

Video Conference Held at Albany

BY LADDY KITE

On Nov. 21 - 22, a conference entitled "Educational Communication Centers and the Television Arts" was conducted 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 host was William Mulvey, director of SUNY at Albany's Educational Communications Center.

The purposes of the gathering, as set forth in the program, were three-fold: 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 developing video artists on their own campuses and surrounding communities; and finally, to indicate ways 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 background and an encompassing perspective through which the participants could relate to the events of the two days.

Past and present media courses and programs were characterized as being fragmented and over-specialized, often divided into several departments with little or no interaction. Our contemporary society demands that we recognize the interdisciplinary nature of our perceptions, O'Grady said, and that we then structure our communication systems and programs accordingly.

O'Grady argued for the integration of such divergent areas as sociology, psychology, art, education, communication and physics into existing and future academic media departments. The ideal educational communication center, he said, should have access to and draw from all of these areas freely, since it is through these interactive processes that each of us perceives and experiences his environment.

Next, William Mulvey presented three examples of "educational productions," each produced for a specific purpose. Mulvey used these productions — one videotape he himself had made, and two slide-tape presentations by Jon Henry, also of Albany — to illustrate the interaction of the arts and education.

Steina 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 tapes by Walter Wright, Eric Segal, Steve Beck, Skip Sweeney, and Woody 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, both film and video, characterized the piece.

Thursday evening was divided into three presentations. 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 Television, San Francisco, formerly at KQED-TV, was the first speaker. He was followed by Fred Barzyk, director of the Television Workshop at WGBH-TV, Boston. Finally, David Loxton, director of the Television Laboratory, WNET-TV, New York,



Gerald O'Grady, director of the Media Study Center, Buffalo, during a discussion at the video conference in Albany (photo by Laddy Kite).

showed excerpts from tapes produced at his facility.

Perhaps the major event of the evening was a presentation by Ed Emshwiller, filmmaker and video artist in residence at WNET. He first performed a live piece mixed with prerecorded film and videotape imagery. He then projected "Scape-mates," a complex videotape made at Dolphin Studios, New York. This presentation was rather unique in that the tape was shown on a color monitor in the center of the space. Directly above the monitor, the same tape was rear projected onto a larger screen, also in color, and directly above that was another, slightly larger, projected image of the same tape in black and white. In addition to the three levels involving monitor and screen, color, and black and white, the three images were not always in exact sync. At times one of the images was slightly ahead or behind the other two, thus adding a time factor to the other levels of perception. The viewer was able to observe the piece from changing points in time, three different physical perspectives, involving three different projection systems in both color and black and white, all simultaneously.

The final event of the evening was a composite of "works in progress, arts systems incorporating people, machines, spaces, movements, visuals and sounds" all produced at Albany.

Friday opened with several speakers discussing the development of electronic art tools. Joel Chadabe of the music department at Albany pointed out, among other things, the possibility of using the same electronic signal which generates video images to also generate synthetic music and vice versa. He further urged academic institutions and other facilities to open their doors to artists, in order to benefit both the artists and the institutions.

Ralph Hocking, director of the Experimental Television Center, SUNY at Binghamton, along with video artist in residence Walter Wright, next demonstrated the use of one of their video synthesizers. They also explained some of the programs and equipment available at Binghamton, along with access procedures.

John Roy, of the University of Massachusetts in Amherst, next outlined the hardware systems and programs offered there.

Roy was followed by video artist

Woody Vasulka, affiliated with the Center for Media Study at SUNY Buffalo and director of the Experimental Laboratory. Vasulka spoke of his perceptions of the medium. In one respect, he said, it can be thought of as a new system that enables man to observe the activities of energy in relation to minute increments of time. "These are dynamic processes, just as the energy in the system is in a constant state of flux," he went on. "Man is involved in a dialogue with these electronic processes," and although he can exercise a certain degree of control, he must observe the consequences of his actions, he noted. Perhaps through an increased understanding of this energy, Vasulka concluded, insight may be gained into other events and forces operating in our environment.

The next segment of the conference was devoted to Arts/Cables/Networks. Speakers including Michael Chase, director of the New York Network, SUNY; Russell Connor, executive director of the Cable Arts Foundation, New York; and Lance Wisniewski, director of Synapse, Syracuse University, and Innervision, 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

New York State Council on the Arts; Jeanne Mulcahy 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 Gerd 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 (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.



Paul Kaufman, director of the National Center for Experiments in Television, San Francisco, speaking at the conference (photo by Steve Moore).