

'TO PUT IT PLAINLY, WHAT YOU HATE IS POWER'

By George Jepson

'TO PUT IT PLAINLY, WHAT YOU HATE IS POWER'. Spoken by an unnamed narrator, the first line of *Forest of Oppression* reveals the crux of Ogawa Pro's filmmaking ethos. The scenes, techniques and methodology of the collective resonate with the works of Chris Marker and Barbara Hammer. In *Sans Soleil*, we see the battleground of Sanrizuka. In Hammer's *Devotion*, we are presented with an ode to Ogawa Pro's collectivity—the intensity of a collective form of life in which cinema is only one form of the expressions of its resistance, only as important as dinner table discussions over shared meals, or the screamed soundbites of political radicals from within the terrain of battle. What we see here is not a particular mode of political filmmaking, but a political form of life—an unwavering resistance to oppression—and its concurrent cinematic expression.

Mapping the struggle at Takasaki City University of Economics, *Forest of Oppression* (produced under the aegis of the Jieiso collective which preceded Ogawa Pro) established the reputation of the emerging filmmakers as masterful documentarians of the political struggles taking place across late 1960s Japan. From the heart of the struggle, the film is a flashbang entry into the radicalism of the period's student movement, evoked through the extreme tumult and violence of a university occupation. Contrasting street battles with riot police and mass demonstrations, with the tense anticipation of arrests facing the students barricaded into their university, the film's visuals always gesture beyond the confines of their particular event, revealing themselves as partial images woven into a mass political struggle.

The film frames the intensity of its battlegrounds through the ruptures between its sound and image, scarcely synchronising them. The rawness of this technique, perhaps a consequence of budgetary constraints, allows the disparate vocalities of the movement - and dissonance with their image - to reveal instead its multiform nature. The film's mass of voices, not tethered to a particular authoritative *voice*, collectivises their message. Rarely individualised, in their non-specificity these voices coalesce to form a dense tableau: making visible the voice(s) of the struggle, the voice(s) *for* the struggle, a voice of and for the collective intellect that cannot be made divisible into its component parts.

It is in this way that *Forest of Oppression* works as not only a harbinger to the better known Sanrizuka series (Ogawa's immersion in the anti-airport protests at Narita in the 1970s), but also to evoke the fractures of post-war Japan as a whole. As the film expands beyond the university, we begin to understand the network of struggles within which it exists: against the US-Japan treaty, against a government moving increasingly toward the right, further propagated by the 'Japanese miracle' and its radical economic expansion. The forms of oppression faced by the Takasaki students speak of the multifaceted oppressions faced by the Japanese left *tout court*, the administrative techniques working as a metonym for the governmental apparatuses that came to confront the wider movement.

This metonymic portraiture reveals the movement and platforms of resistance. The university, the airport, and the collective home all form sites that allow for a coalescing of disparate bodies in space and time that expand the cracks through which one can fleetingly

see the potentials for different forms of life. As with Sanrizuka, what emerges from the student struggle is the resistance against the conflicts and ruptures that plague political movements. In the airport struggle, farmers and students—with disparate ideologies and divergent ends—united with a common goal. Against university administration, the students recognise the techniques of division which would become a common method of governance to combat political movements across Japan.