

Field Work: Ogawa Productions as Farmer-Filmmakers

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ABSTRACT

This article considers the value of the Leftist filmmaking collective Ogawa Productions' interdisciplinary practice, which combined filmmaking and farming as an activist project of advocacy for social and environmental justice in 1980s Japan. It argues that Ogawa Pro, as the collective was known, integrated agriculture and film culture to construct a radically inclusive ecosystemic understanding of humans, plants, animals, and the climate. Viewed today, their approach exemplifies an early model of ecological thinking that speaks to the recent multispecies turn in the arts, humanities, and social sciences. But Ogawa Pro's turn to the land is also riddled with ambivalence: the films harbour agrarian romanticism bordering on a politics of nostalgia and ethnic environmentalism. Torn between what we might today call progressive and reactionary traditionalist politics, Ogawa Pro's enmeshed filming and farming practices constitute an important example of what I call Land Cinema—that is, film entangled in territorial, ecological, and aesthetic aspects of land. Though the collective's earlier and more militant films have received critical acclaim in recent years, its later land-based work merits further attention for the way it exposes political tensions over how to cultivate, represent, and share space responsibly.

BACK TO THE LAND: INTRODUCING OGAWA PRO'S POLITICS OF RICE

Why did a Leftist filmmaking collective from Tokyo go back to the land to farm rice for eighteen years in Yamagata, a rural area of north-eastern Japan, and make a suite of films that document their labours there? Did the Ogawa Pro collective's advocacy of rural life advance a politics of inclusive ecological

care? Or was it rather a politics of selective traditionalist and ethnic environmentalism? The films they made in Yamagata and which I discuss throughout this article display both politics at once.

Two very long feature documentaries stand out from this period and constitute Ogawa Pro's most ambitiously expansive approach to landscape, nature, and rural tradition. They are *Nippon-koku: Furuyashiki-mura* (Nippon Country: Furuyashiki Village, 1982) and *Sennen Kizami no Hidoki – Maginomura Monogatari* (The Sundial Carved with a Thousand Years of Notches - Magino Village Story, 1986). *Nippon* runs to three and a half hours, *The Sundial*, three hours and forty minutes. Both films contain meticulous depictions of agricultural processes, plant growth, and, in increasing quantity and theatricality in their second halves, villagers' stories and re-enactments of local legends. They chronicle Ogawa Pro members' progress in learning how to cultivate rice by hand. Ogawa Pro took inspiration in this manual activity in part from reading Mao Zedong's essays and speeches on the importance of learning through embodied experience. The films also feature many extended interviews between the collective's leader, Ogawa Shinsuke, and local farmers who recall memories and myths of the local area, ranging from ancient folk tales involving gods of water and harvest to more recent memories of young farmers going to fight in the Second World War.

Nippon and *The Sundial* refuse to demarcate plant from human life: the story of rice growing from seed to grain interweaves with the stories of farmers navigating the challenges of cold weather fronts, rural depopulation, ageing, and modernity. Plant time weaves with human, geological, and meteorological times in a combination of scales and paces. In this, the films exemplify an early model of ecological thinking which speaks to the recent multispecies turn in the arts, humanities, and social sciences. The films consider land, plants, and the climate as vital constituents in an expanded ecosystem of which humans are one part. Seen today, the films exhibit what we might now term a 'progressive' kind of green politics.

In *Nippon*, villagers living in a hamlet in the mountains above Yamagata, where rice, persimmons, shitake, and silk worms are cultivated, mourn a bygone Japan of agrarian tradition. Combined with reenactments of feudal and mythic moments, such scenes in *Nippon* and *The Sundial* illustrate the collective's ethnically and selective stance towards Japan's place in the modern world. The films focus on rice, and selected excerpts of Japan's feudal history, to train our thoughts towards aspects of the nation's agrarian and imperial past at the expense of other realities—not least, the rise of industrialised agriculture and imported wheat. Again, from the perspective of today, we might feel such tendencies in these films to display a 'reactionary' kind of traditionalist politics somewhat at odds with the 'progressive' multi-species ecological stance they also exhibit.

The films oscillate between these politics even within a single representational technique. The types of shot used, for instance, embed farmers in lush, paddy field landscapes. Wide-angle shots dominate, and

even when close-ups and zooms focus on individuals, these people are incorporated into the surrounding scenery by re-framing, rack-focusing (where the focus of the lens changes during a continuous shot), and the use of sound bridges (where sound from one shot flows into the next). While this incorporation into the landscape provides a salutary warning against anthropocentrism (these people cannot exist outside the environments that sustain them) it also risks naturalising farmers' socio-economic position by embedding them in a national landscape, cultivating rice—and cultivating a very particular and classed form of ethnicity. Cinematography and editing thus enact both an appreciation of the more-than-human constituents with whom we share the environment and upon whom we depend (by way of natural resources, for example), and an ethnic environmentalism that celebrates nationhood through nature and locates solutions to ecological problems in ancestral belonging and the revival of romanticised communal values. (Marran 2017: 13)

What saves the films from collapsing under the weight of such tensions is their self-reflexivity and refusal to settle within a single genre. They are nostalgic, biting, studious, bawdy, beautiful, dull. Viewers witness rolling, lush landscapes and thatched roofs, farmers' spoken criticisms of Japan's high-growth economic policies, long sequences that chronicle the collective studying soil composition and precipitation levels, villagers unearthing phallic talisman, and much more. In this way, the films flit between television documentary, scientific study, period costume drama, and extended monologue and interview sequences, forming a multispecies filmic ecosystem themselves. Even the type of camera used varies within a single film. According to Ogawa Shinsuke, four cameras were used to film *Nippon*: a French camera, a Bolex, a Bell Howell, and a very small 16 mm camera. (Tournes 1984) Each genre requires a different method of filming, from microscopic time-lapse shots of rice blooming to wide-angle shots of alpine landscapes. The political strategy here is one of displacement: viewers are not allowed to settle into one, prescribed genre such as nature film, observational documentary, or period drama; they must view each as one possible way of seeing amongst others and, by extension, consider the existence of diverse ontological perspectives within one landscape and ecosystem. Though perhaps not fully intentional on the part of the filmmakers, this formal ambivalence offers a model for how to read the films: *The Sundial* and *Nippon* are crystallisations of the tension Ogawa Pro felt between different possible responses to the social and environmental changes brought about by Japan's rapid post-war modernisation and economic growth. The films' multiple formal approaches evidence a sense of crisis, and a restless and often contradictory search for ways out.

What did this modernisation and economic expansion look like? By the late 1960s, roads, stations, shopping malls and offices dotted the Japanese landscape. Japan had risen from the rubble of the Second World War to become a prosperous, politically conservative nation run by a coalition of state, local government, and corporate power. These were the Cold War years. Japan represented an important

strategic position from which the US could project its power into East Asia. Japan's 'economic miracle' was, in part, an American manufacture. (Gordon 2019: 260) In 1962, Tokyo became the first city in the world whose population exceeded 10 million. Four years later, Japan's population exceeded 100 million. By 1969, its economy was growing at a rate three times that of the US and Britain. (Andrews 2015: 65) Income per capita increased by 80% between 1955-1960, 'consumption is a virtue' became a popular catchphrase, and the largest advertising agency in the world was Japanese. (Packard 1966: 182-3; Sato 1998: 185; Goodman 1999: 79)

At this same time, people campaigned against nuclear armaments and the Vietnam War, and for educational and labour reform, civil rights, and environmentalism. Japan's growth had come at a cost. Jobs were gruelling, benefits unevenly distributed. Pollution intensified. The documentarian Tsuchimoto Noriaki chronicled a particularly shocking case of mercury poisoning in *Minamata: The Victims and Their World* (1971) and *The Shiranui Sea* (1975). Corporate negligence in such cases of industrial pollution was rife. The renewal of Japan's Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security with America (*Anpō*) in 1970 caused further outrage. (Andrews 2015: 41) The first *Anpō* had already sparked anger, as seen in Matsumoto Toshio's film, *Security Treaty* (1960), a seething mass of found footage that defaces images of Japanese politicians and American soldiers in an attack on international dependency. Mao's writings on hands-on experience and collective labour became popular amongst leftist people in Japan searching for alternative ways to think about alliance that depended not on American support but on East Asian solidarity and collective struggle. By 1968, tensions in Japan escalated. Japan's growing political left included students, labour unions, and members of Communist and Socialist parties. In 1968 police arrested 6,000 students on charges of protest. Between 1968 and 1971, they arrested 31,852. (Steinhoff 1984: 212; Steinhoff 1999: 73) Protests were growing ever larger and stronger, despite the growth of repressive measures also. The young documentarian Ogawa Shinsuke and future members of his collective were at the heart of these struggles.

Back in 1966, the Japanese government had announced plans for an international airport near Narita, a town north-east of Tokyo. Many Japanese people saw Narita airport's construction as further evidence of the American-allied Japanese capitalist machine, fearing US military planes would re-fuel there en route to Vietnam. It would level farmland and several hamlets in an area called Sanrizuka, compensating displaced farmers or forcibly evicting them if necessary. For example, Ōki Yone, a poor, uneducated farmer who refused to leave her home, that lay at the centre of the proposed runway, was foisted onto a police riot shield, and carried from her house as it was bulldozed. She lost three teeth in the struggle, and was dumped on the ground nearby. Farming tools became Sanrizuka's symbol of civil protest, in part because of Ōki. (Apter 1984: 181-5) Narita became a battleground of rural land rights against urban and global authorities. Sit-ins, violent clashes between farmers and police officers,

protesters chaining themselves to trees and lying in front of bulldozers... Japan's 'miracle' was fast becoming a nightmare, and nowhere was this more apparent than at the airport.

Enter Ogawa Shinsuke. Ogawa's early films championed marginalised subjects including hard-up students and exhausted day labourers. He was disgusted that most intellectuals were uninterested in the countryside and its farmers. The troubles at Narita captured his imagination. Like many of his generation and leftist inclination, he admired Mao Zedong's emphasis on rural work, and hands-on labour and learning. 'I knew I had to film farmers,' he later reflected, 'because I was a farmer myself.' (Ogawa 1972: 29) In fact, Ogawa had not been raised in the countryside, was not particularly poor, and had not dropped out of university—despite claims in his autobiographical asides.¹ This kind of embellishment, so characteristic of his approach, indicates the idealism that came to shape his career: he wanted to side with leftist students, and farmers. Having trained at Iwanami, a public relations firm that opened a film department in 1950 to make industry and government-contracted documentaries, Ogawa joined a splinter group of younger employees interested in political filmmaking and, in 1968, formed his own collective, Ogawa Productions.² Ogawa Pro's members included students and aspiring filmmakers, its size ranging between a handful and tens of members over the following two decades. (Nornes 2007: xvi)

Ogawa Pro spent six years at Narita, filming from the barricades. Farmers and police died in the fighting. The seven films shot there—Ogawa Pro's Sanrizuka Series—testify to the fervour, and failure, of the uprising. Ogawa Pro drove around Japan screening these films in town halls where they were popular with students and farmers. (Nornes 1997) The story goes that, when Ogawa Shinsuke visited Yamagata, a local poet approached him with a challenge: If they wanted to film rural life, had they not better know how to farm? The poet offered them an empty house and an unused rice field. It was 1974. Ogawa Pro moved to Yamagata—and stayed for eighteen years, only disbanding when Ogawa Shinsuke died. (Kimura 2010: 15-20) The collective ranged between a handful and over a dozen members during this time. Despite its ideals of collectivity, Ogawa Pro was in fact hierarchical, centring upon the powerful presence of Ogawa Shinsuke, whose name dominated film credits despite the fact that he often preferred to remain at the collective's headquarters reading rather than filming or farming outdoors. The collective

¹ Ogawa claimed to have been born into a poor family in 1935 and to have grown up in a rural area between Gifu and Yamanashi Prefectures. This is factually incorrect (he was born in 1936 and raised in Tokyo). It is, however, what appeared in several film reference books such as Tayama R. (1991), *Gendai Nihon Eiga no Kantokutachi*, Tokyo: Shakai Shisōsha, p. 168. According to Ogawa, he studied folklore in the literature department of Kokugakuin University, focusing on the works of Yanagita Kunio and Origuchi Shinobu. In fact, Ogawa studied economics. He also claimed to have been expelled from this university for Leftist activities, but in fact graduated with a diploma. Ogawa's fabrications lent him an air of seniority and authenticity amongst fellow filmmakers and farmer subjects.

² Despite potential limits imposed by industrial contracts, some of Japan's most innovative filmmakers began at Iwanami, including Tsuchimoto Noriaki, and Susumu Hani. In 1967 Ogawa formed an Independent Screening Organization, or *Jieso* for short, which was a precursor to Ogawa Pro.

was also biased against its women members who were confined to domestic and assistant roles.³ Ogawa Pro continued making film until shortly before Ogawa Shinsuke's death in 1992. By this time, Ogawa Pro was well-known in Japanese experimental and documentary film circles, and had garnered interest abroad amongst documentarians including Joris Ivens and Jean Rouch. Besides *Nippon* and *The Sundial*, other films made during the Yamagata period include *The Magino Village Story: Raising Silkworms* (1977), and *Red Persimmons* (completed posthumously by Peng Xiaolian in 2001). These films are shorter in length, and more conventional as documentaries, in part because of their tighter focus on single subjects, be that sericulture or the process of drying persimmons. Alongside work preparing these final films, and fundraising amongst loyal individuals who supported the collective, Ogawa Shinsuke also oversaw the establishment of Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival, which continues to this day. The festival, like Ogawa Pro's films (and their festive screenings in the 1980s that included local dance troupes and catering), evidences a profound commitment to supporting local communities and rural traditions, and putting Japan and East Asia on the map for documentary filmmaking.



[IMAGE: Ogawa Shinsuke in the field. Courtesy Centre Culturel de l'Athénée Français, Tokyo]

But not all audiences understood the collective's move to Yamagata. For some, the decision to film rice plants and farming legends, rather than barricades and violent protests, indicated depoliticization and retreat. (Nornes 2007: 180) Ogawa Pro's published newsletters seemed to confirm this. The newsletters were read by fans and supporters, many of whom donated or loaned Ogawa Pro money for its film production and distribution budgets. From around 1976, the newsletters display an increasingly meticulous interest in plants, reducing the amount of coverage of political and film production matters to

³ For more on the group's misogyny, see Barbara Hammer's 2000 documentary, *Devotion: A Film About Ogawa Productions*. For more on the collective's uneven attribution of credit—not least in its naming after Ogawa Shinsuke—see Yasui 2012.

almost nothing. In *Ogawa Pro News* #8 (January 1, 1977), members publish the results of their painstaking macro-photographic studies of stamens appearing from rice buds. Similar shots appear in great quantity in *Nippon*. The newsletter's July 1977 issue is devoted to sericulture, as is a film Ogawa Pro produced about silk the same year—the film and newsletter have very little to do with political activism. Very little—or a great deal. It is in this turn to nature, I argue, that Ogawa Pro took politics towards a new, earthy and ecosystemic frontier.



[IMAGE: Ogawa Pro Newsletter, 1975-80, detailing rice production and photography. Courtesy Iizuka Toshio]

Ogawa Pro's move back to the land, and their focus on plants they cultivated there, helped them construct a form of environmentalism that sees people and their vegetable and climatic environs as enmeshed. I argue that they cultivated a species of ecosocialism there. The small-scale and low-impact nature of rice production in Yamagata providing an alternative to the extractivist agribusiness and urbanization schemes that they witnessed transform Japan's countryside at the time. Rice farming became a model of socially and environmentally balanced living.

But simply identifying Ogawa Pro's Yamagata films as 'political' insufficiently accounts for the ambivalent nature of these politics. The films flirt with both ideas of ecosystemic balance allied with a class-consciousness and attunement to social justice, and a form of ethnic romanticism focused on pastoral idealism. Ogawa Pro were torn between these responses, and this tension plays out in their films.

When it comes to land in its ecological and territorial aspects, the collective's project was both visionary and short-sighted at once.

CULTIVATING JAPONICA: ETHNIC ENVIRONMENTALISM IN THE LAND OF ABUNDANT RICE

Ogawa Pro's association of rice with an image of cooperation can be seen as a political celebration of social and national conformity. (Cf. Robertson 1994: 89) Centralising rice farming— as opposed to foraging or hunting, which are also forms of subsistence—can serve to reinforce Japanese nationalistic interests. Stereotypes of Americans, by contrast to their Japanese counterparts, often feature lone-ranger individualists associated with pioneer travels westward in the United States, and the growth of crops such as wheat that do not need as much cooperation between farmers to coordinate water irrigation. (Hofstadter 1956) Historically, rice is a staple of the Japanese diet; symbolically, rice relates to Shintoism and the Emperor (the god of rice harvests is believed to be a direct ancestor of the emperor). (Totman 2014: 55, 207; Schnell 2005: 202; Kagawa-Fox 2017) There is even a term that refers to Japan as 'the land of abundant rice.' (Ohnuki-Tierney 1994: 55) Rice (*oryza sativa japonica*) is a very old crop in Japan, but the growing of other grains, and hunting and gathering, are older. Rice was only introduced to Japan from Korea around 1000 BC. But it is upon rice that Ogawa Pro focus, portraying it as a nationally endorsed ancient food source rather than a fairly recent crop, in archaeological terms. The representation of rice is therefore somewhat idealised and romantic.

In addition to this focus, Ogawa Pro were drawn to Japan's Edo period (1603-1867)— or rather, to aspects of it. This was partly due to the fact that Edo is characterised as being a distinctively 'Japanese' era because of its isolation from foreign influences, which implies a kind of national and thus ecological purity. It was also because rice farming was a particularly contested and political topic during the Edo period. Farmers were placed near the top of the Edo social structure, inspiring regional protectionism, and rural romance. This was a smoke screen: rice was currency accumulated by landlords; rice farmers were not rewarded. Numerous agrarian riots occurred between the mid-Edo and early Meiji period that followed. These uprisings (*yonaoshi*, literally 'world reformation') attempted to renegotiate power along lines of mutuality. (Scheiner 1998) Re-enactments of such uprisings appear in *The Sundial*. Though peasant-landlord conflict was eliminated by post-war land reform that saw 91% of farmland tilled by its owners by 1951, conflict over land development continued, and the term *yonaoshi* was resurrected to describe uprisings in the 1960s. (Iijima 1979: 270) *Yonaoshi* became reinscribed as a protest movement against both American influence and Japanese corporate and state interventions in rural life. (Andrews

2015: 4, 164, 260) Playwrights and novelists resurrected Japanese peasant heroes from the earlier *yonaoshi* period, or depicted characters searching for fast-disappearing rural homes.⁴ Ogawa Pro's celebration of the bravery of farmers at Narita airport was a clear nod to their Edo forebears, as were its organised and filmed re-enactments of peasant uprisings in Yamagata. Although rice consumption had declined and imported wheat was common by the 1970s, Ogawa Pro focused on small-scale rice-farming as a synecdoche for an endangered and heroic culture.

This romanticism threads throughout *The Sundial*, which marks the collective's second and last major film project in Yamagata. In this film, the extent to which the collective's commitment to ecology and agrarian tradition had grown is evident in the extended sequences involving plants on one hand, and historical reenactments made in collaboration with villagers, on the other. The film weaves plants and people into a complex ecosystem of traditional culture steeped in stories, farming practices, and relics. Mid-way through the film, after an archaeological dig unearths some Jōmon pottery, we cut to a shot of an aeroplane's vapour trail. The film's emphasis on this type of pottery is deliberate. The Jōmon Period (14,000-1000 BC) takes its name from the distinctive marks on pottery made in that era: ropes were pressed into the clay to create striped patterns. Like the film's eponymous sundial, the shard of Jōmon pottery comes to constitute an index of time. The camera moves between the earth and the sky: further visual indexes of the prehistoric and the contemporary. Jōmon pottery dates from the dawn of low-intensity farming; aeroplanes, an age of globalisation. By aligning Yamagata villagers with their Jōmon ancestors, the film implies that the majority of Japan's modern, post-war population (a majority based in its urban areas) is disconnected and unsympathetic to nature. Modernity is expelled from Ogawa Pro's idyll by being placed on a transnational or intercontinental vehicle whose vapour trail traces across the sky, across the film screen, as Ogawa Pro's camera looks up at it. The plane began and ended its journey elsewhere (perhaps at Narita), while Yamagata remained grounded in native, prehistoric tradition.

A similarly functioning scene occurs in *Nippon*, as villagers contemplate the quiet violence of Japan's economic miracle, one old man summarising: 'We thought the paved road would bring modernity; instead, it made it easier for the young people to leave.' Like the bridge leading from Kidlat Tahimik's Filipino village to the outside world in *Perfumed Nightmare* (1977), Furuyashiki village's paved road and bridge represent the promise and disappointment of globalisation's extractive mechanisms, which siphon people, as well as natural resources, from the land.⁵ Even *Nippon*'s title works

⁴ For example, Fukuda Yoshiyuki's 1964 play, *Find Hakamadare!* (*Hakamadare wa doko da*) and Kenzaburō Ōe's 1967 novel, *The Silent Cry* (*Man'nen gan'nen no futtohoru*)

⁵ Tahimik was a friend of Ogawa's and an early supporter of Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival. At its inaugural edition in 1989, Tahimik drafted the Asian Filmmakers' Manifesto, which committed to creating networks to counter the "institutional roadblocks" and "international imbalances" of film production and distribution.

towards this conclusion. The characters ‘Nippon-Koku,’ appended before ‘Furuyashiki Village,’ literally read ‘Japan-Country’ or ‘Japan-Nation.’ *Koku* (nation) is written using the conventional Chinese character, 国. *Nippon* (Japan) is written in *katakana*, the domestic syllabary for foreign loan words (ニッポン). This denaturalisation of ‘Japan’ invites viewers to locate an alternative vision of their nation in what is before them: the traditional rural community of Furuyashiki, Yamagata.⁶

One way to describe Furuyashiki, as it is presented in *Nippon*, is as a *furusato*. The word *furusato* means ‘native place,’ comprising characters for ‘old’ or ‘former’ and ‘village.’ *Furusato* is a term used both by the Japanese state, for whom it functions similarly to American ‘family values’ (indeed, one expression is *furusato famirii*), and by environmentalists who oppose the use of chemical fertilisers and pesticides, and the topographical alterations of roads, golf courses, and malls. (Robertson 1998) *Furusato* sees nature as incorporated, reinterpreted, controlled. (Ivy 1995) As Tokyo became the concentrated locus of information capitalism in the 1970s, *furusato*’s urban/ rural distinction was further exacerbated. *Furusato* tourism continues today, often involving the transportation of city people to rural areas to partake in traditional (read, agricultural) activities such as transplanting rice seedlings and picking fruit or *matsutake*, without having to depend on agriculture for a living. Since tourism is more lucrative than small-scale farming, villagers no longer depend on agriculture either.

Japan National Railways (JNR, privatised as JR in 1987) has played an important part in *furusato*. ‘Discover Japan’ was its successful PR campaign in the 1970s, and was followed by a mail order service for regional foods and souvenirs, *Furusato Parcel Post*, and a magazine, *Furusato Mura Joho* (*Furusato Village Information*), which combined domestic tourism with rural real estate sales and information about farming and environmental lifestyles. (Robertson 1998: 116) *Furusato Mura Joho* is not unlike the newsletters Ogawa Pro published about their farming activities. Issue 9 (dating to 1987, a year after Ogawa Pro released *The Sundial*) carries articles about fertiliser, medicinal herbs, and the legal definition of farmland, alongside an illustrated section listing land and farmhouses for sale. The Yamagata poet who first invited Ogawa Pro to the area had hoped the collective would help revitalise the region into a youthful cultural centre. In turn, Ogawa Pro benefited from Yamagata’s old-style culture that lent their films exotic and nostalgic qualities. Even the hamlet of Furuyashiki’s name was perfect, containing the same character (*furu*, ‘old’) as that of *furusato*. The irony is hard to miss. In connecting the country and the city by rail and film, JNR and Ogawa Pro’s *furusato* initiatives helped reinforce the romanticised ‘difference’ of rural areas in forms of marketable pastoral pastiche, despite how economically and sometimes environmentally useful as these initiatives may also have been. Reading Ogawa Pro’s

⁶ It is for this reason that I retain the word *Nippon* for the film’s title, and don’t translate it as *Japan*, to convey to English readers the sense of otherness in the original title. Markus Normes attempts the same effect by rendering the title in quotation marks (‘Japan’) in his 2007 monograph, *Forest of Pressure*.

Yamagata project in this way, as a politics that forwards nationalistic and nostalgic interests, is integral to a nuanced understanding of the collective. But it neglects Ogawa Pro's equally important politics of focusing on what can be learned from traditional, low-impact agriculture to cultivate a more socially and environmentally just present.

CULTIVATING SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE: LEARNING FROM GREEN POLITICS, PAST AND PRESENT

Ogawa Pro's choice of rice farming as a practice and subject matter speaks to their ecological and social interest in low-impact, sustainable, and cooperative agriculture. Rice farming requires organised schedules of irrigation between neighbouring farmers, and therefore a degree of collaborative work—both between farmers, and between farmers and their physical surroundings. Knowing when a cold front is developing, or assessing which day or hour is best for sowing and transplanting, requires a farmer's sensitivity to nature. Ogawa Pro admired this idea of social and environmental harmony, describing their project in interviews recorded at the time and afterwards as an attempt to learn farmers' skills, alongside the 'language' of rice and how to understand the 'voices' of plants. (Konig 1987) This attempt was a form of advocacy for small-scale and noninvasive farming, and it translates directly into formal choices in filmmaking—the use of time-lapse to capture a plant's blossoming, for example, or close-ups and magnification to view its physical form and structure.

The idea of harmony between humans and plants derived in part from Shinto agrarian traditions. Ogawa Pro members collected local legends and were avid readers of Yanagita Kunio and Origuchi Shinobu's folklore studies. In a traditional *satoyama* (alpine) community, landscapes, weathers, livestock, crops, and people coexist, and Shinto gods (*kami*) represent natural powers such as fire, harvest, or water, and their more-than-human capacities. By the 1970s, common forestlands of red pines and *matsutake* had given way to monoculture cedar and cypress plantations for the timber trade. In the post-war period, villagers began to use kerosene and electricity, and farm with tractors, less often venturing into the forest for brushwood, firewood, fodder, or thatch for roofing. (Tsing 2015: 6, 162, 260) Like the red pines and *matsutake*, village communities including Yamagata's Furuyashiki and Magino, were dying. Ogawa Pro tried to counter this by portraying farmers as bastions of rural virtue who possessed privileged access to land and spiritualism. In fact, Ogawa Pro's farmer neighbours had been using chemical pesticides and fertilisers, and mechanised ploughs and transplanting machines, even before the Second World War. As more people moved to the cities, the use of machines became increasingly necessary. But the films

downplay this. Whereas industrial agriculture relies on nature being seen as a set of objects upon which humans can operate, traditional farming was— in Ogawa Pro’s eyes— a vision of multispecies harmony.

Ogawa Pro were interested in Japanese folklore because of its emphasis on the harmony and continuity between weather and human activities, or more broadly, nature and culture. *The Sundial* explores the way human history and myth are used to make sense of natural phenomena and disasters. It contains numerous interviews with villagers and a folk studies professor who discuss local legends. As we soon discover in these interviews, stories of earthquakes, thunderstorms, and floods abound with mythological characters who teach people to live in harmony with nature. (Toyoda 2017) *The Sundial* attempts to salvage these myths from obscurity (because, although cherished, many have given way to science and are seen as lacking basis or logic). The implication is that an ethics of land and nature requires attending to these myths because they contain wisdom transmitted from the past, through people who work the land.

Ogawa Pro’s interest in harmonious human-nature collaborations speaks to ideas of sustainable agriculture, particularly organicism and a no-till method of farming popular at the time. The method received increasing attention in the late 70s and 80s due to the popularity of writings published by a farmer and environmentalist called Fukuoka Masanobu, which themselves drew from ancient practices of low-intensity land cultivation). Besides Fukuoka’s bestselling 1975 book, *One-Straw Revolution*, the writer Ariyoshi Sawako’s study of the impact of chemical fertilizers and other pollutants also impressed Ogawa Pro members. The study was serialised in Japan’s major newspaper, *Asahi Shimbun* and later published as a book, *Complex Pollution*, its contribution to raising environmental awareness akin to Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* (1962). Ogawa Pro members read Ariyoshi and Fukuoka, and were amongst several artists and filmmakers who moved to the countryside in the 1970s. Going ‘back to the land’ presented an attractive method for challenging notions of centre and periphery, where being ‘in the wilderness’ (*zaiya*) gained a positive connotation of not participating in institutional systems. (Tomii 2016) This was a moment of budding green politics, when many activist groups formed, including Japan’s recycling movement and the Association to Protect the Earth.

Marxism also played a part in Ogawa Pro’s understanding of land, and social responsibility. Like many of their leftist contemporaries, members read Marx from their student days onwards.⁷ Ogawa Pro’s understanding of land and human labour as a sensitive system akin to that of a living organism speaks to Marx’s studies of land, natural resources, and labour. For Marx, a rift occurs between the interaction (‘metabolism’) of humanity and the rest of nature, when intensive extractivist industry simultaneously undermines ‘the soil and the worker.’ (Marx 1992a: 637-8; 1992b: 949. Cf. Harvey 1996: 411; Bellamy

⁷ For example, the filmmakers, photographers, and theorists associated with *fūkeiron* (landscape theory) identified as Marxists. See Voelcker 2021.

Foster 2000: 153-6; Kovel 2007; Bellamy Foster 2010) Ogawa Pro reflect Marx's understanding of the porosity between natural environments and human labour in the way their farming-filmmaking moves back and forth between nature and culture as a means to prove the arbitrariness of this distinction and the importance of living on land, within communities and ecosystems, carefully. The films' many subjects indicate this, proposing what I propose we call hyphenated definitions of 'land' as land-and-weather, land-and-plants, land-and-animals, land-and-people. Maintaining the health of the ecosystem, they demonstrate, requires considering ecological relations, cultural practices, and political economy— all at once.

'REACTIONARY', 'PROGRESSIVE', OR SEEKING SOMETHING ELSE?

Ogawa Pro cultivated a politics that straddles ethnic romanticism, cultural regeneration, and ecosocialist activism, and the manner in which members represent themselves in the films is crucial in expressing this ambivalence. This is their fieldwork, they seem to say, and they too are searching in a speculative, open-ended way for alternatives to the consumerist, industrialised and globalising present. Ogawa Shinsuke confirms this when he describes the collective as

outsiders, or even worse, people from the city, surrounded by artificiality, who had completely lost the feeling for the diversity of other life forms and our relation to nature. Only close cohabitation with the peasants and the learning of work in the fields could show us the way to their essence. (Konig 1987)

Here, Ogawa reproduces a familiar dichotomy of metropolis versus hinterland, and urbanite versus peasant, essentialising peasants by romanticising their 'essence.' (Williams 1973) But the films acknowledge and critique precisely this romanticism and their makers' removed status. In *The Sundial*, for example, Ogawa Pro film a farmer sitting in the woods recounting local tales. Suddenly a professor of anthropology and folk studies stumbles into the background, looking decidedly out of place in his city coat and shoes. He interrupts the farmer to impart information on local legends from his own, bookish perspective. The farmer looks on in bemused silence. This staged and comical juxtaposition of the two men nods to Ogawa Pro's own awkwardness in Yamagata and, more profoundly, to their commitment to bridging diverse discourses and politics of land.

Reading Ogawa Pro's Yamagata project as what we might today call progressive and reactionary reveals an underlying ambition: to seek alternatives to the market conditions rapidly altering Japan at the time. Ogawa Pro did this by using farming and filmmaking to cultivate an alternative, more expansive

ontological account of life. This ontology understands that human life is predicated upon its interdependence, rather than opposition to, other life forms. And such an understanding constitutes an ethics of care. At the broadest level, an ethics of care can be understood as including everything done to maintain and repair an environment in order that people can live in it as well as possible. This environment is a complex, life-sustaining web of human and more-than-human elements. (Tronto 1990: 40; Bellacasa 2017: 97) This kind of ethics developed in a particular way in Japan, in the work of early 20th-century philosophers including Watsuji Tetsurō, who developed an understanding of subjectivity that emphasised an individual's relation to their social and climatic surroundings. Watsuji was particularly interested in Japan's climate (its humidity promotes vegetable growth but also brings violent thunderstorms). He believed Japanese people to be submissive because they lived with such powerful forces of nature. Watsuji's now dated characterisation of ethnicity based on climate appealed to many because it naturalised (and hence hid) ideological forces of assimilation and colonialism.⁸ Similar ethnic tendencies emerge in Ogawa Pro's fixation on Japanese agrarian tradition. Watsuji, like Ogawa Pro, used landscape to reinforce nationhood at the expense of cultural variation (Japanese indigenous minorities, for example, or East Asian subjects of its colonies). But his work (particularly his *Ethics*), like Ogawa Pro's Yamagata films, does present an important critique of the West's individualistic concept of the self by countering oppositional understandings that separate mind, body, nature, and culture.⁹ Watsuji's emphasis on relationality as being a condition of ethics finds an analogue in Ogawa Pro's cinematography, which refuses distance between camera, farmer, and plant, or weather, field, and harvest. A relational, environmental ethics of care is thus embedded in Ogawa Pro's camera, which often becomes plant-like through temporal and scalar mimesis. In the films, landscape is represented as a field of species, each of which require collaborative care. As warm weather arrives in the Yamagata mountains, for example, we see shots of the sky and sun, rice plants ripening responsively, farmers and members of the collective attending to their tools and instruments, and birds and insects waking from the cold winter. The effect is a suggestion that landscapes thrive when its human, animal, vegetal, and earthy constituents are in concert and awake to atmospheric changes.

⁸ For more on Watsuji's thought and connections between environmental philosophy and colonial impulses, see Midori Kagawa-Fox, "The Crucial Role of Culture in Japanese Environmental Philosophy" in J. Baird Callicott and James McRae (eds.) *Environmental Philosophy in Asian Traditions of Thought* (New York: SUNY Press, 2014) and Masako Gavin, "Nihon fūkeiron (Japanese Landscape): nationalistic or imperialistic?" *Japan Forum*, 12, 2 (2000) 219-231.

⁹ For more on the differences between concepts of selfhood in Western and Japanese thought, see Erin McCarthy's 2010 book, *Ethics Embodied: Rethinking Selfhood through Continental, Japanese, and Feminist Philosophies* (Washington DC: Lexington Books)

The word for landscape in Japanese, *fūkei*, comprises characters for wind (fū 風) and scene (kei 景). The same character for wind also appears in the word for milieu or climate (fūdo 風土), indicating that ideas of landscape and climate involve an intuited, atmospheric perception of space. Someone unable to read a situation or pick up on a mood is someone who ‘cannot read the air’ (*kūki ga yomenai*). In his 1935 essay, *Fūdo* (translated into English as *Climate and Culture*) Watsuji develops an ontology premised on the idea that reality is never a one-directional Subject-Object passage of understanding, but an interpretation. In its composition, the word *fūdo* illustrates this, comprising an atmosphere or wind (fū 風) in which a certain land (do 土) is interpreted by its inhabitants. (Voelcker 2021: 4) Ogawa Pro’s ontology is of this same kind: they cultivate an ethical self which develops in relation to the land and plants and communities that it helps cultivate. Animal, vegetable, mineral, and cultural elements act in concert.

CULTIVATING AN ALTERNATIVE ONTOLOGY: RICE LANGUAGE AND PLANT TIME

Ogawa Pro centralised rice plants’ own ‘voices’ in this expanded ontology. One way in which they did this was by exploring plant temporality in film. ‘As city dwellers,’ Ogawa explained, ‘we were incapable of ‘hearing the voices of the rice plants,’ as it is called in the local vernacular.’ (Konig 1987) Temporal manipulation in film became Ogawa’s method for learning rice ‘language.’ ‘I want to make a film that from beginning to end approaches ‘things you cannot see’ through ‘things you can see,’ Ogawa explained. (1986) To do so, Ogawa Pro used time-lapse, close-ups, microscopic lenses, and montage sequences, in an attempt to sync ‘film time’ with ‘plant time,’ and thus display appreciation for more-than-human constituents of the ecosystem through proximity and mimesis. Describing his use of time-lapse, Ogawa Shinsuke explained that ‘the image does not run at the regular speed (24 frames per second), but according to a highly compressed timing: dark clouds agglomerate ominously above our heads, a heavy milky snow front is quickly approaching... All these images are recorded from the perspective of and according to the time of the rice plants. Their life span is only six months, from April to September, which is very short if we compare it to the life span of human beings. Hence the time compression.’ (Konig 1987) In *Nippon*, a cold front hits the valley—we see it in time-lapse sequences of large snowclouds. Ogawa Pro build a machine using dry ice to simulate the effects of cold air on rice, experimenting on screen by constructing scale models and diagrams. Later in the film, time-lapse and extreme close-ups are used again to document the rice after it has weathered the cold snap and begins blossoming.



**[IMAGE: Still from *The Sundial Carved with a Thousand Years of Notches* (d. Ogawa Pro, 1986)
Courtesy Centre culturel de l'Athénée français, Tokyo]**

Along with rice plants, Ogawa Pro treated the sun as a sensate being that operated its own schedule from its own perspective. *The Sundial's* time-lapse sequences of the sun were made in collaboration with experimental filmmaker Yamazaki Hiroshi, who filmed from what he called a heliocentric perspective (demonstrating that the earth revolves around the sun) as opposed to conventional cinematic geo-centrism (in which the earth and camera appear to be static, and the sun appears to move in the sky). Yamazaki considered the sun to be a living being, not an object. When describing it, he uses a verb intended for people or living animals capable of movement (*imasu*, 'to be'). (Altuna 2006) Watching the film, this shift in perspective is not very apparent. Nevertheless, the sun's presence as a life-giving source of energy is emphasised by repeated shots that punctuate the film and are often accompanied by pulsing music to amplify the sense of vivacity.

In a way, Yamazaki and Ogawa Pro's anthropomorphic treatment of the sun and rice contradicts their intended project of recognising non-human ontologies as distinct from their own. Likewise, Ogawa Pro's use of mechanical time-lapse accelerates plant time, threatening to standardise vegetal otherness on man-made terms through the mechanical clock time of the camera's time-lapse device. But these decisions evidence attempts to understand an inherently other form of life from an unavoidably human or man-made point of view through the camera. Thus an ethics of care and relationality is enacted through camerawork. Ogawa Pro are not denouncing their human presence in these scenes, but rather, decentring

themselves in an attempt to appreciate other life forms. Man-made mechanisms such as time-lapse reconfigure a set of conditions or possibilities that determine the horizon of what is visible, audible, and expressible in a given community. And for Ogawa Pro, this community is more than human. It is a meshwork of animal, vegetable, and mineral elements, of nature and culture, of folklore and politics.

Meshwork is a term that the British anthropologist Tim Ingold uses to describe the ‘tangle of relationships’ that form an ecosystem. (2011: 134) Human and more-than-human life constitute a meshwork of interwoven elements, characterised by their interconnectivity, correspondence, or enmeshing. Ogawa Pro’s Yamagata films demonstrate that humans have a responsibility to be ethically and ecologically careful in these relationships. To borrow another term from Ingold, we can say that the films show us that all responsibility depends on responsiveness. (43) Their anticipation of Ingold, and more broadly, the recent multispecies turn in the arts, humanities, and social sciences, is startling.

Ogawa Pro use their own physical presence, experience, and labour to foreground this responsive responsibility across species. Half a decade into their project, Ogawa Shinsuke boasted that, ‘over the course of thirteen years [in Yamagata], the feeling of the sun was documented (was filmed, was imprinted) into our bodies.’ (Altuna 2006) They were learning about the environment by feeling its imprint on their bodies—becoming, in a sense, human sundials. This is far from a conception of time as being regulated by wristwatches and timetables. In Ogawa Shinsuke’s rendition, time is embodied and palpable. His description also likens filmmaker to filmstrip, the skin of the film and the skin of the filmmaker both reacting to the sun. It foregrounds the sun’s diurnal and seasonal movements as lifeforces, and celebrates biological beings (including farmer-filmmakers) who experience, grow, or work with it.

CULTIVATING AN EMBODIED METHOD: AGRICULTURE AND FILM CULTURE AS HANDS-ON FIELDWORK

This celebration of corporeal experience was part of Ogawa Pro’s larger formulation of methods for producing films and rice in unalienated ways—that is, by hand and for themselves as a group. It contributed to the idea of an expanded, more-than-human ontology by enriching an epistemology of land with hands-on experience and long-term immersion. The sheer length of their eighteen-year sojourn in Yamagata (only brought to an end by Ogawa Shinsuke’s death) plays into this emphasis on hands-on immersion, testifying to Ogawa Shinsuke’s determination and ambition—though, as a kind of fieldwork akin to an anthropologist’s, the project also perpetuates tropes of authenticity and authority whereby members transferred their status from DIY incomers to a posture of custodianship.



[IMAGE: Left to right: Mikado Sadatoshi, Shiraishi Yoko, Ogawa Shinsuke, and Iizuka Toshio in Yamagata. Still from *Devotion* (d. Barbara Hammer, 2000)]

Nippon and *The Sundial* represent this immersion by extensively documenting empirical methods of agricultural research such as measuring precipitation that involve *taiken* (‘bodily experience’) and are undertaken, literally, ‘in the field.’ Ogawa Pro admired the ways farmers passed *taiken* from one generation to the next. Aware that they had no farmer forefathers, they set about asking neighbours for advice, and conducting homemade experiments. Ogawa Shinsuke instructed members to ‘walk the fields’ and view them as ‘our school.’ (Altuna 2006) Local police surveyed such activities with interest; neighbours feared the collective was building bombs (in fact, Ogawa Pro’s shed contained beakers used for rice fertilisation). (Nornes 2007: 152) Ogawa Pro’s producer and a core member of the collective, Iizuka Toshio proudly recalls:

We learned how to judge good or poor rice from the colour of its leaves, their softness or hardness. We kept a daily weather record, setting up next to the rice field to measure changes in temperature and humidity, wind direction, wind power, and precipitation. We also inspected the soil, measuring its proportions of clay and nutrients. I acquired a microscope and created a slide to help visualise processes of rice bloom, pollination, and fertilisation. (Private correspondence with author)

Taiken—or *tiyan*, as it is rendered in Chinese—was a central term in the Maoist discourse in which Ogawa Pro members were steeped. Ogawa’s use of Maoism was selective and strategic. Maoism helped root Ogawa Pro’s project in a revolutionary movement that, by the 1970s, captured the imagination of

artists and activists the world over (including Godard in France). Mao emphasised the importance of ‘learning from the experience of real life’ (*tiyan shenghuo*) to temper theory with hands-on labour. He claimed that unless people investigated a problem, they had no right to speak about it.¹⁰ Ogawa replicated such rhetoric: ‘If you don't live in the region, you can't film it.’ (Ogawa 1989) Mao followed Marx in locating the seed of revolution in working-class masses who were capable of understanding reality and solving its problems because they engaged in labour: ‘Man’s knowledge depends mainly on his activity in material production,’ he wrote. (Mao 1937) Ogawa and other members read such statements keenly.¹¹ Iizuka again:

There was a politics to [our project...] connected to the assertion that you can’t simply think about rice. You have to do it in order to talk about it. Living communally, these values displace profit and personal gain. This was the time of the Cultural Revolution and this was the way people in urban centers were reading Mao. A favorite Maoism from the time went ‘Lots of Talk/Empty Hands.’ Our generation grew up with the high growth economy, but was not as happy and hopeful as our parents were. We were all talk with empty hands. So joining Ogawa Pro was a way of living. Going to Yamagata to farm represented a continuation of this spirit. My grandparents were making their own food and clothing, and now I would be, too (Nornes 2007: 158-9)

Having filmed from the edge of rice fields at Narita airport, Ogawa Shinsuke had realised that he should get closer to the action (we can assume he directed this statement at the collective’s other members, as Ogawa himself continued to prefer reading about agriculture, and editing footage, back at the collective’s headquarters). In an interview with Ōshima Nagisa, who visited the collective in Yamagata for a documentary profile, Ogawa continued the rhetoric, stating that ‘we needed to start using our own bodies to realise our ideals.’¹² And indeed, a sense of embodied experience pervades *The Sundial* and *Nippon*, which brim with sequences filmed in close-up, in which the camera shuttles through dykes, over clods of soil and into thickets of swaying stems, confusing boundaries of vegetable, human and technological subject. Whether such a confusion would appeal to a farmer is of course debatable; to Ogawa Pro and its student and artist audiences, such confusions celebrate farming’s direct (unalienated) relation to land.¹³ Whereas *Nippon* comprises entirely sync sound recorded with one microphone on a boom, *The Sundial*

¹⁰ Mao sent thousands of Chinese people to the countryside or to factories to undergo ‘reeducation through manual labour’ during the 1960s and 70s. Smith 2019.

¹¹ Despite these parallels, Ogawa Pro’s methods were of course very different to Mao’s in the way they carved out a space for artisanal labour and tradition, and recognised in film the potential for conservation and community engagement. For Ogawa, revolution was not an overturning of the old so much as a slow return to selections of it.

¹² *A Visit to Ogawa Productions* (d. Jun'ichiro Ōshige/ Ōshima Nagisa, Japan, 1981/ 1999) [Translation my own]

¹³ For contemporary comparison, a similar immersive approach guides several films produced at Harvard’s Sensory Ethnography Lab (SEL) such as *Leviathan* (dir. Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Verena Paravel, 2012) A similar desire for duration, meanwhile, guides an 8-hour film about Japanese farming, *The Works and Days (of Tayoko Shiojiri in the Shiotani Basin)* (dir. C. W. Winter and Anders Edstrom, 2020)

uses Foley to simulate the rustle of rice ears, the squelch of wet soil, and the chirruping of birds. Ogawa claimed that the creation of Foley was only possible because ‘we had documented the rice field for such a long time. That's why the re-enactment is flawless. [...] It was a process of nearly thirteen years to know what reality really is [...] in the depth of the physiological body. [...] That is what I call document. [...] It's not that we are caught in the dispute between fiction and non-fiction, it's the memory that resides in the human body.’ (Ogawa 1987)

Ogawa Pro's emphasis on empirical, embodied learning recalls a common phrase in Japanese, *mi ni tsukeru*, ‘to learn a skill.’ They aspired to learn farming skills so well that they became affixed (*tsukeru*) to the body (*mi*). This recalls Ogawa Shinsuke's aforementioned description of sunlight becoming imprinted on the filmmaker's body. According to Ogawa Pro's ideal, farming skills, and physical land and climatic conditions, would be embodied and imprinted onto filmmaker, film, and audience as a form of political and environmentalist immersion. Claims that Ogawa Pro films are not for the faint-hearted extend their romanticist celebration of immersion and endurance to audiences today.¹⁴ The films' extensive running lengths divided critics. Jean Rouch thought them overly long and indigestible; Suzuki Shiroyasu praised their length because it allowed reality to ‘unspool’ in detail. (Iizuka in personal communication with author; Ogawa 1992: 84) This was a luxury Suzuki missed in his work for public television, which was restricted in depth of analysis and political potential. Ogawa Shinsuke had in fact tried to make a television documentary in the mid-60s but ran into difficulties regarding length and content suitability. His subsequent films and their independent distribution and screenings in village halls (and once, a purpose-built theatre made of mud and thatch), constitute an anti-TV model of documentary, made at a time when television was spreading.¹⁵ Ogawa Pro's alternative film network again contributes to an idea of ecosystemic and collaborative activity, uniting film screening, community festival, and activist meeting models in an expanded cultural event.

CODA - LEARNING FROM OGAWA PRO'S LAND CINEMA

¹⁴ In recent years it has become common that speakers introducing Ogawa Pro films at festival and cinema screenings begin by challenging or encouraging audiences to commit to watching the films in their entirety. The length of the films deters some viewers, and creates a buzz amongst others proud have watched them to the end. This heroicism pervades the study of Japanese documentary, with Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival functioning at its centre as a place of pilgrimage. Discussions of the festival often mention the importance of its informal, late-night, drinking culture, continuing Ogawa Shinsuke's lifestyle preferences.

¹⁵ Ogawa Pro's alternative model of production and distribution has been examined elsewhere, for example Cazdyn 2002; Nornes 2007; Standish 2011; Furuhashi 2013.

Ogawa Pro's hands-on and interdisciplinary practice on land and film provides a model for thinking in more expanded and inclusive ways about social and environmental justice today. Their Yamagata project extends political documentary filmmaking from earlier iterations filmed at student protests in Tokyo, and farmers' barricades at Narita, towards radical ecosocialist frontiers where people, plants and ecosystems converge. As such, Ogawa Pro's Land Cinema posits an early model of interdisciplinary spatial practice concerned with interspecies relations, and anticipates a recent turn in the arts, humanities, and social sciences towards multi-species thinking.

Ogawa Pro's emphasis on rice plants' voices and the sun as a sensate being seems to anticipate a trend within this multi-species turn to endow non-human matter with 'agency.' (For example, Latour 2005; Bennett 2010; Morton 2013) But its ontologically heterogeneous approach must be distinguished from a tendency to downplay humanity's uniquely destructive agency seen in some of these theoretical renderings. (Malm 2018) Superficially, Ogawa Pro's interest in plants and weathers resembles these recent theoretical renderings, but whereas humans are no longer the protagonists of history in some renditions (they are among the many creatures rendered collectively responsible for it), Ogawa Pro never lose sight of people. Their films face environmental and social problems with the understanding that we must stay with the trouble, to borrow Donna Haraway's phrase—that is, we must realise that ecological troubles are inextricably linked to those caused by humans' socially unjust ways of living. (2016) Ogawa Pro thus pollinate a Marxist form of Historical Materialism with an expanded ontology that anticipates New Materialism. Their legacy is precisely this form of thinking and living and caring with others. That their films also crystallise tensions and ambivalences between social justice-oriented and more romanticist tendencies in thinking about land politically is paramount: it points to similar impasses hampering responses to the climate emergency today. Though the rice paddies Ogawa Pro once cultivated have now overgrown into jungle, and wild monkeys occupy Furuyashiki's thatched houses, the films survive. They constitute a form of speculative, provisional, and imaginative research that uses diverse means—from test-tubes to cameras to folklore re-enactments—to envision more inclusive communities and to invite us to consider who and what it is we care for today.



[IMAGE: Furuyashiki village in October 2017. Photograph by Becca Voelcker]

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