

interview, making the film coherent and meaningful. Positioned omnipotently off-screen, the narrator wields considerable power over the film, to the degree that he is often called the "voice of God." Perhaps it's not surprising that this voice is almost always male. Woman's voice is usually restricted from this potent point of origin and enunciation, especially in American films

Not only is the narrator male, but the intended audience seems to be as well. The narrator of *Women of Steel* addresses a male "we" about a female "them." In a condescending attempt at praise, the narrator says, "Of course, *we* had long since accepted *their* aptitude in fabrication, the swift, sure dexterity of their fingers [emphasis mine]." This kind of comment reveals that at the deepest level of documentary voice, the film is organized around a masculine point of view. Thus the women of steel are objects of speech and of looks; though we hear them talk, their interviews are within the domain of the documentary's main, masculine voice.

— Abé Mark Nornes

We Are Working So So Hard  
(*Watashitachi wa konna ni hataraitte iru*)

Japan Direction: Mizuki Sōya, Production: Asahi, Photography: Konishi Shōzō, Print: 16mm, sd., b&w, 18 min., 1945.

Produced in the final months of the war, the title of this film is a complaint about working conditions, and the film itself is the government's stern answer: work harder. The setting is a clothing factory, where women churn out piles of uniforms in furious fast motion. In retrospect, the film's urgent tone appears desperate, and within six weeks of its release, Hiroshima lay in ruins. Seen together with its American counterpart, *Women of Steel*, we can compare attitudes toward working women and their relative position in each society.

The first clear difference is the nature of the work and how it's represented cinematically. Instead of pouring molten steel, these women are performing the most domestic of chores: sewing. This "women's work" is, indeed, performed. The mundane task of sewing endless uniforms is transformed into dance-like spectacle through fast and slow motion. The fast motion creates a sense of urgency and the slow motion turns the work into a thing of beauty.

In the *Women of Steel* essay above, I discussed the power relations evident in the film's organization, particularly the narration. Narrators, particularly those that remain off-screen, are a site of power to the extent that they orient the film in a variety of ways. Off-screen female narrators in American films are extremely rare, but not in Japanese films. Many Japanese films, features and documentaries alike, use women's voices for narration. *We Are Working So So Hard* uses an off-screen, female narrator, but as a site of power this narration is weakened by the grammatical inflection of the text itself. As in the film's title, the narrator uses the first person plural "we" (*watashitachi*). While her voice is singled out above all others, the narrator places herself within the group that's working so hard on-screen. This position has little of the objectifying, controlling power of *Woman of Steel's* omnipotent male narrator.

The fact that the narrator herself is included in the on-screen group strengthens the emphasis on group work and submerged or diffused subjectivity. This is common to most Japanese films of the war period. While the American women of steel are individualized by interviews and are introduced by name, the women of this uniform factory work as a harmonic mass. Virtually the only time a woman worker is singled out for individual attention is when one gives a sewing demonstration. However, as soon as the lecture is over, she quietly melts back into the crowd.

Generally, the documentary form places much less emphasis on individuals than fiction filmmaking. Documentaries encourage us to identify with the film as a member of society or humanity. In comparing Japanese and American war documentary, however, we can see how the American films still rely heavily on characters as hooks for our identification. Examples from this volume would include *Jap Zero*, *The Fleet That Came to Stay*, *Let There Be Light*, and *Women of Steel*. *We Are Working So So Hard* is typical of Japanese war documentary in that audiences are encouraged to identify with an on-screen group, and by extension the *kokutai* (national structure or body politic). This is one reason for the obligatory exercise scenes that may puzzle foreign viewers of Japanese war films. There could be no better example of group unity than rows upon rows of healthy, young bodies moving in synch. Furthermore, these are group activities (exercises, factory work, singing) that the audience itself was undoubtedly performing on a daily basis.

There is one individualized figure in *We Are Working So So Hard*, and this is the key to the film's sexual politics. While women fade in and out of their group, the male supervisor remains apart. He barely tilts in the face of the women's deep bows. He drills them on the correct way to march, and leads their exercises. He is geographically separated from the group, giving speeches to them from a platform. At lunch, he sits at his own table and accepts tea from one of the workers. While he supervises their every move, they are infantilized by being shown skipping ropes and playing on swings. As Father/Manager/Superior Officer, he takes the place of a substitute patriarch. Together with his factory workers, he functions as a microcosm of the emperor and his subjects. By contrast, *Women of Steel* presents a much more positive image of women and their potential.

— *Abé Mark Nones*

#### Justice

U.S.A. Production: Signal Corps, Print: 35mm, sd., English, b&w, 3 min., 1945.

Placed before feature films, *Justice* was a trailer designed to attract people to war jobs. It opens in a factory with the narrator calling out to the workers (and the theater's audience): "Hold on to your seats folks, have you killed a Jap soldier today?" The film continues by cataloging the horrors Chinese suffered under the Greater East-Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, using footage of Japanese massacres that were recycled in countless films, including *Let's Have a Drink* and most episodes of the *Why We Fight* series. The ending cross cuts between shots of factories and scores of Japanese corpses with the voice of God narration booming, "Every forging...Kills