



Ethnographic Documentary Production

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Introduction

The term “documentary production” within anthropology characterizes the making and circulation of ethnographic research and scholarship which includes film and video as the primary medium of storytelling and communicating cultural knowledge. These categories evolve frequently and what constitutes a film as “ethnographic” cinema is a topic of lengthy ongoing debates. In his *Oxford Bibliographies* in Anthropology entry “Ethnographic Film,” Matthew Durlington provides an overview of some of these debates in attempting to narrow down theoretical frameworks and parameters of filmic ethnography. Ginsburg’s 1998 essay “Institutionalizing the Unruly: Charting a Future for Visual Anthropology” (cited under Foundations) charts the lineage of visual anthropology on the development of the subfield as “born of a union between anthropology and documentary film” (p. 173). From its earliest application within ethnographic research, some scholars have approached filmmaking as a methodological and analytical tool that privileges scientific rigor while others regard it primarily as a medium for storytelling and scholarly output. Early adopters of using film within anthropological research, including Mead and Bateson in their 1977 article “On the Use of Camera in Anthropology” (cited under Foundations), have openly quibbled about the role of the camera and the filmmaker in capturing culture on film. These disagreements have been useful in broadening the boundaries of ethnographic cinema, inspiring filmmakers to experiment with different ways of making meaning, as it has been customary from the genre’s inception led by pioneering figures like Jean Rouch, Robert Gardner, and Trinh T. Minh-ha. For a threshold for what constitutes “ethnographic film and media productions,” we can turn to Jean Rouch, who in his essay “The Camera and Man” (cited under Foundations) insists that ethnographic filmmakers must apply the same anthropological rigor—“spend a long time in the field before beginning to shoot (at least a year),” and thereby possessing an intimate understanding of the communities among whom they work while mastering essential “film and sound recording skills” (p. 40). Building on insights offered by Rouch and by drawing on scholarship from documentary and media studies, the goal of this entry is to outline the fundamentals of non-fiction filmmaking geared toward anthropologists who are already trained in ethnographic research. This entry also insists upon a more inclusive definition of ethnographic cinema, one that does not rely on the filmmaker’s academic pedigree as the primary criteria for inclusion into what has historically been a rather insular enterprise. Instead, a section of this entry is devoted to highlighting voices and perspectives from historically marginalized communities—queer, feminist, people of color, immigrants, indigenous filmmakers, who have been sidelined within the discipline of anthropology with its vestiges of colonialism. Another section of this entry highlights the need to decenter the hegemony of North American and European gaze when telling cross-cultural stories by focusing on transnational ethnographic and documentary production, specifically from countries in the Global South.

Foundations

Documentary cinema is a cinematic genre that broadly includes “non-fiction” films, and ethnographic cinema makes up a subgenre within that broader non-fiction genre. In their introductory texts on the subject, Nichols 2001, Renov 2004, and Aufderheide 2007 offer an overview of documentary cinema, categorizing ethnographic films as a subgenre. All ethnographic films can be classified as documentaries whereas, as Ruby 2000 and others have insisted, the criteria for documentaries to be classified as “ethnographic” or “anthropologically significant” are more nuanced and frequently contested (Durlington and Ruby 2011, Trinh 1990). Jackson 2014 insists on a more inclusive approach to evaluating ethnographic film and media for its contribution to anthropological theory and knowledge production. Additional taxonomies of anthropological documentaries can also include films that are produced as a collaboration between anthropologists and filmmakers, like *The Yanomamö Series*, and/or documentaries prominently featuring the works of established anthropologists, for instance, Sam Pollard’s *Zora Neale Hurston: Jump at the Sun* (cited under Documentaries Featuring Anthropologists), José Padilha’s *Secrets of the Tribe* (cited under Documentaries Featuring Anthropologists), Brett Morgen’s *Jane* (cited under Documentaries Featuring Anthropologists) and Fabrizio

Terranova's *Donna Haraway: Story telling for Earthly Survival* (cited under Documentaries Featuring Anthropologists), and/or films that are relevant to the contemporary cultural debates on race, gender, sexuality, and social justice in anthropology including Marlon Riggs's *Tongues Untied* (cited under Performative and Reflexive Films), Jennie Livingston's *Paris is Burning* (cited under Portraits of Community) and Bing Lu's *Minding the Gap* (cited under Made for Public Television). While most films that are screened at the major anthropological film festival each year (like the Margaret Mead Film Festival and the Society for Visual Anthropology Film and Media Festival) or distributed by educational distributors specializing in the Anthropological programming (like Documentary Educational Resources, cited under List of Major Distributors of Documentary and Ethnographic Film) tend to be ethnographic in nature, films that are not self-consciously ethnographic are also considered and are often included within these program or databases. In recent years, spaces for showcasing ethnographic film and media have become more inclusive, moving away from the kind of boundary-policing of the 1990s and the 2000s. Documentary film, as a genre as well as medium for storytelling, has much to offer anthropology, and given the ubiquity of media and media-based communications technologies in our interlocutors' lives, it would behoove anthropologists to learn basic documentary production skills including how to operate a camera and an audio-recorder.

Aufderheide, Patricia. 2007. *Documentary film: A very short introduction*. New York: Oxford Univ. Press.

A short and concise introduction to documentary film with useful working definitions and overview of some of the subcategories included within the genre.

Durington, Matthew, and Jay Ruby. 2011. Ethnographic film. In *Made to be seen: Perspectives on the history of visual anthropology*. Edited by Marcus Banks and Jay Ruby, 190–208. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press.

Durington and Ruby offer a concise history of ethnographic film; where and how it started, who were its early practitioners, and how the subgenre has grown and evolved over the last five decades. They also elaborate on the establishment of visual anthropology as a subfield motivated by visual inquiry, rounding out the edited volume that includes other forms of visual engagements in anthropological research alongside ethnographic film.

Ginsburg, Faye. 1998. Institutionalizing the unruly: Charting a future for visual anthropology. *Ethnos* 63.2:173–201.

Authored by one of the pioneering figures in visual anthropology, this essay explores the history of the subfield along with linkages between theory and practice, and how ethnographic film engages with the world outside of the academy. Ginsburg also chronicles the marginalization of visual anthropology within sociocultural anthropology and documentary film as an academic subfield that has struggled to gain legitimacy.

Jackson, John, Jr. 2014. Theorizing production/producing theory (or, why filmmaking really could count as scholarship). *Cultural Studies* 28.4:531–544.

In this important essay, Jackson analyzes established classifications of ethnographic “theory” and “practice” as it is conventionally applied to film and new media productions, making an assertive case for reworking of disciplinary boundaries and definitions to be more inclusive and afford more legitimacy to extra-textual and multimodal forms of scholarship.

Mead, Margaret, and Gregory Bateson. 1977. On the use of camera in anthropology. *Studies in Visual Communication* 4.2:78–80.

An energetic exchange between Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson on the placement of the camera. Mead prefers the device to be affixed to a tripod and placed in a corner like a telescope looking in, whereas Bateson advocates for a more aesthetically-driven handheld approach to form a narrative out of only the most interesting moments captured by the camera. Their differing views elucidate a long-standing bifurcation within anthropology on the utility of film as either a scientific rigorous research method or an artform used for storytelling.

Nichols, Bill. 2001. *Introduction to documentary*. Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press.

Focusing largely on what would be considered as unconventional documentaries that do not fit seamlessly in the documentary film canon, Nichols offers an expansive and more inclusive definition of non-fiction film. Moving beyond fixating on the documentary form, Nichols unpacks issues related to power, ethics, and politics of representation.

Renov, Michael. 2004. *The subject of documentary*. Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press.

A collection of essays devoted to exploring the topic of cultural representation along with other historical and theoretical frameworks that shaped documentary cinema with a particular focus on questions related to subjectivity, intimacy, and autobiography. The framework of “domestic ethnography” encourages us to rethink the notion of the “other” in ethnographic depictions.

Rouch, Jean. 1974. *The camera and man*. *Studies in Visual Communication* 1.1:37–44.

In this seminal essay, Rouch discusses his approach to filmmaking, and how Vertov’s ciné-eye newsreel along with Flaherty’s participatory camera approach influenced cinema-vérité. Rouch also lays out his fundamentals for ethnographic filmmaking: long-term fieldwork, mastering the basics of camera and sound-recording, avoiding the reliance on music to create dramatic tension, presenting the full rough cut (“from head to tail”) to people who were filmed, and above all, making films accessible for the “largest viewing public” (p. 43).

Ruby, Jay. 2000. *Picturing culture: Explorations of film and anthropology*. Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press.

A distillation of nearly thirty years of writings on visual anthropology and ethnographic film by one of the field’s leading historians. Essays engage in important conversations about representation, ethics and reflexivity that has come to define ethnographic film as a distinct genre.

Trinh, T. Minh-ha. 1990. *Documentary is/not a name*. *October* 52 (Spring): 76–98.

Trinh’s seminal essay offers a forceful critique of non-fiction films as a genre, specifically how knowledge in the form of reality that documentary films purports to present is taken for granted. Calling attention to our basic assumption about what constitutes a “documentary,” Trinh cautions against reproducing preexisting colonial and masculinist hierarchies of knowledge production.

Style and Form

An entire body of literature has emerged over the last decade outlining visual research methods in anthropology and sociology, devoted to thinking about how to use film and video as a methodological tool for research with the goal of supporting written ethnographic analysis. Output of such efforts (the videos produced in the process) would not necessarily be classified as “ethnographic documentaries.” Documentary production within anthropology more frequently serves as a mode for ethnographic storytelling and not a research methodology whose ultimate goal is visual discourse analysis. While different ethnographic filmmakers have taken different approaches to when and how they film their interlocutors, as Vannini 2015 notes in an essay on the various styles of ethnographic filmmaking, the ultimate goal of documentary is to transport the audiences into their world through visual storytelling. In this way, ethnographic and documentary filmmakers are more akin to artists using the medium to convey some greater truths about society and the human condition, as Nisbet and Aufderheide 2009 insist in their essay, and less like social scientists for whom filming is a way of documenting and making sense of the literal truth as it unfolds in front of the camera. Keeping this distinction in mind, there are several different stylistic choices that documentary filmmakers can make in how best to tell the stories they want to tell and how to engage the audiences they want to engage. Thinking through these conceptual choices before the filming commences is incredibly useful in making the appropriate decisions along the way, all throughout preproduction, production, and post-production, that will ensure a successful outcome. For a novice filmmaker, planning for a film project on such an abstract level can be daunting. Having a basic grasp of some of the more popular and previously established styles and forms of ethnographic film provide a roadmap for one’s own project. Documentary films produced to be broadcast on television such as *Ethnic Notions* (cited under Made for Public Television), *Off and Running* (cited under Made for Public Television) and *Roots of Love* (cited under Made for Public Television), often employ established styles and norms of storytelling that includes a linear narrative structure, carefully framed shots, and evenly paced sequences. Performative and reflexive films including *Black is. . . Black Ain’t* (cited under Performative and Reflexive Films), *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* and *Milind Soman Made Me Gay* (cited under Performative and

Reflexive Films) subverts that conventional broadcast style by using performance, repetition, re-enactments, and layering of images, text, and sound in unexpected ways to achieve a certain affective quality. Other approaches pioneered by ethnographer and filmmakers like Sol Worth, John Adir, Jean Rouch, and Sarah Elder (Elder 1995) include participatory or collaborative filmmaking such as *Navajo Film Themselves* (cited under Collaborative and Participatory Films), *Jaguar* (cited under Collaborative and Participatory Films), and *Drums of Winter* (cited under Collaborative and Participatory Films). Nakamura 2013 and MacDonald 2013 highlight recent trends and popularity of observational and sensorial films starting with *Forest of Bliss* (cited under Observational and Sensorial Films) and later *Sweetgrass* (cited under Observational and Sensorial Films). As the landscape of media production evolves with emergence of new technologies, marking a shift from “visual” to “multimodal,” Aston and Gaudenzi 2012, O’Flynn 2012, and Collins, et al. 2017 chronicle a rapidly expanding genre of interactive documentaries or i-docs and 360 Virtual Reality films that require active participation and engagement by audience members. Some notable examples of these include *Highrise* (cited under Interactive Documentaries and VR 360 Films), *The Maribor Uprisings* (cited under Interactive Documentaries and VR 360 Films), and *Traveling While Black* (cited under Interactive Documentaries and VR 360 Films).

Aston, Judith, and Sandra Gaudenzi. 2012. Interactive documentary: Setting the field. *Studies in Documentary Film* 6.2:125–139.

This article surveys the rapidly evolving sub-genre of interactive documentaries or i-docs, carefully considering how audience involvement and the choices they make force us to re-think conventional notions of what a non-fiction film is or can be.

Collins, Samuel, Matthew Durlington, and Harjant Gill. 2017. Multimodality: An invitation. *American Anthropologist* 119.1:142–153.

This introductory essay offers a framework for thinking and theorizing about the future of ethnographic media in an era of technological engagement and advancement where traditional feature-length documentary films shown in 2D are increasingly giving way to more interactive, 3-dimensional, immersive experiences.

Elder, Sarah. 1995. Collaborative filmmaking: An open space for making meaning, a moral ground for ethnographic film. *Visual Anthropology Review* 11.2: 94–101.

In this essay exploring the making of her seminal ethnography *Drums of Winter*, Elder charts a roadmap for doing collaborative filmmaking, how the process requires the filmmakers to give up creative control over their films in exchange for an outcome that is more ethically accountable and respectful of her interlocutors, highlighting the stories they wish to share.

MacDonald, Scott. 2013. *American ethnographic film and personal documentary: The Cambridge turn*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press.

A comprehensive review of the works of Cambridge-based ethnographic filmmakers including Robert Gardner and Lucien Castaing-Taylor who developed Harvard’s Sensory Ethnography Lab, also credited for popularizing sensory films.

MacDougall, David. 1992. When less is less: The long take in documentary. *Film Quarterly* 49.2:36–46.

The popularity of documentary film on television ushered in a distinct style of journalistic filmmaking that relies on fast-paced editing and shorter takes. MacDougall advocates for a return to a more patient and contemplative style that privileges observation and discovery over information dissemination.

Nakamura, Karen. 2013. Making sense of sensory ethnography: The sensual and the multisensory. *American Anthropologist* 115.1:132–135.

A brief and concise review of the sensory ethnography trend in visual anthropology—what does it have to offer the audience and what are its limitations?

Nisbet, Matthew, and Patricia Aufderheide. 2009. Documentary film: Towards a research agenda on forms, functions and impacts. *Mass Communication and Society* 12.4: 450–456.

Nisbet and Aufderheide explore the role and impact of documentary film in American society as a form of cultural production; to inform mass audiences, to inspire political change, to present their version of the truth, and so on.

O'Flynn Siobhan. 2012. Documentary's metamorphic form: Webdoc, interactive, transmedia, participatory and beyond. *Studies in Documentary Film* 6.2:141–157.

An examination of how documentary film has evolved aesthetically from a conventional (linear) form to include transmedia, interactive documentaries, and other experiments made possible by the ubiquity of Web 2.0 technologies.

Rouch, Jean. 2003. *Ciné-ethnography*. Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press.

A collected volume of writings and interview with Jean Rouch that outline his approach to filmmaking, ethnography, and examination of his own films including *Chronicle of a Summer* that defined the once-obscure cinema-vérité style within non-fiction filmmaking, often taken for granted today.

Vannini, Phillip. 2015. Ethnographic film and video on hybrid television: Learning from the content, style and distribution of popular ethnographic documentaries. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 44.4:391–416.

Drawing on a wide range of ethnographic and documentary films, Vannini offers more updated classification of the different styles and how the form has evolved over the last decade. A helpful roadmap for novice filmmakers interested in exploring and experimenting with different approaches to making ethnographic films.

On Representation in Ethnographic Film

Theorizing on film within visual anthropology, Ginsburg 1994 and Pink 2007 note that concerns about representation are central to ethnographic filmmaking. Shameem 1993, Basu 2008, and others have argued that concerns about representation on screen cannot be fully resolved without addressing representation behind the camera. Meanwhile, the American ethnographic film canon remains largely dominated by films made by straight white men from elite educational institutions. Tiffany and Adams 1996 is a forceful feminist critique of films made by canonical filmmakers like Timothy Asch for misrepresenting the Yanomamö women and their experiences. Structural racial and gender inequities act as barriers to entry (in terms of schooling, funding, networking, etc.) keeping native, queer, disabled filmmakers, and filmmakers of color on the margins of the discipline (Kiener and Meiß 2001). Over the last three decades, as Nichols 1991 and Rony 1994 have noted, from these margins we have witnessed poignant critiques of documentary film and diverse perspectives on ethnographic storytelling that have redefined the genre. As Behar 1993 and others have observed, queer, feminist, diasporic filmmakers like Marlon Riggs, Pratibha Parmar, Richard Fung, and Francis Negrón-Muntaner have developed a uniquely different language of visual storytelling, informed by their own personal biographies and experiences of confronting racism, homophobia, sexism, and displacement in North America. Most notably, the feminist perspectives of Trinh 1992 and her contribution to reframing our understanding of ethnographic and documentary cinema, and to the field of visual anthropology overall, is invaluable in furthering this conversation. Ethnographic films made from queer, feminist, diasporic perspectives are frequently sidelined at film festivals and within disciplinary histories, deemed too “postmodern” or “experimental,” and therefore unworthy of being classified as canonical. More recently, disability rights activists and disabilities studies scholars have also started advocating for film made by (and not just about) people with disabilities. Documentary historians, instructors, festival curators, and financiers need to make more of a concerted effort to support content produced by underrepresented filmmakers if they are serious about addressing the glaring lack of diversity in the ethnographic perspectives and voices that are ultimately represented on screen and included within visual anthropology textbooks.

Basu, Paul. 2008. Reframing ethnographic film. In *Rethinking documentary: New perspectives and practices*. Edited by Thomas Austin and Wilma de Jong, 99–106. Maidenhead, UK: Open Univ. Press.

Incorporating critiques of documentary filmmakers who are not necessarily part of the ethnographic film canon, this article further elaborates on ongoing issues of how the “other” is represented in ethnographic cinema, and imagines what an alternative and more inclusive practice of ethnographic filmmaking might entail.

Behar, Ruth. 1993. Expanding the boundaries of anthropology: The cultural criticism of Gloria Anzaldúa and Marlon Riggs. *Visual Anthropology Review* 9.2:83–91.

In this essay, Behar makes a convincing argument for the inclusion of queer, feminist, and people-of-color voices of documentary filmmakers like Marlon Riggs and writers like Gloria Anzaldúa into the anthropological canon, a space that remains fairly homogeneous, male-dominated, and white.

Ginsburg, Faye. 1994. Culture/media: A (mild) polemic. *Anthropology Today* 10.2:5–15.

In this essay Ginsburg offers a detailed survey of different trends, theoretical perspectives, questions and concerns regarding representation in the early days of ethnographic filmmaking and visual anthropology.

Kiener, Wilma, and Eva Meiß. 2001. Women pioneers: An interview with four founding figures of ethnographic film. *Visual Anthropology Review* 17.1:60–67.

A transcript of an energetic exchange among four of the leading figures in ethnographic cinema (Patty Asch, Sarah Elder, Jean Lydall, and Judith MacDougall) on their perspectives on research, collaboration, filmmaking, and fieldwork.

Nichols, Bill. 1991. The ethnographer’s tale. *Visual Anthropology Review* 7.2:31–47.

A forceful critique of early ethnographic cinema, calling out the lack of representation of women/native/others, who appeared almost exclusively as the object of anthropological gaze. Nichols advocates for the inclusion of films made by native filmmakers making auto-ethnographic films that are often overlooked in documentary genre, lacking the conventional aesthetics and resources.

Pink, Sarah. 2007. Video in ethnographic representation. In *Doing visual anthropology*. By Sarah Pink, 140–154. London: SAGE.

This essay explores the variety of ways in which ethnographic videos can be used to produce particular ethnographic representations beyond traditional documentary, especially when working with found footage and other forms of medias, or in collaborative settings.

Rony, Fatimah. 1994. Victor Masayesva, Jr., and the politics of *Imagining Indians*. *Film Quarterly* 48.2:20–33.

A close analysis of the films and photography of Hopi ethnographer Victor Masayesva Jr. that actively disrupts the standards of ethnographic and documentary film, critiquing Euro-American understanding and framing of Native American culture. Rony makes a convincing case for *Imagining Indians* to be highlighted as an exemplar ethnographic cinema.

Shameem, Shaista. 1993. Feminist filmmaking as praxis: Problem and prospects. *Visual Anthropology Review* 9.1:133–138.

A Third World feminist framework for documentary filmmaking, essential to which is the kind of transformative rethinking of ethnographic and documentary film as a genre along with the need to address concerns about representation and subverting the colonial gaze.

Tiffany, Sharon, and Kathleen Adams. 1996. Housewives of the forest: Representation in ethnographic film. *Women's Studies* 25.2:169–188.

A feminist analysis and critique of Napoleon Chagnon and Timothy Asch's *The Yanomamö Series*, chronicling how the filmmakers misrepresent women as passive housewives "without the trappings of civilization," overlooking their labor and erasing their role in Yanomamö society.

Trinh, T. Minh-ha. 1992. *Framer framed*. New York: Routledge.

A collection of film scripts and essays on documentary cinema by one of the most innovative filmmakers and scholars who routinely forces us to re-examine all that we take for granted when we conceptualize documentary cinema.

Ethics of Documentary Filmmaking

Ethics in documentary and ethnographic filmmaking is an area of ongoing concern given the racial, gender, and other disparities between who is often the subject of these films and who are its authors. As Perry and Marion 2010 note, whereas the discipline of anthropology is far more attuned and has invested a lot more effort in speaking to these concerns around representation and ethics in non-fiction filmmaking, others have chronicled how the genre of documentary film remains dogged by allegations of voyeurism, neocolonialism, and exploitation of underprivileged and marginalized communities (Cameron 2002, Pryluck 1976). Citing popular documentaries filmed in Brazil and India as examples of this, Wood 2014 and Gill 2015 show how routinely American and European documentary filmmakers position themselves as savior-figures whose films claim to liberate the natives from their oppressive environments. Some ethnographic filmmakers have effectively turned their cameras onto the voyeurs. Dennis O'Rourke's *Cannibal Tours* and Ilja Kok and Willem Timmers's *Framing the Other* focus on Western tourists traveling to see the natives in their "habitat," documenting the form of gross exploitation and violation of human dignity such touristic encounters entail. Pegi Vail's documentary *Gringo Trails* chronicles other forms of cultural voyeurism, economic exploitation, and environmental degradation involved in adventure tourism of the type first pioneered by colonial explorers responsible for founding the documentary genre. Nakamura 2008 calls attention to the inherent exploitation in giving cameras to our interlocutors, and thereby asking them to undertake the labor of filmmaking without adequate compensation. A genuine concern for ethics in non-fiction film should be rooted in a comprehensive understanding of the hierarchies and operations of power that are at play before, during, and after film takes place. Nichols 2016 implores documentary filmmakers to address these power imbalances by first acknowledging them within their films, and then working to circumvent it, thereby as Coffman 2009 has argued, allowing the subject of their documentaries to have more ownership and authorship over how they are represented on screen.

Cameron, Ardis. 2002. When strangers bring cameras: The poetics and politics of othered places by Ardis Cameron. *American Quarterly* 53.3411–435.

Through a careful examination of power dynamics and issues of representation in Fredrick Wiseman's *Belfast, Maine* and Elizabeth Barret's *Stranger with a Camera*, this essay further elaborates on the complexities and ethics of filming in underrepresented, working-class communities whose members do not have the power and resources to author their own narratives.

Coffman, Elizabeth. 2009. Documentary and collaboration: Placing the camera in the community. *Journal of Film and Video* 61.1:62–78.

Based on case studies and challenges confronting four different filmmakers, two from commercial background and two from academic background, this article explores the nuances of community-based collaborative filmmaking, interrogating roles and responsibilities filmmakers have to their interlocutors.

Gill, Harjant. 2015. Why *India's Daughter* does a disservice to both men and women. *Huffington Post* (3 December).

A forceful rebuke of Leslee Udwin's BBC documentary *India's Daughter*, a fetishistic retelling of a brutal gang-rape and murder of a young woman in the India's capital. The film glorifies the perpetrators of the heinous crime, presenting sexual violence as a "cultural problem" or a compulsion afflicting Indian men. It leaves audience with a rather myopic understanding of violence against women in India, while ignoring the underlying issues of patriarchal and caste supremacy and violence, of which gang rape is often one of the many symptoms. The essay also calls out Udwin for engaging in unethical behavior to gain access to her subjects.

Kok, Ilja, and Willem Timmers, dirs. 2011. *Framing the Other*. DER.

Exploring the complicated relationship between European tourists and indigenous Mursi tribes of Ethiopia, the film follows a Dutch tourist seeking a deeper connection with the natives by offering them small sums of money and gifts in exchange for photographing them.

Nakamura, Karen. 2008. A case against giving informants cameras and coming back weeks later. *Anthropology News* 49.2: 20.

Nakamura cautions against the inherent exploitative nature of expecting participants to record their own stories as part of community-based collaborative filmmaking projects without considering a fair compensation and recognition of authorship for interlocutors who share their stories, and who often undertake the bulk of the labor in such arrangements.

Nichols, Bill. 2016. *Speaking truths with films: Evidence, ethics and politics in documentary*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press.

Compilation of eighteen essays by one of the leading theorists in the field of documentary film, most are meditations on the role documentary films play in our society and explore the ethical obligations and political implications of making documentary films.

O'Rourke, Dennis, dir. 1998. *Cannibal tours*. CameraWork.

A quasi-documentary film that follows a group of affluent Europeans and American tourists as they travel along the Sepik River in Papua New Guinea hoping to get a glimpse into how the natives live.

Perry, Sara, and Jonathan Marion. 2010. State of ethics in visual anthropology. *Visual Anthropology Review* 26.2: 96–104.

This essay provides a useful overview of recent debates and conversations taking place within the subfield of visual anthropology concerning ethics and representation.

Pryluck, Calvin. 1976. Ultimately we are all outsiders: The ethics of documentary filming. *Journal of the University Film Association* 28.1: 21–29.

An early discussion about the ethics of documentary filmmaking that sets the stage for many subsequent conversations and debates to follow.

Wood, Naomi. 2014. A Cosmética da Fome: The staging of poverty in recent arts-focused documentary film. In *Brazil in twenty-first century popular media*. Edited by Naomi Pueo Wood. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

This essay interrogates and critiques the overtly romanticized representations of poverty and *favela* life in Brazil within popular documentaries made by Western filmmakers including Beadie Finzi's *Only When I Dance* and Lucy Walker's Oscar-nominated *Waste Land*.

Vail, Pegi, dir. 2013. *Gringo trails*. Icarus Films.

An exposé of the increasingly-popular adventure-tourism culture and travel industry, and its troubling impact on local communities and ecosystems around the world.

Transnational Documentary Cinema

Even though technological innovations have made it easier for films produced in other parts of the world to enter transnational circulation, documentaries made by American or European filmmakers continue to receive major attention and recognition at international film festivals, on television, among distributors, and within articles written about the history of ethnographic cinema. Over the last three decades, widely celebrated and awarded films about cultures across the Global South seem to be authored largely by white American or European filmmakers, funded and distributed by Western media conglomerates. While many “non-Western” nations have rich local traditions of documentary and ethnographic film, filmmakers in the Global South tend to lack the resources and access to social networks that can catapult their films onto an international success. What does a truly transnational survey and catalogue of documentary and ethnographic cinema look like? As Chatterji 2015 as well as Basu and Banerjee 2018 have noted, countries like India have a documentary film tradition dating back to the 1970s. Indian documentary filmmakers like Anand Patwardhan and Paromita Vohra are among the few who have received international recognition for their critiques of institutional inequities, the role of religion in politics, as well as patriarchal structures of power that characterize how the nation-state governs and the kind of violence it enacts on to its citizenry. Other Indian filmmakers like Safina Uberoi and Rahul Roy have chronicled everyday intimacy among friends and family members, and the gradual transformation in cultural norms and gender relations by exploring individual biographies and family histories across multiple generations. Many of these films are funded and produced for broadcast on Indian television, and as Gill 2017 explains, the filmmakers must negotiate the contentious terrain of cultural regulation and state-sponsored censorship for their films to be shown publicly. Other scholars have also noted a burgeoning documentary film scene in countries like Brazil, Pakistan, China, South Korea, South Africa, and countries across Latin America (Berry 2003, Imran 2016, Maingard 1995, Traverso and Wilson 2014, Yu 2018, Waugh 1998), especially as production becomes more affordable and online streaming makes it easier to access different platforms for circulation. However, a concerted effort on the part of documentary historians, academics, film-festival programmers, and funding agencies is still necessary to overcome the remaining vestiges of colonialism in documentary cinema and level the playing field in the interest of making documentary film a truly transnational enterprise for cross-cultural storytelling.

Basu, Kasturi, and Dwaipayan Banerjee, eds. 2018. *Toward people's cinema: Independent documentary and its audience in India. Gurgaon, India: Three Collective.*

This edited volume features a collection of essays from some of the leading figures (practitioners and theorists) in documentary cinema in India who consider the role non-fiction film plays in democratic representation and progressive transformation within a postcolonial national imagination.

Berry, Chris. 2003. The documentary production process as a counter-public: Notes on an inter-Asian mode and the example of Kim Dong-Won. *Inter-Asian Cultural Studies* 4.1: 139–144.

Focusing on independent non-fiction film productions in South Korea, particularly the films of Kim Dong-Won, this article offers a useful introduction to independent documentary film and video practice in this part of Asia.

Chatterji, Shoma. 2015. *Filming reality: The independent documentary movement in India.* New Delhi: SAGE.

Charting the emergence of the independent documentary film movement in India from 1970s onward, Chatterji offers an in-depth overview of how documentary and ethnographic film practice developed over the last three decades, reviewing films by Indian filmmakers working on shoestring budgets and limited venues for circulation and exhibition.

Gill, Harjant. 2017. Censorship and ethnographic film: Confronting state bureaucracies, cultural regulation and institutionalized homophobia in India. *Visual Anthropology Review* 33.1:62–73.

Narrating his own experiences of obtaining certification from the Indian Censor Board for his 2014 film *Mardistan/Macholand*, Gill's article examines how ethnographic media interplays with and is shaped by the nation-state and cultural apparatuses within which it circulates. Gill

also explores the implication of having ethnographic films subjected to state scrutiny so they can be shown within communities where they are filmed.

Ginsburg, Faye. 1995. The parallax effect: The impact of aboriginal media on ethnographic film. *Visual Anthropology Review* 11.2:64–76.

In this seminal essay on representation and authorship, Ginsburg explores the depiction of aboriginal culture on film and video, and the emergence of “indigenous media” as a genre which characterizes films and videos made by indigenous and minority communities themselves who are frequently the objects of study, rarely its authors.

Imran, Rahat. 2016. *Activist documentary film in Pakistan: The emergence of a cinema of accountability*. New York: Routledge.

One of the first comprehensive accounts of documentary film practice in Pakistan, focusing specifically on independent non-fiction activist filmmaking as a response to religious fundamentalism, extremism, and human rights violations.

Maingard, Jacqueline. 1995. Trends in South African documentary film and video: Questions of identity and subjectivity. *Journal of Southern African Studies* 21.4:657–667.

Explores the development of South African independent documentary film and video movement in response to apartheid from the late 1970s through the early 1990s.

Traverso, Antonio, and Kristi M. Wilson, eds. 2014. *Political documentary cinema in Latin America*. New York: Routledge.

A wide-ranging collection of essays analyzing documentary film traditions and practices across Central and South America including Argentina, Venezuela, Chile, Brazil, Cuba, Jamaica, and Mexico.

Waugh, Thomas. 1998. “Good clean Fung.” *Wide Angle* 20.2:164–175.

This essay explores the early works of transnational queer filmmaker Richard Fung, and how Fung’s biography as a Chinese immigrant who grew up in Trinidad and Tobago informs his transnational storytelling sensibilities, particularly in his documentary films *Dirty Laundry* and *My Mother’s Place*.

Yu, Kiki. 2018. *“My” self on camera: First person documentary practice in an individualizing China*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press.

Exploring first-person narrative documentaries produced in post-Mao China, this book examines the influence and the significance of independent filmmaking in informing contemporary Chinese identity and the notion of the individual as being separate from the citizen.

Film Production

As Barbash and Castaing-Taylor 1997 outlines in one of the first comprehensive handbooks on ethnographic film production, the term “production” broadly refers to the different stages that are involved in the making of a film. Film production as a process has changed significantly since Jean Rouch first theorized ethnographic filmmaking. Changes enabled by continuing advancements in digital technology and the increasing availability and affordability of lighter, more versatile cameras and mobile recording devices. As Hampe 1997, Jolliffe and Zinnes 2012, and Artis 2014 outline in their “how-to” guides for documentary filmmaking, a standard production crew generally consists of a cinematographer or a camera person, a sound recordist, an assistant director, and one or two production assistants. The camera person and the sound recordist are recruited based on their expertise and knowledge of the production equipment, whereas the assistant director

helps manage the logistics of production so the director can focus solely on the subject of the film. An effective director must also be an effective team-leader with a clear conception of the larger plan for production while trusting their production crew to execute their roles to the best of their abilities. When filming, directors are in charge of calling the shots and control the overall production. Yet they must also know when to relinquish control over the equipment to focus on the interviewee or the subject of the documentary. The primary job of directors is to place themselves in the shoes of their audiences when filming. While the production team is monitoring various technical details involved in filming, the director must be attuned to the emotional and affective tone of the story being told, and instinctively react to the interviewee's responses, knowing what else is needed in terms of content and footage. The repeated emphasis in Rose 2015 on the importance of recording good sound, especially during interviews, is worth underscoring as many novice directors end up privileging the visual over the audio, which can prove catastrophic later, in the edit room. To avoid such an outcome, having a skilled sound-recordist is essential to any production's success. When a production team is in-sync with each other and trust each other, production can be a truly collaborative, surprisingly rewarding, and joyful experience. The director must strive to cultivate this sense of trust and harmony among the crew members, meanwhile confidently executing their role as a team leader who is in a position of authority, and on whose shoulders the entire enterprise rests. As Bailenson 2018 notes, virtual reality filmmaking requires one to learn an entirely different language and approach for visual storytelling along with designing a production plan that is unlike most production plans for traditional documentaries. Similarly, as Pepe and Zarzynski 2012 detail, archaeological filmmaking also necessitates different production strategies.

Artis, Anthony. 2014. *Shut up and shoot documentary guide: A down and dirty DV production*. 2d ed. Burlington, MA: Focal Press.

A user-friendly "how-to" guide for novice filmmakers making documentaries on shoe-string budgets. Artis covers the basic of pre-production, production, and post-production with a special emphasis on sound recording with lots of helpful tips, reminders, and visual aids.

Bailenson, Jeremy. 2018. *Experience on demand: What virtual reality is, how it works, and what it can do*. New York: W. W. Norton.

An in-depth exploration of immersive virtual reality (VR) filmmaking, and the medium's application to journalism, non-fiction storytelling, popular entertainment, and everyday life. Based on research being carried out at Stanford's Virtual Human Interaction Lab.

Barbash, Ilisa, and Lucien Castaing-Taylor. 1997. *Cross-cultural filmmaking: A handbook for making documentary and ethnographic films and video*. Berkeley: Univ. of California Press.

One of the first practice-based "how-to" guides for ethnographic filmmakers, broken into three distinct sections covering the nuts and bolts of ethnographic filmmaking. Part 1, specifically the chapter "Documentary Styles," offers a useful taxonomy of non-fiction films and how these have evolved over time.

Hampe, Barry. 1997. *Making documentary films and videos: A practical guide to planning, filming, and editing documentaries*. New York: Holt Paperbacks.

A comprehensive how-to guide for making documentary films written specifically for beginners and novice filmmakers. Hampe draws on plenty of mainstream documentary film examples to illustrate his points. Reprint 2007.

Jolliffe, Genevieve, and Andrew Zinnes. 2012. *The documentary filmmaker's handbook*. 2d ed. New York: Continuum.

A beginner's guide to documentary filmmaking written in a user-friendly manner, with lots of helpful tips, suggestions, answers to frequently-asked questions, and other resources necessary to ensure success in production, post-production, and distribution.

Pepe, Peter, and Joseph Zarzynski. 2012. *Documentary filmmaking for archaeologists*. New York: Routledge.

A comprehensive how-to guide for making and distributing documentaries focused specifically on history and archaeology with the explicit purpose of promoting archaeological research and knowledge.

Rose, Jay. 2015. *Producing great sound for film and video: Expert tips from preproduction to final mix*. New York: Focal Press.

A detailed guide on how to plan for, record, and edit superb sound, perhaps the most crucial component of documentary filmmaking that is often overlooked by novice filmmakers. Includes recommendation for various sound-recording equipment and kits that suit small to big budget productions.

Vannini, Phillip, ed. 2020. *The Routledge international handbook of ethnographic film and video*. New York: Routledge.

The latest comprehensive volume exploring the theory, form, and production of ethnographic film and video comprised of thirty-one chapters written by leading figures in the field. This edited volume covers a wide range of topics including representation, ethics, interactive media, multimodal anthropology, drone and 360 videos, as well as how to produce and distribute ethnographic media.

Before and After Production

In addition to being an effective team leader, directors must also “think like editors” while production is underway, so to be consistently striving for a clearer sense of the overall narrative of their films as their plans change and evolve with each day of filming. As Robert Gardner tells Akos Ostor in an interview, Gardner and Ostor 2002, directors often have very little control over the circumstances in which they carry out filming, and must trust their intuition to guide them through the challenges they confront in the field. As Gill 2014 notes, meticulous levels of planning during the “pre-production” phase (before shooting begins) can ease this process, making production less hectic and more streamlined. The more time and attention invested in the pre-production phase of filmmaking will ensure smoother and less successful production experience. Along with writing treatments, storyboarding, coming up with shot-lists, pre-production entails planning each and every aspect of production, including divvying up all of the tasks associated with production and having contingencies in place. Decisions made during pre-production (in regards to recording format, filming style, etc.) will directly influence the editing and the post-production phase of filmmaking, as noted by Vannini 2017. Other related tasks ideally planned for during pre-production, such as getting personal, location, and artwork releases printed will directly impact the distribution and circulation prospects of the documentary. Whereas the “production” phase is inarguably the most important in overall process of documentary production, as this is when filming itself takes place, what happens before and after production equally determines the final outcome and the overall success of the documentary. Pre-production and post-production phases are significantly longer and consist of far more tedious hours at the desk (planning, reviewing, editing) than filming itself, which is full of excitement and discovery, albeit it only lasts for a few short weeks. During post-production, working side-by-side with an editor or an assistant editor can be immensely useful in identifying the ideal sequence and pacing for the documentary as the director undertakes the daunting task of assembling disparate shots, soundbites, and sequences into a coherent linear narrative. As Murch 2001 and Bricca 2018 explain, the job of an effective editor is to weave together different shots and interviews, filmed in different locations and at different times, into a seamless coherent narrative with an exciting beginning, an emotional arc, and a satisfying ending. However, editors cannot achieve this on their own, without direction and guidance from their directors. After the editing is completed, careful color correction and a final sound mix can allow the film to fully sparkle, making it aesthetically and acoustically a joy to experience. Fishman 2017 has written a helpful guide for finding and using open source or copyright-free music and artwork, a valuable resource for filmmakers working on shoestring budgets.

Bricca, Jacob. 2018. *Documentary editing: Principles and practices*. New York: Routledge.

Detailed strategies for every stage of documentary production that can ensure a smooth transition into editing and a successful post-production workflow. Also includes analysis of popular documentaries and the role editing and post-production plays in turning them into a commercial success.

Fishman, Stephen. 2017. *The public domain: How to find & use copyright-free writings, music, art & more*. 8th ed. Berkeley, CA: Nolo Press.

A how-to guide for finding and accessing copyright-free materials that can be used without paying licensing fees.

Gardner, Robert, and Akos Ostor. 2002. *Making forest of bliss: Intention, circumstances, and chance in nonfiction film*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Film Archive.

A candid conversation between Robert Gardner and his collaborator Akos Ostor about making of *Forest of Bliss*, an unconventional yet seminal film in the history of ethnographic cinema that reshaped the genre, stretching the perimeters of participant observation, visual and sensory storytelling, and non-fiction film.

Gill, Harjant. 2014. Before picking up the camera: My process to ethnographic film. *Anthropology Now* 6.1:72–80.

An overview of one anthropologist's approach to making compelling ethnographic films which entails detailed pre-interviews and spending lots of time understanding and imagining the overall narrative structure of the film before cameras begin rolling.

Murch, Walter. 2001. *In the blink of an eye: A perspective on film editing*. 2d ed. Beverley Hills, CA: Silman-James Press.

Exploring the fundamentals of film and video editing, Murch, a celebrated film editor, shares the principles of his craft and how to successfully edit a film together with seamless cuts, mastery of pacing, and careful control over each frame that makes up the film.

Vannini, Phillip. 2017. Low and slow: Notes on the production and distribution of a mobile video ethnography. *Mobilities* 12.1:155–166.

Based on his experience of making an independently produced short film for Canadian TV, Vannini offers practical and methodological lessons on “mobile” approach to filming ethnographic media, a more contemporary take on Jean Rouch's “direct cinema” method of following the participant and the action.

Distribution and Circulation

Unlike ethnographic books and articles which benefit from the existing infrastructure of promotion and distribution already established by publishers and academic presses, as Gill 2020 explains, the responsibility of promoting ethnographic and documentary films falls largely on the shoulders of the filmmakers. Margolin and Reiss 2017 and others have noted that documentary films are significantly more difficult to promote and distribute especially within academic venues because they are less profitable, and there are fewer distribution companies compared to the academic book publishing industry. O'Sullivan 2017 lays out the challenges confronting documentary distribution in a rapidly evolving technological landscape, from DVDs to Blu-Ray discs to instant-streaming. Therefore, it is necessary for filmmakers to play an active role in promoting their films, showing them at various academic and non-academic film festivals and thereby making their films more attractive to the handful of film distributors who are often inundated with many more submissions than they can realistically accept each year. Vallejo and Peirano 2017 provides us with a comprehensive survey and history of different anthropological film festivals including the Margaret Mead Film Festival, the Royal Anthropological Institute Film Festival, and the Society for Visual Anthropology Film and Media Festival, some of the most significant venues for showcasing ethnographic film and media. As a newer generation of ethnographers produce more and more content in the form of visual media (MacDougall 2001), these venues for showcasing their work struggle to include as many submissions as possible. As Sorensen 2012 observes, funding is often a perennial concern that requires creative approaches including crowd sourcing. Coming up with a thoughtful distribution plan and promotional strategy can significantly improve a film's circulation prospects. With the emergence of online streaming, many filmmakers have chosen to self-distribute their films. Karen Nakamura's films including *Bethel*, John Bishop's *In the Wilderness of a Troubled Genre* (cited under Documentaries Featuring Anthropologists), and Kerim Friedman and Shashwati Talukdar's 2011 *Please Don't Beat Me, Sir!* are a few such examples where filmmakers are able to retain full control over publicity, pricing, and circulation of their films. More often than not, anthropologists and ethnographic filmmakers shy away from sharing their scholarship and creative outputs with broader audiences. As a result, many excellent films are seen by very few people. Lamenting the lack of engagement by ethnographic filmmakers with non-academic audiences, Jean Rouch once warned: “If for reasons of science, or ideological shame, anthropological filmmakers insist on hiding behind their comfortable incognito, they will irrevocably castrate their films and doom them to an existence in archives, where they will be reserved only for specialists” (Rouch 1974, cited under

Foundations, p. 43). Rouch's apprehensions are still relevant today, reminding us that circulating and distributing one's film is just as important as producing it in the first place.

Friedman, Kerim, and Shashwati Talukdar, dirs. 2011. *Please don't beat me, Sir!*. Four Nine & Half Pictures.

Produced in collaboration with a regional theater troop in India, this film explores themes of everyday violence, police brutality, and caste and class inequality.

Gill, Harjant. 2019. De-gentrifying documentary and ethnographic cinemas: Displacement of community-based storytelling in San Francisco's Mission District *Pluralities* 1.1: 1–27.

Personal essay examining the culture of community-based storytelling and the politics of representation in a city undergoing rapid gentrification and displacement of minority and working-class families. It elucidates some of the major challenges related to distributing and circulating community-based narratives after a community has been displaced.

Gill, Harjant. 2020. How to distribute your ethnographic film. In *The Routledge international handbook of ethnographic film and video*. Edited by Phillip Vannini, 281–292. New York: Routledge.

Helpful guidelines and best practices for improving the circulation prospects of ethnographic documentaries, including ways of making films more appealing to festival programmers, securing distribution via major educational distributors as well as exploring hybrid or alternative models for distributing media including film cooperatives and self-distribution.

MacDougall, David. 2001. Renewing ethnographic film: Is digital video changing the genre? *Anthropology Today* 17.3 (2001): 15–21.

In this article, MacDougall elaborates on how the shift from film to digital video format has changed the production and circulation of ethnographic film and media, making it more accessible and affordable.

Margolin, Susan, and Jon Reiss. 2017. Independent documentary distribution in turbulent times. *Documentary Magazine* (17 January).

Surveying the documentary distribution landscape at a time when traditional avenues for documentary circulation are being challenged and circumvented by innovative, social-media-savvy filmmakers and producers.

Nakamura, Karen, dir. 2007. *Bethel: Community and schizophrenia in Northern Japan*. Manic Productions & Amazon.

Self-distributed ethnographic film chronicling daily life in the Bethel House, an organization serving the needs of individuals with disabilities in a small fishing town on the northern island of Hokkaido, Japan.

O'Sullivan, Shane. 2017. The rise of the feature documentary – Fact or fiction? In *DVD, Blu-Ray and beyond: Navigating formats and platforms within media consumption*. Edited by Jonathan Wroot and Andy Willis. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan.

An analysis of key trends in mainstream documentary film distribution over the last two decades along with prediction for the future of a rapidly changing landscape influenced by instant streaming venues like Netflix, Vimeo, and YouTube.

Opper, Nicole. 2018. Toppling structures of inequality in the documentary field. *Documentary Magazine* (20 December).

Opper explores some of the hybrid and cooperative film distribution models popularized by New Day Films, allowing more minority filmmakers to access a genre with restrictive barriers to entry in terms of funding and distribution of documentary film.

Sorensen, Inge. 2012. Crowdsourcing and outsourcing: The impact of online funding and distribution on the documentary film industry in the UK. *Media, Culture & Society* 34.6:726–743.

At a time when government funding for the arts and documentary film dwindle across the world, this article examines how filmmakers turn to crowdsourcing platforms to independently fund and distribute their documentary films.

Vallejo, Aida, and Maria Paz Peirano, eds. 2017. *Film festivals and anthropology*. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholar Publishing.

A comprehensive history of major anthropology film festivals and exhibition venues for ethnographic films including the Margaret Mead Film Festival, the Royal Anthropological Institute Film Festival, and the Society for Visual Anthropology Film and Media Festival.

List of Major Distributors of Documentary and Ethnographic Film

Included below is a list of ten leading distributors of documentary and ethnographic film and media, most of whom specialize in educational distribution. Some of these companies expect filmmakers to be more involved in promoting and circulating their own films (New Day Films), while others already have an established infrastructure for outreach and publicity, having been around longer and operating with more resources and staff (Berkeley Media LLC, California Newsreel, Documentary Educational Resources). Several of these companies specialize in themes like land rights and environmental sustainability (Bullfrog Films, Inc), or human rights and social justice issues (Icarus Films, Good Docs), or films that showcase voices and perspectives of historically underrepresented groups such as Native and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) communities (Frameline Distribution, Vision Maker Media, Women Make Movies).

Berkeley Media LLC.

One of the major distributors of independently produced documentaries and educational media based out of Berkeley, CA.

Bullfrog Films, Inc.

Distributor of documentary and ethnographic films specializing in ecology, sustainability, land rights and social justice issues related to the environment.

California Newsreel.

Founded in 1968, one of the oldest documentaries and ethnographic film distributors focusing on social justice issues, based out of Northern California.

Documentary Educational Resources (DER).

Also founded in 1968, DER is the leading distributor of anthropological and ethnographic films and media specializing in educational distribution.

Frameline Distribution.

A San Francisco–based distribution company that is the leading distributor of LGBTQ-themed documentaries.

Good Docs.

A newcomer, largely women-led, documentary distribution company that specializes in human rights and social justice themed films.

Icarus Films.

Another leading distributor of documentaries specializing in educational distribution, as well as ethnographic and anthropologically relevant films.

New Day Films.

A cooperatively-run documentary and educational distribution company where filmmakers are actively involved in operations, new acquisitions, promotion, and publicity.

Vision Maker Media.

Working in partnership with public television and radio, Vision Maker Media distributes films produced by Native filmmakers with the primary goal of celebrating and sharing Native culture and telling stories about Native communities across North America.

Women Make Movies.

Started as a feminist collective in the 1970s, Women Make Movies (WMM) is the leading educational distributor of documentaries and films made by female-identified filmmakers specializing in themes related to gender equity and history of feminist movements.

Select Filmography

Included below is an annotated filmography of select films that exemplify the key ideas and themes discussed within this article. This select list of films is divided into eight broadly defined categories or popular styles of ethnographic and documentary cinema. By no means is this a comprehensive list of ethnographic films. Rather, these are suggested viewings that provide a useful companion to some of the readings, articles, and essays discussed in the sections above.

Collaborative and Participatory Films

Jean Rouch was one of the first filmmaker to pioneer the idea of shared or collaborative filmmaking, a process he referred to as *anthropologie partagee*, training his interlocuters in film production. Below are examples of films that are produced in collaboration with community-members, and films that involve an active participation of the filmmakers with their interlocuters in its making. The list includes classic ethnographies that defined the subgenre, including *Chronicle of a Summer*, *Jaguar*, and *Drums of Winter* along with more recent ethnographies made in a similar style (*Stori Tumbuna: Ancestors' Tales*).

***Chronicle of a summer*. Directed by Jean Rouch. The Criterion Collection, 1961.**

Filmed direct to camera, these man-on-the-street interviews with Parisians in the 1960s popularized the *cinéma- vérité* (also known as direct cinema) style of filmmaking.

***The Drums of winter*. Directed by Sarah Elder and Leonard Kamerling. DER, 1988.**

A collaboratively produced feature-length documentary that explores the traditional dances, music, and spiritual practices of Yup'ik Eskimo people living in a remote village on the Bering Sea coast between Russia and Alaska.

Jaguar. 1973. Directed by Jean Rouch. Icarus Films.

Produced in collaboration with three of his subjects, this part-fiction part-documentary film follows the journey of three men from Niger into Acara, Ghana, in search of work.

Stori Tumbuna: Ancestors' Tales. 2011. Directed by Paul Wolfram. DER.

In a style similar to Rouch's, the filmmaker works closely with the Lak people of Papua New Guinea to research, script, and film a docudrama about the lives of Lak people.

Navajo Film Themselves. 1966. Directed by Al Clah, Johnny Nelson, Susie Benally, et al. Vision Maker Media.

A series of films made by members of the Navajo community in Arizona in the early 1960s, in collaboration with and after being trained by anthropologist and filmmakers Sol Worth, John Adair, and Richard Chalfen.

Documentaries Featuring Anthropologists

Zora Neale Hurston: Jump at the Sun, Secrets of the Tribe, The Anthropologist, Donna Haraway: Story telling for Earthly Survival, and Jane are all films that feature established anthropologists, showcasing their scholarly works and their contributions to the anthropological community. *In the Wilderness of a Troubled Genre* features interviews and conversations with established and emerging visual anthropologists and ethnographic filmmakers ruminating on the past, present, and future of ethnographic cinema.

The anthropologist. 2015. Directed by Seth Kramer, Daniel A. Miller, and Jeremy Newberger. Ironbound Films.

The film captures the journey of anthropologist Susie Crate and her teenage daughter to communities threatened by climate change across the world.

Donna Haraway: Story telling for earthly survival. 2017. Directed by Fabrizio Terranova. Icarus Films.

Best known for her writings on gender, cyborgs, animals, and post-colonialism, Haraway uses imagination and play to talk about her influences, her ideas, and her life in relationship to this planet.

In the wilderness of a troubled genre. 2013. Directed by John Melville Bishop. Media Generation.

Shot over twelve years, the film features interviews with Robert Gardner, John Marshall, Sarah Elder, and other pioneers and early practitioners of ethnographic film on the evolution of the discipline of visual anthropology and its future directions. The film serves as a useful companion for texts on the history of ethnographic cinema in North America.

Jane. 2017. Directed by Brett Morgen. National Geographic.

A National Geographic film about the life of pioneering primatologist and anthropologist Jane Goodall and her work with chimpanzees and on wildlife conservation.

***Secrets of the tribe.* 2010. Directed by José Padilha. Documentary Educational Resources.**

Made by a Brazilian filmmaker, the film chronicles the alleged misbehavior of scientists and anthropologists working among the Yanomami Indians in the Amazon during the 1960s and 1970s. Alleged accusations against James Neel, Napoleon Chagnon, Kenneth Good, and Jacques Lizot include carrying out unethical medical experiments and engaging in inappropriate sexual behavior, much of which remains in dispute.

***Zora Neale Hurston: Jump at the sun.* 2008. Directed by Sam Pollard. California Newsreel.**

Interspersed with footage from the rural South shot by Zora Neale Hurston herself in the 1920s and 1930s, the film explores the biography, scholarly contributions, and literary works of one of the pioneering figures in American cultural anthropology.

Interactive Documentaries and VR 360 Films

Highrise and *The Maribor Uprisings* exemplify the emerging genre of i-Docs or interactive documentaries. *Notes on blindness: A VR Journey into a World Beyond Sight* and *Traveling While Black* are two stellar examples of immersive 360 virtual reality films, a burgeoning genre as the medium grows in popularity.

***Highrise.* 2009. Directed by Katerina Cizek. National Film Board of Canada.**

A multimedia project about life in residential high-rises, includes five documentary sequences and additional content housed on the project website.

***The Maribor Uprisings.* 2017. Directed by Maple Razsa and Milton Guillén.**

A live participatory that chronicles spontaneous uprisings in the city of Maribor, Slovenia, in response to political corruption.

***Notes on blindness: A VR journey into a world beyond sight.* 2016. ARTE Experience.**

A 360 Virtual Reality experience that serves as a companion to John Hull's film of the same title.

***Traveling while black.* 2019. Directed by Roger Ross Williams. Felix & Paul Studios.**

A short virtual reality 360 documentary set in Ben's Chili Bowl, a black-owned establishment in Washington, DC, that played a pivotal role in the civil rights movement, juxtaposing past racial violence with police brutality that defines the black experience in America today.

Made for Public Television

Ethnic Notions and *Off and Running* are two examples of films that are made primarily for PBS (Public Broadcasting Service), adhering to a particular broadcast aesthetic, format, and run-time requirements. Similarly, *The Edge of Democracy* and *Minding the Gap* exemplify the style of documentaries popular on online-streaming platforms like Netflix and Hulu. Whereas *Roots of Love* and *Mardistan/Macholand* are examples of films made for Doordarshan (public television in India).

***The edge of democracy.* 2019. Directed by Petra Costa. Netflix.**

Filmmaker's personal history intersects and overlaps in unexpected ways with the recent political crisis and economic uncertainty in Brazil, South America's largest democracy.

***Ethnic notions.* 1987. Directed by Marlon Riggs. California Newsreel.**

Examination of the disturbing and dehumanizing anti-black stereotypes and epithets of Uncle Tom, Sambo, Mammy, the Coons, the Pickaninnies, and the Minstrels that permeated popular culture from the ante-bellum period and into the 1960s, fueling anti-black prejudice in the United States.

***Mardistan/Macholand.* 2014. Directed by Harjant Gill. Public Service Broadcasting Trust of India.**

Through perspectives of five different men from diverse backgrounds, this documentary explores the different facets of Indian masculinity, and how India as a "Macholand" is defined by patriarchal supremacy, son preference, homophobia, and violence against women and sexual minorities.

***Minding the gap.* 2018. Directed by Bing Lu. Hulu.**

Lu's autobiographical film chronicles the lives of three skateboarders growing up in an economically depressed American town in the Midwest, struggling with isolation, depression, addiction, domestic violence, and notions of what it means to be a man.

***Off and running.* 2009. Directed by Nicole Opper. New Day Films.**

Opper's film follows the life of Avery, an adopted African American daughter of two white Jewish lesbians, and her decision to search for her birthmother.

***Roots of love.* 2010. Directed by Harjant Gill. Public Service Broadcasting Trust of India.**

An intimate portrait of Sikh families in northern India in global times, as parents struggle to come to terms with their sons' decision to cut their hair and forgo their turbans, the most important symbol of their religious and cultural identity.

Observational and Sensorial Films

Forest of Bliss followed by *Sweetgrass* exemplify sensory ethnographic filmmaking, largely devoid of dialogue, voice-overs, or a linear narrative. *The Prison in Twelve Landscapes* and *Hale County, This Morning This Evening* are two other more recent noteworthy examples of similar (observational) styles of filmmaking.

***Forest of Bliss.* 1986. Directed by Robert Gardner. DER.**

A sensory journey through the streets of Varanasi, India's holiest city, beautifully capturing the circle of life and death, and related rituals in Hinduism as they unfold on the banks of Ganges River.

***Hale County, this morning this evening.* 2018. Directed by RaMell Ross. Cinema Guild.**

A beautifully conceived poetic meditation on contemporary black life in a small rural county in Alabama.

***The prison in twelve landscapes.* 2016. Directed by Brett Story. Grasshopper Films.**

An observational film about the American industrial prison complex primarily through the exploration of landscapes that surround it.

Sweetgrass. 2009 Directed by Lucien Castaing-Taylor and Ilisa Barbash. Cinema Guild.

A largely observational film that follows a troop of modern-day shepherds and their flocks across Montana's vast and breathtakingly beautiful landscape.

Performative and Reflexive Films

Challenging the conventions of documentary and ethnographic cinema, films like *Black is. . . Black Ain't*, *Brincando El Charco: Portrait of a Puerto Rican*, *Imagining Indians*, *Khush*, *My Mother's Place* and *Tongues Untied* exemplify the performative and reflexive style of documentary filmmaking that uses experimental and autoethnographic modes of storytelling. Trinh T. Minh-ha's films, specifically *Reassemblage* and *Surname Viet Given Name Nam*, deserve a special mention in redefining the genre of ethnographic cinema. *Milind Soman Made Me Gay* and *Sea in the Blood* are more recent examples of films made by diasporic queer filmmakers of color that are produced in this performative and reflexive style.

***Black is. . . black ain't*. 1995. Directed by Marlon Riggs. California Newsreel.**

An intimate and autoethnographic reflection on the culture of blackness in America, critiquing the everyday sexism and homophobia that characterized black cultural identity in the 1980s and the 1990s.

***Brincando El Charco: Portrait of a Puerto Rican*. 1994. Directed by Francis Negrón-Muntaner. Women Make Movies.**

A conceptual and performative contemplation on Puerto Rican identity in diaspora from the perspective of a middle-class, light-skinned queer Puerto Rican filmmaker/photographer living in Philadelphia yet longing for connection with the island.

***Imagining Indians*. 1992. Directed by Victor Masayesva Jr. DER.**

With an all-Indian crew, the director interviews Native communities across the United States to offer a powerful counter-narrative to Hollywood's exoticized and stereotypical portals of Native Americans.

***Khush*. 1991. Directed by Pratibha Parmar. Women Make Movies.**

A conceptual short film about queer South Asian identity in diaspora exploring themes of coming out, familial acceptance, and cultural belonging.

***Milind Soman made me gay*. 2007. Directed by Harjant Gill. Frameline.**

In the vein of *Khush*, Gill's film is a more recent conceptual meditation on the notions of home, memory, and citizenship among gay South Asian men living in diaspora.

***My mother's place*. 1990. Directed by Richard Fung. Video Data Bank.**

An experimental documentary about family and home explored through the filmmaker's relationship with his eighty-year-old third generation Chinese-Trinidadian mother.

***Reassemblage*. 1982. Directed by Trinh T. Minh-ha. Women Make Movies.**

A complex visual portrait of women in rural Senegal, subverting the anthropological gaze by refusing to make these women the “object” of study.

***Sea in the blood*. 2000. Directed by Richard Fung. Video Data Bank.**

A deeply personal and intimate narrative about filmmaker’s relationship with chronic illnesses that affects his family and informs his relationship with his partner.

***Surname Viet given name Nam*. 1989. Directed by Trinh T. Minh-ha. Women Make Movies.**

A groundbreaking conceptual documentary about the place of Vietnamese women in nation’s popular and historical narratives. The film also explores the challenges of translating popular texts along with themes of dislocation and exile.

***Tongues untied*. 1989. Directed by Marlon Riggs. Frameline.**

A seminal documentary that weaves together poetry, dance, and performance to explore the black gay male experience in the United States in 1980s, forcefully exposing and rejecting homophobia in the black communities alongside racism in the gay communities.

Portraits of Community

Belfast, Maine, Father, Son and the Holy War, Sent Away Boys, and Strangers with a Camera all chronicle political transitions and/or cultural changes within their respective community over time, offering us an intimate sense of a place and the everyday lives of its inhabitants. Meanwhile, Jennie Livingston’s classic documentary *Paris is Burning* takes us into a world of drag balls in the 1980s in New York City, rarely seen on film before. Faiza Ahmad Khan’s 2008 documentary *Superman of Malegaon* captures one Indian town’s obsession with popular cinema in a hilarious and heartwarming way.

***Belfast, Maine*. 1999. Directed by Fredrick Wiseman. Zipporah Films.**

A compelling portrait of daily life in a working-class New England port city.

***Father, son and holy war*. 1995. Directed by Anand Patwardhan. Patwardhan Films.**

A two-part documentary on the role of religion in informing the psychology of political and communal violence in northern India in the 1990s, and how popular nationalist discourses are coded in gendered (male) insecurity.

***Paris is burning*. 1990. Directed by Jennie Livingston. Janus Films.**

A rare and intimate look into the drag ball culture of New York City in the 1980s, and how queer people of color formed a sense of community within these spaces through dance and performance.

***Sent away boys*. 2016. Directed by Harjant Gill. PSBT & Tilotama Productions.**

As more and more young men leave India in search of better economic opportunities abroad, this film examines how India’s rural landscapes, patriarchal traditions, and gender norms are transformed by their absence.

***Strangers with a camera.* 2000. Directed by Elizabeth Barret. PBS.**

Investigating the circumstances around the death of a Canadian TV journalist in the 1960s, this film explores the politics of representation and who gets to tell whose stories.

***Superman of Malegaon.* 2008. Directed by Faiza Ahmad Khan. Junglee Home Video.**

Khan's film follows hilarious albeit genuine attempts of residents of a small Indian town (Malegaon) as they go about filming a local community-based adaptation of Superman.

Transnational Documentary Cinema

As notable examples of documentary films from the Global South, *City of God – 10 Years Later*, *Mala Mala*, *Suite Habana*, and *Tempestad* are some of the more recent widely-circulated documentaries made by and about life in Brazil, Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Mexico. Whereas *Kedi* is a recent documentary exploring daily human-cat relationships in Istanbul, *Cairo Drive* take its audiences on a journey through the chaotic streets and roadways of Cairo, Egypt's capital city. *Everything Must Fall* captures how student protests in South African universities gave rise to a political revolution against the state, whereas *Five Broken Cameras* is a documentary widely recognized for capturing a deeply personal and moving quest of a Palestinian farmer to document his life and political crisis affecting his neighborhood. Exploring the intersections of gender and belonging, *Manjuben Truck Driver* and *My Mother India* are two notable films that exemplify India's rich documentary film tradition. These films are illustrative of rich documentary film practices outside of the North American and European traditions, worthy of greater attention and adoration.

***Cairo Drive.* 2013. Directed by Sherief Elkatsha. Katsha Films.**

Filmed before, during, and after the 2011 Egyptian revolution, this film captures the routine chaos that pervades traffic and daily life in Cairo, Egypt's capital city, showing us how Egyptians persevere through it all.

***City of God – 10 years later.* 2013. Directed by Cavi Borges and Luciano Vidigal. Livres Filmes.**

Ten years after the critically acclaimed crime-drama of the same title was released featuring actors who grew up in the slums of Rio de Janeiro where it was filmed, this follow up documentary returns to the same community to look at how their lives have changed over the last decade, in light of the international attention garnered by the original film.

***Everything must fall.* 2018. Directed by Rehad Desai. Uhuru Productions.**

Set in Wits University in Johannesburg, the film documents how student-led protests against dramatic hikes in tuition fees in 2015, enabled by social media, quickly galvanized into a nationwide movement for economic and racial justice across South Africa.

***Five broken cameras.* 2011. Directed by Emad Burnat and Guy Davidi. Kino Lorber.**

An intimate and personal account of a self-taught Palestinian filmmaker filmed over four years using five different cameras, as we watch the Israeli army smash each of the five cameras, displacing his community and destroying their way of life.

***Kedi.* 2016. Directed by Ceyad Torun. Oscilloscope Laboratories.**

Following seven different cats, the film explores how residents of Istanbul relate to the large population of stray cats that dominate the streets and neighborhoods of this historic, bustling, cosmopolitan city.

***Mala Mala*. 2014. Directed by Antonio Santini and Dan Sickles. Strand Releasing.**

An intimate look into the lives of transgender Puerto Ricans and drag queens and their quest for equal rights along with attempts to resist daily harassment and discrimination.

***Manjuben truck driver*. 2002. Directed by Sherna Dastur. Magic Lantern Movies.**

The film profiles a rare female truck driver who has cultivated a male persona of a macho truck driver in India, appropriating popular notions of maleness, and thereby challenging societal boundaries and definitions of gender in a punishingly patriarchal society.

***My mother India*. 2001. Directed by Safina Uberoi. Magic Lantern Movies.**

A beautiful, funny, and heartwarming intergenerational tale of migration, home, and belonging as the filmmaker turns the camera onto her mixed-race parents to make sense of her childhood in Delhi along with the violence and displacement her family experienced because of their Sikh religion in 1984.

***Suite Habana*. 2003. Directed by Fernando Perez. Cinema Tropical.**

Using elements of Ethnofiction and observational documentary, the filmmaker depicts the lives of thirteen different residents of Havana over a twenty-four-hour period as they go about their daily lives.

***Tempestad*. 2016. Directed by Tatiana Huezo. Interior13 Cine and ARTE.**

A heartbreaking story of two women from Mexico who are survivors of human trafficking, shedding light on rampant corruption and lack of accountability that allows for such exploitation and violence to continue with impunity.

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