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Author(s)	James Quandt
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TOKYO TWILIGHT

The luminous beauty of Taiwanese master Hou Hsiao-hsien's *CAFÉ LUMIÈRE*, made as an homage for the centenary of Japanese *sensei* Yasujiro Ozu, provides the ideal opportunity to bring back a dozen or so of the most popular films from our complete Ozu retrospective last year. (We include those for which we have received several requests, those in the best prints, but not titles we have screened subsequently, such as *I WAS BORN, BUT...*.)

When Hou emerged in the eighties as a major auteur whose singular vision and stringent aesthetic miraculously combined humanism and formalism, the inevitable search for influences led some of us to premature conclusions. In such early films as *DUST IN THE WIND* and *A TIME TO LIVE AND A TIME TO DIE* (both shown as part of this series), Hou's debt to Yasujiro Ozu seemed obvious: the focus on the everyday and seemingly insignificant; the charged domestic spaces, organized as frames within frames; the precise frontal compositions and static, observant low shots that hang back from a scene, often fixed on an "empty" or abandoned space, just vacated or about to be entered; the subdued, contemplative rhythms and atmosphere of disappointment, even despair, slowly gathering to exquisite epiphany. (Some even saw Hou's interstitial shots of, say, a tree in *A TIME TO LIVE* or the darkling isle in *CITY OF SADNESS*, as the equivalent of Ozu's trademark "pillow shots.") That Japan had occupied Taiwan for the first half of the century, leaving many vestiges of its culture, only reinforced this assumption of influence.

However, Hou has long been adamant that he saw no Ozu films until much later in his career (at which point, he recognized the affinity, and even placed an italicized homage to Ozu in the opening sequences of *GOOD MEN, GOOD WOMEN*). Hou has repeatedly corrected assertions, for instance, that his emphasis on the "empty" frame, his use of offscreen space and ellipsis, are derived from Ozu or from European modernism. Rather, he says, they originate in the Chinese visual tradition of *liu-pai* – literally "to leave a whiteness" – which asks the audience to infer the absent, to imagine the whole when shown only a little, and ally with the artist "to complete the shot." Now, coming full circle, Hou has made a gentle and generous homage to Ozu – and the wonderful surprise is that the film is pure Hou.

Combining the work of two beloved directors whose retrospectives rank among the most popular in the history of Cinematheque Ontario, *OZU/HOU* is a study in influence – how much has Hou taken from Ozu in *CAFÉ LUMIÈRE*, and how has he transformed it? – but each artist and each film stands independently, and any way you approach the series, a sublime experience is assured.

– James Quandt

OZU



CAFÉ LUMIÈRE

EXCLUSIVE LIMITED RUN!

CAFÉ LUMIÈRE

(KOHI JIKOU)
Director: Hou Hsiao-hsien
Japan 2004 107 minutes
Cast: Yo Hitoto, Tadanobu Asano

Glorious. The film that topped both the *Village Voice* and *Film Comment* year-end polls as Best Undistributed Film of 2004, CAFÉ LUMIÈRE comes to us as an exclusive screening; the print has been imported from Europe and is unlikely to be back this way again. When LUMIÈRE was announced as a centenary homage to Ozu, many worried that it would be an exercise in awe-struck imitation, but Hou is one of the most individual artists in contemporary cinema, and it is no surprise that he has fashioned a work utterly his own. Singer Yo Hitoto plays Yoko, a free-lance writer who lives alone in Tokyo, having returned from a sojourn in Taiwan. (Already Hou's concern with his home country's historical connection with Japan, explored most directly in his CITY OF SADNESS, is apparent.) Yoko's research into the life of a Taiwanese composer of the thirties who lived in Tokyo dovetails with the railway mania of her friend Hajime, the proprietor of a second-hand bookshop; pursuing their respective interests, they explore often disregarded facets of Tokyo, recording traces of what once was and is no longer. When Yoko's father and stepmother come from their rural home for a visit – an obvious echo of TOKYO STORY – she matter-of-factly informs them of the decisions she has made about her future. Hou quietly, masterfully incorporates motifs and themes from Ozu (trains, clocks, watches, umbrellas, borrowed sake) into his own reticent vision of displacement and disjuncture, but he resists schematic analogy. One might, for instance, see Yoko as an update of Setsuko Hara's perpetually disappointed but resigned heroines in Ozu, but CAFÉ LUMIÈRE works best when left to breathe on its own. Hou's themes of the inescapable past (even as it physically vanishes), of unspoken hence unreciprocated affection, and his characteristic visual rhythms, textures, and compositions – all quotidian tarry, precise light, and complex spatial articulation – are given rapturous expression here. Elusively beautiful, emotionally cumulative, and at times funny as hell, the film closes with an image – a quartet of trains – that many directors would employ to signify urban alienation (if they had the eye to capture it in the first place), but Hou's beneficent, formalist vision turns it into a joyous instance of found plenitude.

– James Quandt

Friday, April 1 6:30 p.m.
Sunday, April 3 1:00 p.m.

Patrons please note special ticket prices: \$7.25 (including GST) for seniors and members; \$11.50 for non-members.



CAFÉ LUMIÈRE

HOU

DUST IN THE WIND

(LIEN-LIEN FENG-CH'EN)
Director: Hou Hsiao-hsien
Taiwan 1986 100 minutes
Cast: Wang Ching-wen, Hsing Shu-fen

J. Hoberman called DUST IN THE WIND "arguably the director's finest film," admittedly in 1989, before Hou's long run of modernist masterpieces. But DUST is a miracle of humane observation and compositional perfection, and continues to rank among Hou's most important works. A young man and woman quit high school and leave their hillside village for Taipei, where they drift in the inhospitable city, she as a seamstress, he as a delivery boy. They are separated when he is drafted into the military, and he returns to their village alone. Measured and melancholic, DUST "consolidates Hou Hsiao-hsien's reputation as Taiwan's leading humanist director" (Alan Stanbrook).



Saturday, April 9 8:45 p.m.

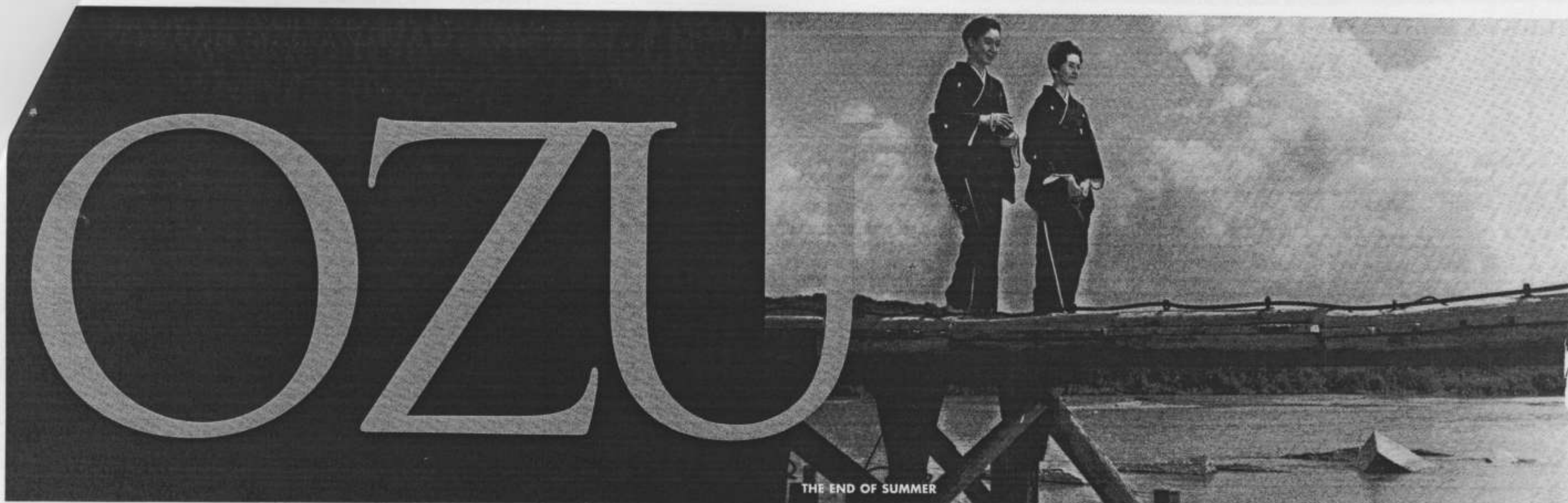
A TIME TO LIVE AND A TIME TO DIE

(TONGNIAN WANGSHI)
Director: Hou Hsiao-hsien
Taiwan 1985 137 minutes
Cast: You An-shun, Tian Feng

"Hou's first genuine masterpiece" (Phillip Lopate, *The New York Times*), A TIME TO LIVE AND A TIME TO DIE is an intensely sad, eloquent autobiographical work, filmed in the village where Hou grew up. TIME pays homage to Hou's father, who during the civil war moved his family from the mainland to Taiwan, where he longed the rest of his short life for the home he could never return to. Adhering to the everyday in this portrait of his family, Hou accrues delicate observations, and moments of loss and regret – the mother's admission of disappointment in life to her daughter reminds one of Ozu's TOKYO STORY. (As in much Hou, the intimate becomes epic; full of oblique political references, TIME is, in miniature, a study of Taiwan at a momentous instant.) The final sequences, culminating in a frontal frieze of four apprehensive boys, transforms childhood remembrance into elegy. "No film I have seen this year has impressed me more than this miraculous history. . . . What Hou has achieved will, I think, become to be seen as a masterpiece. . . . It is a spectacular triumph without anything of the 'spectacular' about it. . . . This is filmmaking on the very highest level" (Derek Malcolm, *The Guardian*).



Friday, April 15 8:45 p.m.



"One of the dozen most magisterial figures of 20th-century movies."

— J. Hoberman, *The Village Voice*

"Ozu's films are a sacred treasure of the cinema."

— Wim Wenders

"I like him. I like him. I like him."

— Hou Hsiao-hsien

The scrim of reverence that has enshrouded certain directors, particularly those considered spiritual or visionary – Dreyer, Bresson, Tarkovsky, Brakhage are obvious examples – has veiled or obscured many aspects of their work. Political, sexual, or psychological readings of their films have been regarded as tantamount to blasphemy, a besmirchment or distortion of pure and inviolable texts. So too Ozu, venerated as a "transcendental" artist, whose international fame has long rested on a half dozen of his (mostly late) films: muted, minimalist home dramas, esteemed for their "eternal verities" about family, death, transience, tradition; for their poignancy, Zen serenity and quiet sense of resignation – subsumed in the concept of *mono no aware* or "sensitivity to things;" and for their delicacy, restraint, and formal rigour.


It's pointless to deny these qualities in Ozu's work or that the late films are sublime – atmospherically, with their limpid, summery calm; formally, with their low-slung, symmetrical and stationary compositions, cut straight and punctuated by gorgeously extraneous "pillow shots" or disorienting ellipses; and emotionally, with their roiling undercurrents of disappointment and smiling despair. But their decorous sense of dissolution has too often been mistaken for Zen transcendentalism and probity, and in the process much of what comprises the Ozu universe has been ignored or suppressed.

The monist impulse of auteurism tends to suppress multiplicity by ignoring or explaining away variation, so Ozu's oeuvre has often been made coherent by regress to an overarching theme – the Japanese family and its dissolution, also a favourite subject of Kon Ichikawa, Mikio Naruse, and many of their colleagues – and a convenient ranking of the "problematic" early films as negligible works or as intimations of incipient mastery: Ozu before he was Ozu, as it were. It would be a grave mistake, as a corrective to this unified view of Ozu, to privilege the little known early work over the famous late films (on which we concentrate in this reprise of last year's retrospective), to reject the sense of his aesthetic as austere or rigorous. Certainly, it is easily demonstrable that his style became more singular, radical, and exacting as he proceeded; the restriction of camera position and movement, the avoidance of wipes, fades, and dissolves, the breaking of the 180-degree axis and shot/countershot rules of conventional cinema – all are commonplace in discussions of the voiding disposition of his late work. (But, as David Bordwell points out in his article on Ozu in *Artforum*, even these aspects have been exaggerated:

"Always the same camera position? No, the setups vary constantly, in response to quasi-geometrical principles. No camera movements? The camera tracks or pans in every Ozu film up to *EQUINOX FLOWER* [1958]. . . . Simple cutting? Far from it; he elaborates the editing experiments of his contemporaries in extraordinary ways.")

However, just as the once dismissed or nervously proffered early films of Robert Bresson (before he arrived at his "spiritual style") have been the subject of increasing and admiring analysis, those of Ozu have recently received more attention, not so much to tame and taxonomize them for the myth of Ozu as minimalist, but to celebrate their tremendous achievement. In turn, the plotless "purity" of Ozu's postwar family dramas has been reconsidered to take into account their strains of satire and melodrama, their often brusque humour, and their continuing debt to American cinema. (*TOKYO STORY*, it is often noted, was inspired by Leo McCarey's *MAKE WAY FOR TOMORROW*.) Clichéd descriptions of Ozu as "the most Japanese of directors" and a Zen elegist and tragedian have been, if not overturned, inflected and complicated by such studies as Shigehiko Hasumi's sly reading of Ozu's "excess of clarity" and David Bordwell's magnificent film-by-film traversal of the career. Ozu's formalism is no longer subjugated to notions of traditional Japanese aesthetics, but is read in terms of international modernism, the studio system and its "rethinking [of] American découpage" (Bordwell), and of Ozu's own peculiar, playful way with space, colour, and shapes. Initially rejected by directors of the Japanese New Wave (including his once assistant Shohei Imamura) for his conservatism and rigidity, Ozu has recently been championed for his "anti-cinema" in a book of that name by New Wave giant Kiju Yoshida. Once rarely mentioned or probed, the politics of Ozu's films have been increasingly examined, by those who consider his anxiety over the loss of tradition profoundly reactionary and others, such as Jonathan Rosenbaum, who has called Ozu "a trenchant social critic throughout his career," with a sometimes "devastating understanding of social context . . . full of radical implications." Can all of these conflicting opinions and interpretations of Ozu be true, simultaneously and concurrently? Yes, because Ozu's career is capacious and complex enough to contain them all.

— James Quandt

 The Japan Foundation

"In short, it is always a good thing to see an Ozu film. . . . The towering masterpieces, such as LATE SPRING and TOKYO STORY, seem to me part of our essential culture, able to be revisited as often as King Lear and St. Matthew Passion."

— Phillip Lopate

"One of the greatest artists of the twentieth century in any medium and in any country."

— British Film Institute

"Ozu's body of work is incommensurable with that of any other Japanese filmmaker except perhaps Kurosawa. . . . As a contribution to Japanese culture, however, it is comparable only to that of the great poets, painters or sculptors of the past."

— Noël Burch

LATE AUTUMN

(AKIBIYORI)

Director: Yasujiro Ozu
Japan 1960 129 minutes
Cast: Setsuko Hara, Chishu Ryu

Ozu at his most serenely heart-breaking. As the title suggests, LATE AUTUMN is tinged with a sense of the inevitable end of things – especially happiness. A widow (Setsuko Hara) lives quietly with her devoted daughter who rebuffs any suggestion that she should get married. Three middle-aged businessmen, old friends of the family, try to act as matchmakers, and decide that the widow must be married first, to "free" the daughter of her familial obligations. Ozu said of LATE AUTUMN: "People sometimes complicate the simplest things. Life, which seems complex, suddenly reveals itself as very simple – and I wanted to show that in this film." He makes of this situation both a comedy of interference – the well-intentioned schemes of the three businessmen are very funny – and an elegy of transience; humour and sadness intensify each other. "One of my personal favourites. . . . Ozu works his magic for two hours and achieves a pitch at the end whereby the simplest little expression seems momentous and heartbreaking" (*Senses of Cinema*).

Friday, April 1 8:30 p.m.



THE RECORD OF A TENEMENT GENTLEMAN

(NAGAYA SHINSHI ROKU)

Director: Yasujiro Ozu
Japan 1947 72 minutes
Cast: Choko Iida, Chishu Ryu

"If Ozu had made only this seventy-two minute film, he would have to be considered one of the world's greatest directors" (David Bordwell). A neglected and truly marvellous Ozu, THE RECORD OF A TENEMENT GENTLEMAN has the ineffably sad, timeless quality of his best films. Set in bombed-out postwar Tokyo, the film charts the relationship between a stern, aging widow who does not like children and an abandoned child dumped on her hands. Exasperated by its gracelessness and bed-wetting, the woman becomes increasingly hostile, and devises various ways to get rid of the child. Chishu Ryu has a delectable role as the peepshow proprietor turned astrologer who initially abandons the boy to the widow. Tender, humorous, and affecting, RECORD ends on a plangent note that suggests that postwar Japan teems with neglected children.

Saturday, April 2 6:30 p.m.



EARLY SPRING

(SOSHUN)

Director: Yasujiro Ozu
Japan 1956 144 minutes
Cast: Ryo Ikebe, Keiko Kishi

Ozu's longest film, and one of his richest, EARLY SPRING followed TOKYO STORY after a three year hiatus to write the script. The hope promised by the title quickly fades as Shoji, a recent graduate become office worker, gradually realizes that he is trapped – in his job, his marriage, his predictable life. His attempt to forestall the inevitable future of disillusionment and loneliness, by dallying with a young, flirtatious typist called Goldfish, leads to separation from his wife and, finally, a new position in a rural outpost. Ozu treats what he called "the pathos of the white-collar life" with characteristic reticence and clear-eyed sympathy; his meticulous portrayal of the rhythms of a "salaryman's" life – the endless cycle of commuting, office hell, and drinking – achieves a kind of quotidian grandeur. "A great, unpleasant film with some of the most poetic and mysterious montage in Ozu's career. The sequence of cuts showing commuters arriving at the station in the early morning, and the cut, later on, in the midst of dramatic crises to a neon sign at twilight are of a profoundness found nowhere else in cinema" (Nathaniel Dorsky).

Sunday, April 3 3:00 p.m.



THE END OF SUMMER

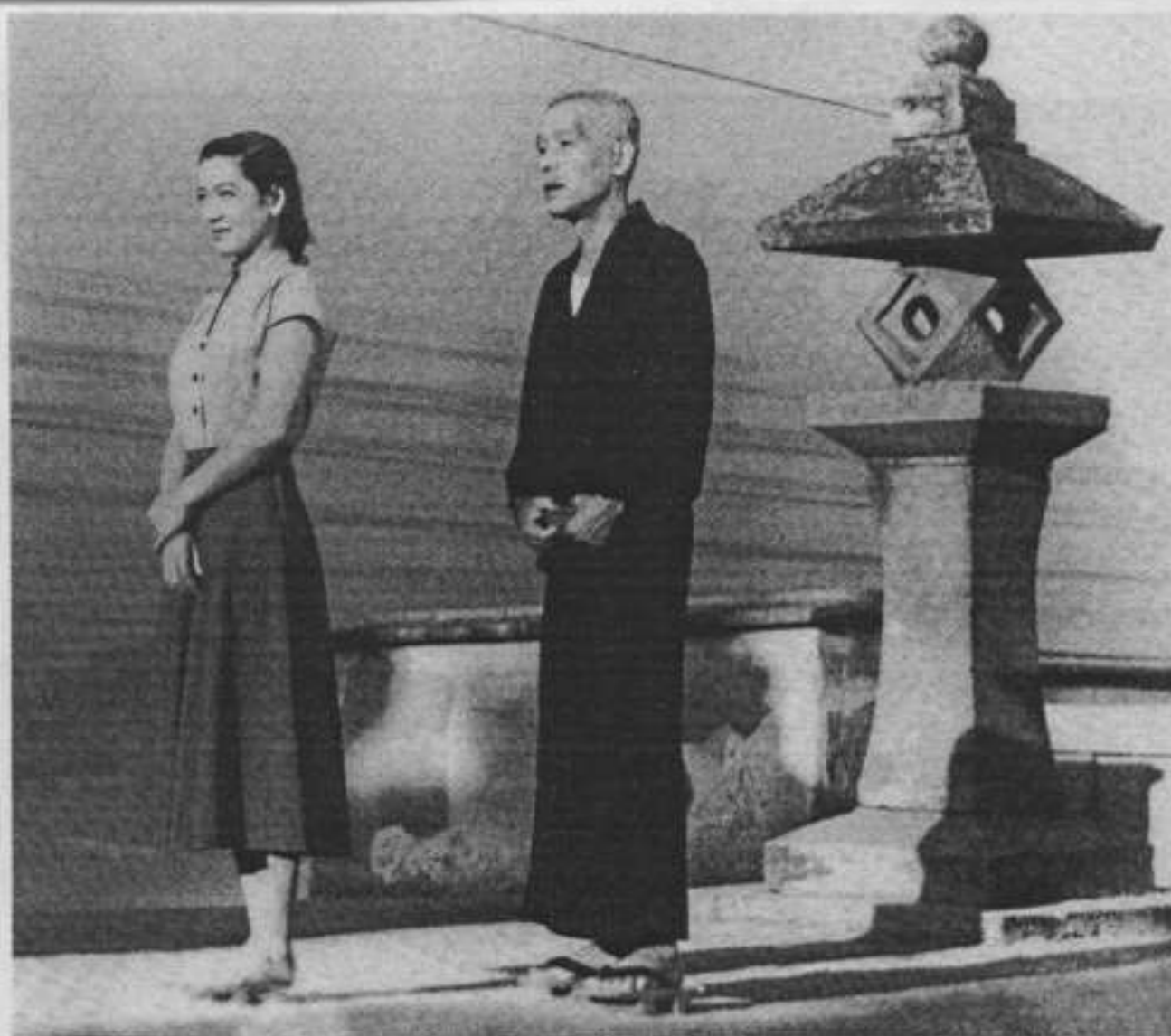
(KOHAYAGAWA-KE NO AKI)

Director: Yasujiro Ozu • Japan 1961 103 minutes • Cast: Setsuko Hara, Ganjiro Nakamura

"One of Ozu's most beautiful films, and one of his most disturbing" (Donald Richie). The aging head of a family who runs a *sake* business in Osaka takes up with his former mistress. His three daughters disapprove, including the youngest, whose marriage has yet to be arranged. What begins as social comedy, played out in lush, late summer environs, suddenly darkens when the randy old man has a heart attack. Ozu's penultimate film, THE END OF SUMMER is both a classic family saga, in the lineage of such works as TOKYO STORY, and a retrospective of his favourite themes and characters. (Chishu Ryu has a cameo as a philosophical rice farmer.) The music score is pushier than in most Ozu, perhaps, and the central performance by Nakamura raucously subverts the director's contemplative ethos, but Ozu's compositional sense is as exquisite as ever and the film's late sequences have a moving directness that suggests the director was facing his own mortality.

Tuesday, April 5 6:30 p.m.





"Not to have seen TOKYO STORY is not to have lived. . . . One of the most beautiful and compassionate films in history."

— Geoff Brown, *The Times* (London)

TOKYO STORY

(TOKYO MONOGATARI)

Director: Yasujiro Ozu
Japan 1953 134 minutes
Cast: Chishu Ryu, Setsuko Hara

"One of the manifest miracles of the cinema" (*The New Yorker*), TOKYO STORY has regularly placed on the Top Ten list of most polls, along with RULES OF THE GAME, THE PASSION OF JOAN OF ARC, and CITIZEN KANE. It should be seen at least once, preferably once a year. An elderly couple journeys to Tokyo to visit their children and are confronted by indifference, ingratitude, and self-absorption. The traditional tatami-and-tea domesticity fairly crackles with vexation and discontent; only the placid daughter-in-law (Setsuko Hara, summoning up a life of disappointment) shows any kindness to the old people. When they are packed off to a resort by their impatient children, the film deepens into an unbearably moving meditation on mortality. "One of the greatest of all Japanese motion pictures. Ozu's style, now completely refined, utterly economical, creates a film which is unforgettable because it is so right, so true, and because it demands so much from an audience" (Donald Richie).

Sunday, April 10 1:00 p.m.

AN AUTUMN AFTERNOON

(SAMMA NO AJI)

Director: Yasujiro Ozu
Japan 1962 113 minutes
Cast: Chishu Ryu, Setsuko Hara

Ozu's last film and one of his most sublime. Distilled and rending, suffused with an autumnal sense of the end of things, but often gently humorous in its satire of contemporary Japan, AN AUTUMN AFTERNOON returns to a favourite Ozu theme: a widower's decision to marry off his only daughter, despite her objections. "It is the last panel in that great fresco which so completely captures Japan as it is. . . . The simplicity of the picture is the result of a style brought to perfection. Nothing is wanting, nothing is extraneous. At the same time there is an extraordinary intensification in the film — it is autumn again, but now it is deep autumn. Winter was always near, but now it will be tomorrow" (Donald Richie). "Ozu at his most breathtakingly assured" (Tom Milne).

Tuesday, April 12 8:00 p.m.



EQUINOX FLOWER

(HIGANBANA)

Director: Yasujiro Ozu
Japan 1958 118 minutes
Cast: Shin Saburi, Kinuyo Tanaka

Pure loveliness. Ozu's first film made in colour is both delicate elegy and delectable comedy — the portrait of a domestic tyrant at odds with his liberated daughter, who shuns the idea of arranged marriage, and with his meek wife, who enters into a conspiracy to make sure the daughter gets her way. Funny and touching, EQUINOX FLOWER has a visual precision, charged with colour coding (especially Ozu's favourite, red), that delivers a succession of quietly implosive epiphanies. Kinuyo Tanaka is unforgettable as the determined mother. Summing up Ozu's sense of life's capriciousness, the father says: "Everyone is inconsistent now and then, except God. Life is full of inconsistencies. The sum total of all the inconsistencies of life is life itself." Nathaniel Dorsky: "Often the most intimate and poignant dialogue between two characters in an Ozu film is that between two women. In EQUINOX FLOWER, on an excursion to a water place (for there is always an excursion to a water place), Ozu offers a progression of shots and cuts during a discussion between two women which dismantles time and space. There is no temporal reality; as a viewer you begin to float, you start to cry. . . ." "Hirayama is as charming a character as Ozu has ever given us. . . . The performers are flawless" (Vincent Canby, *The New York Times*).

Wednesday, April 13 6:30 p.m.



THE FLAVOUR OF GREEN TEA OVER RICE

(OCHAZUKE NO AJI)

Director: Yasujiro Ozu • Japan 1952 115 minutes • Cast: Chishu Ryu, Shin Saburi

"An exquisite, lovely movie, nearly as masterful as TOKYO STORY" (*Newsweek*), THE FLAVOUR OF GREEN TEA OVER RICE has one of the great film titles, even though it might also have appropriately been called CONTEMPT. Ozu set out to portray a man from the viewpoint of a woman, and produced this subtly painful comedy about a married couple drifting apart. He is a stolid, quiet country-bred businessman; she's a city-bred snob bored with domestic life and scornful of her husband's rustic ways (including his taste for the eponymous treat). When a favourite niece comes to visit, the unhappy couple is confronted with the possibility of reconciliation. "A classic Ozu work" (Vincent Canby, *The New York Times*).

Thursday, April 14 6:30 p.m.

TOKYO TWILIGHT

(TOKYO BOSHOKU)

Director: Yasujiro Ozu • Japan 1957 141 minutes • Cast: Setsuko Hara, Chishu Ryu

The revelation of the Ozu retrospective: a film not highly ranked but one that struck us as a true buried treasure, a potent restatement of Ozu's central themes and with some of his most moving sequences. The dusky title suggests sadness, transience, ambiguity — appropriate for this tale of a family's downfall. Setsuko Hara is magnificent as a woman who leaves her abusive, alcoholic husband and returns home to her father (Chishu Ryu) and younger sister. The latter, pregnant and abandoned by her boyfriend, undergoes an abortion before both sisters discover a family secret that has devastating results. Punctuated by grotesque humour (the strange underwear thief in the police station), and set in a Tokyo quarter of pachinko and mahjong parlours, rundown bars, and noodle shops in the grey chill of midwinter, TOKYO TWILIGHT seems a bit tawdry for Ozu, a quality David Bordwell suggests "arose from a reaction to the current success of the 'sun tribe' (*taiyozoku*) youth movies and from charges that Ofuna films, especially Ozu's, were increasingly out of touch with life." Certainly more histrionic than many Ozu dramas, TWILIGHT is nevertheless often reticent and watchful, the low slung camera shots, straight cut edits and severely delimited space, the marvellously detailed soundtrack (all those ticking clocks!) and peculiar music working to make the film classically Ozu. Call it minimalist melodrama.

Sunday, April 17 1:00 p.m.

