

Film history is in constant flow and can be compared to a river. Fed by several springs it grows in size and gains power. At times the stream flows unhurried, at others cataracts, vortexes and counter-currents cause turbulences, at still others the flow seems stagnant. Sometimes the waters are very clear, sometimes muddy and smelly. Influxes prevent the river from drying up and revitalize the waters. Confluents accommodate rare species and biotopes.

If one applies this metaphor to Japanese cinema, the 1960s and early 1970s were a period of turbulent if not troubled waters. After a period of continuing growth and what often is called the Second Golden Age of Japanese Cinema (the first being the 1930s), the 1960s show a drastic decline in attendance figures, the decline of the studio system and the emergence of new forces: the rise of experimental film and sexploitation, the advent of the student and amateur film scene, new modes in documentary film and a diversified and innovative independent cinema. The boundaries were permeable, allowing filmmakers to move from one field to another and making possible interactions between different fields. The institution that not only reflects the changes in Japanese cinema of this period best, but that was an important motor behind these changes was the Art Theatre Guild. Founded 1961 as independent distributor of foreign art-house films, it began to produce its own films in 1967 and remained for two decades one of the most creative and innovative institutions within Japanese cinema.

In 2003 the Viennale Film Festival gave me the chance to curate a comprehensive retrospective dedicated to the Art Theatre Guild with some 35 films and edit a substantial catalogue that for the first time documents this important institution of Japanese cinema in a Western language.

This presented a perfect framework for the AAJ, the Austrian Japan-Society for Science and Arts, to organize the international symposium “Against The Grain. Changes in Japanese Cinema of the 1960s and 1970s” which puts the films of the retrospective into context. With the generous support of the Japan Foundation, for which I should like to express my sincerest thanks, it was possible to bring together experts from Japan, Europe and the United States with different backgrounds and approaches, which ensured lively and very fruitful discussions. The symposium was enriched by the participation of filmmaker Wakamatsu Kōji and the legendary producer and manager of the Shinjuku Bunka cinema Kuzui Kinshirō. Kuroki Kazuo, who was also invited, unfortunately could not attend. He had to cancel at the last moment due to health problems.

The programme consisted of six presentations and four films followed by discussions. In addition, a short film by a Japanese writer was presented as surprise film.

Programme

Monday, October 20, 2003

- 14:45 Opening
- 15:00 Roland DOMENIG (University of Vienna)
“Vortexes and counter currents. The advent of independent film productions”
- 16:00 Mark NORNES (University of Michigan)
“Documentary codes in fiction cinema in times of political stress and artistic experimentation”
- 17:00 HIRASAWA Gō (Tōkyō)
“Underground filmmakers and their struggle 1958–1976”
- 18:00 surprise film

- 18:30 Break
- 19:00 film: *Tenshi no kōkotsu* (Ecstasy of the Angels, 1972) by Wakamatsu Kōji
followed by discussion with Wakamatsu Kōji
- 21:00 film: *Tōkyō sensō sengo hiwa* (The Man Who Left His Will On Film, 1970) by Ōshima Nagisa
followed by discussion with Hirasawa Gō

Thursday, October 21, 2003

- 15:00 Max TESSIER (Paris)
“The Power of the Imaginary in the New Wave films of the 1960s and early 1970s”
- 16:00 Roberta Maria NOVIELLI (University of Venice)
“First traces of media contamination in Japanese Cinema of the 1960s”
- 17:00 YOMOTA Inuhiko (Meiji Gakuin University)
“Cultural milieu on film and the city of Shinjuku”
- 18:00 Break
- 19:00 film: *Ryōma ansatsu* (The Assassination of Ryōma, 1974) by Kuroki Kazuo
followed by discussion with Kuzui Kinshirō
- 21:00 film: *Shinjū ten no Amijima* (Double Suicide, 1969) by Shinoda Masahiro
followed by discussion with Kuzui Kinshirō

My thanks go not only to the Japan Foundation, but also to the Viennale and the Austrian Filmmuseum that hosted the symposium. The newly refurbished Filmmuseum provided an ideal framework for the symposium and the films. It has taken quite a while for the proceedings of this symposium to be published, but I am happy to present them as special edition of the MINIKOMI, the journal of

the AAJ. The Viennale’s bilingual catalogue of the Art Theatre Guild retrospective that complements this special issue, can by the way be ordered at the Website of the Viennale: www.viennale.at.

The symposium was well attended and a great success. Newspapers like the *Asahi Shinbun* and the *Tosho Shinbun*, and magazines like *Shinchō*, *Jōkyō* and *Eiga geijutsu* published reports about the symposium and retrospective and triggered a new interest in Japan as well. The symposium resulted in several spin-offs. In April 2004 the Jeongju Film Festival in Korea hosted a similar symposium as part of their ATG retrospective. Another event that was inspired by the symposium of the AAJ was the symposium “Toward a Political Modernism? Critical Japanese Cinema of the 1960s and 1970s” organized by Michael Raine at the University of Chicago in November 2004. It further explored the themes of the symposium in Vienna and enhanced the academic discussion of Japanese cinema of this period. There were also spin-offs in Japan – from DVD releases of ATG films to an upcoming new book on Kuzui Kinshirō. It is he I want to thank especially. Without him ATG would not have been what it was, and without him the symposium would also not have been what it was. Kuzui is one of those heroes of Japanese cinema whose light has remained hidden for too long. Therefore I dedicated this issue to him.

Roland Damerij