INTRODUCTION

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Saying Cheese was conceived as a vehicle for assembling and presenting general notions and specific studies about the role of visual communication in our lives as participants and observers on the wired planet. We were especially interested in gathering articles on photography (still photography), film (cinema), and videotape, an area of concern for which there is no satisfactory umbrella term. The "stuff" that we are calling "visual communication" often includes sound and other non-visual components as well as visual media which cannot be characterized as photography, film, or videotape.

The legitimacy of these no-name phenomena has by no means been established within the academy: audio-visual technology continues to be conceived either as a teaching tool or as entertainment; thus it is associated with vice principals or film critics. Scholars still take refuge in the security of the printed page, despite the prophetic writings of Buckminster Fuller and Marshall MacLuhan. In most graduate school programs, visual communication is neither recognized as a language or tool skill nor routinely accepted as a medium for serious scholarly exposition. Low budgets and the hassles of selecting, obtaining, and showing the products of visual communication encourage chalk talks; similar problems are evident in attempts to teach production courses.

Also lacking is a neat typology of this stuff. In this issue, we are using one conventional means of sub-dividing visual communication, concentrating upon photography, film, and videotape--and we have distinguished these visual media from other media, such as speaking and writing. We hereby emphasize that these subdivisions and distinctions are more conveniences, and we acknowledge that some media have been slighted in this issue so that we may focus on others which generally have been neglected by students in the social sciences and humanities.

Within the overlapping categories mentioned above, scholars have attempted to define genres using various criteria, such as purpose, technique, skill, and subject matter. For example, films have been categorized as documentary, educational, anthropological, ethnographic, professional, naive, conventional, scientific. We see no reason to assume that such typological concerns will be more than conveniences for retrieval and exposition.

In planning this issue we considered four general areas in which the concerns of folklorists intersect with some aspect of the process of visual communication. The first area is the use of audio-visual technology as a recording device for comparative, repeated, and multiple analyses. This is surely the most common use of the technology among folklorists, anthropologists, and sociologists; a camera, notebook, and tape recorder are commonplace components in the field kit of the researcher. Many questions concerning this use of the technology can be raised: when

is it appropriate? How does it interfere? What does it contribute?
How is it used most effectively? What kinds of relationships obtain be-
tween recording technology and interpretation? Such questions are prior
to the usual questions of brand name and film stock.

A second area we have termed "elicitation." Here the products of audio-
visual technology are shared with "informants" in order to focus inter-
views, stimulate memory, and encourage aesthetic and other sorts of intangible
responses. In other cases, the "researcher" gives the "informants" the
technology in order to gain access to their visual sensibilities. Obviously,
this use of visual communication goes well beyond giving away snapshots in
order to "establish rapport with informants."

A third area might be termed "presentation." By this we mean the use of
audio-visual technology for communicating academic concerns to both general
and specialized audiences. Too often this responsibility is left to audio-
visual specialists who have little or no background in the subject being
presented. We are also concerned that phenomena with significant visual
aspects (for example, dance) are too frequently translated into words
rather than into pictures; this practice tends to obscure rather than
clarify their fundamental nature.

A fourth area is the treatment of audio-visual products, and the circum-
stances of their use, as data. This area reamins largely uninvestigated,
at least by folklorists, notwithstanding that people ("folk," "natives,"
"scholars," etc.) create and preserve audio-visual products and that folk-
lore (however conceived) finds expression in audio-visual forms. "Natives"
and "scholars" alike use photographs and films for reconstructing past
events and for making intragroup and intergroup comparisons through time
and space. All of this begs questions of how such materials are collected,
preserved, archived, and analyzed; visual images can tell us a lot, but
they may not tell us what we want to know. More precisely, visual repre-
sentations do not speak for themselves any more than cameras take pictures:
they are a tangible product of human communication and are understood best
in terms of this process.

When human beings are communicating among themselves, they are structuring
reality by utilizing certain social conventions. Language allows us to
speak about reality as if it existed apart from our perceptions as a thing
in itself--as if it were a concrete material body, objective and universal,
waiting to be perceived, described, analyzed. Bennetta Jules-Rosette's
study of the Marrapodi films is an articulate warning against this siren of
objective reality. Her conclusions concerning visual communication are in
general agreement with those of other reasearchers who have found no identi-
fiable universal language or grammar of speech or music. Given the common
elements of a visual language from which to choose in formulating their films
(zoom, pan, tilt, hold, pause, etc.), Maranke filmers evidence a pattern
that is easily distinguishable from that manifested by Americans filming
the same event. Jules-Rosette sees differences in intent and use, which
seem to vary according to degree of shared past experiences, as important
factors in determining the construction of the filmer's product. In short,

the meaning of any particular event is not the same for the Maranke Apostles as it is for the American students: the Maranke structure their reality one way, the Americans another.

In certain circumstances, visual representations can be used as data for investigating how people perceive themselves and others with whom they maintain intimate interactions. In his examination of "the home-mode of visual communication," Richard Chalfen outlines an approach to studying imagemaking technology by non-professionals within the context of its use in everyday life. Chalfen has adapted several key concepts from sociolinguistics-- notably from Dell Hymes' "ethnography of speaking"--to suit the special characteristics of a visual language. Chalfen's "sociovidistic framework" includes what he conceives to be the significant kinds of visual-communicating events and the salient components of such events, as well as the possible relationships among them. The analysis of home-mode photography, such as home-movies and slide shows, is a potentially rich source for understanding how people structure, preserve, and use their past experiences.

Visual portrayals of past events are no more absolute than any other mode of constructing and communicating reality; the past is not some thing that is laid down once and for all, nor is it somehow captured and pre- served to remain eternally static--despite the compelling "realness" of photographic images. The major conceptual thrust of Karin Becker Ohrn's study of a family's collection of photographs is toward the interaction between individuals' memories of the past and the photographs which stimulate them. Ohrn suggests that "the memories that are sustained by looking through old pictures are the memories of earlier selves. The collection provides a concrete link with past lives,aand going over the collection is a way of communicating with the past." For older family members, the photographs "provide a continuous thread" with the past, while for younger members the pictures are "a way to discover the past" and unite with it. Preceptions of the past vary, however, both within one individual and among the members of the family: the photographs often elicit debates concerning who, what, where, when, and so forth. The past is dynamic, it draws its meaning from the present.

The reality of the past emerges only in relation to its use in the present: the fluidity of use and meaning becomes evident when we take a message out of one context and place it into another. In his paper, Steven Ohrn out- lines the problems inherent in translating visual images formulated for one mode (the home-mode) into another (the data-mode). The outward ap- pearance of the message units (the slides) remains constant, but the code has changed; the "same message" is read differently now because its context-- its use--its meaning--has shifted. Ohrn asserts that attempts to render the Archives' collection more "objective" by eliminating "personal" slides and associations (such as accompanying narratives) has resulted in a loss of information potentially useful as data. Selecting data on the basis of a rigid dichotomy between "subjective noise" and "objective data" is misleading as well as reductive, for it presupposes a nonexistent objective reality. Rather, Ohrn suggests, the procedures for identifying and sit- uating data in the Archives should incorporate the circumstances of the photographer's formulation, encoding, and use of the information.

Photographs are the product of the photographer's perceptions of reality.
The point of thier existence, their meaning, is how they are used.
James Leary utilizes this important background of intelligibility as data
in his discussion of the "ex-Farleyites." The reality which is communicated
by the "Fartley Hall Dirtballs" in their outrageous activities is anti-
thethetical to their everyday, "normal" behavior patterns. This "hurt"
behavior, which deliberately plays on and off of fundamental social con-
ventions, is frequently recorded via photographs. The photographs function
both as visual labels for past events and as periodic stimuli for recalling
and re-experiencing the shared past. The personal-experience narratives,
or memorats, elicited by the photographs are a kind of literal "communal
re-creation": all of the members of the group who are present participate
in relating and restructuring their common (or even conflicting) perceptions
of the past; the narratives that emerge from this process are not the pro-
duct of one individual (even though the photographs may be), but are a
synthesis of individual recollections. As the ex-Farleyites view and
discuss the photographs, they are reinforcing and perpetuating an esoteric
group identity; they are asserting a concurrent reality that is only one
of the various multiple realities each has access to.

A photograph may mean differently. Rochelle Kolodny suggests that this
apparent fact can generate in the viewer a tension between a photograph's
representational ("signifying") qualities, on the one hand, and its aesthetic
qualities, on the other. However, Kolodny warns, the distinctions between
a signifying object and an aesthetic object are neither clear-cut nor hard
and fast. Rather, these two qualities should be seen as the opposite ends
of a continuum which is culturally mediated by the photographer and his
photograph; the viewer also mediates along this continuum--a process termed
"distancing." When the signifying aspects of the photograph obscure its
intended aesthetic or artful qualities, "under-distancing" occurs: the
viewer responds to the photograph as if it were a picture of the "real"
world. When a photograph is perceived aesthetically, the phenomena of
"psychical distance" obtain: the viewer removes the photograph from the
realm of everyday reality, and it takes on the quality of "otherness" or
"remoteness" that is characteristic of the "contemplative mode." Citing
specific examples, Kolodny considers how this approach can contribute to
our understanding of the aesthetic and cultural implications of the "meta-
morphosis of reality into art."

At times, asserting an objectivity which does not exist can hamper effective
communicating (not to mention what it does to epistemology). Many film-
makers adopt an impersonal stance, asserting, in effect, "The less of me
there is in the film, the more objective and true it will be." Or, like-
wise, "The individuals that are portrayed in my films should stand for
----s (a group, society, culture, etc.); they should be typical ----s.
Therefore, their individuality ('idiosyncracies') should not be conveyed."
Felicitas Goodman has tested such assumptions in her classrooms. Asking
the question, "How do students react to the kind of simple, intimate film
making that the Super8 demands?", Goodman elicited from her students direct
comparisions between her "home-mode," Super8 films and slick, commercial
films. Again and again, students expressed preference for Goodman's

low-budget, personal films. As a corollary, Goodman also found that
her students were better able to remember details from her films than
from the rented ones. Her explanations are instructive for those con-
cerned with presenting "others" effectively: her long experience and
personal involvement with the people she filmed provides a continuity
which is expressed in her films; her "informants" become more than "just
images slipping by across the screen"--they are "real" and believable and
memorable, not because they are "objective" or "true" representations of
"typical" Mayans, but because each is a unique human being. This is how
Goodman perceives them, and this is how they are conveyed in her films.

Some filmmakers deliberately omit from their films features of what they
conceive to be "objective reality." Lois Kuter describes one approach
to this sort of visual communicating in her discussion of travel filmers
and their audiences: "Defining 'reality' as the mundane and drab, ugly,
or difficult aspects of life, travel filmers avoid presenting it, although
they are well aware of the less pleasant side of the places they visit."
The livelihood of the travel filmer depends upon attracting a paying
audience. Hence, he attempts to portray his subject in a manner which
will elicit pleasant memories and associations. Many who attend travel
films express a "taste for good clean entertainment;" they regard travelogues
as an alternative to the sex and violence of commercial movies. The suc-
cessful travel filmer is sensitive to the tastes of his potential audience,
and he allows his freedom of choice in formulating and selecting the
visual images he presents to be guided by his perceptions of his potential
audience. Thus, although travel films are professionally and commercially
generated, they often convey the intimacy of a personal mode of communication.

Multiple and shifting realities, freedom of choice in formulating messages,
circumstances or contexts of use, and meaning seem to be closely related and
significant aspects of visual communication--indeed, of the process of
communicating in general.

How far is it possible for human beings to communicate among themselves,
to comprehend another's reality? Does it make sense to ask this question?
Henry Glassie and Steven Ohrn review a film, The Spirit of Ethnography,
which they conclude is "not . . . a satire of anthropology, but . . . a
satire of the human attempt to communicate." Tracing various concentric
circles of understanding, Glassie and Ohrn discuss Spirit as a satire of
ethnographic methodology and the presuppositions of doing anthropology, a
parody of life in the academy, a home movie or "souvenir" for those who
made it, an audio-visual pun on classroom documentary films, a documentary
of our culture, and, finally, "a howl about alienation." The spirit of
their review fits The Spirit of Ethnography fits the spirit of ethnography.
It is not always clear who is doing what and with which and to whom.

The development and refinement of videotape recording technology has
provided a relatively inexpensive, light-weight, and easy-to-operate
tool for folklorists. Carole Bell and Patricia Mastick describe the
major components of VTR equipment, comparing and contrasting its potential
uses with those of film for field recording, eliciting responses from
informants, presenting the results of folklore research, and for the
utilization of informant-generated visual products as data. They discuss

specific examples of the applications of videotape in these areas and include a brief history of its use in North America. Perhaps the unique characteristics of videotape recording technology will aid in stimulating a heightened awareness of visual communication among folk-lorists and other social scientists/humanists.

The articles included in this issue satisfy our hopes for presenting an interdisciplinary publication focusing on (1) problems related to the use of visual communications technology in collection, synthesis, and presentation of data by researchers and (2) analysis of the use of visual communications technology in the context of everyday life by amateur photographers.

The wide-ranging conversation between Steven Feld and Steven Ohrn brings to the surface the major problems and conceptions which underlie the study of folklore and its relation to visual communication. It is an approriate note to close on.