Session 7

History of Ethnographic Film

Download the Handout for this Session
“Genealogy” of Ethnographic Film

“The Humanistic Family”

- Intensive immersion
- The presentation of a drama focusing on a specific individual
- Native feedback
- Visual suspense

In the Footsteps of Flaherty

- The Hunters (1958)
- Dead Birds (1964)
- The Netsilik Eskimo Project

“The Scientific Family”

Reignault, cross-cultural study of movement (handout)

Bateson and Mead, Bathing Babies in Three Cultures (handout)
Typology of Ethnographic Films
*ethnographic fiction films, explorer films*

*educational-film*
  *anthropological teaching film*

*commercial film* ventures with an ethnographic base

*social documentary films*
  ➔ Dziga Vertov, *Kino-pravda*
  ➔ showing ordinary people in their everyday surroundings

  *cinema vérité*
  *shared anthropology*

*Ethno-art film? Forest of Bliss*

*Deconstruction of Primitivism and Exoticism*
  • *Cannibal Tours*, 1988, Dennis O'Rourke
  • *Incidents of Travel in Chichén Itzá*, 1997, Quetzil Castañeda & Jeffrey Himpele
Ethnographic Film vs. Anthropology?

1. early 1900s rely less on visual technologies in favor of the detailed ethnographic monograph
2. shift from the evolutionism of 19th century to cultural relativism and structural functionalism of twentieth century—questioning of anthropometry
3. self-consciousness of its public reputation as a serious scientific discipline
4. “Retreat from the world”
5. emphasis on the intangibles of social structure
6. perceived loss of “primitive society”

→ angst of anthropological self-definition and disciplinary self-protection