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Body-mind and art as inquiry: how do they meet up with human-environment relations in sustainable farming?

submitted by

Kei Yan LEUNG, M.Phil., B.Sc.

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Doktorin der Sozial- und Wirtschaftswissenschaften
(Dr.rer.soc.oec.)

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Supervisor:

Assoc. Prof. Dipl.-Ing. Dr. Ika Darnhofer Ph.D
Institute of Agricultural and Forestry Economics
Department of Economics and Social Sciences

Body-mind and art as inquiry

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Kei Yan Leung

Illustration designed by Megumi Hirose

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Vienna, 5 September 2022 Kei Yan LEUNG *(manu propria)*

Supervisory team and reviewers

Supervisory team

Assoc. Prof. Dipl.-Ing. Dr. Ika Darnhofer, Ph.D

Assoc. Prof. Mag. Dipl.-Ing. DDr. Hermann Peyerl, LLM

Dipl.-Ing. Dr. Lena Luise Schaller

Institute of Agricultural and Forestry Economic

Department of Economic and Social Sciences

University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna (BOKU)

Dr. Jeroen De Waegemaeker

Flanders Research Institute for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (ILVO)

Reviewers

Prof. Lee-Ann Sutherland, PhD

Director of International Land Use Study Centre

The James Hutton Institute

Aberdeen, UK

Assoc. Prof. Julie Crawshaw, PhD

Department of Arts

Northumbria University

Newcastle upon Tyne, UK

Preface

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List of publications

Publications that comprise the main part of this cumulative dissertation

Paper 1

Leung, K. Y., & Darnhofer, I. (2021). Farmers as bodies-in-the-field, becoming-With rice. *Sustainability, 13*(14), 7660. MDPI AG. doi.org/10.3390/su13147660.

Declaration of authorship:

Kei Yan Leung: Conceptualisation, formal analysis, writing—original draft preparation, writing—review and editing, methodology, investigation, data curation

Ika Darnhofer: Conceptualisation, formal analysis, writing—original draft preparation, writing—review and editing, supervision, funding acquisition

Paper 2

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Kei Yan Leung and Line Marie Thorsen: Conceptualisation, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review and editing

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Leung, K. Y. (2022). Reflections on doing cross-cultural research through and with visual methods. In Co-Creativity and Engaged Scholarship (pp. 265-297). Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-84248-2_9

Abstract

In research on farmers who engage in sustainable practices, there is growing body of scholarship exploring how more-than-representational experiences, e.g., affects, emotions, and senses, shape or otherwise relate to farmers' sustainable practices. However, this research has been critiqued for staying only at general descriptions of feelings and everyday life moments. The present thesis seeks to address this challenge by proposing a transactional perspective based on pragmatism, a philosophical approach that focuses on practices and actions, to complement the investigation of more-than-representational experiences. Informed by the work of John Dewey, this thesis makes sense of transaction as a process of humans and their surrounding environments co-evolving and co-constituting one another. It explores how transactions, mediated by body-mind and art, respectively, uncover more-than-representational experience of farmers when they engage with their surrounding environment. Twenty-five rice farmers who engage in sustainable practices in communities that are part of the Echigo-Tsumari Art Festival (ETAF) in Japan were interviewed. This thesis comprises two journal articles and one book chapter: Paper 1 explores how the bodily sensibilities of the farmers transact with the environment(s) and facilitate their alternative approaches to farming. The book chapter uncovers how ETAF's art transacts with the daily life and the work of farmers and creates meanings. The book chapter reflects on the methodological challenges of researching farmers' more-than-representational experiences that emerged during the transactions between body-mind and farming and art and farming. As such, this thesis shows the potential actions and practices that more-than-representational experiences in farming can bring about, thus advancing our understanding of how farmers engage in and appreciate their sustainable practices.

Kurzfassung

In der Forschung über nachhaltige Praktiken in der Landwirtschaft wird ein großer Fokus daraufgelegt, wie Repräsentationen, z.B. Werte und Ideologien, die Praktiken der Bauern prägen. Es gibt eine zunehmende Anzahl von Forschungsarbeiten, die untersuchen, wie Sinneseindrücke, Affekte und Emotionen mit dem Engagement von Bauern für nachhaltige Praktiken zusammenhängen. Diese Forschungsergebnisse werden jedoch von manchen Forschern angezweifelt, da sie nur bei allgemeinen Beschreibungen von Gefühlen und Alltagsmomenten bleiben. Diese Arbeit versucht, eine auf Pragmatismus basierende, transaktionale Perspektive anzubieten; den Fokus statt auf Abstraktion und festen objektiven Wahrheiten auf Praktiken und Handlungen legt, um die Untersuchung der über das Begriffliche hinausgewachsenen Erfahrungen zu ergänzen. Fundiert auf der Arbeit von John Dewey gibt diese These der Transaktion einen Sinn als einem Prozess, bei dem sich Menschen und ihre Umgebung gemeinsam entwickeln und gegenseitig formen. Am Beispiel nachhaltiger Landwirtschaft wird untersucht, wie Transaktionen, vermittelt durch Körper-Geist bzw. Kunst, mehr als repräsentative Erfahrungen von Bauern enthüllen, wenn sie sich mit ihrer Umgebung auseinandersetzen. Unter Verwendung des Echigo-Tsumari Art Festival (ETAF) in Japan als Fallstudie wurden 25 Reisbauern befragt, die sich in lokalen Gemeinschaften für nachhaltige Praktiken einsetzen. Diese Dissertation besteht aus zwei Artikeln und einem Buchkapitel: Artikel 1 untersucht, wie die körperlichen Empfindungen der Bauern mit der Umwelt zusammenwirken und ihre alternativen Einstellungen zur Landwirtschaft begünstigen. Artikel 2 deckt auf, wie die Kunst von ETAF mit dem täglichen Leben und der Arbeit der Bauern zusammenwirkt und Bedeutungen schafft. Das Buchkapitel sinnt über die methodischen Probleme der Forschung über die Erfahrungen von Bauern nach, die während den Transaktionen zwischen dem Körper-Geist-Konstrukt und der Landwirtschaft entstanden sind.

1. Introduction

While social scientists have primarily focused on representations—discourses, values, concepts, and beliefs—to make sense of the world, studies that explore more-than-representational theory, an extension of non-representational theory (NRT), are growing in rural social research. NRT[1] is an umbrella term for approaches that take into account practices, affects, emotions, and senses to make sense of human-nonhuman (a general term in NRT to refer to plants, animals, abiotic things) interactions in the 'more-than-human, more than-textual, and multi-sensual world' (Lorimer, 2005, p. 83). These approaches draw on different theoretical perspectives, such as new materialism, poststructuralism, actor-network theory (ANT), science and technology studies, feminist theories concerning embodiment, and more (Jones, 2008; Lorimer, 2005).

NRT does not conduct qualitative research in a fundamentally different way from traditional, representational-oriented approaches. However, it seeks to add to traditional research methodologies by attending to how the present unfolds in the future rather than how the past is reported (Vannini, 2015), to 'enliven rather than report, to render rather than represent, to resonate rather than validate' (Vannini, 2015, p. 15). Ingold (2011, cited by Vannini, 2015) vividly conveys how NRT can be distinguished from representational research approaches through a drawing of a salmon: NRT is oriented towards drawing lines that encapsulate the movements of a salmon and resonate with its doings and becomings, rather than lines that take the shape of the body, head, tail, and fins, lines that most of us might draw.

However, existing discussions of more-than-representational theories tend to focus more on theoretical understandings of an animated fish than how to draw and convey an animated fish. In other words, theoretical contributions (see e.g., Anderson, 2006, 2016; Deborah Thien, 2005; Harrison, 2000) seem to outweigh methodological ones (Sutherland, 2021; Vannini, 2015). Since it is challenging for researchers to grasp pre-conscious doings, feelings, affects, and becomings (Sutherland, 2021), more-than-representational experience is difficult to capture because traditional qualitative methods, such as interviews, are essentially

[1] More-than-representational theory differs from NRT because it does not deny or ignore representations, reasons, and values that are deliberate (Lorimer, 2005). Although the definitions of the two approaches are different, these differences are not directly relevant to this thesis. I use the more inclusive term 'more-than-representational' and attend to how the theory underscores the interdependence and materiality of human-nonhuman interactions; the term 'NRT' is only used when it is used in a reference.

'representational' (Phillips, 2014, cited by Sutherland, 2021). Even more challenging is that NRT concerns not only the experiences of humans but also that of nonhumans. However, it is almost impossible to testify to and predict the nonhuman world, everything changes once we leave the laboratory, when scientists can no longer use their instruments to mediate and control nonhuman forces (Stengers, 2000, p. 128, cited by Blok and Jensen, 2019). Hence, NRT is deemed difficult to operationalise to engage with the real world; instead, it resorts to general statements about what happened (Jones, 2008) and being 'hospitable' to everything and everyone that arrives (Dewsbury et al., 2002, p. 438, cited by Jones, 2008). While some scholars believe that it is impossible to fully achieve the ideal outcomes of more-than-representational theory (see Sutherland, 2021; Vannini, 2015), they suggest we could still strive to 'fail better' (Vannini, 2015, cited by Sutherland, 2021, p. 683) and maximise the understanding that could be gained from using the theory.

Building on this hope of 'failing better', I grapple with the challenge of operationalising more-than-representational theory. To do so, I follow geographer Owain Jones' (2008) proposal about what pragmatism—a philosophical approach that resists abstraction and fixed objective truths and adheres to empirical actions and practices—could add to NRT: it shares NRT's future orientation, and goes beyond feelings and emotions to ask what new actions and ethics such feelings could bring about (Jones, 2008). I focus specifically on the pragmatist concept of *transaction* to illustrate how it might strengthen the operationalisability of more-than-representational theory, specifically in a case study of sustainable farming, which is broadly defined as practices that replace mainstream, industrial practices with traditional, environmentally sustainable practices suitable to local agro-ecosystems (Gliessman, 2017). Informed by the work of philosopher John Dewey, a transaction is understood as a process of co-constitution between humans and nonhumans in the physical, social, and cultural environment (Bridge, 2013). Through a transactional perspective that sees farming as a co-constituting process between farmers and their farming environment, I explore how more-than-representational experiences of farmers emerge, and uncover the actions that these experiences may bring about.

As both NRT and pragmatism see the world as fluid, uncertain, and pluralistic, they point towards more performative research practices that move away from revealing the fixed truths out there, but which seek to craft knowledge of the world (Dewsbury, 2009; Jones, 2008). As such, I build on human geographer John-David Dewsbury's (2009, cited by Vannini, 2015) approach of drawing inspiration from arts and embodied living. Employing body-mind experience and art as a medium, I scrutinise the transactions between farmers and their surrounding environment when they practice sustainable farming.

Using the Echigo-Tsumari Art Festival (ETAF) in Japan as a case study, this thesis consists of three publications—two journal articles and one book chapter. Based on interviews and focus group discussions with 25 farmers, I illustrate how body-mind and art have transactional qualities that mediate and reveal more-than-representational experiences in farming. In particular, I focus on how they reveal human-environment relations in farming and potentially motivate sustainable practices of the interviewed farmers. Paper 1 focuses on exploring how body-mind experiences, such as affects, senses, feelings, and practices, facilitate transactions that allow the interviewed farmers to make sense of farming differently from mainstream practices, and thus engage in farming differently. Paper 2 shows how art transacts with the work and everyday lives of the farmers, including their connections with the surrounding environment. It validates their farming efforts and inspires reflexivity about their farming approaches. The book chapter reflects on the challenges of capturing and relating to the farmers' more-than-representational experiences during their transactions between body-mind and farming and between art and farming.

In what follows, I first give an overview of how more-than-representational theory is employed in literature about sustainable farming; after that, I introduce the concept of transaction and explain how it relates to more-than-representational theory. I then suggest how body-mind and art reveal transactions that uncover human-environment relations in farming, and therefore potentially expand understandings of more-than-representational experiences within these relations. Next, I summarise the key points in the three publications in terms of how a transactional perspective adds to more-than-representational understandings of the sustainable practices of farmers. I conclude with a summary of key findings, reflections on the limitations of this thesis, and suggestions for future research.

1.1. More-than-representational experience in sustainable farming

In studies that examine how farmers make sense of their sustainable practices, researchers focus primarily on ideology and ethical concerns regarding environmental issues represented through reasons, values, and reflexivity. For instance, to explain the non-economic factors that motivate farmers to convert to organic practices, researchers have highlighted motives such as farmers' environmental concerns (Cranfield et al., 2010), moral or ethical beliefs in terms of human-nature relations (Fairweather & Campbell, 2003), or inspirations from organic philosophy (Fairweather, 1999). These motivations and convictions also shape farmers' decision-making; for instance, they are linked with how farmers adapted to a marginal land environment and carried out sustainable practices to preserve soil

productivity (Preissel et al., 2017). In research that explores farmers' 'good farming' identity, holding a moral and reflexive concern for the environment is an essential characteristic (Stock, 2007). Similarly, one study on a group of smallholding farmers engaged in 'alternative' sustainable practices showed how they distinguish themselves from conventional farmers by stressing their ethical relations with nonhumans (Holloway, 2002).

While these studies offer insights into why farmers adopt sustainable practices, they are limited to representational experiences that farmers consciously express. There is relatively little attention to how farmers actualise these values and ideologies through more-than-representational engagement with nonhumans, or how the materiality of nonhumans—the physical aspects of how nonhumans are enacted relationally—relates to these values, an important consideration, as farming is an activity that involves various nonhumans such as plants, soil, water, trees, machines, and climate. In this regard, more-than-representational theory allows researchers to consider the relationship of nonhuman forces and their materiality in understanding the practices of farmers.

A growing body of work employs more-than-representational theory to study sustainable farming. In this body of work, farming, farmers and their farms are reconceptualised such that the inseparability of human and nature, body and mind, is central (Darnhofer, 2020). For instance, informed by assemblage theory (DeLanda, 2016), farming is theorized as a series of complex assemblages between farmers and nonhumans such as plants, soil, seeds, animals, machines, and regional climate (See e.g., Sutherland & Calo, 2020; van den Berg et al., 2018). To challenge the body/mind separation, farmers are seen not just as rational thinkers, but as people who think and sense with their bodies (Darnhofer, 2020; e.g., Carolan, 2008). Based on actor-network theory (ANT), the farm is conceived of as a composition of nonhuman actants who continually shape and are shaped by the actions of humans (See e.g., Dwiartama, 2017; Dwiartama & Rosin, 2014). These approaches highlight the materiality of nonhumans and the interdependent relationships between farmers and their surrounding environments.

More-than-representational theory, however, comes with methodological and analytical challenges. In the following, I propose using the pragmatist concept of transaction, especially the work of John Dewey, to supplement the application of more-than-representational theory to studies of sustainable farming. I explain how a transactional perspective enriches understandings of more-than-representational experiences.

1.2. Transaction

From a Deweyan perspective, a *transaction* stresses the ongoing process of how humans are simultaneously constituting and constituted by their environment. Unlike an *interaction*, in which the characteristics of the elements and organisms remain fixed, a transaction suggests that the elements and organisms are co-constitutive (Sullivan, 2001). To differentiate interaction and transaction, philosopher Shannon Sullivan (2001) used the metaphor of a tossed salad and a vegetable stew: an interaction resembles a tossed salad in which individual vegetables are mixed so that they are juxtaposed with each other; a transaction resembles a vegetable stew in which the ingredients' taste is intermingled, and they all taste different than when they are eaten by themselves.

In making sense of human-environment relations, the approach of non-representational theories (NRT), such as ANT, assemblage theory, and new materialism, resembles a tossed salad, in which humans and the environment are considered non-hierarchical and symmetrical (Ash, 2020), and human actions are understood through how the two form relations. Before entering these relations, the agency of both entities is seen as pre-given and fixed; changes to the entities are effectively deemed as happening due to outside forces, through forming relations with other entities (Ash, 2020). These assumptions have been questioned by anthropologist Tim Ingold (2016) and sociologist Mustafa Emirbayer (1997), informed by Dewey's work, regarding how they neglect how humans and nonhumans can transform from within; these assumptions have also neglected human decision-making (Bridge, 2013), responsibility, and morality (Waelbers & Dorstewitz, 2014) through the way they eliminate differences between humans and nonhumans.

Compared with NRT, transaction attends more to human intelligence—humans' ability to predict consequences and changes—in understanding human-nonhuman relations (Waelbers & Dorstewitz, 2014). While taking human actions into account does not essentially mean returning to the hierarchical mode of differences, a transactional perspective conceives humans and nonhumans as within and co-constituting each other (Bridge, 2013). In this ongoing process, humans and nonhumans do not stand by themselves as separate units; instead, they gain their whole being by interacting with each other (Emirbayer, 1997). Therefore, the agency of the entities evolves according to the dynamic of any given situation (Emirbayer, 1997), i.e., it is a 'co-authored product of human and nonhuman elements' (Waelbers & Dorstewitz, 2014, p. 26). Sociologist Francois Dépelteau (2015) highlights the notion of agency in a transactional perspective using an example of how a child and a father influence the actions of each other: when a father and a child play a game, the child acts in

certain ways 'only and partly because the father is also there and doing what he is doing' (Dépelteau, 2015, p. 55).

To understand how agency evolves in a transaction, it is important to make sense of how it is underpinned by the notion of experience, defined by Dewey (1934/2005, p. 36) as a product of continuous interaction (transaction) of live creatures and environing conditions in the very process of living'. When one acts, s/he is enacting or undergoing experience, in which the acting is inside the experience (Ingold, 2016). But not all (inter)actions constitute an experience; an experience only occurs when the interaction is clearly differentiated from other interactions and breaks existing relations between the individual and the environment (Brédart & Stassart, 2017, p. 3). Hence, to experience is also to transact, as it is a co-constituting process between one's action and existing human-environmental relations; in this process, agency is evolving in the undergoing of the experience, and the experience itself is also unfolding with the changing agency. Therefore, from a transactional perspective, experience reveals the transformation of the agency of an entity.

By underscoring the unfolding of agency and experience, notably human experience in co-constituting their surrounding environments, a transactional perspective re-elevates the human experience and human-environment interdependence that are missing from NRT (Bridge, 2013; Crawshaw, 2019), not least by putting forward a more operationalisable approach to investigate human-environment relations. By stressing how entities are unfolding and co-constituting one another, a transactional perspective also underlines how entities are acting *with* each other and 'carry alongside one another' (Ingold, 2016, p. 14), instead of how they are simply added to each other. As such, rather than asking what the entities are, it suggests a mode of inquiry that attends to what entities can do and enable; it stresses actions that entities produce, experiences they enact, and exchanges among different entities. In the context of sustainable farming, a transactional perspective proposes a mode of inquiry that looks at exchanges among humans and their surrounding environments; the experience generated out of these exchanges, including more-than-representational experience; and what these experiences do and facilitate, in terms of farmers' engagement in sustainable practices.

To comprehend sustainable agriculture, attending to these aspects are crucial. Sociologist Michael Carolan (2006) has argued that the benefits of sustainable agriculture are not easily visible; this is because how and what we see is dominated by the knowledges and standards of conventional farming. For instance, if the focus is on immediate, production-oriented outcomes, sustainable agricultural practices may not be very compelling. To appreciate the

benefits of sustainable practices, it is important to scrutinise resource management more holistically and attend to slow changes of nonhumans, e.g., soil, plants, and microorganisms, together with embodied and embedded experience of farmers (Carolan, 2006). The further implication is that, to make sense of sustainable agriculture, we cannot just look at human actions or nonhuman forces separately but how the two go hand in hand and 'carry alongside one another'. A transactional perspective can help bring about this more comprehensive understanding of sustainable farming.

1.2.1. A pragmatic approach to study sustainable farming

Relatively little research employs Dewey's pragmatic perspective, including a transactional perspective, to scrutinise farmers' experiences. A notable example is a study that used Dewey's notion of experience to make sense of how livestock farmers transition to alternative feeding practices (Brédart & Stassart, 2017). When these farmers withdrew from conventional animal feeding practices, e.g., a fixed recipe of soybean cake, they had the chance to experiment and wonder about the conventional practices they had been following; it opened them up to surprises and uncertainties, which in turn reconnected them to their experiences of engaging with their farming environments. These experiences constitute Dewey's notion of an experience because of the way they brought astonishment and sometimes pleasure to the farmers when they noticed positive changes in their farming environment (Brédart & Stassart, 2017). More importantly, these experiences trained their attention on changes in nonhumans, e.g., cattle, weed and crops, and thus strengthened their ability to foresee and interpret the consequences of alternative approaches to farming. Brédart and Stassart illustrate how Dewey's perspective works in analysing the mechanism of farmers' actions and practices. It underlines how the farmers predict the consequences of their actions; interpret signs of the health of nonhumans, such as cattle and crops like ray-grass and clover; and gradually develop a conception of good breeding practices. Although Brédart and Stassart's (2017) analysis does not focus specifically on more-than-representational experience, it reveals how farmers' decision-making is co-evolving with the responses and changing conditions of nonhuman forces. This perspective could complement the supplanting of human experience in more-than-representational theory.

Informed by Dewey's pragmatic epistemology, another study explored the relations and values of soil and soil biota that farmers communicated through their practices (Hervé et al., 2020). Unlike most research that studies how values affect farmers' attitudes and behaviours towards soil, Hervé et al. (2020) did the opposite: they started with the practices of farmers,

i.e., what they were doing to their soil, to make sense of their values. As such, values are not considered to exist before actions, but rather to be constantly evolving with actions and their consequences. In other words, they are observable facts expressed through behaviours and attitudes. In this way, Hervé et al. (2020) showed how values, usually considered purely representational and cognitive, are inseparable from practices and doings, an important aspect of more-than-representational theory.

1.2.2. The transactional qualities of body-mind

To illustrate how a transactional perspective can improve an understanding of sustainable farming, I attend to farmers' body-mind experiences based on the more-than-representational experiences it enacts. I illustrate that its transactional qualities offer methodological value for showing how these experiences bring about actions to engage in sustainable practices. Based on Dewey's (1958, cited by Sullivan, 2001) perspective, the term 'body-mind' highlights body and mind as non-dualistic, i.e., cognition and the materiality of the body as a continuum.

In rural social science research, it is not new to challenge the body/mind dualism theoretically; however, research primarily revolves around the absence of dualistic body-mind but not looking for its presence within existing practices (2016, p. 142). Carolan (2016) has suggested searching for socio-material assemblages that create novel doings, feelings, and thinking within the existing system. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Carolan's argument has proven to be fruitful: positive change is perhaps emerging (Blay-Palmer et al., 2020), one that builds on a re-signification of alternatives that already existed before the pandemic, e.g., regenerative agriculture (Massy, 2020) and community-supported agriculture (O'Brien, 2020). The transactional qualities of body-mind also have the potential to identify socio-material assemblages supportive of alternative doings, feelings, and thinking among farmers. Yet, relatively few studies address the body-mind of farmers explicitly (except, e.g., Carolan, 2008) and empirically examine what it enables in co-constituting farming environments and alternative farming practices and approaches.

Viewing body-mind from a transactional perspective could shed light on these undetermined aspects of farmer's body-mind. From a transactional perspective, humans are always in transaction with the world through their body-mind (Sullivan, 2001). Sullivan (2001, p. 30) referred to this form of transaction as 'bodying', a gerund that connotes the process of the body-mind responding intellectually and physically to the world through co-constitutions with

various elements in our environment. Through transacting with the world, body-mind is also constantly constituted by the various environments around it. As such, not only does body-mind mediate or facilitate our transactions with the environment(s), but it is also part of those transactions and is evolving in the process.

In the context of sustainable farming, attending to the transactional qualities of a farmer's body-mind means considering the body-mind as an active, ongoing process that responds to and registers intellectually with the natural environment(s). In this process, the sensibilities of the body-mind are constantly shaped, often enhanced, by transactions with the environments; these would encourage farmers to take actions that are more favourable to their plants, soil, animals and so on. Therefore, body-mind has qualities that facilitate more ethical transactions between farmers and their farming environments. Notably, the transactional qualities of body-mind replace the mainstream research question 'how do farmers' values affect their actions?' with 'what can the body-mind of a farmer enable and bring about?'.

By underscoring what the body-mind enables, a transactional perspective on body-mind could consolidate research that explores farmers' more-than-representational experiences in sustainable farming, in which body-mind is ubiquitous but underrepresented in terms of its transactional qualities. For instance, through transacting with plants by touching and sensing, body-mind enlivens farmers' knowledge about the changing materiality of plants, which may facilitate practices that contribute to healthier plants and soil (Alarcon et al., 2020; Krzywoszynska, 2019). In addition, body-mind also transacts with the materiality of the farm and co-constitutes farmers' decisions and relationships with various stakeholders. Informed by ANT, rural sociologist Angga Dwiartama (2017) has illustrated how a bacterial disease in kiwifruit has shaped the adaptative capacity of farmers and influenced their social relations and decisions. By transacting with the materiality of kiwifruit and the pest, the body-mind of farmers, namely their frustration towards the disease, constituted a change in social relations.

Taking on body-mind's ability to facilitate and mediate transactions, I employ body-mind as a mode of inquiry, in which it acts to reveal human-environment relations in sustainable farming. Using body-mind as a mode of inquiry suggests that I do not study farmers' body-mind by itself by asking what their body-mind is; rather, I study *with* the body-mind of farmers by exploring what body-mind does and enables: the transactions that body-mind facilitates between farmers and their farming environment, the more-than-representational experiences these transactions enact, and the actions that these experiences result in. While looking at body-mind as transactions shows human-environment relations in farming, the experiences

that are induced also illustrate what it enable and result in. As such, using body-mind as a mode of inquiry of sustainable farming allow the research to go beyond the 'spectator view' that neglects the human role (Crawshaw, 2019, p. 307) in more-than-representational theory, but underscore how farmers and environment are co-constitutive and the changes in farming practices body-mind experiences enable.

1.2.3. The transactional qualities of art

The other mode of inquiry that this thesis employs is art, which is closely linked to body-mind through its transactional qualities. Drawing on Dewey's (1934/2005) theory of aesthetics, I position art as coming out of a wide range of processes that are not just limited to those defined by art theorists; therefore, art experience can arise in a variety of situations that are not just limited to those of artworks created by professional artists.

Based on Dewey's sensibility, art, too, has transactional qualities, especially in crossing the borders between body-mind and the physical, material world (Dewey, 1934, cited by Crawshaw, 2019). From the Deweyan perspective, art is a two-fold process: on one hand, when an artist creates art, she communicates her intentions by using the physical materials of the art to articulate her inner emotions (Crawshaw, 2019); on the other hand, when someone else experiences the art, the object of the art transacts with the elements and environments of her own life to co-constitute emotions and reflections. Applying Sullivan's (2001) vegetable stew metaphor, art is similar to an ingredient in a vegetable stew—it intermingles with different life elements and environments in the viewer's life and adds flavours to it. In this process, the viewer employs her body-mind, which could be exemplified as her senses and affect, to transact with the art and her own cultural, social, and political environments, inspiring reflections that could enrich her life.

Through its transactional qualities, art and artistic practices could act as a mode of inquiry for rural planners to make sense of the transactions between humans and nonhumans in space. Academic-planner and anthropologist Julie Crawshaw (2019, 2020) illustrated this through an ethnographic collaboration with two artists in Kultivator, a farming space that initiates and hosts exhibitions and workshops to explore alternative possibilities within and between art and farming. Through the artists' deliberate building of the farming environment, Crawshaw (2020) framed the artistic practices of Kultivator as a more-than-human transaction: the space is not just built through collaborations among humans; as it is an organic farm, the farmers also collaborate with the fields, animals, the buildings, and so on.

As such, the work of Kultivator is essentially about 'building space for working out the transaction of space' (Crawshaw, 2019, p. 312).

While Kultivator exemplified art's transactional qualities from the perspective of artists, some researchers focused on audiences' perspectives (Crawshaw & Gkartzios, 2016). They showed how audiences' experiences with art transacts the border between the physical materials of the art and body-mind experience. Through participating in a series of artistic workshops on an island, Crawshaw used an autoethnographic account to portray how her senses, such as hearing, and feelings, became enlivened to connect with people in the community and the natural surroundings, thus suggesting art's ability to diagnose ability of community and human-nature relations (Crawshaw & Gkartzios, 2016).

In rural social science research, there is increasing attention being paid to the benefits of arts in facilitating social and economic development in rural communities (See, e.g. Anwar-McHenry, 2011; Anwar-McHenry et al., 2018; Balfour et al., 2018; Mahon & Hyyryläinen, 2019). However, such research mainly focuses on the affordances of art as cultural capital or a resource (Gkartzios et al., 2019; Woods, 2012); relatively few studies explore how art, through its aesthetic and transactional qualities, influences the everyday life of rural residents. In particular, farmers as an art audience are rarely considered, except in how art has strengthened their sense of belonging in their community (See, e.g. Anwar-McHenry, 2011).

To address this gap, I look at the exchanges between farmers and art, and how these exchanges meet up with the sustainable practices of farmers. I use art as a mode of inquiry, in which art or artists are not the object *of* study. Instead, I study *with* art and attend to what art does and enables in the everyday lives of farmers. I explore the exchanges between art and farmers in enacting experiences that relate to the sustainable practices of the farmers. To do so, I scrutinise how farmers experience art, and how these experiences transact with their work and everyday farming life, in relation to their sustainable practices.

1.3. Research questions

Building on their transactional qualities, this thesis uses body-mind and art as modes of inquiry to study farmers who engage in sustainable practices, asking:

How do body-mind and art intersect with human-environment experiences in farming, and resonate with the sustainable practices of farmers?

To address this broad research question, this thesis consists of two journal articles and a book chapter. The individual research questions that the articles and the book chapter address are as follows:

Paper 1 thinks with the body-mind of farmers and asks: how do body-mind experiences, e.g., senses, affects, and practices, enable farmers to make sense of their environment differently than mainstream practices, motivating them to adopt more sustainable practices?

Paper 2 examines the art and aesthetic experience of farmers as art audiences. Using a broader conceptualisation of arts and aesthetics that considers the close linkage between art experience and everyday life, it asks: how does art meet up with the lives and work of farmers, and how does it reveal how farmers appreciate their sustainable practices?

The **book chapter** reflects on the methodological challenges of using visual methods in this research, which is set in a cross-cultural context. By discussing the difficulties of making sense of and relating to the body-mind and art experiences of the interviewed farmers, it asks: how do visual research methods supplement verbal interviews in understanding and presenting the experiences of farmers?

Through these questions, this thesis seeks to contribute to discussions of how farmers make sense of their sustainable practices from the perspective of more-than-representational experiences. It argues that, through their ability to uncover and underline the unfolding and co-constituting agency between farmers and nonhumans, body-mind and art provide methodological value for understanding human-environment relations in farming, going beyond describing more-than-representational experiences to reveal actions that consolidate the sustainable practices of the farmers.

1.4. Research methods

1.4.1. Case study: Echigo-Tsumari Art Festival

Echigo-Tsumari Art Festival (ETAF) is located in Echigo-Tsumari, a rural area that spans 760 km^2 in Niigata Prefecture, in northeastern Japan. Initiated in 2000, ETAF is a large-scale rural art festival that takes place every third year to revitalise local communities. Similar to other rural areas in Japan, the local communities suffer from depopulation, and there are many abandoned fields and houses. To revive these communities, ETAF organises a variety of art activities and places site-specific art, an art form that is created specifically for, or refers directly to, its located space, in abandoned fields and community spaces. As the area is

famous for its terraced rice fields, many of ETAF's artworks take form with the agricultural landscapes and underscore human-nature connections in agricultural practices. Hence, these artworks are not only made specifically for local environments but also for the local farming context.

Apart from drawing visitors from other places in Japan and even the world to visit Echigo-Tsumari, the art festival has also attracted farmers who would like to experiment with alternative practices, to reside. The first reason is that ETAF has created more job opportunities, prompting new farmers who want to start farming part-time and experience a traditional rural lifestyle to move to local communities. The other reason is, after more than 20 years of taking root in the area, ETAF has made locals more accepting of new ideas, making it easier for both newcomers and locals to engage in alternative and more sustainable approaches to farming. For these reasons, ETAF is as an ideal case for investigating the exchanges between farmers, art, and body-mind.

1.4.2. Data collection

From February to April 2019, I conducted semi-structured, qualitative interviews with 25 farmers. These farmers were selected based on their engagement in sustainable farming practices, which are defined based on agroecology scholar Steve Glessman's (2017) definition mentioned in the introduction. The interviews were conducted with the help of a Japanese-English translator; they lasted from 40 to 90 minutes, and they were audiotaped and transcribed in full.

In the interviews, I first asked how and why the farmers started farming; I invited the farmers to describe in their own words their farming approaches, how they developed these approaches, and how made sense of them. Instead of cognitive reasoning, my probes focused on understanding their feelings and making sense of their practices. In the second part of the interviews, I used photos of nine selected artworks in ETAF—those that relate to agricultural practices in the local area—to elicit responses regarding how they transact with the farming lives of the farmers. The farmers were first invited to pick the artwork(s) that impressed them the most and share how it related to their farming. In March–April 2020, I went back to Echigo-Tsumari to conduct three focus group discussions with 18 of the 25 interviewed farmers to share preliminary findings and follow up with the discussions about how ETAF's art related to their lives. In particular, I discussed with the farmers why some of them feel disconnected from ETAF's artworks and the qualities they find lacking in them.

Data collected from interviews and focus group discussions were coded with the software ATLAS.ti and analysed through inductive thematic analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). During the coding process, I tried to use with the farmers' original expressions of their body-mind experiences and how these relate to their farming environments and practices, as well as the ways that the artwork impressed or irritated them. I also focused on making sense of the transactions between their body-mind experiences or their art experiences, their farming environments, and their farming,

1.5. Contributions

This section summarises the three publications presented in this thesis and highlights their broader contributions to complementing more-than-representational theory with a transactional perspective. More detailed descriptions of research methods and findings can be found in each of the publications.

1.5.1. Paper 1

Using body-mind as an inquiry, Paper 1 focuses on the body-mind of farmers, revealing how it transacts with and co-constitutes the surrounding environments of the farmers, including soils, the farming landscape, rice plants, weeds, and more. It highlights how these body-mind experiences amplify the worth of engaging in alternative practices and facilitate new opportunities and actions to farm differently. As such, it seeks to go beyond describing more-than-representational experiences that the body-mind mediates by further elaborating on the actions and decision-making that these more-than-representational experiences give rise to, as well as farmers' ability to learn from differences and changes in their farming environments.

First, Paper 1 positions the body-mind of farmers as transacting the border between nonhumans in the environment and the senses, affects, and inner emotional selves of farmers, highlighting how these transactions facilitate sustainable practices. For instance, how and what farmers see in the farming landscape unfolds with their body-mind experiences: the landscape becomes more outstanding and appealing when it transacts with the work of weeding and transplanting rice by hand. Meanwhile, the enchanting sight of the landscape also brings a sense of connection with the environment and motivates farming practices that are more ethical. In these practices, the farmers acquire and actualise the

knowledge of taking good care of rice plants by constantly transacting with the environment through their body-mind. For instance, to understand what the plants need, the body-mind attends to those plants through senses such as touch and smell; to nurture the plants to grow, the body-mind constantly adapts to the farming environment and trains itself to become more sensitive and sensible. Hence, in the transactions between body-mind and nonhumans in the environment, what unfolds are not just farming skills and knowledge but also sensibilities, affects, and enchantment, more-than-representational experiences that shape farmers' decisions and actions.

Paper 1 secondly shows that in the transactions of rice farming, rice and body-mind are not two separate entities with separate agency but are interdependent. In sustainable rice farming, the practices of farmers influence the growth of the rice plants and their growing environments, but they are done in a way that adapts to the ecology of the rice plants and the surrounding environment. In other words, the rice plants themselves also shape how the body-mind engages in these practices. The rice plants grow in certain ways because the body-mind of farmers engage in certain practices that facilitate certain environments. Therefore, the body-mind of farmers and the rice plants are not acting independently but collaborating and co-evolving.

Third, Paper 1 I demonstrates that, through constantly acting with rice plants, the body-mind of farmers also enacts experiences that open farmers to new options and opportunities. When some of the farmers moved away from standardised conventional practices, engaging in sustainable practices allowed them to notice changes in soils, rice plants, and microorganisms; the transition thus constitutes experiences. These experiences allow them to see farming differently and notice new options; more importantly, they highlight the worth of sustainable practices in nurturing healthier rice plants and the environment.

1.5.2. Paper 2

Paper 2 explores how farmers experience the artwork of ETAF, in terms of how the art transacts with their farming life and environments to co-constitute reflections and feelings regarding their sustainable practices. Through these transactions, the artworks reveal human-environment relations in their farming and inspires them to reflect on these relations as well as their practices. As these reflections can validate the sustainable practices of the farmers, Paper II shows that if we attend to art's transactional qualities, its aesthetic aspects can also generate social impacts.

Through this more generous notion of arts and aesthetics, Paper 2 unravels the linkages between art and the daily lives of farmers. Informed by Dewey's (1934) aesthetic theory, the paper suggests that aesthetic experience emerges through art transacting with the environment and elements of the audience's life. In other words, art constitutes an experience because it is outstanding but in a way that it resonates with our daily life. Unlike a conventional understanding of art, which considers to be separated from ordinary life and linked with aesthetic knowledge and theories, this broader notion of art and aesthetics suggests a new perspective to appreciate how the art of ETAF transacts with the work and life of farmers.

Using data collected from interviews, Paper 2 illustrates how art transacts practically with farmers' work and everyday lives. For instance, a farmer may project himself into a particular artwork, considering it to reflect the adaption to nature in his farming practices and lifestyle. Hence, the artwork transacts with this specific and important aspect of the farmer's life—a close connection with nature. Therefore, it enacts an experience, and, acting as a reminder of his relations with nature, this experience validates his sustainable farming practices.

Apart from resonating with the life experience of farmers at the ideological level, the artworks also transact with farmers' everyday lives through their physical presence in the landscape. Situated directly in agricultural spaces, the artworks transacted with the landscape to facilitate social interactions and conversations that gradually inspired some of the farmers to appreciate their marginal farmland. In this case, art transacted with the farming life of the farmers through uncovering their relations with the farming landscape, and knowing these relations encouraged the farmers to preserve the landscape. However, to some farmers, the artworks do not always produce positive transactions. Sometimes they are conceived as out of place because they are regarded as contradicting with the farmers' relations with nature or farming practices.

These negative experiences inspire some farmers to reflect on their ideal artworks, ones that could transact with their lives. These artworks include traditional farming practices and lifestyles in local communities, which may not be conceived of as 'art' according to aesthetic theories, but based on Dewey's sensibility, could be considered art given the way they transact with the human-environment relations of the farmers and enact outstanding experiences. For example, when permaculture was included in ETAF's program and framed as an artistic practice, it generated an aesthetic experience for a conventional farmer because it created experiences that stood out from their conventional practices. This shows that for the farmers, regardless of whether something is defined as art by an art theorist, an

entity is art when it creates an outstanding experience that resonates with the human-environment relations in their farming.

Focusing on art's transactional qualities and what art does highlights how the more-than-representational experiences associated with art meet up with the more-than-representational experiences associated with farming through the ways they both transact with the specific landscapes and environments in Echigo-Tsumari. More importantly, the farmers' experiences with art do not just end at more-than-representational reactions such as feeling impressed, irritated, or touched. They also facilitate social impacts that validate sustainable farming efforts. Hence, instead of restating the common argument that focuses on art's economic affordance in rural social science research, Paper II proposes a new perspective to scrutinise art as well as the impacts and actions associated with more-than-representations experiences in sustainable farming.

1.5.3. Paper 3

Paper 3 is a book chapter that illustrates the challenges of capturing and making sense of the more-than-representational experiences that emerged during the transactions between the body-mind of the farmers and farming, and art and farming, especially in a cross-cultural context. To overcome these challenges, I used visual methods, specifically using photos of ETAF's artworks and paintings to complement interviews and communicate research findings. The book chapter reflects on these processes and on how body-mind and art relate to and complement each other in this research.

As a cross-cultural researcher, not only did I struggle with understanding experiences and practices through words, but I also struggled to understand embodied and emotive experiences tied to the Japanese language and cultural practices. Because of the differences in our culture and life experiences, how the farmers transacted with their environment through their body-mind and with art would never be the same as how I, a foreign researcher, did. Through reflecting on moments when I misunderstood the farmers and when I could not find words to communicate, the book chapter shows that even a perfect translation of words and representations is inadequate to fully relate to the experiences of the farmers, especially if more-than-representational experiences are taken into account.

To make up for the shortcomings of using entirely language-based research methods, I used photos of selected ETAF artworks to elicit responses in the interviews and make sense of the farmers' experiences with farming and art. Consistent with geographer Gary Bridge's (2013)

concept of art as a transaction, the pictures of the artwork transacted with the life and farming environments of the farmers to elicit body-mind-full reflections and experiences, such as practices, feelings, emotions, and sensuous experiences, in their farming and lives. In this sense, the artworks communicated by involving the body-mind; they thus acted as a catalyst of the body-mind experiences of the farmers, uncovering more-than-representational experiences that may have been left out of interviews that were only verbal.

Although the cultural and language differences have restricted how much I could relate to their experiences, and I was unable to see what they saw, these fissures between their seeing and my non-seeing, in turn, unfolded body-mind experiences that are often implicit and taken for granted. In the interviews, whenever I encountered responses that did not make sense to me, my probes encouraged the farmers to get to the bottom of taken-for-granted things and to explain how they unfold in their transactions with farming/body-mind/environment. Similarly, whenever I asked a question that seemed strange to the farmers or the translator or that they could not relate to, it underlined the discrepancies between our transactions that were usually worth delving into to uncover richer understandings of the farmers' experiences. More importantly, all these helped unravel layers of realities that were less straightforward, reasonable, and logical than would have been possible in interviews that are only verbal and that mainly focus on discourses and representations.

Apart from data collection, I also employed art, in the form of paintings, to communicate research findings based on the body-mind experiences of the farmers. In the book chapter, I share the experience of working with a Japanese artist in Echigo-Tsumari to convey three interview quotes highlighting three farmers' body-mind experiences through watercolour paintings. As someone who resided in the local area, had shared similar life experiences as the farmers, and had participated in one of the group discussions, the artist communicated the quotes by transacting with various elements and entities, including the paints, her life experiences, and the environments in Echigo-Tsumari, to constitute the emotions and understandings that she developed regarding the more-than-representation experiences in the quotes.

Through reflections on how I used visual methods based on art in my research, the book chapter demonstrates that the research itself is a process of the body-mind experiences of the farmers and art transacting with each other, in which the two co-constituted how the farmers responded to my questions, how I interpreted the data, and how I communicated the research results.

1.6. Summary and conclusions

In this thesis, I address the methodological challenges in operationalising more-than-representational theory. Most applications of the theory do not capture pre-conscious actions, feelings, affects, and becomings of both humans and nonhumans; the theory is also said to lack focus and to fall back on overly general descriptions of feelings and emotions. Although it is perhaps idealistic to fully comprehend more-than-representational human-nonhuman interactions, this thesis aims to 'fail better' (Sutherland, 2021; Vannini, 2015) and seeks to use the theory to gain knowledge that traditional, representational research approaches cannot offer.

Using sustainable farming as an example, I illustrate how the pragmatic concept of transaction can deepen an understanding of more-than-representational knowings of farmers through uncovering actions that more-representational experiences could give rise to. Since pragmatism stresses making sense of the world through actions and practices, transaction—through its attention to how humans and their surrounding environment(s) co-constitute each other—is particularly relevant for the context of sustainable farming, especially in understanding the processes of farmers and their farming environments shaping and being shaped by each other. While more-than-representational theory would end at the relations formed between farmers and the surrounding environments, a transactional perspective goes further to shed light on the human actions that these relations produce. This is because a farmer acts in certain ways only and partly because, for example, her plant takes certain shapes, e.g., looking healthier, to respond to what the farmer has done previously. A transactional perspective also underlines the transforming agency between the farmers and their environments. This transformation is revealed by the farmer's experience, e.g., feeling joyful, frustrated, or hopeful, etc., which only happens because this transaction with the plant is outstanding, meaning that it differs from previous experiences. This experience is a manifestation of transformative agency in both directions: the farmer has gained a better understanding of what the plant needs, and the plant is growing more healthily. By making sense of the encounters between farmers and their farming environments in this way, a transactional perspective can enrich the scholarship on more-than-representational experiences of farmers.

I use body-mind and art in particular to demonstrate how a transactional perspective works to supplement more-than-representational understandings of farmers and to bring to light the practices and actions beyond these understandings. I argue that body-mind and art can help reveal how more-than-representational aspects of human-environment experiences can

strengthen the sustainable practices of farmers. Using the Echigo-Tsumari Art Festival in Japan as a case study, I worked with 25 rice farmers in local communities through interviews and focus group discussions to explore the transactions between their body-minds and their farming, and their art and their farming.

I employ body-mind as a mode of inquiry because it reveals human-environment relations through its transactional qualities in facilitating and mediating transactions when humans make sense of their surrounding environments. To productively challenge the body/mind dualism, I propose looking at how farmers' body-mind and farming environments co-constitute each other to facilitate experimentation with alternative farming practices. By understanding how the farmers relate their body-mind experiences, such as affects, sensibilities, and feelings, to changes in their practices, I illustrate that more-than-representational experiences shape farmers' decisions and actions in engaging in more ethical farming practices.

Apart from body-mind, art is also used a mode of inquiry because of its ability to transact the border between the body-mind of the viewer and the physical environment(s), and to potentially inspire reflexivity related to the viewer's life. Using a generous conceptualisation of arts and aesthetics that considers the transactions between art and everyday life, I explore how selected artworks of ETAF, which relate to local agricultural practices, transact with the everyday farming lives of the farmers to create meanings. These transactions often include more-than-representational experiences that stand out because of the ways they resonate with aspects of the farmers' approaches to farming. In turn, these experiences help validate and substantiate these more sustainable approaches. As such, I show that art goes beyond creating more-than-representational experience and can have an impact in the real world.

In addition to the discussions of how body-mind and art act as a mode of inquiry to know human-environment relations in sustainable farming, I also reflect on the research process of employing art to study and convey body-mind experiences of the farmers. I take up Dewsbury's (2009) suggestion of engaging in more-than-representational research in a performative way: I do not strive to report what happened and explain the nature of things; rather, I recognise my position as a cross-cultural researcher, and how my knowing, cultural background, and questions have inevitably shaped how the farmers shared their experiences with me and how I made sense of and related to their experiences. Therefore, when I used art, in the form of paintings, to communicate research findings, it was not about describing the more-than-representational experiences of the farmers in the most accurate way. Instead, aligning with the vision Jones (2008) put forward for how pragmatism and NRT

could work best together, I seek to engage audiences to empathise with the more-than-representational experiences of the farmers, as if they are holding the farmers' hands, witnessing, and experiencing what happened when the farmers transacted with their farming environments or the art. Through the paintings, I hope to deploy art's transactional qualities to create reverberations of the doings and becomings of the farmers. Hopefully, these fold back into ongoing practices of farmers or the audiences (see Jones, 2008).

Focusing as it does mainly on the body-mind and art experiences of farmers who have adopted sustainable practices in Echigo-Tsumari area, this research is limited in how well it represents the experiences of farmers in other places. However, it demonstrates how more-than-representational theory can be operationalised in looking at human-environment relations from a transactional perspective. This research of course does not suggest that the transactional perspective can address all of the methodological challenges of more-than-representational theory. But in 'failing better', despite its limits in scope and representation, this research still illustrates how to gain further understanding about how more-than-representational experiences give rise to actions and practices that allow farmers to maintain more sustainable relations with their farming environments. Nevertheless, more research is needed to explore how other mediums or tools could help operationalise more-than-representational theory.

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2. Paper 1

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Kei Yan Leung: Conceptualisation, formal analysis, writing—original draft preparation, writing—review and editing, methodology, investigation, data curation

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Article

Farmers as Bodies-in-the-Field, Becoming-With Rice

Kei Yan Leung * and Ika Darnhofer

Institute of Agricultural and Forestry Economics, University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna, Feistmantelstraße 4, 1180 Vienna, Austria; ika.darnhofer@boku.ac.at
* Correspondence: natalie.leung@boku.ac.at

Abstract: Research on farmers has predominately focused on how they think through the mind, i.e., their reflexivity regarding farming practices and values, as well as their cultural and symbolic representations of farming. While this literature offers valuable insights, it builds on an underlying mind/body duality. Based on qualitative interviews with 25 rice farmers in Japan, this paper focuses on the body of farmers, in terms of how bodily senses shape how farmers make sense of their farming practices. We show that the body, as the site of interaction with matter, shapes the farmers' ability to be affected by rice plants. By honing their senses, the farmers learn to make differences and to perceive new possibilities, engaging in a reciprocal process of becoming-with the rice. This ability to develop sensuous engagements may contribute to farmers developing production practices that are in harmony with the local agro-ecosystem and more generally enable new imaginations, strengthening the possibility that things could be otherwise.

Keywords: new materialism; posthumanism; relations; embodiment; affect; Japan

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1. Introduction

Theorists in rural sociology have taken several approaches to conceptualize farmers. Most of these approaches have in common that they focus on how the farmers think, i.e., the cognitive processes underlying their choices. Thus, farmers are usually presented as explaining in a rational and logical way how their practices align with their preferences, motivations, values, and beliefs; and how they understand, reflect on, and take into account various technical, economic, or social constraints (e.g., [1–4]). While ambivalences and contradictions might be acknowledged, behavior is portrayed as the more or less direct outcome of cognitive processes. In this representation of farmer decision making, the farmer's body is often neglected. Such approaches thus conceptualize the body as auxiliary, passive, and there to execute previously thought-about plans.

However, the visceral, somatic experience of the world may also play a role in how farmers encounter the world. The ability of farmers to involve in the environment surrounding their farm and to have knowledge of nature are central for farm management [5–7]. To facilitate connections with the natural environment, the body may play an important role through sensations and sensing the environment [8], e.g., making sense of soil from a tractor, including the embodied feelings of how a tractor handles the soil [9]. Agri-environmental knowledge is also obtained in the process of doing (see [7,10]), in which experiences combine with the cognition of scientific knowledge to facilitate environmental conservation [6]. Experiential practices are important because they involve an ongoing process of enskillment [11] in which farmers 'get their hands dirty' to figure out how the environment would change under various circumstances of the farm. All this is not to deny that farmers plan and formulate objectives but points toward a more complex interplay of body and mind in how farmers make sense of the world.

Focusing on the body might allow us to understand farming from a different perspective. As Carolan [12] (p. 149) noted, modernized agriculture seems to be more interested in 'telling than listening, in directing rather than following, and in effecting rather than

in learning to be affected'. To shift perspective, it might be helpful to conceptualize farming differently, allowing us to attend to the material world and to explore the entanglements between humans and nonhumans. Farming can be understood as a complex inter-involvement of human body and human mind as well as multiple nonhuman actants, and how they together form an 'effective assemblage' (see [13] p. 88, [14,15]). This framing challenges the subject/object duality, and the hierarchy of power, where the capacities of mind of knowing subjects impose meaningful form on a passive object-world [16] (p. 64).

In this new conceptualization, the body of farmers plays a crucial role in building assemblages with nonhumans, and these assemblages are understood as influencing the farmers' practices. Researchers in care studies have shown examples of how physical engagements and how affective and sensorial involvements of the human body with nonhumans are important to facilitate good care (e.g., [5,17–19]). Through embodied encounters such as looking at and touching plants, farmers develop affects and feel their needs, developing attentiveness toward them [5]. Meanwhile, constant observations of the plants provide farmers feedback when they experiment with different farming approaches and may lead to practices that are more adapted to the local environment [17]. Care is not only facilitated through a material engagement of the body with nonhumans but also by the affective state of the body [18], and this state can be triggered by affective moments such as enchantment [20] (see [21]) and charisma [22].

In this paper, we build on Carolan's [12] (p. 136) invitation to unpack what farmers' bodies do (a performative-as-process claim) rather than focusing on what they are (a fixed ontological claim). We do not want to reduce farming to a specific set of crop production techniques. Rather, we focus on farming as developing a sensibility, a learning to be affected, that enables farmers to engage in an open process of becoming-with crops, animals, and soils. Our aim is thus to contribute to the debate of how we think and talk about farmers, in particular what influences their choices and why they engage in specific crop production practices. We argue that focusing on what the body can do allows new insights into how farming practices are shaped by bodily sensibilities, and how these can enable farmers to make sense differently and thus to see different opportunities. By framing farmers as bodies-in-the-field, we want to add to the discussions that counter the representation of farmers as primarily cognitive thinkers and the dichotomous representation of cognitive and noncognitive knowing. Instead, we focus on the interplay between senses and making sense in farming. By framing farmers as becoming-with their crops, we want to emphasize the role of interactions with the natural world, as well as the processual quality of these interactions. Indeed, the ability to be affected is not a given, but a process of engagement in a reciprocal relationship, built on developing the senses and on learning to make differences.

We start by clarifying our theoretical approach and exploring the conceptual openings afforded by nondualistic approaches to the bodymind. We then outline the study site and the qualitative interviews which were conducted with 25 rice farmers in Japan. In the interviews, we invited farmers to reflect on how they situate their farming experiences within their bodies, through their sense of sight, touch, and smell. In the results section, we present our major findings, focusing on how the farmers are affected by rice and how this ability to be affected enables the farmers to develop different relations with plants, with the soil, with the landscape. We also discuss how this ability of the bodymind to be affected is a sensibility that needs to be developed and how the farmer and the rice engage in a reciprocal and open process that enables different becomings. We conclude by pointing out how this approach challenges the notion of an inert, passive, malleable word onto which the farmer impresses her or his interests.

2. Conceptualizing the Body

The ancient Greek philosopher Plato suggested a dualistic view of mind and body, which has remained influential in western philosophy. Plato suggested that the mind (soul) is imprisoned in the body, and humans can only comprehend the world and develop intelligence by separating the mind (soul) from the body [23]. In the Renaissance, Descartes

carried forward the mind-body dualism to understand how humans possess knowledge; he focused on how the mind interacts with the body [23]. For Descartes, the body is an inert thing; it is 'not a *knowing* body, rather a *known* body, an object among others in a mechanical world' ([24] p. 37, emphasis in original). This may be seen as a secularized form of the spirit/flesh dualism in Christian thought, which contrasts an immortal soul with a mortal body. The mind and the physical body are thus distinct, with a self that 'experiences' itself as being 'inside' the body [25] (p. 352). Associated with the mind/body dualism is the rationalistic thought that reason, which is processed by the mind, is the source of knowledge, the body being subordinate to the mind. Ever since the emergence of the mind/body dualism in ancient Greece, it has generated many debates and criticisms among philosophers. Although it is just one of the philosophical thoughts among many other western philosophies, the mind/body dualism has played a crucial role in shaping the development of modern sciences.

A nondualistic view of mind/body appeared in Western philosophy when Merleau-Ponty reformed the phenomenology of Husserl and Heidegger and rejected the Cartesian view 'I think, therefore I am'. Merleau-Ponty [26] suggested that body is consciousness, it coexists with the world through sensing and sensations. He argued that perceptions and thoughts are not separable: we do not deduce 'I am' from 'I think'; instead, 'I think' rests on 'I am' [26].

In the last two decades, there has been a growing scholarship that strives to incorporate the embodied being of farmers and nonhumans. This builds on the work of social theorists who reengage with materiality (e.g., [13,27–31]). There is an assortment of labels that may be used to refer to their approaches, including 'the material turn', the 'ontological turn', and 'posthuman turn'. In different ways, they question hierarchical binaries such as subject/object, human/nonhuman, culture/nature, and with them the prioritization of the discursive and the representational, pushing toward a relational understanding of subjects and objects, acknowledging the dynamic powers of matter.

The East Asian philosophical tradition does not have the dualistic starting point of much of Western philosophy. There, the body is seen as an intimate part of attaining knowledge. Theoretical or conceptual understanding is seen as partial and insufficient, and to achieve full understanding, the body must live the knowledge [24,32]. For example, in Zen meditation or martial arts, the mind is trained and cultivated through bodily practice, so that the distortions of the mind can be corrected by training the body. The body is thus not mere matter; it is not just a container for the mind. It is something that is active in itself; it is a site of knowledge [24,32–34]. Japanese philosophers Watsuji Tetsuro and Yuasa Yasuo referred to this nondualistic view of humans as 'bodymind' ([35,36] in [24] p. 37).

The Japanese nondualistic 'bodymind' concept resonates with Western new materialist philosophical views. They both treat the human body as active and relational with nonhumans in the material world. In Japanese, human (*ningen*) is composed of the characters for people and social [24]. According to Watsuji ([35] in [24]), *ningen* is more than an individual: it is at the same time an individual and that individual in relation with others. *Ningen* is always also the in-betweenness, embedded in a network of relations—a network that does not only include human relations but also relations with nonhumans [37]. As *ningen*, we relate to other humans, nature, and the world of things through our body ([38], in [37]).

Although the philosophy of Watsuji is used as one of the main arguments to serve the myth of Japanese 'inherent affinity with nature' (the myth of Japanese 'inherent affinity with nature' is originated from the Shintoist idea of unity between human and nonhuman elements [39]; the myth has been used to serve various agendas, e.g., Japanese imperialism and nationalism) [40], and we by no means aim to argue Japanese uniqueness and total difference [41]. Instead, we identify three affinities between the Japanese 'bodymind' concept and the Western new materialist approach and build on these affinities to conceptualize Japanese farmers. By doing so, we take into account local theory culture [42] in Japan and recognize that knowledge in rural studies is not homogenized and monolinguistic.

Through identifying similarities and differences between Japanese and Western approaches, we build on the alternative understandings of a true 'global' countryside [43].

The first affinity is conceptualizing the body as active, engaged, and engaging, rather than conceptualizing the body as passively written in systems of thought, with no desires of its own [44]. The body is understood as an experimenting organism, which has the capacity to form new relations and has the desire to do so [44,45].

The second affinity is that the human body plays an important role in developing subjectivity, through its interactions with social and material worlds. As Deleuze and Guattari [27] argue, it is impossible to have a self without having a body, as the body links psychic experience with the forces of society and nature in creating a sense-of-self [25]. Indeed, the body is the site where our senses meet the material world, allowing to highlight how materialities matter in terms of their effects and affectivities [12,46–48]. Matter is seen as agentic, although not volitional, as affective but not 'willed' [16] (p. 64). Focusing on the body thus allows us to complement the question of: 'what does a farmer think of his/her farming practices?' with 'what can his/her body do?' This question is not about assessing bodily cause and effect. It does not refer to the functions of the body or of its parts. It does not refer to what the farmer can do while complying with social norms. It also does not refer to impositions by agro-ecological processes tied to crop production, such as the physical strain put on the body that is bowed over when weeding a rice paddy. These social, physical, and biological constraints are real, and their impacts must be considered. However, it does not mean that there is no beyond [44], and it is this beyond—beyond the physical limits of the physical body—that is the focus of attention.

The third affinity between the Japanese approach and Western approach is that both highlight the process of becoming, of transformation. What matters is the process through which the body opens to other possibilities. In the Japanese approach, the focus is about how to train the body to cultivate and transform the mind [36]. Similarly, the western approach asks what a body can do and focuses on what can affect a body and what a body can affect, i.e., the psychological, emotional, and physical relations it can form or engage with [25] (p. 356), [44] (p. 80).

The practices of a farmer cultivating crops are thus seen as shaped physically and emotionally by a whole range of natural elements, of materials that affect the bodymind. Importantly, this is an ongoing process, which is shaped by both the physicality of embodied subjectivity and the associated sense-making processes which enable a 'self' [25] (p. 351). By increasing its capacity to be affected, a bodymind can push its limits and enlarge the envelope of what it can do. The body is thus an "interface that becomes more and more describable as it learns to be affected by more and more elements" [28] (p. 206).

This 'learning to be affected' is a dynamic process, where the farmer as a bodymind learns to register, to become more sensitive to the plants, the soil, the insects, the weather, developing the body in what it can do, in how it can be affected, in its ability to discern more and more subtle differences and making sense of them [5]. This is a reciprocal process of engagement with the world, about sensing and making sense. Indeed, "acquiring a body is thus a progressive enterprise that produces at once a sensory medium *and* a sensitive world" [28] (p. 207, emphasis in original). As differences are constructed in the process, rather than being predefined, this process is highly individual, where each farmer might well learn to register different differences. The process is about a body progressively learning to resonate, to be affected, to be moved by new differences it can now register, widening the repertoire of actions, opening new political possibilities, enabling new and unexpected becomings, developed through the interaction with the natural world.

Conceptualizing farmers as bodies-in-the-field allows us to focus on the relations that bodies can build and uphold with the natural environment, with plants, with the soil, and with the landscape. To understand how plants affect farmers' aspirations in their process of becoming, we explore how the bodymind learns to be affected by rice plants and how they influence the active experimentation of farmers in searching for alternative production practices. We argue that the ability of farmers to be affected by rice plants mirrors their

ability to build different relations, different from those guiding mainstream agricultural practices, thus opening new ways of becoming.

3. Data Collection

3.1. Study Site

The study is conducted in the Echigo-Tsumari area of the Niigata Prefecture in Japan. Agriculture in Japan is characterized by small-scale, partly-commercial family farming under the coordination of the Japanese Agricultural Cooperative (JA). Supported by the state, the JA coordinates sales and marketing and promotes a highly standardized management of rice, built on mechanization and the use of agri-chemicals [49,50]. Most farmers are part of the JA system, and the group-oriented nature of farming is further reinforced by the embeddedness of farming in local agrarian communities.

Located in the upland rural areas in Japan, Echigo-Tsumari is famous for its high-quality rice production and its satoyama landscape (*Satoyama* is a traditional farming landscape in mountainous areas in Japan, where the hillsides are covered with managed woodlands and small-scale terraced rice fields [51,52]. The *satoyama* landscape represents people's life in harmony with nature [51,52]), characterized by terraced rice fields. Like many rural areas in Japan, the area is increasingly abandoned due to the aging population, and there are a number of abandoned houses and rice terraces. In the last two decades, the area has become well known for hosting the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale, which is a large-scale outdoor rural art festival that aims to revitalize the depopulated area and remind people that 'humans are part of nature' [53]. By putting open-air art installations in abandoned rice terraces, the artworks are combined with the local landscape to draw attention to human–nature relationships and how they are shaped by traditional and contemporary agricultural practices.

The upland geographical features of Echigo-Tsumari, together with the art festival, have made the area an ideal site for farmers who want to experiment with alternative practices. Because of its remoteness and heavy snows in the winter, traditional farming practices, i.e., small-scale, pluriactive, and subsistence farming, persist among these upland farmers [54]. In addition, the success of the art festival has enabled income generation from tourism and created job opportunities [55], while making local people more receptive of incomers and new ideas ([56], cited in [57]). This context motivates new-entry farmers who want to take up a traditional farming lifestyle, to move to the area and engage in sustainable farming practices. It also motivates local farmers to experiment with alternative practices.

3.2. Methods

In early 2019, qualitative interviews were conducted with 25 farmers who engage in alternative practices. These alternative practices were broadly defined, i.e., included farmers who use more sustainable inputs, those who use more environmentally friendly practices compared to the JA system, and generally farmers who sought ways to reconnect with traditional practices, which are better suited to the local agroecosystem.

Purposive sampling was used based on the practices farmers in local area engage in. In this study, 20 farmers who engage in alternative practices as defined above were recruited through the network of 'Gift from Land', an art–farming program in which the first author participated in the Summer of 2018. The program encouraged interactions with alternative farmers in Echigo-Tsumari because the program combined art, farming, and education through permaculture. After talking with the initial 20 respondents, a pattern of how the farmers relate to bodily experiences was found. Five further farmers were recruited through the referral from these initial 20 respondents. From these five farmers, similar comments were repeatedly heard. This indicated that data had become saturated [58] after interviewing 25 farmers.

Based on the information provided by the respondents, the 25 interviewed farmers are most of the alternative farmers that are known of in the area. Among the interviewed farmers, eight are farm successors, and 17 are new-entry farmers who come from a non-

farming background. Among these new-entry farmers, nine moved to Echigo-Tsumari because of its distinctive geography, landscape, and the persistence of a traditional lifestyle; six moved to the area because of the opportunities afforded by the art festival.

Table 1 shows the background of the 25 interviewed farmers (referred to through pseudonyms) and their farming practices. We distinguish between farm successors and new-entry farmers to highlight the different starting points: the former moved toward more environmentally sustainable farming practices compared to previous generations, while the latter started farming using alternative practices as part of a lifestyle choice.

Table 1. Profile of the respondents, distinguishing between farm successors and new entrants.

Name (Gender)	Age (Years of Farming Experiences)	Crop(s)	Alternative Practices
Farm successors			
Ikeda (M)	50 s (40+)	Rice	Certified organic farming
Watanabe (M)	70 s (43)	Rice, soybeans	Certified organic farming
Seto (M)	50 s (32)	Rice, soybeans, wheat	Reduced chemical pesticides usage + organic fertilizers
Nakano (M)	80 s (77)	Rice	Certified organic farming; no-till farming
Kedo (M)	30 s (4)	Rice, vegetables, wild vegetables	Uncertified organic farming
Koji (M)	70 s (53)	Rice, vegetables	Certified organic farming; duck-rice farming
Yoshihiro	30 s (11)	Rice, Kozo	Uncertified organic farming
Yuji (M)	30 s (2)	Rice, hop flowers	Uncertified organic farming
'New-entry' farmers			
Abe (M)	50 s (5)	Rice	Uncertified organic farming
Ikumo (F)	30 s (7)		
Kudo (M)	30 s (4)		
Kikuchi (M)	50 s (16)		
Tanaka (M)	30 s (10)	Rice	Uncertified organic farming; no machinery
Nagamo (M)	30 s (1)		
Yanaga (M)	30 s (4)	Rice, vegetables	Uncertified organic farming; horse-rice farming
Kita (F)	30 s (6)	Fruit, rice	Uncertified organic farming
Shibata (M)	40 s (7)	Rice, Holy basil	
Keiko (F)	80 s (20+)	Rice, vegetables	Reduced chemical pesticides usage + organic fertilizers
Morita (M)	20 s (4)		
Rika (F)	20 s (3)		
Murata (F)	20 s (3)		
Yokohama (M)	50 s (3)	Rice	
Kouta (M)	20 s (3)	Rice, soybeans, wheat	
Yoshida (M)	30 s (7)	Rice, wheat	
Shuji (M)	30 s (10)	Rice, vegetables	

The interviews were held with the help of a local translator. They ranged from 40 to 90 min and were audiotaped and transcribed in full. During the interviews, the farmers were invited to share how and why they started farming, why and how they developed specific farming practices, and how they made sense of these practices. The focus was not on cognitive reasoning about why and how a specific agricultural production practice works.

Data collected from the interviews were analyzed through inductive thematic analysis [59] and coded with ATLAS.ti. Initial themes were identified through initial coding [60].

Coding themes that emerged include the relationships of bodily experiences with practices, environments, and farming values. Based on these key themes, focused coding was conducted to synthesize the codes generated from initial coding and develop conceptual categories [60]. Finally, theoretical coding was carried out to analyze the conceptual codes in light of theories of embodiment. Through the coding process, we strived to remain

attentive to how farmers referred to their bodies and how they felt affected by material forces, not least by taking farmers' expressions literally rather than assuming they use metaphors when referring to how the plants affected them.

This research is based on qualitative interviews; we therefore cannot measure validity and reliability in an absolute sense based on statistical standards [58]. To ensure a valid portrayal of realities in a relative sense [61,62], we have followed the suggestion of DeWalt and DeWalt [63] to provide a detailed documentation (see [64]) of the research process for the evaluation of readers. The documentation includes transcriptions of the interviews; they are open access. This can strengthen reliability of this research, as it allows readers to evaluate the research process [58].

Although a pilot study was not conducted, the interview questions were adapted slightly after the first three interviews. These interviews showed that the farmers found some of the questions about their farming approach difficult to relate to. Thus, the first author adjusted the questions and focused on those aspects of experiences that are more aligned with the daily farming activities of the respondents. For instance, some of the farmers could not understand what was meant by their farming approach, as it was something they never 'thought' about. In later interviews, the questions probed further to incite farmers to express the affective and visceral aspects of how they make 'sense' of farming. The farmers were explicitly invited to describe their feelings and talk about how they use their senses to develop their knowledge of the plants and their farming practices more generally. The farmers were also asked about memorable moments in their farming life, how they affected them, and how these moments influenced how they make sense of their farming practices. While it seems that bodily feelings and experiences are not something well thought-out before the interviews, the farmers included them in the conversation when making associations between their bodily sensibilities, how they are being affected, and their becoming. Talking to the farmers was thus less about obtaining their accounts of how they feel and focusing on precise meanings. It was more about uncovering how they made associations between their bodymind, their sensations and experiences, and the transformation of their farming practices.

The first author's experiences of working in the rice fields in 'Gift from Land' provided an important check on reliability. These experiences helped her to be more empathetic when asking the farmers to give detailed descriptions of their practices and how they feel. Having worked in the fields with some of the interviewed farmers and learnt their farming practices also gave her a physical experience of the soil, climate, landscape, and rice farming practices of Echigo-Tsumari. These allowed her to make sure that the practices that farmers mentioned reflect what they are doing in reality. In addition, the first author benefitted from being an outsider and a foreigner, as it enabled her to discuss what is taken-for-granted within a community and within a culture. The research was thus taken in awareness of the challenges of doing crosscultural research.

Indeed, there are limitations in the ability of words to communicate emotions, feelings, and embodied experiences [8,9]. A translator who is familiar with the field site and the situations of alternative famers also helped to increase reliability of the data. The translator acted as an important cultural broker to convey meanings, feelings, and emotions across language and cultural barriers. As she had moved from Tokyo to the area to seek an alternative lifestyle, she could relate well to the farmers, especially to the new entrants. She thus provided important background information to contextualize the content of the discussions with the farmers, thus avoiding gross misrepresentation. The first author discussed various aspects with the translator during and after the interviews to make better sense of what the farmers said. In addition, the translation of the quotes was double-checked with the translator, allowing her to highlight the emotional and affective aspects that might have been lost in the English translation.

Validity is about whether the research is indeed measuring what it intends to measure [58]. Internal validity makes sure that the research outcome is not just an artefact of the research design [63]. When the farmers shared their bodily experiences with plants

and environments, these experiences are moments that happened spontaneously in their daily farming life, suggesting that an interview is not the only setting that they would give an account of these bodily experiences. Therefore, this study could fit the criteria for internal validity.

For external validity, it is about how far the research findings could be generalized to a wider population [62]. External validity is limited within this study, as it is a case study that focuses specifically on alternative farmers in the Echigo-Tsumari area. We cannot ascertain to what extent the results can be generalized to a wider population of farmers. To strengthen external validity and its applicability to a wider population of farmers in different cultures, we take into account the broader context of Eastern thoughts and juxtaposing them with European thoughts in the analysis. We build on [65] who explores the different conceptualizations of the world in Chinese and European thoughts, noting that Chinese thought is not founded on a logic of causality but on propensities and influences, not on an isolated subject but on situations, not on abstract 'pure thinking' that searches for the essence of things, but on flux, processes, and adaptive transformation.

4. Bodies-in-the-Field, Becoming-With Rice

4.1. Sense(s) and Sensibility: The Inseparable Bodymind

Humans have five senses, but arguably our eyes are our most important sense organs. Vision is often understood as the eye providing raw data, i.e., the representation of the external, physical, material world, which can then be used to form knowledge. This may be termed 'pure vision', since what is seen is understood as providing an objective view of the world [66]. As Kearns [66] points out, this understanding of vision has been critiqued not least by Foucault, who has raised the question of how the visible is made visible and maintains its visibility. Indeed, for Foucault, objects and phenomena are only visible in certain contexts and discourses. As such, the mind and the concepts it holds influence not only how we make sense of what we see but also what we can see. Moreover, Ingold [67] argued that what we can see does not only depend on concepts we hold in our minds, as how we can think and make sense of the world requires us to engage in it through actions. In other words: how we perceive the world is not independent of our actions; reasons and meanings are not necessarily absolute and well-founded before actions; rather, they are developed in the acts [8,47].

For the farmers in Echigo-Tsumari, the condition to apprehend what they see, e.g., the landscape is not just tied to a broader cultural discourse regarding the need to preserve the *satoyama* landscape; it is also tied to their body. For Keiko, it is the relation she makes between the physical work in the field and the landscape that makes what she sees meaningful, which allows a specific appreciation of what she sees:

> *Keiko: After working hard on rice planting, I sat on a hillside covered by wild edible plants, then I just felt the happiness. The landscape is not just about what you see; it is something you feel . . . it is about what you feel in your daily life.*
>
> *Q: What do mean by what you feel?*
>
> *Keiko: When compared with the tough time I had when working on the rice fields, I felt so happy to sit in the landscape with wild edible plants. How I see the landscape is related to how I feel in my daily life.* (Keiko, a new-entry farmer, 20+ years of farming)

The bodily exhaustion from planting rice with her hands, a practice that Keiko believes is more connected to nature than rice planting with a machine, shapes how Keiko perceives the landscape surrounding her. Morita, a new-entry farmer who strives to preserve *satoyama* landscape, resonated with Keiko in that how he sees and feels in the landscape is influenced by the physical exhaustion of working on rice fields:

> *When I got the moment to rest after working on the rice fields, everything I saw at that moment was really beautiful and impressive. It was like a switch inside me was flipped. When I was working on the fields, I just focused on work. After I finished and looked at*

> *the landscape around me, the sunlight, the trees next to the rice terraces . . . everything had become so beautiful.* (Morita, a new-entry farmer, 4 years of farming)

A sight may also suddenly trigger a profound shift, opening a new way to become, as was the case for Shibata. He had moved to Echigo-Tsumari because he was inspired by the lifestyle of a former co-worker from Tokyo who had moved to the area. However, Shibata was unsure what to do in the countryside. Until one day he was stricken by flowering holy basil (*Ocimum tenuiflorum*), a sight which suddenly gave him a sense of direction:

> *I was on the way to a naïve American ceremony in Nagano Prefecture, I happened to stop by the house of a family there. I was so shocked by the view of holy basil in front of their house, and there was a very beautiful mountain behind their house, it was just so beautiful! I asked, 'what is that beautiful purple flower?', and that was holy basil. I began to think that maybe I wanted to have that view in front of my house too. There is also a beautiful mountain view, I could have the same view here with my own holy basil flowers from my house.* (Shibata, a new-entry farmer, 7 years of farming)

Shibata's aesthetic experience shows that it is not only practice which informs a farmer's appreciation for the landscape, but seeing can also inspire practice. Thus, seeing is an active engagement with the world, allowing one to develop an understanding of it, enabling new relations and new possibilities, which themselves enable a new way of seeing.

The effect of the basil on Shibata can be related to the concepts of 'wonder' and 'enchantment' (see [5,21,68–70]). As Bennett [20] (p. 4) puts it: 'to be enchanted is to be struck and shaken by the extraordinary that lives amid the familiar and the everyday'. Enchantment can be central in shaping farmers' experiential connection with their farms, putting the focus on the microscale, where the personal, contingent, and embodied relations are built [21]. This is illustrated by Yanaga, who often feels enchanted by nature when working on his farm. He mentioned the interconnection between the feeling of being captured by nature and the sense of connection to his farm and nature during the practice of farming.

> *Yanaga: I often feel captured [by nature] when I am working on the farm, it happens every day even though I am very busy. I kind of feel the connection with nature, when I see my plants, even weeds. I always feel so impressed.*
>
> *Q: What kind of connection are you referring to?*
>
> *Yanaga: [it is] in everyday life, but the moment is extraordinary . . . my farm is deep in the mountains, sometimes when I see the rain clouds coming, even these small things are impressive. I feel that I can sense nature; I feel the connection to nature. I think farming itself is the expression of this connection and my respect to nature.* (Yanaga, a new-entry farmer, 4 years of farming)

Yanaga actualizes this connection by being attentive and looking closely at his plants. He pointed out that being sensitive to the plants enabled a more differentiated seeing, which allowed him to be more responsive and to develop a deeper understanding of the needs of the plants. Over time, he has built an intimate knowledge of plant health based on the look of a plant, understanding that what is visible at the surface is indicative of deeper processes:

> *When I am doing well [getting more skillful] in growing some crops, I can see the failure from their shapes. If they don't grow well, it just shows by how they look, I can see that it is not doing well. Everything is visible from the surface. For example, if you look at a tomato closely, you feel the hair, you can feel those things by yourself.* (Yanaga, a new-entry farmer, 4 years of farming)

The process of ensuring that the plants have the nutrients they need to enable their growth is much more than a rational-cognitive process that focuses on material cause-effect relationships as they might be captured by modern crop sciences. For these interviewed farmers, understanding how to care for plants involves all their bodily senses, from the

sense of touch when they transplant the seedlings, to the sight of healthy plants and the smell of the crops, to the taste of the harvested crops.

Indeed, although vision enjoys dominant status when compared to other senses, the experience of touch, sounds, and smell can be equally significant for the bodymind. Within the mind/body dichotomy sensory experiences are understood as organs such as the skin or ears sending nervous signals to the brain when they encounter stimuli from external environment [71]. Therefore, sensory experience is treated primarily as perception, i.e., the process by which the brain selects and interprets sensations. The sensations in the body, i.e., the noncognitive processes are not given much attention. However, these play an important role, as the previous quote from Yanaga illustrates: 'if you look closely . . . you feel'. Later in the interview, Yanaga reiterated the inseparability of the senses and how they are tied to sense-making. He uses all his senses to apprehend the needs of the plants and to care for them throughout the growing season. He refers to this process as artistic, in which he uses his senses to appreciate an artwork:

> *The art festival . . . you know, we call it the art festival of local land in Japanese, it is actually the real meaning of . . . I think vegetables and plants themselves are kind of like art, like how they grow their leaves and how they grow, it is really artistic. The scent, you can feel it, touch it and you can taste it, you use all of your senses. (. . .) From the seed to the whole plant, the plant goes through its whole life cycle in half a year, I felt very impressed when I harvested the fruit.* (Yanaga, a new-entry farmer, 4 years of farming)

Similarly, Yoshida vividly conveys how the knowledge about rice cultivation practices resides in both the mind and the body, which are intimately connected and interdependent:

> *Yoshida: I am trying to use a combination of chemical and organic fertilization. I need more experiences, many things can change the condition: soil, water, weather and everything. I need more confidence of what I am actually doing, then I can move on. Probably after 2–3 years, what I have learnt from books and my mentor will be more in my body and experience, so I will feel more confident. I want to have an actual sense and better feelings of what I was taught.*
>
> *Q: Feeling and sense? What do they mean?*
>
> *Yoshida: It is something that experiences will show me. If I work on practical things maybe two or three times more, I will have more experiences and be more confident about it. The skills and knowledge will be more in my body.* (Yoshida, a new-entry farmer, 7 years of farming)

The interdependence of knowing and doing echoes Japanese philosophy, where being aware of something in the mind already involves the body [24] (p. 42). In other words: there is no just-intellectual understanding, which is then expressed through bodily gestures. Rather, as for Yoshida, his attentiveness to the changes of nature, and knowledge about the health conditions of the plants can only be acquired through repeated bodily interactions with the environment, and he would only feel confident when the knowledge becomes embodied through repeated practical experience. Only then can he acquire a 'sense' of what he was taught, which implies that his bodily senses are able to pick up critical features, by seeing, smelling, and touching the rice plants. Learning is thus not cognitive distancing but integrated in its surrounding; it "does not separate theory from practices or detach a 'self' from the world" [65] (pp. 65–66). It is a learning in which comprehension occurs through acts and discovery made through each limb, where the farmer as bodymind remains actively involved in his or her environment.

What Yoshida also points toward is that learning is more than the transfer of information from his mentor, which he then simply needs to apply. Rather, while the mentor guides and provides relevant information, he needs to actively build the knowledge for himself, as it is experience-based and thus needs time and attention. This is akin to West's [72] description of the process through which artisan cheese makers learn to make cheese through engaging with the curd by making it, touching it, feeling it, and pressing it in the

form. As West [72] (p. 330) points out, this "belies the notion that knowledge is simply passed on like an object from hand to hand".

'Making sense' of the world and of crop production practices is thus intimately linked to bodily senses. This understanding of knowledge as 'skill' contrasts with the classical cognitivist view of knowledge as 'mental content' [31]. Learning is thus about developing embodied skills of perception and action through constant practice, while mentally processing various aspects of the farming techniques. Indeed, the bodily movements involved in taking care of rice plants are not rote repetition but need to be finely tuned, responsive to changes in surrounding conditions. As such, skilled performance of a task is much more than the mechanical execution by the body of a set of commands generated by the intellect, i.e., the simple execution of a predetermined plan, which means that learning is not so much the transfer of information but the 'education of attention' [31]. Ingold [31] proposes an 'ecological account of skilled practice', where the skilled practitioner is continually and fluently responsive to the perturbations of the perceived environment, guided by what she or he sees, hears, and feels even as she or he works. The essence of action thus does not lie in aforethought but in the close coupling of bodily movement and perception [11] (p. 94). Skilled practice is embodied responsiveness [11] (p. 65).

4.2. The Bodymind Affected by Rice

The interviewed farmers in Echigo-Tsumari not only question the body/mind duality, but they also question the human/nature duality. Indeed to them the bodymind is not distinct and separate from rice; rather, they are interdependent. The interrelation between the farmers and the rice is not just the result of manual labor in the field affecting them physically, i.e., through their back feeling sore after a day of transplanting rice seedlings. It is much more an emotional affect, where they engage in resonance with the plants. Affect is noncognitive, and it is prior to feelings [73,74]. Feelings, emotions, and affect are all closely associated with the body: emotions and feelings are experienced and expressed through the body, and affect resides in the body, flows through the body, and defines what a body can do [73,75–77]. The ability to be affected requires the receptivity of the bodymind as well as the agency of rice. The farmer does not see him- or her-self as the only one being active, as imposing his or her will on a passive crop.

In modernized agriculture, the farmer is conceived as an autonomous agent who rationally plans in accordance with his/her objectives and then projects this will onto the crops. The interviewed farmers in Echigo-Tsumari convey a different picture, one in which crop and farmer are interdependent from the beginning, where one cannot be conceived without the other. Farming is thus not a collection of passive objects, but more akin to what Jullien [65] (p. 8) terms "a situation with capacities reciprocally at work". The rice is seen as having an active potential, as engaging in and actively shaping a web of dynamic relations.

This was richly conveyed by Kudo, who is not only a rice farmer but also a professional Shakuhachi (traditional Japanese bamboo flute) player. For him, his physical involvement, the rice plants, and the natural environment are mutually constitutive. It is not about control, but a collaboration with nature, with the rice plants, with the living soil: if there is no rice paddy or no him, there will be no rice. Through an analogy between growing a crop and making a bamboo flute, he explained how the farmer is dependent on nature's collaboration, and how this understanding contrasts with the one underlying modernized agriculture:

> *It [farming] is kind of the same philosophy: Shakuhachi is about collaborating with nature. It is [made of] raw bamboo, but to some extent it is artificial, e.g., I made these holes, so Shakuhachi is made of natural materials but it is not 100% natural . . . If there is no bamboo, or if there is no me, then there is no sound. It is a kind of collaboration. (. . .) The same thing with farming, if you use machines, chemicals and fertilizers, you feel like you are making these food, not nature. I am in control, this is 'ME, making THIS food!' But in organic farming, you have to rely on different creatures, the bacteria, etc., it is not just you making this life.* (Kudo, a new-entry farmer, 4 years of farming)

This description of the close interconnectedness of soil, plants, and farmer is akin to the French notion of 'terroir'. This concept is used by artisan cheese or wine makers to refer to their dynamic relationship with a broader ecology. However, it is not just the distinctive soil composition and the specific climate that gives rise to signature tastes and textures. Indeed "the artisan herself constitutes a component of terroir" [72] (p. 322). Just as Kudo points out that he is not in control but relies on and collaborates with 'different creatures', the French cheese makers point out that they do not "determine the trajectory of the whole" [72] (p. 334). The agency of the soil has also been highlighted by Ferguson et al. [78], who pointed out that farmers perceive the soil as an active agent, and it is the (organic) farmer's relationship with soil that allows for different qualities of food. The farmer is thus someone who uses his/her bodymind to discern, to see ever more nuances, to recognize this active potential, and find ways to develop a "favourable propensity" [65] (p. 9).

The interviewed farmers in Echigo-Tsumari are responsive to the rice, seeking production practices that are in accordance with the local environment and which enables the rice plants to be 'lively' and 'healthy'. Kikuchi and Nakano both pointed out their observations of how the rice plants changed when they experimented with alternative farming practices and contrasted it with growing rice using mainstream farming methods, when they just started farming. When they cared for the rice plants using traditional practices, e.g., using manual labor to grow the seedlings, transplanting them, weeding the field, and avoiding chemical fertilizers, they encouraged a different relation between the rice plant and the soil. They noticed that this led to a very different rice:

> *A neighbour who taught me a lot in farming passed away in the middle of rice planting, I kind of had no choice but took over all his fields for his family. I had never done anything like that before, I did not have any confidence to do 50 acres of land in the organic way, I had to use the machines to plough and chemicals to weed. (. . .) I still preserved the little rice field in front of my house, I did not use any chemicals there. A month later, I could see how different those rice shoots look like, the one without chemical was stronger and more lively, it was obvious. The one with chemicals is not lively, it is like they do not want to do anything, it's like the depressed one.* (Kikuchi, a new-entry farmer, 16 years of farming)

> *Weeds are different . . . and the rice straws look really different too, they look much healthier and taste differently. (. . .) Chemical fertilization mainly provides nitrogen, phosphorous, and potassium to the plants, but there are other elements the rice straw could draw in too. If you give them fertilization, they don't need other elements because they are given enough. But for uncultivated rice [no-till farming rice], they seem to get stronger; the taste has more layers because it gets the taste of the soil.* (Nakano, a farm successor, 77 years of farming)

The quotes illustrate how the perceptive can become affective, when it establishes itself as a partnership, when a relation is established [65] (p. 68). It allows an understanding between the crop and the farmer, building on an open engagement, where the farmer does not project him- or her-self onto the plant, but the plant, making itself conspicuous, emerges from its indifference and brings the farmer into its tensional field (see [65] p. 69).

Nevertheless, this is not so much about forging a relation between discrete individuals but rather a sensibility toward the plants, a responsiveness within a pre-existing interdependence (see [24] p. xi). These farmers engage in producing rice by attuning their thinking as well as practices with the dynamics of the rice paddy ecology and with the agentive potentialities of the entire rice farming assemblage (see [72] p. 336). They see the plants as partners, seeking to understand the plants through a silent conversation (see [65] p. 65). It is about enabling a bodily resonance, attuning themselves with the rice plants so that it may convey its needs to avoid being 'depressed' and allow them to 'get stronger', enabling them to produce grains of rice which have 'more layers'. The skilled rice farmer is similar to a successful cheese maker, in that each needs to develop a 'knack for his terroir—an

intangible way of understanding its dynamics and engaging with them' [72] (p. 329). It is thus not about controlling the plants, but about creating conditions of possibility favorable to their growth, by opening up to their influence and allowing a resonance, about a reciprocal relationship between farmer and plant, about affecting and being affected.

The role of bodily affects in guiding farming practices was also highlighted by Tanaka, who explained how he was affected by the use of machinery, which did not 'feel right', which 'felt ugly':

> *I tried to use a dryer to dry the rice, to make weeding easier I used a little bit of machine. In the end, I went back to the original way, I found it easier to do everything by hand. There is something I did not like in the process, something did not feel right when I changed, it is not in a cycle to me anymore . . . something felt ugly.* (Tanaka, a new-entry farmer, 10 years of farming)

Caring for the rice is then not primarily guided by rational thought based on scientific knowledge of nutrient requirements at various stages of growth or by considerations for efficiency through using machinery. Nor is the manual transplantation of rice seedlings primarily a matter of coordinating the muscles of the waist and of the fingers to insert the seedlings at the right depth in the muddy soil of the paddy. The connection between farmer and rice is subtler. Shibata points out how he uses his body to connect with the plants and the soil, transmitting a positive energy, a vital force, a life-energy (The Japanese concept of '*ki*' is similar to the Chinese '*chi*' or '*qi*', which is seen as a vital force that animates all life. When ki/chi flows smoothly, health and wellness follows. Human beings are thus seen as a life phenomenon resonating with the invigorating activity of nature [32] (p. xiii)). To him, it is the direct involvement of human bodies that makes the rice taste 'more delicious':

> *We like planting rice by hands because it makes rice more delicious. When we use our hands to touch the plants, some good energy is transmitted to the plants and the Earth. I believe in the power of it, that's why I want more people to be involved in my farming, so I can get a lot of good energy from a variety of people.* (Shibata, a new-entry farmer, 7 years of farming)

For Shibata the engagement of the bodymind is crucial: it is not just that the farmer learns how to care for rice plants; it is about the life-energy (*ki*) that flows from his physical body and that connects the humans, the plants, and the soil in harmony. Indeed, in Japanese ethics, *ki* circulates within the body, while at the same time intermingling with the *ki* pervasively present in the environment [32] (p. xxiii). To ensure the flow of *ki*, the body of the farmer thus functions as a mediator between the inner world (mind) and the outer world (matter) [32] (p. xx). For farmers such as Shibata, a sensibility to rice plants is not so much a relation between discrete individuals but a responsiveness to a pre-existing interdependence (see [24] p. xi). When such an intimate relationship is established, it "momentarily folds the opposition of self and world together" [65] (p. 68). This allows a very different form of knowing rice, one that does not isolate 'nature' and situates it as an 'object', as is foundational for the natural sciences underlying modernized agricultural practices.

This is about allowing rice to affect the bodymind, guiding the care for the plants, from the seedling to the mature plant. The flow of care for the rice is expressed through various practices, such as ensuring that the temperature is suitable for the seeds to sprout or protecting the seedlings against too heavy rain or too strong sunshine. Each stage of caring for the rice seedlings involves a minute attention to the temperature, moisture level, soil quality, and water level, where the farmer needs to be attentive to discreet maturations. Kikuchi expresses this by comparing caring for rice seedlings to taking care of children:

> *At first, it was not really fun, I just did it [rice farming] because my neighbour suggested it, it was more about maintaining relationship with the community. But two years later, I tried to start growing rice from seeds, that was life changing to me. From seeds to the thin, white seedlings, and they began to grow quickly after transplanting them to the field. Seeing how they grow, it impressed me so much, I had never felt this way before. It*

> *is like having children, looking at how they grow from the beginning, it was something that really impressed me.* (Kikuchi, a new-entry farmer, 16 years of farming)

The comparison of taking care of rice with taking care of one's child goes beyond anthropomorphizing the rice plant. Comparing the farmer–rice relation to a parent–child relation refers directly to bodily knowledge. Indeed, Watsuji illustrates the concept of a knowing body, of the oneness of bodymind through the example of mother and child who "know one another other *bodily*, not just psychologically" [24] (p. 40, emphasis in original). This is not about a relationship between two independent individuals with two separate minds, as the relationship cannot be separated from the relation of their bodies. As McCarthy [24] points out, this links to the ethics of care in feminist ethical philosophy, with its emphasis on the affective, by considering such categories as care, affect, nurturing, responsiveness, and somatic engagement. It echoes Watsuji's ethical thought and challenges western modernist intellectualism, where truth arises only from detached, context-free, affectless, impersonal observation, and formal reasoning [24] (p. xii).

4.3. Learning to Be Affected, Becoming-With Rice

In the previous sections, we have shown that the farmers do not conceive of themselves based on a duality of body/mind, but rather, their bodily senses are integral to their building knowledge about growing rice. Nor do the farmers perceive themselves as being separated from nature, but rather as interdependent, physically attuned to, engaging in a bodily resonance with the rice plants. In this section, we want to emphasize that this is not an essence of the farmer or of the rice but rather an ongoing unfolding process, a *learning* to be affected.

This ability to affect and to be affected is a sensibility that needs to be honed, and it needs to be cultivated, such as a rice field. Indeed, affect is not universal, and it only takes place when the body has the ability to be affected [73,74]. This ability does not come ready-made; rather, it "*develops*, as part and parcel of the organism's own growth and development in an environment" [11] (p. 94, emphasis in original). Indeed, the farmers 'are' not alternative, and they 'are' not attuned to the plants; rather, they are engaged in a process of becoming-with rice. They actively learn to become ever more receptive to the growing rice plants, the ever-changing weather, the living soil, and the incessant renewal of nature.

> *It is tough to do uncultivated [no-till] rice planting, it is easy to just plant the seed, but it has to struggle a lot in the soil, and I also have to take care of the weed. I am an idiot . . . With machinery rice planting, I can see when to do what, when the leaves will divide, I can tell. But for uncultivated farming, I can't tell, it is new to me every year. I think that is also part of the reasons that it is challenging, and I love the challenges. After I fail, I can succeed in my projects. I love the process of failing, getting better and succeeding.* (Nakano, a farm successor, 77 years of farming)

This is an open process, i.e., there is no attempt to impose a predefined plan. It is a maturation which follows its own course, borne along by its own movement [65] (p. 73). The bodymind engages in an unfolding process, developing its abilities and finding out what and how it can become through the interrelation, rather than striving to achieve a specific outcome that was set beforehand. As Nakano conveys, 'it is new to me every year' even though he has performed it for more than 70 years, and growing rice is not a controlled, predictable, uniform, routine, and standardized sequence of steps as the ideal of crop production within the modernization paradigm. While clearly the broad steps of seeds germinating, plants maturing, and rice harvesting remain the same, Nakano focuses on those details that are different each year, and by paying attention to them, by engaging with them, he learns and becomes-with the rice.

This trial-and-error process implies that experimenting with more environmentally friendly farming practices is quite different from the concept of control based on predictable cause–effect relations underlying modernized farming. It is also not a rote learning and

application of traditional cropping practices. Rather, experimentation with alternative farming is a novel reconfiguration, an ongoing, creative exploration of possibilities, an adaptation to ever-changing configurations. For example, Yanaga finds it difficult to maintain the quality and quantity of his harvest. He is therefore experimenting with the method of growing green manure to improve the soil of his farm. At the beginning, he tried to tackle the problem by taking farming courses and seeking advice from teachers, but he eventually understood that he needs to adapt the methods to the specific conditions and soil of his farm:

> *I went to some farming courses where I met a group of people who learn alternative farming methods in Nagano Prefecture. Those farmers showed me how good different approaches are, and their crops can grow really well. But I eventually realized that even if I do the same thing as them, it does not work the same because the land, the weather, the soil, and everything is different, that's the difficult part. Then I started to improvise the approaches through understanding my own farm and the soil there.* (Yanaga, a new-entry farmer, 4 years of farming)

The alternative practices are an unfolding process where different options are discerned; Yanaga recognized and explored their potentialities through making sense of what is better for his farm and soil. In addition, this process requires an engagement by the whole bodymind, as Nagamo points out:

> *When I first rent the land, it was dry and not in a good condition. My teacher suggested me to use a tractor to plough the soil. At the beginning, I used the tractor. But it is important for me to process, to experience the whole process. I am not interested in knowing and doing the efficient way [using machinery]. I am more interested in doing the actual process, so I can learn things. (. . .) I am going to get to that same position in the end, but I kind of like to walk the winding road to get to that destination.* (Nagamo, a new-entry farmer, 1 year of farming)

Nagamo started with the more efficient method of using machinery, but he felt that he did not get to know the whole process of how rice planting is like. Therefore, he chose to engage in the open process of doing everything with his own hands and body, from growing seedings, ploughing, rice planting, and weeding, seeing where it might lead him. While he might end up reaching the same 'position' as others, he might not, and either way, he will have learned a lot by 'walking the winding road'. This learning process is not guided by an organized, methodical progression, following a preset plan; nor is it about developing a reasoned discourse or elaborating tools of abstraction (see [65] p. 65). The farmers do not look for certainty or construct idealizations through the mind, they do not focus on standardization and repeatability. They do not try to control the process or strive for a specific outcome. Rather, it is processual, and it is about engaging with the individual and singular in each situation, which above all requires receptivity [65] (p. 47).

The bodily senses play a key role in this receptivity. Similar to the nose of perfume-makers who learn to distinguish different smells, the farmer learns to distinguish different colors of the leaves of the rice plants, recognize differences in the shape of rice plants, and see how the soil microbiome changes after they stop using chemicals:

> *I had been buying rice seedlings from JA. I started growing my own seedlings 11 years ago, when I have decided to grow organic rice. Through growing from seeds to harvest, I feel that I am taking care of my own children. I realized that what I am doing right now was normal 60 years ago, it was not so special at that time, but right now it is so rare to do it this way. And the soil changes, I recognized that there are so many animals, like micro-animals, I noticed the increase of those animals in my field.* (Ikeda, a farm successor, 40+ years of faring)

Learning to be affected is a dynamic process, where the bodymind learns to register and becomes more sensitive to the plants, the microorganisms, the soil, and the weather. The body develops in what it can do, in how it can be affected, in its ability to discern

more and more subtle differences and understand how they are interrelated. Ingold ([31], building on [79]) argues that to perceive is a fine-tuning, a sensitization of the entire perceptual system—the brain and receptor organs along with the neural and muscular linkages—to particular features of the environment. In other words, the bodymind learns to resonate with the properties of the environment. Learning to be affected thus means that the perceptual system is increasingly attuned to its environment, being able to pick up critical features that were previously missed.

Importantly, each farmer might well learn to register differences. Indeed, these are constructed in the process, not predefined. There does not exist a fixed set of differences that needs to be acquired over time. It is about progressively developing one's bodymind, which learns to resonate, to be affected, and moved by new differences it can now register, and which enables an open becoming. Be it Nagamo who pointed out that he needs to 'walk the winding road' himself or Yoshida who pointed out that 'probably after 2–3 years, what I have learnt from books and my mentor will be more in the body', they both indicate that this is an individual process, where information enables one to pay attention differently, developing the senses, which feeds back on enabling to make sense of new differences, constructing new relations, generating a new understanding, and enabling a different becoming. Indeed, Shibata's ability to be 'shocked by the view' required a sensitivity that enabled the holy basil to affect him in this very specific way and enabled the specific interaction between his bodymind and the basil, at that moment, to open a bifurcation toward a new future.

Experimenting with alternative practices is therefore not about 'being', but about engaging in an ongoing, open process of becoming. As Deleuze and Guattari [27] (p. 293) clarify, "a line of becoming has neither beginning nor end, departure nor arrival, origin nor destination . . . A line of becoming has only a middle". For the interviewed farmers in Echigo-Tsumari, becoming-with rice is not about changing from one set of cropping practices to another, but a continuous process of transformation, shaped by acting in a specific yet ever-changing environment and by the ability of the bodymind to be affected by it. As Tanaka's statement that 'something did not feel right' indicates, the process experimenting to identify cropping practices that 'feel right' is closely tied to learning to be affected by the rice plants, to allowing the bodymind to resonate with the growing rice plants and the evolving paddy field.

The open process of becoming-with rice contrasts with the understanding that there is a permanent, definite reality 'out there', some 'objective truth', and some abstract, rational knowledge to be distilled, allowing one to define the 'optimal' cropping practice. The world is not fixed; nor is the bodymind static. Honing senses is then less about becoming sensitive to 'facts', to some predefined reality that exists in the world, and more about identifying ever more options. For "learning to be affected means exactly that: the more you learn, the more differences exist" [28] (p. 213). The more differences one is able to perceive and make sense of, the more possibilities are apprehended, the wider one's repertoire of actions.

5. Conclusions

In this paper, we contribute to the questioning of the dominant western view that presents farmers as rational, autonomous, independent individuals, as imposing their will on a passive object-world, controlling plant growth through targeted nutrient application and weed management. We argue that being a farmer is not just about having different values and learning to master the technicalities of crop production practices. Shifting from a one-sided focus on the mind to integrate the body, we conceptualize the farmer as a body-in-the-field.

Based on examples from the interviewed farmers in Japan, we showed that the minds of the farmers do not work in isolation of their bodies and that the body is not a passive object on which the mind imposes its will. Indeed, what is felt by the body affects the mind, just as mental concepts affect what a body can sense and feel. Thus, when farmers speak of an active body, it may be more than the casual use of colloquial expressions. It may well

be a pointer toward a different apprehension of the world, a different way to make sense based on different sensibilities and an open engagement with the material world.

By focusing on the somatic, the body as a site of interaction with the material world comes to the forefront. With it comes the process by which human and nonhuman bodies interact, affect each other, and constitute reciprocal relations. These relations are developed not just because the body is active and has the capacity to form these new relations; they are also developed because nonhuman bodies such as the rice plants are able to affect the bodymind. This challenges the notion of an inert, passive, malleable word onto which the farmer impresses her or his interests. Rather, crops are agentic, able to affect the bodymind.

In this reciprocal process where nonhuman bodies interact with the bodymind, they strengthen its sensibilities and its ability to sense and to make sense. The bodymind is in a process of becoming, responsive, relational, and affecting as well as affected by the crops. Farmers thus engage in an open process of becoming-with an ever-changing environment, enabled by different sensibilities toward nature. This sensibility opens new ways to become and enables new imaginations, reinforcing the possibility that things could be otherwise. As farmers engage with nature, as they acknowledge a distributed agency, a different, a more collaborative ethical imperative emerges. This may well promote responsibility and enable new political possibilities to emerge.

Because of the specific focus on alternative farmers in the Echigo-Tsumari area, this research provides some insights of how farmers engage in farming with the body. It seems promising to further explore the affective and embodied aspects of farming in a future study of farmers. More research could be conducted to examine whether and how different factors, e.g., gender, farming experiences, and types of farming practices, influence the bodily experiences of farmers.

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3. Paper 2

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Experiencing art from a field of rice: How farmers relate to rural revitalisation and art at Japan's Echigo-Tsumari Art Festival

Kei Yan Leung[1] | **Line Marie Thorsen PhD**[2]

[1]Department of Economic and Social Sciences, University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna, Austria

[2]Centre for Environmental Humanities, Aarhus University, Aarhus, Denmark

Correspondence
Kei Yan Leung, Department of Economic and Social Sciences, University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna, Austria.
Email: natalie.leung@boku.ac.at

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Abstract

Focusing on the Echigo-Tsumari Art Festival (ETAF) in Niigata, Japan, we propose a novel conceptualisation of the role of art in rural revitalisation, focused on how local farmers experience art as a catalyst for social, cultural and natural change. Scholarship on the role of art in rural revitalisation has often focussed on arts' problem-solving affordances (e.g., economic, demographic) or on how rural engagements matter to art development. Instead, we turn our attention to the middle-ground: how art intervenes in the everyday life and practices of farmers in the festival area. Based on interviews and ethnographic fieldwork, our analysis draws on the theories of Tsurumi Shunsuke and John Dewey to offer a broad and inclusive notion of 'art' and 'aesthetic experience'. With this framework, we explore how farmers relate to different artworks presented at ETAF and how art can spur farmers to reflect on their lives, their farming and the environments they inhabit.

KEYWORDS

art, Echigo Tsumari Art Festival, farming, Japan, rural revitalisation

INTRODUCTION

Since the early 2000s, arts-led initiatives have taken a leading role in revitalising rural communities across the world via art festivals, biennials and triennials. Scholars have approached this phenomenon from different disciplinary vantage points: Social science research has ranged from studying the economic gains derived from these art initiatives (Gkartzios et al., 2019; Mahon et al., 2018; Woods, 2012) to recognising their social benefits (e.g., Anwar McHenry, 2009, 2011; Anwar-McHenry et al., 2018; Balfour et al., 2018; Gibson & Gordon, 2018; Koizumi, 2016) and facilitation of sustainable community development (e.g., Black, 2016; Hjalager & Kwiatkowski, 2018; Qu & Cheers, 2021). Meanwhile, arts and cultural studies scholars have examined how art is mobilised for rural revitalisation and community building and what this means for arts' social potential, autonomy or political-corporate bridge-building capacities (e.g., Borggreen & Platz, 2019; Klien, 2010a, 2010b).

More recent works have called for an endogenous lens based on rural development theory,[1] a popular analytical model among some European social scientists, to examine art in the specific social, political and cultural context of rural communities (see Gkartzios et al., 2019; Woods, 2012). For example, Mahon and Hyyryläinen (2019) applied the endogenous perspective to compare the effects of two rural art festivals in Ireland and Finland on local development. Other researchers have examined rural art practices that demonstrate endogenous quality, defining these as practices 'that [emerge] within the rural social, cultural and political context' (Gkartzios et al., 2019, p. 586); this includes local craft traditions (Fois et al., 2019) and small-scale, community-led art festivals (Qu & Cheers, 2021). Finally, some research grapples with whether and how art could support a neoendogenous approach to community development. This approach focuses on how a local area and its actors interact with their wider environments (Gkartzios & Lowe, 2019); in the case of art-led initiatives, it recognises how art facilitates interactions of local and non-local actors and their reflexivity, for example, community relationships (Crawshaw & Gkartzios, 2016).

However, most of this research focuses either on outcomes of art in solving rural problems (Gkartzios et al., 2019; Woods, 2012) in the form of resources or capital or on the benefits for or sociopolitical obligations of the 'art world'. While an art practice being endogenous does not automatically guarantee artful experiences to local residents, there is little work that explores how art, through its aesthetic properties and quality, achieves affect or meaning in the everyday lives of rural residents, especially those who are relatively powerless to participate in the decision-making process in rural art initiatives (but see, e.g., Crawshaw, 2019; Crawshaw & Gkartzios, 2016).

In this article, we use the case study of the Echigo-Tsumari Art Field (ETAF) in Japan, a rural art festival that addresses rural revitalisation alongside questions of human relations to nature. We focus on agro-ecological farmers in the ETAF area, exploring how they perceive and relate to the presence of art in their rural communities and whether and how it triggers reflections on their own daily practices. Starting with the farmers, their everyday lives, and their attachments to Echigo-Tsumari landscapes, we ask: How do the merits of artworks emerge as they meet up with local agro-ecological farming?

Initiated in 2000, ETAF[2] is the major international art event that takes place every third year in the countryside of the northeastern Niigata Prefecture. The Echigo-Tsumari area spans 760 km^2 and is famous for its rice production and terraced agricultural landscapes. Before the ETAF, the area was not particularly well known for in situ cultural productions, and today, most of the art events taking place are linked to the ETAF in one way or another. Like many rural areas in Japan, its population is dwindling and ageing, and the area has many abandoned houses and

fields (Ivy, 1995; Kitagawa, 2015). A majority of artworks at ETAF are installed in these landscapes and take form with them to draw attention to human-nature connections amidst traditional and contemporary agricultural practices. ETAF is thus an attempt to merge local landscapes, cultural norms and practices to create site-specific art or art forms that are made for and refer directly to the spaces and places in which they are created (see, e.g., Kwon, 2003; Lacy, 1995). In the case of ETAF, most artworks are made specifically for a given village, house, rice field and so on and only make sense within that context. Many (but not all) are permanent installations and can be visited year-round, year after year. ETAF encourages artists to engage local communities and to learn about their traditions, histories and practices so that their artwork can relate to them (Kitagawa, 2015, p. 46). Spreading across a large area, including mountains, countryside dwellings, villages and small cities, farmers are a key part of these local communities. Farming spans the entirety of the Echigo-Tsumari area, and farmlands play an important role in the festival's integration of art with the landscape. For these reasons (amongst others that we address below), farmers constitute a core group of actors for analysing the promises and perils of ETAF.

Connecting social sciences with art scholarship, our methodologies and theoretical framework in this article are interdisciplinary. Kei Yan Leung (with a background in sociology) conducted interviews and focus groups with farmers in the Echigo-Tsumari area and focused on their responses to high-profile ETAF artworks. Line Thorsen (with a background in art history and anthropology) conducted ethnographic research with farmers, artists, art publics and other locals at ETAF, adding important perspectives to the interactions between different forms of artwork and farmers at ETAF.

We take up the emerging approach of using art as a mode of inquiry (e.g., Crawshaw & Gkartzios, 2016; Gkartzios et al., 2019; Hawkins, 2010; Ingold, 2013; Thorsen, 2017). That is, by exploring how agro-ecological farmers relate to artworks in agricultural landscapes, this article is not a study of art or farmers but rather a way of researching *with* art to grapple with the exchanges that unfold between art and farmers and how these exchanges might prompt the farmers to (re)consider their landscapes, farming practices and daily lives. In this way, art is not an object of analysis but a catalyst and a key component for refiguring rural human-environmental relations. While the research focused on aesthetic outcomes of art-led rural revitalisation has been criticised for neglecting social impacts (Qu, 2020, see, e.g., Favell, 2015, 2016), we suggest that aesthetic and social impacts are not necessarily mutually exclusive. To inform our analysis, we draw on the aesthetic philosophy of John Dewey and the art analysis of Japanese sociologist and cultural theorist Tsurumi Shunsuke.[3] We propose that a broader notion of arts and aesthetics based on Dewey and Tsurumi can provide insight into how art might inspire farmer reflections on their practices, lifestyle and surrounding environment. A more inclusive notion that goes beyond the boundaries set by the 'art world' (Danto, 1964) and highlights the links between art and aesthetics and farmers' everyday experiences has the potential to unlock broader possibilities for the role of art in rural revitalisation.

In doing so, we seek to understand whether and how the artworks at ETAF intervene in the lives of selected agro-ecological farmers and potentially catalyse new ways for the farmers to relate to their environments and everyday practices. Hereby, we also seek to add new perspectives to the field of social science and cultural studies research examining art-led initiatives and rural revitalisation across the world. Specifically, we suggest that the way ETAF presents and blends modes of artistic creation by professionals and amateurs on equal footing offers important insights into processes of interaction between art and everyday life.

The case of ETAF may also offer insights into whether and how various art forms align with the endogenous model in different ways. In concept and practice, ETAF emphasises artistic

processes involving close interactions between local people and environments and extralocal artists and aims to raise questions and spur reflections among locals and visitors about lives in local communities and their surrounding environments (Badtke-Berkow, 2006, cited in Klien, 2010a). The case of ETAF may thus add to the growing literature on art and rural revitalisation while potentially offering a model for other art festivals with similar aims.

The article is organised as follows: We first explore how art can be understood as an experience and a process of inquiry through the conceptual frameworks offered by Dewey and Tsurumi, respectively. We then discuss our methodologies and present our major findings of how farmers relate to the artworks presented to them. Finally, we close by unfolding our suggestion that a broad notion of art and aesthetic experience offers an important lens for appreciating how farmers at ETAF see themselves, their work and their everyday lives in connection to the festival. This lens provides a new perspective on art as it is experienced and given meaning from life on a farm.

EXPERIENCING ART IN EVERYDAY LIFE

In 2019, Leung went to the Echigo-Tsumari area to interview agro-ecological farmers about their farming practices and the presence of artwork in the landscape. Talking to one farmer after another, a pattern emerged: Whenever Leung would ask about direct engagements with the art, the farmer would immediately relate to an artwork from a practical or everyday perspective. For example, when asked about the 'Scarecrow Project' by Oscar Oiwa (see the photo in Ask_yas, 2012), one farmer responded by referring to the farmland surrounding the art installation rather than the installation itself: '[t]here is no water in the rice field, it is like dying'. When asked which artworks he wanted to talk about during the interview, farmer Abe's[4] first response was, 'hmm… I never think about it that way', indicating that the art is not part of his intentional reflections. Most farmers would subsequently turn to longer contemplations on the artworks, but these immediate reactions are worth dwelling on. The farmers did not begin by reflecting on the properties of the art in and of itself but by relating to it as part of their life-worlds and the local environment.

As we ask how farmers experience ETAF artworks in and next to their fields and what these mean to their daily lives, these reactions lead us to an important point: Art, as revitalisation taking place *in* and *for* a specific place, should be approached with generous definitions of arts and aesthetics that consider contextual and situated modes of reception. In other words, if art is for the revitalisation of a community, then that community's way of relating to the artwork is important but underdetermined; how art comes to matter, to whom, and under which circumstances is not given in advance. When analysing the merits of art, it is often assumed that the meeting between art and its given public occurs in a direct and intended encounter: a willing public seeking out the art and relating to it on the premises extended by the artwork, artist, museum or gallery. Such an analysis assumes that the premise for engaging art is everywhere the same and unchanging. For example, if an artwork offers an anti-capitalist critique of consumer society, this vein of the art analysis will assume that this critique is, first, what a public will experience and relate to, and second, that the public will join the artwork's premise in denouncing capitalism. This is often how the success of artwork is evaluated.[5]

Our theoretical starting point for this article is the opposite. When asking how farmers experience and relate to art at ETAF—their valuation, appreciation or despising of the artworks—we understand that these experiences may not primarily come from direct engagement with the artworks, knowledge of or interest in the artists' intentions, or from intentional or benevolent encounters. As the short empirical vignettes above hint, many farmers may not have considered

direct engagement with the artworks at all. Or, more importantly, they consider them only so far as they unfold within and make sense to the farming environments and their everyday lives. Of course, this does not mean that farmers do not care or feel anything about the presence of art in their daily lives. Rather, it means that the farmers are much better than most art analyses at taking art and the art festivals' situated affects seriously. The farmers hint at the observation that art, like life more broadly, unfolds in a particular environment and to most people only makes sense within those situated premises.

This may seem like a banal point, yet the notion of art as something that can only be properly evaluated by an 'art world' (Becker, 1982; Danto, 1964) is still quite influential. In these terms, art is endowed with value separate from how it intersects with other spheres of life, and the aesthetic experience of art is thought to be separate from 'ordinary'—non-art—experiences (McCarthy et al., 2001). According to Danto, an influential philosopher of art and aesthetics, 'To see something as art requires something the eye cannot decry—an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an art world' (Danto, 1964, p. 580). Similarly, Danto defines art as something designed for viewers to grasp the (singular) intended meaning (p. 38). Ideas of art like Danto's, however, are essentialist and universalist, making them ill-equipped to help us grapple with farmers' experiences of art at ETAF: The farmers do not necessarily see the installations as worthwhile art because of the abstract theory or knowledge of art history but because they enter their farming worlds in ways that matter and make sense to those specific worlds.

Since Danto, many other theories of art and how it matters to various members of the public have been developed (e.g., Bishop, 2012; Bourriaud, 2009; Kwon, 2003; Lacy, 1995). For our analysis, we turn to the work of Dewey and Tsurumi as prefaced in the introduction. First, we draw on Dewey's book *Art as Experience*, in which he presents an aesthetic philosophy of art and its fundamental entanglement with everyday life and its environments. As Dewey writes, there is and should be a 'continuity of esthetic experience with normal processes of living' (Dewey, 2005, p. 9). Much like what was expressed by farmers in Leung's interviews, Dewey allows for an analysis of art and aesthetic experiences as something that comes in many forms and that is partially independent of art world doctrines. Dewey laments that our conception of art has been cut short by a too-limited notion of aesthetic experiences and of the situations and events that conjure them. In his analysis, aesthetic experience can arise from a great variety of situations, including but not limited to those prompted by artworks (Dewey, 1934). Although written in 1934, this point is still relevant—not least when exploring art as rural revitalisation and what it means to locals.

To unfold the varieties of aesthetic experience, Dewey separates what he calls '*an* experience' from 'aesthetic experience'. For 'an experience' to happen at all, it must possess aesthetic qualities. This kind of experience can and does occur in ordinary, everyday situations. Dewey provides the example of an astonishing meal (Dewey, 2005, p. 36): Not all meals are 'an experience', as they do not have an aesthetic quality. But a meal that makes us say 'that was an experience' for the way it stands out from routine meals is exceptional because of its aesthetic quality. 'Aesthetic experience', on the other hand, happens when experiences are cultivated purposefully for their ability to intervene in the flux of life. The aesthetic quality arises from the same kind of experiential awakening, but the method through which it is brought into being differs. Cultivation of aesthetic experiences is not limited to art, but art is especially apt at doing so.

For Dewey, this adds a specific dimension to some art, which makes it work on aesthetic premises: Art, humans, and other beings exist in an environment '[…] not merely *in* it but because of it, through interaction with it' (Dewey, 2005, p. 12). Echoing the intuitive reactions of the interviewed farmers, this seemingly simple insight means that art, when cultivated for moments of aesthetic experience, does so with an awareness of and integration with its environment. For this

reason, Dewey proposes that the product of art is not actually the work of art itself: 'The work takes place when a human cooperates with the product so that the outcome is an experience [. . .]' (Dewey, 2005, p. 222). This framing implies that art and aesthetic moments only happen in connection to the world and everyday practices. Hence, the value of art lies in its dynamic interaction with environments and humans.

Sociologist and cultural theorist Tsurumi (1967) extends Dewey's philosophy in his 'marginal art theory' by rooting it in East Asian and Japanese histories of art in continuity with life. Tsurumi holds on to Dewey's notion of aesthetic experience but, building on Japan's history of folk and peasant art, argues that if art and the aesthetic experience of it exist in relation to human activity, social processes and environments, then we must be willing to accept a much broader range of activities as art. Tsurumi's analysis identifies three modes of art-making of equal importance (Tsurumi, 1967, pp. 14–16), although only one of them refers to the mode sanctioned by the art world. Tsurumi calls this first mode 'pure art'; pure art is art made by professional artists and requires other professionals' appraisal. This does not mean that non-professionals cannot appreciate pure art but rather that a work's worth as art is established according to professionalised parameters. The second kind of art Tsurumi identifies is 'popular art' (not to be confused with 'pop art' in the vein of Andy Warhol or Murakami Takashi). Popular art is art (or products) made by professional artists for mass public and consumption, like design, posters and radio entertainment.

The third kind of art—and the one that concerns us most—is 'marginal art'. This is the mode Tsurumi's theory is named for and refers to art made by non-professionals for (primarily) other non-professionals. Its worth as art comes from the way it makes sense and unfolds within everyday life. Taking a cue from folklorist Yanagita Kunio and agricultural scientist and poet Miyazawa Kenji, amongst others, Tsurumi writes that 'marginal art' has always existed in the borderlands of art and everyday life. Flower arrangements, family photo albums, meal preparation, and, indeed, farming tools and practices hold the potential for and actualisation of artful and aesthetic experiences (Tsurumi, 1967, pp. 50–89)—not accidentally but as purposefully cultivated art from the everyday (Tsurumi, 1967, p. 51). Tsurumi unfolds Dewey's notion of 'aesthetic experience' to identify and specify marginal art and its worth and meaning in day-to-day life.

For this article, we are especially interested in how pure and marginal art intersect with and overflow the boundaries between art and life at ETAF. There are a great variety of artworks at ETAF, from paintings and sculptures in galleries, total installations, community and socially engaged art, to the performance and presentation of local customs (e.g., dance, music, farming and food). All are presented as 'art' and thus connote 'pure art' in the terms of Tsurumi. Yet, we suggest that in reality, much of this is closely related to 'marginal art' and that pure and marginal art is constantly blended at the festival and always given meaning and value based on how they speak to and unfold in the everyday life of locals, including farmers. As we discuss in the next section, this double character of the artworks at ETAF (as both pure and marginal) is no coincidence. In fact, it is part of the festival's concept for engaging and revitalising the rural communities of Echigo-Tsumari.

'Marginal art' at ETAF

Funded by the regional government and private corporations, ETAF is a top-down initiative to drive endogenous rural development (Klien, 2010b). ETAF is formulated around two overall ambitions: revitalising the depopulated countryside and reminding people who 'human beings are a part of nature'. Connecting this double ambition, Kitagawa Fram, director of the festival, writes

how the increasing depopulation of the countryside led to a host of community-building initiatives in the 1990s (called *machizukuri* in Japanese; Kitagawa, 2015). Money was channelled to rural areas through various initiatives, mostly based on business support, renewal and modernisation projects. Yet, Kitagawa believes that this strategy was misguided: It alienated the remaining rural public, who consisted primarily of elderly farmers. Instead, he wanted to create an initiative grounded in the particularities of the countryside to magnify, strengthen and promote these places.

ETAF is a meeting place between Tsurumi's 'pure' and 'marginal' art, leaning mostly towards the latter: the art of the local public (Kitagawa, 2015, p. 240).[6] Ideas about 'art' and the inclusion of 'pure art' attractions, like works by Ilya and Emilia Kabakov or James Turrell, signpost the festival and draw art publics (and the art world) from across the country and world. But, once there, these audiences will not only encounter a great variety of artworks, including from local citizens and in the style of cultural art traditions, they will also find that the 'pure art' works are made and installed in a way that highlights the specificity of local cultures, natures and their entwinement.

For these reasons, ETAF engages the local public as much as art tourists and encourages visitors (at least at an ideal level) to travel slowly through the area, noticing landscapes as much as artworks (Kitagawa, 2015). The entirety of ETAF then is shaped along lines reminiscent of Tsurumi's and Dewey's sensibilities of art and aesthetic experience. The environment of ETAF is not just a 'setting' in any simple sense, it is part and parcel of the experience of the artworks.

However, some have criticised the gap between Kitagawa's ambition and the reality of what ETAF has achieved. Klien (2010a, cited in Qu & Cheers, 2021, p. 14) characterises ETAF as 'urban/global/elitism and cultural colonisation' because of its strategy to use 'pure art' attractions, catering mainly to the needs of tourists and imposing outside influences on disadvantaged communities (Klien, 2010b; Qu & Cheers, 2021). Klien (2010b) further considers the art at ETAF as an attempted panacea used to create local autonomy to solve structural problems in local communities. While these studies offer important examinations of rural art initiatives in this non-Western context, they only evaluate ETAF based on its 'pure art' artworks, omitting the festival's intentional bridging with 'marginal art'.

There is certainly a need for critical analyses of such 'top-down' art-revitalisation initiatives, but these have missed key aspects of how ETAF unfolds in practice and has developed over the past two decades. Instead, we take a generous approach, believing Kitagawa when he emphasises that ETAF does not aim to answer but rather raises questions among both locals and tourists (Badtke-Berkow, 2006, cited in Klien, 2010a). Following this, we explore the affectual responses of farmers at ETAF, asking whether and how art raise questions or spurs reflections among them.

METHODOLOGY

A substantial part of our data derives from Leung's qualitative interviews and focus groups, while Thorsen's ethnographic observations offer supporting data that complicate and add nuance to our discussion. Leung conducted semistructured interviews with 25 farmers in the Echigo-Tsumari area in winter 2019 and three focus group discussions in winter 2020 with 18 of the 25 interviewed farmers. Thorsen engaged with ETAF between 2015 and 2020 through both long-term and periodic field research amongst artists and farmers in the Echigo-Tsumari area, described below.

Farmers were selected for interviews with Leung based on their engagement with agro-ecological farming practices, as opposed to mainstream or industrial farming. Agro-ecological farming is broadly defined by the substitution of environmentally sustainable practices for

industrial ones and connects with traditional practices that are well-suited to local agro-ecosystems (Gliessman, 2017). In 2018, Leung worked at ETAF with an art-farming programme, 'Gift from land'. Part of ETAF since 2015, the programme brings together young farmers, scholars and creative practitioners and involves interactions with Echigo-Tsumari agro-ecological farmers to combine farming, education and art by practising permaculture. Twenty of the interviewed farmers were identified through Leung's participation in 'Gift from land'; the other five were recruited through referrals from these 20. According to respondents, these 25 farmers represent most of the agro-ecological farmers in the area. Five of the 25 work for ETAF on a part-time basis, taking care of fields that host artworks; the rest are not involved in the management of the art and are not directly involved with ETAF.

The intentional sampling of agro-ecological farmers was to identify 'information-rich' (Patton, 2002, p. 401) cases for in-depth understanding of whether and how ETAF's artworks inspire farmers to reflect on their inhabited environments, their work and everyday lives. Agro-ecological farming practices resonate with the focus of ETAF and with rethinking rural life in depopulated areas through environmentally sustainable practices; this similarity in aims and ideals suggested that the 25 farmers might relate to and be willing to reflect on ETAF artworks. However, we are aware that this delimitation can constitute a bias in our results because these farmers might be more aware of their natural and cultural environments, to begin with. Nevertheless, as we reflect on in the final part of this article, mainstream and industrial farmers are not necessarily less attuned to their direct environment or cultural practices than agro-ecological farmers. They are rather attuned with other ideals and practices to follow. Hence, Leung's findings are limited in their empirical generalisability to represent the views of farmers in Echigo-Tsumari towards the artworks of ETAF, but we still believe they offer key insights into the way art becomes significant in the lives of farmers.

The interviews ranged from 40 to 90 min, while focus group discussions lasted for around 90 minutes. All interviews and group discussions were recorded and transcribed in full. Most of the interviews and discussions, except for three with farmers fluent in English, were conducted with the help of a Japanese–English translator. The interviews used photo elicitation, drawing on nine photos of seven artworks selected for their relevance to the theme of agriculture. The works were also chosen based on their high publicity and visibility at ETAF and their location in or close to farming fields. In other words, farmers were presented with artworks leaning towards 'pure art' placed in central agricultural locations. In interviews, farmers were first asked to share their farming stories, including how they started farming and their motivations, approaches and values. They were then invited to pick the artwork(s) that impressed them and share how these related to her/his farming. In the focus groups, Leung shared preliminary findings and invited farmers to discuss why some of them do not feel connected to the ETAF artworks and which qualities they find lacking in the art. Leung's data were analysed through inductive thematic analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006) and coded by At.Lasti. After initial coding and subsequent focus coding (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2014), three major conceptual categories (themes) regarding how respondents perceive the artworks emerged: projection of farming life, direct encounters and interactions and disconnections with everyday life. Finally, theoretical coding was conducted to analyse these themes based on the conceptual framework from Dewey and Tsurumi.

Thorsen's ethnographic field research also included formal and informal interviews with relevant stakeholders, which were captured in ethnographic field notes, and some were also audio recorded. In 2015 and 2018, Thorsen stayed in the Echigo-Tsumari area during festival periods in the summer, following activities in Matsudai and Tokamachi, two (out of 10) of the festival's central areas. Between festivals, Thorsen followed the work of selected ETAF artists (spring 2016)

FIGURE 1 'Human re-entering nature' by Thomas Eller (*photo source*: Kei Yan Leung)

and stayed in Matsudai (autumn 2017). These stays were conducted as ethnographic participant observation at ETAF; with the art and farming initiative 'Gift from Land'; and with local residents primarily in the towns of Matsudai and Tokamachi. In 2019 and 2020, Thorsen conducted follow-up interviews with selected artists and locals via online platforms like Skype. Thorsen understands and reads Japanese at an intermediate level, and conversations were conducted in both English and Japanese, sometimes with the aid of a translator.

EXPERIENCING ART AT ETAF

Experiencing connection: 'Human re-entering nature'

'Human re-entering nature' (Figure 1) by Thomas Eller is a four-meter-high human figure modelled after the artist's own bodily composition. It is situated in a field next to a tree, amid grasses and climbing vines. Over the years, the vines have climbed the artwork itself, so it is now enveloped in plants. This growth and the adjacent tree literally immerse the figure in the landscape and make it change with the landscape along with the four seasons (Echigo-Tsumari Art Field, 2021b). As with most of the farmers, Shibata does not think much about the artworks as art, but when asked to consider Eller's installation actively by Leung, he saw himself reflected in the human figure. Specifically, he noted how he is also immersed in the cycles of seasons in his farming process and life in general. To Shibata, the artwork conveys and synthesises his ordinary, lived experience of being part of and subjected to an environment.

Shibata moved from Tokyo to the Echigo-Tsumari area in 2012 because he wanted to live in the mountains. In 2014, he started growing holy basil without using fertilisers. An important aspect of his farming is to engage people with nature, so he regularly organises planting and harvesting

activities that connect people with soil and his holy basil plants. Echoing the vignettes that opened our theoretical discussion, Shibata associated 'Human re-entering nature' with aspects of his farming life:

> Shibata: I like 'Human re-entering nature'; I like that it changes as the seasons change, that's my favourite part. And the people and the tree are connected. That's the image I like.
>
> Leung: Why do you like the image?
>
> Shibata: I can't explain it explicitly, I like it without reason… I like that the human is connected to the tree. I mean, connected to nature, and that [we are part of] the circle [of life]. In the natural cycle, it just exists… [This artwork] probably would decay [in the future]. Trees would probably change as time passes, the tree next to it just gets old, it doesn't remain in the same condition, it is ageing every year, changing every year.

At first, Shibata could not explain why he likes the artwork; he simply liked how it conveys the connection between nature and humans. After contemplating further, he shared how the artwork connects to his farming life:

> Shibata: The artwork is not specifically [connected] to farming, but [to my] life here. Especially [my] lifestyle in this snow country [the Echigo-Tsumari area]. As we have [a] very clear distinction between spring, summer, autumn and winter, you do things that are suitable for each season. I like the rhythm of the cycle of seasons. And I feel it [the rhythm] from this artwork. In this snow country, four seasons are typical, each season is different from one another, so people have to fit in the seasons and live according to the seasons, that's how we survive … and what makes our life the 'snow country life' [life in Echigo-Tsumari], it is different from the city and other parts of Japan, that's what I like and feel from this artwork and from my life. It is changing every season, I like the changes, I feel them in this art and my life.
>
> Leung: Are the changes important to your farming?
>
> Shibata: Yes. In winter, … most cultivated soil is covered by snow so the land can rest; farmers can also rest.… Winter here is tough. When spring comes, it is such a joy … It is about the ups and downs, living and changing, that's why we are grateful for spring.

The artwork stands out to Shibata; it becomes an aesthetic experience, as defined by Dewey, because his encounter with 'Human re-entering nature' is contextualised by the climatic and environmental conditions of his daily 'snow country life'. Regardless of the artist's original intended message, the artwork matters to him in a way that is specific to his farming practices, the environment and his life in Echigo-Tsumari.

The human-nature connection in 'Human re-entering nature' also conveys Crawshaw and Gkartzios's (2016, p. 142) suggestion that art can perform '"a diagnostic" reading" of human and

FIGURE 2 'Rice field' by Ilya and Emilia Kabakov (*photo source*: Kei Yan Leung)

non-human relations' (Crawshaw, 2019, p. 307). In Shibata's case, the artwork is diagnostic of how his everyday life and farming practices adapt to the cycles of nature and seasonal changes, and more importantly, how these changes and adaptions are important to the health of his soil and his wellbeing. By conceptualising art and aesthetics based on their relevance to everyday life, we can uncover the links between the aesthetic qualities of art and its social impact, which in this case is the validation of sustainable agricultural practices and lifestyles through a reminder of the connection with nature in his practices. This also facilitates more diverse perspectives from which to appreciate art in the context of rural revitalisation.

Experiencing art as a process

The artwork 'Rice field' (Figure 2) by Ilya and Emilia Kabakov portrays scenes of traditional, unmechanised rice farming in Echigo-Tsumari through silhouettes of farmers and horses. Together with a display of Japanese poetry describing manual rice farming in different seasons, 'Rice field' aims to remind people of past agricultural practices (Echigo-Tsumari Art Field, 2021c). Shuji, one of the interviewed farmers, has been taking care of the land that hosts 'Rice field' for 10 years. He is impressed by the artwork because he witnessed how the social interactions and conversations it facilitated made the landowner feel more positive about his rice field:

> Shuji: I knew the owner of this land, he has already passed away, but the elderly had taken good care of me and taught me how to do rice farming. The [owner] at first did not like having the artwork on his own land, but he gradually accepted it. By having the artwork on his field, he was able to relate to other people who are connected to the art piece. [To] people coming to see the artworks, or like me who just came to

> take care of the rice terraces, the artwork [created] connections… relationships.… From what I have learned from the [owner, in farming], how he changed his attitude towards the artwork, and by spending time with him [on his rice field], I am most impressed by this artwork.
>
> Leung: How did you know that the owner became accepting of the artwork?
>
> Shuji: The artwork attracted many visitors. The field is in bad condition because it is north-facing and there is not much sunshine. The rice field itself is small, and there is no path. These are all bad conditions for a rice terrace; there is nothing good physically about this rice terrace. But people just came to see the artwork and kept telling him it is such a good place and a fantastic rice terrace, so he gradually understood the worth of his rice terrace.

Connecting the land to the broader history, traditions, and rebuilding of community, the artwork spurred moments of aesthetic experience consistent with the philosophy of Dewey. Slowly, the landowner and Shuji came to see—or experience—the rice field from a new perspective, where it could be appreciated and valued for qualities other than rice production. The aesthetic experiences of Shuji and the landowner did not occur as a sudden moment of realisation; instead, they were cultivated gradually through encounters and interactions with both local and non-local visitors that the artwork drew to the site.

This positive take is rather unusual in the history of ETAF art analyses. For instance, Klien (2010b) argued that the silhouettes hindered the landowner's practical farm work, concluding that this work of art mostly served as 'exoticisation and romanticisation' (2010b, p. 525) of traditional Japan and the area. Klien draws this conclusion based on close attention to the artwork and whether it succeeded in conveying the artists' intentions to the locals and the landowner. However, there are farmers with less direct connection to the 'Rice field' field who share Klien's sentiments towards the artwork. In the next subsection, we grapple more substantially with such differences in reception amongst the agro-ecological farmers. Shuji's experience offers a different way of understanding the merits of 'Rice field'. Shuji also recounted how the artwork impedes farm tasks. But, as the following quote indicates, the meaningful interactions and conversations facilitated by the 'Rice field' also constitute a key part of Shuji's experience with the artwork:

> Honestly, it is just so annoying; practically, it is super annoying. I know the difference between the ideal and the reality, I understand it well, but still, it is super annoying. [But still], I have no choice because this artwork and the rice terrace do mean something.

Shuji's mixed feelings towards the 'Rice field' illustrate that experiences of the artworks are more diverse and complex when we consider their connections with everyday life and the surrounding environment in which the artworks take form. Meanwhile, using a broader perspective to appreciate arts and aesthetic experience shows how 'Rice field' also empowered the landowner and Shuji to maintain the rice terrace and validated their farming efforts through novel landscape appraisals. Thus, there are more experiential dimensions to the artwork than recognised by Klien (2010b); it acts as a catalyst, gradually inspiring the landowner to see his rice

field anew and motivating Shuji to continue maintaining the field and using farming as a way to engage with local villagers.

Detachment from the art

Thus far, we have focused on farmers who had positive or, at least, some form of elevating experiences from interacting with ETAF artwork. However, not all the interviewed farmers were so positively inclined. A few of them expressed that the artworks are out of place because they impose imbalances on the landscape. For example, Seto, a local farmer who grew up in the area, feels unsafe and uncomfortable with 'Rice field':

> It ['Rice field'] makes me feel uncomfortable, it is not in harmony, it is outstanding in a negative way. I know the original scene of the rice terrace [that hosts 'Rice field']; the artwork is not compatible. I feel scared and anxious from this artwork, I don't feel safe. It is not just from this artwork. When I see electric towers in mountains, it is an inharmonious feeling. People in the countryside do not like to see unordinary things. The artworks [of the ETAF] are something the locals and elders are not used to, that's why they feel anxious.

Instead of evoking positive memories of nostalgic, traditional farming scenes, the artworks conjure a sense of unfamiliarity and imposed exogeny for Seto and, according to him, for some of the area's elders as well. He continued:

> We like to refer to the past as the 'good old days', when we think of nostalgic things we feel safe, familiar, and stable. But for the future, we feel anxious and uncertain; these artworks are unordinary and unstable in our everyday life.… When I am talking to you [Leung] right now, I realise that doing the traditional things that my father was doing, I feel relieved and good, safe and comfortable.

Seto's reflections importantly highlight a partial incongruence between the way ETAF frames the festival to urban and international tourists (those they want to attract to the countryside) and how it is perceived by some of the people already living there. Ironically, to Seto, 'Rice field' neither draws him into the landscapes nor reminds him of traditional agricultural practices. It contradicts them. His experience echoes the findings of scholars who mention the risk of inauthentic representations of local culture causing confusion and even negative experiences for locals (See Black, 2016; Klien, 2010b; Qu, 2020). Instead of representations of local culture in the form of art, Seto prefers engaging directly in traditional practices such as rice straw weaving and farming. However, as we know from Shuji and Shibata, Seto does not speak on behalf of all locals or farmers in the area, even though he wields the language of collective experience. In terms of our analysis, the sheer diversity in experiences evoked by the artwork is worth noting.

Like Seto, Kikuchi, an organic farmer and builder of traditional straw roofs, feels that ETAF's art is out of place and disconnected from the natural cycles and lives of the area. He uses the example of 'Tsumari in bloom' by Kusama Yayoi (Figure 3; Echigo-Tsumari Art Field, 2021d) to illustrate this. The work is supposed to show the artist's praise of local environments through a blooming flower under the sunshine in Echigo-Tsumari, but Kikuchi sees otherwise:

FIGURE 3 'Tsumari in bloom' by Kusama Yayoi (*photo source*: Kei Yan Leung)

> I am not interested in these artworks and the art festival. I am more interested in life in this area. Life here is in the [natural] cycle, everything is reasonable, but the artworks are out of the cycle. Like the artwork of Kusama Yayoi ['Tsumari in bloom'] in front of Matsudai station, it was incredible when I saw it in a museum. It was very lively; I could feel what she wanted to express. I would feel the same if the artwork is in Tokyo or in a city. But, in front of Matsudai station, even though it is made by the same artist, it is just so miserable. It is detached from the actual life here.

More so than the artworks, Kikuchi views the actual life, practices and traditions of the area—like the preserved rice terraces and Japanese traditional houses—as the actual art:

> When you draw a picture on a canvas, you communicate something. Living in this village…the village itself is a canvas for me. Living is like art to me, and the village is my canvas; living my life here communicates what I think to other people.

The artworks do constitute an experience to Seto and Kikuchi, in Dewey's sense, just one that they enjoy less than other interviewed farmers. They are still an experience because they stand out from the farmers' everyday life, just in a negative way. These farmers' reactions also show that ETAF's artwork is open to diverse interpretations for people with different life experiences and sensibilities about artful qualities.

Without doing so explicitly, Seto and Kikuchi reiterate Tsurumi's diagnosis of pure, popular and marginal art. In Tsurumi's terms, these farmers express preferences for marginal art practices: the kind of art that is the most longstanding and prolific in most places but that was relegated to the margins with the entrance of 'pure art'. As we suggest, and based on the stated intentions of Kitagawa Fram, ETAF is indeed a place for mixing, bridging and intentionally blurring the

boundaries between 'pure' and 'marginal art'. Seto and Kikuchi express a clear preference for the latter, while Shuji seems to find quality in the way 'pure art' can spur new experiences of the marginal artforms endogenous to the area.

So far, we have only focused on how farmers relate to the works of 'pure art' at ETAF. The chosen artworks are all by acclaimed international artists made to stand out and draw publicity and crowds. However, as mentioned previously, Kitagawa and ETAF are also invested in marginal art forms. We now turn to the way marginal and 'lifeway arts' (Kitagawa, 2015) may be even more significant to ETAF, with a short discussion of the sensibilities evoked in farmers by a broader spectrum of artful creations.

ENCOUNTERS WITH MARGINAL ART

ETAF can be (and has been) criticised for many things in its quest to get national, regional and international art publics to visit the Niigata countryside. This includes ignoring local public and their wishes, imposing unwanted and out-of-place artworks on them, and making their lives difficult with the many people now visiting the festival. But once you visit Echigo-Tsumari, it quickly becomes clear that ETAF is much more than high-profile artworks and top-down artworld gestures. While this is a highly visible overcurrent—indeed, this approach plays a significant part in the festival's commercial success (Echigo-Tsumari Art Field, 2021a)—there are more artworks at ETAF that range closer to what Tsurumi calls 'marginal art' than the 'pure art' drawcards. These include artworks that farmers like Seto and Kikuchi might be more favourably inclined towards, even though they might not even recognise them as art.

For every piece of art by big names like Ilya and Emilia Kabakov, Thomas Eller or Kusama Yayoi, you will find a range of artistic explorations by farmers, villagers, tinkers and thinkers. For every installation by internationally acclaimed artists, you will find even grander installations by local farmers and homemakers, who have turned dwellings into displays of traditional farming tools, cooking practices, locally grown vegetables and song and dance (e.g., 'Ubusuna house', 'Museum of picture book art' and 'Green room project'). All are given catalogue numbers and features in the guidebooks, yet as non-professionals they range much closer to the definition of marginal art than pure art. In these installations, the intentional blurring and mixing of pure and marginal art are overt. Modes of artmaking by amateurs and professionals, locals and internationals, stand side by side and without much hierarchy. In addition, this is very much intended.

In the book *Art Place Japan* (2015) by ETAF director Kitagawa Fram, two things stand out about his characterisation of the festival and his wishes and ideals for the place. First, he explicitly rejects the primacy of Western art history and the art world that comes along with it, stating that 'it was important to emphasise a pluralistic and global perspective on art that would not privilege Western perspectives' and that he was 'inspired by … art in the margin …' (Kitagawa, 2015, p. 17). Second, while rejecting the Western art world and its hierarchies, he consequently emphasises that, to him and ETAF, everything made by human beings is potentially art (Kitagawa, 2015, p. 240). In making this claim, he references Tsurumi amongst others and draws inspiration from 'marginal art'[7] to encircle a key merit and ambition of the festival, one that lies at the base of his ideal for artistic interventions: 'The desire and skill to engage with the local people around the natural environment that they contend with daily […]' (Kitagawa, 2015, p. 240).

This key feature of ETAF becomes important for proper analysis. The interviews described in the previous section were based solely on reflections about high-profile artworks, a selection

that no doubt greatly affected the farmers' reactions. Here, we turn to the insights of Thorsen's ethnographic research, which focused on how ETAF aims to merge with daily life in the many villages across Echigo-Tsumari and how artists and locals, including but not limited to farmers, recalibrate their environmental sensibilities in exchanges with the art festival. During this research, it became clear that many locals simply do not care that much about the high-profile artworks and are mostly indifferent to them. Others find them irrelevant, alienating or annoying. These sentiments are reflected in the way Seto and Kikuchi related to the artworks presented to them by Leung.

Yet completely different responses occurred in relation to the 'marginal art' of ETAF. In 2017, Thorsen was staying in the town of Matsudai. Helping a farmer, Nakamura, in his rice field, Thorsen asked about all the activities in the area that came along with ETAF. Nakamura responded that he did not care much for the art or the tourists; they were just there but not something he paid much attention to. He then started talking about one of the fields neighbouring his own; a group of Hong Kongers had taken up permaculture farming since 2015, and he enjoyed following along with their farming experiments, seeing how it went, and the fact that he could draw inspiration from them. They were great young people, he emphasised, bringing cheer and life to the town. Finally, he exclaimed, 'I far prefer them to the artworks'.

However, what he was talking about—the Hongkongers and their permaculture field—was in fact part of ETAF. It happens to be the initiative that Leung was also involved with in 2018, 'Gift from land', run by the Hong Kong Farmers and Sense Art Studio (2015–2018). Several of the Hong Kong farmers involved throughout the years have also been artists (though not all). Except for this particularity, 'Gift from land' was exactly what Nakamura described it to be: a bunch of Hong Kongers experimenting with sustainable farming methods.

Yet, we argue that 'Gift from land' is an example of another mode of artmaking at ETAF, where its creation as 'marginal art' means that many locals experience a much greater affinity with it than with the 'pure art' works. 'Gift from land' thus aligns well with Kitagawa's ambitions for marginal art at ETAF. It performs a desire to engage locals and their environments and in doing so elicits aesthetic experiences cultivated purposefully in the interactions between practitioners (the Hong Kongers) and local public (Nakamura and others). This is especially clear in the way Nakamura reflected on the inspiration he finds in their farming experiments.

Relatedly, in 2016, one of the Hong Kong farmers told Thorsen about a series of conversations he had with a conventional Matsudai rice farmer. At first, the conventional farmer thought their permaculture farming seemed ridiculous, but after watching it develop over one-and-a-half years, he began noticing that his agriculture magazines were also focusedmore and more on organic and other sustainable farming practices. He noticed how the Hong Kongers managed to grow both rice and soybeans alongside various other vegetables until he finally proclaimed that what they were doing at 'Gift from land' was important to the future of farming (see also Thorsen, 2019, pp. 213–238).

Following the marginal agricultural art practice of 'Gift from land', the conventional farmer experienced something that stood out from his other experiences of farming, relating to the landscape and local environment, and, not least, his daily life. Similar sentiments might have been evoked from Seto and Kikuchi had they been presented in the interviews with other kinds of art practices at ETAF. Like Nakamura, they might not even recognise it as art, but that would not matter, compared to the quality of the aesthetic experiences offered by marginal art encounters.

CONCLUSION

In this article, we have shown how a more inclusive notion of art and aesthetic experience can aid in appreciating how agro-ecological farmers in the Japanese countryside make sense of, enjoy or dislike different forms of art as experienced in their everyday life. Our study of ETAF provides insights into how agro-ecological farmers experience the presence of various forms of art in their daily routines and landscapes and how these can trigger reflections on their farming. With an interdisciplinary approach that draws on the works of Dewey and Tsurumi, we propose an expanded conceptualisation of art and aesthetics that takes the relevance of art to farmers' day-to-day activities into consideration.

While our case study is set against rural Japan, we also suggest that it may add more broadly to social science and cultural studies research on art-led rural revitalisation, including endogenous analyses of such initiatives. The art at ETAF is intentionally facilitated in interactions among local farmers and extralocal tourists and artists, and these interactions have spurred farmers' reflections on their practices in relation to their environment. These reflections are important, as they convey a capacity-building process that is valuable in promoting changes and transformations in rural communities (Shucksmith, 2010).

Alongside the theories of Dewey and Tsurumi, this broad conceptualisation helps to uncover more possibilities for the role of art in rural revitalisation than merely as a tool to generate economic and social impacts. Attuned to the ambitions of ETAF, we see art as aesthetic entities that inspire farmers and rural residents to reflect on their daily lives and environments.

While these processes of reflexivity are only visible when we consider a more inclusive conceptualisation of art and aesthetics, the case of ETAF is useful to showcase these processes. With its explicit and conscious focus on the intersections of pure and marginal art, ETAF mobilises the already blurry boundaries between modes of artmaking to establish a continuity between pure and marginal art forms, offering art publics as well as farmers and ordinary Echigo-Tsumari citizens a much richer pallet of aesthetic experiences in tune with their lives. As our findings indicate, as long as art unfolds in the everyday lives of farmers and others, marginal as well as pure art can facilitate aesthetic experiences for people who do not necessarily possess art-world knowledge (cf. Danto, 2013). Art can and does take many forms, and whether it is identified by the person who experiences it as 'art' is not as important as the aesthetic experience it engenders. Such experiences may come from an encounter with a brightly coloured sculptural flower, but they may also come from everyday activities like farming experienced anew from encountering artful ways of tending to a field—be these sculptural renderings of traditional farming or newly introduced permaculture practices. As such, a broader conceptualisation of art can explain and serve as a mitigation of the problem of rural residents being 'put off' by 'art' in research or community development practices (see, e.g., Crawshaw & Gkartzios, 2016). We finally suggest that a generous notion of art, which broadens our appreciation for the richness of aesthetic experience, can and should also be explored in places beyond Japan that mobilise art for revitalisation and community-building.

Focusing mainly on the experience of agro-ecological farmers, whose farming values align well with ETAF's aims of promoting human-nature connections, it is limited in its representation of the experience of other rural residents. Yet, our research leads us to believe that ETAF and its ambitions of forming meaningful local interactions between rural residents, diverse art forms and aesthetic experiences, artists (professionals and amateurs alike) and visiting the public serve

as a reference for art-led community projects in other places to engage and promote art forms that are aligned with the everyday practices and values of residents. Our research is of course not exhaustive of the potentials of ETAF in neither rural revitalisation nor in how farmers relate to art as part of this process. More research is needed that explores the artful and aesthetic experience of a more diverse groups of rural residents including mainstream and industrial farmers. Here, the role of marginal art vis-à-vis pure and other art forms may prove to be even more significant when grappling with the potential of art in rural revitalisation.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data of the first author presented in this study are openly available in Zenodo at 10.5281/zenodo.4609738.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

ETHICS STATEMENT

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the General Data Protection Regulation of the European Parliament and International Sociological Association.

ORCID

Kei Yan Leung https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6890-4183

ENDNOTES

[1] In rural development theory, the endogenous model highlights the use of local resources within a territory, offering contextualisation focused on the needs and capacities of local people through their active participation (Gkartzios & Lowe, 2019; Ray, 2000).

[2] Past ETAF lasted for around 5 weeks from late-July to early-September. In 2019, ETAF exhibited 379 pieces of artwork contributed from 363 international artists, in which 210 pieces of the artworks have been commissioned on a permanent basis (Echigo-Tsumari Art Field, 2022).

[3] When referencing Japanese names in this article we follow the East Asian convention of family name followed by given name. In the case of Tsurumi Shunsuke, this means that his family name is Tsurumi and his given name is Shunsuke.

[4] All farmer names in this text are pseudonyms.

[5] This is, of course, very generalised and a caricature of an analytical model, which is nonetheless real and prevalent. See Hallam (2008) and Thorsen (2019, pp. 60–67) for in-depth analyses and discussion.

[6] In the book *Art Place Japan* (2015), Kitagawa translates 'marginal art' into his own notion of 'lifeway art'. However, we use 'marginal art' throughout this text to avoid too many competing concepts and potential confusion.

[7] We will not go into details about Kitagawa's argument here, but in brief, while drawing on Tsurumi's art analysis, he also criticises it for being too caught up with Western art history hierarchies. Instead, Kitagawa suggests the

notion of 'lifeway arts'. However, the nuances of difference between 'marginal art' and 'lifeway art' is underdeveloped by Kitagawa. See also note 6.

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4. Paper 3

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9

Reflections on Doing Cross-Cultural Research Through and with Visual Methods

Kei Yan Leung

Introduction

Language is the dominant medium on which social scientists rely in their research practices; they use language both to create knowledge and in their choice of interpretative methods to communicate this knowledge (Davies & Dwyer, 2007). However, our daily lives are composed of many different dimensions, and not all knowledge is reducible to language. Instead of seeking singularity and certainty to make sense of that one reality through language, there are multiple realities, and we need new ways of knowing in order to navigate through the diffuse and messy world (Law, 2004). When we aim to understand the mindsets and practices of interviewees, focusing solely on spoken words may be limiting. In the context of my own research, farmers do not necessarily engage in

K. Y. Leung (✉)
University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna, Austria
e-mail: natalie.leung@boku.ac.at

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word-based cognitive reflection when they interact with plants, animals, soils or tools.

Instead of focusing solely on how we communicate our thoughts and experiences through language, scholars have been shifting their focus to more-than-representational experiences such as emotions, affects and sensuous experiences[1] (Law, 2004; Lorimer, 2005). The relational, emotional and affective aspects in research practices regarding the interactions between humans and non-humans have been increasingly acknowledged (e.g., Campbell et al., 2019; Hitchings, 2003; Krzywoszynska, 2016). In addition to increasing explorations on methods that invoke emotions, different attempts have also been made to theorize and interpret emotions and affect (Anderson, 2006; Harrison, 2000; Pile, 2010; Thien, 2005; Tolia-Kelly, 2006). In these works, the world is conceived as full of sensibilities, and researchers seek ways of knowing beyond words and languages through openness and reflexivity. With the assumption that knowing is more-than-representational by considering both representations and affective, sensuous experiences, this chapter uses the context of cross-cultural research to explore the limitations of knowing solely through language.

Cross-cultural research is a fertile ground used to explore the role that meanings beyond language play in our understanding and engagement of the world. When conducting research in one's own native language, the researcher might also struggle with language, but they focus more on making sense of how discourses and practices work together (Krzywoszynska, 2015). In the context of cross-cultural research, the researcher does not instinctively know all the experiences that are associated with words; knowing also involves the process of understanding the emotive and embodied relationships that are specific to the language, place and cultural practices (Krzywoszynska, 2015). When language cannot give a full account of experiences, it unfolds the opportunity for cross-cultural researchers to seek alternative understandings of the interviewees than a local researcher might do. In this sense, a cross-cultural

[1] There is an extensive body of literature on non-representational and more-than-representational approaches that do not prioritize the role of representation and reasons, they also take into account the role of practices, affects, emotions to account for the interactions between humans and non-humans (e.g., Anderson & Harrison, 2016; Lorimer, 2005).

researcher is perhaps similar to a blind person: they might not be able to see through direct vision like a local researcher, but they can see hidden meanings through a range of sensitivities and sensibilities that a sighted researcher may otherwise neglect. Indeed, it will take longer for a cross-cultural researcher to understand their interviewees because of the cultural and language differences. They will also learn less about certain things because the cultural and language gaps just could not take them there. However, they can potentially learn a wider range of realities, or even participate in the making of those realities, because they are outsiders who always seek more thorough explanations from the interviewees.

Visual methods have the potential to supplement the limitations of verbal research methods in both cross-cultural and same cultural settings. Our vision is not only limited to an objective process that is associated with discourses, meanings and judgements. When we see, we also develop subjective experiences such as sensibilities, and embodiment (Rose & Tolia-Kelly, 2012). Undertaking interviews with images allows people to go beyond the verbal thinking mode and include a wider aspect of their experiences at the emotional level, or layers of experiences that cannot be easily put into words (Bagnoli, 2009).

In addition to data collection, visual methods also have the potential to improve scientific explanation and understanding of scientific knowledge to both scientific and non-scientific audiences (Rodríguez Estrada & Davis, 2015). Scientists have been using graphs and figures to communicate scientific results visually for centuries (Tufte, 1997, cited by Darnhofer, 2018). More recently, visual communications are also increasingly used to connect non-scientific audiences. For instance, Bartlett (2013) used cartoons to communicate her research findings about issues related to misconceptions of dementia. She noted that cartooning helped to present serious topics in a more playful way, making it easier to engage audiences (Bartlett, 2013). Darnhofer (2018) found that using comic-style posters to share preliminary findings with her research participants was effective in engaging the participants to share their feedback and facilitate more in-depth discussions of the research topic.

In this chapter, I will reflect on my experiences as a cross-cultural researcher during my field work in Japan, where I conducted interviews with farmers using photo-elicitation to understand how they build relationships with artworks and their farming. As a Hongkonger, I had previously worked at the field site for three months on an art project about farming. However, I am not able to speak Japanese, so I worked with a local interpreter to conduct interviews with farmers with Japanese–English translation. Through the experiences of working with photo elicitation to collect data, and the attempt to convey research results through illustrations, I argue that visual methods help to uncover different realities that are beyond the scope of linguistic relevance, but nevertheless, fundamental to understanding the mindsets and practices of farmers.

In the following, I start by providing a brief account of how I applied photo elicitation in my doctoral research. I then first discuss how experiencing the challenges of communication brought by cultural differences pushed me to rearrange the interview questions. Second, I elaborate on the limitations of translation in communicating experiences, thoughts and emotions that are tied to cultural practices. Third, I illustrate how photo elicitation helped to unfold different layers of experiences by the farmers during data collection. Last but not least, I discuss the potential challenge of conveying results from research in Japan to non-Asian audiences, and why I combined visual illustrations with verbal quotes to give a more in-depth portrayal of the experiences of Japanese farmers to Western audiences.

The Study: Talking About Art Through Photo Elicitation

In my doctoral research, I used photo elicitation in interviews to explore how Japanese farmers build relationships between their farming and artworks. My aim was to understand how farmers perceive artworks and the potential impacts of art on their farming. The study was conducted in Tokamachi (a remote mountainous area in Northeastern Japan), in two respective field works in the winter of 2019 and 2020. I selected

this particular area because it is where the Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale (ETAT) takes place. Similar to many rural areas in Japan, Tokamachi is facing the problem of dwindling population and increasing numbers of abandoned houses and fields (Kitagawa et al., 2015). ETAT was the first art project designed to address the issue of rural revitalization in Japan; it is the world's largest rural art festival. By placing art installations in abandoned landscapes and rice fields, ETAT uses art as the means of reconnecting with traditional farming practices, and the farming landscape they produce (Kitagawa et al., 2015). Through these, ETAT aims to invite urban visitors and local residents to rediscover existing but neglected local cultural and natural resources, and reflect on their values.

In total, I interviewed 25 farmers and an artist who has been working with local farmers to market their products. The farmers were selected based on their engagement in more agro-ecological farming practices than mainstream farmers. These agro-ecological practices are broadly defined by the way they substitute environmentally sound inputs and practices for industrial ones, and reconnect with traditional practices that are more well-suited to local agro-ecosystems (Gliessman, 2017). In Japan, farming is dominated by small-scale, mechanized rice farming under the co-ordination of state-supported Japanese Agricultural Cooperatives (JA). JAs manage government subsidies, provide advice and input, and govern standardized, industrial rice production and sales (Esham et al., 2012; Mulgan, 2005). The state-initiated agricultural liberalization since 1990 enabled the emergence of this group of agro-ecological farmers who intentionally engage in more sustainable farming practices. This group of farmers were selected because their farming practices resonate with ETAT in re-signifying dying, traditional villages through innovation and re-interpretation of traditions. Such similarity suggested that these farmers might be more able to relate to ETAT's artworks. However, this is not a point that my research can prove because I did not interview mainstream farmers.

The interviewed farmers were selected through snowball sampling. Based on the information of the respondents, it is believed that these 25 farmers are most, if not all, of the agro-ecological farmers known in the area. Among these farmers, five of them work for ETAT on a part-time basis to take care of fields that host artworks; the rest of the

farmers work on fields that do not have artworks and they were not involved in the selection and management of the artworks. This reflects the fact that that most agro-ecological farmers are not directly involved in the artworks or the art festival. After the interviews in Winter 2019, I subsequently carried out three group discussions with them to deepen my understanding of how they make sense of selected artworks that are related to agriculture and landscape in Winter 2020. Similar to many of my research respondents, the interpreter moved to the area from Tokyo to seek a traditional lifestyle in the countryside.

During the first field work, in Winter 2019, I interviewed the farmers with nine pictures of seven selected artworks. The artworks were selected mainly based on their high publicity in ETAT, conspicuous locations on rice fields, and the link to traditional agricultural practices in Japan. In the pre-designed interview guide, I started by asking briefly about their farming background, i.e., how they started, and about their farming characteristics and challenges. The rest of the questions were guided by photo elicitation: I showed the farmer photos of artworks, invited them to choose one that they wanted to talk about, and asked them to share how the artwork is relevant to their farming.

Adaptation of Interview Questions

The first few trial interviews were a mess, and I very quickly realized there is a gap that limited my understandings of what the interviewees said. The questions about the artwork were too difficult and abstract for some of the farmers. They were anxious about not being able to give a 'correct' answer about what the artworks convey. Responses like 'I know nothing about art', 'I am just a farmer, I am not interested in art' were common. Although Tokamachi is dotted with artworks, art is still something unfamiliar and distant to some of the farmers, because they consider aesthetic experiences as something separated from ordinary experiences. Originally, I thought that the multivocality and abstraction of art could invite the farmers to relate to it in a diverse way, but it turned out that the indirectness of art made some of them feel anxious about not being able to give a model answer. I tried to understand why they are not

interested in art; we were exchanging words through the interpreter but we were not able to communicate. They were trying to understand what my strange questions were trying to capture, and I was trying hard to understand the meaning of their answers. Gradually, I realized that what was hindering the communication was my lack of understanding about their ways of being a farmer in the area; I was not able to relate to their mentalities, and to their emotional struggles about being an outsider in the group-oriented village culture in Japan.

For instance, in the following conversation, I originally intended to find out why the farmer was not interested in the artworks and what kind of qualities the artworks lack. At the beginning when I was not aware of the social pressures they were referring to, I had difficulty to logically relate to the distinction they made between artificial things and cultural events/traditions:

Q: Why are you not interested in the artworks?

A: I don't understand the meaning of the works… I am not really interested in those art, so I never thought of anything about them. I have seen some of them, but it is so awkward to put artificial things in nature I don't like the idea, it feels so unnatural. I don't get anything about them, I love nature more than artificial things.

Q: What about Matsuri? It is more of a cultural event.

A: Those ceremonies with fire, all the traditional events, that maybe seem like art to foreigners, I think they have meanings in their cultural background, so I can understand them.

Q: How do you understand them? Does it mean you do not like the artworks because they have no cultural background?

A: From those cultural events, I don't know if I like or dislike them or not, I just accept them. I accept them because the meanings are inherited from the past, I just accept the ideas. But for those artificial things, they are just so awkward, so I don't understand any of them.

Q: You just mentioned that the cultural events are meaningful because they are from the past…what do you mean by just accepting the ideas because they are from the past?

A: (thinking about it hard) Hmm… I think to follow those traditional events, rules and life they have here… it's about respecting the life here… I am following local rules and habits from the past, just like the locals are following their lifestyle from the past. I started growing

> rice and veggies because my neighbours and the elderly also do it in this way, it is really important for me to follow the kind of life they have had for long time, to me this is the meaning of living a local life… in this village we prepare rice shooting collectively and they would use chemicals, I cannot avoid it. It is part of the cooperation. If I do not follow, I will be ditched and complained about by the community. To assimilate in the community and receive support from others, I have to accept something that I don't agree with. For me, it is really important to live in this village peacefully and happily without having any troubles with villagers.

It turned out that the context behind this farmer's rejection of the artworks and acceptance of traditions related to their situation as an incomer in the village and the emotional pressures to assimilate into the community and local traditions. I came to understand that the relationship between art and farming is not just about how the art installation itself is related to the meaning of their farming practices. It involves far more diverse relationships that are connected to their mode of life as a farmer who engages in agro-ecological farming practices and a newcomer in the village, and the emotions and feelings that are tied to it.

As a cross-cultural researcher, I needed to know more about their form of life in order to understand the possible relationships they would develop with the artworks. Therefore, I changed the arrangement of the interview questions, I allocated more time to talking about their farming values and practices before moving to the questions of art. Not only did this help me to make better sense of their farming life, talking about things they are more familiar also helped to empower the farmers and reduce the anxiety of talking about art.

The Difficulty of Translating Life and Practices Under Cultural Differences

Although rearranging the questions inspired more diverse discussions with the farmers over the artworks, I noticed that the limitations of translating emotions and local experiences through language were still present.

After all, I still depended mainly on words to communicate with the farmers and understand how they saw the photos. I noticed that even a perfect word-for-word translation did not help me to proceed smoothly with the interview. As a foreign researcher, I simply lacked the cultural sensitivity and fluency to ask the question in a culturally relevant way to delve into topics in which I was interested.

This is illustrated in the following extract of a group discussion, where apparently the farmers and the interpreter have a different understanding of 'nature' than my original question intended. They do not see nature as separated from humans; they also see humans as part of nature in their cultural concept of Satoyama. When I framed my question based on the western concept of the human/nature split and tried to understand how they make sense of such distinction, it did not lead me anywhere. My question got lost in translation because the interpreter and the farmers were not able to relate to my question:

(Q: me; I: interpreter; A: interviewee)

Q: In your opinion, what is landscape? The artificial rice terrace or the wild forest?

I: It is a hard question, it's not difficult to translate but the question itself is difficult to understand…

Q: Do you make a distinction between artificial rice terraces or natural/wild forests?

A: We called it *satoyama*, there is no translation. It means the middle part of wild nature and where people live. The landscape here or the future of here is the *satoyama*, that's why in the mountain there are rice terraces here, we call it *satoyama* view.

Q: Earlier some of them mentioned being captured by some beautiful moments in life; is that because the nature/landscape you see involves human participants It involves villagers, community, and you also live in this environment…

I: I think it depends; it is different for everyone. What do you want to ask?

Q: I just want to know if they find the nature here beautiful because they are part of it? Like the example of going to the wild nature: countryside people go there and they still find it beautiful, but they cannot live

there, so those kinds of moments that they think as beautiful won't last. But for people here, they can observe the changes in different seasons; is that because they live a life here/they share a life with nature?

A: When you go to the deep mountain here, if there is a path, it means there was life there many decades ago. I see the beauty when I feel the traces of humans, just like I also feel the beauty from the piece of farmland that elders just weeded by hand, I feel the beauty of their work.

These moments were clumsy and awkward, because I just could not find words to communicate my thoughts. It is not because we cannot find the 'right words', but more that I do not have the cultural context to understand their connection with nature in their everyday lives, and therefore their experiences associated with these connections. Meanwhile, the farmers also did not understand what I was asking because the nature/human split simply does not exist in their cultural understandings of landscape. Through these experiences, I realized that there are limitations in language that I simply cannot transcend as a cross-cultural researcher.

Cross-cultural researchers in social sciences tend to focus on solving 'problems' in translation and making communication effective (Turner, 2010). For instance, how to get precise translation, a correct version of an interview transcription to minimize the discrepancy caused by language differences (Turner, 2010). Many social scientists are often preoccupied with words because they tend to believe that the world is static, definite and predictable, and through precise words they can discover these definite states that exist out there in reality (Davies & Dwyer, 2007; Law, 2004). However, my fieldwork experiences clearly showed that the world is more complex and textured, so that the challenge is less in finding an exact translation, than our capacity to understand what farmers try to convey.

Instead of getting frustrated by not being able to maximize accuracy in language, I chose to be reflexive about the role and limitation language plays in cross-cultural research. The language differences made explicit the cultural dimension and demonstrated that meaning is made

outside of literal translation. Pereira et al., (2009, p. 5, cited in Krzywoszynska, 2015) believed that 'a lot of insight can be found, and a lot of knowledge can be produced, through explicit and critical reflection on the challenges and incommensurabilities of language difference'. For instance, there is no such concept of '*Satoyama*' in English. It resembles the concept of 'countryside' but is more than that. If it is translated from Japanese to English literally, it means 'the area between mountains and human settlements'; it is covered with managed woodlands and terraced rice fields (Brown & Yokohari, 2003). However, the translation neglects the values of nature implicit in the concept, that human communities (*sato*) and non-human nature (*yama*) coexist side-by-side in harmony (Yokohari & Bolthouse, 2011). The non-nature/human split does not only shape traditional agricultural practices in Japan, it also shapes the spiritual connections and respect farmers have with nature. There are also *Satoyama* landscapes in various places in other Asian countries like China. The distinctiveness of the Japanese one is the spiritual ties to nature, in which the Japanese believe that there are eight million deities present in nature (Iwatsuki, 2008). As a buffer zone between human settlements and deep mountain areas (*okuyama*), the *Satoyama* area is where they set up shrines to worship the deities so as to ensure co-existence and their guardian in daily life (Iwatsuki, 2008). If I just adhere to the mainstream western approach to strive for a precise translation and omit the cultural understanding that farmers have of nature, the possibility of exploring different approaches of nature/human relationship in another culture could be easily overlooked.

In addition, I also found that the language differences highlighted affective experiences that are tied to cultural practices. Feelings and affects do not just come with words; they are entangled with the specific social and cultural life of the interviewees. Although I went to the field with a local interpreter who acted as a vital cultural broker, it was not easy to convey feelings across cultural and language barriers. For instance, in the conversation about landscape, when I was trying to understand how farmers categorize and distinguish human and nature, the farmers were relating it to how they feel the beauty from the collaboration between humans and nature in an affective way. However, a perfect linguistic translation did not make me experience the feeling of beauty they have experienced. In the following conversation, I was still trying hard to

understand from the interpreter the kind of beauty they were referring to:

> *Q*: What are the things that they found beautiful? What is it that captured them?
> *I*: There were moments that nature and the view just overwhelmed us, those are moments that we are not able to tell what captured us… I just asked them about it, it is not about any specific thing but the whole atmosphere at that moment just captured us in our daily life.

It is therefore important for the interpreter to be sensitive about cultural differences; they have to understand peoples' feelings, reframing them and making them 'reasonable' to researchers from a different cultural context (Turner, 2010).[2] However, in the process of making feelings 'reasonable', the quality of the feelings described is incomparable with how it was experienced (Harrison, 2007). One of the respondents of Giustini (2019, p. 195) illustrated the limitations of language when it comes to the expression of emotions: 'sometimes we can't find the linguistic or cultural expression that would match the same level of emotion, but we try to do as much as we can to impact the audience'.

Opening up New Ways of Seeing Through Photo Elicitation

The use of photography in research is not something new; it first appeared in 1957 to study how different ethnic groups adapt to residence and new forms of work in urban factories (Collier, 1957, cited in Harper, 2002). Since then, photography has been increasingly used in various social sciences disciplines. There are different methods, as photos can be provided by the researcher or taken by research participants through

[2] The roles and influences of interpreters in cross-cultural research is a subject in its own right, and this book chapter is too limited in scope for more in-depth discussions. When one can speak a particular language, it does not automatically mean that you can represent a culture. The sensitivity to cultural differences is not only shaped by one's cultural background, it is also shaped by one's social background, positionality, personality traits, language proficiency, and so on (Turner, 2010; see also: Caretta, 2015; Temple, 2002; Temple & Young, 2004).

a camera handed to them. Also, different terms, such as photo voice, participatory photography and reflexive photography, have emerged to denote the varying use of photography in research.

Photo elicitation is broadly defined as a qualitative research method where photography is used to enrich and complement research data (Harper, 2002; see also Axinte, this book). The advantages of using photography in research are well documented, including research about farmers, or those in natural resources settings (e.g., Beilin, 2005; Sherren & Verstraten, 2013; Sherren et al., 2012). For instance, visual materials prompt respondents to reflect on things that they did not get to discuss in talk-only interviews (Rose, 2014). By putting farmers in control of the conversations that emerged, photo elicitation helps researchers to study complex issues that can be very personal and deeply held by farmers (e.g., farm landscape management), in a manageable and sensitive way (Sherren et al., 2010, 2012).

In photo elicitation interviews, pictures are used to invoke comment and discussions in the course of interviews, and therefore to make various realities visible in data collection (Banks, 2001; Rose, 2014). This approach uses the structure of showing, and then telling what is shown; the image is simply used by the researcher as an inscription device to visualize a certain reality to research respondents (Rose, 2014). Even if the pictures are taken by the respondents, researchers tend to focus more on what is pictured and making meanings by working with what the image shows. For example, photography is also used to study farmers, but it is used in a similar way to trace knowledge and experiences that the researchers are looking for. Harper (2001) used aerial photos of farmlands and historical photos to interview elderly farmers about their memory and interpretations of farm life in the 1940s. By using the photos to make the old way of farming visible again, Harper (2001) elicited rich details from the interviewees about technological transition to industrial farming in the US, what social relationships were like before the transition and, more importantly, their feelings about those old days.

However, Rose (2014, p. 31) finds that in visual research methods there is an almost total neglect of the 'symbolic and communicative components that are specific to the culture'; she refers to these components as visuality. Visuality is the cultural construction of visual

experience; it means what the respondents see, how they are able to see, and how this seeing and unseeing are governed by their cultural understandings of the messages inherent in the images (Foster, 1988, cited in Rose, 2014). In my research, my unseeing of the seeing of the farmers has, in many ways, highlighted how their seeing is specific to the social and cultural contexts of Japan.

Initially, I aimed to use the photos to elicit more information and make it easier for the farmers to talk about relationships between art and their farming. In other words, I also used the photos as an inscription device to confirm the reality that I was looking for, without taking into account how the farmers see. Indeed, the photos helped a lot in relating the artworks to the daily life of the farmers. The combination of artwork and landscape in the photos encouraged them to look at the artworks as pictures or sceneries and share their perspectives freely. It turned out that the photos encouraged different imaginations among the farmers, and they shared more insights than what messages the photos conveyed to them. This was especially so in the case of those who said they knew nothing about art at the beginning of the interview. For instance, they related the photos to the past farming scenes in the area, the resemblance with their current practices in terms of values and actual things they have created like farmhouses, and their vision of the future of the local area. Indeed, their seeing was not just restricted by the art piece itself, but also the background of the artwork and the combination of the artwork with the background. Some of them also built relationships between their seeing and farming life, in which they projected themselves to certain artwork and saw how it signified the rhythms and characteristics of their farming life.

Through these experiences I found that the cultural differences of how some of the farmers and I see visual materials in the photos can serve as a good opportunity for me to understand the social life of the farmers and highlight their associated affective and sensuous experiences. When they talk about the images in the interview, to me it is more than just about what the images show, but also about how they see the images in certain ways. The fissure between the seeing and unseeing among us provided rich material to uncover different realities; this might well

remain implicit and thus hidden in research conducted in the same cultural context.

For example, when I saw artistic elements from the photos of traditional festivals where people are playing traditional Japanese musical instruments, to some of the farmers those are cultural events that worship the spirits of dead people and convey the meanings of assimilation. Some of them saw the projection of traditional cultural landscapes in Japan from the photos, I saw nothing but just some forests with abandoned fields. It is these fissures that inspired me to ask more questions to seek clarification from the taken for granted but unobservable thoughts of the farmers. As a foreign researcher who lacked understanding about how Japanese farmers make sense of farming, this has opened up different realities of local farming context to me. These are realities very different from the one I encountered from doing a literature research, in which the literature mainly highlights the challenges farmers face under different structural forces in Japan.

By sharing how they see the pictures and what the pictures visualize to them, the farmers illustrated how they make sense of their farming life through a different form of knowing, one that does not separate reasoning, feelings, affective and sensuous experiences. These more-than-representational understandings are embodied sensations, such as the sight of rice terraces, or the physical difficulties and embodied feelings of working on the land.

I also found that the point of using visual method is not at all about filling the difference between language and experiences resulting from the gap in cultural understanding in cross-cultural/same-cultural research to make communication 'adequate'. There is never a translation where language is 'adequate', especially if we also take more-than-representational experiences into account (Harrison, 2007). What is significant about using visual methods in both cross-cultural and same cultural research is that it traces the limits and possibilities of mainstream social analysis, and inspires researchers to stop preoccupying themselves with language, and start considering how meanings beyond language can enrich our understanding of our research subject. The following are some examples of how the use of photos in interviews helped to uncover different layers of meanings through the seeing of the farmers and my unseeing.

Ikeda was amazed by the photo of the 'Rice House' in Fig. 9.1. He saw the life of a household in the frame, he saw a kitchen, a living room and a family living there. He related the picture to the concept of *Tanaka*, which literally means a 'house surrounded by rice terraces', and he saw the traditional view of the local village hundreds of years ago from the photo. As a non-Japanese farmer, I was not able to see the rich cultural connotation that the 'Rice House' carries. Yet, such unseeing captured my attention towards the nostalgia that Ikeda had towards such traditional landscapes, and the disappointment he had when he gave up some rice terraces last year, as cultivating them was too physically demanding. His seeing from the photo did not allow me to experience the same emotional connections he has with the landscape, but it highlighted the importance of considering the emotional aspects that are keeping farmers motivated to persist traditional, labour-intensive practices.

Fig. 9.1 'Rice House'—the metal frame merges with the landscape and rice terraces to form an harmonious picture in different seasons (*Source* Photo by author)

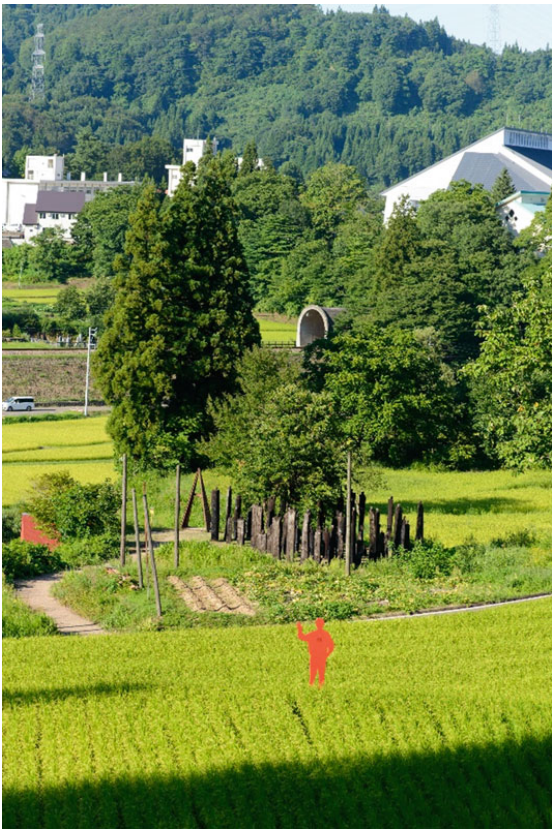

Fig. 9.2 'Scarecrow Project'—the red silhouettes represent the past scene of the family of the landlord working on their ancestral land (*Source* Calvin Wong)

Morita takes care of the rice fields hosting the 'Scarecrow Project' (Fig. 9.2, above). He was working on the fields every day; he did not think much about the artwork because it was too connected

to his daily life. Instead, he focused on the uneven growing conditions of the rice field in the picture. The rice field has experienced mudslides, resulting from rice fields in higher terraces being abandoned. They damaged the field, making it difficult to work on because some parts are deep and muddy. He related the artwork to these embodied experiences of working the field, and this reminded him of the need to keep rice fields active to preserve the landscape. This is in contrast to all I could see from the picture: the red silhouettes. Yet these red silhouettes did not matter to Morita at all. All the photo reminded him of were the uneven growing conditions of the rice plants. From his words, I was able to know the hardship he had endured when working with this field, but I was not able to experience his embodied experiences of physical fatigue and the emotional connections with landscape through language. However, his seeing and embodied feelings uncovered his sentiment towards preserving the *Satoyama* landscape, which is getting lost because in this mountainous area rice fields are increasingly abandoned. As mentioned earlier about the *Satoyama* landscape, to local farmers the loss of the landscape is not just about its physical disappearance, it is also the breaking up of human–nature collaboration and the spiritual connections. To him, the physical fatigue he was enduring was the bridge to rebuild this collaboration, it was associated with the emotional connections to the culturally meaningful landscape.

The strength of how visual materials are more capable in stressing emotional experiences became obvious when Shibata and Keiko talked about their feelings towards snow, respectively through words and picture. The lack of emplaced experiences made it too abstract for me to relate to Shibata's feelings about snow. Also, he believed that as a visitor, I would not be able to relate to the beauty they find from the snow in the area.

> It is the light and darkness about the beauty. If you don't live here for a whole year, you don't know how tough it is to live through the winter. When you just come and see the beauty of snow in winter, the joy is different, and you also would not feel our thankfulness to spring. (Shibata)

Although I am not able to share the same feeling towards the beauty of snow with the farmers, the emotion related to seasonal changes was made explicit when another farmer, Keiko, relieved the feelings she experienced from snow, triggered by a photo from the artwork 'Human re-entering nature' (Fig. 9.3) in winter. Her experiences signified the emotional changes and embodied experiences of living a rhythm of life that is dependent on seasonal changes. For instance, the relief from working on terraced rice fields that are not accessible by machinery in summer, and therefore the calm and stillness she associated with snow in winter.

> I wonder what he is thinking, I can imagine many things by looking at him… I wonder why he is standing like this, nowadays people don't stop, they are all moving around. But when snow comes, we feel relieved because winter has finally come. Maybe he feels relieved to see the snow and he can finally take a rest. It is such a good picture. (Keiko)

Conveying Research Results Through Visual Illustrations

The cross-cultural position as a non-Japanese person has helped me to unfold different layers of meanings that might remain hidden to a Japanese researcher working in their own cultural context, as they might be too obvious to merit mentioning. However, as an Asian I also faced the challenge of adequately conveying the research results to non-Asian audiences through words.[3] It was already difficult for me to 'fully' understand the farmers given the cultural differences between Hong Kong and Japan. As a result, the words of the farmers had already gone through a first layer of cultural translation by the time the interpreter translated the words to me. There would then be a second layer of cultural translation when I communicate my research results through words to western audiences, who are even more culturally distant to Japanese farmers than I am as a Hongkonger. The idea of visualizing interview quotes first emerged

[3] Communicating research results to non-Asian audiences is necessary as the research is intended for publication and doctoral examination in a western context.

Fig. 9.3 'Human re-entering nature', Winter—a 4-metre high human figure that changes with the season (*Source* Anna Mak)

when I checked if the interview transcription is 'correct' with the interpreter. She told me that some of the quotes sound right literally, but the spirit and the emotion of the speaker is gone in the English sentences. For example, when Yoshida spoke in the following quote, the emphasis was on the positive and thankful feelings for being able to work together with the beautiful landscape to produce food. However, the interpreter felt that these emotions were lost, as the English translation sounded more like he was frustrated by the physical workload, which he uses to justify the use of chemical pesticides. She thought that it was important to emphasize the positive attitude through a supplementary note.

> I always enjoy farming in the mountains, I feel proud that my rice and wheat came from these beautiful mountains, and I preserve the Satoyama landscape... I am taking care of the abandoned farmland, but it is taking too much labour and time to do the organic way, I cannot do all the work by myself, I have to use chemicals to weed. I want to reduce the chemical usage on wheat, I am looking for a good way to use them. (Yoshida)

Therefore, I thought of working with a local Japanese artist, whom I interviewed during the first field work in Winter 2019, paying her to produce graphic illustrations of selected quotes. I could use the illustrations to supplement the farmer's verbal quote and depict the scene of how particular experiences were understood by the farmers. Similarly, Dahl et al. (2012) used a graphic novel to retell the life stories of five homeless people they interviewed in academic research. Through portraying the life events preceding their homelessness, and how they experienced these events emotionally, the graphic illustrations draw the attention of a wider group of audiences to the complicated social issue of homelessness.

Together with the interpreter, we therefore identified three interview quotes in which the emotional and sensuous experiences of the farmers are especially absent in the English translation. Afterwards, I arranged a meeting with the local artist, in which the interpreter and I discussed these quotes with the artist and shared with her how the emotions and spirits of the farmers were lost in translation during the interviews. I invited the artist to draw three illustrations based on the three quotes; I also invited her to convey the quotes in her way. Shortly after the

meeting, the artist presented me a first draft with five illustrations. I picked three illustrations that I thought fitted most with the quotes, and I gave her some comments and suggestions for aspects that I thought could be further highlighted in the illustrations. After that, she incorporated my comments, revised the first draft and delivered the final illustrations to me.

As a rare artist working with local farmers in this remote rural area, the artist has been using artistic design to help local farmers to market their products to both local and urban customers The artist therefore provided highly valuable thoughts and ideas because she understood the language and experiences of local farmers, and she is also experienced in converting the language of farmers to non-farming audiences through visualization. Rodríguez Estrada and Davis (2015) point out that not all visualizations are effective communications, and visualization is also not a blind process of integrating written discourses with visual illustrations. It is important for the communicator to not just understand the written discourses, but she should also be able to connect with non-specialist audiences through their language. In the design approach of the artist, she first understands the farming approaches of farmers, then she helps them identify the distinctiveness of their products. Therefore, she is familiar with local farming landscapes and the settings of the farms of local farmers, and knowledgeable about the farming approaches and practices of local farmers. In her design work for local farmers, she communicates these aspects of local farmers to both local and urban customers. Through these experiences and background, she can utilize the techniques in graphic design, e.g., composition, colour, layers, as highlighted by Rodríguez Estrada and Davis (2015), to convert the selected quotes of the farmers to paintings that are easier for non-Japanese audiences to capture emphasis of the quotes.

Using a visual illustration has the potential of supplementing the verbal quote to draw audiences' attention to the more comprehensive experiences of the farmers. Visual illustrations can help convey the emotions and sensations that farmers were trying to convey in the interviews in an imaginative way. To address the common misconceptions related to dementia, Bartlett (2013) used cartoon-style drawings to portray the lifeworld of dementia patients in a playful way with

imaginative scenes in an exhibition. The exhibition received positive feedback, and the cartoons were able to generate fluid and open-ended interpretations. This example shows that illustrations can relate non-verbal connotations to readers of one's research in a metaphorical way. In striving for this, the hope is to inspire the reader to take these aspects into account in understanding the mindsets and practices of farmers. For instance, by just reading the following quote, the embodied aspect of learning mentioned by the farmer can easily be overlooked. The quote can be seen as being merely about cognitive understanding of farming knowledge. In fact, during the conversation the farmer did not separate the cognitive aspect of learning from the embodied one in the quote: how he feels hopeful and is looking forward to reaching the embodied level, more than the fact that he needs more confidence and experiences. It is difficult to capture his emphasis just by reading the quote:

> I need more experiences, many things can change the condition... soil, water, weather and everything, I need more confidence in what I am actually doing, then I can move on after 2-3 year. What I have learnt from books and my mentor will be more in my body. I will feel more confident and have an actual sense of what I was taught. (Yoshida)

The following is a short account of how the artist interpreted the quotes, how she incorporated aspects that I wanted to highlight and visualize the quote.

Figure 9.4 shows a simple and subtle scene of a farmer touching and checking the soil and seedling with two hands: the artist intended to use this ordinary moment to convey different meanings expressed in the quote. She focused on the word 'soil' and used it as an anchor to link different aspects of learning Yoshida mentioned in the quote. In the opinion of the artist, soil shows the impact of weather, humidity and the environment; soil also shapes the condition of plants. Since farmers accumulate knowledge of soil through experience and practices, the artist uses the act of touching and caring of soil in Fig. 9.4 to symbolize the accumulation of knowledge as indicated in the quote. As I wanted to highlight the aspect of learning from an embodied level in the illustration, the artist presented the farmer without a head. The

Fig. 9.4 Illustration of a farmer caring for the plant through his body to accumulate knowledge and experience (*Source* Megumi Hirose)

blue background has two implications: first, it shows a blue sky and aims to bring a positive and hopeful emotion that the quote expressed; second, the background meanwhile can also be the chest of the farmer, the combination of different colours signifies the fluidity of affect and feelings he has for the plant in his heart.

Illustrations can also visualize in a more realistic way the scene of how farmers interact with non-humans through various sensuous experiences in their farming practices. In the following quote, Yanaga shared how she used her body to feel and care for the plants to understand their condition:

> The scent, you can smell it… you can feel it, touch it and you can taste it. If the crop is not doing well, I can see the failure from their shapes. If you look at a tomato closely, you feel the hair…. (Yanaga)

When she expressed the quote, she was excited and showed how these interactions with the plants and attention to small details motivated her in her everyday farming life. However, these emotions are also not explicit in the quote. In Fig. 9.5, the artist wanted to highlight the love and affection that a farmer develops towards her plants and tomatoes in the process of nurturing and caring for them. The facial expression of the farmer in Fig. 9.5 communicates such excitement when she is examining the tomato through the touch of her hand and her smelling the tomato. The farmer is surrounded and embraced by her flourishing plants in the composition of the illustration; it conveys the reciprocity of care and happiness between the two, in which the plants flourish because of the care of the farmer, and the farmer is happy when the plants grow well.

Similarly, Shibata illustrated how he plants rice by hand. In the quote, it is difficult to imagine at the cognitive level how human hands can transfer energy to the plants, within a western scientific understanding. The 'energy' he is referring to is related to the concept of 'ki-energy'

Fig. 9.5 Illustration of a farmer appreciating her tomato like an artwork (*Source* Megumi Hirose)

in Japanese culture. The meanings of 'ki-energy' are very different from what the English word 'energy' conveys: 'ki-energy' signifies a vital force that flows between animated things and inanimate things in the world. In the context of this quote, it is a force that flows between the body of the farmer, the rice plants and the soil:

> We like planting rice by hands because it makes rice more delicious. When we use our hands to touch the plants, some good energy is transmitted to the plants and the Earth. I believe in the power of it, that's why I want more people to be involved in my farming, and I can get a lot of good power from a variety of people. (Shibata)

Both the artist and I identified 'ki-energy' as the key idea to be highlighted in the illustration. The first image that popped up in her mind from the quote is a farmer transplanting rice with their hands in a *Satoyama* landscape. Being an incomer from an urban area, the artist does not just experience *Satoyama* through the visual landscape but also the smell in the air. She believes that a lot of energy is also stored in the air in the landscape. In Fig. 9.6, the white path signifies the moving of 'ki-energy' in the air embracing the farmers, the villages, mountains and forests. The white path also visualizes how 'ki-energy' is generated from manual rice transplantation, an aspect that I wanted to highlight. As the farmer transplants the rice plants using his hands, the 'ki-energy' gathers and spreads to the villages between the rice fields and the mountains. It signifies the process of how the delicious rice produced by traditional rice planting method brings good energy to people. The illustration also highlights that rice transplantation by hand involves more than the physical movement and visible touch of the plants. It also includes the invisible connections that the farmer feels with the plants and soil in the process of transplanting them.

Fig. 9.6 Illustration of a farmer enjoying rice planting by hands to cultivate the circulation of 'ki-energy' between his body, soil and the plants (*Source* Megumi Hirose)

Conclusions: 'Seeing' Meanings Beyond Language

Visual methods can be a useful tool to unlock the sensibilities of a cross-cultural researcher, or in general a same-cultural researcher who is overly or insufficiently familiar with the cultural context. They allow the researcher to better understand emotions and affects that are neglected in the research practices seeking singularity and certainty in social sciences. Through doing cross-cultural research in Japan, I experienced the insufficiency of language in understanding the experiences, emotions and feelings that farmers associated with their practices and forms of life. This led to many awkward moments when words were exchanged, but did not convey meaning. Using the photos in the interviews allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the everyday farming life of my respondents in light of their specific cultural context. The photos also

triggered associations that allowed us to discuss aspects of experiences that are difficult to put into words. Reflecting on what farmers saw, but I could not see, enabled me to co-creatively identify various more-than-representational dimensions they associated with their farming practices, i.e., the emotions and feelings. Reflecting on the cultural constraints during data collection and the resulting difficulties of conveying meanings fully through using only words, I also explored the use of illustrations by a local artist to complement quotes, so as to more fully convey research results to western audiences.

It was through reflecting on the feelings of frustration and embarrassment associated with the language differences that I was able to notice how visual methods can help to uncover different layers of understanding. As noted by Law (2004), method is not just a set of techniques, every method is performative, it depends on what kind of social science we want to practice. Only when I stopped desperately looking for the 'right' words did I become more mindful of how the seeing and unseeing of the farmers reveal a different reality, one that I did not encounter in the literature on farmers in Japan. Indeed, 'method goes with work, and ways of working, and ways of being' (Law, 2004, p. 10). Being a foreign, clumsy and mute body in the field unavoidably influenced the interactions I had with the farmers. My questions often sounded strange to them, as I was not able to formulate my questions in a way that was meaningful in the cultural context of rural Japan. Fortunately, having a local interpreter who already knew most of the farmers helped to encourage the farmers to be more generous in sharing their thoughts and experiences. The farmers did not feel offended and they were willing to explain their seeing in a more in-depth way, making meanings and implications explicit that were a taken-for-granted part of their experiences.

I have found being a cross-cultural researcher, in the context of this field research, in some ways like being a blind person—I could not see directly how experiences and practices are tied to culture. However, through the incorporation of visual methods, this has not been a limitation; rather, the visual methods helped me to capture meanings hidden behind language. I suggest that cross-cultural research is a good opportunity to broaden, to subvert and to remake research methods. It clearly

reveals that the world is so complex that we cannot fully grasp it. It also inspires us to transcend the habit of looking for security and the definite; to recognize the importance of opening up our sensibilities to uncover multiple realities through methods that might otherwise be dismissed as slow, vulnerable and imprecise.

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5. Appendix: Academic CV

The following summarises research activities and outputs during my PhD studies:

Communication and dissemination

Confex: Space of possibility (online)	**Brussels, Belgium**
Chaired the session: 'Stronger together': A participatory approach to (farming) innovation'	June 2021
Co-organised the workshop: 'Let art lead the way': introducing art into research processes' with PeerGroup	
Delivered a presentation: 'Experiencing art from a field of rice – How do farmers experience art at the Echigo-Tsumari Art Festival?'	
Exhibited three paintings that I collaborated with a Japanese artist to convey more-than-representational experiences of farmers	
Attended the premiere of the three educational film clips that two RECOMS colleagues and I produced through collaboration with an animation artist	
Guest lecture for the Master's course 'Global sense of place' (online)	**Wageningen University, the Netherlands**
The transformative potential of place through art	April 2020
Conference 'Consumption and sustainability: Past, present and future'	**Kyoto University, Japan**
Presentation: The impact of rural art on alternative farmers – the case study of Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale	February 2020
The 29th Annual Conference of the Austrian Society of Agricultural Economics (ÖGA)	**Innsbruck, Austria**
Presentation: Art and alternative farming – a case study at the Echigo-Tsumari Art Field	September 2019
The XXVIII European Society for Rural Sociology Congress	**Trondheim, Norway**
Panel discussion: Can art contribute to farm resilience? Evidence from Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale	June 2019
RECOMS Mid-term review for European Commission	**Brussels, Belgium**
Poster presentation: A relational understanding of farm businesses as coupled-ecological systems	February 2019

Participation in RECOMS training events

Creating alternative urban imageries *PhD Winter School*	**Barcelona, Spain (online)**
Engaged in discussions of topics such as housing issues, municipalism, and urban commons in Barcelona with local activists and experts	1-9 February 2021
Online training event *Rachel Carson Centre, Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich (LMU)*	**Munich, Germany**
Learned about the environmental history in Munich and the ecology of Bavaria Forest Attended a one-day writing workshop	31 July – 5 August 2020
Creativity, visualization and communication: workshop and master class *University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna (BOKU)*	**Vienna, Austria**
Acquired video editing skills and presented my PhD research in a 2-minute video Learned more about using participatory video in a research setting and how to design an exhibition	2-13 February 2020
Action learning project II – Community adaptation to energy challenges *University of Groningen*	**Groningen, the Netherlands**
Participated in a 3-day workshop about facilitation Set up a container in the art festival, Noorderzon, and engaged participants in the topic of energy transition through an interactive mapping approach	11-24 August 2019
Action learning project I – Agroecology and food sovereignty *Coventry University*	**Coventry, UK**
Investigated the issue of food poverty in Coventry and presented findings and suggestions to the local City Council	1-13 February 2019
Resilience, positionality and vulnerability *Natural Resources Institute Finland (LUKE)*	**Vaasa, Finland**
Used photography to convey the concept of resilience and vulnerability	16-21 September 2018

RECOMS Secondments

PeerGroup	**Groningen, the Netherlands (online)**
Participated in 'Mestmoeders', a project that explored the challenges of female Dutch farmers through theatre performance	March-May 2021
Examined the impact of using theatre play as communication to talk about the issues facing female farmers through a survey	
Flanders Research Institute for Agricultural, Fisheries and Food (ILVO)	**Ghent, Belgium (online)**
Presented about urban agriculture in HK and my PhD research in the regular team meetings at ILVO	September-November 2020
Engaged in the discussion of the mental health of farmers with researchers at ILVO, and explored the possibility of researching the topic through theatre performance in a workshop	