Course Description and Goals

This course is about culture, visual communication, and anthropology. The term visual anthropology can be read in at least two senses: anthropology as visual communication and the anthropology of visual communication. In this course we will be concerned with the visual dimensions of anthropology as a scholarly activity—the uses made of films, photographs, drawings, and museum displays to convey anthropological knowledge—and we will also explore the concept of visual culture as an object of anthropological study.

The uses of visual media in anthropological research, publication, and teaching have a rich and complex history and an even richer and more complex present and future. The ongoing explosion of technology in the area of visual representation—including digital cameras, highly portable videocams, digital editing programs for computers, cable television, and the Internet—holds exciting potential for ethnography. At the same time, contemporary concerns about truth and ethics in anthropology make the uses of the new technologies a subject of intense debate. This course will critically examine both the history of anthropological films, in the larger context of the documentary film as a genre, and also the contemporary debates about the representation of non-Western cultures in visual modes.

The broader question of the nature of visual culture and the relation between audio and visual modes of communication forms the background of the central problems of anthropology: how does one gains an understanding of one’s own and other cultures, and how can one convey that understanding to others.

Course Procedures and Evaluation

Coming to class (on time) and participating in class discussion are very important parts of this course. Classes will typically involve critically viewing and discussing segments of documentary and ethnographic films in the context of assigned readings and lectures. Grades will be based on a large number of very short in-class quizzlets based on class discussions and viewings as well as on current reading assignments. One purpose of the quizzes is to provide a measure of attendance and attention. The final exam will be a take-home essay—written or visual—demonstrating understanding of and insight into one or more of the major issues addressed in the course that will be due on or before the scheduled final exam date (May 9). The quizzlets will count for 80% of the final grade, the final essay for 20%.
**Text and Readings**

There is no assigned textbook for the course, but Jay Ruby’s *Picturing Culture* (2000), Chicago: University of Chicago Press, is highly recommended. Photocopied required readings (including some Ruby chapters) will be made available in Sinclair Library’s reserve system. Videos will be presented in excerpted form in class. Students are encouraged to borrow the tapes from Sinclair library to view them in entirety.

**Tentative Schedule of Topics by Week (This is not a strict schedule)**

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<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Video</th>
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<td><strong>Part I</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Visual Culture</strong></td>
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<td>1.</td>
<td>Introduction: Picturing and being Pictured</td>
<td>Ruby, chpt. 1</td>
<td>“Hawaii on Screen”</td>
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<td>“Color Adjustment”</td>
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<td>Sharman</td>
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<td>Documentary Genre</td>
<td>Clifford</td>
<td>“Cinema Verite”</td>
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<td>Audio v. Video modes and culture</td>
<td>Armstrong</td>
<td>“Strike”</td>
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<td>Darwin</td>
<td>“Man with the movie Camera”</td>
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<td>Eibl-Eibesfeldt</td>
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<td>Myth, Dreams, and Movies</td>
<td>Eisenstein</td>
<td>“Alexander Nevsky”</td>
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<td><strong>Part II</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Ethnographic Films and Photos</strong></td>
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<td>Flaherty</td>
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<td>“Louisiana Story”</td>
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<td>“Dead Birds”</td>
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<td>“Forest of Bliss”</td>
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<td>“The Ax Fight”</td>
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<td>Ruby chpt. 4</td>
<td>“Bride Wealth”</td>
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<td>Genre Photos; advertising images; political cartoons</td>
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<td>“tv ads”</td>
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<td>Goffman</td>
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Part III
Researching with the Camera: The Positivist Agenda

9. Mead & Bateson
   Sullivan
   “Bathing Babies”
   “First Days of Life”
   “Sibling Rivalries”

10. Kinesics
    Birdwhistell
    “Nonverbal Communication”
    (1970:257-63)
    “Choreometrics”

11. Dance
12. Museum Displays

Part IV
Postmodern Issues

13. Reflexivity
    Ruby chpt. 6

14. Identity Politics

15. Ethics
    Michaels

16. Conclusion

Readings: Selections from:

Armstrong, David F.
   1999  “Where did Language Come From”, Chapter 1, in David F. Armstrong,
   Original Signs: Gesture, Sign, and the Sources of language. Washinton:
   Gallaudet University.

Bennett, Tony
   2 in Sharon Macdonald (ed.), The Politics of Display: Museums, Science,

Birdwhistell, Ray
   1988  Kinesics and Context: Essays in Body Motion Communication.

Clifford, James
   1989  “Ethnographic Surrealism” in The Predicament of Culture. Cambridge:
   Harvard.

Darwin, Charles
   1872  The Expression of Emotion in Man and Animals

Dias, Nelia
   1998  “The Visibility of Difference: Nineteenth Century French
   Anthropological Collections””, Chpt. 3 in Sharon Macdonald (ed.), The
Eibl-Eibesfeldt, Irenaus
  The Biology of Behavior (1970)
Eisenstein, Sergei
  1942 The Film Sense
Gladwell, Malcolm
Goffman, Irving
Langer, Susanne K.
Lindstrom, Lamont, and Geoffrey M. White
Lindstrom, Lamont
Michaels, Eric
Ruby, Jay
  2001 Picturing Culture: Explorations of Film and Anthropology, Chicago: University of Chicago.
Sharman, Russell Leigh
Sullivan, Gerald