

STEINA—May, 1995
Interview by Chris Hill
Transcription by Julia Dzwonkoski
Edited by Chris Hill

CH: Your descriptions of the situation in New York in the late 60s /early 70s is especially important and valuable ...

SV: People grouped together, formed tribes so to speak, at this time in order to afford the video equipment. They just had to pool equipment; it was a tremendous expense. I have no idea what the portapak cost, but \$1000 was worth a lot more than it is now, so it was substantial. Everybody got into this endless thing—that they bought the portapak and they needed the VCR and then they needed to edit. Editing, for the first year or so, was mostly done through razor blades.

The other reason for coming together was that the New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) could not give money to individuals. They realized that this was a big problem, because it's the individuals that make the art, not the institutions. Then they set up CAPS (Creative Artists XXX). These were the 60s and the 70s, and the outlook on art was totally different. First of all, there was a celebration of individual creativity and the distaste for institutions. It went together with—well, don't trust anybody over 30. For you to get money from NYSCA you had to be formal entity, a not-for-profit organization. These production groups and collectives all turned themselves into not-for-profits like People's Video Theater and Freex and Raindance and Global Village.

CH: So probably by 1971, when NYSCA first started funding video projects, they turned themselves into non-for-profit organizations.

SV: Actually the first grant that was going to be given to the video tribes was going to come from the Jewish Museum. For some reason, the Jewish Museum, as a not-for-profit, was going to take a grant and financially administer it and were going to allocate it out to the tribes...[discussion of a wild meeting about receiving funding]...Elliot Glass [from People's Video Theater] was here last week and we were trying to remember who spat on whom. Russell Conner was the NYSCA staff person for video. He was hired by this guy Ken Dewey, who was actually the instigator of everything because he decided before anybody that video was art and should be funded by the State Council. But Dewey died. But it was very remarkable. NYSCA was the first council in the nation, 2 or 3 years before NEA [National Endowment for the Arts], to acknowledge video as a medium. It's interesting that he was so insightful. Then, what Russell did was to run around both New York City and upstate New York and tell people to incorporate because that way they could start receiving money.

He came to Ralph Hocking who was already active at that time. Hocking had been in touch with Nam June Paik who was building a colorizer with Shuye Abe. It was the beginning of the Experimental Television Center and other sites.

NYSCA also went to Howard Wise and said—incorporate not-for-profit, get out of the Howard Wise Gallery and we will be able to give you money. At that time Wise was very taken by Eric Siegel and his work. Siegel was a protégé of Howard Wise, and they asked him who else he wanted to be in his group, and Eric had just met us. We had a kinship. We understood that it was about the tools and the magic and the signal and all those things. He immediately suggested that we could be in the group with him.

The big wordsmith in all of this was Frank Gillette. "Raindance" comes out of R & D, research and development, a phrase which was used all the time. Nobody says it anymore. Raindance was R & D for the video movement. He also coined "Radical Software" and he coined "Electronic Arts Intermix." It was Eric who coined the term "Perception," which was the name of our group. Sure enough, then the Kitchen became an entity of its own, a sub program of Electronic Arts Intermix. The Perception group regrouped and had Ira [Scneider] and Beryl [Korot] and Juan Downey and Frank Gillette in it with Eric Siegel...

This idea of the tribes was totally reinforced by the New York State Council and there was a woman there who suggested to a number of groups that they move upstate to receive NYSCA money. She told the Freex that they would be more likely to get money if they were upstate, instead of in the city. So the Freex said—OK, we'll go upstate. They got a place in Lanesville, NY. I asked Elliot [Glass] why he got out of video, and he said that when parts of People's Video Theater decided to go to Woodstock, NY, he had a teaching job in the city and wasn't willing to go. The State Council had this way of sending people to their destiny, because of the political problem of giving all their money out in New York City.

CH: They've always been very directive so it's not surprising. It's interesting how these institutions become structured.

SV: I thought it was very wrong.

CH: The Kitchen was started by you and Woody. Were you working with anyone else to start the Kitchen?

SV: The third person that started it was Andy Mannik. He had worked a lot with Merce Cunningham as a stage hand, carpenter, this and that. He was passionately interested in

dance, so he saw the Kitchen as a performance/dance space. He just found the space, physically. He not only co-founded it with us, he physically found it, and he just dragged us there, and said look at this space, and it was our destiny.

CH: Where did the idea of the space come from? I know that Woody talks about it being a place called an LATL, a Live Audience Testing Lab. Was this a thoroughly American model? Was there any European model that you were thinking about?

SV: Even if you justify it by saying we wanted a space outside our home because it was getting too crowded and people were there late at night... that wasn't really the reason. The reason was much more innocent. We saw the space that became the Kitchen and fell in love with it. Andy brought us up to the space and said—how do you like this space? At that time we were dragging monitors from one place to another in those big checker cabs. I wouldn't do it today. The monitors were big, but we just did it. We were wishing under our breath that we would have a permanent home for the equipment and to be able to showcase our work...but we were willing to drag along this kind of a difficult New York City life. It was Andy that saw one of our performances and said we ought to have some kind of a video theater.

CH: What kinds of performances were you doing at the time?

SV: We would set up a lot of monitors, 10-15, in Judson Church in a long row and then let the images drift from one to the other, these kinds of things. We used all audio synthesized music. Because of the time, people just sat there for 3 or 4 hours. They didn't care; they would sit or lie on the floor. There would be a fair amount of marijuana smoke in the air. Some people would be cross-legged and rolling back and forth. It was casual. It wasn't like now where you have to come on time and pay money and something starts.

CH: So then the Kitchen became another place where you could have the equipment and people could come and share it?

SV: Yes. What was interesting was, we were always friendly with all of the tribes but sort of just friendly. We had asked them if they would allow us to show in their places and they had turned us down, like at Raindance and People's Video Theater, because they felt that they were doing different stuff. They were saving the world and we weren't really. It was not being turned down cold. It was rather just saying that it wasn't appropriate, and we wouldn't push anything. As soon as we had the Kitchen, they all came. They all wanted to show there. Global Village even wanted to have a show there. We had a different audience.

CH: What was unique about the Kitchen?

SV: It had a very friendly atmosphere; the place itself had very good vibes. What we did usually was to welcome everybody at the door. I always say that I lost interest in the Kitchen when I couldn't shake hands with everybody in the audience, because that's what we did. People were a part of it. The other extraordinarily popular part was that there was a bar outside. People could start in the bar and drift into the Kitchen, or better, when the performance was boring and they couldn't stand it any more, they drifted out and went to the bar. I remember once there was a pretty long, minimal performance and everybody finally went to the bar. The last person had left the Kitchen but they didn't go home; they went into the bar and they were having a hilarious time. And then the guy who had been showing his work came out with a big smile and everybody applauded him in the bar for giving this excruciating performance.

CH: Did you and Woody live there?

SV: No. It was a complex. It was a converted hotel lobby with ballrooms. Our place was the Kitchen of the hotel. Most of the complex was converted into theaters. They were all fairly experimental. There were actors' studios and different kinds of places like that...They all shared the bar in the intermissions...and it was lively.

CH: So there were people going into the other theaters for things as well. How did Paik work with the Kitchen? It seems that he was very close to what was going on at the Kitchen at this time. Is that right?

SV: He lived down the street. The Kitchen was at 240 Mercer Street and he was at 110 Mercer Street. So in the evening, he would often drift over just to see what was happening. We did print the calendar so it was clear what was going on. I think that he came in his slippers, he came wrapped with his little thing over his belly like he had just walked there. He didn't have to put on a coat; he didn't have to put on shoes. He would just drift up the street. He often came in late but he just had a way of brightening up the space. He always come in with this big smile and he would fall asleep and then he would get up at the end of the tape that was showing and he would walk over to the person and say—young man, you are a genius. And he hasn't seen any of the tape you know.

CH: So it was kind of like a performance?

SV: Yes. Then he performed often times, tried out things. Actually, when he had his things, the crowd came, the Madison Avenue type people, and their skins and pelts and pearls and high heels. It was a strangely different kind of crowd.

CH: He was already well known. He, himself, would attract a crowd.

SV: He was in the art world. He was starting to get a name in the gallery world...

CH: Who do you think your audience was at the Kitchen? Video was one day of the week and dance and music had other days. It sounds like people had shared or similar projects and would come to the Kitchen because you or others might be working with similar ideas. So was it a group of mostly artists?

SV: Yes. The music program was fairly separate. It was the most successful, and the success came partially because there was a young critic who had just moved into town and had been hired by the *Village Voice* named Tom Johnson...He would come there every Monday and write about the event. Within a few months the *New York Times* hired themselves their first avant-garde music reviewer, John Rockwell. Both of these guys correctly came to the Kitchen as one of the only showcases. We actually felt very lucky that those guys would write every week about what was going on there.

Video was rarely written about, never, except Jonas Mekas would write hate articles about video but he did cover it. On Fridays or Saturdays there would be live performances. The people involved with that were typically a guy named Walter Wright who just loved to do live synthesis with actors and have the music drive the video or vice versa. There would be an incredible gathering of instruments and people would bring in another keyboard, another synthesizer, another camera and it would be pooled from several places.

CH: What you're describing has a lot to do with basic generosity too. Do you think that the fact that you weren't getting a lot of attention in the press had something to do with it or do you think it had something to do also with the non-capitalist, the non-product oriented idea of the times. What was the basis for this kind of sharing and openness?

SV: That was the times. It was everywhere. Everybody was sharing and everybody was always sending you to meet someone you ought to meet because they could help you. New York was a very friendly place in those years, and the idea of sharing and pooling and using instruments and hooking them together. It was completely spontaneous. It wasn't yet a medium. It wasn't acknowledged. No writer had any vocabulary. The journalists were scared of it more than anything else...

CH: Tony Conrad talks about the underground film scene. Was this completely separate from what you were doing? Was there any relationship at all?

SV: Almost none. Only people like Tony who came over. And Tony came, I think, because he knew Rhys Chatham, or Rhys knew him, and so it was the music connection that brought him over. Then he said he wanted to show this film. That was no problem to set up a projector instead of a monitor. It was much later that other filmmakers became interested. We had some connections to Millennium. Woody had always been interested in film. We wanted to do that and we were just on the verge of making this into an underground, independent movie showcase, but then we split and went to Buffalo, and really became interested in the film scene through Hollis Frampton and Paul Sharits.

CH: Shigeko Kubota was working at Anthology film Archives as video programmer at that time, wasn't she?

SV: No. That's why Jonas Mekas is so intriguing. When Robert Sterns took over as director of the Kitchen he had totally different priorities...The crowd that could experiment with the audience felt they had been left out —was homeless, and I think we were homeless for about a year. We left in spring of 1973 to go to Buffalo. I think Anthology started in 1974 or late 1973, and there was this need to have a showcase for video. And then of all people it would be Jonas, who had never seemed very interested in video in his reviews, who approached Shigeko...or maybe Shigeko approached him, I don't know. Shridar Bapat, who had been with us at the Kitchen, crossed over to Anthology to keep working with video.

CH: Did Shridar work with you in programming video at the Kitchen?

SV: One project that he worked on was the first women's media festival. I didn't have a clue as far as doing administration, sending out letters, figuring out how to do it, and scheduling and everything. The three of us did the festival, me, Shridar, and Susan Milano. The Women's Video Festival was at the Kitchen for the first three years and then it continued at Women's Interart Center, and then it died. There was another festival that we started at the Kitchen. The first year it was already called the First Annual Computer Festival. I thought it was so funny to call it a "first annual" when you hadn't had it a second year. Then came the second annual and then it was thrown out. It was a very enthusiastic group and it was a shame to throw them out. There was a lot of music, computer music. There were films, really experimental films, computer animations, in the early 70s.

CH: What happened to your relationship with Eric Siegel?

SV: He went to India ,and then he moved to California so it was a natural breaking up. He stayed with Perception and we became our own group. It has always been very cordial.

CH: **I was talking with Bob Devine** about this period 1968-70 . **He** said that they were doing media **in Antioch completely independent from what was going on in New York. They didn't even know what was going on in New York until *Radical Software*** started publishing in 1971. **They had** this community media center in 1966.

SV: Then they must have had 1" machines.

CH: **They did, in fact they had 2" machines. It was before the portapak. Could** you talk about what that period of 1968-71 **was like before the Kitchen. One** of the things I remember Rhys **Chatham saying** a few years ago was **that** during this period everybody lived in Manhattan **because** the real estate was so cheap. **People sort of naturally bumped into one another** frequently, **and that was very different** from what happened in the 1980s **when the real estate** started getting so expensive, and everybody had to spread out to cheaper rent areas, and rehearsal and work space became more expensive.

SV: It was a true village. We were all in walking distance from each other. For me, personally, video for me started by working in the Howard Wise Gallery. It was July or August, 1969. I don't trust people who say that the history is much older. Skip Sweney was very early because he had a portapak already in late 1968...

They must have had a half a year to prepare for the Howard Wise Gallery show "TV as a Creative Medium." Howard's was already a full time technology gallery which is very amazing...The gallery was on 57th street. I remember, you went up an elevator and as you came into the space there was *Wipe Cycle* [by Ira Schneider and Frank Gillette]. You would stand, a little confused, in the hallway and say what's going on? Then you looked at the screen and you saw yourself walking out of the elevator, and that was the first time for most people that you would have seen this instant playback. It was completely sensational. The show was in 1969, and that's when I got my head turned around.

CH: But were you **already working** with the portapak at that time?

SV: Woody was because he was working at Harvey Lloyd's. They were doing multi-screen projections for film, and he just knew that video was what multi-screen was all about. He talked this guy into buying some Sony equipment, and then we started hanging

around after the studio closed down at night, watching feedback and watching ourselves and all the things you do with video equipment when you first get it.

CH: So when was the material shot that's included in your tape *Participation*, 1968 or 1969?

SV: The first piece in it is actually something like the Jethro Tull performance which was in 1969. Woody started taking the portapak out in late 1969. I count my first tape as having been made on January 1, 1970, where I really held the camera and made my first tape. I was watching video through Woody's eyes for a half year before that...We were inviting people to come into the studio and do experiments, and that's how we got involved with Rhys Chatham. Woody wanted to see if video synthesis was like audio synthesis.

CH: So you got to know Rhys through that, and later you both worked at the Kitchen?

SV: Rhys was only 16 then. He was this incredibly polite teenager who was a child of Quakers or Seventh Day Adventists. In the beginning we said to him that he should be the music director at the Kitchen, and the only thing he did was to play himself and to invite Lori Spiegel to play with him, week after week. And after a while we suggested that he call LaMonte Young. We urged him to call him and say that you have a place for him but it's for free and he's not going to get any pay. So he calls LaMonte and LaMonte was immediately very interested. Of course he said he could only do this free of charge if he made it a premiere of his new record. So he set up this whole ceremony and [Marian] Zazeela came and showed all of her slides, and the Kitchen was overfilled with people because he had a real following. So after LaMonte had been there everybody wanted to be there and Rhys didn't have any problems calling anybody.

CH: So you were interested in LaMonte Young's music at that time?

SV: Yes, he changed our minds. That was that same fall, 1969. He gave a big concert at NYU in a big hall. We walked into the hall late, and it was thick with marijuana smoke. Thick. People were sitting everywhere, lying down standing up. He created those standing waves so if you would walk around or if you would move your head the sound would change and you could create your own sound by walking around the room or moving around. It was drifting over a very long period of time. The whole room was magnetic. That was a watershed event for me. It must have been after 1970, it must have been after I started doing video. I remember I had a problem with timing in video that things had to have a beginning and an end. Walking into this Lamonte event that had to

have lasted 5 hours, I understood that things did not have to have a beginning, middle, and end.

CH: You're describing a learning process and it sounds like that was what was going on during this period in time. Everything potentiated everything else. I'm trying not to overly romanticize this period. I think it's hard for people to realize how rigid average people's expectations were, maybe not so much if you were already active in the culture, but if you were just a young adult or an average American, even growing your hair long was a big deal at this particular time. People took incredible risks alienating their families.

SV: I didn't have any of that, of course, but I agree that it was an incredibly romantic period, and so strangely full of goodwill even if at the same time the police were running around arresting you for having long hair and all this paranoia, the Nixon years. We were always waiting for the next Rolling Stones or the next Beatles record, comparing it to the previous one. It was blasting out everywhere. Not only them but all the other things. Rock and roll at that time was very interesting...

CH: One of the things that is interesting about *Participation* is that it seems to be a documentation of this gay underground theater scene. It seems that you were interested in that scene, even if that scene wasn't interested in what you were doing at the Kitchen.

SV: No, somewhat the opposite. I would never have pursued that if Jackie Curtis hadn't called me and said—you must come now and you must tape our theater. They would be coming over to our place and hanging out. They used the Kitchen and also the Truckadero de Monte Carlo group, which was a group of gay ballerinas. They also started at the Kitchen. We didn't know much about them. We just gave them a key and they came in the morning. Then I met them a month later and said hey, listen, I gave you a key. Why don't you use the space and they said—oh, we use it every morning. They were just so clean you know. They swept the floor after themselves. I had no idea they were even using the space.

CH: So they wanted you to document them?

SV: Yes, and we wanted to videotape other parts of the scene as well. We were very interested in jazz, but very little came out of that because we didn't have the sound equipment. We have a lot of tape from that period that is basically useless because we were just learning how to do it. We once went up to Audubon Hall in Harlem. They hired us for very little. It was portable equipment. I think we did a very nice job for

them. It was so exciting—a talent show. When it was over, the guy wanted the tapes. He paid us in cash and he wanted the tapes and I said wait a minute, shouldn't we copy them. We just gave them to him and never looked back at anything, and I regret it to this day. I know that a lot of that stuff would have been in *Participation*.

CH: The one group in *Participation* was so amazing. I think it was shot at the Fillmore East. I think you said that that was a drug rehabilitation group? There was the gay theater scene where a tall thin drag queen dies of a heroin overdose as part of the theater. Do you know which theater that was?

SV: It was on the Bowery. I think it was at what later became CBGB. I think it was in that location, a store front on the Bowery.

CH: I think *Participation* is a really important document. I think that there are probably other documents but not cleaned. At this point in time *Participation* is a really important piece.

SV: All of it is excerpts from much longer pieces so it would be nice one day to clean it up and see what's underneath there. The master is on 1/2" reel to reel.

CH: Do you want to say anything about the women's.... The Women's Video Festival and what you think was going on at that time. Do you remember having discussions about what you were going to include?

SV: I'll tell you what the story is. This is again another interesting part. San Francisco did something called "The Tapes of the Tribes." At the same time we did the first Video Festival in the Kitchen. I think they were the same month or month apart so we started preparing to make this festival showcase without knowing each other. So of course, Skip and Arthur were in our show and we were in their show and we thought it was all funny and hilarious that it was happening at the same time. What was remarkably lacking in both festivals were women. I especially thought that this was a paradox considering that almost half of the movement were women, very active women and very interesting women. They were aggressive and active with video and when it came to show the tapes they were nowhere. That's why I talked Susan and Shridar into helping me make some kind of justice.

CH: So you think that half of the people who were working at the time were women?

SV: Maybe not half but at least one third. Between 1/3 and 1/2. Also John Alpert is an incredible hero but when I met them Keiko was much more active. She was just Japanese and shy. She was the one who had brought the equipment with her from Japan and he just latched on to it. John being this dynamic, interesting guy, he sort of took over but I have always felt that he gave her too little credit and she, of course, doesn't want it because she's Japanese. There were incidents like that everywhere. It also had something to do with how incredibly Irish and Jewish this movement was because John was Jewish. These were the two tribes that really don't want to give women any credit, are very aggressive and are very sure of the maleness of things. It's not anything evil on the part of those guys. They were just enthusiastic about their own thing and they just didn't see that there was so much being done by women. And the women, indeed, came up with incredible tapes like "Always Love Your Man," which were from a totally different perspective and the first thing you started seeing from a female point of view. Did you ever see the rape tape? It was four women who talked about being raped and nobody was in the room so they took turns holding the camera while another one was talking. They were just these four horrible stories which were told in this kind of intimacy. The format I liked, that the camera person would be the one who was not telling the story. These were the tapes that showed up. The next year I came to Buffalo and there was supposed to be a women's film festival there. Actually Jerry, of all people, put it together. It was a fabulous festival. There was one woman who showed cunts in a close up. Just one after another but she talked about them. She had this clipped British accent. Ann Severson. And she said: This woman has a very interesting organ. It is oval shaped with a little... you know. And then she says: This woman is a secretary for a man who .. this woman is executive vice president for this company... There were many.. Remember the picture of me and Shegeko which is in the catalogue for the Albright Knox. It's a funny picture of me and Shegeko looking into the camera. Shegeko came up for the festival and I curated a lot of those tapes that had been in the Women's Video Festival. We made an addendum to the film festival so it became a film and video festival.

CH: This was in Buffalo in '73. It was at Media Study or was it at the University?

SV: It was at the hall. It must have been somewhere at the university. It was a large auditorium. I don't know if Tony had come to the University by then. It was very interesting. There were as many men as there were women in the audience. They were all there like Paul and Hollis. The wife of Michael Snow had a piece in it so they both came. Shirley came up. This is what I forgot to tell you about Shirley. She was always so hysterical. She would always break down and cry.

CH: You said during the '70s that this was a problem.

SV: She also came to Buffalo and made a fucking scene and broke down and cried. But strangely enough, she and Jerry made a friendship for life there or before and he never thought that that was weird that she would break down. We were annoyed but for Jerry it was fine. She came with Shreeter and Susan Milano as a kind of troupe. She was her own tribe.

CH: Did she ever use the Kitchen?

SV: Yes, I'm sure. She didn't really want to show tapes. She always wanted to show the process. She wanted to have everything live, live cameras. We also ran into problems. She became suddenly very demanding and hysterical and if it wasn't done right as she wanted she would break down.

(Steina gets Susans' # for getting info on Women's Video Festival) 212-925-5333

She started out in Global Village. Global Village had a very funny thing with Joan Reilley and Rudy Stern and then they always got some lackeys to exploit viciously. One of them was Shreeter and one of them was Susan Milano. There were lots of them. But they all did very well because they had been exploited so badly that they had learned everything.

CH: Do you know what she's doing these days?

SV: She freelances. She does all kinds of video stuff like she gets hired by the Japanese when they do these shows where they travel all over America and have someone run to the top of the mountain and these weird kinds of Japanese shows.

212-265-1329 Russell Conner (talks about what Russ is doing today)

We became artists and residents at the TV Lab. We were the first ones with Nam. And our name has been thoroughly erased from any involvement with the TV Lab. We were on the payroll and when we came to complain to Lockston that we couldn't do anything, that we didn't get any time or allotment he just looked at us, completely surprised, and said Oh didn't you get your paycheck? And we, the last time, were so puritanical that we would be there for a paycheck. We should be there to make art.

CH: So what happened? They weren't interested in what you were doing?

SV: No, it was just the wrong place. I remember one time we had a conference and they said now we have to do something for the air, we have to do some programming, we have to do something serious. I said, I know, I have an idea and David said, no, not that,

no, we can't do that, we have to do something that's more like this and I would say, oh, I have an idea and he would say oh, no. See, you could never even tell him your ideas. He would cut you off before and say he was sure he didn't want that. So you began to ask yourself after a while, what the hell am I doing here.

CH: Do you think that the TV Lab was like that from the very beginning?

SV: No, other people worked there very well, like Nam worked there and he fell in like a hand into a glove and so did Ed M. Shuller and later then, Bill Viola. These people were what we called typical Television Lab Artists. They were these white collar artists who could work in that environment. I got a lot out of it because I sat down with Mr. John Godfrey and had him tell me everything. He was supposed to be this male pig chauvinist who would block women. Shirley Clarke also broke down there and cried and cried and thought that he was the worst pig. John was funny because he would always say, after I said, Hey John, can I do this? and he would say, oh, you want to do the old Stan Vandermede trick. He would discourage you from doing anything. But he became my teacher. He taught me how to read scopes, what was a black, what was a negative running pulse, luminance, RGB... he was a gem and he took us through all the test signals. So we got money and the education and thirdly we got a tape called Vocabulary.

CH: Oh, so you did that there?

SV: Yes and remember the dancer from the Art of Memory? The dancer in the cube? That was all done there but they didn't know it. That was what was so funny. They weren't interested in us so we just took those tapes and left. One day I realized that I wanted those tapes back. I went up to TV Lab, I was already living in Buffalo, I asked them, how about those tapes, could I borrow them and make copies because they couldn't make copies. And they said, sure, just go into the library and ask for those tapes. I remember, these are 2" tapes, that I walked them down 8th avenue, one in each hand. They were killing me, they were so heavy. And I never returned them. Later there was a catastrophe. They were starting to recycle and they wanted to dump them all on anthology. They said one day, we don't want this TV Lab stuff, get it out of here. And everybody started trying to figure out who's priceless pieces of art were there and they called me and I said, no, I don't have anything there because I had stolen it.

CH: People didn't get copies of their work? Everything was owned by the TV Lab?

SV: We got copies but we wanted the originals. We got the originals and we used them well. In that sense, the TV Lab served us well. Later, I applied for a grant and Carol Brandenburg but M. Shuller was on the panel and they said: Here is a grant application

by Steina Vasulka, I think we can just skip that. And M. said oh no I don't think we can skip that, can I look at it? I don't know what we did to them because we just quit.

CH: So you just didn't like working there?

SV: No, it was all this establishment. It was not for revolutionaries. That's why we never understood why those other people like Bill Viola and Bill Etra and Shirley Clarke begged, they were knocking on the door, begging to be allowed to go in there and make masterpieces and we were these revolutionaries saying you're not going to get anything from the institution.

CH: They didn't even have the same equipment that you did. You had more..

SV: We brought in our own equipment. That was not a problem. The atmosphere was just deadening. I would walk into the studio and get a head ache right away. Not very inducive to making art. It was a strange period. These people are also dead. Lockson is dead. We tracked down John Godfrey. ... But the thing is, about this grant. I got the Grant. M. Shuller looked at my application and insisted I would get the money. Then I made the tape and I sent it into them and they lost the master. I said, that's OK, I have another one. So they had to show the tape became I make duplicate master. I sent it to them and they showed it after midnight, once. They were just dead set against us. But I got \$10,000 so I have no complaints.

CH: When we started talking about doing this project 3 years ago, the woman who was programming Independent Focus, Cara Murdus said, you know, all that TV Lab stuff is completely lost, nobody wants to look for it. So we kind of gave up on it because she was actually a friend of video and now it seems that there's a group of them and she's one of them --maybe Bill Horrigan in Columbus and somebody else are working on a program that involves all of the work that's been done in the various TV Labs.

SV: Nam is a good person to talk to. I don't think the stuff was really lost. It was scattered around. Then they offered it and I think Anthology took it all. They were up in arms when they found out that the Lab wanted to throw this stuff out unceremoniously. So what they did was they called up the authors as much as they could find them and the rest went into some archive. I felt so triumphant to have walked out with my stuff. I was going to hold on to it until they asked for it back. It wasn't my intention to steal it but they never asked for it back so its still here in my basement.

CH: Is there anything else that you want to talk about. Your own project, the Ars Electronica project, is certainly an important place for information about the tools specifically.

SV: I think we have covered it very well. We started out being interested in all genres of video although we didn't want to change the world. We didn't see it that way because we were cynical Europeans. We were equally interested in documentary and I am, to this day, a sucker for documentary. If you click through to the educational channel, and you see a documentary and you see that its independent, you immediately stop and watch it. I still have all the passion for that independent focus type stuff. Its just such a tragedy that its less and less.

CH: The tribes, the groups that you considered to be those tribes in New York were...

SV: They were the first four groups: The Freex, Raintance, People's Video Theater and Global Village. These were the first four groups. Then, the next onslaught is :Perception with the Kitchen, Shirley Clarke with her Video Troupe, Downtown Community TV. They got grants later. At that time they were just two individuals running around, tracking...they showcased Chinatown and things like that and who else...these are the only ones I remember in the second couple of years. And then all hell broke loose of course. Actually you can mention Stoney and Red Burns. That was at the same time.

CH: Would you consider them a troupe?

SV: They certainly a group. They were a group that had money because they were supported by NYU but they hired people that were us and Joel Gold who was a fancy camera and who still does independent and underground stuff and Maxie Cohen. We were the people there. It was taken right from the grass roots.

CH: And then they opened up someplace, something that was in the village, some store front...

SV: It was on Bleeker Street. Above the Bleeker Street theater. NYU owns Bleeker Street and owns that building. Its funny because it was physically in the same location as where we did the first experiments with Reese. That's where the first audio synthesizer was placed which belonged to Mort Sebsosnik. To my mind its always first, these four groups, then they started to pop up.

CH: So you don't consider yourself one of those first four groups?

SV: No, we were the outsiders. When we came to that meeting, we looked at them...Shirley was with us, that's when I met Shirley for the first time, and Juan Downey was there and we all looked at these people like what are they doing, what are they fighting over so we were definitely the outsiders.

CH: Did Downey ... he went from group to group but he was really an independent....?

SV: I always put that the Perception groups was the true independent because they never collaborated, they were never meant to, nobody asked them to, they were just a group of individuals who applied to New York State Council together, under the pretext of being ... I never understood why because they had their own non-profit groups but they wanted to apply through Howard. And as far as I know he didn't take a fee and he split up the money and people worked on their own projects. So that was Juan Downey. He got his NYSCA money for years and years through Howard.

CH: As a member of perception?

SV: Yes, that's what was so noble about Perception. It was not an attempt to link these people together. They couldn't have been. They were too diverse and after a while Schneider hated Gillette anyhow so even if they were the only collaborators from before, they didn't collaborate either.

CH: Did Schneider, he probably doesn't get along with Paul Ryan either. I understand that he's very paranoid.

(SV: talks about Linz, Ira's tape. CH: talks about Standby, bitterness. Contemporary stuff)

SV: Berol is wonderful and she is the true founder of Radical Software and not Ira.

CH: So you feel like the women found Radical Software as well as editing the first year.

SV: No, it was the first issue. It was so incredibly sensational but all the guys just came running over and they wanted to take all the credit and take all the control. It was really funny because the reason they protested. You have seen the protest note in Radical Software...

CH: No, but you told me about hers and Phyllis Gashooni's...

SV: They protested in the paper because they were left out. They were omitted as having started the magazine. They made a correction that put it straight but all the guys were against it. I think that Corot is a good source of information and Ira is not because he has this agenda, he wants to be the first. He has no other fame. Corot at least has done pieces lately, she just got a Guggenheim last year so she doesn't bear the grudges and the feeling that this was the only life she had.