THE KITCHEN CENTER
FOR VIDEO AND MUSIC
59 Wooster Street
New York, New York 10013

NOTE: This article is adopted from a report on The Kitchen written by Robert Stearns.

The Kitchen Center for Video and Music is a contemporary arts center specializing in, as the name states, the arts which incorporate video and music. Public events and activities are presented under three programs: exhibitions, performances, and contemporary music concerts. Mary MacArthur is Director; Eric Bogosian, Assistant Director; Rose Lee Goldberg, Video Curator; Jill Kreszen, Video Assistant; Rhys Chatham, Music Director; Marc Grafe, Music Assistant; and Debbi Goldstein, Administrative Assistant.

The Exhibitions usually use video as the central visual element, using video monitors or projectors. Occasionally, exhibitions include photographs, drawings, and sophisticated hardware other than video.

The Performances include events varying from screenings of new videotapes to works of non-literary theater. Performance Art, as it is often called, utilizes the various media of language, movement, video, sound, etc. It is an important and personal expression of art in this decade.

The Contemporary Music Concerts present the work of living composers. These concerts present a broad range of current endeavor. These concerts range from solo performances to ensemble and orchestral presentations. A season's schedule of concerts makes a clear statement about the quality and scope of contemporary music.

The Kitchen also houses a video collection and archive, a viewing room, a touring program, and in-house video production.

Established in 1971 by Woody and Steina Vasulka in the Kitchen of the Mercer Hotel, the Kitchen moved to its present space in 1973. Bob Stearns was director from 1973 to 1978. In the words of Peter Frank, the Kitchen is one of the first places "to devote itself entirely to a schedule of activities which defies easy stylistic or even mediumistic categorization."

AN "ALTERNATIVE SPACE"?

It is impossible to generalize quantitatively about these works. The Kitchen chooses to present artists' current works which are sometimes unpolished sketches.
and ideas at other times highly professional accomplished works. This flexibility is often impossible for larger, more established institutions to attempt. It has become vital, as the nature of contemporary art activity shifts, that a means be kept open for the artist to reach a public. If the older institutions cannot do this, it is necessary to invent new ones.

One of the significant evolutions in the art world in the 1970's has been the development of what are sometimes called "alternative spaces." The term has some meaning. However, it carries with it a connotation of tentativeness, yet also betrays a comparison to some other form of institution—perhaps the museum. The Kitchen is not an alternative to anything. It has its own, uncollectable work and activity. The Kitchen's structure and its staff are uniquely suited to handle the special and changing requirements of the art world.

RADIO AND TELEVISION

The Kitchen occupies a large, handsome loft space in South Central SoHo. As SoHo's visitors have increased in number, so have the Kitchen's. But sitting tight is not the Kitchen's style. Now it is planning to come to its public when its public can't come to it. An ambitious but entirely feasible program of radio and television events is being mapped out, in cooperation with SoHo Television, WBAI, and other interested and feasible broadcast organizations.

By nature of the medium which The Kitchen specializes in, the art presented is often suited for transmission to almost limitless audiences through radio and television.

T. Slotkin

Christopher Knowles, "Soco Piece" (1976), performance using live character generator

The art media of video and music become the communications media of television and radio.

This presents some staggering challenges for the future, and these areas are being explored.

Inaugurated in February, 1976, cable television was introduced to the SoHo neighborhood by the installation of a cable TV line at The Kitchen. Its presence charged the atmosphere as old discussions about TV for art were rekindled. The reality of arts programming for television was now closer than ever in the past. We were able to begin scheduling exhibitions and videotapes that could be seen at the Kitchen but also received via cable TV by the over 80,000 Manhattan Cable Television subscribers.

For music, a special event occurred on the evening of the Bicentennial celebrations. Through the efforts of WBAI-FM, the Center for New Music, The Kitchen, and French National Radio, a live, two and a half hour program highlighting contemporary American music was broadcast simultaneously in New York and Paris. Coupled with television, we can foresee the possibility of live televised concerts and performances simulcast in stereo. We look forward to such collaborations in the future.

The art media of video and music become the communications media of television and radio. There has never been a time when it was possible to experience this connection between the production of art and its communication to audiences with such immediacy.

The Kitchen is based both geographically and professionally within a community of artists. It is our desire to provide for both the community and the public at large within our finite resources...
SINCE WE STARTED WORKING WITH VIDEO WE KNEW WE HAD AN AUDIENCE. PEOPLE WOULD GATHER IN OUR HOME, FRIENDS, AND FRIENDS OF FRIENDS WOULD COME ALMOST DAILY. THE TRANSITION BECAME INEVITABLE. WE HAD TO GO FROM A PRIVATE PLACE, OUR LOFT, TO A PUBLIC ONE.

IN MANY WAYS, WE LIKED THE MERCER ARTS CENTER. IT WAS CULTURALLY AND ARTISTICALLY A POLLUTED PLACE. IT COULD DO HIGH ART AND PRODUCE AVERAGE TRASH. WE WERE INTERESTED IN CERTAIN DECADENT ASPECTS OF AMERICAN HISTORY, THE PHENOMENA OF THE TIME: UNDERGROUND ROCK AND ROLL, HOMOSEXUAL THEATER, AND THE REST OF THAT ILLEGITIMATE CULTURE. IN THE SAME WAY WE WERE CURIOUS ABOUT MORE PURITANICAL CONCEPTS OF ART INSPIRED BY MCULHAN AND BUCKMINSTER FULLER. IT SEEMED A STRANGE AND UNITED FRONT AGAINST THE ESTABLISHMENT.

THE MUSIC IN PARTICULAR CARRIED A SIMILAR KIND OF SCHISM: ON THE ONE HAND IT WAS TECHNOLOGICAL, REPRESENTED BY PEOPLE WORKING WITH SYNTHESIZERS OR CERTAIN STRUCTURAL INVESTIGATIONS OF SOUND. ON THE OTHER HAND, IT WAS AN ALMOST THEATRICAL REJECTION OF ESTABLISHED MUSICAL PERFORMANCE CONVENTIONS. IT WAS DIFFICULT TO SEPARATE THESE TENDENCIES WITHIN NEW MUSIC.

OUR PERSONAL INTEREST WAS IN PERFORMING VIDEO. VERY SOON WE UNDERSTOOD THE GENERIC RELATIONSHIP OF VIDEO TO OTHER ELECTRONIC ARTS, AND THIS REALIZATION BECAME OUR GUIDING POLICY. TO US IT WAS DIFFICULT TO BECOME ESTABLISHED. WE DID NOT WANT TO ADMINISTER, OR HAVE AN OFFICE, OR EVEN A PHONE. THERE WAS A PAY PHONE BY THE DOOR. OUR IDEA OF PROGRAMMING WAS NOT TO SELECT OR CURATE, BUT TO MEDIATE AND ACCOMMODATE. NO ONE WAS TURNED DOWN AND NO ONE WAS SERVED EITHER. SINCE THERE WAS NO STAFF, PEOPLE AROUND WERE CREATIVE ARTISTS, COLLEAGUES. THE PERFORMERS WOULD BRING THEIR OWN CREW, THEIR OWN EQUIPMENT AND THEIR OWN AUDIENCE. AT THE END OF THE EVENING THE AUDIENCE WOULD HELP STACK CHAIRS, AND SWEEP THE FLOOR. SOME ARTISTS INSECTED ON SHOWING FOR FREE, BUT IF THERE WAS A DONATION, THE ARTIST HAD A CHOICE TO COLLECT IT, SPLIT IT OR LEAVE IT TO US.

THEKITCHEN 1973-1978
Dimitri Devyatkin, Shrihath Bapat, Rhys Chatham, Steina Vasulka

IT WAS THIS LOOSE ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENT THAT LET PEOPLE PARTICI-PATE SPIRITUALLY IN THE DIRECTORSHIP. SO, IF THERE WAS ANY VIRTUE IN OUR ARRANGEMENT, IT WAS THE PARTICIPA-TION. ONCE A PLACE IS WELL-ADMINIST-ERED IT BECOMES A VICTIM OF ITS OWN WELL-WORKING. IT INCLUDES OR EX-CLudes, SEEKS ITS HIERARCHY OF QUALITIES AND EVENTUALLY BECOMES AN ESTABLISHED IDEA, NOT ALWAYS ABLE TO PERMUTATE WITH THE NEEDS OF TIME. THERE IS A SELF-PRESERVING INSTINCT WITHIN EVERY CREATIVE PERSON: PREFER-RING THE SENSE OF CREATIVE FREEDOM TO BEING BOUND TO A SUCCESSFUL MODEL. EVERY INSTINCT WITHIN THE DAILY OPERATION IS SUPERIORITY IMPORTANT. THE KITCHEN WAS ONLY AS SUCCESSFUL AS THE ARTIST OF THAT PARTICULAR DAY. IT WAS REBORN EVERY 24 HOURS. OF COURSE THERE WERE CATASTROPHES: ONLY AN ENVIRONMENT CREATIVELY SECURE CAN AFFORD THEM. WE WOULD NOT HAVE HAD A TELEPATHIC CONCERT FROM BOSTON, IF THE EVENT WAS BEING ADVERTISES MONTHS IN ADVANCE, AND THE ARTIST GETTING A FEE.

THE IMPULSE TO CREATE A CONCEPT SUCH AS THE KITCHEN WAS NOT PERCEIVED AS AN ADMINISTRATIVE FUNDRAISING INITIATIVE. LOOKING BACK, WE LIVED IN A UNIQUE SITUATION WHEN AN ALTERNATE CULTURAL MODEL HAD CULMINATED INTO AN ABILITY TO PERFORM ITS CONTENT—WHATEVER THAT MEANT. SUDDENLY IT WAS READY AND EAGER TO EXPRESS ITSELF. WE WENT INTO THIS VENTURE WITH A SIMPLE AND INNOCENT BELIEF THAT THIS ACTIVITY, SO RELEVANT TO US, ALSO WAS OF INTEREST TO OTHERS. AS TWO NEWCOMERS, WE WERE LUCKY TO OBSERVE AND PARTICIPATE SO INTENSELY IN THE BIZARRE CULTURE OF THAT TIME. THE VASULKAS