

**“Offer it all up, our madness that will be crushed on
this land that has come to be called chaos unzipped”**
A conversation between filmmakers Silvia Maglioni and
Graeme Thomson¹ around Ogawa Pro

On the occasion of the Shinsuke Ogawa & Ogawa Pro retrospective at
Cinéma du Réel and Jeu de Paume, Paris (March – April 2018)

— We had just come back to Paris from Bombay. It felt like re-entering a zone of pressure without forest: the unending state of emergency, the final days of the Tarnac Trial and what was about to come, a series of ferocious attempts by the French state and military to destroy the ZAD and the autonomous forms of life that had been flourishing there². And this despite (though, as it turned out, in consequence of) the official decision not to build the airport of Notre-Dame-des-Landes. Weeks of collective discussions about cinema and the productive potentials of the archive that we had shared with filmmakers and comrades from India, Cairo, Istanbul, Berlin at CAMP, Chuim Village, also felt menaced by the grey room tone of the city's studied indifference. So it was a great joy to discover a retrospective season of the Ogawa Pro Collective, and a community that would gather again around Sanrizuka, Heta, Magino... And then came the massive resistance of the ZAD who were up against armoured vehicles, drones, attack dogs, tear-gas, sting-ball grenades. *Ogawa Pro Ogawa Pro Ogawa Pro Ogawa* became a healing mantra of refusal.

— Watching *Peasants of the Second Fortress* (Image 1), I couldn't help but be reminded of Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai*, as though the Ogawa team, veterans of recent wars (the student protests in Kyoto, fiery fragments of which we see in *Prehistory of the Partisans*) were the bearers of a certain code of cinema practice who join a village of peasant farmers and put image and sound in the service of their struggle against the construction of the Narita

¹ Filmmakers and artists.

² Editor's note: The Tarnac Trial refers to the trial of an alleged insurrectionalist organisation, accused of attempting to sabotage part of France's high-speed rail network in 2008 (the group was finally acquitted of the charges of conspiracy and sabotage). The ZAD – “zone à défendre” – refers to Notre-Dame-des-Landes and to a long-term rural occupation of the planned site of the Aéroport du Grand Ouest in Brittany. In April 2018, more than 2,500 riot police were deployed to remove the occupants and their self-constructed dwellings.

Airport. And I asked myself what does it actually mean to put images and sounds in the service of a struggle as though they were tools or weapons. How do they relate to the other means of defence the villagers and they themselves had at their disposal: sticks, stones, erecting barricades, building fortresses, digging a warren of tunnels, chaining themselves to trees?



Image 1: Ogawa Pro, *Sanrizuka - Peasants of the Second Fortress*, 1971.

— I am not sure whether it's the filmmakers or the villagers who are the Samurai. Who keeps the code? Where is cinema? Is it in front of or behind the camera? Around, with, for, against, between, underneath? Perhaps it's more a rupture of a code. Ogawa spoke about the two main principles the collective agreed upon, before they started filming the village. First of all, to clearly position the camera on the side of the farmers engaged in the struggle. If they are oppressed by state power and beaten by police, the camera should be first in line to receive the blows, so that the "message" of power is directly transmitted to the spectator through the screen. Secondly, the camera should never be hidden and the use of zoom lenses must be avoided. The people should not be unaware that they are being filmed, the camera must always be right where they are, that is, at the heart of the struggle.

— Yet this *being with* the villagers' struggle, and with the responsibility of transmitting it directly to the viewer by means of images which themselves suffer the blows of the authorities, is perhaps not the whole story. For you also have the two-fold temporal dimension. In the first place the defence, and perhaps even intensification, through image of a present time of solidarity that is

necessary for the struggle to continue; and secondly the process by which, through the film, time itself will become a weapon in a wider sense, but one that will no longer be in the villagers' or the filmmakers' hands, like a stone thrown to miss its immediate target, to sail over the enemy's head, since it is destined for some as yet unknown future hand that will pick it up and make use of it in a battle to come.

— In his notes on cinema, Félix Guattari talks about how every step of the production of a film is political, and can therefore potentially lead to a revolutionary opening³. What Ogawa Pro seem to suggest to us is that their whole way of filming is also a way of living. A cinema that would produce not exactly a commune but a life in common, allowing them to make and even distribute their films more organically. They understood clearly the importance of taking care of the entire process, from production to shoot to montage to the actual screenings, which were organised in a very idiosyncratic manner that required enormous effort and creativity from everyone involved. The apex of this is the Theatre of a Thousand Years, a structure of logs, tatami, dirt and thatch that they built to screen a single film, *Magino Village / A Tale - The Sundial Carved with a Thousand of Notches* (Image 2). An operation whose stubborn refusal to let the film be swallowed up in the rapids of market or festival circulation strangely reminds me of a recent project to play John Cage's piece *Organ²/ASLSP (As Slow as Possible)* over a period of 600 years on a church organ whose construction is supposed to coincide with the needs of the score. Only that a month later, regarding Ogawa's theatre, "there was nothing left but the wind"... And then I think of Godard saying how he doesn't have distribution for *Le livre d'image* and that he would ideally like to show it in small theatres, or even circuses...

³ Editor's note: See Félix Guattari, *A Love of UIQ*, trans. and introd. Graeme Thomson and Silvia Maglioni (Minneapolis: Univocal, 2016).

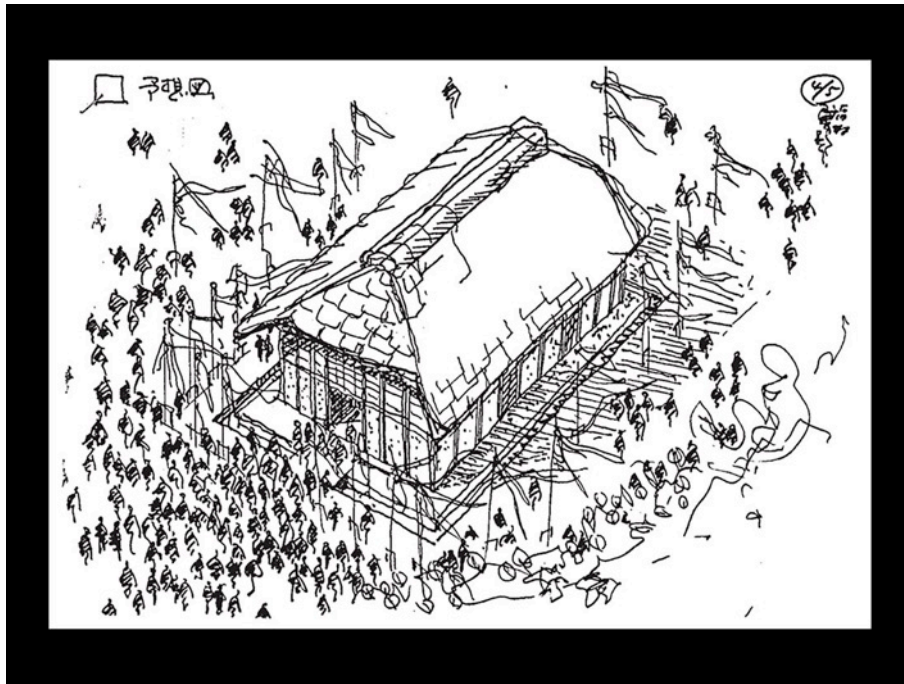


Image 2: The Theater of a Thousand Years, a traditional structure made of dirt, logs, tatami, and thatch built for the screening of *Magino Village / A Tale - The Sundial Carved with a Thousand of Notches* (1987).

— Sanrizuka, Heta, Magino... These names, that we might want to keep in mind in distant relation to the litany of destroyed places recited by Godard in *Je vous salue, Sarajevo*, where he speaks of the rule of culture being to eliminate the exception of art, and in particular an art of life that once flourished “beneath our feet”. And this “beneath our feet” has special resonance in the case of these Japanese peasant villages because their struggle is in some sense a battle between earth and sky, or rather between a just, balanced relation of earth and sky and the dominance of the latter over the former, the erasure of a certain notion of time connected to the possibility of inhabiting and cultivating “a place on earth”. Ogawa Pro's decision to turn away from recording the most spectacular hostilities marks the search for another, less visible, time, that of the village and its complex weave of rhythms as they are affected by the incursion of modernity's implacable violence. In *Heta village*, it's almost as though they have stepped back, perhaps realising that another approach is required, another small learning.

— At the beginning of the film, an old man speaks. He speaks from the edge and from the inside at the same time. From his expression we see that he is quite relaxed, clearly on friendly terms with the film crew: he speaks to them as allies. His voice guides the camera across the fields to the houses in the distance, half-hidden by trees. His words take us inside the houses, the histories of families who live there, the imbrication of solidarities and betrayals, then further back through the history of the land and the water that flows

through it between villages. Several times, ranging across the fields towards the houses, the camera traverses an approach road. The question of how to approach the village and its forms of life poses itself quite literally in the image of this road which might be, we can't tell yet, a through road, or a road of arrival and departure, and whose linearity belies the tangle of stories, gestures and silences that awaits. Midway through the film we will listen to an elderly woman talking about how she came to live in the village as a girl. What's clear from this astonishing long take, as it is from the first scene, is that the Ogawa collective have visited and talked to this woman many times: they have become her familiars to the point where she is happy to open up her life to them. Filming the life of the village, we occasionally hear Ogawa's voice - which is not a voice-off but a voice which comes in and brings us closer.

— And in the way the village meetings are filmed, you have this abolition of distance. Of the film as project, as projection that would separate itself from the situation of the villagers by situating them within its own plans in a move akin to that of the state and the airport corporation. A *being with* of the camera that is as close as possible to how you would be sitting if you had no camera and were just watching and listening, maybe just thinking how you might film the scene. And so were just as inclined to film who listens as who speaks. Because in listening there is thinking but thinking that is underground not yet fully on the surface, like a seed that is planted but has yet to sprout.

— In fact when somebody speaks it takes us a moment to understand where the voice is coming from. The camera does not privilege the speaker who often remains in the background, so we see the listening and with it the thinking of the villagers. As though their faces and bodies were a silent field of resonance where the speaker's words and their meanings gained form.

— You said to me, while watching *Heta Village* again with friends in Berlin: we have to find a way to create our own Magino, our own Heta... After the epic scenes of thousands of farmers fighting back against the riot police in *Peasants of the Second Fortress* (these are the thousand Samurai warriors), *Heta Village* appears as a space of refuge and desertion. A destituent possibility for cinema and life appears, with its hesitations, silences, multiple temporalities, the delicate flow of time. But the memory of these iconic images of struggle, the women stubbornly chaining themselves to trees, are in no way missing. They haunt us, yet we no longer need them to be so central and monumental a presence. The suicide of a young man of the village, Sannomiya Fumio, his body found hanging from a tree, marks one of the struggle's darkest moments. In his production diaries, Yumoto Mareo is obsessed about what kind of life Sannomiya would have lived if there had been no airport. He quotes an old man from the village: "Even if the fortresses are levelled they

won't be able to destroy the fortresses in our hearts, so we will win."
(Image 3)



Image 3: *Molotov Roses* - Installation made for an Ogawa Pro screening in Berlin (detail).

— There is so much talk these days about so-called failed revolutions. But hearing the Heta villagers discussing the importance of solidarity, of sticking together, holding to their collective bonds gives us pause. How lucid is their analysis of the state's tactics: always to try to break the lines of solidarity that grow between people. I think of Fernand Deligny in the Cevennes. Or Jean Genet writing from prison. Danièle Huillet and Jean-Marie Straub on Mount Etna, with William Lubtchansky. Looking for the just relation between the ground and the sky. But one might ask, can we still find, and cultivate, "a place on earth"?

"Shinsuke Ogawa & Ogawa Pro" was curated by Ricardo Matos Cabo at Jeu de Paume in April 2018. A warm thank you to Ricardo for bringing this extraordinary experience to Paris.