



ZEN TUBES[®]

by MARCO VASSI

To write about . . . to write . . . about . . .

Tape is explaining a trip to someone who's never dropped acid. You have to say, it's *like* this.

But here, between the thing and one's consciousness of the thing, between the observer and the thing observed, a gap appears. In that space grow conflict, thought, fear, memory, pleasure, symbolization, sorrow, hope. In short, the entire problem of living.

What helps?

The trap is that any how becomes a what. Any effort in getting from here to there only underscores the fact of the distance. Any plan to get to the other side is merely another ideology.

Some people seem to be able to grab the knack of living in time while aware of eternity, of letting themselves be the formative wave of history while remaining in the formless present. Who knows what does it: genes, traumatic escape from destruction, sheer intelligence, madness, dope, forces from outer space, a shot in the head from a good guru.

But this has always been the few. The many still stumble around in a stupidity concerning self that has brought the species to the point of extinguishing not only itself but all life on earth. How to turn the masses on?

Ah, but that brings us to the how once more. And implies some form of elite who will write the program. Or do the people want to be programmed? Dig, ecology is in the public eye for about a year, and already there are ecology "groups," and an ecology "movement," and a burdgeonong religion of ecology (taped at the Earth People's Park gathering at the Electric Circus, Mama Cass raps, "Ecology has really helped me: I've lost about twenty-five pounds."). In the name of the Fuller, the Commoner, and the Holy Biosphere. Amen.

So, tape is a blast. We sit stoned and dig each other's worldview. We rap and eat and fuck and watch tape. And for us, it's about the same as it has always been: just living fully, openly, honest to the what *is*. Tape adds a dimension. Watch one of *Mango's* pornos, and dig cock and cunt and rock and hip editing. See that it isn't a blue movie, but an easy scene with some people swinging out and grooving. And you wonder about jealousy and exclusivity and how much of the old puritan blood still runs in your veins. And before you know it, your whole fix on sex is changed. Through tape. Or watch one of Frank's dada experiments, and feel your mind be turned to silly putty. Watch habit-dulled objects come alive in ways that make your hair stand on end, and know that your perception of reality has been radically altered. Through tape.

The tube is heavy. Electrons whip through a vacuum and fall in waves on a sensitized screen, where the human animal reads them as patterns, as *meaning*. Just like in real life, where the stuff of existence bops about, doing its subatomic thing, and lo and behold, vortices of consciousness appear to ham their way across the screen. No illusion of movement, as in film. What you see is the stuff of energy doing its dance, and the dance seems strangely familiar.

When the image on the tube turns out to be you, seen through the eyes of someone who knows you well, or who knows how to look, catching you in an unguarded moment, when you see all the intimations you have had about yourself in electronically impacted reality, objectified, then your mind expands.

That's right, kiddies, just like with grass. Only different, and in some ways, more. When the technology really gets sophisticated, it will definitely be more. And for full effect, combine the electric and the chemical inputs.

What is tape? Tape is metatheatre. Tape is understanding the metaphor of life-as-theatre in a more than intellectual manner. There you are, on the screen, doing what you just did ten minutes ago. Reality has been recorded. And you are watching the recording. But you are reality, now. And it doesn't take too long before you make the jump to the awareness of reality watching the recording of reality. And if you have a hip cameraman around, he will tape you watching tape, and then play that back, using a technique which allows you to see yourself in an infinity of television screens, one inside the other forever. Space disappearing into space as time laps upon time.

If you don't achieve satori on the spot, you have a skull filled with solid concrete.

However, we must assume from their behavior, that a good percentage of our fellow human beings (although they are sincere folk doing the best they can) have their skulls filled with cement. Will the genius of the technology affect them? Or more immediately, will the communications barons allow anything more than a spoon feeding, sufficiently interrupted by commercial announcements, and then only if permeated with government approved conditioning?

Tape will soon be everywhere. CATV will bloom, and electronic neighborhoods will be the rage. Special-interest networks will spring up. Home cassettes will rival the hi-fi markets in sound recording. There will be a computer in every pot and playback equipment for the sophisticates to add dash to their orgies. Videotape encounter groups will stick up their hybrid heads and bray like donkeys. Tape as an art form will develop its modes, its classicism, its surrealism, its abstractions. The boobs who have been staring hypnotically at the tube for thirty years will come to with a start, rub their eyes, and discover that they have a radically new medium on their hands. Finally, it will become good business. And the race for exploitation rights will be on.

But by then there may be no air left to breathe.

There is some talk, and there will be more, in so-called underground tape circles about the revolutionary impact of tape. I think it's too late for all that. Every innovation in technology brought about by heads will be used by the power-trip neanderthals to furnish a more sophisticated 1984. But that's the way it goes.

I think the thing to watch out for is this. That there be as little talking about all this as possible, not to keep the enemy from overhearing or any of that nonsense, but to guard against coming to believe one's own rhetoric. The next thing you know, there will be a videotape movement. And theories of videotape. And videotape critics. And the whole superstructure of the very scene that tape is supposed to help get us out of.

Organizations don't work. They never have. They won't now. So it is above all imperative to keep things loose, to keep the flow moving.

Let tape work, not become a fetish. Make beautiful tapes, but remember that you are conveying information, not making art. Art is a fossilized concept. Show tapes to your friends. Make tapes with your friends. Remember that the important thing is the friendship.

Krishnamurti defined war as "the spectacular and bloody projection of our daily lives." Right on. Already the seeds of schism have appeared, the rivalries, the factionalisms. Already there is a scramble for the man's bread, with all the changes that involves. Already the deadly structure of the civilization begins to order the relationships among the videotape avant-garde.

The alarm button is ringing all the time, so loudly and so consistently that it may become an unnoticed part of the environment, and we end by shouting and gesticulating frantically, or ending all efforts at communication, because life these days is like living under a 24-hour blast furnace. You wish everything would just lay down and stop for a while!

But it doesn't stop. History knaws at your belly like rats. The throttle is wide open and the pilot is asleep at the controls. Hydrogen bombs fused and ready, up there flying all the time. Radioactive wastes in the soil. Oil on the beaches. The carbon cycle teetering dangerously. And everywhere, suspicion, anxiety, confusion. Welcome to the twentieth century. Watch the babies starve. Watch the old folks die of loneliness. Watch the schizophrenics drool. Watch freedom everywhere forget its name and sink into a fuzzy memory of what it thinks it might once have been.

There is no good denying it: there is a security to be had in slavery. Not the ownership of one human being by another, but the willing lashing of one's mind to the mast of some inner psychological security, some belief, some seeming certainty. To stand alone and free is sheer terror. Until you get used to it, and then a certain healing numbness sets in, which is the signal that you have slipped into habit once more. Free is putting it all on the line all the time, not copping to false security in the outer or inner worlds. And no one can be free but you. No one can do it for you. Even your friends can only offer you a joint.

Can the sheer impact of the tape experience do it? If the medium becomes interactive on a wide scale, and information is accessible to all, if the dictatorship of knowledge (power) is broken, will the people be free? That is, will every man woman and child on the face of the globe stand in full constant existential freedom, a creature of essence as well as personality, an ape-angel that can live with duality and survive with humor and grace? Because nothing less than that will do.

We shall see. In the face of our history, any vision which even hints at such utopian conditions is suspect. But life is for the living of it, and on we go, doing the best we can. One thing, at any rate, seems certain. A good part of the generation which grew up with television as part of the environment is beginning to use the medium in ways proper to its structure. And in the creative use of technology is the first faint sense that the apocalypse can be caught and reflected in its full awesomeness. Perhaps, if the species can be made to see, really see, itself as a sleepwalking evolutionary freak, perhaps in that very seeing may be intelligent action.

So raise high the video cameras, adjust sensitivity control, fix horizontal roll, stabilize brightness and contrast, and forward! Either to rouse the human lemmings from this accelerating rush to cliff edge and oblivion, or to leave for whoever comes after a video verite of the end of our world.

Humanity has progressed from one percent living in appreciable health and comfort in 1900 to 44 percent currently living at higher standards than ever before—exclusively through the efforts of design-scientists whose heads probably were cluttered with all the fears, illusions and confusions that Krishnamurti so rightly deplures. I acknowledge that Krishnamurti probably was right, but that ultimately it comes down to a question of priorities; we simply don't have much time left for luxuries. Nothing in our experience indicates that sufficient numbers of humanity are going to spontaneously shrug off two million years of fearful conditioning before we reach the deadline of the doomed. With 200 pounds of TNT for every pound of human flesh on Earth, that's a dangerous strategy. On the other hand, it is now scientifically demonstrated that humanity's schizophrenic design-scientists can liberate us all from economic slavery by 1985. Then and only then will we be free . . . Bucky asked if I knew that he and Krishnamurti were friends . . . Krishnamurti maintains that if one thinks clearly, experiences life directly, without bias or ideology or the filters of conditioning, then the physical world will change as a result of the change in man.

. . . Fuller, on the other hand, observes that we are what we eat and insists that a fundamental reorganization of the physical environment will result in a new human consciousness.

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TAPING THE GALAXY[®]

by ALEX GROSS

Two ideas that should be separated right away are video-tape as communication and videotape as art. They may in fact be mutually exclusive, though each one may be alright on its own level. Videotape art is already a reality and is likely to become even more important in the future, but it should be remembered that it is almost part of the nature of videotape to be able to reach large numbers of people, which means that art in its elitist sense, as it has developed in other media, may no longer be a relevant concept. The idea of people coming and paying money for the privilege of worshipping videotape as art may be an approach at odds with the medium.

A more meaningful concept of videotape may involve a simple passage of people in front of the material in an unpretentious, homey sort of background. Part of the appeal of conventional television has been that we have been able to watch it informally with none of the fixed seats and enforced silence of the movie house. Phonograph records have represented the same sort of advance over concert going. If videotape salons do become part of our neighborhoods simply because they offer material not available on conventional television, then we may expect the networks to finally start having second thoughts about their level of programming. It may then turn out that one of the impact of videotape will be to revolutionize the nature of what is available on television.

This will be quite revolutionary in itself, though it is by no means all that videotape will do to change society. Even if network TV does get hipper because of the threat posed by public tape, there will always be a time and culture lag between what the pioneers in the field are doing and what the networks are letting through (or more probably imitating).

The confusion of videotape with art is dangerous for another reason. There are some videotape people who are so turned on by the medium (and its undoubted potential) that they assume that all that is videotape is necessarily good. They worship videotape in a way that is not in keeping with a new medium which must remain lean, lithe, and healthy in order to find its place and be most influential—rather they worship uncritically anything that is put on tape and they put anything on tape in any or no style at all merely as to worship it. It must be realized that there is good and bad taping just as there are good and bad films, acting, or music. Unless some special effect is being attempted, there is an optimum time exposure for any precise purpose, and optimum lighting plan, and a choice of optimum camera angles.

There is nothing wrong with a hand-held camera, poor sound and lighting, and bad timing where the material is all important or better conditions simply are not available (or where they add to a mood or effect), but there is no point in rejoicing in these conditions for their own sake. There is certainly no point in calling such work art. The really great videotape artists may turn out to be the ones who first master the incredibly sophisticated mixing equipment and special effects generators available in commercial TV studios and start playing them like the giant image organs they really are. None of which is to say that art is unobtainable in the meantime on simpler black and white equipment.

Much is also made of videotape's ability to make things seem absolutely natural and lifelike, so that it is possible to jolt people into gaining insights into themselves and society by presenting unexpected material on it. This is undoubtedly true, though it may become less true as tape becomes more an accepted part of our daily lives. The real jolt comes not just because tape is lifelike but because most of the network TV we have been indoctrinated with has been so stylized, remote, and unlikelike. In this sense the effect of the first honest tapes may be the same as the effect of the first socially relevant film we ever saw or the first dirty book we read or the first crotch shot in a sexpaper. In that case the effect will probably wear off and we will be free to explore tape for its own sake, just as we have all become connoisseurs and critics of socially relevant films, dirty books and crotch shots.

Sex is another area videotape is sure to affect, with all the potential this has for the rest of our life. In the last century the famous Victorian sensualist Walter, who wrote *My Secret Life*, used to move a mirror to its best angle next to whatever bed he was operating in. With videotape the participants will have the added pleasure of seeing themselves on TV while they do it or, if they prefer, they can have a tape monitor on one side of the bed and a mirror on the other. But there is a technical problem which the sensualist will encounter in his (or her) use of tape. It is impossible to make love and operate the camera at the same time. This means that the camera must be planted in one place and take in only one angle. The solution to this problem is to invite someone in to hold the camera, which will mean changing the nature of the sexual act for many people. And if one invites one person to hold the camera, why not a second or a third? And in that case why not pass the camera around among everyone—it may turn out that in this context videotape is the kinetic equivalent of the polaroid camera.

The most important thing is that videotape will function for a society based on active participation what television was for a society based on observation from afar. This means that good tape will not necessarily be the same thing as what we thought was good TV, and the tendency to merely parody the television we have known, typified by Channel One, is likely to be a false start, though an understandable one when we realize how much deeply pent-up resentment there is against established television. But tape people should not worry too much about old television standards, rather they should be concerned with defining new open-ended standards for the new audience already in the making. No doubt there will be angry denunciations from those on high, just as there is now a cautious certain quality to the undoubted interest many firms and networks are showing for tape.

But the direction of the future is clear in this regard at least. Videotape is more than just another medium—it is a whole new definition of culture. Where our fathers defined their culture in objects to be sold at auction and shown in museums, we today see the only meaningful definition of culture as all the things that connect one mind with another, as openness to new ideas, as communication itself. And videotape is culture because tape is communication.