ANTH 3521: Visual Anthropology
Fall 2011
O M 210
Wednesdays: 12:45-3:15
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This course explores the role of visual media in the ethnographic representation of socio-cultural systems and sub-systems. It also examines the relationship between visual and verbal representation in ethnography. The first part of the course traces the history of ethnographic film through viewing and analyzing key examples of different stages of the genre's development and examines issues having to do with the ethics and authority of both visual and verbal media, and the role these media play in culturally defined situations. Issues investigated include the nature of visual evidence, objectivity/subjectivity, reflexivity, multimodality, reception, and professional autonomy. The second part of the course concentrates on media productions created wholly or in part by indigenous peoples themselves.

It is hoped that the course will help you to become more knowledgeable and discerning viewers of ethnographic film and perhaps even provide you with a practical and theoretical framework to make ethnographic films yourselves.

**EXPECTATIONS:** Because there will be extensive viewing of films and film excerpts in class with accompanying discussion, attendance at all class sessions is an absolute requirement. If you must be absent for a medical reason or a family emergency, you must present written documentation. Rules of academic integrity must be adhered to.

**TEXTS:** There are two required texts:

The first of these texts (*Picturing Culture*) is available through the GW Bookstore. A copy will also be placed on reserve in Gelman Library.
The other text (*Through Navajo Eyes*), which will be used in the second part of the course, is currently out of print. It will be made available to you on Blackboard and a copy will be put on reserve in Gelman. Should you want your own copy, the book is also available second-hand on Ebay or other on-line merchants. (Try using [www.dealoz.com](http://www.dealoz.com) which searches nearly all book sellers, new and second hand.) If you decide you wish to obtain a second-hand copy, be sure that you look for the revised (1997) edition, which differs in a number of important ways from the first (1972) edition.

**PAPERS AND PRESENTATIONS:** There will be two papers. The first of these will deal with a single ethnographic concept for a film and will be written in installments as the course progresses. The culmination of this assignment will be a class presentation using visual media to be given during one of the last two class sessions. (Guidelines will be handed out as the course progresses.) The second paper will deal with an issue (question, problem, hypothesis, argument, evaluation, perspective) and will be due Wednesday, November 16. (Again, guidelines will be distributed as the course progresses.)

**PROCEDURES:** The procedures that will be followed in this course may be a little different from the usual ones, and therefore stand in need of some explaining. The majority of the
films will be shown—at least partially—in class, allowing for comments, questions, and analysis immediately after (and sometimes even during) the running of the film. In the first part of the course, collateral reading is assigned to be done as homework AFTER the session in which individual films have been viewed, rather than before. (The films will be available on reserve in Gelman Library if you wish to review them after the particular class in which they have been discussed.) I very much want you to develop your own considered reactions to and analysis of the films. I do not want you to be swayed by what the critics and theorists have said. After you have formed your own ideas about each film, taking into consideration the reactions of your classmates, as well as my remarks, then I want you to reconsider your viewpoint in the light of critical opinion as presented in the textbook. This may lead you to want to alter your views or at least broaden them. But if you start with "the authorities" first you may be predisposed to see things in a certain way and therefore miss other possible insights. You'll never know the answer to the question "Could I have thought of that myself?" One of the objectives of this course is to help you develop your own critical skills vis-a-vis ethnographic films. If you have questions about the readings, those can be dealt with at the beginning of the next class. In the second part of the course, we will revert to a more traditional approach and have you do most of the readings before the presentation of the corresponding films, so as to prepare you for knowledgeable viewing of films made BY as well as ABOUT various indigenous groups.

**EVALUATION:** Participants in the course will have their grades calculated according to the following weighting:

- Issue Paper ........................................ 35%
- Ethnographic Film Proposal Papers and Presentation ... 45%
- Class Participation .................................. 20%

Any graduate students enrolled in the course should consult with me at or near the beginning of the semester about extra work needed to qualify for graduate credit.

**SCHEDULE:**

**Part I--Issues Arising in the Development of the Ethnographic Film**

Aug. 31  Introduction to the course

            Class: Viewing and discussion of Edward Curtis's *In the Land of the War Canoes.*
            Follow-up: Ruby, chapter 1, "Researching with a Camera: The Anthropologist as Picture Taker"

            Class: Viewing and discussion of an unnamed ethnographic film.
            Discussion of ethnographies selected by students for their ethnographic film concept paper.

Sep. 21  Topic: First Approaches, Emerging Principles and Issues
            Class: Viewing and discussion of Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North.*
            Follow-up: Ruby, chapter 2, "The Aggie Must Come First"

Sep. 28  Topic: Tensions between Science and Art
            Class: Viewing of Robert Gardner's *Dead Birds.*
            Submission of 2nd installment of your film proposal
            Follow-up: Ruby, chapter 3, "Robert Gardner and Anthropological Cinema"

Oct. 5   Topic: Filming a Concept
            Class: Viewing of Tim Asch's *The Feast*
            Submission of 3rd installment of your film proposal
Follow-up: Ruby, chapter 4, "Out of Synch: The Cinema of Tim Asch"

Oct. 12  Topic: Reflexivity
Class: Viewing of Tim Asch's The Ax Fight
Submission of the 4th installment of your film proposal
Follow-up: Rub, chapter 6, "Exposing Yourself: Reflexivity, Anthropology, and Film"

Oct. 19  Preparation: Chapters 7, 8, and 9 of Ruby.
Class: Submission of the 5th installment of your film proposal

Part 11--Media Productions by and for Indigenous Peoples

The exact assignments for the second half of the course will be posted after the second text has been linked to Blackboard (which will be within the next week or two.)