

Anthropology 476 (10640D): Ethnographic Film Theory from a Historical Perspective

Meeting Time/Place	Monday 4:00-6:50 pm
Instructor:	Jennifer Cool (cool@usc.edu)
Room:	VHE 214
Office/Office Hours:	After class or by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION

If the anthropological perspective is what distinguishes ethnographic film from other genres, including documentary, how is the anthropological perspective revealed in film and how has film shaped the anthropological perspective? This course is an introduction to ethnographic film, broadly defined as a genre of documentary that addresses human cultural issues from an anthropological perspective. We will examine the ways cinema and cinematic ways of seeing have been employed in anthropology, thinking, about the position of the films we view in the history of anthropology and cinema, and also about their relation to the contemporary and future goals of anthropology and ethnographic filmmaking as scholarly practices.

Course Objectives

The course is a selective survey that introduces ethnographic film, focusing on its historical development within anthropology and situating it in the context of cinema, as the dominant cultural interface of the 20th century. We examine theoretical orientations towards the use of visual and audiovisual media in anthropological research and representation from the late 19th century through the 20th, ending with a look at contemporary works and trends. In addition to topical knowledge, the course provides tools for close reading and analysis of both written texts and films. You will have the opportunity to apply these in class exercises and assignments. What claims to truth or knowledge does a particular film make? What elements convey the theoretical orientation of the filmmaker, or cultural context of the film? By answering questions like these, you will develop skills for close reading film. *Ideally* you will come away from this course with (1) sharper critical thinking skills; (2) a broader understanding, not only of ethnographic film and anthropology but of representation as a situated, cultural practice; and (3) greater insight into your own assumptions, expectations, and reception of documentary media more generally.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Understand the broader historical and cultural contexts of, and major approaches to, ethnographic film from the early 20th century to the present.
- Strengthen critical reading, thinking, and writing skills in weekly responses and paper assignments
- Develop analytic skills in the close reading of both written and cinematic “texts”
- Develop independent research and presentation skills

BOOKS

- Grimshaw, Anna, 2001. *The Ethnographer's Eye: Ways of Seeing in Anthropology*, ISBN-13: 978-0521774758

OTHER REQUIRED READINGS (PDFS ON BLACKBOARD)

- Abu-Lughod, Lila (1991), “Writing Against Culture,” in *Recapturing Anthropology*, Richard G. Fox, ed., Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 137-54, 161-2.
- Collins, Samuel Gerald, Matthew Durlington, and Harjant Gill. 2017. “Multimodality: An Invitation.” *American Anthropologist* 119 (1): 1–5.
- Crawford, Peter Ian. 1992. Excerpt from “Film as discourse” in *Film as Ethnography*. Peter Crawford, David Turton, eds. Manchester University Press.
- Gill, Harjant, “Locating Transnational, Diasporic, Queers-of-Color Voices in Ethnographic Cinema.” 2020. *American Anthropologist* (forth coming)
- Jacknis, Ira. 1988. “Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson in Bali: Their Use of Photography and Film” *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (May, 1988), pp. 160-177
- Loizos, Peter. 1994. Ch. 1, *Innovation in Ethnographic Film*, University of Chicago Press.
- Mead, Margaret, and Gregory Bateson. 1977. “Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson on the Use of the Camera in Anthropology.” *Studies in the Anthropology of Visual Communication* 4 (2): 78–80.
- Takaragawa, Stephanie, Trudi Lynn Smith, Kate Hennessy, Patricia Alvarez Astacio, Jenny Chio, Coleman Nye, and Shalini Shankar. 2019. “Bad Habitus: Anthropology in the Age of the Multimodal.” *American Anthropologist* 121 (2): 517–24.
- Worth, Sol. 1980. Margaret Mead and the Shift from “Visual Anthropology” to the “Anthropology of Visual Communication,” *Studies in Visual Communication*. Volume 6. Issue 1.

COURSE BREAKDOWN

Weekly reading responses (~300-500 words) over the course of the semester. Two lowest two scores dropped.	25%
Lead discussion of readings twice (2x) over the semester	10%
Curatorial Project	
• Film Selection Report / Curatorial Proposal (2-3 pages)	10%
• Leading discussion of screening	5%
• Curatorial Presentation (week 15, 10 minute presentation on film analysis paper thesis)	10%
Film Analysis Paper (about 10 pages)	
• Draft	10%
• Final Paper	20%
Participation, in class exercises, peer-review and feedback	10%

LEADING DISCUSSION

You are expected to lead discussion of the readings twice over the course of the semester. Each week, discussants take responsibility for directing discussion to:

- (1) Identify key ideas of the readings. What are the overarching arguments?
- (2) Connect these to questions or issues raised in class, discussion, films or prior readings. How do the readings speak to the week’s theme? How do they touch on questions of knowledge, power, or representation in ethnographic film?
- (3) What are some questions, puzzles, problems, or concerns do you want to raise with the class?

Though leading discussion requires preparation, it is not a solo performance and success lies in proposing ways to think and talk about readings that provoke discussion, thought, dissent, engagement. See Blackboard to sign-up for the weeks you will lead.

WEEKLY READING RESPONSES

Due on Blackboard > Discussion Board midnight Mondays (10:00 am)

You are expected to post responses to assigned readings to the discussion board on Blackboard each week before class. These can be short (about 300 words) and informal, but should show you've done and thought about the reading in terms of questions posed in lecture and class. Don't summarize or cover every topic and point. Do look for the over-arching arguments. Do comment on ideas you found fascinating or problematic, raise questions about passages you found unclear, and add your own links and examples to the discussion.

You should draft reading responses offline, save them, and only then post them to Blackboard (in the body of the post, not as attachments). *Keep your own copy of all your responses for this class.*

- Write and post weekly reading responses over the course of the semester

CURATORIAL PROJECT & FILM ANALYSIS PAPER

This assignment asks that you choose an ethnographic film—contemporary or historic—to screen for the class and discuss in terms of the cinematic styles and anthropological modes of seeing we are reading about (and screening example of) this semester. I will provide a list of films (with links to view online) but you are welcome to research and request specific films that interest you. This is an opportunity to pursue your own interests and trace connections that link the film you select to the cinematic and anthropological approaches we survey in the class.

In addition to screening the film (Student-Curated Screenings)

Film Selection Report / Curatorial Proposal - Due Week 6

Describe the research and thought process by which you selected the film you will work with for this assignment.

Student-Curated Screening: Week 6 - 13

Curatorial Presentations

In our last class, after you have submitted a draft of your film analysis paper for peer-review, students will make a 10-minute presentation on what they learned from their study and analysis of the film.

FILM ANALYSIS PAPER ASSIGNMENT (ON BLACKBOARD)

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week/Date	Readings	Films & Assignment Due Dates
Week 1 – Turning Points & Shifting Boundaries: Ethnographic Film and/in Anthropology		
Jan 9	Worth, Collins et al., Takaragawa et al.	<i>Bathing Babies in Three Cultures, Clips from In the Wilderness.. An American Family</i>
Week 2 – MLK Holiday – No Class Meeting		
Jan 16		
Week 3 – Foundations of Ethnographic Photography and Film in Anglo-American Anthropology		
Jan 23	Jacknis, Mead and Bateson	<i>Clips: Trance and Dance in Bali, TRIPOD: Feedback</i>
Week 4 – Foundations: Ways of Seeing in Anthropology, Modalities of Ethnographic Film		
Jan 30	Loizos (11), Crawford excerpt (6) Grimshaw: Preface, Introduction (ix-xiii, 1-12) Discussant:	<i>Clips: Perspicacious, Experiential (Marshall) Clips: Montage vs. Mise-en-Scene</i>
Week 5 – Anthropology and Cinema as Modern Projects		
Feb 6	Grimshaw: Ch. 1, The Modernist Moment (15p) Grimshaw: Ch. 2, Rivers, Cubism, ... Modernism (11p) Discussant:	<i>Lumières, Regnault, Baldwin Spencer Clips from Griffith, Vigo</i>
Week 6 – Anthropological Cinema as Romantic Quest		
Feb 13	Grimshaw, Ch. 3 (13p) Discussant:	<i>Clips Nanook & Moana Curatorial Film Selection Report due</i>
Week 7 – Presidents’ Day Holiday – No Class Meeting		
Feb 20		
Week 8 – Anthropological Cinema as Enlightenment Project		
Feb 27	Grimshaw, Ch. 4, Grierson, Radcliffe-Brown...(12p) Discussant:	<i>Night Mail (1936, 22 min), directed by Harry Watt and Basil Wright</i>
Week 9 – Cinema & Anthropology Post 1945		
Mar 6	Grimshaw, Ch. 5, Cinema & anthropology...postwar world (19p) Italian Neorealism, Free Cinema, Direct Cinema, Cinema Verité Discussant:	<i>Clips: Chronique d'un été (Chronicle of a Summer) (1960, 85 min)</i>
Spring Break March 12 – March 19		
Week 10 – Rouch: Shades of Romanticism and Enlightenment (Ethnofiction & Shared Anthropology)		
Mar 20	Grimshaw, Ch 6, The anthropological cinema of Jean Rouch (30p) Discussant:	<i>Jean Rouch: Jaguar (1967, 93 min), RAI 2019, Collaborative Short</i>
Week 11 – MacDougalls: Neo-Enlightenment to Observational, an Intellectual Burden		
Mar 27	Grimshaw, Ch 7 (28p) Discussant:	<i>To Live with Herds (1974, 70 min), Doon School, Ax Fight</i>
Week 12 – Llewlyn-Davies: Ethnographic Film on Television (Public Anthropology)		
April 3	Grimshaw, 8 and Epilog (24p) Discussant:	<i>Masai Women, Masai Manhood Disappearing World BBC production</i>
Week 13 – Postmodern, Postcolonial. and Feminist Critiques of Anthropology as Modern Project		
April 10	Abu-Lughod, Lila (1991), “Writing Against Culture,” Discussant:	<i>Reassemblage Bontoc Eulogy</i>
Week 14 – Decolonizing Ethnographic Film		
April 17	Gill, Harjant (2020), “Locating Transnational...” Peer-Review Film Analysis Papers Discussant:	<i>Marlon Riggs DRAFT Film Analysis Paper due</i>
Week 15 – Towards Multimodal Anthropologies: Media Practice in Scholarship & Public Anthropology		
April 24	Collins et al, Takaragawa et al., TBA Presentations	<i>Curatorial Project Presentations</i>
		<i>Film Analysis Paper due May 1 (Mon)</i>