

Send Receive by Margaret Fisher

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As I drove to Mountain View for the fourth time this week, I flashed on several fantasies almost simultaneously, each vying with the other for the spectacular. I first remember sensing a rising tide of horror at the prospect of seeing a face from New York appear on the right hand monitor and call us out name by name: Terry Fox, Sharon Grace, Carl Loeffler, Alan Scarritt, Richard Lowenberg, Margaret Fisher. The power held by the monitor was immense. A few days before Brad Gibbs, head of communications at Ames Research Center division of NASA, located at Moffett Field in Mountain View, California, had confided his own fears of satellite communication to us. He felt this was an instrument as yet unchecked for the terrific ramifications ~~it~~ it could hold in the political and psychological impact of which it was capable. The potential of satellite communication systems in the hands of the public scared him. I shared this fear as my fantasy ran unchecked. I dramatized the moment of reckoning. I was called to the tube. I stood shaking with fear, quivering ~~with~~ through my entire body. A young man or woman from Papua, New Guinea experiencing traffic ~~lights~~ lights, automobiles, and airplanes for the first time would know what I was sensing. ~~I~~ And I began to ~~feel~~ feel the full impact of technological leaps which I had heretofore taken for granted, complacently confronting these events safely from the dining table and the daily newspaper,

The second fantasy, rather than one of fear, was of tremendous excitement. What if. . . was the preface. An alien being, extra-terrestrial planetary being linked up with our signal and appeared on the monitor where New York's picture should be. Reactions were confused, everyone in a state of highest anxiety as our attempts to reach these beings ~~were~~ were reciprocated. I was delighted.

In retrospect, I am shocked that the power of human beings, some of whom I know and know of, would frighten me; and that the appearance of a totally foreign being from the unknown space would delight me. This all was fantasy of course, and in "real" life I cannot be sure of my reactions.

The image of New York was not so startling. They grouped together on the grass along the Hudson River, a sunny warm day forming a beautiful light and shadow environment for them. They were unknown faces. Some bearded, others fresh and smiling, some punk rock campy people. Harmless? Their first approach: Terry Fox, please tell us about your disease? Did you bring X-rays? Terry responds by saying yes, I'll get them and leaving the room. Sharon is brought to the monitor to continue the discussion.

Vague questions about the medical practice of doctors, hospitals, violations against women spill out. Be more specific, Sharon pleads. Finally she says she is unqualified to speak on the subject and has no intentions to negate certain persons or organizations on this particular communications experiment. I am angered. Indulgent, inept, I accuse New York silently. Rude. As crass and vulgar as the medical establishment which they wish to slander--worse. Sharon is decomposed in the next room, sorrowed that for all her weeks of labor in pulling this technical feat together for the East and West Coast art teams, she ~~xxx~~ has entered into such a ridiculous conversation.

Sharon is the high tech person of the project. Her knowledge of hardware and her ~~deep~~ artistic approach made her the ideal person. Deep thought pervades all of her work and often ~~xx~~ achieves priority in her work, to production. This renders Sharon extremely sensitive. A hardware freak would be only too happy to clutter the room with gadgets and operate them for the sake of electronics. Sharon is concerned with the balance between equipment and aesthetics. She enforces the code that the tools are to enhance the statement and extend it. They are not the means in themselves.

She has secured for us documentation systems, character generator, and several video systems which can mix to give us many image possibilities. There are four cameras in the room, a portable floor camera, a documentation camera, a documents camera from overhead, and the talent camera which pivots and sits about 4 feet off the floor. Three microphones, a telephone with speaker system and 2 mikes attached to it, a ~~x~~ audio cassette machine quartz lamps, several video decks and stacks of color tape. The control room next door is even more complex. We all become acquainted with the equipment and familiar with a language ~~x~~ among ourselves which will insure that the cameras are being utilised to maximum potential and not ignored or left upon Sharon's shoulders.

Carl Loeffler is the coordinator of the West Coast team of the Send/Receive project. He is the founder and president of La Mammelle Arts Center, an organization which has often hosted the New York artists with whom we are linking up. ~~inxSanxRyannixsewx~~

Terry Fox, Alan Scarritt and I play music-long drones on various primitive and homemade instruments. Richard is operating the floor camera and the talent camera to combine images in startling ways. New York still appears to be grouped on the lawn wanting to talk endlessly. We drone and drone. The teleconference room at Ames is unrecognizable.

The furniture is out. Everything lies on the floor. A dark blue theatre curtain forms the backdrop for one wall. Quartz lamps replace the fluorescent lights. Instruments and books, papers, maps clutter the floor. Margaret has brought a brightly colored mat on which to rool. In the next room slides, film and videotapes with source material are ready for viewing. Audio tapes are stacked.

Carl sends a message over to New York, which is simultaneously being broadcast at the Art Institute in S.F. via Viacom, a Bay Area cablevision station. Cable subscribers can also see the broadcast. The signal is sent to Menlo Park via microwave, and from there to Stanford where it is picked up by Viacom. Menlo Park is the location of the satellite link up to the Archdiocese. The message thanks all those at Ames, Menlo and Stanford for their assistance.

NASA opens their teleconference room to groups for experimentation with the satellite and communications. Brad is not convinced that satellite is the answer. He believes slow-scan video is much more economical, and I think underneath that belief, lies a solution to the fear of powerful take-over of the globe through satellite transmission. The satellite has footprints on the earth for 2/3 of its mass. This means that should facilities bebuilt or driven via portable trucks, to various places within the footprints, they could pick up the signal. The potential for international communications is great. Politics are often the limiting factor. Arts groups over the country are wanting a part to play in this budgeoning field. The New York group expressed the desire in a ~~more~~ crude way: They said that while the getting in was good, they wanted ~~an~~ access to this powerful medium. Later they complained about the bureaucratic hassles required to secure satellite time, the finances involved, etc.

Our West Coast team was more concerned with experimentation and programming content. We had source material covering weather conditions, food production and agricultural information on California, space colonization, a film titled, "Fluids in Weightlessness", tapes of Richard in space suit meeting Koko the gorilla at Stanford who is learning English, tapes of the building of the Golden Gate Bridge, the Mt. Diablo fire. We had topographic maps, books of bridges, of "sensitive chaos". Slides of the universe. We used almost none of these materials. Instead we created a working interaction ~~w~~ through music, poetry, dance and movement, and discussion. Alan completed an experiment to create a loop, utilizing the quarter second delay characteristic of the satellite.

This latter kind of activity is the stuff which will determine use of the satellite by artists in the future. To utilize an innate factor of

satellite communications (nonexistent in land transmission) to advantage, when most people would like to eliminate such a delay--this is the interesting kind of development looked for by NASA. Nancy Lewis, dancer from New York, and Margaret Fisher, dancer from Berkeley, danced a duet with a split screen, creating one figure out of two. Again the delayed action created a unique effect. Fisher also had the experience of dancing in past, future and present simultaneously. New York sent back our signal. This signal is a quarter second behind the original one. Fisher danced with the delayed ~~xxx~~ signal--the past--pushing it into the future through present movements.

Coordination of programming was a major concern on the West Coast. The group evolved through a series of processes to the environmental interactive one used on Sunday, Sept. 11th. At first we all thought we would be creating individual experiments and projects to relay to N.Y. utilizing the special characteristics of the satellite. Somewhere along the line, a transformation in concept occurred. Everyone was to extend to N.Y. information bigger than their own art work and personal projects, individual personalities played down. Scientific information and data accumulated. Texts piled up awaiting transmission via the character generator, a typewriter which creates the typed word upon a television screen. Saturday, after a tiring day of not being able to send a signal to N.Y. and have it returned, and certain failures in the cohesiveness and substance of the information we were relaying to the Art Institute via Viacom led us to a crisis point. We accompanied Richard to Stanford University ~~xxx~~ where he held an interview with Koko in the space suit. Tired and discouraged as the crew was upon arrival, the soulful interaction with this warm and affectionate mammal drew everyone's highest nature to the surface. Sharon, who was burned out by this time and operating on automatic, fell into the depths of Koko's brown eyes and the two established a love affair with each other in a few minutes. The transformation in her health and vitality were apparent. We convened after the taping to talk about additional taping of San Francisco neighborhoods, particularly the South of Market area in which many of the alternative art galleries and performance spaces are located. Contrary to plans for the taping we began to interact with each other, only to discover that all of us were uncomfortable with the ~~xxx~~ role of delivering scientific data which we did not fully understand. Saturday's run-through had made it all too clear that without the backing of a career in such fields, there was no possibility of discussion, development of the initial idea, or transition to the next subject. The effect was disjointed and inadequate with no personal touch.

The unbelievably warm and tender interaction with Koko drove us to re-evaluate who we were, individually and as a group. It was our self-confidence that was lacking. We are all artists and we were called upon to form the West Coast team because of the previous work we had done. How ~~a~~ could we do anything else honestly? We changed the working environment, encouraged each other to bring process projects to work on as well as specific tasks. The room on Sunday filled with shells, instruments, paper, pens, poetry. We could finally speak honestly to each other.

Regardless of the suppressed feelings and questions about the nature of the material we were presenting, the group always listened carefully to each of its members. Statements were well thought out. Congeniality humor rarely left the group, save for the late night meetings. I emerged from the Send/Receive project with enormous respect and admiration for my ~~fellow~~ colleagues -- we achieved an intimacy, a statement, and a process together in two weeks, as well as a wonderful rapport with the people at NASA and continued interest in projects by each other.

I confess that my optimism and enthusiasm for the project emanates from a personal radiance I experienced throughout the taping and transmission on Sunday. The effect of the ~~images~~ were beautiful and stimulating to me and I took every moment to play with them on the monitor and with the people in the room. In a sense I dominated the screen, greedily picking up information, and confident of the group's trust and buoyancy to be able to involve myself in a project without offending anyone. Whoever ~~held the~~ switches and the camera held the ultimate control. We used the black horns from Navajo Horn Posture and I assumed the pose. I danced with Nancy Lewis. Alan and I did some foot movements on the monitor. Sharon and I traced meridians and exchanged weight. I donned the space suit at a time when Willoughby Sharp's monologue was tedious and our only image was of Carl listening to the endless ~~information~~ barrage of information, self-centered and oblivious to 2-way communication as it was. I ran and danced in the space suit outdoors--a relief to the indoor decor. Overall, ^{however,} the project lacked a great deal in programming. *balance.*

I think for future efforts, each participant needs to develop an experiment ~~to~~ to work out during program time.

Another concern was the typical rhythm of television. We wanted to stay with real-time programming without being boring or indulgent. The process of conducting experiments can be one way of keeping one's interest without ~~succumbing~~ succumbing to television time.

We could have taken more advantage of the delay. We could have been better prepared to conference discussions audially and have more flexible

image making processes. If we had been prepared to do this, we would have used more of our prepared source material.

The layering effect we were counting on was much more complex than we anticipated. The character generator, a slide and a scene from the room worked well together. Combined with audio, and content of words, the message became chaotic.

We could have had much more interaction with New York. They were unprepared with any programming other than talking at their leisure and taping the informal gropp. The dancer and musicians were strictly token entertainment when they were in essence more important than the talkers. NASA's Brad Gibbs emphasized that whatever future programming for the arts New York may be able to achieve, it will be on the basis of the efforts we put out in San Francisco.

The nature of the avant garde is to understand the direction and potential of its culture and to utilize the means to achieve that potential. At a time when this potential is accessible to the general public, the avant garde is often already establishing alternatives to those means.