189 Japanese Media Culture
Syllabus

This course aims at providing a comprehensive view and understanding about the creative uses of new media technologies in contemporary Japan. The field is extremely rich and diverse. While some well-established genres of Japanese visual popular culture, like manga comics and anime animation films are already fairly well-known in the Western world, there are other forms of creativity which are often almost completely unknown or misunderstood. These include the use of robotics, entertainments like electronic games, digital idols, television experiments, virtual reality, innovative advertising strategies, multimedia telephone services and the expanding field of Japanese media art. Indeed, the border between art and other forms of creativity is often less clearly defined in Japan than in the Western world. The course will provide up-to-date information about the developments outlined above, and analyze them within the framework of Japanese culture and aesthetics. An ample selection of demonstration material will be presented, ranging from videos, CD-ROMs, games, portable devices and DVD's to Internet projects.
Assignments:
There is a midterm assignment and a final assignment. Midterm assignment will be an analysis of some of the works shown at the class. (It is subject to change.) The final assignment will be a combination of a project proposal and an essay. Details will be given later. The final assignments will be presented to the class during the 10th week. Short comments will be asked on the Japanese Bunka Lecture Series. Feedback by email will be asked occasionally, depending on the contents of the lecture.

Grading:
The grading is based on the midterm assignment (25%), the final assignment (50%), and on the student's comments, feedback and active participation during the class meetings (25%). More than two absences without the teacher's permission from the class meetings will have a negative impact on the overall grading. There will be a roll-call in the beginning of the each session. If the student arrives late, s/he should make sure that his/her name is included in the list by the end of the meeting.

Text:
A course reader will be available for purchase. A copy will be on reserve at Dickson Art Library. List of recommended additional readings will be distributed.
Supporting material and information will be occasionally uploaded on the class website.

Class meetings:
Friday between 10am - 12:30pm at Kinross 104 (EDA)
Attendance to Japanese Bunka Lecture Series will be considered as a part of class meetings. Please contact me if it is difficult.

T.A.:
The T.A. is Grace Tsai  gctsai@ucla.edu

Office Hours:
2-3pm on Friday at Kinross, 228K
You can also reach me by email, kusahara@ucla.edu.
Office hour with Grace:
2:30-3:30 on Tuesday at Perloff B123

Course outline:

Week 1 Introduction: NON-perspective as symbolic form
- A different view: Space, time, reality
- How is it related to Japanese media culture today?

Week 2 Robots and digital pets
- Why humanoid robots and pet robots are developed and widely accepted in Japan?
- Why "alife" based games such as Tamagotchi and Pokemon are developed in Japan?
- What is the cultural background that supports such phenomena?
- How artists and designers are involved in and using these technologies?

Week 3 Technology as amusement; a historical view
- Karakuri: Japanese automata
- Optical toys and pre-cinema
- Shadow as image
- Science and technology as entertainment in Edo Japan

Week 4 Japanese aesthetics in media culture
- Ukiyo-e (Japanese woodblock prints)
- Kimono as media: Another textile design
- Manga
Week 5 Graphics and interface design today
- Graphics in digital animation, video clips, TV commercials, games
- Space and interface design in interactive environment
- Japanese media art and research projects

Week 6 iMode as culture
- Social aspects of mobile phone culture
- Mobile phone as an art/entertainment platform

Week 7 Games and gaming culture
- Trends in Japanese games and game culture
- "Culture" games and "art" games
- Artists as game creators
- OTAKU and game industry

Week 8 Digital girls
- Girls as the major users of electronic gadgets
- Games, game arcades, anime, comics for girls
- Digital "idols"

Week 9 Japanese Animation
- Utsushi-e and nishiki kage-e: Japanese animated magic lantern show
- Traditional and experimental animation
- Digital animation

Week 10 Identity and originality
- "Collective" vs. "individual" in everyday aspects
- Reconsidering the notion of originality
- Virtual characters, digital pets and the sense of reality
- Identity and originality in the digital era
Week 11  Presentation of final assignment