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The technologies of experimental Japanese filmmakers in the digital era

Abstract

In their works, new Japanese experimental cinema directors present a wonderful combination of filmmaking techniques: from found-footage animation, 3D stereoscopic film shot and double projection, to photochemical support in obtaining high contrast colours. Searching for the best ideas and tools to create unique perceptual experiences, the artists put emphasis on developing high-level technical skills, which helps them in their explorations of their films' subjects. Accordingly, new Japanese experimental cinema authors manifest an extremely creative approach to film production, combining avant-garde postulates with new technologies, while at the same time offering the viewer an interactive, aesthetic experience.

The main point of the proposed paper is the analysis of the technologies used by Japanese experimental filmmakers and the techniques they develop under the influence of the chosen technologies. The paper examines selected examples of visual art created by Takashi Makino, Shinkan Tamaki, Kazuhiro Goshima, and Tomonari Nishikawa, as they are the most distinctive directors of the new generation of experimental film artists in Japan.

Key words: Japanese experimental cinema, independent film, digital technologies, Kazuhiro Goshima, Shinkan Tamaki, Takashi Makino, Tomonari Nishikawa

I was using a Telecine machine at work, transferring film material to video, and came to realize that the technology had arrived at a point where the qualities of film can be preserved after a digital transfer. It had previously taken me two to three years to make one film, and when I made the shift I was suddenly able to make four or five a year. Around the same time, digital projectors became much better, and I realized that the time had come for me to accept it¹.

Takashi Makino

Introduction

New Japanese experimental cinema artists manifest an extremely creative approach to film production, combining avant-garde postulates with new technologies and searching for their own visual styles. Analysing the works of previous generations of Japanese experimental filmmakers, it can be observed that—thanks to the technologies they adopt—the approach among young artists to the creative process has completely changed.

The technological solutions used by experimental directors in the digital era—accompanying them from the beginning of the creative process to the film screening—can be divided into two categories. The first group of technologies relates to filmmaking techniques and undoubtedly empowers the creative process. The second category—allowing artists to present their works to the wider public—concerns the Internet and the opportunities and dangers it brings. While uploading pictures on websites, the independent creator is not only prone to the larceny of the content of his films, but he also faces the menace of losing control over them. Also, as is indicated in further parts of this article, stepping into the world of the Internet the avant-garde artist has to find a balance between the urge to present his achievements worldwide and preserving his unique style. On the other hand, sharing ideas allows the author to build his popularity beneath the traditional means of distribution and even avoid the festival circulation of his films. Furthermore, by receiving responses from an audience, a filmmaker is also able to understand the needs of avant-garde fans and reach a niche group of viewers.

The development of digital technologies makes artists able to improve the quality of visual material. The directors gain new opportunities to visualize their concepts and present more complex works, thus having more chances to gain publicity. Therefore, they are able to create astounding found-footage animations and 3D stereoscopic films and prepare double projections, to name just a few great ways in which Japanese experimenters benefit from new technologies. Obviously, the aforementioned

¹ Julian Ross, “Interview: Takashi Makino”, *Filmcomment* September/October (2014), <http://www.filmcomment.com/blog/interview-takashi-makino/>, date accessed 20 February 2016.

opportunities are rather standard for mainstream filmmakers; however, in the eyes of debuting authors, who strive to get access to the best technologies possible, they can be a huge discovery. While the specific technologies used to develop particular filmmaking techniques will be detailed in the next part of this article, it is also worth emphasizing the second aspect of the appearance of new technologies in the world of Japanese experimental visual art. As Takashi Makino indicated in the quotation cited at the beginning of this paper, the usage of new technologies also allows the independent artist to produce more shots at the same time. In this case, the emancipating role of the new digital solutions is clearly visible, as the creator can accelerate the production process without hiring additional crewmembers—he is able to finish the project by himself in a reasonable amount of time. However, the artist should be conscious that the specific “temptation” to produce more (and, accordingly, publish more) could severely affect the working process. Here, the author needs to find a balance between being faithful to his artistic principles and still profiting from his work. Therefore, the criterion of price is also related to the introduction of new technologies. Digital cameras and fully computerized post-production processes make the creation of movies cheaper than ever before, when artists were constrained by the high costs of film tape and its development. Furthermore, in terms of profits, the era of digital technologies is the first time in the history when avant-garde and experimental artists can raise funds relatively quickly, present their works on the Internet (for example on YouTube) and, in this way, gain wider access to potential customers. Creators can also attract publicity, donors and sponsors almost without leaving home. However, with the great opportunities offered by new media, a question arises of what it means to be an experimental artist in the age of digital technology. Where is the boundary between visual art accessible via the Internet and amateur films posted on websites for profit and entertainment? It can be observed that in this situation the limiting aspects of technology manifest their power, as it is almost impossible to be recognizable in the art world without traces left on the Web.

This paper presents the results of research on the works of the youngest generation of Japanese experimental artists (working on projects from 1995 to 2016). Four directors were chosen during the data selection process, as their technologies, approach to the meaning of art, usage of media, covered themes, and the motivation to use new technologies made it possible to show a wide range of the empowering and limiting aspects of technology in new Japanese experimental visual art. While gathering information about the new Japanese experimental and underground cinema, it was observed that the thematic areas of film analysis could be divided into two groups. The first consists of artists who perceive their work through the lens of the technological solutions they can implement and use to intensify their message. The second group focuses mainly on the issue of the coexistence of nature and human beings in the

modern environment, emphasizing the threats and benefits of modernization. As this latter group does not pay much attention to the technology and equipment they use to convey meaning, the author decided to choose the achievements of the first group to illustrate the covered subject. Obviously, many more Japanese artists could be added to the list of creators interested in technology. However, when searching for the most significant examples of the described trend, the author decided to present ones who have gained the greatest popularity worldwide and have not ceased to develop their styles, skills and ideas. The methodology implemented during the research process is based mainly on the analysis of the works of the selected artists and the publications related to them (books, interviews, conferences, and festival speeches). During the inquiry, the author compared the technical specifications of equipment shared by artists with the results presented on the screen. In addition, a huge part of the analysis was based on searching for correlations between the message that the artists wanted to convey and the technological solutions they adopted to do so. Furthermore, the analysis of the appearance in the media of the chosen artists was created with the help of their websites, personal blogs and social media pages.

In the Shadowland: The Stereoscopic Technique of Kazuhiro Goshima

Kazuhiro Goshima is a visual creator and media artist who also works under the name of his company (Galactic Visions) and as a lecturer at the Okayama Prefectural University. He is one of the most creative Japanese artists, implementing new technologies as a basis for visual experiment. At the beginning of his career in the early 1990s, Goshima worked as a freelance media content designer, completing commercial projects for external companies. But, while developing his abilities and pursuing new forms of expression, the artist decided to start his own visual projects, using his technology-related knowledge in the field of experimental art². His first attempts resulted in the *Fade into White* series³, created between 1996 and 2003. In his early works, Goshima searched for a way to avoid the ultra-realism of the commercial videos demanded by his clients⁴. His specific knowledge of 3D modelling technologies (which had innovative potential when the artist started his career) allowed him to create black and white animations, presenting everyday objects (e.g. a clock, a train, a ball) from different angles. However, the objects in Goshima's video series are shaped by the

² Kazuhiro Goshima's webpage, http://www.goshiman.com/hp/04profile_e.html, date accessed 28 March 2016.

³ The series contains four videos: *FADE into WHITE #1* (1996, Kazuhiro Goshima), *FADE into WHITE #2* (2000), *FADE into WHITE #3* (2001) and *FADE into WHITE #4* (2003).

⁴ Joel Vacheron, "Kazuhiro Goshima: After the Metabolic Cities", *12th Biennial of Moving Images in Geneva*, (JRP | Ringier, Centre St-Gervais, Genève) (2007), p. 42.

presence of the light and shadow, which transfigures them during camera movement. The viewers' perception is deceived by the sudden close ups, changes of surroundings, and unpredictable disappearances of the objects. Goshima achieved such interesting effects by applying 3D computer graphic techniques to traditionally photographed objects. His first films can be perceived as the basis for the later, more sophisticated experiments.

In terms of combining various technological solutions, one of the most complex of Goshima's films is *Shadowland*⁵. According to the jury statement published on the Ars Electronica Festival website (edition 2014), this Japanese author's work is "a wonderful combination of what we call 'found animation' with an innovative stereoscopic technique"⁶. It should also be added that here Goshima abandons the concept of plot or sequence of events to present a new dimension of active involvement of the viewer. The 3D film shots take the viewer into an animated stroll through the streets of Tokyo. The most important aspect of Goshima's masterpiece is that all pictures were recorded with only one DSLR camera⁷. The entire obtained footage lasts twenty hours and, as the author indicates, he spent a great amount of time looking the perfect place to install his camera (Canon EOS Kiss X5 <D600>) due to its limitations. Finally, after the post-production process (reducing noise, choosing the best fragments, adjusting soundtrack and applying 3D effects), the film acquired its final form, fulfilling the purpose of the author. As Goshima pointed out, the main aim of his visual experiment was to show that "every night, the city itself is overwritten like a retina thousands of times, and no one can decipher its memories"⁸.

It can be easily observed that Goshima's film would lose its uniqueness without the use of 3D effects. In *Shadowland*, only the shadows are visible in 3D because, as the author says, then the illusion becomes "very sensitive"⁹. The contrast between the shadows and the rest of the street environment in the film was implied due to the author's previous experiments with 3D graphics. He started from simpler cameras (e.g. Pentax K7) and tried to produce parallax effects using less complex techniques. *Shadowland* is the final stage of his 3D experiments.

When analysing the author's path of self-development, it should not be forgotten that he was able to create *Shadowland* over years of experimenting, when the prices of the cameras finally became lower than in the 1990s. Therefore, as the technology now

⁵*Shadowland* (2013, Kazuhiro Goshima).

⁶ Ars Electronica 2014, <http://prix2014.aec.at/prixwinner/12220/>, date accessed 29 March 2016.

⁷ A digital single-lens reflex camera is the most common type of camera in use between 2000 and 2016. More information can be found at Photo Review, <http://www.photoreview.com.au/guides/pocket-guides/digital-slr/Choosing-a-DSLR-Camera>, date accessed 29 March 2016.

⁸Ars Electronica 2014.

⁹Ars Electronica 2014.

is much more advanced than when Goshima started his career, the artist is able to produce more and more films every year, reducing the amount of time needed. Comparing his first productions to recent works, the quality of Goshima's films has also developed. Furthermore, the author creates his media presence with a great awareness: he updates his web page (created by himself) and posts short trailers of his films on YouTube. Every year he attends at least five festivals to promote his recent achievements. Kazuhiro Goshima's consequent actions, self-development, and perfectly planned media presence seem to be the features of a mature artist who fully benefits from the opportunities offered by new technologies.

Cosmic Abstractions: The Digital Compositions of Takashi Makino

The second Japanese artist worth mentioning among new experimental film pioneers is Takashi Makino. He is an extremely prolific director who has won many widely recognizable prizes and awards (e.g. Terayama Shuji prize at the Image Forum Festival in 2007). After he graduated from the Cinema Department of Nihon University College of Art, Makino studied at the atelier of the Brothers Quay, which shaped his perception of music and lighting design in the film¹⁰. He is keen on working with musicians, performers, and other film artists, and to this end he established a collective of the experimental art creators in Tokyo called Collective Plus [+]. The group's aim is to promote Japanese experimental art abroad and initiate cooperation between artists with different styles and different fields of interest. The active members of the Collective have recently published a booklet with a DVD edition of their works¹¹.

As a representative of the Collective [+], Takashi Makino sets the direction of the artistic pursuit of the members of the group. In his video installations, Makino puts emphasis on incorporating the newest technologies into the world of experimental art and applying them to topics preferred by the members of the Collective. The artist himself is fascinated by the vision of the cosmos; the abstract chaos of colours and shapes that takes the viewer into a hallucinatory and almost transcendent experience. He treats picture, sound and light equally. This is why he prefers to combine them in the most unbelievable compositions, giving equal importance to every aspect of film technique¹².

¹⁰Los Angeles Film Forum, "Takashi Makino: Entering a Noisy Cosmos", <http://www.lafilmforum.org/archive/fall-2014-schedule/makino-takashi-entering-a-noisy-cosmos/>, date accessed 30 March 2016.

¹¹*Plus Screenings 2009-2013*, ed. T. Makino, (Engine Books) (2014).

¹² Los Angeles Film Forum.

The turning point in Makino's career is the film *2012*¹³, which depicts “everything the author saw in the year 2012”¹⁴. Makino said in an interview that he wanted to show the atmosphere in Japan in the year 2012, when the inhabitants were scared of the Fukushima disaster and radioactivity was a cause of major concern. Following his aim, the artist combined audio material captured by Fukushima's online cameras with Geiger counter sounds and, later on, he mixed the obtained data with electronic samples¹⁵. Makino felt that by presenting material somehow connected with the catastrophe, he would be able to catch on the screen the spirit of the nation at that time. The sounds complement the shimmering, blueish picture that depicts scratches, lines, and unrecognizable shapes. The viewer can only imagine that he is observing the surface of an extremely magnified atom, plasma cell, or maybe the inner movements of a supernova.

It should be mentioned that the film was screened as part of live performances and it has never been completed as the author alters some parts of the film before every screening. After the 7th screening of the film, Makino realized that his last alteration would be the last. However, later on, he observed that *2012* is the best example of 3D illusion of depth using the Pulfrich Effect¹⁶, which can be described as a stereophenomenon involving moving targets. The illusion is based on the difference in the timing of the signal recognized by the eyes of the viewer¹⁷. In his film from 2013, the artist digitally transferred the recorded material, increased the frame rate, and applied multiple layering¹⁸. As Julian Ross pointed out, *2012* bridges the gap between analogue and digital filmmaking in Makino's career¹⁹. Interesting here is the artist's motivation to change (or improve) his technique. On the one hand, the artist's was forced by the cost of the prints, when he realized that his works would have more and more potentially interested viewers. On the other hand, digital transfer allowed Makino to improve the quality of the picture. It is also worth mentioning that at the beginning of his artistic career, the Japanese director manifested the “traditional” approach to the technologies he used, as he was accustomed to old-fashioned devices. He said that changing tools for digital equivalents resulted in a feeling of alienation when he watched his own works. However, after the breakthrough during the work on *2012*, Makino understood that 3D technology, perceived by him as a new form of artistic expression, would allow him to

¹³*2012* (Takashi Makino, 2013).

¹⁴Los Angeles Film Forum.

¹⁵Marianne Shaneen, “Takashi Makino's 2012”, *BOMB – Artist in Conversation Magazine*, 130 (2015), <http://bombmagazine.org/article/2000042/takashi-makino-s-em-2012-em>, date accessed 9.12.2015.

¹⁶Los Angeles Film Forum.

¹⁷Ian P. Howard, Brian J. Rogers, *Binocular Vision and Stereopsis*, (New York, Oxford University Press) (1995), p. 535 – 548.

¹⁸Julian Ross.

¹⁹Julian Ross.

create more sophisticated work that influenced viewer's perceptions more. The artist also faced another factor that finally forced him to adopt digital solutions completely. Between 2011 and 2012, the film laboratories in Japan, as well as abroad, were in crisis. The director realized that the cost of production would be too high for him to bear if he did not adopt digital tools. In this case, it can be seen that the decision was made for him from the outset. As it turned out later, this helped the artist to develop his style and find new inspirations, topics and audiences²⁰.

With the screenings of the 3D version of *2012*, another issue arises: the interactivity of art. Makino indicates that—because of the new technologies he applies—his work gained the potential to be interactive, thus giving the viewer a choice of how he will watch the film. The 3D image, the author shows, is also perfectly visible without special glasses, so spectators are able to choose their preferred style of watching it (with or without 3D effects). The artist observes that by using new visual solutions, he stepped into a new dimension of art in which he can create an unlimited number of versions of his films while still keeping the original recorded material²¹.

Takashi Makino, similarly to Kazuhiro Goshima, creates his presence in the media using a personal website with a “news” section and posts the trailers of his films on popular video sites. Therefore, as the most recognizable member of the Collective [+], Makino spends almost all his time travelling (while not working on new projects). He conducts workshops, lectures, and visits international festivals. He also updates his blog²², where fans can find recent information about screenings, as well as the author's personal thoughts and impressions concerning art.

Sketches of the City. The Experimental Documents of Tomonari Nishikawa

Tomonari Nishikawa is another experimental Japanese filmmaker whose outstanding works show the emancipating power of technology. Although, similarly to the directors mentioned before, technology is at the forefront of Nishikawa's video art and installations, when analysing the biography of the author it can be observed that it has also influenced his life as an artist. At the beginning of his career, Nishikawa studied economics, but when he started watching non-Hollywood movies (e.g. works of Shuji Terayama and Toshio Matsumoto), his interest in filmmaking and related technologies awoke. He subsequently decided to move to Australia and later to New York, to pursue

²⁰Julian Ross.

²¹Julian Ross.

²²Takashi Makino's personal blog, <http://makinokino.exblog.jp/>, date accessed 17 April 2016.

his aim and create experimental and avant-garde content²³. As Nishikawa indicated in an interview with Katy Martin²⁴, Ken Jacobs was the person who had the greatest influence on him during his studies. Thanks to this lecturer, Nishikawa developed his interest in “making abstract forms from representational images”²⁵.

Nishikawa perceives experimental art as a way to present cinema apparatus to the viewer. In this way, he can encourage the observer to focus on more than just the storyline, as happens during the reception of the narrative movies. The aim of the director’s work is to get the viewer acquainted with filmmaking techniques, especially with the issue of movement through animated sequences. In this case, it should be emphasized that Nishikawa aspires to the role of educator, as he believes in the highest importance of technology and technique in the visual arts and plot does not seem interesting for him²⁶. The artist also manifests a strong awareness of the materials used in the film production process, as he has devoted a lot of time to photography. Nishikawa’s attitude towards filmmaking comes from the time he spent in the darkroom. He prefers hand processing of films and the post-production technology he prefers employs techniques such as splicing tapes without editing gloves or in-camera editing²⁷. In Nishikawa’s projects, the medium plays the most important part and, as he indicates, it is the first thing to be chosen at the beginning of a new project; the concept and the cultural or social issues the film covers are decided on later²⁸. Although the medium determines the idea presented by the author, he leans towards documentary works and attempts to catch the rhythm of cities.

In terms of technology that allows the artist to fulfil his artistic pursuits, the most interesting works of Tomonari Nishikawa are those presented in the series *Sketch*²⁹. The author recorded them between 2005 and 2007³⁰, trying to use film tape as his personal sketchbook. In an interview with Katy Martin, Nishikawa indicates that at the beginning

²³Katy Martin, “Interview with Daichi Saito and Tomonari Nishikawa”, *Asia Experimental Media Issue*, EXIS International Film and Video Festival, Seoul, Korea, pp. 264-302, <http://katymartin.net/assets/katy-martin-saito-nishikawa-interview-dec08.pdf>, date accessed 1 April 2016.

²⁴ Katy Martin is a visual artist, performer, and curator. She also conducts interviews with the experimental artists whose exhibitions she helps to create. More information about Katy Martin and her writings can be found on her website: <http://katymartin.net/>, date accessed 1 April 2016.

²⁵ Katy Martin, p. 7.

²⁶Katy Martin, p. 8.

²⁷Katy Martin, p. 9.

²⁸Mono no aware, <http://mononoawarefilm.com/special-engagements/connectivity-through-cinema-with-tomonari-nishikawa-in-person/>, date accessed 2 April 2016.

²⁹ The series contains five 3 minutes films: *Sketch Film#1,2,3,4* and *5*.

³⁰ Tomonari Nishikawa film works, <http://www.tomonarinishikawa.com/film.htm>, date accessed 2 April 2016.

of the project he simply perceived shooting the city and its landmarks as everyday filmmaking practice. This exercise then turned into an artistic strategy when the author realized that his abilities were improving and having a camera with him all the time allowed him to create extremely interesting shots³¹. Subsequently, Nishikawa hand-processed the collected material; however, to preserve its original value as a “film sketchbook”, he did not improve (or erase) any flaws that appeared during the process. The author considers the scratches on the film and other mistakes he made during the filming as features intangibly connected to working with the medium. The material gathered in this way was screened as *Sketch Film #1* (2005)³².

Developing his skills and searching for new fields of interest, Nishikawa focused his attention on the visual perception of the observer. As he indicated in the aforementioned interview, while working on *Sketch Film #2*³³ he mostly wanted to “make abstract forms from representational images”³⁴. On his website, Nishikawa describes the second picture from 2005 as a “study in apparent shapes; a shape that cannot be found in a single frame, but it appears on the screen as an illusion”³⁵. When analysing the author’s comments, it can be perceived that he considers this abstraction as a time and space issue. However, more significantly, the study of the technologies allowed him to pursue his artistic goals. In this case, his main “tool” became a projector, which changes the images given (programmed) by the artist. While working on *Sketch Film #2* Nishikawa tried to create “shapes between frames, shapes that do not exist within a frame, but exist apparently on the screen when the film is projected”³⁶. The author observes that the viewers are unable to recognize the objects and places visible in his works, thus, they can only sense the way in which the projector is responsible for displaying those shapes on the screen. In this situation, the projector seems to be the most important part of the screening: not only a device, but also the “creator” responsible for maintaining the sense of the real time and space. While working on *Sketch Film #3* Nishikawa made similar assumptions: he wanted to show the apparent depth on the screen by rotating the shapes³⁷. However, the real breakthrough happened when the artist decided to create his first colour film. In *Sketch Film #4*, Nishikawa decided to research the process of recognizing colours that are not displayed in a single frame. The author was astounded by the power of colours on the screen and, later on, created only two more black and white pictures (among which is *Sketch Film #5*—the last of the series). However, it can be said that while discovering new technology and related devices, the author also lost part of his independence. He needed to entrust the

³¹ Katy Martin, pp. 9 – 10.

³² *Sketch Film #1* (2005, Tomonari Nishikawa).

³³ *Sketch Film #2* (2005, Tomonari Nishikawa).

³⁴ Katy Martin, pp. 9 – 10.

³⁵ Tomonari Nishikawa film works.

³⁶ Katy Martin, pp. 9 – 10.

³⁷ Tomonari Nishikawa film works.

post-production process to an outside company, as he was not trained enough to process the film by himself³⁸. Fortunately, Nishikawa did not give up, which resulted in releasing the next colour film, *Into the Mass* (2007)³⁹, in the same year, which was processed by the author himself.

Regarding the course of the career of Tomonari Nishikawa, it should be emphasized that the technology allowed him to become an artist, as his first artistic pursuits were a result of expanding his technological skills. Therefore, the emancipating role of technology in Nishikawa's case can be perceived in terms of building his identity as an artist. In other words, new technological solutions allowed him to enter the world of free artistic pursuits and find his own way to express his outstanding point of view. The *Sketch Film* series exemplifies a perfect example of how technology influences the choices and artistic visions of the experimental artist. For Nishikawa, experimental filmmaking is a constant search for new technical solutions that can transfer the meaning of his art to the audience. The *Sketch Film* series is unique documentary art in which the processing of material plays a much more important role than the material itself. Moreover, the Japanese author is present on the Internet and, similarly to the previously described artists, he develops his personal site and uploads his most recent films on Vimeo.

Zoom, Detail and Human Perception. The Experiments of Shinkan Tamaki

The last, but not least, Japanese experimental artist whose works are worth mentioning in the context of empowering technologies is Shinkan Tamaki. This young director and performer started making movies in 2006. In his visual experiments, he focuses on researching human perception, looking for ways to present new perceptual experiences. Tamaki creates visual installations, takes part in live performances and works on photographing projects; therefore, his main field of interest remains in film. He perceives technology as the perfect tool to manipulate viewers' perception through distorting images of the well-known objects. In his films, Tamaki has mastered the technique of blurring the boundaries between "image and non-image"⁴⁰. According to his point of view, is possible with developing technologies to transform optical phenomena into images, and later on, compile them into movies. As he indicates in his bio note, "Perception is just the result of the human vision failures, and the way we

³⁸Tomonari Nishikawa film works.

³⁹Tomonari Nishikawa film works.

⁴⁰ Shinkan Tamaki's website, <http://shinkantamaki.net/about/>, date accessed 6 April 2016.

educate our look”⁴¹. Tamaki uses these “failures” to trick the viewer and make him realize that the abstract pictures observed on the screen are parts of everyday objects.

During the creation process of his films, the Japanese author uses techniques such as showing the high contrast of colours, underlining the distinction between figures and ground. He also often compares negative and positive images. To gain the effect needed, he benefits from photochemical support, using his experience obtained in the field of photography. For Shinkan Tamaki, technology is the “magnifying glass,” allowing him to zoom into details or break a picture into pieces, with the aim of inviting the viewer into his perfectly arranged choreographies of abstract visions. Here the film *Africa* (2010)⁴² should be mentioned, as it completely summarizes the author’s technical pursuits. The body of an animal (an elephant) is presented as moving shapes, unrecognizable at first glimpse. Tamaki focuses on the rough skin of the mammal, emphasizing its structure and making it almost palpable. The animal is also a metaphor of the continent, as the texture of its body at the same time resembles the distorted shapes of countries and the vivid African nature. The artist perfectly uses the advantages of the technology: it would be impossible to follow and record the movement of the animal at such a close distance for the presented amount of time. Using zoom and, as the next step of the post-production process, photochemical support, Tamaki was able to trick the perception of the viewer. The Japanese author also uses similar techniques in his later films: *Nacht en Dei* (2011)⁴³ and *Sailing across images* (2012)⁴⁴.

The most significant issue of Tamaki’s recent film art is the exploration of film material that results in images of defragmented 16mm shots. The author’s intention was to emphasize the importance of the technology he uses and, at the same time, to remind the viewer that beyond the picture on the screen also lies the process of creation. Disorientating images of the city and its inhabitants appear in the *Dying Moon* (2005)⁴⁵, *One Record on December* (2007)⁴⁶, *Scene 1* (2008)⁴⁷ and *Uneven Image* (2009)⁴⁸. In this case, the author also tries to disorientate the perception of the observer, as during the projection the picture cracks, changes shape, blurs, and is covered with visible spots and stripes, characteristic of old tape. It seems that Tamaki wants to give the viewer the opportunity to adopt, for a brief moment, the point of view of the filmmaker working with the medium. Furthermore, thanks to the disorientating techniques and sudden close ups, Tamaki can implement his philosophy concerning the attempts to change the

⁴¹ Shinkan Tamaki’s website.

⁴² *Africa* (2010, Shinkan Tamaki).

⁴³ *Nacht en Dei* (2011, Shinkan Tamaki).

⁴⁴ *Sailing across images* (2012, Shinkan Tamaki).

⁴⁵ *Dying Moon* (2005, Shinkan Tamaki).

⁴⁶ *One Record on December* (2007, Shinkan Tamaki).

⁴⁷ *Scene 1* (2008, Shinkan Tamaki).

⁴⁸ *Uneven Image* (2009, Shinkan Tamaki).

viewer's perception and, at the same time, develop his unique visual style. In addition, as this Japanese artist possesses extraordinary technical skills and abilities to perform photochemical processes on the film, he is able to take the viewer into an unforgettable stroll inside the world of experimental arts. He achieves all this working only with the image: Tamaki does not consider music (or other sounds) to be necessary for the complete comprehension of his art, so his films are silent⁴⁹.

Shinkan Tamaki seems to be the most open to contact with his followers as, apart from his web page, he also maintains his Facebook profile (completely open), where he adds his fans as friends. The Japanese artist successfully builds his media presence by posting his films on Vimeo and attending film festivals. Recently he has been working on installations and performances focused on architectonic landscapes of cities.

Conclusion

It is difficult to imagine the new generation of Japanese experimental filmmakers without their technologies. These young artists are extremely well prepared for the art creation process, as they perceive technical education to be an unavoidable part of their careers. Considering the examples of the presented authors, it can be perceived that they, in contrast to the artists of the 1970s and 1980s, graduated from prestigious Universities and Schools with the aim of becoming visual artists. In interviews, they often mention the fact that education is important for creating what they call “good art”. The youngest generation wants to improve the quality and reception of the “new avant-garde”, continuing the tradition of a collective cooperation of artists and cultivating relationships with audiences. Thanks to their impressive skills, the authors are mostly able to complete filmmaking processes by themselves, using digital post-production tools, composing soundtracks, and preparing the distribution copies of their art.

On the other hand, new Japanese experimental art is so strongly related to new media and technologies that authors are often unable to stick to their preferred but less sophisticated technologies, and are forced to adapt new ones. The price of materials, which are lower in the case of digital technologies, and distribution issues make using older technological solutions simply unprofitable. Together with the issue of costs—inevitable during the creation process—comes a completely new phenomenon in the

⁴⁹Shinkan Tamaki's website.

field of experimental filmmaking: the presence of the artist on the Internet. Nowadays it is crucial for experimental artists to promote themselves by creating their own websites, post their movies on popular sites (e.g. YouTube, Vimeo), or keep in touch with their followers by updating Facebook or Twitter profiles. It can be observed that those who take care of their “internet presence”, as does Takashi Makino, gain profit, invitations to festivals, and are more recognizable than artists who avoid (or do not explore enough) the new media. This state can be perceived as a limiting (or even oppressive) aspect of technology as artists who choose not to be “digital” are partly excluded from the artistic community. However, in this case, the ambivalence of the new technologies fully manifests itself. Easy access to the Internet makes it possible to promote branches of art that, before the era of the new media, were mostly dedicated to elite viewers educated in the avant-garde and experimental visualizations. The Internet has made experimental art more egalitarian and available to everyone interested in contemplating its uniqueness.

The artists presented in this article make use of digital techniques and access to the Internet in a masterful way. The promotion process of their achievements starts and ends on websites in the form of relations, posts, reviews, interviews, videos and personal comments. The new technology has liberated their artistic potential, supporting their visual attempts with the best, still developing, tools. However, the question of the boundaries between experimental film and targeted commercial products remains without an answer. The authors do not give the researchers any clues, simply stating that they are an “avant-garde movement with new digital tools”.

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