

ANTHR 424/524 — Visual Anthropology

<http://www.ualberta.ca/~cf6/VisAnth2009/>

Winter Semester 2009

Lectures: Wednesday 9:00-11:50
Classroom - Tory 14-28
Anthropology Visualization Lab – Tory 1-42

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COURSE OVERVIEW

Images are inherently social and they are a fundamental feature of culture as process. Imagery and its uses are part of the world and contribute to its shaping. It is not a mistake that in anthropology we use “world-view” to designate fundamental differences between peoples that at times seem irreducible. To see the world is to rely on and reproduce culture.

Recording and representing culture visually is as old as the discipline of anthropology. Indeed, one could argue that contemporary academic anthropology came into being *because* photography provided a kind of objective verification that transcended the fantasmic descriptions of other cultures that came before. Photographs provided a substantive proof of ethnographic description that changed what the discipline has to say, how we are read, and who we are describing. The camera is a fundamental piece of equipment used by ethnographers in the field and yet the images that are captured remain secondary to the words that are written. Likewise, while films and videos are a staple of undergraduate teaching just about everywhere today they are marginal forms of academic production in professional circles. At a large professional meeting a couple of years ago visual anthropology was reduced to a single room where films—many of them not made by anthropologists or even particularly anthropological—were shown in a pitch dark

room with almost no commentary. Despite the visually stimulating things being shown there was a very passive interaction with the ideas conveyed. Visual Anthropology is thus an awkward element of the discipline; important yet difficult to place in any definitive way. This course is an attempt to change all of this. It is an exploration of what images accomplish in cultural terms, how anthropology works with visual representation, and how all of our lives are shaped by the world we see. It is an opportunity to actively engage with the production of knowledge about culture through visual realms. Students in this course will develop an analytical, critical and creative foundation in visual anthropology.

Course objectives

Among the goals of this course is in the integration of theoretical, topical and technical processes in the creation of imagery about culture and society, as the terms are used by anthropologists. This will involve using visual media creatively in describing some aspect of contemporary and everyday culture. In general we want to achieve an understanding of how imagery has been used over time to transmit the substance of one people's cultural world to another and we want to contribute to that process. Additionally, through assignments students will gain first hand experience with basic anthropological fieldwork methods including participant-observation and informal interviewing. Culture is defined in this instance as the ways in which all people come to understand, act in, and experience the world around them.

Teaching/learning philosophy

- 1) People learn through experience and working with their peers. Consequently this course is organized around doing things collectively.
- 2) Theory and concepts remain partially digested until applied. The work in this course is designed to create opportunities for understanding disciplinary concepts through practice.
- 3) Flexibility of course direction and responsiveness to student interests fosters a collegial and productive learning environment. I fully expect the course evolve over the semester and I expect students to shape that process.
- 4) Anthropology is most challenging and successful when the subjects of research (i.e. people) are actively involved in the research process. In this course students will have the option of producing an assignment in collaboration with a community group through the Community Service Learning program at the U of Alberta. More on this below.

Course organization

This course is designed as a senior undergraduate/graduate level seminar. With any luck it will be a stimulating and spontaneous intellectual environment based in discussion. The course is double numbered (424/524) which means that it is an undergraduate and graduate seminar. This is usually a challenging environment from a teaching and learning perspective. Students should feel free to express their concerns about the course throughout and we can adapt accordingly. There are slightly different (more, in other words) expectations of graduate students than undergraduates. A word of warning: while

it is often fun, working with digital imagery is very time consuming and the time requirements for this course are higher than others at this level. Do not be surprised and, most importantly, do not leave things until the last minute.

A number of ethnographic films will be viewed and discussed in class. In some cases I will ask that the students watch the material outside of class time. We will work out viewing arrangements in those instances.

Course texts:

- 1) Pink, Sarah (2001) *Doing Visual Ethnography* Sage. (available in the bookstore)
- 2) Linked readings on course website.

ASSIGNMENTS/EVALUATION/MARKING

1) Participation (15%)

This course will be conducted as a seminar, with the emphasis on discussion and interaction between students rather than lecturing by the professor. Consequently a portion of your mark will be assigned according to class participation. Obviously attendance is a prerequisite to participation. Participation consists of thoughtful, appropriate and timely contributions to the overall class flow. Quality over quantity is appreciated. Participation will also be demonstrated in contributions to group work.

2) Found Object assignment (20%) Due January 28

This assignment involves finding and analyzing something that suggests an element of visual culture. This can be anything so long as you can approach it as something that carries meaning. Each found object will be discussed in class and a brief analysis (approximately 5-7 pages) will be submitted on your object.

3) Paper & presentation (Graduate Students Only) (25%)

Presentations March 25, paper due April 8

Each student registered in 524 will be responsible for developing a short paper (12-15 pages, double spaced typed) and presenting on a specific topic in visual anthropology to the class. Graduate students will be responsible for organizing and presenting their paper during class. All students are encouraged to put together visual materials as the subject of their presentations and to compliment them.

4) Digital storytelling (DS) episode. 30%

Showing and discussion March 4.

Research and create a digital story episode. Work through the issues identified in the readings and in DS materials.

See course website for DS Links

Each DS will be accompanied by a descriptive assessment of the DS process following the ethical, theoretical and reflective perspectives of Sarah Pink's book and additional readings.

5) Ethnographic video (EV) group assignment 35% (Rough cut viewing April 1; Final edit submitted April 15)

Small groups of 4 or 5 people will put together a short ethnographic video on a topic of their choice. We will build an awareness of ethnographic media throughout the course by concentrating on styles, history and reflexivity in the film making process. More details will be provided on this in the course.

Each video will be accompanied by a collective report on the video development process from inception to last edit. Of particular interest are the lessons learned from collaborative work and the process of trying to do visual ethnography.

Graduate student grades are calculated from 125 points, undergraduate from 100%.

COURSE RESOURCES:

Students in this course have priority access to the Macintosh computers in the AVL. The AVL lab has limited technical support available. Access to the lab is limited to times when the building is open. Keypad codes will be provided for access to this room. **DO NOT SHARE THE CODES WITH ANYONE.**

Software: We will be working with iMovie on the Macintoshes for the DS and Final Cut Pro for the EV assignments. Past experience in this course suggests that working with a PC can be very frustrating unless you really know the software and machine. I strongly encourage people to use the Macs.

I have set up a listserv for this course as a means of communicating outside of class time. This should be a forum for discussing ideas, asking questions, dealing with procedure and so on.

I will provide the video camera for the EV project.

If you don't have a digital or film camera, you should purchase a disposable from any drugstore.

You will need to purchase Mini DV video tape for use in the video camera.

A blank rewritable DVD-R is recommended to store your final EV project and to backup work in progress. **ALWAYS BACKUP YOUR WORK.**

Ethics

THE DS AND EV PORTIONS OF THIS COURSE ARE RESEARCH PROJECTS INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS. As such the research requires an ethical certification before it can begin. Students will submit an ethics statement before beginning their DS work and each group do the same before beginning to conduct research for the Video.

Approximate schedule of readings ANTHR 424/524 Winter 2007

Date	Theme	Readings	Film/Media
Jan 7	Introduction to the course Tour AVL Lab		Various
Jan 14	Anthropology and Found objects	Marks, Geertz Textbook: Intro & Ch. 1	A. Varda <i>The Gleaners and I</i>
Jan 21	Overview of history of imagery in anthropology	Course pack: Classen, Marcus & Fisher; Textbook: Ch. 3 Website: Prins	R. Flaherty <i>Nanook of the North</i> F. Boas <i>Kwakiutl of British Columbia</i>
Jan 28	Found Object discussion/ Digital Storytelling introduction	Textbook: CH. 2 Website: Digital Storytelling Cookbook, links	Various Digital Stories
Feb 4	Techniques: Editing skills/ Camera skills	Textbook CH. 4 & 5	
Feb 11	Key figures in ethnographic film	Course Pack: Rouch, Grimshaw, Taussig	J. Rouch <i>Les Maitres Fous</i>
Feb 25	Issues in Ethnographic Filmmaking – Reflexivity, Ethics, “Comfort”	Textbook Ch. 7 MacDougal Ch 6 (Who's Story is it?) □	
Mar 4	Presentation and discussion of DS	Textbook Ch. 6	
Mar 11	The family and animal in photography / Introduction to Final Cut	Course pack: Ruby, Berger	
Mar 18	Indigenous Media and Counter Representation	Textbook CH. 8 Course pack: Balikci, Turner	T. Turner <i>The Kayapo</i>
Mar 25	Graduate student presentations Remainder of class available for working/discussing ethnographic video process.	Readings to be determined by students	
April 1	Presentation and discussion of ethnographic videos (as close to final version as possible)		
April 8	Wrap up and future directions in visual ethnography/anthropology	Course Pack: Ginsburg, Ruby, MacDougall (CH13 Transcultural Cinema)	

Communication

Please provide me with your email address. My strong preference is for ualberta accounts. Hotmail regularly rejects any message with an attachment.

A course List Serve has been set-up and should be used for communicating to the group. It is each student's responsibility to stay informed and keep in touch with their group members.

Community Service Learning component

This course includes a CSL component that is optional but likely to be highly interesting. CSL is a university supported program that links course work with volunteer opportunities in Edmonton organizations. In this course I have worked closely with the CSL organizers to find a number of organizations that are interested in having VisAnth students create a Digital Story with and for the organization. This is a unique opportunity to examine the possibilities of collaboration in digital visual culture.

Objective of CSL participation:

As this course is concerned with culture as a living entity, and students will be required to produce a DS of something real, there is an opportunity here to bring the services of students to organizations associated with CSL in a mutually beneficial way. Many not-for-profit and community groups have in some way culture explicitly within their mandate, or deal with the many facets of it on a daily basis in their work. Students will benefit from the challenge of moving beyond the classroom and library to work on visual culture project in a real world setting. CSL associated organizations may find it advantageous to have the opportunity to voice some aspect of their mandate/operations in a novel way in collaboration with the student. Students will clearly benefit from exposure to settings that bring together their training with an applied project.

For More information see the U of Alberta CSL website:

<http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/arts/CSLhome.cfm>

Important notes:

1. I accept all written material in either of Canada's official languages.
2. Assignments must be typed, double spaced, page numbered, and include the name(s) of the people submitting. For citation styles please use MLA or the Chicago Manual of Style (CMS). The Library has a good CMS reference page: <http://www.library.ualberta.ca/guides/chicagostyle/index.cfm>
3. Late assignments are not accepted, missed exams will not be made up, and extensions are not given except in exceptional circumstances and when accompanied by written documentation.

“The University of Alberta is committed to the highest standards of academic integrity and honesty. Students are expected to be familiar with these standards regarding academic honesty and to uphold the policies of the University in this respect. Students are particularly urged to familiarize themselves with the provisions of the Code of Student Behaviour available on the University website and avoid any behaviour which could potentially result in suspicions of cheating, plagiarism, misrepresentation of facts and/or participation in an offence. Academic dishonesty is a serious offence and can result in suspension or expulsion from the University.” Please see the university policy at <http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/secretariat/pdfs/chtsheet.pdf>

Students who require accommodations due to a disability affecting mobility, vision, hearing, learning, or mental or physical health are advised to discuss their needs with Specialized Support and Disability Services, 2-800 SUB, 492-3381 (phone) or 492-7269 (TTY).