

: capture [les mots juste]

By
j.j. higgins

A PROJECT IN LIEU OF THESIS PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

2006

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In grateful appreciation of time
given freely by those who believe in the experience

and who were my
collaborators : co-conspirators
advisors and friends

Summary of Performance Option in Lieu of Thesis
Presented to the Graduate School of the University of Florida
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master of Fine Arts

:capture [les mots juste]

By

j.j. higgins

August 2006

Chair: Barbara Jo Revelle
Major Department: Art and Art History

:capture [les mots juste] is an examination space, a container, in which the audience experiences being both subject and object, while interacting within the space and its contents through discovery and play. This project in lieu of thesis is a visual application of a diachronic theory of the machine that centers on the significance of information through constructed language, time, memory, and place. This gallery installation references Baudrillard's simulacra; Foucault's panopticon; de Certeau's everyday; Fillou's ideas, objects and events; Cage's transcendent silence; and de Saussure's structural linguistics in a synthesized laboratory environment.

The project, :capture [les mots juste], consists of surveillance cameras and monitors, video/audio information stations, a clear vinyl tent that represents both a private and public space, and a video projection that requires the audience to intervene within the projected viewing space. In addition, a countertop display case contains arti-

facts, relics, and objects elevated to a perceived value by this mechanism of separation and control; protected from the audience by the glass wall, but accessible from behind.

The audience is invited and encouraged to become part of the space, to play, and to change the system by inventing new rules of operation. While participants in the system explore, examine, and reflect upon their relationships with the objects, their behaviors are being monitored, recorded, and collected, to be projected in another part of the space. Observers and participants can trade places, but never see themselves in each role. So, to whom is the machine answerable?

An experiment, :capture [les mots juste] is a contained space simulating the machinery of social controls, designed to involve the audience in examining public and private behaviors. The panoptic framing places the audience in the position of both subject and object, encouraging awareness of the constructs of language and the power of the machine.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	2
ABSTRACT	3
LIST OF IMAGES.....	6
INTRODUCTION.....	7
MACHINE.....	7
PREFACE:WORK.....	9
OBJECT OF EXPERIENCE	9
OBSERVATION	11
GAME:SPACE	15
INTERVENTION:PLAYSPACE	19
IN:FORM	20
:CAPTURE. [LES MOTS JUSTE].....	22
GALLERY:SPACE	22
FINDING FREEDOM, FINDING PLACE	25
APPARATUS FOR INTERVENTION	28
“ACHIEVING” ACCESS	32
LOCATION. LOCATION. LOCATION?	34
OBJECT:OBJECT	35
TRANSPORTING THE LIVING SPACE	38
THE SUBJECT IS THE OBJECT	39
THE AUDIENCE AS THE MACHINE	40
CONCLUSION:END.....	49
PRODUCT OF THE EXPERIMENT.....	49
LIST OF REFERENCES	50
ADDENDUM.....	52
ADDITIONAL VIDEO CLIPS.....	52
BIOGRAPHY SKETCH.....	53

LIST OF IMAGES

Figure 1-1. [ME]dia:space installation entry.....	8
Figure2-1. someoneelse/notme installation image.....	9
Figure 2-2. w a t e r (installation/videostill).....	10
Figure2-3. text:message(videoclip).....	11
Figure2-4. [ME]dia:space(videoclip).....	12
Figure2-5. self-servicesecurity installation apparatus.....	14
Figure2-6. trans:portableoffice (installation detail).....	15
Figure2-7. lin{ear}(videostill).....	16
:capture [les mots juste]>	
Figure3-1. imstallation:bookdetail.....	22
Figure3-2. galleryinstallation:entry.....	22
Figure 3-3. travel agent (video clip).....	34
Figure3-4. installation: machineinteractionspace.....	41
Figure 3-5. installation:text:machine.....	42
Figure 3-6. installion:information video center.....	43
Figure3-7. Installation: floorprojectioninteraction.....	44
Figure3-8. Installation:mass>juiceself-servicestation.....	44
Figure3-9. installation: mailmapofketchup.....	45
Figure3-10. installation: displayvitrine.....	46
Figure3-11. installation: vinyltent.....	47
Figure3-12. installation: vinyltent:ashabitat.....	47
Figure 3-13. installation: vinyl tent (closeup detail).....	48
Figure3-14. installation: displaycasefullfrontview.....	49
additional video clips	
Figure A-1. (video clip) tourist.....	52
Figure A-2. :capture. les mots juste (video clip) gallery.....	52

Machine

The beginning

Mass movements are usually discerned more clearly by a camera than by the naked eye. A bird's-eye view best captures gatherings of hundreds of thousands. And even though such a view may be as accessible to the human eye as it is to the camera, the image received by the eye cannot be enlarged the way a negative is enlarged. This means that mass movements, including war, constitute a form of human behavior which particularly favors mechanical equipment.

Walter Benjamin, *A Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. [footnote 21]

It would be difficult to pinpoint an exact moment. That moment would be the time I recognized a power that exceeded my own space. I was never certain of how to speak of the way it affected me. Words do not begin to describe the machine. Identifying the moment would mean defining, measuring or positioning time to mark the first experience of its seductive power.

That moment is the time I became conscious of a nearly fetishistic fascination with the machine. I was captivated by the notion of it, not as a mechanism, but through the reversibility of time. The machine is the diachronic langue.¹

The machine merged subject and object, stretched beyond present time, while structuring the future through text, time, and the surrounding world. Ferdinand de Saussure writes that the bond between the signifier and the signified are arbitrary, and in language there are only differences.² Those differences are the operative for the machine.

How did that unseen power work? How did it collect and dispense information? Could I dissect the apparatus, to discover its working parts? The machine was bigger than I had imagined. It was a convenient and impersonal device constructed to manage and transport space, objects and time. It took on the role of controlling space.

¹Levi-Strauss references myth comes as the third referent, the space between langue and parole. Myth relies upon alleged events that have historical backing but occur in spaces where time cannot be identified. (1963:202)

²de Saussure writes that everything is based on relations. . . in the relation of language there are only differences. (1986:652)

It was not the machine as an object that appealed to me. It was the way the machine affected the surrounding space. I wanted to know where its power came from.

It was a magical mechanism, a phenomenological device designed to perform tasks and transcend spaces. I felt as if I had stumbled upon a secret; some treasured information. I remember thinking that everyone must know about it. I wondered why it seemed so ordinary to them. I wanted to have a dialogue about the authority of the machine; to try to comprehend it. But no one was listening. No one acknowledged the questions. How could I bring both sides together?

The machine occupies both internal and external space. It could be a physical entity or a system of operation. The machine is the mechanism for processing information and moving from place to place. It has associations with progress.

The machine is a function of the everyday; a mechanism for the order of existence. I wondered if this were a truthful observation, or if it were my own way of looking at it. Might it have been an amplified perception of 'machine' power, designed to simplify tasks? Was it a modern timesaving device, allowing for more leisure and autonomy?

Inside the machine, I could envision the way the space was occupied and energized; the way it performed tasks and modified behaviors while serving consumers and authoring the future. I was curious about how it worked. I wanted to know more.

I could imagine being the machine. I recognized its power to transform and assign space, as mass communication and advertising have done. Walter Benjamin wrote about it in the epilogue of *Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*.

It was not so much a particular machine. Nearly any machine would do. What mattered were the mechanisms. What were its capabilities? Who was in control?

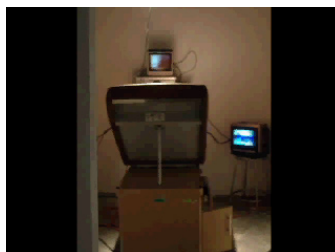


Figure 1-1

We see things not as they are, but as we are.
H.M. Tomlinson

Preface:work

The object of experience



Figure 2-1

The familiar objects occupy a space they do not seem to fit.

Within the contexts of installation, objects are separated from the places we have become accustomed to seeing them. When positioned in new spaces, they take on other meanings. They demand a second look and perhaps a response-- if for no other

reason than to address the curious interruption caused by their new placement. In framing a response, can spaces be read in terms as simple as placement or displacement?

The installations are placed in locations where there is potential for traffic-- in parking lots, between buildings, sidewalks, tabletops, the floor inside a room-- perhaps even taking up the space of the room. In these new locations, the objects become accessible to the individual, to the audience. The context is altered by both time and the displacement of familiar objects; objects that appear out of place. The flow is interrupted, and we are forced to address it in terms of its syntax. The continuum broken, this spatial intervention marks a realization of time. What was understood is now in question. However briefly considered, it becomes a deficiency in our system of language. What happens to language and to the flow of text when the information is disassembled? Perhaps the code, the signifier, has changed and we were unaware of the switch. What should be done about that? Who failed to give us the answers?

With the adequacy of language in question, how would the contents of the space be interpreted? Do we attempt to decipher it alone, or confer with others and form a collective thought, dialogue or opinion? How would the authority be determined? And if it concerns the truth, then who determines it? I question the significance of its power.

Do we recognize the emergence of a new architecture that changes structure of communication and coexistence? Might we consider it an experiment, an exploration for the sake of amusement or entertainment? Is this a game to capture our attention? Through its elements of order, has it the potential to get ‘under our skin’?

Perceptions of space and time have been affected. Authority has been repositioned and meaning compromised. The audience questions the validity of objects in those “out of context” environments. At the confluence of audience and space, the experience begins. It becomes a container, and an emergent forum for constructing a dialogue of meaning. *Les mots juste*. The right word.

My work explores the notions of constructed space and perceptions of time that fall within common language forms. The installations become examination spaces that include the audience as a collective entity, and as co-conspirators in determining value and meaning. The expectation for experience is that the audience will respond, interact, or intervene with

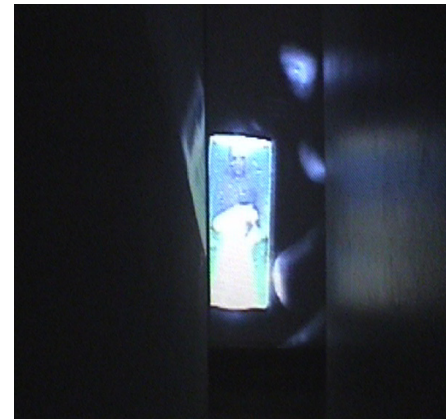


Figure 2-2

the work. Audience response is positioned as a voice contributing to the dialogue. Using the familiar, and representing ordinary time prompts an erasure, a removal of the invisible (yet acknowledged) delineation between structures that separate art from the everyday. Within each examination space, I observe audience behavior, social etiquette, language, culture and the notions of public/private spaces. I seek a common language that relies on etiquette, language and behavior, and a relationship to the transformations of social space. The work consists of components that are often experienced as games.

Observation

I begin with observations of human behavior within the constructs of social space.



Figure 2-3

Data is collected and composited to locate commonalities in cultural language and behaviors through playful interaction with the work. These characteristics are identified through structures, forms, codes, and signifiers and used to look at ways audiences interact, make choices and assign value and meaning to what they do.

My work consists of control (and controlled) spaces where the audience can be observed while interfacing both the public and private space. I dissect (or deconstruct) space as a territory, seeking out moments to interact and/or intervene, and record those responses.

text:message becomes about this simultaneous relationship of the subject and object as a part of the shifting position of experience; exchanging forms and engaging the body through levels of consciousness. It questions the territory of language, its images and its boundaries. A close examination of this ‘territory’, with its content and individual perceptualization of time spaces, can provide the audience opportunity to invent or discover new levels of meaning.

My work intersects with Felix Guattari’s idea of the artist as an operator of meaning, Robert Filliou’s process of experiential learning, and the experiences of space explored by Joseph Beuys, John Cage, Allison Knowles, Daniel Spoerri, Ben Vautier, Robert Watts, and other Fluxus artists who used the dynamics of information and the intermedia as a connection between art and life. What I search for is present, but lies in the space between: the intermedia.

I capture segments of time and image, collecting information.

I place them in examination spaces for observation, interaction, and intervention.

I select from the everyday, assemble objects, and construct environments.

I construct spaces that move through time; or perhaps through anti-time.

This structure becomes the machine. The machine is the tool for intervention, and an entry into the installation space. In *[ME]dia:space*, the entry includes the experience of the body, but is not always about a tactile interaction, giving way to psychological space. The interaction of the audience is critical to the work. Possible interventions determine how the

physical space is maneuvered. Hanging cables and monitors are placed within the uncomfortably close interior space. Once inside, the audience can lie back and relax

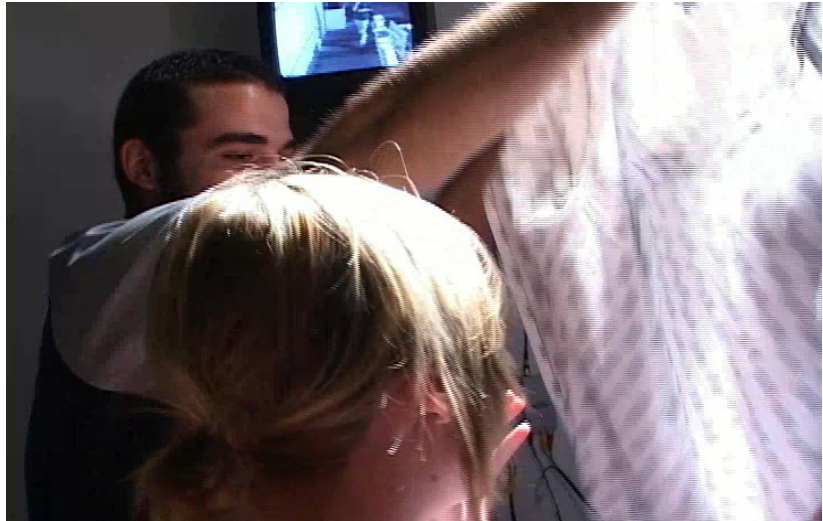


Figure 2-4

on the medical table recliner to view monitors that show surveilled spaces within the installation. The images of the audience are seen next to a monitor playing a recorded cable TV program that features topics of beauty and physical reconstruction. Under the table, in a cabinet, is a monitor playing the speech of an art collector who acts as a voice of “authority”.

The sterile, institutional space no longer exists once the audience enters. Changes occur in the order when the audience begins to handle objects, turn knobs, and experiment with the apparatus. The collaboration of the audience with the installation generates a succession of experiences, a Fluxus strategy. But this game is taking another step and not simply deconstructing. It expects the audience to participate in a reconstruction. This concept art is about the politics of the space, the experience, and the embodiment of the objects that hold the environment in place.

My audience must interact within the framework of the architecture and participate in the discourse of the space to become aware of what it represents. This establishes value for the space, and identifies its presence through time. Taking note of responses and behaviors is a more accurate indicator of truth than the rhetoric of constructed language on which we rely.

what is the news? is a work that reflects our interruption of the processes of nature. The humming of cicadas competes with the white noise remainder of a television monitor in the front yard of a suburban home. It is a reconstructed outdoor space that relocates sound and the experience of that sound. In another form, the transmitted sounds and images were played through a monitor placed in a utility box that was attached to an electrical pole in a place that was completely manmade. The sounds of nature were in either harmony or competition with the sounds of the electrical transformer. Could the audience distinguish the difference? Were they curious enough to open the door and locate the source? We depend on media to place us, even when there is no image.

In my work, I observe and experiment with the way that the audience uses space and their behaviors with the objects in my space. I am as curious about who they are as they are as I am about their responses to the spaces I construct. The space is theirs to question, perhaps to identify a personal connection to it through memory and experience. If they are to be my co-conspirators, I must have some faith in them. This thesis project *:capture. les mots juste* tests that notion. It is the machine that places the audience in a position of simulated control, and creates space to observe interactions in both quiet and activated spaces. The machine functions as a game.

I look for an etiquette, a code, and a common language system. That includes the blurring of boundaries and transcending (but not eliminating) cultural constructs. I seek to provide a mechanism for elevating the level of communication and knowledge. In order to implement it, we have to leave those safe spaces where we have become sequestered. The idea of building community must be expanded.

Operating within the space of community may feel safe. But is it? In most communities a trust system has been formed. However, within that trust there is also a potential liability. Within community, that representative of the institutions about which



Figure 2-5

Foucault writes, there is a hierarchy. This brings to mind Foucault's dictum, "where there is power, there is resistance" (1978: 95) Many cultures, subcultures and religions depend on that loyalty of the larger ungendered space of community that exceeds physical proximity. Often the growth and contribution of the individual to community becomes about the expectation of fulfilling hierarchical functions rather than seeing or opening up new avenues to thinking and performing as a contributing individual.

The 'etiquette' of social control and its punitive nature should be considered. As the general population, we have come to allow decisions to be made for us. Advertising, mass media and consumerism have supported that system, and while we believe there are choices, we are encouraged to choose only from what has been chosen for us. Who then do we become when we no longer know ourselves? How will we know how to see?

The sense of meaning applied to experience becomes diminished. There is no authenticity, no authorship. How would we know 'authentic'? How do we know the truth when we see it? Baudrillard writes that we live in a world that has more and more information and less and less meaning. What could make meaning? Experience?

We need to find play spaces. Not organized play, but creative outlets. Games.

Game:space

My installations are constructed within the framework of games that require the audience to navigate not only the work, but the space that includes others. The idea of creating community are about the audience's engagement with each other.

In an interview with Robert Filliou, John Cage presented a dialogue on the comparison of facts vs. experiences. When the mind and the experience were in dialogue, it is "the brushing of information against other information" that occurs, and "that the mind invents or creates from this brushing".

Without spaces for more experiences through casual interaction and intervention, we lose the confidence it requires to contribute meaningfully to the outside world, not realizing that the small things we do cause us to construct our own values. These small experiences work as connecting devices. We lose that sense of experiential tactility by remaining separated, then have no idea how to behave in public because we have become so out of touch with ourselves that we cannot expect to understand intermedia space --the place that falls between ourselves and others-- much less to attempt a civilized interaction with others. We have allowed-- expected-- the mass media to dictate to us who we are, and yet somehow want to preserve our own spaces as monuments to time. We hide behind masks and ideas that may not be valid in the outside world.

My spaces function as games do. The apparatus demands intervention; an engagement with the audience. Sometimes they contain small objects that require the audience to operate, others are environments that are to be passed through or into, the shadow and light interruption a piece of the work, while others allow for multiple level interactions. A small step, perhaps

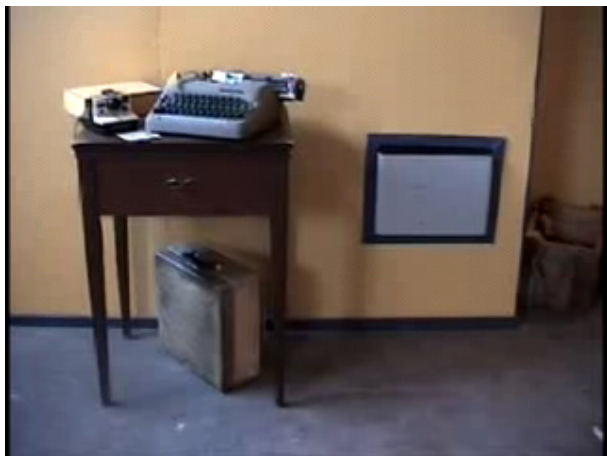


Figure 2-6

untraceable ways of functioning in my spaces, gives the audience a position of authority. The installation *trans:portable office*, is a part of an entire installation that concerned both public and private space, information technology, the relationship of image to text and the experience of intervention by the audience. The participating viewer could take a photograph with the supplied Polaroid instant camera only to discover that the image was pre-exposed, then reinserted into the film pack for recycling to be expelled with each push of the button. In order to have a voice in the authorship the surface of these images of actual people and dolls could then be typed on using the manual office typewriter. When completed, the collaborative work could either remain on the table, be reinserted by the viewer into the camera film pack or be removed as a souvenir. It seems slightly scandalous to obscure this “sacred image” while interacting to alter the piece. The question centers on value. An object is worth only as much as the value placed on it. This is an experience with parallels to Ay-O’s *Finger Boxes*, a visit to Andrea Zittel’s *AZ* site, or shopping Christine Hill’s *Volksboutique*. The audience alters the piece simply by breaking the planes of the space and entering the work. Changing the content makes the piece constantly in flux. The objects are defined, yet the content is no longer specific. Perusing the installation, the audience began to interact with each other. The camera above observes all the activity, projecting into the other side of the room where a recorder and monitor showed the data in delayed time, reminiscent of the work of Dan Graham, Bruce Nauman, and Peter Weibel.

The mechanisms for operations are in place, but it takes time to affect change. As an individual, acting as a private entity, we are unable to proceed. We have begun to rely heavily on the technology, losing ourselves in the convenience. We slip more quickly and deeply into Baudrillard’s simulacrum. We have come to depend on the media to tell us what to do. How do we get out? Or the greater question is, do we want to? Is remaining on the inside of the experience more comfortable than facing what is on the outside? Gilles Deleuze writes of this as the experience of experience. Through the apparatus, we

are even further removed from what might be authentic. The game is to maneuver that present, or locate the exit.

Walter Benjamin wrote of this in the essay *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*. Through a passive takeover, our choices are slowly eliminated, and we fail to notice. We believe they are giving us what we want. Are they? Through mass media, broadcasts, and advertising we have allowed the media to control us with passive power, choosing not to make choices, or choosing to choose theirs. Confronted with the power of mediated space (advertising, consumerism), how might Deleuze or Baudelaire respond? What melancholy might come after dissecting the object and discovering that it, too, is soulless . . . we live within assumptions of space not knowing the difference.

In my work *someone else, not me*, my challenge to the audience comes with a level of awareness. The objective is to redirect our attentions and reclaim our spaces. Are there ethical bounds extended to the voyeur? Is there accountability to the Foucault panoptic eye? Why is it that we are fascinated more by the sight of image in projection than disturbed that it is so easily done? To whom is that image broadcast and why? How is the mechanism constructed? The travel valise sits open in public space, a battery powered television monitor attached to a small receiver sitting inside. The small camera, hidden in the pocket of the case, captures images of the passers by from a tiny slit in the fabric. The camera is hidden from public view, but the image is projected onto the monitor for all to see. The passers by stop and smile, but maintain the space between themselves and the object as if they are restricted to the exterior space. Their image captured on the screen, they look around, perhaps walk away, curious but passive. It sits on a public street in full view, and no one touches it. Only a child leans into the case to touch and is removed by the adult, the authority. Who becomes the true authority? The one who follows the code that no longer manages the information, or the one willing to cross the boundary and experience, engage, alter the space?

Social anthropologist Mark Auge notes that we have given up choices, yet pre-

tend they still exist. Auge's writing concerns the anthropological view of society, writing specifically about the construction of non-places. He observes breaks in the continuity of time and place; where time is marked. My installation videos *empty[space]* and *b[us]/stop* work as homogenized forms. Both pieces reduce information to question the formless experience of time and space. Positioned in a monitor that reads as surveillance, it is a duration of nothingness. The examination of a mechanized dry cleaner operation and a close examination of a Greyhound Bus terminal are poisoned together in continuous space that reveals only the barest presence of anyone. When the audience accepts the constructed environment as authentic experience there is no longer a foothold on the real. How will anthropologists of the future differentiate time and space and culture when the lines are erased? We continue to mark time synchronically, on a continuum, and yet we are no longer certain where we exist. Either we do not know how to voice our acknowledgement, acceptance or rejection; or perhaps we are simply unaware of the loss of identification. Do we have a place to begin?

My investigations are of the audience--the intervention in the spatial construct and

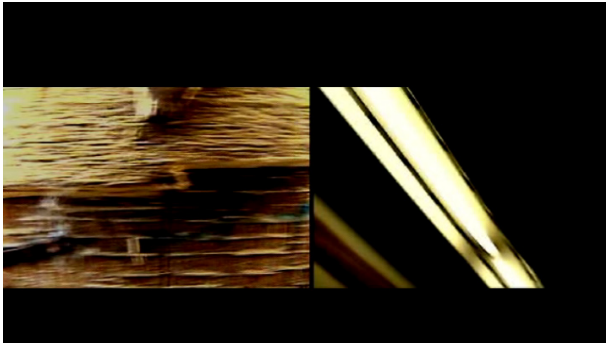


Figure 2-7

interaction with each other. The video projection *lin[ear]* works in that way. The video is a continuous loop of collected images and non-places. I collected images in controlled public spaces, then projected these images across the audience's walking path in

a new site. The concept is one of experience, and the struggle to arrive. The search for destination becomes an ongoing journey through an atmosphere consisting of non-places. Familiar in their architecture, and projected on broken space, the disembodiment of the images in synchronous movement gives the viewer who passes through the projection an alternative way or experiencing time. I depend on that strategy, constructing the archi-

tecture in a way that includes the audience, and pull them into the space. From this point, time and space belong to them. The spaces are no longer mediated in the same way, belonging now to the individuals who experienced them.

Intervention: playspace

My work plays on the curiosity of the audience to gain access to the social space. I position them to make choices about intervention in the installation space. In using this strategy, I become a part of the dialogue. I challenge them to enter the spaces, play, experience and construct meaning to take away.

The architectures I use for constructing containers are designed for interactivity. I place on display fragments of discarded time, recorded and replayed in a new location. These familiar but disconnected fragments are used to reconnect to present time. I want to return the experience of “being” to my audience. Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s “being” considers all parts and all experiences of the human condition in relation to environment. My audience should learn to see themselves through their own eyes, and through the eyes of others; learn the language and speak with confidence; find meaning; see how the universe connects, but without passing judgment.

I work with language and the specificity of ambiguity. I work with a similar concept design to that of Fluxus artist Robert Filliou. The “Poipoidrome” positioned four architectural quadrants as learning situations linking physical, emotional and psychic experiences of knowledge to space and pedagogical practice. My version of language is an experience of the space and time. It incorporates phenomenological aspects of architectures that supersede the unquestioned common function. I want to know the operating system where we become synchronous with others. It was the message of Joseph Beuys, through his teaching and in his work. Beuys idea of activism through participation and performance combined with interdisciplinary dialogue became his ‘sculpture’ as a perspective on history, religion, ethics, science and other. This was Beuys’ interpretation of social space. That idea of participatory art is best served when it ties viewer interactivity

and performative structures with educational and democratic political components. [Higgins. 2002:188]

What I want to know is this: what are the rules?

If we do not know the rules, how can we go about constructing meaning?

in:Form

I told you so. What they might say, or should say.

You could have been paying attention. What was here is now gone. You can neither keep it, nor get it back because it no longer exists as it was.

My work is informed by this:

1. It begins with Duchamp's use of readymades, from authorship to interference, the selection of materials from types and quantities of mass-produced resources and redefining the artist's responsibility to the real.

2. Foucault presents us the tools and structures for *souci de soi*, [care of the self] and our methodology of constructing an institutional order, a punitive order, the panopticon, and the controlled society.

3. The experience of concept art as Fluxus. Through a variety of artists and projects, the complete experience extends beyond the object. This is not the event circuit. It is the order: Nam Jun Paik, Yoko Ono, Joseph Beuys, John Cage, George Brecht, Dick Higgins, George Maciunas, more.

I hope to discover an etiquette system that transcends cultural constructs, removing icons that no longer work and establishing places for the new. The etiquette would function as the structural framework for community, including language and behavior with responsibility and accountability to the society. Ancient cultures and civilizations operated this way, with respective agreements to coexist within a framework of difference. The idea is that the individual begins to realize his role as a contributing member of the community, and accept responsibility and accountability for actions.

I challenge the audience to find something of themselves within the spaces I construct and allow them to experience time in its nonlinear form.

The intent behind my work is that the audience becomes a co-conspirator in changing the structure of social space. They should be active participants in developing language and determining value, with an awareness of community.

My installations are examination spaces; places for re-examining collected time. They are interactive spaces that operate as a forum for the audience to generate dialogue and construct meaning based on memory and experience. I use these containers to collect information, and to disseminate critical dialogue. In order for these spaces to function, the audience must recognize the architecture and be willing to enter its space.

Let the game begin.

:capture [les mots juste]

Gallery:space

The glass doors open to a large white wall.

Stepping into the entry area, the audience is confronted with the presence of the space that includes the gallery and the installation of ‘play stations’. The space is a ‘living laboratory’, where the audience becomes both the viewer and the work.

The first step is to establish a sense of place, then to evaluate the system and how to maneuver the space.

Navigation relies on memory, experience, and social etiquette.

There are no signs, no visual indicators telling us what lies within.

A table sits in the entryway. On it is a lined tablet and a pen, but nowhere for the

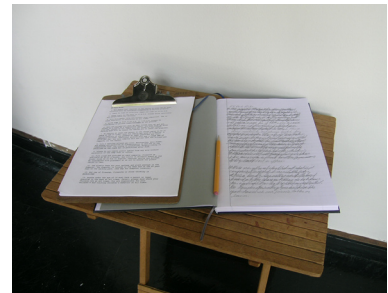


Figure 3-1

audience to sign in. The page is full of handwritten text, marginally legible because of the overlapping. It appears that a book has been written all on the same page. The legibility of the writing becomes illegible in the repetition, and in the overlapping. When the text can be identified, it appears that the writing is about rules.



Figure 3-22

The blank wall is void of information, with the exception of the monitor just inside the entry. The monitor is mounted just above the audience's eye level,

at a height that feels slightly uncomfortable to the audience forced to acknowledge its

presence. It sits as the guardian, providing select information to passers-by, protecting the entry space, and confronting the viewer with a sense of disconnected authority. On the monitor is an image, the projection of the clear vinyl tent inside the 'laboratory'. The captured image has few distinguishing marks. Neither has it a sense of place nor time. There is a discontinuity in the way the image reads. From the screen view of the interior space, we question the images. However, we look from the outside instead of in.

The entry wall obstructs the direct passage to the next room, determining the audience's pathways to enter. Sounds from behind spill over into the entry space. They are the sounds of voices and machines, indicating the presence of others. A view of the monitor might provide clues as to the content of the space, or an indication of activity. The screen image is clear. The camera is suspended over the tent from the ceiling, signifying the value of the occupied space³. The absence of a disruption in the physical planes of the viewing space alters the reading (and the identification) of the object. It provides no perspective, and no association with place. The projection of this static image is occasionally disturbed with passing traffic, jarring a viewer absorbed in another time space with the realization that the image is a live feed. Viewing this clear tent from a topographical position renders the object unrecognizable. It becomes an object and a space for examination, with its interior and exterior exposed simultaneously.

The truth as we know it becomes compromised. The object's scale, image color and viewing perspective are skewed. Anyone entering the peripheral capture space of the camera is subject to collection. Captured and placed on a screen they too become objects for observation. The camera is the all seeing eye.

The transmitted images appear to be those of surveillance, but where is the camera? Who is monitoring the space, assuming the position of authority, or acting as a

³Ferdinand de Saussure's idea of the structure of value lies within importance, and specifically through syntagmats. SYNTAGMATIC relations are most crucial in written and spoken language, in DISCOURSE, where the ideas of time, linearity, and syntactical meaning are important. There are other kinds of relations that exist outside of discourse.

"Course in General Linguistics" in Adams and Searle, ed., *Critical Theory Since 1965*. p.202-205

voyeur? In order to know, the audience must enter the space and become a part of the experiment. The room is large and open, with space to move freely. It has an ambience of familiarity. It is a contained space with stations. Recognizable objects are on display as the ‘working parts’ of the machine.

This machine is a laboratory experience (and experiment) concerned with the observation of behaviors in social space. For this machine to function as both experiment and experience, the audience must interact, intervene, transgress, or accept the rules of the space. The viewers become co-conspirators-- developing a common dialogue, then implementing it to restructure the space.

More specifically, this project is about the investigation of how social spaces are constructed and managed. It becomes a forum to acknowledge the discontinuity of language. Within it, audience interactions with the perceived structure can be monitored. The audience determines language and codes, challenges existing structures and conventions, and considers choice. Within the container, the audience becomes both subject and object; the experiment and experience. How will the audience take this experience with them? How will the information be disseminated?

The contents of this exhibition space are artifacts from an ongoing investigation of social space constructed around transportable communities—more specifically, recreational vehicle communities. It is an examination neither of individual behaviors, nor of the lifestyle of those who travel in motor homes. It is a collective investigation of how these communities have framed social spaces and etiquette systems while working within the constructs of transportable space. The experiment includes looking at the way community and culture has evolved into homogeneous and institutional spaces, and the behavior (or etiquette) that occurs within public and private space. In addition, it is an observation of how value and meaning are constructed through memory and experience. Data is collected, disseminated, then reconstructed and our ideas of play, experimentation, and experience can be reassembled. It becomes a place where art meets experience,

where the consumer becomes more connected to the power of community and of knowledge rather than to separation, mechanization, and the fear of making choices.

Finding freedom, finding place

“The motor home is freedom,” he says. “We can go where we want to, stop when we want to, stay as long as we like. If we don’t like our neighbors, we can move to another location. And we only have to pull in the slide, pull in the awnings, roll in the carpet and go. How much better does it get than that?”

I met Jack and Betty at a rest stop an hour south of Pittsburgh. I had stopped to take a driving break and let the dogs out. I was walking around the manicured grounds where no one lived, looking on the ground for artifacts, or other marks of brief habitation of this space. Of course, I wound up chatting with Jack. We had a friendly conversation about the luxury and necessity of travel—he had noticed my out of state tags and asked our destination. My guess was that it was his way of intervening in the public and uniformly designed state operated rest area. Most travelers are in a hurry, or choose not to be bothered with interaction. The stops are designed for efficiency, not for community gathering. I had time for the visit. These chance meetings become an excellent resource for meeting people, gathering information and capturing time. The rest stop becomes the metaphor for a gameboard.

They were on a return trip to their home in Morgantown, West Virginia. Betty stepped out of the parked motor home with a plastic container half full of Brach’s candy mix and a Tupperware bowl containing water for the dogs.

They were extremely cordial, without any expectation of anything more than acknowledgment. I found them to be quite at ease as hosts in this simulated environment. They seemed quite charming, honest, and right at home in a public parking area. I was more disturbed by how comfortable I became in this space. Perhaps in my experience, I began to know what to expect from these rest stops. As I spent a little time with them,

I realized that Jack and Betty fit into what was becoming my profile of the “typical” RV camper. This profile was informed not so much by physical appearance or age, but in the way they felt so comfortable maneuvering this transportable space--even with its invisible boundaries, codes and structures. It appeared as if they were second nature.

They were in partial retirement, and had always traveled for vacation. They had worked all their lives, built a good business, had a comfortable lifestyle and income, and prepared ahead for this time when they could travel with fewer obligations. Not exactly gypsies of the road, they had a more comfortable access to their idea of adventure. Choosing to pack their personal possessions in a drivable container combined as vehicle and living space, they could go when they chose, meeting others who did the same.

“We love to travel and the people we find along the way,” said Betty, “and this is our vacation house, so we don’t worry about where we’ll stay.”

That meant sometimes in RV parks. Other times it became vagabonding. They met interesting people and made connections that gave them access to a network that extended well beyond the realm (including rules and regulations) of physical spaces. There seemed to be an etiquette that was “universal” within the culture of the RV traveler, but more important was the community. They wanted to have (and be) ‘neighbors’, but the terms are different in this transportable space. They liked the freedom that their motor home gave them.

The conversation with Jack and Betty lasted only a half hour at the rest area, but we exchanged contact information and they kept in touch. I let that communication slip, so contact with them has since been lost.

This particular interaction became the catalyst for a collection of information. I began to consider the questions that emerged from the conversation. How did these people make their way into new communities? Or were they new communities at all? Were they not encoded systems, transferred to a less distinguishable space? Were they out of place, or repositioned in a new spaces?

This project, as an installation, is a container. It is a place for recollecting, repositioning and re-examining structured space, reconstructed language, and captured time. It is the practice of the everyday with all the strategies, tactics, trajectories, and ways of operating. Anthropologist Michel de Certeau includes these topics in the preface of his book that is a theoretical and sociological investigation of social space⁴. (1984:xiii-xix) As an installation, *capture. les mots juste* analyzes the social machine. The audience is asked to interact with the work, which is a gallery installation separated into seven activity and information stations. Within the flow of this 'machine', there are questions that should be raised. The questions concern a range of topics that include community, common language, etiquette and behavior, public/private spaces, acknowledgment of difference, social/cultural codes, and behavior. It also serves to preserve a connection in spaces that are designed to disconnect or disrupt the human experience.

Through my social interactions with transportable communities, patterns began to emerge that relate to the way information is collected and distributed. How was it that people developed relationships, constructed dialogues, discovered each other and found commonalities in cultures that are materialistic, consumer-driven and homogenous? I wanted to maintain a level of faith in human nature. In order to do that I had to determine what faith I had in myself. I had to find my way into a community, and face off against the machine. What would I do? What would I accomplish? How would I choose to interact? To intersect? To connect with others? To connect with time and with space? I might find it difficult to evaluate community, if I could not find who I was.

What could I contribute? Then what could I take away from the spaces I was in, without removing too much?

It becomes about exceeding the object; the way that space is represented by a mark. Memory, experience and time become constructs of position, language, place, communication practice, choice, fear, and self-realization. I needed to know how those components are dispensed in the larger scheme of space. I established my criteria. It was

all about games. The rules would come next.

My interest is in the way language, culture and community become intertwined. The installation project, as a simulated social machine, touches on similarities and differences, and how meaning and value might function as a framework of common language --or whether the truth of a commonality of language is myth1.

My research of the RV culture required a brief immersive into the culture. I would experience the community within the campground space. That began with securing the RV and learning the language, the social system, and the practice of community.

Apparatus for intervention

On the outside, they make it look easy.

Just rent this RV and drive away, off to discover new spaces.

Both the advertising online and at the rental and sales sites that flood the landscape, make it appear as though one could walk into the showroom, select the perfect RV (after a quick tour of the interior space), sign the papers, take the keys, load the vehicle and drive away to a paradise unknown—experienced only by recreational vehicle users.

That is the illusion. Then the reality.

Shopping for just the right product is not such a simple task. When searching for your RV, there are items to be addressed. There is a hierarchy within the RV community. This is the order that oversees the structures of the community, and the culture. When first considering this project as an investigation of the way transportable communities gather, identify and structure social space, the topic that centered on RV communities seemed larger. As with any community, there are elements specific to only a select group. In collecting and capturing information, the separations became more distinct from both my outsider/voyeur position and from conversations within this community.

The recreational vehicle can be identified as either a travel trailer, popup camper, or motor home. The differences are obvious, and selected by their owners for various

reasons. What it comes down to is the container, and how the space is arranged. The most accessible vehicle for use in this project was the motor home. The motor home is the drivable version of a travel trailer that functions as a contained living space. Motor home and travel trailer users have more specific requirements for space (private and public/physical) than do campers. Campers are classified as either tent or popup trailer users. RV owners place themselves inside the framework of an etiquette specific to their choice of community, whether they travel as an entourage or alone. My research is about the workings of the machine of social operation and the institutionalized practices that occur within that space. This function becomes equivalent to the strategy of language and semiotics. de Saussure's structure of the signifier and the signified packaged as the motor home and its associated universe represent both subject and object, signifier and signified.

First comes the research. There are many resources available. With these transportable communities literally always on the road, the most comprehensive resources were located online: RV blogspots, Q&A pages with email contacts, and chat rooms with a complete array of topics from selecting the RV, to campgrounds, events, recipes and decorating. Lists of necessary supplies, mechanical issues, RV etiquette, campground tips and ratings, and the "everything you should know" section are all available. These items are posted to keep the RV community informed. Using these resources was the expectation for the community, and part of the social code. If one expected to be allowed 'inside' the RV world, these were the first set of rules.

An interest and enthusiasm for the RV lifestyle is all it takes for an invitation to the club, but that does not equal 'initiation' into either the community or the culture. That process happens over time, and is about establishing position. It also is about making a commitment. Clearly to be a committed part of the community, the motor home had to be owned, not rented.

A comparative experience would be moving into a suburban neighborhood. Prefacing the dialogue with readings from J.B. Jackson on the topic of suburban sprawl and

my personal observation, the experience of the suburban evolution affects change within community space. The established neighbors are friendly and helpful but either attempt or manage to control the atmosphere (both physical and ethical) by imposing rules structures, which are generally unwritten. Since a system of knowledge and trust has not yet been established, the “new” neighbor must make a commitment to the neighborhood in order to prove value. It is not as simple as joining the community. Your value to others is based on your contribution, which is not always clearly stated—or not in so many words. Sometimes it is what is termed, “an understanding”. Personal judgments are made on the grounds of interpretation, most likely without any recognition of de Saussure’s theory of semiotics. The codes are established, but clearly interpreted on an individual basis. How would one learn the “game rules”? Thus, the meaning of value has a social relevance that does not always transfer to a space beyond that singular location, which establishes invisible boundaries. Social theorist Georg Simmel’s research focused on the psychological and physical aspects of social space.⁵ This experience of transportable space is a visual recognition of that theory. In order to access those invisible boundaries, we have to know both the code and the keeper(s) of the code. Already there is a breakdown.

While I had done research, I had yet to become any kind of entity in this culture. I was willing to enter, but was not sure how to make the next step. What would happen? In other words, what freedoms could I exchange to become a part of this group? Intuitively—or from previous experience in similar social structures—I had an inkling of how things might be ordered. Foucault’s observation of governance⁶ would be on the mark in the examination of institutionalized spaces. I imagined that it could be an eventful experience. Certainly, that part came true.

⁵ *The deepest problems of modern life derive from the claim of the individual to preserve the autonomy and individuality of his existence in the face of overwhelming social forces, of historical heritage, of external culture, and of the technique of life. The fight with nature which primitive man has to wage for his bodily existence attains in this modern form its latest transformation.*

Georg Simmel, *The Metropolis and Mental Life*, adapted by D. Weinstein from Kurt Wolff (Trans.) *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*. New York: Free Press, 1950, p.409

In my novice state, unwilling to commit to the purchase of a motor home, I could never become an insider. I was simply an observer-maybe more of an interloper.

The attempt to temporarily infiltrate the culture was a success.

My first act in this process was to visit several RV sales and rental lots to collect information. After visiting several, nine to be exact, what I discovered was what I expected. The assumption was that only consumers that are interested would stop to look. The sales staff gave time and space to explore and experience the motor homes. I could look first, then ask questions if I had them. This gave me an opportunity to experience how the spaces felt, even though I had never used an RV.

The message from enthusiasts is that RV travel and ownership is affordable and that it allows the travelers to go at their own pace, explore and discover. The ownership option is an attachment to material and consumer culture. In addition, many places that can host such large vehicles are the same in every place, and the discovery takes more effort and time than most are willing to give it. This part of the experience relates to Mark Auge's writing on homogenous space, ambiguity and the transportable space. These spaces are transportations to simulated destinations that have no specific location. Gilles DeLeuze refers to the same untrue experience of experience, where there is no longer a referent, as does Baudrillard in his observation that society has moved from the social to the cultural and the disintegration of stable norms. It appears as if the motor home community maintains a replica of those norms and values within transportable place. They cross the boundaries of space, but still become corporate culture productions of what the consumer wants.

⁶ according to Foucault, society as a self-ordering entity was the fruit of its disciplinarization. (354) It is not merely culture that is contradictory, but also agency. The power relations that constitute subjects with agency also locate them in positions of domination and subordination. *Power/Knowledge*, 1980. Brighton: Harvester.

Jon Simons, "Governing the Public: Technologies of Mediation and Popular Culture¹", *Cultural Values*, Vol. 6, Nos. 1 & 2, 2002. p. 12

“Achieving” access

Returning to the RV shopping excursion, the busy woman sitting behind the desk looks up curiously at me as if she thinks I should know how the process works. She does not realize that this is an unfamiliar process. “The doors to them are unlocked. Go in and look all you want. Let me know if you have any questions, or find one of the guys out there.” She never looked up. I had to figure out the process on my own.

The same experience occurred at every location. I assumed it part of the culture, and the way that potential owners or renters would position themselves in the space. They would determine not only what they would need, but also where everything would be placed. It was a way of entering the space in a simulated version, by the physicality of the surroundings, and experiencing the orders. It is a way of ordering the space.

“Just open doors and go inside—“ and upon getting past the years of the instructions to ‘look with your eyes, not with your hands,’ I felt comfortable enough to explore. I had difficulty overcoming an aversion to the mechanized factory aesthetic. The same decorator palette in every container. I never knew which one I was in, unless I checked the water closet. I collected information about compact space management, but wondered how compact it felt when behind the wheel of one of these rigs.

So how would driving happen? Was there a training, a special license, or at least a warning system for others on the road?

I asked that question. The receiver seemed incredulous, and asked me why would I think they needed one? Nevertheless, I have witnessed octogenarians on the road with oxygen tubes driving the 60-foot conversion busses. I was concerned.

Driving the RV would be an event.

Now there was a skill requirement that could not be acquired on the internet. How would I learn to drive a motor home? It seemed like something that should be learned separately--before arriving onsite. At least that was not my perception. There seemed to be an expectation that magically these behemoths were drivable without ever having been

inside one. I could not quite grasp that idea. Even with experience, it still felt uncomfortable and a little scary. Still I had to get behind the wheel of one of these machines. After researching, looking, shopping, comparing, and asking questions—learning functional parts of the language-- I was certain that I didn't need to own one. It was not necessary to be in "the club".

However, I would learn how to speak the code, and drive the machine.

The encapsulated space of a motor home is difficult if you are claustrophobic. The large windows and doors allowed the light to come in, and still felt like private space. (Although when the lights are on at nighttime in a darkened campground, the contents of the RV are on exhibition.) In spite of the small space, the motor home seemed manageable enough for a short time.

Location. Location. Location?

Choosing a travel destination where there would be a host of other campers and tourists was a necessity. I wanted to observe behaviors in social space, construct and maintain etiquette, and experience regulated versions of nature for the purpose of collection and dissemination. It seemed obvious that choosing a place that would serve all purposes at the extreme level was in order. The destination became the most visited national park, The Great Smoky Mountain National Park, just outside of Knoxville, Tennessee.

The trip became an event, a collective experiment and experience that included fellow artists Jeremy Mikolajczak and Alison McNulty. Travel with a group was more appealing for many reasons, but also would make collecting data and research easier.

The next step would be to begin the actual process.

Online research and bookstores provided the first bit of information on the rental version. The rest came from the actual experience. The RV sizes and floor plans are included in the literature, as well as all the other information that is questionable myth. It never explains how it "feels", but Levi-Strauss, Deleuze and Baudrillard would be proud

of the constructed promotions. The myth, the simulacrum becomes the fact, combining the language of law with the language of ethics in a time placed only through image.

When renting the RV, there are guidelines and checklists. The legal machine was overwhelming. A deposit was required and could be made either on the phone or online, but without a credit card-- no deposit, and no reservation. The travel dates were set, and a specific destination should be established and listed. The check-in process moved us from station to station, form to form. Road service came free with the vehicle and so did catastrophic insurance, but I had to call a certain number to get approval. Did the cell phones work in the mountains? The rate per day unit was only good for a three-night minimum with 300 miles included and the fuel was the responsibility of the user, but the other fluids would be taken care of by the agency if a receipt were turned in with



Figure 3-3

the keys. Did I have two forms of identification and a credit card—the same credit card I had for the deposit? I did, so we could move on. The user would pay for incurred vehicle damages just short of catastrophic. The agency would clean the vehicle upon its return

but everything had to be just the way it left the lot, which actually meant that we cleaned the vehicle to turn it in to be cleaned. To have the deposit returned, the sewage tank had to be dumped, the water should be emptied, all valves were at off position, and the arrival time at the campground should be within two hours of the time departed. The return time of noon would be expected and an hourly overcharge applied if the motor home was late. Could I sign in all the potential drivers? They filled out the forms and had their

license cards copied. Pets were allowed with a deposit, but no firearms. The security deposit would be greater than the rental amount to offset damages, and this had to be paid in advance. Refunds would be issued if all policies were in compliance. The video viewing is required and it takes 30 minutes. The walk-through with the agent would come next. While we were waiting, we could load the motor home that was plastered with signs that advertised CruiseAmerica, with the large Rent This RV 800 number on the front and back. It did not as if we would be able to slip into anywhere anonymously. After the walkthrough and question and answer period, all data collected and information given, we were awarded the “Have a nice day!” smile and given the key. Not once was there mention of driving safety, what to do, how to practice. . .even though we were well-trained in all the functions of the gas stove, the roof air conditioner, the generator, the sewage and septic system. The legal rental requirements met, our agent returned to her desk to a conversation with her daughter about a spider in her room. We were on our own, driving a 25-foot box that we would live in through the city and down into the curvy hilly roads of the Great Smoky Mountains.

It was all about staying inside the lines.

Object:object

The reservation was made at the Tremont Resort commercial campground on the Little River in Townsend, Tennessee, that had full hookups and cable TV access. It was near the entrance to Cade’s Cove. Not knowing the landscape, or the vehicle, or the culture we would encounter would make this recreational experience open to interpretation-- and slightly stressful. Our performance within this cultural structure was based upon standards that were not immediately understood; codes and contexts to which we were not privy. In entering this community and this culture, it was assumed that the rules stated were obviously to be followed. Our behavior would be assimilated through a combination of practice and ‘common sense’. We were expected to function within

the provided framework or we would be asked to leave. This was at the discretion of the campground and without the return of our fees. We had come to observe what happens in the space, but this time we were the objects of observation. From the beginning, we were being monitored. The interpretation of language and recognizing the playing field were the keys: the words were the same, but the language construction was open to interpretation. We were the outsiders, the 'other', the people to be watched. Foucault's panopticon was in such full operation and we were the models for the apparatus. Positioned in the direct view of the office, the caretaker cabin, and on the most traveled gravel strip in the campground in our motor home with the large RENT 800 number, we were the outsiders. More than once we transgressed the space, breaking the unknown rules and disrupting the patriarchal balance, immediately reprimanded and reminded of our position and their power. First the dog ran circles around the RV (6), then the campfire ring was moved too far to the left (12), and the clothesline we strung between trees (18) was not allowed. (The numbers are the campground rules, 20 to be exact.) They monitored the parceled spaces, constantly passing by in gas powered golf carts as a way of controlling the invisible boundaries that existed between campsites. To keep unwanted guests out of the area, the shower house was only accessible through a numerical key code. 5644. Some of the campground monitors were understanding of our beginner status. They were willing to instruct and advise us, but essentially, it was a punitive system. It seemed as if they lurked just out of sight, waiting for one of us to transgress, or break a rule, so authority could be exercised. We were held in check from a distance. Or was that a distance at all?

The idea of renting the motor homes was to gain a level of access to this particular culture--meeting the community on their own turf and in their environment. The way the spaces were divided fits into the lot ratio aspect, the plot lines of a neighborhood. The spaces that were occupied seemed to have boxed boundaries exceeding the space of the vehicles parked on the pads. There was a way of doing things, of constructing environments that were private spaces in the open territory. I questioned the terminology of

“open” and of the “freedom” of moving from place to place with specific criteria.

When talking with some of the residents, I was able to gather information about the etiquette systems and what is and what is not acceptable. Those items were separate from the rules of the campground space, although there were overlaps. They perceive their spaces as private, and separate themselves from campers (both tent and popup) in several categories. A few of the residents I met were also tent campers, who felt the experiences were completely different.

“The motor home is more like your traveling house. You don’t have to pick up anything—well, you do have to remember to undock from the power and the sewage—but you don’t have to pack away anything before you go. You just get in, start ‘er up, and go. Just don’t pull out too fast, in case you forgot to unhook something.”

I had met James, who was giving me his version of the differences, when Tom and Todd came over to return a borrowed tool. I had seen and spoken to them all while on a tour of camp. Nine people had arrived in the two 48 foot motor homes for a week of vacation, floating, fishing and hiking. The conversation continued, “then you can carry your tools, your food, your clothes, and pack a lot of people in. Some of ‘em even have a washer dryer. Those are the big ones. We don’t have room.”

The campground spaces claimed, each vehicle backed into place, electrical connection made and sewage hookup connected, the machine is in place. Motor home neighboring feels more like a division of space; like a suburban landscape with specific entry points, etiquettes and social codes. In the motor home, the physical boundaries are established, extended by the slide, the awning, perhaps a towed vehicle or bicycles, lawn furniture, carpet. . . The contents are not completely visible. Private space feels more private, which is often another version of myth. In following the practice of good campground etiquette, one never enters another camper’s awning space without being invited. Nor do they visit for long periods. The spaces feel private because the owner is in control of all aspects of it, or at least that is the mode of operation.

The tent campers establish boundaries by placing objects—or obstacles—at the perimeter of the spaces they wish to claim. The positioning of objects, direction of the tent, and the height of obstructions are a part of the private/public space code. The space is mutable. The tents or campers are transportable spaces, but not in the same way that a motor home takes on the role.

Transporting the living space

We experienced the motor home as a residence that can travel, while the tent can take on other forms. The tent has a greater range of accessibility and transportability. The fabric walls, while so thin they could not protect the inhabitants from physical objects, enclose the space to allow the experience of privacy. The idea of transportable space is not so much in the actual transportation, but in the idea of moving from one place to another.

The drive through Cade's Cove was a surreal experience. Through the window, we could observe the natural beauty of the landscape while seated at the dining table. We could see the forests, prairies, mountains, wild animals and a parade of other vehicles from inside the temporary residence. It seemed as if it was contradictory to view from one real place into another. We managed our own environment while passing through a national forest environment that was managed by other people, to be managed in the end by nature. We stopped in the middle of the route to have yet another experience in social space—sharing the pristine beauty of the place with other visitors at the tourist center that catered to souvenir seekers. We collected our own mementos alongside the others. Both objects and images returned from this trip. Later in our journey, we went to some trails in the national forest that led to what was billed as a spectacular waterfall, and another hiking trail up the mountain. We parked in designated parking, leashed the animals, locked the house, and proceeded to the signs that stated no pets were allowed on the trail. There were other clearly stated directives as to what was and was not allowed. Leaving the es-

tablished trail, and picking up any native ‘souvenir’ from the natural habitat, leaving trash in the forest, and disrespecting nature in at least this controlled environment. The trail to the waterfall, as it turns out, was paved and fully populated. The hiking trail, a dirt path, was clearly indicated and marked with blue signs. At the base of the hiking trail, while searching the ground for items of interest, I met two young children and their parents. I was walking the dogs and looking at the rocks, limestone gravel brought in to keep the trail from eroding. I was amused by that use of non-native material. The children wanted to play with the dogs. After talking to them and playing, I took the opportunity to have them find their favorite rock for my collection. They looked carefully, finally choosing one each and gave them to me as a memento. I wrote them a receipt on a post-it note and stuck them to the children. They laughed, looked at the notes, petted the dogs and went on. Later I was reading the national forest camp guide that said that no one was allowed to remove any item from the grounds. Ethically, where did I place the children in my intervention in social space? We want to attach to objects, but we are no longer allowed to touch them. I wonder who was watching.

The subject is the object

:capture [les mots juste] is a connection to discontinuous space and language structure. The gallery becomes a ‘living laboratory’ with seven stations. In the observation space, the viewer becomes both subject and object, captured by the camera and projected to other locations within the gallery. The audience chooses its own experience of the machine through observation, experience, participation, interaction, play, or by forming community. How the audience constructs meaning and value will become the next level of this experiment; a way of reconstructing social space.

I look at the examples of theorists and critics,
beginning with Walter Benjamin, Roland Barthes,
Guy DeBoard, Gilles DeLeuze and Felix Guattari.

Marcel Mauss, Marshall McLuhan, Lev Manovich, Jacques Lacan, Gertrude Stein
Nicolas Bourriaud, Jean Francois Lyotard, Mark Auge, Helene Cixous,
Jacques Derrida, Frederic Jameson, Jean Baudrillard and Jurgen Habermas
Judith Butler and Lucy Irigary

the list goes on

Perhaps visionaries in their own times who predicted shifts in the architectures of social space, language, signifiers and the interactive function of communities or individuals.

These become referents, and a reference to time. They observe us, look at the way we function within spaces. They raise questions about the architecture. I question the architecture, but cannot have a meaningful dialogue alone.

Identifying the ways we function within spaces, and the fragility of those spaces in time, are positions that I examine. I question the boundaries and the divisions of public and private spaces. Do we need clearly defined space? Do we need our own territory? Has etiquette been deleted from the social and cultural order?

Order. Law. Rules. Boundaries. Forms.

Does this refer to us? In reference to “us”-- is that all of us? Will we have equal treatment? And what does equal mean?

The audience as the machine

Once inside the gallery, the audience is asked to flow from station to station and to interact with the content. An observer hopefully sees each as a part of the working space that manages to control its own version of time, space, and information. The audience has been given the ingredients to initiate themselves.

Maneuvering the system and connecting the spaces becomes the game.

1 Just inside the entry to the right, and past the monitor mounted to the wall, sits a table loaded with collected machines that project film images. There are audiotapes to accompany the images. They may be switched from player to player. When the tapes are

switched, it gives new meaning to the reading of the image.

The projection machines were once owned by institutions. They were eliminated or discarded because they were out of date for the technology. Forward progress allows their presence. The audience may change the filmstrips, or the slides. They may even choose to bring in their own slide images and project them with the carousel content. When this happens, the space is activated by the audience. During a studio visit, Rirkrit Tiravanija suggested that strategy he relates to his own work. The objects may be added or removed by those who use the space. The composition of the space remains, but the content changes as does language, value and meaning.

Placed on the table are documents-- maps, books, media and instructions about the expectations and use of transportable space. The original images (including audio) are collections from the trip. The slides and filmstrips, while appearing to be 'tourist shots' were taken from video clips, removing their authority as a documentary representation. The images are of the documentation, but come from



Figure 3-4

a displacement. The order was rearranged, the images sometimes manipulated. Do we ask about the truth? Do we really see the images, or do they not hold our attention? Are they not powerful enough? Versions of real-time vs. an expectation of entertainment, the actual machines function in a way that allows the audience to experience tactility, order, instructions, and a way of learning. As a Fluxus experience, this establishes space along with time, memory, experience.

In addition to the provided media, an audio recorder sits on the table. The audi-

ence is asked to pick it up, record, and replace the existing tapes in the machine with the audio collected from the exhibition/installation space, or an audiotope brought in by a viewer. Altering the sound and the image projection is desired, although there is no guarantee that there will be this level of interactive play. In most social space that would feel like a transgression to interfere with the constructed space. When viewers realize that the spaces are meant to be altered, there is a perceptual shift and a greater sense of freedom.



Figure 3-5

The value of the collected information becomes equivalent to audience input.

2 At the next station is the text machine, a discarded writing machine (manual typewriter) with a mechanical dysfunctionality that makes producing linear or continuous text difficult, at best. The station is designed for the audience to leave a text message, but written as the machine chooses, and by chance. There are surfaces and images on the table on which to record the text message. The images represent other places and recorded time, the blank pages, time of another nature, time of movement, time of sound.

The text machine is based on John Cage's mesotic poems, which were arrangements of text on spaces that read both horizontally and vertically. In addition, the structures of time and chance elements are also parts of the text station. Ideas of language and time converge, stories written collectively, images through text are all potential results of an interaction with this piece.

John Cage's *Compositions in Retrospect*

The commercial title will be IVI
MethodStructureIntentionDisciplineNotationIndeterminacy
InterpenetrationImitationDevotionCircumstancesVariableStructure
NonunderstandingContingencyInconsistencyPerformance(I-VI)

3 The information station. Three pedestals with video monitors and DVD players are placed at equal distance apart. The volume is turned to the same amplitude, enough to overlap sound from one space to another. The confluence of sound makes the reading of the information less clear. The interference occurs in space beyond the object. The viewer has the option to either change the video or the audio level--the remote control device is on the pedestal.

There is the question of interference, or interaction, or a transgression of space.

The collections of videos are documents of the trip taken in the motor home.

Not only do they contain the order of the sequences, they



Figure 3-6

contain all the rules and structures within each scenario. Positioning is important at this station, testing the authority of the space. Folding chairs are placed before the monitors, which are mounted on the pedestals at a height that sits just above the viewer's eye level. The machine becomes the authority. The remote control device as an autonomous control tempts individual viewers to control the machine. Will they follow the structures of the space or take control of it? Will they sit in the moveable chairs and keep them in place? Will they maintain the distance from the screen? Will they become the audience that believes in the authority of the image? Gilles Deleuze's idea of deterritorialization is tested in this space, as well as Felix Guattari's idea of the machine, a place where information either enters or exits a structure.

4 Reperceptualizing image through the body. Stretched across the floor just past the information station lies a 10'x12' white screen. It sits behind the wall, blocking the path of passers by. A soft focused image is projected onto the surface from the ceiling. Viewing the projection space with its slight movements and low, but audible sound, affects equilibrium. The obscurity of the images compromises the body's identification of poison in space .

The content of the video is from a projection made on the vinyl tent that sits just to the other side of the wall. This same video is projected inside the tent on a monitor. The

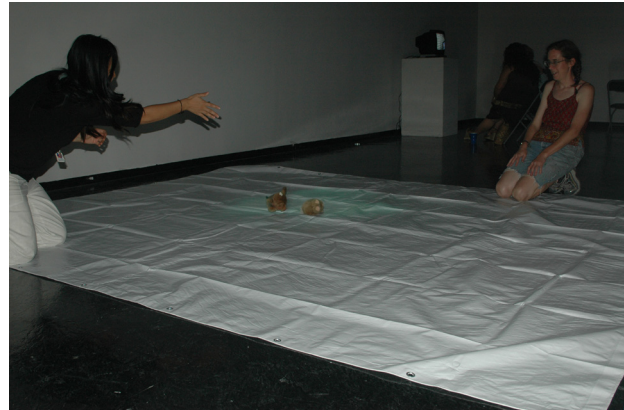


Figure 3-7

container becomes different in the projected space, allowing the image to spill from the projected height, past the body and onto the floor surface.

From there, the audience must choose how to experience this work. The question becomes how to maneuver and interact with this reperceptualized version of a viewing space. Spending some time in the space, how does the experience of the image from the edge affect our senses vs. the image from inside it? The physical nature of the experience comes from seeing it from the outside then entering the space to engage with it in ways that are of play.



Figure 3-8

5 Personalizing mass production.

Another station consists of a juice machine, where the operator becomes the machine through the workings of the object/machine. The object is passive, but the effort placed on making the product becomes a version of production aimed at the consumer. The food

product (juice machine) is an experience in controlling the simple machine that occasionally fails to function as designed. Do we stop there? Seek assistance? Attempt to repair the machine? Achieve the end product? Fresh Florida oranges become an object of production, but in a more intimate space than the customary mass-production that process allows. The juice becomes a product of human interaction with the machine. Do we know the difference between what is produced for the individual and what is produced for the masses?

6 Mapping mechanism >ketchup The map on the wall contains pins and strings leading to nearly 50 rectangular paper containers. Nearly all of the containers are discolored with a substance originating from the white envelopes. Each envelope is hand stamped with a postmark from distant locations; one sent to each of the fifty American states. A spotlight is directed at the map, amplifying the contrast of the dimension, and highlighting the returned pieces of mail. When these contain-



Figure 3-9

ers are experienced--envelopes, containers, objects arriving through the postal system-- interest is increased. The content of the envelopes is ketchup. They are individual packets , collected from nondescript homogenous locations during travel. The packets came from a no less than 19 states. Each packet was numbered, archived, tagged and mailed to the postmaster in each of the fifty states. The idea plays into homogeneity and non-place, the institutional practice of sameness. Ketchup can be picked up anywhere. It is an American condiment. It is used for flavor or cover-up, collectively void of food value. Why do we need so much of it? Does ketchup define us?

When sending something fragile or liquid through the machine, it must be marked

for hand cancellation. Our postal service is proud of its efficient, but personal touch. But a service eliminated is the hand cancelled mail. The Post Office made a judgment call—and thus the broken packets that returned with handwritten notes or within special containers. Each piece became personalized, rupturing the depersonalized space that typifies the machine.

For the viewer, the envelopes can be removed from the wall and handled. The smell of stale ketchup permeates the air nearby, and the envelopes are still slightly damp.

7 Artifacts of consumer culture. A display counter sits in the front of the space,



Figure 3-10

behind the wall with a surveillance camera pointed at the back of the case. The projection is on the monitor just around the corner, posting a real-time view of uncertain significance, framed as the truth. Inside and on top of the case are items from the everyday, collected and

placed on display to read as if they have value--the plastic arm of an action figure, three small rocks from a Cape Cod beach, a package of ukelele strings, keys found on a Paris sidewalk. The audience may first view them from the front of the case and determine whether or not to open the doors and remove the items that have become precious objects, if only by their placement in a display environment. The question runs to the value. When viewed as an artifact, each object is precious. Upon realizing that an exchange can be made for them, does the perception of the value change? Nicolas Bourriaud pointed that out in writing about contemporary forms of monument (Bourriaud. 1992: 53). Defining value, or “work of art lies within a sense of human existence within this chaos called reality.” The sense or meaning comes through a relationship to the space and the viewer.

The vinyl tent is the subject and object of greatest importance.

It serves as a transportable space, with tactile qualities, but passing through time. The fabric is plastic, clear vinyl, and allows no air to pass through. Outside the tent, the viewer is subjected to the view inside, the contained space, the capsule. It holds a chair, a sleeping mat, a pillow, a television monitor playing recorded images of habitation in the space, and significant theory books on the constructs of space, the Fluxus Codex, Relational Aesthetics, in/dif-



Figure 3-11

ferent spaces, Writing Machines, non:places among other references and resources that are relevant to the architectures of spaces. From outside looking in, the tent is framed, a static object that seems slightly fetishized in both form and content. The space is accessibly inaccessible. Entry comes from unsnapping the snaps and lifting up the tent to crawl inside from the bottom.



Figure 3-12

The experience from the inside of the plastic dome is the most interesting. It is an inversion, and gives the sense of the panopticon, as if the walls prevent the external world from entering the space. The sound from outside is muted, suggesting a distance that exists only psychologically and through a

physiological experience. From inside the tent, the world outside continues and it feels as if there is peace and balance to match the activity beyond the walls.

An illustration of the concept of public and private space, the tent—also the object of observation from the lobby monitor—becomes less a division of moveable space and more a position of both. Nicolas Bourriaud in *Relational Aesthetics*, writes of “the ‘criterion of co-existence’, the transposition into experience spaces constructed by the artist, the



Figure 3-13

projection of the symbolic into the real. According to Bourriaud, a constructed situation is defined as a situation becoming the intersection of time, place and action.

The tent represents more than a living space. It is a simple space that allows time for quiet, time for thinking, time for reflection. It is the object of the everyday, a place to escape, to observe the world, to be alone with our thoughts, construct time. It represents the binary, the black and white, the is and is not. Roland Barthes referred to the “zero degree”, where the circle becomes the circumference and represents presence. The inner circle filled, represents absence. The transparent tent and the zero space combine to represent us. We are the language. We are presence and absence. We are subject and object. We are the form and the remainder. Foucault sees the panopticon, the structure of social space where a select group is in control and sits in an all-seeing place where no one else can find them. Once inside the tent, this comes to mind.

Inside the tent, it feels as if there is no one watching. Protected by only the layer of fabric, the audience is privy to all that goes on inside. From inside it is as if the walls

⁷Barthes' interpretation of the Saussurean “zero degree” as a presence but with the absence of all distinguishing characteristics. It is J. Hillis Miller's zero, that place of slippage where we are uncertain whether form is either a letter O or a digit. We realize it's presence, but don't know how to say what it is. Claudia Egerer, “Nothing Matters”, *Journal of Cultural Research*, Vol. 8, No. 2. April 2004, p. 157-164

were opaque, and that space becomes private. There is something about the closeness, the plastic, and the comfort that we feel when we have boundaries. We know the rules then, and it is our choice to follow them.

conclusion:end

Product of the experiment

My questions run to the ownership and territoriality of space; space which cannot be owned. The space within all of us to determine how to use it. Will you use yours to build or to destroy? Or will you fall to a place between? This experiment, and experience, allows us to observe behavior while operating inside the controlled space.

We should think of it as Guattari does. We define the machine, the technology of attachment, to the space. It is the way the space is engaged.

Feel the space, experience being, find truth, find passion, contribute, understand our role as a piece of the whole, and opt not to disintegrate the mass. Open the containers. Look beyond what we know.

Make meaning of what we do.



Figure 3-14

REFERENCES

- Arendt, H. (Ed.) (1968). *Illuminations: Walter Benjamin, essays and reflections*. New York: Schocken Books.
- Auge, M. (1995). (trans. J. Howe) *Non-places: Introduction to an anthropology of super-modernity*. London: Verso.
- Bachelard, G. (1994). *The poetics of space*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Barthes, R. (1975). *The pleasure of the text*. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Barthes, R. (1970). *S/Z*. New York Hill and Wang.
- Barthes, R. (1985). *Camera lucida*. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Baudrillard, J. (1994). *Simulacra and simulation*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press
- Bonta, M. (2004). *Deleuze and geophilosophy, a guide and glossary*. Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press
- Burgin, V. (1996). *In/different spaces*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bourriaud, N. (1998, 2002). *Relational aesthetics*. Paris, France: Les Presses du Reil.
- Cantz, H. (2003). Inventory. *The work of Christine Hill and volksbotique*. K Reclama, Bulgaria: Druck
- de Certeau, M. (1984). *The Practice of Everyday Life*. (trans. S. Rendall) Berkeley: University of California Press
- DeBord, G. (1995). *The society of the spectacle*. Cambridge: Zone Books.
- Derrida, J. (1994). *Of grammatology* [corrected edition]. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Fillou, R. (1970). *Teaching and Learning as Performing Arts by Robert Filliou and the READER if he wishes, with the participation of John Cage, Benjamin Patterson, George Brecht, Allen Kaprow, Marcel, Vera and Bjoessi and Karl Rot, Dorothy Iannone, Diter Rot, Joseph Beuys, Konig Verlag, 1970* Fillou, R. (1970). *Teaching and Learning as Performing Arts by Robert Filliou and the READER if he wishes, with the participation of John Cage, Benjamin Patterson, George Brecht, Allen Kaprow, Marcel, Vera and Bjoessi and Karl Rot, Dorothy Iannone, Diter Rot, Joseph Beuys, Konig Verlag, 1970*
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. New York: Vintage.
- Foucault, M. (1988). *The care of the self: Volume 3, the history of sexuality*. New York: Vintage.
- Gardner, H. (1993). *Multiple intelligences: The theory in practice*. New York: Basic Books.
- Harmon, K. (2004). *You are here: Personal geographies and other maps of the imagination*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press.
- Harris, R. (Ed.) (1965, 1986) *Ferdinand de Saussure, Course in General Linguistics*. Chicago: Open Court Publishing Company.
- Hayles, K. (2002). *Writing machines*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Heidegger, M. (1962). *Being and Time*. San Francisco: Harper.
- Hendricks, J. (1995). *Fluxus codex*. New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc.
- Higgins, H. (2002). *Fluxus experience*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Jullien, F. (1999). *The propensity of things: Toward a history of efficacy in China*. Cambridge: Zone Books, 1999.

- Kelley, M. (2003). *Foul perfection*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003.
- Krauss, R. Bois, E. (2000). *Formless*. Cambridge: Zone
- Krauss, R. (1982). *Photography's discursive spaces*. Art Journal, Volume 42, Issue 4, p. 311-319.
- Kwon, M. (1980). *One place after another: Notes on site specificity*. October 80, Spring 1997, p. 85-110.
- Latour, B., & Weibel, P. (Eds.) (2002). *Iconoclash: Beyond the image wars in science, religion and art*. Karlsruhe: ZKM | Center for Art and Media..
- Levin, T. Frohne, U. Weibel, P. (2002) *CTRL Space, Rhetorics of Surveillance from Bentham to Big Brother*. Karlsruhe, Germany:ZKM | Center for Art and Media.
- Levi-Strauss, C. (1963). *Structural Anthropology*. New York:Basic Books.
- Lotringer, S. Virilio, P. (2005). *The accident of art*. New York: Semiotext(e).
- Lyotard, J. (1991). *The Differend*. Minneapolis : University of Minnesota Press.
- Lyotard, J. (1986). *The Postmodern Condition*. Manchester, England: University Manchester.
- Manovich, L. (2002). *The Language of New Media*. Cambridge: Leonardo.
- McLuhan, M. (1967). *The Medium and the Massage*. New York: Bantam.
- Pelzer, B. (2001). *Dan Graham*. New York:Phaidon
- Rabinow, P. (Ed.) (1994). *Michel Foucault: Ethics, subjectivity and truth*. Volume I: Essential works of Foucault, 1954-1984. New York: The New Press.
- Read, A. (Ed.) (2000). *Architecturally Speaking, Practices of Art, Architecture and the Everyday*. New York: Routledge Press.
- Sekula, A. (Winter, 1986). *The body and the archive*. from October 39, Winter 1986
- Ulmer, G. (1995). *Applied grammatology: Post[e]-pedagogy from Jacques Derrida to Joseph Beuys*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Wardrip-Fruin, W. & Nontfort, N. (Eds.) (2003). *The New Media Reader*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

ADDENDUM

RESOURCES

WEBPAGE

<http://randomversion.com>



Figure A-1



Figure A-2

The experience of the machine. A video document of the event in the gallery space and the audience's interaction and intervention with the project stations.
University Gallery, University of Florida, Gainesville. July 21, 2006.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

an ongoing reinvention, jj higgins is a cacophony in the dialectic of life-altering experience .

and the everyday will never be the same.

In a previous lifetime jj was employed in an institutional setting and had access to students who became research assistants. Through her teaching she gave that world a new way of seeing.

jj higgins, is an emerging new media artist, whose work is formed through the concepts of architecture and social space in constructing installations that become recontextualized spaces for audience examination and intervention.

A graduate of the Kansas City Art Institute and an MFA candidate at the University of Florida, jj's interests collide at the intersection of social behavior, etiquette, surveillance and the psychological spaces that embody memory and experience.

Within an interdisciplinary practice that includes visual culture, language, theory, sound, video, performative and interactive elements, the composite is both overwhelming and accessible to its audience, whose engagement with the work is critical.

jj's interests hover around the way spaces are constructed: the nonlinear methodologies of time and place, through consumerism, homogenous spaces—the non-place and its reference to 'non-culture', in the uses of public and private space, and reconstructing the tools of language to bridge the space between text and image. Site specificity and the non-gallery aesthetic are components of her work, which is an attempt at bridging the gallery and the community at large through a common language system.