Visual anthropology is a sub-field of anthropology that is committed to the analysis and production of visual culture. Such commitments call attention to the politics and poetics of representation, and to the inadequacy of words for representing and interpreting cultural practices. Yet visual anthropology’s traffic with “the real” is far from straightforward; its histories and practices weave between documentary genres of cinema, experimental media worlds, and broader disciplinary debates around ethics and social action. In this course, we will interrogate visual anthropology as a practice, exploring a range of visual ethnographic approaches to documenting culture in order to arrive at an understanding of the sub-field’s formation and the kinds of anthropological questions it can ask. We will start with a history of ethnographic film and video in relation to contemporary questions around representation, asking how different means of showing—visual styles, technologies, and social relations of production—work together to generate meaning for various publics. In the later part of the course, we will analyze a range of visual ethnographic materials beyond film toward a consideration of the potential of multi-media methods for innovative and socially engaged ethnographic research.

Assignments

All films will be screened in class, and will also be on reserve at Media Commons. You will be expected to refer to visual materials as well as readings in your assignments; we will go over good “active viewing” practices in the first class, and work out some strategies for effective note taking during screenings. Hard copies of all written assignments are due at the beginning of class. Late work will not be accepted.

Ethnographic film response – 20%, due February 10th
Write a short (500 word) response one of the films we have watched in class so far. Be sure to cite specific scenes, and also refer to class lectures and readings.

Media curation project – 20%, due March 9th
Using the format on In Media Res (http://mediacommons.futureofthebook.org/imr/) as a guide, pair an audio-visual clip with a 500-word “Curator’s Note” and post it to Tumblr (specific instructions will follow).

“Showing seeing” group presentation – 20%, March 23rd
In small groups, you will do a 15-minute presentation that responds to a very open prompt: “show seeing.” You may choose to bring in objects for a show-and-tell format, screen audio-visual media, create a performance, or do/make/show in any other format.
Final project – 35%, due April 6th and Proposal – 5%, due February 24th

For your final project, you may either a) write a 3000-word research paper on a topic related to visual anthropology, or b) make an audio-visual document accompanied by both a shorter piece of writing (max. 1000 words) summarizing your intentions and some reflections on the process of making your visual anthropological product. More details will follow.

You must let me know in your proposal which option you are choosing (i.e. no deciding to make a video on Vine at ten p.m. the night before your project is due). Please list a minimum of four scholarly sources that you plan to consult; these should connect obviously to your project. If you choose the audio-visual option, please give me some information about intended format and how you will get it to me (e.g. on DVD, providing a Vimeo link in an email, etc).

Policies

I expect that you are familiar with how to properly paraphrase and summarize from sources, and how to correctly acknowledge material using footnotes, quotation marks, and bibliographic entries. It is also expected that you are familiar with what constitutes an academic offence under the University’s Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters, which includes plagiarism, submitting purchased material, providing unauthorized assistance to friends, and use of unauthorized aids during tests. If you are not familiar with these rules, or need a reminder, check these resources. I am available to you at any time during office hours for help with assignments. You can also get help through your college Writing Centre and the Academic Success Centre.

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. In particular, if you have a disability/health consideration that may require accommodations, please feel free to approach me and/or Accessibility Services at (416) 978 8060; accessibility.utoronto.ca

Schedule

January 13: Introduction

January 20: Ethnographic romanticism
Screening:
Nanook of the North (1922), 79 min. Robert J. Flaherty

Reading:


January 27: Science and art

Screening:
_Bathing Babies in Three Cultures_ (1951), 9 min. and _Trance and Dance in Bali_ (1951), 22 min. Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson.

Reading:
“For God’s sake, Margaret” Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson in conversation.


Faye Ginsburg, “‘Now Watch this Very Carefully…’ The Ironies and Afterlife of Margaret Mead’s Visual Anthropology” (2003), _The Scholar and Feminist Online_ 1(2), electronic resource.


February 3: Histories of violence

Screening:
_The Ax Fight_ (1975), 30 min. Timothy Asch and Napoleon Chagnon.

Reading:
Documentary Educational Resources _Ax Fight_ Study Guide.


February 10: Ciné-ethnography

**FILM RESPONSE DUE**

Screening:

Reading:


February 17: Class cancelled for reading week.
February 24: Ecstatic ethnography
FINAL PROJECT PROPOSAL DUE

Screening:
Meshes of the Afternoon (1943), 16 min. Maya Deren and Alexander Hamid.

Reading:

March 2: Sensory ethnography
Screening:
Leviathan (2013), 87 min. Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Véréna Paravel


March 9: Shooting back
MEDIA CURATION PROJECTS DUE
Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy (1990), 19 min. Tracey Moffatt.
Savage (2009), 7 min. Lisa Jackson.


** March 13 is the last day to drop this course from your academic record**

March 16: Activist documentary
Screening:
The Children of Fogo Island (1967), 17 min. Colin Low
Encounter at Kwache House (1967), 17 min. Rex Tasker

Reading:


March 23: “SHOWING SEEING” PRESENTATIONS

March 30: Multi-media ethnography
Screening: TBA according to student interests


April 6: Autoethnography
FINAL PROJECTS DUE
Sweet Clover, a Homecoming (2010), 17 min. Jen Heuson.
