

**B. A. (H) sociology**  
**Skill enhancement course 02**  
**Techniques of ethnographic filmmaking**

**Course Objectives**

This course is premised on accessing sociology and social anthropology through forms other than the textual; in particular, the aural, the visual – the sensory. It introduces students to techniques of anthropological filmmaking as a form and method of description and argument, along with enabling an understanding of the relationship between film and text as distinct ethnographic practices. One concern that may be perceived in the transaction of this course is regarding its accessibility within the visually challenged encounter. However, this course imparts and highlights the significance of a sensory research practices, rather than being a purely visual exercise.

**Course Learning Outcomes**

1. The SEC on techniques of ethnographic filmmaking starts by laying groundwork for orienting students to the techniques and methods of using the method of visuals in sociology. As students engage with the course along with other important programmes as part of their B.A (H) in sociology, they also begin to understand the intersection of classroom-based knowledge and practical realm. At this point, the course aims to prepare them for challenges of doing sociological fieldwork and observing real-world spheres through the mode of filmmaking. It enables them to build on the graduate attributes of disciplinary knowledge, critical thinking, research-related skills, scientific reasoning, reflective thinking and multicultural competence.
2. Film screenings, assignments and projects in this course are aimed at broadening the spectrum of engagement through sociology. Through ethnographic filmmaking, students move beyond the textual reading and writing mode. Centered on the means of visual, oral and aural, the programme helps them build on the use of diverse media (and tools) to represent cultures and narratives.
3. A key learning outcome of the course is to introduce students to the skills and sensitivity needed to engage with the social world. Through ethnographic fieldwork and filmmaking, as they grasp the knowledge of technical, the meaning-making of social remains crucial in the SEC programme. An understanding of diversity of gender, culture, class, caste, sexuality, and religion is fundamentally reflected as they produce films on multiple issues.
4. Teamwork: An important aspect of the programme is working in teams/groups for the final filmmaking projects. Through team work and extensive discussions, students encounter and learn the importance of decision-making, ethics, communication skills, and planning. These are core competencies that the SEC orients them about.
5. The experience of producing visual anthropological content as part of the SEC helps students gear up for the specific electives and courses they take up in the later semesters, particular the research methods course. The brush with social research skills, techniques of sociological fieldwork and thematic issues of

representation helps in enriching their engagement with the theoretical framework in final year of BA (H) Sociology.

**Course Content:**

**Unit 1. Introduction to Anthropological Filmmaking**

- 1.1. History of Ethnographic Filmmaking
- 1.2. Anthropology and Filmmaking: The Text and the Image
- 1.3. Different Modes of Filmmaking

**Unit 2. Understanding the use of Camera in Anthropology**

**Unit 3. The Filmmaker and the Filmed: Relationship and understanding ‘ethics’**

**Unit 4. Editing and Construction of Meaning**

- 4.1 Understanding multiple shots and camera movement
- 4.2. Tools for Film Editing

**Unit 5. Filming Oral testimonies, Interviews and Interactions Final Film Projects**

**Unit 6. Final Film Projects**

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**Unit 1. Introduction to Anthropological Filmmaking: [Week 1-3]**

**1.1. History of Ethnographic Filmmaking**

Heider, Karl G. ‘A History of Ethnographic Film.’ In *Ethnographic Film*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006. Pp. 15-49.

Hastrup, Kirsten. ‘Anthropological Visions: Some Notes on Visual and Textual Authority’ In *Film as Ethnography*. Peter Ian Crawford, and David Turton, eds. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993. Pp. 8–25.

Suggested Screening of Film Scenes/Sequences, *Trance and Dance in Bali* by Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson, 22 mins.

**1.2. Anthropology and Filmmaking: The Text and the Image**

Heider, Karl G. ‘The Attributes of Ethnographic Film’. In *Ethnographic Film*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006. Pp. 50-109.

Nichols, Bill. ‘What types of Documentary are there?’ In *Introduction to Documentary*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001. Pp. 99-137.

Suggested Screening of Film Scenes/Sequences: *Etre et Avoit* by Nicholas Philibert’s, 105 mins, 2002; *New Boys* by David MacDougall, 100 mins, 2003; *Dilli-*

*Mumbai-Dilli* by Saba Dewan, 63 mins, 2006; *Bowling for Columbine* by Roger Moore, 120 mins, 2002.

Suggested topics for technical discussion - Understanding the Camera – still, moving, digital, analog; Shot Vs Scene; Image Vs Sound; Camera angles; How to store your data?; How to take care of equipment?

Practical Work for Week ½ - Familiarise yourself with your camera. Use your still and video cameras to shoot the same objects from different angles, lighting, and sound spaces.

## **Unit 2. Understanding the use of Camera in Anthropology: [Week 4]**

El Guindi, Fadwa. 'For God's Sake Margaret' In *Visual Anthropology: Essential Method and Theory*, Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 2004. Pp. 61-82

Suggested Screening of Film Scenes/Sequences: *Diyas*, Judith MacDougall, 56 mins, 1997/2000.

Suggested topics for technical discussion – Small and big cameras, tripod and hand held cameras, Understanding light; F I L M m a k e r ' s Dilemma – where to place the camera?; Filmmaking – Working Single or in a Team?

Practical Work for Week 3 – Camera mounting on tripod; handheld camera practices.

## **Unit 3. Filmmaker and the Filmed: Relationship and understanding 'ethics'. [Weeks 5-6]**

Spiegel, Pauline, 'The Case of the Well-Mannered Guest' in *The Independent Film and Video Monthly*, April 1984. Pp. 15-17

MacDougall, 'Whose Story is it?' In *Visual Anthropology Review*, Volume 7, Issue 2, Pp. 2–10, September 1991

Suggested topics for discussion: Dimensions of relationship between the filmmaker and the filmed - Gender, Class, Ethnicity.

By this point, students should have finalised their topics and groups for their final film.

Practical Work for Week 5-6: Assignment on Observational Mode; Make one shot of something of your interest. Not more than 2 mins. Fixed frame, without movement. No speech/dialogues. Tripod is optional. Camera type is optional, as long as the resolution allows viewing on a classroom projector.

Viewing of assignments and discussions.

## **Unit 4. Editing and Construction of Meaning [Weeks 7-9]**

#### **4.1 Understanding multiple shots and camera movement**

Suggested topics for technical discussion: Multiple shots, understanding point-of-view; narrative building, filming a process, types of editing; Understanding space and material objects – vis-à-vis the character; Types of camera movement; Motivations behind Camera movement; Movement within the shot.

Barbash, Ilisa, et al. 'Reframing Ethnographic Film: A 'Conversation' with David MacDougall and Judith MacDougall.'" *American Anthropologist*, vol. 98, no. 2, 1996, pp. 371–387.

By this time, students should have approached their respondents, acquired permissions and rekeyed possible shoot locations.

Suggested Screening of Film Scenes/Sequences: *Battleship Potemkin* by Sergei Eisenstein, 69 mins. 1925; *Strangers on a Train* by Alfred Hitchcock, 101 min, 1951.

#### **4.2. Tools for Film Editing**

Suggested topics for technical discussion: Understanding editing software (Suggested software: Avid/Final Cut Pro/Windows Movie M a k e r ) ; Transferring and sequencing of data; Data Backup before editing; Viewing footage; Transcription and Paper Edits.

Practical Work for Week 7-9: Assignment on Process film; 3 mins; Film an activity; Include camera movement; Break it down in stages - beginning, middle and end; Understand the cause and effect; Focus only on (i) the person (ii) the activity; editing the process film.

Viewing of assignments and discussions.

### **Unit 5. Filming Oral Testimonies, Interviews and Interactions [Weeks 10-11]**

Suggested Screening of Film Scenes/Sequences: *Chronicle of a Summer* by Edgar Morin, Jean Rouch, 85 min, 1961.

Suggested topics for technical discussion: Sound and audio equipment.

Practical Work for Week 10-11: Film an oral testimony, with maximum 2 people; Length, no more than 5 minutes; Focus on Interaction; Location is optional

Viewing of assignments and discussions.

### **Unit 6. Final Film Projects [Weeks 12-14]**

6.0.1. Film length limited to 5 - 8 mins.

6.0.2. Viewing of projects and discussion.

**Note: This course will require a special budget for the purchase/hiring of equipment and for honorarium to technical resource persons.**

**References:**

**Compulsory Readings:**

Barbash, Ilisa, et al. 'Reframing Ethnographic Film: A 'Conversation' with David MacDougall and Judith MacDougall.' *American Anthropologist*, vol. 98, no. 2, 1996, pp. 371–387.

El Guindi, Fadwa. 'For God's Sake Margaret' In *Visual Anthropology: Essential Method and Theory*, Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira, 2004. Pp. 61-82

Spiegel, Pauline, 'The Case of the Well-Mannered Guest' in *The Independent Film and Video Monthly*, April 1984. Pp. 15-17

Hastrup, Kirsten. 'Anthropological Visions: Some Notes on Visual and Textual Authority' In *Film as Ethnography*. Peter Ian Crawford, and David Turton, eds. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993. Pp. 8–25.

Heider, Karl G. 'A History of Ethnographic Film.' In *Ethnographic Film*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006. Pp. 15-49.

Heider, Karl G. 'The Attributes of Ethnographic Film'. In *Ethnographic Film*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006. Pp. 50-109.

MacDougall, 'Whose Story is it?' In *Visual Anthropology Review*, Volume 7, Issue 2, Pp. 2–10, September 1991

Nichols, Bill. 'What types of Documentary are there?' In *Introduction to Documentary*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001. Pp. 99-137.

**Additional Resources:**

**Books & Articles :**

Barnouw, Erik, (1993). *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film*, Oxford University Press.

Rouch, Jean, 'Conversation between Jean Rouch and Professor Enrico Fulchignoni,' In trans. Steven Feld, *Cine-Ethnography*. University of Minnesota Press, 2003. Pp. 147-187

**Audio Visual Material**

*Battleship Potemkin* by Sergei Eisenstein, 69 mins. 1925;

*Bowling for Columbine* by Roger Moore, 120 mins, 2002.

*Chronicle of a Summer* by Edgar Morin, Jean Rouch, 85 min, 1961.

*Dilli- Mumbai-Dilli* by Saba Dewan, 63 mins, 2006;

*Diyas*, Judith MacDougall, 56 mins, 1997/2000.

*Etre et Avoit* by Nicholas Philibert's, 105 mins, 2002

*New Boys* by David MacDougall, 100 mins, 2003;

*Strangers on a Train* by Alfred Hitchcock, 101 min, 1951.

### **Teaching Learning Process**

1. The primary thrust of this course is to enable students to develop social research skills through the use of camera and film technology. In this exercise, the role of the teacher is to familiarize the students not only with the techniques of ethnographic filmmaking but, to contextualize the practice within the larger theoretical framework in order to bring out the specific nature of anthropological films in comparison with other documentary genres.
2. This course demands a constant and rigorous one-on-one interaction with the students, as the teacher has to continually see and evaluate the visual material produced by the young filmmakers. The inputs provided by the teachers are not merely technical but are meant to guide the students regarding the very ethics of anthropological filmmaking. It is this combination of techniques and ethics that is central to the production of film based ethnographic research material.
3. A particular challenge in the transaction of this course is that students have already been exposed to a certain kind of visual thinking, generated by social media photography and video making. Because of this, the teacher has the crucial responsibility to guide the students to develop an academic bent while thinking visually, so that the latter learn not only to produce research relevant films but are also able to critically evaluate the circulation and exchange of images on various social media platforms.

4. This course allows the students to come out of their comfort zones, interact with people, engage with fieldwork, and in the process develop an understanding about their own abilities, limitations and interests. It allows them to address their own understanding of the world in a practical and experiential manner, thus challenging some of their predetermined ideas about the ‘other’.

### **Assessment Methods**

Since this is a Skill Enhancement Course, the assessment of this paper entails a two-fold evaluation process, pertaining to the gradual competence acquired by the students. *Firstly*, the students will be marked on the series of exercises that they have to complete as mentioned in the syllabus. Along with technical soundness, students are expected to show ethical integrity in their project work. *Secondly*, they will be marked on the final film that they make at the end of the course. Those teaching the paper may invite filmmakers or other faculty members transacting this course to grade these student films. Students may execute their exercises as group projects.

### **Key Words**

Ethnographic Film, Anthropological Filmmaking, making films for fieldwork, Filmmaking Ethics