

For Expression of Ideas

Cameras Viewed as Pencils of the Future

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The director of the University of Buffalo's Center for Media Study predicts that cameras soon will be used as readily as pencils in expressing thoughts and ideas.

"Why Johnny Can't Read" was an important problem in the 1960s. "Why Johnny Can't Write" is being discussed today, and a major topic of the 1980s may be "Why Johnny Can't See."

The bombardment of thousands of moving images into our daily lives already is being taken seriously in many quarters, and its impact is beginning to be felt by the public.

THE STUDY OF MEDIA and its implications is the concern of UB's Center for Media Study. Dr. Gerald O'Grady, center director since 1972, says that since we know how to read and write from the age of five, we can understand and interpret the written word. But we have not made images or used film and video cameras to express our thoughts and ideas, and so we do not have that comfortable familiarity with images needed to fully understand them.

"But, a time will soon be here," Dr. O'Grady says, "when cameras will be used as readily as pencils."

Students are studying all aspects of media at the center in the Ellicott Complex on the Amherst campus. The center's concept of "media," is very broad.

"IT INCLUDES film and television as we know it," he says, "but, more importantly, all of the codes of human expression, all of the symbolic codes of culture, concentrating specifically on the moving image accompanied by sound."

Course work encompasses the making of film, video tapes and other media; the history, theory and analysis of media forms, and the psychic and social effects of media.

While other schools throughout the country offer courses in film or television,



Steina Vasulka

Dr. Gerald O'Grady

*Courier-Express/I. R. Sorgi**... in experimental lab at Ellicott Complex*

Dr. O'Grady says the center is unique because it offers analysis, history and the making of film and video. It has gained a national and an international reputation that has enabled it to attract a young top-flight faculty.

FILMMAKERS Paul Sharits and Hollis Frampton, known for their intensely personal films, have been part of the center since 1972. James Blue, a documentary filmmaker, joined the faculty this year. His appointment expands the center's offerings in nonfiction and social documentary film and video.

Film history and semiology are the province of Dr. Brian Henderson. He has contributed articles to "Film Quarterly" and the "Quarterly Review of

Film," two of the fields' leading journals.

The creation of personal video art is the domain of videomaker Behuslav "Woody" Vasulka. Vasulka's students create electronic images on half-inch video tape and have access to synthesizers, generators and colorizers with which to manipulate them.

MORE THAN 300 undergraduate and 65 graduate students from all areas of the university are enrolled in the courses, making it a interdisciplinary unit. About 10 undergraduate degrees were awarded last year to "special majors," and about 12 Master of Arts in Humanities degrees were awarded to graduate students.

Programmers at the center are aware of the value of and need for interaction with the community. Every week the center offers public programs featuring visitors to the campus. A look at the weekly calendar notes filmmakers, videomakers, multimedia artists or technical specialists scheduled to give lectures or demonstrations.

These events, open to the public, have numbered in the hundreds over the years and are planned at convenient locations. Some are at Ellicott, others at the Main Street campus, while some are presented in cooperation with Media Study-Buffalo at the Buffalo and Erie County Library and at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery.

MANY OF THE creative artists who come to Buffalo each year participate in the center's oral history project on the American Independent Cinema. Through this major research program, the center has recorded more than 500 hours of interviews with more than 50 independent filmmakers. This basic research material is being used by scholars as prime source

material for research in the history of this field over the last 50 years.

Since 1972 the Summer Institute in the Making and Understanding of Media has been important in university activities. Plans for this year's summer institute include seven concentrated weeks on the problems of "narrativity" in film. An international conference is planned in early June on the development of electronic tools for the arts. Twenty guest designers, artists and teachers have been invited.

THE SUMMER institute also will sponsor a four-week Lighthouse Project on the Arts. Invitations to this program will be extended to 50 of the most talented New York State high school students in media making.

The center also has been sponsoring screenings of contemporary films from abroad. A series on Poland was shown in July. "Russian Cinema Today: Thirteen Features from Six Soviet Republics" are being presented this month. Tentative plans have been made for screening of Egyptian films in March and African films later in the spring.

The weekly Electronic Arts Series will continue on Tuesday nights beginning on Jan. 20 in the Ellicott Complex.

Monthly programs on the American Narrative Cinema will start on Jan. 27. Dates for the cooperatively sponsored lecture-screenings at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery and the Buffalo and Erie County Public Library will be announced this month.