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Platformized Visual Intimacies: Visibility in Feminist Instapoetry

Introduction

What started as a photographic series about menstruation on Tumblr with Rupi Kaur continues today as aesthetically specific multimodal Instapoetry.[1] To be exact, the hereby analyzed poetry on Instagram belongs to visually engaging feminist renderings from the Anglophone, German-, and Polish-speaking Instapoetics, showcasing an extract of a multifaceted range: from "bookish" (Pressman 2020, 31), print-alluring typewriter poetics to colorful, platform-mediating examples. Furthermore, the body as a central topic and as a poetic device stands out in the chosen media-specific, feminist writing. When one looks at the long history of feminist literature and visual art (see, e.g., Wentrack 2014, 148–167; Janz 1995, 30), it is clear how the female body has been utilized as a canvas on which to portray societal norms, as an object on which patriarchal norms have been visibly displayed and negotiated in discourses *about* the body. These experiential renderings have then been performatively – thus, repeatedly – enacted *with* the artist's body or a figurative illustration of the body, a drawing, or with the help of an evoked ekphrasis, with which the body is deconstructively broken, thereby creating disillusionment and anti-hegemonial moments of resistance through repetitive patterns (cf. Butler 1988, 519–531). As such, specific variants of Instapoetry can be precisely situated within feminist literary practices that center the body as a key marker covering topics such as reproductive rights, online harassment of embodied marginalization, the queer love of "othered" bodies, and sexual violence against bodies that are perceived as female. As Mike Chasar argues with regard to the all-pervasive media, Instapoetry focuses on a "tripartite liberation – media, body, and poetry." Moreover, the scholar states that Instapoetic feminist writing displays a "synergy of bodily, visual, poetic, and medial creative control" (Chasar 2020, 186; cf. also 187), benefit-

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1 This article forms part of my dissertation project, in which I elaborate further on feminist Instapoetic writing. For instance, the networked dimension of Instapoetry will become even clearer in my netnographic/media ethnographic analysis of the comment section of "pre-baby body" with its 68 comments. To do so, I will combine various media ethnographic approaches such as netnography (cf. Kozinets 2020, 129–160) with affect analysis (cf. Zappavigna's "ambient affiliation," 2011, 800). Furthermore, in my multimodal analysis I will extend and adapt previous approaches by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, Carey Jewitt, David Machin, and Sigrid Norris among other scholars in this field.

ting the agency of the feminist writer. Here, he refers to the bypassing of influential editors, journalists, marketing specialists, and publishers as instapoets such as Rupi Kaur now embody these multiple roles themselves. Thus, "liberation" is meant as a positive outcome of this new movement, whereas the body in poetry is also regarded as a canvas, "as a medium" (Chasar 2020, 188). Nevertheless, this entrepreneurial undertaking by poets puts them under intense labor-intensive pressures that center around the sale of one's own work and one's 'brand' (Holm Soelseth 2022, 43–44). This fact thus complicates the 'freedom' poetry and poets are seemingly granted on Instagram. So, I argue that the poetic feminist space on social media is a space of ambivalence that grants agency but simultaneously diminishes it. The double logic of this poetic form – its embeddedness in a capitalist, profit-based platform and its simultaneous activist premises – stand at the forefront of this article's feminist Instapoetic examination. This article will first present theory pertaining to the visibility and affective paradigm of Instagram, initially conceptualized in 2010 as a visual photo-sharing application (cf. Leaver et al. 2020, 44–52), before continuing with a brief overview of stylistic communities in feminist Instapoetry. Finally, it will conclude with an analysis of the multimodality in Hollie McNish's Instapoem "pre-baby body" (2021a).

(In)visibilities: Feminist Instapoetry and ambivalence

The internet and social media platforms have made it possible for feminists to express themselves through and with "body territories" (Brunner 2021) such as via platform-specific poetry and self-publishing efforts. They thereby bypass some of the powerful gatekeepers of the literary industry like mainstream publishers, critics, and literary committees. As an alternative practice of writing, reading, and publishing, social media poetry revolves around creating "greater visibility for demographics that are usually underrepresented or misrepresented" (Manning 2021, 269) in the largely white, patriarchal public literary sphere, including the perspectives of Black[2] female poets and collectives, and those of post-migrant authors (cf. bruce 2022, 246–263; Leetsch 2022, 301; Matthews 2019, 400). One pressing issue here, however, is that this seeming openness can be easily contradicted by the platform policies themselves, which continuously censor female

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2 I choose to capitalize "Black" in order to signal the political implications of race in accordance with scholars such as Jenn M. Jackson (2020, 107).

bodies, e.g., by not allowing female breasts to be displayed, with the exceptions of mastectomies and breastfeeding, resulting in hashtag campaigns such as #freethe-nipple (cf. Are 2021, 1).[3] Underlying these censorial practices is the white, racist, patriarchal, and specifically US-influenced gaze directed at gender and sexuality, which is fostered by multi-billion-dollar networks such as on Elon Musk's Twitter and Mark Zuckerberg's Meta (cf. Little and Winch 2021, 9; Noble 2018, 14, 64). These conventions are exemplified by the Meta community guidelines, which were drafted in alignment with a hypersexualized Victoria's Secret advertising campaign (cf. Are 2021, 2). Magdalena Olszanowski appropriately names this control of the female body "sensorship," a "censoring of the senses" (Olszanowski 2014, 83), which users actively and creatively circumvent and negotiate with regard to queer and female corporeality. She connects her observation with the visual dimension of visibility, the "networked image" (Olszanowski 2015, 237) of the artistic and visual Instagram post and its comments. With this terminology, Olszanowski describes a space where networking allows users to generate power by creating visibility, that is, by commenting, liking, and tagging, which also applies to Instapoetry.

Regarding public spaces in general, Zofia Burr rightfully looks at Maya Angelou's engaged poetry to rightfully argue that the public space is not a neutral ground for discussion, as gendered and racialized bodies are consistently marginalized and accordingly discussed in marginalizing terms (cf. Burr 2009, 428–436). Even though the public space of Instagram offers them opportunities to "write back" internationally as it partially bypasses the racialized, class-based, and gendered power of the literary industry,[4] it does not circumvent the hegemony of social media platforms or their cultural embedding *per se*. Practices of writing back therefore take place in an ambivalent space, as the logic of marginalization con-

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3 Currently (as of January 2023), Meta's advisory board (for Facebook and Instagram) has suggested to overhaul the ban on the free exposure of breasts by women, non-binary and trans people. Meta has sixty days to decide how to act upon this decision, which was made official on January 17, 2023 (cf. Demopoulos 2023).

4 As US-based research by Claire Grossman, Stephanie Young, and Juliana Spahr ("The Index of Major Literary Prizes in the US") revealed, the current situation of the prize-based literary system is particularly painful "for writers who are not white, a troubling contradiction in what otherwise appears to be a moment of watershed inclusion." (2021) While the diversification of prize-winning authors may seem positive at the surface, institutional legacies paint a more complex picture that proves how the entering of these systems is necessary for a successful career. Especially Black and otherwise marginalized writers are, statistically speaking, required to prove themselves professionally to a higher degree, and are put under immense pressures to write about their own identity in a certain manner (for a European context see also: Łomnicka 2018; for the observation of gender see the VIDA/Women in Liberal Arts count 2019). In regards to gender, the inadequate representation of non-binary writers is another concern, as VIDA reported in 2019.

tinues to apply on Instagram in the form of "shadowbanning": the suppression of content by platform algorithms and/or moderators, making it less visible or completely invisible, i.e., removing it from explore, hashtag, and search pages. This means that content is partly or completely hidden for interested users without the content creators' knowledge. Algorithms are thereby "engaged in the filtering of what can be seen," resulting in "new visibilities and invisibilities" (Amoore and Piotukh 2016, 6). Furthermore, the practice of shadowbanning is carried out on a variety of marginalized groups and identities – affecting multiple possible points of contention, e.g., LGBTQIA+ populations or Black female content creators. When it comes to female bodies, shadowbanning is a "form of light and secret censorship targeting what Instagram defined as borderline content, particularly affecting posts depicting women's bodies, nudity and sexuality" (Are 2021, 1–3). Olszanowski also confirms this assertion, writing that posts and stories that are "nude, nonconforming to ideals of beauty, [or] dealing with violent subject matter" are examples of content that is potentially "flagged," "and/or removed via Instagram," shadowbanned, or even deleted (Olszanowski 2015, 233). The problematic implications for instapoets are that poems and posts are not visible on explore pages when users search by certain hashtags and/or content, thereby reducing existential income that specifically depends on content visibility. This exclusionary practice, highlighted by the negative and visual connotation of the shadow, leads to disillusionment about the so-called "safe space" rhetoric propagated by the platforms (cf. Olszanowski 2015, 240, with reference to bell hooks's critique of white feminist safe spaces).

Feminist Instapoetry is embedded precisely within this two-faced logic of the new media sphere, which has to be dissected and analyzed in terms of its visual style – a highly political endeavor – which can be achieved through "persistent looking," a "refusal to look away from what is kept out of sight" (Mirzoeff 2017, 85). Feminist Instapoetry is a space of continuous negotiation and resistance against platform policies and reflects a desire to carve out a space for diverse voices on social media. Instapoets and their followers thus operate within a neoliberal ambivalence, situated in "economies of visibility" (Banet-Weiser 2018, 21; cf. Glatt and Banet-Weiser 2021, 43) and embedded within the social media entertainment industry marked by "visibility labor" and "self-branding" (cf. Holm Soelseth 2022, 43–44; Pâquet 2019, 300–301). "Economies of visibility" describes "the ways in which the visibility of particular identities and politics, such as gender, race, and sexuality, circulates on multiple media platforms" (Glatt and Banet-Weiser 2021, 43), affecting female and/or Black and/or LGBTQIA+ populations in particular. Given these circumstances, it is revealing to see how the phenomenon of civically engaged Instapoetry manages to incorporate feminist creation, mirroring a certain discursive body politics circulating on social media in general.

In line with the ambivalence described above, "visual capital" (Mirzoeff 2019) on Instagram in the form of feminist Instapoetry can create a starting point for an aesthetics of resistance that incorporates certain female visibilities. This type of poetry can, however, also be commodified into visual capital once more, potentially with the same visible bodies it attempted to previously empower, which are then repurposed for a "postfeminist sensibility" (Gill 2017, 610; cf. Orgad and Gill 2021, 54–55). For instance, feminist Instapoems as such can be easily commodified through product-endorsements, e.g., when creators post period product advertisements. One example of this is Hollie McNish's (unnamed) poem on menstruation that was posted as part of the #EndPeriodPoverty campaign, where the brand Always donated one pad per like to the Red Box Project in the UK. This was problematic considering the brand's years-long body shaming practices and indicates a postfeminist "wokewashing" (Orgad and Gill 2021, 31) accompanying the in itself feminist content of the poem.

Moreover, the visuality of Instapoems is created by the "affordances" of social media that are central to the human-technology relationship, as argued by, e.g., Jenny Davis (cf. 2020, 22–30) and Taina Bucher and Anne Helmond (cf. 2018, 233–253). This concept describes "*how* objects shape action for socially situated subjects" and "how objects enable and constrain" action (Davis 2020, 18; 22). This means that affordances allow for all kinds of creative exploration in poetic writing but can also constrict certain artistic possibilities. Davis' theory is an extension of James Gibson's "affordances of the environment" (Gibson 1986 [1979], 127) and Dan Norman's design theory (2013) that is here applied to postdigital poetry. In other words, the affordances of networking and visibility are made possible by connecting the in itself valuable poetic work to hashtags, location tags, and captions as well as through the multimodal coloring, compositions, and the use of typography. But they are afforded in dependence on the media literacy of the poet and reader on Instagram as well as the technical conditions of the platform (cf. Davis 2020, 18; 22). While keeping the concept of affordances open and flexible, it can be argued that it plays a major role in the scrutinization of the possibilities and limitations associated with poetic creation in the digital age.

One result of this is the different visual elements and aesthetics, and ultimately various "stylistic communities" ("Stilgemeinschaften," Gross and Hamel 2022, 9–10) that emerge in visually non-monolithic Instapoetry. While Gross and Hamel mainly discuss elements such as punctuation, brevity, and irony, here, visual elements such as color are also poeticity creators. These will be explored in the following in discussions of poetry written in English, German, and Polish by Nikita Gill (@nikita_gill), Carina Eckl (@kursives_ich), and Rudka Zydel (@rudka-zydel) respectively.

The visuality of feminist Instapoetry: Stylistic communities

In Nikita Gill's poem "Death Threat (Trigger Warning)" (2021) about the harassment of and violence against women in online spaces, she uses an affective mode of shock and anger. As this paper will later argue, this affect is a pre-emotional state that subsequently influences any action and is inextricably linked to the consequent emotions (cf. Paparachissi 2014, 5). In Gill's poem, affect and emotionality are exemplified by the use of swear words like "bitch" and connected to the trigger warning in the caption describing "violence against women," where the female author positions herself at the receiving end of misogynistic hate.[5] The visuals of the feminist poem are plain and simple, reminiscent of pen and paper, with a longer text in the caption that ends with the hashtag #poetry, thereby marking it as a poem and its author a member of the poetic community on Instagram. The use of black font against a white background stands out on the highly stylized platform, although this would not seem unusual in the material form of the book. Gill's feed – i.e., her profile (see Gill 2022), which comprises all the poems she has posted, sometimes in remediated audiovisual versions that circulate from the book page to the platform and back – is highly structured. It is consistent, alternating between black-and-white, "bookish" poems and colorful, promotional content, which creates the unique aesthetic that is associated with Instapoetry. In the poem itself, a serious topic is juxtaposed with a simple visual form, further emphasizing the poem's content through this stark contrast. Here, it makes an allusion to book culture and a certain type of nostalgia reminiscent of Instagram's early lo-fi, vignette-centered, "vintage" aesthetics – a "nosthetics" (Grubnic 2020, 145; cf. Leaver et al. 2020, 44–55).

Similarly, Carina Eckl's typewriter aesthetic, also often seen in Instapoetry, focuses on the corporeal dimension, the body, which is already manifest in her user name @kursives_ich, meaning "@cursive_me." To be specific, *kursiv* in German refers to italics and also sounds like the word "curvy" in English. The relation between these words, and therefore the inherent word play, is further enhanced by the fact that italics are a typographic form of writing that consist of malleable text, which here also points to the malleable body. When considering the phrase "soft body soft heart" in the author's bio, this relationship becomes even clearer. The account name is therefore a creative exploration of languages that ultimately and

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5 As studies show, women and girls, and especially further minoritized women, experience disproportionate hate online, which is still fairly unregulated by EU and international law with regard to the digital sphere (cf. Bayer and Bárd 2020, 17).

formally centers poetic content on body image, a *topos* that permeates Eckl's poetry. In general, her whole profile is black and white, and short poems on e.g., queer love alternate with framed photographs of visual art and museum snapshots. One case in point is an unnamed poem that forms part of a postmodern aesthetic that utilizes "analog" materials, which are relocated into the post-digital sphere of a square Instapost by means of remediation, i.e., the poem was written on a typewriter and then photographed and uploaded to Instagram. Hence, Eckl layers visual materialities, which results in a truly "hybrid aesthetic" (Bassett 2015, 136), a marker of post-digitality, with the remediated typewriter font also showcasing a critique of "old-fashioned," patriarchal systemic ideas that need to be revised. The poem's scope and its meaning are also expanded through the political caption "your body, your choice" and with seven lines of hashtags, including repetitions of #yourbodyourchoice and #feminismus, clear positions and visible feminist slogans (Fig. 13). These hashtags are part of a wider international feminist discourse centered on bodily autonomy. By changing the politically significant feminist slogan "my body, my choice" and its first-person pronoun to the second-person level with #yourbodyyourchoice, Eckl addresses the reader directly, in a poetic and activist manner.
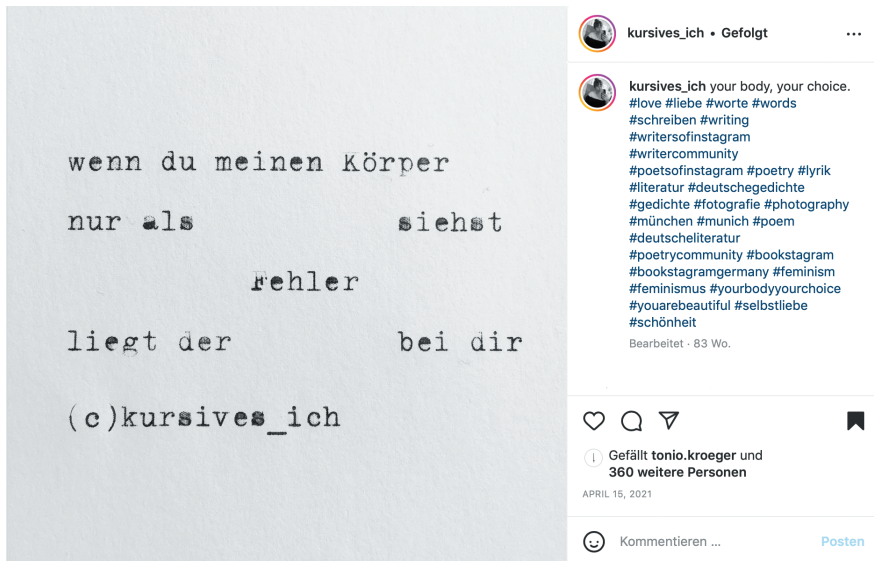

Fig. 13: @kursives_ich. Unnamed poem. Instagram. April 15, 2021.

Engaged or "activist" poetry has a more radical, materialist feminist aesthetic and its own stylistic community (cf. Baumgardner and Richards 2000, 95; Lorde 2009, 356). Audre Lorde formulates it in this way when discussing the existential necessity of poetry: "For women, then, poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. [. . .] Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought." (Lorde 2009, 356) Thus, poetry is in itself actualizing this pivotal need – as in all discussed examples in this article –, as for instance, in poems that play a crucial role in activist strategizing. A specific case in point are poems that specifically draw upon current political movements and "tangible action," as in the feminist online anthology *Wiersz nie jest cudem* (*A Poem is Not a Miracle*; 2022). Here, poetry is functional and manifests a visual surplus, utilized by Polish feminists in the context of the Black Protests,[6] the #czarnyprotest, the #strajkkobiet ("womensstrike"). Particularly in the wake of the 2020 protests that took place on social media and the streets, the political movement initially founded in 2016 made visual art to propagate its opposition to the curtailing of reproductive rights in Poland and to show solidarity with the affected women (cf. Graff 2020, 230–235). Poetry on Instagram continues this protest by visually utilizing these specific symbols and content from the women's rights movement and therefore directly positions itself as a part of this political endeavor. For example, the title of Rudka Zydel's poem "Babskie wiersze" (Fig. 14), which can be found on her Instagram profile and in a longer version on the webpage of the online anthology, plays ironically with the minoritization of literature written by women, as it seemingly reduces this highly affective and critical poem to the category of "Women's poems," the direct translation of the original Polish title, but even more so reclaims the category.

The caption contains numerous movement-specific hashtags such as #piekłokobiet ("womenshell") and a repetition of the last poem's line #jebaćlukierróbmydym ("fuckfrostingletscreatesmoke"). This use of the hashtag can be aligned with Elizabeth Losh's statement of hashtags as "condensed [. . .] expressive cultural artifacts" (Losh 2020, 4), thereby rendering the symbol a poetic one in itself. Moreover, the famous red lightning symbol of the feminist movement, placed against the beige background and black font, immediately draws attention to the political endeavor and connects the excerpt of the longer poem with it. Due to space con-

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6 The "Black Protests" ("Czarny Protest") were the women's rights protests against the restrictions to abortion rights in Poland from 2016, to which everyone attending wears black clothes "as a sign of mourning for women's reproductive rights" (Graff 2020, 231). A not so obvious or well-known allusion is to the "spectacle of women wearing black during Anti-Russian demonstrations in 1861" (Graff 2020, 231). For a detailed discussion of the hashtag in the context of the feminist Black Protest movement see Nacher 2021.

Fig. 14: @rudkazydel. "Babskie wiersze." Instagram. October 26, 2020.

straints, Zydel has posted a rather short version of the whole poem on Instagram
in the form of six lines, which is also visually indicated through three dots in
brackets in the first line of the poem. Here, the poem's meta self-reflection clearly
identifies the writing as feminist poetry ("feministyczne wiersze") and basically
contradicts the figure of the sweet, obedient girl, replacing it with a loud, subver-
sive, angry woman (cf. Graff 2020 232, 242). Such affects are used throughout this
particular movement, the Czarny Protest and the Strajk Kobiet, and can be re-
garded as helping to embody a collectively visualized and subversive "feminist
killjoy" character within the poem's lyrical persona and in the author persona as
well as within the poetic reader-writer collective (cf. Ahmed 2010, 582).

Social media logics: Affectivity in platformized poetry

Feminist stylistic communities range from black-and-white "bookish" aesthetics to
materialist collage styles and specific symbols rooted in material feminist move-
ments outside of social media. In addition, they utilize platform features such as
hashtags to visually and visibly create a specific feminist multimodal aesthetics. Its
multimodality lies in the actual poetic units of text-image or text-moving image-
sound accompanied by paratextual or epitextual elements such as the caption (the
text beneath the poem), a location tag (the location indicated above an Instagram
image connected to the platform's cartography), hashtags (words marked by a # sign

or "a finding aid"[7] (Losh 2020, 3) linking the post to a theme, political movement, the Instapoetry writing scene, or providing additional self-definition), and the comment section (comments beneath the *poeimage* – a term I use to describe the inherent imagery of Instagram poems). These textualities are additionally entangled with the visual multimodal elements of Instapoems, such as typography, color, and composition (cf. Ledin and Machin 2020, 88–186). As such, Instapoetry inherently forms part of the platform and is marked by a tension between its given platform options and shared poetic feminist efforts. Therefore, Instapoetry is "platformized poetry." With this concept I am picking up on media and cultural studies scholars Thomas Poell, David Nieborg, and Brooke Erin Duffy and their theory of platformization as the "penetration of digital platforms' economic, infrastructural, and governmental aspects into the cultural industries, as well as the organization of cultural practices of labor, creativity, and democracy around the platforms" (Poell et al. 2022, 5). Feminist Instapoetry can be accordingly located in the sphere of cultural production and is highly entangled with the economic realm, precarious gig labor, and the diminished visibility of certain groups, meaning that it is a form of platformized creation and production (cf. Holm Soelseth 2022, 98).

The platformization of poetry is accompanied by the importance of visibility in a network marked by information and pictorial overload and scarce possibilities for action. If we relate it to the previously described control over female bodies and "sensorship" (Olszanowski 2014, 83), as well as Taina Bucher's theory of algorithms (2012), the concept of visibility is challenged by its opposite. Visibility as a notion has been discussed in visual culture and cultural studies most famously with regard to Michel Foucault's theory of the panopticon and its power-infused "regimes" of visibility. The panopticon, an architectural prison model designed by Jeremy Bentham, has an invisible observer at its center overseeing everyone from every possible angle, which compels people to discipline themselves accordingly, as Foucault claims (cf. 1995, 201). While this theory is useful for thinking about the invisible control exerted over female bodies by the internet's black box of largely hidden APIs, the post-digital sphere employs another oppositional concern: the possibility of disappearing, of not being considered important enough. In order to appear, to become visible, one needs to follow a certain logic embedded within the architecture of the platform (cf. Bucher 2012, 1171). In her study on algorithms on social media, Bucher speaks in this context of a "threat of invisibility on the part of the participatory subject" (Bucher 2012, 1164). Additionally, from an ontological

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7 As Elizabeth Losh researched, the hashtag was initially conceptualized for an additive phone button and its function was "sorting digital content into similar clusters" (Losh 2020, 2), which continues to exist as such on social media platforms.

standpoint, the more the poetic work is entangled with the platform's "visual capital" logic (Mirzoeff 2019) – i.e., the more one's livelihood depends on these (in)visibility structures – the more crucial it becomes to consider censorship practices on social media. Monetization efforts are thus a direct result of differing levels of platform dependency, further fueled by the gendered dimensions of gig work on platforms, such as unpaid brand labor by female creators (cf. Duffy 2015, 1). These implications cannot be ignored for feminist Instapoetry as it is grounded in the visibility of the female body – illustrated or drawn, ekphrastically evoked, photographed, in pictures made by the authors themselves and *of* themselves, and/or by other artists in collaborative efforts. Consequently, the threat of invisibility is productively and poetically challenged by the visualized body that circumvents all attempts to visually extinguish it.

Simultaneously, the capitalist, neoliberal environment of the platforms means that visibility at times fluctuates between "wokewashed" postfeminist poetry in the manner of representation politics (visibility for the sake of visibility) and feminist poetic content of resistance that cannot completely escape its neoliberal embeddedness but tries to resist it. As Zoë Glatt and Sarah Banet-Weiser rightfully argue in reference to the ambivalent status of social media creators, which can be applied to the Instapoetry described here, the

> emergence of exciting queer, intersectional, and progressive political content [. . .] working to transform hegemonic power relations [. . .] is fundamentally built on a platform designed with the capitalist logics of competition, hierarchy, and inequality. So, while some content creators aspire to be "transformational" – to change social norms, to challenge discrimination, to disrupt systems of power – as long as this kind of transformation is also transactional, there is a limit to its progressive potential. (Glatt and Banet-Weiser 2021, 54)

The following analysis will examine the extent to which the poetry by Hollie McNish aspires to resist and yet cannot escape the capitalist, transactional logic of Instagram. But before that, I would like to make a few remarks about Instapoetry's affective dimension.

Generally, a kind of "transformational" resistance in visible, online community feminist efforts is a commitment to *affectivity*, meaning to the affects evoked through Instapoetry and its paratextual elements, i.e., visually displayed in the audience's commentary. Theories of the affect on social media and its politics reflect the interconnection between the social media system, political movements, and feminist art. Affects and affectivity are understood here as the ability to invoke emotions, so deeply personal and intimate states of being such as love, hate, joy, anger, and hope (cf. Paparachissi 2014, 15; Ahmed 2014, 43–61; 82–100; 122–143). Affect is thus "a form of pre-emotive intensity subjectively experienced and connected to [. . .] processes of premediation or anticipation of events prior to their

occurrence" (Paparachissi 2014, 5). To clarify the terminological use in this paper, when one speaks of affects, it is difficult to separate them from the resulting emotions that are therefore always considered together with affects. In addition, affects work through their close proximity to embodied subjects and objects, i.e., they create feelings of closeness across varying situations, such as across geographical distances. The affected subjects and their emotive responses are therefore further characterized by a directional "stickiness" (Ahmed 2014, 89–90). This logic is used on social media in order to politically mobilize readers through the use of hashtags, e.g., on Twitter (cf. Paparachissi 2014, 30–63, in particular her analysis of the Arab Spring as a hashtag movement; cf. Illouz 2010, 5, and her concept of "emotional capitalism"). Media scholar Zizi Paparachissi calls these practices of closeness and affect "affective affiliation," which manifest themselves in "affective publics" (Paparachissi 2014, 115–136). Hinting at a culture of feeling created by hashtags, linguist Michelle Zappavigna refers to them as "ambient affiliation" (Zappavigna 2011, 800).

In intersectional feminist theory, emotions are regarded as productive vehicles for radical change. Accordingly, "love," "anger," and "hope," among an array of emotional expressions, can further the equality of lived feminist realities presented in feminist Instapoems. Epistemologically, this view underpins an understanding of emotionality that is entangled with rationality and not erased from it (cf. Ahmed 2014, 43–61; 82–100; 122–143). This is important to mention here as there is a complicated and problematic history of the literary establishment rejecting young adult fiction and Instapoetry as objects of analysis for being genres that are "too emotional" – a highly debatable sentiment considering that a myriad of writers and readers that occupy these genres are young Black and Brown women (cf. Bronwen 2020, 90; see also Watts 2018). Do young female writers and readers then constitute targeted reading and writing communities? Paparachissi and Zappavigna, are wary of speaking of "communities," instead opting for terms like "publics" and "affiliations" in order to stress the "connective" (Poell and Van Dijck 2015, 534) character of social media that does not necessarily encompass enduring initiatives, i.e., communities. Here, the term community is used very consciously as something that indicates self-definition and emphasizes a seriality of feminist visuals – e.g., symbols, logos, or colors – that are not only indicative of a commodity culture but are also aspects of a visualized unity, feelings of belonging, and both aesthetic and affective sharing practices. While Instapoetry cannot escape its neoliberal placement, its focus on the "shared rituals" and "relational linkages" central to "virtual communities" (Parks 2010, 111) renders it fruitful for discussions of lived, feminist realities. Olszanowski fittingly names this visualized feminism on Instagram a "community *in* an image" and an "affective exchange" in the form of the post, the comments, the caption (Olszanowski 2014, 233). With reference to Hollie McNish's YouTube

work, George Cox also speaks of the "affective ability to constitute a community" within the "poetics of platforms" (Cox 2020, 2).

Similarly, in Instapoetry, relationships of closeness characterize the relationship between the author and the audience, where captions and comments exhibit cultures of feeling on an intimate level in networks and in scale-dependent "network effects." Direct network effects explain why "the more users who join a network, the more valuable that network becomes" (Poell et al. 2022, 37; cf. also Franzen 2022, 116). This means that the economic value of a platform and its poems rises if a specific author puts out more poems or "content." The network also signalizes that only a few nodes in the network will ever achieve such a popular status. Thus, a few instapoets may relate to a huge number of followers or fans in an intimate way. Furthermore, Olszanowski speaks of affect as an inherent element of aesthetics when considering aspects that lead to interactions with others, creating layered meaning and potentials of action (Olszanowski 2014, 17). It could even be said that affect can be seen as an implicit element of aesthetic affordances in Instapoetic writing. Affective feminist visualities, moreover, can be traced back to DIY cultures, blogs in the alt-lit or alternative literary scenes of the 2000s, where playfulness toward gender and existing stereotypes resulted in the creation of "public selves" as part of a collective understanding called "community" (Harris 2012, 221–222). What is referred to as "feminist Instagram aesthetics" (Crepax 2020, 71) constitutes these subversive feminist practices inherent in the feminist Instapoetry discussed here. The unifying aspect is visualized through a "networked" quality, the aforementioned "relational linkage" (Parks 2010, 111) in the sharing of women's highly personalized lived realities and therefore in the shared "intimacies" of poetry and its dynamic media environments (cf. bruce 2022, 246).

Specifically, the angry figure of the "feminist killjoy," which refers to the expression of powerful feelings, furthers the advancement of women when everyday conversations become uncomfortable but productive (cf. Ahmed 2010, 582). This means that this figure's expression of anger – an often negatively connotated emotion for women – sheds a light on crucial issues. It can be said that, e.g., anger in networks about sexual violence, hopes for equal payment, and the love felt in sisterhoods are emotions that can be productively used. This is the case, for example, when shared emotions are acknowledged as valid expressions by individuals and institutions and they further the organization of public street protests. If these emotional states are expressed and shared in connection with highly personal topics in a public sphere, they are marked as "intimate publics" (cf. Olszanowski 2014, 232). Intimacy is thereby understood as something that reveals our "innermost" selves and can be traced back etymologically to the Latin root *intimus*. This intimacy is publicly shared through individual poems and collective practices of commenting, liking, and sharing, and is situated in cultural

and contextual spaces (e.g., concerning the association of colors with femininity, for instance). These practices of intimacy are then visually expressed in feminist visual artistic renderings using multimodal elements such as colorful emojis or unifying hashtags that signify solidarity or belonging or, in general, through the "networked image" of the Instapoem. To summarize these considerations about the entanglement between multimodal visuality, visibility, and affect, feminist Instapoetry is a phenomenon of what I propose calling *platformized and networked post-digital visual intimacies*. I will now further explore these intimacies by analyzing an emblematic example, Hollie McNish's poem "pre-baby body."

Hollie McNish's "pre-baby body": Platformized visual intimacies

Hollie McNish (@holliepoetry) is a British poet and writer, whose Instagram bio states: "I love writing poems / Sunday Times Bestseller / Books: Slug, Plum, Nobody Told Me, Antigone / Agent @lewinsohnliterary / Bookings: oli@pagetoperformance. org" and contains a "linktr.ee," a categorized collection of links. These include a link to her books, tour dates, and a donation link to "Planned Parenthood" (cf. McNish 2022).[8] Thus, an initial glance at her Instagram page shows how McNish and/or her agent are positioning her as a successful poet: her bio mentions the *Sunday Times* bestseller status granted to her last collection of poetry, prose, and short stories *Slug: and Other Things I've Been Told to Hate* (2021d) as well as her poetry books *Plum* (2017) and *Nobody Told Me: Poetry and Parenthood* (2020), for which she received the Ted Hughes Award for New Work in Poetry. In addition, her official representation by an agent makes the account, which McNish curates herself, seem highly professional (email correspondence McNish, December 2022). Her follower count of 80,700 underlines her position as an avid social media poster who regularly uploads content. Her work is versatile and multimodal, and crosses genres; it ranges from poetry performances and album recordings at Abbey Road Studios to poetry readings and spoken word pieces on YouTube, the project "Poems in Pyjamas," and Instapoetry on Instagram. Thematically, McNish's poetry is centered around motherhood, sexuality, female empowerment, body image, and politics, and can therefore be considered feminist writing. For example, her poem "Embarrassed" (2013) about breastfeeding in public and the hyper-sexualization of mothers' bodies went viral on YouTube with

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8 As of November 20, 2022, there were 2,677 posts on Hollie McNish's social media feed followed by 80,700 followers.

1,4 million views. It was then turned into a poetry film in collaboration with film-maker Jake Dypka (2016). The artistic versatility of the poet, dramatist, spoken word artist, and host is also evident in her feed visuals.

Her Instagram profile displays visually static, colorful, highly saturated poems to-gether with recorded poetry readings, audiovisual snippets and photographs of poetry performances and other artistic events, screenshots of Twitter posts, photographs of herself and with other poetic collaborators, a few advertisements for period products, and political calls for action. Her visual poetry is immediately recognizable due to the use of neon colors such as pink in the formally identifiable series "sketches," of which the poem "pre-baby body" (Fig. 15) is a part. This poem about motherhood was posted on July 21, 2021, was liked 1,470 times, and received 68 comments, with the paratextual caption description: "Today's sketching after reading a lot of Summer body / baby body back bollocks (for the last eleven years of motherhood) and imagining someone delivering my pre-baby body to me x." (McNish 2021a). A direct reference to the body, besides the obvious content of body politics, is the alliteration of "baby body back bollocks," pointing to the title "pre-baby body." Accordingly, semantics and sound ("baby," "body," "breasts," and "bones,") unite the poem and the caption, rendering it "authentic" (Lajta-Novak 2020, 324) and also approaching a seeming amalgamation of the implicit persona in the caption and the lyrical persona in the poem.
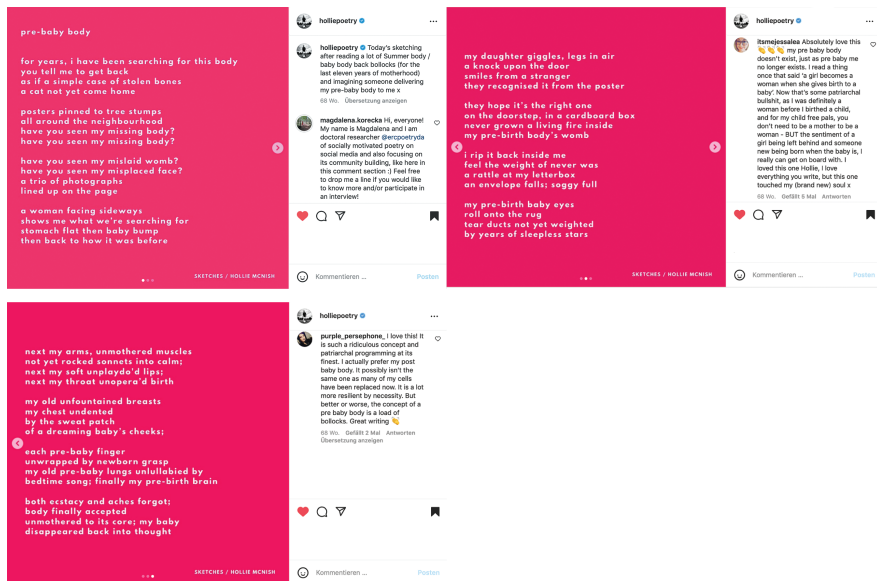

Fig. 15: @holliepoetry. "pre-baby body." Instagram. July 21, 2021.

However, the unity of the ironic take and simultaneous criticism of the societal expectations on a mother's body is visible not only in the caption and in the poem's semantic and poetic interconnections but also on the visual level. The connection between the poem's twelve stanzas of four lines on the one hand and the series "sketches" on the other is visibly marked by capital letters in the lower right-hand corner of the "poeimage." It consists of a so-called "carousel post," i.e., multiple slides or pages – in this case three – instead of one square image post, and cleverly circumvents the platform's space constraints. The visible contrast between the highly saturated pink in the flat background or foreground and the white font also strikes the reader immediately. The poeimage shares this aesthetic with other poems on the poet's profile and in the series, such as the poems "newborn" (McNish 2021b) and "no stones in her stomach" (McNish 2021c). Thus, "sketches" is a visual format, particularly with regard to its use of color. Making reference to multimodal theory and the interpersonal functions of language (cf. Ledin and Machin 2020, 8), "coherence," "ideas," and "attitude," we could say that the tripartite poem series with its ready-made aesthetic seriality is characterized by visual "coherence" (Ledin and Machin 2020, 91–96), and therefore unity in its format. In addition, there are two relevant dimensions of the interpersonal function and thus of an intermedial transfer of meaning-making. Visually addressed to the audience, "ideas" (Ledin and Machin 2020, 89–90) in the form of feminist discourse are also communicated through the modes of color, composition, and typography. Moreover, "attitude" (Ledin and Machin 2020, 90–91), an affective dimension expressed in various ways, is also implicit in the poem's visual communication.

In general, the poem "pre-baby body" by Hollie McNish is a visual deconstruction of the misogynistic body politics associated with motherhood and forms part of platformized and networked post-digital visual intimacies. This means that the poem displays and circulates the platform-specific dimensions of the poetry, i.e., the visual utilization of color, composition, and typography, the networked content in the caption and comments, the visual modes including 'traditional' textual elements, and the highly intimate content of embodied motherhood. On the content level, a lyrical persona is "searching for this body," i.e., the "pre-baby body" in the title – a seemingly non-essential object or an animal as the rhyming similes "a simple case of stolen bones" in line three and a "cat not yet come home" in line four suggest. The twice repeated "missing body" is a personified object in a missing person's report as the evocation of a photographed woman "facing sideways" on a "poster" indicates. This aesthetically postmodern montage is composed of a body semantics combined with negatively connotated adjectives of disfiguration and the affective dimension of disgust. Body parts such as "my mislaid womb" and "my misplaced face" are replaced with a separation between the female connoted body and motherhood, by e.g., "unmothered muscles," "pre-birth baby eyes," "soft, unplaydo'd

lips," "throat unopera'd birth," "old unfountained breasts," "pre-baby finger," "pre-baby brain," and, finally, "body [. . .] unmothered to its core." The body is gradually dissected into its individual elements, from head to toe, only to refer back to the "brain," that is, the beginning and the "acceptance" of the body in an "unmothered" state. By distorting the visual image of the body through the peculiar-looking words – before the reader's inner eye as well – McNish poetically creates and exhibits a focus on the materiality of the body. Only the glitch in the flow of reading creates a "hésitation" (Valéry 1960, 637), a forced moment of reflection. Thus, the absurd image of a body being delivered disrupts the rules of convention by making a chronological break, by returning to a previously embodied state of personhood, devoid of motherhood. By utilizing text, color, typography, and composition as its core visual modes, without any photographic elements, and by evoking a female body by poetic means, the poem circumvents the "sensorship" regulations imposed on the female body (cf. Olszanowski 2014, 83). The ekphrastically evoked body, visible to the inner eye, cannot be registered by platform algorithms or censored.

By separating the body from motherhood on a semantic level through disgust, the "stickiness" of certain emotions toward maternal bodies, a gendered norm, is performatively revealed and simultaneously deconstructed. As feminist scholar Sara Ahmed argues, embodied disgust relies on "economies of disgust" that "also involve the shaping of bodies. When the body of another becomes an object of disgust, then this body *becomes* sticky" (Ahmed 2014, 92). The poem portrays a disembodied motherhood ekphrastically and visually as strange by negating body parts ("*un*mothered muscles," emphasis added) when they are removed from the embodied mother. The violation of such a separation also becomes manifest through the absurdness of returning to a "pre-baby body" that only aggressive force may achieve as the lyrical persona "rip[s] it back inside." This awareness of disgust sticking to the mother's body makes apparent the absurdity of such societal discourses, i.e., of returning to a "pre-baby body." That is when dissent about a visual, affective, and highly intimate level of the self becomes possible. When embodied collective feelings, "intimacies," connect the bodies of motherhood to other emotions such as love, they separate the body from disgust (cf. Ahmed 2014, 100).

In addition, the performed repetitiveness in relation to the body in the poem reenacts a further deconstruction of this societal discourse and the pressure on mothers to lose weight after birth. Lines seven to ten, the last two lines of stanza two, and the first two lines of stanza three read: "have you seen my missing body? / have you seen my missing body? / have you seen my mislaid womb? / have you seen my misplaced face?" These lines not only create a certain rhythmicality and musicality in the poem but are also subversive and deconstruct the "disgusting body." A "*stylized repetition of acts*" (Butler 1988, 519) enforces gender norms and constitutions. These repetitions visualize how a body may be affec-

tively associated with certain characteristics through frequent use over time. This "subversive repetition" has a "transformational" potential, which is also how Glatt and Banet-Weiser (2021, 49–51) describe effective feminism. Accordingly, such a disclosure leaves room for the visibility of an affective and alternative possibility of (performed) gender expression. Thus, seriality and repetition are not only important in social media poetry as far as a commodified aesthetics are concerned; another act of feminist subversion and another attempt at visibility lies in the modal dimensions of color, typography, and composition.

Concerning color, the use of bright pink as a background color, highly energetic, i.e., creating a strong contrast with the white, lower-case font, catches the eye of the potential reader in the flow of pictures and information in Instagram's economy of attention. The color used here is saturated, conveying an "emotional temperature," and is also decidedly bright, rather flat, and u-modulated, signaling "truthfulness," i.e., conveying ideas within a clear worldview (cf. Levin and Machin 2020, 100; 107). The pink is a hybrid between white and red, the latter a color known to elicit attention and highlight importance, and thus affectively plays with a potential reader-writer (cf. Elliot 2015, 3). This means that it not only signals the importance of the poem's feminist message; rather, the use of the color pink in the poem also contradicts the expectations of the audience, which are created at first sight. While in Western culture pink is mostly associated with a conservative notion of womanhood, it is subversively and explicitly utilized here to deconstruct the gendered gaze. This means that the distinct use of stereotypical and gendered aesthetic notions forms part of a produced and celebrated "hyper-femininity," created with the help of visual elements such as color or even "glitter, [. . .] soft lighting, candy and pastel colors, pretty flowers." (Crepax 2020, 79) Such renderings are a case in point for post-digital feminism or a certain "feminist Instagram aesthetics," as Rosa Crepax claims (2020, 76).

These visualities are productively utilized in order to shed light on urgent feminist issues such as motherhood, sexuality, and reproductive rights. This creates visibility for feminist content, as in McNish's poem, and mocks misogynistic content on Instagram through visual playfulness. Nevertheless, "girly" feminism cannot entirely escape its "postfeminist sensibility," so, the placement of the poem in the capitalist, data-driven platform logic (cf. Crepax 2020, 76). In a highly restricted environment such as Instagram, such efforts mirror platform logics while simultaneously subverting them. For this reason, it can be argued that the criticism in the poem of the unrealistic body standards placed on women is reflective of Instagram culture itself, which is known to proliferate photoshopped body types. However, it is not only the mode of color that functions as a crucial meaning-maker in "pre-baby-body" – typography and composition fulfill additional functions.

With regard to the typography and the composition of "pre-baby body," the following visual characteristics situate the poem within nostalgic book culture. Clicking the three slides and looking at the open space on the right side of the square frame is like turning a page, visually signified by an arrow. The material and tactile dimension evoked here can be said to exist within the compositional mode. When specifically dissecting and persistently looking at the objects and subjects of analysis (cf. Mirzoeff 2019), the "modal configurations" (Norris 2011, 78) of typography and composition, and the following revelations become clear: the consistently left-justified text, which is written in lower-case letters, is characterized by a regular, horizontal, bold, and rounded font that signals openness, seriousness, and artistic playfulness (cf. Levin and Machin 2020, 135). Such aesthetics, leaning on the previously mentioned "nosthetics" (Grubnic 2020, 145), are a means of generating legitimacy and visualizing the literary establishment. Therefore, the modes of typography and composition lend it a rather 'traditional' literary visibility due to the manner in which the poem is placed visually within the Instagram environment and allude to the literary field (cf. Pressman 2020, 25–30; Bourdieu 2000 [1974]). Consequently, such an allusion not only seemingly grants prestige but also evokes products that are actually sold, such as McNish's books, which form one component of Instapoets' existential income as Instapoems are uploaded free of charge.

Conclusion

While feminist Instapoetry is actually a highly versatile poetic form in terms of its stylistic communities, which range from colorful, neon carousel posts to seemingly traditional "bookishness" and experimental collage cut-ups, feminist messages prevail on a continuum from micro-politics to activism. Moreover, the affective dimension together with the relational affordances of platformized poetry can give individual poems visibility as well as a certain aesthetic. This visibility is, in turn, highly important with regard to feminist embodiment practices as well as discriminatory and commodifying practices that (may) diminish the power of feminist poetry on Instagram. The circumstances shared intimately in poems, captions, and (potentially) in the comments sections, however, function as antidotes to the truly ambivalent, neoliberal media environment and lead to the formation of feminist post-digital platformized, networked visual intimacies. With regard to the affectivity analyzed here, the poem "pre-baby body" takes up the topic of "love" as a form of resistance by visually invoking the so-called "feminist killjoy" figure by utilizing productive anger as well as the visual, poetic dissection of the female body (cf. Ahmed 2014, 141).

While feminist Instapoems inherently move between platform conventions and authorial creativity, these platformized works of art continuously alter their visuality in accordance with the rapidly changing digital and visual culture of the internet. This is resulting in the numerous stylistic communities constantly being created and a variety of feminisms in poetry, representing current discourses, as well as moves toward more video and audio productions and developments toward a TikTok-like visual culture, as several discussions have lamented (cf. McCallum 2022). It is all the more surprising that poets like Hollie McNish are keeping up with the growing demands, changing platform practices, and continuing to create feminist poetry, e.g., on concepts of the body in motherhood, that stands in stark contrast to Instagram's censorship practices regarding the queer and female body. In this manner, Hollie McNish's "pre-baby body" deconstructs the constant work of the embodied, female self that platforms such as Instagram demand but also creates space for both readers and poets to carry out potential and continuing system critique.

In the various feminist Instapoetic stylistics, exemplified here in the work of Nikita Gill, Carina Eckl, and Rudka Zydel, it becomes clear that visuality is highly entangled with efforts to generate visibility that permeate existentially relevant modes of perseverance in platformized poetry. These stylistic communities also show that Instapoetry is not a visual monolith but encompasses various styles, techniques, and utilized materialities. In addition, Instapoetry serves individual poets and their fans, often writers themselves, and at times entire feminist movements, by enabling them to reflect and to express solidarity visually. Furthermore, the choice of colors, typography, layout, and the use of platform affordances in the form of hashtags, comments, and captions are means of mounting resistance against platform practices such as shadowbanning and literary exclusionary systems outside of social media. In this space of negotiation on Instagram, the examples shown here reveal how multimodal, aesthetically specific Instapoetry embraces a range of feminisms, e.g., material, queer, and post-feminist renderings, within culturally-specific contexts and beyond.

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