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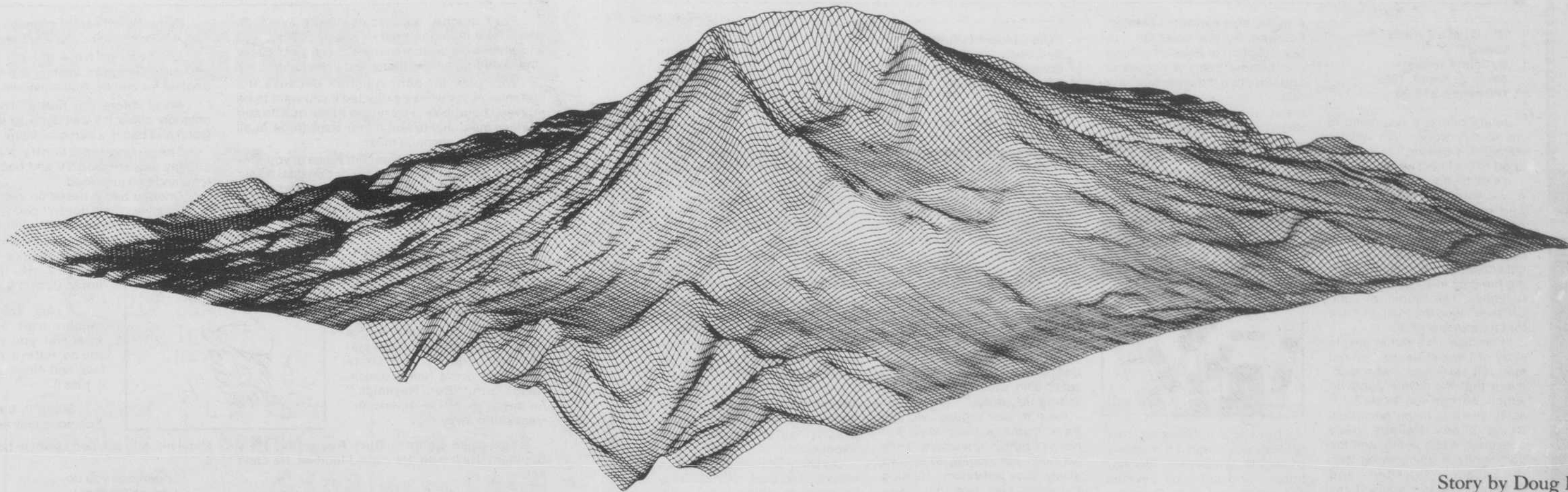
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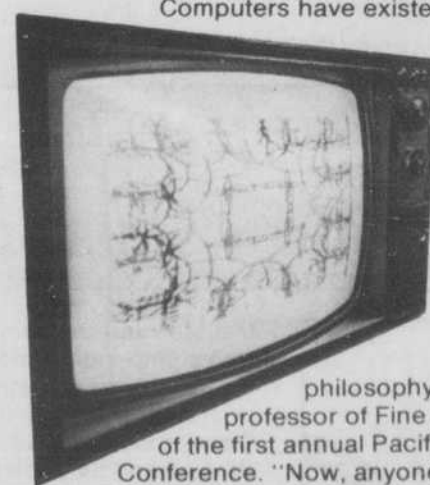
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Bit by byte, electronic graphics do compute



Enter the age of the computer. Very rarely has a single component so generally and indiscriminately asserted itself upon society, its art and science, its work and leisure. As the recent University-sponsored computer graphics conference showed, the evolutionary, or rather, revolutionary process continues at a frenzied pace.



Computers have existed for decades. But only since the early 1960's, when scientists wired them to humans and Boeing invented a primitive flight simulator, did computer graphics — visualizing ideas on computers — become functional. Since then, doctors, engineers, architects, educators, moviemakers and artists have explored the computer's potential.

"It represents a major change in philosophy," said Ken O'Connell, associate professor of Fine and Applied Arts and co-director of the first annual Pacific Northwest Computer Graphics Conference. "Now, anyone who wishes to do his or her own work better, can use the computer as a tool."

A unit that costs \$3 to 4 million 10 years ago can be purchased for \$3 to 4 thousand today, he said. Within the last six years, companies like Apple, Inc. have developed basic

computer languages the simplest of us can comprehend. "Computers will be in the hands of many, as familiar to all of us as television."

Indeed, the conference attracted a large following. The brainchild of O'Connell and Gene Bressler, conference co-director and associate professor of Landscape Architecture, the event attracted some 800 avid computer buffs, seven businesses demonstrating their wares and renowned speakers from 12 academic disciplines.

The state-of-the-art exhibition showed that even the way in which we receive information may be changed by computers and their graphics components.

"We are on the verge of a very gradual evolution away from print, and we have a long way to go," said Richard Gingras, of KCET-TV in Los Angeles. In cooperation with its network, the station brought news and sports to 100 families with home computers.

Aaron Marcus, staff scientist and graphic designer at Lawrence Berkeley Laboratory in Berkeley, Calif., agreed. "If you have 1,000 television stations and hundreds of newspapers coming into your home every day, you will need an information management system just to deal with that."

Meanwhile, displays showed how representation of objects on the computer screen can aid molecular biology, design and manufacturing, landscape architecture, land planning and film animation. With equal efficiency, computers could show the stress of a bridge, the aesthetic quality of a proposed shopping center or the comfort of a Birken-

stock shoe.

"People with different areas of interest are able to utilize the computer as a tool to aid in their applications," O'Connell said.

Computer art, criticized by many artists fearful of losing their jobs to a machine, also drew praise.

"The computer is not the artist," said Paul White, a graduate fellow in landscape architecture. "It only is a way of visualizing things — a painting, film, or sculpture — to help the artist."

"We will always need artists," declared Alvy Ray Smith, computer graphics project leader at Lucasfilm, Ltd. In film, computer graphics are used very little.

"So far, only four or five films have used computer-generated images," Smith told the delegates. Further, the procedure involves 20 or 30 exposures for a single frame. "You can't screw up, even once."

As an example of the difficulty involved in animation, Smith showed a 60-second clip from "Star Trek II" that took about six months to produce on the computer. "We're obviously not ready for feature-length movies," he said.

And though he refused to disclose any information about the next Lucas blockbuster, Smith did mention a personal dream — "a computer game to make your own movie."

A game for the young. Indeed, the youth of the speakers indicated that computers are for the future.

"The next generation will be unimpressed by the technology," exclaimed keynote speaker Randall L. Stickrod,

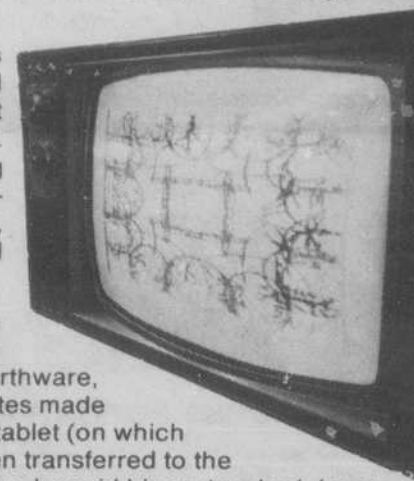
founder and publisher of Computer Graphics World. "For them, the computer will be a natural extension, a tool of the living environment. I can't wait until 10 years from now, when they're developing a whole new generation of technology."

Encouraged by both student and administration support, conference organizers hope to make the University a center for computer graphics research, development and application. "The conference did wonders for the University's image," O'Connell said.

Next year, the directors intend to have a bigger and better conference in the Hult Performing Arts Center. Vendors are already voicing interest in the second convention — a far cry from this year, when the conference suffered a "credibility problem."

By 1983, this year's displays just could be obsolete. Gordon Gales, from Earthware, in Eugene, watched as delegates made computer art on his digitizing tablet (on which one draws an image that is then transferred to the computer). In reply to a question, he said his system had been in existence about 18 months.

"You think that's new? In this business, it's ancient."



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