INTRODUCTION TO VISUAL ANTHROPOLOGY

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“…the accepted report of an event is of greater importance than the event, for what we think about and act upon is the symbolic report and not the concrete event itself.”

INTRODUCTION

This course offers a general introduction to the anthropology of visual communication and is a required seminar for all students on the visual anthropology track. Its objective is to provide a grounding in the field as a whole, and to enable students to subsequently take part in specific courses that are offered by the faculty.

The course has a survey approach; the theoretical overview is grounded in a perspective that applies concepts of culture to processes of visual communication. Lectures, readings, and course work will review and utilize theories, methods, and topics relevant to visual symbolic forms.

The course will be conducted by a leading lecture or presentation by the instructor followed by a discussion. In each session two students will be expected to initiate the discussion. It is imperative that students come to each seminar having done the reading and with a commitment to engage in discussion. There is an average of 80 pages per week of required reading.

It is expected that all students are able to write in a clear manner. Learn the format of the American Anthropologist and use it in all of your work. Take the admonitions of the “Style Sheet” seriously. If you know that you have trouble writing, you are urged to go to the Writing Clinic on Weiss Hall. Students are not permitted to turn in work written for other courses without prior permission from the instructor. Students must turn in their assignments in time. No late papers will be accepted. Should extraordinary circumstances prevail please contact the instructor as soon as you are able.

REQUIRED STUDENT WORK

1. Critiques of Required Readings — During each meeting of the course, two students will critique the week’s required readings. Assume that everyone has read the assignment. Access the readings, discussing their
weaknesses and strengths. Try to articulate the relationship of the readings with other readings in the course and to the field in general. These critiques will begin with the readings for the second week and continue throughout the semester.

2. **Screenings** are a mandatory part of the seminar. The screenings are for the benefit of the students. As discussions will follow screenings it is important that students do not miss these presentations as there is no way to provide for additional venues for screenings.

3. **An Annotated Bibliography** should be prepared after students have had their term project approved. Annotations need only be a few sentences that summarizes, critiques, and contextualizes the publication. The purpose of the bibliography is to prepare the student for the research paper. Select an area of exploration that is sufficiently narrow as to make it possible to comprehensively cover the published materials. Please consult with the instructors to assist in the selection of the topic. Please submit a 100 word description that can be circulated to other students no later than October 3rd. Once approved, the student should begin immediately to gather the entries. A word of caution, Temple’s library is a busy place, do not wait until the last minute to locate the necessary resources. It is assumed that students will become sufficiently familiar with the databases in the library and the internet to exploit these resources. Bibliography is due on November 7th. Prepare sufficient copies for everyone in the seminar.

4. **A Research Paper** is required that builds upon the annotated bibliography. It is to be a critical evaluation of one specific and well defined area of the anthropology of visual communication within the topics covered during the seminar. This is a “state of the art” paper that critiques contemporary understanding and suggests future research. The suggested length of these papers is at least 20 double spaced pages. Please follow the seminar style sheet. The date the paper is due will be announced. Two copies are required.

5. **Examination:** There will be a final exam unless otherwise decided by the instructor.

6. **Grades** are determined as follows:
   - Bibliography & Written Paper  50%
   - Examination  25%
   - Seminar Participation and Critiques  25%

## TOPICS AND READINGS

**WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION**

**WEEK 2: VISUAL/PICTORIAL ANTHROPOLOGY**

Visual anthropology is a field without clear boundaries. Viewed in its most narrow and least sophisticated, it is a fancy name for ethnographic film or even “audio-visual aids” for the teaching of cultural anthropology. Ginsburg would confine it to the anthropological study and production of media. Worth and Ruby suggest an “anthropology of pictorial and visual communication” approach which would encompass anything
“made to be seen.” This year-long seminar is designed around this model. We begin the seminar with an exploration of these images of the field.

REQUIRED READINGS


1. Introduction by Larry Gross, pp. 1–35.


WEEK 3: ETHNOGRAPHY — THEORY, METHOD, AND EXAMPLE

What does the ethnographer do? ....he writes. (Geertz 1973: 19) The ethnographic filmmaker in turn, makes visual texts. A central part of anthropology is to make superficially exotic practices appear familiar and superficially familiar practices exotic. To achieve these aims the anthropologist engages in fieldwork- ‘being there’ - and during the period of ‘being there’ attempting to live as a friend amongst strangers and as an alien amongst friends. Fieldwork is not only a way of doing research, it provides a format for organizing data that appears in the form of the monograph. The written and the visual text complement each other and it remains a fundamental necessity for the ethnographers of the visual to have a good grasp of the written monograph so as to articulate the saliency of the visual strategy of text making over the written, when a subject is selected for research.

REQUIRED READINGS


WEEK 4: RESEARCH METHODS — THE LIBRARY, NET, AND WRITING

Gaining access to information and acquiring the skills necessary to effectively use that information is the basis of good scholarship for all academics, visual anthropologists included. The elementary, secondary, and undergraduate educational systems is the U.S. do not normally assist its graduates in developing either this knowledge or these skills. Graduate school is where you will play “catch-up.” The readings and exercises for this
week are practical in nature. A more theoretical discussion of the implications of Cyborg Anthropology will occur in next semester's seminar.

1. **LIBRARIES, INTERNET, AND OTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION**

   All students are required to obtain a computer account and to use it regularly. Read the following two articles:


   **Mizrach, Steve, 1995.** "Advancing the Purposes of Anthropology Through Electronic Technology."
   Unpublished paper delivered at SAA.

   **EXERCISE**

   Explore the research capacities of the CD-ROM databases in Paley library and on the internet via WWW, gopher, and other systems. Using the topic you will be writing a paper about, explore the resources and citations in the Tozzer Library CD-ROM and World Wide Web via [http://www.yahoo.com](http://www.yahoo.com). Be prepared to discuss what you learned. Be creative. Surf as much as possible. It really can be fun!

2. **WRITING**

   Please read and employ the suggestions contained in the Style Sheet.

   **Becker, Howard, 1986.** *Writing for Social Scientists*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press.) Chapters 1 through 4 are required. All are strongly recommended.

   **EXERCISE**

   Locate examples of what you would regard as good and bad writing. Ideally find them in anthropology or some related social science/humanity. Select a paragraph or so that you feel demonstrates the success or failure of the writing. Bring it to class and be prepared to articulate the reasons for your selections.

**WEEK 5: CULTURE AND COMMUNICATION**

If culture is the webs of significances an individual suspends herself in, these significances are known and shared through the processes of communication. What are the kinds, levels and modes of communication? How is significance and symbolic value recognized and valued? How does communication take place and what might visual anthropologists make of subjectivity and objectivity in interpreting the communication of visual texts.

**REQUIRED READINGS**


Morgan, John and Peter Welton, 1992. See What I Mean?: An Introduction to Visual Communication. (London: Edward Arnold.) Chapters 1, 2, and 3.

WEEK 6: THEORIES OF VISUAL PERCEPTION AND COMMUNICATION

An anthropology of visual communication presupposes a particularly theory of visual perception, namely, that our pictorial world is culturally constructed rather than a product of our genetic inheritance. The readings this week explore a variety of theories of visual perception and communication. Also refer to your earlier readings by Sol Worth.

REQUIRED READINGS


WEEK 7: SPACE, BODY, DANCE, SETTLEMENT PATTERNS / BUILT ENVIRONMENT

This session introduces the concepts of space, the body and the dance as culturally variable and comprehensible. In doing so the readings articulate how space is visualized, the body as visual text inhabits and traverses space to symbolically communicate to other social actors. The readings on the built environments suggest how culture is visibly manifested. It is a field of endeavor in which archeology, cultural anthropology, folklore, environmental psychology, and architecture intersect.
REQUIRED READINGS: KINESICS


REQUIRED READINGS: SPACE/PROXEMICS


REQUIRED READINGS: DANCE


REQUIRED READINGS: OVERVIEW OF BUILT ENVIRONMENT


WEEK 8: PERFORMANCES, RITUALS, CEREMONIES

If any area of anthropological study cried out for pictorial research tools and virtually predicated the development of a visual anthropology it is ritual. The readings demonstrate a range of research strategies for which ethnographic film/video/photographic techniques are a necessity.

REQUIRED READINGS


WEEK 9: CONSTITUENCIES OF THE WORLD IN ENCOUNTER

REQUIRED READINGS: DISPORA

REQUIRED READINGS: HETEROGLOSIC CIRCUMSTANCES


REQUIRED READINGS: EMERGENT SOCIETY


REQUIRED READINGS: CULTURAL COMPLEXITY


WEEK 10: WAYS OF CONCEIVING SYSTEMS OF VISUAL REPRESENTATION

REQUIRED READINGS


WEEK 11: WAYS OF SEEING

REQUIRED READINGS


WEEK 12: AESTHETICS

REQUIRED READINGS


WEEK 13: INDIGENOUS MEDIA I

We do not expect indigenous peoples to write anthropological monographs but we do know that they have leapt the literacy barrier and today present us with visual texts made in film and video. This serious development immediately questions the premise of traditional ethnographic filmmaking that in most cases has assumed to speak for the society it has engaged with. These readings inform of various efforts by indigenous groups large and small at self portrayal and of the politics generated as a consequence.

REQUIRED READINGS


WEEK 14: INDIGENOUS MEDIA II

These papers concentrate on reports of collaboration between anthropologists and local societies as well as a survey of such activities in different societies. It also addresses the practice of producing for both internal and external consumption. By looking at some autobiographical writing as well, it may force us to appreciate how different agenda for video production may arise in societies that have different world views and social objectives.
REQUIRED READINGS


**Aufderheide, Pat, 1994.** "Videomaking with and by Brazilians: The Video in the Villages Project." (Unpublished paper.)


**Turner, Terence, 1990.** "Visual Media, Cultural Politics, and Anthropological Practice: Some Implications of Recent Uses of Film and Video Among the Kayapo of Brazil."


WEEK 15: ORAL PRESENTATIONS OF PAPER SUMMARIES