

A Clumsy Movie: *On Oxhide II*

by Liu Jiayin

Subtraction

I continue to subtract.

You can put a lot into a film and think you still have a film.

But what you have is no longer a film.

I want to wring the sponge dry.

Jogging is jogging, not track and field.

A film is a film, not acrobatics.

I am focused on what a film can do without; that is want to get rid of.

I don't want to add; I want to subtract.

I want to get back to basics and build my clumsy movie with my clumsy hands.

The Basic Elements

One table; three people; one scene; nine shots.

These are the basic elements of *Oxhide II*.

The film was shot in my parents' home, which is 540 square feet in total; the entire film was shot in the 430-square foot main room, which is where the table is.

The characters of the father, mother, and daughter are played by my parents and me; the three of us made up the entire crew. No one else was involved in shooting the film, unless you count the three cats.

The camera moves around the single space of the table, and the film unfolds in real time.

In a steady series of shots from fixed positions the camera moves in a clockwise direction around the axis of the table.

Time and Space

In *Oxhide II* the idea is to shrink time and space.

Films usually link different times and different spaces together through editing. Shooting a single space in real time is a constraint, but this constraint can be liberating.

The size of anything is relative; what matters is the method of observation.

If you observe closely, the most trivial event can be dramatic.

A strand of hair can block out the sun, and the smallest movement or the slightest look can be a climax.

With no natural scenery and no sex and violence, a family sitting down to a meal is fascinating.

The room may be small, but I can shoot it the way one would shoot outdoors, and the reverse would also be true.

I am passionate about trying to understand the smallest things we do as

humans, including each moment of hesitation and doubt. We should not overlook the tiny, quotidian details of life.

What others get rid of, I want to keep.

Cinematography

The aspect ratio is 1:2.35.

Widescreen makes two different things possible. By stretching the width of the standard frame you allow the audience to see more. But by compressing the height of the standard frame you are making the audience see less. I'm interested in the latter.

Fixed camera position.

The use of a fixed camera position for each shot was not a choice dictated by the objective conditions of the shooting environment; it was my personal aesthetic choice. There is beauty in a fixed shot, and the use of fixed camera positions fits the preoccupation of the film, which is observation.

The camera moves around the axis of the table. We start at degree 0 in the first shot and move in a clockwise direction in a complete 360-degree circle. There is about a 45 degree shift between each fixed camera position.

From *Oxhide* to *Oxhide II*

Oxhide II was an extremely low budget movie and so I'm embarrassed that two years passed between the two films. Arriving at a shooting schedule was a long, slow process, but not because there was anything stopping me, it was just me. It was entirely me. After I left *Oxhide* behind, I did a lot, and the most important thing I did was think. In that process of thinking I finally understood some things about *Oxhide*, and that allowed me to continue to explore film narration from a theoretical standpoint.

Many people said *Oxhide* took a particular aesthetic to an extreme. For me, *Oxhide* doesn't seem to be so extreme anymore; it is kind of a jumble. *Oxhide* doesn't have too little in it; it has too much in it. It isn't pioneering; it is traditional.

I had thought that the fundamental element that would allow me to continue the *Oxhide* series was my parents' old apartment, but I don't think that way anymore. The soul of *Oxhide* is a family, a father, a mother and a daughter, and the relationship among them.

As long as my family is around, *Oxhide* will continue. It might be in the apartment, but we might go outside. We might go to a park. As long as we are there, no matter where we are, it's all *Oxhide*.

Oxhide is not my only subject, but it is a subject that will go on because life will go on.

--trans. by T. Moran