

# CLOSE-UP

CLOSE-UP FILM CENTRE presents

**THEATRE SCORPIO SEASON  
JAPANESE INDEPENDENT AND EXPERIMENTAL CINEMA OF THE  
1960s**



## PRESS RELEASE

**DATES:** 12 – 28<sup>TH</sup> JULY

**VENUE:** BETHNAL GREEN WORKING MEN'S CLUB

## SUPPORTED BY:



**JAPAN**FOUNDATION

Close-Up Film Centre has put together a programme of 1960s Japanese independent and experimental cinema to celebrate the range of activities at Shinjuku's legendary art space Theatre Scorpio for the first time in the United Kingdom. This special programme includes films never before screened in the country or to an English-speaking audience, some brand new prints and

freshly subtitled films to offer an engaging insight into a decade that was defined by political ferment and avant-garde activity.

The diverse line-up includes: films by internationally recognised directors including *Yunbogi's Diary* (1965) by **Nagisa Oshima** and some early shorts by *Hausu* director **Nobuhiko Obayashi**; U.K. and London premieres of radical filmmaker **Motoharu Jonouchi** whose films are back by popular demand after the success of our Nippon Year Zero screening with Zipangu Fest; a feature-length surreal masterpiece *Galaxy* directed by Koji Wakamatsu's right-hand man **Masao Adachi**, screened for the first time with English subtitles; and pioneering experiments by the members of **Nihon University Film Studies Club**.

All screenings will include an introduction by one of the curators or an expert on the field and a Q&A discussion session will follow each programme. **Go Hirasawa** (Meiji Gakuin University, Tokyo), curator of the season and editor of *Underground Film Archives* and various texts on Koji Wakamatsu and the Art Theatre Guild, will introduce *Galaxy* (1967) on the 26<sup>th</sup> July. **Shane O'Sullivan**, director of *Children of the Revolution* (2011), will also join us to discuss Motoharu Jonouchi films on the 19<sup>th</sup> July.

And last but not least, we have invited independent filmmaker **Katsu Kanai** as a special guest who will be joining us for his first visit to the U.K.

Katsu Kanai will introduce his debut *The Desert Archipelago* (1969) and *Good-Bye* (1971) on the 28<sup>th</sup> July and will join us for a Q&A session after the screenings. Katsu Kanai is one of the luminaries of the Japanese independent film scene and a winner of the FIPRESCI award at the 50<sup>th</sup> Oberhausen International Short Film Festival.

For any questions on the programme or to arrange an interview with any of the guests, please get in touch with the programme coordinator:

**Press Information:**

Julian Ross: [julian@vertigomagazine.co.uk](mailto:julian@vertigomagazine.co.uk)

**THEATRE SCORPIO:**

Named by Yukio Mishima after Kenneth Anger's film *Scorpio Rising*, Theatre Scorpio (Sasori-za) was a legendary underground art space beneath the Art Theatre Guild's Art Theatre Shinjuku Bunka. The venue quickly became a centre of activity for all corners of the 1960s arts scene, offering a platform for performance art, theatre, dance and screenings of avant-garde films. Although their autonomous voices were characterised by diversity in approach and style, the artists were united by their urge for individual expression and a desire for a space to share their ideas. Theatre Scorpio met their needs and became a nexus for their experiments.

**PROGRAMME:**

Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> July - 8pm

**Studies in Movement: Experiments by Three Filmmakers**

**An Eater** (Nobuhiko Obayashi & Kazutomo Fujino) (1963 | 23 mins | 16mm)

**Complex** (Nobuhiko Obayashi) (1964 | 15 mins | 16mm)

**Wan** (Nihon University Film Studies Club) (1961 | 25 mins | 16mm)

**Yunbogi's Diary** (Nagisa Oshima) (1965 | 30 mins | 16mm)

Introduction by Julian Ross (University of Leeds/Mixed Cinema Network)

Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> July - 8pm

**Motoharu Jonouchi: Avant-Garde Visions of 1960s Protest Movements**

**Pupu** (Nihon University Film Studies Club) (1960 | 22 mins | 16mm)

**Document 6.15** (Motoharu Jonouchi) (1961 | 19 mins | 16mm)

**Wols** (Motoharu Jonouchi) (1965 | 19 mins | 16mm)

**Tatsumi Hijikata** (Motoharu Jonouchi) (1967 | 1 min | 16mm)

**Mass Collective Bargaining at Nihon University** (Motoharu Jonouchi) (1968 | 22 mins | Silent | 16mm)

Introduction by Julian Ross (University of Leeds/Mixed Cinema Network)

Discussion with Shane O'Sullivan (E2 Films; Director of 'Children of the Revolution' (2011))

Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> July - 8pm

**Galaxy** (Masao Adachi) (1967 | 75 mins | Digital) (New English Subtitles)

Introduction by Go Hirasawa (Meiji Gakuin University, Tokyo)

Thursday 28<sup>th</sup> July - 8pm

**An Evening with Katsu Kanai: Smiling Milky Way**

**Desert Archipelago** (Katsu Kanai) (1969 | 56 mins | Digital)

**Good-Bye** (Katsu Kanai) (1971 | 52 mins | Digital)

Introduction and Q&A with filmmaker Katsu Kanai

Tickets:

£9 for non-members; £5 for Close-Up members.

Season Ticket:

£25 for non-members; £15 for Close-Up members.

Visitor Information:

BETHNAL GREEN WORKING MEN'S CLUB

44-46 Pollard Row | London E2 6NB

CLOSE-UP FILM CENTRE

139 Brick Lane | London E1 6SB

Tel: +44 (0) 20 7739 3634

<http://www.closeupfilmcentre.com/>

Facebook: Close-Up | Twitter: @closeupfilms

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**CLOSE-UP SUPPORTS THE FOLLOWING RELATED EVENTS:**

**FLAT TIME HOUSE**

Friday 29<sup>th</sup> July (time tbc)

**Hi-Red Centre Shelter Plan** (Motoharu Jonouchi) (1964 | 19 mins | 16mm)

**Shinjuku Station** (Motoharu Jonouchi) (1974 | 15 mins | 16mm)

**Gewaltpia Trailer** (Motoharu Jonouchi) (1968 | 12 mins | 16mm)

Visitor Information:

FLAT TIME HOUSE

210 Bellenden Road | London SE15 4BW

[www.flattimeho.org.uk](http://www.flattimeho.org.uk)

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**‘ART THEATRE GUILD OF JAPAN: SPACES FOR INTERCULTURAL AND INTERMEDIAL CINEMA’ SYMPOSIUM**

Saturday-Sunday 30-31<sup>st</sup> July (time tbc)

41 Gordon Square Cinema, Birkbeck College, University of London

**Keynote Speakers:** Roland Domenig; Go Hirasawa; Yuriko Furuhashi; more tbc

**Special Guest:** Katsu Kanai

**Screenings:**

**Sain** (Nihon University Film Studies Club) (1963 | 55 mins | 35mm)

Introduction by Go Hirasawa

**The Kingdom** (Katsu Kanai) (1973 | 83 mins | Digital)

Introduction + Q&A with filmmaker Katsu Kanai

**Crazy Love** (Michio Okabe) (1968 | 90 mins | 16mm)

**Visitor Information:**

BIRKBECK COLLEGE, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

41 Gordon Square | London WC1H 0PD

<http://www.bbk.ac.uk/creative/news-events/atg>

**SUPPORTED BY:**



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**Shinjuku Diaries: Films from the Art Theatre Guild of Japan at BFI SOUTHBANK**

August 2011

**Visitor Information:**

BFI

## NOTES ON THE FILMMAKERS:

### KATSU KANAI

Katsu Kanai began his career at Daiei Studios after graduating Nihon University, but decided to use the skills he had developed for independent production. He set up his production company 'Kanai Katsumaru Production' in 1968 and has since made many TV documentaries and short experimental films, one of which won him a FIPRESCI award at the 50<sup>th</sup> Oberhausen International Short Film Festival.

"Coming at the tail end of the 1960s New Wave, Kanai Katsu became a pioneer of truly independent filmmaking that traversed Japan and Korea to surrealistically engage with issues of politics and identity" [Aaron Gerow]

### MOTOHARU JONOUCHI

Motoharu Jonouchi was one of the leaders of the Nihon University Film Studies Club and the legendary VAN Film Research Centre where artists enacted cross-disciplinary collaborations to explore the art of film. Jonouchi, also the assistant director on Hiroshi Teshigahara's feature-debut *Pitfall* (1962), picked up his camera to record artistic events, such as 'happening' art by Hi-Red Centre in *Hi-Red Centre Shelter Plan* (1964) and *butoh* dance in *Hijikata Tatsumi* (1967), as well as socio-political protests in *Mass Collective Bargaining at Nihon University* (1968) and the emergence of drug experimentation in *Document LSD* (1962). Yet what was most remarkable about Jonouchi was his ability to integrate his personal vision into his documentation, creating a concoction of personal and collective, imaginary and tangible spaces.

"In their meticulous assemblage of individual shots of different spaces imbued with the symbolic significance of political confrontation, [Jonouchi's films] rejected the theatrics of spectacle, instead establishing a radical materialism of spaces in both structure and methodology" [Jonathan M. Hall]

### NOBUHIKO OBAYASHI

Nobuhiko Obayashi started filmmaking as a youth making 8mm and 16mm 'personal films', screening his work as part of the Association of Three (*Sannin no Kai*) and the *Film Independents*, alongside Takahiko Imura and Yoichi Takabayashi. He joined the advertising firm Dentsu to produce a variety of innovative adverts, which led to his the creation of his now-infamous *Hausu*. He made some teenage comedies with the Art Theatre Guild and continues to direct TV dramas and feature-length films where hints of his playful film style and light-hearted exuberance of his early days remain.

For more information on Nobuhiko Obayashi, please check:

<http://www.midnighteye.com/features/nobuhiko-obayashi-vagabond-of-time.shtml>

“Beyond formal experimentation, what makes Obayashi’s early work distinct from other filmmakers to come out of the 1960s is the way he pairs an emphasis on malleable time and space with an equally fervent impulse towards melodrama of the most robust and romantic sort” [Paul Roquet]

### **MASAO ADACHI**

Masao Adachi was a member of the Nihon University Film Studies Club, the Film Independents and the VAN Film Research Centre in the early 1960s, participating in the forefront of independent cinema. He worked as a scriptwriter for films by Nagisa Oshima and Koji Wakamatsu, and directed some notable *pink* film titles, including *Gushing Prayer*, that pushed beyond its genre for Wakamatsu Production. His work has always been political, reaching its polemical zenith with his landscape-film *AKA Serial Killer* and *The Red Army/PFLP: Declarations of World War* that he co-directed with Wakamatsu and led to his long-term stay as an activist in Palestine.

Interview with Masao Adachi:

[http://www.midnighteye.com/interviews/masao\\_adachi.shtml](http://www.midnighteye.com/interviews/masao_adachi.shtml)

### **MICHIO OKABE**

Michio Okabe began as a pop-artist associated with the Neo-Dada Organisers, a group of young artists including Genpei Akasegawa and Ushio Shinohara that emerged out of the infamous Yomiuri Independents exhibitions. Inspired by Kenneth Anger’s *Scorpio Rising* and other films from the American underground that were screened at Sogetsu Art Centre in the 1960s, Okabe returned to the venue in 1967 to win a prize at its experimental film festival. Okabe’s film style is defined by his camp sensibilities and joyful awe at the happenings that were daily encounters for the artist.

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## **NOTES ON THE FILMS IN SCREENING ORDER:**

### **AN EATER**

A satire similar to Luis Bunuel’s darkly comic condemnations of bourgeois dinner rituals, Nobuhiko Obayashi co-directed *An Eater* with painter Kazutomo Fujino to point out the voracious greed of human behaviour. A waitress is sickened by her customers’ overindulgence and loses consciousness. When she awakens, she finds her body is being dissected and prepared for the next meal. The surreal absurdities and comedic tone is a precursor to the director’s recently rediscovered masterpiece *Hausu* (1977). The film won a special award at Knokke-le-Zoute Experimental Film Festival in 1964.

### **COMPLEXE**

Nobuhiko Obayashi began making 8-mm ‘personal-films’ where he explored the joy of moving images by recording his immediate surroundings and playing with the possibilities of the medium. *Complexe* employs stop-motion

animation techniques on live-action footage generating jittery effects - its rapid-fire cutting become comically surreal. The film follows a suited man's walk through town where his digressions lead to a series of encounters and humorous happenings, in the style of Takahiko Imura's *Dance Party in the Kingdom of Lilliput*. *Complexe* was screened at the inaugural event of the *Film Independents*, a group of independent filmmakers that was set up with Takahiko Imura.

### **WAN**

The 4<sup>th</sup> production of Nihon University Film Studies Club, *Wan* was led by Masao Adachi and was produced in the wake of the failure of student protests against the Anpo: US-Japan Security Treaty in 1960. The lucidly surreal images illustrate a young man who rebels against an eerie ritual, yet it becomes uncertain whether his act of rebellion is autonomous or a part of the ceremony.

### **YUNBOGI'S DIARY**

A lyrical and ethereal montage of still-images, *Yunbogi's Diary* is a collage-piece by Nagisa Oshima with darkly sombre undertones. The collection of photographs were taken by Oshima during his two-month research trip to South Korea in 1965 where he was astounded but strengthened by the poverty-stricken street-children in Seoul. The voiceover narrates diary entries from a six-year old Korean boy and Oshima's own ruminations of Japan-Korean relations, a subject that was revisited throughout his career, surfacing most prominently in *Sing a Song of Sex* and *Death by Hanging*.

"An unflinchingly iconoclastic and ceaselessly inventive filmmaker, Nagisa Oshima (1932- ) has scorched an indelible path across postwar Japanese cinema. Oshima is one of Japan's original outlaw masters – a rebellious and instinctively anti-establishment artist" [James Quandt]

Oshima's first film co-produced with the Art Theatre Guild will screen at the BFI Southbank as part of their season 'Shinjuku Diaries: Films from the Art Theatre Guild of Japan'.

### **PUPU**

Along with Masao Adachi, Jonouchi was a member of the legendary Nihon University Film Studies Club where students collaborated to make films that have been cited as pioneering experimental films. *Pupu*, their third film as a unit, was led by Jonouchi and evokes an insight into the subject matters and stylistic flavours he will later come to favour. Two young males are rendered immobile by an overwhelming accumulation of sound and images related to various cases of national and international oppression, and eventually a ritual turns one of them into a mannequin. The scene in a room full of human-sized dummies more than matches the famous sequence in Stanley Kubrick's *Killer's Kiss*.

### **DOCUMENT 6.15**

A living space and film lab set up by Jonouchi and his collaborators, the VAN Film Research Centre were invited to make *Document 6.15* for a

demonstration event mourning the death of student protestor Michiko Kanba. Led by Jonouchi, the collaborative film was conceived as part of a performance with slides and live-sounds, and for a screening a year later, Jonouchi re-edited the material and invited Yasunao Tone, Takehisa Kosugi and Toshi Ichiyonagi, all leading noise-musicians, to perform live alongside performance art by Yoko Ono and Shou Kazakura. At one of the screenings, one of the speakers was stolen, causing a riot, but Jonouchi proceeded to continue with the screening amidst the chaos, reveling in the unplanned intervention.

## **WOLS**

Wols is the pseudonym for a German artist active in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Alfred Otto Wolfgang Schulze, and Jonouchi meticulously filmed nearly fifty of his paintings to construct a cine-collage. The result is reminiscent of Alain Resnais' rendition of Pablo Picasso's *Guernica*, as both filmed interpretations refuse to provide the viewer with a full picture of the paintings, instead fragmenting and splintering the frame. The film is an attempt at translating the durational experience of observing a painting, as the camera becomes the eye, focusing on individual marks and shifting back and forth. Jonouchi had abandoned the film at the processing lab, only to pick it up three years later and ask noise musician Takehisa Kosugi from Group Ongaku, Taj Mahal Travellers and Fluxus fame, to layer some improvised sounds over the images.

Takehisa Kosugi's work is exhibited at the Raven Row Gallery between 9<sup>th</sup> June and 17<sup>th</sup> July. For more information, please check: <http://www.ravenrow.org/>

## **HIJIKATA TATSUMI**

The co-founder of *Ankoku Butoh* dance, Tatsumi Hijikata was an extremely significant figure in the Japanese art scene, his influence reaching beyond the realms of dance into other creative genres. Jonouchi, who at times had participated in *butoh* performances, offers a homage to his artistic mentor in an uncharacteristic documentation of dance that breaks up the flow of movement into individually fragmented frames.

## **MASS COLLECTIVE BARGAINING AT NIHON UNIVERSITY**

The late 1960s saw Japan in a fever pitch of political agitation where student protests were a frequent occurrence. A timely insight into radical protest and mass meetings from almost half a century ago, the film reveals the aftermath of protests and shares extremely rare footage of mass meetings that were held at universities. An active participant of the movement against the U.S.-Japan Security Treaty (Anpo) in the late-50s, Jonouchi revisits his university to document the demonstrations against the re-signing of the pact. The empty spaces he discovers in the aftermath of agitation are chaotic yet sombre. Once again, Jonouchi inserts his own personality into the documentation, only capturing what interests him and abstracting the images to near-incomprehension, submerging documentary and subjectivity.

## **GALAXY**

The inaugural film for the Theatre Scorpio, a man gets lost in his own consciousness in Masao Adachi's surreal masterpiece that had people queuing round the corner upon its release. Adachi uses inventive camera work and creative cuts to throw his protagonist and audience into spatial confusion whilst his characters ruminate on identity and subjectivity. Memory and dreams collapse into incomprehension in a film soundtracked by Fluxus associate Yasunao Tone.

### **THE DESERT ARCHIPELAGO**

Winner of the Grand Prix at Nyon International Film Festival and selected for Tony Rayns' 'Eiga: 25 Years of Japanese Cinema' programme at Edinburgh International Film Festival in 1984, Katsu Kanai's debut *The Desert Archipelago* is the first of the 'Smiling Milky Way Trilogy' and a landmark in experimental narrative cinema. A young man reaches adolescence and escapes the nunnery where he survived a tortured upbringing. Whilst on the run he encounters strange deities including over-sized newborns played by performance artists Zerojigen and his doppelganger which his wounded back has given birth to.

### **GOOD-BYE**

The first postwar Japanese film to be shot in South Korea, Kanai Katsu continues his 'Smiling Milky Way Trilogy' with *Good-Bye*, an exploration of Japan-Korean relations and the roots of the Japanese bloodline.

"The film uses surrealism and oneiric imagery as well as the disruptive effects of the performance as happening both to fantasize and to subject to ethnographic scrutiny Japan's fraught relation to Korea" (Ryan Cook)

### **HI-RED CENTRE SHELTER PLAN**

Hi-Red Centre were comprised of Genpei Akasegawa, Natsuyuki Nakanishi and Jiro Takamatsu, who enacted 'happening'-style performance art in unusual spaces during the early 1960s in Japan. The film is an extremely rare document of one of their early events, where they hired out a room in the Imperial Hotel and invited many friends and professionals in the art scene to participate in the occasion. The performance parodies Cold War fears and the construction of private bomb-shelters, as they diligently measure each guest's weight and proportions in pretence that they are to build human-size shelters for each individual. Key figures of the art scene make an appearance, including Yoko Ono, video-artist Nam June Paik, noise artist Yasunori Tone, filmmaker Masao Adachi and graphic designer Tadanori Yokoo. A rarely seen and exceptional insight into the Japanese art scene of the era, Jonouchi records the event in his characteristically erratic style.

### **GEWALTOPIA TRAILER**

The title *Gewaltopia Trailer* has a dual meaning in the Japanese language; one meaning for the word *yokoku* (trailer) could mean a compilation of extracts to promote a film, but it can also mean a prediction, a prophecy for the future as a *Gewaltopia* (revolt + utopia). The film accumulates footage from his earlier films and arranges them in different contexts, a characteristic style of Jonouchi's who often re-edited his films for each screening and

provided different soundtracks. The jarring aural atmosphere, exemplary of the emergent noise-music scene, haunts the screen in an oppressive hypnosis and will seduce you into entrancement.

### **SHINJUKU STATION**

The Shinjuku district was the epicentre of Tokyo's art scene and the political fever pitch where protests took place on a regular basis during the 1960s. Jonouchi's compilation footage of the area defies documentary imagery and transforms itself into something altogether more poetically subjective, attempting to capture the chaos of the location through his camerawork and editing. In 1974, Jonouchi projected images of the past onto himself whilst reciting Dada-influenced and virtually inaudible poetry generating a cacophony of images and sounds, drawing from and participating in the maelstrom of political and artistic expression during the era.

### **SAIN**

The fifth production by the legendary Nihon University Film Studies Club, *Sain* is an eerie meditation on death and the rituals that surround it. Imbued in morbid despondence, the overexposed images and creepy soundtrack, composed by John Cage disciple Toshi Ichiyanagi, merge to elicit an uniquely otherworldly quality. The screening of the film in Kyoto and Osaka were planned as a 'live-art happening', entitled *Sain Ritual*, where Hi-Red Centre's Genpei Akasegawa, performance artist Sho Kazakura and musicians Yasunao Tone and Takehisa Kosugi, amongst others, accompanied the screenings.

### **THE KINGDOM**

The finale of the 'Smiling Milky Way' project, *The Kingdom* closes the trilogy with a story of poet Goku Katsumaru who is burdened by the mechanical dictation of time and how it imposes its permeation on his life. He encounters other eccentrics, played by a cameo lineup of countercultural figures including Kanai himself, who similarly conspire to outwardly reject its constraints. Katsumaru gradually loses his grip and the film escorts his descent into madness where it reaches fantastic realms into the origins of time itself. Kanai's stylistic flourish flexes between angular black and white photography and serene imagery in colour with impressive ease.

### **CRAZY LOVE**

A document of its time rather than a traceable narrative, Michio Okabe's *Crazy Love* captures the spirit of the 1960s through photographing live-art performances, street 'happenings', *futen* hippie life and dance-hall grooves. A celebration of the freedom of expression in its various intonations, Okabe's film is a rare insight into an entertaining counterculture that is delivered with camp sensibilities. Performance artists Zerojigen, musician Yasunao Tone and photographer Kenji Kanesaka are just few of the faces of the Shinjuku underground that make an appearance in a film sound-tracked by familiar pop songs from the decade.