Visual Anthropology
Anth 313
Spring ’10

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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 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 quizzlets 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 11). The quizzes will count for 80% of the final grade, the final essay for 20%.

**Text and Readings**

The assigned textbook for the course is Jay Ruby’s *Picturing Culture* (2000), Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Photocopied required readings will be made available in Sinclair Library’s reserve system. Videos will usually 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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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Video</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<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>2.</td>
<td>Documentary Genre</td>
<td>Sharman</td>
<td>“Cinéma Vérité”</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<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”</td>
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<td>Eibl-Eibesfeldt</td>
<td>“Camera”</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Myth, Dreams, and Movies</td>
<td>Eisenstein</td>
<td>“Alexander Nevsky”</td>
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**Part I**

**Visual Culture**

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<th>Week</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Video</th>
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<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>Flaherty</td>
<td>Ruby Chpt. 2</td>
<td>“Nanook”</td>
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<td>“Louisiana Story”</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Gardner</td>
<td>Ruby Chpt. 3</td>
<td>“Dead Birds”</td>
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<td>“Forest of Bliss”</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>Asch</td>
<td>Ruby Chpt. 4</td>
<td>“The Feast”</td>
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<td>“The Ax Fight”</td>
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<td>“Bride Wealth”</td>
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**Part II**

**Ethnographic Films and Photos**

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<th>Week</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading</th>
<th>Video</th>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>Genre Photos; advertising images; political cartoons</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>“tv ads”</td>
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<td>Linstrom</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
(1970:257-63) Communication”
“Choremetrics”

11. Dance

12. Museum Displays
Bennett
Dias

Part IV
Postmodern Issues

13. Reflexivity
Ruby chpt. 6
“Memories of
Ancestral power”

14. Identity Politics

15. Ethics
Michaels

16. Conclusion

Readings: Selections from:

Armstrong, David F.

Bennett, Tony

Birdwhistell, Ray

Clifford, James

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

Dias, Nelia
Course Paradigm:

Text

Communication

Pragmatic Meaning

Truth

Audience

Event

Eibl-Eibesfeldt, Irenaus
1970 The Biology of Behavior

Eisenstein, Sergei
1942 The Film Sense

Gladwell, Malcolm

Goffman, Irving

Goffman, Irving

Lindstrom, Lamont, and Geoffrey M. White

Lindstrom, Lamont

Michaels, Eric

Sharman, Russell Leigh

Sullivan, Gerald