



fickly dissatisfied with the old, 'impoverished reality.' (Stereo speakers will sound tinny next to quad. The Elia Kazan-Rod Steiger brand of drama, which had seemed the very meat of realism in the 1950s, now looks hammy.)

I have maintained that in scale, depth of focus, lighting, camera movement, editing and other ways, the videotape image severely distorts reality. That we accept it generally as a truthful picture of the world testifies to our internalizing a number of highly contrived (if persuasive) conventions and translating them through wishful thinking into an approximate verisimilitude.

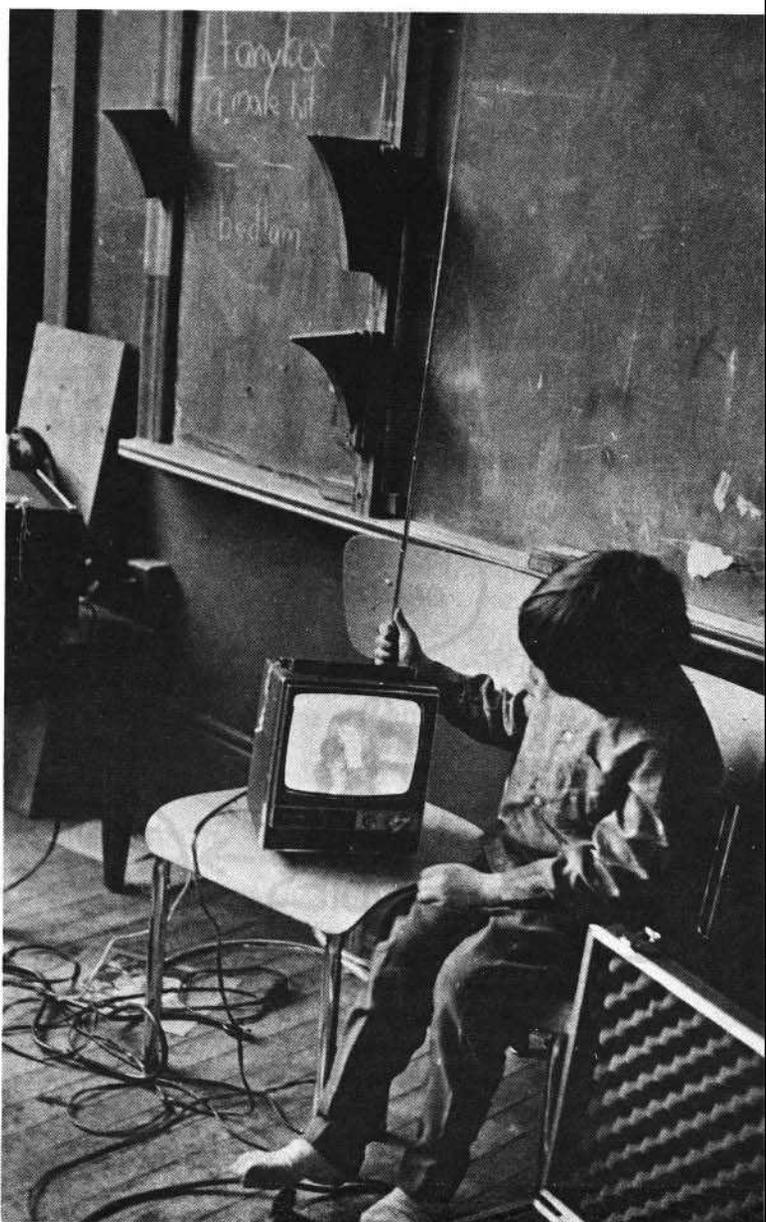
The automatic and unquestioning use of videotape as a reliable documenting agent by government, educational institutions, hospitals, etc. may be bizarre, but it will persist as long as these distorting factors remain invisible. Still it seems a shame for group therapists and psychologists to turn wholeheartedly to videotape as a magic mirror capable of reflecting back a person's behavior and thus modifying it, when they have not taken into consideration certain crucial subjectivities and inaccuracies that creep into the videotape record.

Let me say then that videotape lies. As photographs lie, as movies lie. What next? The future of videotape as an objective witness may be destroyed, but its career as an art medium may have only begun.

Television has been in existence for over twenty-five years – videotape for over ten, and it has still not generated an artist of the originality and stature of a Griffith or an Eisenstein. The question is not whether videotape is an art form. It is undoubtedly that; but one practiced carelessly, and almost unconsciously. "Television is a stream of under-selected images," wrote Susan Sontag. In "big-time" television, dominated by sponsor economics, there is a constant deferral of responsibility as to who will make that final selection. There are plenty of directors and producers, but virtually no auteurs or creators.

In portapak circles, the deferral of responsibility for artistic quality is subtler. It goes under the name of videotape as "process," videotape as "behavioral feedback," videotape as "the People's Medium," videotape as "folk art," videotape as "experience," or videotape as "training people to operate videotape." All alibis. Just many rationalizations for mediocre tapes.

I would hope that the initiative for developing videotape as an art form would emerge from the independents: that is to say, anyone who can lay hands on a portapak. But before that promise can be realized it will be necessary for videotape enthusiasts to approach their job with more rigor. They will need to analyze and to question the images they are getting, like the best of the experimental filmmakers (Straub, Godard, Michael Snow); they will need to break the seductive spell of a technology that seems only too happy to control itself and a "realism" that is at bottom, false.



Mary Sheridan