Expanding the public realm through curated collaborative action

The Echigo Tsumari abandoned house project

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> If you or I just tried to move into a house in a rural area like this, we would have a lot of trouble becoming part of the place. But, when art or an artist goes into a community, even if they run into difficulties, a lot of people get involved and connections are made. For art as well, this engagement with place brings huge meaning. . . .
>
> Art was an urban thing in the twentieth century, and when cities have problems, art expresses them. Bringing attention to urban problems is not a bad thing, but that kind of art is painful to look at all the time and it's not all that art can be. . . . Also, when an artist expresses urban ills he/she becomes a spectator. An artist can't possibly remain a spectator in Tsumari, and so they start to feel like doing something [about things].[1]

The Echigo Tsumari Art Triennial has taken place in Echigo Tsumari, a 760 km^2 area in Niigata Prefecture north-west of Tokyo, every three years since 2000. Most of the land is steep forestland, yet the highest quality rice in Japan is produced there. Cut off by terrain and climate, the region has had a reputation for being closed and politically isolated. Snow accumulation of up to five metres has contributed to depopulation since the middle of the twentieth century and many of the 65,000 people remaining are elderly, living in villages of 5–30 houses. All things considered, it seems an unlikely place for an international arts festival.

Co-mingling of urban and rural culture

One of the goals of the Triennial has been to expand the understanding of the public realm within the community and open a space for communication, discourse and cross-fertilisation with mainstream urban culture. Fram Kitagawa, who directs the event with his team of curators at Art Front Gallery, calls this a 'co-mingling' of urban and rural culture.[2] Triennial aims to create places and situations where this co-mingling

can occur. A large gap separates urban and rural culture in Japan today. To bridge this gap effectively, the triennial has had to deal with two conditions that may be particular to Japan: first, the perceived status of rural culture and, second, the understanding of what constitutes 'public'.

Built and maintained with great skill and care over hundreds of years, Japan's rural landscape is clearly the product of a traditional culture making best use of difficult terrain and limited resources. Still, it is unlikely that producers of that landscape see their work as 'cultural' activity.[3] The Triennial's goal of 'co-mingling' urban and rural culture requires the rural setting to be recognised as a valuable product and producer of culture. The perceived status of agriculture within the minds of farmers needs to be raised before it can begin to interact on an equal footing with urban culture.[4]

Japan's single-minded pursuit of economic development over the last 60 years has had both positive and negative effects on rural culture. It has brought improvements to infrastructure including better roads and the rationalisation of agricultural lands. Unfortunately, these improvements have often been carried out without due consideration to their effect on local landscape and communities. Alex Kerr has written extensively of the ways that Japan's brand of economic prosperity has contributed to the devaluation of rural culture and the gradual degradation of rural environments.[5]

Television, the Internet and ease of travel have spread mainstream culture and, with it, an unexamined acceptance of its values. While these changes have reduced the gap between the way of life in urban and rural settings, they have further undermined traditional rural culture. Unable to see their own cultural productions reflected back through mainstream media, residents in rural communities are at risk of gradually losing a sense of the value of their own creations. In the same way that they see their children leaving to work in the cities as natural, they may also view the chipping away at their culture and communities as an inevitable consequence of progress.

The lack of an open public realm in rural communities accelerates this phenomenon. Public space in rural communities of the past was generally limited to the grounds of local shrines and temples. Public gatherings held to discuss issues of concern to the entire community took place in the house of the hereditary village headman. The sociologist Yasunaga Toshinobu writes that Japanese words for public and private reflect a dialectic between the ruler and the ruled – the state and the subject of the state. This is fundamentally different from the notion of public as something that is shared, in the sense of belonging to all, versus something that is private, or belonging to the individual.[6] The Triennial needs to present an alternative kind of 'publicness' – something shared by everyone – in order to succeed.

Local residents did not initially appreciate these goals, and the first event went ahead in 2000 despite significant resistance at the village level. As a result, most of the works were 'sculptures' on public land.[7] A possible measure of the event's success is that a large proportion of the 330 artworks on display in 2006 were located in 'private' spaces within villages. Many of these were part of the 'Abandoned House Project', which made use of empty farmhouses.

Use/conservation

Professor Yosuke Mamiya has speculated on the way the verb 'to use', when considered in the context of the conservation of buildings, contains a contradiction. He writes in an article about the Triennial:

> When we think of the verb 'to use', we think of the thing we use as being reduced through the using of it. Therefore, to use = to consume, and to spend = to use up. When we conserve something, whether it is nature or a building, we refrain from 'using' it . . . and try to keep people away from it.
>
> Buildings, however, decline to ruins when they are not used. Of course, if we use them in the sense of consuming them [reuse the materials of which they are made] then their ruin is hastened, but if they are used and maintained, then use = conservation.[8]

According to the 2003 census, there are an estimated seven million abandoned houses in Japan. The reasons for their abandonment are various but generally relate to the decrease in and ageing of the overall population. The fact that mainstream culture favours new styles of living, which are seen as incompatible with older houses, may also be to blame. At the same time that they are romanticised as environments where a purer Japanese way of life may be possible, old houses are seen as dark, dirty, too hot or too cold, and terribly inconvenient. In the context of a village of 25 households, an abandoned house radically affects the real and perceived potential of the place. As long as these buildings are not used, the productive space of the community is

Echigo Tsumari abandoned house.

reduced, which in turn decreases the social and cultural potential of the community in a very tangible way.

A small number of houses are protected by the Japanese government through Important Cultural Property designations. Today there are 326 vernacular houses ('*minka*' or 'folk houses') designated as Important Cultural Properties.[9] Many of these have been restored to an 'original' form and opened to the public to present information about a past way of life. They are maintained and therefore conserved, but their power to shape or participate in contemporary culture is limited by the manner of presentation. A few more abandoned houses have found their way into outdoor farmhouse museums where vernacular buildings from different parts of the country are brought to one location and arranged in a sort of village. These become tourist attractions and often offer visitors the chance to experience aspects of what it would have been like to live in such a house in an earlier time.

A number of architects and builders have found a niche in refurbishing old houses, either for their original owners or for clients in other parts of the country or even abroad. Houses are often taken apart and moved. There is even a society for rescuing buildings that would otherwise collapse or be demolished, finding owners for them and helping the new owners to rebuild them in other settings for other uses.[10] The Echigo Tsumari abandoned house project offers a radically different approach to the problem of abandoned houses.

Japanese Minka.

The abandoned house project

The project grew out of a desire to stem a downward spiral caused by depopulation, and was based on the concept that houses deserted by families that cannot maintain them scar fragile communities, encouraging further depopulation. The project team obtained permission to use abandoned houses as venues for site-specific works, to be developed with community collaboration. The idea was that breathing new life into the abandoned houses, by means of collaborative action between artist(s) and community, would help to regenerate the communities.

The project brought together three objectives: (1) the renewed houses would become a resource that would draw new residents to the region; (2) aspects of traditional regional culture embedded in the fabric of the buildings would be highlighted through exploration of the opportunities and constraints they offer to the production of meaning through art, and this knowledge could then be brought forward into contemporary culture; and (3) working on the projects with the participation of local builders and craftspeople would contribute directly to the regeneration of local industry.[11]

Artist/architect teams transformed 40 abandoned houses and schools in 2006. Their actions ranged from practical refurbishment to allow the display of artworks, to transformation of the buildings themselves into works of art. The project is ongoing and its ambition goes beyond the event. These houses – whether *works of* or *venues for* art – are for sale. The hope is that people from outside the region will sponsor projects *and* come to live in the region. Kitagawa has created a new initiative, the Community Museum Owner Project, to push this plan forward.

The abandoned house project works presented in 2006 might be seen to fall into different categories: (1) those that focus critical attention to the rural way of life; (2) those that draw attention to formal or poetic relationships; (3) those that create opportunities for social exchange; (4) those that present traditional crafts; and (5) those that elevate the status of everyday artefacts.

The abandoned house project might also be examined as a testing ground for forms of cultural production addressing different aspects of contemporary art discourse – site specificity, translation, local/global dichotomy, the aesthetic experience, the sublime, relational or dialogic art practice, interactivity, social sculpture, etc. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to address these or detail all the projects. I will, however, introduce four projects and discuss their implications against the goals of the Triennial.

Ayse Erkmen, *What Happened!*

> The house barely survived heavy snows and the Great Earthquake of 2004. The walls are cracked, glass fragments are scattered on the floor. By walking inside the house, visitors will realize its age. The ivy planted around it will slowly cover it, enclosing the time inside.[12]

What happened!

There is something about this village that is less organised, somewhat poorer than others – the house more isolated. A long blank wall of weathered boards faces the road. Vines will soon cover the house completely. Inside, the entry area is dilapidated and gloomy, the surfaces dirty. A messy arrangement of certificates hangs over an inner door. A small shopping cart, the kind that old ladies use as walkers, waits, but there is no one here. I step out of my shoes and onto a smooth timber surface, a path running through the house. I smell and feel the soft freshness of new wood underfoot, its luminous warmth an enticement in this cheerless place. As I move further in, my perception shifts – I am not simply entering a house, I am on a trail expecting scenic overlooks, vista points and adventure.

The house is in serious disarray. The walls are cracked – great chunks of plaster strewn about. The familiar apparatus and objects of everyday life are shaken from their settled places and thrown into uncanny relationships around me. The neat wooden plank leads into the depths of the house, past lists in extra-large script stuck haphazardly to the wall above the telephone and a television askew on the floor. The path pauses, jutting into the kitchen, offering a view of the entire collection of kitchen utensils and vessels lying smashed on the floor. Around to the bath, upstairs to children's bedrooms, messy as if the children have just left for school, the wooden path takes me further into the mystery. What has happened here? I know that many people

were forced to leave their homes after a violent earthquake in 2004. With the local building industry stretched to the limit, reconstruction was impossible before the winter snows, and in some cases it was too dangerous to stay. Surely there was time to pack, but nevertheless, some families took only what they could grab and left. They had had enough.

Erkmen's work draws me into the intimate circumstances of the people who lived here, even as it holds me at a distance. The path turns me into a tourist. I am allowed right into the thick of things. No display or special effects disrupt me and there is nothing between me and the action. I can move about freely – even off the path if I chose. The path separates me from the scene and works against the empathy I feel for the people who have left. I am forced to look critically at the pleasure I get from standing safely on the path imagining their panic and fear – at the way I enjoy the aesthetic arrangement of their shattered world.[13]

The work spotlights a decisive moment, fixing it into a recurring loop – forever separated from the possibility of growth and change. *What Happened!* opens a public space, but only as a window into deprivation and loss and perhaps communicating the artist's desire that something be done. But, what can we do? It is difficult to see how this work can create the kind of after-effects the Triennial hopes to achieve.

Projection of Life/From here and there.

Shunichi Ohtani (with architect S. Nakamura), *Projection of Life/From here and there*

> Ohtani visited all 120 families in the Murono community, listening to their stories as he looked through their photo albums. He scanned the photos, transferred them to film, and posted them onto the windows of the houses. Light passes through them, merging the current outside scenes with the community feelings captured in the photos.[14]

The village of Murono is in a valley along a main road. It has the feeling of a *shukuba* – an inn town that offers lodging to travellers. The house is not large, but it is made of grand stuff. The structural timbers are heavier and more evenly milled than is typical. I learn from the artist working there that the structure had originally been part of a grander house and was moved to the present location about 100 years ago. In contrast to *What Happened?*, all evidence of the lives of former occupants is gone. The ground floor of the house has been deconstructed, its floorboards removed to reveal the substructure. Like the Erkmen work, however, there is a path at what would be the floor level. Light pours in through many multi-paned glass doors and windows. I notice that the light is coloured, so I take the path to the nearest window and see that it is covered with what looks like a family photo album. The light is filtered through hundreds of photographs of families, events and outings. I know nothing about the individuals who lived in this house, but the people who live in the village populate its light. Photographs overlay the view of the surrounding houses. My focus shifts between the photos in the foreground and the houses beyond. I can only look at one or the other, but the shadow of the other remains present.

I feel privileged to be able to look at the photographs at my leisure, noticing the things I have in common with the locals and the things I do not. I follow the path to each window and then up the stairs. Each room offers more of the same, yet each is different. The images colour the light pleasantly. Still, I start to feel slightly claustrophobic. Light, air and sustenance … everything only finds its way into the house through the participation of the village as a whole. In the city we see work as something we do in order to support life; it is the space where we are 'exploited' and it is opposed to 'life'. Only with effort can I remember that, taken together, 'work' *is* the communal activity of supporting human life. The photographs printed on the glass are a potent reminder of the communality of life.

Two aspects of the work offer the pleasure of being able to see what is usually hidden inside albums or under floorboards. I enjoy being able to look at the photographs in my own time and enjoy their cumulative effect. Unlike paging through an album under the eye of the owner, I am not constrained to appreciate or respond in any particular way. I can jump from one group of pictures to another. I am freed of any responsibility towards them. At the same time, the secrets of the house are laid bare. The construction is in plain view and I can admire the simplicity of method and the craft in the execution. There are no poetic nooks to delight Bachelard. The space is abstract and depersonalised. The house has become an object-as-product-of-technology offered

for sanitised consumption. Stripped of its history of specific inhabitation, the house presents itself as available for inhabitation. This work exposes a tension inherent in the abandoned house project. The houses are retrieved from collapse and given a short-term life during the Triennial. But in order to survive long term, each house must find a sponsor and so it must communicate liveability. While presenting information about itself through selective deconstruction and about the village through the photographs, the partial refurbishment also gives a generalised sense of the 'charming' lifestyle possible there. It seems to say, I may be old, but I can be contemporary.

Nihon University College of Art sculpture course (with architect C.J. Mancke), *Shedding House*[15]

> Junichi Kurakake together with his former and current students have been hand carving the surface of walls and pillars inside and abandoned house. Simultaneously the house has undergone some renovation. Once carved, the space revives.[16]

This village of detached houses arranged on a steep south-facing slope seems coherent and prosperous. *Shedding House* is halfway up the hillside. I approach it from the side, a wall of weathered boards, a thatched roof covered with metal. As I come around to the front, I see that the rest of the house has new siding. A gabled volume projects from the south-east corner, making an L-shaped footprint. The entrance is under the projecting gable and into a rough concrete-floored space, with darkened timber walls and ceiling. Every timber surface is scored by individual strokes of a small carving tool, revealing the lighter meat of the wood. I pass through a wide opening and the space opens up above my head revealing an astonishingly striking frame of natural timbers supporting a lashed roof thatch visible from below. Here again, every piece of structure (beams, posts, rafters) is scored, as are the floors, window frames and plaster and timber walls. I have walked into a woodblock print of a

Shedding House.

fairytale house. Light streams in. Surfaces shimmer and dematerialise. The space is abuzz with energy, the air alive. I remove my shoes and step onto the grooved surface that massages my feet as I walk. I lie on the floor and revel in the visual vibration.

There is no furniture and no visible kitchen or bath. A stair leads to a room over the entrance with stunning views across the valley – richly green. This room is also entirely scored – the floor carving spinning out from the centre. I feel dizzy and strangely exhilarated. Downstairs again, I look behind two ancient blackened doors to find *tatami*-floored rooms with closets for bedding and clothing – bedrooms. A stair hidden in the closet leads up to a loft overlooking the main space. A mysteriously mute volume clad in flamed vertical boards sits on the other side of the main space. Inside are two brightly lit white spaces – a 'system kitchen' and a 'unit bath' and toilet. These prefabricated components, so common and utterly grounded in the contemporary everyday life of Japan, contrast radically with the timeless quality of the rest of the house.

A Butoh[17] dancer performs to an audience packed into the narrow spaces around the main room. Extra lights flood the space – warm light reflecting off plaster walls – the scored surfaces seem to flicker. A single scroll depicting an emperor in full regalia hangs on the narrow piece of wall between the dark doors. The dancer emerges and a frightening machine-like sound fills the space. His performance is intense and painful to watch. I wonder how the children in the audience are coping. Later we speculate on the dancer's intent. Someone remarks that perhaps he was distressed at the way the house has been stripped of its history, emerging scraped of responsibility and shame – as fresh and young as the students who marked it. Did the dancer want to bring the spirit of that past back into the house,[18] to remind us that the consequences of actions remain?

Shedding House was one of the most popular works in 2006 and still receives visitors on weekends. It is regularly used for workshops and performances. Bringing attention to the hitherto concealed structure has brought the skill of anonymous builders to light and raised the status of all the houses in the village. The students' actions, gentle and violent, performed on all the surfaces over time – cleaning, marking and finally bathing in gentle light – give the space a living energy that is much more than visual shimmer. The accumulation of their repetitive action has transformed the house into a powerful and nuanced public space. As Lefebvre might have said, the energy deployed within it has made the physical space real.[19] The juxtaposition of the unremarkable conveniences of contemporary everyday life further reveals unacknowledged relationships between the present and imagined pasts and futures.

Grizedale Arts (Marcus Coates, Juneau/Projects/, Barnaby Hosking, Tim Olden, Adam Sutherland, Nina Pope, Karen Guthrie, Lali Chetwynd, *Seven Samurai*

> Seven artists from the group will live here and do something useful for the community – anything from farm labour to artwork.[20]

The performance takes place in the protected undercroft of the new Snow-land Agrarian Culture Centre. One of the group, a man, is speaking in English against a background of pseudo-religious sound imagery. It is a manifesto, I think, but it is difficult to follow. The text is projected in Japanese behind the performers, and also read out by one of the curating staff in equally difficult Japanese. Later, as the men of the group play and sing, the two women, their faces masked by white makeup, mime what seems to be a history of dance. Another man, wearing a contemporary woman's dress and a blonde wig crowned with an animal's head, dances shaman-like, reined in by a rope attached to his waist.

The atmospheric machismo of the manifesto reading and the image of women as either silent mimes or a bound shaman (who is actually a man) communicate something that unnerves me. Is it intentional? I look around to see what other people are thinking. It is very dark and I cannot read faces. Am I the only person to think this? Towards the end of the performance, people from the village join on stage to perform local folk songs and dances. I read real warmth in these people's expressions. Whatever they thought of the performance, I can see that they like the young artists and are enjoying their interactions.

The Grizedale Arts project is perhaps the most conceptually distant from conventional notions of art and architecture among the abandoned house projects. Seven British artists took up residence in an abandoned house in the same village as *Shedding House*. Part of the house had been refurbished to present the work of two Japanese artists. The Grizedale group used the rest as their home base. Styling themselves after the seven mercenaries in the film who were hired by a village to protect it from bandits, the artists offered themselves to the community to develop something together through a collaborative process.

I found the *Seven Samurai* conceit very troubling at first. Casting themselves into an evangelistic role relative to the village, the artists appeared to suggest a superior, or more privileged, knowledge than the locals.[21] It seemed an irredeemably arrogant starting point and the performance seemed to confirm this view. I became intrigued, however, as I learned more about the group's encounters with the village. Each artist/artist team pursued different activities, which together involved nearly every person in the village. The projects involved music, dance, food, stories and even ideas for how the village might develop products or services. The group put together a website and web-based shop, where village products can be purchased.[22] And, nine months after their residency, the artists welcomed a group of ten from the village to the Grizedale headquarters in Cumbria, to run workshops in farming and cooking. Although at times perplexed about what was expected of them during their trip, the participants I spoke to expressed satisfaction with the trip and an expectation of further exchanges in the future.[23] The artists seem to have successfully established a relationship with the village, which is still ongoing at the time of this writing.[24]

Several curators and writers have written on Derrida's ideas about hospitality in relation to biennales.[25] Hosts gain creativity by allowing the 'unlimited agency of the guest', and jointly they build a 'conflicted yet convivial relationship [which] could

create a space of intersection of the "local" and the "international" in a temporary "dissociative" community formed by the ... exhibition'.[26] This creative agency of hospitality is clearly at work in *Seven Samurai*.

Conclusion/after-effects

I have been able to stay at *Shedding House* twice since 2006. In June 2007, two of the locals took me to the paddies to see fireflies. They explained that in their youth, clouds of fireflies filled the heavy air above the young rice plants in early summer. The fireflies completely disappeared after the terraces were rebuilt some years ago. It turns out that fireflies depend on a kind of crustacean that lived in the ancient stone-lined ditches, but does not thrive in the smooth concrete channels that replaced them. A few years ago, the village lined some of the channels with stone. And so, that night we were surrounded by the magical flashing blue light I remember from my own childhood summers in Pennsylvania. We shared a perfect moment – ephemeral yet stretching through time, unquestionably particular and local, yet also connected through me to a faraway place.

When I was there again in December 2007, I noticed a newsletter (first edition dated October 2007) for a new community-based organisation dedicated to enhancing the region and its way of life. The 'Scarecrow Brigade' was formed by a group of local residents who had participated in the Triennial. It is a forum to which anyone can bring ideas for discussion, development and eventual implementation. The goals include: supporting local events and festivals; supporting the Triennial; exchanging with artists and others; developing regional identity and culture by making full use of art works, local culture, history and preservation; and participating in and cooperating with local government.

It is difficult to unpick the many ways the Echigo Tsumari Triennial has affected its setting. Would these things have happened without the kick-start it provided? It is impossible to know for sure, but I doubt it. International art events like Echigo Tsumari have the potential to speak and be heard beyond the art world and can and do engage with the needs of the communities in which they are set. They offer the possibility for and in some cases actually achieve genuinely regenerative after-effects.

Echigo Tsumari succeeds because it has operated in the understanding that the true value of global exchange is to be found in direct personal interaction. Local residents, visitors and other participants make personal connections, exchange ideas and impressions and learn to see their practice/environment/world differently. By redefining the abandoned buildings as artefacts participating in contemporary art discourse, Kitagawa's strategy changes them from structures too archaic to support contemporary life into liveable and desirable 'works of art'. This method can be seen as a radical response to the ways that historic buildings and landscapes are fetishised through preservation practices. The buildings are physically transformed through

action, which changes both how they are perceived and how they might be interpreted. The fact that the action is collaborative further transforms their status from purely private dwellings into dwellings that are also part of the public realm.

Notes

1 F. Kitagawa, 'Abandoned houses, art and community – Towards a place for the co-mingling of the urban and the rural. Special Edition Case Study City: The whereabouts of 7,000,000 abandoned buildings', *Shin Kenchiku Jyutaku Tokushu*, 246, October 2006, p. 82.

2 F. Kitagawa, 'Abandoned Houses, Art and Community', p. 82.

3 In English, the conceptual link between 'agriculture' and 'culture' is unavoidable, but there is no equivalent semantic link between these words in Japanese where 'agriculture', 農業 (*nōgyō*), is made up of two characters that mean 'farming' or 'farmer' and 'work'; and 'culture' (文化 *bunka*) is made up of the character for 'written character' or 'literature' and a character that generally means 'change'.

4 It is no accident that one of the three buildings built in conjunction with the Triennial is nicknamed the '*Nōbutai*', which means 'Agriculture Stage' but is a homonym for a stage for Noh Theatre, a form of theatre which is very high culture indeed.

5 See A. Kerr, *Dogs and Demons: Tales from the Dark Side of Modern Japan*, New York: Hill and Wang, 2001, and *Lost Japan*, Victoria, Australia: Lonely Planet Publications, 1996.

6 '*Kan*' (官) refers to the 'official', or the business of the state, while '*Min*' (民) connotes the business of individuals. M. Mae, *Gibt es in Japan eine Civil Society? Zum schwierigen Verhältnis von Öffentlichkeit und Privatheit*, available online: www.uni-duesseldorf.de/home/Jahrbuch/2003/Mae, accessed 10 October 2007.

7 F. Kitagawa, unpublished interview, 2006.

8 Y. Mamiya, 'Creating new space for living that continues and renews the regional. Special Edition Case Study City: The whereabouts of 7,000,000 abandoned buildings', *Shin Kenchiku Jyutaku Tokushu*, 246, October 2006, p. 80.

9 Government of Japan, *National Treasures (Buildings)*, available online www.mext.go.jp/b_menu/shingi/bunka/toushin/04112401.htm, accessed 10 October 2007.

10 JMRA: *Nihon Minka Saisei Recycle Kyoukai* (Japan Minka Recycle Association).

11 Y. Mamiya, 'Creating new space for living that continues and renews the regional', p. 81.

12 Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial, Executive Committee, *English Guidebook*, Tokyo: Art Front Gallery, 2006, p. 14.

13 I am reminded of an artwork I saw in London recently. In *Collecting Time: The Living and the Dead* (2005/6), the artist Fran Cottell installed a raised path through her house and allowed visitors to wander through as she and her family went about life as usual. The difference is, of course, that *What Happened!* is a 'still life' – a memorial to an event – whereas Cottell's work is truly 'live'.

14 Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial, Executive Committee, *English Guidebook*, p. 48.

15 I was part of the collaborative team that produced *Shedding House*. As the architect, I worked closely with the owners and the artist team to integrate the sometimes-conflicting goals of each. Although I am an interested party to the project, I have tried to write about the experience as if visiting for the first time.

16 Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial, Executive Committee, *English Guidebook*, p. 48.

17 The word '*butoh*' means 'dance'. When capitalised it generally refers to a form of contemporary dance more accurately known as Ankoku-Butoh, or the 'dance of utter

darkness'. See S. Klein, *Ankoku Buto: The Premodern and Postmodern Influences on the Dance of Utter Darkness*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University East Asia Papers, no. 49.

18 Particularly the era of the Showa Emperor (1925–88) when Japan emerged as an imperialist power, suffered massive destruction and humiliation in defeat and clawed its way to becoming a world economic power.

19 H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, transl. D Nicholson-Smith, Cambridge, MA; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1991, p. 13.

20 Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennial, Executive Committee, *English Guidebook*, p. 48.

21 See G. Kestor, *Conversation Pieces Community and Communication in Modern Art*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004, for a cogent discussion of the way that community-based art practices sometimes fall into evangelistic patterns which may be in opposition to their stated goals.

22 See www.sevensamurai.jp/.

23 Junko Maruyama, an artist who accompanied the group to Britain, expressed further reservations in conversation with the author about the way the events in Britain were arranged, alluding to gaps between the expectations of the two groups.

24 The project as it has evolved might be compared to the *Art Barns: After Kurt Schwitters* projects in Lancashire directed by the artist/curator group Littoral. Especially relevant is Toro Adeniran-Kane's work, which led to a mutually beneficial commercial arrangement where women from the artists' community in Manchester contracted to buy produce directly from the farms (G. Kestor, *Conversation Pieces Community and Communication in Modern Art*). And also to Jeremy Deller's piece at the Muster Skulptur project in summer 2007 (*Speak to the earth and it will tell you*).

25 See J. Verwoert, 'Forget the national: Perform the international in the key of the local (and vice versa)!', and other articles in *Research Papers Biennials and City-Wide Events*, 2007.

26 S. Dutton and J. Griffin, 'Something like nothing, happens anywhere', *Research Papers Biennials and City-Wide Events*, 2007: 6.