



STEINA AND WOODY VASULKA

July 28 - September 4, 1994

IN THE EXHIBITION GALLERY

BOREALIS by Steina

1993, color, sound, 10 minute loops
2 channels on videodiscs


In BOREALIS, Steina uses projectors, translucent screens and split beam mirrors to create a magical environment of free-standing self-illuminated moving imagery. Taking astonishingly beautiful images of the natural landscape of her native Iceland as the base for the visual material, she has manipulated images and layered sound to construct dense layers and multiple perspectives that fuse the natural world and technology in space and time.

BROTHERHOOD, TABLE III by Woody Vasulka

1994, interactive computer/video installation
video disc, slides, audio

NOTE: Visitors to the gallery are invited to interact with this installation. Speaking into the microphone or striking the electronic drum will affect the video images.

The central theme of Woody's BROTHERHOOD project revolves around the dilemma of male identity in relation to the general compulsion of mankind to re-organize Nature itself. It presents the male in the context of warfare and explores the link between male violence and technology. Primarily constructed from surplus materials from Los Alamos - the detritus of war culture - the entire project consists of



six Tables. Each table contains instruments able to produce, compose and display varied acoustic and visual structures. Woody has said of the project, "As of yet, it is the most complex work I have attempted with requisite knowledge of various crafts: electronics, optics, engineering and computer programming."

TABLE III holds two picture delivery arrangements: a specialized slide projector and a video projector. Each occupies a specific projection environment consisting of multiple screens sharing the identical pathway of a six-way beam splitter. The Table also contains elements of sound and interactivity.

IN THE VIDEO VIEWING ROOM:

LILITH

by Steina in collaboration with Doris Cross.
1987, 9:12 mins., color, stereo sound.

In LILITH - a name that evokes biblical and mystical references - Steina alters and manipulates the face of a woman (painter Doris Cross) so that it is submerged within a natural and technological landscape. Employing the imaging techniques of focal plane shift (altering the depth of field) and frame "grabbing" (a succession of frozen images), she created a constantly shifting visual field in which an image appears to exist in a constant flux of temporal and spatial planes. The woman's electronically distorted speech adds a further haunting dimension to this almost sculptural fusion of human figure and landscape. (from "Electronic Arts Intermix: Video", A Catalogue of the Artists' Videotape Distribution Service of EAI)

THE COMMISSION

by Woody Vasulka. Camera: Steina. With: Robert Ashley, Ernest Gusella, Cosimo Corsano, Ben Harris, Andrea Harris, David Ossman. Set Design: Bradford Smith. Editor: Peter Kirby. Audio Mix: Baird Banner. Vocoder: Harald Bode. Scan Processor: Rutt/Etra. Digital Articulator: Jeffrey Schier.
1983, 44:55 mins., color, stereo sound.

Applying his electronic imaging codes to narrative in THE COMMISSION,

Vasulka develops a metaphorical image language to envision an epic electronic opera. The text, which is based on the relationship of violinist Niccolò Paganini (played by video artist Ernest Gusella) and composer Hector Berlioz (composer/performer Robert Ashley), confronts myths of Romanticism, history and art-making. Constructing a fantastic video theater, Vasulka stages a narrative of transformation, an intricately crafted blend of figuration and abstraction, in which imaging techniques serve as expressive visual syntax. Specific video effects are assigned interpretive meaning: reframed images proliferate within images in recompositions that propel the narrative progression. **THE COMMISSION** is a pivotal work in the articulation of narrative strategies through an electronic image language. (from "Electronic Arts Intermix: Video", A Catalogue of the Artists' Videotape Distribution Service of EAI)

ABOUT THE VASULKAS

It would be difficult to imagine the development of the electronic arts, especially with regard to the moving image, without the contributions of Steina and Woody Vasulka. Steina was born in Iceland and attended the Music Conservatory in Prague. Woody, born in Czechoslovakia, studied at the School of Industrial Engineering in Brno and the Academy of Performing Arts Faculty of Film and Television in Prague. They met in the early sixties while students in Prague and emigrated to the United States in 1965. They began their collaborative exploration of electronic media in 1969 and in 1971 they co-founded The Kitchen, a major alternative exhibition and media arts center in New York City.

They have devoted the last twenty-five years of their lives to, as they put it, "dialoguing with the tool and the image". Steina has said of their work, "We were absolutely in love with what we call the signal which is the voltage and frequency part of video. It could be translated from one property into another. You could affect the image, the content of the image itself. We were interested also in processing the images and in moving them in unconventional ways."

Over these many years the Vasulkas have come to be among the three or four most experienced and accomplished practitioners of the electronic arts in the world - Nam June Paik and Bill Viola being others from that first generation of artists to work

with video. The Vasulkas have each developed a signature style rich in content and ideas as well as visual appeal. The Vasulkas have won numerous awards and their collaborative and individual works have been widely exhibited internationally. They presently reside in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

This exhibition was organized by JoAnn Hanley.

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13th August(Thu) Asahi shimbun /wakato onishi

People tends to call interactive art as " the Art completed by the audience" in a friendly way.

And the words "dialogical art" and "participate-style art" has democratic and open impression.

I know many bright touch works actually. But I wonder if dialogue and participation would be closely related to the brightness directly?

Woody Vasulka(born in 1937)'s six large scaled works are interactive, but not cheerful.

One of new pieces is gleaming metallic mass placed in the dark gallery. It looks like bone specimen on the operating table assembled with rough parts. Audience can operate the work with one's voice through the microphone. Movement controlled by the frequency of the voice. Even though it was made by metal, it looks like some kind of creature. But I associated that suffered people was on the table. And that, title is "the maiden", it means "virginity". It doesn't have bright impression.

Metal became to a creature.

Invisible human is suffering fastened on that table.

I felt that it expresses our circumstance, living un the world controlled by gigantuc systems.



Brotherhood

The *Brotherhood* is a summary of media concepts presenting a specific domain of ideological and personal concerns. While the central theme of the *Brotherhood* revolves around the dilemma of male identity, it could be understood as arising from the general compulsion of mankind to re-organize Nature itself. This process is of course destructive to the natural order and leads to conditions of polarization and antagonism in various social and philosophical strata. It presents the male once again in the context of warfare as an expected and integral part of human evolution, in the construction and abandonment of human utopia, in perilous values of male sexuality. This work does not argue for a reformist agenda or a strategy of defence. It stands sympathetically on the side of the male but it cannot resist an ironic glance at his clearly self-destructive destiny.

While avoiding a single discipline, genre or style, the work tends to track clusters of systemic expressive primitives -- those which seem human-like yet reside within the machine.

The frustration at describing the modes of various media participation found in *Brotherhood* lies in a generic failure to interpret concepts like human or machine "intelligence." While certain electro-mechanical systems can contain a volume of cultural property, their usefulness or value can only be judged against the exclusive domain in modelling of certain human behaviors or in acquisition of procedural rituals. For example: Table IV possesses the faculty of performing physical letter writing under the control of a human voice via microphone, digital voice recognition and plotter system, thus emulating this rather complex

human activity. In the past, the term intelligence would have been freely applied to the similar machine state. Burdened with too much meaning, it is being replaced by more somber terminologies such as simple behavioral patterns or the more fashionable emergent properties of complex dynamical systems.

But the *Brotherhood* is after all an abstract piece and does not lend itself to correct analyses. If art should participate in this context, the authentic technological extensions and constraints will clearly impose themselves on the work. As of yet this is the most complex work I have attempted with requisite knowledge of various crafts: electronics, optics, engineering and computer programming.

The Tables (General Description):

Project *Brotherhood* is a complex assembly of six smaller arrangements acting in a mutually coordinated manner as a series of Tables.

The Tables are quadratic cage arrangements placed horizontally on metal table legs. Each Table contains instruments, able to produce, compose and display varied acoustic and visual structures. Additionally these clusters of technology exhibit a certain volume of behavior through digital programs or in reaction to a set of sensors associated with each Table.

Table III (Functional Description):

Table III holds two picture delivery arrangements: the first is a specialized slide projector while the other is a video projector. Each of these systems is associated with a family of images that occupy a specific projection environment: the stills

are confined to a small six screen layout while the moving images occupy an extended projection environment. Both kinds of projections share the identical pathway of a six-way beam splitter with the images distributed along six axes of cubical vectors to the six screens. During the still image sequence, the projection is intercepted by smaller screen/frames defining its own projection environment out of the general space. These small frames fold, freeing the projection path for the moving image sequence. This extended projection environment is defined by an arrangement of six projection screens, four standing on the floor plus one suspended from the ceiling. The character of the screen material lets the images appear on both sides, extending the installation's observation mode from the inner core to the outside. There the installation becomes an object with a multitude of interrelated images. The installation has additional functional elements of sound and interactivity. These provide a mode for determining the observer's presence and a certain level of participation.

Excerpt from a discussion between Woody Vasulka and David Dunn:

WV: I've incorporated vast amounts of military equipment into this piece. If you read the label on this table it's called: "Case and Rack Assembly Bomb Navigational Control." It's crazy that these things come to my house so I took this and incorporated it into my targeting system because this is what it really is. It was designed to navigate bombs so I'm using it to navigate my pictorial corridors which are basically trajectories of invisible projectiles.

DD: So that's an overt connection to this idea of Brotherhood and the machinery of war.

WV: I don't hesitate to speak about it because while I have always been intellectually opposed to it, in fact I've surrounded myself with these war machines and have adopted them. In fact the RPT robotic head in *The Theater of Hybrid Automata* is made from a celestial navigation unit that navigated the bombers for the Strategic Air Command. When I brought it to Europe and showed it to one of my colleagues in Brno, he looked at it and said: "now I know what you are doing because I was an adviser to the Egyptian military about missile navigation systems." He not only recognized the Brotherhood but became a "brother" of the Brotherhood.

DD: So, in your mind, this is becoming explicit as content. For years you have been working with surplus from Los Alamos but it was media related as appropriated materials for your studio.

WV: Now its become very naked as the content itself.

DD: It's certainly upfront in terms of this surplus material being the detritus of that culture of war. Artists here have been raiding the Los Alamos scrap yards in order to make these metaphoric expressions as a kind of critique of the nexus of science and military cultures. But what you are doing is taking very specific cast-off materials and, rather than refashioning them into a sculptural expression, resuscitating the structural intentions of these devices as a kind of pure articulation of their generative ideology.

WV: It has exactly the same purpose, to amplify the mind of its creator: the male idea of the machine's destructive power. This thing, a vestigial bombing rack,

carries the inspiration with it. When I saw it for the first time, I knew exactly that this was a piece of that soul. I didn't even know what it was until I read it later but I understood it intuitively. When I opened the box, there was a table with four legs and these racks which I later read were part of these bombing computers. I envisioned these guys sitting in the jungle, just before they went to Cambodia, programming these computers. They were probably dressed in fatigues, drinking beer, punching the code into computers mounted on these racks. So I'm trying to replicate exactly the spirit contained within this piece of metal. It is probably subconscious but very authentic: these were the machines for automatic bombing so that no one had to have the consciousness or responsibility of inflicting death. These codes are hidden to the general art strategies unless one descends to this level of intimacy where you recognize by strange instinct the role of these objects. I think it transfers subconsciously to the mind of the observer. It is this third level of involvement that really interests me rather than the obvious one.

The Electronic Theaters of Woody Vasulka

David Dunn

While the work of the Vasulkas has long been a seminal influence upon video art, they have maintained an aloofness to the fashions that have recently compelled that genre. Perhaps because their work began within the cultural climate of the 1960s, it has consistently investigated electronic technology and media as a cultural environment that, for good or bad, not only carries with it a new visual ontology but more essentially a potential for perceptual exploration. All of their work is in some way connected to a fundamental agenda: to interrogate the intrinsic properties of the machine as cultural code and the latent or overt perceptual changes that emerge.

As the retrospective of early video art and technology that they curated amply demonstrated (*Eigenwelt der Apparatwelt, Ars Electronica 1992*), the co-emergence of video art and solid-state electronics during the late 1960s represented a unique historical window: the artist and engineer were inseparable, participating in a collaborative dialogue from which the systemic identities of the machine and art product met in an unprecedented mutuality of form and function. In retrospect it has become evident that this opportunity for artistic influence of technological innovation occupied a very narrow slice of time. Within less than a decade, commercial forces had displaced the artist/engineer with the mainstream cultural agenda, redirecting artistic innovation towards satiating the needs of the popular film and broadcast industries. This situation has only become more acute as the structure of media tools has moved into a predominantly digital domain. Technical innovation is now synonymous with commercially motivated improvement in the production

of mostly cliched and traditional image making while the innovative artist unsuccessfully plots ways to influence the design of its digital code.

It is this shift from primary to secondary levels of artistic participation in the design of media tools that now concerns Woody Vasulka. Is aesthetic research of the kind that occupied him for over two decades still possible or even relevant? In many ways the current installations are an attempt to address this question and more specifically to explore it in the context of both the contemporary and recent historical arenas of the machine as cultural code. In his earlier work Woody could explore the electronic reconstruction of archaic perception with a naive enthusiasm reinforced by the immediate cultural context: the belief in the expansion of human perception through a technological stratagem. In his current work a deeper set of references emerge. The didactic purity of machine as generative source is displaced by the machine as an environment of problematic semiotic codes that intrinsically project a self-critique into their sensory enfolding.

In the two installations to be exhibited, a radical philosophical issue forms the ideological structure that houses a set of often contradictory references. In *The Theater of Hybrid Automata* the core issue is that of physical being in the light of its virtual representation. Neither in a Platonic world of Ideal Form where sensation floats free of matter, pure signification written in numeric code without body, nor in an Aristotelian ground where language only projects and reflects its desires upon an imperfect universe, the robot eye navigates a purgatory of numerical coordinates to sustain an environment of control systems: a tautology of self-reference vaguely aware of the intruding spectator. Rather than an exposition of an electronic theater, it is a dream of an electronic theater that

parodies the dark side of a cybernetically-controlled environment. With the eerie efficiency of a high-tech office building after the workers have left, it rotates through its automatic behaviors, devoid of human presence yet awaiting the birth of an unknown form of dramatic action as absolution.

The *Brotherhood* further explores this conflict between matter and its representation within an historical frame: the link between male violence and technology. While this subject is overt in the choice of the sculptural frame material that forms the armature within and upon which the media action unfolds (*Case and Rack Assembly Bomb Navigational Surplus* from Los Alamos National Laboratories), it is also present as embedded content: phallic pneumatic pistons that control the revelation of circuitry designs related to nuclear weapons fabrication, sounds of industrial process as ritual sacrifice, radio transmissions of "friendly fire" death verifications in warfare, and silent explosions in animated space as targets for virtual projectiles. All of these references intersect to form a larger revelation of the male idea of the machine's destructive potential and reveal the underlying archetypal psyche without overt horror or celebration. It is an evocation of an invisible intention as if this rack was a power object around which hovers the ghosts of its generative mentalities.

In both of these installations, the role of the viewer only hints at the current fashion of interactivity. The audience is not readily invited to control the action like a video game and therefore enact a preconceived ritual of pseudo-interactivity. These environments remain autonomous with only a potential for perturbation by an intruder into their drama and therefore assert a specific kind of interaction: these are autonomous worlds that define their closure through

their emergent language, forcing the spectator to swim in the intrinsic cultural code of the machine.

Influential Person

Woody Vasulka

Beyond the door I step into a world of relics of electronic history: racks for computers used in targeting from the Vietnam War, the inner ear (gyroscopes) of B-52s, stacks of laser disc players and synchronizers, piles of electromechanical equipment and "TV Furniture." The master of this untidy domain is a man who has challenged and altered my perception of the world.

Woody Vasulka is an internationally recognized video installation and technology artist. He, however, considers himself a machinist and a *bricoleur*. To me he is a humanist and a sage.

Woody grew up in Moravia (Czech Republic). As a perceptive observer of American culture, he has prompted me to hold up a mirror to scrutinize my thoughts and values. As we talk about Zen, his work, and how to cook a pheasant, Woody jars my beliefs on each subject, helping me to be less judgemental and to expand my perspective. He tells me he has no desire to become enlightened because it requires too much responsibility to one's fellow man. Then Andrew comes to the door. Woody makes him tea and toast and sends him on his way with a few dollars and several blankets so that this homeless man won't freeze in the back shed.

The subject for Woody's recent work, *The Brotherhood*, comes from his perceptions of the male identity in connection with aggressive behavior. His installations incorporate military surplus from Los Alamos and Sandia National Laboratories which he buys at auction in Albuquerque. His installations depict his beliefs in the futility and horror of war, destruction, violence, and greed. His multi-media installations are an onslaught to the senses, an attempt to make viewers aware of the cruelty and senseless actions of men.

Since English is not his native language, Woody speaks in an unconventional manner. He has an inventive way of using words and gestures to carefully form vivid images of what he is communicating. For instance, he calls his equipment "the pool of enlightened tools." This name comes from the fact that Woody lends his equipment freely to artists young and old, to the CCA Teen Project, to anyone who needs it to further their work.

Woody is a true artist, examining and questioning all that touches his world. He has the curiosity of a child and the appearance and manner of a mischievous Buddha with a Flowbee™ haircut.

Name of Applicant Jamie Hamilton

Social security #