

carefully question the rest of us about whether or not he was getting fat. He would also stick his finger out through his pants and wiggle it, making it look very much like the real thing. Some students put the camera on their friends, more I think to check out their responses than to get the picture itself. These spontaneous outbursts of inner feelings help everyone become more comfortable with themselves and each other.

Our equipment is not portable so we are restricted to studio work. Students come up with stories or vignette sequences that are rich with fantasies and fears of violence, love, power and death. A girl writes a script about finding a lover. Or, a timid boy acts out a murder. On another tape, a boy tries to attract a girl and when she rejects him - poof! - he makes her disappear.

Sometimes something is said about relationships within the class if the student himself chooses who is to perform on his tape. Some students' tapes force intimacy by staging fights, or love scenes, or by having students show more of their bodies than

they usually do.

Each student's idea for taping is an expression of the self deep inside wanting to come to the surface in some form and wanting to be accepted. Whether the individual knows it or not, this happens. Since dramatic tapes are conceived of as entertainment and, in successful ones, there is joy shared in the producing, even the most repulsive fantasies can in the end be accepted as human. Kids feel closer to their friends in class after having expressed ideas that might in other forms appear too frightening, too loving, or too ambitious. Seeing others act your ideas on tape legitimizes and lends reality to what was once secret.

There is a strong need among psychiatric patients to feel useful enough to perform a task and to feel equal to other people in doing and thinking what comes naturally. Very few other activities in my experience have been as compelling and have offered so much toward these needs as has the use of videotape.

Aesthetics of the Portapak

PHILLIP LOPATE

The portable videotape camera-and-tape deck system, or "portapak," has been called by some, the most revolutionary breakthrough in media since Gutenberg. From the evidence of the ½ inch videotapes produced so far, this remains to be seen; yet it is easy to understand the enthusiasm of portapak fanatics, if not always to agree with them. The portapak represents a simple-to-operate technology which can come into the hands of a large number of users. One portapak can go a long way in a community if used democratically. Moreover, it makes it possible for one person to be the producer, director, and cameraperson of a videotape.

Visceral Documentaries

The excitement of shooting on location is like that shiver once produced in audiences by neo-realist cinema, when the historical conditions of liberated Italy forced a kind of shooting on the run, as filmmakers went into the streets and seemed to find fresh material everywhere. Portapak users have accomplished something equivalently new in documentary work by uncovering corners of neighborhood life that had always been neglected by professional crews.

However, where Rossellini or, later, direct-cinema documentarists like Leacock were able to mediate fresh footage into an intelligent narrative whole, the average portapak cameraman fritters away

novel subjects because he does not know what he is looking for. Panning a hand-held camera from face to face, from store to street, he tries to make the eye do all the selective work instantaneously that the brain should be in on. Videotape, by the ease with which it can be kept running, encourages the operator to find solutions through a reaction to visual stimuli as they are thrown at him. The impulse is to forego preliminary analysis and "dig into reality." The fact that the reality captured in this way is only as subtle as an individual's defensive reaction time does not get questioned.

Let us take the example of a birthday party. (But a protest march or a street fair would be just as good.) The tendency is to shoot into the thick of things. But greatest density also yields greatest overlap of planes, and since the video camera is poor at giving depth perspective, you get low definition information when you play back. It would be wise for the user to take two or three seconds extra to analyze what details are worth recording. Yet the anxiety to get it all down leads to a rapid glossing over of surfaces. The familiar figure-8 eye movement which is a natural way to look at crowds is not necessarily a good way to convey visual information to an audience. In hand-held portapaks, the emphasis is placed on having the camera follow the path of the eye. The only problem with this is that the taped image can never duplicate what the