HUMA2331

JAPANESE ANIMATION:
Technology, Gender, and History

Spring 2026
Lecture: Monday, 5:00 – 6:50 pm (LTB)
Tutorial T1: Thursday, 10:30 – 11:20 am (2465)
Tutorial T2: Thursday, 6:00 – 6:50 pm (2406)
Tutorial T3: Thursday, 4:00 – 4:50 pm (G009B, CYT Bldg)

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION
Baryon Tensor Posadas
Room 2355
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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 model seminar discussion format during the tutorial sessions. We

will divide the class into several groups of 6-8 members each. Beginning in Week 6, on the Thursday tutorial 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. The class is conducted as if it were small seminar, with the students engaging in a discussion of the assigned material. The last 10 minutes of the class can then be devoted to addressing questions coming from the floor, 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 13). 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	20%
Seminar session x1	10%
Critical Reflection x1	10%
Session review x1	10%
First exam	25%
Final exam	25%

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 exam,
For the first exam on Week 5, students will be 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, including such topics of cinematic vs. animetic movement, the relationship between technology, history, and media spectatorship, gender and character animation, etc.

(Due Mar 4)
Late papers will be subject to a 2% penalty per day.

Final Paper
Similar to the midterm exam, for the final exam, students will be asked to select one question among a range of possible topics taking up critical issues in relation to Japanese animation and the cultural formations and discourses surrounding it. Possible topics include questions of animation technology, gender and fan culture, or media form and history.

(Due May 13)
Late final papers will be subject to a 2% penalty per day.

ANIMATIONS
Super Dimension Fortress Macross: Do you Remember Love? (Chōjikū Yōsai Makurosu: Ai oboeteimasu ka?, 1984, Kawamori Shōji)
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)
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

Feb 2   Orientation

Feb 5   NO CLASS

Week 2   **Defining "Anime"**

Feb 9   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 12   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 16   *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).

Feb 19   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 23   *Princess Mononoke* (*Mononoke hime,* 1997, Miyazaki Hayao)

Thomas Lamarre, *The Anime Machine: A Media Theory of Animation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), Chapters 6-8 (pp. 65-100).

Feb 26   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   **Midterm**

Mar 2   First Exam

Mar 5   NO CLASS

PART 2: ANIMATION AND HISTORY

Week 6   **Digital Animation and New Media**

Mar 9   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.

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).

Mar 12   *Metropolis* (2001, Rintarō)

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 16   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 19   *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 23   Murakami Takashi, "A Theory of Super Flat Japanese Art." In *SUPER FLAT*, ed. Murakami Takashi (Tokyo: MADRA Publishing, 2000), 8–25.

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

Mar 26   *Akira* (1988, Ōtomo Katsuhiro)

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

Week 9   **Anime Beyond Japan: Guest Lecture by Prof. Stevie Suan**

Mar 30   Stevie Suan, "Anime's Performativity: Diversity through Conventionality in a Global Media-Form" in animation:an interdisciplinary journal 2017, Vol. 12(1), 62–79.

Stevie Suan, "Colorful Execution: Conventionality and Transnationality in *Kimetsu no Yaiba*," *Transcommunication* 8.2 (2021): 179-191.

April 2   *Macross: Do You Remember Love?* (1984)

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

Ruh, Brian. "Transforming U.S. Anime in the 1980s: Localization and Longevity." *Mechademia*, vol. 5, no. 1, 2010, pp. 31–49.

MID-SEMESTER BREAK (Apr 3-9 NO CLASS)

PART 3: ANIME FAN CULTURE AND GENDER

Week 10   **Introduction to Otaku Culture**

Apr 13   Okada Toshio, "Introduction to Otakuology." *Debating Otaku in Contemporary Japan: Historical Perspectives and New Horizons*. New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015. 89-102.

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

Apr 16   *Otaku no Video* (1991, Mori Takeshi)

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

Week 11   **Otaku Pathology and Sexuality**

Apr 20   Saitō, Tamaki. "The Psychopathology of the Otaku." *Beautiful Fighting Girl*. University of Minnesota Press, 2011. 9-32

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.

Apr 23   *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.

Week 11   **Magical Girls**

Apr 27   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.

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.

Apr 30   *Puella Magi Madoka Magica: Beginnings* (*Mahō shōjo Madoka Magika: zenhan,* 2012,

Shinbo Akiyuki)

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.

Week 13 **World Type**

May 4 Miyadai Shinji, "Transformation of Semantics in the History of Japanese Subcultures since 1992." *Mechademia* 6, no. 1 (2011): 231–58.

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

May 7 *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.

TBA: Final Exam

COURSE POLICIES

Statement on Assessment and Grading
This course will be assessed using criterion-referencing, and grades will not be assigned using a curve. Numeric percentile grades will be converted to letter grades using the following standard:

A+	97-100	
A	93-96	Excellent Performance
A-	90-92	
B+	87-89	
B	83-86	Good Performance
B-	80-82	
C+	77-79	
C	73-76	Satisfactory Performance
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](#).

Course AI Policy
The use of generative AI tools is not permitted in any aspect of this course.

Communication and Feedback
Under normal circumstances, assessment marks for individual assessed tasks will be communicated via Canvas within two weeks of submission. Students who have further questions about the feedback (including marks) should consult the instructor within five working days after the feedback is received.

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.