# Documentary Meets Art Project: Remembering Post-3.11 Territories in *The Double Layered Town* (Haruka Komori and Natsumi Seo, 2019)

Lucie Rydzek

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**Introduction**

3.11, also known in Japan as "The Great East Japan Earthquake", refers to the triple disaster that occurred in March 2011 mainly in Japan's Tōhoku (northeastern) region: a magnitude 9.0 earthquake, a tsunami of 30 metres in height in some areas and a nuclear accident at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, leading to long-term contamination in several areas. The disaster led to significant policies affecting disaster-stricken territories, such as temporary relocation and scattering of communities and heavy reconstruction works. In this context, the notion of territory appears central to disaster management in its geological, political, cultural, and economic dimensions. [1] It is also a key notion for recontextualising artistic works such as films, especially when made in response to disasters. Considering Martin Lefebvre's intuition that images can be looked at not only as landscapes or settings, but also as territories – that is, "a subjective and lived space", "seen from the 'inside'" and pervaded by issues of identity and belonging [2] – this paper argues that cinema can be an interesting medium to understand territorial issues, when produced collaboratively by relying on multiple subjectivities and visual experiences to look into territories from the inside. In line with this purpose, and to broaden the scale of the research, this work will address the entanglement between documentary film practices and collaborative practices known as "art projects", known for their tendency to meddle with territories. Its case study, the documentary *The Double Layered Town / Making a Song to Replace Our Positions* (*Nijū no machi: kōtaichi no uta o amu,* 2019, Japan, 79') by Haruka Komori and Natsumi Seo, was shot in the coastal city of Rikuzentakata (Tōhoku) after the disaster and is centered around a

"workshop" involving residents and non-residents. Post-3.11 films invite exploration of questions around cinema's role in considering territorial issues and making the history of territories, which take on renewed significance after the devastation caused by a disaster.

Over the last fourteen years, many scholars have explored various aspects of post-3.11 cinema and arts. This paper aims to shed new light on long-term, late-blooming works, such as Komori and Seo's film, that focus on the process of transmission rather than the actual passing down of stories of the stricken areas, representing a new stage in post-disaster artistic response. The paper also outlines Japanese independent cinema's entanglement with art projects, a connection which has been understudied, although after 3.11 several signs converged in showing that cinema shared concerns with the expanding art project scene.

**Conceptual framework**

The term "territory" came to prominence in French geographical debates in the 1980s and has been an issue for scholars because of its polysemy. [3] Anglophone geographers long preferred notions such as "space, place, landscape, region, and scale" in their works on boundaries. [4] According to a recent work by French geographer Hervé Brédif, territory can be understood in four different ways: (1) a "domain/system for the deployment of a biophysical phenomenon"; (2) an "area of sovereignty and exercise of political authority"; (3) a "cultural matrix and place of identity construction"; or (4) a "constituent element or link in a globalized economic and financial system/network". [5] His third definition draws from the work of Swiss geographer Claude Raffestin [6], who considers territory a "socially constructed space" [7] that equals "the 'sum' of the relations maintained by a subject [or a

community] with their environment". [8] This approach to territory implies that arts such as cinema, especially when exploring how humans relate to their environment, have the capacity to either observe or intervene in the making of territories.

The role of space or time in cinematic narratives is a regular and important topic in film theory. [9] Scholarship on cinema and territory has explored both filmic contexts – cinema's relation to economic and political territories [10]– and texts – the "exploration, construction, or recreation of a territory" through cinematic aesthetics. [11] According to Morice *et al*, the "territory in cinema is a physical space but also an imaginary signifier, as recalled by Christian Metz [*Imaginary Signifier,* 1982 (1977)]". It exists at the boundary of the "document" and the "fiction". [12] Through its history, cinema has maintained a privileged relationship with urban territories and provided a space for reflection on what makes a city. [13] But it is not only about considering territorial issues through cinema, an art where image and sound are edited in ways that remind its audience of the very process of thinking; it is also about concretely intervening in the social construction of territories during the filming. In this last case, art projects offer an accurate example of how the 'workshop' apparatus becomes an opportunity to think about territorial issues.

Art projects (*āto purojekuto*) have been neglected by the fields of aesthetics and art history, except for a few works by Japanese scholars such as Kenji Kajiya and Sumiko Kumakura or French art historian Estelle Zhong Mengual on what she coined "art in common" (*art en commun*). According to Kajiya, though, the "art project"

> has constituted a major category in Japan's art world since the 1990s. The term chiefly denotes art exhibitions, but includes performances, workshops, and social practices that take place in buildings other than museums or in the open air in the city and countryside. It covers a wide range of operations from large-scale exhibitions organized by local governments to moderate-size projects organized by non-profit organizations to small-sized artist initiatives. [14]

Drawing on the avant-garde and outdoor exhibitions of the 1960s and the 1970s, the cultural development of rural territories and audiences' waning interest in experimental art due to the growth of consumer culture, art projects were influenced by American public art (which arrived in Japan in the 1990s) and projects set in Japan by Belgian curator Jan Hoet. [15] The establishment of the Japan Council of the Arts (*nihon geijutsu bunka shinkōkai*) in the 1990s allowed artists involved in art projects to directly benefit from governmental grants and patronage [16], whereas the founding of semi-governmental organisations known as "Arts Councils" (*āto kaunshiru)* across various regions (including Tokyo) in the 2000s and the 2010s provided art projects with direct assistance and financial support. [17]

Like the British "art in common" studied by Estelle Zhong Mengual, which involves setting up a "participation device" that makes creation a "collective process" with a "dual artistic and political scope" [18], art projects are "community-aiming arts" [19] in the way they "empower[r], constitute[e], and activat[e] communities" [20] by transforming social contexts and overcoming preexisting social boundaries. [21] Art projects thus generate a transitory space and time where a territory's very own human component, its communities, can step aside and think about its issues from outside, sometimes while mingling with individuals that are foreign to their territory, which is the very process of the film *The Double Layered Town*.

*The Double Layered Town* is the most awarded documentary film from the art unit formed by director Komori Haruka (1989–) and painter, writer, and workshop coordinator Seo Natsumi (1988–), receiving in 2021 the Special Mention at Sheffield DocFest and the Cultural Documentary Award of the Japanese Agency for Cultural Affairs. In 2012, after the completion of their master's degrees at the University of the Arts in Tokyo, Komori and Seo moved together to Rikuzentakata for volunteering work. The city was almost entirely destroyed by the tsunami, resulting in 1761 dead or missing people, 8035 damaged houses, and heavy reconstruction work – 124.6 hectares and 12.3 metres in height. [22]Komori and Seo were soon asked by locals to document their lives as mementos. [23] For approximately ten years, they used several media, including films, video installations (Komori), drawings, paintings, texts, and workshops (Seo) to address the issue of documenting tsunami-stricken areas. Several of these works were named the "Double Layered Town", including a book and exhibitions made of poems and drawings that imagined Rikuzentakata in 2031. [24]

Through their activities in the city, and more recently in the Minamata disease-stricken area of the Aga River, the Noto Peninsula, the city of Hiroshima, and the Marshall Islands, both artists demonstrate a strong interest in exploring people's relation to the land and its history, especially considering the unavoidable occurrence of disasters in a world dominated by risk-inducing policies. Their works are the result of their listening to residents' words (*kotoba*) and observation of landscapes (*fūkei*). [25] They pay attention to the material, small-scale changes of people's everyday lives, in a gesture that relates to ecocritical art. [26] However, Komori and Seo's originality among post-3.11 artists can be found in their exploration of the receiver's position. The notion of "traveler" (*tabibito*) is key to their art – as will be discussed later – and helps them formulate the issue of inheritance in "transitional land[s]" – *kōtaichi,* a

word used in *The Double Layered Town*'s Japanese subtitle: in their art, Komori and Seo address what should be remembered and passed on to future generations after a disaster that led to major territorial transformations. For Seo, indeed, inheritance is a means of subsistence, and stories contribute to it in the manner of seeds that travel and grow throughout several generations. [27]Here, film is being used as a way to connect individual stories to larger narratives in order to preserve territories' identities in a self-reflexive manner that addresses the problem of reception and retransmission of a traumatic event that could seem to be beyond imagination.

**3.11 and transmission**

Undoubtedly, 3.11 engendered reconsideration of how to document and pass down the memory of stricken territories. As Gennifer Weisenfeld points out, "visual responses" to disasters and their "codifi[cation] into collective memory" inform how events are "narrat[ed]" and "remember[ed]" as history [28] – whether it is through the lens of "national trauma" or not. [29] Images contribute to the "memorialization culture" [30] that attempts to give a communicable shape to collected memories of the event for long-term transmission. As Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano has argued, the post-3.11 mediascape featured a large quantity of moving images taken and diffused by news media, artists, and citizens through "affordable, portable, personal digital media technologies". [31] Images of the tsunami, the debris, the nuclear plant's explosions, and residents' distress were broadcast daily by television channels. Mass media contributed to the rhetoric of "'*ganbatte nippon*' (Hold on, Japan) and '*kizuna'* (connections/linking)" by emphasising, in their reports, the importance of the mobilisation of non-victims, alongside victims, to overcome the situation. [32] Their

political agenda implied partial commemoration and partial denial of disaster-related realities. [33]

Thus, post-3.11 cinema first encountered a desire to move beyond representations from mass media and explore the realities uncovered in doing so. Some of them failed to escape the appeal of visual pleasure in front of the disaster's "sublime" landscapes [34] and the excitement of exploring dangerous foreign areas: they relied on "raw footage" of "dark tourism". [35] Documentaries are indeed impacted by ethical debates: first, there is the issue of violating law by visiting forbidden areas, or disregarding residents' sorrow [36], and ending up creating sensational artworks that may inhibit audiences' capacities for ethical judgment and intervention. [37] Moreover, artists might be misjudged as re-using such realities for "personal gain". [38]

This issue relates to questions surrounding the legitimacy of non-victims (*hi-hisaisha*) or people who were not directly impacted by the disaster (*hitōjisha*) to narrate the stories of victims (*hisaisha*) or those who were otherwise directly impacted by the disaster (*tōjisha* – a word from the legal field that became part of the common language after the Japanese Disability Rights Movements of the 1960s). [39] Post-3.11 Japanese mass media popularised the use of these dichotomies, suggesting that *tōjisha*'s experience remains inaccessible to *hitōjisha* and cannot be expressed by the latter. Thus, *hitōjisha* artists widely relied on the practices of *kikikaki*, writing after listening to the victims [40], and interviews. [41] *The Double Layered Town* addresses this responsibility of *hitōjisha* in this process of passing on the memory of a foreign territory.

**Komori and Seo in the art project scene**

Before analysing *The Double Layered Town*'s approach to territories and its relation to art project methods, it should be noted that Komori and Seo never use the term "art project" to name their activities. Indeed, their works are mostly exhibited in cinemas and art galleries rather than non-institutional public spaces, where art projects mostly take place. However, their art has been acknowledged by key figures of the art project scene, as will be explained below.

Komori and Seo's initial project was to "travel throughout Japan to conduct field work and create spaces for creation [*seisaku*] and dialogue [*taiwa*]". [42] Within this context, they moved to Sendai in 2015 and founded the collective of artists "NOOK" (pronounced 'no-o-ku'), which has three types of activities: (1) planning events, exhibitions, screenings, and workshops; (2) documentation through surveys, images, videos, texts, drawings; (3) producing works that are consumable in the form of books, DVDs, films, web content, illustrations, and paintings. [43] Through NOOK, Komori and Seo manage projects that are anchored both in specific territories and in relation to broader networks. For example, their most recent project, "Karoku Recycle", aims at recycling "documents of disasters" through arts to retrace their history. Documentation is made in "cooperation with the territories" (*tochi to kyōdō*) [44], and the project's final goal is to create networks for territories and citizens to join forces when facing disasters. In that way, Komori and Seo's activities share similarities with art project processes, especially since the art's final product is not only the artwork but also its networks.

Besides, Komori and Seo took part in the "Art Support Tōhoku-Tōkyō" project (2011–2021) [45], which was conducted by Risei Satō, now Program Officer at the Arts Council Tōkyō, with the support of the Tōkyō Metropolitan Government, the Arts Council Tōkyō, and the Tōkyō Metropolitan Foundation for History and Culture [46], to help communities rebuild themselves after 3.11 and to pass on their experiences to future generations. For this purpose, artists were offered consultations, benefited from already established networks, and could receive some financial support. This encounter with Risei Satō, a key figure in the art project scene, was long-lasting for Komori and Seo's activities: he is now a consultant at NOOK, and Komori and Seo are taking part in his "Noto Records" project, which encourages artists to document the Noto Peninsula since the January 2024 earthquake and the September 2024 torrential rain disaster. Here, again, the project operates as a bridge between local communities and far away artists and audiences. [47]

Lastly, Komori and Seo have been contributing to workshops and online conferences about their ongoing projects for about three years at the Tokyo Art Research Lab (TARL). [48] For instance, they took part in the first edition of the seminar "Creating your own art project" (*Jibun no āto purojekuto o tsukuru)* in 2022 [49], together with director Ryūsuke Hamaguchi and art team "Mé". The seminar's purpose is to provide audiences with key information on how to launch their own art project – a "do-it-yourself" tone that echoes that of the *Mediatheque* of Sendai's "Recorder 311" project of creating community archives of the disaster with the involvement of locals. [50]

As discussed, Komori and Seo are deeply engaged with art project networks, although they do not consider their works as such. In addition, *The Double Layered Town* is one of their films with the closest ties to the art project genre in its conception process.

**The film's structure**

*The Double Layered Town* is based on footage of a workshop coordinated by Seo (mostly) and Komori in Rikuzentakata in 2018 for about two weeks. Its title refers to Rikuzentakata as a complex town made of two layers of space and time: the ground after the tsunami (past) and the ground after the elevation works (present) – a metaphor which promotes imagination. [51] Its Japanese subtitle *"kōtaichi no uta o amu"* implies the "weaving" of "song(s)" of a "land in transition", suggesting that the film combines different stories about a changing territory as an act of memento – or a "modest heritage" (*chiisana keishō*), to follow the film's website.

The film's workshop brought together four apprentice actors: Haruka Koda, Leon Kō Yonekawa, Haruka Sakai, and Aoshi Miura, who are young *hitōjisha* chosen out of 50 applications. [52] They are referred to as "travelers" (*tabibito*) – their names only appear in the film's credits – and had to perform three tasks:

- Readings of a fiction book by Seo about Rikuzentakata's past and present residents in the year 2031. The book was first written in 2015 and later published as "The Two Layers Town: The Song of [this] Transitional Place" (*Nijū no machi: kōtaichi no uta*, Tōkyō, Shoshō Kankanbō, 2021). [53]

- "Field work" consists of exploring the city's territory under reconstruction and talking with its residents.

- "Discussion/Feedback sessions" [54] to explain on camera how they welcomed and remembered residents' testimonies, while relating to their own experience.

Like filmmakers such as Ryūsuke Hamaguchi in *Happy Hour* (*Happī awā*, Japan, 2015, 317'), Komori and Seo's methods connect with those of the art projects in the way they rely on collaboration with non-professional actors – apprentices or residents – to build their narratives. The specialised vocabulary of art projects thus seems relevant to the analysis of the film. For the making of the *Double Layered Town*, Seo took on the role of what Claire Bishop calls a "collaborator and producer of situations" [55], and the workshop consisted of a "co-creation" soliciting participants' creativity [56] around specific activities [57] devised by Seo and Komori.

Seo's book is the central thread running through the workshop. She wrote it upon her own fieldwork in Rikuzentakata in an attempt to express the concerns held by the residents through several fictional characters, from children to the elderly. Each participant was assigned one chapter to read aloud in front of residents during their stay. To understand the characters' feelings better and improve their reading, they walked through the city and met up with residents whose stories sometimes echoed those of the characters. Kōji Nakashima analyses the chapters as follows: [58]

1. "Spring 2031", read by Koda (16 at the time of the filming), is told from the perspective of a young boy who lives in the upper town with his father. Prompted by

his interrogations, his father takes him to the "lower town" through hidden stairs in the town's memorial monument. Downstairs, there is only a field of flowers, but the father describes what used to be there before the tsunami. It is the world of the dead.

2. "Summer 2031", read by Yonekawa (25 at the time), is told from the perspective of one of the dead who live in the lower town, during Tanabata (Star) Festival on 7 August. Its music and dance steps reach the dead's ears in the lower town, adding to their imagined sense of how beautiful life in the upper town must be.

3. "Autumn 2031", read by Sakai (25 at the time), is a conversation between an old couple and their grandchild in the upper town. While the couple share stories and songs in remembrance of the lower town, the grandchild realises their own responsibility in passing these on after their death.

4. "Winter 2031", read by Miura (22 at the time), is told from the perspective of a father who is afraid that the passage of time will cause him to forget about his own deceased child. Unlike in the other chapters, he expresses concerns about the landscapes' ugly distortion – due to the reconstruction – hindering recollection of the past. However, he realises that the new town will ultimately become the cherished hometown of new generations.

As the bonus features of the film's DVD show, the book's chapters were read aloud in their entirety by the participants on 14 September 2018 in Rikuzentakata's kiosk in front of the "People of the Small Flower Garden of Rikuzentakata". [59]This video record consists of full and medium still shots from different angles of readers facing the audience, low-angle close-ups of readers' faces, and a few inserts of the surrounding landscapes (wide shots) or listeners' faces and hands (close-ups). In the film, it was only used at the end of the first

chapter (where the film's title appears) and at the end of the last chapter (Figure 1), thus giving useful information to viewers about the circumstances of the readings that exceeds the frame of the film. To provide better sound quality for the readings, Komori and Seo appear to have re-recorded them in studio conditions to use as voice-overs for footage of the participants walking through the city, meeting residents, or volunteering. Part of the voice-overs also consists of "discussions" or "feedback" on their experience as listeners: fictional and non-fictional narratives thus merge in a confusing way [60], while words transform the audience's comprehension of images and vice versa.



**FIGURE 1**—The two kiosk scenes at 0:13:46 and 1:07:00 © Komori Haruka & Seo Natsumi

**Filming the territorial landscape from a collective point of view**

Landscapes play an important role in the film. As suggested by Lefebvre, paintings of landscapes earned significance during the 19th century by "transforming purely vegetal and mineral nature into an image of human nature". [61] Landscape is what is "perceived" by humans [62] – for geographers, it is thus something "symbolic" and "lived". [63] In Rikuzentakata, past landscapes were places of memory for the residents, who are mourning their double loss following the tsunami and the reconstruction work. Their regeneration is an important component of the community's revival, facilitating new places of gathering and commemoration. Komori and Seo's visual approach to Rikuzentakata thus goes beyond the usual definition of the landscape: they care about residents' sense of belonging to the territory when putting it into images. In *The Double Layered Town*, care was taken to ensure that the travelers did not remain external contemplators of the distorted territory. They were asked to walk through the city to learn what it looks like from within – through the residents' perspectives and multiple temporalities conveyed by their testimonies, much like in Michel de Certeau's *Practice of Everyday Life* (1984 [1980]). Long shots depict landscapes inhabited by the travelers as they walk through the city; very few shots exclude the protagonists – unlike in other films by Komori, such as *Listening to the Air* (*Sora ni kiku*, Japan, 2017, 73'), where landscape shots without human silhouettes are regularly used as inserts. Drone shots are inserted right in the middle of *The Double Layered Town* (00:39:36): while they may express the travelers' desire to grasp and convey a global image of Rikuzentakata, they reflect the opposite of what the travelers are actually doing, as the drone can only capture a superficial image of the territory – detached, external, and fixed in time.

In fact, in her previous films, Komori shot Rikuzentakata's landscapes from places where residents themselves used to contemplate their territory [64], and these locations were likely used by the participants in *The Double Layered Town* – especially the elevated viewpoint, the cemetery, and popular roads. By doing so, Komori avoids two pitfalls: the production of an informational (cartographic) image of the evolution of the territory of Rikuzentakata, detached from any emotion; and the production of an aesthetic image given to the free expression of the emotions of viewers, without considering the emotions of the residents. If the image generated by a camera never equates to a human point of view, it can nevertheless serve as a medium to transcribe the idea of a collective point of view [65], shared by the residents, the film crew, and the travelers. This collaborative synthesis retraces the emotional history of the territory and allows the synchronisation of the sensitivities of the travelers with those of the *tōjisha*. It shows a desire to take care of the way *hitōjisha* look at foreign territories that bear the mark of an unshared trauma and restores their legitimacy to tell these places' stories through space and time.

**"Travelers" and words: a collective approach to "inheritance"**

Aside from landscapes, in *The Double Layered Town*, Komori and Seo focus on words, and the figure of the "traveler" allows them to consider the roles of both *tōjisha* and *hitōjisha* in the memory of an evolving territory. The film's framing suggests that the storyline is being told from the points of view of the four participants, through matching eyeline shot-reverse shots (especially around 00:09:50 when the participants are looking at the city from above), through over-the-shoulder shots with the participant's shoulder in the foreground during conversations, placing the viewers in the participant's position, and by following the participants from behind through wide still or travelling shots (Figures 2 and 3).

**FIGURE 2**— Sequence showing Koda Haruka's interaction with two high school girls through an over-the-shoulder shot (around 00:03:50). ©Komori Haruka & Seo Natsumi

**FIGURE 3**—The four participants observing the town (around 00:09:50). The camera follows Koda's point of view by framing her, then the scenery she is looking at. ©Komori Haruka & Seo Natsumi

The film not only shows participants walking around the city or listening to *tōjisha'*s words during fieldwork: it primarily focuses on the "discussions" and "feedback" sessions, in which the participants repeatedly explain who they met, reformulate the stories they were told, interpret the *tōjisha*'s emotions, express how they felt about these interactions and question their own position as listeners and mediators of their words. These sessions occur on two different occasions. First, private interviews with each participant (Figure 4), filmed through mid-shots and medium close-ups from the front, and allowing camera gazes. The participant's body is lit by studio lighting and stands out against the black background, allowing the viewers to focus on their voice and body expressions. The soundtrack from these interviews is either synchronised with its original image or used as voice-over on images of the "fieldwork", alternating between different interviews. The second apparatus is that of group sessions with the four participants (Figure 5), in an empty room of a building (probably the new town hall), sitting directly on the floor. This apparatus appears only twice: at the beginning of the film (00:05:00), where Koda shares stories she heard, and at the end of the film (1:08:18) after a fade to black and just before the last sequence, which mirrors the first one by depicting the participants' travel back home. Participants are invited to formulate any feedback they want to discuss with others and probably answer Seo's questions, which were cut during editing. The film begins and ends with a high-angle shot of the four participants, who are later shot separately through eye-level full shots and close-ups. Here, again, the camera's stillness and the editing's slow pace allow the viewers to focus on the participants' words and body expressions. This late sequence addresses methodological issues when rephrasing others' stories: the problem of not remembering everything, of being subjective, and of not being able to access painful memories. Travelers appear as mediators – Seo herself designates them as *baikai* or representatives/people who express (*hyōgensha*) [66] – who, though being *hitōjisha,* navigated through *tōjisha*'s territory and acquired a better

understanding of their condition and a consciousness of the issues surrounding the transmission of others' memory and the history of foreign territories. The workshop thus makes it possible for *hitōjisha* to endorse the status of travelers and make their first attempts at passing on others' stories.



**FIGURE 4**—Interviews with the participants ©Komori Haruka & Seo Natsumi

**FIGURE 5**—Group feedback session ©Komori Haruka & Seo Natsumi

Here, Komori and Seo use a collaborative method similar to the one used in their film *Under the Wave, On the Ground* (*Nami no shita, tsuchi no ue*, Japan, 2014, 68'), which displays different layers of storytelling throughout its three chapters. For this earlier film, Komori and Seo interviewed two residents of Rikuzentakata about the evolution of their lives after the disaster and during the reconstruction work. Then, Seo wrote a first-person narrative based on her recollection of these interviews and added a third piece, reflecting her own point of view. Later, they asked the original interviewees to read the texts aloud in front of a recorder, making corrections when necessary. These records were ultimately used as voice-overs for footage showing Komori and Seo with residents in locations related to the testimonies. This is what Nakashima called a "collaborative" (*kyōdō*) work. [67] According to Aoyama, by merging subjectivities into a common "I", the film creates what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari called a "conceptual character" – one that is neither I nor You, but in between, and expresses something that exceeds both. [68]

In *The Double Layered Town*, it is not residents who reformulate a non-resident's text about their stories, but rather travelers who engage in the process of reading Seo's reality-based fiction book. Through this, they rephrase residents' memories while also putting into words their own impressions. The film highlights a key mechanism of retransmission: the filtering of the residents' and book protagonists' sensibilities through those of the travelers, shaped by their own experiences and capacity for empathy. In this way, the film's central experimental process consists in placing young *hitōjisha* from various regions in the role of "travelers" – a position well known to Komori and Seo themselves, as travelling artists. The film's narrative thus emerges from the experiences of these apprentice travelers. Moreover, through Seo's fiction book and the testimonies of both residents and travelers, the territories are explored through multiple temporalities. This approach frames the experiences of the four participants as part of a broader history of transmission, while also opening pathways for imagining the future.

To summarise the workshop's process (Figure 6): travelers first lend an attentive ear to the residents' words, aiming to better understand the emotions of the protagonists in Seo's book's and to gain residents' trust – a necessary step for them to share their own stories. In doing so, travelers confront their imagination with reality, allowing for "affective resonances" to emerge between themselves and the residents. [69] They also lend an attentive eye to the city's landscapes by exploring the territory and visiting locations frequented by the residents, with the drone shot being the only exception. *The Double Layered Town* workshop's individual and group feedback sessions serve a dual purpose: they allow participants to rehearse the act of reformulating others' words and explaining contextual details, testing the limits of their own memory and interpretation; and they encourage a form

of self-reflexivity, prompting participants to question the very process and history of how territorial memory is transmitted across space and time. While watching the film, viewers are invited to share in these reflections.
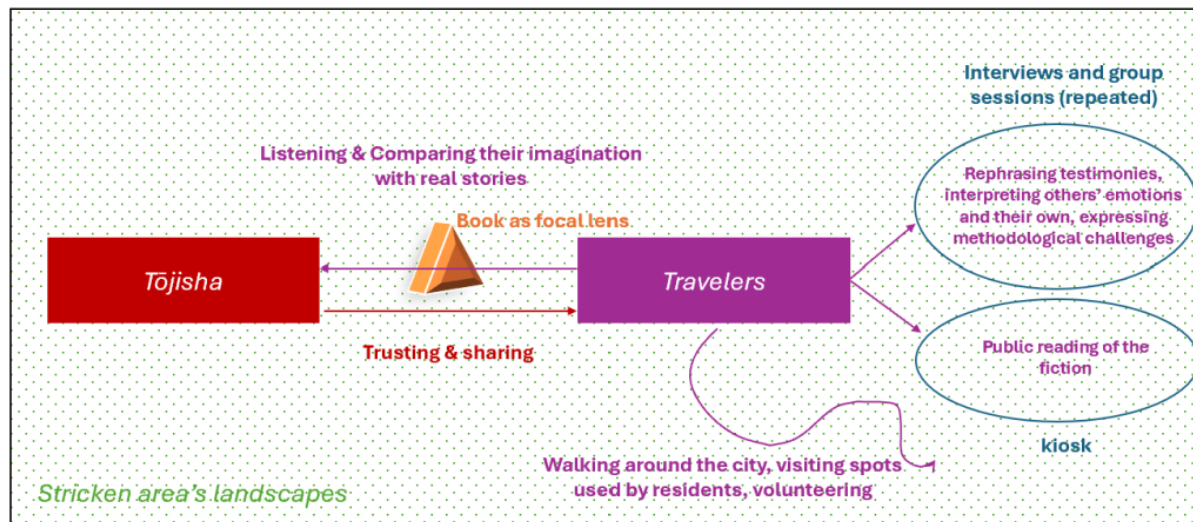


FIGURE 6—The workshop's process

**Conclusion**

As Irena Latek *et al* point out, the appeal of cinema in the representation of territory lies in its capacity to "short-circuit heterogeneous data to represent life", thanks to what architect Rem Koolhaas has described as a "system of systematic and intelligent ruptures". In this sense, cinema uses imagination to open up reality by offering new perspectives – distinct from those allowed by "non-artistic tools of conception and representation". [70]

In the case of *The Double Layered Town*, art becomes a means of challenging the viewer's imagination and opening it to unfamiliar realities through the participants' physical and emotional exploration of a foreign territory during the workshop. By looking at a territory's landscape from the viewpoints used by the local community, and by listening to and reformulating intertemporal stories shared by residents, participants are offered long-term

tools for acquiring a deep, multidimensional knowledge – intellectual, emotional, and sensory – of a transforming and unfamiliar territory. Such understanding supports not only personal reflection, but also the remembrance and transmission of that territory's evolving identity.

This process requires the collaboration of both residents and non-residents, as the collective memory of territories can only be sustained through the sharing of multiple subjectivities. As Robert Putnam, following sociologist Pierre Bourdieu, notes, the success of such transmission depends on fostering both "bonding social capital" (intra-communal ties) and "bridging social capital" (extra-communal connections), which is one of the art projects' aims [71] and which is achieved in *The Double Layered Town* by encouraging encounters between travelers and residents. Through this process, the film addresses the inheritance of testimonies left by Rikuzentakata's residents regarding the transformation of their territory after the disaster. It also raises the question of how such memories can be transmitted to other communities and future generations, contributing to the recollection of lost territories and prompting reflection on territorial issues in relation to their historical context.

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**Notes**

[1] Four dimensions discussed in Hervé Brédif, *Réaliser la terre: prise en charge du vivant et contrat territorial* [Embracing the Earth: Managing the Living and Territorial Pact] (Éditions de la Sorbonne, 2021).

[2] Martin Lefebvre, 'Between Setting and Landscape in the Cinema', in *Landscape and Film*, ed. Martin Lefebvre, AFI Film Readers (Routledge, 2006), 53.

[3]Brédif, *Réaliser la terre*, 141.

[4] Joe Painter, 'Rethinking Territory', *Antipode* 42, no. 5 (2010): 1091–93.

[5] Brédif, *Réaliser la terre*, 143–53.

[6] Claude Raffestin, *Pour une géographie du pouvoir* [For a Geography of Power], (Librairie technique, 1980).

[7] Brédif, *Réaliser la terre*, 149.

[8] Martin Lefebvre, 'Between Setting and Landscape in the Cinema', in *Landscape and Film*, ed. Martin Lefebvre, AFI Film Readers (New York: Routledge, 2006), 53, quoting Raffestin (1980, 145).

[9] For instance, David Bordwell et al., *Film Art: An Introduction* (McGraw-Hill Education, 2019); Noël Burch, *Life to Those Shadows* (University of California Press, 1990); Gilles Deleuze, *Cinéma 2: L'image-temps* [Cinema 2: Time-image] (Minuit, 1985).

[10] See, for instance, Agustín Gámir Orueta and Carlos Manuel Valdés, 'Cinema and Geography: Geographic Space, Landscape and Territory in the Film Industry', *Boletín de La Asociación de Geógrafos Españoles*, no. 45 (2007): 157–90; K. A. Borisovskaya and S. A. Risinson, 'Cinema as a Modern Trend of the Territory Branding Development', Kubik, 2019, 17–19; Delphine Le Nozach, 'The "placement" of territory in films. Statuses, modalities, and ways of presenting territories in films, *Communication & langages* 202, no. 4 (2019): 25–38; Amanda Rueda, 'Festival de cinéma : Médiations et construction de Territoires imaginaires [Film Festival: Mediations and Construction of Imaginary Territories]', *Culture & Musées* 14, no. 1 (2009): 149–71, https://doi.org/10.3406/pumus.2009.1512.

[11] Jean-René Morice et al., eds., *Territoires Du Cinéma* [Territories of Cinema] (L'Harmattan, 2017), 13–14. Also see Stephen Groening, *Cinema Beyond Territory* (British Film Institute, 2014), https://www.torrossa.com/en/resources/an/5203219.

[12] Morice et al., *Territoires Du Cinéma*, 12. They rely on Jacques Rancière's *Film Fables* (2016 [2001]).

[13] Nicolas Droin and Mélanie Forret, eds., *Écrire la ville au cinéma: traces, mouvements, imbrications* [Writing the City in Cinema: Traces, Movements, Interconnections] (Presses universitaires de Vincennes, 2022), 6.

[14] Kenji Kajiya, 'Japanese Art Projects in History', *Field* 7 (Spring 2017): para. 1.

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[16] Kumakura and Nagatsu, *An Overview of Art Projects in Japan*, 6.

[17] Yayoi Yoshizawa, 'Heisei 27 Nendo Sōgō Bunka Kenkyūjo Kenkyūjosei "Āatsu Kaunshiru to Bunka Seisaku" Ni Kansuru Hōkoku [2015 Report on "The Cultural Policy of the Arts Council" with Research Support from the Arts and Sciences Laboratory]', *Bulletin of Center for Interdisciplinary Studies of Science and Culture Kyoritsu Women's University & Junior College*, no. 23 (February 2017): 219.

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[19] Kumakura and Nagatsu, *An Overview of Art Projects in Japan*, 11.

[20] Zhong Mengual, *L'art en commun*, 147–48.

[21] Kumakura and Nagatsu, *An Overview of Art Projects in Japan*, 31–32.

[22] Kōji Nakashima, 'Hisaichi No Fukkō o Meguru Basho No Sōshitsu to Saikōchiku: Seo Natsumi "nijū No Machi" o Yomu [Loss and Reconstruction of Places in Rikuzentakata: Reading Natsumi Seo's "Nijyuu No Machi"]', *Space, Society and Geographical Thought*, no. 25 (2022): 3.

[23] Yū Takehisa, 'After the Exhibition Artists and the Disaster: Documentation in Progress', trans. Justin Jesty, *FIELD* Issue 7 'Japan's Social Turn Vol. 1' (2017).

[24] Ryan Holmberg, 'Overview: In The Aftermath', *ARTnews.Com*, 21 April 2016, https://www.artnews.com/art-in-america/aia-reviews/overview-in-the-aftermath-62150/.

[25] Haruka Komori and Natsumi Seo, 'File 11. Komori Haruka + Seo Natsumi: tabibito toshite kairo o tsukuru [File 11. Komori Haruka + Seo Natsumi: Opening New Routes as Travelers]', YouTube – Tokyo Art Research Lab Channel, 11 August 2023, https://youtu.be/M6kiOigzUpA.

[26] This is particularly relevant in Seo's "New Habitations" project (*sumu no fūkei*, lit. "the landscape of inhabiting"): https://newhabitations.com/about/ (last consultation on 15 May 2025).

[27] Natsumi Seo, *Awai yuku koro : Rikuzentakata shinsaigo wo ikiru* [In-between times: living in Rikuzentakata after the disaster] (Shōbunsha, 2019), 19-21 ; 341–42.

[28] Gennifer Weisenfeld, 'Imaging Disaster: Tokyo and the Visual Culture of Japan's Great Earthquake of 1923', *Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* 13, no. 4 (2015): 1–13.

[29] Rachel DiNitto, 'Narrating the Cultural Trauma of 3/11: The Debris of Post-Fukushima Literature and Film', *Japan Forum* 26, no. 3 (2014): 340–41.

[30] Julia Gerster, 'Beneath the Invisible Cloud. Kamishibai After 11 March: Between Disaster Risk Education and Memorialisation', *Amfiteater (Ljubljana)* 7, no. 1 (2019): 65. Also see: Yūsuke Matsuura, 'Kioku media toshite no saigai ikō: 3.11 no kiokujutsu [Memory Media as vestiges of disasters: Memorial Techniques of 3.11]', in *Posuto san ten ichi ichi media gensetsu saikō* [Reflexions on post-3.11 Mediatic Discourses], ed. Marciano Wada-Mitsuyo (Presses de l'Université de Hōsei, 2019), 3–4.

[31] Mitsuyo Wada-Marciano, 'The Cultural Turn in Post-3.11 Documentary: Kamanaka Hitomi's Accented Documentary', in *A Companion to Japanese Cinema*, John Wiley&Sons, ed. David Desser (Croydon, 2022), 639.

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[35] Wada-Marciano, 'The Cultural Turn in Post-3.11 Documentary', 639–40.

[36] Hirano, '311', 378.

[37] Laurent Jullier, 'Devant Les Images de l'horreur [Facing Images of Horror]', *Esprit*, no. 291 (1) (2003): 108. Jullier pointed out that plastic beauty, such as in Eugene Smith's photos of the victims of the Minamata disease, can be a hindrance to actual intervention.

[38] Marco Bohr, 'Naoya Hatakeyama and the Photographic Representation of Post-Tsunami Landscapes in Japan', Loughborough's Research Repository, 2019, 4–5.

[39] Anne-Lise Mithout, '"We reject egotism in the disguise of love": the ethics of care of the Japanese Disability right movement', in *Asia in care*, ed. Myriam de Loenzien and Aurélie Varrel (CNRS Editions, 2025), 182–83.

[40] Saeko Kimura, *Theorizing Post-Disaster Literature in Japan: Revisiting the Literary and Cultural Landscape After the Triple Disasters* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2022).

[41] Atsushi Sasaki, *Eiga yo sayōnara* [Farewell, Cinema] (Film Art, 2022), 250.

[42] Official website: https://komori-seo.main.jp/blog/biography/  (last consultation on 10 June 2025).

[43] According to NOOK's official website: http://nook.or.jp/hp/ (last consultation on 10 June 2025).

[44] Haruka Komori et al., 'Noto hantō no jishin to gōu no ato o kirokusuru. Kokoromi no hajimari [Documenting the Noto Peninsula after the Earthquake and the Torrential Rain Disaster. First Attempts]', YouTube Live – 'Noto Records' Channel, 11 December 2024.

[45] Official website: https://asttr.jp/about/index.html (last consultation on 10 June 2025). Updates to the site ended as of 30 June 2021. The project led to the publication of several

books; its website is archived on the Web Archiving Project of the National Diet Library: https://warp.ndl.go.jp/waid/20001 (last consultation on 12 May 2025).

[46] Official website: https://www.rekibun.or.jp/en/ (last consultation on 10 June 2025).

[47] Komori et al., 'Noto hantō no jishin to gōu no ato o kirokusuru'.

[48] 'Haruka Komori in conversation with Lucie Rydzek', 24 February 2024.

[49] The seminar's page on TARL: https://tarl.jp/projects/newroute-seminar/ (last consultation on 27 May 2025).

[50] "Recorder 311" is a project organised by the *Mediatheque* of Sendai in which Komori took part. It aims to produce citizen archives by encouraging artists and non-artists to create around the theme of 311.

[51] Sasaki, *Eiga yo sayōnara*.

[52] 'Haruka Komori in conversation with Lucie Rydzek'.

[53] The book was first self-published under the title "Double Layered Town – 2031, A Landscape that Someone may see somewhere" in 2017 (*Nijū no machi: 2031 nen, dokoka de dareka ga miru kamomshirenai fūkei*). It then contained seven of the forty-one illustrations coming from Seo's exhibition "*Kuriteriumu 91 Seto Natsumi: Nami no shita, tsuchi no ue / Nijū no machi*" at Mito Contemporary Art Gallery from November 2015 to January 2016. The publication of the book in 2021 by Shoshō Kankanbō included thirty-nine illustrations and two more texts: "*Kōtaichi no uta*" (Song of the Transitory Land), written after hearing the 2018 workshop's participants, and "*Hokōroku – 2019 nen 3 gatsu*" (Walking Journal –

March 2019), which is a compilation of her Twitter (now X) posts. Nakashima, 'Hisaichi No Fukkō', 5.

[54] These distinctions between "Fieldwork", "Discussion", and "Feedback" are suggested by Sasaki, *Eiga yo sayōnara*.

[55] Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (Verso Books, 2012), 2; quoted in Zhong Mengual, *L'art en commun*, 12.

[56] Kumakura and Nagatsu, *An Overview of Art Projects in Japan*, 29.

[57] Zhong Mengual, *L'art en commun*, 59–60.

[58] Nakashima, 'Hisaichi No Fukkō', 7–10.

[59] Before the film was made, Seo already orchestrated several reading sessions and discussions around the book in Tōkyō, Kōbe, Niigata and Hiroshima. Seo, *Awai yuku koro,* 342.

[60] Aya Motegi, 'Memory and Oblivion of Catastrophes: Landscapes in Contemporary Japanese Films', Conference 'Uncertain Landscapes': Representations and Practices of Space in the Age of the Anthropocene, Doctoral College of Strasbourg, 21 October 2022.

[61] Lefebvre, 'Between Setting and Landscape in the Cinema', 20–23.

[62] 'Introduction', in *Paysages inhumains* [Inhuman Landscapes], ed. Hélène Schmutz et al. (Presses de l'Université Savoie Mont Blanc, 2021), 7.

[63] Lefebvre, 'Between Setting and Landscape in the Cinema', 53.

[64] 'Haruka Komori in conversation with Lucie Rydzek'.

[65] Tarō Aoyama addresses this issue by coining the concept of "the middle voice in multiple gazes" (*fukume-teki chūdōtai*) in his general theory of "mediopassive" filmmaking. Tarō Aoyama, *Chūdōtai no eizōgaku: Higashi nihon daishinsai o kiroku suru sakkatachi no seiseihenka* [Science of Mediopassive Images: the Becoming of 3.11 Documentary Filmmakers], Horinouchi Shuppan (Hachiōji-shi, 2022), 349.

[66] 'Natsumi Seo in Conversation with Aya Motegi and Lucie Rydzek', 23 May 2025.

[67] Nakashima, 'Hisaichi No Fukkō', 5.

[68] Aoyama, *Chūdōtai no eizōgaku*, 170.

[69] Martini and Minca use these words to describe one of the positive aspects of tourism in disaster-stricken areas (especially in the case of cross-cultural interactions). Annaclaudia Martini and Claudio Minca, 'Affective Dark Tourism Encounters: Rikuzentakata after the 2011 Great East Japan Disaster', *Social & Cultural Geography* 22, no. 1 (2021): 17, https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2018.1550804.

[70] Irena Latek et al., eds., *In Situ-de Visu-in Motu: Architecture, Cinema and the Technological Arts* (Infolio, 2014), 15–16.

[71] Kumakura and Nagatsu, *An Overview of Art Projects in Japan*, 33.

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