

Every Friday
at 12:40pm

WINTER 2007
CENTER FOR EAST ASIAN STUDIES
FRIDAY NOON FILM SERIES

A BRIGHT FUTURE: Japanese Cinema and the New, New Youth Generation



In recent years, new Japanese directors have achieved notoriety with iconoclastic films on dysfunctional families and troubled youth. From lyrical meditation to outright confrontation, these films explore the peculiar anxieties of their era as embodied by embattled school kids and young adults unable to grow up. A wayward generation represents the greater fears and longings of an entire society. While each of these films presents a unique viewpoint, generational conflict and the continuing relevance of older social mores remain central issues. Parental figures in these films range from the absent to the ineffectual; when adults do attempt to assert control, their efforts seem doomed to failure. Identity is hard-won. Interpersonal relationships are heavily mediated by new technologies and escapist concepts of selfhood. Newfound communities and surrogate families aren't always what they seem. Nouveau deviance is blamed for a host of anti-social behaviors, yet such transgressions also open up previously undreamt-of possibilities for expression. This series represents a fresh perspective on humanity from the imaginations of 10 talented filmmakers, whose works explore the world of the shin shinjinrui, the "new, new breed" of Japanese youth who came of age in the 1990s. Amid these characters' attempts to maintain connections with themselves and others, we are reminded of why we need to do so in the first place. If you listen carefully, we're sure you'll hear the faint music of bizarre optimism...

This series is presented by Laura Lee and Diane Wei Lewis, graduate students in the Committee on Cinema and Media Studies.

**ALL SCREENINGS ARE FREE AND TAKE PLACE AT JUDD 302, BEGINNING AT 12:40 PM.
THE FILMS ARE IN JAPANESE WITH ENGLISH SUBTITLES.**

January 5: Bright Future (Akarui mirai)

Kiyoshi KUROSAWA, 2004, 92 minutes

Instead of focusing on Japan's youngest misfits, Kurosawa looks at that awkward in-between generation that fears becoming part of the older generation, can't function independently, and seems to be sapped of its youthful vitality. Yuji and Mamoru work part-time in a washcloth laundry, where their middle-aged boss overzealously tries to make friends. As if trapped in the same channels, the maladjusted two are independently compelled to commit the same crime. Mamoru leaves Yuji in the wake, with a pet jellyfish and elaborate instructions for care. Yuji and Mamoru's father attempt to move on, but find that the will to survive and the will to change one's nature might not be the same thing. Once again, the director of *Pulse* and *Cure* creates a fantastical portrait of Tokyo in this thoughtful meditation on human nature, urban architecture, and all their unknown corridors.

January 12: Visitor Q (Bizita Q)

Takashi MIIKE, 2001, 84 minutes

At once an attack on the nuclear family, a commentary on the voyeurism of reality TV, and a scathing and hilarious taboo breaker for its own sake, this film is all Miike: he has built his reputation directing dark, violent films that are both scandalous and topical. In this one a father, a down-on-his-luck TV reporter, gets more than he bargains for when he decides to turn the camera on his own incredibly dysfunctional family, whose members are powerless to help themselves or one another. Mommy's throwing knives and on heroin, the bullied son wields switches during sadistic bouts, and the daughter's a hooker. But when a mysterious guest intervenes, hidden desires become healing. This may be the only instance in which spontaneous lactation and necrophilia become key to the integrity of the family unit. No wonder the results are so very far from normal.

January 19: Suicide Club (Jisatsu circle)

Shion SONO, 2002, 99 minutes

Not-so-hardboiled detectives investigate a series of suicides that seem to have no relation. Meanwhile, large coils of skin are found sewn together from the flesh of the dead. The young victims are clearly "linked," yet, as a series of taunting phone calls from a mysterious child caller point out, the cops don't get the connection. Often compared to *Battle Royale* for its outrageously irreverent critique of generational deadlock, *Suicide Club* is a far more meandering mélange of pop idol culture, Internet message boards, noir horror, and low camp. There's the requisite spectacular opening sequence in which 54 high school girls throw themselves on the rails at Shinjuku Station—but who would've expected a glam rock ballad performed in a bowling alley-turned-dungeon of iniquity? Notorious *Suicide Club* isn't the most trenchant social commentary, but it is damn well unforgettable.

January 26: Bounce Ko Gals

Masato HARADA, 1997, 109 minutes

This film takes on "compensated dating" (*enjo kosai*), the shady practice of young girls getting paid to go on dates—and often more—with older men. In the '90s, this much-hyped form of prostitution responded to both men's inexhaustible Lolita fetish and girls' eager quest for all things with a designer label. Whereas others have taken a documentary-like approach to the subject, this film flaunts its fictionality. Yet it resists insincerity, which is a difficult feat when teenagers are shown selling used underwear to the highest bidders and exchanging tales of their most sordid deeds. Lisa falls on bad luck upon arriving in Tokyo and takes up with a group of girls, led by Jonko, that gets in over its head in the underworld playground of the Shibuya streets. *Bounce Ko Gals* depicts the intersection of prurience and consumerism. Like Jonko says, when adults act like kids, kids gain power.

February 2: Dark Water

Hideo NAKATA, 2002, 100 minutes

Nakata's 1997 film *Ringu* showed a reporter and a ghostly videocassette locked in a deadly race to get to viewers first. If that film can be read as a parable about the contagion of images in contemporary society, *Dark Water* is an edifyingly chilling comment on broken homes. A young mother is locked in a custody battle with her scummy ex-husband, stretched to the limit trying to balance work and parenting. Given her own lonely childhood, she's especially sensitive to the consequences for her own daughter. In the meantime, a dead girl haunting their building reaches out—but for what or to whom? With a gruesome poignancy rivaling that of *Rosemary's Baby*, Nakata lays out the themes that would make his American remake *The Ring Two* a brilliant disaster. This is his original exploration of the indestructible bond between mother and child, and all attendant anxieties.

February 9: Blue Spring (Aoi haru)

Toshiaki TOYODA, 2001, 83 minutes

Violent crime director Toyoda focuses on youth in this film based on a manga by Taiyo Matsumoto. This tale about the end of friendship and youth unfolds in a high school where choosing ice cream is a matter of life and death, and the only adult worth admiring is the midget gardener Mr. Harada. In this school cum graffiti-laden wasteland, the only thing students are being prepared for is a career in the yakuza. But the firm hierarchy of the school gang, led by Kujo, collapses amid violent anarchic assaults. These youth have no dreams, as the self-destructive paths they choose demonstrate, but they are very cool—Toyoda's stylized execution and the pounding soundtrack by Japanese garage punk band Thee Michelle Gun Elephant see to that. And under it all the director's occasional bent toward the poetic forges a faint glimmer of hope.

February 16: A Touch of Fever (Hatachi no binetsu)

Ryosuke HASHIGUCHI, 1993, 114 minutes

Tatsuru is a college student who has a girlfriend during the day but at night works as a hustler at the bar Pinocchio. Impassive, he moves from encounter to encounter. But newcomer to the scene Shin challenges the cool collectivity Tatsuru has perfected. By the end, each is forced to confront his feelings about the other and himself. The first low-budget indie of its day to achieve box-office success, this initial offering by gay cult director Hashiguchi launched a wave of independent filmmaking in Japan. And by extending the time-honored theme of adolescent confusion and insecurity to a gay subject, the film also opened a dialogue within Japan about gayness in general. *A Touch of Fever* is mesmerizing in no small part because of the director's unique style: his abrupt sequence transitions underscore the ironic predicament in which these youth find themselves, and his handheld-camera long takes capture moments as excruciating as they are ludicrous.

February 23: All About Lily Chou-Chou (Riri Shushu no subete)

Shunji IWAI, 2001, 146 minutes

For the unfortunate junior high school students in this film, social pathology spreads over a half-visible network of technologically mediated, profit-motivated exchanges in place of meaningful, face-to-face relationships. The only thing capable of filling the vacuum between these desperate kids is the music of enigmatic pop chanteuse Lily Chou-Chou, whose ambient music rules the "Ether." On a fansite message board, rapturous emotions are liberated by the anonymity of Internet connections. But in the real world, it's peer-to-peer brutality or paralysis at best. Adults are completely oblivious as their students and children exploit each other. Convolutional plotline meets melodramatic clarity in this film's incredibly beautiful high-definition, super-saturated color images.

March 2: Moonlight Whispers (Gekko no Sasayaki)

Akihiko SHIOTA, 1999, 100 minutes

17-year old Takuya finally gets to date Satsuki, the hot girl from kendo practice, but he can't help being more interested in collecting her dirty socks and smelling her gym shorts than in pursuing a more typical relationship. When she discovers his secret stash of taboo items, she calls it off. Takuya comes to accept his sexual predilections but is lost without Satsuki. Willing to risk everything in order to be near her, Takuya begins stalking her and proclaims his desire to be her dog. To get back at him she begins dating another guy—too bad that only makes them both need each other even more. Shiota's film offers a tender portrayal of these teens, who battle social norms to find their place. *Moonlight Whispers* explores the desperate need we all have to be true to ourselves.

March 9: Peep "TV" Show

Yutaka TSUCHIYA, 2003, 98 minutes

This deeply disturbing, semi-documentary portrait of contemporary media culture focuses on a group of loosely-connected characters and their fascination with a fictional website called "Peep TV Show." For young people whose lives revolve around the consumption and projection of images, the "realism" of webcam surveillance video, news footage of the WTC towers collapsing, and live chat with animal torture have fetishistic appeal. According to Peep TV Show's webmaster-voyeur Hasegawa, this generation's lives have been hijacked by high-speed media, and Tokyo is their Ground Zero. Images of destruction get mass distribution. Suffering is available for passive consumption. The commercial subcultures that result are captured in lush digital video, interspersed with footage from ultra-compact CCD cameras, confessional monologues, and still photographs.



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