

## **ANTH 380D: Ethnographic Film**

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Social Science 1, 218; Office Hours: Mondays 2:30–4:30

Mondays 4:40–7:40; Student Services Wing 211

### **Course Overview**

How do we come to know the world? And how do we convey that knowledge to others? These questions are motivations for thinking through the overlapping projects of documentary film and anthropological ethnography, both of which take as their goal the capture and curatorial framing of social worlds. These questions and efforts in turn lead to deeper questions – about objectivity, accuracy, analysis and aesthetics.

Film and ethnography developed in tandem. Both find their origins in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and, although they haven't always been in direct contact, there are many meeting points throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In this course, we follow this history of film and ethnography, media and methodology, into the birth of cinema and anthropology in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. This is succeeded by attention to a series of methodological problems and experimentations – around time, space, bodies, objects, language, non-humans – that captivate theory and practice. How experimentation with content changes expectations of form, and how experimentation with form alters content have impacts both on the production of anthropological knowledge and texts and documentary film; we consider some of these changes with attentions to particular texts and aesthetic movements in anthropology and filmmaking.

### **Outcomes**

This course is intended to train students along two lines: the first is the analysis of ethnographic film; the second is to familiarize students with theories related to film and media more generally, with an eye towards conceptualizing how ethnography and cinema might produce generative possibilities for future work in anthropology and documentary filmmaking.

### Course Texts:

Most readings are available through myCourses (listed in the Course Content section of the site, arranged by week). Books that are required are available at the university bookstore.

Stewart, Kathleen. *Ordinary Affects*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.

### Course Viewing:

Required films will be shown in whole or part in class. Very few of the films are owned by the university library; if you miss class on a given day, you will likely need to interlibrary loan the film you missed (which can take weeks), or purchase it on Vimeo, Fandor, or Amazon.

Cannibal Tours (Dennis O'Rourke, 1988) (Bartle)  
Childhood Rivalry in Bali and New Guinea (Margaret Mead & Gregory Bateson, 1952) (YouTube)  
Chronicle of a Summer (Jean Rouch, 1961) (Kanopy)  
Darwin's Nightmare (Hubert Sauper, 2004) (Bartle)  
Fake Fruit Factory (Chick Strand, 1986) (YouTube)  
Florence and New York Portrait I (Peter Hutton, 1975, 1979) (YouTube)  
Heavy Metal Parking Lot (Jeff Krulik & John Heyn, 1986) (Bartle)  
Land of Silence and Darkness (Werner Herzog, 1971) (otherwise unavailable)  
Les Maîtres Fous (Jean Rouch, 1955) (Bartle)  
Leviathan (Lucien Castaing-Taylor & Verena Paravel, 2013) (Bartle)  
Nanook of the North (Robert J. Flaherty, 1922) (Kanopy)  
Nanook Revisited (Claude Massot, 1990) – (Bartle)  
Our Daily Bread (Nikolaus Geyrhalter, 2005) (Bartle)  
The Phantom of the Operator (Caroline Martel, 2004) (Fandor)  
Portrait of Jason (Shirley Clarke, 1967) (Bartle)  
Royal, Nebraska (Toby Lee, 2007) (Vimeo)  
Seven Up (Paul Almond, 1964)  
Singapore Gaga (Tan Pinpin, 2005) (Vimeo)  
Songhua (JP Sniadecki, 2007) (Fandor)  
The Tailenders (Adele Horne, 2005) (otherwise unavailable)

### Grading & Assignments:

Reading Guides (30%) – Students are required to complete at least 2 reading guides each week during weeks 2–4, 6–9, 12–15. To receive full credit, students should plan to submit 3 reading guides each week. There are more readings [33] than points available for Reading Guides, so students have some latitude in which readings they submit Reading Guides for. Reading Guides must be turned in to the instructor at the beginning of class in which the reading is discussed. Late Reading Guides will not be accepted for credit. The Reading Guide is included as Appendix A.

Exams (2 midterms @ 20%; 1 final @ 30%; 70% total) – As indicated in the syllabus, at three points during the term, an in-class essay exam will be given. Students will watch an unannounced film and be asked to integrate their understanding of previous four weeks of course content in the analysis of the film. There are no make up opportunities for missed exams. The midterms **will not be** comprehensive (i.e. they will only cover the preceding four weeks of course content); the final exam **will be** comprehensive. All exams are open note – you may use Reading and Viewing Guides in class while taking the exams (but they must be printed out).

### Policies:

**No exceptions to policies will be made for students who add the class late.**

**There is no extra credit available.**

**A curve will be applied to the final grades in the course based upon the highest attained grade (i.e. the highest grade will be rounded up to 100 and every other student will receive the same number of points).**

**No late work will be accepted for credit.**

**Students taking the course Pass/Fail must earn a C to receive a Pass.**

Workload: This course is a 4-credit course, which means that in addition to the scheduled lectures, students are expected to do at least 9.5 hours of course-related work each week during the semester. This includes things like completing assigned readings, studying for tests, preparing written assignments, other tasks that must be completed to earn credit in

the course.<sup>1</sup> I assume that undergraduate students can read 1 page of academic writing in 3 minutes; 100 pages of reading should require about 300 minutes, or 5 hours. You may need to read some of the texts more than once to fully understand them. In most cases, you should expect to be reading about 75–125 pages per week (approximately 4–6 hours) in addition to other course requirements.

**Disability-related Equal Access Accommodations:** Students wishing to request academic accommodations to insure their equitable access and participation in this course should notify the instructor as soon as they are aware of their need for such arrangements. Authorizations from Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) are generally required. We encourage you to contact SSD at 607-777-2686 to schedule an appointment with the Director or Learning Disabilities Specialist. The SSD website ([www.binghamton.edu/ssd](http://www.binghamton.edu/ssd)) includes information regarding their Disability Documentation Guidelines. The office is located in UU-119.

**Academic Integrity – Academic misconduct of any sort will not be tolerated. Evidence of academic misconduct – which is not limited to plagiarism and cheating – will result in an immediate failing grade in the course and actions as dictated by university policy regarding academic integrity for undergraduate students.<sup>2</sup>**

**Contacting Me:** I only check my email between 9–11 AM on weekday mornings and during my office hours. I will always respond to emails within 24 hours, except for emails received on Fridays, which will be responded to on the following Monday. If you plan to stop by my office hours, please contact me ahead of time, either by email ([mwolfmey@binghamton.edu](mailto:mwolfmey@binghamton.edu)) or in person before or after class.

**Correspondence with instructors:** Only correspondence that follows professional conventions of correspondence will be replied to by me. For example, your email should begin ‘Dear Professor Wolf-Meyer,...’ and end with your signature. Beginning an email without a salutation, a ‘Hey’ or other informal forms of address will ensure your email will not be responded to. If the answer to your question is clearly stated in the syllabus or assignment guidelines, instructors may not respond to your email.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.binghamton.edu/academics/provost/documents/syllabus-credit-hours-0314.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.binghamton.edu:8080/exist9/rest/Bulletin2014-15/xq/2\\_academic\\_policies\\_and\\_procedures\\_all\\_students.xq?\\_xsl=/db/Bulletin2014-15/xq/2\\_academic\\_policies\\_and\\_procedures\\_all\\_students.xq?\\_xsl=/db/Bulletin2014-15/xsl/MasterCompose.xsl](http://www.binghamton.edu:8080/exist9/rest/Bulletin2014-15/xq/2_academic_policies_and_procedures_all_students.xq?_xsl=/db/Bulletin2014-15/xq/2_academic_policies_and_procedures_all_students.xq?_xsl=/db/Bulletin2014-15/xsl/MasterCompose.xsl)

Style Matters: All written work should be double-spaced, 12 point font, in Times New Roman, with 1 inch margins on all sides, and page numbers. Citation should look like this: (Author Year: Page), e.g. (Wolf-Meyer 2009: 408). Failure to meet these standards will result in a reduced grade.

### Week 1 (January 22): Introduction

#### Watch:

Childhood Rivalry in Bali and New Guinea (Margaret Mead & Gregory Bateson, 1952)

Les Maîtres Fous (Jean Rouch, 1955)

Seven Up (Paul Almond, 1964)

Heavy Metal Parking Lot (Jeff Krulik & John Heyn, 1986)

Cannibal Tours (Dennis O'Rourke, 1988)

### *Part 1: Film as Ethnographic Experiment*

### Week 2 (January 29): What is Ethnographic Film?

#### Read:

Crary, Jonathan. "Modernity and the Problem of the Observer." In *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the 19th Century*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992.

Haraway, Donna. "Semantics." In *Modest\_Witness@Second\_Millennium.FemaleMan@\_Meets\_OncoMooseTM*. New York: Routledge, 1997.

Rabinow, Paul, James Clifford, and George Marcus. "Representations Are Social Facts: Modernity and Post-Modernity in Anthropology." In *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, 234-61. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986.

#### Watch:

Chronicle of a Summer (Jean Rouch, 1961)

### Week 3 (February 5): Colonial Dialogues

#### Read:

Fabian, Johannes. "The Other and the Eye" IN *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes its Object*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983.

Rony, Fatimah. "Nanook of the North: The Politics of Taxidermy and Romantic Ethnography," IN *The Birth of Whiteness: Race and the Emergence of United States Film*, ed. Daniel Bernardi. Rutgers University Press, 1996.

Lutz, Catherine, and Jane Collins. "The Photograph as an Intersection of Gazes: The Example of National Geographic." *Visual Anthropology Review* 7, no. 1 (134-149): 1991.

#### Watch:

Nanook of the North (Robert J. Flaherty, 1922)

Nanook Revisited (Claude Massot, 1990)

Week 4 (February 12): Film as Capture

Read:

Kittler, Friedrich. "Film" IN Gramophone, Film, Typewriter. G. Winthrop-Young and M. Wutz, transl. Stanford: Stanford University, 1986.

Ginsburg, Faye. Indigenous Media: Faustian Contract or Global Village?. Cultural Anthropology, 6 (1991): 92-112.

Jackson, John. Ethnography Is, Ethnography Ain't. Cultural Anthropology, 27 (2012): 480-497.

Watch:

The Tailenders (Adele Clark, 2005)

Week 5 (February 19):

Midterm #1

*Part 2: Ethnography & the Everyday*

Week 6 (February 26): Ethnographic Affect

Read:

Shaviro, Steven. "Film Theory and Visual Fascination" and "Warhol's Bodies" IN The Cinematic Body. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.

Stewart, Kathleen. Ordinary Affects. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.

Watch:

Florence and New York Portrait I (Peter Hutton, 1975, 1979)

Royal, Nebraska (Toby Lee, 2007)

Week 7: Winter Break - March 3-7

Week 8 (March 12): The Everydayness of Film

Read:

de Certeau, Michel. "Part 3" In The Practice of Everyday Life. S. Rendall, transl. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1988.

Grimshaw, Anna. "The Eye in the Door: Anthropology, Film, and the Exploration of Interior Space" IN Marcus Banks and Howard Morphy eds. Rethinking Visual Anthropology, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997. Pgs. 26-52.

Watch:

Singapore Gaga (Tan Pinpin, 2005)

### Week 9 (March 19): The Logic of Life

#### Read:

Biehl, João. "Life of the Mind: The Interface of Psychopharmaceuticals, Domestic Economies, and Social Abandonment." *American Ethnologist* 31, no. 4 (2004): 475–96.

Frank, Geyla. "On embodiment: A case study of congenital limb deficiency in American culture." *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry*, 10.3 (1986), 189–219.

Linger, Daniel. What Is It Like to Be Someone Else? *Ethos*, 38 (2010): 205–229.

#### Watch:

Portrait of Jason (Shirley Clarke, 1967)

### Week 10 (March 26): The Infrastructure of Everyday Life

#### Read:

Elyachar, Julia. Phatic labor, infrastructure, and the question of empowerment in Cairo. *American Ethnologist*, 37 (2010): 452–464.

Larkin, Brian. "The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 42 (2013): 327–43.

Von Schnitzler, Andrea. Traveling Technologies: Infrastructure, Ethical Regimes, and the Materiality of Politics in South Africa. *Cultural Anthropology*, 28 (2013): 670–693.

#### Watch:

The Phantom of the Operator (Caroline Martel, 2004)

### Week 11: Spring Break – March 31–April 8

### Week 12 (April 9)

Midterm #2

### *Part 3: Frontiers of Ethnographic Film*

#### Week 13 (April 16): Artificiality and Cinema

##### Read:

- Ashley, Jennifer. Prime-time politics: News, parody, and fictional credibility in Chile. *American Ethnologist*, 41 (2014): 757-770.
- Bernstein, Anya. Freeze, die, come to life: The many paths to immortality in post-Soviet Russia. *American Ethnologist*, 42 (2015): 766-781.
- Taussig, Michael. "Spirit of the Mime, Spirit of the Gift" IN *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*. New York: Routledge, 1993. Pgs 88-99.

##### Watch:

- Fake Fruit Factory (Chick Strand, 1986)
- Land of Silence and Darkness (Werner Herzog, 1971)

#### Week 14 (April 23): Cinema as Politics

##### Read:

- Dowell, Kristin. "Indigenous Media Gone Global: Strengthening Indigenous Identity On- and Offscreen at the First Nations\First Features Film Showcase." *American Anthropologist* 108, no. 2 (2006): 376-84.
- Lempert, William. "Decolonizing Encounters of the Third Kind: Alternative Futuring in Native Science Fiction Film." *Visual Anthropology Review* 30, no. 2 (2014): 164-76.
- Ruiz, Rafico. "Media Infrastructure: The Grenfell Mission of Newfoundland and Labrador." *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies* 29, no. 3 (2015): 383-401.

##### Watch:

- Our Daily Bread (Nikolaus Geyrhalter, 2005)
- Songhua (JP Sniadecki, 2007)

Week 15 (April 30): Cinema as World-Making

Read:

Druick, Zoe. "UNESCO, Film, and Education: Mediating Postwar Paradigms of Communication." IN *Useful Cinema*, edited by Haidee Wasson and Charles Acland, 81-102. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011.

Vaughn, Megan. "Seeing is Believing" IN *Curing Their Ills: Colonial Power and African Illness*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991.

Wasson, Haidee. "Studying Movies at the Museum: The Museum of Modern Art and Cinema's Changing Object." IN *Inventing Film Studies*, edited by Lee Grieveson, 121-48. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008.

Watch:

Leviathan (Lucien Castaing-Taylor & Verena Paravel, 2013)

Week 16 (May 7): The Inhuman

Read:

Cua Lim, Bliss. "The Ghostliness of Genre" In *Translating Time: Cinema, The Fantastic, and Temporal Critique*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2009.

Gelder, Ken, and Jane M. Jacobs. "The Postcolonial Ghost Story." In *Ghosts: Deconstruction, Psychoanalysis, History*, edited by Peter Buse and Andrew Stott, 179-99. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1999.

Gordon, Avery. *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

Watch:

Darwin's Nightmare (Hubert Sauper, 2004)

Final Exam: TBA

## **Appendix A: Reading Guide**

*For each reading, you will need to fill out this form. Bring copies of each reading guide to class to receive credit and ensure that you understand each reading.*

1. Who is the author? What kind of disciplinary background are they coming from (e.g. anthropology, history, cinema studies, film)? Who is it written for? How can you infer the audience?

2. What is the main argument and goal of the writing? -- to verify something? or challenge a theoretical claim? In other words, if you had to explain it in class, how would you summarize it?

3. Identify the author's thesis. What are the key concepts used? Are concepts challenged or invented?

4. Who are the texts' friends and enemies? That is, who is the author citing and how are they citing the people they cite? Are they adding nuance to someone else's claims? Or arguing a specific point?

5. What is the article, book, or chapters about, empirically? In other words, what is being studied as the object? Where are the events and people geographically situated? What is the scale of analysis? (e.g. nation, region, city, institution, person)? When did the study take place? Is there an explicit comparison? Is there an implicit comparison? If so, of what?

6. What methods were used in collecting data (ethnography, interviews, statistics, textual analysis, archival research)? Does the data look at what people do, say, or think? How was the data analyzed? What assumptions – of the author or his or her society -- shaped the inquiry? What core values are assumed, especially values related to cinema, technology, and ethnography? What data would strengthen the text?

7. Discuss a passage (citing page number) that inspired you or frustrated you. Then type out a paragraph or two (160–300 words) discussing that passage and describing how it resonated or clashed with other course content (which might be a discussion, a film, or another text).

8. If you take one thing away from the text, what would it be? In other words, if you're telling a friend about this article, what's the one nugget you would share to start a conversation?

## Appendix B: Viewing Guide

*For each reading, you will need to fill out this form. Bring copies of each reading guide to class to receive credit and ensure that you understand each reading.*

1. Who is the filmmaker? What kind of background are they coming from (e.g. anthropology, documentary, cinema)? Who is the film for? How can you infer the audience?

2. What is the main goal of the film? -- to show something? or to make a claim? In other words, if you had to explain the film it in class, how would you summarize it?

3. Identify the filmmaker's subject. Who are the key people, places, ideas, or things focused upon? How does the filmmaker frame these objects in order to cast them as the film's subject?

4. Describe 2–3 scenes that demonstrate what the filmmaker wants you to think about the film’s subject. That is, if you had to boil the film down to 2–3 scenes, what would you say are those scenes? Use as much detail as you can muster to describe them.

5. Describe a scene that inspired you or frustrated you. Then write out a paragraph or two (160–300 words) discussing that scene and describing how it resonated or clashed with other course content (which might be a discussion, a film, or another text).

6. If you take one thing away from the film, what would it be? In other words, if you're telling a friend about this film, what's the one nugget you would share to start a conversation?