



Joel Neville Anderson, at left, moderates Q and A session on the movie "Man from Reno" at the 2014 Japan Cuts festival with director Dave Boyle, actor Kazuki Kitamura, and interpreter Marie Iida. (Photo by Mike Nogami.)

UR PhD student helps reshape Japan Cuts film festival

In 2009, Joel Neville Anderson volunteered as a ticket taker at Japan Cuts, the largest North American festival devoted to Japanese film.

Now, in his second year as curator of the festival, the fourth-year University PhD student in Visual and Cultural Studies from Flushing, Queens, has helped reshape Japan Cuts. He's introducing those ticket holders to a more varied fare of contemporary Japanese documentary, avant-garde, and newly restored films at a festival that traditionally concentrated on popular genre cinema.

"A palpable anti-establishment energy emerges," Anderson said of this year's program, which runs through July 19 at Japan Society in Manhattan. It offers 28 feature films (more than half making their North American debut) and numerous short films. The features range from "Joker Game," a spy genre thriller, to "HIBI ROCK: Puke Afro and the Pop Star," a soulful punk comedy, to period film "Sanchu Uprising: Voices at Dawn," and political documentary "The Wages of Resistance: Narita Stories."

"I think those elements together show something important about the state of film culture in Japan today," Anderson said. "This rebellious energy is newly tangible while also precarious and unpredictable, suggesting new waves of talent."

Mike Hale of *The New York Times*, in an article about this year's festival, writes that Anderson "doesn't ignore the Japanese studio mainstream, a sector widely seen to be in a deep creative trough at the moment. . . . But Mr. Anderson's interest clearly lies with the idiosyncratic, the eccentric, the experimental and the weird, a taste that Japan rewards as richly as any country, even the United States."

Japanese friends he met while attending Concord-Carlisle Regional High School in Concord, Mass. and repertory screenings in Boston first sparked Anderson's interest in films from that nation. His involvement with Japan Cuts gradually progressed from volunteer ticket-taker, to a film program intern, to part-timer, to full time employee of the development arm of the Japan Society. After leaving to attend UR, he was hired to work as Japan Cuts curator on a contract basis.

A filmmaker himself, Anderson also regularly publishes essays and reviews in the "Directory of World Cinema" book series. His article "Cinema in reconstruction: Japan's post-3.11 documentary" will be included in "Film on the Faultline," a collection of essays on cinematic responses to earthquakes due out from University of Chicago Press and Intellect this year.

Anderson's research interests at the University also include personal documentary, experimental film and video, film programming and media arts centers. He is recipient of the University's Celeste Hughes Bishop Award for Distinction in the Graduate Studies, given annually to undergraduate and graduate students for academic accomplishments, teaching achievements, and general contributions to the Department of Art and Art History and the Graduate Program in Visual and Cultural Studies.

This fall he will teach "Women's Personal Cinema" as a Teaching Fellow at the University of Rochester's Susan B. Anthony Institute for Gender and Women's Studies.

His long-term goal is to continue in academia as a researcher and teacher, focusing on personal documentary and film history with secondary interest in Japanese cinema. But he also wants to remain involved in film programming and publishing projects that reach audiences outside academia, such as the Japan Cuts festival. "This is sort of the beginning of how I'm developing that goal," Anderson said.