

Fall 2016 Wed 2-5 E-51-165
Michael M.J. Fischer
Thorsten Trimpop

New Approaches to Ethnographic Documentary

Ethnographic documentary has a long and rich history. From Haddon's pioneering 1898 sound and moving image recordings in the Torres Strait Islands, to Jean Rouch's *Chronique d'un été* (Chronicle of a Summer, 1961, directed with sociologist Edgar Morin), from Flaherty's enacted *Nanook, 1922*, and George Boas' staged demonstration films with the Kwakiutl to Oppenheimer's re-enacted *The Act of Killing* (2012), technologies and modes of representation have changed, in the process challenging anthropological norms and *provoking reflection on who represents and how*.

Today's *interactive, immersive and location-based technologies* pose the greatest challenge yet. Their capacities for representing in innovative ways and forging new relationships among subjects, makers and the public, while exciting, can also seem at odds with the notions of expertise, authorship and the carefully structured points of view that characterized the past.

Students will develop their own project, with in-class workshops, doing two short interim projects and a final project.

This course will explore ethnographic documentary and particularly the fast-changing partnership between technologies and ways of seeing using three approaches:

- 1) a critical look at key moments in the history of ethnographic documentary-making;
- 2) discussions with film makers regarding their visions and choices;
- 3) a semester-long interrogation of a project-in-development by a linear documentary maker who is shifting to interactive forms.

Film makers who have been invited to share their films and choices with us include: soundscape artist Ernst Karel; Chris Bobel and Chris Walley; Daniel Hui; Lisandro Alonso; Alex Fattal; John Gianvito; Thorsten Trimpop.

We will discuss also films by Tim Asch, RJ Flaherty, Jean Rouch & Edgar Morin, Joaquim Pinto, Lucian Taylor and Verena Paravel, Robert Lemelson, Joshua Oppenheimer, Apichatpong Weerasethakul, and Urophong Raksasad.

The discussions will focus on both
(a) production and editing techniques;
(b) intellectual contributions.

- These latter will explore the trade-offs, balance, or other relations in:
- (i) using cultural genres from within local traditions (vs universal "philosophical" or personal and poetic forms);
 - (ii) registering vs staging "reality" (letting the material "speak" vs speaking for)
 - (iii) use of "footage" in narrative film (integrity, context);
 - (iv) using sound, dialogue, and visuals in disjunctive vs sync'd fashions.
 - (v) what film can do that even the best writing cannot vs the limits of film

Most sessions will be split in two: a working-practice segment, and a discussion session.

CLASS SCHEDULE

Sept. 7. **Introduction**

- (1) Introduction to the class and assignments
- (2) Introduction to Thorsten Trimpop's project *The Lure of the Birds of Paradise*
- (3) Intro to the dialogue among film-makers, ethnographers and documentarians
- (4) Introduction to key moments in the history of doc. & ethnographic film:

films (in class)

The Ax Fight by Tim Asch, 1975

excerpts:

In the Land of the War Canoes (excerpts, Curtis & Hunt 1914)

Nanook of the North by Robert J. Flaherty, 1922

Grass (Cooper and Schoedsack, 1925)

Chronique d'un été (Chronicle of a Summer) by Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin, 1961 [said to have begun *cinéma vérité*]

History and Memory (Rea Tijiri, 1991)

Sept. 14. **Fukushima: A Film-maker's Approach to Ethnographic Film [Bartos Theater]**

Film Screening (in class): *Furusato* 古里 by Thorsten Trimpop, 2016

Workshop: Camera Basics I

Sept. 21 **Aesthetic Filmmakers' Variants of Ethnographic Film**

Film screening in class (excerpts):

Fish Tail (Joaquim Pinto, 2015)

Leviathan (Lucian Taylor / Verena Paravel, 2012)

Workshop: Camera Basics II

Sept. 28 **"Personal Documentary" and Ethnography of Deindustrialized Steel Towns**

Film screening and discussion with filmmakers:

Exit Zero (Chris Bobel and Chris Walley, 2015)

Workshop: Sound Basics I

Presentation Assignment 1 (Photo Montage)

Oct. 5 **Sensory Ethnography and Use of Soundscapes [Bartos Theater]**

Guest: Ernst Karel

Oct. 12 **Ethnographic Film, Thai (and Southeast Asian) Style**

Guest: filmmaker Daniel Hui

film screening:

Cemetery of Splendour (Apichatpong Weerasethakul 2016)

Agrarian Utopia (Urophong Raksasad 2009)

Snakeskin (Daniel Hui 2014)

Oct. 19 **Staging Ethnography & Ethics in Documentary Filmmaking**

Guest: Alex Fattal

Film screenings:

Vampires of Poverty (*Agarrando Pueblo*, Luis Ospina, 1977)

Dreams from the Mountain of Concrete (work in progress)(Alex Fattal)

[? *Trees Tropiques* (Alex Fattal)]

Workshop: Editing Basics I

Oct: 26 **In Depth Ethnography & Character Portraits: Respect (for whom)?**

Films:

Forty Years of Silence (Robert Lemmelson, 2009)

The Act of Killing (Joshua Oppenheimer, 2012)

The Look of Silence (Joshua Oppenheimer, 2014)

Presentations II: Silent Character Portrait

Workshop: Editing Basics II

[Nov. 2 **Ethnographic Documentary as Cultural Critique in Iran & Ukraine** (no class?)]

films:

Close Up (Abbas Kiarostami, 1990)

Our Times (*Ruzegar-e Ma*) Rakhshan Bani-E'temad, 2002) [2001 elections]

We Are Half of Iran's Population (Rakhshan Bani E'temad 2009)

<http://www.cemproductions.org/bridgetoiran/we-are-half-of-irans-population/>

Maiden (Sergei Loznitsa 2014) Ukraine

work on final project

Nov. 9 **Minimalism and Abstraction of Hinterlands:** endless pampas in *La Libertad*, the teeming jungle in *Los Muertos*, the frigid snow country of Tierra del Fuego archipelago in *Liverpool*, through which non-professional actors wander.

Guest: Lisandro Alonso

November 16 **Interactive Platforms and Ethnographic Film**

Guest: William Uriccho

VR Pieces: Felix and Paul Studios

November 23 & 30 **Rough Cut Screening / Final Film**

Dec. 7. Wrap up & Retrospective with **Guest:** John Gianvito

December 14 Student Presentations