

IN THE FACE OF BIG BROTHER

A film with Woody and Steina Vasulka

55 minutes, color

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As we enter the final days of the present century, art (as civilization, in general) is faced with a most profound dilemma; one which threatens its very survival but also one which, if solved, will issue in a totally new and different creative identification for the societies of the future.

High technology brings with all its wonders and benefits enormous societal problems. Because of the high degrees of complexity, specialization and cost, basic human values are easily cast aside in the name of efficiency. Certainly, one of the greatest threats we are facing as our cultures are ever changed by high technology is the dehumanization of the planet. More and more, we are faced with a greater sense of alienation among our peoples; more and more, we hear individuals feeling that their destinies are now being determined by apparatuses beyond their control.

The artist has always represented that force in society which champions the cause of humanism: the creative potential based upon love, growth and challenge, serving to inspire and encourage societies to surmount immediate obstacles by redirecting the individual back to the fundamental human values found in each and everyone of us. For the artist, human ingenuity and inventiveness are the keys to the hopes and aspirations of all societies.

The primary danger to the artist from high technology revolves around the contemporary tools for self expression. With the introduction of sophisticated computerized mechanisms which visually and sonically offer spectacular possibilities; with the development of laser technology (i.e. holography) and all the other mind-boggling spinoffs of high tech, we find limitless worlds which are at the same time becoming more and more inaccessible to those individuals who might best use them.

Because of these costs and complexities, we find that most of the highly advanced artistic tools of today and tomorrow are made available only to industrial or military interests. Young art students have virtually no access to the machines. And more and more established artists feel an alienation so great or, as well, are not able to gain access to this equipment because of commercial exclusivity, that we find precious few who are willing to spend the prodigious efforts necessary to readjust their life and their creative potentials to the new realities.

The present film intends to be a tribute to the courage, determination and enormous talents of Woody and Steina Vasulka; as well as a presentation of the very real problems faced by today's artists, in order to encourage the development of new concepts and practical methods to confront positively the new age upon us. And, as well, it is hope that students and young artists as well as the concerned public will gain inspiration from the Vasulka example: not simply to press pre-set buttons and systems created by commercial manufacturers, but to "rip the boxes open" in order to reassert the human factor, the individualism back into the mass produced systems of today.

The film is divided into four sections which are integrated with each other throughout the work. The first is a general background of the Vasulka's from the time they came to the USA some twenty years ago to begin working with video, Their work resulted in their founding The Kitchen in New York City, which became the country's most important showcase for video artists. Included in this section will be examples of early experiments with computerized visualization systems which they invented in order to develop their own characteristic visual possibilities for the video screen.

The second section concerns itself with the confrontations between the Vasulka's and various elements of the artistic community and the makers of this film; probing into the problems outlined in the above description. Efforts were made by the filmmakers to create highly provocative discussion and analysis between the groups and individuals involved in the project.

The third section will present approximately ten minutes (each) of present day creations by the Vasulka's. And in the final section, viewers will be exposed to the Vasulka's work studios located amidst the deserts of New Mexico. Viewers will gain insight into their working process and their commitments to those still cherished human values so vital to the heart of the Vasulka's work.

The makers of this film believe such a project is sorely needed to reaffirm the power of the human spirit in the face of such a growing dehumanizing environment. The examples of the Vasulka's, still fresh, even more alive because of the struggle, will hopefully serve to portray as well as strengthen this new face of the phenomenon called art that for so many centuries has had to face a never ending succession of cultural identifications and has managed to do so ultimately because of the power of the human forces involved.

NOTE: The rough elements from the film included with this paper portray some of the confrontations referred to in the second section of the above description. The aggressiveness contained in the material was, as has been mentioned, consciously conceived in order to provoke from those interviewed fundamental positions. All sections of the film will attempt to scrape through the facades generally created by individuals in order to arrive at moments of true feeling and consciousness. It is against this vitality that the presentation of the Vasulka works will take on the richness of poetry and meaning they so fully deserve.