

Eric Siegel: 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 and that took place at Washington . . . I don't 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 happening simultaneously in a state of confusion and noise and so forth. And there were signals coming in and out I didn't know. . . . They had a moderator. It was the Hocking(?) Show . . . So 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 synthesizer 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 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

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It was a little square box, a little bit bigger than a cigar box. It had two video inputs, one video output and an audio input. It had an oscillator knob on the top and it had a switch that had three positions and above the switch was a push button. When you put the switch in the middle position, the push button would switch the pictures, so you could do it manually. It was really basic and simple but that's the way I like things. When you put the switch to one side, audio would switch the pictures. When you switch the switch to the opposite side the oscillator would switch the pictures. And the oscillator had a knob and you could control the speed of the oscillator. Now, simultaneously . . . I don't remember if it was through the switch or not through the switch . . . the same audio signal would go into a solarizing circuitry that would always be active, be able to work. Just a matter of turning one or two knobs. By the way, I have one of the things that came before that which was called the "Solarizer" and actually have a physical one that you can take with you. It probably still works.

I was working for a company, a video industrial company and I met this other engineer there, a guy who knew how to make printed circuit boards. And I was amazed because that was like alchemy to me. How do you make printed circuit boards? But I was designing fantastic circuits and he couldn't design circuits but he could make beautiful boards. So I made a deal with him. I said, "Why don't we cooperate and you can make my circuits on your beautiful boards." How it started is the company that we were working for asked me to design a cable compensation

amplifier. I was a teenager. A high school dropout. But I enjoyed designing circuits. It was fun and so when they had me do it for a major job, lots of money back then, they said, "Can you design cable compensation amplifiers?" And I said, "Sure." I didn't know how to make them but it sounded like fun to figure out. They gave me about two months to play. So for two months I ordered whatever transistors I wanted, whatever parts I wanted. They gave me a scope and I just played all day long and I made it work good. So when the circuit was finalized and finished this guy made it on printed circuits. And I looked at my own boards and said, "Wow, that's mine. I did that!" So I made this deal with the guy that we would make equipment together and so we made a prototype of a switcher/fader with the fading arms and the push buttons, the banks of push buttons.

Howard Wise wanted to label me as an artist and I was, you know, young and rebellious and I didn't see the advantage of being labelled an artist but I was trying to tell at least Howard Wise that my work was more like a Nicolai Tesla or some experimenter that's not just into art but I was trying to fine tune frequencies, make strobes, flickering things and cause something that would snap something in the brain to cause an altered state of consciousness. That's what I was playing with and that's why I was building all these boxes thinking, "What happens if I hit a certain flicker rate?" And that's because I was noticing that certain flicker rates were influential when I would watch them and as a matter of fact before I made the Magic Box there was one night I was stoned and I had one of the nine

inch TV monitors on and there was something wrong with it and it was flickering and I was noticing that it was doing something very interesting and I said I got to expand upon that effect and then I built the box.

...the colorizer was . . . it took the lumen signal and passed it through a prock amp circuit and then the prock amp circuit made a colorburst on the back boards telling the color TV set, "This is a color signal." And with the same sub-carrier that I made the burst I fed it through two phase modulators. They were doubly-balanced modulators that twirled around themselves and so phase modulator No. 1 fed out to phase modulator No. 2 and they would go through this twirling of phase (?) and the bias control for each doubly-balanced modulator was one of the knobs on the front panel and by changing the bias you changed the starting and ending point of one phase sweep and then it would go to the next one to sweep around even more. By playing with these two knobs and switches that flipped them 180 degrees you'd be able to, roughly, throw in the colors in the areas you wanted to colors to be...

...When I was in Sweden I had lots of time to think and no distractions from anything. It was like very quiet there . .
..(chit chat here) It was in that very subdued environment that I was able to think and meditate and daydream, daydreaming is something I was doing in school when I was a kid. They used to mark me down for it bad. Gee, I thought, you know if you had all different kind of these circuits, like if I had a doubly-balanced modulator and I designed this little box of a circuit that it was

one volt peak to peak on the input, one volt peak to peak controlled the whole throw of the circuit. Remember I had the pots in the front on the colorizer before but the voltages . . . whatever they needed that's what they got to work the chip. But then I was thinking why don't I make each little circuit box that's exactly zero to one volt on the control and its control voltage is zero to one volt and its input voltage is zero to one volt. These are children's building blocks. You can take different circuits and just hook them all together in certain formations to try out different ideas. It was all analog. At the time I was designing this I didn't realize that the temperature drift problem would screw up the analog effects but I just didn't think about that. That was something that I had to actually go ahead and build this thing to find that out. I thought of all the circuits that I knew about that would do something interesting to a video signal. There was the solarizer that I already did. There was a colorizer and there was switching two video signals with a control and the control was analog linear but if you put a square wave in then it would switch to square wave type. I don't remember all of the circuits but I had about five, six circuits that were the blocks and there was a prock amp that all of these circuits fit into the prock amp and what the prock amp would do is synthesize the video signal. It would make the burst, the blanking and all the video signal stuff. You'd have a black level control to raise the pedestal up and down and you'd have your synthesized video coming in and that would make up whatever came on the screen. Anyway, I came back to New York city because of

the video freaks wanting me to build the colorizer for them for their CBS Mr. Dan Show. It never really happened because it was too revolutionary. CBS hierarchy said, "No way, would we put this on the air." Anyway, the murder of Fred Hampton and all kinds of revolutionary . . . the Angela Davis crowd. The video freaks, they were really Communist revolutionaries and so they got indigestion over that. Anyway, so after I was already back in NYC I went up to see Howard Wise and I said, "Hey, I got a new invention." "Oh, yeah, what?" And he didn't buy the idea at first. He said, "What's a video synthesizer? What does it do?" And I was like, "It's for this and it does this and it does this and blah, blah, blah." And then he started to understand what it did. He understood that I could create live video art, abstract though, but he was able to relate to abstract and then I made it clear to him that the abstract would not be a still but it would be moving and metamorphosizing. He saw the advantage to that and decided "Okay, I'll fund it." And so he threw \$20,000 at it...

...You know, back then there was only broadcast TV and that's all there was. There was no music TV, MTV. What anybody did back then was a contrast. (Enter Brian). What the alternative to broadcast TV could have been at that pivotal point in history was just limited to the different imaginations of the different individual that were doing whatever they were doing. Okay? So I was off in my metaphysical direction and everything that I was doing with video had something that was caught up with that. And others were just doing whatever they were doing. Like Ken Marsh was doing interviews with people out on the street, very

humanistic type of stuff and then you were doing abstract totally. You and I were like flipping around with abstract and regular stuff but it seemed that I get this feeling like there were some that stayed in abstract only....

... Why was I making a television set when I was thirteen years old? Why was I making a TV camera when I was fourteen years old? Why was it that this good friend, Jack, that committed suicide in Australia a few weeks ago, why was it that my good friends were illegally broadcasting at fourteen years old, fifteen years old in the Bronx? There is a pattern and the pattern is that I was attracted to television, radio and television broadcasting. I was attracted to that. I was exposed to the invention of television at a young age and I caught on to it very strongly and I saw it as a magical device for influencing culture and where cultures would go would be directed by this new invention, the box, this TV thing and I recognized that very young. I also had this feeling that it can go any way and I wanted to take it in a spiritual direction. "Einstein" was the first thing they latched onto. That was the first thing, "Oh, this is something useful he did. Let's take that and put that into the show. That's good. We don't know about that other stuff he was doing there but "Einstein" was real good." I hit upon something that worked that got out there but "Einstein" was what I would consider to be a metaphysical piece....

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