

# Relational Creativity

## A Manga Project Report

In this manga<sup>1</sup> we'll introduce the work of our research network from the AHRC-funded project 'Groups, Clubs, and Scenes: Informal Creative Practices in Japan'

**Jennifer Coates**  
Network PI & Professor of Japanese Studies  
The University of Sheffield, UK

**Joan**  
Jen's pet dog  
Affectionate yet demanding  
Likes cheese and ice cream

1

### 01 About 'Relational Creativity'

September 2021

The research network brought together academics from around the world who study relational creative practices in **Japan** and **East Asia**.

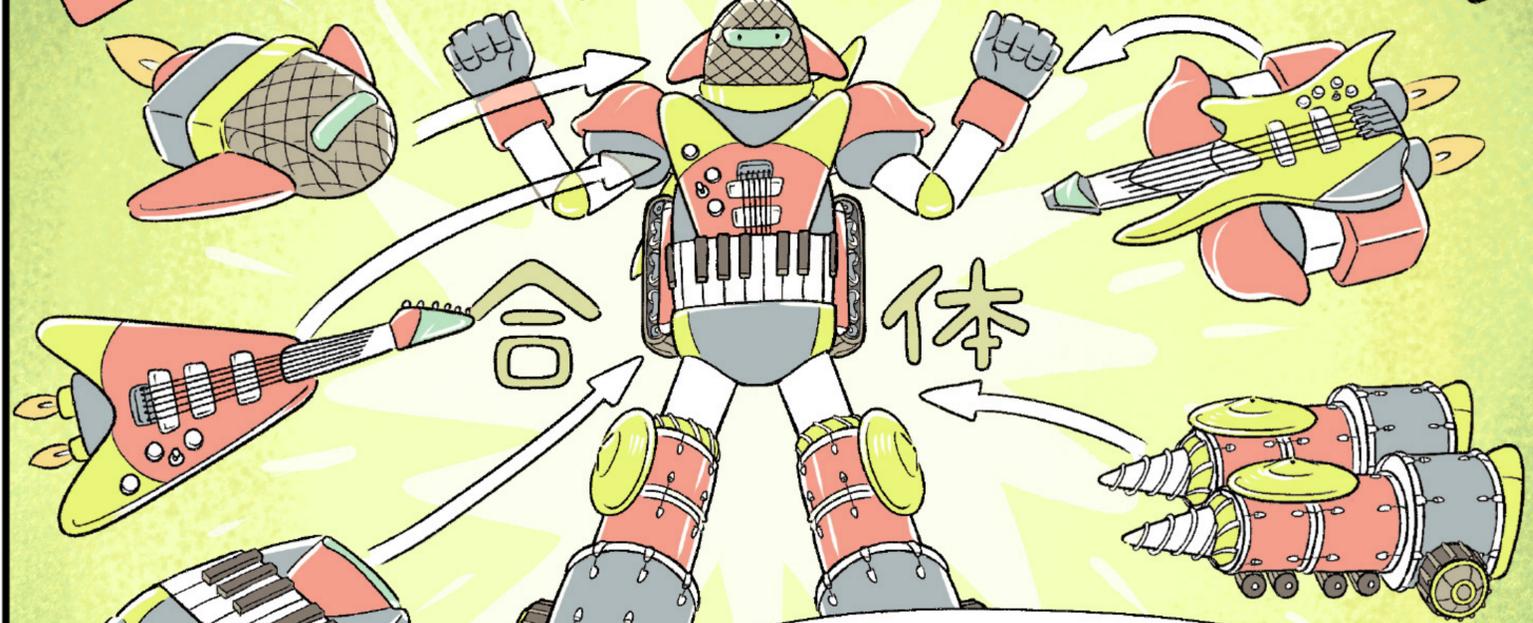
What do you mean by 'relational creativity'?

Welcome!

2

# Relational Creativity

イレーショナル・クリエイティビティ (関係性の創造性)



It's a form of creativity that emerges through **relationships** with, and/or alongside the practices of, other people pursuing artistic projects.

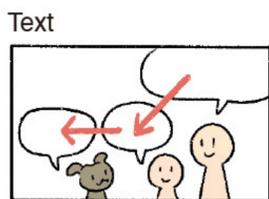
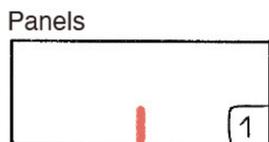
In other words, the term posits creativity as something that is inherently shaped by **collaboration** and **interaction** with others<sup>2</sup>.

I see!

3

#### 1 Manga Reading Order

Read the panels from top to bottom according to the numbers in the bottom-right corner. The text within each panel should be read from top to bottom and from right to left.



<sup>2</sup> This draws on an understanding of creativity as 'collaborative and social' (Leach & Steven 2020: 95) and highlights the importance of understanding creative processes as something driven by collaboration, interpersonal improvisation, and social networks. For more info, see Littleton & Miell 2004; Ingold & Hallam 2007; Cattani et al. 2013.

Actually, this manga is the product of an *exercise in relational creativity!*



January 2023  
Somewhere in Tokyo

The idea for a manga report was born in a conversation with Chris, the network's Administrative Research Assistant.

Sounds interesting!  
Let's try that.

How about turning the report into a **manga** of sorts? It would be in line with the focus on creativity...

**Christoph Schimkowsky**  
Postdoctoral Research Fellow  
The University of Tokyo

4

3

Colloquial Japanese term for northern shrimps which literally translates to 'sweet prawn' (ama-ebi). Northern shrimps have a sweet taste when eaten raw, hence the name. They are often eaten as sashimi or sushi.

**Amaebi**

Mostly does illustration work but also works as a manga artist sometimes

Sure thing!

Chris asked the Japanese illustrator Amaebi<sup>3</sup> for help.

We'd like to turn the report into a kind of manga, can you help us with that?

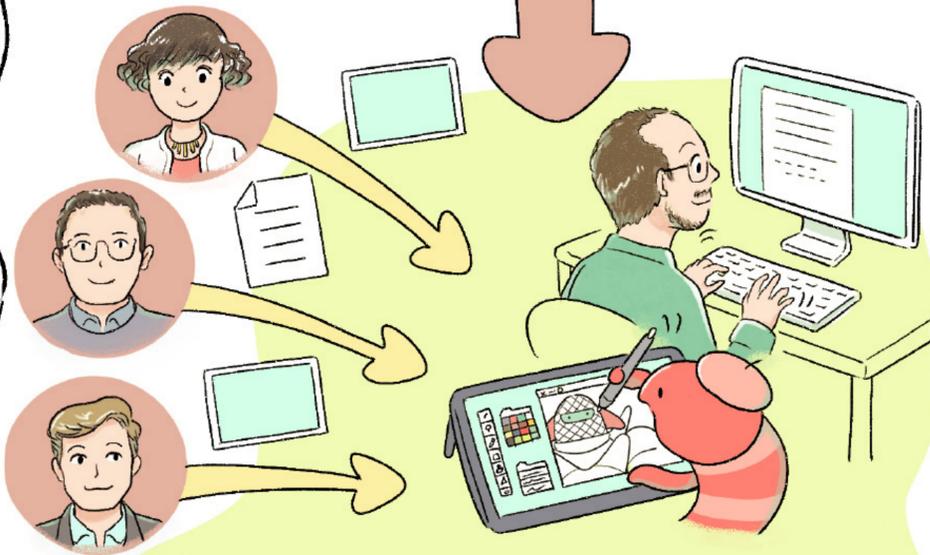
5



The document evolved in conversations between Chris and Amaebi

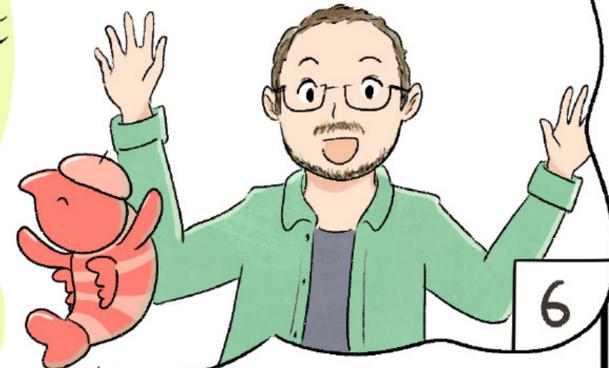


Chris wrote a draft of the script and discussed it with Jen



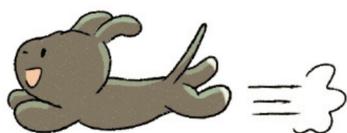
Amaebi and Chris turned the draft into a manga while consulting Jen and drawing on photographs provided by network members for the artwork.

As you can see, we all worked together to create this manga.



6

Accordingly, making the manga was an *inherently relational* activity!



I'm getting ahead of myself!  
Let us first look at the origins of the network.



7



## 02 The Story of the Research Network

4



October 2018  
Sainsbury Institute for the Study of Japanese Arts and Cultures (SISJAC)<sup>4</sup>

The *idea* for a project on relational creativity emerged at a workshop in Norwich.

8

5

Rather than supporting original research, this funding programme is designed to bring together teams of people who have already studied a related topic, and allow them to think about new directions for their work together.

Granted funding under the AHRC Research Networking Scheme<sup>5</sup>

December 2019

Applying for funds from UKRI

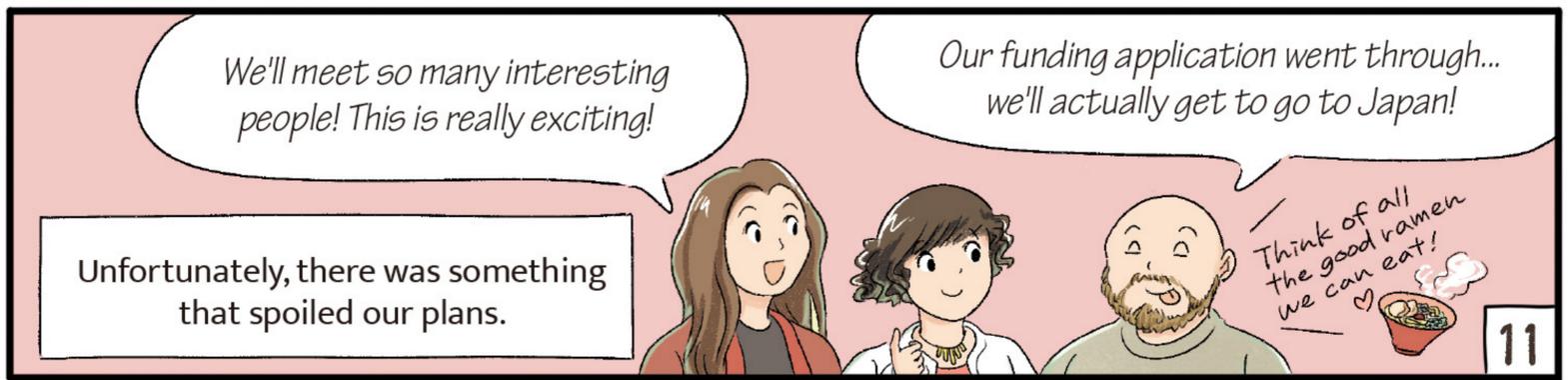
おねがい  
しまーす

9

The network planned to organise a study trip to Japan, during which network members would introduce each other to **fieldsites** they have previously worked in.

We chose Japan because daily life in the country is notable for its high number of activities conducted in **organised groups**. There are many groups dedicated to arts at schools, universities, and other institutions which **bring creative people together**.

10



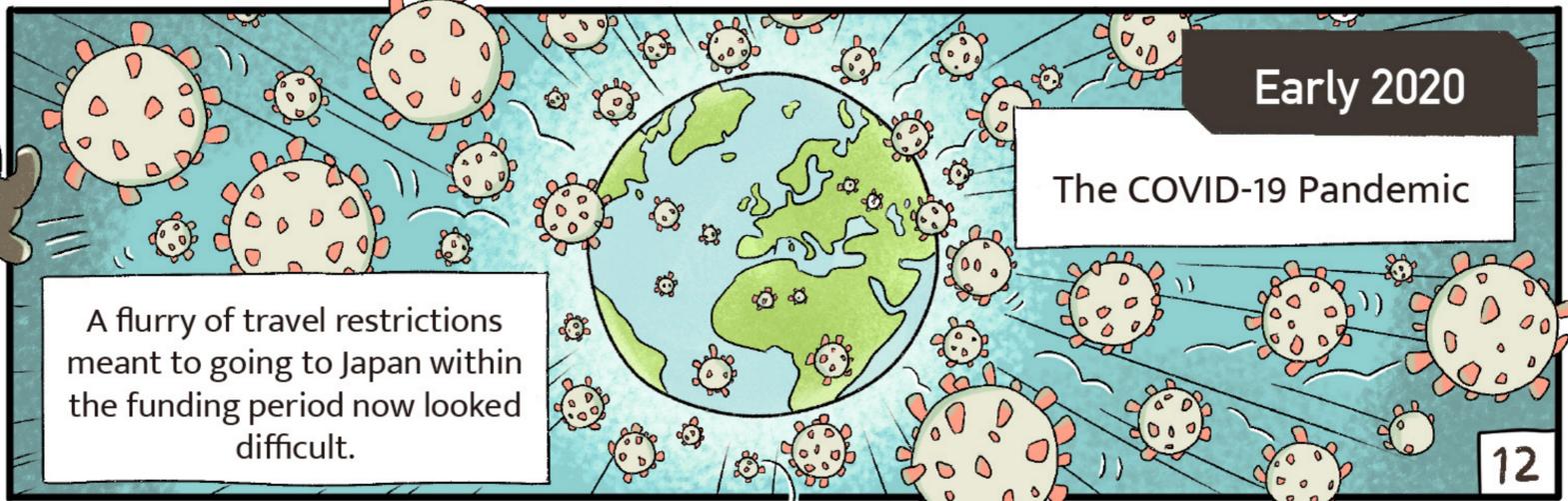
We'll meet so many interesting people! This is really exciting!

Unfortunately, there was something that spoiled our plans.

Our funding application went through... we'll actually get to go to Japan!

Think of all the good ramen we can eat!

11

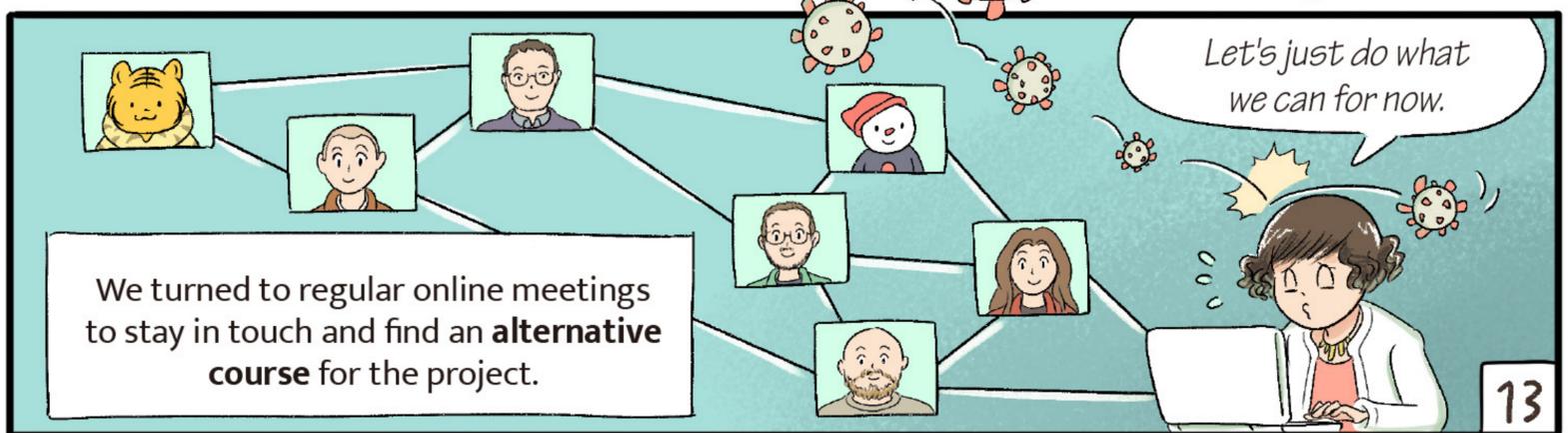


Early 2020

The COVID-19 Pandemic

A flurry of travel restrictions meant to going to Japan within the funding period now looked difficult.

12



Let's just do what we can for now.

We turned to regular online meetings to stay in touch and find an **alternative course** for the project.

13

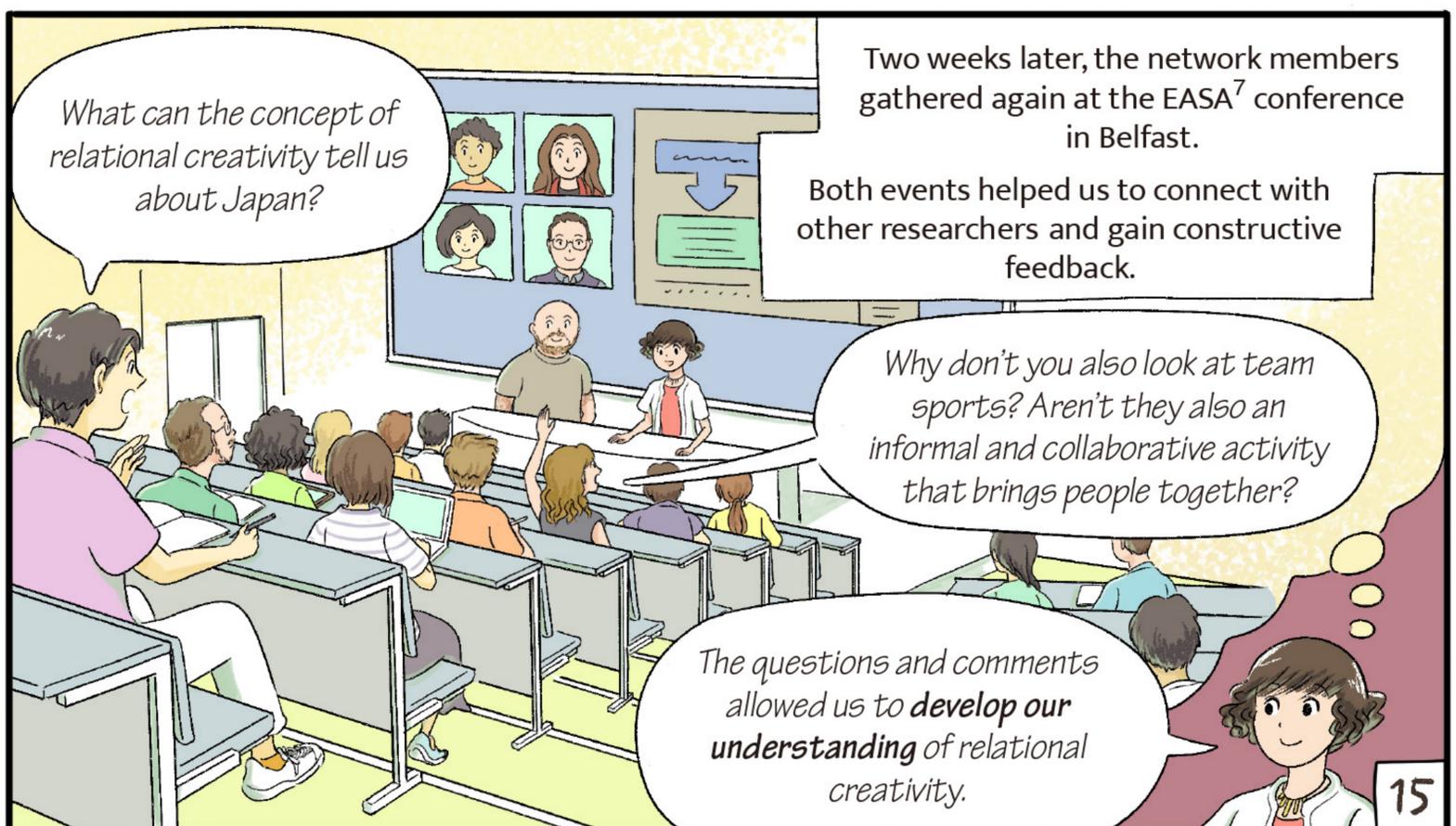


July 2022  
About two years later

When COVID-19 restrictions were relaxed in Europe, network members finally met in person at the JAWS<sup>6</sup> conference in Barcelona.

14

6  
JAWS: Japan Anthropology Workshop



What can the concept of relational creativity tell us about Japan?

Two weeks later, the network members gathered again at the EASA<sup>7</sup> conference in Belfast.

Both events helped us to connect with other researchers and gain constructive feedback.

Why don't you also look at team sports? Aren't they also an informal and collaborative activity that brings people together?

The questions and comments allowed us to **develop our understanding** of relational creativity.

15

7  
EASA: European Association of Social Anthropologists

8  
The funding period lasted from September 2021 to March 2023. The grant was originally awarded in August 2020 but the start of the funding period postponed because of COVID-19.

**August 2022**

We've postponed our Japan plans several times but it might be impossible to go during the funding period<sup>8</sup>...

But while COVID restrictions in Europe were gradually lifted, Japan's immigration and visa regulations remained strict.

It's a shame but we might have to change our plans.

16



**10th-12th February 2023**

Jen and Jamie planned a large two-day **workshop** in Sheffield City Hall<sup>9</sup>

Let's hold a closing event in Sheffield instead!

which was designed to bring together core network members and the new contacts made over the course of the funding period.

Sounds good!

17

10  
For more on the idea of an 'unconference', see Misha Glouberman and Sheila Heti's 'The Chairs Are Where the People Go'

The workshop took the form of a participant-led 'unconference'<sup>10</sup>. Instead of presenting papers, participants responded to writing prompts shared by the organisers beforehand.

Participants' responses were circulated before the event, and provided a starting point for networking, discussion, and identifying collaboration possibilities.

18



One of the main goals of the event was to set up **working groups** which will be in charge of different publishing projects that will form the network's **research output**.

Central to these outputs is an online **toolkit** which is designed to help researchers interested in creative practices to think about how to conduct their research and present their findings in accessible ways.

19

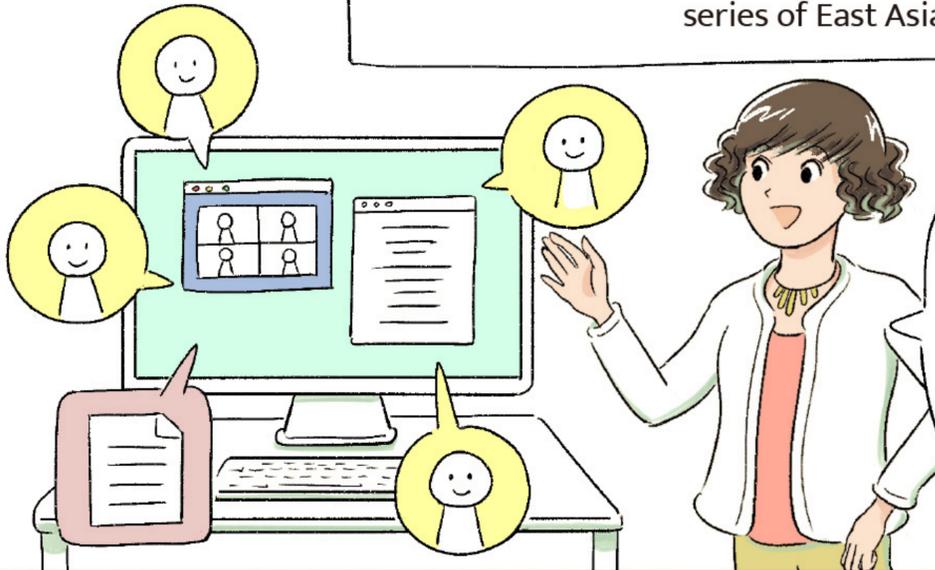
Me too, but look at all the progress we made at the workshop!

I'm still disappointed we couldn't go to Japan in the end...

### Projects advanced at the workshop

#### Jen

Jen will guest edit a special issue which brings together network members who will apply the concept of 'relational creativity' to a series of East Asian case studies.



The Special Issue will help us better understand how groupbased creative practices are employed to satisfy the varying desires and goals of creative groups and their members.

#### Jamie et al.

Jamie, Iza and Christian are planning a special issue which will engage with the idea of 'relational creativity' from an anthropological, bottom-up perspective.



The issue will focus on agencies, relationships, and human/non-human configurations.

#### Iza and Rob

Iza and Rob will host a new season of the anthropology of art podcast Artery.

Also check out the first season!

We'll collaborate with researchers we recruited at the workshop to produce a new season that'll focus exclusively on Japanese artists.



These projects will highlight some of the key insights facilitated by the network's activities. For example...

Creative work is rarely the product of a single individual.

The creative potential of individual artists...

...is amplified in an ensemble performance.

Yeah

Right

As mentioned in the beginning, this manga is the result of the **collaboration** of several people.

24

The creative collaboration has helped strengthen our friendship!

Another finding was that creative collaboration can establish **strong bonds** between people.

25

### 03 The Future of the Network



...while the network helped us map similar instances of people coming together to create across East Asia, we still don't know how the concept can help us to understand creative practice elsewhere in the world.

East Asia

Even a clear definition of the term 'relational creativity' remains elusive, as creativity means different things to different people.

However, there are also still many unanswered questions. For instance...

26



In other words, more work remains to be done.

*So please get in touch if you want to help us tackle these open questions or are interested in exploring collaboration opportunities.*

## Relational Creativity A Manga Project Report

リレーショナル・クリエイティビティ／関係(性)の創造性 漫画報告書

AHRC Research Network  
Groups, Clubs, and Scenes: Informal Creative Practices in Japan  
Grant number: AH/V00090X/1

Principle Investigators : Jennifer Coates and Iza Kavedija  
Art: Amaebi  
Concept and Script: Christoph Schimkowsky

### Contact Details

Jennifer Coates:  
jennifer.coates@sheffield.ac.uk  
relational.creativities@gmail.com

Amaebi:  
sitesue.net

Christoph Schimkowsky:  
ch.schimk@gmail.com

