

UNDERGROUND

Regie Kaori Oda

Japan | 2024

83 Min. | Japanisch mit englischen Untertiteln

Buch Kaori Oda. **Kamera** Yoshiko Takano. **Montage** Kaori Oda. **Musik** Miyu Hosoi. **Sound Design** Iwao Yamazaki. **Ton** Iwao Yamazaki. **Produzent*innen** Ryohei Tsutsui, Eijun Sugihara. **Produktionsfirma** trixta (Yokohama, Japan). **Mit** Nao Yoshigai, Mitsuo Matsunaga, Mikie Nishihara, Eiga Matsuo, Hayato Nagasaki.

Weltvertrieb Parallax Films

Synopse

Dunkel und Licht, Spiegelungen und Projektionen, schemenhafte Umrisse, ein Schatten, der die Gestalt einer jungen Frau annimmt. Kaori Odas **UNDERGROUND** führt behutsam hinab in die Tiefen der Höhlen von Okinawa und überlagert Vergangenheit und Gegenwart, Erinnerung und sinnlich-haptische Erfahrung. Der Film ist eine kreative Erweiterung von **GAMA** (2023), benannt nach der lokalen Bezeichnung der Höhlen und Tunnelsysteme. Erneut voll experimenteller und visueller Meisterschaft entdeckt und entfaltet Oda die unterirdischen Räume als Ort der transgenerationalen Erinnerung an die Schlacht um Okinawa im April 1945. Während „peace guide“ Mitsuo Matsunaga mit nüchterner Stimme von den Schicksalen der Zivilpersonen berichtet, die vor den Bombardements der US-Truppen hier Zuflucht suchten, gleitet der „Schatten“, verkörpert von der jungen Frau, durch die Höhlen, berührt Felswände und Spuren der Vergangenheit. Wortlos, mit tastenden Fingern. In magischen Bildschichten überlagert Kaori Oda Erinnerungskultur und historische Wunden. Die unfassbaren Berichte vom kollektiven Selbstmord werden umrahmt von einer sinnlichen Klangkulisse. **UNDERGROUND** zeigt ein Leben mit den Schatten. (Fabian Tietke, Annina Lehmann)

Kaori Oda, 1987 in Osaka, Japan, geboren, ist Filmemacherin und Künstlerin. 2016 promovierte sie in Sarajevo in Filmmaking, betreut von Béla Tarr. **ARAGANE** (2015), in einer bosnischen Kohlemine gedreht, feierte Weltpremiere beim Yamagata International Film Festival. **TOWARD A COMMON TENDERNESS** (2017) wurde beim DOK Leipzig und **TS'ONOT / CENOTE** (2019), gefilmt in Unterwasserhöhlen in Yucatán, in Rotterdam uraufgeführt. **GAMA** (2023) wurde bei der MoMA Doc Fortnight und Cinéma du Réel gezeigt. Oda erhielt 2020 den Nagisa-Oshima-Preis und 2021 den New-Face-Award des japanischen Bildungsministers.

Filme: 2010: *Thus a Noise Speaks*. 2014: *Ko Oh* (Kurzfilm). 2015: *Aragane*. 2017: *Toward a Common Tenderness*. 2019: *TS'ONOT / Cenote*. 2023: *GAMA*. 2024: *Underground*.

Kommentar der Regisseurin

Jede und jeder einzelne von uns hat hier gelebt

The traces we gaze at become a collective memory

Angefangen mit meinem ersten Film **THUS A NOISE SPEAKS** (2010), der mit den Worten „Sicher werden wir uns eines Tages daran erinnern“ endete, und gefolgt von **FLASH** (2015), einem Kurzfilm, der die Frage stellt: „Was ist meine früheste Erinnerung?“, habe ich das menschliche Erinnern erforscht. In **ARAGANE** (2015) fand ich immaterielle Erinnerung, die im Material von Steinkohle und deren Abbau eingelagert ist, und in **CENOTE** (2019) versuchte ich, die Kollektivität der Erinnerung im Laufe der Zeit im Wasser aufzudecken; beide Filme spielen an unterirdischen Orten. Ich glaube, ich habe gespürt, dass ich unter der Erde vielleicht Hinweise auf etwas Ungreifbares finden könnte, auf die Erinnerung selbst.

In meinem neuesten Film **UNDERGROUND** habe ich meine Erforschung der Erinnerung vertieft. Während des Produktionsprozesses habe ich ihre kollektive und gegenseitig konstruktive Natur und ihre Beziehung zur „Zeit“, auch etwas schwer zu Fassendes, erforscht. Dabei fragte ich mich, warum ich Erinnerungen durch das aufzeichnende Medium Film bewahren will, während ich mit anderen Leuten interagiere. Die Menschheit wird unweigerlich eines Tages aussterben, und solange wir Menschen sind, werden du und ich mit Sicherheit sterben. Dennoch möchte ich bestätigen, dass jede und jeder einzelne von uns hier gelebt hat. Ich glaube, dass ich deshalb versuche, den Film als lebendige Spur zu hinterlassen.

In diesem Film benennen wir etwas, dessen Aufgabe es ist, durch die lebendigen Spuren der alten Vergangenheit, der Gegenwart und der fernen Zukunft zu reisen, als „Schatten“. Mein Ziel war es, den Schatten zu nutzen, um das Unterirdische und das Oberirdische, das Verlorene und das Verbleibende, das Lebendige und das Tote miteinander zu verbinden und so ein Bild von „uns“ zu schaffen. Tod, Verlust und die Dinge, die zurückgelassen werden... Im Untergrund, wo diese Zeichen spürbar sind, hat das Medium Film die eingefrorene Zeit für einen Moment wieder in Bewegung versetzt. Räume, die versteckt, verdeckt oder verborgen waren, werden durch die Augen der Lebenden ans Licht gebracht. Die Lebenden in diesem Film sind nicht nur wir, die beteiligten Filmschaffenden, sondern auch das Publikum, das auf die Leinwand blickt.

Die lebendigen Spuren, die durch den Film betrachtet und dem Licht ausgesetzt werden, werden zu einem kollektiven Gedächtnis.

Das seltsame Phänomen von „uns“ wird erneuert, wenn das kollektive Gedächtnis eine neue Ebene erhält.

Ich hoffe, dass mein Film „uns“ erneuern wird.

Kaori Oda

Interview

Close to the Collective Subconscious

Kaori Oda speaks to Charlotte Hafner and Barbara Wurm about the connection between underground spaces, collective memories and filmmaking

DIESES INTERVIEW WURDE AUF ENGLISCH GEFÜHRT.

Barbara Wurm: Kaori, we've met before, but have not discussed your film yet. I'm very happy that UNDERGROUND, after playing at Tokyo IFF, will have its international premiere at Berlinale Forum. Let me start by asking for how long this film has been on your mind.

Kaori Oda: We spent more than three years to make this film, from research to shooting and editing in post-production.

Charlotte Hafner: Is the history of the Battle of Okinawa and of the role of the gama (the Okinawa expression for cave) during and after the battle something that is generally known in Japan, or is it a chapter of history that has been forgotten?

KO: We do learn about the Battle of Okinawa at school, all of us. But there may be differences in perceptions among individuals depending on where they live. Some people know that the group suicide in Chibichirigama was mostly due to pressure from the Japanese military and some people might not know that. If you live on Okinawa Island, you know more about the Battle of Okinawa, of course.

CH: In UNDERGROUND, the history of the gama is told by a local guide, and I think it's a really wonderful choice to include this element of narration and oral storytelling in your film, which is all about memory and how it is passed down, how we preserve it. And especially the history of marginalized peoples, whose collective history is often only passed down through oral storytelling. Could you tell us a little bit about the guide? How did you meet him?

KO: His name is Mitsuo Matsunaga, and I found his homepage on the internet. He lives in Okinawa and works as a peace guide for students and for people who, like us, want to learn about the gama. He used to be a taxi driver, and on the job, he met Gushi-san. Gushi-san was a nurse at the Okinawa Army Hospital. He became a peace guide in 1988 after Gushi-san encouraged him to participate in the collection of remains in the cave. He met many people during this volunteer work who experienced the Battle of Okinawa and began to think that he would like to pass on their wartime experience to future generations.

CH: One story that really moved me in the film was that of Toshie Asato, who decided to share her story many years after the war was over, in 1977. The gama are also a space that preserves history, almost like a museum. And they're also, in a way, eyewitnesses of the tragedies that have happened there. They become portals that connect the past to the present. Could you tell us a little bit more about the techniques you used to show the portal-like qualities of the gama, and underground spaces in general?

CH: Let's talk about the shadow. I think it's an interesting element, which is new to your work as well, an element of performance.

KO: Before UNDERGROUND we made a middle-length film called GAMA, which was only the Okinawan part. And there was a shadow in the film as well. But like I said before, I wanted to merge different underground spaces across Japan into one underground space for the film. We've talked about war and Okinawa, but UNDERGROUND is not only about the gama. For me, it's about collective memory and our subconscious. And I wanted to have someone or something to create this intangible thing.

BW: The underground is a metaphor, it's a place, a space, and layers of memory. Can you talk more about this concept, how it helped you to combine these two spheres of the film, the material aspect, touching bones and touching walls and becoming the shadow, and the bigger overarching idea?

KO: People ask me why I'm attracted to caves or the underground, but I'm not so much into caves as such, but rather human memories, especially collective ones. And for me, going underground physically was somehow an opportunity to be close to this collective consciousness or subconscious. The act of touching walls with the hand of the shadow connects to the image of cave paintings. And I was thinking, they left these paintings in order to say they were there. That was the beginning of the idea of playing with the hand and shadows, because the film is talking about leaving traces.

CH: There are ritualistic elements in the film as well. The scenes of prayer and of honoring the memory of the dead, but also the scenes in the apartment where we see rituals of everyday life, everyday routines. Could you talk a bit more about this aspect of the film?

KO: When I was thinking about how the audience would watch this film above ground, whether they would be able to relate these abstract images and sounds to themselves, I thought I should have scenes above ground, like making miso soup or doing yoga. The underground spaces and its memories are not at all distant from our daily lives, but everything is connected to the ground we live on now, like the plane going over the head of the shadow at the seashore in Okinawa. The shadows that seem to wander underground are also present in the depths of people living now.

CH: The scene on the beach where the shadow sits at the seashore and there is the noise of a plane flying over her was very powerful. I couldn't help but think about wartime planes. There was something really eerie about it. I think, right now, we live in a very unstable society, and there is constant war or conflict. Although we know about the horrors of the past, we keep making the same mistakes as a society. Was that also something that you thought about when you made UNDERGROUND?

KO: The beach is the one that the US military landed on when they arrived on Okinawa. And close to the beach, there was a military base. But we didn't expect there to be jets flying over us when we were filming. It was a military aircraft. Yoshigai-san, who plays the shadow, kept acting naturally and didn't stop making sounds with the dead corals. The coral remains look like human bones in a way, too. The sounds of the corals may not be as loud as the aircraft, but it's not like we cannot hear it. And to preserve this small sound, the small voices, was my mission in the film. We're not making political films, but every film is political because life is political, and in daily life, each of our choices is connected to politics. If we try to capture life, politics is always involved. That's my stance about the film's political aspects.

BW: In a way, you are bringing to life the many forgotten, unburied souls with this film, which is another layer of memory.

KO: That's why we wanted to show the fragments of dead corals on the beach, which look like bones. And in the first shot of the film, we project colorful grains. I used these grains to describe the small memories, wandering around underground.

BW: Working with the shadow, did you ask Nao Yoshigai to act in any particular way?

KO: I told her to listen Matsunaga-san, the guide, during the Okinawa scenes. But at the same time, she has to listen to the space itself, the space of the gama. I asked her to not react, but

to be open to both – Matsunaga-san and the gama. But then, how she does that is up to her. It's not about emotions per se, but about her physicality.

CH: You also incorporated the element of cinema or cinema as another form of cave, in a way. Could you talk a bit about the scene inside the cinema?

KO: We shot the cinema with the hope that our film itself would be a living trace for the next generation to come. And that's what Matsunaga-san does with his storytelling in the gama, the cave. We tried to do what he does, using the language of film, in the cinema. Also, I think we reflect ourselves when we watch films. I was playing around with this idea.

BW: Yoshigai-san, who plays the shadow, like you is part of the younger generation and of contemporary discourse. I wonder how your generation thinks of this aspect of history. And how was the reception at the Tokyo International Film Festival?

KO: Yoshigai-san is my age, mid 30s, almost 40. In Tokyo, I think most of the reactions were not so much about politics but about individuals like Matsunaga-san, about how precious it is to have him in the film. Also, the film language itself is very interesting for Japanese audiences. People were interested in that, how we constructed the underground in the form of the images and especially in the sound.

CH: The soundscape of the film is very special. It's your second collaboration with Hayato Nagasaki, who also did the sound for CENOTE. Could you tell us a little bit about how you approached the sound of UNDERGROUND?

KO: There are three people in the sound team. Hayato Nagasaki did the sound recording on location. Iwao Yamazaki did the sound design for **UNDERGROUND** in post-production. Finally, Miyu Hosoi made the soundtrack for the film. This film is the first film Miyu composed music for. I requested that she make the sound independent from the image, so that it could stand alone. The images are their own world, and the sounds should be their own world, too. When sound and image meet, it creates a third world, which belongs neither to image nor to sound. That's what we talked about when we were making the tracks.

CH: In your œuvre, there's also some very personal works, such as the films you made under the guidance of Bela Tarr at his film school in Sarajevo. Are you planning to do more personal work in the future, or are you going to stick to the topic of collective memory for a bit longer?

KO: I started filmmaking by shooting myself and my family. I chronicled my coming out as a sexual minority to my family because they rejected who I am. We used filmmaking to communicate again. After that struggle, I didn't know what to shoot anymore because I'm not coming from a cinephile background. But then I was lucky enough to enter the film factory in Sarajevo. Because I didn't have anything I could pull from myself, I needed to see the world, meet new people, and see what's going on outside of my space. I think that is why I made films like ARAGANE and CENOTE, and also **UNDERGROUND**. I was trying to pass on memories to the next generation. But right now, I'm going back to my mother again to make a small short film together, because our relationship is changing. And I realized that my mother will die. I mean, I will die too, but my mother will die before me. I want to record what she has been through. For me, she was always my mother, but I finally realized that she has a name.

CH: That's really powerful. The way you use cinema as an archive is so incredible, preserving our histories and preserving our stories.

KO: Thank you.