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Research Article

Introduction: Performance, Projection, Provocation! Relational Creativity in Contemporary Japan

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Abstract

This introduction to the special issue "Performance, Projection, Provocation! Relational Creativity in Contemporary Japan" presents a history of group-based creative practice in Japan, from the amateur endeavors of sākuru (circles) to the professional creativity of international production companies. The special issue applies the concept of "relational creativity" to a series of case studies to better understand how creative practices shape relationships and other social forms, institutional and less institutional.

Keywords: Sākuru; Group; Creativity; Relationality; Collaboration

Introduction: Situating group-based creative practices in Japan

Group-based creative practice is a common activity in Japan, from the amateur endeavors of *sākuru* (circles) to the professional creativity of international production companies. This special issue applies the concept of relational creativity to a series of case studies to better understand how creative practices shape relationships and other social forms, institutional and less institutional. We draw inspiration from the Japanese "サークル" (*sākuru*) a borrowed term from the English word "circle," which refers to groups of people who share common interests or goals, particularly in the context of school and university clubs or societies. The term became widespread in Japan during the 1950s to 1960s, following the Asia–Pacific War. During this period, there was a shift among students toward forming more autonomous and flexible group activities compared with traditional, official "club activities" (部活動). These new groups emphasized equality among members and valued independence from rigid organizational structures and hierarchical relationships. Although a borrowed term, *sākuru* conveys a sense of a "ring" or "gathering" in Japanese, symbolizing people coming together on equal footing, reflecting groups that prioritized free and equal participation. Over time, the use of *sākuru* extended beyond universities. It came to describe groups who gather over shared hobbies, interests, and creative endeavors, including community associations, art collectives, and adult social clubs. As Makiko Andro-Ueda reminds us in her study of the famous *Sākuru-mura* (Circle Village) established in a mining town in northern Kyūshu in 1958, *sākuru* now "refers to any group or coalition of people whose members join by choice. It is this freedom of membership that distinguishes circles from professional organisations and groups based on family ties or proximity of residence" (2021: no pagination).

Defining relational creativity

This free association for the purposes of co-creating forms the basis of our application of the concept of relational creativity to a series of case studies of collaborative production practices in Japan. Our use of the term relational creativity takes its theoretical focus on relationality from Georg Simmel's claim that when three or more people act in relation to each other (a "triad," in Simmel's original terminology) something different takes place compared with when people act alone or in partnership (Simmel 1971). As Simmel argues, in a triad, the possibility of new social orders that exceed any one of its members takes place, because even if one member is removed, a relationship remains between those left, and the memory of the third can continue as part of the norms and shared meanings, linking group members. Simmel's seemingly abstract argument can be more simply expressed as follows: sociological questions begin at the triad, whereas dyads and individuals are more personal and individualistic. Following this logic, particular kinds of creativity can be envisioned in similar ways, taking on meanings that exceed any one creative participant when conducted in groups. We posit the term "relational creativity" to explore this dynamic, while

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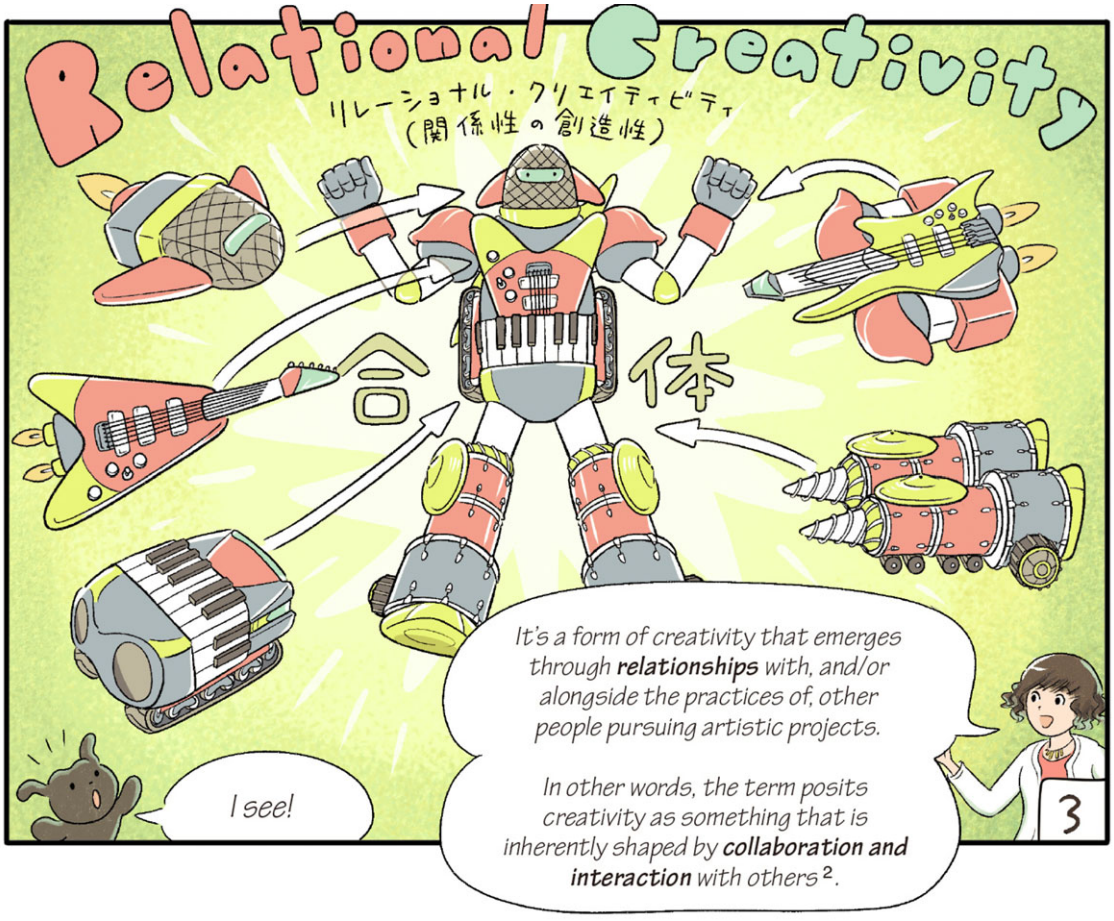

The concept of relational creativity visualised by manga artist Amaebi. For a Manga Project report on the Relational Creativity Network, please see: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/seas/research/relational-creativities-east-asia/relational-creativity-manga-project-report.

admitting that all creative acts are likely to exceed their participants in some way. Relational creativity is a kind of creativity that emerges through relationships with, or alongside, other people pursuing similar projects, such as writing poetry, building virtual or model worlds, designing visual imagery, or choreographing performances.

In many senses, all "human creativity is collaborative and social" (Leach and Stevens 2020: 95) and there is increasing recognition of the importance of collaboration (Littleton and Miell 2004), interpersonal improvisation (Ingold and Hallam 2007), and social networks (Cattani, Ferriani, and Colucci 2013) in understanding creative processes. Despite the acknowledgment of these dynamics, further consideration is needed to account for the differing social configurations of these relationalities and their collaborative creative effects. We explore how creative practitioners project and coordinate their actions, provoking others within a group setting to create something different from that which would be possible alone. In some of the cases analyzed in this special issue, what is created through relationality is literally or physically not possible to create alone, such as a group dance or musical performance. In other cases, we might wonder why group participants have chosen to create together with, or alongside others, when the creative output is not something that requires multiple bodies, such as the haiku poems produced by a writing group in Susan Taylor's article or the model towns and villages discussed in Fuyubi Nakamura's article. In all cases, choosing to create together rather than alone seems to generate a sense of mutual benefit, inspiration, or satisfaction, or at least to carry the expectation that this will be generated in the process of creating collaboratively.

We define relational creativity as creative efforts or practices that are pursued or take place within a relational framework, that is, in an environment of interpersonal relationships. We find this particularly curious in cases where creative practitioners choose to work in groups, when working alone seems equally possible but take an inclusive and exploratory approach to what we consider relational creativity. Historically dominant portrayals of creativity in the humanities suggest that individual acts of creativity embody the freedom of vision afforded to the lone creative and the freedom from compromise that creating alone can offer (Ingold and Hallam 2008). Writing, drawing, physical or digital design, and musical composition can be practiced alone, so why choose to create these forms in groups? This special issue explores four case studies from contemporary Japan that analyze group-based creative practices to consider the benefits that participants gain, or expect to gain, from working relationally.

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Japan is a relevant area of focus for this investigation owing to the long tradition of group-based, often amateur, creative practices of circles (*sākuru*), clubs (*kurabu*), and other associations (*kai*). The articles included in this special issue explore a range of creative practitioner groups who work together, or alongside one another, to create a particular kind of artwork, text, atmosphere, or creative space. Many also collaborate to transform the actual location or institutional context in which they perform or work into a new and stimulating area for creative practice. For Taylor's amateur poets, a local bar in the Jimbōchō book district becomes a creative haven when a haiku writing group adapts the space into a literary salon in which to set writing themes, listen to new poems, and debate their merits and problems in a group ranking of the works submitted. Nakamura's group of architects, students, and residents of the local communities with whom they work brings destroyed places back into being by creating models of areas devastated by the triple disaster of March 2011, decorating and denotating places that continue to have meaning for residents even after their destruction. The virtual YouTube performers known as VTubers discussed in Mila Bredhikina's article similarly create a place that does not physically exist in the virtual world of the metaverse yet rely on the actual geographical location of Akihabara and its association with otaku culture and gaming cultures to recruit newcomers to their virtual community. Finally, Ikeda, Morgner, and El Barbary analyze how ideas about Japan as a place are communicated through opening and closing ceremonies for the Olympic Games, exploring how creative groups design costumes, compose music and performances, and create visual media spectacles to bring areas such as Nagano or Tokyo to life in the imaginations of viewers.

In addition to interacting with actual geographical locations in Japan, the group creative activities analyzed in these articles also demonstrate how relational creativity can become a means of bringing imagined places into being in response to individuals' desires or needs to inhabit such a space as a means to develop or understand the self and to communicate about individual experiences to a wider public. Bredhikina's VTubers most clearly articulate their need for an imagined place that can allow them to perform aspects of their selves that they cannot realize in the everyday physical world by identifying the metaverse as a place where "metaverse natives" can assume an appearance different from that of their physical form and perform as another gender or even a new type of being. For the people whose lives were drastically changed by the triple disaster of March 2011, as interviewed by Nakamura, the recreation of their destroyed environments in the form of illustrated models offers a pathway from a stricken victim identity to that of active creative collaborator. Taylor's amateur poets similarly take their creativity out into the world on inspirational trips and activities, which recast the everyday as a place full of creative potential. However, Ikeda, Morgner, and El Barbary point out that efforts to depict an imagined traditional Japan at the Nagano Olympic ceremony were not well received, suggesting that the imagined places evoked through relational creativity for commercial purposes can fail when inward creativity, that is, a focus on the relations among the group of creatives, takes precedence over outward or commercial creative concerns. In this way, we understand imagined place as glitchy and unstable and identify tensions emerging from the group or collaborative effort to imagine and create these places even as they flicker or erode.

"Relational creativity" as a set phrase has been most often applied in scholarship on workplace contexts where creativity is recruited for commercial gain (e.g., the creation of advertising campaigns or collaborative solutions for workplace problems) (Jung and Lee 2015; Stephens and Carmelli 2017; Alavovska 2018) or to educational settings where children are introduced to creative practices as a means of facilitating peer communication and relationship building (Alipour 2020; Pierroux, Steier and Ludvigsen 2022). Scholars have also identified specific locations that bring people together to engage in creative enterprises as places that facilitate relational creativity (e.g., music recording studios and maker spaces) (Gibson 2005; Staber 2012; Bennett 2020). These approaches to understanding the operations and value of relational creativity tend to take for granted the question of what brings people to these sites of potential collaborative creativity in the first place. As these studies focus on creative production as part of work or learning, participation is not considered optional; in short, the question "Why choose to undertake a creative practice as part of a group?" is never asked. Thinking about relational creativity from the context of Japan, home to a wide range of creative clubs, groups, and societies that often meet outside or separate from institutions of labor or learning offers the opportunity to explore this question more thoroughly than extant literature has yet done.

At the same time, we are also interested in how relational creative practices and experiences can shape our understandings of our world and our places in it. Recent scholarship that posits amateur, recreational, leisure, and artistic creative practices as instances of relational creativity has emphasized the role that this kind of relational creativity can play in constructing the worlds that we inhabit, as well as shaping our communications and endeavors within those worlds (Leach and Stevens 2020; Country et al. 2022). In applying the concept of relational creativity to four case studies from Japan, we seek to demonstrate how this kind of creating between and among people brings into being new ways of imagining or understanding our world(s). Analyzing instances of group creative practice through the lens of relational creativity can, therefore, help researchers of Japan to better understand how an idea of "Japan" and the creative practitioners' place or role therein is formed.

Here we take inspiration from French art theorist Nicolas Bourriaud's concept of relational aesthetics, a "set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space" (2002: 113). Bourriaud sought to understand how participatory and collective art projects could "patiently re-stitch the relational fabric" of society (2002: 36), turning "the beholder into the neighbour" (2002: 43). We examine how the relational fabric of contemporary Japan is being re-stitched

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by: (1) exploring how creating performances in relational contexts bring new spaces into being; (2) projecting the outcomes of group creative practices; and (3) provoking others to respond or join in creative production, thereby bringing new worlds into existence. The autoethnography practiced by Turner and Bredhikina as participant–observers in their respective creative groups, the professional participation and framing of the group work practiced by Nakamura as a professional curator, and the visual analysis offered by Ikeda, Morgner, and El Barbary as audience–researchers also demonstrates how the scholarly beholder becomes a copracticing neighbor in the study of relational creative practices.

Relational creativity in Japan: From arts practice to the practice of everyday life

In art exhibitions and auteur studies, creativity is sometimes presented as an independent quality, associated with the mythic figure of a lone genius pursuing excellence in a technical or competitive field (Wilf 2014). Yet much creative practice in our everyday lives is in fact relational or collaborative. In Japan, many people devote a significant amount of time and energy to the pursuit of nonprofessional or unpaid creative practices, often conducted in groups. This special issue aims to draw more attention to such instances of collaborative informal creativity. We seek to move from a general understanding that creativity, when collaborative, is the combination of individual creative capabilities, to a specific understanding of creativity as relational and relation building.

Although our conceptualization of relational creativity includes a wide range of socialities, it draws inspiration from preceding work in and about Japan. Group activities undertaken as part of circles (*sākuru*), clubs (*kurabu*), or associations (*kai*) have been the focus of studies in sociology, anthropology, history, education, film studies, and art history since Tsurumi Shunsuke's pathbreaking essay "Why Study Circles?," which opened the *Shisō no Kagaku Kenkyū Kai* (Research Group on the Science of Though) publication *Joint Research on Groups: The Postwar History of Thought on Circles* (1976). Even before the *Shisō no Kagaku Kenkyū Kai* drew scholarly attention to the activities of groups, circles and clubs had been commemorating their own activities by publishing journals and histories of their organizations since the first recorded use of the word *sākuru* by Kurahara Korehito in 1931 (Andro-Ueda 2021; Coates 2023). Today's historical scholarship often draws on these materials to explore particular periods of circle activity from an intellectual history perspective, with a focus on the "circle boom" of the 1950s and the creative activities of leftist organizations of the 1960s (Narita et al. 2004–2007; Amano 2005). By contrast, much recent sociological, anthropological, and educational scholarship in Japanese tends to focus on clubs and circles which have an obvious developmental effect on the individual, such as sports clubs or language learning groups. Recent studies have assessed the benefits of participation in circles and groups from the perspective of achieving specific life goals, such as employment (Ikeda, Fushikida and Yamauchi 2018), increased physical skills (Hirai, Kiuchi, Nakamura, and Urai 2012), or successful child-rearing (Yūki 2001).

The motivations for joining a group for students seeking better employment opportunities through participation in university circles, amateur athletes attempting to improve their skills by joining sports clubs, and parents trying to improve their child-raising practices by joining child-rearing associations seem fairly apparent. By contrast, the reasons motivating a choice to join a creative practitioner group to produce something that does not in itself require the participation of multiple people are currently understudied in the extant literature on groups in Japan, and so we take this inquiry as the focus of this special issue.

In addressing creative practices pursued within the relational structure of groups and circles, we build on recent sociological and anthropological studies that attend to the attractions and effects of group or collaborative creative practices in the field of popular culture, such as cosplay, manga *dōjinshi*, fan fiction, and musical performance (Lamerichs 2013; Sugawa-Shimada 2020; Yokota 2024). The articles collected in this issue draw from foundational research on the history and formation of group activities around leisure in Japan (Arai and Matsu 2003; Shishido 2004; Mizumari 2005; Narita et al. 2007; Yokoyama 2012; Tsuji 2015; Unoda et al. 2016), many of which are not available in English translation and so scholars working on informal group-based creative activities in other languages have not had access to this body of scholarship (for example, Cooper and Jayatilaka 2006; Ingold and Hallam 2008; Ingold 2013; Amabile 2018; Oztop et al. 2018). While the relatively small corpus of scholarship in English on group-based creative practices in Japan has often been subdivided within the fields of history, art history, and anthropology (for example, Nakamura 2008; Yu ; Ross 2013; Lamerichs 2013; Klien 2016; Morris-Suzuki 2017; Morris-Suzuki 2018; Jesty 2018), connecting these diverse areas of scholarship can provide a more holistic picture of relational creativity in Japan. By adding a focus on relational aspects in research methods as well as in the creativity practiced by research study participants, the articles in this issue consider the relational creativity of group artistic practices from the perspective of the ethnographer or audience member–researcher, already engaged in a relational practice in their interactions with study participants and the texts that they produce.

Many of today's creative practitioner groups in Japan have been shaped by the cultural legacy of the earlier "circle movement" mentioned above, in which "small voluntary associations called circles (*sākuru*)" were established "within workplaces and communities throughout Japan" (Bronson 2016: 124). Justin Jesty argues that in the 1950s and 1960s, there were too many circles to categorize, whether they were affiliated with universities, workplaces, schools, or political institutions or "just for fun" (2018: 22–23). Whether participation was fun or not, circles were thought to be places that could "produce citizens capable of realizing the promise of postwar democracy" (Bronson 2016: 124). Circles established in Japan in the 1930s often drew inspiration from Soviet cultural circles founded in factories and other

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workplaces in Russia (Yuchi 1991: 405), and the postwar iterations of the "circle boom" years were, likewise, associated with leftist and egalitarian principles. Amano Masako argues that after Japan's defeat in the Asia–Pacific War in 1945, "American-style democracy" was influential in "defining the spirit of the times," yet while "political parties and unions" were associated with this interpretation of democratic thinking, the Marxist orientation of many circles caused "discord" between these informal groups and politicians and union officers "keen to exert an influence on them" (Amano 2005: 21).

Nonetheless, the mid-to-late 1950s was "a golden age for circles of all types" (Gordon 2009: 98), marked in 1955 by the foundation of a national body to support workplace circles, managed by the Sōhyō federation. The Shūdan no Kai (Association for Groups), which as Simon Avenell points out was itself a group formed of intellectuals including Tsurumi Shinsuke, Ōsawa Shinichirō, and others, was formed in 1963 to study circles and other group associations (Avenell 2010: 46). In a publication assessing group activity from 1945 to 1976, Sasaki Gen argued for "six broad categories of circles" (Avenell 2010: 46). These included groups based on friendship, those based on common interests, study groups, civic action groups, cultural production groups, and research groups. Here, we can see the question of motivation for joining these groups baked into the very categorization of the groups themselves, indicating that the *Shūdan no Kai* considered this aspect fundamental to understanding the function of groups for their members. In focusing on what participants hope or expect to gain from engaging in group-based relational creativity, we seek to place these questions of motivation, function, and effects back at the heart of studies of group creative practice.

Performing, projecting, and provoking in groups

The creative group activities analyzed in this special issue range from the commercial, serious, and meaningful to the amateur, light-hearted, and intermittent, but all have three factors in common. Shared creative spaces are brought into being (whether physically or virtually) through group interactions that can be categorized as performance, projection, and provocation. Group members perform within the space of the creative circle to try out new skills or identities or to recover lost memories and experiences. These individual realities are projected through shared objects, images, or texts, which make invisible sensations and experiences visible to the group and to audiences beyond. To bring these individual contributions together, group members or leaders often provoke participants through critique, adjustment, or creative intervention.

Susan Taylor's ethnography of a haiku group in Jimbōchō, Tokyo explores the role of provocation in the form of critique in her examination of the role of scoring participants' poems in the shaping of collaborative creativity. In Taylor's article, poetry writing is not a lone creative pursuit but simultaneously a collective or relational and individual practice, where the judgement of peers, especially elders, is recruited to develop poetic skills. While members of the haiku group insist on the unserious nature of the gathering, Taylor notes that the relationships between mentors, mentees, and group members nonetheless have "a formal aspect." In this way, the relational creativity of Taylor's haiku group encompasses "community-making, intergenerational cultural exchange, and social reproduction."

Taylor argues that such amateur creative groups bring into being a kind of flexible social space that can foster play, care, distraction, and community-building alternately. At the same time, however, the competition inherent to the assessment and scoring practices of the group leads Taylor to question how communal creativity can withstand such a challenge. The provocative interventions made possible by the group scoring practice may appear detrimental to creative freedom, yet group participants understand this critique as a form of care for their art, designed to develop their skills and make their practice stronger.

Group haiku scoring can also become a vehicle for joking, turning the exercise into a game. By analyzing the practices of the haiku group as both an artistic endeavor and game, Taylor considers how group-based creativity can serve social functions. Fuyubi Nakamura's article on the "Lost Homes" Scale Model Restoration Project demonstrates the social function of another kind of participatory creative project, which seeks to engage creativity as a means of memorialization and healing from trauma. The "Lost Homes" Scale Model Restoration Project is a collaborative endeavor between architecture students and professors who create predisaster models of 3.11 affected areas, and community members in the Tohoku region who decorate and finish the models to preserve and celebrate memories of the areas. Community members in the disaster region are invited to share and preserve their memories and stories, and paint predisaster models of affected areas created by the architecture students. Nakamura asks us to consider the ways in which social roles can be addressed through creativity in the aftermath of such disasters, and to think through how creative works assist in recovery processes and the preservation of memories.

The diverse spectrum of creative practitioners involved in this post-disaster recovery project range from amateur to professional, from residents of the affected areas, students, and professors to artists, architects, and curators. Similar to Taylor, Nakamura also became a participant in the project, though in a professional rather than amateur capacity. By curating a collaborative exhibition featuring the "Lost Homes" Scale Model Restoration Project, Nakamura adopts "relational creativity as method." This means abstaining from the kind of analytic writing that can dominate an academic article, instead presenting visual images of the group at work and using direct quotation to let the creative work and the creative practitioners speak for themselves. This approach puts the group's creative works on equal footing with Nakamura's scholarship, a curatorial decision that demonstrates relational creativity in practice.

Similar to Nakamura, Liudmila Bredikhina similarly became both a participant, contributor, and ethnographer

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of another group of creative practitioners bringing an imagined space into being in the virtual realm of the metaverse. Drawing from the words of her study participants, self-published in a range of formats and shared in several interviews, Bredikhina analyzes the "MetaBirthday" project, a collaboration by a group of VTubers (virtual YouTube entertainers), to show how online groups of creative practitioners can use virtual and physical spaces to create a sense of positivity in tension with the everyday realities of these spaces. Taking an unusual example of a group creative effort that developed online between individuals who "kept their physical world identities secret from each other," Bredikhina asks "what the individuals within the group had to gain from this collaboration on both personal, creative, and potentially economic levels." Similar to the amateur haiku poets of Taylor's Jimbōchō gathering, Bredikhina's participants understood coming together as a group as a way of challenging themselves and becoming more skilled through collaborative creation. At the same time, however, the professional and commercial goals of many of the creative practitioners involved in the MetaBirthday project raise questions for Bredikhina about the role of commercial pressures in collaborative artistic work. Bredikhina points out that instances of relational creativity that begin from amateur enthusiasms can, nonetheless, enhance professional reputations, promote advertising for commercial projects, and even become a means of crowdfunding.

Moving into more explicitly commercial creative practices, Mariko Ikeda, Christian Morgner, and Mohamed Nour El-Barbary take us beyond the boundaries of Japan in their analysis of the 1998 Nagano Winter Olympic Games' opening ceremony and the 2016 Rio Olympic Games' Japan-themed closing ceremony through the lens of relational creativity to better understand how a series of contradictory composite images and imaginaries of "Japan" were constructed through collaborative creation and performance. Ikeda, Morgner, and El-Barbary focus on the collaborative effort to make shared meaning as an example of relational creativity, arguing that "collaborative experimentation, especially in managing contradictions and misunderstandings, becomes a form of relational creativity in itself." In this way, Ikeda, Morgner, and El-Barbary posit the collaborative production of meaning as well as the resulting products of creative endeavors as instances of relational creativity.

Ikeda, Morgner, and El-Barbary (similar to Bredikhina) explore the uses of technology that can make relational creativity possible by bringing together creative practitioners who are physically or geographically located apart from one another. They are also sensitive to the commercial applications of relational creativity for attracting tourism and investment. By identifying a repertoire of themes generated by the collaborating creative practitioners working on each ceremony performance, the authors explore how collaborative creative practices inform the construction of meanings in audiovisual media concerning time, dance, and music that can be understood by domestic and global audiences alike.

Conclusion: Relational creativity as world building

This final article demonstrates that Japan itself is always in relation, to its neighbors, to its global interlocutors, and to researchers of the area. From groups of writers or artists who gather physically to create to groups of anonymous creators who meet and exist primarily online, this special issue considers relational creativity in both physical and virtual spaces as a means of co-crafting desirable areas and atmospheres. The issue as a whole also presents a range of modes through which researchers can engage with relational creativity. Thinking critically about our modes of encounter is central to the core objectives of this project, as the degree of participation of the researcher in the creative activities under study will inevitably shape our understanding and depiction of the impact of these activities on the individuals involved. Some authors play the role of participant in the groups that they study, such as Taylor's regular haiku contributions to the Jimbōchō poetry group that she analyzes, demonstrating the value of autoethnography and participant observation for understanding how participating in group creative practices can feel. Other authors such as Bredikhina and Nakamura bring their professional expertise into the group activities that they observe, Bredikhina providing translation of her project participants' lyrics and Nakamura in her capacity as professional curator at the Museum of Anthropology and the Department of Asian Studies at the University of British Columbia, Canada. Conversely, Ikeda, Morgner, and El-Barbary take the position of viewers of the final products created by the collaborating individuals that they study, showing that researching relational creativity can be productively approached through considered consumption of the end product as much as through participation in its creation.

Whether researchers and participants (as well as the researcher–participants of many of these articles) are immersed, integrated, or interpolated into the shared creative worlds in which the performances, projections, and provocations detailed here take place, it is clear that creating something in relation to or with others changes more than just the participants' creative practice. In each article, new worlds are opened up for participants through the relations afforded by their creative groupings. As in Mei Zhan's conceptualization of *worlding,* which she describes as recognizing "the 'oneness'—entanglement and simultaneity—of knowledge-making and world-making" (2010: no pagination), the entanglement of creativity and relationality produces a certain reality for its participants. This worlding relies on limits as much as possibility, each group containing their own boundaries and restrictions. The groups are capacious in ways and restrictive in others, some welcome multilingual creativity while others specify strict language usage (see the haiku *kigo* police in Taylor's article) and rules of engagement. Such creativity within limits demands the attention of group members, who must practice a kind of "feeling with the world" (De Antoni and Dumouchel 2017) to operate within shared boundaries, resulting in an acquisition of skills that improves their awarenesses and ability to collaborate with others (Kavedžija 2022). Continuing the recent focus on "feeling with Japan" (De Antoni and Cook 2019) then, we

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invite readers to consider the limits, possibilities, and worlding effects of creating together.

Relational creativity stretches the imagination through the performance of making something new, draws us into collaborative engagement in the act of projecting these new ideas into concrete form that others can see and in the provocations these new visions create in others' world views. One such provocation is to think beyond stereotypes of agentless overwork and social isolation in wider representations of Japanese life. Japan, similar to many late capitalist economies, faces social challenges. Yet, as attested to by many of the people who feature in the articles gathered here, in the current period of precarity and atomization, relational creativities in Japan may suggest some answers to the problems of a relationless society (*muen shakai*) (Allison 2015).

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