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## **WOODY VASULKA TIMELINE**

The italicized remarks are taken from an unpublished, taped interview with Linda Cathcart on August 19, 1978 in Buffalo, New York, unless otherwise indicated.

### **1937**

Born Bohuslav Vasulka in Brno, Czechoslovakia, January 20. Father, Petr: metal worker; mother, Florentina: housewife.

### **1945**

Experiences the end of the war in the suburbs of Brno, Moravia, across from a military airfield. Soon after, collects sizable number of electro-mechanical parts of war machines. Performs extensive autopsy on them; first encounter with technology. Is forced to play the violin; drops out after one year.

*I guess the war had an overpowering experience. I don't think, except video, I've had any other overwhelming experience since... Europe was a junkyard, where we would find great dumps full of war equipment... we could go through them and see the whole anthropology of war.*

### **1952**

Studies metal technology and hydraulic mechanics at School of Industrial Engineering, Brno.

### **1955**

Begins writing poetry influenced by the 19th century French poets and by futurist poets, Mayakovsky and Marinetti. Plays trumpet in a combo.

*I found poetry to be the most interesting art form. I still find it this way even if I don't practice it verbally. The modes of expression - the transformations - are the most powerful. In poetry you can transform into anything in an instant.*

*That kind of power fascinates me.*

### **1956**

Awarded First Prize for Design Research, School of Industrial Engineering. Jazz Critic for *Rovnost*, a daily newspaper in Brno. June, graduates from School of Industrial Engineering with Baccalaureate degree.

### **1956-57**

Military service.

### **1959**

Involved in short story writing and non-fiction genres. Studies Italian. Extensive work in photography. Designs hydraulic assembly-line equipment at Kuria Metalworks Factory, Kurim u Brna.

### **1960**

Moves to Prague. Receives State Scholarship for Higher Education; enters Academy of Performing Arts, Faculty of Film and Television. Begins to direct and produce 4 short films.

*I saw film, and I still see film, as extended literature, a kind of literature practiced in space, in a spatial way. At that time I also started to practice prosaic work and I started to write, trying to figure out large formal structures ... I saw film as a medium, a material, a dimension of narrativity which was the most modernistic, one still not*

*mastered... With literature I had to compare myself daily with Kafka or others, that was very hard to withstand - poetry the same thing ... Film was still very much unmapped, it was free territory.*

**1960-64**

Makes short films at the Academy. Continues writing. Studies English.

**1962**

Receives Special Prize, Young Directory category at National Festival of Documentaries, Carlsbad. Meets Steina in Prague.

**1963**

Works during the summer as Assistant Director, Czechoslovak Television Network, Brno.

**1964**

Graduates from Academy of Performing Arts, awarded Diploma in Production and Direction of Documentary Films, Dissertation topic, "The Work of a Documentarian in an Unknown Terrain." Travels to Algeria to shoot documentary film. Marries Steina, makes film with her in Iceland.

**1965**

Emigrates to the United States to join Steina. Settles in New York City. Continues studies in English.

*I was seeking some kind of a status of modernism which I fantasized, again probably through my involvement with literature, and didn't find in Europe. I figured the most exotic and interesting practiced system of modernism was the American system ... I wanted to examine that, I had to be sure ...*

**1966**

For the next three years, works as film editor with Francis Thompson and later for the architects Woods and Ramirez. Works on multi-screen industrial presentations. Designer and editor for Harvey Lloyd Productions.

**1967**

Experiments with electronic sound and stroboscopic lights. Meets Alphons Schilling.

*Through the experience of film especially after the summer of 1967, when I worked on multi-screen films, I developed a personal theory in which I accused the cinematic frame as being singularly responsible for all narrative tendencies in film, tendencies which I presumed were inhibiting me in working with film. My attention turned against the cinematic apparatus itself. At first I made two, three-screen films (aimless people, peril in orbit), trying to prolongate the horizontal frame. Then I constructed a frameless cinema, using a continuous transport of the film against a narrow slit, recording the environment through a rotating mirror synchronized to the film movement. In that way I made several 360 degree records.*

*In the summer of 1967 when Steina went to Paris to study violin, I shared a loft for a few months with Alphons Schilling at 128 Front Street, in New York. Alphons was going through related crisis but on a much broader scope, since he was dealing with the discipline of painting as well.*

*We experimented with a camera on a turntable, directed by remote control. Alphons filmed a scene (a person walking in a room), and by mounting the projector in the place of the camera while projecting onto the walls of the same space, he succeeded in tracking the initial image movements.*

*This space reconstruction triggered a series of experiments for both of us. We felt that our dilemma had something to do with space - the construction and reconstruction of space in time.*

*We both used the experience of a real space to turn toward interpretation of the underlying codes; for Schilling, leading him to his conquest of binocular principles, for me, to time/energy as an organizing principle of sound and image.*

**1968**

Granted Icelandic citizenship by the Althing [Parliament]. Accepts Icelandic name Timoteus Petursson.

### 1969

Begins exploration of electronic image and sound with equipment from Harvey Lloyd's studio.

*That way I got very close to technology. He built a small, cheap studio. That was the first resource for my video experience. About that time, it hit me that this is the medium in which I wanted to work. I was interested in this metaphysical concept - that an image is an energy system.*

### 1971

Exhibits in numerous video festivals. Receives Creative Artists Public Service (CAPS) grant. Technical advisor to Alternate Media Center, New York. Associated with Electronic Arts Intermix, New York. Assists in the selection and post-production of a video exhibition at the Whitney Museum organized by curators David Bienstock and Bruce Rubin. Receives a New York State Council on the Arts (NYSCA) grant with *Perception Group* (Steina, Eric Siegel and others) under Electronic Arts Intermix sponsorship. Co-found, with Steina, The Kitchen, an electronic media theater forum for new video, film and music.

*Our contribution was that we provided certain mechanisms for video, that means the space, and we initiated or made certain paradigms or some limitations to it. We said, "Let's use it electronically, as a place that does electronic music and electronic sounds...."*

*We could do avant-garde plays and we could do average trash. But we had a collective of people (especially the owner) who were willing to risk a lot. So in this milieu, our theater (or whatever it was), we carried unorthodox approaches as well. To the purists, we were very unpure. At the same time, by a sense of instincts, the true, established, orthodox avant-garde also found it. And if you look at the performance list, you'll see that we introduced people who would eventually become part of the legitimate avant-garde. So, I must confess, we were very much interested in certain decadent aspects of America at that time - including homosexual theater, rock and roll, and beyond all that.*

*We, in fact, enjoyed certain things that were forbidden to the true radicals in the sense of purity of thinking of Buckminster Fuller and McLuhan. We would be very much involved in the phenomenon of time. And we could incorporate all those things: we took a certain interest in that particular aspect. We motivated (in a way) an undefined creative milieu. As you know, it was purely participatory; people did not pay - they advertised themselves. At that time, the form was fluid and there was no problem. Eventually, it grew and became more structured and now The Kitchen is on its own, doing probably, much "established" gallery work. The milieu that existed in the sixties and early seventies does not exist in that form. I guess, after us, people had much more exact ideas about what it should be.*

*We started to show the tapes that we had made; we already had about forty hours of material. So we started showing that material and to play it with music. With presentations we played the monitors - just as the means of presenting it. We did it about three times a week, then we did it twice a week. Then as there were more people to fill in the holes we'd get twice a month and then twice a year. (2)*

1. Linda Cathcart, unpublished, taped interview with Woody Vasulka, August 19, 1978, Buffalo, New York.
2. Jean Grippi, unpublished, taped interview with Woody Vasulka, August 4, 1975, Buffalo, New York.

### 1972

Receives travel grant with Steina, from National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and NCET at KQED Television Stations. Begins to develop personalized electronic art tools in cooperation with George Brown and Eric Siegel with support from NYSCA.

### 1973

Participates as film/T.V./media panel member for NYSCA. Spring, leaves The Kitchen. Fall, moves to Buffalo.

**1974**

Takes position of Associate Professor, Center for Media Study, SUNY, Buffalo. Investigates computer controlled video image research. Buys Rutt/Etra scan processor and begins to experiment with it.

*Compared to my previous work on videotape, the work with the scan processor indicates a whole different trend in my understanding of the electronic image. The rigidity and total confinement of time sequences have imprinted a didactic style on the product. Improvisational modes have become less important than an exact mental script and a strong notion of the frame structure of the electronic image. Emphasis has shifted towards a recognition of a time/energy object and its programmable building element - the waveform.*

**1975**

Makes ten tableaux of stills on waveform codes in electronic imaging. Begins to build *The Vasulka Imaging System*, a digital computer-controlled personal facility.

*In this time the work entered the most complicated grounds. Many aesthetic values had to be thought over and the question of individualism, creative process, team work, development and possession of tools, acquisition of new knowledge; all these became the invisible works investments which perhaps should bring some result later.*

3. Statement by Woody Vasulka in Woody Vasulka and Scott Nygren, "Didactic Video: Organizational Models of the Electronic Image;" *Afterimage* (Rochester, New York), vol. 3, no. 4, Oct. 1975, p. 9.

**1976**

Receives NEA grant for production of film series, "Recorded Images." Included in The Museum of Modern Art's Projects: *Video IX*.

**1977**

Recipient, with Steina, of one-year grant from The Corporation for Public Broadcasting and the NEA as artist-in-residence, PBS Channel 17, Buffalo. Prepares and edits video works for presentation through television broadcast in six, one-half hour segments.

**1978**

Makes eight tableaux of still photographs titled "The Syntax of Binary Images" published in the Summer issue of *Afterimage Magazine*.

*End*