

## **BINARY LIVES** Transcript of final edit

Woody: I feel that, in a way, we artists for example, working with these medium, we became the keepers of the flame. We are here not because we created machines, we are here because the machines need us to live.

Steina: I don't like that things progress in a certain way, and then they lived happily ever after. It means nothing to me. It's kind of an ending, you know, beginning, middle, ending. So for me it is a wonderful escape, to be able to do installations, and deal just with time, information, deal sort of with this medium as if it was music. Which never comes to a final solution, happy endings, or anything like that. It comes to maybe a big chord at the end.

S: We met in Prague. There was this friend of mine who kept saying I should meet this guy, and then I heard that he could fix my motorcycle. So then I also realized I should meet this guy. But we met once before, in the hallway...

W: Yeah

S: And Woody said to me, "Marry me. Get me out of here." The first words he ever said to me.

S: And I said "Sure, let's do it." And I didn't see him for months and months. The next time I saw him I had him fix my motorcycle.

S: And then because he fixed my motorcycle I felt I had to give him something for it, so I took him to dinner. And now we know the story.

W: It's all about machines, you know. You know the ritual, as we talked about, has something to do with the machine. Fortunately I was the proud owner of a motorcycle, so I could play it cool.

W: So I abandoned film, because it is very much the duty of the filmmaker to say something. Fortunately, I found an American school still practicing avant-garde concepts. With kind of a structuralist content when I came to America. But video was like a way out of it. Finally there was bare bones, there was simplicity, a primitive way. And one could completely abandon this idea of telling, of the narrativity.

W: We are here not because we created machines, we are here because the machines need us to live. And once you get fully involved in building and maintaining and programming these machines, you understand how little life you have, how much you have to devote to the technological structure to be maintained, extended, used, formulated. So I'm very curious about what it all means. I'm actually very confused about what role technology plays, because I can see with the long view, that technology will become very complex and very challenging. If it will need us, I don't know.

W: We are on automatic evolution, or pilot. There is nothing we can supervise. The dream of the artist or the intellectual is to supervise the evolution. But this is no longer possible. There is no utopia through which the intellectual could manipulate history, and there is no position of the knowledge of the media that an intellectual could possibly influence the social consciousness. Because remember, when the right people got their hands on film, they could really extraordinary work that did redesign our own consciousness. And we all remember film as one of the great influences besides the music and literature and the rest of it. But film had that period. I don't think we see it now. What television does is a whole different influence. It does not influence these, I would say, the most precious thoughts, or most fleeting, or most fragile..... I have nothing more to say, I'm sorry.

[**Artifacts** voice over]

In the following sequence I will use the image of this sphere taken with from reality by a video camera. The image is made of 16 slices of gray scale the camera sees, translated by computer to 16 discreet binary numbers. As I peel off layer by layer, number by number, the image that follows appear as a disc against the background.

By artifacts I mean 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 have come to me, in a spirit of exploration. I encourage you to blink your eyes, move your head, and if you are close to the tape recorder, freeze and unfreeze the tape a few times.

[end **Artifacts** voice over]

W: Electronic systems, the lesson of electronic systems for our generation, and for our century, should be summarized, it is that systems have their input/output possibility, that the output can be looped into the input. And it behaves, as I say, it resonates, and it shows the inner architecture of the tool, or the machine. So this doesn't sound so important, but I think it is extraordinary that we get, that we've been taught, that we are being continuously taught this element of feedback. And we talk about it now on the level of ecology and everything. But this simple instrument of video performed it so explicitly and visually and emotionally, so that I found this remarkable.

W: There was this, video was separated into the purposeful, social agenda, and into this purposeless media exploration. They made sense in the 60's very well, and later in the 70's, and the galleries somehow took that kind of art making, or media oriented art, and separated also as a nomenclature, to put another meaning on it. But we among ourselves were kind of divided. We were the unethical, sort of children at play. The others had a social message, social change.

S: They would always say to us, "But you are just playing!" I remember that, it was accusatory: "But you are just playing!" I was very pleased by that, obviously. I said "Yea, you got it."

[**Orbital Obsessions**]

S: That might be interesting, you are right. That could be another one, especially if you exposed the camera like that. You know, and then go around like that.

W: You could put this monitor on the top.

S: Hum?

W: I think we should actually put the monitor on the top. I mean here, see. And shoot up higher.

S: That's true. It's much nicer. You start from far away, and you would actually see the whole, in this state. It depends on if you could get it sharp enough, but I guess you could.

S: Would you change the zoom lenses. Zoom both in and out, either of them. Both at the same time, or pan them, or something. First one, and then the other. Uh, huh. That's nice.

[end of **Orbital Obsessions**]

S: So my installations deal a lot with landscapes, or if I'm in a city they deal with cityscapes. And I try not to have too much purpose when I go out with a camera. I like to have movement in the picture. So in that case the camera can be still, if there is something that's moving. And that can be people, that can be a river, or a volcano. I don't care. If there is no movement then, of course, the other way of doing it is to move the camera. And I like to do that through mechanical means. Not movement through human muscle. And I like about if I put the camera on any mechanical device, like a turntable or something that moves up and down, or pointed at the mirror that's moving. I get an alternate viewpoint that's not a human viewpoint. Because most of the pictures, 99.9% of pictures we see are always from this human point of view. And are actually from the camera persons point of view. And who the hell is he or she to tell us what the world is, what's the center of the universe. So it is a kind of way for me to break out of that too, the hegemony of the human eye.

S: It's such a cliché to move to the southwest and become a landscape artist. But of course I got seduced like anybody else, it was a... There was a solution, and the solution for me was to take just a part of it, take the texture, take some details, and farm them out on multiple images. To make like several channels, and have the images move from one to the other. So, that way in some strange way I fooled myself at least, into a kind of suggestion of spatiality. An imitation of a kind of sensational space you have out there. By putting details onto tiny television screens. Don't ask me how this works, but to my mind it somehow worked. And I became very enamored of doing this kind of landscape installations. The West was the first one, and then **Geomania**, where I combine the southwest with Iceland.

W: Art of Memory was a much more deliberate effort to deal with this concept of the past's present and also very distant voice. But the true direct connection in Art of Memory, in the work of mine, to the past was the newsreels which I watched as a child from the Goebbels propaganda machines in Bohemia when I grew up. We would go twice a week to watch the newsreels. And then I stumble over these newsreels in the context of (?) programs, and I said that it is maybe time to pay a tribute to what I denied

always in my work, which is the content, the actual experience. And I stopped being abstract, being material only, and I said, ok let me just make the epos, a large canvas, so to speak. And the canvas of course, the background, was New Mexico landscape, because it is a very natural large canvas. You can't really find a bigger one.

W: RPT and the I do RPT bar. It came up. Hold it, hold it, hold it.

S: Excuse'm moi, you have a working system, sir.

W: There something wrong with the voltage....

W: Right from the beginning, both of us, Steina and me, have been working with what's called machine vision. She eventually inherited that line of production. But I built machines from day one.

From my recent experience with computer, I was not very satisfied in being just with the computer. Looking at the screen, because again that's another representation, that's another abstraction space. Even if it's called 3D, it's the same 2D window. It just behaves, once in motion, as a three dimensional representation. So, I decided to use my hands again, get physically involved, so I built what computer naturally possess, which is the Cartesian coordinate space, with all the properties of angles, and the ability to point to any particular vector, using a three dimensional program that is constructed as a three dimensional playground. So, I simply took that concept and set it into the physical appearance, hoping that sooner or later I will interlock these two spaces completely, so if virtual changes, then actual will change. If the actual will change, then the virtual will change.

W: The slides are actually artifacts of early masks of electronic circuits which I found as anthropologist in Los Alamos junkyard. And they are very precisely manufactured and they represent the first level of integrated circuits. And aesthetically interesting to me. And I think they also provide sort of a background to this technology history and knowledge. And there is another stage that is video. Video of course, deals with moving images. And that the principal of these two families of images is very simple. It is a still circle arrangement of the masks of the circuits, and the other one is a corridor. That is, a six screen designated corridor that approaches the center or recedes from the center, from this optical center, which provides some kind of trajectory of telling, it's like a narrative corridor. These are corridors, which expand or contract. That's the visual part of this.

S: This is a midi violin. It's both a midi violin and an ordinary violin, solid body.

S: So, what midi means is that I can get digital information out of each string.

S: And if you are dealing with video disk, it means that each frame is addressable. You say I want frame 3, 750....

S: and guaranteed if you play that stop on the violin, that image will come up.

S: It becomes sort of the editing suite. Because these are a series of edits, all of them.

And it is different from the early work I did with the violin, which was an analog violin, which generated wave forms that interacted with the picture. Here it is the cut. It is the typical difference between what the analog does and the digital does. So I have a digital violin.

S: I have always been a pyromane. I love to burn the lawn outside. I love fire.

S: I must make my own pictures. I couldn't take somebody else's pictures. I couldn't send someone out and say make pictures of steam or water or something. I personally, this flesh and blood and bones, has to physically go there and do it. And you are like a creature of the future, because you can do, you can send me as your agent out there.

W: All the images have already been made.

S: Not mine.

W: That is a delusion, of course.

W: Even your images have been made.

S: By me.

W: Yeah, but you make them because you turn them around, or make something specific to your signature. You only put a signature on it, because god made the landscapes.

S: God never ran fire upside down and backwards.

W: You don't know that.

S: I never saw god do that.

W: You don't see how god sees.

W: It is an interesting problem how much you trust the camera, as yours. There has been a debate in photography if camera is an art form, because you appropriate in each step. Of course you put a signature on it, but you cannot be, as you say, enamored, amoured, or whatever it is you said. It is, you have no right to god's images.

S: So you consider yourself one step further in evolution?

W: No, I just believe in man-made images.

S: Woman-made.

W: Whatever, computers separate you from the world. Which is the only interesting part. Because suddenly you can't deal with computer as the world, I mean as light image of the world. It comes from a different organization.

S: So you say that computer images, that's the first time that god doesn't make the images at all.

W: The god has to share something with us this time. He is not imposing any more. He has somehow to deal with this artificiality.

S: That was profound.....