagery and its role in sustaining consumerist ideology, creating an alternative visual grammar and reclaiming language as a locus of resistance.

In 1963, Lucia Marcucci created *L'appetito vien mangiando*, a collage on paper that explores recurring themes in her work, where sharp irony emerges through the juxtaposition of advertisements for food products (among which, the Simmenthal tin stands out, alongside the advertisement for Galbani cheese, still regularly aired on Italian television). On the left side, the image of a mouth triumphs—an orifice from which food is consumed—imbued with a strong sensual connotation due to its vertical arrangement, which evokes a reference to the vulva-vagina. To complete the visual artwork, on top of the whole artwork is the verbal insertion carefully selected by the artist is the well-known proverb that gives

¹¹ Apicella, 1974.

the piece its title. Decontextualised, as is typical in visual poetry, it here becomes a true slogan of consumerism, emerging production, and capitalist voracity.

A key aspect of Marcucci's verbo-visual practice is in fact her engagement with language as a site of resistance. Through the strategic deconstruction of advertising slogans, political rhetoric, and popular media catchphrases, she reveals the ideological operations underlying mass communication. Her work frequently disrupts the passive consumption of media by reconfiguring familiar linguistic structures, compelling audiences to reconsider the messages they absorb daily. By emphasizing the performative and constructed nature of both language and gender, Marcucci aligns herself with a broader feminist critique that seeks to dismantle normative representations of femininity.

Marcucci's critique of the commodification of femininity is deeply intertwined with second-wave feminist concerns surrounding the objectification of women in media. Her work not only exposes the mechanisms of exploitation but also reclaims agency by recontextualizing and repurposing media imagery. Rather than accepting the passivity imposed upon female figures in advertisements, her collages reframe them within a discourse of defiance and disruption. By fragmenting and reassembling visual and textual elements, she challenges the fixity of gender roles and reasserts the presence of female subjectivity in a space traditionally dominated by male-driven narratives.

Ketty La Rocca: Language, Body, Identity

Ketty La Rocca was a pioneering figure in Italian conceptual art, renowned for her innovative use of language as a material to interrogate the intersections of the body, identity, and communication.¹² Working at the crossroads of visual poetry, performance, and semiotic experimentation, La Rocca's artistic practice subverted the conventional uses of language, transforming it into a tangible medium through which she explored the constraints imposed on the female body and selfhood. By dismantling linguistic structures and engaging with gestural forms, her work serves as both a critique of patriarchal systems of meaning and an assertion of embodied subjectivity.¹³

La Rocca's engagement with language was deeply rooted in the verbo-visual practices of the Italian neo-avant-garde, yet she distinguished herself through her unique material treatment of words. In works such as *In principio erat il verbo* (1971), she inscribed and manipulated written text onto photographic and sculptural surfaces, problematising the assumption of language as a transparent conduit for communication. Rather than functioning as a vehicle for clarity, words in her art become fragmented, obscured, and sometimes rendered illegible, pointing to the inherent instability of meaning. This deliberate obfuscation underscores the disconnect between linguistic representation and lived experience, particularly in relation to female identity, which is frequently mediated and constrained by dominant discursive structures.

Alongside her textual interventions, La Rocca's practice frequently incorporated the body – both her own and those of her subjects – as a primary site of artistic exploration. Through performative gestures and photographic documentation, she investigated the tension between corporeality and signification. In *Le mie parole, e tu?* (1971), for instance, she placed text directly onto images of her own hand gestures, emphasizing the physicality of communication and the ways in which non-verbal language can serve as a counter-discourse to hegemonic forms of expression. By prioritising bodily inscription over spoken or

¹² Perna, Gallo, 2015.

¹³ Perna, Poggi, 2022.

written word, La Rocca destabilised conventional modes of signification and suggested alternative, embodied ways of knowing and expressing identity.

La Rocca's manipulation of language and gesture is fundamentally linked to a broader critique of identity as a fixed or stable construct. Her works often reflect a deep engagement with feminist and semiotic theories that challenge essentialist notions of selfhood. The recursive, often obsessive repetition of words and phrases in her text-based works serves to illustrate the constraints of linguistic categories, particularly in relation to gender. Through this process, she exposes the violence inherent in naming and categorisation, demonstrating how language both constructs and confines individual and collective identities.

Giulia Niccolai: No Joke is Neutral

Giulia Niccolai was a unique voice in Italian experimental poetry, renowned for her use of irony as a means of subverting conventional poetic language. As a poet, translator, and member of the neo-avant-garde movement associated with Mulino di Bazzano, Niccolai consistently challenged the notion of neutrality in poetic discourse. Her works employ irony not merely as a stylistic device but as a radical critique of linguistic authority, exposing the ideological underpinnings of seemingly objective or transparent language.¹⁴ By engaging with irony, wordplay, and intertextuality, Niccolai destabilised the assumption that poetic language can ever be truly neutral, revealing its embedded biases and cultural constructs.

Irony functions in Niccolai's poetry as a tool for linguistic deconstruction. Through parody and self-referentiality, her texts expose the artifice of poetic conventions, challenging the idea that language is a transparent medium of expression. Her collection *Poema & Oggetto* (1974) exemplifies this strategy, where the interplay between text and material objects highlights the instability of meaning and the performative nature of language.

This approach aligns her with the broader tendencies of the Italian neo-avant-garde, which sought to interrogate and dismantle the traditional structures of literature. However, Niccolai's use of irony is also deeply entwined with a feminist critique of literary tradition. The neutrality of poetic language, often posited as an ideal, is revealed in her work to be a patriarchal construct that marginalises alternative voices. By incorporating elements of humour, absurdity, and pastiche, Niccolai challenges the exclusionary frameworks of the literary canon.

Signalling openly and explicitly the attempt to challenge the rigidity of an imposed phallogocentric language, Giulia Niccolai consistently employs the dictionary as both a critical and creative instrument. This can be observed, for instance, in her notable publication *Humpty Dumpty* (1969) – a small masterpiece of visual poetry and an ironic deconstruction of Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* – where an example of a dictionary entry appears in the epigraph. The phrase – if it can indeed be termed as such – literally states: “Desdemona n. See Othello”. The nominative choice of the example in the epigraph demands attention, particularly the dynamic of dependence and belonging between Desdemona and Othello. In seeking to define Desdemona's identity (feminine, singular) one finds that there is, paradoxically, little singularity in her representation. Her narrative is entirely framed through reference to the more prominent and authoritative figure of Othello, a man whose role in shaping her destiny is irrevocable. Any attempt to comprehend Desdemona's existence necessitates recourse to Othello's story, where her presence is contingent upon the

¹⁴ This is also due to the visual background she inherited from years of work as a photographer. See Mazzucchelli, 2023 and Portesine, 2024.

space she occupies within his narrative. Consequently, she is never independently represented but instead exists only in reflection: her subjectivity mediated through his. This act of 'looking at' Othello is not neutral; rather, it carries the weight of a subtle directive, an imposition embedded in language itself.

Her seemingly light-hearted tone foreground issues of gender, authorship, and power dynamics within poetic discourse. In doing so, Niccolai exposes the ways in which language serves as a site of ideological control, particularly in relation to the construction of female identity in literature.

Tomaso Binga: Performing the Authorship and the Alphabet

Tomaso Binga's artistic and poetic practice is defined by a radical use of the body as an expressive, semiotic, and political medium. Her verbo-visual and performative experimentation does not merely deconstruct the written language but extends it to incorporate the physical presence of the artist herself, turning the body into a text to be read and interpreted. In this sense, her work situates itself within a broader intermedial tradition that challenges the separation between word, image, and action, critically reworking the conventions of language and the representation of femininity.¹⁵

One of the most emblematic examples of this fusion between body and writing is *Alfabetiere murale* (1981), where Binga uses her own body to form the shapes of the alphabet's letters. Through this corporeal inscription, she transforms the female body into a linguistic code, overturning the conventional relationship between the writing subject and the written object. Writing, rather than being a purely abstract and intellectual activity, is rendered into a tangible and organic presence, undermining the very notion of a disembodied and neutral linguistic system. This gesture operates on multiple levels: on the one hand, it ironizes the historical exclusion of women from the sphere of knowledge production, rewriting the visual grammar with a female body that asserts itself as a sign. On the other, it rejects the conventional objectification of the female body, transforming it from a passive spectacle into an active structural component of language itself. This strategy embodies a form of resistance against the mechanisms of power that regulate the representation of women in Western culture, exposing the gendered hierarchies embedded within language and visibility.

A crucial aspect of Tomaso Binga's artistic practice is her use of photography as a tool for self-representation and the deconstruction of authorship. Photography enables her to capture and amplify the visual impact of her performances, while also playing with the boundaries between image and text. In works like *Alfabetiere murale*, the photographed body, frozen in alphabetic poses, is not merely a record of a performative act but becomes a sign in itself, a visual writing where femininity manifests as an alternative linguistic system. Thus, photography is never a neutral document but an extension of her verbo-visual discourse, where the body simultaneously becomes text and image.

Binga's use of the body within her performative poetics aligns with a wider set of feminist artistic practices that, from the 1970s onwards, employed performance to interrogate and dismantle patriarchal codes of representation. Like Marina Abramović, Gina Pane, and the artists associated with Body Art, Binga does not treat the body as a mere expressive tool but as a site of experimentation where cultural and social limitations are tested and subverted. Yet, unlike many of her contemporaries, Binga incorporates a crucial element of irony and play, which confronts the language of power head-on. Her decision to adopt a

¹⁵ Fabbris, Vidal, Zuliani, 2025.

male name is not just a provocation but a strategic war against the rigidity of gender categories. This subversive approach also permeates her performances, where the body becomes a means of exposing the constructed nature of femininity. Rather than conforming to the aestheticized, eroticised depictions of the female body dominant in Western visual culture, her body functions as a disruptive presence: both physically and linguistically.

A central aspect of Binga's poetics is her deliberate use of the naked body, which distances itself from traditional male-gaze objectification. While in classical Western art the female nude has historically been presented as a passive, consumable object, in Binga's work nudity assumes a radically different function: her body is not displayed for the spectator's pleasure but is instead presented in its agency and action. For Binga, nudity is a choice, a strategy of defiance rather than submission. Her body is not adorned, idealised, or staged according to conventional aesthetic seduction but is returned to its raw, autonomous presence. This is evident in the often deliberately awkward or strenuous poses she assumes in her performances and verbo-visual works: the body is not static, nor idealised, but is active, tested, flexible, and under pressure. Her nude body is not an eroticised spectacle but a site of linguistic resistance, exposing the artificiality of femininity as a constructed social role.

Mirella Bentivoglio: "To be or not to be"? To be (!)

Bentivoglio's concrete poetry is notable for its engagement with the materiality of language, where text is not simply a means to convey abstract meanings but an object in its own right. This approach to language allows Bentivoglio to move beyond the confines of conventional poetic forms, questioning not only the structures of language but also the hierarchical gender norms that govern creative practices. In many of her works, Bentivoglio subverts traditional gender expectations by using language in ways that escape the confines of the binary logic traditionally associated with gender identity. The use of fragmented, non-linear, and sometimes chaotic textual arrangements resists the neatness and order that is often seen as characteristic of masculine forms of creativity. This departure from order mirrors the rejection of rigid gender roles, suggesting that both language and identity are far more fluid and dynamic than cultural norms would have us believe. Bentivoglio's visual poetry does not adhere to the traditional, masculine-coded ideals of clear and rational expression. Instead, her works often involve a juxtaposition of abstract shapes and fragmented text that allow for multiple interpretations. This open-endedness is itself a commentary on the constraints placed on women in creative spaces, where clarity, coherence, and rationality have historically been gendered as masculine traits. Through her visual poetry, Bentivoglio proposes an alternative model of creativity, one that is not tied to fixed, gendered roles but is open, fluid, and inclusive.

In 2019, FM Centro per l'Arte Contemporanea, located within the historic Frigoriferi Milanesi complex in Milan, hosted the exhibition *Il Soggetto Imprevisto. 1978 Arte e Femminismo in Italia*, curated by Marco Scotini and Raffaella Perna. This comprehensive exhibition delved into the relationship between visual arts and the feminist movement in Italy, highlighting the pivotal year of 1978 (*Materializzazione del Linguaggio*). As a tribute to Bentivoglio's artistic, essayistic, and curatorial work, the exhibition published a catalogue and promoted the event using one of her poems: "Am". In this black-and-white collage poem, an open mouth of a young woman is depicted with a fragment of the verb "amare" inserted within it. Notably, in English, "am" holds its own specific meaning as the first-person singular conjugation of the verb "to be".

In *Am*, the mouth is both the site of enunciation and a visual emblem of the body, reinforcing the corporeal and gendered nature of speech. The juxtaposition of the fragmented “Am” and the full “Ti amo” calls attention to the gap between self-assertion (“I am”) and relational identity (“I love you”), a tension historically central to feminist discourse on subjectivity. Is the female voice in the image affirming itself, or is it being consumed by the performative utterance of love? Moreover, the work can be read as a critique of the traditional association between women and emotional expression, particularly within the confines of romantic discourse. By visually disassembling “Ti amo”, Bentivoglio exposes the mechanics of how love is articulated and how language itself structures affect. Bentivoglio’s *Am* is a powerful feminist statement that interrogates the relationship between language, gender, and subjectivity. By isolating “am”, she invites the viewer to reconsider the fragmented nature of speech and selfhood, particularly in relation to the affective weight of “Ti amo”. Through the visual and performative play between voice, image, and text, Bentivoglio dismantles the seemingly natural structures of language, exposing the power dynamics embedded in the very act of speaking and loving.

6. A Genealogy for New Beginnings

This overview, following reflections on the categorisation of the poetic genre, aims to highlight the inherent contemporaneity of positioning and experimentation in both authorship and artistic stance that non-male artists continue to pursue today. Their work challenges a dual marginalisation: first, a literary one, in which their participation in the poetic genre is often delegitimised due to the intermedial and innovative elements they introduce; and second, a cultural one, where female authorship is systematically undermined, both within the poetic sphere and in the broader social arena.

Marcucci’s verbo-visual interventions remain profoundly relevant in contemporary feminist discourse, particularly in light of the ongoing critique of media representations of women in the digital age. The strategies she employed to reveal the commodification of femininity – appropriation, fragmentation, and textual subversion – continue to inform contemporary feminist and activist art practices. In an era where social media perpetuates and amplifies commercialized images of femininity, Marcucci’s work offers a historical precedent for resistance and reappropriation, underscoring the continued necessity of critical engagement with media culture. Lucia Marcucci’s collages stand as a vital critique of the ways in which mass media constructs and commodifies femininity. By subverting advertising language and imagery, she exposes the ideological underpinnings of consumer culture and challenges the passive consumption of gendered representations. Her verbo-visual approach not only aligns with the concerns of second-wave feminism but also remains a significant point of reference for contemporary feminist art. Through her innovative use of collage, Marcucci dismantles the glossy facade of media-driven femininity, offering instead a fragmented, complex, and ultimately more authentic representation of women’s lived experiences.

Despite her untimely death at the age of 38, La Rocca’s influence endures in contemporary feminist and conceptual art practices. Her radical approach to language and the body prefigures later developments in performance art, visual poetry, and semiotic deconstruction. Contemporary artists and theorists continue to engage with her work as a crucial reference point in discussions on the materiality of language and the politics of identity. Her deconstruction of verbal and gestural codes remains profoundly relevant in an era where digital communication and mediated self-representation further complicate the relationship between text, image, and corporeal presence. Ketty La Rocca’s conceptual art reconfigures

language not as a mere tool of communication but as a physical material through which to explore the complexities of the body and identity. By fragmenting, distorting, and recontextualising textual elements, she disrupts the authority of linguistic signifiers and foregrounds the embodied nature of meaning-making. In doing so, her work challenges the patriarchal structures embedded in both language and visual culture, offering a compelling, subversive mode of artistic inquiry that continues to inspire critical engagement with the intersections of text, image, and selfhood.

A hallmark of Niccolai's poetic practice is her extensive use of intertextuality, whereby she engages in dialogue with other literary traditions (or literary objects, such as the dictionary), only to subvert and reconfigure them through irony. This method serves to deconstruct authoritative discourses, demonstrating how meaning is contingent, fluid, and open to reinterpretation. By borrowing and altering fragments from various textual sources, Niccolai underscores the constructed nature of language, resisting any notion of poetic purity or objectivity. Giulia Niccolai's ironic texts serve as a powerful challenge to the perceived neutrality of poetic language. Through irony, intertextual play, and feminist critique, her work dismantles the illusion of linguistic objectivity, revealing the ideological frameworks that shape poetic discourse. In doing so, Niccolai not only disrupts traditional literary hierarchies but also reclaims poetic language as a dynamic and subversive tool for critical engagement. Her legacy remains a crucial point of reference for contemporary discussions on the intersections of poetry, language, and power.

Tomaso Binga's work radically challenges the patriarchal frameworks that structure language, representation, and authorship. By transforming the body into a textual and visual medium, she disrupts the conventional boundaries between signifier and signified, revealing the artificiality of gendered constructs. Her strategic use of irony and self-representation subverts the historical erasure of women from intellectual and artistic domains, asserting the female body as both an agent of meaning and a site of resistance. In doing so, Binga not only critiques the mechanisms of exclusion embedded in linguistic and visual culture but also proposes an alternative, embodied poetics that reclaims authorship and performative presence as spaces of feminist intervention.

Bentivoglio's work exemplifies how concrete poetry can function as a critical tool for interrogating the intersections of language, gender, and power. By challenging conventional forms of expression and embracing fragmentation, her poetry resists the reductive binaries that structure both linguistic and social systems. Am encapsulates this approach, transforming language into a site of both self-assertion and critique, where the female voice simultaneously emerges and is put under pressure. Through her verbo-visual experiments, Bentivoglio not only expands the possibilities of poetic form but also reclaims authorship as an embodied and political act, redefining the role of women in artistic and intellectual discourse.

While it may be argued that the creation of a counter-canon – or even an alternative canon – risks ghettoising¹⁶ female experiences or assimilating them into structural categorisation practices that experimentalism, particularly in its feminist positioning, inherently resists both ideologically and practically, the erasure of a constellation of female agents within the field of experimental poetry has often prevented the establishment of specific genealogies of reference. Despite their originality and the interconnections between their

¹⁶ As stated in the article published on La Biennale's official website on 10 June 2022, accompanying the re-edition of the anastatic volume *Materializzazione del Linguaggio*, "a critic described the exhibition [Materializzazione del Linguaggio, 1978] as the 'pink ghetto' of the Biennale." <https://www.labiennale.org/it/news/ristampata-la-storica-pubblicazione-del-1978-materializzazione-del-linguaggio>

methods, these figures have frequently been excluded from the dominant historical narratives, limiting the recognition of their contributions and the development of a cohesive lineage. A lineage that still operates today as a mechanism capable of profoundly destabilising the production of/by gender and genre.

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