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RALPH HOCKING AND THE EXPERIMENTAL TELEVISION CENTER

By
ROBERTA GRANT

Ralph Hocking aids and abets serious play with video systems in upstate New York. He is the founder and Director of the Experimental Television Center, Ltd. in Binghamton.

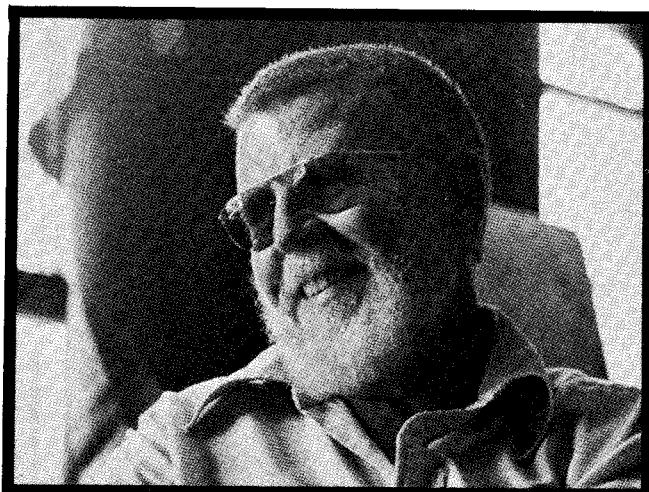
Established in 1971, the Center operates a large studio facility available to independent videomakers (free of charge to New York residents). It also offers an instruction program in video, workshops in video art exploration and a visiting artist series including tape showings, discussions and performances open to the public and involving such videomakers as Nam June Paik, Jean-Pierre Boyer, Ken Marsh, Gary Hill and others. The Center, funded primarily by the New York State Council on the Arts and the National Endowment for the Arts, operates workshops for high school students and also cooperates with the SUNY Cinema Department of which Hocking is the Chairman on video courses offered at the University as well as co-sponsored activities within and outside the classroom.

Ralph Hocking is nonchalant about the energy, creativity and exploratory processes he has nurtured. "I got into television by curiosity more than anything else. I saw that a lot of people were interested in it, interested in making their own statements with it, and I've known Nam June since 1968, so I thought I'd pull a few things together and see what came of it. Russell Connor came up with the initial money from the State Council on the Arts and we opened the Center.

"In the beginning, our policy was just to open the doors and let anyone borrow the equipment to see what they could do with it. We wanted to reach the artists, the students, faculty—everyone. 'Take it out and see what happens' was our approach. At the same time we started working with synthesizers. Abe brought us one in 1971 and we got people working with it.

"Then I became involved with the advisory panels on the Arts Council. The more I saw what was happening there, the more I thought the money from the Council should be supporting the arts primarily. So the Center started moving towards a tighter viewpoint. My initial encounters with Nam June made a lot of sense to me. I'm primarily concerned with what an artist can do with the electron. So now the Center has moved from a 'take it out and play' attitude to more of a focus on art and experimentation.

"We ask that the people who come here have a certain knowledge of video to begin with. We don't sit



Chip Kizzia

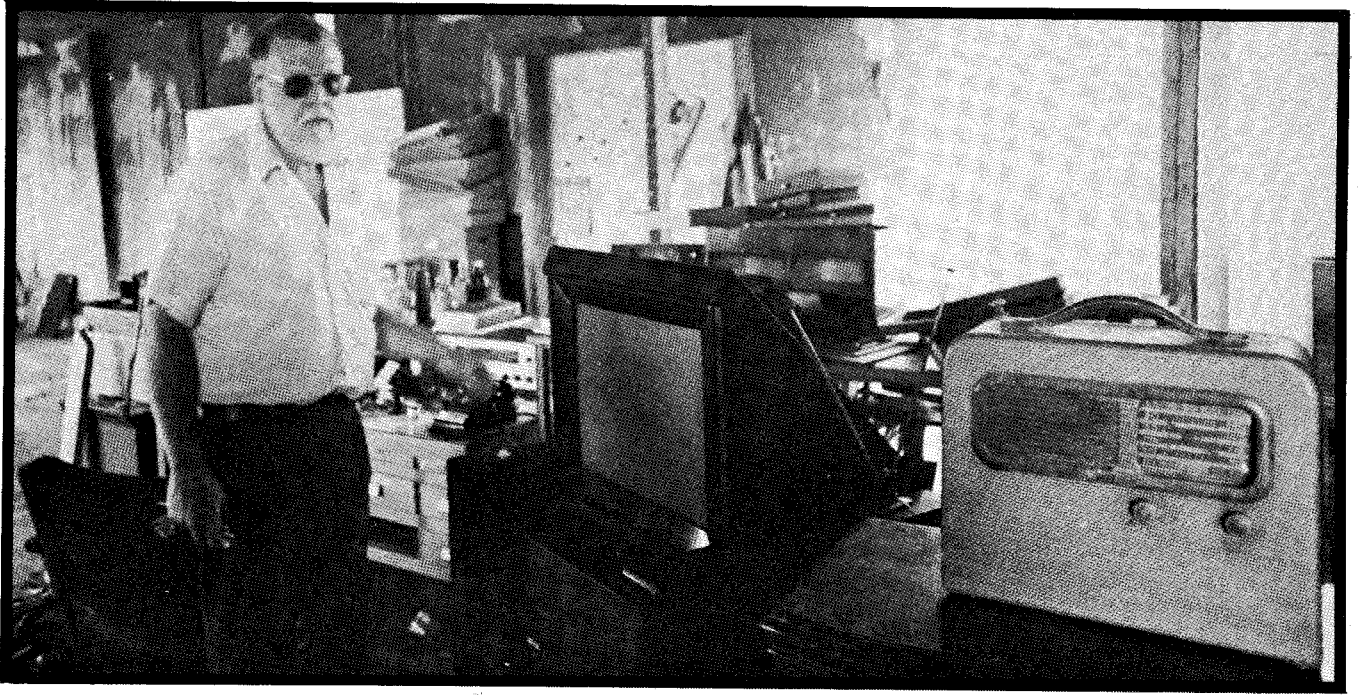
Ralph Hocking

here and help them. The main reason they come is to get at the equipment. If they want to bring fifteen people with them they can. We're not a very tight organization in terms of security—there's nothing we ask for."

VIDEOSCOPE asked Hocking about the first tapes done at the Center. "A lot of the first tapes that people made here were boring as hell. But the *process* was very important to their lives. The main thing I understood was that people want to have control over the media. They don't want to just sit there and be told by broadcast or cable. We had a cable show for awhile where we could put on anything we wanted. But nobody was interested. They wanted to take a playback and monitor and put it in their living room to watch with their friends. That makes a lot of sense to me. The biggest problem with television is that there's no individual, personal control over it. It ought to be done through disc systems or computer recalls that you can punch into the library structure and watch in your house when you want."

Short of that ideal, Hocking isn't too interested in distribution. "A broadcast station is a conduit for distribution. Eventually people from the Center will get their tapes on the air, but I don't think I'm going to affect our culture by being on cable or broadcast because most of what is broadcast is entertainment, though I see great things happen in places like Channel 13. I'm not interested in entertainment, but I'm very open to any of the broadcast or cable stations using what we're doing. I don't have any tendency to build walls between us. In fact, I'm very friendly with the new station manager at the local PBS station. But all we have to offer them is the use of our equipment. I don't want to commit myself to any kind of ongoing regular programming.

"I suspect that Howard Wise at Electronic Arts Intermix gets a lot of tapes from people who work here, but I



Ralph Hocking in the attic of the Experimental Center which houses ancient electronic gear.

don't pay too much attention. I still think the nucleus of the whole thing is control over the image, getting to look at it as long as you want. I think that concept could fit in with the library system. That's the kind of distribution system I was pushing for five years ago. I'm not too concerned with it now. I am concerned about the ways you can access cables with computers, though. It would be great to try it out on campus.

The link between the Center and the campus is the basis for some present and future experimentation since the Center serves the community and the academic community is part of that. "We've been working on a computer project, tying in with computer synthesis, which is growing because of our involvement with the campus. There's a school for advanced technology there which is now interested in tying into the whole video thing. Also, we are talking to the music department which has a monstrous Moog setup.

"We're still just scratching the surface of synthesis right now. A lot of tapes I've seen have used it in a very superficial way. It lacks depth, basically because we don't know enough about it yet. It's a very young concept—there's no history to fall back on. I'm into switching right now. But it's driving me nuts. I have to watch it frame by frame to understand how the machine can give me that live multiple image. I want to spend more time on keying, too. It's one of the few things unique to video. Feedback is another, but I told my students I never want to see a tape with feedback on it unless the feedback is part of a structure they're using. It's a lot of fun and I still do it. I'll run feedback and walk by it and it's like having a pet dog or something. So I get all my students to experience that and then I tell them I want to go a little deeper and see if we can structure something and pull it together."

Hocking described some of the problems of teaching video: "When you teach, first you have to get people to see, then the main thing is to get into processing, manipulating the possibilities. Start out with one camera and a monitor, look at it, look around the room with it, translate it, play with the brightness and contrast and the video level. Introduce a recorder into that chain and then introduce an SEG and another camera, then another camera on top of that and possibly some audio generators. That's about as far as we go with equipment in the beginning course. I think it works pretty well. The problem comes when I try to teach synthesis to people who have had this course. The transition is just too great. I'm going crazy trying to figure out how to bridge from one to the other. I'm trying to find a conceptual nucleus to work from. I struggle everytime I teach to figure out what the hell I'm trying to do. I keep coming back to some very basic ideas of how you see things. I try to get people involved in very minimal constructions they can really spend time with, to discipline themselves. At this point people are not disciplining their art.

"I don't draw too fine a line between documentation and analysis and synthesis and those sort of things except for purposes of clarity. I want to have separate courses, but eventually I want them to come up with basically the same thing. Whether they're putting together a tape synthesis that has no imagery from cameras or working straight from a portapak, I want them to see that it's got to be the same thing: a strong visual statement.

"I'm going to teach a course in documentary, but I'm not calling it 'Documentary Television'. Many documentaries are just visual fluff. A lot of people in-

volved in documentaries are still waiting for somebody to jump out of a window so they can tape them on the way down. It's a very stupid viewpoint. I'm going to call the course 'Video as an Analytical Tool' or something like that. It'll be straightforward, down-to-earth portapak and small studio setups. I'm doing it basically because nothing has been happening in television on this campus for the last ten years."

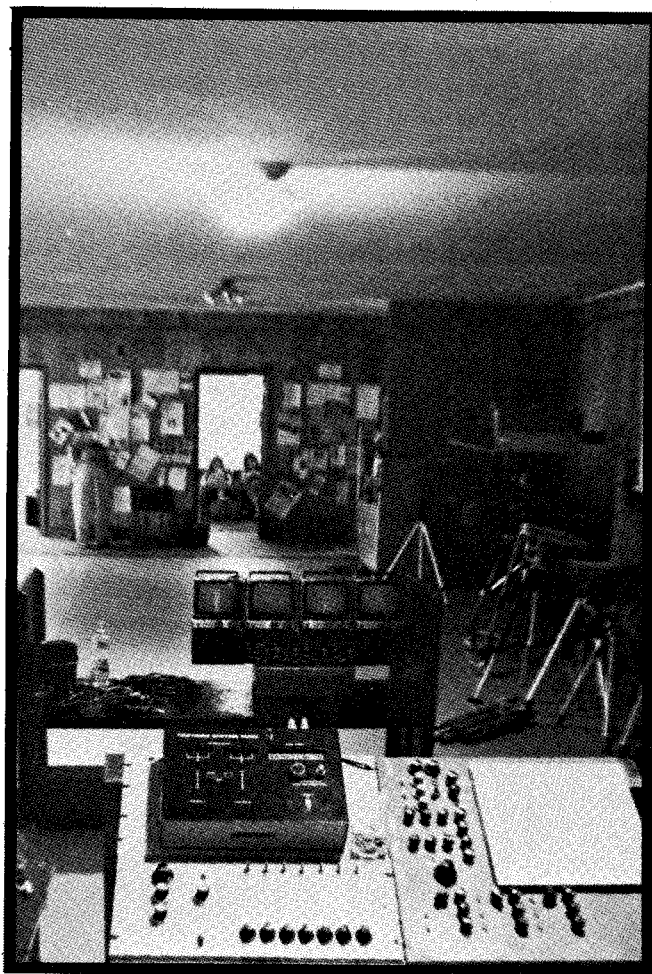
When Hocking first arrived at SUNY Binghamton in 1969, the University was constructing a new center for exploring television as an instructional medium. "The more the building went up and the more the big Ampexes came in, the less it made any sense to me. The whole program has gone through some changes since I've been here, the most recent being that they fired the director and gave me all the equipment. It's all 2-inch stuff, which used to be pretty exciting, but now having four black and white orthicon cameras is like having four dinosaurs. And with time base correction it's fairly ridiculous."

Hocking returned to the new course he's teaching. "I figure that if I can get hold of fifteen or twenty people each semester and indoctrinate them in the possibilities of video, then they can go to sociology and the other departments and see how they can use it. I'm going to start pushing video with the faculty, having workshops so they can start borrowing equipment and see all the different concepts. Then I'm going to try to decentralize the whole thing and make all the departments buy their own equipment!"

Based on his participation in both film and video, *VIDEOSCOPE* asked Hocking about the relationship between them. "The big thing that fascinated me initially about video was that there may be a real difference between this and anything else. And there's not. You're still stuck with the same old stuff: time, space, linear structure, and large and small as they relate spatially. It's all the same."

"I'll run feedback and walk by it and it's like having a pet dog or something."

"In general, I don't pay much attention to structure, such as how to cut. I don't want to emulate film that way. I think one of the things video is capable of utilizing, that film doesn't take advantage of, is *time*. The length of a statement can be very long. I mean, I would like to watch the six o'clock news until nine o'clock. But that doesn't happen too often. Generally, people are not making long statements that are very interesting. Most of what you see are attempts at heightening the excitement of the event through mani-



Chip Kizzia

The synthesizer at the heart of the Experimental Center.

pulation of sound tracks, quick cuts, flip-flop things, stuff that just doesn't lend itself to understanding what's going on.

"There's a certain animosity right now between filmmakers and videomakers, but I think it's lessening. I just heard that Tony Conrad, an excellent filmmaker who teaches film at Buffalo, is teaching a video course this year. I think there are more and more people on the campus here who are in film and want to get into video. I want to interconnect things, slush them together and see what happens."

A lot is happening in terms of video at the Experimental Television Center in Binghamton: the waiting list for studio facilities is filled months in advance. Says Hocking, "We could double the number of artists here any time we wanted to if we had more staff and more space. We're involved in a lot of projects right now. A lot of people who have gone through the whole process here are now putting on shows at various universities and museums. Half the time I don't know what's going on, which is fine. I'd say that we're evolving into a larger structure but it's going slow. I refuse to go faster. We're still doing basically the same thing we started out to do: we make tools available to artists." ■ ■ ■





Chip Kizzia

GERALD O'GRADY: THE PERSPECTIVE FROM BUFFALO

By
KAREN MOONEY

Gerald O'Grady is the nucleus of one of the most elaborate and comprehensive media programs in the world. The bearer of two Ph.D.'s in medieval literature and a teacher of literature and communications at numerous schools and universities, Dr. O'Grady regards himself as a "philosophical anthropologist—someone who is interested in culture, the ways culture is transmitted through codes, and in theorizing about the methods used to examine these ways."

From an office on the campus of the State University of New York at Buffalo, Dr. O'Grady directs the

Educational Communications Center which supplies all media services to the university; the Center for Media Study, a degree-granting program; and Media Study/ Buffalo, an extensive community program. Through these organizations, he steers a movement to proliferate participation in communications processes—from snapshots to satellites—at all levels, from children to Ph.D.'s.

The root idea is this: "Literacy's been with us now since the nineteenth century and is pretty much accepted to be a universal thrust. My own theory is

that we should move towards what I call 'mediacy.' It's a political issue: one cannot participate in society unless one can use the channels or codes of communication that are current in the time that one lives."

"I'm not saying that everyone has to make tapes and have them shown. While the Constitution guarantees the pursuit of happiness, it doesn't guarantee happiness. But it seems to me that it has to guarantee access."

"My own theory is that we should move towards what I call 'mediacy' and it's a political issue."

Dr. O'Grady's first effort to change this situation in Buffalo was the establishment of Media Study/Buffalo four years ago. At that time it offered its first 20-week workshop of film and video, free to the community, taught by such artists as Stan Vanderbeek, Ed Emshwiller, and Yvonne Andersen. "In the beginning," Dr. O'Grady explains, "the concept was to get people involved in all the media, looking at different kinds of image processes—still, moving, video, and so forth. We were hoping that those people would go out and start little units of their own and teach others, and some of them have."

Now Media Study, in addition to offering workshops in the various media and even in circuit design ("we think it's important to give artists access to designing their own tools"), also serves as an information service and a funding conduit, and operates several screening programs and a distribution network. "The principle is access and that's kind of the system—to give information and training and competency through access to equipment, access to work by others, access to distribution of their own work, access to money outside of our own, and then access to advice on legal and other problems. Access is a word for environment."

At least four or five films or videotapes are screened weekly, many accompanied by the artist. This is a system to funnel aid and money back to the working artist. The screening system encourages access: "Instead of showing films and tapes in one place, again, we promote access to a variety of screenings all over the city. We see ourselves as catalytic and cooperative and what we try to do always is to make the best use of the financial material and human resources in a whole community." The screening sites include libraries, the Albright-Knox Art Gallery, Shea's Buffalo (the "Radio City of Buffalo"), and these cultural organizations supply the space and projection while Media Study makes the selection and supplies the money for film rental.

The most recent asset to Media Study's structure is the acquisition of the Mars Hotel, a 100,000 square foot, seven-story former-hotel, which houses fifty

climate controlled editing rooms, offices, living space, and the largest sound studio in New York State.

The building, part of a city block acquisition assessed at \$640,000, is near the site of a new transit system being built in Buffalo which will deposit 40,000 people daily near the former hotel. "It puts us in a very good position. We moved there to help resurrect downtown. That was one of our interests, to contribute to the urban development."

Some of the other community affairs and services for which Media Study/Buffalo is responsible are a project with the City Council to do an interactive cable information service within one precinct, an internship program with the cable stations, and an NEA filmmaker in the schools program, and, in cooperation with the university, a nationally sponsored summer youth-in-residence program which gives training to talented youths in the arts.

A second facet of Dr. O'Grady's enterprise is the direction of the "Center for Media Study" which he founded four years ago at SUNY/Buffalo to "involve people in the relation of consciousness to codes to cultures." He elaborates: "I think each of us has our own mind or consciousness which is in interaction with culture, which is physical, environmental, social—all these different systems—and that you do that interaction—the kind of I-thou relationship—through codes—gestures, language, and especially, what was lacking here and most places, any knowledge of image codes, what I call the moving image."

"... What we try to do always is to make the best use of the financial material and human resources in a whole community."

The faculties of both Media Study and the Center for Media Study reflect the essential relationship of making to understanding. "The only people who I thought could really speak knowledgeably about film and video materials were people who are practitioners." For this reason the core faculty consists of Hollis Frampton, Woody Vasulka, Steina Vasulka, Paul Sharits, Tony Conrad, Brian Henderson, and James Blue.

The programs work on three levels: making, including film, video, holography, computers; history, tradition, and interpretation of these image structures; and their psychological and social effect. Although students, working towards B.A., M.A., M.F.A., and Ph.D. degrees will be able to concentrate or combine any of these three areas, Dr. O'Grady states that "Everyone in the program has to participate in the making side. Generally, we think that it's a good idea for the makers to have some idea of the traditions and history but we're not as concerned with that."

The Center for Media Study also offers a summer program called the "Summer Institute for Making and

Understanding Media," which offers seven-week courses taught by visiting teachers, a large number of visiting speakers, and a conference. The conference topic for this past summer, "Electronic Tools Design," fits well into the media system teaching program in general: "We have conceptual systems and tools which result from them, and then the works that result from the tools. Generally, most of the things I do are thought through in that design fashion. And the purpose of that is to open us up to all different new kinds of image designs that are coming forth."

"The center of education will have to become codes because codes are the media—the connectors, the ligatures—between consciousness and culture."

For all this, Dr. O'Grady's "one paying job" is Director of the Educational Communications Center at the University, "an agency like the library or computing center which serves the other 126 departments." It operates a public radio station, WBFO, and the first language laboratory to have video and film in addition to audio as basic components of teaching language. It also is planning all the audio-visual spaces for a new campus at Amherst, outside of Buffalo, which will be the largest campus ever built in world history (\$650 million). Within three years there will be two 2400-square foot color television studios with 2-inch and 1-inch capability, and satellite connection. There will be 32 video and audio channels between all buildings.

These programs operate within a fertile setting.

SUNY/Buffalo is the largest of the SUNY system of 72 campuses and over 350,000 students—"The largest university in the whole history of the world." And the city of Buffalo itself is "one of the most media-ized city in the world"—it has outlets for the three major networks, a public television station, a UHF station, three television channels from Canada, four cable companies, seventy-five commercial radio stations, and three public radio stations. "It's a place where there are a lot of channels open for communication."

"Oh, Buffalo's an interesting place, because on one hand it's within New York State and it's sophisticated and relatively well-financed and on the other hand it's really like a mid-western city, like the old cities of Detroit, Cleveland, Milwaukee—in some ways it's almost a 19th century industrial city; after years of going downhill, just beginning to turn around. It's right on the border of a foreign country. And it's within \$100 round trip of everywhere—Toronto, Montreal, Boston, New York, Washington. So we use that system and we bring everyone through here all the time. The Rockefeller "State of the Art" report says we're a small media think-tank, and that's what we try to be."

From this perspective, Dr. O'Grady commented on future directions: "My general sense is that the arts,

so-called, will have to relocate themselves in what I call culture, something broader, and I think that's happening. I'm not saying that they went in the wrong direction. I think they went in the absolutely right direction, in other words they won't let the rest of culture keep them back; they're more advanced. But I think it's now important that they somehow interact with other cultural systems and I think that's going on."

"I would hope that everyone would become a philosophical anthropologist and I think that'll be the direction of future education, that teachers will teach codes, they won't teach language."

"I think we have to become more sophisticated about the whole environment of teaching and that teaching be centered on codes, just to make it clear once and for all that man is man because he is a symbol-making animal . . . The center of education will have to become codes because codes are the media—the connectors, the ligatures—between consciousness and culture. And that's my educational program, to keep those three in an interactionary dance, because your consciousness is always changing and your culture is always changing, and your codes, print and visual information, even though they change less quickly, also change."

"Images will become crucial," because the amount of information in the world is increasing so swiftly that "the only possible way of keeping in touch with it, especially after you've gone through school, is through the public media—image transmission which is, of course, information in condensed form."

Dr. O'Grady summarized the Buffalo activity:

"We're involved here not only at the boundaries of the experimental tradition with the Vasulkas moving into computers and stereoscopic explorations, but we're also very much involved in serving the community in the documentary, the basic recording and revelation of people to each other, some type of interactionary form—there James Blue is one of the modern masters."

"So I'm in a unique position. Through the ECC, we serve all the departments at a major university. The State is still the best endowed materially and has the most advanced education system, is most open to the arts, and has an arts council budget that's more than the other 50 states put together. We have our own 'research and development' within that, the Center for Media Study, which is an academic program which teaches courses and gives degrees. That faculty includes Hollis Frampton who is 'making/remaking the history of film as it should have been made,' and Paul Sharits is investigating the multiple forms of presentation of the celluloid image and the deepest sources of filmic materials and Brian Henderson's work has been in the basic demystification of previous film theories. My hope is to be as inventive in pedagogical and social formulations. At the foundation, Media Study/Buffalo, the task is to structure the media environment in the community." ■ ■ ■



THE KITCHEN

The Kitchen's performance space

Katherine Landman

The Kitchen Center for Video and Music was founded in 1971 by Woody and Steina Vasulka. Originally located in the kitchen of the old Broadway Central Hotel (hence the name) which housed the Mercer Arts Center, The Kitchen moved in 1973 to its present Broome Street loft just before the hotel collapsed.

While first it was funded through the auspices of Howard Wise and Electronic Arts Intermix, its budget demands soon became greater than the total of all Mr. Wise's other projects. It was at that point The Kitchen became an independent, non-profit organization operating as Haleakala, Inc. under its present Director, Robert Stearns.

Originally focusing on electronic music and video, The Kitchen has since moved away from funding experiments in those fields and now concentrates on presentation. It provides space, publicity, equipment and technical assistance for video exhibitions, concerts and multimedia performances, and has presented tapes and performances by such artists as Juan Downey, William Wegman, Frank Gillette, Beryl Korot, Shigeko Kubota, Ira Schneider and Steve Paxton. Musicians who have performed here include Steve Reich, Philip Glass and La Monte Young. Performance space is in such demand that

artists may present their work only on an every-other-year basis.

In addition to presenting tape showings, concerts and performances, The Kitchen has a video room where anyone may view 1/2-inch reel-to-reel and 3/4-inch cassette videotapes, color, black and white, and European PAL color. You may bring your own material or select works from The Kitchen tape library.

Future plans include increasing its tape collection and making it available for showing through other individuals and organizations. Also, The Kitchen is in the process of developing a touring program where by it would pay transportation costs to museums, galleries, art centers, and schools for performance artists and video installations.

This organization publishes a monthly calendar of events and an annual catalog which lists all events, concerts and exhibitions of the season.

The Kitchen is presently staffed by Robert Stearns, Director; Carlota Schoolman, Video Director; Michael Shamberg, Assistant Video Director; Garrett List, Music Director; Rhys Chatham, Associate Music Director; and Daile Kaplan, who will be organizing the touring program. The Kitchen is funded by the National Endowment for the Arts, the New York State Council on the Arts, and the Martha Baird Rockefeller Fund for Music, Inc. ■ ■ ■