Digital technologies are affecting documentary filmmaking in at least three important ways. First, the process of producing films has been de-mystified as digital technology has made filmmaking affordable and accessible to a much wider population. Today, anybody with a smart phone and a laptop can shoot, edit, and distribute a documentary film. Second, the popular use of image-manipulation software such as Photoshop or Afterimage has called into question the epistemological status of the photographic image, resulting in what some call ‘the crisis of [the] indexical sign.’ Documentary images are no longer accepted as transparent records of reality. Their credibility as a form of objective evidence has been undermined.

Third, but not least importantly, digital technologies such as 3D, Imax, and 360 degree Panoscope, intended to transform cinematic spectacle into a virtual reality experience, are altering audience encounters with documentaries. Narrative meaning is being pushed into the background, while affective aspects of the cinematic experience are being strongly enhanced. These new technologies are turning documentary film into a medium for sensory and emotional experiences, while diminishing its main social function, conventionally understood to be to record and convey ‘cognitive information’, that is, the objective facts and ‘truth’ of reality.

When these digital technologies are deployed, they shake the raison d’etre of documentary film.

In short, as documentary filmmaking has become technically accessible to a wide general public, it has become very much a part of our everyday media culture. The new immersive digital-cinematic environment, or ‘digital ecology’, is transforming documentary film into a more ‘realistic’ mode of sensory/affective communication while at the same time diminishing some of its authority to portray objective truth and communicate cognitive information. The digital ecology tends to enhance and intensify what some scholars called ‘immediation’. As Christopher Brunner puts it:

Immediation describes the immediacy of aesthetic sensation and locates the event of immediated experiences in everyday life. It highlights the immediacy with which digital processes enhance or delimit perception and affect through directly shaping experience[…] immediation underline[s] the creative role of perception as neither subjective nor objective but relational, embodied, and located in everyday life and reconsideration of the digital not as pure abstraction but a relational process immanent to perception[…].

Following Brunner, I call cinematic technologies that enhance embodied sensory/affective experi-
ences ‘technologies of immediation’. The ability of digital technologies of immediation to hyper-stimulate the senses gives rise to tremendous affective power.4

In recent years, documentary filmmakers in Japan have begun adopting these technologies in an attempt to engage the public in emotionally powerful experiences, while leaving cognitive meaning tacit. For progressive camp, this is because the rightwing LDP (Liberal Democratic Party) government has publicly rebuked mainstream media outlets critical of its policies and stances.5 Mainstream Japanese newspapers and broadcasters (public and commercial) have responded by censoring themselves. They have avoided reporting on controversial issues such as the nuclear power plant disaster in Fukushima and the protest against the U.S. military base in Okinawa, for example. Given the oppressive regime and the self-censorship of the mainstream press, progressive journalists and filmmakers have felt an urgent need to draw public attention to such issues. Both progressive and conservative camps are keen to use the new technologies to communicate affectively with the public, while shifting away from the more informational documentaries of the past. This short paper therefore poses three questions concerning the cultural and political ramifications of the use of new digital technologies of immediation in Japanese documentary films: How effective are digital technologies in providing an affective experience to the public? What are the politics of these affective communications in documentaries? Is there anything inherent to technologies of immediation that gives rise either to conservative or progressive social relations?

The 3D documentary film entitled Giant Tsunami: The 3.11 Memoir for the Future (Kawamura 2015) provides an example of the affective turn in Japanese documentary filmmaking along with self-censorship by mainstream filmmakers. The filmmakers recorded the towns and villages destroyed in the tsunami and the people who have continued to live in the affected area over a three-year period using 3D cameras. Director Kawamura stated on an official website:

Japan is an island nation blessed with exceptionally rich and beautiful nature but at the same time repeatedly hit by earthquakes, volcanoes, tsunami, and typhoons. Each time natural disaster struck, Japanese people accepted both the destruction and blessing of nature and reconstructed their lives again and again to live happily in this island of beauty. What I want to show in this documentary film, Giant Tsunami, is the pride of the Japanese people who lived and created the nation through these natural phenomena.6

The director of photography notes, ‘There is need for visual documents so we do not forget what we must not forget in future. Here, the power of 3D to convey the reality as you-are-there is significant. I strongly believe this documentary fulfills its mission to pass the message beyond 100 years [from now] about the truth of the tsunami’.

Produced by NHK Media Technology (a subsidiary of a public broadcaster), which has been developing and working with 3D technology over the past 25 years, the documentary was distributed nationwide by a major company (Sony PCL) and screened across the nation in all major Japanese cities. The feature film version is a compilation of four shorter 3D documentary films produced from 2011 to 2013 in partnership with Tohoku University’s Michinoku Sinrokuden (Northeast Japan Earthquake Story) archive project.8 The project was run by the industrial-governmental-academic institute Tohoku Daigaku Bousai Kagaku Kenkyu Kyoten (Research Center for Disaster Defense Science at

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6 See http://www.ootsunami.jp accessed at 03.12.2015

7 Ibid.

8 See http://shinrokuden.irides.tohoku.ac.jp/shinrokuden/summary accessed at 05.12.2015
Tohoku University). The institute was ostensibly established to ‘collect and archive all memories, documents, cases, knowledge relating to the Great East Japan Earthquake Disaster’. However, examination of the project’s catalog of contents reveals that the documentary materials collected is disproportionately weighted toward the direct damages of the tsunami, while very little of the disastrous consequences of the nuclear power station meltdown in Fukushima was recorded.

Along with 3D technology, small wearable cameras such as the Go Pro represent another notable new technology of immediation. Go Pro cameras, designed to record extreme-sport experiences, are often attached to the tip of a skateboard or surfboard or to a helmet worn by cyclists and skydivers. They enhance the affective power of visual communication by placing the audience in the viewpoint of the subject in action. These cameras capture images that affect audiences physically, making it possible for even low-budget documentaries to provide embodied sensory experiences as strong as high cost 3D but with qualitative differences. For example, the film *Leviathan* (2014), produced by Sensory Ethnography Lab at Harvard university, was praised as ‘Looks and sounds like no other documentary in memory’ or ‘Mind blowing’ by reviewers.9 The film was shot entirely on a fishing trawler operating in the ocean. It depicts activities in and around the fishing trawler not only from a human viewpoint but also from the viewpoints of fish, seagulls, machines, and so on. A Go Pro camera was attached to a seagull to capture the visual experience of its flying and diving into the ocean. Then the POV captured by the camera seems to be that of a fish swimming, being caught by a fishing net, and lifted onto the deck of the trawler.

This use of Go Pro cameras to create an immersive cinematic experience was adopted by the peace activist filmmakers Fujimoto Yukihisa and Kageyama Asakowas to produce an independent political documentary film entitled *Sea of Killing: Okinawa Henoko [assatsu no umi]* (Fujimoto & Kageyama 2015).10 The filmmakers have participated in and documented the anti-U.S. military base movement in Okinawa since the early 2000s.11 The planned relocation of the U.S. military base from Futenma to Henoko on Okinawa generated large-scale protests both on land and on sea. The new base will be constructed on top of a coral reef and sea grass beds, in an area inhabited by dugong. The relocation would not only betray the people of Okinawa but also be an ecological disaster. Despite local opinion being firmly against construction of the new base, as demonstrated in three elections won by politicians from the anti-base camp, the current national government is determined to ignore local voices and go ahead with relocation plans. Non-violent protesters in Okinawa have been met with disproportionate means of control by riot police. This film closely follows and documents protestors’ actions from within. The camera is always on the protesters’ side in recording their actions as well as the reactions of the police and coast guard against them. According to Kageyama, the documentary film was meant not only to record the protests but also as an intervention. By recording interactions between protestors and police, her and Fujimoto hoped to restrain police brutality.12

The filmmakers initially found it difficult to film many of the interactions at sea because protesters were on isolated canoes and the coast guard prevented camera boats from entering this restricted zone. The filmmakers then adopted a wearable device – the Go Pro camera. They asked protestors

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9 The Sensory Ethnography Lab (SEL) is an experimental laboratory at Harvard University that promotes innovative combinations of aesthetics and ethnography. It uses analog and digital media to explore the aesthetics and ontology of the natural and unnatural world. See https://sel.fas.harvard.edu accessed 3.12.2015. 
11 Their previous documentary film, *Marines Go Home, Henoko, Mehyangni, Yausubetsu* (2005), recorded anti-base protests in Okinawa, Korea, and Hokkaido.
in the canoe squad to wear helmets on which these small waterproof cameras had been attached. In one scene, a member of the canoe squad paddles into the restricted sea zone to protest against workers who are rigging the landfill operation. Soon after, a coast guard motorboat shows up to stop and remove the canoe squad. When a protestor resists, she or he is dragged out of the canoe and pushed under water by the coast guards. Some of the protestors nearly drowned.

Recording these events with small cameras affixed to protestors’ helmets allowed audiences to experience them from the exact viewpoint of the protestors as they resisted and struggled with the coast guard. The rough and wobbly visions captured by the Go Pro cameras do not contain much cognitive information, but they do stimulate a visceral response in the audience. By providing a point of identification from which the audience can sympathize with the protestors, they mobilize the audience with affective power.

**Discussion and conclusion**

In today’s digital ecology of filmmaking, documentaries tend to foreground the immediacy of the senses while pushing back the mediation of meaning. Both films examined above strive for an immersive cinematic experience through sensory stimulation by use of technologies of immediation such as 3D and Go Pro. They are designed not only to convey some cognitive information but also to have strong, long-lasting, emotional and visceral impacts on their audiences. These two films were made with different socio-political intentions, however.

Audiences of *Giant Tsunami* praised the ‘feel as if you are there’ quality of the 3D film.

Some viewers seemed to have adopted the patriotic affect of the film in mentioning that it was important not only not to forget the people who suffered from the tsunami, but also who we are as the Japanese nation. Buried under these dominant patriotic readings of the film were a few resistant readings, as some people pointed out the conspicuous absence of images of Fukushima and the nearby nuclear power plant in the documentary.

Audience members had very different responses to *Sea of Killing: Okinawa Henoko*. Some were shocked by the brutality of the coast guard and many mentioned they felt strongly indignant on behalf of the protestors. Others mentioned that the wobbly images captured by the Go Pro made them nauseous. Still others complained that the film was not sufficiently informative, that it did not explain the complexity of the issue but simply displayed of protest actions and violence.

The affective power of technologies of immediation is clearly apparent in both films. The encoded political meanings of the films were also challenged in both cases. Thus, some space for critical contemplation obviously remains even when the technology of immediation gives rise to affective power. It is crucial that we develop a critical understanding of the processes of immediation to better understand the social consequences of the digitization of visual culture. Future research will continue to explore how and what kinds of social relations are co-emerging with the embodied, sensory, and affective experiences immediated by such technologies.

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13 See http://coco.to/movie/38722 accessed at 08.12.2015

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* This research was supported by Komazawa university’s 2015 Special Research Program.