

Black and White in Colour

A view of past displacement

The Displaced View
Directed by Midi Onodera
Kingston International Film Festival

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The Queen's Journal

It is said that art reflects life. Often, however, this connection is tenuous at best – a mere shadow vision. But in Toronto filmmaker Midi Onodera's *The Displaced View* – one of the films featured at *Black and White in Colour*, the Kingston International Film Festival – the reflection of life in art is indisputable.

The Displaced View is the story of Onodera's struggle to fit together the puzzle of her family history, played out against a backdrop of racism and oppression. The past comes to the viewer as it does to Onodera herself – in scraps and fragments which must be pieced together to form a whole. And the whole, the film acknowledges, will never truly be complete – the missing links are irretrievably lost to time.

Only fifty-two minutes long, *The Displaced View* is densely layered with political, social and psychological commentary.

As a third-generation Japanese-Canadian, Onodera battles to reclaim her past through the accounts of second and first-generation Japanese-Canadian women, her mother and grandmother. The barrier of age, the 'generation gap', is further complicated by the barrier of language – Onodera's grandmother speaks only Japanese and Onodera only English. Communication between the two is dependent upon the mediation of Onodera's mother – and much, *The Displaced View* implies, is lost or transformed in the translation. "There are so many things I would like to ask you – myself – not through Mom, but myself."

The Displaced View obliquely comments on the fallibility of

memory, the impossibility of ever reconstructing the past exactly as it was. Bits and pieces are all we can hope to gather, and the process of fitting them together is one of continual verification, an "ongoing chain of connections and understandings." At best only a partial portrait can be drawn. In addition, "everyone has their own story," their own version of past events, and Onodera implies that such interpretations may differ radically.

been here? You have such good English.' I can *only* speak English."

"Am I a Japanese-Canadian or a Canadian of Japanese descent?" Onodera wonders – the question is more than simply one of semantics. How does our cultural and racial past determine our present? and our future? Onodera explores this in the context of the dynamics of the relationships between the three generations of women.

in. Don't make waves." There is awareness that the fight for individuality may often have unforeseen benefits – "because I had to fight for my sexuality, I wound up protecting my culture."

And there is celebration of the gifts unconsciously imparted from one generation to another – "Through you I've gained the strength to be who I am. And I've found my own."

This is not a film of high drama

of Onodera, her mother's accented English and her grandmother's Japanese – without subtitles – the viewer's inability to comprehend reflecting that of Onodera herself. In contrast, much of the English narration is subtitled in Japanese.

By far the most poignant aspect of *The Displaced View* – and the cornerstone on which it rests – is the obviously close relationship of Onodera and her grandmother. Onodera's desire to reclaim the past, to substitute the reality for the fairytale she created as a child, is frustrated by an insurmountable language barrier. However, despite their inability to communicate, it is her grandmother who bequeathed to Onodera the strength to be herself. *The Displaced View* ends with Onodera's greatest fear – that her grandmother will die. "What will happen when you are gone?" Death is the ultimate silencer of memory, of the past. With the death of Onodera's grandmother, an entire chapter in her family history will be forever lost.

Capturing the frustration of the inability to know and the impossibility of finding out, *The Displaced View* speaks eloquently to and of those who have ever felt a vital part of their family history to be forever and irrevocably obscured behind the barriers of age and language.

Black and White in Colour presents one screening only of *The Displaced View* on Thursday, November 1 at noon in the International Centre. Filmmaker Midi Onodera will be present at the screening and will make a presentation in Room 207 of Ontario Hall at 10:30 a.m. on Friday, November 2. Friday afternoon, at 3 p.m., Onodera will participate in a panel discussion – "Made in Colour" – concerning race and representation in film, to be held in the International Centre.



Toronto filmmaker Midi Onodera will be present at the screening of her film *The Displaced View*

The task of sifting fact from fiction becomes impossible.

Onodera also points to racist assumptions prevalent in society – assumptions which can hamper the reclamation of one's cultural past. In an attempt to create the possibility for communication with her grandmother, Onodera once enrolled in a Japanese language course. She quit after two weeks. "Everyone assumes that, because you look Japanese, you can speak Japanese. 'How long have you

There is recognition of the incapable influence of the generations before us, even when we strive to act against them – "perhaps I am more like my mother than I like to think." There is rebellion against ways of thinking and lifestyles incompatible with those we have chosen – "I refuse to be someone I'm not – a marriage simply to carry on the family."

There is rejection of past behaviour – "I was taught never to stand out in a crowd. Always blend

– not a thrill-junky's pet poison. Despite the action and speed portrayed in some scenes, *The Displaced View* has a slow-moving, dream-like quality, as it intercuts from one scene to another and back again. Family photographs, clips of performances by the Wasabi Daiko drum group, footage of a Japanese-Canadian cultural festival, home movie-type sequences of the family celebrating the grandmother's birthday – all are overlaid with the voice-narration