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Shomei Tomatsu's Hikōki (Airplane): Rediscovery and Archival of the 16mm Film

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Keywords:
Shomei Tomatsu; Hikōki (Airplane) film; 16mm film; Film restoration and archiving; Visual cultural studies

ABSTRACT:

This paper introduces the recent rediscovery of the valuable film *Hikōki* (Airplane), shot by Shomei Tomatsu (1930–2012), one of the leading photographers of postwar Japan. In addition to providing an overview of the work, it also offers a brief report on the process of its digitization and the current state of the archival activities conducted at the artist's private studio, with which the author is directly involved.

Lo studio presenta la recente riscoperta del prezioso film *Hikōki* (Aereo), realizzato da Shomei Tomatsu (1930–2012), figura di spicco della fotografia giapponese del dopoguerra. Oltre a delineare una panoramica critica dell'opera, il contributo fornisce un resoconto sintetico del processo di digitalizzazione e dello stato attuale delle attività archivistiche condotte presso lo studio privato dell'artista, al quale l'autrice partecipa direttamente.

Opening Picture:

Fig. 3: Title page of Shomei Tomatsu, "IWAKUNI Iwakuni IWAKUNI: A Strange Reality Suddenly Given to Me, Which I Call Occupation - Iwakuni,Yamaguchi -".

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Introduction

This paper reports the recent rediscovery of the film *Hikōki* (*Airplane*) by Shomei Tomatsu (1930–2012: fig. 1), a photographer of paramount significance in postwar Japan, and seeks to provide both an overview of the work and essential information regarding its preservation and potential scholarly use. The film, produced in 1960, constitutes a rare and invaluable record of the contemporary environment and everyday life, thereby possessing substantial academic relevance within the field of visual and cultural studies.

Focusing on the newly recovered *Hikōki*, this study offers a concise account of its content and production context, while also detailing the processes of restoration and digitization. Furthermore, the paper addresses, insofar as pertinent, the current status of archival practices within the personal studio of the artist, in which the author has been involved. It should be emphasized that the principal aim of this study lies in the introduction and documentation of the film, as well as its preservation and transmission; detailed formal or aesthetic analyses of the film are deliberately deferred to future research.

The objectives of this paper are twofold. First, to render the content of the film comprehensible to readers through a systematic description of its sequence and the provision of illustrative figures. Second, to elucidate, from an archival perspective, the methods employed in its restoration and digitization, and to highlight the scholarly and practical significance of these processes.

The structure of the paper is as follows. It begins with an overview of the production period and situates *Hikōki* in relation to Tomatsu's *Occupation* series. This is followed by a detailed presentation of the film's content. The subsequent section reports on the restoration and digitization process. The paper concludes with a discussion of the prospects for the work's future archival utilization and its potential contribution to scholarly research.

The Production Period of *Hikōki* and Its Context within the Occupation Series

Due to space constraints, the full biography of Shomei Tomatsu will not be presented here; however, the following overview focuses on events up to the 1960s that are relevant to the present work.

Shomei Tomatsu was born on January 16, 1930, in Higashi-ku, Nagoya, Aichi Prefecture, as the second son of Shinsho Miyazaki and Tsuyuko Tomatsu. Around 1950, influenced by his elder brother, he began engaging with photography, borrowing a camera (Silver-Gelto) and taking his first photographs. He enrolled in the Faculty of Economics at Aichi University and joined the university's photography club. During this period, he exhibited works such as *Hiniku na Tanjō* (*Sarcastic Birth*) at the 2nd Aichi University Photography Exhibition, marking his debut as a photographer.

After graduating from Aichi University, Tomatsu moved to Tokyo in 1954 and joined the camera staff of Iwanami Shashin Bunko. That same year, he contributed to publications such as *Iwanami Shashin Bunko 124: Floods and the Japanese* and,[1] in 1955, to *Iwanami Shashin Bunko*

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165: The Town of Pottery—Seto.[2] In 1956, he left the company to work as a freelance photographer.

In 1957, Tomatsu participated in the exhibition *Ten Eyes* (Konishiroku Photo Gallery, Tokyo; May 10–17, 1957), curated by the critic Tatsuo Fukushima.[3] Other participants included photographers who would later co-found the group *VIVO* in July 1959: Kikuji Kawada, Akira Sato, Akira Tanno, Ikko Narahara, and Eikoh Hosoe.[4] In 1958, he received the inaugural Newcomer Award from the Japan Photographers Critics Association for works such as *Local Politicians*, and in 1959 he held his first solo exhibition, *Japan Series: People*, which earned him the 5th Mainichi Photography Award.

From 1960 onward, Tomatsu devoted himself to photographing U.S. military bases in Japan. This period also saw the creation of the *Senryō* (*Occupation*) series. He noted that his primary locations included Misawa in Aomori Prefecture; Yokosuka, Sagami-Otsuka, Chūō-Rinkan, and other areas in Kanagawa Prefecture; various locations in Tokyo including Tachikawa, Yokota, and Sunagawa; Sasebo in Nagasaki Prefecture; Chitose in Hokkaido; and Iwakuni in Yamaguchi Prefecture.[5] During this time, he was also commissioned by the Japan Council against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs to visit Nagasaki and photograph remaining war relics and atomic-bomb survivors.[6] Photographs from these sessions, together with Ken Domon's images of Hiroshima, were included in the Council's 1961 publication *Hiroshima–Nagasaki Document 1961*.[7] That same year, Tomatsu received the 5th Japan Photographers Critics Association Award for his work. Deeply affected by the devastation in Nagasaki, he developed personal connections with survivors and continued to visit and photograph the site throughout his life.[8]

As part of the *Occupation* series, Tomatsu also documented Okinawa during the 1960s, culminating in the publication of the photobook *OKINAWA Okinawa OKINAWA* (fig. 2),[9] produced by his self-established publishing company, Shaken, in 1967. Tomatsu's focus on "occupation" can be partly attributed to his birth in 1930 and his formative experience of defeat at the age of fifteen.[10] He himself explained: the area where he began photographing was a "base town" in Nagoya.[11] He stated as follow.

> *Because I started photography in that base town, whenever I opened my front door with a camera, there were U.S. soldiers everywhere. People made a living by doing business with Americans—women, mixed-race children born from relations with Americans lived nearby. Because I began photographing in such a landscape, every time I stepped outside and pressed the shutter, the American scenery was captured. Therefore, for me, the landscape of the base is the original scene, the primordial landscape.*

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24558

1

Tomatsu repeatedly emphasized his preoccupation with the occupation, stating in another contribution: "The defeat and occupation coincide with the period when one is most sensitive, the time of shedding one's boyhood and becoming a young adult. They thus constitute a major factor that shapes the course of one's subsequent life. In other words, the shadow of the war is my original landscape".[12] It should be noted here that Tomatsu does not take an antagonistic stance toward the United States. Immediately following this statement, he remarks that he likes both the country and its people, has fellow photographer friends in America, and feels a sense of hope in American democracy.[13]

From around 1960, Tomatsu began producing the photographic works collectively referred to as the *Occupation* series. To fully understand this series, it is necessary first to consider the historical referent of the term "occupation" within the context of Japanese history. In general usage, the Japanese "occupation" denotes the period of Allied governance that commenced with the signing of the Instrument of Surrender on September 2, 1945, and continued until the Treaty of San Francisco came into effect on April 28, 1952. Although the occupation was formally conducted under the auspices of the Allied Powers, it is important to note that, in practice, it was largely shaped and directed by United States policy. With the enforcement of the treaty, Japan regained its sovereignty, and under international law, the occupation was thereby considered to have formally concluded.

However, the historical and legal conclusion of the occupation did not necessarily entail a rupture in Japan–U.S. relations or a complete resolution of occupation-like conditions. Although the de facto occupation is generally understood to have

Fig. 1:
Shomei Tomatsu.

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24558

2

Fig. 2: Shomei Tomatsu, Book cover image of *OKINAWA Okinawa OKINAWA. Not a Base in Okinawa, but Okinawa in the Base*, Shaken, 1969.

ended with the treaty, the continued stationing of U.S. forces in Japan and the postwar security arrangements under the U.S.–Japan Security Treaty meant that American influence in Japanese society persisted in a sustained and structurally embedded manner. This influence extended beyond political and military spheres to encompass consumer culture, urban landscapes, and everyday life, penetrating Japanese society in ways that combined both positive and negative dimensions while interacting with indigenous social structures.

Tomatsu's deliberate use of the term "occupation" in the titles of his works directly reflects his own perception of postwar Japanese conditions. Notably, as discussed below, he published a work in *Asahi Camera* entitled "A Strange Reality Suddenly Given to Me, Which I Call Occupation," a formulation that is particularly suggestive. By employing this term, Tomatsu redefined an institutionally and legally concluded occupation as a concept in the present tense, continuing to designate the complex and ambiguous conditions under which Japan had been situated throughout the postwar period.

Thus, in the *Occupation* series, Tomatsu's use of the term "occupation" extends beyond a mere reference to the historical period of Allied governance. It may be understood as an expanded conceptual tool through which he critically visualized the pervasive presence of the United States in postwar Japanese society and the "strange reality suddenly given" that emerged under these conditions.

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As will be discussed later, this film was screened on October 2, 1960—a period during which Tomatsu was deeply engaged with the theme of "occupation". That same year, he began publishing a series of works on the subject: in the January issue of *Asahi Camera*, he presented photographs taken in Yokosuka under the title *HARLEM (Black Quarter): A Strange Reality Suddenly Given to Me, Which I Call Occupation.*[14] This was followed by *Shisen* (*Gaze*)—photographs from Chitose (Hokkaido)—in the February issue,[15] and *Shūhen no kodomotachi* (*Children on the Periphery*)—taken in Misawa (Aomori)—in the March issue.[16] In April, he published *IWAKUNI Iwakuni IWAKUNI* (fig. 3) in *Chūō Kōron*,[17] featuring images captured in Iwakuni. Considering this timeline, it is reasonable to assume that the 16mm film was shot around the same period as the works published in the April issue of *Chūō Kōron*. However, to date, no subjects appearing in both the magazine photographs and the film have been identified, and the precise period of filming remains a matter for future investigation.

This film constitutes a rare moving-image work within Tomatsu's extensive career, one that can be situated among the recurring themes he explored throughout his life.[18] Sandra S. Phillips, Curator Emeritus of Photography at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, has noted that Shomei Tomatsu was "The first photographer to explore the experience of postwar Japan and its ambiguous relationship to the United States, Tomatsu would portray this subject more thoroughly and intensely than any other photographer. Only toward the end of his life was the issue of the Americanization of his country somewhat lessened in his work.[19]" Phillips further evaluates Tomatsu's *Occupation* series, stating:

> *Of all his subjects, it would be the one he persisted in most forcefully and inventively.*[20]

This work holds exceptional documentary value as the only film piece publicly released by Shomei Tomatsu. Its significance, however, extends beyond mere formal rarity; it is situated within the very subject to which Tomatsu devoted the most intense attention and passion during this period. As such, it serves as an extraordinarily rare and important cultural document, revealing his reflections and practices regarding Occupation-era Japan through the medium of film. Long considered lost, its recent rediscovery opens the possibility of identifying thematic and visual correspondences with photographs produced during the same period. This, in turn, provides a crucial opportunity to reassess Tomatsu's activities in 1960 within a more comprehensive framework.

Long believed to have been lost, its rediscovery opens up the possibility of identifying thematic and visual correspondences with his photographic works from the same period. This, in turn, provides an opportunity to recontextualize and more comprehensively understand Tomatsu's activities in 1960.

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Fig. 3:
Title page of Shomei Tomatsu, "IWAKUNI Iwakuni IWAKUNI: A Strange Reality Suddenly Given to Me, Which I Call Occupation — Iwakuni,Yamaguchi—" in *Chūō Kōron*, April issue (1960), Tokyo: Chuokoron-sha, Inc..

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650 EXPERIENCE and Tomatsu's 16mm Film

This 16mm positive film is believed to have been used for screening at the "Second 650 EXPERIENCE Gathering" held on October 2, 1960 (fig. 4).[21] The "650 EXPERIENCE Gathering" was organized by Tatsumi Hijikata (1928–1986), the founder of Butoh dance, who was widely recognized both in Japan and internationally. The gatherings were intended for avant-garde artists and included not only dancers but also filmmakers and composers.[22]

The precise circumstances of the meeting between Hijikata and photographer Shomei Tomatsu are not clear. However, Tomatsu himself stated that he was invited to participate by Hijikata.[23] The "650 EXPERIENCE Gathering" was held four times between 1959 and 1961, with the dates and titles as follows:

- *Six Avant-Garde Artists* – September 5, 1959 (Dai-ichi Seimei Hall, Hibiya)
- *Tatsumi Hijikata DANCE EXPERIENCE Gathering* – July 23–24, 1960 (Dai-ichi Seimei Hall, Hibiya)
- *Second Six Avant-Garde Artists* – October 2, 1960 (Dai-ichi Seimei Hall, Hibiya)
- *Tatsumi Hijikata DANCE EXPERIENCE Gathering* – September 3, 1961 (Dai-ichi Seimei Hall, Hibiya)

Tomatsu's participation occurred during the third screening, the *Second Six Avant-Garde Artists*. The pamphlet for this gathering lists dancers, photographers, musicians, and writers, illustrating the wide-ranging interdisciplinary connections among contemporary artists.

Fig. 4:
Cover page of The Second Six Avant-Garde Artists (pamphlet).

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Notably, Yukio Mishima wrote in the pamphlet that "in the latter half of the twentieth century, the era of cross-genre exchange and synthesis in the arts will revive",[24] while Shūzō Takiguchi praised the gathering as one that "is not confined to pre-existing artistic categories yet has the potential to grasp the most fundamental roots of art", and concluded, "I long to witness such a site of genesis rather than conventional avant-garde practices".[25] It is clear that the gathering brought together talent from across all contemporary artistic fields and was highly ambitious in scope.

In the same year, 1960, Tomatsu also photographed Neo-Dada artist Masunobu Yoshimura, through which he met architect Arata Isozaki.[26] Furthermore, in 1961, Tomatsu became involved with the Metabolism movement alongside architects Kisho Kurokawa, Masato Ōtaka, Fumihiko Maki, and designer Kiyoshi Awazu.

Fig. 5: The title "*Hikōki*" written by hand on the wheel.

Additionally, at the *Tatsumi Hijikata DANCE EXPERIENCE Gathering* held from July 23–24, 1960, Eikoh Hosoe, a founding member of VIVO, is listed among the participants. This suggests that Tomatsu may have joined the gathering through Hosoe's invitation. Although Tomatsu's own memory of the event appears somewhat unclear, he described the occasion in an interview as follows:[27]

> *It was probably through Eikoh Hosoe's introduction, but the 650 EXPERIENCE Gathering was held at Dai-ichi Seimei Hall, which had previously been a base for MacArthur and the GHQ. Hijikata asked me if I would like to present a work. I thought it wouldn't make sense to take photographs in a theater-like space, so I bought a 16mm camera and made a film. Among the presenters were Hijikata, Toshiro Mayuzumi,[28] and Shūji Terayama. At that time, I had been photographing military bases, so I filmed jet planes.*

Tomatsu's activities during this period were evidently diverse. The *650 EXPERIENCE Gathering* thus serves as a point of departure for exploring his collaborations with artists from other fields and the broader artistic practices of his contemporaries.

Furthermore, aspects of the production process for this work can

Tomoko Araki
Shomei Tomatsu's Hikōki (Airplane): Rediscovery and Archival of the 16mm Film

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24558

be gleaned from Tomatsu's magazine contributions. He later recalled that making this film was "ultimately reckless," yet he also stated that he handled every stage of production by himself—from writing the scenario, preparing the equipment, negotiating with models, and scouting locations, to the actual filming.[29]

Regarding this, Tatsuo Fukushima also noted in a newspaper article that the artist executed all aspects of the work alone.[30] Fukushima went further, providing a detailed description of the film:

> *Without any explanation or story, it begins with a model airplane falling into a pond, then flying across the frame in intersecting paths, eventually crashing into glass and leaving cracks. Meanwhile, the images of children's expressions and festival scenes evoke a vivid impression unlike anything experienced in conventional cinema.*

Fukushima's description aligns with the contents recorded on the film, indicating that this positive print was likely not merely a reproduction but was actually screened.

Although somewhat difficult to read, the reel bears the inscription "Hikōki – Shomei Tomatsu" (fig. 5), which further suggests that this film was indeed intended for actual use. While this study does not, of course, undertake a comparative analysis of the work with other films, a subsequent interview with the artist confirms that he praised the Polish film *Ashes and Diamonds* and the French film *À bout de souffle*, while criticizing Japanese Nouvelle Vague films as commercial and dull. Tomatsu stated, "My work is not what you would call a cinematic film; it is something more accessible, more popular".[31]

In response, Tatsuo Fukushima, who conducted the interview, noted, "His 16mm film *Hikōki*, which he produced entirely on his own, was easy to understand, and the issues and characters it addressed were popular and relatable even to us". This suggests that, for contemporary audiences, the film was not experienced primarily as a poetic or avant-garde work but as something that could be readily comprehended. The film's composition—carefully constructed through location and model preparation as well as scenario planning—presented content that was naturally understandable and depicted familiar concerns for viewers of the time. This, in turn, vividly illustrates the extremely realistic stance Tomatsu himself later identified as central to his approach as a photographer.[32]

Hikōki: Synopsis and Preliminary Analysis

The central question here concerns the visual content of the film. Given the difficulty of fully transcribing the work into text, only a brief overview is provided. Although a digital version of the work already exists, a more refined and fully prepared edition will eventually be made publicly available, and readers are encouraged to consult it upon release. In the following, I limit myself to an objective account of the sequence of

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images, depicted objects, and other details, many of which remain under investigation, and therefore describe only what can currently be established with certainty.

1. Overview of the Film

In a previous interview published in *Bijutsu Techo*, Fukushima describes the content of the film as follows:[33]

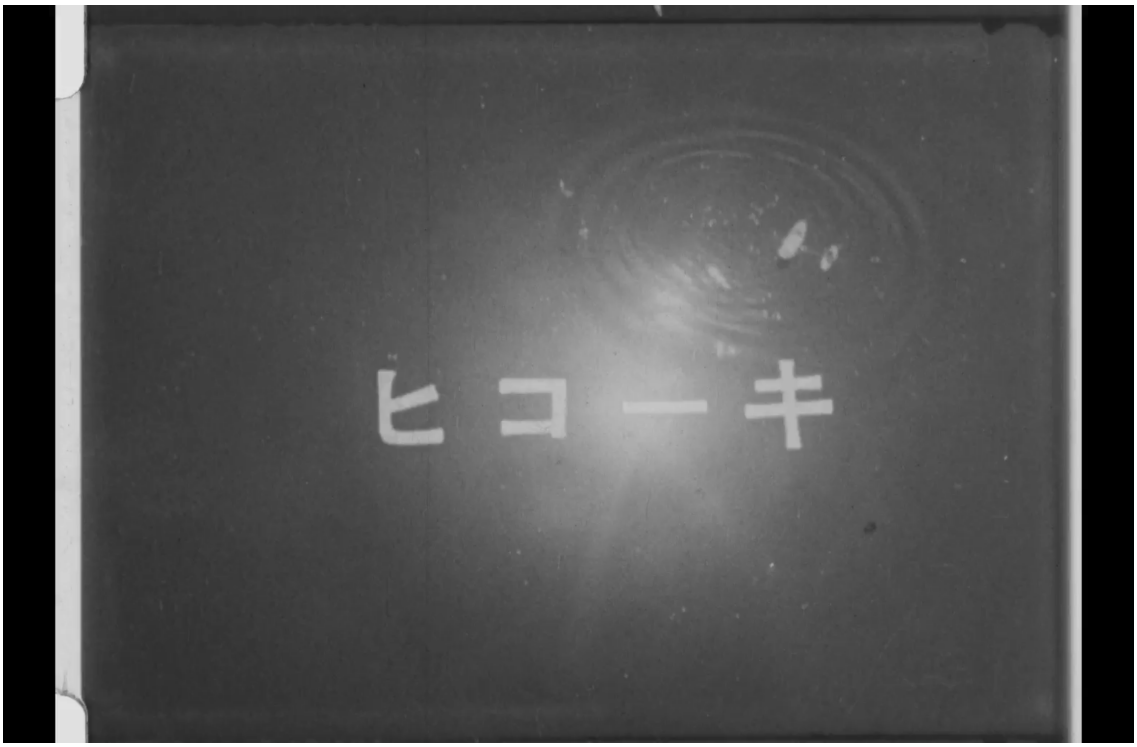
> *His 16mm film Hikōki, entirely produced by himself, was both accessible to us and engaged with subjects and characters that were popular among audiences. The film begins with a model airplane falling into and quietly sinking in the surface of a pond, and concludes with a real jet plane in flight, followed by a falling jet, the narrative ending in their interplay. Along the way, it depicts a festival near a military base, children, and other scenes in this roughly ten-minute short. This too, however, can be seen as part of his "occupation," a persistent exploration of remarkably popular themes.*

As Fukushima notes, the film may have appeared "accessible" and "popular" to contemporary audiences. However, for present-day viewers, some explanation of the depicted subjects and content is necessary. The author conducted a search of magazines and newspapers from 1960 and 1961, the period during which the film was produced, but detailed accounts of its content have not yet been located. Therefore, the following provides a descriptive account of the objects and events shown in the film.

The film opens with a countdown leader, and shimmering reflections appear on the surface of the water. From the left side of the frame, a toy airplane—possibly a rubber-powered model—glides into view and makes a gentle splash upon landing. The aircraft traces concentric ripples across the water, while the reflected light dances and flickers. At this moment, the title of the work, *Hikōki*, appears in katakana across the screen (fig. 6). The scene then cuts to a jet aircraft hurtling in from the left at high speed, which the camera tracks closely. As the jet disappears behind the shadow of a tree, the frame shifts again.

A young boy, who appears to be foreign, is shown laboriously inflating a balloon painted with the American flag (fig. 7). As he struggles to blow it up, he moves the balloon behind his head, and suddenly the entire screen is filled with the image of the flag. When he relaxes the finger he had pressed against the balloon's opening, it deflates instantly. In the next shot, a jet emerges from a gap in the foliage and streaks across the frame from left to right. Responding to the passage of this aircraft, the camera shifts to the right, revealing another boy. This boy, scratching his back with his right hand, gazes upward as one jet, then another, flies past. From his facial features, he appears to be Japanese (fig. 8) and slightly older than the first boy introduced.

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24558



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The camera follows the jets as they pass, circling dynamically through the frame. Although the film is silent, the planes' movements convey a sense of thunderous noise, trailing dark smoke as they speed by. The scene then cuts to the two boys together, smiling shyly at the camera. At this point, the viewer is made aware that the short film is, in a sense, their story.

Abruptly, the frame shifts to a man wearing a *Hyottoko* mask, followed by alternating shots of the dancing masked man and the laughing boys. A jet again pierces the foliage at extraordinary speed. One air-

Fig. 6: Opening title screen of the film.

Fig. 7: A scene of the film.

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24558

8

9

Fig. 8:
A scene of the film.

Fig. 9:
A scene of the film.

craft passes, then a second, and the masked man appears from the left, dancing across the screen. Seemingly beckoned by this figure, a group of boys carrying a *mikoshi*—a portable shrine—emerges from the rear and moves to the right of the frame. The two main boys run to follow them. A bright-haired girl watches the procession, while foreign cars speed past in the background. Two *mikoshi* pass, and a large fan inscribed with “Nishitsuruma Chōnai Anzen” (a prayer for the safety of the Nishitsuruma neighborhood) appears prominently (fig. 9).

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24558

The two boys, having accompanied the *mikoshi* group, pass behind an elderly woman holding a parasol at a street corner, separating from the procession as they proceed down a different street.

The boys are shown holding hands and running joyfully through the trees. As they progress through the forest, a large spider web fills the frame, seemingly foreshadowing the events to come. Upon exiting the woods, a sign reading "Western Rodeo at Boys Town" appears, along with the inscriptions "MINAMI-RINKAN YAMATO-SHI KANAGAWA-KEN JAPAN." As the sign rotates, the scene shifts to reveal the boys observing a stable through a chain-link fence (fig. 10), where white men and women tend to horses. Wearing western hats and boots, these figures handle the horses with a cowboy-like precision. After watching them for some time, the two boys leap and run away, leaving the scene in high spirits.

The next sequence depicts six Black boys marching in a line from right to left, arranged in order of height. A small white boy discovers a rope and places it around the neck of the older Japanese boy. The two then engage in a playful "horse game," lifting, spinning, and dragging each other across the grass. During this interlude, the six boys previously introduced suddenly appear from the undergrowth (fig. 11). As the camera closes in on their faces, the younger white boy disappears from the frame. Left alone and holding the rope, the Japanese boy abruptly turns on his heel and exits the scene.

Once again, a jet plane streaks across the sky. Within a tunnel-like grove, the Japanese boy proceeds as if pursued by the six boys. When he glances back, they stand resolutely, as if guarding the boundary of their territory. Defeated, he lowers his shoulders and departs in apparent dejection. Exiting the tunnel, he removes the rope from around his neck, while the six boys remain visible on the far side. The sequence then cuts to a close-up of the Japanese boy shedding tears.

At seven minutes and five seconds, the film returns to the jets. Formations of four, three, and two planes fly by, some moving at unusually slow speeds seemingly—a phenomenon currently under technical investigation. Multiple jets of varying sizes and forms occupy the frame. Interspersed with these aerial sequences are close-ups of the crying boy and shots of shattered mirrors. This alternating montage continues until nine minutes and seven seconds, when a mirror laid on the grass finally breaks. Subsequently, the katakana characters *Owari* (The End) appear over the broken glass. The film concludes with a blackout.

2. Preliminary Content Analysis

The foregoing provides an overview of the film in question. The following section presents a preliminary analysis and observations based on the author's current examination.

As noted above, this film had long been considered lost. Moreover, it had proven difficult to ascertain its content in detail from contemporary critical descriptions, and information regarding the filming location remained unclear. Traditionally, this film has been associated with a known work purportedly shot by Tomatsu at the Iwakuni base

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24558

10

11

Fig. 10-11: A scene of the film.

(fig. 3), and it had generally been assumed that the footage was filmed in Iwakuni.

However, through the process of digitizing and closely examining the film, the author has identified evidence suggesting a different location. Specifically, the characters on the fans carried by a group bearing a portable shrine, as well as signage posted in a U.S. military residential

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area displaying the names "Nishitsuruma" and "Yamato," indicate that the film was shot in Nishitsuruma, Yamato City, Kanagawa Prefecture. Furthermore, as noted above, the address visible on a sign at a U.S. military facility, reached via a path through a grove of mixed woodland, corroborates that the filming took place in the Chūō-Rinkan area, which includes Nishitsuruma adjacent to Tsuruma.

Yamato City, including the Tsuruma area, has maintained close historical ties with military and defense facilities since the prewar period.[34] In the late 1930s, the Ayase region saw the establishment of a Japanese Navy airbase. In particular, beginning in 1939, preparations were undertaken for the Atsugi Naval Airfield, which would later become Atsugi Air Base, spanning what is now Yamato City and Ayase City. Following Japan's surrender in 1945, the Atsugi Airfield was seized by Allied forces (United States) in September of that year. Although initially left unused, the base was redeveloped as a U.S. Navy air station during and after the Korean War (1950–1953), functioning as a strategically significant facility in the Far East. From 1971 onward, the base has been jointly operated with the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force, a partnership that continues to the present day.

The area has also experienced the hazards of military activity. On September 8, 1964, a U.S. military aircraft crash caused substantial destruction to residential and industrial buildings within Yamato City, resulting in casualties among local residents. Tomatsu's filming occurred during a period when the base was actively used by the U.S. Navy in the post–Korean War years. In September 1960, local neighborhood associations established the "Atsugi Air Base Noise Prevention Promotion Alliance",[35] reflecting the community's growing concerns regarding noise and other impacts from the adjacent U.S. military residential areas. The surrounding region thus encompassed both the military installation and the housing of military families, giving rise to a complex set of social and environmental challenges.

Given this context, it is unsurprising that Tomatsu, whose work in the 1960s often focused on issues of "occupation" and involved filming across multiple bases throughout Japan, selected this particular locale as a filming site. Notably, the film features striking depictions of verdant groves through which boys walk. While pockets of natural environment, such as Izumi-no-Mori and Chūō-Rinkan Nature Forest, persist in contemporary Yamato City, urban development has largely fragmented these areas. The groves depicted in the film, by contrast, suggest a more extensive and continuous natural landscape, offering a rare visual record of pre-urbanized scenery. As such, the footage holds cultural and historical value as a document that allows for the study of Yamato City's urban and natural environment during this period.

Research on the neighborhoods where the *mikoshi* festival took place, as well as the boys depicted in the footage, is currently underway with the cooperation of the Yamato City Neighborhood Association Council.

In the film, there is a scene in which

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two boys watch American adults tending to horses through a chain-link fence. The fence in the foreground functions not merely as a physical barrier but as a highly suggestive symbolic element. Historically, chain-link fences were installed to separate Japanese residential areas from U.S. military facilities and housing, thereby visually materializing the occupation and the subsequent base system.

This motif of fences recurs throughout Tomatsu's photographic oeuvre. In his work, fences are never merely components of the landscape; they operate as visual devices that simultaneously signify spatial division and embody the asymmetries of power and culture. Tomatsu underscores this symbolic dimension in *Camp Okinawa*, where he observes:[36]

> *A characteristic feature of postwar Japan, I have said, is Americanization. From the barbed wire and chain-link fences surrounding U.S. military bases, America gradually and imperceptibly seeped out, spreading across the country.*

The adverbs "gradually and imperceptibly" here convey the subtle, almost insidious manner in which American presence penetrated everyday life, reflecting Tomatsu's direct experience of witnessing the foreign culture and authority imposed upon the local landscape. This is not an abstract historical observation but a statement grounded in lived experience.

In this sense, the film's depiction of the boys' gaze through the fence functions similarly to Tomatsu's photographs: it structures a visual dichotomy between observer and observed, inside and outside, dominant and dominated. The recurrent presentation of the fence in the film thus symbolically represents the pervasive yet often invisible presence of the United States in postwar Japan, which, although ostensibly confined within the fence, permeated daily life.

It should be noted from the outset that the interpretations presented below are speculative and reflect the author's own conjectures. Tomatsu's direct experience of war corresponds to his childhood between the ages of nine and fifteen. From the perspective of developmental psychology, this period spans late childhood to early adolescence, a critical stage during which an individual's values and sensitivities are formed.

Regarding the Japanese boy depicted as the protagonist of the narrative, his exact age is not specified; however, it is reasonable to assume that he has not yet reached fifteen. Nevertheless, this age range largely overlaps with the late childhood that Tomatsu himself experienced under wartime conditions. From this standpoint, it is conceivable that Tomatsu projected his own memories, emotional states, and the inner conflicts arising from wartime experiences onto the figure of an anonymously depicted boy. This interpretation is supported by Tomatsu's own statements. In *Showa Shasin Zen-Shigoto,* he reflects:[37]

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> *After the defeat, darkness and light beame clearly visible, and values shifted 180 degrees. Our distrust of adults grew by the day. The new era began this process unfolded. My most impressionable years were spent during those times, and that intense experience became a filter through which I've seen things ever since....*

Through the "filter" imposed on his childhood memories, Tomatsu may have mediated his own experiences and emotions via the boy protagonist, thereby embedding these reflections within the work itself.

As noted above, the content of this audiovisual work is currently under detailed examination, with the cooperation of the Nishitsuruma Neighborhood Association, to verify historical accuracy and regional context. Additionally, future research will investigate the U.S. military bases that existed in the area at the time. Following a thorough verification of the objects and landscapes depicted in the footage against historical sources, consideration will be given to its public release.

This film can be situated as a record capturing the moment when "Americanization" permeated the everyday lives of those in the Tsuruma district who shared their living spaces with the U.S. military, entering their world through the mesh of a "chain-link fence." As Fukushima has noted, at the time these phenomena were readily comprehensible to the people and accepted as "popular" realities, both in terms of the issues addressed and the characters depicted.

However, in the present day, more than eighty years after the end of the war, much of the contextual knowledge and experiential understanding that once informed interpretations of these circumstances have been lost. For this reason, it is essential not to treat the events depicted in the film as self-evident. Rather, a careful, element-by-element examination is required to reconsider the intentions underpinning Tomatsu's construction of the work. On this basis, the present study aims primarily to clarify the historical value and expressive characteristics of the film.

The film can also be understood as a valuable visual document that records the quotidian dimensions of life at a specific historical moment—1960—through a narrative structure that communicates these experiences to contemporary audiences. Scenes of traditional Japanese ritual centered around portable shrines (*mikoshi*) reflect everyday life and communal customs of the period. At the same time, the work is characterized by the intermittent intrusion of contemporaneous yet incongruous elements.

For example, sequences are inserted in which foreign automobiles, normally absent from the streets, pass between the visually contrasting presences of Japanese children in ritual processions and a blonde foreign girl (fig. 12). This imagery symbolically illustrates the coexistence, without clear order or integration, of traditional life and foreign cultural elements that persisted in post-occupation Japan's urban spaces. Similarly, visual motifs such as

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24558

12

jet planes traversing the sky in multiple directions or the sudden appearance of a cowboy in a wooded area disrupt temporal and spatial continuity, producing an impression that diverges from everyday realism.

The concatenation of these fragmentary and discontinuous images can be read as reflecting the social and psychological conditions of the people at the time. The reality depicted is not one that can be fully explained through orderly historical narrative; rather, it is an extremely "disjointed" and contextually fragmented world, where multiple cultural codes and power structures intersect abruptly. In this regard, the film can be evaluated as a visual and narrative embodiment of what Tomatsu Shomei himself described as the "Strange Reality Suddenly Given" of postwar Japan.

Fig. 12: A scene of the film.

This work of Shomei Tomatsu can be evaluated as an effort to depict specific historical circumstances through a narrative form while simultaneously capturing objective facts for transmission to later generations. The adoption of a narrative structure offers a distinct advantage unique to the medium of film, allowing for the expression of temporal continuity and psychological transitions that cannot be fully realized in still photography.

Although direct comparison with his photographic oeuvre is constrained by the lack of extant moving-image works, it is noteworthy that Tomatsu actively constructs a narrative plot in this film that is absent from his photographs. Specifically, the disjointed worldview experienced by a Japanese boy and the attendant formation of his mental landscapes are repeatedly punctuated by imagery of jet planes. This structural device functions to intersect personal experience with images emblematic of the "Occupation."

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24558

From this perspective, a detailed analysis of the narrative structure and cinematic techniques in this work offers a productive lens through which to reconsider the visual and conceptual characteristics inherent in Tomatsu's photographic practice, particularly within his *Occupation* series.

Archival Digitization

1. Digitization for Preservation Purposes

Shomei Tomatsu's wife, Yasuko, has long supported her husband's activities while also working as a printer for his photographic projects. Currently, Yasuko manages Tomatsu's personal office, the *Office of Shomei Tomatsu, INTERFACE,*[38] where she continues creative work and is also involved in planning and organizing exhibitions and publications. The office's activities include archival management of Tomatsu's works. The archive contains not only the artist's works but also the equipment he used during his lifetime, photobooks and magazines in which his works were published, and other paper-based materials such as contributed essays.

Because Tomatsu frequently relocated his photographic work sites, he moved multiple times, leaving many materials in a largely unorganized state. During the process of organizing the archive, this work (*Hikōki*) was rediscovered. Its discovery is particularly significant, as the work's whereabouts had been unknown for a long period.

Upon opening the protective case, a strong vinegar-like odor was detected from the film. The film was wound on a reel measuring 7.5 cm in diameter (fig. 5) and stored in a square protective case with 21-cm sides (fig. 13). The protective case bears Tomatsu's own handwriting: "Hikōki Shomei Tomatsu". On April 27, 2022, digitization of the film was conducted at YOKOCINE D.I.A. INC.,[39] a private company in the motion picture industry. The total runtime of the footage is 9 minutes and 29 seconds, and it uses the standard cinematic frame rate of 24 frames per second. As will be described later, the digitization process was carried out carefully, and expert inspection confirmed that the film's condition was good.

First, a film inspection was conducted to assess the condition of the material. During this process, the edges of the film, which had become brittle due to aging, were repaired using specialized film repair tape. Foreign matter and dust adhering to the film surface were carefully removed, and any residual adhesive from prior editing—potentially a source of future film damage—was meticulously eliminated (fig. 14). These procedures were carried out by experienced technicians, who examined each frame sequentially, performing condition assessments and necessary repairs as required.

Next, the film underwent a cleaning process. This stage involved ultrasonic cleaning and reconditioning through water washing. Prior to this, the responsible technicians had thoroughly examined the material properties and the degree of deterioration, enabling the selection and application of the optimal treatment method tailored to the condition of the film.

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24558

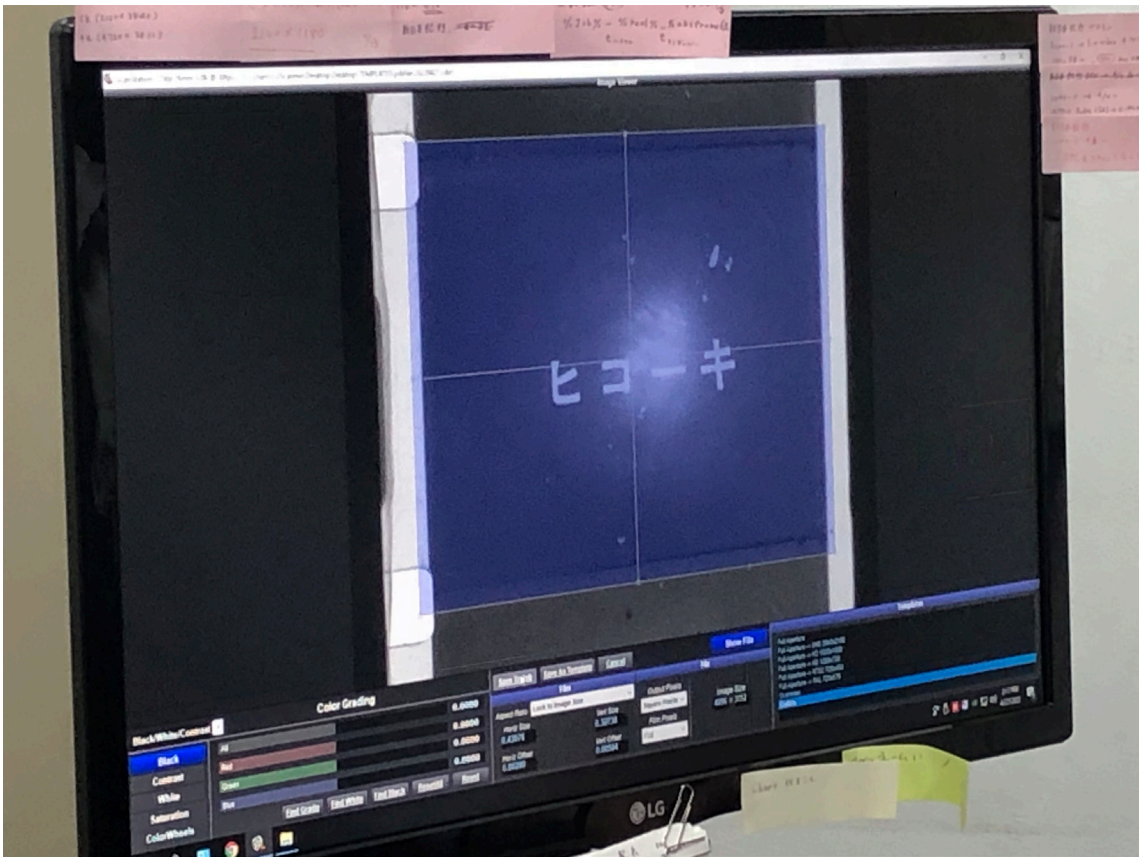
13

14

Fig. 13: The case in which the film was stored.

Fig. 14: Conducting slight restoration of the film.

https://doi.org/10.60923/issn.3034-9699/24558



15

Finally, the film was digitized through a scanning process (fig. 15). Typically, positive films are considered duplicate materials, and high-resolution cleaning or 4K preservation may be excessive. However, in this case, the original negative had already been missing, and thus the positive print was treated as equivalent to the original. Upon recommendation of the technicians, the digitization employed the ProRes 4444 format, which allows low-compression, high-quality preservation. ProRes is a widely used versatile compression format, and the 4444 variant, in particular, offers minimal quality loss, making it suitable for archival purposes.

Additionally, scanning in the standard 4K television aspect ratio (16:9) would have introduced black bars (Pillarboxing) on the sides,[40] reducing data efficiency. Therefore, the film was scanned at a 4:3 full 4K size to preserve the original aspect ratio, resulting in high-resolution digital data faithful to the source.

Although a vinegar-like odor was detected upon discovery, detailed condition assessments by the technicians confirmed that the film was generally in good condition, allowing the procedures to proceed without impediment. During the inspection, observations of the perforation shapes and conditions revealed that multiple film segments had been spliced together.

Through these sequential processes, the valuable film footage was successfully digitized and preserved. For reference purposes, a lightweight MP4 file was also produced, ensuring accessibility while maintaining the integrity of the archival material.

Fig. 15:
Digitization.

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2. Future Prospects of the Archive

Rare film works such as the one under consideration are ideally preserved over extended periods. In this context, it is necessary to conserve not only the negative and positive film materials themselves, but also the containers in which they are stored, as well as the various physical media produced at the time of public exhibition, including flyers, posters, and brochures. As many specialists have noted, Japan's high-temperature, high-humidity environment presents particularly severe conditions for film preservation, resulting in the ongoing deterioration and loss of cultural resources that should be imparted to future generations. Furthermore, decisions must be made regarding which physical materials to retain and to what extent, given the constraints of limited storage space.

From the perspective of film storage, Japan has historically maintained specialized national institutions for film preservation. The Film Center, established under the auspices of the Tokyo National Museum of Modern Art, served as a key repository.[41] In 2018, this institution evolved into the National Film Archive of Japan, the sixth museum within the framework of the Independent Administrative Institution, National Museum of Art.[42] The National Film Archive systematically collects surviving films from both Japan and abroad, with priority given to films at risk of deterioration or disposal, films of high rarity, and those required for screenings or international exchange. The Archive also engages in comprehensive collection of related materials, including books, posters, and still photographs.

Meanwhile, in the offices of many photographers, both individual and corporate, dedicated rooms with controlled, low, and stable temperature and humidity are maintained for the preservation of films and prints.[43] As Kae Ishihara has pointed out, specialized storage environments for film are rare outside of public film archives or commercial storage services.[44] Nevertheless, photographers and archival offices responsible for their works largely achieve preservation through independent efforts. From the standpoint of safeguarding Japan's valuable cultural heritage, however, it is also necessary to consider, for the future, comprehensive public repositories capable of long-term preservation that can encompass all relevant materials. In such cases, careful consideration must be given to the rights of the photographer and copyright holders, particularly because many offices continue to actively promote exhibitions and publications both domestically and internationally, regardless of whether the artist is living or deceased.

All archival materials of Shomei Tomatsu, including the work in question, are currently managed by his private office. Yasuko Tomatsu now directs the office and oversees the archiving of his work alongside posthumous exhibitions and publications. The author is involved in the operation of the office and the management of its archival activities. The rediscovery of the work, long believed lost, was a significant and welcome event, and its digitization prior to the onset of film degradation was particularly fortunate. Moving forward, this work represents an invaluable resource for the study of Japanese photographic

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history. While detailed analysis of its content falls outside the scope of the present paper, such research is planned.

Looking ahead, there are plans not only to preserve this material but also to make it publicly accessible, akin to Tomatsu's other photographic works. This may involve converting digitized materials into a Digital Cinema Package (DCP) and conducting digital remastering. However, these processes are closely intertwined with preservation and restoration strategies, including questions regarding the extent to which the original should be maintained and the degree of restoration to be undertaken—issues central to contemporary conservation practice—and therefore require careful evaluation and scholarly discussion.

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Endnotes:

1 * The author wishes to express deep appreciation to Mrs. Yasuko Tomatsu, wife of Shomei Tomatsu, whose enduring support has been essential to his creative practice. As the current director of the Office of Shomei Tomatsu, INTERFACE, she continues to make significant contributions through her engagement in production, the mentoring of younger generations, and archival work. Her generous cooperation in the preparation of this study is gratefully acknowledged.

The author also extends sincere appreciation to Mr. Minoru Tano (Group Gendai Films), Mr. Takashi Fujimoto, and Mr. Yokoo (YOKOCINE D.I.A.) for their valuable advice and kind assistance during the archival process.

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Iwanami Shashin Bunko 1954.

2 *Iwanami Shashin Bunko* 1955.

3 The ten participating artists were as follows: Yasuhiro Ishimoto, Kikuji Kawada, Shun Kawahara, Akira Sato, Akira Tanno, Shomei Tomatsu, Toyoko Tokiwa, Masaya Nakamura, Ikko Narahara, and Eikoh Hosoe.

4 The photographic collective *VIVO* was founded in July 1959 by six of the above members, including Shomei Tomatsu, and remained active until June 1961. At the time, the *Realism Photography Movement*, led by Ken Domon, held significant influence in Japan. In response, *VIVO* sought to explore new directions for contemporary Japanese photography. The group emphasized “private” or “subjective” photographic expression and, following the example of Magnum Photos, aimed to establish a system in which photographers could autonomously manage the use and distribution of their own works.

5 Tomatsu 1967.

6 Regarding this project, Tomatsu stated that it was brought to *VIVO* by the photography critic Tomomi Ito (1927–1986), who designated him as the photographer. He also recalled that during the location scouting in Nagasaki, he was accompanied by Ito, the photography critic Koan Shigemori (1926–1992), and a staff member of the Japan Council against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs. This account is recorded in the following interview conducted by Yasufumi Nakamori at the artist’s office in Naha, Okinawa, on August 7, 2011: Oral History Interview with Shomei Tomatsu, conducted by Yasufumi Nakamori and Ikegami Hiroko, August 7, 2011, Oral History Archives of Japanese Art, https://oralarthistory.org/archives/interviews/tomatsu_shomei_02/.

7 Japan Council Against Atomic and Hydrogen Bombs 1961.

8 Many of the works photographed and documented by Tomatsu in Nagasaki at that time were later included in the following photobook published in 1966: Tomatsu 1966.

9 Tomatsu 1969.

10 For Tomatsu and the “Americanization” brought about by the “Occupation,” see the Yoshinari, Miyoshi 2022.

11 Taira 2013, pp. 12–17; based on the keynote report: Shomei Tomatsu, *Report: Symposium Commemorating the Exhibition Shomei Tomatsu: Okinawa Mandala—The Memory of Photography, The Creation of Photography: Shomei Tomatsu and Okinawa* (July 6, 2002).

12 Tomatsu 1986.

13 Tomatsu 1986.

14 Tomatsu 1960a.

15 Tomatsu 1960b.

16 Tomatsu 1960c.

17 Tomatsu 1960d. Although the reason why only the Iwakuni installment was

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published in a different magazine remains unclear, the first three installments that appeared in *Asahi Camera* each bear the heading "U.S. BASES IN JAPAN SERIES" on the cover page, numbered (1) through (3). Moreover, the subtitle-like phrase "A Strange Reality Suddenly Given to Me, Which I Call 'Occupation" is shared across all four installments.

18 As a moving-image work that was made publicly available, even if only temporarily, this film was likely the first and last of its kind by Tomatsu. However, it is evident from his later conversations—such as his dialogue with poet Shuntarō Tanikawa—that he was by no means dismissive of filmmaking. In that exchange, Tomatsu expressed his desire to create a film about Nagasaki: Tanigawa, Tomatsu, 1962, p. 152.

19 See: https://www.sfmoma.org/artist/Shomei_Tomatsu/.

20 https://www.sfmoma.org/artist/Shomei_Tomatsu/.

21 Among the physical materials once owned by Shomei Tomatsu, only the pamphlet reproduced in this paper has been confirmed. Meanwhile, on the website of the "Hijikata Tatsumi Archive" operated by the Keio University Art Center, images of a poster designed by Mitsuo Kano and of tickets that were sold at the time for 300 yen can be found. http://www.art-c.keio.ac.jp/old-website/archive/hijikata/portas/performance/RCA_TH_EP3.html.

22 In the pamphlet for the second performance in which Tomatsu participated, the names of a diverse range of artists—including Tatsumi Hijikata, Toshiro Mayuzumi, Yukio Mishima, Shuji Terayama, and Shuzo Takiguchi—are listed. The pamphlet also features a double-page spread of photographs by Tomatsu himself.

23 See the aforementioned Oral History Interview with Shomei Tomatsu, conducted by Yasufumi Nakamori and Ikegami Hiroko, https://oralarthistory.org/archives/interviews/tomatsu_shomei_02/.

24 Mishima 1960.

25 Takiguchi 1960. This page also features contributions by Yukio Mishima and Tatsuhiko Shibusawa.

26 See the aforementioned Oral History Interview with Shomei Tomatsu, conducted by Yasufumi Nakamori and Ikegami Hiroko, https://oralarthistory.org/archives/interviews/tomatsu_shomei_02/.

27 This interview was conducted in conjunction with the exhibition *Letters from the Sun* (September 23–November 20, 2011) held at the Okinawa Prefectural Museum of Art on October 30, 2011. As Tomatsu was suddenly taken ill and unable to attend the symposium with Gozo Yoshimasu originally scheduled during the exhibition period, the interview was carried out at a later date. It is published in Tomatsu, Yoshimasu 2013.

28 Toshiro Mayuzumi (1929–1997) was a prominent figure in postwar Japanese classical and contemporary music and served as a lecturer in the Composition Department at the Tokyo University of the Arts.

29 Tomatsu 1960e.

30 Fukushima 1960.

31 Fukushima 1961.

32 Tomatsu 1983, pp. 98–99. This two-page spread by Shomei Tomatsu clearly demonstrates his stance as a photographer who is deeply attentive to the present moment. In it, he emphasizes that "photography is always the now; the camera captures only the present", and further explains that "what the camera records is the object as it exists in the present, even if a thousand years pass. Therefore, photography is always the now".

33 Fukushima 1961, p. 47.

34 The cultural promotion department, Yamato-City (ed.), *History of Yamato-City*, 2020, Yamato-City, pp. 450-474.

35 https://www.atsugibakudou.com.

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36 Tomatsu 2010, cover page.

37 Tomatsu 1984. Although it originally appeared in the work cited on the left, the author here quotes it from the following book containing Rubinfine's translation: Tomatsu, Rubinfien, Junkerman 2014, p. 19.

38 Regarding the activities of Yasuko Tomatsu, see the interview conducted at her gallery in Okinawa in February 2025□https://imaonline.jp/articles/interview/tomatsu_yasuko/#page-3.

39 YOKOCINE D.I.A. INC.: https://www.yokocine.com/index.html.

40 For reference on the term "Pillarboxing", see: https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100327379.

41 See the following web site for reference of the Film Center: https://www.nfaj.go.jp/FC/fc.html.

42 See he following web site for reference of National Film Archive of Japan: https://www.nfaj.go.jp/english/.

43 Research on photographic preservation has been compiled by scholars and photographers, including Eikoh Hosoe, and was referenced by the author in the present study: Gazō Hozon Kenkyūkai (Image Preservation Study Group), Society of Photography and Imaging of Japan 1996 (Japanese text only). It should be noted that the same society has continued to hold seminars on image preservation up to the present day.

44 Ishihara 2018. See especially pp. 12-38 for a comprehensive overview of previous film archival activities in Japan.

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