Spring 2011
Wednesday 7:00 pm - 9:00 pm

A Social History of Aesthetics in Japan

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Aesthetics was the emotional ground from which developed some of the major social movements of the modern age, from nationalism, fascism, liberalism, and environmentalism to racial ideologies, bourgeois consumerisms, counter-cultures, imperial fantasies, gender perceptions, eroticism, and globalization. Before an ideology such as nationalism could become an object of allegiance, it had to be made beautiful. If thinkers were the ones who conceptualized the political project of the nation, it was the poets, historians, and artists who breathed life into the political imagining of the nation and of every other modern social movement.

This course understands aesthetics as an attraction towards an object of desire, an object that we come to define as beautiful. The definition of what is attractive and what is repulsive varies, of course, between individuals as well as between groups. Finding something attractive often involves belonging to a community who finds it attractive. This social history of aesthetics will use aesthetics as a lens from which to observe different and often competing social ideologies, social movements, and social practices that have shaped the history of modern Japan.

Course Requirements

Presentations and Short Papers
Each student will be responsible for three short papers. Paper writers will become the experts on the topic for that week and will be given 15 minutes at the beginning of class to discuss the merits and demerits of the week’s readings or multimedia, to relate them to other works, and to start discussion. To impart their expertise to the class, each expert will write a short essay (1-2 pages typed, single spaced) and be prepared to answer questions and lead discussion on the readings.

Copies of each essay should be sent to members of the seminar via email 24 hours before beginning of the seminar. One hard copy of each essay should also be placed in the class mailbox in the third floor of Child Hall (next to the elevators) 24 hours before the start of the next seminar. All students are expected to read the student essays as part of the required readings each week.

Research Paper
Each student is required to write a research paper (10-15 pages single spaced) on one aspect of the social history of aesthetics in Japan. Selection of a topic should be finalized by March 9. A one page description with bibliography is due March 23. You will give a 20 minute presentation of your paper to the class on May 4 or May 11. The completed paper is due on May 22 at 11 am. Students may choose their own topics, but the instructor must approve it.
REQUIRED TEXTS

Required texts have been ordered in paperback at the Oberlin Bookstore (basement) as well as placed on reserve at Mudd Library.


GRADING AND ASSIGNMENTS

Three presentations and short papers 15% each
Final paper 40%
Class attendance and participation 15%

Short papers are due 24 hours before the beginning of class. The final paper is due on May 22 at 11:00 am. Late papers will be marked down 2/3 of a grade for the first day and 1/3 of a grade for every day thereafter. One week after the due date they will no longer be accepted.

HONOR CODE

All students are expected to adhere to the Oberlin Honor Code on all written assignments.

WRITING ASSISTANCE

Students are encouraged to visit the Writing Center in Mudd Library where tutors from the Writing Associates Program can provide strategies for improving writing skills.

OFFICE HOURS

Tuesdays and Thursdays 10:00-11:00 am or by appointment
Students are encouraged to come see the instructor with questions about any aspect of the course.
CLASS SCHEDULE

FEB 9: INTRODUCTION

FEB 16: SAMURAI, COMMONERS, AND NETWORKS

FEB 23: TEA AS RELIGION, TRADITION, AND CONTESTATION

MARCH 2: DECADENCE & CONSUMPTION

MARCH 9: REBELLION, PLEASURE, AND SURREALISM
APRIL 6: FASCIST AESTHETICS