Video Conference Held at Albany

BY LADDY KITE

On Nov. 21-22, a conference entitled "Educational Communication Centers and the Television Arts" was held at the State University of New York at Albany. The conference was coordinated by Gerald O’Grady, director of the Center for Media Study of SUNY at Buffalo. The conference represented both New York State Council on the Arts and the National Educational Television Center.

The purposes of the gathering, as set forth in the program, were threefold: first, to present the latest developments in the video arts and their related technologies and systems; second, to suggest ways in which the facilities of communication centers within colleges and universities might be prepared to serve educational centers within colleges and universities; and finally, to indicate in which centers might stimulate activity in all of the arts and humanities.

The opening presentation by Gerald O’Grady established the tone of the conference. Entitled "Three Universes of Media," it provided an historical overview of the current and an evolutionary perspective through which the participants could relate to the events of the day.

Past and present media courses and programs were characterized as being fragmented and over-specialized, often divided into several departments within the same university. Our contemporary society demands that we recognize the interdisciplinary nature of the arts/cables networks, said O’Grady, and that we then structure our communication systems and programs accordingly.

O’Grady argued for the integration of such endeavors, emphasizing psychology, education, communication and physics into existing and future academic media departments. The ideal educational communication center, he said, should serve as a magnet drawing people from all of these areas freely, since it is through these interactive processes that we can create new perceptions and experiences in our environment.

Next, WilliamMulvey presented three segments of "A Dialogue of Productions," each produced for a specific purpose and a specific result. An videotape the artist he himself had made, and two videotape presentations by Jon Henty, also of Albany — to illustrate the interaction of the arts and education. Steve Vasulka, video artist and director of the video workshop at Media Study Center in Buffalo, next presented selected videotapes illustrating the history of the generated image. Included were portions of videos by Walter Wright, Eric Segal, Steve Beck, Skip Sweeney, and Woodhead and Steina Vasulka. These tapes all dealt with synthetic or electronic imagery or processing.

Filmmaker and video artist Tom Dewitt next presented his film "Fall." Extensive use of multiple imagery, color, sound and video, characterized the piece.

Thursday evening was divided into three segments. The first allowed representatives from three of the largest experimental broadcast facilities to explain their respective programs, both past and projected. Paul Kaufman, director of the National Center for Experiments in Televison, San Francisco, formerly at KQED, was the first speaker. He was followed by Fred Barzyk, executive director of the Cable Arts Network, SUNY; Russell Connor, executive director of the Cable Arts Foundation, New York; and Lance Wisniewski, director of Synapse, Syracuse University, and Innerversity, Syracuse, discussed the types of activities their respective organizations are involved in, and the equipment they have available.

A panel discussion of representatives from various funding organizations followed. They were: Peter Bradley and Lydia Silman of the National Endowment for the Humanities; Donn Alan Pennebaker, well-known filmmaker ("Don't Look Back") and a member of an advisory panel for the National Endowment for the Arts; and David Stewart, director of Special Projects for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

The final presentation was a slide-tape presentation and discussion by Gerard Stern, president of Intermedia Systems Corporation. He talked about the present state of communications systems and some possible directions for evolution.

The conference as a whole was very tightly organized, and provided a comprehensive perspective of video activity throughout the state, including information about what systems are available in what areas. However, as one participant put it, "interaction among the participants can be as productive as interaction between the audience and the speakers." In any conference of this type, it is critically important to schedule periods of time permitting where people can mingle and exchange ideas among themselves. An area where tapes may be viewed on an informal basis would provide an opportunity for people to view each other’s work, and at the same time add an additional level of informational flow.

Laddy Kite is coordinator of the Visual Studies Workshop Media Center.