

Interview

Woodie Vasulka, Electronic Artist, New York City

How did you happen to get into the electronic world with your art form? Were you trained as a scientist or an artist?

I was a movie maker in Czecho-Slovakia. The Film School of Prague. Before that I was a writer. In film, the picture was too strong for me. I couldn't put any illusion into it. I was following straight documentary realism in a sociological sense. Films on alcoholism, on the draft problem. I went to Iceland and did some typical geographical impressions, very straight documentary, in the Flaherty tradition.

Then I got involved in multi-screen through a friend. Soon I was working with three screens, five screens. Very little single screen. Once, when we were faced with putting together about sixty viewing modules for an exhibit, I suggested television because I thought that was a natural multi-screen. Actually it was. We put together a system which was fifty-six modules, and six channels of different program distribution. Because the signal is flexible, it could be distributed, it could be multiplied, it could be activated into other media. Sounds could be translated into images. The flexibility is totally overwhelming.

In my experiments with film--as in 360-degree space recording--I never really built a projector because that's when I realized that a motion picture projector was 19th Century machinery. All those wheels and turns. The signal itself gave suddenly the freedom of space, in the sense that you could distribute or duplicate an

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Image immediately. Our only limit, actually, is amplification. If you have more monitors, then you've got kinetics. You've got a moving image, from one to the other, so you get that enlarged space. The kinetic portion of the image is more important than the image itself. Then I finally got free because I didn't have to follow any realistic concept. I got interesting effects. The whole gate to it was the signal.

Do you, as an artist, feel that you are giving up a part of yourself by working so closely with these advanced electrical systems?

First of all, I would say it's so vast, the electronic medium--not only television but the whole spectrum--that it at first just gets you. You don't know what to do with it. Then you select a fragment, and you go through that little section. Of course, behind that first wall, there is another wall. You can go through in many ways. The thing to do is to allocate your piece of electronic reality, and work in that little piece. To limit yourself, and just work with one of them.

So your answer is that instead of being a restricting thing, it is almost a limitless world for exploration?

It is totally inexpressible how much you are offered by the media. It is so vast that everything written from the 19th Century on, in the books, can never match it. You will find more stereotypes in literature--you can never match these stereotypes in electronics. It's incredible. It's as if all the history of man would suddenly

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stop, and start again, with a universe that has never been explored. That kind of electronic universe is such a challenging thing--it would be loads of fun to try to do some documentaries.