

C #3

Conversation with Woody Vasulka, Jon Burris, Robert Polidori,
Steina Vasulka, Jan Sutcliffe recorded 10/16/77

+ p.23
p.24
p.26

JON 25

JON: So, In the last session ^{Woody} you said, ~~Woody~~, "I'm just trying to destroy the perceptual mechanism as the only possibility of perceiving ~~let's say~~ reality."

~~WOODY: I guess...~~

JON: It's an important question.

WOODY: I have ~~in a way (been) objecting, in fact, Polidori brought me today to a certain kind of objection.~~ As long as we're going to look at the surface only as quality of image, ^{or} as resolution, then we will be bound to discuss perceptual qualities, which of course are very ambiguous to define, ~~and so on.~~ What I was trying to say is that, for me at least, there is a possibility to descend from this surface appreciation or perceptual appreciation to step behind, ~~let's say~~ to understand the principle of organization and ^{to} elect that as an esthetic principle. / So I have the privilege to commute between the perceptual, which may be the only way to ^{perceive} ~~see~~ what we call the unspecifiable elements, like the ~~the~~ mood, the feelings... But I would like to have the privilege to commute from that ~~one~~, into ~~maybe~~ the more, not rational but ~~maybe~~ different logic sphere in which I suddenly could also realize the process, ^{stat} / Because I object to ~~being bound~~, to be ^{and} actually ~~in~~ confined to the ~~perceptual~~ surface perception only, ~~and~~ that was probably the wish I had... projected. Because I do believe that esthetic appreciation can be ^{at} beyond the perceptual one, and ^{then} the inner architecture of a ^{particular} event, even if it's dynamic, takes precedent. over the perception of the surface.

POLIDORI: But not all perception is on the surface, and to recognize the inner working structure, that still has to be channelled through the medium...it has to be perceived from your output.

WOODY: But you're talking as a consumer, ^{of} as an audience. If ^{an} you have the privilege of initiating such ^{an} experience, as an author, you have a different set of responsibilities and you have different set of possibilities. Even if you say, ^{that} in fact, ~~that~~ the perceptual one may eventually be interpreted in those various ways, by an observer, I still think ~~that~~ ^{as an} as an author or ^{an} initiator of those, you can also elect them as prior.

ROBERT: Right, but I think that's because if you're working on it yourself you've already established a certain set of terms of what things mean. You've working ^{ed} (short drop-out in tape)...your operant vocabulary. So in a sense you're your own audience and you already know, but to communicate it to another person you have to put it out in certain way that the basic...they can input into your rationale.

JON: What's the purpose of looking ^{at} ~~into~~ the organizational principles?

WOODY: I would again say that it depends on what we name as a content. If we say that our product, or what we do, our composition, or let's say our product of our work should maybe only indicate certain new structure, and should not be maybe utilizing the structure to attach, or put another meaning to it. That means materiality and mythification.

JON: You mean cultural meanings. Meanings that are implied not by the materials being used but by ends outside of this.

WOODY: What they represent to...

JON: ...esthetic cultural ^{social} constructs.

WOODY: ^{They have taught me that} We can speculate about the material. The material is not binding the primary level. You can take a material ^{and} and use it in a highly speculative way as Polidori says, even we can use it to negotiate our relationship to the audience, or as he said, we have to tell the audience in some direct way. But these are assumed obligations, we of course don't have to. Or we can violate that, or we

can simply disregard it. But I think...

ROBERT: But my point is, even if you don't do it for another person, when you do it, you're doing it in your own language for yourself. You're just...

JON: Sure, but ~~there's~~ this constant reference to the product now, and I think....to deal specifically with the product, puts a set of considerations that are important but that aren't precisely what we're talking about right now. I think we're talking more about the process of examining and analyzing and understanding these organizational principles and the organizational material.

WOODY: Okay. So let's ~~get~~ continue what' you've been suggesting. Because I happen to agree in this particular time, this particular period, that just to ~~define~~ ^{identify} those elements and just ~~and~~ ^T learn how to control them takes precedence over any speculation. Or any speculative possibility let's say if you go into composition you already do speculate, in fact, negotiate ~~within~~ the whole context of the culture. But if you're ~~in~~ ^{on} this particular level ⁱⁿ which ~~you~~ try to identify each component and use it, not use it, even just foreseeing its use, not even indicating ~~its~~ ^{the} use, just ^{trying to} put it in some hierarchic order. That, for example, for us, for me, and I know for Jon, is for example totally enough. We are busied by it, baffled by it and our... ~~We still of course,~~ I would still call it a creative process. In a way I would never exclude it from the process of creation or the process of art, yet the attention that we pay services people on ^{other} ~~another~~ ^{different} level. It shares in fact this first responsibility of understanding of those elements, which we have elected as a content of our work.

JON: I'm also not sure that what you'd call traditional art is ~~not~~ ^{necessarily} so different in kind. It is different in its' direction, perhaps. But almost all art has been rationalized by some kind of analytical procedure. With the impressionists for instance it was to examine light. With Italian painting of the 16th and 17th century it was perspective. In fact,

I was reading Alberti (?) this morning and he says "I will speak of the mathematicians what the mathematicians have to say which deals with linearity and geometry and so forth and I give to the painters what they have to say. Both of these areas were shared. So that there is frequently ~~and~~ in some sense having to do with the materials, whether it be painting, or with the visualization, with the world out there, there's often some ^{kind of} analytical framework and it's often a very fundamental way questions are posed in art. So it's not, in kind, so different. What seems to distinguish it here is that we're dealing with tools that are technologically based, and we are not engineers, we are what we are. And also these tools present to us certain paradigms, certain microcosms of interaction that don't exist for the painter or the sculptor. And so we're confronted with a set of questions to examine these mechanisms, to find some kind of systematic methodology for relating it in some general way to our view of the world, of course. And then we're confronted with this really sticky and awful problem which is the human perceptual mechanism. We exist in a time in which psychology has only ^{very} recently become, how to say precise. I mean it's only been sixty years that psychology has had any kind of intricate meaning, any kind of analytical function. And so we're here in a time which, in dealing with all these systems, we also have to deal with our own. We have to say there's this system here and I look at it and I imagine from it, I take ideas from it and so forth and what are these properties of my perception and cognition? That are as much a part of that system for visualizing reality, as this is. And so we have this double layer. And this also has many modalities in quantum theory which is interesting too. It's an interesting historical coincidence that a double level of experimental equipment was brought in at almost precisely the same time in psychology

as when analytical science was getting off the ground. And that the atomic physicists were in ~~the~~ ^{this} position of having to say "Well there is the subatomic world and I'll deal with one model there, but at the same time I must keep most of my experiments in classical mechanics. That I must assume that this is, that there's ~~this~~ ^{the} double level to ~~the~~ ^{this} system, that I have to assume that the experimental model is ^{both} closed and at the same time open. And so they were confronted with precisely, not even ^{an} analogous problem. I mean in a certain way, it's precisely the same problem. So there are all these aspects that work into it, ^{that} in some way are of immense concern to us.

WOODY: I would put it this way. The more the external systems develop, ^{the} more we become linking them to our own perceptual events. The viticon behaves very much ^{as} ~~like~~ certain events on the retina, so that seems to us to be modelling our thoughts towards that as a possibility of somehow understanding ~~that~~ the perceptual events, Further, if you go into the computer it also seems to be challenging this neural biological structure of nervous system or even processing of information. So I don't think we are really in command of those processes, we are just in a time ^{in which} ~~when~~ those other processes, those technological ones, seem to be very much relevant to our way of interpretation of those mysteries which we could have never thought ^{about} ~~of~~ before they existed. So again, the priority, What we are talking about is if ~~my man, or I don't know,~~ man's ability to interpret the world is primary, or if it's dependent upon those technological processes which help in fact him to progress. So this bondage toward technology is totally obvious. But the interpretation of it differs. Some people feel it's infringing on their evolutionary ideas.

JON: Well, this brings us back to what we started the session with, with this quote, having to do with alternate modes of perception, or modes of realization that have

nothing to do with our accustomed perception. And what seems the given in scientific research and to a very strong degree in almost everything we do is that aspect that as you look deeper and deeper and larger and larger, there has to be an absolute consistency and that the bondage^{that} we feel towards technology is that ability to ~~feel~~ experience reality^{which} we would have ~~had~~ no experience. We wouldn't know^{the} stars if we didn't have telescopes except as they appear to us, we'd have no sense of distances. We'd still think the ~~world~~^{that universe} was ~~this~~ glass ball with these stars embedded in it. We are now confronted with major challenges to thought ~~which~~^{that} exist ~~at~~^{on} the very small level, the subatomic level, because it is shown to us paradigms that challenge the consistency of all the assumptions that we'd held. And so here we're confronted with this; ~~that~~ everywhere we look our assumptions are challenged. And all of a sudden we have to ask ourselves number one, whether there are other modes, ^{for,} which you can completely account for all the aspects we may experience or perceive. There are other paradigms, organizational paradigms or operative paradigms that will similarly account ~~for~~ with consistency that is different. And then we have, and number three which is a kind of sublevel, is that... And then the last thing is^{that} we've been, we've ~~maybe~~ lived long enough in this culture. I'm not sure when this occurred, to realize that the process of science and the process of esthetics are such that you have, that each of these paradigms for perceiving is superceded. That you have no, there ~~is~~ no absolute qualification of progress. That all are satisfactory and all are in a sense equivalent, bound to your knowledge. And so we're confronted again with these various modalities of rationalizing, of understanding, which in a sense have only a relative aspect^{to them.} That we use classical ~~mechanics~~^{dynamics} to deal with celestial mechanics, and we use quantum theory, satisfactory or unsatisfactory as it is, to deal with sub-

atomic physics. That there is in fact no single answer, no single comprehension. So we're confronted with this ambivalent paradigm, and with this knowledge and understanding we are confronting other areas of understanding for ourselves in a more personal way. It makes us ask that question, you know, what are the other modes of perceiving that are as viable as the ones we've come to know?

WOODY: So then, let me ask you this question. What you say brings me this particular image. That we are surrounded by certain complexity, in which more we look at, more we see of it, but we don't really proportionally are able to develop theories or methodologies to understand them. We are continuously re-learning, or restructuring our methodologies, our vocabularies. ^{In fact} The knowledge is available ^{at} ~~in~~ such a magnitude that we cannot even process it in a certain human sense, so that's how the specialized branches thrive. But of course there's no communication to a general humanistic codes or human codes of exchange. That's why we found these principles continuously amazing and new, and surprising. Another way you put it, in the tradition of art as if art could have answered ^{alot of} ~~all the~~ questions in the past up to the modern art, which would continuously examine those other areas, and in fact developed certain styles and methods to understand them. But it seems to be disproportionate now. Art as we know it cannot ^{any more} answer so many questions because it may not be even function of that art.

STEINA: It's because everything has become so exclusive. You know everything has become specialized and therefore art has become sort of on a fringe instead of ^{the} ~~a~~ mainstream that art probably was much more in every other time and age. It has become exclusive because there are so many fields and like ^{what} Jon was saying, there is no way of amalgamating this all together

JON: Except it's interesting...I forget who pointed it out, there's a parallel between our society and late Rome

this period of decadence, and also 15th century Europe, again, the end of a period before the renaissance which is that the arts have become...if anything our society is over artified. That the arts have become of immense popularity, immense importance, and have extended themselves throughout many areas, ~~if~~ ~~mean into the most trivial design, into~~ "Culture is Contagious!" catch stuff. ~~This is the ADS slogan.~~ It's become so widespread, that it indicates that in fact there is no paradigm that unifies all these things, so people seek refuge in art, in this culture. And I see this in many places.

WOODY: But in fact that art has ^{the} a theory that it always overcomes all the obstacles of understanding, will live forever, ^{it} has eternality, what ^{ever} ~~is it?~~ you want, which is the closest conceptual relation in which ^{omni-} ~~only~~ God is present, omnipotent and all, which cuts across the bound of time and energy totally, so that's a priori said, that's the way it is and art comes the closest of a discipline I can recall to...

JON: ...secular religion...

WOODY: ...Towards the perfect model. ^{And it seemed to be} ^{always} always working, because after all, people elect certain ~~area~~ ^{and} ^{this absolute} masterpieces to represent ~~certain~~ model and even if it's dynamic, it accomodates that need. So I guess it is the continuous rivalry between the religious and art kind of concepts to accomodate the need or...permanent quality or... ideal model of beauty and...

JON: What do you think of the absolute inhumanity of the kinds of approaches...

WOODY: It's transitory because there are periods in which, I like, what do you call humanity? Is it a certain quality a priori that lays within which says human kind is positive...

JON: Or things that appeal to the emotions, to ^{effective} responses?

WOODY: I think it has been violated so many times by ~~the~~ various crusades,

or various political movements or nationalisms, or racism. These things have been questioned probably since the beginning...there's no true quality in anything we call humanistic a priori.

JON: This is not so much to interrupt as to interject. I was reading Quantz (?) this morning. J.J. Quantz, you know him? He was a baroque flute player and composer, the most famous flautist in Europe at his time and he wrote a book called on playing flute.....In any case, so he and a number of people like Auterre (?) and other commentators on baroque music speak of the purpose of music: you must play charmingly, you must play slower to create the mood that is ~~somber~~^{somber} or dark and you must play ^{lighter} to produce -- I forget the words they use, they're all related to these affective responses, and so music and art at that time was all dedicated towards producing these affective responses and this was sufficient. It was the purpose of the performer to make people somber in one section and in the gigue (?) to make people lively.

ROBERT: Same with Eisenstein and Kuleshov.

WOODY: That's an interesting point.

JON: But they have ideological rationalizations.

ROBERT: But they used to go into theatres and look at the American ~~movies~~ films and say these the people^{they} get a bigger response from the people because they^{found that in} had more cutting. And they started taking apart american films and they developed all their theories, but from going to the low-grade theatres, in fact they didn't go to the high-class, because there they tend to hold back their responses.

WOODY: Let me put it this way. You can devise those paradigms, as you did, which go let's say from a dark mood to satanic -- that would probably still be permitted -- then they go down to somber things that produces tears. And later

you would say it's dolce, and eventually it would be euphoric... whatever ~~anything~~ you want. But of course there would be these paradigms and there would be the permitted ones. But if you take the modern art, it ^{works} ~~goes~~ beyond that. It goes into what we call for example a pathology -- or psychopathology. In fact, most of the modern literature that we like, or that I like has that kind of character. Or it goes into paradox, that it should appear in fact to be this but it is not. And it becomes antagonistic. Or anti-humanistic - ~~because~~ ^{that} it mockers (?) all those qualities. Because that Hollywood may still be interested in producing tears and it does produce the tears. So that these paradigms have changed. They're no longer the true efforts (as you describe them in Baroque, in music) can stay so simple, in a way.

JON: But ~~it seems also that~~ ~~--- I mean~~ the Baroques revelled in the artificiality of the exercise. They revelled in that, you know, there would be an adagio and everybody would be... which would be an introduction and it would be kind of sad but always expectant. And then you'd go into an allegro which would be livelier (it can be tinged with sadness), they always loved the minor keys). And then you go into another adagio and everybody would be very very sad and then you go into a gigue (?) and that's complete release, you know

STEINA: Was this popular culture or was this exclusive culture?

JON: It was on a high level. The composers had patrons at that point for the most part. So it was by no means popular. Although the other side of it is that this was house music, a lot of it. Like Telemann published - I forget the English title of it - published music and was very successful at it, which people would buy and then play at their house. There was a very high level of musicianship in Europe (these were bourgeois and above, of course). But it was popular, but it wasn't rock and roll in any way.

~~STEINA~~:

STEINA: But it seems to be sort of, ^{in a way} ~~already~~ audience-oriented. It reminds me of a formula - Hollywood has a formula and the networks have a formula... Even each network, if you start thinking about it has their own formula of how to create those mood responses in you. Because they always throw in a certain amount of sentiment, a certain amount of thrill and a certain amount of fun... danger, yes. It seems to be that kind of formula-oriented thing.

JON: But this ^{was} ~~is~~ on a much higher... I mean this was not tv, ~~I mean it was widespread, it was popular.~~ So that, on the highest level, supposedly on the most enlightened level in Europe at ~~this~~ that point, this was the purpose of art -- to manipulate ^{the} feelings in a completely artificial way and everybody could (like they watched a Hollywood movie) say that was really fun going through all those artificial experiences. But it seems the art that's ^{being} made now isn't dealing with this any more. And one thing that seems to be strongly different is that so much of it deals not in... It looks ^{at} ~~for~~ things for what they are.

~~WOODY: I'd say~~

ROBERT: I'd say a lot of it just looks at itself.

JON: Well, there's a lot of that, and that's part of that phenomenon, which is that it looks... when you make, or when somebody makes a tape of wave forms, let's say, you are looking at the wave forms not for their signification, but for themselves. To pick a very good example of this, when Stockhausen uses noise in composition, or radio bands, he happens to put it into a very interesting and complex structure, but he is in one way using it as an ^{ur-}example of a certain kind of phenomenon that's in the world that can blow your mind -- that there is all this stuff ambient in the atmosphere, passing through you, it's communicating at vast rates, you can pick it up, here's this organization and so forth. Vito Acconci

looks at a book. And you see it as a book, as a system of reference and ~~and~~ storage and so forth...that all of this stuff is looking at the work for itself. Looking at the stuff for itself and if it~~s~~ looks within itself, of course, if ~~then~~ it's reflexive then it's still doing the same thing, so that's a special case within that.

ROBERT: Right, but see, ^{when it gets to} that terrain there, I think it gets to be as sick as ~~that~~ ^{the} first example that we were examining - when you do everything for conditioned response.

WOODY: Well, I think it was this way maybe that after the confinement of a...even Christianity, if you take the Bible, because you can arrange a sermon taken from that book which goes through whole emotion scale - from rejection to celebration to torture. These codes were, in a way, religiously coded. Maybe the Baroques first used them neighbor-to-neighbor or person-to-person on non-religious model. But it is a mode of control. If I can make a composition that makes you cry then it's in a way a victory and I can feel that I possess the universal code.

JON: Except we're all just waiting to cry.

WOODY: But people are always ~~just~~ waiting to cry. It's an interesting phenomenon because when people start crying in the movies (which happens to all of us) it usually isn't in the same place for the whole movie house. There could be two explanations: either the cut or the edit has changed this particular event from one to the other produce a distinct chemical change. Or some people simply radiate this urge of crying and then they trigger the audience into crying. But these codes probably can be examined. It eventually has to be translated in some chemical change within the brain, because that's how we function. ^{search,} So in a way, ~~such~~ for those codes have never ~~not~~ really been identified, we don't really know. We know the Greek drama goes - it has some peak then goes to catharsis or whatever - and that has been followed but many times and

it always works, so there are certain models that work. But I don't think anyone has specified precisely the formulas. Maybe Hollywood did. I'm maybe too old for that - I mean too young for that. Because the previous generation that totally trusted movies ~~we-they~~ went through this experience...

STEINA: I think Madison Avenue has totally governed it. I think they've governed it down to a science...the Nielson ratings...I think they've taken it all the way there. Where they have precise formulas - how to make stuff to promote whatever feelings.

ROBERT: But one thing there comes to a moral issue. See, they make a circle out of it.

(End of side one)

ROBERT: ...but it's always the same. It's always the...

STEINA: It is the so-called popular culture, that it's always the same.

ROBERT: I know some Greek students here, and what got them, after being one year in America, this ~~on~~ young woman asked a baby, "What does a happy baby do? in America?" and he says, "OH, you eat, you play and you watch t.v...."

WOODY: It's an interesting point so what we are searching for is are there any useful codes, I mean traditional codes which ~~we-can~~ deal with control of emotions as we know them in a past art, or... Rephrase the question.

JON: I'm more concerned, not by their useful codes, because we're going to ~~be~~ use what's useful or not as we ^{find it necessary} ~~are~~ going to use them - that's proven in the execution and not in the theorization, theorizing. What I'm concerned with ~~is-why~~ though is that why ~~we~~ it is that all of a sudden we don't want to use these codes and that we're concerned with questions that have ^{absolutely} nothing to do with them at all.

ROBERT: Let me say this, that I'm interested in them.

WOODY: But why don't you master them? I think they're so possible?

JON: Why didn't you go to Hollywood?

STEINA: That's a silly.... When we are talking about Hollywood and network we are just...it has nothing to do with...

JON: There's a lot of good Hollywood film around. I think some of it is really good, is real art, is meaningful and all that stuff.

WOODY: But let's not talk about real art, because it's a very relative term....

JON: I want this ~~excise~~ excised from the record..

WOODY: I think that most of the codes that Jon described are possible to achieve within known media, whatever you take, like photography, music, film, ^{composition,} even video. But for example are not sought by people that we are dialoguing about or with. In our sphere of consciousness this term does not seem to be permitted. But if you come from a different...and when it is permitted, then we have to ask you "Why don't you exercise those? What prevents you?"

ROBERT: I try to to a certain degree.

WOODY: But your art doesn't look like Hollywood art at all. And that means also you have restricted yourself in a particular way...

STEINA: But he didn't say he wanted to make Hollywood art, he wanted to evoke moods...

ROBERT: The software has to be thrown at a person according to the natural ways in which ^{information} ~~nature~~ is received. You have to follow nature. There's many types of artificial codes that we can conjure up but that our being favors certain ones. It can be due to conditioning, some of it can be genetic. We don't know yet all the parameters of what forms those natural codes.

JON: Don't you find it important to know? Which are natural and which are not?

ROBERT: Yes.

WOODY: But you have suppressed the formalism totally by that statement. You say ^{that} only naturalism is permitted and

formalism is a nuisance because it doesn't search for the true real codes of the natural processes. What is formalism in your own mind, then?

ROBERT: Formalism?

WOODY: ..versus naturalism.

ROBERT: Okay. Formalism is when you erect, what I would say ~~is~~ an artificial system -- that is to say an invention of your own mind. It's still natural, but you're not extracting it from nature, you're putting it ~~up~~ out. It comes from the other axis. And then, then what do you do is ^{once} ~~when~~ you have the artificial system, you measure it up against the natural system, nature's system. And then you ~~make~~ a synthesis of the two and you just keep going like that.

WOODY: That would be too mechanistic. It would be too speculative. I don't think it can grow from such knowing of the procedures. Because actually we are much closer to abstract kind of innocence. You are describing a formula, in a way.

ROBERT: I'm describing a path. See, all that I do, is I have a path, a faith in a process. But where that leads you is completely...nature.

WOODY: It's a destiny...

ROBERT: ...that you just follow.

JON: So that when you're confronted with ~~the~~ both natural and the formal, what's the process~~?~~ you execute at that point?

ROBERT: He asked me what formalism was.

JON: Right, and then you...

ROBERT: Formalism is like when you make your fences first

JON: Good metaphor.

ROBERT: You make your fences first. When...Where in the other part you find the natural limits...the material imposes it on you...

JON: ^{of} ..what you can observe. You said that you have these two things: the fences and the material that you're observing. And then you said there's some thing that seems to be a kind of reconciliation.

ROBERT: Where formalism is good,^{is} it helps you predict the future. Because once you've taken in enough data and you can put them in graded likenesses or dissimilarities or whatever and you try to find the basic ways (like internally) that it behaves. And there's a certain time ~~that~~^{which} is needed here, the problem of resolution of data. But after a certain time, which varies according to ~~which~~^{what} subject you're dealing with, then you try to come with some empirical form of how basically it behaves and then you test it by seeing if your predictions for the future work.

JON: You mean, by whether art follows you? Or, it's viable because when you put it on the screen everybody's interested?

ROBERT: I was out of the domain of art and I was speaking of how an empirical method - empirical means ⁱⁿ trial. It has to be put to the test....

WOODY: Let me give you a strange example. Van Doesberg (??) and Mondrian were deeply involved in friendship this strange thing happened. Van Duesberg turned his painting ninety degrees towards the frame, and that broke their friendship forever. Is that what we're talking of a formalistic experience? In which we have to test these bases of our relationships also, or are you talking of something different.

ROBERT: Sort of different, I mean. Although I think that both Van Doesberg and Mondrian were formalists, the fact that that effected their friendship I don't think was necessary. I don't know which aspect of your question...

WOODY: What is formalism to you? Is it a strength or weakness, ~~ROBERT~~ is it a privilege...

ROBERT: It's helpful at times. It can be useful at times. But basically I think that formalism comes from the same idea that makes Christians humanize god. It's idolatry to me, basically. So you have a system first and you want to go out and prove it. Like I used to be a big fan of Carl Sagan now I'm not so interested because he wants to ~~make~~

go and prove that "Yes, that somewhere else, something^{else} like us exists" Human facism. Where I think that nature is greater than us. We are a subset of nature. And that you don't go out first with something to prove. You go out with a right way of digesting the input and making certain sets of inferences about that as to the overall laws of nature. So it's a picture that gradually comes into focus, rather than starting with an a priori shape that you push out and...

JON: How do you know if your methodology in perceiving nature is accurate?

ROBERT: When you give output, you watch the way that different types of human beings process that information and you must be interested in basically seeing how they key into it. So in that way, you work yourself towards the universal

WOODY: You see, there are two past art movements, since you are interpreting this _____ that are relevant to your way of interpretation. One is Romanticism, which totally trusted emotional structure of their procedures, yet of course they would not reject the subject, in the ^{sense} ~~case~~ of programmed music. And the other are ~~rationalists~~ naturalists - that was a school of French and Russian novel in the nineteenth century, which totally relied on instincts of man justifying every activity including murder.

ROBERT: I think it's good to use intuition, but I don't want to overstate the case for it in this method. You can still be a very judicious in what you accept and ~~what you~~ don't accept. You. It's just that your formalism is more verb here, more verb-oriented than in formalism, it's ~~more~~ noun-oriented. You make a thing, but when you're an empiricist, you make a thing out of your verb.

WOODY: Let me ask Jon. I recognize myself unfortunately also as a naturalist, or nature-like follower, because I think ~~that~~ what I do in electronic image is purely to deal with certain events ^{which} ~~that~~ are totally natural to the set of

explorations. Do you think there is something like formalism that in fact can be involved in contemporary art? Is there something that formalism can represent as quality, not in the direction that Polidori was putting it, because he was really putting the formalism as in a way negative artificiality. Is there in your mind something that has a different meaning? Than formalism itself, as performed in this new material?

JON: Well, I tend to view it somewhat differently. I see the exercise as ultimately synthetic in the sense that you are dealing within a framework that you hope to....Given this one assumption that we make which we may abandon at some point, that you need to have an overall consistency to justify your paradigms, whatever those paradigms may be. But given that, then I see it as synthetic ~~as~~ in the sense that we are doing these things as experiments in a way, to test hypotheses (in a way. Not formal scientific hypotheses but hypotheses) to test these things to derive some way of synthesizing an idea of the system in human perception that is consistent and coherent and relevant of course to our concerns. So I'm not sure where that puts it in the realm of formalism...

WOODY: Interesting...evolutionary kind you are confessing towards these ~~technologies~~ processes let's say of the technologies^y or systems as related to perception - as in fact telling something about evolutionary relationship.

JON: Well, I can only see us as under the microscope also. We're just in this ridiculous position of being under it and looking through it at the same time. So in that sense, sure.

WOODY: You are also a naturalist in a way.

JON: In a way, but yet on the other hand I don't find the primary drive to be descriptive. To be as Balzac was which was to look at society in all its intricacy. It's rather synthetic. Which is to say to look at whatever we're looking

at in its intricacy and then hoping to come to terms with it that draw connections, which I'm not perceiving now.

WOODY: I'm just interested why we^d all reject formalism as something that we would not like to be known as.

(omitted discussion on Victor)

ROBERT: Maybe when I get old, then I'll be^{come} formal, a formalist. How can you be a formalist when you're young? You don't know enough yet. You know what I mean? I'm still finding out the interrelationships of things, because now we're in a world of complexities of varying grades...

~~JON: Maybe we're all too young to be formalists.~~

WOODY: Maybe we are all not brave enough to be formalists.

ROBERT: When I get old I'll have to face that. What I hope for is when I get old, that all the diffused aspects of my life will become integrated. I want them to become, the one thing I look forward to in old age is I become an integrated person...I certainly don't have that now.

(we took a break)

JON: You say, here a priori the^u control is specified, the performance is arbitrary." What do you mean by control?

WOODY: What I meant is the process...from. If you present a program, then the process ~~is~~ from program to execution - to the output - is in fact identical. There is no processing involved within the system -- unless you would attach another system to it. But the processing itself is contained in the program itself. So what I maybe meant is that...

JON: Well, why don't I read the whole thing. You were talking about..."But I know by observing let's say Grauer and Walter (Jon: Walter Wright I assume) that I'm not interested in structuralism as such. I was tempted before because video tends to challenge you by saying there's a possibility of control, and then you have to struggle for specifying it. Here (Jon: meaning the computer) a priori the control is specified, the performance is arbitrary. I don't believe that by variation of the program, that the full variation

of the program is the challenge, because it can be done. It's a large amount of finite possibilities." So that was your full statement.

WOODY: Well, let me see. It's basically what I said, so let me try to paraphrase it.

JON: Well, relating ~~it~~ ^{this} more specifically to the hardware, there is that aspect of the computer that is the control input to the memory, is this correct.

WOODY: ^{No.} Let me put it this way. The only control in the computer is the program itself ...

~~JON: Which can mean multiple programs, though?~~

WOOD Y: The software itself becomes the ^{only} possibility...but that doesn't mean it's simple - or doesn't mean that it has in fact very baroque performance. It could be very rich. It could be built as an internal mathematical program feedback - so it doesn't indicate simplicity whatsoever. It just indicates that the computer does behave as a passive executor. It executes that particular _____. Now, some of the programs involve more of the internal works of the computer. If the program ~~is~~ specifies that ^{certain} ~~some~~ string has to be internally processed, yes, then I would say the com-
puter ^{then} involves itself greater. But what I was talking about ^{is} ~~was~~ this: I still don't see the autonomous performance of the computer. I believe in this mythical quality, since I've always found it in analog systems. There always was a feedback. We have tried...

JON: You mean ~~there~~ was an internal system performance.

WOODY: That's right. We have tried, for example, a feedback loop here, but only...that was looped only at the output device. It did not reach the CPU function. But I do believe, or I have a desire to find in a computer its own true inner processes, its own expression - which the first thing in my mind is the feedback. But then the feedback through a computer may not be ~~the same as~~ as simple as let's say feedback through another system.

JON: All right. So the dilemma seems to me now to be that in video when you speak about the organizing principles, you can speak of some kind of system performance. In the computer when you speak of organizing principles, you can speak of first^{of all,} the computer architecture. I mean the various macro-modes that are put together in various configurations. You can speak of the structure of...within that - the structure of each chip let's say or the structure of each unit. But the system itself ... it exists only through its arbitrary (by program) ^{organizational} ~~operational~~ modes .

WOODY: I know it. Now. Let me put it from a different angle. I'm interested in systems that are on, or alive, or that are being. That exist...they exist actively.

JON: that are dynamic.

WOODY: Yeah, but dynamic indicates that they have certain results. That they have moved or something.

JON: Oh, I was just thinking of systems that are constantly undergoing some kind of function or change...unlike film.

WOODY: Okay. I still wouldn't use dynamic, because dynamic sort of indicates advanced phase. Yes. I'm interested in the state of the system, or the machine, which would indicate its activity as a product. Not activity which would then produce a product. That means, state on. Active state. Now in the sense of computer we can call it ^{the} maybe image. Image of a computer. That means what's inside, ^{what's} active, may not even be transmitted outside, but of course we know there is an internal state. How to visualize it, or how to make it audible, or how to display it in a behavioral way that would ~~that would~~ present an unambiguous statement of its own performance - or ~~of~~ its own image. Let's call it image. Then, that would be the mystery I'm trying to find within computer system. Imaging as we do it right now, or application to audio generation, or others - are too artificial, or too specific. Too specialized, in a way. That's too traditional in our case.

JON: You mean to say that it's too allied to the product.

WOODY: Yes, and that's _____ our past knowledge.

We knew, or we do understand to a certain degree electronic images. That's why for us it was natural to ask the computer or put a demand to the computer to in fact work with such an image.

JON: All right. So. But there seems to be a kind of paradox emerging which is that you ask for an unambiguous statement of its own performance - of its own nature, yet... Well, let me ask you directly. ^{THE DISPLAY IS CALIBRATED} Do you want to use the computer as a ~~kind of~~ microcosm? As ^a kind of a paradigm from which to extrapolate larger principles?

WOODSY: So, from a certain time - like when I first encountered the feedback loop in video - I understood it was an organism in which there is a ^{of an} input image there's an output and there's a performance regardless if you are there or not. That means, same demand. At least I'm trying to make in my own mind on another system which is called a computer. So I would say the priority, or the appreciation of a computer is not utilitarian in my case. We can treat computers any way we want, but most of the computers are explained as a utility. Again, I'm trying to view the computer as an organism which has its own behavioural pattern, and just to grab this engram or this particular ~~internal~~ image and somehow transpose it in my own terms of understanding of it. Once I understand that then I may integrate it to my own likeness - as a utility of my own mind, or whatever I want and I can also use it for other things. But so far, I've been simply trying to state to analyze what it is to its own internal performance. And I haven't...I've seen glimpses, but I haven't really seen much of that. The screen verifies only certain activities within the peripheral bus. It signifies very little, or as we have it programmed it is only a small amount of information that is slavishly delivered to the surface. It's our inability

to explore it - this particular tool. But that means, with understanding of the ^{inner} architecture, we can occupy every inch of that inner space, whatever it has, and activate that; make it into a state of being, a state of performance eventually.

JON: What about the aspect of Boolean algebra, which seems really interesting to me, knowing only very little about it. which states that you can specify...I mean, you have normal mathematics which is kind of analog...which is analog, and you have Boolean algebra which ~~is~~ says that you can build an entire panorama of statements through simply these two functions: you can specify (correct me if I'm wrong, because my knowledge is very elementary) that you can specify any statement that can be ~~stated~~ ^{formulated} in some way mathematically through the use of this true and this false. This seems to me to be precisely ~~one of these~~ ^{one of these} examples of ~~kind of~~ alternative views - alternative visions. Alternative perspectives, realizations, paradigms.

WOODY: What we have to understand is that we're using these two functions as a code-building process. It would be just too linear to say we could replace all ^{the} mathematical and arithmetical structures by these two statements. We can, but they are usually used first to build code relationships. But in some way boolean algebraic functions provide a natural routing, let's say, on and off, or true ~~and~~ false - the typical workings of a network. So in a sense of a network, yes, it's direct. You can apply this logic to a routing of a signal. But if you speak about complex mathematical functions, we have to build it. And that I would say is related to the question of speed as a _____ put it on a table, _____ that analog devices are faster than digital. And then we have to say of course the digital analogs engaged themselves ^{again} into translating ~~it~~ every value into a code and then into a value.

JON: But it seems then the content is kind of hidden.

WOODY: I beg your pardon?

JON: To change the subject slightly. In the computer your

RTI → PG 16 #2

content which becomes what we've been defining as content which are those modes of control and...Just a second.

WOODY: I'm interested now in specifying... trying to deal with imaging as a particular vertical process. I don't have a language for it yet.

ROBERT: What do you mean by a vertical process?

WOODY: Let's do it as a non-translatable item. You want to put it on paper? This theory of mine. It's very incomplete. Maybe you should ask a different question.

What I'm interested in are two things...

(END OF TAPE)

JON:...depth layers, the buffer, it contains within itself a complete full-raster image ~~good~~.

WOODY: Let me see. In some cases, you could contain it as an image, that's one example. You could also contain one layer as a function. See? That means, you could have six, six-layer deep buffer in which each layer could be an image. But if each layer were an image you would not have any ~~function~~ instruction of performing any functions on those six images. You would have to have two bits serve, or reserved for switching - or four. With two, that's only four. So if you would like to have sixteen functions you would have to have four bits. Some of the locations so to speak vertically would contain a binary representation of a code. But what it would mean, then, that they could be related - how should I say it - not only now we fill the buffer and ~~now~~ we empty the buffer ~~but~~ they would be able to perform vertical operations on themselves as images or as instructions.

JON: So that the function and the image in a sense ~~are~~...are equivalent.

WOODY: That's right. They are equivalent, and they are relatively fast. We would not have to go all the time to a computer to calculate the surface all the time, but we would be able to allocate our autonomous processes right outside... I'm talking about an image which is not maybe controlled a priori, as point-by-point. I'm talking about an image

which would be active and its true state of image in a sense of time, that could be active at that time and then it could develop its own processes,^{some of them} of course I could control through computer by delivering as much control information as I could, but the product of image itself would be autonomous, it would be active, it would be on, as a...

JON: Then, how would you define... There's a translation here, I assume. I mean, I'm not sure I'm understanding you correctly. So that you have each of these boards, chips, whatever - ~~which~~ would have information, raw data, which ~~could~~^{is able} be used either as display, or as function. So that if you have six you would have I guess six factorial versions of the levels of data operating on image or image themselves and so forth through the various permutations of this six factorial. Is this what you mean?

WOODY: For example, my buffer would be maybe sixteen-bit word. Certain portions could be assigned to permanently hold the image, certain would be variable of the image, and certain would be functional.

JON: All right,^{but} you're talking about the translation of raw data into image as we know it, or process through translation. So how would you define the mode of translation? Or would there not, in fact, it doesn't sound ~~as if~~^{like} it needs a visual parameter, I mean it's almost to trivialize it to do that.

WOODY: It's only a state of... you had a better word. It's only to activate it which is the content. The activity of that particular buffer is the subject of this particular interest of mine. It's very hard to specify what it actually would do visually because I can instinctively...

JON: Sure, but there's... there is the aspect where you will - Woody Vasulka will have to specify the precise parameters of these operations.

WOODY: First of all, I have to rely heavily on packaged programs like arithmetic logic units which have boolean

algebra functions available and they function at times - which is 100 nanoseconds - which are useful for that particular function. So I must confess ^{definitely} source of the program, or changing of operations will probably be within those pre-packaged programs. But then I can also work on a line of fast memory and in sort of sub-time. Once this is active I'll have ^{10⁻⁷} of time to access those buffers ~~of~~ then of slow time from the computer. So in a relatively reasonable time I can reprogram those functions in a very slow manner. And then I can make, in a way a non-linear, or non-arithmetic or let's say logically specified operations or program. But then we are coming to a whole different issue which is the modelling of such a program. And then again we got into this ^{because} problem since I've experienced the same dilemma in video - as ^{and} internal/external models through a large space, and the computer has exactly the same problems for me. It is the internal access ~~of~~ or search for internal models and search for algorithmical which are external models and then we have to talk about the area which is where to obtain them - if we can read them directly from the matter somehow - imprint them into magnetic materials like _____ memories, whatever and read them binary ~~th~~ ^{the} and use them to create objects by various addressing schemes. But these are the concepts that I'm trying to terms in my own mind. What is the internal modelling? So first I was interested what is the internal image of the system itself and then what are the internal modelling schemes or modelling programs which we have again found in analog systems. sometimes the function is the image, or control is the image or sometimes the signal is the image and they have vast interactive modes and I presume most ~~of~~ of them do exist in the digital possibilities. But I'm totally unable to find this rich source of non-mathematical programming, or modelling. That persists as kind of a dilemma. So I guess...

JON: So, but how do you define which ^{one is} ~~are~~ more relevant?

Than any other. I mean, you're going to be confronted by the boundless arbitrariness of this machine. That you have immense number of possibilities only controlled by the speed and the data storage of your machine and that to actually define the model is left to you and your imagination. But yet, you're still concerned with certain issues that are...

WOODY: To a certain degree. You see, by now I know there is such a thing, a priori. And surprisingly enough, it always shows...it's like a trust in the system. And it always rewards you with strong statements. And they're not many, maybe, through one's perceptual, or through one's selectibility, but they always are statements. And I am here to collect them, you know, pick them up as mushrooms are picked. ^{that's what} And ~~these are~~ my ambitions are, ^{very} kind of low-keyed. It's based on a faith, again, the faith that I'll find - it'll be a good season - and I'll find them right there. So it's the primitive instinct of the hunter that I'm talking about. It's like with the functional - the arithmetic logic unit by its image...

JON: It sounds to me ^{that} ~~like~~ what we were talking about before, you've just denied.

WOODY: So? What did I deny?

JON: Well, you tell us you're here to collect the berries of the system, and that the system itself (which nobody contests) could conceivably have strong performance if you ^{find} ~~have~~ an unambiguous statement of the system. And yet we're coming, in a roundabout way to defining some kind of rationale for this kind of work and to defining if not quite a methodology ^{at least} then ⁱⁿ some sense of method. And now you tell us that you're not at the mercy of reality ^{but} you're at the mercy of the system. And ~~that~~ you're here in fact to deal with the products that the system might drop into your basket.

WOODY: I thought ^{that} that was always my position, in a way. Because I think that people who view images, look at images, tend to attach the victory

to a person. Somehow the society is conditioned to see every event - even let's say x-ray outburst in the crab nebula is rather assigned to an astronomer who put a name - his own name - to it - than to ^{the event} itself...

JON: Haley's comet.

WOODY: That's right. It becomes Haley. It doesn't become a comet. That's arbitrary because it could be any comet. So that's ~~just~~ I feel very much the same way, ^{that} when I bring, of course I must say, maybe not many people seek the mediative position for various reasons. ~~Because~~ ^{in a way} So I ^{maybe} gain certain ~~some~~ significance ~~in some way~~ just by this particular exclusive activity - but that's in every field, inevitably. ^{that} But I bring this product to the audience, ~~it~~ is a true ^{-cess} mediation. It is a ~~product~~ in which I have to mediate with the system and I ~~have to~~ somehow locate it, save it. But that doesn't mean that it's a finite activity, because as we know in other directions, people tend to take more charge over certain systems - in fact there are people who design systems a priori towards their utility - like in the space program or imaging as science there are some problems which are then solved by computer or by hardware. But since this a priori need is usually a commercial one, or justifiable one I think ~~we~~ people like we are kind of spared these necessities. And I think we can trust rather in the performance than the output reasoning, even if its related to great things like the human mind. I think we could in a way give up this particular myth and trust the manifestation of those systems as materialistic, or naturalistic, or part of the universal laws. And then the product is unbound to a utilitarian interpretation. And I would say that is a quality image which we deal with as individuals working with computers in area of image which happen also to be corresponding with the label of art.

JON: I'm just really uncomfortable with that kind of definition.

ROBERT: You know, what that reminds me of, You can take a

an abacus, and you can shake it, you can use it to make music. The computer is a man-made thing. It has, certain types of behavior are built into it. It has tremendous complexities in the ranges of choices that are possible. So like a random path through, if there is such a thing - You'll never find yourself to be at the same spot, within this maze. But it still has an internal behavior which is man-made and pre-defined.

WOODY: Well, let me give you an example. This computer can be extremely unambiguous if you are speaking of a straight utility like you have to maintain the security of the country ~~or something~~ - so they have to intercept particular ~~messages~~ ^{missile ...} - I don't know. But if you deal with brain research, and if you want to make a model of consciousness and that model of consciousness should be depicted through you know use of the computer you've gained an area in which the computer is in a way of little use to you because you don't have a defined problem. And then the reason behind that you want to explore human consciousness, is the prior one. And that's how you're going to be judged, or valued, or whatever. What I'm talking about is the line of reasoning behind the activity which eventually distinguishes art from non-art or art from science. But the boundary one thinks when an activity becomes an art or creative one in the sense of - these are the boundaries that are very difficult to sketch or trace. We meet continuously people who work for example ^{with-} in industry. But they have crossed this boundary of a reasoning of an industry. They are on what we call the other side or on our side - yet they don't escape their own conditions since they maintain this relationship with industries. And so they're trying to develop another set of reasons, like maybe it's commercial. Yet their demands are ~~only~~ ^{already} purely esthetic even though that doesn't mean art or nothing - purely within abstract discipline, ^{which is} not cash at all. And they may never cross this barrier between the commercial utility

and the art - undefined or unspecified - I don't know what it is. And that territory fascinates me tremendously because the definition of art can eventually be done later. Like ~~later~~, after it's done. But these inner reasons, why people cross these ordinary, or rational barriers in the sense of social utility into the more abstract. That is the transition which I feel is the ~~more~~ important one. And I would like to be in that territory. Then I would not have to ~~feel that~~ be in a way purely responsible - or continuously responsible ^{to} ~~for~~ particular aesthetic schemes. That I would rather be negotiating this position between the tool and the utility and be working this dangerous, basically, area because anytime you face an exclusion from one side. But it's very easy to be included. It's very difficult not to be sure about it. And that doesn't mean that... it's not a quality that I would justify, but it's the territory that I like in a way. Maybe that sounds sort of pompous, but that is the explanation I have. There's no other clue to it.

JON: You see, I guess I'm really not sure to whom we're talking and what are the questions in these people's minds. That would give us some aid in defining ^{the} ~~some~~ questions ~~of~~ in our own minds.

WOODY: You see, for us it's so new