

Clouded Vision: The Films of Yo Ota
Sunday, May 21st at 7:30pm
Anthology Film Archives
32 Second Ave., New York, NY

Städel, 1985, 16mm, color, silent, 7 min

A study of temporal variation “according to the time axis.” Made while Ota was a student at Staatliche Hochschule für Bildende Künste – Städelschule (Städel), where he took courses on filmmaking and cooking with Peter Kubelka. Shot in a single take using an Arriflex 16ST and a handmade dolly. Ota changed the filming speed from 48 to 4-6fps while shooting. “After the camera moved around many times, it stopped at the location where it started filming. The door to a studio closed at that time as if it was planned.”

Distorted “Tele” Vision, 1997, 16mm, color, sound, 11 min

“The visual harmony of the landscape is disturbed by a screen that allows us to see into the distance (television).” In six separate scenes, televisions displaying footage of natural and manmade locations are rephotographed within those same locations at different times and with varying frame rates. Described by Ota as “an experiment in space and motion,” “Distorted ‘Tele’ Vision” aims to disrupt the established perceptual customs that inform our perception of perspectival space, and to “produce a new screen.” The work existed in many forms prior to its completion, including an expanded gallery exhibition that involved two analog film loops and a video work presented alongside the film.

Distorted Movi Sion, 1998, 16mm, color, sound, 8 min

An attempt “to make minor changes to the contents of the contract” by which audiences come to perceive the two-dimensional movie screen as a four-dimensional space-time. For Ota, this contract is what “makes a movie a movie.” But film is also capable of “show[ing] a new vision.”

Temps Topologique, 1981-82, 16mm, b&w, silent, 10 min

Made for the occasion of the 1982 Paris Biennale, “Temps Topologique” uses multiple exposures to explore time as a feeling produced by “movements and variations,” rather than “a thing in itself.” For the film, Ota recorded images of the moon with a 500mm telephoto lens. While shooting, he noticed that the moon would move out of frame almost as soon as he composed a shot – a result of “the speed of the earth’s rotation.”

Incorrect Intermittence, 2000, 16mm, color, sound, 6 min

An extended sequence shot that employs varying frame rates to explore the idea of time as a “function of movement in space.” Though the film was shot on color negative stock, Ota had the lab produce two prints: one color, one black and white. Using an optical printer, he rephotographed the prints, alternating between the two according to a strict mathematical system. For Ota, the irregular tempo of the motion depicted in the film is only “incorrect” if we view cinema as a mechanism for the exact replication of reality, rather than a plastic medium for “shaping the image on the screen.”

Incorrect Continuity, 1999, 16mm, color, sound, 9 min

“Sequences of space-time manipulation that raise the problem of continuity in the shot.” Filmed in five separate locations. Created by taking multiple exposures of each location at varying frame rates while using a partially-opaque glass filter to obscure portions of the frame during each exposure. “The action of watching a screen of a ‘movie’ is different from watching a space in reality. In order for us to believe the time and space on the screen of a ‘movie’ is the representation of the space and motion shot by the camera, we must know that it is a ‘movie.’ Of course, as the moving image is flooding everywhere today, we do not think of this anymore. The premise is embedded in the mind of people at the age when they start going to school. As we do not doubt what we think we know, we would feel discomfort when it is questioned. Such a feeling of discomfort is the concept of ‘Incorrect Continuity,’ as this ‘movie’ is made by ‘a wrong continuation’ of ‘motion.’”

Installation Time, 1989-90, 16mm, color, sound, 6 min

“Mr. Tsuguō Yanai makes paper objects. He installs these objects in a gallery in Tokyo. The camera was also installed in the gallery. It filmed all of the time of installation and its preparation... Yet the film is not the documentary of an installation, but of installation time.”

Translation of voiceover narration by Tsuguō Yanai: “We often hear the word ecology. The title of this work is ‘Territory of Water and Plants.’ The initial idea was very simple. It was a matter of returning to nature what is removed from nature. In other words, making linen fiber in its fundamental vegetal state. The tree is an essential image in this work. Trees draw water from the earth. This water turns into a mist, in clouds, in rain. Then it returns to earth. I wanted to express this natural cycle of energy through the process of making these sheets of fiber. Animals cannot live without plants. This is a fundamental theme. In other words, the plant has the right to live. Nature is a magnificent work of art. She lives with us, like us. I would like to regain the respect that man once felt before nature—as well as the beliefs, the symbolic meanings that have been attached to it—through these essential images that I take from nature and order in my own way. An ever-expanding economy is an inevitable fact in our consumer societies. But there are limits that cannot be surpassed, in civilization as in nature. Denouncing our materialist society is no longer realistic. Faced with various problems, the destruction of the ozone layer, acid rain, etc., we must act, make concrete decisions.”

Inclined Horizon, 2007, 16mm, color, sound, 8 min

“My attempt at a filmic interpretation of Haraguchi Noriyuki’s ‘Inclined Horizon,’ a three-dimensional physical work featured in the ‘Dance Hakushu 2006’ exhibition held in the Hakushu district of Hokuto City, Yamanashi Prefecture. Haraguchi’s work was modeled out of earth that will return to its original form after about a month, and my aim was to resurrect the concept of this work on film.” Originally shot on both 8mm and 16mm. The 8mm footage was hand-processed and blown up to 16mm.

Reflex/reflection, 2009, 16mm, color, sound, 8 min

“This film was made for an event that included an exhibition of artwork by Eishi Yamatomo. Yamatomo’s metal sculpture is often finished with a chromium plating, which reflects its surroundings. For this project, I tried to obtain the image of a metal sculpture as an existing entity and its reflection as an illusion on a film medium, which can hold an image as an object. It was originally shot on 8mm film, hand-processed, edited, then re-photographed on 16mm film.”

ULTRAMARINE, 2014, 16mm, color, sound, 5 min

“The ‘exhibition’ held by ‘artist’ Katsuhiro Fujimura in Tokyo during the very hot summer of 2013 was one that made viewers suffer. The ‘painting’ that stood leaning against the window had very faint colors and regular scratches that could not be seen very well because of the light streaming in from the outside. The light changed with the time of day, and the surface of the painting also shifted. The paint on the front of the panel can only be perceived as ‘color’ by reflecting light. The fact that if the light changes what is seen also changes is quite obvious, but because it is a ‘painting’ viewers find this hard to accept.” Original 8mm footage hand-processed and blown up to 16mm.

Nebukawa, 2012, 16mm, color, sound, 4.5 min

“There was an art event at a closed school, Kataura Junior High School, in Nebukawa, Kanagawa Prefecture. If I did not participate in this event to show my films, I would never have got off at Nebukawa Station. I saw the sea from the school building. The installation by Tetsuya Iimuro was placed in a science room at the school, where one could see the ocean through the windows.” Original 8mm footage hand-processed and blown up to 16mm.

TRT ca. 82.5 min

Quotations by Yo Ota from <http://tokyo100.com/ota>, <http://lightcone.org>, and other sources. This program is made possible through the generous support of the Amherst College English Department, as well as the Department of Asian Languages & Civilizations and the Film and Media Studies Program at Amherst. Curated by Josh Guilford. Co-organized by Tomonari Nishikawa.