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The Labour of Creativity: Meaning in life and work among young Japanese artists

Graduate School of Human Sciences, Osaka University

Host Professor: Professor Scott North

The project conducted with the support of the JSPS Postdoctoral Fellowship comprises an ethnographic study of a group of young artists in Osaka, focusing on their ideas of good life and meaningful work. The research dealt with issues of motivation, creativity and uncertainty in everyday life, with specific attention paid to issues of age and life-course.

The group in question is a network of young people, mostly in their twenties and thirties, engaged in a variety of contemporary art projects and creative activities ranging from contemporary dance and music performances, multimedia installations to painting and sculpture. The research was conducted through participant observation of artists during their daily routines, attendance of contemporary art events followed by in-depth interviews with selected participants. It was supplemented by semi-structured interviews with other people belonging to the same social circle of event attendees and organizers, including art producers, event organizers and art promoters, as well as some gallerists. In other words, this project traces a section of an *Osakan art world*, which is not necessarily a clearly bounded unit or an organization, but rather consists of 'all the people whose activities are necessary to the production of the characteristic works which that world, and perhaps others as well, define as art.' (Becker 2008 [1982]:34).

During the course of the fellowship I presented my work on community networks of support at Osaka University as a part of the Kansai Modern Japan Research Group. I co-organized an academic workshop on the topic of hope in contemporary Japan with my Host Professor, Professor Scott North. This workshop, entitled 'Ethnographies of Hope in Contemporary Japan', was held on October 19, 2013 at the Graduate School of Human Sciences, University of Osaka (for further details, including the presentation abstracts and programme please see the website: ethnographiesofhope.wix.com/workshop).

My experience of working at the Graduate School of Human Sciences was overwhelmingly positive. Whilst most of my time was taken up by fieldwork and writing, which is a rather solitary activity, I received ample support and advice in this process from my Host with whom I had many intellectually stimulating and inspiring conversations. Overall, I enjoyed and am grateful for the combination of academic freedom and support so important at the fieldwork stage of ethnographic research.

