UNDERSTANDING PHOTOGRAPHS: Example #4

Shomei Tomatsu, *Protest (From the series: Protest)* Tokyo, 1969

VISUAL

A **raw**, **grainy** and **impressionistic monochrome street scene.** What looks like a young person is caught in the act of throwing something. The figure is **distorted** against a **blurred** and **out of focus background**. The camera appears to have been **panning** across the subject during the exposure. The image verges on **abstraction**. **Deep shadows** and **bright highlights** - very **few mid tones** (greys). The approach captures the **energy**, **drama** and **violence** of the **conflict**. We see only the student protester - a **symbol** of youthful resistance. **Neither a conventional street photograph** or a **documentary image** but something more **personal** and **expressive.**

TECHNICAL

The artist appears to have used a **hand held 35mm camera** and at least a **50mm lens**. The use of **available light** (from street lights at night) required a **long shutter speed**. **Fast film** and **low light** produces a **grainy** image - typical of Tomatsu's style. **Panning** creates relatively static figure against **blurred movement** of background. Printing emphasises **tonal contrast** and **grain**.

CONTEXTUAL

Tomatsu is one of the leading **post-war Japanese** photographers, He was part of **VIVO** (1957-1961), a photography **cooperative**, along with two other major Japanese photographers Ikko Narahara and Eikoh Hosoe. He is best known as for photographs from the book 'Hiroshima-Nagasaki Document' 1961 and his **documentation** of Japan during its **post-war transformation** and the influence of American culture. His images of **student protests** in the late **1960s** capture the sudden **turbulence of social change**. Tomatsu later said he saw the youthful rebellion of that time "through the eyes of a stray dog". He was an important influence on his younger friend Daido Moriyama.

CONCEPTUAL

- Conflict - viewpoint?
- Playing with focus and movement - deliberate motion blur to suggest instability and turbulence.
- Documenting social change in a series of images
- Public and private
- Darkness - photographing at night - mystery/danger
- Youth culture
- Disregarding conventional techniques - emphasis on mood/atmosphere