Let me make this perfectly clear

① Why I do not think the group as constituted has the competence to do Community Memory and only marginally the chance to "sell" pacific into competentant hands.

② What I think my relationship to that competance is.

③ The other side that "contempt" ≡ the continually changing rules of the game, ~~and~~ the individuals.and ever growing frustration.

④ What needs doing.

First perspective —

~~ons~~ In case it's unclear I do believe in cooperative forms, though I'd would have to say that ~~of~~ all my co-operative experiences have been in straight jobs and with adventuring bands of friends. The formalization of co-operation in both co-op's and collectives seems to frequently replace the spirit with the letter and eventually ends in warfare.

Cooperation is important but there is nothing holy about its intellectualized forms. Futher, cooperative forms must have means of dealing with the world as it is, not as it might dream it to be.

In an ideal organization there are many things to be maximized in addition to cooperation. They include:

The goal of the group.

The spirit of the group.

The justice of the group.

The "correct" external world behavior of the group.

The imagination of the group

The intelligence of the group

the productivity of the group

AND

the freedom and development of the individuals.

I. Why I think this group is not up to its espoused task, This includes myself as part of the group.

A. Historical "facts" and other points of greater objectivity.

1. There·is not a common understanding of a common goal. Just what does it mean to do 'community memory' and who in which subgroup sees this as the primary goal? My estimate would be less than 1/2 of a full tuesday meeting could claim a serious comittment even to the words, uninterpreted.

2. For five years the group has lived off the earning power of a few individuals and continues to do so.

3. The actual programming problem is extreme, it has ~~been~~ never been solved in any existing system. I believe that with two other _designers_ with about the same skill level as myself we might crack it. I do not believe any one in the shop has a skill at design approaching mine even remotely. I think if steve wanted to be trained as a designer instead of a mathematician he could probably develop that level of skill. No one else seems a likely canidate.

(see note on designers, generalists, and specialists)

4. There has been no improvement in the care or premeditatedness of hiring practises though everyone agrees this is an enormous hole.

Notes

Designers, Generalists, and Specialists.

There are a variety of trained skills that are very important in doing Community Memory, These include programming, political theory, writing, design and trained generalists. There is also the important skill of visionary, but I don't know how one trains. (I think Mark Szpakowski is our only skilled visionary).

Generalists and designers have alot in common but they are not the same thing. There are four people in group currently that are to some degree generalists, mostly because they are information sinks; Ken, Judeth, Miller, and myself. Miller probably has the greatest spread of ~~practical~~ "practical" and almost practical knowledge, the Jude the greatest and deepest knowledge though much is tangential to the situation at hand like medicine and Japanese poem forms, Ken is probably the most successful at generalist thought and i think that may come from intention on his part since I meet him at World Game a generalists day dream. I originally conceived myself as a generalist later decided to become a designer, a closely allied speciality.

Generalists are the key to the success of any grand undertaking. Many entrepreneurs are generalist, in fact many generalists go into business explicitly because it is one of the few areas that does not try force them down a narrow channel (if they succeed) or automatically equate general knowledge with dilettantism. Obviously the unsuccessful generalist is not good at anything, but the successful ones are not so much good at ~~t~~ multiple specifics, but at synthesizing new things from existing areas and can bind together efforts that

crisscross varied expertise. CM is such an undertaking and unfortunately our generalists are a little under trained and not supported to develop as generalists. They ~~would~~ should be.

A _designer_ is **not** a ~~fancy~~ _programmer_ nor is it necessarily a generalist. The focus of the idea as a designer as a distinct trade comes from architecture and has only recently been picked up by the "systems" world. My training and interest came originally from an interest in mathematics and biological process, particularly the nature of consciousness and interplay between consciousness and form. Later I picked up the skills of a systems programmer and rudimentry film making skills. The process of film direction is very similiar to the other processes of design. Trying to make a synthesis of film, ~~and~~ systems design, and politically useful work lead me to identifing as a designer in 1972. Since then I've explicitly studied the design literature in architecture and package design, along with some actual architecture, art, art history, algebra, political theory, economies, film theory, theoretical biology, ~~electronics~~ digital electronics, systems theory, foundation physics, other cultures . . . . both for their own sake and for what general design principles can be elucidated.

It is not clear what a designer needs to know in addition to all the "usual" techiques of any area shes going to work. However it must include a lot of something else ~~any~~ and a dose of generalisms or ~~she~~ he will be locked into the frame of reference of a builder not a designer.

Community Memory and Pacific Software

The major issues between CM+PS at the *Efrem*
time of issuance of P.S. stock seem to be

① The nature of the sequitur license,
particularly the amount of royality
to be paid CM.

② The amount of stock to go to
CM ish purposes.

③ The amount and manor in which
employee's are to receive stock.

The issue of how to divide the stock among the
"founders" does not seem hotly contested, nor
are the amounts to give board members and
friends. The question of how much to give
key people in Pacific is currently a formal
question only, though it will no doubt cause
debate in the future.

A closer, but very important question is who
has the right to ~~dist~~ issue the undistributed
shares? Since more then 50% of the shares will
Treasury stock when the company is formalize, if

the board can issue without consulting the stockholders. The balance of power which has been carefully kept with the stockholders ~~it~~ will be shifted to the board.

On the Questions:

The issue of the license + royalties ~~is~~ is extremely important. The balance is between CM getting enough money to make the last 3 years effort worth the trouble and Pacific's ~~survival~~ survival and growth. There is also an outside player, if Pacific does not provide CM with substantially more income that it could get from another company, we are all going to be in serious trouble with the tax man.

The question of how much stock should go to CMish purposes has a much greater (in tom's language) impressionistic component. The players here are diverse including us, past intent, the tax man, and future venture capitalists. It seems to require an experiential knowledge we do not have. As far as I can tell all the different

positions are based on responses of emotion or self-interest, and that no intellectually solid position capable of direct realization has developed. The 50% founder / 50% cm seems the beginnings of one, but has not been carried through to a workable conclusion. This seems an inherantly difficult problem.

The question of what and how to give employee's stock seems nearly a problem of doing the home work, the ~~principles~~ principles being agreed upon. My meager researches indicate that our information from Dick was very incomplete.

The license agreement

Generally the question of royalities is being discussed without enough numbers. Even if the numbers available are inprecise they help thought.

year	Pacific ~~Seq~~ License	Pacific Sey Income (at 1,000 per)	CM royalit~~y~~ at 15%
83	500	500,000	75,000
84	1000	1,000,000	150,000
85	2000	2,000,000	300,000
86	4000	4,000,000	600,000
87	8000	8,000,000	1,200,000

Assuming Pacific doubles every year it would not be until 1986 that CM could support a staff the size of the "current shop." or $ less than 3 times the current number of CM+VD employee's at $10/hr

The salary expenses for CM+VD are currently ~~about~~ $150,000/year. That's without paying Ken or paying anyone more than $10/hr.

A database expert or real communications expert would cost close to $40,000/yr by them selves.

—

This is not an ~~entirely~~ entirely accurate picture because X.Dot sales are at 50% royality and mass sequitur sales might radically increase the figures

next year. On the other hand The usual justification of our way of doing pacific is That CM needs millions of dollars soon,

so: Assumptions for ~~maxymizing~~ analyzing the royality question.

(1) Pacific Software exists because CM needs royality income from its products and Pacific can give it a substantially better deal Than anyone else is offering.

(2) CM's object is to maximize its income not its percentage.

(3) With a reasonable royality rate growth in Pacific is very valuable to CM.

(4) Income from Pacific has to be viewed in balance ~~to the~~ with That which Lee is putting into Pacific and ~~that which~~ That which CM could get by selling to some one else.

(5) If Pacific does not pay CM at a rate greater than it can get else where, the state may consider this to be self-

dealing and remove CM's tax exemption and possibly charge the founders ~~$~~ with fraud. (or something)

(6) ~~●~~ Pacific is going to be very capital poor its first few years.

(7) Actual profits kept in Pacific rather than CM are going to suffer a big tax bite.

(8) Pacific royalities are a good mechinism for moving "investment money" from pacific to CM.

(a) My current (very weak) understanding of industry royality rates is —

if a product is good, but easily re created then the authors see between 5 and 15 percent.

if a ~~good~~ product is good and difficult to recreate than the rate is between 15 and 25 percent.

Higher royality payments are known,

(10) John Davork thinks that 25% is the top workable royality, but his actual evidence is thin.

(11) It is frequently argued that because sequitor is a mass market item the costs of selling it will be <u>proportionally</u> higher than those for selling X.DoT. Again there is no actual evidence for this. Infact the reverse may be true, we will not know for atleast a year.

(12) _____

There are a lot of ways to add this all up. The main point is that it has to be added up not guessed at.

My proposed solution is (a) an initial 15% royality on small end users sales of sequitor with an understanding that as Pacific develops it will be raised (cautiously) to 25 maybe 30% but not beyond what Pacific can support (or should be able to support.)

(b) a 40% royality on large scale sales, to manufactures and the like with the possiblity it may later be raised toward 50%.

(c) The current X.Dot 50% left unchanged.

(Notice that a complete sale of X.Dot is nearly twice as valuable to CM as the same size sale made by Pacific)

(d) That for the next year the easy revotability of the licenses be maintained, but when the future relationship is more formed they should be replaced by performance clauses so that the terms under which the relationship is to be maintained is more formal.

(e) The licenses should have a non competition clause. Pacific should not be able to develop competive software.

The stock split

The points here get vague, but fairness seems like a good place to start. I think we should start with a _fair_ division (subjective) of the stock, attempt to realize that as a technical problem then modify that division as forced by either financial necessity or the lack of legal tools adequet to a fair division.

I propose as a <u>possible</u> fair division.

The "founders"	30%
CM	30%
Future Employees	30%
Officers, Board Members and hot shots	10%

Everyone would be ~~diluted~~ diluted equally for capital or possible very expensive hot shots. At a future date it may also be desirable to raise the employee's share

The major problem is that CM can only hold about 5% directly. If that 5% were never diuted it could be made equivalent to 10 or 15%. That leaves 20 to 15% to deal with. Some could be given to Village Design. The rest could be given to a foundation. It could also be held by individuals in separate lumps, under a verbal/moral agreement that they would contribute it to ~~other~~ projects according to a given plan.

[Point foundation worked by giving each director the right to disperse 1/n of funds each year on their own discresion]

Mechanism probably exists to go most of the way towards the above "fair" distribution if we are willing to look for it.

Now the arguments for and against CM's share.

For: (1) Pacific software is one of CM's most valuable products. If PS is cashed out CM should partisipate.

Counter Argument - CM will get its share from the sale of the license. and from royalities.

Answer (a) - Think of selling Pacific in 6 years ~~Pacific~~ for 10 million and the license for 10 million. The license is only software and it will be hard to for someone to talk themselves into spending that much for software. It ~~was~~ will be ~~either to g.~~ easier to get them to spend 20 Meg on pacific with 2 to 4 Meg for the license.

Answer (b) Pacific ~~will~~ is and will continue to try and push the royalities down.

Answer (c) If venture money in Pacific cashes out by ~~taking~~ Pacific public ~~out~~. CM is left out in the cold without a fair share of the gravy

and stuck with a much
larger and likely ineffectual
(look at apple) marketing
organization. ie. It is
probably not to CM's
advantage for Pacific to
go public unless CM get
a good share.

(2) CM was originally going to own most
of Pacific and the reason we changed
that was legal difficulties.

Counter Arguments - Individuals
did the work.

CM gets the royalities.

Since we discovered the legal
difficulties the situation has
change further.

Answer - true, but not true enough
to cut back CM so far with
out very carefully making it up
in royalities. And it is not
conclusive that that covers it. ie going public.

(3) Abstract fairness.

(4) maintaing a clear <u>common</u> interest between the two organizations.

<u>Against</u> CM stock.

(1) The venture capitalists, will not like it.

<u>Counter Argument</u> — If the stock were directly held by CM they would love it, because it ~~in~~ assures CM's continuing interest.

If it were held by people, they would not notice.

If it were held by a foundation it would be diluted along with all other stock and would have both positive and negitive impacts on the negotiation. Note that is possible for the foundation stock to be non voting.

Ha Ha —   Idea,

give CM part of it's share ~~in~~ directly in non-voting stock. I'll check this with the lawyers.

The Employee Stock

My hand is tired so I'm not going to go into much detail ~~know~~ now, I still lack a lot of information, but my understanding is.

We should do an ESOP, Employee Stock Ownership Plan.

Pacific gives stock a trust and takes a tax deduction for the value of the stock.

The trust holds the stock in various employee's accounts making divisions according to lose rules we can setup.

The employee's collect either stock or money when they become "vested" after a certain period of time. The rules for vesting can also be made as complex as needed.

The ESOP can also buy stock from Pacific or get loans ~~to~~ for Pacific with very good Tax treatment.

ESOP's are expensive to set up ≈ $10,000 but seem to be a much better deal for both company and employee than stock options. (The Employee does not pay for The stock)

The trust should be given the stock slowly to maximize the tax benefits.

It does **not** <u>yet</u> appear that there is any advantage to setting all the stock to given aside.

We should agree now to the eventual division of the company, even if it does not have to be formalized.

I'll continue research, There is a book called Employee Ownership that has a lot of information.

Pacific Software in Community Memory

In what follows it should be ~~be~~ clear
at the start that by PS +CM and
I do not mean specific individuals
but formal organizations and states
of mind.

Efrem

Tom, → you still do not hear

I am the least, not the biggest victum
of your mouth. Mostly you pick on weaker
people or the group as a whole.

I've heard you abuse Marcy, Miller, Jude and
Philip with more viscivousness than you use
on me, so don't say that your use of your
mouth is the result of your anger with me.

Most typical is a meeting which has no chair,
you uniformally grab the chair, Even when
a meeting has a chair you frequently try
and grab control. Remember the last time
Philip stopped you, you are not a good chair
in fact your a miserable, loud mouthed, authertarian
chair,

~~I think your~~ I don't think smartness and
goodness are the same thing. I think you
have one of the better hearts in shop,
even though I've frequently seen you mash
people it seems like a wild animal get not from
a deficency of soul. However, I do not
respect your thinking, I especially do not
respect your political thinking — I feel
your a political idiot. Since you have no

no malice you can be moved from a bad idea to a better one, once you can be made to see it. However that task is usually enormous and for me has long stopped being worth the trouble.

The only reason we have not talked about the report generators in public is that you have not brought it up in public. I've never done anything to stop you, I just don't feel compelled to be judeth's manager -- I explicitly dropped that role a long time ago.

I agree, the stock questions should have been settled long ago!! However, before they can be settled some basic information is required. What I said is that instead of shooting your mouth off for 2o meeting about doing it now, after the 5th time you should have asked what need to be done and done some of it, or investigate why it was not getting settled. However all you did is yell and shout and then Miller and I had to go do the work. I am tired of hearing you shout about what your not going to do. Your mouth gets nothing done.

As for my various imperfections as a human being I'm sure many of them are true.

As for the military sale decision it makes more sense Than no policy, ~~but~~ [I mean our decision not what Dick Gray ~~wrote~~ wrote, Though it is charming]. However, I will not do any more ~~radical~~ technological advance ment under the latest policy — it does not meet my needs it's mearly better Than the ~~en~~ economist stupidity That you like to spout.

signature

Efrim;

OK, here's one for you.....just as blunt as the one you wrote.

It seems to me that it would make a big difference if you could

step, for a moment, out of the technocratic framework in which the
solutions to all problems can be reached by finding the right
"design" and look at this fix we are in developmentally.

It seems to me that you should look at the destructive way that
you express your opinions. These opinions, in themselves, are xx
sometimes well thought out (except for your several blind spots),
but your presentation of them is so steeped in bitterness and
disregard for other peoples opinions and feelings that you are
almost xxxx impossible xxxx to deal with. When you leave a meeting
it becomes possible to have a discussion, while you are there it can
only be an argument.....that is, unless what is being discussed is
so x unimportant that you will let the peons have it for a while.

I take particular offence at the way in which you stake out the
ethical high-ground x for yourself and, from it, aggressively
broadcast the image of greedy incompetence on all those outside
the current purview of your clan-consciousness. The military sale,
and the way in which you imposed your will, was a case in point.
xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx
xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx You see your own
ideas, but you really do not balk at imposing them upon others. And
you really do not have the only angle on the truth. The policy we
settled upon, as a matter of fact, doesn't make any sense. Others
have aggreed to it as a compromise -- to placate you and allow
business and work to proceed. When is the last time you ever went
along with others about anything important? Or if you did, when is
the last time you did so without making everyybody feel like shit
first? Do you understand why Carl feels x like your slave?

And you arrogance is, my friend, so unfounded. I can imagine that
a group of reasonably developed human beings would agree to submitt
to the will of some übermench who was possessed of some truely
brilliant vision. But you are wrong a lot, and sometimes in a quite
predictable way. This delegitimates you in the public eye and makes
you appear as an overbearing asshole. Pick someone xm at random
and ask them if it isn't true.

Let me take judith as a case in point, for you use her "high level
of skill" against the other programmers whenever you can. Let me
only say that we the other programmers who maintain the system decided
long ago that it was OK with us to accomidate to her needs, and to
give the support within which she could be reasonably productive.
Personnally, I like Jude. But what do you think others think of
your judgement when you insist that she is a better "programmer" than
me, and even than carl. (which you have x been known to say.) And,
by the way, I think you are nuts if you think the way you "protect"
her is good for her.

The report generator, three years later, is one of the weakest parts of the system. Why haven't we been able to talk openly about this?

You double standards are widely precieved, as are the ways in which you conflate the interests of "CM" with your own opinions. You may not believe it, but I would be glad if you were to begin to see what would be necessary for you to begin to work co-operatively with people who, unlike Jude and Phillip, will not submit to your will.

As for my mouth, I agree it is a problem. The anger that I feel at what has happened is so great that it bubbles out whenever I don't make a real effort to control it. I am sick of whatching you push out those who cannot or willnot stand up to you. I am sick of the hypocracy that was so carefully cultivated about the "collective". I am sick at your manipulative ways. I am sick of you self-reightous bitterness. I am sick of your dogged, stubborn refusal to see the key role that you have played in the creation of the present situation.

I still think things could be changed. You are bright and have lots of good ideas. I say this even knowing you are not gracious enough to say the same. (But do you know how rediculous you look when you say things like "none of you could understand what I have been doing on the IBM?) Brightness is not enough -- if you cannot co-operate with others that dis-agree with you about important things then it is politically irresponsible to even try to do CM, for you will fail. This money could be better spent than that.

About the stock: You have some good points, but I think you misunderstand my insistance that resolution occur soon. I don't think that we, organizationally, can survive on the obscurity and ill-defintion that you thive on (and which you rationalize in your datacratic terms as provisional design) I want to nail things down for exactly the reason that formal organization is preferrable (in times of conflict, or in the presence of people like you who would rather drive everyone else out of the meeting with interminable disaggreement than actually co-operate). Because informality and fluidity is the source of power of those who are willing to impose their wills on others. You, Efrim, more than any other, are the reason for the darkening of these waters.

                                    Tom A.

Tom,

In the hope that you might hear something in writing which you can't hear when it is said to you 100 times this:

There are two classes of hard, soluable problems -

one is of complex structure such that one part is determined by another and the whole is not soluable as a unit. For these the procedure of "late binding" works well. First one determines the parts which are reasonably fixed, set them constant then try and solve the resultant simpler problem. Since in a computer program that fixing takes time and the results are not clear until it is actually done. This procedure takes time and the idea that some parts of the problem are "bound" later than others is literally true. However the overall development time is usually shorter than by other means.

the other class of problems
requires knowledge that exists
but which one does not have.
This kind of problem requires
getting that knowledge. No amount
of yelling, screaming, pronouncing how
we must settle this now, or general
acting like a jackass will create
the knowledge from thin air. If
you want the problem solved, you
go get the knowledge.

I am frankly sick of your
substituting the use of the
mouth for the use of the
mind. It has caused at least
Philip, Jude and me considerable
unnecessary hardship and I am
sure has made many other lives
substantially less pleasent.

I feel I get a lot of flack because I've got very good design
instincts, but am not omnipitant. There have been repeated
attacks made on repeated columns, the strongest under the leader
ship of Derrick Wright. (This is a puzzle because as a prolog
fiend he should have understood them better than me). In this
process I have "known" at a fairly deep level that they were
not only kosher, but necessary for a reasonable system. I have
not always known how to make them work correctly, but was confident
that the problem was not too hard. Now I have all the theoretical
tools necessary to repeal any attack.

I gave in on some more minor point, but my experience with
customers leads to believe that I was right and it is important
to restore them. Specifically the general invisibality of templates
and selectionsx output tables.

I do not think I am the only source of good design ideas around.
Carls selection scheme and the join & set templates are excellant
ideas. I do think that the importance of intuition and broading
understanding is not properly dealt with by the group and eventually
will result in products that only advertising will sell and a
Community Memory that does not work. I think I do not get
enough time to do my proper work which is design and not
programming or business (except for planning). I think neither
the time nor environment necessary for good design are accepted.
Finally, I believe that when I've felt strongly that something
should be done a certain way, or that the correct appoach was not
clear I've been uniformally wright. Unfortunately I've not
been correct either on matters of timing or provisional attempts
when the matter was still cloudy. That is I frequently know
where I'm going, but k not how to get there. This can lead to a
lot of back tracking.

As both a collective and an entrepenural organization we have to
develop better means for dealing with the intuitive part as
opposed to the logical part of any long term plan or design.
It is only the intuitive part which has real value the other is
too easy.

Currently our only means of dealing with intuition is the
personXal power of the intuitor. The only other mechinism
at hand, though rarely used is long term relationship and
personal trust. For example I have a lot off faith in Ken's
intuition, though I think I've learned how to discriminate his
good ideas from his more panicy off the wall ones.

This is a very serious issue and not just for me personally.
I believe it is the core of the military issue and likely
the core of the CM vs Pacific organizational issue.

THE COMMUNITY MEMORY PROJECT --- the story of a "closely-held collective"

MORE FACTS!

Some months ago Les asked me to write an article about Community Memory, an computer communications project that I have been involved with for about five years now. It seems an auspicious time to take him up on his offer, since the CM system, as a functional technical entity, has finally evolved to the point where it threatens to become operational. After years of struggle and madness, we might actually be able to float a CM system in the Bay Area later this year.

don't abbreviate

In retrospect, I would have to say that CM is one of the strangest and most contradictory organizations I have ever been involved in. It is simultaneously a high-tech software house; a coterie of assorted left-communists, communitarians and libertarians; a well known and often cited populist computing center; the publisher of a respected if small-circulation journal (the Journal of Community Communications); a computer software company (actually, we attempted to spin off the software company, but never quite succeeded); a nest of friends and ex-friends; and a family surrogate for a handfull of the atomized individuals of late capital. Last but not least, it has long been, and I think it remains, a collective under siege by reality.

A word of explanation: CM, and here I speak of the original and still central goal of the collective, is a "non-hierarchical" computer system now long been in development, a system which is threatening to be finished soon. I will quote our pamphlet:

> "Community Memory is a system for the public management of public information. It is an open channel for community communications and information exchange, and a way for people with common interests to find each other. It is a shared community filing cabinet. It is a tool for collective thinking, planning, organizing, fantasizing, and decision -making."

> "The Community Memory system gives people a place to store and label information, which can then be selected, sorted, and fished out as needed. All the information in the Community Memory is put in directly by the people who use the system: anyone can post messages, read any other communications that are there, and comments or suggestions at any time."

Community Memory, [Project] as an organization, is more difficult to
explain. There are many of us, I'm not sure just how many.
Tuesday night dinner/meetings are usually attended by about a
dozen, but altogether there are about twenty "friends of Commun-
ity Memory." We are writers (many of us have improved our writing
quite a bit here, polishing our licks on some of the left's first
word-processors.) We are computer scientists who would rather not
work for the military -- or the banks. We are environmental
activists -- many of us have been involved in the Abalone Alli-
ance and the Livermore Action Group. We are alternative communi-
cations experts; one of us even has a degree that says so. We
are ex-hippy marginals now earning absurdly high rates as techni-
cal writers. We are, as a group, sharp, scientific, and articu-
late. Oh, and we have our own sociologist, a lucid and funny guy
with writers block ~~that~~ [who] makes $75.00/hr as an APL hacker, but
whose real love, as with most of us, lies elsewhere.

CM is formally organized as a workers co-operative and run, for
all practical purposes, as a "closely held collective." In the
event of a irreconcilable dispute we can fall back onto our by-
laws and vote, but this has happened only once. Most of our
disputes are broken on the back of a slowly evolving group pro-   RACK?
cess. And we have other organizational manifestations as well.
There is Village Design, a full non-profit corporation that does
fundraising (as yet unsuccessfully) and publishes the Journal.
And there is Pacific Software, a stock-company in the business of
selling our software to bring in the bacon, and of perpetually
drawing us into the turmoil and "passion" of a dynamic and
rapidly consolidating sector of the economy. And we have private
enginnering companies, joint ventures and Limited Research and
Development partnerships coming out of our ears. It's all very
fertile ground for organizational schizophrenia.

We have a beautyful warehouse in Berkeley which we share with the
technical staff of Pacific Software, which increasingly handles
the technical work of maintaining our products. For the record,
there are two:

    1) Sequitur, a relational Database System with integrated
    word-processing,

    2) X.Dot, a portable C-language implementation of the inter-
    national standard packet-switching protocol, X-25.

Our co-habitation with Pacific's programmers gives a certain
peculiar air to our warehouse, and exemplifies the balancing act
which has occupied us for the bulk of our history. Pacific's
technical staff shares our our offices, our computers and our
kitchen, and yet even the most junior of them makes more than the
$10.00/hr which we pay ourselves.

In fact the whole organization has a peculiar air to it, an air
that has driven more than one of our people to the brink of
insanity. Until we instituted the "co-ordinating committee"

about a year ago, our weekly Tuesday night meetings were so taken
up with the business of the business, and so little occupied by
practical steps towards the implementation of the CM system, that
when we did finally try to talk about it, it seemed an abstract
and dubious exercize.

PERHAPS A FEW STORIES WILL TELL A BETTER TALE...

Ok, so there we were, about two or three years ago. We had set
up a software company to make a lot of money so that we could "do
CM." The trouble was that Sequitur was never quite finished and
ready to sell. In fact, Sequitur being "almost finished" became
quite the witty comment.

The other product, X.Dot, for some peculiar reason which I don't
fully understand, was marketable even though it wasn't really
finished.

Ok so there we were, just about broke. (We've been just about
broke for years now, though we've managed to make the payroll
until a couple of months ago.) And we were trying to sell X.dot
(which goes for a couple of hundred thousand bucks per copy), and
we hadn't sold one in quite a while, and then it turned out that
we had a hot customer....in Johanasburg!

The punchline is that we didn't do it. In fact, the license
agreement for X.dot, as it took shape in the wake of the South
Africa discussion, specifically prohibits Pacific Software (which
we hope to lose control of any month now) from selling to South
Africa.

But the discussions were bloody, and for no good reason except
our own collective confusion and individual personality problems.
The situation was basically thus: no one really wanted to make
the sale (except for the few who sometimes seem more identified
with Pacific than with CM -- and they didn't press it.) But the
situation made us wonder just what the fuck we were doing. There
was a certain amount of feeling (particularly identified with the
views of the author) which while somewhat sophistic are neverthe-
less sincerly held -- that the banks are just as bad, if not
worse, than the military. (The discussion of South Africa melds
in my memory with the related discussion about sales to the mili-
tary.) Others argued persuasively that slow death (banks) is
better than fast death (armies.)

It was a long discussion, and all sorts of arguments were put
forth. The "all money is dirty money" argument seems, in retros-
pect, to be particularly relevent to our history, for it forced,
or at least allowed, us to consider CM as a political project in
a universe of other such projects. Instead of swelled heads
about how great and exceptional we were in computer nurdland, we
began to weigh CM against the much more concrete political reali-
ties of anti-military organizing and international technology

boycotts.

Just why was CM a valuable political project anyways? Was it because it would demonstrate that high technology could be used to bring people together, to counter social alienation and not to reproduce it (as the television and advertizing based computer "communications" systems we will prehaps be all too familiar with will do?) Was it because of the moral/political legitimacy which we as a group of articulate and sometimes very radical black sheep of the computer priesthood could muster to denounce the trajectory of the market/state? Because we could sound off and be taken seriously even in the pragmatist nightmare of modern America because we were <u>doing</u> something? Was it just our institutional existence itself that was important -- that some lost souls of the computer state would hear about us and know they were not alone? Was it because we were trying to take media activism into the future? Or was CM, as an organization, important simply because it was implementing the CM system? Would the system itself, as variously more and fewer of us thought/think, make such a big difference in the world that it could justify our small part in modernizing the metabolism of Capital to pay for it?

In the end we called a front group for the African National Congress, asked them if they would take the money from the South Africa sale and channel it to the guerrillas (we needed the sale not only for money but to establish our name in the market.) They said no and we refused that sale. And we adopted a sales policy that explicitly prohibited military sales. Except for the hard feelings, it was all over.

PERSONALITIES AND OTHER PECULIARITIES

[handwritten margin note: MANY DIFFERENT PERSONALITY FLAWS CAN lead to The SAME DiSFUNCTiONALiTy.]

Here I can touch upon one of the most unfortunate, and frankly, the saddest parts of the whole experience. One of our founders, at about this time in the history of CM, began to get so seriously alienated from the group, and from certain members of the group, that he eventually chose to leave. Aside from the lessons to be learned about pride, muddied agendas and group process, and there are many of these, this crisis in the group was significant for what it marked the end of.

For the man in question was the pivotal person in the design of the software that our fortunes, to this day, hinge upon. As the malaise of alienation and frustration that built up inside our collective - turned - software company reached a critical mass, one of the most immediate and most serious casualties was the collective design process that had, for the longest time, been one of the greatest joys -- and in my opinion -- one of the most significant facts about CM.

For a while, you see, we were able to write software together within the context of what seemed to be very democratic social

relations. We had a "chief designer," just as the corporate "chief programmer teams" did. But we had no rigid division of labor, learning was a respected and crucial part of the design process, the hearty and the strong helped the weak and the halt to make their contribution. And the code we produced was good, sometimes it was damn good.

Why did things break down? I wish I knew. The pressure of the market, if not the key reason, was at least the omnipresent background to our increasingly bitter scenes. We came to call the programmers warrens "the zoo," a title it still holds though would no longer earn. And the mechanism by which things fell apart -- let's call it neurotification. Tolerance was strained. No one felt that they were doing what they really wanted to do. Some of us, in our rising spirals of tension and burnout, became less and less effective as programmers. But finally he pulled rank. In a dispute about an aspect of the command language (which took a long time to design) Mr. chief designer not only disagreed with everyone else but refused to yield his ground. Bitterness, frustration, self-image come to self-importance.

There is something peculiar about the way in which so much trouble came to rotate around one individual -- not only in the technical aspects of the work but throughout the organization. For it couldn't have been, and wasn't, one persons fault. What really happened was that the chemistry of the collective broke down under the pressure of the schizophrenia that permeated our history. Some of us were a lot more trouble than others, but we can ascribe this to the contingencies of personality. The crucial factor was elsewhere, in the lack of definition that was essential to the whole enterprise.

Put it this way: if we do make that big deal we hope to close soon then we will have succeeded in:

1) Setting up and cashing in a software company, without having sold anything to the military that would have been of unique benefit to it.

2) Establishing a well endowed political organization dedicated to non- hierarchical communications and the socially beneficial uses of computer technology.

3) Spreading our ideas though our Journal, which we have recently found to be quite influential in the underworld of lefty techno-creeps.

4) Building and propagating a very neat and quite sophisticated public communications system -- and asserting an anti-passivity "myth" to go with it.

Does it seem that the capitalist logic of the first achievement is somehow at odds with the political nature of the others? Sure! But also note that the others would not be possible

without the first. We never got any money from foundations for this crazy computer utopia of ours -- we had to finance it internally. That made us a business, right? And that drove us crazy, or almost anyways. But where else would we have gotten the money?

Things have, fortunately, calmed down quite a bit. Pacific may be a moneymaker yet. And it did turn out, after all, that the "toolkit" we built for Sequitur could easily support CM. The irreconcilable personality disputes that developed in the midst of our collective psychotic episode have been resolved by personnel changes. We've gotten enough positive feedback from scattered political activists to justify ourselves to ourselves -- and we even seem to be modernizing our "myth." There seems almost a consensus at this point that if we are going to do something that is as "pro-computer" as CM, then we had damn well better also spend a lot of time holding forth about the reality of computerization in this miserable world of ours. CM is not intended to be advertizing for either the military computer state or the micro-computer corporate utopia. It is intended to say that, damn it, computers really can be used for something else!

Which, I suppose, brings me to a political evaluation of the project, now five or so years old and still not out of the shop.

WHO CARES ABOUT DEMOCRATIC COMMUNICATIONS ANYWAYS?

CM's stated and most obvious goal is to demonstrate that computer systems can be built that will facilitate the ability of people to connect with other people with congruent interests, in effect to create an electronic public space. This modest intent is not anti-capitalist, except in the way that all useful utopias are, by implying the destruction of the existing world order by underscoring its' deficiencies. Indeed, CM strikes many computer oriented political activists (especially those oriented towards shop floor politics) as being prehaps off-the-wall, and prehaps even dangerous by way of perpetuating the myth of the friendly machine.

We agree that this is a danger, but see other factors as well. The future is dim, but some things about it seem reasonable clear: capital is transforming itself globally, and if it can continue to avoid its own increasingly exterminist logic (unlikely, but that's another article) we are likely to see our children inherit a very closely bound but unstable world in which islands of high-tech prosperity embed a brutal and barely contained barbarism of ravaged eco-systems and managed desperation. Computers and guns will hold the whole mess together.

The uses of the microprocessor are already more than visible:

* They allow automation and increased managerial control.

* They support a whole panoply of surveillance and entertainment systems.

* They allow for a tremendous increase in the destructiveness and "feasibility" of war, thus pushing us ever closer to the edge of nuclear nightfall.

And simultaneously, they aid the reinvigoration of the most retrograde ideologies of progress and technological transcendence, leaving us more paralyzed than ever by rendering reality effectively invisible.

[handwritten: WOW. RHETORIC.]

In such a situation, how could we be so stubborn as to insist on the importance of an alternative vision? Prehaps because, whatever our disagreements, we share a conviction that traditional left approaches, approaches which focus exclusively on the miseries of modern life, and which fail not only to paint a picture of another possibility, but equally to evoke the big picture at all, have earned a deserved failure.

The question around CM is not whether or not to make the point that computer technology could be used to help make another world, but rather HOW to make that point so as to avoid being packaged into some vile ideology or another. David Noble claims (in Present Tense Technology, an essay recently published in Democracy) that "the fight for alternatives...diverts attention from the realities of power and technological development, holds out facile and false promises, and reinforces the cultural fetish for technological transcendence." We agree that it has done all of these thing, but don't believe that a politics uninformed by alternative possibilities will escape the resignation and passivity that comes with the complete "naturalization" of contemporary capitalist society, the pervasive belief than nothing else is really possible.

[handwritten marginalia: This whole thing about alternative left don't fall into ...]

WHAT HAVE WE ACCOMPLISHED?

So, how well then have we done at proving that these miserable machines (without which I can no longer write decently) can be used to free ourselves? It's hard to say. Until recently, we were so bound up with the fate of our mutant child, Pacific Software, that we hardly made any progress towards the establishment of a CM system. Now we have almost got the thing done, but we haven't got much money left. Our fortunes could change again, but in the meanwhile all we can do is hold forth. We get a lot of publicity, and we use it more or less well as the occasion, and the shifting sands of our own collective intelligence, allows.

Sometime this year we will probably put up a system in San Fransisco or Berkeley. It will be accompanied ~~to~~ a advertising
[handwritten: by]

campaign that makes it clear that CM is different than standard Teletext (more commercials you pay to see.) And it will say other things as well, slyly prehaps, but it will say them.

Look at it this way, CM has survived, as an organization and as a idea, because it fits into the local scene. It is a high-tech project in a part of America that lives for its' microchips. Its' history fades back into the Appropriate Technology movement, and its membership goes back even further to the ancient days of the free-speech movement. Its' official ideology, sometimes libertarian and sometimes anti-capitalist, is vague enough to dispel the anxieties of those among the computer priesthood that would do good work instead. And yet we're sharp too, and sometimes we think we know what we're doing. Enough of our people are die-hard American Pollyannas to keep the others from sinking into realism. Add to that the conviviality of the warehouse and the crying need to do something to start carving out a new politics of high-tech, and it seems we manage to keep our heads above the water.

In the end, I think, CM will echo for a while in the dank canyons of the last days, but that is my personal dispair. Certainly we have had an effect of some sort; our Journal has a clever populist formula that acknowledges the widespread belief in computerized democratization, and then drags it to the left. There are a lot of small radical computing projects starting up in the states, and we're in a position to offer political and technical support. And every chance we get we badmouth "hierarchical communications systems." It all makes a certain kind of sense.

- what concretly (abstract) can you say about the problems the group had?

- South Africa happened first and was really clear... so writing that way later and all danger out

- other organizations have those kind of problems too, but they have mechanisms for diffusing them to like firing them

★ Bitterness precluded MATURATION instead of Degeneration.