

HUMA2331

MEDIA THEORIES OF JAPANESE ANIMATION

Spring 2024

Mondays/Wednesdays 12:00-1:20 pm

Room 4619

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION

Baryon Tensor Posadas

hmbposadas@ust.hk

Office Hours: by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course takes as its object of analysis the technologies, genres, and themes of Japanese animation. Needless to say, the course cannot make any claims to being comprehensive or up to date with the latest anime given the sheer volume of available titles through the past decades. Nonetheless, while it is selective in its coverage, through the examination of select works of important directors (Miyazaki, Oshii, Kon, Shinkai, etc.) alongside media theories and other scholarly analyses, the course will cover not only the major genres and recurrent themes of anime, but also, the important cultural and critical contexts for apprehending Japanese animation. Initially we will focus our attention on the technology of animation and its impact on the development of the aesthetics of anime. With this as our starting point, we will then proceed to examine the ways in which animetic aesthetics have shaped different facets of the practices of spectatorship vis-à-vis Japanese animation. Our discussions will cover such issues as anime fan culture, thematic engagements with issues of media and history, the representation of women and sexuality in anime, and the development of anime into a transnational and transmedia cultural commodity. At the heart of the course will be the question of not only what Japanese animation is, but more importantly, the question of how to critically approach Japanese animation as a cultural object.

By the end of the term, students are expected to:

- Explain the technological and cultural practices that underpin the development of Japanese animation.
- Perform formal and stylistic analyses of anime texts.
- Explain the practices of spectatorship vis-a-vis of Japanese animation.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the works of the important directors of animation in Japan.
- Describe the significance of Japanese animation as a transnational and transmedia cultural commodity.

CLASS FORMAT

In an effort to facilitate the active engagement of all in our discussions in class, from Week 6 onwards, we will make use of a quasi-seminar discussion format. We will divide the class into several groups of 11-13 members each. Beginning in Week 6, on the Wednesday session of each week (with a few exceptions), we will have a different group of students sit in a semi-circle in the front of the classroom and conduct a discussion, with the rest of the class occupying their usual seats serving as the audience. For the first part of session, the class is conducted as if it were small seminar, with the students engaging in a discussion of the assigned material. The second half of the

class can then be devoted to addressing questions coming from the floor (led by the assigned session reviewers), which can be addressed to both the instructor and the students participating in the seminar. Every week, a different set of students sit in front, with every student doing so once during the course of the semester.

During the first two weeks of class, students are asked to sign up as a seminar participant for one of the scheduled sessions (between Week 6 and 14). Students may sign up for any session of their choosing, as long as it is not already full. Group sign-ups can be completed on the Canvas site.

COURSE EVALUATION

Attendance and participation	15%
Seminar session x1	10%
Critical Reflection x1	10%
Session review x1	10%
First paper	25%
Final paper	30%

Attendance and Participation

Attendance to class sessions and active participation in the discussions (both in class and alternatively on the course website discussion board) is mandatory. Please come to class prepared to critically engage in a conversation about both the anime title and the critical materials assigned for that session. Performance during the session in which you are seminar participant will be evaluated separate from this category.

Critical Reflection

On the week wherein you are scheduled to participate in the discussion seminar, you are required submit a 1-2 page (single-spaced) response one day before the session in question (due Monday evening before midnight). In these responses, you are asked to critically reflect on one or more of the assigned theoretical readings in relation to the anime screened for that week. These reflections should go beyond mere summaries of the texts; instead, they should raise questions for discussion, highlight important critical issues raised by the assigned readings, and otherwise demonstrate a grasp of the key theoretical concerns at hand. The format is fairly informal and flexible, and can consist of (for example) the extended articulation of a question for discussion, or a staging of a debate between two of the readings, or a discussion of the relationship between the critical material and the work of animation up for discussion on that week. The purpose of these responses is to facilitate our subsequent discussions in class by serving as signposts and frames of reference.

(Due one day before assigned seminar session)

No late seminar responses will be accepted.

Session Review

You are also required to submit one 1-2-page (single-spaced) review of a discussion seminar other than the one in which you participate. In this review, students are tasked with responding to points raised during the discussion in class after the fact. Reviewers are encouraged to ask questions of the seminar participants during the Thursday session and use the ensuing conversation as a point of departure for articulating a commentary about the discussion as a whole that took place during the seminar session. As with the critical reflections above, these session reviews should go beyond mere summaries; instead, they should build upon the preceding discussions by raising further questions and inquiries or by highlighting relevant related critical issues. You are encouraged to make use of these reviews as a space to articulate your own particular interests in relation to the course material and topics of discussion at hand.

(Due one week after the seminar session reviewed)
No late session reviews will be accepted.

First paper

As a midterm assignment, students are required to submit an essay of about 4 pages in length. In this paper, students are asked to engage with key issues raised in the class up to that point by making use of the assigned readings taken up during the discussions from the preceding weeks and articulating a critical position vis-a-vis the most pressing problems at stake in the relationship between the forms and technologies of animation and the history of Japan. A set of guide questions will be provided a few weeks in advance of the due date for the paper

(Due Mar 4)

Late papers will be subject to a 2% penalty per day.

Final Paper

Using one or more works of Japanese animation as a focal point, produce a solid original analysis of selected critical issues arising from how the text illuminates and is informed by questions of form and technology, gender and fan culture, or war and nationality. Final papers should be between 6-8 pages in length and should be rigorously documented and well-organized. While students are expected to make use of the relevant theoretical and critical materials covered in class, the specific choice of text and focus of the paper is for the student to determine, in close consultation with the instructor. A set of guidelines will be provided closer to the deadline for submission of the final paper.

(Due May 13)

Late final papers will be subject to a 2% penalty per day.

ANIMATIONS

Castle in the Sky (Tenkū no shiro lapyuta, 1986, Miyazaki Hayao)

Akira (1988, Ōtomo Katsuhiro)

Otaku no Video (1991, Mori Takeshi)

Princess Mononoke (Mononoke hime, 1997, Miyazaki Hayao)

Perfect Blue (1997, Kon Satoshi)

Blood: The Last Vampire (2000, Kitakubo Hiroyuki)

Metropolis (Metoroporisu, 2001, Rintarō)

Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence (Inosensu: Kōkaku kidōtai 2, 2004, Oshii Mamoru)

Summer Wars (Samaa Woozu, 2009, Hosoda Mamoru)

Puella Magi Madoka Magica: Beginnings (Mahō shōjo Madoka Magika: zenhan, 2012, Shinbo Akiyuki)

Your Name (Kimi no na wa, 2016, Shinkai Makoto)

SCHEDULE

PART 1: ANIME AS MEDIA TECHNOLOGY

Week 1 **Introduction to the Course**

January 31 Orientation

Week 2**Defining “Anime”**

Feb 5 Gan, Sheuo Hui. “To Be or Not to Be – Anime: The Controversy in Japan over the ‘Anime’ Label.” *Animation Studies* 4 (February 14, 2010).

Thomas Lamarre, “Anime,” in *The Japanese Cinema Book*, ed. Hideaki Fujiki and Alastair Reynolds (London: BFI, 2020)

Feb 7 Thomas Lamarre, *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), Chapters 1-3 (pp. 3-44)

Week 3**Technology of Anime**

Feb 12 NO CLASS – Chinese New Year

Feb 14 *Castle in the Sky* (*Tenkū no shiro rapyuta*, 1986, Miyazaki Hayao)

Thomas Lamarre, *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), Chapters 4-5 (pp. 45-64)

Miyazaki Hayao, “Thoughts on Japanese Animation” and “On Animation and Cartoon Movies,” in *Starting Point 1979-1996* (VIZ Media, 2009), 70-85, 123-128.

Week 4**Miyazaki Hayao and Ghibli Animation**

Feb 19 Thomas Lamarre, *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), Chapters 6-8 (pp. 65-85)

Feb 21 *Princess Mononoke* (*Mononoke hime*, 1997, Miyazaki Hayao)

Thomas Lamarre, *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), Chapter 8 (pp. 86-100)

Susan Napier, “*Princess Mononoke*: Fantasy, the Feminine, and the Myth of ‘Progress’” in *Anime from Akira to Howl’s Moving Castle: Experiencing Contemporary Japanese Animation*. Palgrave, 2005, pp. 231-248.

Week 5**Thematizing Technology**

Feb 26 Toshiya, Ueno, and Michael Arnold. “What is Animation?” [Kurenai No Metalsuits: Anime to wa nani ka] *Mechademia* 1, no. 1 (2006): 111–18.

Feb 28 *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence* (*Innocence: Kōkaku kidōtai 2*, 2004, Oshii Mamoru)

Orbaugh, Sharalyn. “Emotional Infectivity: Cyborg Affect and the Limits of the Human.” *Mechademia* 3, no. 1 (2008): 150–72.

Brown, Steven T. "Machinic Desires: Hans Bellmer's Dolls and the Technological Uncanny in *Ghost in the Shell 2: Innocence*." *Mechademia* 3, no. 1 (2008): 222-53.

PART 2: ANIMATION AND HISTORY

Week 6 Digital Animation and New Media

Mar 4 Philip Rosen, 'Old and New: Image, Indexicality, and Historicity in the Digital Utopia,' from *Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory* (University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 301-349.

First paper due

Mar 6 *Metropolis* (2001, Rintarō)

Thomas LaMarre, "The First Time as Farce: Digital Animation and the Repetition of Cinema," in *Cinema Anime: Critical Engagements with Japanese Animation*, ed. Steven T. Brown (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

Mihailova, Mihaela. "The Mastery Machine: Digital Animation and Fantasies of Control." *Animation* 8, no. 2 (July 1, 2013): 131-48

Week 7 Origins of Animation

Mar 11 Azuma, Hiroki. "The Otaku's Pseudo-Japan." *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*. University of Minnesota Press, 2009. 3-24

Ōtsuka, Eiji. "An Unholy Alliance of Eisenstein and Disney: The Fascist Origins of Otaku Culture." *Mechademia* 8, no. 1 (2013): 251-77.

Mar 13 *Blood: The Last Vampire* (2000, Kitakubo Hiroyuki)

Bolton, Christopher. "The Quick and the Undead: Visual and Political Dynamics in *Blood: The Last Vampire*." *Mechademia* 2, no. 1 (2007): 125-42.

Week 8 Superflat and the Postwar Imagination

Mar 18 Murakami Takashi, "A Theory of Super Flat Japanese Art." In *SUPER FLAT*, ed. Murakami Takashi (Tokyo: MADRA Publishing, 2000), 8-25.

Mar 20 *Akira* (1988, Ōtomo Katsuhiro)

Bolton, Christopher. "From Ground Zero to Degree Zero: *Akira* from Origin to Oblivion." *Mechademia* 9, no. 1 (2014): 295-315.

Thomas Lamarre. "Born of Trauma: *Akira* and Capitalist Modes of Destruction." *Positions: East Asia Cultures Critique* 16, no. 1 (2008): 131-56.

PART 3: ANIME FAN CULTURE AND GENDER

Week 9 Introduction to Otaku Culture

Mar 25 Okada Toshio, "Introduction to Otakuology." *Debating Otaku in Contemporary Japan: Historical Perspectives and New Horizons*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015. 89-102.

Mar 27 *Otaku no Video* (1991, Mori Takeshi)

Azuma Hiroki, "The Animalization of Otaku Culture," trans. Yuriko Furuhashi and Marc Steinberg, *Mechademia 2: Networks of Desire* (University of Minnesota, 2007, 75- 87.

Thomas LaMarre, "Otaku Movement," in *Japan After Japan: Social and Cultural Life from the Recessionary 1990s to the Present*, ed. Tomiko Yoda and Harry Harootyan (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 358-94.

MID-SEMESTER BREAK

Week 10 Otaku Pathology and Sexuality

Apr 8 Saitō, Tamaki. "The Psychopathology of the Otaku." *Beautiful Fighting Girl*. University of Minnesota Press, 2011. 9-32

Apr 10 *Perfect Blue* (1997, Kon Satoshi)

Norris, Craig. "Perfect Blue and the Negative Representation of Fans." *Journal of Japanese and Korean Cinema* 4, no. 1 (January 1, 2012): 69-86.

Napier, Susan J. "'Excuse Me, Who Are You?': Performance, the Gaze, and the Female in the Works of Kon Satoshi." In *Cinema Anime*, edited by Steven T. Brown. Palgrave Macmillan, 2006, 23-42.

Week 11 Magical Girls

Apr 15 Kumiko Saito, "Magic, Shōjo, and Metamorphosis: Magical Girl Anime and the Challenges of Changing Gender Identities in Japanese Society," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 73, no. 1 (February 2014): 143-64.

Apr 17 *Puella Magi Madoka Magica: Beginnings* (*Mahō shōjo Madoka Magika: zenhan*, 2012, Shinbo Akiyuki)

Deborah Shamoon, "The Superflat Space of Japanese Anime." In Lilian Chee and Edna Lim, eds. *Asian Cinema and the Use of Space: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Routledge, 2015), 93-108.

Forrest Greenwood, "The Girl at the End of Time: Temporality, (P)Remediation, and Narrative Freedom in *Puella Magi Madoka Magica*," *Mechademia* 10 (2015): 195–207.

PART 4: ANIME MEDIA MIX

Week 12 Cool Japan

Apr 22 Koichi Iwabuchi, "Undoing Inter-National Fandom in the Age of Brand Nationalism," *Mechademia* 5, no. 1 (November 10, 2010): 87–96.

Apr 24 *Summer Wars* (2009, Hosoda Mamoru)

Condry, Ian. "Collaborative Networks, Personal Futures." *The Soul of Anime: Collaborative Creativity and Japan's Media Success Story*. Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2013, 35-53.

Takeshi Okamoto, "Otaku Tourism and the Anime Pilgrimage Phenomenon in Japan," *Japan Forum* 27, no. 1 (January 2, 2015): 12–36.

Week 13 World Type

Apr 29 Miyadai Shinji, "Transformation of Semantics in the History of Japanese Subcultures since 1992." *Mechademia* 6, no. 1 (2011): 231–58.

May 1 NO CLASS: LABOR DAY

Week 14 Wrap-up: The Animesque and Media Mix

May 6 *Your Name* (*Kimi no na wa*, 2016, Shinkai Makoto)

Teng, Tim Shao-Hung. "Time, Disaster, New Media: Your Name as a Mind-Game Film." *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 20, no. 4 (October 2, 2022): 459–88.

Uno Tsunehiro, "Imagination after the Earthquake: Japan's Otaku Culture in the 2010s," *Verge: Studies in Global Asias* 1, no. 1 (2015): 114–36.

May 8 Eiji Ōtsuka, "World and Variation: The Reproduction and Consumption of Narrative," trans. Marc Steinberg, *Mechademia* 5 (2010): 99–116.

Marc Steinberg, "Media Mixes, Media Transformations." *Anime's Media Mix: Franchising Toys and Characters in Japan*. University of Minnesota Press, 2012. 135-169.

Stevie Suan, "Anime's Performativity: Diversity through Conventionality in a Global Media-Form" in *animation:an interdisciplinary journal*, Vol. 12.1 (2017): 62–79.

Final papers due 13 May

COURSE POLICIES

Grading Policy

In this course, numeric percentile grades will be converted to letter grades using the following standard:

A+	97-100	Excellent Performance
A	93-96	
A-	90-92	
B+	87-89	Good Performance
B	83-86	
B-	80-82	
C+	77-79	Satisfactory Performance
C	73-76	
C-	70-72	
D	60-69	Marginal Pass
F	0-59	Fail

Academic Integrity

The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology is a community designed for scholarship - for teaching, learning, and research. Academic integrity and honesty are critical values in upholding HKUST's reputation as a community of scholars and its claim to the "intellectual property" created by staff and students. All students who join HKUST are therefore committed to an [Academic Honor Code](#).

The use of generative AI tools is not permitted in this course.

Special Educational Needs

The University takes a proactive role in ensuring and cultivating a positive learning environment for students, where equal opportunities in academic and non-academic pursuits for each student are guaranteed.

The SEN Support under the Counseling and Wellness Center provides a wide range of support services and resources to ensure that all students have equality of opportunity, that they benefit equally from university life, and to cultivate a campus culture of inclusion.

If a student is diagnosed or suspects his/her difficulties are related to any type of SEN, he or she is strongly advised to self-identify and provide recent documentation of his or her SEN to SEN Support. Reasonable accommodations or adjustments will be worked out amongst student, instructor(s) and SEN Support. If SEN Support is not aware of a student's needs, please contact sen@ust.hk to arrange a confidential discussion. All information is handled in the strictest confidence.