

Ethnographic Film: History and Theory
of Ethnographic Representation on Film and Video
Anthropology 305/Fall 2011/Mon. 1:30-4:00/ PNE 349

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Course Description

This seminar explores the history and evolution of ethnographic film as a genre for representing “reality”, anthropological knowledge and cultural processes, as well as the broader issues of cross-cultural representation it has raised. We begin by examining how the progenitors of ethnographic film emerged in a particular intellectual and political context. Then, we study the key works that have defined and altered the genre. Ethnographic films have evolved drastically: from representing to attempting to speak alongside the “Other” to representing and/or interrogating the self—shifts in self-reflexivity and practices of knowledge production that in many ways preceded similar advances in written ethnography. We will chart this evolution and analyze its ramifications. Throughout the course we will keep several things in mind: the properties of film as a signifying practice; its place within the larger project for representing culture; the cultural and social contexts in which such films are shot, distributed, and seen; and the ethical and political concerns raised by representing and/or communicating across cultural boundaries.

Requirements

(1) Class Participation (15% of your final grade). This is an advanced, intensive seminar that requires your energetic participation in class discussions, as well as your active in-class viewing of films. You must thoroughly **read** the assigned readings before class, and demonstrate thoughtful consideration of these readings and in-class screenings in class **discussions**. While films are being screened, you must demonstrate your active attention, taking rigorous notes and remaining alert and respectful of the film and your classmates. **Active viewing** practices will be introduced in your first class session.

(2) Reading Responses. (15% of your final grade). By 9:00 pm the night before class, you must post to Sakai a **reading response** in which you elaborate on a question or point that you hope to engage while watching the film in class. The responses should be 1-2 pages in length (double-spaced). Come to class with your response printed out, and be prepared to discuss it in light of the screening(s).

(3) Papers: Three short theory/review essays and a final research paper. More specific instructions will be handed out closer to the due date. These will consist of:

1. Paper I: History of Ethnographic Film (15 % of your final grade). Due Fri. Oct. 21 by 5:00 pm.
4-6 pages. What is ethnographic film? How has the genre emerged and changed, especially since the 1920’s? What sorts of representational and ethical issues does it raise, and how do these speak to written anthropology

and other forms of representation? Discuss at least three films that we have seen so far in the course.

2. Paper II. (20 % of your final grade). Due Friday Nov. 18 by 5:00 p.m. 6-8 pages. Review the work of one filmmaker/unit presented thus far in class. Analyze at least one film in the context of the issues raised by the relevant readings and the history of ethnographic film.

3. Final Research Paper: (25 % of your final grade). Due Mon. Dec. 12 by 5:00 p.m. Proposals of topics due Mon. Nov. 7. 15-20 pages. Explore one ethnographic filmmaker/movement in light of the themes, dilemmas, and trends of the genre that we have studied in class. You may choose to explore in depth a filmmaker or movement we have discussed in class, in which case you will need to research additional in-depth materials and the filmmaker must be different from the one you discussed in essay 2. Alternately, you may choose a filmmaker/movement not discussed in class, in which case, you will need to analyze the subject in relation to the films/filmmakers discussed in class.

(4) Presentation of Final Research Project (10% of your final grade). In class presentation, including well-selected clips from ethnographic films you're analyzing, on Dec. 5.

Guidelines/Regulations

- Laptops, iPads/Pods, cell phones, and other electronic devices may NOT be used in the classroom. All electronic devices must be switched off for the duration of class (not just silenced).
- If dissatisfied with your grade on Paper I and/or II, you may rewrite it, as long as you hand in the revised paper no more than two weeks after the original graded paper has been returned to you. You are encouraged to discuss the essay with your professor and/or a writing tutor. The grade for the revised paper will be your final grade for the assignment; that is, even if the revised paper is of inferior quality to the original, its grade will count rather than the original grade. You may not rewrite your Final Research Paper.
- If not explained by a doctor's note or a notification of a legitimate religious observance or family emergency, each absence will result in a 2-point reduction in your participation grade.
- Late work will not be accepted, nor will I grant extensions or incompletes; there is no January Option for this course.
- Students must abide by the Wellesley Honor Code. Plagiarism will be adjudicated by the Wellesley Honor Code Council. Please be aware that improper citation can constitute plagiarism. Take care to learn and follow the proper citation practices. See Wellesley's Citation 101 at www.wellesley.edu/GeneralJudiciary/citation101.html
- Papers will be graded according to the Wellesley College Writing Program's standards.

• Students with disabilities who require disability-related accommodations are encouraged to work with Jim Wice, the Director of Disability Services. Find Jim on the third floor of Clapp Library. If you have a disability, including a learning disability, that is undocumented, Jim will arrange for you to be tested, and for appropriate accommodations to be made.

Course Schedule

1. **Wed. Sept. 7** Introduction

2. **Mon. Sept. 12** What is Ethnographic Film? What was the context of its emergence?
What are some of the central themes and dilemmas of the genre?

Screening:

Cannibal Tours (1987) 70 min. Dennis O'Rourke

Readings for today:

de Brigard, Emilie 1975. "The history of ethnographic film." In Hockings, Paul (ed) Principles of Visual Anthropology. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Ginsburg, Faye 1998. "Institutionalizing the Unruly: Charting A Future for Visual Anthropology." *Ethnos* 63:2.

Griffiths, Allison 2002. Chapter 3: "Knowledge and Visuality in Nineteenth-Century Anthropology." Wondrous Difference: Cinema, Anthropology and Turn-of-the-Century Visual Culture. (New York: Columbia U. Press.)

Loizos, Peter 1993. Ch. 1: "Innovation in ethnographic film, 1955-85." Innovation in Ethnographic Film, (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press).

3. **Mon. Sept. 19** Romantic Primitivism and the Flaherty Tradition

Screening:

Nanook of the North (1922) 79 min. Robert J. Flaherty

Nanook Revisited (1990) 60 min. Claude Massot (selections)

Recommended Film: (to view outside of class.)

Atanarjuat: The Fast Runner (2001) 170 min. Zacharias Kunuk.

Readings:

Barnouw, Erik 1993. "Explorer" in Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film. Oxford: Oxford University Press, Pp. 33-51.

Huhndorf, Shari. 2000 "Nanook and His Contemporaries:

Imagining Eskimos in American Culture, 1897-1922.” *Critical Inquiry* 27.

Rony, Fatima. 1996. Ch. 4 “Taxidermy and Romantic Ethnography” in The Third Eye: Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle. (Durham: Duke University Press).

Ginsburg, Faye 2002. “Screen Memories: Resignifying the Traditional in Indigenous Media.” In Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod and Larkin, eds. Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain (Berkeley: University of California Press). Only pages. 39-44.

Recommended Reading:

Catherine Russell 1999. “Playing Primitive”. *Visual Anthropology* 8, especially pg. 66-end.

On *Atanarjuat*: Ginsburg, Faye 2000. “Atanarjuat Off-Screen: From ‘Media Reservations’ to the World Stage’, *American Anthropologist* 105(4):827-32.

4. Mon. Sept. 26. Scientific Cinema: Gregory Bateson and Margaret Mead

Screening:

Margaret Mead on 1950 NFC program *Four Families*

<http://barnard.edu/sfonline/mead/four.mov>

First Days In the Life Of A New Guinea Baby (1951) 19 min

Bathing Babies in Three Cultures (1951) 9 minutes

Karba's First Years (1950) 19 min.

Trance and Dance in Bali (1951) 22 min.

Readings:

Jacknis, Ira. 1988. Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson in Bali: Their Use of Photography and Film.” *Cultural Anthropology* 3(2).

“Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson on the Use of the Camera in Anthropology.” *Studies in the Anthropology of Visual Communication*, 4(2). 1977.

Mead, Margaret. 1975/95. “Visual Anthropology in A Discipline of Words.” in Paul Hockings, ed. *Principles of Visual Anthropology*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co.

Russell, Catherine. 1999. Ch. 8, “Ecstatic Ethnography: Filming Possession Rituals.” In Experimental Ethnography (Durham: Duke University Press).

Worth, Sol. 1981. “Margaret Mead and the Shift from ‘Visual Anthropology’ to

'The 'Anthropology of Visual Communication'." Studying Visual Communication, Philadelphia: U. of Pa. Press.

5. Mon. Oct. 3.

From Observational Cinema To Video Advocacy: The Work of John Marshall

Screenings:

N/um Tchai 1966 (20 min.) John Marshall

N!ai: The Story of a !Kung Woman (1979) 57 min. J. Marshall

A Kalabari Family (2002) segments from the 5 part series: Part 1 "A Far Country" and Part 5, "Death By Myth"

Readings:

Douglas, Stuart and Jennifer Law. 1997 "Beating Around the Bush(man!)" *Visual Anthropology* 10.

Loizos, Peter. 1993 Ch. 4 "Constructions from Real Lives." in Innovation in Ethnographic Film. (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press.).

Wilmsen, Edwin. 1999. "Knowledge as the Source of Progress: The Marshall Family Testament to the 'Bushmen.'" *Visual Anthropology* 12 (2-3).

Young, Colin. 1975 "Observational Cinema" in Paul Hockings, ed. Principles of Visual Anthropology. (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter & Co.).

Recommended Readings:

Clifford, James. 1986. "On Ethnographic Allegory." In Clifford, James and George Marcus, eds. Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography. Berkeley: U. of California Press.

Tomaselli, Keyan. 2002. "We Have to Work With our Own Heads: San and the Media." *Visual Anthropology* 15.

Documentary Educational Resources N!ai Study Guide.

6. Mon. Oct. 17

Tim Asch: Scientific Ethnography, Reflexivity & The Yanomamo Debate

Screenings:

The Feast (1970) 29 min. Timothy Asch and Napoleon Chagnon

The Ax Fight (1975) 30 min. " "

Jero on Jero (1980) 17 min. Tim Asch, Patsy Asch, Linda Connor

Readings:

Asch, Tim. 1979. "Making A Film Record of the Yanomamo of

Southern Venezuela.” *Perspectives on Film* 2.

Asch, Tim. 1992. “The Ethics of Ethnographic Film-Making.” in Peter Ian Crawford and David Turton, eds. Film as Ethnography. (Manchester: Manchester U. Press).

Asch, J.I. Cardozo, H. Cabellero, J. Bortoli. 1991. “The Story We Now want to Hear is Not Ours to Tell.” *Visual Anthropology Review* 7(2).

Marks, Dan. 1995. “Ethnography and Ethnographic Film: From Flaherty to Asch and After.” *American Anthropologist* 97 (2).

Ruby, Jay. 1980. “Exposing Yourself: Reflexivity, Anthropology and Film.” *Semiotica* 10 (1-2).

Recommended Reading:

Geertz, Clifford. 2001. “Life Among the Anthros.” *New York Review of Books*. 18-22 (On the Yanomamo Debate).

Friday Oct. 21. *** Paper I Due *******

7. Mon. Oct. 24 Jean Rouch: Cine-Transe and Ethno-Fiction

Screenings:

Les Maitres Fous (1955) 35 minutes, Jean Rouch (clips)

Moi, Un Noir (1958) 70 min., Jean Rouch

Recommended:

Rouch in Reverse (1995) 60 min. Manthia Diawara (To be seen outside of class)

Readings:

De Bouzek, Jeanette. 1989. “The Ethnographic Surrealism of Jean Rouch” *Visual Anthropology Review* 2.

Feld, Steve 2003 “Editor’s Introduction.” In Ciné-Ethnography: Jean Rouch. (Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota Press).

Rouch, Jean

“The Camera and Man.” (in Ciné-Ethnography).

“On the Vicissitudes of the Self: The Possessed Dancer, the Magician, the Sorcerer, the Filmmaker, and the Ethnographer.” (in Ciné-Ethnography).

Yakir, Dan, 1978, "Ciné-transe: The Vision of Jean Rouch." *Film Quarterly* 31 (3).

Look back at Russell Ch. 8 from week 4.

8. Mon. Nov. 7

Jean Rouch: Provoking Truths and Anthropologie Partagée

Proposal for Final Research Project Due

Screening:

Chronique d'un Été (Chronicle of A Summer) (1961) 90 min. J. Rouch and E. Morin

Readings:

Barnouw, Erik. 1993. "Catalyst/ & Guerrilla" in Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Loizos, Peter. 1993. "Challenging Documentation-Realism."
Innovation...

Ginsburg, Faye. 1996. "Two Kinds of Truth." *American Anthropologist* 98 (4).

9. Mon. Nov. 14

The Unprivileged Camera: David & Judith MacDougall

Screenings:

To Live With Herds (1973) 70 min. (selections)

The Age of Reason (2004) 87 min. David MacDougall

Readings:

MacDougall, David. 1995. "Subtitling Ethnographic Films: Archetypes into Individuals." *Visual Anthropology Review* 11(1).

MacDougall, David 1998 Transcultural Cinema. (Princeton: Princeton University Press).

Chapter 4. Beyond Observational Cinema.

Chapter 9. "Unprivileged Camera Style"

MacDougall, David 2006 The Corporeal Image: Film, Ethnography and the Senses. (Princeton: Princeton U. Press).

Chapter 4. "Social Aesthetics and the Doon School"

Chapter 5. "The Doon School Reconsidered."

Friday. Nov. 18

Paper 2 Due

10. Mon. Nov. 21

Indigenous Media: The "Natives" Take on Ethnographic Film

Screenings:

Navajo Film Themselves (selections):

Intrepid Shadows (1968). 18 min. Al Clah
The Spirit of the Navajo (1968). 21 min. Maxine and MaryJane Tsosie
Satellite Dreaming. (1994). 48 min. Ivo Burum for CAAMA
Two Cars One Night (2004). 11 min. Taika Waititi (Maori)

Readings:

Dubin, Margaret. 1998. "From Artful Ethnography to Ethnographic Art: The Enduring Significance of the Navajo Film Project." *Visual Anthropology Review*.

Ginsburg, Faye. 1991. "Indigenous Media: Faustian Contract or Global Village?" *Cultural Anthropology* 6.

--- 1999. "The Parallax Effect: The Impact of Aboriginal Media on Ethnographic Film." In Michael Renov and Jane Gaines, eds. Collecting Visible Evidence. (Minneapolis: U. of Minnesota Press).

Turner, Terence. 2002. "Representation, Politics, and Cultural Imagination in Indigenous Video: General Points and Kayapo Experience." In Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod and Larkin eds. *Media Worlds: Anthropology on New Terrain* (Berkeley: U. of California Press).

11. Mon. Nov. 28

With Postcolonial Eyes: Ethnographic Impulses in Non-Western Documentary Film

Screenings:

Lakshmi and Me Nishtha (2007). 60 min. Nishtha Jain

Readings:

Nichols, Bill. 1994. Embodied Knowledge and the Politics of Location" in Blurred Boundaries. (Bloomington: U. of Indiana Press).

Russell, Catherine. 1999. "Autoethnography." In Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video. (Durham: Duke University Press).

12. Mon. Dec. 5

Student Presentations

Mon. Dec. 12

Final Research Papers Due