ROUTLEDGE RESEARCH IN ART HISTORY

AMERICAN ART IN ASIA

ARTISTIC PRAXIS AND THEORETICAL DIVERGENCE

Edited by
MICHELLE LIM AND KYUNGHEE PYUN

ROUTLEDGE

American Art in Asia

This book challenges existing notions of what is "American" and/or "Asian" art, moving beyond the identity issues that have dominated art-world conversations of the 1980s and the 1990s and aligning with new trends and issues in contemporary art today, e.g. the Global South, labor, environment, and gender identity.

Contributors examine both historical and contemporary instances in art practices and exhibition-making under the rubric of "American art in Asia." The book complicates existing notions of what constitutes American art, Asian American (and American Asian) art. As today's production and display of contemporary art takes place across diffused borders, under the fluid conditions of a globalized art world since transformed by the COVID-19 pandemic, new contexts, and art historical narratives are forming that upend traditional Euro-American mappings of center-margins, migratory patterns, and community engagement.

The book will be of interest to scholars working in art history, American studies, Asian studies, and visual culture.

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American Art in Asia

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Cover image: Dinh Q. Le, *A Bouquet for the Lady of the House*, 2019. Site-specific installation in a vacated house in Awashima, Japan. Setouchi Triennale 2019, fall season. Photo: Michelle Lim. Courtesy of the artist.

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James Jack is an artist and Associate Professor at Waseda University. James Jack is an artist who engages layered histories tied to place as a way to concentrate on instances of positive change achieved through community-led initiatives. Exhibitions of his work have been held at the Echigo-Tsumari Triennale, Setouchi Triennale, Busan Biennale, Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Art, Honolulu Museum of Art, Oku-Noto Triennale, Institute of Contemporary Art Singapore, TMT Art Projects (Fukuoka), TAMA Gallery (New York) and NTU Centre for Contemporary Art Singapore. Publications of his writings include "Spirits of Tsureshima: Creative Storytelling with Islanders" in *Shima*, "Stories of Khayalan: Reparative Islands" in *Place-Labor-Capital*, *The Sea We See* and an essay in *Requiem for the Sun: The Art of Mono-ha*. He holds a PhD from Tokyo University of the Arts, was a Crown Prince Akihito Scholar, a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Social Art Lab, Kyushu University, a Georgette Chen Fellow and directed the artist-in-residence program at Yale-NUS College in Singapore from 2018–2021.

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David Kelley is an Associate Professor in the Roski School of Art and Design, University of Southern California. His recent work examines circuits of extraction, shifting social and political geographies, and the effects of global capitalism. Kelley has exhibited work internationally, including BAK in Utrecht, the Netherlands; deCordova Sculpture Park and Museum in Massachusetts; the Nanjing Art Museum, China; the Museum of Modern Art, New York; MAAP in Brisbane, Australia; and the Jim Thompson Art Center in Bangkok. His collaborations with fellow USC faculty member Patty Chang have earned them both recognition and awards. Their film about the Three Gorges Dam, *Flotsam Jetsam* (2007), was exhibited at the 2008 New Directors/New Films Festival and won the Golden Pyramid at the Cairo IMFAY Media Arts Festival. Another collaboration, *Route 3* (2011), a three-channel video about a recently completed highway in Laos, has been exhibited in venues in Massachusetts, Brisbane, Hong Kong and the Bangkok Experimental Film Festival. Kelley earned a bachelor's degree from Trinity College

Part II

American Artists in Asia Today

6 The (im)Possibilities of Cultural Collectivity: American Artist in Setouchi

James Jack

What methods do my artworks suggest for understanding the world?

Artistic systems for reflecting on moments outside of now to better understand the contradictions of this moment. We all stand on moving ground, the community is in motion, opinions changing one at a time in relation to each other.[1]

Introduction: Intercultural Encounters

The late Satsuki Kuroshima often told stories during long visits I made to her home. On the topic of this book, the following story immediately comes to mind:

> Soon after the war, I moved from Kobe to this harbor town of Kōnoura. One day, a foreign sailboat landed in the harbor. As the visitors came to shore, I could see they were Americans. They approached perhaps to ask for a toilet, water or a store, but I couldn't understand a word they spoke. I stood there and simply said, "No English." They understood me perfectly, how amazing that was.[2]

Seven decades after this brief encounter, Satsuki vividly recounted the joy she felt as they understood the only words she knew in their language, "No English." Together we would roll in laughter each time she told this story, aware of the irony of her utterance with our communication now possible entirely in the Japanese language. She would retell this story whenever I brought someone who did not understand Japanese to her house. I would translate the story into English for the visitor each time, transforming an inability to communicate to one of mutual understanding. In contrast to historical relations between the United States and Japan, these micro-communications led to rich exchanges based on mutual understanding. While working on an artwork next door to Satsuki's home over the past ten years, I have been facilitating cultural relationships between atypical counterparts. These relationships not only shaped the artwork I made with the historic site, but also shifted my artistic methods to engage directly with the collective possibilities and impossibilities of language itself.

Working on the West edge of the Pacific Rim for the past two decades, creative work with language is woven throughout my art practice. Chinese artist Yida Wang who spent much of her life in Honolulu taught me that linguistic misunderstandings can mean just as much if not more than understanding for artists. While working with

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dialogue is central to my praxis, which is full of understandings, misunderstandings and more, "America" and "Asia" are just two of many words floating in the air.[3] In this chapter I aim to diversify these two terms with a more complex language from the air we breathe in artistic practice. I pause before using the word "Asia," and extend this to "America" with the aim of finding more imaginative ways to discuss artists and the places they are working today.[4] I rely upon region-specific vocabulary and folklore, think of people as more than their birthplace or citizenship status, and resist homogeneity with active engagement of internal diversity in groups.[5] This chapter investigates the collective possibilities and impossibilities of intercultural artistic engagement through an intimate lens in Seto Inland Sea, or Setouchi in Japanese. As an artist I believe in the value of artistic research and aim to contribute critical reflections from one island in a rural area of Japan so they might impact social relationships in other places. It is my hope these reflections can foster a shift away from hierarchical relations towards cooperative methodologies for artistic practitioners working with diverse communities.[6]

Reflective artistic research opens spaces for artists, communities, and others to share cooperative methods for how to work respectfully with each other in mutually beneficial ways. However, there are far too many examples of artists and scholars not working with communities. I offer methods for how to work through challenges and find ways to "suspend damage" with research "to reimagine how findings might be used by, for and with communities."[7] I have witnessed the presence of American power in the form of military bases, resource extraction, and economic oppression first hand in Okinawa, Hawai'i and Indonesia. This power is often based on modernist thinking including the superiority of the West and its racist, imperialist, and unjust structures. A commitment to cooperative artmaking is a critical part of undoing violent footprints with peaceful actions made in solidarity with others who stand up against the barriers that militarism exerts on cultural diplomacy.[8] As a methodology, cooperative work with close-knit communities resists hierarchical thinking by working equally with people of diverse linguistic, ethnic, gender, socioeconomic, and age orientations. As faith in democracy and capitalism further erodes in the age of COVID-19, alternative models for intercultural engagement have urgent implications for communities across the globe working towards cooperative systems of governance and horizontal forms of exchange.

In this chapter, I search for alternative forms of cultural diplomacy based on nonviolent methods at the site of one artwork entitled *Sunset House: The House as Language of Being*. Here, I work with the possibilities of collective language in intercultural encounters providing one new perspective from rural Japan. This artwork has been transformative for community members, visitors to the site, and myself as an artist. It contains useful lessons for those expanding upon art as a form of meaningful social engagement outside of colonial centers.[9] I work on moving ground where opinions change and contradictions arise, which I work through in creative ways. One tenet I learned in Setouchi and continue to employ in my praxis now is: if people want the artwork to exist, it will continue, but if they do not, it will cease to exist. This can be confining, liberating, or more, depending upon the situation. A cooperative approach with people at the center means the existence (or cessation) of the work depends upon a social fabric of different opinions woven together by multiple participants in *longue durée*.

Hope Shattered

During my first visit to Setouchi in 2009, I saw few people yet felt great presence. On a small boat together with newly appointed triennial director Fram Kitagawa we stopped at the islands of Teshima, Shōdoshima, Ogijima, and Megijima. At the site of a rustic shed full of fishing and farming tools, time slowed to the speed of cracks in the rough interior mud walls and stains of rust seeping in from nails on the exterior. This village stood as still as the tranquil sea, yet I felt the presence of powerful movements. This town of Kōnoura, 神浦 or "bay of spirits," was a protected harbor along a maritime artery where boats would frequently anchor. From the 7th to nineteenth century, ships were the primary means of transportation, carrying people, stones, culture, beliefs, and more across the sea. In the twentieth century, Setouchi region went from becoming the first national nature park in Japan in the 1930s to functioning as a repository for toxic waste in the 1980s. Over the past decade, I have been working amid a complex social landscape of intercultural encounters, shattered hope and collective dreams interwoven in this shed and its social relations. An early sketch captivates part of this relationality. In it, I drew each of the names of the people, elements, and activities that kept the site alive, as the foundation for *Sunset House* as an artwork (Figure 6.1).

The stillness of small harbors and winding one-way roads of Setouchi are inaccessible by low-cost carriers, Shinkansen, and ultra-large container vessels. Instead, one must slow down to take a ferry boat and a bus, car, or local train. I first encountered methods of co-creation, cooperation and collective praxis while participating in the 4th Echigo-Tsumari Triennale in Niigata earlier in the same year I first visited Setouchi.[10] Between ten to twenty artists and I resided in a former

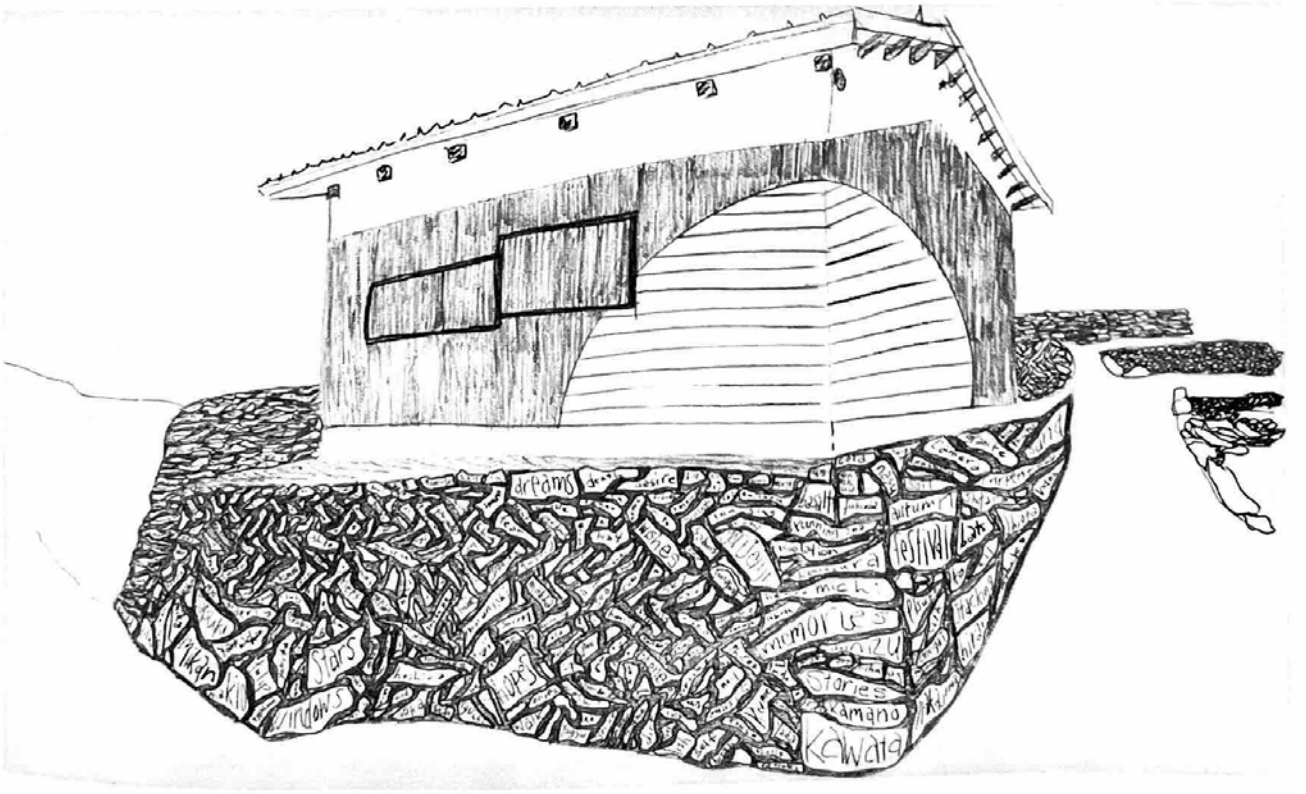

Figure 6.1 James Jack, *The House as Language of Being*, 2011. Graphite on paper, 17.9" x 22". Image retouched by Kenta Kawagoe.

dormitory for elementary school teachers, interacting daily with local farmers, craftspeople, and schoolteachers. Here, I felt Kitagawa's "vision to reconnect art and nature" while working with a local farmer, temple keeper, and kindergarten children to create an artwork in the former schoolhouse where we all exhibited.[11] This philosophy resonated with me deeply as I was seeking a wider range of imaginative possibilities while growing less concerned with marketplaces which my early career had depended upon. I saw other American artists such as Mierle Laderman Ukeles and James Turrell exhibit in Niigata as well, yet their approach to site-specificity did not appear to include working with communities on the ground in a durational way. The approach of conversing daily with people in their language and noticing overlooked aspects of the place while in residence over long periods of time led me and other artists to interact with people and place on their own terms, adapt to their timing and adjust to their pace.

This residential approach is shared by other artists in the Postwar period.[12] First travelling to Japan in 1957, artist Sam Francis (1923–1994) established a studio, built a home and continued to spend significant time in Japan until his death. He saw the relationship between both places as interdependent as can be seen in the following excerpt from a poem: "New York needs Tokyo needs Paris needs Tokyo needs L.A. needs Tokyo needs the world."[13] Francis actively engaged with artists, writers, architects, and composers in Japan and had two children with video art pioneer Mako Idemitsu, one of whom is Shingo Francis, an artist. Printmaker Sarah Brayer arrived in Japan in 1979 to work with renowned woodblock printers and continues to utilize traditional craft in her work with *washi* paper and aquatint techniques today. By maintaining an active practice between Kyoto and New York over the past four decades, Brayer devotes her work and life to gaining a deeper appreciation of Japanese craft outside of Japan. Conceptual artist Arthur Huang moved to Tokyo and established the artist collective Art Byte Critique in 2012. His time-based works, which are made with a meticulous focus on mapping memories, utilize creative ways of recording daily walks in microforms; Huang is also known for shifting ocular perception, through an artwork included in the 2013 Setouchi Triennale. Like these artists, I often engage in long conversations, walk on winding roads, and employ local materials as a method to embody complexity underneath cultural stereotypes in my artistic process. The grassroots, slow-lifestyle, and communitarian aspects of my art practice have grown alongside artists, curators, and local people of diverse age, gender, and cultural upbringings who share these aims.

Art can and does inspire sea changes, sparking robust tranformations that resonate with broader forms of cultural awakening.[14] By working with others in creative ways, artists and cultural workers resist extractive approaches to place by building meaningful social structures to nurture collective dreams. To this day my art, teaching, and activism remain in solidarity with the aim of "positive social change achieved through community-led initiatives."[15] Each year, I witness people depart and pass away in a community that has largely been left behind in the quest for speed and convenience. Currently, only five children reside in the town where my work was created, which is a common situation across rural Japan. While working in Setouchi, I learned how to actively acknowledge that my works only exist because of the participation, motivation, and vision of community members. Together with new and renewed sites—a bath house, gelato shop, bookstore, kayak guide, a saké brewery, and countless cafés—artworks are an attraction on the twelve islands and two ports where the Triennale is concentrated.

Initially reliant on a familiar museum model of attracting wealthy domestic and Euro-American audiences, the islands have grown into one of the most prominent examples of community-based art practices with year-round grassroots activities. Here, a sustainable revitalization project including people of diverse socio-economic backgrounds is underway.[16] After initial experiments with typical exhibition models from Tokyo and other metropolises on Naoshima, artist-turned-curator Yūji Akimoto developed a radical model in 2000, when he began linking artists face-to-face with islanders to make artworks intimately connected with local culture.[17] This developed into the "house project," in which historic sites were re-purposed and new houses were built in harmony with vernacular architecture inside small villages. Permanent artworks were installed on other islands including Inujima and Teshima, leading up to the launch of a large-scale rural triennial in partnership with the prefectural government and a private art gallery in 2010.[18] Now the methodology of artists engaging with abandoned places and local people over long periods of time is transforming regions into places of abundance at other festivals occurring across Japan and Asia.[19]

> *Of course, the area is afflicted by depopulation. However, the excitement upon seeing this bay for the first time, and the excitement of walking along the coastline later, will never be forgotten. It can be said that Sunset House borrows elements of the surrounding bay, mountains and villages as part of its scenery. I will surely have another chance to write about this house and garden. But most noteworthy in this garden is the open process of collaboration, participation and dialogue with the local residents. In that sense, this garden cannot be called an ordinary work of art.*[20]
>
> —Shinichi Anzai, 2013

Collective Dreams

The community-involving artistic praxis I engaged with for the project, *Sunset House: The House as Language of Being*, opens opportunities for cultural collectivity while also revealing situations where collectivity is not possible. A complex language weaves through social and material encounters on site. In this small shed infused with the stories of a defunct stone quarry, I was invited to hold summer workshops by the island town council along with thirteen other artists in 2010. At the site, I felt memories, stories, and hardships seeping out of the dirt walls, wood floor, and tile roof that compose the house. These feelings became visible through participatory workshops. Slowly acquainting myself with townspeople, listening to their stories, and reflecting upon all that had happened before me, I envisioned methods for remaking an existing structure into more than an "ordinary" artwork. Each person who had touched the structure shaped its existence thus far in decades past, yet it was now falling out of use, to the point where its existence could only continue if a new group of people were to actively touch the site in the present. The site required urgent care, so I began with repairing the floor and painting the interior walls with fresh mud together with artist Kō Maeda. Along the way at all stages, spontaneous small gatherings occurred inside and around the house as well as on meandering footpaths in the village. Upon finishing the tatami floor, informal gatherings lasted longer as Satsuki played her instrument, Satoru caught fresh fish to

share, Atsushi stood by chuckling, and the mayor would frequently stop by to observe all that was happening.

I utilized vernacular materials such as mud, upcycled tatami and *yakita* (burnt clapboards) while repairing the house. While this was in progress I wrote, "One by one each useless item finds a new purpose. Not necessarily useful but also no longer useless."[21] I also experimented with local materials in unconventional ways, including stone dust from granite and basalt mined on the island as well as upcycling ceramic rooftiles. The dust I mixed in with the mud to paint arc forms into the walls to show the links the small house has with the sky and earth. Many of the artists who stayed more than a few months on the island would get calls from Michael Yada whenever his construction company was on demolition job sites, as we shared his obsession with upcycling. One material I recovered from him included old black rooftiles. With another artist from France, I broke the tiles up using a hammer and spread them over the dirt floor inside the house, thinking this would make a cleaner interior and match the color palette of the mud walls. However, shortly after the triennial was over, the son of the owner asked the town council managing the artwork to have the rooftiles removed. I was informed of this in Tokyo but did not understand the underlying motives until later.

Over a year later, after returning to live as an artist-in-residence in a repurposed kindergarten on the island, I sat down with Satsuki's son Makio Kuroshima. We spoke at length while listening to jazz in his three-walled shed, which overlooked a modest hillside garden of persimmons, carrots, herbs, and more. I shared stories about how my artworks utilized local materials such as dirt and walnut husks, while he shared stories about his father and his grandchildren, while we sipped on coffee and ate fresh tangerines. I learned how he had taken apart and rebuilt the shed with his father after a landslide occurred in the 1970s. During a long and winding conversation, he explained why he felt rooftiles were intended for roofs, not to be stepped on, and so asked the town officers to remove them after I left. From a material aesthetic standpoint, I disagreed with him; yet I empathized with him as changes were made without including him in the communications. His care for the shed and the land became the underlying spirit that united us, as I too was falling in love with it now. Against the modernist trend of artistic genius, where art is *for* communities, I chose to prioritize people over aesthetics in order to work *with* the community members, leading to unpredictable results. Art with community, not for them. Each time I visited Shōdoshima from then on, I paid respects at the local temple, went to bring a gift for Makio and spoke with community leaders to ask what had changed in their lives. Ideas for the artwork would slowly arise afterwards in the air we breathed together. These conversations became the basis for a work that stood not upon stone, wood, and mud—material choices shift over the years—but with the core language of communication—seeking advice and making decisions together. The language of shared memories became the core framework for the work.

While repairing the walls during this period of residency, I opened the process to people of all ages. I invited everyone who wished to write on papers to have them become part of the mud walls (Figure 6.2). The essential work of replacing the exterior clapboards needed urgent attention as the sea salt and wind had taken their toll over time. But instead of completing the work in days, I extended the process of working with a local carpenter so the walls would remain open for months, allowing open participation to occur. While slowing the pace of carpentry and plastering work,

(caption on next page)

Figure 6.2 a) One of the residents, the late Satsuki Kuroshima, writing her note, "28 October 23 Heisei. Praying the soul of this artwork will become a great success. Do your best, Kuroshima," *for the interior wall of Sunset House*. Shōdoshima, Japan, 2011. b) One of the last notes still visible on the north wall of *Sunset House* before the community's song-and-dance closing ceremony, reads, "Folksong of Kōnoura: Come visit this great place of Kōnoura/The sound of pilgrims' bells echoes from mini Fuji in Spring ... Let's you and I embark on a trip together/We will make great memories!" Shōdoshima, Japan, 2011.

spirits at the site came to life. The exterior of the mud walls, which would normally have been exposed for only a number of hours, were kept open for weeks as people contributed wishes, dreams, and hopes for the future. This was a creative method of visualizing historic voices from the past that are at risk of being forgotten, and a way to collectively reflect on the future potential of the site. Wishes were only temporarily visible and were subsequently contained within the *yakita* walls of the house. As an outsider invited into the community by the public education sector of the island town council, I could bring people from rivaling towns, different age groups, and competitive schools together, to contribute to the project. For example, in one workshop, two elderly women who both loved the project but despised each other showed up. One served tea while the other retreated near the door to observe, without exiting. This taught me that conflicts exist not only in the visible forms of discrimination that I grew up with in New York City, but also *within* communities in less visible ways, a lesson that I continue to work with in other art projects.[22]

Artistic practice opens dialogue with and within communities. Intercultural dialogue is not just about Japanese, American, Korean, Chinese, or French cultures interacting, but is also about bridges between the elderly and youth, men and women, those born on the island and those who moved from other places, and among other subgroups often conglomerated into "locals." Every third year I observed artists on an international stage when the triennial would open. Yet, I found rich textures of intercultural dialogue with and within local communities in the years the triennial was not held. I saw the social landscape shift through the seasons and learned the structure was formerly used as a gathering place for employees of a basalt stone quarry known as the Mutsumi Clubhouse through the 1970s. The presence I had felt on the initial visit was confirmed as the house returned to its origins as a gathering place for locals, visitors, and guests to engage with one another (Figure 6.3). While sitting inside the house, one youthful islander who had just returned from living in Central America named Ayako Fujii said, "As a child, I wanted nothing more than to leave the island to live in a city. Now that I have seen that way of life, I see the appeal of local island culture and traditions."[23] Our activities within the house recirculated memories of the hands of those that had constructed and reconstructed the house after a landslide decades earlier. I hope that circulating these imaginative possibilities from the past could help shape an alternative future.

The language of participation is cloaked in risk
as more people gather the chances of danger increase
alongside communication comes the risk of damage
personal and communal wounds surface
As artists engage communities, we have responsibilities[24]

(caption on next page)

Figure 6.3 a) "Small Islands with Big Visions" roundtable discussion with Yasuo Hirai, Michelle Lim, Yoshitaka Mōri, Yoshiaki Kawata and islanders at *Sunset House* in autumn, during the Setouchi International Art Festival 2016. Photo: Lindsey Dewitt. b) *Sunset House*, 2016, interior view. Basalt stones, upcycled granite grain grinders and ceramic shards in foreground; upcycled tatami, tea table, historic television with documentary video co-created by participants and basalt dust arc shape inside rear wall connecting the house with the surrounding sky.

im/Possibility

Being multilingual, I am sensitive to the layered meanings of familiar and unfamiliar words. While working on *Sunset House,* I would at times contemplate simple and complicated words in both Japanese and English, to the point where I could think about little else. During this time, I discovered letters exchanged between the philosopher Martin Heidegger (1889–1976) and scholar of German literature Tomio Tezuka (1903–1983).[25] In my reading, their exchange of ideas provided ways of thinking through the space between languages. I discovered the possibility that language could express the impossibility of words corresponding with memories, thoughts, dreams, and feelings. Along the pathway of making this work, the site hosted many exchanges in language: from casual conversations and informal tea gatherings to popular musical events and scholarly roundtables.[26] While reflecting upon conversations with people on Shōdoshima, the latent memories of our words felt true to the language of participation. *Because* the words were not visible, there was a necessity for them to be *felt.* Thus, words would remain inside of its walls, underneath the garden, and serve as witnesses to all of our contributions seen clearly with the heart. The house would be kept alive with the words themselves contained within.

Language itself creates and sustains this house of being, forming the subtitle for this artwork, "the house as language of being." In their letters, Tezuka and Heidegger reflected on the meaning of words in both German and Japanese. Their concept of "language as the house of being" deeply influenced me while I was reading them in English, my native language. In the work, *Sunset House,* I have reversed "language" and "house." This is because the house does not exist as a philosophical tool for contemplating language in the project of *Sunset House.* Rather, here on the island it is the language of being, by townspeople, artists, visitors, and distant audiences, that sustains the physical house. The material structure of the house is a vessel for words that cross national, urban-rural, and socio-economic boundaries to become a collective space for reflection and storytelling. Architectural materials such as mud walls, *yakita,* granite, basalt, tatami, and bamboo appear to keep the house together; but symbolically and metaphysically it is the collective language that holds this house together.

This language is composed of creative miscommunications, accidents with words, and playful communication circulated in the physical structure itself. Without this collective language, the house will slowly disintegrate into the earth, as can be seen in so many other buildings dotting the Japanese countryside.[27] The insertion of papers into the walls and writing on the stones has activated the site. When considered individually, these acts embody personal thoughts and private hardships. Together and collectively, they breathe new life into the house, lifting it into the sky.

Each issue arising here is part of an ecological network of relations, stimulated by the artwork and nurtured or destroyed by participants. Through the intersection, collision, and weaving of local and global cultures, new links are made between harsh realities and soft dreams.

After the second triennial, the house was repaired, and community leaders invested in the project. I learned from my initial experiences to consult them frequently; thus, I have shared sketches of my ideas at the community center for discussion at all stages since. I have learned to trust decisions made together, so negotiations over the design, materials, and scope of the artwork have been made out of collaboration with the community. Communication has broken down at times and we have passed through many emotional upheavals over the years. I am still not a local and never will be. I am not alone in this regard: one forty-year resident, married to a local islander, reported to me that he is also considered an outsider and will remain that way because he is originally from Kobe, which is just a couple of hours away by boat. There are long-standing rivalries among neighboring towns, personal feuds that go back generations, conflicts over land use between residents and the government, and a whole village of many, many strong voices and contradictory opinions. During the third year of the work, while offering the shed for shared dialogue between those who would not sit together in the same room under any other circumstance, I felt that *Sunset House* would stop being an artwork without the insertion of these difficulties and hardships.

The garden became a collective space for sharing these frustrations. Local and non-local participants wrote their difficulties, challenges, and hard feelings on the underside of granite stones and then arranged them by hand in the garden (Figure 6.4). These messages brought nourishment to an area used for the past two decades to burn garbage. The turning over of these granite stones from a local quarry revitalized the site. Its life comes from what already exists there, yet often remains invisible. Through participation, the language of being, which can only be seen during certain periods, can be felt anytime at the site. The artwork was created in a temporarily synergistic effort by community residents, town officers, the Triennale organizers, and myself, and sustained for a decade through shared language.[28] The messages contained within the house and the larger messages for redrawing hierarchies of center and periphery remain. Returning to the initial question posed at the start: what methods do my artworks show for understanding the world? Intimate relations in a small shared house can impact global understanding if we take responsibility for our actions and commit to the communities we work with. A commitment to communities requires embracing uncertainty as decisions are made according to non-hierarchical methods.

> *There was a time, not long ago, when "Asian Americans" did not exist.*[29]
>
> —Helen Zia, 2006.

Conclusion: Durational Dancing

This chapter aims to contribute to the wave of knowledge about what American Art in Asia has, does, and might mean in the future. What is the "American Asian story" and why does it matter today?[30] An alternative to hegemony is urgently needed now. Perhaps an examination of my praxis and other artists based outside of America will

Figure 6.4 James Jack, *Sunset House: The House as Language of Being*, 2010–2020. Granite, basalt, *ubame* oak tree, *yakita* clapboards, mud walls with granite and basalt dust, wishes, hopes, dreams, tatami, pine, broken ceramics, 40-minute digital video, hardships, fears and challenges. Photo: Shintaro Miyawaki.

contribute to an expanded lexicon of cultural practice in the future. In the current global art scenes linked by a network of digital platforms, what is more important is self-consciousness of belonging, which involves countries where artists reside and interact, their praxis with local and global audiences, and their web of mutual relations. This shift of thinking aids artists, thinkers, and cultural practitioners in critically evaluating their praxis and artworks—a theoretical method we can employ. While retaining awareness of distinctions between American and Asian contexts, I find a resonance between what we are now attempting to describe and what Asian Americans felt did not exist.[31]

Attention should be paid to the problematic, hierarchical legacy of artworks created with a U.S.-centric approach in Asia, and those created in North America then shipped to Asia for dissemination. Based on exhibitions, publications, and critical perspectives on exchanges between East and West throughout the past century, we must now move towards defining artistic praxis as interrelations not between two places, but between artists and audiences who reside in two or more places. Crossings between Asian artists and America, or American artists and Asia, can complicate discourses based on an artist's birthplace and citizenship. I earnestly ask myself whether I practice "American art" in Japan—an archipelago on the Western edge of the Pacific Rim. No matter how long I engage with communities in Japan, townspeople still consider me a foreigner—a non-local like the husband from Kobe.

According to curator Masahiro Ushiroshōji, Asia redefined itself on its own terms in the 1990s: "The curtain is about to close on Asia's modern age, when learning from the 'West' was insisted upon as an absolute value. In keeping with this, the framework of the 'modern period' of Asian art is also being transcended."[32] America can now redefine itself in terms relevant to the discourse of transnational art praxis. This chapter has outlined artistic approaches based on a collectivity informed by my knowledge of inter-Asian diversity today. If the shortcomings of multiculturalism in America, as aptly described by curator Susette Min, are applied to American artists practicing in Asia, I propose an adaptation that includes "decentralization matters" and "inclusion matters."[33] In other words, breaking down centralized hierarchies gives birth to ways of working with communities where artists are in residence and engaged in *longue durée* projects while using inclusive methods of participation that foster intimate forms of social change.

The spaces between "living," spoken words and "dead," written scripts, are activated at *Sunset House*. The issues arising here from one durational American artist's praxis in Asia today diversifies the directionality of artistic influence to date.[34] In spite of increasing attention paid to socially-engaged art in Asia, there is still a need for a more expansive lexicon of diverse practitioners in the region of Pacific Asia beyond the ethnonational political hegemony. As increasingly global visitors meet local people in art sites such as Setouchi, social interaction is not only about finding commonalities or feel-good art, but also about dealing with conflict and understanding distinctions—and discovering methods for social change in one's own community. Artworks alone do not replace social welfare, reverse the concentration of economic and cultural resources in urban areas, or alter extreme rates of population decline.[35]

Sunset House is one site which demonstrates how cultural hierarchies are broken down, and a collective language is made possible, when diverse audiences nurture and cultivate horizontal relationships within complex social landscapes. While nationalism, isolationism, and exceptionalism unfurl along with the pandemic, artistic sites like these include not only cultures circumscribed within national borders, but also cultures shared between islands and migrant people. In the uncertain future of both this artwork and the world at large, I am reminded that existence of this structure rests not on its astute walls, floor and roof, but on its relationships with the local people who care, amend, and breathe with it. And they have transformed me as an artist; I now react to emotional turmoil more slowly, and am more conversant with local materials, surroundings, and where I work now. Remaining in harmony with the people and the place in which it exists, the artwork can be an archive for collective emotions and ecological testimonials—for that which is possible, impossible and more, tangled in a net of continuing relations.

Notes

1 Artist memo, "Thoughts upon leaving the island," February 14, 2013.
2 Artist in conversation with Satsuki Kuroshima, August 2, 2012.
3 In searching for the language of American Asian Art, I am indebted to artists and scholars in the field of Asian American Art including Robert Lee, Margo Machida, Karin Higa, and others who articulated the framework for their own works, identities, and positions within contemporary art.

4 Art historian Michio Hayashi "cautions us not to readily and effortlessly discuss 'Asia,' ... should we discuss the concept, we should pause before the word is articulated, and prolong the pause for as long as possible, so that we can take a closer look at the convoluted issues at hand. ... 'Asia' is a concept that was created by Europe, but was later internalized by those in Asia as a concept that counters the West, as well as a process that builds a self-defined idea of Asia within a diverse range of co-existing cultures." See *Count 10 Before You Say Asia: Asian Art after Postmodernism* (Tokyo: Japan Foundation International Symposium Report, 2008), 204–05.

5 "One may speak of collectives without necessarily positing a totalizing homogeneity among individuals or their particular concerns." See Margo Machida, "Reframing Asia America," in *One Way or Another: Asian American Art Now* (New York: Asia Society, 2006), 19.

6 Cooperative strategies borrowed from community oral history methodologies include conversations to discuss artwork ideas, open work-in-progress sessions and open processes for decision-making. Laurie R. Serikaku, "Oral History in Ethnic Communities: Widening the Focus," *The Oral History Review* 17, no. 1 (Spring, 1989): 71.

7 Eve Tuck, "Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities," *Harvard Educational Review* 79, no. 3 (Fall 2009): 409.

8 For example, I joined scholars in taking a stand against the American government's decades-long ban on Fram Kitagawa's entrance. His ideas for socio-cultural reform disrupt the grip of American militarism in postwar Asia, with a diplomacy of shared hope, agrarian revolution, and collective dreams. Jen Graves, "Keynote Speaker for UW's Conference This Week on Socially Engaged Art in Japan Is Denied Visa, He Says," *The Stranger,* November 11, 2015.

9 To understand the contexts for socially-engaged art in Asia, see Yasuyo Kudo and Hiroko Shimizu, *SEA Raundo tōku kirokushū: Āteisuto ha ima, sōsharī engeijido āto wo ika ni toraeteiru no ka? ["SEA Roundtable Record: In What Way are Artists Grasping Socially Engaged Art?"]* (Tokyo: Art & Society Research Center, 2019); Mia Nakamura et al., *Sōsharu āto rabo: Chiiki to shakai wo hiraku ["Social Art Lab: Opening of Region and Society"]* (Tokyo: Suiyosha Press, 2018); and Jay Koh, *Art-Led Participative Processes: Dialogue & Subjectivity within Performances in the Everyday* (Helsinki: University of the Arts Helsinki, 2015).

10 The Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale was the first large-scale rural art festival in Japan commencing in 1994 with General Director Fram Kitagawa in his home prefecture, Niigata. The first Triennale was held in 2000, with the public and private sectors collaborating from its 2009 iteration, in which I participated. On the "collective" approach (in Japanese: *kyōdō*, 協働, literally, "working together") in contemporary art, see Susanne Klien, "Collaboration or confrontation? Local and non-local actors in the Echigo-Tsumari Triennale," *Contemporary Japan* 22, no. 1–2 (2010): 153–78; and James Jack, "Art from What is Already There on Naoshima and Other Islands in the Seto Inland Sea," in *Introducing Japanese Popular Culture*, eds. Alisa Freedman and Toby Slade (New York and London: Routledge, 2018).

11 Fram Kitagawa, *Kibo no bijutsu, kyōdō no yume: Kitagawa Fram no 40 nen: 1965–2005["Art of Hope, Collective Dream: Forty years of Fram Kitagawa 1965–2005"]* (Tokyo: Kadokawa, 2005); and Fram Kitagawa, *Art Place Japan: The Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale and the Vision to Reconnect Art and Nature,* trans. Amiko Matsuo and Brad Monsma (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2015).

12 Other American artists residing in Asia include Michael Cherney, Richard Streitmatter-Tran, Waswo X. Waswo and Ashley Bickerton; artists who maintain residence both in Japan and the United States include Shingo Francis, Sarah Brayer, and Abraham David Christian.

13 Sam Francis' lifelong friendships and family relations with critics, artists and poets in Japan along with his artistic influence from Japanese culture and direct impact on artists including Atsuko Tanaka, Kishio Suga, and Aiko Miyawaki is markedly different from other American artists who visited Japan in the Postwar period. Richard Speer, *The Space of Effusion: Sam Francis in Japan* (Zürich: Scheidegger & Spiess, 2020): 181.

14 Examples include Hugh MacDiarmid's poems inspiring the Scottish Renaissance in the 1930s and Herb Kāne's paintings inspiring the second Hawaiian Renaissance in the 1970s.

15 Curator Healoha Johnston wrote, "James Jack is a social practice artist who engages layered histories tied to place as a way to concentrate on instances of positive change achieved through community-led initiatives." See the wall text of the exhibition, *Molokai Window* at the Honolulu Museum of Art (April 25–September 16, 2018).

16 In the late 1980s, creative activities began on the nearby island of Naoshima, initiated by the late Tetsuhiko Fukutake, who built a campsite for international students to visit in the summer, and followed by art and cultural activities by Sōichiro Fukutake which continue today after his retirement from Benessee Holdings.

17 This approach was embodied in Akimoto's exhibitions, *The Standard* (2001) and *Naoshima Standard 2* (2006) which became a foundation for *The Naoshima Plan* (2011). American art in Setouchi includes Walter de Maria's and George Rickey's sculptural works, 2D works by Andy Warhol and Robert Rauschenberg, and site-specific works by James Turrell, Mike and Doug Starn; slow process-based, participatory and socially-engaged works are made almost exclusively by artists based in Japanand slightly increasing numbers from Asia primarily under the curation of Kitagawa.

18 Namely, Kagawa Prefecture and Art Front Gallery.

19 Large-scale rural art festivals with a shared methodology are currently held in Niigata (est. 2000), Gunma (est. 2007), Okinawa (est. 2012), Shizuoka (est. 2014), Chiba (est. 2014), Nagano (est. 2017), and Ishikawa (est. 2017) in Japan, as well as in Madou (est. 2017) in Taiwan and developments are underway in China.

20 Blog entry by the late Shinichi Anzai (1960–2014), *Anchan no burogu jyazu furūtosōsha ni shite Tōdai jun kyōju Anzai Shiniichi no kutō no hibi!?* ["Jazz Flutist Performer Anchan's Blog!? Daily Struggles of University of Tokyo Associate Professor Shinichi Anzai"] http://ameblo.jp/laboriosus/theme-10018005558.html (accessed September 6, 2013), translation by author.

21 Artist memo, "Island thoughts," May 31, 2013.

22 This methodology of working through seemingly invisible conflict towards justice for those who are left out of dominant narratives has been an important facet of my work in Southeast Asia that deals with decolonizing place.

23 Ayako Fujii, interview in *Sunset House* co-created documentary video, 2013. Fujii began working at the local town office and went on to work for the Setouchi Triennale committee offices in Kagawa Prefecture.

24 Artist memo, September 2014, written after a young volunteer drowned while helping artist Hideyuki Usui install a work titled *Fart of the Gods* in Kōnoura harbor.

25 The phrase "language as the house of being" comes from Heidegger's "Letter on Humanism" (*Brief tiber den Humanismus*) in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell, trans. Frank A. Capuzzi (New York: Harper & Row, 1977). See Martin Heidegger, *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1971).

26 Two examples of events I organized include: *Musical Gathering* (2013), featuring Makoto Nomi, Bruce Huebner, Ryu Furusawa, Akira Tanabe, local residents and *Small Islands with Big Visions* (2016), a round table discussion involving the author, Yoshitaka Mōri, Michelle Lim, and local residents.

27 The disintegration of architectural structures in the Japanese countryside is often considered unfortunate, but these structures show us the limits of the constructed environment and human-centric thinking. Studies of ruins and the followers who obsess over them show alternative ways of thinking about high-speed growth models of industry and what they leave behind. See Tim Edensor, "The Ghosts of Industrial Ruins: Ordering and Disordering Memory in Excessive Space," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 23, no. 6 (2005): 829–49; and Tong Lam, "Japan Lost and Found: Modern Ruins as the Debris of the High-Speed Growth," in *Introducing Japanese Popular Culture,* 386–98.

28 *Sunset House* is transitioning away from collective management by the town office, Kagawa Prefecture, the artist and Art Front Gallery to return to Satsuki's children and grandchildren who currently envision building a second home for holiday gatherings at the site in the near future. Members of the elderly association that have cared for the garden and watched over the site are ageing with one key member now suffering from Alzheimer's

and others becoming less and less mobile. Support from the prefecture that supported the work has shifted away from the island to the city of Takamatsu and in 2020 soon after the onset of the pandemic the garden stones were all removed from the site leaving the house in a state of transition now.

29 Helen Zia, "Asian American: An Evolving Consciousness," in *One Way or Another: Asian American Art Now*, 10.

30 Robert Lee wrote about me, "This is the other side of the coin, not an Asian American but an American Asian story." See ARTRAIN exhibit catalogue, 2008, http://artasiamerica.org/artist/detail/164.

31 For example, citizenship in Asia is less permeable in many Asian nations than in the United States, as ancestry is more important than birth right or residence. In other words, being Japanese is based on whether or not you have Japanese ancestors, not where you were born or where you currently reside.

32 Masahiro Ushiroshōji, "Realism as an Attitude: Asian Art in the Nineties," in *4th Fukuoka Asian Art Show* (Fukuoka: Fukuoka Art Museum, 1994), 38; Patrick D. Flores, "The Curatorial Turn in Southeast Asia and the Afterlife of the Modern," in *Count 10 Before you Say Asia: Asian Art After Postmodernism*, 222.

33 Susette Min, "At the end of the day, multiculturalism was less about a comprehensive analysis of race and racism and more about a question of belonging, diverting deep analysis about race and racism into debates of political correctness and common core values.... Race matters.... Representation matters." See "The Last Asian American Exhibition in the Whole Entire World," *One Way or Another*, 38–9.

34 Exhibitions highlighting directional influence from West to East are numerous, and now there are examples reversing the binary. See Alexandra Munroe, *Third Mind: American Artists Contemplate Asia, 1869–1989* (New York: Guggenheim Museum, 2009). However, more complex, heterogeneous models of bi/tri/hybrid/mixed cultural identities, mobility and durational residence are needed to discuss artistic praxis occurring in Asia such as Wei-Hsiu Tung, *Art for Social Change and Cultural Awakening: An Anthropology of Residence in Taiwan* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2013).

35 For critical views on the danger of artists being seen as a replacement for social welfare, see Adrian Favell's talk "Sociology and Social Aesthetics: Japan as a Source of New Art Theory and Practice," *Socially Engaged Art in Japan: Questions for Contemporary Policy and Practice*, symposium organized by Justin Jesty, University of Washington, Seattle, November 12–14, 2015.