

Introducing *Japanese Cinema Expanded*

By Go Hirasawa, January 2020

In the program, we would like to introduce five films, mainly by Japanese filmmakers and artists. However, despite the title *Japanese Cinema Expanded*, two of the films were shot in the US and one was shot in the US and Japan. The films cannot be captured within the regional framework of Japan. They provide a historical context for the cross-cutting experiments in film, art, and music in the same period, with Japan as a medium. We will introduce single-channel works, considering the concept of expanded cinema not only as a form of multi-projection and performance screening, but also as a cross-disciplinary film and moving-image expression.

The program is also related to Shuzo Azuchi Gulliver's intermedia masterpiece *Cinematic illumination* (1968–69) and the publication of *Japanese Expanded Cinema and Intermedia: Critical Texts of the 1960s*, edited by Julian Ross, Ann Adachi-Tasch, and myself at Archive Books in Germany. *Cinematic Illumination* was presented at Intermedia Art Festival in 1969, organized by musician Yasunao Tone, Takehisa Kosugi, and Chieko Shiomi. The work has been re-produced by Tokyo Photographic art museum in 2017, then MoMA in 2020, where it is installed until the end of February 2021.

In discussions of the history of expanded cinema or intermedia in Japan, the narrative tends to be that they were introduced from the West in the early 1960s, starting with the underground cinema and Fluxus movements, and under their influence new homegrown works and movements emerged. Of course, such an idea is not wrong if you are referring to the terms expanded cinema and intermedia themselves. However, many similar interdisciplinary experiments were being carried out in Japan in the late 1950s. Those art activities were referred to as “total work of art,” “rituals,” “happenings,” “events,” “festivals,” “anti-art,” and “environments.” There was a reexamination of the universality, specificity,

and uniqueness of the interdisciplinary expression in Japan through concepts such as “expanded cinema” and “intermedia.” Thus it is necessary to reconsider these newly generated movements in their totality, not simply in terms of unilateral influence or relationship—what preceded what and so forth—but in terms of their shared concern with contemporary issues and mutual resonance among artists working concurrently at the time.

The first one, *Disappearing Music for Face* (1965), by Mieko Shiomi, is the “Number 4” of Fluxfilm. Shiomi, who was a member of the Group Music, stayed in New York from 1964 to ’65 and collaborated with Fluxus. *Disappearing Music for Face* was originally presented as a music and performance piece in 1964, and after Shiomi’s return to Japan, George Maciunas produced the work as a film with a performance by Yoko Ono. Created as Shiomi’s attempt to not limit music to sound, the original score, in which the smile gradually disappears from the smiling face, is played. The movements were filmed with a high-speed camera and were stretched frame by frame for screening. It goes without saying this original work reexamined what music is, but through filming, it visualized the medium of film, which is composed of images and sound, and its time.

Film critic Kenji Kanesaka lived in the US in the mid-1960s and actively introduced American underground cinema and its theories. As a filmmaker, he produced *Super Up* (1966). In January 1967, a public happening was held by Kanesaka to record sound for *Hopscotch*, a film shot and edited in the US and Japan. Given that the film was shot as a happening, Yasunao Tone suggested the film score recording also take the form of a happening, and he held a central role in the sound recording event with free-jazz musician Yosuke Yamashita, filmmaker Rikurō Miyai, as well as other artists.

Artist Masanori Ōe, who moved to New York’s East Village in 1965, began making films at the height of the psychedelic movement, producing *Head*

Game (1967), which documents a Be-In in Central Park, and *No Game* (1967), which chronicles a demonstration at the Pentagon on International Anti-War Day, while participating in the Newsreel collective along with Jonas Mekas and others. *Great Society* (1967) collaged newsreel footage of the massive political, social, and cultural upheavals of 1960s America with footage he had shot himself, and was projected simultaneously on six screens. Since it is not easy to screen the film with six 16mm projectors, there have not been many opportunities to show the film in its original format at the time or now. However, this film is a historical masterpiece of expanded cinema.

In 1966, filmmaker, Rikurō Miyai established Unit Pro as a combined living space and studio, and as the hippie movement and psychedelic revolution got underway, they produced interdisciplinary film works that transcended the framework of existing cinema. Miyai's works in expanded cinema recognized the essential quality of film to be its re-productibility. These works included *Phenomenology of Zeitgeist* (1967), which condensed the spirit of 1967 into a documentary containing a long take that moved from the studio to the east side of Shinjuku Station, where the Zero Dimension group and other avant-garde groups staged a street ritual/happening; and *Shadow* (1968), featuring a man's shadow in negative-positive reversal. These works were shown using multichannel projection or as performative screenings. He was also involved in events, performances, psychedelic shows, live music performances, and discotheque production—including Killer Joe's, where Gulliver's *Cinematic Illumination* had been shown. Miyai pursued cinema or the moving image not as a medium to be controlled by a single filmmaker, but as just one of many media to be fused with others in an attempt to expand its potentiality.

Motoharu Jōnouchi, who had produced *Document 6.15* (1961), which covered the 1960 struggle over the US-Japan Security Treaty, documented *Shelter Plan* (1964), a happening staged by the avant-garde group Hi-Red Center and their associates at the Imperial Hotel. After this, Jōnouchi

turned his camera back to the protest movement as a new student leftism emerged in the late 1960s. He produced a series that began with *Nihon University Hakusan Street* (1968), *Mass Collective Bargaining at Nihon University* (1968), *Gewaltopia Trailer* (1969), and *Shinjuku Station* (1968–74). “Gewaltopia” was his own concept of combining *Gewalt* (German for “force” or “violence”) and utopia. The related production was originally conceived not as a single work but as an unbroken, potentially endless series of film footage. *Shinjuku Station* portrays an uprising in Shinjuku at International Anti-War Day on October 21, 1968. At first, Jonouchi read his poems in front of an audience or a screen as a performance. In 1974, he started to film his own performance and made a re-edited version, which will be shown here.

In the online program, it is difficult to reproduce and recreate the one-time-ness of expanded cinema and intermedia. However, I would like to make use of the limited media, moving images, and sounds to provide a paradoxical opportunity to reexamine these experiments.