

EAST 467

Topics: Japanese Cinema

Topic: Eco-cinema in Japan

Instructor: Marianne Tarcov

Course Description

In this course, we will learn and think about the relationship between cinema and the natural environment in Japan. What does it mean to make films concerning the natural world in a time of ecological crisis? We will think about how cinema can help critique or protest environmental devastation in Japan. On the other hand, we will also think about how cinema can sometimes be complicit, in some sense part of the problem. From the legacy of the 1945 nuclear bombings, to the 2011 nuclear meltdown, and beyond, we will trace cinematic portrayals of ecological crisis and loss in Japan.

In my thinking and preparation for this course, I have so far encountered two categories of ecological films: one I would like to provisionally call "realistic," which grapples with the world as it is, and the other "fantastic," which engages ecological themes in more imaginative, sometimes indirect ways. Eco-cinema can thus include documentaries like Tsuchimoto Noriaki's *Minamata: The Victims and their World*, but also otherworldly fantasies like Studio Ghibli and the Godzilla films. As you will see from the schedule below, the course is divided into thematic units built around this division between reality and fantasy.

Learning objectives

The course will help students learn to work with materials related to the topic of eco-cinema in Japan. This material includes both primary sources, especially films, and secondary sources, including film studies scholarship, ecocriticism, and other fields. Learning objectives include: how to close read a scene from a film, how to read and evaluate an argument from a secondary source, and how to craft your own argument using close readings as evidence or support.

Class Format

The class meets for 4 hours because I want to screen the films in class, rather than having each of us watch on our own. This way, we will be able to view the films on a bigger screen than most of us have at home. Cinema is also a collective experience best had in communion with others, and I think this approach will give us all the best viewing experience possible for these films. During COVID, I realized how much I missed collective aesthetic experience of all kinds, especially movies. We can see how it goes, and if it gets to be too much, we can figure something out.

The films will all be available either to stream on various websites or on reserve at the library. If you miss an in-class screening, you can watch on your own.

Here is a preliminary outline of the class time. Of course, it will vary from week to week based on the length of the film.

1:35-3:30: Movie time! In-class screening of the weekly film. Please silence and put away all devices to avoid distracting your fellow movie-viewers. If you take notes, please use pen and paper.

3:30-3:50 Break. The break is a good time to reflect on the film and chat with classmates about what they thought.

3:50-5:25: Combination of lectures, small group activities, in-class writing, and class discussion. Will vary from week to week.

Evaluation

Participation: 10%

Weekly before-class responses (7): 15%

Weekly in-class responses (7): 15%

Midterm essay (first draft): 25%

Final essay (revise and resubmit): 35%

Participation: 10%

The participation grade is a holistic letter grade that I generate at the end of the semester. It's based on 1) verbal comments in class, 2) active, respectful listening, and 3) attendance. There is no exact number of absences you need to avoid to get an A, B, C, etc. I have found that it is different for each person.

There isn't a difference between excused and unexcused absences. If you are sick, I strongly encourage you not to come to class to avoid spreading germs. I invite you to keep the lines of communication open via email regarding attendance, but you do not need to share confidential information, medical documentation, or things of that nature.

Another important part of participation is verbal comments in class. How I struggled with this one when I was an undergraduate back in the day! My goal used to be to make one comment or question out loud per class session. This goal was a good way to challenge myself to be more intellectually outgoing and courageous. Think about setting a goal of your own. Take a risk and express your thoughts.

If verbal comments really aren't for you, then you may choose to write extra discussion posts, beyond the minimum of 7 of each category.

7 Weekly before-class responses: secondary sources 15%

Please note that there are two separate discussion forums on MyCourses. The top one is for before-class discussion posts, and the second one is for in-class discussion posts. Ideally, you should aim for 7 in each forum, for a total of 14.

Please post your response in the Before Class discussion forum on MyCourses before 10pm on MyCourses.

The Before Class response is about the reading, which is almost always a secondary source.

In your Before Class post, first provide a one-paragraph summary of the reading. What is the writer's argument? What evidence do they use to support it? What conclusions do they draw?

Then, in the next 2-3 paragraphs, choose a particular quote or excerpt from the reading and write a discussion question inspired by it. What does the quote make you feel, think, or wonder? Why did you choose it?

These responses can be stepping-stones for your essays, in which you summarize arguments made by others and put them in dialogue.

7 Weekly in-class responses: primary sources 15%

After we watch the film together, there will be a brief in-class writing assignment. It will be different for each film, but they will for the most part involve close reading of primary sources. These close readings will also be good stepping-stones for your midterm and final essays.

Midterm essay: first draft 25%

length: 1000-1250 words (4-5 pages double-spaced)

Prompts will be available later in the semester.

Due: Friday Oct. 11 11:59pm

Final Essay: Revise and resubmit 35%

length: 2500 words (10 double-spaced pages) and up

due: December 10

More information will be available later in the semester, but for now, allow me to say that the final paper will be a significant revision and lengthened version of your midterm. You will have the opportunity to go back to your midterm and expand on it, while re-thinking and improving the argument and adding more material.

Early Drafts

Unfortunately, I cannot look over early drafts of any written assignments.

Email Policy

Please allow time before you receive a response. Email is recommended for short, concrete questions and concerns. For matters requiring more substantive discussion, such as

brainstorming or help with essays or other assignments, office hours or an appointment are recommended.

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).

For this course, representing as one's own idea any thought that was AI-generated may be considered an academic honesty offence. In this class, it is ok to use AI for cosmetic purposes, such as polishing your grammar and spelling. However, the ideas, thoughts, and content of your writing must be human-made.

Language Note

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.

Schedule

Friday August 30
Introductions, syllabus

The Real vs. The Fantastic

Friday Sept. 6
film: TBA

Saitō, Kōhei. *Slow Down: The Degrowth Manifesto*. Translated by Brian Bergstrom. New York: Astra House, 2024. Preface and Chapter 1.

Fisher, Mark. *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?*. UK: Zer0 Books, 2009. 1-12.

Friday Sept. 13
Film: TBA

Marran, Christine. "Arboreal Unicorns and Other Megaflora: On Kurosawa Kiyoshi's Film *Charisma*." In *Ecocriticism in Japan*. Edited by Hisaaki Wake, Keiji Suga, and Yuki Masami. Blue Ridge Summit: Lexington Books, 2017. 267-278.

O'Neill, Daniel. "Rewilding Futures: Japan's Nuclear Exclusion Zone and Post 3.11 Eco-cinema." *Journal of Japanese and Korean Cinema* 11, no. 1 (2019): 85-100.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/17564905.2019.1600697>.

Friday Sept. 20

Kamanaka, Hitomi, director. *Ashes to Honey: In Search of a Sustainable Future*. Group Gendai Films, 2012. 116 minutes. DVD. <https://mcgill.on.worldcat.org/oclc/822232131>.

Field, Norma and Kamanaka Hitomi. "Complicity and Victimhood: Director Kamanaka Hitomi's Nuclear Warnings." *Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* 9, issue 18, number 4. Article ID 3524.

Kamanaka, Hitomi, Tsuchimoto Noriaki, and Norma Field. "Rokkasho, Minamata, and Japan's Future: Capturing Humanity on Film." *Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus* (2007):
<https://apjff.org/kamanaka-hitomi/2614/article/2614>.

Friday Sept. 27

Honda, Ishirō, director. *Mothra*. Toho, 1961. 91 minutes. DVD.
<https://mcgill.on.worldcat.org/oclc/441454982>. Also streaming for rental on AppleTV.

Rhoads, Sean and Brooke McCorkle Okazaki. *Japan's Green Monsters: Environmental Commentary in Kaiju Cinema*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2018. 50-71.

Friday Oct. 4

Tsuchimoto, Noriaki, director. *Minamata: The Victims and their World*. Zakka Films, 2011 [1971]. 120 minutes, DVD. <https://mcgill.on.worldcat.org/oclc/711888872>

Also available on Internet Archive: <https://archive.org/details/minamata.1971.dvdrip.x264-bipolar>

Inoue, Miyo. "The Ethics of Representation in Light of Minamata Disease: Tsuchimoto Noriaki and His Minamata Documentaries." *Arts* 8, no. 1 (2019): 37.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/arts8010037>.

Friday Oct. 11

Miyazaki, Hayao. *Nausicaa and the Valley of the Wind*. Studio Ghibli, 1984. 1 hour 57 minutes. streaming on Netflix, Apple TV, etc.

No reading or before-class discussion post

Midterm essay due

Friday Oct. 18
no class

Nostalgia and longing

Friday Oct. 25

Shinkai, Makoto, director. *Weathering With You*. Toho, 2019. 1 hour 52 minutes. Streaming for rental on AppleTV, etc.

Furuhata, Yuriko. "Weathering With You: Mythical Time and the Paradox of the Anthropocene." *Representations* 157 (2022): 68-89.

Friday Nov. 1

Yamazaki, Takahashi, director. *Godzilla Minus One*. Toho, 2023. 2 hours 4 minutes. Streaming on Netflix and others.

Wake, Hisaaki. "On The Ideological Manipulations of Nature Inherent in Japanese Popular Culture." In *Ecocriticism in Japan*. 223-238.

Tvorun-Dunn, Maxim and Nathalie Pascaru. "Environmentalism Polluted: Consumerism and Complicity in Studio Ghibli's Media Mix." *Journal of Cultural Economy* 15, no. 6 (2023): 886-907. [doi:10.1080/17530350.2023.2225548](https://doi.org/10.1080/17530350.2023.2225548).

Friday Nov. 8

Obayashi, Nobuhiko, director. *The Deserted City*. Art Theatre Guild, 1984. 1 hour 45 minutes. Available on Internet Archive. <https://archive.org/details/nobuhiko-obayashi-1984-the-deserted-city>

Fukunaga, Takehiko. "Dead City." Translated by Ken Wakamatsu. *Manoa* 13, no. 2 (2001): 176-199. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4230010>.

Cubitt, Sean. "Toxic Media: On the Ecological Impact of Cinema." In *Eco-trauma Cinema*. Edited by Anil Narine. New York: Routledge, 2015. 231-248.

Beyond Narrative: Experimental Cinema

Friday Nov. 15

Kurosawa, Akira. *Dreams*. Warner Brothers, 1990. 120 minutes. DVD. <https://mcgill.on.worldcat.org/oclc/51846078>.

Also streaming on AppleTV, others.

Yoshimoto, Mitsuhiro. "Nuclear Disasters and Invisible Spectacles." *Asian Cinema* 30, no. 2 (2019):169-185. https://doi.org/10.1386/ac_00002_1.

Friday Nov. 22

Film: TBA

Furuhata, Yuriko. *Cinema of Actuality: Japanese Avant-garde Filmmaking in the Season of Image Politics*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013. 115-148.

Writing

Friday Nov. 29

writing workshop plus coworking