

A PROPOSAL

Towards founding a Society for Visual Anthropology

At a recent meeting of the Board of Directors of the Program in Ethnographic Film, it was decided that, in conformity with the American Anthropological Association's suggestions, PIEF would begin to explore the formation of a society for Visual Anthropology.

The following is a short description of how and why we would like to see such a society developed.

PIEF was the culmination of many years of organizational work by a small group of anthropologists and filmmakers who were interested in both making and using ethnographic films, and who wanted to provide a forum for disseminating information about research and production in ethnofilm. We now have a membership of 1,000 and a start has been made in bringing together those interested in this area.

In examining the interests of PIEF's membership, and in thinking about recent research trends in anthropology, it has become apparent to us that there is a growing and deep interest not only in ethnofilm but also in the use and the study of visual forms in general. Not only is the term "ethnographic film" too specific and limiting to cover current interests, but its use actually tends to discourage the kinds of conceptualizations and research needed to understand how ethnographic films are and can be made and used. Ethnofilm is only one specific use of film, and knowledge about film as such—how it is made, used and understood by different cultures for different purposes in varying contexts—is clearly necessary before we can understand how it is used in one specific context—anthropology. Ethnographies of film conceived and carried out in frameworks similar, for example, to ethnographies of speaking, or ethnographies of art, will enable us to escape from the visual provincialism within which we now live.

But anthropologists are interested in more than films. There are those interested in painting, housebuilding, decoration, clothes, nonverbal and nonlinguistically connected body behavior, television, dance, drama, and a host of other culturally learned and meaningful activities that take place through the use of a large variety of visual codes and modes. These nonverbal or pictorial symbolic forms are organized and patterned within a culture in a way similar to the organization of speech and language.

A society for visual anthropology would be able to bring together those whose interest in the study of all or any visual forms fall within the conceptualizations and methodologies common to ethnology and anthropology. Such people work in a number of disciplines other than anthropology—communication, sociology, psychology, and the history of art, for example—but all are interested in what can be called the cultural dimensions of visual communication and behavior. In one way or another they are concerned with the study of the patterns, codes and rules within which visual symbolic forms are developed and used, and with the relationship of these specific codes and modes to other patterns and codes within a culture.

How does the use of pictures, carvings, films, tapes relate to how one speaks, tells stories, sings, dances, or constructs one's language? Do films or tapes made by Navajos follow Navajo linguistic (syntactic) rules? Does the way we structure reality when we make pictures of it determine how we speak of it (to turn Whorf around for a change)? Is the world out there ordered and presented to us, and are our pictures of it—and ethnographic films—merely a copy? Do all people structure their visual codes in different ways?

And another group of questions: How do different groups in our society or in other societies organize themselves around different visual codes? Does everybody find the same social organization for making movies or pictures? What social purposes are served by visual symbolic forms? Is it the same as for verbal ones?

Should one teach visual communication to our children in schools? Should one teach children to make movies or television? How? Should anthropologists learn about television as they once learned about field methods since in the future they may get to know other peoples through the tube rather than in the field? How does one analyze how another culture structures reality?



A society for visual anthropology would be able to bring together researchers who are interested in these and many other questions related to visual anthropology.

In general we would hope to invite for membership the following groups of people:

1. Those interested in the study, use, and production of ethnographic film, tape and photography for research and classroom teaching.
2. Those interested in the analysis of visual symbolic forms from a cultural-historical framework.
3. Those interested in visual technologies and methodologies for recording and analyzing behavior.
4. Those interested in the ethno-semantics of visual communication; that is, the structuring of reality as evidenced by visual production.
5. Those interested in the cross-cultural study of art and artifacts.
6. Those interested in the relationship of culture and visual perception.

We would like to expand the *PIEF Newsletter* and to change its title to the *Journal of Visual Anthropology*. It would in expanded form consist of three sections: (1) papers devoted to the kind of questions discussed above; (2) short descriptions of research in progress so that all of us can begin to share research directions and ideas; (3) reviews of books, film, and other visual material available for classroom and research uses.

We would like to help organize institutes and symposia at the Annual Meetings of the American Anthropological Association in the areas of interest to our members, ranging from research institutes to screenings, exhibition, and discussion of visual productions for use in teaching as well as general public information and presentation.

The visual media are growing increasingly powerful not only in our society but in those of many developing countries. Control of the use and distribution of films and television in schools and in nations means power to create culture. We would hope in the Society to provide a forum for discussion of the anthropological politics of symbolic forms, and would expect that our membership might want to present resolutions to the American Anthropological Association on matters about which we are knowledgeable and concerned.

VTR SCREENINGS AND DISCUSSION—at Temple University's Fifth Annual Anthropological and Documentary Film Conference

1. *EDDIE'S LOVE*. This was taped under a program organized and sponsored by the Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation, and funded by a grant from the Economic and Youth Opportunities Agency of Los Angeles under the Office of Economic Opportunity. Project Director: Ron Rundstrom; Project Coordinator: Ed Neiss; Director: Eglá Pimentel; Music: Frank Ledesma; Writers: Eglá Pimentel, Gloria Leyvas, Isela Pimentel, Rudy Montes, Eddie Villalobos, Raymond Rivera; Camera: Rudy Montes, Raymond Rivera, Paul Rivera; Film Production Unit: Larry Perea, Ron Rundstrom, Pat Rosa. Running time: 20 Minutes. Video Camera: Sony Portapak AVC-3400; Videotape: ½" B/W, Sony helical scan. Distributor: contact—Ron & Don Rundstrom, 134 Chautaugua Blvd. #12, Santa Monica, CA 90402. Apply for price.

Video Van Project: This tape is one of many short ones that total about 40 hours of tape. They were exclusively shot by children ranging in age from 6 to 19, in a special cultural arts project organized and sponsored by the Los Angeles County Department of Parks and Recreation. The project consisted of a '68 Dodge Van equipped with 3 portapak cameras and ½ hour tape decks, 4 monitors, SEG-1 special effects generator, a sound mixer, AV-5000 1 hour tape deck with editing capabilities and a lighting kit. The van as a highly mobile unit, was developed to provide exposure to an artistic media generally denied the socio/economically disadvantaged minority groups in the Los Angeles Inner City. The 10 week pilot program operated largely in these three ethnic minority areas: East Los Angeles, ethnicity: Chicano; Watts, ethnicity: Black; Sho Tokyo, ethnicity: Asian American. The 40 hours of tape can roughly be divided into 3 basic groups: (1) Free play tapes produced by setting up the cameras through the SEG-1 generator and monitors in the van located at a county park, and then turning the camera over to the children for "Play;" (2) Biographical Documentaries: Tapes made by teams of children sent out from the park using ½ hour run porta-pack units to tape what they wished; and (3) Developed Taping: Tapes either in documentary or dramatic forms, using the media as a tool to creatively express concern about themselves, their life styles and/or problems in their community. The tape, *Eddie's Love*, is one of these. The project director is available for discussion or demonstrations in workshops or symposia in the video area.

2. *NORTH AMERICAN HABITATS: THE MOBILE HOME*. Producer: David E. Kemp, Ph.D.; Director Editing: Beverly Hill and David E. Kemp; Resources: UC-Davis and Health Science Television. Running Time: 15 minutes. Video Tape: 1 inch helical scan (Amplex). Distributor: David E. Kemp, Univ. of California-Davis Medical TV, Mental Health Services, Sacramento Medical Center, 2315 Stockton Blvd., Sacramento, CA 95814. Not for Sale Now. Rental: Free.

It consists of highly-edited excerpts from 10 (45-60 minute) interviews with inhabitants of an "upper-middle" class mobile home park. The interviews, conducted by a clinical psychologist (who is mostly edited out) were unstructured, and were focused on several issues: (1) How the respondent came to choose his habitat; (2) What his home means to him, especially in terms of day-to-day life style; (3) What he thinks about a mobile-home park as a neighborhood; and (4) most importantly, ascertaining if there is a sense of community in the park.

In a sense this is a call for an organizational meeting to be held at the annual meeting of the Association in Toronto in November, 1972. We would welcome—in fact, we urge you—to write and tell us your feelings about what we have proposed. How do the list of interests correspond with your own? Do you want a Society of Visual Anthropology defined in general as we outlined? What ideas do you have?

If your response seems to warrant the formation of a Society (meeting during the Annual Meeting of the AAA, with dues and a journal), we will set up an organization meeting at the Toronto AAA meeting. You can write to: PIEF, Temple University, South Hall 200, Philadelphia, Penna. 19122. Please let us know your attitudes and thinking about this.

Sol Worth, Annenberg School of Communications
University of Pennsylvania

Jay Ruby, Temple University

The major purpose of the tape is to reveal the phenomenology of a mobile-home dweller. The tape is based on the assumption that the "real" words and visual appearance of an informant and his habitat carry far more useful information than abstract reports.

3. *TRUCKSTOP*. Production crew: Charles Lord Jr.; William D. Hurr; Hudson B. Marquez; Curtis Schreiber; Douglas D. Michels. Running time: 15 minutes. Video Camera: Sony Portapak. Video Tape: ½" Sony. Distributor: Ant Farm Video, 994 Union St., San Francisco, CA 94133. Sale price: \$60.00. Apply for Rental.

We spent three months building the media van and the life support system, now we have been on the road for two months. We are on the road back. We have only one portapak but (on portapak support systems) it has been adequate. At first we developed a style of editing in-process—that is, making judgement on tape we had already shot, and recording over slow parts. In the South and Midwest there were no support systems. Indeed the process was alien to almost everyone. In Syracuse and New York we found editing equipment and changed our style. Now we keep all original tapes in a data bank and make edited composites from this.

Our tapes are a mix of our own bus trip; weird shit along the side of the road; survival mode stuff such as building Yurts, unknown talent and rural American commercial television. We were looking for people who had taken control of their immediate environment, especially older enviro-weirdos.

4. *EL GATO Y EL RATON*. Credits: Audrey Smith; Alice J. Dunlop; Carolyn Nuanez. Running time: 12 minutes. Sony Videocorder. ½" Video Tape. Distributor: Contact—Rodolfo G. Serrano, The University of New Mexico, College of Education, Dept. of Educational Foundations, Albuquerque, New Mexico 87106. For Sale or Rental, apply.

This tape can best be described as one that attempts to "capture" the games that Mexican American migrant children play on the school grounds. The games that are played on the school grounds as shown in this tape, are those games that Mexican American migrant children play during unstructured class time. Efforts were made to trace the games to Spain and the efforts proved successful.

