

Interview with Peer Bode
by Chris Hill
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HILL: New York State was one of the earliest public funders of video art and artist-run centers in the country. I'd like to talk about the Experimental Television Center in Owego, NY, where you worked for many years teaching artists to access the video tools in the studio for their residencies and also doing your own work. Also, I would like you to address the aesthetic changes between the 1970s and the 1980s, looking at how attention to the materials and modernist queries into the "essential features" of the medium have shifted.

BODE: Video was one of those forms which didn't come out of a singular tradition, and because it wasn't connected to a singular ideology, video existed in multiple communities and built multiple discourses. At the same time, if you're willing to live with the idea of multiple discussions then there is some inquiry as to how they temper each other, how they activate each other, and how the discussions are out of sync with each other...

HILL: One question which video art begs to some audiences today is who saw this work in the 70s, where did this work show? Many people's media cultural experience tells them that if it doesn't show on television it doesn't exist. This was probably true for people in the 70s as well as people in the 90s. But there was another system that was supported enthusiastically, even though it was virtually underground in that there weren't huge demands for publicly funded experimental work to be shown to large audiences. In the 70s it was possible for decentralized artmaking and especially alternative cultural centers to be research and development as well as a testing ground for emerging artists.

BODE: ...The idea of the artists' space — that is an interesting history, and one that one could be tracked from the early cine clubs in the 20s and 30s in Europe that were really clubs for film makers and visual artists who cooperatively shared equipment and a screening space... Maya Deren [American experimental filmmaker] in the 1940s was aware that not only was it possible to put together a new kind of cinema but that one needed also to make a new kind of theater, and to deal with funding. By the end of the 60s and in the early 70s a number of factors came together so that in fact there could be funding for these alternative

artist-run centers. And then a whole range of work was created within those centers. The Experimental Television Center [1971-78 in Binghamton, NY, and 1978-present in Owego, NY] had an early access program which loaned out the 5 or 6 portapak. Ralph [Hocking, founder of ETC and current co-director with Sherry Miller Hocking] was dealing with the idea of using low cost 1/2" portapaks and making them available to the Binghamton community. Within a relatively short time Ralph was also helping Nam June Paik and Shuya Abe complete their Paik-Abe video synthesizer and beginning to support initiatives involving the modification of low-cost video systems and then building basic modular electronic tools. That would be Ralph's vocabulary, I think.

There's a certain attitude at the Center that comes partly from Ralph's background in sculpture, ceramics and photography, an idea that has to do with personal tools. There were kinds of materials one could personally own, and therefore have high access to and work with in a very particular way, and other tools that could be shared among a number of people. Then there was another question – how do you make the access to the capital-intensive equipment be time-based and still make sense of what it really takes for people to make art with these tools, to think through something and to spend time really exploring and really learning something? The learning aspect was part of the whole process. This need to actually learn how these tools worked and what new configurations might be that would deliver what you might want, since possibilities for these electronic tools were largely unknown. The model of industry was not the model one wanted to imitate because it was structured to produce certain genres of work...

HILL: And it was also designed to satisfy a market...

BODE: It was a kind of joke – the Detroit assembly line way of working. And one didn't need to make work that way... The material in the studio begins to be in dialogue with the material of the world, and at that point one can critique the world as well.

Ralph was interested in how a lot of the industrial television tools that were out there existed in very reduced configurations compared to what those tools really could do. Like the SEG [special effects generator]. The front panel on the SEG totally reduced what was possible to access inside of the machine. This came up over and over again. The video tools were all industrial tools, they were all part

of that other system. But then things like the portapak came out and began to undermine a whole set of practices and values. People like David Jones [tool designer, ETC technical director since 1972] would look at the equipment and say –jeez, you could restructure that piece of equipment so that it would do many more things than just what the front panel, its marketed definition, enabled you to do...Ralph was interested in externalizing internal controls. So the target, beam, and focus controls that adjusted how the tube picked up the image were externalized on the outside of the cameras, turned into pots [potentiometers] sitting on the outside of the camera. The tools began to get modified to go beyond what the limits of the industry definition of them had been.

People like Nam June [Paik] and Shuya Abe were good examples of what we would now call computer hackers, where this sort of kluging of found stuff would happen. The Paik- Abe synthesizer was a color encoder made from a color camera and a video mixer. They didn't invent those components, they were parts from other already functioning pieces of equipment which were then reconfigured. The Paik-Abe synthesizer was a 7-channel mixer/colorizer; you had potentially 7 layers of video. But this was not an industry idea. At that time broadcast television was based upon traditional filmic language, which was to get to from shot 1 to shot 2 to shot 3. There was no reason to overlay images...The guys from WNET [New York public television station] came to the Center. John Godfrey was a broadcast engineer and very sympathetic and interested in a new kind of working, and David Loxton was a producer. I remember them being at the Center wearing their white shirts and ties and looking very formal, like business men, and holding clip lights for Nam June while he had a little model of the Empire State Building on a lazy susan spinning around [one of shots in the tape *The Selling of New York*, 1972, by Nam June Paik]. They had several cameras going at once that were then being colorized and keyed and overlaid. The scene was Nam June grabbing the Empire State building with his hand and pulling it out of the frame. In any case, WNET didn't have their TV Lab yet in New York and Paik and Abe came to the Center to do their work. Within a year or so they established the WNET lab for artists to work and make new television. These ideas about labs for artists using video – these things all happened simultaneously in different parts of the country.

HILL: ...WNET also screened experimental work on series like *VTR (Video Television Review)*, hosted by Russell Connor...

BODE: People put those programs together with someone to introduce the work, and it was all about trying to figure out how to do the cultural translation or set up a context that could be understood by audiences unfamiliar with this kind of work... That's where this work was on television; there wasn't any MTV. And that work, in terms of its electronic base and its visual, painterly language, was doing something that also wasn't even yet a part of advertising. It really had a separate identity, and you could argue whether it was more advanced or not advanced, but it had a real difference about it. At the same time there were other distribution venues – museums and alternative centers, and then also people being interested in media activities on the street...My own coming out of a film background and a New American Cinema history background connected video work with that which was being created through an engagement with issues around materials and the process of seeing and perception and cognitive overlays as well. Film work was not coming at first through the museum; it was circulating through another set of institutions that the film community had created for itself – places like the Millennium and Anthology Film Archives [in New York]...

HILL: Can you say something about the relationships that bridged your working with film and video, and also music?

BODE: Let me step back before I do that.. .this thing about where people saw the work. There was art criticism or cultural reporting that also had to do with something about the ideas and values of the 60s. There was an attempt to identify where things were changing in response to changes in values. It has perhaps some of the same flavor of people who are involved with computers now and their ideas showing up in the popular press and media. It's important to realize that this stuff wasn't completely disconnected from the larger culture. It was one of the important discussions of the culture, even if it named itself as "alternative culture."

HILL: So alternatives to the dominant culture forms and activities were named and tolerated. They may have been understood as being critical of the mainstream, but they were still tolerated and publicly supported as necessary channels of culture.

BODE: That whole relationship between the PBS artist centers [WNET-New York, KQED-San Francisco, WGBH-Boston] and the other artists-run centers [like ETC] is interesting one to flesh out, because the artists-run centers had connections to their local communities and also created a different definition of community...And the difference between the large capital investment productions and the low capital investment productions. This is something that doesn't get talked about enough – what does it mean for something to be a \$50 production, or a \$100 production or a \$10,000 production or a \$5 million production? It was clear that some work could be made with just that portapak.

That same kind of difference began to set up around different aspects of media production. When you have a larger capital outlay system for the production, you also have a larger capital outlay for the promotion and distribution of that production. These activities are certainly part of working in an information and an advertising based culture. The resulting perception can be, though, that those projects which didn't spend the money on advertising never existed, and that's part of the history that needs to be done. A lot of the focus and the commitment in the 70s were to put the resources into the actual making of the work, not into its advertising. That's important, because there is a tendency for histories to be connected to large institutions which had little spaces of alternative culture – small pockets within the larger structures – and it would be a mistake to historically look at those as the only alternative activity that was going on. Those larger institutions were clearly in dialogue with the other scenes where the research and new idea developments happened, places which received less funding but were higher in terms of freedom and actual connection to artmaking communities.

HILL: There was also an aesthetic investment in process, which for many people meant that the product was not valorized; rather the process was important, and of course that led to many tapes not being preserved as some final object...

BODE: What you were commenting on before, the early tool making ideas. ...There was also this issue of what were the other models out there? What kinds of questions could one ask? Clearly, in terms of "instrument making," the whole tradition of electronic music making was something that by the late 60s/ early 70s already had a good long history, and the audio synthesizer was very visible. What my father's Bode audio synthesizer had demonstrated was modularity; the Moog audio synthesizer had demonstrated modularity, voltage control,

manufacturing, and distribution. Modularity meant being able to break things into smaller pieces and parts so that you could reconnect the equipment, and one piece of equipment could be connected to and control many pieces of equipment. Voltage control was an analog, MIDI-like system, for controlling functions with other signals. I remember Dan Sandin talking about it as a model for his own IP [video image processor]. What would it take to build a Moog-like synthesizer for video? Well it basically meant running faster amplifiers so you could pass that higher band-width signal. You could mix together camera images; you could filter camera images...These are electronic process-oriented ideas that have to do with high speed switching, that have to do with comparator structures that let you set a voltage level within the video signal. In combining the comparator and the switcher you get a keyer, and you have ways that images be defined, in terms of gray scales, and in what level they would overlay. Luminance keying is a matting technique that you could compare to what had been developed in other mediums, like the solarization processes which historically had been done with film. So on one level they were understood visually, but these same visual effects hadn't been seen before with television and video. But the other part was seeing things that had not been seen before in the coding of other mediums, and that introduced the project of the coding of this new electronic medium.

HILL: What would be examples of that?

BODE: Some of the most obvious ones would be managing the time-based structures. One of the things you became aware of working with video was that the smallest unit with video was the dot; the most basic unit wasn't the frame as it was in film. There was a particular relationship between time and space. You could actually construct images that were time-based structures; they existed because of time bases and they would shift and move and change if those timing signals were altered.

HILL: You're talking about the scanning electron beam.

BODE: Yes. But also, what you saw on the screen was about time distinctions—something being faster or slower than the standard time-based window of the monitor itself. The image that you see on the screen is in fact an illusion. There was never a full image. A similar thing could be said about film...and Peter Kubelka talked about this idea that film is all still frames. It's a medium of illusion, and when you get to a certain number of frames per second, the

persistence of vision phenomenon kicks in, and the nervous system turns discrete film frames into continuous movement. But there's another level which happens with video. If you look beyond the frame rate structure you find that images are divided into lines and those lines are divided into dots, and all of that is based on a scanning dot which is driven by a particular time-base. So if one interacts with the time-base, if one introduces changes that are faster than the time-base, then those changes begin to be graphically visible on the monitor.

So you created a kind of imagery that resulted from time-based structures that were moving faster than the time-base of the framing system that was recording them or displaying them. It was about seeing the coding of the medium that you were working with, but it was also the idea that an equivalence between time and space had real physical meaning. Here were things that became really interesting extensions of cinematic language. I remember seeing Woody and Steina's [Vasulka] work and various kinds of manipulating of time-base, playing one time-base against another so that images drifted, and realizing that the drift had to do with complex rhythms. The time-base was a kind of rhythmic structure, and another rhythmic structure could be played against that. That concept works with sound in terms of creating complex rhythmic structures; and here was a case where the phenomena were visual...

HILL: Your work included in the video survey also deals directly with this issue of time-base .

BODE: *Video Locomotion (man performing forward hand leap)* (1978) and *Music on Triggering Surfaces* (1978) are both recordings about activating systems, ideas, and viewers. Both recordings were experiments and performances. They involved articulating electronic vocabularies, representations, transformations, and set ups for shifting responses. These were frameworks to discover and activate known and unknown intensities. These recordings were intuitive and structural, the semiotic and the body, vibrations and cycles, spaces outside the screen, inside the screen, and curious spaces of response. In these tapes the image, its reference, and its carrier are metaphorically and literally shifting. *Video Locomotion (man performing forward hand leap)* uses a 19th century Edward Muybridge photographic grid series as a familiar base image to explore the other image spaces of electronic time-based systems. The 19th century Muybridge proto-cinema image series drifts and strobes in what could be considered a new proto-video or proto-computer space.

Music on Triggering Surfaces involves a linking of image and sound. The image drifts past a sensor dot reading light values and translating that to sound. A cross sensory link is established and then explored and performed. Also again the hidden, secret, illegal television/video, image/signal language is revealed, and literally and metaphorically connected to the body to be seen and heard and travelled through.

Speculation of the cross-disciplinary site that is the reception for this work involves the contradictions and negotiations of various ideas. These surround issues of electronic systems, materiality, representation, and response. All looked at across the historical and institutional dialogues of the fine arts and television, the space across the personal and social. It's there if you want to consider it. You can also be immersed in the tapes and attend to the pleasures of that experience.

The tools to make these tapes were a combination of low-cost, off-the-shelf video systems, altered and interfaced with handmade modular video and audio systems. Defining these, making these accessible, and spreading the ideas of these systems has been very much of the ETC project. The struggles around that tool development and evolution is another story.

To make these tapes I used 2 black & white portapak cameras with trim pot adjustable horizontal and vertical sync signals, a modular analog synthesizer with oscillators, sample, and hold, a keyer designed by David Jones, and a 9-channel light sensor-to-control-voltage box that I built. Years later this struggle to access the signal and access to artists' tools and general electronic tools, this commitment to the principle of independent media making, access to low cost open system tools continues. All the pressures of what at times seems to be an economic censorship system won't stop people from pursuing these activities and principles.

HILL: How did you find yourself becoming interested in video coming from film? Do you think it was these kinds of questions that then translated into a new set of electronic tools?

BODE: I think it had to do with being a young filmmaker graduating from university, having had a few experiences with the Center while I was a student...I had had some experiences already while I was in school working in

the film industry because my brother, Ralf Bode, was a cinematographer living in New York and was making commercial films [such as *Saturday Night Fever* and *Coal Miner's Daughter*], and I'd experienced that process of working on some PBS shoots, and some of his friends' independent productions...I thought that process of making the work was interesting but I really disliked what the results were. They were pieces that I never would have looked at. The work that I really responded to, the tough and exciting work was that which I was studying. Part of my task was to figure out how to be connected with that so that I could dialogue with that and continue that kind of work..The other part of my own background is that my father was active in electronic tool development, and I had grown up in this household with his electronic organs, frequency shifters, ring modulators, and vocoders. Having grown up in that environment, I didn't have a way of stepping outside it to find out what it was really all about and what it was connected to. It was only years later that I understood the value of my father's pioneering efforts. The Moog synthesizer was based on his first ever modular synthesizer and he had been dealing with electronic tool development in terms of audio and music since the 1930s...

A way of responding to the work of the generation of film makers before me... my own work, or the next work that needed to be done, could be a response to that work and yet would not be more of the same of that work...There were kinds of perceptual experiences and perceptual spaces and conceptual spaces that earlier cinema created that were also kinds of spaces that I wanted to create, yet with some changes. That was the crossover for myself... It also had to do with connecting to a medium. Broadcast television and what it was all about was always an image in the background. Whether one made work that referred to it directly, one was always referring to it and critiquing it. It was different than being connected with a history of cinema where in fact these various bodies of work that did have to do with a more serious, more evolved, more literary, more historical context, existed. In video there were things to be seen that had not been seen before, that didn't exist with television. In some sense video was the more common medium or the vernacular form, and artists were crossing into issues about that as well.

HILL: One of the terms that you use a lot is "vocabulary" and you're talking about a phenomenological and experiential vocabulary as well as a vocabulary that's built up from understanding these various electronic processes and the architecture of the tools. It's a image language that, especially to the extent that

it's tied into a specific study of the tools, has been buried or neglected over the last decade, although I think it's possible for people to get at experientially by working directly with the tools.

BODE: ...There is a difference between the theorist/analytic position and the visual artist that might yet be a theorist but is also interested in visual and conceptual generative production. In other words, the reason that one makes work is that something happens at the level of making and receiving images; it's that exchange with the stuff and the world. The experience of people who work with a vocabulary of images and a vocabulary of sounds is different from that of people who are functioning only within a verbal language structure. One is really aware of the fact that one is working with something that is semiotic (language based/meaning based), at the same time one is dealing with how the body responds to what one is seeing...what those images were, what those objects were, what kinds of references they had, and how the procedures that those objects were put through then forced them into some other kind of relationship with what those were as images and also as references...What that reference was and what those associations were and what the codes were that hovered around that image/object. And then what kind of experience, what reception happened as those elements were put through processes or manipulations.

On one level this was connected to an art process discussion that was happening in the 60s and 70s, that John Cage and other people were involved with, that could be about dealing with any object/element in the world, and manipulating those through procedures/processes, and how that developed a way of looking at those elements in ways that you hadn't seen before, that was also a way of critiquing your own particular cultural fix. It gave you a way of placing yourself culturally, relative to those objects. You can overlay one more piece on that, which is the vocabulary of the event structures that one uses, which can come from the electronic coding, its strategies, processes, and procedures.

I think some of the reception of that early work was problematic because it was unclear what the electronic code meant personally and then culturally. Did it inevitably mean "technology," and then "technology" meant power and control of the cultural that might also be connected to the military which developed these tools, and to a political analysis of how technology is used in this country? There comes a point where one wants to have a way of reflecting on that, because we

use these electronic materials more and more as part of how we live our lives, and then there are aspects that do have to do with them being everyday materials/objects/experiences/phenomena...

In this whole area of independent media making and personal studio making which is also connected to a tradition of activism, there has always been an analysis of the system at large, how images are produced, and how films and media are produced. Those industrial systems are not going to go away. They keep evolving, consolidating. As new mediums are developed industry slows down various initiatives to make sure that it is in the right position to take advantage of those new media. So how does one function "independently" or partly separate from it? I think that in the 1970s some people were really purist about it, and I think other people really believed that the hybrid structures could work both inside and outside of it. But clearly there was something about constructing the personal, independent side that, in fact, the industry models would never agree to construct. It's a challenge to that commercial system, and the people who challenge that system mostly won't be easily represented within that system. That's what it means to be outside...

At the same time that we're talking about personal and independent video and film making we're also talking about various forms of collaborative activities, various levels of communities and co-operatives. These "not-for-profit" structures that existed in media arts centers were ways of people actually working together and not working primarily for wages. They were really living a different model of how one would even trade services or work on each others' projects.

In the 70s there was a clear sense that personal was also a good word, like "the personal is political" was an idea that was used within a feminist discourse. It was also an idea that went beyond gender issues; that had to do with how one functioned, where one had some kind of power in the world, articulating a voice. The video and filmmakers had a sense of that and could articulate that to a certain point. The best image makers were not always the best writers, but when one is involved in a process of making like that...there's some kind of urgency and reason that you do it. One has a sense that these things are interconnected. One's writing is part of one's thinking which is also part of one's making of the work...But people who then wrote about media gradually were not practitioners but actually came to observe video from other disciplines. At this point the

understanding of the value of issues around labor and production were lost. The other piece that has always had to concern various making communities and visual arts communities and language communities is that written language still has a real legitimizing power within the culture, and the commercial publications that ended up as a forum for writers were often not interested in those projects which were not commercially based. As any writer will tell you, within the art magazines, one could only represent what happened in those not-for-profit alternative art centers to a very small extent because the publications survived on a commercial advertising base. No ads, no reviews...

Also part of the dilemma is where do we get our flow of information? In the late 70s a lot was happening in those alternative media centers, and their publications that announced shows and had little articles about people, for example Media Study/ Buffalo's publication – those shows were very important to the various communities of practitioners in order to be able to communicate among themselves. Earlier, *Radical Software* would be another example of a important publication that communicated some of the work that was being done and also placed the whole making endeavor within the context of politics and the culture, and about changing the culture. Here was a case of that alternative culture communicating to itself, which brings up the question of what are the cultures of resistance and how is it that they communicate to themselves and across themselves. *Radical Software* and other publications were the desk top publishing of the time, talking to communities of makers...

HILL: This notion of finding a voice took the form of articulating positions, articulating manifestos. The production of the written text was potentially part of the artist's process, closer to the process of the artist. And I don't know why that should have been the case in the early 70s and why that became less the case in the early 80s. Is it because in the 80s people specialized in a field that was trying to establish itself? In the early 70s video artists were also advocates for a new practice...

BODE: ...This is related to a systems approach, which was important in the 60s and 70s – being able to think about how things functioned as systems and then being able to see how those systems interrelated...I remember from conversations that it would come up over and over about how things were linked together, the whole idea about looking across boundaries...This is some of the critique and the

heritage of the 60s about being critical of institutions and critical of the boundary systems within which the culture works...

Coming back to people being image makers and writers, I remember a metaphor being used in relation to exploring new possibilities with video, and not feeling so strong about it at the time, but I'm beginning to find it more and more interesting – the idea of your video system, whether it be your portapak or a slightly more graphic oriented system, being your pen, and using it to write, and what that means... Within the industrial models of film and television making, the idea of the person with his or her pen is absent, so is the camera as part of one's every day life, and with it the potential for a diaristic tradition.

HILL: This connects with another contemporary issue which is public education's failure to support both print and media literacy regardless of class, which has a bearing now on understanding video as an artform with a literature and using it as an accessible communications form. If we're able to continue to understand this video language that you've alluded to having evolved through the 70s, then there needs to be more attention paid to developing a media education curriculum, one that would teach history, strategies, and tools through direct production experience.

BODE: And people really anticipated that by now, the mid-1990s, the educational piece would be in place, that media and photography would have a place in the schools. Right within *Radical Software* one really has all sorts of elements being advocated, including media education. I've not done research about this, but there were various media education projects funded by the Rockefeller Foundation in the late 60s, and there was Paul Sharits' article [written in 1974] in *Film Culture* [No. 65-66, 1978] called "A Cinematics Model for Film Studies in Higher Education."

HILL: One of the ways that you have described this period is as an activism that encouraged concentration, resistance, self-making, claiming one's own authority, and supporting community making as well. However, one of the problems with these alternative cultural projects over the long term is that, because they aren't supported by mainstream industry, and with the eroding of government support, there's no guarantees that you'll come out of this engagement with a job or with even a modest savings account. That's one of the enduring insecurities that makes people question their commitments to alternative

structures. Also the strategies for responding to the various critiques of authority changed in the late 70s/early 80s. In the late 60s the authorizing capacity of systems was questioned, whether you were looking at the authority of the vocabulary that you were using which then became part of the urgency to develop a new vocabulary, or whether it was the authority of the economic system or legal system and its enforcement. By the early 80s through the strategy of image appropriation, "authority" became just one more mask to wear. Once there was a way in and it became legitimate to appropriate mass media imagery in order to deconstruct it, artists played with authority and that playing became almost like authority drag—for example, Cindy Sherman's work is sort of like an authority "drag." While this work performed the extent to which individuals sincerely participated in self-authorizing cultural norms, there was a danger in losing a sense of direction of the opposition. Maybe appropriation became one of the dominant art strategies in the early 80s in part because people felt that they couldn't really change the system. What had been accomplished in the 70s was an accommodation to the idea of playing with authority through manipulating its languages and codes primarily...

BODE: Representation has ethical aspects: the use of imagery, the mis-use of it, at what levels one can establish a place of resistance. Part of the shift that happened in the 80s also had to do with the fact that you had a Republican president who was suggesting a different model, a business oriented model after a decade that was anti-corporation. Part of the alternative process was that you couldn't work within the corporate system. Part of the structuralist idea is that your structure is part of your content. So if your structure is the corporate structure then your content will be corporate content. So to establish another kind of structure and create another content and service is one of the needs that one has to perform as an individual within a culture.

In the 80s we had a cultural revolution in this country, and the myth was recreated about corporate America being very positive, and the competitive market being the best system for producing wealth and information. And so every arts organization was pressured to become more like corporations and to use a business model, which meant that they had to have a larger percentage of earned income, they had to lay out who their audiences were, what were the numbers that were receiving benefits from the cultural product that was being put out. Organizations were under incredible pressure to lose their funding unless they responded...

For both an art scene and also in general culture there is a desire for new all the time, and appropriation had a real freshness about it...Part of what happened within electronic media was that that essentialist discourse about the electronic processes suddenly had no validity. The new discussions were about construction, were about the body, were about desire, were about identity. In a sense, the earlier discussions about materiality, systems, phenomenology, and semiotics relative to electronics were not far enough along. In a certain way we dropped the ball because those of us who were involved with electronic processes didn't continue to be the writers that would make that link between the old and new discourses that would, for example, problematize the written discussions of electronic tools and production around issues of the body and reception.

The 80s were actually a very remarkable time in terms of what was produced at the ETC because there was the whole foundation that got set up with a process approach in the 70s with this commitment to studio-making and tool-making and community making. So a whole body of work did get generated that may not have been the work that, from a critical position, was getting the most attention [in the 80s] but actually the structure had been put in place and in terms of a production environment, was functional and was extremely generative...

HILL...There is another component to whole picture which involved an audience performative which had much to do with how this work was actually received.

BODE: There is another issue of time base work that has to do with these intuitive processes...The potential involvement with the work has to do with these intuitive process issues. I remember Benny Powell, a jazz musician, who came through the ETC with Celia Shapiro, a California video maker. Benny was Count Basie's side man for 10 years, and he said that when they performed on the road one of the things that would happen within the first tune or two is that they would adjust the speed of their playing to try to figure out what clicked with their audience. This practice was based on the fact that every town and audience would actually respond to a different speed/ beat. So the first piece that they did would be to sort of test that response; to figure out how they would play the rest of their pieces. That deals with the notion of time base and how much there is about this information that we can't see. We can't photograph it

but it becomes a time based filter which determines whether people look at something or don't look at something.

HILL: I also think that one of the issues that has to be folded into this, which has to do with the time base and its relationship to these attentional filters, is that a lot of this work was based on an assumption that audience membership was participatory, your participation was assumed to be active. Even if you weren't a maker but attended performances and exhibitions at these various spaces, you expected that there could be conversation afterward with the artists about the work. One of the things that seems to be characteristic of this period in time is a kind of an intimacy between performers and audiences. It's about an audience watching the work and aware of its own attentional processes as well, or an audience that wants to share something about the excitement of the making.

BODE: There were also secondary spaces of attention and participation that were created that were full of richness – personal and social, the body and ideas – a kind of virtual system one might click into or find.

HILL: And there was also the performance of the tools themselves. The artist was seen to be one element in that performance, certainly a major element, but with respect to the tools and with respect to accidents and with respect to aleatory gestures and that, as you said, there could be other things too. There was the social element of participation, and participation in an alternative scene which cultivated alternative forms of attention, as well as a cultural notion that participation was what was desirable.

BODE: I think it's good not to forget reception, how the work was actually received, audience and audience participation. There were many occasions where the work was not received very well and where the work was not necessarily popular or where the work actually had to find its own community. This has to do with that aspect of work – I'm thinking more about film tradition and experimental film work and stories that I remember hearing more so than I remember with video – large numbers of the audience would walk out. Andy Warhol's films meant something in terms of who he was and as part of a larger project he was doing, but they were not mainly driven by their reception as films. There was also this willingness to have that disapproval. There was something about that phenomenon that had an edge that I remember. It was pretty interesting being able to say not everybody is going to be interested.

That's OK. Those people who are left have made a commitment on their own that they are interested and want to continue being there. It's interesting how now there is an absolute sense of horror now if people leave a show, that some terrible disapproval has been made of everybody else who stays. There just wasn't that kind of unified sense; that people felt that they all belonged to the same interest pool.

Also, the work wasn't made necessarily with response as the main issue. There was a willingness for the response to play itself out across a whole range of issues. Work could be very unpopular and still be very successful; it could be difficult and require patience...How would you know if it was good or not, or is there a connoisseurship system, and what is that? I think it had to do with an historical context – people invested in developing a knowledge of the discipline or the field or the genre, which was also very much the case in a lot of the independent film making community . That's part of what also happened in those cine clubs is that people could develop an historical context.

The thing I realize about my own education, and I'm so grateful for it, is that having been at [State Univeristy of New York at] Binghamton and also in [State Universtiy of New York at] Buffalo at the Center for Media Study, I was studying with people who were actually makers and who valued the actual experiencing of the work. I think in a lot of other places people got some piece of information about the New American Cinema and they might actually see one or two representative pieces, and then a lot of writing that contextualized it. What happened through artists actually being the teachers and artists being the writers was that the text that was the work was still really privileged, and it meant that the text as work really had to do something. Again it's this whole dilemma of the relationship of the experiential as text and the idea as text.

How do these practices continue? How does one protect the early electronic work? How does one deal with some of the physical issues of deterioration? And how does one make copies available so that the stuff still can exist in its various contexts, or whatever the contexts come to be, based on somebody's work or on a collection? Within that, selections get made so that work can be screened in the context of other pieces made at the same time. A really important piece of the history will be deciding how to deal with the mechanical problems of how one accesses this stuff. I think a lot of the problems are mechanics and institutional responsibility. How do you save the work so that it's there over time? And so

one can continue to re-engage and participate in the larger body of diverse historical experiments and discoveries, experiences and ideas that took on the electronic and its potential as significant forms of engagement? In my mind, this is some of the very significant work at the end of this millenium.

Peer Bode has been active in the evolving electronic video, computer, and contemporary arts communities. Presently producing video installations and electronic photolithography work and participating in tool and studio development, production, and literacy, he is director of the Video Arts Program at the N.Y.S.C.C. at Alfred University.