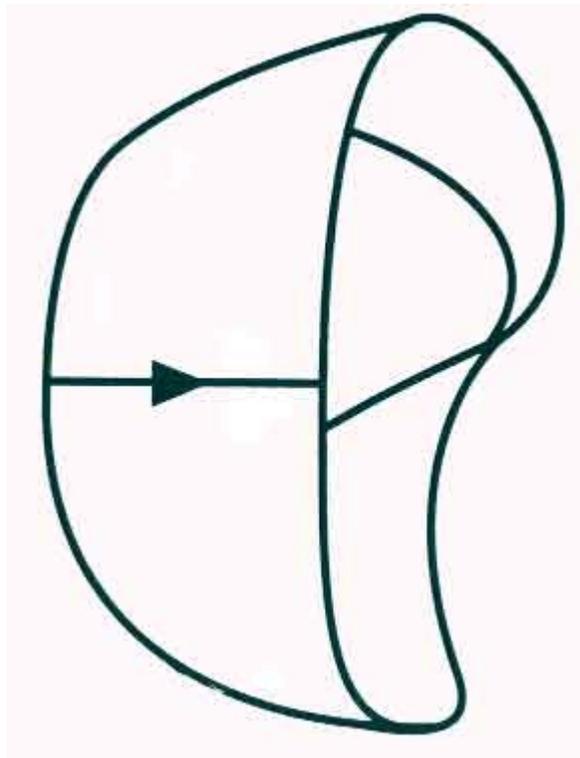


Self-Processing

A Möbius strip is a one-sided surface that is made by taking a long rectangle of paper, giving it a half twist, and then joining its ends. Any two points on the strip can be connected by starting at one point and tracing a line to the other without crossing over a boundary or lifting a pencil.



Möbius strip

The Möbius strip provides a model for dealing with the power videotape gives us to take in our own outside. With film, we are taking in the edited experience of others. What follows is a composition for video to be acted, edited, directed, and viewed by you in privacy. Feel free to bend, fold, and mutilate as you wish.

It is not designed to peel your own skins off until you find some fiction called the true you. Rather it is designed so that you might get a taste of processing yourself through tape, so that you might begin to play and replay with yourself. Hopefully it will suggest ideas for your own compositions.

Your Strip, Your Trip

Technically, this is the way it works:

Using an audiotape recorder, record the following series of cues, pausing after each instruction for as long as you would want to follow it out.

Set yourself up in front of the video camera for a head and shoulders shot.

Have the monitor off. Roll the tape. Follow/don't follow the cues.

Relax and breathe deeply, just relax and breathe deeply. Loosen up your face by yawning stretching your neck, working your jaw. Now, explore your face with your fingertips. Touch the favorite part of your face. Close your eyes and think of someone you love. Remember a happy moment with that person. With eyes open give facial responses to the following people: Don Rickels, Spiro Agnew, your mother, Huey Newton, Margaret Mitchell, you. For the next twenty seconds do what you want. Now let your face be sad. Turn your back to the camera. Now face the camera take a bow. REPLAY.

“Wow, It’s Like Making It With Yourself.”

As long as we adopt the Narcissus attitude of regarding the extensions of our own bodies as really out there, really independent of us, we will meet all technological challenge with the same sort of banana skin pirouette and collapse (McLuhan 1964: 68).

McLuhan understands all extensions of man as inducing a corresponding numbness and closure. Narcissus’ image in the pool is a kind of self-amputation brought on by irritating pressures. To counter the irritant of amputation, his image in the pool produces a numbness in Narcissus which makes it impossible for him to recognize his extended self.

This mechanism is at work with people seeing themselves on tape. The most telling instance I know of is the replay I did for a three-year-old girl in a family setting described above. As noted, she felt compelled to imitate what she saw herself doing on the screen. This three-year-old seemed to be using real-time mirror ground rules to deal with her videotape experience. It seemed she was playing a mirror part for her video image—the part the mirror would ordinarily play for her. In doing so, she became a numb servomechanism of her extended image. The next time I brought the camera around, she ran. She refused to become spellbound by her tape-extended self. By contrast, I heard a children’s sensitivity leader once brag that he had seen so much of himself on tape, that he was desensitized to it.

The Möbius video strip is a tactic for avoiding both servomechanistic closure and desensitizing in using videotape. Tape can be a tender way of getting in touch with oneself. In privacy, with full control over the process, one can learn

to accept the extension out there on tape as part of self. There is the possibility of taking the extending back in and reprocessing over and again on one's personal time warp.

*There will be tape, there will be time,
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet.
Time to murder and create.*

—after Eliot

It may be wise to invite a good friend to watch some of the replay with you. Yet avoid inhibiting word labels on what you're doing. The Möbius tape strip is a tactic for infolding information unto a fullness. As Blake said "Exuberance is Beauty...the cistern contains, the fountain overflows." To overflow one need be infolding. The process of infolding cannot be frozen in words. Let go the formulations and take another trip round the Möbius strip.

Videotape is the "some power" that is answer to the prayer of Burns people which they instinctively quote when talking about tape:

*Oh wha some power the Giftie gie us
To see ourselves as ithers see us
It would from many a blunder free us
And foolish notion.
What airs in dress and gait would lee us
And e'vn devotion.*

"It Would from Many a Blunder Free Us."
It would enlarge our ability to self-correct.
It would extend us in a cybernetic way.

With video we can know the difference between how we intend to come across and how we actually do come across. What we put out, what is taken by the tape, is an imitation of our intended image; it is our monkey. A video system enables us to get the monkey off our backs, where we can't see him, out onto the tape, where we can see him. That is the precise way in which we've been making a monkey of ourselves. The monkey has been able to get away with his business because he operates on the other side of the inside/outside barrier. The Möbius tape strip snips the barrier between inside/outside. It offers us one continuous (sur)face with nothing to hide. We have the option of taking in our monkey and teaching him our business or letting him go on with his.

Taking in your own outside with video means more than just tripping around the Möbius strip in private. One can pass through the barrier of the skin, pass through the pseudo-self to explore the entirety of one's cybernet—i.e., the nexus of informational processes one is a part of. You can listen to the Beatles too much. You can turn a Möbius strip composition into a merry-go-round of ego tripping on a single loop. In fact, we live in multiple loops. Möbius composition can touch on these loops: Agnew-mother-Huey Newton. But to confine ourselves to this use of video is to confine a cybertool to closet drama.

Cybernetics...recognize(s) that the "self" as ordinarily understood is only a small part of a much larger trial-and-error system which does the thinking, acting, and deciding. This system includes all the informational pathways which are relevant at any given moment to any given decision. The "self" is a false reification of an improperly delimited part of this much larger field of interlocking process (Bateson, 1972: 331).

The cybernetic extension of ourselves possible with videotape does not mean a reinforcement of the ordinarily understood "self." Total touch with one's cybernet precludes the capitalism of identity at the expense of understanding process that the West has habitually engaged in. One's resume is not one's reality. Master Charge does not make you master of anything but involves you in an expensive economy of credit information processed by computer, your checking account, TV ads, long lines in banks, and busy telephones. The Master Charge card exploits the illusion of unilateral control over life the West has suffered with. The poet William Henley expressed that illusion very directly. "I am the master of my fate/I am the captain of my soul." We have yet to understand there is no master self. They are now putting photos on charge cards when they should be mapping the credit system the card involves you in. Video users are prone to the same illusion. It is easy to be zooming in on "self" to the exclusion of environmental or social systems.

Doing feedback for others, one comes to realize the necessity of taping and replaying context. I had the opportunity to do a kind of video meditation on the house of two friends while they were away. The replay served to deepen their sensitivity to their everyday surroundings.

A friend I know did a half-hour continuous tape of his family eating cold cuts in Chicago. Showing this tape to friends in New York was in effect using video to interloop two different pathways of "himself."