

# We Are All One: In the Company of USCO

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Reviewing a performance of *Hubbub* in December 1965 by the New York–based artist collective USCO, a reporter proclaimed, their “accomplishment is something of a monument to the creative imagination of an artist using the electronic devices of this, our scientific, age.”<sup>1</sup> Though brief, this statement serves as testament to the diverse achievements of USCO, a group of painters, architects, sculptors, poets, filmmakers, engineers, photographers, and weavers who formed a cooperative work and living space in a church in Garnerville, New York, during the 1960s. There they made multimedia, multisensory, transitory, and often immersive artworks featuring slide projectors, audiotapes, moving images, oscilloscopes, strobes, diffraction lenses, and lasers. Creating a cacophony of images, lights, colors, and sounds, their pioneering work was performed at universities and theaters and installed at museums and galleries. They collaborated on the *Psychedelic Explorations* with the Castalia Foundation in New York City, designed the first multimedia discotheque, Murray the K’s the World located in Garden City, New York, and even constructed a multimedia environment, *The Tabernacle* at their church.

Operating as a collective, USCO’s ethos directed and imbued their artistic practice. Drawing on the influences of technology and mysticism, USCO utilized everyday materials, new communication apparatuses, and the traditions of Eastern and Western religions to create innovative artworks that bombarded and overloaded the senses. These artistic spaces unleashed a psychedelic celebration that centered participation; through interaction with and within the work, an individual’s awareness was heightened, and their consciousness expanded. USCO foresaw the transformative power of technology, enlisting it as a conduit to alter mental and physical experience while incorporating a philosophy derived from visionary theorists and spiritualists such as Marshall McLuhan, Buckminster Fuller, Meher Baba, and Ananda Coomaraswamy into their many pursuits.

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1. B.F.S., “Hubbub at RISD Auditorium,” *Providence Sunday Journal*, December 12, 1965, p. W-20. *New York History*, 105.2, Winter 2024–2025

USCO's ability to fluidly traverse the boundaries of the avant-garde communities of 1960s New York, demonstrated in their participation in the *New Cinema Festival I*, involvement in several commercial ventures, and inclusion at art institutions such as the Riverside Museum, Whitney Museum of American Art, and the Jewish Museum, have routinely placed them in a unique position transcending categorization and critique.<sup>2</sup> This article will outline USCO's beliefs and practices, and by focusing on a range of projects—the performance, *Hubbub*, the multimedia discotheque, the World, and the environment, *Down By the Riverside*—made during their most prolific year of activity, 1965–1966, suggest how the group explored and embraced the potential of new media in the 1960s as a means to create a utopian reality.

USCO is the abbreviation for US Company or the Company of US, a moniker used by a collective who worked and oftentimes lived together out of the “Church,” a former Methodist Episcopal church located in Garnerville, New York, Rockland County, about forty miles north of New York City.<sup>3</sup> In late 1963, Gerd Stern, Michael Callahan, and Steve Durkee began to collaborate, laying the antecedents for USCO, though it wasn't until 1964 that the name USCO was conceived to describe these activities and 1965 that it was officially used in print.<sup>4</sup> Though Gerd Stern, Michael Callahan, and Steve Durkee are often portrayed as the three founders, the core group central to USCO's formation also included Barbara (von Briesen) Durkee and Judi (Wilson) Stern.<sup>5</sup> Both Barbara Durkee and Judi Stern contributed artistically to the group, running a silkscreen studio out of the Church, while also managing it as a home—cooking, cleaning, shopping, raising children, and

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2. Similarly, USCO's nebulous nature and difficulty fitting neatly into a prescribed discourse during their years of operation continues into the present as scholars have explored the group through a range of topics, what scholar Michel Oren refers to as “various genealogies” in “Getting Out of Your Mind to Use Your Head,” *Art Journal* 69, no. 4 (Winter 2010): 76–95. For example, see also Andrew Blauvelt, ed., *Hippie Modernism: The Struggle for Utopia* (Walker Art Center 2015); Alastair Gordon, *Spaced Out: Crash Pads, Hippie Communes, Infinity Machines, and Other Radical Environments of the Psychedelic Sixties* (Rizzoli, 2008); James Nisbet, *Ecologies, Environments, and Energy Systems in Art of the 1960s and 1970s* (MIT Press, 2014); Francesco Spampinato, “Atmospheric Psychedelia: USCO's 1960s Intermedia Environments,” *Visual Culture Studies*, no. 1 (November 2020): 119–45; and Fred Turner, *The Democratic Surround* (University of Chicago Press, 2013). However, because USCO was overlooked for several decades with their activities challenging to pin down, historical inaccuracies occur even in some recent literature. This article attempts to offer an accurate overview of USCO's practice and activities through archival and historical research and first-hand documentation with the artists that the author began in 2007. It is an effort that will hopefully lead to a comprehensive account of USCO that has yet to be written.

3. As of 2016 the USCO Church, also known as the Church of the Tabernacle, is part of the National Registry of Historic Places.

4. This is partly what makes USCO complicated to document, as their collective philosophy challenges the fact that they were often identified individually by name. For instance, Gerd Stern, who previously worked in public relations, was often the de facto spokesman for the group. One can argue at best USCO was an ideal that was difficult to achieve because of the traditional structures still dominating society.

5. Starting in 1968, interviews spell Durkee as Der Key. Steve eventually changed his name to Nooruddeen Durkee while Barbara adopted the name Asha Greer.

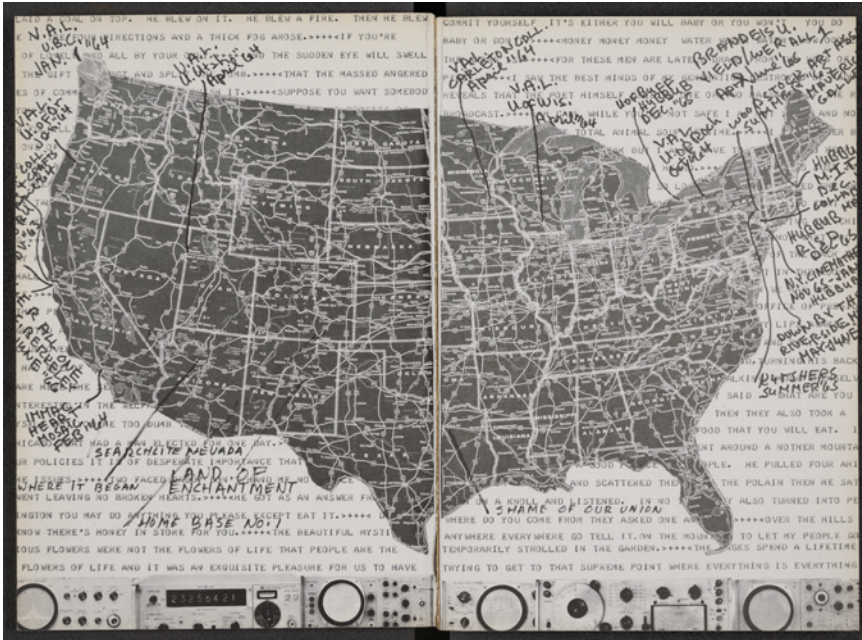


Figure 1. USCO Map of Activities drawn by Judi Stern. Originally published in USCO, “Our Time Base Is Real,” *Tulane Drama Review* 11, no. 1 (1966): 82–83, COURTESY OF USCO, COLLECTION OF THE AUTHOR.

performing many of the traditional roles assigned to women during this time.<sup>6</sup> Over the years, Jonathan Ayers, Sara Ayers, Stewart Brand, Lois Jennings Brand, Barbara Budd, Jane Burton, Adrienne Callahan, Bob Dacey, Chris George, Owen Jones, Jim Kennedy, Judy Kennedy, Bob Kugler, Mary Orser, Brian Peterson, Jerry Wapner, Paul Williams, Dion Wright, and Jud Yalkut contributed their own expertise and talents to USCO’s collaborative spirit and projects.<sup>7</sup>

6. Interview with Asha Greer by Devin Lander and Paige Rozanski, February 2, 2021; Interview with Asha Greer by Devin Lander and Paige Rozanski, February 8, 2021.

7. While this article largely treats USCO as a collective, respecting the ambitions set out by the group, here I want to acknowledge some of the individual participants, several who are perhaps better known for their activities outside the auspices of USCO. There is no official record documenting the composition of USCO, rather this list of names was developed over the years with Michael Callahan, who provided crucial insights into the group’s dynamics. Stewart Brand contributed photographs to USCO before creating the multimedia performance *America Needs Indians* in 1964 with his then wife Lois Jennings Brand. In January 1966, he co-organized the Trips Festival, long recognized as one of the seminal events that kicked off the hippie counter-culture movement in San Francisco. Starting in 1968, Brand created and published *The Whole Earth Catalogue*, which won the National Book Award in 1972. Jane Burton, known as “Generally Famished,” was part of Ken Kesey’s group of Merry Pranksters. Adrienne Callahan, wife of Michael Callahan, who first met in 1967, has carried on USCO’s legacy, assisting in a 2019 performance at the National Gallery of Art. Bob Dacey, referred to as “Dace,” was a tie-dye artist while Dion Wright is a painter and metal sculptor. Wright published an autobiography, *Tempus Fugitive*,



Figure 2. USCO and friends at the Church, Garnerville, New York, April 1966, from left: Barbara and Steve Durkee (holding Dakota), Judi Stern, Chris George, Gerd Stern, Owen Jones, Michael Callahan, Radha Stern, Jane Burton, Stewart and Lois Brand COURTESY OF USCO.

Gerd Stern first met Michael Callahan in California and Steve Durkee in New York, introducing them, and bringing their divergent backgrounds together in 1964 after developing friendships and enlisting their skills on projects independent of each other. Gerd Stern,

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in 2016. Owen Jones worked as an electronics technician while Chris George took photographs for USCO. Mary Orser was an accomplished astrologer who worked as an executive secretary at Rotron Manufacturing in Woodstock, NY, and provided access to an IBM typewriter and a Xerox machine. Jud Yalkut, an experimental filmmaker and video artist, made several films with USCO, including *Diffraction Film* (1965), *Us Down By the Riverside* (1966), *Turn, Turn, Turn* (1966), and *Us* (1966–67). He went on to make *Aquarian Rushes* in 1970 featuring footage from the Woodstock Festival and collaborated with artists like Nam-June Paik. Jerry Wapner was a lawyer who provided legal counsel to the group. Paul Williams was an architect who founded the Gate Hill Cooperative after leaving a faculty position at Black Mountain College.

associated with the Beat scene and bouncing between New York City and San Francisco, held a variety of jobs in the decade preceding USCO, managing poet Maya Angelou and composer Harry Partch, writing for *Playboy* magazine, and working as a public-relations executive. Foremost, he considered himself a poet, releasing two books: *First Poems and Others* (1952) and later, *Afterimage* (1966). His earliest poetry was preoccupied with visual experience and language's ability to store an image in order to perceive, reflect, and reproduce it. As Gerd Stern describes, around 1961, his poems "started running off the paper in collage and lights and sounds."<sup>8</sup> Steve Durkee began his career as a self-taught painter but, resisting the label of pop artist ascribed to him in a 1964 *ARTnews* interview, he vacated the New York art scene, opting to focus on ideas of awareness and process through the creation of large, pattern paintings intended to induce contemplation.<sup>9</sup> Michael Callahan, the youngest of the trio, became the first technical director of the San Francisco Tape Music Center directly out of high school, where from 1961 to 1964 he specialized in the development of hardware associated with multimedia and the use of audio and visual multi-channel equipment. Steve and Barbara Durkee met in New York City at the Cedar Bar and for a time they lived together in his studio in Coenties Slip while she taught art at Trenton State Teacher's College. Judi Stern, a weaver and photographer who studied at The Cooper Union for the Advancement of Science and Art, was living in Woodstock, New York, when she was first introduced to Gerd Stern.

The initial move toward the establishment of USCO came in late 1961 when the Durkees bought a former church in Garnerville, New York. Located in the Hudson Valley, the Church was about a ten-minute drive from the Gate Hill Cooperative (also known as the Land) and an hour from the estate where the Castalia Foundation settled in Millbrook, New York.<sup>10</sup> All three communities were closely affiliated during the 1960s. The Church functioned as the headquarters for USCO, providing housing and living spaces for the artists and their families, as well as a workshop area. It eventually became the site for their multimedia environment, *The Tabernacle*. It also was the locus of operations for a cooperative approach to art making that espoused collectivity and anonymity over the individual, tenets that came to define USCO's identity. As Gerd Stern exclaimed, "What motivates us to live together is work. Our technology is so complex you can't do it yourself. Since we work

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8. Quoted in Richard Kostelanetz, *The Theatre of Mixed-Means: An Introduction to Happenings, Kinetic Environments and Other Mixed-Means Presentations* (RK Editions, 1980), 244.

9. Written by critic Gene Swenson, "What Is Pop Art? Answers from 8 Painters" was published as a two-part interview in November 1963 and February 1964 with Durkee's response published in the later issue. See G. R. Swenson, "What Is Pop Art?," *ARTnews* 62, no. 10 (February 1964): 40–43, 65–66. Earlier he was included in G. R. Swenson, "The New American 'Sign Painters,'" *ARTnews* 61, no. 5 (September 1962): 44–47, 60–62. During this time, he went by Stephen Durkee and was represented by Allan Stone Gallery where he had two solo exhibitions in 1961 and 1964.

10. The Castalia Foundation developed out of Timothy Leary, Richard Alpert, and Ralph Metzner's research into the potential of psychedelics, which began at Harvard University and continued when the group settled at an estate located in the village of Millbrook. Popular accounts refer to their commune as "Millbrook."

together, we might as well live together, and share what we have.”<sup>11</sup> This type of engagement benefited USCO’s installations and multimedia artworks, which required many people and demanded painters, photographers, filmmakers, and electronic specialists to realize. Individuals did not become members of USCO, rather Michael Callahan has emphasized participant is a more appropriate description for the role each person had in contributing their talents to the larger group. To be able to devote themselves fully to USCO, the group raised money through commercial endeavors that generated funding to support their artistic undertakings. For example, in addition to the World Discotheque, the group made and sold posters through their silkscreen studio, created electronic audiovisual set pieces for theater productions like *The Beard*, and a Christmas light display for Henri Bendel department store, and designed a multimedia campaign for Scott Paper Company. Author Naomi Feigelson astutely explains why USCO was so successful while other art communities during the time were not:

For one thing, USCO started out as a group of artists and ended up a family, not the other way around. . . . For another, the work they did demands certain skills used in combination—in metalwork, electronics, electricity, kinetics. The nature of the mix requires that a group produce it. Finally, while they had as little patience with the hypocrisies of straight society as any other hippie group, they also had an artistic point of view, a critical, philosophical approach to life, and a goal beyond today. They were a group of individuals and artists, each disciplined in his own craft, and all together they were on a work trip.<sup>12</sup>

This collective work ethic was expressed in the decision to forego the use of individual names and rather attribute all artworks made together as USCO. This desire reflected a yearning to return to a premodern society and a tradition of anonymous art making that focused less on the status of the individual artist and more on the group. As USCO stated in an interview with Richard Kostelanetz included in his book, *The Theatre of Mixed Means*:

We all came out of individual bags, as it were; and the thing that appealed to us was rejection of the conventional concept of artist—the agony-and-the-ecstasy-type scene—to get into the 20th century or back into a traditional concept of the artist. It isn’t the person but the work which is important. Our whole motivation is to reintegrate into a traditional society, because that’s what we see is happening. We’re going

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11. Grace Glueck, “A Little ‘Be-In’ Goes a Long Way,” *New York Times*, May 15, 1966, p. D20.

12. Naomi Feigelson, *The Underground Revolution; Hippies, Yippies, and Others* (Funk & Wagnalls, 1970), 192.

forward to where we were in the beginning; in the re-tribalization of the world, as it were, the circle is coming full around.<sup>13</sup>

The writings of both Ananda Coomaraswamy, a historian and curator of Indian art, and media theorist Marshall McLuhan were instrumental to USCO from the beginning. In his book *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art (Formerly Titled Why Exhibit Works of Art)* (1956), Coomaraswamy highlighted the role of traditional arts in society, placing emphasis on symbolic language rather than the personal vision of the artist.<sup>14</sup> This was in direct opposition to the stress on individualism that had first developed during the Renaissance. The idea of community, described as a global village by McLuhan, was essential to USCO, who perceived their adoption of traditional modes of society as a retribalization. For McLuhan, retribalization expressed the role electric media would take in connecting and bringing people back together.<sup>15</sup> Emboldened by McLuhan's theories, USCO incorporated his language into their philosophy and welcomed the utilization of new media and technologies into their artworks.

Before entering into a more detailed discussion of McLuhan's influence, the way in which USCO expressed their collective and anonymous activities should first be noted. In addition to signing their works USCO, they developed phrases that vocalized their attitude like the mantra, "We Are All One." This declaration, infused with the teachings on divine unity by Meher Baba, a spiritual leader who claimed he was the Avatar of the Age, was elaborated by USCO in the following remark:

The basic thing is that we are all one; that is the root. Once we can have the understanding that you're not threatening to me and I'm not threatening to you—in other words, that you are myself outside of myself, so to speak—then we can begin to work together . . . We all serve one another; it's a mutual symbiotic relationship, if you will, which the whole world has with itself. If we can communicate that, then we have the basis for going on to what we don't know.<sup>16</sup>

"We Are All One" became the title of one of their multimedia presentations and the phrase as well as Meher Baba's likeness were included in the group's printed materials.<sup>17</sup>

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13. Richard Kostelanetz, *The Theatre of Mixed Means* (Dial Press, 1968), 246.

14. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art (Formerly Titled Why Exhibit Works of Art)* (Dover Publications Inc., 1956), 39–40. The book was originally published as *Why Exhibit Works of Art?* in 1943.

15. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (McGraw-Hill, 1964), 24, 93. See also Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium Is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects* (Gingko Press, 1967).

16. Kostelanetz, *The Theatre of Mixed Means*, 257. See also Meher Baba, *God Speaks: The Theme of Creation and Its Purpose* (Dodd, Mead & Company, 1955), 70.

17. A version of this image was included in a five-page spread featuring photographs and graphics by USCO. See USCO, "USCO," *Image* (Spring 1967): 56–60.



Figure 3. USCO, *We Are All One* flyer, silk-screen print on paper, COURTESY OF USCO, COLLECTION OF THE AUTHOR.

This notion of togetherness, integral to all their activities, is also evident in USCO's focus on simultaneity and the explication they often employed—"in a world of simultaneous operations, you don't have to be the first to be on top."<sup>18</sup> This idea would act as the seed for a new generation in which competition, envisioned as the root of war, and hierarchy would disappear and equality would prevail. Not only did this practice permeate USCO's

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18. This quote became ubiquitous and was used in many USCO press releases to announce their activities. For example, Gerd Stern, "From Beat Scene Poet to Psychedelic Multimedia Artist in San Francisco and Beyond, 1948–1978," an oral history conducted in 1996 by Victoria Morris Byerly, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2001, 78. Also quoted in The Castalia Foundation for Psychedelic Research presents: *Psychedelic Explorations* [draft], 1965, M1954, box 20, folder 8, Gerd Stern papers. Dept. of Special Collections and University Archives, Stanford Libraries, Stanford, California (hereafter cited as Gerd Stern papers) and in Jonas Mekas, "USCO: Interview with Gerd Stern," *Film Culture-Expanded Arts* 43 (Winter 1966): 3, later re-published as "Interview with Gerd Stern and Michael Callahan," in Jonas Mekas, *Scrapbook of the Sixties: Writings 1954–2010* (Spector Books, 2015), 86–100.

belief structure, but it also played a central role in how they conceived, fashioned, and harnessed technology.

In the 1950s, McLuhan started to develop cybernetic approaches to communication media and to envision tribal-based structures of social networks. These concepts became fundamental points in his theorization of media in the early 1960s. Widely read during this time, McLuhan's writings made a big impression on USCO, deeply impacting the group's views on technology. For McLuhan, "the artist is the man in any field, scientific or humanistic, who grasps the implications of his actions and of new knowledge in his own time. He is the man of integral awareness."<sup>19</sup> Gerd Stern first became acquainted with McLuhan after reading his 1960 report to the National Association of Educational Broadcasters, a typescript that formed the basis of *Understanding Media*, which was eventually published in 1964. McLuhan's insights about media first found resonance in Gerd Stern's poetry, pushing it in a new visual direction that incorporated technological elements. He started to make three-dimensional kinetic poems such as the sculpture *Contact Is The Only Love*, a seven-by-seven foot yellow octagon consisting of flashing words; neon, fluorescent, and incandescent lights; and rhythmic sounds. Soon after, he organized the performance *Who R U?* and *What's Happening?* at the San Francisco Museum of Art in November 1963. As Gerd Stern later recollected, "Even before USCO, I used multiple slides, multiple audio and closed circuit television."<sup>20</sup>

*Understanding Media* and *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (1962) both argued that transformations in communication technology would inextricably impact humans leading to a retribalization of society. For example, *The Gutenberg Galaxy* suggested man was leaving the typographic age and entering an electronic one. McLuhan professed that the domination of type was responsible for a cultural shift away from the utilization of all senses to a tyranny of the visual. In his opinion, the invention of the printing press created a separation of functions largely responsible for rationalization, bureaucracy, industrial life, uniformity of culture, and the alienation of the individual; an age in which individualism took rise over the collective. McLuhan believed that electronic technologies would break down these barriers, new connections between people would form, and

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19. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 65.

20. Gerd Stern, email message to author, April 17, 2007. USCO went on have a direct relationship with McLuhan, even performing *The Verbal American Landscape (TVAL)* on two separate occasions where he was present. Gerd Stern and McLuhan began corresponding in the fall of 1963. See Gerd Stern and Marshall McLuhan correspondence, box 20, folder 8, Gerd Stern papers. Then in January 1964, Gerd Stern along with Michael Callahan and Judi Stern met McLuhan in person for the first time at the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, during the Festival of the Contemporary Arts. This was only their second performance (advertised as *The Verbal American Landscape, Take Two*), which came on the heels of *TVAL*'s debut during *Who R U?* and *What's Happening?*. See Festival '64 Poster, box 69, folder 2, Gerd Stern papers. At the time, these presentations were billed as Gerd Stern, however, one can argue they mark the earliest iteration of USCO-related activities. Later in October 1964, a program took place at the University of Rochester, which featured a talk by McLuhan followed by a performance of *TVAL*.

human patterns of association and interaction irrevocably altered. Additionally, these technologies would collapse both time and space, paving the way toward a new epoch in which electronic media linked humanity into a global village where ethnic, racial, linguistic, and national distinctions disappeared.

This sensibility of looking toward a primeval past, romanticized as a time when the structures defining modern society had yet to coalesce, came into vogue during the 1960s and continued into the next decade. For example, media theorist Gene Youngblood similarly framed his discussion of the evolution of mankind in terms of technology's ability to produce a global intermedia network, infusing his argument with an idealist vision of the primordial past. "I've found the term *Paleocybernetic* valuable as a conceptual tool with which to grasp the significance of our present environment: combining the primitive potential associated with Paleolithic and the transcendental integrities of 'practical utopianism' associated with Cybernetic."<sup>21</sup> For Youngblood, USCO were prime practitioners of this phenomenon; unfettered from the past, USCO were citizens of an electric age, exploring imaginative technologies to expand human connection.

McLuhan's *Understanding Media* connected this new vision of a global village to a cybernetic discussion of human-machine entanglement, in which technology linked the individual's human body and humanity together into "a global embrace," a single nervous system, a collective consciousness.<sup>22</sup> The belief that electronic technologies could produce complete contact communication is echoed by USCO, "millions of people are on the same trip at the same time; that's sharing an awful lot of awareness and time. All those people are being stimulated in precisely the same way; the same information is going into millions of human heads at one time."<sup>23</sup> This statement not only invoked McLuhan but also the theories of Buckminster Fuller, the visionary architect, inventor, and philosopher. Fuller perceived the younger generation as more communitarian in nature, largely a result of the recent advent of television, which was programming millions of people simultaneously. He envisioned a material world connected by invisible yet universal principles and in his 1963 book, *Ideas and Integrities*, he developed the concept of the Comprehensive Designer, "an emerging synthesis of artist, inventor, mechanic, objective economist and evolutionary strategist."<sup>24</sup> This designer, aware of the greater patterns in the universe, could create new technologies and employ existing industrial resources for everyday life as tools to ensure human happiness.<sup>25</sup>

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21. Gene Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema* (Dutton, 1970), 41.

22. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 3–4.

23. Kostelanetz, *The Theatre of Mixed Means*, 258.

24. Buckminster Fuller, *Ideas and Integrities: A Spontaneous Autobiographical Disclosure* (Prentice-Hall, 1963), 176.

25. Professor Fred Turner elaborates on the connections between the technocentric visions of McLuhan, Fuller, and USCO in *From Counterculture to Cyberculture: Stewart Brand, the Whole Earth, and the Rise of Digital Utopianism* (University of Chicago Press), 53. See footnote 7 for more on Brand, who participated in USCO for about three years, from 1963 to 1966.

Both Fuller and McLuhan theorized technology as an extension of consciousness that would act as a vehicle for social change. Their celebration of new media emphasized the possibility of individual and collective transformation through these technologies. Author Friedrich A. Kittler, in his book *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, describes how media innovations made during wartime were later adapted and mobilized into mainstream listening practices.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, USCO's adoption of new media reflects an analogous practice whereby they employed computer technology originally developed during World War II and the Cold War for more utopian purposes. Their appropriation of IBM main frame computers and other technological components allowed them to imagine media as a tool for creating a new society rather than simply as industrial products.

USCO utilized everyday objects in unique and unconventional ways to bring awareness to how media was increasingly affecting and impacting human reality. For instance, their performances incorporated diverse electronic materials as a stimulus to transform an audience's consciousness. This required both expertise and an innovative approach to their application. Visual effects were produced through Kodak slide carousels, often controlled by a centralized operating system, comprised of discarded IBM computers and surplus parts, that directed the pace of images and intensity of a light's pulse; 16 mm projectors from Bell & Howell; and 35 mm Nikon F and Pentax cameras.<sup>27</sup> Sound was created by two Ampex ¼ inch tape machines, the number of channels limited by expense and weight. Audio amplification was generated through a Dynakit Stereo 70 and a 15-watt Heathkit unit, three Western Electric 755A 8-inch speakers, and a 15-inch Electro-Voice. Strobe lights were often brandished because of the flickering, flashing, and fragmentary effects they created. The dislocation of time and space created by the strobes, and described by Steve Durkee as a "digital trip," allowed an audience member to lose oneself in the experience.<sup>28</sup> A performance such as *Yin/Yang Sine/Pulse* (1967) even featured weather balloons, which were employed as a projection surface. While the balloons floated and lingered in the air above the audience, USCO trailed the movements of the circular shapes, projecting slide and film images onto them.

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26. Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (Stanford University Press, 1999), 110–11.

27. Detailed descriptions of USCO's technology can be found in the brochure that accompanied the retrospective of their work at Anthology Film Archives in March 2005 and were discussed with Michael Callahan and Gerd Stern in preparation for a performance in March 2019, which the author organized. Michael Callahan, Adrienne Callahan, and Gerd Stern have presented two multimedia performances as USCO since the 1960's using original media and equipment. The first was a series of performances March 25–27, 2005 at Anthology Film Archives in New York and the second occurred on March 3, 2019, at the National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. Both attempted to present an USCO performance in as authentic a manner as possible. At this time, no original film footage and only a handful of photographs documenting the group's performances have been located. Recordings of both the 2005 and 2019 events provide valuable documentation that captures the experience and feeling of an USCO performance.

28. Jonas Mekas, "Movie Journal," *Village Voice*, June 16, 1966, p. 27.

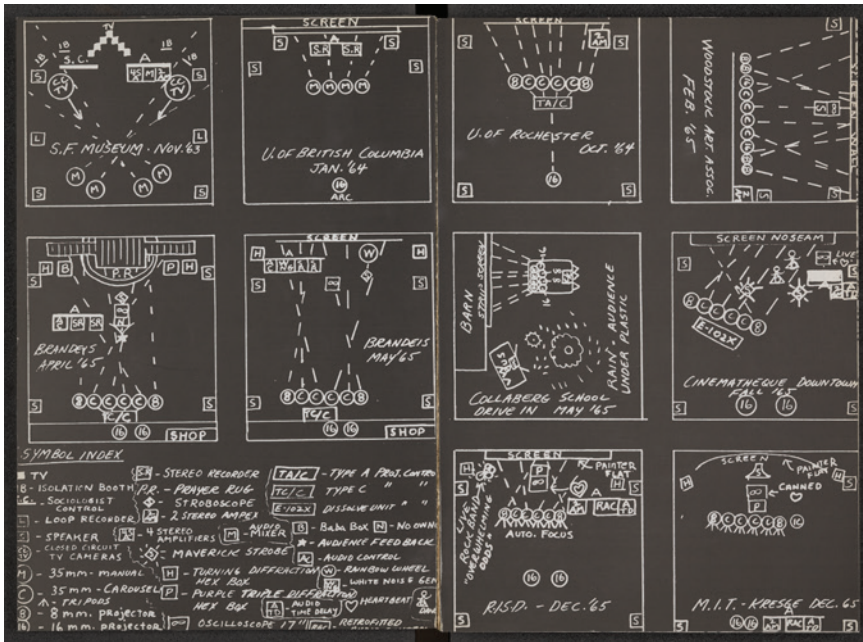


Figure 4. Documentation of USCO performances drawn by Judi Stern. Originally published in USCO, "Our Time Base Is Real," *Tulane Drama Review* 11, no. 1 (1966): 80–81, COURTESY OF USCO, COLLECTION OF THE AUTHOR.

A drawing made by Judi Stern and published in the 1966 autumn edition of *Tulane Drama Review* documented ten USCO performances, four of which took place in New York over the preceding two years. The diagram attests to the complex setups and the range of apparatuses the group employed.

Though each performance was a unique event dictated by the venue's layout, they all shared a similar feature—a cross-wiring of media that filled the space, creating a total environment that bombarded the senses from all directions. A legend at the bottom left-hand corner of the drawing includes a range of symbols that captures the placement of speakers, a stereo recorder, reel-to-reel tape recorders (Stereo Ampex), amplifiers, an audio mixer, 35 mm carousels, 8 mm and 16 mm projectors, loop recorders, an oscilloscope, and stroboscope. In addition to electronic equipment, a prayer rug, isolation booth, and rainbow wheel are noted. Sculptural works such as the group's diffraction hex boxes constructed out of motorized discs covered with diffraction grating and illuminated by a number of incandescent lamps, a xenon strobe light, a "Baba box" featuring a photograph of the Indian guru Sathya Sai Baba, and a lit candle were also employed.<sup>29</sup> A series of dashes indicates

29. USCO, "Our Time Base Is Real," *Tulane Drama Review* 11, no. 1 (1966): 80–81. Also described in an unpublished USCO chronology by Michael Callahan and Paige Rozanski, December 2018–present. A version of this chronology was published in "USCO: illustrated chronology 1963–1970 (Carl Solway Gallery, April 2019).

how the various media were connected to each other as well as the pathways of the projectors and the direction of media output. As USCO's chief engineer, Michael Callahan's inventive use of circuitry and hybridization of media enabled the group to channel their ideas about programming, control, randomization, and multi-channel setups. Their technological ingenuity showcased a language of circuits and switches. Michael Callahan also introduced Gerd Stern to the differences between an analogue or digital experience demonstrated in the sensation of flashing versus pulsing lights. As Gerd Stern explained: "It wasn't until [Michael] came along that I understood the whole contemporary preoccupation with whether a phenomenon was digital or analog, whether you had this organic continual process curve going on or whether you chopped everything up in terms of clock time"<sup>30</sup> USCO came to favor the analog experience as they felt pulsing lights better reflected the reality of the vibrational universe.

USCO's application of this diverse audiovisual equipment allowed them to explore concepts such as stimulus overload, fragmentation, feedback, and simultaneity in their work. Originally described as mixed media or multimedia art, USCO eventually employed the term *intermedia* to describe these creations, an immersive experience that expanded consciousness through psychic exploration and perceptual, sensorial, and intellectual awareness. Describing *intermedia* within Youngblood's *Expanded Cinema*, the group stated,

Intermedia refers to the simultaneous use of various media to create a total environmental experience for the audience. Meaning is communicated not by coding ideas into abstract literary language, but by creating an emotionally real experience through the use of audio-visual technology. Originally conceived in the realm of art rather than in science or engineering, the principles on which intermedia is based are grounded in the fields of psychology, information theory, and communication engineering.<sup>31</sup>

This synchronous application of media and fully encompassing environment are two essential components at the heart of USCO's practice and what New York audiences would have encountered, whether it be while attending a performance, experiencing the atmosphere of a multimedia discotheque, or visiting the spaces they created within a museum setting.

On November 17 and 18, 1965, USCO performed *Hubbub* at Jonas Mekas's Film-Makers' Cinematheque, located at 434 Lafayette Street in New York City. Organized by managing director John Brockman, the performance was part of a larger multimedia showcase arranged for November and December of that year, which featured the likes of Claes Oldenburg, Nam June Paik, Robert Rauschenberg, and Andy Warhol. Called *New*

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30. Mekas, "USCO: Interview with Gerd Stern," *Film Culture-Expanded Arts* 43 (Winter 1966): 3.

31. Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*, 348. The move to using the phrase *intermedia* to describe their activities is most evident in the founding of the publicly traded multimedia production firm, Intermedia Systems Corporation, in December 1967 by Gerd Stern and Michael Callahan with Dr. George Litwin and a group from Harvard Business School.

*Cinema Festival I*, the forty or so commissioned performances endeavored to expand the form of cinema by challenging its very definition, dissolving “the edges of this art called cinema into a frontiersland mystery. Light is there; motion is there; the screen is there’ and the filmed image, very often, is there; but it can not be described or experienced in terms you describe or experience the Griffith cinema, the Godard cinema, or even Brakhage cinema.”<sup>32</sup> The historic nature of this groundbreaking series of events is implied in scholarly accounts that oftentimes simply refer to it as the Expanded Cinema Festival. In addition to productions by well-known cultural figures, the festival also featured several emerging psychedelic artists working with light such as Jackie Cassen and Don Snyder.<sup>33</sup> USCO’s performance, scheduled for a Wednesday and Thursday evening, with two showings each night at 8 and 10 p.m., cost two dollars to attend. *Hubbub* was advertised as “light, film, tape, sound, movies” and featured six films. An announcement for the event states that it was presented by “w.e. usco” and lists each of the films with attributions of authorship to specific USCO participants involved in their making.<sup>34</sup>

Running along the edges of the typed release are the handwritten names of everyone involved in the event—Gerd Stern, Michael Callahan, Stephen Durkee, Judi Wilson, Jud Yalkut, Barbara Durkee, Gunther Weil, Carolee Schneemann, Robert Dacey, Brian Peterson, Ivan Majdrakoff, Mary Orser, Walter Gundy, Phoebe Neville, Jonathan Ayers, Paul Williams, Radha Stern, Ted Koch, Charles Rotmil, Bill Silver, Jim Kennedy—suggesting USCO’s fluid nature and emphasizing the participatory ethos of the group.<sup>35</sup> The set-up for the Cinematheque is noted in Judi Stern’s drawing, which indicates the location of the two

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32. Jonas Mekas, “Movie Journal,” *Village Voice*, November 11, 1965, p. 21.

33. “Official schedule for *New Cinema Festival I*,” box 21, folder 4, Gerd Stern papers.

34. The six films included: – *Cathode Ray* (usco, Brian Peterson), *Highfreethrusafeway* (usco), *Y* (usco, Ivan Majdrakoff), *Diffraction Film* (usco, Jud Yalkut), *Omix* (usco), and *Ghost Rev* (usco, ghost rider Jonathan Ayers, shot by Jud Yalkut, choreographer Carolee Schneemann, performed by Schneemann with Phoebe Neville). See Announcement for Release Herenow, box 21, folder 4, Gerd Stern papers. An advertisement from the *Village Voice* from October 28, 1965 (p. 28) and November 11, 1965 (p. 22) included the event as part of a larger schedule for the *New Cinema Festival I*. In October, both Gerd Stern and USCO are mentioned while in November, the event is advertised as a single performance on each of the two nights by “USCO with Carolee Schneemann & Co.” A third advertisement published in the *Village Voice* on the day of the second performance, November 18, advertises the event as follows, “Gerd Stern’s USCO presents HUBBUB with Carolee Schneemann & Co.” and then lists the six films (p. 22).

35. These names do not align with the list of names mentioned on p. 4 though they do overlap, further suggesting the transitory dynamics at play within USCO. Dr. Gunther Weil was a PhD student who participated in The Psilocybin Project with Timothy Leary and Richard Alpert at Harvard University. He organized an USCO performance while a professor at Brandeis University in 1965 and later working closely with Gerd Stern and Michael Callahan at Intermedia Systems Corporation (see footnote 31). Radha Stern is Gerd Stern’s daughter from his first marriage. Ivan Majdrakoff was a painter and professor at the San Francisco Art Institute who was a longtime friend of Gerd Stern’s since childhood. Charles Rotmil took photographs while Walter Gundy researched content for the group. Carolee Schneemann was a multidisciplinary artist best known for her kinetic painting and performances that engaged the body. Phoebe Neville is a dancer and composer.

GERD STERN · MICHAEL CALLAHAN · STEPHEN DURKEE · JUDD WILSON · JUDD YALKUT · BARBARA KENNEDY · YIM DURKEE · GUNTHER WEIL · CAROLEE SCHNEEMANN · ROBERT KEOCH · CHARLES ROTMIL · BILL SILER · VIM

OUR TIME BASE REAL

PHOEBE NEVILLE · JONATHAN AYERS · PAUL WILLIAMS · ANNOUNCEMENT FOR RELEASE HERENOW · w.e.usco presents · HUBBUB · FILM-MAKERS' CINEMATHEQUE · 434 LAFAYETTE ST. AL 4-4060 · WED. & THURS. NOV. 17 & 18 · 2 shows a nite - 8 p.m. & 10 p.m. · admission \$2.00 · CATHODE RAY · usco brian peterson · HIGHFREETHRUSAFEWAY · usco · Y · usco ivan majdrakoff · DIFFRACTION FILM · usco jud yalkut · GHOST REV · usco ghost-rider jonathan ayers · shot by jud yalkut choreographer · carolee schneemann performed by · her with phoebe neville · LIGHT\*FILM\*TAPE\*SOUND\*MOVES--in a world of simultaneous operations · you don't have to be first to be on top--usco multi-channel mixed-media · performances s.f. museum vancouver arts festival university of wisconsin · rochester brandeis et cetera. HUBBUB also at RISD Dec. 7, MIT Dec. 9 · for further information contact usco through john brockman, film-makers' · cinematheque, 434 lafayette street, al 4-4060 or na 8-5268. · RYAN PETERSON · IVAN MAJDRAKOFF · MARY ORSER · WALTER GUNDY · DACEY · BIAN · RADHA STERN · YIM

Figure 5. Announcement for *Hubbub* at the Film-Makers' Cinematheque, November 1965, COURTESY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, STANFORD UNIVERSITY.

8 mm projectors, four 35 mm slide carousels, four speakers, two 16 mm projectors, stroboscopes, oscilloscope, two stereo Ampex tape recorders, projection screen, dissolve unit, and additional features such as an audio time delay, dancers, and a live heartbeat that comprised the performance.<sup>36</sup> The various media components were operated from a programmed control center that Michael Callahan built. He also modified one of the carousel projectors,

36. USCO, "Our Time Base Is Real," 80-81. Also described in Sheldon Renan, *An Introduction to the American Underground Film* (Dutton, 1967), 235.

replacing the incandescent lamp with a high intensity xenon strobe, which caused a projected slide to appear suddenly in a flash of light.<sup>37</sup> Visual documentation of the evening is scant, but photographs capture artist Carolee Schneemann and dancer Phoebe Neville's performance against the backdrop of a paper screen that had the films projected onto it. Equipped with brushes, buckets, and other domestic implements, they painted "live interference patterns" onto the projections while performing a series of actions.<sup>38</sup>

Following this two-night event, USCO went on to perform *Hubbub* in December at the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD) (December 7), the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) (December 9), and the University at Buffalo (SUNY Buffalo) (December 13) before returning to Manhattan. After the November performance, the



Figure 6. Carolee Schneemann and Phoebe Neville performing *Ghost Rev* during USCO's *Hubbub* performance at the Film-maker's Cinematheque, New York, November 1965, COURTESY OF GETTY RESEARCH LIBRARY.

37. Unpublished USCO chronology by Michael Callahan and Paige Rozanski, December 2018–present.

38. Sheldon Renan with photographs by Peter Moore, "Festival at the Film-Makers' Cinematheque," *Art Voices* 5, no. 11 (Winter 1966): 36. See also *X-screen: Film Installations and Actions in the 1960s and 1970s*, edited by Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien and Matthias Michalka (Walther König, 2004), 61; and Pamela M. Lee, *Chronophobia: On Time in the Art of the 1960s* (MIT Press, 2004), 205–9. Schneeman refers to this performance as *Ghost Rev*, stating, "I took the title from the final film," in *More than Meat Joy: Performance Works & Selected Writings* (McPherson & Company, 1997), 99.

Cinematheque, “singled out one program which we think is well suited to serve as an introduction to this new, multiple cinema experience,” and scheduled USCO for repeat performances of *Hubbub* January 18–23, 1966, at their new location on West 41<sup>st</sup> Street where they had recently moved. This six-night run of performances started at 8:30 p.m. and cost two dollars to attend. It was advertised as, “Expanded Cinema! Psychedelic Cinema! Media Mix! Marshall McLuhan! Timothy Leary!... A visual feast.”<sup>39</sup> The *Village Voice* advertisement suggests how *Hubbub* and the six films, originally listed individually in the press materials for the 1965 performances at the Cinematheque, were now thought of holistically. However, the notes for the program, which describe *Hubbub* as a “multi-channel media-mix of films, tape, oscilloscope, stroboscope, kinetic and live images. Effects, from one channel through a twelve-channel mix, is explored in six integrated movements, each hybridizing a set of media,” did continue to list each of the films.<sup>40</sup> Artists such as Andy Warhol and his Factory crew, including members of the Velvet Underground, were in attendance.<sup>41</sup>

The title *Hubbub* was adopted from theologian Martin Luther’s conceit that all the world is a hubbub and was an intentional attempt by USCO to achieve overload through an incorporation of simultaneous media and sensory bombardment. USCO continued to adapt *Hubbub* until it later morphed into the performance, *We Are All One*, which “developed through a post psychedelic realization that multiplicity and fragmentation were aspects capable of transformation into unities through meditation and focus consciousness.”<sup>42</sup> *Hubbub*’s media-mix incorporated an eclectic array of slide photographs that were projected from each of the four slide carousels, flashing and superimposed at different speeds, and layered with the 8 mm and 16 mm films on top of one another upon the screen. This montage of still and moving imagery featured combinations of Eastern mystical symbols and sights, words, the natural world captured through a range of photographic lenses, outer space and the ocean, sequences of a motorcycle trip, and a journey on a human landscape. “Some images are from the fabric of our daily lives, some are sexual, some esoteric.”<sup>43</sup> The visual elements that accumulated and overflowed from the screen were juxtaposed with vibrating light effects, the squiggling lines of an oscilloscope, the odor of incense, and a mysterious range of sounds such as gongs, sirens, the chirping of crickets and croaking of frogs, chants, whimpers of human ecstasy, roaring motorcycles, a NASA countdown, popular music from the Shangri-Las, The Beatles, Billie Holiday, and the Rolling Stones, radio fragments of political discussions about Vietnam and voting polls,

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39. “Advertisement for Film-Makers’ Cinematheque,” *Village Voice*, January 13, 1966, p. 18. McLuhan and Leary were likely mentioned as a selling point to draw attention to the performances.

40. Notes on the January 18–January 23 Program for *Hubbub*, 1966, Archives of The Film-Makers’ Cooperative.

41. Unpublished USCO chronology by Michael Callahan and Paige Rozanski, December 2018–present.

42. U.S.C.O., “We are All One,” *Film Culture-Expanded Arts* 43 (Winter 1966): 9.

43. Dick Preston, “Preston Present’s High for \$1.50,” *East Village Other*, February 15, 1966, p. 11.

and excerpts of lectures and talks by luminary figures including McLuhan, James Joyce, Malcom X, and Alice B. Toklas. Reviewed in the *East Village Other*, the performance was described as a “hallucinatory experience. Its object is to try and give the viewer a total visual and auditory voyage into regions that are barely chartered, much less explored.”<sup>44</sup>

Randomness and chance dominate *Hubbub* and are inherent in the pacing and the mélange of images and sounds that render each performance unique. While there is an element of control in the selection and organization of the visual and audio materials, often similar-themed images were grouped together, and the parameters of USCO’s repertoire, the performances were not tightly choreographed and therefore each evening’s experience had its own particularities—chance meetings of images, lights, and sound on the screen—that unfolded in a singular way over the course of almost two hours. While many critics commented on the extreme and deafening noise and overwhelming nature of the images, for instance a review for the performance at RISD was titled “Visual Rape” and described the experience as torturous, others cited the boredom and confusion that ensued when faced with a cascade of imagery and sounds.<sup>45</sup> The subliminal effects of the media, the brevity of the images on the screen, and the diffusion of the audio track, played from different locations in the theater, served to assail the senses. Expanding on the connection between randomness and sensory overload within their work, USCO stated:

We’re dealing with questions of how you can get into the mind with information and images and whether literary, sequential ordering is really a decent, rational, and reasonable input. Also, if you project twenty images simultaneously, does the receptive system take them in and retain them. That’s the kind of thing we’re testing. We’ve discovered certain things. For instance, until you get above seven images or so, a lot of people can still just hold on to one of them. Past that point, people either let go or suffer pain.<sup>46</sup>

The *Hubbub* performances provided USCO with an experimental platform to investigate the brain’s capacity to absorb information. Observing the effects of technology and the audience’s limits, when it became too much and sensory overload took over, USCO tested and adapted the best way to get inside a participant’s head, exploring the impact of the experience on a person and whether it could change them. As USCO developed *Hubbub*, they learned how to better harness the technology. Sharing the following anecdote about their performance of *Hubbub* at the Kresge Auditorium at MIT, Gerd Stern stated, “we were into multiplicity, no doubt about that. And we overdid it. And it took us quite a while to realize that we were overdoing it, and that we were kind of getting people stressed.” He described how the morning following the event, Dr. Harold Edgerton, a professor of

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44. Preston, “Preston Present’s,” 11.

45. Sally Beardsley, “Visual Rape,” *Blockprint* 14, no. 13 (December 13, 1965): n.p.; and K. Hunnibell, “Hubbub,” *Blockprint* 14, no. 13 (December 13, 1965): n.p.

46. Kostelanetz, *The Theatre of Mixed Means*, 266.

electrical engineering at the university credited with inventing the stroboscope, reached out to the group, and said, “You don’t have to do things that loud.” Michael Callahan continued, “We did take his advice. And I think began to end the show with nature.”<sup>47</sup>

USCO developed an understanding that the audiovisual bombardment and pace of the overload should slow as the performance reached its conclusion, manifesting in the motif of the quest through images and sounds like photographs of sunsets and raga music, which they envisioned as a peaceful culmination after an intense voyage through the senses that the audience would experience together. Expanding *Hubbub* into *We Are All One*, they honed in on imagery that channeled the cycles of life, archetypal themes innate to all individuals, “WE ARE ALL ONE is a journey of this being, riding and fighting the waves from birth through love’s body, searching living currents, sampling peaks of illumination, holding on and letting go to the experience of time-space death, finding potential rebirth in the consciousness WE ARE ALL ONE.”<sup>48</sup> Simultaneity wasn’t simply about synchronizing the various media, rather it took on greater resonance in regard to humanistic relations. Adopting McLuhan and Fuller’s discussion of how the effects of electronic media could link humankind to one another, USCO remarked, “We live in a world where everything is happening simultaneously, right here and now we’re always in that movement; and what distinguishes you from me is where my focus is, or where my locus or direction of focus is. The whole thing about getting people together is having them focus at the same locus at the same time.”<sup>49</sup> Echoed in their phrase “we are all one,” USCO connects simultaneous media to the concept of togetherness, allowing them to envision the global village as a generational interconnectedness, a unification of beliefs and values, demonstrated not only in the total immersive and communal experience that occurred during a performance, but evidenced in the collective spirit that dictated their artistic output and lifestyle. For USCO, the channels and circuits of the new technology were conceived similarly to the currents that bind humankind.

Within six months of performing *Hubbub* at the Cinematheque, USCO’s experimental adoption of new media technologies was adapted to support a commercial endeavor—the discotheque. The photograph gracing the cover of the May 27, 1966, issue of *Life* magazine foregrounds two dancers, bodies in motion, twisting and awash in an array of flashing lights and screens, surrounded by a crowd of onlookers. The image captures a night at Murray the K’s World, one of the first multimedia discotheques included alongside the Cheetah and Bob Goldstein’s Lightworks in the *Life* photo story documenting this new trend of multimedia entertainment.<sup>50</sup> Opened in spring 1966 by Michael Myerberg, producer of Samuel

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47. Michael Callahan, Gerd Stern, and Paige Rozanski, “USCO: A Conversation with 1960s Multimedia Pioneers,” National Gallery of Art, March 3, 2019, <https://www.nga.gov/collection/usco.html>.

48. U.S.C.O., “We Are All One,” Winter 1966, 9.

49. Kostelantetz, *The Theatre of Mixed Means*, 247.

50. “Bedlam at the Discotheques,” *Life*, May 27, 1966, 72–76. Later *Life* included a photograph of the World in Yale Joel, “Psychedelic Art,” *Life*, September 9, 1966, 60–69.

Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Walt Disney's *Fantasia* and named after the famous rock and roll impresario Murray Kaufman, the World was located in a vacant aircraft hangar in Myerberg's motion picture studio complex at Roosevelt Air Field in Garden City, Long Island.<sup>51</sup> Myerberg conceived the World as a total-theater containing elements of live and recorded rock and roll music, underground films, op and pop art, closed circuit television, and an electronic control system. With an occupancy of three thousand individuals, the World was decorated with black and white Op art on the walls and featured a five thousand square foot glossy wood dance floor encompassed by black upholstered benches and tables and concession stands lining the walls. Various platforms rose above the stands, one held the sound and light equipment, one housed the musicians and entertainers, and one was suspended from the ceiling in the center of the room above the attendees and filled with the film, video, and slide projectors. The central concept of the World was an immersive experience where "the individual *is* the 'focal point' ... you are the center, and everything is happening around *you*."<sup>52</sup>

USCO, under the auspices of Maverick Systems, the name they used for commercial projects, was enlisted to develop both the content, over two thousand slides featuring photography taken by Chris George and Charles Rotmil, and films by Jud Yalkut, and the installation that included the design of a visual programmer control unit built by Michael Callahan. This console controlled up to twenty-one projectors (eighteen Carousel slide projectors, two Philips FP-16 16 mm projectors, and an Eidophor video projector) and was tuned to whichever song was playing over the speakers. It could be set to run automatically off a punched paper tape program or played manually like an instrument. The projectors followed forward and backward commands and their bulbs could be dimmed or pulsed at various frequencies while the lens's focus could travel at varying intervals. Television cameras filmed the dance floor, and the closed-circuit TV projected footage of the audience onto diamond, round, and square screens that hung from the walls. USCO produced thematic slide sequences for fifteen or so songs on the playlist, which included "Satisfaction," "Barbara Ann," and "A Hard Day's Night." Planning documents contain film worksheets listing songs with visual descriptions for correlating slides while a schedule captures the intricate coordination that occurred nightly between each song, the corresponding slides and 16 mm film and shots that the live tv camera would film. On stage performances also occurred throughout the evening from musical groups such as The Rascals, The Hollies, and The Isley Brothers.<sup>53</sup> Michael Callahan ended up working the console most Friday and

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51. Press releases mention an opening date of March 18, 1966, while Callahan recalls the World opened in April 1966. Schedules for Friday, April 1, and Saturday, April 2, 1966 are located in box 23, folder 5, Gerd Stern papers.

52. Renata Adler and Gerald Jones, "Murray the K's World," *The New Yorker*, April 16, 1966, 44. See also Robert Kotlowitz, "Pleasure Dome '66: The World of Murray the K," *Harper's Magazine*, July 1966, 96-100.

53. Schedules and planning documents for the World located in box 23, folder 5, Gerd Stern papers.

FROM: Bill Doll and Company  
 1700 Broadway  
 New York, New York 10019  
 JUdson 6-8894

GET READY FOR TOTAL ENTERTAINMENT  
MURRAY THE K IS OPENING HIS OWN WORLD!

Step Into Murray The K's World -  
 The Most Fabulous Out-Of-This-World  
 Entertainment Showplace That Ever Went Into Orbit!

This is it! A new concept - so different, so exciting - so out of this world - you won't believe your eyes - or your ears. Forget the rest! This is wall-to-wall entertainment!

This is a new entertainment scene - where you are the center, and everything is happening around you! You are really living it. Are you ready for the fantastic?

You are dancing on a giant, crazy dance floor-in-the-round - surrounded by 21 giant screens - some of them movie, some of them closed circuit TV, all of them popping with action, and synchronized with live entertainment that's filling the place with the big hits and the big beat. These 21 giant screens blow up what's happening - in 21 different styles! That means that if it's a love song they're wailing out, those screens will be popping with love things - the guys you'd love to love - the girls you'd love to love - there's room for them all - and you'll see them bigger than life! All the screens have a different scene - but the theme's the same! When the song changes - the screen changes!

That's only the beginning. Then - suddenly! hidden cameras zoom in on the dance floor - and you better give it everything, cause suddenly! you are on screen! You are the star - right there in the movies - for everyone to see! And

Figure 7. Press Release for Murray the K's The World, 1965, COURTESY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, STANFORD UNIVERSITY.

Saturday nights commuting back and forth between Garnerville and Long Island, until the World closed in October of that year. The World represents one of several commercial arrangements that USCO pursued, including a campaign for Scott Paper Company and interior decorations for Henri Bendel department store. These projects provided large infusions of cash allowing USCO to fund their more artistic pursuits; the income generated from the World paid for the exhibition they were developing for the Riverside Museum that May, which would bring them notoriety and accolades in the popular press.

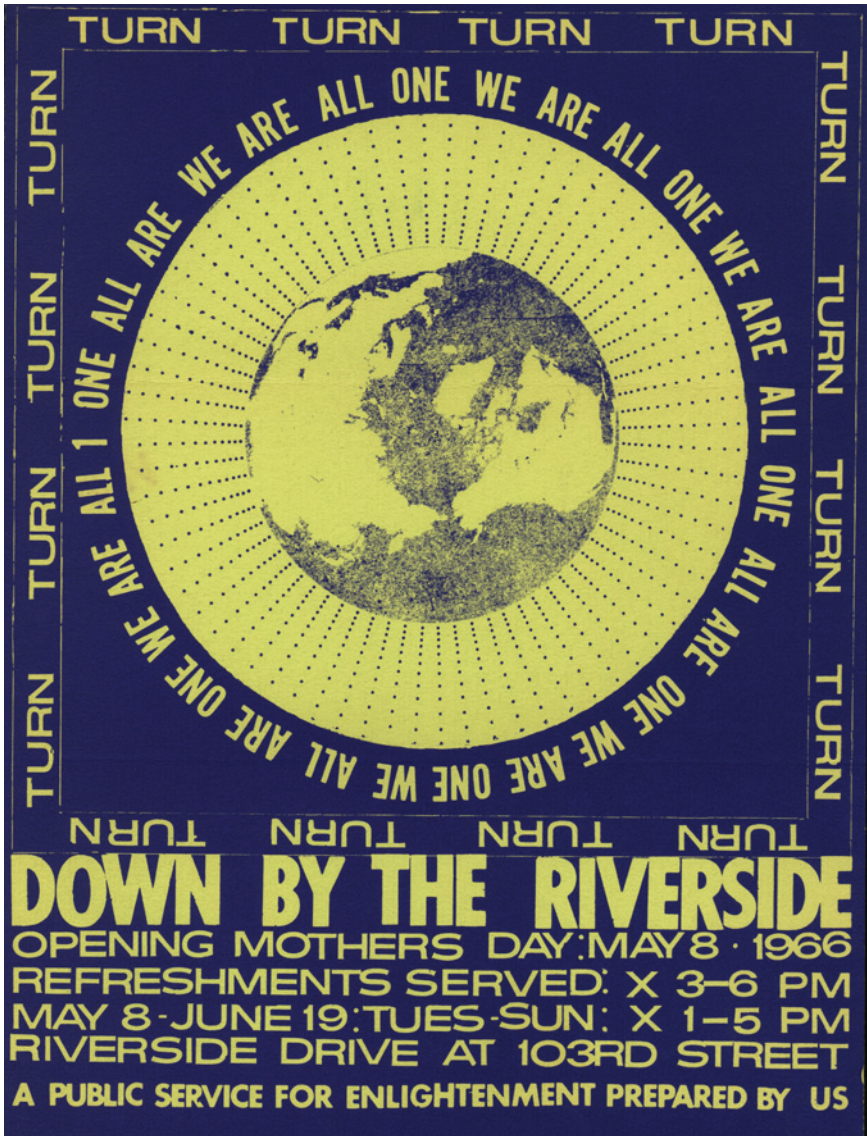


Figure 8. Poster for *Down By the Riverside*, Riverside Museum, 1966, COURTESY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, STANFORD UNIVERSITY.

USCO's *Down By the Riverside* opened at the Riverside Museum on Mother's Day, May 8, 1966. Silk-screen posters advertised the installation as a public service for enlightenment and featured an image of the earth at the center with the expressions "we are all one" and "turn, turn, turn, turn" surrounding it.<sup>54</sup>

54. Poster for *Down By the Riverside*, Riverside Museum, 1966, box 21, folder 17, Gerd Stern papers.

The show was on view for only a month, closing on Father's Day, June 19, however its reputation proceeded it, lasting for many months after it shuttered. The exhibition garnered attention in the mainstream press including coverage in the *New York Times*, a segment on the *Today Show* with host Barbara Walters in which she describes USCO and the installation as unusual no less than three times, and several full-page color photographs published in *Life* magazine's issue on LSD ART (September 9, 1966).<sup>55</sup> Little known today is that USCO coined the term "Be-In" to describe the immersive environment that a visitor would exist within rather than simply look at.<sup>56</sup> The show's success and popularity with visitors was largely due to USCO's ability to create and order a space, "to set a thing up which would just keep running and let people go through it at their own will."<sup>57</sup> The museum located at 310 Riverside Drive at 103<sup>rd</sup> Street in New York City normally received a handful of visitors per day. However, during USCO's tenure it became packed with hundreds of teenagers and young adults that stayed the entire day, often bringing their lunch, attracted by the contemplative and meditative experience, and encouraged by the comfortable seating that USCO interspersed with the artworks. As Gerd Stern described, "We've provided places for the viewer to sit and spend time with our works. Actually, it would be ideal if we could all come and live here for the show's duration. Art is where the home is."<sup>58</sup>

*Down By the Riverside* provided an opportunity for USCO to draw together their existing artwork in one location and for participants, about thirteen at the time, to contribute individually to the production of what was conceived as a total work, "a new electronic environment, making waves: analogs of head and heart for love and peace."<sup>59</sup> While USCO was amenable to sharing a complete list of works by request, they did not want the individual artworks labeled nor a catalog or checklist available for visitors to wander with. Rather they "would really like to take as large a jump as possible from the 'I did it' to the 'this is our world' ness."<sup>60</sup> The installation consisted of four rooms and a balcony featuring an array of paintings depicting chakras, totems, waveforms, and scriptural messages; kinetic sculptures, textiles, lights, and sound that invited the participation of the visitor. An individual entered the space through a balcony area where they were greeted by Dion Wright's *Taxonomic Mandala of Evolution*, among other works, which visualized

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55. Transcript for *Today Show* Special on USCO Art Exhibit at Riverside Museum, June 16, 1966, box 21, folder 17, Gerd Stern papers; Yale Joel, "Psychedelic Art," *Life*, September 9, 1966, 60–69.

56. Journalist Grace Glueck includes the phrase in her review, "A Little 'Be-In' Goes a Long Way," *New York Times*, May 15, 1966, p. D20, and it is also mentioned by Walters in the *Today Show* transcript. The phrase Be-In entered the vernacular after the Human Be-In was held in San Francisco in January 1967, an event that came to symbolize the American counterculture and was henceforth used to describe a public gathering of hippies.

57. Kostelanetz, *The Theatre of Mixed Means*, 266.

58. Glueck, "A Little 'Be-In,'" p. D20.

59. Riverside Museum Press Release, "Be-In, An Environment By USCO," May 7, 1966, box 21, folder 17, Gerd Stern papers.

60. Gerd Stern to Oriole Farb, Associate Director, Riverside Museum, March 16, 1966, box 21, folder 17, Gerd Stern papers.

an intricate rendering of the story of creation, an explosion of light at center with protozoa, dinosaurs, animals, a man and a woman, DNA and RNA codes swirling across the oil painting that measured over twelve feet high and eight feet wide. A visitor next entered a dimly lit space where five, nine-foot-tall, shaped paintings, some constructed with electronic components, were installed. The works represented the basics of life and included depictions of planets in orbit, the Tree of Life, seven spheres, and the Hindu deities Shiva and Sakti. For instance, the painting *Shiva* features a figure of the deity with outstretched arms and a seated Buddha stenciled overtop it. A single red light emanates from the center of the work, symbolizing Shiva's energy chakras. Painted lines radiate outward from the central figures to the edges of the canvas. At eight of the painting's corners, the lines meet a pulsating red-light bulb timed to the duration of one breath. A photograph of *Shiva* is reproduced in *Life* magazine accompanying the "Psychedelic Art" article. Another painting, *Spheres-Time (Tabernacle Painting)*, includes rings of metallic circles with rays arising from an internal core.<sup>61</sup>

Situated in the middle of the room was a water fountain and sandbox that contained a rotating aluminum column pierced with holes to allow filaments of light to pass through. Atop the pillar were four revolving-colored lights that were hooked up to a dimmer circuit that flashed them on and off, producing a range of color and intensity that illuminated the surrounding paintings. The five elements of nature were referenced throughout the room—the earth represented by the sand, the water in the fountain, the fire produced through candles, the smell of incense wafting in the air that filled the space, and a collage tape loop that played the sacred, original vibration of the universe, Om, as well as other sounds like a heartbeat. As USCO articulated:

What we had in that room, in short, was everything that is. The basic facts of existence, which are man, woman, man and woman and child, spheres, the stars, all create a meditation room. That's what it was. . . . That's the only thing you could fill a meditation room with. . . . What we wanted to do was give people all the elements of being; so that when they were there, they would be centered—they would have everything that is.<sup>62</sup>

The room provided an area for meditation; a contemplative space for introspection and self-examination where a visitor could reflect on his existence within the grander cosmos.

Photographs documenting the exhibition, show spectators comfortably sprawled out on cushions strewn across the room, sitting cross-legged in front of the paintings, deeply

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61. The two paintings *Shiva* and *Spheres-Time (Tabernacle Painting)* were acquired by the National Gallery of Art in 2023, <https://www.nga.gov/press/acquisitions/2023/usco.html>. On the original press release for *Down By the Riverside* they are referred to as simply *Siva* and *Spheres*.

62. Kostelanetz, *The Theatre of Mixed Means*, 263.



paintings that covered the walls, floor, and ceiling to form a tent-like structure. Located in the center of the space was a five-sided, rotating mechanized hassock built by Owen Jones that visitors could sit or lay down on as a resting spot or opportunity for contemplation. *Dacey's Cave* is also illustrated prominently in *Life* magazine, published in full color across two pages. The cave, the symbolic origin of humanity's first dwelling, was adorned with depictions of fetuses, gods, demons, and people, a "total blur of being," which USCO envisioned as a space "to turn people back into their subconscious—into nondiscrimination—where everything is just stuff."<sup>64</sup> The final room featured an array of kinetic objects including the mechanical sculpture *Contact Is The Only Love*. Several of these works incorporated diffraction grating like *Triple Diffraction Hex* while others integrated IBM surplus parts, like the tic-tac-toe game, *Ideas of Order*.

Though much of the environment's lights and sounds were programmed, some variables, including the stroboscopic light and oscilloscope, necessitated an interaction with a visitor. A three-minute film directed by Jud Yalkut, *Us Down By the Riverside*, records the exhibition's atmosphere funneled through the spinning diffraction lenses of the sculptures, the whirling lights of the flower garden, and the sitar drone of The Beatles song, "Tomorrow Never Knows."<sup>65</sup> The kaleidoscopic effects were achieved by a fine mesh made of thousands of microscopic holes that Jud Yalkut cut up and inserted into the filter slot of his 16 mm Bolex camera.<sup>66</sup>

USCO's "Be-In" at the Riverside Museum employed the concept of a total, immersive environment to create situations that altered the experience of viewing and interacting with art within a museum setting. As the group surmised:

That's the experience of an environment. What happens is that you get out of the belief that you can hang a painting on the wall and expect somebody to *spend* time relating to that painting. After you've been painting things for a while and hanging them in galleries and museums, you know that nobody is going to stand in front of that painting and spend a lot of time with it. Then, if you're thinking about consciousness and wanting people to make jumps, you wonder how to do it. . . . The environmental circumstance is beautifully suited to communication. You take a space and an open-ended piece of time, and you see what you can make it do to people. Can it change them? What's the effect? . . . You're inviting someone to live in your room, in your time; and if the situation doesn't engage him, he's liable to leave.<sup>67</sup>

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64. Kostelanetz, *The Theatre of Mixed Means*, 261–62. The first quote is by Steve Durkee, referenced as Der Key in the interview with Kostelanetz, while the latter represents the collective's opinion.

65. It is interesting to take note of the soundtrack—*Tomorrow Never Knows* ushered in the psychedelic sound but was not released until August 1966, after the close of the exhibition. It drew inspiration from *The Psychedelic Experience: A Manual Based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead*, the 1964 book by Timothy Leary, Richard Alpert, and Ralph Metzner.

66. Michael Callahan, email message to author, May 1, 2023.

67. Kostelanetz, *The Theatre of Mixed Means*, 265.

Conceived as a system, each space provided a perfect setting to design a field of visual, aural, and even, at times, olfactory stimuli. Youngblood likens USCO's shaping of an atmosphere and intermedia pursuits to that of the ecologist who deals with environmental relations, stating, "thus the act of creation for the new artist is not so much the invention of new objects as the revelation of previously unrecognized relationships between existing phenomena, both physical and metaphysical."<sup>68</sup> The environmental circumstances USCO created allowed them to focus on the overall effect of the technologies they engaged with rather than their content. As Gerd Stern suggests, "the work when it is experienced is what it is, not what it is about."<sup>69</sup> Similarly, McLuhan championed the belief that the content or use of the innovation was not what mattered but rather the change in interpersonal relations that the invention brought about. Writing in *Understanding Media*, "the 'message' of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs."<sup>70</sup> Though USCO demonstrated a sophisticated knowledge of new technologies and developed innovative re-inscriptions for their use, their primary concern was the effect that these materials had on a person's mental and physical state. Could media change awareness and thereby impact consciousness or transform human patterns of association?

The participatory nature of USCO's work meant that primacy lay with the audience and success was dependent on their involvement and engagement. Here again, the group's practice connects to McLuhan and his claim that different types of media invited varying levels or degrees of participation determined by an individual's consumption preferences. Whether it be vis-à-vis an intermedia performance like *Hubbub*, the total theater of the World, or the immersive environment of *Down By the Riverside*, USCO facilitated a relationship between the technological apparatuses they employed and a viewer/participant. This mediation was aimed at an individual's psyche, their emotions, and the central nervous system. Sensory bombardment and stimulus overload had the potential to decondition the mind by breaking down existing categories and modes of perception to create a new psychedelic awareness. The circumstances that made each interaction distinct were also dependent on the person's unique perceptions and perspectives. Through USCO's orchestration, an attendee's expanded consciousness could be channeled into a group energy creating a collective experience for all involved. Though USCO was aware of the negative implications control could have on mass society—consider the manipulation of the masses in regard to hate groups in the 20th century such as the Nazi Party or the Ku Klux Klan—they were invested in the utopian potential that their directed focus could create.<sup>71</sup> They were not interested in dominating the audience but rather in generating a feedback loop whereby the participant experiencing the work could reinject a personal and

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68. Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*, 346.

69. Gerd Stern, email message to author, April 17, 2007.

70. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 8.

71. Robert Kotlowitz alludes to this concern in "Pleasure Dome '66: The World of Murray the K," 99.

individualistic encounter into the creative process, designing a chain of giving and receiving that strengthened the artwork. As Youngblood claimed:

If the information (either concept or design) reveals some previously unrecognized aspect of the viewer's relation to the circumambient universe—or provides language with which to conceptualize old realities more effectively—the viewer re-creates that discovery along with the artist, thus feeding back into the environment the existence of more creative potential, which may in turn be used by the artist for messages of still greater eloquence and perception.<sup>72</sup>

Technology wasn't the only tool for altering the usual modes of perception at the disposal of the counterculture whose lifestyle and belief system USCO aligned with within the greater context of the 1960s. Contemporaneously, the expansion of consciousness was explored through other means, including the use of psychedelic substances. At times, these investigations were inextricably linked such as USCO's collaboration with the Castalia Foundation on *Psychedelic Explorations*, a series of workshops on the topic of psychedelic substances and methods of expanding consciousness.<sup>73</sup> Though USCO's direct experiences with these substances may have influenced their thought process and creative acumen by heightening their own awareness, they did not believe the use of psychedelics was an essential nor necessary component for experiencing their artwork. Referring to the use of mind-altering substances, Steve Durkee explained, "I don't have a need for them now. Those things took me a certain step, and I've assimilated that electro-chemical information they gave to me, once I understood these things in terms of my own chemical and electrical network, as it were."<sup>74</sup> Though sharing similar characteristics to the spirit and insights one might experience on psychedelics—a release of the mind, extending into new thought-patterns, perceptions and realities, conceptions of time, space, and one's place within the greater

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72. Youngblood, *Expanded Cinema*, 64–65.

73. A more thorough description of *Psychedelic Explorations* can be found in Devin R. Lander and Paige Rozanski, "The Communication of Experience is Art': USCO, the Castalia Foundation, and Psychedelic Art in the Hudson River Valley," *The Hudson River Valley Review* (Marist College, Autumn 2024): 2–29.

74. Kostelanetz, *The Theatre of Mixed Means*, 259. One of the divisions that led to USCO eventually disbanding was a letter from Meher Baba that instructed them to stop using psychedelic substances. The Durkees took this message to heart while others in the group did not. See Asha Greer interview by Devin Lander and Paige Rozanski, February 2, 2021. See also Excerpts from a reply by Adi K. Irent to a letter of query from the U.S.A., October 10, 1964; and Adi K. Irent to Barbara Durkee, February 13, 1966, box 19, folder 17, Gerd Stern papers. Plans for Solux, the spiritual community USCO intended to build in New Mexico, were abandoned by the group, but this concept led the Durkees to form the Lama Foundation with Jonathan Altman in 1967, a spiritual community, educational, and retreat center that still exists. At Lama, the Durkees were instrumental in the creation and publication of Ram Dass's *From Bindu to Ojas* (1970), which was developed into the influential book *Be Here Now* (1971). See Correspondence: 1967, M1237, box 6, folder 3, Stewart Brand papers. Dept. of Special Collections and University Archives, Stanford University Libraries, Stanford, California; and SOLUX blueprints, box 109, folder 4, Stewart Brand papers. See also Ram Dass and Rameshwar Das, *Being Ram Dass* (Sounds True, 2021), 210–13.

cosmos—USCO's integration of art and technology produced the same effects without the use of chemical substances. In essence, they were trying to create a drugless trip. Psychedelia, as Gerd Stern comments, "is not a term nor an idea it is a physical and consciousness expanding experience which takes you somewhere else than w[h]ere you were and transforms your insights."<sup>75</sup> In many instances, USCO framed an experience with their art as an audiovisual trip. Just as a comedown occurs when a synthetic trip wears off, so too did the effects of the media shift as the interaction neared its end. Attuned to the experience they created and aware that the overload of stimulants may in fact "blow a participants' mind," USCO sought to orchestrate a peaceful return from the journey they had taken their audience on. As they expressed, "It's easy to overload people; but it's hard to bring them down to the point where they'll leave the theatre peacefully."<sup>76</sup> While one can assume psychedelic substances were often present, given the group's popularity with a demographic that attracted young adults, the counterculture, and a conducive and receptive audience interested in perhaps pushing even the bounds of what the effects of the media-mix could achieve by augmenting the experience, it is important to understand USCO's intention was to explore and demonstrate another avenue for enhancing consciousness.

USCO's aspiration that technology would promote new ways of envisioning the world was largely mediated by the relationship they foresaw between media and the realm of mysticism, and their belief that spiritual enlightenment could be attained through greater awareness. Not only did USCO incorporate elements of mysticism into their work through the adoption of signs and symbols relating to Hinduism, Buddhism, and the Kabbalah, but they often equated the impact of experiencing their work to a mystical journey or religious occasion. Both *Hubbub* and *Down By the Riverside* incorporated religious iconography of Hindu gods and goddesses, avatars, and holy sites while also illustrating themes of creation and life processes such as birth and death through the structure of the quest. Even the World included USCO's slides of Hieronymus Bosch and Pieter Bruegel the Elder paintings that drew on allegory and depictions of sin, the afterlife, and the conflict between good and evil.

However, it was not simply the vocabulary of signs and symbols that connoted spirituality, but also the technique of bombarding the senses exploited through these new technologies. These elements would not only alter consciousness, but also demonstrate the mystical qualities inherent in the cosmos. USCO believed that sensory overload, produced through the integration and manipulation of media, would cause an individual to search for archetypes within their experience of the artwork and thereby create myths, infusing and imparting their participation with a sense of ritual or an awakening that would stay with them once the program ended. As USCO explains, "if the viewer starts by forgetting the content ... and looks at what's happening as experience, he begins to see the religious reality that exists in the vibrational universe, and in the nature of light. The reality is the

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75. Gerd Stern, email message to author, April 17, 2007.

76. Kostelanetz, *The Theatre of Mixed Means*, 266.

metaphor.<sup>77</sup> Technologies such as the oscilloscope, an instrument that observed frequencies in terms of color, sound, and wave-form, provided a way for USCO to comprehend the mysterious nature of the universe. As Gerd Stern declared, “there’s some secret of the mystery, for me, of the space-time continuum. It’s in the rainbow and it’s in the sweep of the audio-oscillator and it’s in the visualization of the wave form as phosphor on the cathode ray tube that it becomes most apparent to me as mystical reality.”<sup>78</sup> Media suggested a way to visualize, construct, and comprehend the greater forces existing in the world while mysticism was invoked as a tool to emphasize the connections between human beings. Equating a USCO work to a religious or mystical experience, Mekas stated, “they have arrived somewhere, and gained a certain peace, certain insight, and now they are beginning to meditate.”<sup>79</sup> For USCO, the enlightened use of new technologies became the mechanism to expand consciousness, bringing about greater introspection and communication, while forging new connections, communities, and global harmony.

Perhaps this is best evidenced in *The Tabernacle*, the meditative space that USCO built at their church in Garnerville, New York, in September 1966. After the success of *Down By the Riverside*, which brought substantial attention to the group but was only on view for a short time, USCO decided to install a portion of the environment at the Church, allowing an opportunity for more people to experience it, especially as photographs from the exhibition continued to circulate in the popular press. USCO constructed an enclosed hexagonal structure with a domed, barrel roof made from an orange and white nylon parachute within what was the original worship space of the church, entered through the rear of the building. There they installed the five large-scale shaped paintings, one on each wall, and the rotating fountain. Fifteen speakers placed along the base of the walls were wired to spin sound around the space in rapid succession, while four slide projectors displayed a continuing lightshow consisting of images, color, and light abstractions onto the parachute ceiling above.<sup>80</sup>

Visitors took off their shoes and entered the carpeted space through two entrances on either side of *The Tabernacle*, whose perimeter could be walked around along the outside walls. A control booth was located in a back area featuring turntables, microphones, and wires, while several diffraction boxes were set up along the east wall of the church.<sup>81</sup> The film *Us* (aka *Building the Tabernacle*) captures USCO hard at work erecting the walls of the structure and the ceiling. *The Tabernacle* opened on September 21, 1966, with a tour organized by the Lincoln Center Film Festival that included Annette Michelson, Agnes Varda, and Andy Warhol. Incorporated under the auspices of the State of New York to establish a free church, the environment became known as the Church of the Tabernacle and was open to the public every Sunday, becoming a popular destination for New Yorkers. It served as

77. Naomi Feigelson, *The Underground Revolution: Hippies, Yippies, and Others*, 191.

78. Jonas Mekas, “USCO: Interview with Gerd Stern,” 3.

79. Jonas Mekas, “May 26, 1966, On the Plastic Inevitables and the Strobe Light,” *Movie Journal: The Rise of the New American Cinema, 1959–1971* (Macmillan Company, 1972), 243.

80. Original blueprint of *The Tabernacle*, SOLUX blueprints, box 109, folder 4, Stewart Brand papers.

81. A thorough description of *The Tabernacle* can be found in John F. Cory, “Mod Church—to Hippies. It’s a Little Bit O’ Heaven,” *Buffalo Evening News*, June 7, 1968, p. 21.

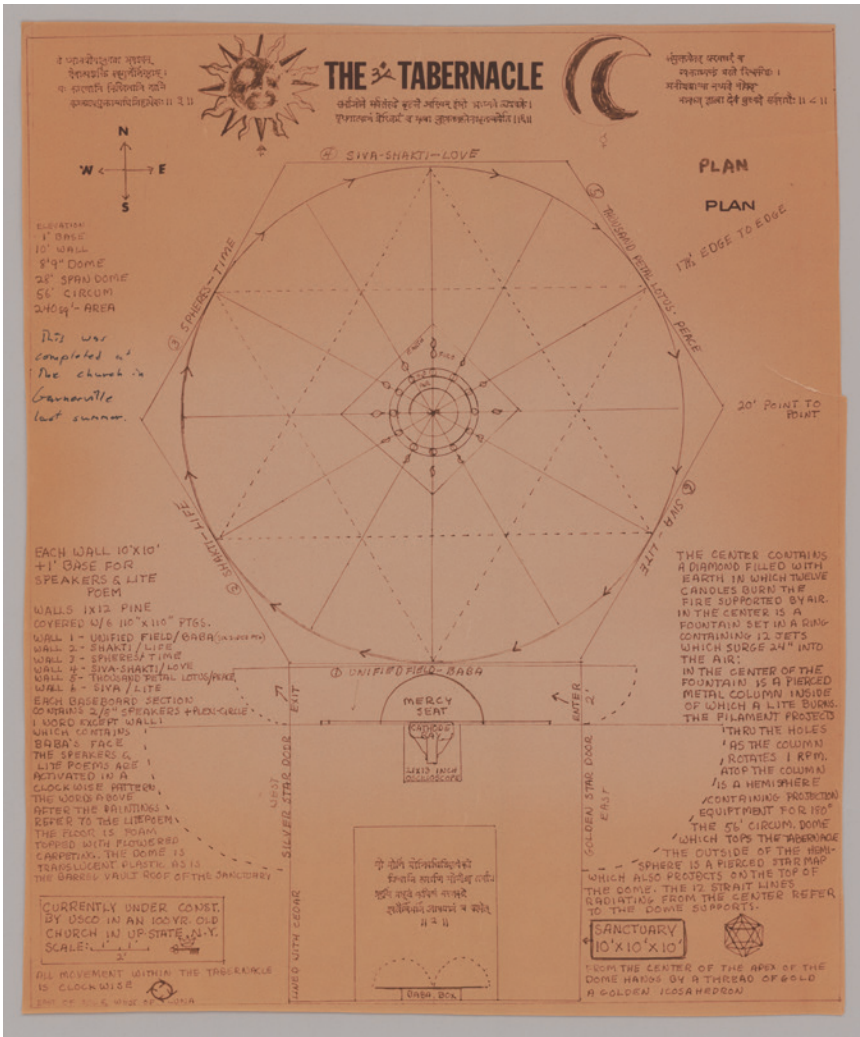


Figure 10. Blueprint for *The Tabernacle* included in SOLUX Blueprints, COURTESY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF SPECIAL COLLECTIONS, STANFORD UNIVERSITY.

a multimedia sanctum where peyote rituals, gatherings, and even a wedding took place. However, its notoriety led to a breakdown in the USCO community as hangers-on flocked to the church, often camping out, and disrupting the work-life balance of the USCO participants who resided there. As Gerd Stern exclaimed, “in its original conception, any artist who wished to live at the church and work on projects was welcome. This persisted for some time until the site began to be noticed in the popular press . . . Sheer numbers did the whole thing in.”<sup>82</sup> Through 1968, USCO continued to make work together, but the group was peripatetic,

82. Stewart Kranz, et al. *Science and Technology in the Arts: A Tour through the Realm of Science/Art* (Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1974), 214.

and the church no longer served as a base for their endeavors. Albeit for a brief moment, *The Tabernacle* represented the culmination of USCO's activities, a sanctuary where the cults of technology and mysticism united, togetherness reigned, and consciousness was expanded.

USCO's radical and unique exploration of technology and their attempts to alter consciousness transcends categorization as do their underlying philosophy and collective spirit. Self-reliant and self-sustaining, USCO developed their own model, forming networks that straddled both the artistic and commercial spheres. For decades, USCO's influence has been overlooked for this resistance to classification, and though many of the same challenges abound as they did in 1965 when *Hubbub* first premiered, the group's activities in New York, specifically the focus of this paper, were prolific and paramount to developments not only in the arts, but also in the sciences, pushing the boundaries of the artist's role within society. As Mekas insisted at the time, USCO were able "to abandon themselves completely, not to bother about what art or cinema is and to work on the sensuous sea of color, motion, and light that seems to surround us completely and we swim in it almost bodily and it is like going through the most fantastic dream."<sup>83</sup> In hindsight, USCO's undertakings during the 1960s are quite prescient—not only are they central to counterculture history and the conceptualization of psychedelia but their visionary articulation of how media would facilitate togetherness yet irrevocably alter human interaction paved the way for the transformations in digital technology that have occurred in the last half century. As Michael Callahan sat at Millbrook on New Year's Eve 1964, about to usher in a new year, a decade before the phrase "internet" was coined, he reflected,

somehow through this sea of junk I see through something very important—the synthesis of machines which will help man to see; or rather to expand his consciousness to the point wher[e] they become evident and self true—his inter-relationship with his environment. We have found that analogies drawn between electrical phenomena and patterns of human behavior to be striking in addition to providing us the instruments to extend our senses—electronics has given us perhaps something even greater—a model on which to base perceptions and projections into ourselves.<sup>84</sup>

In a society now habituated to the constant changes in communication technology and media's capacity for overloading the senses, USCO's pioneering performances, environments, and artworks paved the way for a world that is now accustomed to instantaneous connectivity, and immersive experiences, and one that finds itself grappling with the existential threat to humanity that artificial intelligence may pose. Yet the dream of USCO remains, for what Mekas saw as fantasy, an experience of togetherness and an enlightened state of consciousness mediated by technology, is the enduring reality of USCO and their artistic legacy.

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83. Jonas Mekas, "Movie Journal," *Village Voice*, December 2, 1965, p. 23.

84. Michael Callahan, Handwritten letter with notation indicating Millbrook, NY, December 31, 1964, 11 pm, box 17, folder 14, Gerd Stern papers.