

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL INTERVENTION:

VIDEO FIELD EXPERIENCE

Tedwilliam Theodore
COMMUNICATIONS FOR CHANGE

A. VIDEO INTERVENTION.....	1
B. FIELD EXPERIENCE: SOCIAL INTERVENTION.....	2
C. SOCIAL INTERVENTION: GENERAL PRINCIPLES.....	7
D. FIELD EXPERIENCE: POLITICAL INTERVENTION.....	8
E. POLITICAL INTERVENTION: GENERAL PRINCIPLES.....	10
F. REMARKS.....	11

A. Video Intervention

Whenever video recording or playback is introduced to a situation, the interpersonal and group dynamics of the situation are altered. This video intervention, quite apart from the uses of the information recorded and exchanged, can have a major effect on that situation. A community group that knows how to apply the techniques of video tape social and political intervention has a powerful tool at its disposal.

Social intervention is the use of video recording or playback within a group to change the dynamics of the group interaction, to influence the direction of the group's movement, or to support the group in a process which is alien or threatening. Political intervention is the use of video recording or playback as a tool, a weapon to force decision making from the closed political arena of elected and appointed public officials or closed corporations into the public arena.

Of the two major components of the video process, information exchange and intervention, the first is most easily understood. A community group uses video tape to reach out to possible members, to similar groups in other parts of the city, to resources, etc. A group uses information feedback as a way to better understand itself and the relationships within the group and outside it.

Too often, the video intervention component is not dealt with at all. If, however, the alteration in group process is ignored or ill conceived, introduction of the video process might be counterproductive. In most cases, the video intervention component, is merely tolerated or eased, so that the information exchange component can be carried out more effectively. When video intervention, social or political intervention, is thought of as a usable, positive set of techniques which, along with information exchange and feedback techniques, make up the video process, the use of the medium can have a much greater impact in goal oriented settings.

Each of the techniques discussed here is a short term application of the video process and most of the techniques require only the minimum of equipment, a porta-pak and a television set. Community groups and video facilitators need not make major investments to attempt these techniques. Almost anyone, if he is resourceful enough, can get access to this minimum of equipment, either through a video organization, like Communications for Change, in Chicago, with which he has developed an affiliation, or from a local high school, college, institution, or company.

The great majority of field experiences outlined here were done with the Uptown Special Projects, an organizing effort in the Edgewater-Uptown area of Chicago, which has worked for over three years with more than thirty community groups in that area and which is now helping community leaders create an organization of organizations, ONE, the Organization of the North East.

B. Field Experience: Social Intervention

Tenants Organizing:

A young community organizer was set the task of creating a tenant's union in a quickly deteriorating building which had seen a number of such efforts fail and in which there was a well-founded sense of frustration. He found a tenant willing to hold a meeting and posted signs which said: Tired of rent increases? Before you move out, come to a meeting on Wednesday at 7:30pm in Apartment 406!

At six o'clock that Wednesday, he brought a portable video recorder into the courtyard and began taping the conditions, talking to passing tenants about their experiences with the landlord and with the kids about the lack of play area. This was a highly visible procedure which increased curiosity about the impending meeting. People were told that the tape would be played at the meeting.

As people came into the meeting room, they saw that more taping was going on. A young man was talking about the problems he had seen in the building and how something had to be done about them. When he finished talking, the tape was immediately played back for those present and by the time the meeting began, all the people in the room had begun to think seriously about their situation.

The discussion at the meeting, once it had moved past testing the organizer and cameraman, focused on the conditions depicted on the tape. Fifteen people in the group decided to stay and form an organization to work on the problems. They asked to see the tape again and were as engrossed in it the second time through as they had been the first.

After the second showing of the tape, they elected a chairman and decided on a name for their group. They also decided to demand a meeting with the government agency which could affect their situation. The cameraman offered to bring the tape to this meeting. This suggestion was well received and plans were made.

The use of video recording made the situation in this apartment complex more 'real', gave it an importance which the tenants were not used to giving it, and offered them a chance to objectify their common experience and see it in some ways as if it were being presented on the six o'clock news. Dynamically, the group was able to focus on the specifics of their situation and move quickly past the generalities in which such meetings usually founder. They gained a sense of individual and group importance, and when they realized they could show the video tape to people in authority, they felt in control of a powerful ally.

Special Interest Organizing:

A struggling community group which had an interest in cutting a specific issue in a way which would help them gain strength in the community and effectively deal with that issue had asked each member to try to arrange coffees in their apartments, in the community rooms of large apartment buildings, and in local churches. The announcement of the coffees included a statement that a television program would be on the agenda.

At some of the coffees, a video tape was shown that had just been recorded in front of the building. In others, previously recorded and edited video tape material was presented. In each case, the people who had come to the coffee were encouraged to talk about the experiences they had heard and the opinions which were expressed on the video tape.

This kind of presentation both heightened the sense of importance which the coffee sponsor had about his efforts and gave the coffee participants a common base of experience, a common set of opinions, with which to agree or disagree. For the community group, the

availability of the video process encouraged them to make a maximum effort in generating attendance at the coffees and helped them organize the issue which they wanted presented. At the sessions themselves, the video tape presentation could prevent the discussion from degenerating into a series of complaints and generalized negative statements about the situation and helped the participants relate to specific experiences and points upon which they could build a positive program.

Cutting The Issue:

An established community organization felt that it ought to take a stand on the issue of traffic flow through the community. An expressway ends in the major shopping area of the community and dumps thousands of cars, trying to reach the outlying suburbs, into the heart of the business district. The issue is extremely complex, however, and various plans had been suggested to alleviate the problem. The issue had become confusing.

An ad hoc committee was set up to develop a video tape which would explain the issue and help residents decide how they want the community group to handle it. This committee met and found that, more than making a tape, what they needed to do was research the issue. They divided the task, made phone calls, read through files, and collected whatever information they could. They set up appointments with city officials and these meetings were video taped for inclusion in the final presentation.

After this process was well under way, they wrote a script for the video tape which set out clearly the results of their investigations. They included video tape material from the interviews, and helped shoot the script and put it together. The final presentation was a clearly defined analysis of the problem which existed and four possible solutions to that problem.

As important as that final presentation was to helping residents decide how to attack the problem, an equally important element was that a committee of people was forced to think carefully about the issue, do the research necessary to understand the issue, and learn to present it in a way which could be understood and appreciated by all the factions within the community. The making of the video presentation created a group cohesiveness which encouraged people with differing self-interests and opinions to work together to find a solution which would benefit the entire community.

Issue Visibility:

A well-established community organization was attempting to start a 'Whistlestop' crime prevention program in the community. This program needed for its success an extremely high degree of visibility. Everyone needed to know that they should carry a whistle and that they should call the police if they heard a whistle being blown.

A number of committees were set up to package and sell whistles, to find stores which would carry them and post a sign advertising them, and to talk with community groups about the program. A video committee was also set up. Young people from the community spent a day learning to operate portable video equipment. They then contacted local businessmen, supermarkets, etc., and found a number of merchants who were willing to let them set up a monitor in front of the shop, record interviews with passing residents and shoppers, and play back the interviews on the spot.

This recording and playback system was set in operation and the youthful committee took turns manning the cameras and interviewing people. They visited one or two locations a day on weekends for almost two months, interviewing people, passing out literature about the Whistlestop program, and, in general, being an extremely visible force for the program in the major shopping areas of the community. Some of the video tape recorded at these sessions was used in a video presentation being shown to block clubs and churches, but most of the tape was recycled (reused after being shown at the location it was taped.)

The main affect of this action was to build an ad hoc committee of people who had never been involved in a community project before, which was reaching a sizable audience each day in a way which involved that audience personally in the process of communication. A young woman with small children to take care of could identify and understand the statement of a woman she sees on the television monitor in a position similar to her own.

Everyone in the community could begin to see the things they have in common and understand the need for a concerted effort. Because of this initial involvement, some of the young people on the ad hoc committee have taken a further interest in community activities.

Pot Hole Action:

A community leader, active in a number of community groups, became angry at the city's refusal to answer her requests to repair a dangerously collapsed sewer on the residential street on which she lives. She called a few friends, all active in community affairs, to join her at the site of the cave-in and asked that a video cameraman come to record interviews with people talking about the problem. Very few of the people she called actually appeared, but the presence of the camera drew neighbors and passersby.

What looked like it was going to be a disappointment turned into a fun-filled few hours. People took turns standing in the hole, which came up to most people's waist, talking about the problem, how long it had been unattended, what the particular dangers were to children, automobiles, bike riders, etc., and what they thought of city services in general.

A pledge was made to come back in three days and fill the hole with concrete if the city had not rebuilt the sewer. By this time, enough people had joined the audience and speakers to make the threat genuine.

The next morning, without any further action, the sewer was quietly repaired by the city.

The leader who initiated this action had been involved in the use of video tape in a number of previous projects and was applying the experiences she had gathered to a new need. She used the video camera's presence to generate an event, an action which got results, increased her stature in the community, and created a feeling of accomplishment and power in those who participated in the event. The video recorder provided a context for the action, there was the threat of political intervention, and the possibility of information exchange, but, most importantly, a dynamic situation was created from a group of apathetic individuals. Speaking to a video camera encouraged strong statements of concern and support and left the group with the feeling that their protest would be heard in the proper places.

Action Support:

A newly formed tenants union from a low-income housing project made an appointment with the head of a federal agency to demand that their rents, newly raised, be lowered, and that the firm hired to manage the building either perform required services or be dismissed. This group had been very vocal about their needs within the community and had made a video tape of their concerns and demands. They agreed to show this tape to the agency head.

At the meeting, the leader of the group began to speak, but the experience of being ushered through an outer office of fifty men and women working at desks to an inner office with Musak piped in, plush carpeting on the floor, fine wood panelling and a wall of windows with a view of the city, was so far outside the range of this leader's experience that he found it difficult to express himself. After a moment, it was suggested that the video tape be shown. The monitor was set up after clearing a space on the agency head's desk, the lights were turned off, and the tape was played.

The agency head appeared concerned about the conditions and statements presented to him and responded to the tape as if it were a representative of the group. When the lights were turned back on, group members seized the initiative which the tape had provided to press their points.

The dynamics of this situation were reversed during the video tape playback. What began as an intimidating experience for the group was turned into a meeting in which the agency head was put on the defensive. The group leader found it impossible to address the agency head as long as he could not see beyond the trimmings of his office, and the government official could not deal with the statement by that leader. He could, however, deal with what he considered the non-threatening statements made via video tape, and his attempt to do so allowed the group leader and other members to break through the intimidation of the large office and deal with the man behind the desk.

Action Support:

A group of tenants and concerned community residents had joined forces to testify in building court in an effort to force a slum landlord to correct building code violations in eleven apartment buildings he owned in one community. Video tape had been used in information exchange settings to let community residents know of the conditions inside these buildings and they had all agreed that the video material would be a good spokesman for the group in court.

The court date arrived and the community group packed the courtroom, filling the seats and lining the walls. Court procedures did not meet their expectations, however. The scene was chaotic and there was a growing frustration that nothing was happening at all, that no case was being adequately heard. The frustration grew until a lawyer for the group asked the judge to admit into evidence the video tape which the group had brought. The defense lawyers objected vigorously but the tape was allowed by the judge.

For once during the morning, the courtroom was silent and orderly, the video tape playback caused visible consternation on the part of the slum landlord and his attorneys which could be understood and witnessed by the community group, and the group was affirmed in its decision to come to court and testify.

In the use of video playback, the taped material did not present the case better than the witnesses. In fact, before a good, professional judge, video tape evidence is of little use. Better visual evidence would be a polaroid picture taken that day of the violation and signed and dated by the photographer and a witness. The video tape did, however, become a focal point about which the defense and prosecution could argue and around which the community group could rally. The morale of the group improved as they saw clearly the effect of their efforts.

Confrontation Training:

A group of community leaders met with a powerful elected official of the city to demand a more responsive approach by the staff of that official's office. They asked that a cameraman accompany them, bringing a video recorder as a political intervention tool.

The meeting with the official was very cordial and friendly. The community leaders stayed for two hours and left feeling that the official was a good man and that they had been heard.

They reviewed the meeting on video tape and analysed their progress in spelling out their position. They found that their strong statements at the beginning of the meeting quickly became undercut by the fatherly, longwinded lecture by the official and that the initial agreement of that official became less strong, more vague, and more conditional as the meeting progressed. In general, they found that they lost ground as the two hours went by and that what started out as a discussion among equals became a campaign meeting between a candidate and his supporters.

Realizing this, the group quickly drafted a letter to the official, restating their initial demands and giving him a deadline for providing the support he promised at the beginning of their meeting with him. This letter recast the negotiations in a form in which it was possible for the community group to gain its objectives.

In this case, video tape was called on to provide support for the group and to create an action research situation with the elected official. As the meeting progressed, it became apparent that another use of the medium was indicated. The video playback to the group, at the group's headquarters, led to a reevaluation of the meeting and a repositioning of the group's attitude and form of dealing with the official, both of which had been altered in the official's favor by his manipulation of the meeting.

Action Closure:

As a community group watched a courtroom procedure, with case after case being called and dispatched amidst a general confusion, they began to lose sight of what was taking place. The lawyers and judge were all talking in a low voice, when witnesses testified, they could not be heard, and no other talking was permitted in the courtroom, so that the group could not communicate among itself to find out what was going on.

The press had been notified that this group would appear in court, but, as expected, no reporters showed up. Before people could drift away, the group leader called a press conference in an adjoining room and, with the video tape camera to legitimize the proceedings, explained what had just gone on and what steps needed to be taken in the future. As he talked, the group members began to understand why they had come that morning, what they had won, and what they needed to do to sustain their victory.

The presence of the video recorder provided a means for closure of the action. Instead of letting everyone drift off, which would have dissipated energy and made the next meeting of the group less effective, the leader found a way to summarize the action and help people understand what they had accomplished. This summation changed an energy draining experience into an invigorating one and the group left the courthouse solidly in favor of the action and the power of people working together.

Action Movement:

A group of women had gotten together to try to urge the city to change its plans to build a play lot in what this community group saw as a dangerous location and, instead, to build one on a vacant lot on a side street. They had written letters and made phone calls to no avail. Finally, they decided on a public action. They called the newspapers and television stations and set a date.

On the morning of the action, a group of fifty women linked hands and blocked the major street at the site of the city's proposed play lot. They ushered children wearing bandages and splints across the street at this site to dramatize that they thought children would cross there and be hurt. There was a great deal of enthusiasm generated and a feeling of euphoria began to take over.

An organizer had brought a video recorder with her and video taped the action. She interviewed mothers, children, people in stalled cars, and got some good shots of the corridor built across the street.

Just at the point when the leaders of the group were wondering how to gracefully move out of this fairly static action without the letdown a quick signal to end would produce, the woman with the video recorder suggested that they all go back to an apartment and view the tape. This suggestion was greeted with enthusiasm and the group marched off together, trailing newsmen and newsreel camera in their wake.

An action like this one is highly visible, develops a sense of comradeship, gets good press coverage, but does not flow well from beginning to end. Having an instant replay of the action helped that flow a great deal, got the actors out of the scene gracefully and as a group, and provided a sense of closure which improved group cohesiveness.

Action Recapitulation:

A welfare rights group which was very loosely organized decided to demonstrate at the welfare office on the day that a new welfare system was being put into effect. They intended to shut the offices down to prevent this program from beginning and to try to gain a hearing with the state superintendent of welfare.

They organized effectively, brought a large number of people to the office, a great many of whom did not know each other, and set up a picket line.

There were a number of movements in the action. The group sent representatives inside to talk with the office supervisor, the group, or part of it, moved inside to block the office itself, the office supervisor met with a delegation of the group and a compromise was reached. When it seemed that nothing more was to be gained from remaining at the office, the group moved out and back to the headquarters to review the video tape made of the action.

In this case, care was taken to interview demonstrators about their grievances and intentions, but also to document each change in the action. A demonstrator stated that the office supervisor refused to talk with the group. Later, someone recorded that the group had sent a delegation in to talk with the supervisor. Still later, someone stated that the office supervisor had come down to talk with the demonstrators and that a compromise had been reached.

When the tape was shown back to the group at the headquarters, many of them learned for the first time what was going on when the group moved or someone new appeared on the scene. Not only did the replay provide closure for the action, but it helped recapitulate exactly what went on, helped the group decide what the next step ought to be, and allowed them to talk about the action and express their satisfaction with the course that they took.

C. Social Intervention: General Principles

The presence of a video recorder in a group changes the dynamics of that group and it is possible to use that change, or to create that change, to help the group move towards its own goals. It is the obligation of the video facilitator, whether he is a group member or a technical assistance specialist, to offer techniques to the group in straightforward, unambiguous terms, laying out a verbal contract which can be understood, accepted, or rejected by the group, and to insure that, whatever use is made of the techniques and resultant video tapes, the process will remain under the control of the group.

Video recording legitimizes an action. In many instances, there are ideas which need to be verbalized, actions which need to be taken, and relationships which need to be indicated, but no rationale exists which will allow these occurrences, except the recording of them on video tape. A 'press conference' can be held to summarize an action when no press have shown up. People can talk informally about the conditions in their apartment buildings without being spokesmen for a group. A public demonstration can be created in order to record and deal with an existing problem within a community.

Video recording and playback objectify a situation. Self awareness and group awareness are made feasible or enhanced by the objective eye of the television screen. A group of individuals can begin to see common concerns. An individual can look analytically at himself or someone in a position much like his own. An action can be understood and reviewed clearly, without the confusion of the subjective response to the actual event.

'Making' video tape supports group interaction. Often results are demanded without a sustained process through which those results can be obtained. Putting together a video presentation can be a way to provide that group process. A group can learn to work together to do basic research and coordinate efforts required in making an effective video presentation. An open process of making video, street interviews and playback sessions, can open participation in a program to a great many people.

Video tape playback helps structure a confrontation. Dealing on an equal with elected officials, the courts, or large corporations is out of the realm of experience for the great majority of people. Having the initial statement on video tape brings an element of known experience into the situation. A community group finds it easier to follow up a video presentation as it presses demands on a federal agency. A loose coalition of groups finds video presentation the only way to make sense of a chaotic courtroom.

Video tape recording and playback provide means to move an action. Making and watching video tape provide new possibilities for action with groups caught in a static, or frustrating position. A group can gracefully move out of an action to replay it on television. A collection of frustrated individuals can be formed into a cohesive body through the recording and playback of statements of concern. Passersby can be made aware of a situation and drawn into involvement by involving them in a video-making situation.

Video tape playback restates and summarizes an action. A public action, a confrontation meeting, a group activity, or most other community actions which involve a number of people acting in different roles, are confusing events in which a lot of information is not clearly communicated. Video playback of the action is one good way to insure that these communications take place. A group can review and understand the steps which took place during a public action. A meeting with a public official can be reviewed and analysed out of the arena in which it occurred.

In all these techniques, the purpose is to restructure the relationships and attitudes of the group to make it more effective in the pursuit of its goals. Video tape as a tool for social intervention should always be looked upon as a dynamic element in the group action or interaction. The video facilitator must be aware of the possibilities for the use of the video tape process and must be able to mold those possibilities to the reality of the situation in which he finds himself.

D. Field Experience: Political Intervention

Action Research:

A community group had gathered considerable information about the leading policies of local banks, about federal programs with which those banks might be working to insure certain high risk loans, and about state programs to encourage banks to be more responsive to the community. They set up an appointment to talk with executives of the largest bank in the community and appeared with a video cameraman and recording equipment.

As the meeting progressed, not a word was said about the cameraman. He was introduced as a member of the group and was highly visible with his equipment at the conference table, but the bank executives did not indicate that they were aware of his presence.

The group asked pointed questions of the executives, demonstrating that they had considerable knowledge about banking policy. The executives began by offering information and ended by hedging on that offer and defending archaic and repressive bank policy. As the meeting progressed, they became obviously more concerned with the presence of the camera and cautious of the questioning and their responses. The meeting had become a difficult one for them and they had been put on the defensive.

A few days after the meeting, a member of the community group, who was a leader in a number of community efforts which did business with this bank, was called and asked to meet with members of the board of the institution, supposedly to talk about the bank's relationship to some of his other projects. When he got to the meeting, he was chastized for the tactics which the community group used, and was particularly reprimanded for bringing a video recorder into the room. The chairman of the board, however, did admit that without those tactics, the group would not have gotten the hearing that it did, and that the bank was very concerned about how those video tapes were going to be used.

By bringing the video recorder into the room, the community group altered the dynamics of the situation and posed a threat to the ability of the bank executives to make decisions and carry out policies without public scrutiny. This kind of aggressive, action research technique forces institution policy makers to account for their decisions in a public arena and, sometimes, produces information which is of great value to the community group.

Policy Exposure:

The community advisory board of a health facility was in complete disagreement with a policy of the city's Board of Health. They also felt that the commissioners of health did not listen to them on any issue, let alone weigh the advice they were supposed to give.

The advisory board asked a video facilitator to come to a monthly meeting to tape their discussion of the issue to show to residents of the community. The meeting was a great disappointment because, partly through the camera's presence, the group did not squarely address the issue. The video facilitator and group leaders left the meeting with a feeling of loss.

The next morning, the assistant commissioner of health, who had somehow heard of the taping, threatened to fire staff members of the health facility who had been at the meeting and had not objected to the taping. The video facilitator was notified of this and he called the commissioner, telling him that he represented a communications group that was working with the community advisory board, that he had some video tape that would be shown at a mass meeting, and that he would like to meet with the commissioners of health to show them the tape, discuss the implications, ask them where else it might be profitably shown, and ask them to add their comments, on video tape, to the end of the existing presentation.

When the commissioners eagerly accepted and set up an appointment for the next day, the video facilitator got on the phone and arranged to video tape some advisory board members stating the issue as clearly as possible. (No one said that the tape of the advisory board meeting was the tape in question, and no one would have wanted to use that tape for anything.)

This new tape was shown to the commissioner of health, the assistant commissioner, the director of the specific health program, and a few aids, all of whom became extremely indignant at the presentation, pounded the table and attempted to interrupt the tape. When it was over, the group was quite agitated and they lashed out at the self-serving advisory board members who, they said, did not have the interest of the community at heart (even though they had been appointed by the Board of Health principally because they did live in the community and knew its concerns.)

The assistant commissioner, who, some say, was the political boss of the outfit, spent an hour with the video facilitator, telling him that a multi-million dollar training grant had been approved, that they would like to use video tape, and would he be interested in working with them on the project. He refused, however, to discuss the points in the video tape and stated that he would not dignify their position with a response.

A mass meeting was arranged, with invitations going to all local and state elected officials as well as to community leaders. The video facilitator added his report of the meeting with the commissioners to the end of the video tape.

As the date of the meeting approached, the head of the advisory board received a call from the Board of Health member who was in charge of the subcommittee dealing with this issue. They agreed to a meeting to look at the video tape and talk about the situation.

At this meeting, the Board of Health member tried to persuade the group not to have a mass meeting, not to show the video tape which he had just seen, and not to plan other actions to support their position. In return, he promised to make sure that no decision was made without major input from his committee and that he had listened closely to the arguments presented to him on video tape and in person.

The group curtailed its overly ambitious plans as a compromise. They went ahead with the planned meeting, showed the video tape, but also reported on the meeting with the Board of Health member. Instead of being a meeting called to begin an action, it was one called to report progress and to apprise the community of what was taking place so that they could form a watchdog stance to see that the promises were kept.

In this example, the commissioners of health had seen the video material as a powerful spokesman for the community and one which could not be ignored. Had they not threatened to fire staff members, the community group would not have known the depth of the concern. Once this was known, however, it was an easy thing to threaten exposure of an unpopular decision and force the commissioners to open up a channel of communications with the Board of Health member who, unwittingly or not, had provided the professional cover for what was a palpable political decision. Once that channel was open, the decision making process became a public one which could be dealt with by the community group.

Public Demand:

A tenants' union made an appointment with the regional director of HUD to demand that their building, which had been taken over by HUD in a guaranteed mortgage bankruptcy case, be made available for subsidies, which had been in effect before the HUD take over. They also demanded that the management firm that HUD had employed be fired for incompetence.

At the meeting, a video cameraman recorded the demands and response. Putting on the public face of the federal government, the HUD director agreed to make an on site inspection of the building, stated that the government had a direct responsibility for this building, and agreed to review the conduct of the management firm hired to perform services.

In this simple, straightforward victory for the tenants' union, the HUD official was forced to deal from a public stance in a private meeting. He was not allowed to promise things he later could deny or contradict. What he had anticipated as a private meeting with some community residents whom he could impress and put off, turned into a public event in which his statements were being recorded and could be used in any number of situations.

Landlord Confrontation:

A coalition of community groups interested in forcing substandard housing in the community up to code, had arranged a tour, with the landlord, of a number of buildings which would appear in building court on charges of building code violations.

The coalition asked a video cameraman to accompany them on the inspection, to record the violations and to take statements from community leaders and the landlord. At the beginning of the inspection, the landlord had violent objections to the presence of the camera, but agreed to let it be used when threatened with a group walk out. He claimed he had nothing to hide.

As the inspection progressed, the landlord became more and more concerned that his side of the story be told, that the good walls and sinks be shown as well as the broken ones. By the end of the inspection, the landlord was demanding to make statements to the video camera, to balance the statements made by the community leaders. In these statements, he

clearly defined his past history of abuse of the buildings and the fact that he was only fixing them up because of the pressures brought on him by the courts and by community groups.

In this situation, the social intervention of the video process bolstered the coalition effort, and legitimized a dialogue between the landlord and the community leaders. It also, however, helped pinpoint and show up the decision-making process of the landlord and demonstrated how he responded to public and court pressures. The threat of exposure, of one-sided interpretations of the inspection, caused him to reveal himself to a damaging degree.

The Discrepancy:

A community group was demanding that the construction of a new state agency facility in their community be halted until minority contractors had an opportunity to bid on that construction. The head of the agency, Mr. Smith, had said, both publicly and privately, that he was in favor of local, minority participation in the construction.

When the state office in charge of building facilities for state agencies was contacted, they said that Mr. Smith was demanding that construction proceed on schedule and that no delay be permitted. The office head, Mr. Jones, claimed to be willing to work with the community group and local minority contractors, but that he was bound by the wishes of Mr. Smith.

Luckily, the community group had a video tape of the action research interview with Mr. Smith. They asked the video facilitator to make an edited version of this interview which included statements of support for the group and pointed up some of the problems in trying to work with Mr. Jones and his office in charge of new construction.

This tape was shown to Mr. Jones at a meeting on the day before contracts were to be awarded, and his response was also video taped. When confronted with the public statement of Mr. Smith, which conformed to his own public statement, and when put under the pressure of performing in a public manner through the video medium, his arguments for not including minorities began to sound weak, even to him.

The meeting was adjourned with no commitment to stop the contract awarding scheduled for the next day. The community group indicated its intention to use the tapes, both of Mr. Smith and Mr. Jones, in the community to educate the residents about the procedures for awarding contracts.

That afternoon, the community group leader was called by Mr. Jones, who said that the contract awarding had been delayed and a conference with large contractors and minority contractors would be set up before the contracts were awarded. A little later, Mr. Jones contacted the video facilitator to ask for a copy of the edited video tape of Mr. Smith's remarks so he could show his superiors what he was up against. This request had to be denied because it was outside the scope of the verbal commitment of the group to Mr. Smith when the recording was made.

It is clear in this case that somewhere along the line, a public and a private policy were at odds. Did Mr. Smith tell Mr. Jones to build immediately, or did Mr. Jones try to push the onus for his decision off to someone else? In either case, the use of video tape was an excellent way to point out the infighting going on in the levels of state government and insure that that infighting did not damage the opportunities of community residents to benefit from the construction of the new state facility.

E. Political Intervention: General Principles

In all institutions, whether government agency, large corporation, or small group, each individual has an unwritten list of priorities with which he deals. At the head of that list is 'making it through the day'. Below that, in various orders, is 'being promoted', 'making friends', 'helping friends', 'getting a rake off' (in corrupt organizations), etc. Somewhere, usually far down the list, is 'getting the job done'.

When a decision is made within an institution that is based on any priority other than 'getting the job done', that decision is a political one, having more to do with the people and politics of the institution than with the public policy which created that institution. The purpose of using video tape as a tool for political intervention is, in some way, to make that decision making process a public one, or threaten to do so, so that 'getting the job done' is raised on the list of priorities because it is one good way of 'making it through the day'.

Video tape forces the opposition to act in a public manner. The discrepancy between policies generated from political considerations and those dictated by the public stance of the institution can be papered over if the policy decisions can be made in a private manner. Bringing video tape to a small meeting and demanding action can force decisions on the basis of 'getting the job done'. A government official reacts in a public way to demands from a few citizens meeting in his office, because his response is being video taped, and is forced to live up to the decisions made in that way. A state agency head is set up to support a community group, perhaps against his own private inclinations, because he is being recorded.

Video tape puts the opposition on the defensive and causes mistakes. A clear statement of the issues on tape or the threat of exposure of an official's contradictory public and private positions forces the opposition to act rashly. A landlord talks about his operation in ways he would rather not. A city official threatens to fire some staff and, therefore, indicates his vulnerability. A federal official is led into dealing directly with a community group rather than preaching to it or putting it off. A bank executive can not decide how to handle a video taped private meeting and reacts to questions unwisely.

Video tape threatens exposure in an effective manner. Shifting public positions to accommodate private requirements is common for public figures and this shifting can go on undetected unless it is carefully documented in ways which can be effectively disseminated. A video taped statement fixes a position and any alteration of that position can be recorded and compared to the original in an extremely effective presentation. The HUD official who responded to the community group understood that he could not later shift his position without suffering consequences. The public stances of the state agency head and the state office head could be put back to back to support arguments against plans proposed by those individuals. The landlord rushes to offer his side of the story because he fears the use of the video tape against him. The commissioner of health opens a dialogue because he feels threatened by the existence of a video tape. The board of directors of the bank attempts to dissuade the community group from using the video tape they have made.

The video tape threat is more effective than the video tape performance. This maxim of community organization applies to video tape as much as to any other form of direct action. The power of video tape as a political weapon is based to a great extent on the uncertainty as to what it can perform. Television is a powerful medium and the community group which uses it is seen as powerful as well, whether or not it has any power at all. Showing video tape to small groups is a tedious process in a city without cable television and the threat of exposure always far outweighs the actual ability of this small group communications device to deliver.

F. Remarks

The temptation must be resisted, when it is discovered that a basic set of equipment is available, to 'do video'. 'Doing video' is like 'doing typewriters', an exercise in futility unless at least a shadow of an idea exists of why the instrument is being used. Like all tools, the video medium can be used well, used poorly, and can be misused entirely. It is not necessary or possible to know in advance exactly how the video process will apply in any given situation, but it is important to use it always towards some goal.

The video systems used in these processes were half inch, EIAJ standard, battery operated, portable, single camera systems (porta-paks), half inch editing systems, and half inch playback systems. A video facilitator from Communications for Change, a group working experimentally with video tape in community organizations and social agencies, provided assistance to the groups. Communications for Change also provided some recording systems and all editing and playback systems.

In some groups it was important that the members learn how to operate video equipment and in all groups such activity was encouraged. It is the function of the video facilitator, however, to provide whatever technical assistance is required and to help the group discover techniques which will be useful to them. Learning to operate video equipment takes some time and a great deal of energy, commodities which are much valued in most grass roots organizations. Therefore, it is not always necessary that community leaders learn to operate equipment. It is, however, very important that they learn the advantages of the video techniques they employ and that decisions to use video and how to use the process remain with them.