

**City University of Hong Kong**

**Information on a Course  
offered by School of Creative Media  
with effect from Semester A in 2012 / 2013**

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**Part I**

**Course Title:** Visual Ethnography: Critical and Creative Practices

**Course Code:** SM6324

**Course Duration:** One semester

**No. of Credit Units:** 3

**Level:** P6

**Medium of Instruction:** English

**Prerequisites:** NIL

**Precursors:** NIL

**Equivalent Courses:** NIL

**Exclusive Courses:** NIL

**Part II**

**1. Course Aims:**

This course explores visual ethnography as both a form of ethno-methodologies for the study of everyday urban culture and its relevance in the context of research-creation, which has grown in valence in contemporary art practices.

This course has two main components: to learn how to study our everyday culture and produce knowledge about the world using visual media, and to study visual objects in our everyday life, such as photographs, movies, maps, posters, materials on YouTube, graphic design etc. to see the unique ways they tell us about the world in which we live.

A strong focus of this course rests on developing competence and critical thinking in the deployment of audio-visual tools in field studies, and the epistemological implication of these tools – how knowledge production is mediated by tools and how media representation of fieldwork findings articulates as well as shapes the way we know. Students in this course therefore embrace the multiple identities of an observer, critic and mediator, and artist.

One fourth of the course will be spent on well-known cases of artists and works that involve substantial exercises of visual ethnography -- to study how they transform field experience into artistic actions. This component will allow those students who, instead of an elaborate written report, choose to present their final work in the form of an art work.

This course discusses in depth important cultural theories, history of documentaries, creative impulses in urban studies, and research methods in anthropology. This course is project-based, individual and in groups. Students are expected to be independent learners who are ready to discover more via reading, research and creation.

The FOUR key subjects in visual ethnography that form the research-creation of this class are:

- A. Deploying audio-visual media in ethnographic research;
- B. Researching and collecting visual/audio objects to gain insight into culture and everyday life;
- C. Ethnography and/for/in art-making: from ethnography to creative collecting and art-making; and
- D. (Re-)presenting research findings as audio-visual artifacts, e.g. a documentary, an audio album.

## 2. Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs)

*Upon successful completion of this course, students should be able to:*

No.	CILOs
1.	Explain the use of ethno-methodologies in the study of urban, everyday culture with case examples
2.	Give an accessible account of the idea of visual ethnography, its varieties, and the philosophical basis of visual anthropology
3.	Conceive their own research of everyday life based on informed views in cultural studies
4.	Design, conduct and manage ethnography independently
*5.	Deploy audio-visual tools effectively in research and be aware of the difference they make to the research process
*6.	Turn the findings of ethnography, the work of collecting, classification and interpretation into EITHER an elaborate written report OR a creative artistic project

\*Negotiated Learning Outcome (NLO) explicitly articulating the elements of Discovery oriented learning.

### 3. Teaching and learning Activities (TLAs)

(Indicative of likely activities and tasks designed to facilitate students' achievement of the CILOs. Final details will be provided to students in their first week of attendance in this course)

TLAs	ILO No
-Lecture	CILO 1
-Adaptation in personal research projects expressed in the form of a written statement	CILO 2
-Task-based take-home research assignment	
-Lectures on everyday culture and case studies	CILO 3
-Mid-term presentation on final projects	
-Semester-long research projects	
-Lectures/workshops on visual research, observational and collecting strategies, and image analysis	CILO 4
-Semester-long research projects	
-mid-term presentation on final projects	CILO 5
-Task-based take-home exercises on research methods	
-semester-long research projects	
-Mid-term presentation on final projects	CILO 6
-Semester-long research projects	

### 4. Assessment Tasks/Activities

(Indicative of likely activities and tasks designed to assess how well the students achieve the CILOs. Final details will be provided to students in their first week of attendance in this course)

Type of assessment tasks/activities	ILO No	Remarks
-Semester-long research project with EIHTER an elaborate written report OR artwork with a thesis statement	CILO 1	
	CILO 2	
-Mid-term presentation: progress report	CILO 3	
Task-based take-home exercises on research methods: Field photography, thick description, coding and framing, video research, experimental ethnography	CILO 4	
	CILO 5	
-Semester-long research project with EIHTER an elaborate written report OR artwork with a thesis statement	CILO 6	

### 5. Grading of Student Achievement:

Refer to Grading of Courses in the Academic Regulations for Taught Postgraduate Degrees.

Continuous assessment. 100% course work. Grading: A+,A,A-...F

Grading is based on performance in assessment tasks / activities

#### A. Research-based Written Report/ Thesis Statement

Students should demonstrate ability to utilize primary and secondary sources, build up argument and analysis. The threshold of 'discovery' lied in a student's self initiatives to conduct additional research and to personalize theories for her/his personal daily experience.

Letter Grade	Grade Point	Grade Definitions	Description
A+	4.3	Excellent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Excellent grasp of materials, ability to explain key concepts, assumptions, and debates, demonstrating sound knowledge of the field</li> <li>- Rich content, exceptional ability to integrate various resources into primary and secondary levels based on demand;</li> <li>- Design and conduct research which is firmly built on thorough</li> </ul>
A	4.0		
A-	3.7		

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– knowledge of existing theoretical frameworks</li> <li>– Evaluative judgments about existing research and demonstrate application of strong critical thinking skills</li> <li>– Strong ability to approach a text or a theme using a variety of theories and analytical tools</li> <li>– Strong organization of research findings with effective organization and procedural clarity at the same time demonstrating the importance of the process</li> <li>– Insightful suggestion of how the research findings may lead to future research</li> </ul>
B+ B B-	3.3 3.0 2.7	Good	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Firm grasp of materials, ability to explain key concepts and assumptions</li> <li>– Adequate content, strong ability to integrate various resources into primary and secondary levels based on demand;</li> <li>– Design and conduct research which is built on thorough knowledge of existing theoretical frameworks</li> <li>– Appropriate judgments about existing research and demonstrate application of critical thinking skills</li> <li>– Ability to approach a text or a theme using a variety of theories and analytical tools</li> </ul>
C+ C C-	2.3 2.0 1.7	Adequate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Comprehensive grasp of materials, able to explain key concepts</li> <li>– Adequate content, fair ability to integrate various resources into primary and secondary levels based on demand</li> <li>– Design and conduct research which is built on knowledge of theoretical frameworks</li> <li>– Appropriate judgments about existing research</li> <li>– Weak ability to approach a text or a theme using a variety of theories and analytical tools</li> </ul>
D	1.0	Marginal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Loose grasp of materials, cannot explain key concepts</li> <li>– Weak content, with primary and secondary levels</li> <li>– Design and conduct research which is appropriate for the research objective</li> <li>– Marginal judgments about existing research</li> <li>– Poor ability to approach a text or a theme using a variety of theories and analytical tools</li> </ul>
F	0.0	Failure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Poor grasp of materials</li> <li>– Inadequate content, without primary and secondary levels</li> <li>– Fail to design and conduct research which is appropriate for the research objective</li> <li>– Fail to make reasonable judgments about existing research</li> <li>– Fail to approach a text or a theme using a variety of theories and analytical tools</li> </ul>

**Note: All A+/A/A- grade assignment should comply with the highest performance of Discovery-oriented learning.**

## **B. Creative Project/ Technical Project/ Portfolio**

Students should demonstrate ability to utilize primary and secondary sources, execute creative ideas and projects. The threshold of ‘discovery’ lies in a student’s proactively turning theory into praxis, to transform course material into self-owned authorship.

Letter Grade	Grade Point	Grade Definitions	Description
A+ A A-	4.3 4.0 3.7	Excellent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Work has strong affective quality and the articulation of personal styles and signature</li> <li>– Excellent appreciation, exploration and/or application of the aesthetic and expressive qualities of the medium</li> </ul>

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Work raises questions and instill insights about the process of conception, creative strategization and production</li> <li>- Innovative exploration by combining knowledge from different disciplines (e.g. mathematics, psychology, physics, anthropology, etc.) to create an inter-disciplinary project</li> <li>- Efficient adjustment of plans and strategies in response to resources (time, space, equipment, etc) available with constructive adjustment</li> </ul>
B+ B B-	3.3 3.0 2.7	Good	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strong appreciation, exploration and/or application of the aesthetic and expressive qualities of the medium</li> <li>- Ability to create project/ work that demonstrate the processes of thinking and creative exploration</li> <li>- Proper adjustment of plans and strategies in response to resources (time, space, equipment, etc) available and constructive feedback/ suggestions</li> </ul>
C+ C C-	2.3 2.0 1.7	Adequate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Basic appreciation and/or application of the aesthetic and expressive qualities of the medium</li> <li>- Limited ability to create project/ work that demonstrate the processes of thinking and creative exploration</li> <li>- Adjustment of plans and strategies in response to resources (time, space, equipment, etc) available</li> </ul>
D	1.0	Marginal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Marginal appreciation of the aesthetic and expressive qualities of the medium</li> <li>- Marginal ability to create project/ work that demonstrate the processes of thinking and creative exploration</li> <li>- Limited adjustment of plans and strategies in response to resources (time, space, equipment, etc) available</li> </ul>
F	0.0	Failure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No appreciation of the aesthetics and expressive qualities of the medium</li> <li>- Fail to create project/ work that demonstrate the processes of thinking and creative exploration</li> <li>- Minimal adjustment of plans and strategies in response to resources (time, space, equipment, etc) available</li> </ul>

**Note: All A+/A/A- grade assignment should comply with the highest performance of Discovery-oriented learning.**

### **C. Presentation**

This assessment will grade on content and fluency of presentation. Students should show their co-operation to conduct a well-organized presentation with their own argument and evidence from readings and notes. The threshold of 'discovery' lied in a student's self initiatives to conduct additional research and to personalize theories for her/his personal daily experience.

Letter Grade	Grade Point	Grade Definitions	Description
A+ A A-	4.3 4.0 3.7	Excellent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Rich, informative content, excellent grasp of the material with in-depth and extensive knowledge of the subject matter</li> <li>- Rigorous organization, coherent structure, and systematic exposition with a strong sense of narrative</li> <li>- Superior presentation skills: distinct pronunciation, fluent expression and appropriate diction, exact time-management</li> <li>- Critical analysis with insightful comments opening up new issues, or suggesting the ability to theorize</li> </ul>
B+ B B-	3.3 3.0 2.7	Good	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Adequate content with firm grasp of the material that informs the audience on a subject matter</li> <li>- Reasonable organization, balanced structure and composition</li> <li>- Good verbal communication: comprehensible pronunciation, fluent expression and diction, fair time-management</li> </ul>
C+	2.3	Adequate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Adequate content with comprehensive grasp of the material</li> </ul>

C C-	2.0 1.7		demonstrating basic knowledge of the subject matter – Fair organization, weak structure and composition – Fair presentation skills: acceptable pronunciation, expression and diction, fair time-management
D	1.0	Marginal	– Weak content, loose grasp of the general ideas with some knowledge of the subject matter – Poor organization, structure and composition – Poor presentation skills: marginal pronunciation, expression and diction, poor time-management
F	0.0	Failure	– Inadequate content, fail to identify the general ideas with knowledge of the subject matter – No organization, structure or/and composition – Poor presentation skills: marginal pronunciation, expression and diction, minimal time-management

**Note: All A+/A/A- grade assignment should comply with the highest performance of Discovery-oriented learning.**

#### **D. Logbook/ Journal**

The evidence of ‘discovery’ lies in the students’ demonstrated ability to address and approach problems in multiple perspectives, and to provide illuminating documentation of the research or problem-solving process.

Letter Grade	Grade Point	Grade Definitions	Description
A+ A A-	4.3 4.0 3.7	Excellent	– Organization bears conceptual insight – Content carries illuminating details and reflects self-directed search beyond required coverage – Communication of distinct authorship and personality – Exceptional ability to address in details the conditions and limitations in the journal process – Self-reflexive about the process and methodology of research and the impact of circumstantial factors – Evidence of wide-range ideation and brainstorming; notes, drawing, developmental sketches are included
B+ B B-	3.3 3.0 2.7	Good	– Reasonable organization; Informative content with details – Identifies the subject, strong ability to address the conditions and limitations related – Include adequate notes and possible ideas of research done to formulate solutions – Evidence of ideation and brainstorming; Notes, drawing, developmental sketches are included – Account of how the solution is built, demonstrate ability to analysis and critique
C+ C C-	2.3 2.0 1.7	Adequate	– Reasonable organization; Adequate content – Adequate coverage – Some evidence of ideation and brainstorming; – Sufficient documentation of research process and/or presentation of solution
D	1.0	Marginal	– Less than 50% of required coverage – Inadequate organization and content – Include little notes of research done to formulate solutions or documentation – Inadequate evidence of ideation and brainstorming; – Inadequate presentation of the solution
F	0.0	Fail	– No submission; OR – Minimal coverage of what is required – Marginal ability in documentation – No evidence of ideation and brainstorming;

## Part III

### Keyword Syllabus:

Social anthropology (purposes, politics, problems); anthropology and cultural studies; dialectical materialism; ethno-methodologies; objects and things; the open-ended quality of research, ethnography and history, visual ethnography and art-making, archive, collecting;

Michel Foucault's notions of archaeology and genealogy; Irving Goffman's frame analysis,

Representing Others in Film; functions of visual ethnography; visuals in ethnography; interdisciplinary approach to the visuals in ethnography; distinctions between ethnographic film and anthropological film; historical development in visual anthropology; limitations and benefits of using photography and video in anthropological research; visual ethnography as cultural intervention; visual anthropology: the case of Maya Deren; Direct Cinema; visual ethnography and avant-garde cinema; creating subjective voices; ethics in ethnographic film

Postmodern narratives; performativity; phenomenology; experimental ethnography; auto-ethnography; theories of photography; documents and documenting; interventionist strategies

### Recommended Reading:

Text(s):

#### [key text & resources]

Aldridge, Michael 1995: "Scholarly Practice – Ethnographic Film and Anthropology; Beyond Ethnographic Film: Hypermedia and Scholarship," in *Visual Anthropology* vol. 7 (3). 233-5.

Emerson, R.M.; R.I. Fretz and L.L. Shaw, 2001: "Participant Observation and Fieldnotes," in Paul Atkinson (eds. et al), *Handbook of Ethnography*. Sage, London.

Pink, Sarah. *Visual Ethnography*.

Roberts, John 2006: *Philosophizing the Everyday: revolutionary praxis and the fate of cultural theory*. Pluto Press, Ann Arbor.

*Visual Anthropology Review* (a journal of the Society for Visual Anthropology; an excellent resource showing how anthropologists use videography and photography as a research method).

Web resources for Visual Anthropology: a UR list:

<http://www.usc.edu/dept/elab/urlist/index.html>

UR-list 7: audio visual collections: <http://www.usc.edu/dept/elab/urlist/ur07.htm>

UR-list 5: visual ethnographies: <http://www.usc.edu/dept/elab/urlist/ur05.htm>

Library of Congress: early motion pictures on the web, 1897-1916:

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/browse/ListSome.php?format=Motion+Picture>

### **[basic reference on visual ethnography and visual anthropology]**

- Biella, Peter 1994: *Codifications of Ethnography: Linear and Non-linear*. University of Southern California.
- Collier, John 1986: *Visual Anthropology: photography as a research method*, in John Collier, Jr., and Malcolm Collier (ed.) Revised and expanded edition. University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque.??? Essay or book?????
- Crawford, Peter Ian and David Turton (eds.) 1992: *Film as Ethnography*. Manchester University Press, New York.
- Jarvie, I.C. (1983). "Problem of Ethnographic Real." *Current Anthropology* 24: 313-25.
- MacDougall, David. (1992). "Photo Hierarchicus: Signs and Mirrors in Indian Photography." *Visual Anthropology*, vol. 5, pp. 103-129.
- Marshall, John. (1992). "At the Other End of the Camera." *Visual Anthropology*, Vol. 5, pp. 167-173.
- Martin, R. (1997). "Looking and reflecting: Returning the gaze, re-enacting memories and imagining the future through phototherapy." In S. Hogan (ed.), *Feminist approaches to art therapy*. London, Routledge.
- Rose, Gillian 2001: *Visual Methodologies: an introduction to the interpretation of visual materials*. Sage publications, London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi.
- West, W. Gordon 1996: "Photo-documentary and Visual Ethnography in a Postmodern Digital World: From Positivist Empiricist Pomposity towards a Critique of Photoelectric Representation" (November 30), available on-line at <http://webhome.idirect.com/~gordwest/minweb/gwtexts/thdcph5.htm>

### **[expanded modes of ethnomethodologies and case examples]**

- Adrian, Bonnie 2003: *Framing the Bride: globalizing beauty and romance in Taiwan's bridal industry*. University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London.
- Bach, Hedy 1998: *A Visual Narrative Concerning Curriculum, Girls, Photography, Etc.* (Dissertation)
- Ofield, Simon 2005: "Cruising the Archive," in *Journal of Visual Culture* vol. 4(3). 351-64. On-line version available at: <http://vcu.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/4/3/351>
- Spina, S.U. 1995: "Worlds together... Words apart: bridging cognition and communication for second-language learners through authentic arts-based curriculum," in *Language, Culture, and Curriculum* 8(3). 231-47.
- Walker, Ian ????: *City Gorged with Dreams: surrealism and documentary photography in inter-war Paris...*

### **[Documentary films, ethnographic films and extended forms]**

- Barsam, Richard M. 1986: "American Direct Cinema: the Re-presentation of Reality," in *Persistence of Vision* 3/4. 132-56.
- Bruzzi, Stella 2000: *New Documentary: a Critical Introduction*. Routledge, London and New York.
- Corner, John 2002: "Performing the Real: Documentary Diversions," in *Television & New Media* 3. 255-68. On-line version available at: <http://tvn.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/3/3/255>
- Deren, Maya 1960: "Cinematography: the Creative Use of Reality," in *Daedalus* winter. 150-67.
- Morin, Richard P. 1994: *Anthropologist's Award-winning Film Chronicles Indian*



*Village Life*. CHECK.

**[on objects, things, and new perspectives in critical theory]**

Collins, Douglas 2002-3: "The Great Effects of Small Things: Insignificance with Immanence in Critical Theory," in *Anthropoetics* 8, no. 2 (fall 2002 / winter 2003) at <http://www.anthropoetics.ucla.edu/ap0802/collins.htm> (read August 3, 2007).

Cummings, Neil (ed.) 1993: *Reading Things* (Sight Works, volume 3). Chance Books, London.

\_\_\_\_\_ and Marysia Lewandowska 2000: *The Value of Things*. Birkhäuser, Switzerland; August Media, London.

Latour, Bruno 1997: *From Real Politics to Politics of Things.....*

Macdonald, Cynthia 2005: *Varieties of Things: foundations of contemporary metaphysics*. Blackwell Publishing, Malden, Oxford, Carlton.

Plantinga, Carl (1987). "Defining Documentary: Fiction, Non-fiction, and Projected Worlds." *Persistence of Vision* 5: 44-54.

Renov, Michael, ed. (1993). *Theorizing Documentar*. New York, London: Routledge.

Sapir, J. David. (1994). On Fixing Ethnographic Shadows. *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 21, no. 4, pp. 867-884.

Schwartz, Dona. Visual ethnography: Using photography in qualitative research. *Qualitative Sociology*, 12(2), Summer 1989.

**[theoretical thinking on everyday landscape]**

Fenton, Laura 2005: "Citizenship in Private Space," in *Space and Culture* 8. 180-92.

Online version available at: <http://sac.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/8/2/180>

Edensor, Tim 2003: "Defamiliarizing the Mundane Roadscape," in *Space and Culture* 6. 151-68. On-line version available at:

<http://sac.sagepub.com/cgi/content/abstract/6/2/151>

**[on ethnography & art-making]**

Aliaga, Juan Vicente; Maria de Corral; and Jose Miguel G. Cortes (eds.) 2003: *Micropolíticas: arte y cotidianidad 2001-1968* [Art and everyday life 2001-1968]; a book that accompanies the exhibition "Micropolitics, Art and Everyday Life (2001-1968)," organized by the Espai d' Art Contemporani de Castello, held from 31st January to 21st September 2003, Spain.

Le Feuvre, Lisa; and Akram Zaatari (eds.) 2004: *Hashem El Madani: Studio Practices*; published to coincide with the exhibition "Hashem El Madani," at the Photographers' Gallery, October 14 to November 28, 2004. Arab Image Foundation, Beirut; Mind the Gap, Beirut; and the Photographers' Gallery, London.

Ngan, Irene; and Eliza Lai (eds.) 2004: *Mapping Identities: the art and curating of Oscar Ho*; a catalogue to accompany the exhibition "Mapping Identities: the Art and Curating of Oscar Ho," the 4th of the "Hong Kong Artists in the 1980s" series, exhibited at and organized for the Para/Site Art Space, November 5 to December 5, 2004, Hong Kong

**Case Studies:**

- (History of documentary) Maya Deren, Jean Rouch, Chris Marker, Fredrick Wiseman, Trinh Minh-ha, Yvonne Rainer etc.
- Wendy Ewald
- Jo Spence

- Vito Hannibal Acconci
- Abigail Child(?) / found footage work
- Zoe Leonard
- Tracey Emin
- Guatemala project + Yunnan project
- “Atlas Group” and Walid Raad (Beirut)
- Hashen El Madani Studio Practices
- Sophie Calle
- Norman Klein: *Bleeding Through* (history of Los Angeles)