

X-Mailer: Microsoft Outlook Express Macintosh Edition - 4.5 (0410)
Date: Tue, 21 Sep 1999 23:50:07 +0900
Subject: <aucun objet>
From: "Philippe Valdois" <pv@gol.com>
To: woodyv@santafe.edu

Dear Woody and Steina,

don't know if you'll remember me. I once showed up at your place near Santa Fe, with Gene Youngblood, told you I was a friend of Jean-Paul Fargier, etc. Then met Woody again a few years later at Artifices in St-Denis. I was with another friend that time, Gary Hill. After about 12 years in Europe, I've moved to Japan, I've been writing for InterCommunication, at the ICC center, for about 3 years now. Gabriel Soucheyre mentioned you might be interested in seeing the original version of the review I wrote on the Brotherhood, so here it is. If you come to Japan again, please let me know.

Best regards, Stephen Sarrazin

WOODY VASULKA: THE BROTHERHOOD

BIG BROTHER

For those who have followed Woody Vasulka's career since the seventies, or discovered his work during the following decades, this exhibition marks the accomplishment, the fulfillment of a vision that ultimately had to take shape and distance itself from pure process. While Vasulka might be more discreet than other video pioneers, his experimental tapes have been shown regularly in various events & festivals in Japan, and though he is a considerable presence, he has always wanted his experiments to 'speak' for him. Vasulka made a name for himself out of being weary and suspicious of content and explanations. More importantly, it must be understood that his work has come to represent one of media art's points of origins, as relevant and significant as what was launched by Nam June Paik and Wolf Vostell. Clearly, a contemporary artist such as Gary Hill, through the manner in which he shows what the sound does to the image, owes a lot more to Vasulka than he would to Paik. It should also be noted that Vasulka, like Gary Hill, and Bill Viola, is a peripheral artist, that his work did not have to emerge from New York, in order to be recognized.

Still, because of the artist's history, Vasulka's work has neither contained the 'generosity' of a Paik, nor obviously the irreverence of a Vostell, and he is strangely absent from the American contemporary use of media in art, which has focused during the last decade on much lower-tech applications.

And yet, after more than two decades, this exhibition, which could probably not have taken place anywhere else but Japan, offers a tremendous lesson to younger new media artists, in that we are confronted here with an aesthetic of technology that took some "real time" to materialize itself. Vasulka's inner space was ultimately filled with sad machines.

Undoubtedly the most extraordinary aspect of this show of six installations lies in the fact that Vasulka actually lets the spectator be an actual participant in the concrete experience of the sculptures and installations. Prior to this, his tapes were always bracketed moments, phenomenological investigations contained by processed technology. And as Hisanori Gogota's catalogue introduction suggests, this has to do with the artist's relationship to cinema, and film theory, how narrative distancing techniques gave way to a desire, using electronic media, to control every single frame, always going further in order to be able to act both on the time and space within that one frame. Getting 'inside' a Vasulka tape seemed a desperate act. Then came openings in the system during the eighties, when Vasulka made two 'kind of' narrative tapes, "The Commission", and the extraordinary "Art of Memory". Narratives, in spite of the artist's suspicions, appeared to be able to contain ideas that would not stay put (still, in place) in earlier tapes.

On the other hand, a number of cultural mythologies surround Vasulka and help us to grasp a little more what is at stake between this artist and a history of modern images, such as the underground cinema of eastern Europe, founding the Kitchen in New York City, and leaving the east coast in order to move to the American south west, a space highly charged with symbolism; one thinks of pioneers and westerns, world war 2 and killing technology, contemporary art, and still smarter killing technology. Certainly the title "The Brotherhood" is both ironic and romantic; the raw materials that make up the sculptures and installations consist of military surplus waste, from the Los Alamos Military Research Center. Specific pieces such as "Friendly Fire", "Stealth" and "Automata" clearly mark a thematic and territorial space, while the others, "Translocations", "Scribe", and "The Maiden", reveal a more manifest aesthetic intention. As Vasulka says in one of the catalogues interviews, "I succumbed to the seduction of the object", and these three works also function as intriguing reflexions on the evolution of sculptural hybrids. One may think of Duchamp, as Errki Huhtamo quickly suggests, but perhaps more accurately of Tinguely combined with experimental film making from the sixties and seventies. His team of engineers, welders, and computer experts managed to challenge media aesthetic and strategies that have defined our era, those of war and images, of conflict and 16mm film, geopolitical unrest and real time video, smart bombs and satellite broadcasts.

The industrial nature of these works goes against much of what we encounter today in interactive media art: the technology is made clearly

VISIBLE. But then again, this exhibition clearly transcends the field, the scope of a debate which would limit itself to temporary issues of process and ephemeral content. Vasulka is pounding his fist here, and one hopes that the sound will resonate beyond the walls of the ICC Center, which has given us here one of the great solo exhibitions of the nineties.

Stephen Sarrazin