



April 10, 1984

To: CMS Faculty  
From: Tony  
Re: Digital Arts

I find myself painfully preoccupied with difficult questions.

The most appropriate way I have been able to find to share these questions with you is the attached vehicle of introspection, "Opening Our Eyes and Selves."

It is my wish to disseminate this somewhat ponderous statement in time for some consideration in the course of our faculty meetings, - on a basis that must be informal, initially.

Please regard this action on my part as a free and open disclosure of my own individual concerns, without reservation or mitigation; I hope to stimulate some effective and meaningful response and discourse.

Incidentally, at this time I would suggest that this material be confined to the consideration that we, as concerned faculty, can give it; I am not releasing any copies to others, nor am I showing it to anyone else for reply until we can share our own thoughts among ourselves on this subject.

My project is an art practice that is theoretical as well as aesthetic... to engage and enlarge the domain of language as it relates to visual forms in time ie. ----the temporal----

...New Digital Rhetorics and the Unknown...

.. Electronic discourse .. Digital Cinema .. Theoretical Tools..

Artist - object - existence - not unique objects but discourse... Physics has never found any 'solid' phenomena , only energy event complexes ... only RELATIONSHIPS ...

Video artist Nam June Paik was interesting when he said 'Moon is oldest T.V.'...but moonlight reflected to eyes so - Moon is the oldest Movie - and Sun is the oldest T.V. - but too bright - also bad for eyes... then maybe the distant suns, the stars, are the oldest digital pixel graphics. On a biological level maybe glowing phosphorescent moss or fashionable glowing fish first phosphorescent T.V. displays. In which case then fireflies oldest digital pixel graphic with program stored in firefly genetic code. Then fireflies--- the oldest biological computer bric-a-brac.

What are the programs of the stars?

I am a recording artist. My mediums are video tape and computer discs. My project involves activating the sliding languages of Art, Science, Writing and Desire.

'INVENTED EYE/MEMORY TRACTS' is an installation of multichannel Video and Computer prints. ...Linguistic and non-linguistic forms of seeing...seeing the seeing...memory...modes...parameters, the digital world with its multifunctional relationships...

I am not waiting  
for a promised sign.

Communication(s) Design(s) Electronic(s) / sending-recvieving-  
making... ART....

The Subject  
you are here

+/- expectations... interest...

The Artist Is Another Audience  
The Artist Is The Work  
The Work Is The Audience  
The Audience Is Another Artist  
The Video And Digital Is Seeing The Seeing...

Video as an artform will not approach the sustained achievements

of the other historical arts until artists are allowed to be artists using electronic tools and developing ideas in the structure of personal studios. Strictly industrial processes can create art but mostly create narrow industrial forms. I'd rather experience the complexity and power of an informed industrial and artisan poetics. The electronic artisan is yet to be discovered as a significant force in new media work and ideas. Video art tends to make bad television programming and television programming bad video art. My support goes to the Electronic Media Artists. Viva Video ! Viva Digital !

I ~~DO NOT~~ LIKE ART BECAUSE ----- it is not exact and overdetermined thereby leaving room to be speculative and provisional, room to construct, play and wonder.

I ~~DO NOT~~ LIKE TECHNOLOGY ----- it attempts at the absolute and exact and it is overdetermined. I have even discovered how to use it leaving room to be speculative and provisional, room to construct, play and wonder.

Mine is not so much an art of SPACE as it is an art of TIME.

To want these things is one thing. To achieve them is another.

I am interested in the fact of how language and images, both material forms, become each other and provide the elements for rich complex ideas and experiences. When does the matter with it's interrelational possibilities become significant form and idea ?

My Dog Knows Me Therefore I Am.

OR My Computer Detects No Error In My Program Therefore I Am.

OR The Tool And Process Allows Me To Reflect And Interact With The Event.

OR The Completed Piece Is Infact Incomplete And I Am Involved In Constructing The Work.

I AM WATCHING IT ... !

ELECTRONIC IMAGING TOOLS ARE PERCEPTUAL AND CONCEPTUAL  
A M P L I F I E R S ! ! !

To traverse from computer code to perceptual code is to have understood a cybernetic machine language and have used it to generate information in relation to human language capabilities. The computer machine is exact and correct in its execution of the program. However the computer does not make the art nor can it understand and enjoy it... There are high and low definition systems. Which generate more information ? There can be a freeing (therapeutic) effect to INEXACT interpretations.

If our habit of thought and social customs are linked to our

religious, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds what happens when we enter into unknown languages such as Cybernetic, Digital, and Electronic (influenced) discourses ?

New languages = change in  
THOUGHT patterns...

Art is also an intellectual discipline. There is no problem in this if we are willing to extend our adventures with the unknown to thought as well as vision. Art is subversive. It is always a challenge to what we know and don't know. Are we ever capable of a complete analysis of our situation?

A single work is a curious artifact of a makers ideas. A body of work (the word body is curious) is a trace of the history of a/the body. This is particularly significant when working with machine systems. Compared to electronic technologies are we ONLY human or better ESPECIALLY human ?

There is a language to electronic imaging---  
There are image Sources, Processors and Controllers. These technical processes are occurring primarily in 'real time'. Simultaneously a collaboration between the artist and system architecture occurs the result of which is recorded on videotape or computer disk.

There is a language to electronic imaging viewing---  
There is the artist, the electronic imaging and the viewer. This is also a collaboration that results in a internalized construction and experience which makes the functioning of the work. The work is a play of forms. The work activates the field of imaging and language. These microstructures are continuously active, adjusting and changing their functions over time. This is the territory of activity that the notion of 'PROCESS' embraces. This is the unspoken story or narrative of these works. It is an open ended narrative, a network of multifunctional parts, a multiple series advancing, diverting, reverberating in a shifting field of perceptual and conceptual relevance. Process is more than any single idea.

These words are not the video and digital work. But they do live along with it for me. There is the concrete physical work, the electronic imaging--- a discourse with/without words and yet dialoguing across all languages... the rhetorics, the fictions, the images, the conventions, the unknown : the unknown images and the unknown names...

These are ideas I am thinking about / (with) ...

and time ...

of all my assistants time proved the  
most usefull ...

Time to test these thoughts... electronic imaging on the  
other line , excuse me...

Dear Mr. Poole,  
Thank you for your  
reminder concerning artistic  
applications of TV. Your  
blatant inquiry provoked the  
attached summary of my  
theoretical investigations,  
which are now 2 years old;  
unfortunately, I have had  
no access to hardware, though  
my conversations with the  
Whitneys and Terry Riley,  
who have had facilities on the  
Coast, seem corroborative.

September 25, 1969

Peter Poole  
Experiments in Art & Technology, Inc.  
235 Park Avenue South  
New York, N. Y. 10003

Dear Mr. Poole,

Your recent letter came as an unusual inspiration to me, since it concurs with my conclusion that a research television facility is not only technologically overdue but also offers at this time to return enormous artistic profits. I find it very interesting that commercial art forms such as TV advertising tend to absorb ideas most quickly from areas that artists have worked out experimentally; the slow progress of advertising in developing visual excitement especially effective through the medium is a result of the fact that independent artists are specifically restricted access to most types of TV production facilities.

My own interest in this area is projected immediately from my having in the last few years transferred most of my attention from contemporary music to film. Before I describe my own proposals for working a lighted area, I would like to suggest some terminology that should make my explanations easier, and the general adoption of which would avoid some of the confusion that electronic music experienced.

TRANSDUCER... Camera, CRT Display, Tape Equipment, etc.  
This term defines the boundary of the electronic portion of the information transfer system.

FUNCTION... Source Material, Signal, Input & Output, etc.  
This term associates the information itself with its dimensional coordinates; in TV, the source has traditionally been three dimensional (a flat projection of space-time four-space), the signal one dimensional (time).

RANGE... Hue and Intensity, Voltage, etc.  
That part of the information medium which appears as the value of a function; the information itself.

OPERATOR... Transducer, Active Electronic Device, etc.  
A mechanism for modifying the information (function), forming a new function according to some technological system.

DIGITAL OPERATOR... TV Camera or Tube, Computer, etc.

Any case in which information intrinsically continuous in value is handled as discrete values related to the corresponding continuous values through some sampling procedure.

SIGNAL... Voltage or Current, Electronic Parameter

This term is safe to apply to the information any time it appears in electronic form.

This vocabulary affords the following advantages:

1. The ideological issues that arose in music regarding electronic music vs. musique concrete will be avoided ("Electronic TV" would be entirely digital signal, except for display transducers. "TV Concrete" would concern itself with operators, drawing the signal from digital transducers operating on non-digital functions.)
2. Just as recent electronic music instruments are conceptually designed to comply with the "natural" organizational propensities of the medium, so these terms are conceptually generalized to conform with existing technology.
3. Existing work in TV technology can be seen to cluster within various limited areas of the total field. Although the gamut goes from the limited development of recursive signal gating emerging in commercial TV, through entirely non-operator VTR experimentation, to Nam June Paik's transducer operators; although this is already true, the vocabulary suggests vast areas yet to be developed. Some of the possibilities that have occurred to me are especially close to the developments I have made in film during my recent Rockefeller Foundation grant (as seen in a forthcoming film, COMING ATTRACTIONS). The expiration of this grant will leave me looking for something new this fall, probably in this area.

My own work lately has striven to use redundancies that arise in applying symmetrical operators to different dimensions of the visual function as a means of finding compositional structures (such as visual rhythms in the various real dimensions). Of course, the operators available in film are severely limited by the three-dimensional character of the function, whereas television, using a digital signal, offers all the resources of electronic logic. My suggested program would be:

1. Develop the theoretical tools for understanding and generalizing the subsequent work. I have already made inroads in this area, thanks to my training in mathematics at Harvard.
2. Develop new electronic operators to sketch out some of the stronger new tools that electronics technology could add. The corresponding technology in sound was my principal musical interest just before I started films.
3. Work on a production schedule to generate a resultant product, either "electronic", from a computer source (I spent a year in programming), or preferably from an original dramatic source. Using narrative or other "real" source material would better suggest the possible applications thrown off by the new technology.

Please send me a copy of your report and keep me informed of progress. Also, let me wish you luck in organizing the facility.

Sincerely yours,

Tony Conrad