Course Description:
This course explores contemporary Japanese popular culture from an anthropological perspective. We want to understand how emblematic media forms such as manga, anime, video-games, etc constitute a ‘culture’ in a distinctive way, and how this culture relates to existing sociohistorical conditions and aesthetic traditions. We may also call this culture of media ‘otaku culture,’ in so far as this is how some of its participants and observers habitually describe it today. The contemporary ‘otaku’ experience will be examined not simply as a convenient window through which to explore ‘Japanese culture’ but as itself a heterogeneous site of cultural action, aesthetics, and political economy. Drawing on scholarly articles, visual texts, and a field trip, the course will introduce you to several key phenomena (e.g. cosplay, media mix, pilgrimage) and key concepts (e.g. ‘character,’ ‘dimension,’ ‘animation’) to explore a wide variety of issues and ideas, such as globalization, locality, affect, labor, the human, and the non-human.

As we explore this heterogeneity, we frame the course with the general theme of INTERTEXTUALITY. Intertextuality means that the contemporary media culture cannot be adequately appreciated without investigating the way in which a given text refers to, quotes, comments upon, reproduces, evaluates – generally ‘talks about’ – other texts and other genres: how otaku cultural texts create complex linkages to sociocultural phenomena, literary discourses, political idioms, historical events, etc. (So, the cosplay performance of a manga character, the technique of ‘character branding’ for a company or a product, and our engagement in this very course – these are examples of intertextual connection.) Along with this theme, we will also take up the theme of REFLEXIVITY. Reflexivity means intuitive awareness of the intertextual nature of aesthetic works on the part of producers, consumers, performers, interpreters, and even characters. (We often call this quality ‘meta’: as you might know, many anime works are a commentary on other anime works or on themselves, and are thus rather exquisitely ‘meta.’) We will be concerned with how people participating in this culture develop and deploy their reflexive sense of intertextual connection in creating, sharing and appreciating cultural expertise.

Required Readings:

All other REQUIRED course materials, as specified in Schedule below, will be made available electronically.

Students with Disabilities:
-Students with documented needs for accommodation should speak with me before the first session.

Honor Principle and Course Policy:
-All academic activities will be based on student honor. Plagiarism will not be tolerated. Evidence of plagiarism will result in failure of the course. See Sophia University Academic Honesty Policy: http://www.sophia.ac.jp/academics/academicethics-2
-Turn off your mobile device during class session or set it to silent mode, and keep it in your bag. You don’t need it, so don’t use it. Your laptop is allowed only for reading and note-taking purposes. No audiovisual recording allowed.
Course Requirements:

0. **READ THIS SYLLABUS**

1. Read/ watch all the assigned readings/videos (mandatory)
2. **Class Participation (30%)**: You will participate actively in class discussion. Come to the class prepared with questions and comments about the assigned readings. See below *
3. **Response Statements (30%)**: You will write a short statement (a few paragraphs will do) responding to the assigned course material. You must do this for at least 5 sessions; otherwise, the highest course grade you could obtain will automatically be B-. Individual statements will not be graded. Do not summarize: instead, develop questions on topics, issues, and texts referred to in the session’s assignments. Try to address your questions to other students in the class to stimulate discussion. You will post your statement on our online portal. Your statement is due the evening before the session in which the readings are assigned so that the class as a whole can share your questions before we meet.
4. **Final Writing Assignment (40%)**: EITHER 1) You will write a paper in which to develop an analytic argument about some of the visual texts featured in this course. OR 2) Based on your visit to Comike, you will write an ethnographic analysis of how your experience of the event relates to course materials and class discussion. (This year’s Summer Comike is held August 10-12). 5 pages. DUE: TBA
5. Extra Credit (optional, 5%): In-Class Presentation: You may sign up for ONE session to perform in-class presentation (20 minutes). In your presentation you will present critical questions about the assigned readings for class discussion. If you want to do this, please let me know at least two sessions prior to the session in question.

*About attendance

You are required to attend all the sessions of the course. Unexcused absences will result in a penalty of the half of letter grade from your final grade, for each additional absence—i.e. two missed classes turns an A into an A-, three turns it into a B+, and so on. In cases of unavoidable conflict, you must provide formal documentations in advance: the terms of such unavoidability are determined by the instructor.

**Important Dates:**

7/26, Friday: First session of the course
8/14, Friday: Final session of the course
TBA: Your FINAL PAPER DUE
Fyi: This year’s Summer Comike (Comike 84): 8/10, 8/11, and 8/12

**Notes:**

-Our discussion will include a lot of references to anime and manga titles, video games, and subcultural idioms more generally. Do NOT expect that everyone in the class already knows everything about these texts and idioms. (No one does.) If you encounter a work of anime you do not know in the readings, for example, do not be too concerned. Instead, think about how and why it is being talked about in the context of an argument. Do a little research on it yourself or ask others about it, just so that you have sufficient familiarity with works like this. Accordingly, if you want to refer to some anime or manga as an example that illuminates your argument in your paper or our discussion in class, try to contextualize it for those who might not be familiar with it and make clear how the example relates to the discussion and the argument.

-I do not grade you on the basis of your immersion in Japanese popular culture. Whatever the degree of your immersion (your otaku-ness, in a sense), my assessment of your course performance is based solely on how you demonstrate your analytic understanding of the culture through required assignments. In short, being already an anime fan doesn’t automatically give you a good grade, while the course does require you to approach this culture in an ethnographically deep and analytically sophisticated way and moreover to appreciate it in its own right. Avoid speaking like a geek: we are interested in social conditions and effects of such a way of talking.
Course Schedule:

Session 1 (7/26, Fri): Introduction
Course overview. Looking at otaku culture anthropologically. What kind of ‘popular culture’ we are talking about. Meta-ness. Connoisseurship. Sociality. The idea of ‘dimensionality’ (jigen). In-class screening: DAICON IV.

No Readings.

Session 2 (7/27, Sat): Culture of ‘Characters’
Fantastic characters and their sui generis reality. The idea of moe, “characterological empathy.”

-Alt and Yoda

Session 3 (7/29, Mon): Culture of ‘Characters’ cont.


Session 4 (7/30, Tue): Media Mix
Character branding, character merchandising; political economy of empathy and affect. Characters and their (non-in-)consistency in media mix environment.


Session 5 (7/31, Wed): Characters, Narratives, Databases
How characters move in and out of narratives. The ‘database’ view of characters; the idea of ‘moe-elements.’ The narrative-database feedback.


Session 6 (8/1, Thu): Dōjin Sociality. Propriety of Circulation / Citation
In-class viewing: Otaku no Video (1991; 100 min)


Session 7 (8/2, Fri): Characters and Ensoulment
How humans give souls to (‘animate’) characters. Cosplay as animation.

-Watch Silvio’s lecture first <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R8lT1SgBzKU> (about 40mins, 0:36:47-1:11:28), and then skim her article

Session 8 (8/5, Mon): Fujoshi
In-class screening: Fujoshi Kanojo (2009; 97 min)


Session 9 (8/6, Tue): Fujoshi, cont
In-class screening: Akihabara Geeks (2005; 44 min)
Session 10 (8/7, Wed): Anime Pilgrimage
How humans move across the ‘dimensional’ divide.


Session 11 (8/8, Thu): Humans and Machines


Session 12 (8/9, Fri): Service Characters

-Raz, Aviad E. Ch 4, Riding the Black Ship: Japan and Tokyo Disneyland.

Session 13 (8/10, Sat): Humans, Machines, Characters – and Coffee
In-class screening: Time of Eve (2010; 106 min)

-No readings.

FIELD TRIP TO COMIKET (8/10 Sat, 8/11 Sun, 8/12 Mon)
arrange your trip individually or in group

Session 14 (8/12, Mon): Maid Cafés


Session 15 (8/13, Tue): Characters, Voices, Souls
Voice acting. Synthesized voices (e.g. Vocaloids).

-Nozawa, Shunsuke. MS.

Session 16 (8/14, Wed): Recap

-Readings TBA

Your Final Paper DUE: TBA