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This is very much an image based talk, and I start here above with an old cinema. The missing letter, the bit you can't see on the wall, is from MOMOSHIMA TOEI: it is the *kanji* for "Momo", for one hundred, which has fallen off. I'll be mentioning what this is a bit later on.

This will be an introductory lecture: it is research at an elementary stage, part of a book project that I am developing with the architect and urban theorist, Julian Worrall. He has been teaching at Waseda University, and recently moved to the University of Adelaide, and it is really a joint work. Pretty much everything we are doing on the subject now is a combination of our interests, bringing together contemporary art and architecture. Julian and I have a similar relationship to the subject matter, although he is more of a true Japanologist going back. I was a lucky Abe Fellow who was brought into the field of Japanese studies later on in my career. We have both over the last few years had an interesting parallel involvement in the art and architectural scene in Japan, as writers and commentators about the scene, so my research is effectively a kind of ethnographic research as an art writer. I have developed a kind of profile as an

art writer, and Julian similarly, alongside our academic roles. We thus found ourselves doing a similar kind of work, which has enabled us to get quite close to some of the characters that I will talk about in this particular presentation.¹

The structure of the talk is going to look like a series of holiday snaps initially. I am going to take you to the island of Momoshima and show you what I found there; then there will be a little more background on the artist in particular I want to talk about, Yanagi Yukinori; and then I'll discuss some of the related projects connected to the kind of social and community art that he has been developing, telling the background story about that, which is a kind of art history. It relates to the aims of my book, *Before and After Superflat*. Then I'll end with a series of open propositions—really questions to raise, which I hope will lead into the discussion—where I will try to bring in more of a sociologist's and human geographer's view of this topic, and in relation to the art and architecture that I have been describing. That is obviously the goal of our book, effectively: to offer a long, systematic history of art and architecture in Japan since 1990, in context, that is, since the start of the decline in Japan, the end of Japanese growth, as it were, and the consequences of this in the creative fields.

A visit to the Seto Inland Sea

But as I said, let's start with some pictures. I'm taking you to the Seto Inland Sea in Japan.



[Fig.1] Map of South West Japan

I'm sure this is familiar to all of you, the Inland Sea between Shikoku and the mainland, with here Hiroshima; Momoshima is here, East of Hiroshima, and a bit later we will be on Naoshima, over here just south of Okayama. The landscape of the Inland Sea is of course a highly emotive, sentimental, historical landscape for Japanese people. Dramatic volcanic islands between the main islands of Japan, which became during the industrial era, transport lane for industry. It is still a place, when you are travelling across this area, where you can see all the big

tankers, and this constant line of moving industrial products. So these beautiful volcanic islands are also of course the scene of great industrial damage and despoilage over the years. It is also a setting for some of the most dramatic population decline in Japan, as I will be talking about later.

Fig.2 is the kind of view you get when you are on the boat, and you arrive at the little island of Momoshima; Fig.3 is the view looking out from the island to some of the ship building industrial sites across the water. Some of it has closed



[Fig.2] View from an Inland Sea ferry

down, some of it is still in production; on the left of the picture, at the back, there is a big aquarium, which is defunct—one of those late 1980s Bubble-era pleasure parks, that is no longer there.



[Fig.3] View from Momoshima harbour

This is all close to the small city of Onomichi, which is really at the heart of this heavily industrialized former ship building area. Momoshima is a small island,

which did not have industry, but actually was a place to which people moved during the wartime, initially to escape the bombing around the area. During the immediate post-war years, and the Japanese recovery, it grew to have a maximum population of about 3000 people. It was an orange producing island, and it still has a lot of orange trees, mostly untended on the island, and a population now, as you will see, of under 600.

This is what the island looks like.



[Fig.4] Momoshima houses

It's a lot of abandoned houses and abandoned things. Here's a photo, "Coke is it", an old advert from the 70s. There are some working machines, some other more vintage things that are not.



[Fig.5] "Coke is it"

This next image [Fig.6] is of a place that is being lived in: it in what used to be an electronics shop, SHARP, with the sign now falling off. There's even a part of the island, where there are abandoned holiday houses, second houses. Lots of old

vans and machines have also been dumped, around the island, you also see empty shacks, and so forth.



[Fig.6] SHARP house



[Fig.7] Holiday homes



[Fig.8] Abandoned shack

It is, in all, a kind of emblematic place: a good example of a *genkai shūraku*, the "limit settlement", that is a term coined by a sociologist Ono Akira in early 1990s to describe population settlements where the population has gone beyond a particular point of self-replenishment and sustainability, and is now in terminal decline. On Momoshima, there is a population with an average age in the late 60s.



[Fig.9] Momoshima head count

Here is an image from the little town hall on the island: a chalkboard where they put up every month the actual population of the island. So here you see a total population of 550 overall, 332 women and 228 men. There are a couple of empty schools on the island, and one still being operated by Onomichi city, which boats children into the place, although they ear there will soon be no children on the island to justify it. There are indeed hardly any children at all on the island, and it is a spectacularly old population, a kind of classic location in its way for contemporary Japan, in its own way.



[Fig.10] Abe in the ditch

That's Mr. Abe in the ditch [Fig.10]. The human population on the island, meanwhile, is well out-numbered by spiders, cats, and crows, especially, which are a big feature of the place.



[Fig.11] Spiders, cats and crows

It was the artist Yanagi Yukinori, whose career I am going to talk about, who was called upon by the Mayor of Onomichi, partly because of his previous work in the Seto Inland Sea, to come to Momoshima and do something with an art intervention into this island. Using the ideas he had developed in his work in the Seto Inland Sea, he would be able to set up an art base, with the idea of a kind of revitalisation of the island as the official plan for it. The project is also funded by the Japanese Government Agency of Culture, Bunka-cho, at the same time as the city, and the art base has thus been set up in the former middle school of the island: an abandoned school. It is yet another one of these projects in Japan, featuring an old school which used to nurture the many children that were being born and raised on the island, where now there are none. As elsewhere, the idea is to bring in the artists and the art projects to revitalize the place. Yanagi has also come along with his students, essentially from Hiroshima City University where he is an iconoclastic professor, to develop this particular project.



[Fig.12] View of Art Base Momoshima

Below [Fig.13] is Yanagi's Jeep, and some bikes you can ride on the island. And outside you find this painted motto [Fig.14], where some interesting ideas are being expressed in connection with the overall idea of the work there.



[Fig.13] Yanagi's jeep

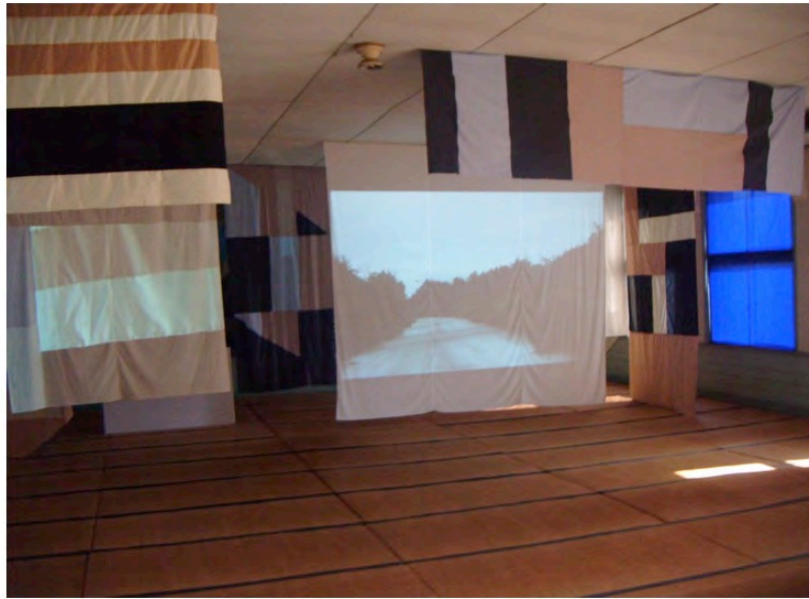


[Fig.14] Art Base motto

There is a particular kind of idea here, expressed in the motto of the base, alluding to Situationist ideas about *Homo Ludens*, about art and play and freedom on an island that could, in a utopian sense, be made sustainable in its own terms: if, the thought goes, Momoshima can develop its own energy base. As you might imagine, the base is very high tech: it's fully wired, it's got all the computer technology and production facilities needed for the art base operation, as much as for the young students who are working there as part of their education. But more than that, the day-to-day operation of the base is centred on managing its engagement in the community, that is the key part of the project: it is in the community relations that the sustainability of the island might be found.

The online site and Facebook blogs of Art Base Momoshima give a good sense of all this. When I first visited the island it was to talk with Yanagi after the opening and launch of the base with the first show *Utopia* in late 2012. I then returned to visit again in Autumn 2013 to see a much larger exhibition, co-directed by a young artist-curator of the Yanagi school, Furukata Taro: *100 Ideas on Tomorrow's Island: What Art Can Do for a Better Society*. What they have done in this project, which perhaps goes beyond some of the familiar rural art projects around Japan, is pay particular attention to engage with the community through the art in a very socially sensitive way: with artists really living on the island, not just coming on to do artistic work, but to also make a positive engagement in the life of the community, with the old people, with the existing stock of buildings, with the land, in terms of cultivation. Bringing small groups of artists to the island, often couples, they would be encouraged to develop their ideas as part of the overall project. In the first part of the *100 Ideas* exhibition in 2013, about 30 or 40 initial "ideas" were shown. There is a strong sense of personal engagement of the artists with the island: a feeling that if they are not actually themselves going to settle and have children there, they might want to at least attract people who might come back to the island as young families to live on the island with the older people.

At the show in 2013, both German and Japanese artists were brought in. Raul Walch designed and displayed imaginary national flags of non-states and utopian lands, also provided a particular flag for the island (and a T-shirt design). The shot in Fig.15 is from inside the village hall, on the first floor. These tatami mats on the floor, no more than one of two people can step on to the floor, without risk of the whole building collapsing, it is a rickety old building that is about to collapse. Here is one of the untended orange trees. A German couple, Anja Gerecke and Stefan Rummel, had come in and renovated one of the houses, which fits with the strong emphasis on renovation. Quite a few of the projects are very much engaged in memorializing old people's memories and artefacts. Going into houses either which have been left or which are about to be left full of their things, but producing objects out of these things, working with their memories, on the island.



[Fig.15] Raul Walch, Flags and video of his visit inside Fukushima exclusion zone (2013)



[Fig.16] Anja Gerecke & Stefan Rummel, Orange trees and house conversion

I come back to the cinema. The cinema is probably the emblematic centrepiece of the island, and Yanagi in fact had found the "Momo" part of the title on the floor, and this became a kind of readymade as a sculptural installation at the *100 Ideas* show.



[Fig.16] Momoshima Toei Cinema

The cinema is obviously an emblem of the peak years of the island. You have to imagine this island in 1950, with 3000 people, and everyone packed into the cinema watching movies and newsreels, in the old Eastern Picture House. Obviously now a collapsing building, with a battered old vending machine and broken ticket office outside. During the *100 Ideas* exhibition, the cluttered interior had been used for a particular installation.



[Fig.17] Yanagi Yukinori, *Momoshima Toei Reconstruct Project No.2* (2013)

Central to the show, was Yanagi's reflection on this as an artist. He produced a series of prints on photographic works, inspired by views from the island, imagining ships carrying surreal parts of boats across the Inland Sea. He also used the cinema as an inspiration, as in Fig.17, in which we see one of the signatures of his work, the neon *Hinomaru* (Japanese flag), which he often uses to foreground and critique Japanese nationalism, here re-imagined on stage at the cinema, inside the old building, as a kind of potential installation work. It is symbolising the disappearance of the 1950s heyday, with a kind of nostalgia alongside the mock grandiose staging of the image, amidst the decaying building, which foregrounds the illusions of past modernizations and the social disasters associated with the idea of endless growth and prosperity in Japan during this former period.



[Fig.18] Yanagi Yukinori, *Untitled* (Submarine)

Fig.18 is another work he showed in a small show in Tokyo related to the *100 Ideas* exhibition: a rusty submarine, perhaps to escape from the island with, made out of some found old piping. In another part of the school site, the old basketball court, Yanagi had installed his graduation piece from his MFA at Yale University, where he was an art student in the 1980s: an enormous mouse cage in which a petrol driven car that he built by hand rolls around inside the wheel, piloted by a smiling Mickey Mouse in the driver's seat. This empty and ironic playboy's toy is situated in the middle of a huge circle of empty coloured oil cans, creating a stage in the centre of the basketball court. The installation brings together various ideas repeated through Yanagi's work, about historical change in Japan, its problematic relation with the US, environmental issues, and a political critique of nationalism: a characteristic sensibility expressed through immaculately constructed pieces that are conveyed in a powerfully consistent and direct symbolic language.

Career of Yanagi Yukinori

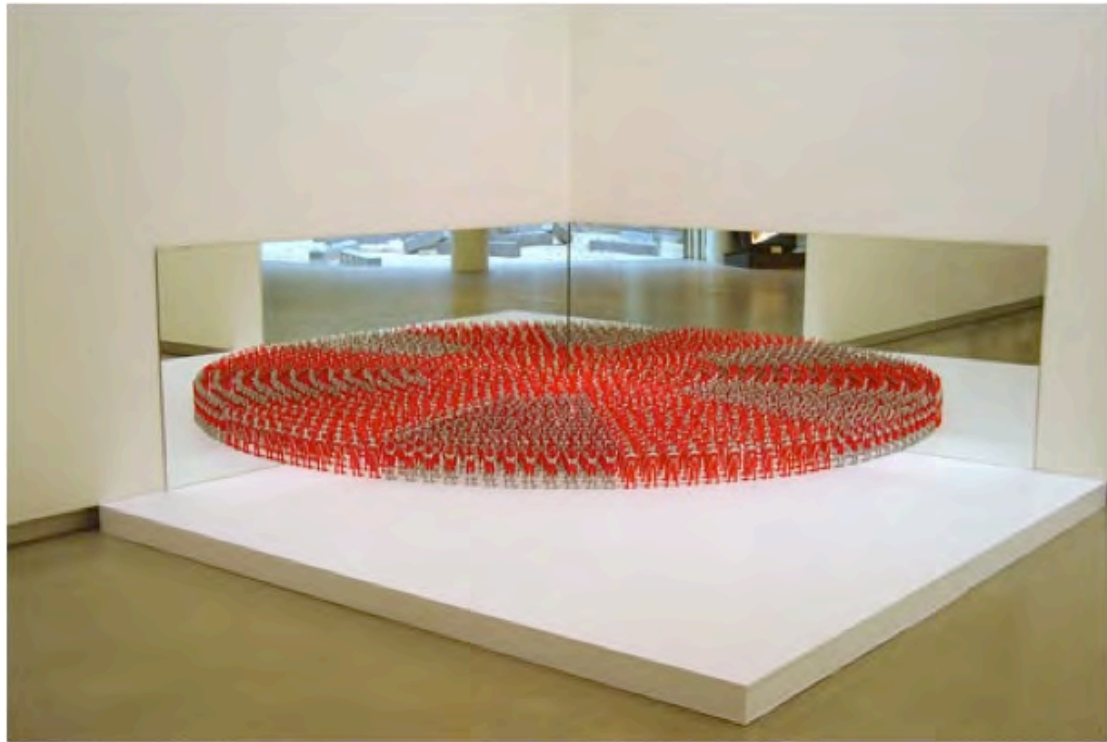
That's the first part of the talk. Now, I would like to go on to talk a bit more about Yanagi's career and his ideas: why he is interesting, and why his career is a guide to some of what is effectively the best of Japanese contemporary art, as a key figure in an emerging history of Japanese contemporary art that we are going to have of the 1980s, 90s, and 2000s.²



[Fig.19] Yanagi Yukinori (b.1959)

Yanagi was born in 1959, in Kyushu, and by the late 1980s was already recognised as an emerging talent, after studying as Musachino. This background he shares with Ohtake Shinro, another key figure from this period, slightly older, who is close to Yanagi thematically and geographically. Ohtake, indeed, is the other key "neo-pop" artist from the 1980s now getting a lot of attention internationally in the last few years outside of Japan (finally, it might be said).

Yanagi was initially the most successful internationally and commercially of the Japanese neo-pop artists of the late 1980s and turn of the 1990s, and this happened a little before the now more famous emergence of Murakami Takashi and Nara Yoshitomo. Yanagi was doing a comparable kind of work to Murakami, in fact, that combined a pop art sensibility, the use of toys, with a political edge and critique of Japanese nationalism, wrapped in a visually striking and colourful style (for example, Fig.20, his *Banzai Corner* of 1991); it was kind of cocktail similar to the one that Murakami put to work internationally from the mid 1990s on. Already around the turn of the 1990s, some of Yanagi's signature work he had already been noted, particularly his most representative work, the *World Ant Farm* (1990), which also went to Venice (1993). This sly critique of nationalism and visualization of a kind of a global world (made by ants!) was particularly difficult to travel with; animal rights protesters in the end would make it impossible. The work and its various derivatives represent national flags mounted on a wall, which when viewed close up can be seen as little plastic boxes eating away the flag, and interconnecting the nations through their busy



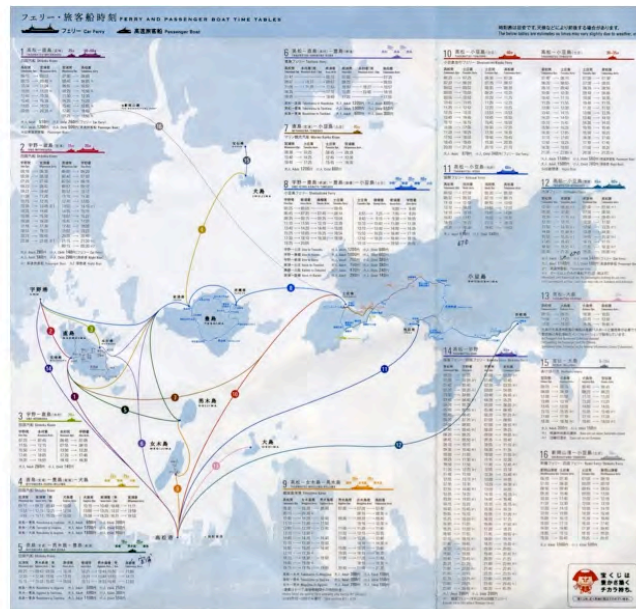
[Fig.20] Yanagi Yukinori, *Banzai Corner* (1991)

passageways. There are some interesting stories about the ants, about how Yanagi managed to get around the problem of importing and exporting the ants to do the migrant work, as it were.

Look into international media coverage of Japanese art of the period, and the work of Yanagi is up front and central; with influential articles about the early neo-pop emerging from the post-Bubble moment in Japan by observers such as Alexandra Munroe.³ Yanagi is central to them, he is the pivotal artist in her discussion of the idea of the "wandering position", which Yanagi conceived to describe his attempts to escape the combined ghettos of the Japanese art world and national identity. In 1988, he goes to Yale University to do a Masters, then later sets up a studio in Hell's Kitchen in New York, which leads to significant commercial success in the early 1990s, as well as growing high brow recognition through international biennale and art media. Yanagi, it might be thought, is the key young emergent talent from Japan at this point.

But something goes wrong for Yanagi in the commercial setting of the 1990s. He gets increasingly frustrated with the New York art scene and the commercial aspects of his work, and already in the early 1990s he starts to return to Japan very regularly. He has retained good links with his native Kyushu (he is from near Fukuoka), and he also develops ties in Hiroshima where he will eventually become a professor at Hiroshima City University. Close to here, from 1992 on, he begins to explore the Seto Inland Sea, beginning to conceive of the idea of finding a base for his "lifework", a much bigger project than his current series. This indeed is another part of the meaning of the talk's title: the idea of "islands for life" evoking the idea of Yanagi's lifework as an artist. He starts to conceive of going into these islands to potentially transform them with his work. Yanagi is,

temperamentally, a kind of traveller/explorer: a kind of loner character or adventurer, you see pictures or hear stories of him hang gliding, sailing, deep sea diving; these practices see him becoming a kind of land (sea, and air) artist. When he arrives first on the remote island of Inujima in late 1995, that has not been recommended to him as at all ideal for his purposes, he is on a mission to get away from curators and museums, as much as the commercial world, as he gets into these islands.



[Fig.21] Map of Inland Sea island and ferry routes

What he discovers in the Inland Sea is the potential of an island, remote even from Naoshima, the one inland sea art destination you have probably heard of, for reasons I will go into in a moment. Teshima, to the east of Naoshima, is also an important site (in terms of art and environmental damage, but it is the small island of Inujima (to the north of Teshima) where Yanagi decides to set up base.



[Fig.22] View of Inujima

Even by Seto standards, it is an extraordinary place: only 40 old people living there, an average age approaching 80, a semi-abandoned village, on an island of huge environmental damage, from an abandoned copper factory from the Meiji period of Japanese industrialisation. Inujima perhaps is not quite so abandoned now—because of what has happened on the island subsequently—but it is an extreme version of the post-industrial *genkai shūroku*: a truly terminal place. On the other hand, there is an open discussion to be had about whether Momoshima can in fact be revitalized by the art, the artists and the (eventual) populations coming onto it; it is at a kind of tipping point situation.

Since the early 1990s, Yanagi has had an association with the millionaire businessman, Fukutake Soichiro, the CEO of the Benesse Corporation, the man behind the Naoshima art island. Benesse are a company which has made lots of money from cram schooling and online education; Fukutake, who inherited the company, starts in the 1980s to look for something more meaningful in his life, back in his native region, into which he can invest his millions. Much older than Yanagi, he recognises his talent early on; Yanagi is in fact the first contemporary



[Fig.23] Fukutake Soichiro

artist that Fukutake patronises seriously as a collector, after having built (more typically) a collection of European modernist works during the Bubble era. Fukutake invests in building a tourist and art site in Naoshima, setting up the Naoshima Benesse Art Foundation, and in the first museum he opens there, Yanagi is the first contemporary artist to be given a full show: his *Wandering Position* exhibition of 1992.

Naoshima is an art tourism island now, quite big news internationally in the art world. Later developments saw Ando Tadao building the *Chichu* (underground) museum to house Fukutake's French impressionist works, alongside James Turrell and a small number of other artists. The main museum still features Yanagi's work and other Japanese contemporary art, alongside a well composed

contemporary collection; and there are various other new museums and island house projects on this island and others. Without a doubt, though, the most impressive site in the region is what is to be found on Inujima.

I am, of course, reflecting the way Yanagi tells this story. There is an interesting controversy and contested narrative about the ideas that are subsequently developed and brought to fruition on the island of Inujima, that reportedly even had legal overtones. Fukutake now says much of it was his idea, and it is certainly true in terms of international media, that it was the architect who was later brought in to work with the artist and patron, who got a large part of the attention for the project. Yanagi, though, recounts the Inujima project as basically his set of ideas, developed as a roving, sailing artist going to the island, and deciding this is the place for his lifework. He sets up a little shack to live in on the island, he develops relations with the old people, starts sounding out ideas, as he battles for a long time to clear the insects in the house he is living in.

Already from the first visit in 1995, he sketches ideas that can be traced through to the final project. These were shown last year at the Mori Art Museum in *Roppongi Crossing* (2013). They imagine a project that will utilise the site, the village, the population, as well as all the industrial detritus he has found: an abandoned copper refinery, a lot of old quarry sites, chimneys and bricks, and a whole lot of pollution. Yanagi sketches a particular kind of environmental art,

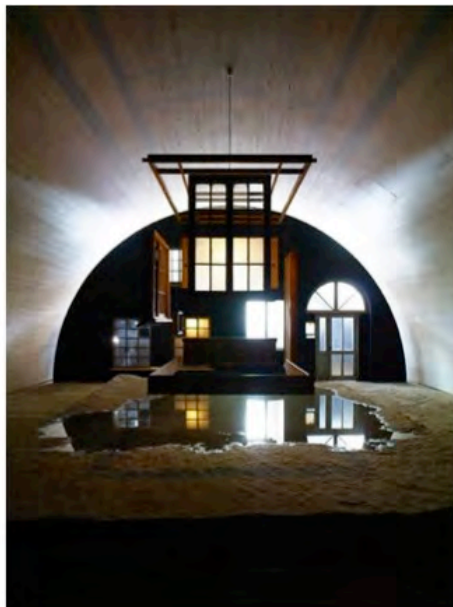


[Fig.23] Aerial view of *Seirenscho* (2008)

that will use everything that he has found on the island as part of the art work. This is how he presents the idea: the old people, the houses, the factory, the quarries; everything is material for the art project, which will make the island a kind of *Gesamtkunstwerk*. Yanagi's first ideas about the transformation of the island date to his first fateful landing in 1995, and certainly can be directly traced through to what comes out of it, eventually in 2008, as the *Seirenscho* ("Refinery") museum and art site. The central environmental idea which develops along the way from Yanagi's initial sketches and discussions with Fukutake, to the full

scale collaboration with the environmental architect, Sambuichi Hiroshi, is an entirely self-sustaining (powering) set of buildings that will use wind power generated through these chimneys to power the place electrically. Moreover, the site will effectively recycle many of its basic elements, such as the old found brickworks. For Yanagi, there is a certain bitterness about his legacy, in that it is Sambuichi, the young architect who came in and realised the project, who becomes the main focus of reception and debate about the project internationally when it is opened, because of the brilliance of his architectural design (which again, is emphasised throughout by Yanagi as a fruit of collaboration).

It is a quite stupendous site to visit, and very difficult to give you a proper sense of its scale and ambition, and what it feels to go around it. The nearest I can convey is that feeling that this is like a Japanese version of Pompeii, with the extraordinary feeling of stepping back into the decay of a former civilisation, in this case, the early 20th modernization of Japan, Yanagi sees it in these terms, contrasting the failed linear development of Japan's industrial past, with what he calls the feminine, horizontal, diachronic, "timeless" community life of the island, and its slow culture of passing generations and a thousand gods. The old people and their stories, then, are juxtaposed with a third, dramatic dimension: the displays inside the museum. The interior of the museum is entirely devoted to Yanagi's installations, which turn the maze-like passage through its dark interior into a journey through a kind of heaven and hell. Through the first part, the visitor gropes their way past and away from a burning sun, towards a cool moon-like light that open out into a central room, in fact lit by a kind of blacked out eclipsed half sun, where Yanagi has installed parts of Mishima Yukio's old house from Shōtō in Shibuya as a kind of readymade (Fig. 24).



[Fig.24] Yanagi Yukinori, *Hero Dry Cell "Solar Rock"* (2008)

This is another key part of the story. Fukutake is a great collector of Mishima memorabilia and when he discusses this collection with Yanagi it sparks the idea of somehow installing Mishima's memorabilia into the museum as its focal point.

The idea of a reconstruction of the whole house on one of the industrial lakes was first mooted, but this does not work because many of the pieces of the house are missing. So instead, the idea develops of installing these parts in the museum. Mishima, the radical traditionalist, is of course one of the great cultural critics of the Japanese post-war boom years and the corruption of traditional Japanese culture during this period. As suggested by Tomii Reiko in her reading, seeing the dead Mishima as his Other, Yanagi seems to want to deconstruct the myth around Mishima, deconstruct his words and images, juxtaposing his critique with his own critique of Japanese modernisation and the overlooked quiet tragedy of the disappearing island life. It is a finely balanced and ambiguous juxtaposition, which itself has attracted further controversy, not least from the Mishima family, unhappy with the way Yanagi aestheticises and decomposes some of the speeches of Mishima in the two final parts of the museum.



[Fig.24] Yanagi Yukinori + Sejima Kazuyo, *Dollar Web Garden* (2010), Inujima

The other part of the project on the island are the art houses which Yanagi initially conceived as part of his idea of creating art with the islanders, but which again get wrapped in a contested set of narratives about the origins and inspiration. They parallel the art houses that Fukutake has sponsored on the island of Naoshima, where a leading artist works with an architect to create a permanent house/installation as a feature among the various residencies of the island. The art house project is developed with the curator Hasegawa Yuko, the most powerful curator in Japan, and the architect Sejima Kazuyo, the female architect who is one half of SANAA with Nishizawa Ryuu, who has also been involved in various projects in the Seto Inland sea. Using Sejima's limpid architecture, the houses were created as special installation spaces for Yanagi's work. In one of them, a glass construction by Sejima mirroring a public space in the island, became a show case in which Yanagi installs his work: a decomposing tapestry of a big US dollar sign, that is being eaten away by spiders (the art houses are another source of bitterness, as Hasegawa Yuko subsequently removed Yanagi's installations to use the sites for changing curated exhibitions).

Setouchi and Echigo Tsumari

There is clearly important work to be done sorting out the contested relationship between the ideas and their protagonists. What is clear is that Fukutake's Naoshima ideas have gone through quite considerable change since his art island was first conceived. The high tech, Ando part of the project, feels like a reclusive millionaire's playground, and certainly not a community art project; the underground museum with its specially uniformed operatives gives first time visitors the feeling they might be in the hidden mountain base of the baddies in James Bond—on a private island somewhere with a nuclear bomb inside. But certainly as the project develops, Fukutake really embraces the idea of social and community intervention, of intervening for the revitalisation of these islands; of working with local governments, and of combating and reversing the environmental degradation of the region. This all develops ultimately, via Inujima and Teshima, into the Setouchi Festival, which was such a huge national hit in 2010 and again in 2013. At this festival, there has been talk of as many as a



[Fig.25] Poster of Setouchi Festival (2010)

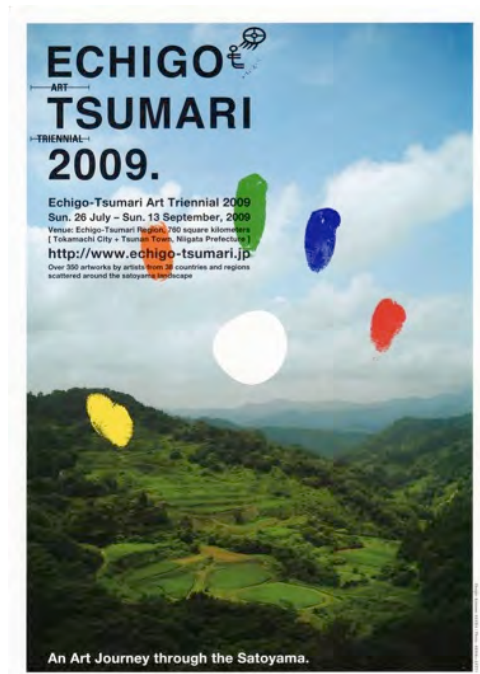
million visitors, amongst them a particularly high number of women friends' \$parties seduced by magazine coverage into a special "art tour" (although surprisingly few foreigners). The numbers are undoubtedly exaggerated by the official counting, but in any case, it was an awful lot of people packing Seto's skeletal ferry and bus services on their art pilgrimage. What they saw on all the islands, were local based interventions by artists very similar to all of the art projects I have been showing so far: projects in which artists work with communities, using empty or available old buildings, and as a visitor you get to tour, slow down, eat local delicacies and meet local people, and get in touch with a typical "lost Japan" that can still be found in part on these islands.



[Fig.26] Kitagawa Fram

These ideas of a festival all bear the stamp of a figure who now needs to be introduced into the story as a key player: one of the most crucial figures in Japanese contemporary art, the art producer Kitagawa Fram. He even has a relationship with Yanagi going back, having been the first gallerist to represent Yanagi in the late 80s at Art Front Gallery, and having given him some of his first opportunities to show publically at the Hillside Terrace in Daikanyama. Yanagi describes this connection as having been particularly fortuitous in the development of his own ideas. Kitagawa has been the managing director of the Setouchi projects, working closely with Fukutake on all these projects, and bringing his own organisation to take care of the principle logistics. Setouchi has all the hallmarks, and even the packaged look, of a Kitagawa project. Since the 1980s, Kitagawa has been the key figure behind the extraordinary development in Japan of social and community art taken to remote locations, particularly through the series of Echigo Tsumari festivals (triennale) which began in 2000. The hallmark of his festivals is the situating of art in deliberately difficult and inefficient locations as a kind of treasure hunt: in places as far from the traditional white cube museum or gallery as possible, where you cannot walk in and just see art but where you have to really make a huge effort; to go up a mountain, go looking for an installation in the middle of a forest, or—in the case of Seto—get on a boat to visit a remote island. Yanagi too stresses this in his own

work: you really have to make a big decision to go to Inujima, to see my work (he says); it is not easy to get there, there are two boats a day that get you there, they can only allow in ten people at one time, etc. It is not easy to see this wonderful museum.



[Fig.27] Poster of Echigo Tsumari Festival (2009)

Kitagawa has basically made this style of art consumption a big theme in his Echigo Tsumari festivals: the notion of commitment, of time out of life, and of slowing down—and perhaps even missing a lot of the art, when it's impossible to get to everything. There will be more to say about Kitagawa in a moment.

The art works seen at Echigo Tsumari and Setouchi mostly embody this form of community art. To give one example: Shiota Chiharu's really lovely conversion of the old rice house on Teshima (fig.28). Teshima is notorious for being one of the most polluted islands in the Seto Sea, having suffered much industrial dumping over the years; it is a central part of the Setouchi festival, and has become a subsidiary part of the Naoshima art experience with its permanent installations and (especially) the Teshima Museum by Nishizawa Ryuu and Naito Rei. Shiota, who is a Berlin based artist known for her spectacular installations, was given this evocative old rice building to work with; it has also been a school for the tiny village on the south side of Teshima. Working with the producer Kitagawa she was at first not clear about what she could do here. She asked him: what can I do as an artist here, I'm not very good at these social/community forms, I need lots of equipment and materials and so on in such an isolated place. Kitagawa basically tells her, well, what you have got to do is say hello to people, say hello to your neighbours, be nice to them, be interested in them, and they will help you. Then they will do things for you, you will be able to get all the stuff you need that way. Through this community method she then developed an intervention into the structure of the rice house, going round the islands in the Seto Inland Sea to collect windows from abandoned houses (a signature method she has



[Fig.28] Chiota Shiharu, *Farther Memory* (2010)

often used in East Berlin), which she would then install in the house as a form of architectural memory. In the old house, she created a time tunnel within the house, removing one of the pillars: at one end the tunnel looked out at a traditional rice field; at the other, the tunnel pointed towards a house where the first baby on the island in 70 years had been born. This is how Shiota tells the story: a story about hope, community intervention and historical memory in an almost extinct island village.

I include here three further images of typical sites of art from the Echigo Tsumari triennale: old empty *minka* (country houses), schools, and small textile factories. The emphasis in the triennale since the mid 2000s has been on this kind of site: installations in old buildings and community art interventions. At its outset



[Fig.29] Echigo Tsumari art sites

there was more evidence of Kitagawa's earlier style of work, which was commissioned sculptures and installations "in the wild", as it were, some of which were rather bad examples of toxic art spoiling landscapes, and which were a logistical and financial nightmare to maintain, especially during Niigata's extremely tough winters. Since the mid 2000s, though, there has been stronger

insistence on community revitalization, always using elements of the remote and mountainous landscape of Niigata on a huge scale. The festival sprawls over 760 square kilometres of rather empty rural landscapes dotted with very small industrial (former textile) towns, centred on the Shinano River. By harmonious chance, Kitagawa's name of course signifies "Northern River", and it is his home region. This was a landscape despoiled by industrial decline and pork barrel investment during the boom years of the 1970s and 80s, a lot of it linked with the nepotistic regional support of LDP prime minister and local boy Tanaka Kakuei: mountains and rivers entirely rebuilt and paved over, lots of tunnels and roads that go nowhere, too many public buildings projects (schools and hospitals for children not being born or disappearing populations), massive subsidies for rice production on unsustainable terraced landscapes, and the *Jōetsu shinkansen* that barrels through all of it. Social change and economic decline left behind countless abandoned sites, both in villages and in the countryside (including abandoned tourist sites), and the younger population (and investment) that was supposed to be attracted by the transport links to Tokyo but just used the train to get away even faster.

All of these places have been re-invested by artworks and art projects through Kitagawa's festival. Fig.30 (over) is another poignant example: yet another old school in one of the most remote villages I visited in 2013 with my research partner Julian Worrall. This project is led by the famous and mercurial figure Hibino Katsuhiko, another of the key pop artists of the 1980s. The project, *Asatte* (The Day After Tomorrow), saw Hibino and lots of his students taking over a particular site for a whole summer colonizing the old buildings, and populating a tiny mountainous village where only a few old people still live. We see here the school which is the centre of art production, the house they all live in, and way up in the mountain, a former tobacco factory turned into a psychedelic studio space. What *Asatte* does is produce everyday a newspaper everyday about the daily lives of the old people; the newspaper editions are plastered over the walls here, with Julian talking to some of Hibino's students. I think the interesting part about this is the bringing together of the massive surplus of young people coming out of art and design schools in Japan with essentially nothing to do on their hands, and very little professional future (outside of McJobs). They are the continuation of the serial lost generations of Japan; a kind of *freeter* generation (or two) of the post-growth period who are still coming into the creative work in unsustainable numbers. They are brought into these projects, and put to work for utopian causes, that essentially link them as both welfare receivers and providers with the declining terminal old populations. Kitagawa calls them the *kohebi* (little snakes) of his projects, working for him, or Hibino, or other similar producer-artists, bringing hope and life to the village. In Hibino's work, this has been given further national resonance by the idea that *Asatte* is also creating seeds to distribute around the nation (some have even been taken into space).

I would end my second section here, this basic history of the social and community centred side of Japanese contemporary art, by underlining that what is most interesting about all this is how little known all of these examples are internationally. I see my contribution to the emergent art history of the 1990s



[Fig.30] Hibino Katsuhiko and students, *Asatte* (2013)

and 2000s as this: contextualising and downplaying the fair obsession for years in the field with "cool Japan"—the obsession with anime and manga and the high tech branding of Japan, in particular—which the Japanese government



[Fig.31] "Gross National Cool": McGray's article and artist Murakami Takashi posing for a government brochure

effectively invented in the early 2000s as the hoped for (and illusory) saving grace of the Japanese economy; how Japan would save itself internationally through its pop culture and content industries; ideas made famous initially by the American journalist, Doug McGray in his 2002 article, "Gross National Cool". In art, that story, of course, is associated most of all with Murakami Takashi, and his *Little Boy* re-packaging of Japanese contemporary art, which came to New York in 2005, after being in LA in 2001 as *Superflat*. I retell the story of Murakami and the historically distorting rise of "otaku art" in my book, *Before and After Superflat*, going on to re-position this dominant discourse in relation to the alternative story of the internationally much less well known other artists

doing various forms of social and community art since the mid 1990s. The issue for me in the book is to what extent the history of the 1990s will be misrepresented—as it currently is in the international mainstream art world—by the overweening success of Murakami's narrative of Japanese contemporary art.⁴

Contexts and social structural backgrounds

Now, in the final part of this lecture, I want to contextualize what I've said in a broader way. I'd like to shift from the stories and my version of a history of the Japanese art world that I've just given you, to things that I think are a bit more sociological: that is, in relation to ideas, historical developments, causalities and periodizations we might find in this post-1990 period. I am interested in the social structural factors that might be driving all this, and the way we might conceive the relation of the art and architecture discussed in our research to its social, economic, demographic and/or cultural backdrop. I will present this in terms of a number of propositions.



Yamano Shingo

1. 60s Radicals? Ideas and Networks



Kitagawa Fram



Hoshina Toyomi



Ikeda Osamu



Nakamura Masato



Kawamata Tadashi

The first proposition that I want to talk about in relation to our forthcoming book, and where Julian and I have focused a lot of attention, is in terms of re-telling the story of the influence in Japan of the prior *older* generation to Murakami and his generation—that is, the generation before the *shinjinrui* generation born in the late 1950s or early 1960s. The younger artists now around 50, grew up during the boom years, and came of age professionally in the late 80s or early 90s, developing the "neo" pop art effectively as a kind of decadent response to the consumerist excess of the 1980s and the bubble bursting. That's the story of

the pop art of the 1980s and 90s which I told in *Before and After Superflat*, and I want to contrast that particular movement, to a more idealistic, social and political generation now in their 60s, born in the baby boom 1940s and early 1950s. Murakami's generation were in many ways problematic from a social and political point of view, often nihilistic, destructive and politically ambiguous: for example, an artist I have written a lot about, Aida Makoto, who is very close in time and cohort to Murakami in many ways, and a classic example of that kind of work and mentality.

In contrast, the previous generation, born as baby boomers, had in some cases been old enough to have been around as students in the late 1960s, or the critical anti-ANPO protests of 1970, and to have been part of those protests. What I would like to suggest is that a lot of the ideas I have been presenting from the Inland sea or rural backwaters of Japan, are the continuation of a different legacy of 1960s radicalism, re-worked for a post 1980s—that is a post-corporate 1980s—context, as a sort of ongoing left wing yet pragmatic environmental utopianism. It is, clearly, a continued reaction against the mainstream currents of Japanese society, yet one that learned to work with both private and public support, as it sought to translate radical ideas into populist events through art projects.⁵

The key figure in this story is indeed Kitagawa Fram, the central face in the network presented here (Slide 1). Kitagawa is a true 60s radical: he was thrown out of Todai as a 60s student before studying at Geidai. It is possible then to see how his later ideas developed out of his 60s radicalism, mixing a kind of Maoist agrarian vision of Japan, with a version of nationalism—a return to "old Japan", something lost, the nostalgic part of it—with a very skilful talent for public-private partnership developed through the corporate sponsorship for art that he turned to in the 1980s. Kitagawa knows very well how to work with moneyed people (he played an important part in the development of the Daikanyama Hillside Terrace project for example), and it also a highly political operator; yet, as a student originally of Buddhist art, there is also a traditionalist Buddhist sensibility thrown into the mix. It is this unusual combination of ideas you see expressed in Echigo Tsumari. Centrally there is an emphasis on reversing the focus of culture in city based urban development and its tight link with the urbanisation of Japan, with instead a move back to the provinces and a focus on the polarisation of Japan, the disappearing Japan of ageing old people, redundant youth and fading locations.

Kitagawa sits at the centre of a network of characters, which I can only briefly sketch here, but whose trajectories and ideas are connected closely. Yamano Shingo, and old partner of Kitagawa, and the director now of the inner city Koganechō project in Yokohama, is also extremely important as a radical of the same generation. Yamano was a product of the radical art school, Bigakko in Tokyo, and a pioneer of street art projects, particularly in Fukuoka, going back to the late 1980s. Notably he pioneered the organization of the Museum City Tenjin street art projects, with the then very young curator Kuroda Raiji, a city festival which developed a model corporate sponsorship and political cooperation against the usual antipathy for contemporary art. Both Yamano and Kitagawa

had strong early connections through curation and production with the well known installation artist Kawamata Tadashi, who has become familiar as one of the most well known international Japanese artists for his architectural installations using wood and recycled materials to modify and comment on buildings. Kawamata is slightly younger, and contrasts his more moderate politics with the radicalism of his slightly older peers, who he calls the "baby boom guys", but he made his first works in collaboration with them in the early days (again, mainly in Kyushu), and has more recently began develop his own version of social and community art with projects in Tokyo and at Bank Art in Yokohama.

Kawamata is connected as a student and teacher to Geidai, and was a close partner of his contemporary Hoshina Toyomi there, who is currently head of the Oil painting department, the most radical part of the school. Hoshina is a kind of unsung hero of the social and community projects that have been developed in Ueno over the last 20 or so years, and is in turn the senior academic colleague and mentor of Nakamura Masato, the former partner of Murakami Takashi, founding director of the 3331 Arts Chiyoda Centre. 3331 Art Chiyoda Centre in Akihabara has become perhaps the most important site of contemporary public art in Tokyo today. Nakamura is an artist from the next "neo-pop" generation, who famously turned away from the corporate commercial vision of Murakami, to instead create and produce social and community related art in the city. Via Hoshina and others, Nakamura represents the next generation continuing the ideas of Kitagawa and Yamano, alongside Ikeda Osamu, director of Bank Art in Yokohama, which is a similar kind of site to 3331. Ikeda is a direct prodigy of Kitagawa and likely to become the next director of the Echigo Tsumari organisation. Not shown here, but also deserving a mention is Serizawa Tadashi, another member of the older generation, an environmental thinker from the 1960s, who founded the P3 (Planet 3) art space in Tokyo in the early 1990s in an old temple, one of the first non-commercial art spaces in the city, which became a key site introducing global contemporary art in the city. In recent years, in collaboration with another of the next generation artists, Yamaide Junya—a kind of south western equivalent of Nakamura Masato—they are the founders of the Beppu Art Project, in the old bathing town in Kyushu, which has also been running similar kinds of social and community art projects for the last 10-15 years.⁶ And, again in Kyushu, there is a connection here to the Kuwamoto Art Polis projects in architecture, founded by Isozaki Arata in the 1980s, and now continued by Ito Toyo. These projects in social and community based architecture are a direct forerunner of the experimentations in art, and which can be traced through to the post 2011 disaster period, which I will show in a second. Isozaki, too, as a figure crops up numerous times in the story, as an early mentor of Kawamata, for example, and an everpresent influence on the art scene.

My second proposition relates to the periodization of this history, notably the role of disasters as crucial punctuation and turning points. Is it right to periodize everything in terms of the disasters, that is, 1995 as much as 2011? Or is this all just "disaster porn", exploiting a fascination with disasters that automatically associates contemporary Japan with apocalyptic images?

2. Periodization: Disasters as Punctuation?



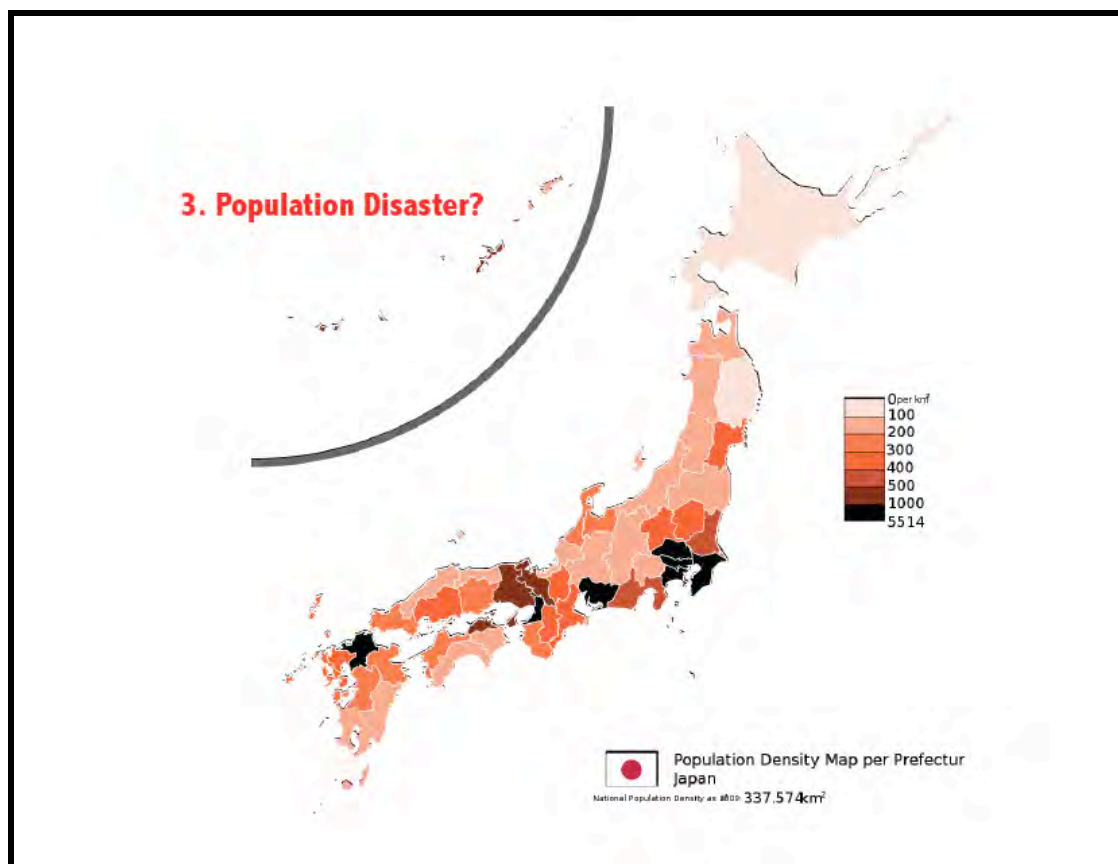
For sure, post-2011, everything in Japanese contemporary art seems overshadowed by its relation to the 2011 moment. Yet it is important to recognise that the social, community and relational art has roots well before 2011 (in fact 1995 is a crucial moment in many respects), and that many of the organizational forms of urban and rural art projects have antecedents going back to the 1990s and 1980s.

Isozaki, of course, is a source of the obsession with disaster in Japanese art and architecture: for example (Slide 2, above) the 1996 *Fractures* show at the Venice Biennale for Architecture, where in collaboration with Ishiyama Osamu, Miyamoto Katsuhiro and Miyamoto Ryuji, he literally put the rubble of Kobe 1995 in the pavilion, winning the top prize, the Golden Lion. Not coincidentally, the only other time that Japan has won the top prize, was after the next disaster of 2011, with Ito's *Home-for-All*. There is obviously a dangerous idea of periodization here—as well as a potentially overbearing fascination with Japan's disasters internationally—and post-2011 everything in Japan seems to have fallen in line with this. What we are seeing in all the major survey exhibitions, such as Roppongi Crossing 2013, is post-disaster art, even the older pop art generation have all changed their tune and are now producing work in relation to the changed atmosphere of the times. Moreover, nearly all the work now looks like a Kitagawa project. The emphasis is all on social and relational art projects, effectively in which artists and architects foreground their engagement in communities. So in this sense, the emphasis on periodization is right.

When we look back, however, it is important to note that much of this style of work has been there since the 1990s. The social and community art has its roots even prior to the 1995 disaster, for example, with the Fukuoka Museum

City art projects that Yamano Shingo was organizing. 1995, certainly, is a key moment, when there is the birth of a new kind of NPO sensibility, and the emergence of alternative art spaces and artists doing work that is social and community related because of the shock of the disasters of that year. Yanagi Yukinori is certainly part of this turn, as he begins to tour Seto and imagine another kind of art away from the New York commercial art scene. Nakamura Masato clearly also becomes part of it in his similar turn away from commercial art. Looked at this way, other artists now emerge around this time, and become much more important in the eventual history that might be told: for example, Shimabuku, Takamine Tadasu, and Ozawa Tsuyoshi, can be included. Their art then in turn takes on greater significance again after 2011.

It is also notable that when Yanagi Yukinori now presents his work retrospectively in the context of current international art and architectural theory, his ideas are bang on the money: it is where art theory is now, with its social, community and relational interventions, its environmental concerns, its emphasis on process, on art in the long run, art outside the white cube, outside of the museum. Suddenly Yanagi's work becomes really interesting in that global context. One has to I hope that it will not get narrated historically in the way that the Japanese Gutai and Anti-Art of the 1960s was initially narrated: that is, as some kind of poor copy of Western art theory and trends. Those kinds of colonialist readings have been shown to be wrong, and have been the object of the corrections put forward by the shows in the last couple of years at MOMA and the Guggenheim. This is why we need to make clear now these corrections about the 1990s and 2000s in Japanese contemporary art.



A third proposition questions whether it is indeed population disaster currently faced by Japan, and how art relates to this. The map above (Slide 3), very crudely, gives a sense and simple visualization of the social polarization in Japan, where we are talking not only about massive differences in concentrations of population (i.e., population density), but also of wealth and growth. Everything that is dynamic or growing is concentrated in an ever smaller number of huge mega-city urban conurbations, with massive depopulation, ageing and rank poverty in other parts of the country.

Yes, Japan is a population disaster. Even when the idea of post-growth is contested, and commentators argue that might be something to be said about the improved aggregate performance of the Japanese economy under Abe and Abe-economics, in terms of demographic growth, it is clear and irrevocable, that the population has been declining since 2005 at 8% annually, that the birth rate starts declining in 1974—which means that women of child bearing age now, are beyond the getting beyond the 40 year mark; that the nation reached a post-war low in child births in the early 2000s of a 1.26 replacement rate; and that based on UN projections presented in the presented in the very interesting book, *Japan's Shrinking Regions*, by Peter Matanle and Anthony Rausch, the consequences and scenarios over the next 40 years are that there is nothing Japan can do about it without massive scale immigration, which is politically unthinkable (at well under 2% foreign population, Japan has currently the lowest rates of immigration in the whole OECD). It is even more the case when projections of matching the ratio of working to non-working population, let alone rates of productivity, at the height of Japanese GDP is factored into it. Even if miraculously a lot of children start being born again, not much can alter these structural facts for a generation or two, and with the baby boomers reaching late retirement age, the scale of the population reaching their 60s and 70s is unprecedented. That's why there are so many old people in these old villages.⁷

So Japan obviously *is* a post-growth society. Thinking about what this means in terms of the massively discussed theses on inequality by French economist Thomas Piketty, he argues that historically population growth rather than productivity always accounts for the largest part of economic growth.⁸ Coupling its slow growth performance with massive population decline, and growing concentrations of wealth and inequality as everywhere, the scenario for Japanese society is critical. I also do not think that robots are going to deal with this problem. Maybe it is thought that you could re-populate Japan with robots to bring back better growth per capita, which is perhaps the government's policy and what they are talking about, but robots are not going to do very much for Momoshima.

Those that argue under Abe there has been a return to growth obviously ignore what human geographers will say about this: it is a seriously unbalanced growth; textbook neo-liberalism in its rejection of redistribution, and its embrace of polarization and urban (global city) concentration. This is how the classic corporate developmental state now works in Japan, having given up its former attempts to encourage regional development (often via the corrupt practice of pork barrel politics to LDP strongholds). Instead, the new, post-Koizumi LDP has

rejected all redistributive ideas, or ideas of (middle class) equality in Japan, and have allowed municipal and provincial regions to decline dramatically. This goes back to the Koizumi reforms of the early 2000s, the *Heisei Gappei* reforms, which amalgamated municipal jurisdictions, causing the rationalization of administrations and then the close of many public facilities. Hence, the empty schools and hospitals. Instead growth returns by a combination of concentrating all investment on the big cities (Tokyo) and using the disasters as a massive boom for security and construction. This is of course also the economic policy background to Japan winning the Olympics, which will be in a sense a further part of this ongoing disaster story. Yes, Japan has got the Olympics and the benefits that will go with it; but those benefits will be massively concentrated in their effects in Tokyo.



4. Post-politics?

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I think this reading then feeds into a fourth proposition about the prevalence of "post-politics" in Japan. Obviously there is a lot of money to be made for the construction state repaving Fukushima and Miyagi with concrete, rebuilding sea walls and cities (as was done before) in fatally dangerous tsunami zones. A thoughtless, un-reconstructed modernist urbanism has been rolled out against the advice of all architect and enlightened experts in the wake of the disaster, as Ito Toyo has vociferously argued. And, of course, the duly returned LDP government has sought to over-ride all protest and turn back on all the nuclear reactors, however insanely dangerous nuclear power is in a land of frequent earthquakes. Nuclear sunshine is the illusory and warped source of the whole post-war prosperity in Japan, as philosopher Yoshimi Shunya has argued.⁹

In response to the obvious despair that these politics arouse, it is significant how artists have come to the forefront in playing out an alternative politics that has given up on traditional politics, on mainstream democratic forms. The widely recognised work of Chim ↑ Pom (Slide 4 and Fig.32), doing their anarchic interventions in the Fukushima site and in Tohoku, or Endo Ichiro, inspiring communities up and down remote parts of Japan with his message of hope, are clear examples of these post-traditional forms of politics in recent art. Along with the work of architects such as Ito, and the projects of Yanagi and others discussed above, it is a politics that can be thought of as a kind of alternate welfarism; a politics of withdrawal from the mainstream, and of local hope in remote locations, after mainstream politics has abdicated its responsibilities in these places. Instead it is the artists who step in providing a kind of welfarism for abandoned and lost populations, what is perhaps arguably a post-politics of the left in Japan.



(Fig.32) Chim ↑ Pom, *Real Times* (2012)



(Fig.33) Endo Ichiro. *Mirai e! (Go for Future)* (2005)

025:Architecture. Possible here? Home-for-All

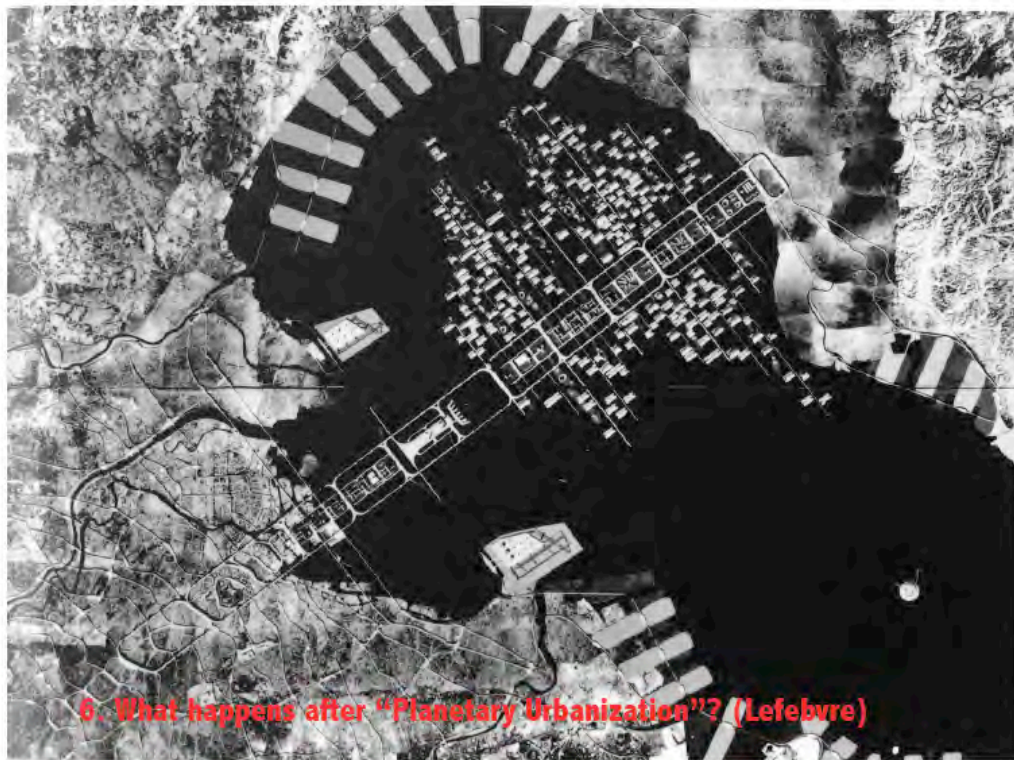
Photo: Naoya Hatakeyama



'Home-for-All' in Rikuzentakata, and the Venice Biennale International Architecture Exhibition
Toyo Ito, Kumiho Inui, Sou Fujimoto, Akihisa Hirata, Naoya Hatakeyama

Venice Biennale Japan Pavilion: Recognizing the Significance of Architecture as a Blessing
Hiroshi Moramatsu

(Fig.33) Ito Toyo, *Home-for-All*, Venice Biennale for Architecture (2012)



6. What happens after "Planetary Urbanization"? (Lefebvre)

My final proposition relates to an idea of critical urban theorist, Henri Lefebvre. It is the thought that what we have seen in Bubble-era Japan and its ongoing urbanization—the extraordinary futuristic sprawl of urban Japan mythologised by the metabolists—was a kind of maximal urbanization: the closest thing we have seen in modernity of the "planetary urbanization" foreseen by Lefebvre.¹⁰ This is a vision of an economy and society in which all territory has been urbanised, including supposedly rural areas, which are all functionally domesticated and integrated as part of urban regions. There are times when the

ever-expanding sprawl of Tokyo and its peripheries, extending all the way from Sendai to Nagoya in one seamless spread, can appear like this. It is an imagined society in which the entire country appears to be an a hyper-organised endless city, where all the mountains, rivers, and beaches have been paved and tamed, in which all agriculture is industrial, all forest replanted in standardise forms, where a society has got as close to 100% urbanisation as it can possibly go. I am interested then in what happens next, when you reach 100%, and society has nowhere to go except into reverse. That would be the true post-growth moment, and it is here perhaps that the true interest of post 1990 Japan lies: as an advanced guide to what is or may be happening in less dramatic ways in other locations, parts of Europe certainly facing decline and similar economic or demographic trends, or indeed widely imaged post-industrial metropolises like Detroit. There are, of course, city level examples such as this, but not whole societies that have reached the post-growth condition (America as a whole does not think of itself as post-growth, it just sees it as a problem of the North East). But in Japan perhaps we have reached a new kind of state; in which the ruins of the future are now visible.

***Incubated cities are destined to self-destruct
Ruins are the style of our future cities
Future cities are themselves ruins
Our contemporary cities, for this reason,
are destined to live only a fleeting moment
Give up their energy and return to inert material
All our proposals and efforts will be buried
And once again the incubation mechanism is
reconstituted
That will be the future***

Isozaki Arata, *Incubation Process* (1962)



I purposely echo here Isozaki's ideas about the ruins of the future in the modern buildings of the present, something we might work out perhaps as a kind of human geography of contemporary society as a whole in Japan.¹¹ It is this condition to which the artists and the architects are responding, with necessarily utopian ideas imagining responses to the factual ruins of Japanese modernity, through welfaristic care for old people, lost youth, of care of the self, ultimately.

I end here (Fig.34, below) with an image from Shimabuku, one of the key social and community artists to have emerged from Japan since the 1990s. His work was first noted after the Kobe disaster of 1995, when he posted public notices in his ruined home city. Asked to do something similar after the events in 2011 at the Yokohama Triennale of that year, he came up with this large placard on an advertising hoarding, placed mysteriously in the middle of the financial district of Yokohama, in order to speak directly to the hurried passers-by of the city. "This is the chance to rediscover our humanity", he said. It is an emblematic example of the kind of art I have been talking about.



(Fig.34) Shimabuku, *The Chance to Recover our Humanity* (2011)

Q & A

(Q1)

I thought it was interesting that you attempt to create this narrative or art history of contemporary artists, and you have this framework of post-depression Japan, and the artistic responses to that, under these conditions, in the past two decades. I was thinking about Kyushu-ha in the 1950s. After the Korean War, and after a very brief economic bubble in the mid 1950s, there was a moment when mines were closed, and there was the Mitsui labour dispute. Artists moved from Tokyo to Kyushu to set up these places to work together with the workers who were laid off. This is not an example of the present period, but it is an example of artists responding to these large scale changes after an economic bubble. How would you see these different kinds of cases as a historical comparison, of artistic political engagement with the economy in the past sixty years at different times?

(AF)

I think you are absolutely right, if you look back to the Kyushu-ha, or look back to the 1960s anti-art movements, what they were doing they were protesting and problematising growth and development at the time, during those periods, and perhaps were responding to specific events and moments where the growth machine faltered or created social and human costs. Yanagi's uncle, Miyazaki

Junnosuke, incidently is one of the famous Kyushu-ha artists, something he also refers to in his self-presentations of his origins. That is always pointed out as a source of his work and it is also a connection made by Kuroda Raiji—one of the Japanese curators most familiar to international art historians and who has also influenced a lot my own thinking on this topic—who is a key writer about the 1950s and 60s as a new kind of radical art. The difference is, of course, that we are currently in a period where the economy and all the associated social trends is really going in reverse. The situation is so much more urgent and widespread in the mainstream. The steam roller of negative development in terms of demographics and social polarization is not going to stop any time soon, yet we have a politics in the mainstream that is just ploughing forward with the same old growth line. That is the kind of potential disaster to which I'm alluding in the talk, but also which is very much in the minds of all the artists I have been talking about or mentioning, as well as the art organisers/producers I presented. It's a dramatic scenario, certainly, and yes, there is an obvious way of linking it back to the 1950s and 60s radical artists.

(Q2 / Peter Eckersall)

I was also really pleased when you went back to the 1960s, with the roots in the 60s generation. These are kinds of seeds of what we are seeing again and again, not only in art movements, but also folk movements and back to nature trends. From my own perspective, there is also a history of performance companies developing this kind of rural regeneration project, that actually precedes a lot of the 1990s art events you discuss. There is Suzuki Tadashi taking his theatre company to Todamura in 1978 and collaborating with architects to build a kind of performance village there. The company was in residence for half the year, and for a period of time he ran a very well known international arts festival really miles from anywhere right up in the mountains, and that still exists as a kind of youth art festival. Then there is Tanaka Min's *Maijuku* company, that established a kind of art camp in Hakashu, Yamanishi. They established a vision of a kind of agrarian *butoh* where you would wake up at 5 in the morning to work and then do *butoh* practice in the afternoon. They also had an annual festival that was extremely interdisciplinary and involved visual arts practices, music as well as performance, and they commissioned artists to do sculptures in rice fields and so on. This is something that dates from around 1985-86 and became really prominent as an annual event in the early to mid 1990s. And so it would be fascinating to do a history of this, and to incorporate a history of some of these movements into what you are saying.

(AF)

Yes, my sense from those doing work on performance, theatre, music, etc, is that there is a continuity going back to the 1960s, but that the history as far as I know that is appearing in English is only up to the about 1990. Maybe there are now other things being written, but its clear that for a while at least the focus on a different kind of commercial pop art during the 1990s maybe meant that the interdisciplinary connections and parallels you mention were not being recognised. Clearly in the Echigo Tsumari and Setouchi festivals all of the

performance arts are coming in. Now, I'm not qualified to talk about the interdisciplinary distinctions and relations across them that much, and it is maybe the case that the contemporary artists as I am presenting them are behind certain trends, I don't know, in terms of the contemporary arts more broadly in Japan. But certainly if you go to any of these particular events, like Kitagawa's events, it is now a hub of all of these interdisciplinary forms, the architecture, the performance art, the music, as well as object based art and installation based art is all coming together in these festivals.

(Q3 / Marilyn Ivy)

I think this is a topic that hasn't been examined that much in English—although I am sure there is a lot in Japanese. I can see the sociological dimension gives us a kind of overview of these various projects and their relation with politics and what's going on in the country during this period, and you have a quite detailed genealogy of the interconnection of the figures and their influences... It is pretty Japan specific, and I think we need to know something more comparative in its evolution. We don't get any sense of if any of people or organisations you describe were influenced by trends abroad. It would be interesting to get a sense of whether there is a larger world for them. I understand that you are maybe not doing that because you want to make clear that this about the Japanese response to these phenomena, but it does seem a bit insulated in that sense... My real question, though, has to do with the few times you mentioned that you are doing an art history. I see it as a *history*, of certain figures and movements and responses to the sociological and political and economic shifts that you are detailing and how that extends over a number of years, but I don't see it though as an *art* history because art history, in the way I would think about it, has to do with the art itself, it has to do with some kind of formal considerations going on with the work, some kind of critical set of responses or understandings, and what is going on formally and aesthetically. So I would ask you, do you think that the art itself has anything to do with what you are doing? From the perspective of someone who does art history or art criticism, who is interested in art for its the formal dimensions, as say with literature, it seems like there is not a lot of consideration here of the art itself. Do you think that that it is just a subsidiarity, something else that you have to bracket, or does this dimension ever come into your analysis or considerations?

(AF)

Yes, this is an awkward question for me. I think that in my earlier work, and the stuff I have been publishing in art journals, it sits in this awkward area. I *am* speaking to the art historians and I would say alerting them, but I am not the art historian who is ultimately going to be doing this work. I think there is a room for a sociology of the art world, which is my angle into it. I am sociologising the Japanese art world. Regarding the art itself, I do not have a great emphasis on talking to artists about the formal aspects of their work. I do talk to artists, and hear what they have to say, but I don't always find the narrative of their art as interesting as the influence of all the other characters in the art world, the art organisers, producers, curators, writer and so on, and what they are saying about

what they are doing. That's the sociological dimension. I think the nature of my work is like that, and I think that it has a respectful place in the practice of art history or criticism. Where I would say something in relation to the notion of the art work itself, is that we do have to look again at what the "objects" of this art is. The "object" should not necessarily be found in a close analysis of Yanagi's print or sculpture, for example. Yes, these are obviously part of the work, and it is worth pointing out, but the work is something much more, the art work is the whole thing, the "gesamtkunstwerk" of the island itself, which is the way they are describing it. So if you want to put it in to contemporary art theory terms, it's about "practices" really.

Last night I was listening to the debate they had with Yanagi at MOMA in May 2013, with Tomii Reiko acting as translator for Yanagi on stage. They were presenting his work in the context of three other artists social and community artists, one American and two European, and they were all talking the same language, the language of "artists' practices" as the product, and what they are doing. I don't think this is a point very well articulated by the similar Japanese artists themselves sometimes, but to me it suggest that they are at the right at the cutting edge of things. What's really interesting about their work is the sheer scale of it, certainly with Yanagi. Yes, there are art festivals in the Lake District (England) or in East Germany, there is all kind of art that might look like a Kitagawa festival, but I cannot think of an example of art festival which is a such a large scale project, a vast area of Niigata, which has all these ideas in it about remoteness and inefficiency and slow life. Yes, the art that you find at Echigo Tsumari is hit and miss, there are good artists and bad artists, there is hokey, sentimental and nostalgic art, amongst other things which I think are simply fabulous works, and I'm interested in all of that. Where in the world do we have dozens and dozens of abandoned schools, not just one abandoned school, but dozens of them, each of which is being used systematically in all kinds of ways as a site of art. For example, Kawamata Tadashi went to one of them, and put in this enormous library construction, a tower of Babel of books, from the collection of the late art critic, Nakahara Yusuke. There are astonishing works like this, and I'm trying to articulate a little bit the excitement of that in terms of scale. It's that I think which makes the products, that is, the practices, that are coming out of this, internationally important, and I don't see this being recognised anywhere.

(Q4)

I was wondering about the question of cultural production: the issue of the discourses which emerge around this return to the land. Is it left wing critique or is it a return to Japan, that is, seriously right wing? I find this opposition quite frustrating. It is like with this 1970s documentary film making, and other examples of these art collectives who went to rural areas, and made these films about the richness and diversity in these regions. It was a kind of third way thinking, producing art in rural areas. I was wondering if you saw your project similarly as defining a way of trying to getting around that kind of thing which I find very frustrating: that it has to be either left wing critique or some kind of nationalism. You find this discursive opposition throughout the modern history, including before the way. That is, the production of art in the countryside culture

in the rural regions can be either the social incubator of fascism or its a left wing alternative.

(AF)

Yes. Well, I don't know what you thought about my argument about the welfarist dimension of this work, but that's what I was trying to stress: the social ambition of bringing together the old people and the young people, these two surplus populations, and providing a certain sort of focus of activities, when there is obviously an absence of political will to really address these things. There are local governments who are involved, and other sources of funding, but its an incredible uphill battle for people like Kitagawa to put on his festivals, and there is an enormous political resistance to it, and there has been enormous resistance at the local level too. The other interesting part of it has been that artists have to go in to these places and convert and convince people one by one to be involved in the projects, and not just see them as a kind of incoming affluent invasion of city folk, indulging in the landscapes. Because it can easily be seen in those critical terms and there is some interesting work of this kind (for example, by Susanne Klien).¹² I think you can be very sceptical about the economic effects of these festivals, all these revitalisation plans, and there are lots of problematic aspects. Some of the things that Setouchi and Echigo Tsumari are setting out to do, can be pointed to as such, in relation to issues of counter-urbanisation and gentrification of the countryside, but when I think the projects seem to have got things right, such as in Momoshima and some of the Echigo villages, it is because of the really interesting attempt to socially engage with people independently in a sense of left wing ideology or the right wing nationalistic stuff that packages these things. There is a kind of nostalgia as well as the obvious left wing critique of corporate Japan and so forth, and yes, there is a social dynamic there, which I hope I capture a bit with the notion of welfarism.

(Q6 / Nathanael Andreini)

I am going to ask you a bit about the periodization question; the idea that all art work after 2011 is essentially post-disaster. I wonder if you can talk a little bit more about that. My interest is that as an artist, having been in Japan during that time, and seeing my own work being transformed by that disaster, and being connected with other artists in the country with the same thing, I have since then been really interested in this personal transformation that occurs as a result of an event of this kind. In your research or in your observations, what could you say about these transformations that these individuals have gone through in order to transform the nature of the art work they are producing as a response to this disaster.

(AF)

I have raised it as a question, really. Sometimes, it is put to me in the kind of straight narrative that I'm giving of 1995 and 2011 as key turning points—with the "zero year" of 1995, and the obvious punctuation point of 2011—that it becomes a too easy way of understanding everything, of narrating things. Yet, the

obvious observation is that the entire art world *has* been transformed in Japan by these events, in the sense that not only has it been a big enough shock to everyone that it makes them think again about what they are doing—in the discourse around their work, you can see that in numerous artists—but also that you observe how a lot of the funding and the focus and the thematics of Japanese contemporary art also changed in that directions these last years. So Roppongi Crossing which is the three year summarising of the art scene in Japan, was entirely focused around last year. The selection were based around on the post-disaster moment, and so that shift is hugely important in that part of the narrative. What we need to do is look for the kind of lineages of this. So it's not coincidental, then, that Yanagi, who I have presented, comes back into the frame. As in last year's Roppongi Crossing, he is now seen as a key part of the lineage again with these events.

I obviously can't speak directly for the kind of responses artists feel. My sense, though, of having been there before and after the events, with friends who have been through it and seeing the kind of reaction that they had, I see there is a deep sense of shock being articulated, and possibly more so beyond the physical disasters of the tsunami, in relation to the Fukushima disaster and what that means for the whole idea of post-war Japan as a viable economic machine dependent on nuclear power. Again, this is Yoshimi Shunya's point about "nuclear sunshine" and the illusions involved in maintaining that. Then we had the anti-nuclear politics and the protests, which were a very exciting moment for everybody, but it is difficult to see now that this had much effect in relation to what the government has been able to do after the elections. So the artists are inside this story and responding to it, and you can easily find all that is coming out of that. What is good art and what is not, is obviously a key part of the issue critically speaking, but I think the historical moment and the punctuation point is there and needs to be talked about as such.

Acknowledgements

Figs.17, 18, 20, 23, 24, copyright images courtesy of Yanagi Yukinori and Miyake Fine Art, Tokyo. Figs.23, 24 photo by Izumiyama Road.

Notes

¹ Interviews conducted for this research included: Yanagi Yukinori, Miyake Shinichi (Miyake Fine Arts), Furukata Taro, Kitagawa Fram, Yamano Shingo, Kawamata Tadashi, Kuroda Raiji, Nakamura Masato, Serizawa Takashi, Amano Taro.

² This section is based on material from Yanagi's various catalogues, particularly *Inujima Note* (2010), as well as discussions with the artist and his gallerist Miyake Shinichi. Particularly helpful is translator Tomii Reiko's introductory essay for this volume.

³ Alexandra Munroe (1992) 'Wandering position', *Flash Art* 25 (1992): 71-74.

⁴ Adrian Favell (2012) *Before and After Superflat: A Short History of Japanese Contemporary Art 1990-2011*, Hong Kong: Blue Kingfisher.

⁵ See also Kajiya Kenji (2010) 'Art projects in Japan: Their history and recent developments,' *Hiroshima Art Project 2009* (Catalogue): 261–271.

⁶ See also online research by curator Keith Whittle on this subject: <http://keithwhittle.org/>

⁷ Peter Matanle and Anthony Rausch with the Shrinking Regions Research Group (2011) *Japan's Shrinking Regions in the Twenty-First Century: Contemporary Responses to Depopulation and Socio-Economic Decline*. Cambria Press.

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- ⁸ Thomas Piketty (2014) *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press.
- ⁹ Yoshimi Shunya (2012) 'Radioactive rain and the American umbrella'. *Journal of Asian Studies* 71,2: 319-331.
- ¹⁰ Neil Brenner (ed.) (2013) *Implosions/Explosions: Towards a Study of Planetary Urbanization*. Jovis.
- ¹¹ See also Amelia Groom (2011) 'The obsolete in reverse' in *Big in Japan* (online blog) <http://biginjapan.com.au>
- ¹² Susanne Klien (2010) 'Contemporary art and regional revitalization: selected artworks in the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial 2000-6', *Japan Forum* 22 (3-4): 1-30; (2010) 'Collaboration or confrontation? Local and non-local actors in the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial', *Contemporary Japan* 22 (1-2): 1-25.