

**Session 8**



# What is Ethnographic Film?

## **QUESTIONS, POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS**

- What kinds of films are there?
- Which films are the ethnographic ones?
- Some films are more ethnographic than others(?)
- Films become ethnographic by virtue of their use (?)

## **FOOTAGE vs. FILM**

- Films = structured, presentation to an audience
- Footage = raw “data”

### **(a) “OBJECTIVE RECORDING”:**

- record footage & research footage
- structured by sequence of action
- (i) Descriptive records, e.g. 1898 Haddon’s footage from the Torres Strait Islands
- (ii) Analytic records, e.g. Bateson & Mead

### **(b) “SCRIPTED FILMING”:**

- Scripted filming, e.g. Edward Curtis’ *In the Land of the War Canoes*
- edited, structured, composed to convey clear messages
- Script/plan dominates the visual

### **(c) “REPORTAGE FILM”:**

- *Reportage* film, preserves the indigenous structure of the event
- emerges from preceding fieldwork
- narration

## **WHAT MAKES A *FILM AN ETHNOGRAPHIC FILM?***

- how films are USED—anthropology is *about* something other than itself
- how a film was PRODUCED—the value of films is what they can do *for* anthropology

→ *productionism* has tended to dominate:

- (1) an ethnographic film is one made by an anthropologist, based on field research
- (2) content is recognizable as typical of anthropological concerns
- (3) not meant to entertain
- (4) sympathy for the people being shown
- (5) realist conventions: representative, not creative
- (6) narration, minimal and dispassionate
- (7) editing should preserve the natural sequence of action

## **ILLUSTRATION AND REVELATION:**

→ spoken commentary

→ *Illustrative ethnographic films*

→ *Revelatory films*

→ *Self-revelatory films*