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Abundance and repetition. Conversation with Anders Edström C.W. Winter

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Anders Edström & C.W. Winter

Abundance and repetition

Von Martin Grennberger und Philip Widmann

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THE WORKS AND DAYS (OF TAYOKO SHIOJIRI IN THE SHIOTANI BASIN) by Anders Edström and C.W. Winter was part of the first Encounters selection at the Berlinale. A 480-minute film set in a small farming village north of Kyoto, THE WORKS AND DAYS explores seasons of agriculture and human life cycles and establishes an intricate space of exchanges: of actors and non-actors, locals and visitors, document and fiction, photography and cinema, image and non-image, sound and music, as well as of an abundance of non-cinematic references and the distinct visibility of a topography, placing viewers somewhere in its midst.

Anders Edström, a photographer with familial ties to the Shiotani basin, and C.W. Winter, researcher in art practice and theory at the Ruskin School of Art, Oxford, create their films from an expanded notion of collaboration, familiarity and locality. THE ANCHORAGE (2009) was set around the house of Anders' mother on a small island in Sweden. The central location of THE WORKS AND DAYS is the house of Anders' mother-in-law Tayoko Shiojiri. Both works have been deliberately labelled as fiction films by their makers, an assertion that exposes the fault lines of such demarcations and potentially characterizes film as the ground on which the given and the invented coexist with actuality and memory. Emerging from THE WORKS AND DAYS are questions on the ethics of working together in front of and behind the camera, as well as the broader implications of fieldwork and socializing in situ for almost a decade before starting the actual shooting.

In Berlin, the film was awarded a Golden Bear. Festival screenings following the Berlinale were cancelled or postponed due to the pandemic, so that THE WORKS AND DAYS has remained unseen since. The following interview was conducted via email between April and July 2020, taking its time in gleaning the many potential entrances for reflecting upon the film. In this written conversation, C.W. Winter speaks on behalf of both directors, changing from the first person singular to the first person plural and back with ease. During the editing of the conversation, an interview appeared in issue 83 of *Cinema Scope* that contains passages that are almost verbatim with the material presented here. On this, C.W. remarked that «while of course we understand that it's unconventional, we see the repetitions as self-reflexive to the way we work. We see them as formal analogs to the way we film. In the way we film, repetitions abound.»

Philip Widmann: When I initially asked to interview you in early April, I mentioned that my memory of THE WORKS AND DAYS is already fading. It's an 8-hour long film, so I would credit a built-in capacity of forgetting to its duration. Beyond that, however, I felt the film defies quantification. I didn't only forget some of what I saw and heard, I also forgot the meaning of minutes and hours to some extent. And eventually, it turned out that for me the film is much longer than the 480 minutes of its screen time. To reuse the film's title: it worked inside me for days. It's transgressive—vindicating the cinema and exceeding it at the same time. My question is twofold: How would you describe the film to those who haven't seen it? And what is your own relation to memory working on a film for almost ten years from a first writing period to its premiere?

While we welcome the interpretation, it hadn't occurred to us yet to think of it in terms of transgression, as that wasn't what it felt like while doing it. Our interests at the time were more to do with discipline than with trespass—something more like a Senecan or Tayokoan kind of ethic. Tasks, tools, materials, problems, solutions.

In thinking about duration, we could go in quite a few directions with that, though most of the answers would somehow deal with economies and investment-over-time in people and place. A first answer would be about indifference. Indifference to the somewhat standardized two-ish hour length of fiction features. A set of expectations born out of the bottom lines of cinema chains wishing to maximize concession sales. It would just feel absurd to us to fold that sort of concern into the way we think about making things. So the aims aren't contrarian; they're just somehow elsewhere. Maybe it's something closer to Italo Calvino's interests in *Lightness*. The desire to work from a less crowded space.

The film's title betrays geographic interests. Interests in a set of families who, for eleven generations, have settled and farmed this particular alluvial fan that spills down out of a ravine in the Tamba Mountains and into a river formed by the Kanbayashi Fault, the suture of the Miyafuku and Tamba geological zones. It's a terrane and a landscape that leads one easily to thinking about Huttonian deep time or Braudelian *longue durée*. The film is a description not just of those who appear on-screen, but a set of memories—often ritualized—of those no longer there, a family spanning wars and eras and alternating periods of comfort and hardship. So we suppose there are something like strata of memory throughout the film. The events and non-events of the present; of structures razed or left to neglect; stories of times past told amongst the actors on-

screen; the georgic sense-memories of habit, passed down through generations, seen in their labor; and the memories, revealed by the film's apparitions, of those who were there before. There is always more to a place. A map is not the territory, etc.

This is a family and a basin that Anders began photographing with regularity in 1993. A place we first visited together in 2003. But that we wouldn't start filming until late 2014, after accreting what we felt was a passably sufficient supply of our own memories, of learning stories and lore, developing relationships, until it somehow felt right that we might start recording. The scale of the film arose naturally out of this long-term investment.

In some ways as well, the film is a love letter to cinemas. Of times spent in them, of memories built up in them. Of collective experiences had and communities made. A recognition that the film world has much better chairs and much better speakers than does the art world, for example. And a desire to take advantage of all these factors to make an extended experience. A film that can, for a day, be somehow lived in.

PW: In the synopsis, the film is called «a georgic in five books». A poem dealing with agriculture, according to the dictionary, derived from a Greek word that combines the earth (geo-) and work (ergon). The title of the film itself seems to make reference to Hesiod's didactic farming poem «Works and Days». Speaking of the map and the terrain, it's almost as if you took a specifically classical-European «map» to the Shiotani basin.

The film is indeed replete with references. The overwhelming majority are Japanese. Though there are indeed a handful that nod to the international. Even as the mapping is very thoroughly local. Were the occasional outside allusion to constitute a map, we should think we might be considered somewhat lazy cartographers. The sorts of international references that appear in the film are knowledge that is well-assimilated into Japanese education; into its robust art world; its brilliant outsider, experimental, and classical music cultures; and its towering literary tradition. An author like Homer, for example, was first published in Japanese in 1904 with the work becoming something of a sensation, going through several editions rather rapidly. A Japanese person referencing Greek myth would be every bit as commonplace as a European referencing Hokusai. It is mundanely common knowledge.

The film's title does indeed reference Hesiod's *The Works and Days*, a farmers manual poem from c. 700 BC, a work in a tradition of farmers manual poetry that includes Nicander's *Georgica*, Marcus Terentius Varro's *Agricultural Topics in Three Books*, and Virgil's *Georgics*. Our movie describes the life of one farmer in a valley in rural Honshu. And while she is valorized by the film's title, it was at the same time important to us that her life, a life dear to us personally, be rendered for the viewer as merely one life, any life—remarkably, if beautifully, unremarkable.

And further still the title is a reflection of agrarian life across time. Farming is the stuff of our survival. A baseline of common humanity going back over 11,000 years. And to some degree the film's title opens up the possibility of an echo of that history. A Braudelian long view of the lumber of life.

It might also be worth noting something of a corrective to what could, for some, be a misreading of provenance or at least of inheritance. Already by the time of Hesiod, there existed significant cross-pollination and interweaving of storytelling traditions across Eurasia. And over the preceding centuries, we can see frequent and substantial overlap and analog in narrative and mythology across Greek, Semitic, Indian, Altaic, Chinese, and Japanese literature. For example, a good number of the symbols, characters, and mythological hierarchies found in Hesiod's *Theogony* can be found in barely altered form in Hittite literature and later in the Japanese *Koji-ki* [an early Japanese chronicle compiled in the 7th and 8th centuries.—Ed.]. Lost to the haze of time are the specific origins of some of these myths. Though near-direct mirrorings of the mythological themes and events described by Hesiod would have been common in Japan for at least the last 1,200 years. To see ancient myth as hermetically European might be to miss this vital history while devaluing the extent of Asian contribution, incorporation, and interrelation.

Martin Grennberger: THE WORKS AND DAYS is the second film you have made together. Can you tell us something about the nature of your collaborations? What were the starting points for working together in general, and for the two films in particular?

The story of our meeting is one of preposterous chance but is maybe too much of a tangent from talking about the film. A short version is that we were both in Berlin on jobs and met by happenstance at a bar. A couple of weeks later, en route back home to America, I stopped for a few days in London, where Anders lived with his wife and son.

This was before their daughter—one of our actresses, Mai—was born. And we got to talking about ideas. Those few days were the beginning of what has been one rather long conversation about photographs. How we feel they work or don't. The ever shifting lines between the commodity image and the non-commodity image. Images as resistance to the dominant economy or to the sellable choice. Disinterest to allure. A preference for plainness. For recursive decisions over taste-based decisions. The sometimes virtues of failure. The welcoming of underestimation, etc.

Anders' photography practice began in 1986, and so he was well down that road by the time we met. As an undergrad, I had been aware of and had admired his work. I would frequent a newsstand in Los Angeles run by a Frenchman. He and I would talk about photography. And, knowing that I couldn't afford to be buying loads of magazines, he was nice enough to let me pull up a stool and look through all of their small press journals, as long as I'd buy the occasional one. A number of those publications were coming out of Paris where Anders was living and working at the time. And his work was frequently published in them. I was struck by his sensibility. I found it singularly dissensual—«bad photography» it might have been called at the time—in a way that seemed like some sort of analog to the music I most cared about.

Out of undergrad, I had fluked into a job as a ghost writer after spending time on film sets doing menial tasks like being a night shift guard of equipment trucks or fetching coffees. So that when we met and agreed that we should try to make things together—films probably—the roles fell into place. Anders on camera. Me writing, or at least outlining, in addition to recording the sound. With each of us playing the role of the other's critic: «too strong», «too alluring». That sort of thing. And we'd usually agree.

At the beginning, we didn't want our reach to exceed our grasp. We thought we'd keep things contained. Just images and sound. So we spent much of one summer at Anders' family's house in the Stockholm Archipelago. For the sake of scope, we set out to make a film about mosses and lichens. Some sort of austere psychedelic movie we thought. Some weeks into filming, Anders' mother, Ulla, came out to join us. Over dinner one night she told a story of a time, many years prior, when, during moose hunting season, an unfamiliar hunter arrived by boat and set up camp. She told of the disquieting experience of realizing that, on multiple nights, the hunter was walking out around the periphery of the largely glass-walled cabin, just at the edge of the tree line. And I

realized that this bit of information, this fragment of a family folk story, was enough material from which we could make a whole fiction film. It took some time to figure out how, but three years later, in 2006, we returned and shot our first feature, *THE ANCHORAGE*. And from there forward our interest has been fiction.

As with *THE ANCHORAGE*, the catalyst for *THE WORKS AND DAYS* arose from drinks after a meal. In 2010, we were in Shiotani, looking for something. We weren't sure what. One night we were drinking sake around the kotatsu [a low table with a blanket and a heat source.—Ed.] with Tayoko, Hiroharu, and Junji. And Tayoko issued forth with a story, one she'd kept mostly bottled up for decades. Of a lifetime of regret and frustration. Of opportunities denied her due to her sex. An education denied her. A career denied her. And the remorse, at this stage of her life, of wondering what if. A story she hadn't dared tell before. Why tell it then? We're not sure. Was it the observer effect of mine and Anders' presence? Perhaps. Though it became clear in those moments that we had enough of something to get to the starting point of making a film.



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PW: Both films have been shot in places connected to Anders's family. What's the role of the family—and the familiar—in your collaborations?

There's a certain vogue at the moment for a type of film that we call sort-of-ethnography, which is like sensory ethnography but without having to do all that

homework. It's an approach to making that is often explained with arrays of parlour game terminology as apologia for what are often rather casual engagements with people and with place.

In the case of this film, we spent a combined thirty-six years getting to know this village and a bit longer still getting to know Tayoko and Junji. When one arrives in a new place, one is often struck by observations that, after some time, one will come to realize were merely touristic. Observations too obvious, too readily beautiful, or too easily interesting. By spending years in a place, one can move past these sorts of observations and reveal a place from a greater sense of knowing. A greater sense of detail. Working as more sensitive instruments. This meant a research phase spent collecting stories from the family and neighbors, and, during the production phase, giving them the time to air these stories out such that they could be worked and re-worked into the film. So in this way, the actors enter the process pre-writing, early enough in the ideation that they are able to leverage their own perspectives, making for a chorus of familiarities. So in choosing the sites of our first two films, it seemed clear that we could benefit from working in locations that Anders had already spent years photographing. This brought us to home and family. The result is one set of proposals for thinking some things through.

MG: The dynamic between sociality and solitude works differently (for some obvious reasons, one being duration) in THE WORKS AND DAYS than in THE ANCHORAGE, where solitude and the protagonist's relationship to the landscape function as a vector for the film's intensity. Has your notion of place, home and the inner workings of temporality changed during the incubation time and the actual production of this new work?

Different people work in different ways. In Anders' work, there's always been an importance placed on the familiar. Knowing a place over time. You can see this clearly in books of his like *Hanezawa Garden* in which a single, not particularly remarkable geographic location is just looked at and looked at and looked at. It's a sort of sustained drilling down that dovetails with our shared interest in the projects of any number of 20th century composers focused, in one way or another, on duration and repetition. In some ways maybe it's similar to how T.J. Clark worked when he wrote *The Sight of Death*. Spending six months looking at just two paintings by Poussin and putting down

thoughts almost daily. Although in Anders' case, it's from the perspective of the maker instead of of the historian.

In each case, though, this meant me then getting up to speed. Years of lead time getting to know his immediate and extended family. Building those relationships. Accumulating oral history. Finding an emotional register. And then seeing, as I developed the rough film outlines, how various formal interests of mine might overlay onto those situations.

As far as family more generally, again one could go to Ford or to Ozu. And their stoic case-making for the healthiest aspects of the institution. Love, loyalty, inherited wisdom. A ground for agreement and disagreement. Of togetherness despite difference. Of the acceptance of foibles. Of collective ethics as a long term if sometimes fraught project. Of grace. Family returns us to our interest in investment, participation, and observation over time.

Which we suppose leads us into your asking about the inner workings of temporality. And so maybe we should be clear that in making a film of this length, we had no interest in making some sort of forbidding Modernist monolith, some perverse endurance test for a viewer to pass. To the contrary. The lessons of cinematic Structuralism, for example, have already been laid down. And they're there for the re-viewing whenever one would like. We re-visit them ourselves and as such feel no compulsion to re-create them. Our interests were in some other sort of assignment. Similarly, this film is decidedly not Slow Cinema, a move that, upon starting pre-production in 2013, we felt was so loaded with already-doneness that it was an option no longer available. This movie, at an average shot length of eighteen seconds, is a film that moves at a clip that would land roughly in the mid-range pacing of, say, Ernst Lubitsch's or even Billy Wilder's body of work. Nor, at the other end of things, is ours an exercise in wall-to-wall dramaturgy of the type that, for us, at such lengths, tends to fatigue. Our aims instead were towards some other sort of density. A lightness of a kind perhaps, maybe a challenging lightness for some, but one that we hope extends some sort of affective generosity and freedom of movement to audiences hardy enough to be willing to invest much of a single day.

PW: There are passages in THE WORKS AND DAYS that indicate a sort of liminality, a porousness or permeability between the spaces on both sides of the lens. What are the movements or exchanges that are going on between these spaces?

While not in any orthodox sense, we do place a certain emphasis on self-reflexivity. But not in a way of now threadbare *Nouvelle vague*-ian gestures. Nor in a way of the salient materiality of much experimental film. What we were more interested in showing was something dumber. Just the simple fact of our there-ness. The actors in the film are, for us, extended family, friends, and neighbors. And so our being there is something that would occur anyway whether we were making a film or not. So our appearances in front of the camera aren't some nod to an avant-garde. They're more just a natural result of what goes on there and a way of making, indifferent to purisms, that would allow for that to be logged.

Sometimes our appearance is more personal in nature. For example, it would have been disrespectful, during certain family rituals, for us to simply have remained planted behind the cameras. Even if that meant, for the occasional shot, that we would depart somewhat from the intensity of undistracted looking and listening, which we feel, for what we do, should be the predominant mode. We feel that these occasional trade-offs, aside from being basic manners, benefit the whole of the project.

Other times, these appearances have a directorial purpose as well. For example, we had become accustomed, when visiting over the years, to extended family dinners that were pretty lively affairs. However, during the first full week of filming, the presence of the movie cameras became something that, fair enough, the family needed to adjust to. What were normally free-flowing dinners became stilted and too silent and somehow awkward. The lines fell flat. Etc. After two evenings of failing to get what we felt were working scenes, while outlining the day's shots the next morning, I happened across a picture I had on my computer of Jerry Lewis behind a camera, in make-up, during the filming of *THE DAY THE CLOWN CRIED*. Which led to our hatching a plan with Tayoko's brother, Hiroharu. We agreed that at that night's dinner, we would drink and smoke in excess. Just to set a tone. To stir up a scene from within. The film needed clowns. So we enlisted ourselves. «My idea of comedy is a man in trouble. There, but for the grace of God, go I», said Lewis. And after two nights of failed scenes, we were men in trouble. But that third night, over dinner, as we matched each other shot for shot, first sake then whisky, the others joined in. Then came the laughter. The lines delivered freely. The stories well-told. And we'd had our breakthrough. There would be no more stiltedness for the rest of the production.

That particular scene ends with me passed out on the floor, somehow bleeding out the side of my head. A stupid, D-rate Jerry Lewis. With cameras still rolling. The film ghost riding. There are times when all the ideas in the world can't beat something visceral.



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MG: Could you elaborate a bit further on the notion of the «film-as-adaptive landscape» that is mentioned in the synopsis? What does «adaptive» signify in this specific usage and context, in relation to your understanding of landscape, of the «geographic description of the work and non-work» of the film's main protagonist? To what extent is adaptiveness intermingled with a notion of indeterminacy, of time as a figure of indeterminability?

Our films, among other things, are films about their own making. To the degree that it's possible, a stripping away of motivated reasoning. A departure from the fiction mode of the overly-determined or the pre-ordained. A departure from the capital-driven model of the dominant film culture, with its elaborate and costly apparatuses resulting in eyes

ever-nervously fixed on the ledgers. With a minimal kit and a crew of four, we can work cheaply and with greater agility. With scenes written or outlined on set, maybe the morning of, or maybe the day before. A topological re-working of the real into the fictional.

An adaptive landscape is something that is gone through over time. A set of evolutions marked by peaks of contingencies. And the way that we work is very much based on embracing contingency. This shouldn't be confused with chance or improvisation. What we're doing finds more sympathy maybe with someone like Nathalie Sarraute and her interest in tropisms, moves made due to external forces.

Contingency is a set of befallings. *Contingere*. Events that impose themselves. Like black swan events or other befallings at smaller scale. In the case of this film: deaths, storms, snake bites, etc. The types of events that would disrupt or derail the expensive productions with all their built-in costs and financial leveraging. Perhaps our only leveraged move is taking an advance on common sense. Our approach is more anti-fragile. More to do with tinkering. Of defeasible ideas that can be confirmed or disconfirmed by our engagement with a place. Something like Louis Agassiz's spirit of learning by getting the earth between one's fingers. With a bit of Dewey's art as experience, or, since you mentioned indeterminability, maybe something like Keats' notion of giving oneself over to negative capability. «Not everything can be resolved.»

It's an adaptive landscape that extends into the post-production as well. Of peaks of work. Just work. Getting hundreds of hours down to a thirteen-hour edit. And then thirteen down to eight. An endurance exercise that it seemed, if undertaken, might result in unpredictable byproducts. Just as, in what is hopefully a less workmanlike way, this adaptive landscape extends into the viewing for the audience as well. A film not merely to watch but to go through.

PW: Sometimes, as you mentioned before, one needs to set the stage for things to «take place», always running the risk that they don't play along. If you describe your work as a «landscape» on various different levels, how do observation and construction relate within it? Is landscape something found or something made?

To some degree, all of the above is in our dropdown. Again, the dominant production model places a premium on known-knowns. On controlling for as much as possible

going in. And fair enough, this is done as a mitigation of risk. We would propose, however, that not all of these risks need to be built-in. The classical production model is a sort of probabilistic decision-making. Such and such pre-planning (writing, doctoring, auditioning, storyboarding, tech recs, extensive equipment rental, etc.) will give the greatest likelihood of such and such outcomes and the lowest likelihood, in terms of the film itself, of existential threats. But this is a model that makes these productions rigid and fragile, even when they have fantastic amounts of money to throw at every problem. Almost anyone with experience in film production knows that something unusual happens usually. The dominant model is a sort of maxipok system, an interest in maximizing the possibility of an okay result. Which can be useful when you're safeguarding a civilization, but is not always optimal to certain artistic concerns.

When other fiction films are obsessing on writing their scripts, we're busy conceiving our production. Not on coming up with an original story. But doing our best to come up with an original model for making in the first place. An emphasis less on content than on coding. Not on aboutness but on all the stuff that aboutness presupposes. And then to make it interesting for ourselves, hewing it all closely enough to fiction that it can comment on narrative film.

Instead of working to the letter of a script, our way of working is with heuristics. Ballpark ideas, vague hunches, maybes, possibilities. Ideas that are close enough. And in our collaborating, a way of working with each other that is more tacit than explicit. The production isn't a fending off of contingency but an embracing of contingency. So that when the inevitable shocks arrive, we can open the production to them instead of battening down. We can change the direction of our fiction on a dime at almost any point in the process. It's a just-in-time writing model. It's going onto the set, going out into the field with two cheap cameras and a microphone and making things with them. Sometimes this means patience and waiting. Other times it means pressing and forging. All the while being open to the unexpected and finding ways of working, re-working, altering, and re-staging. It's in the edit when low variance and precision take over.

This doesn't mean though that everything is unexpected. Ours is a way of working born out of first having spent years investing in a place and with our characters. The way we film wouldn't be possible without that extended investment. So, from that, there are things that one can predict from experience, as with Kafka: «Leopards break into the

temple and drink all the sacrificial vessels dry; it keeps happening; in the end, it can be calculated in advance and is incorporated into the ritual.»



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MG: I want to ask about the use of black sections aligned with the film's intermissions, of which there are three in the film. What's the relation between these and their accompanying soundscapes? At one point there is also a deviating low pitch drone that lasts for a few minutes. This altered the apperception of my body due to its sheer viscerality, and I am curious to hear more about its presence.

Each black section works as a bridge or an enjambment between the five chapters, transitioning from the sound conditions of one filming round to the next. These sound collages seemed like a logical continuation of our shared musical interests. Some pathway leading from Luigi Russolo to Luc Ferrari and so on folded into our cinematic concerns. And there's probably some indirect incorporation of the film fundamentals that Morgan Fisher describes better than anyone in his *Picture and Sound Rushes*: picture with sound, picture with no sound, sound with no picture, and the null set. Those are the options, and you get to building from there. Sound over extended black screens just felt like a natural move. A chance to untether sound from picture so that it could be worked with in and of itself. Without picture, the mind is called upon to draw up its own recollections, associations, memories, and so on. Engagement as opposed to entertainment. Which then works as a way of re-tuning the ear to hear the film once pictures do re-appear. While *THE ANCHORAGE* was pushing a certain sort of formal homogeneity, *THE WORKS AND DAYS* is more heterogenous. An array of storytelling approaches. An array of registers. And, even with something as specific as musical drones, a certain array within those as well. We hear examples from Folke Rabe, Éliane Radigue, Keiji Haino, Phill Niblock, and Alvin Lucier. As well, there are drones produced by appliances and industrial machinery. And then there is the one you mentioned—maybe our favorite and the most basic at the same time—just a very low 30Hz sine wave, downloaded off the internet, and held for a couple minutes. A sound that works physically on the body of the viewer. Not the sort of sound one expects in a cinema. And a sound that will only be experienced by people who see the film in cinemas. Most consumer home systems and laptops simply can't play a sound that low. And in worst cases, it will destroy things like headphones. So, the home video version will feature a different sound choice that hasn't yet been made.

PW: For me, these intermissions functioned like extended fades between our place and the place of the film. But then the compositions open up to different places, of musical avant-gardes of specific regions and ages that establish their own correspondences with us and what we've seen. I think this is connected somewhat to the idea of employing a map made from classical European knowledge to

explore a village in the mountains of northern Kyoto prefecture. The film is very much about place, but isn't it equally about a multitude of places, full of references, whether they're musical, pictorial, cultural or something else?

We were well aware from the outset of the project of a cinematic sub-history of directors swooping into remote locales and getting straight away into the work of filming, resulting in projects falling on a broad spectrum of sensitivity or lack thereof to people and to place. And so in the case of our films, we make familiarity paramount.

Prior to filming the Shiojiri/Shikata family, Anders' own extended family, he had spent over two decades knowing them and getting to know this village. And even once he and I felt that perhaps we could make a film there, we spent eleven years before rolling a single frame of video. Investing in their lives. Learning. Listening. Accumulating oral history. Gathering experience in this terrain. Doing the chores. Cataloguing the flora and fauna. Sitting in on local grange meetings. Participating in funerals and weddings and religious rituals. Bleeding the touristic from our observations. Such that by the time we got to recording, this place was a part of our lives. It was like home. So that as we filmed, we filmed from a sense of the everyday.

We shot the film between November of 2014 and January of 2016. We didn't title the film until December of 2019 in the very late stages of post-production—a title offered merely as an apposite allusion. Which of course you couldn't have known. So in no way was the notion of Hesiod or European classicism employed at any stage of the production or edit, excepting the use of two classical compositions—one each from Brahms and Webern—played by Tayoko of her own volition from her own CD collection. The filming of Shiotani was an exercise of the filming of Shiotani. When we discuss mapping, we don't mean it in some allusive, abstract, or overloaded way. We mean it quite literally. Having watched *MY DARLING CLEMENTINE*, for example, (or insert: *FORT APACHE*, *SHE WORE A YELLOW RIBBON*, etc.) one could draw the layout of Ford's version of Tombstone. Just as, having seen our film, one could do the same with Shiotani. The mapping is very exhaustively local.

This isn't to say that international aspects don't appear in the film. Certainly they do. Much of this is born out of the character of this particular family, which we understand may come as a surprise to some viewers who might reasonably expect that a rural Japanese family would be entirely Japanese. But as is increasingly so across the world, the

reality is more complicated than that. We learn from a story Tayoko tells in the film's first reel that she studied classical cello. Junji had a knowledge of American jazz that would put many Western music critics to shame. Their two daughters have each lived in Europe. Tayoko has three grandchildren. Two are half-Swedish. The third was adopted from Haiti and has an adoptive father who is Nepalese-French. Our actress Mai-chan, Tayoko's granddaughter and Anders' daughter, speaks Japanese, English, Swedish, and French and in the autumn will begin studying her fifth language, German. Tayoko herself is a europhile who has visited the continent several times. The paintings we see in the film are from an art history encyclopedia that the family owns. In *THE WORKS AND DAYS*, seven actors are Swedes, and one is American. Some of this naturally arises through Tayoko and Junji's children, who, over the years, in addition to inviting extended family from abroad, have invited a good number of European and American friends to the village. The factness of this family is that it is mixed Japanese-Swedish-French. This is simply who they are. And the film records and reflects this.

And so if there is a sensibility in this regard, it is neither stereotyping nor exclusionary. Nor is it the politics of urban elitist theory types who tend to want to fetishize working class families as noble illiterates—a sort of thinking that fails to graft onto reality. A purpose of the film is to confer respect and valorization to people who are strong and learned and dignified. People from our actual lives for whom we have affection. It's a common humanity sensibility embodied by who this family is.



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MG: Considering the nature of the work, the presence of the somewhat elusive music may be surprising to some (it would be almost unimaginable to have non-diegetic music in a film by, let's say, Wang Bing). Is the use of music here somehow connected to your general interests in fabrication and fiction?

It indeed would be almost unimaginable to have non-diegetic music in a Wang Bing film, just as it would be easy to imagine a Godard or Ozu film, for example, with such music quite present. Wang Bing is working with an approach that is in some ways of a piece with the early documentaries of Kieslowski who said of his own work, «Only when something has been described can you start speculating about it. If something hasn't been described and a record of it doesn't exist—it doesn't matter what form it takes: a film, a sociological study, a book, or even just a verbal account—then you can't refer to it. You have to describe the thing or situation before you can deal with it. If you can understand that, then you can understand that certain anomalies, and even corruption, have to be described.» Wang Bing does a brilliant job as a describer of lives

that, in one way or another, have become the detritus of the CCP. And his asceticism serves this assignment well.

Just as we need windows onto things that don't work, a politics of the anti-, we need examinations of things that do work as well. In the case of Shiotani, an eleven-generation collective economy. It's a communitarianism that is slowly being lost as younger generations move to the cities—drawn by the false promises of embedded growth obligations that no longer function, of an ever-expanding gig economy, a perpetual precarity that sees fewer being able to afford to start families, fewer being able to step onto the property ladder, and fewer ever having the hope of being able to retire with dignity.

Literary history is born of fiction's power to get at certain truths that documents can strain to or fail to reveal. And in an ascendantly postmodern social landscape, one in which narratives proliferate more than ever—and from more fields than ever—even in the face of what may be meta-narrative stagnation, the recursive narrative attempts the role of revealing narrative workings, constructions, propagations, and stagnations to make audiences better readers of narratives themselves. Or so one might hope. It's an exercise in sense making.

This is the nature of this fiction. And you're correct to see our music use as tied to our fiction interests.

While not always, of course, music is often used in films as some sort of a crutch to save a failing scene. Aware of this view, Huillet and Straub come along and make *CHRONICLE OF ANNA MAGDALENA BACH* and give us music nearly wall-to-wall—one of the great gestures of force and defiance in the history of film music. Our use of music stakes out some kind of imprecise polarity to this move: a use of music barely present. In many cases, almost invisible—to the degree that that can make sense—such that often one cannot be certain whether music is being used at all: «is that score or just the air conditioner?» It's music designed to be present while disrupting the equanimity as little as possible.

At the same time, the music choices give clues to our authorship: choices to be considered as choices in and of themselves. One thing that annoys us is when a cinema raises the lights during the end credits. For our way of thinking, the end credits are as

important as any scene in a film. In most cases, it's the movie's most self-reflexive shot. Credits reveal much about a film's formal construction. About attention to things like typography. A window onto a way of working. God is in the footnotes. Etc.

PW: Alongside the film, there will be a photo monograph by Anders and an LP assembled by C.W. Is the film itself an independent work of art, or do we need to talk about a constellation of works? How does that affect ways of and ideas for distribution?

Marcel Broodthaers said that «the definition of artistic activity occurs, first of all, in the field of distribution.» It's an idea that is central to how we work. For us, THE WORKS AND DAYS is a project. It represents many years of research and production. The film is the central object in that production. But for us, there are other objects as well: the book, the LP, but also every other ancillary thing: the posters, for example, all of it. In the dominant economy of cinema, materials like posters or soundtrack albums or so on are tools of a marketing department often made with minimal to no participation of the director. The rare exceptional example might command some critical attention. But, for the most part, these objects are seen as other than the film. We don't approach things this way. For us, the poster, for example, is as important as any shot in the movie. It's a thing we made. Not as a part of a branding campaign but as a continuum of objects responding differently to the defaults of the various materials: video, off-set printed paper, html, vinyl, etc. And we feel each should be subject to the same harsh light of criticism that the film is. So the same is true of the book and the LP. Somewhere in there we could find Martha Rosler's notion of the *as-if*, the idea of art cloaked in other disciplines: be it philosophy, activism, records, advertising space, etc. Which is an idea expanded on by Seth Price in his wonderful essay «Dispersion.»

From a cinephilic perspective, the book is a fairly clear lateral move. Pictures without the motion part. It will be roughly 677 pages of images taken by Anders in and around Shiotani over a twenty-three-year span. It's an ode to long-term investment. Spending time with the book will give one an expanded understanding of this place and of the people. Just as it will elaborate on and clarify the ways of looking found in the film. The book, Anders' sixth, could be seen as both a continuation of his thirty-four-year photo practice and as part of the expanded project of THE WORKS AND DAYS.

As far as artists releasing albums, we could enjoy spending much of a day just talking about that, thinking about different approaches and intentions and so on. We could

consider any number of primarily gallery-based artists who, with varying degrees of investment, used the LP or cassette as a format: Jack Goldstein, Dan Graham, Hanne Darboven, Joe Jones, Yves Klein, Martin Kippenberger, Dieter Roth, Lawrence Weiner, Raymond Pettibon, Roman Opalka, Bruce Nauman, Hermann Nitsch, Richard Long, Dalí, Art & Language, Jean Dubuffet, etc. There are filmmakers as well like Alexander Kluge, Michael Snow, Tony Conrad, Warhol, and Joshua Bonnetta. We could think of Japanese examples like Kisho Kurokawa, Yoko Ono, Akio Suzuki, Yasunao Tone, Yamantaka Eye/Hanatarash, and the Nirvana School. And then there are others with whom it's harder to tell where musician ends and artist begins, which we think is sufficient enough reason to find the distinctions not particularly helpful. People like: Robert Ashley, Henning Christiansen, Joan La Barbara, Philip Corner, Christina Kubisch, Terry Fox, Rodney Graham, Christian Marclay, or The Red Crayola.

Specific to cinema though, we can again consider the dominant modes: the soundtrack album or the score album. *The Works and Days: The Black Sections* is somehow both and neither. Too much to be one; too little to be the other; and something else besides. It isn't simply an extraction of the movie's music, ordered and packaged. It's a thing made specific to itself. Whereas in the film, the music seeks an invisibility, in the album the music comes more to the fore, rising up out of a sound collage made from twenty-seven weeks of recordings taken during the film production in and around Shiotani. It's two different approaches to editing that can inform the other.

An additional byproduct of THE WORKS AND DAYS is a set of a cappella recordings made in the editing suite, using only voice and a phone, that emerged out of the delirium-inducing extremes of the edit. Portions of this collection will be exhibited at the [Kunstverein Hamburg](#) in August.

In talking about the various objects, these are individual works that could be taken on their own. Though our primary interest was in the emergence that results from their being considered together—the idea that, put in relation to each other, each gains properties that they wouldn't have alone. Each of the works informs the others. Each gives clues into the principles of the making. Etc. So we'd propose that it might be more interesting, instead of seeing them as just a set or as a mereological sum, seeing them a mixture. If you wanted. But don't let us limit you.

MG: Interspersed throughout the film is a selection of Japanese death poems. These jisei, or «farewell poems to life», were written by poets on their deathbed. How do these often deadpan textual interventions readjust the audiovisual material of the film?

The death poems were included to serve a few purposes. To some extent they work as foreshadowing. Though in a film largely ambivalent to dramaturgy, each isn't a narrative foreshadowing. These are instead foreshadowings of mental states. Unplaceable offness. Fatigue. Resignation. Stoicism. A hint of things to come.

These poems, written between 1734 and 1927, also have some sort of scaling effect. There is a sense of a *longue durée*. A reminder, once it arrives, that the death of our friend Junji, here fictionalized, is of the everyday. One of innumerable deaths over time on this island in locations not dissimilar to this particular basin. A set of images presenting a certain continuity of natural elements that at once expand from and contract back to this particular place.

Additionally, the poems relate again to our interest in emergence. The idea that a gathering of components—photographs, concrètes, minimal compositions, jisei, etc—can be combined to create something that functions altogether differently than each would by itself.

Though most importantly, in terms of our priorities, is probably the manner in which the poems are written. These are last poems. A chance for one's final statement. A moment in which many might aspire to the outermost of ornament or flourish. For these authors, though, the impulse was the opposite. Understatedness. Plainness. Insignificance. The remarkably unremarkable. And then, nothing more.



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PW: From the first scene with the drunken discourse of a group of elderly men, transience, sickness and death are present, but only late in the film does death directly affect one of the film's characters, Junji-san. Over hours, we see Junji receding, fading into the background, so that he has almost disappeared by the time death finally arrives. This arrival, however, seems to emit a shock that affects the economy of the film. All of a sudden, it feels as if some principles established over hours are suspended: there is something like drama, which soon after subsides, and the film finds its rhythm again. In the credits we see that Junji is one of the characters that isn't playing himself. How do you work with death in a film setting that is also the home of some of the characters and their extra-filmic experiences?

To make a film with abundant open space, with time to reflect and recollect, time to interpret while still watching, along with a dispersion of dramaturgy, is to intentionally make a film that will be interpreted in different ways. And this will be true of the arrival of an event like Junji's death. Via the jisei, the apparitions, the Hesiod, the home death

shrines, the multi-generational family folk lore, and so on, many will come to see his death as but another occurrence in an extensively extended everyday.

But we're pattern-seeking primates, and so naturally others will come to see his death as an amplitude that recalls, if only temporarily, something like familiar narrative form or event structure. And we'd be fine with either, or a splitting of the difference. Just as it might also be seen compositionally as something like *andante*, *andante*, *andante*, *accelerando*, *rallentando*, *andante*. An extended walking pace, a speeding up, and a slowing down back to a walking pace.

Almost anyone reading this will be familiar with Tarkovsky's notion of sculpting time. Our interests have more to do with sculpting expectation. When one enters a contemporary art gallery, for example, one usually brings fewer expectations than one does entering a feature film cinema, as narrative film tends to deviate less from its classical baseline than art does. We would propose that this affords fiction film a promise of golden ages still to come. Of essentially immeasurable wilderness where lies something other.

To yield the effect of a rupture in expectation—as with Junji's death, even be it a death partially foretold—one must first calibrate those expectations. In this particular case, a 425-minute calibration leading to that moment. With roughly half a typical feature still to go lest it be misread as any sort of climax. Such that, in terms of the film's principles, the death doesn't represent a bug in the operating system; it is of the operating system.

With both of our features, while filming, we've lived in the main character's home. Which, in this case, meant the crew gathering up futons and so on each morning and stowing them away. We are filming family and friends. So the familiarity and intimacy come built-in. Junji's death would be the third death in this immediate family that Anders has documented over the years, in a culture that is considerably more frank and explicit about death than most from the West will be accustomed to. And so our being there was mundanely normal for them. If anything, reassuring. Yet more voices to encourage Junji on his forty-nine-day walk into the beyond.

Junji's death came unexpectedly, just days before production was to have begun. The plan had been to include him as an actor. And in the week after his funeral, we took a break from filming and considered a new way forward. In talking to Tayoko, she

confided one aspect of her grieving. In the last year of his life, there had been tension and arguments in their marriage. The sort of thing that hadn't much occurred since their first couple years together. And Tayoko was feeling remorse that things had ended this way. But in those few days after his death, as she talked to Junji at the shrine set up for him in the house, the facts of her faith were revealed. She knew with certainty that Junji could still see and hear everything she was doing and saying. Expressions of love and sorrow and apology. And in seeing this, what would be the undergirding of the film was revealed. The film, at least in part, could, for Tayoko, be a second chance. A chance to go back, to re-live the previous year, and to do the things she wished she'd done with Junji and to say the things she wished she'd said. Knowing that he would be watching and listening. Tayoko was moved enough by this proposal that we agreed we'd weave these sorts of moments in throughout the film. To do this, we cast Hiroharu's childhood friend, Iwahana, to play the role of Junji. And from there we got back to work.

MG: As a closing question, how do you perceive the situation for the film now, four months after the premiere, and with the current state of things?

It's tough to say. It isn't entirely clear to us what exactly we've made when we've finished something. To some degree of course we know. But there is also a certain mystery that only starts to become clear when we can hear from audiences about their experience of the film. We began to get some sense of this at the Berlinale. Though there, a film is only allowed one Q&A, and so our audience interaction thus far has been somewhat minimal. We look forward to learning more about the film once we're finally able to travel around with it. Of course we're disappointed to be missing out on so many festival experiences. But this pandemic has hit so many people in ways that are far more personal and devastating than has been the case for us. So we're not going to complain. It was ten years between having the idea for the film and finally premiering it. We can wait a few more months.

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