Japan Past & Present

Goodbye CP and Disability Movements

Lesson Plan: Goodbye CP and Disability Movements
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Creation date: December 19, 2023
Keywords: Film, Cerebral Palsy, Disability Rights, Documentary, Poetry

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Target Audience:

Undergraduate students, Graduate students

Duration:

1 or 2 class sessions (add one more if the film is screened in class)

Learning Objectives:

This lesson is centered on the 1972 documentary *Goodbye CP*, one of the most significant modern cultural works in relation to disability in Japan. The film is an unflinching look at disability rights activists, thinkers, and cultural creators with cerebral palsy, most of whom are part of the seminal disability rights activist group the Green Lawn Movement (Aoi Shiba no Kai). It was the first feature length film by the now very well-known director Hara Kazuo, who does not identify as disabled, in collaboration with two leaders of the movement who are the documentary's main figures: the poet and activist Yokota Hiroshi, and the photographer, writer,

and activist Yokozuka Kōichi.

All in all, *Goodbye CP* is an extraordinarily complex and fraught work, which serves as both an extremely valuable early record of the burgeoning disability movement in Japan, but also brings up many tricky issues in relation to representations of disability; the power relations between disabled and nondisabled creators; disability and masculinity; and disability in relation to poetry, intelligibility, and legibility.

The main objective of this lesson is an introduction to the history and cultures of disability activism in Japan through this film, and to start a series of conversations on difficult but generative topics in relation to them; it would be an excellent way to bring the topic of disability into a wide variety of courses and disciplines, both Japan- and globally-focused.

Potential Courses to Include this Lesson in:

- Japanese, Asian, or global history
- Japanese, Asian, global, or documentary film
- Life writing, poetry, or other writing from marginalized perspectives
- Methods courses related to anthropology and ethnography
- Any course that focuses explicitly on disability

Required Materials:

Goodbye CP (*Sayōnara CP*), a 1972 documentary film by Hara Kazuo, 82 minutes.

- Available through the Criterion Channel streaming service, or as a DVD; screenings can also be booked through Janus Films.
- **Content warning:** Discussion of sexual violence committed by an interviewee, 32:44–35:00. Several scenes of disabled people being denigrated by non-disabled people, as well as intense domestic arguments.

Potential Readings:

Kazuo Hara, "The Healthy vs. The Disabled: *Goodbye CP*," in *Camera Obtrusa: The Action Documentaries of Hara Kazuo*, translated by Pat Noonan and Takuo Yasuda (Kaya Press: 2009), 68–94.

- A translation of a chapter Hara himself wrote about his own documentary, in which he talks frankly about his (quite controversial) intellectual, creative, and ethical bases behind creating the film.

Anne-Lise Mithout, "*Sayōnara CP*: The First Filmic Representation of the Japanese Dis/ability Rights Movement," in *Dis/ability in Media, Law and History: Intersectional, Embodied AND Socially Constructed?*, edited by Micky Lee, Frank Rudy Cooper, and Patricia Reeve (Routledge: 2022).

- A wonderful chapter detailing the context and history of the film in relation to Japan's disability rights movement, with close readings of the visual representation of the disabled activists in the documentary. See also her recent paper that is a highly useful general introduction to Aoi Shiba no Kai.

Andrew Campana, "You Forbid Me to Walk: Yokota Hiroshi's Disability Poetics," *positions: asia critique* 30, no. 4 (2022), 735–762. Also available as an audio recording at the link above.

- My article focuses on the main figure of the documentary, the poet and disability activist Yokota Hiroshi; it focuses on Yokota's poetry reading/protest in the film, and includes close readings of a wide variety of poems he wrote over several decades in relation to disability and disability rights.

Background Information for Instructors:

The history of disability rights activism in Japan in the 1970s (the central context of this film) is long and complicated, as is the specific history of the

Green Lawn Movement (Aoi Shiba no Kai), the association of disability activists which included most of the subjects of the film. The Mithout reading above is therefore highly recommended. The film itself, however, provides much of the necessary context—most viewers of the film historically did not know about the broader context of disability rights activism inside or outside or Japan, and so the students will be on the "same page" of much of the historical audience if they just watch the film alone.

Discussion Questions:

- What is the relationship between the director and the documentary subjects? What kinds of power do they each have in this relationship?
- In *Goodbye CP*, the speech of the people with cerebral palsy is often difficult to understand, particularly for audience members who don't have CP. (Reports from the time note that when the activists with CP in the film watched this film, they had no trouble understanding all the dialogue.) The English version of the film includes English subtitles for all dialogue; the Japanese version, however, does not, resulting in an interesting situation where all the speech is perfectly intelligible for international viewers through subtitles, but not to many Japanese audience members. In *Camera Obtrusa* (one of the potential readings above), the director Hara explains his decision, stating that "If the protagonists of the film had not been Japanese, there's no question that I would have added subtitles. I also might have used subtitles if they had been from far-off areas with strong regional accents-for example, if people living in Tokyo would have had a hard time understanding their local dialect. But the difficulty an audience is confronted with when people with cerebral palsy talk doesn't have to do with dialect. I think an audience has to become accustomed to how people with cerebral palsy speak. That is, if the audience gets used to this, if they spend some time with them, they'll come to understand them" (74–75). Do you agree

with Hara's decision to not subtitle the speakers with CP in the original version of the film? How do you think your experience watching the subtitled version might have been different than a Japanese audience member of the original version?

- As Anne-Lise Mithout points out in her chapter (one of the potential readings above), "rather than a movie about 'dis/abled people,' *Sayōnara CP* is a documentary about 'dis/abled men'" (145). How are masculinity and femininity represented in the film, especially in relation to sexuality, carework, motherhood, and the (limited) representation of women?
- In the poetry reading scene in the film, Yokota, sitting on the ground in front of the train station, reads aloud part of his poem called "Legs" ("Ashi") to the gathered onlookers. This is what we hear of it before the reading is broken up by the police: "Crowds of people gathered around me/You all have legs/You all— you all— I—you all forbid me to walk/And only through this do you keep your legs./Crowds of people! /Gathered legs!/You—on what basis do you all forbid me to walk?" What do you think Yokota is saying in this particular poem? Also, how much does Yokota Hiroshi's identity as a poet have a role in the movie?
- The vast majority of the people with CP in this film were part of the Green Lawn Movement (Aoi Shiba no Kai), a radical disability activist group. What do you think about how their activism is portrayed on screen? Does it do justice to their beliefs and helping the audience understand their activist actions?
- How are the bodies of different people with CP depicted in the film? What do you think was the significance of the scene in which Yokota Hiroshi is nude?
- Much contemporary discourse about disability in media relates to the question of representation—for example, what characters constitutes "good" and "bad" representation of disabled people; what are the limits of this kind of representation; and the ethics of representing a group that is not one's own versus representing one's self as a spokesperson

for a larger community. How does *Goodbye CP* deal with questions of representing disabled people and their perspectives on screen?
- How does the movie deal with the issue of accessibility, particularly in relation to urban infrastructure like train stations? Why did Hara ask Yokota to go around without a wheelchair for the film? What do you think of this choice?

Relevant Vocabulary:

Here is a great general guide for best practices in disability-related language by the Center for Disability Rights.

Credits/Acknowledgements:

Thank you to Anne-Lise Mithout and Frank Mondelli for their suggestions, and for providing discussion questions 8 and 1 respectively.