

EXPERIMENTAL FILM

Forms, spaces and networks: A history of Japanese experimental film

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The independent film collective [+] has voiced an aversion to being associated with the term ‘experimental film’ (*jikken eiga*) in Japan. While *jikken eiga* is most commonly used to designate such film-making practices, [+] member and historian Sakamoto Hirofumi has suggested that some film-makers feel the term ghettoises their work and encourages a false presumption that it is separated from cinema at large.¹ This chapter proposes that the contribution to wider film culture made by such peripheral activities can nonetheless be best illuminated by loosely grouping them together and assessing certain shared tendencies in their practice. Tracing Japan’s history of experimental film is to draw together a network of disparate creative voices each with their own unique history and distinct approach to film-making. Ranging from formal challenges to the limits of the medium to alternative explorations of identity, space and thinking, what these dispersed activities all have in common is their anti-institutional stance where personal expression is pursued unbound by the commercial incentives of industry.

Despite its extensive history in comparison to other Asian countries, experimental film-making has been mostly overlooked within historical accounts of Japanese cinema. The fact that the Japanese experimental film sector has stronger ties with the international film community than Japan’s mainstream film industry may have accounted for this occlusion. On the other hand, international chronicles of experimental film have also painted a fragmented

picture of Japanese contributions due to the paucity of available resources in other languages. In Japan, and elsewhere, experimental film challenges the medium specificity of film and often crosses over into the realm of the other arts; something that has also played a role in the situation.

Although preserving the idea of experimental film as a flexible form of classification has allowed for it to remain prevalent amid developments in technology, industry and the changing status of art, this inclusivity has also proved problematic for both the purposes of definition and its critical development in Japan. Japanese experimental film was first described as *avant-garde* (*zen’ei*) in the late 1920s – the political connotations of the word often being one reason for confusion. In marked contrast to studio film-making, the use of narrow-gauge film led to such practices being categorised as ‘small-form film’ (*kogata eiga*), ‘small film’ (*shō eiga*) and, in the postwar re-emergence of amateur film-making, ‘personal films’ (*kojin eiga*). The rise of television and the increasing ubiquity of the screen in the 1950s also caused a renegotiation of terminology from movie (*eiga*) to image (*eizō*), a term that encompassed broader currents in moving image production.² As a means of showing allegiance with American experimental cinema, films came to be described as experimental (*jikken eiga*) and the notion of underground film, transliterated and shortened to *angura*, not only described cinema but also a whole culture of peripheral art and lifestyle in the 1960s. As artists increasingly began incorporating film, video and

computer graphics into their practice, the term 'media art' became commonplace from the 1970s to describe artistic output related to, and beyond, moving images. Nonetheless, this chapter will still retain the use of the term 'experimental film' in order to interconnect these practices in Japan with a broader history and a wider global network.

While there have been several monographs devoted to American, British and Austrian experimental film cultures, there is still no complete history of Japanese experimental film in English. This chapter will therefore take the form of a survey in order to map out films, film-makers and activities that have shaped Japan's experimental film culture. While considering many key concerns in experimental film more broadly, the chapter will also dwell on local specificities in terminology, activity and development in order to shift the dominance of Western narratives of experimental film and encourage the internationalisation of the field of study. The chapter seeks to be a reference point not only for readers of Japanese cinema but also for those interested in broadening the conversation on localised experimental film cultures.

At least three concerns have continued to play a key role in shaping the development of experimental film in Japan and the chapter is structured around these in order to thoroughly address its peaks and pillars. Firstly, experimental film has a direct relationship with the medium – perhaps more than any other type of film-making due to the film-makers' intimate involvement with the film material and apparatus from production through to exhibition. While media continue to change along with developments in technology, experimental film-makers are often one of the first to not only try out new technologies but also identify what makes each medium unique from its predecessors. As such, the chapter's initial section, 'Medium', will outline in what ways the advent of technology and the availability of new cameras – from narrow-gauge to digital apparatuses – have influenced shifts in experimental film practice. Secondly, being positioned on the peripheries of the industry has led to experimental film-makers struggling to secure any permanent and dedicated space for their works. Finding accommodation in a diverse range of alternative spaces has, however,

encouraged experimental film-makers to encounter new audiences and establish a sense of collectivity with one another. The second section, 'Screening spaces', will profile a number of such key spaces and explore their importance through a selection of significant events. Lastly, experimental film-makers have often built relationships with individuals working in other forms of artistic practice to achieve new joint approaches to cinematic expression. The final section, 'Networks', will highlight a number of case studies where intermedial collaborations, both domestic and international, have led to new challenges for the definition of cinema. Through an exploration of these three key concerns – medium specificity, screening spaces and networks – this chapter will thus offer a comprehensive overview of the multiple sites, histories and faces of experimental film in Japan.

MEDIUM

The first wave of experimental films to come out of Japan was instigated by the newly available apparatus of small-gauge film cameras in the domestic market and a burgeoning culture of avant-garde arts imported from Europe. The arrival of 9.5mm and 16mm cameras, and the newfound mobility they offered, encouraged non-industrialised film-making and led to a number of individuals taking up the production of what came to be known as 'amateur films'. Although most of what was produced resulted in sketches, travelogues and home-movies, the Pathé Baby 9.5mm format and Kodak 16mm film, both introduced to Japan in 1923 for domestic use, offered opportunities to explore film-making unrelated to the codes of narrative, genre and drama developed by the major studios. The founding of amateur film societies, specialist magazines and film contests marked the emergence of an amateur film movement in the mid- to late 1920s, the most notable being the Tokyo Pathé Kinema Club, who began organising a film contest in the same year it was founded, 1925. Ogino Shigeji, who started film-making in 1928, became a leading figure with his prolific and diverse approach to narrow-gauge film-making that involved experiments in abstraction, as seen in works such as *River* (1933) and *Rhythm* (1934).³

Although the films presented at such contests displayed a diversity of personal visions, the rise of amateur film coincided with the arrival of imported European avant-garde titles and this came to shape the direction films took. Walter Ruttmann's *Symphony of a Great City/Berlin: Die Sinfonie der Großstadt Berlin* (1927), considered to be the first avant-garde film shown in Japan, and Dziga Vertov's *Man with a Movie Camera* (1929) both had an indelible impact as a surge of amateur film-makers began to shoot their own portraits of city life.⁴ Despite the low number of imported films, translations and reports were published in film magazines where debates ensued about titles not yet been screened in the country. Higo Hiroshi, a manager of what was probably Japan's first art-house cinema, Cinema Palace, visited Chateau de la Sarraz, Switzerland, in September 1929 for the International Congress of Independent Film where European film-makers Alberto Cavalcanti, Hans Richter, Sergei Eisenstein and the Japanese critic Tsuchiya Moichiō were among the participants. Higo subsequently founded the Zen'ei eigasha (Avant-Garde Film Company) and Zen'ei eiga kanshōkai (Avant-Garde Film Cine-Club) on his return to Japan. When the programme was shown at the Hibiyā Public Hall on 9 February 1930, with accompanying lectures, police interrupted the screening believing it to be a political gathering due to the use of the term 'avant-garde' in its promotion. Despite being censored by the state, French avant-garde films such as Man Ray's *The Starfish/L'Étoile de mer* (1928) and Germaine Dulac's *The Seashell and the Clergyman/La Coquille et le clergyman* (1928) were attacked for their neglect of social issues, in favour of questions of form, by leftist critics writing during the Shōwa depression.⁵ The 9.5mm format was also preferred by Prokino as a tool to document protest events and address the public thus launching a debate on the role of narrow-gauge film in the film-making community.⁶ This conjunction between art and politics set a precedent for the ways in which experimental film was to proceed with both remaining at its axis.

After World War II and the end of the US Occupation in 1952, the coincidence of developments in technology and shifts in social conditions once again laid the ground for the re-emergence of

experimental film. Although the double-8 format had been available in Japan since 1932, 8mm film rose in popularity among amateur film-makers in the mid-1950s when 16mm film became more expensive as television stations used it to shoot their programmes. Takabayashi Yōichi's unique blend of documentary, travelogue and film poetry, such as *Ishikkoro* (1961), began to feature at amateur film screenings in the late 1950s and the director was the recipient of various prizes at international amateur film festivals in Italy. Ōbayashi Nobuhiko and Iimura Takahiko, both snubbed by amateur film contests, joined Takabayashi and the three started to screen their works together. After shooting 8mm films in Ohio as a teenager, the American film-maker and writer, Donald Richie, also made a number of short experimental films in Japan, where he lived from 1953. Richie introduced overseas experimental film to a younger generation of film-makers and joined these three and a number of others in submitting films to the film festival EXPRMNTL 3 in Knokke-le-Zoute, Belgium, where they received a group award in 1963. Despite impediments including its small image and increasing lack of availability, the 8mm film format continues to be incorporated into artistic practice for its particular aesthetic and mobility. In the 1980s and 1990s, personal dramas by Obitani Yuri, eerie animations of Kurosaka Keita, abstract textures in the *Ecosystem* series by Koike Teruo, and film poems by Yamada Isao, mostly shot on Super-8, have all testified to the perseverance of the 8mm format in the video and digital era.

The emergence of video similarly instigated another new phase in the history of Japanese experimental film. With its technological capacity for live transmission, video offered opportunities for film-makers and artists to present an image at the same time it was recorded. As such, live performance was utilised early on in the development of the format. The first presentation of video art in Japan is considered to be the performance that took place at the 'EX POSE '68: Nanika Ittekure Ima Sagasu' (Say Something Now, I'm Looking for Something to Say) event held in May 1968, where the art critic Tōno Yoshiaki sat cross-dressed in a separate room and spoke to the camera with the image fed live onto an onstage monitor. Japanese

video art experienced a slow beginning before the collective Video Hiroba was founded in 1972. This is despite the introduction of the Sony Portapak in the domestic market in 1967 and the technician Abe Shūya, in collaboration with the Korean artist Nam June Paik, developing what is widely considered to be the first video synthesiser in 1969, the Paik-Abe Video Synthesizer. Video Hiroba's first event, 'Video Communication Do-It Yourself Kit', held at the Sony Building, Tokyo, in February 1972, became a landmark with presentations of local and international video art through the support of Canadian video artist Michael Goldberg. The show included *Eat* (1972), a performance by the artists Yamaguchi Katsuhiro and Kobayashi Hakudō, where the two sat across a table from one another and took turns recording each other eating while having this fed live onto a monitor. The particularities of the live feed in the video format continue to be utilised by younger artists to this day. In *Video Feedback Live Performance* (2011–), a performance by Hamasaki Ryōta and Kawai Masayuki (co-founder of Video Center Tokyo), flickering video signals from analogue video are manipulated to create synchronised audio beats and streams of colour.

As the television monitor became increasingly prevalent in domestic spaces across the country, it also became the subject of critique by Japanese video artists who explored its form as an object in performances and installations. The film-maker Matsumoto Toshio performed *Magnetic Scramble* (1968) at the Shinjuku discotheque L.S.D. where he distorted the transmitted image by placing magnetic coil against a monitor, an experiment that was later incorporated into a scene in his feature film, *Funeral Parade of Roses/Bara no sōretsu* (1969). Kawaguchi Tatsuo, Uematsu Keiji and Muraoka Saburō's performance for television broadcast, *Image of Image-Seeing/Eizō no eizō – mirukoto* (1973), showcased a destructive tendency in the artistic use of television monitors, which were taped over, smashed and thrown into a river.⁷ In April-May 1969, at the Electromagica '69 exhibition held at the Sony Building, the artist Yamaguchi Katsuhirō presented *Image Modulator* (1969), where glass plates were placed in front of three colour television monitors to fragment and distort the images in a video art appropriation of

his own *Vitrine* series of light sculptures developed during his time as a young artist in the 1950s.

As many of the early video artists in Japan had previously worked in film, the differences between film and video were emphasised in experiments with the latter. Beyond aesthetic concerns, the ability for video to instantly transmit information was also taken up to address social issues. Women artists, in particular, began incorporating the video format into their artistic practice. In collaboration with the artist Kobayashi Hakudō, Nakaya Fujiko completed her first video piece *Friends of Minamata Victims – Video Diary/Minamata o kokuhatsu suru kai – Tent mura Video nikki* (1972), where she documented a demonstration held at the headquarters of Chisso Corporation, the company whose mercury pollution caused the infamous Minamata disease. Nakaya placed a video monitor at the scene to produce a closed circuit where protestors were able to see themselves in action, thus utilising the format's capacity for communication and self-reflection. Nakaya was a founding member of Video Hiroba and began distributing works by video artists in 1979 through Processart Inc. She opened Video Gallery SCAN in 1980, started the Japan International Video Television Festival in 1987 and has remained a consistent advocate for the video medium. Feminist concerns in Japanese society are explicitly addressed in Idemitsu Mako's works, including *Another Day of a Housewife* (1977), which features a television monitor showing a close-up of Idemitsu's own eye staring at her as she takes on a series of house chores (Fig. 13.1). Since its introduction to the art scene in 1960s Japan, video has continued to remain relevant in the arts with support particularly from Tamura Gallery, Tokyo, and the Fukui International Video Biennale (1985–99).

Despite the increasing accessibility of video and digital equipment, some artists in Japan have continued to use film materials in ways that assert the uniqueness of the format through emphasis on its textual qualities and the existence of individual frames. Coinciding with the emergence of video, experimental film in the 1970s became increasingly artisanal in its approach. Matsumoto Toshio's *Atman* (1975) uses infrared film to shoot 480 still images of a man sat down wearing a *noh* theatre mask from multiple angles. The director



Fig. 13.1 *Another Day of a Housewife* (Mako Idemitsu, 1977). Courtesy of Studio Idemitsu.

activates a sense of spinning motion through still animation techniques that draw attention to film projection as the quick succession of photographic frames. This highly coordinated technique was hugely influential on various Japanese film-makers; it was honed to dynamic perfection in *Spacy* (1981) by Ito Takashi and its impact can still be seen in Sonoda Eriko's *Garden/ing* (2007) and Saitō Nasuka's *A Labyrinth of Residence/Kyojyū meikyū* (2008). The idea of film as a succession of still photographs was also accentuated with the visibility of the photographic frame in Isao Kōta's *The Dutchman's Photographs/Orandajin no shashin* (1976) and Kawanka Nobuhiro's *Switchback* (1976), a tendency which the critic Darly Chin has identified as having echoes of Western 'structuralist film' – experimental film-making in the 1960s to 1970s that drew attention to the material conditions of film – albeit with the distinct principle of gratification and irony (Fig. 13.2).⁸ The lack of accessible film laboratory equipment could perhaps explain the preference shown by Japanese artists for the re-photographing technique, often used in stop-motion animation, in their experimental films. Unlike the case with British counterparts such as the London Film-Makers' Co-operative, for example, artist-run film labs were not as prevalent in Japan since film laboratories were used to offering their services at a relatively low cost.

Another tendency that emerged in the use of film in the video and digital age was a reflection on, and

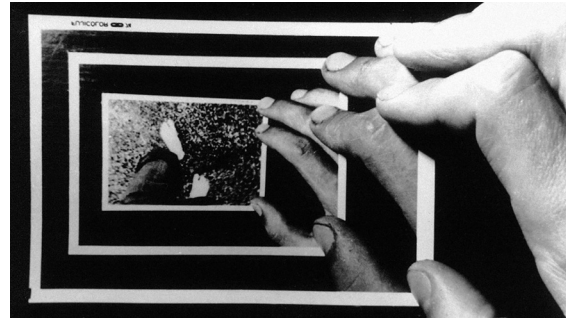


Fig. 13.2 *Dutchman's Photograph/Orandajin no shashin* (Isao Kōta, 1974). Courtesy of Image Forum and Isao Kōta.

artistic appropriation of, film history. In an early example of such film-making in Japan, Okuyama Jun'ichi's *Le Cinéma/Le Cinéma Eiga* (1975) utilised one second from a close-up shot of a woman in a Hollywood film and redesigned it into a short film by fragmenting the second by multiplying it and rearranging the order of the frames. Sueoka Ichirō similarly took a song sequence from *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) and subverted it through seemingly unending repetition in *The Rainbow of Odds/Fuwa no niji* (1998). Found footage from television also became subject to appropriation; it was, for example, violently painted over in *Work/Sakuhin* (1958) by Shimamoto Shōzō, a member of the Gutai Art Association, a leading postwar avant-garde art group based in the Kansai region. A younger member of Gutai, Imai Norio, also presented *Severed Film/Setsudan sareta film* (1972), an installation that involved abandoned film stock from a television production that was cut up to fit into a 35mm slide holder with the rest discarded on the floor of the exhibition space. For his series *Plate/Han* (1999–), Itō Ryūsuke created a collage out of found footage from various formats and processed it through direct contact printing onto the film, including its optical soundtrack, where the material became the image itself in what he called 'an image print'. More recently, the Montreal-based Japanese artist Daichi Saitō has taken a fragment from a Kung Fu film for a double-projection piece, *Never a Foot Too Far, Even* (2012), where he presents two projections of a figure in a forest, one on top of another. Although the same image is shown, one of the reels includes an additional

frame thus expanding its length and creating a sense of dissonance in the projection until both versions eventually become synchronised. Saito has described the filmstrip as embodying a structural similarity to the Japanese writing pad and many Japanese contemporary film-makers who focus on individual frames, such as New York-based Nishikawa Tomonari and Sapporo-based Ōshima Keitarō, share his artisanal dedication to the film format.⁹

SCREENING SPACES

Existing on the peripheries of the film industry, experimental film in Japan has struggled to find a dedicated space for exhibition throughout its existence. Although sparse and often short-lived, spaces that can accommodate film-makers and artists have provided valuable opportunities for experiments and discussions to take place. As cinemas are mostly owned by, or contracted with, major film studios, films have often been presented together as one-off programmes in rented spaces. This is a screening practice that continues to this day. As small-gauge film projection doesn't require the cumbersome set-up of the 35mm format, projections are mobile and relatively easy to prepare. Due to their close relationship with the other arts, experimental films have also often been screened on the walls of small gallery spaces. The struggle for space is not only limited to Japan, it has also been a perennial concern for experimental film around the world. Nevertheless, close analysis of just a few spaces can reveal the particularities of Japan's situation.

After being ignored by the amateur film contests, Iimura Takahiko presented his debut screening at the Naiqua Gallery in August 1963, thus inaugurating the Naiqua Cinematheque film series, where he projected his 8mm films onto all walls with the audience sat on the floor. Previously a dental clinic, this unique space in Shinbashi, Tokyo, became a home to performance artists and visual artists such as Yoko Ono, Shinohara Ushio and the collectives Zero Jigen and Hi Red Centre. This established various interactions between film-makers and artists as seen in the presence of members of the Hi Red Centre in the panel discussion presented after Iimura's screening. Lunami Gallery in

Ginza, Tokyo, similarly began a series of screenings in the form of the 'Lunami Film Gallery'.

The first space in Japan to present experimental film programmes in the form of a theatrical run was the Theatre Scorpio in Shinjuku – the refurbished basement of the Art Theatre Shinjuku Bunka, one of the nationwide chains of cinemas that showed films distributed and produced by the Art Theatre Guild (ATG) of Japan. Starting in 1962, the ATG was an initiative launched by Kawakita Kashiko to tackle the dearth of cinemas in Japan showing foreign art-house and local independent titles; later, in 1967, it also became a coproducer of local independent films. Managed by Kuzui Kinshirō, Shinjuku Bunka not only showed ATG titles but also staged productions by underground theatre troupes, such as Terayama Shūji's Tenjō Sajiki, and showed local experimental film-makers' works. The small-gauge films made by some of these artists were deemed unsuitable for the enormous screen in the space, thus encouraging Kuzui to convert the basement into a small underground art space. Named by the novelist Mishima Yukio after Kenneth Anger's *Scorpio Rising* (1963), the space opened with what is considered the first Japanese experimental feature-length film, Adachi Masao's *Galaxy/Gingakei* (1967), and quickly came to represent the pinnacle of experimental film culture until its closure in 1974.

Another pivotal art space was the Sōgetsu Art Centre (SAC) in Akasaka, Tokyo, that went on to become the epicentre of experimental arts in postwar Japan. Set up in 1959 by the film-maker Teshigahara Hiroshi, the SAC was located in the basement of Sōgetsu, a unique flower arrangement school ran by the film-maker's father. Under the auspices of Teshigahara, the space became a place where improvised music, modern dance, underground theatre and symposia on the arts were held regularly. The founding ethos of the space was to create a meeting point between different kinds of practice. In the early years, the organisers of the SAC invested considerable energy in the marriage of modern jazz and other art forms with events organised by the Association of Etcetera and Jazz in 1960 involving simultaneous presentations, some of which entailed projections of film, with participants including Terayama Shūji, the composer Takemitsu Tōru and the animator Manabe

Hiroshi. When Manabe founded the Animation Sannin no Kai (Three-Person Animation Circle) with Yanagihara Ryōhei and Kuri Yōji, they carried out similar experiments by reconfiguring the conventions of screening animation; Manabe's *Animation for the Stage/Butai no tameno animation* (1960), for example, involved his animation *Marine Snow* (1960) presented together with modern dance and live readings of dramatic poetry. The success of these events was such that in 1964 they organised the first animation festival in Japan at the SAC and encouraged graphic designers and illustrators, such as Yokoo Tadanori, Uno Akira and Tanaami Keiichi, to try out animation. The SAC was also the place where the first experimental film festival in Japan, the Sōgetsu Experimental Film Festival,¹⁰ was held in 1967. Running for three editions, the festival presented a mixture of international titles and as many as 105 local films therefore revealing a strong contingent of experimental film-makers in Japan. The final edition of the festival was forced to cancel on the opening day by the 'Joint-Struggle to Destroy the Festival' (Festival funsai kyōtō kaigi), a group of protestors who rejected the hierarchy imposed within the competition structure. The action effectively split the experimental film community, some members of which were involved in the protests, and instigated a debate on the importance of space (*ba*) for the presentation of films to cultivate new talents and audiences.

Other sectors of the film community affected by the cancellation were the Japan Film-makers' Co-operative, founded in March 1968 by the film critic Satō Jyūshin in order to establish a distribution network for experimental film, and the Japan Underground Centre (JUC), a screening initiative ran by Kawanaka Nobuhiro. Despite a strong relationship with members of the Joint-Struggle to Destroy the Festival, both Satō and Kawanaka refused the call for support they received on the grounds of ideological difference and subsequently converted the JUC into a distribution and exhibition unit. After temporarily organising screenings at a table tennis hall and in an apartment room, the JUC, changing their name to the Underground Centre, found a regular base in the basement of the Tenjō Sajiki theatre. When Tenjō Sajiki shut its doors in 1977, the Underground Centre renamed itself Image Forum,

first relocating to Shinjuku and eventually Shibuya in 2000. Image Forum is now considered the centre for experimental film in Japan and in addition to editing the magazine *Monthly Image Forum* (1980–95), now distributes local film-makers' work internationally and organises its own annual experimental film festival, the Image Forum Festival (1987–).

Although Image Forum remains significant to this day, it is by no means the only platform for Japanese experimental film. Other key institutions and film festivals that have a strong representation of experimental film include the Yebisu International Festival of Art and Alternative Visions at the **Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography**, the Yamagata International Documentary Film Festival and the Art Film Festival in Aichi Art Centre.¹¹ Clubs and music venues, such as Uplink in Shibuya, Shinsekai and SuperDeluxe, both in Roppongi, continue to facilitate film-makers that seek to incorporate aspects of live performance into their screening practice and create opportunities for interactions between new audiences and experimental film. Despite the continuing difficulties in securing a dedicated space for screening experimental films, other forms of exhibition have also begun to take place on virtual platforms, such as the streaming websites U-stream and Dommune, where film-makers present their works online and engage in discussions through social media.

NETWORKS

Due to the lack of studio support in Japan, experimental film-makers have been encouraged to proactively forge networks with one another in order to seek assistance with both production and exhibition. These relationships have not just been important for mutual support but also creativity, as film-makers influence and inspire one another. One of the first groups to emerge out of such conditions was the Film Independents, founded in 1964 in Tokyo, whose membership included Iimura Takahiko, Ōbayashi Nobuhiko, Donald Richie, Adachi Masao and Kanesaka Kenji. In December 1964, the group encouraged artists working in other fields to make a 2-minute film for an event they organised at the Kinokuniya Hall. The programme 'A Commercial

for Myself' included submissions by the performance artist Kazakura Shō, artist Akasegawa Genpei and musician Tone Yasunao. The group's name itself was a reference to the vital annual exhibition series Yomiuri Independent (1949–63), where dissident artists found a platform for their practice with all works submitted being exhibited and showing the collapsing boundaries between film and other arts.

Another space that enabled such interaction was the VAN Film Science Research Centre. An apartment converted into a film processing lab and communal living space, VAN was set up by students of the Nichidai Eiken (Nihon University Film Studies Club), a film discussion and production unit established in 1957 that made films under a collective name in defiance against the existing hierarchy of film production. With Adachi and Jōnouchi Motoharu as residents, VAN became a meeting point for a range of artists and film-makers, including Akasegawa, Tone, Kazakura, Imura, the musician Kosugi Takehisa and Yoko Ono. VAN's first collective project was *Document 6.15* (1961), a project commissioned by the All-Japan Federation of Self-Governing Students (*Zengakuren*) for an event to mourn the death of a student protestor, Kanba Michiko, during demonstrations against the Anpo US–Japan Security Treaty. *Document 6.15* became a multi-projection screening at the Kudan kaikan that involved projections of slides and film with involvement by Adachi, Jōnouchi and Imura. In a follow-up to the event the following year, Tone arranged live music and a performance by the performance artists Kosugi, Kazakura and Ono, who the film-makers got to know at VAN.¹² Such interpretations of what a film screening could entail inspired film-makers, such as Jōnouchi and Imura, to consider multiple versions of a single film and introduce live action into the event of film projection in a form that came to be known as expanded cinema. In 1963, for example, Imura presented *Screen Play* at the SAC by projecting his film *Colour/Iro* (1962–3) on the back of the artist Takamatsu Jirō. Jōnouchi accompanied projections of his film *Shelter Plan* (1964) with live action that varied on each occasion, at times whipping the screen and at other times giving poetry recitals while his film was projected onto his body.

A term introduced in 1966 from the US, expanded cinema provided a way to group such film presentations that sought alternatives to the single screen format. Founded upon networks between film and other arts, expanded cinema intersected with the arrival of 'intermedia' as a concept to describe work that linked conventionally separated artistic forms. While the historian Miryam Sas has emphasised the relations between 1960s intermedia and 'total work of art' (*sōgō geijutsu*) theorised and practiced in the 1950s,¹³ my own research has called attention to the dance critic Ichikawa Miyabi's own reading of intermedia as a 'scattered totality' (*bara-bara zentaisei*), where individual forms of artistic expressions retain their own identity.¹⁴ Rather than *sōgō* that related to a sense of unification, a shift in terminological usage to the term 'mixedness' (*kongō*) took place for works more closely related to performances of the international art network Fluxus, from which the term intermedia originated. In practice, expanded cinema in Japan incorporated both approaches. The notion of 'intermedia' was launched at the Lunami Gallery in May 1967 at a five-day series of event called 'Intermedia', which brought together painting, sculpture, performance and film, including Kanesaka Kenji's own Fluxus-inspired interruption of his film *The Easily Burning Ears/Moeyasui mimi* (1967). A network was established, particularly between New York and Tokyo, and many Japanese artists who later participated in 'intermedia' events subsequently became associated with Fluxus. As expanded cinema rose to prominence, film-makers began incorporating multi-projection into their practice, something showcased at events such as the Intermedia Art Festival (1969) and Cross Talk Intermedia (1969). The film historian Yuriko Furuhashi has pointed out the correlation between multi-projection formats and the surveillance control rooms of Expo '70, thus drawing attention to the influence of both the state and the industry.¹⁵

In Kyoto and Osaka, a group of young artists who had previously worked in the sculptural arts began producing experimental films under the name of the Art Film Association, a loose network that included Matsumoto Shōji, Imai Norio and Kawaguchi Tatsuo. Due to their background in the plastic arts, the group's

approach to film also incorporated a strong focus on the presentation of their work thus leading to the advent of the film and video installation. Indicative of this shift was the Gendai no zōkei (Exhibition of Contemporary Plastic Arts), an annual series of exhibitions organised by members that began in 1968 as an outdoor sculptural exhibition, switched to film screenings in 1970, before being followed by a group exhibition of film installations in 1972, which integrated their sculptural beginnings into the presentation of film.¹⁶ Film and video in the gallery or museum space increasingly shifted from singular events to looped installations with less focus on sequence in order to account for the particular visitor experience of such spaces. As video became more accessible, the Art Film Association artists moved into the fields of video art, video performance and video installation, and the Exhibition of Contemporary Plastic Arts became a key showcase for video work until its closure in 1977.

Expanded cinema became commonplace in the 1960s, but there are earlier examples that explored alternative modes of projection and intermedial collaboration. Although it was peripheral to their work, the young artists' collective Jikken Kōbō Experimental Workshop experimented with film and the use of autoslide projection in their modern ballet productions and music concerts throughout the 1950s. One of their members, Yamaguchi Katsuhiro, made *Mobiles and Vitrines* (1954), about two *obuje* (objet d'art)¹⁷ with the photographer Kitadai Shōzō. The film was projected together with slides at their collaboration with a strip show, *7 Peeping Toms from Heaven*, regularly staged between October and December 1954 at the Nichigeki Music Hall.¹⁸ The Sanka zōkei bijutsu kyōkai, a theatre group inspired by the European avant-garde, presented their live performance, *Button*, at the Tsukiji Little Theatre in May 1925 along with several Dada films. Murayama Tomoyoshi, one of Sanka's members, formed the avant-garde group MAVO (1924–5) who staged theatre productions along with multiple projection and interaction between the performance and the on-screen image, in a manner inspired by the early cinema productions of *rensageki* (chain drama).¹⁹ Kinugasa Teinosuke, the director of the landmark independent silent film *A Page of Madness/Kurutta Ichipeiji* (1926),

similarly collaborated with Senda Korenari to present *Kino Drama* (1937), a theatre production that involved screens on both sides of the stage and projections onto the set.

Various international networks have been crucial to the development of experimental Japanese film. As previously noted, early film-makers and critics became deeply invested in the activities of the avant-garde and, in many cases, work was discussed without access to the films themselves with people relying on reports, essays, stills and limited postal exchange. The movement to New York by artists in the 1950s and 1960s, in particular, therefore had an indelible impact on the Japanese art and experimental film scene as information exchange and the visibility of works strengthened. As well as screenings organised by Donald Richie in the US in the 1960s, Iimura Takahiko's six-month European tour in 1969, armed with reels of work by the Film Independents, also helped Japanese experimental film reach a wider audience. The migration of film-makers and artists out of Japan led to transnational collaborations that encouraged new developments in artistic practice. Oe Masanori flew to New York in 1966 and spent four years in the US during which time he stayed at Third World Studios and Studio M2, where he shot activist documentaries of demonstrations, co-directed by Marvin Fishman, as part of the Newsreel collective. Some Japanese film-makers and artists found residence in overseas countries, including Daichi Saito who relocated to Montreal and founded the Double Negative film collective with other local film-makers. The longstanding activities of these film-makers who no longer call Japan their only home allows us to question the validity of national cinema as a framework in describing their work. We may also note that the intimate scale of experimental film production can allow a level of international mobility that is comparatively difficult to attain for directors restricted to mainstream narrative film-making.

Despite the internationalisation of experimental film, local networks have remained relevant by maintaining a sense of community between artists and film-makers that has enabled them to share information, attitudes and audiences. The screening collective Hairo, established in Shibuya in 1970, have

continued to project 8mm and 16mm films in the same venue for over forty years. Ōnishi Keiji, who made a highly personal and confrontational experimental documentary about his father's death, *A Burning Star/Gyōsei* (1999), ran the Cinema Train distributing local film-makers' work and showing experimental films from overseas. The collective [+], including the film-makers Makino Takashi, Hayama Rei, Tamaki Shinkan and the researcher Sakamoto Hirofumi, are the most vital force in the current circle of experimental film-making in Japan. Regularly presenting their own work in Europe and South East Asia, the collective also curate works by international film-makers that its members have discovered in their travels. In particular, Makino's abstract work that superimposes layers of images to immersive effect sees him collaborating with foreign musicians, including Lawrence English (Australia) and Jim O'Rourke (US/Japan) as well as film-makers such as the Dutch media art group Telcosystems (e.g. *Deorbit* [2013]). His unique merging of film and digital working processes is pulling Japanese experimental film in exciting directions and onto an international platform.

While retaining a position at the periphery of the industry, Japanese experimental film has continued to position itself at the forefront of cinematic expression. By taking three central themes into consideration – medium specificity, screening spaces and networks – this chapter has highlighted the peaks of creativity and significant activities that have contributed to the shaping of experimental film in Japan. As a call to internationalise the field of study and reconsider the Western hegemony in the current historicisation of experimental film, this chapter has offered a broad survey of experimental film that has contributed to the development of alternative film-making in Japan. What an overview of such work finally reveals is that the continuing evolution of Japanese experimental film is due, more than anything else, to the impetus of its film-makers to question every possible preconceived framework of cinema itself.

Notes

- 1 See Sakamoto Hirofumi, 'Jikken eiga e no gigi, sono rekishi-teki zentei', in Plus Publishing (ed.), *Plus Documents 2009–2013* (Tokyo: Engine Books, 2014), p. 9.
- 2 Yuriko Furuhashi has provided astute analysis on this shift in the conception of the image. See her *Cinema of Actuality: Japanese Avant-garde Filmmaking in the Season of Image Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), p. 40.
- 3 The National Film Archive of Japan is currently undergoing an extensive preservation project of many Japanese pre-World War I amateur film titles, including works by Ogino and Kansai-based Mori Kurenai.
- 4 *Man with a Movie Camera* was released theatrically in Japan as *Korega Russia da!* (This is Russia!) in 1932 by the Yamani Yoko distribution company. *Berlin: Symphony of a Great City* received a theatrical release in 1928.
- 5 The Shōwa depression was a financial crisis in Japan that took place in 1927. While the post-World War I years saw an economic boom, Japan faced a downturn soon after in the 1920s with the economy slowing down and the Great Kantō Earthquake in 1923. For a comprehensive account of Japan's pre-World War II amateur films, see Nishimura Tomohiro, 'Nihon jikken eizōshi', *Aida* nos. 87–123 (2004–6), which also offers a comprehensive historical account of Japanese experimental film up until the 1970s.
- 6 Prokino is short for the Proletarian Film League of Japan (Nihon puroretaria eiga dōmei) who documented protests and workers' activities and organised screenings of their own work. For more on Prokino, see Abé Mark Nornes, *Japanese Documentary Film: The Meiji Era Through Hiroshima* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).
- 7 Throwing the television monitor into a river was probably a homage to Wolf Vostell's *Television Décollage* (1963) performed by Tone Yasunao and Akiyama Kuniharu at the artist Ay-O's Fluxus event 'Happening for Sightseeing Bus Trip in Tokyo' on 18 December 1966.
- 8 See Daryl Chin, 'The Future of an Illusion(ism): Notes on the New Japanese Avant-Garde Film', *Millennium Film Journal* no. 2 (Spring/Summer, 1978), p. 87.
- 9 See Daichi Saïto, *Moving the Sleeping Images of Things Towards the Light* (Montreal: Les éditions Le Laps, 2013).
- 10 The festival was renamed Film Art Festival Tokyo for its second and final editions, in 1968 and 1969 respectively.
- 11 Other committed journals and magazines that discussed experimental film titles include *Kiroku eiga*, *Eizō geijutsu*, *Eiga hyōron*, *Eiga hihyō*, *Kikan*

- film, Geijutsu club, Underground Cinematheque* and *NeoNeo*. Many of these journals were born out of discussion groups that brought together a multidisciplinary network of artists and critics that shared and discussed works, translated critical essays from overseas and organised events.
- 12 See Adachi Masao, 'Subetewa VAN eiga kagaku kenkyūjo kara hajimatta: Eiga undō ni kanshiteno danshō', in Hirasawa Gō (ed.), *Underground Film Archives* (Tokyo: Kawade Shobō Shinsha, 2002), pp. 96–99; and Hirasawa Gō, 'Politics, the Street, and the Expansion into Everyday Life', in Tasaka Hiroko (ed.), *Japanese Expanded Cinema Revisited* (Tokyo: Tokyo Photographic Art Museum, 2017), pp. 138–47.
 - 13 See Miryam Sas, 'Intermedia 1955–1970', in Diana C. Stoll (ed.), *Tokyo 1955–1970: A New Avant-Garde* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2012), p. 143. Ken Yoshida also proposes a relation between Hanada Kiyoteru's understanding of *sōgō geijutsu* and 1960s intermedia in Japan. See his 'The Undulating Contours of Sōgō Geijutsu (Total Work of Art), or Hanada Kiyoteru's Thoughts on Transmedia in Postwar Japan', *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* vol. 13 no. 1 (2012), pp. 36–54.
 - 14 See Ichikawa Miyabi, 'Jizoku suru jikan to fukusū no bashō', *SD* vol. 79 (April 1971), p. 123. For more on intermedia and expanded cinema, see Julian Ross, 'Beyond the Frame: Intermedia and Expanded Cinema in 1960–70s Japan' (PhD thesis, University of Leeds, 2015).
 - 15 See Yuriko Furuhashi, 'Multimedia Environments and Security Operations: Expo '70 as a Laboratory of Governance', *Grey Room* no. 54 (Winter 2014), pp. 56–79.
 - 16 The exhibition itself is being restaged at the Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, in October–November 2015 in a project curated by Miwa Kenjin.
 - 17 *Obuje*, the Japanese translation for *objet d'art* (the art object), was often used in postwar Japanese art circles to signify small items placed in an artistic context.
 - 18 Other film experiments related to Jikken Kōbō include *Kine-Calligraphy* (1955) by Graphic Shūdan (Graphics Group), a direct animation inspired by Norman McLaren, and Matsumoto Toshio's first film *Silver Wheel/Ginrin* (1956) that involved contributions from its members.
 - 19 *Rensageki* combined film and theatre in a mixed format presentation that saw short-lived success in the mid-1910s. See Diane Wei Lewis, 'Shinkō geijutsu undō to rensageki: Murayama Tomoyoshi o megutte', *Bandarai* vol. 12 (2013), pp. 195–205.