Course Description and Aims

This course provides an introduction to Japanese cinema in historical context. We will explore the question: how does cinema help navigate times of crisis or anxiety? The course begins with a look at the fraught present moment, before circling back to the impact of the Second World War and continuing in chronological order. We will watch and discuss works by major Japanese film directors, such as Kurosawa Akira (1910-1998), Ozu Yasujirō (1903-1963), and Mizoguchi Kenji (1898-1956) and many others. Our explorations will even take us into the realm of anime, via the director Kon Satoshi (1963-2010). This course is a gateway to the appreciation of Japanese cinema.

In addition, we will also learn about the basics of formal film analysis. Why did the filmmakers choose one particular shot, and not another? How do elements like visual composition of the frame, sound design, and art direction contribute to viewers’ experience of a film? What traces of the film’s historical context can we locate in its formal artistry?

Thirdly, we will learn the basics of how to read and write film analysis, using both the historical and formal aspects described above. We will learn how to construct an argumentative essay and how to use elements from the film as evidence to support a thesis.

Materials

There are no required books for purchase for this course. All readings will be available on MyCourses, and all films will be available through the McGill library or on Youtube.

Course Delivery Guide

The class will meet through live Zoom sessions at the scheduled class time.

There will be a combination of lectures (with PowerPoint slide show), discussions, and group activities. Live components will be recorded.

Professor will hold Zoom office hours each week.

Students will be able use the discussion boards to post responses and questions and to communicate with each other.

Course Requirements
Weekly posts: 25%
Creative visual assignments: 20%
Midterm Paper: 20%
Final Paper: 25%
Participation and Attendance: 10%

For more information about the above requirements, please see the below sections.

In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

Asynchronous Assignments and Evaluation

- For each class, there are 3 required posts on the Discussions forum on MyCourses. These are due at 5pm on Sundays.

  1) Choose a scene from the weekly film and write a one-paragraph response. Identify one or more key elements that stand out to you and offer some speculation about what they might mean. Also, craft one discussion question related to your scene.

    Please do not write about the film as a whole. The assignment is to select a single scene.

    In length, your scene may range from a single frame to a 5-10 minute sequence. As a rule, the shorter your scene the better, because you have more time to delve deeply.

  2) Reply to 2 of your classmates’ posts and explore their discussion questions. Your response should be about a paragraph long. You may choose any classmate’s post to respond to. Feel free to double up if someone else has already responded. If you are inspired to participate further, you may reply to more than two posts. Feel free to let the discussion flow.

    Weekly posts comprise 25% of your final grade.

- Creative Visual Assignment: Curating an Image (4 times)

  Due to MyCourses Assignments:  
  Sunday Sept. 20 10pm
  Sunday Oct. 18 10pm
  Sunday Nov. 8 10pm
  Sunday Dec. 6 10pm

For this assignment, you will submit an image inspired by one of the films we watched. You will also write a one-paragraph caption about how and why you generated your image and what it reveals about the film.
You may choose a still from the film; a still from another film, video, or show that the film reminds you of; a photograph taken from your environment; a scan or photograph of a handmade drawing; a screen shot from your computer or phone; or another option.

This is not a studio art class, so you will not be graded on the aesthetic quality of your work. Instead, I will assess how deeply and accurately you engage with course materials.

The creative visual assignments are worth 20% of your final grade.

- Critical Essays: You will be responsible for 2 critical essays. More information will be available later in the semester.
  
  Midterm essay: comparing two scenes
  Due to MyCourses Assignments: Wednesday Oct. 14 at 5pm
  
  The midterm essay comprises 20% of your final grade.

  Final essay: Making an argument
  Due to MyCourses Assignments: Friday Dec. 11 5pm
  
  The final essay comprises 25% of your final grade.

Synchronous Assignments and Evaluation

The class will meet synchronously on Zoom on Monday 1:35-2:45pm ET. Attendance at synchronous sessions is not mandatory, but it is highly recommended for those who are able to attend and comfortable doing so. I will be keeping a record of attendance.

For those who cannot attend, a 1-paragraph written response to the recording is required in the 24 hours after class. These will be posted to Discussions in MyCourses.

Attendance and participation will count for 10% of your final grade. You will not be penalized for taking the asynchronous option.

During the class meeting time, the instructor will start with a live interactive lecture. We will then use the Breakout Rooms for small group discussion activities, and the instructor will drop in on as many groups as possible. Finally, we will reconvene as a class for collective discussion and debriefing.

All class activities will be recorded for use by students who cannot attend. Recordings are for class use only and must not be disseminated beyond. For the Breakout Rooms, the recording will follow me, so that whichever group I am visiting with will be recorded.

I encourage you to turn your video on if you are able to and comfortable doing so, but you are also welcome to attend the Zoom meetings with your video turned off. You may participate in discussion and other activities either with your audio or with the Chat function.
Content Note

Some of the films we watch will include violence, rape, and other disturbing content. Please reach out if you need accommodation.

Academic Integrity

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see McGill’s guide to academic honesty for more information).

Weekly Schedule

Japanese Cinema Today: COVID-19

Mon. Sept. 7

Ueda Shin’ichirō, One Cut of the Dead Mission Remote, 2020, 26 minutes (Youtube)
Watch the film: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5QGi6Y6NZLI

Optional Reading:
1) https://www.japantimes.co.jp/culture/2020/05/08/films/shinichiro-ueda-telework-movie/


Legacy of the War

Mon. Sept. 14

film: Kurosawa Akira, No Regrets for Our Youth, 1946, 112 minutes (Kanopy)

reading:
1) https://filmanalysis.yale.edu/basic-terms/
3) **optional reading:**

Mon. Sept. 21

film:  *Fires on the Plain*, Kon Ichikawa, 1959, 106 minutes (Kanopy)

reading:  
1) [https://filmanalysis.yale.edu/mise-en-scene/](https://filmanalysis.yale.edu/mise-en-scene/)  

3) *optional reading*:  

Postwar Recovery and Japanese Cinema’s Golden Age

Mon. Sept. 28

film:  *Late Spring*, Ozu Yasujirō, 1949, 109 minutes (Kanopy)

reading:  
1) [https://filmanalysis.yale.edu/cinematography/](https://filmanalysis.yale.edu/cinematography/)  
Section 1 “Quality” and Section 2 “Framing”

2) video essay: Nerdwriter, “Why Did Ozu Cut to a Vase?,” [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TcfZCCm4elo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TcfZCCm4elo)


optional reading:  

Nakamura Hideyuki, “Ozu, or On the Gesture”

Mon. Oct. 5

film:  *Rashomon*, Kurosawa Akira, 1950, 89 minutes (Kanopy)

reading:  
1) [https://filmanalysis.yale.edu/cinematography/](https://filmanalysis.yale.edu/cinematography/)  
Section 3 “Scale” and Section 4 “Movement”

3) **optional reading:** Paul Anderer, *Kurosawa’s Rashomon: A Vanished City, A Lost Brother, and the Voice Inside His Iconic Films*


Mon. Oct. 12

**film:** *Ugetsu*, Mizoguchi Kenji, 1953, 98 minutes (Kanopy)

**reading:**

1) [https://filmanalysis.yale.edu/editing/](https://filmanalysis.yale.edu/editing/) first half, through the section WIPE

2) Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasures of Narrative Cinema”


**optional reading:**


Mon. Oct. 19

**film:** Naruse Mikio, *When a Woman Ascends the Stairs*, 1960, 112 minutes (Kanopy)

**readings:**

1) [https://filmanalysis.yale.edu/editing/](https://filmanalysis.yale.edu/editing/) MATCHES to the end


**optional reading:**


2) Joan Mellen, “Late Ozu, Late Naruse” JSTOR
The Sixties: Experimentation and Protest

Mon. Oct. 26
film:  *Branded to Kill*, Suzuki Seijun, 1967 (Kanopy)
reading:

Mon. Nov. 2
film:  *Funeral Parade of Roses*, Matsumoto Toshio, 1969, 106 minutes (Kanopy)
reading:
   1) https://filmanalysis.yale.edu/sound/

optional reading:

Mon. Nov. 9
film: Shinoda Masahiro, *Double Suicide*, 1969, 104 minutes (Kanopy)
reading:
   1) McArthur’s Children: An Interview with Masahiro Shinoda By Kyoko Hirano, JSTOR

The Bubble Economy: Boom and Bust

Mon. Nov. 16
film: *Tampopo*, Itami Jūzō, 1985, 115 minutes (Kanopy)
reading:

optional reading:
Optional extra credit: Bring one of your favorite snacks to show the camera at our Zoom meeting on Monday!

Mon. Nov. 23

film: Violent Cop, Kitano Takeshi, 1989, 103 minutes (Kanopy)


Mon. Nov. 30

film: Shoplifters, Koreeda Hirokazu, 2018, 121 minutes (Criterion On Demand, Netflix Canada)

reading:


2) Anne Allison, Precarious Japan, excerpts

Anime

Mon. Dec. 7

Kon Satoshi, Millenium Actress, 2003, 87 minutes (Criterion on Demand)

reading:

1) video essay, Every Frame a Painting, “Satoshi Kon: Editing Space and Time,” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oz49vQwSoTE&feature=emb_logo