Kinema Club XIX A2—20 Years On

Dates: Friday, November 1, 2019
to Sunday, November 3, 2019

Venue: University of Michigan
City and State: Ann Arbor, MI
Organizers: Markus Nornes

In 1999, Kinema Club members met in Ann Arbor for their first gathering to talk about how Japanese film studies developed, where it was, and where we should aim for moving forward. This fall we will meet once again to take stock of the field 20 years on and discuss our bright future. In the spirit of the original Kinema Club workshop, we will discuss our past precisely to forge a collective path ahead.

Some historical background…

Younger scholars and students may not be aware of Kinema Club's origin story (a full version is on our website: https://kinemaclub.org/about-us/history). We coalesced in the early 1990s, mostly graduate students interested in Japanese cinema and vaguely aware there were like-minded people out there. Somewhere.

As we found each other, we shared some of the same practical problems, starting with the paucity of bibliographic information on film. Our first collaborative effort was to split up major film journals to copy and share the tables of contents; new people could become "members" by copying a new journal and adding it to the packet. Eventually it was a couple inches thick.

Along the way, the Japanese bibliographer at OSU, Maureen Donovan, encouraged us to go digital and exploit this new thing called the internet to expand our collaboration. We gave

ourselves the name Kinema Club—after a Taisho era movie theater—and went online in January 1995.

Four years later, we met in person at a workshop on the campus of University of Michigan. The idea was to get together and talk about how Japanese film studies came about. Ask what is *was.* And think about where we might take it from there. This was all happening at an interesting moment. Japanese film had been a space for the discipline of film studies to work out many basic theoretical issues over the years, thanks to the work of stellar scholars like Noël Burch, Stephen Heath, Dudley Andrew, David Desser, Kristin Thompson, Maureen Turim, Robin Wood, Peter Lehman, Dana Polan, Scott Nygren, Philip Rosen, David Bordwell, Paul Willemen, Edward Branigan and others. Just as Kinema Club appeared as if by nature, the discipline of film studies was pushing Japanese film to the margins while Japanese studies, broadly construed, opened new spaces for it.

Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto and Markus Nornes organized the first Kinema Club workshop on this morphing disciplinary landscape to take stock of the situation and chart a course into an unknown future. You can find the original announcement and a summary of the meeting on the Kinema Club website (https://kinemaclub.org/conference/kinema-club-workshop). After the workshop was over, we concluded,

> We are, in a certain sense, "euphoric." We face multiple possibilities and that's good. We don't mourn the passing of that old field and its sense of institutional comfort. And despite the fact that it has left us groping to comprehend the consequences for our lives as teachers, intellectuals and as intellectual workers, we sense something very interesting on the horizon in a decade or so. The senior scholars who have already done a lot of research on Japanese film will be publishing the best work of their careers. Many newly arriving people will have published books and secured tenure. We will have read and engaged each other's work. It will not configure itself in a discipline, but we will have a much easier time talking to each other.

Twenty years after this first meeting, Kinema Club has gathered 18 times and taken many different forms in just as many far-flung places. This fall, let us gather again to look into the rear-view mirror as we barrel toward KCXXXVI in 2039, 20 years on from now!

KCXIXA2

Schedule

Friday

3:00-3:30: Welcome

3:30-4:30: ① Animating (Christine Marran & Tom Lamarre)

4:45-5:45: ② Theories Histories (Aaron Gerow & Naoki Yamamoto)

5:45-7:45: Dinner (Silvios)

8:00: Sneak Preview of an Unreleased Japanese Film (Angel Aud A)

10:00~: KC Designated Bar: TBA

Saturday

8:00: Breakfast

9:30-10:30: ③ Media+ (Stephanie DeBoer & Yuki Nakayama)

11:00-12:00: ④ Imperium (Kate Taylor-Jones & Irhe Sohn)

12:00-2:00: Lunch

2:00-3:00: ⑤ Embodied ⚧ Desired (Jennifer Coates & Sharon Hayashi)

3:30-4:30: ⑥ Possible Futures→[and Pedagogies] (Alex Zahlten & Chika Kinoshita)

4:00-5:00:

7:00~: KC Designated Bar: TBA

Sunday

9:00 Breakfast

10:00-11:00+: ⑦ 〆 : *Onward* (Anne McKnight & Markus Nornes)

KCXIX will take a discussion format to the end of forging a collective future. Each discussion will have two leaders, and some key participants who have submitted abstracts (see below); some of have also submitted position papers to stimulate discussion, which are available at https://tinyurl.com/KCXIXA2.

Abstracts:

Friday

3:00-3:30: Welcome

3:30-4:30: ① Animating (Christine Marran & Tom Lamarre)

Give Me the Power to Revolutionize Theory! *Shōjo kakumei Utena* and the Philosophical Possibilities of Japanese Film

Ryan Frankel (UC Berkeley)

Writing theory through Japanese film can reveal novel theoretical landscapes that could not be written in absence of these films – if we can overcome certain impasses. On one hand, one might subject a Japanese film to unbounded, ahistorical close-reading that "demonstrates" an existing theory. This approach requires neither watching *that* film to reach one's conclusions nor

theoretical innovation. Conversely, one might insist that Japanese films' particularity make them unusable for theory. This attitude reflects an orientalist division between "Eastern" and "Western" films, arbitrarily excluding the former from theoretical conversation.

By sharing my reading of *Shōjo kakumei Utena* with respect to questions about internalization of gender and sexuality, narrative, and ethics, I outline an approach to Japanese film that considers a film's particularity as the essential catalyst for new theory. The first part of my paper summarizes key practices and traditions within *Utena*'s context – including the Takarazuka Revue, *Ribon no kishi*, *Berusaiyu no Bara*, Terayama Shūji, the Class S genre, and *mahō shōjo* – alongside close-reading that shows this context at play. Additionally, I consider situational limitations on *Utena*, particularly budget, broadcast codes, and cultural attitudes towards queerness. This contextual grounding provides a basis for A) framing *Utena* within a theoretical discussion of internalization, narrative, and oppression and B) elucidating the aspects of *Utena* that make it unique in relation to its situational limitations and artistic predecessors. In its second half, my paper argues that conveying *Utena*'s particularities as a response to this theoretical discussion both prevents *Utena*'s assimilation into existing theories and enables a novel theoretical position to emerge from close-reading and contextual consideration. To demonstrate, I abbreviate my longer attempt (elsewhere) to read *Utena*'s two complementary endings as illustrative of unexplored ethical possibilities within an atypical kind of intersubjective relationship: a shared, improvisatory project that aims towards unknown ends.

The Human Being in the Age of Its Digital Reproducibility

Alexander Lin (UC Berkeley)

In its dramatically increasing sophistication and deployment in film, CGI promises to be one of the most important theoretical loci for film studies in the near future. I contend that digital representation of humans is an especially important area of technological innovation that is forcing filmmakers to rethink the basic aesthetic and ontological premises of their form – and that places a conceptual and political demand on film scholars to theorize its consequences. The corpus and scholarship of Japanese film, with its focus on animation and environmental and technological implications for humanism, occupies a strategic position for what may well be a revolution of the medium.

Among a number of recent films, *Blade Runner 2049* (2017) and *Gemini Man* (2019) are exemplary in their synthetic approach to the problems of the reproduction of labor (in the figure of expendable and dehumanized soldiers) and digital reproduction of memory. Duplicating the human being in both body and mind, these media productions are proleptic, in a world in which such reproduction could become a major goal of states and corporations, but moreover also present a medium that allows us to think those material problems – and that, I believe, could itself constitute a crucial component of that production.

That Japanese film studies should think through these American films is not arbitrary: the interchange between the two cinemas, which mirrors in important aspects the postwar relationship between the two states, has generated such genre-defining crossings as from *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) to *The Matrix* (1999) that at once participate in and reflect on the wider historical impetus of dematerialization theorized by Paul Virilio among others with specific emphasis on cinema.

Now with the CGI convergence of live-action and animated cinematic forms, the dynamics of anime compositing (Thomas Lamarre) and media mix (Marc Steinberg) may reach a new field of elaboration, while future Japanese film may also be presented with an opportunity for invigorating synthesis and an alternative position to Hollywood (Nöel Burch).

This broad polemical argument is also to open up a new space to for the intersection of different theoretical and generic discourses. Chief among these is how a cinema of digitally (re)produced human beings both represents a new understanding of what it means to be human *and* in doing so itself effects such an innovation. More specifically, not a few recent cutting-edge sci-fi films with fantastic premises about the state of the world return, paradoxically or necessarily, to classic humanist and social concerns with the family in order to work out the implications of their (hypothetical) technologies. This suggests a renewed relevance, both formally and conceptually, of such filmmakers as Ozu.

Indeed, I would like to argue on a methodological level that aside from its perhaps more apparent link to capital, the very technological and contemporary issue of CGI as a cinematic medium has established an essential connection with the basic dramatic issue of character representation; and that this link invites the deployment and rethinking of more traditional resources from film, film theory, literature, and beyond.

4:45-5:45: ② Theories Histories (Aaron Gerow & Naoki Yamamoto)

Where does Japanese Film Theory Happen?

Earl Jackson (Asia University, Taichung)

The publication of 日本戦前映画論集 (Aaron Gerow, Iwamoto Kenji, Markus Nornes, Eds.) has retrieved from obscurity and put in one place some 600 pages of prewar Japanese film theory. Apart from the self-evident ways in which this collection is an invaluable contribution to an understanding of the history of Japanese film theory, the range of approaches there can also stimulate and guide an understanding of the ways such theory comes into being, then and afterward. In this paper, I would attempt a selective survey of post-war theoretical writings, taking as initial inspiration this collection in the ways it showcases the various relations between the theoretical formulations and the films that either inspired them or are illuminated by the readings such theories enable. For example, Marxist film theory often predates and is independent of films it may be used to analyze. This is also true for entirely other reasons, of the

writings of thinkers who already had developed a world-view or philosophical relation to culture that subsequently included film as an object of attention – for example the writings of Tanizaki Jun'ichiro, or more systematically—the writings of the aesthetics philosopher Nakai Masakazu. And then there were singular moments in cinema history, exemplified by *Kurutta Ippeiji*, which to some extent, developed in tandem with the *Shinkankaku Ha* prose writers, and whose "experiment" emerged to some extent as a metaphorical extension of (or challenge to) the perceptual theories and practices of these writers. In my own work on Masumura Yasuzo, Oshima Nagisa, and Yoshida Kiju, I have focused on the relation of theory and practice within their respective films and writings. Here, however, I will turn my attention more broadly to the variety of discursive relations between theoretical writing and film as object of scrutiny. Below are some of the possible foci of the paper (time would not allow for all of them of course).

1. **Technologically based theoretical readings**. – In 1951, a young man who had just seen *Genji Monogatari* (Yoshimura Kozaburo 1951) with his mother, came to Yoshimura's door, and asked him to explain the meaning of the film. This inspired Yoshimura to write a remarkable monograph reflecting on technology and meaning-production, using the *Genji* film as his chief example, but including considerations of the work of cinematographers such as Gregg Toland. 映画の技術と味方. Later writing with a technological point of departure would include Kinoshita Chika's work on Mizoguchi, for example.
2. **Critical-Creative Synergy**. Principle example: Kurosawa Kiyoshi studied with Hasumi Shigehiko and both his films and his own critical writings reflect that influence while forming a kind of critical disposition of his own. Recently, another kind of loop has occurred in this history, with the publication of Abe Kasho's dense monograph on the films of Kurosawa, 黒沢清、映画のアレゴリー.
3. **Variations of Auteur-Theory**. This is the most speculative characterization of a critical relation between theorist and film. Certain filmmakers could be seen as implicit theorists. In this case, reading the films could be a practice of discerning and elucidating a system of representation and/or signification operative within the films. I contend that Ozu's films beginning with 晩春 (1949) constitute a body of work in from which a system could be extrapolated. If more films were extent, perhaps the *oeuvre* of Ito Daisuke would reveal a system. Finally, I would argue that recent work on Kawashima Yuzo seems to intuit a system within and across his work that both individual and collective efforts are moving toward elucidating.

Saturday

9:30-10:30: ③ Media+ (Stephanie DeBoer & Yuki Nakayama)

The Limits, Edges, and Futures of Kinema/Media

Miryam Sas (UC Berkeley)

At a recent faculty retreat discussing future directions of a particular department of film & media, scholars named a number of future trends and directions. Although it was not quite clear whether these directions for the field/department were intended to be *de*scriptive or *pre*scriptive, only some of the summary terms that emerged—which included television/screen studies, theory of the image (photography), digital media theory and practice, emergent technologies and privacy, animation and gaming, race/gender and media, sound studies, and ecology/environment— explicitly call upon any aspect of "global" cinema studies, even though all of them might officially (if asked) aspire to evoke a "world" media landscape. For example, among those areas named, Japanese cinema is one of the places where at least animation studies finds a key location. However, in practice, Japanese cinema often gets placed along with other "national cinemas" within an older rubric, as part of a place in which people are (still) interested in *film* itself, in actual films as opposed to, say, media archeology, digital effects, or game coding as media practice. It struck me as odd but not so surprising that the rubric of "national" came to be linked with the rubric of "film" as two areas that represent a prior set of definitions and disciplinary parameters. The question emerged: are departments of film and media still even interested in film, actually? (Is performance studies still interested in theater, or have they too moved on to the study of digital media landscapes and transnational online fanscapes?)

Many of the papers of this conference clearly push beyond the older cubby-holing of national cinema: noting the labor of making celluloid as part of a broader object-life of cinema, or aiming to focus on distribution and colonial viewership and production, or studying theoretical intersections. Scholars have now for some time questioned the usefulness of "Japan" (or area studies) as a rubric, evoking the emergence of "after Japan" or Japan's position "after media"—I don't want to recapitulate that thinking, but instead, to consider the edges and potentials of "Japanese cinema and media" in relation to the shifts in these more recently (contingently, but also symptomatically) named futurities and directions. Is the move from "cinema" to "media" the same kind of problem as the move from "Japan" to "after Japan" or a different one? What happens when we think these two problems together? What gets lost that might need to be thought anew?

11:00-12:00: ④ Imperium (Kate Taylor-Jones & Irhe Sohn)

To See the Films Unseen: An Archeology of the Manchurian Motion Picture Association

Ying Guo (University of California, San Diego)

This paper examines the Manchurian Motion Picture Association (Man'ei), a Sino-Japanese co-production film company located in Manchuria from 1937 to 1945. During its short-lived eight years, it produced 189 documentaries and 108 feature films widely circulated in wartime Japan and its colonies, including Manchukuo, Korea, Taiwan and etc. Nevertheless, few of them remain at present. Increasingly, works by film scholars focus on the extant newsreels, educational short

films of Man'ei, and its pan-Asianist star Yamaguchi Yoshiko (Li Kōran), however, other buried histories revolving around Man'ei wait for further exploration, for example, the missing bulk of its feature films, its massively transnational circulation and multi-linguistic production processes. Looking for approaches to absolve these questions and searching for other perspectives, this paper proposes the significance of "to see the film unseen:" 1) Non-extant films taken granted for non-existent films: in which method shall we deal with the archival shortage when film theories find no film to apply? 2) Also up for discussion, colonial films like Man'ei films as the ignored Japanese film: how do we relate these two beyond considering the former as extension of the latter? 3) Last but not the least, multi-ethnic audience behind the singular spectator: how do we unravel the interactions between film production and reception circumventing linguistic barriers or failing this attempt?

What Time Does it Start?: Labor, Ecology, and the Manufacturing of Film History

Zach Hill (UC San Diego)

Film studies often focus on the cycles of exhibition, distribution, production (as in the making of a particular film), and reception. These approaches generally emphasize the viewing of a film as the main event that gives it value. However, this is not the only way that film and media impact society. In particular, little attention has been paid to how the manufacturing of necessary materials for film, such as celluloid, requires a certain amount of exploitation of labor and the environment. This is particularly true in the colonial period, when colonies such as Taiwan provided labor to extract camphor for the production of celluloid (sold not only to Dai Nippon Celluloid but also to Eastman Kodak). In that case, what happens when we re-think what constitutes a film/media "market" and connect the viewing of a film to camphor or cotton farming? How has imperialism developed infrastructure that has made the circulation of film more efficient, and how has this affected the spaces and lives (human and non-human) involved in its processes?

To answer these questions it is necessary to move beyond the modernist divide between nature and culture and accept that culture comes from nature and never escapes its vine-like grasp. Concepts like Donna Haraway's "naturecultures" or Jussi Parikka's "medianatures" are necessary tools to represent the history of film as not only existing in the abstract sphere of "culture," but as part of industrial processes that have drastically reshaped the environment and the biodiversity of the species who once did and continue to live there. In that case, when we consider this in the context of cinema it is difficult to accept that film begins on screen or even in the lab or factory. To fully collapse the nature/culture divide, then, it is necessary to view film as coming from various localities made up with their own materials and everyday rhythms. This approach would then allow us to connect camphor trees from a Taiwan forest to the factories of Eastman Kodak in New Jersey. It would compare the labor of Taiwanese cutting down and

gathering the trees to those in the factory taking camphor oil and turning it into celluloid on an industrial scale.

This approach also challenges the discursive-turn in historiography, which, I argue, overemphasizes urban, intellectual experience as the foundation of modernity rather than as one strain on a see-saw of uneven development. Discursive analysis does provide a way to understand what is valued within a society, but only if it is discussed as such. In the case of film studies and modernity, it is clear that in the early twentieth century people were impressed by films in relation to speed, shock, and technological advancement. This does not tell us, however, what was actually being done to support this infrastructure of astonishment for those in "modernizing" (colonized) areas of the world. In that case, early film histories follow roughly the same path. They attempt to answer the questions: When was the first film shown, when the was the first film locally produced, who are the important filmmakers, and how did intellectuals experience the development of film in relation to changes in their society? When we consider colonial territories such as Taiwan, then, we are left with something that does not seem particularly worthwhile, diminishing Taiwan's importance to the global conversation. It is not that these questions cannot be answered (they have), but there is not as much to say from this perspective, and we do not necessarily learn anything new about modernity. The discursive approach that overemphasizes cinema as a textual object then arises as a repetition of earlier national histories that are "usually concentrated on the origin and development of a specific group or people and their realization of a state entitling them to occupy a place in world history" (Harootunian). If we want to escape this paradigm, then it is necessary to find ways to represent uneven development on multiple scales. This means that we must resist adding to a history about cinema and modernity that overvalues urban space and upper class experience of life as filtered through the nation-state, by finding different experiences and subjectivities, both human and non-human, brought on by the need to mass produce film.

Rather than focus on the discourse about film that is often boxed into a particular language and often skews elitist, it is necessary to consider film itself as a commodity that goes through a long process of creation. In other words, the question "what is cinema" cannot only be "an object located in particular discourses," but must also consider various alternatives. In this case, then, cinema can be understood as the processes necessary to film's production and projection. These processes are a part of various everydays organized under the practices of capital accumulation. This is especially true in colonial contexts, where labor and the environment were exploited to make the circulation of film possible. As film historian Dong-hoon Kim argues in the context of film cultures in colonial Korea, "in order to understand the histories of the colonial cinemas, and particularly the blurry boundaries between early Japanese and Korean cinemas, therefore, it is necessary to reflect upon the very nature of how one understands the 'cut' that both severs and connects imperial and local film cultures." This "cut" is necessary to reflect on not only in the case of mixed audiences or co-productions of particular films, but the way that markets and

industries spread out their practices throughout various parts of the world. Only by examining where the cuts have been made in the thickets of history can we understand the ideologies that sustain global capitalism and imperialist practices under “modernity”. In order to push beyond the often described urban, middle class, technological modernity, then, we need to first re-think what constitutes a media industry as well as how the makeup of that industry is involved in the final product of a film.

2:00-3:00: ⑤ Embodied ⚧ Desired (Jennifer Coates & Sharon Hayashi)

“Diversity Work” in Japanese Film and Media Studies

Junko Yamazaki (UCLA)

I would like to propose “diversity work” broadly defined as a topic of discussion. What type of “diversity work” scholars of Japanese film and media have done and do in order to challenge the existing forms of knowledge production? What sort of discourses of diversity are available within Japanese film and media studies? How do we critically engage those existing discourses in our research and pedagogy on Japanese film and media and through curatorial work and mentorship? These questions can be pursued by asking how the field of Japanese film studies has been transformed by scholarship grounded in and intersecting with postcolonial studies, media studies, gender studies, critical race studies, and critical (or criticism of) area/Japan studies among others. I would also be interested in exchanging thoughts on the state of archival research in Japan in terms of conditions of access and use, support for research and pedagogy available in different types of institutions, and completed and ongoing collaborative projects, as they have come to shape the objects of our study.

The Unrealized Ambitions towards Changing Perceptions of Sexuality in the “Art Cinema” of the 1960s and 1970s.

Paul Berry (Kyoto)

During the Sixties and Seventies, so-called “art cinema” was active globally in portraying aspects of sexually that were hitherto largely unexplored in cinema. In so doing they pushed against censorship laws that often resulted in greater flexibility in direct portrayals of sexual activities of many kinds. In the hands of various directors and screen writers in Japan, this international trend proliferated for a time in Japan. Although in terms of sheer quantity pink film and later *Roman Poruno* films were most pervasive, it was those films of higher intellectual caliber distributed in various ways under the vague rubric of “art films” (among other terms) that most directly intended to challenge the sexual attitudes and forms of expression not only in the film industry but in society at large. Ranging from Mushi Pro animation such as *Belladonna*, to works by Oshima, Hani, Wakamatsu and others, these productions set their goals far beyond box office numbers and simple entertainment values. Among them, certain works (including those by Jissoji and Matsumoto) distributed and sometimes produced by Art Theatre Guild (ATG) were

especially ambitious, being issued with booklets that had critical reviews of each film together with the full scenario which attempted to give these films the stature of serious theatre and literature. Looking back at these works and their ambitions, it seems that despite breaking new ground on some areas of depicting sexuality, that their larger goals remained unrealized.

3:30-4:30: ⑥ Possible Futures[and Pedagogies] (Alex Zahlten & Chika Kinoshita)

映画の教室: Cinema as an Educational Tool for Japanese Youth

Anastasia Fedorova (HSE, Moscow)

This paper will explore the use of cinema by Japanese educators in the classroom setting, as well as "in the field". Commercial movie theaters and museums are often attended collectively by Japanese students and their teachers as part of their extracurricular activities. Japanese intellectuals like Gonda Yasunosuke argued for the use of cinema as an educational device already from the 1910s, but how were these ideas implemented into life? Some of the topics for further investigation and discussion may include: 1. the educational use of cinema in correctional facilities (juvenile detention centers, etc.); 2. major film studios and film oriented amusement parks (ex. Toei-Eigamura) as popular destinations for school trips and excursions; 3. the adaptation of Japanese and foreign films into *kamishibai* and its use in the classroom setting (Nikolai Ekk's *Road to Life* (1932) depicting the education of homeless children in post-revolutionary Russia was adapted to *kamishibai* shortly after the film's release in Japan and was used for educational purposes until the early 1980s) 4. the depiction of teachers and educators in Japanese cinema, the reception of these films by the teaching professionals.

Future Career in Japanese Film

Yuta Kaminishi (University of Washington)

A workshop on the state of the field should talk about the future of academic careers in Japanese film studies. At this moment, the possible institutions that are employment options are Asian studies and film studies departments. But in emerging new interdisciplinary disciplines such as gender studies, will those options change? If so, what kind of academic training should graduate students prepare before going on the job market? For example, in addition to teaching experience of common courses like film theory, history of Japanese cinema, and anime studies, what teaching portfolio will be important? At this moment, we should discuss possible new disciplines and potential courses including materials, methods, and syllabi.

Approaches to Japanese Post-war Modern Cinema

Luke Cromer (The University of Sydney)

The narrative history of post-war Japanese cinema has a tendency to focus on the political films of the "new wave" directors and the master auteurs such as Kurosawa Akira, Ozu Yasujiro, and Mizoguchi Kenji. Although scholarly attention to other overlooked films and filmmakers can be

found in academic journals, there is a distinct absence in book publications that stray from the already established history writing. Recent retrospectives such as “The Other Japanese New Wave” at the Japan Society in New York (April, 2019) and “What was the Japanese Nouvelle Vague?” in Tokyo (February, 2019) are evidence of a broader, and perhaps undetermined categorization of the movement(s), which suggests that, a broader critical gaze is necessary when defining and writing about Japanese post-war modern cinema. The essays from directors Oshima Nagisa and Yoshida Kiju together with the philosophical notion of subjectivity (*shutai-sei*), have significantly directed the perception and focus of scholarship. These critical essays combined further with a reliance on Japanese film criticism, have provided the foreign researcher with a way to support their perspectives by demonstrating a local understanding. However, in doing so, it is often the same films and directors that continue to be recycled. The purpose of this discussion is to consider the implications of this approach and to explore the possibilities of an investigation of alternative films and modes of inquiry into Japanese post-war modern cinema.

Genre in Japanese Cinema

Susanne Schermann (Meiji University)

The category of genre is one of the tools in film history and theory (and prior to film, literary studies). It often concerns narrative, but also ranges into style and function. Is this critical tool still of use in Japanese film studies, or does using it require special caution? Although some genres like the yakuza film seem to have an equivalent in Western film (studies), some other genres like the *shinpa* or the Shochiku New Wave are more a mode of production than a mode of expression. Furthermore, genres like the *keiko eiga* are quite short-lived, which might provoke the question if they are important enough to merit the term genre. We might also argue that Japanese culture is strongly inclined towards classificiation and the tool might not be a tool anymore. The tools we use are the ones we make ourselves; they are not cast in iron but should fit out purposes. Therefore, they might change over time and cultures, and in exchange, they have to be reconsidered and reflected accordingly in order not to lose the precision of the tool.

Encountering the Unforeseen: Improvising the Future of Japanese Cinema

William Carroll (Indiana University)

There has been a recent shift in a strand of Japanese independent cinema toward a more collaborative and improvised production and performance style that marks a distinct contrast with the precisely staged and edited films of the 1990s and 2000s. This transition can be seen in the work of Takahashi Hiroshi. Most famous as the screenwriter of J-horror films like *The Ring*, Takahashi famously wrote an elaborate set of rules determining how to frame and stage ghosts in a film; the directors he primarily collaborated with in this period, Nakata Hideo and Kurosawa Kiyoshi, can be seen adhering to Takahashi’s rules, and to deriving meaning and effect in their work by creating powerful imagery and building sequences around subtle and precise shifts in

the placement of figures within the frame. By comparison, Takahashi's recent *Occult Bolshevism* is notable for the way that it uses the film frame less as an image designed to fit a preconceived plan than as a visual field facilitating the encounters of performers within it, particularly as members of the cult practice performance exercises within a warehouse with a minimalist set and largely flat lighting. This trend has also appeared in other independent Japanese films, and particularly relates to the invocation of acting exercises and theatrical performances within the films (perhaps intentionally invoking the work of Jacques Rivette or John Cassavettes), within such films as Shinozaki Makoto's *Sharing* and (former student of Takahashi and Kurosawa) Hamaguchi Ryusuke's *Asako I & II*. In describing examples of this trend in these recent films, I hope to open to a discussion of why this transition is taking place now, and what it may mean for the future of Japanese cinema.

Sunday

10:00-11:00+: ⑦ 〆: ***Onward*** **(Anne McKnight & Markus Nornes)**