

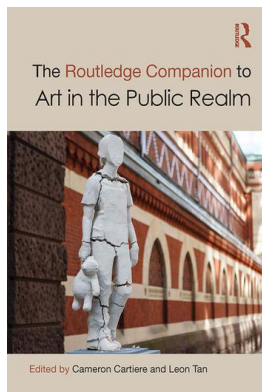
This article was downloaded by: 10.3.98.104

On: 30 Nov 2021

Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



The Routledge Companion to Art in the Public Realm

Cameron Cartiere, Leon Tan

Japan's Rural Art Festivals

Publication details

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780429450471-3>

Justin Jesty

Published online on: 20 Oct 2020

How to cite :- Justin Jesty. 20 Oct 2020, *Japan's Rural Art Festivals from: The Routledge Companion to Art in the Public Realm* Routledge

Accessed on: 30 Nov 2021

<https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780429450471-3>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR DOCUMENT

Full terms and conditions of use: <https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/legal-notices/terms>

This Document PDF may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproductions, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The publisher shall not be liable for an loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

3

JAPAN'S RURAL ART
FESTIVALS

The Echigo-Tsumari Paradigm

Justin Jesty

This chapter discusses Japan's large-scale rural art festivals, focusing on the paradigmatic example of the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale (ETAT) that began in the year 2000. These rural art festivals are among the largest art events in the world: ETAT attracts half a million visitors with each iteration, while the largest, the Setouchi Triennale, sees just over a million. Since the mid 2000s these festivals have been the most prominent and influential site of transformations in the social existence of contemporary art in Japan. Beginning in the 1990s, art has been increasingly sited outside museums and integrated into projects aiming to strengthen struggling communities, reactivate vernacular culture, and seed more inclusive and sustainable ways of life. Artistic practice has changed in tandem: site- and context-specific work, collaborative and participatory projects, archives and documentaries have become mainstream. The most common term in Japan for art's new forms and contexts is *āto purojekuto*, a transliteration of the English words 'art project'.¹

The rise of the art project has brought a massive increase in the prominence of public art, a proliferation of sites and modalities of public art-making, and a diversification and intensification of hopes for art's potential in the public realm. It has also embedded the idea that public art can drive regional transformation within the mainstream of policy-making. Although these shifts are roughly contemporaneous with the rise of social practice and socially engaged art, art historian Kajiya Kenji has shown that Japan's art projects are even more strongly connected to lineages of public art than their North American and European counterparts. He traces three lineages in particular – experimental outdoor exhibition in Japan post-1945, public art discourse introduced from the United States in the 1980s and 1990s, and Jan Hoet's curation in the 1990s – arguing that they show

that Japan's art projects do not derive directly from the influence of relational art nor from socially engaged art. The concepts of relational aesthetics and socially engaged art came to be known in Japan respectively in the early 2000s and in the mid-2010s, when art projects were already thriving. Therefore, it is little wonder that Japan's art projects have a different structure from relational art and socially engaged art in Europe and the United States.²

This chapter will explore three major aspects of Japan's regional art festivals that differ from expectations rooted in Euro-American practice, approaching them as generative opportunities

that can illuminate achievements, shortcomings, blind spots, insights, and unique potentials in both traditions. First, curation at ETAT and other rural festivals deliberately appeals to mainstream audiences and strives for an affirmative tone. This generates large numbers of visitors and enables more durable forms of intergenerational and interregional social capital, but many commentators raise the concern that it glosses over the actual needs of the local people and the politics of rural decay. I argue that we should balance that critique with awareness of the social dynamics of the site: attraction may be the most appropriate form of intervention where the forces of global capitalism manifest as depopulation and degrowth. A second difference is ETAT's rejection of socially engaged art's call to make art useful and its (re)affirmation of a more idealistic vision of art's power to effect change. This unfortunately limits ETAT's utility as an interface for practical experiment, but it illuminates a confusion in discourses such as *arte útil*: the idea that the 'everyday' and the 'real' are guaranteed by practicality.³ ETAT insists that celebration and wonder are as much part of everyday reality as usefulness, and implicitly argues they are more transformative. The final difference is the lack of emphasis on collaboration in the production of most artworks at ETAT. Although the festival's staging relies on a massive ongoing collaboration among area residents, artists, officials, and festival staff, the work remains mostly 'backstage'. Few of the artworks are participant-driven and the festival's curation does not consistently foreground participant testimony or creative contribution. This raises an intriguing question: can ideas about artistic collaboration countenance collaborators who are not fully committed to the aesthetic claims of the project but are willing to support it for instrumental reasons?

Rural Sustainability and the ETAT Paradigm

Regional revitalisation is one of the most common missions of art projects in Japan, and ETAT has become a paradigm for that kind of project. In 2018 there were 379 works on display at ETAT, spread over a mountainous area the size of New York's five boroughs but with a population only slightly over 62,000. The 2018 festival was ETAT's seventh iteration, but it has now pushed beyond a strictly triennial format: there are year-round activities, ongoing art and theatre residencies, and approximately 200 permanently installed artworks. The festival has gradually taken root as a major public undertaking in the area, with a unit in the city office assigned to it and a managing non-profit organisation with about 30 staff on-site.

ETAT's size and success make it exceptional rather than typical. But ETAT's very success has popularised the model of using a contemporary art festival to spur rural revitalisation. Many have tried to imitate it. At its most basic, the format consists of siting a number of artworks in different communities or neighbourhoods in a given area, with the goal of increasing visitors and activating the area and its people so that they can be more socially and economically self-sustaining. Kitagawa Fram, who founded and directs ETAT, still leads the field as both an organiser and public figure. Out of approximately 13 large rural art festivals, Kitagawa directs five, and he founded a sixth that he no longer directs.⁴ It is therefore worth focusing on Kitagawa and ETAT.

Japan's rural areas have been losing population for a long time. The baby boom of the 1950s and manufacturing boom of the 1960s and 1970s were accompanied by massive urbanisation and suburbanisation of the population. But the problem has gotten worse in recent years, as the country's population as a whole has started to shrink. Japan is forecast to lose 40 per cent of its population by 2100.⁵ The places that bear the brunt of this loss are rural villages that literally disappear, returning to nature after the last of their aged residents

die or move into a care facility. Tōkamachi and Tsunan, the two municipalities where ETAT is held, lose 1,000 people per year, a trend that would cause them to disappear by 2082 if it continues.⁶ Amplifying the effects of this trend, Japan's economy has entered a condition of post-growth or degrowth. When low growth and price deflation began in the 1990s people treated it as an aberration, referring to it as a 'lost decade'. But nearly 30 years later Japan's economy remains 'lost', and most developed countries have followed it. The conditions undermine a foundational assumption of modern economic and monetary policy: the assumption of growth. Broadly speaking, Japan's rural art projects attempt to address the unevenness of degrowth and to imagine post-growth forms of life and value.⁷

Although revitalisation is the accepted key term for this mission in both Japanese and English, it may be a misnomer.⁸ The editors of an important study of Japan's regional degrowth write:

One question raised by our research is whether revitalisation – to the extent that it means a return to growth – is ultimately possible within the context of the protracted depopulation that Japan has only just begun to experience. We therefore invite readers to consider other concepts, such as stability and sustainability as replacements.⁹

Sustainability in this context is not a question of ensuring continuing capacity for biological life: Japan has national health insurance, high-quality public education, and excellent transport and communications infrastructure even in remote areas. It is also not a question of species survival: although many art projects do explore sustainability as an ecological question, the main focus of revitalisation discourse is a discrete collective. Villages are dying. Regions are dying. Ways of life are dying. Rural communities like the ones where ETAT is located are inefficient and unproductive. The urge to save them contradicts economic logic, both liberal logic that says things the market doesn't support *should* die, and the logic of central planning that could distribute national resources more efficiently. The challenge facing them is how to survive collectively in a world where the larger economic forces welcome their extinction.

Kitagawa is an articulate advocate on these issues. His critiques of urban modernity are among the most radical in the field of contemporary art in Japan. Although he decries aesthetic degradation wrought by 'mass consumerism, endless competition, stimulation, and excitation' of life in cities,¹⁰ his core argument is that cities are the most direct expression of capitalist development.

Cities have been the goal of the 20th century. The values that cities aim for are the same values that now rule the world with the U.S. at its center ... The U.S. government espouses democracy while continually destroying the civic foundations necessary to create democracy. The Japanese government follows them blindly in that.¹¹

Non-urban areas' current state of abandonment is the ultimate playing out of post-war development as determined by the Japanese state in its subservience to a US-led consumer-capitalist agenda.¹² Kitagawa frames ETAT as an effort to spur regional autonomy, whose forms of life will emerge precisely from their points of unassimilable difference. The unique features of local life are the resources of autonomy, and the need to attend to them becomes even more pronounced in a historical moment when capitalism has dead-ended.

The Politics of Attraction

But Kitagawa's strong critical positions take a softer edge on-site at ETAT. It is rare to find a critical voice among the artworks – even criticism of urban life is mostly absent. What Kitagawa emphasises instead is how the artworks, and the travel between them, should inspire wonder, joy, learning, and appreciation. Kitagawa envisions the visitor on a journey (*tabi*) – a transformational process without a definite destination. He is famously proud of the inefficiency of ETAT. Artworks are miles apart and Kitagawa makes a point of finding new remote sites with every iteration. The artworks and their location selectively open out and reframe an unfamiliar territory, providing a chance to appreciate the self-sufficiency of the people in the area who built the capacity for habitation into jungle-like hillsides across multiple generations. All such evidence of humankind's ingenuity should be considered art, according to Kitagawa, and the particular form of that art responds sensitively to the climate, topography, and ecology.¹³ Visitors are therefore expected to encounter difference at ETAT. But what that difference occasions is not critique or self-scepticism, but a celebration of the diversity of everyday life, history, and culture, which operates through all the senses and by all the means available to contemporary artists.

Let us look at two examples. The first is Fukasawa Takafumi's *Echigo-Tsumari Homestay Museum* (2015). Fukasawa recruited 26 non-local (mostly young) people to be 'homestay researchers', who were dispatched in teams for a one-night homestay with one of the nine households that had volunteered to be hosts and research subjects. The researchers were tasked with documenting stories and negotiating to borrow materials to be put on exhibit at the museum. The museum displayed the results of their research during the festival, housed in a building in the downtown area of Tōkamachi.

Fukasawa's underlying concept was 'a museum of the average person', where neither the subjects on display nor the researchers have any particular distinguishing characteristics.¹⁴ As a slightly over-formalised medium of visibility and set of performance protocols, the museum functioned to defamiliarise the 'average person', to reveal the material and experiential richness unique to each life. Rather than pathos or awe, the general tone of the museum was playful and curious. It featured a variety of natural oddities (such as the unanticipated trickiness of the bottle gourd, or a patch of 'gutsy roses' near Mr Fukuzaki's entryway that only flourished after being paved over), creatively repurposed equipment (an unemployed tofu press used to make award-winning pressed-flower artworks, or a plastic sled put to use harvesting asparagus), professional skills and hidden talents (all manner of construction and food-prep techniques, including how to make a rice cooker from two beer cans and a milk carton), and changing roles and relationships (an elderly couple who host homestay children as a way to pass on their knowledge, and a researcher who recently relocated to a village she'd been visiting for 40 years to document its vernacular Buddhist statuary). All of the displays highlighted the unstable, provisional, ongoing nature of the lives being represented, reimagining the 'museum' as a space and manner of inquiry that can be used to frame and admire overlooked meaning and value. The presentation of material gave play to the push and pull between the exoticisation of the visitor's perspective and the narrative setting provided by the hosts' accompanying stories and explanation. In the final analysis the project succeeded in forcing together two attitudes that mutually resisted each other: the contemporary life of the nine households appeared simultaneously to be both irreducible and remarkable, and entirely normal.

The second work, titled *Tracing Water* (2018), marked six points along the course of a mostly hidden waterway that diverts the flow of a small river to irrigate the lower fields of

the village of Aramachi Shinden. It was a collaboration between Australian artist Sue Pedley and Iwaki Kazuya and students at Tokyo Denki University. At each of the six points, the group installed several large snub dodecahedron frames (i.e. polyhedrons with 92 faces) that were made of spindly blue plastic rods, inset with small mirrored triangles.¹⁵ The objects represented water molecules. Although they were large (2.5 metres across) they weighed less than 4 kg: they swayed and turned with the breeze and were surprisingly difficult to see even in daylight. The concept and installation involved little collaboration with the local villagers. But Iwaki and his students had worked in the same village for the three prior triennials and made regular visits in off-years. In conjunction with the triennial, members of the community held weekend lunch events, with a menu featuring local produce and a small informational display.

I visited *Tracing Water* because another visitor had suggested it to me as I was relaxing at Senju Shrine (discussed later in the chapter). The person related her whole itinerary for the day with such a compelling personal narrative that I decided to follow the same route the next day. *Tracing Water* was the last work on the route. It was late afternoon when I arrived, sunny and gusty. The first installation site was a high plateau with a majestic view of the river valley. The second site was at the irrigation dam, from which the diverted water flows underground, down past a shrine, through the village, and into the rice fields. The final installation site was in a grove of trees beyond the village at the far end of the rice fields that marked the place where the water returned to its natural course. The grove had once been the village's crematory. The wind was blowing and making eddies in the rice fields as I walked out to the final site. Inside, the grove was quieter but there was enough breeze to make the suspended spheres rotate slowly, independently of one another, occasionally glinting when a mirror caught the light. I was the only one there. I'd met no one on the road out. In the dim patch of forest with the wind moving over the treetops, I had a sudden, dizzying insight into my own mortality, my insignificance within the movements of nature. How many others had returned to nature in this very spot? The slowly turning polyhedron frames were part of that experience but not the only part. It is, I think, an example of what Kitagawa means when he discusses ETAT as an experience that includes artworks, individual journeys, and encounters with others.

Nevertheless, many artists, critics, and art historians in Japan have raised concern about the lack of clear politics in rural art festivals.¹⁶ The artworks at ETAT and similar festivals rarely feel urgent, and the diversity in experience they foreground is not challenging enough to be compared to social justice testimony. Part of the reason for that lack relates to the terms of the festivals' existence: they depend on the goodwill of the local people, who are middle- and working-class citizens who own land – not subaltern by any means. ETAT is also a tourism booster and its success as such has been its most powerful pitch to local businesses and administrators. But we need to recognise as well, that the socio-economic dynamics of these sites are entropic rather than intensive. That makes them fundamentally different from the urban settings assumed in most Euro-American art critical discourse. In cities, global capitalism pushes people out of their homes and neighbourhoods through gentrification and urban development. The very same market forces are driving Japan's rural decline but they manifest as negative pressure in rural locales.¹⁷ Although enticement and attraction tend to provoke suspicion in the critical discourse of urban intervention, they should be recognised as crucial tools of intervention at entropic sites.

Further, although counting tourist dollars provides a rough measure of success, a more ambitious goal of ETAT and other rural festivals is to create deeper forms of mutual involvement. There is much anecdotal evidence to suggest that ETAT has succeeded in

seeding cross-generational and inter-regional connections. The most generative context has been the relatively long-term working relationships between the hundreds of young volunteers who prepare and staff the festival and the mostly older residents. The Chūetsu Earthquake, which devastated the area in 2004 is often cited as a turning point in the attitude of older residents: when the young volunteers they had met responded with concern and aid, it demonstrated that they could rely on these new connections in times of need. Quantitative sociological research has demonstrated ETAT's success in increasing levels of social capital as well.¹⁸

The Idealism of ETAT's Art

The only way to create true social sustainability, however, is to attract people to take up life there. Interestingly, that prospect is not as far-fetched as it might sound. Many people in their twenties, thirties, and forties in Japan, who entered professional life during the 'employment ice age' post-1990 are looking for ways to escape the city. Cities are expensive, crowded, and alienating: the sacrifice of living in them does not make sense when growth no longer promises future reward. In a survey of Tokyo residents in 2005, 20.6 per cent of the respondents said they wanted to move to a farming or fishing village. In 2014 the figure was 31.6 per cent.¹⁹ Back-to-the-land movements can be found across the twentieth century but they have always been subcultural or alternative. In contemporary Japan, urban exodus has become a mainstream aspiration, with a cottage industry of advice books and support networks to facilitate it.

Urban exodus entails some sacrifices. Professionalised city life is 'convenient' because it outsources the labour of cultural and social reproduction to anonymous vendors. But it is precisely in the non-professional pursuit of activities such as house repair, farming, and maintaining neighbourly ties, that the value of daily work becomes newly palpable. Ethnographer Susanne Klien's interviews with urban out-migrants have shown that they 'have opted for a voluntary move [to the countryside] to set up their own enterprises, implement their ideas, contribute to local revitalisation and achieve self-realisation'.²⁰ Artistry and creativity fit well with these new life courses: they are chosen and built, they require refashioning existing resources, and they find value in non-fungible experiences of responsiveness and quality. These ways of thinking about capitalism, sustainability, and life values resonate with Kitagawa's critique of cities and admiration for the autonomous creativity of ETAT's rural communities.

But surprisingly, ETAT has made relatively few efforts to connect the artworks at the festival to these social and cultural trends. The managing non-profit organisation does run a rice field bank that allows people living outside the area to lease small patches of rice field.²¹ A group of activist farmers from Hong Kong tried to set up a permaculture farm that would offer apprentice residencies to aspiring farmers.²² In the end they found it too logistically challenging. This is the only example of such an experiment occurring as an art project in the festival: it is telling that the initiative and most of its funding came from a Hong Kong foundation rather than ETAT. Given the level of cooperation ETAT has built at the village level there would be opportunities to support agricultural experiments that would introduce people to the ways of life Kitagawa is otherwise eager to admire. The fact that that is not a major part of the curation is revealing of Kitagawa's understanding of public art and its purpose.

Several prominent socially engaged artists in North America advocate making art practical.²³ Kitagawa's beliefs are fundamentally different on this point. His basic prototype for ETAT is the *matsuri* (folk festival): a celebration that is socialised and

site-specific but that gives expression to emotional and creative excesses that cannot emerge in more practical modalities. His evaluations of artworks often evince near-reverence for their power to elevate: artworks offer prayer and connect people to each other spiritually, they express the ephemerality of joy and the meaning of existence, they illuminate the environment, give voice to the region, tap into the land's life force, and connect humans with things faraway.²⁴ Art is intertwined with daily life for Kitagawa but not by dint of its efficacy. As he writes, 'matsuri and love letters are essential to the daily life struggle'.²⁵ Which is to say that even in everyday milieu, art is an index of human inspiration. It is rare to find such open affirmation of art's sublime origins and effects in the discourse of socially engaged art. Kitagawa also seeks artworks that have 'the power to create experiences and phenomenological effects' with an 'immediacy' unique to the work in its site.²⁶ This translates into large-scale artworks: an affirmation of monumentality that social practice generally rejects.

Kitagawa's curatorial vision generates a mismatch between the revitalisation claims of ETAT and the artworks' often fanciful mode of existence. It makes it difficult for the practical needs of the local people – or the practical potentials of the festival – to enter the artworks in any sustained way. Susanne Klien, who conducted extensive on-site research in 2007–2008, makes an incisive critique of the festival along these lines. She shows how artists and festival management demonstrate little interest in the needs of the hamlets, beyond securing basic permission from the community and concludes that

in spite of . . . the engaging and heart-warming *furusato* [hometown; country home] parlance of the triennial, it is time to face the fact that the nostalgic romanticisation of regional values and lifestyle by urbanites has achieved little to improve the harsh demographic reality of rural hamlets.²⁷

Klien's conclusions largely hold true today. But I would argue that the root cause lies with Kitagawa's idealistic investment in art, not romanticisation of the site. The festival as a whole is a poor example of nostalgia, first and foremost because of the artworks. Their visual and conceptual vocabulary defamiliarises the landscape and local culture considerably. The hybridity and incongruity of site and artwork are fundamental to the festival's basic mechanism of attraction. The artworks also typically foreground (rather than try to erase) modern and contemporary transformations to the area's landscape and lifeways when they engage them. Finally, the discourse of *satoyama* (literally village mountains) – which has been a key term of the festival from the start and that many have critiqued as purely pastoral – has genuine ecological significance. *Satoyama* refers to common land on the outskirts of human settlements that is situated between farmland and wilderness and is harvested but not cultivated. *Satoyama* were once essential sources of food, building materials, and fuel, but modernisation gradually destroyed them. Many environmental initiatives in Japan appeal to *satoyama* restoration as a step towards (re)building sustainable food and energy systems.

But the festival does not connect in a practical way to such initiatives. Fukasawa's *Homestay Museum*, for instance, was not nostalgic. But the format of a museum restricts the visitor to a position of spectatorship, and this is typical of ETAT's structuration of the encounter between art and visitor. The festival could foster practical-experimental contexts for visitors to learn new lifeways, but in the vast majority of cases the practical ripple effects of the festival occur outside the purview of its curation. The works themselves address the visitor as spectator rather than potential participant.

The Inner Public of ETAT

Klien's critique of collaboration at ETAT alerts us to the fact that the organisation and operation of the festival is not egalitarian or democratic. Groups of citizens who want to host an art project apply to do so, but from that point forward they have little control over what happens. Art Front Gallery controls artist selection and placement. An artist may decide to work collaboratively with the people from the hosting group, but even then the artist sets the outlines of the project. However, while true that the curation of the festival and the majority of artworks within it are not collaborative, the staging of ETAT requires deep, ongoing collaboration. If we include the people living in all the hamlets that host an art project, together with the local officials, businesses, and volunteers, the number of collaborators for each of the recent iterations of the festival would easily top 10,000. The issue, therefore, is not simply the presence or absence of collaboration. It is rather the festival's tendency to keep collaboration backstage, to assign it an invisible supportive role, away from the event's planning and the artworks proper.

Artist Krzysztof Wodiczko's description of the 'inner public' can help illuminate this issue. The inner public is the supportive, involved public that emerges within a project as it develops. Most audiences – the 'outer public' – only see the final form of a project (which in Wodiczko's work usually takes the form of disenfranchised individuals speaking truth in public about systemic violence or suffering they've experienced). But for Wodiczko, the inner public is the more important site and subject of change.

In most theoretical and critical discussions of public art, there is rarely any emphasis placed on the value and meaning of projects for those who invest lived experience in them. However, a grasp of the psychologically developmental, therapeutic, educational and performative procedures of these works is crucial for understanding the social objective of such projects.²⁸

I would venture that greater emphasis on the 'value and meaning of projects for those who invest lived experience in them' is a defining feature of new public art and its analysis.

But ETAT is quite different. Whereas in Wodiczko's work, the testimony of the participants forms an arc that coheres across the threshold between the inner and outer public, at ETAT there is little direct connection between the inner public and the artworks on display; there is little logical or substantive continuity between what the outer public encounters in the artworks and what the inner public puts in. It is this rupture between what the inner public provides and what the outer public experiences that distinguishes ETAT from projects that structure participation as an act of (self-)empowering expression undertaken by the participants themselves.

It took years of work to build ETAT's inner public. Kitagawa held over 2,000 meetings with local groups over a three-year period leading up to the first festival. Yet only two out of over 200 villages agreed to host an artist. There are now approximately 100 hosting villages, and the demand to host artists outstrips what the festival can provide. A hosting group can technically be anything, but it usually corresponds to a village or neighbourhood (*shūraku*) consisting of a handful to a few dozen households. The most basic responsibility of a hosting group is to help the artist realise their work. Oftentimes the artist simply wants to be tolerated on-site while they work. In other cases they might want people from the hosting community to participate, by sitting for photographs, lending materials or stories, or by appearing in a performance. The hosting group might also be expected to maintain the site during the festival or to check people's tickets at a reception table.

Such activities may sound menial but they achieve some of the goals of the festival (and it is worth noting that Wodiczko also includes technical and professional support roles in the inner public). A basic goal is to activate the residents of the area, who are mostly elderly and can easily slip into obscurity, especially in depopulating areas. But whether that activation is experienced as fun or a chore depends on the person, and it is unclear how much the festival activates *new* actors and networks. Agricultural villages already have well-developed systems for sharing communal tasks. All the ones I have studied have an informal hierarchy wherein a handful of men rotate the duty of being village head (*kuchō*), who is responsible for communicating with municipal offices, coordinating annual holiday festivities, and serving as a point person during ETAT. It would be nearly impossible to avoid activating such existing systems and might not be desirable to do so. But there is a risk that the festival becomes 'just another' undertaking on the village's calendar of communal responsibilities.

While keeping that issue in mind, the festival is unavoidably different from other activities. Contemporary art is unfamiliar to most elderly people in Japan. Meeting artists and helping them in their work is a new situation that the members of the inner public negotiate collectively. The art of the festival creates a context of mutual unfamiliarity: it pulls people together but with no road map forward – a situation that can lead to new experiences and perspectives. It is common to hear that local people learned to see the attractions of their surroundings through the eyes of outsiders. It is also common to hear insightful analyses of artworks and thoughtful personal itineraries.²⁹ Getting involved in the art festival thus creates new sensitivities to value. As discussed earlier in the chapter, it also creates durable connections with people outside the region that would not have been possible otherwise. Several villages recently restarted annual festivities like *bon* dancing because the festival brings enough people from outside to make them worthwhile. The festival therefore demands a hybridisation of the hosting group as a collective subject: it activates existing networks and resources but in a context that is unfamiliar and unpredictable, and in the name of a community that is much more diverse, abstract, and fluid than the usual bounds of the hosting community.

But ETAT does not provide a reliable platform for the local participants to express themselves, either in terms of their needs, or in a playful spirit of creativity. Their role is to facilitate artists' work and festival operation but whatever transformation that might entail has an essentially arbitrary relationship with the artist and artwork (except in relatively rare cases where the artist makes it central to their project).³⁰ The conversations and sustained relationships with outsiders, for instance, happen alongside the artworks, not through them. It almost doesn't matter what the artwork is specifically, as long as it creates a context for encounter. In this way the rupture between the inner and outer audience insulates both the artwork (from operating within the specifics of the hosting community) and the substantive participation of the inner audience from one another.

To give an example, a group of citizens requested to host an artwork for the 2015 festival. The group's core was the volunteer service association (*hōsankai*) for Senju Shrine, which is nestled on the outskirts of a quiet residential neighbourhood. All shrines have a nominal service association but they are often inactive. Senju Shrine's *hōsankai* was eager to activate the shrine and its grounds: to bring more people to it for a greater variety of activities and to make it a more integral part of the community. The head of the group, Shirai Toshio, actively lobbied to host an artist as a way to open and enliven the space even more.

Liu Jianhua was selected for the site and he installed the artwork *Discard* in a grassy clearing adjacent to the shrine, formerly a ground for sumo matches. The work featured

about 7,000 household objects made of white porcelain, arranged in a circle around the square central dais where sumo bouts had taken place. Liu visited for about a week during the installation. The only role the supporters had in realising the work was helping unload the pieces of porcelain from the delivery truck. And, although the gleaming white porcelain stood out beautifully against the green bowl of the grounds, it was not a site-specific work. It debuted at the Keng Gallery in Taipei in 2014. It would be easy to criticise this as an example of ‘old’ public art: fabricated off-site, deposited on-site, and left for locals to accommodate themselves to.

But the hosting group found ways to turn the installation to their needs. Led by Shirai Toshio and his wife Masa, members of the hosting group stationed themselves at the shrine, where they could greet visitors passing by on their way down to the installation. When visitors came back past the shrine, they would invite them in to relax on the tatami, where they had set up some small tables with tea and snacks. On my first visit I stayed for about 45 minutes chatting with Toshio and other local people who came and went on various errands. It was a normal conversation: we talked about ourselves, the shrine, the local area, the festival, and the artwork, which was beautifully framed through the shrine’s open shutters.

The conversation would never have happened without the artwork. But it was not part of the artwork and its content was mostly unrelated to it. This is the dominant form of inner-audience participation that one encounters at ETAT. It takes place independently of the artwork, at the initiative of the hosting group, and usually takes the form of a host/guest relationship.³¹ Hospitality (*omotenashi*) has been adopted by many local supporters to structure their presence at the festival. A number of villages refer to the group that works on triennial-related activities as the *omotenashi no kai*, or ‘welcome committee’.

Hospitality’s availability as a performative format is overdetermined: it is a form of labour in the tourist industry, an opportunity to display and/or garner symbolic capital, it plays on tropes of country hospitality, and recalls parents and grandparents humouring prodigal offspring. But Senju Shrine’s approach demonstrates that it can provide a way for members of the inner public to build their own connections with the outer public. The handicrafts on display in the shrine were made by Masa and friends. The dictionaries and atlas at the table – which at first seemed purely practical – turned out to be part of Toshio’s hobby of collecting dictionaries. In the 2018 Triennale, they displayed even more crafts, and the local photography club contributed photos of winter scenery. The theme was chosen partly to educate visitors about the heavy snowfall that the region is infamous for, and partly to make the shrine feel a bit cooler in the summer heat, Toshio was fond of joking. Masa played the role of the impresario: always laughing and stirring the pot. She wore the same puckish blue and yellow hat every day of the festival and was the first to greet new arrivals.

Senju Shrine’s assistance association is a good example of local citizens investing in ETAT in a way that appears mutually beneficial, enriching the experience of the festival for visitors and furthering the hosting group’s goals. But we should recognise that they achieved this of their own initiative, on the sidelines of ETAT’s main programming. We should also recognise that the format of hospitality is laborious, and risks reinstating (rather than playfully foregrounding) the inequality between depopulating rural areas and urban power centres. Toshio and Masa nearly exhausted themselves in 2018 by being on-site at the shrine every day of the festival – a level of commitment that approaches a professional performance. Finally, the accessible and fun tone of their performance – although an excellent fit for the affirmative tone of ETAT – does not surface the anxieties and internal struggles of the people of the area as they face the prospect of increasing isolation.

Conclusion

The ETAT paradigm constitutes an unruly object of study. Well over 1,000 artworks have been displayed since 2000 and its many biennial and triennial imitators follow a similar path of gradual expansion. It is a body of work that defies generalisation. As this chapter's meandering from admiration to critique and back again indicates, conclusions are at best provisional.

The ETAT paradigm has changed contemporary art's position in Japan. It has created a mass domestic audience for contemporary art that did not exist before, especially for Japanese artists.³² But that mass appeal may have come at the price of artistic refinement – such is the consensus among art critics in Japan, even today. Public art and socially engaged art have tackled the elitist cultural politics of modernist criticism, to be sure. Nonetheless, the uneven, sometimes gauche mixture of contemporary art, children's games, traditional craft, hobbies, post-dramatic theatre, music festivals, talent shows, and more that one finds at ETAT might test the limits of taste for even the most permissive of art world populists. Which is to say that the rise of the ETAT paradigm has – at the same time that it has shifted art's institutions – opened up an ontologically significant discussion of taste in the world of art and cultural criticism: a discussion of what should be framed as valuable and what better left to decay. The stakes of that discussion of taste are driven deeper by the problems of rural depopulation and the critique of urban modernity that Kitagawa attaches to ETAT. There is no easy way to disentangle the post-growth, locally focused, autonomous, ecological ethics that Kitagawa invokes, from strands of privileged conservative nostalgia that have haunted modernity since its beginnings, especially when Kitagawa and most of the artists participating at ETAT continue to live in cities.

But ETAT's goals and Kitagawa's rhetoric are more than simply hot air. ETAT has changed the lives of people who live in Tōkamachi and Tsunan. It has increased and diversified their connections both inside and outside the region. Serendipitous encounters lead to friendships and recurring visits. The influx of visitors every summer – and especially in festival years – has revived traditional celebrations where they had been suspended for lack of participants. The vast majority of the people who visit would never have done so otherwise: the festival raises consciousness about problems that are otherwise all too easy to forget. But at the same time, and by dint of the very same mechanism, the festival may be suppressing the complexity of the local people's anxieties and struggles. Celebration attracts people from far and wide but celebration demands work from the hosts – the very people the festival intends to celebrate. How should we feel about the proposition that their actual struggles are not directly taken up in most of the artworks? Testimony is a structure that is at the core of much social practice: it powerfully connects personal expression with political speech. Is its absence from ETAT a missed opportunity? For whom? In my research, the communities who have been involved in more richly collaborative projects have been even more taxed by the demands on their time and energy. Although cutting the weeds might seem like a disappointing form of collaboration by some abstract measure, for the majority of local residents it is probably preferable to, say, being part of a community theatre production. From the perspective of the collaborator, everything is a form of performative labour, welcoming smiles and devastating testimony alike. Which is more real? Which is more needed or more effective? Which is more valuable as symbolic currency? For whom?

How, in the end, do we evaluate qualities of collaboration? It is common to appeal to the amount of time spent together and the care of the collaborative process. But those standards of evaluation only come into effect once the participants have submitted to the framework of a project. That might be necessary in cases like Wodiczko's, where the

participants need a supportive inner public to build their capacity to speak. But it is questionable in other contexts: insisting that collaboration be defined by a model of authentically expressive speech is problematic for the homogeneity it enforces in permissible forms of subjectivity and judgement. ETAT involves all sorts of instrumental, partial, ‘inauthentic’ participation. Hosting groups use participation to pursue their own goals. Individuals participate out of friendship, loyalty, curiosity, and sometimes duty. A majority of local people have a favourable view of the festival and want it to continue. But only a minority are interested in the artworks or believe the festival can change the region.³³ The farther one moves away from the controlled, focused ‘inner public’ of collaboration, the greater the diversity of collaborative modalities becomes.

Whatever practical possibilities might be born from ETAT, they are things that the festival leaves visitors and local people to work out for themselves. But by investing so little in the possibility of daily conversation and collaboration as frames for aesthetic experience, and by foregoing the energies of the local people as creators, ETAT risks reinforcing a latent division in the festival between art and non-art, which plays out along entirely orthodox lines, between artist and non-artist, art and the everyday, ideal and reality. In the end, the fact that these questions remain in a turbulent state of undecidability indicates to me that there is an actual experiment still underway on-site.

Notes

- 1 This chapter is based on research conducted in Tōkamachi and Tsunan in the summers of 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019. The author would like to thank the following for their generous support of the research: the Northeast Asia Council of the Association for Asian Studies, University of Washington Japan Studies, University of Washington Innovation Fund, University of Washington East Asia Center, and Ishibashi Foundation/Japan Foundation Fellowship for Research on Japanese Art. For an introduction to art projects, see Kajiya Kenji, ‘Japanese Art Projects in History’, *FIELD: A Journal of Socially Engaged Art Criticism* 7 (Spring 2017): n.p., <http://field-journal.com/issue-7/japanese-art-projects-in-history>; and Sumiko Kumakura and Yūichirō Nagatsu, eds, *An Overview of Art Projects in Japan: A Society That Co-Creates with Art* (Tokyo: Tokyo Arts Council, 2015), which is a highly compressed English translation of *Āto purojekuto: Geijutsu to kyōsō suru shakai* [Art projects: a society that co-creates with art], ed. Kikuchi Takuji, Nagatsu Yūichirō, and Kumakura Sumiko (Tokyo: Suiyōsha, 2014).
- 2 Kajiya Kenji, ‘Japanese Art Projects in History’, n.p.
- 3 In Stephen Wright’s *Toward a Lexicon of Usership* (Eindhoven: Van Abbemuseum, 2013), for example, usability becomes inextricably entangled with questions of ontology.
- 4 It is difficult to pin down the current number of regional art festivals because they appear and disappear quickly. As of September 2019, the following festivals are running or scheduled to run in the near future. The first five are directed by Kitagawa, the sixth was founded by him: Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale, Ichihara Art X Mix, Setouchi Triennale, Oku Noto International Art Festival, Kita Alps International Art Festival, Water and Land Niigata Art Festival, Yamagata Biennale, Fukushima Biennale, Nakanojo Triennale, Rokko Meets Art, Sanriku International Arts Festival, Biwako Biennale, Reborn Art Festival. There are several major festivals in urban areas as well, but they do not address rural revitalisation. These include Sapporo International Art Festival, Saitama Triennale, Yokohama Triennale, Aichi Triennale, Fukuoka Asian Art Triennale. A relatively up-to-date index can be found at <http://eiennare.site/index.html>.
- 5 United Nations World Population Prospectus 2019, <https://population.un.org/wpp>.
- 6 It is unlikely that the area will completely depopulate: the trunk of relatively concentrated settlement that runs north-south along the Shinano River and includes the downtowns of both Tōkamachi and Tsunan is unlikely to disappear. But the smaller villages in more remote areas are already disappearing and will continue to do so. Tōkamachi City Office, *Tōkamachi-shi jinkō bijon* [Tōkamachi city’s population vision] (2015), www.city.tokamachi.lg.jp/ikkrwebBrowse/material/files/group/6/000043279.pdf.

- 7 Adrian Favell, 'Socially Engaged Art in Japan: Mapping the Pioneers', *FIELD: A Journal of Socially Engaged Art Criticism* 7 (Spring 2017): n.p., <http://field-journal.com/issue-7/socially-engaged-art-in-japan-mapping-the-pioneers>. Favell also explores the social background to these festivals in Adrian Favell, 'Echigo-Tsumari and the Art of the Possible: The Fram Kitagawa Philosophy in Theory and Practice', in *Art Place Japan: The Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale and the Vision to Reconnect Art and Nature*, ed. Fram Kitagawa (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2015), 143–173; and Adrian Favell, 'Islands for Life: Artistic Responses to Remote Social Polarisation and Population Decline in Japan', in *Sustainability in Contemporary Rural Japan: Challenges and Opportunities*, ed. Stephanie Assman (New York: Routledge, 2016), 81–96.
- 8 There are actually many terms for revitalisation in Japanese, as there are in English: *okoshi* (revitalisation); *kasseika* (revitalisation, activation); *zukunft* (development); *saisei* (rebirth); *shinkō* (development, promotion); *sōsei* (creation, generation).
- 9 Peter Matanle and Anthony Rausch with the Shrinking Regions Research Group, *Japan's Shrinking Regions in the Twenty-First Century: Contemporary Responses to Depopulation and Socio-Economic Decline* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2011), 5.
- 10 Fram Kitagawa, *Hiraku bijutsu: Chiiki to ningen no tsunagari o torimodosu* [Opening art: restoring the connection between people and region] (Tokyo: Chikuma Shinsho, 2015), 8
- 11 *Ibid.*, 9. Kitagawa's account of the post-war relationship between city and country is not entirely balanced: it omits the strong relationship between rural areas and the centre-right Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), whose long-time rule was built partly around funneling money to regional infrastructure projects.
- 12 *Ibid.*, 146–148.
- 13 Fram Kitagawa, *Art Place Japan: The Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale and the Vision to Reconnect Art and Nature* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2015), 240.
- 14 Fukasawa Takafumi, *Echigo-Tsumari Minzoku Hakubutsukan* [Echigo-Tsumari Homestay Museum] (Tokyo: Gendai Kikakushitsu, 2016).
- 15 Documentation and photographs are available on Sue Pedley's website, www.suepedley.com.au/tracing-water-echigo-tsumari-art-triennial-2018.html.
- 16 Fujita Naoya, 'Zen'ei no zombitachi: chiiki āto no shomondai' [Zombies of the avant-garde: the problems with regional art], in *Chiiki āto: bigaku/seido/Nihon* [Regional art: aesthetics/institutions/Japan] (Tokyo: Horinouchi, 2015), 11–44.
- 17 I have discussed this at greater length in Justin Jesty, 'Japan's Social Turn: Introduction to Part II', *FIELD: A Journal of Socially Engaged Art Criticism* 8 (Fall 2018): n.p., <http://field-journal.com/editorial/japans-social-turn-introduction-to-part-ii>.
- 18 Akira Sawamura, ed., *Āto wa chiiki o kaeta ka: Echigo-Tsumari daichi geijutsusai no jūsan nen, 2000–2012* [Has art changed the region? A decade of the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale] (Tokyo: Keiō Gijyū Daigaku Shuppankai, 2014).
- 19 Cited by Noda Kunihiko, 'The Agglomeration of Creative People and Regional Revitalization in a Small Town: A Focus on Fujino, Japan', presented at the 10th International Conference on Cultural Policy Research, Estonia (2018).
- 20 Susanne Klien, 'Young Urban Migrants in the Japanese Countryside Between Self-Realisation and Slow Life? The Quest for Subjective Well-Being and Post-Materialism', in *Sustainability in Contemporary Rural Japan*, ed. Stephanie Assman (London and New York: Routledge), 95–108.
- 21 As of 2017 it managed 8.3 hectares. *Matsudai tanada banku kawaraban* [Newsletter of Matsudai terraced rice field bank] (Spring 2017): 1, www.echigo-tsumari.jp/common/img/about/kawaraban_2017_total.pdf.
- 22 G. Yeung and Evelyn Char, *Horizon: Urban X Rural, Japan X Hong Kong Connect* (Hong Kong: C. C. Wu Cultural Education Foundation Fund, 2018).
- 23 Examples include Pablo Helguera's emphasis on actual as opposed to symbolic practice and Tania Bruguera's concept of *arte útil*.
- 24 This is an amalgamation of Kitagawa's evaluation of various artworks in *Art Place Japan*, 59, 65, 89, 193, 194.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 240.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 14.
- 27 Susanne Klien, 'Contemporary Art and Regional Revitalisation: Selected Artworks in the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial', *Japan Forum* 22, no. 3–4 (2010): 513–543. See also Susanne Klien, 'Collaboration of Confrontation? Local and Non-Local Actors in the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial', *Contemporary Japan* 22 (2010): 153–178.

- 28 Krzysztof Wodiczko, 'The Inner Public', *FIELD: A Journal of Socially Engaged Art Criticism* 1 (Spring 2015): n.p., <http://field-journal.com/issue-1/wodiczko>.
- 29 Artist Satō Yū collected eight such itineraries together with the stories behind them and published them in an online collection titled *Art Map Word*. www.artmapword.com.
- 30 Major collaborative works include Christian Bastiaan's *Real Lear* (2003), Mierle Lederman Ukeles' *Snow Workers Ballet* (2003, 2012), and Navan Rawanchaikul and Navin Production, *The School of Akakura* (2015).
- 31 Another common type of spontaneous participation is the independent gallery.
- 32 Shirakawa Yoshio, *Bijutsu, shijō, chiiki tsūka o megutte* [On art, market, and regional currencies] (Tokyo: Suiseisha, 2001).
- 33 Economist and sociologist Sumi Eiji conducted two major surveys of residents' attitudes towards ETAT, in 2006 and 2012. Sumi Eiji, 'Daichi no geijutsusai to sōsharu kyapitaru', in *Āto wa chiiki o kaeta ka: Echigo-Tsumari daichi geijutsusai no jūsan nen, 2000–2012* [Has art changed the region? A decade of the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale], ed. Akira Sawamura (Tokyo: Keiō Gijuku Daigaku Shuppankai, 2014), 63–100.