

eye sees. For one thing, the cameraman is positioned in a 360 degree setting and is aware, through peripheral vision, of objects that will never get on the tape. For another, the portapak user unconsciously supplies more three-dimensionality than will emerge on the taped image. And we cannot even go into the vagaries of framing, since whatever appears on the borders of a televised image differs from one set to the next. In short, what you see is not necessarily what you get.



Dan Edelman

Some advocates of portapak videotaping seem to feel that the biological closeness between camera and operator create a warmth which makes up for whatever difficulties in following the action may result. And indeed, an umbilical connection between camera, eyepiece and user is one of the main aspects of the portapak style. This has been shown to greatest advantage in certain dance videotapes, when the cameraman has entered into the mood of the movement (not necessarily mimicking as flowing with the thing recorded) so that dance and camera become harmonious. One cameraman told me that all the shots in his videotape were based on a sequence of Tai Chi movements. This may be more fun to shoot than to watch.

The portapak, as it has been used so far, has a provisceral and anti-intellectual bias. Which may be one of its charms. But we should keep this in mind when claims are made that the videotape image manages an objective description of reality.

Lighting

The standard, black and white portapak camera is quite good at registering an image in almost any lighting situation. There is often no need to bother with studio lights, and so videotape users get into

the habit of working with available natural lighting. This produces a "sameness" in lighting tone which links many videotapes to each other, as if part of a visual family. It would be risky to attempt to generalize about this lighting tone, but I would say that it inclines toward a Confucian medium. Sharp contrasts, the highs and lows, sculptural and three dimensional shadowing as well as crepuscular delicacies are all lost on it; in the same way that the subtleties of night scenes in old movies are

washed away by a uniform blur when televised.

On the other hand, domestic interiors videotaped in daylight have a vivacity which film often lacks. The camera drinks in kitchens, sofas, schoolroom sunlight. The world of the afternoon is Videotape's dominion. One is pulled in videotape toward a normative or everyday quality of light, which those with a hunger to believe in a normal world would call realistic. Natural lighting is often very beautiful and satisfying. The only regret is that by ignoring the art of lighting we encourage that passivity of mind which is satisfied with anything the videotape camera registers, and deny the medium an expressive potential.

Scale and Depth of Field

The videotape image is domestic, intimate, quotidian. Not only is TV a home medium but the subjects it treats most relaxedly are familial, or warmed-over until they become familial. Films distort by giving the human body a majesty and monumental luminosity it cannot live up to in real life. TV distorts the other way: everything is made homey, slightly mediocre, understandable, human-all-too-human. Johnny Carson and Dick Cavett are television personalities who could never be movie