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# Japan

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Research Journal

Artist International Development Fund

Katie Day

April 2017



Katie Day, Artistic Director, The Other Way Works

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*Research Journal*

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# Introduction

In April 2017 I spent two weeks travelling around Japan, exploring contemporary and traditional Japanese culture, and meeting creative programmers.

This Research Journal provides a day by day account of my activity.



Shinto Shrine,  
Yamaguchi



Shibuya Crossing, Tokyo



# Arrival in Japan

## *Day 1*

After months of planning, accommodation booking, and emails back and forth to contacts in Japan, it was exciting to finally arrive into Haneda Airport in Tokyo. Unfortunately we managed to bring the English weather with us, and it was a rainy for most of the day.



## Meeting Miyuke Tanaka

<http://miyukitanaka.com/>

Clare Reddington from Watershed had kindly introduced me to Miyuke by email.

From Miyuke's website:

Born in 1980, Miyuki Tanaka graduated from Sophia University and Kuwasawa Design School, and finished MA Curating Contemporary Design at Kingston University / London Design Museum.

Having worked at 21\_21 DESIGN SIGHT, Yamaguchi Center for Arts and Media [YCAM], and Miraikan, she started working as an independent curator/producer/editor. By understanding design as a

method to organize and communicate mechanisms and social issues rather than limiting it to issues of decoration and elaboration, she develops and showcases design without categorizing them. Recently, under the theme, “To think about disabilities is to think about the world anew,” she has been working towards a society where different people can live with mutual respect for one another regardless of disabilities.

We met on the 8th floor of the new Hikarie building in Shibuya which featured a small design museum, shop, and d47 “shokudo” (canteen). All very beautifully curated with carefully made items from around the country. Very apt, given Miyuki’s design credentials!



<http://www.hikarie.jp/8/en/>

We had a wide-ranging conversation taking in our own work histories, as well as current creative interests, and of course a few tips for my time in Tokyo.

## *Notes*

- A project similar to my Bandstand project is Tokyo Heterotopia by Akira Takayama, an audio guide revealing the lives of immigrants living in Tokyo <http://portb.net/en/archives/119> . There are plans for this to become an iPhone app in time for the 2020 Olympics. It was presented at the Festival Tokyo - [http://www.festival-tokyo.jp/13/en/program/13/tokyo\\_heterotopia/index.html](http://www.festival-tokyo.jp/13/en/program/13/tokyo_heterotopia/index.html)

- <http://portb.net/en/about> His work and company sound like they have a very similar ethos to mine. Email - [akirat16@yahoo.co.jp](mailto:akirat16@yahoo.co.jp)
- Miyuke attended "The journey of death" workshop. [http://www.machitera.net/project/spirit\\_body/death/](http://www.machitera.net/project/spirit_body/death/) Participants were able to 'practice' their death. The processes they went through had a lot in common with the process in the Koreeda film 'After Life'. It was delivered by a Buddhist in a temple.
  - Write down all the things you value, then choose fewer, finally just choose one.
  - Think about someone you love
  - Think about all the living organisms around you
  - She lay down in a coffin (with the lid off!) and reflected
- I asked about some of the aspects of Koreeda's film After Life, as she is also a fan of this film and his work more generally. I asked if the calm way that the characters seemed to accept that they had died was indicative of Japanese culture generally or more specific to this film and situation. She thought that it was very much Koreeda's style to portray a calm, tranquil ordinary 'life', where the drama that occurs bubbles quietly underneath and emerges gently.





## *Recommendations in Japan*

- Go to Teshima instead of Naoshima - its better and less busy
- Experience Noh theatre - its a masked movement theatre about death
- Experience a tea ceremony
- See the Sakura (cherry blossoms) in Shinjuku Gyoen (park) or Yoyogi park
- Visit Roppongi Hills for good views of Tokyo tower
  - Mori Art museum is on the 60th floor (a ticket for here gets you into everywhere in Roppongi Hills)
- 2121 Design Sight museum is nearby <http://www.2121designsight.jp/en/>

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# West Tokyo

## Day 2

We explored around the Shibuya and Shinjuku area and ate a beautiful vegetarian Japanese set lunch at “Brown Rice” cafe.



We exchanged our Japan Rail pass and booked reserved seats on the Shinkansen trains. This was an unexpectedly bureaucratic process with plenty of paper stamping and highlighter pens. Although it's possible to use the 'Hyperdia' website and app to search for train times online, the reservation process appeared to involve a huge paper reference book and several 90's era small desktop PC type machines. The experience had more in common with train booking in India than in western Europe, although the trains run on time to the minute rather than being late by a couple of hours.

After a wander through the streets of Harajuku, gawping at the weird and wonderful fashions on sale and on display, we ate (vegan!) Ramen for dinner at Afuri a counter style ramen shop. You make your food choice at a vending-type machine at the entrance, then take a seat when one becomes available.

Everything is subtly backwards here: you put your money in first, then make your food selection. The same is true of the buses where you enter through the rear doors, then pay as you leave through the front door. All perfectly sensible when you get your head around it, but a bit discombobulating in the beginning.

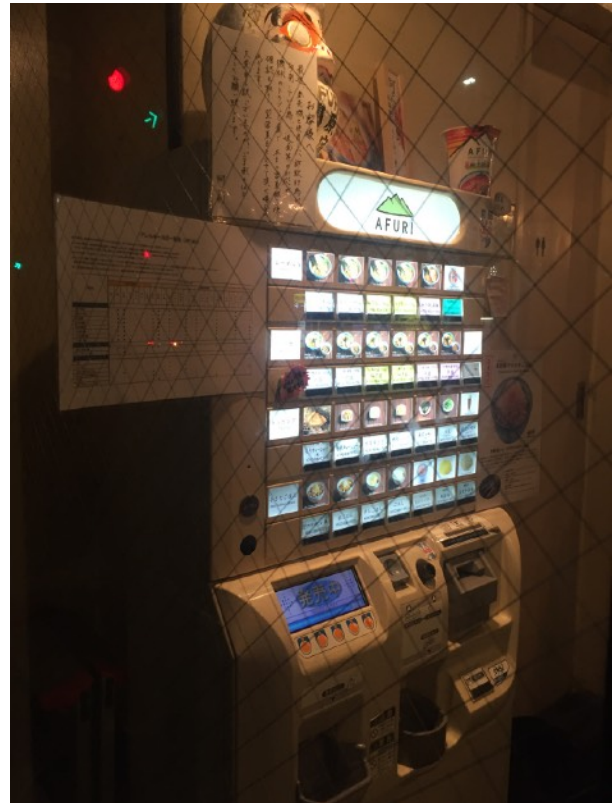


Afuri Ramen Shop, Harajuku



## Vending Machines

Vending Machines are a phenomenon in Japan. They are everywhere: on street corners in the smallest villages to the high rises of Shinjuku. You will never be far from a cold drink.



But they don't leave it at cold drinks. There are hot drink vending machines and umbrella vending machines. At some Ramen shops there are vending-machine-type interfaces to make your food selection and pay for it. Though the machine stops short of making it for you and delivering a steaming bowl of noodle soup from the slot below.

They got me thinking about what else could be vended from a vending machine? Something more metaphysical? A promise, an instruction, a living creature? A prayer or blessing? A choice of memory type - location, or sense, or relationship it features?

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# Riding the Shinkansen to the Inland Sea

## *Day 3*

We experienced the end of the Tokyo rush hour crush as we tried to get in from Shimo-kitazawa to Shibuya on the local Keio Line train. We let several trains pass as we watched the platform staff shoulder and barge willing would-be passengers against the wall of bodies into the doorway of the train. We finally found a postage stamp of space to squeeze us and our copious luggage into, and rode a crushed 7 minutes into Shibuya station.

The Shinkansen was a much smoother and more ordered situation. The white smooth-nosed trains glide in and out of the stations, lining their doors up precisely with the coloured queue lines marked on the platform floors. The Japanese take queuing to a new level.





A couple of changes on local trains saw us chugging finally into Uno Port, gateway to Naoshima and the islands of the Inland Sea.

The unexpectedly cold wind blew through the converted industrial building serving as a kind of rough-not-so-luxe hostel where we spent the night.

The popularity of Naoshima as an art tourism destination has not yet been matched with accommodation options. Staying on the island itself was prohibitively expensive, and already booked up several months in advance. The hostel where we stayed was very much still under construction, but served its purpose.

A local restaurant Oosakayashokudou provided tasty dinners on both nights.

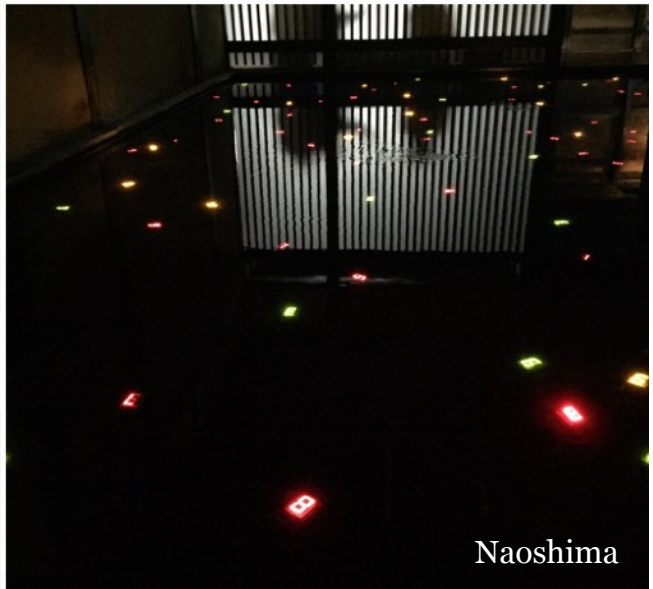




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# Naoshima the art island

## *Day 4*



A rather wet day of outdoor art sightseeing awaited us. I took the ferry from Uno Port for the short 20 minute journey to Naoshima island.

There are art experiences on every scale in Naoshima, and I explored many of them, mostly in the pouring rain.

First, a tour around the Art House Project in Honmura. This is a series of artworks housed in converted village houses.

The most striking of these was Minamidera, housing the work 'Backside of the Moon' by American artist James Turrell. I hadn't read the title of the work until writing this journal, and so the whole experience was a total surprise to me:

*"We entered a completely dark building and sat on a bench for five minutes as our eyes became accustomed to the darkness. In front of us a large rectangle of light appeared. I assumed it was a light area on a wall, but as we were invited to approach the light and reached out to touch it, I found my hand pass into a void filled with warm white cloud."*

I visited two hill top shrines, one a 'normal' shrine, and one an 'artwork'.



Shinto Shrine, Naoshima

Next I took the local bus to the Chichu Art Museum - a fascinating contemporary gallery building built into the hillside. A beautiful garden inspired by Monet's waterlily paintings could be taken in on the walk between the ticket office and the main gallery building. The museum felt incredibly Japanese: clean lines, beautiful order, and insanely strict behaviour rules. To view the Monet waterlily paintings in their special room with tiny white circular floor tiles it was necessary to wear special white slippers. To view the James Turrell work, another different pair of slippers was required. When my daughter changed back into her shoes again the gallery assistant, very politely of course, asked if there was any way of turning off the flashing light her shoe makes when she walks on it, as it was disturbing the low light ambience of the gallery corridor. I'm afraid not, I replied, and left to walk outside and make as much noise and disturbance as we required.

The rain had finally called it a day, so we walked down the hill past many outdoor sculptures, ending up at the iconic pumpkin sculpture on the beach.



# Hiroshima

## *Day 5*

Another day of travel was punctuated with a visit to Hiroshima.

We were of course there to visit the site of the A-Bomb explosion. A haunting shell of a building topped with a skeletal, twisted dome marks the epicentre of the explosion. It was one of the only buildings in the area left standing, and whilst the rest of the city was bulldozed and re-built, this building was left as a marker and memorial to the tragic event.



Adjacent is a large garden area containing several monuments and a hall of memory, all dedicated to peace. It is a moving and humbling place. Especially coming from a country who was part of the coalition involved with the atrocity. There appears to be no contemporary animosity to British or American citizens, and there were in fact many American visitors in Hiroshima.

Several people have spoken to me about the impact of WWII on Japanese society, which saw post-war Japan re-form itself as a modern economy. The pre-war and war-time rhetoric corralled the Japanese people to unite under a Shinto-backed Nationalist agenda. Post-war a more diverse agenda was encouraged, more individualist, but also allowing for a wider religious expression which accommodated Shinto and Buddhism in all manner of combinations.





Peace monument and park in Hiroshima

## Hanami

Life very much carries on in Hiroshima, and it's a busy modern city. The cherry blossoms (sakura) were in full bloom the day we visited, and the ritual of Hanami (eating a picnic under a blossom tree) was being heartily taken up by the locals.



## Arrival in Yamaguchi

I arrived in Yudaonsen in the evening. Yudaonsen is one of the villages that make up the sprawling Yamaguchi town. Its a very old Onsen resort (spa town), and the huge hotels that line the main road all cater to spa tourists. Ours ([Hotel Kamefuku](#)) attempted to create an old style Ryokan vibe, but in a very 90's era modernist way, and with well over a hundred bedrooms! The onsen facilities were very extensive though, and included an outdoor mineral pool of cloudy water. Late in the evening I had the ladies area pretty much to myself, but from the other side of the high fence dividing the male and female areas I could hear large groups of Japanese men rowdily talking and laughing.



Tatami room at Hotel Kamefuku

Our room was a kind of suite, with a tatami room (with futons folded away in the cupboard), and a room with western style beds, so you could choose what kind of bed you wanted.

Yamaguchi was the only place I visited where there was very little english spoken. It isn't really a place geared towards the international tourist market!



# YCAM:1

## Day 6

The reason for staying in Yamaguchi was to visit YCAM, the Yamaguchi Centre for Arts and Media, a huge cutting-edge arts & technology institute with an international outlook. I had heard that YCAM was located in a provincial town, and actually being there underlined its strangeness of location vs its significance. I can't imagine an equivalent in the UK.



My visit began with a tour of YCAM from Akiko Takeshita, who had invited me and was hosting me during my visit.

Akiko is the Performing Arts Producer at YCAM. I had met Akiko a few years ago whilst she was on a one year secondment at Watershed, Bristol.

We visited all of YCAM's spaces - galleries and auditoria, and took in the exhibitions currently showing, which included some interesting sound installations and a quirky interactive exhibition exploring electronic surveillance in every day life.

Then I received a presentation about the work of the YCAM InterLab by the R&D director Takayuki Ito. My notes are below:



YCAM's main funder is city of Yamaguchi, its a small city with around 2000 people.

Multiple skill sets in staff - use them, people work well beyond the scope of their job titles.

<http://re-marks.ycam.jp> - archive website of past YCAM projects.

### **Some notable past projects:**

Ryoji Ikeda - supersymmetry 2014

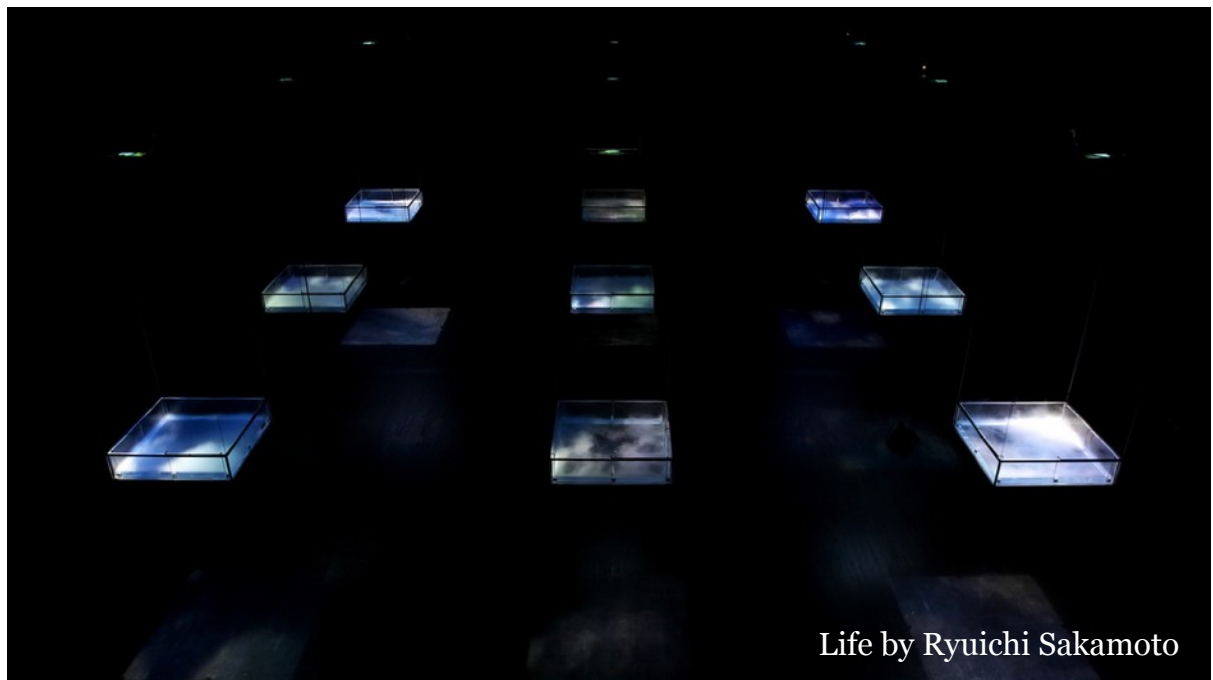
Ryuichi Sakamoto - Life

Original workshop with kids kankaku athletic - feel body shape - inspire choreographic shapes

Yamaguchi mini maker faire - 5000 people in 2 days, 2013, 2015

Kyle Macdonald - mapamok - open source projection mapping - you can use the software - git hub - ycam interlab





Forest symphony - connect a nail to a tree and to the ground to collect electrical signals, voltage. collected over one year. Then created a sound piece from the data.

CCo - can use -completely free and open the data

Open Frameworks developer conference 2013

Developed their own contract with artists for creating open source projects

RAM project running for more than 5 years. Started with dance, but now applying to sport, disability. Measuring personal space - applying to autistic people - to measure space and see how to make it more comfortable

Korogaru series

Playpark - children can propose ideas for changes, vote, then they make it in next 3 days

Think things (2015) for kids- play a game, then document, people can take and re-use to make a new game

*These kinds of creative education projects are very innovative for Japan.*

Sports hackathon for adults - like think things for adults - Like their annual community sports day. Created a lot of new games.

Community bio labs

DiyBio

They invited a guy from Indonesia HONF

Micronation/macronation

They wanted to make a self sufficient village. They created a modified rice that can be planted 5 times a year

A good time to educate ourselves about our food GMO

Shared their research in a rural area in Yamaguchi with old farmers

Open Yeast protocols - on git hub

Collected yeast, fermented, then made bread from this yeast

Marshmallow Laser Feast - VR visor in the forest - can be a mosquito

DNA of forests - Collected a plant, extracted the dna, analysed & discover the name of the plants

## My presentation to YCAM

In the afternoon I gave an hour-long presentation about my work to around 15 members of YCAM staff. We are making the symbol meaning 'Yamaguchi' (under the mountain).



Someone suggested to look at Singapore company Drama Box, community space, Forum theatre theatre company. Both sides, Now (death & life) <http://www.bothsidesnow.sg/>

This looks like an interesting and varied arts-led two day public event about dying and its relationship to living. Some memory recall aspects.

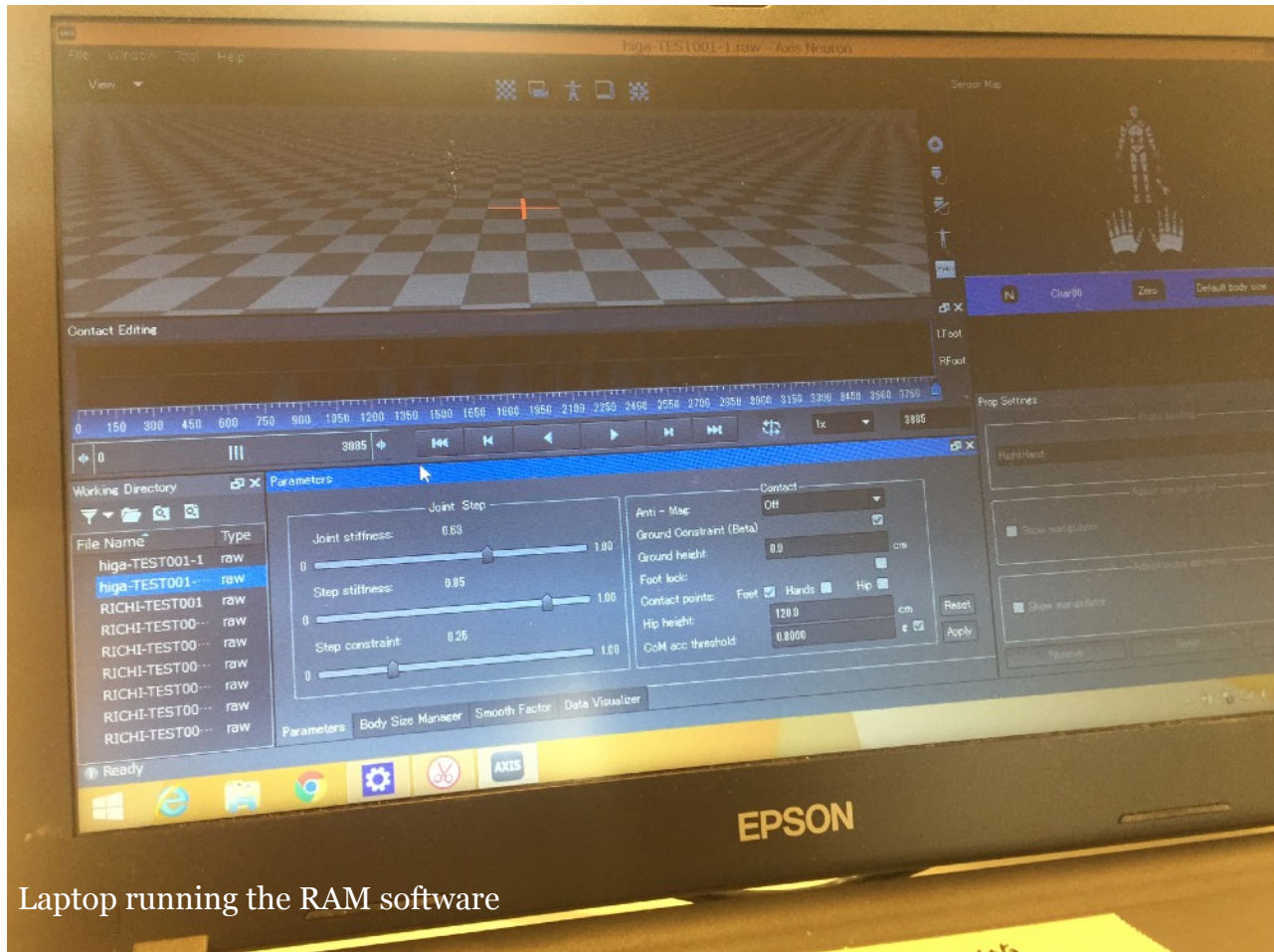
Another person suggested watching the Movie - Okuribito (Departures) 2008

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Departures\\_\(2008\\_film\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Departures_(2008_film))

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RXTP\\_wRSHQw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RXTP_wRSHQw) (trailer)

A cellist, newly out of work, becomes a mortuary assistant. Looks like this would be a useful film about Japanese funeral rites, currently available on Netflix.

## Trying out the RAM system of motion capture



Laptop running the RAM software

Richi and Akiko fired up the software and hardware and fitted me out in a motion capture suit to allow me to try out their RAM system.

Richi showed me something that he was developing using the system, which also involved a kinect sensor, that allowed the person wearing the VR goggles and mocap system to also see their own body visualised just in front of themselves, as well as other objects and bodies around them. I really liked this - I usually find VR rather isolating, and kind of disabling in the way that it disembodies the participant. I feel physically exposed and powerless in the embodied world, and that detracts from my immersion in the virtual one. This visualisation of my body appearing in the virtual world went some way towards overcoming this feeling. I'd be interested to see how this could be developed.





Live motion capture using the RAM software

Akiko lent me a YCAM bike to use during my stay.

I think all UK arts centres should provide bikes for visiting artists during residencies etc. It shows generosity and encourages and facilitates environmentally friendly and healthy transport choices.



# YCAM:2

## Day 7

In the morning I spoke to the General Director Akeo Adachi of YCAM (with translation by Akiko). He was an extraordinary 84 years old.

His wife had recently died, and he was still in a formal period of mourning. He was a practicing follower of Shintoism, and as part of the 50 day period that he believes his wife's soul takes to travel to the afterlife he could not shave his face, so had a long beard.

84 seemed a very old age to still be heading up an organisation like YCAM, and I'm unsure as to exactly what his duties are. Don't people retire in Japan?? But he seemed a lovely man, with a huge amount of knowledge and a good sense of humour.

In Shinto - the soul takes 50 days from death to reach heaven.

In buddhism it takes 7 x 7 days - 49 days.

Later in the morning I heard a presentation about YCAM's education projects from educator Young-Ja Park. My notes are below:

YCAM school program

Sports Hackathon for kids - 3 schools this year, children create new sports.

Helps children learn how to work with tech - it would be good to experience it. Use it while doing something familiar - sports.

YCAM team built 5 tech tools that the kids can use to develop new games. - e.g. iPhone in a blow up ball, kinect, poles that connect, segway etc, surfboard that tilts

In groups - first understand how tool works, then brainstorm, then try to practically create the new games - lots of trial and error.

At end of programme - they had a mini sports day. Everyone got a medal at the end. The children are audience, player, and now creator too.





Teachers valued to opportunity for kids to learn with equality

In terms of planning for an event with open outcomes - e.g. afterlife

rules & boundaries - games have to finish in 3 mins (time deadline); groups; 5 tools to use; 10 years old.

At lunch time I used my borrowed YCAM bicycle to cycle up to an old Shinto shrine at the base of the mountain (Taga Shrine).

Visiting a shrine has its own rituals of course, which should be done in a particular order. Firstly washing your hands using one of these ladles. Then after a series of bows and claps you can pull the cord and ring the bell.



Taga Shinto Shrine in Yamaguchi





In the afternoon I heard a presentation on local engagement projects, and discussed ideas about YCAM's Regional Lab with Takuya Ishikawa.

Local development lab. The aim is to bring tech from YCAM exhibitions to local people. To help local people have new perspectives & become creators.

Radical and R&D (radlocal) 2014

He joined as a participant the first time round, now he works there and runs the programme.

Fab lab movement (near yamaguchi). They try to make it more accessible to local people [radical.ycam.jp](http://radical.ycam.jp)

Bamboo bike project - Worked with someone from Indonesia to design a bamboo bike. Then they brought some over from there to Yamaguchi. Used a research kit: Dan Levy Cultural Probes <http://designresearchtechniques.com/casestudies/cultural-probes/>

Bio - miso, sake, pickles, soy - Fermentation is very close to Japanese people, very familiar as the processes are used in lots of common Japanese foods. Malt (yeast).

Radlocal 2 - data mining - big data.

[resas.g.jp](http://resas.g.jp) - government programme, shows population by area

mesh - by sony, small sensors - that you can connect - via ifttt

Population decreasing problem

Open government

A lecture in speculative design

People propose what activities they could do with a sensor in the local area.

Next Concept

Hackathon is in fashion

4 days workshop



I had an informal chat with Richi Owaki

He told me about a Shrine in Kyoto: Rokudochinnoji.

MAP <http://www.rokudou.jp/>

There is a well there. Ono no Takamura climbed down the well to go to hell (the underworld) to help Yama - Judge of heaven & hell - to do his judging.

Cross road - all the devils come - crossroads are very dangerous.



Cross roads are a border line. The name of this place uses the Kanji symbol for cross roads.

The river in Kyoto is a border between life and death. The eastern side of the river is the underworld.

Richi told me about one of his own projects: Bakemon Go - like pokemon go! - Richi Owaki

Bakemon means ghost. They have to get cards. Every year he works with members of the public to create a kind of ghost train.

Richi and Akiko, as well as others, suggested that Noh theatre would be of interest to my After Life project.

Noh - the ghost possesses the actor. Dead spirit.

Finally I asked Akiko a few more questions about YCAM's performing arts programming:

[dumbtype.com](http://dumbtype.com) - Kyoto based - inspired YCAM's work with new tech and theatre/dance

YCAM - performing arts

make 1 original piece a year

and invite several other pieces

when they invite a portfolio work, they present an original project along side

The Quiet Volume by Tim Etchells & Ant Hampton

Park City (about Hiroshima) - live performance, and via monitors at each seat

Radical Bodies - currently in development

Marshmallow laser feast - in the eyes of the family

## Socialising Japanese style

In the evening Akiko met me at my hotel and we went to a nearby restaurant. Taka Ito joined us later. It was a classic Japanese style place, with a handwritten menu in Japanese (impenetrable to me as Google Translate can't decipher non-printed text using its visual processing tool). It was tiny, seating a handful along a bar facing the galley kitchen, and about eight more on a raised platform at floor tables (with sneaky footwells). Two people were staffing the place, presumably the owners, and certainly the chefs as well as the waiting staff.





# Travelling to Kyoto

## Day 8

Back onto the Shinkansen today, all the way back to Kyoto, a 3.5 hour journey.

Sorting out an unsatisfactory accommodation situation frustratingly took up rather too much time in the afternoon and evening, and following morning, which meant that I didn't really see much of Kyoto beyond the station and the local supermarket.

Here are some photos of the surprisingly contemporary Kyoto Station (since its known for its heritage buildings and activities), and the Sakura viewing chart posted at the station!



~ Sakura Flower Viewing ~  
Cherry Blossom Guide

Area	Sakura Viewing Spots	In bud	Beginning to bloom	Almost at their best	At their best	Starting to fall	Past their best	Area	Sakura Viewing Spots	In bud	Beginning to bloom	Almost at their best	At their best	Starting to fall	Past their best
North	Jakko-in Temple								Ryoan-ji Temple						
	Kamigamo-jinja Shrine								Taizou-in Temple						
Central	Kyoto Gyoen Park								Tenryu-ji Temple						
	Nijo-jo Castle								West	Daikoku-ji Temple					
	Tetsugaku-no-michi Street									Osawa-no-ike Pond					
	Heian-jingu Shrine									Yoshimine-dera Temple					
	Nanzen-ji Temple									Jurinji Temple					
East	Maruyama Park									Shoji-ji Temple					
	Kodai-ji Temple									To-ji Temple					
	Bishamon-hall								South	Daigo-ji Temple					
	Ninna-ji Temple									Kajuji Temple					
West									Over	Byodo-in Temple					

※Please check (<http://souda-kyoto.jp/>) for the details about each spot.  
※This is only a guide and status may be changed due to weather.

CENTRAL JAPAN RAIL  
COM

9

# Kyoto: Walking the path of philosophy

*Day 9*



A great improvement over the previous day! It was a beautiful sunny weather, so I spent most of the day outside, walking.



## Nanzen-ji Temple

Nanzenji Temple is located in the Northern Higashiyama area, at the foot of the Higashiyama mountains. It is one of the most important Zen temples in all of Japan.



Sanmon Gate, Nanzenji Temple



Hojo Rock Garden, Nanzenji Temple

I was particularly interested in the gardens, and the Hojo rock garden with the raked sand, where each rock is representative of an animal (tiger, cub etc).



## The Path of Philosophy



The temple marks the southern end of the 'Path of Philosophy', a secluded canal side path that winds north past several temples. On the day we visited the cherry blossom was in bloom, and with the sun out, it was idyllic. It was also SELFIE CENTRAL!

By the time I reached the end of the path the Ginkaku-ji Temple was closed. But just up the road was an entrance to a shrine, so I went to explore. As I climbed the paper lantern-lit stone steps in the gathering dusk I felt like I was walking right into the world of Spirited Away. The Hachi Shrine was surrounded by woodland, and jammed full of lit up paper lanterns.





# Kyoto: Escaping the rain in the covered shopping area

## *Day 10*

A very wet and rainy day, which ruled out temple visiting. Luckily, all the major shopping streets in Kyoto have covered pavements - very convenient for a rainy day!

The main event was the covered Nishiki Market, famous for its huge array of Japanese foods to buy and try. I took a photo of a beautiful scale model of a shop, which was out the front of the shop. Here you can only see the model.



I also explored the Sou Sou shops, which specialise in their own designs of Japanese textiles. And sell an insanely large range of Japanese socks (with a split between big toe and other toes so you can wear them with flip flops or traditional Japanese clogs).

# An epic pilgrimage to Koya San

## *Day 11*

### Fushimi-Inari

Before leaving Kyoto, I headed south of the city to Fushimi-Inari.

Red shrine gates snake up the hillside. Swarms of tourists shuffle along underneath them, constantly taking selfies. It was not exactly atmospheric! Ducking outside of the corridor of gates gave a more secluded perspective, and they do make for a striking sight.



### Koya San

Then I embarked on the pilgrimage to Koya San, which became much more of an undertaking than expected!



Upon arrival at the Ekoin Buddhist monastery lodgings (Shukubo) where I was to spend the night, I couldn't have felt any less 'zen'. A particularly fraught journey starting with a missed train connection, continuing with a one hour wait in the train at a station because the line was not safe ahead, and finishing with a taxi to a rail replacement bus to our destination.

So far so normal (for the UK at least) but the destination was Koya San, a mountain top monastery town. The bus couldn't follow the mountain railway and funicular route, so took a one and a half hour road route winding up tiny mountain roads.

The monks had kept our dinners for us, so it was straight to our room to enjoy our vegan monastery dinner on little tray tables on the floor.



Then out for a special night walking tour of the Okunoin cemetery concluding with a visit to the mausoleum of Kobo Daishi the founder of the town of Koya San and of the specific Buddhist sect followed by the monks who live there.

The cemetery was beautifully atmospheric in the dark, lit by a series of lantern-like spirit houses that lined the stone path.

Okunoin cemetery at night



We were all careful to watch our footing as we ascended a particular flight of stone steps - a stumble or miss step on which would have signalled that we had less than three years to live.

Photos of the mausoleum were not permitted, but it was spectacularly lit with more paper lanterns than I'd ever seen before.

The monastery even has its own (very hot) Onsen baths, which I tried out before bed in order to warm up a bit as it was very cold on the night tour.

The monks had cleared away our dinner things and laid out our futons in our room, as is traditional in Ryokan style accommodation.



12

# The Kyoto Experiment

## *Day 12*

### Koya San in the morning

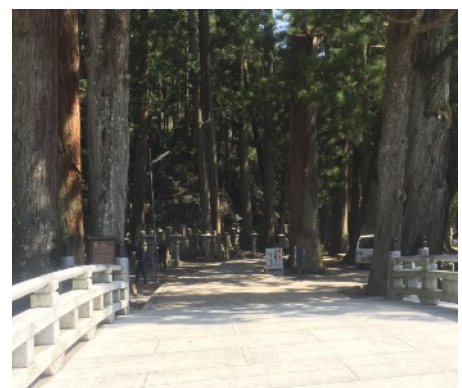
I got up early the next morning to attend the 6:30am Fire Ritual, held in a special temple in the courtyard. Whilst one monk chanted and banged a drum, another sat cross-legged and built a very neat fire from dry kindling wood in the middle of the temple, and then wafted some prayer requests on wooden panels through the resulting smoke and flame.

Breakfast had a lot in common with dinner, as is the way with traditional Japanese food.

I returned to see the cemetery by daylight in the morning, and was able to enjoy the markings on the stones, the moss covering them, and the incredible ancient trees that grew around them all.



Okunoin cemetery





Thankfully the train line was operational again, and I was able to travel back to the valley on the incredibly steep funicular railway, and back to Kyoto without incident.



## Meeting Yusuke Hashimoto, Director of Kyoto Experiment Festival



I arranged a meeting with Yusuke Hashimoto, as I had been recommended to meet him by both Manami and Miyuke, and Kyoto Experiment has a reputation for producing experimental theatre. We met at the huge ROHM Theatre complex in Kyoto, where their office is based.

The festival started in 2010. Yusuke was running a production company, producing independent artists in Kyoto making contemporary theatre work.

Kyoto's population is 10% students, a high percentage.

He had trouble getting representatives of the equivalent of the national arts council to come from Tokyo and see their new productions. They suggested that if he presented several shows over the same weekend it would be worth them visiting (the travel costs between the cities are very high). And so the Kyoto Experiment Festival was born!

(This kind of thing is problem for regional theatre in the UK as well, though problems attracting national and international programmers, and national press is more of an issue.)

These days they Co-produce or Produce about half of the work they present. Half Japanese artists, and the rest international. Approximately 10 shows, and now exhibitions and concerts too.

The organisation has 6 staff, and an additional 10-12 for festival time. It is not its own company, it is a collaboration between three large organisations: ROHM Theatre, Kyoto Arts Centre, and Kyoto University. Yusuke is employed 50% as Director of Kyoto Experiment and 50% as Program Director for ROHM Theatre.



They have a problem with venues in Kyoto.

There is a big gap between contemporary theatre and traditional forms of theatre (Kabuki and Noh). Traditional theatre is dynastic and therefore essentially a closed shop to anyone not born into a Kabuki or Noh family. Only members of certain families can play principal parts, so for anyone else they will only ever get to be in the chorus.

In 2017 Kyoto is the Cultural City of East Asia. The 2017 festival therefore has a focus on East Asian artists. The next festival starts on 14th October 2017.

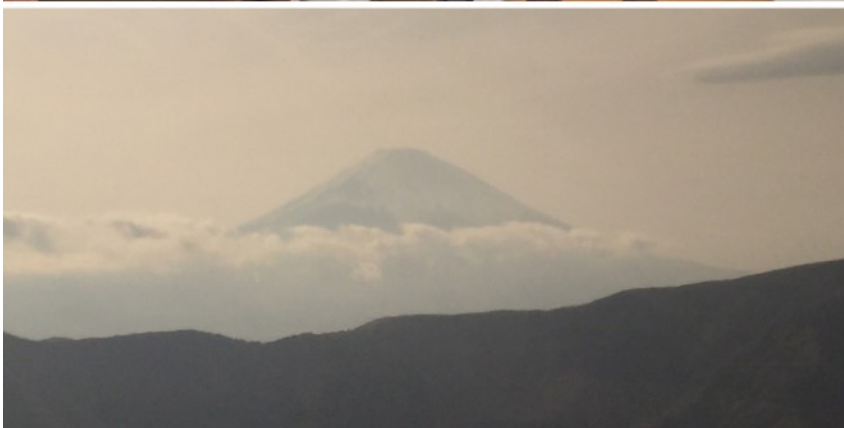
- RAM camp - East Asian dancers + team from YCAM
- Heiner Goebels
- Sound & physicality
- Music theatre

The festival will take place over 4 weekends, with 3 productions each weekend. The Organisational Partners provide 30% of the budget, Tickets 10%, and Government subsidy 40-50%.



13

# Heights of Hakone

*Day 13*

Another day another train. This time though the modes of transport were multiplying: Shinkansen train, local train, narrow gauge mountain train, funicular railway, gondola. Unfortunately we were too late in the day to board the sightseeing pirate ship out onto the lake. There were stunning views of the majestic Mount Fuji from the gondola.

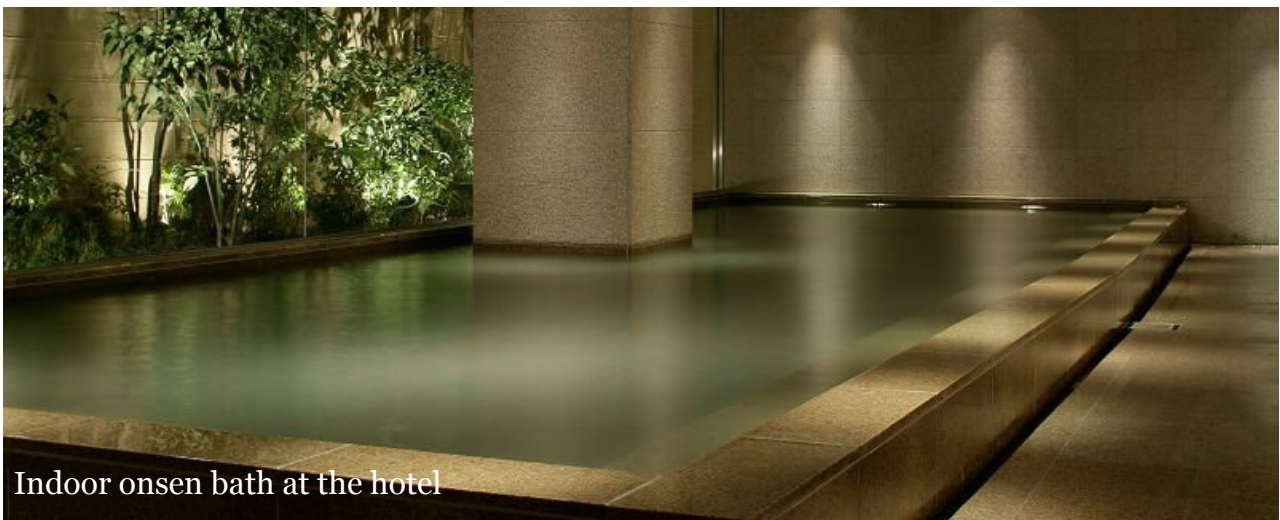


## Onsen Bathing

Hakone is famous for its Onsen. It's a hugely active geothermal area, and every hotel is geared around Onsen bathing. Hakone is only around an hour or two from central Tokyo, and so is an easy weekend getaway for tourists and locals alike, and the hotel scene is focused on what we might call in the UK: 'spa breaks'. You can see us wearing our Yukata (like a lightweight Kimono) in the photo, which is what you wear around the hotel, to visit the Onsen baths and you can also go down to breakfast wearing it, which I got quite into!



Outdoor onsen bath at the hotel



Indoor onsen bath at the hotel



## Hakone Open Air Museum

This turned out to be a huge world-class outdoor sculpture park. We thought it might be a pleasant diversion for an hour, having read that they had a sculpture that was also a climbing frame. As it turned out we dashed around for an hour trying to take in work by Henry Moore, Anthony Gormley, and a whole Picasso pavilion. As had become a firm pattern of this trip by now, we could have spent 3 times as long here.



Hakone Open Air Museum





14

# Shinjuku station at rush hour

*Day 14*

Along with 3 million others, we transferred trains at Shinjuku station today. We timed it perfectly for the Friday afternoon rush hour. We had 2 weeks of luggage and a 5 year old though, which added to the fun! The sheer number of people in Tokyo is a phenomenon. The capacity of their public transport systems is another.



Shinjuku Station platform at rush hour

Before this I had been meeting Manami Yuasa at the British Council offices.

## Meeting Manami Yuasa - Head of Arts, British Council Japan

Some notes from our meeting

**What are British Council Japan's current and upcoming priorities and programmes?**

Talking about UK - Japan partnership for 2020. Major programme across Japan.

**What opportunities are there for UK artists to collaborate with Japanese artists and institutions in Japan, or tour their work here?**

**In terms of experimental performance or interdisciplinary practice, are there any particular festivals or organisations**

**- that present non-theatre-based performance work?**

**- that work with international artists from the UK?**

Kanazawa - 21 century contemporary museum <https://www.kanazawa21.jp>

Yuko Kuroda (she), Director.

They produce a performing arts strand. 2 year residency programme. She hosted a forest fringe residency in Japan, and will be coming to Edinburgh showcase this year. She also went to In Between Time last year, wants to engage with wider community, more interested in Live Arts.

Site-specific practice is only just starting in Japan.

Japanese funding is focused on presentation not R&D.

Very reliant on government funding in Japan. Less mixed funding than UK.

Duncan Speakman presented at Saitama Art Festival (Triennial) & did residencies & made new work for the city.

Residencies:

Saison Culture Foundation - private foundation, develop public performing arts - drama & arts. They have a space but also a grant scheme to pay for International artists to spend time on research in Japan. Can apply for yourself. Its a good one! They give funding.

Air\_J database of artist residencies in Japan.

Duncan did a residency in Yokohama - but because of lack of producers its hard to work & develop. Only administrators.

Tokyo performing arts Market - Yokohama. TPAM. - every February. In 2010 British Council brought over 10 UK artists.

Yokohama Triennial - Brought 8 scottish producers out last year.

Grants: for UK Japan - around £2k - cover travel: Daiwa Anglo Japanese Foundation, and Great Britain Sasakawa Foundation.

**Related to a production I am developing and have been talking about....  
What is the status of homosexuality in Japanese society?**

The status is well behind where things are in the UK, in terms of rights and visibility.



15

# Studio Ghibli Museum magic

*Day 15*



Studio Ghibli Museum

As a huge fan of Studio Ghibli films, a visit to the museum was going to be an essential part of this trip. I was sadly much too big and old to go on the cuddly climbing frame Catbus, but my 5 year old daughter enjoyed it.



Studio Ghibli Museum



The Japanese obsession with rules extended even into this very playful and imaginative place, with the pre-school aged children subjected to a 1 minute correct behaviour briefing before their 5 minute timed session on the cuddly Catbus (no jumping off the roof, no throwing the soot gremlins). The whole thing was already so padded and there were 2 attendants to help at all times, and all the children are so well behaved anyway that it hardly seemed necessary. This level of risk-avoidance does constrict children's ability to be playful, to 'be children', and to learn through making mistakes.

It's interesting to observe our cultures' differing opinions and practices where it comes to raising children. There's no doubt that Japanese children are extremely well behaved and obedient. They are well loved and taken precious care of. But coming from the UK, I think we decided that we were going too far with 'health & safety' a few years ago, and the direction of travel is about the benefits of risk taking as children, of getting their hands dirty, and experimenting for themselves. UK children are more demanding, disruptive and individualistic, but also able to challenge structures of power, and to innovate.

The museum was magical though, with lovely touches aimed at children: things to look at at the right height, things to touch, a fun building to explore. They have a strict no photos policy indoors, which meant a pleasant relief from the incessant selfie taking by the Japanese youth!



16

# Monorail to ASIMO

*Day 16*



## Tokyo Views

My last day in Japan was dedicated to exploring contemporary Tokyo.

First on the agenda was a trip 202 metres into the air to the viewing level of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building, for spectacular views free of charge.

Next up a stroll through Shinjuku, and a glance in one of the famous electronics mega stores.

Then onto the transit network and onto the driverless monorail (YURIKAMOME line) to the island of Odaiba on reclaimed land in Tokyo harbour.

## Asimo

The famous humanoid robot Asimo provides regular demos throughout the day at the Miraikan Museum of Emerging Science. I'd seen Asimo back in 2010 at Ars Electronica in Linz, but it was interesting to see him in his home habitat in Tokyo. And he still seems extraordinary in comparison with any other robot I've seen. My daughter didn't believe he was a robot, he was too lifelike!

Even more lifelike was the Otonaroid android by Hiroshi Ishiguro, who was definitely a resident of the uncanny valley.

## Lost in Translation pilgrimage

No trip to Japan would have been complete for me without a visit to the Tokyo Park Hyatt Hotel in Shinjuku. Heavily featured in the film *Lost in Translation*, the hotel also played a key part in the narrative of The Other Way Works' production *Black Tonic*.

Unfortunately the ACE/BC grant didn't exactly stretch to staying the night here (£1,000 per night for a standard room), but I thought I'd at least be able to have a drink in the famous New York Grill Bar.

Sadly, with a child in tow, we weren't allowed in the bar. But on the plus side, we saved ourselves £20 a drink, and still got to ride the lift to the 52nd floor and enjoy a brief sunset view over Tokyo and a glimpse of Mount Fuji on the horizon.



The Peak Lounge, 41st floor, Park Hyatt Tokyo



17

# Sayonara Japan

*Day 17*



Corridor, Royal Park Hotel Haneda

After an overnight stay in the high-tech Royal Park Hotel Haneda at the airport, there was nothing left to do but board the flight home to London.

Sayonara Japan!

# Artist International Development Fund Evaluation Questions

1. An outline of the activity delivered - what you achieved, compared with the original aims of the activity:

In my application I stated 2 main aims for my proposed trip:

1. To build relationships with artists, programmers and producers in Japan with a view to developing and touring my own work there in the future;
2. To research contemporary and traditional Japanese culture through experiencing it first hand, with a view to integrating my experiences and learning into a new project called 'Afterlife'.

I believe that my visit to Japan was effective in addressing both of the above aims.

Once I received confirmation of the AIDF grant I began to plan and research my trip. Through this process I identified several locations that would be interesting to visit beyond those I had originally identified (Tokyo, Kyoto, Yamaguchi). These included:

- Naoshima (an island transformed by contemporary art);
- Koya San (a mountaintop Buddhist Monastery town);
- Hakone (a famous onsen area).

The timing of my visit shifted to April 2017, which allowed me to take in the Japanese cultural phenomenon of Sakura and Hanami season (cherry blossom).

I planned in an intensive two day visit to YCAM in Yamaguchi, and arranged meetings with other contacts in Tokyo and Kyoto: Miyuke Tanaka (Independent Producer, Tokyo), Yusuke Hashimoto (Kyoto Experiment Festival), and Manami Yuasa (British Council Tokyo).

At YCAM I was hosted by Akiko Takeshita, and my visit included a presentation from me to the staff team about my work. I also met with many other staff members and heard about the activities of the different parts that make up the InterLab. I had sessions with R&D director Takayuki Ito, educator Young-Ja Park, and Takuya Ishikawa who organises their Regional Lab. I also got to try out their RAM system for motion capture.



I managed to stretch the trip to 16 days, but there still felt like there was far too much to squeeze in, and never enough time. It was very useful for giving me an overview of many aspects of Japanese culture, and I experienced many things in a short time, and so has acted as a taster for further more focused visits in the future.

Activities I undertook in relation to researching my 'Afterlife' project included:

- A night tour of a vast cemetery and mausoleum in Koya San;
- An overnight stay in a Buddhist temple in Koya San, eating traditional vegan temple food, and experiencing their early morning fire ritual;
- Informal conversations with people I met about Buddhist and Shinto ideas and traditions around the afterlife;
- Visiting Onsen baths in Yamaguchi (Yuda Onsen), Hakone, and Koya San;
- Visiting Temples and Shrines in Kyoto (Fushimi Inari, Nanzen-ji), Koya San, and Yamaguchi;
- Seeing the robots and androids at the Miraikan museum in Tokyo;
- Visiting the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Park, to learn about how this horrific event is remembered and commemorated.

## 2. What you learned, and how the activity has helped you to develop:

### *Japanese Contemporary Culture*

It's so much easier to pick up on Japanese social cues and norms when you are right there in the middle of it all. The visit allowed me to immerse myself in contemporary Japan, and feel for myself what it was all about, which was a valuable experience for me.

As with all travel, comparing a different society to one's own provides a new perspective on how culturally entrenched one is within one's own social norms and cultural expectations.

Japan was both very similar and very different to the UK. It's a 'developed' nation (similar), but it is also very much an Asian nation (different).

I found the Japanese on the whole a polite, considerate and highly ordered people. They are accustomed to strict behaviour rules in every situation and adhere to them religiously. This leads to a very organised situation on train platforms (a good thing), and also a very restrictive understanding of children's play in play environments (for me, a bad thing).

They have very high levels of employment, which translates into very high levels of staffing everywhere. This is in contrast to the UK where staff are being replaced by automation (self-service checkouts in shops, ticket machines), or reduced as a result of austerity-related cut-backs. There is always someone (or several people) to help you

(good), and the Police have the personnel resources to respond to noise complaints in residential properties, due to a late night laundry session (maybe a bit over the top?!).

The fabled two-handed business card exchange with a bow happens exactly as caricatured. But this kind of care in transaction is carried through to all interpersonal exchanges, and seems to place a value on your presence and on the connection in that moment. This is very different to interpersonal exchanges in the UK, where these days one might make a purchase at a shop without exchanging eye contact or even speak to each other. This kind of care, eye contact, and respect in interpersonal transactions is a mode of behaviour or performance that I would like to include in my Afterlife experience, as I think it feels pleasantly 'other' and also ascribes value to each party.

### *Japanese Traditional Culture*

I was interested to learn about and experience Japanese rituals. Most things in Japan were heavily ritualised, with a clear and strict order to be followed.

Onsen bathing has its own specific rules which must be followed step by step: remove all clothing; wash at a stool with a bucket or shower and soap; enter the bath and soak; return to washing stool to wash again; return to bath and soak; rinse and dry off; get dressed.

Visiting a Shinto Shrine also has a list of actions to be undertaken in a particular order. This is of course not uncommon with religious ceremonies, but feels like it is taken more seriously here somehow.

### 3. Any longer term impact the activity has had:

#### *Japanese Theatre Scene*

Through conversations with the people that I had meetings with in Japan, I feel that I have a better sense of the Japanese theatre, arts and technology scene. It has become clear that Japan does not have a developed interdisciplinary arts scene, and that YCAM is very unusual in the kind of arts/tech crossover work it develops. Even in YCAM's case, most of their performance work is geared towards large scale auditorium shows. Kyoto Experiment is similar, with most of their projects being text-based plays for theatre auditoria.

Once you understand about the rigidity of Japanese society, it quickly makes sense that the fields of art and technology would remain siloed. Also that interactive performance or performance in public space would be intensely transgressive.

This isn't to say that things may grow and develop in these areas, but that Japan is well 'behind' the UK in terms of the field of work in which I operate and produce. There isn't



currently a market open and waiting to present or develop the kind of work that I make with The Other Way Works.

As I continue to develop my Afterlife project, the things that I have seen, experienced and learned on this visit will filter through and inform the form and content of the production, and I am excited to discover where they will take me.