Contested Sites, Contested Bodies: Post-3.11 Collaborations, Agency, and Metabolic Ecologies in Japanese Art

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At 2:46 p.m. on March 11, 2011, East Japan was shaken by one of its strongest earthquakes to date. The earthquake set off a disastrous chain reaction: It triggered a tsunami whose height and force exceeded all predictions. The fourteen-meter-high megawave effortlessly swept over the six-meter-high sea wall of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, cutting off its power supply. The subsequent loss of control and failure to contain the nuclear fission eventually led to a meltdown. The reactors overheated, causing a series of hydrogen explosions that catapulted radioactive dust into the atmosphere. Wind and rain transported these radioactive particles throughout the prefecture and beyond, contaminating the environment, animals, plants, and agricultural products. This cataclysmic triple disaster caused death, destruction, and the evacuation of thousands of people due to widespread radioactive contamination. The name "Fukushima" has since become synonymous with the nuclear disaster of March 2011 and its aftermath.[1] The *envirotechnical* disaster of 3.11 brought with it a renewed awareness of the inseparable interconnections between the realm of nature and the realm of humans, technology, and culture—two realms that, until now, have often found themselves all too neatly sorted into supposedly discrete categories.[2]

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* This article is part of my forthcoming Ph.D. dissertation. The dissertation investigates collaborative strategies and practices of Japanese artists that critically engage with the post-disaster environment and the non-human-human interrelations of the March 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster. It does so by means of an ecological approach, as introduced in this article. I would like to thank the two anonymous peer reviewers for their generous and constructive feedback. I am also deeply grateful to Monica Juneja and Franziska Koch for their invaluable support and advice on form and content.

1 The events have also been called "3.11" in reference to the date of the multiple disasters. In the interest of brevity, this article will mostly refer to these events as such.

2 Environmental historian Sara B. Pritchard identified the Fukushima disaster as an envirotechnical disaster. In other words, the disaster occurred because of the permeability between natural or environmental and sociotechnical processes, and their convergence. The Great East Japan Earthquake and the tsunami played as much a part in the unfolding of the nuclear disaster as human technology and the failure to contain it. See Sara B. Pritchard, "An Envirotechnical Disaster: Negotiating Nature, Technology, and Politics at Fukushima," in *Japan at Nature's Edge: The Environmental Context of*

The events of the cataclysm sparked a multitude of artistic reactions. Feeling a sense of urgency, Japanese artists responded to diverse post-disaster needs.[3] Artistic practices and strategies included community engagement projects with evacuees, as well as documentation, archiving, and aesthetic contemplation of post-disaster landscapes. Through large-scale initiatives such as art festivals, reconstructive artistic practices in the disaster-stricken area aspired to revive the affected localities. The Japanese government and the Tokyo Electric Power Company's (TEPCO) delay in providing emergency response, attempts at cover-ups, general mismanagement of the nuclear disaster, and the subsequent contamination highlighted structural problems within Japanese politics and society.[4] This resulted in critical and anti-nuclear artistic practices.

Post-Fukushima artistic responses have often involved some form of collaboration. Artists have worked together with diverse groups engaging with multiple environments outside of conventional gallery and exhibition spaces. Many artists formed collectives to collaborate with the disaster victims, helpers, clean-up volunteers, and other artists. Such practices are often referred to as "socially engaged art" (SEA), a term that gained traction in the English-speaking world in the early 2000s and in Japan especially post-3.11, where it is taken over as a loanword (*sōsharī engeijido āto* ソーシャリー・エンゲイジド・アート).[5] However, scholars disagree about what precisely makes art socially engaged.[6] Especially in Japan, the designation of artwork as

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a Global Power, ed. Ian J. Miller, Julia Adeney Thomas, and Brett Walker (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013), 255–279.

3 On artistic and cultural responses to the 3.11 disaster, including poetry, literature, and theater, see Barbara Geilhorn and Kristina Iwata-Weickgenannt, ed., *Fukushima and the Arts*: *Negotiating Nuclear Disaster* (London: Routledge, 2016); Lisette Gebhardt and Masami Yuki, ed., *Literature and Art After* "*Fukushima*": *Four Approaches* (Berlin: EB Verlag, 2014); and Kurabayashi Yasushi, *Shinsai to āto: ano toki, geijutsu ni nani ga dekita no ka* 震災とアート:あのとき、芸術に何ができたのか [*Disaster and Art: What Could Art Do at That Time?*] (Tokyo: Bookend, 2013).

4 Jeff Kingston, "Mismanaging Risk and the Fukushima Nuclear Crisis," *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* 10, no. 12 (2012): 1–25, accessed July 28, 2020, https://apjjf.org/2012/10/12/Jeff-Kingston/3724/article.html.

5 Nato Thompson, ed., *Living as Form*: *Socially Engaged Art from 1991–2011* (New York: Creative Time Books, 2012). For a genealogy of SEA in Japan see Adrian Favell, "Socially Engaged Art in Japan: Mapping the Pioneers," *FIELD: A Journal of Socially-Engaged Art Criticism*, no. 7 (2017), (no pagination), accessed March 1, 2021, http://field-journal.com/issue-7/socially-engaged-art-in-japan-mapping-the-pioneers.

6 Other contributions to the SEA discourse, besides Thompson's, include Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells*: *Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012); and Pablo Helguera, *Education for Socially Engaged Art*: *A Materials and Techniques Handbook* (New York: Jorge Pinto Books, 2011). Both of these publications have been translated into Japanese. For a critical evaluation of Thompson, Bishop, and a summary of the different positions regarding SEA in the West, see Jason Miller, "Activism vs. Antagonism: Socially Engaged Art from Bourriaud to Bishop and Beyond," *FIELD: A Journal of Socially-Engaged Art Criticism* 3 (2016), 165–183, accessed August 30, 2019,

SEA risks conflating critical art practices with government-sponsored, often economically motivated art projects, or exhibition festivals aimed at regional revitalization.[7] As cultural practitioners Anthony Marcellini and Matthew David Rana have pointed out, there is inherent anthropocentrism at play within SEA due to its focus on the social as something fundamentally human.[8] This perspective is limiting because collaborations are based on social relations. Therefore confining the social to humans also constricts collaborations to being a solely human endeavor. For these reasons, this article postulates that SEA as a concept cannot fully encapsulate post-3.11 artistic practices, and therefore aims to formulate a counter-argument.

This article argues that works of art critically engaging with the radioactive contamination post-3.11 require attention to artistic collaborations beyond humans, such as with the environment, geological forces, radioactivity, animals, or inanimate objects such as foodstuffs. The two artworks selected to advocate this case are *Flow in Red* (2014) by Kyun-Chome and *Does This Soup Taste Ambivalent?* (2014) by United Brothers. Kyun-Chome's artwork included potentially contaminated rice from Fukushima and its neighboring prefecture Ibaraki, while United Brothers worked together with vegetables grown in Fukushima that may be radioactive. The infiltration of radioactive nuclides into human food chains impacted the ecological networks, bringing to the forefront the interconnected and also interdependent relationships between humans and their environment. In analyzing these two artworks, this article maintains that post-3.11 artists engaging with the disaster have mobilized radioactivity, or food items penetrated by radioactivity, in this sense collaborating with non-human actors. In this context, the key point of this article is to outline the artists' human-based collaborations, but also to show how analysis of the artworks can be greatly enriched by exploring non-human collaborations. In this endeavor, the aim is not to deny that human collaborations exist, but to show how they are enhanced and superseded by non-human collaborations that truly drive the message of the works forward. While this article thus makes a case for the agency of non-humans, as will be

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http://field-journal.com/issue-3/activism-vs-antagonism-socially-engaged-art-from-bourriaud-to-bishop-and-beyond. For a recent critical discussion of SEA in the Japanese context, see Hiroki Yamamoto, "Socially Engaged Art in Postcolonial Japan: An Alternative View of Contemporary Japanese Art," *World Art* 10 (2020): 161–189, https://doi.org/10.1080/21500894.2020.1752794.

7 Justin Jesty, for instance, points towards the ambiguity stemming from the use of the term in the context of art festivals. Justin Jesty, "Japan's Social Turn: An Introductory Companion," *FIELD: A Journal of Socially-Engaged Art Criticism*, no. 7 (Spring 2017), (no pagination), accessed February 26, 2020, http://field-journal.com/editorial/japans-social-turn-an-introductory-companion.

8 Anthony Marcellini and Matthew D. Rana, "Notes Toward a Non-Anthropocentric Social Practice," *Art Practical* 3, no. 11 (2012) (no pagination), March 14, 2012, accessed February 27, 2020, https://www.artpractical.com/feature/notes_toward_a_non_anthropocentric_social_practice/.

addressed in more detail in the conclusion, it is impossible to be completely non-anthropocentric. Therefore, the article also comes as a thought experiment, which tries to decenter artistic authorship, not to deny it. In this way, this article aims to contribute to an expanded understanding of post-Fukushima artistic production. By tracing dispersed agencies across human and non-human collaborators, as well as by analyzing the reception of the works in their multiple localities of display, this article unravels the artworks' subject matter of post-disaster social and political concerns, such as distribution of power, contamination anxiety, and discrimination against disaster victims.

To extend the exploration of artistic collaboration beyond humans, this article puts forth a new methodological framework, namely an ecological approach to art history as based in transcultural studies. Transcultural studies advances research beyond categorizations of cultures as singular and delimited.[9] As such, this article's ecological approach benefits from a transcultural approach, which already operates on the premise of interconnection. The prefix "trans-" in transcultural studies is here defined as advancing beyond culture, beyond humans, and as challenging anthropocentrism. To formulate an ecological approach that can trace both human and non-human collaborations, this article draws on elements of Bruno Latour's actor-network-theory (ANT) and Jane Bennett's vital materialism.[10] Both scholars call attention to non-human agency and the affective power of objects. On the foundation of the work of Latour and Bennett, this article's ecological approach seeks to study non-humans and their agency according to their interrelationships with other beings or objects. Moreover, ANT's redefinition of the social as emerging out of interrelations between non-humans and humans is helpful in that it provides a broader definition of collaboration. Extending the definition of collaboration beyond conscious working together toward a common aim of two or more sentient parties may assist in the discovery of forms of collaborations that formerly may not have been recognized as such. Using this methodology, the article aims to contribute to the emerging scholarly foray into ecological art history and nuclear culture, both inside and outside of Japan.[11]

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9 Such categorizations are, for instance, informed by past historiography, colonialism and post-colonialism, or the modern nation-state. See Monica Juneja and Christian Kravagna, "Understanding Transculturalism: Monica Juneja and Christian Kravagna in Conversation," in *Transcultural Modernisms*, ed. Fahim Amir et al. (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2013), 23–33.

10 Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social*: *An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*: *A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

11 Two recent publications that cover post-nuclear artistic practices more broadly are Ele Carpenter, ed., *The Nuclear Culture Source Book* (London: Black Dog Publishing, 2016), and Gabrielle Decamous, *Invisible Colors*: *The Arts of the Atomic Age* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2018).

Fig. 1. *Kyun-Chome,* Flow in Red, *2014. Installation view. Rice, plaster, warning tape, video. Image courtesy of the artists.*

A mountain of contaminated rice, a cauldron of toxic soup

In 2014, the one-off installation *Flow in Red (Makka ni nagareru* まっかにながれる) by Kyun-Chome, an artistic unit consisting of Homma Eri (born in 1987) and Nabuchi (born in 1984), was shown at the 17th Taro Okamoto Award for Contemporary Art Exhibition.[12] The work consisted of a five-by-five meter space with three walls and an open ceiling. Accessible from one side, the entrance to the cubicle was partly obstructed by yellow warning tape bearing text proclaiming "Do not enter! Caution" in both English and Japanese.[13] Inside the space, the ground was covered by a layer of rice. A rice sack stood a couple of meters in front of the cubicle, with an inscription that read "Please trespass into the no-entry area" in Japanese.[14] A cone-shaped

12 All Japanese names are written according to Japanese convention, that is, surnames first. Exceptions have been made in the cases of Japanese living and working abroad or those who themselves write their names in the Western convention.

13 *Kiken tachiiri kinshi* きけん立入禁止.

14 *Tachiiri kinshi no sono saki e dōzo o-hairi kudasai* 立ち入り禁止のその先へどうぞお入り下さい.

mountain of red-colored rice was piled up at the center of the rectangular room. A small human arm and fist clutching another strand of warning tape jutted out from its pinnacle.

Videos of Kyun-Chome entering the real exclusion zone were projected on either side of the mountain of rice. The first video, *Toll the New Year's Bell, Inside the Prohibition* (*Tachiiri kinshi kuiki ni joya no kane wo narashi ni iku,* 立ち入り禁止区域に除夜の鐘を鳴らしに行く) shows the artists entering the site around Fukushima Daiichi on New Year's Eve of 2013 to ring the bell of a temple, as is custom in Japan.[15] The second video, *New Japan Paradise*, documents the New Year's Eve of the year prior and shows the artists entering the exclusion zone and painting black decontamination bags containing radioactive soil with blue circles to emulate an inverted Japanese flag.[16]

Fig. 2. *Kyun-Chome,* Flow in Red, *2014. Installation view. Rice, plaster, warning tape, video. Image courtesy of the artists.*

15 The exclusion zone is a post-nuclear disaster evacuation zone. After the Fukushima disaster, the Japanese government ordered the human evacuation of an area spanning a 20–30 km radius around the Fukushima Daiichi power plant. Since 2011, large parts of this area, euphemistically called the "difficult-to-return area" (*kikan konnan kuiki* 帰還困難区域), have been decontaminated and reopened.

16 Kyun-Chome, *Tachiiri kinshi kuiki ni joya no kane wo narashi ni iku* 立ち入り禁止区域に除夜の鐘を鳴らしに行く [*Toll the New Year's Bell, Inside the Prohibition*], 2014, film. https://www.kyunchome.com/blank-14; Kyun-Chome, *New Japan Paradise,* 2013, film, https://www.kyunchome.com/new-japan-paradise.

Fig. 3. *United Brothers,* Does This Soup Taste Ambivalent? *2014. Installation view. Image courtesy of the artists.*

Does This Soup Taste Ambivalent? is a work by United Brothers, consisting of New York-based artist Ei Arakawa (born 1977) and his brother Arakawa Tomoo (born 1975). As part of the 2014 Frieze Art Fair's live program in London, the brothers flew in their mother from Japan to cook miso soup for visitors at this art fair. For their self-founded *Green Tea Gallery*, the brothers were given an L-shaped gallery booth. In the booth, their mother Arakawa prepared soup on two hotplates stacked on top of a folding table and served it in paper cups. The soup contained daikon radishes and shiitake mushrooms from Iwaki, Fukushima. Plastic picnic blankets, reminiscent of those used in Japan, were spread out in front of the soup stand, enticing visitors to sit down and take a rest to enjoy the soup.

On one of the booth walls to the left of their mother, the brothers displayed several maps, papers, and photographs depicting the spread of contamination in Japan. This included printouts presenting the negative test results of the vegetables used in the soup, which had been tested by the Japanese Farmer's Association for contamination by the radioactive elements Cesium 134 and 137. A large flatscreen next to the soup stand played two of the brothers' *Fukushima Android: UB Android* film series on a loop: *Prologue: New York*

New York, and *Episode 1: Les Androides*.[17] These films are part of a six-part nuclear science-fiction series filmed in proximity to several nuclear power plants across the globe, directed by United Brothers and featuring an international cast of artists.

Fig. 4. *United Brothers,* Does This Soup Taste Ambivalent? *2014. Installation view. Image courtesy of the artists.*

Homma Eri and Nabuchi of Kyun-Chome had worked as individual artists before the disaster and credit the start of their artistic collaboration to the events of 3.11. Nabuchi is from Mito in Ibaraki, an area heavily affected by the disaster. This personal connection prompted the two artists to artistically respond.[18] Under the moniker of Kyun-Chome, they define themselves as an "art unit" (*āto yunitto* アートユニット), translated to English as "artist unit."[19] Historian of post-war Japanese art Reiko Tomii has pointed out the different kinds of collectivism practiced by Japanese artists throughout the

17 United Brothers, *Prologue: New York New York*, 2012, film, https://www.greenteagalleryworldwide.com/prologue-new-york-new-york; United Brothers, *Les Androides,* 2013, film, https://www.greenteagalleryworldwide.com/episode-1-les-androides.

18 Kyun-Chome, interview by author, March 10, 2019. *Flow in Red* is just one of several artworks focusing on the 3.11 disaster that the duo conceived of between 2011–2018.

19 "キュンチョメ(KYUN-CHOME)WEB/CV," accessed March 14, 2020, https://www.kyunchome.com/cv. By contrast, the Japanese term for artist (*bijutsuka* 美術家) sounds more traditional and is usually used by artists who graduated from fine arts universities.

twentieth and into the twenty-first century.[20] In contrast to the traditional and hierarchically structured groups of established artists (*bijutsu dantai* 美術団体) that emerged during the twentieth century, Kyun-Chome's collaboration exemplifies the trend of a "more fluid and more broadly based collectivism of 'communities' and 'units,'" which Tomii identifies as a distinguishing feature of the current phase of Japanese contemporary art (*kontenporarī āto* コンテンポラリーアート).[21] As Tomii points out, the Japanese word for unit (*yunitto* ユニット) is one of several English loan words associated with recent developments in Japanese contemporary art. "Unit," as well as "collaboration" (*korabo* コラボ), are terms increasingly used in Japanese art and popular culture genres such as music.[22] Therefore, Homma and Nabuchi's decision to define their collaboration as an art unit suggests that their working together as Kyun-Chome is less hierarchically confined and more horizontal in approach.

Fig. 5. *United Brothers,* Does This Soup Taste Ambivalent? *2014. Installation view. Image courtesy of the artists.*

20 Reiko Tomii, "Introduction: Collectivism in Twentieth-Century Japanese Art with a Focus on Operational Aspects of Dantai," *positions: asia critique* 21, no. 2 (2013): 225–267, https://doi.org/10.1215/10679847-2018256.

21 Tomii, "Introduction: Collectivism in Twentieth-Century Japanese Art," 234. Sociologist Mōri Yoshitaka also points to the emergence of new collective art forms since the 1990s, arguing that these became especially pertinent post-3.11. See Yoshitaka Mōri, "New Collectivism, Participation and Politics After the East Japan Great Earthquake," *World Art* 5, no. 1 (2015): 167–186, https://doi.org/10.1080/21500894.2015.1047038.

22 Tomii, "Introduction: Collectivism in Twentieth-Century Japanese Art," 234.

The two artists of Kyun-Chome avoid assigning specific roles when conceiving a project; rather, as Homma states, they rapidly throw ideas at each other.[23] They have a general idea of what they want an artwork to be like as they begin to work on it, but then make things up rapidly as they go.[24] This way of working suggests an artistic practice that is experimental and contemporaneous. "Kyun-Chome" refers to the Japanese onomatopoeia for the skipping of a beating heart (*kyunkyun* キュンキュン) and the non-descriptive XX (*chomechome* チョメチョメ) meaning a space left empty to fill. This name, therefore, emphasizes the intuitive, playful, and spontaneous nature of their collaboration.

In formulating a critical artistic response to post-3.11 food contamination, Kyun-Chome's artistic practice displays great sensitivity towards contemporary society and its ills. Nabuchi cites their collaboration as a major turning point that drew him out of a six-year stint as a social recluse (*hikikomori* 引きこもり).[25] Informed in part by this experience, the duo is guided by a heightened emotive intuition and awareness and is thus concerned with carving out space for and granting visibility to marginalized members of society. In their other works, Kyun-Chome collaborated with refugees in Germany and Japan, anti-US base activists in Okinawa, and the victims of the 3.11 nuclear disaster.[26] This collaboration-based approach creates room for the articulation of diverse agencies. It further renounces the importance of the singular artist's subjectivity in favor of an open, non-hierarchical, and affective artistic practice that is also capable of admitting non-human collaborations.

Much like Kyun-Chome, the Arakawa brothers first began working together in the wake of the 3.11 disaster. Originally from Iwaki in Fukushima, Ei Arakawa has been residing in the US for the past twenty years, where he received most of his artistic training.[27] However, in March 2011, Arakawa

23 Kyun-Chome, interview by author, March 10, 2019. Homma uses the Japanese term *nageai* (投げ合い), which derives from baseball and describes a fight in which the combatants throw things at each other.

24 Kyun-Chome, interview by author, March 10, 2019.

25 Jessica Holtaway, "Art as an Antidote: Artist Duo Kyun-Chome Discuss the Fragility of the Human Condition and Why We All Need Art," accessed February 20, 2020, https://jessicaholtaway.wordpress.com/2016/05/24/art-as-an-antidote-artist-duo-kyun-chome-discuss-the-fragility-of-the-human-condition-and-why-we-all-need-art/.

26 For their work with Syrian refugees in Germany, see *New Faces*, 2015; for their work with refugees in Japan, see *"New Faces" made here*, 2016. Their project in Okinawa is titled *Making a Perfect Donut*, 2017–2018. Works of Kyun-Chome that engage in direct dialogue with Fukushima victims are for example *The Story of Making Lies*, 2015, and *Deleting Them with the Sky*, 2017. See Kyun-Chome, "KYUN-CHOME WEB: Selected Works," accessed February 12, 2021, https://www.kyunchome.com/.

27 Ei Arakawa, interview by author, July 13, 2020. Ei Arakawa has discussed his artistic influences and training in greater depth in a conversation with Reiko Tomii. See Tomii Reiko and Ei Arakawa, "Nihon bijutsu ōraru hisutorī ākaivu/Arakawa Ei ōraru hisutorī 2013/3/30 日本美術オーラル・

happened to be in Tokyo and experienced the disaster firsthand. During the aftermath, Arakawa became aware of the gap between his reality—that is, his life as a contemporary artist residing abroad and traveling the globe—and the reality of the residents of Fukushima. Collaboration was already a fundamental part of Arakawa's artistic practice, so he did not hesitate to approach his brother, a Fukushima local living in Iwaki, to bridge this gap and "be a liaison of reality in Fukushima."[28] Thus, the nuclear disaster provided the impetus for Ei Arakawa to reconnect with his family and birthplace, ultimately leading to the conception of *Does This Soup Taste Ambivalent?* in 2013–14. In contrast to Ei Arakawa, his brother Arakawa Tomoo, a former owner of several tanning studios in Fukushima and Ibaraki, was a complete newcomer to the art-world. Ei Arakawa locates the beginning of their collaboration as United Brothers—a name taken from a company his brother has owned since the nineties—to a *bon* dance festival, which is held every year by the city of Iwaki, in October 2011.[29] Ei Arakawa brought his friends from overseas and paintings by German artist Kerstin Brätsch to accompany his brother, who, together with the employees of his tanning company, danced as one of the participating groups in the dance parade of the Iwaki Bon festival. Initiated by Ei Arakawa's urge to rekindle his connection with his birthplace, he, his friends, and Brätsch's paintings joined his brother's troupe in the festive procession and danced around Iwaki station.

Generally speaking, post-Fukushima government-sponsored art projects are often aimed at improving the conditions of the local communities.[30] For Ei Arakawa, however, the United Brothers' collaboration on the occasion of the dance festival played out quite differently. Instead of giving the community "some sort of treatment or service," he perceived his participation with artists and artworks at the dance festival as a collaboration with the energy of the local people.[31] Suggesting an awareness of mutually influential and dispersed agency amongst persons and things, Arakawa notes that "in a way, the artworks participated inside the energy of the community."[32] For him,

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ヒストリー・アーカイヴ/荒川医オーラル・ヒストリー 2013年3月30日 [Japanese Art Oral History Archive/Arakawa Ei Oral History, March 30, 2013]," accessed August 17, 2020, http://www.oralarthistory.org/archives/arakawa_ei/interview_01.php.

28 Ei Arakawa, interview by author, July 13, 2020.

29 Ei Arakawa, interview by author, July 13, 2020. Derived from Buddhist customs, *bon odori* (盆踊り) are traditional folk-dance festivals typically held during the summer across Japan. Due to the 3.11 disaster, Iwaki's *bon* dance was pushed back to October 2011.

30 Justin Jesty, "Art Projects: Japan's New Public Context for Contemporary Art," in *An Overview of Art Projects in Japan: A Society That Co-Creates with Art*, ed. Sumiko Kumakura and Yūichirō Nagatsu (Tokyo: Arts Council Tokyo, 2014), 38–40.

31 Ei Arakawa, interview by author, July 13, 2020.

32 Ei Arakawa, interview by author, July 13, 2020.

United Brothers merely documented these events. According to Ei Arakawa, United Brothers' subsequent activities grew out of this initial performance. As the collaboration of the brothers as United Brothers attracted more and more international friends and artists, they initiated the *Green Tea Gallery* as a permanent platform in 2012 and structured it as an artist-run gallery.[33] This nomadic space provides a stage for collaborations between artists from Japan and abroad to create art inspired by Fukushima.

Both United Brothers and Kyun-Chome's inter-human collaborations seem to be based on the desires of the artists to advance beyond the individual artist's abilities, insights, and agencies. The artists' collaborations translate into their enhanced joint awareness of disparate localities, human conditions, and experiences. Both collaborative groups devalue the singular artist in favor of the acknowledgment of a laterally dispersed set of agencies between human and non-human collaborators. The following analysis of non-human collaborators, therefore, allows for a deeper understanding of the social and political traction in *Flow in Red* and *Does This Soup Taste Ambivalent?* to bring into visibility post-disaster power dynamics between the Japanese government, citizens, and disaster victims.

Non-human agency: From transculturality to ecology

Transculturality, in the context of art history, seeks to forego prefigured categorizations such as style, genre, and an art-historical genealogy that presupposes divisions between "west" and "non-west." It recommends an examination of artistic strategies that remains mindful of the fact that these are neither culturally bounded nor limited. Monica Juneja has pointed out that discussions of transculturality often take Fernando Ortiz's concept of transculturation as their starting point.[34] This provenance is important because Juneja identifies a "counterhumanism, a current that breaks down the ontological distinction between subjects and objects in favor of a distributive agency across persons and things" within Ortiz's critique of modernity.[35] She further demonstrates that Ortiz's object-oriented approach, which he formulated as early as 1940, anticipates Latour's argument against

33 Ei Arakawa, interview by author, July 13, 2020.

34 Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), quoted in Monica Juneja, "'A Very Civil Idea…': Art History, Transculturation, and World-Making—With and Beyond the Nation," *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte* 81 (2018): 461–485; 467. Ortiz devised the concept of transculturation as an advancement of the existing concept of acculturation. In his study of Spanish colonialism in Cuba, he identified mutually constitutive processes of cultural merging, creation, and exchange in the dynamics of the colonizer and the colonized. These processes, he argued, went beyond the simple binaries and power structures imposed by the colonizer.

35 Juneja, "'A Very Civil Idea…'," 468.

an ontology that postulates a division between humans and non-humans as proposed during the post-Enlightenment era.[36] It is thus possible to conclude that attention to non-human agency is inherent to a transcultural approach, as is a holistic ontological view that recognizes the inseparability of humans, non-humans, and their environment. These conditions ultimately form the crux of an ecological methodological approach. As formulated in this article, such an approach advances beyond perceptions of cultural distinctions as rigid and culture as a closed-off human terrain separate from nature.[37] Transculturality thus becomes a methodological imperative.[38] Additionally, marrying an ecological discourse to the existing insights of a transcultural approach can result in an increased awareness of research conducted beyond culturally defined concepts and categories.

Ernst Haeckel first coined the term "ecology" in his book *General Morphology of Organisms* in 1866. He wrote that ecology is to be understood as the study of "the relationship of the organism to the surrounding exterior world, to which relations we can count in the broader sense all the conditions of existence. These are partly of organic, partly of inorganic nature."[39] Haeckel stressed the inclusion of non-living objects. On these

36 Juneja, "'A Very Civil Idea…'," 469.

37 As T. J. Demos points out, such a separation arose from principles of Cartesian dualism between human and non-human worlds propagated during the Enlightenment. T. J. Demos, *Decolonizing Nature: Contemporary Art and the Politics of Ecology* (Berlin: Sternberg Press, 2016), 14. An understanding of nature as something separate from humans that needs to be saved has also built much of the foundation of the environmentalist movement of the 1960s and 70s, while paradoxically and simultaneously legitimizing capitalist exploitation of natural resources and pseudo-sustainable practices such as green capitalism. See T. J. Demos, "Contemporary Art and the Politics of Ecology: An Introduction," *Third Text* 27, no. 1 (2013): 1–9, https://doi.org/10.1080/09528822.2013.753187. For a review of Western philosophies based on the nature-culture dualism, see Yrjö Haila, "Beyond the Nature-Culture Dualism," *Biology & Philosophy* 15, no. 2 (2000): 155–175, https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1006625830102.

38 However, not all transcultural approaches thus formulated necessarily take an ecological perspective, nor is such attention to ecology and non-human agency particular to the transcultural studies discourse. Environmental studies scholar Yuki Masami points out that ecocriticism that pays attention to ecology within the study of literature and the environment originated in the United States as a scholarly discipline in the 1990s. It has since come to incorporate other media such as film or visual arts. However, it is still a nascent field in Japan. See Masami Yuki, "Introduction," in *Ecocriticism in Japan*, ed. Hisaaki Wake, Keijirō Suga, and Masami Yuki (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2017), 1–19. Non-human agency has been explored since the late 1990s, most notably by Graham Harman and others contributing to the object-oriented ontology discourse. For a very brief overview, see, for instance, Graham Harman, "Brief SR/OOO Tutorial," accessed August 2, 2020, https://doctorzamalek2.wordpress.com/2010/07/23/brief-srooo-tutorial/. The call for a dissolution of the nature-culture divide has been formulated by scholars such as philosopher Timothy Morton. See Timothy Morton, *The Ecological Thought* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

39 The original passage reads as follows: "Unter Oecologie verstehen wir die gesammte Wissenschaft von den Beziehungen des Organismus zur umgebenden Außenwelt, wohin wir im

grounds, this article holds that an ecological approach must pay attention to materials, objects, humans, non-humans, and their respective agencies while always remaining conscious of the context of their reciprocal relationships and embeddedness within the exterior world. In the context of an art historical analysis, this translates into attention to networks and interconnections; it means treating the artist and the materiality of the artwork as mutually influential and effective, while also paying attention to non-human agency.[40]

An essential difference must be noted at this point between ecological art, as art that takes matters of ecology as its subject, and an ecological approach to art, as a research methodology that aims to examine art from an ecocentric or non-anthropocentric perspective.[41] The latter approach considers art's fixity within cultural, natural, and technological environments and gestures towards a more inclusive object and non-human oriented ontology. Furthermore, it draws attention to works that might not previously have been thought of as environmental.[42] *Flow in Red* and *Does This Soup Taste Ambivalent?* warrant an ecological approach, not because the artists or their works have an outspoken environmentalist agenda or are fashioning new ecological alternatives, but because the works unravel and highlight the dynamics of the Anthropocene, the current age of environmental pollution, and the irreversible man-made impact on the planet.[43] An ecological approach to these works is

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weiteren Sinne alle 'Existenz-Bedingungen' rechnen können. Diese sind theils organischer, theils anorganischer Natur; sowohl diese als jene sind, wie wir vorher gezeigt haben, von der größten Bedeutung für die Form der Organismen, weil sie dieselbe zwingen sich ihnen anzupassen." Ernst Haeckel, *Generelle Morphologie der Organismen*: *Allgemeine Grundzüge der organischen Formen-Wissenschaft, mechanisch begründet durch die von Charles Darwin reformirte Descendenz-Theorie* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1866), 286.

40 Linda Weintraub calls such a position "ecocentrism," i.e. "the principle that humans are not more important than other entities on Earth." Linda Weintraub, *To Life! Eco Art in Pursuit of a Sustainable Planet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 7. Weintraub's book is designed as a comprehensive introductory compendium to what she calls "eco art." Besides Weintraub, scholars such as T. J. Demos and Yates McKee have argued for attention to be given to ecological art practices. See Yates McKee, "Art and the Ends of Environmentalism: From Biosphere to the Right to Survival," in *Nongovernmental Politics*, ed. Michel Feher, Gaëlle Krikorian, and Yates McKee (New York: Zone Books, 2007), 539–583. Andrew Patricio has advocated for an ecological perspective to art history. Andrew Patrizio, *The Ecological Eye*: *Assembling an Ecocritical Art History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019).

41 At least within the limits of never being able to overcome our status as human beings.

42 Contra Weintraub, for instance, for whom eco art is defined by its focus on non-human organisms, the non-living environment, and human actions, as well as its emphasis on interconnections, dynamism, and ecocentrism. Artworks that merely reproduce nature as a separate entity or that use nature as a mere aesthetic backdrop or abstraction do not constitute eco art in her view. Weintraub, *To Life!*, 5–16.

43 The concept of the Anthropocene as an era in which humans represent the major driving geological force, irreversibly altering the planet's geology and ecosystem, was put forward by scientists Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer in 2000. Paul Crutzen and Eugene Stoermer, "The

able to trace non-human agency, collaborations that are more-than-human, and transcultural networks. Furthermore, the inclusion of radioactivity as a (hypothetical) material that forgoes any national or cultural delimitations demands such an approach.

Putting the ecological approach into practice

In a manner that is emblematic of the Anthropocene, the 3.11 nuclear disaster exposed the inseparability of nature, technology, and culture. *Flow in Red* and *Does This Soup Taste Ambivalent?* reflect this inseparability, because they reveal diverse networks emerging out of the nuclear disaster. One such network revealed by these works is the spread of radiation and its infiltration of the human food chain. Through the inclusion of (potentially) contaminated food, the artworks become part of this network while at the same time producing networks of their own. Elements of Latour's ANT can inform a holistic ecological perspective that traces the networks and actors highlighted in *Flow in Red* and *Does This Soup Taste Ambivalent?* Furthermore, Latour's reconsideration of the social helps discern what makes these works socially engaged beyond what has hitherto been accounted for. An analysis sharpened in this manner should contribute to a broadened understanding of the ways in which the collaborations of *Flow in Red* and *Does This Soup Taste Ambivalent?* advance beyond the inter-human workings of the artists as artist duos or units.

Latour aims to challenge how the social sciences have formerly defined the social as a static sphere or material entity.[44] This pertains to the current analysis because social relations form the basis of collaboration. Latour makes a case for a re-evaluation of the social. Returning to the term's etymology, he defines the social not as something fixed, but as something that arises out of momentary connections or associations of actors that must be traced along networks. Latour borrows the term "actant" from literary theory to arrive at a more inclusive conception of what constitutes an actor or agency.[45] Actants are sources of actions, they can come in the shape of objects, humans, non-humans, and even concepts, all of which possess

'Anthropocene'," *Global Change Newsletter* 41 (2000): 17–18. Forgoing an anthropocentric focus, scholars such as Jason W. Moore and Donna Haraway have also proposed alternative terms for the current age. Jason W. Moore, *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History, and the Crisis of Capitalism* (Oakland: PM Press, 2016); Donna Haraway, "Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making Kin," *Environmental Humanities* 6, no. 1 (2015): 159–165, https://doi.org/10.1215/22011919-3615934.

44 Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 1.

45 Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 54.

agency.[46] Following this definition, the radioactive rice in *Flow in Red* as well as the potentially radioactive vegetables of *Does This Soup Taste Ambivalent?* can be considered as figurations of the actant of radioactivity. Radioactivity possesses an agency that, though it cannot be fully curtailed by humans, can be collaborated with.[47] Therefore it is worth tracing this confluence of agencies as a collaboration in order to understand the social engagements and underlying critical currents of the artworks.

Fig. 6. *Kyun-Chome,* Flow in Red*, 2014. Installation view. Rice, plaster, warning tape, video. Image courtesy of the artists.*

46 Importantly, this does not mean to engage in anthropomorphizing objects. While Bo Zheng and Sohl Lee have pointed out similarities between Bruno Latour's theory and East Asian metaphysics, I would suggest that this caution against personifying objects is something that might distinguish the two. The aim cannot be to personify non-humans, and thus anthropomorphize them, but to acknowledge them as others that carry agency even if this agency is not agency in the human sense of the word. See Bo Zheng and Sohl Lee, "Contemporary Art and Ecology in East Asia," *Journal of Contemporary Chinese Art* 3, no. 3 (2016): 215–222, https://doi.org/10.1386/jcca.3.3.215_2.

47 It is impossible for humans to know non-human consciousness, therefore one will never be able to fully tell whether non-human actants want to collaborate with us or share our goals. For the sake of the thought experiment of this article, it is nevertheless assumed that radioactivity can act as a collaborator in its own right.

The Tohoku region in north Fukushima, a largely rural area with a focus on primary industry, was the most affected by radioactive contamination. Before the meltdown, rice and produce from Fukushima were renowned for their good quality and consumed all over Japan.[48] After the disaster, there was widespread unease around the consumption of these products. As of June 2011, government-initiated campaigns began to promote Fukushima-grown food items under the slogan "Let's support East Japan by Eating!" (*Higashi Nihon wo tabete ōen* 東日本を食べて応援) in an attempt to suppress discrimination against products from Fukushima by appealing to the Japanese population's sense of duty towards Fukushima's reconstruction.[49] This government-propagated normative rhetoric dictated the upholding of the national bond and support of the reconstruction effort of the Japanese nation above personal wellbeing, goals, or values.[50] Nevertheless, the disaster was a significant blow to the agricultural industry of the area.[51] In 2014, discrimination against rice from Fukushima had become so severe that supply exceeded demand. Many farmers sold potentially contaminated rice that had been deemed unfit for human consumption as animal feed on internet platforms such as eBay. This was also where Kyun-Chome sourced the rice used in their work.[52] The vegetables employed in *Does This Soup Taste Ambivalent?* were tested and deemed safe by the Japanese Farmer's Association. However, as nuclear engineer and anti-nuclear activist Koide Hiroaki points out, this does not mean they are entirely free from radiation, since radiation below the machine-detectable level of 20Bq/kg is not considered to be contamination.[53]

Whether it was brought into Kyun-Chome's exhibition space or steamed in United Brothers' soup at the London art fair, the foodstuff exerted an agency beyond what the artist would be able to achieve with pure representation.

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48 Masami Yuki, "Post-Fukushima Discourses on Food and Eating: Analysing Political Implications and Literary Imagination," in *Literature and Art After "Fukushima": Four Approaches*, ed. Lisette Gebhardt and Masami Yuki (Berlin: EB Verlag, 2014), 37–51; 38.

49 Yuki, "Post-Fukushima Discourses on Food and Eating," 42–43.

50 See Tokita Tamaki, "The Post-3/11 Quest for True Kizuna: *Shi no tsubute* by Wago Ryoichi and *Kamisama 2011* by Kawakami Hiromi," *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 13, no. 7 (February 2015): 1–13, accessed February 18, 2020, https://apjjf.org/2015/13/6/Tamaki-Tokita/4283.html.

51 Mizuho Aoki, "In Shadow of Nuclear Disaster, Fukushima's Rice Farmers Look to Rebuild Their Market," *The Japan Times*, March 11, 2018, accessed February 17, 2020, https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/03/11/national/shadow-nuclear-disaster-fukushimas-rice-farmers-look-rebuild-market/.

52 Kyun-Chome, interview by author, March 10, 2019.

53 Katsuya Hirano and Hirotaka Kaisai, "'The Fukushima Nuclear Disaster Is a Serious Crime': Interview with Koide Hiroaki 福島核災害は明らかに深刻な犯罪である—小出裕章氏に聞く," *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* 14, no. 6 (2016): 10, accessed July 27, 2020, https://apjjf.org/2016/06/Hirano.html.

The actual object has to be present because it is the human–non-human collaboration that creates certain meaningful effects in bringing to the forefront the post-disaster conditions that arise from radioactive foodstuff. Building on Latour, Lorenz Engell and Bernhard Siegert have pointed out that actants may exert agency not only by making us do something but also by making a noticeable difference, to "make [something] present" or "make exist" by just being there.[54] In the case of these artworks, the presence of the radiation within the rice and vegetables from Fukushima makes present the nuclear disaster in the exhibition space or fairground. However, there is a second step of confrontation in which the viewer-cum-participant must grapple more concretely with the effective agency of the contaminated foodstuff.

In *Vibrant Matter*, Bennett identifies foodstuff in particular as something that possesses agency, as it can profoundly alter the organism that ingests it when it is consumed.[55] For Bennett, a productive power intrinsic to edible matter allows it "to affect and create effects" within organisms.[56] Encounters between humans, non-human organisms, and their environment that result in an actual or imagined change of the organism or object's physical body can be summarized as metabolic ecologies. *Flow in Red* and *Does This Soup Taste Ambivalent?* involve metabolic ecologies since their subject is the radioactive contamination of foodstuff and its actual or hypothetical consumption. Moreover, following Engell and Siegert's claim, their potential for agency exists even without consumption and exerts itself through the food's mere presence.

There is a moment in the artwork *Flow in Red* when the viewer must decide whether or not to become a participant. In order to view the videos displayed inside of the cubicle, the viewer has to step on the potentially radioactive rice. The viewer thus finds herself in a dilemma: on the one hand, the bag of rice positioned a couple of meters in front of the cubicle asks the viewer to enter the no-go area, implying a call to enter the exclusion zone; on the other hand, yellow warning tape obstructs the cubicle. The presence of the rice forces the viewer to grapple with anxiety as she becomes conscious of her own permeability as an organism. She recognizes that she is in fact made up of the environment that surrounds her, as it becomes her through metabolization. This confrontation also calls to mind the aforementioned post-disaster demand to support your fellow Japanese by eating Fukushima-grown produce. Eating to support the local economy forms part of the discourse about bonds (*kizuna* 絆) that arose in the aftermath of 3.11.

54 Lorenz Engell and Bernhard Siegert, "Editorial," *Zeitschrift für Medien- und Kulturforschung* 4, no. 2 (2013): 5–10; 10, https://doi.org/10.28937/ZMK-4-2.

55 Bennett, *Vibrant Matter,* 50.

56 Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 49.

Crossing the taped-off boundaries of the cubicle and stepping onto the rice can also be interpreted as a performative proclamation of dissent in the face of hegemonic state power, as to step on the rice is to recognize the rice as inedible, question governmental claims to food safety and refuse to succumb to the "Let's support East Japan by Eating!" rhetoric. This underlying power that the viewer can act against is what philosopher Michel Foucault defines as disciplinary power. Largely invisible but ever-present, disciplinary power emerges through internalized norms, mutual surveillance, and the production of knowledge.[57] As it is expressed in Japan post-3.11, an example can be found in TEPCO and the Japanese government's selective control and instrumentalization of information about the disaster and food contamination. For Kyun-Chome, the small raised fist placed on the pinnacle of the contaminated rice represents their anger about this post-disaster situation in Japan.[58]

When asked about their decision to include rice in their installation, Kyun-Chome said that they expected people to be shocked or at least irritated when encountering the foodstuff, as stepping on rice is considered taboo.[59] Visitors took to Instagram and Twitter to express their feelings of unease and hesitancy when confronted with the decision of whether or not to step on the rice.[60] Evoking a commonly-held belief in the spiritual animation of revered things, Nabuchi stated that when the rice became contaminated with radioactivity, the gods inside died.[61] Therefore, stepping on this rice is an acknowledgment of the overwhelming magnitude of the disaster, and serves as a refusal to continue business-as-usual as a diligent citizen and follow official calls to food consumption as though nothing had happened. *Flow in Red* is therefore deeply political in its revelation of a power struggle between citizen and government, as the choice between refusal and compliance is turned into a political act.

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57 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*: *The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 135–194.

58 Kyun-Chome, email conversation with author, July 6, 2019.

59 Kyun-Chome, interview by author, March 10, 2019. Cultural anthropologist Ishige Naomichi points out that rice is a highly valued food staple in Japan and was historically considered as a sacred grain in which divine spirits dwell. See Ishige Naomichi, "Food Culture," in *The Cambridge Companion to Modern Japanese Culture*, ed. Yoshio Sugimoto (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 300–316; 301.

60 See Saiki Shunsuke 斉木駿介, "Kyun Chome-san no sakuhin ni furuemashita…!! キュンチョメさんの作品に震えました…!! [I was shook by Kyun-Chome's work…!!]," Instagram, March 6, 2014, accessed February 19, 2020, https://www.instagram.com/p/lL1oqnSpgb/; Tobitakyū tsūrisuto 飛田給ツウリスト, (@tobita92), "'Dōzo o-hairi kudasai' to iwarete mo, hairu no wa tamerawaremasu どうぞお入り下さい」といわれても、入るのはためらわれます [Even If It Says 'Please Come in' You Are Hesistant to Enter]," accessed February 18, 2020, https://twitter.com/tobita92/status/435722827216330752.

61 Kyun-Chome, interview by author, March 10, 2019.

Of course, the non-human agency of the rice or the vegetables in the soup is partly constituted by their human-cultural construction as food items. However, their agency is also constituted by their potential radioactivity, a condition that ultimately finds its genesis in the natural seismic activity of the earth's fault lines. This activity, together with a human failure to contain the resultant nuclear disaster, ultimately provided the conditions for radioactive contamination to occur. This chain of interconnected effects of a larger network and its subnetworks is revealed in the way the artists work together and consequently collaborate with the rice or vegetables. In the words of Latour, "action is not done under the full control of the consciousness; action should rather be felt as a node, a knot, and a conglomerate of many surprising sets of agencies that have to be slowly disentangled."[62]

In the work of Kyun-Chome, this coming together of agencies culminates in the exposure of hidden anxieties and underlying power dynamics by the inclusion of an element that allows the possibility for defiance. It is these momentary human–non-human associations of the viewer/participant–artwork encounter that constitute the social—as a way of living together, relating to each other and society as a whole—enabling more-than-human collaborations to be recognized as such. A more detailed analysis of United Brothers will further clarify how these collaborations result in effects beyond the full control of the consciousness of the artist.

Before the United Brothers exhibited their soup at Frieze, Ei Arakawa held a similar performance under the name *Yum Yum Vibe & Lost Love* in Amsterdam in 2013.[63] In Amsterdam, artist Hanna Törnudd served the soup with dried daikon posted by Arakawa's mother from Fukushima. As art critic Catherine Woodhas points out, Ei Arakawa typically takes on the role of a sort of presenter in his participatory performances; he introduces and directs, and then renounces control to remain in the background for the duration of the performance. Wood concludes that Arakawa challenges the importance of the single artist's "interiority" through his performance formats where agency is spread out amongst the participants.[64] *Does This Soup Taste Ambivalent?* takes this distribution of agency even further. Ei Arakawa notes that while he thought it was interesting that the soup was prepared by people from Iwaki, namely his mother and brother, in truth, anyone could have made it so long

62 Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 44.

63 This performance was part of the *Japan Syndrome-Amsterdam* conference, which took place from March 13–15, 2013, at Rietveld Academie and was accompanied by a screening of the 1978 film *Lost Love* by Kuroki Kazuo. After Frieze, Ei Arakawa staged *Does This Soup Taste Ambivalent?* for a final time at Paramount Ranch Art Fair, Los Angeles in January 2016.

64 Catherine Wood, "Out of Body: On the Art of Ei Arakawa," *Artforum International* 51, no. 6 (2013): 172–181; 174.

as it contained ingredients from Fukushima.[65] In this way, he acknowledges the effective power of the non-human collaborator of radioactive foodstuff that operates independently of human intervention. Hence, the agencies of Arakawa's non-human collaborators go beyond what he intends or consciously expects of his work.

In both installations, the presence of radioactive foodstuff and its agency generated a range of emotive responses, including anxieties around eating potentially contaminated food. Ei Arakawa, however, notes that he also hoped the performance would draw attention to the negative media coverage Fukushima received, especially outside of Japan.[66] He therefore specifically planned that the piece be performed abroad. For him, there was a discrepancy between what he knew about his family's everyday experience in Iwaki consuming Fukushima foodstuffs, which he describes as "not so dramatic," and what he sensed to be hysteria around the nuclear disaster abroad.[67] However, the artist did not anticipate the press commotion that ensued as the Frieze fair's press relations company harnessed the symbolic power of Fukushima. Arakawa found that the British media's sensationalist response to the work exceeded what he considered to be the hysteria of the foreign media that he had wanted to draw attention to in the first place.[68]

About three months before the fair, Frieze announced the work with the slogan "Eat Radioactive Soup!" on their Facebook page.[69] Alongside this, they posted a press photo that showed a bowl charmingly presented between flowers but with toxic green contents.

The British press picked up on this image and a whirlwind of media reportage ensued, focused on the potential presence of radioactivity. A few days before the fair and before the performance took place, *Art Net News* reported: "Artists to Serve Radioactive Soup at Frieze London."[70] Later, Matilda Battersby from the newspaper *The Independent* asked "Would you eat Fukushima Soup?"[71]

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65 Ei Arakawa, interview by author, July 13, 2020.

66 Ei Arakawa, interview by author, July 13, 2020.

67 Ei Arakawa, interview by author, July 13, 2020.

68 Ei Arakawa, interview by author, July 13, 2020.

69 Frieze Art Fair, "Eat Radioactive Soup! Feel Like You're Moving Whilst Standing Completely Still! Become Part-Body, Part-Sculpture…," July 30, 2014, accessed February 19, 2020, https://www.facebook.com/friezeartfair/photos/eat-radioactive-soup-feel-like-youre-moving-whilst-standing-completely-still-bec/829753347049536/.

70 Henri Neuendorf, "Artists to Serve Radioactive Soup at Frieze London," *Artnet News*, accessed October 31, 2019, https://news.artnet.com/market/artists-to-serve-radioactive-soup-at-frieze-london-114962.

71 Matilda Battersby, "Would You Eat Fukushima Soup? Frieze Visitors Queue up to Risk 'Delicious' yet Possibly Toxic Radish Broth," *The Independent*, October 17, 2014, accessed

In her article, Battersby quoted one visitor at the fair who waited for others to try the soup before deciding to taste it. The visitor reassured Battersby that he would report back to her should his body begin to grow additional extremities.

Fig. 7. *United Brothers,* Does This Soup Taste Ambivalent? *2014. Official Press Photo. Image courtesy of the artists.*

Later on, United Brothers produced a video documenting reactions of the participants throughout the multiple stagings of the work. In this video, one viewer of the performance in Amsterdam shared his opinion of the responses of the viewers as a mix of hysteria and infantilism.[72] He observed that while feelings of anxiety were present, there was also a discernible sense of frivolity in the reactions of those who were confronted with ingesting potentially radioactive food. Although this viewer's assessments may have been overdrawn, the above reactions show how receptions of the work in Amsterdam and at the London art fair ranged between responses that lacked seriousness to those that were highly emotionally charged.

February 28, 2020, https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/news/frieze-visitors-queue-risk-delicious-yet-possibly-toxic-fukushima-radish-soup-9801420.html.

72 This video was later displayed alongside copies of press reactions, photos of the actual performance, and information on contamination in the 2016–2018 exhibition series "The Ocean after Nature." "The Ocean After Nature," *Independent Curators International*, accessed August 5, 2020, https://curatorsintl.org/exhibitions/the-ocean-after-nature.

During the performance in Amsterdam, Arakawa was confronted onstage by New York-based activist and critic Sabu Kohso. In a manner reminiscent of the political choice offered by *Flow in Red*, Kohso proclaimed that he would not eat the soup, as to eat it would be to make a political choice for the nuclear state.[73] Kohso's reaction mirrors a complex discrepancy inherent to United Brothers' work. On the one hand, Ei Arakawa hoped to create a dialogic platform and to bring the realities of Fukushima to the world outside Japan, thus countering what he perceived as media hysteria abroad. On the other hand, Arakawa's interpretation of this hysteria as "damage caused by rumors," reveals that the artist may himself have partly fallen into the trap of governmental rhetoric.[74] The Japanese government utilized the slogan "damage caused by rumors" in the aftermath of the disaster. Exerting disciplinary power mechanisms and thereby silencing critical news sources, the slogan was used, for instance, to control the spread of knowledge about the extent of contamination. According to Koide Hiroaki, this expression is entangled with a national morality discourse, just like the "bonds" mentioned earlier,[75] making official information unreliable for Fukushima residents and creating "abstract anxiety" as identified by Arakawa.[76]

Some of the implications of the artwork, such as presenting an opportunity to show support for Fukushima farmers through eating, were lost in its staging at the British art fair. While the anxiety around confrontation with contaminated food re-emerged, the diverse agencies of human and non-human actants played out in such a way that the potential of the work to create a dialogic platform was partly overshadowed. The artwork turned into an exciting dare, a spectacle that invites one to participate, simultaneously thrilling and causing unease—though some visitors also viewed the work as merely a welcome opportunity to grab a quick cup of soup during a busy visit.[77]

The non-human agency of radioactive foodstuff is undoubtedly present and effective independently of human actors, since without human cooperation radioactive materials decay and expel radiation. In the context of this analysis, it has, however, become apparent that this agency is also subject to human interaction and interpretation, in particular when framed through art. Along the same lines, although Bennett stresses the importance of paying close

73 STUDIUM GENERALE RIETVELD ACADEMIE, "EI ARAKAWA: Iwaki Odori (2nd Anniversary) & Lost Love," uploaded May 21, 2013, accessed February 19, 2020, YouTube video, 01:45, https://youtu.be/vvQUCaDAtjU.

74 Ei Arakawa, interview by author, July 13, 2020.

75 Hirano and Kaisai, "The Fukushima Nuclear Disaster is a Serious Crime."

76 Ei Arakawa, interview by author, July 13, 2020.

77 Sam Sherman, "Ei Arakawa in Conversation," *OCULA*, October 19, 2014, accessed February 28, 2020, https://ocula.com/magazine/conversations/ei-arakawa/.

attention to the agency of matter and giving "voice to a thing-power," it is nevertheless still her voice—or that of the author of this article—that speaks for the non-humans, since to assume a non-anthropocentric viewpoint is never fully possible.[78]

As the above analysis has shown, it can nevertheless be productive to assume an ecological perspective by looking beyond the effects that the artists hoped to achieve, which may be influenced by cultural constructions. An ecological perspective helps to redirect the analytic inquiry towards non-human agency and more-than-human networks and collaborations. It shifts the focus onto the persistent interconnectedness existing beyond human hegemonic power and political rhetoric, such as reverence for nature or a symbolic national bond. In this way, the analysis becomes transcultural, challenging the limitations of anthropocentric cultural referentiality.

As the analysis has so far shown, there are a multitude of power dynamics present in both artworks, one such power dynamic being the pressure to support the Japanese economy by consuming potentially toxic foodstuffs. In an article published in *The Japan Times*, Arakawa is cited as saying that he did not intend to make a political statement with the work.[79] Similarly, Kyun-Chome insists on the non-activist nature of their artistic practice, stating that they want to resist being associated with any kind of ideology. Such a non-positioning, in their opinion, leaves more room for open debate instead of outright antagonism.[80] Subsequently, both Kyun-Chome and United Brothers could be criticized for merely imitating existing power structures. At the fair or in the space of the museum, they recreate real-world scenarios of post-disaster citizen consent about whether or not to consume certain foods, and heighten post-disaster dynamics and psychological anxieties, but neither group truly challenges these conditions. However, while the artists might say that they are not making an outright political statement, the works themselves are still deeply political. This is echoed by Ei Arakawa, who does acknowledge that the work *itself* could be construed as political.[81] The refusal to consume and interact with potentially contaminated food items can also be an act of defiance, resisting hegemonic narratives enforced by the Japanese government and TEPCO.

Kyun-Chome's work includes a tongue-in-cheek, playful element of defiance, and further suggests the redistribution of power. This consists of

78 Bennett, *Vibrant Matter*, 2.

79 William Hollingworth, "Art Show on Fukushima Food Safety Causes Stir," *The Japan Times,* October 17, 2014, accessed February 28, 2020, https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/10/17/national/fukushima-food-safety-debated-london-art-show/.

80 Kyun-Chome, interview by author, March 10, 2019.

81 Ei Arakawa, interview by author, July 13, 2020.

having visitors physically reenact a crossing of boundaries, stepping on the rice and into a fictitious exclusion zone. In *Flow in Red,* political agency is therefore expanded from the personal choice of whether to collaborate and comply with hegemonic power structures, or to silently abstain as is the case in *Does This Soup Taste Ambivalent? Flow in Red* provides the visitor with the possibility to physically, and in a manner visible to others, enact resistance to governmental power by disregarding the tape that cordons off the area, which represents these normative structures, to enter and to step onto the rice despite these structures.

Fig. 8. *Kyun-Chome,* Flow in Red, *2014. Installation view. Rice, plaster, warning tape, video. Image courtesy of the artists.*

The above observations show how the interconnected agencies of the actants of the artworks' materiality, such as foodstuff and radioactivity, the artists and the viewer-participants could be discerned by analyzing the artworks through an ecological perspective enabled by employing the ANT approach. Latour explains that while ANT flattens the conceptual terrain in giving equal consideration to all actants, their figurations as actors, and networks, it does not dismiss the existence of asymmetries or power relations; it rather tries to explain them.[82] Similarly, the ecological approach is a non-hierarchical framing device that considers equally the subjects of inquiry, human and non-human, while acknowledging the post-nuclear disaster sociopolitical conditions that

82 Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 16, 64.

the artworks unravel.[83] The above comparison between *Flow in Red* and *Does This Soup Taste Ambivalent?* demonstrates that both works provoked anxiety, while the latter also generated responses that were deemed emotionally charged and childish.

Radioactivity and radioactive materials are *a priori* transcultural. They disperse indefinitely across the planet irrespective of man-made national or cultural boundaries. They attest to the chain-like interconnectedness of things and are the cause of a concern about radioactive contamination shared transnationally. Thus radioactivity—and the artworks that contain it—are ultimately part of a nuclear network that spans the globe.[84] Radioactive materials travel along different spatio-temporal scales, from the size of an atom to that of the globe, and the decay of the atomic nucleus effectively turns linear time on its head.

Flow in Red and *Does This Soup Taste Ambivalent?* also operate on multiple scales in time and space, something which warrants attention. However, it is here that the ecological approach differs from Latour's ANT. Latour does not approve of global as a concept that is divergent from the local, but rather prioritizes the chain-like interconnectedness of different localities.[85] In contrast, an ecological approach acknowledges that the global nuclear network, as an aggregate of diverse nuclear sites, can become an actor in its own right.[86]

Both transcultural and ecological art historical scholarship have called for art historical practice to attend to matters of scale.[87] Here, attention to scale means engaging in multiple readings, avoiding dualisms between micro and macro, and freely assuming different vantage points while taking on simultaneous and diverse scales as reference. Gabrielle Hecht conceptualizes nuclear materials as "interscalar vehicles."[88] She defines them as "empirical

83 Patrizio has also argued for non-hierarchy as part of an ecological approach to art history. Patrizio, *The Ecological Eye*, 15.

84 The global nuclear network consists of various interconnected components such as nuclear research, uranium mining, nuclear energy, nuclear weapons production, nuclear waste management, and the trade of nuclear materials.

85 Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 176.

86 With her concept of "eco-cosmopolitanism," Ursula K. Heise has made a productive case for the global as a shared and directly experienced space that can be dislocated from the local. Ursula K. Heise, *Sense of Place and Sense of Planet*: *The Environmental Imagination of the Global* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

87 Patrizio, *The Ecological Eye*, 10; Juneja, "'A Very Civil Idea…'," 476. On the practice of scaling in humanities research, see also E. S. Carr and Michael Lempert, ed., *Scale*: *Discourse and Dimensions of Social Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016).

88 Gabrielle Hecht, "Interscalar Vehicles for an African Anthropocene: On Waste, Temporality, and Violence," *Cultural Anthropology* 33, no. 1 (2018): 109–141, https://doi.org/10.14506/ca33.1.05.

objects" characterized by their "deployment and uptake, … [and their] potential to make political claims, craft social relationships, or simply open our imaginations."[89] An analysis of these vehicles provides us with the "means of connecting stories and scales usually kept apart."[90] Hecht's inquiry into radioactive materials as interscalar vehicles echoes the underlying analysis of the agency of radiation at play in the two artworks, as well as their multi-sited human and non-human collaborations. Their inclusion of radioactivity in the form of contaminated foodstuff links the artworks tightly to matters of scale.

Does This Soup Taste Ambivalent? caused controversy across national borders and was hotly debated on Japanese social networking platforms. Ei Arakawa remarked that when the press furor in London was reimported to Japan, criticism was the first response that the brothers received.[91] The opinions of the Japanese were more polarized than those that Kyun-Chome's work provoked, ranging from "Is this art?" to outrage about the artists' choice to use the name Fukushima as a symbol for the disaster and supposedly damaging the prefecture's reputation abroad.[92] Some Japanese respondents understood the artwork as contributing to the local discourse of "damage through rumors" rather than countering it. Despite these reactions to the work, it did serve to connect different localities across the globe through a shared human concern about radioactive contamination. At the same time, it highlighted the incommensurability of artistic expectations and reactions in different locales. As the agency of radioactivity was subjected to diverse human interpretations, this agency played out in various and unexpected ways. Instead of the spatial reconciliation Arakawa had hoped for, the work elicited similarities in global responses just as much as disparities.

Kyun-Chome's work, too, served to connect different localities while highlighting the disparities between them. As part of the award exhibition, *Flow in Red* was displayed in the Taro Okamoto Museum of Art in Kawasaki just outside of Tokyo and thus largely drew its crowds from the Tokyo metropolitan area. As participating visitors had to confront the potentially radiated foodstuff that elicited

89 Hecht, "Interscalar Vehicles," 115.

90 Hecht, "Interscalar Vehicles," 115.

91 Ei Arakawa, interview by author, July 13, 2020.

92 "Fukushima-san yasai no pafōmansu ga butsugi eishi ga 'kaku sūpu' no midashi de hōdō suru 福島産野菜のパフォーマンスが物議　英紙が「核スープ」の見出しで報道する [Fukushima Vegetable Performance Controversial; British Newspaper Reports Under Headline 'Nuclear Soup']," *J-CAST Nyūsu J-CAST*ニュース, October 20, 2014, accessed August 7, 2020, https://www.j-cast.com/2014/10/20218825.html?p=all. For a collection of tweets on the work, see Okumura Yūki Okumura, (@oqoom), "United Brothers ni yoru Fukushima no yasai wo tsukatta sūpu no sakuhin @ Frieze Art Fair (London) ni tsuite United Brothersによる福島の野菜を使ったスープの作品@ Frieze Art Fair（ロンドン）について [About United Brothers Using Fukushima Vegetables in a Soup @Frieze Art Fair (London)]," accessed February 20, 2020, https://togetter.com/li/724500.

underlying anxieties about radioactive contamination, the work transported "Fukushima" to the greater Tokyo area. In this way, *Flow in Red* presented an antithesis to the desire to return to business as usual and the voluntary amnesia that gripped the Japanese public outside of the disaster-stricken area.[93] A history of discrimination against the less prosperous northern regions of Japan can be traced back to before the disaster. In an act of what some scholars consider to be internal (nuclear) colonialism, Tokyo's government and the occupying American forces established nuclear power plants in the small fishing communities of the Japanese hinterlands in the 1960s and 1970s.[94] Luring the rural occupants with promises of jobs and money, the nuclear industry ultimately locked these communities into the shackles of economic dependency.[95]

In addition to the non-human actors of radioactive foodstuffs, both United Brothers and Kyun-Chome collaborated with human residents of the disaster-stricken area by including family members or Fukushima farmers into the processes that sustained the works. However, neither of the two works directly represents the voices of the people affected.[96] The victims of the disaster were facing the same anxieties that were elicited in the participants of these artworks, while also being subjected to anti-Fukushima discrimination and grappling with the maintenance of a sense of normalcy in their everyday lives in Fukushima despite the contamination. Many victims were conflicted, as they had formerly considered the nuclear industry as a provider of jobs and livelihood. Nonetheless, after the disaster, they were still bound in a relationship of dependency as recipients of governmental compensation, and they felt resentment against the government and TEPCO.[97]

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93 The term weathering (*fūka* 風化) is frequently used in post-3.11 disaster discourse. It translates to the geological weathering of natural materials, but also to the fading of memories. See for instance "Fukushima-Ken Fūhyō Fūka Taisaku Kyōka Senryaku Ni Tsuite 福島県風評・風化対策強化戦略について [About the Strategy to Strengthen Countermeasures Against Rumors and the Fading of Memories Concerning Fukushima Prefecture]," accessed February 27, 2019, https://www.pref.fukushima.lg.jp/sec/01010d/senryaku-sakutei.html.

94 For a summary of the Japanese discourse on Tohoku as Japan's internal colony see Nathan Hopson, "Systems of Irresponsibility and Japan's Internal Colony," *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* 11, no. 52 (2013), accessed December 15, 2020, https://apjjf.org/2013/11/52/Nathan-Hopson/4053/article.html.

95 Daniel P. Aldrich, "Post-Crisis Japanese Nuclear Policy: From Top-Down Directives to Bottom-Up Activism," in *Japan at Nature's Edge*, 280–292.

96 Most of the human victims were evacuees who were still unable to return home even as late as 2014.

97 Philip Brasor and Masako Tsubuku, "Tepco's Compensation for 3/11 Victims Has Made Matters Worse for Many," *The Japan Times*, April 13, 2018, accessed February 28, 2020, https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/04/13/national/tepcos-compensation-3-11-victims-made-matters-worse-many/.

Interestingly, the artists chose to work with radioactive food items rather than an account of the victims. However, the work's power to reproduce feelings of anxiety and division through the non-human collaborations might be an even more productive means to foster an understanding of the post-disaster situation of the victims. In experiencing these feelings directly instead of just hearing about them via personal accounts, viewers may ultimately extend greater empathy to victims.

Fig. 9. *Kyun-Chome,* Toll the New Year's Bell, Inside the Prohibition*, 2014. Video still. Image courtesy of the artists.*

The moment the viewer of *Flow in Red* decides to disregard the warning tape and step on what was once sacred, she is transported right into the heart of the exclusion zone. The videos shown inside the cubicle have been filmed in a handheld camera aesthetic, documenting Kyun-Chome's excursions into the evacuated no-go area. Half-shrouded in darkness, with faces or objects occasionally illuminated by flashlights, Kyun-Chome speak in hushed voices. The videos convey the atmosphere of children playing a prank. Simultaneously, there is something uncanny, almost dystopian about them, as Kyun-Chome trespass into an area that is devoid of humans and is highly radioactive. As viewers watch the duo make their way to a temple to ring the New Year's bell, there is a sense of traveling into a post-apocalyptic future along with them. In *Toll the New Year's Bell, Inside the Prohibition,* the artists' near-encounter with the so-called "hogzillas" (*inobuta*イノブタ) heightens the dystopic atmosphere of impending doom. Whispering, they share rumors of a hybrid cross between wild hogs and house pigs abandoned after the disaster. Their offspring, the hogzillas,

are said to be bigger and wilder creatures. In juxtaposing the reality of radioactive food contamination with notions of animals reclaiming a toxic landscape abandoned by humans, rural legends, and the uncanniness of the post-disaster exclusion zone, *Flow in Red* highlights multiple post-disaster dynamics. The video work depicts a vision of anthropocentric power turned upside down, as nature and animals seem to reclaim the space of the exclusion zone. When the artists finally reach the temple's bell, they play the New Year's countdown on the radio. As a cheerful female voice wishes listeners a happy new year, the disparity between the exclusion zone and the rest of Japan once again becomes apparent.

Fig. 10. *United Brothers,* Episode 1: Les Androides*, 2013. Film still. Image courtesy of the artists.*

The notions of disaster contained within the term "Fukushima" take on different meanings depending on the locales in which they play out. Just as in Kyun-Chome's work, the films screened alongside *Does This Soup Taste Ambivalent?* serve to connect different localities. According to Ei Arakawa, it was his brother Tomoo who came up with the idea to produce these low budget style films.[98] With a troupe of international artists cast as B-movie actors, the science-fiction narratives of *Prologue: New York New York* (2012) and *Episode 1: Les Androids* (2013) draw a new energy network between multiple places around the globe.[99] In the roles of UB (United Brothers) agents, the artists work tirelessly to construct non-human agents, so-called UB androids, in cities such as Iwaki, Los Angeles, New York, Tokyo, Paris, and Berlin. The prologue shows two androids traveling from Iwaki to New York, thus connecting the two places. In Episode 1, in a battle of good vs. evil, these androids seek to defy

98 Ei Arakawa, interview by author, July 13, 2020.

99 Aldrich, "Post-Crisis Japanese Nuclear Policy," 280–292.

a shrouded villain who goes by the name of "Madame" and to facilitate the spread of a new power source made up of volcanic energy and solar power. At one point in *Les Androids*, UB Inc. Android Doctor Shimon (played by artist Shimon Minamikawa) arrives at the quaint-looking station of Nogent-Sur-Seine just outside of Paris. As the town's nuclear power plant dominates the background, he remarks upon how weird it is that such towns with power plants look the same everywhere. The encounter with radioactivity in the United Brothers' films occurs on a fictional level and is thus less intimate than Kyun-Chome's direct exploration into the center of contamination. However, its reach spans further. The film constructs a global network between nuclear sites. In doing so, it shows how Fukushima unfolds simultaneously in multiple places across the globe, that is, in every place where non-human agents of wind, rain, and water transport the disaster's radioactive particles, but also everywhere that human agents harness radioactivity for energy production. By personifying the network of nuclear sites and radioactivity in the form of the villain Madame, the film attests to this global nuclear network as an actor in its own right. The nuclear network rendered evil in the form of the villain is juxtaposed with the international cast of artists and their androids, who seek to establish an alternative utopian energy network based on their collaboration with renewable energy sources of solar and geothermal origin.

United Brothers and Kyun-Chome's artworks draw attention to the global scale of the disaster. However, aided by their non-human collaborators, both groups also act on a much more intimate level—the site of the human body. The body acts as a conceptual site of bio-political contestation through the ingestion or refusal of food as discussed above. Additionally, it constitutes the first point of scalar reference as one confronts the work.[100] Becoming aware of one's metabolic interconnectedness, one wonders: how will my body, this organism, be affected as I ingest or am exposed to radioactive materials? As E. Summerson Carr and Michael Lempert have pointed out, the body acts as our "most immediate comparable unit."[101] In her exploration of radioactive materials as interscalar vehicles, Gabrielle Hecht also reflects on the body. According to Hecht, it is here that radioactive contamination turns into slow accumulative violence as it moves along the temporal scale of continued exposure.[102] In the

100 The human body as a site of contestation where political and societal dynamics are played out also ties the works to the Japanese post-war avant-garde. Compare Taro Nettleton, "Hi Red Center's Shelter Plan (1964): The Uncanny Body in the Imperial Hotel," *Japanese Studies* 34, no. 1 (2014): 1–17, https://doi.org/10.1080/10371397.2014.886507; and Doryun Chong, "Tokyo 1955–1970: A New Avant-Garde," in *Tokyo, 1955–1970: A New Avant-Garde*, ed. Doryun Chong et al. (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2012), 26–93. However, such a historical contextualization is beyond the scope of this article.

101 Carr and Lempert, "Introduction: Pragmatics of Scale," 2.

102 Hecht, "Interscalar Vehicles," 119.

context of the nuclear disaster, the body acts as a battlefield of political power.

At the wall of their gallery booth, next to the newspaper cuttings, United Brothers displayed a leaflet that British anti-nuclear activists had distributed over the course of the art fair. The leaflet warned against radioactive elements that were not tested for in the vegetables: "Once radioactive particles get inside you, when you eat, drink or breathe them in, they will repeatedly blast the cells surrounding them, breaking the DNA strands in those cells, causing major permanent damage."[103]

Fig. 11. *United Brothers,* Episode 1: Les Androides*, 2013. Film still. Image courtesy of the artists.*

The leaflet thus drew attention to the metabolic ecologies of radioactivity, as well as to the enormity of scale traveled by both radioactivity and, coincidentally, also the artwork that includes it, from the infinitely small entities of nuclear atoms blasting the body on a cellular level to global networks.

The second film that Kyun-Chome showed inside their cubicle (*New Japan Paradise)* considers the infinitesimally small amounts of radioactivity emitted by decaying atoms. Radioactivity is tasteless, odorless, and invisible; a Geiger counter is the only immediate way to confirm its presence and measure its impact on the body. *New Japan Paradise* shows Kyun-Chome enter the exclusion zone to spray blue circles on black bags containing contaminated soil while a voice reads out the daily radiation readings over a loudspeaker. The camera and flashlight trace the bags as the artists show and read out the micro Sievert per hour that have been noted down on little labels attached to each bag. Once

103 Okumura Yūki Okumura, (@oqoom), "Konaida no tōku de kankyaku no katsudōka G ga kubatta rashī handoauto mo haridasareteta" こないだのトークで観客の活動家が配ったらしいハンドアウトも貼り出されてた [The leaflet that seems to have been given out at a talk the other day by an activist in the audience was also put up], October 15, 2014, accessed February 27, 2020, https://twitter.com/oqoom/status/522358753602326528.

Homma finishes painting the bags with circles, she holds up her phone to look at the bags through the negative function of the phone's camera. The inverted colors show a white backdrop with a red circle: the Japanese flag. Again, the contrast between the dystopian reality of the zone and the Japan outside of it becomes apparent when, in a final shot, Homma stands on top of the bags shouting "Happy New Year" (*akemashite omedetō* 明けましておめでとう).

Fig. 12. *Kyun-Chome,* New Japan Paradise*, 2013. Video still. Image courtesy of the artists.*

Back in the museum, Kyun-Chome's installation with its red cone and white ground of contaminated rice, too, formed the *hinomaru*, the Japanese flag, when viewed from above. This set-up evokes the so-called *hinomaru bentō*s that were promoted by the government and given to school children and workers during the Pacific War.[104] These lunch boxes contained white rice and barley, upon which a single red plum was placed in the middle. A lack of protein, fat, and vegetables made these lunch boxes nutritionally inadequate. The boxes testified, therefore, to the government's prioritization of nationalism over health and to governmental power over the body. In the act of symbolically metabolizing Japan, personal wellbeing and individual agency are disregarded, and the body is assigned to the nation. Just as the global nuclear network discussed above, the nation as a concept represents an actor in its own right, operating on a different scale.

As Gabrielle Hecht has demonstrated in her analysis of African uranium ore mining, the bodily absorption of radioactivity ultimately serves to cross

104 Ishige, "Food Culture," 309.

spatial and temporal scales. These metabolic ecologies join those who consume with the origin of the object of their consumption across demarcation lines and beyond cultures.[105] In both works, the body is a site of contestation of the infinitely small decaying atom, but also of different localities, crossing scales and joining the individual to the global nuclear network along which radioactive particles travel. As a transcultural actant, radioactivity and its non-human actors come together to collaborate, testifying to a more-than-human social. Transcultural in the context of this analysis must be understood foremost as trans-anthropocentric, as transcending the realm of human agency and the division between nature and culture. These non-human actors evoke the Fukushima disaster as an equally personal, national, and even global concern.

Towards a conclusion

The works of Kyun-Chome and United Brothers offer a critical reflection on the underlying social and political dynamics of the Fukushima disaster. As a progeny of the global circumstances of progressive environmental collapse, the nuclear disaster is an urgent reminder of the inseparability of humans, culture, technology, and nature. Recognition of this inseparability calls for an adjustment of existing research frameworks in the humanities and beyond. Newly configured frameworks should formulate more inclusive and environmentally sustainable methodologies that can replace scholarly approaches based on human superiority and singularity. This article aimed to formulate such a framework. Aided by elements of Latour's ANT and Bennett's vital materialism, it traced the dispersal of agency across humans and non-humans, transgressing the nature-culture divide. The article postulated an ecological approach that broadens the meaning of the transcultural and, by paying non-hierarchical attention to human and non-human actors and collaborators, attempted to dislodge human agency as the central reference point.

Using this framework, this article explored the metabolic ecologies of two artworks: *Flow in Red* and *Does This Soup Taste Ambivalent?* The utilization of the ecological approach revealed the works' political traction—independently of how the artists intended the works to function—in the mirroring of socio-political conditions constituted by the distribution of power, situation of the victims, and contamination anxieties. These effects were observed in the diverse reactions in the multiple locations in which these artworks were displayed. To study such dynamics more productively, this article formulated a framework that advanced beyond the scope of socially engaged art. In citing Latour's redefinition of the social as arising out of temporary associations in the coming together of diverse actors or actants, this article also made a case for a broadened definition of collaboration. Were we to define it to mean that the

105 Hecht, "Interscalar Vehicles," 129.

non-human actor has to *want* to collaborate, human–non-human collaboration would be impossible, because we can never truly know what non-humans *want*, nor can we be sure that they have a consciousness as humans define it. Therefore, it is limiting to conceive of collaboration in the narrow, traditional sense. As previously stated, the analysis proposed a thought experiment, with due awareness of its own limitations. Within the framework of this proposal, it is feasible to recognize that collaboration occurs with non-human agents, as it is impossible for the artists to gain full control over the properties of radioactivity, for instance, by making the foodstuffs stop being radioactive or fully controlling the effects they elicit.

Subsequently, rather than assuming that the artists made *use* of the radioactive foodstuff, this article holds that they collaborated with the properties of radioactivity that cannot be fully harnessed or dominated. While the inter-human collaborations of the artists ushered an increased awareness of diverse agencies and multiple voices into their practice, the broadened definition of the social highlighted the capacity of the artworks to drive political and social concerns forward. This capacity emerged out of the collaboration with non-human agency that operated independently of the artists' control, and recreated post-disaster anxiety and power dynamics on multiple scales. The transculturality and interscalarity of radioactivity enabled the artworks to traverse different scales, from the microscopic to the global, and from the individual to the national body. Finally, it becomes apparent from the viewer-participant responses to the works that there are differences in the ways that non-human agency plays out in different localities and associated networks.

Such disparities continue to be influenced by human interpretation. As such, the author acknowledges this as a further limitation of her own undertaking. While this article has aimed at dislodging human agency as the sole focus of inquiry, it must be considered that the artworks as objects of study, the methodological tools, the language used, and the analytic conclusions drawn are all inevitably human-made. Similarly, scaling across local, national, and global spaces necessarily plays out in accordance with human reference points.[106] Nevertheless, tracing perspectives and responses across different locations, decentering human authorship, allowing non-humans and objects of inquiry to dictate their scalar vantage points, and recognizing wider distributions of agency are part of formulating alternative research practices.

106 Anna Tsing also draws attention to the limitations of scalability—of the ability to expand something across scales without changing its framework conditions. While radioactivity retains its properties across scales, other actants might not. This possibility for non-scalability is inherent to ecology. Subsequently, listening to the objects of inquiry also includes acknowledging a possible inability to traverse scales. Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World*: *On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 37–43.

Such an undertaking is becoming increasingly non-negotiable due to the current global environmental situation. This article is therefore an invitation for future studies to expand existing research frameworks based on artistic or cultural autonomy, so that they acknowledge and include non-human agencies on an equitable level. An art-historical imaginary thus sharpened opens up new and alternative perspectives retrospectively and prospectively. In times of environmental collapse, such an imaginary can pave the way for new ways of writing art history, which could end up decisively impacting the creation of transcultural societal and political spaces that can be shared *pari passu* by humans and non-humans alike.