

Sociology
Discipline Specific Elective (DSE) 18
Ethnographic Filmmaking in Sociological Practice

Discipline Specific Elective (DSE 18) : Ethnographic Filmmaking in Sociological Practice

CREDIT DISTRIBUTION, ELIGIBILITY AND PRE-REQUISITES OF THE COURSE

Course title & Code	Credits	Credit distribution of the course			Eligibility criteria	Pre-requisite of the course (if any)
		Lecture	Tutorial	Practical/ Practice		
DSE 18: Ethnographic Filmmaking in Sociological Practice	4	2	0	2	12th Class Pass	Nil

Learning Objectives:

1. Understand the history, theoretical foundations, and significance of ethnographic filmmaking.
2. Develop technical skills in camera work, lighting, sound, and editing for sociological storytelling.
3. Learn to navigate ethical issues in sociological filmmaking, including consent, representation, and collaboration.
4. Synthesise creative, technical, and ethical practices to produce a reflective ethnographic film.

Learning outcomes:

By the end of the course, the students will be able to:

1. Demonstrate knowledge of the historical and theoretical framework of ethnographic filmmaking.
2. Apply technical filmmaking skills to create sociological visual narratives.
3. Produce films that adhere to ethical standards in representation and collaboration.

SYLLABUS OF DSE:

Unit I: Foundations of Ethnographic Filmmaking (8 Hours)

This unit discusses the origins and evolution of ethnographic film within anthropology and sociology. Additionally, it examines how film mediates cultural knowledge and the politics of representation.

a. Introduction and History

b. Ethnographic Representation and ‘Ways of Knowing’

Unit II: Camera Practices and Techniques in Ethnographic Filmmaking (10 Hours)

This unit focuses on observational methods, framing, and the technical use of camera to sociologically capture lived experiences.

a. Understanding Camera Use in Ethnography

b. Light, Movement, and Collaboration

Unit III. Ethics and Relationships in Filmmaking (10 Hours)

This unit addresses power dynamics, consent, and the ethical responsibilities of filmmakers towards those being filmed.

a. Reflexivity, Power, and Ethical Engagement

b. Consent, Dialogue, and Production Ethics

Unit IV. Filming, Editing and Post-Production (17 Hours)

This unit covers the workflow from shooting to editing, emphasising narrative construction and the filmmaker’s interpretive role.

a. Visual Data Management

b. Editing Tools and Final Film Review

Practical Component: NIL

Essential/Recommended Readings:

Unit I. Foundations of Ethnographic Filmmaking

a. Introduction and History

Macdougall, David. (1969). ‘Prospects of the Ethnographic Film’. *Film Quarterly*, 23(2). Pp. 16–30.

Heider, Karl G. *Ethnographic Film*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006. Chap 1 and 2.

b. Ethnographic Representation and ‘Ways of Knowing’

MacDougall, David. (1998). ‘Visual Anthropology and the Ways of Knowing’. In *Transcultural Cinema* (pp. 61–92). Princeton University Press.

Pink, Sarah. (2009). 'Situating Sensory Ethnography: From Academia to Intervention'. In *Doing Sensory Ethnography* (pp. 7–23). SAGE Publications Ltd.

Renov, Michael, (1993). 'Toward A Poetics of Documentary'. In M. Renov (Ed.), *Theorizing Documentary* (pp. 12–36). Routledge.

Suggested Film Screening:

- *Nanook of the North* (1922) – Directed by Robert Flaherty
- *Trance and Dance in Bali* (1952) – Directed by Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson
- *Forest of Bliss* (1986) – Directed by Robert Gardner

Topics for Technical Discussion and Practical Work:

- Understanding different types of cameras: still, moving, digital, and analog.
- Exploring the concepts of Shot vs. Scene and Image vs. Sound.
- Experiments with shooting from different angles, under various lighting conditions, and in diverse sound environments.
- Best practices for storing your data.
- Guidelines for maintaining and caring for your equipment.

Unit II. Camera Practices and Techniques in Ethnographic Filmmaking

a. Understanding Camera Use in Ethnography

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

b. Light, Movement, and Collaboration

Heider, Karl G. *Ethnographic Film*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006. Chap 3.

Topics for Technical Discussion

- Comparing small and big cameras: strengths and limitations.
- Tripod vs. handheld cameras: when and how to use each effectively.
- Framing the subject: where to place the camera and why
- Angles, close-ups, wide shots, and depth in constructing narratives
- Understanding light: natural and artificial, and its impact on filmmaking.
- Practicing mounting and using a camera on a tripod.
- Explore handheld camera techniques to develop stability and fluidity.
- Working individually vs. collaborating in a team.

Unit Task

Create a 1-2 min film on a specific process or activity, focusing on its progression.

Suggested Film Screening:

Dead Birds (1964) – Directed by Robert Gardner

Trance and Dance in Bali (1952) – Directed by Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson

Man with a Movie Camera (1929) – Directed by Dziga Vertov

Unit III: Ethics and Relationships in Filmmaking**a. Reflexivity, Power, and Ethical Engagement**

Ruby, Jay. (1977). ‘The Image Mirrored: Reflexivity and the Documentary Film’. *Journal of the University Film Association*, 29(4), 3–11.

b. Consent, Dialogue, and Production Ethics

Henley, Paul. (2021). ‘How to Subtitle Ethnographic Films: Some Practical Suggestions’. *Visual Anthropology*, 34(1), 75–100.

Topics for Technical Discussion

- Examining power dynamics, consent, and authenticity in ethnographic filmmaking.
- Examining impact of gender, class, and ethnicity etc. on interactions.
- Choosing angles and shot types to maintain ethical representation
- Capturing clear dialogue
- Exploring collaborations involving subjects in the filmmaking process
- Understanding subtitling and translation in ethnographic film

Unit Task: Create a 3–5-minute Interview Film focusing on ethnical engagement and informed consent

Suggested Film Screening:

- *Chronicle of a Summer* (1961) – Directed by Edgar Morin and Jean Rouch
- *Reassemblage* (1982) – Directed by Trinh T. Minh-ha
- *When Four Friends Meet* (2000) – Directed by Rahul Roy
- *New Boys* (2003) – Directed by David MacDougall

Unit IV: Filming, Editing and Post-Production**a. Visual Data Management**

Banks, M. (2007). 'Presenting visual research' in *Using Visual Data in Qualitative Research*, Chap 5, (pp. 92–112). London: SAGE Publications.

At this stage, students are expected to have already approached their respondents, secured permissions, and finalised potential shooting topics and locations.

b. Editing Tools and Final Film Review

At this stage students should critically engage with how editing shapes ethnographic meaning, and how sociological reflexivity operates through selection, sequencing, and post-production interventions.

Unit Task

Create a 5–8-minute reflective final ethnographic film that follows an event, a story or character/s integrating the technical, ethical, and creative skills learned throughout the course.

Topics for Technical Discussion

- Introduction to Editing Software like Avid, Final Cut Pro or any other.
- Understanding Data Organisation and maintaining a logical folder structure.
- Understanding how sequencing of clips affects pacing and storytelling.
- Developing visual storyboards to map out transitions and scene flow.
- Viewing of final films, discussion and grading.

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

Suggested Readings:

Mead, M. (1963). *Anthropology and the Camera*. In *Ciné-Ethnography* (S. Feld, Ed.). University of Minnesota Press.

Grimshaw, A., & Ravetz, A. (2004). *Visualizing Anthropology*. Intellect Books.

Adams, J. W. (1979). Representation and Context in The Ethnographic Film. *Film Criticism*, 4(1), 89–100.

Otway, F. (2015). The Unreliable Narrator in Documentary. *Journal of Film and Video*, 67(3–4), 3–23.

Asch, T., Marshall, J., & Spier, P. (1973). Ethnographic Film: Structure and Function. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 2, 179–187.

Harjant S. Gill. (2014). Before Picking Up the Camera: My Process to Ethnographic Film. *Anthropology Now*, 6(1), 72–80.

Pink, S. (2015). Ethics in Visual Research. In *Advances in Visual Methodology* (pp. 92–105). SAGE Publications.

Ruby, J. (1980). Exposing Yourself: Reflexivity, Anthropology, and Film. *Semiotica*, 30(1), 153–179.

Ganti, T. (2014). *Producing Bollywood: Inside the Contemporary Hindi Film Industry*. Duke University Press

Nichols, B. (2016). *Speaking Truths with Film: Evidence, Ethics, Politics in Documentary*. University of California Press.

Minh-ha, T. T. (1991). *When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender and Cultural Politics*. Routledge.

Note: Examination scheme and mode shall be as prescribed by the Examination Branch, University of Delhi, from time to time.