

Susumu Hani's Bad Boys (Furyō shōnen, 1960)

by Marcos Centeno

Bad Boys (Furyō shōnen, 1960) was the first feature film directed by the leading figure of the Japanese 'New Wave', Susumu Hani, and marked the beginning of the renewal of cinematic language in Japan in the 1960s. The story revolves around Hiroshi Asai (Yukio Yamada), a young boy who is arrested for robbing a jeweller and sent to a reformatory. *Bad Boys* had a major impact when it was released and triggered debates about the possibilities of a new form of cinema. This work, which was first on the list of best films of 1960 elaborated by *Kinema Junpō*, was awarded in Germany and commended in France by Truffaut, Godard and Renoir. In addition, the soundtrack, composed by Tōru Takemitsu, was praised by Japanese critics for its modern elements and transgressions of jazz principles.

Bad Boys blurs the boundaries between reality and fiction through the innovative style that Hani developed during his earlier work as a documentary filmmaker for Iwanami Eiga. During this period, Hani wrote dozens of essays in which he proposed a new form of documentary film which is characterized by a consistent method of filmmaking, based on proximity to the portrayed characters and naturalist techniques. This would allow filmmakers to find a kind of subjectivity (*shutaisei*) that should be alien to that of the filmmaker. Thus, Hani shifted his interest from subject (*shutai*) to filmed object (*taisho*): instead of projecting the author's mentality, his documentaries were committed to exploring inner universes in the outer reality. Hani claimed that this subjectivity could only be reached once directors were familiar with "protagonists who do not act". Throughout his essays, Hani also rejected the use of scripts as this entailed imposing filmmaker's preconceived ideas on the profilmic world.

After the success of his documentary films, Hani received a proposal from Nikkatsu to make a feature film. However, rather than hiring youth icons of the time, Yūjirō Ishihara, Akira Kobayashi and Hiroyuki Nagato, he was determined to work with real delinquent youths, something that was far from the usual way of working at the big studios. As a consequence, Hani resorted to Iwanami Eiga to make this film using his previous documentary style, comprised of the extensive use of hand-held camera, improvisation, non-professional actors, natural lighting and location shooting in Kurihama reformatory, the districts of Tokyo and the slums surrounding the American military base of Yokosuka.

The film presents an avant-garde style aimed at seeking new mechanisms to explore the reality which Hani developed, inspired by the philosophical pragmatism of the American psychologist William James, and by *seikatsu kiroku* ("life document") practices which consisted of amateur writings in which authors expressed their own experiences in everyday life. In fact, *Bad Boys* is loosely based on the book *Tobenai tsubasa (Wings that cannot Fly, 1958)*, another example of *seikatsu kiroku* in which the psychologist Aiko Jinushi gathered the autobiographical stories of inmates from the same Kurihama reformatory. During the shooting of *Bad Boys*, Hani proposed similar situations to those depicted in the book and modified them according to the boys' experiences, memories and fantasies. During the eleven days it took to shoot the scenes in the reformatory, Hani lived with the protagonists and included suggestions and even texts written by the boys themselves.

Hani encouraged the characters to express themselves freely and do whatever they wanted in each situation, including scenes of robbery in which protagonists act as if it was a real theft. They also watched and commented on the material they had filmed each day. The boys quickly repudiated their own image of wayward youngsters on screen and their attitudes changed throughout the shooting, a spiritual change towards maturity that was also transferred to the characters they played. As a consequence, the fictional components in *Bad Boys* are extraordinarily ambiguous and the film reaches an unseen level of realism that breaks free from previous narrative structures and codes, bringing about a coexistence of fiction and nonfiction cinema.