

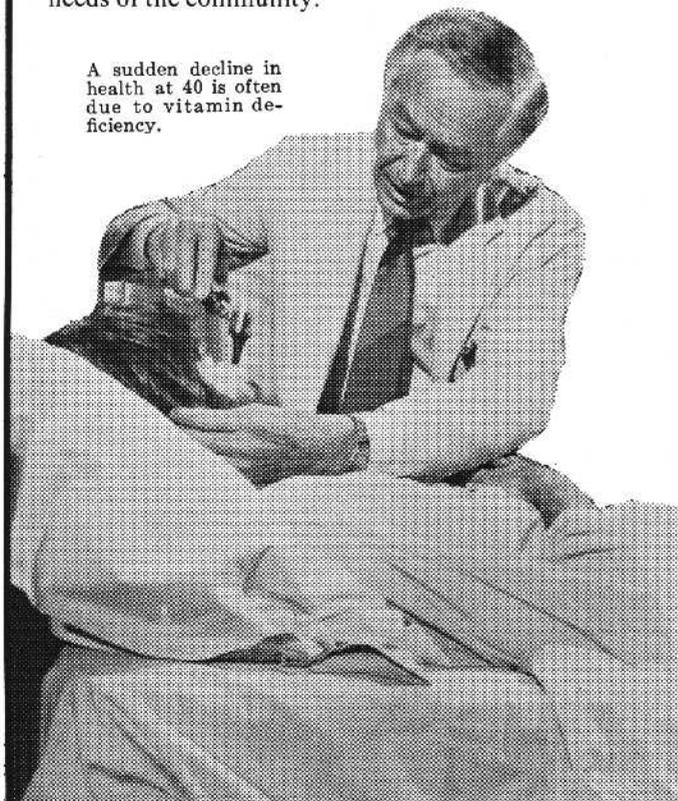
USING VIDEO IN HEALTH CARE by People's Video Theater

People's Video Theatre is an alternate media group which has been working with ½" video in metropolitan New York for the last two years. At present, we are a small working collective, supported in part with grants from New York State Council on the Arts and in part by commercial or contracted video work. As part of our objective to develop a community based television, our energy has increasingly been focused on a series of projects which we refer to as "health information". The purpose of this communication via Radical Software #5 is to describe some of the experiences which have oriented us to this project, explain what we understand by "health information" and why we think that this kind of approach to communications is valuable at this time.

Generating Information

Video Theatre takes place primarily in the public space. For us it developed as a result of working with liberation groups and around community issues. We saw that portable video with live feedback and various styles of selective feedback could define a space where people could psychically connect up with each other to create an information event. Initiated and recorded by a communications group with a sensitivity to how to move information, tape is shown to others who respond on tape and a process is begun whereby people have generated new kinds of information which they need and can use. We became aware of the need for health information through our desire to see this kind of event become the basis of a community-wide media experience which could begin to serve the real and immediate information needs of the community.

A sudden decline in health at 40 is often due to vitamin deficiency.



Initially our approach was to interview people in the street and parks asking them about the kind of health care they received and what kind of health information they could best make use of. We became aware that most people we talked to were in a state of frustration and confusion over their inability to connect up their own experience with the kind of information the health establishment was dealing through the various commercial media. Based on this, we felt we should start to create health information events utilizing as much feedback as was necessary to find ways of creating information about health concerns that people could trust and use. During the summer we made a series of tapes dealing with doctor-patient relationships in the examination and diagnostic process, peoples' and scientists' attitudes toward air pollution and their concerns about the effect of air pollution on health, and awareness of venereal disease.

The movement of these tapes was to try to bring together those sources of information and concern that are traditionally kept apart by institutional and class attitudes. The tape of V.D. was most successful. We went to a busy street with a doctor and nurse, set up our equipment with live feedback, and began asking people about venereal disease. People quickly got into using the doctor and nurse as an information resource for both their practical questions about V.D. as well as checking out some of their fears and fantasies of what it was all about. People with personal experience with various kinds of V.D. (especially one guy who claimed to have had clap forty times) began to fill out the linear, medical descriptions with graphic stories of what it felt like and how they handled it. In this way people began to exchange information, deal with each other's attitudes, with everyone digging each other on the live feedback—and the street temporarily became a place devoted to people's creating information for themselves. Using video in this way, we found we could analyse people's information needs, and demonstrate possible ways of meeting that need—though not on any expanded scale precisely because there is no real information media system to fulfill this role.

Health and Information Systems

Some groups don't have the problem of lack of awareness of a problem due to insufficient or bad information. Toward the end of last summer, we started working with a community of handicapped people (a summer camp) where the major concern was the isolation forced on the handicapped by a culture and professional elite which is both ignorant and hung up. Through getting into the equipment and designing messages to parents and non-handicapped people, people in the camp quickly saw video not only as a way of bridging their separation from the larger community, but also as a tool for documenting and presenting their needs to those who plan their space and administer their programs. Their goal is to resist the rip off that is laid on them by a professional elite and regain control of decision-making issues such