

# portable video: the natural medium



photo: Dudley

## *Life Processes, a process revolution*

Just what is it anyway about the nature of portable video which makes process its most important product?

(A blessing in disguise). Somehow at a crucial point in time in a highly commercialized, industrialized, mechanized nation, we have become enamoured with a technology for which there is no marketable product. Oh yes, there will be the cassette revolution, and of course cable tv is a possibility, and really, the range of possibilities for its use is infinite—but still—who's buying ½ inch video tapes these days?

*With no market in sight, we are at last being forced into using a high tech communications tool as a real aid in extending our capabilities of relating to our fellow man and even in better understanding our own complex selves.* Except for a few industry types who use ½ inch video as a "notebook" of ideas for making more realistic automobile commercials, most of the people who become involved with the medium are sincerely interested in developing humanistic uses of the technology. Could be also that most of these people share a feeling that there is a certain beauty in life which is a lot more interesting and honest as information than the inane, if not complete life-negating entertainment and "news" which the networks see fit to sell to their audiences.

Because we are concerned with life as a process, it is

only natural that in the act of taping, the foreplay (as well as the afterplay, instant replay) becomes as important as the orgasm itself. Otherwise, the subject becomes an object, and the cameraman (or woman) becomes a video chauvanist or rip off artist which is most often the case when a big tv or film crew comes into a scene and takes the information and runs.

Portable video, because of its nature, has a built-in safeguard against such tendencies. Even if you're not into passing the camera around and letting your subject/object become a participant in the production and seeing how easy and fun the whole media trip really is, you can at least let him (them) (her) have the experience of seeing himself replayed on a monitor after the fact, since no one should be denied the realization that he is equal to any superstar the establishment decides to hype up. Anyone who has ever taken his portapak and a portable monitor into the street and just let the tape roll, knows the power this little machine has in making things happen—i.e., people actually begin talking to you! (which doesn't always occur so easily if you happen to look a little wierd to them). They also start talking to each other and in their amusement with seeing themselves and their friends on tv, they begin to develop a consciousness that what they have to say does mean something to someone besides themselves and that maybe, if it isn't too much to hope, *they can begin to regain something long ago lost to them in a world of giant corporate power structures, and that is the feeling of having control over their own destiny.*



Whether we're into it or not, the often logical result of process video is some sort of product, certainly nothing to fear. An enhancement in fact, of that very process which so involves us. With video, we end up with a taped record of time past, a magnetic memory of our real life experiences to be stored in our memory bank (on the shelf as so many video tapes sit!) or to be shared with others as an enrichment to their own realm of experience. If a tape is intended to be shared with people who weren't there at the time of the taping, its technical coherence is as important as its content and its feeling of flow. For sure, the amount of energy put into the making of something *is* reflected in the final result. How many times though, have we watched a tape, well able to realize the nature of the situation, even wishing we could have been there, but somehow not really being able to share the fullness of the experience because the cameraman was looking the wrong way (up at the ceiling or down at the floor), couldn't get it together to focus or steady the camera, and in general just wasn't in tune with his instrument or his environment. We do cry out for an organic camera design which more nearly duplicates our personal vision (see RS III, p. 15, for our suggested camera design), and which is of course lightweight and easy to handle without undue concentration. But until someone builds one, we have to decide if we are indeed making tapes as a form of communication. If so, we must train our audio-visual vision to tune in to that space in time and take from it those elements which most succinctly communicate the nature of the experience we have participated in. Natural rhythms call to us. Whether we edit in the camera or via transfer, we are still applying conscious order to our experience and in so doing we must consider the effect of timing and sequence, as well as audio and visual content. (As a tape and time saver, turn off the camera when there ceases to be anything relevant going on) Because we lose energy in the transfer from real time to recorded time, the electro-magnetic product has to be that much more together in order to involve us, the viewer. Artistic framing *can* come with conscious vision.

I do want to share your experiences but since I am not addicted to the blue tube, I need to be stimulated by it before I will sit for it. So all we ask is that a tape be interesting, informative, and entertaining, and that it show us as closely as one mind can see, just what really happened. Take us on a journey, but don't bore us. That we can do ourselves by flipping to another channel . . . Natural tv, however, comes from your own heartfelt experience, and that I would hope, is a world of soulfull sensitivity, not of sensationalism as we are led to believe by the media minded marketeers of the 6 o'clock news.

*Getting it around. Networking.  
Sharing the information/experience*

"Send us a tape and we'll send you one back, no shit."

It is happening. Not in a flood of video tapes certainly, but slowly and from a core of people who are really into the experience of this life, there is emerging a decentralized network of shared experience. We're learning about eachother. We know we're a part of a growing col-

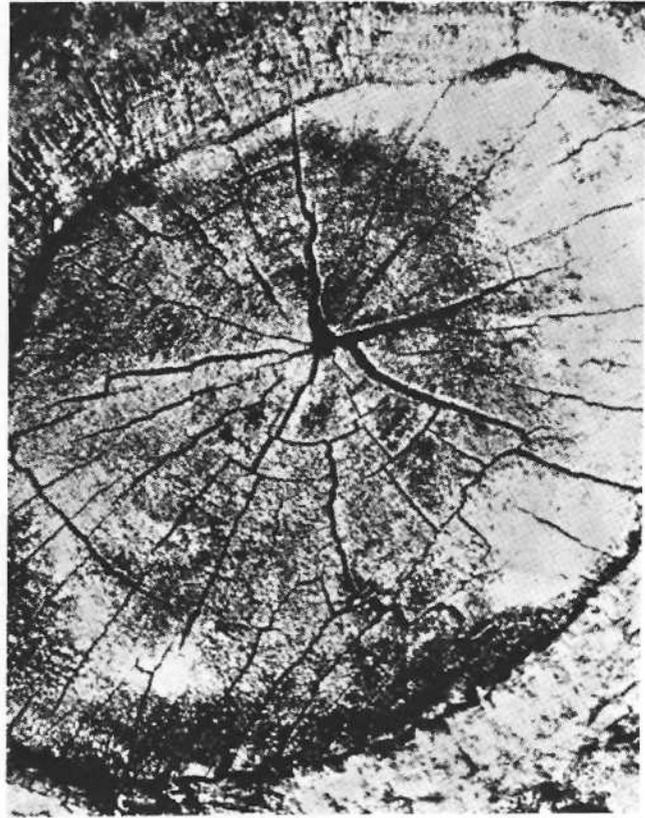


photo: Dean

lective consciousness, sharing in a struggle to alter the course of our farfetched futures, and we know we are not alone.

Still though, we want to know more. Our fancy has raced ahead of the technology and we imagine a system as functional as the telephone, carrying its audio-visual messages of experience (time, life, space) truly relevant to our survival on this planet. But now is now, and we still get responses like . . . "we've only had our portapak a few months now, and we haven't gotten anything together yet." And then we never hear from them. Of course there is no reason for a network if we have nothing to share, but really, we just want to know who you are and what you're into, even what your space looks like, and what your neighbors have to say. After all, it is real live people who make up the infinite diversity of human forms and only by tapping this vast range of life forces can we begin to realize the potential of our evolutionary course (here and now!).

In this issue we are publishing a comprehensive directory of all the people we know who are working in video (the "other networks to plug into" section in this and past issues can also be used as a reference in hooking up with people). Get in touch with each other! We have found that our close friendships with other video groups have proven invaluable, not just in the sharing of certain technical information which we all need so desperately, but also in giving us a more diverse base of experience from which to apply our knowledge. In this way, video becomes an impetus for people getting together with themselves and eachother, rather than keeping them as passive receivers. Tape exchanges and information exchange imply feedback and learning becomes a two-way vehicle towards communication.

We are moving away from the concept of teacher as an authority figure, and we approach a more organic system where we all have information to share with each other and our community once again becomes the place of learning, rather than the pseudo schools and establishment media which have heretofore hyped our educational environment. Thus we strive for tapes which promote human interaction and growth.

We would also encourage the showing of tapes to as many people, as often as possible, still believing that video is most effectively relevant to small groups. Getting your tapes shown on cable tv is important also since of course you can thereby expose many more people to humanistic ways of viewing the world, but still, the medium lacks feedback and two-way exchange. On the other hand, setting up a community viewing space seems to satisfy many more of our needs for personal contact and in the long run does more to turn people on than any kind of mass media so far.

We had a really positive experience last year when we set up a viewing space in our New York City loft and showed tapes to the public every Saturday night. Probably one of the reasons it was so successful, besides the fact that the tapes took people places they had never been and introduced them to people they had never known, was the fact that we tried to create an environ-

ment that was as comfortable and natural as your own living room. We used several monitors, all showing the same tape (which isn't to say that several relevant tapes couldn't have been shown simultaneously with conscious mixing of audio tracks). Seating was in small comfortable groups, each around one or two tv's, and relaxed conversation among the viewers occurred as a result. The space resembled a landscape. Seating platforms on different levels, monitors piled up on top of each other, cushions on the floor, one big video picnic under a giant parachute sky. The tapes were a collection of the best sequences from our own archive and from those of other video groups (Video Freex, Peoples Video Theater, Media Access, TVX in London) so the resulting experience was a life trip of considerable diversity.

Diversity. It's almost a dirty word in a nation founded on principles of equality (a concept which has somehow been misconstrued to mean homogeneity.) We are confronted with a centralized information source which tries to push its constituency into a common mold and we struggle to be free of it. We are all unique individuals and in a world of joy there is room for diversity. A healthy planet encourages it. We do in fact strive for it. And a de-centralized communications system which allows free expression to all, embraces it.

*Dudley*

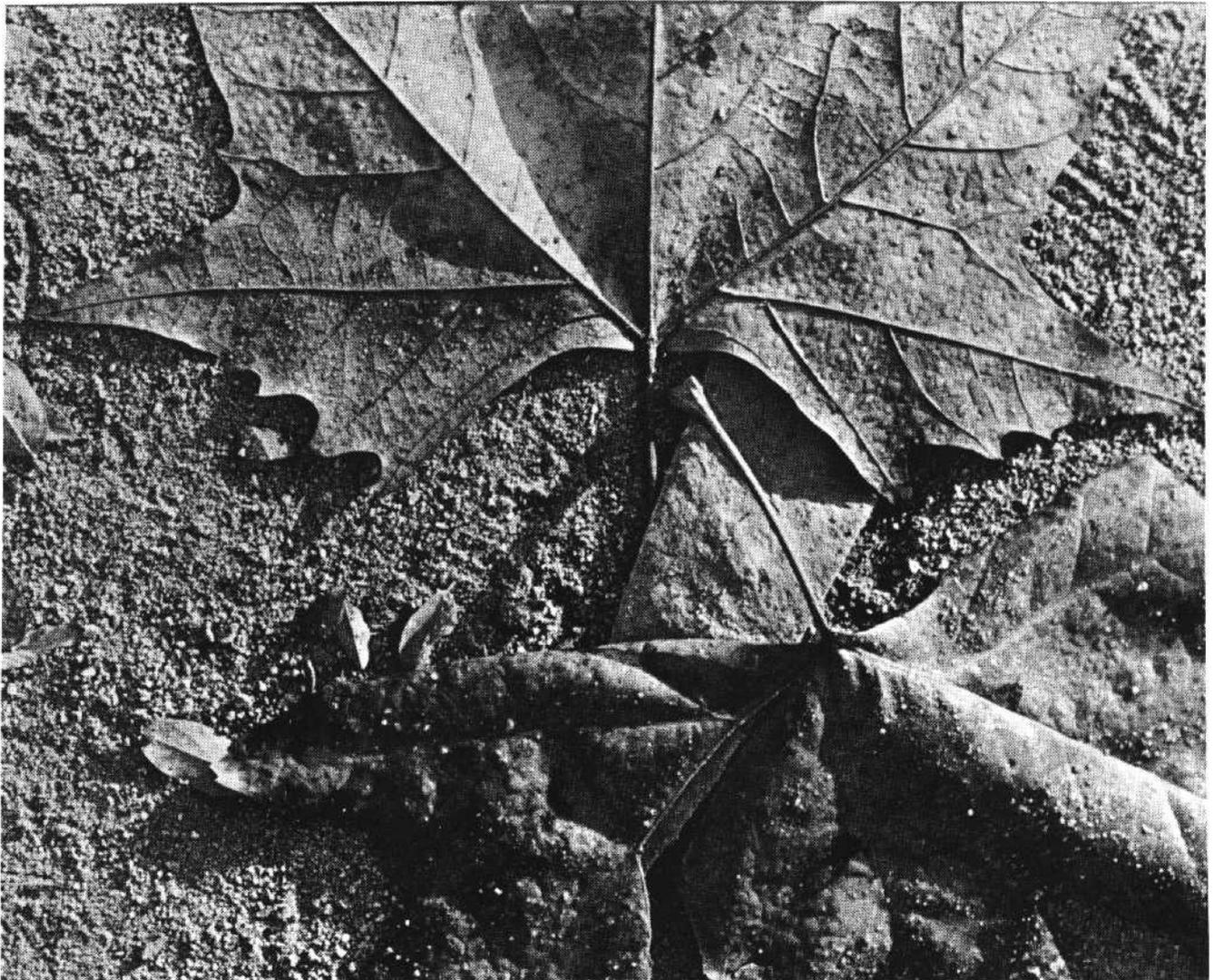


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