

THE KITCHEN: An Image and Sound Laboratory:

A Rap with Woody and Steina Vasulka, Shridhar Bapat and DIMITRI Devyatkin

The Kitchen was founded in 1971 as a video and performance space at a cultural complex on the outskirts of the Soho area of New York City called the Mercer Arts Center. At 240 Mercer Street, the Kitchen, so-named for a past use for the space in an annex building to the Broadway Central Hotel, shared quarters at the Center with Off-Off Broadway theatre spaces, acting schools and bistros. The Kitchen initiated some of the first annual video festivals, several versions of the first annual computer arts festival, and programmed the work of video artists from around the country, as well as music events and performance events, many of which incorporated the electronic media.

The sudden collapse of the structure of the Broadway Central Hotel in 1973 closed the Mercer Arts Center for good, but the Kitchen reemerged further in Soho at 59 Wooster Street near Broome Street. The Kitchen continues today as a well-endowed performance center with ongoing video exhibition facilities and archival functions closeby at 484 Broome Street, and has served as a model for other media arts spaces through the United States and Canada.

On April 1, 1973, Jud Yalkut hosted a monthly edition of the panel ARTISTS AND CRITICS for WBAI-FM in New York with the founders of the Kitchen. Woody and Steina Vasulka, and their co-workers, Shridhar Bapat and DIMITRI Devyatkin. The discussion entailed a complex overview of the state of video art at that time.

JUD: Let's start with the genesis of the Kitchen, what it was meant to be, and how it relates to the current video scene.

WOODY VASULKA: When we came into the scene, into video actually, we felt there was some kind of vacuum in the presentation of video. But, of course, it was very subjective, because there were existing places like Global Village, Raindance for a while, and People's Video Theater. There were loft concerts; Bill Creston actually advertised shows. We went to that show once with Alfons Schilling. We were just four people who got together and rapped about the concept of a theater, and then there a few other places, but they all had a problem with the audience. Of course, they were badly advertised, and it was purely individualistically oriented, like whatever particular groups or individuals did, they showed.

KITCHEN
Page Two

JUD: It was a random generated scene.

WOODY: Exactly. So we were somehow toying with an idea of filling up that vacuum. We were trying to put together a more egoless concept of things, to bring more participation of other people, so it would create its impact. Of course, the concept was much bigger than what we ended with, always a chain of compromises. Actually, there were 3 or 4 people talking about the theater; the first was Andy Mannik, who physically found the space of the Kitchen, and there was Michael Tschudin, and there was Steina and myself. Later DIMITRI Devyatkin came, and Shridhar Bapat, and that's how it is right now.

STEINA VASULKA: Michael is a musician, and he was going to combine live music with video, and he doesn't dance himself but is very involved with and knows what's going on in the dance scene. He was going to do dance programs there. And we were going to try and combine and make really mixed media.

WOODY: So, we soon realized that to present video only, as other groups had done, was not really enough to put together a scene. JUD: To sustain an environment.

WOODY: So we had these two concepts: one was to be a live audience testing laboratory, which was supposed to attract industries also, to donate equipment- of course, these were the dreams, like asking Sony to give you a camera, or RCA- these are very naive concepts. But then we said, let's take electronic media as art material, let's put them together and do something like the future is the reend of, using the whole environmental range of media. And that somehow was closer to what people felt about and brought in, so then we called it Electronic Media

Theater, and that's how it stands. Our new tendencies, since Steina and I are slowly withdrawing to other duties, the new generation like Shridhar and Dimitri are proceeding in electronic image programming. It happened in a time when there wasn't really much around, and it was a good time to start and to unite the video scene. Of course, we had a few people who would not participate in the Kitchen, but we are not bitter about it because they had their own way of presenting video, but I think mostly we got that part which we like which is the abstract or non-figurative or electronically generated video. So we put that scene together, I would say.

JUD: Image processed work in the medium rather than as a purely recording medium. Although the Kitchen had presented examples of both.

THE KITCHEN

Page Three

SHRIDHAR BAPAT: One of the major points that comes up with our emphasis on processed imagery, image-oriented video, is the fact that that is the one form of video which can work in a performing situation. We actually perform, in many cases, instead of just presenting tapes.

JUD: Rather than being a newsreel theater.

SHRIDHAR: We're actually a performance space, and video becomes an instrument, in the same way that a musician performs. But our orientation has not been totally image-oriented really because we have by and large been over the past two years the only regularly functioning video presentation space of any kind in New York, if not the East, in general. And some of most successful programs have been the open screenings.

JUD: On Wednesday nights.

SHRIDHAR: A fully unstructured kind of thing. People bring in the worst stuff, and sometimes incredible discoveries are made.

STEINA: But the people who have found a home in the Kitchen are the image-oriented, like the electronic image people. They've become associates, or even like Nam June Paik who's not an associate, but there's not a week that he doesn't show up, and Walter Wright, and Bill Etra. Those people have found the Kitchen a very ideal space, whereas those people who deal with video as social or political impact have not made that much use of it, and it's nobody's fault. That's just how it developed; the Kitchen was just as open to them as everybody else. And there's another group of video artists who have almost not used the Kitchen at all, and those are the so-called Conceptualists. JUD: They're mainly gallery oriented.

STEINA: I think because they are not dramatically oriented, they are more oriented towards continuous showing and the Kitchen really is a theater. So it has the concept of the audience coming in, and then the evening starts and ends, and so we have very few of them.

JUD: Many of those artists have dealers who sell videotapes in limited editions at high prices, which still uses the gallery concept for the distribution of video information.

DIMITRI DEVYATKIN: I think you can look at the Kitchen in a much different way, as a real turning over place, where lots and lots of information changes hands, and I really feel my own role there, and a large part of the role that the four of us play, is that we serve a network function- that someone comes with something that they specifically need to know and we can easily direct them to where they should go. Therefore,

THE KITCHEN

Page Four

we represent a great deal more information than we might have ourselves personally, and this is a function that anybody could serve, but as you keep serving it, you become better and better at it. What the Kitchen has really done has been just opening and getting these new informations to cross and intermix,

and especially the idea of music, dance, video and other kinds of performing interacting with each other. It's just amazing, to fine artists working right down the hall from each other, and they've never seen what the other is doing. Just having a space where they can meet each other and see what others are doing generates a very healthy climate.

JUD: It generates an interest and is also a stimulation for new work in one direction or another. That's the way Cinematheque and the underground film scene became a bit more rigidified. WOODY: I also feel that this is the dilemma of the Kitchen. If this should be a place to meet, or a place to produce, or a place to show. When we started, there wasn't a great interest in the Kitchen and we could barely make a week of programming; now, it's different. But it cuts our private time, unfortunately; I think we are too much in showing and very little in production. STEINA: We are too much into success.

JUD: Also the atmosphere of the Mercer Arts Center with five theaters, and a weekend hangout for Off-Off Broadway types. Quite a few wander into the Kitchen from this other milieu. WOODY: Dimitri described one function, which is the meeting place for the exchange of ideas, or the directions of visual thinking, but we have the capacity of actually making an impact by producing, but we haven't used that; it's an energy drain and we let it go. I think that's a bit of a cop-out on our part. We should be pursuing and doing more in that direction, and also on the structure of visuals rather than on the presentation of the visuals. But, since there were many presentations before, perhaps that's enough. (Laughter) JUD: Of course, there's been much discussion over the use of the space and how it would difficult for it to double for both functions, and it would really require the use of another space somewhere, and of course more funding from somewhere.

THE KITCHEN
Page Five

SHRIDHAR: More equipment resources, more time, more personnel.

DIMITRI: I think it's really important that the people who ran the Kitchen were artists on their own, and it made a very different feeling and atmosphere than if it had been people who were strictly in it for the administrative or managerial role. JUD: Or even the purely hardware end of it.

DIMITRI: Right. Like the Open House things, where you always get a chance to show your own tapes, and it's not an egotistical thing, only perhaps in some ways, but it's also a thing with a loose, spontaneous feeling, and if the person running the show has some reason of being involved themselves, it's really an exponential addition, as opposed to saying, well, here's another artist. Because the artist is doing something that's channeling other art adds another qualitative level.

JUD: It's a very healthy ego involvement for the artist to be presenting his work to an audience for the first time. The genesis of the Open screenings is a very interesting story. STEINA: Yes, it's interesting. You were at the party when we opened; everybody was. But the thing is, there was no floor; we were dancing on a strange floor.

WOODY: Cement.

STEINA: Yes, and the walls weren't ready, or anything, but we made the party to see what we had and to use it, and the first one to come up with an idea was Shirley Clarke at that party. She had been talking to a fellow artist about the exact same thing, that there was this vacuum, that there was no place where you could take your tape and play it. And she had this actually fantastic concept that would be totally open and unprogrammed, that people would just come and show each other their tapes WOODY: That was taken from the movies because that's what Millenium was doing.

JUD: Millenium still has open screenings. The Cinematheque used to have open screenings on Wednesday nights.

STEINA: Well, it's typical that it comes from a filmmaker, the idea of having open screenings, but we hadn't thought of that. And, sure enough, she opened it the first time, came one or two times after that, and then didn't show up any more, but that was alright since she had initiated it.

WOODY: She put a seed there.

JUD: She's a kind of prime mover in many respects.

THE KITCHEN

Page Six

WOODY: Extremely brilliant in concept. It was much more personal when it was very small, with very few outsiders. It was actually only fellow tapemakers who came with an audience of ten to twenty people and it was much more intimate. Now Dimitri is facing a different problem; not only is he running the Wednesday nights-

STEINA: But now it's a full house.

WOODY: So now he gets an audience. He gets a crowd.

STEINA: All our things are facing that: the dilemma of success, because now we seem to be averaging something like eighty people a night, and that was unthinkable a few months ago. So it's not playing around anymore; it's serious.

JUD: What do you think about handling that serious business? DIMITRI: Sometimes you get the feeling that the spontaneity is gone, and there's just this tension on every single moment. Days are booked up months in advance. There's a harsh competition among artists and, therefore you're forced to start choosing between them- those are just the negative things. The positive thing is that it is really starting to spread information; people are rapidly becoming aware about video. That's an important thing. It will undoubtedly affect the communications of the future. I really see ten or twenty years from now people using video as opposed to letters. I see an influence in people's lives in a very intense way, especially with cable and computers working together to allow people to have whatever program they want in their home. And the Kitchen will help affect that.

WOODY: It has that impact indirectly. We have found, by traveling around to Canada and the West, that people are actually informed about the Kitchen. It gives them a certain security that it's true, that electronic media are alive and are performed. We get letters from Europeans, so the idea of the Kitchen may be more important than its production. And we send calendars just to be seen around that there is something like electronic media.

STEINA: I think some of these thoughts are already coming, because we are hearing about video theaters opening up all over the United States, in the Midwest and out on the coast. Because they can't really be run commercially, not yet, even Groove Tube two years ago couldn't really make it. People are now considering the idea that as long as the rent is paid, if you get some funding, just to help pay the rent and for basic equipment, you can run a video theater, which really wasn't thinkable two years ago.

THE KITCHEN

Page Seven

SHRIDHAR: In many ways, just running a video theater is much cheaper than running your own little portapak, if you're doing your own little productions. It's such a comparatively simple thing to do.

WOODY: It's time-consuming. It becomes monstrous.

JUD: Particularly at the Kitchen where many shows require completely different setups, just in terms of video monitors and switchers.

WOODY: Right. It couldn't be produced commercially really because it would become such an overhead, and such a hassle. We are actually lucky to be running it half-sloppily because it gives you the leeway of rearranging things. Perhaps I'm still regretting that it didn't develop its own dramatic form. The media is still very sketchy, performed more as accident. Configurations of the monitors is still many times accidental. But that's still a dream; the electronic medium may not be yet together enough to be composed.

JUD: There are a few people who have been thinking of that, in terms of matrixing monitors, like Frank Gillette and Ira Schneider.

SHRIDHAR: Some of Global Village's multi-channel mixes.

JUD: Even some of the Video Free America things which use in a dramatic context.

WOODY: Right. Those are more or less environmental. Environment as something people respect more, because environment has been around for a while longer, sound environments, light environments.

JUD: It started with Scriabin.

WOODY: Right. I haven't seen much of, maybe it's a bad word, dramatic use of video or performance as such, when I'm talking of sounds really coming from different directions, and really making sense in those configurations, really making walls of sound, that have up and down, and right and left. Perhaps it's too literal, but to master the electronic media the way that music is mastered, that the composer really makes a little movement and it makes a difference in a tuba or a cello. So, in that sense, I guess we all are waiting for those computers, but maybe it's time to start without it. I see very little of that, and for me, that's my bag, to perfect that direction.

DIMITRI: Another aspect that the Kitchen serves, I feel, is as a political place, not in the sense of Democrat and Republican politics, but political in that it affects culture and the way people relate to their society in their own minds. For example, the showing we had of THE IRISH TAPES by John Reilly and Stefan Moore, tapes made in Northern Ireland

THE KITCHEN (NOTE: page 8 of this transcription is missing.)

Page Nine

with the Catholic community, and to have that running simultaneously with scenes of the soldiers, or scenes of the B-specials of the Protestant politicians, and so on. But we all depend on this basic level of technology. And Woody's point was that we haven't gone far enough in the direction of really developing that. We've created a space. I don't think we've filled it with enough goodies yet, technologically. These aren't available yet. It's not just a question of money, video synthesizers are barely-

JUD: In their infancy.

SHRIDHAR: And low-light cameras are absolutely essential.

WOODY: Yes. And you go to an exhibit of IEEE and you see that everything is possible, but when you come to base of the daily production, and you're still dealing sometimes with old systems like CV, which is five years old, and you have beat-up cameras, and a switcher which is no good. Let's face it: what we have on our hands is a basic level of technology, and that's how we live.

JUD: One factor is that 1/2" technology is all basically in the realm of consumer technology, and that is the last level to which all of the research filters down into.

WOODY: Well, thank god, on one level, because the prices are reasonable. If you really step up into the professional range of equipment; like we are now facing the whole problem of developing our own custom-made equipment. We were lucky enough to find good, and yet still inexpensive enough engineers, but it's incomparable with industry. It would be beyond the reach of any individual. It's a blessing that the consumer was the initiator of the whole video movement. It has these to ends. JUD: Just as the cassette audio recorder has changed the face of nonfiction and journalism, with the ability of being able to record information anywhere, and transcribe it at one's leisure. WOODY: Again, if you analyze the way people perform, there is already the beginnings of that video cliché, which can be expressed two ways, positive or negative, which means that there's a form to the presentation of video, so some people with no imagination have just the cliché, but someone with imagination builds on the cliché, making something which is controllable.

JUD: A good deal of video art has been based on the transformation of clichés, like the early work of Paik, and much early work grew out of channel switching, building a collage out of broadcast garbage, and taking new forms, which was a beginning of the video switching aspect.

THE KITCHEN

Page Ten

WOODY: My comment is this. This is the first time we are facing video synthesis. Video, especially early Nam June Paik, represented an analytical form, a form of destruction, which is heavily switched, changed, turned, and beam-deflected, so it's a kind of anarchy. It's very inspiring. But now, the new generation, very new, like Stephen Beck, has a very disciplined and oriented form of energy.

JUD: Almost virtuoso.

WOODY: Right. It's very contrary to video used to do, taking inputs off the air and processing it. Now, it has become a very rigid, disciplined whole effort, a whole direction of controlling video, which is going into a direction of finely controlled changes.

DIMITRI: You really notice this in the computer pieces. We're going to have a Computer Arts Festival, for the first two weeks of April (NOTE: 1973) and the works which have been coming in fall into two basic categories: people using this immense technology of computers either to have this precise control over many, many variables, such as Walter Wright, with his programs on very highly advanced hardware, where he's able to call up any shape and any form and any distortion of the pattern at will, and he knows exactly what he's going to get when he punches it up.

"My tapes are made on the Scanimate 'computer' system built built by Computer Image Corp. Scanimate is a first generation video synthesizer. Images are input in a number of ways- thru (2) 1000 line b&w vidicon cameras (these cameras may look at still artwork, a TV monitor, etc.), from an Ampex 2" VTR, or from a studio cameras. Two of these input channels pass through a video mixer to the Scanimate CPU (main control unit) where position and size of the image are controlled... Also on the CPU are (3) oscillators... The CPU also controls the axis (the lines about which an image folds) and allows the image to be broken into as many as (5) separate sections... I play Scanimate as an instrument and all my tapes are made in real time without preprogramming. I also try to avoid editing. I am designing and hope to build a live performance video synthesizer... Most of my tapes have a score as in music. WALTER WRIGHT- from 1972 notes for a KITCHEN performance.

DIMITRI: Then a whole bunch of people are using this technology for its random qualities, for example there's a Dutchman named Peter Struycken

THE KITCHEN

Page Eleven

who sent a film which, as you watch it you can't possibly see anything change, but there are repeating, random, little patterns, and you just see day pass into night, and you can't possibly see it repeat.

"In order to gain acquaintance with the premise applying to the reciprocity between element and structure, the changing degree of variation being the criterion, I make models which \ relate to this problem... One of these models is my image programme 1-1972." - PETER STRYCKEN from the notes to the FIRST COMPUTER ARTS FESTIVAL at the KITCHEN, 1973.

JUD: Most of the work coming in is digital?

DIMITRI: Yes, but a lot of video synthesizer work is analog. David Dow, from Southern Methodist University, is coming for the Festival with live dancers with myo-electric crystals attached to their muscles, so a particular motion will generate a particular current on these electrodes, and it goes into a digital computer that's programmed to respond to these changes in motion and can cause audio and video signals to change. It's very easy to control; you know if you lift your arm, you're going to get green, whereas the feedback pieces that used to be based on electrodes to the brain are not that easy to control. JUD: This reminds of the E.A.T. Nine evenings piece by David Tudor, using the Bandeoneon, to make videographic abstractions and sounds simultaneously- one to one live generated imagery and sound.

WOODY: Right. There is a whole direction with audio-visual composing which is as yet basically untouched. The artists in the past seemed to try to gain access to

technology and just then demonstrate what it could do. But now, artists more generally are gaining access to technology, to the tools. But, now there is another problem, how to really use these tools in a particular frame of mind, or philosophy, or direction, which we're going to have to face' sooner or later. You cannot get away with just flashing images anymore. And it was so beautiful- the Kitchen was so free. People could bring things that were beautiful because they were new. But, suddenly after three years, they've become garbage to us. It's not beautiful anymore; we've seen in a hundred times. It's that first feedback that you do. And we started to discriminate within ourselves. Video wasn't new anymore. You are studying how many layers of images are there, that you couldn't see before because your mind wasn't able to recognize the structure of the image.

THE KITCHEN

Page Twelve

SHRIDHAR: You're looking at it from the point of view of somebody who's been working intimately from inside the medium as long as it's existed. What about the person who's never been exposed to video, or has limited exposure to video or experimental television. He walks into the room and sees the first feedback that somebody did, all those mandals going allover the place; his reaction is much more valid, in a sense, it's I more childlike. It's not geared to trying to analyze what level of technological mastery there was behind that particular image. And one reason why this still continues is that, unlike film, we do not yet have a body of criticism on video that exists.

WOODY: But, let's face it, a symphony orchestra, when they really go in sync and they draw the bows, it's beautiful. That aspect is still in the traditional mode, but if you put a tape on and you just see those two reels turning, it's something else, of course. It becomes a performance within your head, but it has very little to do with the space, because sometimes people dim lights totally. So that is a dilemma of the electronic media.

JUD: Dimming the lights is like making the theater more private.

WOODY: Making it smaller, or making it all in your head again.

DIMITRI: It enhances the suspension of disbelief.

STEINA: There's no suspension of belief required when listening to a piece of music.

WOODY: But we like the Kitchen as a space; that's why we rented it. It was the physical space; every media, especially dealing with video and audio, there has to be a place, a space, the room is your stage. I'm talking about trying to perform directions, levels, movements of the image. There are so many configurations of the screen that can be done: horizontal on the floor, suspended from the ceiling, like the heavens.

JUD: Some of the dreams of Frank Gillette, thinking about the first news of flexible flat TV screens, was being able to construct a tunnel that you could crawl through and have your image all around you.

WOODY: Yes, Frank has fantastic concepts. He has done a few of them; they are on the model scale. We all work on model scales; except you can amplify sound infinitely, but you cannot yet amplify image. It's still the basic monitor. So you have to multiply the number, or what- ever you can do, but once you get the amplification of the images, then that's it, you can terrorize anything.

SHRIDHAR: Even when we started using video projectors, a point which

THE KITCHEN

Page Thirteen

Rudi Stern brought up a long time ago, and obviously McLuhan made the point too, is that video is light coming out at you. Video is a light bulb, not a mirror; anything that's reflected is bound to lose some of its power.

WOODY: These may be the legends of video. There has been an incredible amount of speculation about the size, of why video is so particular, \ because it has this small size. It's in a box. When you project it, though, you suddenly realize that

it's not really true; of course, there's the scanning, a whole field behind the scanning; you stare and you're hypnotized.

JUD: It's a low-definition cool medium, right now.

WOODY: Once you blow it up in a proper brightness, half of these leg-ends about video just go away, because actually you deal with a frame, and you have the same law of composition as other large pictures, like film.

SHRIDHAR: Oddly enough, someone decided on a 4:3 aspect ratio a long time ago. We've been working within time ago, and we've been working within 60 cycles too. JUD: Which is an interesting harmonic scale.

SHRIDHAR: Pythagorean, as well.

"There is another way to tune in to 60 cycles. Keep the power away from you by transmitting through the air~ Use your ears as transducers. Convert from analog to digital. Join the most constant universal life event on our continent. Hum at 60 cycles, way down on the end of the Fletcher-Munson curve. Slip in between the molecules in the body and learn about being a clock, I tell the limp-skinned ones." - TONY CONRAD, program notes for DR. DRONE IN CONCERT, 1972, at the KITCHEN.

WOODY: But it goes back to, once the tools are developed, there's going to be more work with it, but we could do it on the model scale, as Gillette has done. We could perform any configuration, and actually it's your mind that fills the space. You can really extend your perception, in the sense that you can eliminate the rest of the room. Once it works, it's dramatically effective. Of course, life size is the next philosophical dimension, and bigger-than-life is the next.

THE KITCHEN

Page Fourteen

STEINA: A painter friend of mine started to philosophize about it, and he thought that the video screen was actually a continuation of church windows, because it's a back light; it's not a painting; so he found a continuation there that I have never thought of-

JUD: Electronic stained glass, in motion. There's a relationship to Thomas Wilfred's Lumia, which was backlit, especially when we get into performance. The space-window concept.

SHRIDHAR: Wilfred actually had a greater advantage working where he was than we do, because he was able to manipulate his images over any time-span that he chose, and many things of his took about 35 minutes to see perceivable changes, and we're still stuck within that basic time frame.

DIMITRI: When I went to Princeton and saw the computer there that Aaron Marcus works with, where you have a special joystick with which you can control movement within a special cybernetic world that he's created, and you can up and down, around, into the air; you can travel at any speed you like, and meet other people who happen to be in the same computer, traveling around that same imaginary space, and it's just a little screen. You can also put a little disc in front of your eyes that spins fast enough to make a delay from one eye to another so that it looks 3-D, and you really feel as though you're in the space, even though it's this one little screen. No, glasses, just a disc spinning in front of your eyes.

"Computer art promises to challenge more profoundly than ever before what is real and what is not." - AARON MARCUS, notes to film THE BEGINNING at the KITCHEN.

WOODY: But, again, these are what people call the gimmicks. For us, it's the universe. It seems to me that the audience wants to be convinced, so they want to enter the room and it's really there, a 3-dimensional life-size display. And, that's the difference between the establishing of the media and the research of the media. We are still really in that research; we play R&D. Our friend, Alfons Schilling, works with binocular vision; he has done beautiful exploratory works. They are important because even if you apply them to life-size, the principles are the same, the calculation of distances. But again, it's the scale. Now, what will make the impact on a society, somehow we are stuck, because the Renaissance could really build those beautiful churches; they put them on paper, they calculated them, but they built them, and

THE KITCHEN
Page Fifteen

they were so big, so fantastic. If this time is a rationalization, as I believe, of art, it has to be built, it has to exist physically, and I guess we just have to catch it within our generation.

JUD: Since the Kitchen really has been a repository and filtering place for many of the tendencies in video, how do you see those tendencies crystallizing at this point?

STEINA: It is crystallizing a lot. We are actually waiting for other such theaters to open, to crystallize it more, but eventually I think that there will be separate places, and they are going to be further and further apart.

SHRIDHAR: It's already crystallized sharply into three different things: three different areas which are defined less by their content than by the way that they're shown: cable public access, in New York particularly, has been oriented to social action uses of video, community projects, school boards, and also useful information tapes-

JUD: Yes. The New York Public Library has teenage video workshops.

SHRIDHAR: Yes, this is an example of how we're crammed full of all the other tendencies. Once a month we show young people's videotapes done by the New York Public Library people, as well as many high schools around the area. The main tendency of art-oriented video has been split up between the processed image- the image people- and we're really the major showplace for them, at least in New York; and the other sharply defined group in the conceptual artist, to whom video is a kind of incidental tool.

JUD: From another side, the teledynamic environment can extend into the conceptual category, as well as the psychological aspect.

SHRIDHAR: But the conceptual category has been almost exclusively limited, with the exception of some of the Avant Garde Festival, to certain galleries and certain museums, where the resources exist for permanently installing a setup for at least a week or two.

DIMITRI: I think there's a very great hope; I see a hope of two main currents of video, the reportage or documentary style combining with the artistic or electronic thing. I could see, for example, using the electronic media with a real humanitarian sense, dealing with social issues, and what you would create would not fit into any categories at all. It would be possible to use a lot of the electronic effects, chromakeying, feedback, superimpositions, but it could also deal with real content and issues that matter to people. Video has this capability more than

THE KITCHEN
Page Sixteen

any other form, first because it's so immediate. You can show something live or that afternoon; it's very light, very cheap, can be put into people's hands, and it's incredible the way you can manipulate the signal once you have it down on tape or live to create effects. I think if you could integrate the real part of video with the electronic part, you would get something where the whole would be more than the sum of its' parts.

WOODY: Let me comment on that. Only if you master the compositional form of video, can you use it as you describe it. It's like the 19th century novel; the vocabulary was all there; there was not a missing word. So you could really go and do multi-layer analyses of society, plus fantasy, whatever you wanted, like Doestoevsky-

JUD: And eventually James Joyce-

WOODY: Right. Joyce. He describes fossil layers, because they are actually described in the Encyclopedia Britannica; they all exist. There is as yet no vocabulary of electronic image. We don't really know how to name it. How can you say that someone enters a room, and suddenly through his forehead flashes an

ocean, and there's a reflection of sunset, in red, and the forehead suddenly turns pale. These are the terms you would have to be able to script, to perform your image. Now, we are not there yet whatsoever. We are just trying to divide video further, and make sub-categories. There are some people who just deal with a loop and delay. There is still a struggle for analytic form. We, the Vasulkas, went into almost an imitation of painters, like Magritte (NOTE: particularly the GOLDEN VOYAGE of 1973.) because we couldn't stop that; there's so much potential in the painters of the past, the philosophical insertion. The boxes are not open, and if you really touch Dali and you see those exploded moments, it's just unbelievable how this predicts the whole dynamic electronic image. And if you go into Escher and his developments, those incredible computer-like, feedback-like loops, day to night, or his incredible spiral development; All these things that preceded video, or electronic image manipulation are philosophically much further than video, because video people still deal with the accidental. No one has yet selected his future in video by his choice, I think. We all came to it through film, through a job, or through some other strand. There is a generation that may be born to be video, and electronic image oriented; but now it's all sketchy; it's all accidental.

THE KITCHEN
Page Seventeen

SHRIDHAR: At the same time, Woody, the novelist who's sitting in the 19th century had his words. He did not necessarily depend on the existence of paper and ink to be able to use and actualize those words. But we depend on a piece of technology that does certain things, a certain basic limited number of variables that you manipulate when you manipulate a set of video images. . WOODY: Some writers today wouldn't write without a typewriter; they have to have at least a \$100 typewriter, (Laughter) They refuse to write by hand.

SHRIDHAR: The typewriter still doesn't tell them what to write. They could alternately write it with their hand, or with a finger in some sand. The point I'm making is that this is like a linguistic analogy, in structural linguistics, that is, the deep structure is there; the deep structure is the equipment we're using. We're only slowly starting to actualize it, and I don't think we can afford to sit around and mathematically work out every single kind of possible image manipulation. You'd spend 60 years just doing that, and have three years of your life left to apply what you've learned.

JUD: That will be a new science, video general semantics. DIMITRI: Much of the art that you're talking about, like Escher and Dali, is something that appeals to artists, but, in my experience, showing tapes that are purely abstract to people who have strong content needs leaves them completely dry, and I feel that video can serve them also. Referring to something that's real in the world, the message that you're trying to give becomes that much more important because it's talking to someone about a question that they already have. It relates to something after they leave the room. Whereas, if what you're doing is totally abstract, there is a totally subjective reaction to that work. Like with rock and roll bands, some bands are very egotistical and somehow people who listen to their music have an individual response that's subjective; and there 'are other band, like the Grateful Dead, maybe I'm prejudiced, who call up the communal feelings, who use an objective language that gets the people, when they feel warmth to each other, and calls up human emotions that have a positive effect. I think that video can do that also. That video, maybe using real images, or maybe the language that you're talking about, Woody, like a man coming into a room with an ocean in his head; that seems to be a subjective thing. I'm referring to an objective situation where you can show, with very few images, a whole

THE KITCHEN
Page Eighteen

situation, very quickly.

STEINA: You're talking about artist's audience relationships, but that is something that the artist can't create. He just has to be true to himself, and hopefully therefore to the audience. Because an artist who pleases the audience is often not an artist, but this will vary from one artist to another, and has always in history. You can't really say that it should be one way or the other.

DIMITRI: No, I'm not saying that. I just see a need for using it another way from what we call art.

WOODY: There is a great tendency in what you describe; it's like the integration of the human into electronic space; it sounds glamorous. But if you watched the last piece of Ed Emshwiller, *SCAPEMATES*, there is an attempt. It's a very important piece in that respect. He's talking of that communication between electronic space and man, but he still doesn't know what he is doing there, but that's up to you to decide if he fits there or not. But, mostly, all art communicates through these human symbols. JUD: I find that Emshwiller tape very interesting because he uses monolithic computer generated forms and complex abstraction with the organic perambulating quality of human dancers in opposition. This relates to me to the very beginnings of film abstraction where a pioneer like Hans Richter was always concerned with the conflicts between strong compositional control and the chance element, which causes discoveries, with the direct confrontation of formal rigid elements with organic flowing form.

WOODY: Exactly. There are attempts of humanizing the abstract image. It's a matter of reading the image and translating it into human terms, but sometimes I even doubt if that is important because the movement of the electron can be ten times more dramatic to me than the movements of a Cecil B. DeMill with a field of soldiers and a full frame of moving horses. See, the drama itself has very little to do with humanity. JUD: It's like the drama we see when we look through a telescope or microscope.

WOODY: Right. If you look through the telescope, you can see happenings, which are somewhere where you have no way of ordering them. They exist besides you. There is another dimension of human life; it's the existence of different activities somewhere else.

JUD: Also in time travel.

WOODY: Right. It's not a distance. It could one millimeter from your eye, or it could be a hundred miles, but you just don't see it because

THE KITCHEN

Page Nineteen

you refuse to see these thing because you want to see a human tragedy, someone killed, or someone married, all those nuisances of film. Film has come so far in the human development story, there's actually no way back. They bring the drama within the emotions as the most important element, but actually it may have nothing to do with human stories or human shapes. Drama itself relates within the third dimension.

DIMITRI: Something that comes to my mind immediately is the way the war in Vietnam was covered by television. Every single person in America could turn on their TVs at night and find out the score: the Knicks played somebody in basketball, and the Vietcong lost 5, and we lost 3. That television culture used real imagery, conveying a whole propaganda, a whole way of looking at something.

JUD: Actually, the assassination of JFK and the first moon landing were incredible communal events, and the term global village is very valid in that we are creating microcosms that may become as broad as broad- cast television becomes only at such rarefied moments.

DIMITRI: And it's interesting to see the way that it's manipulated, like the way Nixon invaded Cambodia the same day he had a moon landing, so the live TV cameras were all on the moon. Imagine if they'd blacked out the moon cameras and put the live cameras on the helicopters.

WOODY: I understand your American dilemma. You were brought up with it, and you do believe in television, but really for Steina and I that is not the problem at all. What we work with has something to do with the electronic screen, and then there's

something called television, which I understand. It's a big- WOODY: Business. (Laughter) It's a threat to your private securities, of course. That's why there are these confrontations between television and video. I don't find them very actual to what I live in, but of course it comes from the same box. That why I say the box has no meaning to me. It could be projected; it could actually all be in the third dimension. It could exist in your room; it could be a ceiling; it could be a sky. On the right side should be a beach, and the left should be a hill
STEINA: A forest.
WOODY: A forest, and you'd be walking in the sand. That's where electronic image or television progresses for me.

THE KITCHEN

Page twenty

JUD: The quality of the can doesn't determine the quality or the product.
WOODY: What disturbs me about the communal use of video is the power struggle that goes on which is so ilmilar to other power struggles I've seen. Like in Czechoslovakia, the first act of the revolution was to erect poles with loudspeakers on them, and once the village had loud-speakers and a central room with a microphone, collectivization was a matter of two days. Then you can tell people what to do. You can organize them very well. You can say, you're to be there at 5'oclock in this place, and they'll be there. So I know the power of the media, which' is incredibly strong when politically used. And the fight over the media~ even when it's for the public channels is thesame mechanism; it's the struggle for political power. Intuitively, I object to that use, but this society has got to be flexible enough to operate with political power; that's the basis of this society.

DIMITRI: Speaking of TV, we should also probably mention that approximately 80% of all 1/2" video systems are used for surveillance. You hear about the different state police buying huge volumes of cameras, and I've heard that narcs make these beautiful, beautiful 1/2" tapes be- cause they're just around with this equipment all the time; they don't know what to do with it. But that's the primary use of it.

STEINA: But that has more to do with the pencil and the paper. WOODY: Exactly. It's the only medium that gives you such a. causality of recording real life. You hesitate twice: should I push the button?

JUD: You really have to think.

WOODY: Video has the possibility of recording the casual life of the 20th century as it has never been before, and sometimes we see those tapes and they are very beautiful because they are conceived with such a casuality. People disregard television cameras very soon; they don't pay attention to it. It doesn't make any noise.

JUD: The best way to use video is to live with it.

WOODY: Right. Sometimes you regret that Homer didn't write about a little square where beggars would come and rap; he always had to pick up some strange heroic stories of the past. Or if the big writers of the past would have paid attention to some trivial moments. It would be so beautiful to read about a rainy day in Athens, but video for the first time will be able to bring you a rainy day in New York because it will be recorded.

THE KITCHEN

Page Twenty One

SHRIDHAR: Even that requires a certain amount of discipline, because we've seen a lot of tapes like that. The person casually recording his life; if you're skilled at something, that casualness require a lot of ability and training, the ability to be there at the right time-

WOODY: The ability to turn the right knobs-

SHRIDHAR: With the right piece of equipment.

JUD: It's a new definition of the concept of the decisive moment.

WOODY: It's just closer to that moment; it's not there yet. I feel the same way about the perception part of video; it discloses and helps to close the gap between the image and the brain, but it's just close. It's not really there yet, and may never be-

JUD: Until we tap into the synapses themselves.

WOODY: Even then, we'd be the distance of a few microns. There would still be a distance between the plane of realization, the brain and the image.

JUD: That distance has to do with the concept of consciousness, realizing that the real "I" in ourselves is the master of all the other "I's". And it's really at a distance, almost an alientation within one's self, that becomes more of an observer; it has to evolve into a more divine aspect which can creep over into our use of the media as an extension of our neurological system.

WOODY: Right. So, it's all there. We believe in video.