

Notes on Videotherapy

In 1962, when I was teaching sociology at Queens College, Lou Jacobson, then a student (now a PhD Clinical psychologist with a thesis on videotherapy behind him) invited me to come down to the video studio they had there to play with the hardware he enjoyed playing with as a student "announcer". At the time, I was busy writing my own dissertation on Plato's theory of time, and then and for years afterward I made absolutely no connection between the two. All I knew was there were these video toys and I was going to get a chance to play with them, turned on, as usual, by a hip student. I sat in a chair facing a student, and we rapped while each of us was being taped by a huge studio camera, one camera each, as it were. I remember we thought of it as instant film, were nervous, and wondered how we would look when they played it back, the same day! No developing time! Imagine our surprise when the playback turned out to have been "mixed", so that the playback experience was entirely different than the recording experience. I realized then and there that I was watching the director's experience of me, not my experience of me. And he (Lou) was sly enough even in those days of inch Phillips decks (What Gillette calls 1938 plymouths) to record our experience during the playback, and slyer still, to show us on studio monitors how he was mixing the shooting of our playback experience. To this day, I still vividly remember how hard it was to choose which monitor I wanted to watch: the playback, the live mix, or the camera monitors. It was not till a couple of years later that I got into the clinical significance of such happenings. I went home that night stoned on video, stoned on Plato, stoned on sociology, and wondered how in hell these three excitements could each give me the same feeling of being stoned yet be so different and uniquely individual experiences. Ah, the naivete of the young.

In 1964, at a conference of social psychiatry, I was presenting the results of some research on multiple family therapy I had been doing at the Creedmore state hospital. At the conference was a team from Jewish Family

Service of N.Y., including the famous (now deceased) Nathan Ackerman. For some reason the team liked me and/or my work and invited me to present some of it back in N.Y. As a sociologist, I was interested in the family and as a person in psychoanalytic therapy myself, I was more than interested in doing the kind of research into families which would be useful to me as a pro as well as a patient. So, when they asked me what I wanted to do, I said I wanted to tape families in treatment (family therapy) and learn how the playback experience could be brought into the treatment setting. They thought that was cool until they found that it would require (at least) two cameras and two decks. In them days, cameras and decks cost a lot more than they do now: a camera was around three grand, a deck was about five and tapes cost a dollar a minute, by the gross. So, what happened was they bought one camera and one deck. Which meant they could make instant "films", but could not playback and "film" simultaneously. Aside from the "reservations" they had for other reasons, this severe crimp in feedback research meant I would either have to heave or get into other lines of research. I chose the latter. I needed the bread. I hoped the price of hardware would come down. I wrote the grant proposals for more hardware

