

CENTER FOR EAST ASIAN STUDIES
FRIDAY NOON FILM SERIES

PRESENTS

Science Fiction in Japanese Film: Monsters, Mutants and Machines

Painfully aware of the devastating impact of technology through the A-bomb, Japanese filmmakers beginning with Honda Inoshiro – of Godzilla fame – have continued to produce exciting and thought-provoking works of science fiction for half a century. (While a handful of prewar science fiction films exist, subtitled prints are unavailable). This film series will present a collection of representative Japanese science fiction works, in the live action format as well as the animated format (anime), which unlike its American counterpart, is not mostly geared toward younger audiences. Moreover, since the majority of Japanese science fiction films are anime, it is only natural to include them here. While several of the films written soon after the war deal with the aftermath of nuclear destruction (Godzilla, The H-Man, The Face of Another), space exploration (Galaxy Express 999), or genetic engineering (Parasite Eve). Each film will be introduced with a five-minute video presentation providing background information, poster art and other visuals to complement the viewing experience.

This series will be presented by Xavier Bensky.

March 29: Godzilla, King of Monsters

Terry Morse, US, 1956, 119 mins. (Original film: Gojira, Directed by Honda Inoshiro, Japan, 1954)

One of the longest-running series in film history began with Inoshiro Honda's grim, black-and-white allegory for the devastation wrought on Japan by the atomic bomb. As his visual metaphor, Honda uses a 400-foot tall mutant dinosaur called Gojira, awakened from the depths of the sea as a rampaging nuclear nightmare, complete with glowing dorsal fins and fiery, radioactive breath. Crushing ships, villages, and buildings in his wake, Gojira marches toward Tokyo, bringing all of the country's worst nightmares back until an evil more terrible bomb — capable of sucking all the oxygen from the sea — returns the monster to its watery grave. The original film, Gojira (1954), is chilling, and brimming with explicitly stated anti-American sentiment. All of that was removed when the film was picked up for American distribution two years later and given the name Godzilla, King of Monsters, at which time newly filmed inserts, featuring Raymond Burr as reporter Steve Martin (!), were expertly edited into the original footage. Incidentally, the name gojira, a combination of gorilla and kujira (Japanese for "whale") was allegedly the nickname for a clumsy Toho stagehand. English dubbed.

April 5: The H-Man

Honda Inoshiro, Japan, 1958, 79 mins.

The H-Man rates as one of the most genuinely frightening Japanese horror films of the 1950s. When a minor-league drug runner completely vanishes, leaving only his clothes behind, detective Tominaga (Akihiko Hirata) investigates. Along the way, Tominaga makes the acquaintance of scientist Masada (Kenji Sahara), who theorizes that the missing dooper was melted into a liquid "H-Man" as a result of being exposed to nuclear radiation. Sure enough, the H-Man soon resurfaces, seeking out victims to "dissolve" so that he can continue to survive. Director Honda Inoshiro's matter-of-fact approach to the material is far scarier than his giant monster pictures from the same era. English dubbed.

April 12: The Face of Another

Teshigahara Hiroshi, Japan, 1966, 110 mins.

Bearing traces of both Frankenstein and the 1959 Georges Franju horror classic Eyes without a Face, The Face of Another is a brilliant and disturbing film by Teshigahara Hiroshi. His face horribly disfigured in an accident, Nakadai, a wealthy industrialist, commissions a special mask from a renowned plastic surgeon. Nakadai's wife fails to recognize her husband and makes advances to him, which effectively destroys their relationship. Driven

insane, Nakadai turns to murder to compensate for the loss of his identity. Metaphorically, the film treats the chronic anxieties of powerlessness and the uniquely Japanese terror of facelessness through nuclear devastation. The Face of Another is Teshigahara's second cinematic adaptation of Abe Kobo's fiction, the first being the cult classic *Woman in the Dunes*. Japanese with English subtitles.

April 19: *Metropolis* (2001)

Rin Taro, Japan, 2001, 107 mins.

Metropolis was a manga (comic) by Tezuka Osamu (the creator of *Astro Boy*) which was inspired by the visionary German novel and film of the '20s. Now, writer Katsuhiro Otomo and director Rin Taro – whose credits between them include such anime touchstones as *X* and *Perfect Blue* – have crafted a jaw-droppingly beautiful film that upends nearly every cliché of Japanese animation. Mixing elements of film noir and the dystopic SF of the German *Metropolis*, the story hinges on the fate of Tima, a girl-like robot that the sinister Duke Red intends to use to control the world. That's bad news for the city's underclass of impoverished humans and the much-abused robot laborers that have replaced them, unless a bumbling Japanese detective and his plucky nephew Ken'ichi can foil the scheme. The theme of destructive technology vs. humanism contained in the original manga – written in 1949 immediately after the nuclear bombs in Nagasaki and Hiroshima – is echoed in *Metropolis*' own cinematic language. It uses breathtaking computer graphics to depict the city and its technology while its "human heart" is conveyed through Tezuka's simple yet expressive line-drawn characters and a poignant swing Jazz musical score. Japanese with English subtitles

April 26: *Astro Boy* (Original TV Episodes 1-4)

Mushi Productions, Japan, 1963, 100 mins.

Astro Boy, based on Tezuka Osamu's pioneering 1951 manga, was Japan's first attempt at an animated TV series from 1963 to 1966, and is considered a seminal work for animators and science fiction writers alike. In "The Birth of Astroboy," scientist Dr. Boyton disowns the super-robot he created in his deceased son's image. But Astroboy is soon befriended by Dr. Elefun, and their adventures begin. In "The Monster Machine," the alien Ork uses Dr. Muddle's radio telescope to control his mind and build a terrible machine which, among other things, teleports Ork to earth. Only Astroboy, with the help of an Ultragun can stop Ork and his monster machine. In "The Terrible Time Gun," mad scientist Doctor Tempo sends Dr. Elefun and Astroboy back to the time of King Arthur through his invention, the Time Gun. Astroboy saves the day while Dr. Elefun finds them a way back to the future. In "One Million Mammoth Snails," the giant snails bred by an eccentric scientist escape from his overcrowded mountaintop laboratory and crawl toward the helpless cities. Astroboy seems to be the only resource when the Army, Navy, and Marines fail. English dubbed.

May 3: *Galaxy Express 999*

Rin Taro, Japan, 1979, 129 mins.

Created by Matsumoto Leiji, a pioneer in anime with his series *Space Battleship Yamato*, *Galaxy Express 999* is one of the most famous and beloved animated films in Japan. Tetsuro is a boy living in the slums of a future Earth; his mother was killed by the evil cyborg, Count Mecha, who hunts humans for sport. To achieve his revenge, he must get to a distant planet where he can trade his mortal body for a deathless mechanical one. A mysterious woman named Maetel rescues him from the robo-police and travels with him among the planets via the *Galaxy Express* railway. Tetsuro's search for vengeance builds into a war between humans and cyborgs. As the battle reaches its climax, the space pirates Captain Harlock and Queen Emeraldas, arrive with unexpected assistance. Matsumoto Leiji owes much of his inspiration for his science-fiction anime epic to Miyazawa Kenji's 1927 novel "Night of the *Galaxy Express*" which he read in his youth. Japanese with English subtitles

May 10: *Roujin Z*

Kitakubo Hiroyuki, Japan, 1991, 80 mins.

Japan faces the expensive problems of caring for an aging population. As a solution, Mr. Terada, an official in a mysterious government ministry, unveils the Z-001, a high-tech bed that cares for an invalid's every need.

His chosen guinea pig of a patient is Mr. Takazawa, an aged man in the care of Haruko, a pretty young nurse. Haruko realizes that the machine can't attend to Mr. Takazawa's emotional needs and tries to rescue him. When Terada foils her efforts, she turns to a group of elderly patients – who turn out to be ace hackers. The complications pile up when an unscrupulous member of Terada's staff reveals that the Z-001 is actually a prototype battle robot. But once Haruko's aged hackers gain control of it, the Z-001 takes on the personality of Mr. Takazawa's late wife. It sets out to realize his dream of spending a day at the beach at Kamakura, wreaking havoc wherever it goes. Although it's filled with robot battles, sexual jokes, and sinister-sounding acronyms, *Roujin Z*, written and designed by Otomo Katsuhiro, the director of *Akira*, has a humane warmth that sets it apart from run-of-the-mill anime features.

May 17: *Parasite Eve*

Ochiai Masayuki, Japan, 1997, 120 min.

Ochiai Masayuki makes his screen debut with this bio-horror flick about killer mitochondria threatening to dominate humanity from within, based on Sena Hideaki's best selling book. The film opens with a traffic accident that renders the scientist Nagashima Toshiaki's (Mikami Hiroshi) wife Kiyomi (Hazuki Riona) brain dead on the day of their first wedding anniversary. Grief-stricken, he vows to make her live again and steals her liver from her corpse. While examining the disembodied organ, a sticky goo attacks his assistant Sachiko (Nakajima Tomoko) and suddenly Sachiko turns into Toshiaki's dead wife. Later, the scientist realizes that his dead wife is in fact a dastardly organization of sentient mitochondria bent on making a new species that will wipe out humanity. Will mankind's cytoplastic foe prevail? Japanese with English subtitle

May 24: *Perfect Blue*

Kon Satoshi, Japan, 1999, 81 min.

One of the most ambitious animated films to date, *Perfect Blue* is an adult psycho-thriller that uses the freedom of the animated image to create the subjective reality of a young actress haunted by the ghost of her past identity. Mima is a singer who leaves her teeny-bop trio to become an actress in a violent television series, a career move that angers her fans, who prefer to see her as the pert, squeaky-clean pop idol. Plagued by self-doubt and tormented by humiliating compromises, she discovers that someone has posted disquietingly intimate details about her private life on the web. Soon she is stalked, in her waking and sleeping moments, by an accusing alter ego who claims to be "the real Mima," until she collapses into madness as her coworkers are brutally slain around her. Director Kon Satoshi, adapting the novel by Takeuchi Yoshikazu, shows us the world from her schizophrenic perspective: days blur, dreams cross over into the waking world, the TV show blends into her real life, until her life merges with her part and she can't separate the "virtual" from the real-life stalkers. While this film isn't science fiction, it poses serious questions about technology's alienating effects, either through the manipulation of images in the entertainment industry or through the anti-social potential of the Internet. Japanese with English subtitles

ALL SCREENINGS ARE FREE AND TAKE PLACE AT JUDD 302, BEGINNING AT 12:40 PM. FEEL FREE TO BRING YOUR OWN LUNCH TO EAT WHILE WATCHING THE FILMS!