RE:COPYing-IT-RIGHT AGAIN

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ABSTRACT: RE:COPYing-IT-RIGHT AGAIN addresses art-science-technology connections in Media Art from Chicago during the late 1960's and early 1970's. Artists, including Phil Morton (founder of the Video Area at The School of the Art Institute of Chicago) and Dan Sandin (founder of the Electronic Visualization Lab at the University of Illinois at Chicago), collaborated on realtime audio video projects that anticipated current New Media Art theorypractices as well as Open Source software and Free Culture. The School of the Art Institute of Chicago and The University of Illinois at Chicago acted as incubators for these communities, becoming internationally recognized homes of artistic experimentation and technological innovation. Artist-developers such as Phil Morton, Dan Sandin, Jane Veeder, Jamie Fenton, Larry Cuba, Ted Nelson, Tom DeFanti, Kate Horsfield, Lyn Blumenthal and Gene Youngblood connected in Chicago during this time. Creating projects that deeply influenced national and regional perspectives on Media Art, these Media Art Histories are still little known due to their radical, alternative, experimental and playful approaches. In 2007 I initiated the Phil Morton Memorial Research Archive, containing Phil Morton's "personal video databank" of materials documenting these histories. My presentation draws from this original research.   KEYWORDS: Media Art Histories, Chicago, realtime, New Media Art, Open Source

Both Sean Cubitt and Lev Manovich have written introductions to their work that recognize the hybrid meshworks of connections, meanings, materials, histories and theorypractices of Video Art and New Media Art. In Videography: Video Media as Art and Culture, Cubitt wrote that Video and thereby Video Art are "at the heart of increasingly interlinked webs of previously separate media... neither an autonomous medium... nor entirely dependent on any one of them."[1] Ten years later, Manovich similarly wrote that the languages of New Media Art are "always hybrids, incorporating memories, expertise, and techniques of already well established cultural forms".[2] These quotes articulate together that Video Art and New Media Art histories are deeply interconnected, technosocially situated and culturally encoded.

Current New Media Art theorypractices have developed from the Media Art Histories of Video Art. the Video Art of the 1970's anticipated many specific New Media Art theorypractices. I trace these histories through the lens of experimental Media Art projects made in Chicago during the decade of the 1970's by a group of artists and academics whose deeply collaborative artistic research and development led to the establishment of new technologies, approaches, organizations and Media Art projects. Phil Morton, in particular, is the key in my study of this period. Morton acted as a major hub of interconnection in this group and importantly articulated ethical and theoretical positions of the groups that formed through these collaborations.

During the early 1970's, the work of Media Artists in Chicago anticipated and developed Open Source approaches to Free Culture, foregrounding collaborative experimentation. Phil Morton developed an approach called COPY-IT-RIGHT. COPY-IT-RIGHT is an ethical position that motivated the early Video Art communities in Chicago and beyond to share resources, to widely distribute media and create transparent, decentralized and open systems. In 1971 Dan Sandin developed The Sandin Image Processor, a patch-programmable analog computer optimized for video processing and synthesis. Morton, who was a friend and neighbor to Sandin, asked Sandin if he could build the first copy of Sandin's original Sandin Image Processor. Sandin and Morton then began to work together creating the schematic plans for the Sandin Image Processor from 1971 to 1973. They named this document The Distribution Religion. Sandin open sourced his invention, giving the schematic plans away for only the cost of the Xerox copies and postage while simultaneously incorporating any additions or modifications made by those who built their own Sandin Image Processors into any further releases of The Distribution Religion. This proto-Open Source project gave an international community of artists unprecedented abilities to process and perform realtime audio and video projects.

It was during this time Morton developed COPY-IT-RIGHT, the anti-copyright approach to making and freely sharing Media Art under which the plans to build Sandin Image Processors were released. The Distribution Religion and many of Morton's individual and collaborative Media Art projects were released under the COPY-IT-RIGHT license. COPY-IT-RIGHT encouraged people to make faithful copies, caring for and distributing Media Artworks as widely as possible. A close-knit community of collaborators worked together in Chicago on the New Media of their time, incorporating digital and analog computing with realtime audio and video synthesis, processing, computer programming and experimental improvised performance.

As Christine Tamblyn wrote in her 1991 essay "Image Processing in Chicago Video Art, 1970- 1980", these artists did not "market their work in conventional art contexts"[3] and were not concerned with traditional forms of commodification. They were, in fact, importantly opposed to these commodity forms as well as philosophically and ethically opposed to Intellectual Property Regimes and restrictive corporatist copyright law. They created and encouraged digital and analog systems of open collaboration and exchange. As Sandin told me in a 2003 interview, he felt that his role was to "create and disseminate information"[4] which is why he freely and openly gave away the plans to his Sandin Image Processor. Sandin states that he was and continues to be opposed to the ideas and approaches of commercial software in relation to New Media Art. he furthermore observes the connection between the early Video Art moment and current New Media Art particularly through the lens of Free & Open Source Software and Culture.

Morton vehemently advocated for Free Culture and Open Source approaches to Media Art before such terms were in use. He experimented relentlessly with boundaries, ignoring as many distinctions between personal, professional, political, aesthetic and technological categories as possible. He immediately moved to include analog and digital computing into his artistic work and academic curriculum with very few antecedents to rely on or refer to. In doing so he purposefully and playfully explored what we would now refer to as New Media Art, an art that was radically open, remixed, collaborative and conversational.

Morton wrote in his 1973 NOTES ON THE AESTHETICS OF 'copying-an-Image Processor' that: "First, it's okay to copy! Believe in the process of copying as much as you can; with all your heart is a good place to start – get into it as straight and honestly as possible. Copying is as good (I think better from this vector-view) as any other way of getting ,'there.' "[5] This position as articulated by Morton in The Distribution Religion constitutes an important aspect of his COPY-IT-RIGHT ethic, namely, that copying is right, morally correct and good. In fact, for Sandin and Morton, copying is not only good it is necessary for their process, for their project, because it was conceived of (conceptually and technically) as expandable, open, modular and decentralized.

Jane Veeder, who collaborated closely with Morton and Sandin, has explained that Morton's COPY-IT-RIGHT ethic came from an "early counterculture... sense that information should be free."[6] Veeder links Morton's position to current Digital Art and New Media as well as Free & Open Source Software development. As Veeder details, COPY-IT-RIGHT means making faithful copies, caring for and sharing work. As such, COPY-IT-RIGHT is an ethic, an ethical position. Lucinda Furlong wrote in her 1985 essay on the Video Art subgenre of Image Processing, that Sandin himself "got involved in video in 1970 during the student protests that resulted from the Kent State killings"[7] and so, like Morton, Sandin understood the medium of video and realtime Media Art to be importantly always already sociopolpitical rather than neutral. Sandin and Morton set out to mobilize critiques of economic power structures such as copyright, the singular authority of authorship, profit as a basis for creativity and technological hierarchies in their decentralized innovations and pedagogic projects. They understood their work, not only in terms of being personally and culturally transformative through technologies, but also importantly in the context of sociopolitical and economic struggle.

Veeder and Morton traveled the continental United States in a mobile Media Art lab built into a customized General Motors van. They engaged in "Videotape presentations, live Video and Computer Graphics performances, workshops, and/or any useful format of collaboration"[8] sharing these programs under the COPY-IT-RIGHT license. They referred to this project as the Electronic Visualization Center. Veeder has said of the Electronic Visualization Center that it was imaged to be parallel to and inspired by the Electronic

Visualization Lab that Sandin and DeFanti had created at the University of Illinois Chicago Circle Habitat or what became known as the Electronic Visualization Lab. As Media Art Historian Michael Century describes it, this group of people working at the Habitat/Electronic Visualization Lab was "a distinctly counter-cultural unit exploring the "phenomenology" of interactive imagery for use in experimental art and scientific visualization."[9]

Gene Youngblood explains that Morton and Veeder's artistic process of travel into the American West embodies a countercultural impulse. Over the course of their travels, Veeder and Morton created a series of programs, digital and analog electronic media, cyberpsychedelic road movies. In one such program, called Program #7 and made in 1978, Veeder and Morton combine Image Processed video that has been affected using the Sandin Image Processor with footage of traveling through the American West, diaristic voice overs, source code, game play, computer generated text and abstract patterning created with the Zgrass and the Bally BASIC system running on The Bally Arcade Video Game System. This material and aesthetic hybridity is a direct example of the hybrid meshwork that connects Video Art and New Media Art through their shared material and Media Art histories.

Jamie Fenton appears in and collaborated on Program #7. Fenton developed the ROM based operating system for the Bally Arcade Video Game System in 1977 in Chicago. At this time, Fenton also developed Bally BASIC, an interpreter for the widely used BASIC computer programming language. Fenton was also a developer of the Zgrass language for realtime computer animation which was a collaborative effort between DeFanti, Fenton and Donato during 1977 and 1978. Fenton was involved in early video game development and she contributed significantly to the field of arcade and home video games as well as going on the be a co-founder of MacroMind in 1985. She developed the authoring software MacroMind VideoWorks in 1985 which became MacroMedia Director in 1987. Director enabled countless artists to create what was known in the 1990's as "CD-Rom Art" or more generally "Multimedia", a precursor to current forms of New Media Art. This form flourished during the 1990's.

Many artists creating CD-ROM-based artworks at that time developed what Media Archeologist Erkki Huhtamo called "the archeological approach in media art".[10] Huhtamo identified this tendency in a number of artworks produced with the Director authoring software, listing in particular the work of Morton's former student Christine Tamblyn and her She Loves It, She Loves It Not: Women and Technology from 1993. In 1996, Huhtamo curated an exhibition of "CD-ROM Art" that included Tamblyn's project. Huhtamo wrote in his introduction to the exhibition that CD-ROM technology had by the time of his writing become a ubiquitous standard of personal computing and that artists where dealing with this technology in innovative ways and asking critical questions about the issues of distribution and access. Huhtamo also underscored the Media Art historical connection of this activity, writing that CD-ROM Art shared "similarities with the pioneering times of video art in the 1960's and 1970's."[11] One literal point of connection is Tamblyn herself who had been educated by Morton. Another significant but little documented connection is Fenton herself who had also been a part of the Chicago-based collaborative group of artist-educator-innovators discussed in this study. Tamblyn worked with the tools (Director) that Fenton developed and both had come out of the Chicago group working with Morton.

Morton and Veeder's Programs anticipated the development of the affordable and accessibely designed personal computing that Ted Nelson advocated for in his Computer Lib/Dream Machines (which he self-published when he was roommates with DeFanti while living in Chicago and teaching at the University of Illinois at Chicago) or the multimedia authoring tools that Fenton would go on to develop. Morton and Veeder's ability to envision and anticipate these systems and the development of digital video in the 1990's or it's distribution online in the 2000's arises from their engagement in conversational Media Art projects that put them in direct communication with those who would go on to develop these tools and systems such as Nelson, Fenton, Gene Youngblood, Woody and Steina Vasulka. Their foresight also results from their optimistic early adoption of these systems and the influence they had on their students and collaborators, encouraging and as Youngblood asserts, articulating, for the first time, the philosophical and political urgencies of their ethical engagements with Media Art, such as Morton's COPY-IT-RIGHT ethic.

Morton and his collaborators were explicitly interested in and committed to constantly commingling the

concepts of Cybernetics, Psychedelics and countercultural positions on issues such as the socioeconomic and political power relations refied through and embedded in 'the technological' via their proto-New Media Art projects. Morton explained this to Youngblood by saying that they were transmitting themselves into "different worlds – perceptual, conceptual, physical, survival"[12] in order to "process those worlds electronically."[13] Veeder reflected on the imaging aspect of this process, saying that their projects include simulations of themselves and their desires. She told Youngblood: "We work hard out there every summer collecting documentation with which to simulate our desired future. And we do it electronically."[14] Morton continued this line of thinking saying that their project could be understood as "an imaginary model of us electronically visualizing ourselves so much more powerfully, a more powerful spell."[15] Morton's reference to spellcasting in the context of computing and electronic media points towards the transformational understanding of technology that was so critical to Morton and his collaborators. At a certain point in the interview Youngblood refers to their collaborative video projects as 'pieces' and Morton corrects his use of the term 'piece' saying: 'We don't make pieces... We make communiques and responses."[16] These communiques and responses were also directly aimed at corporations (such as General Motors) and conceived of as critiques of commodities, copyright and Intellectual Property.

As Janice T Pilch states in her essay "Collision or Coexistence? Copyright Law in the Digital Environment" intellectual property regimes are most "often associated with efforts to wipe out music and film piracy"[17] in terms of file sharing and copying of digital files online or in peer to peer networks. Morton's COPY-IT-RIGHT ethic was conceived of for the purpose of exactly this find of sharing, copying and exchange of Media Arts. Various forms of resistance to copyright have been identified by scholars such as Debora Jean Halbert. Halbert seeks to find and highlight the strengths of "alternatives to protecting knowledge resources that don't translate them into private property"[18] while investigating a number of areas of the legal expansion of copyright with a focus on the ways in which Intellectual Property regimes limit creativity while increasing suspicion. These limits and suspicions result from the assumption that "creation stems from the chance of monetary rewards."[19] Morton and his Chicagobased group of collaborators and students, resisted this assumption and considered their creative work to be for the (moral, artistic, personal and political) good of their communities. As such, Halbert's search for alternatives and resistance to as well as critiques of copyright law and Intellectual Property regimes hold particular importance, underlining that the experimental work undertaken by these artistdevelopers is echoed in critical and scholarly analysis thirty years later. Over the course of these thirty years the issues of copyright and Intellectual Property in Media Arts become even more pressing as the digital forms that Morton and his collaborators developed and experimented with eventually became the basis by which almost all media is rendered, distributed and exchanged.

Halbert explains that as "solutions become increasingly draconian with each new lobbying round by major intellectual property interests"[20] and the conceptual framework of property is the main way in which creative work is enframed or understood more suspicion is produced. This suspicion has a destructive effect, causing people to worry about "how their work will be misused instead of used".[21] Rather than promoting a culture in which the creative arts are valued in frameworks other than property and artists are encouraged to freely exchange and share ideas, the United States Congress has enacted laws that further expand the definitions of copyright and Intellectual Property in favor of industries rather than individuals and in order to further protect corporate rather than public interests. Halbert plainly states that these laws are "not a neutral body of abstract principles, but is instead the codified will of those with economic and political power."[22]

Before definitions for the terms Open Source, Free Culture or New Media Art were used, circulated or understood, Phil Morton playfully experimented with remixological processes and projects that sprawled across these boundaries and borders. Morton's projects were not only transgressive in these terms, but also because they resisted commodification, copyright and Intellectual Property. Morton and his individual and collaborative works defend an ethic of openness shared by the Chicago-based group of collaborators. Alternative Media Art Histories can provide parallel historical accounts of forms of resistance to copyright in Media Art cultures and communities. At a time when transnational corporations have increasingly sought and received legal support for expanding the definition of copyright, Morton's COPY-IT-RIGHT makes clear that other worlds are possible. Or as Halbert writes, "we do have a choice in how the

future develops."[23] This future, in which these alternatives to copyright can exist and flourish, relies on a recognition and critical inclusion of under represented, repressed, lost or forgotten histories (such as the subject of this study) in order to establish the past upon which the future Halbert defends, a viable future of ideas, can be based.

Footnotes 1 Sean Cubitt, Videography: Video Media as Art and Culture, 1993, Palgrave Macmillan p. xv 2 Lev Manovich, The Language of New Media, 2003, The MIT Press, p. 1 3Christine Tamblyn, Image Processing in Chicago Video Art, 1970-1980, 1991, Leonardo, Vol. 24, No. 3, p. 303 4 criticalartware, 'Dan Sandin interviewed by criticalartware', 2003, http://criticalartware. net, accessed 2008.08.05 5 Dan Sandin and Phil Morton, The Distribution Religion, 1973, self-published, p. 1 6 criticalartware, 'Jane Veeder interviewed by criticalartware', 2003, http://criticalartware.net, accessed 2008.08.05 7 Lucinda Furlong, Tracking Video Art: "Image Processing" as a Genre." 1985, Art Journal, Fall Vol. 45 No. 3, College Art Association of America 8 Phil Morton and Jane Veeder, Machine Language Puzzler, 1979, The Electronic Visualization Center 9 Michael Century, Graphical Performance Machines: Computer Graphics as a 'way of life', 2008, unpublished manuscript 10 Erkki Huhtamo, Resurrecting the Technological Past: An Introduction to the Archeology of Media Art, 1995, InterCommunication No.14 11 Ibid. 12Gene Youngblood, "ART AND ONTOLOGY: Electronic Visualization in Chicago", 1986, p. 9, an edited version of which appeared in Lorne Falk and Barbara Fischer, The Event Horizon: Essays on Hope, Sexuality, Social Space, and Media(tion) in Art, 1987, Walter Phillips Gallery 13 Ibid. 14 Ibid. 15 Gene Youngblood, MORTON-VEEDER INTERVIEW, 1980, unpublished 16 Ibid. 17 Janice T Pilch, 'Collision or Coexistence? Copyright Law in the Digital Environment', 2005, Virtual Slavica: Digital Libraries, Digital Archives (ed: Michael Neubert) The Haworth Information Press, p. 80 18 Debora Jean Halbert, 'Resisting Intellectual Property', 2005, Routledge, p. 5 19 Ibid. 20 Ibid. p. 3 21 Ibid. 22 Ibid. 23 Ibid. p. 7