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Two Landscape Sculptures by Taho Ritsuko in the Minami-Ashiyahama Danchi

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Deux « sculptures-paysage » de Taho Ritsuko à Minami-Ashiyahama danchi*

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Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/paysage/13647>

DOI: 10.4000/paysage.13647

ISSN: 1969-6124

Publisher:

École nationale supérieure du paysage de Versailles-Marseille, Institut national des sciences appliquées Centre Val de Loire - École de la nature et du paysage, École nationale supérieure d'architecture et de paysage de Bordeaux, École nationale supérieure d'architecture et de paysage de Lille, Agrocampus Angers

Electronic reference

Catherine Grout, "The Notions of *Fūkei*, *Ba*, and *Fukkō* in a Community Art Project", *Projets de paysage* [Online], 23 | 2020, Online since 30 December 2020, connection on 22 September 2021. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/paysage/13647> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/paysage.13647>

This text was automatically generated on 22 September 2021.

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Les notions de fūkei, de ba et de fukkō au cœur d'un projet collectif artistique – Deux « sculptures-paysage » de Taho Ritsuko à Minami-Ashiyahama danchi

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- 1 In this essay, I will present an art project carried out by artist Taho Ritsuko¹ (たほ りつこ) with a group of survivors of the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, which struck Osaka-Kōbe in 1995.² The artist was invited to participate in a social art program for the new public housing complex (*danchi*) being built as part of the reconstruction (*fukkō*), which led to the production of eleven works. Taho's aim was to involve the survivors in the process so as to encourage their interaction and create an active co-presence consistent with the notion of *ba*, which can be translated as scene, place, or field. As process, the work—composed of two landscape sculptures—was therefore integral to forming a community in the wake of a natural disaster that destroyed living environments and families. Initiated in part by the survivors, the project is inseparable from their desires, actions, and relationships with the artist, as well as from the specific understanding of landscape as agricultural landscape. To analyze this project, I will use several interrelated approaches: the concrete and symbolic relation to plants, cultivated land, soil, and landscape (*fūkei*) as the instigator of the project and the relationship to the world; the work as process and concrete form; and the interpersonal and sociospatial relationships over the years. Basing my analysis on a visit to the site in 1999, shortly after the project was carried out, I will focus on its production context in the late 1990s and on the artist's intentions. The notion of landscape (*fūkei*) combines a relationship to a potential collective or cultural history, a concrete reality bound by laws (what is or is not possible to do), and a set of gestures and actions associated with

the earth, the community spatializing a bodily relationship with the world, and living things as related to the notion of *ba*.

Intervention Context and Site (Two Meanings of *Fukkō*)

- 2 The site of the project corresponds to a public housing relocation program in Minami-Ashiyahama. This public program (Minami-Ashiyahama Disaster Recovery Public Housing), financed by the Hyōgo Prefecture and Ashiya City, associates *fukkō* (復興) (a reconstruction after a disaster) (Sendai, 2014, 132–135) and *danchi* (団地) (a large complex of identical buildings build as part of the same program). When I visited Taho's project in 1999, I found an entirely new neighbourhood of roads, five- to ten-story buildings constructed in an orthogonal layout, and ground plantings of shrubs, grasses, and perennials, the whole set alongside a vast, empty, flat field extending to the bay. The overriding impression at the time was one of precise technical expertise, where everything seemed calculated and based on rules. The site's artificiality bore no history other than that of this expertise and the preferences of the day for certain materials and architectural styles. Having just moved in, the residents' history was not yet visible, and some units were still vacant. Lacking a relationship to the older city and landscape (as an environment that shapes the subject over time), one couldn't help but wonder if this relocation was likely to become a second phase of losing all points of reference. In an essay on the notion of *fukkō* (復興), Sendai Shoichiro laments the fact that during reconstruction "the issue of historicity and the landscape prior to the disaster are [often] silenced. The question of a future legacy is left open" (*ibid.*, 134). The author stresses the importance of history, of what should be preserved, for example the Atomic Bomb Dome in Hiroshima. Although he addresses the issue based on the event that has taken place and needs to be remembered, he also introduces a connection to landscape, namely a daily relational factor between living beings and the world around them. He mentions the importance of allowing the lost landscape to gradually emerge (just as a particular environment is inhabited and transformed by those who live there). Also an architectural historian, he examines the radical transformation brought about by *fukkō* since the Second World War, despite the fact that its lexicographical meaning "refers to something in decline that is beginning to thrive again" (*ibid.*, 132)—this is the meaning used by Taho and which I take up here, as it evokes the renewal felt by the people who participated in the project, a renewal corresponding to recovering and rediscovering a certain vigour and drive—and not to reconstruction per se (which would be the term *saiken* 再建). According to Sendai, reconstruction is a modern notion in urbanism and, therefore, doesn't indicate the material reference leading to a more or less identical reconstruction, but a new development planned in the wake of large-scale destruction caused by natural disasters like the 1995 earthquake. Major programs appear as new developments, located on a site without history.³

Figure 1. Tourist map of Minami-Ashiyahama published by Ashiya City in 2011

The other side of the document is titled "Ashiya's new hometown with the mood of resort." The *danchi* is located south of Yoko Park (A3) and has an area of 4.2 ha (2.19 ha belonging to the prefecture and 2.01 ha to Ashiya City). Consulted on the city's website (August 6, 2020).

Source: https://www.city.ashiya.lg.jp/kokusai/living_information/documents/07_e.pdf.

- 3 With the fires caused by the earthquake in Kōbe and Ashiya, the everyday landscape associated with deeds and actions disappeared in a sudden and tragic manner. The Minami-Ashiyahama district did not exist beforehand. It is a project of land reclamation (*umetate-chi*, 埋め立て地, literally "land created by filling"⁴) of 125 hectares built into the bay south of Ashiya and intended for different public and private programs (a hospital, public housing, a baseball field, several public parks, schools, an aquatic centre, a subdivision). Connected to the mainland by two bridges and a footbridge, it is, like other nearby land reclamation areas, traversed by an elevated expressway. In contrast to the former urban structure with its houses and network of alleys, the *fukkō* can appear as a clean slate, located on the periphery, poorly connected to the city centre (particularly for pedestrians), and lacking any reference to a memory of place.

Figure 2. From the balcony of an apartment, a partial view of the *danchi* and the work, with some reclamation land not yet developed

Source: Catherine Grout, 1999.

- 4 For the “Community & Art” project funded by Ashiya City and the prefecture, eleven permanent artworks were created for public spaces in the *danchi*: six lobbies, elevated walkways, and outdoor spaces. Selected by a planning committee,⁵ nine artists and architects (including one collective) participated, and two of the projects were made by residents, children, and volunteers. Hashimoto Toshiko, art producer and director of the private enterprise Life & Culture Environment Research Corporation in Osaka, proposed Taho Ritsuko⁶ to the committee. With Taho, Hashimoto was interested in re-envisioning the traditional vocabulary by focusing on a practice that is less concerned with form and more interested in setting up a process that is directly connected to the people and the site.⁷ Such a practice was not common at the time. Taho explains that, in 1997, the “Community & Art” project “was introduced to encourage survivors not to be isolated and to vitalize the forming of a new community. It was the first big experiment” since it was at the scale of the *danchi*. She stresses:

It was at the very last stage of the public housing project that they decided to introduce the artworks for residents to have a better living environment, as they began to realize that the psychological depression of survivors was serious after the earthquake.⁸

Several actions were taken in parallel since, as Hara Hisako, the project’s artistic director, points out, “community is not born spontaneously,”⁹ and different types of workshops, including art workshops, were held. Between May 1997 and April 1998, citizens were able to exchange ideas on how to use the communal spaces in “creative workshops,” an “art plan” was dedicated to the production of the artworks, and in relation to Taho’s project, workshops on agriculture and plants were held.

A Narrative Principle to Invoke *Fukkō*

- 5 The project had three key stages: developing the project with survivors who had been living in temporary shelters for two years; obtaining the authorization to cultivate the land; producing the project in the rehousing context. The fourth stage of farming was carried out by the residents without the artist's presence. Not knowing the people beforehand or what would happen exactly, she envisioned a dynamic that would combine time and space through shared gestures and actions. This amalgamated four elements: the first corresponded to a cultural background suggesting a possible narrative; the second would come from the people she would meet in the shelter, the group that would be part of the project; the third would stem from the work of a professor at the Tokyo University of Agriculture who focused on agriculture in both urban and rural contemporary society in Japan; and the fourth represented the notion of *ba*, defining a specific approach to the project and to landscape based on people and their bodily presence.

- 6 As Taho describes, the work's title, *Joy-Farm Shop with Many Orders*, reflects the first element.

The title was inspired by Kenji Miyazawa's masterpiece *Restaurant with Many Orders*, published on December 20, 1923, a collection of nine fairy tales, one of which is also titled "Restaurant with Many Orders." ... I had a fantasy to play with natural elements and phenomena. All the fairy tales are set in a forest and have many characters. ... In the story of my art project, it was expected [that the project would] have many orders from the survivors like in Miyazawa's fairy tale.

- 7 To get involved in a collective movement, she transposed the situation (working with a group of people in a creative process) to a known narrative structure that puts emphasis on the directions to be received from people. At the same time, this narrative structure comes with a framework, namely that of play that has the potential to transform the spaces into scenes (*ba*). The transposition and appeal to this famous author could therefore initiate a series of actions related to placing orders. Although her imagination was strongly informed by Miyazawa's fairy tale, Taho did not focus on the forest but decided to depart from the narrative context and allow images to come to the people involved:

As I was invited to create an artwork for the Minami-Ashiyahama "Community & Art" project for the survivors of the January 17 earthquake, I wondered if I could share the memory of the lost landscape of Japan, reconstruct the experience of the past, and encourage them to live the rest of their lives. The artwork could play the role of reading aloud a fairy tale, going from one scene to the next with a sense of wonder, like in Kenji Miyazawa's masterpieces, which transform sorrow into smiles, bitterness into laughter, anger into joy, while gently holding their shoulders.

- 8 Therefore, a relationship to a lost landscape (失われた風景)¹⁰ is present from the start. It involves gently helping people overcome the rupture and difficulty of envisioning the future when their points of reference have disappeared. To "reconstruct the experience of the past" means to search in the past in order to initiate actions that look to the future. I will return later to the importance of the connection to landscape, to the experience of an inhabited, well-kept, and cultivated landscape (*fūkei*), and therefore to the soil and roots. For now, I note that it was also important to the artist to share this memory, understand it, and find common elements related to landscape, thus making a horizontal relationship between her and the people possible.

- 9 To her deep regret, although she received some directions or orders from the people in the group, they were limited in number, and she felt as though her main narrative was being diverted by the project's overall context:

However, many orders were not from the survivors but from the “Community & Art” team and the “Public Housing Construction Project” team of architects, landscape architects, and engineers commissioned by the Urban Renaissance Agency (UR), a semi-governmental organization, for the Minami-Ashiyahama public housing project. ... My expectation to receive orders from survivors wasn't satisfied, yet there were many requests, one after the next, as if my ideas and skills had been absorbed into the big stomach of a great number of people who worked on public housing for the 1995 earthquake survivors. The main purpose of the art project was to heal and revitalize the survivors, who were mostly seniors, couples, and single-parent families who must continue living with memories of LOSS:¹¹ of families, houses, personal property, the landscape that furnished the memories of their lives. Thus, the “Community & Art” project wanted me to provide the key ideas for designing a physical setting as a [ba] where various events could take place, as well as solutions to various issues related to public housing.

- 10 Gradually, the imagined space was merged with the objective of a material production that would serve several functions. The sponsors wanted results for daily life that could be identified in some way in the community's habits (creating spaces that could accommodate outdoor gatherings appropriate for different seasons and days in the calendar). Considering that, in Japan, interactions with one's neighbours are essential to social life and are based on interrelationships, it was necessary to rectify their absence for the people that would live in the *danchi*. Even though this intention was similar to Taho's and included the idea of the scene (*ba*), the artist felt a certain tension. Instead of engaging in a bottom-up process with the assembled group, she faced pressure from the two organizing bodies (responsible for the art and the rehousing) to steer the project in certain directions. Given the particular planning practices and strong expectations at work, the iterative process generated by the functions set by and carried out with the people living in this temporary and vulnerable situation could not develop as wished. The storyline of the main narrative was diverted, perhaps leaving less room for the imagination and more for addressing the functions defined, such as accessibility to artworks and the ability to work the soil while in a wheelchair. Henceforth and as we will see below, a large part of the artist's work with the group consisted in maintaining a connection to the landscape.

Relationship to the Rural and Agricultural Landscape (*Fūkei*)

- 11 As the artist describes, her first action was to go out into the field and visit the shelter:

I visited the temporary shelter, met survivors, saw what their life was like there, and asked what brought them joy at the shelter. Many of them enjoyed looking at flowers and planting vegetables around the shelter.

The first two orders came from this initial step and first visit:

Order 1: One of the survivors who planted vegetables around the shelter wanted to continue this at the new public housing, as he felt healed by it. Order 2: The survivors received gifts of flower pots from many people in Japan at the time. One of the survivors who felt healed by looking at flowers wanted to plant flowers in memory of her family lost in the earthquake.

Their directions constituted the second starting point of this co-created art project. For the artist, the initial narrative held the possibility of developing an art project, from one stage to the next, for and with these people within a limited time period and in a “natural manner.” Her own interest in nature as a vital process led to a temporal consideration: work with the past to reintroduce a movement toward the future. She then developed her project with a group of participants, especially the fifteen or twenty people who came to every meeting and always participated in the discussions. By having them share stories and memories, her intention was to seek the survivors’ “image of landscape in Japan.” It turned out that “going back to their childhoods, they were familiar with rice fields and terraced rice fields in the mountains.” The narrative aspect and appeal to their childhood memories helped them to remember places they had experienced and establish points in common that were independent of the conditions of their meeting in the shelter.

- 12 Another source for the artist was the work of professor Isoya Shinji, from the Tokyo University of Agriculture, on the interpretation and understanding of agriculture at the time in Japan. Taho was interested in the different levels of engagement described by the professor and his team: one related to contemplation, one to the garden, and one to working the land. With the group of future residents, she steered the process toward agriculture rather than flower gardening, even though horticulture was among the subjects discussed and flowers were subsequently planted. Connected to the orders placed by the future residents, this practice gave substance to her initial idea mentioned above. Thus three elements (the narrative structure of the fairy tale, the connection to plants as a vital and affective resource, and the social and cultural context associated with farming) came together to feed both the imagination (as a projective force) focused on a particular landscape (*fūkei*) and the project.

To me, the important point of this project is to touch on the issue of memories of lost landscape in Japan, and to expand the poetic imagination of memories that can be shared among people with joy and smiles.

Taho, therefore, did not see the possible nostalgia associated with the “lost landscape” as an obstacle but as a poetic strength to encourage the future, particularly in its ability to be shared and conjured with pleasure (the work’s title, after all, combines “joy” and farm”). She brought together a group of people, offered them a horizon with concrete actions to plan and carry out, and potentially changed their physical and psychological state. The poetic imagination desired by the artist could draw on the fairy tale and the narrative strength of a reference that is both real (the many common elements of the specific landscapes evoked by the people) and symbolic (the lost landscapes of the past and of a time that was mostly gone due to modernization, the aging rural population, and the depopulation of the regions). The relationship to the rice fields is not surprising but rather commonplace, possibly representing an affirmation of Japanese identity. As Augustin Berque points out, the rice field “describes the Nipponese space.” According to the Japanologist, the rice field “in Japan has long been the symbol of inhabited land (*ecumene*), the prism of a sense of nature, the standard of the land and the riches it holds, and the foundation of socioeconomic structures” (Berque, 2014a, 474). Today, the rice field still refers to a manner of relating to the world that is grounded in the soil while also being strongly connected to a practice, water management (requiring regular upkeep), hard work, and almost daily food. Although, in her project, Taho linked the two aspects—that of a shared symbolic reference and that of action and labour—she did not wish to examine the identity-based and

nationalistic character of the reference. Common to all people, the rice field had certainly exceeded the relationship to the individual homeland (*furusato*¹²), which potentially also had a strong identity-based connotation, since it was encouraged and circulated by imperialist ideology during the Meiji era (Satow, 2006), a reference that Taho likewise did not put forward.

Figure 3. *Joy-Farm Shop with Many Orders* under construction

We can see that the other spaces accommodate plantings, play areas for children, and benches.

Source: © Taho Ritsuko, 1998.

- ¹³ The process resulted in a two-part work located between two high-rise buildings,¹³ in a communal space of 1,500 m². Taho calls them landscape sculptures (ランドスケープ彫刻), a term she uses to describe her artworks made for public spaces.¹⁴ Here, she references the typical terraced structure *dandan batake* (だんだん畑). The key element is the link to an identifiable agricultural landscape. As such, the levels of the two landscape sculptures are edged by stones, as much for building purposes as to evoke terraces in such a way that they are immediately recognized. The imaginary space suggested is therefore different than that of a vegetable plot, alluding to a “relocational” (or at least not localized) force, since the site is urban, and appearing in stark contrast to the reference (they are clearly not actual terraced landscapes, but rather landscape sculptures evoking them) and to the spatial context (at the base of buildings on flat, human-made reclamation ground).

Figure 4. *Joy-Farm Shop with Many Orders*, just after planting

Source: © Taho Ritsuko, 1998.

Uprooting and the Relationship to the Earth (*Fukkō*)

- 14 The project's context is connected first and foremost to the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake. To evoke it, I draw on the writing of psychiatrist An Katsumasa, who was living and working in Kōbe at the time and who describes the trauma of the earthquake victims. He uses the term “uprooting” to refer to:

losing everything that forms the basis of life. In a sense, this term can be applied to the people who lost everything in the earthquake. An earthquake implies the experience of terror when the earth shakes and the ground subsiding under one's feet. But for those who have lost their homes and families, the earth is still shaking today [in March 1995]. The earthquake has, in every sense of the word, uprooted people¹⁵ (An, 1999, 104).
- 15 Having lost their sense of being grounded in a place, their concrete and affective environment (to which they were spatially and temporally connected), they had been uprooted and could not rely on the earth, as this could no longer function as a base or support. Regarding the earthquake, the survivors evoked their threefold terror. The first related to the magnitude of the tremors,¹⁶ which they felt physically as most inhabitants were still in bed, a magnitude that led to the collapse and destruction of their environment (houses, elevated highways, train tracks, roads). In Ashiya, 92.5% of dwellings were destroyed. Then came the terror caused by the extent of the fires, and lastly, that of the rapidly escalating number of dead.¹⁷
- 16 Taho's project makes sense in relation to the term “uprooting” because it summons an archetypal agricultural landscape associated with childhood¹⁸ and because the

imagination can be activated based on the earth and the cycle of nature. Yet although these gestures and rituals introduce a relationship to the land and a possible intergenerational transmission, this land was elsewhere. The reference is rural while the region of Kōbe, home to the biggest harbour in Japan as well as many industries (relocated from Tokyo after the Great Kantō Earthquake of 1923), is a long strip of narrow land located near the megalopolis of Osaka, between Mount Rokkō and Osaka Bay, and in the region's shelters more than 250,000 people suffered from "the psychological wounds resulting from the functional collapse of a large city" (An, 1999, 111).¹⁹ With respect to the urban development of the *danchi* and to what Sendai refers to as "the stratification of memory," Taho did not offer a direct relationship to the landscape of the living environment of Ashiya's residents. She did not wish to restore what had been destroyed, but rather to summon the imagination and an older (preindustrial) memory. For her, *fukkō* related more to people and their ways of being rather than to landscaping. She thus implicitly critiques any landscaping created without references, in a standard, technical, and, as she writes, "dehumanized" manner.

- 17 Therefore, growing plants (especially when they are planted in the ground and not in a pot) does not (only) involve the fact of finding visual pleasure in flowers and vegetation or of needing to work or feed oneself. The activity cannot be separated from a sedentary presence consistent with settling somewhere (being able to settle there), establishing a deep relationship, and through one's personal and collective actions, being part of the cycle of nature as an energy that also constitutes being (in relation to the body's physical state). The implicit, underlying idea is that the terror caused by the earthquake and the exacerbated relationship to ground movement²⁰ could be overcome (if they hadn't been already) by relating to living things through the contact with the earth and an affective imagination. This project thus involved activities that went beyond the process of remembering and of visual appreciation.
- 18 For their part, the residents expressed their desires concretely, saying for example: "I wanted to grow a lot of tomatoes and cucumbers" or "it's hard to grow vegetables so I wanted to grow flowers" or "I wanted to grow some herbs and have everyone taste my tea"²¹ (Ishida, 1998).

Figure 5. The daily care of the landscape sculpture

Source: Catherine Grout, 1999.

Figure 6. The sweet potato harvest

Source: © Taho Ritsuko, 1998.

19 Taho describes the orders once the planting had started:

One of the survivors told me that the soil was not good enough for vegetables except for sweet potatoes, so the first planting at my landscape sculpture was sweet potatoes.

Caring for the site thus introduced tension between the reality of the soil and land—which was not agricultural land but a new urban development with poor soil filled in—

and the reference to the individual and collective memory previously mentioned. Going forward, the “survivors wanted to improve the soil in the years to come.” This improvement was the last order she received. She mentions that “even though the soil and urban design were not suitable for cultivating and planting, the survivors felt encouraged and healed by improving the soil, cultivating, and planting. In a way, it was a reconstruction process (*fukkō*) of the mind and heart.” So another aspect of memory was being played out. By concretely setting things in motion, even in this impoverished site, the artistic and interpersonal process introduced a relationship to the earth through cultural gestures adapted to the circumstances and people over a long time.

Autonomy Achieved

- 20 To carry out this project concretely, the artist had to make it possible for the residents to be able to farm on public land not intended for this use, that is a space which didn’t belong to them. Compared to the practice of pot planting (*hachiue* 鉢植え),²² which corresponds to an informal interspace altering the boundaries between private and public, Taho’s project, located in a public *danchi*, couldn’t just be marginally tolerated, even if out of goodwill, but actually recognized and laid claim to as the development and activity of the group responsible for its landscaping and content. The artist explains:

It became the first case of farmland being managed by the community in a public housing project in Japan. ... *Joy-Farm Shop with Many Orders* is an artwork that was considered a winning battlefield of a local community’s cultural war against the globally standardized modern city and the nation’s centralized administration system in the post-earthquake era when the dehumanized nature of the modern city was being seriously questioned. Eventually, it introduced both material and immaterial urban infrastructure, integrating farmland and legitimizing the community’s responsibility and self-administration of their own living environment.²³

- 21 The work in this particular urban context entails a potential political engagement as it claims an autonomous community action, since it’s usually companies that manage green public spaces. Perhaps the emancipation of this group of people and/or action can reveal the broader possibility of farming in the city and thus somehow contribute to the development of what has more recently (and very broadly) been referred to as “urban agriculture” or to a new understanding of the presence of plants and their care (for example, with or without pesticides), since these communal spaces are often undervalued by residents (Ishida, 1998). This victory was highly publicized in the regional and national media and constituted an important societal recognition of the earthquake survivors. Laying claim to the land also implies a more or less overt criticism of the anonymous urban development that was difficult to access, as well as of the social and qualitative difference relative to the prior living conditions. The housing that was destroyed consisted of individual wood houses grouped in *shitamachi* (residential areas), where relations with one’s neighbours were very important. Some residents emphasized their motivation:

These fields are for everyone, so let’s make create together (Ishida, 1998).

Let’s plant vegetables and sweet potatoes and eat them together (*ibid.*).

The connection between the collective and the fact of doing something together was important to forming a community of people living on the same site. As such, about a

hundred people took part in the first “Agricultural Day” on October 23, 1999, the day the artwork was inaugurated, many more than just the people who planted.

Figure 7. The group work involved in planting

Source: © Taho Ritsuko, 1998.

Figure 8. Different generations working together

Source: © Taho Ritsuko 1998.

The Notion of *Ba*

- 22 In the 1990s, this type of intervention, which involved the contribution of artistic skills but was also done for and with people, was much less developed than today, especially after the triple disaster of Fukushima in 2011 (Miura, 2014; Borggreen, 2018). For her part, before being invited to participate in this program and while in the United States, Taho had “incorporated the process of working with architects, landscape designers, and various contractors” but not with residents. For her, given the act of working the land, the planting, the time connected to the seasons and their rituals, the sculptures corresponded to a “*ba* (場), where various interactions and communication happened.” *Ba* has several meanings. Insisting on its contrast to modern Western individualism, Augustin Berque writes about this notion:

[*Ba*] can have three main meanings: a place; a place where something happens; what happens someplace. The context decides which one takes precedence but the two other meanings are always implicit. This means that *ba* is concrete: it happens in a growing together (*cum crescere* > *concretus*) between places, people, things, and facts. ... It expresses the spatiality of the Japanese subject extremely well (Berque, 2014b, 41).

- 23 We can see the association of the time/place/people that are active or present. Therefore, *ba* is both tangible and intangible. *Ba* is present in any activities with a group of people. These different meanings nourished the *ba* for the artist. We’ve seen the meaning of the scene that played out (and the scenes that could have come one after the next) and of the play that held the artist’s imagination. Furthermore, she

indicates “It was important for me to create an artwork that not only responded to the physical context but also to people’s interactions and activities.” The connection to *ba* makes explicit the fact that the art project differs from a participatory process in which participants take part simply to execute it, and the fact that the result is not an object. Her project was less about leading people through an art process that has social value and more about involving the survivors in her approach, which could then continue without her. She states that the work “physically exists for long period of time and, in this sense, it can be called a permanent artwork, yet simultaneously it could function as *ba*—various activities could happen or not happen in it—[and thus be] a work in progress.” The *ba* began in the interactions, was realized in the landscaping of the sculptures, and continued through the labour of planting, sowing, watering, harvesting, then through the meals, gatherings, or shared celebrations. Mentioned by Berque, the notion of “growing together” is clearly at work here in the union of vital plant growth and renewal (*fukkō*).

- 24 For the artist, at the time of co-creation, crossovers between different disciplines were necessary given the situation after the earthquake, and we’ve already discussed her interest in professor Isoya’s work. In regards to *ba*, she refers to the writing of scholar Shimizu Hiroshi, whom she met and who drew on the work of philosopher Nishida Kitarō to develop this notion in the field of knowledge. *Ba*, as it signifies in Taho’s art project, is the fourth element indicated at the beginning of this essay. I also wish to mention the interpretation developed by landscape engineer Nakamura Yoshio based on a meaning derived from physics and used in psychology, a meaning which he also associates with landscape (*fūkei*). Here *ba* is understood as a force or energy field (Grout, 2017; Marlin, forthcoming). It is a way of relating to the world in which people are immersed, of which they are part, and from which, as subjects, they don’t consider themselves to be separate (and thus separate from other people) or to have precedence, but to exist in a joint movement of becoming. Given the communal activities related to farming, agriculture, and horticulture, I propose envisioning *ba*—as field of relations and field of action—in connection with a certain bodily presence in the world and tonicity (which includes effort and fatigue). *Fūkei*, *ba*, and *fukkō* are part of the same constellation of meanings here.

Figure 9. A time and place for gathering: a choir in the middle of one of the landscape sculptures

Source: © Taho Ritsuko, 1998.

Many Phases and Moments of *Ba*

- 25 At first living in prefabricated buildings, the survivors were forced to endure overcrowded conditions that were at times very challenging. An Katsumasa indicates that “in the shelters ... everyone [worked] hard to find balance in their lives” (An, 1999, 106). The psychiatrist emphasizes that people lived “an uncomfortable life [there], trying, despite everything, not to make too much mess” (*ibid.*, 113). Following this difficult phase came that of being rehoused in anonymous places. As we have seen, the “Community & Art” project was set up so that the future residents could meet a year prior and take part, in some way, in the landscaping of their communal areas, since the rehousing would likewise entail a change of landmarks. For Taho, planting was not the goal but rather a step to get past, perhaps since most of the people involved were over 60 years old, to then make room for other activities that the people themselves would choose. The artist states that “for the survivors it was important not to be isolated and feel disregarded or discarded. It was crucial to draw [the ‘Community & Art’ sponsors’] attention to the survivors and provide a support program until they could be rehoused and [to have] interaction between the survivors and the outside.” The *ba* associated with the project is not limited to a concrete, physical space or defined by a community that would have exclusive use of the site (even though it mostly involved residents). The community that formed initially involved the people participating, whether regularly or not, in the workshops and meetings, then any other person that joined in, in an ever-expanding manner. In other words, the relationship between *ba* and community is malleable, evolving, contextual. The act of working together to make the landscape sculptures could therefore expand to other people, then become less obvious over time, and even no longer be a support but an obligation or burden on the individual subject, since, as Berque shows, *ba* also has a restricting

side,²⁴ particularly since the location at the base of ten-storey buildings created a perspective, in addition to a potential view from high above, that is very different from a horizontal spatial relationship.

- 26 In regards to landscape, several imaginary spaces influenced the project. With Miyazawa's fairy tale, we first saw the forest, which, as Brosseau indicates, is "connected to the agricultural community and is a fundamental reference to a sense of nature and the imaginary Japanese landscape" (Brosseau, 2014b, 352), and then the rice field. These two references raise questions about their symbolism and about what is lost and what is created: two landscape sculptures that are not rice fields. American critic William J. T. Mitchell has put forward a model for analyzing the representation of landscape by considering it as a cultural practice with political impact. He is particularly interested in what landscape *does* (Mitchell, 1994). In regards to Taho's project, this means understanding what the reference to an archetypal landscape could do relative to place, its occupation and spatial appropriation, which comes with possible expropriation. First of all, the sculpture does not represent a landscape: no one sees rice paddies²⁵ or fields in it, and the two terraced structures are more an allusion than a topographic reality—perhaps an allusion to the sculptural, spatial, and temporal possibility of a group of people appropriating a space that is open and common to all people. Although the landscape sculptures enabled another way of relating to the anonymous place of the *danchi*—since they focused on agricultural practice—and made possible an administrative and political recognition of the project led by the group, which had value for all the survivors, the community that was created and grew did not wish to maintain the same agricultural or gardening activity for more than ten years. To ensure a community, what was important was not the material appropriation of a space, but rather the possibility of *ba*, in other words, the possibility of people experiencing this place in relation to a *ba* (whether a scene, a place of work, or a space for doing something together) without needing to conceptualize it. Therefore, what developed for a time could potentially transform, or not, into other relationships and activities that no longer needed to refer back to the landscape of terrace cultivation. This was a temporary element, related to one phase of it. Nevertheless, it was an essential phase. On the one hand, it activated the people's imagination and provided a basis for their relationship to the earth, and therefore a renewal of their collective and individual mode of being. On the other hand, it led them to a process of claiming their right to make decisions about their living environment and produce the work as *ba*.

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NOTES

1. As is customary in Japan, the last name appears before the first name.

2. At a magnitude of 7.2, the earthquake occurred on January 17, 1995 at 5:46 a.m. and led to 6,437 people dead, 120,000 buildings damaged or destroyed, 7,000 people burned, and 250,000 people displaced.
3. Regarding the key spatial and anthropological difference between site and place, see the essay by architect Naitō Hiroshi (2007).
4. For geographer Philippe Pelletier, the *umetate-chi* “costs less than land expropriation in the interior; it can be newly equipped, easily connected, open to international maritime traffic, accommodate all kinds of innovations (the fantasy of the *tabula rasa*), and consequently expand. Geohistorically, [it is] part of ‘coastal capitalism’” (Pelletier, 2014, 519–520).
5. The project’s planning committee included university professors, curators from the Ashiya City Museum of Art & History (very active in contemporary art), consultants, and experts in different fields related to urbanism.
6. Born in 1953 in the Tokushima Prefecture, Japanese artist Taho Ritsuko studied with George Trakas, among others, in the United States. At the time of the commission, she was an Associate Professor at MIT, before being a professor at the University of Tokyo Gedai). Since 1989, she has created permanent works in urban spaces in Japan and the United States, taking into account the social context while also showing an interest in nature. While she has sometimes invited residents to participate in her projects, the production of this particular project is unique in her practice in terms of method and follow-up.
7. At the same time, the goal of the planning committee was that all the artworks produced would be part of daily life and that the residents would appropriate them through lead-up discussions, workshops, and their eventual upkeep.
8. Unless otherwise noted, the citations are taken from email exchanges between Taho Ritsuko and the author in January and April 2020.
9. “Minami Ashiyahama Beach Community & Art Plan,” April 1998, interview with Hara Hisako (Art Producer, Professor, Osaka Electro-Communication University School of General Information) by Yu Nakano (October 5, 2011), <https://tm19950117.jp/en/interview/2791/>, consulted on August 5, 2020.
10. In Japan, two words are used to denote “landscape”: *Keikan* (景観) and *fūkei* (風景). They are associated with two main approaches to landscape. One is the technical approach of engineers, in which landscape is considered an independent object and reality. The other is the cultural, embodied, and aesthetic approach of ordinary practices and body memory, in which the subject is not separate from the world.
11. The artist’s own emphasis in capital letters.
12. Philippe Pons writes that “the ‘old village,’ i.e. the hometown, has a particular connotation in countries where belonging to a region remains strong. The hometown is more than just the rural land of childhood; it is the emotional and idealized place of a harmonious world that has vanished.” Philippe Pons, “La nostalgie du village natal,” *Le Monde* (May 20, 2011).
13. As one of the two buildings belongs to Ashiya City (400 units) and the other to the Hyōgo Prefecture (414 units), the artist designed two landscape sculptures, one of which held the vegetable garden.
14. Taho uses the term ランドスケープ (*landscape* written in *katakana* phonetically retranscribes a word from a foreign language) for her sculpture. For her, this term refers to landscape architecture, *fūkei*, to landscape in visual arts or nature, and *keikan*, to landscape in urban design.
15. An Katsumasa takes up the term “uprooting” from German psychiatrist Hans Bürger-Prinz who used it in relation to “the depression that affected liberated prisoners” (*ibid.*). Sociologist Ogino Masahiro also points out that “a major earthquake ... makes the state of health of those who were sick before the earthquake even more precarious” (Ogino, 1999, 126).
16. Ogino Masahiro, who also experienced this major earthquake, focuses on sensorial memory: “I felt the earthquake before I thought it” (Ogino, 1999, 133). The memory “is initially individual,

but it can also be collective. If for a moment, the victims felt that they belonged to a community, it was certainly due to a shared sensorial memory. An implicit solidarity was created through sensorial memory. However this implicit solidarity never became explicit” (*ibid.*, 133–134).

17. “At first, they announced a few dozens, but *immediately afterwards* it was two thousand (the official number of victims is 6,400)” (An, 1999, 101, my emphasis).

18. The relationship to childhood is not necessarily a refuge for the imagination, including historically speaking, because some people would have lived through other natural disasters or catastrophic events related to the war and the bombing (Kōbe was almost entirely destroyed during the Second World War), as well as, in the case of relocation, the atomic bomb.

19. This included “disrupted traffic routes, the interrupted gas and water supply, and difficult daily life,” as well as a lack of electricity and telephone lines in the first hours or days.

20. “The victims suffered from various symptoms. Almost everyone had trouble sleeping and became particularly sensitive to noise and ground movement” (An, 1999, 109).

21. Thank you to Kawasaki Hisako for the translation from Japanese.

22. Sylvie Brosseau describes this practice that is very typical for Japanese streets: The residents’ “main reasons for pot planting include their desire to feel the change of seasons *shiki*, their interest in taking care of plants, and their wish to make their environment more beautiful by making it alive.” She mentions that the practice also transforms the space by creating an interspace that reduces traffic. The potted plant is a “basic element that is adjustable, flexible, easily movable since lightweight, and part of a permanent but reversible set” (Brosseau, 2014a, 155). I also wish to note that I’m deeply grateful to Sylvie Brosseau for reading this essay and offering editorial advice.

23. Taho Ritsuko in an email addressed to the author in 2001.

24. “Japanese studies ... emphasize the tyranny imposed by *ba* on the individual subject. For example, taking up the notion from ... Nakane Chie, who emphasizes the individual’s belonging to and identifying with a collective *ba*, Kawai Hayao ... shows that *ba* envelops and protects, but also enslaves the subjects that come under its scope” (Berque, 2014b, 41).

25. This is not symbolically claimed.

ABSTRACTS

This essay shows how a specific understanding of landscape (*fūkei*) as an agricultural landscape associated with the collective imagination, memory, and the activities related to vegetable farming enabled artist Taho Ritsuko to engage survivors of the Great Hanshin-Awaji Earthquake, which struck Osaka-Kōbe in 1995, in a movement of reconstruction and renewal (*fukkō*). The project involved the survivors in the entire process, from conception to realization, of a work intended for a communal outdoor space in the *danchi* (a new public housing complex) where they were being relocated. The project gained renown in Japan for the political and administrative battle won, which gave the survivors the right to independently cultivate part of the public land in the Minami-Ashiyahama district. By involving them in a creative process that became political, the artist aimed to encourage their interaction and create an active co-presence consistent with the notion of *ba* (scene, place, or field). Composed of two landscape sculptures, the work was integral to the process of forming and establishing a community.

Nous verrons, ici, comment une certaine conception du paysage (*fūkei*) en tant que paysage agricole, associé à un imaginaire, à la mémoire ainsi qu'à des activités de culture maraîchère, a pu permettre à l'artiste Taho Ritsuko d'engager des personnes rescapées du séisme de Hanshin-Awaji (Osaka-Kōbe) de 1995 dans un mouvement de reconstruction ou de regain (*fukkō*). Ce projet a associé celles-là dans tout le processus de conception et de réalisation d'une œuvre destinée à un espace extérieur commun au *danchi* (nouveau logement social) où elles allaient être relogées. Il fut célèbre au Japon pour la bataille politique et administrative gagnée afin qu'elles puissent avoir le droit de cultiver de manière autonome une partie de ce terrain public à Minami-Ashiyahama. En les embarquant dans un processus créatif devenu politique, l'ambition de l'artiste fut de susciter leurs interactions pour une coprésence active correspondant à la notion de *ba* (qui veut dire scène, lieu ou champ). L'œuvre, constituée de deux « sculptures-paysage », fut ainsi inséparable d'une communauté en train de se constituer et de s'établir.

INDEX

Keywords: fūkei (landscape), ba (place, scene, field), fukkō (reconstruction), agricultural landscape, work in progress

Mots-clés: fūkei (paysage), ba (lieu, scène, champ), fukkō (reconstruction), paysage agricole, work in progress

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