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Ikiru (To live), Kurosawa, Akira, 1952

Donzoko (The lower depths), Kurosawa, Akira, 1957

Yojimbo, Kurosawa, Akira, 1961

Ikimono no koroku (I live in fear), Kurosawa, Akira, 1956

Sugata Sanshiro (Sanshiro Sugata), Kurosawa, Akira, 1943

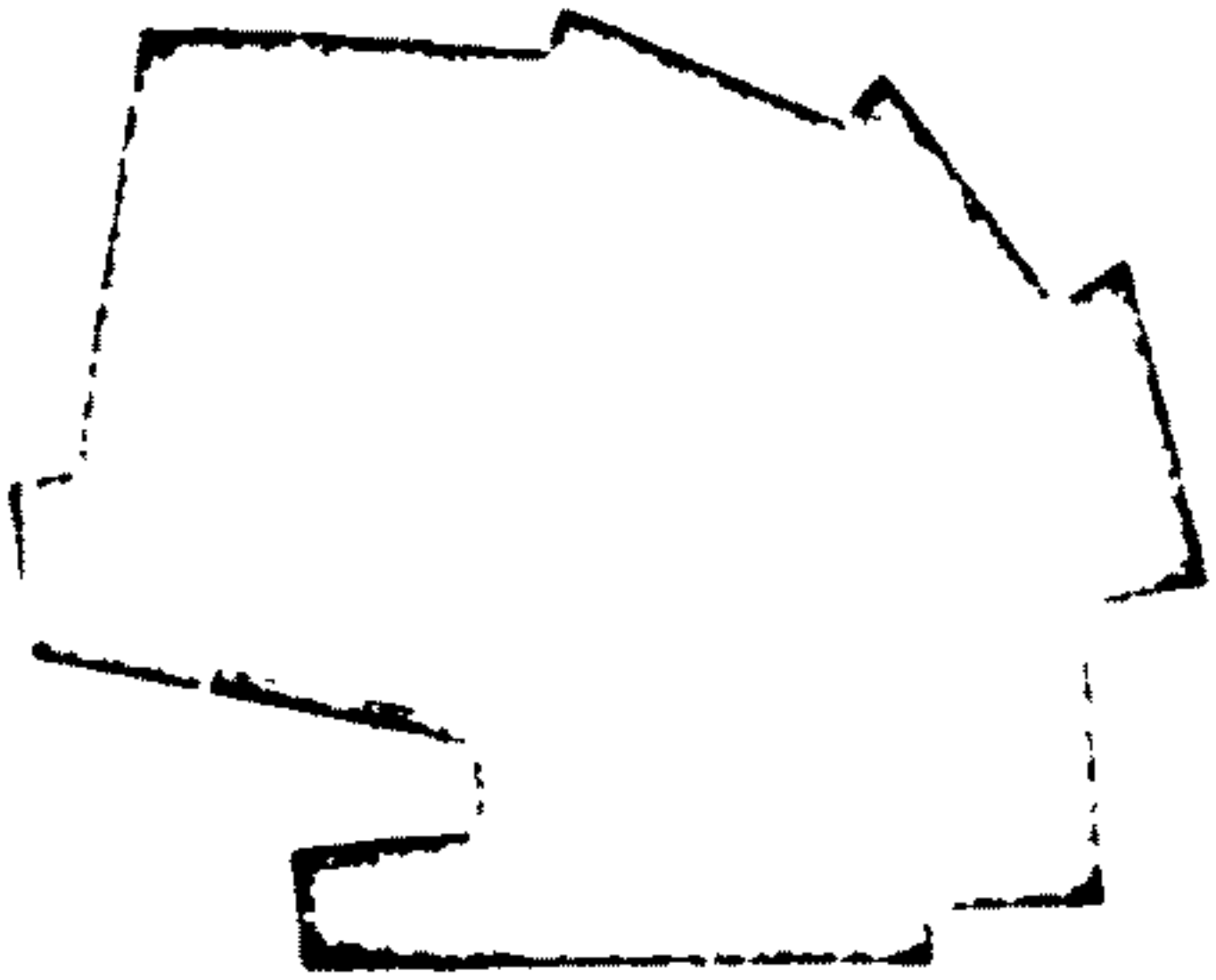
Akahige (Red beard), Kurosawa, Akira, 1965

Yoidore tenshi (Drunken angel), Kurosawa, Akira, 1948

Kakushi toride no san-akunin (The hidden fortress), Kurosawa, Akira, 1958

Warui yatsu hodo nemuru (The bad sleep well), Kurosawa, Akira, 1960

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THE FILMS OF AKIRA KUROSAWA A RETROSPECTIVE JANUARY 5 -- MARCH 13, 1974

During the Winter Quarter 1974, the Pacific Film Archive, University Art Museum, will present a retrospective survey of THE FILMS OF AKIRA KUROSAWA, featuring 20 of the famous Japanese director's 25 completed films. With Ozu and Mizoguchi, Kurosawa is one of the three great masters of Japanese Cinema: more than Ozu and Mizoguchi, he is a director whose films have proved popular with audiences in Japan and abroad. Sixteen of Kurosawa's 20 films in this series feature Toshiro Mifune, the actor Kurosawa discovered and launched to world wide fame.

The ideal publication to illustrate and accompany this series is Donald Richie's book THE FILMS OF AKIRA KUROSAWA, published by Berkeley's UC Press. The following background on Kurosawa's life and work is adapted from Richie's text:

Akira Kurosawa was born in Tokyo in 1910 into a family of the samurai class. He studied painting and worked for a while as a painter and commercial illustrator. As a student Kurosawa read a great deal and was strongly attracted to 19th century Russian literature, especially to the novels of Dostoevsky. It was from Dostoevsky that he learned about human psychology and the compassion an artist can have for human suffering.

In 1936, not out of a desire to make films his career but rather simply to support himself, Kurosawa went to work for P.C.L. Studios (forerunner of Toho). Kurosawa was assigned to Kajiro Yamamoto who had a great influence on him. He spent seven years as an assistant director, during which time he wrote many scripts and yearned to direct on his own. He made his first film SUGATA SANSHIRO in 1943.

The most conspicuous aspect of Kurosawa's work in his craftsmanship: everything is made to work in a Kurosawa film. This is partly a result of his personal discipline and his perfectionism. But it is also because he takes an utterly pragmatic approach to making a film, more so perhaps than any other major director in the world. He does not bring a preconceived concept of cinematic style to his material. Instead, he lets the material determine how the film will be made.

The basis of the Kurosawa style is a search for reality and an inability to tolerate illusion. "There are people," he has said, "who criticize my work....and say it is not realistic. But I feel that merely copying the outward appearance of the world would not result in anything real--that is only copying. I think that to find what is real one must look very closely at one's world, to search for those things which contribute to this reality which one feels under the surface....These are the core around which the world moves, the axis on which it turns. The novels of Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and Turgenev show us what these things are." And in Kurosawa's films one finds that these things include an awareness of oneself and an awareness of the world: an awareness of the idea that the world and the self cannot match. People cannot be happy because they are human. The central thesis of Kurosawa's films is the assertion that man must fight to retain hope in the midst of this hopeless world and in this fight all men are brothers.

THE SCHEDULE

Saturday
January 5
4:30, 7:30, 9:30

JUDO SAGA (SANSHIRO SUGATA, 1943, 80 mins, 35mm)

This film is ostensibly about the conflict between judo and jujitsu, between the new martial art and the traditional one. It is a radical film and the form emphasizes the radical implications in the content: just as judo is challenging the conventions of jujitsu, so the new director is challenging the conventions of traditional filmmaking.

Saturday
January 12
4:30, 8:05

SCANDAL (SHUBUN, 1950, 104 mins, 35mm)

An attack on the yellow journalism which erupted in Japan at the end of the Occupation. The story involves a painter (Toshiro Mifune) who is slandered and his lawyer (Takashi Shimura) who almost ruins him.

Saturday
January 12
6:20, 9:50

DRUNKEN ANGEL (YOIDORE TENSHI, 1948, 98 mins, 35mm)
Kurosawa describes this near-masterpiece as an "allegory of post-war Japanese Society": Takashi Shimura plays a doctor who tries to bring about the spiritual and physical recovery of the human debris who live in the ashes of a poor quarter of Tokyo immediately after the war; Toshiro Mifune is strikingly effective as an uprooted petty gambler and black-marketeer. In its dynamic visual style, its quivering realism, its expression of a deeply philosophic outlook, DRUNKEN ANGEL ranks with the best-known of Kurosawa's later classics and provides interesting comparisons to his recent RED BEARD, whose hero is also a doctor.

Saturday
January 19
4:30, 7:30, 9:45

STRAY DOG (NORA INU, 1949, 122 mins, 35mm)
Kurosawa says he is fond of the works of Georges Simenon and wanted to do something in his manner. This thriller is the story of a young detective whose pistol is stolen. He eventually tracks down the man who stole it but not before it is used for murder. Kurosawa based the film on his own unpublished novel.

Saturday
January 26
4:30, 7:30, 10:20

THE QUIET DUEL (SHIZUKANARU, 1949, 95 mins)
A doctor operating on a syphilitic patient accidentally cuts himself and contracts the disease. After various plot convolutions the doctor, played by Mifune, was supposed to have gone mad. Kurosawa was prevented from using this ending by the opinions of various Japanese doctors as well as the Medical Section of the American Occupation Forces, which reasoned that this ending would frighten people into not seeking medical aid.

Saturday
January 26
6:15, 9:15

THE MEN WHO TREAD ON THE TIGER'S TAIL
(TORA NO O O FUMU OTOKOTACHI, 1945, 58 mins, 35mm)
Kurosawa's most stylized period film is an adaptation of a popular Kabuki drama about a 12th Century lord forced to flee his estate with only six dedicated retainers to guard him. The wartime Japanese government banned the film since it failed to extol the traditional concepts of feudalism and obedience. Indeed, Kurosawa parodies his source by introducing a low-comedy porter and satirizing militarism. Curiously, the Allied Occupation forces also banned the film as pro-feudal. In any case, this strange and fascinating film may be enjoyed as an early masterpiece by Kurosawa.

Wednesday
January 30
WHEELER AUDITORIUM
7:30, 9:30
Plus, Kenji Mizoguchi's
UGETSU (1953, 96 mins,
35mm) One showtime:
8:30

RASHOMON (1950, 88 mins, 35mm)
This film concerns a samurai and his wife traveling through the woods near Kyoto. They are stopped by a bandit, the wife is raped, the husband is killed. Different versions of the story are told (to the camera) by the participants and by a woodcutter who witnessed the incident. Each description is, of course, fundamentally different from all the others. What actually happened is never made clear, and the film has become recognized as a comment on the nature of reality and illusion.

Saturday
February 2
4:00, 7:00, 10:00

THE IDIOT (HAKUCHI, 1951, 166 mins, 35mm)
Dostoevsky's essential quality, the suffering for mankind that comes from the deepest compassion, is also at the heart of THE IDIOT. Kurosawa obviously poured his soul into this adaptation, which translates very well to a setting in the snow-country of Hokkaido, Japan's northernmost island with many historical connections to Russia and a Westernized populace given to wintry introspection. The visuals are stunning, and Kurosawa's fidelity to the characterizations and themes of his "favorite author" is near-fanatic.

Wednesday
February 6
WHEELER AUDITORIUM
8:00

THE SEVEN SAMURAI (SHICHININ NO SAMURAI, 1954,
211 mins, 35mm)

Kurosawa's best-known film is possibly the best Western ever made -- as well as being a visual masterpiece and a parable of immense effect. Seven samurai hire themselves out to a small village, teach the villagers to defend themselves and depart decimated, leaving the fruits of victory to the farmers.

Saturday
February 9
7:00, 9:30

IKIRU (1952, 143 mins, 35mm)

This film was very important for Kurosawa, being both an ambitious picture of contemporary Japan and his own personal meditation on the nature of death. To contemplate death on a serious level--as Kurosawa does--is to examine the meaning of life, to determine what is in a person's life that justifies his being able to die. In IKIRU a minor government official learns that he has cancer and is going to die in six months. He gradually begins to realize that he must do something before he dies in order to give significance to what is left of his life.

Wednesday
February 13
WHEELER AUDITORIUM
7:30, 9:30

THRONE OF BLOOD (KUMONOSU-JO, 1957, 110 mins, 35mm)

One of the most original translations of Shakespeare to Cinema is this Samurai "MacBeth", set in 16th Century Japan during the Sengoku Civil Wars: Toshiro Mifune's characterization of a ruthless war-lord is short on Shakespearian reflection--as one would expect in such a transposition--and heavy on Noh-accented violent actions and mannerisms. Kurosawa's mastery of spectacle was never more imposing.

Saturday
February 16
7:30, 9:30

I LIVE IN FEAR (IKIMONO NO KIROKU, 1955, 113 mins,
35mm)

Toshiro Mifune--at thirtyfive portraying a man of sixty--is a foundry owner convinced that he is in constant danger of atomic annihilation. He tries to persuade his family to emigrate to Brazil, but they respond by getting the court to judge him incompetent. In a desperate act, he sets fire to his foundry and then is consumed by guilt at having put his employees out of work. It is this guilt which pushes him over the brink of sanity.

Wednesday
February 20
WHEELER AUDITORIUM
7:30, 9:45

THE HIDDEN FORTRESS (KAKUSHI TORIDE NO SAN-AKUNIN,
1958, 126 mins, 35mm)

An immensely enjoyable action drama that incorporates all the elements of the traditional Japanese sword-fight costume pictures (disguised princess fleeing with warriors and gold) and makes them really functional. Donald Richie says it as though Bunuel had made THE MARK OF ZORRO.

Saturday
February 23
7:00, 9:30

THE LOWER DEPTHS (DONZOKO, 137 mins, 35mm)

Kurosawa's adaptation of Gorky's play is both literal and theatrical. Little of the original was changed and the approach is that of filming a play, though Kurosawa's innate cinematic sense enables him to avoid the look of a play-on-film. In the confined, depressing place that is the only setting for the action, the camera seems to be everywhere, not so much photographing a set as examining an environment and its inhabitants. The characters--thief, landlady, gambler, priest, samurai, prostitute, actor, and the others--represent various ways of life. What they have in common is that they have all come to grief, and they all believe their fate to be different from what it is.

Wednesday
February 27
WHEELER AUDITORIUM

YOJIMBO (1961, 110 mins, 35mm) 7:00, 10:40
SANJURO (TSUBAKI SANJURO, 1962, 92 mins, 35mm) 9:00

YOJIMBO

A wandering samurai arrives in a small town divided between two warring clans. He hires himself out to both sides, allows them to exterminate each other and departs with a little money. Despite the savage zest of the fighting and the grotesque qualities of the townspeople, this superb film is essentially a philosophic black comedy.

SANJURO

The wandering samurai decides to help a group of earnest, clean-cut, immaculately attired young samurai in a struggle against corrupt local officials. Along the way he teaches them something of the ways of the world. Together they rescue a chamberlain's wife and daughter. The cynical warrior again uses deception to accomplish his ends. He pretends to be hired by the enemies of the people he is helping in order to facilitate the progress of events.

Saturday
March 2
7:30, 9:45

THE BAD SLEEP WELL (WARUI YATSU HODO YOKU NEMURU,
160, 135 mins, 35mm)

The title refers to the complacency and comfort of the truly evil, the people who accept their crimes with such equanimity that their sleep is never disturbed. Kurosawa is concerned here with exposing the total unscrupulousness of corporate intrigue. The secretary (Toshiro Mifune) to a corporate president marries the lame daughter of his boss in an attempt to be at a better vantage point to expose the cruelty of his father-in-law. He is secretly the son of a man murdered by his father-in-law, and becomes ensnared by conflicting emotions, by his unexpected love for his wife, and he is ultimately destroyed.

Wednesday
March 6
WHEELER AUDITORIUM
8:00

RED BEARD (AKAHIGE, 1965, 185 mins, 35mm)

Kurosawa spent nearly two years making this moving film about a tough-minded doctor in a public clinic for the poor. The scale is Dickensian but steers clear of sentimentality. The story tells how a young medic learns from Red Beard what it really means to be a doctor. RED BEARD is a positive work, a strong affirmation of life.

Saturday
March 9
7:00, 9:30

HIGH AND LOW (TENOKU TO JIGOKU, 1963, 143 mins,
35mm)

Based on a novel by Ed McBain and transposed to Japan, this film poses some universal questions about the value of life. A kidnapper mistakenly grabs the son of a rich industrialist's chauffeur instead of the rich man's own son. He demands the ransom anyway. The rich man pays--and is ruined. But that's only the first part of this taut thriller.

Wednesday
March 13
WHEELER AUDITORIUM
7:00, 9:30

DODES'KA-DEN (1970, 140 mins, color, 35mm)

In DODES'KA-DEN Kurosawa has finally used color and used it in an unusual way. When Kurosawa was shooting he knew exactly how he wanted everything to look, and would simply spray paint roads, garbage heaps, etc., to get what he wanted. The effect is of an oddly sunny world that is purely photographic; the sun is never seen. It is an unusual film for Kurosawa, a radical departure from the films he made in the 'fifties and sixties'. The structure is very episodic as he follows the inhabitants of a shanty-town.