

A Place for Watching Together: On “Cinema with Us 2013”

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I clearly remember during the first Yamagata after the disaster that no matter the venue, I found the screenings in the “Cinema with Us” program to be permeated by a strange and potent tension. I imagine that was because it was fresh in all our memories, but I think the particular unique quality of that atmosphere was due to the fact that victims of the disasters unfolding on screen were present with us in the theatres.

There were people from Tokyo next to people from Kansai next to people from other countries, next to people from Tohoku (the northeast), including those living in the areas affected by the disaster, all of us watching the same footage. This resulted in an atmosphere of extreme tension.

The way I saw what I watched was different from the people seated beside me. The sense of incongruity was physically palpable, even in the pitch black of the theaters. Dialogue in dialect caused laughter among people who understood it, while those to whom it was unintelligible were silent. We watched the movies each with our own degree of distance from the subject matter.

I myself have continued Image.Fukushima, a project that shows movies directly or indirectly related to the Fukushima disaster, and I was able to reconfirm time and again the significance of the act of watching movies together, separate the value of the works themselves. I experienced this with particular clarity in Yamagata.

This is because the movies were shown in an international film festival that attracts a diversity of audience members. The disaster, which affected a limited geographic area, revealed the politico-economic imbalance in Japan, and at an event like this, audience

members can't just swallow what they see thinking only of their own little world. It becomes an opportunity for them to lose their voyeurism (enjoying spying on something from a safe place).

Here we are two years later, meeting one another in the same place again. This time however, we lack the direct stimulation to our consciousness of some massive event. For some the memory of events may have become distant, while for some this is an impossibility. Some cannot escape the reality even if they try. Some want to forget. I think we will be able to perceive those differences among us.

In these two years we have witnessed this kind of wearing thin and vanishing of peoples' memories. We might call the decision to hold the Olympics in Tokyo one symbol of this. From now on, film and video of Japan is likely to show this country as united, by inflamed appeals to people's emotions. Apparently it is realistic to expect that the economy should be run by illusions and to assert that things are on the road to recovery. But of course there are realities left out of this picture. More than just criticizing this kind of thing, what we need is to ensure we retain places where we can come together without being expected to all be the same as one another.

As memories continue to wear thin and vanish all the more, I wonder will the wounds become hidden. For us, a movie theater is a place to recognize the reality of people who face realities different from our own. We want to be there; not because we seek universal inspiration in some glamorous fantasy, but to watch with one another documentary footage that modestly brings to our gaze collected fragments of reality.

(Translated by Jeremy Harley)

■ Discussion

Archiving Documentary Films About 3.11 【CU】

Panelists: Okada Hidenori, Miura Tetsuya, Matsuyama Hideaki

Moderator: Ogawa Naoto

..... 10/13 12:30–14:00 [M5] | Admission Free