UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
RIVERSIDE

Mieko Shiomi: A Bodily Exploration of Selected Objects

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Art History

by

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June 2022

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Acknowledgments

This project was made possible by the support of a number of wonderful people. Many thanks to my smart, kind, inspiring, and ever-patient advisor, Liz Kotz. Thank you to Susan Laxton and Jason Weems for their willingness to serve on my committee and their invaluable comments on my thesis. I am grateful to the entire Department of Art History at UC Riverside for being a warm, welcoming place.

I would like to thank Mieko Shiomi for making art that I find endlessly fascinating and for graciously giving me permission to use images of her work.

Thank you to my magnificent, understanding, cheerleading family, especially my husband Stan. Happy 30th anniversary, darling! And, not least, thanks to my God, who has high expectations for His daughters and helps them fulfill them.

ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

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by

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University of California, Riverside, June 2022
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Mieko Shiomi's creative practice extended beyond the conceptual bounds of her training and the geographic limits of her birthplace, reflecting her willingness to think outside the confines of convention. Born in Japan in 1938 and educated in music, she translated her ideas about space and time, which had their origin in her musical training, into artworks that employ the human body. Her first forays beyond music were her action poems, which she created independently around the same time other artists were writing event scores along the same lines. The first visual object she created was her *Endless Box* (1963-), a set of thirty-four paper boxes nested inside each other, which turns the idea of diminishing sound into diminishing space into a visual of diminishing boxes. Shiomi's work as an experimental composer and her *Endless Box* put her in contact with Fluxus, the international artist collective based in New York. Her involvement with Fluxus epitomized Japanese and American cross-cultural exchange during the explosion of performance art in the sixties. During her year in New York and after she returned to Japan, she orchestrated her *Spatial Poem* (1965-1975), an extraordinary convergence of conceptual and material art. Shiomi's created her art to be more than observed; she

intended it to be enacted or interacted with. Performing or handling her work is an apt way of gaining knowledge about it as its corporeal aspects are central. Bodily knowledge of Shiomi's artworks significantly expands understanding. This thesis will look at how selected artworks express Shiomi's ideas, more closely examine them beyond their guise as Fluxus output, and, by performing, remaking and interacting with selected works, will present the greater understanding gained through these physical explorations.

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Introduction

Mieko (Chieko)[1] Shiomi's[2] art is an exercise in making the immaterial into the material. Over the decades, Shiomi has talked openly and written freely about her history, her involvement with Group Ongaku ("the Music group"), the experimental music group she co-founded, and with Fluxus, the loosely organized international network of artists.[3] Much of what has been written about her follows her narrative closely and focuses on the ideas she explored, especially space and time.[4] This emphasis is justified since Shiomi

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[1] Shiomi changed her given name from Chieko to Mieko in the late 1960s as a result of a divination, which is why her earlier works, including those from her time in New York, are signed as Chieko Shiomi. Midori Yoshimoto, *Into Performance: Japanese Women Artists in New York* (New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 226n3.

[2] The convention in Japanese is to write the family name first and the given name second. However, as many other Japanese did in the 1960's, when Shiomi signed her works in English she followed the English practice of writing her given name first and family name second. She signed her name as "Mieko Shiomi" as recently as 2020 on my copy of *Spatial Poem* invitations. This thesis follows the custom used by Shiomi.

[3] *Ongaku* translates to "music." William Marotti argues that the group's name is more correctly translated as "the Music group" and that doing so cleanses the discussion of the cultural limitation often ascribed to the group by non-Japanese writers. While his point is a good one, I will retain the more recognizable translation but urge the reader to remember that group *Ongaku* was more than a Japanese group influenced by the West and by John Cage in particular. I encourage the reader to see Group Ongaku, as Marotti put it, as "fellow travelers" with John Cage, likely influencing him as much as they might have been influenced. William Marotti, "Challenge to Music: The Group Music's Politics," in *Tomorrow Is the Question*, ed. Benjamin Piekut (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2014), 109, 129.

[4] Yoshimoto's book chapter is an excellent overview of Shiomi's life and work. Midori Yoshimoto, *Into Performance*, 139-167. Sally Kawamura wrote a dissertation in 2009 mapping the connection between foundational work by the Music group and later participation in Fluxus by some of its members, including Shiomi. Sally Kawamura, "Object into Action: Group Ongaku and Fluxus" (PhD, University of Glasgow, 2009), https://eleanor.lib.gla.ac.uk/record=b2694779. Kawamura writes elegantly and expansively about Shiomi's scores, including a description on page 319 of how one of those scores engages with space and time on a micro level. Sally Kawamura, "Appreciating the Incidental: Mieko Shiomi's 'Events,'" *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory* 19, no. 3 (November 1, 2009): 311–36, https://doi.org/10.1080/07407700903399474. Jessica Santone wrote a dissertation exploring selected social acts of Fluxus and how they were documented, including Shiomi's *Spatial Poem*. She has an interesting take on the time and space theme in Shiomi's work. Santone suggests,

did ingenious things with these concepts, making art that was an enlightening reflection on both time and space. Whether it was her spatial or temporal innovations or her work that fostered relationships with other people and the earth we live on, she has spent her life making art that translates colossal concepts into superficially simple actions and surprisingly unassuming objects. It is Shiomi's objects, as much as the ideas that fueled them, that this thesis explores.

This is not to be an overview of Shiomi's whole oeuvre, but rather a close-looking at a few of her works. It is two-pronged, as is fitting for objects that are both material and conceptual. Shiomi's interest in experimental music, the circumstances of her life, and her interest in the spatial and temporal ideas that led her to create the chosen works will be introduced, as they are part of what makes the objects meaningful, but this will not be the focus. Rather, I will use physical interaction with the works as a framework for going beyond the conceptual and engaging more intimately with the objects of Shiomi's art. While there is excellent scholarship on Shiomi in English, it does not include detailed descriptions of bodily encounters with her works.[5] Multi-sensorial, corporeal experience expands knowledge of artworks beyond what can be gained only by looking. This thesis

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referring to Jean-Luc Nancy's ideas, that it is the interruptions in time that build community, rather than a continuity and actual simultaneity. Jessica Lynne Santone, "Circulating the event: the social life of performance documentation 1965-1975" (PhD, Montreal, McGill University, 2010), https://escholarship.mcgill.ca/concern/theses/rv042t477. For another example of writings that expand on the space/time theme in Shiomi's work, see Fujii Aki and Yamashiro Daisuke, "To the People of the 30th Century: The Lives of Shiomi Mieko's 'Endless Box,'" Post, July 12, 2013, https://post.moma.org/to-the-people-of-the-30th-century-the-lives-of-shiomi-miekos-endless-box/. Other Post entries about Shiomi's works are https://post.moma.org/interview-with-artist-mieko-shiomi/, https://post.moma.org/intermedia-transmedia/ and https://post.moma.org/spatial-poems-by-shiomi-mieko/.

[5] See above footnote for an overview of the English scholarship on Shiomi. An overview of the Japanese scholarship on Shiomi is outside the scope of this thesis and beyond my language skills.

argues for expanded encounters, leading to deeper knowledge, with Shiomi's artwork and, by extension, other artworks that invite participation beyond viewing. Descriptions of bodily experiences, which consisted of replicating throwing keys, performing < *mirror piece* > (1963), remaking her *Endless Box* (1963-) and engaging with the SHADOW film from her *Spatial Poem No. 4 (shadow event)* invitation (1971) are included.

Mieko Shiomi was born in 1938 to a musical family in Okayama, Japan and was a classically trained musician before she turned to object making. She was a child during World War II and vividly remembers the frustration of not being able to play the piano whenever she wanted to. Because of the scarcity of pianos after the destruction of the war, she had to wait her turn to play on the one piano available to her at school.[6] She credits her simmering anger at this deprivation of expression she suffered with her life-long desire to create.[7] War and destruction, however, were not Shiomi's only memories and motivations. The village where she grew up and returned to after she attended university faced the Seto Inland Sea. In 1934, the natural areas around Shiomi's childhood home became Japan's first national park in recognition of their beauty and historical significance.[8] This natural environment made a deep impression on Shiomi, stirring a desire in her to understand and even "merge with this beautiful nature."[9] These

[6] Fujii and Yamashiro, "To the People."

[7] Yoshimoto, *Into Performance*, 141.

[8] Mary Sutherland and D. Guyver Britton, *National Parks of Japan* (New York: Kodansha International/USA, 1980).

[9] Mieko Shiomi, "Shi wa janru o koete," unpublished Japanese manuscript for a German translation included in Klaus Peter Denckner, *Visuelle Poesie aus Japan* (Hamburg: Leternatur Haus, 1997), quoted in Yoshimoto, *Into Performance*, 141.

twin motivators of frustration and desire combined to enliven and establish a lifelong need to create in Shiomi.

Shiomi considers herself a composer more than she thinks of herself as an artist, and her art practice was born of her music.[10] She attended Tokyo National University of Fine Arts, where she majored in musicology. This was an unusual path for a Japanese woman at the time: most of her female contemporaries chose performance rather than the history and theory offered in her major. While Shiomi chose to study theory, she did not abandon performance. A particular performance, of Arnold Schoenberg's *Moonstruck Pierrot*, inspired Shiomi's interest in improvisation.[11] One result of this dual interest in theory and performance, especially experimental performance, was Shiomi's founding along with other musicology and literature students (Takehisa Kosugi, Shukou Mizuno, Mikio Tojima, and Gen'ichi Tsuge) of the avant-garde Group Ongaku. Yasunao Tone, a recent university graduate in literature, was another member of the group and the one who named it. They were interested in the essence of music and tried to find it through experimenting with new forms, seeking to redefine music itself. The group experimented with unconventional ways to make sounds—using musical instruments in unusual ways, running electrical appliances, moving kitchen utensils—seeking to understand how those sounds related to each other in an arrangement.[12] Shiomi's first compositions for Group Ongaku, *Mobile I, II, III,* exhibited the interest she had in time and space, which was a consideration in many of her later works. *Mobile I, II, III,* named in reference to

[10] Yoshimoto, *Into Performance,* 139.

[11] Yoshimoto, *Into Performance,* 142.

[12] Yoshimoto, *Into Performance*, 142.

Alexander Calder's moveable sculptures, were meant to be three-dimensional sound objects, with performers arranged both inside and outside the venue.[13] Shiomi's formative collaboration in Group Ongaku gave her the opportunity to explore her radical interests with like-minded thinkers. Shiomi described the early days of the group as an "explosion of activity . . . characteristic of our insatiable desire for new sound materials and new definitions (redefinitions) of music itself."[14] It was during this time that she realized that her ideas about music could be expanded into other forms beyond sounds, such as actions and objects.

Shiomi recounts an experience from this part of her life with a set of keys that awakened this realization in her. During a session with Group Ongaku with Tone on saxophone, Kosugi on violin, and Takeda at the piano, Shiomi's attention turned to something other than the music they were making:

> We were doing an improvisation with very "talkative" sounds. I got bored with it then. Picking up a bunch of keys from a table—perhaps they were for Tone's car, I started to throw them up in the air to make some noises by having them almost touch the ceiling. I kept repeating this performance. Later, I became conscious of the fact that I was not making sounds, but I was doing an action of throwing keys. Since then, I have geared myself toward action music.[15]

This realization was a turning point for Shiomi, and her art took off in new directions as she started to explore new ways of expressing musical concepts such as writing what she called "action poems" and creating a physical representation of sound with her *Endless*

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[13] Yoshimoto, *Into Performance*, 143.

[14] Yoshimoto, *Into Performance*, 142.

[15] Kuniharu Akiyama, Ay-O, and Mieko Shiomi, "Fluxus Universe: A Conversation between Kuniharu Akiyama, Ay-O, and Mieko Shiomi," in *Fluxus: Art into Life*, ed. Mami Yoshimoto and Hajime Morita, trans. Midori Yoshimoto, Nobuko Akita, and Yoko Hayami (Saitama: Urawa Art Museum, 2004), 158.

Box.[16] Group Ongaku had already been making music with everyday objects, which became a useful springboard, giving Shiomi the framework to make this further discovery. The difference between what Group Ongaku had been doing when they made music with everyday objects and the key throwing was Shiomi's acute awareness of *how* she was engaging with the objects she was using.

Throwing keys is not a one-way encounter. Reenacting Shiomi's key-throwing gives new insights into the effect of the human-thing interaction. As they rise in the air, a tossed set of keys are subject to the force initially exerted on them, jingling as metal bumps against metal. Shiomi recalled that she was throwing her set of keys almost to the ceiling, which would require a certain, measured, amount of effort. Depending on the ceiling height, the keys may have been subject to significant force, causing them to fly upwards until their momentum ebbed in the face of another powerful force: gravity. If one watches a set of keys being thrown towards the ceiling, it is at this point—when gravity prevails, and they begin to descend—that the relative positions of the keys change. The shape of a set of keys that has been thrown in the air is relatively stable as it rises. But once they reach the apex, the keys twist and turn, make a louder sound as they pivot, and then fall comparatively quietly. Their sound is loudest at the bottom of their arc as they collide with hands or the floor.[17] The keys are not merely being acted upon; they are also acting upon. They are objects with characteristics—spikiness, heaviness,

[16] See Chapter 1 for more on Shiomi's action poems, which are instructive works also called events or scores.

[17] To understand this process better, I threw my keys repeatedly while my family videotaped me. We then slowed the videos down, listened to the changing sound and watched the shape of the keys as they moved. Our slow-motion video viewing resulted in this description.

sharpness—that have influence. When they crash into a person's palm, they can hurt, especially if they are thrown over and over again, causing a crescendo of pain. Not only are the keys subject to the hands that throw them, but the hands that catch them are subject to the force of the keys. When Shiomi was tossing the keys, it was a two-way conversation between her body and the things she was throwing. Replicating her action is a way to "hear" this conversation with one's body and gives greater insight than merely reading about Shiomi's experience.

Similar insights can be gained by physically engaging with Shiomi's artworks. Art can engage different senses and some rely on sensorial experiences beyond the visual more than others. For example, the effect of Ed Ruscha's *Chocolate Room* (1970-), with its walls lined with papers coated in chocolate, is many times more powerful when one experiences it in person and is able to smell the chocolate versus seeing a photo of the chocolate-covered walls. The opportunity to engage with art beyond the visual is often out of reach in a museum setting, where conservation and protection of the collection is highly valued. Some of Shiomi's works are more accessible, and for this project I was able to have bodily experiences with a few of her works. I performed her first action poem and closely examined and played with a copy of the *Spatial Poem* (1965-1975) invitations that I was able to purchase. While Shiomi has made about thirty copies of *Endless Box,* obtaining one was beyond my reach, so I recreated a slightly smaller replica in order to be able to interact with and understand it more fully.

Shiomi's works encourage people to interact with and really see the things around them.[18] They prompt a participant to notice how they move through their environment and how the surrounding things affect them. She recognized the importance of paying attention to the world, including the objects in it and what they have to say to us, when she said, "Feedback is our way of receiving or experiencing things in daily life, or of polishing our senses and enriching our imagination."[19] Her attention to things aligned with her participation in Fluxus, an interdisciplinary art network with a strong affinity for object production.[20]

Thing theory, with its assertion that knowledge is transmitted through objects,[21] provides a useful framework for understanding human-thing relations. Two decades ago, Bill Brown coined the term "thing theory" in an article for *Critical Inquiry* where he built on Martin Heidegger's and others' ideas.[22] Heidegger distinguished between objects and things by looking at the difference between humans taking an object for granted because it fills its intended purpose and that same object becoming a thing when it is broken or

[18] This is explored in more depth in chapter one.

[19] Yoshimoto, *Into Performance,* 139.

[20] The seeds of her association were sown in 1962 when Toshi Ichiyanagi sent some of her music to George Maciunas. Shiomi later opened a correspondence with Maciunas herself, which resulted in her moving to New York for a year to take part in Fluxus, and following her return to Japan, in her continued lifelong involvement.

[21] John W. Mohr et al., *Measuring Culture*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), 78.

[22] Bill Brown, "Thing Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 1 (2001), 1, https://doi.org/10.1086/449030.

misused.[23] Tone's car keys changed from object to thing in a Heideggerian sense when Shiomi started using them for an unintended purpose.

Brown elaborates on this idea of objects becoming things when their purpose is upended by describing things as objects we *see* rather than look through. In other words, they are objects which have altered subject-object relations.[24] Shiomi's actions poems and her later reuse and expansion of them, *Spatial Poem*, are instructions for altering one's relationships with the things around them. In the same way that seeing makes an object a thing, even her instructions that simply have participants focus on things are an alteration of the subject-object relationship. Brown argues that "however freed it might be from the prototypical subject-object structure of perception, the *thing* (the thingness of the object) emerges in and as a relation."[25]

These relationships are not set by an artist to then remain constant. Works of art are actual objects that exist in space and time; not frozen, but ever-changing. An artist may start with a certain intention, but once their idea is made into a thing, it has a life of its own outside its creator. Art may be an actualization of an artist's specific idea, but that same art can subsequently shape minds and bodies in ways different than what their creators intended.[26] Finally, each encounter has the potential to be different because the

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[23] Martin Heidegger and Joan Stambaugh, *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein Und Zeit* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996), 325.

[24] Brown, "Thing Theory," 4.

[25] Brown, "Thing Theory," 12.

[26] Mohr et al. describe this potential and its temporal dimension: "[M]uch like living things, objects have a temporal life cycle. At the simplest level, they have stages of production and consumption. Someone produces an object, and another person consumes and discards it, applying meaningful interpretations during this process. Finally, objects are talked about, acted

people encountering the thing are different. This is another reason to seek corporeal engagement with a work of art. A bodily experience has the potential not only to give greater insight into the artist's intent and give access to possibly otherwise inaccessible information, but also to add to the work of art itself and its cultural meaning with each person's diverse experience.[27] The potential for influence and change is especially likely when a work of art invites interactions like Shiomi's works do. Looking at examples discussed in this thesis, her scores were meant to be performed, her *Endless Box* was designed to be opened sequentially rather than kept on a shelf, and her *Spatial Poem* would not have existed without its participants.

Besides the extravisual knowledge to be gained, another reason to engage in a deeper examination of Shiomi's works, is that her art, like many other Fluxus contributions, is often considered to be parts of a whole—a set, a collection, a *Fluxkits* or a movement—rather than as individual works. Fluxus, the interdisciplinary, intermedia, international network of artists, was loosely collected under its self-proclaimed organizer, George Maciunas. His 1963 manifesto proclaimed one of Fluxus's goals to be the merging art and life, blurring the boundaries between the two and making art accessible to all, not just to the intellectual and economic elites.[28] Many of the artists gathered under the umbrella of Fluxus had similar interests in performance and in scores, and Maciunas

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on, and in some cases they themselves act. Objects have what we could think of as properties such that they themselves are actors in the world. Like other active agents, objects shape human behavior." Mohr et al, *Measuring Culture*, 60.

[27] Please note that I am not encouraging irresponsible alterations to irreplaceable art or cultural artifacts.

[28] Clive Phillpot, "Manifesto I," George Maciunas Foundation Inc., accessed May 14, 2022, https://georgemaciunas.com/about/cv/manifesto-i/.

advertised, commissioned, collected, labelled, bundled, published, and sold their art. He corresponded with Shiomi, collected her scores to publish and purchased enough copies of her *Endless Box* to fund her plane ticket to New York. While Fluxus was most active in the 1960s and '70s, some artists still participate. Shiomi herself has moved in and out of what she has termed the "Flux galaxy," but continues to take part in Fluxus performances and has written a book about Fluxus.[29] Shiomi's artworks are a part of Fluxus, but they are more.[30] For one thing, while she took part in Fluxus, she wasn't subsumed by it. As she noted in a 2014 interview, she was happy to be labelled 50% Fluxus by George Maciunas, instead of 100%.[31] She developed her action poems and *Endless Box* before she knew Fluxus existed and before she was exposed to *Fluxkits* or event scores. To Shiomi, Fluxus was first an opportunity to move to New York and to broaden her network and audience outside Japan. After she returned to Japan, Fluxus was a way for her to keep her global connections to the art world alive. For her it has been an aide, not an overseer, so to only look at her work as Fluxus productions is to only see one aspect of it. A close-looking can bring to light aspects of her work that are unique to her,

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[29] Akiyama, Ay-O, and Shiomi, "Fluxus Universe" 177.

She talked about her performance activities in a 2014 interview and has presented new work as recently as November 2021 during Art Week Tokyo. Shiomi Mieko, "Oral History Interview with Shiomi Mieko," Interview by Kakinuma Toshie and Takeuchi Nao, trans. Reiko Tomii, Geishiken, December 1, 2014, https://www.kcua.ac.jp/arc/ar/shiomi_eg_1/; Mieko Shiomi, "Beyond Time and Space—Inside the World of Mieko Shiomi," Interview by Azusa Hashimoto, November 26, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TSffYtxwTuk.

Shiomi Mieko, *Furukusasu to Wa Nani Ka: Nichijō to Āto o Musubitsuketa Hitobito* (Tōkyō-to Shinjuku-ku: Firumu Ātosha, 2005).

[30] *Endless Box* was unique in its lack of text or inscribed lines and *Spatial Poem* was unique in the back-and-forth aspects of the network it created. See chapters two and three for more on these works.

[31] Shiomi Mieko, "Oral History Interview."

rather than allowing her work to be subordinated under the category of Fluxus productions.

When Shiomi threw the car keys, it was a conversation between artist and object. She reframed her relationship with the keys, paid attention to their feedback and was rewarded with a new understanding. As Natalie Harran argues, Fluxus was a material-focused endeavor.[32] Even the performance-based works—the events scores and concerts—had thoughtfully designed printed matter as a component. George Brecht, another Fluxus artist who wrote event scores, said in 1976 that "every object is an event . . . and every event has an object-like quality."[33]

Bodily experience with Shiomi's instructive artworks and her objects, including the object-like parts of her scores and invitations, makes possible a more thorough and deeper understanding of them than could be gained from only looking at the visual or considering the conceptual aspects of the works. Physical experience with these works is a particularly apt way to gain knowledge of works that invite, encourage, and even demand participation rather than mere viewing. With this in mind, chapter one will look at Shiomi's action poems or scores, chapter two at her *Endless Box*, and chapter three at her decade-long project, *Spatial Poem*.

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[32] Natilee Harren, *Fluxus Forms: Scores, Multiples, and the Eternal Network*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), 212-214.

[33] Michael Nyman, "George Brecht: Interview," *Studio International* 192, no. 984 (December 1976): 257.

Chapter One: Action Poems

In the early 1960s, Shiomi was one of a number of artists around the world who started writing event scores, or instructional works of art meant to be available to anyone to perform. They were a key instrument in the Fluxus push to integrate art and life.[34] Fluxus artists like George Brecht, La Monte Young, Yoko Ono and Shiomi wrote relatively spare instructions that were meant to be enacted. Performing a score gives a person the opportunity to think about what they are doing and to notice their own relationship to the people and things around them. They are prescriptions for bodily encounters with the world.

One difference between these performance-based works of art and purely material pieces like paintings or sculptures is the dispersion of control over the piece. Once an artist signs a painting, the assumption is often that it will be forever kept in the same state. That is certainly the hope of museum conservators. Event scores, on the other hand, are available to anyone to perform however they will. Liz Kotz describes them as "a kind of structure that other artists could use to produce diverse interpretations or realizations—thereby creating new pieces, and effectively blurring the boundary between 'composer' and 'interpreter.'"[35] Variations in interpretation and outcome are what make these works even more intriguing.[36] The variations are as vital as the original score. Harren describes

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[34] Kuniharu Akiyama described Fluxus as trying "to shorten the distance between daily life and art, or to dissolve art into daily life." Akiyama, Ay-O, and Shiomi, "Fluxus Universe," 178.

[35] Liz Kotz, "Post-Cagean Aesthetics and the 'Event' Score," *October* 95 (2001): 80.

[36] For example, Shiomi collected and published hundreds of responses to her *Spatial Poem* and considered the final reports as part of the work. See chapter three for more on *Spatial Poem.*

this vitality when she writes that "Fluxus's score-based practice emphasized the work's fundamental translatability, it also defended the importance of the uniqueness of each material instantiation."[37] One example of an event score is Young's *Composition 1960 #5:*

> Turn a butterfly (or any number of butterflies) loose in the performance area.
>
> When the composition is over, be sure to allow the butterfly to fly away outside.
>
> The composition may be any length but if an unlimited amount of time is available, the doors and windows may be opened before the butterfly is turned loose and the composition may be considered finished when the butterfly flies away.[38]

There are all kinds of possibilities for variation in this work: location, performer(s), number and type of butterflies, audience reaction, and so on. Event scores are art that relinquishes creator control in exchange for limitless potential. Some give more strict instructions, while others are more open-ended, but once the written instruction ends, so does the control.[39]

Shiomi was not unfamiliar with a desire to cede some degree of control in her art. She experimented with action painting and collage as a college student.[40] Members of

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[37] Harren, *Fluxus Forms*, 212.

[38] La Monte Young, *Composition 1960 #5,* 1960, mimeograph, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, https://www.moma.org/collection/works/127627.

[39] Young's *Composition 1960 #10* (1960) "Draw a straight line and follow it," is an example of an unrestricted score. Shiomi's < *music for two players I* > (1963), discussed later in this chapter, is an example of a more structured one.

[40] Shiomi Mieko, *Furukusasu to Wa Nani Ka: Nichijō to Āto o Musubitsuketa Hitobito* (Tōkyō-to Shinjuku-ku: Firumu Ātosha, 2005), 60, referenced in William Marotti, "Challenge to Music: The

Group Ongaku were familiar with Surrealist ideas and experimented with automatism in their music-making, a practice that led them to focus on previously unnoticed sounds.[41] One of the results of the group's experimentation, as described by Marotti, was to "engage in a truly open dialogue with an insistent world of things beyond necessity and routine." They used the term *objet,* and Shiomi, in particular, thought back to her earlier experiments in visual art to think of music in these visual terms.[42] She referred to sound *objets* and sonic collage and spoke about collecting sound memories.[43] These conceptions attest to Shiomi's willingness to ignore boundaries between media and to express concepts in a variety of forms. This open-minded willingness to move between disciplines made it possible for Shiomi to create music made of *objets* and to make objects, her *Endless Box*, that referenced music. She later describes this method of hers, of expressing an idea in different forms, as "transmedia."[44] She explained her invented term, "For example, if I start with an Event, I turn it into an object, a musical work, and then into a video. The original concept is carried into subsequent works even though the form of expression is different each time."[45] Shiomi's desire to express her ideas in

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Group Music's Politics," in *Tomorrow Is the Question*, ed. Benjamin Piekut (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2014), 133n23.

[41] Marotti, "Challenge to Music," 117.

[42] Referring to *objet sonore* or sound object in French, a *musique concrète* term from Pierre Schaeffer, Marotti, "Challenge to Music," 122.

[43] Marotti, "Challenge to Music," 126-7.

[44] Shiomi Mieko, "Intermedia/Transmedia," trans. Midori Yoshimoto, Post, July 11, 2013, https://post.moma.org/intermedia-transmedia/.

[45] Shiomi, "Intermedia/Transmedia."

tangible forms, along with a moment of ennui, propelled her to a new medium, her event scores, or, as she first called them, action poems.

The incident when she was driven by boredom to toss keys to occupy herself was not the only time that being bored would propel Shiomi to take her artistic practice in a new direction. After graduating from university, she moved back to her parents' home in Okayama and organized a solo concert. During an interview for Art Week Tokyo in 2021, she described how completing the concert had left her in a state of boredom:

> But as soon as it had finished, I felt these things were already in the past for me, and that it would be boring to continue in the same direction. Wishing to create something completely new, I subsequently decided to explore the possibilities of action art by focusing on some element in nature, which I had admired since childhood. There was a real sense of returning to my roots. I took the liberty of calling them "action poem." [46]

Shiomi began writing her action poems in 1962, considering them music scores comprised of words instead of notes.[47] Her action poems were seemingly simple instructions that presented opportunities for a new consciousness of and connection to one's surroundings. The poems were meant to focus a person's attention on sensing and experiencing the world outside—sometimes on the other people, and often on the things, in it. Following Shiomi's instructions causes one to pay attention to natural phenomena and objects, to one's own body, or to the bodies of others—things often taken for granted or passed by. Shiomi's event scores are instructions for listening and recognizing things outside the self.

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[46] Shiomi, "Beyond Time and Space," 5:10.

[47] Yoshimoto, *Into Performance*, 145.

Shiomi's action poems were originally written in Japanese but she translated them to English and shared them with George Maciunas in 1963, who went on to publish a set of them in 1964 as *Events and Games*.[48] The Museum of Modern Art in New York has published photographs of scores in their collection, handwritten by Shiomi, some in Japanese and some in English. Shiomi wrote in small, neatly printed penmanship, with the words centered in an expanse of creamy white paper.[49] The space surrounding the instructions gives the words greater import than if they were crowded onto a small slip of paper with no margins. There are larger-than-normal spaces between each word, which give the impression that they should be read slowly and carefully. At the bottom right of the paper is her first initial, her last name and the year: "C. Shiomi 1963."[50] In one example, <*mirror piece*> from 1963, each of three sentences is preceded by a bullet point, and this separation of the sentences also contributes to a slow and thoughtful reading (figure 1.1). The text of <*mirror piece*> reads as follows:

- Stand on the sandy beach with your back to the sea.
- Hold a mirror before your face and look in it.
- Then step back into the sea and enter into the water.

Another example is < *shadow piece* > (1963):

Make shadows — still or moving — of your
body or something on the road, wall, floor,
or anything else.
Catch the shadows by some means.

[48] Yoshimoto, *Into Performance*, 147.

[49] Most of MoMA's collection is on paper that is about 7 x 9 inches, much larger than necessary to fit the amount of text.

[50] Based on her original given name.

A third is < *music for two players I* > (1963):

Stand face to face to one another
and stare at the opposite man (woman)'s eyes.
At first 3m. apart (4 minutes)
then 1m. apart (4 minutes)
then 0.3m. apart (4 minutes)
then 6m. apart (4 minutes)
then 3m. apart (4 minutes)

An assistant may show them the time and the distance.

These action poems or event scores of Shiomi's exhibit her interest in exploring how a person could interact with her surroundings and her fellow inhabitants and how she moved through time and space. Even before Shiomi started writing her action poems, she had experimented with the ideas of time and space in her music, arranging performers in hidden and unexpected places and instructing listeners to grasp at the *objet* of the sound.[51] Just as a musical composition is meant to be performed by anyone able to play the instrument that it is written for, these action poems could be, and were, performed by others as well as by Shiomi. While she was very open and welcoming to others performing her works, she also had moments of precision that she was unwilling to budge on: both qualities were manifest in *Spatial Poem,* her decade-long project that lasted from 1965-1975.[52]

Shiomi considers herself first a composer, and she has never set aside the musical lens she sees the world through. All her various works have some connection to her

[51] Yoshimoto, *Into Performance*, 143.

[52] See my discussion of *Spatial Poem* in Chapter 3.

musical foundation. Her event scores can be considered in this light. They are music composed with the human body as the instrument, performing actions instead of sound.

Shiomi has explained how she turned to nature, "which [she] had admired since childhood," as she was looking for a new and different art practice after leaving school.[53] Growing up and returning to a place of great natural beauty, the Seto Island Sea, she came to appreciate the beauty of nature around her. Yoshimoto describes how "[e]ventually, a strange desire grew within her to 'merge with this beautiful nature' and to 'grasp various attractive phenomena on the earth by [her] own means.'"[54] One of her event scores, <*mirror piece*>, is illustrative of the idea of the body as an instrument for knowing the world. Shiomi's action poems situate participants in a place where they focus their attention on various phenomena, look outside their own concerns, and notice the things around them.

Shiomi's first action poem, <*mirror piece*>, epitomizes the connection with nature she was hoping to realize and is her favorite.[55] Performing <*mirror piece*> merges the body of the performer with the sea in a measured, attentive, and self-aware manner.[56] The participant observes her own body make this coalescence through multiple senses. The sounds of crashing waves and calling seabirds add to the immersiveness of the

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[53] See the quote from her Art Week Tokyo interview above.

[54] Yoshimoto, *Into Performance*, 141.

[55] Kawamura, "Appreciating the Incidental," 319.

[56] In order to try to grasp <*mirror piece*> better, I performed it, with my cell phone, instead of a mirror. I took a few steps into the water while I was holding it, and then handed it to my daughter who held it up while I continued back into the ocean. Performing <*mirror piece*> gave me a much more complete understanding of it than just reading it did.

experience. She feels the sand beneath her feet turn from dry and loose to wet and compact. As she moves further into the water, she feels the sea turn from a gentle lapping on her toes to stronger and rougher waves. The more she merges with the water, the stronger it becomes, tipping the balance of power from human to ocean a little more with each step. The force of the ocean is manifest, and the result is a simultaneous attentiveness to herself and a losing of herself. The sensation of touch is coupled with and magnified by the visual experience of watching the sea come closer and closer in the mirror held up to the performer's face. While she feels the water rise up her legs, she also sees it deepening around herself in the mirror's reflection. One of Shiomi's stated goals for her action poems was to "create 'a duration or flow of time that replaces music by its poetic tones and certain tension."[57] The merging of body and sea in <*mirror piece*> mimics music as it traces a duration of time. It is music as action as it tracks movement through space.

If <*mirror piece*> is an exercise in slowly surrendering control to another, < *shadow piece* > is an act of asserting oneself on the other by inserting the body in between a light source and a surface. The performer can even be so bold as to insert themselves between two bodies as astronomical as the earth and sun. This bodily assertion is both a negation, in censoring the light that shines, and a mark-making. The mark is a fleeting one, as fleeting as the light that shines around whatever the performer is wielding, whether it is the body, as in Shiomi's first suggestion, or something else, as in her second. Shiomi recognizes the transitory nature of the shadow-mark and instructs the performer to

[57] Yoshimoto, *Into Performance*, 141.

capture it, leaving the means to do that up to the individual. The resulting record is a further affirmation, an "I was here." The awareness of the things—in this case the light manipulated by the participant—is a forceful and subduing, rather than a submitting, recognition.

Another of Shiomi's event scores, < *music for two players I* >, adds a "you are there" component to the "I am here" aspect of <*mirror piece*>. Instead of merging or communicating with impersonal natural bodies or forces, the interaction here is between two humans—two entities similar in size, form, and power. This score introduces a back-and-forth that is missing in the other scores discussed above. It adds a social element. Whether that is one of collaboration, antagonism, struggle for power or submission could vary infinitely depending on who the two performers are and how they approach the event. Shiomi expands the social connection aspect of her work in *Spatial Poem.*

In an example of Pan-Pacific zeitgeist, Shiomi's action poems were similar in form to the event scores being written, unbeknownst to her, by other artists in both Japan and New York.[58] Brecht wrote of his own experience discovering that event scores developed around the world while he also thought he was the only one writing them, "Later on, rather to my surprise, I learned . . . [that] . . . others had made public realizations of the pieces I had always wanted to notice occurring."[59] Another artist explained a similar

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[58] Natalie Harren describes event scores as "the first common language of Fluxus." Harren, *Fluxus Forms*, 101.

[59] George Brecht, "The Origin of Events" (one-page typed, mimeographed statement, Artist's File, Museum of Modern Art Library, August 1970), quoted in Liz Kotz, *Words to Be Looked at: Language in 1960s Art* (MIT Press, 2007), 73, 76.

instance of simultaneous Pan-Pacific innovation in this way, “If the field is fertile, the seeds sprout at the same time.”[60] This simultaneous development should not be seen as derivative. Rather the world stage, after coming out of the second world war, was fertile ground for similar ideas to grow and flourish. Post-war Japan, with its growing democracy and newfound freedoms for artists who had been strictly controlled both preceding and during the war, was a place of innovation and a fruitful focal point of the avant-garde.[61] The Gutai Art Association was founded in 1954 by Jiro Yoshihara who memorably said, “Create what has never been done before.”[62] Another collective, the influential Hi-Red Center was founded in May 1963, the same year Shiomi wrote *<mirror piece>*.[63] She recognized the similarity between her work and that of other artists when she first saw some Fluxus event scores written by Brecht and others, in Ono’s apartment in 1963, at which point Shiomi started calling her own work “events.”[64] The action poems Shiomi was writing before her exposure to Fluxus, as well as her *Endless Box,* were similar enough to works by other Fluxus artists that Nam June Paik, the Korean American pioneer of video art, encouraged Shiomi to reach out to Maciunas.

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[60] Robert Lang and Joshua Foer, "Paper Perfect: Robert Lang and the Science of Origami," *Virginia Quarterly Review* 90, no. 3 (2014): 14.

[61] Ming Tiampo, "‘Create What Has Never Been Done Before!,’" *Third Text* 21, no. 6 (November 1, 2007): 694, https://doi.org/10.1080/09528820701761335.

[62] Tiampo, “‘Never Been Done Before!,’” 689.

[63] Shiomi was familiar with High Red Center and admired them, even taking part in several of their Events. Akiyama, Ay-O, and Shiomi, “Fluxus Universe,” 155.

[64] Yoshimoto, *Into Performance*, 146.

He reassured her that her work would fit in with what others were producing under the aegis of Fluxus.[65]

Shiomi and Ono were musicians and composers, and both wrote instructional pieces. Comparing their events scores gives insights into specific qualities of Shiomi's scores and the way her scores prompt engagement. Musical notation with its sparse visual instructions can be seen as precursor to their scores, but both artists recognized that what they were doing was moving away from the conventional concept of music. Independently from each other, they moved to instructions for performers that did not require years of training or practice on specialized instruments. Giving their early event scores new names was both an act of creation and a separation from what had been done before. As described above, Shiomi called her first scores action poems. Many of Ono's first scores were titled "paintings." In her 1966 address, "To the Wesleyan People," Ono said her art could have been called almost anything, but she the liked "the old word painting because it immediately connects with 'wall painting' painting, and it is nice and funny."[66]

Shiomi and Ono were both born in Japan in the years just before World War II and have formative memories of suffering through the war. They both spent years training as musicians. There are similarities between Shiomi's and Ono's event scores, but the differences are more telling. One notable difference is that Shiomi's scores are generally

[65] Yoshimoto, *Into Performance*, 147.

[66] Yoko Ono, "To the Wesleyan People," *Yoko Ono: Half-a-Wind Show: A Retrospective*, ed. Ingrid Pfeiffer and Max Hollein (Munich: Prestel, 2013), 180-182.

external: the performer is communing with something outside herself. Ono's event scores, in contrast, turn the performer's focus inward. She stated, "If my music seems to require physical silence, that is because it requires concentration to yourself," and "[t]he music is in the mind."[67] This score, included in her book *Grapefruit,* exemplifies the interiority of Ono's event scores:

COLLECTING PIECE (1963):

Collect sounds in your mind that
you have overheard through the week.
Repeat them in your mind in different
orders one afternoon.

Contrast *Collecting Piece* with Shiomi's <*mirror piece*> that instructs the performer to surrender themselves slowly to the sea. Shiomi's work is a merging of human and environment, a connecting, even submissive, action, while Ono's is a separating one. Rather than becoming subject to the surrounding world, the participant reenacting *Collecting Piece* takes bits of it, changes them at will, and makes them her own. The pieces of the outside world she collects can be unabashedly rearranged and even changed to suit her imagination: there is no requirement that they retain their original characteristics. Shiomi's sea has immense power and agency—a wave can knock a person over easily. Ono's sounds, in contrast, are stripped of agency—once they become inhabitants of the mind, they can be reshaped and remembered however the performer chooses. Ono even suggests the performer can change the order of the sounds at will,

[67] Yoko Ono, "To the Wesleyan People," 182.

disregarding their temporal identity and further removing them from their time and place of meaning.

Another one of Ono's event scores, also from *Grapefruit*, goes even further, instructing the performer this time to not only do with the sounds what they will, but also to forget them, essentially erasing any influence the sounds might have over the performer:

BELL PIECE (1963):

Listen to the sound of a bell for an hour.
Diminish the sound to piano
by ringing it over in your head.
Diminish the sound to pianissimo
by ringing it over in your dream.
Diminish the sound poco a poco
troppo pianissimo by forgetting.

Try other sounds
i.e., mother's voice
baby cry
husband's hysterics

Ono's score not only transfers power away from the sounds to the listener, who erases the sounds from their perception by purposefully forgetting them, but transfers power in the same way to the performer in relation to their family members, giving them the ability to diminish and erase agency by lessening and forgetting. If a person is ignored, their power to influence, or the exercise of their agency on another is diminished.

Bell Piece and < *music for two players I* > have almost opposite mechanisms: Shiomi's action poem forces people to confront each other, to acknowledge and

recognize another person's existence. There is no way to perform it as instructed without seeing another person intimately. Ono's event score, on the other hand, is a lesson in lessening another's agency, importance, and even existence. While Ono seeks to provide a way to disconnect from others and enrich one's inner life, Shiomi is prompting connection with someone or something else.[68]

Harren describes event scores as "frames for heightened attention,"[69] and while Shiomi and Ono turn that attention in different directions, both artists' scores fit well within that definition. While Shiomi's event scores ask the performers to look outward, they are still doing their looking thoughtfully, using their intellectual capacities to understand the knowledge that the things around them impart. Thus, both Shiomi's and Ono's event scores can be considered mental exercises. Kristine Stiles writes:

> Fluxus performance stresses interaction between the material and mental worlds, and its actions negotiate degrees of human freedom in relations between the private and social world—directions that recall philosophical descriptions of the phenomenological character of the body as an instrument *acting* in the world.[70]

Shiomi's action poems are music written for bodily instruments to perform in such a way that the performers confront the reality and materiality of things around them.

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[68] I see a contrast in how Shiomi and Ono instruct people to notice (or not notice) the world around them. Kawamura compares two other scores by Shiomi and Ono and sees a contrast in how the two artists intend passers-by to notice (or not notice) their events. "Appreciating the Incidental," 318.

[69] Natilee Harren, "We Are All Fluxus Artists Now: Natilee Harren on Making the Most of Mundane Tasks," *The Chicago Blog* (blog), May 12, 2020, https://pressblog.uchicago.edu/2020/05/12/we-are-all-fluxus-artists-now-natilee-herren-on-making-the-most-of-mundane-tasks.html.

[70] Kristine Stiles, "Between Water and Stone: Fluxus Performance: A Metaphysics of Acts," in *In the Spirit of Fluxus*, ed. Janet Jenkins (Minneapolis: Walker Arts Center, 1993), 65.

Performers are given the opportunity to recognize the things around them in a way they otherwise might not, without Shiomi's action poem reminders that art can be experienced at any time and in any place. Kawamura describes Shiomi's event scores as having "usually an element that requires the performer to interact in a thoughtful or playful way with material."[71] One final example of an event score by Shiomi gives the performers a chance to notice their own agency, as they can in < *shadow piece* > and also to become aware of a crescendo[72] of influence being enacted on them as with < *mirror piece* >:

< *wind music* > (1963)

I. Raise wind.
II. Be blown by wind.
    Let something be blown by wind.
III. Wind at the beach
    Wind in the street
    Wind passing by the car
    Typhoon

Performing one of Shiomi's event scores gives a person the opportunity to slow down, thoughtfully sense the surrounding environment, and gain a bodily understanding of the relationship between the self and the outer world. The broadening of one's sensorial experience through the enactment of Shiomi's scores can expand one's understanding and help a performer to grasp at the possible subject-object relations Shiomi was considering when she wrote the scores. Each performance also adds meaning, expanding not only the accessibility of other kinds of knowledge about the

[71] Kawamura, "Appreciating the Incidental," 313.

[72] Kawamura and I were both struck by this aspect of this action poem, which contrasts nicely with diminuendos in other works by Shiomi, for example *Disappearing Music for Face* and *Endless Box*.

score beyond the visual and conceptual, but also adding information as a result of the uniqueness of each occurrence.

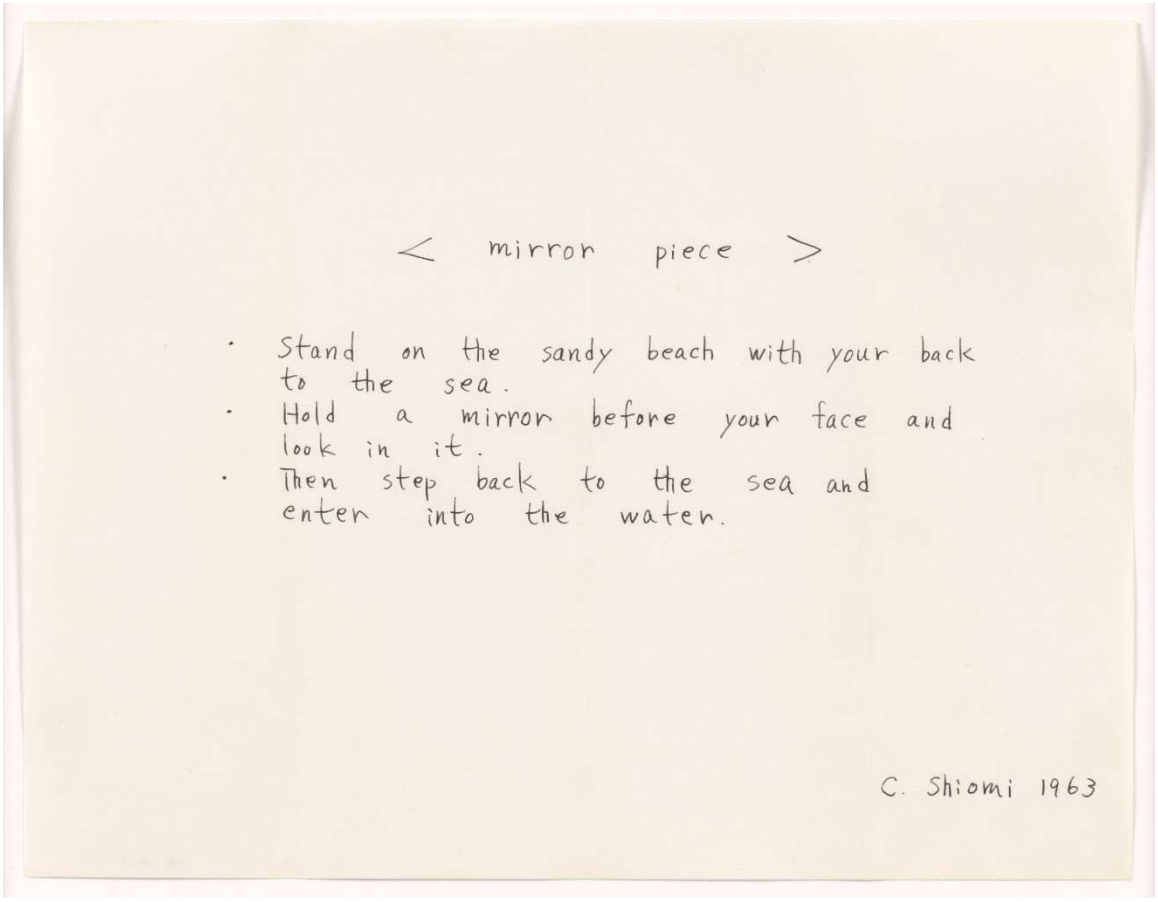

Figure 1.1. Mieko Shiomi <*mirror piece*>, ink on paper, 1963. Photo credit: The Museum of Modern Art, New York, via Art Resource.

Chapter Two: *Endless Box*

When Shiomi made *Endless Box,* she created an object based on the idea of infinity that invites interactive exploration and a bodily experience. This invitation to physically engage with the work introduces the possibility of change to both *Endless Box* and the people who engage with it. *Endless Box* can change because that possibility is built into the object—the individual paper boxes are moveable rather than fastened together. Not only does the appearance of *Endless Box* invite tactile exploration with its repeating ridges of paper, but Shiomi conceived it as a transformable work, imagining what it would be like to open one box at a time before she made the first set and later including performances of a person opening and arranging a *Endless Box* in her concerts.[73] Shiomi recognizes the beguiling aspect of *Endless Box* and has written about how, as it is opened, one box at a time, it "beckon[s] the person onward."[74] The work can change shape as a person manipulates it, and it can change over time as a result of human and environmental factors. While Shiomi intended *Endless Box* as an interactive work, to touch and move, that is not the reality when it is held by a library or museum. It is either exhibited under glass, or viewing it must be done under supervision in a reading room. Understandably, the institutions that hold copies and are generous enough to let researchers have access to them generally do not want that access to include manipulating the boxes at will, so the interactive, bodily experience Shiomi intended might be difficult to have. If it were possible to play with the work as intended, the capacity to learn more

[73] Shiomi, "Intermedia/Transmedia."

[74] Shiomi quoted in Fujii and Yamashiro, "To the People."

about it might be more apparent, because those who engage with the work can change also. Corporeal engagement with *Endless Box* allows for a greater comprehension of the work. In order to better understand it, I tried to replicate it, seeking to discern how Shiomi folded it and how she used paper to make shapes and lines.

The name *Endless Box* implies, and Shiomi has explained, what the echoing edges of paper are meant to represent: "a ceaseless passage of time."[75] Germinating with her experience as a composer, Shiomi's inspiration for the *Endless Box* came from an unending diminuendo of sound. A musical term, diminuendo is a gradual lessening of sound, a decrescendo. Taken to its limit, this effect can create sound that gets quieter so slowly and imperceptibly that the listener does not know exactly when the music stops. The paper boxes get smaller so gradually that they form a legion of quantum leaps. While the decrements are not so small that they are imperceptible, and the littlest box is not too tiny to be measured, the slight step-downs combined with the size of the smallest box give the impression that the box extends into an imperceptible minuteness, getting smaller forever.

The fact that Shiomi's *Endless Box* is an open, unnumbered edition (of approximately thirty) is another way it is unending.[76] Each copy of it extends its reach to another person and a new realm. Shiomi was not a Fluxus artist when she first created *Endless Box*, but it fits well into the Fluxus oeuvre and, like many Fluxus works, is

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[75] Shiomi quoted in Fujii and Yamashiro, "To the People."

[76] "Endless Box," Fondazione Bonotto, accessed May 14, 2022, https://www.fondazionebonotto.org/en/collection/fluxus/shiomimieko/183.html. On the number of copies, see "Shiomi Mieko 'Endless Box,'" Toki-No-Wasuremonocc, accessed May 9, 2022. http://tokinowasuremono.com/e/artist-e47-shiomi/shiomi_07.html

designed with interaction in mind. For example, each item in a *Fluxkit*, including the sturdy vinyl attaché case housing the kit itself, is an invitation to open, discover and touch.[77] Fluxus was about many things: art, performance, collective, publication, anti-establishment, and play. Many of the Fluxus productions were created for interaction.[78] The person confronting one, in all their myriad forms, *is* a part of the work. These interactive artworks, including *Endless Box,* were not made for mere viewing. Bodily exploration is a fundamental characteristic. They are not finished works of art until they are physically engaged with and their invitation is interminable. The people participating are not passive recipients, but active components. They each bring a part of themselves to the work. Each give-and-take with Fluxus artworks, including *Endless Box,* expands them even further.

Endless Box is both one object and many. The box consists of thirty-four origami boxes, wrapped in pale purple chiffon, housed in a wooden box with a lid.[79] Maciunas

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[77] An example of a *Fluxkit* with Shiomi's *Endless Box* can be seen on the website of the Museum of Modern Art. Various Artists with Eric Andersen, Ay-O, George Brecht, Dick Higgins, Joe Jones, Alison Knowles, Takehisa Kosugi, George Maciunas, Nam June Paik, Benjamin Patterson, Mieko Shiomi, Ben Vautier, Robert Watts, *Fluxkit*, 1965, vinyl-covered attaché case, containing objects in various media, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, https://www.moma.org/collection/works/127139.

[78] Natalie Harren describes Fluxus objects as having, "integration with a notation based, iterative, performative, and participatory practice that could never be fully reconciled with the exhibition protocol of museums and galleries." *Fluxus Forms:* 105.

[79] Many thanks to Marcia Reed for the opportunity to examine the Getty's *Fluxkit* in 2019 during my undergraduate studies. The formal descriptions in this thesis are based on two of Shiomi's *Endless Boxes*, one in the *Fluxkit* and one separate, both held in the Getty's archive. In the Getty's *Endless Box*, the fabric has three rough edges, cut but not finished in any way, and one selvedge edge. Written near the edge of the fabric, close to a corner, in small, neat handwriting, perhaps with a ball point pen is the inscription, "C. Shiomi 1965."

The outside dimensions of the wood box that contains the Getty's *Endless Box*, are six and one-eighths inches by five and fifteen-sixteenths inches by three and one- eighths inches.

created a stylized rendering of Shiomi's name that he used for labels for some, but not all, of her Fluxus contributions.[80] In *Endless Box's* place in the Getty's *Fluxkit*, the first thing you see is an offset-printed label with Maciunas's graphic of Shiomi's name, pasted to the lid of the wooden box.[81] This outer box is made of flat pieces of wood ranging from three-sixteenths to one-quarter inch thick, with a simple, unattached lid of the same wood. The lid just sits on top—it does not have a recess or an extension to keep it in place. When the lid is lifted, it reveals a jumble of sheer lilac fabric folded in and over itself in a purple mass of curved light and shadow.[82] The person opening the box might expect immediate resolution to the question of what it contains, but instead there is another wrapping, a further mystery. The fabric contributes to a sense of wonder as one moves deeper into the contents—it is like a gift wrapped in layers, or another door immediately behind the first one. Unwrapped, opened, and spread out, the fabric becomes a square, repeating both the square of the wooden box it rests in and the multitude of white paper squares that constitute the finally-revealed *Endless Box* (figure 2.1).

Additionally, beneath the paper boxes, within the wood box there is a small wad of what appears to be small pieces of cut up nylon panty hose. It is presumably there as cushioning, perhaps to make it easier to remove the boxes from their housing, but that is conjecture.

For another detailed description, please see Fujii and Yamashiro, "To the People."

[80] He also used this one to label her *Events and Games* but created a different design to label Shiomi's *Water Music.*

[81] Fujii and Yamashiro, "To the People."

[82] The Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo website lists the fabric as nylon. "Endless Box," Tokyo Museum Collection, accessed May 30, 2022, https://museumcollection.tokyo/en/works/62612/.

The Fondazione Bonotto lists it as silk. "Endless Box," Fondazione Bonotto, accessed May 14, 2022, https://www.fondazionebonotto.org/en/collection/fluxus/shiomimieko/183.html.

Each *Endless Box* is made from two large sheets of Japanese paper—approximately thirty-one by forty-three inches—that have been cut and folded by Shiomi into thirty-four origami boxes that nest inside each other.[83] This nesting makes the "many as one" of the object possible while also emphasizing the precision that must be exercised when measuring, cutting, and folding. Shiomi wrote about how *Endless Box* was conceived during a time when she was striving to find a visual language to express the essence of music and the passage of time. She remembered the origami boxes she made as a child and saw the possibility in remaking them as an expression of a musical concept.[84] My own bodily experience with *Endless Box* started with replicating it so that I would have a copy that I could play with. My recreating *Endless Box* was prompted by a desire to understand the origami folding Shiomi used, led to an inquiry into the history of origami, and ended with an understanding of one of the most puzzling visual aspects of *Endless Box*—the spiral created when the boxes are assembled. I could not have figured out what created the spiral without the experience of recreating and handling my replica.

Shiomi learned origami, the art of folding paper, when she was young, as many children do. Origami was first taught to children as part of the kindergarten movement in Germany. Friedrich Froebel (1782-1852) the founding father of early-childhood education, developed an object-based approach to teaching young children. He believed

[83] Fujii and Yamashiro, "To the People."

[84] Fujii and Yamashiro, "To the People."

children needed to interact and play with objects to learn about the world.[85] One of the types of play he employed was paper folding. A brief history of origami will illuminate the connection between German educational practices and Japan's paper-folding tradition.

Paper was first made in China, presumably by Ts'ai Lun in 105 BC. Papermaking knowledge soon passed to Korea, where a sample of paper has been found that dates, at the latest, to the early fourth century. Papermaking was then introduced to Japan from Korea in 610 BC. People have theorized that origami began in China or Korea based on the assumption that paper folding developed soon after the invention of paper. These conjectures, however, have no historical evidence. There is, however, documentation of early paper-folding practices in both Japan and Europe. Origami in its current form appears to be a combination of these two traditions.

Many people assume origami originated in Japan for good reason. The name used around the world to describe it is a Japanese word derived from *ori*, "to fold" and *kami*, "paper."[86] Japan has a rich and extensive history of papermaking and currently produces paper for origami enthusiasts worldwide. Origami as an art is practiced at all skill levels in Japan—from young children and hobbyists to mathematicians and fine artists. When it comes down to it, it is not possible to say exactly who invented origami and when. Paper

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[85] Yoko Shirakawa and Olivia N. Saracho, "Froebel's Kindergarten and Its Movement in Germany and the United States," *Early Child Development and Care* 191, no. 7-8 (2021): 1164-1174, https://doi.org/10.1080/03004430.2020.1865338: 1165.

[86] Nick Robinson, "Origami," in *Encyclopedia Britannica*, accessed May 7, 2022, https://www.britannica.com/art/origami.

is not the most durable medium and so much of the historical record has been lost. There are records, however, that point to Japanese origami originating as ceremonial folded wrappers in the fourteenth century. In Europe, there are images of what appear to be paper boxes as early as the fifteenth century and records of folded baptismal certificates in the sixteenth century.[87] The two traditions were quite distinct before they merged after Japan opened to global exchange. Before the mid-eighteenth century, Japanese folded paper often began with paper of many different shapes, while European folded designs mostly started from square pieces of paper. The Japanese designs were complex and included cutting and painting the paper, while European designs were based on grids. As Koshiro Hatori, origami artist, instructor and author writes, "When one examines the origin of origami, the question should be, in my opinion, about how origami has emerged and developed instead of who folded paper first."[88] Hatori goes on to assert that origami has "never been a 'Japanese' art," but has been documented as developing simultaneously in Europe and Japan, with a rich and fruitful exchange between the Eastern and Western styles of paper folding beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century. One of the paths this exchange travelled was through kindergarten curriculum. Invented in Germany by Froebel, the method of teaching kindergarten spread throughout the world, including to Japan under the direction of Clara Matsuno, née Zitelmann, the German wife in the first officially recognized marriage to take place

[87] Koshiro Hatori, "History of Origami in the East and the West before Interfusion," in *Origami 5,* ed. Patsy Wang-Iverson, Robert J. Lang, and Mark Yim (New York: A K Peters/CRC Press, 2011), 10.

[88] Hatori, "History of Origami," 4.

between a Japanese and a foreigner.[89] The flow of exchange was not one way. Origami knowledge passed from Japan to the West because of a fascination with Japanese culture and the resulting Japonisme of latter-nineteenth century.

The paper Shiomi used to make her origami boxes is machine-made and was originally a bright, almost bluish white but tends to turn a creamier white over time.[90] It is a heavy, coated paper that is shiny and slick, similar in feel to a high-quality magazine cover.[91] Shiomi's boxes appear to be regular masu boxes, but on closer inspection, are put together differently than many of the masu box instructions found online.[92] The method of construction she uses differs in several ways. First, it creates a more stable box that is not as easily taken apart. It is possible to take one of these boxes apart with focused effort, but it is impossible for Shiomi's style of masu box to unfold accidentally, or even easily. If she had made them with the more common folding technique, the boxes

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[89] Kirsty Kawano, "The Woman Who Brought the Joys of Kindergarten to Japan," The Japan Times, December 14, 2016, https://www.japantimes.co.jp/community/2016/12/14/issues/woman-brought-joys-kindergarten-japan.

[90] My foray into the construction of the boxes did not end with researching folding, but extended to sourcing materials. I checked a few places for Japanese paper in the US, including Hiromi Paper in Culver City, California and Washi Arts in Blaine, Washington, but was not able to find a paper to match the *Endless Box's*, which is like the cover of a fine magazine. The closest I could get was 80lb gloss text, which was more like magazine pages than covers.

The change in color is perhaps due to fading of a fluorescent brightening agent. Fujii and Yamashiro, "To the People."

[91] Coated paper is often made with clay. "Grades of Paper," Pulp and Paper Resources and Information Site, accessed May 9, 2022, https://paperonweb.com/grade.htm.

[92] Masu boxes were originally wooden boxes used to measure rice in the feudal period in Japan. This discussion refers to the paper versions popular with origami enthusiasts. See examples of online instructions at https://origami.me/box/, https://www.paperkawaii.com/origami-photo-tutorials/masu-box/, https://www.cutoutandkeep.net/projects/the-traditional-masu-box, https://make-origami.com/masu-box/ https://www.origami-fun.com/origami-box.html, all accessed March 10, 2022.

would have been less likely to withstand repeated handling. Regular masu boxes could have easily unfolded on their own as the nested boxes were separated. Shiomi always meant for the thirty-four boxes to be able to be separated from each other—a necessity for the work to maintain its dual nature of one object and many.[93]

A second difference between Shiomi's method and the one found in origami instructions everywhere is that her method produces boxes with a more streamlined appearance. When you look inside most masu boxes, you see four triangular pieces of paper meeting in the center of the inside base (figure 2.2). Shiomi's boxes do not have these, either because she cut them off, or because she tucked them inside the walls of the boxes. Shiomi also constructs her boxes in a way that does not leave the creases in the base that can frequently be seen from the outside of many masu boxes (figure 2.3). The lack of these inner flaps and outer creases not only makes the boxes look sleeker but also widens the visual distance between the creator and the work by withholding the signs of construction that can be seen with other methods of making origami boxes.

A third difference in the construction of the boxes is a subtle but powerful one that materially changes the way the boxes behave individually and in relation to each other. The final step in the construction of most masu box patterns is to arrange the square of pre-folded paper into a long, six-sided shape with rolled sides and pointed ends (figure 2.4). The ends with points are folded into the center while simultaneously pushing

[93] A 1964 Maciunas photograph shows the boxes disassembled. See https://www.moma.org/collection/works/128284. Shiomi made a large set that she displayed disassembled during concerts. The Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo's video shows the *Endless Box* being taken apart one box at a time as recently as 2011.

folds of paper into the walls to form the box. It is easy to determine if a box has been constructed this way. Looking at the vertical edges of a masu box, one can see where the paper that forms one wall continues under an edge of the adjoining wall. A regular masu box has two walls where both sides continue under and two walls where both sides overlap (figure 2.5). In contrast, Shiomi's boxes' walls are all the same: one continuing side and one overlapping side. This may seem like a minor thing, but it has a large effect on the way the boxes behave and on how they look under close inspection. For one thing, each wall locks the one next to it in place with a triangle of folded paper tucked beneath the neighboring wall. Common masu boxes are stabilized by the four triangular flaps that meet in the center of the inside base of the box. Hiding or removing those triangles has the potential of compromising the stability of Shiomi's boxes. Her unorthodox masu box construction, omitting the stabilizing inner triangles, and with its ring of locked-in-place walls, both creates and solves the same problem—how to keep the box streamlined while preventing it from unfolding on its own.

Shiomi's tucked-into-their-neighbor walls both add and subtract from the visual aspect of the boxes. They subtract by hiding the triangular pieces of paper within them, leaving a cleaner inner box, less diluted by extra information. The component the tucked walls add is a surprising spiral—unpredictable since the curved lines are created with paper boxes that are made only of straight lines. The spiral appears because, instead of two thick walls and two thin walls like the ones on a regular masu box, each of the four walls in Shiomi's boxes has a thick half and a thinner half—the thick half being the section that contains the flap of paper from the adjoining wall. The thick and thin wall

sections alternate around the four sides of the box. This cycle of thick, thin, thick, thin forms the spiral—both subtly on each individual box and more powerfully when the boxes are assembled.

The *Endless Box* is made of the simplest of materials—plain white paper without any marks. Paper forms both the skin and the bones, the substrate and the expression, of the work. It is a geometric composition, simultaneously a concrete and an abstract expression of an idea. There are no marks on the *Endless Box.* As with a marble bust, all in white, the form is discerned by light and shadow. There are no grid lines or asemic writing or tiny, typed directions. There are no ink stains or gradients of color. Shiomi took great care to make the boxes in a way that left them devoid of as many marks of the maker's hand or extraneous visual information as possible. Being devoid of markings is one of the striking aspects of *Endless Box*, especially as it was made during a time that Shiomi's major creative focus was on her action poems—works that had their physical expression in text. In addition to this contrast with Shiomi's own works from the same period, this lack of marks makes the *Endless Box* stand out from most of the other works associated with Fluxus, a movement centered on the printed word.[94]

Once the wood lid is removed and the lilac fabric is folded back, the viewer is confronted with Shiomi's *Endless Box* in one of two ways. Within its wooden box, it can be arranged with the openings all facing up or with them alternating between up and down. If the openings alternate direction, they create a matryoshka-like box that has to be

[94] Simon Anderson, "Fluxus Publicus," in *In the Spirit of Fluxus*, ed. Janet Jenkins (Minneapolis: Walker Arts Center, 1993), 40.

flipped over each time a layer is removed. Positioned this way within the box, the viewer first sees a flat white glossy surface—an invitation, much like the folded fabric, to continue opening and delve deeper to see what the object contains or what it might say. This arrangement is the one that inspired Shiomi to describe the work as "charged with a sensual reality of removing one box cover to reveal another box, then another, and so on."[95] *Endless Box* has this tantalizing affect, not only when it is put together with opposite openings, but in either arrangement, because of the wood box and fabric wrapper. When the openings alternate, however, this sensation of suspense, curiosity, and delight is extended for much longer. It could feel endless to the thoughtful person opening the boxes, especially if they did not know ahead of time how many there are. One might wonder, "How long will this go on? How many boxes did she fit in here? How much smaller can these boxes get?"

Shiomi has written about *Endless Box*:

> I was thinking about transparent music, music in which nothing could be heard but the ceaseless passage of time. And I thought, perhaps this could be presented to the senses not necessarily through sound, but by some other method. . . . I emptied my mind, and what came into it was an image of the origami boxes I used to make as a child. No matter how many boxes you opened, there would always be a slightly smaller one inside, and each time you opened a box, it was as if you were entering yet another, deeper layer of time.[96]

One way to get a limited glimpse into what it is like to intentionally and thoughtfully open the *Endless Box*, is to watch the film created for a 2012 exhibition in

[95] Yoshimoto, *Into Performance*, 146.

[96] Fujii and Yamashiro, "To the People."

Tokyo, *MOT Collection Chronicle 1964-: Off Museum* at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo (Feb. 4–May 6, 2012).[97] Aki Fujii, a curator from the Museum of Contemporary Art, Tokyo, describes one problem in displaying the *Endless Box*:

> When we featured [Shiomi's] work . . . exhibiting the work presented a dilemma, as a museum is restricted to the existing vocabulary of display models even when showing work such as this, which possesses a dynamism that transcends the rigid confines of glass cases and the static relationship between artwork and viewer.[98]

Fujii's solution to the problem of displaying a work of art that demands to be interacted with was to make a film of her hands gracefully and carefully taking the boxes apart, one at a time.[99] It is understandable that Fujii would want to make the *Endless Box* more accessible. Since it is an artwork that can influence multiple sensations, limiting it to a single visual image would be unfortunate. While the video is still only a visual experience, it at least gives the viewer an opportunity to experience the tactile by proxy as they watch Fujii's hands manipulate the layers of folded paper. It also provides an opportunity to feel the sensual reality of the temporal aspect of the work: one that speaks of being infinite and endless.

This reference to infinity is more immediately apparent when the paper boxes are arranged with all their openings facing upwards, as in a photograph from the Museum of Modern Art (figure 2.6). Seen as Shiomi's visual representation of a diminuendo, the

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[97] Fujii and Yamashiro, "To the People."

[98] Fujii and Yamashiro, "To the People."

[99] Shiomi insisted it was another person's hands in the film, not her own. Fujii and Yamashiro, "To the People."

boxes go from largest to smallest in a multitude of miniscule steps.[100] The smallness of the innermost boxes and the smallness of lessening sound is the genesis of the work's conception—the idea that Shiomi had in mind while she planned and measured and cut. She also had in mind the passage of time, which is a necessity for a change in sound. The boxes can also be looked at as beginning in the center and growing ever larger, an expression not of a lessening, but rather of an ever-increasing expansion. While the boxes are limited by the constraints of their materials and the space they actually occupy, they effectively express the idea of infinity.[101]

The immediacy of the concept seen when the openings are aligned, in contrast to the more drawn-out expression in the alternating arrangement, does not mean that seeing the boxes with their openings facing one way is any less captivating. The boxes stacked together in this way create a number of lines: parallel, perpendicular, vertical, horizontal, near, far, straight, and curved. Outside the wood case, the largest of the boxes, despite being made of paper, appears solid and substantial, even without the wood to add gravitas. Its ramrod-straight and rectilinear outer dimensions brook no infringement into its space. The inner part has more movement. Here is where the ever-smaller boxes are seen and where the lines become more varied. As noted previously, these lines are not formed by any kind of mark-making; they only result from the play of light over the box

[100] The outside measurements of the largest paper box in the Getty's *Endless Box* are five and one-eighths inches by five and one-eighths inches by two and nine-sixteenths inches. The smallest box is three-eighths of an inch by three-eighths of an inch by one-eighth of an inch.

[101] All the boxes are folded from the same paper and in the same way. There comes a point where the thickness of the paper interferes with the creator's ability to fold ever small squares of paper into even smaller boxes.

forms. Most prominent are the lines made by the upper edges of each box, squares that run evenly along the corresponding parallel lines of boxes just larger and just smaller. These are brightest white at their apices, where the glossy paper catches the most light, while the narrow spaces between the boxes create lines of shadow demarcating the limits of the individual squares. These strata change intensity at each corner, which is also the locus of a curiosity: curved lines made by the squarest of objects. As the boxes diminish in size, they are encouraged into a slight twist by the differing thicknesses of the walls resulting from Shiomi's box-making method. The variation in thickness and the resulting twist together make two sets of curved lines. The more obvious one is at the corners of the boxes, where the shadows change depth as the side of the box changes its position in relation to the light source. Because of this movement towards light or dark, the curve is easy to see. There is another, more subtle set of curved lines. They run down the centers of the four sides of the boxes' walls (figure 2.6). Like the corner curves, they are a result of a change in light and shadow but occur where the walls change their thickness. The extra bulk of the tucked-in triangles forms a small protuberance in the shiny paper on the crest of each wall. These tiny bumps lined up in a row make a ridge that grabs more light than the rim of wall on either side of it. Lined up together, those little dots of extra light form a band (figure 2.6). These curves becomes more or less obvious with a change in lighting, with a raking light emphasizing the effect and bright light directly overhead minimizing it. While it may not be the first thing a viewer notices, when the lighting conditions are right it is one of the most beguiling.

A third way to arrange the paper boxes is singly and unbundled. This was always an option for the work as conceived by Shiomi. She made a larger set that performers disassembled and arranged in different patterns during concerts.[102] Fujii, in addition to the film of her hands opening the boxes, also arranged the individual boxes of a copy of *Endless Box* for photographing and display (figures 2.7 and 2.8). In writing about how she decided to arrange them, Fujii referred back to their inception as a musical idea, "I would like to mention the *Endless Box* exhibit. As you probably know, there are no instructions by the artist on how to exhibit that work. In the two images, I tried to display this work as if I were playing a musical instrument at will."[103] Each *Endless Box*, separated into its thirty-four parts, becomes a landscape of white straight-edged forms, a miniature cityscape stark in its simplicity, a ghost town devoid of the markings of civilization. The endlessness of the work is still there in its repeated forms, but they have a different relation to each other. Instead of many becoming one, they are individuals competing for the attention of the observer. The association of the separate boxes changes from a collaborative to a hierarchical one, with size their distinguishing characteristic.

The many options for arranging and experiencing the boxes point to their mutability. Even though many are stored away in archives or under vitrines, and even if the librarians and conservators charged with caring for Shiomi's boxes cringe at the thought of a patron interacting with them, they were never meant to be out of reach. Rather, Shiomi's intention was that they would both seen and touched. While seeing and

[102] Shiomi, "Intermedia/Transmedia."

[103] Aki Fujii, email message to author, May 23, 2022.

feeling are only two of the five senses, the physicality of *Endless Box* prompts one to wonder what it would be like to bring into play all the sensorial possibilities of an experience with the work. While tasting the boxes might not be very satisfying, smelling them could be. An *Endless Box* would perhaps have that old book smell, described as a "combination of grassy notes with a tang of acids and a hint of vanilla over an underlying mustiness."[104] There could be the quiet swish of paper moving against paper as each box is removed from the cocoon made by the box just larger. What other sounds could be made with the boxes? If they were turned upside-down and gently tapped what tones would emerge? Could the ridges be thrummed like some sort of paper harp?

Besides the visual, perhaps the tactile experience would be the most satisfying. What is it be like to touch Shiomi's tantalizing set of white paper boxes? Is there a danger of a papercut, or do the folded edges preclude that threat? What is it like to run one's fingertips from the outer edge to the center, feeling the lip of each box in turn? One might experience them for a while as a single object, but it would be hard to resist the temptation to separate them. Do the boxes slip apart with ease, or does it take some wiggling? How much skill does it take to put them back together? These questions have nothing to do with music. Once an artwork offers the invitation to touch, to play, to enter, it opens itself up to change. This change can be, like Fujii's display of *Endless Box*, one of shape or distribution. The idea of human interaction and the resulting possibility for change is built into Shiomi's *Endless Box,* and like other Fluxus objects, it was meant for

[104] Matija Strlič et al., "Material Degradomics: On the Smell of Old Books," *Analytical Chemistry* 81, no. 20 (October 15, 2009): 8617, https://doi.org/10.1021/ac9016049.

human-thing interplay. Indeed, leaving them in a drawer or under a case dims the vision their creators had for them and stunts their potential for realization. Touching and moving something changes its place in the world, changes its relation to the people and things around it, and can change its meaning. Artworks can be created with one message in mind, but as they move, post-production, to a new owner, a dealer, a buyer, a museum, they are open to new interpretations and new potentialities. This is especially true of *Endless Box* for three reasons. First, there are multiple copies, which means that no one iteration has a market on its meaning. Second, its inborn invitation to play means its place and expression can be morphed. And third, Shiomi feels that *Endless Box* ought to stand on its own, independent of its creator, and that anonymity was in keeping with the ideals of Fluxus.[105]

Shiomi's diminuendo is an object with nothing more to it than blank white paper to express ideas. Even as an unnumbered, unlimited edition, copies of *Endless Box* made by Shiomi are necessarily limited by the inclination of the artist. Copies that are functionally equivalent, however, could conceivably be recreated by anyone with the time and interest to choose paper and learn origami, since Shiomi's method of making the boxes effectively hides the hand of the creator, thus making a replica closer to an original than if evidence of the artist's touch was retained in the work. The boxes are folded so precisely that they almost seem machine-made. The wooden box shows hints of its maker more clearly in the smear of putty covering the nails than in the precisely folded boxes do. Shiomi's original concept can be repeated in ways that artworks that highlight the

[105] Fujii and Yamashiro, "To the People."

hand of the artist cannot. This visual distance between the creator and the work is intentional. This innate anonymity of *Endless Box* and its pure while palette can be compared to Robert Rauschenberg's *White Paintings* (figure 2.9). A comparison between these two works can give insight into the historical context of *Endless Box* and how it operated in the framework of Post-war artistic production. It places Shiomi's work in as innovative and powerful an art historical place as Rauschenberg's more studied works.

In 1951, Rauschenberg painted six sets of canvases by applying white house paint with a roller. The sets include varying numbers of panels: one, two, three, four, five and seven.[106] His stated purpose was to make paintings that did not show the hand of their creator and thus took the visual indicators of the artist out of the work. Rauschenberg took this idea so far as to instruct others in *White Paintings*' recreation—the person who actually did the painting was irrelevant to the visual result Rauschenberg wanted.[107] *Endless Box* could be recreated the same way by anyone with the right materials and a proper understanding of the process, just like *White Paintings* were.

Another kinship these two objects share is their focus on the temporal. Shiomi's work is very much about the passage of time, both in its reference to decreasing sound over time and in the way a person interacts with it: disassembling, arranging, and combining back again. *White Paintings* also reference time in two ways: one more immediate and one long-term. In the moment, the paintings can be indicators of the

[106] "White Painting (1951)," Robert Rauschenberg Foundation, accessed May 14, 2022, https://www.rauschenbergfoundation.org/art/galleries/series/white-painting-1951.

[107] Robert Rauschenberg. *White Painting. 1951*, The Museum of Modern Art, audio file, accessed May 14, 2022, https://www.moma.org/audio/playlist/40/639; "White Painting (1951)."

passage of the hours in a day as the light changes around them. The observant viewer can be connected to the paintings' surroundings by observing the effect the environment has on them. Their lack of other information can even be seen as forcing this environmental interaction. John Cage wrote, "To Whom it May Concern: the white paintings came first; my silent piece came second" and the paintings can be compared to Cage's *4'33"* composition in that their lack of information can free the observer to notice what else might be going on, whether it is the sunlight on a blank white canvas or the sound of wind outside a concert hall without notes being played.[108] Long-term ravages of time are seen differently by Rauschenberg, however. He has, on occasion, instructed that they be repainted to return them to their pure state and retain their lack of symbols or signs.[109]

A third characteristic *Endless Box* and *White Paintings* share is, of course, their pure white palette. Once removed from their wooden box and fabric wrapper, Shiomi's boxes are as pure and clean an object as Rauschenberg's freshly painted white canvases. The lack of inked or painted lines and color in these works allows them to interact with light and shadow. This interplay connects them with the space around them in more obvious ways than does a work that is distracting the viewer with myriad other types of information. While, in reality, *White Paintings* are three dimensional as they are painted on canvas that was stretched around wooden boards, they function as two-dimensional images. This is one area where *Endless Box* has more information than Rauschenberg's

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[108] John Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writings*. United States: Wesleyan University Press, 2010: 98.

[109] Sarah Roberts, "White Painting [Three Panel]," SFMOMA July 2013, https://www.sfmoma.org/artwork/98.308.A-C/essay/white-painting-three-panel/.

White Paintings. *Endless Box's* three-dimensionality quite literally adds another dimension and moves the work into another sphere. While the bottoms and sides of each individual box can function, like Rauschenberg's paintings, as flat white rectangles, the open tops are different, exposing their interiors and holding a space for air, or smaller boxes, to inhabit.[110] The insides of the boxes are also canyons for light to either shine into or be excluded from, depending on its angle.

Endless Box's expansion into a third dimension is not, of course, the only difference between these two works. They differ in terms of scale. Shiomi has made *Endless Box* in different sizes, but the majority of them are the same and take up just a six inch by six-inch square of a surface, rising just over three inches above it. Rauschenberg's *White Paintings* in contrast are all large; except for the one-panel painting, they are each six feet high. The seven-panel iteration stretches over ten feet across the wall.[111]

They differ in their media. Each medium and process is reflective of the life and culture of the artist who used it. Paper has been central in Japanese life for centuries and folding origami boxes was a part of Shiomi's childhood. Rauschenberg studied at a number of different art schools in the United States and France, where painting would

[110] I use the terms bottom, side and top here rather loosely to hopefully direct the mind's eye of the reader to what I am describing. Each plane of the boxes can act as top, bottom, *or* side, as evidenced by the different ways to arrange and assemble the boxes.

[111] "White Painting (1951)."

have been included in the curriculum.[112] The different materials imbue each work with varying visual qualities but create an even larger separation in how someone might interact with them haptically. Rauschenberg's *White Paintings* are off-limits to human handling. Keeping them pristine and untouched was important enough to the artist that he would have them repainted as needed. In contrast, *Endless Box* is meant to be touched and is best understood when interacted with. Another way the media of the two artworks differ is in their essential composition; the bright white of *Endless Box* is inherent in the paper, while for the *White Paintings* it is an addition.

At least to some, paper carries with it the connotation of impermanence, while canvas references the Western tradition of oil paintings and their status as a "fine art." This notion of a painting having a certain prestige in the art and museum world may be one reason Shiomi's *Endless Box* has not generally been considered as revolutionary as Rauschenberg's, but that is only one of many possible factors. For one thing, Shiomi has not talked about her *Endless Box* in the same terms that Rauschenberg has, nor has she instructed others in her method of remaking her *Endless Box.* The stated reproducibility is one of the most important components of *White Paintings.*

Whitney Chadwick describes how women's "attempts to juggle domestic responsibilities with artistic production have often resulted in . . . works smaller in scale, than those produced by male contemporaries. Yet art history continues to privilege . . .

[112] Marco Livingstone, "Rauschenberg, Robert," Grove Art Online, accessed May 14, 2022, https://www.oxfordartonline.com/groveart/view/10.1093/gao/9781884446054.001.0001/oao-9781884446054-e-7000070888

monumental scale . . . over . . . intimate."[113] This observation points to another reason *Endless Box* has not been given the same attention as *White Paintings*—the scale of the works. Size influences the effect an artwork has on people because of how it relates to bodies. Something larger has a certain sublimity built into it by virtue of its size in relation to the viewer. A person encountering a smaller object may need more imagination or attention to be immersed in it in the same way. This catalog of factors is not exhaustive, but the final one for consideration is the setting in which these works were first revealed to the world and with which they are still associated.

Rauschenberg's *White Paintings* were created by an artist who already had a growing reputation and who had connections to powerful people in the art world. Shiomi's *Endless Box* was the first visual creation of someone who, while well-connected to avant-garde music in Japan, did not have many art world connections before her involvement with Fluxus, a group created in opposition to the intentions and structures of the art circles Rauschenberg moved in. Rauschenberg boldly sold his *White Paintings* in prestigious New York galleries where the individual artist was almost deified. In contrast, Shiomi was surprised at Maciunas' willingness to pay her twenty dollars each for ten of her *Endless Boxes* which then went into *Fluxkits* as part of a move towards, as Maciunas put it, "purge the world of . . . intellectual, professional, and commercialized culture."[114] When Paik saw the connection between Shiomi's work and what was going on in Fluxus,

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[113] Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art, and Society* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2007), 11.

[114] Clive Phillpot, "Manifesto I," George Maciunas Foundation Inc., accessed May 14, 2022, https://georgemaciunas.com/about/cv/manifesto-i/.

he encouraged her to send them to Maciunas.[115] Maciunas, the mastermind behind much of the Fluxus coordination in New York at the time, liked *Endless Box* so much that he requested more copies from Shiomi.[116] He encouraged her to come to the United States and, in time, purchased ten more copies of the *Endless Box,* which gave Shiomi the funds to fly to New York. She lived there for a year, taking part in Fluxus. Even after her return to Japan, Shiomi still considered herself a Fluxus artist, although not exclusively. As noted earlier, she agreed with Maciunas' categorization of her as "50% Fluxus" and said in an interview that most of what she had done between her return to Japan and that point was "composing, which has no relation to Fluxus."[117] Fluxus may have provided introductions to like-minded creatives and broadened her venues and connections on a global scale, but it did not create Shiomi the artist. Her work, despite its similarities to other Fluxus event scores and objects, was never derivative. Being Shiomi's introduction to Fluxus will always be a part of what the *Endless Box* is, but it is important to remember that Shiomi created it independently before she was introduced to Fluxus. These two works, *Endless Box* and *White Paintings* had very different beginnings, but have many characteristics in common. Their initiators may have had different motives,

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[115] Yoshimoto, *Into Performance*, 147.

[116] Yoshimoto, *Into Performance*, 147.

[117] Rather than 100%. Shiomi, "Oral history interview."

This was in 1983 and she somewhat diminishes the time she spent on *Spatial Poem*. Since that time, Shiomi has returned to taking part in Fluxus performances and even, as mentioned in the introduction, written a book about Fluxus. Kuniharu Akiyama, Ay-O, and Mieko Shiomi, "Fluxus Universe: A Conversation between Kuniharu Akiyama, Ay-O, and Mieko Shiomi," in *Fluxus: Art into Life*, ed. Mami Yoshimoto and Hajime Morita, trans. Midori Yoshimoto, Nobuko Akita, and Yoko Hayami (Saitama: Urawa Art Museum, 2004), 176 [originally printed in *Art Vivant 11: Fluxus* (Tokyo: Seibu Art Museum, 1983), n.p.]

but the objects fall into step with each other in historical importance as they move beyond their creators.

Shiomi's *Endless Box* was made with a haptic experience in mind. She chose paper with a slight blueish violet tint, "with the pliability, tension, and strength required for folding."[118] Paper and papermaking are important in Japanese culture and history. Paper has the potential to be both beautiful and perpetually useful. Shiomi took a fundamentally useful thing, paper, and made an object that expressed an abstract idea. She transformed her avant-garde thinking about music into a tangible, mutable thing. This thing grew outside the bounds of its original concept, even in Shiomi's eyes, turning an abstract thought into a sensual experience.

Endless Box is a world on its own, a self-contained geography of white ridges that make a funnel for the eyes and mind. The materiality of *Endless Box* extends an invitation to engage with it, just like Shiomi's events scores, which Kawamura described as work that "does not seek to communicate only her ideas but encourages the performers to interact with the environment around them and become aware of their own diverse perspectives regarding it and themselves."[119] *Endless Box* calls out to be handled and experienced—it is as solid as a cube and as delicate as a paper blowing in the wind. It is serious and playful. I was able to finally understand how the curved lines of *Endless Box* were formed after my replication of it, demonstrating how bodily engagement facilitates a greater comprehension of artworks, especially those created with interaction in mind.

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[118] Fujii and Yamashiro, "To the People."

[119] Kawamura, "Appreciating the Incidental," 314.

Figure 2.1. Mieko Shiomi, *Endless Box* 1965. Photo credit: Fondazione Bonotto, Italy.

Figure 2.2. Masu box with paper triangles meeting in the middle. Photo credit: Amy Spencer

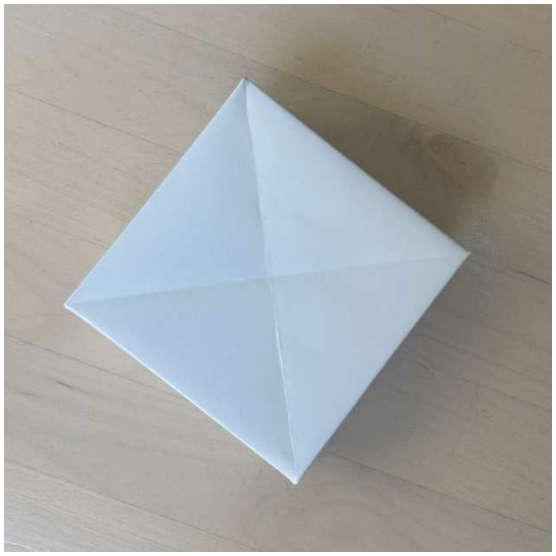

Figure 2.3. Visible folds on the bottom of a masu box. Photo credit: Amy Spencer

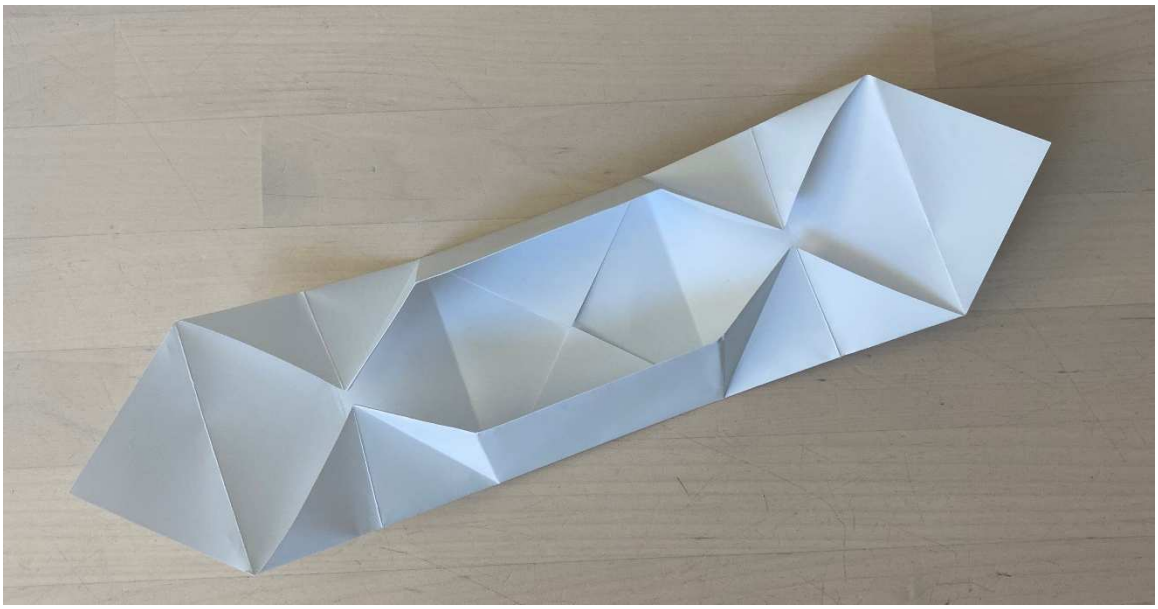

Figure 2.4. Six-sided shape with rolled sides and pointed ends. Photo credit: Amy Spencer

Figure 2.5. The paper that forms one wall continuing under the edges of the adjoining walls. Photo credit: Amy Spencer.

Figure 2.6. Mieko Shiomi, *Endless Box* 1963. Photo credit: The Museum of Modern Art, New York, via Art Resource.

Figure 2.7. Shiomi Mieko, *Endless Box*, 1963/1990. Photo credit: Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo.

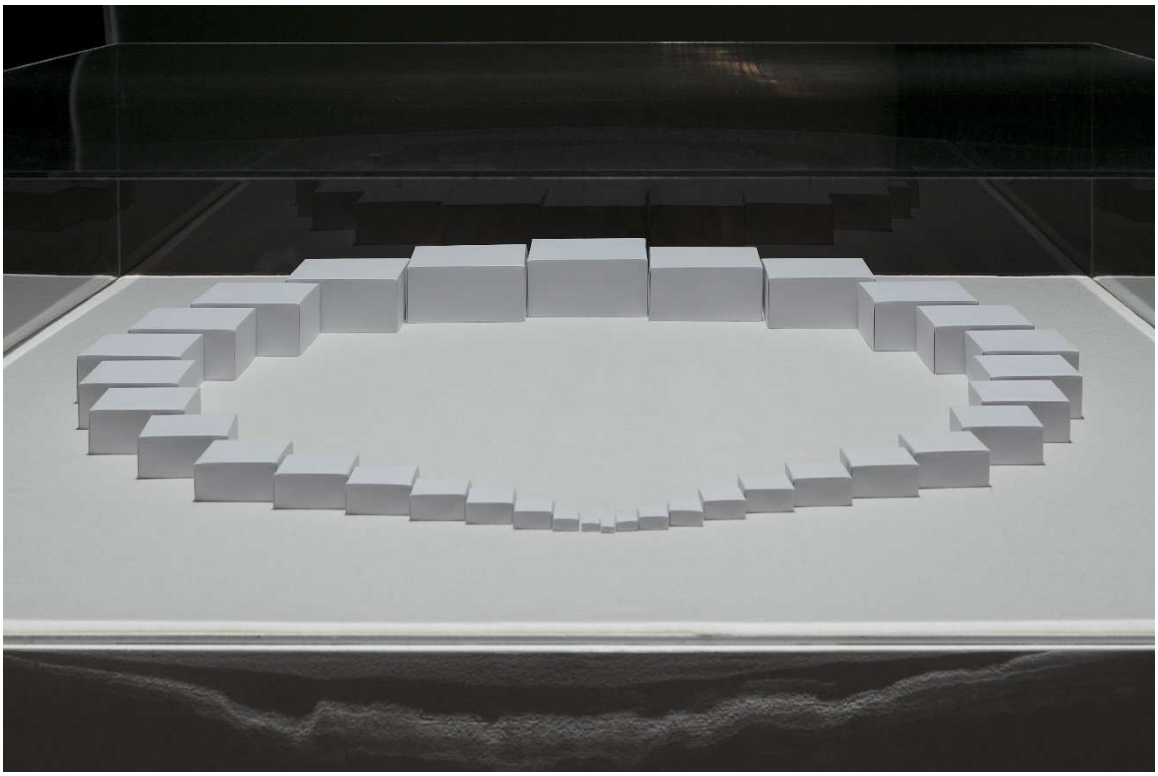

Figure 2.8. Shiomi Mieko, Endless Box, 1963/1990. Photo credit: Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo.

Figure 2.9. Robert Rauschenberg, *White Painting [Three Panel]*, 1951. Photo credit: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, https://www.sfmoma.org.

Chapter Three: *Spatial Poem*

Spatial Poem, Mieko Shiomi's decade-long project of mailing event invitations and collecting responses has often been described in terms of time and space. It certainly pushed temporal and spatial boundaries: it lasted from 1965-1975, and included events that took place around the world.[120] Shiomi made a monumental work that spanned the globe decades before the internet. She considered it as one great whole, rather than nine separate events.[121] Looking at it on a large scale is revelatory and brings to light some of its most innovative aspects. Close looking at the details is also illuminating and provides an opportunity to engage with the materiality of elements of *Spatial Poem* on a smaller scale. This chapter aims to do both.

The individual events or components of *Spatial Poem* are often considered rather than the whole. These parts have been called several things: concrete poems, maps, events, land art, and mail art. These can all be considered aspects of *Spatial Poem*, especially if examined out of context*,* but the whole is greater than the sum of its many parts. It is as vast as the globe it spanned and as finite as the moment each performance was enacted in. Fitting into Shiomi's self-described category of transmedia production, it consists of a multitude of both physical and conceptual parts.[122]

A brief look at the principal elements gives an idea of the monumentality of the work. It had its genesis when Shiomi was in New York performing Fluxus events. She

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[120] This is the time frame Shiomi wrote in her book, *Spatial Poem.* I would argue that the book itself is another part of the work. It was published in 1976 and extends the time frame a year beyond the decade Shiomi noted.

[121] Mieko Shiomi, *Spatial Poem* (Osaka, Japan, 1976).

[122] Shiomi, "Intermedia/Transmedia."

began to feel limited by geography as she, and by extension, the work she was performing, could only be in one place at a time. Even if she was anticipating her return to Japan, she would not have known at this point what a fortuitous development this would be for her personally in the coming years. Shiomi has written about a time when the demands of motherhood kept her close to home. It was during these years of early motherhood that Shiomi orchestrated the bulk of *Spatial Poem*. The project kept her connected to and engaged with the larger world at a time when her own movements through it were limited.[123] Her first desire was to create art that could be "alive everywhere all the time and at any time anybody wanted it."[124] She had become a person who not only wanted but needed art that defied geography.[125] In response to *Spatial Poem No. 2 (direction event),* Shiomi herself recorded that at the specified time she was "walking towards the sounds which were too distant to reach her ears," which was a fitting analogy of what *Spatial Poem* was for Shiomi—a grasping for, and successful capture of, things beyond her reach.[126]

This concept of art that can happen anywhere was the beginning of *Spatial Poem;* the next additions were the physical paper invitations Shiomi created. They were like her

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[123] Jessica Santone quotes a letter Shiomi sent to Maciunas in 1968 telling him she cannot help with his plans for a record of *Spatial Poem No*. 3 because, between her baby and the elderly relative she was caring for, she was "a prisoner in house," in "Archiving Fluxus Performances in Mieko Shiomi's *Spatial Poem.*" Chris Townsend, Alex Trott, and Rhys Davies, eds., *Across the Great Divide: Modernism's Intermedialities, from Futurism to Fluxus* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 133.

[124] Yoshimoto, *Into Performance,* 155.

[125] Her drive to create music and art has been both consistent and insistent throughout her life.

[126] This was, for Shiomi, 7:00 am, Tokyo time on October 16, 1965. Her response is recorded in the book she published containing all the responses to the nine events. Shiomi, *Spatial Poem,* 13.

action poems, or event scores, in their minimalism and in how each person might have interpreted and performed them. Indeed, some refer to earlier action poems.[127] They differed because they were part of a larger project with a prescribed time frame. One could reenact the scores from 1963 now and they would be part of the same work of art, but *Spatial Poem,* at least in its original form, was limited temporally.

As described in chapter one, an event score is a particular kind of art that relinquishes control in exchange for potential by allowing anyone to perform the work. In the case of *Spatial Poem,* the potentiality Shiomi was in search of was freedom from geographic limitation. To move outside the boundaries that had been frustrating Shiomi, she needed help. Her participants' performances and the reports they sent back to Shiomi made the project into the global act that she had envisioned. Yoshimoto describes how Shiomi saw *Spatial Poem* as a collage or poem on the earth.[128] Perhaps the most expansive component of the work was the network that was created as people connected with each other.

This network is what made *Spatial Poem* unique when compared to other event scores and mail art projects. It is different from other event scores in that it was a series

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[127] For example, < *shadow piece* > from 1963 that was described in chapter 1 is an obvious inspiration for *Spatial Poem No. 4 (shadow event)* and the first line of instruction, "Let something fall from a high place," from < *falling event* > (also 1963) is similar to *Spatial Poem No. 3 (falling event).* Shiomi explained, "I thought of *Spatial Poem* when I was searching for a new method for broader communication without changing the concepts I had already developed." Kuniharu Akiyama, Ay-O, and Mieko Shiomi, "Fluxus Universe: A Conversation between Kuniharu Akiyama, Ay-O, and Mieko Shiomi," in Fluxus: Art into Life, ed. Mami Yoshimoto and Hajime Morita, trans. Midori Yoshimoto, Nobuko Akita, and Yoko Hayami (Saitama: Urawa Art Museum, 2004), 162. Originally printed in *Art Vivant 11: Fluxus* (Tokyo: Seibu Art Museum, 1983).

[128] Yoshimoto, *Into Performance,* 156.

of nine events performed over a decade, in Shiomi's use of the international mail system, and in the specificity of her instructions. Scores can have varying degrees of control written into them depending on the extent and particularity of the instructions. The exactness of Shiomi's *Spatial Poem* directions will be explored later in this chapter. In order to clarify the singularity of the project, a brief look at mail art is fitting. Mail art is distinguished from art sent through the mail and even from correspondence between artists in that it is a work of art in itself, rather than a vehicle for art. The art is not enclosed or added onto something else, the object that goes through the mail in its entirety is the physical component of the work. Correspondence between artists began to make this transition to correspondence art in the 1950s, at the end of which Ken Friedman wrote that the "three primary sources" of mail art were taking shape, including The New York Correspondence School, the Nouveau Realistes and Fluxus.[129] Friedman distinguishes between "correspondence art" and "mail art," describing the first as an exchange and the second as one-way communication.

An example of one-way mail art was undertaken by Fluxus artist On Kawara during overlapping years with Shiomi's *Spatial Poem*. Kawara's *I Got Up* (1968-1979) consisted of the artist rubber stamping the words, "I GOT UP AT" followed by the rubber-stamped time he got out of bed each day on two postcards and mailing them off to people he knew.[130] The postcards were generic, tourist-type reproductions of photographs

[129] Ken Friedman, "The Early Days of Mail Art," in *Eternal Network: A Mail Art Anthology*, ed. Chuck Welch (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1995), 3–16.

[130] "Postcards: I Got Up," The Guggenheim Museums and Foundation, accessed May 21, 2022, https://www.guggenheim.org/teaching-materials/on-kawara-silence/postcards-i-got-up.

of where he was at the time. Some people would get just one, while other might receive an entire month's worth of missives from Kawara.[131] Along with his analogous works *I Met*, and *I Went, I Got Up* was self-referential. They recorded a moment that the artist existed in and "turned the previously ephemeral into a kind of object," but the artworks did not include a return of the favor receiving a record of others.[132] Kawara sent information about his own activities but, at least within the scope of these projects, showed no interest in any response from his recipients. He used the mail to spread information about the mundane minutiae of his life as a statement of existence. Shiomi, in contrast, wanted to know about and connect with the existence of others as expressed by their performances. As Kawamura put it, "Experiencing and experimenting with materials in the environment brings one closer to the material reality of one's own existence, and to that of others."[133]

Like Kawara, Ray Johnson was a mail artist who sent out self-focused missives. He said of his work, "I have written a lot of letters, and given away a lot of material and information, and it has been my compulsion. And as I have done this, it has become historical. It's my resume, it's my biography, it's my history, it's my life."[134] Writings on

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[131] "Postcards: I Got Up."

[132] Jeffrey Weiss et al., *On Kawara — Silence*, First Edition (New York: Guggenheim Museum Publications, 2015), 29.

Kotz, "Post-Cagean Aesthetics," 62.

[133] Kawamura, "Appreciating the Incidental, 315.

[134] Tim Keane, "I Is an Other: The Mail Art of Ray Johnson," *Hyperallergic*, August 22, 2015, http://hyperallergic.com/230800/i-is-an-other-the-mail-art-of-ray-johnson/.

Johnson highlight the network he created with his correspondence, but his network was very different from the one Shiomi was creating with *Spatial Poem.* Shiomi sent invitations to others to experience the environment in various way as an expression of her admiration for the earth. Rather than spreading information about *her* life experiences, she was interested in the experiences of others.[135] Her network was one of sharing and connection more than one of self-display.

Shiomi self-published a book in 1976 to chronicle the decade of *Spatial Poem.* It includes the names of every person who responded to her invitations with a contribution and a record of every one of the replies she received (figures 3.19-3.23). In the decade Shiomi was sending out invitations, two hundred and thirty-two people from twenty-six countries contributed over five hundred responses.[136] Both Shiomi and Kawara made works in the Fluxus tradition of blurring life and art, but Shiomi's project intertwined her life with others' lives in a way that Kawara's didn't attempt. The back and forth of it, the return communications, the compilations, and representations of the reports are what really built this web of connections and are what makes *Spatial Poem* stand out.

In the same way, *Spatial Poem* includes aspects of mail art, but it is more. It resembles concrete poetry, but it is larger. Instead of being defined by white space on a page, it describes space on the earth. *Spatial Poem* includes a variety of maps, but instead of diagraming a geography that exists, it adds to that geography with its postal

[135] As quoted in Yoshimoto, *Into Performance*, 156.

[136] Kawamura, "Object into Action," 136.

crossings.[137] It includes score-like invitations, but they differ from mere orchestrations in their demand for a *répondez s'il vous plait,* an expectation of contribution to a larger whole. Shiomi requested reports back from each participant and kept a record of the performances. These building blocks of the network—each individual performance—were fundamental aspects of the work and make *Spatial Poem* more dynamic and alive than it would have been if, for example, Shiomi had just sent self-addressed stamped postcards for people to stick back in the mail. Looking through the photographs and reading the text of the records of performances that participants sent back to Shiomi is reminiscent of the social media phenomenon from the pandemic quarantine of 2020 where people recreated artworks and posted photos.[138] Each rendition began with a visual prompt such as a painting. People who happened to choose the same artwork had that theme running through their interpretations, but their creations were still individual and distinct. Just like the pandemic recreations that took a two-dimensional painting of a three-dimensional body and then remade it again using bodies as the medium, Shiomi's events used bodies, along with the paper and postal services, to write her global poem. The corporeal expressions of her instructions translated the two dimensions of her invitations into three, and even four, dimensions as she played with space and time.

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[137] Shiomi created a map for *Spatial Poem No. 1*, but would not allow Maciunas to print the newspaper he wanted to make for it. She did let him create one for *Spatial Poem No. 2* (figures 3.5 and 3.6), and he also recreated her *Spatial Poem No. 1* map at a later date for inclusion in the *Flux Cabinet*. See https://www.moma.org/collection/works/127939.

[138] See for example, Sarah Waldorf, Annelisa Stephan, and Getty Publications, *Off the Walls: Inspired Re-Creations of Iconic Artworks* (Los Angeles: Getty Publications., 2020).

This dimensional translation happened over and over again with *Spatial Poem.* From the invitations to bodies and then back to two-dimensional written and photographed reports, this was an artwork with varied expression. Despite this variety, and despite Shiomi's willingness to let others interpret her invitations however they liked, she did not relinquish all control. For one thing, most of her events had exact time frames, some as long as three weeks, and others specified down to a global minute. For another thing, Shiomi had strong feelings about what she would produce to share the results of *Spatial Poem No. 1 (word event)*. The grid of back-and-forth pathways the ideas and information formed was like a net encompassing the globe. A physical representation could have made those conceptual connections more comprehensible, but Shiomi is a conceptual thinker and was committed to the keeping the ideas of *Spatial Poem* as pure as she had conceived them. While she surrendered control of the performances, she was unwilling to concede when Maciunas tried to express her idea in a way she did not agree with. He wanted to print a newspaper in addition to Shiomi's map, but she stood her ground, not wanting *Spatial Poem No. 1* depicted in two different physical formats. She was concerned that a two-dimensional representation would not be able to hold all the information she received and she already had something specific in mind—a three-dimensional map that she termed an "object poem," a descriptor that aligned with her earlier naming of her event scores "action poems" and her subsequent efforts as a "spatial poem."[139]

[139] Akiyama, Ay-O, and Shiomi, "Fluxus Universe,"163.

It might have been that Shiomi wanted to retain her aesthetic which was markedly distinct from Maciunas's. He was known to alter artists' designs when he published them.[140] Maciunas was enamored with clip art from the past and complex compositions. Shiomi, in contrast, favored clean, minimalist designs. The three-dimensional object poem she created for *Spatial Poem No. 1.* was comprised of a paper-covered board with mere outlines of landforms making a world map (figure 3.3). The responses she received were printed on tiny flags then attached to pins. This minimalism can also be seen in her design for the invitations with their sanserif text and lack of embellishment. It is carried over to the book she published, which had clean and subdued world maps—in this case, single tone blocks of white and dark or light blue-black. Shiomi's refusal to allow Maciunas to print a newspaper for *Spatial Poem No. 1.* nearly got her kicked out of Fluxus by an angry Maciunas.[141] This was not the only time they argued,[142] but it was serious enough that Shiomi did not even say goodbye when she left New York.[143] Maciunas was persistent, though, and continued to write to Shiomi once she returned to Japan, and she allowed him to create representations of the next three *Spatial Poem* events—numbers two, three and four.

The map Maciunas created for *Spatial Poem No. 2 (direction event)* (figures 3.5 and 3.6) with his circles of text, 18th-century navigators, compass roses, and faux-

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[140] Harren describes how artists' works were often changed by Maciunas for productions, "The handcrafted, one-off prototypes submitted to Maciunas for reduplication as Fluxus editions typically emerged as cheap, mass-produced counterparts." *Fluxus Forms,* 140.

[141] Yoshimoto, *Into Performance,* 156.

[142] Akiyama, Ay-O, and Shiomi, "Fluxus Universe," 178.

[143] Akiyama, Ay-O, and Shiomi, "Fluxus Universe," 166.

stenciled text highlights the differences in his and Shiomi's styles. The book Shiomi published in 1976 to depict the results of all nine events in one place, for example, was a thoughtfully and cohesively designed catalog of the responses to *Spatial Poem.* The events are included chronologically and each time the book moves from one event to the next, the page backgrounds change. There are a total of eight different backgrounds. The only ones that match exactly are *No. 4* and *No. 6* —the two events mainly composed of submitted photographs—which have plain white backgrounds. The other backgrounds are all the afore-mentioned world maps, none of which are the same, although the differences in some cases are barely detectable. These minimalistic depictions of the world served to remind the reader of the global nature of the work without detracting from it. Maciunas' map (figure 3.5) on the other hand, foregrounds *his* design and puts Shiomi and the performances second, if not third, after Fluxus and after himself, its self-styled leader.[144] These physical portrayals of the events—Shiomi's map and Maciunas' maps, calendars, and microfilm—were joined by Shiomi's book as another part of the *Spatial Poem* whole.[145]

Shiomi extended the conceptual aspect of *Spatial Poem* further when she included imagining the possible remaining word cards from *Spatial Poem No. 1 (word event)* years

[144] Shiomi expresses deep gratitude and admiration for Maciunas but is not blind to his faults. She once described his autocratic tendencies: "He wanted to build the Flux Kingdom – to become the man behind the Kingdom and the actual King." Akiyama, Ay-O, and Shiomi, "Fluxus Universe," 165.

[145] Maciunas created both a two-dimensional map with all the *Spatial Poem No. 2 (direction event)* responses depicted, but also recreated Shiomi's object poem (three-dimensional map) for *Spatial Poem No. 1 (word event)* to include in later Fluxus productions.

after the conclusion of her formal collaboration.[146] Finally, the remembrance and rediscovery of *Spatial Poem* will continue to expand Shiomi's everywhere, anytime, artwork as long as a record of it survives and there are people to think about it. Shiomi considered the work a monumental poem, inscribed on the earth for future generations by the actions of its inhabitants. The last page of her book, *Spatial Poem,* reads, in part, "dedicated to the people of the 30th century."[147]

As shown in previous chapters, physically engaging with Shiomi's artworks is a fruitful way to get closer to them and to begin to understand them in the way they were meant to be experienced: corporally. *Spatial Poem* does not offer quite the same opportunity to encounter it in its complexity and completeness. For one thing, it took place over a decade and included hundreds of participants, so for a person to recreate it would be a big project. Also, it was always designed to be limited to a certain time, if not an exact place. The time in which each event of *Spatial Poem* could be performed was specific and contained. Some of the events were meant to take place simultaneously at a global minute painstakingly described by Shiomi in the instructions, while others could happen any time over a set three weeks. Whether long or short, the performances needed to take place during the determined time to be a part of the whole. There are individual components that can be experienced anew, however, as long as it is recognized that the whole is larger than its parts and that these smaller pieces cannot stand in for the entirety. Before a bodily exploration and deeper dive into details, an overview of each event,

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[146] Yoshimoto, *Into Performance,* 157.

[147] Shiomi, *Spatial Poem,* 70.

including a brief, formal description of the invitations will give context to the physical encounter with *Spatial Poem No. 4 (shadow event)* described later.[148]

Shiomi composed, orchestrated, and recorded nine different *Spatial Poem* events over the decade from 1965-1975. The first one is titled *Spatial Poem No. 1 (word event)* (1965; figure 3.2). She typed all the invitations to this first event in New York to save on printing costs, with various layouts, on white paper. The example described here has the title "SPATIAL POEM NO. 1" on the top line of the card, with the subtitle "word event" underneath it.[149] The typewritten instructions are in one, left-justified, block as follows:

> Write a word (or words) on the enclosed card
> and place it somewhere.
> Please tell me the word and the place, which
> will be edited on the world map.

There is a lower-case typewritten signature on the bottom right: "chieko shiomi, 1965." The world map mentioned on the invitation was how Shiomi planned to document this first part of *Spatial Poem.*

Spatial Poem No. 2 (direction event) (1965; figure 3.4) was titled, but not subtitled at the time Shiomi composed it, again in 1965, but after her return to Japan. This one was printed in Okayama on creamy onionskin paper. The instructions are as follows:

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[148] The descriptions in this thesis are based on set #7/23 of a 2020 limited edition collection, *Invitations to Spatial Poem* (2020), in my possession. Shiomi chose to make an edition of 23 since she had that number of clear plastic films with the word *SHADOW* on them remaining in her papers. "Shiomi Mieko 'Invitations to Spatial Poem,'" Toki-No-Wasuremono, accessed May 21, 2022, http://tokinowasuremono.com/e/artist-e47-shiomi/shiomi_17.html.

My copy includes mostly original invitations, with facsimiles that closely mimic the remaining ones that Shiomi did not have original copies of. This difference between original and facsimile is noted in the inventory list included and pictured in figure 3.1.

[149] Since they were individually typed, they are not exact copies of each other.

Around the time listed below
what kind of direction are you moving
or facing toward?
— either performance or spontaneous —
Please send me a report about it
which will be edited on a world map

After these instructions is a list of twenty-six world locations. Most are cities—New York, Rome, and Sydney, for example. But her list also includes six countries—Japan, Scotland, India, Brazil, Iran, and Greenland—as well as one state, Hawaii. She expands her list of twenty-six indefinitely with the abbreviation "etc." at the bottom. Each location is followed by a time and date and follows the same pattern as the first row, "New York …… 5:00 pm, Oct. 15, 1965." On the same line as Shiomi's "etc.," but tabbed to fall under the times rather than the locations, is the word "simultaneous" which draws attention to the care Shiomi took to list times and dates that would occur concurrently, no matter where in the world the participants were.[150] The performances took place on October 15, 1965, at 10:00 pm, Coordinated Universal Time, which fell on the 15th in some locations and on the 16th in others. On Shiomi's list, the places are not grouped by time zone or location, but jump around the world, back and forth between continents. One notable aspect of *Spatial Poem No. 2* is that the participants were instructed that they could chose to face a particular direction, but intention was not required; they could alternatively note which direction they happened to be facing. The important thing was making note of the direction the person was facing at the exact

[150]There are a couple of curiosities in the times as noted by Shiomi. She lists noon in Hawaii as 0:00 pm, and there are two locations with times listed on the half hour—both are places that use half hour time zones. Matt Rosenberg, "The History and Use of Time Zones," ThoughtCo, April 2, 2017, https://www.thoughtco.com/what-are-time-zones-1435358.

moment of the event and then reporting it back to Shiomi. This work is also signed at the bottom, but this time Shiomi capitalized her name and included her address. Under the signature is one final bit of instruction—the request, "Please write in print hand or use typewriter." Perhaps this appeal for a legible response resulted from a difficulty in deciphering replies to her first effort.

Spatial Poem No. 3 (falling event) (1966; figures 3.6 and 3.7) was also printed in Okayama, also on thin, cream-colored paper. *No. 3 was* the only one of the nine written in both Japanese and English (as opposed to only English) in order to make it accessible to what Shiomi termed "domestic people."[151] This was the event she received the most responses to (almost a hundred and forty) of all the *Spatial Poem* events.[152] *Spatial Poem No. 3* broadened the conceptual base of *Spatial Poem* in that it expanded the participation beyond even the people around the world receiving Shiomi's instructions by framing the action—an "intentional effort to make something fall"—as an *addition* to all the constant falling already happening towards the surface of the earth. This broadening of the event to occurrences that were not initiated by participants is unique to *No. 3* and expands the work in a way that the other events do not. Rather than a web with empty spaces, this event can be considered a solid sheath, taking place everywhere on earth that is affected by gravity. The actions performed by the people reporting back were both included in this

[151] Shiomi, *Invitations to Spatial Poem,* #7/23 of a 2020 limited edition collection, cover sheet.

[152] Yoshimoto notes this number as "over a hundred and twenty" in *Into Performance,* 165. I counted 138 in Shiomi, *Spatial Poem,* 14-27, with Walter Marchetti alone turning in 29. His eagerness to participate was unusual—most participants returned one answer to Shiomi. I could not find out definitively if Shiomi included every response she received in her book, but I believe she did. For one thing, it was her stated intention to do so, and there are a full 552 entries for the nine *Spatial Poem* events.

larger phenomenon and set apart from it by virtue of their documentation and inclusion in the calendar record produced by Maciunas. *Spatial Poem No. 3* includes a signature like the one on *No. 2.* It is the first of the spatial poems to designate a deadline with the note, "You could participate as many times as you want until August 31, 1966."

Spatial Poem No. 4 (shadow event) (1971; figure 3.9) came with an announcement (figure 3.8) that began, "The series of Spatial Poem which was started in 1965 and done by now up to No. 3 will be continued under a new project. This series consists of nine events which include the similar character of space."[153] She goes on to describe her goal of publishing a book at the end of a series of nine the events that will comprise *Spatial Poem* and writes, "I hope you would keep participating in this series and your performances over the world would present a poetic panorama."[154] She then lists all nine *Spatial Poems* with their respective subtitles. Shiomi returns to signing her name in all lower case, but notably, this announcement is the first inclusion in *Spatial Poem* series signed "mieko shiomi." Both the accompanying announcement and the instructions for *Spatial Poem No. 4 (shadow event)* were printed in Osaka on creamy yellow paper.[155] Also included was a piece of clear plastic film (figure 3.10), with two and a quarter inch tall, sans-serif uppercase letters (figure 3.11) in opaque black, spelling the word "SHADOW." The event consists of participants using the word to cast a shadow

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[153] Shiomi, *Invitations to Spatial Poem*, note with *Spatial Poem No. 4*.

[154] Shiomi, *Invitations to Spatial Poem*, note with *Spatial Poem No. 4*.

[155] The copies of notes 4-9 published on MoMA's website were printed on "tan, green, red, and yellow papers" Shiomi Mieko, "Spatial Poems by Shiomi Mieko," Post, July 11, 2013, https://post.moma.org/spatial-poems-by-shiomi-mieko/. The colors listed here are from the aforementioned #7/23 of the 2020 edition.

and then returning a detailed description of "the place, light source, duration, movement, deformation etc." of each performance to Shiomi who then recorded them on a world map. The performance period as noted as December 11-31, 1971.

Shiomi standardized the layout and organization of the *Spatial Poem* event invitations at this point. Each one included a duration of about three weeks, except *No. 7*, which returned to the simultaneous global performance Shiomi conceived of for *No. 2*. Each one mentioned the global nature of the work, with most promising that the reported performances would be recorded on a world map. *No. 7* was again the exception. Instead of being turned into a map, the reports would "produce a global symphony."[156] For this (*No. 4*) and each subsequent event, she requested descriptions of around three-hundred words, ideally in English.

Spatial Poem No. 5 (open event) (1972; figure 3.12) was printed on light blue paper in Osaka. The time allotted for people to take part in the event was anytime from July 15 through August 5, 1972. It appears to be the simplest of all the *Spatial Poems* and starts with, "Open something which is closed." Even this seemingly straightforward action has limitless potentialities within it. Shiomi includes these potentialities in her request for a description when she asks for a report both on "how you did it and *what happened* by your performance."[157] Beyond the possibilities of interpretation already discussed, this expands these works even beyond the agency of the participants to the consequences of their actions.

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[156] Shiomi, *Invitations to Spatial Poem*, *Spatial Poem No. 7*.

[157] Emphasis mine.

This theme of possibility is expressed explicitly in *Spatial Poem No. 6 (orbit event)* (1973; figure 3.13). This one was printed in Osaka on deep orange paper with one smooth side and one laid side, with the text on the laid surface. The performance period was May 3-23, 1973. Shiomi writes specific instructions but includes some flexibility within the specificity. She lists alternatives to let her collaborators know they have options that will not prevent their performance from being a part of the work as a whole:

> Let some person's portrait go on a orbit (not necessarily circulating)
> by attaching it to some moving object — either automatically or
> manually, also unceasingly or intermittently.

Spatial Poem No. 7 (sound event) (1974; figure 3.14) returns to the concurrent performances of *Spatial Poem No. 2.* It was printed in Osaka on the same smooth and laid paper, this time in a pale lemon lime. She expands her list of locations to thirty-eight total, including twenty-seven countries and eleven cities. All the cities are in North America except for Moscow. They are grouped together by times and Shiomi organizes the list as if she circled the globe in an airplane, starting over Great Britain and heading east until she reached the time zone that includes, "Greenland, Brazil, [and] Argentina." *Spatial Poem No. 7* includes a similar mix of specificity—the instructions mention a particular time—but also includes a certain open-endedness: "At the time listed below listen to the sounds around you for *a while*."[158] It is up to each performer to decide what "a while" is and, also, what sounds they pay attention to and record. There is plenty of room for agency, in the event—how long and with what attention performers listen—but this *Spatial Poem* is also notable for the passivity of the action. Instead of bodies used to

[158] Emphasis mine.

create something or to do an action, they are apparatuses of sound collection. It is as if the performers have changed places from where they were in *Spatial Poem No. 5,* as perpetrators watching for what resulted from their actions: instead of acting on, they were being acted upon. Their ears become instruments, vibrating as they are hit by external sound waves. Shiomi called this a "global symphony,"[159] but its creation took a radically different form than that of musicians playing pianos or violas. Like *Spatial Poem No. 3,* which references what is happening around the globe already, *No. 7* does not aspire to become bigger than what is already occurring, but to record the performers' place in it. *Spatial Poem No. 7* goes even further in merging performers with the world around them than does *No. 3*. The participants are not instructed to add to the sounds, but just to listen to them. That is not to say a person could not have listened to themselves talk, or sing, or stomp around on the muddy ground, but making your own noise was not a directed part of Shiomi's instructions.

Spatial Poem No. 8 (wind event) (1974; figure 3.15) is like *No.1 (word event)* in that it has participants actively contribute to the physical world, sometime during October 7-27, 1974.[160] The contribution in *No. 8* is that of energy, the movement of bodies converted to movement of air molecules:

> Make wind or disturb the movement of the natural
> wind which surrounds this globe.
> Please tell me what kind of apparatus you used
> and how you performed this event.

[159] Shiomi, *Invitations to Spatial Poem*, *Spatial Poem No. 7*.

[160] This one was also printed in Osaka on deep orange paper with one smooth side and one laid side, with the text on the laid surface.

Spatial Poem No. 9 (disappearing event) (1975; figure 3.16) was the last event of *Spatial Poem* and included a note (figure 3.17) addressed "Dear friend" to that effect.[161] Besides announcing the end of her global project, she also expressed her gratitude for the over four hundred reports that she had received up to that point. She describes how, all together, the responses she received and collected "represent a really fantastic panorama," echoing the hope for participants to create together a "poetic panorama" that she expressed in the announcement she sent out with *Spatial Poem No. 4.*[162]

Appropriately, this final event to end the decade-long series was a disappearing event. Its performance period was June 2-22, 1975. *Spatial Poem No. 9* was printed in Osaka on pale lemon lime colored paper. Two copies of the same printed instruction are glued together, with the printed sides of the papers facing out. The two papers are perfectly aligned horizontally, but vertically are offset by two and five-sixteenths inches. They are attached to each other in such a way that the blank smooth space (the printing is on the laid side) is under the bottom of the text. Shiomi returned to the possibility of passive reception of people's surroundings, but articulated the possibility for participants to be actors as well as receptors:

> Notice the natural phenomenon that something is going
> to disappear — either suddenly or gradually.
> Please describe to me it's process in details.
> This disappearing event also can be intently performed
> by yourself.

[161] Shiomi, *Invitations to Spatial Poem*, *Spatial Poem No. 7*.

Shiomi's decade of events, forming one large work of art, kept her connected to the avant-garde world. It was a world she moved in confidently, but one she had to move away from for a time while her children were young. She has talked about how her husband was supportive, but that it wasn't practical to continue the activities she had enjoyed before having a family.[163] Unlike her concerts and performances, she could continue her *Spatial Poem* efforts from home. It did, in a sense, move Shiomi herself outside her constraints—she could be in the art world intellectually and conceptually, if not physically. She could travel around the world through her ideas and have corporeal experiences through the bodies of others.

Each one of the *Spatial Poem* events relied on bodies to perform them. Movement of bodies requires both space and time—there is no movement without somewhere to go or time to change position. The bodies of her friends and collaborators encountered the world around them and shared those experiences with Shiomi. *Spatial Poem* explored longitude and latitude, cardinal direction, gravity, light, physical, centrifugal and centripetal forces, sound waves, the movement of gas molecules and fading away. These experiences were both passive and active. Taken together, they are a chronicle of what it is to exist in physical space.

Performing the corporeal experience is one way to better understand *Spatial Poem.* From the nine poems, I chose *Spatial Poem No. 4 (shadow event)* for a physical encounter because the invitation, with its included clear plastic film with the word "SHADOW," is the most tactile. The film is soft and flexible, with a slight attraction to

[163] Yoshimoto, *Into Performance,* 165.

skin that makes it feel almost tacky when held. The invitation to *Spatial Poem No. 4* reads:

> Make a shadow or shadows of the enclosed letter SHADOW on somewhere.
> Please describe to me in details how you performed it ¨ ¨¨ about the place,
> light source, duration, movement, deformation, etc.
> Your reports will be recorded on the world map.

Shiomi's 1976 book includes not only requested descriptions but also photographs people submitted, reprinted as monochrome in the same blue-black ink of the rest of the book. The flexibility of the "SHADOW" film allows it to be folded or curved into a circle, like Per Kirkeby did when he wrapped it around a candle which he then lit. It could echo the shape of something it was wrapped around in the same ways a thing's shadow echoes its form. But this object, despite what the word on it implies, is not an echo, it is an original thing. It has its own shadow when held to the light, one that will change shape when the film is manipulated: a shadow of a shadow.

The "SHADOW" film invites engagement much like *Endless Box*, and not just with the text that so explicitly spells out what one is to create with it. It promises a three-way interaction between the object itself, the light in the environment and a person presented with the opportunity to pick it up and move it wherever they will. It is almost a toy in the way it invites engagement and play. Without two partners in conversation with the film—light, to shine around the letters and to be blocked by the word, and a person, to pick it up—the "SHADOW" film would not reach its full potential. This is an artwork that needs willing collaborators to interact with it. Left on a flat surface, there would not be space for the shadow to cast.

The play it invites is as varied as the people who picked it up, as shown by the differing responses Shiomi received. Some of the participants seemingly used it to mark ownership of a person or place. Maciunas tried to cast his shadow text the furthest, holding it up to a telescope to "try" to cast a shadow on "PROCYON star of the first magnitude (Canis Minoris)."[164] One woman, Carla Liss, propped the "SHADOW" film on a windowpane and let the shadow or the letters fall over her face. Dušan Klimeš' contribution was a photograph of Jiří Valoch casting the shadow on his wife Mira's face. Jiří Valoch's contribution was a photograph of the shadow cast on his wife's thigh as her skirt was pulled up to her hip, which Valoch described as "somewhat sexy."[165] Valoch also described casting a shadow on himself and the wall of his home. Myor Hayashi documented casting a series of shadows on what he described as "my motorboat" and out over the sea and sky in the horizon. Others experimented with different kinds of light or surfaces, ranging from daylight to candlelight and from freshly fallen snow to all the faces of friends at a gathering. Some participants treated the "SHADOW" film like a medium or tool. For example, Peter Moore used it in his darkroom as he printed negatives with the addition of "SHADOW" on the image.

If the invitation to engage is accepted, the first thing a person might become aware of when they pick up the "SHADOW" film is the two different textures. If the word is held facing the performer so that the letters are in the correct order, the tackiness

[164] Shiomi, *Spatial Poem,* 30.

[165] Shiomi, *Spatial Poem,* 35.

of the vinyl-like[166] plastic is continuous across the back of the object. The tackiness of the front, however, is interrupted by the slickness and slight graininess of the black paint used to print the letters. The letters are mainly matte with splotches of shine here and there where perhaps the paint was burnished in production. These two textures make distinctly different sounds when rubbed lightly with fingertips. Once the feel of the surface is understood, it is tempting to test the flexibility, making waves and curls with the plastic to assess its properties.

The visual is one of contrast between shiny and matte and between light and dark. The edges of the letters are clean but not perfect, and the kerning is slightly off, with the *A* shifted closer than it should be to, and almost touching, the *D* (figure 3.12). Looking at the photos in Shiomi's book, these minor disparities are consistent across all the copies of the "SHADOW" film, which points to an uneven stencil, whether they were painted by hand or printed by machine.

Once a person has interacted enough to understand the object they have to partner with in making a shadow, the desire to try it out with a light source arises. Engaging with the film physically animates a desire to perform Shiomi's score. There are two options that come to mind. A diffuse source, like daylight shining through an array of kitchen windows won't cast a shadow unless the "SHADOW" film is held very close to, even touching the surface to be marked. On the other hand, a shadow can be cast at quite a

[166] The Museum of Contemporary Art Tokyo website notes the original printing as plastic ("Invitation Letters of 'Spatial Poem No. 1 - 9,'" Tokyo Museum Collection, accessed May 30, 2022, https://museumcollection.tokyo/en/works/59860/) and a later printing as vinyl ("Shadow Event No. Y," Tokyo Museum Collection, accessed May 30, 2022, https://museumcollection.tokyo/en/works/59890/). My copy is one from the original printing.

distance with enough light concentration. For example, a flashlight, either a conventional one or a cellphone masquerading as one, can throw a shadow six feet, or twelve, or even further if the surrounding space is dark enough. This interaction of three participants—film, light and person—does not leave any one of them unaffected. The light is absorbed by the matte black letters, like moonlight soaked up by velvet. The "SHADOW" film is left with fingerprints, a mark of whoever has handled it. The person has her mind opened.

Just like performing one of Shiomi's standalone event scores, the invitations she sent to friends and associates to take part in her *Spatial Poem* gave the participants the opportunity to stop, set aside a minute or ten of their day and integrate art into it. Instead of taking objects for granted, they could actually see, feel and hear them, noticing and better understanding the relationship between themselves and the world. Performing *Spatial Poem* is a corporeal experience that gives one the opportunity to intentionally experience what it means to exist in a physical space, through purposefully noticing where one is on the earth, which direction one is facing and how one is affected by physical perceptions of gravity, light, physical, centrifugal, and centripetal forces, sound waves, the movement of gas molecules and fading away. It was not only Shiomi who was liberated from the limitations of time and space she was striving to escape, but everyone who took part was freed for a time from the unremarkable and routine into a realm of noticing things around them.

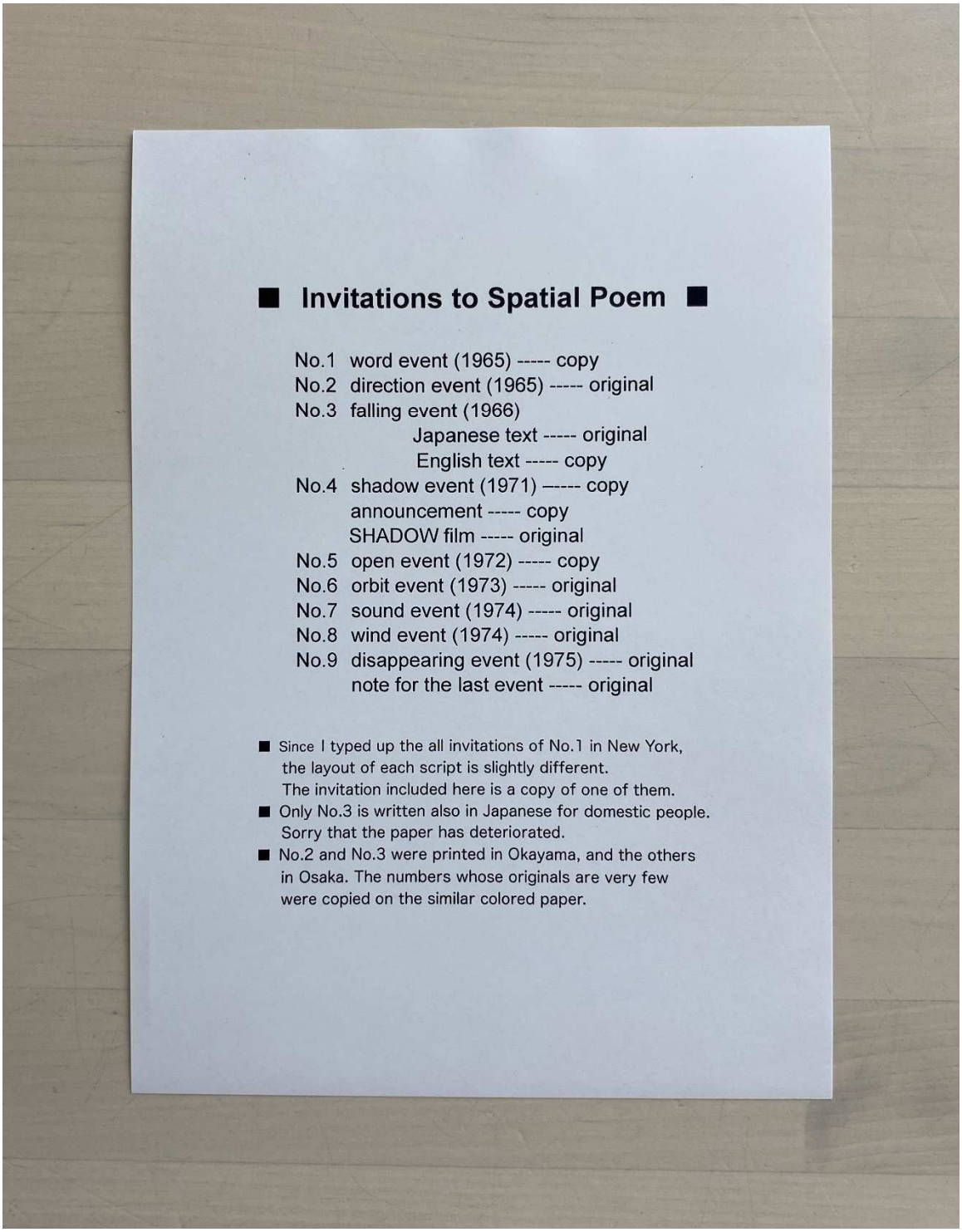


Figure 3.1. Mieko Shiomi, *Invitations to Spatial Poem*, inventory note, 2020. Photo credit: Amy Spencer.

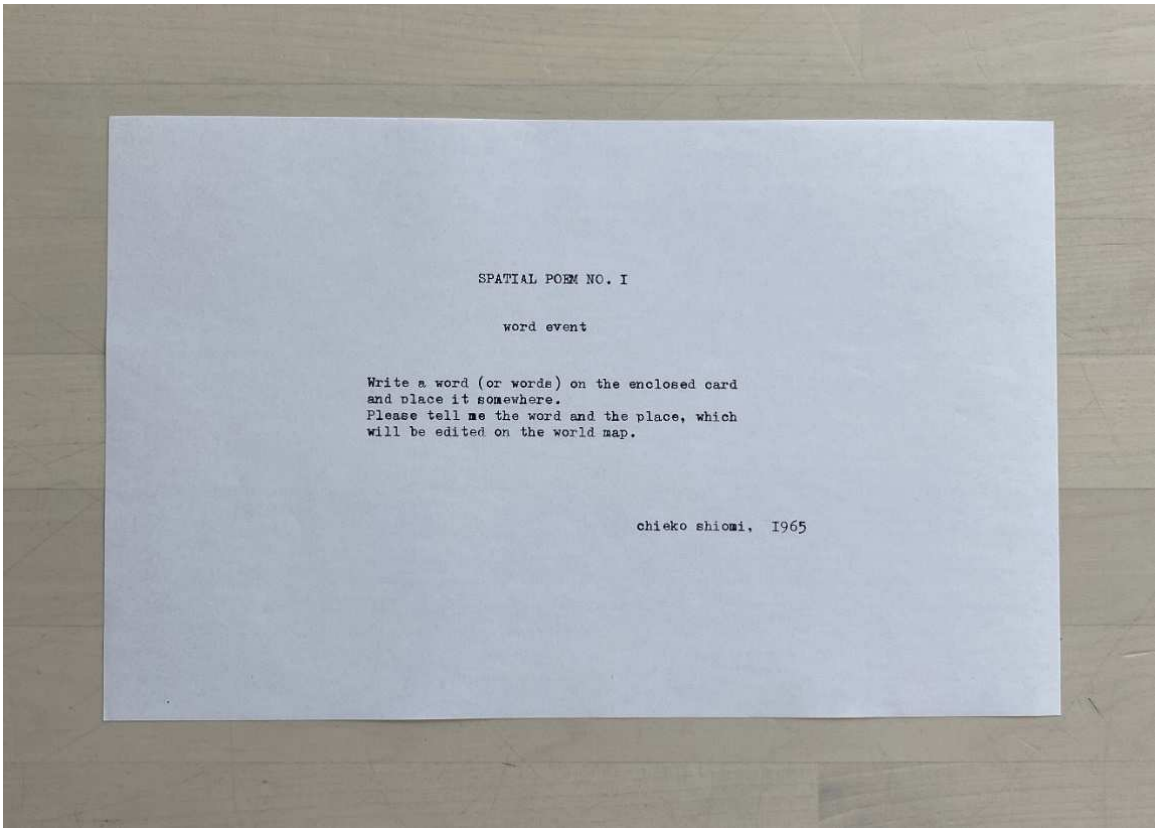


Figure 3.2. Mieko Shiomi, *Spatial Poem No.1*, 1965. Photo credit: Amy Spencer.

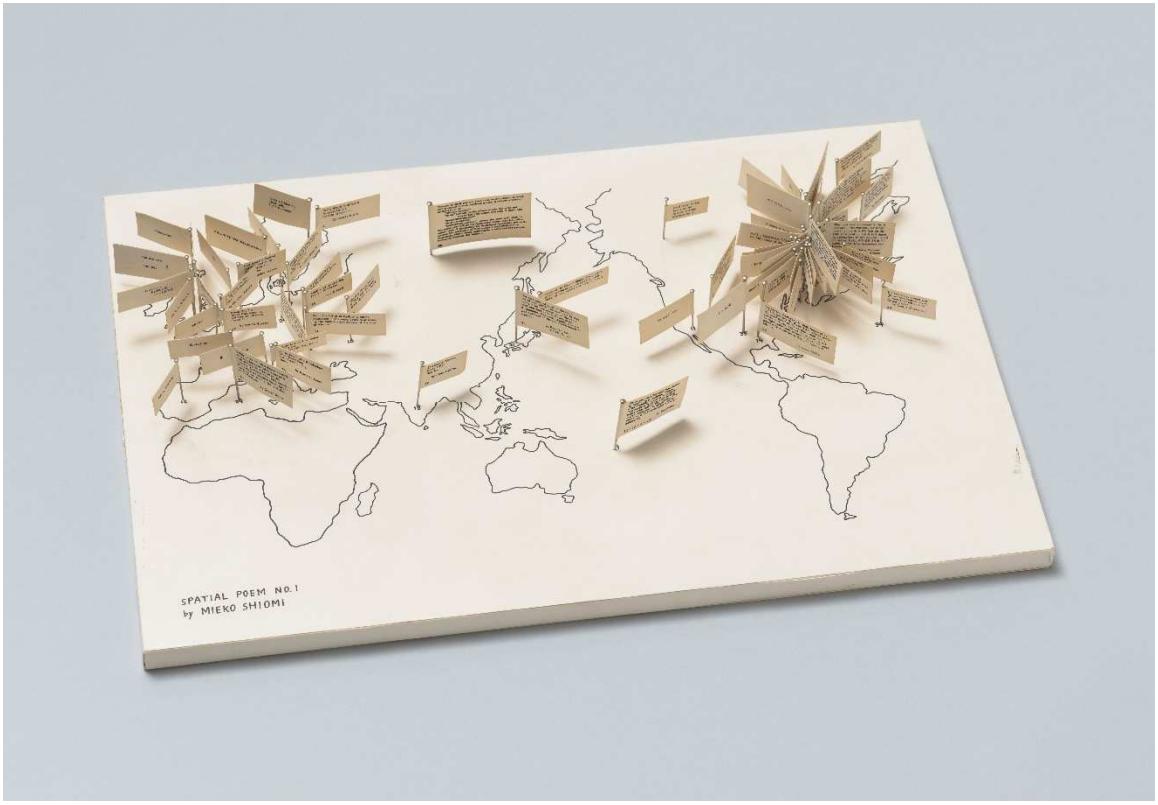
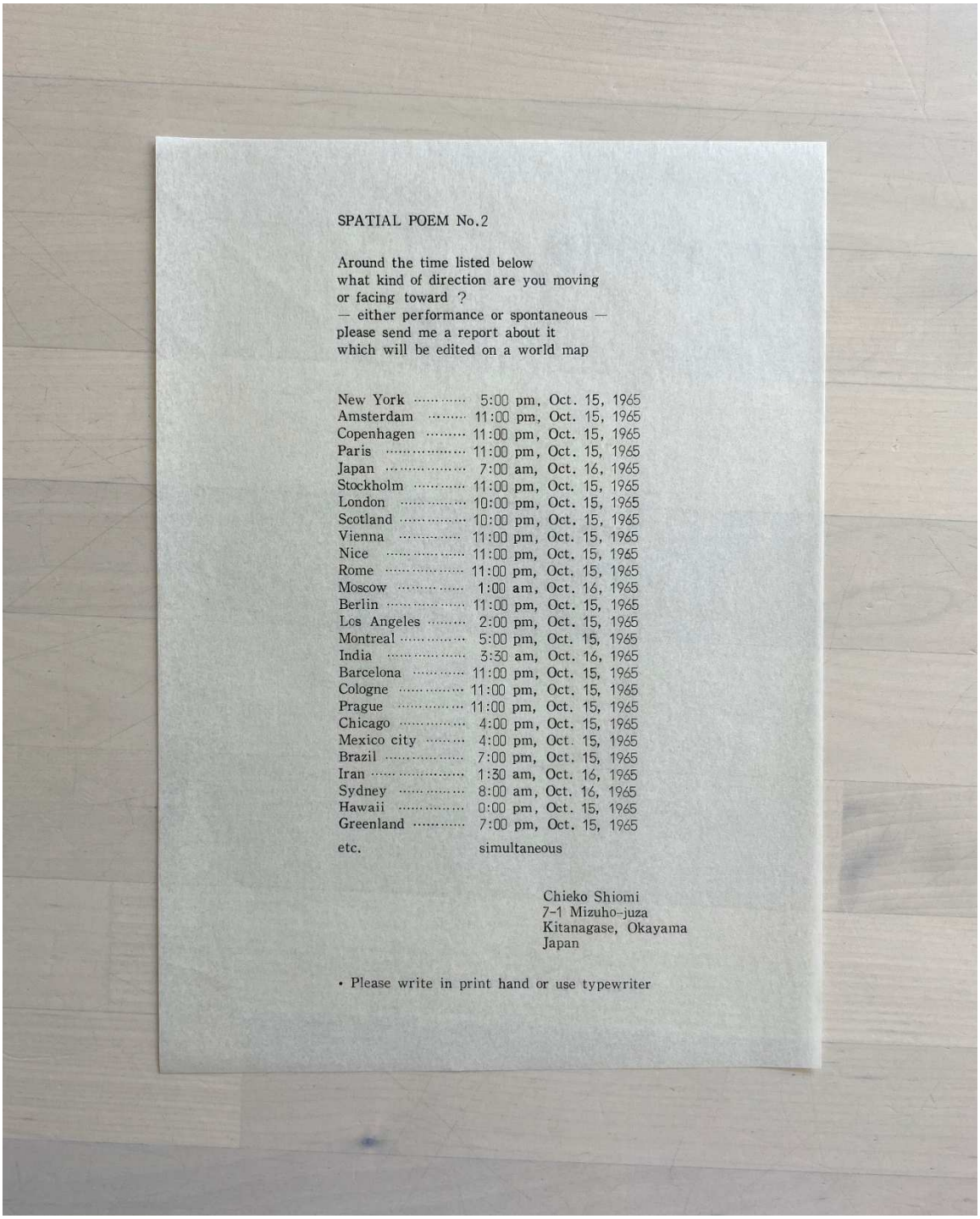


Figure 3.3. Mieko Shiomi, *Spatial Poem No. 1,* 1965. Photo credit: The Museum of Modern Art, New York, via Art Resource.



SPATIAL POEM No.2

Around the time listed below
what kind of direction are you moving
or facing toward ?
— either performance or spontaneous —
please send me a report about it
which will be edited on a world map

New York	5:00 pm, Oct. 15, 1965
Amsterdam	11:00 pm, Oct. 15, 1965
Copenhagen	11:00 pm, Oct. 15, 1965
Paris	11:00 pm, Oct. 15, 1965
Japan	7:00 am, Oct. 16, 1965
Stockholm	11:00 pm, Oct. 15, 1965
London	10:00 pm, Oct. 15, 1965
Scotland	10:00 pm, Oct. 15, 1965
Vienna	11:00 pm, Oct. 15, 1965
Nice	11:00 pm, Oct. 15, 1965
Rome	11:00 pm, Oct. 15, 1965
Moscow	1:00 am, Oct. 16, 1965
Berlin	11:00 pm, Oct. 15, 1965
Los Angeles	2:00 pm, Oct. 15, 1965
Montreal	5:00 pm, Oct. 15, 1965
India	3:30 am, Oct. 16, 1965
Barcelona	11:00 pm, Oct. 15, 1965
Cologne	11:00 pm, Oct. 15, 1965
Prague	11:00 pm, Oct. 15, 1965
Chicago	4:00 pm, Oct. 15, 1965
Mexico city	4:00 pm, Oct. 15, 1965
Brazil	7:00 pm, Oct. 15, 1965
Iran	1:30 am, Oct. 16, 1965
Sydney	8:00 am, Oct. 16, 1965
Hawaii	0:00 pm, Oct. 15, 1965
Greenland	7:00 pm, Oct. 15, 1965
etc.	simultaneous

Chieko Shiomi
7-1 Mizuho-juza
Kitanagase, Okayama
Japan

• Please write in print hand or use typewriter

Figure 3.4. Mieko Shiomi, *Spatial Poem No.2*, 1965. Photo credit: Amy Spencer.

Figure 3.5. Mieko Shiomi, designer, George Maciunas, *Spatial Poem No. 2*, Reflux Edition, 1992. Photo credit: Amy Spencer.

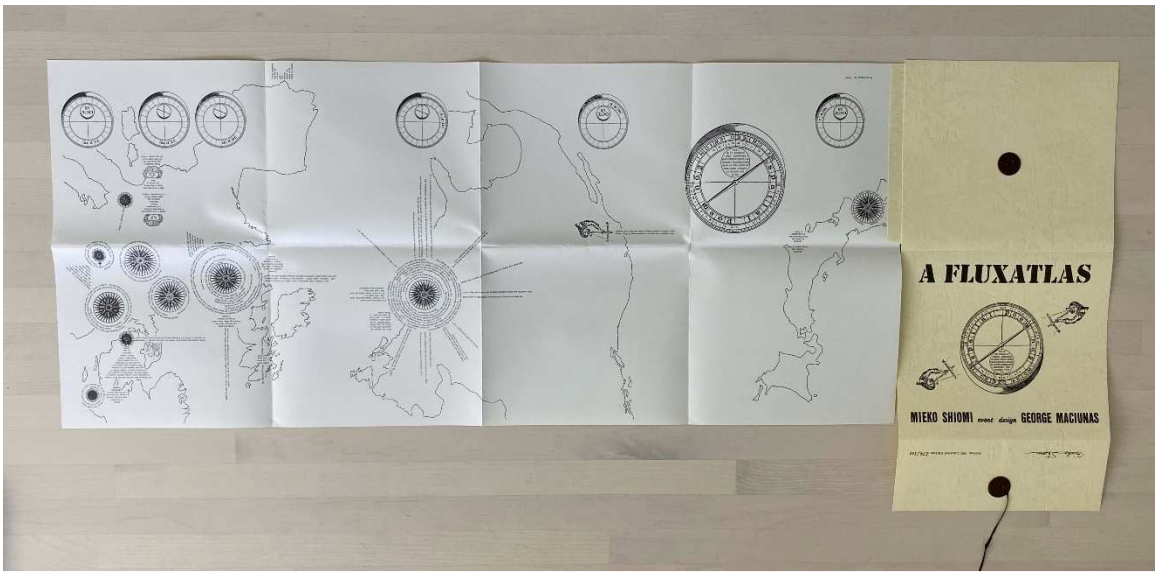
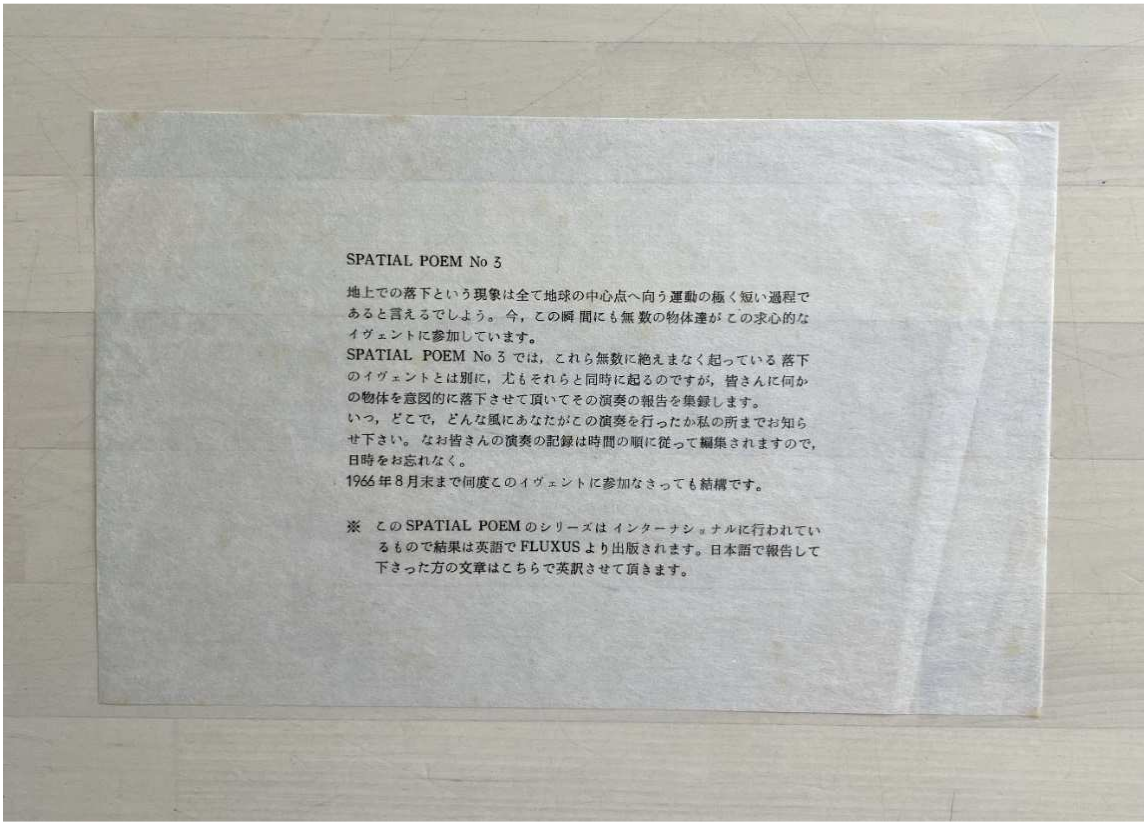


Figure 3.6. Mieko Shiomi, designer, George Maciunas, *Spatial Poem No. 2*, Reflux Edition, 1992. Photo credit: Amy Spencer.


SPATIAL POEM No 3

地上での落下という現象は全て地球の中心点へ向う運動の極く短い過程であると言えるでしょう。今，この瞬間にも無数の物体達がこの求心的なイヴェントに参加しています。
SPATIAL POEM No 3 では，これら無数に絶えまなく起っている落下のイヴェントとは別に，尤もそれらと同時に起るのですが，皆さんに何かの物体を意図的に落下させて頂いてその演奏の報告を集録します。
いつ，どこで，どんな風にあなたがこの演奏を行ったか私の所までお知らせ下さい。なお皆さんの演奏の記録は時間の順に従って編集されますので，日時をお忘れなく。
1966年8月末まで何度このイヴェントに参加なさっても結構です。

※ このSPATIAL POEMのシリーズはインターナショナルに行われているもので結果は英語でFLUXUSより出版されます。日本語で報告して下さった方の文章はこちらで英訳させて頂きます。

Figure 3.7. Mieko Shiomi, *Spatial Poem No.3*, Japanese, 1966. Photo credit: Amy Spencer.

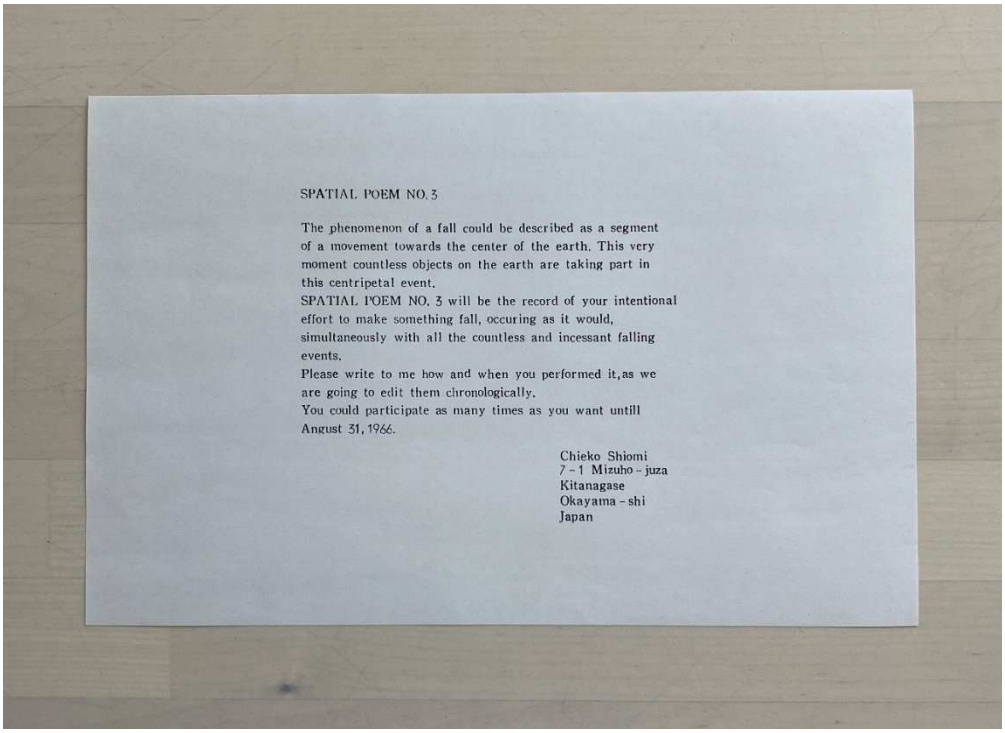
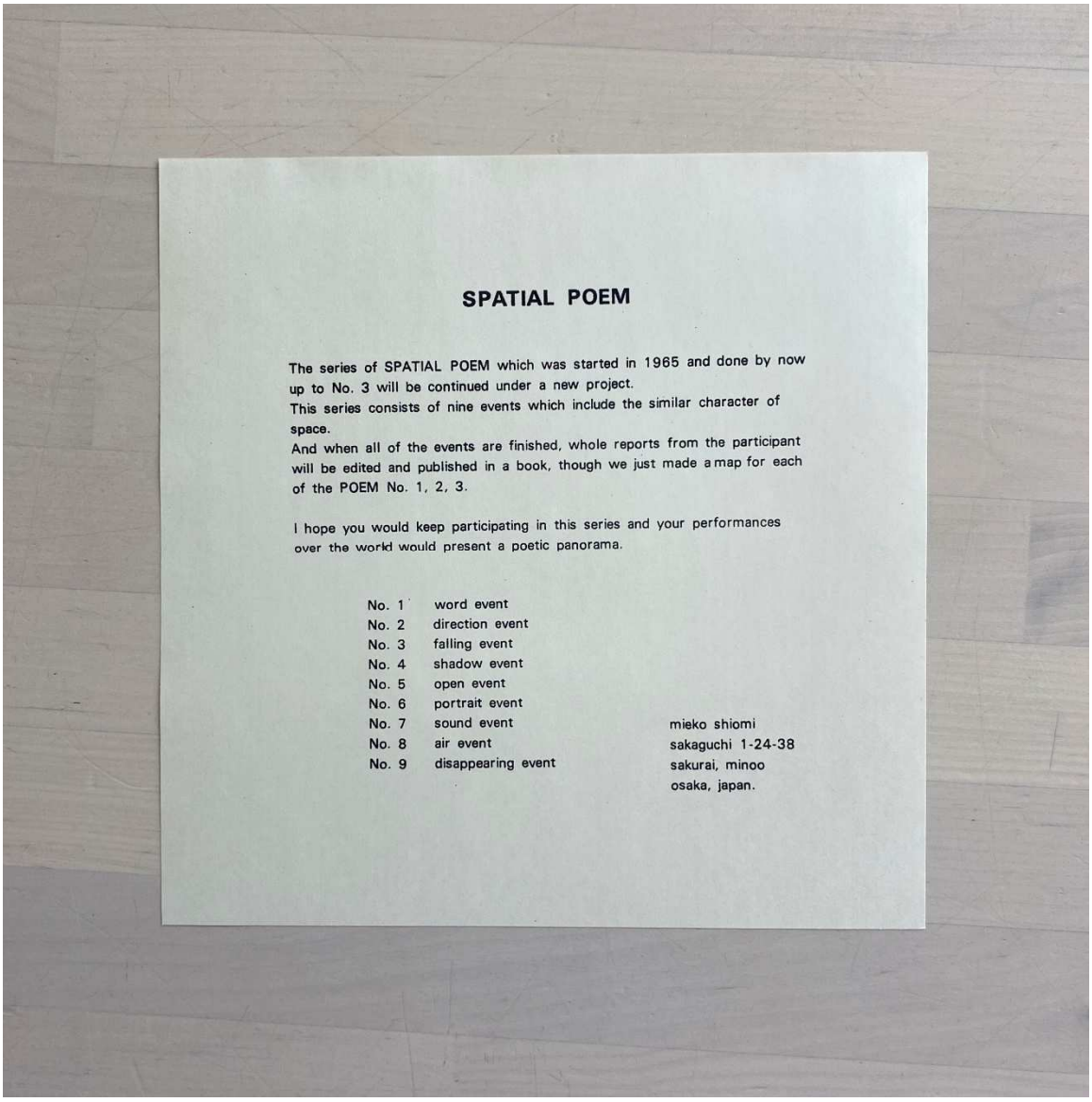


Figure 3.8. Mieko Shiomi, *Spatial Poem No.3*, English, 1966. Photo credit: Amy Spencer.



SPATIAL POEM

The series of SPATIAL POEM which was started in 1965 and done by now up to No. 3 will be continued under a new project.
This series consists of nine events which include the similar character of space.
And when all of the events are finished, whole reports from the participant will be edited and published in a book, though we just made a map for each of the POEM No. 1, 2, 3.

I hope you would keep participating in this series and your performances over the world would present a poetic panorama.

No. 1	word event
No. 2	direction event
No. 3	falling event
No. 4	shadow event
No. 5	open event
No. 6	portrait event
No. 7	sound event
No. 8	air event
No. 9	disappearing event

mieko shiomi
sakaguchi 1-24-38
sakurai, minoo
osaka, japan.

Figure 3.9. Mieko Shiomi, *Spatial Poem*, note with *No. 4*, 1971. Photo credit: Amy Spencer.

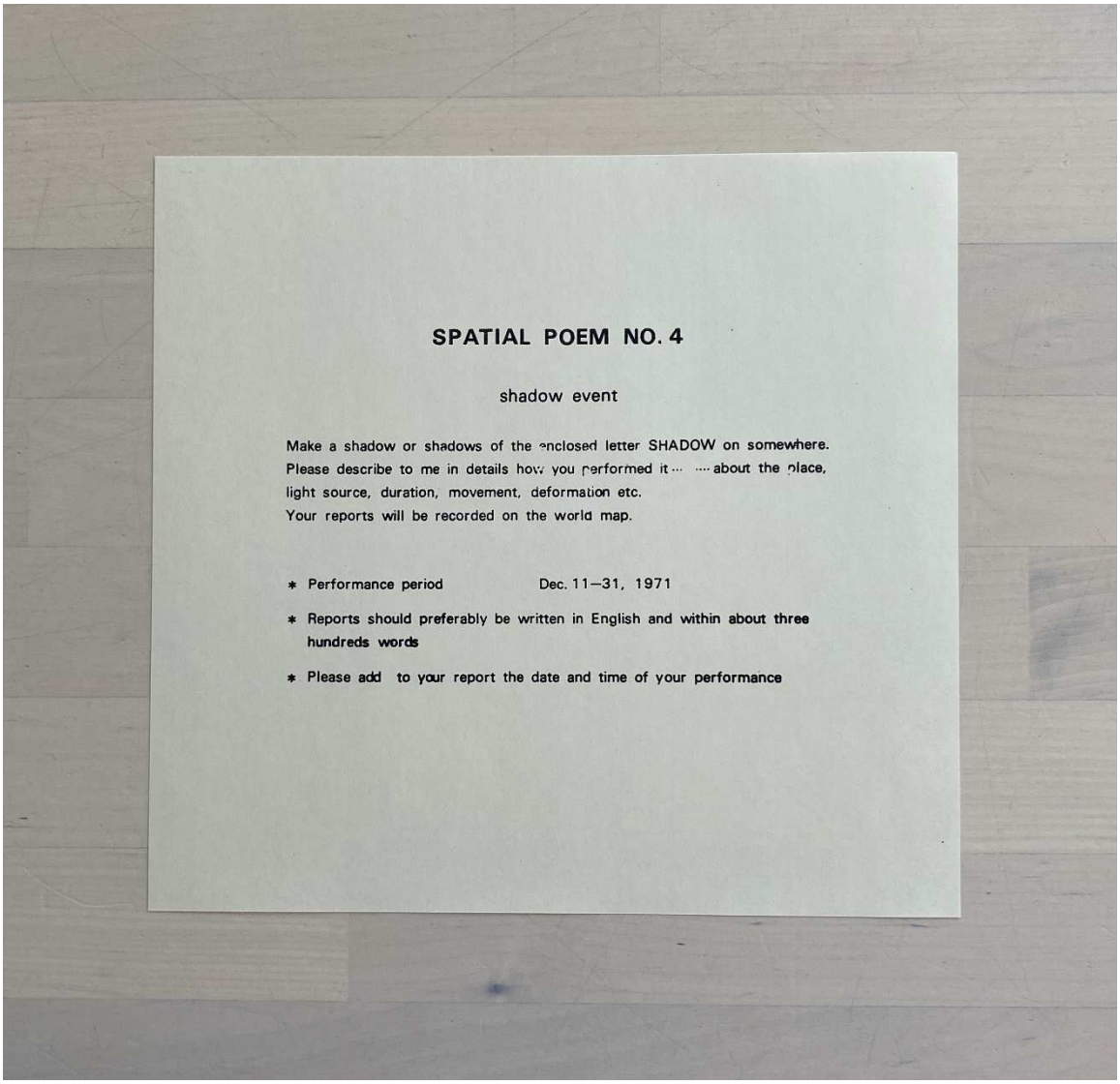


Figure 3.10. Mieko Shiomi, *Spatial Poem No.4*, 1971. Photo credit: Amy Spencer.

Figure 3.11. Mieko Shiomi*, Spatial Poem No.4*, *SHADOW*, 1971. Photo credit: Amy Spencer.

Figure 3.12. Mieko Shiomi*, Spatial Poem No.4*, *SHADOW*, kerning, 1971. Photo credit: Amy Spencer.

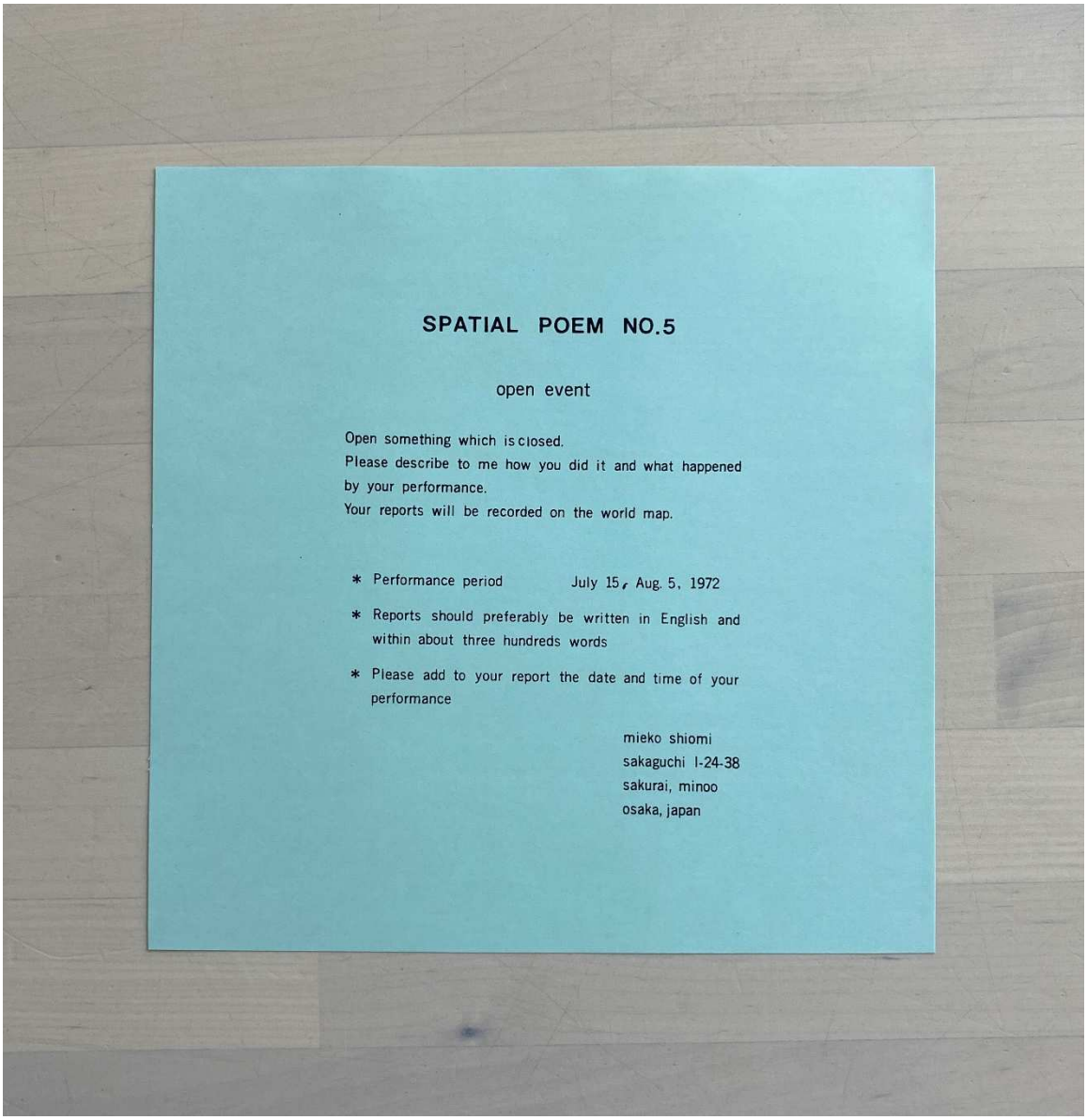
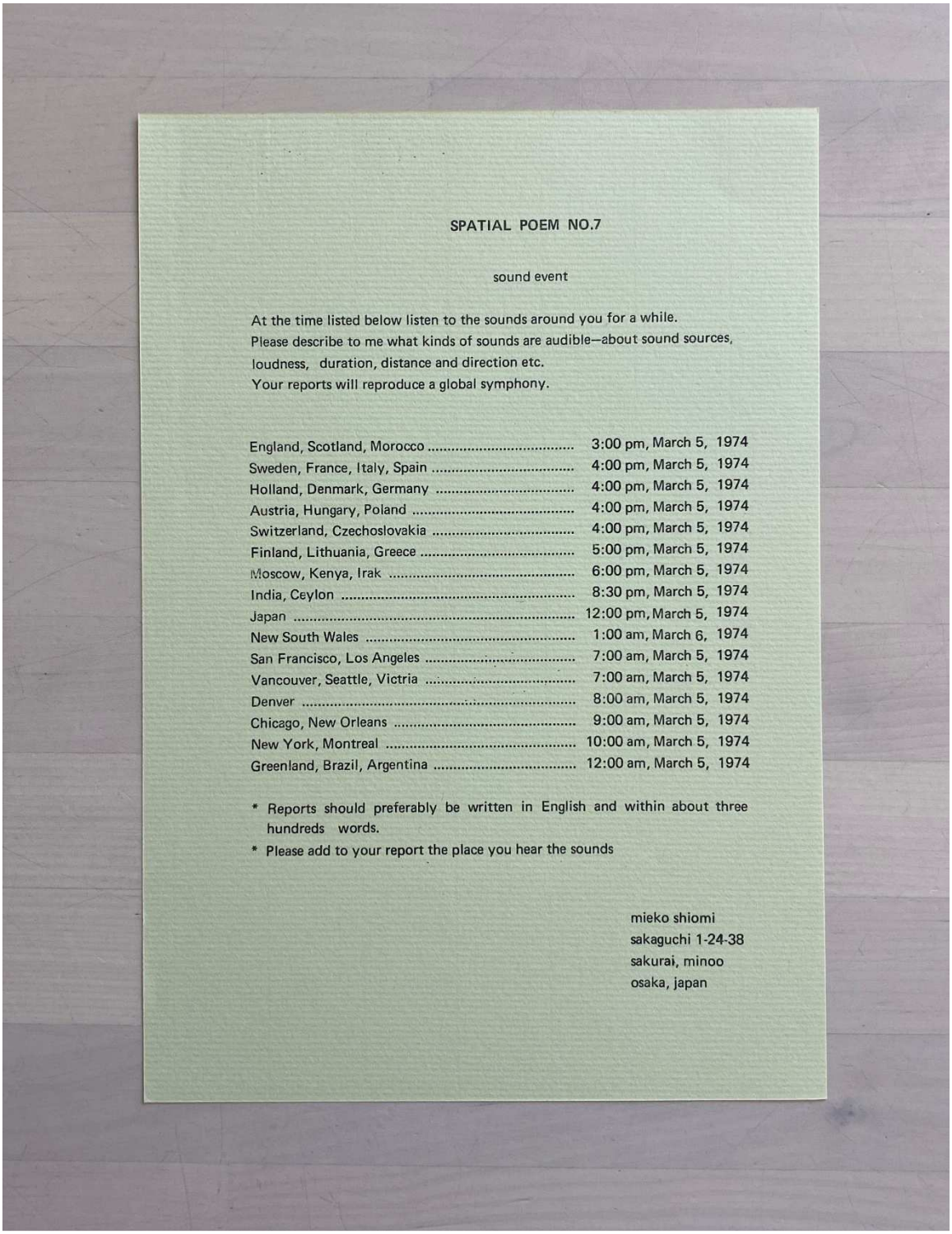


Figure 3.13. Mieko Shiomi, *Spatial Poem No.5*, 1972. Photo credit: Amy Spencer.

Figure 3.14. Mieko Shiomi, *Spatial Poem No.6*, 1973. Photo credit: Amy Spencer.



SPATIAL POEM NO.7

sound event

At the time listed below listen to the sounds around you for a while.
Please describe to me what kinds of sounds are audible—about sound sources,
loudness, duration, distance and direction etc.
Your reports will reproduce a global symphony.

England, Scotland, Morocco	3:00 pm, March 5, 1974
Sweden, France, Italy, Spain	4:00 pm, March 5, 1974
Holland, Denmark, Germany	4:00 pm, March 5, 1974
Austria, Hungary, Poland	4:00 pm, March 5, 1974
Switzerland, Czechoslovakia	4:00 pm, March 5, 1974
Finland, Lithuania, Greece	5:00 pm, March 5, 1974
Moscow, Kenya, Irak	6:00 pm, March 5, 1974
India, Ceylon	8:30 pm, March 5, 1974
Japan	12:00 pm, March 5, 1974
New South Wales	1:00 am, March 6, 1974
San Francisco, Los Angeles	7:00 am, March 5, 1974
Vancouver, Seattle, Victria	7:00 am, March 5, 1974
Denver	8:00 am, March 5, 1974
Chicago, New Orleans	9:00 am, March 5, 1974
New York, Montreal	10:00 am, March 5, 1974
Greenland, Brazil, Argentina	12:00 am, March 5, 1974

* Reports should preferably be written in English and within about three hundreds words.
* Please add to your report the place you hear the sounds

mieko shiomi
sakaguchi 1-24-38
sakurai, minoo
osaka, japan

Figure 3.15. Mieko Shiomi, *Spatial Poem No.7*, 1974. Photo credit: Amy Spencer.

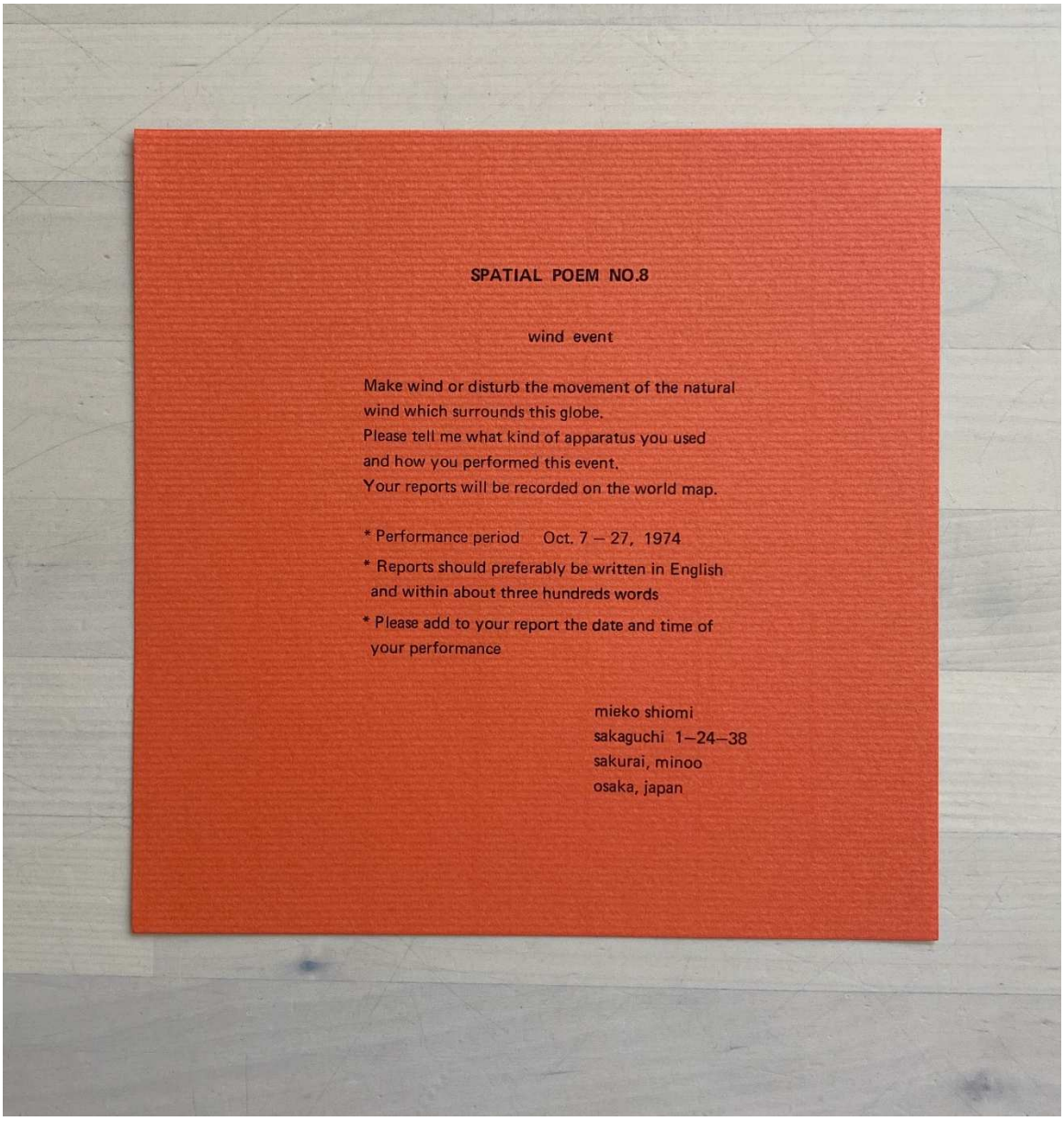


Figure 3.16. Mieko Shiomi, *Spatial Poem No.8*, 1974. Photo credit: Amy Spencer.

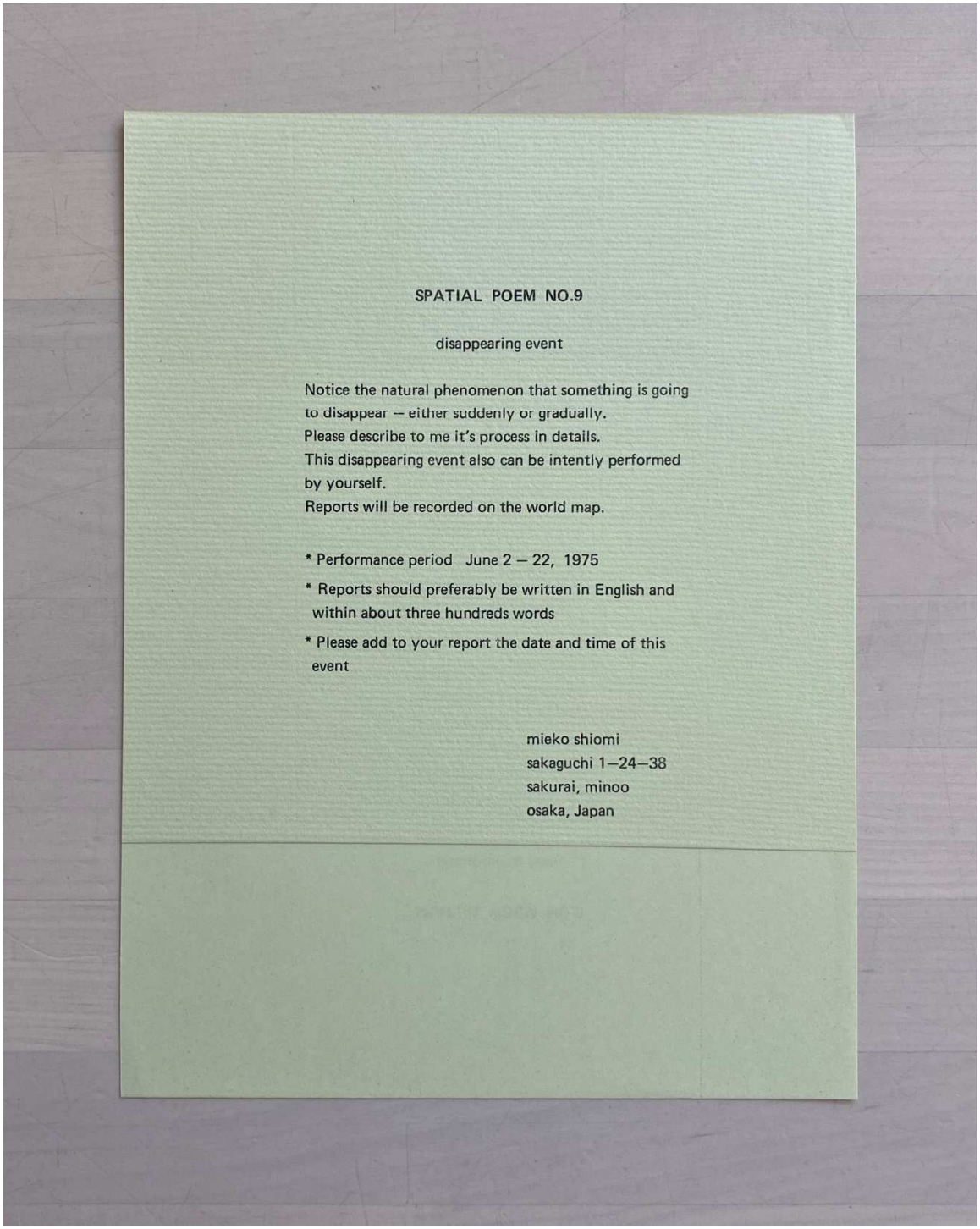


Figure 3.17. Mieko Shiomi, *Spatial Poem No.9*, 1975. Photo credit: Amy Spencer.

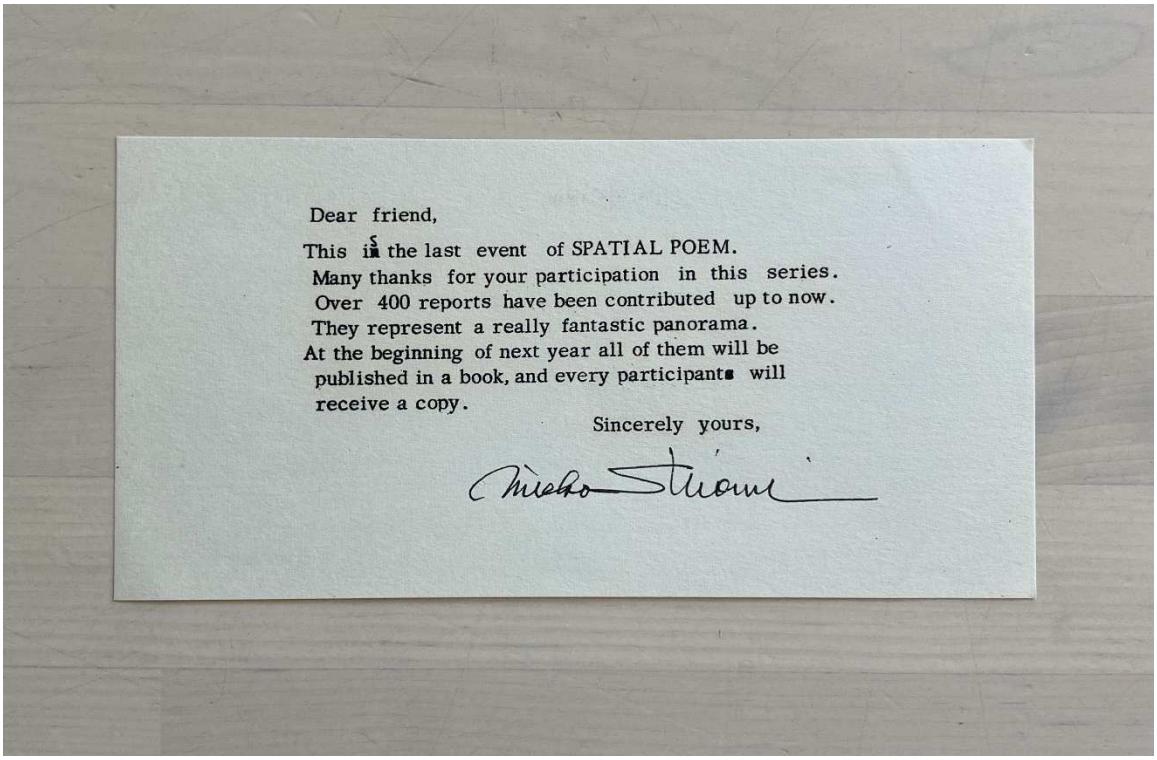


Figure 3.18. Mieko Shiomi, *Invitations to Spatial Poem*, final note, 1975. Photo credit: Amy Spencer.

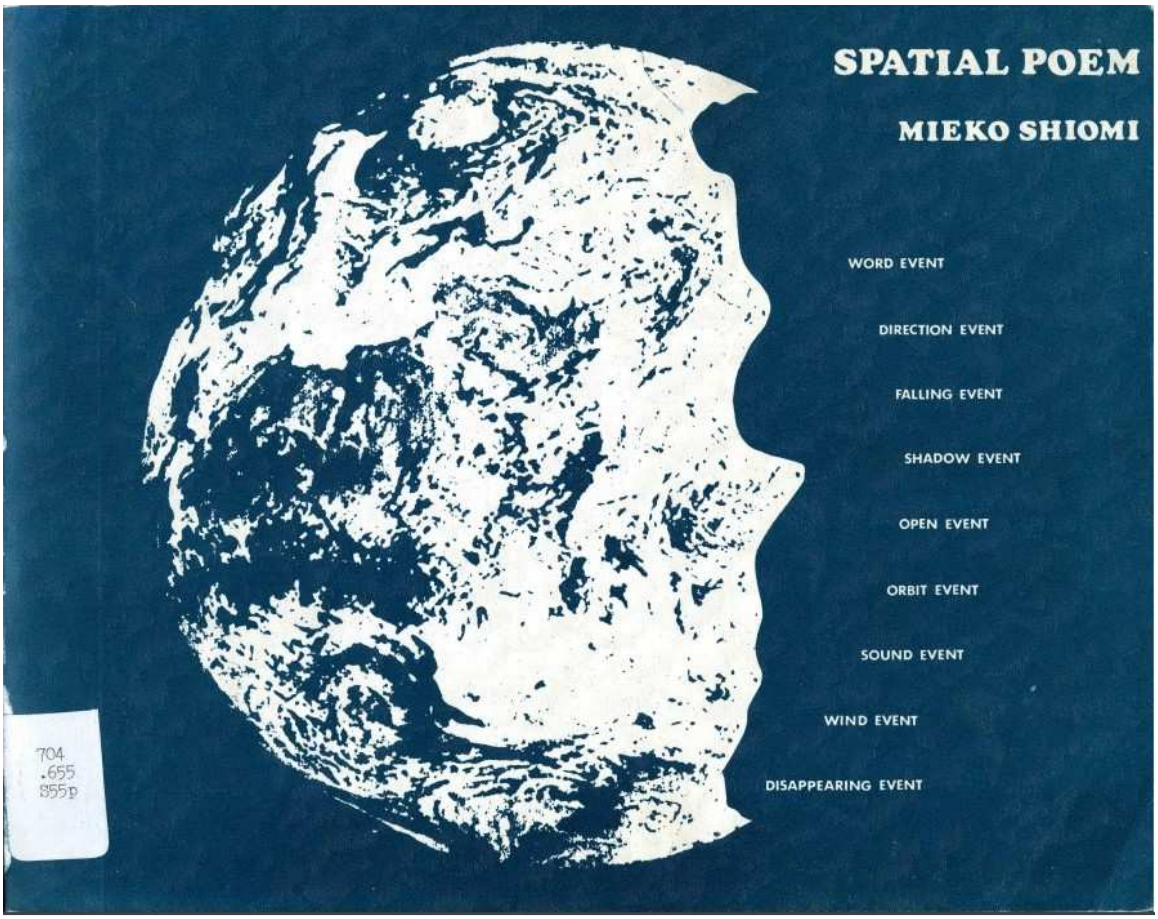
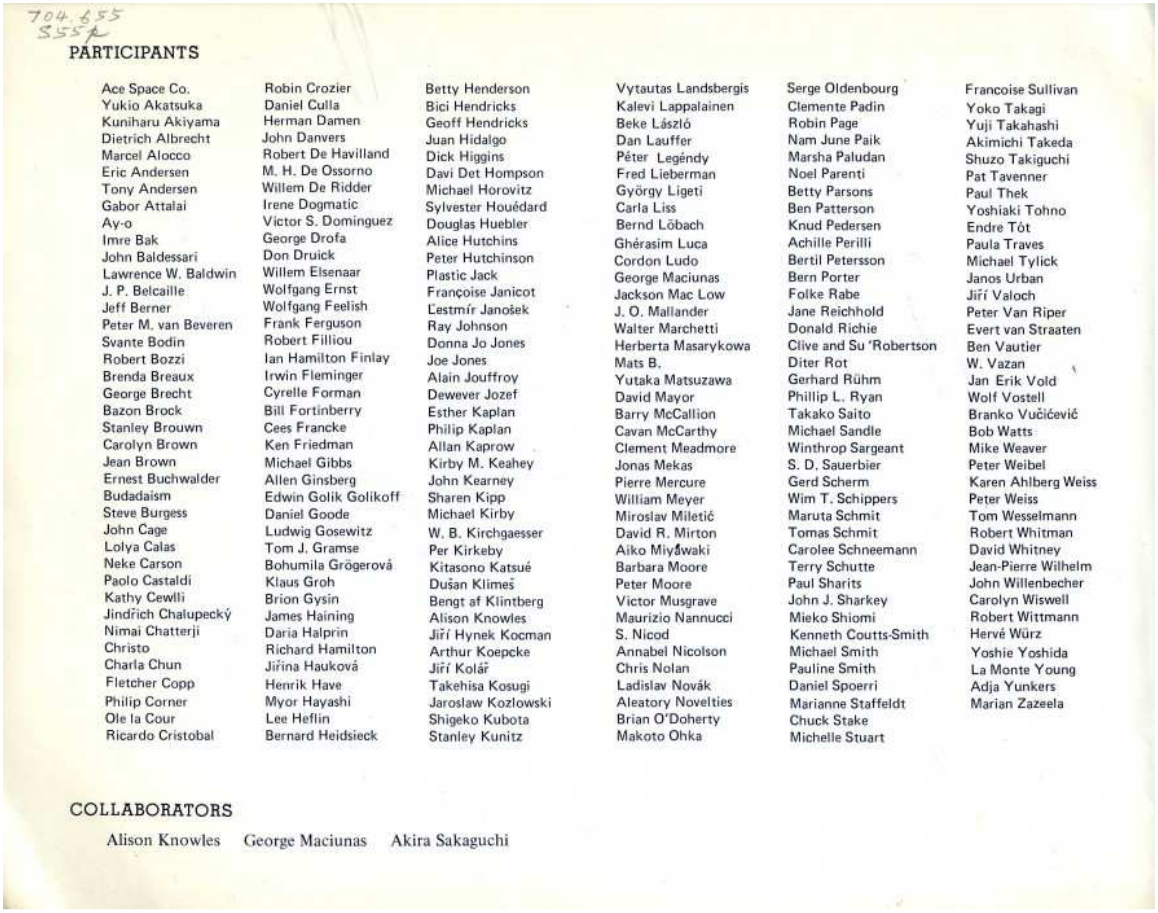


Figure 3.19. Mieko Shiomi, *Spatial Poem*, cover, 1976. Photo credit: Amy Spencer.



704.655
S55A

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Marcel Alocco
Eric Andersen
Tony Andersen
Gabor Attalai
Ay-o
Imre Bak
John Baldessari
Lawrence W. Baldwin
J. P. Belcaille
Jeff Berner
Peter M. van Beveren
Svante Bodin
Robert Bozzi
Brenda Breaux
George Brecht
Bazon Brock
Stanley Brouwn
Carolyn Brown
Jean Brown
Ernest Buchwalder
Budadaism
Steve Burgess
John Cage
Lolya Calas
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Paolo Castaldi
Kathy Cewlli
Jindřich Chalupecký
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Philip Corner
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Ricardo Cristobal
Robin Crozier
Daniel Culla
Herman Damen
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Willem De Ridder
Irene Dogmatic
Victor S. Dominguez
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Don Druick
Willem Elsenaar
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Bill Fortinberry
Cees Francke
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Lee Heflin
Bernard Heidsieck
Betty Henderson
Bici Hendricks
Geoff Hendricks
Juan Hidalgo
Dick Higgins
Davi Det Hompson
Michael Horovitz
Sylvester Houédard
Douglas Huebler
Alice Hutchins
Peter Hutchinson
Plastic Jack
Françoise Janicot
Lestmír Janošek
Ray Johnson
Donna Jo Jones
Joe Jones
Alain Jouffroy
Dewever Jozef
Esther Kaplan
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Allan Kaprow
Kirby M. Keahey
John Kearney
Sharen Kipp
Michael Kirby
W. B. Kirchgaesser
Per Kirkeby
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Dušan Klimeš
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Alison Knowles
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Kalevi Lappalainen
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Dan Lauffer
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György Ligeti
Carla Liss
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S. Nicod
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Chris Nolan
Ladislav Novák
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Makoto Ohka
Serge Oldenbourg
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Betty Parsons
Ben Patterson
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Mike Weaver
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Peter Weiss
Tom Wesselmann
Robert Whitman
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Marian Zazeela

COLLABORATORS

Alison Knowles George Maciunas Akira Sakaguchi

Figure 3.20. Mieko Shiomi, *Spatial Poem*, list of participants and collaborators, 1976. Photo credit: Amy Spencer.

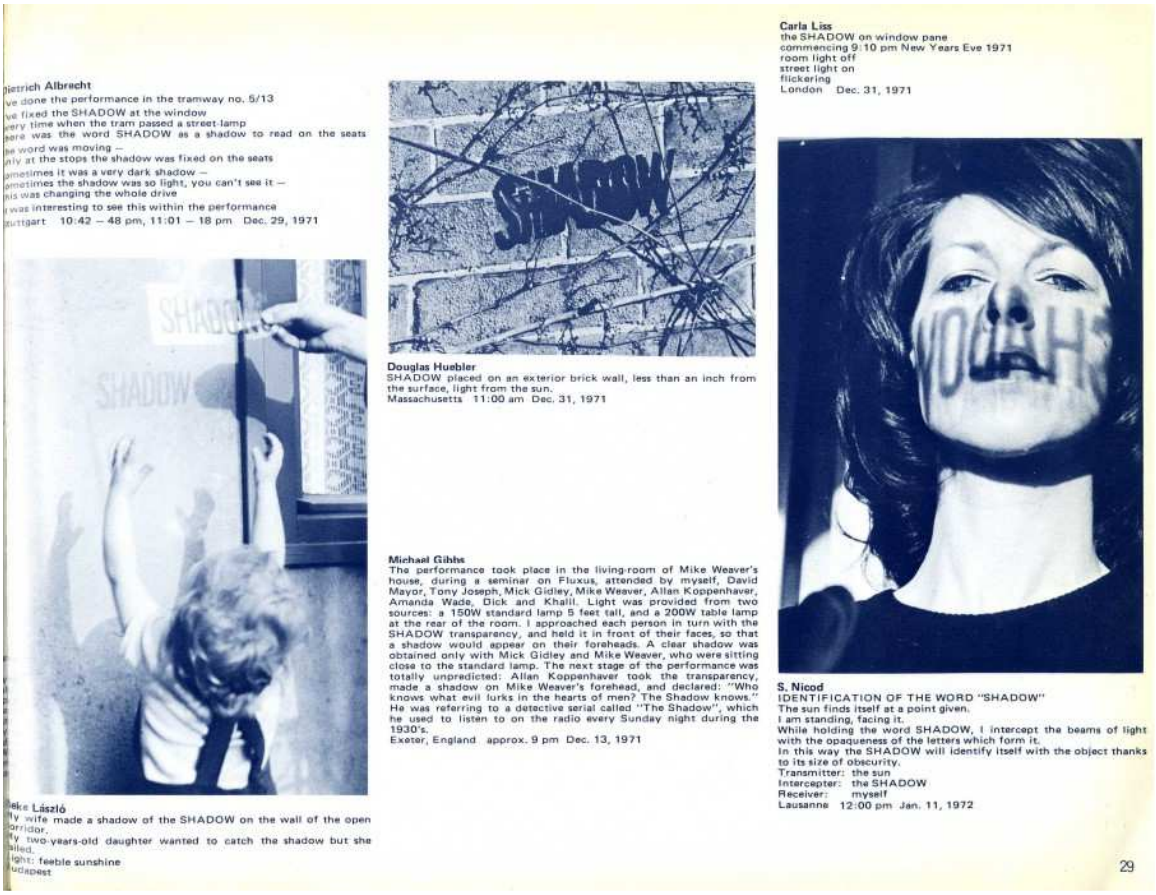

Figure 3.21. Mieko Shiomi, *Spatial Poem*, page 29, 1976. Photo credit: Amy Spencer.

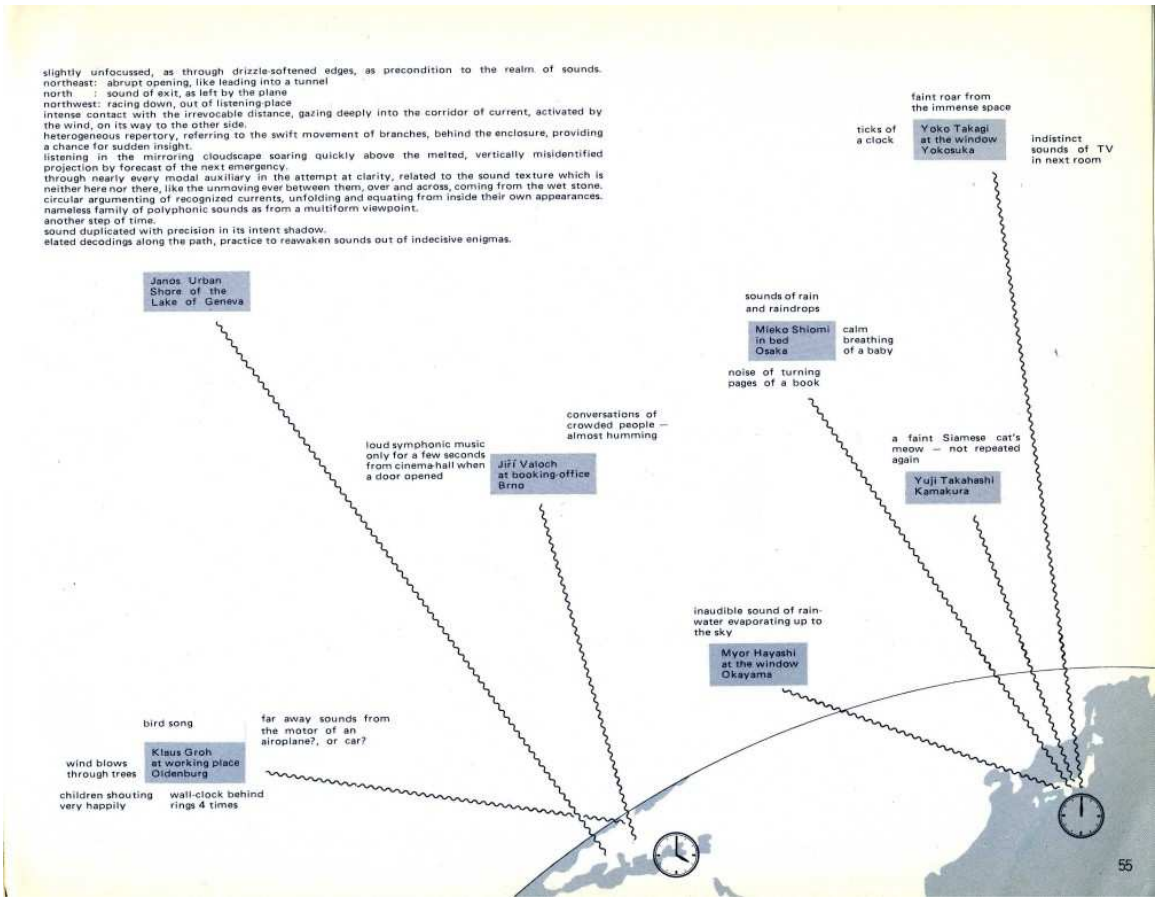

Figure 3.22. Mieko Shiomi, *Spatial Poem*, page 55, 1976. Photo credit: Amy Spencer.

Figure 3.23. Mieko Shiomi, *Spatial Poem*, page 69. Photo credit: Amy Spencer.

Conclusion

Mieko Shiomi translates ideas into tangible actions, instructions and objects that persuade performers to notice how they move through the world. Her work has its roots in her extensive musical and theoretical training and has flourished in the sunlight of her boundless curiosity, deep-thinking and drive to create. She has made a body of work that shares her way of experiencing the world. Kawamura described Shiomi as "seeking something new and satisfactory to herself rather than just accepting the versions of reality she had been taught."[167] She has found new realities in her actions and in translating ideas from one medium to another. Brown declared in his writings on thing theory that things are objects we *see* rather than look through, and Shiomi's artworks show us how to stop and see.[168]

If knowledge is passed through objects, then engaging with Shiomi's objects—whether they are, like the *Endless Box*, something Shiomi has made, or like the sea, a thing she points out—is a way of gaining enlightenment. Bodily experiences and focusing on the tangibility of things will foster a greater understanding of them. A fruitful way to grasp Mieko Shiomi's ideas is to connect with her works yourself, have the corporeal experience she prescribes, and see what comes of it.

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[167] Kawamura, "Appreciating the Incidental," 330.

[168] Brown, "Thing Theory," 4.

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