Woody and Steina Vasulka: Single Channel Titles

Selected Experiments

Adiago
10 minutes 1969-1970

Decay #1
7 minutes, 1970

Decay #2
7 minutes, 1970

Evolution
16 minutes, 1970

Interface
3:30 minutes, 1970

Sketches
27 minutes, 1970

Tissues
6 minutes, 1970

Black Sunrise
21 minutes, 1971

Contrapoint
3 minutes, 1971

Discs
6 minutes, 1971

Elements
9 minutes, 1971

Keysnow, 1971
6 minutes, 1971

Shapes
13 minutes, 1971

Swan Lake
7 minutes, 1971

Distant Activities

6 minutes, 1971

Soundprints
loops, 1971

Spaces 1
15 minutes, 1972

Spaces 2
15 minutes, 1972

All of the pieces listed above are short experiments with the video signal. The work with the scan processor indicates a whole different trend in my understanding of the electronic image...Emphasis has shifted towards a recognition of a time/energy object and its programmable building element-the waveform."

Woody Vasulka, BeauFleuve , Media Study/Buffalo, December, 1979

"We would...make a tool and dialogue with it...We belong to the family of people who would find images like found objects. But it is more complex because we sometimes design the tools, and so we do conceptual work as well."

Woody Vasulka, Beau Fleuve , Media Study/Buffalo, December, 1979

Participation,
60 minutes, 1969-70
Shortly after they arrived in the US from Prague in 1965, Steina and Woody Vasulka began documenting New York City underground theater and music scenes with a portapak. Steina has remarked that she learned the craft of camerawork as documentarian of these celebratory, countercultural scenes of the "avant-garde" during the late 1960s.*Participation* features performances by an anonymous rhythm & blues group led by a young, charismatic singer below a pulsing light show projection at the Fillmore East in New York, and a scene from an off-Broadway drag theater.

"We are primarily known for the generation of electronic imagery with no camera. At one time, however, (1969-1971) we worked primarily with a single camera and a portable recorder. Participation is a new edit of some of that earlier material; it shows the particular way that video has affected us."
(Steina and Woody Vasulka, The Third Annual Video Documentary Festival)
Festival ,Global Village, 1977)

Jackie Curtis' First Television Special

45 minutes, 1970
Early documentary on the famous underground star, Jackie Curtis.

Calligrams
60 minutes, 1970

Calligrams is an example of one of the Vasulkas' earliest experiments with altering the analog video image. Here, what is seen is an image rescanned from the monitor, the only way for them "to capture and preserve the violated state of the standard television signal." The "violations" which they performed on the standard video signal in *Calligrams* include deliberately re-adjusting the horizontal hold of the monitor, and then slowly advancing the reel-to-reel tape manually. The repetition of the horizontally drifting video image not only functions as visual rhythm, but is key to their conceptualization of the video image as unrestricted by the concrete frame, as in film. The Vasulkas have described their work in the 1970s as "didactic," as exemplified in this tape by Steina's explanatory voiceover. Their stated commitment to foregrounding a new electronic imagevocabulary and working with other artist/engineers to develop specific video instrumentation led to the production of work which often reveals the process of its making.

Switch! Monitor! Drift!
60 minutes, 1976

Switch! Monitor! Drift! is one of a series of "machine visions" constructed by Steina in the 1970s. In this documentation of a studio landscape, two cameras signals are combined through a luminance key. One camera is mounted on a turntable; the second camera is pointed at the first. The image from the stationary camera is time-base adjusted so that it appears to drift horizontally across the monitor, exposing the horizontal framing interval, a black (low voltage) area that is normally hidden from the viewer by the edge of the monitor. The signal of the revolving camera is keyed into the black areas of the stationary camera's image (which is drifting horizontally) as well as the black areas of the framing intervals. The revolving second camera continuously pans the studio, occasionally revealing Steina walking around and flipping a directional switch at the turntable. As the tape progresses the luminance key is adjusted to include a broader tonal range through which the signal from the revolving camera is increasingly visible.

> Watching an individual behind a camera 'delivering you '
> space...It was a challenge to me to create a space that would not
> deal with the idiosyncrasy of human vision. (Steina, in Robert Haller,
> "Video Texts," Anthology Film Archives, 1983)

Another characteristic of our work has been a consistent traveling of the frame, horizontal traveling...The television image, rather than a series of fixed celluloid images, is a continuously evolving and decaying sequence of lines beintracked by an electron gun on a phosphor coated television screen. The movements of this electron gun are 'normally' regulated by horizontal and vertical control signals, which insure a stable, non-travelling image. (Steina, Beau Fleuve,
Media Study/Buffalo, December, 1979)

Golden Voyage
28 minutes, 1973
6 Input Keyer-Mixer/Gen-Lock System: George Brown.
Dual Colorizer: Eric Siegel.
1973, 27:36 min, color, sound.

In this early work, an electronic homage to Magritte, the Vasulkas demonstrate fundamental imaging techniques. Inspired by Magritte's painting *The Golden Legend,*, this exercise employs a three-camera set-up, with images layered through a multikeyer, to create the illusion of objects moving through spatial planes. Loaves of French bread embark on a surreal video journey through electronic landscapes, finally arriving in an abstract space. The spectacle of the animated loaves adds a playful spontaneity to this early articulation of illusory space and three-dimensionality in video.

Home
16:47 minutes, 1973
Dual Colorizer: Eric Siegel. Video Sequencer/Video Keyer: George Brown.
Line-locked Strobe: Steve Rutt.

Home is an early experiment in which the Vasulkas transform ordinary household objects through analog imaging devices. With humor and a sense of spontaneous discovery, they animate everyday objects through the application of electronic effects which serve as a primer of early imaging techniques: horizontal drift of layered image planes, colorizing, keying. Apples, shoes, bottles, teapots come to life in surreal tableaux that suggest psychedelic Magritte paintings, as the Vasulkas transform still lifes through the inner dynamic of electronic image processing.

Vasulkas: Selected Works II

Heraldic View
4:21 minutes, 1974
Multikeyer: George Brown.
Waveform Generators: Steven Rutt.

Dual Colorizer: Eric Siegel

1-2-3-4
7:46 minutes, 1974
Programmer/Multikeyer/
H.D.Variable Clock: George Brown.
Dual Colorizer: Eric Siegel.

Soundsize
4:40 minutes, 1974
Scan Processor: Rutt/Etra

Telc
5:10 minutes, 1974
Scan Processor: Rutt/Etra.
Colorizer: Eric Siegel.

Total program: 1974, 21 :57 min, color, sound.

Here the Vasulkas continue to develop the imaging potential of artist-
designed electronic devices, as they formally analyze and
deconstruct the inherent materiality of video. In *Heraldic View,* an oscillator-
generated pattern drifts over a camera image of bricks and stone, the patterns
modulated by sharp bursts of voltage generated by an audio synthesizer.
1-2-3-4 is an exercise in animating numbers, using four cameras and a
multikeyer to re-order and layer the image planes. *Soundsize* continues
the Vasulkas' investigation into the relationship of sound and image. Here a
pattern of dots is modulated by sounds generated from a synthesizer,
changing size and shape in a visual manifestation of electronic sound. In*Telc,*
a Rutt/Etra Scan Processor is used to transform portapak images from a trip to
a town in Southern Bohemia. Like faded memories, images of the landscape
and people are sculpted and abstracted, as the energy of the image is translated
into electronic scan lines.

In Search of the Castle
12 minutes, 1981

Progeny
19 minutes, 1981

In these two works, the Vasulkas employ imaging tools to transform physical
space and alter perception. *Progeny* is a collaboration
with sculptor Bradford Smith. Smith's organic and sensual sculptural forms
are transformed by the merging of one of Steina's Machine Vision devices - a
rotating, mirrored sphere with pre-programmed camera movements and

optical transpositions - with Woody's digital processing. In *Search of the Castle* is a journey of personal, perceptual and technical transformations. Driving from in the industrial wastelands of Buffalo, New York, taping through Steina's mirrored globe, the Vasulkas develop the central metaphor of a search. This work traces their odyssey from naturalistic to increasingly complex, image-processed landscapes, until they
arrive at an abstract electronic environment, a synthetic space transformed by technology.

Woody Vasulka: Selected Works

> *Explanation*
> 12 minutes, 1974
> Multikeyer: George Brown
> Dual colorizer: Eric Seigel
> Scan Processor: Rutt/Etra
>
> *C-Trend*
> 10 minutes, 1974
> Multikeyer/H.D. Variable Clock: George Brown
> Scan processor: Rutt/Etra
>
> *The Matter*
> 4 minutes, 1974
> Scan Processor: Rutt/Etra
>
> *Vocabulary*
> 5 minutes, 1973, stereo sound
> Scan processor: Rutt/Etra
> Dual colorizer: Eric Siegel
>
> This program of early works includes didactic explanations of
> Vasulka's image-making tools, and also charts his search for the new
> "grammar".

In C-Trend , one of Woody Vasulka's "dialogues with tools," the video
raster, or monitor screen, is controlled by the Rutt-Etra Scan Processor, a
scan deflection tool designed by Steve Rutt and Bill Etra (1973). The
camera image being modified with the Rutt-Etra is one of urban traffic,
whose syncronous sounds are clearly recognizable on the audio track. Two
basic modifications of the electronic image are evident. Each horizontal
line of the video camera's raster which is scanned by the electron beam
translated through the Rutt-Etra into a live graphic display of voltage,
radically reconfiguring the luminance information and the video image
(functioning similarly to a wave form monitor). Additionally, in *C-Trend*
the rectilinear shape of the video frame itself, the raster, is skewed
through an adjustment of the Rutt-Etra. The deflection coils, which
electromagnetically control the positioning of the electron gun and thereby
the framing of the raster, receive mathematically recoded analog
information, reconfiguring the normally rectilinear video frame. The "empty
spaces" between the altered frames, which appear to drift or roll
throughout *C-Trend,* are the horizontal and vertical blanking intervals
between electronic frames.

Artifacts
21:20 minutes, 1980
b/w and color, sound.
The Image Articulator: Jeffrey Schier.

Artifacts is a didactic demonstration of the syntax and vocabulary of the
digital image,via the electronic capabilities of the Digital Image
Articulator. Vasulka's intent is to create a dialogue, a symbiotic relationship
between artist and machine. "By artifacts," he states,
"I mean that I have to share the creative process with the machine. It is
responsible for too many elements in this work. These images
come to you as they came to me - in a spirit of exploration." Initiated by basic
algorithmical procedures, the images coalesce to form an
overall conception of the electronic vocabulary made possible by this
technology. Vasulka works with a spherical shape and, in an ironic reference
to the "hand of the artist," studies his hand as transformed by the Image.

Steina Vasulka: single channel videotapes

Let It Be
4 minutes, 1970
Steina mimes the Beatles song, *Let it Be*,
in extreme close-up.

Violin Power
10:04 1970-78
b&w, sound.
Phase Shifter: Harald Bode
Processor: Rutt/Etra.

Steina terms this procedural work "a demo tape on how to play video on the
violin."Her background as a violinist and her evolution from musician to
visual artist is referenced through an analogy of video camera to
musical instrument. Steina is first seen in footage from the early 1970s,
playing the violin and singing to The Beatles' *Let It Be*. As
succeeding segments trace a chronological progression, Steina layers imagery
and time. The violin itself ultimately becomes an image-generating
tool, as she connects it to imaging devices, creating abstract visual
transpositions of sounds and vibrations. This unconventional
self-portrait is a study of the relationship of music to electronic image.

Machine Vision Project

From Cheektowaga to Tonawanda
36 minutes, 1975

Signifying Nothing
15 minutes, 1976

Sound and Fury
15 minutes, 1975

Orbital Obsessions
25 minutes, 1975-77

Switch!Monitor!Drift!
50 minutes, 1976

Snowed, 1977
15 minutes, 1977

Land of Timoteus
15 minutes, 1977

The Machine Vision project was pursued by Steina throughout the 1970's and is an investigation into the capacity of electronic machines to reorchestrate concepts of space.

Flux
8:10 minutes, 1977
b&w, sound.
Field Flip/Flop Switcher: George Brown
Processor: Rutt/Etra

A two character material, water flow and video noise are the basic sources of multi-directional movement within switched frames or slow scanned noise fields. _ Woody Vasulka

Selected Works
    Bad
    2:14 minutes, 1979
    The Image Articulator: Jeffrey Schier.

    Urban Episodes
    8:50 min. 1980,
    Optical Instrumentation: Josef Krames.
    Produced by KTCA-TV, Minneapolis.

    Summer Salt
    1982, 18:48 min.

    Sky High
    2:42 min;

    Low Ride
    2:59 min

    Rest
    2:16 min;

    Photographic Memory
    5:10 min.

Total program: 1979-82, 29:52 min, color, sound.

Steina's works from the late 1970s and early 1980s are exercises in the phenomenology of vision and the redefinition of space and landscape, as articulated through mechanized, optical and electronic devices. *Bad* is a technical exploration of several commands in the Vasulkas' Buffer Oriented Digital Device, which controls digital imaging functions such as up/down and right/left movement, as well as the stretching and squeezing of the image. Steina uses her own face as visual material, rhythmically dismantling and reconstructing her self-image. *Urban Episodes* is a striking phenomenological study in an urban landscape, an exhilarating restructuring of physical space that defies expected modes of seeing and the laws of gravity and reflection. In a public plaza in Minneapolis, Steina set up a motorized, rotating Machine Vision device, which includes mirrors and two cameras that pan, tilt andzoom. *Summer Salt* is a dramatic exploration of the phenomenology of space and vision, as Steina uses mechanical and electronic devices to physically investigate the Southwestern landscape. This artificial vision allows the viewer altered perceptions and spatial perspectives. The five segments include dynamic exercises with Steina's mirrored lens attachment, the physicality of unexpected camera placement, and electronic manipulation of the textures and colors of the landscape.

Selected Treecuts
1980, 8:11 min, color, sound.
The Image Articulator: Jeffrey Schier.

Selected Treecuts is a formal examination of the distinction between camera-generated and digital images, and a layered juxtaposition of contrasting representations of reality. The methodology of the tape is simple: a zoom lens moves slowly in and out on a group of trees, alternating between digitized and camera-generated, "real" images. The movement in the tape is produced by the automated zoom lens and rotating prism; the images switch rhythmically between camera images and digital images held briefly in computer memory. The contrast between the "real" camera images of trees and the frozen, digital computer images forms an essay in motion and stillness, the organic and the synthetic, tracing a trajectory from the photographic to the electronic.

Cantaloup
in cooperation with Jeffrey Schier and Woody Vasulka.
A production of the TV Lab at WNET/Thirteen.
The Image Articulator: Jeffrey Schier.
1980, 27:54 min, b/w and color, sound.

Cantaloup is an informal documentary on the Vasulkas' Digital Image Articulator, a sophisticated imaging device they designed

with Jeffrey Schier. Using image material such as a cantaloup and the three artist/designers as image material, Steina explains the capabilities of the machine, including its real-time imaging ability and the articulation of images in a form of a digital code. She describes the varying sizes of pixels (picture elements), the layers (or slices) of color and tone that can be derived from one image, and techniques such as "grabbing" the image and multiplying it. This document offers a highly informative, spontaneous demonstration of a complex imaging device.

Voice Windows
in collaboration with Joan La Barbara.
Music: Joan La Barbara.
Scan Processor: Rutt/Etra, The Hearn Video Lab.
1986, 8:10 min, color, stereo sound.

Sound, as visually manifested through electronic imaging, becomes a spatial component in this exquisitely rendered confluence of landscape, music and digital manipulation. Singer/composer Joan La Barbara performs a series of voice chants and intonations, creating energized patterns on a grid of horizontal lines that recalls a musical scale. This animated line pattern, vibrating and dancing to the energy generated by La Barbara's voice, is inscribed onto moving imagery of the Southwest landscape. Through electronic imaging, the energized patterns themselves act as "windows"that reveal yet another layer of landscape imagery, creating intricate fields of illusory spatial transformations.

Total running time: 15:00 hours