

Norman White

A Summary of My Work Modes and Objectives



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1. Essentially, incurably, and unashamedly, I am a tinker.
2. Originality, if it occurs in my work at all, is a casual by-product of my particular kind of tinkering.
3. Tinkering is a form of reading and writing, concerned with the literature of humankind's machines.
4. Articulation is a keyword for the understanding of this literature. Machines can be thought of as compositions of smaller articulating devices or as devices that articulate within a larger context. At the most abstract level, machines articulate human aesthetics, fears, needs and aspirations.
5. The most elegant articulations do not necessarily derive from recent technological advances, nor do they claim greater efficiency. It seems to me that efficiency is something that can never be completely grasped by anyone – much less by a civilization. What seems to work just fine here and now may well be screwing things up elsewhere in time/space.
6. I am *least* impressed by machines that express themselves in weightless, frictionless ways, through shifting images on the face of a television screen, contrived less to inform than impress.
7. If I could, I would build a working computer out of rubber bands and paper clips.

Here's an idea that I first presented to at a 1991 Banff conference entitled "Bioapparatus". Summarizing my work and objectives I ended with, "If I could, I would build a working computer out of rubber bands and paper clips." One of the attendees responded that it had already been done... with Mecanno parts. However, for me this is cheating... Mecanno is already very structured, whereas paper clips and rubber bands have minimal structure and maximal flexibility.

7. If I could, I would build a working computer

out of rubber bands and paper clips.

A friend, Rob Erlich, and I have already embarked on this project but we haven't got very far... we've been able to assemble logic inverters and simple logic gates. However, I'd like to throw this out as a challenge to all those people out there who understand the difference between hi-tech hardware and cutting-edge ideas... that you don't need one to have the other.

Oh yeah, and it's OK to use thumbtacks.

Best,
Norm