

TOWARD AN ETHNOGRAPHIC SEMIOTIC

Sol Worth Annenberg School of Communications University of Pennsylvania Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (This Paper delivered to introduce conference on "Utilisation de L'ethnologie par le cinéma/Utilisation du Cinéma par L'ethnologie," Paris, UNESCO, February 1977. It was to appear in *Proceedings*, UNESCO 1978 but Sol died in August, 1977 and left the paper unfinished.)

I shall deliver this paper in English and I ask that you forgive me. Ordinarily I would not burden you with what might appear to be my own provincialism, but the fact that I only speak the language of my culture is central to the problem that I want to raise regarding film and visual communication in general. When we consider or think about verbal languages, or more accurately, when we deal with speaking, with *parole*, most of us seem to "know" that there is such a thing as one's native language. We know those semiotic codes so well that we "know" immediately when we do *not* speak another's language, and we also know that there are many languages--different from our own.

One of the problems I would like to raise today concerns the fact that this knowledge about speaking--the knowledge that there are many codes and languages of speaking--does not seem to extend to our understanding of visual signs. Somehow as soon as we leave the verbal mode we begin to talk about universal languages. Even scientists who are careful about what they say about verbal language easily fall into the pleasant trap of using phrases such as "visual language," "the language of art," "the language of dance," and of course "the language of cinema." We seem to want very much to believe that by the use of pictures we can overcome the problem attendant to words and in particular to different languages. Somehow the notion persists that the cinema, like pictures in general, has no individual cultures that "speak"--and here I have to use a verbal metaphor because there is no word that applies to articulation and interpretation in film--in differing languages, or articulate in differing codes. We somehow assume that the theories and concepts we apply to speaking should or could automatically be transferred to film and called such things as "discourse," or "language" in a kind of sleight of hand metaphor with speaking. We never seem to ask if there is or could be such a thing as a native speaker of film, or a native viewer of film, or if we have to learn to understand and to interpret the cinema.

The assumption often needs to be that it is "natural" for people to understand pictures--particularly such "realistic" pictures as those presented in moving pictures. As distinguished a linguist as Roman Jakobson feels that pictures, and in particular photographs and movies, are meant to be representations of natural events, that people understand those representations intuitively, and that people only have to *learn* to interpret "abstract" pictures. All other representational signs in the pictorial modes are "natural."

In visual communication or in the visual realm--and in cinema particularly--we frequently are content to think of ourselves as responders to a visual stimulus--something akin to the dogs of Pavlov or the rats and pigeons of Skinner; animals who innately and naturally respond to a pictorial stimulus. We do not, in regard to pictures, seem to think of ourselves as humans who have to *learn* to interpret visual symbolic articulations--the signs and codes of our culture produced in the visual code. We still cling to a deep separation between verbal signs and pictorial signs.

This is why it is important today to talk about pictures, about film, and about film semiotics. Not only is film the most important new sign system developed in the 20th century, but it is, along with television, the most pervasive and powerful socializing force available today. Not only does the study of film allow us to understand how our culture presents itself and controls itself, but

studying film and television with the new methods that semiotics offers allows us to look at older sign systems such as speaking, painting and music in new ways and from new perspectives. Christian Metz, who has probably done more than anyone else in the last fifteen years to make semiotic thought about film interesting, has opened this colloquium by saying that semiotics and film semiotics in particular is beginning to emerge from the infantile stage. I agree and I hope it is entering an adult stage, which in my opinion is more exciting but also more difficult and more dangerous. No more--if we become adult--will we be able to hold the hands of mother linguistics and father philosophy. We will have to stand alone and try to grow. The infant stage lasts only a few years. Unfortunately--but if we are lucky--the adult stage will last a long time. If we do grow and become adult we may be able to show that what we said yesterday as children was said clearly enough to be proven wrong today. Let us hope then, that what we have said here at this colloquium will be clear enough also that at the next one we will be able to correct it.

One more word about some of the things that have been said here before me. There has been some criticism that film semiotic thinking in France or in other countries doesn't deal with the large variety of problems that one can think about. I should hope so. No idea or method of analysis can possibly be any good and yet deal with everything. I feel that to criticize film semiotics for what it does *not* do is fruitless. I hope we can begin in adulthood to criticize what semiotic analysis *does* do and to begin to suggest ways that what it does do could be done better.

I would like in this too brief a time to discuss two things. First, to tell something about a kind of visual semiotics that is beginning to grow up in America--a semiotics that I call "ethnographic semiotic," represented by the Society for the Anthropology of Visual Communication and its journal *Studies in the Anthropology of Visual Communication*. Second I want to show examples of some of my own work along those ideas. For the sake of brevity allow me to be dogmatic. It will take less time and perhaps be ore provocative. Let me try to say what I mean by an ethnographic semiotic. Ethnography as I shall use the term for the moment, can be considered as a description of how people actually live and do things. Semiotics is concerned with meaning and how people make meaning. If semiotics is not concerned with meaning it is not about anything, and if ethnography is not about how actual people live it is about nothing. So for me, ethnographic semiotics is about how actual people make meaning of their symbolic universe. How they learn to make meaning. How this differs from group to group, from young to old, from context to context and from culture to culture. Just as we have studied our physical environment, our biological environment, and more recently our social environment, ethnographic semiotics as I understand it is the study of our symbolic environment in a particular way.

Given this dogmatic description, what does it imply for the study of film? Mainly it suggests that we broaden our horizons. That we not only study films in the abstract--and that in itself is quite difficult, but that we study how *actual* people (filmmakers) articulate meaning through film, and how other actual people (viewers) interpret or make meaning from film.

For too long semiotic study, particularly in its visual forms, but in verbal and musical ones as well, has been concerned with how *one* analyst often labeled a "critic," has interpreted or made meaning out of one particular work. Recently, in literary theory, (and dealing with something called, "literature" only) has there been a movement to study how actual people make interpretations. In the area of the semiotics of visual communication, a small group of people are beginning to think about theories that might explain how people in general go about the process of interpreting visual signs and codes. Only recently are we asking how an ethnographic semiotic can help us to develop theories of interpretation in general, as distinguished from specific

interpretations of particular works. The process by which, and the very fact that, a critic or a scholar analyzed or interpreted a particular work of art or of literature has been accepted by us for at least the last 3,000 years. The methods may have changed but the idea of *one* person giving his personal interpretation of one single work has remained fairly constant. I think it is time for us to consider the process of the interpretation of symbolic events *in general*; time to study how we understand and interpret rather than continue to provide more interpretations of specific works. And it is time to compare the process of interpretation--of making meaning--across modes and across works. We need to deal not only with literature, but with all books, not only with painting, but with pictures, not only with architecture and sculpture, but with buildings and statues. We need to see if making meaning of speech bears any relation to how we make meaning of pictures, or of music. We need to find out if children do things the same way that adults do and whether certain kinds of education, or the viewing of films and television, allow us--or "train" us--to interpret symbolic events in certain ways.

I want to argue that in general a more ethnographic and empirical approach can be a useful tool in the understanding of all symbolic events as well as that which we call film. But I also want to talk about film as it is used in ethnography not only by social scientists but by newscasters, government officials, revolutionaries, and many others--as film or as television. I want to talk about some ideas that I believe have almost paralyzed certain area of filmmaking and film study. This is, of course, a particular controversy in the United States right now, but perhaps there are those here who can say whether what I talk about has been a struggle in Europe also.

These problems may best be understood by examining how one label, "visual anthropology" has led to the creation of another, "the anthropology of visual communication." My basic premise will be the rather obvious statement that making a film--organizing a set of filmic signs--is a means of making statements about the world, and that whether anthropologists use these signs to make such statements or whether artists or businessmen use them, they are all dealing with essentially the same problem: the articulation and structuring of their views of the world.

We have, it seems, come a long way from the days when just being able to make a picture, moving or still, of strange people in far away lands doing exotic things was excuse enough for lugging cameras to the field, or to our living rooms. In those earlier times--from 1895 to about 1920--people just took pictures--without naming what they did--most often to prove that the strange people and places that they were making movies about actually existed. Archaeologists quite early--around 1900--found the camera to be more accurate, "truer to life," or to artifact. I believe that it was from the use to which archaeologists put photographs that cultural anthropology, sociology and now mass television and film developed its first--and still extremely important--semiotic paradigm about the use of pictures: that the purpose of taking pictures was to show *the truth* about whatever it was the picture purported to be of; an arrowhead, a potsherd, a house, a person, a dance, a ceremony, a war or any other behavior that people could perform, and cameras record.

A subtle but all important shift took place when we extended--perhaps unknowingly--the principles we apply to arrowheads to the study of people and behavior. We first used photographs as evidence; a photograph of a arrowhead or a potsherd was evidence of the existence as well as the shape of an artifact. We then began to apply the same rule to people, to human behavior, and to culture itself. That is, we began to believe that a film or photographic *record* of behavior was evidence of the existence of cultural behaviors and even of culture itself. This belief in the evidential quality of a photograph pervades not only the scientific and social

realm, but also is extremely influential in the aesthetic as well. Note the number of film theories that refer to the "intrinsic," "natural" relationship between film and reality.

Rudolph Arnheim's 1930 dictum that film was art only to the extent that it was *not* real can be compared in a rather interesting way to Bazin's notion that film could only be used to depict an ontological as well as a physical reality. Kracauer subtitled his book on film theory, "The Redemption of Reality." He argued that it was only when film was a mirror of reality that it used its essential "filmness." In both science and art we seem to accept, without thinking, the stranglehold of the concept of the "real," and the camera's "natural" duty to replicate it.

Of course what we photograph is related to what is out there--to what the camera is pointed at--but more important to understand is that what is photographed is also related in a very complex way to what is in here, in us.

We assumed that the camera was an automatic description system. When a perfect description didn't occur by just pressing the button, we were annoyed. No one, of course, denies the need for handwriting that is legible or typewriters that work. It is rather that with the use of cinema by social scientists, as well as TV newscasters, we have moved, without changing our level of concern, from how to make sure that cameras don't shake and that the film doesn't get spoiled to learned treatises about *where* to place the camera and *what* to photograph. We began to believe that the answer to questions of placement of camera, focal length of lens and such other technical notions would help us to become either more scientific or more moral. The concept of objectivity as a moral requirement for the filmmaker is both new and since began to turn upon the mistaken notion, first that such a thing was possible with this technology and second that such a thing was good. We continue to act as if the latter question--the question of *what to photograph* was of the same type, as the question of how to keep the camera from jiggling. We answered both questions in a simple technological way. There still is a tendency on the part of many people in the West to think of visual anthropology as the use of cinema to make a kind of record which follows simple prescriptive rules about the length of the lens used and so on. I needn't refer to the number of museums and archives that want "footage" not films, in the mistaken idea that footage is somehow pure, wholesome and scientific. That "films" are tainted and anti-science.

It is important at this point to be able to understand and to distinguish between many kinds of cinema as well as many kinds of uses of cinema--and of particular importance in this paper to be able to see the various uses of cinema for an ethnographic understanding of man. We should be able to distinguish between the cinema as a record *about* culture and the cinema itself as a record *of* culture. One should also distinguish between *using* a medium and studying how a medium *is used*. In terms of cinema, specifically, the three distinctions I want to emphasize are those between (1) the use of the camera as a tool to collect data *about* culture, (2) the use of the camera to *present* culture, and (3) studying how the camera *is used* by members of a particular culture.

Photography as a record *about* culture spans the distance from the casual snapshot, which reminds one of what a house or an informant looked like, to the systematic work of a Mead a Bateson or a Birdwhistell, and here I must emphasize that it is not their photography that is important, but their analysis of it. The reason their photographs and films are records is that they were *taken in ways which allowed them to be analyzed* so as to illustrate patterns observed by scientists who know what they were looking for.

Let us now turn to the second level of analysis: the analysis of photographs and films as records *of* culture; as objects and events which can be studied in the context of the culture within which they were used. The photographs and films analyzed in this way are understood to be parts of

culture in their own right, just as conversations, novels, plays, and other symbolic behavior have been understood to be.

Here I am talking about looking at how someone takes a photograph or puts together an advertisement as well as a movie. One is concerned at this level, for example, with finding patterns of moviemaking by anthropologists, physicists and Hollywood entrepreneurs, by college students, by "artists," by people using 8 mm. cameras in our own culture as well as by Navajo Indians or members of any other group who are making photos or movies for purposes of their own.

Here one looks for patterns dealing with, for example, what *can* be photographed and what *cannot*, what content *can* be displayed, was *actually* displayed, and how that display was organized and structured. Was it arranged according to how these people tell stories? To how they speak, or to the very language and grammar that they use? Recent work by one of my students, seems to indicate that even among the congenitally deaf, the "grammar" and related patterns of their sign language influence how speakers of American Sign Language structure films that they make.

Looking at films as records of culture was only one direction in which workers like Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict as well as Erik Erikson and others were analyzing films. After World War II, the term "visual anthropology" became associated primarily with the use of making films about culture. That is, using cameras to make recordings, as one records with a tape recorder or a pencil, the behavior of people around them. This idea was keyed to the notion that the camera can somehow mirror behavior and therefore, culture. In many ways some of the newer cinema techniques, "cinema verite," "direct cinema" seem to stem from some notion of the technology as a recording device which tells the truth about the behavior before it. Although, of course, the term, "cinema verite" come from the Russian "kino pravda," the method of organizing and the theories behind them were totally different. Kino pravda recognized that the very essence of the cinema was restructuring the pieces of film. While the words meant the same in French as they did in Russian the notion behind cinema verite seems to presume that there is no structure other than that occurring in the real life behavior which the camera records. In the days of visual anthropology, the camera was in the hands of the anthropologist outsider.

What visual anthropology did not connote was the study of how cameras and cinema, and in fact pictures in general, were used with a society by members of that society. The term "the ethnography or anthropology, of visual communication" was coined to connote studies that lead us to ask what we could learn about a culture by studying what the members of that culture made pictures of, how they made them, and in what context they made and looked at them. The ethnography of visual communication then was concerned *both* with making records, and presenting others, as well as--most importantly--with *finding out how others* presented themselves. The ethnography of visual communication was concerned with our own structuring of others as well as understanding another's structuring of others as well as understanding another's structuring of himself.

When in 1963, at a meeting of anthropologists, I began to point out that the films and photographs made by students in colleges, people in their homes, as well as mental patients in hospitals, could be looked at as ways in which these different people structured *their* world, rather than as "true images" of *the* world, I thought I was merely bringing a truism about drawing and painting up to date.

Let me stop my argument for a moment and try to provide a framework for my further remarks by briefly outlining how I will use the word "communication," since I want to contrast this

particular usage with other usages, and because it is my belief that a semiotic investigation of symbolic events must be conceived within a framework of communication. As will be evident from the following discussion, I believe it is central to our investigations to determine whether the people who make meaning with and from signs are acting in a social manner or in a purely personal (psychological) or biological manner. The question of whether those who use signs, in any mode or medium, are using them as social devices, assuming social conventions and rules about their use, seems to me to be a central issue in semiotic method. It is not always the case that sign use or behavior fits into a social matrix, but it is always necessary for students of sign use to know whether or not we are dealing with a social matrix.

I define communication as a *social* process by which a person or persons create or produce a set of things which we recognize and can call signs, and which we further treat in a special way so that meanings can be inferred from them. This definition carries with it certain implicit statements which I'd like to make clear. First, the meaning which we make of visual forms is just that: *meanings which we make*. Films, like stories, drawings, paintings, and so on, *do not* have any meaning in and of themselves. They are artifacts until we either attribute or infer meaning to and from them. Symbolic forms can be interpreted only in terms of their context, structure and conventional usage. Only in this sense do I use the words "to mean," and only in this sense do I say that cinema means. Communicational meaning in my use of the word is therefore social. It rests upon an agreement about how things mean that exist within a group. It rests upon the viewers, or the interpreter's *assumption* of an intention on the part of someone--a creator, a symbol producer--to *arrange*, articulate manipulate, create, put together forms with the intention of implying meaning. And such arrangement and articulation can only occur when the creator knows that the way he arranges things will enable another to interpret it. Conversely, *interpretation* on a communicational level can only occur if the interpreter *assumes* that the symbolic world--or work--he is trying to make meaning of, was made intentionally, following conventions and rules that he can use for his interpretation.

I want to make a distinction between what I call communication and other forms of behavior that I will call interaction, that may also involve signs, because many researchers in our field have traditionally confused these areas and have, in my opinion, made actual research activity difficult, both practically and theoretically. The anthropologist, as well as the cinema artist, in trying to deal with human behavior in the context to not only a cultural but a physical and biological environment, must try to distinguish between man's intentional *social* symbolic behavior and his interactional behavior. I am trying to contrast such behaviors as sweating when the sun shines or shivering in the cold, with understanding poems, telling stories to one another or making and understanding movies. Although man does both, they are in many way different behaviors. The former, sweating in the heat, I call interactional behavior and the latter, making and interpreting poems or films, I call communicational behavior. In this sense I am suggesting that the ethologist's biological notion of ritual, which they regard as innate and genetically determined, must be sharply differentiated from the social definition of ritual. Although genetic factors set limits to our physical as well as social behavior, the sense in which ritual's *social* is the essence in which it can be considered as a communicative event. In the same frame, to the extent that something called "language" or "language competence" is innate, it is not a social event, and not a communication event. To the extent that whatever is innate about a symbol system is *used* in a social way, within a conventional context, to that extent can it be said to be part of a communication event. How our retinas, cortex, and nervous system encode visual stimuli is innate and part of our *interaction* or response to the environment that surrounds us.

Perspective, on the other hand, or the concept of the "art" in cinema is a communicative code, socially learned not biologically determined, by which we can articulate two dimensional representations of three dimensional concepts and events.

Photography and the cinema in general can be used as records of, and as methods for the study of, *both* interaction and communication. The cinema can be a record of data about *our* observations as well as data in their own right of how *others* structure their symbolic universe. But the ways to use the cinema for these various purposes are vastly different.

The kind of scientific problem posed by current understandings of perceptions can only be briefly discussed here. Perhaps this somewhat lengthy quote from a recent paper by Jerome Lettvin of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology on the physiology of perception, will give the reader some clue as to how scientists of perception are grappling with questions of the relationship between what we "see" and what is "out there." The problems of "camera truth," of ethnographic recording without "bias," "scientific objectivity," the benefits of moving or the stationary camera, the long or short focus lens, long takes versus short takes, editing versus footage photographing behavior, or making statements about behavior, all assume their rightful place as pseudo problems for the student of human symbolic behavior when seen in the light of the current understanding of how we perceive and *organize our perceptions* of our environment. Lettvin deals with the relation of the eye and brain and organizer of events:

These considerations . . . led me, as other things lead other physiologists, to a queer idea of myself. The 'I', who perceives, receives reports from a great many observers whose fields of view overlap considerably. This is in vague accord with anatomy and physiology. My job as perceiver is to construct a model of what is 'out there' from the reports. What I don't know is how many collators and processors and censors like between the point-to-point image reporters and myself. I have a private map showing positions of reports. In this map, one report can be to the left and above another report. Each reporter says only what he sees and uses terms such as to the left and up. But the terms used by the reporters do not refer to the map.

I have two spaces to deal with: that spoken of by the individual reports and that which I use for arranging the reports. I am obliged to remember that what I am receiving are reports--not images in the optical sense--so that putting together reports is not like patching together NASA photographs of the moon, but rather like taking evidence from witnesses and patching together what they witnessed as a unitary thing. Accordingly, my view of the world--the model I make of it--is not easily imagined in terms of a three-dimensional fixed scaffold. I may have high resolution for the form of something and yet not know quite where it is with the same kind of spatial precision. . . . In other words, there is no world of perception except for what is given by reports. The visual world is not a continuous and unified geometry but a set of rules whereby patched are somehow fitted to each other in a lawful way--a topology.

Faced with the concept that symbolic events produce different worlds--and most specifically that pieces of film, no matter how made, are constructions made by someone--the truth-seeker in films tends to become confused, dogmatic and angry. There is a large group of researchers who find it hard enough to believe that their analyses are constructions, what Levi-Strauss has called "a myth about a myth." Faced with the fact that what they want to call primary photographic data are also mediated by their or someone else's view of the world, they become angry. It is hard for many to give up the notions of "objectivity," the "unbiased nature of science" and the camera as the ultimate mirror of the world.

I am arguing that it is impossible--physiologically and culturally--by the nature of our nervous system and the symbolic modes or codes we employ, to make unstructured *copies* of natural

events. The camera is not a mirror of the world any more than our eyes or our brains are. Thus, I am further arguing that it is as silly to ask whether a film, a painting, or a photo is true or false, as it is to ask whether a grammar--particularly one conceived of as innate--is true or false, or whether a performance of a Bach Sonata or a Beatles song is true or false.

One can indeed ask if a particular grammar is a useful description of how people talk. One can ask if a particular sonata was--in fact--written by Bach, or if "that" was a Beatles song. If the notion of a grammar is understood to be an articulation, a statement about *how* people talk one can ask in what ways it corresponds to how people *do* talk. But this requires that we conceive of a grammar, a performance, or a film, as a statement about something. It requires that we understand that verbal grammar as well as cinema is *not a copy of the world out there, but someone's construction, someone's statement about the world.*

Let me try to say this more specifically about film. It is only by making a film *statement* and by treating the film we interpret as a *statement* that we can begin to find ways to answer the question. "Aren't some worlds more correct, more true than others?"

Treating film (the camera and celluloid) as a copy of the world, rather than as materials with which to make statements about the world, forces us into the impossible position of asking whether a performance is true. Understanding that photos and films are statements rather than copies or reflections forces us to ask how the statements were made. In what context, for what purpose. Under what rules, conventions and restrictions. It enables us to look, as some of us are doing at various ways of picturing the world.

By looking at pictures in general as possible statements--as possible communicative acts--and by having some theoretical means of determining whether something is or is not a communicative act, we may be able to understand who is making the statement, how it was made, under what cultural restraints--and here I mean technological as well as cognitive and emotional and in what context and with what intent.

At this point I would like to try to retrace some of my steps. I have suggested that there has been some change--and possibly progress--in the way some of us are beginning to understand the ethnography of visual events. I have suggested that until recently the use of cinema in ethnography was mainly understood--and the exceptions such as Rouch serve to underscore this understanding--as a way of collecting data--or recording human behavior and culture. The cinema was understood to be an objective, unbiased tool or the final solution for achieving an accurate presentation of "reality." Even in fiction we have tended to depend on our western understanding of pictures as "truth" and have used "direct," or "documentary" techniques to make our fiction more believable. Unlike painting and other visual arts, in cinema, the "pravda" and the "verite" were the cinematic treads that we--audience as well as filmmaker--clung to.

More recently some of us, both in social science and in the arts, are trying to suggest that cinema be considered not as a recording of reality, or as a tool for mirroring the world but as another symbol system that we use for *structuring* the world. Some of us are suggesting that we think of and look at cinema, as well as all sign systems, as a communication event--as something from which we can infer meaning, and as something with which, as filmmakers in both arts and sciences we can imply meaning.

I am suggesting that cinema is more than a stimulus, or than a record of reality to which we can do no more than to respond. I am suggesting that cinema can be used to communicate meaning as well as to act as a "turn on." I am suggesting that cinema be understood as an event in which people are trying to articulate meaning about the world.

I am also suggesting that there is no specific set of films we can call "ethnographic cinema," that instead there is only cinema and the way we use it. There is cinema and the various ways people deal with it. Some people treat cinema as a way to understand culture. I am also suggesting that we can treat culture as a way to understand cinema. In both cases it is cinema and how that particular way of structuring the world can be understood as a communicative act.

As examples of the relationship between cinema and ethnography, I'd like to show you two films that can be--and indeed should be--looked at as both ethnography and cinema. One of these films was made by an American Indian, and the other by a young black man in East Harlem.

Let me tell you something about the ideas of ethnography and cinema that led to the making of these films. In 1966 John Adair, an anthropologist who had worked with the Navajo for some 25 years, and I, got together and designed a project that can perhaps best be explained by the following analogy. Suppose that we could find a people who heard "talk," saw people talk, but didn't have the little mechanism in their throats that allowed them to produce talk. Therefore, this people developed a whole way of living in which talking was not a part. They communicated by a variety of other sign means. We would go to this group and tell them that we had invented a machine that would enable them to make all the sounds in the world. We would teach them to use this machine, to press the buttons that would enable them to make any sounds they wanted. All we asked is that we be allowed to watch and to listen to what they did, and to ask them questions about their use of these sounds.

We wanted to see if they would develop "language." What kind of talking would they do. Would they imitate what others who talked did or would they use some of the symbolic codes which were related to the modes of communication that they had already developed. We carried this metaphor to film. We said: "Suppose we could find a people that had seen movies, heard about movies, but had not ever worked with movies before. Suppose we could find the people who didn't have a tradition of making pictures which were representations of anything. Suppose we would go to these people and offer to teach them to use movie cameras and film. Further we would introduce them to a splicing machine telling them that this was a machine that would allow them to put pieces of film together if the film broke, or for any other purpose." We could then observe what they wanted to photograph, how they photographed it, and how they organized and used what they photographed. Would they develop rules of filmmaking that would in any way be similar to ours. Would they find rules that were related perhaps to their verbal language. Would they relate their filmmaking activities to the way they told stories, or to their religious ceremonies or other ways in which they had organized their lives.

What we decided to do was to go to a small Navajo community in which most of the people actually had never seen movies but where movies were certainly known about. We found six young people who, with the community's permission, agreed to be students to learn how to use motion picture cameras. Some were craftsmen, some were politicians, and some had no particular Navajo or "white" avocation. We spent a week teaching them how to use the equipment and then watched them, talked to them, and questioned them very carefully about the films that they did. One of the films that you will see was made by one of our Navajo students. Much of this work is described in greater detail in the book, *Through Navajo Eyes* by Sol Worth and John Adair.

The second film was made by a member of our own western culture. I had been working with a group of doctors in a seminar in a large teaching hospital in New York City. Part of the work of the seminar involved my teaching the physicians to make films so that they could then teach

others in the medical community (nurses, patients, paramedical personnel) to make films which would perhaps allow both groups to articulate, through film, their view of their health worlds.

One of the doctors had decided to make a film about his internship. While he was walking around the hospital with a camera on his shoulder working on his film, a young black patient, who had been examined by a group of doctors at the teaching hospital the day before, came to see my student physician for some diagnostic help. When his new patient--Maximo--saw him with a camera on his shoulder, he asked what the doctor was doing. "I'm making a movie," said the doctor. "Could I borrow a camera to make a movie," the young man asked. Dr. L asked him if he had ever made a movie before. When Maximo replied that he had not, Dr. L told him that of course it was impossible. He then realized that this was the very thing we had been discussing in the seminar, and he called Maximo back. "What makes you think you can make a movie?" he asked him. "I don't know, I just want to do one." Dr. L asked Maximo to come back that Friday telling him that he would teach him to use a movie camera and that he would loan him one to use.

Maximo returned that Friday and Dr. L spent about a half hour showing him how to use a 16 mm. Bolex and an exposure meter. Dr. L. told me what he had done and expressed his concern about whether the camera would be stolen, and whether his young student would ever return. On Monday morning Maximo returned with four rolls of film (which were all that he had received) exposed. They were hurried to the lab and were returned to Maximo on Wednesday. When I arrived for my seminar on Friday, I found Maximo waiting for me with what he said was a completed film. I looked at it in a viewer and saw that it had been cut up (edited) and pasted together with scotch tape. No one had explained to Maximo how to use a splicer, but he had obviously understood something about the concept of editing. I looked at the film in the viewer and immediately asked him if I could take it and make a copy for myself. He said yes. The film that you will see is the copy that I made in the lab from the original work print that Maximo had prepared.

When I asked Maximo where he got some of the ideas for putting the film together in this way (I didn't want to use the word "editing") he replied that he wanted to make it look like some of the exciting programs that he had seen on television.

These two films are only a small sample of the more than twenty-five films that my students and I have helped others to make by teaching them how to handle a motion picture camera and editing equipment. It is with the analyses of such films that one aspect of an ethnographic semiotic can start. We can begin to compare these films with a variety of other films made by different people in different contexts and for different purposes. We can analyze the films and we can analyze the ways that various people understand and go about interpreting these and other films.

These films are part of the world that man creates through semiotic systems. Some of these are called "art"--a term which has a social meaning which may differ across history and across culture. The search for an ethnographic semiotic is at its roots a search for how to understand the meaning of the various art forms we have previously studied in other ways. It is indeed fortunate that at this symposium artists and scholars concerned with semiotic theory and method have come together jointly to grapple with new ways to understand our symbolic environment.