



# Anthropology & Aging

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## Longing Glances

Photographs from the series "Far From Home"

Bes Young

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### Artist bio:

Bes Young holds a BA from Amherst College and an M.F.A. in Photography from the Belfast School of Art. While still a freshman at Amherst, Young took an advanced seminar in "Psychology of Aging," a course that would propel her to turn her camera towards the lives of older adults. She won a 2010 100 Projects for Peace grant to photograph senior homes in Turkey and the United States, and in 2011, she traveled to Japan with the support of a [Henry Luce Scholarship](#). In 2013, Young was the recipient of the [Oxfam Photography Prize for Women for her photographic work in Sri Lanka](#). She continues to explore memory, identity, narrative, culture and aging in her photography, more of which can be viewed at her website:

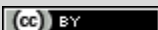
<http://www.besyoungphotography.com/index/>

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Photographs from the series "Far From Home"

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The shift from institution to home-like environment for dementia care is often cast as a shift away from the marks of an institution: surveillance, power, and control, with the model's success measured in decreased BPSD's, which are behavioral and psychological symptoms of dementia such as aggression and agitation. In my position as a Henry Luce Scholar at Kwansei Gakuin University from 2011-2012, I photographed group homes for dementia care throughout Japan with an interest in exploring the tension between institutional control and these new home-like designs. I found the home-like environment to be not necessarily a shift away but rather a re-imagining of the ways in which the body can be regulated and controlled via the environment, decreasing feelings of visibility which can lead to BPSD's and providing flexibility for new and individualized approaches to governmentality.

Group homes are small home-like environments for residential dementia care which house anywhere from eight to fifteen residents. In Japan, these homes are designed to house nine residents at a time. Although some buildings may house more than one group home unit, each unit of nine residents is designed to feel like its own complete entity where continuity is maintained by a small, consistent group of staff. This portfolio is drawn from my stay with Pokka Pokka no Ie, a group home for dementia care in Kanegasaki, Japan. Pokka Pokka is onomatopoeia in Japanese meaning warmth, often used for "warmth of heart." The name Pokka Pokka no Ie implies something along the lines of "warm home." Although a mixed-gender facility, at the time of my visit the group home was at full capacity with an entirely female population.

Each resident in Pokka Pokka no Ie has an individual bedroom. These bedrooms contain personal items, either curated by family members or the resident herself. Not all residents enjoy these solitary bedrooms, however. In the past, the staff of Pokka Pokka no Ie had difficulty with one resident nearly every night. Her single bedroom was at the end of one of the two long hallways connected to the central living space. This resident refused to go to sleep and often made loud noises from her bed or got up to wander in the night. Eventually, the staff decided that she was lonely, or potentially scared, sleeping by herself in this private bedroom. Since then, they have encouraged her to sleep on a traditional Japanese futon in a semi-private, elevated living space attached to the kitchen and dining area. The variety of private, public, and semi-private spaces in group homes provides flexibility to the staff for effective management of behavioral symptoms.

Pokka Pokka no Ie is also designed in such a way to include many large windows looking out onto the group home's garden areas and local paddy fields. Large windows also line one wall of each hallway, which lead to the residents' bedrooms. The natural light decreases the need for harsh, institutional lighting, and the views provide a point of interest for residents – watching wildlife or looking at the plants outside. One such window looks out onto the front garden and serves another purpose as well. M. San grows strawberries and other small plants in the front garden. She is able to go outside and tend to the garden while a staff member can watch through this large window from inside. The outside garden is visible for a member of staff working in the combined kitchen and dining area space. While I was at Pokka Pokka no Ie, M. San asked me to join her in picking strawberries. She was unprompted by staff to do so and did not need to ask permission. She simply invited me to join her, and we went outside into the unfenced garden. The unobtrusive form of surveillance the large front window provides allowed M. San a sense of independence while still allowing the staff to monitor her whereabouts.

The design of Pokka Pokka no Ie, however, is not entirely conducive to this form of unobtrusive surveillance. Part of the move towards a more home-like care environment is the removal of the nurse's station or staff desk from a position of surveillance or, in some instances, a removal of the desk altogether (in which case, staff are encouraged to complete paperwork while seated with the residents rather than behind a desk). Pokka Pokka no Ie still has a staff desk, but it is located off to the side of the main kitchen and dining room area. This way the desk can remain as unobtrusive to the home-environment as possible. This comes at a cost, however.

When I asked Hareko-san, the manager of Pokka Pokka no Ie, if there were anything she would change about the design of Pokka Pokka no Ie, she explained that the location of the staff desk was such that the route to one exit door was not visible from it. This makes monitoring the residents very difficult, particularly during the night when only one staff member is on duty. Since they have a policy of leaving doors unlocked (both a fire safety issue and a therapeutic decision to create a less restrictive environment), this out-of-view door provides a potential safety concern. A resident could slip outside unnoticed by staff. This is an example of where the effort to create a more home-like environment comes in direct conflict with surveillance needs. Pokka Pokka no Ie has solved this problem by installing a motion detector near this door. The detector beeps when someone walks nearby. Modern technology is assisting in regulating dementia care residents in less obtrusive ways. This also serves as a lesson, however, that an objective of the home-like environment is still governmentality. Each beep is a reminder that this is not actually home.

Beds in Pokka Pokka no Ie still have safety railings on them. Many rooms contain commode chairs. There is a sterile nature to even the most decorated of rooms. Despite attempts to make the facility more home-like, a group home still must regulate residents, ensure safety, and provide care through means of surveillance and design. The effects of these new forms of governmentality are present, embodied in longing glances and wistful statements, even if BPSD scales no longer fully apply for their measurement. These photos attempt to make visible new tensions that must be considered in the evaluation of dementia care environments.

One afternoon, a resident of Pokka Pokka no Ie saw a leaf decorating the dining table and it reminded her of a fan she had in her room. A staff member went to retrieve it and the next half hour was spent by the staff and other residents in the kitchen and dining area appreciating and discussing the fan - holding it up to the light, asking how it was made, commenting on its beauty.

The staff of Pokka Pokka no Ie saw everything, even an offhand comment, as an opportunity for making the day a little more special.

My time spent in Pokka Pokka no Ie indicated that the success of a home-like living environment lay not in the design alone, but in the staff's engagement with the design and willingness to help residents to do the same. But when I asked Hareko-san the most difficult part of her job as manager of Pokka Pokka no Ie her face immediately saddened, and she said, "All they want is to go home." Thus, even with home-like considerations made in the design of care homes, the desire to 'go home' still persists in those with dementia.

*A resident sits in Pokka Pokka no Ie's combined kitchen and living area*



*The door that cannot be seen from the staff desk*





*M. San looking out of a large window onto a garden area*