

Lover

T H E K I T C H E N

FOR THOSE WHO KNOW THE KITCHEN IN ITS CURRENT SPACE, WE WOULD LIKE TO ADD A FEW NOTES ON ITS ORIGIN, LOCATION AND OPERATION FROM SPRING 1971 TO FALL 1973.

THE "OLD KITCHEN" WAS LOCATED AT THE MERCER STREET ENTRANCE OF THE "BROADWAY CENTRAL HOTEL" IN THE "MERCER ART CENTER", A CONGLOMERATE OF THEATRES ADAPTED FROM THE CATERING- AND BALL-ROOMS OF THE HOTEL. OUR SPACE WAS A FORMER KITCHEN.

THE TERMINATION OF THE MERCER ARTS CENTER WAS THE TOTAL COLLAPSE OF THE BROADWAY CENTRAL HOTEL IN AUGUST OF '73.

SHORTLY BEFORE THIS CATASTROPHE, THE DIRECTORSHIP HAD BEEN TRANSFERRED TO BOB STEARNS, AND THE "NEW KITCHEN" MOVED TO ITS CURRENT LOCATION ON WOOSTER STREET.

THE "OLD KITCHEN" WAS FORMULATED BY CONTRIBUTIONS OF MANY PEOPLE, NAMELY ANDY MANNIK, SIA AND MICHAEL TSCHUDIN, REYS CHATHAM, SHRIDHAR BAPAT, DIMITRI DEVIATKIN AND LATER BY JIM BURTON AND BOB STEARNS, ALL OF WHOM HELPED RUN THE DAILY OPERATIONS AND PROGRAMMING. A PARTICULAR CREDIT FOR THE THREE ANNUAL FESTIVALS: THE VIDEO FESTIVAL, THE COMPUTER FESTIVAL AND THE WOMEN'S VIDEO FESTIVAL, SHOULD BE GIVEN TO SHRIDHAR, DIMITRI AND SUSAN MILANO RESPECTIVELY. HOWARD WISE THROUGH "ELECTRONIC ARTS INTERMIX" PROVIDED FOR US THE ADMINISTRATIVE UMBRELLA, WITHOUT WHICH WE COULD NOT HAVE EXISTED.

EVENTUALLY, THE FUNDING BY THE STATE COUNCIL ON THE ARTS HELPED TO SECURE THE RENT, AND A FURTHER CONTINUATION.

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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 IT COULD PRODUCE AVERAGE TRASH. WE WERE INTERESTED IN CERTAIN DECADENT ASPECTS OF AMERICA, THE PHENOMENA OF THE TIMES; 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 MCLUHAN 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 PERFORMING 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 ESTABLISHMENT. 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 INSISTED 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. ALMOST EVERYBODY LET US KEEP THE BOX, WHICH PAID FOR THE MONTHLY CALENDAR AND PETTY CASH.

IT WAS THIS LOOSE ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENT THAT LET PEOPLE PARTICIPATE SPIRITUALLY IN THE DIRECTORSHIP. SO, IF THERE WAS ANY VIRTUE IN OUR ARRANGEMENT, IT WAS THE PARTICIPATION. ONCE A PLACE IS WELL-ADMINISTERED IT BECOMES A VICTIM OF ITS OWN WELL-WORKING. IT INCLUDES OR EXCLUDES, 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; PREFERRING THE SENSE OF CREATIVE FREEDOM TO BEING BOUND TO A SUCCESSFUL MODEL. EVERY INSTINCT WITHIN THE DAILY OPERATION IS SUPERBLY 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 ADVERTISED MONTHS IN ADVANCE, AND THE ARTIST GETTING A FEE.

THE IMPULSE TO CREATE A CONCEPT SUCH AS THE KITCHEN WAS, SHOULD NOT BE 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.

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BY [unclear]

I THINK MUSIC IN PARTICULAR CARRIED THE SAME KIND OF SCHISM AS I DESCRIBED IN MY PERSONAL UNDERSTANDING OF THAT PERIOD OF ART. ON THE ONE HAND IT WAS TECHNOLOGICAL REPRESENTED BY PEOPLE WORKING EITHER WITH SYNTHESIZED SOUND, PURE ANALYSIS OF SOUNDS, LIKE LAMONTE YOUNG, OR CERTAIN STRUCTURAL INVESTIGATION OF SOUND. ON THE OTHER HAND, IT WAS THE ALMOST THEATRICAL REJECTION OF ESTABLISHED MUSICAL PERFORMING CONVENTIONS. IT WAS IN A WAY AN EXTENSION OF THE EUROPEAN AVANT-GARDE OR FLUXUS THAT EVENTUALLY MANIFESTED IN THIS PECULIAR FORM. IT WAS HARD TO SEPARATE THESE TWO TENDENCIES WITHIN NEW MUSIC.

WE PREFERRED ELECTRONIC IMAGE OR SOUND MAKING, AND THAT WAS OUR PRIMARY INTEREST, BUT WE COULD TOLERATE GREAT IMPURITIES AND LOOK AT THEM AS THE CULTURE OF THE TIME. AN ALTERNATE CULTURE, CRYSTALIZED AND STRONG. IT DID NOT MAKE SENSE TO DISCRIMINATE.

EACH OF THESE GROUPS GOT TO REGARD THE KITCHEN AS THEIR, I WAS SURPRISED ONCE TO HEAR SOME MUSICIANS REFER TO THE KITCHEN AS "THEIR", I THOUGHT IT WAS MINE! SO ALTHOUGH THERE WAS A LOT OF INTER-ACTIONS BETWEEN SOME DISCIPLINES, THERE WAS ALSO SOMETIMES A TOTAL MUTUAL UNAWARENESS, BETWEEN SAY MUSIC AND VIDEO. EVENTUALLY, WE FOUND THE KIND OF VIDEO, WE WERE INTERESTED IN QUITE NEGLECTED, WE WERE CURIOUS ABOUT THE WORKS OF OUR COLLEAGUES, SO WE ORGANISED A MONTH LONG FESTIVAL IN JUNE 1972 AND AGAIN IN '73. THERE HAD BEEN SIMILAR TYPE OPEN FESTIVALS A YEAR EARLIER, ONE ORGANISED BY VIDEO FREE AMERICA IN SAN FRANCISCO, THE OTHER BY VIDEO EXCHANGE AT WESTBETH, NEW YORK, THE ONLY CURATORIAL FESTIVAL YET, OCCURRED ALSO IN '71 AT WHITNEY. ALTHOUGH OUR FESTIVALS WERE OPEN, THERE WAS A CURIOUS LACK OF WOMEN PARTICIPANTS, OTHER WISE SO NUMEROUS AND ACTIVE IN VIDEO RIGHT FROM THE BEGINNING. I ASKED SUSAN MILANO TO ORGANIZE "THE WOMEN VIDEO FESTIVAL" WHICH LATER WAS MOVED TO THE WOMAN INTERART CENTER. THE THIRD TYPE OF ANNUAL FESTIVAL WAS THE COMPUTER FESTIVAL INITIATED BY DIMITRI DEVYATKIN.

TO ME IT WAS IMPORTANT NOT TO BECOME AN ESTABLISHMENT, I 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. NOBODY WAS TURNED DOWN AND NOBODY WAS SERVICED EITHER, SINCE THERE WAS NO STAFF. EVERYBODY AROUND WAS A CREATIVE ARTIST, A COLLEAGUE. THE PERFORMERS WOULD BRING THEIR OWN CREW, SOME OF THEIR OWN EQUIPMENT, MAKE THEIR OWN POSTERS AND PUBLICITY-BRING IN THEIR OWN AUDIENCE. AT THE END OF THE EVENING THE AUDIENCE WOULD HELP STACK THE CHAIRS, AND SWEEP THE FLOOR. MONEY WE DID NOT HAVE TO ADMINISTER, SINCE THERE WERE NON. LOT OF ARTISTS WANTED TO SHOW FOR FREE, BUT IF THERE WAS A DONATION

THE ARTIST HAD A CHOICE TO COLLECT IT HIM/HERSELF, SPLIT IT OR LEAVE IT TO US. ALMOST EVERYBODY LET US KEEP THE BOX, WHICH PAID FOR THE MONTHLY CALENDAR AND PETTY CASH. ONLY AFTER WE RAISED SOME MONEY FROM THE FOUNDATIONS, DID THE BOOKKEEPING CREEP IN.

IT WAS THIS LOOSE ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENT THAT LET PEOPLE PARTICIPATE SPIRITUALLY IN THE DIRECTORSHIP. I THINK THAT SERIOUS ADMINISTRATION BRINGS A TOTAL OPPOSITE TO A DYNAMICALLY CREATIVE PERFORMING SPACE LIKE THE KITCHEN. ANARCHY OR LACK OF STRUCTURE BREEDS THE CREATIVE INITIATIVE. SO IF THERE WAS ANY VIRTUE IN OUR ARRANGEMENT, IT WAS THE NON-STRUCTURAL, THE PARTICIPATION. ONCE A PLACE IS WELL-ADMINISTERED IT BECOMES A VICTIM OF ITS OWN WELL-WORKING. THE INNER WORKING IMPRINTS THE EXTERNAL AESTHETIC STRUCTURE ON IT, AND BREEDS ITS OWN SELECTIVITY. IT INCLUDES OR EXCLUDES, SEEKS ITS HIERARCHY OF QUALITIES AND EVENTUALLY BECOMES AN ESTABLISHED IDEA, NOT ALWAYS ABLE TO PERMUTATE WITH THE NEEDS OF TIME. ANOTHER ADVANTAGE OF HAVING CREATIVE PEOPLE RUN PLACES LIKE THAT IS THAT ONCE IT BECOMES SELF-SERVING, THERE IS NO PLACE TO ACCOMMODATE SUCH A THING., UNLESS YOU EXCHANGE YOUR PERSONAL WORK FOR ADMINISTRATIVE WORK. THERE IS A SELF-PRESERVING INSTINCT WITHIN EVERY CREATIVE PERSON; PREFERRING THE SENSE OF CREATIVE FREEDOM TO BEING BOUND TO A SUCCESSFUL MODEL. INEVITABLY ANY ORGANISATION THAT GETS INTO INNER STRUCTURAL ORDERING HAS TO SCALE TO SOME SENSIBLE ENVIRONMENT, AND THAT IS WHERE MY WHOLE INTEREST ENDS. EVERY INSTINCT WITHIN THAT DAILY OPERATION IS SUPERBLY IMPORTANT. THAT IS WHY I THINK THAT PEOPLE WHO RUN PLACES LIKE THAT HAVE TO BE PRACTICING ARTISTS. OF COURSE THE KITCHEN WAS ONLY AS SUCCESSFUL AS THE ARTIST OF THAT PARTICULAR DAY. IT WAS REBORN EVERY 24 HOURS. OF COURSE THERE WERE FAILURES, YES CATASTROPHES- WONDERFUL CATASTROPHES. A PLACE LIKE THAT WILL ALWAYS RUN INTO THEM, SOMETHING A PLACE DEPENDENT UPON SPONSORS AND ARTS-FOUNDATIONS CAN NOT AFFORD. WE WOULD NOT HAVE HAD A TELEPATHIC CONCERT FROM BOSTON, OR UNEDITED RUSHES IF THE EVENT WAS BEING ADVERTISED MONTHS IN ADVANCE, AND THE ARTISTS GETTING A FEE. IN OUR LIFETIME THE KITCHEN WILL BECOME AN ESTABLISHMENT WHICH WE WILL EITHER CO-EXIST WITH, BE ABSORBED BY, OR EVEN REBEL AGAINST. SO THERE IS THIS FRIGHTENING POSSIBILITY THAT OUR GENERATION WILL REPRESENT THE STATUS QUO. IT MAY ALREADY HAVE HAPPENED.

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THE DRAWBACK TO SUCH ARTISTIC FREEDOM WAS NO BUDGET FOR PRODUCTIONS AND NO ARTISTS' FEES. THE IMPULSE TO INITIATE SUCH A CONCEPT AS THE KITCHEN SHOULD NOT BE UNDERSTOOD AS AN ADMINISTRATIVE FUNDRAISING INITIATIVE. LOOKING BACK, WE LIVED IN A UNIQUE SITUATION WHEN THAT ALTERNATE CULTURE MODEL HAD CULMINATED IN SOME KIND OF A BELIEF THAT IT HAD THE POTENTIAL TO PERFORM ITS CONTENT WHATEVER THAT MEANT. AND SUDDENLY WAS READY TO EXPRESS SOMETHING. WE WERE VICTIMS OF OUR OWN INNOCENCE AND WENT INTO THIS VENTURE WITH THE SIMPLE

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this particular activity had its audience and it was interesting to others.