PAAS 487

Trends in Japanese Cinema, 1960-Present:
Japanese Comedies

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Office hours: MR, 3:00-4:00 PM

Objectives
The theme of this course this term is “Comedy and Humour in Japanese Cinema.” One of our primary objectives is to examine how Japanese films critique various social issues utilising the particular features and strengths of diverse forms of humour, from satire to parody to farce and to comedy of manners. We will begin with attempting a definition of humour and its categories, and end with an understanding of how humour can both work for critical change but also for integration and stability or normalisation.

The second primary objective, we leads to tangible, measurable learning outcomes, is to provide an opportunity for in-depth analysis of texts and the construction of clear rhetorical arguments. You will have two research-essay assignments to help you demonstrate advanced knowledge about the subject of the course; in these assignments you will draw on and polish the research and writing skills you have acquired in previous Humanities courses to create clear, persuasive, and objective arguments about a narrow thesis, which your research into Japan, comedy, humour, and cinema will support. All assignments are available on CourseSpaces at the beginning of term. I will not distribute print-outs in class (for environmental reasons), although we will discuss them in advance in class. All students are responsible for downloading copies of the assignments at the beginning of term.

The class will consist of alternating screening/discussion sessions—participation in the discussions is required. As most of the films are extremely rare in Victoria, regular attendance in class is required—I will not make copies of these films available to students unable to attend the screenings. Completion of all required readings (which will be assigned in class) before they are discussed is politely but strongly recommended.

In accordance with the policies of the Department of Pacific and Asian Studies, students who miss more than 10% of classes (in this case, two classes) will not be permitted to write the final exam.

Many of the issues we will discuss have the potential to be controversial. I am committed to creating an equitable, inclusive, and challenging educational space. I will ask students making abusive or disruptive comments, or behaving inattentively, to leave the classroom.

Tentative Schedule

Thursday, September 7: Introduction
• Overview of the course, assignments, goals.
• How to Approach Cinema/Ways of Reading a Film
• What is ‘comedy’? Why are some things funny?
• Definitions, categories, social functions of humour/comedy
• Vermillion Pleasure Night, Gaki no Tsukai, Zenzen daijoubu, etc.

Readings:
• Vexler, Julius “The Essence of Comedy,” The Sewanee Review, Vol. 43, No. 3 (Jul.-Sep., 1935), pp. 292-310

1. Postmodern Society, Postmodern Story Structures
Thursday, September 14: *Tampopo*, 1987, Itami Jûzô
- Comedy and Parody: a postmodern portrait of modern Japan
- Bibliography Assignment/Term Paper Suggestions

**Readings:**
- Iles, Timothy “*Tampopo*: Food and the Postmodern in the Work of Itami Jûzô,” Japanstudien: Jahrbuch des Deutschen Instituts für Japanstudien, Number 12, Spring, 2000, pp. 283-297

Thursday, September 21: *Katakuri-ke no kôfuku*, 2001, Miike Takashi
- The family as the smallest social unit; therefore, as the funniest social unit
- Developments in the utility of postmodernism as artistic technique

**Readings:**

2. Integrating the Outsider

Thursday, September 28: *Shimotsuma monogatari*, 2004, Nakashima Tetsuya
- Can “conformist” societies accept nonconfirmists? Is there room for individuality in communities?
- Midterm essay topics

**Readings:**

Thursday, October 5: *Instant Numa*, 2009, Miki Satoshi
- Critiquing “The Ordinary” through humour; optimism and perseverance

**Readings:**
- Weeks, Mark “Laughter and Japan in Transition: Towards an Understanding through a Time-based Incongruity Theory,” *Studies in Languages and Cultures* 25 (March, 2010). pp. 149-62. [Kyushu University]

Thursday, October 12: Discussion
- Refining our definition of comedy; the place of humour in social engagement
- Consideration of the key themes and techniques that hold our first films together

Thursday, October 19: MIDTERM ESSAY IS DUE AND MIDTERM EXAM (these are required course components)
- In-class, 2 hours
- Essay-styled answers, three from a choice of six questions

3. Communities of Acceptance

Thursday, October 26: *Waterboys*, 2001, Yaguchi Shinobu
- Confirming social bonds through incongruous behaviour

**Readings:**
- Kitazume, Sachiko “Do the Japanese Have a Sense of Humour?” *SOC* 47, 2010, pp. 35-37
Thursday, November 2: *Stereo Future*, 2001, Nakano Hiroyuki

- The humour in relationships, the pathos in work
- **BIBLIOGRAPHY ASSIGNMENT and ESSAY OUTLINE DUE** (these are required course components)

**Readings:**

4. Farce and Political Satire


- Co-opting organisations, institutions, genres, expectations

**Readings:**

Thursday, November 16: *Big Man Japan (Dai Nippon-jin)*, 2007, Matsumoto Hitoshi

- Irreverent idols, irreverence for idols...

**Readings:**

Thursday, November 23: Discussion

- **TERM PAPERS ARE DUE** (this is a required course component)

Thursday, November 30: **FINAL EXAM** (this is a required course component)

- In-class, 2 hours
- Essay-styled answers, three from a choice of six questions
- Term essays returned
- Final exams may be claimed from the Department of Pacific and Asian Studies after December 9.

**Required Texts**

There is no textbook for this class. Readings are available via CourseSpaces. Refer to the attached list.

**Grading**

- Attendance is mandatory. Students who miss more than 10% of classes may not be permitted to write the final exam.

- **Midterm Exam:** 15%
- **Final Exam:** 15%
- **Midterm Essay:** 25%
- **Term Essay Outline:** 5%
- **Bibliography:** 5%
- **Final Essay:** 35%

**Mark Ranges**

- **A+:** 90% —>
- **A:** 85-90%
- **A-:** 80-84%
- **B+:** 77-79%
- **B:** 73-76%
- **B-:** 70-72%
- **C+:** 65-69%
- **C:** 60-64%
- **D:** 50-59%
- **F:** Below 50%

Students who do not complete all course assignments may receive an N. It is the student’s responsibility to ensure that all course requirements are complete.
Department of Pacific and Asian Studies

Plagiarism and Cheating

The Department of Pacific and Asian Studies upholds and enforces the University’s policies on plagiarism and cheating. These policies are described on pp. 46-48 of the current University Calendar (2017/18). All students are advised to read this section.

Practices that are not acceptable include, for example:

- Persuading or paying someone else to write the student’s assignments, or otherwise presenting someone else’s work as the student’s own;
- Downloading essays or articles from the Internet, or copying passages from books or journals, and presenting them as the student’s own work;
- Citing only a portion of a quotation, and presenting the remainder as the student’s own work;
- Copying from another student or sharing information in examinations or tests;
- Unauthorised use of an editor (either an individual, friend, or professional service)
- Submitting the same work (essay, passage, etc) in more than one course
- Bringing notes or other materials into an examination or test, except as authorised by the examiner or instructor.

In addition, the following kinds of behaviour, unless specifically authorised by the instructor, are unacceptable in an examination: talking or communicating by computer or other electronic device with another student; looking at the work of other students while writing an exam; consulting books, electronic materials or other sources of information.

For more information, refer to: https://www.uvic.ca/learningandteaching/students/resources/expectations/index.php

In every course, the instructor may choose to conduct an additional oral examination, in the presence of another faculty member from the Department, so as to ascertain the level of a student’s knowledge or understanding of the course material.

Departmental Policy Regarding Penalties for Plagiarism and Cheating

The possible penalties for plagiarism and cheating are outlined in the Calendar. An instructor will notify the Chair of the Department of cases of a suspected violation and the Chair will contact the student to arrange an interview with the student and instructor to review the case. If it is determined that a violation of University policy has occurred, the Chair will notify the Director of Academic Advising of the case and a letter of reprimand will be issued to the student. Any repeat offenses will be dealt with directly by the Dean. In the Department of Pacific and Asian Studies, the minimum penalty for a first offence will be a grade of zero for the assignment, examination or test. Depending upon the seriousness of the offense and the weight of the assignment, the Chair may assign a grade of F (0 GPA) for the course. Students will not be permitted to rewrite an assignment, examination or test on which they have been found to be cheating, nor will they be permitted to complete supplemental assignments. Records of any violation will be held by the Director of Academic Advising on behalf of the Dean of Humanities. Such records will be destroyed four years after a student graduates. A repeat offence may result in the additional penalty of Disciplinary Probation being placed on the student’s Official Transcript by the Dean; this notation is removed upon graduation.

If you have any doubts about the University’s policies, or want to know if a practice is acceptable or not, you should raise your concerns with your course instructor.
Reading List

Materials are available on CourseSpaces. Students are responsible for reading this material before the class in which we will discuss the various articles.


Iles, Timothy *Tampopo: Food and the Postmodern in the Work of Itami Jûzô,* Japanstudien: Jahrbuch des Deutschen Instituts für Japanstudien, Number 12, Spring, 2000, pp. 283-297


———“Female Voices, Male Words: Problems of Communication, Identity and Gendered Social Construction in Contemporary Japanese Cinema,” *the electronic journal of contemporary japanese studies*, Volume 5, Number 1, 2005

Kitazume, Sachiko “Do the Japanese Have a Sense of Humour?” *SOC* 47, 2010, pp. 35-37


Weeks, Mark “Laughter and Japan in Transition: Towards an Understanding through a Time-based Incongruity Theory,” *Studies in Languages and Cultures* 25 (March, 2010). pp. 149-62. [Kyushu University]


