

4

RUSS CONNOR INTERVIEW with Woody Vasulka & Steina Vasulka

Page 1

RUSS: That's interesting. I'd like to ask you about that topic again.

WOODY: In the image sense...I have a whole rap about what I call internal models, or about the models of image. One, which is the traditional one relying on camera...

RUSS: Did you say internal models?

WOODY: Yeah. I would say first models of image. One derives internally through ~~shall we say~~ ^{let's say} electronic means, ^{which means} the organization of image is derived internally. The other is derived from the let's say light space to the camera which is ~~traditionally from~~ ^{to film camera or} camera obscura ~~or~~ ^{television camera which is} only extended camera obscura. ^{These two} Models - what I mean by models is that the nature ~~of~~ or the light space ^{??} the alignment with ~~a~~ ^{particular} edges ^{and} of information giving you in fact the model. If you rely on an internally organized model then you have to in fact position or couple it, every component of the image. Of course there ^{a certain} is always ~~every~~ point is identical - or can be identical, but then the whole question of ~~model~~ ^{model} to the screen becomes the domain of time we seem to get all the models ~~for~~ from your storages or compilations to the screen. It becomes extreme high domain problem because your camera can get it instantly it's ^{-tinuously} ~~constantly being~~ repeated through copying or surveilling ^{the lightspace.} But this would be kind of a second subject. Image as a model. Because image, once it's on the screen it is a display of that. But it has to be conceived before it ^{comes} ~~is~~ on the screen: in one case from the camera, ~~the~~ the other ^{case} from internally organized ^{image} electronic components like wave form generators or computer or video...

RUSS: Doesn't the term "model" itself suggest a didactic purpose? to teach?

WOODY: So? No. Because I'm talking about image totally devoted?... in a sense of disregarding the content as ² symbolic or iconic or interpretive. I'm talking about image as a particular construct. ~~In~~ television it's the construct line by line,

by timing components and energy distributions we construct - in fact a very artificial ~~we~~ construct of the image. What comes to it is then the subject or the content itself, is the subject of a whole different story, but how it's constructed - that is the model stage I'm talking about. It's derived from the camera or ~~is~~ internally organized. What it means is a whole different ~~story~~ story - subject, narrativity....

RUSS: That's what I think is very key and maybe we can ^{even} begin with that. To me, that's an exploration - if you want to reach a lot of people with this show, which I would like to do, that's news to most of them - that there is a television picture before there is a ... that's Kojak. You could start on that ~~very~~ elementary level. It's elementary to me because my understanding of it is still elementary....

WOODY: Maybe I could start this way. I look at the television frame as an object, it is constructed from those things physically - time, energy, as a construct, in a sense of ~~not~~ physicality. From this material or materiality I can in fact now ^{feel} feel there's a construct

because it can be controlled, it can be touched - not directly with the hands but through knobs ⁱⁿ and controlled situations and that's basically what we're doing, translating the real physicality of the world into controlled physicality. And the television beam is ~~just~~ just good to demonstrate that.

RUSS: I wonder if we start off ^{right} ~~from~~ there and at some point ^{we} jump ~~off~~ out of that and go into personal history. It's ^{maybe} a good way to begin. As we talk, could you keep in mind where there are tapes that ^{we} ~~you have~~ ^{we} done that might serve in a sense to illustrate that, ^{which} ~~that~~ we could cut to?

WOODY: In fact, there's the most crucial approach, I would say, to our work is the horizontal ^{travel. ~~side~~} ~~travel~~, if you recall some of the early work ^{we have} ~~there is~~ a lot of ^{frames that} ~~travel~~ horizontally which has something to do with two times, ^{as} ~~what~~ I call them two time zones: one

referential which is relatively ^{steady} stable, the other drifting. We have numerous tapes like that so we can put up some ^{of them these} on the screen and we can then specify the problem.... or nitty-gritty.

RUSS: One of the things I admire about the work you two have done over the years ^{is} what seems to me an intense dedication to finding out what is the television image ^{nature of} before there's a picture on it, before there's Kojak or Marcus Welby - ^{to explore} before the alphabet of video, ^{and} the vocabulary. Is that the way you see it yourselves, as what you're doing?

WOODY: So first of all I guess we have to realize to work in television that behind the television frame, behind the meaning, behind the image there is a physicality in the sense of any other medium ^{there is certain} a physicality which in the case of television is manifested through a frame which carries the image and is in fact a construct. It's ^a construct ^{area} line by line which then provides the space or provides the display for television image, which is coded into this particular frame. And since ~~is~~ we pay a lot of attention to that aspect we have developed a particular relationship to that frame as being controllable, or being accessible through another means, for example ^{with} through non-camera means - internally generated images which have ^{something} to do with possibilities of placing energy ⁱⁿ particular proportions ~~into~~ this time-construct of a frame. But again it's a specific approach I'm describing. It's ^{to} a very ordinary kind of relationship ~~with~~ the image which has developed in working with a television frame in that way. ~~is~~ So I don't know how to place it in ordinary jargon. I had to develop all that language ^{with} certain components myself, so I add that particular interpretation to it, so maybe you could ask...

RUSS: Maybe this is not the right time but I would like to ask since you have so much understanding of the engineering aspect of video, could we go back a little bit with both of you, to where you came from and how you got into video and maybe that will shed some light on the different approaches you've taken within video. Steina?

-roduced to it

STEINA: Well I was interested by Woody so I think we have to trace it to the origin.

RUSS: Can we be even more biographical? You're from Iceland, is that correct?

STEINA: Yes, I was born and raised in Iceland and trained as a violinist. And that's what I was doing, I was free-lancing as a violinist in New York when Woody started bringing home those toys from a place where he worked. As a matter of fact...

RUSS: You met Woody in New York?

STEINA: Oh no, I met him in Prague. I was studying violin in Prague and I met him and we came here together in '65. And so we were here five years before we sort of landed in video. Woody started in '69 somewhere in the summer. We started spending nights over ~~in~~ ^{at} the place he was working which was called "Lloyds Productions" - we were doing an industrial show for television, an industrial exhibit I guess it was, ~~I-guess...~~

WOODY: I think we can scrub that part of my background...

STEINA: All right.

RUSS: Are we going to get a selected ^{-we} version of your history?

WOODY: Let's make it very...to talk about Harvey Lloyd right now, he was a very sweet character but...

RUSS: Let's talk about whatever you want to talk about, but is it maybe useful for the audience to know that you were in film, ~~school~~ - you studied engineering ^{at} ~~in~~ school?

WOODY: It's kind of a paradox. I studied hydraulic engineering which I never had any use for, because my mind was never mathematical, for example, and there was a lot of calculation. So by family tradition I became a trained engineer, but in my private interest I did a lot of writing in poetry and in fiction. I'm in a way a literary-oriented mind. By coincidence I went through film school in Prague which I appreciated very much, so it gave me some practice in image. But it was rather to the narrative,

and kind of symbolic content of image oriented work^{that} I had done, even if I learned it in kind of documentarian ~~branch~~^{branch}, I was still practicing poetry. That was my general background. I still hope it is my^{general} background.

RUSS: Were you involved in the Czech pavilion at Expo' or did I have that wrong?

WOODY: No, but strangely enough when I came here it was '64, in about two years I got working in New York City in many multi-screen projectinns and multi-screen film work for Montreal exhibit. So indirectly. I had not participated in the Czech part of ~~it~~ that multi-media presentation but I landed in multi-media on the American side. I guess I was ~~kind of~~^{in a way} predestined to do some kind of media work I would say, compared to the literary experience. But I could never practice in film. I could do it but I could never find a mysterious challenge in it. But with video it was kind of instant devotion because ~~of~~ the non-materiality of it and the mystery of it were just overwhelming. Even it was of course the simplicity to begin with, but then eventually it came to a whole kind of pre-occupation.

RUSS: How did you...what was the historic day when you first picked up a portapak? How did that happen?

WOODY: That was through a place I worked in and it was in '69. In fact very important for me was seeing Howard ~~Weinst~~ (sp 2) Wise' exhibit, "Television as a Creative Medium".

Steina: I think that gave us all the excuses to go ahead. We had already been doing feedbacks and stuff. We sort of did it for each other and ^{we} didn't know if it had any meaning or could be justified ^{by} ~~to~~ society, I don't know. But seeing that exhibit, and seeing that other people were dealing with the same kinds of things. We walked in there and we found Nam June on the floor, fixing the t.v.-bra. And I realized ~~that~~ in retrospect that that had a great deal of influence on us.

RUSS: Nam June Paik?

STEINA: Not he in particular but that scene, that exhibit, everything that was in it. Actually I remember best Siegel piece, Einstein.

WOODY: For us, Siegel and that branch, I also respected...

RUSS: This is Eric Siegel, for ~~those~~^{people} who don't know...

WOODY: It's interesting how video got sidetracked into art interpretation or art world....

RUSS: Do you think that's unfortunate?

WOODY: No but it's ^{simply totally} misleading to my interpretations, I think.

There was a phenomenon ~~that~~^{which} went beyond the category of art. It was a particular phenomenon in time and...

RUSS: Of course my orientation is that there is nothing beyond the category of art. That's a different...

WOODY: Right. Of course it is... To summarize that, in that exhibit I have totally completed my experience. (TAPE DROPS OUT)

RUSS:... it was beautiful, sculpturally. The tape he was showing never got^t seen very well, I think. But somehow it almost didn't matter because it ~~just~~ was beautiful as an object.

WOODY: So there were a number of these ~~but~~ but of course I had seen Paik's piece at Binghamton at Ralph Hocking's place.

STEINA: That was later, that was ~~a~~ year later.

WOODY: It was a year later. That blew my mind absolutely. It was just _____ (Le Sejour?) piece...

STEINA: You know the three, the red, green and blue guns going on _____ just endlessly? That is one of his best pieces.

WOODY: So you see his latest work is for me ~~just~~ like going back to dealing with structure of narrative, narrativities and all those factors which is very important to him, I'm sure. Some of it I also like very much. Like the "Guadalcanal", but it's a whole different position.

RUSS: We're not taping now so we can talk freely. I was very impressed with the "Guadalcanal", but I hear people say - people who

used to think very highly of Nam June, like Fred Barozik or someone would say, "Isn't it too bad about Nam June?" On the basis of Guadalcanal

STEINA: Really?

WOODY: That was a comeback for ~~him~~ me...

STEINA: I mean "Blow by Blue?" was for me "too bad for Nam June."

WOODY: Yeah, right. That's something that I don't care for. But it was a total comeback, through Guadalcanal. It's the "personal journalism" as I call it, it's a new kind of open-ended...

STEINA: Absolutely original.

WOODY: IT has some consistency with what Juan Downey did, some strange coincidental relationship. But "Guadalcanal" has vastly complex sociological structures. It's a whole different ball game. And if people don't see that they're just kind of...

STEINA: That's okay.

WOODY: It's just their problem.

RUSS: Good, I'm glad to hear that.

("This is take number four of the Vasulkas, it's June 29, '77
Cable Arts _____")

~~***~~ ^{were} RUSS: We ~~are~~ just discovering that the exhibition at the Howard Wise gallery in 1969, "Television as a Creative Medium" was something of a watershed for both of us. I mean that is a show that certainly accelerated my interest in video and got you guys deeper involved yourselves. How about the origins of the Kitchen. Can we talk about that? That was, still is a very prominent gallery in New York City devoted to video and electronic music. And I think of you people as the - pardon the expression - ~~as~~ the parents of it. Didn't you get it off the ground?

STEINA: So I'm the mother of the Kitchen, you're the father of ~~it~~ the Kitchen.

RUSS: The chief cooks.

WOODY: Right. Can I backtrack to Howard Wise' exhibit? What was, what still is astonishing to me is that it in a way completed totally my television experience ^{art} as a genre, or video ~~experience~~ as genre, a concern of a genre, because it had all components that

HAVE been through time only extended, they had not been reinvented. Like, it was image processing, colorizing. There was raster processing, repositioning of the scan lines and self processing. There was a time-delay ~~work~~ ^{-ing work,} there was a sculptural work there. So all these components, ^{since that exhibit} I have never seen performed, in a way, conceptually different. Video was in a way completed by that show for me.

STEINA: It touched all ^{the} areas.

WOODY: And it's very strange, because we're still doing video, or kind of associated with video, but it has totally different meaning now, for ~~me~~ example to me, because that was video. What I'm doing now has different meaning now. Going back to the Kitchen.

RUSS: Let's pick ~~that~~ that up later, because I'd like to pursue that. Let's get some history over with. How about the Kitchen? You mentioned that you were involved in multi-screen art works or light shows or whatever it was in the '60's then when the Kitchen started you began the multi-channel ^{video} pieces. Am I getting things in the wrong order here?

STEINA: Yes, well, we did them before. The thing is, we got so many people visiting us at home that we had no privacy left so we were already wondering about ~~the~~ if we could find any place and there was no place, there was no video theater. There were a couple, but they were dedicated to their kind of work, they weren't open to other artists coming in. A friend of ours showed us this place and we just fell in love with it. So I think the Kitchen originated - there was some idea behind it - but mostly it was that wonderful space that was there. And we started fixing it up not knowing really what we wanted to do with it. And as it turned out we couldn't use it. We couldn't possibly use it seven nights a week. So we started inviting anybody else who had anything to express to come in there. Luckily enough we got this musician ~~who~~ to organize avantgarde music - which was at that point much more advanced than video. And their contribution to the

Kitchen was great. They just gave us so much. We just learned so much from these ^{-ose} people in the sense that they had tradition and culture and were dealing with electronic medium in a way that we haven't even ~~approach~~ approached it yet, seven years later. I mean "we" the video generation, in the sense of discipline and form and originality that these people have and had.

WOODY: At that time there was in a way a vacuum in a space that would allow performance of that kind. There were a few places, as you remember Automation House and ~~a few~~ others which would of course schedule very sophisticated electronic works. But it wasn't the open scene. So all our contribution was, when I see it in time, was to provide a time-sharing space. Soon it just grew out of our hands and became so totally programmed. So our credits were ~~partly~~ ^{truly} as the mediators of that particular ^{physical} facility - like paying the rent and all those things - and I would say a certain open-mindedness not to avant-garde, but to non-avant-garde in fact. To what was highly culturally polluted environment; ^{from} ~~like~~ rock and roll to kind of homosexual theater - we had that kind of possibility of ~~expanding~~ ^{tending} our interests beyond the narrow crowd of avant-garde. I was in fact surprised when the first ^{Kitchen} legitimate avant-garde came to the ~~theater~~. It never truly came. It was always somehow around but we had developed that particular.. I would say avant-garde in this narrow let's say video sense. But again there are many ~~people~~ other video people that would not consider that a place for them. It was not culturally defined, ~~that's~~ ^{want} that's what I ~~was~~ ^{want} to say. It was totally ambiguous. That's what I am proud of.

STEINA: It was also a problem that we didn't understand then. We never invited anybody to perform there. We never asked anybody to do anything there. People came to us and as long as we had it we managed never to turn anybody down. Because we had that muhh time ~~on~~ ^{our} hands. By now the Kitchen is very ~~and~~ overcrowded and they cannot accommodate everybody who wants to perform there. So it was self-running. And we didn't do anything for the artists

either. We didn't do a think for them. They had to sweep the floor, they had to set up the chairs, they had to take ^{care of} the collection at the door, and it's fantastic how much they enjoyed it. Print ^{-ing} their own posters. So our contribution wasn't that great, ~~and~~ we just let people slave for themselves.

RUSS: One of your major contributions was showing them your own works there, which were very beautiful. Can you describe some of those early works and the origins of them. Maybe we might even be able to see a little of them.

STEINA: The best work we did there we don't even have a tape of.

It was so beautiful, we called it "Gemini" and we had those two ~~naked~~ ^{naked} boys, they sort of descended from the ceiling down, and we had all of those screens, ^{like} ~~we had~~ six or eight monitors ...

WOODY: I didn't know that was the best work of ours. You see how different we are.

STEINA: It must be the best because we don't have any record of it.

WOODY: ...maybe with the two naked girls descending from the ceiling. It's an interesting phenomenon.

STEINA: Maybe that was what it was.

WOODY: It's an interesting recollection, I wouldn't...

STEINA: Oh, I love that. It is just that among others. We did those live performances. And we performed video which ^{the} you can only do if you have all the machines there if it's yours and you have a lot of time then you can perform video.

WOODY: You see, we kind of obtained multi-monitors, I mean we got them cheap so to speak, and a good size, 25 inch _____ -Carlson's so we established that habit of showing on multi-screen. For example I ~~never~~ liked multi-channel in the sense of multi-information matrix ^{as other} ~~like some~~ people would do. We would rather relate all the screens to a single movement, like horizontalities. We did a lot of work in which the horizontal frame was cut loose. It's a conscious ~~re~~ timing effort - retiming the horizontal synch. So maybe that would be a sample we could look at and give you some visual introduction to ^{that particular} ~~the~~ direction. And then we stayed with this multi-channel and ^{it} ~~we~~ ^{even} probably stayed behind after ~~video~~

~~they~~ ^{we} left and became kind of a footprint on the kitchen.

RUSS: Did there come any point when you thought of making videotapes that could be seen ^{by} ~~of~~ broadcast as any kind of goal, as of something you wanted to do?

STEINA: ~~Not~~ Not really as a goal in the sense of making it for a broadcast, but I would love to see my tapes on broadcast. I think ~~that~~ ^{that kind of} people would watch them. But if you mean audience-oriented geared toward ~~an~~ audience, no I don't think so.

WOODY: I have this dilemma with what mass culture means. Because I constantly detect that people would like to participate in a some kind of ^a common unconscious ~~of~~ living or building a common myth, like the youth cult, or ^{like} Hollywood at ~~its~~ ^{its} best was doing, and also rock and roll has done this together ~~ness~~ of the sixties. I have a great dilemma with that, because the number or the participation is only time-conscious. It exists in particular time. I'm much more interested in ~~things~~ ^{a certain} things that are in fact indirect or placed culturally so that at ~~some~~ point you have to stumble over them if you grow up. That's how I came to liking poetry. It was a very buried stream which I had to find ^{an} by accident. So I have no great desires to participate in mass cultural medium. I would rather hope that some of these ^{streams} ~~things~~ would be buried somewhere ~~it~~ ⁱⁿ ~~my~~ ^{my} ~~might~~ work and may eventually be found. It doesn't mean that I don't want to work. I don't know what it ~~means~~ is. I don't know how to work for legitimate television. I don't know how to ^{even} address a television which I have home directly as a person to ^a person. I work ~~directly~~ ^I with television as material. I build it ~~together~~ together, put it together physically or extend it and control it. And I understand what it is. But what it is, I eventually believe television - it's like what we are, we in fact create a myth of television, but there's no unity between the television and me yet. I'm trying to build some relationships. I have the possibility ^{ies} now to use the medium to in a way communicate to a larger audience. We did not have that before. We were kind of confined into our own environment. But it was for _____

in a way coming to terms with broadcast or technological exchange we are suddenly facing the possibilities of having this mode of work.

RUSS: The ~~prop~~ prospect of the greatest hits of the Vasulkas on a video disc at your local record shop...

WOODY: It's always possible. It's kind of a very strange notion. All of it is possible.

STEINA: Even if it wasn't the greatest hits and sell five million, it could be something that could sell in the hundreds and the thousands and it could be wonderful.

Because luckily good composers

(Here tape develops ~~a~~regular noise - hard to understand til the end)

(TAPE ONE SIDE TWO)

WOODY: How sweet of you Steina. I don't know where we... ^{You} ~~we~~ will probably have to eventually edit. We'll see.

STEINA: Just don't ask us why we came to Buffalo.

RUSS: Or about the impact of video on the Buffalo working class?

WOODY: That would be interesting. I have this dream to videotape the people coming out of the factories. ^{If you} You come from Europe, ^{& you} have this ~~kind of a~~ hang-up about this mass of workers, the humiliating experience ^{like} of a working day. People don't understand that it's the...they just think it's ^{just} the content of their life. I was like that. I also went in the factory and I went out in this mass. But I'm going to do it eventually. I have to insult the masses somehow. I have to be somehow...

STEINA: You have to be strong.

WOODY: Maybe they would like me to insult them because then they could hate me.

RUSS: Steina, one of the questions I have related to your work, ^{being shown widely} ~~to~~ your tapes, are you still doing tapes? Because ~~the~~ what we're seeing here is the direction of video installation, which is not very widely distributable, as you mentioned.

STEINA: No, I also document ^{it}. I also go around and make tapes of it. That's actually what I've been doing the last year. The type of tapes I have ^{any} been doing. You haven't been doing tapes, you have been doing films ⁱⁿ this last couple of years. And I have been doing that, mostly what I call ~~my~~ machine vision. And then all kind of color field type work, or working with grain and like ^{beading?} bleeding of colors and this kind of absolute no-image. So I could show you some examples of that.

RUSS: Can you talk about them a little bit as if we were seeing them?

STEINA: That's really hard because I would have to be looking at ^{to see them.} them. It's just...

RUSS: How do you relate the two? To the average viewer, like me,

the installations and the abstract tapes seem two different orientations.

STEINA: They are totally unrelated. Because one is sort of a pre-occupation with space - sort of with time and space, and the other thing is absolutely surface, two-dimensional, and deals with texture^{and grain.} So they are in a way opposites, I compensate one for the other. Also the installations I do all in black and white and the other I do almost all in color.

WOODY: I would say it's very hard to... we sometimes think we have the kind of direction or style, but we have violated that so many times. Like one time I wanted to be purist and to use only generated image. I would not touch the camera image. Other times I just don't mind violating those rules. And I found that in Steina's work even much more pronounced. It's so contradictory, in a way. Because sometimes it's totally like, as she said, light or surface oriented, the other case it's solely physical. And in my case, I have this schism now. ^{In one sense arithmetic} ~~once~~ I deal with ~~mathematical~~ image, in the other case I deal with scan-processed image. One so physical or so analog, the other ^{one} so digital or so abstract in a mathematical sense...

RUSS: Could you stop there and talk about the two in more and more detail?

WOODY: I would put it this way: the main key towards what appears to be a style or direction is usually embedded in the tools. It's the evolution of the tools which in our work we usually ~~are~~ illustrate. That means our work may not be illustration, but that's definitely the outward or the structural - how it looks like - ~~it is~~ usually imprinted, or the result of a particular tool. So we went from very simple tool to more sophisticated, complex video tools - colorizers, multi-layer keyers. And eventually we arrived ~~at~~ ^{to} scan processors. In that evolution each of those components have definitely affected ~~or~~ imprinted the visual style. Now the same happens to us. Through the evolution of the tools we are arriving to a digitally-organized image which a priori I could never find a

Because
motive ⁱⁿ ~~for~~ such an image. It's ~~was~~ totally alien to me by my non-
mathematical nature. But I deal with it since it has the con-
sistency of the evolution of the tool. Because I'm not really
obsessed with style. In fact, style has no meaning to me. I
found that constantly a tradition in my work. But all the pos-
sibilities of dealing with the tool, ^{or} ~~with~~ the technology, in fact
evolving this self-learning process ^{through} ~~with~~ the tools and in fact
mastering that with our own environment and economical unit as
two individuals, that is crucial to me. In fact I'm looking
for some possibility of acquiring a knowledge which would probably
give me some security. So I would say that would be the main line
since I've been watching ~~who~~ with great interest what ~~has~~ ^{been} I'm
doing as disrelated individual to what I am. So it is that kind
of path I would trace in my own work. And basically in our work.

STEINA: In case you show ^{that} ~~the~~ tape I'll just make the comment in
case you ^{select it} ~~show~~ _____ . The Machine Vision comes out
of Woody's background, that he was a machine maker, he did this
kind of ... in film he did this kind of panning and type of things that
he needed to construct the tools that I'm now using. But I also
now integrating into ^{my} ~~the~~ work my background, which is the violin.
I used the violin, the stroking - there's a bow on a string - to
trigger the electromagnetic spectrum in the sense that I would use
it to switch between two cameras and things like that.

WOODY: That relates to a ~~sound~~ sample, by the way.

STEINA: Yes, that relates only if you select that sample then ~~that~~ ^{this}
is the introduction to it.

WOODY: It's a very good example by the way. I think that should
be noted. It's a very interesting one.

STEINA: I'll just give you that tape, ^{with you,} our copy of it and you can
look at it and see if you like it.

WOODY: If we characterize ourselves as a working team, that would
probably be the key understanding ~~to~~ what we do. That we can ex-
change particular physical experiences, like Steina was using a
lot of the tools which ⁺ developed for a different purpose. She'd

simply apply them to a whole different... I learned from her this untraditional look at image and treatment in time, which is her very much musically developed discipline ~~into~~ tools. Which I never really had because I thought camera was a matter of abuse. To the camera there is a picture. But eventually the whole discipline and structuralism in fact I inherited from her. The freedom of non-narrative literary structures, which I was brought up with and worshipped for a long time. This is the level of ~~impotence~~ ^{interchange}. Because in work you cannot truly share, you cannot work, you cannot create in a unit of two. You can in fact make a creative decision only in a unit of one, which we were both witness to.

RUSS: So that sometimes you each become the assistant of the other.

WOODY: That's exactly what it is.

STEINA: That's exactly what happened/. Sometimes you wouldn't even know it. Sometimes it was so fluid that one ^{of us} would take over and since we trust each other we have no problem ~~and~~ in just giving up the ego to the other, and then without knowing it, it would have changed the balance again. So in those pieces that we used to do together, we cannot identify ^{in many cases} whose idea it was, whose development it was, it was totally...

WOODY: But the performance itself is always,

STEINA:...there's always an individual...

WOODY:...yeah, because you have to either step out, because you become very tired after three o'clock when you've been working on a piece, you may just give up. And the other picks it up and *eventually* performs it or ~~eventually~~ does it. So it's that kind of...

(TAPE DROPS OUT)

STEINA:...leaving tonight I guess. Because you were talking about him yesterday.

RUSS: He's going back to New York City tonight?

RUSS: I'm very bad at maintaining a train of thought...

WOODY: You need a script girl, they usually do that for the giants...

STEINA: We were through with the last thread so you can just start a new one.

RUSS: I want to ask a ^{really} ~~very~~ dumb conventional question because...

~~you-men~~ of the tapes that you've done, you mentioned that you have ~~one~~ work that ^{was a favorite of yours which} ~~you gave done that~~ is not available on tape but the tapes you have done - do you have individual favorites, the two of you, and are they the same? Steina, what do you think?

STEINA: It's very hard. The favorite changes all the time. And then we find an old tape ~~and~~ that we had thrown off as not being very good and we say "Oh, this is now our favorite" and then of course it isn't. I personally always liked "Noise Field" very much. Maybe I like it specially because it seems ^{to me that} not that many other people like it. It's maybe sort of a step-child type of...

WOODY: Kind of a retarded child syndrome...

RUSS: What was the thinking behind "Noise Field"?

STEINA: There wasn't really any ... well Woody did all ~~the~~ the thinking on that, I think. You set up the circle and the noise. You set it up, set it in motion and then you walked away because you said "this is it!" and I sat down and I pressed the recording button and started working with it which is sort of typically what you do. If I ~~set~~ set something up Woody is pressed to come in and sort of perform it. I remember very well in this case. You set it up, and I was very impressed and you just walked away.

RUSS: Let me ask if you object, when we showed that tape - we show part of "Noise Field," is it all right to continue some that dialogue over the beginning of it ^{of} or does that offend you?

STEINA: Certainly. No, but at a certain point the sound is...there is a sound/image relationship. We should actually talk about the sound/image relationship.

WOODY: Yes, but we would have to go to the genesis of our work. But the sound/image interchange is very important to us. Because in fact, all the control modes - what I mean by the control modes, ^{is} the change of the image in time is usually kind of a relatively slow voltage change. So it's a natural source for

voltage control of the sound. So we have done a lot of sound/image...

RUSS: Which is reciprocal? Sometimes the image controls the sound...

WOODY: Right, exactly, so we could generate images from sound/wave forms and we could also influence the sounds ~~through~~ ^{from} the structure of brightnesses of electronic - I mean from television image.

RUSS: Is there one particular work we ~~could~~ ^{could} show that would dramatize that?

STEINA: "Noise Field" is one for sure.

WOODY: There 's a piece called "Evolution" which is kind of a crucial ~~time~~, personally. It was the first time when I attempted to make a composition in three parts, kind of a triptych, again slipping back into ^{the} narrative structures. That particular piece contains these most important components to me which is: sound/image exchange, image/sound control, and ^{the} retiming - the horizontal drift. The name was given by a friend so I'm innocent of that. But it's called "Evolution." And that contains all the codes of early work. So that would ^{be} my favorite - but again, favorite, it really changes. It's like in music. I stumble over works which I kind of culturally dismissed, like Brahms was totally forbidden to me because I grew up in an environment which Brahms wasn't a particular favorite. But now I found out that Brahms is a great contribution to my personal interpretation of... That happens to me all the time in the other arts, in painting and in video ~~it~~ happens to me also. I suddenly discover these a-synchronous importances. But I still prefer working ⁱⁿ ~~with~~ electronic image because I think it is - not only to me - I think it has a ~~supreme~~ ^{supreme} importance, otherwise I wouldn't deal with it, of course. But I feel it is the medium that incorporates a possibility of working with rather metaphysical environments.

RUSS: Do you think that...

STEINA: Wait a minute, Russ, before you ask a question. (checking tape cassette)

RUSS: What do you think is a necessary audience preparation for... (telephone)

Let's make the assumption that it's desirable that as many people as possible appreciate what's going on in video - let's say particularly what you're doing.

We know that to get the most out of painting a certain amount of education is desirable... Do you think that it's required that to understand the works that you're doing that a person should know what horizontal drift is, for example, or get a higher technical education than the average person has?

WOODY: So again, since I have the privilege of putting into philosophical terms, I would say it's the understanding of time which I personally gained from working in television. That I can treat that ~~that~~ screen as a particular time-conscious or time-influencable surface or whatever. That means the notion of physicality of time, ^{or} time in a particular distance or position or space, became in a way from ~~a~~ phrase of spoken word became a physical experience. I can ^{even} ~~some-~~ ^{better} ~~how~~ progress to the ^{let's say} understanding of the general theory of relativity. Which is totally beyond my well-educated background. I just could not comprehend that as a possibility that I could place that thought there. Now I can ^{not} ~~can~~ even see that light as a ~~propagation~~ propagation of light, which is the philosophical boundary of our way of dealing with the universe is in fact relatively slow. It's in fact very slow. It's the bounce between moon and earth which takes a second or something. Suddenly there is a whole different understanding of the space ^{or} ~~of~~ the universe. That for me was very important, that I could through this medium gain a didactic understanding of particular environment. That in fact is the right motive. That's what I think through the work should be understood. That brings me back to the educational kind of environment - since I'm teaching. But I feel that the teaching in the sense of university ^{of} ~~and~~ students is in fact very confined environment. In a way ^{in which} elitist, a priori it sounds good, you work at the university, you work for the society. But in fact it is retreated from the possibilities we had as artists in a way working in a larger milieu of those ideas distributed through art and maybe through legitimate television as well. That we can indicate those transformations. That personal experience then maybe can become way through the means or the codes we put into our work, or appear in our work. And I think it ~~is~~ also has a political implication. From this romantic revolutionary street work we become in a way conscious of earth as an environment in which the establishment maintains the orbital surveillance. That's in a way the place through which today the Earth is being made secure or insecure. It is also ... it's the physicality of ^{this} ~~the~~ environment - electronic environment - which then provides the environment we live in. So I would find this very important that we can, as individuals, disclose the secrets of the establishment in that sense, and try to understand what's going on on all the levels. I think that is the supreme political duty.

RUSS: Related to that, you've had recent experience showing your work in Europe. Do you find the response on the same level as you do around here? Is there a gap of some kind?

WOODY: I just... speaking openly it may sound arrogant or very much unfair... I found the ~~the~~ European mode of thinking very much involved ~~with~~ in kind of social alignment - post-Marxist class-oriented understanding of society - which pays a lot of attention to the primary relationship between the means of production and individuals, between the oppressive capitalists and the workers... Most of the intellectual work gets backed down on this basic neo-romanticist or post-Christian level of understanding of all the political struggles. I'm hoping that I could convey the idea that just placing these importances, or these political stresses outside of the primary level can in fact alter the whole structure of political meaning of those antagonisms and all those - I didn't say it well....we have to scratch that. You see I grew up in an environment in which ~~a~~ revolutionary romanticism was still alive. I did in fact believe in certain instances that it is the human conditions that can be altered. But I've certainly given up on this particular...It is a great sport, a great interest or great passion, but...to see it as a sense of being,,. I think there are many other possibilities. And this one- is one of them. Just to understand. First we understood that the globe was round - it became an object in space. Now we can locate it at least in particular relationship to the solar system and ^{to} the rest of the galaxies. I think these steps of understanding of our presence is extremely important to our interpretation of being.

RUSS : I think I may ~~be~~ have been interpreting you too literally. Do you see ^{inter-}experimental work in video as somehow helping to break down national barriers in any way?

WOODY: I don't know because most of the Europeans that come for example here, and they see the surface, they see this junk, the industrial junk, equipment - they get caught in the first level. They usually accuse us of being misled or being coopted.

STEINA: You talk about Europeans as "them" but ~~you~~ ^{don't} forget they are also "us".

WOODY: Right. It's an exchange. I like the cultural background which I've inherited. But I understand American society as the society that deals with ~~the~~ values

differently. This doesn't mean much to American society as a value system, but it still means a lot to European Intellectuals.

RUSS: Go back to that phrase "coopted." In what sense ^{would view} they see you as being coopted?

WOODY: First of all, of course, we are, in a way, an institution, in our own way. We are very much related to a support structure. We cannot maintain or develop our environment or the equipment through let's say selling of the product. So we are somehow very much linked to like funding. And that is very much again related to the ^{rest of the} ~~other~~ values of the society. We are judged at some level somewhere - we are kind of maintained here. Which is surprising to me as well. Why the society should maintain this kind of research. I have explanations for that, but that's all kind of personal. But even this particular level existence ~~is~~ ^{is} by many Europeans put into the dilemma of establishment and anti-establishment as in a class-conscious structure. And it's related to ^{is} ~~is~~ by American system which is in many cases interpreted as kind of a capitalistic, imperialistic... These terms are... I don't have that sort of dilemma. I constantly doubt them, but...

RUSS: Do you ever feel inhibited by any of the funding you get from various government or state or private sources? Is there any inhibition on your creativity?

WOODY: Do you want to answer that?

STEINA: No.

RUSS: Is there any danger of it? Perhaps it is something to be alert for...

STEINA: Yes, well, what should the danger be?

RUSS: I don't know. Is there any self-censorship that one might impose because one is taking a grant from some source that might be offended if you took some particular direction in your work.

STEINA: No. There might be a self-censorship in the sense of when I ~~get~~ get a grant I feel that I have been very lucky, but now it's up to me to really use ~~the~~ this opportunity. I've been granted an opportunity, and that I have to use it. That's again that Christian morality I guess or whatever. But I never know if I'm ever ^{ever} going to be granted that again. So this is the time to ^{use} use it. So, I ~~actually~~ work very hard. I actually do when I teach and get my income that way I don't work that hard, because, I feel I come home ^{exhausted} exhausted from teaching and I feel that I am entitled

to rest and a nice time because I earned my money. But with grants you don't get that. You get very restless and very sort of hunted to work.

WOODY: Yes, but that comes from your... Protestant upbringing. We Catholics don't have that. I have a whole different... I'm continuously surprised that I....

END OF TAPE ONE SIDE TWO

WOODY:...continuously surprised that I ~~can~~ can exist in such an environment. But I feel sometimes that I've been given a job to do these things ~~for~~ with some kind of a return - which is I'm here to disclose certain ^{secrets} principles, which I ~~then~~ then in a way convey back. I don't have other explanation for this. Why would I be living in America, ^{or in Buffalo,} doing this kind of work. But I feel totally free in doing it. I don't feel in a way motivated or modified by any of that. It becomes in a way for me a physical problem. How to develop this environment or how to extend this environment and still being able for example to maintain it, in the sense of repair, in the sense of purchase. How to know, in fact. How to have the knowledge of having it. So the money itself becomes a mediator. But ^{in that.} the purpose - I have no idea why ^{am I} doing it physically. I know why I'm doing it mentally, because I'm interested. Very much.

STEINA: I know why. All societies, all cultures have ^{always} granted money to certain people to accumulate knowledge.

WOODY: I have a different experience from society. I was brought up in a society which was always conscious of experim^{me}ent. But it was always interpreted directly, through a social need, like political application. But this society, maybe I am, I don't see it, I'm not aware of it, and I'm trying to find out where is the moment in which there is an exchange which is the hard cash exchange. I would like to find that, or define it. I haven't found it yet. But there must be some ... There may not be, I don't know. I don't want to testify for the ~~free~~ free society of United States this way. But I haven't found ^{that} the limiting boundaries of this ideological pressure here yet. I don't think it exists.

RUSS: That's very good. We may have pressed that as far as we can. ~~because~~ Can we go back a little bit and pick up - I remember I asked about what kind of technological education an audience ~~is~~ might need.

(non-essential discussion here)

RUSS: This question I think has to do with the relationship of the world of ^{art} making video to the world. And it harks back to the question I asked earlier: what sort of technological education ^{would} do you think an audience would need to appreciate your work at a beginning level at least? What kind of art education, if any, do you think it would be helpful for them to have? Because to me, I can only understand - because I developed as an abstract painter - only understand some kinds of video as an extension of that. I can understand the possibility that people could come directly to it without any interest in painting at all and still enjoy it and I just wondered if you have views on that.

WOODY: It's an interesting dilemma, for example, if you speak about abstract and concrete in the sense that other arts - in particular painting has developed in fact intellectual distraction of form or creating an alternate form. Here in video we went from the other end to it. Our material since we reached for non-~~opera~~ image, was very ambiguous to begin with. It was abstract and it still in many cases is.

(AIRPLANE PASSES)

RUSS: Maybe since the question was so long we may dispense with it, if you could sort of start the answer in some way that establishes the question.

WOODY: So first of all about the terms, abstract and representational.... Let me start again. If we speak for example about the art of video being, in our case, abstract. I think in other arts, especially in painting, the distraction of a form has been an intellectual process in which certain clues of....

(TAPE DROPS OUT)

RUSS: If it seems like ^{any} natural related topic, if you'd care to say ^{at} the end, if you feel any identification with current trends in the visual arts - in painting and sculpture - or whether that's

STEINA: There's actually three questions....^{He's} asking about relationship to the current art, about abstract representation art, and ~~about~~ the education of the audience. So you can pick any part of it.

WOODY: Right. Let me maybe start from the first which is where I started. It's the abstract structure that is usually assigned to ... It's spoken about video being abstract, which is a kind of ... look at it from a painter's point of view,

Scratch it and start again.

In a sense of video being abstract, contrary to other arts, which in fact developed abstraction through conscious ~~the~~ destruction of form or reassembling a new in a way forms. Video came to us as abstract, as ambiguous in its shape. ~~Because~~ We could hardly control it, of course. It was a phenomenon like video feedback. It's a fiery substance, you cannot do anything with it. When you start ~~doing~~ ^{doing} something with it, and eventually you try to create some sense of reality out of it. That means the process ~~is~~ totally different. Of course it's identical in electronic music. One branch of electronic music dreams of total identifying with legitimate music or instrument-like sound. Other branch would say "let's forget that imitation of reality" and take into whole different branch of its own material. So we have ~~hardly~~ ^{barely} reached ... We haven't reached the possibility of making this ambiguous or abstract material of video identifiable with representation of reality let's say in the sense of a camera image. It's very difficult for me to link it aesthetically to art movements as being controlled through a human minds. It's still a struggle to control a tool. For us this is the struggle. In the sense of education, how much do you have to be prepared to conceive of such a thing? I don't think there is "how much". It looks mysterious, it means it looks unexplainable. It is a magic. It was to us and it ~~still~~ is a magic. Once you reach the frontier of understanding of certain structure, there's another one which again is magic and you try to deal with that one. Once you rationalize that one, there's another area. So it's basically, it cannot be rationalized in the sense of material yet. Like maybe sculpture can be understood as material substance. ~~Like~~ ^{the} stone. The structure of stone can eventually be understood. But this material is far from that. And what was the third component?

STEINA: The audience education...

RUSS: Well you touched on that. Maybe...we're running short of time now... we'll let that go. That's excellent, what we've got there. There's one more question which ideally ~~you~~ ^{of you} both could jump on. What can you envisage for the future? Can you anticipate... ~~is~~ is it possible that you'd be working with three-dimensional television in another five years and it will be totally unrelated to what you're doing now or...do you have a crystal ~~ball~~ ^{this} ball on ~~that~~ matter?

STEINA: Well, this is really going to be your question, but I can maybe start or whatever.

WOODY: Go ahead. You must have your dream, your vision...

STEINA: We were just talking about this - that this material came to us and we had to try to, in many cases we took ~~as was~~ ^{this wild} material and we made into type of images that resembled at least recognizable images. Like if they had been gotten through a lens, although they ~~had~~ ^{were} not ~~been~~ gotten that way. Similarly to electronic music being a form that many musicians want to tame ^{into} composition into recognizable instruments, into recognizable music. So we have at least, we have this vision that eventually the computer image will get control to such a degree...

(AIRPLANE BREAK)

WOODY: It's very hard to say that because in fact sometimes we do like that it doesn't resemble anything.

RUSS: Maybe in the interest of time we can try to make it as concise as possible.

STEINA: I couldn't formulate it, but ^{the hint is} ~~it's like~~ that eventually you would be able to, without the lens, to dial images of very fine textures like tree and hair and ^{dots} ~~lines~~ ^{things} running and like that. I don't want to go into that.

RUSS: That's a dream and ^{I think} you ought to talk about it.

WOODY: I have a whole different view on it. Because it's....

RUSS: Steina, talk just a little bit about that image. You'd rather Woody do it?

STEINA: Yes, Woody will do it.

WOODY: I have this kind of, it's not a vision, it's kind of assembling of existing elements. I think we've got what we call media, which can make sound, pictures like television, can even organize like a computer. We're very much interested in three-dimensional images and we have a good friend, Schilling, that has done tremendous work in that field. But again, three-dimensionality ^{for example} ~~again~~ brings us to the crisis of the object. Because it becomes an object and it has ^a whole different meaning ^{it's} - not two-dimensional meaning any more. I think that the future will be in a way of constructing from those elements particular large narrative structures, as strange as it sounds. The possibility of expressing powerful myths as nineteenth century was able to do. But of course it may be only a dream. But it is my dream that there's a possibility of speaking with ^{the medium} ~~meaning~~ directly ^{to} ~~with~~ people

in this very basic manner. It does not have to be coded as highly as we work with. We work with such a remote coding system just to disclose the principle of the codes that they become like minimal or whatever the art eventually is called. But it does not, after the elements are identified, I think they could be used for ~~something~~ synthetic works of that scale. But it won't be one single medium any more. I think the target now is the structure of consciousness as I would say. It is not really the medium. ~~as we the receptors~~ ^{are} It is in fact we that are the receptors. In what way we constructed. in the way we perceive the events, that then becomes the structure of the narrativity. So The next frontier is the next ^{next} narrativity, or narrative structures which will convey larger thought/images, thought/structure and that's what I find as a frontier. So I'm not waiting for the next medium. It may never come.

STEINA: Good Woody, that was a good show.

RUSS: Did you have that punch line ready?

THE END