

## Document Citation

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Author(s)	Mike D'Angelo
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### ***All About Lily Chou-Chou***

Dir. Shunji Iwai. 2001. N/R. 146mins.  
In Japanese, with subtitles. Yuichi  
Hasumi, Shusuke Hoshino.

**A**ll About *Lily Chou-Chou* is a tough sell for an American audience. In part, that's because it shares many of the potentially alienating attributes of the foreign-made art movie: opaque, inarticulate characters; events depicted out of chronological order, without helpful signposts; an emphasis on individual moments of lyricism or brutality at the expense of a clear narrative through line. But there's also the matter of the film's central conceit, which requires the viewer to spend much of its two and a half hours reading subtitled chatroom banter. For lengthy intervals, there's nothing to look at but Kanji characters scrolling up a black screen, accompanied by vaguely Björkish music and the rhythmic clickity-clack of a computer keyboard; like it or not, you're logged on at [www.alienated-japaneseteens.com](http://www.alienated-japaneseteens.com).

Chances are that this device worked better in the material's original form.



**NO DAY AT THE BEACH** Ichikawa listens to Ohmas strum the guitar in Iwai's drama about the difficult lives of teens living in contemporary small-town Japan.

Iwai originally wrote *Lily Chou-Chou* as an interactive novel, published only on the Internet. In both incarnations, the story revolves around a group of confused teenagers living in a blighted, semi-industrial wasteland; their only respite from lives of stultifying boredom punctuated by random violence is their passion for the eponymous diva, about whose ethereal music and plan-

gent lyrics they regularly rhapsodize on a fan-based message board. The characters' passionate, vivacious online personalities (characterized by handles like *blue cat* and *philia*) bear little or no resemblance to the sullen demeanor they affect at school or at home, and fellow Lilyholics don't necessarily identify with or even recognize each other in person, despite having poured their hearts

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out to each other at 60wpm.

It's a strong idea—just not necessarily a strong idea for a movie. Iwai, whose 1995 film *When I Close My Eyes* was a small masterpiece of dry-eyed romanticism, has a distinctive visual sensibility and bottomless empathy for quietly ardent loners; the film's most affecting scenes tend to be those in which the nominal protagonist, Hayato (Hasumi), simply wanders through verdant fields with his Discman, using Lily's music as both a means of escape and a source of solace. (They'd be even more affecting, however, if the music created for the fictional Lily weren't so relentlessly banal.) But for all its impressive craftsmanship, and despite an overbearing series of third-act crescendos (rape, murder, etc.), *Lily Chou-Chou* never really builds up a head of emotional steam. The disconnect between what these teenagers type and how they behave remains a curious abstraction; by the end, you feel as if you've learned little or nothing about them. (Opens Fri; see Index for venues.)—Mike D'Angelo