Reading Physical and Virtual “Poetic Spaces” in Contemporary Japanese Experimental Poetry

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Abstract

When a poem written on the ground suddenly appeared around Ōmiya station in Japan in spring 2020, it caused a sensation on Twitter and irritation among residents. To read it, people had to walk along its written words, connecting the text to the surrounding scenery. What emerged was a reading experience of poetry different from a conventional setting – a reading of a "poetic space".

Shi no kasoku is just one of many recent experiments with exhibiting poetry in space by young Japanese poets. Instead of a book or magazine, they publish poems in art galleries, on the streets, in food halls in department stores or in the virtual space of the internet. Using a selection of these poetic spaces as examples, my thesis examines the intersection of reading, poetry, and space in contemporary Japanese poetry, asking what "happens" when we read poetry in a spatial configuration. Its theoretical framework combines theories of space by authors such as Henri Lefebvre, Edward Soja, and Maeda Ai with the fields of literary studies and art studies. It proposes that poetic spaces create a more activated way of engaging with literary text, highlighting ideas about the role of the readers in the process of meaning-making as proposed by Roland Barthes, Umberto Eco, and Jacques Derrida. It also argues that poetic spaces can serve as "sites of resistance" that negotiate normalised spatial practices by creating moments of irritation.

Methodologically, the project combines close reading of poetic texts with exhibition analysis, while also including qualitative data gathered on-site from interviews, surveys, and participant observation. By examining the act of reading in poetic spaces, the thesis demonstrates that poetic spaces hold the potential to inspire new ways of imagining both space and poetry.

1. Introduction

> I think that when we suddenly see a poem in the city or in an everyday scene, the words we encounter unexpectedly flow more vividly into the reader's mind. We read words in books and magazines with the awareness that we are reading, but I believe that words that catch us off guard can transcend this awareness. This work was born from that thought. (Saihate 2020b, author's translation)[1]

In late 2020, during a period of mandatory COVID-19 quarantine following my return to the United Kingdom, I encountered an online article about a poetry installation titled *Shi no kasoku* (詩の加速, The Acceleration of Poetry, 2020–2021). The accompanying photograph depicted a striking scene: a single poem rendered in large Japanese characters, extending vertically along the ground of a narrow alleyway. Created by poet Saihate Tahi (b. 1986) for the Saitama Triennale, this site-specific work had transformed an everyday place within a Japanese city into something else – a space where people could encounter poetry unexpectedly. Confined within the limited space of my Oxford room, I was immediately drawn to this image of a poem spread across an alley and occupying so much space that it could only be read by walking along its characters. I began to reflect on what it might mean to experience such a poem not through viewing a photograph on a screen, but through being physically present within its spatial context.

Further research into Saihate revealed that this was just one of her many experiments in publishing poetry through formats that are deeply interwoven with the spaces they inhabit – from interactive poetry exhibitions to hotel rooms filled with verse. I also discovered that she was not alone in pursuing such experiments. Other poets of her generation in Japan were similarly exploring spatial forms of presenting poetry: Fuzuki Yumi (b. 1991), for instance,

[1] The tweet in Japanese reads as follows: 街や日常のシーンに突然詩が現れるとき、不意に出会うその言葉は、より生々しく読む人の中に流れ込むのではないかと思います。本や雑誌にある言葉は「読む」と意識して読まれますが、不意打ちに出会う言葉はその意識を超えていくことができるように思います。この作品もそうした思考から生まれました。(Saihate 2020b)

created a sound installation in which her poems formed a polyphonic soundscape; Aoyagi Natsumi (b. 1990) engaged in a livestreamed poetic dialogue with a fellow poet from their respective homes; and Mizusawa Nao (b. 1993) contributed a poem to an online exhibition where it was displayed alongside a virtual walk on Google Street View. In line with Saihate's reflection on *Shi no kasoku*, as previously quoted, these examples prompted me to ask: what exactly happens when poetry is read not on the page of a book or magazine but in the form of a physical or virtual space?

While reading from a portable, flat object is not tied to any particular location and can, in principle, occur wherever one has a book or e-reader at hand, the previous examples link the act of reading to the experience of being in a specific space. Whereas a "successful" reading experience is often thought to depend on blocking out one's surroundings to become immersed in a literary world, these poetic experiments instead heighten awareness of those very surroundings. This awareness brings with it a fuller sensory engagement, drawing not only on sight but on the body as a whole. Movement becomes part of the reading process, as readers must physically navigate the text rather than relying solely on their eyes. Put simply, the poetic work comes fully into being only through the readers' bodily presence and active engagement.

What may sound like a straightforward question was, in fact, the starting point for a complex inquiry, as it touches on three key terms – "reading", "poetry", and "space" – with each having its own distinct body of theory and discourse, yet all three of them have rarely been considered in conjunction.

Considering "poetry" as the first key term, experimental poetry has been widely discussed in academic research, from the works of Guillaume Apollinaire (1880–1918), Ezra Pound (1885–1972), and Kitasono Katué (1902–1978) (Kamimura 1986; Dencker 2010), to the Beat Generation – itself deeply shaped by Japanese poetry and philosophy while influencing Japanese practice in turn (Tomiyama 2017) – and more recent experiments with digital

devices, sometimes labelled “Computer Poetry” (Abel 2016; Beals 2018). The most substantial recent publications on experimental Japanese poetry are Taylor Mignon’s *Visual Poetry of Japan, 1684–2023* (2023) and Andrew Campana’s *Expanding Verse: Japanese Poetry at the Edge of Media* (2024). Mignon introduces readers to examples spanning 300 years of Japanese poetry that intersect with visual art, including visual translations of Matsuo Bashō (1644–1694), textual manipulations during the Taishō era (1912–1926), and surrealist photography and concrete poetry in the twentieth century. In comparison, Campana examines experimental poetic practice in Japan from the 1920s to the present through the lens of media theory. He argues that experimental poetry did not merely engage with different media forms, but also critiqued them, challenging dominant ideologies, technologies, and practices. Both Mignon and Campana, like this thesis, are concerned with what happens when poetry is transposed from its now dominant medium of print into other artistic forms – in Mignon’s case, visual art and photography, and in Campana’s, hybrid media such as cine-poems, tape-recorder poems, performance poetry, or augmented-reality poetry. Yet because both Mignon and Campana cover such broad time spans – one over 300 years, the other a century – their studies remain largely framed as historical classifications within broader socio-cultural trends, emphasising the role of the poets and artists rather than that of the readers, while also focusing on “media” as a key term rather than “space”.

The role of reading when it comes to literature is one of the topics explored in the newly emerging research field of cognitive literary studies, which incorporates insights from cognitive studies to the study of literature. In the subcategory of what Alan Richardson terms the “cognitive esthetics of reception” (Richardson 2017, 17), the focus is on mental imagery in the practice of literary reading, seeking to examine the relation between sensory experience and image production, among other topics. This is the closest field of cognitive literary study to my research project, as it concerns itself with the experience of the readers and the activation of their senses. However, when the materiality of the reading experience

is addressed, as is the case in Gillian Silverman's writings, reading is still regarded as a practice which involves printed matter or a digital reading device; particularly with the materiality of the book, the acts of touching the cover and turning the page are important considerations. The question of what happens when a text is encountered outside this normative frame – when poetry is presented spatially – remains largely unexamined in cognitive literary studies.

A comparable gap appears in scholarship on space. Since the so-called "spatial turn" in the social sciences and humanities during the 1980s – shaped by the work of philosophers such as Henri Lefebvre, geographers and urbanists such as Edward Soja and David Harvey, and historians such as Michel Foucault – scholars have increasingly emphasised space and spatiality as fundamental to how we experience the world, arguing that space is not a neutral backdrop but a social product. Literary studies, in turn, have also adopted spatial approaches. In what is now referred to as "spatial literary studies", however, the focus has generally been on the "dynamic relations between the text and the spaces and places represented in it" (Tally 2017, 25), in other words, textual representations of real spaces. When the spatial form of a literary text is examined, this usually involves analysing its arrangement on the page, as in the case of concrete poetry (McHughes 1977). By contrast, relatively little attention has been paid to literary works – whether poetry or prose – situated in three-dimensional physical or virtual space.

The experience of encountering a work of art arranged in space has been more widely discussed in the field of art studies. While many of these ideas will be examined in greater depth in the following chapters, I briefly introduce here two key ideas that have informed the research presented in this thesis.

The first derives from Lefebvre's account of the role of art in the production of space. Writing from a Neo-Marxist perspective, he argues that art has the potential to intervene in everyday environments shaped by capitalist logics, opening it up to "myriad possibilities"

(Lefebvre 1991, 422–23; also cf. Dünne 2006, 298–99). Soja develops this point by framing such interventions as "spaces of resistance to the dominant order", sites from which alternative spatial narratives can emerge (Soja 1996, 67). This framework has been especially influential in analyses of the political potential of art in public spaces – for example, socially engaged art in urban spaces that may "facilitate a negotiation of taken-for-granted spatial orderings of the world, and to provide alternative urban imaginaries" (Olsen 2019, 986), or street art that aims "to transform urban space through acts of individual creativity" (Hologa 2018, 201). In this light, a poetic work presented in a non-conventional space can also be read as carrying an implicit political dimension, provoking a rethinking of how we perceive and inhabit everyday spaces, thereby serving as a "space of resistance", to echo Soja's term.

The second key idea is based on Claire Bishop's analysis of installation art from the perspective of the viewer. For Bishop, installation art is defined by the requirement that the viewer physically enters the work in order to experience it (Bishop 2005, 6). This demand for bodily presence has two implications: first, it produces a more active mode of engagement, as visitors must move through, around, and sometimes interact directly with the work; and second, it generates a decentred mode of viewing, since installation art is inherently multiperspectival and resists a single fixed vantage point from which it can be observed in its entirety (11–13). Although Bishop does not address works that present literary texts in spatial formats, her insights are nonetheless productive for thinking through forms of poetry that, by virtue of their spatial arrangement, are closely related to installation art. Such works require readers to physically (or, in later examples, virtually) enter them in order to engage, resulting in a similarly activated and decentred mode of reading.

In fact, many of the examples of poetic experiments previously mentioned are referred to as "installations" or "exhibitions" in their announcement texts, sometimes combined with the term *shi* (詩, "poem") in front of it, as in *shi no insutarēshon* (詩のインスタレーション,

"poetry installation") or *shi no tenji* (詩の展示, "poetry exhibition"), implying a close relationship to the visual arts. This is also reflected in the contexts in which such works are frequently presented, including gallery spaces, art fairs or as commissioned public art projects. The term *shi* also signals that the poetry involved in these works is typically modern free verse rather than traditional forms of Japanese poetry such as *waka* or *haiku*, as *shi* became synonymous with "new-style" poetry following the publication of the anthology *Shintaishishō* (新体詩抄, A Collection of New-Style Poems) in 1882, which featured translations of English poets such as Shakespeare and Tennyson alongside five original free verse poems in Japanese. From there, free verse poetry gained wider popularity and acceptance (Campana 2024, 3). The terms poetry installation and poetry exhibition, however, do not fully capture the phenomenon I aim to examine. Not all examples fit neatly into these categories, and the terms may also suggest exhibitions focused on displaying objects related to a poet's life and oeuvre, intended to educate visitors about their biography and literary legacy, rather than to provide an unconventional reading experience.

To foreground the spatial dimension of the works analysed in this thesis, I use the term "poetic spaces" as an umbrella category for works of poetry that employ physical or virtual space in ways that exceed conventional modes of publishing. Unlike conventional literary presentations in the form of books, magazines or other print media, poetic spaces foreground spatiality itself as integral to the reading experience, inviting readers to engage with poetry not only textually but also bodily and sensorially. However, depending on the nature of the individual work under discussion, I may also occasionally employ other terms such as poetry exhibition, installation or project to refer to specific works.

The lack of scholarship that considers reading beyond the conventions of print media, that engages with poetic experiments taking spatial form, and that treats space not only as something represented in texts but also as a condition of reading, underscores the importance of closer examination. Precisely because these poetic experiments resist easy categorisation,

they provide a vantage point from which to question and reimagine what we mean by "reading", what we call "poetry", and how we understand "space". Returning to the question that inspired this dissertation project – what happens when we read poetry in spatial formats – the central aim of this thesis is to examine the intersection of these three key terms (reading, poetry, and space) in contemporary experimental Japanese poetry, with particular attention to readers' experiences in poetic spaces. To achieve this, I analyse a selection of poetic spaces situated in different spatial contexts, using an interdisciplinary approach that draws on literary, art, and social studies. This framework enables me to pursue three core objectives: first, to define poetic spaces with greater conceptual clarity; second, to explore how the content of a poem and its spatial form intersect; and third, to investigate how these configurations reshape the act of reading and what social and aesthetic implications follow from such encounters.

The poetic spaces examined in this thesis are all based on free-verse style poems created between 2019 and 2023 by poets of the Heisei generation (1989–2019).[2] Focusing on this narrow frame provides comparability, offering a close look at a specific historical moment rather than a broad overview across decades. This is not to suggest that poetic spaces are entirely new. These experimental practices have their roots in the avant-garde poetry and art of the first half of the twentieth century and, more distantly, in traditional forms of Japanese poetry such as *surimono*, which combined a free-verse-like poetic style with visual elements in the late eighteenth century. What this focus allows, however, is attention to poets and works often overlooked in the canonisation of Japanese literature, as their works fall outside established literary canons because of their relatively young age, their position at disciplinary borders, and their focus on free verse – a mode still "strikingly underresearched

[2] Saihate's year of birth (1986) falls within the final years of the Shōwa era (1926–1989). However, since she began her career as a poet in the mid-Heisei period, it remains appropriate to consider her part of the Heisei generation.

and undertaught in both English- and Japanese-language academia compared to fiction, art, and film", despite being, as Campana argues, "at the forefront of literary experimentation" (Campana 2024, 2).

The years between 2019 and 2023 also coincide with the COVID-19 pandemic, which, as noted in the introduction to this thesis, profoundly altered our relationship to space. In a globalised twenty-first-century world where borders had seemed increasingly fluid or even erased, the pandemic suddenly rendered them tangible again. Most of the examples analysed here emerged within this context, and it is hardly coincidental that questions of space and spatiality permeate them. For this reason, the study of poetic spaces as presented here is not only timely but significant, as it shows how poets negotiated these conditions by creating "spaces of resistance" at a moment when art and culture themselves were deemed *fuyō, fukyū* (不要不急, "nonessential and nonurgent") by authorities (Terui and Takahashi 2022, 33).

The COVID-19 pandemic is not the central focus of this thesis, but it nevertheless shaped how this project came into being. Working on such a contemporary topic meant that the pandemic influenced not only the poetic spaces examined here and the perspective from which this project was developed, but also its methods. Positioned at the intersection of comparative literature and art studies, and with a particular emphasis on reader reception, the research adopts a mixed methods approach that combines close reading with exhibition analysis, exploring how spatial arrangements and poetic texts intersect. However, while some installations were permanent and could be experienced first-hand after Japan lifted its COVID-19 travel restrictions in October 2022, others were temporary and dismantled before that was possible. In these cases, the analyses rely mainly on secondary sources such as reports, photographs, and videos. Where possible, reader perspectives are incorporated through online comments, tweets, and blog posts. In the final chapter, this approach is complemented by a case study, which draws on participant observation, interviews, and a

survey within a poetic space, enabling a more empirical examination of how readers engage with poetry in spatial form by including qualitative data gathered on-site.

While this represents the overarching methodological approach, each chapter modifies both methods and theoretical frameworks slightly, depending on the specific spatial context under investigation. The chapters are arranged roughly from more conventional to less conventional spaces for artworks – beginning with poetry installations in galleries and museums, then a site-specific installation in urban space, followed by a hybrid virtual space still connected to a physical setting, and concluding with the bustling environment of a department store food hall.

Chapter 2 establishes the theoretical framework underpinning my thesis. It is structured into three integral components: "reading", "poetry", and "space" as well as the interconnections between those three aspects. Delving into the nuanced dynamics of reading poetry and exploring how the transference of poetry to physical or virtual spaces influences this experience, my research incorporates insights from cognitive literary studies and reader response theory by authors such as Richardson, Silverman, and Rita Felski. The framework also situates poetic spaces within the history of experimental poetry in Japan, highlighting key developments and examples that foreground spatiality. In addition, it critically examines the terminology used to describe such experimental works, assessing where existing labels are adequate and where they fail to capture the distinctiveness of poetry presented in spatial formats. The final component focuses on space itself. Drawing on spatial theory, space is approached not as a neutral backdrop but as socially produced, dynamic, and mutually shaped by human activity. Building on Lefebvre and further developed by theorists including Soja, Maeda, and Devin Proctor, poetic spaces can be understood as interventions that disrupt normative spatial logics, offering new modes of experiencing and imagining both physical and virtual environments.

Moving to analysing examples of poetic spaces, Chapter 3 focuses on two examples of poetry that are presented in the form of installation art in exhibition spaces: Saihate's *Shi no mobīru* (詩のモビール, Poetry Mobile, 2019–2025) and the sound installation *Koe no genba* (声の現場, Voices On-Site, 2021–2022), a collaboration between poet Fuzuki Yumi and composer Bandoh Yuta. Drawing on Luise Reitstätter's *Die Ausstellung verhandeln* (Negotiating the Exhibition, 2015), which conceptualises the space of an exhibition as a site of visual communication shaped actively by visitors, and Bishop's *Installation Art: A Critical History* (2005), which links the emergence of installation art to poststructuralist theory, this chapter contends that poetry installations create a multiperspectival, fragmented experience of poetry through their spatial arrangement. In doing so, they reveal the evolving dynamics of language itself and highlight the poetic work as an open process, positioning readers as co-authors of the installations.

Chapter 4 compares Saihate's experimental short story *Kimi wa POP* (きみは POP, You are POP, 2014) with her poetry installation *Shi no kasoku*, arguing that her use of urban photography as backdrops in the short story was later adapted to real urban space in the installation. Through a close reading of *Shi no kasoku*, combined with an imagined walk through the installation and drawing on Miryam Sas's concept of *deai* (出会い, "encounter") in postwar Japanese art, I argue that the work functions as a site of encounter, fostering transformative interactions between subject, artwork, and space. Drawing on theories of the political potential of urban art by Cecile Sachs Olsen, Lefebvre, Massey, and Herbert Marcuse, I further suggest that the installation also operates as a site of resistance, prompting awareness of the possibilities for new urban imaginaries.

Chapter 5 explores the intersection of poetic spaces, virtuality, and COVID-19 through two projects: *Ōfukurōdoku* (往復朗読, A Circle of Reading, 2020–2021) by Aoyagi Natsumi and Sato Tomoko and *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu* (隔離式濃厚接触室, Isolated Intensive Contact Room, 2020) by Fuse Rintarō and Mizusawa Nao. With in-person events

largely cancelled or postponed, the chapter examines how livestreams and a website with limited access were used to create distinctive audience experiences, balancing connection and solitude. Audience responses gathered from articles, blog posts, and tweets are analysed to show that these virtual poetic spaces are more than mere substitutes for physical events, offering aesthetic experiences shaped by the pandemic and its effects on spatial perception.

The spatial setting of Chapter 6 is a food hall in the basement of the department store Kyoto Tower Sando, where another of Saihate's works is located – the poetry exhibition *Shi wo ippuku* (詩を一服, A Dose of Poetry), commissioned by Kyoto Tower Sando for their reopening in April 2023. Unlike the previous examples, this installation foregrounds the role of translation, both in its poetic content and its spatial design, prompting reflection on reading and translating within a poetic space. Methodologically, the chapter complements exhibition analysis and close reading with on-site qualitative research conducted over four days in July 2023. This includes visitor surveys and interviews, participant observation, analysis of Instagram posts and interviews with the organisers of the exhibition. Using *Shi wo ippuku* as a case study, the chapter examines how visitors engage with and perceive a poetic space in the flow of their everyday lives.

The final chapter, Chapter 7, draws together the findings from the preceding chapters, addressing what occurs when poetry takes the form of a physical or virtual space and how the act of reading intersects with, and is shaped by, that space. It concludes that poetic spaces can serve as "sites of resistance" that negotiate normalised spatial practices by creating moments of irritation, while also demonstrating that poetic spaces hold the potential to inspire new ways of imagining both space and poetry.

Before turning to the main body of this thesis, a few practical details are noted. Japanese names are presented in the conventional order, with the family name first, and the Hepburn system is used for transliteration. Where relevant – for example, when presenting a poem in

full, giving the title of a poem or artwork, or referring to key terms – the original Japanese characters are included.

2. Breaking Down “Reading” “Poetic” “Spaces”

The theoretical foundation of this thesis, which explores how the interplay between poetry and space alters the experience of reading poetry, is built on three central pillars: “reading”, “poetry”, and “space”. Each engages with its own distinct body of discourse, while also intersecting with the others, forming a triadic relationship at the heart of the conceptual framework of the thesis.

Focusing particularly on the act of *reading*, this thesis examines reader reception in poetic spaces. By combining my own subjective reading of the works examined here with the perspectives of others – gathered from blog posts, social media, or a survey – it seeks to understand how encountering poetry in a certain spatial context can open up new interpretative possibilities. The thesis therefore emphasises the dynamic relationship between poetry and space in the reading experience. To develop a deeper understanding of what *reading* entails and how it functions, it uses insights from cognitive literary studies as a reference point. These perspectives help to illuminate how reading is conventionally conceptualised and, crucially, how the act of challenging these normative assumptions shapes our understanding of poetic spaces – spaces that may require readers to move their bodies, rearrange a text, or interact with it in other ways that question the traditional view of reading as a purely cognitive act.

Defining *poetry* in this context and situating poetic spaces within their historical framework is also essential. As previously mentioned, poetic spaces are inherently interdisciplinary, blending textual elements with other media. The discourse on intermedial poetry encompasses a range of terms, each emphasising different aspects of this phenomenon: visual poetry, optical poetry, avant-garde practices. Additionally, throughout much of its history, Japanese poetry has not only existed as texts but also as oral performances, woven into music and theatre. Written poems typically combined different visual elements, such as calligraphy alongside various forms of illustration, and appeared

not only on paper but also on diverse materials, from scrolls and folding screens to fans, cups, and vases (Campana 2024, 5). Understanding poetic spaces therefore requires a critical discussion of the terminology surrounding the fusion of poetry and other media.

Finally, placing emphasis on *spatiality* means examining how poetry manifests in physical, three-dimensional space or virtual space, while also considering the ways in which a poetic text invites interaction based on its spatial presentation. Space is never a neutral or value-free backdrop; rather, it is a product of social practices – shaped by us just as we are shaped by these spatial dynamics. To further explore the spatiality of the poetic experiments discussed in this thesis, I will engage with the writings of Lefebvre, Soja, Maeda, and Proctor – all of whom engage with triadic models of space. This theoretical framework positions the thesis within a Neo-Marxist discourse on spatiality, exploring the role of poetic spaces in the social production of space and highlighting their potential as "spaces of resistance".

The following section will explore each of the three pillars underpinning this theoretical framework – "reading", "poetry", and "space" – in greater depth.

2.1. "Reading" as an Embodied and Relational Act

To gain deeper insight into the reading process, literary scholars have increasingly drawn on cognitive science since the mid-1990s, coinciding with the rise of the World Wide Web, which facilitated the creation of an increasingly active community (Richardson 2017, 1). Cognitive literary studies is a broad umbrella term for "work of literary critics and theorists vitally interested in cognitive science and neuroscience", as Richardson defines it (2). Combining literary theory with cognitive science, the term signifies interdisciplinary ventures that may share common interests and reference points, but not necessarily coherent paradigms or methodologies and therefore resists unified views (ibid.). Richardson divided cognitive literary studies into "soft" subgroups with "overlapping memberships", which are meant to highlight the variety of work being done rather than implement a set of strict

boundaries: cognitive rhetoric, cognitive poetics, cognitive narratology, cognitive materialism, and cognitive esthetics of reception (3).

Cognitive rhetoric – shaped by works such as Mark Turner's *Reading Minds* (1991) – is primarily concerned with linguistic questions, aiming to uncover universal links between embodied human experience and conceptual or linguistic activity (such as image schemata or metaphor) (4). Cognitive poetics, a term coined by Reuven Tsur, focuses on adapting information-processing models to "describ[e] the structure and reception of literary texts", arguing that literary texts disrupt, deform, or delay "normal cognitive processes" and produce a defamiliarisation effect (8). Cognitive narratology, by contrast, draws on computational theories of mind to explore how readers engage with narrative texts. It examines how they bring with them repertoires of frames and schemata that enable them to recognise certain sequences as stories or to situate them within familiar genres (15). While cognitive rhetoric approaches literature from a linguistic perspective and looks for universal patterns in the use of metaphors and other image schemata, scholars within the cognitive materialism subgroup draw on cognitive models and theories from a historical perspective to "open up new readings of an earlier era's literary, philosophical, and scientific discourses on mind and language", acknowledging that the brain's use of metaphor and other cognitive patterns is shaped by specific cultural conditions (19).

The subgroup of cognitive literary studies that aligns most closely with this research project is what Richardson refers to as "cognitive esthetics of reception". This approach focuses on mental imagery in literary reading and "brings together the traditional concerns of philosophical esthetics […] with those of literary criticism, reader response theory, and the relation between sense experience and image production" (17).

While this thesis does not focus specifically on readers' cognitive imaging abilities, it seeks to examine how the spatial presentation of a poetic work influences the reading experience and its reception – including the sensory dimensions and the perception of the

space in which the poem is encountered. To further reflect on the sensory aspects of reading, Silverman's exploration of the sense of touch from the perspective of cognitive literary studies proves particularly insightful.

Silverman draws attention to the materiality of the book itself, arguing that it is "something more than [a] mere vessel" (Silverman 2021, 452), and instead serves as a point of physical contact that invites haptic engagement from readers. Although she contends that "reading begins with touch" – as we hold books and turn their pages with our fingers – the act of reading has historically been shaped by restrictions concerning how books ought to be handled, particularly within certain institutional or cultural contexts (454). As Leah Price points out, while handwritten, richly decorated books in the medieval scriptorium were "voiced, stroked, smelled, and gazed at", by the nineteenth century, public libraries had become sensory-restrictive spaces in which "no looking, listening, touching, tasting, smelling" was permitted in order to protect the printed pages and minimise intrusions (Price 2012, 31).[3]

The demand for silence and bodily discipline in libraries also reflects another point Silverman raises regarding the role of touch in reading. Following the post-Enlightenment emphasis on linearity and rationalism, reading has largely been theorised as a purely cognitive and solitary activity – one in which, ideally, external stimuli are minimised in order to engage fully with the text (Silverman 2020, 2–3). From this perspective, reading is conceived as a disembodied act, one that requires a certain detachment from all sensory experience except sight. Becoming aware of the materiality of the book while engaged in the act of reading – re-engaging the sense of touch – implies a failure of the cognitive process (2). However, Silverman seeks to reframe this view of touch and reading,

[3] In a similar vein with regard to Japan, Maeda, in his essay *The Rise of the Modern Japanese Reader* (1973), also asserts that "[t]oday we take for granted that the novel [*shōsetsu*] is something to be read alone in silence", even though communal reading – whether within the family or for educational purposes – had been a well-established practice until the early Meiji period (1868–1880s), owing to the scarcity of books and relatively low literacy rates, particularly among women and children (Maeda 2004a, 223–29).

highlighting the haptic pleasures that books can offer. She argues that we take joy in their physicality, and that despite our capacity to store vast amounts of text in compact digital formats, "books endure because of our deep attraction to their material form" (Silverman 2021, 451). For her, to examine the significance of touch in the reading experience is to emphasise the destabilising effect of touch on one's sense of self, as it reveals our fundamental dependence on the world around us, "[a]ll touched objects function briefly as prosthetics, extending the body in new directions, creating, through the erasure of distance, a formal unity" (Silverman 2020, 2).

While Silverman focuses on the physical book in her examination of the role of touch in reading, her observations are equally relevant to the poetic spaces discussed in this thesis. Whether manifested as walkable installation art or virtual environments, these poetic experiments foreground the reader's physical presence, inviting movement as part of the reading experience or encouraging tactile and interactive engagement with the poems themselves. In a sense, by, for example, anchoring the act of reading to a specific space and incorporating additional sensory elements, the reading process may appear to become less focused, potentially disrupting the cognitive engagement with the text. Yet, there is another way to view this shift: rather than constituting a distraction, the sensory and spatial dimensions may instead enrich the reading experience, fusing with the text to produce something qualitatively new that is more than the sum of its parts. Silverman reminds us that, despite its theorisation as a disembodied, purely cognitive act, reading is *always* an embodied interaction – beginning with touch as we hold a book, turn its pages, or trace the printed lines with our fingers. Likewise, as Ellen Esrock notes, *every* reading experience is shaped by its contextual features: the physical environment, lighting, ambient sounds, even the chair in which one is seated – all of these elements influence how readers perceive and engage with a text (Esrock 1994, 179). These factors are not exclusive to poetic spaces. However, by departing from what is today conventionally regarded as the "ideal" reading

situation – one marked by minimal external stimuli and a suspension of bodily awareness – poetic spaces bring these elements into focus. They draw attention to the reader's embodied experience, their sensory engagement, and their physical presence in a given environment, making these aspects integral to the poetic work itself and to the experience of reading it.

Coming from an Actor Network Theory (ANT) approach, like Silverman, Felski highlights the reader's (or viewer's) individual experience, situation, and "attachments" – with the latter being a key term used in her book *Hooked* – that contribute to an artwork's social meaning, calling for "a rethinking of the fundaments of aesthetic experience" as something not exclusively reserved for "those trained in professional techniques of interpretation" (Felski 2020, xiv). ANT has become established as a theoretical and methodological approach within the social sciences, shaped in large part by the work of Bruno Latour. Within ANT, the term "actor" is understood in a broad sense to refer to anything that exerts an influence on something else. This includes not only humans and animals, but also objects such as books, poems, or installations, since ANT does not require an actor to possess consciousness, intent, or will in order to be considered as such (21–22). The term "network" refers to the relations in which actors are embedded, in all their varied forms – regardless of distance, size, shape, or power differences. This also includes the researchers themselves, who are also "implicated in the processes they are tracing" (22). According to Felski, the "theory" aspect of ANT can be misleading, as she describes it not as a theory in the conventional sense – with propositions or a self-contained body of ideas – but rather as "a certain way of going about things" (xi). It purposefully approaches a given topic from a specific vantage point, instead of striving for a detached, "God-like" perspective (23).

In *Hooked*, Felski uses ANT to examine how people form connections with cultural products such as films, novels, paintings, and music, with a particular focus on affective ties or "attachments" – what draws us in, and how we become "hooked" (24). To explore

audience responses and the nature of these attachments, she turns to a wide range of materials, including memoirs, critical essays, reflections on her own experiences, audience ethnographies, and online reviews, emphasising the need for a plurality of sources, as "no source can be definitive or unimpeachable" (38). She argues that such attachments are often neglected – or even viewed with suspicion – within academic contexts, where they are frequently dismissed as naïve or uncritical (2). In response to philosopher Theodor W. Adorno's influential idea that art's value lies in its ability to distance us from "the tyranny of instrumental reason and the slick seductions of the marketplace", as well as the common idea that art functions to subvert or negotiate the status quo, Felski contends that while these views are not necessarily incorrect, they are incomplete (x; 40). Artworks also matter because they foster bonds – because "they create, or cocreate, enduring ties" (1).

In this respect, both Silverman and Felski, despite coming from two different theoretical frameworks, emphasise the relational ties formed in the reception of art, whether quite literally through touch in Silverman's case or through affections in Felski's. They share a view of engagement with art as an embodied rather than purely cognitive act – one shaped by closeness instead of distance, by sensory responses, emotions, and the specific standpoint under which the experience takes place. Echoing Silverman's critique of the idealisation of reading as a distanced, disembodied pursuit, Felski similarly notes that distance is often treated as a prerequisite for knowledge: we are taught that standing back from our object of study allows for sharper insight (10). However, reflecting also on her own position as a researcher, she not only recognises complete impartiality as an illusion but also suggests that affective ties may be even *stronger* within academia itself, where repeated engagement with a particular author or work – through multiple publications, for instance – can deepen a scholar's sense of attachment (28).

For the purposes of this thesis, Silverman and Felski yield valuable insights in three key areas. Firstly, they propose a shift away from conceiving of reading – or aesthetic experience

more broadly – as an activity characterised by distance and detachment, one that implies "a dyadic encounter on an empty stage: a solitary self faces a self-contained work" (15). Instead, both scholars emphasise the relational ties and bonds formed through these acts, viewing them as embedded within a network of interconnected actors – drawing on the terminology of ANT – who mutually influence one another. In this light, poetic spaces are not self-contained, sovereign entities but rather ongoing, dynamic processes. The elements that constitute these spaces – reader, poem, and environment, as well as poet, curator, or even a friend accompanying the reader – all shape and are shaped by one another, collectively constituting the aesthetic experience of a given poetic space.

Secondly, they both highlight the embodied nature and subjectivity of aesthetic experience. When talking about what "happens" when we read poetry in space specifically focusing on reader reception with all sensory stimuli, with the potential movement and interaction, it is important to note that aesthetic experience can only occur in the first person. As Felski points out, "no one can listen or read or look for you; no one else can have *your* response. To treat such experiences as symptoms of larger structures is to erase those very qualities that define them: their perceptual and sensual textures, their variability, the way they are experienced as 'mine'" (15). Examining testimonials of such experiences – whether through blog posts, tweets, or online reviews – can provide valuable insight into emerging patterns and tendencies, though a complete picture inevitably remains out of reach.

Thirdly, while the preceding point also relates to the question of subjectivity, a further takeaway is the need for reflection on my own position as the author of this thesis within the network surrounding poetic spaces. While such reflexivity is a well-established aspect of academic practice, it becomes especially relevant in the context of aesthetic experience, which is shaped by embodied, situated, and relational factors. In the context of this study, my sustained engagement with the poetic spaces under consideration – through repeated analysis, site visits, and exchanges with individuals involved in their creation or reception –

has inevitably situated me within the network under examination. However, rather than viewing this embeddedness as a limitation, it can be reframed as a potential asset. As Felski reminds us, attachments to art are not obstacles to critique but part of what makes interpretation possible. An understanding of the aesthetic experience offered by poetic spaces therefore requires immersion rather than a purely external vantage point. Allowing myself to undergo the acts of reading at the heart of this project – or, where site visits were not possible, imaginatively reconstructing what such experiences might have been like – opens the way for a richer, more nuanced analysis. This is not to suggest that my impressions are presented as universal, but that they can serve as one possible mode of engagement, valuable precisely for the perspective they bring.

2.2. "Poetry": Defining and Historising Poetic Spaces

Poetic spaces are potentially hybrid, genre-bending, and intermedial forms of poetry that typically situate themselves at the intersection of what is traditionally classified as "literary arts" (*gengo geijutsu* 言語芸術) and "visual arts" (*shikaku geijutsu* 視覚芸術), with a particular emphasis on spatiality. They are experimental setups that challenge conventional modern conceptions of reading as a solitary, disembodied, purely cognitive act, as discussed in the previous subchapter. However, poetic spaces did not emerge in a vacuum, they are rooted in a history of poetry that challenges modern conventions and genre boundaries, reflecting a sustained curiosity to experiment. While a comprehensive history of experimental poetry in Japan lies beyond the scope of this thesis – and has already been documented elsewhere (cf. Mignon 2023; Campana 2024) – this subchapter aims to highlight developments and examples within that history which reflect the aspect of spatiality central to the concept of poetic spaces as defined here, beginning with *surimono*, experimental text-image works of Edo Japan, and extending to the avant-garde poetry movements in the mid-twentieth century. Situating the works analysed in this thesis within

this historical context helps clarify that they are not entirely unprecedented but rather part of a long-standing endeavour to explore, play with, and expand the possibilities of poetic expression, showing similarities but also distinctions from the poetic spaces within this thesis. Therefore, a further aim is to examine existing terminologies used to describe experimental poetry, in order to assess where poetic spaces might be situated within these frameworks – and where such terms fall short.

2.2.1. Experimental Text-Images in Edo Japan: *Surimono*

Japan undeniably has a long-standing tradition of poetic expression that, in modern terms, could be described as genre-bending, combining text with image. The oldest examples of these are works by *waka* poet Minamoto no Shitagō (911-983), such as *Goban no uta* (Kamimura 1997). According to Kamimura Hiroo, these "figurative poems" can be divided into three types: a) religious text-images, such as the *Shuji-mandala*, consisting of Chinese sutras; b) figurative poems by *waka* poets such as Minamoto no Shitagō, that, similar to concrete poetry, arrange words in the form of iconic images, e.g. sun beams; c) combinations of image and text from the Edo period, such as *ashide-e* (singular *kanji* integrated into an illustration, that are hinting at a whole, well-known poem), or *moji-e* (Japanese characters meant to look like figures integrated into a poem) (ibid.). Although Kamimura does not mention them explicitly, there are two more important examples for text-images from the Edo period: *haiga* and *surimono*. The first one entails a *haiku* accompanied by a painting, the second describes a woodblock print with a poem, often a so-called *kyōka* poem, and an illustration.

While *haiga* images offer a compelling example of intermedial poetry, the following section focuses on *surimono*, as their incorporation of *kyōka* – which Betty Siffert describes as "roughly comparable to 'free verse,' although many rules were applied to composition" (Siffert 1996, 58) – more closely aligns with the free verse poetry featured in the poetic

spaces examined in this thesis. In addition to this formal affinity, *surimono* are also notable for their experimental and at times rebellious character. Officially banned by the shogunate for their opulence and therefore privately commissioned and distributed, they carry a subversiveness that positions them as a more likely conceptual predecessor to the spatial experiments examined in poetic spaces. This section offers a brief overview of their historical context, modes of reading, and an analysis of a specific example – *Pillars of the Eitai Bridge* (1785) – in relation to its play with spatiality.

Surimono (摺物), which translates into English as "printed thing", are privately commissioned woodblock prints typically combining an illustration with a *kyōka* poem – a thirty-one-syllable comic or informal verse (55). *Surimono* were printed on thick, soft paper known as *hōsho*, and were usually produced for special occasions – most commonly as New Year's greetings, but also as invitations to literary or musical performances, announcements of name changes, memorials for the deceased, or in celebration of birth or old age. Popular subjects included still-lifes featuring "writing accessories, musical instruments, books, games, fishes and shells, and so forth", as well as depictions of literary classics or contemporary customs (Shūgō 1998, 28). While today *surimono* are typically encountered mounted on walls, they were originally intended to be touched, and in some cases, folded and unfolded as part of the reading experience. When folding was incorporated into the design, artists carefully orchestrated the visual composition so that each step of the unfolding process gradually revealed another element of the full image, often incorporating unexpected details to surprise the reader (Siffert 1996, 61).

The origins of *surimono* can be traced back to the custom of exchanging *e-goyomi* ("picture-calendars") as New Year gifts. These prints displayed the sequence of long and short months in the coming Japanese lunar year and can be described as "a combination of New Year's card and calendar for cultivated persons", a practice that enjoyed popularity during the second half of the eighteenth century (Shūgō 1998, 19; Siffert 1996, 55). The

Tokugawa shogunate granted the right to produce these prints only to designated publishing houses. However, woodblock artists such as Suzuki Harunobu (1724–1770) began to embed the designations of long and short months within the illustrations themselves, subtly hiding them in order to avoid openly violating the shogunate's regulations. The Kansei Reforms (1787–1793) put an end to this practice, when the authorities imposed stricter regulations on materials considered luxurious, banning the public sale of unauthorised calendar prints.

Surimono gradually replaced *e-goyomi* and came to serve as a medium for the exchange of New Year's greetings. They were tolerated by the shogunate despite their opulence, provided they were privately commissioned and distributed (Siffert 1996, 56).[4] The emergence of literary and poetry societies also contributed significantly to the growing popularity of *surimono*. As the merchant and lower samurai classes became more affluent, their interest in cultural practices and decorative art increased, leading to the formation of groups dedicated to the creation and appreciation of poetry. The *kyōka* poetic form gained popularity among the newly wealthy in particular, who used it to display their wit and cultural sophistication. These societies became important patrons of *surimono* artists and commissioned prints for different announcements, such as "changes in career or name, the opening of a business, or the staging of a musical or dance performance" (58). The *kyōka surimono* reached their peak popularity in the 1820s and early 1830s, with numerous *ukiyo-e* artists contributing to their production. However, from the late 1830s onwards, the genre saw a rapid decline, especially following the economic hardships brought about by the

[4] Their "opulence" was, for example, emphasised in texts on *surimono* aimed at Western art collectors in the early twentieth century, such as Gardner Teall's article "The Surimono of Japan" from 1920, in which he praises the materials used, stating: "The paper on which surimono were printed is of a thicker, softer sort than that usually employed in other color-prints and the number of colors employed generally exceeded that found in any other class of prints, with gold, silver and copper inks introduced, and occasionally thin particles of mother-of-pearl. […] The whole luxurious product was enriched in effect by the process of *gauffrage* (a process of embossing), which varied the surface of the surimono with impressed pattern, exquisitely wrought" (Teall 1920, 363–64).

widespread famine that struck Japan between 1834 and 1836 (Shūgō 1998, 23–25; Siffert 1996, 71).

As previously mentioned, the *surimono* are intermedial in nature, combining illustration with text. In addition to their intermediality, however, *surimono* can also be linked to poetic spaces in terms of the compositional relationship between image and text. When groups engaging in *kyōka* writing commissioned *surimono*, the poem was usually composed first, with the image added later by the artist following the commission. The illustration would often support or interpret the poem in "ingenious ways", not merely depicting its content but enriching it through visual symbolism and wordplay. This approach reflected the prevailing ideal: "The more complex the relationship of poetry to design, the better the *surimono* was judged to be" (Siffert 1996, 59).

While many examples could illustrate this point, one stands out as particularly relevant to the topic of reading poetic spaces: *The Pillars of Eitai Bridge* (1785) by Kitagawa Utamaro (1753–1806) (Figure 1). In this early example of *surimono*, the poem is positioned to create the illusion of being carved directly into the architectural structure depicted, imbuing it with a sense of spatial dimension and "illustrates the puzzle-like quality of *kyōka surimono* that so intrigued the public" (60).

The *surimono* features eight poems, with two inscribed on each of the four pillars, all composed by members of the Yomo *kyōka* club. Written by eight different poets, the poems collectively offer interpretive clues that help identify the bridge depicted – as these prints were originally untitled – as well as the season and the occasion for which the *surimono* was produced. For example, on the second pillar, the poem on the right refers to spring as having "slithered […] like a snake in the grass", indicating that the work was created in 1785 as a New Year's greeting, a year associated with the zodiac sign of the snake (ibid.). Their content is rather light, keeping in tone with the festivities for New Year, being full of wordplay and puns (cf. McKee 2008, 387). As each poem appears to be written directly onto

the pillars themselves, this visual placement invites multiple interpretations. It may suggest, for instance, that the poets wanted to present themselves as "the pillars of *kyōka*" (ibid.), especially given that *surimono* also functioned as a medium of self-promotion, lending legitimacy and an aura of authority within *kyōka* circles (Kobayashi 2008). At the same time, the image evokes associations with *rakushu*, a subversive, satirical form of poetry, akin to the comedic *kyōka* but with a more overtly political tone. *Rakushu* were often distributed anonymously or inscribed directly onto alley walls and other hidden public spaces, functioning as a kind of early "street art" (McKee 2008, 387). Even if the content of the poems in *The Pillars of Eitai Bridge* is not explicitly political, the spatial positioning of the text nonetheless carries symbolic weight. It may reflect a sense of power or cultural assertion – whether in the poets' self-perception as the foundational pillars of the *kyōka*, or in the symbolic act of carving their words into the monumental pillars of one of Edo's (now Tokyo's) iconic bridges, as a gesture akin to leaving one's mark in the public sphere.[5] What can be stated with certainty, however, is that the spatial placement of the poems within an illustration of a public and well-known landmark gives rise to interpretive possibilities that neither the image nor the poetry evoke on their own – and that vary depending on the reader's subjective vantage point, to echo Felski's point on subjectivity and the reader reception in the previous subchapter. Following this thesis's definition of poetic spaces – as works by poets that employ three-dimensional physical or virtual space to present their poems in a form that extends beyond conventional two-dimensional formats – *The Pillars of Eitai Bridge* would not strictly qualify. However, by *imagining* the poems as inscribed on a three-dimensional structure, the *surimono* nevertheless bears a close conceptual affinity to the notion of a poetic space.

[5] The bridge has been depicted in numerous woodblock prints; for reference, see the collection featuring Eitai Bridge in *The Landmarks of Edo in Colour Woodblock Prints* online archive: https://www.ndl.go.jp/landmarks/e/sights/eitaibashi/ [last access: 4 June 2025].

2.2.2. Japanese Avant-Garde Poetry: *VOU* and *ASA*

Following the end of the Edo period and Japan's reopening to foreign influence, Western ideas and artistic movements profoundly shaped the art and culture of the Meiji (1868–1912) and Taishō (1912–1926) eras, while Japanese culture simultaneously influenced modern art and poetry in the West. This mutual exchange was particularly evident in the experimental and avant-garde art circles of the early twentieth century, including Futurism with poets like Hirato Renkichi (1894–1922), author of the *Manifesto of the Japanese Futurist Movement* (1921); Dadaism, represented by Takahashi Shinkichi (1901–1987) and Nakahara Chūya (1907–1937); and Surrealism, exemplified by Takiguchi Shūzō (1903–1979), Kitasono Katué (1902–1978) and Nishiwaki Junzaburō (1894–1982), while the concise style of Japanese *haiku* also influenced Western modernist poets such as Ezra Pound (1885–1972).

Avant-garde poetry in the early twentieth century "contained at its core the force of a deep shock", questioning poetic conventions and testing the possibilities of language (Sas 2001, 8). At the same time, its political implications made it a target of the special higher police (*tokkō*) in the years leading up to the Second World War. Takiguchi, for instance, was imprisoned for nine months in 1941 for his involvement with the Surrealist movement, and publications such as Yamanaka Chirū's 1936 translation of André Breton's *L'Immaculée Conception* (1930) were subject to partial censorship (21). While some poets remained active and continued publishing before and after the war, many others associated with the movement have since been forgotten (11). According to Sas, however, these early avant-garde experiments nevertheless exerted a lasting influence on a younger generation of artists and poets in Japan, attesting that "these early and idiosyncratic avant-garde works and journals were crucial in inspiring them to pursue literary interests and in enabling them to perform their own artistic experiments" (ibid.).

One avant-garde poet who remained active and influential after the Second World War was Kitasono. In the postwar years, however, he became increasingly critical of his earlier

work, feeling it had been overly shaped by Surrealist doctrine, and consequently distanced himself from the movement (23–24). Instead, he turned toward forms of poetry that emphasised visual abstraction. A similarly influential postwar avant-garde poet experimenting at the intersection of poetry and visuality was Niikuni Seiichi (1925–1977). Both figures went on to found their own poetry groups – *VOU* and *ASA* – shaping distinct yet related trajectories within postwar experimental poetry.

Kitasono's first international recognition came with his poetry series *Tanchōna Kūkan* (単調な空間, Monotonous Space, 1958), which was translated into Portuguese by Brazilian poet and composer L.C. Vinholes, who was working for the Brazilian embassy in Japan at that time, and published in a newspaper in São Paolo in 1958 (Kamimura 1986, 43). The work attracted the attention of the Brazilian *Noigandres* group, which had been pioneering the development of "poesia concreta" in Brazil (ibid.). Vinholes later also translated the work of Niikuni Seiichi, who had begun exploring a form of poetic expression closely aligned with concrete poetry. Niikuni himself referred to his works as *miru-shi* (視る詩, "poems to see") and *kiku-shi* (聴く詩, "poems to hear") in his poetry collection *Zero-on* (０音, Zero Sounds, 1963) (cf. Okuno 2021, 24). Encouraged by Vinholes, Niikuni sent his poems to members of the *Noigandres* group, as well as to key figures in the European concrete poetry movement, such as Pierre Garnier. This transnational exchange helped foster an emerging international concrete poetry network, culminating in a major exhibition co-organised by the Brazilian Embassy, the German Cultural Institute, and the Sogetsu Art Centre in Tokyo in 1964. Among the poets featured were thirteen from Brazil, nine from Germany, one from France, and five from Japan: Kitasono Katué, Shimizu Toshihiko, Fujitomi Yasuo, Miyagishi Akiyoshi, and Niikuni Seiichi (Kamimura 1986, 44).

Kitasono was the founder of the *VOU* club, a "a group of outsider poet-artists with their roots in Japan's Modernist avant-garde of the 1930s", and its magazine of the same name, which was published from 1935 to 1978 (Selland 2022, 9). Over its lifespan, *VOU* became

one of Japan's most influential avant-garde magazines, ultimately producing 160 issues (Kamimura 1986, 43). Other recognizable members of the *VOU* group were Yamamoto Kansuke (1914–1987), Terayama Shūji (1936–1983), Tamura Ryūichi (1923–1998), or Shiraishi Kazuko (1921–2024) (Mignon 2001, 61). Following his experience with the 1964 international exhibition, Niikuni Seiichi, together with Fujitomi Yasuo, founded another poetry group, *ASA* (an acronym for Association for the Study of Arts), and launched a magazine of the same name in 1965 with the aim of promoting experimental poetry (Wong 2015, 116).

The two groups initially worked closely together in organising exhibitions of their work in and outside Japan (Kamimura 1986, 44). However, while Niikuni and the *ASA* group continued to focus on exploring the possibilities of concrete poetry, for example through collaborating with Pierre Garnier to promote its transnational character (Wong 2015, 118), Kitasono began instead to experiment with the combination of poetic text and photography in a form he termed "plastic poems" (*purasutikku poemu*) (Kamimura 1986, 44; Mignon 2001, 70). In an effort to distinguish this new category of poetry from concrete poetry, he writes in an essay titled "Note on Plastic Poetry" (1966) in issue 105 of *VOU*:

> Plastic poems are a form of poetry that requires neither lines nor stanzas, a structure that is poetry itself, a "device for poetry" that needs no rhythm or meaning. The stream of experimental poetry, flowing from the sources of Futurism, Dadaism, and Cubism, created small puddles of concrete poetry here and there. But to me, they suggest only a fleeting sparkle, soon to vanish. *Poet, how long will you seek the applause of the audience – for yourself, a true artist of language? Such applause is never to be expected.* Within the viewfinder of my camera, I compose poetry with a handful of paper scraps, cardboard, and shards of glass. This is the birth of the plastic poem. (Kitasono as quoted in ensui_books 2023; Kamimura 1986, 46, author's translation)[6]

[6] I encountered this excerpt from Kitasono's essay "Note on Plastic Poetry" in Kamimura's text on concrete and visual poetry from Japan, written in German. As copies of *VOU* magazine are rare, I searched online for the original Japanese version and came across an Instagram post by a bookseller who had used the same excerpt as a caption. I compared it with Kamimura's German translation and found them to be largely identical, apart from the omission of a rhetorical question in the middle: "*Dichter, bis wann willst du Beifall des Publikums für dich, einen realen Künstler der Sprache, erwarten? So ein Beifall ist niemals zu erwarten.*" ("Poet, how long will you seek the applause of the audience – for yourself, a true artist of language? Such applause is never to be expected.") (Kamimura 1986, 46). I translated the excerpt from the original Japanese and incorporated the missing sentence from Kamimura's German version, marking it in italics.

Kitasono never offered a more detailed explanation of why he referred to his photographs as "plastic poems", but, as John Solt points out, the term appears to allude to the category of "plastic arts" (*zōkei geijutsu* 造形芸術) (Solt 1999, 278–79). In a piece published in *VOU* issue 100 – shortly before his "Note on Plastic Poetry" – Kitasono describes plastic arts as "the newest dimension of modern art", emphasising their challenge to established distinctions between genres such as painting and sculpture. He concludes that the distinction between "poet, painter, and sculptor will disappear, and only the word artist (*geijutsuka*) or 'art operator' will remain" (Kitasono as quoted in Solt 1999, 278). In this sense, "plastic poetry" can be interpreted as a way for Kitasono to express his wish to overcome genre boundaries between different art forms, finding the concept of concrete poetry increasingly restrictive.

In the decade leading up to Kitasono's death in 1978, *VOU* magazine became a key platform for publishing visual poetry[7] – or, in Kitasono's case, plastic poetry – ranging from text-image hybrids to works that completely abandoned textual elements in favour of pure visual composition.

VOU remained active throughout Japan's turbulent 1960s and 1970s – a period marked by political unrest over the renewal of the U.S.–Japan Security Treaty and widespread anti-war sentiment among students, leftist intellectuals, and artists (Selland 2022, 9). However, following Kitasono's death, the group disbanded and ceased publication, with the final issue appearing that same year. *ASA* magazine had already concluded earlier, with its last issue published in 1974. Niikuni's death in 1977 signalled the *ASA* group's definitive end (Kanazawa 2009, 69).

According to Selland, despite many descendant groups and magazines that came from the *VOU* group, such as *gui*, *O*, *δ*, or *TRAP*, to only name a few, *VOU* vanished from the

[7] This information is taken from the abstract of *VOU: visual poetry, Tokio, 1958–1978*, edited by Taylor Mignon (Mignon 2022b).

mainstream since it dismantled, as they "failed to gain the official recognition of Japan's conservative poetry community" (Selland 2022, 9), which instead canonised postwar poets perceived to embody a distinctive or authentic Japaneseness, such as Hagiwara Sakutarō and Nakahara Chūya (12), and the same would also apply to the *ASA* group, whose magazine ran for a significantly shorter period of time with fewer issues (seven compared to 160).

However, in 1997, poet and German-language professor Kamimura Hiroo, observed a renewed interest in the group's work abroad after Kitasono's death – particularly in Germany – where their poetry featured in exhibitions held in Bielefeld and Gelsenkirchen (1978/79), Siegen (1986), Stuttgart (1993), and Hamburg (1997), the last of which Kamimura curated. In the foreword for its catalogue in a text called *Visuelle Poesie aus Japan* (Visual Poetry from Japan), Kamimura notes that a new generation of Japanese poets, shaped by the international exchanges fostered by the *VOU* and *ASA* group and inspired by their concrete and visual poetry, had emerged. Among those involved in the exhibition were Habara Shūkuro (1935–), Hasekura Takako (1941–), Itō Motoyuki (1935–2020), and Kamimura himself (Kamimura 1997).

With the publication of a new anthology of visual poetry by the *VOU* group in 2022, covering two decades (1958–1978), poet, translator, and university lecturer Taylor Mignon helped reignite international interest in Japanese avant-garde poetry. Mignon, who co-founded the still-extant *Tokyo Poetry Journal* (*ToPoJo*) in 2015, had worked on the book for nearly 20 years, meticulously collecting issues of *VOU* magazine, hoping that the anthology "may contribute to this strengthening wave of interest in an often overlooked aspect of twentieth-century and contemporary Japanese art and poetry" (Mignon 2022a, 112). This momentum appears to have continued under the *ToPoJo*'s current editors, who dedicated Volume 15, published in late 2024, to "Visual Visionary Poetry." The issue features an international line-up of contributors, including emerging Japanese poets such as Sawamura Takahiro and Ōtani Yoichiro (b. 1990). Their work closely aligns with concrete poetry while

also incorporating elements of digital art: Ōtani, for instance, designs virtual three-dimensional sculptures composed of moving and floating kanji formations (Ōtani 2023), while Sawamura creates the illusion of three-dimensional spaces solely through the arrangement of kanji on a two-dimensional background, such as in his work *Thunderbolt* (Sawamura 2024).[8]

Both Kitasono's *VOU* group and Niikuni's *ASA* group shared a vision of reimagining poetry by breaking away from traditional conventions of poetic composition in Japanese culture. They pursued new approaches through experimentation and established international networks with like-minded poets abroad. Although both groups disbanded following the deaths of their respective founders in the late 1970s, their influence on Japanese experimental poetry remains evident, as seen in the examples previously mentioned – even if their names never fully entered the official Japanese poetry canon or gained widespread public recognition. Determining the extent to which the poets examined in this thesis are aware of, or feel influenced by, the work of the *VOU* and *ASA* groups proves difficult – if only because many contemporary poets appear reluctant to cite clear influences in interviews. Yet, even in the absence of direct references to these twentieth-century avant-garde movements, the poetic spaces analysed clearly exhibit elements characteristic of both concrete and visual poetry – whether in their playful engagement with language, treating it not merely as a vehicle for expressing thoughts and emotions but as material whose structure and form *is* the content, or in their hybridity, merging poetry with installation, video, and digital art.

[8] The use of virtual space for poetic experimentation will be examined in more detail in Chapter 5 of this thesis. However, in discussing how digital technologies are employed for experimental poetry, it is also worth noting the emergence of so-called "Twitterature" – a term referring to the rise of Twitter as a platform for literary expression. Jonathan E. Abel suggests that condensing a narrative into just 140 characters recalls traditional poetic forms of constraint (*haiku*) and linkage (*renga*), while also evoking a sense of spontaneity. A well-known example of poetry published in this way is the work of Wago Ryōichi, who shared poems about the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami as the events were still unfolding (Abel 2016).

Above all, this section and the one preceding it have demonstrated that, while it is tempting to describe any artistic or poetic innovation as fundamentally new, such developments never emerge in a vacuum. Rather, they build on earlier attempts to explore and stretch the boundaries of poetic expression. Even if it was not the explicit aim of the Yomo *kyōka* group to redefine the genre of *surimono*, their decision to print their poems not in the usual blank spaces surrounding an illustration, but directly onto the pillars of an iconic bridge in *The Pillars of Eitai Bridge* – making it appear as though the poems were carved into the three-dimensional structure – demonstrates a willingness to experiment with the expressive possibilities of their medium. Figures like Kitasono and Niikuni more consciously articulated their intent to break with conventions and explore new modes of poetic composition.[9] Their works, positioned at the intersection of poetry and visual art, were not only meant to be read in books but also viewed in exhibition spaces. In this sense, they already anticipate a reading experience closer to that of poetic spaces – though still presented as flat objects hung on walls rather than fully spatial arrangements. At the same time, this discussion makes clear that poetic spaces cannot simply be subsumed under existing categories such as "visual poetry" or "concrete poetry", even if certain similarities exist.

The following section turns to existing terminology for experimental poetry, highlighting where such categories prove inadequate for the works under discussion. It argues instead for the introduction of a new label – "poetic spaces" – better suited to describe the phenomena at the centre of this thesis.

[9] Kitasono himself professed the aim of creating an entirely *new* art genre – one that regarded language as merely one of several media through which poetry could be expressed and sought to expand the possibilities of meaning-making by combining poetic text with other media, most notably photography in his case (Kamimura 1986, 46). However, as the previous section on text-images in Edo-Japan has shown, poetry in Japan has a long history of embracing media hybridity.

2.2.3. Labelling Poetic Spaces

Having explored the historical and conceptual links to which poetic spaces are connected, I now turn to the terminology used to describe poetic phenomena that blur the boundaries of genre and medium. This examination serves not only to situate the present discussion within broader academic discourse, but also to identify the terminological space in which the spatial forms of poetic expression analysed in this thesis might most appropriately be located.

In the preceding sections, the terms "visual poetry" – including "plastic poetry", a form distinctive to Kitasono – and "concrete poetry" have been used to describe the experimental poetry of Japan's avant-garde scene. While "visual poetry" described poetic works that combine textual elements with other media, such as paintings, photographs, or collages with found objects like scraps from newspapers (as found in the *VOU* group's works), "concrete poetry", in contrast, referred to compositions that engage with the visual arrangement of text itself (see the *ASA* group's works). In his text, Kamimura draws a distinction between the two terms to highlight the two poetry groups' contrasting approaches: *ASA* adopts a "language-internal" perspective in their concrete poetry, in which language is treated not as a vehicle for expression but as a visual material, and the poem's meaning emerges from the visual arrangement of the text (Kamimura 1986, 45–46); by contrast, Kamimura attributes to *VOU* a "language-external" stance, as its visual poetry or plastic poetry foregrounds non-verbal materials, such as photography in Kitasono's case (46–47). However, this binary division is not as clear-cut as it may appear.

"Visual poetry" is rather often understood as an umbrella term that encompasses "concrete poetry" as one of its subcategories. One of the most prominent theorists advocating this broader understanding is Willard Bohn, Professor Emeritus of French and Comparative Literature at Illinois State University, and the author of several influential works on visual poetry. Bohn defines visual poetry as a hybrid genre that merges elements of poetry and painting, encompassing a spectrum ranging from purely textual compositions (which would

be equivalent to “concrete poetry”) to poems that omit language altogether, with most examples falling somewhere in-between (Bohn 2011, 13–15). Taylor Mignon adopts the same terminology in *Visual Poetry of Japan: 1684–2023* (2023), using “visual poetry” as the overarching category for the works he examines, which include haiku, calligrams, collages, and concrete poems, among others. A similar approach is taken in volume 15 of the *ToPoJo*, where the term “visual poetry” in the title also encompasses poetic works that, following Kamimura’s definition, would fall under the category of concrete poetry. A comparable trend can be observed in Japanese terminology, which appears to follow Bohn’s classification. *Shikakushi* (視覚詩, combining the kanji for “sense of sight” and “poetry”), described as “poetry for the eyes” (Katsurayama 2011, 35) or “poetry consisting of combinations of text, drawings or photographs”) (Ōtani 2022, 5), generally functions as a broader term, while *konkurīto poetorī* (written in katakana) refers more specifically to the concrete poetry movement associated with Niikuni Seiichi, the *ASA* group, and international figures such as Pierre Garnier, Eugen Gomringer, and the *Noigandres* group (cf. Nagahata 2002). The way hashtags are used on Instagram – which may offer insight into how contemporary poets engaged in experimental poetry perceive these terms – appears to support this interpretation, with #視覚詩 encompassing a wide range of experimental poems, many of which resemble concrete poetry.[10]

However, some scholars push back against the conflation of concrete and visual poetry. A prominent voice among them is Klaus Peter Dencker, poet and professor of media theory and media practice at the University of Trier.[11] Although both terms emerged around the

[10] To view the results associated with the hashtag on Instagram, see: https://www.instagram.com/p/C0ARTQjShXL/ [last access: 18 May 2025]. An Instagram account is required for access.

[11] Dencker was also active in the poetry circles surrounding Kamimura Hiroo, and collaborated with Kamimura, Fujitomi Yasuo, Itō Motoyuki, Mukai Shūtarō, and Takahashi Shōhachirō on a visual chain poem, which was published in 2002 under the title *RENSHI* (Fujitomi et al. 2002).

same time in the 1960s and respond to one another, he emphasises their fundamental differences. Dencker writes:

> On the one hand, concrete poetry had a liberating influence, encouraging writers to abandon traditional metaphorical styles in favour of new literary forms of expression. On the other hand, the highly reductive approach of concrete poets – focusing almost exclusively on the materiality of language – became so restrictive that a visual expansion, an interweaving of textual material with figurative and pictorial elements, became a necessary development. For this reason, the form of visual poetry as I understood it at the time – going beyond concrete poetry – had little in common with the way the same term was used by concrete poets themselves, who employed it merely to distinguish the visual component of concrete poetry from its acoustic counterpart (Acoustic Poetry). (Dencker 2010, 3)

This is why Dencker proposed a new overarching term to describe these experimental forms of poetry: "optical poetry" (*optische Poesie*). He argues that, when considering the various forms these poetic expressions take, it is their optical qualities that most clearly distinguish them from more traditional understandings of poetry. Since Dencker does not elaborate further why he chose the word "optical", it can be assumed that he uses the term synonymously to "visual" – that is, pertaining to what is perceived through the sense of sight. In this framework, visual poetry refers more specifically to those works developed in reaction to the limitations of concrete poetry in the 1960s, while optical poetry serves as the broader, inclusive category encompassing a range of visually oriented poetic forms, including concrete and visual poetry.

Unlike Bohn, who defines visual poetry primarily as a fusion of poetry and painting – thus largely focusing on two-dimensional forms of art – Dencker explicitly broadens the scope to include spatial poetic forms and poetry situated in public spaces in his notion of optical poetry. Examples include Jan Merx's public art project *Floating Poem* (1990), comprising large floating letters on a lake that drift and recombine to generate new words and meanings; early twentieth-century poster poetry, such as Pierre Albert-Birot's *Poème-Affiche* (1916–1924), which was displayed on street corners and park pathways, thereby integrating poetry into everyday urban life; and the poetry installation *The First Minute of the Rest of a Movie* by Ján Mančuška and Jonas Dahlberg (2005), which used projections to create large, floating

texts within the gallery's exhibition space (771-820). He also extends his scope to include poetry in virtual space in this category, such as *Remotewords* (2008) by Achim Mohné and Uta Kopp, a project realised through Google Maps (817). These examples correspond more closely to the poetic spaces examined in this thesis than to the works typically classified as "visual poetry" or "concrete poetry" by Bohn – or by Kitasono and Niikuni, as discussed in the previous subchapter – given their emphasis on spatiality, whereby the physical or virtual environment becomes an integral part of the artwork itself.

Nevertheless, the use of either "optical poetry" or "visual poetry" as umbrella terms remains problematic for the purposes of this thesis, as both foreground the sense of sight through their lexical choices. This is particularly evident in Bohn's description of how visual poetry is read in contrast to conventional poetic texts. He outlines a three-stage reading process: first, the viewer takes in the overall design and composition, "absorb[ing] as much visual information as possible" as an immediate, image-driven response; second, the textual elements are deciphered, much like reading a traditional poem, though visual poetry often requires further interpretive effort due to its unconventional layout, particularly in determining how the text is meant to be read: Is it arranged from left to right, top to bottom, in a circular motion, or in a less linear fashion? Where does the poem begin and end – if such boundaries exist at all? Finally, the third stage involves synthesising visual and textual information to explore how they interact and what new meanings emerge through their interplay (Bohn 2011, 15–17). While Bohn's framework offers useful tools for analysing poetic spaces – particularly in terms of how one might *read* them – it also underscores his emphasis on sight: we see the composition, we see and interpret the text, and we observe the interaction between image and language. But if reading is conceived as an embodied act, not solely dependent on visual perception, and if sensory stimuli form part of the aesthetic experience within poetic spaces, where do such elements figure in Bohn's model of reading visual poetry?

Bohn's strong emphasis on the visual may be unsurprising, however, given his definition of visual poetry as "poetry that is meant to be seen" in the very first sentence of his book *Reading Visual Poetry* (13). What is perhaps more curious is that Dencker, too, places a strong emphasis on the visual in his discussion of optical poetry, even though many of the examples he cites clearly involve other sensory modalities – particularly in works that merge poetry with installation art. While this focus may reflect the historical terminology and context in which Dencker writes, it seems somewhat at odds with the multisensory nature of many of the poetic forms he explores.

For these reasons, I have chosen to adopt the term "poetic spaces" in this thesis, as it highlights the spatial dimensions of the works under consideration and the role that spatiality plays in their reception. I also use the term "experimental poetry" to reflect the playful and boundary-pushing qualities of these works, as well as their tendency to challenge genre conventions and normative understandings of poetry. Compared to the more visually oriented terms "visual poetry" and its perhaps broader yet still sight-focused counterpart "optical poetry", experimental poetry also offers a more neutral and inclusive descriptor. As previously established, poetic spaces, as explored in this thesis, are not solely to be seen; they are also to be traversed, touched, heard, and interacted with. These works engage the reader – or rather, the visitor – through multiple senses and modes of experience. Returning to Bohn's definition, if visual poetry is poetry meant to be seen, then poetic spaces are poetry meant to be entered, navigated, and lived.

2.3. "Space": Poetic Spaces as Sites of Resistance

Since this thesis focuses on the perception of "reading" and "poetry" when a work is presented in spatial form – whether in three-dimensional physical space or in virtual environments – the final pillar of its theoretical framework is spatiality.

The dimension of space has gained traction in recent decades in academic discourse through a paradigm shift known as the spatial turn. As Doris Bachmann-Medick explains, since the 1980s, cultural and social studies have increasingly adopted a spatial perspective, focusing on how space and spatiality are culturally perceived and constructed (Bachmann-Medick 2016, 211–44). The spatial turn draws on the work of key thinkers such as Henri Lefebvre and Michel Foucault in France, Edward Soja and Doreen Massey in the US, Martina Löw in Germany and Maeda Ai in Japan, and is grounded in the understanding that space is not a neutral, pre-existing backdrop, but rather the product of social practices. As Edward Soja puts it, "[…] we are becoming increasingly aware that we are, and always have been, intrinsically spatial beings, active participants in the social construction of our embracing spatialities" (Soja 1996, 1) – and just as society produces its spaces, these very spaces also influence and shape the structure of society in return.

In literary studies, applications of the spatial turn have often focused on analysing how spaces – such as the city (McNamara 2014), the maze (Gehring 2009), or the home (Giuliani 2021), to only name a few – are represented within texts. This thesis, however, takes a different approach. Rather than examining how space is narrated or constructed in poetry, it applies spatial theory to explore what happens when the experience of being in a physical or virtual space becomes integral to a poem's form and presentation. Here, spatiality is not merely a thematic concern but a constitutive element of the reading experience. Although relatively little scholarship exists on this topic in relation to poetry or literary texts more broadly, there is a growing body of research that investigates how encountering artworks in specific locations affects viewer perception. Much of this work stems from studies on site-specific installations (Kwon 2002) and street art forms such as graffiti (Hologa 2018; Rácz 2018). Other research examines how the setting of a gallery or exhibition space shapes our experience of artworks – through spatial conventions, guided pathways, and curatorial

choices such as which pieces are shown together and how they are positioned in relation to one another (Reitstätter 2015).

Each chapter of this thesis draws on slightly different concepts and perspectives from spatial theory – including those already mentioned, as well as those of Gaston Bachelard, Marc Augé, and Doreen Massey – which are introduced within the context of each chapter to allow for a more direct connection with the examples under analysis. However, the central theoretical foundation underpinning the broader framework of this study is Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*, originally published in French under the title *La Production de l'espace* in 1974 and given renewed prominence following its English translation in 1991 (Merrifield 2006, xx). Lefebvre's now widely cited assertion that "([s]ocial) space is a (social) product" (Lefebvre 1991, 26) has been instrumental in shaping critical discourse on space and is often cited as a cornerstone of the so-called spatial turn. His formulation of a spatial triad has significantly influenced many of the theorists engaged with throughout this thesis, as well as my own conceptualisation of poetic spaces. Given its foundational role, the following section outlines Lefebvre's key arguments and traces how subsequent thinkers – Edward Soja, Maeda Ai, and Devin Proctor – have further developed these ideas, while connecting them to the context of poetic spaces.

2.3.1. Henri Lefebvre

Henri Lefebvre (1901–1991) was a French Marxist theorist best known for his influential work on everyday life, space, and urbanism. Over the course of his career, he authored more than sixty books, many of which have been translated into multiple languages, and he left many more projects unfinished (Merrifield 2006, xxi–xxii). In addition to his academic work, Lefebvre was politically active: a long-time member of the French Communist Party

(from 1928 until his expulsion in 1958)[12], he participated in the Resistance during the Second World War and later played a mentoring role in the student revolts of May 1968, embodying a synthesis of theory and political action (xxi).

While *The Production of Space*, written throughout his sixties, is his most widely known work in the Anglophone world, it has received less attention in France, where Lefebvre is primarily remembered for his Marxist humanism and for making Marxist theory more accessible to French scholars (xxxii). His ideas also had a notable impact in Japan, where his writings were translated and circulated from the 1950s onwards, beginning with Takeuchi Yoshitomo's translation of Lefebvre's *Le Marxisme* in 1952. The text was part of the *Bunko kuseju* (文庫クセジュ) series by publisher Hakusui-sha, containing Japanese translations of the French pocket library *Collection Que sais-je*. In the foreword to a revised edition of his translation published in 1968, Takeuchi explains that his translation of Lefebvre's work was welcomed by many readers in Japan because a general interest in Marxism was growing at the time. According to Takeuchi, this interest was shaped by international crises such as the Korean War as well as by developments within Japan, particularly the so-called *gyaku kōsu* (逆コース, "Reverse Course") – a shift in U.S. occupation policy that moved away from demilitarisation and toward the suppression of communist and socialist influence during the early Cold War – which was perceived as conflicting with the goal of establishing peace and democracy in postwar Japan (Takeuchi 1968, 1). The early reception of Lefebvre also points to a broader postwar engagement with French thought in Japan. France offered Japanese intellectuals an alternative to the hegemonic model of the United States for imagining how national identity might be preserved within a democracy after the end of the war (Slaymaker 2002, 7). Although

[12] Lefebvre had previously expressed his intention to leave the Communist Party, as he, like many of his contemporaries, grew disillusioned by Stalin's now widely acknowledged crimes. His eventual expulsion in 1958 therefore came as little surprise (Merrifield 2006, xxiii; Kelly 1992).

Marxism had already been widely circulating as an idea in Japan before – as demonstrated by the proletarian literary movement – French philosophers' postwar rearticulation of these ideas proved particularly resonant. As Katō Shūichi notes about Jean-Paul Sartre's existentialism, for example, its emphasis on individuality aligned with the sense of liberation many writers and intellectuals experienced after the war, following years in which only state-sanctioned, pro-war propaganda had been publishable (Katō 2002, 55–58). Lefebvre can likewise be understood as part of this wave of French postwar Marxist theorists whose work resonated with the concerns of many Japanese intellectuals at the time, contributing to the rapid translation and circulation of their writings in Japan.

With regard to Lefebvre's writings on space, his call for inclusivity and accessibility in urban environments in *Le droit à la ville* (The Right to the City, 1968) was translated into Japanese only a year after its publication as *Toshi e no kenri* (都市への権利) by Morimoto Kazuo, a professor of French literature who also translated several of Lefebvre's other works.[13] *La révolution urbaine* (1970) followed in Imai Shigemi's translation in 1974, and *Espace et politique* (1972) appeared in Japanese translation a year later. By contrast, *La Production de l'espace* (1974) was translated much later, in 2000, by socio-economic scholar Saitō Hideharu under the title *Kūkan no seisan* (空間の生産). As Yatsuka Hajime suggests in his review of the book, the timing of this translation was likely influenced by a renewed interest in Lefebvre's spatial theory, mediated through Anglophone thinkers such as Soja, Massey, and Harvey and the Japanese translations of their work (Yatsuka 2004).

The Production of Space combines Marx' historical materialism with elements from Hegel and Nietzsche, as well as "Lefebvre's grasp of romantic poetry, modern art, and architecture" (Merrifield 2006, 103). Lefebvre demonstrates that space is not merely "the passive locus of social relations" (Lefebvre 1991, 11), but is actively produced. He also does

[13] Morimoto also translated *Problèmes actuels du marxisme* (1958) in the same year as its original publication, as well as *La Vie quotidienne dans le monde moderne* (1968), which appeared in Japanese in 1970, both published by Gendaishichō-sha.

not hesitate to criticise the role of capitalism in this process, stating that hegemonic powers seek to instrumentalise space, "with the help of knowledge and technical expertise, of a 'system'" (10–11). However, he refrains from labelling space as essentially capitalist, as this would imply that the process in which space is produced is already complete – whereas Lefebvre insists it remains ongoing and open (11). As Merrifield observes, the aim of Lefebvre's book is ultimately a political one: "To know how and what space internalises is to learn how to produce something better, is to learn how to produce another city, another space, a space for and of socialism" (Merrifield 2006, 108).

The central pillar of the book is the proposal of a triadic model of space consisting of three interrelated realms: 1) spatial practices or space as perceived (*perçu*), which refers to the routines, behaviours, and physical interactions that structure our experience of space; 2) representations of space or space as conceived (*conçu*), which encompasses the conceptual and technical understandings of space, such as maps, blueprints and institutional discourses, implying abstraction and domination, as this is "the space of capital, state, and bourgeoisie" (109); and 3) representational spaces or space as lived (*vécu*), which captures the subjective, affective, and often symbolic experience of space by individuals, "linked to the clandestine or underground side of social life, as also to art" (Lefebvre 1991, 33).

Before Lefebvre, Western spatial concepts were largely theorised in a dualistic framework, focusing on the perceived and the conceived (Soja 1996, 10).[14] His contribution was to introduce a third realm – space as directly lived – which repositions the individual as an active agent in the production of space. This addition disrupts any strict top-down power dynamic from "above" (conceived space) to "below" (perceived space), and resists framing

[14] The term "Western spatial concepts" is used here because traditional approaches to space in Japanese philosophy tend to operate outside binary modes of thinking. One example is the Buddhist notion of *mu* (無), commonly translated as "nothingness" or "void", which describes an aesthetic mode of engaging with the world from a state of selflessness and freedom from ego attachment (Odin 2001, 120–23). This principle of the "void" was also explored in Japanese Dadaist and later Surrealist poetry, most notably in Kitasono's concept of the "vacuum tube", in which he describes a "timeless space", where meaning arises from as the core of the act of writing (cf. Sas 2001, 121–24).

the process as wholly determined or closed to change. Instead, by emphasising lived space, Lefebvre allows for individual agency, proposing that each person, through their actions and decisions within space, can potentially reshape spatial norms – that is, how space is used, constructed, understood, and ultimately produced. The production of social space, in this view, is a malleable process, open to reconfiguration. Perhaps due in part to his proximity to politically engaged avant-garde movements such as the Situationists active in 1950s and 60s Paris, Lefebvre identified art in particular as a means through which normative spatial practices can be disrupted and renegotiated (Dünne 2006, 298–99).

This is why Lefebvre emphasised the importance of a triadic model over binary oppositions, arguing that "[r]elations with two elements boil down to oppositions, contrasts or antagonisms" (Lefebvre 1991, 39), and instead advocated for a both/and logic rather than an either/or dichotomy (Soja 1996, 7). Yet, as Soja notes, Lefebvre's own stance on dualisms can at times appear inconsistent, as he maintains other binaries such as mind/body, male/female, or Western/non-Western (31). This ambivalence is not entirely out of character, however, considering Lefebvre's often rapid and fragmentary style, which left many of his projects "gaping, incomplete, suggestive, as he flitted on to something else" (Merrifield 2006, xxii).[15] Overall, *The Production of Space* should be read as an opening provocation rather than a definitive system, a "dialectical simplification" rather than "a mechanical framework" (109), that has inspired and informed a wide range of later approaches to spatial theory.

2.3.2. Edward Soja

Edward Soja (1940–2015), a geographer and urban theorist, was one of the central figures who shaped the spatial turn in academic discourse in the US. Much of his work focused on

[15] Lefebvre often dictated his work to his partner at the time – a practice which, as Merrifield suggests, may have contributed to the impression of his writing as fragmented (Merrifield 2006, xxii).

the urban environment, particularly the city of Los Angeles with its spatial and social inequalities. In his monograph *Thirdspace: Journeys to Real-and-Imagined Places* (1996), Soja extends Lefebvre's spatial triad, proposing a framework of "spatial trialectics", reconfiguring Lefebvre's categories as "Firstspace", "Secondspace", and the titular "Thirdspace". As previously outlined, Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* already carried a political undertone. Soja extended this aspect further by placing particular emphasis on the third realm of Lefebvre's spatial triad: representational (or lived) space. Reframed as "Thirdspace", Soja conceptualises it as a space of resistance, where alternative spatial narratives can emerge – a notion that will now be examined in more detail.

Soja's model of spatial trialectics closely mirrors Lefebvre's triad, though it seeks to clarify some of Lefebvre's occasionally ambiguous terminology (such as similarly phrased terms like "spaces of representation" and "representations of space"). In Soja's framework, 1) "Firstspace" refers to the tangible materiality of spatial forms – spaces that can be empirically measured – corresponding to Lefebvre's notion of "perceived space"; 2) "Secondspace" encompasses the conceived aspects of space: the mental or cognitive representations of spatiality, aligning with Lefebvre's "conceived space"; 3) "Thirdspace" corresponds to Lefebvre's "lived space", and is framed as the terrain for "'counterspaces,' spaces of resistance to the dominant order arising precisely from their subordinate, peripheral or marginalized positioning" (67). While the notion of lived space is often interpreted as a combination of conceived and perceived spaces, Soja contends that "lived space" – and by extension, Thirdspace – "extends well beyond them in scope, substance, and meaning", presenting it as a "thirding" of spatial imagination (Soja 1996, 11). Soja employs the term "thirding" or "thirding-as-Othering" in reference to Lefebvre's attempt to move beyond binary thinking by introducing a third realm, thus transforming his spatial model into a triad. As Soja puts it, "There is always the Other, a third term that disrupts, disorders, and begins to reconstitute the conventional binary opposition into an-Other that comprehends

but is more than just the sum of two parts" (31). As such, Thirdspace is a transgressive concept, "a meta-space of radical openness where everything can be found, where the possibilities for new discoveries and political strategies are endless, […] a strategic and heretical space 'beyond' what is presently known and taken for granted" (34).

In developing his concept of Thirdspace, Soja draws not only on Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*, but also on his notion of *Le droit à la différence* (The Right to Difference, 1968), where Lefebvre asserts the right to be different in the face of homogenisation, fragmentation, and hierarchically organised power, not only for individuals but also extending this idea to architectural design, urban neighbourhoods, and so on. Soja closely links this idea to Thirdspace, which he frames as a "space of collective resistance" for marginalised groups. It is therefore fitting that Soja also engages with scholars from critical theory to further ground and expand his conceptualisation of Thirdspace. For instance, he argues that bell hooks – herself influenced by both Lefebvre and Michel Foucault – "recomposes our lived spaces of representation as potentially nurturing places of resistance", directing creative inquiry towards the intersecting spatialities of race, class, and gender (12). Most importantly, Soja also links his thinking to Foucault's notion of heterotopia, introduced in Foucault's short but influential lecture on "Other Spaces", which gained considerable traction across the social sciences and humanities. Soja contends that Foucault's heterotopia can be read in line with Lefebvre's lived spaces, as both offer a "thirding" of conventional binaries by imagining alternative spaces beyond dominant orders (15).

Soja's concept of Thirdspace is not a descriptive for a category of particular places, but "a particular way of thinking about and interpreting socially produced space" (Borch 2002, 113). In an interview discussing his book, Soja shares that he often gets asked if place X or site Y can be considered a Thirdspace. However, he states that there is no definite answer here, as all spaces can be seen as Thirdspaces, as it "depend[s] on the scope of one's critical

geographical imagination, the perspective one has on how far one can reach with a critical spatial perspective" (114). This is why the book can also be seen as his thesis on critical spatial thinking, a mode of thinking that has too often been ignored in favour of time. As Soja remarks in the same interview:

> That everything exists in time and has a significant historical dimension and intrinsic quality has always been assumed, taken for granted. Things develop over time, process presumes time, we write biographies as lived times. One would find it hard to deny these arguments/statements. What I am arguing is that space is just as important as time, that you can substitute space for time in all the previous statements, despite a long history of burying this possibility under the privileged binary of society-history (116).

This call to recognise spatiality as an equally vital analytic category to time also underpins the work of Maeda Ai, a literary and cultural critic who draws on Lefebvrian concepts to examine the spatial dynamics of modern Japanese urban life.

2.3.3. Maeda Ai

As Stephen Dodd points out, Lefebvre as well as Foucault have also influenced academic spatial thinking in Japan in the 1960s and 70s, which can be seen, for instance, in the writings of Maeda Ai (1932–1987) (Dodd 2016, 20). Maeda was a prominent public intellectual in late twentieth-century Japan, known to a broader audience for his appearances on national educational television as well as for his contributions to magazines and newspapers. Initially trained in premodern Japanese literature, his interest shifted in the late 1960s towards modernity, engaging deeply with postmodern theory and European critical thought. Drawing on thinkers such as Walter Benjamin, Karl Marx, and Mikhail Bakhtin, Maeda also closely engaged with the works of his contemporaries including Michel Foucault, Georges Poulet, Gaston Bachelard, Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva – and notably, Henri Lefebvre (Fujii 2004, 1). Much of his writing, which often blurs the lines between social history, cultural criticism, and literary analysis, focuses on visual culture and everyday urban life during Japan's Edo (1600–1867) and Meiji period (1868–1912) (2). Central to his work is a sustained attention to space (*kūkan*), using Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* as a

theoretical foundation to examine “the space of intersections, of contest, exchange, that is, a dialogics broadly, richly, and finely articulated as speaking and listening, oppressing, resisting, and mobilizing” (ibid.).

Like Lefebvre and Soja, Maeda adopted a Neo-Marxist perspective, examining how the body negotiates urban space through tensions between nation and subject, state power and private desire, viewing the body as “a player in the city, that is, as a subject whose materially conceived agency would allow one to recognize the political and social dimensions and consequences of participation in city life” (6). For him, urban space is contested and remade through lived experience – through the everyday actions by which individuals assert their presence. To this end, Maeda turned his attention, for example, to the student radicals of 1960s Shinjuku – much as Lefebvre considered the 1968 Paris revolts – and their use of the bus terminal at Shinjuku Station’s west exit as a meeting point. In a short time, this space evolved into a site for self-organised anti-government demonstrations, rallies, and street theatre – until the Tokyo government intervened, redeveloping it into a multi-level driveway designed to deter public gatherings (12).

One of the concepts from Maeda’s work that has gained wider traction in literary analysis is his distinction between the realm of the everyday (*ke*) and that of the festive (*hare*) within urban space, with the latter being associated with play (*asobi*) (Maeda 1992, 44).[16] This conceptual pairing is developed in his essay *Kaika no panorama* (開化のパノラマ, The Panorama of Enlightenment, 1977), particularly in his analysis of Hattori Bushō’s *Tōkyō shinhanjōki* (東京新繁昌記, New Tales of Tokyo Prosperity, 1874). Written in the early Meiji period, Bushō’s work became a best-seller and captures the city at the cusp of modernisation – between Edo and Tokyo. It catalogues various *things* (which Maeda refers

[16] Maeda uses katakana to refer to all three terms. For an example of how his notion can be applied to the analysis of spatial representation in literature, see Mayumi Manabe’s article, “From the Margins of Meiji Society: Space and Gender in Higuchi Ichiyō’s ‘Troubled Waters’” (Manabe 2016).

to as *mono* もの) that serve either as emblems of Enlightenment (aligned with the Meiji slogan *bunmei kaika* 文明開化, "Civilisation and Enlightenment", propagated by Fukuzawa Yukichi) or remnants of the Edo era, such as temples, shrines, and the brothels of the Yoshiwara red-light district (Maeda 2004b, 69). Maeda thus describes the text as a panorama of Enlightenment Japan, "as reflected in the eyes of one provincial samurai" (ibid.), likening the panorama to "a device for replicating the urban landscape on a 360-degree painted surface in realistic perspective" (72).

Maeda compares Bushō's work to *Edo hanjōki* (江戸繁昌記, Tales of Edo Prosperity) by Terakado Seiken, published in the 1830s, which served as its inspiration. Seiken's book opens with accounts of Yoshiwara and the city's theatres, underscoring their status as markers of Edo's prosperity (75). Yet these spaces are also framed as *akusho* (悪所, "bad places") – zones morally and spatially set apart from the city's normative order (ibid.). Located at the fringes of Edo, they reflect a binary logic between sacred and profane, centre and margin, everyday and non-everyday (76). However, despite these divisions, Edo is portrayed as a space of circulation and convergence, where people traverse boundaries freely and routinely gather (77). While Seiken's Edo is characterised by a dynamic rhythm of *hare* and *ke*, and by spaces of gathering and play (78), Bushō's Tokyo foregrounds sites of connection – railways, telegraph offices, newspaper companies. As Maeda notes, "[w]hereas Edo appeared to Seiken as a 'gathering' of people, Bushō was pursuing a rhetoric of the city that corresponded to the structure of 'flow'" (80). This transition marks a shift from interpersonal interaction to a consumer-driven one between people and *things*, displacing the communal pleasures of play with the routines of commerce (83). In other words, in Bushō's Tokyo, urban scenes revolve around consumption rather than conviviality.

Although Maeda does not overtly praise one spatial logic over the other, his analysis is tinged with a quiet melancholy for Edo's communal atmosphere. Implicitly, he critiques the capitalist dynamics shaping Bushō's Tokyo, where even the realm of *hare* becomes subject

to commodification. No longer "a lyrical place conveyed by metaphors of suburban nature" as in Edo-period literature, Yoshiwara and its brothel quarter are instead "organised within a temporal and spatial complex that is abstract and commodified" (84). Given Maeda's Marxist leanings, one can read this as an implicit defence of *asobi* as a form of resistance to a capitalist status quo. In its perceived "uselessness", play embodies a subversive potential, standing outside the utilitarian logics of capitalism where value is tied to productivity – a point that Maeda does not elaborate on in *Kaika no panorama*, but in another essay called *Kodomo tachi no jikan* (子どもたちの時間, Their Time as Children, 1975).

In this essay, Maeda applies the concept of play to his reading of Higuchi Ichiyō's short story *Takekurabe* (たけくらべ, Child's Play, 1895–1896), written near the end of her brief career and often considered her masterwork. The story centres on a group of young boys and girls living near the edge of the Yoshiwara pleasure quarters, unfolding across the threshold between two distinct forms of play: the innocent play of childhood and the commodified "adult playground" of the licensed district – into which one of the characters, a girl named Midori, is eventually sold to become a courtesan. Maeda draws on Huizinga's idea of *Homo Ludens*, which "first sought to legitimise the function and mythical significance of play in an effort to de-emphasise the utility and the value of labour […] and to restore the originary richness of life" (Maeda 2004c, 110). When adopting a child's perspective, Maeda suggests, play becomes a form of escape from the demands of adult life in modern industrial society (ibid.).

Maeda Ai's analyses of literary representations of urban space reflect his interest in "play" as a strategic space that "serves variously to diminish, confound, and resist the state" (Fujii 2004, 10). This closely echoes Lefebvre's understanding of the political potential embedded in lived space, a notion Soja would later intensify by explicitly framing his Thirdspace and "thirding" as a political strategy. In Maeda's case, however, the political dimension of play is more implicit than overt. Unlike Lefebvre or Soja, who explicitly aligned their work with

forms of political activism, Maeda comes across more as a perceptive observer, dissecting the relationship between the material reality of space and its literary representations – representations that, as he suggests, "must be read as social products" (Manabe 2016, 27) and which both shape and are shaped by the real spaces they depict. Nevertheless, his spatial explorations of *hare* and *ke*, or of *asobi* more broadly, offer a valuable framework for considering poetic space through the lens of a playful subversiveness, where the experimental use of genre, media, and form echoes a similar impulse to play, escaping the need for utilisation and commodification.

2.3.4. Devin Proctor: Virtual Space and Lefebvre

While Maeda extends Lefebvre's ideas into the literary realm, Devin Proctor carries them into the virtual, developing a conception of "internet space" as a socially produced space. As previously noted, this thesis approaches space not solely in physical terms, but also as encompassing poetic spaces that emerge within virtual environments. It is therefore essential to unpack the various terms associated with internet space – borrowing Proctor's phrasing – and to consider how virtual space intersects with Lefebvre's spatial triad, as well as with the subsequent theoretical developments by thinkers such as Soja and Maeda discussed earlier in this chapter.

According to Proctor, our conceptualisation of the internet has long been embedded in spatial metaphors: we speak of "cyberspace", "websites", "domains" and "surfing the internet" (Proctor 2021, 597). These linguistic habits reflect a tacit spatial logic in how we understand digital environments. However, Proctor argues that internet space should not be understood merely in metaphorical terms. Drawing on Lefebvre's triadic model of spatial production, he proposes that the internet is not only a social space but one that is socially constructed in much the same way as physical space (596). That is, spatiality is not determined by physical dimensions like three-dimensionality, but by the patterns of social

interaction that emerge within and through it. This understanding allows Proctor to equate various digital environments – such as Instagram accounts, Facebook groups, and fully immersive video game worlds like those of *World of Warcraft* – as equally valid forms of socially produced space (ibid.).

To develop this idea further, Proctor rearticulates Lefebvre's spatial triad using a new set of terms tailored to digital contexts. Lefebvre's idea of spatial practice (or perceived space) is reimagined by Proctor as the *space of affordance* (602–4). He defines this as "the mode of 'material' relation within the perceived space of the Internet", or, put differently, "the ways in which the platform reveals itself to be likable, typeable, and watchable by the user – all available relational interactions" (603). That is, the space of affordance encompasses the implicit and explicit materials, which Proctor also calls the "structured structures" (604), by which users engage with a platform or with one another. For example, giving a "thumbs up" is a specific feature, while the broader ability to express approval through such interactions is what he calls affordance. Crucially, these affordances are not uniform across all users. On a platform like Facebook, for instance, ordinary members of a Facebook group may have access to a range of features, whereas group administrators are afforded additional actions such as approving or blocking members or deleting posts (ibid.).

The second realm, Lefebvre's representations of space (conceived space) becomes what Proctor calls the *space of programming* (605–6). This refers to the underlying structures, such as code and software design, that define and regulate how a digital space operates. Like architectural blueprints or city planning maps in the physical world, these abstract structures are created by figures of authority – developers, executives, and lead designers – and shape the constraints and possibilities of the digital environment.

Proctor's third realm, which he calls the *space of virtuality* (606–8), corresponds to Lefebvre's concept of spaces of representation, or lived space. It refers to the user's personal, situated, and often unpredictable experience of internet space – "what the Internet *feels* like

and what being there means to us" – emphasising the embodied nature of digital experience (606–7). Just as Lefebvre, Soja, and Maeda highlighted the subversive potential of lived space, Proctor argues that users can similarly challenge, or even resist, the programmed affordances and structural designs of digital platforms through their interactions. As he puts it, "what we actually do in the Internet social space can subvert conceived space" (607).[17]

To illustrate this, Proctor draws on the example of so-called emojis (from the Japanese *e* meaning "image" and *moji* meaning "character"). In the early days of text-based digital communication, users creatively employed alphanumeric characters to express emotion – such as :) for a smile – or more elaborate examples, particularly in Japan, like (っ˘•ω•˘)っ̥̥̥̥̥̥̥̥̥̥̥̥̥̥̥̥̥̥̥̥̥̥̥̥̥̥̥̥", which mimics the gesture of tapping on a table to get attention and combines multiple writing systems. Over time, these improvised expressions were formalised into cartoon images and built into devices as programmed features. While this could be read as a corporate co-opting of user innovation, Proctor sees it instead as a case where "tactical action taken in the lived space of virtuality subverted the strategic space of programming, resulting in a change in the fabric of the space of affordance" (608). However, to him, such acts of subversion, and their subsequent incorporation into digital infrastructure, may not be exceptions but rather the rule, proposing that this dynamic is "the engine powering the mutual co-production of the Internet space" (ibid.).

Devin Proctor's application of a Lefebvrian lens to the space of the internet proves particularly useful for analysing poetic spaces that make use of virtual environments. His analysis challenges the common view of the internet as an aspatial or placeless realm (Hine 2000, 105; Proctor 2021, 598). While the internet may not be rooted in geographic coordinates, Proctor shows that it nonetheless operates as a socially produced space, much

[17] Proctor suggests that Lefebvre "envisioned us all disabled by the overwhelming power of the system", implying that he viewed perceived and lived spaces as subordinated to conceived space. However, as previously argued, Lefebvre also recognised the potential of lived space to negotiate with and subvert the dominant spatial order imposed by conceived space (see Chapter 2.3.1).

like any physical environment. This argument gains further relevance in light of recent metaphorical shifts in how the internet is conceptualised – moving from the already mentioned spatial terms, such as “cyberspace”, towards more diffuse and fluid imagery like “cloud” or water-like metaphors (Proctor 2021, 598). Furthermore, his work draws our attention to the internet as an entity with its own distinct dynamics between conceived, perceived, and lived space – with the lived realm arguably holding even greater influence here than in physical settings.[18] However, what Proctor’s framework does not fully address is the interaction between virtual and physical spaces. While his article acknowledges the internet’s ubiquity, noting how it no longer represents a separate space we visit occasionally but instead pervades everyday life through our constant access via digital devices (cf. 609), this blurring of boundaries between the virtual and the real is not fully explored in his adaptation of Lefebvre’s triad.

This interaction becomes particularly crucial when considering how poetic spaces are perceived. As will be demonstrated in the examples analysed later in this thesis, installations such as Saihate’s *Shi wo ippuku* (see Chapter 6) are not only experienced in situ – in this case, the food hall of Kyoto Tower Sando – but are also mediated through photos and videos shared online. These images are shaped by users’ captions, framing choices, filters, and other curatorial decisions on their personal social media accounts. Some visitors may arrive having already seen posts about the installation, bringing with them a pre-formed impression against which they compare their own experience. Others may come across *Shi wo ippuku* for the first time yet still engage with it not only physically but also virtually, by sharing photos or videos online. In short, the perception of poetic spaces has the potential to emerge through both physical and virtual spheres: prior online representations may inform present

[18] This becomes especially evident when considering recent trends such as the use of AI-generated content for ironic political commentary, including the circulation of Studio Ghibli-style cartoons used to depict journalistic images of serious issues – a trend adopted even by the official X account of the White House in the United States (cf. Baker 2025).

experiences in the physical space, which in turn potentially shape future digital representations.[19]

I would therefore propose an extension to the Lefebvrian framework as employed in this thesis: that physical and virtual spaces must be understood as interdependent, each continually shaping and informing the other. This interrelation suggests that lived space – whether conceived as representational space (Lefebvre), Thirdspace (Soja), *hare*/play (Maeda)[20], or space of virtuality (Proctor) – possess the capacity to negotiate and potentially subvert the prevailing spatial order in both virtual and physical contexts. Such spaces may thus be understood as potential "sites of resistance" to dominant structures of power, which increasingly operate across and between both realms rather than within a single, isolated domain.

2.4. Conclusion: Reassembling "Reading" "Poetic" "Spaces"

The preceding analysis of "reading", "poetry", and "spaces" now makes it possible to draw these strands together within a unifying conceptual framework, supporting the following examination of what occurs when poetry is read within physical or virtual spaces in the subsequent chapters, and what potential role poetic spaces may play in the social production of space – a process which, as the spatial turn suggests, both shapes and is shaped by society.

A central pillar of this thesis is the notion of rethinking reading not as a detached, purely cognitive act, but as an embodied and relational experience. As cognitive literary studies and theorists like Gillian Silverman and Ellen Esrock show, reading always involves the body and the senses – elements often suppressed by conventional reading norms but made explicit

[19] It is also worth noting that a poetry installation might also be encountered solely in a physical sense, particularly by visitors who do not use social media. Conversely, others may only experience the work online, through photos and videos shared by others, without ever visiting the physical site themselves.

[20] As previously discussed, Maeda's concept of the *hare* realm and the mode of play (*asobi*) stands somewhat apart from the other frameworks considered here, as it does not directly align with Lefebvre's spatial triad. Rather than operating within a tripartite model, Maeda articulates a binary between *hare* as the festive and *ke* as the everyday. However, when play is understood as a strategy for subverting spatial norms, it closely resonates with the notion of lived space as theorised by the other three thinkers.

in poetic spaces. These spaces draw attention to the act of reading as something immersive and spatially situated, foregrounding touch, movement, and environment as integral to meaning-making. Building on this, Rita Felski's take on Actor-Network Theory (ANT) further challenges the notion of critical detachment, instead framing readers, creators, and works as interconnected actors. Like Silverman, Felski insists that art matters not only because it disrupts norms, but because it fosters connections and affects. Both approaches highlight the relational nature of aesthetic experience. From this, three key takeaways emerge: 1) reading (and aesthetic experience more broadly) is relational and networked, shaped by dynamic exchanges between readers, works, creators, and context; 2) such experiences are inherently embodied and subjective; 3) my own embedded position as a reader and researcher within this network is not a limitation, but a potential resource; reflective strategies, such as imagined walks through poetic spaces, acknowledge and integrate this subjectivity into the analysis.

As I have demonstrated, poetic spaces do not emerge in isolation but grow out of a rich tradition of poetic experimentation that challenges genre boundaries and conventional formats. Defined here as hybrid, intermedial forms that blur the line between literary and visual arts with a strong emphasis on spatiality, poetic spaces have a historical and literary lineage rooted in pre-existing practice, such as the Japanese *surimono*. These works combined poetry with illustration in inventive ways, with the spatial positioning of text within visual contexts offering new layers of interpretation – much like the poetic spaces examined in this thesis. Likewise, the influence of twentieth-century avant-garde groups such as Kitasono Katué's *VOU* and Niikuni Seiichi's *ASA* remains visible in today's experimental poetry. While it is unclear to what extent contemporary creators consciously draw from these movements, the formal playfulness, intermedia hybridity, and focus on the form seen in poetic spaces clearly resonate with visual and concrete poetry traditions. As such, poetic spaces should not be seen as entirely novel inventions, but rather as part of a

longer continuum of poetic inquiry – one that consistently seeks to expand the boundaries of what poetry can be. For this reason, this thesis avoids terms like *visual* or *optical poetry*, which limit the aesthetic experience to sight alone. Instead, poetic spaces are conceived as multi-sensory, spatially anchored forms that invite embodied, immersive encounters with poetry.

When it comes to the dimension of space and spatiality in reading poetic spaces, space should not be understood as a neutral container but as socially produced and dynamic, shaped by and shaping human behaviour. Drawing on Henri Lefebvre's spatial triad, we have moved beyond traditional binary models of space to consider its perceived, conceived, and lived dimensions – foregrounding the active role individuals play in producing space through everyday practices. By situating poetic spaces within this framework, it becomes clear that these artworks are not merely situated in space but actively participate in its production. Influenced by Lefebvre's legacy and developed through theorists like Soja, Ai, and Proctor, poetic spaces can be seen as interventions that question normative spatial logics, offering alternative ways of experiencing, representing, and imagining physical as well as virtual space. Rather than treating space as a backdrop to reading poetry, this thesis recognises it as an integral component of poetic meaning-making.

In doing so, poetic spaces emerge as potential agents within the broader processes of spatial production – capable of unsettling dominant narratives, foregrounding embodiment, and drawing attention to the relational ties between text, reader, poet, and environment.

3. Filling Galleries and Museums with Poetry

Hanging from the ceiling like mobiles in a room are fragments of poems – some larger, some smaller, some containing more words, others fewer – filling the entire space with poetry. Each piece has a black side and a white side and rotates slowly, turning both on its own axis and in relation to the other fragments within these mobile-like constructions. As the lowest pieces hang roughly at torso height, there is no way to move through the room without gently pushing them aside. Navigating the space requires contact with these fragments – not only to reach the other side of the room but also to stop them from spinning in order to read the words written on them. Since the fragments are not designed to be read in a specific order, visitors choose each piece for themselves, assembling their own individual poem as they navigate the space.

Against this backdrop unfolds *Shi no mobīru* (詩のモビール, Poetry Mobile, 2019–2025, Figure 2), an installation by poet Saihate Tahi. The work was first exhibited as part of her debut solo show, *Saihate Tahi shi no tenji* (最果タヒ詩の展示, Saihate Tahi poetry exhibition), held at the Yokohama Museum of Art from 23 February to 24 March 2019. The official exhibition poster featured a poem by Saihate, its design echoing the style of the poetry fragments of *Shi no mobīru*, with the text reading:

> 氷になる直前の、氷点下の水は、
> 蝶になる直前の、さなぎの中は、
> 詩になる直前の、横浜美術館は。
>
> *kōri ni naru chokuzen no, hyōtenka no mizu wa,*
> *chō ni naru chokuzen no, sanagi no naka wa,*
> *shi ni naru chokuzen no, yokohama bijutsukan wa.*
>
> Water below 0°C about to become ice,
> a chrysalis about to become a butterfly
> the Yokohama Museum of Art about to become poetry" (Figure 3).[21]

[21] This English translation was provided on the poster itself (Figure 3). It renders the final part of the poem as "or a museum about to become poetry", whereas in the original Japanese, the Yokohama Museum of Art is explicitly mentioned.

Taking the last line of Saihate's poem literally, what does it mean to transform an exhibition space into poetry? How does the act of reading poetry within a three-dimensional installation at a museum or gallery operate, and what is the role of the reader within this configuration?

The aim of the following chapter is to examine two examples of poetry presented in the form of installation art, Saihate's *Shi no mobīru* and the sound installation *Koe no genba* (声の現場, Voices On-Site, 2021–2022, Figure 4)[22] by poet Fuzuki Yumi and composer Bandoh Yuta, in order to address the questions previously outlined. Drawing on Luise Reitstätter's *Die Ausstellung verhandeln* (Negotiating the Exhibition, 2015), which conceptualises exhibition space as a site of visual communication in which visitors play an active role in its production, as well as Bishop's *Installation Art: A Critical History* (2005), situating the rise of installation art in relation to poststructuralist theory, this chapter argues that poetry installations construct a multi-perspective, fragmented experience of poetry through their spatial configuration. In doing so, they make visible the shifting dynamics of language itself and emphasise the notion of the poetic work as an open process that positions its readers as co-authors of the installations.

This chapter is structured in three parts. First, it analyses the spatial context in which the artworks are presented – the exhibition space – drawing primarily on Reistätter's insights, in which she defines the exhibition as a form of virtual communication in space. Second, the chapter brings together discussions of installation and interactive art in relation to poststructuralist theory, drawing primarily on Jacques Derrida, Roland Barthes, and Umberto Eco. Particular attention is given to the role of the viewer and their perception, while also contextualising these theoretical perspectives within the Japanese historical context. Third, this chapter examines the poetry installations *Shi no mobīru* and *Koe no genba* through the theoretical framework previously outlined, arguing that both works

[22] "Voices On-Site" is the official English title provided by the venue, Tokyo Arts and Space (TOKAS); see https://www.tokyoartsandspace.jp/en/archive/exhibition/2021/20211224-7076.html [last access: 6 January 2026].

feature aspects of multiperspectivalism by presenting poetry in three-dimensional form and that both create poetic spaces that are only completed through the embodied engagement of readers.

This chapter is based on *Shi no mobīru* and *Koe no genba* as examples for poetic spaces within museums and galleries, as both installations make purposeful use of the spaces in which they are situated, inviting viewers to move within and around them. However, they employ markedly different concepts and materials to present poetry in an exhibition context: one fills the exhibition room with fragments of poetic text suspended from the ceiling, while the other fills the room sonically through a polyphonic soundscape. Created only a few years apart – *Shi no mobīru* in 2019 and *Koe no genba* in 2021 – by female poets of the Heisei generation, the two installations are comparable not only in socio-historical terms but also as part of a potential broader tendency to present poetry in exhibition contexts such as museums and galleries. For the purposes of focused analysis, however, the discussion will centre on a single installation in each case, rather than addressing the entirety of their respective exhibitions.

While I was able to visit *Shi no mobīru* in person and therefore draw on first-hand experience and observations, I was unable to experience *Koe no genba* myself due to Japan's entry ban for foreign visitors during the COVID-19 pandemic. Accordingly, the analysis presented here is based on secondary materials, including descriptions, video recordings, and photographs provided by Fuzuki's management and by Tokyo Arts and Space, the institution that originally hosted the installation. Although such documentation cannot fully reproduce the spatial and sensory dimensions of a three-dimensional installation, the inclusion of *Koe no genba* remains valuable, since its emphasis on sound, in contrast to the textual orientation of *Shi no mobīru*, allows for a comparative case study that highlights different modalities through which poetry may be experienced in installation form.

3.1. Museums and Exhibition Spaces

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines an exhibition as "a public display of works of art, products of industry, or other items of interest, esp. one held in an art gallery or museum" (Oxford English Dictionary 2025). The term refers to the cultural practice of displaying certain objects within a particular space. In a broader historical sense, the origins of exhibitions can be traced back to antiquity, where they featured in grand public spectacles such as military victory processions. From the 15th century onwards, the first documented exhibitions in Italy primarily service commercial purposes, particularly the sale of paintings. By the seventeenth century, exhibitions were held at art academies, and later in the nineteenth century, they became part of Parisian salons and world fairs, serving both aesthetic and commercial interests (Reitstätter 2015, 25). The exhibition of objects within a museal context in Europe has its roots in the Enlightenment era, when the rise of industrial civil society coincided with the founding of the first public museums. These institutions marked a significant shift in the cultural valuation of objects, as the museums positioned the object as something to be studied and contemplated, placing it in opposition to the rational, observing subject of Enlightenment thought (24).

A similar trajectory can be observed in Japan, where the display of objects was also historically connected to political or religious as well as commercial acts. In ritual displays of the Kofun period (c. 300–538), people decoratively arranged *haniwa* clay figures inside burial mounds, while commercial display practices began to emerge with the rise of marketplaces toward the end of the Asuka period (538–710) (Satomi 2014, 3–4). The concept of the exhibition in its modern sense entered Japan in the late nineteenth century, most notably with Japan's participation in the 1867 Paris Exposition and the Iwakura Mission (1871–73), in which a group of Japanese representatives travelled abroad to study Western systems, institutions and innovations to assess their potential adaptability to Japan. Among the institutions that drew the most admiration was the South Kensington Museum in

London (now the Victoria and Albert Museum), which the group covered extensively in their reports (7–8). This led to the first National Industrial Exhibition (*Naikoku kangyō hakurankai*), held in Tokyo's Ueno Park in August 1877, which featured not only a machinery and agricultural hall, but also an art museum (8). While the distinction between trade fairs and non-commercial exhibitions remained blurred in the prewar era, Satomi notes that exhibitions with educational aims increasingly began to take place in dedicated venues such as museums and galleries from the 1960s onwards. This development, he explains, also signalled the beginning of a new approach to exhibition design – one that aimed to "make the complex world of academia accessible and enjoyable to view" (11). In other words, the notion of the exhibition increasingly shifted from the display of objects to a conception of it as a space of communication.

Applying a Foucauldian lens to exhibition spaces such as museums and art galleries and focusing on the power dynamics within them, Tony Bennett describes them as sites of "the exhibitionary complex", a system that "simultaneously order[s] objects for public inspection and order[s] the public that inspected" (Bennett 1988, 75). Unlike earlier spectacles of power such as public executions, which positioned the people on the side of those being subordinated to power, exhibition spaces of the nineteenth and early twentieth century invited visitors to identify with power, manifested through the "ability to organize and co-ordinate an order of things and to produce a place for the people in relation to that order" (80). The key element in this display of power is the gaze. As previously discussed in this thesis (see Chapter 2.1), knowledge and power are closely bound to the notion of the gaze, establishing a division between subjects and objects – between those who see and those who are seen. This "civilised" gaze presupposes a fixed vantage point from which the object can

be viewed in its totality, exerting domination by maintaining a certain degree of distance between viewer and object (Reitstätter 2015, 126; Bennett 1988, 97–98).[23]

Any behaviour that might disrupt this concentrated gaze is deemed inappropriate within exhibition spaces, and the general public is carefully regulated. When the first museums opened to the public in the mid-1800s, entry was restricted to small groups and credentials were checked (Bennett 1988, 81). In some cases, instruction booklets were issued to working-class visitors, stressing "the need to change out of their working clothes – partly so as not to soil the exhibits, but also so as not to detract from the pleasures of the overall spectacle" (85). While such printed instructions have largely disappeared, museums and other exhibition venues still display signs prohibiting behaviours that could damage objects or distract other visitors, such as shouting, running, touching, or taking photographs with a flash.[24] Put differently, visitors may have been able to occupy a subject position in exhibitions – observing and thus exerting symbolic control over objects through the gaze – but they themselves are also the object of observation, monitored either by security guards or by other visitors to ensure they adhere to institutional norms.

However, while museums and exhibition spaces are closely tied to Enlightenment ideals in the ways previously described – establishing power dynamics through the display of objects, privileging sight above other senses through its perceived link to knowledge and civilising the public while disciplining their behaviour – they also have the potential to become sites that challenge or subvert these ideals. Museums and art galleries can therefore also be understood as spaces of discourse, where cultural norms, values and practices are not

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[23] A paradigmatic example of this is the Eiffel Tower, constructed as the centrepiece of the 1889 Paris Exhibition, from which the entirety of Paris could be surveyed. Barthes in his essay on the Eiffel Tower observes that " [t]o visit the Tower is to get oneself up onto the balcony in order to perceive, comprehend and savour a certain essence of Paris" (Barthes 2012, 125).

[24] The so-called White Cube format can be seen as epitomising the desire to minimise distractions within the exhibition space, presenting itself as a neutral, white backdrop for the displayed objects. Yet, as Brian O'Doherty analyses in *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (San Francisco: Lapis Press, 1999), this seemingly neutral space is also ideologically charged, seeking to distance art from the everyday.

only upheld but also contested and negotiated. Circling back to Foucault, while he describes the museum as a space that disciplines human behaviour, he also presents the museum as an example of his concept of heterotopia in his published manuscript of his lecture "Of Other Spaces". A heterotopia is understood as a counter-site to society that reflects real space while also being capable of contesting or inverting it, thereby having the potential to *irritate* dominant orders (Dennis 2017, 170–71). For Foucault, the museum is a place where time accumulates, aiming to represent the entirety of history within a single, enclosed space (Foucault 1986, 26). As Beth Lord rightly points out, Foucault's definition is quite narrow, as not all museums focus on archiving historical objects to display an overarching human history. However, she extends his idea of the museum as heterotopia by describing it as a space of difference, arguing that:

> The museum is a heterotopia not because it contains different objects, nor because it contains or juxtaposes different times, but rather because it presents a more profound kind of difference: the difference between objects and concepts. (Lord 2006, 5)

When objects are displayed as symbols for a larger idea, there is always an inherent gap between the object itself and the way it is interpreted, which will vary from person to person. As Lord explains, "without interpretation, without representing a relation between things and conceptual structures, an institution is not a museum, but a storehouse" (ibid.).

Building on this idea and incorporating Lefebvre's concept of the triad of space – particularly his notion of spaces as lived (see Chapter 2.3.1) – into the discussion, the gap described by Lord aligns closely with what Lefebvre, and later Soja, identify as the third element alongside the supposed binary of spaces as conceived and spaces as perceived, saying that even if a space is conceptualised in a particular way and its spatial practices are normalised accordingly, each individual still chooses their own spatial behaviour within, or in response to, these two realms. In this way, Lefebvre opens up the possibility for people to challenge and potentially transform a certain status quo. Applied to the context of museums or exhibition spaces, these may be architecturally designed to provide a complete vantage

point for the viewer, and the prohibition of touch is often a normalised spatial practice within these spaces. However, individual exhibitions – shaped by the decisions of curators, artists, designers – need not necessarily adhere to these norms. Instead, it can be designed to deliberately challenge such normative spatial assumptions, for example by obscuring the view or encouraging visitors to interact with objects through touch. As such, an exhibition can make visible the constructed character of these norms, thereby causing a moment of irritation.

In recent decades, this more experimental approach to the use of museum and exhibition spaces seems to have gained widespread acceptance. As Reitstätter notes, particularly since the 1960s, new artistic practices such as conceptual art, happenings, and performance art have shifted their focus away from addressing audiences solely as civilised viewers and rather as active co-creators (Reitstätter 2015, 126–27). Rather than functioning as spaces that produce a particular conception of truth through the display of objects, museums and exhibition spaces began to evolve into sites for dialogue and possibilities (32). This leads Reitstätter to define the exhibition not simply as a display of objects, but as a form of visual communication in space, in which the (un)conscious intentions of artists and curators meet the visitors' interpretations. This exchange is shaped by the spatial configuration of the exhibition itself as well as the architecture of the building in which it is housed, and by the embodied perception of those moving through it (Reitstätter 2015, 18). In other words, Reitstätter emphasises that an exhibition is constructed not only physically but also socially, reinforcing Henri Lefebvre's claim that space is always actively produced.

One significant development in this shift towards more experimental approaches within exhibition spaces is the emergence of installation art, which creates spatial environments that invite viewers to step inside the artwork, pluralising the perspectives from which the work can be experienced and encouraging a more sensory, embodied, and participatory engagement with both the object and fellow visitors (126). The following section examines

installation art in more detail, drawing on Bishop's claim that the rising popularity of installation art since the 1960s is closely related to the popularisation of poststructural theory during the same decade. It also draws on conceptualisations of interactive elements within artworks, discussing the role of the viewer within installation art.

3.2. Installation Art and Exhibiting Poetry

Bishop defines installation art as a form of art into which the viewer physically enters, frequently described as "theatrical", "immersive", or "experimental" (Bishop 2005, 6). While the installation *of* art refers to the arrangement of different artworks within a given space (bringing it semantically closer to the definition of the term "exhibition"), installation art regards the entire spatial environment – the space within its compounds and the ensemble of elements within it – as one unified artwork (ibid.).[25] Installation art has no single, linear historical development; rather, it draws from a range of disciplines, including architecture, cinema, sculpture, performance art, theatre, set design, and curating, reflecting the diversity of works encompassed by the term. It has its roots in the early twentieth-century works of Marcel Duchamp, Kurt Schwitters, and El Lissitzky; the Environments of the 1950s; the Minimalist sculptures of the 1960s; and, under the newly emerging label of installation art, the works of the 1970s and 1980s by Kusama Yayoi, Judy Chicago, Ilya Kabakov, among many others. A decade later, installation art had moved from the margins to become a mainstream favourite among museum and gallery audiences, as it became the "institutionally approved art form par excellence of the 1990s" (8).[26] Unlike more traditional media such as

[25] In Japanese, the katakana terms *insutarēshon* or *insutarēshon āto* ("installation" or "installation art") are used in much the same way as their English counterparts. The word "exhibition" in the context of art, however, can be translated in several ways: *tenrankai*, *tenjikai*, *tenji*, or simply *ten*. Broadly speaking, *tenrankai* and *tenjikai* suggest a form of gathering, as the suffix *-kai* typically implies a meeting or assembly. *Tenji* carries a more verbal nuance, referring to the act of exhibiting (*tenji suru*), while *ten* is often used as a suffix following the name of the exhibition, such as *Saihate Tahi-ten* (Saihate Tahi exhibition).

[26] As Reitstätter's survey in her study *Die Ausstellung verhandeln* indicates, installation art emerged as the preferred and most memorable art form among participants. As she notes: "One of the first notable findings of the visitor survey is that, despite differing individual preferences, installation art ranks among the most popular

painting, sculpture, video, or books, installation art "addresses the viewer directly as a literal presence in the space", thereby emphasising the embodied experience of the viewer. Through this immersive quality, it presents art not merely as an exercise in viewing, but as an *experience* of being within it, making viewers integral to the work's completion (6).

For Bishop, two central implications arise from this demand for bodily presence within installation art. First, she associates the emergence of installation art with poststructuralist theories of the 1960s and 70s, which suggest that "each person is intrinsically dislocated and divided, at odds with him or herself" (13). Installation art is seen to reflect this condition by offering multiple perspectives and denying "any one ideal place from which to survey the work", thereby reinforcing the notion of a decentred and fragmented subject (ibid.). Second, installation art invites a more active form of engagement, as visitors are required to move through, around, and at times interact directly with the work. This movement fosters a heightened sensory awareness – not only of the artwork itself, but also of the spatial environment and of others sharing the space (11). These two implications, which Bishop terms the decentring and activation of viewers, not only impact the way the artwork is perceived but also the act of reading poetry when it is presented in the form of installation art. The following sections delve deeper into these two aspects, connecting Bishop's findings to poststructuralism from the perspective of literary theory and relating them to the reading of poetic spaces.

3.2.1. The Decentred Reader

According to Bishop, the rise of installation art alongside the emergence of poststructuralist theories on the fragmentation of the subject is no coincidence (Bishop 2005, 13). The symbolic significance of installation art's fragmented, multiperspectival character becomes

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art forms. Installations are not only the works most frequently remembered, but also those most often associated with positive accounts. In my view, the reason for this preference lies in the tendency of installation art to engage viewers more directly and to appeal to them on a physical level" (Reitstätter 2015, 156).

clearer when contrasted with the implications of central perspective as typically found in Renaissance painting. In his book *Perspective as Symbolic Form*, first published in 1924, Erwin Panofsky argues that the mathematised perspective of Renaissance painting positions the viewer at the centre of the depicted world, connecting their gaze to the horizon line. In this way, paintings of the Renaissance reflected the Cartesian notion of the subject as rational and self-reflexive, while also establishing a hierarchical order between the centred viewer and the imagined world of the painting (Panofsky 2012; Bishop 2005, 11). As Panofsky writes: "Perspective mathematizes [a painting's] visual space, and yet it is very much *visual* space that it mathematizes; it is an ordering, but an ordering of the visual phenomenon" (Panofsky 2012, 60). In the twentieth century, expressionist painters, however, began to reject perspective precisely because it "affirms and secures that remnant of objectivity" (ibid.), and new art movements such as the Cubists presented multiple viewpoints simultaneously in their paintings, disrupting the notion of a hierarchical order between viewer and painted world (Bishop 2005, 13).

From the 1960s onwards, poststructuralist thinkers influenced by Barthes, Lacan, Foucault, and Derrida began to challenge the Cartesian ideal of the self as rational and coherent, instead envisioning the subject as contradictory and fractured (ibid.). At the same time, critical writing on central perspective intensified, particularly among art critics aligned with feminist and postcolonial theory, questioning its role in perpetuating a worldview based on dominance, as it presupposes a single vantage point from which claims to objective truth can be made, and was described as a masculine and panoptic gaze (11–13). According to Bishop, installation art can be understood as subverting the Renaissance model of perspective by denying viewers this ideal position from which the totality of the work can be observed, reflecting the idea of a decentred condition of human subjectivity that is shaped by unconscious desires and fears as well as by the power structures within society (13).

Unlike the mathematically grounded central perspective of the Western Renaissance, East Asian art has traditionally employed oblique parallel perspective to structure pictorial space. Whereas Renaissance painting organises the represented world around a single, centred standpoint, traditional East Asian perspective avoids vanishing points or a fixed viewing position, instead inviting a wandering gaze that moves across the image rather than anchoring itself in one spot (Sofron 2023). However, with the introduction of European painting techniques to Japan, artists began experimenting with linear perspective in their work. Among the first to do so were Okumura Masanobu (1686–1764) and Utagawa Toyoharu (c. 1735–1814), who created so-called *uki-e* ("floating pictures") woodblock prints depicting theatre interiors and other scenes of urban life (167–168). Although oblique parallel perspective continued to dominate traditional Japanese painting styles (169), the opening of Japan to Western influence during the Meiji period led to the emergence of *yōga* ("Western painting"), giving rise to a lineage of modern Japanese painters who embraced techniques and materials from Renaissance-based European traditions, including oil painting and linear perspective.[27]

Besides the distinct historical context of perspective in Japanese painting that only later adopted a linear perspective style in the *yōga* genre, poststructuralist discourses on the fragmented human subject also had an impact on Japanese thinkers. As James A. Fujii notes: "Japan's sensitivity to intellectual currents of Continental Europe [began] to yield Japanese translations of works by Merleau-Ponty, Barthes, Derrida, Kristeva, Foucault, Bachelard, and Deleuze almost as quickly as they appeared in the original French" (Fujii 2004, 1). According to literary critic Karatani Kōjin, however, ideas of a decentred, fragmented self

[27] According to Bert Winther-Tamaki, the adoption of European painting techniques and practices was initially referred to by the materials used, with terms such as *abura-e* ("oil painting") appearing in the early Meiji period. It was only in the 1880s that the term *seiyōga*, shortened to *yōga*, was introduced to highlight its "Westernness" and to set it in contrast to pre-Meiji painting practices, which came to be labelled *Nihonga* ("Japanese painting"), leading to the perception of two competing schools of painting in Japan (Winther-Tamaki 2013, 128).

were already present in Japan before poststructuralist theory popularised the concept. He traces this back to Zen Buddhist teachings in pre-modern Japan, which operate according to a differential logic rather than establishing fixed metaphysical centres such as the ego or God (Odin 1990, 64). This theme arose in a discussion partly published in the *Asahi Journal* in 1984, during Derrida's visit to Japan, where Derrida, Asada Akira, and Karatani considered the possibility of a native Japanese form of "deconstruction".[28] Responding to this idea, Derrida remarked:

> At the same time that something is constructive it must be deconstructive. This is not just something that applies to Japan, but France is the same. Deconstruction is not some universal system that is the same everywhere – this is in itself the meaning of deconstruction – that it's multiple, various. There are multiple kinds of deconstruction according to specific social and historical situations. We must say that it's not possible for it to be anything but this multiplicity. (Derrida quoted in Marilyn Ivy 1989, 41).

The emphasis on multiplicity in poststructuralist theory, highlighted by Derrida in this statement, has influenced not only the reception of visual art but also literary theory. Derrida uses the term *différance* to describe the inevitable gap between signifier and signified. He conceives language and sign systems as open, dynamic processes, in which signifiers follow their own shifting dynamics rather than carrying a stable relationship to the signified – which renders capturing a single, fixed meaning in a literary text impossible (Derrida 2008; cf. Jeßing and Köhnen 2007, 311–14). Much like Derrida's *différance*, Barthes sees the relationship between signified and signifier also as dynamic, refusing the idea that a literary text can have one, fixed meaning, claiming:

> Thereby literature (it would be better, from now on, to say *writing*), by refusing to assign to the text (and to the world-as-text) a "secret," i.e., an ultimate meaning, liberates an activity we may call countertheological, properly revolutionary, for to refuse to halt meaning is finally to refuse God and his hypostases, reason, science, the law. (Barthes 2008, 124)

[28] In literary theory, "deconstruction", a term introduced by Derrida and related to poststructuralist ideas, refers to a mode of reading that seeks out semantic tensions and contradictions within a text. By revealing counter-meanings, which go beyond what the author consciously intended, it challenges the notion that a text can have a fixed meaning (Jeßing and Köhnen 2007, 314).

For Barthes, this shifts the reader from passive consumer to active producer of literary meaning, as he concludes: “[T]he birth of the reader must be requited by the death of the Author” (ibid.).

These theories had, of course, significant implications for how literature and narrative media in a more general sense can be analysed – whether by applying poststructuralist ideas to a text or even by attempting to “deconstruct” it in the Derridean sense.[29] However, they can also be related to the *materiality* of the literary text, much as Bishop connects installation art to poststructuralist thought. Reading poetry – or any literary text, for that matter – in a book or another two-dimensional medium such as a magazine or e-reader is, in many ways, comparable to viewing a Renaissance painting. The reader is positioned at a vantage point from which a page, or even a double-page spread, can be taken in at once, with a clearly demarcated beginning and end and its direction of reading following cultural norms from either left to right or right to left, as is the case in Japanese literature. Reading this way involves minimal bodily movement and is focused on the sense of sight, as the reader’s eyes trace the lines of text while their hands occasionally turn a page (or swipe on a digital device).

Comparing this mode of reading to that of reading a poetry installation, it seems that through its presentational form alone readers are denied this point of view from which they can view the whole poetic work in its totality at once, as they have to *physically* enter the work in order to read it. By default, it is presented as fragmented through installation art’s multiperspectival nature. At the same time, readers become more aware of the space itself, including their own position in relation to surrounding objects or people. This heightened attentiveness also extends to senses beyond sight, which are drawn into the reading

[29] For example, analysed through a poststructuralist lens – even if it is often regarded as an example of modernist literature – Akutagawa Ryūnosuke’s *In a Bamboo Grove* (1922) can be seen as hinting at a conception of the self that is fragmented and decentred, as it depicts multiple perspectives on a particular incident, rendering each narrator as unreliable and leaving readers to the impossible task of “piecing together” the true events while denying them access to a “vantage point” from which they can see the full picture (cf. Prince 2018).

experience. Consequently, such a mode of engagement can feel disorienting, as the text offers neither a clear beginning nor an end, and attention shifts away from the written words alone.

However, as Bishop argues, through this mode of presentation, viewers of installation art are seen as being more "activated" – through movement, through choosing one's own perspectives from which to look at the artwork, and through purposefully creating ways to interact with the piece. The same goes for the reading of poetry in the form of installation art. By presenting a poetic text in this manner, new possibilities to engage with it emerge, making the readers' physical presence necessary in order to complete a given poetic space – granting them the additional role of an active co-creator of the piece.

3.2.2. The Activated Reader

Active engagement with an artwork is often seen as correlating with movement. As Charlotte Klonk argues, the simple act of walking through a museum can already be interpreted as a creative act, as visitors forge their own connections between displayed objects, "arriving at a wide range of perceptions and conclusion" (Klonk 2010, 308), and Reitstätter also views walking as well as stopping and pausing within the context of an exhibition as individual acts of bodily engagement, that may lead to a heightened awareness of the visitors' relationship to their surroundings (Reitstätter 2015, 161).[30] Walking through an exhibition can even be interpreted as an act of appropriating it, following Michel de Certeau's reflections in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, where he understands walking and spatial traversing as an attempt to create a place for oneself within the unfamiliar – making the exhibition one's own, so to speak (Certeau 2008, 154; Reitstätter 2015, 162).

[30] Reitstätter points out that although visitors make individual choices about how to navigate an exhibition space, her case study also revealed a tendency for many visitors to anticipate the path intended by the curators and to adjust their routes accordingly, rather than deliberately resisting their intentions (Reitstätter 2015, 162).

The correlation between activation and movement is also pronounced in Bishop's discussion of installation art. As already touched on, the possibility of entering an installation and navigating its spatial configuration creates an immersive environment. As Bishop puts it: "Instead of *representing* texture, space, light and so on, installation art *presents* these elements directly for us to experience" (Bishop 2005, 11). The immersive nature of installation art is also seen as heightening the viewer's sensory awareness, making the perception of the artwork more immediate. According to Bishop, it is precisely this need to move through the work to experience it, together with the sensory immediacy, that many artists and critics regard as "activating" the viewer, while contemplating art only through one's visual sense is associated with passivity and detachment (ibid.).

Activating viewers in this sense – transforming passive observers into active contributors – is often interpreted as a form of emancipation, suggesting a potential link between installation art and socio-political implications (ibid.). This political dimension is accentuated in the genre of "interactive art", a broad category encompassing artworks that incorporate interactive elements allowing viewers to participate more directly in the creation process. While all installation art can, in a sense, be regarded as interactive insofar as it requires viewers to move through the work, interactive art more explicitly foregrounds active engagement, whether between viewer and object or among viewers themselves, and does so to varying degrees. These range from minimal interaction, where the work remains essentially unchanged, to more intensive forms in which participants' interventions alter the integrity of the artwork – either temporarily, with the work returning to its default state, or permanently, leaving lasting traces of the interaction (cf. Huber 1997, 187–89; Simanowski 2014, 98).

However, the political potential of interactive art remains contested. Some critics interpret it as symptomatic of a broader shift in the arts from content to form (Simanowski 2014, 36), aligning it with what Guy Debord termed the "spectacle" and fearing that the cultural

industry is increasingly overlapping with the entertainment industry (50–51). Nicolas Bourriaud, by contrast, frames interactive artworks in his theory of *Relational Aesthetics* (1998) as opportunities for encounter, privileging collaboration over detached spectatorship and turning audiences into “communities” (Bishop 2004, 54; Simanowski 2014, 94–95). Yet Bishop has sharply criticised this position as a naïve conflation of interactive art with “feel-good” concepts such as togetherness and community, arguing that it risks collapsing art into compensatory entertainment, where any form of conviviality is equated with meaningful political agency (Bishop 2004, 79).[31]

Interestingly, enabling interaction in literary formats was discussed in terms similar to those surrounding interactive art, particularly with the rise of so-called “hypertexts” in the 1990s, which allowed readers to determine the trajectory of a story by clicking on hyperlinks. On the one hand, these were celebrated as signalling “the end of the dominance of the author and emancipation of readers” (Simanowski 2014, 115). On the other hand, critics have noted that experiments with interactive literature can paradoxically feel less compelling, despite granting readers greater agency, since the texts often appear less deliberately crafted and more arbitrary (Chaouli 2005).

What becomes evident here is that, by activating the reader in poetry installations, some creative control over the work is transferred to the reader. The extent of this transfer depends on the degree to which interactive elements are embedded, ranging from free bodily movement within the installation to permanent transformations of the work itself. By opening the piece to such co-creation, however, the focus is also partially redirected: away from the *what* of the work – in the case of a poetry installation, the textual content of the poems – towards the *how* of reading, namely the mode of the text’s presentation and the

[31] This accusation of transforming an exhibition space that has the potential to trigger a form of reflexion and internal interrogation into “a space of leisure and entertainment” (Bishop 2004, 52) appears to have gained renewed traction in recent years with the advent of social media platforms and the growing popularity of immersive media art such as that created by the Japanese art collective *teamLab*, whose visuals captivate body and senses but are often regarded as demanding little intellectual engagement (Lee 2022, 32).

experience with it. A poetry installation therefore places considerable demands on its readers, as it functions simultaneously as a site of immersion and reflection, asking them to engage with a particular space while also contemplating what is being read.

It therefore seems that the decentring *and* activation of readers in a poetry installation pull them in two opposing directions. This apparent conflict is also addressed by Bishop, who acknowledges the paradox that installation art produces "*both* an assertion of *and* a decentring of subjectivity" (Bishop 2005, 130). As she explains, "[a]fter all, decentring implies the lack of a unified subject, while activated spectatorship calls for a fully present, autonomous subject of conscious will" (131). However, Bishop interprets this "irresolvable antagonism" as the source of installation art's critical force, since it "calls for a self-present viewing subject precisely in order to subject him/her to the process of fragmentation", thereby challenging "our sense of stability in and mastery over the world" (ibid.; 133). A similar tension characterises the experience of reading a poetry installation. Such works demand an activity conventionally associated with silent contemplation, cognitive effort, and the exclusion of sensory distractions – practices that presuppose a unified subject. At the same time, this activity is reconfigured into a multiperspectival, immersive format that not only reflects the fragmented nature of human subjectivity but also highlights the unstable nature of words themselves. Rather than presenting a fixed, self-contained work, poetry here appears as a perpetually shifting process.

Building on the considerations previously outlined – the simultaneous decentring and activation of readers, as well as the presentation of poetry as a process rather than a fixed work – the following section examines two contemporary examples of poetry installations exhibited in Japanese museums and gallery spaces: Saihate's *Shi no mobīru* and Fuzuki and Bandoh's *Koe no genba*. The discussion concludes with a comparative reflection on the two works and on the broader relationship between poetry installations that foreground the gap

between signifier and signified, and the exhibition space itself as a site of communication as well as a site of negotiation between objects and concepts.

3.3. Saihate Tahi's *Shi no mobīru*

Shi no mobīru has been a prominent feature of several of Saihate's poetry exhibitions. Starting with her debut solo show at the Yokohama Museum of Art in 2019, it was also exhibited in *Saihate Tahi-ten: Wareware wa kono kyori o mamorubeku umareta, yoru no tame ni aru 6 tōsei na no desu* (われわれはこの距離を守るべく生まれた、夜のために在る６等星なのです, Saihate Tahi Exhibition: We are the sixth magnitude star of the night, born to keep this distance, hereafter *Wareware*), a travelling exhibition that made stops in Fukuoka, Tokyo, Nagoya, Sendai, and Ōsaka between 2020 and 2023.[32] After Saihate received the 32nd Hagiwara Sakutarō Prize, it was most recently shown at the Maebashi Literature Museum from 7 June to 21 September 2025 as part of the *Saihate Tahi-ten* (最果タヒ展, Saihate Tahi Exhibition), alongside a selection of her other installations.

In the accompanying catalogue for the Maebashi Literature Museum exhibition, *Shi no mobīru* is described as "an installation in which poetry can be not only 'read' but also experienced" (Maebashi Bungaku-kan 2025, 16). For this work, Saihate selected fragments from her past free-verse poetry collections, printed them on black and white paper slips shaped like shards, and suspended them in large, mobile-like arrangements.[33] In its current form, the work comprises roughly 47 mobiles, holding 257 slips in total that are printed on

[32] Saihate states that the exhibition's title is inspired by her belief that we all have our own specific places and views from which we see the world around us – therefore every poem and every word has its own unique meaning for each person and these meanings themselves are also shifting depending on time and place. This is why Saihate calls on her readers to "come [to the exhibition] and see the words from the star where only [they] can stand". See Saihate's message to visitors on https://kai-you.net/article/78717 [last access: 14 January 2026].

[33] Visitors were given an additional information sheet about the *Saihate Tahi Exhibition* at the Maebashi Literature Museum's entrance, which specifically named two poetry collections as the origins of the text fragments: *Shinde shimau kei no bokura ni* (死んでしまう系のぼくらに, For Us, the Dying Kind, 2014) and *Yozora wa itsudemo saikō mitsudō no aoiro da* (夜空はいつでも最高密度の青色だ, The Tokyo Night Sky is Always the Densest Shade of Blue, 2016).

both sides, resulting in 514 text fragments. The text fragments on the pieces are typically between three and thirty characters long and are written in *tategaki* ("vertical writing"), meaning each line is read from top to bottom, with the lines themselves progressing from right to left. The mobiles fill up the entire room, which measures roughly 40 m^2, its walls painted black. The highest fragments start a little above the viewer's head, while the lowest end around their torso, obscuring the view of the room. Although it is not explicitly stated anywhere, the pieces can be touched – in fact, when moving through the room, it is impossible not to touch them, as they hang in close proximity to one another.

When readers enter the exhibition room, they are immediately immersed within these mobiles. Depending on where they stand within the installation as well as the movement of the mobiles themselves, a different set of fragments appears in front of them. Readers are explicitly (through metatexts such as info sheets explaining the installation) encouraged to combine different pieces to one text they deem a poem. While no fixed order of reading is prescribed, the fragments are generally arranged so that it makes the most grammatical sense to begin with one of the higher pieces on a mobile and proceed downwards. The upper fragments often contain openings of sentences, for instance beginning with a noun followed by the topic particle *wa*, such as *watashi wa…* ("I…"), *boku wa…* ("you…") or *shōjo manga wa…* ("girls' comics…"). Fragments in the middle frequently end in the *te*-form, which functions as a conjunction to link clauses, while those at the bottom often close with a full stop. This pattern, however, is not always strictly observed, as fragments ending with a full stop also occasionally appear higher up and the other way around. Semantically, the fragments on the same mobile tend to share similar themes and kanji. Although readers are in principle free to combine them in any sequence, some combinations produce more natural, sentence-like constructions or make greater semantic sense than others.

The decentring and activation of the readers also plays a major role in the experience of *Shi no mobīru*. The work is decentring in that Saihate deconstructed her previously carefully

constructed poetry collections into fragments, rejecting the idea of a single "authorial" or "genius" ordering of poetic words in favour of multiple possible configurations. At the same time, the installation activates readers not only by presenting the poems as installation art, but by inviting direct interaction: visitors can touch the fragments, move within the work and view it from shifting perspectives, and create their own poems by selecting resonating fragments.

However, another crucial aspect that impacts the experience of reading *Shi no mobīru* is the motion of the mobiles themselves. As the catalogue notes, "because the mobiles are constantly swaying due to the movement of the people and wind, the same poem never appears twice" (Maebashi Bungaku-kan 2025, 16), meaning that the fragments already begin to drift in new directions while they are still being read, so that any poem composed immediately slips away.

3.3.1. Co-Authoring *Shi no mobīru*

To illustrate the experience of *Shi no mobīru*, I will briefly describe how, as a visitor and reader, I navigated the installation and what the poem I encountered – and thereby also constructed – looked like, as well as how that process unfolded.

First, the room in which the poetry installation was presented at the *Saihate Tahi-ten* in the Maebashi Literature Museum is not immediately visible from the exhibition entrance. Visitors must first pass through another room, which features other installations by Saihate, before entering the second one. However, even then, the scale of the installation is not immediately apparent, as the pieces suspended from the ceiling obstruct one's view. This may explain why many visitors I observed paused in front of the room, attempting first to discern what they were looking at and how it functioned before stepping into the mobiles.

In my case, the first fragment that caught my attention was one on which the character *ai* ("love") was written eight times. As I tried to make my way toward it, gently pushing other

mobiles aside, it began to spin slowly due to my movement. My eyes shifted to the fragment beneath it, inscribed with "*dareka ga dareka ni okutta ai wo*" ("the love that someone gave to someone"). As I continued reading and combining the surrounding pieces, the following poem emerged, with each line corresponding to a fragment:

愛、愛、愛、愛、愛、愛、愛、愛、
だれかがだれかに贈った愛を
昼間、口のなかに夜がひろがり、甘い気がした。
本当は傷つかない、
嫌われても傷つかない心と体を手に入れている。

Ai, ai, ai, ai, ai, ai, ai, ai,
dareka ga dareka ni okutta ai wo
hiruma, kuchi no naka ni yoru ga hirogari, amai ki ga shita.
Hontō wa kizutsukanai
kirawarete mo kizutsukanai kokoro to karada wo te ni irete iru

Love, love, love, love, love, love, love, love,
The love that someone gave to someone
In the daytime, night spread inside my mouth, tasting sweet.
In truth, I have gained a heart and body that cannot get harmed
That cannot get harmed even if hated. (Author's translation)

The way I constructed the poem was partly coincidence, partly just picking up what my eyes were naturally drawn to, such as the repetition of *ai* and recognising the word *ai* again on the fragment underneath it. I ended it when I read the word *kirawarete mo* ("even if hated") on the last piece, as I was thinking it would tie nicely back into the first one I read due to both words being their opposites. So even while I was assembling the poem, I was already contemplating different interpretations and where they might lead. Although I was not the one who actually wrote these words, I did get the sense that the very act of combining and assembling the fragments resulted in a poem that was at least in part also a product of my own creative efforts.

The basic concept behind *Shi no mobīru* resembles earlier experiments in poetry, most notably French poet Raymond Queneau's *Cent mille milliards de poèmes* (A Hundred Thousand Billion Poems, 1961). Described as a "machine à fabriquer des poèmes" (Queneau as quoted in Baillehache 2021), Queneau's book allows readers to combine 140 sonnet lines printed on movable paper strips, generating one hundred thousand billion possible

variations. His aim in this project was to empower readers by turning them into producers of poetry (ibid.). Similarly, Saihate emphasises the active role of readers in the production of poetry through her experiments with installations, remarking in the catalogue for the Maebashi Literature Museum exhibition that "[w]ords are only completed the very moment they are read" (Saihate 2025, 25). This statement resonates with poststructuralist perspectives on the reader's role within literary texts, echoing Eco's formulation in *The Open Work* (1962) that "the author offers the interpreter, the performer, the addressee a work to be completed" (Eco 1989, 19).

It is important to note that while poststructuralists such as Barthes emphasised the active role of readers in the production of meaning to the extent of denying the author's authority over a text, Eco framed this as a question of degree. For him, some works are deliberately designed to be more "open" to active reader participation than others. Yet he also insisted that even an open work ultimately remains the property of the author, since it is the author who has "proposed a number of possibilities which had already been rationally organized, oriented, and endowed with specifications for proper development" (ibid.). Although Saihate has occasionally expressed a desire not to be overtly visible as the author of her texts – referring to her poems as "possessions of the reader" (Komine 2021) – she remains highly present as the author of *Shi no mobīru*: the fragments are written in her distinctive style, and her name is prominently featured throughout the exhibition, including in its title, on posters, and in the catalogue. At the same time, she relinquishes a degree of authorial authority by providing the experimental framework for poetic production, while the text itself can be completed only through the readers' active engagement.

In this sense, the relationship between Saihate and the readers within her poetry installation is best understood as one of co-authorship. *Shi no mobīru* does not offer a complete emancipation from the author, nor does it fully abandon the more traditional mode of reading as detached contemplation; both remain integral to the work's experience. At the

same time, the freedom to move through the installation, to encounter it from shifting perspectives, and to assemble the fragments into an individual sequence can be interpreted, in de Certeau's terms, as appropriating space (Certeau 2008, 154). Readers complete the installation by navigating it, engaging with the words written on the pieces, and constructing poems shaped by their own choices, preferences, or even sheer coincidence. Yet these creations, while experienced as one's own, are always grounded in the framework and textual materials provided by Saihate.

3.3.2. Movement and Ephemerality in *Shi no mobīru*

Returning to the comparison between *Shi no mobīru* and Queneau's *Cent mille milliards de poèmes*, the most striking difference lies, of course, in their modes of presentation. While both works play with the idea of offering text fragments that can be recombined in multiple ways to create poems, Queneau's experiment takes the form of a static book, which, though interactive, remains materially fixed. Saihate's three-dimensional experiment, by contrast, not only produces a multiperspectival and immersive environment but also presents its poetic fragments in a state of perpetual motion. Any poem assembled by the reader is thus always already on the brink of dissolving again with the movement of the mobiles. During my visit to the Maebashi Literary Museum iteration of the work, I observed many visitors eventually overcoming their initial hesitation and touching the installation, holding fragments in their hands in an attempt to stop them from spinning.

In *The Open Work*, Eco discusses a particular example of his idea of an open work – the "work in movement", a concept he associated with the avant-garde of the early twentieth century. He described such works as "artistic products which display an intrinsic mobility, a kaleidoscopic capacity to suggest themselves in constantly renewed aspects to the consumer", since they are "elementary structures which can move in the air and assume different spatial dispositions" (Eco 1989, 12). For Eco, the emergence of such works

reflected epistemological shifts that are based on notions of openness and dynamism: instead of confronting "an absolute conditioning center of reference", readers, listeners, or viewers encounter a "multiple polarity" in which "all available perspectives are equally valid and rich in potential" (18). Eco's notion of the work in movement resonates closely with what Bishop has described as multiperspectivalism in installation art that challenges the idea of a single, fixed vantage point from which an "objective truth" might be perceived. Eco, however, does not restrict the term to installation art but also applies it to musical compositions and sculptures. Significantly, he highlights Alexander Calder's hanging mobiles as exemplary instances of the concept – the same form that Saihate adopts for her poetry installation. For Eco, Calder's mobiles realise the principle that "work and viewer should never be able to confront each other twice in precisely the same way", since their motion is not merely suggested but real, producing a "field of open possibilities" (86).

Saihate frames the concept behind *Shi no mobīru* and her exhibition in a similar way, suggesting that the shifting movement of the mobiles reflects her understanding of language itself. Her remarks appear to echo poststructuralist ideas, though without explicitly naming them, as she suggests that words are inherently in flux:

> Even words in books are always shifting. Or rather, words themselves are constantly shifting. Although they appear to exist to fix a single meaning, their colour and the meaning they convey changes depending on the reader, their state of mind, and the moment from which they are approached. What does the word "dream" sound like? The answer is always slightly different, and entirely different for different people. This holds true for every single word. (Saihate 2025, 26, author's translation)

Saihate highlights two key factors that, in her view, alter the way a poem is read: the person engaging with the poem and the specific moment of its reading. This can, as already suggested, be connected to the movement within the installation itself – visitors' movements create air currents that cause the fragments to spin and drift, therefore literally creating different formations as time is passing. But it also relates to the readers themselves: the "I" in this moment is not the same as the "I" of five years, months or minutes ago. Accordingly, one's reading, understanding, and interpretation of the text on the pieces may already have

shifted, since not only do words remain in a perpetual state of flux, but subjectivity itself as well.

While poststructuralist theorists such as Eco, Derrida, and Barthes have argued that every text or artwork is, in principle, open to unlimited interpretation – whether due to the unstable relation between signifier and signified or the shifting nature of subjectivity – *Shi no mobīru* renders this openness particularly tangible. On the one hand, the installation exists as an open process that is only completed through the readers' active engagement, positioning them as co-authors; on the other hand, its perpetually shifting constellation not only underscores the instability of words themselves but also reflects the decentred and unstable position of the subject encountering them.

3.4. Fuzuki Yumi and Bandoh Yuta's *Koe no genba*

While the poetic fragments of *Shi no mobīru* revolve around timeless themes such as love, loneliness, and a general fascination with human emotions and existence, the poems integrated into *Koe no genba* are rooted in a specific historical moment – the COVID-19 pandemic.[34] They are drawn from Fuzuki's collection *Parareruwārudo no yōna mono* (パラレルワールドのようなもの, Something Like a Parallel World, 2022), written in the early phase of the pandemic in a diary-like mode that seeks to document her personal memories of that period, interspersing it with news reports and other contemporary materials.

The poetry installation *Koe no genba* was exhibited at TOKAS (Tokyo Arts and Space) in Hongo from 24 December 2021 to 16 January 2022 as part of the institution's "OPEN SITE" programme, which showcases cross-genre, experimental projects selected through an open call. According to TOKAS's 2021 annual report, participating artists were required to make "necessary adjustments amidst constraints imposed by the pandemic" (Sugimoto et al.

[34] Further details about the socio-historical context of the COVID-19 pandemic in Japan are provided in Chapter 5, which examines poetry installations created in virtual spaces in 2020.

2022, 86), which meant that installation designs had to account for social distancing and other precautionary measures. Within this framework, *Koe no genba* was structured to allow for sufficient spatial distance, as visitors entered a room where six music stands were evenly distributed along the walls. Each music stand was illuminated by a spotlight and displayed a printed version of one of Fuzuki's poems from her collection. Suspended above each stand, a loudspeaker played an audio recording of the corresponding text, which were voiced by six different readers, all female and of roughly the same age group as Fuzuki, with Fuzuki herself taking part. The recordings were arranged by composer Bandoh Yuta in a way that formed a polyphonic sound collage: at times a single voice emerges distinctly, at times multiple voices overlap into indistinguishability, and at other moments all converge in unison on the same word.

While it can be argued that the focus in *Koe no genba* is more on listening to poetry than reading it, the possibility of experiencing the poetry installation from multiple perspectives as well as the activated mode in which visitors perceive the poems presented, are nevertheless key elements of its reading (or listening) experience. Unlike *Shi no mobīru*'s arguably universal themes, however, *Koe no genba* devotes itself to a specific social event and its impact on human perception – that of the COVID-19 pandemic. The following section therefore shows how multiperspectivalism in the poetry installation is used to highlight the diverse and contradictory accounts of the pandemic. It then continues to argue that, considering the cancellation of physical events as prevention measures and the lack of physical gatherings of people, presenting a work like *Koe no genba* in an exhibition space makes the presence of other people part of its aesthetic experience, establishing a space for collective remembering and reflection.

3.4.1. Fragmented Memory in *Koe no genba*

At first glance, *Koe no genba* appears to place far less emphasis on multiperspectivalism than *Shi no mobīru* when it comes to the reading experience. The written poems are not presented in a fragmented manner but as prints on paper, mounted on music stands at a comfortable reading height, each text visible in its entirety once the reader is standing in front of it. Visitors may move from one stand to another, yet the act of reading itself requires little more than the usual eye movements, suggesting a comparatively conventional reading experience. However, the distinctive feature of *Koe no genba* is the polyphonic sound collage that surrounds visitors as they move through the installation and engage with the poems, as implied by its title ("Voices On-Site" in English). As Uchiyama Fumiko notes in her review for TOKAS's annual report, the experience begins the very moment one enters the space: "When you open the door and enter the exhibition space, you are overwhelmed by the resonance of sound pouring out of it" (Uchiyama 2022, 117).

As already mentioned, six speakers hang from the ceiling above the music stands, each assigned to a single voice and a single poem. Yet the arrangement is not straightforward, since the voices do not simply recite their respective poems. Instead, they bleed into one another, at times interrupting, at times merging, and at other times briefly synchronising. In one recording I was provided for this thesis, a chorus of voices repeatedly utters the English word "go", until another voice interjects with "stay", provoking a brief pause. The collective then resumes, adding a syllable to form "go to", which is again disrupted by the voice uttering "stay". In the next cycle, "go to" evolves into "home", culminating in the compound "stay home". All three terms – "go to", "stay", and "home" – are English loanwords that entered Japanese discourses in new ways during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Go to Travel" was the name of a government campaign launched in July 2020 to stimulate the domestic economy by subsidising up to 50 percent of travel costs, compensating for the collapse of international tourism during the travel ban. However, it

was suspended again in December 2020 amid rising infection numbers. A similar "Go to Eat" campaign, introduced in October 2020, sought to support restaurants through vouchers and a point-reward system but was halted in spring 2021 (Okubo 2022). These campaigns unfolded in the periods between Japan's first state of emergency (7 April–25 May 2020) and its second (8 January – 21 March 2021). During these phases, the "Go to" campaigns encouraged citizens to travel or dine out, while the states of emergency were dominated by calls to remain at home. The interplay of voices in *Koe no genba* can thus be heard as an echo of these contradictory imperatives that followed one another within only a few months, sonically reflecting the confusion and dissonance of pandemic life.

While the first segment remains relatively abstract, consisting only of a few emerging words, the following one shifts toward fuller sentences. Yet, just as these begin to form, they are abruptly interrupted by one voice loudly declaring "*mitsu desu*." This phrase, widely circulated during the COVID-19 pandemic, condensed government guidelines urging citizens to avoid the so-called three types of density. The Japanese word for "density" (*mitsudo* 密度) sounds similar to the word for "three" (*mittsu* 三つ), making the slogan "*mittsu no mitsu*" (三つの蜜, "three densities") both catchy and easy to remember (cf. Kümmerle 2024, 6; Borovoy 2022, 6). The English version of this slogan was translated as "avoiding the 3Cs", since all three types of density to avoid begin with the letter "C" in English ("closed", "crowded", "close contact").

Once the interruption ceases, all six voices begin reciting their poems simultaneously, producing a polyphonic density in which no single poem can be distinctly heard. This cacophony eventually gives way to alternating recitations, yet these too are fragmented: one voice interrupts another, lines are cut short, and fragments are recombined across speakers. In the process, the poems merge into a new, composite text that emerges precisely through interruption and overlap.

This experience, however, shifts subtly depending on the visitor's position within the installation. Since the sound collage is dispersed across six separate loudspeakers, each dedicated to one of the voices, the perceived volume of each voice changes in relation to the listener's own spatial positioning. When moving closer to a particular speaker, that voice is more dominant and can be more easily distinguished from the others, especially when visitors read along the corresponding poem that is provided on the music stand while listening. In other words, as in *Shi no mobīru*, visitors actively shape their perception of the work through bodily movement, here not by assembling textual fragments but by positioning themselves in relation to the polyphonic soundscape.

The spatial layout of *Koe no genba*, which, like all installation art, requires the visitor's bodily presence and foregrounds sensory immediacy, ensures that the installation is always experienced differently depending on one's movement through the space. Like in *Shi no mobīru*, this multiperspectivalism denies the possibility of a single vantage point from which the work can be grasped in its entirety, while the overlapping voices likewise reject the notion of a single dominant narrative about a nationwide crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Instead, the poetry installation acknowledges a multiplicity of perspectives – at times harmonious, at times contradictory – that shaped the experience of that moment, even when recorded by a single author. Reflecting on this process, Fuzuki observes how her poems, though based on her own diary-like writing, became unfamiliar to her when voiced by others:

> For this exhibition, I asked five other people to read the text aloud. Some were acquaintances, some I had never met before. When those unfamiliar with the author's feelings or the background to the work gave voice to the text, the words came alive with new freshness. Though the diary was unmistakably my own voice, the five readers endowed it with unexpected expressions that were not mine. (Fuzuki 2021)

In this way, *Koe no genba* illustrates – through its fragmentation of Fuzuki's poems into six different voices that contradict, interrupt, and occasionally harmonise with one another – what poststructuralist thinkers have also postulated: that the subject is always at odds with

him or herself, intrinsically divided. The installation resists the notion of a single "objective truth" about the COVID-19 pandemic, even when one turns to ostensibly factual documents such as news articles. Instead, it suggests that the collective memory of the crisis is made up of a multitude of perspectives and voices, both across individuals and within a single person's experience. *Koe no genba* makes this multiplicity of voices and memories tangible, transforming the exhibition space into a medium for exploring the complex, layered nature of human experience and memory during the pandemic.

3.4.2. Remembering Collectively in *Koe no genba*

Compared to *Shi no mobīru*, Fuzuki and Bandoh's installation appears to involve fewer interactive elements, giving it an ostensibly more static quality. As previously discussed, however, the mere ability to move within an installation already "activates" viewers in shaping their perception of the artwork – something that is also true for *Koe no genba*. Beyond this physical engagement, the installation activates listeners in another sense: it constructs a polyphonic account of collective memory during the COVID-19 pandemic, implicitly inviting visitors to join in and reflect on their own experiences. While the accompanying texts do not explicitly request participation, the ubiquity of the pandemic means that each visitor brings their own, sometimes conflicting, perspectives to the installation, contributing to its layered and multifaceted representation of that historical moment.

This is where the significance of the poetry installation's presence within an exhibition space comes into play, rather than explicitly interactive elements. *Koe no genba* opened at a moment when everyday life in Japan had begun to stabilise after the turbulence of 2020 and 2021, years marked by cancellations and postponements of cultural events. Physical exhibitions had finally become possible again, albeit under strict disease prevention protocols. At the same time, however, the emergence of the Omicron variant reinforced the sense of an ongoing crisis, disrupting the regained feeling of normalcy. The very fact that

Koe no genba was staged in a physical exhibition space therefore carried weight, since it created, at least in theory, a context where visitors could encounter not only the installation but also each other.

As Reitstätter argues, an exhibition space is always a space of communication – not only where ideas and concepts are conveyed through artworks, but also where exchanges among visitors themselves can take place. This does not necessarily require direct conversations between visitors. Rather, through the spatial configuration of installation art, the mere presence of others becomes part of the work, generating a shared, sensorial experience that Reitstätter compares to a ritual (Reitstätter 2015, 189). Such rituals were especially significant during the COVID-19 pandemic, as they "provide us with a steady resource of connection" – one that abruptly diminished when the physical spaces where they usually occurred were closed during the pandemic (Imber-Black 2020, 912).

From a constructivist perspective, Reistätter argues, it is precisely through such forms of communication – whether verbal or non-verbal – that we construct a sense of reality (191). Yet, as Bishop reminds us in her critique of Bourriaud's relational aesthetics, the fact that an installation brings people together does not automatically transform strangers into a community or guarantee a positive outcome. In the case of *Koe no genba*, however, the context of the pandemic is crucial: as an installation in an exhibition space it provides a place not for isolated but for communal reflection on the shared experience of the crisis, symbolised both through the polyphony of the six voices in the sound collage and through the collective perception of the work in the gallery. In doing so, it weaves visitors into its account of the pandemic and implicitly invites them to add their own "voices" in a metaphorical sense, serving as a point of departure for further conversations – whether online or in person – making the installation a record of crisis as well as the starting point for a collective memory in the making.

3.5. Conclusion

Circling back to this chapter's initial question – what it means to transform an exhibition space into poetry, to fill it with words, and to transpose the act of perceiving poetry into a three-dimensional installation – *Shi no mobīru* and *Koe no genba* both demonstrate the potential of such an endeavour. Each employs their spatial configurations to construct an experience of poetry that requires the physical presence of readers, engaging their whole bodies and senses as they move through the poetic space. In *Shi no mobīru*, fragments of poems are suspended from the ceiling, their constellations shifting both with the readers' changing positions and with the movement of the mobiles themselves. In *Koe no genba*, the poems remain technically intact but are fragmented by the way six different voices are interwoven in Bandoh's composition, with a particular voice becoming more distinct when the visitors move closer to the corresponding loudspeaker. In both installations, the perception of poetry changes according to the visitors' movement, illustrating the multiperspectival character of installation art, as defined by Bishop, and extending it to the acts of reading and listening to poetry.

At the same time, the demand for the readers' physical presence is regarded as corresponding to a more activated mode of engaging with the poems. This is not to imply that reading poetry in more conventional forms, such as in a book, is a passive act, since it always involves an active cognitive process. Rather, both poetry installations activate their visitors in a more embodied way, with both works only reaching completion through the readers' engagement. In *Shi no mobīru*, this activation is overtly integrated, as Saihate provides a framework for individual poetry creation through the assembling of fragments. In *Koe no genba*, by contrast, there is no similar direct invitation to interact. Instead, the exhibition space itself becomes a site of communication, as Reitstätter defines it, a space where voices are heard, keeping with its title. In their reflection on the COVID-19 pandemic, a crisis that affected all citizens of Japan, the poems put special emphasis on everyday

loanwords circulating in the news ("go to", "stay", "home", "*mitsu*"), implicitly addressing also the visitor's own experiences of the pandemic. These memories and accounts are often fragmentary and sometimes contradictory. For instance, a single individual might have experienced the pandemic simultaneously as a welcome pause from everyday life and as a potential threat to their safety; they might recall the desire to follow the government's "Go to Travel" campaign, but also to be told to stay at home due to a newly declared state of emergency. The presentation of the installation, whose polyphonic soundscape consists of overlapping, interrupting, and harmonising voices reading Fuzuki's poetry, reflect this confusion and uncertainty during the pandemic.

Both features of poetry installations – the active mode of reading and listening, as well as their fragmented, decentred character – suggest a scepticism toward fixed meanings of words and, by extension, of poetry itself. What Derrida described as *différance*, the shifting interplay of signifier and signified, seems to be at the basis of both poets' projects. By only providing fragments that can be creatively combined to new poems and can be taken into completely new contexts that Saihate herself may not have anticipated, she highlights the words openness to interpretation and takes a step back as the authorial voice over her own work, denying that her work contains any hidden "message" that the readers must decipher. In the case of *Koe no genba*, this scepticism toward the possibility of conveying something like a clear message is stated through the multiplicity of interpretations of Fuzuki's poetry that are conveyed through the stylistic choices made in each voice recording. As Fuzuki herself has noted, hearing her poems read aloud by others renders them unfamiliar, since each performance introduces a distinct inflection that diverges from her initial intention. Put differently, by willingly sacrificing some of their autonomy over their own work and presenting their poetry in the form of installation art, both *Shi no mobīru* and *Koe no genba* encourage others to infuse their words with new, not anticipated meanings, highlighting poetry as an open-ended process rather than a self-contained work with a fixed message.

This also corresponds with the shift of understanding the museum space or art galleries as a "space of communication" (Reitstätter) or a "site of negotiation" (Lord), terms that imply its role not merely as a site where objects and concepts meet, but as one where their gap – the unstable, shifting relation between signifier and signified – is made tangible and negotiated. Poetry installations set within these exhibition spaces, as exemplified by *Shi no mobīru* and *Koe no genba*, can be regarded as extending this sensibility to poetry. They make readers aware of not only the words they are reading (the *what* of their readings), but also of the mode in which they are reading (the *how*), allowing them to recognise their own productive involvement in the meaning-making process of poetry within these installations as well as in a more general sense.

4. Encountering Poetic Spaces in the Cityscape

In early 2020, Saihate Tahi was commissioned to create a piece for the Saitama Triennale of that year. After experimenting with exhibiting poetry in three-dimensional space in her first solo exhibition simply called *Shi no tenji* (詩の展示, Poetry Exhibition) the previous year, she planned to transfer this experience to the city, where people would encounter her poetry unexpectedly.[35] She composed two short poems consisting of a single line each, asked designers Sasaki Shun and Nakanishi Yoko to come up with a design for them and eventually painted both poems in big white unmissable characters on the ground in early March 2020: *Shi no kasoku* (詩の加速, The Acceleration of Poetry, 2020–2021, Figure 5) in a small back alley in the nightlife district Minami Ginza and *Shi no teishi* (詩の停止, The Suspension of Poetry, 2020–2021) at the Daimon Underpass. Both locations are close to Ōmiya Station – the busiest station in Saitama Prefecture – which serves as a major commuter hub for travel into Tokyo and as an intercity terminal connected to destinations across Japan via the Shinkansen network.[36] Then, just ten days before the art festival was scheduled to open on 28 March 2020, the opening was postponed indefinitely due to the spread of the COVID-19 virus. However, the poems were already painted, so Saihate decided to leave the installations as they were. Because there was no prior announcement or info text accompanying her installations, people in Ōmiya were even more likely to encounter her words of poetry unexpectedly. Tweets posted in spring 2020 highlight this sense of unexpectedness, as users describe the installations as *nazo* (謎, "puzzle", "mystery") and share photos and videos of

[35] *Shi no tenji* was exhibited at the Yokohama Museum of Art from 23 February to 24 March 2019.

[36] According to statistics published by JR East, Ōmiya Station was the busiest station in Saitama in terms of daily commuter traffic with 244,393 passengers in 2023. It ranks seventh overall, surpassed only by stations located within Tokyo – Shinjuku (650,602), Ikebukuro (489,933), Tokyo (403,831), Shibuya (314,059), and Shinagawa (274,221) – as well as Yokohama Station (362,348). In terms of Shinkansen passengers, Ōmiya Station ranked second within the JR East network with 30,291 daily passengers. The highest number was recorded at Tokyo Station with 65,056. Passenger statistics by year are available at the East Japan Railway Company website: https://www.jreast.co.jp/passenger/ [last access: 3 October 2025].

their discoveries, often giving directions to others on how to find the poems.[37] Only a few months later in June, Saihate revealed the origin of the installation in a tweet, stating, “There was all this talk about mysterious back-alley poems in spring… it was me … sorry for the trouble!” (Saihate 2020a). The Saitama Triennale finally took place from 17 October to 15 November of that year and Saihate’s poems were removed on 6 January 2021, ten months after their initial appearance.

Exhibiting art in an urban space, compared to presenting an art object in a gallery, a studio or a museum, comes with its own set of aesthetic categories and critical discourses, as the ongoing discussion on art’s relationship and engagement with site in the form of phenomena such as site-specific installations has shown (Kaye 2000; Suderburg 2000; Kwon 2002; Hawkins 2013). Adding now poetry as an element into the mix, untangling the individual components as well as the dynamics and interplays between them seems to become even more complicated. How can we productively analyse the construct of a site-specific poetry installation in urban space as presented by *Shi no kasoku* to find out in what ways encountering a poetic space in the landscape of a city can transform our ways of reading the poem and reading our surroundings? What happens when we encounter poetry unexpectedly in urban space and which political or aesthetic implications might come with this encounter?

To make sense of the sometimes more or less subtle effects of poetic spaces in the cityscape, I aim to use Saihate’s *Shi no kasoku* as an example and examine her poetry installation by combining a close reading of the poem with an imaginary walk through the installation. This approach seeks to honour the embodied reading experience that a poetry installation such as *Shi no kasoku* requires. As previously mentioned, since Japan’s border

[37] For reference see tweet by *@hatolier_camera* dated 6 April 2020, available at https://x.com/a_la_nozo/status/1275977019101114371 [last access: 15 January 2026] or tweet by *@mapper_akst*, available at https://x.com/mapper_akst/status/1249849611574898688 [last access: 15 January 2026]. An account on X is required for access. For those who visited the installation after seeing a tweet about it, the encounter would no longer be entirely unexpected. It is therefore important to note that, while the lack of an institutional setting increases the chance of encountering the installation unexpectedly, this experience still depends on various factors, such as in-person or online conversations with others who may have seen the installation before.

measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 made it impossible for me to experience *Shi no kasoku* in person, my analysis relies on photos, videos, blog posts, tweets, and a virtual exploration of the relevant site using Google Street View. Following this analysis, I use the notion of encounter in postwar Japanese art, as assessed by Miryam Sas in her book *Experimental Arts in Postwar Japan: Moments of Encounter, Engagement, and Imagined Return* (2011), to argue that *Shi no kasoku* can be read as a site of encounter. Drawing on essays written by Mono-ha painter Lee Ufan (b. 1936) and avant-garde writer and director Terayama Shūji (1935–1983), Sas states the idea of *deai* (出会い, "encounter") was the driving force behind many works of postwar artists, as they aimed to create sites of encounter between the subject, the art object and the surrounding space through their art, which hold the potential to bring about transformation for all involved parties, while also breaking down the boundaries between them. Using the idea of *deai* and combining this with a discussion on the political potential of art when exhibited in urban space by using arguments postulated by Cecilie Sachs Olsen, Henri Lefebvre, Doreen Massey, and Herbert Marcuse, I will also argue that *Shi no kasoku* can be perceived as a site of resistance to established spatial orderings and clear categorisations. I begin this chapter by defining what we talk about when we talk about urban space and urban imaginaries to clarify the terminology I intend to use. I continue with a discussion of another work by Saihate, which delves into the display of poetry in urban spaces but takes a more traditional approach by publishing it on paper: her short story *Kimi wa POP* (きみは POP, You are POP, 2014). I posit that this short story can be seen as a predecessor to Saihate's experiments with exhibiting poetry, as she uses photographs of actual urban spaces for her story – and only later translated this concept into real three-dimensional space within a city in her poetry installations for the Saitama Triennale, among others. The contrast between *Kimi wa POP* and *Shi no kasoku* helps to understand what encountering and reading a poetic space within the cityscape means and in

what ways it differs from the traditional reading experience transmitted through books and other print media.

4.1. Defining Urban Space and Urban Imaginaries

Urban space is usually characterised as a space of change and dynamism (Olsen 2019; Rácz 2018; Oshima 2016). This holds true for space in general, as Massey states in the first of her three propositions for space, "we recognise space as always under construction. […] it is always in the process of being made. It is never finished; never closed" (Massey 2005, 32). However, this dynamism can be said to get accelerated in an urban environment where "something is always pulled down, and something is always constructed" (Rácz 2018, 214).

In post-war Japan, there was a significant emphasis on rational urban planning to quickly rebuild cities devastated by the war from the mid-1950s to the mid-1970s. As awareness grew regarding the increasing urban issues and limitations associated with functional city planning in a capitalist system, left-leaning groups like the *Toshi dezain kenkyūtai*, which included architect Isozaki Arata (1931–2022) among others, emerged in Tokyo in 1956 as "a movement to critique contemporary architecture and cities" and to advocate for the preservation of traditional structures within urban environments (Oshima 2016, 624). In 1961, the group published a special issue of the magazine *Kenchiku bunka* (The Architectural Culture) focused on urban design. Drawing inspiration from sources such as Le Corbusier's *Plan Voisin de Paris*, they present the city as "physical, social, dynamic, symbolic, and visionary" (626). In the same issue, they argued that Western urban planning typologies – such as the grid, linear, cluster, ring, satellite models – are not adequate to analyse Japanese urban space, developing their own typologies for the spatial principles and types particular to Japan, including the *Go* pattern, which is based on the layouts of many Japanese castle plans that resemble the character for the number five (ibid.). These principles were based on the idea that the Japanese city is "never fixed; it is always in a state of

transition" (Isozaki 2009, 203), mirroring Massey's proposition that space is always in the process of becoming. However, given the backdrop of recurrent natural disasters, such as the Great Kantō earthquake in 1923 or the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami, as well as the destruction caused during WWII, including the Tokyo Air Raid in March 1945 and the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki that August, Japanese cities have gone through cycles of devastation and reconstruction. In this context, the conceptualisation of the city as a dynamic process "has particular relevance" in Japan (Oshima 2016, 631).

The other two propositions by Massey – namely, recognising "space as the product of interrelations", and understanding space as "the sphere […] of coexisting heterogeneity" (Massey 2005, 31) – also seem to gain another quality in an urban environment which is usually marked by a dense population residing in close proximity. In their edited volume *Urban Imaginaries* (2007) Alev Cinar and Thomas Bender claim that it is precisely our combined individual imaginations in combination with our daily urban practices and interactions that produce the city as an "at once indefinite and a singular space" (Bender and Cinar 2007, xi). By using the term "urban imaginaries", they emphasise that the city is not a "unified and contained thing" but must always be seen in context of its networks, boundaries, and the many and diverse subjective experiences of a city (xvii). Looking at the production process of urban space and the city from a Neo-Marxist point of view, Cecilie Sachs Olsen also claims that the city is not merely a passive setting in which social actions unfold, but rather it is shaped by these actions. However, she notes that simultaneously, the city – or how we perceive it – shapes our actions, normalising particular behaviours and spatial practices within it (Olsen 2019, 986). Put differently, the city's process of becoming can be seen as a two-way-street, as it is not only the people who shape the space of the city but they are also shaped by the space itself, as it is precisely "[t]he happenstance, liveliness and risk of these encounters […] what make the urban a site in which the boundaries of the 'givens' and what is normal are constantly negotiated" (989).

Olsen grounds her theoretical framework in Lefebvre's influential concept of the "triad of space" (see Chapter 2.3.1.), which posits that urban space – like any other form of space – is shaped through a three-part dialectic: the conceived space (*conçu*), defined by city authorities and urban planners, and the perceived space (*perçu*), which reflects society's collective understanding of the city and its spatial norms. The third spatial mode that Lefebvre introduces directs attention to the individual sphere and the daily subjective choices made while inhabiting and navigating through urban space (*vécu*) (Lefebvre 1991, 38–39). This third mode, also referred to as spaces as lived, underscores a shift towards the individual, asserting that through subjective urban imaginaries, to use Çinar and Bender's term, these spatial practices and norms can be perpetuated or contested.

In his writings, Lefebvre expresses a strong critique of capitalism, the driving force behind what dictates spatial practices in modern society. This is especially true for urban space, as "cities have increasingly become part of the machinery of commodified dreams and desires" (Olsen 2019, 992). Moving through a city is scarcely feasible without allowing one's gaze to wander across posters, billboards, screens displaying advertisements, or other promotional materials. In his work *Le droit à la ville* (1968), Lefebvre asks who has the right to the city, examining the social and anthropological needs that human beings aspire to fulfil within their spatial surroundings. In his view, these needs include creativity and play, interaction, and exchange, and they cannot be addressed within the structures of consumption (Lefebvre quoted in Hologa 2018, 201).

This brief discussion on urban space and urban imaginaries highlighted three key points that are crucial for the subsequent analysis of poetic spaces in the city in general and Saihate's works in particular, namely 1) the city is a dynamic space that is constantly evolving; 2) urban space is not a singular, universal entity but is composed of various coexisting urban imaginaries; 3) while these imaginaries are influenced by modern day capitalist structures, they also possess the potential to contest them.

4.2. Saihate Tahi's *Kimi wa POP* as a Predecessor to *Shi no kasoku*

Saihate created *Kimi wa POP* in collaboration with photographer Moriyama Tomohiko, designer Sayama Taichi and design studio Three&Co for the art magazine *Bijutsu Techō* in April 2014. It was later republished in her short story collection *Paparararereruru* (パパラララレレルル) in 2021. Even though technically speaking, *Kimi wa POP* is not considered one of Saihate's poetic works, its format can best be described as unconventional and experimental, since its words are not printed on white paper but on photographs of various places we associate with the city. We see her text appear on billboards, posters, light switches, CD covers, book spines, laptop and smartphone screens, newspapers, signs of various shapes, and on the ground of a street. In short, the words appear on places where the readers usually expect to see words and seamlessly blend into the landscape of the photographs, creating a sense of ambiguity about whether the words were added later or were part of the original shot.

The short story centres around Aki, a recently acclaimed idol and pop star. Written from the perspective of an autodiegetic narrator, she describes how she began to feel estranged from her fans, as she perceives their love and support as mere lies. In her eyes, attending concerts and cheering for your favourite pop idol are acts of narcissism, as their support only lasts as long as they can personally relate to that pop star and their music. According to Aki, her fans use her as a reflection of themselves rather than seeing her as an autonomous person. Despairing over this realisation, she seeks advice from her mentor, who, as it is implied, is in a romantic relationship with her. However, neither can understand or agree with the other. The short story abruptly concludes with the teacher's suicide, leaving Aki in even further despair.

Written in the form of an internal monologue, the narrative emphasises Aki's inner turmoil through an associative and emotionally loaded language, culminating in a paragraph that only contains the word *sensei* (先生, "mentor") repeatedly, 59 times in total (Saihate 2021,

101–2). Shifting the focus onto how text and visuals intertwine in *Kimi wa POP*, these two elements seem to present a stark opposition: a story with an affective, internal monologue-like narration style about a pop star's inner struggles with fame and fan culture on one side, juxtaposed with photographs of a nameless city capturing a quiet and cold atmosphere. Their composition lines consist of straight vertical and horizontal lines, conveying a static impression, while human presence in these photos is minimal. Instead of reflecting Aki's struggle through the short story's form, the cold and impersonal cityscapes portrayed in the photographs appear to rather diminish the emotional impact of the narrative.

Another noteworthy aspect of the subjects in the photographs is their connection to consumer culture. Most of them show billboards on top of high-rise buildings or advertising posters draped outside among stickers and hints of graffiti, while others appear to be signs displaying the name of a certain building or park. These elements share a uniform look across Japanese cities, making it challenging to pinpoint the exact locations where the photos for *Kimi wa POP* were taken, especially without seeing more of their surroundings. Put simply, they convey a sense of placelessness.

The central idea in Marc Augé's concept of "non-places" in an age of supermodernity revolves around this association between placelessness and consumer culture.[38] Non-places represent areas lacking a strong sense of identity, history, or social connection, often serving specific functions like airports, shopping malls, or highways (Augé 1995, 78). As the photographs of the short story do not capture tangible locations with distinctive features, but rather serve as generic representations of urban space, the nameless city within *Kimi wa POP* seemingly epitomises the idea of a non-place. According to Augé, text is the crucial link

[38] Augé uses the term supermodernity (*surmodernité*) to describe the present as an intensification of modernity rather than "post"-modern. In his work *Non-Lieux Introduction à une anthropologie de la surmodernité* (Non-Places Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity, 1992), he argues that our age is defined by three "excesses": of time (an overload of simultaneous events), space (global shrinkage through travel and media), and individuality (heightened isolation as traditional collectivities erode). These overlapping excesses mark a qualitative shift in experience, prompting Augé to call for new anthropological approaches (Buchanan 2018).

between individuals and their surroundings in a non-place, since they usually establish the instructions and rules on how to behave in that space: street signs telling you not to smoke or commercial texts asking you to buy a certain product (94). All these texts shape the image of what Augé refers to as the "average man" – or, to avoid the generic masculine, the "average person" (100).[39] In these very spaces, where the messages shaping the identity of the average person usually reside, Saihate unfolds her short story telling the personal dilemma of an individual grappling with the repercussions of a consumer culture that renders her both a victim and an accomplice.

This ambiguous relationship between art and consumption is the main theme of *Kimi wa POP*, as also the title of the short story itself suggests. "You are POP" is the advice Aki gets from her mentor, meaning that she is part of consumer culture and there is no escaping it (Saihate 2021, 93). If we connect this sense of entrapment conveyed in the text to the visual elements, it is noteworthy that on each page, the words are confined within the borders of their designated space – whether it be a sign, a newspaper, or a poster. This composition not only upholds the illusion that the words telling Aki's story could potentially be found somewhere in a Japanese city but also effectively conveys the protagonist's sense of confinement, being trapped in a consumerist framework that tends to perceive her more as a commodity than a human being. However, an unexpected deviation from this interplay between visuals and text occurs on the second to last page. Suddenly, at the peak of Aki's despair, the words extend beyond the confines of the billboard in the photograph (Figure 6). This culminates in the repetition of an unfinished sentence ("*ji*... *ji*... *ji*…") and concludes with the sentence "*Kenjū ga nai*" (拳銃がない, "There is no pistol") written in the air (104). The short story's conclusion is left open to interpretation; however, the mention of the pistol, her mentor's chosen method of suicide, and the repetition of the syllable "*ji*", which may

[39] A detailed exploration of the gendered dimensions of space and place – often overlooked in broader spatial theory – can be found in Doreen Massey's *Space, Place and Gender* (Cambridge: Wiley, 1994).

allude to the word *jisatsu* (自殺, "suicide"), suggests that Aki's despair continues to spiral downward. The last page only shows an empty billboard, brightly lit at night, with no words written on it (105).

The previous points illustrate that the photographs of different locations within urban space in *Kimi wa POP* are a vital component of the short story, as they inform and impact the way of reading the narrative, opening it up to new potential interpretations. On one hand, text and image seem to contrast with each other (an emotionally loaded narrative versus "cold" and empty visuals), on the other hand, the composition of the text-image units reflects and emphasises crucial themes and key moments in the short story, such as the feeling of entrapment and the sudden downward spiral of Aki's mental condition.

Some of the ideas on integrating text within space that Saihate explored in *Kimi wa POP* left their imprint on her subsequent poetic spaces. We find poems written on real book spines in her travelling solo exhibition *Wareware*, for instance, and a poem written on the ground of a real street instead of on a photo of a street in *Shi no kasoku*. How does the shift of the reading experience from a portable book to an alleyway influence our approach to reading and interpreting a poem? To delve further into this question, I will focus on Saihate's poetry installation *Shi no kasoku* in the next section, starting with a detailed depiction of the artwork and its designated space, followed by a close reading approach that combines text, space, and movement.

4.3. *Shi no kasoku* – The Poem and the Location

As described in the beginning of this paper, *Shi no kasoku* was part of Saihate's artwork for the Saitama Triennale 2020. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the art festival was postponed, and the installation lost its institutional context, transforming from a commissioned piece into a new entity, resembling urban art forms such as a happening or

street art.[40] The installation was painted on the ground in a back alley (*roji* 路地) that is located south of the East Exit of Ōmiya station in a district called Minami Ginza, which is renowned for its vibrant nightlife scene. The work was completed under the supervision of designer Sasaki Shun, just a few days before the first of two postponement announcements, issued on 6 March 2020.[41] This district is home to various establishments, including restaurants, *izakaya*, karaoke bars, pachinko parlours, and what are commonly known as *gāruzubā* ("girls bars") and snack bars. The latter are typically staffed by female bartenders and primarily cater to male white-collar workers seeking companionship and relaxation after their workday.

The typical Japanese *roji* holds a significant place in every Japanese city, serving as a favoured subject for poets and researchers alike. In his poetry collection *Shinkokyū no hitsuyō* (深呼吸の必要, The Need for Deep Breathing, 1991), Osada Hiroshi describes the *roji* as "a pathway that winds through the spaces between houses in the heart of the city", highlighting especially the sight of flowerpots placed along the walls that are hinting at the presence of other people, even if no one else is in sight, making "you suddenly feel as though the thoughts of your daily life have been refreshed" (Osada 2015, 162). Heide Imai views the *roji* as a multisensory environment, where the boundaries between private and public are blurred (Imai 2008, 335), leading to the impression of a "visual chaos" consisting of alleys

[40] The Saitama Triennale is a major cultural event in the city of Saitama that receives extensive promotion and attracts a substantial number of visitors. In 2023, the festival recorded 490,820 visitors – an impressive figure when considered against the city's population of approximately 1.3 million. The 2020 edition, which was ultimately held in a hybrid format due to the COVID-19 pandemic, drew 403,641 attendees, including online participants. Detailed figures are available at https://www.saitama-np.co.jp/index.php/articles/79667 [last access: 3 October 2025]. Even in the absence of a plate or explanatory text at the site of *Shi no kasoku*, it is reasonable to assume that many visitors would have recognised the installation as part of the festival, had the event unfolded as originally planned. When the Saitama Triennale 2020 eventually opened in October 2020, the installation was listed on the festival's official website, along with detailed information about its location, available at https://art-sightama.jp/project/uFoQn5I0 [last access: 3 October 2025].

[41] The Saitama Triennale was initially scheduled to open on 14 March 2020. On 6 March, the opening was postponed to 28 March, but by 19 March, the event was officially postponed indefinitely. The revised schedule was announced on 23 September 2020, stating that the online program would run from 3 October to 15 November and the on-site program from 17 October to 15 November 2020. See the news section of the official website for a full timeline of events: https://art-sightama.jp/en/news [last access: 3 October 2025].

"cluttered with bicycles, flowerpots and little knick-knacks" (336). The author Nakagami Kenji, on the other hand, associates the *roji* in his writing with his homeland in the *buraku* – districts linked to the lowest caste in the Japanese feudal system, whose descendants continue to experience discrimination today despite the system's abolition during the Meiji period (Ishikawa 2020, 9). His work depicts the *roji* as a peripheral urban space, taking on the image of a site "associated with the outcaste context" (45). In his article "The Space-Time Compression of Tokyo Street Drinking", James Farrer describes another side of the *roji*, emphasising its social importance within Japan's nightlife and drinking culture and using the term "spaces of play" among others to describe them (Farrer 2021, 50). He argues that the narrow *roji*, defined by closely positioned small-scale shops, leads to a compression of space, mirroring the atmosphere of Asian night markets. This spatial compression facilitates a sense of intimacy and familiarity among the people frequenting these places (49). However, he also highlights the gendering and male-centric nature of these urban nightlife spaces, a trend he suggests is gradually waning. He attributes this shift to the targeting of working women by these establishments, a change prompted by the demographic transformation in the workforce following the burst of the Japanese economic bubble in the 1990s (51). Osada, Imai, Nakagami, and Farrer all highlight the distinctive character inherent in each back alley within a Japanese city. Whether located in a vibrant nightlife district with small-scale bars and *izakaya* or situated within a tranquil residential area adorned with flowerpots, each *roji* possesses a unique character. Their narrowness and confined space compel people to slow down, barely accommodating a motorbike, let alone a car. At the same time, these alleys cultivate an intimate atmosphere that blurs the lines between inhabitants and customers.

The small *roji* of *Shi no kasoku* leads away from the main road of Minami Ginza and is roughly 70 metres long and only one and a half metre wide. Interestingly, the ground in this specific *roji* has a distinct appearance compared to the other alleys and roads in that district.

It features irregularly shaped yellow-brown street tiles, bordered on each side by white rectangular tiles, lending an almost frame-like quality to the poem presented in the installation (Figure 5). The poem of *Shi no kasoku* starts in said back alley at the opposite end from Minami Ginza's main road and concludes where the back alley meets the main road. It consists of one single line written in a vertical reading direction, with the words saying:

> 私の加速に一番ふさわしい季節。春って。あなたとあなたとあなたのことを忘れたぶんだけ愛しているとうそぶく春は乱視です。今日だけは、あなたが信じたものが真実かもね。
>
> *Watashi no kasoku ni ichiban fusawashii kisetsu. Harutte. Anata to anata to anata no koto wo wasureta bundake aishiteiru to usobuku haru wa ranshi desu. Kyō dake wa, anata ga shinjita mono ga shinjitsu kamo ne.*
>
> The season that suits my acceleration the best – that's spring. Spring is an astigmatism, forgetting you and you and you as much as it pretends to love. Only for today, what you believed in might be true. (Author's translation)

Each character of the poem is roughly 60 cm tall, 40 cm wide and painted in white on the ground. Its dimension is a crucial element of the installation, as due to the length of the poem and the size of the characters, it cannot be viewed in its entirety at a single glance. Viewers must move along the characters and walk through the whole back alley to read the full poem. As the alley is hardly visible from the side facing away from Minami Ginza, most people would discover the installation from the main road and initially see or read the last words of the poem. To view the beginning of the poem, readers would technically need to first walk through the entire alley, and to read it, they would have to move backward along the line of poetry while facing the opposite direction.

As it is typical for poems by Saihate, *Shi no kasoku* follows a free verse structure with no rhyme pattern. It consists of four short sentences, written in one vertical line. The poem starts with the kanji for *watashi* (私, "I"), introducing a personal tone and potentially identifying

its speaker as female.[42] This sense is heightened by incorporating an unnamed *anata* (あなた, "you"), evoking the atmosphere of an inner monologue or an intimate conversation between two people, and further intensified by a syntax reminiscent of spoken Japanese, with sentences left incomplete or shifting between different levels of politeness. Following *watashi* and the possessive particle *no*, the second noun is *kasoku* (加速, "acceleration"), the same word as in the installation's title, this time describing the speaker's acceleration. The use of *kasoku* conveys a sense of movement – a movement which becomes faster and faster, creating a restless, rushed, and agitated atmosphere to which, as the speaker claims, the season spring fits the best.

Highlighting a season prominently in a poem, particularly by a poet like Saihate, who is well-versed in traditional Japanese *waka* as evidenced by her translation of the famous classical Japanese anthology *Hyakunin isshu* (百人一首, One Hundred People, One Poem Each) into modern Japanese, seems to be more than a coincidence.[43] The use of seasons to establish a poem's atmosphere and scenery is a central tenet of Japanese traditional poetry, dating back to the late seventh century (Shirane 2012, 27). In classical Japanese poetry, spring is associated with many things, among them the growth of plants and flowers, symbolising new life (34). The dawn of a new day is also intricately tied to the spring season, echoing the famous exclamation from Sei Shōnagon's *Makura no Sōshi* (枕草子, The Pillow Book, ca. 1002), "*Haru wa akebono*" (春はあけぼの, "Spring is dawn") (Kubota and Baba 1999, 719). Within the context of *Shi no kasoku*, the term "spring" may encapsulate a similar concept of new beginnings, aligning with the restlessness and agitation implied by the term *kasoku*.

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[42] The word "potentially" is used here because *watashi* can technically be used by both men and women. However, as noted, the poem has a conversational, personal tone. While women often use *watashi* in such contexts, men typically prefer other first-person pronouns like *boku* 僕 or *ore* 俺 in informal situations. That said, the use of first-person pronouns in Japanese is flexible, which contributes to the poem's overall ambiguity.

[43] Saihate Tahi's translation of the *Hyakunin isshu* is revisited in Chapter 6, where her renderings of classical *waka* into modern Japanese are presented within a poetic space.

In the original Japanese, it remains unclear in the second sentence whether the subject is again "I" (*watashi*) or if it is spring itself that forgets the addressee while equally loving them. Spring could also be personified as a stand-in for the lyrical subject, especially since a connection between spring and the speaker is established in the first sentence. The grammatical structure of that sentence places emphasis on the final noun: *ranshi* (乱視, "astigmatism"). Referring to a visual condition in which an irregular curvature of the cornea causes distorted or blurred vision, *ranshi* resonates with the poem on multiple levels.

For one, blurred vision is often associated with movement, as an object that moves fast usually appears blurred in our vision, relating to the word *kasoku* ("acceleration") at the beginning of the poem. Blurred or distorted vision could also be connected to feelings of fatigue and tiredness. A famous example of this appears in Miyazawa Kenji's (1896–1933) poem *Higashi iwate kazan* (東岩手火山, East Iwate Volcano, 1924), where he uses the expression *ranshi* to describe his mental exhaustion, writing:

> 月はいま二つに見える
> やつぱり疲れからの乱視なのだ (Miyazawa 2000)
>
> *Tsuki wa ima futatsu ni mieru*
> *yatsupari tsukarekara no ranshi na no da*
>
> The moon now appears as two
> indeed astigmatism caused by exhaustion (author's translation)

Like Miyazawa suddenly seeing more than one moon, the speaker in Saihate's poem also seems to perceive more than one "you", repeating the word *anata* three times. Additionally, astigmatism, with its resulting double vision, can be linked to the poem's juxtaposition of forgetting and pretending to love – two actions that would normally be mutually exclusive but are presented as being carried out with equal intensity through the grammatical construction *bun dake*. Both images, double vision and emotional contradiction, can be associated with a distorted perception, one visual and the other emotional. Just as double vision prevents the observer from distinguishing a single, true image, the juxtaposition of forgetting and pretending to love suggests an emotional state in which the boundaries

between these contradictory emotional actions blur, hinting at the unreliable nature of human emotions – especially considering the speaker only *pretends* to love. Whether due to exhaustion and fatigue or the speaker's prior establishment of emotions as unreliable, in the final sentence, the speaker allows what *anata* believes in – the love the speaker pretends to offer – to be perceived as genuine, if only for today.

Despite its shortness, the poem includes all the typical elements for Saihate's poetry, consisting of a free verse structure, writing the poem from the perspective of a non-descriptive "I", addressed to a nameless "you" as well as dealing with "themes of isolation, depression, and downright bewilderment about love of all kinds" (Smith 2017, 109). As mentioned before, it creates the intimate atmosphere of reading someone's inner monologue – which is why it is even more striking that Saihate chose to write this particular poem on the ground of a back alley in Ōmiya's nightlife district in big, unmissable characters for her installation.

4.4. Text, Space and Movement: Reading *Shi no kasoku*

Through its spatial dimensions, *Shi no kasoku* enables the readers to *be* in the poetic work, standing right in the middle of its words while reading them. As a site-specific installation, it also establishes a relationship between the art object, in this case the poem painted on the ground, and the location where it was placed, namely the back alley in Minami Ginza, Ōmiya.

Presenting poetry in the form of a site-specific installation turns reading *Shi no kasoku* into a simultaneously cognitive and corporeal act that presupposes "the literal presence of the viewer" (Bishop 2005, 6). To recall Bishop's observation from the previous chapter, "[r]ather than imagining the viewer as a pair of disembodied eyes that survey the work from a distance, installation art presupposes an embodied viewer whose senses of touch, smell and sound are as heightened as their sense of vision" (ibid.). This means that the experience

of being in that specific location *Shi no kasoku* is presented in is as much part of the poetic work as the written characters themselves. Readers not only physically engage their entire bodies to read the poem, but they also find themselves immersed in a multitude of stimuli, ranging from other written words like shop signs or commercial posters to the typical bustling sounds of a city and the scents of flowerpots, restaurants and perhaps rubbish put outside for collection. Readers become fully aware of their own physicality with all their senses during the reading process, merging the ambiance of the back alley with the words of the poem.

In the following section, I intend to use an imaginary stroll through *Shi no kasoku* as a tool to weave the poem with its surrounding space, conducting an analysis of the interplay between these elements. The notion of an imaginary stroll, as introduced by Karen van den Berg in her article "Das unbedingte Museum. Die fragile Logik des Ensembles" (The Unconditional Museum: The Fragile Logic of the Ensemble, 2008), serves as a method-logical inspiration. In her analysis, she employs this imaginative walk through an exhibition to blend her subjective impressions as a viewer with a conceptual examination of the "aesthetic space of experience" (van den Berg 2008, 11).

It is sometime in the afternoon, and the nightlife district of Minami Ginza has not yet fully come to life. The doors to the small upstairs bars remain closed, while the restaurants and pachinko parlours are already bustling. Seen from the main street of Minami Ginza, the entrance to the alleyway *Shi no kasoku* is presented in is framed by a ramen restaurant and a Chinese restaurant specialising in Tanmen. Both signs are in a vibrant red, signalling, through their advertisements, that affordable, quickly prepared food is available there. A typical street bollard on the left side of the entrance is covered in brightly designed advertising stickers and tags from various street art groups. Gazing down the alley, one encounters the characteristic visual chaos of a *roji*, as described by Imai. The scene unfolds with long cables spanning the passage, ventilation ducts, vending machines, bags of rubbish,

bicycles, potted plants – and most notably, overlapping brightly coloured signs that are affixed to the outer walls of various restaurants and bars. On the ground, there is the poem spreading from the other end towards the readers. They encounter the poem in reverse, reading its last words "*shinjitsu kamo ne*" ("maybe it is true") first. In a blog post discussing Saihate's installation, blogger Ribu described their encounter with reading the poem in reverse, stating "I was overwhelmed by the power of the words that emerged when reading it in reverse". When they read "*shinjitsu kamo ne*", they wondered, "what might possibly be true?" and then continued walking through the alley, while reading (Ribu 2020). When reaching the second to last sentence of the poem, "*Anata to anata to anata no koto wo wasureta bundake aishiteiru to usobuku haru wa ranshi desu*" ("Spring is an astigmatism, forgetting you and you and you as much as it pretends to love"), the landscape of the alleyway has slightly changed. The further away from the main street of Minami Ginza, the more the signs of Chinese restaurants, soba restaurants or yakitori bars get replaced by signs of the local snack bars and girls bars with names like "Silk", "Major AAA", "Big Sister", "Members Lucia", and "Clown". As mentioned before, these markers designate the alley as a gendered space – one intended for male customers and female service providers. At the same time, the signs hint at a business that, to some extent, specialises in simulating affection for their customers. Could the middle sequence of the poem, where the speaker pretends to love "you and you and you", be read as a reference to these establishments? And if that is the case, could the *ranshi* caused by fatigue and the emotional exhaustion potentially belong to one of the women employed in one of the bars – tired from feigning affection for a multitude of male customers, as emphasised by the enumeration? In this sense, *Shi no kasoku* could also be read as a testament to a loveless yet love-craving city, where feigning affection has evolved into a lucrative business.

As the readers progress along the alley, they eventually encounter the first two sentences of the poem, situating it temporally in spring – the season originally intended for the Saitama

Triennale 2020. This temporal alignment has the potential to deepen the readers' immersion into the poetic space, asking them to be attentive to the distinct array of sights, scents, and sounds associated with spring. Furthermore, the conciseness of these two elliptical sentences imparts a sense of speed, mirrored in the term *kasoku*, as well as in the movement of the readers themselves. The poem commences where the alley concludes – and as the readers step beyond the poetry installation, they find themselves at a small T-shaped junction, with a narrow back alley to both their left and right. Here, they decide whether to embark on a re-read of *Shi no kasoku*, this time from start to finish, or to follow one of the other alleys. However, in the afternoon, this tiny *roji* is almost empty. How would the experience of reading the poem change if it were nighttime, with groups of people gathered in front of the bars, obstructing one's path and line of sight? What if the poem were read from a second-floor window, offering a vantage point over the entire scene – remaining still while watching others move below? And considering that the installation appeared during the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic, when public life had already slowed down, how might the contrast between a once-bustling pre-pandemic nightlife and the present moment reshape the perception and interpretation of the poetry installation? How does the reading experience change across different seasons?

Reading *Shi no kasoku* as a poetic space means directing one's senses outward while reading, incorporating all sensory experiences as well as one's own perception of and associations with that specific space into the poem. A space is never just its physical dimensions. In his *The Poetics of Space* (1958), Gaston Bachelard says "[i]nhabited space transcends geometrical space" (Bachelard 2014, 67), meaning, when we *are* in a space our memories, associations, and imaginations overlay it, infusing the space with a poetic quality. As previously mentioned, the space in which *Shi no kasoku* is situated is far from a neutral backdrop for its words; rather, it adds layers of meaning that unfold differently depending on the individual reader, as well as the time and surrounding conditions. Imagining a walk

through the poetry installation illustrates this dynamic interplay among space, movement, and text, highlighting the potential meanings that can emerge. However, this represents only one example among countless possible ways of perceiving and reading *Shi no kasoku*.

4.5. Conceptualising *Shi no kasoku* as a Site of Encounter and Resistance

Employing *Shi no kasoku* as an example, this section delves into the examination of the question what happens when poetry is embedded within urban space, going beyond the impact on the content and potential readings of it as previously illustrated, and, more generally, examine the intrinsic socio-cultural implications of integrating poetry into the urban environment. This section draws parallels with other instances of incorporating art in experimental forms within urban spaces, particularly examining postwar avant-garde movements in 1960s and 70s Tokyo and Paris, such as Hi-Red Center, the Situationists, or the Mono-ha. Employing Japanese avant-garde concepts of encounter (*deai*), alongside Henri Lefebvre's notion of lived space as a theoretical foundation, I posit that Saihate's *Shi no kasoku* can be interpreted as a site of *deai*, presenting an encounter where the subject, object, and space intricately shape and are shaped by one another. Moreover, I contend that it can also be construed as a site of resistance by negotiating established spatial practices and by blurring dichotomies such as public and private, familiarity and unfamiliarity.

4.5.1. Encountering *Shi no kasoku* Unexpectedly

The idea of an unexpected encounter (不意な出会い, *fui na deai*) with poetry in an everyday urban space was the driving force behind Saihate's site-specific installation *Shi no kasoku*, as she revealed in a tweet:

> I think that when we suddenly see a poem in the city or in an everyday scene, the words we encounter unexpectedly flow more vividly into the reader's mind. We read words in books and magazines with the awareness that we are reading, but I believe that words that catch us off guard can transcend this awareness. This work was born from that thought. (Saihate 2020b, author's translation)

Encountering a work of art in a public space by chance – whether it is an installation, a performance, or a happening – comes with an element of unpredictability and surprise. It encapsulates a disruption from the everyday, challenging the overly familiar sights of the urban spaces people encounter in their daily routines. Avant-garde art collectives like Hi-Red Center sought to use this moment of surprise in their artistic practice during 1960s Japan. They orchestrated events like the *Yamanote-sen jiken* (山手線事件, Yamanote Line Incident), where members, faces painted in white, boarded a Yamanote line train, each holding portable egg-shaped objects crafted from everyday items like wristwatches, bottle tops, and human hair. This direct engagement with the public aimed to defamiliarise "the everyday, communal, enclosed spaces of train cars" and "awaken their consciousness" (Mitsuda 2023, 111).

Many of these practices revolve around the concept of encounter (*deai*), a key term for Japanese postwar artists that envisions the direct interaction between a subject and an object or another subject, such as between audience and performer, viewer and painting, or reader and poetry (Sas 2011, 97). One of the artists to draw on theories of encounter or *deai* is Lee Ufan, member of the artist group Mono-ha that was active from the late 1960s to early 70s. Critical of an artistic approach that relies on mimesis and the idea of representing the world, the Mono-ha's aim was to create an encounter between the viewer and the world "as it is" (*ari no mama*) or the object "left alone" (物を放って置く, *mono o hōtteoku*), rather than expressing their own subjectivity or intention through the object (105).[44] According to Lee, the Mono-ha regarded their artwork as a beginning or provocation, rather than a representation or completed work, which leads to an encounter that they themselves cannot foresee (108).

[44] *Ari no mama* ("as it is") refers to the attempt to depict or perceive things exactly as they are, without distortion. In modern Japanese literature, figures like Sōseki and Katai associated it with realism and naturalism, while its roots also connect to Buddhist practice, where cultivating self-detachment allows one to observe reality directly (Ama 2021, 76).

In writer and director Terayama Shūji's dramatic theories, *deai* is conceptualised as an artistic practice in which the stage and audience seats are eliminated to reject the hierarchical distinction between audience and actor, building a collaborative connection instead (109). At the same time, *deai* marks an interruption of the everyday and "the entrance into another world, another space" – a space which is always already there but concealed beneath social norms and conventional thinking (111). In other words, the notion of *deai* encompasses mediations on one side and interruptions and distortions on the other, representing an interaction between two or more unstable and unfixed terms, each ideally undergoing irreversible change through the encounter (126).

While the conceptualisation of *deai* as previously described is tied to the artistic practices of postwar Japanese artists, particularly the Mono-ha and Terayama Shūji, I argue that Saihate's *Shi no kasoku* employs similar mechanisms to evoke a response from its readers. As evident from Saihate's tweet, the unexpected encounter with poetry in an urban setting aims to "transcend the awareness that we are reading", echoing the avant-garde ideal of a direct encounter between the subject and the object that is unmediated by being aware of the author or artist behind that work.

One way of transcending this "awareness of reading" lies in the font design of *Shi no kasoku*, which strikingly resembles the typical *tomare* (止まれ, "stop") writing on streets throughout Japan (Figure 7), serving the same function as a stop sign. Like *Kimi wa POP*, where the text in the photographs is placed in spaces traditionally reserved for commercial messages, the installation also uses a common placement and design of text in Japanese urban space but alters it to a degree that renders the familiar as unfamiliar. This ambivalent realm between familiarity and unfamiliarity is the element that captures the reader's initial attention. By blending this well-known style and font with the unexpected presence of poetry, individuals encountering *Shi no kasoku* instinctively begin reading the words, if only

to discern what is written there instead of the usual *tomare* – and start to read poetry without even initially realising it.

The placement of the poem also echoes Terayama's idea of breaking down the distinction between stage and audience, or object and subject, as there is no barrier between the two in *Shi no kasoku*. The painted characters are neither behind glass nor placed within a setting where the spatial norm is to refrain from touching the artwork like a museum or gallery. Instead, readers have no choice but walk over it to read the poem. The consequences from this placement are evident in photographs captured by viewers at various points during the installation's runtime, revealing the visible impact of hundreds of footsteps on the paint.[45]

Another facet of *Shi no kasoku* that appears to resonate to some extent with the notion of *deai* is the uncertain authorship during the initial months when the installation appeared in Minami Ginza. As previously discussed, according to Lee, the optimal encounter between a subject and an object can only be realised when the art object exists in a state of "left alone" (*mono o hōtteoku*). In the context of Mono-ha, this entails unveiling the world as it is through using materials with "minimal artistic interference" in their works (Mitsuda 2023, 144). Saihate's approach does not centre around materiality in the same manner as the Mono-ha's work did. However, adopting a more expansive interpretation of an object in a "left alone" state to mean concentrating on the object itself and its perception rather than interpreting it solely as an expression representing the artist, it can also be applied to *Shi no kasoku*.

Saihate is very vocal about having no desire to be the authoritative voice when it comes to her own poetic work, as she has stated in an interview with *Asahi Shimbun*, calling her poems "*yomite no mono*" (読み手の物, "possessions of the reader") (Komine 2021). By withholding the contextual details of *Shi no kasoku* for the initial months, residents of Ōmiya

[45] The fading paint of the characters is visible, for example, in this Instagram post by user @*tomoemakino* dated 12 November 2020, available at https://www.instagram.com/p/CHfIc4tD1-N/ [last access: 1 October 2025].

experienced the poetic space Saihate had crafted in a literal "left alone" state, prompting speculation about the origin and purpose of the "mysterious back-alley poem."[46] This absence of context also enhanced the element of surprise during this unexpected encounter, transforming *Shi no kasoku* into a puzzle-like entity that motivated viewers to share photographs of their findings online and engage in discussions about their theories. This contextless publishing approach bears a striking resemblance to graffiti or what Marie Hologa defines as "contemporary practices of urban do-it-yourself inscription" (Hologa 2018, 200). Many street artists opt for anonymity and adopt pseudonyms due to the illicit nature of unauthorised street art. While applying terms like street art or graffiti to *Shi no kasoku* may seem a stretch, given its official authorisation by the local government and Saihate identifying herself as the author a few months later, its legal status remained somewhat ambiguous to outsiders.

However, conceptualising *Shi no kasoku* as a graffiti-like entity, an inscription in urban space, can prove productive in more than one way. The installation shares a characteristic with graffiti, that was pointed out by István Rácz: the creation of palimpsests in the form of "texts written on top of another text" (Rácz 2018, 214). Much like a graffito engages in a continual interaction with the surface it is written on, altering the meaning of the wall while simultaneously being influenced by the wall's impact on its interpretation, *Shi no kasoku* shapes its surrounding space – and in turn, the installation's surroundings exert their influence on the way we perceive and read *Shi no kasoku*. Returning to the concept of *deai*, Lee asserts that the encounter he envisions is not just between the subject and the object. It also extends to the world beyond it, establishing a "resonance space" that transcends the confines of the artwork (Sas 2011, 107–8). As Lee describes it, "what is painted may 'breathe

[46] See the discussion below Saihate Tahi's tweet, where she disclosed her authorship of the installation (Saihate 2020a).

life into' what is not painted, and what is not painted penetrates and reveals, and thus becomes part of, what is painted" (108).

The essence of *deai* lies in this interplay – an encounter not confined to the subject and object alone, but also extending to the space surrounding the other two terms. In *Shi no kasoku*, these three inherently unstable and non-fixed components (subject, object, and space) converge, mutually influencing and being influenced by one another, resulting in a transformative process that leaves none of the components in its pre-encounter state. This is the reason, in accordance with Terayama's perspective, why an encounter or *deai* in this sense is "full of mediations, reiterations, interruptions; it enacts various kinds of distortions, slippages, divergences (*zure*), and leaps" (124). These very elements also happen to be what qualifies *Shi no kasoku* not only as a site of encounter but also as a space of resistance – a concept that will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

4.5.2. *Shi no kasoku* as a Space of Resistance and New Emerging Urban Imaginaries

The notion of *deai* as conceptualised by Lee and Terayama, viewed as a transformative force capable of dissolving boundaries and binaries, has a similar potential as what Henri Lefebvre calls spaces as lived and Edward Soja "Thirdspace", which he describes, as mentioned in Chapter 2.3.2., as a transgressive concept, functioning as "a third term that disrupts, disorders, and begins to reconstitute" (Soja 1996, 31). And in its otherness and difference, it is also "the terrain for the generation of 'counterspaces,' spaces of resistance to the dominant order" (67). Both Lefebvre and Soja consider lived spaces or Thirdspace to function as a "strategic location" (68), from which alternative urban imaginaries can emerge. Influenced by his friend, Guy Debord, a prominent figure in the Situationist art movement in 1950s- and 1960s-Paris, Lefebvre specifically associates art with the concept of lived spaces. Within this framework, he considers art as a crucial instrument for negotiating normative spatial

practices while simultaneously generating and broadening the scope of possible urban imaginaries (Dünne 2006, 298–99; Olsen 2019, 986).

Influenced by the tumultuous events of the 1968 uprisings in Paris, the political dimension is crucial for Lefebvre's spatial imagination (Soja 1996, 68), mirroring the Situationists' belief in the inseparability of art and politics (Trier 2019, 227). During the May events of 1968 various graffiti, often attributed to either the Situationists or the surrealist movement, started to appear on walls in Paris, among them their most famous slogan "Sous les pavés, la plage" ("Under the paving stones, there is a beach") (Plant 1992, 104). This slogan (or short poem)[47] combined the revolutionaries' weapon of choice (cobblestones hurled at the police) with the Situationist concept of *détournement* ("diversion" or "subversion"), defined as "a gigantic turning around of the existing social world" (89). The graffiti evolved into a symbol representing the transformation or *détournement* of the city and encapsulating the avant-garde aspiration for art realised in the fabric of everyday life (104–5). The expression "Sous les pavés, la plage" established a reciprocal connection with the surrounding urban space and engaged with the passers-by of the Parisian metropolis who unexpectedly encountered the graffito. The poetic space that was created prompted them to re-read the streets of Paris by becoming aware of the city "under the cobblestones", a version of Paris that had been there all along but concealed.[48]

This era of political tumult forms the fertile ground for Lefebvre's Neo-Marxist-influenced spatial theory, emphasising the pivotal role of art in the political shaping of urban space, especially the avant-garde as illustrated by the examples cited here, as he views the

[47] In his article "Graffiti as a Site of Resistance in British Poetry", István Rácz suggests that graffiti resembles a form of poetry (Rácz 2018).

[48] The 1960s were also a time of "eruptions of protest and the subsequent repression of antigovernment movements" in Japan, as there were large-scale demonstrations against the Renewal of Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security between Japan and the United States, also known as *Anpo,* anti-Vietnam war rallies and student uprising (Chong 2012, 30). Especially the streets in Tokyo became a site for political protest for artists, as the *Yamanote-sen jiken* has shown (ibid.).

city as a realm of limitless possibilities, a "virtual object", where "the past, the present, the possible" are intricately intertwined (Lefebvre 1996, 148; 156).

Lefebvre's ideas continue to resonate in discussions surrounding contemporary art in urban spaces such as street art (Hologa 2018) or socially engaged art (Olsen 2019). However, as Hologa points out, while Lefebvre perceived the transformation of urban space from below within the context of class conflict, street art around the turn of the millennium tends to be viewed more as a conflict between generations or a cultural issue, originating from "urban, creative twenty-somethings: art students or designers, bloggers, skaters and photographers", who, through artistic expression, try to appropriate the city space and advocate for the right to visually shape their surroundings (Hologa 2018, 202). Furthermore, she asserts that street art has taken on a novel commercialist facet, as more and more successful street artists started selling their aesthetic style, engaging in collaborations with advertisers or fashion designers (203). However, even if an expression of street art may not inherently convey an explicit political message, the "performative act of creating a city within a city" itself can nevertheless be regarded as a political act, according to Hologa (202).

Based on the previous discussion, in what ways does *Shi no kasoku* create a poetic space within an urban environment that can be considered political to some extent, serving as a site of resistance? To further address this question, it is also essential to contemplate the connotations embedded within the term "resistance" and identify the specific elements against which *Shi no kasoku* offers resistance.

In the 1960s in Paris as well as Tokyo, the target or entity contested by avant-garde artworks such as the *Yamanote-sen jiken* appears to be easily identifiable, as they are intertwined with ideologies advocating for an uprising against a capitalist, exploitative system. In contrast, contemporary street art, also thriving as a vibrant scene in Japan, as evidenced by numerous publications on street art in Tokyo and other Japanese cities (Camerota 2011; Pan 2015; Sanada 2007), may exhibit less explicit political motivations or

association with a specific movement. Nevertheless, given the quasi-illegal nature of street art, it inherently embodies a political impetus which can be labelled as a "valid territorial claim", aiming to "transform urban space through acts of individual creativity in one way or the other" – and as a form of resistance against an "increasingly bland, commodified, and homogenized urban realm" (Hologa 2018, 201–2). However, simply using this framework to apply the label "resistance" to *Shi no kasoku* seems hardly justifiable, despite its almost guerrilla-style existence for outsiders, as, after all, it was still a commissioned piece for one of Japan's major art festivals.

This is why I believe it is helpful to reassess the implications associated with "resistance", using Doreen Massey's critique of a binary thinking of resistance versus power, where the central power is separated from the everyday, framing the streets as "the margins", "the interstitial space", and a "site of deviance" (Massey 2005, 103–5). This conceptualisation, which she calls a form of "spatial fetishism", rejects any acknowledgement of implication in power and any responsibility for it (215). Building on Massey's framework, Olsen points out a flaw in viewing art as originating from an outside that is inherently liberating or communal, as she emphasises the necessity of avoiding a simple binary between a homogenised and controlled urban space versus an open and liberatory urban space. Instead, she advocates for a closer examination of "the often-suppressed contradictions within artistic as well as urban processes" and proposes analysing artworks in urban space in a dialectic manner (Olsen 2019, 990–91). This contradiction appears to find a perfect embodiment in *Shi no kasoku*. It fluctuates between being contextless street art and a commissioned work for the Saitama Triennale. It takes the form of a dematerialised, site-specific installation, devoid of direct resale value, yet intricately woven into an institutional context which aims at the promotion of Saitama as a city of contemporary art. While it proves to be difficult to see *Shi no kasoku* through the same lens of resistance Lefebvre or Soja applied to the Situationists' work, the label "resistance" still applies in a more subtle form that, in

accordance with Massey and Olsen, also acknowledges the contradictions of artistic expression in a capitalist system.

Rather than conceiving art as resistance through a Marxist lens that accentuates the class character of artistic expression, philosopher and Frankfurt School member Herbert Marcuse suggests that art's political potential lies inherently within the art itself, embedded in its aesthetic form (Marcuse 1979). Furthermore, Marcuse argues that the autonomy derived from its aesthetic form enables art to challenge and transcend existing social relations, thereby "subvert[ing] the dominant consciousness, the ordinary experience" (ix). This perspective implies that art has the potential to distance individuals from their "functional existence and societal roles", while simultaneously emancipating "sensibility, imagination, and reason across all spheres of subjectivity and objectivity" (9).

Applied to *Shi no kasoku*, one way the installation challenges and transcends existing social relations and orderings is through its placement within a back alley or *roji* in a dense nightlife area combined with the act of reading poetry. When people stop to read the poem, moving slowly along its line of poetry or even moving backwards in order to read it from the beginning, this potentially creates a disturbance for other people within the narrow confines of a back alley, therefore estranging the people passing by or through the back alley from their ordinary experience within this urban space. In doing so, the poetry installation temporarily removes individuals from their daily routines and offers an aesthetic encounter, that prompts to stimulate their sensibility and imagination, perceiving the back alley in a new light. One of these new re-readings of the space emerges from the tension between the presumably female speaker of the poem juxtaposed with the bars that typically cater to male workers – making it a subtle territorial claim not unsimilar to that of graffiti, negotiating the nightlife back alley's taken-for-granted gendered dimension.

Another way *Shi no kasoku* negotiates established categorisations and orderings involves the deliberate blurring of the private and public spheres. Similar to the *roji*, which oscillates

between these realms, this blurring of lines is evident in the combination of an intimate poem delving into a personal monologue or conversation about love with the public street serving as its canvas, presenting a tension between content and form reminiscent of *Kimi wa POP*, but now in the real urban landscape. By transplanting the act of reading into the public sphere, the installation also prompts an awareness of the numerous texts and writings encountered in urban spaces – such as shop signs, billboards, and the like – which hold the potential to become integral components of the poetic space embodied by *Shi no kasoku*, alongside the poem itself.

Shi no kasoku's potential as a site of resistance does not hinge on delivering a clear-cut political message or statement against capitalism. Rather, its resistance manifests in the creation of an aesthetic experience woven into the fabric of daily life, yet subtly deviating from it, transforming the familiar into the ever-so-slightly unfamiliar. This aesthetic moment, or encounter, distances readers from their societal roles and functional existence, to echo Marcuse's words. It gives rise to a moment of disruption and playfulness, prompting individuals to adopt a more receptive stance towards alternative urban imaginaries and re-readings of their everyday surroundings.

4.6. Conclusion

This chapter began by asking in what ways encountering a poetic space in the landscape of a city can transform our ways of reading a poem and perceiving our surroundings. The ensuing discussion has unveiled the intricate layers comprising a poetry installation like *Shi no kasoku* within an urban environment, perceiving it not as self-contained art piece, but an open, multi-layered network of interactions, intertwining readers, poetry, and space, as well as movement, temporality, and embodiment. When comparing the experiences of reading *Kimi wa POP* and *Shi no kasoku*, both use the interplay between words and urban space (or representations of urban space in *Kimi wa POP*'s case) to open their texts up to new potential

interpretations. While reading *Kimi wa POP* still consists of the conventional experience of holding a book, the inclusion of photographs and the adjustment of the characters to let the text seamlessly integrate with the photographic landscape adds complexity to the act of reading. However, by integrating poetry into real, tangible urban spaces, *Shi no kasoku* not only enables unexpected encounters with its poem but also transforms reading into a cognitive *and* physical act involving movement and the senses, opening up the poem and its words to endless potential interpretations, as the imaginative walk through the installation has illustrated.

Furthermore, conceptualising *Shi no kasoku* as both a site of encounter and resistance helped to understand its socio-cultural potential within the dynamic cityscape, setting it even further apart from *Kimi wa POP*. As previously stated, the city is not a stable, neutral background to *Shi no kasoku*, it is a dynamic space that shapes its inhabitants while it is also shaped by them and their individual urban imaginaries – which means that the spatial practices and the boundaries of the givens within it are not fixed but negotiable. Although *Shi no kasoku* refrains from giving a clear political statement, by providing an aesthetic moment of disruption that detaches individuals from their usual routines and functional roles within society, it prompts a new awareness for this flexibility and room for negotiation within the city, challenging its seemingly stable ordering.

5. Between Isolation and Close Contact: Virtual Poetic Spaces during COVID-19

On 30 April 2020, media artist Fuse Rintarō (b. 1994) and poet Mizusawa Nao (b. 1995) launched their online exhibition *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu* (隔離式濃厚接触室, Isolated Intensive Contact Room), inviting viewers to "experience art that is only possible in a society where people are not free to leave their homes and rooms" (Fuse 2020a). The catch: it can only be visited by one person at a time. If the webpage is already in use, a pop-up window prompts visitors to try again later. This approach seemed rather counterintuitive in early 2020, a period that was heavily impacted by the first wave of measures against the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

In times when people were encouraged not to leave their homes and avoid unnecessary outings, the internet was perceived as the lifeline that could still connect people while maintaining physical distance. That is why many exhibitions, performances, panel discussions, and other cultural events were abruptly moved online, after cultural and entertainment activities were among the first to be designated as *fuyō fukyū* (不要不急, "nonessential and nonurgent"), leading to the widespread postponement and cancellation of events, as cultural institutions were advised to close their doors without compensation in February 2020 (Terui and Takahashi 2022, 33).

While Fuse and Mizusawa's project *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu* seemed to provide an even more isolating environment by limiting access, *Ōfukurōdoku* (往復朗読, A Circle of Reading, 2020–2021)[49], an online project by Aoyagi Natsumi (b. 1990) and Sato Tomoko (b. 1990), made exchange its primary motif. Conceived in April 2020, it was designed as a dialogue through literary texts, with the two artists taking turns reciting a piece each day

[49] "A Circle of Reading" is the project's official English title; a literal translation would be "round-trip recitation".

during the pandemic. They expanded this initial idea to a livestreaming format that could be followed by a wider audience and occasionally invited other collaborators to join in, responding with a reading of a poem, short story, or other literary text to the previous one.

When we talk about poetic spaces and the impact they can have on our perception of space as well as on the poems we are reading, it seems largely justified to dedicate a chapter to poetic spaces during the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic was, of course, mainly a health crisis, but, at the same time, it was also a crisis communicated through spatial terms, impacting our perception of the environment surrounding us as well as our spatial behaviours. As Manol Gueorguiev and Adrian Anagnost argue, "our lived experiences of the COVID-19 pandemic are hyperlocal" (Gueorguiev and Anagnost 2022, 19), in the sense that the pandemic was experienced primarily within one's local communities and cities. Local infection rates not only influenced our "sense of safety" in crowded, enclosed spaces but also prompted governments to shape our behaviour and movement in public spaces through recommendations and regulations. At the same time, virtual space was given even more significance than before, with use for videoconferencing software having increased exponentially in 2020. While there were only 10 million people using Zoom in December 2019, by April 2020 there were 300 million users (Wiederhold 2020, 437).

Considering these three components together (poetic spaces, virtuality, and COVID-19) this chapter uses the two examples previously mentioned, *Ōfukurōdoku* by Aoyagi and Sato as well as *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu* by Fuse and Mizusawa, to examine the use of virtual space for their projects, as in-person events were largely cancelled or postponed. The analysis focuses on their respective media and their relationship to spatiality – livestreaming from their own apartments in the case of Aoyagi and Sato, and a limited-access website in the case of Fuse and Mizusawa – examining how these formats have been employed to shape particular audience experiences, balancing between fostering connections and creating moments of solitude. For this purpose, I also include an analysis of audience responses,

evaluating the reception through various media such as articles, blog posts, and tweets. This analysis demonstrates that these virtual poetic spaces, created by two artist duos during the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic, are more than substitutes for events that were otherwise held in-person. They offer distinctly different aesthetic experiences, rooted in the shared reality of the pandemic and its impact on our perception of space.

To provide context for the following analysis, the first section of this chapter outlines Japan's initial response to the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on the cultural and arts sector, where organisations faced not only financial hardship but also a struggle for legitimacy. It also considers the role of spatiality in Japan's public health communication around COVID-19. The chapter then turns to an analysis of *Ōfukurōdoku* as a livestreaming event that conveyed intimacy through both the possibilities and limitations of the medium. This includes a close reading of one livestream video – Aoyagi's recitation of Miyazawa Kenji's *Annelida Tänzerin* (蠕虫舞手, literally "Worm Dancer" 1924) – examined in relation to its presentation style and the role of user interaction during the broadcast. I then discuss the transformation of these livestreams into an exhibition, arguing that this reframing shifted them from a temporary experiment during the pandemic into an archive of shared, lived COVID-19 experiences.

The latter part of the chapter focuses on Fuse and Mizusawa's *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu*, a website that combines a Google Street View panorama, generated from the user's IP address, with the display of a poem by Mizusawa. After outlining Fuse's concept for the online exhibition and his notion of "solitude" (*kodoku* 孤独), I discuss the project as a form of locative media that connects virtual and physical space through Google Street View, enabling users to reappropriate their own neighbourhoods during the pandemic through aimless strolling. At the same time, I highlight the ambivalent temporality of the medium, since Street View images always depict a past moment rather than real-time space. Building on this, I offer a close reading of Mizusawa's poem within the conditions created by the

online exhibition, before turning to responses from users who engaged with the work during its launch phase. I argue that, despite its intention to isolate viewers, the project simultaneously fostered community, as participants exchanged impressions, advice, and reflections online.

Finally, the chapter concludes by comparing the two projects. Despite their seemingly divergent aims – one foregrounding connection, the other prioritising separation – both *Ōfukurōdoku* and *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu* ultimately oscillate between distance and intimacy, isolation and connection, reflecting the ambivalent conditions readers and viewers found themselves navigating during the pandemic.

5.1. COVID-19's Effects on Japan's Cultural Sector

Just three days after the WHO confirmed the existence of a dangerous, fast-spreading new coronavirus, Japan reported its first case of COVID-19 on 15 January 2020. Eventually, on 26 February, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe made a televised announcement, asking the public to practice *jishuku* (自粛, "self-restraint") and avoid "leisure activities, fun family events, and vacations" in order to stop the spread of the virus (Wright 2021, 459–60). *Jishuku* is a compound word consisting of the kanji *ji* (自, "self") and *shuku* (粛, "doing something in moderation"), the latter often associated with quietness and respect.[50] Together, the two kanji are typically rendered in English as "self-restraint". The term *jishuku* was first employed by the Japanese government during the Second World War to demand "individual sacrifice in solidarity with others suffering for a national cause" (Abe 2016, 245). Since then, the term has frequently been invoked in the context of national crises to make similar appeals to the public – examples include the period following Emperor Hirohito's death in 1989 and the aftermath of the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami. Encompassing a range of

[50] A more detailed definition of *shuku* can be found in the online dictionary Weblio: https://www.weblio.jp/content/%E7%B2%9B [last access: 10 February 2025].

meanings depending on the specific context, *jishuku* often meant restraining from financial profit as well as from activities associated with entertainment or celebration, leading to sports and cultural events as well as wedding ceremonies getting postponed or cancelled to avoid being perceived as disrespectful (Wright 2021, 462–64). Therefore, by invoking *jishuku* in his speech, Prime Minister Abe tapped into an established cultural tradition in Japan that seeks to change individual behaviour through appeals to personal responsibility and national solidarity in times of crisis (465–66).

Unlike other industrialised nations during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Japanese government did not have the legal authority to impose a nationwide stay-at-home order or mask mandate, leaving the call for *jishuku* largely voluntary. Although the 2020 amendment to the Act on Special Measures against Novel Influenza technically granted local governments the power to order temporary closures of businesses and schools, the consequences for non-compliance remained minimal, as the only potential form of penalty was the public disclosure of the names of individuals and businesses that refused to cooperate (455). Despite the voluntary nature of the measures, mobile device data and surveys from the early phase of the pandemic indicate that most Japanese people adhered to Abe's call for self-restraint (456). However, while cultural and entertainment events came to a halt in Japan, commuting to work carried on as usual (as long as one's job was not in an industry affected by the *jishuku* request), as photos of crowded commuter trains in Japan's major newspapers illustrated, published just a few days after Prime Minister Abe declared a state of emergency in Tokyo and six other prefectures on 7 April 2020 (Borovoy 2022, 2).

While most companies refrained from offering remote work and continued to expect employees to commute on crowded trains, cultural institutions were advised to voluntarily close their physical venues and postpone or cancel all in-person events – without any initial offer of compensation. Although these public guidelines were once again framed as requests rather than legally enforced mandates, most institutions complied. Any efforts to resume

work or reopen venues were met with widespread criticism (Terui and Takahashi 2022, 33). As a result, this led to significant financial hardships for artists and everyone working in the cultural industry, with numerous people losing their jobs and income. To put this into numbers, revenue for museums and galleries plummeted by 54.1% in 2020, while theatres saw an even steeper decline of 71.2% (ibid.). Even when some aid for the cultural sector was provided by the Agency for Cultural Affairs (ACA) and local governments later that year, more than 80% of artists found it insufficient, according to an online survey, since these grants were typically restricted to funding new projects rather than covering fixed costs or living expenses. Moreover, the grant application involved extensive paperwork and often took several months to process (33–34).

The impact of COVID-19 on the cultural sector, however, extended beyond financial losses, as the very legitimacy of art and culture was called into question during the pandemic's initial phase, when cultural institutions were labelled *fuyō, fukyū* (Terui and Takahashi 2022, 33; Borovoy 2022, 2). At a press conference on 28 March 2020, when Prime Minister Abe was asked about compensating the culture and arts sector, he acknowledged the importance of culture, arts, and sports, emphasising that "once this light goes out, it will be very difficult to bring it back." However, he also stated that using taxpayers' money to cover their losses would be "difficult" (Prime Minister's Office of Japan 2020).

This statement sparked public debate about the role of culture and the arts during times of crisis, both in the media and online forums. Cultural organisations as well as individuals working in this sector pushed back against the widespread online sentiment that "there is no need to use taxpayers' money to support hobbies (道楽, *dōraku*)" (Hisashi 2020), highlighting the vital role art can play after experiencing a collective trauma. In the October

issue of *Shizuoka Event News*[51], a local newspaper distributed by the Shizuoka City Cultural Foundation, Michihiro Hoshino of the Shizuoka City Cultural Hall reflected on how "arts, culture, and sports were used to heal and uplift those worn down by prolonged evacuation life, achieving tremendous results across various regions" after the 2011 Tōhoku earthquake and tsunami. He concluded his column by calling for a similar re-evaluation of the importance of arts and culture in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic (Hoshino 2020, 3). In a similar vein, the *Nishinippon Shimbun* (West-Japan Daily) published a statement in response to Prime Minister Abe's press conference on 16 June 2020 by Fujii Shintarō, a professor at Waseda University's Faculty of Letters, Arts, and Sciences. In his statement, Fujii noted that "many have discovered during this time of self-isolation that literature, music, and film bring colour, joy, and healing to life. […] This period should also prompt us to re-evaluate the importance of culture and the arts and consider how public support can be improved" (Hisashi 2020).

This public debate highlights the defensive position the Japanese cultural sector found itself in during 2020, as it struggled to justify its legitimacy and importance while facing a wave of closures, financial challenges, and job losses due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The crisis exposed the divergent views on the function of art and culture in Japanese society, the precarious positions many cultural actors and creatives face, and the unstable funding structures for the cultural sector. At the same time, cultural organisations were compelled to seek alternative methods for securing funds and income, turning for example to crowdfunding (cf. Terui and Takahashi 2022) and hosting online events after the government's request to close their physical venues.

[51] The local newspaper is titled しずおかイベントニュース in Japanese, using hiragana for "Shizuoka" and katakana for the English words "Event" and "News", although the latter appears in romaji on the paper's covers. An archive of all published issues is available on the Shizuoka City website: https://www.scpf.shizuoka-city.or.jp/event/ [15 January 2026].

5.2. COVID-19's Effects on the Perception of Space

In addition to the call for *jishuku* or voluntary self-restraint, another communication strategy introduced by the Ministry of Health, Labour, and Welfare (MHLW) and the Japanese Prime Minister centred around the idea of avoiding three types of "density": 1) closed spaces, 2) crowded places, and 3) close-contact settings, using the slogan *mittsu no mitsu* (cf. Chapter 3.4.1.). Once again, the responsibility fell on individuals and institutions to take all necessary measures to make avoiding the 3Cs possible. This included actions like moving meetings and social gatherings online, commuting during off-peak hours, seating arrangements in a zigzag pattern during lunch breaks, and ensuring physical separation in crowded spaces, like restaurants, by using transparent acrylic sheets (Borovoy 2022, 6–10).

According to Borovoy, the message *mittsu no mitsu* was "ubiquitous" in Japan and "raised public awareness about 'closeness' and 'density,'" emphasising the connection between physical proximity, enclosed spaces, and the increased risk of COVID-19 infection (6–7). In other words, public spaces, particularly those falling under the 3Cs category, were perceived as high-risk areas, whereas the home was seen as a safe space providing protection from the virus. This dichotomy between an unsafe outside and the secure home was reflected in the hashtags trending on Twitter and Instagram in Japan between March and May 2020, such as "*ouchijikan"* and "*ouchide*" ("home time" and "at home"), along with the English phrase "stayhome" (Satō 2020; also cf. Borovoy 2022, 2). These hashtags were often used in combination with photos or videos of various activities done at home, encouraging others to do the same. The perceived threat of "density" was particularly pronounced in Japan's urban areas, where 91 percent of the population lives, "characterized by high levels of population density and crowded transit stations, streets, and schools" (Borovoy 2022, 10).

As Setha Low and Alan Smart wrote in their short essay titled "Thoughts abouts Public Space During Covid-19 Pandemic", written in 2020, "We are experiencing a shrinking sense of the world", when public spaces are "deemed dangerous because of the possibility of

coming into contact with those who might be infected" (Low and Smart 2020, 2). As previously stated, some so-called "third spaces" – spaces where people gather and feel a sense of belonging to a social world (1–2) – remained open in Japan during the early stages of the pandemic, unlike in the other G7 nations.[52] However, the heightened risk of infection from leaving the house, along with social pressure to follow Abe's call for *jishuku* and avoid unnecessary outings, led to a greater reliance on the internet to stay connected and new ways of utilising technology for social gatherings and public events emerged.

This trend is reflected in data collected from mid-February to mid-May 2020 in a study conducted by the Department of Geography at Tokyo Metropolitan University and the Graduate School of Environmental Studies at Tohoku University (Yabe et al. 2021). The study found that internet use for socialising, such as online drinking events and online games, replaced 10% of the usual time spent outside (6). Internet use for leisure and entertainment purposes saw the greatest increase, with over 70% of respondents refraining from visiting physical locations for these activities (4), resulting in a 7% substitution for the time typically spent outside (5). The findings illustrate a clear spatial shift from engaging in social activities in physical third spaces like restaurants, coffee shops, or shopping malls, to connecting with others online, highlighting the substitution relationship between internet use and out-of-home activities.

The heightened awareness of "density" (*mitsudo*) as a measure of potential infection risk, along with the distinction between the home as a safe space and the outside world as potentially dangerous – particularly in densely populated urban areas – led to the perception of the internet and virtual platforms like Zoom as safer alternative spaces for maintaining connection despite physical distance. They enabled social interaction without the need for

[52] The term "third space" here draws on Ray Oldenburg's notion of place and differs from Edward Soja's "Thirdspace" (see Chapter 2.3.2). Oldenburg categorises places into three types: the first place is the home, the second place the workplace, and the third place a communal setting where people casually gather (cafés, bars, parks) (Maran and Raj J 2023, 3).

constant vigilance over the crowdedness of a space, proximity to others, or poor ventilation in enclosed areas. Consequently, virtual spaces were widely regarded as substitutes for physical spaces during the first months of the pandemic, not only for socialising but also for leisure, entertainment, and cultural activities that would typically require being in a shared physical space with others.

5.3. Connecting through Reading: *Ōfukurōdoku*

On 20 April 2020, Japanese poet Aoyagi Natsumi live-streamed herself reading Yamashita Sumito's (b. 1966) novel *Hoshi no ko* (ほしのこ, Star Child, 2017) on the Periscope app.[53] The following day, fellow poet Sato Tomoko responded by live-streaming her recitation of selected poems by Takami Jun (1907–1965). This exchange marked the beginning of their collaborative art project, *Ōfukurōdoku*, which began two weeks after Japan's first state of emergency was declared. In the project, the two poets take turns reading poems or fragments of stories to each other as one-off, daily live-streamed events, with each reading serving as a response to the previous one and the selections being made on the same day as the livestream. Occasionally, they would also invite other writers, poets, and film makers to contribute, such as Yamashita Sumito himself (reading one of his own works), media artists Komiya Marina (b. 1992) and director and photographer Iioka Yukiko (b. 1976), among others.[54]

While the livestreams initially took place daily, they gradually became less frequent over time. By early 2021, fewer than ten were held each month from January to April, and after that, only one or two per month. Following the end of Japan's last state of emergency on 30 September 2021, only three more livestreams were broadcast, with the final one airing on

[53] Periscope was a live video streaming app launched in 2015 by Twitter. It was discontinued on 31 March 2021 due to declining use. However, archived videos are still available on Twitter (now X).

[54] The act of offering a poem or reading and then responding to it recalls classical Japanese poetic practices such as *kusari renga* ("chain *renga*"), a form of linked verse composed collaboratively in turn-taking sequences of three or more stanzas, which rose to popularity in the mid-twelfth century (Konishi 1991, 88).

28 November 2021. In this last session, composer and artist Komiya Chiku (b. 1993) recited *Piriado*, a modernist poem by the relatively unknown poet Marui Hideo.

There was no official statement explaining why the livestreams ended – one explanation could be that life simply returned to a more normal rhythm as vaccines gradually rolled out in Japan from March 2021, making everyone's schedules busier once again. However, while the livestreams have concluded, the project itself continues. All recordings remain available on a dedicated website called *Two Private Rooms* (title in English, Figure 8), where they are presented in a timeline format with rectangular thumbnail images from each session, documenting the period between April 2020 and November 2021. The project also extended into the physical world through a multimedia installation titled *TWO PRIVATE ROOMS – A Circle of Reading*, showcased at the NTT Intercommunication Center (ICC) in Tokyo as part of the *Tasōsekai no arukikata* (多層世界の歩き方, Random Walk in the Multi-Layered World) exhibition from 15 January to 27 February 2022, among other venues.

5.3.1. Live from "Two Private Rooms": The Aesthetics of Livestreaming

In its original announcement on Twitter, *Ōfukurōdoku* was described as being "like exchanging diary entries or waiting for your turn at karaoke" (honkbooks 2020a). Indeed, there are aspects reminiscent of writing a diary, as each livestream captures a fragment of the sender's daily life, as the text that is chosen not only serves as a response to the previous text, but also as a reflection of the sender's emotional state of that day, always adding another layer to the ongoing correspondence. However, there are other elements to it, more in accordance with sending letters than writing a diary entry. One is the anticipation while waiting for the response to one's own "letter", to keep it within the analogy, as there is always at least a day between two livestreams, making it an asynchronic form of communication. The other is the idea of letters being sent to enable communication between two distant locations. A key theme emphasised in the project's description on its website is

the idea of connection despite distance, as the livestreams are described as "a practice to reconsider the meaning of 'interchange' (as intersection, interrelation, interaction, interplay, etc.) across separate locations" (Aoyagi and Sato 2020).

However, there are two key differences between the analogy of sending a letter and the actual form of communication used. First, unlike the typically private nature of letter exchanges, a livestream is usually intended for a broader audience, sometimes even an entirely open one, which was also the case with *Ōfukurōdoku*. The links to the livestreams were posted on Twitter and openly communicated for anyone to join. Second, livestreams occur in real time and are audio-visual in nature – we witness the response to the previous livestream as it is being created.

During the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic, when live performances of all genres were cancelled or postponed, livestream performances became increasingly popular, with the organisers behind them usually trying to emulate the live, in-person experience as closely as possible (Kanga 2022, 359). The production quality of livestreamed cultural events during the pandemic varied greatly. Some were professionally filmed and edited, sometimes incorporating pre-recorded elements – especially those organised by major theatres, music labels, or museums. Others, typically when run by the artists themselves, had a more homemade, spontaneous, and unpolished feel.[55] After all, the only essential tools for a livestream are a modern smartphone, live video streaming apps such as Periscope, YouTube or Twitch, and a stable internet connection. However, while livestreams may attempt to emulate the experience of a live, in-person event, they are inherently distinct in the ways they shape their audience's experience.

[55] For a comprehensive overview of the various livestreaming formats used for musical performances, see Zubin Kanga's article "All My Time: Experimental Subversions of Livestreamed Performance During the Covid-19 Pandemic" (Kanga 2022).

The most obvious difference is that, rather than experiencing the full sensory immersion of a physical space, the virtual space of a livestream is a compressed one. We typically view a livestream on our smartphone or laptop screens, seeing only a fragment of the broadcaster's physical environment and a miniature version of themselves. In an online essay on the aesthetics of livestreamed musical performances called "The Great Compression", UK-based musician Neil Luck uses the following words to describe this experience:

> The compressed proscenium of the screen, presenting the vista of an app's window, offering a glimpse into the miniature stage of the living room, further compressed through optimised video codecs, tiny bitrates, and pithy character limits squashes us in a *mise en abyme* of increasingly chambered spaces. (Luck 2020)

Luck's quote also highlights two other key aspects of livestreaming during the pandemic. With stay-at-home orders in place worldwide – and the call for *jishuku* in Japan – livestreams in spring 2020 were typically broadcast from people's homes. Depending on the budget and preparation involved, audiences often caught glimpses of broadcasters' private spaces, untidy bookshelves or piles of laundry in the background included. It is no surprise that videos quickly went viral of newscasters reporting live on serious topics – only to be momentarily interrupted by pets or children playfully wandering into the frame. The other aspect is the frequent technical mishaps that occur during livestreamed events: occasional drops in bitrate, sudden Wi-Fi disconnections, unidentifiable background noises, shaky camera angles, or forgetting to mute or unmute oneself, to mention only a few. These glimpses into private spaces and technical hiccups bring a sense of relatability and intimacy with people who are strangers to us. As the surge in Zoom users has shown, audio-visual online communication became the norm during the pandemic – an experience nearly everyone shared, along with an awareness for the many "traps" to avoid when being on a call.

The same atmosphere of relatability can be felt in *Ōfukurōdoku*. Aoyagi and Sato broadcast not in front of a studio or some form of screen, but from changing different private corners of their homes, while later also taking it outside to read by a local river or train

station, showing also glimpses into their neighbourhood. There are also these small mishaps that occur during the livestreams too, when, for example, in their first livestream, Aoyagi takes a few moments at the beginning to adjust her setup, looking for the best camera angle while the stream is already running. As she reads, a loud vibration sound can be heard each time someone joins the stream.

However, there is also a noticeable learning curve that the audience can observe throughout the livestreams. In subsequent streams, vibration sounds are muted, and livestreams begin more quickly with less preparation time. The broadcasts also become more experimental, as if to test the possibilities of the medium. Reflecting the sudden surge in interest in baking and making sourdough bread during the pandemic, Sato livestreams herself kneading dough while reciting texts by Ishii Baku, a pioneer of modern dance in Japan. Meanwhile, Aoyagi reads fragments of Stanisław Lem's *Solaris* (1961) into a microphone at a karaoke booth, distorting her voice to make it sound more alien. This atmosphere of trial and error significantly enhances this sense of authenticity, but also conveys a playful randomness made possible by the particular possibilities and limitations of livestreaming.

This is also why it is easy to feel a sense of community through these livestreams, which gets enhanced through interactive features streaming apps like Periscope offer during a livestream. For example, viewers can see a counter showing how many others are watching, send hearts anonymously for everyone to see as a form of appreciation, and post live comments that are visible to all. These features remind them that they are not alone in watching this particular livestream at this particular time and provide a sense of connection with others beyond the person broadcasting the stream.

From this perspective, *Ōfukurōdoku* not only connects the two poets, Aoyagi and Sato, from separate locations through reciting poetry and literature, it also draws the viewers into its web of textual connections, as the hearts and comments become part of the performance.

Although Aoyagi and Sato typically focus on the text they are reciting and refrain from immediately engaging with the comments during the livestream, they remain visible to others. The comments have also been preserved in the video-on-demand versions available in the web archive and became an essential part of the multimedia installation *TWO PRIVATE ROOMS – A Circle of Reading*, transforming the audience from merely viewers to a form of contributors.

5.3.2. Reading *Annelida Tänzerin* from Floating Post-it Notes

As previously mentioned, the livestreams became increasingly experimental over time. While the first ones generally followed the same pattern – either Aoyagi or Sato positioning themselves in front of the smartphone camera, picking up a book, and reciting from different locations within their homes – a significant shift in their approach occurred on 30 April 2020. On the day of their eleventh livestream, Aoyagi broadcast herself reading Miyazawa Kenji's (1896–1933) poem *Annelida Tänzerin* in response to Sato's recitation of Akutagawa Ryūnosuke's (1892–1927) novella *Kappa* the previous day (Aoyagi 2020).

Miyazawa Kenji's *Annelida Tänzerin*, from his only poetry collection published during his lifetime, *Haru to Shura* (春と修羅, Spring and the Demon, 1924), is a modernist and experimental work that depicts the metamorphosis of a worm in water into a princess. The title is written with the kanji for "worm" (*zenchū* 蠕虫) and "dancer" (*maite* 舞手), however, the katakana that usually accompanies it indicates the reading *Annelida Tänzerin*, a hybrid of the Latin term for "worm" and the German word for a female dancer. As "Annelida" closely resembles feminine names such as "Annalinda" or "Annelina", the title itself already implies the transformation taking place in the poem.

For the recitation of *Annelida Tänzerin*, Aoyagi directs the camera toward yellow Post-it notes, each bearing a handwritten excerpt of the poem (Figure 9). Holding her smartphone, she placed a note in a small puddle on her balcony and read the words written on it aloud,

repeating the process for each Post-it note. This marked the beginning of Aoyagi and Sato taking a more experimental approach to their exchange, exploring new video formats by choosing different angles, focusing on specific objects, or making the presentation of the written text itself a central element of the livestream. In the following, I will analyse the eleventh livestream of *Ōfukurōdoku* in more detail, considering selected passages of the poem, the performance within the video, and its aesthetics as a livestream, while situating it within the spatial realities of the COVID-19 pandemic. This analysis is based on the video-on-demand recording of the livestream, available on the project's web archive. It was captured from the Periscope app ten months after the original broadcast (cf. Aoyagi 2020).

The video opens with a close-up of the surface of a puddle, where the water shimmers with a faint green hue. Reflected in the water are what appear to be the bars of a balcony and the smartphone being used to record the video. We can hear indistinct noise, possibly the sound of a finger brushing against the microphone and see the video frame shifting between vertical and horizontal, before settling on a vertical view. The first yellow Post-it enters the video at 00:00:23 and Aoyagi's hand carefully lets go of it a second later, so it gently lands on the water surface. While it slowly drifts upward and gets slightly translucent because of the moisture, we can hear Aoyagi's voice reading out loud the title of the poem written on the note in Katakana and Kanji: *Annelida Tänzerin* (00:00:30). At 00:00:35, a green box appears at the bottom of the screen, indicating that a user named *gima0721z* has joined the livestream.[56] The poem continues as Aoyagi's hand places the next Post-it note on the puddle, while the first one has already drifted slightly upwards. She recites the words she has written by hand on it:

（え〵　水ゾルですよ
　　おぼろな寒天(アガア)の液ですよ）
日は黄金(きん)の薔薇
赤いちひさな蠕虫が
(Miyazawa 2000)

[56] The video analysed here is the one that can be found on the project's web archive, which seems to be a recording presumably Aoyagi Natsumi herself made of the livestream.

(Ee, mizu zoru desu yo
Oborona agaa no eki desu yo)
Hi wa kin no bara
Akai chiisana zenchū ga

(Well this is water sol
Hazy agar liquid)
The sunlight golden roses
A small, red wriggling worm
(Miyazawa 2009, 69)

The first sentence in parentheses sets the scene – a watery sol with hazy agar liquid. As viewers hear Aoyagi speak the words and read them on the note, they also see the similarly murky water of the puddle in the background in which the paper floats, visually mirroring the imagery of the poem. The close-up view of the camera reinforces this connection between the video's setting and the words, suggesting the perspective of someone who crouches down to get closer to the ground and observes a tiny worm in a puddle, when Aoyagi recites the line "a small, red, wriggling worm".

She continues with reciting the poem, placing the next Post-it note on top of the previous one at 00:00:51:

水とひかりをからだにまとひ
ひとりでをどりをやつてゐる
(Miyazawa 2000)

Mizu to hikari o karada ni matoi
Hitori de odori o yatte iru

Wearing water and light around its body
Is alone doing a dance
(Miyazawa 2009, 69)

As she reads these words, the wind seems to pick up, slowly spinning the two Post-it notes, mirroring the dance of the worm in the poem. At 00:01:00, the familiar sounds of adjusting the grip of a phone can be heard, before Aoyagi moves the camera slightly to the left to place another note on the surface of the water, this time reading:

（え ゝ、８ γ e ６ α
ことにもアラベスクの飾り文字）
羽むしの死骸
いちゐのかれ葉
真珠の泡に
ちぎれたこけの花軸など
(Miyazawa 2000)

(Ee, 8 γ e 6 α
Koto ni mo arabesuku no kazari moji)
Hane mushi no shigai
Ichii no kareha
Shinju no awa ni
Chigireta koke no kajiku nado

(Eh, 8 γ e 6 α
Truly arabesque letters decorate)
Fly corpses
Dead yew leaves
Pearl bubbles
Moss stems ripped up and so
(Miyazawa 2009, 69)

The sequence “8 γ e 6 α”, made up of letters and numbers from the Arabic, Roman and Greek alphabets, appears five times in Miyazawa’s poem, acting as a chorus and suggesting a musical rhythm. At the same time, the spell-like sequence with its round letters can be seen as a visual representation of the worm’s movements, resembling changing shapes the worm takes on as it moves (cf. Kuroda 2024, 13). As the notes themselves begin to “dance” in the wind, slowly spinning, the worm’s movements are also reflected in the balcony bars. Their reflections distort with the motion, appearing like wriggling lines. Recalling Neil Luck’s description of livestreams as a “*mise en abyme* of increasingly chambered spaces” (Luck 2020), the scene at 00:01:00 – along with the other times “8 γ e 6 α” is recited – seems to embody this sensation particularly well. Viewers experience the scene through their smartphone or laptop screens, where this “miniature stage” is fragmented into bright yellow Post-it notes, the water’s surface in the background, and the reflections of the balcony bars, each element in motion. Meanwhile, Aoyagi’s recitation, with its musical tone, along with the visual appearance of the letters and symbols written on the note, also evokes the worm’s described movements. The entire scene unfolds like a frame within a frame within a frame.

When Aoyagi places the next Post-it note onto the puddle at 00:01:29, another user joins the livestream that gets highlighted: *tmkstooo*, Sato's username, as people, who have followed their exchange up to this point know. Aoyagi recites the next part of the poem:

（ナチラナトラのひいさまは
いまみづ底のみかげのうへに
黄いろなかげとおふたりで
せつかくおどつてゐられます
いゝえ、けれども、すぐでせう
まもなく浮いておいでせう）
(Miyazawa 2000)

(Nachiranatora no hī-sama wa
Ima midzuzoko no mikage no ue ni
Kiiro na kage to ofutari de
Sekkaku odotte iraremasu
Īe, keredomo, sugu deshō
Mamonaku uite oide deshō)

(Princess Nachiranatora
Now at the bottom of the water on a granite stone
Together with Mister Yellow Shadow
Deigns to dance for pleasure
Oh but, no, before long
Her Highness will float up, soon)
(Miyazawa 2009, 69)

When Aoyagi recites the line "Now at the bottom of the water on a granite stone" at 00:01:40, a pink heart symbol appears in the bottom right corner, slowly drifting upwards before fading away, sent by an audience member. Ten seconds later, a green heart follows, almost as if in response to the first, signalling that another viewer is present and watching the livestream. In these lines Aoyagi recited, the worm – already personified as female in the poem's title – seems to transform into a princess with the enigmatic name "Nachiranatora", dancing with her partner, a yellow shadow. The dance seems short, however, as it is suggested that the princess will soon float upwards to the surface and to an uncertain fate.

Continuing with the poem, the "red Annelida Tänzerin" continues to turn and twirl around in the "8 γ e 6 α"-sequence. Yet the pearl buttons she wears are revealed to be "in truth false ones / Not even of glass but of air" (Miyazawa 2009, 70), suggesting the image of the

princess to be a mere illusion. As Aoyagi recites a later passage at 00:03:34, the mood gradually shifts, becoming more agitated:

> それに日が雲に入つたし
> わたしは石に座つてしびれが切れたし
> 水底の黒い木片は毛虫か海鼠のやうだしさ
> それに第一おまへのかたちは見えないし
> ほんとに溶けてしまつたのやら
> (Miyazawa 2000)
>
> *Sore ni hi ga kumo ni haitta shi*
> *Watashi wa ishi ni suwatte shibire ga kireta shi*
> *Mizuzoko no kuroi mokuhen wa kemushi ka namako no yō da shi sa*
> *Sore ni daiichi omae no katachi wa mienai shi*
> *Honto ni tokete shimatta no yara*
>
> And the sun is now hidden by a cloud
> And my feet have gotten numb sitting on the stone too long
> And the wood chip at the bottom looks like a worm or a sea slug
> And most importantly your form can't be seen now
> So, have you really melted away?
> (Miyazawa 2009, 69)

At 00:03:36, user *gima0721z* posts the first comment during the livestream, writing "*Kirei na rizumu no buntai*" ("A writing style with a beautiful rhythm"), adding another layer to the scene, overlaying the yellow Post-it notes, and signalling the presence of another person at that particular moment, beyond Aoyagi herself. However, as the comment fades out again, roughly ten second later, the tone of the poem also has shifted.

As soon as the sun disappears in the poem and the reflected light on the water surface fades, the illusion of the princess vanishes as well. The speaker in the poem abruptly reconnects with the "real" world, noticing the numbness of their feet. The wood chip at the bottom once again resembles a worm, and the speaker asks the princess if she has "really melted away." Even in the final lines, as the narrating voice attempts to reassure themselves – "No, Her Highness is there, surely there / The Princess is there" – it feels more like a desperate delusion. With the sunlight gone, so too is the dancing Annelida Tänzerin.

The theme of transience and impermanence is not only embedded in the poem's words but also reflected in the livestream's visuals. As Aoyagi zooms out at the end of the livestream (00:05:00) – following a brief drop in framerate – the viewers are left with a

striking final image: a landscape of yellow notes, half-submerged in the puddle. Unlike reading from a book with a sturdy cover as Aoyagi and Sato had done in the livestreams before, the slowly dissolving Post-it notes in the water seem to serve as a reminder that all is transient.

Furthermore, this sense of ephemerality is also mirrored in the very format of the livestream versus its recording. A livestream captures a fleeting moment in time, one that, once gone, is gone for good. While we can revisit its recording in a web archive, such as *Two Private Rooms*, the original experience – marked by the awareness of synchronicity, proven by real-time reactions of other viewers – can never be truly recreated. Yet there is a quiet comfort in this impermanence, one that I imagine resonated with viewers still living through the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Just as this moment fades, so too will the crisis we are living through.

As this reading of Aoyagi's eleventh livestream has demonstrated, time and space are strongly intertwined when experiencing *Ōfukurōdoku*. The livestreams broadcast by Aoyagi and Sato create an atmosphere of authenticity and privacy, while also allowing viewers to feel a sense of community and the presence of others through different possibilities of interaction – that eventually become part of the poetic space itself, as it results into visual feedback integrated into the livestream. However, like *Annelida Tänzerin* creates the feeling of a momentary vision – a worm transforming into a princess – that as quickly as it came already fades away, this ephemeral feeling is transported into its presentation style, with Post-it notes slowly drowning in the puddle as well as the nature of a livestream that depicts a moment only available while it is happening. However, as already hinted at, while the livestreams themselves stopped, they were archived and are still available online to watch retrospectively as well as archived in the form of a multimedia installation that transposes the experience of the livestreams from a space online to the physical space of a gallery – a transformation that will be examined in more detail in the following section.

5.3.3. The Afterlife of *Ōfukurōdoku*: Bringing the Livestreams into a Gallery Space

After the livestreams have stopped, *Ōfukurōdoku* took on a new form as a multimedia installation titled *TWO PRIVATE ROOMS - A Circle of Reading*. It was first exhibited at honkbooks – an independent bookshop and artist collective that counts Aoyagi among its members – from 17 November to 6 December 2020, while the livestreams were still taking place regularly (honkbooks 2020b). The exhibition showed recordings of the livestreams, with each weekday dedicated to one or two months of readings, culminating in a special edition of the online reading on the last day that was broadcast live. Given the small size and independent character of the venue, the exhibition retained the intimate, private character of the original broadcasts. Visitors, some of whom had likely participated in the livestreams as viewers or even collaborators, were also able to browse the books featured in the readings at the bookshop. While the livestreams had fostered a sense of community despite physical separation, this new format brought people physically together to experience (or revisit) the readings collectively.

When the installation was featured in the *Tasōsekai no arukikata* exhibition at the NTT ICC in early 2022, it expanded in both scale and format, departing from the intimate setting of the honkbooks exhibition (NTT ICC 2022). With two years' worth of livestream recordings from the pandemic, the volume of material had naturally increased. However, the presentation had also evolved: videos were projected onto large screens in darkened exhibition spaces, while other recordings were displayed alongside tweets commenting on the readings, capturing the conversations and moments of connection that had emerged around the project.

As this exhibition took place after the final livestream had been broadcast and after the Japanese government had lifted the last state of emergency, the spatial dynamic had also shifted. Going outside for leisure and entertainment was no longer avoided (although masks were still recommended in 2022), and many cultural events had returned to face-to-face

formats or adopted hybrid models. However, in its new form as a multimedia installation, *TWO PRIVATE ROOMS - A Circle of Reading* stands as a testament to a brief but intense period when physical gatherings and in-person events were replaced by video calls and livestreams, reflecting the realities of communication during the first year of the pandemic. It serves both as an archive of the cultural sector's efforts to collaborate and forge bonds across physical distance through virtual platforms, and as a work of art that elevates a need for human connection and exchange – deemed worthy not only of preservation online in the form of a web archive, but also of presentation in a physical gallery space.

5.4. *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu* by Fuse Rintarō and Mizusawa Nao

On 30 April 2020, in the same month that Aoyagi and Sato broadcast their first livestreams, media artist Fuse and poet Mizusawa launched their online exhibition *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu* (Figure 10), with Fuse serving as the main organiser. To enter the virtual room, visitors must access a designated webpage and click on a bright red link inviting them to "enter your exhibition" (Fuse 2020a). The content of the window that opens next, however, remained somewhat of a mystery for several weeks, as those who had seen the online exhibition deliberately withheld details – that is, until the first in-depth reviews were published and revealed its nature to a wider public.[57] The secrecy surrounding the project stemmed from the fact that accessing it is an experience in itself. A key conceptual feature of *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu* is its exclusivity – only one visitor can enter at a time. If someone is already exploring the exhibition, a window titled "Waiting Room" will pop up with a message asking to try again later.

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[57] Purposely blurred screenshots of *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu* can be found by searching for "隔離式濃厚接触室" on X (formerly Twitter) under the following links:
https://x.com/mujina1985/status/1257451338864132098 [last access: 3 October 2025];
https://x.com/mioko_dayo/status/1258461993133981696 [last access: 3 October 2025]. An account on X is required to view the links.

When a visitor finally gains access to the "Isolated Intensive Contact Room", they are presented with a split-screen layout – divided horizontally on a laptop or vertically on a handheld device. One half shows Mizusawa's poem *Shī* from her poetry collection of the same name, displayed in black text on a white background, positioned either at the top or on the right-hand side, depending on the viewer's device.[58] The other half features a Google Street View panorama, overlayed by a blue-violet filter and a soft blur that lends a dreamlike quality to the urban landscape. The view moves forward automatically, with the camera angle slowly shifting in random directions. What sets this online exhibition further apart, however, is its dynamic, site-specific nature: using the viewer's IP address, the exhibition generates a personalised Street View of their local neighbourhood. This use of real-time location data would technically mean that no two experiences of the exhibition are identical – however, if access to the IP address is restricted, the exhibition defaults to displaying the same neighbourhood in Tokyo.

Above the access link to the online exhibition, viewers can find a description, stating that the project was developed by Fuse as a form of "quiet resistance" (*shizukanaru teikō* 静かなる抵抗) to the spread of the COVID-19 infection and the resulting "restriction of the art of exhibition."[59] Fuse added another text underneath the access link called "Notes for Art in the Age of Infection Isolation" (*Kansen kakuri no jidai no geijutsu no tame no nōto* 感染隔離の時代の芸術のためのノート), further explaining the concept behind *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu*. It reads as a critique of the conditions under which art is produced within a capitalist system, with the pandemic exposing its limitations. Fuse argues that the

[58] The title of both the poem and the collection is written in katakana and can be read either as the English word "sea" or "see." The collection was published in November 2022 by the Tokyo-based publisher Shichōsha, two and a half years after the launch of *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu*.

[59] The original Japanese sentence states: COVID-19 の感染拡大と、それに伴う展示芸術の不自由に対する抵抗として、布施琳太郎の企画による『隔離式濃厚接触室』を開催いたします。
The kanji compound 不自由 (*fujiyū*), which I have translated as "restriction", literally means "unfreedom." However, this term is more commonly associated with physical or cognitive impairments and is often used in the context of disabilities.

economic sanctions imposed on artists and curators through the call for *jishuku* have the capacity to suppress artistic expression. *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu* is thus framed as an attempt to position an artwork at the margins of such a system: to detach it from the cycle of "production–reproduction", to resist conceiving it as a vehicle for financial profit, and instead to create something through which viewers may experience art as art. (Fuse 2020a).[60]

For Fuse, an exhibition is a space apart from the everyday, a site of solitude within the city where we may experience the individuality of our bodies before re-entering the city's social network awaiting outside. By limiting access to the online exhibition, he sought to recreate this sense of solitude. Importantly, the text also stresses that the aim was not to produce a virtual tour of an exhibition that might otherwise have taken place in a physical venue, but rather to develop something new: "an experience of art that is only possible in a society where you are not able to freely leave your house or room" (Fuse 2020a).

While the concept of *Ōfukurōdoku* revolved around the key word *majieru* (交える, "exchange"), and the connections made through the "Circle of Reading", Fuse emphasises the significance of *kodoku* (孤独, "solitude") for the concept behind *Kakuri-shiki nōkō-sesshoku-shitsu*: "Art does not exist to foster connections (*tsunagari* 繋がり), but to sever them in ways never seen before. That is the new solitude, and it is precisely the role art must play in an age of infection isolation" (Fuse 2020a).[61]

To better understand what Fuse means by *kodoku*, it is worth looking at an essay he wrote on his concept of *atarashii kodoku* (新しい孤独, "new solitude"), published in 2017 with honkbooks – the very bookshop and collective that Aoyagi is also associated with. The essay later also received an honourable mention in a competition held by the Japanese art magazine *Bijutsu Techō* to mark the 70th anniversary of their inaugural issue in 2019.

[60] In his text, Fuse frames this as not only possible but necessary, stating: "First, art must be experienced as art", or, in the original Japanese: まず芸術は、芸術として体験される必要がある。

[61] The original Japanese passage reads: 芸術は繋がりを育むためにあるのではなく、これまでにない仕方で繋がりを断つためにあるのだ。それこそが新しい孤独であり、感染隔離の時代に芸術が果たすべき役割だ。

In this essay, Fuse laments the loss of solitude in modern society, describing it as "the time for oneself to speak to oneself" (Fuse 2019). For Fuse, this new form of solitude is not about detaching from others, but rather about deeply connecting with art. He notes that visitors nowadays bring smartphones into museums and galleries, using them to take photos of artworks and figuratively "touch" them by editing the images with apps before sharing them on social media. This way of handling the artworks, according to Fuse, erodes their "aura" (ibid.).[62] Without explicitly referencing him, Fuse's critique of how artworks lose their aura through reproduction on small smartphone screens echoes Walter Benjamin's concept as laid out in *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1935) – the idea that a work of art possesses an inherent aura, which diminishes in the age of mechanical reproduction (Benjamin 1980, 477). Benjamin argues that due to mechanical means such as photography, a crucial element of artwork disappears, "the here and now of a piece of art – its unique existence in a single place" (475), and with artworks becoming more mobile and accessible, "the urge to grasp the object up close in the picture – or rather, in its reproduction – becomes increasingly irresistible" (479). By deliberately resisting easy access and the possibility of existing in several places at once – since *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu* can only be entered by one person at a time – Fuse ensures that his project keeps its aura, in the Benjaminian sense, as it exists solely as a singularity.

However, creating a solitary virtual environment does not only serve the artwork by preserving its aura, but Fuse views it also as productive for the reading experience, offering a space for self-reflection and inner dialogue. According to Fuse, it is precisely here, in this space of "new solitude", that new art can come into being (Fuse 2019).[63] This connection

[62] Fuse uses a katakana transliteration here which, when written in rōmaji, is spelled the same as the English word "aura". In the original Japanese, he writes:「幻想の触覚」は「触ることができない」という言明によって保たれていた芸術作品のアウラを完全に消去した。

[63] To illustrate this idea, Fuse held an exhibition alongside the publication of his essay at honkbooks, inviting visitors to bring a smartphone or tablet. However, he asked them not to take photos or videos to share them on social media. Instead, he encouraged them to share their images with fellow visitors within the exhibition space,

between "isolation" (*kakuri* 隔離) and "intensive contact" (*nōkōsesshoku* 濃厚接触) is reflected in the title of the exhibition – experiencing art in solitude to engage "in intense contact with yourself" ("*anata no anata jishin to no nōkōsesshoku*") (Fuse 2020a) – or put simply, creating an intimate atmosphere between the artwork and the viewers by isolating them.

What deepens this sense of intimacy in the online exhibition, beyond the theme of isolation, is its highly personalised visuals that accompany Mizusawa's poem. By using the reader's IP address to generate a virtually "walkable" Google Street View panorama of their surroundings outside, the work situates them and their spatial experiences within the artwork, along with the memories tied to their local neighbourhood.

Art that employs such localisation technology is often categorised as "locative art". While Fuse himself does not apply this label to his work, the discourse around locative art, with its concern for linking physical and virtual space, offers a productive lens for understanding spatiality and its effect on the reading experience within poetic spaces such as *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu*. For this reason, the following section considers the online exhibition in relation to locative art, arguing that the virtual rendering of one's own neighbourhood fosters a heightened sensitivity to and awareness of one's immediate environment, casting new light on the spaces traversed in everyday life.

5.4.1. *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu* as Locative Art

The term locative art was coined by Drew Hemment in a 2004 article of the same name, where he defined it as a heterogeneous field of artistic practices that incorporate location-based technologies (Hemment 2004; Popplow and Scherffig 2013, 277). Locative art emerged following the public availability of GPS signals since May 2000 and the increasing

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as well as to write down their thoughts or create sketches inspired by their experience (honkbooks 2017). The way the exhibition was presented made it clear that Fuse's idea of *kodoku* is not about being completely isolated from others. In fact, the exhibition did encourage exchange, but it was focused on sharing personal experiences of solitude with the art, rather than posting photos of it online and using the artwork for social media content.

affordability of devices capable of using these signals (Popplow and Scherffig 2013, 277). This development has surged with the rise of smartphones, which are equipped not only with GPS but also with an accelerometer, compass, and proximity sensor. Aside from determining their location, these features also enable phones to detect how they are held and sense any nearby objects, contributing to what has been described as a "mobile location-aware future" (Tuters and De Lange 2013, 51). Another key factor in the rapid development and widespread availability of this technology is Google's free location-based services, including Google Earth and Google Street View. These platforms have paved the way for a new use of geospatial data – "an immersive form of geovisualisation" (Buschauer and Willis 2013, 173). Rather than viewing a simplified, abstract two-dimensional map of a three-dimensional space, these services allow users to navigate through a virtual simulation of real physical environments and "walk" through streets as if navigating a video game.

The social sciences and the humanities have long viewed the internet as "placeless" and "timeless", a space detached from physical reality (cf. Hemment 2004, 1–2; Buschauer and Willis 2013, 173; Tuters and De Lange 2013, 50; also cf. Chapter 2.3.4.). However, locative media challenge this strict separation, suggesting it may never have existed in the first place. Whether using Google Maps to navigate a city, find the best public transport route, or explore a potential future neighbourhood on Google Street View, location-based online services have become deeply embedded in everyday spatial experiences, making virtual and physical spaces increasingly interconnected (Buschauer and Willis 2013, 7). As mentioned earlier, readers of *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu* – if they manage to access the exhibition – are met with a split screen: one half displaying Mizusawa's poem *Shī*, and the other showing a Google Street View simulation of their surroundings outside their homes. The site utilises the application's navigation feature to create the illusion of continuous movement, seamlessly zooming from one 360° image to the next. Upon entering the online exhibition,

readers are, in a sense, taken on a digital journey through a simulated version of their own neighbourhood.

This opportunity to virtually dwell in one's local surroundings as part of an art project takes on a new meaning in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic in spring 2020 and after Abe's request to not leave the house except when necessary. What does it mean to go for a stroll through one's own neighbourhood in a time when commuting to work and buying daily essentials are often the only reasons to step outside within these first months of the pandemic? The act of aimlessly walking has frequently been interpreted as a form of appropriation or reclamation of space. Michel de Certeau, for instance, compares walking through a given environment to a speech act, "a process of *appropriation* of the topographical system on the part of the pedestrian (just as the speaker appropriates and takes on the language)" (Certeau 2008, 154). Lefebvre, in a more explicitly political register, theorises *dérive* ("drifting") – aimless movement through the city – as a means of reclaiming urban space from capitalist structures, a notion later taken up in various Situationist art projects (cf. Popplow and Scherffig 2013, 283; Tuters and De Lange 2013, 54).[64] From this perspective, the virtual stroll through the reader's own neighbourhood in *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu* may be read as an act of re-situating the self beyond the confines of the home, despite the call for *jishuku*, traversing that space not as a consumer or worker (the roles deemed "necessary" under the state of emergency during the COVID-19 pandemic) but simply as an aimless dweller, thereby fostering a new awareness for that space and reclaiming it.

However, despite the photorealism of Google Street View and the immersion created by its game-like features, the walk through the neighbourhood offered by the online exhibition

[64] In one such experiment, led by the architectural group *COBRA*, which later became part of the *Situationist International* (S.I.), participants used walkie-talkies to communicate across different city districts. By describing their immediate surroundings to one another, they generated new situations and perceptions in the other district, thereby disrupting conventional ways of experiencing urban space (Popplow and Scherffig 2013, 283).

is not a *real-time*, virtual simulation. Another crucial aspect of using Google Street View is that it relies on images taken at specific moments in time, meaning that the neighbourhood viewers encounter is always a version of the past. They see shop fronts that have long since closed, buildings that have been demolished, or blurred figures of people who may no longer live in the area. In the context of the exhibition's launch in April 2020 during the first phase of the pandemic, these images can be seen as offering an already nostalgic, pre-COVID version of one's surroundings – a space frozen in time before the crisis in a moment that already ceased to exist when the photo was taken. Being aware of the impact of the pandemic together with knowing that the images presented here are a simulation of a neighbourhood that no longer exists (and only ever existed for a single moment), gives the project an atmosphere of melancholy, an awareness for the fluid nature of the urban space we frequent daily.

Taken together, these observations suggest that viewing *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu* through the lens of locative art brings its ambivalent position into view – not only spatially but also temporally. On the one hand, it links the virtual and the physical through using readers' IP addresses and generating a Google Street View panorama of their surroundings. On the other, it connects present and past, since the images produced are not a real-time simulation but snapshots of an archived moment. The following sections will therefore discuss how these temporal and spatial dynamics shape the act of reading the included poem, *Shī* by Mizusawa. I first provide a close reading of selected passages of the poem, connect it to the way it is presented within *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu*, before turning to responses by readers during the launch of the online exhibition to further examine how they perceived their experience with it in context of the early phase of the pandemic.

5.4.2. Reading Mizusawa Nao's *Shī* in One's Virtual Neighbourhood

Shī was written by Mizusawa specifically for this online exhibition after being approached by Fuse (Fuse 2020a). She had just won the 25th Nakahara Chūya Prize for her debut poetry

collection *Utsukushii kara da yo* (Because You Are Beautiful, 2019) on 8 February 2020 – roughly three months before *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu* was launched – cementing her status as a rising star in Japan's poetry scene.

The poem is composed of five sections and is written in free verse. The speaker is an unnamed *watashi* ("I"), a female student in a high school setting. She addresses a *kimi* ("you"), implied to be an egg she cherishes and protects, while those around her, classmates and teachers, are dismissive of both her and the egg she carries. Although the poem remains abstract, there is a recognisable narrative that follows *watashi* through her school day: sitting in her classroom, staring out over the sports field, returning a world map to the materials room, taking a lunch break, going on a school excursion to a clear file manufacturer, and eventually taking her egg to the beach, where the poem ends with the speaker cracking it.

The egg is the poem's principal motif, depicted as a companion to the speaker who is not only always with her, but is also personally addressed and personified. Their strong attachment is further underlined in a situation at the beginning of the fourth section where a teacher takes it away from her:

先生
いもむしが交尾していました
花柄のガーゼハンカチのうえで
先生
ちがいます
ゲームなんかじゃありません
わたしのたまごです
 決めるのはわたしです
もし　わたしが将来だれかとかぞくに
 なるときにも　きっと紹介します
こどもがほしいって
そんなに惨めなことですか
先生がたまごをうばった

Sensei
Imomushi ga kōbi shite imashita
Hanagara no gāze hankachi no ue de
Sensei
Chigaimasu
Gēmu nanka ja arimasen
Watashi no tamago desu
Kimeru no wa watashi desu
Moshi watashi ga shōrai dareka to kazoku ni

Naru toki ni mo kitto shōkai shimasu
Kodomo ga hoshii tte
Sonna ni mijime na koto desu ka
Sensei ga tamago o ubatta

Teacher
The caterpillars were mating
On top of the gauze handkerchief with a flower pattern
Teacher
It's not what you think
It's not a game or something
It's my egg
I'm the one who decides
If someone ever becomes
My family in the future   I will surely introduce them
Is wanting children
Such a miserable thing?
The teacher took the egg away
(author's translation)

In this scene, the egg is transformed into a symbol of bodily autonomy, with the speaker emphatically asserting that it belongs to her and that she alone has the right to decide its fate. Closely tied to the female body, the egg also works as a symbol for birth and motherhood – both themes explored in this sequence, which opens with the image of mating caterpillars and later questions whether the desire for children can genuinely be viewed as negative. Yet, as the excerpt's final sentence makes clear, the teacher disregards the speaker's wishes and her plea for autonomy.

Despite *watashi*'s maternal feelings towards the egg, it also embodies a more ambiguous, potentially destructive force. In the segment immediately preceding her encounter with *sensei*, she describes the egg being boiled in a small pot and refers to its "glued-together body", suggesting both fragility and a subtle violence. This juxtaposition of care and menace highlights the speaker's conflicting feelings towards it, situated between affection and unease. Deepening this quietly unsettling atmosphere, the third section concludes with:

子宮のうえを通り過ぎると
ブラウスの
胸元が赤く滲んだ
硬くってなめらかな線が
両胸にぴざりと浮かび上がった
ポケットの中でたまごが
ピィピィわめいている

Shikyū no ue o tōrisugiru to
Burausu no
Munamoto ga akaku nijinda
Katakutte nameraka na sen ga
Ryōmune ni pizari to ukabiagatta
Poketto no naka de tamago ga
Pīpī wameite iru

When it passes by the top of my womb
Red bleeds from my breasts
Through the blouse
The hard but smooth lines
Stood out on both breasts
The egg inside the pocket
Is chirping loudly
(author's translation)

Again, the poem oscillates between maternal imagery and darker undertones. On the one hand, the speaker refers to her breasts, from which fluid pours, evoking associations with breast milk and breastfeeding. This maternal symbolism is reinforced by the image of the egg in her pocket "chirping loudly", a sound that recalls the feeding of birds. Yet the imagery takes a more unsettling turn with the introduction of the colour red, a shade more readily linked to blood – another bodily fluid – thereby disrupting the nurturing associations and complicating the poem's exploration of motherhood.

The ending, by contrast, offers a more optimistic perspective, framed by the serene seashore scene that gives the poem its title. The closing lines employ language with subtly erotic overtones – phrases such as "undoing buttons one by one", "stroking gently", and "swelling". This gradual intensification culminates in the poem's climax, when the egg finally cracks open, releasing its yolk as caterpillars and butterflies emerge.

胸骨に沿って並んだくるみボタンを
ひとつひとつ外してゆく
まっしろで
平たい胸の真ん中に割れ目があった
わたしは人差し指と中指で
甘酸っぱい焼き菓子のように膨らんだ
その傍らを撫でた
うっすらと生えそろった産毛
饐えたオパールの匂いがする
結晶化した
海に向かって叫ぶように

米粒より黄色い卵が
いもむしが
蝶々が
次々にきみの割れ目から
這い出してゆく
わたしはそれを見ていた
ずっと見ていた

Kyōkotsu ni sotte naranda kurumi botan o
Hitotsu hitotsu hazushite yuku
Masshiro de
Hiratai mune no mannaka ni wareme ga atta
Watashi wa hitosashiyubi to nakayubi de
Amazuppai yakigashi no yō ni fukuranda
Sono katawara o nadeta
Ussurato haesorotta ubuge
Sueta opāru no nioi ga suru
Kesshōka shita
Umi ni mukatte sakebu yō ni
Kome-tsubu yori kiiroi tamago ga
Imomushi ga
Chōchō ga
Tsugitsugi ni kimi no wareme kara
Haidashite yuku
Watashi wa sore o mite ita
Zutto mite ita

The with fabric covered buttons along your sternum
I unbutton them one by one
Exposing pure white
There was a crack in the middle of your flat chest
With my index and middle finger
I stroke the area beside it gently
Which had swelled like a sweet and tangy pastry
Covered with a faint layer of fluff
It smells like rotten opal
Crystallised
As if shouting towards the sea
An egg yellower than a grain of rice
A caterpillar
A butterfly
One after the other from your crack
Crawling out
I've been watching them
I've been watching them the whole time
(author's translation)

In the poem's final section, the earlier image of mating caterpillars is revisited, this time evoking both birth – as they crawl out of the egg – and metamorphosis, as butterflies also emerge. Significantly, the egg that the speaker had so fiercely guarded does not fracture by chance, but it is deliberately cracked open by her, an act that permits new life to appear. If the egg is understood as a symbol of bodily autonomy, the conclusion may thus be read as the speaker's eventual attainment of such autonomy. Taken together, Mizusawa's *Shī* can be

interpreted as a meditation on a female-coded experience of coming of age, transformation and self-determination, culminating in the affirmation of authority over one's own body.

When considering how the act of reading might be shaped by the experience of *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu*, two aspects stand out. First, the exhibition introduces a new interpretative dimension to the poem by linking the reading process with a virtual stroll through one's immediate surroundings. Second, it sets up a tension between the solitude Fuse identifies as necessary for engaging with Mizusawa's poetry and the collective character of the exhibition's launch, when numerous people tried accessing the website simultaneously.

With regard to the first point, the presentation of the text itself appears relatively conventional when compared to other poetic spaces examined in this thesis. Displayed in black font against a white background, it resembles an e-reader format, allowing readers to scroll through the text either with a cursor on a computer or by swiping on a mobile device. Yet, in contrast to this static presentation of the poem, the Google Street View panel on the other side of the split screen remains in constant motion, slowly rotating and shifting, drawing the reader's attention between the two halves. In this way, images of one's own neighbourhood become woven into the act of reading the poem – and vice versa – as the gaze naturally alternates between them.

However, because each reader effectively experiences an individualised version of *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu*, it is difficult to make universal claims about how precisely the Street View panorama and the poem might intersect. For instance, someone accessing the work while staying at their childhood home might find that memories of their school years, tied to the spaces of their upbringing, resonate strongly with Mizusawa's poetry and with the exhibition's ambivalent position between past and present. By contrast, a reader engaging with the work from a location with little personal significance may encounter fewer such affective overlaps. Nevertheless, regardless of the extent to which

connections between the two halves of the screen are activated in each individual case, fact is that *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu* introduces an additional personalised spatial as well as temporal layer to the poem through the exhibition's mode of presentation, which in turn becomes integral to the reading and possible interpretation.

Turning to the second point, Fuse describes his motivation for including Mizusawa's poem in the online exhibition as "an experiment aimed at taking the written word, which has become part of everyday life, out of its usual context and into the margins" (Fuse 2020a). In other words, just as the one half of the split screen has distorted the familiar view of one's neighbourhood, Mizusawa's abstract, long, and difficult-to-decipher poetry has a similar distorting effect on "the written word". Her style, which resembles a collage of images that shift between smaller scenes and larger set pieces, resists straightforward interpretation. *Shī* therefore requires a commitment from its readers to spend time with it, a determination to dig deeper. For this reason, and in line with his idea of a "new solitude", Fuse recommends engaging with the work in isolation – to immerse oneself and "have a conversation with yourself" (ibid.).

Yet, just as *Shī* drives on ambiguity and contradicting expectations, whether in its title (which can be read as both "sea" and "see") or in its imagery (with caterpillars and butterflies emerging from an egg rather than a bird), so too does the notion of solitude in *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu*. The title itself exposes this juxtaposition by combining two seemingly opposed terms that became prominent in public discourse during the COVID-19 pandemic: *kakuri* ("isolation"), used to describe the quarantine of infected individuals, and *nōkōsesshoku* ("close contact"), usually referring to close contact with an infected individual. While Fuse has stated that the title reflects the already mentioned idea of *isolating* the viewer within the virtual exhibition space to bring them into *closer contact* with themselves and the artwork (Fuse 2020a), it also seems to refer to another, less-explored "room" within the online exhibition: the waiting room. This is the page that visitors see when

another person is already viewing the exhibition and is therefore an important part of the experience. However, while the "exhibition room" isolates the viewer, the number of users who can join the waiting room is theoretically unlimited, evoking the image of a small, crowded area filled with strangers. Fuse expressed the contradiction of being both alone and connected in *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu* as "it was as if people were gathering, but also not gathering" ("*Hitobito ga atsumatteiru yō de, atsumatteinai yō de*") (Fuse 2020b).

In this sense, although the exhibition's primary mechanism is isolation, it also heightens the reader's awareness of others simultaneously seeking access to *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu*. The experience of being the only person currently reading Mizusawa's poem, while knowing that others are waiting to enter, fundamentally shapes how the exhibition is perceived. The following section will therefore consider audience responses to the launch on Twitter, focusing on how this interplay of solitude and shared presence influenced their perception of the poetic space.

5.4.3. Reader Responses during the Launch of *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu*

A few days before *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu* was launched on 30 April 2020, an online article from *Bijutsu Techō* introduced the online exhibition to their readers, sharing the link to the exhibition (Bijutsu Techō 2020). Over 90 tweets were published in the first three days of the online exhibition, making Twitter the primary forum for conversations about *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu*. For this section, I analysed the first 90 tweets posted on Twitter between 30 April and 3 May 2020 using the keyword *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu* to understand the overall reception of the exhibition.[65] This involved recognising reoccurring themes and attitudes, as well as tracking individual users'

[65] The results of the search presented here can be accessed via the following link: https://x.com/search?q=隔離式濃厚接触室%20until%3A2020-05-03%20since%3A2020-04-30&src=typed_query&f=live [last access: 9 February 2025].

interactions with the project – from attempting to access it to their initial viewing and thoughts of the experience.

The vast majority of these tweets were brief, focusing on whether users had successfully accessed the exhibition. However, many users also shared more detailed reflections on their experiences with *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu*. For example, they shared their repeated attempts to enter the exhibition, exchanging strategies to improve their chances. Some tried accessing the site late at night, assuming there would be fewer visitors[66], while another user suggested creating a chart to track peak demand times and help each other out.[67] One particularly determined user even attempted to bypass the one-person limit by analysing the webpage's JavaScript code, hoping to reconstruct what the exhibition might look like.[68] Among those discussing their unsuccessful attempts on Twitter, anticipation grew as they waited to finally discover the exhibition's contents, especially as the first tweets from those who had successfully gained access began to appear.[69]

Among those who successfully accessed *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu* and shared their experiences on Twitter, three recurring themes emerged: a heightened awareness of others' presence, a sense of responsibility towards those still waiting for their turn to enter, and a profound sense of isolation, of being truly alone on the internet.

As previously stated, the presence of others is most acutely felt in the so-called "waiting room" – the space users face when access is denied because someone else is already inside the online exhibition. Those who finally gained entry, however, often tweeted about feeling sympathy for those still waiting, demonstrating a heightened awareness of their presence.

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[66] Tweet by *@z_t_e_n* dated 1 May 2020, available at https://x.com/z_t_e_n/status/1256290493765320704 [last access: 20 February 2025]. The following tweets referred to in this chapter will be provided in a footnote to maintain the readability of the bibliography. An account on X is required for access.

[67] Tweet by *@sinshin725* dated 2 May 2020, available at https://x.com/sinshin725/status/1256643215924420608 [last access: 20 February 2025].

[68] Tweet by *@hasaqui* dated 1 May 2020, available at https://x.com/hasaqui/status/1256265413328900102 [last access: 20 February 2025].

[69] Tweet by *@thistulip* dated 2 May 2020, available at https://x.com/thistulip/status/1256550383582711816 [last access: 20 February 2025].

One user linked the experience to being in a physical gallery with limited capacity[70], another one to being at the front of a queue to a famous painting, conscious of the crowds waiting behind them.[71] Another analogy compared the experience to being "isolated in a vinyl shed with a blurry crowd waiting outside."[72]

While some users expressed a sense of rivalry over who would gain access next – describing "a mix of slight guilt and superiority"[73] at having made it into *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu* – many others felt a sense of responsibility toward those still waiting. Some even tweeted about voluntarily limiting their time in the exhibition room to give others a fair chance to experience it.[74] Furthermore, as previously stated, many users avoided sharing screenshots of the exhibition to prevent spoiling the experience for others.

However, this awareness of people in the waiting room also heightened the sensation of being isolated in the exhibition room. The moment users entered *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu*, they were instantly aware that no one else could be viewing it at the same time. Some found the experience "liberating",[75] whereas others referred to the overwhelming sense of isolation as "horror",[76] "a sense of fear", and "an unsettling pressure throughout the entire process, from entry to viewing."[77]

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[70] Tweet by *@goldenmilkvisit* dated 30 April 2020, available at https://x.com/goldenmilkvisit/status/1255786165409472512 [last access: 20 February 2025].

[71] Tweet by *@naoyoukey* dated 3 May 2020, available at https://x.com/naoyoukey/status/1256796204844806144 [last access: 20 February 2025].

[72] Tweet by *@kilarla_yohaku* dated 3 May 2020, available at https://x.com/kilarla_yohaku/status/1256991147718660096 [last access: 20 February 2025].

[73] Tweet by *@koki9s* dated 3 May 2020, available at https://x.com/koki9s/status/1256732437914116096 [last access: 20 February 2025].

[74] Tweet by *@goldenmilkvisit* dated 30 April 2020, available at https://x.com/goldenmilkvisit/status/1255786165409472512 [last access: 20 February 2025].

[75] Tweet by *@dou_mu_ra* dated 3 May 2020, available at https://x.com/dou_mu_ra/status/1256843392463409152 [last access: 20 February 2025].

[76] Tweet by *@okomeinusame* dated 3 May 2020, available at https://x.com/okomeinusame/status/1256966991434280962 [last access: 20 February 2025].

[77] Tweet by *@_rntru_* dated 3 May 2020, available at https://x.com/_rntru_/status/1257066902934810624 [last access: 20 February 2025].

This unsettling sensation within the online exhibition is also linked to Mizusawa's poem. Although the poem was only referenced about ten times in the 90 initial tweets analysed here, those engaging with it in greater depth in their posts described it as evoking a "sense of bodily intrusion"[78] or a "shifting consciousness oscillating between an undifferentiated or fused body",[79] highlighting the transgressive imagery of the poem.

While most users only tweeted once or twice about the project, one user going by the name *@yzusnow* meticulously documented their thoughts and experiences of attempting – and eventually succeeding in – accessing the exhibition in six tweets over the course of three days. Their first post expressed a sense of synchronicity (*shinkuro-kan* シンクロ感) they felt when their first attempt was unsuccessful:

> I can't get into *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu*, but the sense of synchronicity – knowing that someone else is doing the exact same thing as me at the same time – is visibly present, which makes the experience interesting and strangely fascinating in its own way. No matter when I try, I am never really alone.[80]

This sentiment echoes Fuse's own observation that "it was as if people were gathering, but also not gathering". Put differently, being denied access heightened *@yzusnow*'s awareness of others engaged in the same act, producing not solitude but the opposite – the sense of never truly being alone. Over the following days, they continued to post updates on their unsuccessful attempts, at one point playfully suggesting a matchmaking app for people simultaneously trying to enter *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu*, revealing a desire not only to acknowledge but also to connect with those unseen others.[81]

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[78] Tweet by *@shikkokusai* dated 2 May 2020, available at https://x.com/shikkokusai/status/1256661535205675008 [last access: 20 February 2025].

[79] Tweet by *@okomeinusame* dated 3 May 2020, available at https://x.com/okomeinusame/status/1256966991434280962[last access: 20 February 2025].

[80] Tweet by *@yzusnow* dated 2 May 2020, available at https://x.com/yzusnow/status/1256375968056307713 [last access: 20 February 2025].

[81] Tweet by *@yzusnow* dated 2 May 2020, available at https://x.com/yzusnow/status/1256514478469873665 [last access: 20 February 2025].

When they eventually gained access, *@yzusnow* expressed surprise at how "isolating" and "intimate" the experience felt.[82] In a subsequent reflection, they wrote:

> It feels truly strange to see the deeply personal memories I've built up in this place being cut out and isolated within a networked space. Combined with the quiet power of the poem, I find myself here, yet at the same time, feeling as if I've been flung far away. The possibilities of the worlds I didn't choose, the sights I never saw, the people I never touched.[83]

Their words articulate the project's intrinsic ambivalence, already observed in the previous analysis: being here yet distant, virtual yet physical, familiar yet alien, caught between a yearning for solitude and a longing for connection.

What emerges from this analysis of tweets during the exhibition's launch is the acute awareness participants had of each other's presence. The "waiting room" interface made visible the fact that others were attempting access at the same moment, creating the sense of synchronicity that *@yzusnow* emphasised. Once admitted, this awareness shaped their behaviour in different ways: some users rushed through the reading to allow others a turn, while others experienced the exclusivity as a privilege and lingered. Another recurring theme was the personalised dimension of the work. Because the Google Street View panorama incorporated each user's real surroundings – familiar yet distorted by its altered colour scheme – some found the effect unsettling, even uncanny, presumably because it disrupted the assumed anonymity of online browsing. Yet, as *@yzusnow*'s reflections show, this same personalisation could also foster deeper resonance with the poem, prompting contemplation of one's own life and the choices made – or left unmade. Taken together, these responses highlight how *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu* transformed solitary reading into a paradoxical experience of both isolation and collective awareness.

[82] Tweet by *@yzusnow* dated 2 May 2020, available at https://x.com/yzusnow/status/1256542503810940930 [last access: 20 February 2025].

[83] Tweet by *@yzusnow* dated 3 May 2020, available at https://x.com/yzusnow/status/1256772709574275075 [last access: 20 February 2025].

5.5. Conclusion

Both *Ōfukurōdoku* and *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu* operate in virtual space, were launched during the initial months of the COVID-19 pandemic in spring 2020 and integrate poetry into their projects. However, as the analysis of the way both describe their own projects has shown, they seemingly pursue fundamentally different aims: *Ōfukurōdoku* foregrounds interaction, communal presence, and the weaving of art into everyday life, whereas *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu* prioritises solitude, introspection, and the individualised experience of the poem, emphasising the need of a space for art that is at the margins of everyday life, where "art can be experienced as art", to echo Fuse's words.

Yet, examining how these two projects actually functioned in practice reveals that this apparent opposition does not fully hold. Both *Ōfukurōdoku* and *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu* oscillate between distance and intimacy, isolation and connection. Each *Ōfukurōdoku* livestream featured only a single person at a time, mirroring the isolation imposed by COVID-19 countermeasures in Japan during the spring of 2020, when social gatherings were discouraged. All interactions between people (who did not belong to the same household) were mediated through these "increasingly chambered spaces", as Luck described livestreams and video calls. Even if the livestreams were framed as a means to connect – they were also a reminder that connecting in person was not yet possible as part of the call for *jishuku* during Japan's states of emergency.

On the other hand, while *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu* isolates the viewer upon entering the virtual exhibition room – successfully cultivating a sense of solitude, as reader responses have indicated – it is precisely this restricted access that heightened awareness of others in the virtual space, as the responses have also shown. Viewers adapted their behaviour accordingly, conscious of those still waiting. A sense of shared experience was visible, where users exchanged thoughts on the exhibition and offered tips to help others gain access.

Both projects not only share an ambivalent relationship to isolation and connection, but also cultivate an equally ambivalent sense of temporality, offering glimpses into a past that is irretrievably gone. In *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu*, the Google Street View images of readers' neighbourhoods are always snapshots of the past, subtly evoking a nostalgic, already-passed version of these spaces rather than simulating real-time presence. By contrast, *Ōfukurōdoku* consisted of live events that were truly immediate, producing a sense of synchronicity with the poets and audience only during the moment of broadcast. Although recordings of these livestreams have been archived, the immediacy of the original event – the possibility of interaction and the shared experience – cannot be relived.

Both of these layers, the ambiguity of time and space conveyed through the presentation styles of the two poetic spaces, shape the experience of reading the poems within them. This manifests both in the reading process itself, such as feeling rushed when engaging with *Shī*, due to the awareness of others waiting to access the exhibition, or sensing the simultaneous presence of others in a livestream while listening to Aoyagi recite *Annelida Tänzerin*, and in the way the presentation contributes to the poems' meaning. In *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu*, for instance, the personalised neighbourhood images potentially resonate with the content of the poem, while in *Ōfukurōdoku*, the manner in which Aoyagi delivers the poem informs its interpretation.

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, during the early months of the pandemic the cultural sector was placed in a defensive position: labelled nonessential and nonurgent, venues were forced to close without adequate financial compensation. This created pressure to move cultural activity online. Such initiatives, however, were largely perceived as temporary stand-ins until in-person venues could reopen. While most have since given way to in-person or hybrid formats, it is notable that both *Ōfukurōdoku* and *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu* remain active. Aoyagi and Sato's project has developed into a travelling

multimedia exhibition, while Fuse and Mizusawa's work has been extended indefinitely, accessible at any time provided no one else is inside.

Neither project was conceived as a replacement for live events, but rather as an exploration of the possibilities offered by their respective media – livestreaming and locative technology. Both created aesthetic experiences that resonated with the emotions of the pandemic between isolation and the longing for connection. At the same time, they offered alternative spaces where art and poetry could unfold, reasserting the continuing relevance of poetry and artistic practice in shaping how we make sense of the experiences in our everyday lives – especially in times of crisis.

6. Poetic Space in Translation: Saihate Tahi's *Shi wo ippuku*

In the basement of the Kyoto Tower Sando building – a prominent department store for local souvenirs and delicacies standing opposite Kyoto Station – visitors find themselves in a food hall, where poems climb up the walls, draw lines on the floor, or glow in bright pink neon. This is the setting for Saihate's site-specific poetry exhibition, *Shi wo ippuku* (詩を一服, A Dose of Poetry, 2023). Its title is a pun that plays with the Japanese phrase "*ippuku wo suru*" (一服をする), meaning "to take a break", often specifically referring to taking a break for a smoke or a drink, or in this case to read poetry, thus we could translate it as a "puff", "hit" or "dose" of poetry. The exhibition features a series of installations with translations of classical *waka* poetry into contemporary Japanese. However, the poems are not only translated but also transformed into a three-dimensional poetic space, as visitors can find these installations scattered all around the food hall, sometimes forming a single line of poetry on the floor that leads up a wall, or perhaps hiding in a corner by the ceiling, waiting to be discovered. As with all the examples discussed in this thesis, an awareness of the space that surrounds you during the practice of reading constitutes an essential element of *Shi wo ippuku*.

The previous chapters examined poetic spaces situated in museums and galleries, in urban environments, in virtual contexts, and this chapter turns to a poetry installation deliberately placed within an everyday, bustling space of consumption – a space that might also be described as a "non-place", to borrow Augé's term for sites that lack a strong sense of identity, history, or social connection, typically serving specific functions (Augé 1995, 78; cf. Chapter 4.2.). However, there is another feature that sets this poetry installation apart from the other examples discussed so far: the role translation plays within its conceptualisation that also finds expression in the installations' spatial design. *Shi wo ippuku*'s genre-bending nature as a poetic space therefore not only prompts a consideration

of *reading* poetry but also of *translating* poetry in relation to its integration within spatial contexts.

What distinguishes this chapter from the rest of this thesis, however, is not only the setting within a space of consumption and its emphasis on translation, but also the methodological approach employed; *Shi wo ippuku* serves as a case study to complement the methods mainly used so far, exhibition analysis and close reading, with qualitative data on the reader reception of the poetry installation gathered on-site during a four-day fieldwork project conducted at Kyoto Tower Sando between 22 and 25 July 2023.[84] An analysis and close reading of one key work in the exhibition remains central to this approach, but I have also included surveys and interviews with visitors within the food hall, an analysis of Instagram posts, participant observation, and semi-structured interviews with key figures involved in the exhibition's conception and realisation: Watanabe Kyōhei, director of Kyoto Tower Sando; Nishi Ryōko, the creative coordinator; and graphic designer Sasaki Shun, who collaborated closely with Saihate to actualise the project.[85] The aim of this fieldwork project is to investigate how visitors, in the course of their everyday lives, engage with and perceive a poetic space, using *Shi wo ippuku* as a case study.

This approach is inspired by Luise Reitstätter's *Die Ausstellung verhandeln* (Negotiating the Exhibition), in which she explores the relationship between space and social actors (visitors, curators, artists) within exhibitions through similar means: the analysis of artefacts and artworks, participant observation, and interviews with visitors as well as artists, curators, gallery directors and other people involved in the organisation process of the respective exhibitions. Reitstätter justifies her approach by pointing out the advantage of complementing the observation of visitors' natural behaviour within the space with interviews that explore how they themselves *narrate* their actions and perceptions. This

[84] This fieldwork was supported by the German Institute for Japanese Studies (DIJ) in Tokyo.
[85] An interview with Saihate Tahi herself was not possible due to her anonymity and lack of contact options.

serves to balance the researcher's perspectives and interpretations against those of the individuals who actually inhabit and navigate the space in their everyday lives. At the same time, an analysis of what Reitstätter calls "artefacts" – in other words, the objects displayed at an exhibition themselves – provides a means of situating the exhibition within its social context, shedding light on aspects of reception that may not surface explicitly in interviews. For this reason, she considers the combination of these methods essential for analysing the exhibition space as a site of social interaction (Reitstätter 2015, 6).

The chapter is structured in five parts. The first section provides a brief overview of the exhibition, including its development, intended purpose, and the key individuals involved in its conception and realisation. The second section offers a close reading and analysis of a particular piece from *Shi wo ippuku*: a pink neon light installation featuring Saihate's translation of a poem by the Heian poet Ono no Komachi (c. 825–900), presented alongside the original *waka*. This discussion examines the relationship between the two poetic texts – one designated as a "modern translation" of the other – while also considering the implications of their spatial presentation as an installation piece. Drawing on different accounts of intralingual translation, I analyse Saihate's own approach, as elaborated in her essay collection *Hyakunin isshu to iu kanjō* (百人一首という感情, Emotions of One Hundred Poets, One Poem Each, 2018), which was published alongside her modern Japanese translations of the classical anthology *Hyakunin isshu* (百人一首, One Hundred Poets, One Poem Each, c. 1235).[86] I argue that Saihate adopts a style of translation which, rather than seeking equivalence between source and target text, purposefully opens the poem up to multiple new possible modes of interpretation.

[86] *Hyakunin isshu* refers to a classical Japanese anthology format comprising one hundred waka poems by one hundred poets. The version translated into modern Japanese by Saihate is the most famous and canonical compilation assembled by Fujiwara no Teika (1162–1241). For an English translation, see *One Hundred Poets, One Poem Each: A Treasury of Classical Japanese Verse*, trans. Peter MacMillan (London: Penguin Classics, 2017 [2008]).

The third section outlines the methodology and framework of the fieldwork project at Kyoto Tower Sando, while the fourth presents the findings, organised according to relevant themes. Finally, the fifth section brings together the results from the different methods and situates them within a broader discussion of the overarching research question of this thesis: how can we define poetic spaces, and what happens when we read poetry within them?

6.1. The Making of *Shi wo ippuku* in Kyoto Tower Sando's Food Hall

Shi wo ippuku by Saihate is a site-specific exhibition commissioned by Kyoto Tower Sando in conjunction with its reopening in April 2023. This work comprises multiple installations containing the artist's translations of classical Japanese *waka* from the *Kokin wakashū* (古今和歌集, Collection of Ancient and Modern Poems, c. 905-14)[87] and the *Shin kokin wakashū* (新古今和歌集, New Collection of Ancient and Modern Poems, c. 1205)[88] into contemporary Japanese, positioned throughout the walls and floors of the underground food hall and staircase of the building. Predominantly written in either white or black paint, some of the installations seamlessly traverse from the walls onto the floor, thus enhancing their three-dimensional quality (Figure 11). Overall, the installations of *Shi wo ippuku* can be roughly divided into two different formats: single-line compositions in a *tategaki* ("vertical") format (Figure 12), some maintaining a straight line while others feature a 90-degree rotation in the middle of the poem, requiring readers to adjust their perspective to continue reading, and block configurations that adhere to the *yokogaki* ("left to right") format (Figure 13). Their prominence varies, with some poems positioned in easily visible locations and others more subtly integrated into the building's architecture (Figure 14).

[87] The *Kokin wakashū*, also known as the *Kokinshū*, was the first of several anthologies of Japanese poetry compiled at imperial commission. For an English translation, see *Kokinshū: A Collection of Poems Ancient and Modern*, trans. Laurel Rasplica Rodd (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984).

[88] The *Shin kokin wakashū*, also known as the *Shin kokinshū*, was the eighth commissioned imperial anthology of Japanese poetry. For an English translation, see *Shinkokinshū: New Collection of Poems Ancient and Modern*, trans. Laurel Rasplica Rodd (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

There are twenty poems in all, six of which have the classical poem next to Saihate's translation. These include *waka* by Ariwara no Narihira (c. 825-880), Shunzei's Daughter (c. 1171-1252), Jakuren (c. 1139-1202), and Ono no Komachi (c. 825-900). The original poems are usually painted in a slightly lighter colour than the translations.[89] Another striking feature is the spatial relationship between the original and the translation. All of Saihate's translations take up much more space than the concise 5-line *waka*, directing the reader's focus away from the originals and toward the translations.

To draw visitors' attention to the poetry exhibition, it was decided that there should be a symbolic main object at the underground entrance – a prominent pink neon light installation measuring 3.56m x 2.25m (Figure 15). This installation serves as the centrepiece of the exhibition, displaying Saihate's translation of a poem attributed to Ono no Komachi, number 552 of the *Kokin wakashū*, also known by the first word of the poem "*Omoitsutsu*" (おもひつつ, literally "while thinking"), in pink illuminated characters on a glass wall. Behind the installation is a smaller structure with Ono no Komachi's original poem written in white on a grey background.

Shi wo ippuku is a collaborative project between Saihate and graphic designer Sasaki, who has also designed other poetry exhibitions for her and several covers for her poetry collections.[90] They worked closely together with Watanabe Kyōhei, director of Kyoto Tower Sando, and Nishi Ryōko, Kyoto Tower Sando's creative coordinator, as their aim was to create a space that blends consumerism and art, allowing their customers to take a break and

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[89] The use of the term "original" can be problematic, as it may suggest that the source text possesses "originality" while denying this quality to the translation. This reinforces the Romantic idea of the individual author as a genius who creates autonomous, "original" compositions, denouncing the creative use of others' ideas. Even though literary theorists like Julia Kristeva challenge the concept of autonomy and originality in literary text production, claiming that "any text is constructed of a mosaic of quotations" (Kristeva 1986, 37), the belief in the "original text" as autonomous and superior to its translation remains widespread (Chan 2020, 10–11). However, in this context, the term "original" is meant purely as a descriptive term to differentiate between the source text and its translation.

[90] Other works by Saihate, designed by Sasaki, that are discussed in this thesis, include *Shi no mobīru* (see Chapter 3) and *Shi no kasoku* (see Chapter 4).

relax, as the title suggests (Watanabe and Nishi, "Personal Interview", 24 July 2023). The collaboration was initiated by the Kyoto Tower Sando project management team, who decided to include some form of public art as part of their concept for the building's reopening. They decided on the theme of poetry and the classical poetry collections of the *Kokin wakashū* and the *Shin kokin wakashū*, with the intention of linking the exhibition to Kyoto, as these poems originate from the court of the former capital, and would allow their visitors to connect their memories and images of the city with the words they read. In the interview I conducted with the Kyoto Tower Sando team, Watanabe notes that with so many texts like tourist guides and advertisements surrounding people in the city, being enveloped by poetry would offer a welcome change of pace (ibid.). They approached Little More, a small press known for combining art and literature and publishing more experimental work, including volumes of Saihate's poetry and her modern translations of the classical Japanese anthology *Hyakunin isshu*. Saihate agreed to the project. As she prefers to remain anonymous, all communication was mediated through Little More and Sasaki, who was responsible for the design of the exhibition.

The idea that the poetry installations would be scattered throughout the food hall and the staircase that connects the three floors of the building was clear from the start, according to Watanabe (ibid.). In theory, at least one poem would always be visible while eating or drinking in the food hall, no matter where visitors ended up sitting. For visitors familiar with Saihate – or just curious about the poetry exhibition – there is also the aspect of a "treasure hunt", as Nishi calls it during our interview (ibid.). Some poems were deliberately placed to make them difficult to locate (for example, in small corners on the way to the bathrooms or near the ceiling) and to generate excitement about their finds and to encourage engagement with the space itself.

Finally, Kyoto Tower Sando reopened on 22 April 2023, and its official Instagram account teased *Shi wo ippuku* with six posts from 22 to 24 April, each showing a graphic with the

original *waka* on a pastel colour gradient, followed by Saihate's translation on a graphic using a slightly more intense colour gradient, and a photo of a fragment of the poetry installation.[91] Saihate shared these on her own Instagram account in the form of Instagram's story-function and reposted a selection of photos taken by visitors in the week following the reopening. For its reopening, the Kyoto Tower Sando team also organised a book fair featuring a selection of Saihate's essay and poetry collections. Held in the building's souvenir shop until 21 May 2023, the fair also distributed small giveaways, including a pamphlet containing her translations of the six *waka*, designed in the same pastel colours as the Instagram posts. The exhibition itself was designed as a permanent feature of the food hall and can still be seen at Kyoto Tower Sando at the time of writing.

6.2. Intralingual Translation in *Shi wo ippuku*

In the bottom right corner of the six installations that present the originals alongside Saihate's translations, her name is credited with the compound word *gendaigo-yaku* (現代語訳), combining the characters for "modern language" and "translation", a term commonly used to describe the rendering of classical Japanese texts into modern Japanese. *Gendaigo-yaku* can be understood as "intralingual translation", a term coined by Roman Jakobson in his essay "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation" (1959), where he defines the act as "an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language" (Jakobson 2007, 182). An original text usually undergoes intralingual translation when its content poses challenges for the target reader's comprehension.[92] To specifically address translations between different historical stages of the same language, more precise terms such as

[91] For reference, see this post by @*kyototowersando* on Instagram via https://www.instagram.com/p/CrYGlWhL1nl/ [last access: 5 October 2025].

[92] These difficulties may not solely arise from temporal disparities between the source text and the intended audience but can also result from factors like gaps in knowledge. A notable example is the current practice of simplifying complex texts, such as legal documents, into "easy Japanese" (*yasashii Nihongo*), with the aim of enhancing accessibility.

“diachronic intralingual translation” have been introduced alongside Jakobson’s terminology (Pillière and Albachten 2024, 4).

Various terms are employed to characterise the transtextual rewriting between different languages or historical layers of the same language, often depending on the degree of fidelity to the source material. In *Western Theory in East Asian Contexts: Translation and Transtextual Rewriting* (2020), Leo Tak-hung Chan uses the terms “translation”, “adaptation”, and “imitation” to establish a spectrum of transtextual rewriting. Translation is positioned as the most faithful, followed by adaptation, and then imitation. However, Chan underscores that every act of translation would incorporate elements of all three modes to varying degrees (Chan 2020, 11–12; 33–34). He posits that while many contemporary scholars define the aim of translation as transmitting an original message as accurately as possible to an audience who may not have the linguistic competence to access the source text themselves, the practice of transtextual rewriting in East Asian contexts historically exhibited a more adaptive and freer style. However, according to Chan, the increasing influence of Western thought and Romantic notions of authorship and originality during the nineteenth century led to a greater emphasis on fidelity in translating source texts in Japan and other East Asian countries, affirming the subordinate position of translation with respect to original texts (149).

In her analysis of intralingual translator’s prefaces in the anthology *Ikezawa Natsuki-hen: Nihon bungaku zenshū* (池澤夏樹編日本文学全集, Edited by Ikezawa Natsuki: The Complete Works of Japanese Literature, 2014–2020), Paula Martínez Sirés has demonstrated that the translators generally aimed to remain as faithful to the original text as possible, yet what “being faithful” meant seems to be open for interpretation. According to Martínez Sirés, most of the anthology’s translators opted for a foreignisation over domestication approach. For instance, the writer Morimi Tomihiko outlines his “modern translation policy” (*gendaigoyaku no hōshin* 現代語訳の方針) for his translation of *Taketori*

monogatari (竹取物語, The Tale of the Bamboo-Cutter) as comprising two primary rules: firstly, any additional elements that do not appear in the original text should be avoided; secondly, the use of modern expressions should be kept to a minimum (Martínez Sirés 2021, 93). However, poet and translator Koike Masayo, who was responsible for translating the *Hyakunin isshu* for the anthology, described her approach as "follow[ing] the gaze of the old poets in order to see the same things." For her, fidelity to the source text entailed following the same aesthetic rhythm. She prioritised adapting the external appearance from the premodern format to a contemporary one, while the transfer of meaning played a secondary role (92–93).

This brief discussion of Martínez Sirés' analysis of "diachronic intralingual translation" in Japan highlights the tendency among *gendaigo-yaku* translators to strive for what they perceive as accuracy to the source text, avoiding divergence wherever possible. For Morimi, this entails avoiding any element that might "add" something absent from the original, whereas for Koike accuracy is achieved through what she terms maintaining the same "aesthetic rhythm". Both, along with the other translators in her case study, emphasise the importance of equivalence, though they differ in how they conceive of and pursue it.

If we now consider Saihate's reflections on her translational work, the inherent ambiguity of translating poetry is a recurring theme in her collection of essays on her translations of the *Hyakunin isshu*, published separately in her book *Hyakunin isshu to iu kanjō*.[93] The preface of the book begins by recounting how Saihate was asked if she could imagine translating the *Hyakunin isshu* into modern Japanese and the thought process it triggered in her. Like the vast majority of people who were educated according to the Japanese school system, Saihate had encountered the collection of classical poems as a mandatory part of the curriculum in the subject *kokugo* (国語, "national language"), so she perceived the *Hyakunin*

[93] Saihate's translations themselves were published under the title *Sennengo no hyakunin isshu* (One hundred poets, one poem each, one thousand years later, 2017, Tokyo: Little More).

isshu not as poetry but as *benkyō* (勉強, "study material"). *Gendaigo-yaku*, or translating into modern Japanese, is also part of the curriculum and usually follows the same process, which she describes as follows: "You break down the sentences into their components, replace words with their modern equivalents, think about the meaning in reference to the historical context, and then you translate them directly (*choku-yaku* 直訳)" (Saihate 2018, 1). Perceiving the *Hyakunin isshu* as "*benkyō*" meant viewing it as a task, similar to an exam question with one correct answer.

However, to Saihate, poetry is devoid of definitive answers; it thrives on ambiguity, encapsulating emotions that resist neat categorisation (1–2). She describes coming to the realisation that poets have shared this struggle for thousands of years in search of words to express ambiguous emotions and perceptions and that behind each poem, there is an individual person and a distinctive moment that inspired it. She compares her approach to *gendaigo-yaku* to "trying to uncover the gaze they had at the time, as they sought those words; the impulse and emotions they felt in that moment", using the imagery of aligning one's gaze with that of the poet who wrote the original text (3). This is similar to the way Koike described her approach in terms of embodying the poet's gaze to see what they saw. However, in the afterword of the essay collection, Saihate acknowledges that despite her efforts, she could never fully grasp the original poets' sentiments in the precise moment that inspired these poems. At the same time, the poets of the *Hyakunin isshu* never experienced the contemporary Japan of her generation, leading to a gap that will always be there, as she states. Precisely because of this gap, Saihate says, she could not fully empathise with the *waka* poets or speak on their behalf. Instead, she imagined them standing in front of her as she read each poem: What are the things she would like to say to them? What are the things she cannot help thinking about? She asserts that despite the distance of a thousand years, she can still sense their presence as human beings. She concludes her afterword by directly

addressing the classical poets, stating, "I see you. On the other side, a thousand years ago. You're there" (297–99).

In her preface and afterword, Saihate describes how her perception of *gendaigo-yaku* has changed through her experience translating the *Hyakunin isshu*. Initially, she recalled the task from her high school days as something straightforward, characterised by clear-cut right and wrong approaches, and assessed in exams according to a stringent set of rules. However, this approach meant overlooking the human element behind classical poems – that is, their inherent ambiguity and resistance to definitive interpretations. Her desire to attune to this quality of the poetry leads her to adopt an empathetic approach, striving to align her gaze with that of the poets. However, she also acknowledges the gap between her modern-day Japanese perspective and that of the *Hyakunin isshu* poets, underscoring the impossibility of fully comprehending their emotions and sentiments, let alone "accurately translating" them without interpreting the source text and inevitably infusing it with her own perspective.

Although Saihate does not explicitly reference any translation theories or discourses within translation studies, the points she makes echo current discussions within the discipline. One such point is the idea that every act of translation is necessarily an act of interpretation. Matthew Reynolds elucidates this relationship in his introduction to the edited volume *Prismatic Translation* (2019), by stating that, "no meaning is simply there in the source-text for the translation-text to be the same as or different from: interpretation is already the beginning of translation" (Reynolds 2019, 10). Reynolds highlights that categories like "accuracy to" versus "divergence from" the source text are not universal, but context-dependent, subjective labels grounded in interpretation (ibid.). The central concept underpinning the notion of "prismatic translation" involves perceiving translation as fundamentally multiplicatory, characterised by proliferation rather than reproduction. Unlike the more conventional metaphor of translation as a channel between two languages, which implies the existence of an ideal translation to strive for (a text that transmits the

source text as accurately as possible), viewing translation through the prism metaphor entails "opening up the plural signifying potential of the source text and spreading it into multiple versions" (2–4).

Even though Saihate does not use these precise terms to describe her own strategy for *gendaigo-yaku*, she recognises the limitations of striving for equivalence between the source text and the translated text and is critical of approaches that overlook the ambiguity of poetic expression and language overall, raising questions about whether absolute equivalence should indeed be the ultimate aim of translation. When examining *Shi wo ippuku*, one is prompted to think of Saihate opening up – expanding – the original *waka* in a literal sense, especially when considering the word count of the source text vis-à-vis the translated text, as a citation of the pink neon light installation (Figure 15) in its entirety shows:

Ono no Komachi "Omoitsutsu" (*Kokin wakashū*, number 552)

おもひつつ	*Omoitsutsu*	Did he appear
寝ればや人の	*Nereba ya hito no*	because I fell asleep
見えつらむ	*Mietsuramu*	thinking of him?
夢と知りせば	*Yume to shiriseba*	If only I'd known I was dreaming
覚めざらましを	*Samezaramashi wo*	I'd never have wakened.
(Okumura 1978, 199)		(Ono no Komachi and Izumi Shikibu 2023, 5)

Saihate's modern translation of "Omoitsutsu" in *Shi wo ippuku*

愛している、と、あの人のことを思いながら横たわる私の
体のずっと下に、湖のような恋心が広がり、そこに落ちて
いくように、いつも眠りに落ちていく、だから、やっとき
みに夢で会えたのかもしれません。夢なのだとわかってい
たら、もう目を覚さなかったのに。生きていたら会えない
のでしょうか、目覚めていたら会えないのでしょうか、愛
していても、会えないのです、そうわかっている、知って
いる、私の指先に触れているその人、いつまでも、眠って
いれば、きみは私のことが好き。

Aishite iru, to, ano hito no koto wo omoi nagara yokotawaru watashi no
Karada no zutto shita ni, mizuumi no yō na koigokoro ga hirogari, soko ni ochite
iku yō ni, itsumo nemuri ni ochite iku, dakara, yatto kimi ni
yume de aeta no kamoshiremasen. Yume na no da to wakatte i
tara, mō me wo samasanakatta noni. Ikite itara aenai
no deshō ka, mezamete itara aenai no deshō ka, ai
shite ite mo, aenai no desu, sō wakatte iru, shitte
iru, watashi no yubisaki ni furete iru sono hito, itsumademo, nemutte
ireba, kimi wa watashi no koto ga suki.

> "I love you", I say, and while I'm thinking of that person, I always fall asleep as if I'm falling into a lake of my love, getting wider and wider underneath my body lying down. Maybe this is why I could finally meet you in my dreams. If I had known it was a dream, I would never have woken up again. Alive I can't meet you, awake I can't meet you, isn't that so, even though I love you I can't meet you, I understand that, I know that, that person touching my fingertips, forever, if I am asleep, you will love me. (Author's translation)

Looking at the pink neon light installation, for which Saihate translated Ono no Komachi's "Omoitsutsu", she has significantly expanded the original *waka*'s concise wording. While "Omoitsutsu" consists of 29 characters, the translation contains over 200, making it almost eight times larger than the original. A *waka*'s concentrated form is usually regarded as integral to its aesthetic appeal, subtly conveying emotions and sensations through metaphor and imagery, while generally avoiding overly direct expressions. The poem depicts a scenario where the speaker falls asleep while thinking of their lover and encounters them in a dream. It then ends with the words: "If only I'd known I was dreaming, / I'd never have wakened." In her *gendaigoyaku* of the poem, Saihate does not attempt to imitate this concise style. Instead, she delves into motifs, which juxtapose *yume* (夢, "dream") and *nemuru* (眠る, "sleep") with *sameru* (覚める, "wake up"), and extrapolates on this. For instance, she likens the experience of dreaming about the speaker's beloved to "a lake of my love, getting wider and wider underneath my body lying down." Furthermore, she heightens the sense of longing, typically associated with Ono no Komachi's poetry, by adding a parallel syntax in the second half of the poem: "alive I can't meet you, awake I can't meet you, even though I love you I can't meet you", thus implying that the speaker's sole means of connecting with the other person seems to be through dreams.

Through its presentation as installation art, *Shi wo ippuku* also opens the original *waka* to additional layers of meaning beyond the text itself. Take the example of Ono no Komachi's "Omoitsutsu" – here, the use of neon lights for the characters seems to visualise the gap Saihate describes feeling between her contemporary viewpoint and that of the Heian period poets in her preface of *Hyakunin isshu to iu kanjō*. In the interview I conducted with Sasaki,

the exhibition designer explained that they had deliberately chosen material for the main installation that is strongly associated with the modern, contemporary side of Japan and is therefore as far removed as possible from the tools used to pen the original poems a millennium ago (Sasaki, "Personal Interview", 8 September 2023). As previously mentioned, the original *waka* is displayed behind the translation, printed in white on a grey glass surface, rendered in a Mincho typeface, a style akin to serif typefaces in Western languages that aims to replicate calligraphic brush writing with varying stroke thickness. The use of different reading directions adds to the visualisation of the temporal gap between the original *waka* and Saihate's translated text. The *waka* is presented in a traditional *tategaki* format, which involves vertical reading from right to left. In contrast, the translation adopts a *yokogaki* layout, read horizontally from top to bottom – a format influenced by Indo-European languages and introduced after Japan's modernisation efforts in the Meiji period (1868–1912).

The physical placement of the poems shapes both the reading experience and the perception of the two texts in relation to each other. Regarding the representation of the source language in diachronic intralingual translations, Hilla Karas suggests that, for instance, presenting the translation parallel to the source text facilitates comparisons, enabling easy switching between the two. However, if the translation is printed in a smaller font or relegated to an appendix at the back of a book, it might lessen its perceived significance, thereby diminishing its status (Karas 2024, 25–27). In *Shi wo ippuku*'s neon light installation, translated text and source text are positioned on top of one another, with the translation in front of the original *waka*, creating a grid-like structure due to their different reading directions. The translation, with its bright pink characters, is prominently displayed, while Ono no Komachi's poem appears somewhat concealed behind it. The white characters of the original poem, set against a grey backdrop, are only faintly visible behind Saihate's rendition.

Applying Karas' observation regarding how such placement might suggest a hierarchy between texts – that is, one text's superior status over the other – this arrangement of the two texts could be interpreted as a form of "overwriting" or "rewriting" Ono no Komachi's original, imparting a palimpsestic quality to the installation. While her poem remains present, the emphasis is clearly on the translation. However, considering Saihate's reflections on her translational work, another interpretation of this spatial arrangement seems plausible, once again linking *Shi wo ippuku* to the perceived distance between herself and the poets of the original *waka*. As Saihate mentioned in her afterword, despite the vast differences between their worlds, their poems should not be dismissed as "dead", but rather acknowledged as still breathing and alive:

> Just because these are words from the past or because the circumstances then and now are different it's not true that we can't regard poems as living words, a span of "a thousand years" does not erase the emotions and life contained within it. It merely carries them away into the distance. (Saihate 2018, 299, author's translation)

However, this temporal distance of a thousand years has somewhat obscured their words. To Saihate, they remain present and perceptible though faint, as if existing on the other side of a thousand-year gap. The readers are also able to gain an understanding of the distance between themselves and the original *waka* in *Shi wo ippuku* when they try to decipher the white text on the grey background peeking through. Even with the neon lights, they can still see its words lingering in the distance.

In short, *Shi wo ippuku* builds on well-known *waka* – commonly taught in schools as part of the *kokugo* curriculum – by presenting Saihate's diachronic intralingual translations alongside the originals. Yet rather than treating translation as a quest for equivalence between source and target text, Saihate approaches it as a creative act with the potential to contribute to the artwork's meaning and experience. This act of addition is realised not only through the translations themselves but also through the transformation of the poems from texts typically encountered in a printed format into a three-dimensional exhibition within the food hall of a Kyoto department store. Readers are thus presented not only with the classical

poems and their translations – translations that some might argue introduce elements “not really there” in the source text – but also with a format that departs from the conventional ways in which poetry is usually experienced today.

Having examined the development of *Shi wo ippuku* and its nature as a poetic space that foregrounds translation in its very concept, the following sections set out to embed visitor’s perceptions of *Shi wo ippuku* into the discussion through the fieldwork project conducted at Kyoto Tower Sando in summer 2023.

6.3. Methodology of Survey and Interviews in *Shi wo ippuku*

As already outlined in the introduction to this chapter, the examination of *Shi wo ippuku* also draws on empirical qualitative methods to explore how the exhibition is perceived in relation to the food hall in which it is located. These methods include a visitor survey, interviews, participant observation, and semi-structured interviews with individuals involved in the project’s development, who were able to provide insights into the development process and intentions behind *Shi wo ippuku* over the course of four days.

I chose to adopt a mix of methods, including both interviews with selected visitors and a two-page survey, to give myself greater flexibility depending on the context and circumstances I encountered during my fieldwork. Since *Shi wo ippuku* is located in a food hall, the space becomes particularly busy around lunchtime and again from dinner until closing time at 11 p.m. During these peak hours, visitors are often stressed or distracted, as they are hungry and focused on finding a table and something to eat. In such situations, handing them a short survey sheet that they could complete in their own time while waiting for their food seemed to me more promising than asking them to commit to an interview on the spot. Whenever the food hall was less crowded, I also approached participants for brief, conversational interviews, recording their responses later from memory. This method allows for a degree of responsiveness to participants’ answers, generating discussions that are more

suitable to capture the ways in which they *narrate* their experiences, in line with Reitstätter's previously mentioned rationale for preferring interviews in her study. At the conclusion of the fieldwork period, 21 visitors completed the survey, and twelve consented to take part in interviews, bringing the total number of participants to 33.

Regarding participant selection, I aimed to approach people while they were using the food hall as part of their everyday lives. For this reason, it was not feasible to work with a pre-selected sample group invited to Kyoto Tower Sando. Instead, I approached visitors directly and asked them to either take part in the survey or in an interview. To keep the process as random as possible, I approached one person approximately every fifteen minutes, regardless of their demographic group or any other apparent features. This approach, however, also resulted in a relatively high rejection rate, with around two-thirds of those asked declining to participate. Of the 33 people who agreed, the majority were female (21) and the majority of participants fell into the category of 29 years and under (17). One possible explanation for this pattern may be my own resemblance to this demographic, which could have made participants of the same age and gender more inclined to agree to take part. Alternatively, it might indicate an unconscious bias on my part in deciding whom to approach, despite my efforts to avoid such partiality.

At the same time, it may also reflect usage patterns of the food hall, since I observed that younger visitors are more likely to visit during the day in larger groups of friends or as a dating spot, whereas from around 6 p.m. onwards the space tends to be frequented by groups of co-workers in their 30s to 50s for after-work drinks. However, the later it became, the more difficult it was to conduct surveys and interviews, as alcohol consumption increased. For this reason, after the first day I stopped administering surveys at around 7 p.m., which may have also contributed to the lower representation of older age groups in both the survey and interviews.

6.4. Results and Findings

This section summarises the results and findings of the survey, combining them with insights drawn from my interviews with the Kyoto Tower Sando team. I begin by outlining my observations of the food hall itself – how people navigate the space and its overall atmosphere – to illuminate the setting in which *Shi wo ippuku* is situated. As emphasised throughout this thesis, the surroundings of a poetry installation form an integral part of the reading experience, shaping perception just as much as the words being read. The remaining findings are then organised under the following themes: the sense of unexpectedness and irritation the installation provoked among visitors; the notion of reading the poems automatically and with one's whole body; and, finally, *Shi wo ippuku*'s appeal as a photo opportunity and its portrayal on Instagram.

6.4.1. Kyoto Tower Sando's Food Hall as a Bustling Meeting Spot

During fieldwork, the food hall in which *Shi wo ippuku* is situated emerged as a space where visitors generally operated in two main ways: either moving through the hall – seeking an overview of the available stalls, queuing, making their ways to the WCs – or sitting down to eat, drink, or have a conversation with the people accompanying them. This dual mode of engaging with the space contributed to the overall atmosphere surrounding *Shi wo ippuku*, which is that of a bustling meeting spot, characterised by constant movement and a shifting soundscape, comprising background music played over loudspeakers, conversations and laughter, the sizzling of frying pans, and the beeping of portable buzzers signalling that orders are ready for collection. The intensity of both movement and sound varies significantly depending on visitor numbers, with peak hours occurring between 1 p.m. and 3 p.m., and again after 6 p.m., while weekends generally see higher visitor numbers than weekdays.

The layout of the food hall resembles that of a street food market, with various stalls distributed throughout the space and tables positioned between them, rather than a central dining area surrounded by stalls along the walls. The impression of a market is further reinforced by the relatively dim lighting and the extensive use of dark grey concrete, while many of the shop signs feature neon lights in a variety of colours.

In terms of its visitors, Watanabe and Nishi noted in interview that a significant proportion of the food hall's clientele are tourists, both domestic and international (Watanabe and Nishi, "Personal Interview", 24 July 2023). This observation aligns with my own, as several visitors were carrying suitcases, suggesting that many stop at Kyoto Tower Sando either shortly after arriving at, or just before departing from, the nearby Kyoto Station. At the same time, however, I also engaged with numerous local residents, particularly among younger age groups, indicating that the food hall functions as a popular dining space for both tourists and locals.

6.4.2. Provoking a Sense of Unexpectedness and Irritation

Among the 33 individuals I spoke with, only one was familiar with Saihate beforehand, and none had come to Kyoto Tower Sando specifically for the exhibition. Rather, they were there to eat or drink, meaning that all participants encountered the poetry installations by chance. In both conversations and survey responses, most participants reported feelings of surprise or unexpectedness upon encountering the poems, with reactions ranging from "I didn't recognise them as poems at first, I thought they were part of the decoration" to "It was only when I was taking a photo of [the pink neon light installation], that we realised that it's a poem and we began reading it; that was very unexpected and it felt like suddenly entering a different world."

The nuances of this sense of surprise varied, ranging from a welcome departure from the everyday environment of the food hall to a feeling of strangeness. For instance, two female

high school students who completed the survey expressed a strong interest in poetry, as both were members of a competitive *karuta* club, a Japanese card game based on the classic *Hyakunin isshu* collection of classical Japanese *waka*, in which players must match poems to their closing lines. One student described her experience as bringing her a sense of joy (*ureshisa* 嬉しさ) when she realised that the hidden writings on the floors and walls were poems, particularly as she had studied most of the original *waka* featured alongside Saihate's translations at school. Having discovered one, she then walked around actively searching for more, reading whichever caught her eye in no particular order and discussing them with her friend. Both welcomed the exhibition, expressing the hope that placing poetry in a space frequented by so many young people might spark a broader interest in poetry. A group of three men in their twenties whom I interviewed voiced a similar sentiment. One of them noted that he appreciated how the exhibition made the famous *waka* more accessible, not only by presenting them in the setting of Kyoto Tower Sando but also by providing translations that felt less like literal renderings and more like interpretations of the poems. By contrast, a male participant over 60 years old described his experience in more negative terms, reporting a feeling of discomfort (*iwakan* 異和感): "It felt odd having poetry in the [Kyoto] Tower Sando space where people are eating and drinking … it was a little strange, and didn't make me feel relaxed." Others responded more indifferently, remarking that they had not recognised the writings as poems and had no interest in them. Although these are only a few examples, they illustrate the range of responses to an unexpected encounter with poetry in a food hall. Some participants viewed it positively, expressing the hope that an exhibition like *Shi wo ippuku* might make poetry more accessible by integrating it into everyday spaces. Others reported a sense of discomfort, finding the juxtaposition of poetic text with a setting intended for eating and drinking strange.

Another way in which *Shi wo ippuku* provoked irritation was through the placement of the poems – particularly the pink neon light installation, the centrepiece of the exhibition.

Positioned directly at the underground entrance, it immediately draws attention, with its glow being visible from outside through the building's automatic glass doors (Figure 16). At the same time, its size obstructs the view into the food hall, forcing visitors to circumvent it to the right or left in order to enter. Several individuals approaching from this entrance seemed to hesitate briefly before recognising the familiar setting of the food hall behind the installation. The work thus interrupts the visitor's initial intention, compelling a short pause. For some, this became an opportunity to look more closely, read the words, and take a photograph before proceeding further.

When asked whether this placement was intentional, Watanabe explained that the original plan had been for the installation to be only half its current size, but it proved technically impossible to fabricate characters from fluorescent tubes at such a small scale. When the organisers asked Saihate if she would consider shortening the poem, she instead asked if the piece could be made larger (Watanabe and Nishi, "Personal Interview", 24 July 2023). It therefore seems that blocking the visitors' view of the food hall and compelling them to pause was not part of the original design but rather an unintended consequence of the work's construction process.

Other aspects of the exhibition also disrupted established spatial practices within the food hall. For instance, to read the lines of poetry inscribed on the floors, visitors were required to move backwards – similar to the act of reading in *Shi no kasoku* (see Chapter 4) – without being able to see whether they might bump into another person. In addition, pausing to take a photograph of a poem, particularly at busier times, also risked obstructing the paths of others.

6.4.3. Reading Automatically and With Your Whole Body

When asked whether they experienced any difference between reading *Shi wo ippuku* in space and reading poetry in a two-dimensional format, some visitors remarked that, when

standing in front of an installation such as the pink neon light piece, they perceived it with their whole body rather than solely through their eyes. One of the two high school students from the *karuta* club explained: "Instead of following predetermined lines of text, I had to seek out the words myself to read them – that felt fresh and intriguing."

Others emphasised the role of the surroundings and atmosphere in shaping the experience of reading poetry in a spatial setting. One of the three young men in their 20s described it as follows: "When poetry is exhibited in a space like this, it forms a reading experience during which you perceive the whole room around you as well, because you're not looking down, concentrating on a piece of paper, but you're looking into the space, standing upright." Similarly, a young woman in her 20s explained that when she encounters a poem in a space like this, she also perceives the entire atmosphere surrounding it.

When considering the sensory dimension of reading *Shi wo ippuku* in a food hall, it appears that all senses are stimulated at once: people taste food while perhaps glancing at a nearby poem from their table; they are immersed in the multilayered soundscape of background music, voices, and kitchen noises; and the smell of food permeates the hall. Yet it seems that one sense is activated in direct connection with the pink neon light installation – touch. Many of those entering through the underground entrance reached out to touch the glowing pink characters, usually cautiously at first to see if they were hot. Children, in particular, seemed fascinated by the bright letters and touched them with less hesitation. This often evolved into a reading practice with their parents, as they traced the characters they could reach while parents helped them sound out the kanji they did not yet know.

The interview with the organising team revealed that this tactile interaction was not anticipated and in fact caused practical issues. The neon installation, being the most expensive piece of the exhibition, began to deteriorate as repeated touching caused parts of the fluorescent tubes' outer shells to wear away. In the interview, Watanabe and Nishi therefore jokingly suggested installing a sign to prevent visitors from touching the work, but

based on recent photos shared on Instagram, no such sign seems to have been installed (Watanabe and Nishi, "Personal Interview", 24 July 2023).

Another recurring theme in how people described their reading experiences of *Shi wo ippuku* is that, because some of the writings appear at eye level in relatively large characters, they easily catch the reader's attention, prompting them to begin reading almost automatically. Only later do they realise that what they have read is in fact poetry. This can be linked to the sense of surprise reported by many visitors, who may have initially assumed the words to be some form of guidance text about the space or perhaps an advertisement. According to Watanabe, this was very much part of the concept. He explained that while the streets are saturated with advertisements, opportunities to encounter literary texts while strolling through the city are rare (ibid.). Placing poems in a space where written text is usually limited to promotional messages or practical information – menus, signs, directions – was therefore a deliberate aspect of *Shi wo ippuku*'s design.[94]

6.4.4. *Shi wo ippuku* as a Photo Spot and on Instagram

Photography and social media play a pivotal role in the experience of *Shi wo ippuku*. During fieldwork, I observed that any interaction with the installations – once people had noticed them – would entail the documenting of that moment by taking a photo or a video. As one of the women in her 20s stated: "I was so intrigued by the poem in combination with the whole atmosphere surrounding it, that I wanted to capture that moment in a photo".

Quite a few people would also just enter the food hall, take a photo of the pink neon light installation, and then leave again, maybe having seen its glowing light from outside. A couple that I interviewed said they also stumbled upon the food hall by accident, as they

[94] This design choice recalls *Kimi wa POP* and its strategy of placing text within photographs of locations where one would typically expect to encounter advertisements rather than literary works (see Chapter 4).

were coming down the escalator looking for the exit – and, when they saw the poems, started taking photos before leaving again, without any intention of staying for food or drinks.

While some were more focused on documenting the exhibition, together with their experience within it, by capturing them from various angles, others would use them as backdrops for portrait photos or group shots. I observed groups of friends taking turns photographing each other in front of it, parents taking photos of their children while they were interacting with it, and a group of four men in their 20s striking poses in in front of it. One of the two girls from the *karuta* club used the word *fotosupotto* ("photo spot"), a loan word from English, to describe the installation's aesthetic appeal, as she also observed many people stopping in front of it to take photos.

The primary social media platform for sharing photos – particularly those of exhibitions and artworks – is Instagram. As Lachlan MacDowall and Kylie Budge argue, the app "has risen up through the social media platforms as 'king' of the visual due to [an] interest and emphasis on aesthetics" (MacDowall and Budge 2022, 8), enabling users "to produce creative responses themselves" (7). By curating a carousel of selected images, adding captions, and sometimes even pairing them with music, users take on the role of de facto curators, shaping how an artwork or exhibition is perceived on social media through their choices.

To analyse how Instagram users "narrate" their encounters with *Shi wo ippuku*, examining the hashtag #詩を一服 (*Shi wo ippuku*) on Instagram demonstrates that most images display excerpts from the exhibition – typically, either one installation in its entirety or a close-up detail.[95] Other people are usually excluded from the frame; if a figure is present, it is almost always photographed from behind or in profile, apparently engaged in viewing or reading

[95] The results of the hashtag presented here can be accessed via the following link: https://www.instagram.com/explore/search/keyword/?q=%23 詩を一服 [last access: 1 October 2025]. An Instagram account is required for access.

the work. The busyness of the space is almost entirely absent from these posts; instead, the images tagged under the hashtag convey an impression of quiet contemplation in a calm environment.[96]

However, the avoidance of people may also reflect a conscious aesthetic choice. One user captioned their image: “First thing on a weekday morning, there were hardly any people – perfect!”[97] Another, commenting on their photograph of the pink neon light installation near the underground entrance, wrote: “It’s so close to the entrance doors, with a constant flow of people, that it’s really difficult to take a good photo.”[98] Thus, while the lively atmosphere of the food hall is rarely captured in the images themselves, it is often acknowledged indirectly in the captions. Some captions also hint at the presence of drinks and food, such as a user describing “I was quietly moved, right next to people having an early lunch”[99], while another wrote, “Beer, art, sake – in Kyoto! Saihate Tahi’s modern translations are everywhere!”[100], although there is no single drink, item of food or person visible in both of their photo selections.

There seem to be two opposing impulses at play. On the one hand, the captions often function as brief reviews, acknowledging the exhibition’s situatedness within the bustling setting of a food hall – an everyday space in which poetry is encountered in three-dimensional form, while people eat, drink, chat, and move between tables. On the other hand, when captured in photos, there seems to be a desire to isolate the poems from their hectic

[96] This absence of visible crowds may be partly explained by Japan’s relatively strict privacy rules, which prohibit photographing strangers without consent. Since the accounts using the hashtag are public, users may have avoided including recognisable figures for legal or ethical reasons.

[97] Instagram post by *@erii_nosu* dated 3 June 2023, available at https://www.instagram.com/p/CtAvhp9xjZQ/ [last access: 1 October 2025]. The following Instagram posts referred to in this chapter will be provided in a footnote to maintain the readability of the bibliography. An Instagram account is required for view the posts.

[98] Instagram post by *@jinuco2* dated 18 January 2024, available at https://www.instagram.com/p/C2PWslrvsLm/ [last access: 1 October 2025].

[99] Instagram post by *@p_lisanishihama* dated 10 May 2023, available at https://www.instagram.com/p/CsEVp40v72h/ [last access: 1 October 2025].

[100] Instagram post by *@honeypoisoning* dated 7 May 2023, available at https://www.instagram.com/p/Cr7jw4jPl0z/ [last access: 1 October 2025].

surroundings, making the words clearly visible and readable for the audience when presented in two-dimensional form.

6.5. Discussion

The findings of this analysis and fieldwork project highlight the complex interplay of layers that shape the perception of a poetic space such as *Shi wo ippuku*. What emerges is a picture of a space largely defined through friction and tension: situated between consumerism and resistance to it, between embodied reading and distracting overstimulation, between the classical and the contemporary – a *misumacchi* ("mismatch"), as one Instagram user described the seemingly contradictory elements that characterise *Shi wo ippuku*.[101]

The following section builds on these insights by discussing the findings from the exhibition analysis, close reading, and fieldwork project in greater depth, with a particular focus on the tensions that inform and define the perception of the poetic space *Shi wo ippuku* represents.

6.5.1. Between Consumerism and a "Site of Resistance"

As a commissioned work for a department store, *Shi wo ippuku* was conceived with customers rather than readers in mind. As Watanabe and Nishi revealed in the interview, the underlying idea was to offer visitors a moment of rest, a brief pause from their chores or travel plans, through poetry encountered while dining at the Kyoto Tower Sando food hall (Watanabe and Nishi, "Personal Interview", 24 July 2023). In this sense, *Shi wo ippuku* can be understood conceptually as a secondary feature of the food hall: its primary function remains the consumption of food and drink, while poetry is presented as an optional accompaniment to the dining experience – something that may enrich the visit but can, in theory, just as easily be ignored. This is reflected in the fieldwork data: all survey participants

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[101] Instagram post by @*tatanchat* dated 15 June 2025, available at https://www.instagram.com/p/DK78eIEzrsI/ [last access: 1 October 2025].

were at Kyoto Tower Sando to eat or drink, not specifically to engage with the exhibition. This already marks a key distinction between encounters with *Shi wo ippuku* and those with poetic spaces in galleries or museums, where contemplation of art is typically the primary purpose of the visit.

What cannot be as easily ignored, however, is the way in which the installations intervene in normative spatial practices within the food hall, a space generally associated less with leisurely wandering than with purposeful movement between food stalls, restrooms, tables, and exits. Reading a poem written across the floor may require a visitor to move backwards, potentially colliding with others; stopping to take a photo can interrupt another's path; and the large pink neon installation by the underground entrance quite literally blocks the view into the hall. Frequently, someone pausing to photograph an installation would draw the attention of others, who then noticed the poems themselves – sometimes stopping to read or take a photo in turn. These moments briefly suspend the functional character of the food hall, creating interruptions through irritation.

Returning to what Lefebvre framed "space as lived", which Soja reconceptualised as "Thirdspace" (see Chapters 2.3.1. and 2.3.2.), such moments can be understood as openings in which normative spatial practices and perceptions are unsettled and potentially renegotiated. In this sense, *Shi wo ippuku*'s presence within the food hall introduces a disruptive element into a space otherwise conceived as streamlined for consumption, therefore generating moments that break with established spatial routines in a consumerist setting. Although encouraging visitors to pause and take a relaxing break from their travel itinerary or shopping trip was part of the project's concept, such disruptions were arguably not intended, as the Kyoto Tower Sando team's account of the pink neon light installation illustrates, whose imposing size resulted less from curatorial intent than from production constraints. From this perspective, *Shi wo ippuku* can be understood as a "site of resistance" insofar as it is "thirding", to use Soja's terminology, the binary between Secondspace (space

as conceived, represented by the planning process undertaken by Kyoto Tower Sando) and Firstspace (space as perceived, defined by the normalised spatial practices in the food hall). This resistance does not necessarily arise as an intentional strategy on the part of the curators, Sasaki, or Saihate but rather emerges through the poetic space itself, which exerts an influence on how the other actors involved within this network engage with it.

However, while it is tempting to interpret *Shi wo ippuku* primarily as a disruptive force that unsettles consumerist everyday spatial practices, the exhibition must also be understood in relation to its origins as a commissioned work for a department store, making it deeply entangled with capitalist structures. Although this was not explicitly mentioned in the interview with Watanabe and Nishi, *Shi wo ippuku* also functions as a marketing device. During Kyoto Tower Sando's reopening campaign in spring 2023, the exhibition featured prominently on the company's Instagram account and website, offering striking images that lent themselves well to social media promotion. Beyond this, the installations' appeal as photo spots encouraged visitors to generate and share their own pictures and videos online, as my findings have shown. This dynamic aligns with the widely used social media marketing strategy of user-generated content (UGC), where visitors' posts effectively become a form of advertising, extending the visibility of the space without having additional costs.

Put another way, *Shi wo ippuku* is part of the consumer-oriented framework of Kyoto Tower Sando, yet at the same time it disrupts the very spatial norms that define that environment, where movement is usually streamlined and efficiency prioritised. These contradictions are not unusual for artistic expression within a capitalist system, as discussed in Chapter 4.5.2., but they become especially striking in a "non-place", to reuse Augé's term, like the food hall. Here, the exhibition effectively reconfigures the space: the poetry installations not only lend it a stronger sense of identity, but they also make it appear less

purely functional, thereby challenging the expectations visitors might ordinarily have of such a setting.

6.5.2. Between Automatic Reading and Sensory Overstimulation

As with all examples of installation art, *Shi wo ippuku*'s poetry installations demand the bodily presence of their viewers (Bishop 2005, 6). While not every piece in the exhibition requires the same degree of physical movement to be read, they nevertheless engage visitors' bodies in multiple ways. Some began reading the more prominent poems almost unconsciously, as these were positioned where the eye would naturally fall when it wandered around the food hall. For others, the encounter was mediated through tactile engagement, most notably with the pink neon light installation: the instinctive gesture of reaching out to touch the glowing characters often came before the recognition that they formed a poem – specifically a modern translation of one of Ono no Komachi's *waka*.

In addition, there is what Nishi described as a "treasure hunt" aspect, as some of the poetry installations were more concealed than others. For example, the high school girls from the *karuta* club who took part in the survey turned the act of seeking out all the poems into a kind of game, which they found exciting. This element of "play", that shapes the mode of reading in *Shi wo ippuku*, resonates with Maeda's conception of *asobi* (see Chapter 2.3.3.): reading becomes an embodied practice that engages not only the sense of sight but also other senses and bodily movement, enabling individuals to experience and affirm their own presence outside the utilitarian logics of a department store such as Kyoto Tower Sando.

However, it can also be argued that through its spatial design that addresses the physical presence of the visitors, *Shi wo ippuku* effectively "tricks" people into reading poetry, shifting the practice of reading from an intentional, mainly cognitive act of literary

engagement toward an embodied, multisensory, and "incidental" experience.[102] Within the social reality of the food hall, this experience can generate inspiring chance encounters with poetry – where, as one participant phrased it, "the surroundings become part of the poem".

Yet, my findings have shown that the very same surroundings, with all their sensory stimuli, can also prove distracting and even overwhelming. A woman in her 60s articulated this feeling when asked about the difference between reading the poems as they are presented in *Shi wo ippuku* compared to reading them in a book, saying:

> When I hold a book in my hand, I am conscious of the fact that I am reading, and I decide to only focus on reading. When I am here in this food hall, there are so many things that distract me, like where can I find something to eat, where is the entrance, where can I sit down – that's a bit overwhelming.

This is an element of poetic spaces that I have already discussed in relation to other examples, such as *Shi no mobīru* in Chapter 3.2.2: the friction between the demand for focus and concentration required to read a poem, and the simultaneous stimulation of multiple senses. However, in the museum where *Shi no mobīru* was exhibited, the surrounding conditions were usually relatively stable throughout opening hours, shaped by spatial norms that emphasise quietness and the minimisation of distractions. By contrast, a food hall is far more variable: its atmosphere shifts with how crowded it gets during mealtimes. At lunch and dinner peaks, large crowds bring with them a different set of normative spatial practices – centred less on quiet contemplation and more on efficient movement and conversation.

In critically reflecting on my own behaviour within the space, I also became aware of fluctuations in my ability to engage more fully with the poetry installations across the four days of fieldwork – whether through reading them alongside the original *waka*, interpreting them, or connecting the written words to their surroundings. I found it easier to move between the poetry installations and read them in the morning, when the food hall had just

[102] This rings very familiar to the concept of an "unexpected encounter" with poetry that also inspired Saihate's site-specific poetry installation *Shi no kasoku*, drawing on the idea that when words catch us off guard, they can transcend the awareness that we are reading (see Chapter 4.5.1.).

opened. During peak times, however, I was more conscious of not obstructing other visitors and therefore focused more on other aspects of my fieldwork, such as observing visitor behaviour or recruiting participants.

By placing a poetry exhibition such as *Shi wo ippuku* within the bustling food hall of a department store, a tension arises between the exhibition's demand for an embodied and immediate mode of reading and the distractions produced by the environment, which intensify depending on the time of day. As one participant observed, it can therefore feel irritating or create "a sense of discomfort" that *Shi wo ippuku* is situated in Kyoto Tower Sando. Contrary to Nishi and Watanabe's intention of offering visitors "a dose of poetry" as a moment of pause, the conditions during peak hours are often not perceived as conducive to the reading of poetry. This may also help to explain why most of the Instagram posts using the exhibition's hashtag show the poetry installations clearly visible yet isolated from the bustle of their surroundings – symbolising an attempt to freeze a moment in which distractions were absent, and the text could be read with greater ease.[103]

This tension reveals the shifting nature of a poetic space such as *Shi wo ippuku*, as the experience within it changes significantly depending on the circumstances: the day and time, as well as one's own receptiveness to poetry in that particular moment, since, as previously stated, most visitors are not intentionally seeking out this encounter but rather "incidentally" find themselves reading poetry. It can therefore be seen as both an invitation to engage playfully with the food hall beyond its consumer-driven spatial practices and as yet another source of stimulation within an already crowded environment.

[103] Considering this, it is perhaps unsurprising that my own photographs, presented in the appendix of this thesis, also reflect the same impulse: to capture the poetry installations clearly and unobstructed.

6.5.3. Between Classical Poetry and Modern Translation

As noted earlier in this chapter, Saihate's translations of *waka* from the *Kokin wakashū* and *Shin kokin wakashū* do not aim for the kind of straightforward equivalence typically associated with *gendaigo-yaku* in the Japanese school system. Rather, her approach challenges the very notion of equivalence, expanding the originals and opening them to new layers of interpretation – both through her choice of words and through their spatial presentation.

When considering how readers perceive Saihate's translations in relation to the original *waka*, the theme of accessibility was particularly prominent in both the survey and interviews. Participants who commented on the translations often emphasised how they made the sentiments and emotions of the originals feel more relatable, personal, and direct. One Instagram user, for instance, remarked: "When I studied these poems as a student, I didn't understand them and found them dull, but through Saihate Tahi's expression they felt closer, allowing me to picture the scenes and sense the depth of the words."[104] Similarly, one interviewee from the group of young men mentioned earlier described the translations as more accessible, not only because they moved beyond word-for-word renderings but also because they offered an interpretation of the concise *waka* that introduced a more personal tone. A comparable view was expressed by one of the two young women from the *karuta* club, who hoped that Saihate's translations might encourage more young people to take an interest in poetry. None of the participants expressed concern that something essential had been lost in translation – whether its "spirit", "essence", or "intended way of reading." On the contrary, they regarded Saihate's versions as enriching the originals.

Importantly, Saihate's work did not only translate the *waka* into modern Japanese but also into installation art with a striking visual presence. This highlights a group that has been

[104] Instagram post by *@megumi_matsumoto* dated 23 July 2023, available at https://www.instagram.com/p/CvDAM4npeTe/ [last access: 1 October 2025].

underrepresented in the fieldwork so far: international tourists visiting Kyoto Tower Sando who do not necessarily speak Japanese yet can still engage with the visual aspects of the exhibition. In a conversation with two women in their 20s from the United States, both beginners in Japanese, they expressed curiosity about the unusual placement of the text in the basement and the appeal of its visual presentation, even though they were unable to fully comprehend the poems. From the perspective of Actor-Network Theory (ANT), and drawing on Rita Felski's approach to translation, such encounters can themselves be understood as a form of translation.

As explained in Chapter 2.1., for ANT, an actor is anything "that makes a difference" – whether human, object, or text – while a network can be understood as an "assembly of actors that share information and coordinate action", emphasising connections and mediations (Felski 2016, 748–49). Felski conceives of translation as precisely such an act of mediation, recognising that these processes are inherently unpredictable and ambiguous. Interference is thus a constant presence in every act of translation, yet this "noise" also has the potential to enrich it (752). Seen through this lens, Saihate's poetry installations are always already engaged in an act of translation, even if these acts might not qualify as "translation proper" in Jakobson's terms (Jakobson 2007, 182). For non-native readers, this process may involve identifying recognisable words, filling in gaps with imagination, or appreciating the aesthetic qualities of the script as a visual form.

In this way, Saihate's *Shi wo ippuku* renders classical poetry more accessible not only for a Japanese-speaking audience – who, although familiar with the originals, might, as Saihate herself admitted, associate them with schoolwork rather than inspiring reading – but also for those unable to understand every word, or indeed any of the text. For the latter, the exhibition may be "translated" into their own interpretive framework with more of this "noise", yet still in ways that enrich the original *waka* rather than diminish its meaning.

6.6. Conclusion

This chapter has examined the reading of a poetic space in relation to its spatial qualities, with particular attention to the role of translation. Using *Shi wo ippuku* as a case study, it has also engaged with the perspectives of visitors who move through and inhabit this space in their everyday lives, aiming to investigate, in line with this thesis's overarching objective, what happens when poetry is encountered in spatial form by including qualitative data gathered on-site.

While the translation of classical poetry into modern Japanese, or *gendaigo-yaku*, is often framed as a pursuit of equivalence – even if ideas of how this equivalence might be achieved differ – Saihate makes clear in her essay collection on translation that there will always be a gap between the intentions of a poet writing in a specific historical moment and Saihate's own frame of reference. At the same time, she argues that ambiguity is integral to poetry, resisting the notion of an "ideal" translation that might serve as the single correct answer in a *kokugo* exam. Rather than conceiving of translation as a channel, her reflections align more closely with the image of a prism – a multiplicatory act that refracts meaning into many possibilities. This approach is also evident in *Shi wo ippuku*'s centrepiece, the pink neon light installation featuring Ono no Komachi's *waka* "Omoitsutsu" alongside Saihate's rendering. Here, the translation expands the concise form of the *waka* significantly, adding new rhetorical devices and images, while the installation itself invites readers to consider both texts in tandem through their spatial arrangement. On one level, the translation appears dominant, with the original relegated to the background. Yet the installation simultaneously illustrates the very gap Saihate identifies between her translation and the source text by layering the two texts and contrasting their size, design, and material, making visible both their connection and their non-equivalence.

Situated in the bustling food hall of Kyoto Tower Sando, a space whose atmosphere shifts considerably throughout the day, *Shi wo ippuku* prompted a range of responses, from

positive surprise to irritation, producing an overarching feeling of unexpectedness. Visitors' behaviour reflected this tension: at times the installations blocked sightlines or reading them caused temporary obstructions in the pathways of others. Another dimension of the experience was the movement it required. Visitors were encouraged to traverse the food hall to "find" all the poems, engaging their whole bodies in the process and becoming more aware of their surroundings. Because the poems were displayed at eye level in locations usually associated with functional signage such as menus or directions, many participants reported starting to read them almost instinctively, only realising afterwards that what they had encountered was poetry. The findings also show that photography and Instagram played a pivotal role in how *Shi wo ippuku* was perceived and engaged with. The installations served as compelling visual objects or backdrops for portrait or group shots, while curated posts on Instagram tended to highlight the poetry exhibition in isolation, stripped of its crowded surroundings.

Taken together, these results underscore the complexity of an entity such as *Shi wo ippuku*, which operates on many levels simultaneously and often generates contradictions and frictions. On the one hand, it forms part of the consumer-oriented framework of Kyoto Tower Sando, conceived as an "extra" addition to the food hall – something that may enrich a visit but is not an integral part of its functionality. It also contributed to the reopening's marketing strategy, encouraging visitors to photograph and share the installations online, thereby promoting the food hall. Yet, on the other hand, the poetic space can also be read as resisting these very spatial norms that define consumerist "non-places". By literally disrupting the streamlined movement of visitors, it aligns with Soja's notion of a "Thirdspace", capable of unsettling normalised spatial practices and provoking moments of awareness that potentially renegotiate consumer-driven environments.

Another apparent contradiction lies in the demand for bodily presence due to the fact that *Shi wo ippuku* consists of several poetry installations that address the body in its physicality

with all senses activated, yet at the same time it requires reading – a mode of perception usually associated with a need for quietness and minimal distraction. While this emphasis on embodiment in engaging with the poetry exhibition was perceived by some as an exciting "treasure hunt", it also led others to feel overwhelmed and ultimately to withdraw from further reading the installations. The reactions also depend on the circumstances in which people find themselves within a dynamic environment such as a food hall. This also highlights the ephemeral nature of a poetic space like *Shi wo ippuku* itself, which is entangled with its surroundings and therefore also always changing, never leading to the same encounter twice.

Finally, *Shi wo ippuku* can also be seen as mediating between the apparent opposites of classical *waka* and modern poetry through Saihate's *gendaigo-yaku*. Visitors described these translations as more accessible, noting that they brought the *waka* "closer" to them. From an Actor-Network Theory (ANT) perspective, this process extends even to non-Japanese speakers, for whom engaging with the visual qualities of the poems can itself be understood as an act of translation.

Reflecting on the research process, *Shi wo ippuku* appeared as a promising case study, as it is one of the few permanent poetry exhibitions I encountered during my research, allowing sufficient time to design a fieldwork project. Other examples typically ran only for a few weeks or took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, making interviews, a survey or even site visits difficult. At the same time, conducting fieldwork in a site like Kyoto Tower Sando's food hall presented challenges, particularly when approaching visitors directly. Most were focused on eating, drinking or travelling, rather than discussing poetry, and the sensory stimuli – especially the soundscape during peak times – were not only distracting for reading poetry but also for conversing about it. For a future project, I would adopt a mixed approach when it comes to sampling, combining direct engagement with visitors in their everyday settings with an invited group of participants to counterbalance the high

rejection rate. I would also prioritise interviews over surveys, as many survey responses were very brief, while interviews conveyed more vividly how participants narrated and perceived the space – through tone of voice, facial expression and the possibility of follow-up questions. One potential method for future research is Luise Reitstätter and Martina Fineder's AIR (*Ausstellungsinterviewrundgang*, "exhibition interview tour"), which combines focused interviews with a "thinking aloud" approach, inviting participants to go on a walk through the exhibition with the interviewer, while engaging with selected objects and verbalising their reactions in the moment (Reitstätter and Fineder 2021). One advantage of this approach is that walking through the exhibition together allows interviews to include elements of participant observation. This means the analysis can draw not only on what participants say, but also on how they react and behave. Another lies in its immediacy, as responses are given in the very moment of engagement rather than retrospectively, potentially prompting more nuanced reflections.

Overall, however, the fieldwork proved fruitful. It demonstrated that there is indeed a basis for the claims about what "happens" when poetry is read in spatial configurations made throughout this thesis: it foregrounds poetry as an open process, always in flux; it highlights the embodied nature of reading; it emphasises the active role of readers, whose engagement completes the poetic space; and it makes visible the entanglement between art and capitalist structures, while also showing how such spaces can negotiate with – and potentially resist – this very status quo by functioning as "Thirdspaces" or "sites of resistance". In this way, the fieldwork provides a grounded perspective that complements the theoretical discussions of this thesis, anchoring them in the lived realities of those who encountered the exhibition.

7. Conclusion

This thesis set out to explore the act of reading physical and virtual poetic spaces in contemporary Japanese experimental poetry by examining the intersection of three key concepts: reading, poetry, and space. Drawing on an interdisciplinary approach that integrates literary, art, and social studies, the thesis analysed poetic spaces situated in diverse spatial contexts. To offer a final reflection on the question that started this inquiry, what happens when poetry is encountered not on a flat, portable object, but within a physical or virtual spatial configuration, the discussion in this concluding chapter is divided into three sections: first, the collaborative nature of poetic spaces and the role of readers within them; second, how such spaces reconfigure our understanding of poetry as an open process rather than a self-contained work; and third, how poetic spaces can influence our perception of the spaces surrounding us. The chapter concludes with a consideration of future directions for this line of research.

Poetic Spaces as a Collaborative Effort

The examples analysed in this thesis highlight the profoundly interdisciplinary nature of poetic spaces and their strong intersections with other media and disciplines. Situated at the borders of literature, visual art, music, and digital design, their creation often involved multiple contributors – designers such as Sasaki Shun, who collaborated on many of Saihate Tahi's installations; composers like Bandoh Yuta, whose sound design shaped Fuzuki Yumi's *Koe no genba*; and artistic partnerships such as Aoyagi Natsumi and Sato Tomoko's *Ōfukurōdoku* or Fuse Rintarō and Mizusawa Nao's *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu*.

This collaborative dimension, however, also includes the readers. While the notion that a text comes to life only through reading – granting the reader an "active" role – has long been discussed in literary theory, from Barthes's "Death of the Author" to Eco's "open text" (see Chapter 3.2.1. and 3.3.1.), the poetic spaces examined here make this role more tangible and

accentuated. While some examples, such as Saihate's *Shi no mobīru*, include direct interactive elements that let readers assemble their own poems, all share an assumption of the reader's physical and sensory presence – whether through movement and walking, heightened awareness of senses beyond sight, or digital gestures like clicking hearts, commenting, and sharing to make one's presence visible to others in virtual poetic spaces. Through this engagement poetic spaces truly come into being – they exist not only through artistic creation but through the active participation of readers, whose presence completes and continually redefines them.

Poetic Spaces as an Open Process

The notion of an artwork as an open process has accompanied experimental art since the avant-garde (cf. Chapter 3.3.2.). Poetic spaces can be regarded as open because of the previously discussed active involvement of the readers in their creation, making each encounter subtly different from the last and challenging the idea of a self-contained, fixed work. In other words, the activated mode of reading that poetic spaces invite is precisely what turns them into entities that resemble an open process rather than a completed artwork.

As the analyses in this thesis have shown, however, their openness is also closely tied to space and temporality – most notably, to their inherent ephemerality. This becomes especially palpable in site-specific poetry installations and exhibitions like *Shi no kasoku* and *Shi wo ippuku*, where the atmosphere and conditions of a space are constantly shifting. These changes continually generate new potential ways of how poems, space and the readers can intersect, as well as how these poetic spaces can be read and interpreted.

A sense of ephemerality also extends to virtual poetic spaces such as *Ōfukurōdoku* and *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu*. Both works create experiences that occupy an ambivalent temporal space between present and past – whether through the synchronicity of a livestream, which by nature cannot be relived once concluded (*Ōfukurōdoku*), or through the

use of Google Street View, which depicts a simulation of physical space already belonging to the past the moment the images were captured (*Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu*).

While arguably this ephemeral quality may appear less pronounced in poetic spaces situated within galleries or museums – where efforts are often made to maintaining relatively stable conditions – such works nevertheless retain a shifting and unfixed character. This manifests, on the one hand, in a direct and tangible way: in *Shi no mobīru*, for instance, the mobiles themselves remain in constant motion, continually producing new perspectives of the installation. On the other hand, it appears in a more abstract sense, as *Shi no mobīru* as well as *Koe no genba* point to the inherent instability of language itself and the perpetual gap between signifier and signified – a gap that is always in flux and never fully fixed.

Poetic Spaces as Sites of Resistance

The idea that poetic spaces can function as a "site of resistance" has been a recurring theme throughout this thesis. This discussion draws on spatial theory, especially Lefebvre's concept of "lived space", as well as Soja's idea of "Thirdspace". In these Neo-Marxist frameworks, resistance arises from spatial practices that challenge or reimagine the power relations embedded in capitalist systems, understanding art as separate from these structures and the "other" to economic and social power. However, the poetic spaces examined here complicate this division, as they also double-function as promotional tools – sometimes more explicitly when they were commissioned by a company or city council, other times in more subtle ways, as they also help to sustain the artists' own visibility and livelihood.[105]

When we speak of poetic spaces as "sites of resistance", it is therefore important to acknowledge the contradictions of artistic expression within a capitalist system. The form of resistance shown in these works is less a direct confrontation with capitalism than a possible

[105] Although Fuse and Mizusawa's *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu* explicitly seeks to operate outside these commercial logics, as evident in Fuse's reflections on the project (see Chapter 5.4.1), these dynamics nonetheless remain present.

shift in perspective via aesthetic experience. As Marcuse argues, art's political potential resides in its capacity to interrupt everyday perception and open up a space for imagination and reflection (Marcuse 1979). In this sense, poetic spaces can be understood as a disruption of spatial orderings we take for granted by transforming a familiar experience, such as reading a poem in a book, magazine or e-reader, into an unexpected encounter within space. Their resistance manifests in this opening up of our surroundings – whether in the city, a department store, a gallery, a virtual environment like Google Street View or livestreams – to new readings and imaginaries that momentarily suspend the functionality of those spaces.

Returning to Saihate Tahi's tweet cited at the beginning of this thesis – "I think that when we suddenly see a poem in the city or in an everyday scene, the words we encounter unexpectedly flow more vividly into the reader's mind" (Saihate 2020b) – the analyses presented here suggest that such encounters indeed carry the potential to heighten the vividness and resonance of poetry. Put differently, poetic spaces invite shifting, playful synergies between poem, space and readers, generating meanings that exceed the sum of their parts. At the same time, as the fieldwork in Chapter 6 has shown, such experiences are not universal. Encountering poetry in this manner may also overwhelm certain individuals, leaving them unprepared to engage with it in that particular moment. The term "potential" is therefore significant here: poetic spaces can generate new ways of perceiving both space and poetry, but this potential is realised only if the reader is perceptive to this experience.

Lastly, while not all poetic spaces discussed here have a direct link to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is also within this context that a form of resistance can be located. As the analyses have shown, most of the examples were affected by the pandemic in one way or another. *Koe no genba* addressed it thematically and had to comply with disease prevention protocols that shaped its spatial design. *Shi no kasoku* took on the character of a guerrilla-style street art project when it appeared unexpectedly after the postponement of the Saitama Triennale. Both *Ōfukurōdoku* and *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu* were conceived and

realised during the early phase of the pandemic, when states of emergency most profoundly altered our sense of spatiality and when public discourse viewed the cultural and art sector as nonessential. Whether through creating sites of collective memory, fostering encounters (*deai*), or articulating the ambivalent feelings of isolation and longing for connection experienced during the pandemic, these poetic spaces demonstrate a particular resilience, navigating through and beyond the pandemic against the pressures placed on art and culture during that time.

Potential for Future Research

These findings have shown the creative interpretive potential that emerges when poetry is transposed beyond its conventional publishing forms. Poetic spaces bring to life ideas long discussed in literary theory – such as the activation of multiple senses in reading (Silverman), the notion of texts as open processes (Derrida and Eco), and the reader's creative role in meaning-making (Barthes). They therefore offer promising experimental frameworks where such questions can be explored more concretely.

This project has also identified promising poets outside Japan who work across disciplines to create entities akin to poetic spaces. French-Norwegian poet Caroline Bergvall (b. 1962), for example, developed an exhibition based on her poem *Drift* (2014), incorporating prints, sound, and collages to transform the work into a multi-sensory environment. Similarly, German poet and media artist Franziska Ostermann (b. 1992) creates poetic works that strongly resemble poetic spaces like the ones presented in this thesis, such as her *Spacial Poems* (2023), a series of poetic sculptures in a virtual environment. A comparative analysis of poetic spaces across cultural and linguistic contexts could enhance our comprehension of how readers engage with poetry as a spatial and embodied practice, thereby enriching our understanding of the interplay between reading, poetry, and space.

The approach taken in this thesis – combining theories from literary, art, and social studies with close readings attentive to the aesthetic and affective experience of being within a poetic space – was complemented by an empirical study of reader reception in Chapter 6. While it was not possible to conduct fieldwork on more than one example due to Japan's entry ban for tourism during the COVID-19 pandemic (lifted only in October 2022), doing so could have offered deeper insight into how audiences engage with poetic spaces in practice. This limitation, however, points toward fertile ground for future research that integrates literary and art analysis with social research methods such as surveys, participant observation, and interviews – helping to bridge the gap between theoretical perspectives on reading and the lived experiences of readers themselves.

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Appendix A: Figures

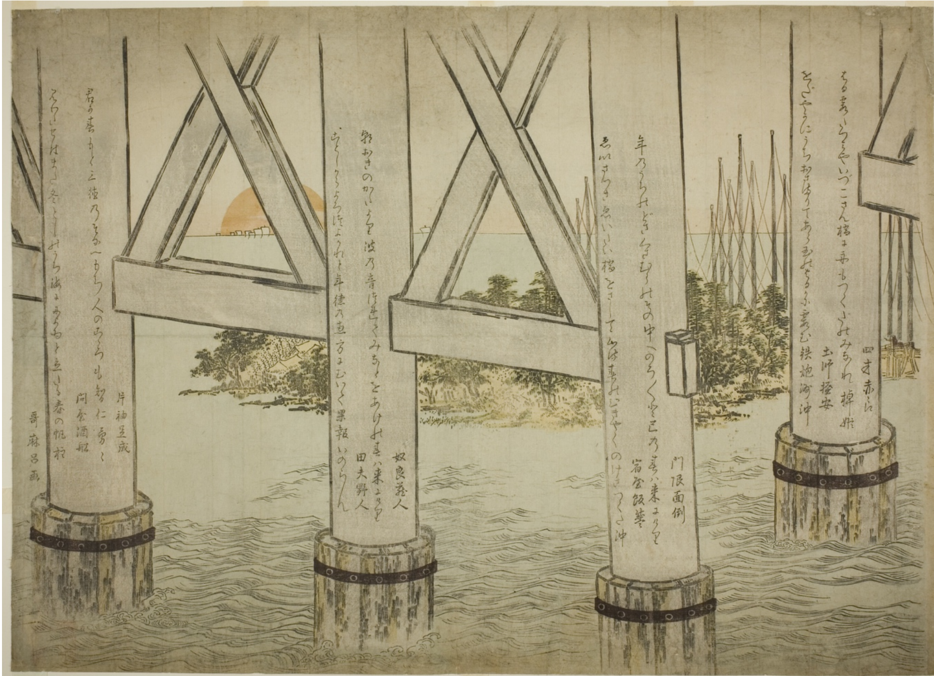

Figure 1: Kitagawa, Utamaro. 1785. *Pillars of Eitai Bridge*. Colour woodblock print. 41.2 x 57.4 cm. Chicago: Art Institute Chicago. https://www.artic.edu/artworks/21569/pillars-of-eitai-bridge [last access: 4 June 2025].

Figure 2: Saihate Tahi. 2019–2025. *Shi no mobīru*. Ink jet prints, paper, steel, brass, nylon string. Maebashi: Maebashi Literature Museum. Photograph taken by the author.

Figure 3: Yokohama Museum of Art. 2019. Promotional material for *Tahi Saihate: Exhibiting Poetry*. In: Harorudo. 2019. *Saihate Tahi shi no tenji Yokohama bijutsukan*. https://blog.goo.ne.jp/harold1234/e/e774f5ab26e44bcf1d0bd4bce485ce90 [last access: 9 September 2025].

Figure 4: Bandoh Yuta and Fuzuki Yumi. 2021–2022. *OPEN SITE 6 “Koe no genba”*. Music stands, loudspeakers, paper, mixed media. Tokyo: Tokyo Arts and Space Hongo. Photograph taken by Takahashi Kenji, courtesy of Tokyo Arts and Space.

Figure 5: Saihate Tahi. 2020. *Shi no kasoku*. Mixed media. Site-specific installation in Ōmiya, Saitama. Photograph taken by Sasaki Shun.

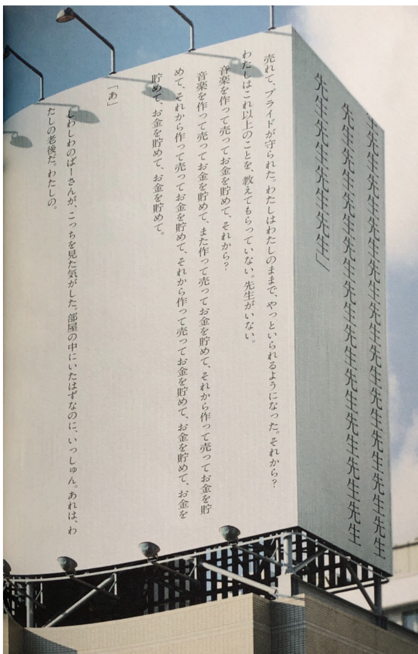

Figure 6: Saihate Tahi. 2021. *Kimi wa POP*. In *Paparararereruru*. Tokyo: Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 103–104.

Figure 7: m-louis. 2015. |*tomare*|*tomare*. Digital Photograph. Licensed under CC BY-SA 2.0. https://flickr.com/photos/m-louis/23400982063 [last access: 4 March 2024].

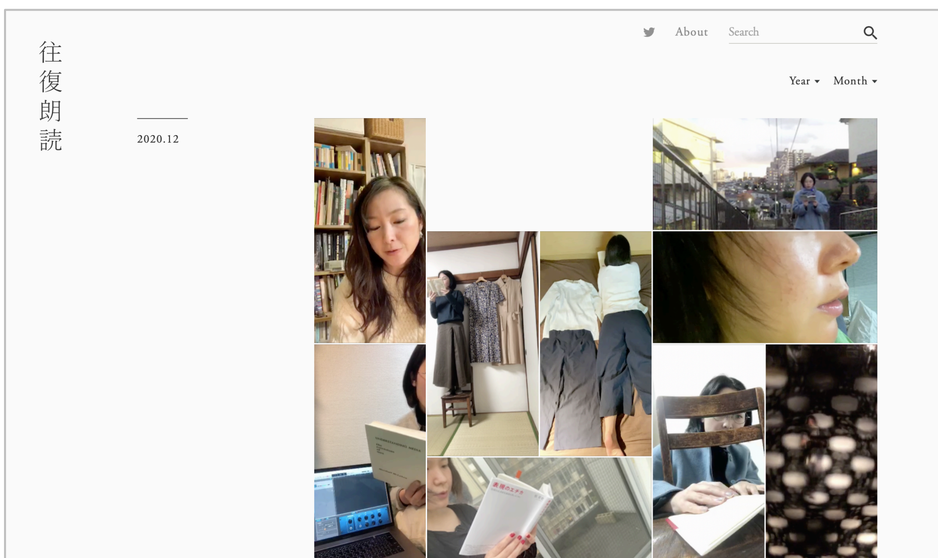

Figure 8: Aoyagi Natsumi and Sato Tomoko. 2020–2021. *Ōfukurōdoku*. Website, video. https://twoprivaterooms.com [last access: 2 September 2025]. Screenshot taken by the author.

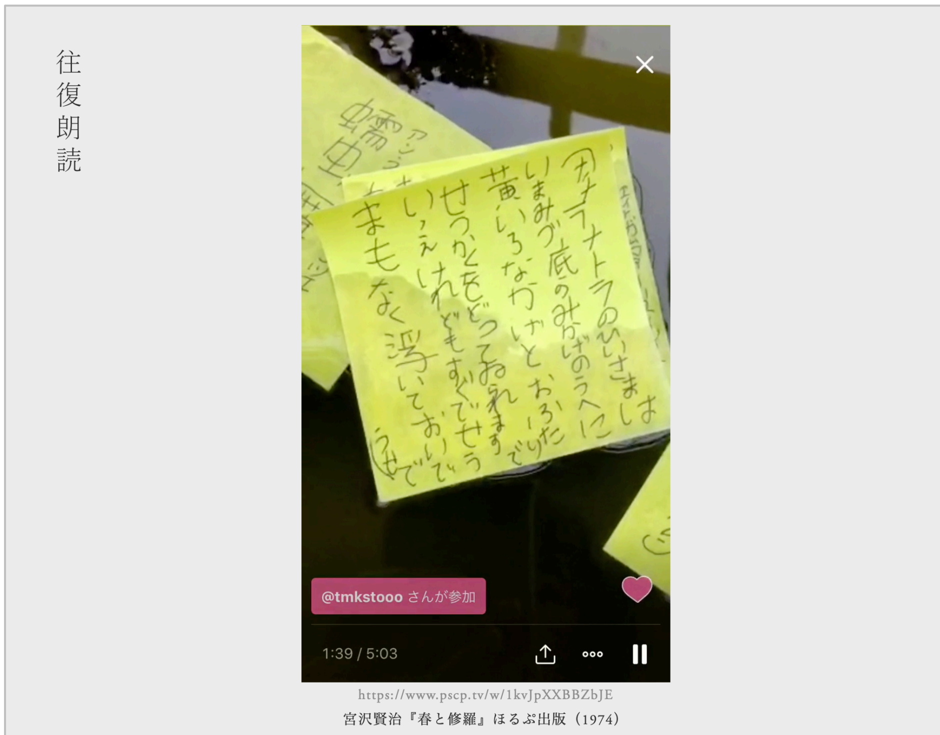

Figure 9: Aoyagi Natsumi. 2020. *Ōfukurōdoku #011. Miyazawa Kenji "Annalida Tänzerin"*. Website, video. https://twoprivaterooms.com/20200430-2/ [last access: 2 September 2025]. Screenshot taken by the author.

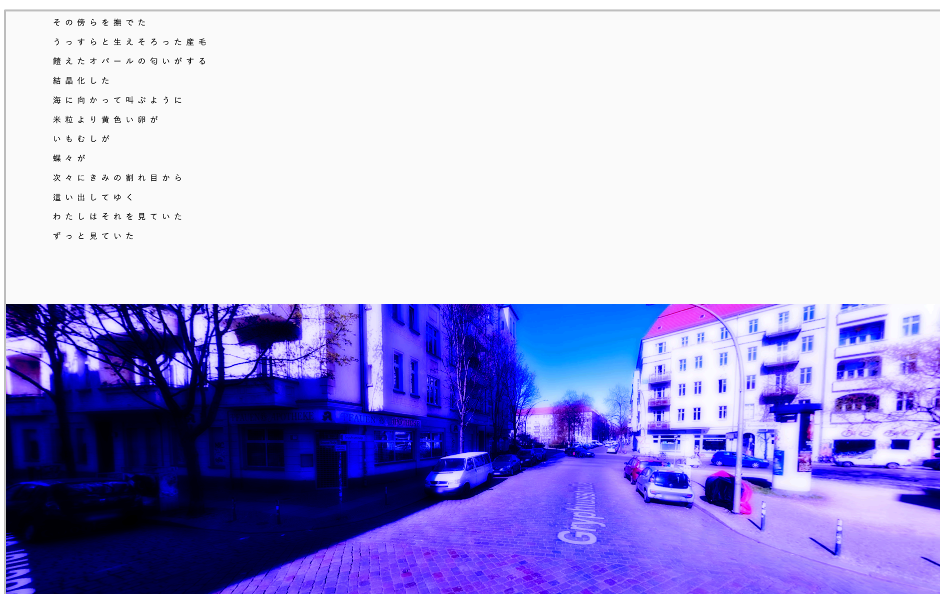

Figure 10: Fuse Rintarō and Mizusawa Nao. 2020. *Kakuri-shiki nōkōsesshoku-shitsu*. Website. https://rintarofuse.com/covid19.html [last access: 9 February 2025] Screenshot taken by the author.

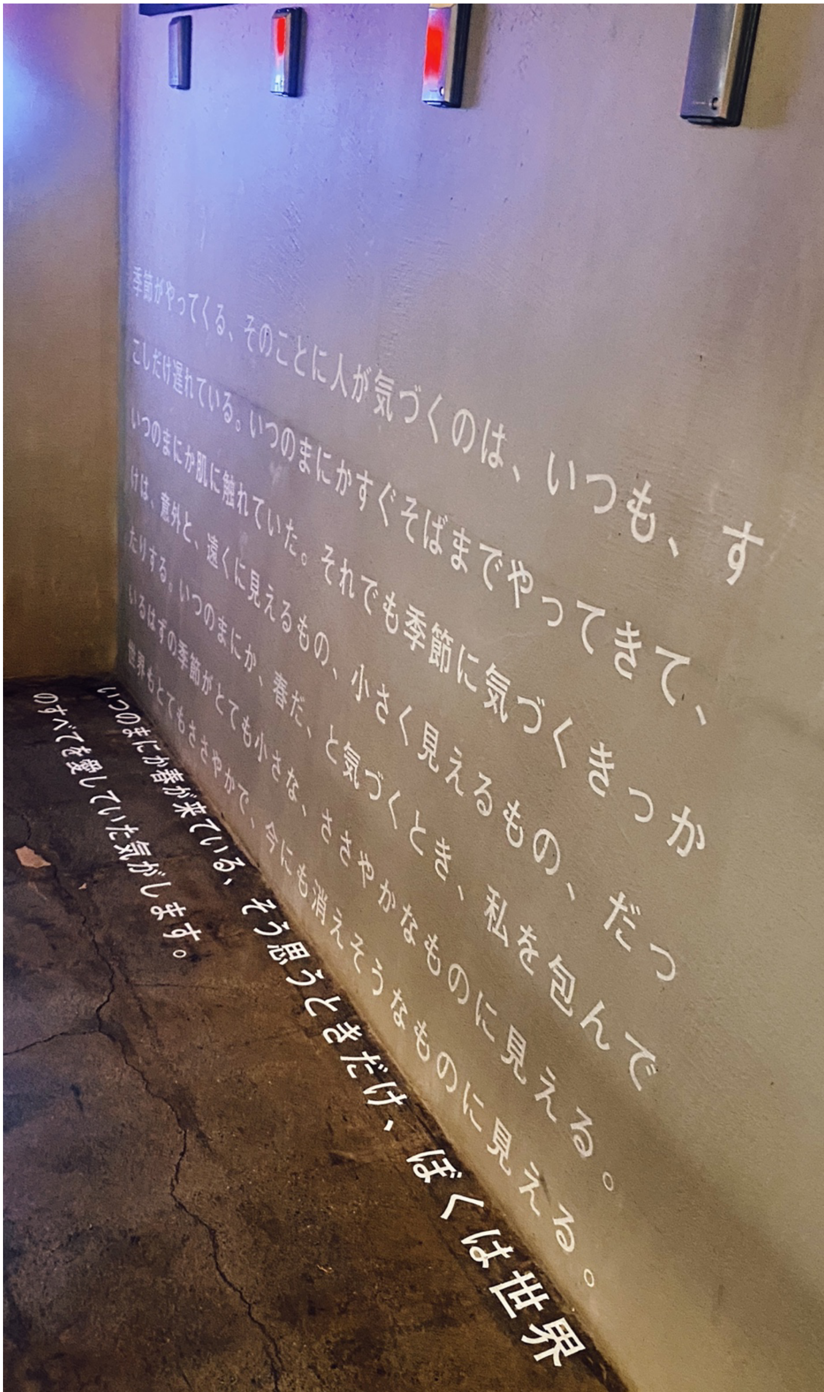

Figure 11: Saihate Tahi. 2023. Detail of *Shi wo ippuku*. Mixed media. Kyoto: Kyoto Tower Sando. Photograph taken by the author.

Figure 12: Saihate Tahi. 2023. Detail of *Shi wo ippuku*. Mixed media. Kyoto: Kyoto Tower Sando. Photograph taken by the author.

Figure 13: Saihate Tahi. 2023. Detail of *Shi wo ippuku*. Mixed media. Kyoto: Kyoto Tower Sando. Photograph taken by the author.

Figure 14: Saihate Tahi. 2023. Detail of *Shi wo ippuku*. Mixed media. Kyoto: Kyoto Tower Sando. Photograph taken by the author.

Figure 15: Saihate Tahi. 2023. Detail of *Shi wo ippuku*. Mixed media. Kyoto: Kyoto Tower Sando. Photograph taken by the author.

Figure 16: Saihate Tahi. 2023. Detail of *Shi wo ippuku*. Mixed media. Kyoto: Kyoto Tower Sando. Photograph taken by the author.

Appendix B: *Shi wo ippuku* Reader Reception Survey

「詩を一服」展・アンケート

ご職業：

年齢：　〇 〜19 歳　〇 20-29 歳　〇 30-39 歳　〇 40-49 歳　〇 50-59 歳　〇 60 歳〜

年間でご覧になる展覧会の数（おおよその推定）：

性別：　〇女性　〇男性　〇答えたくない

1. 文学や詩に興味はありますか？

a. はい、とても興味があります。

b. はい、少し興味があります。

c. いいえ、あまり興味がありません。

d. いいえ、全く興味がありません。

2. 最果タヒという詩人をご存知ですか？

a. はい

b. いいえ

3. 京都タワーサンドで開催されている最果タヒの「詩を一服」という展示について聞いたことはありますか？そして、この空間で発表された最果タヒの詩に気づきましたか？

4. 「詩を一服」の詩を読みましたか？もしそうであれば、どれくらいの数の詩を読みましたか？

a. 読んでいません。

b. 一つか二つを読みました。

c. 半分くらいを読みました。

d. ほとんどを読みました

e. 全ての詩を読みました

5. 「詩を一服」について、簡単に全体的な感想を教えてください。最初の印象はいかがでしたか？

-----------ここから先の質問は、少なくとも一つの詩を読んだ方に対してです---------

6. 最果タヒの詩は壁や床、天井に書いてあります。その詩と京都タワーサンドの空間の関係について考えれば、どのように感じましたか？例えば、詩の理解に影響を与えましたか？そして、空間に関する印象が詩を通じて変わってきましたか？

7. 個人的に展覧会で印象に残った作品や瞬間はありましたか？それらを印象づけた要素は何でしたか？

8. 京都タワーサンドで詩を読む体験を、本や雑誌で詩を読む体験と比べると、どのように感じられましたか？どのような点が異なりましたか？

9. 詩を読むために、どのように歩き回りましたか？特定の順序やアプローチを持ちましたか？

10. 展覧会は他の来場者との会話を生み出しましたか？そのような交流について詳しく教えていただけますか？

11. 他に伝えたいことがありましたら、ここにお書きください。

ご協力いただき、誠にありがとうございました。

English Translation:

“A Dose of Poetry” Exhibition – Questionnaire

Occupation:

Age: ○ Under 19 ○ 20–29 ○ 30–39 ○ 40–49 ○ 50–59 ○ 60+

Approximate number of exhibitions you attend per year:

Gender: ○ Female ○ Male ○ Prefer not to say

1. Are you interested in literature and poetry?

a. Yes, very interested
b. Yes, somewhat interested
c. Not really interested
d. Not at all interested

2. Have you heard of the poet Tahi Saihate?

a. Yes
b. No

3. Before visiting, had you heard about the exhibition “A Pause for Poetry” by Tahi Saihate at Kyoto Tower Sando? And while here, did you notice the poems displayed in this space?

4. Did you read any of the poems in “A Pause for Poetry”? If so, how many?

a. I didn’t read any
b. One or two
c. About half
d. Most of them
e. All of them

5. Please share your overall impression of “A Pause for Poetry”. What was your first impression?

----------- Please continue if you read at least one poem -----------

6. Tahi Saihate’s poems are written on the walls, floor, and ceiling. How did you feel about the relationship between the poems and the space of Kyoto Tower Sando? For example, did the setting influence your understanding of the poems? Did your perception of the space change through reading them?

7. Were there particular works or moments in the exhibition that left a strong impression on you? What made them memorable?

8. How did the experience of reading poetry in Kyoto Tower Sando compare with reading poetry in a book or magazine? In what ways did it feel different?

9. How did you move through the exhibition in order to read the poems? Did you follow a particular route or approach?

10. Did the exhibition spark any conversations with other visitors? If so, could you describe those interactions?

11. Please use this space for any additional comments you would like to share.

Thank you very much for your cooperation.