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### ***THE WEST***

#### **2 channel video installation**

**Steina Vasulka**

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**By: Kathy Tanney**

*Do not attempt to adjust the controls of your television*

*We control the vertical*

*We control the horizontal*

*We can make the picture fuzzy, or give it  
crystal clarity*

*We now return control of your television*

-The Outer Limits (Sci-Fi TV Program) *You are not in charge of the space, it is not your choice-it is somebody else's.*

Steina Vasulka, *Allvision*

When the ten monitors of *The West* black out at the exact same moment that the audio stops on a dime, (all aided by a synchronizer), an exchange occurs. The power to see selectively is returned to the viewers, but not without a sense that there is more to seeing than meets the eye.

Two channels of videotape are checker boarded within a ten monitor matrix- five monitors per channel stacked horizontally in two rows on the floor with a mirror placed underneath them. Viewing is either theater style, or one can stand closer and look down into the wall of monitors reflected in the mirror. The sets of images move away from each other, toward each other, into each other, and become the same image moving in perfect alignment. Natural forms become abstract patterns of changing colors and textures in a stunning video kaleidoscope. The interaction of images completely reorders the act of perceiving and processing visual stimuli. A logic unique to the installation emerges, a language that once introduced, becomes both trance-like and highly precise.

Extending her efforts to divorce photography from the human tendency to selectively edit visual information, Steina uses motor-powered video cameras that survey the environment in even, multidirectional sweeps. The beauty of the Southwestern landscape-specifically New Mexico, the Anasazi ruin in Chaco Canyon and a radio telescope (the Very Large Array) is presented as seen by the mechanical "eyes" of these cameras. The imagery binds time together under the leveling stare of an artificial intelligence.

The structural basis is the circle and the rotating 360-degree panorama, flattened by the video monitor. The cameras are either panning or, if stationary, focused on the radio telescope which scans the sky in a circular motion. The landscape itself swirls across the surface of a mirrored, rotating globe placed in front of the camera. As the landscape bends around the turning sphere-a fisheye view floating within the square monitor-the camera remains central in the image. Elements of simultaneous feedback pervade the work on every level, often insidiously as with the audio environment created by Woody using video-activated audio. Together, video and audio transform the image gathering process of the cameras into an eerie, unpopulated environment running like clockwork

Manipulations of the video footage by custom built electronic processors complete the non-human point of view, the "gaze" of the machine. A horizontal-drift variable clock causes the image to drift continuously. A multi-keyer allows foreground and background shifts. The *Rutti/Etra* scan processor organized an image according to its brightest parts, making a topography, and the digital image articulator combines images, allowing programmed

switching between digital and analog inputs. The result is a symphonic array of machine-generated activity; layering and abstracting information, colorizing, extended panning by equipment specifically designed to let the electromagnetic nature of video express itself. Thus the landscape is not intended to be represented as we see it, but exactly as we do not see it, cannot see it. Steina's visual effects suggest the entire spectra of the invisible: light lifeforms, electromagnetic activity, while the audio track suggests omnipresent frequencies that we do not hear.

In *The West*, surveillance of space is a profound vision of an alternate reality.

*End*