

Eric Slegel
San Diego, CA
December 9, 1991

The video "**Einstein**", which still exists on 2 inch tapes could be played on the 2inch VCR. The tape itself should be restored, too. "Einstein" was shown at the show "TV as a Creative Medium" in black and white. Later he did a colored version. He says his colorizer for the Einstein tape could be restored.

All his tapes are in NYC in Brooklyn, **Barbara Wise** knows about it (also "Psycho TV").

Eric recommends the following persons as interesting for the show:

- Tom Tadlock
- Dorothea Weitzener, who should know where the Architron is

Interview Dec. 9, 1991
San Diego

E: It seems, that at a very young age I was interested in media - we are counting from age thirteen now - when I was thirteen years old, I - from scratches, from parts - built a TV. I was an electronic wiz. And the following year, one year later, I built a TV camera ... we are talking about the nineteen fifties. So its hard to appreciate that now when you go to a store and buy a little camcorder. But in the nineteen fifties this was very very special and unique. And that was because I wanted to have a TV camera. And there was only one way to have a TV camera: you had to make it, because there was no way to get my hands on fifty thousand Dollars - in nineteen fifties Dollars, which would be two hundred thousand Dollars now. So, the motivation for making the camera was because I wanted one. The motivation for teaching myself electronics was to have a media equipment.

K: How big was this camera? [✓]

E: It was big. This camera is sitting in my friend ~~Winnie Novak's~~ [✓] house in NYC. - I keep giving things away. I don't want to hold on to things. And so I interested the camera to him, he still has it.

K: Do you think it would be possible to bring it on the show?

✓ E: If there is enough money for all the expensis it will be possible, sure. I think that ~~Winnie~~ would allow it to take, but it would have to be insured.

K: Can it be restored?

E: Maybe, I don't know. He tells me that it's still in working condition. Keep in mind that it would require an American monitor there. And this is like a collectorizing lense put on the camera, there is none on it holding very soildly (???)

✓ ~~Winnie Novak~~, I can tell him to give you the permission to take it in the show. You would also have to discuss money, ya know.

So, at fourteen within one year I had built the TV camera. And I got some of these parts from ABC Television which still exists. I called up on the phone and introduced myself and went down there and they gave me parts, these were expensive parts.. And the imager also would need the tube. The tube was a fifteen hundred Dollar

tube which I had to get for fifty Dollars. The image vertiger (?) was about the third tube in television. The first was the conoscope. Fourteen, fifteen, sixteen I played around with the camera. And I went away, I was travelling around Europe actually.

K: Where have you been there?

E: Oh, I've been in England and when I was seventeen I went to live in England, stayed there for a couple of years and came back to America, hang around in America for a while and then went back to Europe for a while, stayed in Holland and Sweden and Denmark. Anyway, there was gaps, gaps where I wasn't doing very much with the camera. But - I'm not certain of the chronology here - but when I was in my twenties, eighteen, nineteen, twenty around those ages, when I had come back from my travels I was working for a close circuit TV repair company where we would maintain industrial broadcasting equipment. And I would work on this Ampex machine - remember we are talking about the nineteen fifties still, late fifties. Ampex had a two inch machine which I will show you, it's in my shop. Which is a machine I still use. I became an expert on this machine, the Ampex 660. It was the first small video tape recorder ever made, by the Ampex corporation people who invented the video tape recorder. First there was a model 1500 that they came out with, and they used a two inch tape and it was a portable video recorder - there were no portable video recorders before this one. It was the most advanced machine at its time. And so I became an expert on this machine. So much that they sent me to WHAM (?) because they had machines there, they were showing broadcast TV in Wham, the same stuff that they are watching in NYC. They would have a company there and that was taping things - and then they sat me on the plane every time to go on and fore. They had programs there in Wham and when a recorder broke there it was like an emergency, they put me right on the plane and sent me to Wham. So I was THE expert. I was a young kid genius expert.

Anyway there was a man called **Robert Goldman** - I don't know if he's still alive - he owned Merl (?) Sound Recording Studios - we are still talking of the same time, a year later or so - and groups like The Who were recording in that sound studio like "I can see for miles". Anyway, this man made friends with me and invited me to come to his recording studio to help him setting up video. He knew that video - it was all music videos going to come in the future - so he needed cameras and video recorders and so forth - and he got a special diode from Ampex, he bought about ten of these 660 machines, broken. All defected, parts and pieces. And he said to me: I make you a deal. You make me two good ones that work perfectly and I give you all the parts, all the pieces, so that you can go on with them on yourself. Yes, I made the deal with him. And I fixed up two machines for him and he gave me all the parts to have my own fifty thousand dollar machine. It took me about another year fiddling around and working out all the kinks and ... Now I had the camera that I had built and the video recorder that I had built and so I started playing around, recording with the camera. I got very encouraged by what was - big experiments that I was performing - and I made a little box that was nick-named by somebody else **The Magic Box**.

... I had thought up in my mind certain special effects that I wanted to create. So it came from what I visually wanted to do. And then I thought what kind of circuitry do I have to make that will do that. And so I made special circuits that I called the Magic Box to create those image looks that I wanted. Now, I make it no secret that I was using Marijuana back then when I was playing around - and also an interesting thing is, that at that age - I was in my early twenties now - for some reason it really hit me strong. And I noticed that when the TV screen was flickering it was a very interesting phenomena, it was a strobe, a strobing type of phenomena. And I noticed

now this strobing phenomena was helping to create a trans-like state of mind, a transcendental almost transidentia state of mind. So I said, this is interesting I want to deliberately play around with this. So one of the circuits that was built into the Magic Box was a video strobing circuit that would strobe two video pictures in and out. And they would strobe the video pictures in and out positive or negative and set a lot of different variations of strobing. It could switch two pictures back and forward at any strobe rate you wanted to do. And we had a special quality to it, there was a softness to the transition that it was like a sine wave type of transition rather than a bum bum bum bum, it wasn't hard edged, it was soft edged. Deliberately done, special circuits having to do with bolids (?) and photo resistors to give the soft transitions to smooth it all out. Because it was driven by square waves but the volving photo cells smoothed it out. Whenever you want a smooth transition even in an audio equipment they use a bold and photo cells. So, the magic box included that and it included a solarizer for the solarization of the images and I had made up with Serge Boudelaine (?) and Susan Burge. Susan B. was working with Serge B. with various artistic video pieces, very experimental, I don't even know how much they got out. And I met Serge B. again through this video repair company where they needed someone who knew about colorizers and again they pointed at me, because I was into all that advanced stuff that none of the rest of them went in. So that's how I met Serge and I went up there and helped him with his colorizing system and I met Susan B. through him. Susan B. was a modern dancer. She knew that I was playing around with video and I don't remember who asked who first but it came about that she came to my bedroom studio and I turned my bedroom into a TV studio. It was not a bedroom any more. She came up and we experimented and played around and this tape actually does exist. But it's sitting in Brooklyn on a two inch video tape and it's never really transformed, that's all kind of financial problem to get it out somewhere. But it does exist.

K: Was it already done with the colorizer?

E: ~~There was no color then.~~ Not at that time, it was black and white and done with the image authorizer (?) camera that I had built and I got my hands on a videocam surveillance camera, ya know a cheap video camera, and I connected them, gem-locked them together so that they could go through the Magic Box and work together as two things. And I experimented with the solarization and strobing and so fore, she did a dance piece, and the music was by the group Cream. I forgot exactly what song it was. And so I was experimenting with modern dance with Susan B. And I started to make more friends and let them know what I was up to. And another friend, Michael Kirsch (?), he saw that I was creating video and he wanted to get involved and he did some comedy things, and in the process of doing the comedy things there were some other people who came up and I was video taping more and more people doing their things. Something like Andy Warhol was doing. The direction still was not clear, I was still experimenting, trying all kinds of experiments.

K: This was in the sixties.

E: This was 1969 now, because I remember the riots in the black ghettos. That was going on and that was a violent time in America but it's always a violent time here. ... And so I made friends with Tom Tadlock, again through that same TV repair company - I had met a number of people who were into video through that company. Tom Tadlock was building the Architron for - originally in NYC - she is still alive and her name is Dorothea Weltzner. I have a way of contact to her. ... I don't know if Tom Tadlock is still alive, I was told that he's not. But the Architron is an excentric piece of machinery that he built for these millionaires, Dorothea

C

? volts

? sur

Weitzner, which created kaleidoscopic images all on their own from broadcast TV. It would take broadcast TV and turn on to color kaleidoscopic images just going ad infinitum. He also had a number of controls on it so that it could be played as an instrument. It would be able to flip the pictures upside down and inside out and all that kind of stuff. And naturally Tom Tadlock had me built the electronic circuitry inside the Architron for. I was subcontracted to build all the video circuitry that he couldn't do.

K: And this machine still exists.

E: It's in Dorothy Weitzner's home in NYC. I don't know if it's in working condition but probably - if it's not, it could be made to work. ...So that's the Architron, it's a big black box.

K: How large is it?

E: About five feet high and three feet wide... Tom Tadlock was one of my friends back when I was doing all that experimentation. He was always telling me about Howard Wise. He already was associated with **Howard Wise**. He used to come to my house, slash studio,Tom was watching, what I was doing - keep in mind that I was using psychedelic substances back then, that was what was happening then, Timothy Leary was the great high priest of LSD and all that, and I was right in the thick (X) of all that stuff. And I have no reservations about saying so.

Anyway, I had a dream. The dream made a very strong impression on me. When I woke up the next morning I remembered the dream and I felt very challenged. I thought that would be something, when you would take actually a dream you had and make it visible to other people. And I thought about the imagery that I saw in the dream and I knew I couldn't make it exact, but I thought of various ways of creating something that would give a suggestion of the dream. No way to reproduce the dream for real. And, the dream was **Einstein**. ... I called up my friend Mike Kirsch and I asked him if he could please come over and help me in make creating a video. And he came over and I got a photograph of Einstein and set up a monitor all up down to the other end of the hallway and I set up a camera with a zoom lense far away from the monitor - and I guess I made the house dark or waited for night time; and I hooked up the magic box and bla bla bla, and I took an old seventy^{eight} record of Rimsky-Korsakoff - Shaharazade - and played it at half speed. And all of these elements were put together through the Magic Box, and there was another switcher, keyer that I also had made a long time ago, and I had that too, I forgot to mention that. And Mike worked the switcher-fader while I worked the cameras and I created this video called "Einstein". And when I showed it to my friends they all flipped. Blown away. And Tadlock was blown away. It blew everybody away who saw this video. And so he said to me, you gotta show that to Howard Wise. He made an appointment for Howard Wise to come over to my house and I showed it to Howard Wise and he was blown away, too. And he told me that he was making this show, called "TV as a Creative Medium" in his art gallery and he wanted that piece in the show. But it was in black and white and he said to me, can you make this in color? And I said when there is enough money anything can be accomplished. There really was enough money because he gave me three hundred dollars as money. And what I did with the three hundred dollars, I went out and bought a CF (?) color TV, and ... so when a black and white picture comes in that color TV, the color TV itself would take the great skill and turn it into a rainbow of colors. That's how I created the gallery presentation of Einstein in color.

K: And which year was it presented in the gallery?

E: Probably 1968. ... So unfortunately Howard Wise wanted this to be on a video tape loop that would keep repeating itself. The best Einstein was the original. I had

... friend of mine create a system where there was a machine I did has gone to the show. He created a system where there were mechanical sensors on the tape to detect when it reached the end and automatically started playing it again. The system tuned up the Einstein tape. That was the original. So portions of the original Einstein was all tuned up. And that's one of the reasons why there are too many copies of the Einstein. ... I did make a copy of the original and how the wise show, and from that copy all the existing copies are made. ... I have a copy but not right here. Again it's sitting on a video tape in a trunk in NYC. There is no money. So, TV as a Creative Medium was a hit show. And they wrote about it in Time Magazine and in all these big journals and publications, it brought up a lot of issues. And I met a lot of the other people like Frank Gillette, Myron (?) Schneider and they were also doing their video thing which I didn't know about until I participated in the show. I think it was then that I met Nam June Paik and Paul Ryer (?), Charlotte Moorman and all of these people that were doing something that had to do with video. After the show was over we all got together and went to a macrobiotic restaurant in East Village that was the... We were all chatting and saying, well, now what do we do. We just did this fantastic TV show that raised a lot of issues, and I proposed to everyone I think it's a good idea that we create a magazine. I proposed that. And they all picked up on the idea, they thought it is a great idea. And they went ahead and created a magazine and they named it **Radical Software**. M. Schneider who was one of the main people involved in the creation of the magazine, he was friends with a person called Michael Schaumburg (?) - he is now famous, he is a famous movie producer. And Michael S. became the, I think editor of Radical Software back then. We were still, ~~we~~ had long hair, and Michael S. was a long haired hippie, and this magazine which all I did was write for it, became very popular. And the talk of the college circuit. It was a very well done magazine. That was about five issues that were the best ones. At some point along the line it became too much for them to handle it, they sold it. ... As result of that I met the Video Freaks, I'd live with the Video Freaks for a short while.

I did leave NY and I went to Sweden. I stayed in Sweden for a while. I went to Sweden because things began to become too intense in NYC. The social things that were going on and the whole political environment. I just wanted to get away from it all and take a rest. ... Stockholm had this very very different atmosphere. K: So what was going on in Europe then with video?

E: There was nothing. The only thing that was happening in Stockholm when was the conscientious objectors - because of the war in Vietnam, the people who couldn't go back to America. ... I got a chance to relax, to meditate on things.

K: How long did you stay there?

E: Probably about six months. I had known that there were audio synthesizers and I thought to myself, why can't I build a video synthesizer? The whole secret to synthesizers was the interface. A system of being able to interface electronic signals in and out of various circuits with ease. I can't remember correctly, what I did is, I thought up all the various circuits that I wanted to pass video signals through. And just put them in boxes, keys, oscillators, inventing any kind of trick circuit I put down as another one. And then I said all the inputs and outputs and control signals have to be all the same voltages peak to peak. And I think I decided on one volt peak to peak but it might have been a ten volt peak to peak. I can't remember now. And so all circuits required ten volts peak to peak in and 10 Volts out and ten volts as the control signal. And after I had dreamt all that up and drawn it down on paper I got a phone call in Stockholm from one of the Video Freaks asking me for

Ira

turn up ?

Siegel. CAT

thousand dollars if I would step back into hell, NYC. And that was the bat that got me to return to NYC. And Video Freaks were working on something for CBS with Mike Dan (?) I think it was . Mike Dan was trying to create a new show for CBS and somehow the Video Freaks were involved with it, delegated a lot of responsibility for this show. So that's what the Video Freaks called me back for helping them, they wanted my skills. I was playing around various kinds of special effects, I had a video tape loop going there in their studio and I would remixing-delayed video back into - same thing you do with audio reverberation, I was doing with picture reverberation. ...That was one of the experiments I performed. And the tape was actually looping through two video tape recorders. The show got cancelled. I think it had to do with, the Video Freaks were getting into very radical politics and CBS didn't want to touch the stuff. Mike Hampton had something to do with that. Mike H. was skilled with the Black Panthers etc. etc. etc. The Video Freaks were getting into a lot of left wing radical politics and introducing that into the show, I think they just went overboard and CBS just cancelled the whole thing.

...So the show was cancelled and I was back in NYC and after that through Tadlock I had another meeting with Howard Wise and I told Howard Wise that I wanted to build a new machine that would be quite revolutionary at that time. There was no computer imager back then. It just did not exist. And so I tried to explain to Howard Wise what a video synthesizer would be. It would be a tool for the creation of abstract video patterns that could be played like a musical instrument. And he was very sceptical about it but I managed to convince him that it was a real thing that could be good. So he agreed to finance it. And I again wanted to get out of NYC. So I told Howard Wise that he should expect that I would transfer some of the money to San Francisco. I originally started the work with Tadlock in San Francisco. And of personality things I had to stop with Tadlock. It took about a year to make it. This was a project where I got myself in electronics just almost over my head. ...

K: What time was that actually?

E: Could have been the seventies already. A lot of things were moving fast.

...Howard Wise was advancing a lot of money, he claims that it was a total of twenty thousand Dollars - I can only take him at his word, but my fingers never touched twenty thousand Dollars. The money went elsewhere for other things, not through my fingers. So there was this stress and strain of "c'mon, you've been funded, is there any results". And at the end I thought like I've been driven, I didn't feel good any more. But I did finish it. Then I had to go back to NYC with the finished synthesizer and Howard Wise would have some exposures and shows that took place at Washington ...I dont want to go into that because it was bad. It was bad for me because it was like I was placed in a show where everyone was there, but it was not clear to me what was going on and, ya know all things were happen simultaneously in a state of confusion and noise and so fore. And there were signals coming in out I didn't know... They had a moderator. It was the Flocking (?) Show. ... S that was one of the exposures of the **Video Synthesizer**. It sat in one of Howard Wise's offices, but what I had accomplished with it was like elementary. It was working, it was demonstrating to people that a video synthesizer was a viable piece of technology. But I had not sophisticated it enough to the point where I created a kind of art work. I really wanted to create mandalas. Live moving mandalas like you can see from India. ... Cause I was getting connected up with things from India. And so the motivation behind the creation of the video synthsizer was to create mandalas. To alter states of consciousness, and it couldn't do that quite yet. I did a few things with it but I lost interest in the video synthesizer because it turned

into a job that I had to complete because I was getting money. And something was wrong with the whole arrangement of that all. So I didn't do any great pieces ...

(..side two..)

E: I introduced **Woody and Steina** to Howard Wise and we put together a group called **Perception**, that was myself, Woody and Steina and Frank Gillette. ... And I was making my own plans and my own plans were going to India. And I was manufacturing colorizers and making some decent money. Because everybody else wanted to have this trick hardware. ... From the prototype colorizer I developed to build copies for other people. So when I accumulated enough money to take off for the trip to India at the last minute I was informed that the grant came through. Perception has been funded as a group. **Russell Connor** was the in-between-person between the NY State Council of the Arts - he was working for it at that time - and Howard Wise. And he had heard that I was planning to go to India and he didn't like that, the NY State Council of the Arts wanted the artist to be in NY State. I was not very impressed by that idea and I said, ok but if you give me that money you have the art but you don't have to have me. And I don't have to make the art here. I wanted them to get it on the air what I was video taping there. I wanted the culture of India to be exposed in America.

And remember, back then public television was not doing all the great things that it's doing now. It's doing a great job now. But then public TV was still in its infancy, it was doing some things occasionally, like they had limbo on once, a dance piece. Anyway, I went on to India with the grant money, no no I didn't. They spoon fed the money to me in fivehundred dollar installments and I didn't know they were gonna do that. So I took a lot of my money and spent it on the Mercedes van to make this overland trip to India. But the breaks were bad ... It was a six thousand miles journey, it was the greatest thing that I ever did in my life ... I bought the van in Luxembourg and went from Europe. ... In the video it shows the van. Unfortunately certain parts of the videos have ~~been~~ disappeared like the introductory part where I'm in Brussels...

After the grant was finished I got sick and came back to Europe because I needed the cold weather. ... I was down to skin and bones as a result of being sick there. ... I got back to Europe, to France, and I met somebody who wanted me to build an editing system. You could not buy any editing systems, they did not exist. The Japanese would only make video recorders which they did not think about it how people would edit. The edit systems were all custom designs by engineers, and there was this group in Canada, and they had made a video editing system and they were making plans public and so I got some of the plans from them. I modified their plans and successfully built the editing system for these people in France. ... Then I went to my brother in New York and the recession was going on, or the inflation was going on, and the money that I had come with just evaporated and I went broke in NYC and went back to France, sold off my van with a big loss to get some cash. I came back to NYC and started manufacturing video equipment again and didn't do too well. I don't remember how long this went on in NYC, a year or two.

K: When was this?

E: This was at about seventythree, four or five. Maybe six, seven. It was hard, just knocking my head against the wall with economics to make some money. But it wasn't that bad, later towards the end somehow we came out of the recession and I finally sold enough stuff to save enough money to move to California, so I moved here to San Diego. And in San Diego I was trying to continue the manufacturing of

video equipment, but I was not paying attention to the world events that were going on and Japan was taking over all this video equipment. And there were popping out those products of Japan, they were well designed... So after my business break-down all I could think was to survive, was to repair home VCRs. And we are talking about the last ten years now that I've been repairing old VCRs to survive.

The end

Katharina Gsöllpointner