

Arts and Ideas 310: Japanese Culture and Artistic Creation

Location: 035 Karpen Hall

Instructor: Christopher Daniels

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Required Texts:

Wabi Sabi for Artists, Designers, Poets & Philosophers, Leonard Koren

Manga! Manga! The World of Japanese Comics, Frederick L. Schodt

Empire of Signs, Roland Barthes

Underground, Haruki Murakami

The Woman in the Dunes, Kobo Abe

Our class Wiki: outsiderjapan.pbwiki.com

Recommended Texts:

Please see the wiki for a list of recommended texts.

Movies:

Yojimbo, Akira Kurosawa

We will hopefully be showing a spate of Japanese films outside of class time, and attendance will be encouraged but optional.

Music:

Please bring a blank CD-R at some point before the music unit, as I will record a CD's worth of Japanese music that we will discuss.

Course Objective:

The goal of this class is to examine art's function to expose and reconcile an individual's relationship to society. Most art is heavily concerned with this theme, and a favorite vehicle of writers, filmmakers, and musicians to express this is the conflict between the outsider and the insider.

In particular, we will look at how artists use this notion of the outsider in their art: through characters, themes, symbols, methods, and even the artist's own persona. We are going to examine these ideas in the culture of Japan because of the way it has absorbed, reconfigured, and retransmitted the archetypes and themes of our own culture. We will also, naturally, examine our own methods of employing the outsider in art as well as our reactions to Japan's reactions to our reactions, ad infinitum...

We will begin by looking at a traditional Japanese aesthetic (*wabi-sabi*), and then take a look at Modern (i.e. 20th and 21st century) Japanese artists in literature, film, visual art, and music to see how they attempt to solve the problem of belonging to the group while staying outside of the mainstream.

Attendance and Participation:

A major part of your grade is going to be based on participation – this means that you should be in class, you should prepare by reading the assigned texts, and you should speak up and offer

your opinions in class. You are allowed three unexcused absences in a one-semester class, and every subsequent unexcused absence will result in a drop of half a letter grade.

Projects:

You will have three projects due in the course of the semester.

1. A short paper (2-3 pages)
2. A work of art – the format is up to you
3. Constructing a page on the class wiki

There are three due dates for the projects, but you will have a choice between the different media for each due date. However, you may only do each option ONCE! When you do options 2 or 3 you must also do a short presentation in front of the class: 5-10 minutes for the work of art, 10-15 minutes for the Wiki page. Each project has 3 days reserved for presentations.

Grades:

The breakdown of grades is as follows:

3 projects = **75%**

Attendance/Participation/Small Assignments = **25%**

Schedule:

August

- 20 Class Introduction, Hand out syllabus
- 22 The Individual Vs. Society / Intro to Japanese history
- 25 **Wabi Sabi:** Introduction, A History of Obfuscation, A Provisional Definition,: A Comparison With Modernism, A Brief History, Chart, The Metaphysical Basis of Wabi-Sabi
- 27 **Wabi Sabi:** Wabi-Sabi Spiritual Values, The Wabi-Sabi State of Mind, Wabi-Sabi Moral Precepts, The Material Qualities of Wabi Sabi
- 29 History and the bridge to the West: **Barthes** pp. 1-26

September

- 1 Labor Day – No Classes
- 3 Manga
- 5 Manga
- 8 Manga
- 10 Manga
- 12 **Project #1 Due**
- 15 **Project #1 Due**
- 17 **Project #1 Due**
- 19 History
- 22 Kurosawa: Biography
- 24 *Yojimbo*
- 26 *Yojimbo*
- 29 *Yojimbo*

October

- 1 *Yojimbo*
- 3 Barthes – Pachinko, No Address, The Station
- 6 Barthes – Bowling, The Breach of Meaning, Exemption From Meaning
- 8 Woman in the Dunes: pp. 1-60
- 10 Woman in the Dunes: pp. 61-120
- 13 Fall Break – No Class
- 15 Woman in the Dunes: pp 121-194
- 17 Woman in the Dunes: pp. 195-241
- 20 Barthes
- 22 Barthes
- 24 **Project #2 Due**
- 27 **Project #2 Due**
- 29 **Project #2 Due**
- 31 Murakami: *Underground* – pp. 1-72

November

- 3 Murakami: *Underground* – pp. 73-153
- 5 Murakami: *Underground* – pp. 153-209
- 7 Murakami: *Underground* – pp. 213-309
- 10 Superflat
- 12 Superflat
- 14 Superflat
- 17 Superflat
- 19 Music
- 21 Music
- 24 Music
- 26 **Thanksgiving Holiday**
- 28 **Thanksgiving Holiday**

December

- 1 Music
- 3 **Project #3 Due**
- 5 **Project #3 Due**
- 8 **Project #3 Due**