

Carolyn Tennant: It might be interesting to get some biographical information from you, but I am most interested in your decision to go into video. What led you to video to begin with, and what questions you might have hoped to address? What was your process for that transition, and was this something that came from your work in other disciplines?

Ralph Hocking: Do you want the whole history? I don't know where to start with the damn thing. I was interested in trying to figure out what to do with technology, the arts, and education. I was teaching at Allegany College in Pennsylvania and they fired me—or denied me tenure, whatever you want to call it. I had run into Nam June Paik in 1968 and I couldn't figure out what the hell he was doing. So we kept in touch. After I was fired the president of SUNY Binghamton, which is now Binghamton University (they change their name every once in a while), hired me to come in and figure out what I was going to do. So I started screwing around with technology because I was curious about how things worked, what you could do with them, and how far you could go with junk. I guess stuff like this was also a lead out of teaching regular courses in art. I had kept in touch with Nam June, so I finally decided that I'd like to play around with television. We used to call it television before the word video.

I thought the whole notion of education television was bizarre. ... I originally got interested in the TV stuff when I'd been to Pembroke State College and watched a TV presentation. It was educational television in the classroom, just a guy on TV that had a black board; there was no proctor or anything. The people in the classroom sat there and told the guy to fuck off, screamed at him, and had a good time. They were just playing with the guy and paying absolutely no attention to him at all, and that impressed me. I thought that was very reasonable. It seemed to me that something could be done with it—the stuff of television. Nam June was doing his magnet patterns and stuff like that in New York, so that was one thing that could be done; then Sony came out with portable equipment so I talked the school into buying some. I gave to the president a fairly simple proposal to explore the idea of what could be done with television. They gave it to me to play with and I started lending it out to people to see what would happen. I think we called it the Student Experiments in Television. So I lent portable stuff out, played with it

myself, tried to figure stuff out. All of this led to getting a grant from New York State Council for the Arts to set up a storefront in Binghamton. Now I had to set up a separate organization because the State Council cannot give money to the State University system, which is still in effect.

I don't know why I was particularly interested in television except that I get interested in things and I pursue them until I get tired of them. I've been through pottery, sculpture, photography, a lot of different things that I still have some affinity for but I can't pin down a reason why. [Maybe] it was genetic. My grandfather had a penny arcade, so that's as close as I can get. [...] My grandmother would sit behind a cage and make change for people. Every time I went there they gave me a bag of pennies and said, "Don't go out the door with this." As long as I put them in the back of machines it was all right. So I played all the machines. ... I was about five or six years old. I was trying to screw around. You know these things that will grab something and dump it? I put a lot of pennies in that thing trying to catch that son of a bitch—trying to out wit it, which of course I couldn't do.

TENNANT: So what was the model for the Center?

HOCKING: There was no model. It was the first one.

TENNANT: What model were you working against?

HOCKING: There really wasn't any model. That is a serious statement. This started, it went on, and it's still going on. And that's all I know about it. This is all bullshit that happened before you were around or anyone else was around playing with video. There's no way that you can bring anything into that except its all sort of random structural stuff that I paid attention to. It wasn't going to be like Global Village, or SUNY Binghamton, or educational communications, but there was no model. I didn't know what the fuck I was doing! But the whole notion of not knowing what you are doing is a wonderful thing, because it allows you to be ignorant. And then you can use your ignorance and learn

something, instead of saying to yourself, “Well I know about this, so I’ll find out if I can affirm my position.” There was no model. Nothing. Now where do you want to go with that one? Don’t screw around with words or your language because I won’t accept them.

TENNANT: So what would you if I said the word business?

HOCKING: I don’t know, it’s fine.

TENNANT: What is business’s relationship with the Center?

HOCKING: There isn’t any.

TENNANT: Why?

HOCKING: Why should there be? [long pause] Well I’m serious! Why should there be business relationship to the Center?!

TENNANT: How has it survived then?

HOCKING: Through the graces of the people at the New York State Council of the Arts the National Endowment of the Arts, and other people who have given us money. I told them early on, I said, “I’ll do this and you’ll get a lot of work for little money.” At one point I was told by one of the people running the Council if I would do documentaries of the arts organizations in Binghamton, they could give us money to do the stuff we wanted to do like the Centers artist in residence program. I said, “I’m not going to do that. You give me money to do what we’re doing or don’t give me money.” And they backed down. We’ve not gotten a whole lot of money a year, but it’s all we live on as far as the TV Center goes—I mean, I’m obviously teaching and making money other places. But there’s no business involved in it, and I think that all of this bullshit that’s going on. I argued with Vickie Levine. Vickie Levine is one of the first people that is on the State Council, and was one of the first people to get this masters degree in the arts business

administration; she started that at SUNY Binghamton. When I saw that coming I said, “This is disastrous! This is bullshit!” Once you set this up under the guidelines of business, you’ve lost all of the possibilities of intelligence, of serendipity, accident and chance. Stuff like that. And your forcing the notion of business to become the primary understanding of what the arts are. A good example of this is Public Television. It’s exactly what happened to them. So no. There’s no business.

TENNANT: To understand how the artists work at the Center is based on a different—

HOCKING: Are you thinking about your words before you throw them at me? (laughs) It’s smart—don’t do it! You’re in trouble! I’m not doing it just to be mean. I’m doing it to give you a sense of what my thinking is, which is what you’re after. And I’m not really attacking you; I’m attacking your style. Your style is something that you’re learning in school now and it is time to rethink that too. [...] I think it has to be thought about.

TENNANT: Well as far as that goes, what would be a more affective or a productive way to think about the ETC, and the work that you’ve done with the Center?

HOCKING: How could we be more productive? We can’t be more productive. We’ve been turning away people for thirty years. The only thing we could do is to have more of what we’ve got, and that takes money that we don’t have. Nobody wants to give us the money, and I don’t give a damn. I think it’s better to be really good at what you’re doing on a small size than to try to expand into the universe. You can count the people who have tried this. Gerald O’Grady. Hell, almost every group in Upstate has gone to hell because of that. Because they’re trying to be expansive because they’re encouraged to be expansive. And that’s what NYSCA taught. Or else, you’re just seeing a hell of a debt somewhere along the line. I think Rochester is a good example of that; it seems like Nathan and his crowd are constantly on the edge of disaster. I don’t know how I could better what I’m doing and I don’t know how to define what I did. I guess it comes down to that. It’s day to day. Pay attention a little bit, and don’t let it get away from you. Don’t think too big. It certainly had nothing to do with stardom, fame and glory.

TENNANT: I'm curious about the research and development of tools that happened.

HOCKING: That was actually called "how can we fuck this thing up and do something else with it?" I never heard anybody talk about "Research and Development." Did you Sherry? [to Peer] Did you?

PEER BODE: It wasn't the term but—

HOCKING: It was: "what could we do with this thing to make it do something more, or different?" So again, you're bringing in this terminology, which I'm not objecting to—I'm just pointing out that it's not what he was thinking at that time, and it certainly isn't now either. R&D department has never existed.<sup>1</sup> I knew they existed in the world because IBM had one.

SHERRY MILLER HOCKING: But it was also the language used by the council, when we first approached the Council for help. That's actually not true; with the Paik Abe, which was funded by the Council early on in '71-'72, they just funded it. But as they got more used to the idea, when Peer, David, Rich, and Walter started coming up with ideas for these tools and we ultimately got small amounts of money to work on these ideas, when we talked with them the word research came up. I can't remember if we started using it, or they started using it, but I think it was a way for them to understand what it was we were trying to do.

HOCKING: ...When I think of "Research" I think of wandering around libraries and digging into books, things like that. What I wanted to do was turning a machine apart, and seeing what crap you could push out of it or pull into it. I suppose "Development" is universal and it's something that happens all the time with what we're doing.

BODE: I seem to remember "Tool Development" being a term. We had that Tuesday Afternoon Club with Matt Schlanger, Mimi Martin, Neil Zussman, Barbara Buckner, just

a number of us artists who were around making things. Each person was dealing with building one part [of the system]; the goal of this little side project was to try to get some of the tools moved forward, and also for us all to be able to have systems of our own. It was expanding ownership of the equipment, so this thing about tools was a really big deal—artist tools.

HOCKING: And that wasn't done by the Center. It was done by those people and I had nothing to do with it.

BODE: I think that it came back into the Center when we applied for some funding. Because it became clear that maybe it was a good idea to print the tool base that was at the Center; the boards would get printed so things at the ETC wouldn't be first generation, hand wired machines. So that's how it eventually folded back into the Center.

HOCKING: That was the influence of other people coming into it, but I had nothing to do with it. I was spending my time going to see what kind of junk I could find at the surplus. I was more interested in bringing junk back and I did that all the way through this whole thing. Had a whole floor full of crap all over the place. I've had a good time with that.

BODE: Was a lot of that from Binghamton, from this area, or did you go far?

HOCKING: No, it was the whole state. A lot of it was primarily government surplus and surplus from the SUNY system. I got myself on a surplus list and became what they called a picker, or something like that. They had outlets in Canandaigua, Albany, Brooklyn ... They'd take all of the surplus in the state system and whatever the government would donate to them, and throw it in this warehouse. You'd go in there and buy it cheap. I think it was in Brooklyn where I filled up my truck with Steenbecks. Things like that would cost me ten bucks, so I'd bring this stuff back. I was more interested in that than buying new stuff. If I had to buy new stuff, I would. But I have very little interest in buying new stuff unless that's the only way I can get it. I'm much

more interested in stuff that's been used, humanized and worn—that has some sort of character to it.

PAMELA SUSAN HAWKINS: Can you explain “humanize” a little more, how you mean that?

HOCKING: Wear and tear. It may have been changed around a little bit. A person has obviously touched it; it's not fresh out of a box. It has had some comfortable existence sometime before that. I'd get cameras with someone's writing all over it, crap that they stuck on it. They were great, and I still have a few of them around somewhere. They were enjoyable because they'd been touched by human beings.

HAWKINS: You have been talking about individual participation and curiosity and it seems like you really honor that.

HOCKING: It is the only thing that makes any sense to me. The group thing sucks. You don't get anything done. All you do is sit around and try to elect a president. I think individuals are the way things happen. But I mean that's partly due to my connection and understanding of visual arts. Those visual arts that I've been exposed to are nothing but people—separately. Painters, sculptors, potters—people like this, who are usually working by themselves. To work in a crew in television is totally alien to me. I wouldn't even think of it. It's pretty much what a lot of groups did: they became collectives. They went out and collectively did something. We didn't have a collective. We just had a loose conglomeration.

BODE: We had friendships.

HOCKING: We had friendships. We had a dry spot on Court Street where you could get in out of the rain and hang out.

BODE: Do you think that this idea of working as an individual was something that

influenced what was done with the equipment? Television as a system is really made to be a group, team thing. Were the instruments made to be able to make something individually?

HOCKING: The idea was to see what you could do with some of the ideas of television but I think the goal was not to have five people operating the video synthesizers at once. So they were tools to be used by individuals.

BODE: I roughly remember a term that you used a lot that had to do with machines being ideas or some kind of connection between ideas and machines. Conceptual machines, or machines as concepts.

HOCKING: I don't remember. That sounds like Woody. But I have a terrible memory—I've never been able to remember anything. I failed in school because I couldn't remember anything for tests, but decided that was a good because I wouldn't have my head full of shit. So I trained myself not to remember things. But I knew where to find out about them. When you say things like that, sometimes it sounds like somebody else was doing it somewhere. That's why I said Woody.

BODE: It's funny because I definitely remember, but maybe it was stuff you said when you were in teaching mode. Another thing that came up was about hands and fingers, and an argument I remember happening here on one of the Sundays when Paul Davis and David Jones were here.

HOCKING: Computer Sundays.

BODE: Yes. Computer Sundays: building equipment and software development. Paul was trying to convince you that mathematics was the way to go—that it sharpened your brain. Plus, it was the basis of all of these systems. And you said this thing, that it had to be in the fingers.



HOCKING: Well, for me it does. I just can't do mathematics. [...] I can't do algebra without a machine; I can't do multiplication or division easily. I wouldn't pursue it, and consequently all I could do was irritate Paul and David, who understood some things. But I thought that maybe they were missing things that I thought were important. So I've never been able to do circuitry. I can't sit down and solder circuitry together because I have no idea what the fuck is going on. I know a resistor resists and a capacitor builds up a charge, but I'd probably put them in backwards because I don't know which way they're supposed to go. I can't read block diagrams, and I didn't want to!

BODE: But that's something they could do—they were the engineer guys who knew that stuff.

HOCKING: Yeah, and they were the ones doing it. I was a good cook, so I'd make dinners on Computer Sundays. And I grew some nice dope. Gotta keep 'em high, keep 'em happy. It all worked out nicely—for a while! (laughs) Until there was nothing left to invent and everybody went in their own direction.

BODE: That's the "Research and Development"! (laughs) I remember coming in on a number of those Computer Sundays and they were really great. A lot of stuff happened and accumulatively things got done: the D +7A Input/Output Extension Box, general purpose interfaces.

HOCKING: If I had been a businessman at that point, we probably would all be rich. But we wouldn't have as much fun! (laughs)

BODE: Well it's funny because in the 70s, that box was about being able to have knobs and switches, inputs and outputs to a computer. Which is kind of what happens with MIDI controls for different products.

HOCKING: I was driving that too. I said, “I do not want to sit at a keyboard and punch an H or something, and have it mean something else up there on the screen. Give me something to get a hold of. At least let me turn a knob or throw a switch.” That’s where the D +7A Box came from, that push when we first started playing with computer. I wouldn’t sit with keyboards and learn a language because with language, I’m right back to mathematics. I can’t do languages either. “Que pasa?” is about as far as I get. That’s only because I was in Cuba in the Navy, and that’s what everybody said to each other. So at least I learned that much. “Nada”, I can do that.

TENNANT: I guess I’m getting back to words, which could be dangerous, but what was the impetus behind using Experimental in the title Experimental Television Center?

HOCKING: What would be the alternative? These were experiments. I didn’t know what I was going to do and I didn’t know what I was doing. We could have said Invention Center, or something like that, but Experimental seemed to be a reasonable term. Art and Science to me are pretty close. As far as if you’re looking for something, or trying to figure something out—or you don’t know what you’re looking for but you’re trying to understand at least what might happen, where the accidents occur, that kind of thing—the whole notion of experiment sounds right. It’s still reasonable for me to think of this as television too. I know everything has become digital and television is a dead issue, but we’re still looking at these television screens that have a different configuration. The notion is still the same: you’re putting this Seurat like crap together to make an image. To me the whole thing really does go back to Seurat and those notions that was painters experimenting with pigment. I guess that’s where it comes from—if you want to find a route that way. What else would you call it? I can’t think of another name.

BODE: I saw a text that Nam June wrote in the catalog of one of his first retrospective shows at the Everson. Maybe it wasn’t a retrospective; maybe it was just a show. But there’s a really nice catalog that came from that. I think it was an opportunity to put together his writings from when he was at Stony Brook, sort of like ten years of Nam June’s writings. In it he almost describes the TV Center in terms of a place where artists

and engineers could bump into each other, the interests in education, and things about video synthesis. I know you had contact with him. Did you ever read this? The show would have been '72.

HOCKING: It's probably the show we did.

BODE: Yeah it had the video bed in it.

HOCKING: I don't remember reading the text, but it's not a new idea in that sense. EAT, Experiments in Art and Technology, was around before us. That was pretty much an exclusive club, tied to a few people for the most part and it seemed to me that what it did was to give them a place to make their own art. Which is fine, but it wasn't what I was thinking about. I didn't particularly know what was going to happen, and they were trying to make something happen. I had no intention of doing this directly but as I look back on it, I think the differences between what we did and almost every other group was we incorporated educational structures, the arts, and the community. I mean, where the hell do you stop? And there wasn't any kind of exclusivity from the first part of it. Now there is. We only play around with people who have some kind of back ground with video, but that's the extent of it. You can still walk in off the street and away you go. But that's not how a lot of these other organizations would operate.

TENNANT: You've mentioned Seurat. What are some of the other artistic influences on your own work?

HOCKING: J.T. Abernathy at Ann Arbor, do you know him? You wouldn't know him he was a potter. Michael Angelo is probably the first. When I was seventeen or eighteen years old I was in the Navy and went to Florence. That Medici Chapel blew me away. These huge naked people made out of stone astonished me, and I thought "God, what a jerk that was!" (laughs) Renoir as a painter, not particularly what he painted but the way he painted. Rodin did pretty much everything I wanted to do with sculpture, so I gave up. Who else? I think Don Judd's work is pretty interesting, as is Dan Flavin's; they're

contemporary. Nam June is capable of doing some interesting work, he just hasn't done much of it. Most of it is his cultural crap. There are the Han Dynasty, and Neolithic Japanese potters—where do you want to stop? It goes on and on. None of my influences came from politics, sociology, or business. Everything was from the visual arts.

BODE: Can you say a little bit more about Donald Judd and what interests you about his work? I saw his work for the first time here, and was just amazed by it. I always think of Donald Judd in your world, somehow.

HOCKING: One thing I can't do is analyze things very well when it comes to the theoretical structure of what this or that is about. I really block that out. I'll sit in on an art history presentation and they start talking about this, looking at a slide: down in this right hand corner is this symbolic "bahzahzah", which usually means "koofahfah" instead of "googoofu", but this time it actually means "guhcahcah", which is a real shock. And in the mean time you've just got this fucking painting. I can't analyze Judd's work. I can just say it's really nice work, and it's stuff that I really respond to. On the other hand I respond as well to Sara's [Hornbacher] work. I responded, like I said, to Michael Angelo's work. I saw a Renoir painting in the Phillips collection when I was in Washington, "The Luncheon of the Boating Party". I got up close to it and kept isolating areas of it. Every piece I isolated was a separate painting—there was nothing incomplete about any piece of it. And in some ways, it made less sense of me as a whole. I had a group of students with me. I went out and sat on the curb and said, "What the fuck hit me? This is astonishing stuff!" That's the way I respond to things but I don't analyze them. Like, if Judd had made fourteen pieces of his stack instead of twelve, what would be the significance of leaving out the last two? Maybe he ran out of money, I don't know. I can't do it. You accept these terms the culture gives you: the histories, the theories—

BODE: I chew on them! (laughs)

HOCKING: —you eat them and you spit them out onto print now and then. I just avoid them because they scare the shit out of me! They make me angry, so I try not to use them.

I try to be tolerant of people that do use them, but sometimes my tolerance leaves me.  
(laughs)

BODE: You just mentioned some exhibitions, in which you saw work that you really responded. There are certainly possible conversations that have to do with how media should or could be displayed. Thinking about video in media exhibitions: one question could be about some experiences that you've had where you've gone to a video exhibition and felt that kind of thing about media; another kind of question could be more general and if you have some sort of fantasy about how exhibitions should be done, or how it's not being done?

HOCKING: Well I've been saying this for years, and I'll still say it: single channel stuff should be displayed in your bedroom and never, never, never shown on a large screen where you've got a whole group of people watching it. [...] It's just nuts to even think about doing stuff like that. So I'd say for single channel work, if the stuff that goes on to a screen doesn't need or have any kind of relationship with a different kind of space, then take it to bed! Watch it, have a good time, and think about it. I think most of the attempts I've seen of these sculptural spaces that have developed for video haven't worked very well. I've lost interest in it and I haven't seen anything for ten years. I saw Nam June's stuff where he would stack shit up and do that, and those things demand to have a space to be put in. I can remember some of Gary Hill's earlier stuff with sound that was kind of interesting, but it wasn't video. "Wipe Cycle" was fascinating to me; it was one of the first things I thought was interesting that used time delay.<sup>2</sup> Everything else in the room I don't remember. Nam June may have had some wiggly shit there and other things going on.

HAWKINS: Weren't you involved in making TV Bed?

HOCKING: Yeah, I made it. Sherry thought it up, I made it, and Nam June took the credit for it. He said, "I'm sorry, I have to take all credit for it." I said "Nam June, go ahead. I don't give a shit!" Now he denies it, but Sherry thought it up, I made it, and Nam

June took the credit. Nam June wanted to be famous and he was working his ass off to become famous. I didn't give a shit about being famous. I just wanted to see what life held for me. Which way am I going to go tomorrow? I'll get up and see what happens! (laughs) But he worked at it and I have no problems with that. He also did a lot of things for other people, including me, so I don't have any regrets. I built the "Video Cello" too, and I think I was needling him one day and said, "I didn't get any credit for building the Video Cello." He said, "Carpenters don't get Credit." So I said "OK". And he's right: Don Judd never built any of his stuff. You have no idea who built it because the carpenters don't get credit.

MILLER HOCKING: Going back to this idea that Peer brought up about installation work versus single channel. Just recently you have, with the help of the Institute for Electronic Art and Peer Bode, been able to put together a DVD of your early single channels. We've been giving them freely to people to take home and view that stuff as you think is appropriate. But you've also, over the years, done some work that was more like installation. I'm thinking of the last show that you did at Munson Procter with the three monitors and the Amiga stuff. What about that work? How do you see that fitting in?

HOCKING: If it takes more than one channel you can't put it in your bedroom, that's all. It seems reasonable to me to set things up that are more expansive and more complicated. I don't have any problems with things like that, I just don't know if I want to watch it. That was the last time I was in a museum. [...] And before that, it was probably another five years. I don't go to museums any more. I don't go out to look at things. I'm just not interested in stuff and I don't think I'm very interested in video anymore, that's part of it. I don't burn out, I just get tired and bored with stuff. Actually, I'm back into photography; I'm doing a lot of re-looking at old photographs, and doing that through the computer. I'm not making any new photographs or videotapes. [...] I'm designing the structure and putting this house together. [Points to a wall] This wall is a thing that we built last winter that's full of pipes and radiates heat. I'm trying to figure out how to keep this place warm in the wintertime. Stuff like that's important to me too. Cooking, not

because I want to be a gourmet, but because I want to eat and I don't like to go out to eat. I enjoy a lot of things that I'm doing. I have no passion for business, industry, the arts, any of that. I don't any allegiance to any of it. What happens when you get a little older is that you can fuck around the way you want to. I wish I had some of my abilities that I had when I was younger, but I guess I could live without them. I enjoy the idea of getting up and seeing what happens so I don't have any schedule. I don't have to go to New York and I don't have to go to meetings. This is one of the few meetings that has happened to me this year, maybe the last! (laughs)

MILLER HOCKING: Or maybe not... (laughs)

HOCKING: All of those cultural connections are things that carry you along or drive you, but I just want to enjoy life. I expect to be productive because I don't know what else to do other than to be productive. I went out the other day and bought a golf cart to drive around out back. It runs on electricity so I'm going out there and I can't hear any engines. I can't hear anything! I'm moving through space, with no fucking engine, and this fascinates me. The deer look at me like, "What is this big white thing?" I'm having a good time with things like that. I have no ambition. I have enough money now to not be ambitious.

HAWKINS: But ambition aside, this collecting—there's still a curiosity; you are still gathering tools. There's still a playful engagement with these tools. [...] What drives you to collect certain things?

HOCKING: How could I keep building buildings to put stuff in without being a collector? Is it genetics? Was I denied everything when I was a kid? You have to put me under a deep psychology to pull that one out. What drives me? Nothing drives me, I just do it.

BODE: I have an observation in parallel with what you've just described. The TV Center actually affects the incredible numbers of people who have gone through this place. As

one of them, my experience is that it's one of the most generous places and situations I've ever experienced. In a way, maybe it has some relationship to what you're describing in terms of your own process, your own interest in creating an environment that lets us do whatever. It's pretty amazing, remarkable.

HR It is the way school should be. Basically it's an experiment in education. I see it that way and I'm aware of it, because I was so fucked up by the educational systems that I went through. But I think the TV Center is a very successful experiment in education, and it still operates that way. You're right. It has brought a lot of things together for a lot of people. And there are no rules. There's no, "You gotta be here. You gotta do that. You gotta do this."

BODE: "You have to finish XYZ..."

HOCKING: I mean, you have to bring back the Portapak or we'll send the cops out after you and you won't get it again. That's about the only law I think we had. In some ways it was a response to schooling. I'm a poor participant in school systems because I hate school systems. I still do. I won't give them a dime. I think they should all be destroyed. They should take the money away from the school systems and give it to the war to get the war over with! How's that?! (laughs) I don't have anything good to say especially about our public school systems. I've thought about this for years. Sherry drives me nuts because her father was a superintendent of schools in Kenmore, and she has a great allegiance to that whole thing. But the more I think about it, the worse it gets. It seems to me that the TV Center was built as a good school in some odd way. I used to say I'm making that, it's my sculpture, I'm making artists. I'm well aware of all of these things.

BODE: I have a question for you Ralph. I just saw this Wim Wenders film about Nick Ray, *Lightening over Water*. In it Nick refers to the film he did in Binghamton with his students called *We Can't Go Home Again*. He mentions the use of super-8 film, 16 mm, video synthesizers; he sort of rattles off all of the different techniques that he was trying out. I know the video synthesizer is the Paik Abe, which I'm pretty sure he used at the



TV Center. I'm curious if there were ever conversations that you and he had about video and film. I don't know quite what the relationship was like, but he seemed to be open to it because he was using it.

HOCKING: We didn't have many conversations about that stuff. As innovative as he pretend to be, I think in the back of his mind he was always ultimately trying to make Hollywood listen to him again, to make another a movie, another James Dean wonder or something. That's probably what drove him. But he saw something he wanted to do with four or five different projections on the screen and the ability to able to mix stuff. You could do that easily now, but it wasn't time to do it then. He and I would drink together. I got a house in Sag Harbor one summer [...] and took my family out there. Nick showed up for about a week or two, we went swimming and drinking and had a good time. I don't remember having any conversations with him that would relate to philosophical positions. He was pretty much bombed most of the time. [...] When we'd go out he would direct. He saw himself as the director so he would have people going around and doing this and that for him. I don't think he knew about machinery for the most part. One time I saw him trying to load a camera and it was a fiasco. [...] I enjoyed him up to a point—he could really be a pain in the ass, insistent. The only thing that bothered me about Nick is that he'd show up at three or four in the morning. He'd wake me up and want to get in to play with his students.

BODE: In terms of collaborators, Woody Vasulka and Steina Vasulka are people that you've known for a long time and have had a friendship with. You have worked together in some capacities, or at least in parallel—your paths have crossed. Was what they were doing something that was collaborative in terms of inspiration: were they inspiring to you or were you inspiring to them? There seems like there was some back and forth, which I saw in terms of travel because they'd show up here.

HOCKING: Woody got the idea that he wanted to put a computer together. He'd get Paul or David interested and they'd show up here, we'd talk about it, and then we'd discuss how to get money. Woody showed up one day with his little antenna machine and we

broadcast through the TV Center; that was kind of fun because we had a small broadcasting unit and we had all of these sets and TVs in the place. We didn't talk much about the work. Woody's interest was pretty much in making the computer machine that he wanted—and making operas. I don't give a shit about operas. Steina did pretty much her own work by herself, which made more sense to me in some ways. But it was not influential nor do I think I was influencing her. On some levels we had certain kinds of similarities. We were using the same machinery and had similar concepts about how if you could only get so many shapes off of an oscillator, then you'd have to start screwing with it to get something different.

TENNANT: Getting back to an early question that Peer about conceptual machines. Do you think this is a romantic idea? What do you think about people placing value on the machines as psychic things?

HOCKING: It's bullshit. Bullshit, total bullshit. Absolute, utter, stinky bullshit is what I think about it.

TENNANT: Well looking back on some of the writings of people in the 50s 60s and 70s who were not even talking about video but technology, it sounds like there were these anthropomorphic undercurrents. I'm wondering how hard it was to fight against that.

HOCKING: I'm not fighting against anything. I'm just playing, and having a good time discovering things. I don't spend my time reeling against the universe. I do occasionally, when something gets in my face. But I don't go out and look for it. I spend more time reeling against my wife because she's reeling against the universe, screaming about how bad George Bush is. I keep saying, "Look, you've got to figure this out instead of saying 'He's an asshole! He's an asshole!'" I don't want to spend my time being negative about things—I want to spend my time being thoughtful about things. I don't want to lead any particular conclusions; I just want to have a momentary answer, maybe for the day. I don't see machines as being anything but machines. I don't fall in love with little bunny rabbits and stuff like that. We have some bats living in an empty chimney, which is kind

of neat, but I don't have an affinity beyond that. I don't think of the "cutesy little bats-ies", or [pointing to the camera] the "wonderful DVCam-ies!" (laughs) Its kind of that thing that people do. And you're right; it's anthropomorphic. I don't want to deal with it—I believe in calling a spade a club.

BODE: I have a question about economics, which is not about business but about the economics of being an artist working with technology and media. It's also about strategies, because technology can be expensive and there are lots of different ways of doing it.

HOCKING: It can be, but it doesn't have to be. We don't use expensive technology and we never have. When we were playing around on Court Street a lot of people in New York were trying to get as much money as they could to get two or three cameras. I thought that was ridiculous! To me, the importance of what you're after is the imagery, not the machines to make the imagery. You can't blame everything on the machine if you don't get a good image; the only thing you can do is blame yourself because you're not smart enough to know how to get a good image, which you can do with really cheap cameras. On the other hand, some of the things that are expensive are kind of fun too. But I don't need them and I don't long for them if I can't have one to play with. I'm not sitting here trying to figure out how to get a Rolls Royce—I like used Cadillacs! (laughs)

MILLER HOCKING: It's that surplus strategy. I think it's one of the ways we survived early on. We took what other people were discarding and used it.

BODE: Now that would be EBay phenomena.

HOCKING: Oh I'm on EBay all of the time. I just got a couple decks. A brand new VHS deck, never used, for twenty bucks. I threw it in the back so if I ever need a brand new VHS deck, I've got it. If I don't need it, maybe somebody else will. I thoroughly enjoy that kind of goofing around.

BODE: So in terms of economics and strategy, that's one example of how to function.

HOCKING: Well you only have two choices if you can't afford something: go get it or go into debt. I wouldn't go into debt and we have never been in debt. We were always either a little bit ahead of the game or even. It's been that way in my life too. I went into debt once in the 60's. I had three or four of gasoline credit cards, and I didn't pay attention. Pretty soon I was two hundred dollars in debt to the gas company and it was shocking to me that I had done that. I cut up all of the cards and sent them back to this one company with a check to pay them and paid off the other credit cards. The company I had sent the cut up cards to actually made somebody sit there and glue them all back together. They sent the ones that weren't theirs back to me, all very carefully put back together. I thought, "Oh my god, this is insane." So I wouldn't let the TV Center go into debt—I'd shut it down first. We have a fairly easy way of getting money now. It's just called apply for it and you get some! (laughs) We've been doing it for so damn long. At the same time, if we didn't get it, we'd be turned off the next week. We'd shut this place down and everybody at the Council and the National Endowment knows it. I jumped on their ass one year when they didn't fund us, so you know we don't get much from them—\$10,000 bucks—but it's what we need. We just need enough to pay the rent and stuff, and everything else was kind of manipulated in some way—with surplus, or by people putting stuff together, people giving us stuff. I'm very lucky. I have a tendency to be in the right place at the right time. I hardly ever have problems getting parking spaces—it's nutty. I don't worry about stuff like that, it sort of happens. I attribute it to the fact that I'm pretty cheap. I don't have to get paid a lot in fact I was the lowest paid full professor on our campus. [...]

BODE: I have a question to clarify this partial memory I have at the TV Center years ... NYSCA wanted to see the work that was being produced at the Center and if I have the story right, you wouldn't send it to them because you didn't want to be involved in the competition or pressure of various other places producing TV programs. It was this issue that the Center wasn't about producing.

MILLER HOCKING: Yeah, there was an issue about production and making artists

finish things. There was a lot of pressure to show completed works, but in terms of the residency we were always open so that people could come in and experiment.

BODE: It was about process not production.

HOCKING: They wanted me to put together those documentaries about the artists. But they were bullshitting, and playing around with us: “Do this and that, and we’ll give you money so that you can do what you really want to do.” But that’s not the way we operate. And we didn’t do it. I kept throwing the screws back to the funding agent and saying, “If you like what were doing, give me money and well keep doing it; if you don’t give me money, I’ll quit doing it.” But I wont go out and look for more money. I refuse to spend my life chasing around funds, begging places to give me money. In a socialist way, I’m fairly adamant about the position we take: this is not about capitalism, competition and that kind of thing. This has more to do with the fact that we are willing to work for little money, that we are absolutely dedicated to what do, and that you can’t get a better deal than us anywhere else as far as production goes. And if you don’t give us the money, then fuck it! I’ll find something else to do. So I just kept pushing it and they responded. Most of the people who have been at NYSCA are smart and appreciated what we do and the way this structure works. As you know, you are pretty much evaluated by your peers, and our peers happen to like what we do and they vote to give us money. It has certainly been easier on us; we are lucky and we have fairly good connections that way. We haven’t pissed anybody off enough to get people together and say, “Lets get those people out of there!” (laughs) Unlike most people, a fairly high percentage level of our funding is by NYSCA; they don’t give us a lot of money, but the percentage of what they give us in our over all funding is quite high, which is unusual. But we do a lot of stuff for them too. And again, there is no growth. [...] John Giancola, when he was on the staff at the State Council said, “We gotta figure out a way to clone you!” I told him, “John you can’t clone us! Nobody is stupid enough to do this except us. Nobody will work for this little money!” And I was right! (laughs)

BODE: A lot of people go through each year.

HOCKING: About fifty.

BODE: [...] This thing of artisan modes of working, it's actually a term I have that doesn't get used much in the writings that I've read about art. When she was writing about Hollis Frampton, Annette Michelson brought up some things about artisan modes but even she seemed to be having a hard time with the idea that has to do with filmmaking. Again, filmmaking traditionally is about a crew and a group of people. Here was Hollis and a group of filmmakers who had decided to make films as individuals. Hearing you talk about your own work and putting the TV Center together, its clear that it is a space that you've actually been enriched from, that you feel comfortable in. [...] It's this thing about machines, not directing the machine as in Nick Ray the director, but actually knowing how thing works and, some how, doing something with them. It is one of the things that's interesting about computers: people don't talk about artist activity with computers, but and people do a lot of things as individuals with personal computers, which, in a way they don't do with other machines. I'm curious about the artisan and this mode of working. [...]

HOCKING: [...] Mechanical things are fairly simple to understand and you can fairly easily take things apart. If you take out this part and leave it out, then you will have a problem. If you put more teeth in the gear it will go faster—things like this. I suppose there are some basic laws of physics and some things in the practical sense. Artists tend to work with very simple machines, visual artists. [...] If you come at it from another angle, that you know all there is to know, you are sort of hardened by the training that you've had. Usually it seems like that's the case if you're coming at it from engineering. Your father [Harald Bode<sup>3</sup>] may be an exception to this, and I think Edison was an exception to this. But people coming from the other side tend to not really take to the machine because it's so god dammed complex, they don't work well with it because it's such a daunting piece of structure. I think the notion that makes a lot of sense to me is artist as re-inventor of tools. Having said that, we work on the computer, which is a shitty tool to even think about reinventing because you can't get at at the stuff. You and I

played with Basic, and that's the invention place for the most part; it's where you can start messing around with computers, getting down to that language structure, and putting together something that will make something else happen other than Photoshop. Now everybody is saying Photoshop is the place of invention, but I'm not. It's an interesting program and I use it all of the time, but it's completely defined and has nothing to do with the arts. Ninety percent of what's going on within a computer structure comes with a definition that culture gives it; most of the time it's being defined by somebody who is trying to make some money. By that definition, it has to have parameters that artists aren't looking for or don't want to be bound by. I hope that this is changing with Jitter and stuff like this, but even Jitter is an emulation of something that has already happened. Maybe we should make that stuff happen again instead. Computers are very inhibiting machines when it comes to visual art. As far as I'm concerned, they are very limited.

BODE: I just showed Sherry a manual for this 3D program called Blender. It probably has a lot of the problems you are talking about. One of the things that is interesting about it, however, is that it's an "open source" program, which means it's free. There's a community of people that raised thousands of dollars to buy the program from the company, which was going to deep six it. You can download the program now for free. When I first heard about that I thought of the TV Center, in terms of some of those ideas of getting low cost tools out there, and the communities of people involved in that type of practice. [...]

HOCKING: That may be a good example. There is the whole notion of people gravitating to Macs as the tool of the artist. To me it's total fucking bullshit, because the idea of the Mac was to give you a closed system that could be dictated to by their software people and that is what you'd wind up working with. What we were trying to do on the other hand was create open-ended systems that allowed you to come into it from any direction you wanted, to add to it, and to make something else happen. We'd take a special effects generator out and put some new doodads in to make it do something else, so that it would become flexible to the point where it could be developed and move into another direction. You'd run out of stuff to play with and go on to the next machine.

Macintosh to me is the biggest bully on the block and I won't have anything to do with the damn things. I bought one, but I got rid of it because I just couldn't handle that. With machines before computer, they were either open-ended or else we made them open-ended. I'm glad to hear that at least in software development, they are starting to re-look at the open-ended systems.

---

<sup>1</sup> Whether or not the notion of Research and Development was unrelated to early experimentations at the Center, Hocking does use the phrase in the 1986 essay from the Generic Real-time Interactive Digital Catalog, a show curated by Peter Chamberlain at the Arnot Art Museum: "The ETC Ltd, also has a research and development program concentration on the invention of low cost analog and digital tools and the development of software to support these tools. The main thrust of the ETC Ltd, is to encourage individual artists to develop a person studio for their own purposes of video art making. This is based on my feeling that the art form will no develop fully unless daily contact is possible with equipment necessary to produce the art. As the const of machines and components declines, we are coming closer to that goal."

<sup>2</sup> Ira Schneider and Frank Gillette, 1969, for TV as a Creative Medium at the Howard Wise Gallery, NYC.

<sup>3</sup> "In 1961 Harald Bode, recognizing the significance of transistor based technology, wrote an important paper that influenced the design of electronic musical instruments. Bode's ideas of modular and miniature self-contained transistor based machines was taken up and developed in the early 1960's by Robert Moog, Donald Buchla and others."  
<http://www.experimental-tv-center.org/history/people/bio.php3?id=56>