

PART THREE

Chapter

8

Analysis

Up to this point we have been concerned with describing specific procedures and events in the field. We presented an outline of work already done, and a description of a set of interrelated problems in communications and anthropology which led us to the work described. Now our task is to analyze the data and relate them to the problems under study. The procedure and events in the field are critically important, in our opinion. It is not only the films that will be analyzed, but the films in relation to the filming behavior we observed: patterns of Navajo social and cognitive activities as our students related them to their process of making films. We will consider the films conceived, photographed, and edited by Navajos in the light of our field notes which recorded how we, our students, and the community behaved during the project. We will also refer to transcribed interviews covering the Navajo students' conceptions, difficulties, and achievements during the filmmaking, as well as their explanations of the way they edited and completed their films.

Our analysis draws upon several disciplines: communication, anthropology, linguistics, and cognitive psychology. Hymes

(1967, 1970) has recently dwelt on the theoretical problems of interdisciplinary research, using linguistics as a conceptual paradigm. He correctly points out that the problem is not one of combining a body of theory in anthropology with a body of theory in another discipline and thus being "interdisciplinary." Rather it is a question of certain problems demanding new theories, which (in our case) are not "anthropological" alone or "communicational" alone. What is needed in our case is what Worth has called a theory of "Codes in Context," or what Hymes (1964) has called the "Ethnography of Communication."

While our analysis is not presented as part of a formal theory of codes in context, we did have such a theory in mind as an organizing principle for our analysis.

Our analysis will be concerned with the following kinds of questions: (1) Who, in what culture, with what technology, with what instruction, and in what conditions or context, can communicate by means of motion pictures? (2) Among those who can communicate by means of movies, how do members of some specific culture organize their communication? Is there a discernible pattern or code in the structure of their movies? If so, (3) is it present in such a way that others in their own or other cultures can understand or infer meaning from their patterned film productions? (4) If persons in differing cultures can produce film productions that are patterned and allow communication to take place between filmers and film viewers, what is the relation between the code and the culture in which films are produced and understood?

These are the sort of questions that a theory of codes in context would have to elucidate, and we will deal with them in our analysis. We have obviously not been able to find definitive answers, but our analysis should provide several valuable tools toward such answers. First, there is a need to stimulate more work in this area and this report presents the first exposition of a methodology designed to assist the development of a theory of codes in context. Second, this report documents a large range of

findings which make it possible to begin comparative work across cultures using a comparable methodology. Despite the difficulty of generalizing beyond our Navajo experience, enough work has been done by us and by our students to make possible some comparisons between Navajos, black teenagers, white teenagers and other groups. In a concluding chapter we will present data from other comparable research that makes it clear that certain aspects of filming and filmmaking differ from group to group. We can see that persons in different cultures approach the filming situation differently and make films that differ on several important parameters.

It is therefore important to recognize that our analysis is not meant to describe only Navajo films and filming, although we stick very closely in this study to observations of the Navajo. Our work is intended as a paradigm in both a theoretical and a methodological sense of how to observe and compare the way groups go about communicating in the film mode.

It is also important to realize that once a method of teaching people in other cultures to make films is articulated and people of a different culture prove able to make films amenable to analysis, a great variety of complex and controllable possibilities become available for research.

A theory of codes in context such as that underlying what we are doing would suggest testing along homogeneous or heterogeneous linguistic groups or similarly divided cultural groups to see if the coding and patterning of films follow broad cultural, performance or linguistic patterns, and what their relationship is to each other and to film.

Another broad area of research suggested by our findings is that of "universals" in film communication. That is, do the Navajo films as a group show similar patterns and do they show patterns similar to films made in other cultures? Conversely, where do the Navajo films differ from one other, and where do they differ as a group from films made in other cultures?

The Navajo learned to put discrete records of image events

into a sequence which they assumed would be meaningful to someone who saw their film. It is as if they had an innate sense that visual events in sequence have meaning, and more, that other people—certainly people like themselves—would understand the meaning they implied when they chose the events they photographed in the way they photographed them and in the way they organized them into a film. The fact that they strung these image events together in a specific way different from the way we photograph and sequence events seems to us much less important than the fact that they did in fact string them together and assumed that someone else would understand. The important universal of film may be that we “know” that images in sequence have meaning.

Let us state it another way. If we were to start writing in Finnish, most readers of this manuscript would not understand. They would, however, assume we were writing in another language. For our part, we too would assume that many would not understand us. An unspoken agreement in our concept of verbal language is that a *variety* of languages exist and that our ability to speak and to understand all of them is limited.

On the other hand, if we make a film or a Navajo makes a film, we assume that we all can more or less understand it. Whether or not it is true, we somehow do assume that everyone can understand a movie. “A movie is a movie,” we seem to imply, and the babble of tongues doesn’t change our intuition. That notion is now open to testing, using the materials we have gathered. One can find out, given the statements by the Navajo about what they meant to convey, whether in fact others can infer the same meaning from the film. One can find out how much was conveyed and more importantly who, and from what cultures, with what training, can make inferences from a film similar to those implied by the filmmaker.

Another striking aspect of our research was that, although we found it comparatively easy to teach people of another culture to make a movie, they did not necessarily use it in the same way that

we did, show the same sort of interest in it, or seem likely to continue to use it and find a place in their culture for it. The most difficult thing to accept about our Pine Springs experience was our feeling that when we left Pine Springs, so would all ideas about the use of movies by the Navajos. It was not, after all, as if we were teaching graduate students, who were seeking knowledge and techniques to fit into their plans for a career.

We felt that when we pulled out of Pine Springs after two months the innovation would stop. There is good evidence that we were right. The social and economic structure of the Pine Springs community was not geared to support this innovation. Each of the filmmakers was at a dead end, with no opportunity to do anything more with what he had learned. So, while the motivation and ability were there, we too were there—as a stimulant to the innovation process and as an economic resource. In 1970 Adair interviewed Johnny Nelson to learn what had happened in the community after each student had received the print of his film. To the best of his knowledge he is the only one who has shown his films publicly.

Stated in another way, if Johnny Nelson, as a local political leader, wanted to make further use of film for the development of his community, he would have to seek financial as well as psychological support from some outside source. Capital for the use of film at Pine Springs would not be available in that community. If film is to become a functional part of the life of the Navajo themselves, it will have to be funded, at least initially, from some outside source.

Likewise we, as outsiders, would have to gain economic and political support if we were to attempt to test the feasibility and functional use of this innovation to the tribe as a whole. If such an attempt could be made, it is predicted that this mode of communication would be taken up in many parts of the reservation. This estimate is based on (1) the feasibility of teaching Navajos the technology of filmmaking in a community such as Pine Springs; (2) the ongoing interest of the Navajo leadership in mod-

ern modes of communication; and (3) the desire of the tribe to communicate to the remote areas on the reservation those methods of development that have proved practical at Window Rock.

We can report that teaching filmmaking to the Navajo and to members of other culture groups in our society was easy. The Navajo seemed to know what films were—even those who said they never saw one—and they learned to make them quickly and easily. They learned to make films much more easily, for example, than we learned to speak Navajo. It is clear, after this experience, that the Navajo learned to express themselves more fluently through film after one month of instruction than members of one linguistic community learn to express themselves in the verbal language of another.

It is this that strikes us as more remarkable than all the differences that we shall report between the way we make films and the way the Navajo make films. Not only the Navajo but all the people—black, Navajo, young, old—with whom we have worked seem able to learn this method of communication readily. Why should people of a culture so different from ours or with such different training learn a new and complex mode of communication so quickly? Could it be that a concept similar to the Chomskian view of an innate deep structure of language operates for the visual mode of communication also? Chomsky's view seeks to explain the almost miraculous ability of children to have mastered at two years of age the complex grammar of speech by suggesting that the human brain has so evolved over the millenia that it is neurologically functional to learn a complex system of rules relating verbal signs to each other and to the outside world to which they refer. The theory suggests that this structure is the same for all verbal language, and that specific languages are variations or transformations from a more basic deep structure. It seems to us not at all unreasonable to assume that just as children have internalized a complete and complex system of rules which can generate original verbal utterances whose meaning is shared within a culture, so have the Navajo—or others who have never

made films and whom we can metaphorically consider as film children—internalized some set of rules which may also be innate, which may be based on rules of perception and cognition that are neurologically functional, and which make learning to construct film utterances possible, easy and “natural.”

It should be noted here that our use of the word “language” reflects not only an academic difficulty—we have hedged and put quotation marks around it throughout—but reflects a bias in our very use of symbolic forms in communication of all kinds. We simply do not have a good word for the structure inherent in messages in different modes. We do not have the right words to talk about film, dance, facial expression, body positions, and communicative patterns or structures that are not verbal or that accompany verbal communication. “Language” is the word we use when we want to say that communication has occurred in any mode. Thus we find that we talk of the language of dance, the language of gesture, the language of art, the language of film, and even the language of poetry. We are only now beginning to separate speaking from “language” and to make the kinds of distinctions which in many ways the ubiquity of the word “language” has prevented our recognizing. It is only recently that a phrase like “the language of speaking,” referring to the pattern, code, or even grammar of speaking, has become meaningful.

We will continue to use the word “language” because euphemisms for it are not really clear enough, but we would like our readers to know that we are concerned with more than the commonly accepted ideas of verbal grammar. We are interested in more than the rules of grammatical utterances or in so-called correctness. In fact, at this point in the development of our understanding of film or in the development of film as a mode of communication, the notion of grammaticality doesn’t make much sense. We are concerned with patterns of usage in our film “language,” with why a person makes one film cademe rather than another or why he makes one particular cademe at one time and not at another time or in another situation. We are concerned

with what things he chooses to say—filmically—and with how he says it, so that we may discover the rules he is unconsciously following.

The Way We Intend to Analyze Our Data

In order to delineate some of the differences we noted, we will need to describe certain elements of the context (the filming behavior) as well as of the code (the film). It is useful, therefore, to think of our work as the report of observations in these two areas, code and context, and to consider (1) the differences we noted as reflecting the different contexts in which we and the Navajo make films and (2) the consequences of those differences on the resultant pattern of film.

The context might be defined as those dimensions which explain some important aspect of the specific situation within which the films were produced. Among them are the following. (1) The learning situation—composed of the students' previous level of learning as well as what we taught them, and including the specific arrangements and methods under which they learned. This would have to include the way the Navajo conceived of learning, its place in their value system in general, how they placed learning *film* within their general notion of learning, and how they structured their own learning situation in relation to our teaching methods. (2) The choice of students—the ways and reasons that we had for choosing certain students, and the ways they devised for controlling our choices. (3) The students' choice of actors for their films—the kinds of activities and talents they felt actors in their films should have, as well as the social relations they felt it necessary for them to have with their actors. (4) The choice of film subjects or themes—the kind of subject matter they thought appropriate to make a film about, and the kind of event they felt appropriate to photograph to express an idea or theme. Under this aspect of context we would include

their awareness of the community's feelings about appropriateness of certain themes or events being described or shown in a film. (5) Their method of working, both technical and perceptual—how they handled equipment, what kind they preferred, whether they literally *saw* comfortably or in the same way we did when looking through viewfinders or viewers or at projected images. (6) The interrelation of the filmmaking and the community. Here we would be concerned with analyzing the social controls and freedoms surrounding filming, filmmaking, and learning film within this particular culture.

The second area of analysis includes those elements which relate to the *code*—the film—itsself, its description, and the rules or patterns that might be applied to generating or producing what we or they would call a "Navajo film." The areas considered at this stage of code analysis are: (1) The narrative "style" of the films, related to the mythic and symbolic forms of the culture. Here we would be concerned with how a Navajo feels it necessary to tell a film story, and what specific structures he always, or in certain situations, employs. (2) The syntactic organization and sequencing of events and units of "eventing." Here we would be concerned with how an event, an act, or a part of a story or theme is divided into units of *cademes* and *edemes*. We would be concerned with the rules of sequencing—they way *edemes* are joined—which *edemes* or *cademes* need "something in between," or "can go together." We would want to know if certain *edemes cannot* go with others, are optional, or must be preceded or followed by some other event. (3) The cultural, perceptual, and cognitive restriction influencing either semantic or syntactic organization and structure. Here we want to show not how they see, in a biological sense, but what they feel they *ought* to see in a cultural sense. Can certain *cademes* be taken but not used as *edemes*? Are there cultural restrictions about taking or using close-ups, long shots, or medium shots of specific events, in specific situations? (4) The relation between the structure of their verbal language and the structure of their films. Here we want

to relate specific properties of the Navajo language—its concern with motion, for example—to specific ways in which Navajo speakers structure their films.

We have decided to build our analysis around a presentation of the differences between our films and the Navajo films on the level of code. Many of the areas delineated above in the first area of analysis have been discussed in previous chapters and can best be further discussed in connection with the specific films or parts of films we will be describing on a coding level. The areas of context (1 to 6) and code (1 to 4) are in truth necessary intellectual distinctions which we hope can be kept in mind. The process of making a film, however, is an ongoing one. A specific person living in a specific way makes a specific film. He doesn't decide that certain problems are code problems or context problems any more than a child speaking makes conscious decisions about syntax or semantics when he wants to tell daddy about seeing a red fire engine. The process of describing how people make films seems in some way similar. Things get mixed up in the describing; more than one level of analysis is necessary to describe what on another level looks like one event.

We will therefore talk about specific films and specific edemes and cademes, how specific students photographed and edited them. In the process, we will bring to bear our observations on the context which influenced them. We will not talk about the similarities between the way the Navajo make films and the way people in other cultures make them. We have already mentioned that the way so many different groups make films understood by so many others is one of the most significant findings in our research in this area.

We are concerned in this book primarily with two things: to present a method of teaching people to make films showing us how *they* see *their* world, and to present a way of analyzing these films in their cultural context as a communicative code.