

San José State University
Department of Anthropology
Anthropology 173, Section 1, Spring 2014

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Office Hours:	Monday 10:30-11:30 am or by appointment
Class Days/Time:	M/W 12:00-1:15
Classroom:	WSQ 004

Course Description, Philosophy, and Practice

We live in an environment increasingly saturated by visual culture, forms of information and spectacle that operate in parallel with print culture and spoken communication, but that cannot be reduced to either, and must be understood on their own terms. This course is an introduction into how to understand visual culture and how to think about producing one's own visual documentation.

In the same sense that critical reading and thinking skills have been developed in order to help students attend to the circulation of written materials and argumentation at work in the public sphere, this class intends to help students begin to develop an understanding of the anatomy of visual culture, and the forms of rhetoric, persuasion, and genre that our visual culture deploys. The course, in other words, will help students acquire a kind of visual literacy. It will help students begin to inquire into how visual culture is organized, how it persuades, how it achieves its reality-effect or spectacular pleasures, and how to use its forms to engage in social or ethnographic documentation. We will begin from the premise that anthropology can (and should... and *maybe*... someday... will?) develop films that are not merely supplementary or secondary to ethnographic writing. Thus, we will address film – in photo, fiction, documentary, and experimental film – in order to cull lessons about how to develop visual documents that address contemporary social, cultural, and political life with an anthropological spirit. And we will think about how to become *producers* of visual culture rather than *passive* consumers.

To work towards our goals, the course will introduce students to basic analytic and critical tools for conceptualizing film, photo, and digital visual materials. *First*, we will learn to look and analyze what it is we see when we look: for instance, that cultures develop “ways of seeing” or habits of looking; as well as how film and photo contains an implicit rhetoric that often appears natural, or remains below the level of conscious thoughts – but not without registering on our perception. *Second*, the course will introduce students to formal analysis, a way of breaking down the grammar of a film and how it achieves its representational and narrative effects – that

is, we'll examine *how* films *make sense* in the same way that sentences, paragraphs, or novels *make sense*. Formal analysis is a way of sensitizing us to a variety of components – such as editing, cinematography, mise-en-scene, and sound – that interact with and shape the way that stories are told and understood. And it will provide us with a grasp of the basic building blocks of filmmaking. *Third*, the course will provide examples of critical analysis: work that seeks to engage, describe, and often criticize film in terms of the way they represent cultural and political life. Critical analysis is essential to engaging film as something more than as a mere passive viewer. It's a form of literacy increasingly essential in today's world. However, we will not use critical analysis to simply deconstruct or criticize, but instead to elaborate, broaden, fill out, and draw connections between film style and broader social worlds. In other words, the course will assess a variety of films in order to examine their possibilities and limitations – and how they might teach us to tell our own stories and represent culture through film. *Finally*, students will develop documentary projects of their own, thereby applying anthropological concepts to the development of visual media.

A warning: this course is not an experience in passive spectatorship. Even less so is it a matter of simply watching movies. Students will encounter a range of genres and styles of filmic representation – some of them challenging and purposely bent on upsetting the economy of pleasure, spectatorship, and sense that we have all learned from Hollywood editing conventions. While the course will still be fun, it will be an experience in learning to think about film through *practicing different viewing habits and by attempting to develop documentary projects*. Learning to understand culture through film requires this kind of defamiliarization and an ability to reflect on the way that filmic conventions cultivate our expectations about the relationship between seeing, information, and reality.

Course Goals and Learning Objectives

Students who satisfactorily complete this course will be able to

1. Identify and analyze the formal elements of film, including sound, mise-en-scene, editing, cinematography, and narrative
2. Develop literacy in the grammar of the visual environment
3. understand the rhetorical construction of narrative point of view
4. analyze the ideological and persuasive contents of both film form and narrative
5. understand different filmic strategies for composing visual texts
6. analyze the relationship of filmic representation and anthropological knowledge-making
7. develop skills in composing visual media
8. translate ethnographic research into film-based exploratory practices
9. develop skills in ethnographic research

Departmental Learning Objectives and Skills:

The department of anthropology also has key learning objectives and skills that we wish students to obtain. By the completion of this course, students should have an increased:

1. Understanding culture as the distinguishing phenomenon of human life, and the relationship of human biology and evolution.

2. Awareness of human diversity and the ways humans have categorized diversity.
3. Knowledge of the significant findings of archaeology, cultural anthropology, and physical anthropology, and familiarity of the important issues in each sub-discipline.
4. Knowledge of the history of anthropological thought and its place in modern intellectual history
5. Comprehension of migration, colonialism, and economic integration as significant phenomenon shaping global society.
6. Ability to access various forms of anthropological data and literature.
7. Awareness of importance and value of anthropological knowledge in contemporary society, and the ability to apply it to social issues.
8. Knowledge of the research methods of the sub-disciplines of anthropology, and the ability to apply appropriate research methods in at least one sub-discipline.
9. Ability to present and communicate anthropological knowledge and the results of anthropological research to different audiences.
10. Knowledge of political and ethical implications of social research

Required Course Texts

Timothy Corrigan and Patricia White, *The Film Experience*, 3rd Edition
Patricia Aufderheide, *Documentary Film: A Very Short Introduction*

Optional text:

Keri Smith, *How to be an Explorer of the World: Portable Art/Life Museum*

Additional readings will be added to my faculty page in electronic form.

Classroom Protocol/Student Responsibilities

Please do not use your cell phones or MP3 players for any purpose during class. However, if you are expecting an important call you should notify me so we can make arrangements. Please do not use your computers to take notes during in-class films.

There will be various in-class assignments intended to help students grasp and apply concepts that are discussed in class. I highly recommend students attend class as often as possible. Some in-class assignments will be given at the beginning of class and others at the end of the class; thus, it is important to arrive on time and attend the entire class period. Students will not be able to make-up the in-class assignments. If you know in advance that you should be unable to attend an exam, it is your responsibility to contact me immediately by either e-mailing me, leaving a message for me at the main department office, or coming by during my office hours. Only students with a valid documented excuse will be able to take a make-up exam or hand in a late assignment. Late assignments will not be accepted otherwise. Students will not be able to make-up the in-class assignments.

I have a zero-tolerance on cheating and plagiarism; if you cheat or plagiarize you will fail the course! Incidences of cheating and plagiarism will be turned into the academic integrity office. Students are responsible for understanding and adhering to the academic integrity policy.

I will not answer questions about what occurred in class due to an absence. Please ask your fellow students for copies of their notes.

Students are responsible for understanding policies about adding, dropping, and incompletes.

Students are responsible for being aware of assignment due dates, midterm date, and the final exam schedule.

If you have any concerns about your class performance or comprehension, come by my office during office hours or schedule an appointment. I am always willing to help students and I care about whether students are grasping the material and enjoying the class.

Course Requirements and Assignments

SJSU classes are designed such that in order to be successful, it is expected that students will spend a minimum of forty-five hours for each unit of credit (normally three hours per unit per week), including preparing for class, participating in course activities, completing assignments, and so on. More details about student workload can be found in [University Policy S12-3](http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S12-3.pdf) at <http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S12-3.pdf>.

Course Assignments

1. Deconstruction of Facebook/Advertising Image:

Students will be required to perform a semiotic analysis of something in their image environment – for instance, Facebook or Instagram photos, or advertising – by drawing on and refashioning ideas proposed in course materials by Susan Sontag, John Berger, Roland Barthes, Michael Taussig, and/or Laura Kipnis. Students must perform close-readings of the image in order to support their argument. This requires taking note of the graphic and empirical matter of an image, and linking that matter to social, symbolic, and semiotic properties conveyed in implicit, often unconscious, messages, ideologies, histories, social, and technological relations built into the image and its medium. 2-3 pages. 10% of grade.

2. Documentary Research Proposal:

Students will complete a film, photo, or mixed-media documentary project over the course of the semester. The documentary proposal will 1) present each student's idea for their project; 2) who, what, when, where, and how fieldwork will be completed; 3) the social, political, and historical relevance – and rationale for – their project; 4) proposed background research (library, documentary history, and interviews) that they plan to begin. 1 page. 10% of grade.

3. Field Notebook(s), Film Journal, and Visual Archive:

Students are required to maintain a written field notebook of ethnographic research that they do in the service of their documentary project; it may also include a film journal in which students record notes and responses to films they watch, or collect lists of films that they should watch; finally, students must develop some kind of archive of their filmic and photographic sketches – an online source, like a blog, is acceptable.

Field notebooks are notoriously personal and fieldnotes qualify as a strange and hidden – and downright fetishistic – ritual among anthropologists. A field notebook is not meant to be coherent. This incoherence, along with the meticulousness and self-discipline of keeping a notebook, is arguably central to the real work of ethnographic inquiry – and some would add, ethnographic creativity. The discipline of taking fieldnotes is an underestimated aspect of the empirical and, dare I say (somewhat ambivalently), scientific element of conducting ethnographic field research.

Notebooks should be helpful to students on a number of fronts: 1) to remind you that ethnographic work is a *process*, not something that springs fully-formed from your head; 2) that the relationship between the diary form – or the montage-like and incoherent notes you jot down – and the completed and polished essay is its own kind of dialectical washing-machine; 3) that taking fieldnotes, much like drawing, is as much an act of creating knowledge and seeing the world anew as it is a matter of training oneself in empirical observation, to attend to what's out there rather than your own preconceived notions; 4) learning to understand the interplay of observation and fieldnote-taking will help students conceptualize – via a detour through writing – how image culture *performs* rather than *tells* us what's in the world; 5) a field notebook will – again via a detour through writing – help students grasp the basis of different (some might say warring) aesthetic styles in documentary film: from the naïve claims of Griersonian “realism” to the avant-garde truth-claims of Vertovian montage. How you manage your notebook is not my concern. There are no rules. Students must, however, demonstrate an ongoing engagement with their research project through their notebook and a visual archive (perhaps a tumblr page or some other web platform – your choice). 10% of grade.

4. Shot Breakdown and Formal Analysis Paper:

Students are required to perform a shot-by-shot breakdown of a scene of their choice from one of the films we watch in class. After their shot breakdown, students will be asked to develop a conceptual essay that demonstrates how the form or rhetoric of the chosen clip works – a “formal analysis.”

That is, the shot breakdown will sensitize students to the way that editing, mise-en-scene, and cinematography unconsciously shape our experience and understanding of a film. A shot breakdown forces you to become conscious of *what you see*. And it will force you to explain how *your experience and ideas result from what you see*. It will demonstrate to students the unconscious mechanisms by which films persuade, appear “real,” shock us, make us feel, or confuse us. The cardinal sin of a shot breakdown is a “plot summary” that skips over details. In this sense, a shot breakdown is a filmic counterpart to ethnographic fieldnotes: a very close, empirical immersion in what you see (in the case of film) or what's really going on in your fieldsite (in the case of field research).

A shot breakdown is essentially a list of shots: close-up, medium close-up, establishing shot, shot-reverse-shot, etc., as well as other relevant “formal” qualities in the mise-en-scene or cinematography. It will list, step-by-step, how a film sequence is stitched together. Students will thus learn something about the mechanics of film editing – the “grammar” of film.

The succeeding formal analysis is, then, an argument about the way that formal elements of your chosen sequence tell a story. By doing so, students will come to understand very clearly why we can be quite assured that, while film may capture some thing or person that existed at some point in time, film is *not* reality. Students will come to see, in other words, how film, like rhetorics of other kinds, are persuasions that depend on choices and strategic omissions, that conceal as much as they reveal, or that constitute what historian of anthropology James Clifford has called “partial truths.”

Shot breakdown: 1 page
Formal Analysis: 3 pages.
15% of grade

5. Historical Contextualization and Critical Analysis Paper:

The historical contextualization paper calls for students to conduct background research that helps them contextualize the socio-historical background of their research project. This context will help students understand why their chosen project matters – that is, its significance. In many cases, this paper can be developed in consultation with the instructor, and may require students to develop a short, yet pinpointed, bibliography and bibliographical essay. To some extent, models for this task – albeit in considerably advanced form – will be drawn from Kristin Ross’ discussion of the films of Jean-Luc Godard and Jacques Tati in their relationship to the social conflicts and transformations during the era of French Decolonization and the Marshall Plan (“La Belle Americaine”). 7 pages. 20% of grade.

6. Workshops and Critiques

Class time will be punctuated regularly with the presentation of ideas, difficulties, photos, and film clips that arise from student work. Students will learn early in the course how to critically assess images and narratives. As a class we will, therefore, engage in what are called “critiques” in art and architecture schools. Criticism is essential to these spaces – in order to propel ongoing work forward. However, students should not mistake critique as a space of antagonism. Rather, it will provide a collective, collaborative, and affirmative space for all of us to work and learn together. Students will come to learn how collaboration and dialogue are essential to the construction and completion of any artistic or scientific work – not to mention success in many endeavors they may face in their future work-life. And criticism is essential to coming to understand – and produce – visual culture that has learned from ethnographic research and knowledge.

Students will be required to present ongoing work for class critiques. And students will also be required to be primary respondents at a critique. The schedule for critiques will be developed as class begins and student projects congeal into working groups. 10% of grade

Finally, I would like students to bring printed photos to class regularly in order to collectively curate a montage of vernacular experience at SJSU. Extra credit.

7. A film, photo, or mixed-media documentary project:

Over the course of the semester students will be required to develop a documentary piece of some kind that draws on the ideas and skills developed throughout the class.

Students should not panic about this assignment. No one will be expected to produce a classic – process will be emphasized, and students' work will be judged largely on the basis of process, imagination, creativity, how well students learn from their own mistakes, and fieldwork. Student films should reflect a hands-on attempt to integrate theory and practice, criticism and making, fieldwork and storytelling, raw material and narrative. To the question “critical theory or storytelling?” Students should respond, following Charlie Chaplin: “Yes, please!” 25% of grade

Grading

Late papers will be docked one letter grade for each day they are late. Grades will be determined on the basis of the following assignment weighting.

Facebook paper = 10%

Research Proposal = 10%

Field Notebooks = 10%

Shot breakdown = 15%

Historical contextualization = 20%

Workshop/Critiques = 10%

Documentary project = 25%

Grades will be based on percentages: 90-100% = A, 80-89% = B, 70-79% = C, 60-69% = D, below 60 = F

Departmental Goals

Learn about the goals of the anthropology department and how it can benefit your education.

Goals <http://www.sjsu.edu/anthropology/departmentinfo/goals/index.html>

Credit Hours

Success in this course is based on the expectation that students will spend, for each unit of credit, a minimum of forty-five hours over the length of the course (normally 3 hours per unit per week with 1 of the hours used for lecture) for instruction or preparation/studying or course related activities including but not limited to internships, labs, clinical practica. Other course structures will have equivalent workload expectations as described in the syllabus.

University Policies

Here are some of the basic university policies that students must follow.

Dropping and Adding

Find the procedures and deadlines for adding and dropping classes.

Catalog Policies <http://info.sjsu.edu/static/catalog/policies.html>.

Add/drop deadlines http://www.sjsu.edu/provost/services/academic_calendars/

Late Drop Policy <http://www.sjsu.edu/aars/policies/latedrops/policy/>

Consent for Recording of Class and Public Sharing of Instructor Material

All students must obtain the instructor's permission if they wish to record lectures or distribute materials from the class.

University Policy S12-7 <http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S12-7.pdf>

Academic integrity

Learn about the importance of academic honesty and the consequences if it is violated.

University Academic Integrity Policy S07-2 <http://www.sjsu.edu/senate/docs/S07-2.pdf>

Student Conduct and Ethical Development website <http://www.sjsu.edu/studentconduct/>

Campus Policy in Compliance with the American Disabilities Act

Here are guidelines to request any course adaptations or accommodations you might need.

Presidential Directive 97-03 http://www.sjsu.edu/president/docs/directives/PD_1997-03.pdf

Accessible Education Center <http://www.sjsu.edu/aec>

Resources

The university provides resources that can help you succeed academically. Just look here.

Academic Success Center <http://www.sjsu.edu/at/asc/>

Peer Connections website <http://peerconnections.sjsu.edu>

Writing Center website <http://www.sjsu.edu/writingcenter>

Counseling Services website <http://www.sjsu.edu/counseling>

Anth 173 / Culture Through Film, Spring 2014, Course Schedule

Course Schedule

Week	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
1	1/27-29	Week 1: Reading and Deconstructing the Photographic Image Susan Sontag, excerpts from <i>On Photography</i> John Berger, "The Suit and the Photograph" and "Uses of Photography: For Susan Sontag" in <i>Understanding a Photograph</i> Roland Barthes, excerpts from <i>Mythologies</i> <i>The Film Experience</i> pp. 413-430 Look at Diane Arbus' photographs Reading Facebook/Ads assignment – use Barthes' <i>Mythologies</i> as examples Recommended: Roland Barthes, "The Third Meaning: Research Notes on Some Eisenstein Stills" in <i>Image, Music, Text</i>
2	2/3-5	Week 2: Ethnographic Methods and Unpacking Images Michael Taussig chapter 3 and 5 in <i>I Swear I Saw This: Reflections on Drawings in Field Notebooks, Namely My Own</i> Laura Kipnis, "Clothes Make the Man"

Week	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
		<p>Look at Cindy Sherman photographs</p> <p>Recommended: Keri Smith, <i>How to be an Explorer of the World: Portable Art/Life Book</i></p> <p>Prompt long-term research proposal assignment: film project, photo documentary project, or hybrid mixed-media/storytelling project</p>
3	2/10-12	<p>Week 3: Mise-en-Scene and Cinematography</p> <p>Read chapter 2 and 3 in The Film Experience</p> <p>Prompt for ongoing photo/film/fieldnote assignment</p>
4	2/17-19	<p>Week 4: Editing</p> <p>Read chapter 4 in The Film Experience</p>
5	2/24-26	<p>Week 5: Sound and Narrative</p> <p>Read chapter 5 and 6 in The Film Experience</p> <p>Shot breakdown and formal analysis assignment</p>
6	3/3-5	<p>Week 6: Narrative II: Dialogic Texts and Ideology</p> <p>Mark Bould, excerpts in <i>The Cinema of John Sayles: Lone Star</i> Slavoj Zizek, clips from <i>The Pervert's Guide to Ideology</i> Begin Patricia Aufderheide, <i>Documentary Film: A Very Short Introduction</i></p>
7	3/10-12	<p>Week 7: Documentary and Experimental Film</p> <p>Read chapter 7 and 8 in The Film Experience Eliot Weinberger, "The Camera People" Aufderheide, <i>Documentary Film: A Very Short Introduction</i></p> <p>Recommended: Bill Nichols, "Types of Documentary," in <i>Introduction to Documentary</i> Jay Ruby, "Speaking for, Speaking about, Speaking with, Speaking Alongside," in <i>Picturing Culture: Explorations of Film and Anthropology</i></p>

Week	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
8	3/17-19	<p>Week 8: Documentary and Experimental Film</p> <p>Aufderheide, <i>Documentary Film: A Very Short Introduction</i> Jay Ruby "Robert Gardner and Anthropological Cinema," in <i>Picturing Culture</i> Catherine Lupton, excerpts from <i>Chris Marker: Memories of the Future</i></p> <p>Optional: John Grierson "Postwar Patterns"</p>
9	4/2 no class 3/31	<p>Week 9: Critical Analysis and Historical Contextualization</p> <p>Judith Halbertstam, "Oh Behave! Austin Powers and the Drag Kings," in <i>In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives</i> Kristin Ross, "La Belle Americaine" in <i>Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture</i> Zizek clips</p> <p>Historical contextuzliation research project hand out (might require student research for their own project) View: <i>Mon Oncle</i> and <i>Weekend</i></p>
10	4/7-9	<p>Week 10: Shaping a Narrative, Editing...: Story and Plot</p> <p>Guest Lecture: Documentary Filmmaker Kiazad Ehya Workshop</p>
11	4/14-16	<p>Week 11: Developing a Voice: Rhetorical Positions, Aesthetic Practices, and the Question of Truth in Documentary</p> <p>Joan Didion, "The White Album" Kathleen Stewart, short excerpts from <i>Ordinary Affects</i> Handout: "On Ethnographic Writing" Review Aufderheide, <i>Documentary Film</i></p> <p>Thinking in Images: Bob Dylan in-class evocation assignment</p> <p>Recommended: James Clifford "On Ethnographic Authority" in <i>Representations</i> Miranda July, "Majesty" in <i>No One Belongs Here More than You</i></p>

Week	Date	Topics, Readings, Assignments, Deadlines
12	4/21-23	Week 12: Digital Storytelling Listen to <i>This American Life</i> Read about MIT Digital Storytelling Project
13	4/28-30	Week 13: The Big Lebowski Excerpts from British Film Institute Classics Series, <i>The Big Lebowski</i>
14	5/5-7	Week 14: Workshop and Critique
15	5/12-14	Week 15: Workshop and Critique
16	5/19-21	Week 16: Workshop and Critique
Final Exam	5/19	WSQ 004 Monday, May 19, 9:45-12:00