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## **The body of the viewer and immersive audio-visual art. The somatic character of new Japanese experimental film**

### **Introduction**

The directors of new Japanese experimental film, a phenomenon that has developed rapidly since 2000<sup>1</sup>, are primarily focused on the viewer's perception and their place in the process of "being touched" by the work of art<sup>2</sup>. They wish to influence the observer, initiate changes in their perception (for example, opening them up to new forms of visual art), and underline the significance of "feeling the film."<sup>3</sup> Here, the

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<sup>1</sup> The new Japanese experimental film movement first emerged in 2000 as a continuation of the artistic attempts of previous generations of Japanese independent filmmakers. Artists such as Rei Hayama, Takashi Makino, Shinkan Tamaki, Kazuhiro Goshima and others not mentioned in this article, all wanted to revive the artistic means that seemed to have long disappeared since the video revolution of the 1980s, and the development of multiplex cinema in Japan in the 1990s. For more on the subject, see for example: Agnieszka Kiejziewicz, "The technologies of experimental Japanese filmmakers in the digital era", *Transmissions: the Journal of Film and Media Studies* 1:1 (2016), pp. 99-114.

<sup>2</sup> See: Takashi Makino (ed.) *Plus Documents 2009-2013*, (Tokyo: Engine Books) (2014), pp. 4-7, 14. In a manifesto published by Collective [+], together with a short lexicon of their works, the artists underline the importance of influencing the viewer and inviting them to contemplate experimental and expanded works. Explaining the purposes of their artistic pursuits, the artists often use the phrase "to touch the viewer" – relating the act of communication between the creator and the observer to senses other than sight.

<sup>3</sup> See: Marianne Shaneen, "Takashi Makino's 2012", *BOMB – Artist in Conversation Magazine* 130 (2015), <http://bombmagazine.org/article/2000042/takashi-makino-s-em-2012-em>, date of access 13 June 2018. Summarizing Makino's aims and achievements, Marianne Shaneen observes that Makino describes the screenings as "creative collaboration with filmmaker and audience". Also, she points out that his art is "[...] an embodied, perceptual engagement with the continually transforming materiality [...]" which generates "sensations of sublime transcendence—an inspiring model for experiencing everyday realities, as well as cinematic ones".

main concern of the artists is, using terminology introduced by Luke Hockley in his *Somatic Cinema*<sup>4</sup>, “the body of the viewer.” This means that screenings of their films (or displays of audio-visual installations in galleries), are designed to be perceived by all of the senses, to immerse the viewer into the audio-visual spectacle. They are often accompanied by ‘dilemma charts’, instructions, to-do lists and models that can be touched, or surroundings to be discovered. The corporeality of the observer becomes a part of the performance – one of the elements of the scenography, a lens filtering the picture, or even another screening surface.

The artists discussed in this analysis employ different means of fulfilling these schemes. For example, Takashi Makino combines live music and projection of audio-visual materials on several surfaces with simple 3D technique, called Pulfrich effect. Moreover, Hayama and Makino edit the filmed performances during the screening, depending on the reactions of the public and their personal feelings. Kazuhiro Goshima<sup>5</sup>, another artist covered in this article, prepares the viewer to understand his installation by providing them with complex technical descriptions to be learned before the performance/screening. Ai Hasegawa<sup>6</sup>, a biologist and computer graphics animator, even invites the viewer to contemplate the possibilities of their body. By offering false biological theories supported by convincing audio-visual material, anatomic models and dilemma charts, Hasegawa invites the viewer to undertake a game of imagining possible future scenarios for humankind. According to the artists, their works – using Hockley’s words to summarize the aims of the new generation of experimental audio-visual directors – are designed to enable the viewer to “experience the immersive qualities that are part of cinematic experience.”<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, the somatic character of the majority of the new Japanese audio-visual experiments can be made even more visible by comparing the directors’ achievements and goals with Hockley’s theory. He points out that experimental film often manifests “the shift from considering ‘viewer, screen’ and instead asserts the primacy of the ‘viewer-screen’ paradigmatic relationship as the key way through which to better understand the cinematic experience.”<sup>8</sup> In the optics of representatives of the new Japanese experimental movement, accepting the leading role of this new relationship allows for focussing on – again using Hockley’s term – “mindfulness.” If understood

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<sup>4</sup> Luke Hockley, *Somatic Cinema: The relationship between body and screen – a Jungian perspective*, (New York: Routledge) (2014), p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> The artist’s website, see: Kazuhiro Goshima, [http://www.goshiman.com/hp/04profile\\_e.html](http://www.goshiman.com/hp/04profile_e.html), date accessed 28.03.2016.

<sup>6</sup> The artist’s website, see: Ai Hasegawa, <http://aihasegawa.info/>, date accessed 15 June 2018.

<sup>7</sup> Luke Hockley, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Luke Hockley, p. 7.

as “a practice of bringing one’s attention to bear on the present moment,”<sup>9</sup> it situates the process of the viewer gaining awareness (of their body or another aspect chosen by the artist) in the center of the artistic pursuits of the Japanese experimental directors. Writing about the somatic aspects of cinema, Hockley proposes perceiving film as “a type of transitional object”<sup>10</sup> and cinema as a “transitional phenomenon” . This corresponds with the point of view of moving pictures manifested by the directors<sup>11</sup>. For example, Takashi Makino perceives the moment of screening as a “creative collaboration with filmmaker and audience, in which each act of watching gives birth to a new cosmos”<sup>12</sup>, and as “an act of true creativity.”<sup>13</sup> In his view, a film screening can initiate the process of transition of the viewer from one mental state to another – designed by, or at last expected, the director.

In considering the boundary-breaking works of this young generation of Japanese directors and their creative approaches to inter-media concepts, as well as their fascination with new technologies, their work can also be classified as “expanded cinema.”<sup>14</sup> Introducing Le Grice’s definition<sup>15</sup>, it can be seen that these new Japanese experiments expand the boundaries of film and performance, going further than the experimental artists of Japan’s 1960s, ’70s and ’80s. After the year 2000, the ‘expanded’ character of the new wave of Japanese experimentation is intangibly connected to the emergence of new technologies, such as computer processing of images or the use of 3D. However, although primarily aimed at offering an experience distinct from live-

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<sup>9</sup> Luke Hockley, p. 7.

<sup>10</sup> Luke Hockley, p. 7.

<sup>11</sup> In the optics of the Japanese experimental artists discussed herein, the transitional character of cinema is related to the postulate that a film screening should change the viewer – develop their perception, initiate metaphysical reflection upon reality and teach them to read the meaning behind the experimental forms. As Takashi Makino points out: “While the audience experiences the film’s visual and sonic display, nonetheless, they are free to dwell into their own imagination. What fascinates me most about film expression is the potential for what is presented on the screen to collide with each individual viewer’s emotional landscape, and the new ‘image’ created inside the viewer’s mind resulting from this collision.” More, see: Makino Takashi, <http://makinokino.exblog.jp/>, date accessed 15 June 2018.

<sup>12</sup> Marianne Shaneen.

<sup>13</sup> Marianne Shaneen.

<sup>14</sup> Malcolm Le Grice, *Experimental Cinema in the Digital Age*, (London: Palgrave) (2001), p. 273.

<sup>15</sup> Malcolm Le Grice, pp. 273-274. Le Grice offers the following definition of expanded cinema: “The concept of Expanded Cinema was part of this [during the 1960s – author] general move by artists to break old artistic boundaries, explore cross-media fusions, and experiment with new technologies but, most importantly, to challenge the constraints of existing art discourses.”

action popular films<sup>16</sup>, this expansion is often created with consideration of the position of the viewer.

This article will examine how these award-winning Japanese artists of the new avant-garde movement invite the viewer to immerse themselves in their installations and screenings, to transgress the boundaries of the body, religion and political views, and contemplate “film as a film.”<sup>17</sup> The audio-visual installations described in this article were chosen from different thematic areas, and represent artists with diverse views on the problem of the somatic character of their works. However, they all share the same approach to developing the concept of the new avant-garde movement, agreeing that the need to immerse the viewer should shape their artistic pursuits.

## **Toward The Tactile Visions**

After several solo projects and collaborations with people from outside the world of art<sup>18</sup>, members of the Collective [+] group<sup>19</sup> Rei Hayama and Takashi Makino decided to work together. This resulted in an audio-visual performance they call *Toward The Tactile Visions*<sup>20</sup>. The project, which had two screenings (the first in Chiang Mai, Thailand, on May 12<sup>th</sup> 2018, and the second in Bangkok on May 15<sup>th</sup> 2018<sup>21</sup>), workshops and meetings with audiences, was put together with Arnont Nongyao<sup>22</sup> and

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<sup>16</sup> Makino states that Hollywood films predetermine certain images should be perceived – for example, those rendered in 3D. According to him, experimental cinema can offer an individual approach to the viewer that doesn’t determine the patterns of their reception; therefore it stands against mainstream cinema. For more, see: Ross Julian, “Interview: Takashi Makino”, *Filmcomment* (2014), <http://www.filmcomment.com/blog/interview-takashi-makino/>, date accessed 15 June 2018.

<sup>17</sup>See: Malcolm Le Grice, p. 275.

<sup>18</sup> For example, Takashi Makino has worked with musicians and composers, such as Jim O’Rourke. Moreover, Hayama was often accompanied by her sister, who helped with filming natural landscapes (for example, in the film *Their Bird* [2010-2012, 8 mm film and video, 13 min]).

<sup>19</sup> Currently, [+] is working more as a screening organizer group, not a group of artists pursuing the similar aesthetic objectives. For the project *Toward The Tactile Visions*, Hayama and Makino collaborated as individual artists, not the members of [+], what seems to be significant from the point of view of the mentioned directors. That decision of creating an independent project had not only the financial implications, but also allowed inviting Arnont Nongyao to the joint project.

<sup>20</sup> The only public information about the project was published on the Facebook event’s site. See: *Toward the Tactile Visions*, <https://web.facebook.com/events/2087048401511185/>, date accessed 10 June 2018 [event’s webpage].

<sup>21</sup> Excerpts from video recordings of the performances can be checked out on the Internet, see: *Toward the Tactile Visions*, <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCcgLLozI4B7M0IZS81hDj1g>, date accessed 15 June 2018 [performance video recording, excerpt].

<sup>22</sup> See: IFFR, <https://iff.fr.com/en/persons/arnont-nongyao>, date accessed 17 June 2018. Arnont Nongyao (1979) is an experimental filmmaker from Thailand. He is mostly focused on searching for experimental sounds and vibrations – which he then incorporates into his films. So far, he has

curated by Pathompong Manakitsomboon. *Toward The Tactile Visions* was designed to bring together the areas of interests of the artists to create an inter-medial experience for the viewer.

Here, it is worth mentioning the objectives and backgrounds of the artists before we present, later on, the connections between their different styles. Rei Hayama<sup>23</sup> studied at the Department of Moving Images and Performing Arts at Tama Art University,<sup>24</sup> but her films have also been screened abroad, including in the Netherlands, Slovakia, Germany, Belgium, and the USA<sup>25</sup>. Hayama's films are deeply inspired by her childhood memories of living in a forest with her parents, where she was able to experience close contact with nature and observe the life cycles of particular species. She was inspired by birds the most, so in her films one can find many references to these "mysterious creatures,"<sup>26</sup> as she calls them. Hayama connects the creative process to her moods, describing it in this way: "I'm making films like making a forest. This is what I feel through my creative thought process; the feeling tells me how the fiction and reality is like a house and nature, and how we traverse between these two worlds again and again."<sup>27</sup> The core concept of Hayama's pictures is the act of transformation (often into a bird)<sup>28</sup>, but she also references other symbolic figures: men, children, memory and nature. The filmmaker uses them to explain the relations between technological development and the longing for the past, when people existed closer to nature<sup>29</sup>. What's more, the artist claims to take the perspective of "a bird's-eye view,"<sup>30</sup> which she explains in her manifesto: "[...] I think about the thing that has been lost or neglected from an anthropocentric view of the world. I attempt to fall off from the arbitrary illusion of human's »height«, transport nature into the space of human's thought by the temporal art that makes time for thinking about what we are, and what is the relationship between human and others. My works are based on an

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directed such films as: *Mr. Weirdo and Anomalous Space* (2003, short), *A Perfect Disaster* (2004, co-director), *All the Chapter of the Song You Ate Me* (2006, short), *Anonymous* (2013, documentary), *Drink Sky On Rabbit's Field* (2014, short), *Sound Inventing & Inside Inventor* (2015, short), and *Ghost Rabbit & The Casket Sales* (2015, short).

<sup>23</sup> Biographical information and the Rei Hayama's objectives were also presented in the author's article, "Literary inspirations in Japanese audiovisual experiment. Rei Hayama's film art", *Problems of Literary Genres* 61:1 (2018) [in print].

<sup>24</sup> Light Cone, <https://lightcone.org/en/filmmaker-2639-rei-hayama>, date accessed 14 June 2018.

<sup>25</sup> Rei Hayama, <http://reihayama.net/>, date accessed 14 June 2018.

<sup>26</sup> Monica Delgado, José S. Hinojosa, "Interview: Rei Hayama", *desistfilm*, <http://desistfilm.com/interview-rei-hayama/> (2014).

<sup>27</sup> Monica Delgado, José S. Hinojosa. The quotation is presented in its original form.

<sup>28</sup> Hayama Rei, *Private conversations with Rei Hayama (2017-2018)*, [interviews in the author's own archive].

<sup>29</sup> Hayama Rei.

<sup>30</sup> Monica Delgado, José S. Hinojosa.

allegorical plot, and it told by poetic writings and symbolical images such as recorded body action. There are some key factors often appear in work such as bird's eye viewpoint, forest, pretend (play), the non-human leading character."<sup>31</sup> In this case, it can be seen that Hayama seeks to avoid the anthropocentric point of view and gives voice to the animals instead, in an attempt to deliberate their gaze upon the human world<sup>32</sup>.

In contrast to Rei Hayama, Takashi Makino<sup>33</sup> rejects decipherable visual forms and symbols, focusing on the abstract. He debuted in 2004 with a short film, *EVE*, which pointed the way ahead for the artist's further development. As the filmmaker has indicated, he is searching for the best and most intimate way to show the tremendous character of the cosmos and make the liminal experience of 'touching the void' as palpable as possible. Makino's pursuits stem from an accident he suffered when he was young, and a series of visions he then experienced. Subsequently, he found that film works for him as a tool for explaining his feelings, and similarly to Hayama, bring back memories and make them accessible to viewers<sup>34</sup>. To create, as he calls it, the "perfect film,"<sup>35</sup> Makino tests the viewer's ability to understand his experimental visions of whirling shapes and colours. While explaining his choice of the artistic means, the director observes: "None of the creatures that exist in the world are born of their own volition; when they first achieve awareness, they find themselves adrift in chaos. It is only by creating cosmos that they are able to overcome the fundamental meaningless and fear of existence"<sup>36</sup>.

The third member of the *Toward The Tactile Visions* project, Arnont Nongyao, experiments with the connections between sound and moving pictures, and considers film as an illustration of sound. Nongyao is a debutant, who had his first solo exhibition, entitled *Another Sound*, at the beginning of 2018<sup>37</sup>. As he describes his own objectives, his main aim is "exploring an approach to communications and the

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<sup>31</sup> Rei Hayama.

<sup>32</sup> However, it should be pointed out that the artists also take inspiration from western literature (for example, the poetry of Paul Valéry), films such as Béla Tarr's *Werckmeister Harmonies* (*Werckmeister harmóniák*, 2000), and Pier Paolo Pasolini's works, as well as the performative art of Ana Mendieta.

<sup>33</sup> For more about Takashi Makino, see: Kiejziewicz Agnieszka, "Enter the metaphysical cosmos: the visualizations of the universe in Japanese experimental cinema", *Maska. Anthropology Sociology Culture* 29 (2016), pp. 147-156.

<sup>34</sup> Marianne Shaneen.

<sup>35</sup> Marianne Shaneen.

<sup>36</sup> Light Cone, *Makino Takashi. Still in Cosmos*, <http://lightcone.org/en/film-7445-still-in-cosmos>, date accessed 17 June 2018.

<sup>37</sup> Arnont Nongyao, [http://www.arnontnongyao.com/arnontnongyao.com/Another\\_Sound.html](http://www.arnontnongyao.com/arnontnongyao.com/Another_Sound.html), date accessed 15 June 2018.

concept of life passing-on through sonic and visual mediations.”<sup>38</sup> Nongyao contributed to *Toward The Tactile Visions* mostly by adding sound to the filmed footage, using his previous experience of working on *Another Sound*. On the project, he considered sound samples to be a unique language that helped him communicate with his fellow artists, getting around the Thai/Japanese language barrier that forced them to communicate through experimental compositions<sup>39</sup>. It’s worth indicating that Nongyao’s performances are very similar to Makino’s: he shows films, mostly of whirling shapes and colours, on surfaces other than normal screens, accompanied by live music. The artist also works with scripts that can be modified on the fly during the screenings, based on live observation of the audience’s reactions.

The pictures and sounds included in the final version of *Toward The Tactile Visions* clearly bear a resemblance to previous works by Hayama, Makino and Nongyao individually. As the artists indicate on the event’s Facebook page<sup>40</sup>, they aim to show the relationship between the medium and the emergence of “the consciousness and awareness of cinema as the real cinematic event.”<sup>41</sup> They also emphasise that contact with experimental/expanded cinema “contaminates”<sup>42</sup> the viewer – creating the ability to connect his body to the sound and image he experiences. *Toward The Tactile Visions* was designed with the purpose of teaching audiences about the diversity of possible cinematic forms that differ from narrative cinema. In their description, the artists also use the term “to touch” experimental cinema, and this idea underlines the somatic character of their work.

The first screening took place at Chiang Mai University Art Center, with the venue being a giant white cube that allowed the artists to project the films on every wall in the room. Later, the group discussed how the location significantly influenced the way they modified the event, and how the screening itself went totally differently than the second one in Bangkok. Apart from the displays of cameras and musical instruments placed around the venue, other items related to the film were set out. Among these were branches without leaves, specially prepared by Hayama to underline the theme of nature in the film. Moreover, the artists used their bodies as parts of the scenography, freely moving around the white cube and casting shadows on the screens. Some of the images in the film are Makino’s ‘noisy supernovas’ – colourful collages, changing from deep rose to blue, or light dots moving down the screen. Between the whirling abstractions, various distorted, enlarged shapes of recognisable items emerge, such as

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<sup>38</sup> Arnont Nongyao.

<sup>39</sup> Arnont Nongyao.

<sup>40</sup> *Toward the Tactile Visions*, <https://web.facebook.com/events/2087048401511185/>, date accessed 10 June 2018 [event’s webpage].

<sup>41</sup> *Toward the Tactile Visions*.

<sup>42</sup> *Toward the Tactile Visions*.

parts of plants, tools, animals and even people recorded during their daily routines. It is significant here that the artists are visible to the viewers throughout the screening, sometimes even stepping in front of the screen, continuously engaged in the process of creating the performance. It is worth noting that because of the shape of the venue, the second screening at the Alliance Française center in Bangkok was restrained to one big screen, with some additional effects projected onto the walls closest to the screen. Explaining the differences between two venues and their influence on the project, Hayama observed:

“At Alliance Française center, we did perform at the normal cinema. It was a very interesting contrast to our previous performance at Chiang Mai University. At Alliance Française center, we felt sort of limitation of the space for our performance because the space is well designed for screening cinema. In the end, we decided to add two small stand screens on both sides of the main screen. I put one guitar in front of the main screen, and the long strip of clear 16mm film was going through the string. The film strip was run through the middle of the audience to where the projector set and kept making a sound of the guitar. (At Chiang Mai University, I set the black film strip went through the tree branch instead of the audience. And the tree gradually made a scratch on the film during the performance.) Their audience could hear the image and see the sound. It also made the audience noticed the film and the situation of cinematic space.”<sup>43</sup>

The postulate of allowing the viewer to ‘touch’ the film was also fulfilled in another significant way. A projector was pointed at the audience, displaying images on the backs of the viewers’ heads and faces, making another screen out of their skin. As such, observers were also able to follow the images on their bodies and the bodies of the other audience members. The immersive character of the screening was reinforced by this attempt to make the viewer the center of the picture, liberating the picture from the confines of screens. The colours and movements of the projected images let the audience feel as though they were floating in a sea of pictures.

In *Toward The Tactile Visions*, these three artists came together to merge the styles and objectives known from their previous works. The visual collages of Makino, the focus on the environment and living creatures of Hayama, and the search for experimental sounds by Nongyao, were all brought together to fulfil the postulates of haptic cinema.

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<sup>43</sup> Agnieszka Kiejziewicz, *Conversations with Rei Hayama* (2018), [the interview with Rei Hayama, the material in the author’s archive].

## This May not be a Movie

Kazuhiro Goshima<sup>44</sup> began his film experiments slightly before the increase in popularity of this kind of artistic activity that occurred in 2000<sup>45</sup>. This visual creator debuted as a freelance media content designer in the mid-1990s, but soon gave up the commercial market and devoted himself to new forms of expression as an experimental filmmaker<sup>46</sup>. In his work, Goshima is mostly focused on the role of light and shadow, which in his hands shape not only recognizable images but also have the power to make their surroundings come alive. For example, in his 2013 *Shadowland*, the shadows are the “breath of the city” that gives the metropolis its unique identity<sup>47</sup>. From early on, Goshima has also been interested in playing with viewer’s perceptions. Using sudden close-ups and sudden disappearances of objects<sup>48</sup>, experimenting with movement and the viewer’s position<sup>49</sup>, or connecting sounds with blurry pictures, he makes audiences guess the final shape of the presented scene<sup>50</sup>. However, even though Goshima has been busy deliberating on the position of the viewer from the beginning, his first work engaging the viewer’s body could be said to have a somatic character, and appeared in his portfolio in 2014. This is an audio-visual installation entitled *This May not be a Movie*.

Analysing Goshima’s film, it is worth starting with Le Grice’s article *Problematising the Spectator’s Placement in Film*<sup>51</sup>, which launched a polemic against Christian Metz’s paper *The Imaginary Signifier*<sup>52</sup>. Le Grice comments on the theoretical approach Metz manifests toward the role and condition of the viewer of experimental film. Following Metz’s findings, Le Grice focuses on the mechanisms of identifying viewers, while encountering (using Metz’s terminology) “inhuman sequences” in avant-garde films that “eliminate the portrayed character or even eliminate all photo-recording.”<sup>53</sup> He makes the observation (which could be useful when analysing Goshima’s films), that viewers might “identify with the camera.”<sup>54</sup> He says that this means identification with

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<sup>44</sup> I wrote about the role of the technologies used by Goshima in his films between the 1990s and 2016 in an article: Agnieszka Kiejziewicz, “The technologies of experimental Japanese filmmakers in the digital era”, *Transmissions: the Journal of Film and Media Studies* 1:1 (2016), pp. 102-104.

<sup>45</sup> Kazuhiro Goshima, [http://www.goshiman.com/hp/04profile\\_e.html](http://www.goshiman.com/hp/04profile_e.html), date accessed 28.03.2016.

<sup>46</sup> Agnieszka Kiejziewicz, “The technologies...”, pp. 102-104.

<sup>47</sup> Agnieszka Kiejziewicz, “The technologies...”, pp. 102-104.

<sup>48</sup> For example, in such films as *Uncertain camera* (2009), or *In the forest of shadows* (2008).

<sup>49</sup> For example, in *Relative position* (2012).

<sup>50</sup> For example, in *Looking and listening* (2014).

<sup>51</sup> Malcolm Le Grice, pp. 172-183.

<sup>52</sup> Metz Christian, “The Imaginary Signifier”, *Screen* 16:2 (1975), pp. 14-76.

<sup>53</sup> Malcolm Le Grice, p. 177.

<sup>54</sup> Malcolm Le Grice, p. 179.

the mechanism, as well as the “authority behind the narrative order.”<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, Le Grice tries to explain the place (and situation of the body) of the viewer trying to understand experimental films in which there are no narrative patterns visible. He concludes that “[...] it is necessary to assume that the spectator must produce an auditory and specular construction for the film which is not directly that of the film presented – the spectator must be expelled from the film text in order to produce the conceptual construct as an act of the symbolic.”<sup>56</sup>

The situation of the viewer explained above seems to describe the shape of the projection and the viewer’s identification process, as designed by Goshima in *This May not be a Movie*. Here, Goshima raises the question of what a film is, and at which point the viewer starts perceiving the sequence of moving pictures as a consistent film production<sup>57</sup>. As he pointed out in an interview for *The Japan Times*<sup>58</sup>, he used the Japanese term *dōga*, translated into English as ‘movie’, ‘film’, ‘motion picture’, or even ‘cinema’. However, in the Japanese language *dōga* is comparable to the term *eiga* (which also translates as ‘film’). It is thus perceived as meaning ‘motion picture’ – expressing different content and emphasising that the work, as Goshima sees it, is “composited from still frames.”<sup>59</sup> Explaining the reasoning behind his work, the author says: “When you think about the fuzziness of meaning of the wider application of *eiga* in its broad conceptual sense, you realize that it is the product of multiple mechanisms. I created one mechanism that pushes it to its limit in one direction, and by doing so I hoped to expand the breadth of its conceptualization. That’s why although the title is »This May Not Be a Movie«, its real message is »It’s possible to alter the meaning of ‘movie’ any number of times«.”<sup>60</sup>

*This May not be a Movie* is in fact an audio-visual installation, built out of screens, fibre-optic cables, a lattice, an image sensor and a movie camera, situated in the center of a small room. For their first glimpse, it gives viewers no hints about its purpose or the meaning of the images displayed. The blurry, colourful images on the screen are pictures of several hundred lines of light that appear after changes in the brightness of each pixel on a piece of 4×5 inch film<sup>61</sup>. This is accompanied by an explanatory

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<sup>55</sup> Malcolm Le Grice, pp.179-181.

<sup>56</sup> Malcolm Le Grice, p. 183.

<sup>57</sup> Kazuhiro Goshima, [http://www.goshiman.com/hp/04profile\\_e.html](http://www.goshiman.com/hp/04profile_e.html), date accessed 28.03.2016.

<sup>58</sup> *The Japan Times*, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2015/02/05/arts/kazuhiro-goshima-sheer-amount-information-4k-exceeds-reality/#.VvmZ4kcoN8h>, date accessed 28.03.2016.

<sup>59</sup> *The Japan Times*.

<sup>60</sup> *The Japan Times*.

<sup>61</sup> Kazuhiro Goshima.

movie<sup>62</sup>, from which the viewer can learn that behind the displayed images are the simple sequences of a Japanese man waving two white flags, running or riding a bicycle, as well as three people walking. This technical addendum explains the technological process and allows viewers to better understand the concept. However, it is impossible to fully experience the installation, as well as depict its meaning, without engaging with these additional materials. Here, Goshima seeks to show the viewer how the optical illusion of seeing a film works, stating that the amount of information the observer receives “exceeds the reality.” The director states that such experimental art can power the imagination and leave room for new interpretations of the objects so viewed. In this case, he re-examines the relationship between the viewer’s perception and the medium, focusing on the lack of identification of the observer with the presented pictures. Instead, he offers a pure description of the technological process, which reveals the boundaries of the viewer’s perceptions and its constraints. It can be stated that the center of Goshima’s installation is not the process itself, but the observer, whose body receives a new position – an imperfect lens that distorts the original picture.

## The Mother of species

The last project described in this article was designed by Ai Hasegawa, a biologist and visual creator, who speculates on possible future scenarios and combines audio-visual art with her scientific background. So far, Hasegawa has presented such installations as the widely-discussed *(Im)possible Baby*<sup>63</sup>, and *The Extreme Environmental Love Hotel*<sup>64</sup>, in which she tackles socially important topics such as biotechnological modifications to

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<sup>62</sup> The explanatory movie was also posted on YouTube, see: [これは映画ではないらしい THIS MAY NOT BE A MOVIE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E4i-3Pc6nCE&feature=youtu.be), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E4i-3Pc6nCE&feature=youtu.be>, date accessed 17 June 2018 [Kazuhiro Goshima’s technical details explanation film].

<sup>63</sup> Ai Hasegawa, <http://aihasegawa.info/>, date accessed 15 June 2018.

<sup>64</sup> See: Shift. Japan-based international online magazine features creative culture, <http://www.shift.jp.org/en/archives/2016/02/ai-hasegawa.html>, date accessed 11 June 2018. The *(Im)possible baby* project is another example of Hasegawa’s speculative design. It was created to “stimulate discussions about the social, cultural and ethical implications of emerging biotechnologies that could enable same-sex couple to have their own, genetically related children.” The artist analyzed the DNA data of a lesbian couple, and comparing their genotypes, visualized the look of their potential children (two girls). Hasegawa used these simulation models to create a set of fictional photos, showing the unique moments that could have happened (for example, family meals and celebrations). The results were presented around the world as photo exhibitions, as well as in a 30-minute documentary, made with the help of the Japanese national television, NHK.

human genomes, and environmental issues. Similar themes also appear in her 2013 installation *I Wanna Deliver a Dolphin*<sup>65</sup>.

The artist approaches issues of overcrowding, overdevelopment, and environmental crisis through presentation of an alternative, even grotesque form of human reproduction – delivery of endangered species<sup>66</sup>. Giving birth to animals (such as a dolphin, tuna or shark) could, according to Hasegawa's speculation, satisfy humankind's need to reproduce, as well as its need for nutrition<sup>67</sup>. The idea for her *I Wanna Deliver a Dolphin* audio-visual installation emerged when the artist turned thirty and she started thinking about having her own children. In an interview for an online magazine, *Shift*, she said that "I had turned 30, and was at an age when I would have to seriously think about having children. At the same time, there was a lot of news coverage surrounding environmental issues. Such news reports made me think about overpopulation and the food problem, and I thought, »are more humans necessary? Would children be happy being forced into this deteriorating world?«" In this case, it can be pointed out that *I Wanna Deliver a Dolphin* was a result of the author's consciousness of her bodily changes, and a need for sharing that awareness with a broader audience.

As an example of an ideal species for becoming a human baby, the artist chose the Maui's dolphin, which has the right size to be grown in a human placenta. Combining a highly suggestive fragment of film showing the birth of a dolphin and its first moments, with footage of a human mother and a model of a placenta displayed next to the screen, Hasegawa tricks the viewer into considering the possibility of the depicted situation. The scientific descriptions that accompany the screening seem to suggest the possibility of the process, further legitimized by technical details<sup>68</sup>. What's

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<sup>65</sup> *I Wanna Deliver a Dolphin* was also exhibited in Poland, thanks to the artist's cooperation with the Wro Art Center in Wroclaw. See: Wro Art Center, <http://wrocenter.pl/pl/ai-hasegawa-jp-i-wanna-deliver-a-dolphin/>, date accessed 18 June 2018.

<sup>66</sup> Ai Hasegawa.

<sup>67</sup> Ai Hasegawa.

<sup>68</sup> See: Ai Hasegawa. The technical details, presented together with the film and model, are as follows: "To make it possible for a human mother to deliver a dolphin from her womb, there is a need to synthesize »The Dolp-human Placenta«. The usual human placenta interacts to pass from mother to baby oxygen, carbon dioxide, nutrients, hormones, antibodies (Immunoglobulin Gamma, IgG) and so on. The Dolp-human placenta blocks the delivery of IgG to the baby. The placenta originates from the baby's side, which in this case is a dolphin, and not from the human side. This avoids the ethical and legal difficulties associated with reproductive research involving human eggs. The decidua is formed by implantation of the egg. Usually, foreign cells in the body (for example from other individuals) are attacked by the immune system, but inside the decidua they are tolerated. However, even though the decidua accepts cells from other individuals, non-human cells would still be

more, the author presents a ‘dilemma chart’ and invites the viewer to consider whether they would like to deliver an endangered species. It’s worth pointing out that the project asks the question from a non-western, non-male perspective, which fact was especially praised by the jury of the 2014 Core 77 Design Awards<sup>69</sup>. The dilemma chart that accompanies the film is designed for female viewers to follow,<sup>70</sup> and in doing so imagine themselves in the situation presented on the screen. Here, the observer, tricked by the mock technical details designed to convince viewers of the truth presented on-screen, is invited to reconsider the abilities of their body. Moreover, the artist questions the motivation and morality of the viewer in imagining the possibility of giving birth to an endangered species, only to eat it for its unique, luxury meat. It is significant that while approaching the installation in the exhibition space, the viewer is not informed that the dolphin is a robot (and that the whole birthing process is simulated by an actress). The simulation is also enhanced with various graphic details, such as blood filling the birthing pool.

Following the primary aim of expanded cinema, Hasegawa pushes the boundaries of the relationship between audiences and audio-visual material, as well as encouraging immersion in the projection and a response to questions of a moral and even religious character. Here, the body of the viewer is a transmitter of meanings, which seems to be perfectly illustrated by a quotation from Vivian Sobchack’s *Carnal Thoughts*: “the film experience is meaningful not to the side of our bodies, but because of our bodies. Which is to say that movies provoke in us the »carnal thoughts« that ground and inform more conscious analysis.”<sup>71</sup>

## Conclusion

The appearance of the body of the viewer – exposed to a cacophony of sounds, colours and the insecurity resulting from seeing controversial or thought-provoking content – becomes the reason for creating such encounters in moving pictures as those presented by the Japanese experimental directors discussed in this article. They are checking the boundaries of audiences’ understanding, continuously balancing between shocking and comforting them. What’s more, the artists are often genuinely

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attacked. In the dolphin-human placenta’s case, it has been modified to distinguish mammal from non-mammal cells, making it even more tolerant” [excerpt].

<sup>69</sup> Ai Hasegawa. The Core 77 Design Awards are awarded annually to the best practitioners of such areas of design as open design, interaction, design concepts, consumer products, visual communication, and so on.

<sup>70</sup> Reading the provided dilemma chart, viewers can find questions such as: Can you take responsibility for another person’s life? How about an animal child? Do you think your child is going to have a happy life in this world?

<sup>71</sup> Vivian Sobchack, *Carnal Thoughts: Embodiment and Moving Image Culture*, (Berkeley: University of California Press) (2004), p. 60.

interested in receiving feedback from their audiences, and they collect opinions on the emotional states the viewers reached during the screenings – becoming something like researchers on human perception. The somatic character of these new Japanese audio-visual experiments could be a subject of further interest, as these three directors at least are not stopping pursuing new methods of fulfilling their postulates. As such, it can be assumed that in the next few years the list of experiments, following their achievements presented in this article, will be expanded.

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