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## Aru michi

A Road

### Daichi Sugimoto

**Producer** Miki Ohi. **Production company** Pia Film Festival (Tokyo, Japan). **Written and directed by** Daichi Sugimoto. **Director of photography** Daichi Sugimoto. **Editor** Daichi Sugimoto. **Sound** Daichi Sugimoto.

**With** Daichi Sugimoto (Daichi), Yuta Katsukura (Kattu), Rika Sugimoto (Okan), Masato Ikariishi (Masa), Yoji Kondo (Yoji), Konosuke Dobashi (Dobashi), Gonta (Gonta), Hiroki Noda (Hiroki).

DCP, colour. 85 min. Japanese.

**Premiere** 16 September 2015, Pia Filmfestival Tokyo

Childhood is a time for dreaming. For Daichi too. One of his dreams has now come true: he's studying film. But whatever became of the happiness from back then? Those moments of elation as a little boy when he and his friends used to catch lizards without a care in the world? A documentary exercise at film school forms the starting point of his search for the end of childhood: for Daichi, capturing images with his camera is now just as much about capturing lizards.

Can we retrieve the past? In *Aru michi*, director Daichi Sugimoto casts himself as a film student of the same name in pursuit of his childhood. Calmly, ingeniously, he blurs reality and fiction as well as the boundary between the past and the present. What he discovers is both painful and beautiful: you can catch a lizard and keep it captive, but you can't do the same with the past – which, unlike our memories of it, is ephemeral. In everyday situations with his mother and his friends, Sugimoto paints an authentic portrait of a generation on its way to adulthood. *Aru michi* is a sensitive film about taking leave of childhood while preserving what it means to be a child.

Ansgar Vogt

## True humanity

As I child I once stole some sweet potatoes from a field in my neighbourhood for fun. A man I knew caught me. I don't remember the expression on his face but he said, 'Here, take these too,' and dug up some more potatoes and gave them to me. What he did was so unexpected that I felt something close to a sense of sin. And that smell of the soil from the field that has been dug up for me, the sour taste of saliva in my mouth as I watched him – there are times when I still vividly recall such things that I experienced when I was younger. They are trivial occurrences, but every time I recall them, I feel as if there is no other sensation in the world as great and absolute.

I began shooting *Aru michi* based on a screenplay I wrote for an assignment in my second year at university. Movies today tend to force out human emotions through hideous incidents, miserable circumstances, or an unfair society. But I want to depict the intrinsic, visceral emotions that humans or organisms have. That is why I based the screenplay on personal experiences, played the lead myself and had my mother and my friends play the other characters. I think that films can only capture humanity in its true sense when they are based on the things that one has experienced and felt. *Aru michi* is a work that was born from such an approach. The cast and crew were all non-professionals. There were many rehearsals and a lot of trial and error. We had to figure out together how to shoot and how to act. For example, we would use duct tape to fix a microphone to a stick and use it as a boom arm, or we'd fasten ourselves to a motorbike to do a shoot. Looking back, I'm embarrassed to say that I was the worst actor among the entire cast. My childhood friends that I used to catch lizards with, my gang from my youth and the ones I met at university didn't know each other in advance. And yet they all mingled and helped me out as the cast and crew. It was a lot of fun making a movie like that together with everyone.

Daichi Sugimoto

## "The personal memory is strongly connected to what I currently long for"

*When did you realise that you wanted to go to film school?*

**Daichi Sugimoto:** I began thinking about what I wanted to do in the future during my last year of high school. I hadn't really considered going to university and I spent every day trying to figure out what I liked. I narrowed down my interests to motorbikes, animals, and watching movies. So movies were among the choices that I had.

*What was it like to turn yourself, your friends and family into characters? Did this process change the way you see yourself and them?*

I got a sense of a strength that lies within acting that's grounded in actual existing relationships. Interacting with your family and with friends that you've fostered connections with over the years gives a compelling credibility to the story, and depth to the characters, even if the acting itself is fictional. The actors had no experience but they began to study how they normally behaved. This in turn changed the inherent naturalness that the actors had, which I found very interesting.

*Why is the character of Sugimoto so eager to get into university?*

It's not so much wanting to enter university as not being able to stand the lukewarm situation that he finds himself in.

*In the beginning, Sugimoto seems to experience an increasing alienation from his friends. He also seems quite withdrawn when he notices that his former best friend hasn't changed much. What impact do you think meeting a new group of friends has on one's own personal development?*

I think you get to know yourself better by closely observing various people around you, not just limited to the new friends you meet. You can always ask yourself if it's your friend who hasn't changed or whether you're the one who's transforming.

*You often use a black screen between shots. This gives *Aru michi* an almost collage-like feeling. What was the reason for this aesthetic choice?*

I didn't intentionally aim for a collage, but I did have the sensation of turning the pages of a book, for example a picture book, in mind – that space between the pages, the moment when you move from the current page to the next. Within it lies a pleasant feeling and a moment to reflect once again on the previous scene.

*At the end of the movie, Sugimoto is seen on his bike, waiting at a red traffic light. He scans the bushes nearby as if hunting for lizards. For a few seconds it seems that he is drawn out of everyday life and into his positive memories of his own excitement in childhood. What role do you think those very personal memories play in our lives?*

Sugimoto probably remembered the feeling of his childhood, but also experienced the current sensation of not being able to get into it as much as he used to. The things we find important and that keep us alive aren't necessarily the same and differ from person to person. In my case, that 'personal memory' is strongly connected to what I currently long for. I can't forget the poignant memory of excitement and the pleasure I felt, so in some ways that helps me to figure out what I currently really want.

*The only time we hear about Sugimoto's father is on one of the home video tapes from his childhood. What happened to him?*

I didn't intend anything by that. I simply wanted to purely and deeply focus on the character of the mother. By the way, there's an older sister in the real Sugimoto family, but she never appears in the film.

*Sugimoto's mother seems to love her cat just as much as the lizards fascinate Sugimoto. In the very last shot of the film, the cat and the lizards meet. What was your idea behind this encounter?*

When Gonta the cat takes an interest in the lizards, that sense overlaps in part with Sugimoto's feeling of when he used to be fascinated by them as a kid. I thought it was a good way to tell the story and that it would enable me to effectively express that feeling.

*Interview: Björn Hochschild, January 2016*



**Daichi Sugimoto** was born in 1993 in Tokyo, Japan. He is currently studying Film in the Department of Design at Tokyo Zokei University. *Aru michi/A Road* is his debut film.