

**Late Japanese New Wave Documentary and Cinematic Truth:  
Charting the Theory and Method of “Graphic Sensitivity” Towards  
Cultural Otherness**

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*Simply:*

*the FACTORY OF FACTS.*

*Filming facts. Sorting facts. Disseminating facts.  
Agitating with facts.*

*Propaganda with facts. Fists made of facts.*

*Lightning bolts of facts!*

– Dziga Vertov, *The Factory of Facts*<sup>1</sup>

Japanese New Wave cinema is characterised by an exploration of the marginalised and outsiders, including peasants, juvenile delinquents and factory workers. Through politically charged philosophical and artistic inquiry, it provides a fascinating insight into alternative possibilities of subjectivity and cinematic truth, and offers a theory for representing the subaltern through a “graphic sensitivity” towards otherness.<sup>2</sup> Against the backdrop of political and social change in a Japan ravaged by war, and alongside a strong and exceptionally creative mainstream film industry,

filmmakers including Hani Susumu, Imamura Shohei, Ogawa Shinsuke, and Oshima Nagisa<sup>3</sup> challenged the boundaries of conventional filmmaking by undertaking an ontological and epistemological interrogation of representation from the 1950s through to the early 1980s.<sup>4</sup>

The Japanese New Wave, or *nūberu bāgu* (ヌーベルバーグ, the Japanese pronunciation of the French *nouvelle vague*) was a period of exceptional creativity, usually understood as having taken place roughly between the 1950s and the early 1970s when, according to scholar of Japanese New Wave film Abé Mark Nornes, “something happened” in both cinema and wider society.<sup>5</sup> Emerging out of Japan’s robust domestic film industry after World War II, when a diverse avant-garde pursued cultural inquiry in radical directions,<sup>6</sup> the New Wave responded to social and cultural change. Although it should be noted that the Japanese movement occurred concurrently as a separate phenomenon to the French New Wave, these filmmakers were primarily concerned with understanding and documenting social and cultural changes in those communities and groups marginalised or oppressed by dominant power structures, and sought to bring them into a shared space, unique both in its production and methods of distribution.<sup>7</sup> Japanese New Wave cinema constituted, to follow Vertov, a “factory of facts,” clamouring to “undress a flirtatious bourgeoisie and a bloated bourgeois, and in returning food and objects to the workers and peasants who’ve made them ... [giving] millions of labourers the opportunity to see the truth and to question the need to dress and feed a caste of parasites.”<sup>8</sup>

I will argue here that the shared space that these films were able to support represents the emergence of a particular kind of (national) “imagined community” away from what Benedict Anderson calls the totalising official discourse or “grammar of power.”<sup>9</sup> Rather, it is one that fostered a way to unite the marginalised around a common creative bond which incorporated subjectivity through sensitivity towards difference. These are stories otherwise neglected in Japanese cultural expression, drawing not only on new forms of political expression, but also on aesthetic form in filmmaking, including graphic violence and frank portrayals of sexual encounters, and engaged the *vérité* styles of filmmaking discussed in this article. It follows that the documentary films made during this period raise critical questions about subjectivity, the reflexivity of the filmmaker, and cultural representation. In doing so they present us with new models of portraying cultural otherness, critiquing modernity and the expansion of capital in visual culture, responding to their subjects’ desires to commemorate past wrongs and shared traumas. Nornes argues that in comparison with Ogawa and his collective, Ogawa Pro[duction]’s<sup>10</sup>

remarkable political documentaries, which will be the focus of this article, Jean Rouch's self-confessed role as the *provocateur* is almost condescending: Ogawa's films' "graphic sensitivity to cultural otherness [have] few precedents."<sup>11</sup> In Ogawa's films the camera seems to become another subject of the film, much in the style of Vertov's kino-eye, bearing an "unmediated relationship to the reality of the pro-filmic event."<sup>12</sup> Nornes explains that this is due to the Japanese treatment of subjectivity (*shutaisei*) which emerged as a theoretical strand first elaborated by filmmaker Matsumoto Toshio in the 1950s, marking a clear departure from wartime filmmaking, rebuked for its filmmakers' collaboration with the War effort, "quickly and hysterically, in the manner of a fast-spreading disease among children, engaged in a biased practice that subordinated art to politics."<sup>13</sup> I argue first that the emergence of particular notions of subjectivity in this context yield a new field of exploration for the treatment of truth and representation in the field of visual anthropology, and, second, that these notions of subjectivity came to reflect a shared space outside of official discourse or the national imagination by the end of the New Wave period of filmmaking.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, as David MacDougall writes in *Transcultural Cinema*:

The search for the subjective voice in ethnographic film often reflects, perhaps surprisingly, a repudiation of Western ideologies that celebrate the isolated individual consciousness as the only locus of understanding in a hostile but unquestioned social order. In many of the films I have discussed it is instead the means toward a more complex understanding of a cultural consciousness that consists of discourses between different subjectivities.<sup>15</sup>

In this essay I will analyse cultural and social change through the late, and post, New Wave of Japanese cinema (1972 to 1982), contemplating both aesthetic form and critical engagement with politics, by considering two films by the documentary filmmaker Ogawa: *Peasants of the Second Fortress* (1972)<sup>16</sup> and *A Japanese Village* (1982).<sup>17</sup> Though *A Japanese Village*, filmed over twelve months in 1982, falls outside of what is generally considered to be the timeframe of the Japanese New Wave, I argue that including it into the frame of analysis provides a way to chart the emergence of a combination of a unique aesthetic style and theoretical approach to subjectivity alongside wider Japanese and international political currents (particularly as they relate to artistic movements). As Nornes argues, there is a definite shift in Japanese documentary filmmaking as it emerged after the War, beginning with the theoretical shift towards *shutai/shutaisei*, translated as subject/subjectivity. However, as

Nornes points out, this direct translation must be treated with caution.<sup>18</sup> Japanese documentary filmmaking based on a strong affinity with its subject and subjectivity was embraced by the Left very early on as a way to “produce lightning bolts of truth,”<sup>19</sup> and to carve out a shared space quite outside of the official “imagined community” which, for the subjects concerned, represented exploitation and inequality; a feeling also adopted by filmmakers in their representation, lending itself to reflexivity—the filmmaker and their camera playing a self-aware role, in the style of Vertov’s kino-eye. According to a controversial article by Matsumoto Toshio from 1957, the Left’s desire to destroy the power of the filmmaker over the filmed subject came in part from a criticism of wartime documentary-makers’ slavish representations of truth, as it was directed by power without concern for their subjects.<sup>20</sup> The criticism of the manipulation of ideology based on official national discourses foreshadows the emergence of the countermovement: the establishment of a shared space through the distribution of films preoccupied with documenting the lives of those relegated to the margins, dealing at once with the historical memory of exploitation and ensuing social and cultural change.

The genealogical roots of Ogawa’s 1982 film, *A Japanese Village*, lie in the response to social and cultural change characterised by the Japanese New Wave. He and his group relocated to a farmhouse in Kaminoyama, Yamagata, near the location of the village which is the subject of *A Japanese Village* in 1974, providing an indelible connection with the filmmaking of the previous decades, despite the geographical shift. The movement to such a remote location away from centres of leftist revolutionary activity and the deep desire to deal with their subjects patiently and scientifically are posited by film critic Ueno Koshi to be connected to the “miserable dead end to which the era of struggle had sunk,”<sup>21</sup> following the bloody end to the Red Army siege in 1972. Adachi Masao also described it as a dark point in the formulation of revolutionary struggle and related cultural expression in Japan.<sup>22</sup> The Ogawa film collective’s relocation and subsequent documenting of the lives of farmers’ histories and cultures in northern Japan established a way to portray the struggle to establish a good life in difficult surroundings. This connection, combined with the aims and aesthetic sensibilities of the earlier New Wave films, warrants an expansion of the parameters of the period to include this comprehensive, yet poetic, meditation on social and cultural change experienced by rural communities.

Writing in 2002 about the Yamagata International Film Festival, Nornes accepts a certain periodisation of documentary film by Japanese filmmakers and film critics between the 1960s and early 1970s, and notes a

general decline in both quantity and quality after this period, demarcated by a certain attitude towards subjectivity and preoccupation with politics lacking in contemporary film.<sup>23</sup> However, the period when “something happened”<sup>24</sup> did not dissipate altogether after 1975; rather, I argue that its theoretical and aesthetic properties continued into the early 1980s and as far as 2000 when Ogawa’s final film, *Red Persimmons*,<sup>25</sup> filmed in the 1980s, was finally released.<sup>26</sup> After a discussion of Japanese New Wave documentary makers’ attitude towards subjectivity from a comparative perspective, against the films and theoretical positions of visual anthropologists and filmmakers Rouch and David MacDougall, I will seek to understand the methods of subjectivity of Japanese New Wave filmmakers in the context of their political activism through a critique of Ogawa’s *Peasants of the Second Fortress*. In the third section I will trace the changes in aesthetic and political responses by the New Wave in one of its last incarnations through an analysis of Ogawa’s film, *A Japanese Village*. I do so by viewing the films within their historical contexts and as a part of social and economic changes underway, seeking to understand the experiences of the villagers and how they situated themselves against these transformative events. In particular, I will discuss a number of primary historical materials—letters to the editor of the major daily newspaper, *Asahi Shinbun*—to understand the complex and troubled relationship that many of Ogawa’s film subjects had with the War and its role in imagining the Japanese nation. In doing so, I prompt further contemplation on the production of shared spaces by way of film for remembering traumatic experiences and voicing political concerns. Connecting the politically volatile experiences of post-War Japanese peasants’ battles with the Narita Airport authorities and the government in 1972 to a brief comparison with the fascinating radical filmmaker Adachi Masao, and finishing with the fragile and liminal experiences of Yamagata villagers in 1982 through an analysis of Ogawa’s *A Japanese Village*, I seek to present a way to understand the changing political climate through artistic expression. I adopt a comparative perspective on the Japanese New Wave in order to do so—looking across historical periods of film in Japan and at examples of ethnographic film by Jean Rouch at the same time in France—this article therefore offers new ways to understand how filmmakers and artists responded to their times, and in doing so contributed to the construction of non-official shared spaces within Japanese society. Following from this, I look at ways in which these shared spaces acted as a framework for filmmakers and film subjects alike to situate social and political struggle. My conclusions also suggest that radical politics within the Japanese national imagination itself changed form over the course of the ten year period

discussed, resulting in certain currents within filmic and political expression.

One way to understand these changing currents is to examine the methods of distribution and style of filmmaking, from the depiction of violence and action through poorly illuminated shaky footage presenting itself as raw and unedited, distributed via political channels to communities throughout the country, to the polished feature-length documentary films released from 1982 onwards, distributed on mainstream television channels and through the international documentary film festival circuit. The textual and historical framework through which these filmmakers were able to establish their approach is of critical importance for an understanding of their approaches to the representation of the subaltern on screen. Ogawa not only responded to his times, but to the politics and cultures of the film subjects on screen in a reflexive method stemming from the theoretical framework offered by *shutaisei* (subjectivity), where the delicate relationship between film subject, filmmaker and the camera itself creates a common space for communities otherwise excluded from cultural production. While they share common stylistic and theoretical aspirations with European New Wave-filmmaking, including mutual interests in Dziga Vertov's kino-eye and similar approaches to those of Jean Rouch—particularly *cinéma vérité* and shared anthropology—these films represent a unique style of modernist filmmaking particular to its historical and cultural circumstances.<sup>27</sup>

Japanese counter-cultural expressions were not limited to non-fiction filmmaking during this period, when experimental literary and other cultural forms delved into the experiences of the marginalised. For example, Nakagami Kenji's *The Cape* (1975) is a novella of interlocking stories about *buraku*<sup>28</sup> communities living on the fringe of a rapidly changing Japanese society in the 1960s, which presents us with a literary depiction of the experiences of a marginalised group in the same period.<sup>29</sup> The aesthetic features of Nakagami's novella—an irregular narrative structure, dream sequences, graphic violence and a frank portrayal of sexual experience—are similar to the techniques of filmmakers of the same era, and thus the text provides an interesting reference point to understand the creation of a shared space for the subaltern, and further contemplates a graphic sensitivity to cultural otherness, which I argue establishes the grounds for new ways of understanding and documenting social and cultural change.

Adachi, on the other hand, is a radical filmmaker who presents a fascinating point of departure from the work of Ogawa, though their work is connected by their shared use of the style of guerrilla filmmaking. Adachi has expressed praise for Ogawa's work, going so far as to include footage from the *Sanrizuka* film series in his *Red Army/PFLP* (1971) film alongside

footage of guerrillas and radical armed Japanese revolutionary movements, “to propose the landscape as a space that could illuminate the contrasts between these three separate layers.”<sup>30</sup> Despite his connections to Ogawa, Adachi differed in his radicalism and total rejection of the political status quo by engaging in revolutionary activities through filmmaking in the 1970s. He was arrested and then banned by the Japanese government from leaving the country as a result of his association with the Red Army during time spent in Lebanon.<sup>31</sup> His story provides the necessary context to understand the broad creative and philosophical endeavour bound by political will, which characterises this movement’s approach to filmic truth. By extending the boundaries to documentary film traditions of non-Western societies engaged in an exploration of the contours of psychological and philosophical realities within their own cultures—whether political or social—it might be possible to uncover a greater understanding of the role between subject, filmmaker and audience and the possibility of a new approach to sharing underrepresented histories in visual culture. By using personal experience and creativity in the domains of politics and truth, Japanese New Wave cinema allows for a contract between filmed subject and audience and a desire to represent them on their terms, the generosity of its empathy a *sui generis* approach to difference on screen.

Rouch is credited with revolutionising the representation of cultures on film through *cinéma vérité* and observational cinema marked by “a movement from public to private, from the general to the particular and the typical to the unique.”<sup>32</sup> Indeed, Rouch often fused a political position with philosophical investigations of the subjectivity of the filmmaker and film subject to create deeply moving and insightful ethnographic films, such as the documentary *Chronique d’un été*<sup>33</sup> (1960) and the ethno-fictional *Jaguar* (1955).<sup>34</sup> But despite Rouch’s evident concern with the postcolonial situation of the subjects of his films, his is clearly the dominant voice in them. Despite this, his ability to shock Western audiences with images of the deep psychological scars caused by colonialism through his use of Antonin Artaud’s “theatre of cruelty” and the revelation of the role of the filmmaker’s subjectivity are immensely important developments in the progression of transcultural and ethnographic cinema.<sup>35</sup>

Japanese New Wave film, which also emerged in the 1950s and 60s, was born out of social and cultural change in the wake of World War II, particularly the mass mobilisation and leftist movements which came after the signing of the Mutual Security Treaty with the United States, which came to represent Japan’s willingness to embrace the neo-colonialism of the postcolonial period.<sup>36</sup> Particularly threatened by this move were the subaltern peasants, farmers, *buraku* and fishermen. This was not merely a

domestic or isolated political event. It was part of a political epoch which saw the world in flux, where the decolonisation process of the postcolonial period saw a renewed interest by the United States in building up its security forces and access to resources as part of the Vietnam War and the Cold War.<sup>37</sup> In this context, the Japanese student movement, which culminated in the widespread protests and university occupations of 1968, was crucial to the development of the political and creative consciousness of the New Wave filmmakers.<sup>38</sup> Ogawa and other New Wave filmmakers emerged as part of an active avant-garde, looking for ways to disseminate their message by infusing their creativity with political ideals. As Harry Harootunian and Sabu Kohso note:

In Japan, a vibrant avant-garde was already formed among artists, filmmakers, writers, dramatists, dancers that looked increasingly to the everyday as the site for cultural production and political practice, as in fact the place of their reunion.<sup>39</sup>

This is reminiscent of the films of Jean Rouch and other *cinéma-vérité* filmmakers, who were preoccupied with bringing to the screen the experiences of the lower classes and those whose lives were particularly vulnerable to being rendered invisible altogether by mainstream film studios. By firmly placing those marginalised or at the edges of a rapidly changing society in the context of modernity in the centre of the screen—as in the *cinéma vérité* film *Chronique d'un été*—there existed a palpable and very visible existential critique of power and its agents. This was also the case for Japanese non-fiction filmmakers such as Ogawa and Hani Susumu. An understanding of and political solidarity with the subaltern subject was the *raison d'être* of Ogawa and other filmmakers during this period.<sup>40</sup> With a shared political ideology that formed during the 1960s, the networks of Japanese filmmakers and artists established in Tokyo reflected on Ogawa's self-reflexive filmmaking, as filmmakers came together both pre and post production to discuss their film subjects and associated theoretical and methodological approaches.<sup>41</sup>

Hani Susumu is another filmmaker whose theoretical and methodological approach set out new ways of representing the subject, described as “the river of cinema carving new routes after the equilibrium of their bed is upset.”<sup>42</sup> Hani's films include *Children in the Classroom*<sup>43</sup> and *Children who Draw*,<sup>44</sup> a documentary about children's creativity, and *Bad Boys* (1961),<sup>45</sup> a pseudo-documentary about disadvantaged youth.<sup>46</sup> These films, and their preoccupation with their subjects, reflect on the difference that divides self-reflection in the relationship between filmmaker, film subject and audience. They blurred the boundary between documentary

and fiction film and introduced a way of seeing which allowed marginalia, at once fragile and vigorous, to emerge on the screen. These films are not only a mode of displaying and reflecting on these boundaries in everyday experience. They also pursue justice for the subaltern against the landscape of industrialised Japan—uniform steel mills and factory towns—and subsequently evoke alienation in their performances of subjectivity, themselves critiques of globalisation as constituted by free markets and homogenised cultural formations. As astute critiques of power, these films and emergent theoretical frameworks form the basis of a contract between film subject and audience. Looking to the individuals themselves as sites of resistance, their everyday experience presents a disruption.

In this context, the films and politics of Adachi Masao present a fascinating point of departure, which can be presented in comparison with Ogawa to better articulate the development of this distinctive approaches to filmmaking within its social and political context in Japan in the 1960s and 70s. While differing from Ogawa and Hani in his radical activism and his support for the Japanese Red Army, Adachi, filmmaker and political activist, was rooted firmly in the same networks and criticism of what they saw as the relentless march of total capitalism and neo-imperial ideology, manifesting in the counter-movement and incomplete revolution of 1968.<sup>47</sup> Adachi explained two methods he employs in his filmmaking in an interview conducted in 2008:

One of those methods is to try to tell my own private story as honestly as possible. Another method is to project everything that is built up from my imagination. That is to say, to project the memory of reality, the things that we conceive but aren't necessarily real, to put forth an image of unreality, or what we might call a way of observing the relationship between the anti-realistic or anti-personal things of the world and our own reality.<sup>48</sup>

This method of personal reflection as representation—allowing the private story to insert itself honestly into the frame of self-reflection—shares a common thread with the films of Ogawa in their preoccupation with abolishing the difference dividing self-reflection, the philosophical and theoretical framework which enables the establishment of a contract between subaltern and audience.

The notion of a political aesthetic in ethnographic film is well understood, particularly since Rouch's creative critique of colonialism and postcolonial contexts in Africa, and Marxist commentary on post-World War II France in *Chronique d'un été*.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, the combination of Rouch's *cinéma vérité* style and political message has been described by some

commentators as constituting an attempt to break down the isolation of urban life, and that “the rediscovery of a new cinema-truth in the same act creates a cinema of fraternity.”<sup>50</sup> The emphasis on marginality through the subaltern in Rouch’s films mark an important progression in cinema and the representation of culture in France and West Africa, proving that it is possible to creatively explore the condition of the oppressed through cinema.<sup>51</sup> In the case of Japan on the other hand, the disruption of existing social structures and relationships with production caused deep resentment towards the government in the lower classes, who already felt betrayed by the government for the War. This was articulated by villagers in *A Japanese Village*, which constituted—rather inconsistently—both a major trauma and part of the way in which the nation was imagined.<sup>52</sup> This indicates that the official and unofficial registers of feelings expressed about the War are quite different. This is particularly the case for those who experienced great loss, such as the village of Furuyashiki as depicted in *A Japanese Village*, indicated a number of times in references to the death of young people and the lonely commemoration of the dead by a lone bugle player during one scene of the film.

Memories of the War and the ways that it is commemorated in the post-war period are complex sites of contestation and representation which “continue to shape interpretations of Japan as a state and the identity of its citizens.”<sup>53</sup> Thus, it is important to discuss briefly how memories of the War affected both the political situation and the emergence of a particular form of cinematic representation in the late 1960s. This is particularly so in the case of Ogawa’s films, considering that for many of the subjects and filmmakers of both *Peasants of the Second Fortress* and *A Japanese Village*, these memories represented a major personal and communal trauma, and a basis for inclusion in a shared space outside of official nationalism.

While the experience of the War is an important way in which the Japanese national imaginary is reinforced through rituals of commemoration and mourning,<sup>54</sup> I am interested in exploring how counter-cultural movements flow against the current of official discourse, and how those marginalised by it are represented on screen. As mentioned earlier, the introduction of notions of *shutaisei*, or subjectivity, in Japanese documentary-making occurred with the publication of an article in 1957 by filmmaker Toshio, with an epistemological heritage in the exploration of the concept by philosophers including Nakai Masakazu. The article was a scathing criticism of the complicity with the war effort that marred pre-war and wartime documentary films and the suppression of subjectivity that realism had come to represent.<sup>55</sup> What followed was an explosion of

creativity that reacted against the realism of past forms through an aesthetic and attitude towards subjectivity that produced some of the most extraordinary creative works produced in Japan in a period marked by political conflict and dissent towards dominant power structures, culminating in the turbulence of the 1960s and 70s.<sup>56</sup>

However, it was not just filmmakers and their theoretical positions that emerged out of the memories of World War II. The subjects of the films themselves—the Japanese subalterns—were also struggling to voice the trauma experienced, and the feelings of disenchantment and unease with the Japanese nation. While apparent in the melancholic way that the subjects of *A Japanese Village* discuss their feelings about the War and its effect on their community—apparent in the anger of an elderly man as he compares the loss of young people during the War to the loss of young people as they drift to cities—the War's impact has been particularly complicated in Japan by the fragile national discussions about how best to commemorate the war dead, resulting in an ambiguous and opaque position which satisfied few of those who lost friends and family during the War.<sup>57</sup> Japanese historian Beatrice Trefalt notes of the controversy surrounding the commemoration of Japanese fallen soldiers at Yasukuni Shrine and the creation of a new, secular memorial at Chidorigafuchi in Tokyo:

As a result of Chidorigafuchi's ambiguous symbolism and of its failure to replace Yasukuni as a widely accepted and uncontroversial space of commemoration for fallen soldiers, it seems to many people that the nation cannot acknowledge those who died in its service during the Second World War. For obvious reasons this is unsatisfactory to those who lost a member of their family.<sup>58</sup>

Commemoration of the War in ways which seek to reduce the level of appropriation by national imaginings form a particularly important space, where communities are able to attempt to reconcile a trauma which is very personal. In a letter to the editor of the major daily newspaper, *Asahi Shinbun* (the collection of which forms a fascinating perspective on war, memory and commemoration in Japan), one letter-writer describes an experience in a tiny village in the mountains in Izu, a mountainous peninsula situated west of Tokyo on the Pacific Ocean. She explains that she came across a small local temple where she experienced a “much more direct way of transmitting the sorrow of war,” where a priest plays the *shakuhachi* flute to the photographs of the many young soldiers who had left and not returned.<sup>59</sup> These experiences suggest that in the post-war period there were many instances where unofficial shared spaces—both

large and small—were created by those who wished to express their grief outside of official state discourse. This extends to Ogawa's films, such as *A Japanese Village*, which capture the memories and feelings about the war of the Furuyashiki villagers in the context of their rapidly changing way of life. They are drawn into a shared space outside of the official "imagined community" and towards a counter-discourse which reflects the concerns of the subaltern. The filmmaker adopts their concerns<sup>60</sup> and uses them to formulate an approach to film which is able to transmit traumatic memories and share them with other communities.

It was in this context of an ambiguous and strained relationship with history and the nation that the films of Ogawa emerged, just as Rouch's films did in France, as the visual arm of a political movement critiquing postcolonial (or post-occupation-era) Japan. Ogawa was situated in this reunion between cultural production and political struggle, an event which was to become one of the most traumatic in modern Japanese history, namely, the construction of New Tokyo International (Narita) airport.<sup>61</sup> Between 1968 and 1977, Ogawa created seven films about the ensuing struggle between the state and farmers whose land was being taken at Sanrizuka village.<sup>62</sup> These films are a remarkable and surprising testament both to political activism and creativity, displaying a striking commitment to humanism through their ability to connect film subject with audience. Indeed, connecting audience, filmmakers and the subjects of the film was a preoccupation of the production processes of these films, which relied on a network of distribution centres throughout Japan for their dissemination.<sup>63</sup>

The fourth film in the Sanrizuka series filmed in 1972, *Peasants of the Second Fortress* (Sanrizuka: Dainitoride no hitobito), adopts a *cinéma vérité* style of observational filmmaking, recording the struggle of the farmers and students from behind the barricades. The film makes extensive use of the long shot, and both the footage and dialogue is halting and filled with interruptions, which is unsurprising given that the film's subjects were actively engaged in battle with security forces. A photograph of Ogawa's camera operators in armour testifies to the level to which the filmmakers were involved with their subjects.<sup>64</sup> The footage is left largely unedited and recorded using synchronous sound, lending the images a sense of immediacy, as the viewer is drawn deep into the political plight of the villagers. The film's patient style is, as film critic Noël Burch argues, a "remarkable material understanding of the concrete modes of behaviour and discourse specific to those who work the land."<sup>65</sup> For example, after guiding the camera into their underground fortress, a farmer stops to show a ventilation hole using a candle, repeating the action over the course of several minutes. Most filmmakers would cut away after a brief display, or

ask the subject to change their action, but Ogawa does not, and this allows for feelings of both solidarity with and understanding of the farmers' situation to be transmitted by the filmmaker to film viewers. After watching the film, the farmers insisted that the length of this scene and emphasis given to it "was not excessive," given the importance of the ventilation hole in keeping them alive.<sup>66</sup> In *Peasants of the Second Fortress*, it is possible to recognise Ogawa's deep concern for his subjects, and his desire to portray them as a metaphor for wider Japanese society. In their concern for the underclass and exploration of themes of alienation and human happiness, Ogawa's films are analogous to Rouch's, such as *Chronique d'un été*.<sup>67</sup> Through a combination of a particular aesthetic and theoretical approach, Ogawa's *Peasants of the Second Fortress* is noteworthy in its ability to fuse visual ethnographic detail with a political message. Without removing the political or social agency of the subject of the film, Ogawa's "graphic sensitivity to otherness" reveals a filmmaker whose approach is a close approximation of Vertov's model of the kino-eye (the camera as participant in the film).<sup>68</sup>

Ogawa's *A Japanese Village* (Nipponkoku no mura—Furuyashiki), bears many resemblances to Rouch's films. The perceptible presence of the filmmaker as part of the film and his deep concern for his subjects, as well as a constant interrogation of the imposition of Western models of development on non-Western peoples, is apparent in the film. In cinematic style, however, it is closer to the laconic filmmaking of MacDougall which "retains within the finished films traces of the original encounters that gave rise to them."<sup>69</sup> *A Japanese Village* is stunning in its scientific attention to detail and remarkable in its length (almost three-and-a-half hours). By adeptly weaving together scientific documentary, ethnographic film and historical analysis underscored by a deep humanistic concern for the villagers, Ogawa transcends the boundaries between "us" and "them" in one act, subverting modes of subjectivity and refashioning the meaning of reflexive filmmaking. Divided into two sections, *A Japanese Village* "ranges patiently over the breadth of the village's history, geography, and human work," tracing one year in the life of Furuyashiki village in Yamagata, northern Japan.<sup>70</sup>

The first half of the film is a scientific analysis of the weather patterns experienced by the village over the course of a particularly cold, and therefore difficult, year. Yamagata and other parts of the region including Niigata, Akita and Aomori prefectures experience heavy snowfall which can last for many months. This section of the film combines stunning scientific detail of both the biological and the meteorological: images of an ear of rice under a microscope, and long shots of clouds pouring over mountain

ranges appear in tandem with extended and patient discussions with villagers in order to establish a contract of understanding between the subject and the viewer, mediated by the filmmaker. Once this contract is established, the film progresses to its moving and more ethnographic second part, connected to the first through the “life and language of rice.”<sup>71</sup> Nornes refers to Ogawa’s filmmaking as “organic history writing,” in which we are able to connect with the subject of the film because we understand certain layers of detail, allowing a transcendence of the perspective of the anthropologist.<sup>72</sup>

*A Japanese Village* concludes with an elegantly filmed scene of an elderly lady describing the founding of Furuyashiki village, sitting on a *tatami* floor in the darkness of a *minka* (farmhouse), a single spotlight illuminating her against the darkness, an effective use of chiaroscuro lighting. This scene draws together a number of Ogawa’s concerns, primarily “the struggle to establish a comfortable and good life in a remote space and the threat to that life by powerful forces from without.”<sup>73</sup> Japanese film critic Kitakoji Takashi describes the film as visual anthropology, beautifully describing encounters between cultures, yet one which does not constitute an asymmetrical meeting between “civilised” filmmaker and “savage” subject.<sup>74</sup> Although the film’s proposed aim—to record the last traces of a disappearing way of life—comes close to the salvage ethnography of Japanese anthropologist and ethnographic filmmaker Tadayoshi Himeda, *A Japanese Village* avoids this by serving ends both ambiguous and ambitious: It records the village’s fading history and the way in which it is fading, only to connect it with the wider political messages circulating in the film.<sup>75</sup>

Ogawa employs a voiceover narration in the style of early visual anthropologist Timothy Asch, but his tone and informal Japanese registers do not refer to the audience or his film subjects in an honorific way through *keigo* or respectful language, thus subverting the ordinary hierarchical dominance or scholarly aloofness of the filmmaker/anthropologist as expert. Rather, there is an intimate connection between filmmaker and subject, both of whom transgress these boundaries. The film thus presents itself as a melancholic and emotional journey into the lives of a group of people who, having faced the trauma of World War II, now face a second trauma of the destruction of their village and way of life, as Japan moves from modernity and industrialisation to postmodernity and the post-industrial state of free markets and globalisation. Focusing on a community that is truly on the margins, the documentary feels just that, documenting a history of the vanishing present,<sup>76</sup> to follow Spivak, presenting the subaltern at their most taciturn and fragile. Yet in doing so, it inscribes their story

“both within and against the grain” of hegemonic political discourse through the production of a shared space.<sup>77</sup> In this sense, the filmmakers are presenting the political subjectivity of the subaltern as a rejection of the “proper and responsible” political character of Japan from the perspective of the central government in Tokyo.<sup>78</sup>

The analysis of Japanese New Wave filmmakers allows us to engage in an exploration of the contours of the psychological and philosophical realities of filmmakers within their own culture(s). Given the advanced state of its film industry from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and the artistic, political, and economic transformation experienced after World War II, the Japan of this time presents a unique situation which poses important questions about subjectivity, and the role of cinematic truth in the representation of cultures in a time of great upheaval and transition through modernity.<sup>79</sup> This is a common concern of ethnographic filmmaking in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and perhaps part of its paradox: although it portrays the fragility of these cultures, it simultaneously undermines them, drawing them into a Faustian bind with modernity where they act as both active subject and passive object in a complex and shifting representation of the other, an interpretive process connected to the disposition of power in the discursive formations of race and ethnicity. Whether encountered in Robert Flaherty’s salvage ethnographic filmmaking in *Nanook of the North* (1922), Robert Gardner’s symbolism in *Dead Birds* (1965), or MacDougall’s subject participation in *To Live with Herds* (1968/72), ethnographic and documentary film has continued to be an exploration of the human condition, engaging with the logic of social and cultural change in the wake of modernity and amidst postmodernity.<sup>80</sup>

Japanese New Wave documentary film’s treatment of subjectivity and cinematic truth is quite different, presenting new possibilities for the exploration of cultural otherness on film, and the representation of the subaltern. Consequently, the subaltern speaks directly against the grain, via politically and socially engaged leftist filmmakers, whose theoretical intervention of the possibility of a contract of understanding between viewer and film subject allows for the traversing of new grounds to criticise the dominant discourse, and to inscribe their own texts into history. Ogawa’s films indicate that the Japanese treatment of subjectivity (*shutaisei*) yields a new field of exploration for the treatment of truth, representation and subjectivity in the fields of visual culture and postcolonial theory. Through films such as *A Japanese Village*, which fuses scientific understanding and cultural awareness, and *Peasants of the Second Fortress*, which presents a scathing critique of authoritarian state power through an observational style of cinema akin to *cinéma vérité*, Ogawa was able to transcend the

role of *provocateur* as proposed by Rouch, and MacDougall's participative cinema, and presented a "graphic sensitivity" to cultural otherness<sup>81</sup> bringing to mind Vertov's notion of the potential of the filmmaker's spinning film reels to be the machinery of a factory creating "lightening bolts of truth,"<sup>82</sup> establishing a shared space not necessarily born of radicalism, but a desire to produce an alternative meta-narrative of the discourses of Japanese history and power.

This shared space represents a remarkable imaginary, establishing a collective understanding of struggle through its distribution networks crisscrossing Japan, its films shown in civic centres, universities and other unofficial locations to both criticise and acknowledge the situation of these places and peoples at a particular point in time. This shared space, generated through film, allowed for an expansion of parameters usually reserved for the official discourse of the "imagined community," its bold attempt to portray the private commemorations and feelings of wartime experiences marking a deeply moving and humanistic approach to the historical memory of exploitation. Charting the late New Wave of Japanese cinema indicates that the theoretical attitudes towards representations of otherness did experience a shift in subject matter from the general to the specific, and from newsreel, guerrilla-style cinema, to a polished aesthetic displaying advanced scientific and cultural knowledge. In doing so, Ogawa and Japanese New Wave cinema more widely present new ways of looking at and representing cultures on film. In doing so, they offer artistic and humanistic tributes to the diversity of human cultures and the possibility of creative expression, encompassing diverse experiences to both document and act against exploitation.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Dziga Vertov, "The Factory of Facts and Other Writings," trans. Kevin O'Brian, *October* 7 (December 1, 1978): 109.

<sup>2</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Colonial Discourse and Post-colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 93. Spivak's feminist deconstruction concludes that, indeed, the "subaltern cannot speak" (in this case, speaking of *sati* or Hindu widow sacrifice), framed as she is by masculine and colonial discourses around her actions in the historical archive. Ideologically cathected as reward, Spivak writes of *sati*, the (historical) world that the subaltern inhabits, that it has

been claimed by the dominant discourse where her own concerns remain but a palimpsest imprint on the archive. I argue here that Japanese *shutaisei* (subjectivity) and the overriding concerns of a “graphic sensitivity” towards otherness in Japanese New Wave cinema have created a space where the subaltern does speak, and with political and sociological consequence.

<sup>3</sup> Japanese names are written in the Japanese style, last name followed by first name, throughout the article. All transliterations follow the modified Hepburn system of romanisation as employed in *Kenkyusha's New Japanese Language Dictionary* (2003).

<sup>4</sup> Abé Mark Nornes, *Forest of Pressure: Ogawa Shinsuke and Postwar Japanese Documentary* (University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 14.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>6</sup> Harry Harootunian and Sabu Kohso, “Messages in a Bottle: An Interview with Filmmaker Masao Adachi,” *Boundary 2* 35, no. 3 (Fall 2008): 64.

<sup>7</sup> This artistic charge, underpinned by political fervour, was an international phenomenon. In part, it was a response to processes of decolonisation surrounded by a euphoria which quickly turned into fear and repression given the intensification of the Cold War in these contexts. Japanese filmmaker Adachi Masao described the Korean War and the Vietnam War as “continuing currents in the social conditions in which we lived,” realities against which “various cultural and artistic experiments and models exploded with great vibrancy onto the scene” in Japan and other industrialised nations (Harootunian and Kohso, “Messages in a Bottle,” 71). In the context of the changing form of international politics and the nation-state, as well as an intensified criticism of existing conservative social structures, the 1960s represented a time of often interconnected artistic and political movements around the world.

<sup>8</sup> Vertov, “The Factory of Facts and Other Writings,” 109.

<sup>9</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Rev. and extended ed. (London; New York: Verso, 1991), 163.

<sup>10</sup> Ann Hui, Sato Makoto and Mark Nornes, “A Roundtable on Barbara Hammer’s Devotion,” Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival, April 25, 2002, <http://www.yidff.jp/docbox/19/box19-2-1-e.html>. Ogawa Pro[ductions] was the filmmaking collective established by Ogawa Shinsuke as a political and cultural response to the pressures of what the Japanese Left saw as increased neo-liberalism and the failure of liberal democracy to deliver political demands. Barbara Hammer’s *Devotion* (2000), discussed in this interview, provides a fascinating insight into this unusual and complex group. It should be noted that this film was made some time since Ogawa’s (and the collective’s) death in 1985. Various sources, including Hammer’s film, indicate that Ogawa was rather dictatorial in his attitude towards both filmmaking and the group, leading to some personal conflict and tension.

<sup>11</sup> Nornes, *Forest of Pressure*, 84.

<sup>12</sup> Mick Eaton, *Anthropology, Reality, Cinema: the Films of Jean Rouch* (London:

- British Film Institute, 1979), 40.
- <sup>13</sup> Nornes, *Forest of Pressure*, 44.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.
- <sup>15</sup> David MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema* (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1998), 122.
- <sup>16</sup> *Peasants of the second fortress* (Sanrizuka– Dainitoride no hitobito), directed by Ogawa Shinsuke (Ogawa Productions, 1972), VHS, 143 min.
- <sup>17</sup> *A Japanese village: Furuyashikimura* (Nipponkoku no mura–Furuyashikimura), directed by Ogawa Shinsuke (Ogawa Productions, 1982), VHS, 210 min.
- <sup>18</sup> Abé Mark Nornes, “The Postwar Documentary Trace: Groping in the Dark,” *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 10 (March 1, 2002): 44.
- <sup>19</sup> Vertov “The Factory of Facts and Other Writings,” 112.
- <sup>20</sup> Nornes, “The Postwar Documentary Trace,” 44.
- <sup>21</sup> Vertov, “The Factory of Facts and Other Writings.” 112.
- <sup>22</sup> Harootunian and Kohso, “Messages in a Bottle,” 89.
- <sup>23</sup> Nornes, “The Postwar Documentary Trace,” 41.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.
- <sup>25</sup> *Red persimmons* (Manzan benigaki), directed by Ogawa Shinsuke and Xiaolian Peng (Brooklyn, NY: Benigaki Documentary Film Production Committee and First Run/Icarus Films, 2001), DVD, 90 min.
- <sup>26</sup> In my analysis, I forego a rigorous periodisation of films in favour of an attempt to understand the complex relationships between Japanese cultural production and social change, working towards an understanding of those spaces it creates outside of hegemonic cultural structures in the context of the transition from modernity to postmodernity.
- <sup>27</sup> Nornes, *Forest of Pressure*, 19.
- <sup>28</sup> Anne McKnight, “Imperial Syntax: Nakagami Kenji’s ‘Monogatari’ and Modern Japanese Literature as Ethnography,” *Discourse* 28, no. 1 (January, 2006): 143. The *buraku* make up two to five percent of Japan’s population and are defined as a “modern underclass,” which is characterised by higher levels of poverty and unemployment and lower levels of literacy and educational opportunity (*ibid.* 143). Nakagami’s writing foregrounds the discrimination and racialisation of *buraku* communities, offering literary and journalistic treatments of these subjects through the method of *monogatari*: narrative operations which lie at the intersection between the literary and the ethnographic, an interesting parallel to the films of Ogawa Shinsuke in the same period (*ibid.* 147).
- <sup>29</sup> Kenji Nakagami, *The Cape and Other Stories From the Japanese Ghetto* (Berkeley, California: Stone Bridge Press, 1999).
- <sup>30</sup> Harootunian and Kohso, “Messages in a Bottle,” 87.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.
- <sup>32</sup> MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema*, 4.

- <sup>33</sup> *Chronique d'un été*, directed by Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin (Argos Productions, 1960), VHS, 85 minutes.
- <sup>34</sup> *Jaguar*, directed by Jean Rouch (Paris: Films de la Pléiade, 1955), VHS, 93 minutes. It is an interesting coincidence that within the Japanese New Wave Susumu Hani's ethno-fiction film *Bad Boys* was released in 1961, and that his experimental documentary film *Children in the Classroom* (1954) predates Rouch's *Jaguar* by one year.
- <sup>35</sup> MacDougall, *Transcultural Cinema*, 112–113.
- <sup>36</sup> Harootunian and Kohso, "Messages in a Bottle," 64.
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.
- <sup>38</sup> Nornes, "The Postwar Documentary Trace," 47.
- <sup>39</sup> Harootunian and Kohso, "Messages in a Bottle," 64.
- <sup>40</sup> Nornes, *Forest of Pressure*, 94.
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.
- <sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.
- <sup>43</sup> *Children in the Classroom* (Kyoshitsu no kodomotachi), directed by Hani, Susumu, 1954.
- <sup>44</sup> *Children Who Draw* (Kyoshitsu no kodomo), directed by Hani, Susumu, 1955.
- <sup>45</sup> *Bad Boys* (Furyo shonen), directed by Hani, Susumu, 1961.
- <sup>46</sup> Nornes, *Forest of Pressure*, 15.
- <sup>47</sup> Harootunian and Kohso, "Messages in a Bottle," 57.
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.
- <sup>49</sup> Peter Loizos, *Innovation in Ethnographic Film* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 57.
- <sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.
- <sup>51</sup> Steven Feld, "Themes in the Cinema of Jean Rouch," *Visual Anthropology* 2 (January 1989): 230.
- <sup>52</sup> Vertov, "The Factory of Facts and Other Writings," 116.
- <sup>53</sup> Harootunian and Kohso, "Messages in a Bottle," 115.
- <sup>54</sup> Vertov, "The Factory of Facts and Other Writings," 117.
- <sup>55</sup> Nornes, "The Postwar Documentary Trace," 44.
- <sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.
- <sup>57</sup> Vertov, "The Factory of Facts and Other Writings," 124.
- <sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.
- <sup>59</sup> Frank Gibney, *Sensō: the Japanese Remember the Pacific War* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2007), 313.
- <sup>60</sup> Harootunian and Kohso, "Messages in a Bottle," 87.
- <sup>61</sup> Nornes, *Forest of Pressure*, 291–294.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 291–294.

<sup>63</sup> Nornes, *Forest of Pressure* 292.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>67</sup> Lucien Taylor, “A Conversation with Jean Rouch,” *Visual Anthropology Review* 7, no. 1 (March 1, 1991): 92.

<sup>68</sup> Vertov, “The Factory of Facts and Other Writings,” 110.

<sup>69</sup> Ilisa Barbash et al., “Reframing Ethnographic Film: A ‘Conversation’ with David MacDougall and Judith MacDougall,” *American Anthropologist* 98, no. 2, New Series (June 1, 1996): 372.

<sup>70</sup> Nornes, *Forest of Pressure*, 187.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 188.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 189.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 190.

<sup>75</sup> Nornes, *Forest of Pressure*, 190. The result of racialised epistemologies founded in imperial discourse, salvage ethnography dominated institutionalised anthropology in North America in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, attempting to salvage a record of cultures which were seen to be vanishing or at risk of disappearing (Wakeham, P. “Becoming documentary: Edward Curtis’s ‘In the Land of the Headhunters’ and the politics of archival reconstruction.” *Canadian Review Of American Studies* 36, no. 3 (2006): 294). Salvage ethnography compiled an “empire of artefact” which deployed the devices of the archive—film, photography and writing—in order to construct a notion of the wholeness of humanity to support linear hypotheses of development and progress (ibid., 294). As such, many early anthropologists and scholars of other cultures engaged in research based on patronising notions of preserving a culture for the benefit of the coloniser—contributing to the production of discursive epistemological formations that Edward Said would come to call Orientalism—which not only sustained power but was in fact its modus operandi (Said, Edward W. 1995. *Orientalism*. Harmondsworth: Penguin). The act of salvaging though recording a culture which is ostensibly disappearing is to represent the other as powerless and timeless. This, according to Said’s Orientalist framework, works through its regularised ideological biases to present stereotypes and tropes which cross countless cultural boundaries, simplifying the complex other into a static and unanimous whole able to be controlled, regulated and known, the other whose “actuality is always subject to the continuous interpretation and re-interpretation of their differences from us” (ibid., 332). Robert Flaherty’s early epic film *Nanook of the North* (1922), which portrays a romanticised version of the life of the indigenous peoples of the Inuit of the Canadian Arctic, is one such early example of salvage ethnography. In the film, Flaherty sought to portray his film subjects as childlike and static. In doing so salvage ethnography and its epistemological anxieties are a method of representation—drawing on colonial assumptions about race and progress—

which say more about power and its function than about the film subject and their cultures.

<sup>76</sup> In *Red Persimmons* (2004), which was filmed by Ogawa in the late 1980s, but finished by his disciple Peng Xiaoliang, Ogawa mentions the importance of his role as a recorder of the way that these villages disappear (in Japanese, *kiekata*, translated as the way of disappearing). He explains it as like a candle which eventually reaches the end of its life (in Japanese, “Aru hi, rōsoku no jimyō ga kieru yō ni Furuyashiki no yō na mura mo kieteikikimasu”) and that such villages in Japan are disappearing unnaturally, yet in a way which seems natural (in Japanese, “fushizen ni kieru kedo shizen ni kieru.”).

<sup>77</sup> Gayatri Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics* (New York [u.a.]: Routledge, 2006), 281.

<sup>78</sup> Harootunian and Kohso, “Messages in a Bottle,” 64.

<sup>79</sup> Nornes, *Japanese Documentary Film*, 6–7.

<sup>80</sup> Loizos, *Innovation in Ethnographic Film*. Yet at the same time, as Said says, this process of documentation is not “mere academic wool gathering” (Said, *Orientalism*, 332). Rather, it is bound up with the character of power and powerlessness and the ways that a fetishised archive is carefully constructed for concrete political purposes including, among other things; the introduction of laws, foreign and economic policies and systems of education to legitimise uses of violence in certain contexts (ibid., 332).

<sup>81</sup> Nornes, *Japanese Documentary Film*, 84.

<sup>82</sup> Vertov, “The Factory of Facts and Other Writings,” 109.