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THE VASULKAS, INC.
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TEL. (505) 471-7181/FAX. (505) 473-0614

March 12, 1992

Fred Barzyk
New Television Workshop
WGBH
90 Windham St.
Boston, MA 02134

Dear Fred Barzyk,

Woody has asked me to write to regarding your generous offer to search the WGBH archives for material pertinent to our project on early electronic tools. We are especially interested in any material on the early use of the Paik/Abe Video Synthesizer, e.g., photos of the machine and its inventors. We would also be very pleased to see early tapes made with the Paik/Abe. I am enclosing a list of the tools we are researching - the ones we have located in good condition that are to be exhibited in Linz. Also enclosed is a brief description of the exhibition.

Please be assured that any original material you might send will be returned if it is clearly marked. Also, let us know the proper credit line.

Thank you for you interest and assistance.

Regards,

MaLin Wilson
Exhibition Co-ordinator

THE VASULKAS, INC.
99 ROUTE 6
SANTA FE, NEW MEXICO 87501

TELEPHONE: 505/471-7181 **FAX: 505/473-0614**

RECEIVER:

Attention Jean Moncrieff

Company Name New Television Wkshp

Fax Number 617/787-0714

SENDER:

Individual'sName MaLin Wilson

Number of Pages (including this sheet) 2

Dear Jean Moncrieff, April 24, 1992

Following please find a copy of the letter we sent via Fred Barzyk regarding our project. Woody called Fred today because we hadn't heard or received a response and Fred referred us to you. As the date of the exhibition in Linz zooms closer we are still hoping to get material from Boston to include in our catalog and on the laser discs we are preparing for the installtion.

We would greatly appreciate any help you can give to us. What is possible?

Thank you,

MaLin Wilson
Coordinator

MAY 1 '92 17:14

Fax Cover Sheet

WGBH

sent to 'Woody Vasulka fax # 505-473-0614 date 5/1 time 3pm

sent by Jean Muncrieff WGBH fax # 617 787 0714

This is page 1 of page(s). If there are problems with this transmittal, please call 617 492 2777 extension

Dear Woody -

Sorry I couldn't come up with anything better @ the synthesizer. I can follow-up with David Atwood if you like - although it may not be in enough time

Send me an invitation to the opening! I'd love to go

best -

Jean

Susan DEPT. (TX) : WKSHOP

DAVID ATWOOD

TELEVISION: DIRECTOR / DESIGNER

30 Forest Road
Acton, Massachusetts 01720
617 / 263-1932

March 28, 1985

Sandra Forman
WGBH Educational Foundation
125 Western Avenue
Boston, MA 02134

Dear Sandra:

Finallly I had a chance to get over to MIT's Center for Advanced Visual Studies, to take a look at the Paik/Abe Videosynthesizer for WGBH. On March 27th I met with Otto Piene and looked over the equipment that now constitutes the synthesizer.

As we agreed, I will give you an informal report on the Synthesizer's condition plus some recommendations for the future. With this report my involvement will end unless arrangements are made for a more formal working relationship.

The central core of the synthesizer, the two mixing/encoding racks and a third scan deflection rack, is at CAVS just about in the same place as it was five years ago when I was there. There are about nine cameras with the synthesizer now. Nothing is cabled up but I was told it was in working condition. There are no lenses with the cameras and I did not see any tripods. (originally there were about sixteen cameras, ten tripods, lenses with all cameras, viewfinders with about six). I did not see any viewfinders for the cameras.

The original synthesizer was a collection of these racks and the equipment in them; cameras, cables, two or three color monitors, four or five black and white monitors, audio amplifiers, gererators, modified TVs, boxes of all kinds of cheap trinkets, turntables, record players, wire, tools, and a lot of other stuff that either helped generate imagery or genarally added to its ambiance. That is, the synthesizer, as first built, was not only a piece of electronic equipment with X number of componants and Y number of cables connecting them, it was much more.

Obviously, it is not in its original condition, but then it is fifteen years old. With the central mixing/encoding units still close to their original condition the original synthesizer is restorable. It has been at the CAVS for some eight to ten years and although some of the peripherals have walked away, it has been preserved remarkably well.

CAVS has some documentation on the synthesizer, some of which they have done. I urged them to save the paperwork as it could be very valuable in any attempt to restore the synthesizer. They also have a copy of the equipment list that Marc Chow drew up before the synthesizer went to CAVS.

Otto and I talked for some time about the history of the synthesizer at CAVS. He seemed somewhat content to have the PAVS continue its residency there, but with discussion of its sale, had some concerns about protecting it from further deterioration.

I recommend that the PAVS be catalogued, and then stored until its future is decided. Historically, this is an extremely valuable work. My recollection is that there were originally five synthesizers designed and built. The first was done at WGBH in 1969/1970. What is at CAVS and what we call the Paik/Abe Videoisynthesizer is really one and a half. for there are two encoding/mixing units. (Two master controls if you will). The second mixer/encoder with the present synthesizer is really what Paik planned for the fifth systhesizer and is #5 in the series so in a way this is two-fifths of the total of central processing units built.

But I don't think its value is in it size or relation to the other PAVSs. I think when Nam June conceived the idea of the synthesizer, he thought not just of the type of imagery it would create but of how it would be used and the types of people who would use it; That is, other visual artists, and semi-technical people who could actually handle the cameras, and mix the signals in a way that had not been done before. What evolved was indeed "low" technology, but it was high art. The artist didn't have to work through producers, directors, camerapeople, or engineers. Instead they could use the device directly. It could not produce a perfect color reproduction of a scene, but it could make video imagery that had never been done before. It was difficult to control, it could not repeat an image exactly from day to day, it was temperamental, and it was in a way fragile, as the slightest move of any camera, knob, or monitor woud make the present image flow change, usually never to return.

The imagery that came from the synthesizer was indeed beautiful. It was unlike any before it, it was hypnotic. To this day, with all the unbelievalby powerful image-making and image-shaping devices, the pictures that came from the PAVS in the hands of Nam June, Ron Hays, Mark Allen, and others has not been equalled which I believe, guarantees its place in the history of video art.

If I were to plan its future, I in the hands of a person who could restore it to its original condition. Then it should end up on permanent exhibition, together with samples of some of the imagery it has created. To do this first would take time to research its history. First, to gather all of the documents, photos, videotapes and paperwork that has been generated on it or about it. All of its "keepers" should be talked to. The "keepers" are the succession of people to use it, fix it and see that it stayed in good health. Nam June was of course the first, I was the second (as I remember), Ron Hays was the third, and there have been a sucession of others after that. Each person kept some records or inherited some from the previous person. The real inside knowledge of the machine is with these people. Whoever restores the PAVS would have to first talk with them.

Once all the tape, documents, photos, etc. were gathered, the restorer could find out what type of equipment is needed to bring it back to original strength. It would be like restoring an antique auto. One would have to go to electronic junk shops for old tube type audio amplifiers, possibly schools to find the same black and white cameras, viewfinders, lenses, tripods. Nam June would have to spend some time showing a person how to modify old color sets to make the same types of patterns the original PAVS did. I see the job of restoring as more time intensive than dollar intensive. I would estimate it would take a person six months to a year, probably not full time, to do the research acquire the equipment, and complete a full restoration.

So here's my guess on a budget (and it is really a guess):

salery 12 months 1/3 time	10000
travel	2000
office expenses	500
replacement electronics	5000
engineering consultant/rebuilding	2000
total	19500

I am basing this estimate on the fact that much of the core synthesizer is still intact. Only the peripherals are missing. To find out what those are, to modifify them (as Nam June and Shuya Abe did), and to integrate them back into a working synthesizer would take more time than money.

Please do not take this as a criticism of MIT and their housing and use of the synthesizer. It is fifteen years old and from the time it was first assembled and given its maiden voyage (August 1st, 1970) "things" that were part of the original synthesizer have somehow walked away. Nam June took some, (he took scan deflected color TVs that were his personal works), some never came to MIT when it moved from the TV workshop in Watertown, some have walked away since. Everyone who has had contact with the device has taken something, whether it was a tape with beautiful imagery or a document, or a piece of cheap plastic that was put on a turntable to make a colorized moving background, or a piece of video cable. (I had for some years an audio generator that was never used, it is now with the TV Workshop.)

Whatever you and WGBH decide, I will be available to help should it be necessary. I have some documents, pictures, and videotape, plus I could give a person a lot of leads.

I hope you find this useful.

Sincerely,

David Atwood

cc: Henry Becton, WGBH
Otto Piene, MIT: CAVS