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