recollections of Xerox PARC’s PAIR program:

Rich Gold’s art & technology collider

Cathy Marshall

artmeetsstechnology

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part 1

PAIR

*circa 1993-1999*

the vision, a few pairings, and could it happen here?
...PAIR is a project **not for creating wonderful art or exciting science**—because we are dealing with highly skilled, talented, and motivated people these things almost always happen—but for creating better artists and better scientists...

...PAIR is a conscious attempt to boost, alter, nudge, and in a minor way redirect the creative forces of PARC by providing **alternative viewpoints, theories, personalities, and methodologies** within the halls, offices, and long corridors...

--Rich Gold
three PAIRings
Sunset
O Night without Objects
comparing documentary practice
Judy: basements
For years after the newspapers caught fire in the basement of the house in Winchester, my mother made sure that the only matches in the house were safety matches. She thought that somehow the hot weather and some strike-anywhere matches in the immediate vicinity of the pile of old newspapers had resulted in spontaneous combustion.

Actually, my brother, whose chemistry set dominated that area of the basement, had lit the newspapers on fire just to see what would happen.

Cathy: no basements
Where I grew up the houses had no basements. They were built on cement slabs on the side of a hill and looked down on more expensive houses capped by red tile roofs, shaded by giant eucalyptus trees that smelled like cat piss when the fog rolled in off the ocean.

My friends and I were curiously passive, without overt ambition. When our teachers would ask us why we hadn't been in class, we'd shrug and say, "Went to the beach," as if full disclosure would suffice. Perhaps it was the weather. You could walk outside barefoot on a January morning.

Our fathers were engineers, defense workers, and we were their war bonds, their peace-time dividends, the ICBMs of their eyes. Once a year, each of the major aerospace companies sponsored a Family Night at Disneyland. I never knew what my father did at work, but couldn't help connecting it with Disneyland.
I have always thought that engineers and artists shared a hands-on sensibility about working with material, but I have never seen engineers as mere "facilitators" of artists' ideas. I have always called for one-to-one collaborations between artists and engineers or scientists, each acting in his or her professional capacity. Such equal collaborations will open up possibilities for the artwork that neither could have predicted before they started working together.

I salute Rich Gold on his persistence in establishing the artist-in-residence program at Xerox Parc ... and I applaud Xerox for the kind of enlightened corporate support of the arts that we envisioned when we founded E.A.T. 30 years ago.

BILLY KLUVER
Berkeley Heights, N.J.
New York Times op/ed 29 August 1999
PAIR is deeply embedded within PARC—a native species to it—and it is not clear whether it could be transported to other environs, at least with its present genetic makeup, a makeup that is the result of a specific evolution within the PARC ecology.

PAIR is an organism that lives in the very real atoms-to-culture landscape of PARC, where one is as likely to eat lunch with a molecular physicist, computer scientist, anthropologist, philosopher, linguist, interface designer, mathematician, cryptographer, or artist.*
provocation: would a corporate research lab sponsor a PAIR-like program today?

“Some people look for a basic research renaissance at Microsoft, as fat a monopolist as Xerox ever was in its time, and one still spending lavishly to corral top research talent. But it's hard to imagine anything like PARC's culture and breadth of vision germinating in the bowels of that behemoth, with product developers scraping hungrily through the windows. Wherever it occurs, the next revolution will require a sponsor sufficiently patient — or, like Xerox, sufficiently clueless — to know when to leave the kids alone.”

3 things that are more likely
Researcher in corporate lab is the artist

*The Printing Dress*, Asta Roseway
Corporation funds institutional programs
Art happens outside; corporation facilitates

QWERTY 9, Sarah Frost

KINECT toolkit
a more usual outcome if art and technology more carelessly collide
“Finally there was an exhibit, and I was asked to be on a panel which judged the works of art. Although there was some good stuff that was inspired by the artists' visiting the companies, I thought that most of the good works of art were things that were turned in at the last minute out of desperation, and didn't really have anything to do with technology. All of the other members of the panel disagreed, and I found myself in some difficulty. I'm no good at criticizing art, and I shouldn't have been on the panel in the first place.”*

“it might help if someone who knew something about technology could be a sort of liaison”
PAIR was daring by anybody’s standards. The biggest requirement was to fly undetected on the larger corporate radar.

Everybody’s got to be open to failure; otherwise the sparks are just the frisson of the strange.

It’s the collaboration itself that matters, not finding a researcher whose art meets critical standards or an artist who can write papers.
part 2

malloy / marshall
an anecdotal view
- first impressions are deceptive
- institutional support doesn’t trickle down
- our collaboration outlasted our pairing
we spent three years weaving together our pasts via a series of email exchanges, an accumulation of related stories
we went back and forth about our experiences at parc, of course
Judy: behavior modification
Feelings of not belonging sweep over me in the hallways, in the coffee room, in the lunchroom.
In High School (applying some behavior modification techniques she had learned for dealing with Samuel)
my Mother paid me 25 cents
everytime I was able to start a conversation with someone with whom I'd never talked before.
Samuel got M&M's for not repeating questions.
I got 25 cents for talking to strangers.
My Mother didn't have to part with a lot of M&M's or quarters.

"I'll be happy if you talk to one researcher a day," said the program director.
Cathy: one researcher a day

The longest straight hallway -- the one at the far end of the building that ends at the fitness center -- that's the hallway I'm talking about. I was at one end, he was at the other. Even at 50 yards, I could tell that he was the researcher I sat next to at lunch in the cafeteria the day before (by the cut of his clothes, the way he was working his mouth around a wad of chewing gum, his dark glasses, the swing of his briefcase). I prepared my face to smile, and rehearsed some kind of casual greeting: "How's it going?" That's what I planned to say. Nothing I said was impromptu those first months.

We neared.

It's a long hall; I thought of a half dozen more pleasantries.

Even nearer.

I narrowed our hypothetical conversation to exchanged hellos.

Momentarily parallel: I yelped hi (much louder than I expected), and swung out my hand in a gawky half-wave. He turned his head toward the wall, as if he were looking for an emergency shower, and didn't say a word.
but we also exchanged stories and scenes remembered from our lives

these were personal

some were redacted from the final work
Judy: cheese puffs

"Do you know any psychiatrists?"
We had passed Echo farm and were heading down the hill into town.
The cheese puffs were almost gone.
He had also purchased a candy bar
and was probably planning to eat it too before we arrived home.
Mum would tell him to save it until after supper.
I never said anything.
We were lifelong fellow rebels against New England rules.
"Do you know any psychiatrists?"

"Stephen," I said naming our brother.
I used to think he was the only
Born Again Christian psychiatrist in the world,
but this turned out not to be true.
Cathy: a therapist
"Sit down, shut up, and listen!"
Jim was fond of saying.
He was a Synanon graduate who
believed in AA like a born-again Christian.

Three meetings a week:
another dictum of his.
Coincidentally, that's the same number the court prescribes.

A meter maid gave Jim a ticket
for parking his wine-red Jaguar in front of a dry-cleaners
in a no-parking zone.
"The lousy cunt," he said.

If I were a meter maid, looking to give my quota of tickets,
I'd certainly cite a big man with his beard neatly combed
and parted down the center
getting out of a perfect illegally-parked Jaguar sedan.
He must've spent hours getting his beard organized like that.

While he talked, I grimaced ambiguously,
and looked not at him, but at the
huge orange and white goldfish that swam in circles, alone,
in an octagonal tank beside me.
in the end, we had 276 lexia (or screens, as we called them) looking for an interface. we decided we wanted to do three things...

• ... recreate the process: forward
• ... multiply connected hypertext: anywhere
• ... recombinant narrative: lines
His wife had gone to bed. We sat in the living room, close together, but not touching.

"I want to show you something." He got up and went into the kitchen.

The handgun was in a small leather case which did nothing to conceal the shape of the weapon. It reminded me of the pouch with a sanitary napkin in it that I carried in my fringed leather purse in junior high.

He took the gun from the case and held it for just a moment. I thought he might point it at me in an ironic show of dominance, but instead, with some ceremony, he zipped it away and slippéd back into the kitchen to hide it.

I slept on their couch that night, after he had kissed me goodnight. His wife slept soundly, but I could hear him rustling in the night.

Moving on to the next page:

forward anywhere lines

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New narrative based on gun

John Lennon was gunned down on the sidewalk in front of his house. He wanted me to get him a gun. I knew he could really shoot someone.

The two men prepared to blast. Each had brought his gun: the driver, a Mauser. The gunshot rang off the flat dark walls of trees. They turned.

"No," I said, handing the gun back to him. "No, I'll just watch.

The handgun was in a small leather case which did nothing to conceal. He took the gun from the case and held it for just a moment.

My father brought his handgun to the shooting range to fire at targets. The gun didn't make me feel any safer at night, while I watched.

The BB gun lay on the ground, next to the dart gun. He showed me where the loaded guns were kept.
two of the four interfaces to the hypernarrative

Web version of *Forward Anywhere*

Eastgate’s *Forward Anywhere*
PAIR quietly ended in 1999
Xerox “spun out” PARC in early 2002
Rich Gold died in 2003

Forward Anywhere, Web, is increasingly difficult for me to maintain
Forward Anywhere, Eastgate, still runs on a modern Windows platform

I feel changed by PAIR, more not less, as the years have passed
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to find my papers and talks
http://research.microsoft.com/~cathymar
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