

ANTH 5650
Visual Anthropology and Ethnographic Film
2026

Lecture: 6:30 PM – 8:15 PM, Room 306, WMY Building

Tutorial: 8:30 - 9:15pm

Teacher: Alberto Gerosa

Office Hours: by appointment

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Course Description:

This course offers a chance for the application of audiovisual research practices in anthropological inquiry. Through practical exercises, students' projects and lectures, participants will learn about the craft and academic requirements of ethnographic film and performance, with a primary focus on video production skills. We will experiment filmic ways in which students can enlarge ethnographic methods and anthropological scholarship beyond the written word. To explore and represent the human experience, how could we use film and performance to collect evidence, and how as filmmakers can we experiment with voice, style, form, genre, process, etcetera in response to debates over issues of representation? The study of visual anthropology is essentially an exploration into the nature of reality and the problem of perspective. Students' fieldwork project will be the starting point to choose the most appropriate method of ethnographic research. The power of our academic poetics and politics is considerable: on behalf of whom are we speaking? What kind of story does a particular film or performance tell? Can the means of representation really be shared with informants, as co-authors? Can multimodal anthropological investigation render seemingly unintelligible worlds intelligible?

Learning Outcomes:

Describe and explain in an informed and broad-based manner the visual anthropological theory, history, and practice relevant to art and anthropology

Develop and conduct an ethnographic research using film

Utilise a range of academic methods and collaborative practices to render the ethnographic fieldwork data creatively.

Analyse the concept of a film and its cultural responsibility, through ethnographic research terms. Render it in both video, performance and photography.

Show an ability to think critically, independently, and creatively in order to solve problems and communicate clearly and coherently.

Language Of Instruction:

English

Required Texts:

All readings will be posted on Blackboard.

Assessment:

Guidelines for how to write response papers and for the independent project will be provided in class. All assignments (response papers and independent project) must be submitted to VeriGuide. Assignments without a signed declaration from VeriGuide will not be graded.

Please visit:

https://academic.veriguide.org/academic/login_CUHK.jspx

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<i>Grade Item</i>	<i>Percentage</i>	<i>Due Date</i>
Independent Project, Pre-Production Stage	15%	February 15
Written Reflection, Visual and Performance Ethnography	15%	March 20th
Independent Project, Production Stage	20%	March 29 th
Independent Project, Final Result	30%	April 22 nd
Participation	20%	--

Course Schedule:

Week 1 (5th January): Introduction

Introduction to Course Content and the Visual and performative Ethnographic Method. Starting from the documentary dilemma of the “fly on the wall” debate, students will be familiarised with the discipline of visual anthropology and the benefit it brings to social research and cinema.

Jean Rouch, "The Camera and Man," (1973), available online at <http://www.der.org/jean-rouch/pdf/CameraandMan-JRouch.pdf>.

Suggested Films:

Leviathan (Barbash and Taylor, 2013, 90 mins) – clips

PRACTICE: Practical Exercise: Shoot 10 images to describe a given feeling

Week 2: 12.01 Science and Art

Science and Art In this topic, the double-nature of ethnographic film as both a science and an art will be deepened, inspiring students on how to bring its formal discourse forward.

PRACTICE: Shoot a short film, without ever moving the camera, describing your daily life

Week 3: 19.01 Cine Ethnography

In this topic, students will be acquainted with the milestones of the history of ethnographic film, with a special attention towards the cinematic masterpieces it produced

PRACTICE:

Camerawork II record a sound short interview on a given topic, max 2 minutes

Week 4: 26.01 Sensory Ethnography In this topic, students will learn how to focus on the sensorial side of human experience through the use of cameras.

PRACTICE:

Editingwork I: Edit the 'day in the life' videos of your classmates into one collage of 1-3 minutes maximum

Editingwork II: Edit the images shot so far with the sound recorded interview from week 3. Max 3 minutes

Week 5: 02.02 Writing the First Film Treatment Draft

In this topic, students will be required to think of a film treatment draft and research question, based on their interest and the choice of the Professor. They will learn how to write a proposal for an audiovisual ethnography, structured around research focus, and both academic and aesthetic priorities.

PRACTICE:

Camerawork: Framing, Lightning Photography (natural light, artificial light, soft-hard

light, mood)

Week 6: 9.02 Revisions; Start of Ethnographic Film Fieldwork

Students will learn about each other's research choices, and start transforming their film treatments into a film ethnographic project.

PRACTICE: Performative Turns: What happens when reality confronts your initial ideas?

Week 7 16.02 – In-class Analysis of Ethnographic Film Fieldwork

In this topic, students will discuss their experience of film fieldwork so far, and decide how to proceed towards its development.

PRACTICE: The Dramaturgy triangle: “You, Audience, Subject of Research” (How to keep your direction within a long-term ethnographic fieldwork forest)

Week 8 (23.02): Second analysis of Ethnographic Film Fieldwork and first editing In this topic students will be shown each other's material and continue refining their research focus.

PRACTICE: Film Editing (Montage Theory, Cinema Theory)

Week 9 9.03 Developing the rough-cut In this topic, students will start editing their rushes towards the creation of a first roughcut: Their final Ethnographic films will start to take shape.

Week 10 16.03: Shooting the last materials and finalising the rough-cut Students have a final chance to improve the shooting and editing of their final films, according to their own interpretations of their initial research focus.

Week 11 23.03: In-class Final Cut Editing

Students are invited to work on their own editing to finalise the last touches of the final cuts.

Required Readings:

Deren, “Author’s Preface” and “Introductory Note” to *Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti*

Suggested Films:

Divine Horsemen: The Living Gods of Haiti (Maya Deren, 1985, 52 mins.)

Les Maîtres fous (Jean Rouch, 1954, 35 mins.)

PRACTICE: Distribution: How do we promote our work (being pro-active, leverage on a community of interest, the impact VS academic rigour dilemma)

Week 12 30.03: The Anthropological Cinema of Jean Rouch

Required Readings:

Grimshaw, “The anthropological cinema of Jean Rouch”

Suggested Films:

Chronique d’un été (Jean Rouch, 1961, 85 mins) – clips *Jaguar* (Jean Rouch, 1967, 93 mins.)

Week 13.04 In/class presentations

Students present to the class their final films, explaining how their project has evolved throughout the semester.

Class presentations of independent projects Final Deadline to hand in final project: **April 22nd**

Week 14 20.04 Public Screenings

Students present their films to the larger audience (not mandatory)

POLICIES

Participation

Student participation is critical to the success of each class. Please come to class prepared to discuss and listen to your classmates thoughtfully, and ask questions. You certainly don't have to speak up during every class period, but you will be evaluated on the general pattern of your class involvement over the course of the semester. Keep in mind that there is no such thing as a stupid question or comment. As long as it is respectful to others, your question or comment will likely help to stimulate conversation.

Late Submissions Late response papers will suffer a full grade deduction – e.g. an A- will become a B-. Late

submissions will not be accepted past Monday 5:00 p.m.

Late take-home exams will not be accepted more than 48 hours past the original due date, and will suffer a full grade deduction for every day late.

Academic Honesty

The Chinese University of Hong Kong places very high importance on academic honesty, and adopts a policy of *zero tolerance* on cheating in examinations and plagiarism. Any such offence will lead to disciplinary action including possibly termination of studies at the University. Students should know how to properly use source material and how to avoid plagiarism. Students should read the detailed guidelines and examples for the acknowledgement of sources in the University's website at <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/policy/academichonesty>. Students are required to submit all papers through VeriGuide, which is also explained at the above website.