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"CLICK"

(an experiment in virtual anthropology)

or

How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Conceptual Art

Graduate Thesis
Master of Fine Arts
School of Photographic Arts and Sciences
Rochester Institute of Technology

by Eve Ogden

Spring 1997

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* indicates a documentary photograph of the project taken by Stephen M. Schaub

THE OBJECT WHICH ORDINARILY
OCCUPIES THIS SPACE IS CURRENTLY
ON LOAN TO THE COLLECTION OF THE
SPAS GALLERY, ROOM 3000, BUILDING 7B

To my parents and brother, who never miss a show,
and to Steve for being there from beginning to end.

An artist is a dreamer consenting to dream of the actual world.

Santayana

A Description of the Installation

The installation “CLICK” was exhibited in the SPAS Gallery, Frank E. Gannett Building, on the RIT campus from September sixteenth through twentieth, 1996. Through a combination of the placement of wall-height dividers, the natural configuration of the gallery, the cre-

ation of a partial “ceiling” and differing lighting techniques, the space was divided into two main “rooms:” one much larger room (measuring approximately 35 feet by 25 feet), and one smaller room (measuring approximately 16 feet by 13 feet) which the viewer could reach only after passing through the larger.

Upon entering the gallery, the viewer passed down a

rather long passageway (19 feet in length), and this first space significantly affected my layout of the first room. In the original sketch I drew for the installation plan I drew the viewer as a pinball, poised to be projected out of this thin, narrow tube. (See Fig. 2.) Normally this is an underutilized area in the gallery: it is too narrow to accommodate much, and yet too long to ignore. Usually it is dealt with by a placement of the show title, credits or artist’s statement, and occasionally one artwork as a sort of preliminary to the rest of the show. I was particularly intrigued by this awkward space and wanted to make it as significant to the installation as the other two main

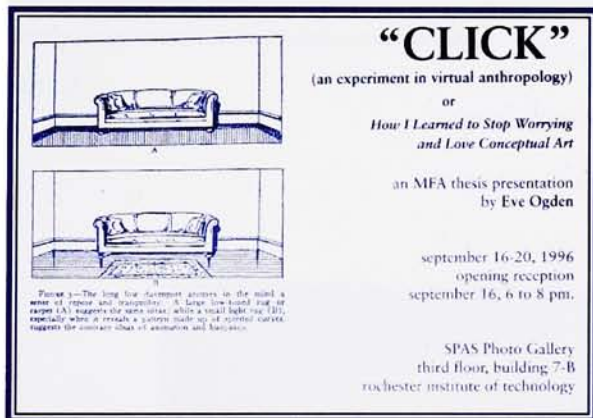


Fig. 1

gallery spaces. The solution I came up with was to use the space as a metaphor.

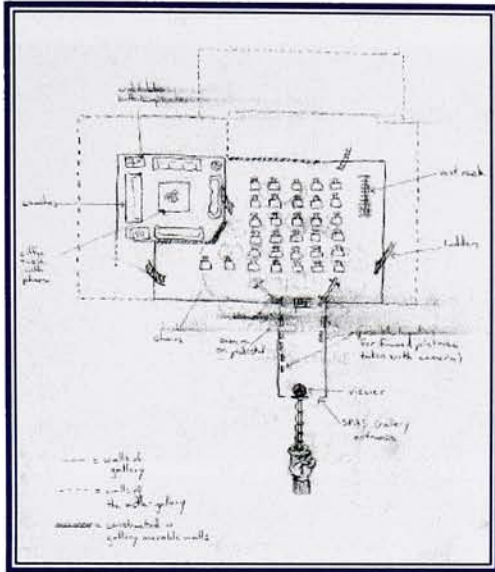


Fig. 2

As the viewer came in therefore, on the left hand wall was an amassed accumulation of pinned and tacked up papers, all swirling outward from the framed show poster which served as the announcement of the show title. (See Fig. 3.) All of these papers had been generated by me in the process of orchestrating the installation, with an emphasis on the bureaucratic: memos, requests, forms, letters of permission, e-mail message print-outs, notes to myself, and the many versions of different maps that had been generated at various stages, both of the gallery and of the campus. The arrangement pointed to the significance of the “how” of the show, the swirling radiating

papers duplicating the home “mission control” that I had set up and operated over the course of the weeks prior to the show. As a metaphor, the hallway thus became the “road” to the show in terms of what had been necessary for



Fig. 3

me to accomplish, who I had to speak to, gain permission from, and so on, in order to reach the show at the end as the goal. Additionally, everything which was hung up here was very emphatically “paper:” papers were pinned by one or two tacks each, layers of paper rested on top of one another, and if a breeze had happened through the space they would have created a papery rustle. This was to emphasize the importance of paper, and the scale of paper, the hand-holdable 8 by 10 inch size primarily, in the bureaucratic process of the institution.

Returning to the idea of the viewer as “pinball:” rather than being hurtled down an empty passage, therefore, the viewer had perhaps been slowed by the visual friction of the paperwork. I noticed from the video-

tapes as well as personal observation that when I watched viewers enter, they often seemed confused, as if torn between a desire to stop and figure out what the papers were about, and a compulsion from the architecture to keep



moving, to enter the “actual” space of the gallery. Taking advantage of this spatial directive, I chose to place my “classroom” here, directly in the path of the entering viewer.



The “classroom” was the first and larger “room” of the installation as previously mentioned. To the right of the entering viewer was a large, free-standing blackboard, directly in front of the viewer was an arrangement of thirty “tablet-arm chairs,” hard chairs which have the desk attached, and which are the most ubiquitous academic seating at RIT. Next to or perhaps just in front of the viewer was a 35mm camera on a tripod, placed at a “normal” height of approximately four and a half feet. In such a way the viewer entering found him or herself placed at the “head of the class,” in the position of class lecturer, and it was here that the forward motion was thwarted. Whereas in other shows the “pinball” effect often serves to project the person into the room, proceeding to the fringes of the room to view work, in the case of this installation the room was full and the walls were empty: the viewer’s natural forward movement was inhibited. In almost every case the initial reaction was one of discomfort: the viewer did not



Fig.s 4, 5 &6

feel he or she could go forward, blocked from the traditional viewer path, and the one which was “recommended” or encouraged by the architecture. Additionally the presence of ordinary academic furniture in place of conventionally accepted, unique, “art” objects may have created an uncertainty as to what, exactly, he or she was supposed to be “looking” at, as one expects to

do in a gallery. In fact, the viewer's relationship to the gallery had been inverted, and now it was the gallery installation which somehow seemed to be regarding the viewer, the chairs lined up in rows implying rows of students and taking on an almost anthropomorphic aspect. At the same time,



Fig. 7

the camera, similarly placed at the front of the class and "looking" back at the rows of chairs, could almost be seen as mimicking the frozen viewer.

The result of the uncomfortableness of this position was an overwhelming tendency to swerve to the viewer's left- the only place the he, perhaps, felt there was to "go," thus extricating himself from such a

focal point. To the viewer's left then, he found two choices: a model in the corner to look at with an artist's statement to read posted beside it, or in the alternative, another room which could be entered. (See Fig.s 7 and 8.) Lit

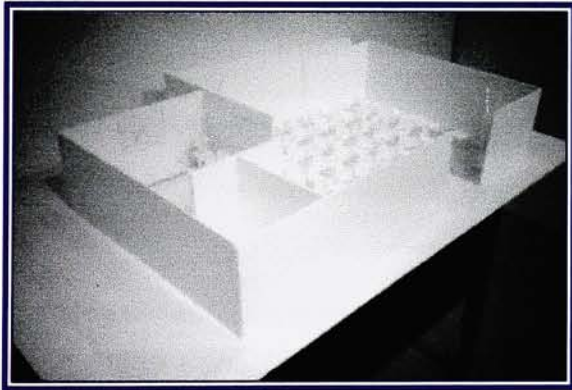


Fig. 8

differently, and set off very intentionally apart from the "classroom" space, the model and statement served as a sort of a respite, allowing the viewer to step back for a moment and extricate himself from the show. In fact the model was a replica of the very space in which the viewer found himself, allowing the viewer to be in a way removed *from* the gallery, so that he could be rather outside of it looking in, looking down at a

miniaturized version of what he himself was experiencing. Additionally he could read the statement "about" the work, allowing him to feel he is a step back, once again comfortably removed from the work. Beyond providing a psychological "ledge," above the fray so to speak, two other rationales exist for the inclusion of the model: the first relates back to the entryway paper installation, as yet another aspect of the preparations for and "how" of the show, alluding to the life of the show beyond its temporary incarnation at

that moment. It seems that often artists take great pains to make their work seem as if it simply appeared, came out of nowhere- and subsequently it is often assumed to be evidence of great artistic skill, that the artist is able to make everything appear “effortless.” In such cases it is simultaneously obvious that the work did not “just” appear out of nowhere, as in a painting or sculpture- because it is clearly man-made we know that it took a great deal

of work on the part of someone, yet the fact that we are so fooled by its impression of effortless is interpreted as skill.

Conversely, this particular installation was comprised entirely of objects of the “everyday:” unremarkable and unspecial in their treatment outside of this gallery.

Carrying the reversal even further then, rather than hiding the artist’s labors toward the end product, the viewer was given ample opportunity to witness particular evidences of the artist’s labor in the forms of the bureaucratic “papers,” as well as the scale model. Rather than offering the implied “artistic” skills of facility with conventional artistic media, the skills offered for the viewer’s inspection are quite different ones: bureaucratic and simple model build-

ing skills, inviting the question, what does qualify for the “skills” of the artist? What is it that we expect, or require, him to be skilled *at*?

The other reason supporting the model’s inclusion was one which initially struck me as slightly irrational. Whereas I began the model without any intentions beyond a form of three-dimensional “notes” to myself, charting the progress of the installation’s approval and determining scale relations, I found that the more I worked on the model, the more I became interested in it, interested in making it “well.” Assembling pieces like those of a puzzle as each object was approved for use in the show, I became increasingly

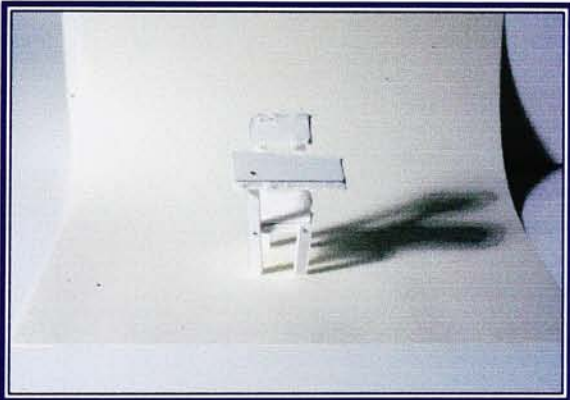
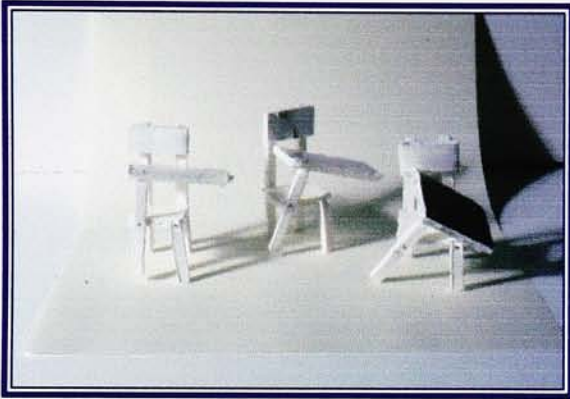


Fig.s 9 & 10

involved in the production of each individual piece, its accuracy, attention to

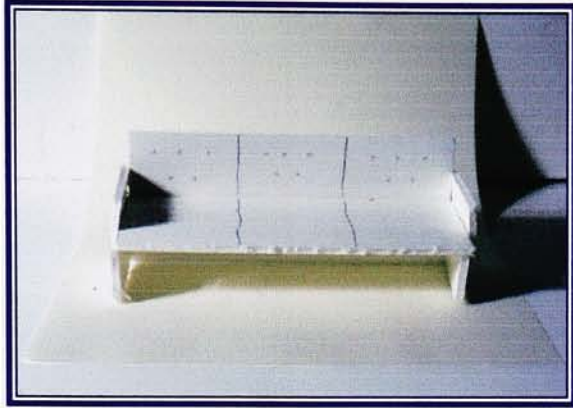


Fig. 11

detail, sturdiness and so on, despite the fact that all that this was well beyond what was needed for my purposes. I became strangely attached to the model and spent increasing amounts of energy on making it “right,” wondering all along why it was so important to me. This change in attitude may be observed by a comparison of the first furniture models that were completed, as in

figures 9 and 11, and some of the last ones to be completed, as in figures 10 and 12. Ultimately, as the show was being installed it seemed essential that the model take some part in the final product of all my labors, but why?

Finally I realized that it was the “age-old” issue of art versus craft: certainly I could explain the philosophy of the show as a work of art, as I saw it, and certainly it had taken “work” in order to create it as a work of art, yet ultimately, I found that as a traditional artist by training, there was still a part of me that was unsatisfied, and this more traditional “creative” side, creative in the sense of making something by hand, was what found it’s outlet in the creation of the model. Once I realized this, I found it’s inclusion in the installation to be particularly poignant, if only to myself- as if it was standing in for

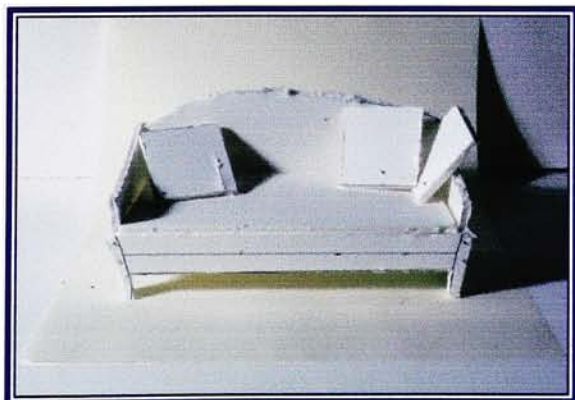


Fig. 12

a thing that had been lost.

Upon entering the second “room” the viewer was confronted with an entirely different, purposely inverse setting to the outer “class-room”: where the first room had been large and open, this one was almost cozy and with a fabricated low “ceiling” made from muslin and wood

beams; where the first room had been lit by rows of greenish overhead

flourescents, this one was lit by small table lamps and overhead track lighting which filtered through the muslin to create a warm, soft light; where the

layout of the first room was confrontational towards the viewer, placing him involuntarily in a strategic spot as if at the head of a triangle point, disallowing certain directions of movement and inciting an uncomfortable, “watched” feeling, conversely this room was nonconfrontational, square and without any particular emphasis, with four long couches- one to each wall- creating a circle of movement and offered seating possibilities. In addition to the four couches, four



Fig. 13

large paintings were hung, one over each couch, and a square rug lay underneath a square coffee table in the center of the space. In between the coffee table and the couches there was just enough room to walk comfortably. An end table sat in each of two corners of the room, each with a table lamp on it. One of the end tables additionally held a regulation RIT office telephone which worked, as RIT

phones do, within the local calling area, and could be dialed from the outside by dialing the gallery’s extension, which had been included on the invitation to the show.



Fig. 14

The viewer’s reaction to this space was one of two: he either sat down, tried the phone, relaxed (at least one visitor took a nap), or he left this space quickly, again disconcerted, if perhaps less so than the first space, by the insecurity of what was “correctly” expected of him as a viewer. What occurred in several cases was some combination of these two reactions, wherein the viewer would enter looking up, at the

walls, at the landscape paintings with what I would refer to as traditional viewer “gallery posture,” then, as if realizing the “use” intent of the space- as

opposed to a “viewing” intent, he or she would “switch” postures, not only changing demeanor but also physically turning 180 degrees, away from the things, in order to be able to use them: sit down, use the phone, etc. The implication is that this change occurred once the viewer made the decision that the objects were not intended for looking *at*, as they were obviously no different than any other objects one would encounter in any number of other RIT spaces. While their presence in a gallery space inclined people to view them differently at first, as “viewers,” it seemed that a small percentage of viewers were able to make the transition from viewing to “using” the space. The objects which ordinarily would contain a “plot” of sorts refused to do so, forcing the attention back to the variable of the viewer. In this way, the view-



Fig. 15

er could become the true “subject” of the artwork. It is in our attempts to gauge this viewer reaction that we find the value of videotape data.

Two video cameras , each enclosed in a small wooden box with the lens protruding, were posted one in each room for purposes of documenting viewer reaction to and interaction with the space. A notice was posted at the front of the gallery to notify viewers that their progress through the gallery might taped. Taping did not occur at all times but was instead done on a random basis, several hours each of the five days. The presence of these cameras affected viewers to widely varying degrees, anywhere from extreme self-consciousness and glances toward the camera, to a near indifference to their presence. This also varied depending upon which room the viewer was in, in all likelihood due to the fact that one camera was perched high up and to the back of the “classroom,” (see Fig. 15,) while the “lounge” camera was necessarily lower, closer to the room occupants, and

more conspicuous as a result.

Other notable aspects of the installation include the posting of a “gallery guard,” at the front entrance to the gallery. This was due to the presence of the 35mm and video cameras in order to prevent theft, but also as a

measure to assuage concerned department heads that, indeed, their couch or painting was going to be well cared for. (For some reason no one was as concerned about the contents of the classroom.) Also, posted in the “pinball” hallway, across from the paper-wall, was a large framed “thank you” list, expressing my gratitude to the 32 different people and departments who helped make the installation come about, either through the donation of time, services or the loaning of furniture, as well as to my thesis committee. (See Figs 16 and 17.) This is yet another element which points to the bureaucratic aspect of the show’s preparation, but it points, perhaps surprisingly, directly to the fact that it is through bureau-



Fig. 16

cracy that the show was accomplished, that is to say, that without the bureaucratic process itself the installation would not have been possible. Because



Fig. 17

the term “bureaucracy” is so often assumed to have an implicit negative connotation, through the deliberate inclusion of this extensive list I hoped to undermine assumptions that would be made that simply because the bureaucracy of an institution had been incorporated into the workings of the show in a significant way, that this necessarily entailed a critique of such workings. Certainly, bureaucracy can be frustratingly “bureaucratic,” yet, on the other hand it is a vehicle, like any other

medium, artistic or other, through which one may navigate and things may be accomplished which otherwise could not.

Upon entrance to the gallery, and next to the wall of papers, the viewer found atop a table a guest book for comments, and a map. (See Fig. 4.)

The map, although a subtle and perhaps overlooked element of the exhibition

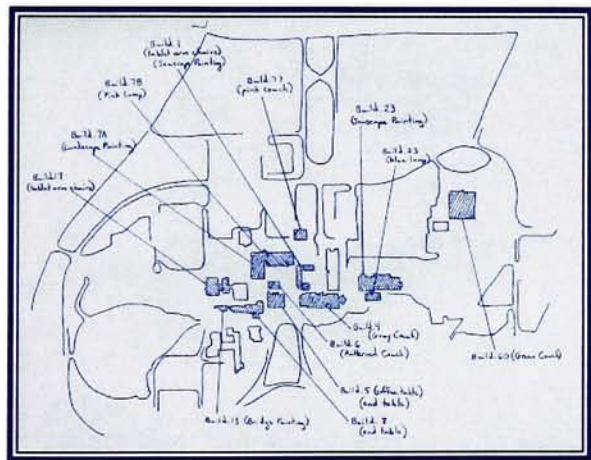
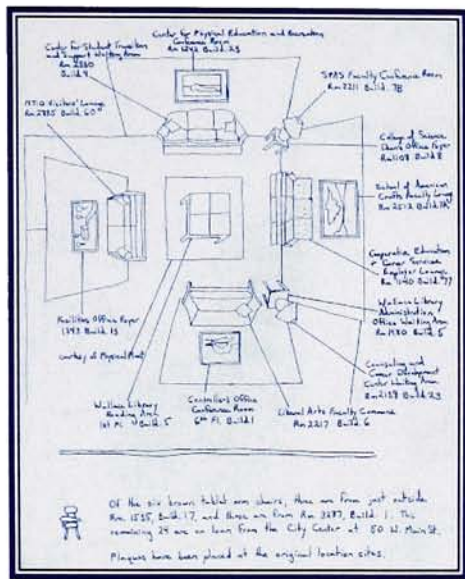
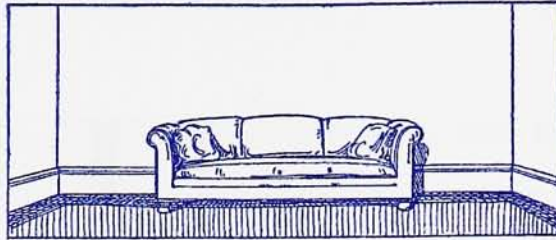


Fig.s 18 & 19

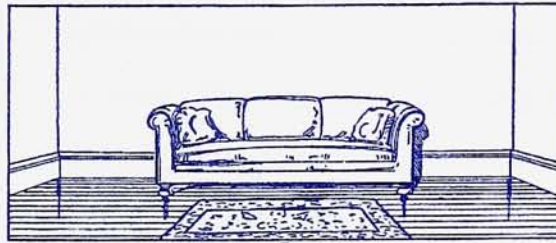
for some viewers, was for me the crux of the show. On the front of the map was a drawing of the lounge and all the objects found in it as seen from above, while below was a drawing of a tablet arm chair, representing the contents of the classroom. (See Fig. 18.) Each object pictured had a line drawn from it to a side description of which department, room and building it had come from. On the obverse side of the sheet was a map of the RIT campus, with each of the buildings from which objects had been borrowed labeled accordingly. (See Fig. 19.) The purpose of this was two-fold: firstly to point out that despite the fact that

the two rooms appeared to be harmonious environments, to emphasize that in fact they had been pieced together from almost every building on campus, and that an attempt had been made to not only describe environments of RIT, but to illustrate a consistent, campus-wide design strategy at work, despite individual variations. Secondly, the option was made readily available to the viewer to go and visit the “home” environments of the objects he was viewing on temporary display

in the gallery. If a viewer did take this opportunity during the show, he would find in the empty space which the object normally occupied a brass plaque, with the following words engraved in black letters: “THE OBJECT WHICH ORDINARILY OCCUPIES THIS SPACE IS CURRENTLY ON LOAN TO THE COLLECTION OF THE SPAS GALLERY, ROOM 3000, BUILDING 7B.” This additionally created the equal and opposite opportunity for the people who were the object’s everyday “viewers” to venture out to see its temporary relocation.



A



B

FIGURE 3.—The long low davenport arouses in the mind a sense of repose and tranquillity. A large low-toned rug or carpet (A) suggests the same ideas; while a small light rug (B), especially when it reveals a pattern made up of spirited curves, suggests the contrary ideas of animation and buoyancy.

Click: On The Metaphor of Communication

Unlikely as it may seem, this entire installation began with an idea about the telephone. The last installation I had done concerned itself primarily with the telephone as a medium of communication and compared it with art as another medium of communication. The start of my thesis began with a deeper investigation into the telephone. I was intrigued by some contemporary commercial photographs I came upon of people talking on the telephone, as well as some historical images which depicted the workings of early telephony. (See Figs 21 and 22.) What caught my interest in particular was the, perhaps unintentional, focus in such images, both historical and contemporary, upon telephone communication as a somehow inherently “feminine” activity.

This idea of “communication” as having gender specificity led me to the work of “sociolinguist” Dr. Deborah Tannen. In her book *You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*, she establishes her theory that men and women communicate in fundamentally different ways, likening the phenomenon to speaking in different languages. She argues that it is due to the fact that men and women grow up essentially in different “cultures,” speaking these different “languages,” that men and women have a greater difficulty communicating across the gender gap than within their own sex.

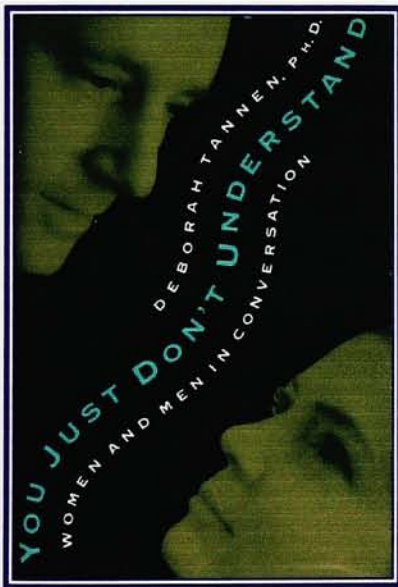


Fig. 20

Dr. Tannen asserts that women are raised in a communication tradition of “rapport” or “‘private’ speaking” in which communication is utilized as “a way of establishing connections and negotiating relationships,” where “Emphasis is placed on displaying similarities and matching experiences,” (Tannen 1990, 77). Men’s communication is posed against this view of “female” communication: whereas women communicate through “rapport-talk,” she describes men as communicating through “report-talk,” or “‘public speaking.’” She states: “For most men, talk is primarily a means to preserve independence and negotiate and maintain status in a hierarchical social order. This is done by exhibiting knowledge and skill, and by holding center stage through verbal performance...,” (Tannen 1990, 77). As opposed to women’s communication, which is perceived as both more intimate and reciprocal in nature, Tannen describes men’s communication as being largely concerned with maintaining itself, the speaker, as the subject of focus and dispenser of information, which keeps those communicated to in a position of object, of recipient of information. Of course, Tannen is not claiming that men never use “rapport-talk” nor that women never use “report-talk,” and neither is she claiming that one cannot approach a private conversation in the described “public” manner or vice versa. She is, however, attempting to correlate certain tendencies of communication methods with the sex she observes using them most.

From such assertions as defined by Tannen, I began to draw a correlation between such “masculine” and “feminine” manners of communication, and what I found to be corresponding *technologies* of communication: that is, the telephone and the camera. In keeping with my previous observation of telephones and women being linked in their representation, the telephone does seem to correspond to a “feminine” style of com-



Fig. 21

munication as defined by Tannen: it is an “equal-opportunity” device, that is to say it does not privilege either user over the

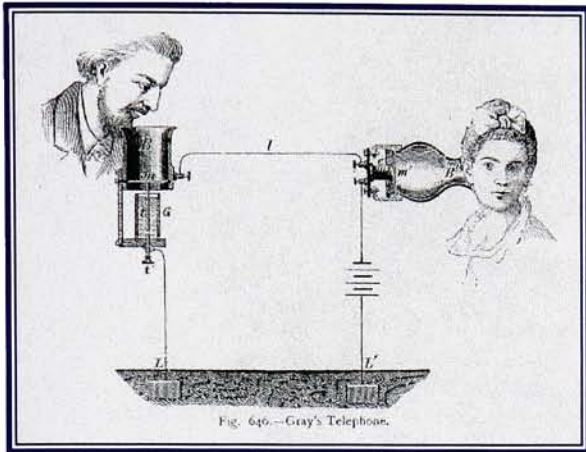


Fig. 22

other in the communication, but actually favors a back-and-forth dialogue, a sharing of information. In fact, this association of the telephone with feminine communication strategies is alluded to by Tannen in particular, listed as one of the many “private” situations in which “men think women talk a lot because they hear women talking in situations where men would not,” (Tannen 1990, 78). Again, Tannen is not

saying that men never talk on the telephone, nor even that they do not have long, “private” conversations on them, only that there is the *perception* that women do this *more*, which, true or not, is a significant key to understanding what differences between men’s and women’s communication may actually exist.

Contrastingly, the camera may be seen as an inherently “privileged” technological means of communication: the photographer maintains an uninterrupted control over all aspects of what

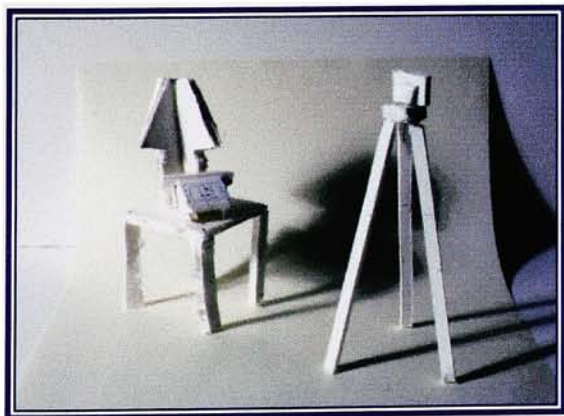


Fig. 23

is communicated and how, whereas the viewer, as recipient of information is held in the position of receiver, with no means of response or mediation of the communication. Although a “private” photography certainly exists of snapshot photography, the tradition of “public” photography extends much further back, in which the photographer exhibits a privileged vision through his

manipulation of the medium. In particular we may look to the “popular photography” and “National Geographic” aesthetics, wherein the photographer bravely ventures out into the unknown

to capture his superior glimpses of the foreign, providing his public with evidence of his or her skill and bravery. Certainly such activity has correlation with “exhibiting knowledge and skill” and “holding center stage through... performance...” (Tannen 1990, 77); in this case, the performance is of a static, visual nature. Once again, we may point out that such a firmly established tradition of the intrepid photographer is not an exclusively male domain, for example Margaret Bourke-White belongs to such a tradition, but rather that it is conceived of in its *stereotype* as being a masculine activity.

Once we have established such a correlation, where does this lead us; what is the point of extending Tannen’s verbal communication theories to technology? For one thing, it is significant to note that certain technologies not only *allow* certain types of communication, but that additionally they *facilitate* certain types of communication. For example, if one has chosen to take a photograph, print it and display it, in order to make the process an interactive one he or she would have to step outside the medium in order to receive feedback from his or her audience- either through standing next to the photograph and discussing it with his or her viewers, or perhaps through leaving a comment book next to it. And even then, it would be very difficult to engage with such viewer comments through the *medium* of photography- more likely such an exchange would necessarily be verbal. So the very nature of photography itself is inherently a one-directional, “public-speaking” in which one individual, the photographer, is encouraged to be the storyteller of sorts, enrapturing his audience, or not, but always remaining in the privileged position with relation to his viewers. This holds true equally well if he or she has a hundred thousand viewers as if he or she has only one, the nature of the dialogue does not change.

In a similar way, to use the telephone as a “public” means of communication could be accomplished, but would be difficult and would require modifications. Whereas the telephone lends itself, indeed, *encourages* the private exchange of two people in a back-and forth exchange of information, if we attempted to use it, for example, to give a long-distance speech, we would encounter problems. Perhaps an extremely large conference call could be engineered, before which everyone would be instructed not to speak. Even then, what is being done is telling the audience to go deliberately *against* the nature of the medium, and all the social conditioning which has accompanied it. In such a situation the substitution of a megaphone, or a memo accomplishes the task with much greater efficiency.

Keeping such oppositions as these in mind, I began to address the issue of the gallery itself. In previous installations I have established an ongoing concern for issues of environment, specifically the idea that no art work exists independent of, or uninformed by its surroundings. Accordingly I have consciously addressed the issue of context by creating work specifically for and about its intended context. Because the gallery exists on the RIT campus, the show was being done for the completion of an RIT thesis, and due to the fact that the audience would be primarily one consisting of RIT related persons, I chose to make the gallery space descriptive of itself and of its own surroundings; what more relevant subject to discuss in the SPAS Gallery- an artistic display space of RIT, than the spaces of RIT? I chose to try investigating rather than ignoring or denying the issue of what the SPAS Gallery “is.”

The gallery naturally seems to divide itself into two “room-like” spaces, one of which is slightly larger than the other. Starting from this “built-in” opposition within the gallery, I established that the best way to

discuss RIT space would be to exaggerate this division, setting up oppositions within the space which would correlate with those ideas I had established with regard to different types of communication. In analyzing RIT space, and not without the previously established oppositions in mind, I came upon a distillation of RIT's spaces into two types of space, and arrived at the "classroom" type and the "lounge" type. Certainly other types of spaces exist at RIT: the ice rink, dining areas, faculty offices, and so on, but generally speaking even the most unusual space may be fit into one of these two categories if we look at them with particular attention to facilitating certain types of communication. The more I thought about it, the more these two generalizations seemed to oppose one another, complementing one another: where the lounge is a space for relaxation, the classroom is a place for work; where the lounge is a place for informal communication, the classroom is a place for formal communication; where the lounge is a place for dialogue, the classroom is a place for communication on the part of one to many, or a monologue; and so on.

Remembering, then, that the installation "classroom" contained a 35mm camera on a tripod, and that the "lounge" contained an RIT telephone, we may see that the "report/ rapport" metaphor extends even further. That is, if we recognize that architectural space is fabricated space, and that, just as certain technologies are engineered to facilitate certain types of communication, so interior decoration is engineered to facilitate certain types of interaction, then we may deduce that the diametrical opposition which Tannen has established may be applicable. Much in the way of Tannen's "masculine" communication, and much as we have viewed the photographic form of communication, so can we conceive of the classroom as a three dimensional space which is constructed towards

similar ends, that is to say, a “report-talk,” “public,” one-way form of communication. Conversely the “lounge” is conceived of as representative of a “feminine” communication, corresponding to the telephone’s

inherent nature, as a three dimensional facilitator of “rapport-talk,” a “private,” two-way communication.

In the generic RIT classroom, an analysis of the layout of the room bears out this extension of our metaphor: most, though not all, RIT classrooms, much like many classrooms found in other academic contexts, are arranged with rows of chairs facing one direction. (See Fig. 24.) Usually there is a blackboard, podium, or other indicator that is deliberately the focal point of the room’s attention. Floors are linoleum tile, the chairs are most often “tablet arm-chairs” which are made of a hard plastic material without padding. The lighting is most often harsh, overhead fluorescent and the color scheme, if it can be called that, is ordinarily one of extreme neutral whites, cream colors and browns. All these elements point clearly to the fact that the persons in the tablet arm chairs are intended to be slightly uncomfortable, at some form of attention, and clearly able to see and focus upon either the blackboard or the figure at the podium. Neutral colors indicate an unwillingness to distract the viewer from his focus upon the front of the room. If there is a blackboard, it is by far the darkest thing in the room, focusing attention upon it, whereas if it is one of the newer white boards, it focuses more specifically upon whatever dark, written text or numbers might appear on it. Normally the

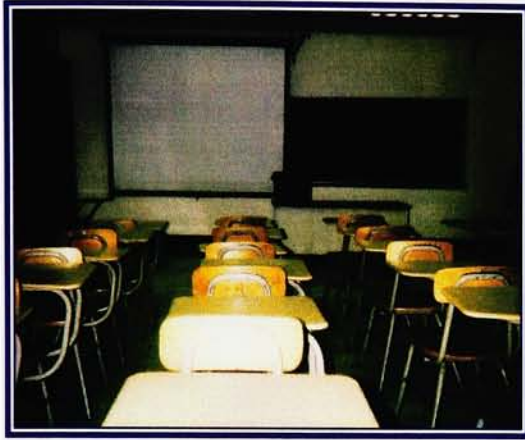


Fig. 24

walls are left either completely blank in order to minimize distractibility, or else supplementary materials may be hung. If the lecturer stands at the front of the room, he or she is clearly in a position of physical dominance

over the scene (one pauses to imagine what the nature of a class would



Fig. 25

be like if all those in attendance stood for the entirety of the lecture...) but even if the lecturer chooses to sit it is common for their chair to be a regular chair as opposed to a tablet arm-chair. All these indicators, and especially when we find them strategically utilized consistently throughout the campus, point toward a manipulation taking place, or an encouragement towards a certain *type* of interaction between the disseminator of information and those who are designated to receive it. It is this type of interaction which we have described as “masculine.”

Although this description may make simple academic design seem somehow sinister, we must not assume such construction of a space toward an end only exists in the “classroom.” Quite the contrary, if the “uptight” spaces have consciously been engineered to be so, then we may indeed extrapolate that “relaxed” spaces must have been similarly constructed. Let us again return to the generic RIT space, this time with a focus on the “lounge.” Generally we may recognize such a space by a drastically different lighting from the classroom space, normally table lamps and or floor lamps. (See Fig. 25.) As contrasted with the slightly greenish cold light of fluorescent bulbs, this light is warm and red. There is carpeting, soft, comfortable chairs and sofas are arranged in groupings close together, facing towards one another. The color scheme is often an intentional combination of colors which will

not only look acceptably well together, but ideally provide a “settled” background atmosphere. For example I found that nearly all of RIT’s “lounge” type furnishings were designed with the same color scheme in mind- ostensibly in order to make them as interchangeable as academic

furnishings: heathery colors were foremost, accented by the occasional turquoise or powder blue shades. On the walls we find paintings, or replicas of paintings, framed.

Of course the “goal” of such a space differs accordingly: the space is designed specifically to provide a certain degree of “comfort,” without being *too* comfortable; to be reminiscent of a “home-like” atmosphere, without actually displaying any one, personal sensibility. Thus the occupant of the room is generically urged to relax, without encouraging over-relaxation on the one hand, and without offending any one particular sensibility on the other.

Viewing all the spaces at RIT in such a manner we may begin to see the symptoms of one or the other strategies of design, furnishing and lighting at work. A dining hall used for student and faculty meals during the daytime, with its small tables and chairs facing one another, may be read as a “feminine” space, encouraging “private” interaction between its users in addition to the primary objective of supplying nourishment. That same dining hall may be transformed at night into a concert hall for a performing band, at which point the tables are removed, a raised area is placed at one end of the room for the musicians, and rows of chairs are lined up facing it; in this case the previously “feminine” space has been transformed into a “masculine” one, with its primary emphasis now on the dispersing of entertainment towards the audience.

As a result of my conclusion of the two divisible “types” of RIT spaces, and my subsequent correlation with the theories of Dr. Tannen and my own extrapolations of her thesis, I set out firstly to confirm my conclusion with regard to the two “types” of space through research, and secondly to select examples for use in the installation in order to recreate my three-dimensional metaphor within the gallery setting; to recreate RIT

space in a general sense, within an actual RIT space and with actual RIT objects.



An Experiment in Virtual Anthropology: The Analysis

The show subtitle “An Experiment in Virtual Anthropology” actually refers to two different experiments: firstly, and most obviously the fact that the show functioned as a controlled and observed environment. Reactions of the viewers were videotaped, in hopes that they might provide relevant information to our hypothesis as previously stated that is, firstly that environments and technologies are constructed to facilitate certain specific types of communication and

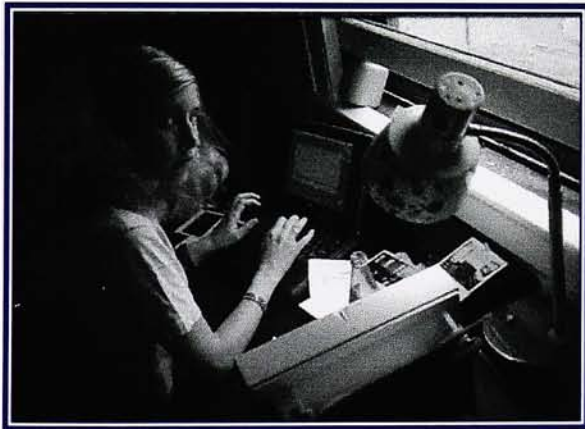


Fig. 26

behavior, and secondly that these types of communication and behavior may correspond to our defined “masculine” and “feminine” forms of communication. The subtitle, coupled with the presence of videocameras, pointed precisely to the function of the show not only as a display, or provider of experience and information for the general public, but to its equal function as a gatherer *of* information and experience

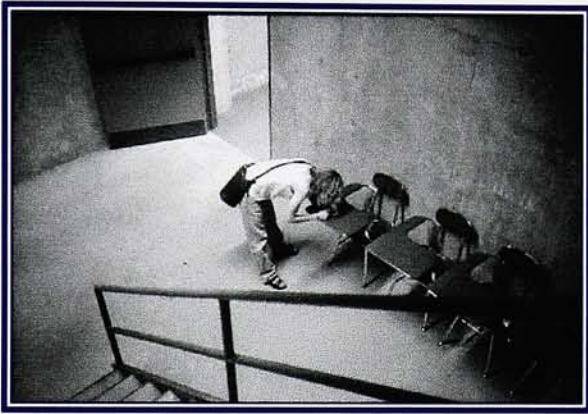
from the viewers.

The other “experiment” to which the subtitle refers is that which took place prior to the installation, that is, the experiment of bringing all the various pieces of the show together. Although certainly alluded to in the “wall of bureacracy” in the entryway by the dozens of correspondances put forth through various media, it is hard to convey, after the fact, the pervading sense of uncertainty which characterized the installation’s

organization, even down to the last few hours before its opening. I had intentionally chosen to make the show in such a manner that it would entail variables beyond my control, making the end result an open question, and reflective not only of myself as the artist, but of RIT as a medium through which things may be accomplished. Further than this, I was determined to have a show which involved people from the RIT community not ordinarily involved in the activities of SPAS or the SPAS gallery. In this, I was interested in gaining not just a wider audience, but in actively involving people other than myself and people in my particular program in the artistic process. I resolved from the beginning that the show should be something that would be simultaneously a very simple notion, one that could be communicated in a sentence or two, and yet complex, in terms of resonat-



Fig. 27



ing with a variety of different levels of meaning. Such an impulse has characterized nearly all of my previous work as having a concern with the “re-presentation of reality” as a method for calling into question the idea of “objective” reality and the assumptions which underlie it. In this case the idea was to do something very simple: borrow furniture for a period of five days; and yet to do something which may never have been done before, and which the system was not set up to assist: borrow furniture from various departments at RIT, who would allow me to do so with no other incentive except that it would help me with my thesis.

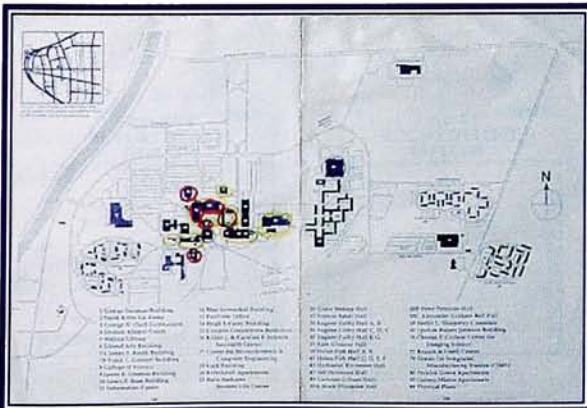


Fig. 28

In this way, I was making it possible for RIT to represent *itself*, within the parameters that I had established, and with my help. It is in this light that the show would either prove optimistic or cynical, depending on how it



Fig. 29

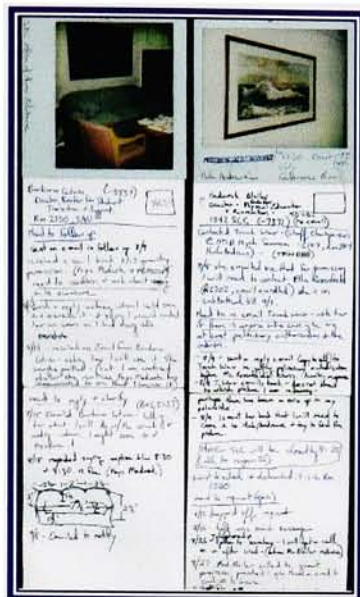


Fig. 30

pulled together, or failed to, in the end result.

I began researching the spaces of RIT, making myself familiar with all the spaces on campus which could be considered relevant to my ideas on the construction of space and communication. For approximately two weeks I spent every day wandering from building to building with a polaroid camera, taking pictures of

classrooms and waiting areas. "Lounges" per se were a rare find, (although more than one secretary exclaimed to me "Lounge? Oh I wish we did have one!"). More often the spaces which corresponded most closely with my "lounge" conception were waiting areas and conference rooms. Using the official campus map as a guide I crossed off each building as I accumulated a file of polaroids which corresponded to it. (See Figs 27 and 28.)

The next step was to see if two environments could be constructed from the data as it had been gathered which would support my initial hypothesis, work spatially as realistic, usable, environments in the gallery, and still present a representative cross-section of the RIT campus. After selecting 13 objects with which to compose the lounge, and a total of 3 objects for the classroom, from a total of 13 different buildings on campus, I attached an index card to each polaroid of an object being requested, which served as the status report on that particular object.

Every time any communication was either sent or received regarding that particular piece of furniture it would be noted on the index card; in this way each object began to accumulate a mini-biography. (See Figs 29 and

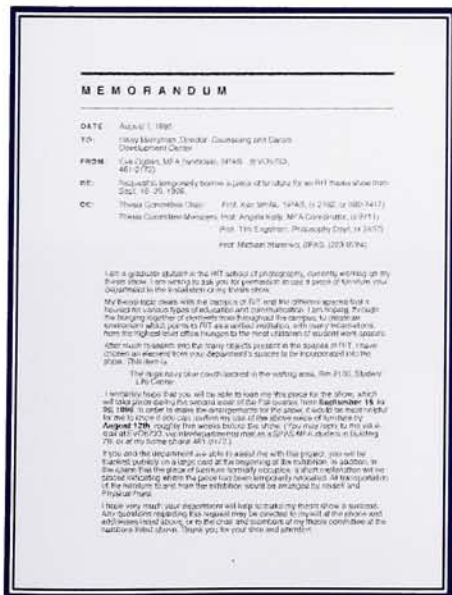


Fig. 31

30.) What once were undistinguished institutional objects began to take on individual characteristics and histories.



Fig. 32

A form request was then drawn up and filled in for each piece. (See Fig. 31.) As I knew of no precedent for such a request, I directed all my requests to the heads of whatever department the object happened to be found in. For example, in order to gain permission to borrow the couch from the Liberal Arts faculty lounge, I directed my request to the Dean

of Liberal Arts. Often, my request would be redirected to a subordinate,



Fig. 33

or another person who was considered more appropriate. Initially the chairs were requested in groups of three from ten different classrooms throughout campus, however I quickly became aware that while I could request the more “personal” objects, such as couches and end-tables, directly from their departments, all tablet-arm chairs fell under a general RIT jurisdiction, that of the Registrar.

Despite their campus-wide ubiquity, it would turn out that the tablet arm-chairs were going to be the hardest objects to borrow for the

show by far. Every person I spoke to had the name of a different person I could ask, but no one was able to help me.

Finally, in the eleventh hour, through a combination of the efforts of the Registrar Daniel Vilenski, and the manager of the downtown RIT facility, Duane Barto, we managed to get 24 rather old tablet arm chairs transported in a truck up to campus for the purposes of my installation. The other six chairs were lent by two departments from whom I had originally



Fig. 34

nally requested them, who, if they were not supposed to lend them to me,



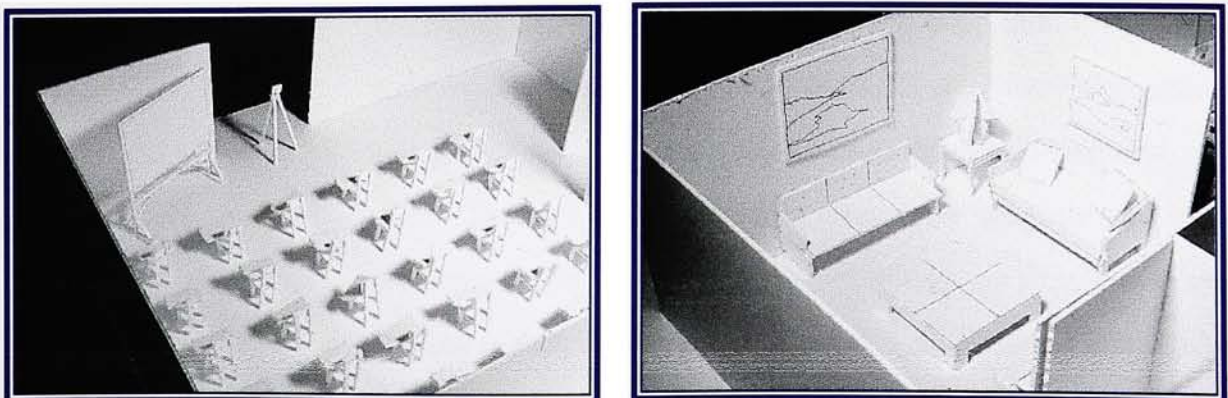
Fig. 35

did not seem to be aware of this fact.

By comparison, borrowing most of the objects for the lounge were easy. The couch from the Liberal Arts faculty lounge was the hardest object in the lounge space to obtain, as it was requested that both I and my department chair sign a form guaranteeing the couch's safe return, demonstrating how bureaucracy can invent itself when no precedent exists. The carpet which was in the lounge space was a scrap of left-over RIT carpet that Physical Plant let me have. Only two requests were denied out of the original 13 for the lounge space, for a coffee table and one couch, and once replacements were selected my requests for these pieces were quickly approved.

Clearly, the installation was changing its shape nearly every day, and despite my own admonitions that the show was an "experiment" with a purposely unfixed result, I spent most of my time on pins and needles trying to make it come out the way I had envisioned it- anything less, I

Fig. 36



knew would not speak to the metaphor in which I was interested. An empty room where the classroom was intended to be, or a lounge which had only three couches and no coffee table, would ultimately end up being more about what was missing than what was present.

The final crisis came when the permission I had to borrow the blackboard was revoked, only a matter of days before the opening. Again, I had run into the paradox that the ordinary academic furniture, while not individually valued or cared for, was at the same time considered not just essential to the proper work-

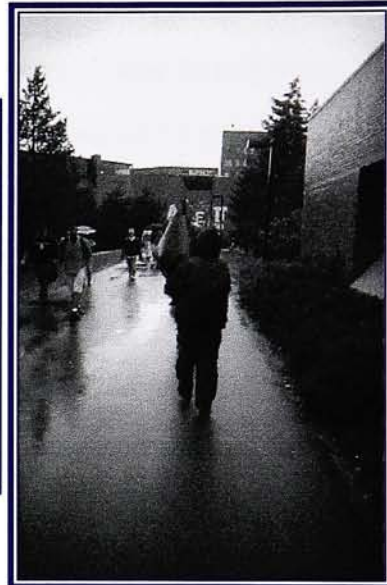


Fig. 37

ings of the institution, but almost intrinsic to the sense of power and control of the department from which it came. More than reluctant to assist me, it was as if people's reactions to my requests verged on suspicious. On the other hand the easiest pieces to borrow were the more personalized objects for the lounge, about whose individual safety nearly everyone was very concerned. Yet, although they were so individually valued, they were still considered mere amenities, and dispensable to the everyday functioning of the department.

Throughout this process of researching and requesting I received responses varying from puzzlement or intrigue, to pity, from people going way out of their way to get me a name or assistance, to people who just



Fig. 38

did not want to talk with me at all. What was possible to do changed correspondingly with these varying attitudes and responses. When, in the last few moments of the ticking clock I got my blackboard, this made me realize with full force the fact that bureaucracy can be played both ways: it can be a stone wall, or a back door depending not only on who you are, but on who you are talking to and at what time. Although a common complaint about bureaucracy, and RIT, is that it is impersonal, harsh, and needlessly wastes time and energy, I found this to work both ways- it may be impersonal and harsh, but only if viewed from an outsider's perspective. While it can be a waste of time, it can also save time, and where it can make the simple impossible it can make the impossible simple. I am not trying to sing the praises of this particular system, but only wish to make the point that it accomplishes objectives like any other medium, in its own subjective manner. Like painting or cinematography or playing the violin, it is not necessarily fair in whose favor it works or towards what end it is used.

.....

But to return to the other, more obvious experiment which took place during the show itself, and concerned itself with viewer reaction: videotapes recorded a total of 16 hours out of a possible 37 hours which the gallery was open during the week, plus the two hour opening. I attempted to establish a system by which the information gathered could be processed so as to be somehow relevant to our previously stated concerns.

There were so many different things occurring when a viewer entered the gallery space: not only where he chose to walk but what he looked at, for how long, whether he touched or refrained from touching both the technologies and the furniture, whether he was present as a viewer or as a student in a class being held in the gallery, the sex and age of the viewer, and so on. All of these factors and others would have a hand



Fig.s 39 & 40

in determining viewer reaction to, and interaction with the installation. In gathering data, I focused on a few basic points: which room, where the viewer went in the space, whether it was a male or female viewer, and whether he or she used the technology. For the telephone “use” was defined as picking the receiver up and holding it to the ear; for the camera “use” was defined as looking through the viewfinder. (See Fig.s 39 and 40.) From the tapes it was clear that if a viewer was going to choose to interact with the space in any way, it was most likely that it would be by doing one of these two things; although I was also interested in less superficial forms of use, such as actually placing a call, taking a picture, sitting on the chairs or writing on the blackboard, such events were so infrequent that to tabulate these results would not have yielded any

useful information.

Some of the relevant guidelines which I used for the tabulation of statistics from the videotapes are as follows:

- * My own activity in the gallery, as well as that of anyone helping me open the gallery, was not included in the data.
- * The activity of persons who were in the gallery for purposes *other* than that of being viewers, for example Cage workers, gallery teaching assistants, and physical plant workers, the gallery guards and students talking to the gallery guards, were not included in the data.
- * Two exceptions to the above rule were: if a person who was in

the gallery for some other purpose than viewing stopped their non-show related activity and appeared to begin to view the show or interact with it in some way, these actions were included in the data.

*Persons who were present in the gallery for purposes of attending a class were included in the data.

*The tapes from the show opening are not included in the data.

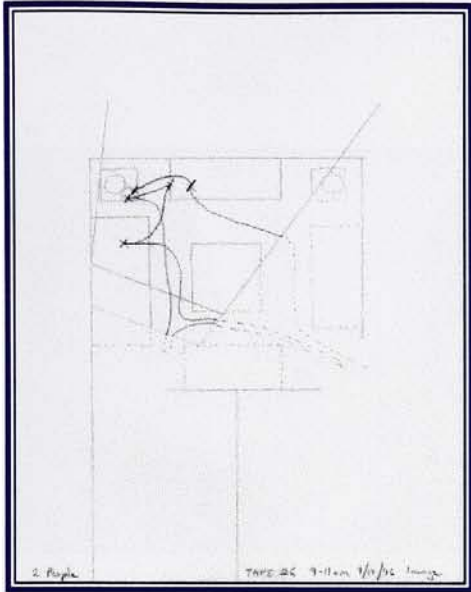


Fig. 41

A chart was drawn for each videotape, tracing the movements of each viewer who entered the space as far as the videotape was able to record it. (See Figs 41 and 42.) On these charts, dotted lines indicate presumed viewer movements off camera, and an “X” indicates a technology “use.” The parameters of vision of the cameras are noted on these charts, and although the classroom camera was able to record every entrant to the gallery, as it had a view of the entry hallway, the lounge camera’s angle of view did not record every person to enter, but only allowed it to see viewers who came at least halfway into the room. At the bottom of each chart the total number of viewers whose paths are recorded is noted, as well as the tape number, time of day and date the tape was made, and which room it shows. (See Appendixes 1 and 2 for the complete set of charts.)

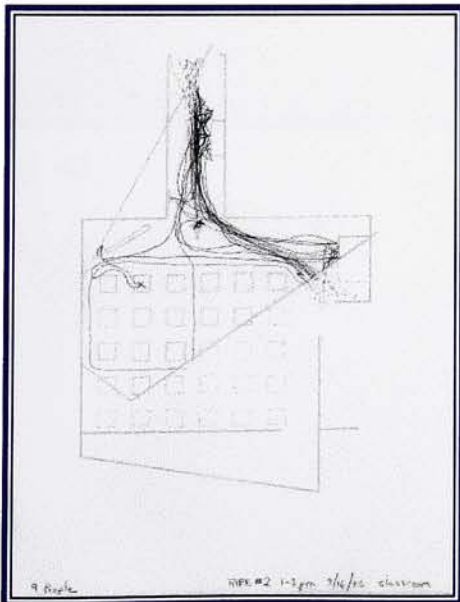


Fig. 42

The most conspicuous result from these charts is their demonstration of a clear, almost uncanny predictability in the movements of the viewers through the gallery. In nearly all the charts there is demonstrated a definitive tendency on the part of the viewer to hover around the four “safe” areas in the gallery: the wall of bureaucracy, the model, the artist’s statement and the thank you list. In fact, a significant number of viewers restricted their view of the show to a rotation between some or all of these points, going directly from one to the next, refusing to engage with, or even passingly observe the vast majority of the installation at all. Another significant percentage of viewers did “drive-by”

viewings, in which they walked directly up to the end of the entrance hallway, peered out off the edge of it into the room, reminiscent of a swimmer at the edge of a diving board, then turned around and exited with equal swiftness.



Fig. 43

The only times these viewer patterns were altered (watching the videotapes I marvelled that they didn't wear a track into the linoleum) was in the instances that a class was held in the gallery. This occurred in three instances: on the second half of tape three, all of tape four, and the majority of tape eight. Tape three records Margaret Wagner holding her gallery management class, which is normally held in the gallery, while tapes four and eight were recorded classes held by Michael Starenko and Ken White respectively. (See Figs. 44, 45 and 47.) Both of the latter two classes normally took place at other locations, and were held in the gallery at my request. In all three of these cases, students filed in and assumed a "student" posture, sitting immediately in one of the tablet arm chairs, and remaining there until dismissed. In

the event that a break was taken by the class, interestingly, many students then took on a "viewer" posture, strolling around the gallery to (surprise), read the wall of bureaucracy, regard the model, read the artist's statement and thank you list, as we can see in Figure 45, in a comparison between Michael Starenko's class during lecture, and that same class during a break.

A few conclusions may be drawn from the information given by the tapes and their corresponding charts. Through the dislocation of ordinary, usable objects, and an attempt to showcase and/or examine how such objects encouraged certain behaviors, most often what we would

presume to be the “ordinary” behavior which would have normally

accompanied these objects was thwarted, obscuring examinations of how they might ordinarily have functioned. Rather than tending to prefer one room/environment over the other, the vast majority of viewers seemed to have an equally alienated reaction to both environments, seeking to escape both.

Escape usually took the form of an almost exaggerated attention to the “fringe” aspects of the installation, the most popular

with the viewers to spend time with presumably because they were the elements with which they were most comfortable, in that they knew what was expected of them in terms of a response. In all four cases, the

“fringe” elements were items to either be looked at and/or read- a traditional viewer posture and one with which the viewers were apparently much more comfortable.

Based upon the almost surprising consistency of these results, I would contest that whether the viewer is entering the Metropolitan Museum of Art, or something which resembles his own living room, if he has been told he is entering a gallery or a display place for “art”- his behavior will be virtually identical: he will resort to what he has been conditioned is the appropriate “viewer posture,” a look-but-don’t-touch attitude which emphasizes the visual above all else, with reading coming in a close second. Due to the utterly familiar nature of the objects, and the fact that these are not just replicas, but plainly *are* the objects which would be simply used in

any other context on campus without so much as a second thought, we are given a good idea of the overwhelming precedence that the context of the gallery is taking in these instances. Both the objects and the context



Fig. 44



Fig. 45



Fig. 46



Fig. 47



Fig. 48



have their own learned behaviors associated with them, however what we have now done is to put them into competition with one another- they are in direct opposition. The posture which wins out with the average viewer is the one associated with the context.

The only exception to this is to be found in the cases where the gallery is being used in some less purely viewing-oriented context, either as a classroom, or as a setting for the opening. In these cases it was remarkable how easily viewer demeanor shifted from one of apprehension and unwillingness to engage with the environment, to one of use without so much as a second thought. See Figures 46, 47 and 48 for a direct comparison of viewer demeanor in both the “classroom” and “lounge” spaces during, respectively, the opening, Ken White’s class, and normal gallery hours. Once the viewer is pointedly directed by an authority to use the environments, either implicitly by the artist at the opening, or by the professor of a class, suddenly the objects are returned to a dull familiarity and “museum self-consciousness” is all but forgotten, even with regard to the surveillance cameras. This was equally true of the classroom as well as of the lounge, as observable by the fact that one student spent the entirety of Michael Starenko’s class sitting in the lounge, yet fully participated in the class, as well as the fact that Ken White’s class spent equal amounts of time in each of the two rooms, with no noticeable changes in behavior. Just as in other instances viewers had appeared equally uncomfortable with both of the spaces, in these cases most students appeared equally *comfortable* with both the room/environments.

At what point do what something “is” and how we behave toward it intersect? If we define a space as a “classroom” or a “lounge” or any other space for that matter, most people will not only accept such a desig-

nation, but behave accordingly in that space: they furnish it with objects which will encourage, direct and even circumscribe those actions which are associated with the functions of that type of space, and when users enter that space they will automatically begin to behave in ways which are considered more or less appropriate to that space. One of the questions the installation asks is: what happens when the objects change, and no longer facilitate the activities which we associate with the definition of that space? Which takes precedence, the conduct associated with the space, or the conduct associated with the contents of the space? In this



Fig. 49

case we have observed it could just as easily be either, dependant on what the room-viewer's expectations have been conditioned to be. But is it possible for both uses or attitudes to be present at the same time?

By far my favorite moment recorded on the videotapes occurred on the last day of the installation. Ken White was having his undergraduate class in the gallery, and after spending the first half of class in the "classroom," they moved into the "lounge" for the remainder. On the classroom videotape you can faintly hear the class occurring off camera, when two non-class member viewers entered the space looking around. (See Fig. 49.) Coats and books had been left on the tablet arm-chairs, and the blackboard had writing on it- and unlike previous viewers, they looked briefly at *these* elements,

also peering into the "lounge" from a distance. Here, then, was a moment of such intersection.

Although the argument could be made that students would be forced to assume a "student" posture no matter where the professor decided to hold class, what is interesting is that even in cases which are

completely voluntary- as at the opening, or during the regular gallery hours, where people are completely free to use the space however they choose: they could use it as a study space, have a meeting there, rearrange the furniture, turn the lamps off, write messages on the board, take a nap on the couch...any number of possible activities *could* have taken place, but viewers voluntarily chose, almost unanimously, simply to remain viewers, by their *own* direction, rather than make any decision about engaging in any way with the objects around them.

An alternate argument could be made that whatever people came to the space either expecting or needing to do would determine what they were going to do- if they came to the gallery with the intention of “looking at art” then they would look at whatever was in the gallery. If they entered the gallery with the intention of attending an opening reception, then they would be prepared to look, perhaps eat and drink, and possibly sit or talk. Whatever purpose was motivating the entering person to the gallery would dictate their actions, designed to accomplish whatever their goal had been- regardless of the context or the objects.

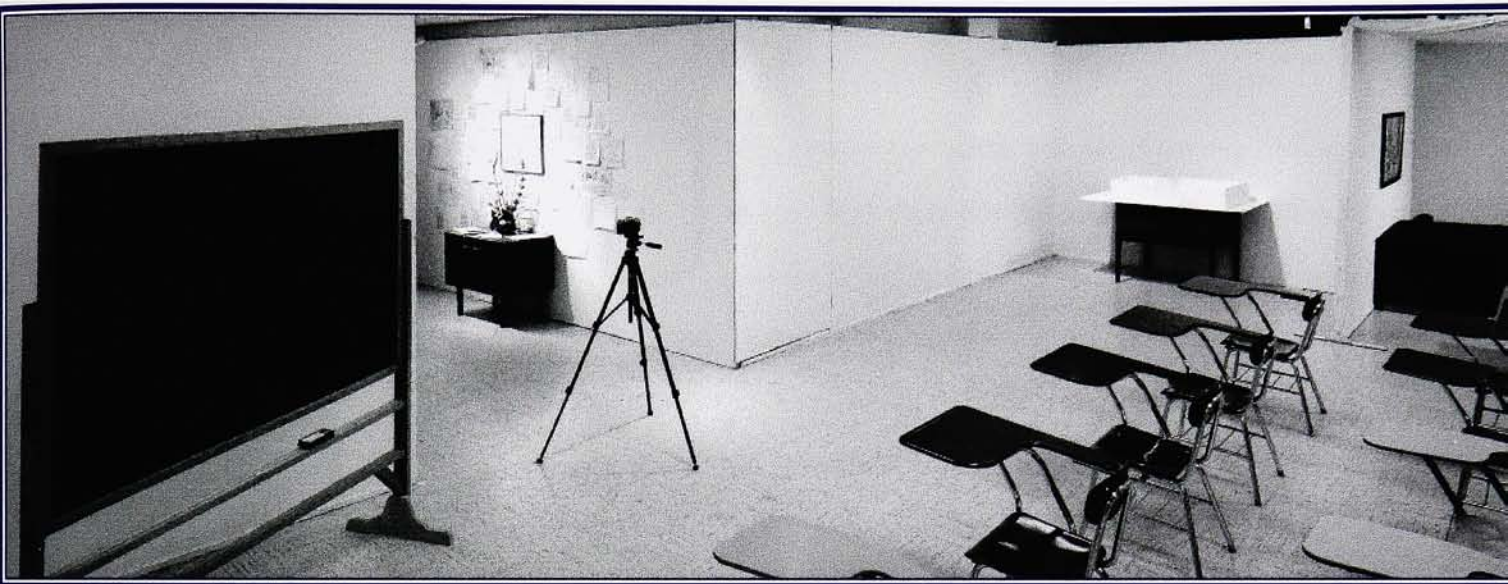
While putting the classroom and the lounge on display in the gallery perhaps stifled examination of what such environments may actually encourage in their “home” environments, the fact that their meanings could be overridden by the context points to the construction of another RIT space: that of “the gallery.” As we have observed in this experiment, it issues an overwhelming directive to the viewer, both in its construction (white walls, simple construction, little distraction), and in our social conditioning as to appropriate art atmosphere behavior as being, above all, to *view*. In this way we can see a similarity to the way we have observed both the classroom and the camera to function- again it is a one-way, and what we have previously defined as a “masculine” communication.

.....

In addition to our conclusion regarding viewer reaction to the gallery in terms of their movements through the gallery as observed on the videotapes, we may make a statistical analysis regarding the technology “use” es as previously mentioned. As detailed on the Classroom and Lounge statistics charts in Appendix 3, for the classroom a total of 64 men, and a total of 40 women entered while the video was recording. For the lounge, a total of 13 men and a total of 11 women entered the lounge environment (far enough to be seen by the videocamera,) while it was recording. Out of these numbers, a total of 11 men and 8 women “used” the camera, and a total of 3 men and 11 women “used” the phone. If we attempt to determine the likelihood for each sex to use the technology of each room using these figures we arrive at an interesting finding: that while the likelihoods for men and women to use the camera, and for men to use the phone vary only slightly, we find that statistically women were *more than twice as likely* to use the phone, than for any other single technology use by either sex. (See “Degree of Likelihood” bar graph, Appendix 3.)

This finding would seem to indicate that women were comfortable with accepting the telephone as an object which they could touch or use to such a degree, that despite its presence in what was otherwise overwhelmingly treated as a “no touch” art context, they were more readily able to engage with it than they were with the camera, and than men were with using either technology. Such an observation might indicate a greater degree of familiarity with the telephone on the part of these female viewers in a very literal way, or perhaps more metaphorically

point to a greater willingness to engage in a two-way communication. It might simply point to the environment, indicating that women were more comfortable in the “feminine” environment and thus would be more at ease engaging with any technology in this context.



The Installation as Photograph; Art as Furniture- Furniture as Art

Underlying these “anthropological” or experimental interests of the show there lies the fundamental question of why such an investigation should be considered to fall under a conception of “art.” Because this installation was created for the purpose of a Master of Fine Arts Thesis, coupled with the fact that it was held in the School of Photographic Arts and Sciences Gallery, which routinely shows objects which fall perhaps more readily into conventionally accepted definitions of “art” in this community, one may assume correctly that the installation is intended to be considered art, with myself as artist.

Much of the uncertainty surrounding what is and is not accepted as “art” stems from an ambiguity in the term itself. While most people would agree that certain traditional indicators, for example the use of a canvas and oil paints, point to an object’s rightful status as an “art object,” whether or not that art object is considered to be a particularly valuable or “art-ful” work, deserving of discussion or display is quite another matter. An object can be an artwork in terms of its placement within a system of classification, without being a “*work of art*,” in terms of denoting a system of evaluation. For our purposes here “artwork,” will refer to the conventionally accepted object considered to fall under the category of art as a classification. Conversely, a distinguished and particularly “creative” or exceptional object we will refer to as a “*work of*

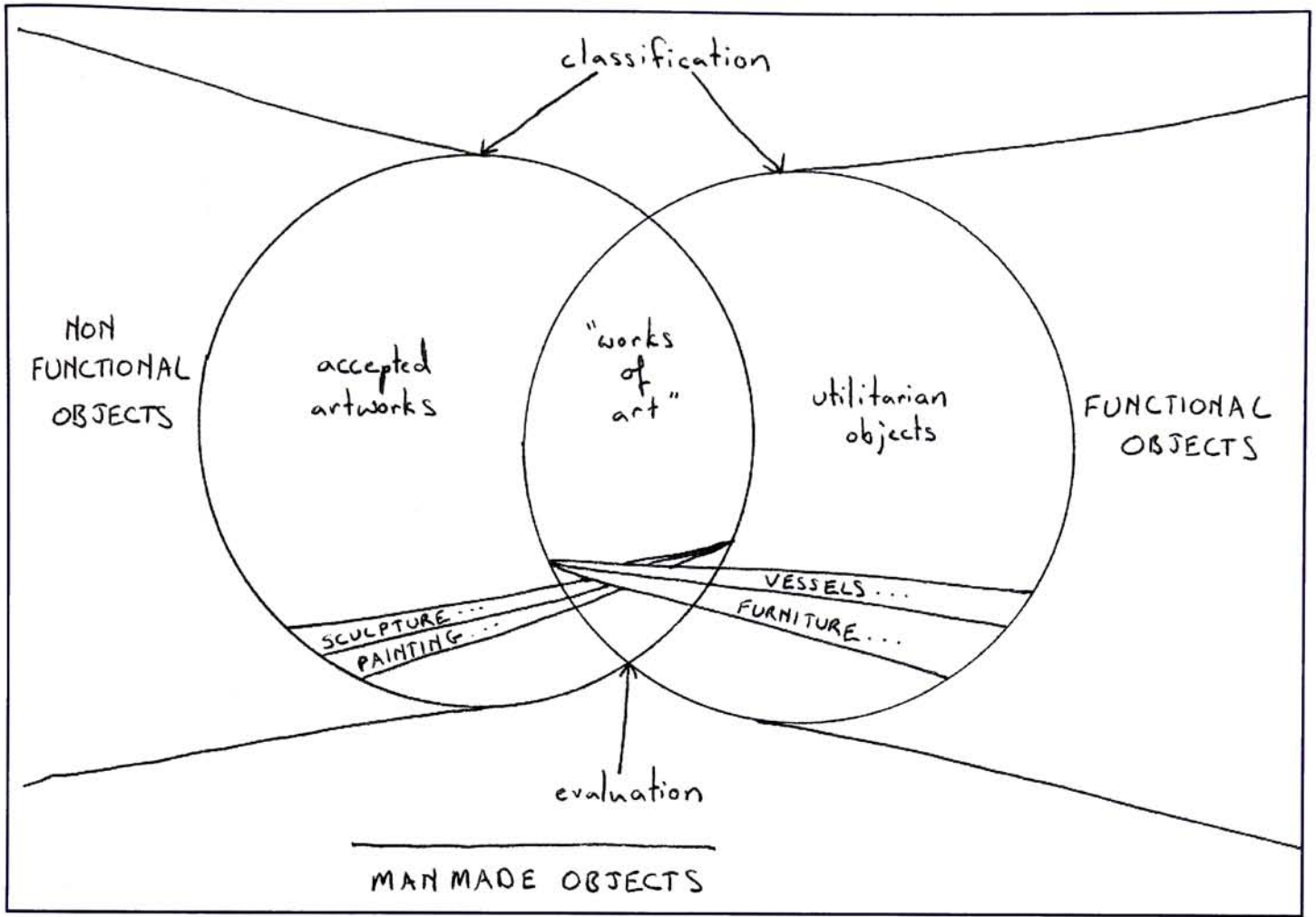


Fig. 50

art" in the praiseworthy sense.

Just as an object can be an artwork, without attaining status as a "work of art," so is it also that not all accepted "works of art" necessarily fall into accepted categories of artwork. For example, although the vast majority of furniture is not ordinarily considered or treated as artwork, we are nonetheless familiar with seeing furniture in an art context- the Metropolitan Museum of Art as well as the Museum of Modern Art come to mind as immediate and very different examples of this phenomenon. The presence of such objects in an artwork setting is a function of their being recognized as exceptional, as "works of art." (See Fig. 50.) This is the very opposite path that a painting would pursue in its progress to the Met or MOMA, that is through acceptance initially as a conventional artwork, to be gauged only secondarily for its value as a "work of art." The

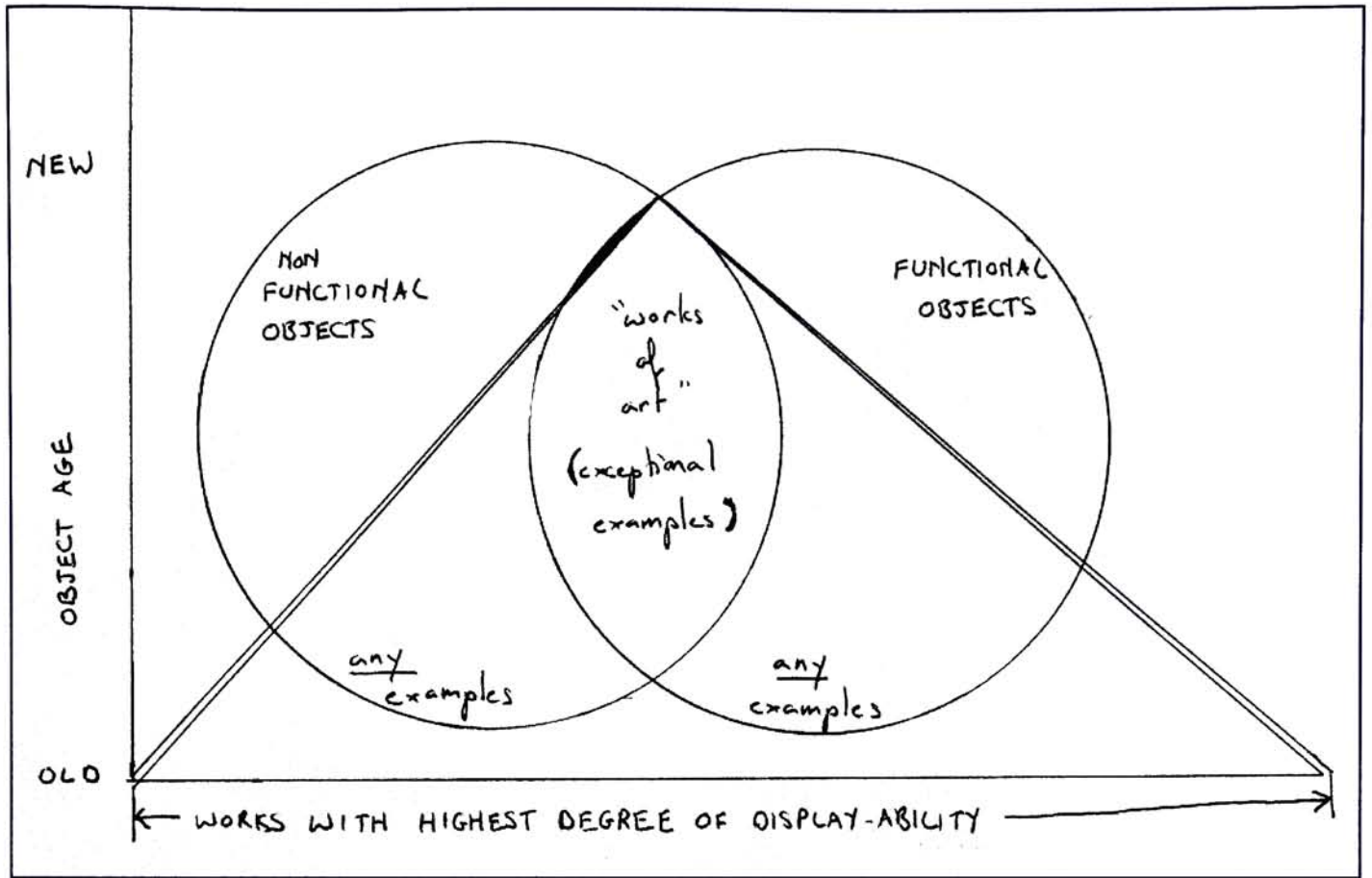


Fig. 51

third factor in the equation by which we determine display potential of the object in an art context is anthropological value: as we may observe, the more age an object has, the less necessary it becomes for the work to be a notable “work of art” in order to be considered valuable and worthy of attention and display, in which case degree of rarity of *any* example stands in for a degree of rarity due to an exceptional degree of quality, (see fig. 51). Even the mediocre object, in the process of attaining age, may develop artistic significance as the only remaining example of a particular style or technique.

When many people today enter a space which has been indicated to be a display area for art, such as a gallery or museum, they often expect to see the first two of these forces at work- if not all three- without consciously realizing that they are distinct criteria. Each person has his or her own personal conception of what comprises “legitimate art media,”

which may range from a sensibility which expects art objects to fall into discrete, easily recognized and very traditional forms such as painting, sculpture and print-making, to a sensibility which accepts not only anything which has been presented in a museum or gallery, but also many works which appear in a non-art context as well. Because I have an ongoing concern for context and audience, I wanted to create a work which would engage with these expectations in a semi-challenging manner, with the end result that the viewer would both accept the work as art, and yet have his preconceptions about art called into question at the same time. The installation was therefore recognizable as art through its presence in an art context, yet it was not immediately identifiable as belonging to a category of artworks: nothing outward about it would necessarily lead the viewer to assume that these were either outstanding, or rare and antique examples of academic furnishings, which leads naturally to a question on the viewer's part as to what the rationale for display *was* in this case. Through this re-presentation which placed non-art contents in an art context, I hoped to confound the viewer, causing him to rethink the fabricated, constructed nature of both art and academic spaces and objects.

When, with the advent of the age of mechanical reproduction, (Benjamin, 1968) our notion of "skill" and "dexterity" changed drastically, it changed both our conception of the parameters of categories of artwork, as well as altering forever our system of evaluation for exceptional "*works of art.*" Whereas previously the degree of manual dexterity of labor seemed inextricable from a presumed innovative thinking on the part of the mind, now the question of manual dexterity seemed moot; a machine could produce objects not only quicker and more cheaply, but more reliably and accurately than the human hand. In addition, unlimited

numbers of these flawless reproductions became possible- the “one-of-a-kind” unique art object no longer was proof of value in and of itself. Many in the art world found this split between the skill of handwork and the skill of conception of the idea to signify that the entire burden of proof for the exceptional work now lay in the arena of human intelligence. Because it was no longer considered relevant, consideration of craft in the evaluation of a work ceased to be an independent value; evaluation of expert execution became subordinate to the primacy of the “idea.”

Nearly from the moment of photography’s inception, cultural uses of the medium have played an instrumental role in this technological revolution and the corresponding devaluation of hand-craft. Even before becoming remotely accepted as a legitimate art medium, photography had seemed to render rationales for the existence of many of the traditional art media obsolete. Photography has suffered as a medium ever since from varying degrees of an Oedipal complex: guilty, ambivalent and self-conscious with regard to its own status as an accepted art medium. Public perception of photography did not help the case, considering it an “un-artlike” medium, even as it was replacing painting, drawing and print-making in many contexts. The culprit of this unwillingness to accept photography fully as a new art medium was the medium’s perceived association with science and technology, dismissed by a majority of the public as an inversion of the creative process: rather than making “something” out of “nothing” as people perceived to happen in painting, drawing, ceramics, weaving, and so on, photography has been seen as a more or less scientific matter of simply “selecting” or editing- that is, out of all the possible elements within the field of vision of the photographer, this is what he chose to point his viewfinder at. Whereas a viewer

regarding an average, competent painting of a bowl of fruit would likely recognize that it is not every person who has the skills required to accurately convey the aspect of a bowl of fruit in paint, that same viewer would undoubtedly be less impressed with an average, competent photograph of a bowl of fruit, for such is the nature of photography that the part which requires skill is not the achieving of a believable likeness. Since photography's invention, photographers have endeavored to change this widespread view, in the interest of having their work included in the definition of "art" and correspondingly included in conventional "art" contexts. Comparable to the phenomenon we described before with regard to the acceptance of utilitarian objects in an art context, (see fig. X), photography was considered in many ways a utilitarian medium, and was not automatically accepted by the public as belonging to a category of artwork; it too had to follow the reverse path from traditional artworks, proving itself first with individual exceptional "*works of art.*" Arguably, all of modernist photography may be seen as a series of different strategies towards this end of proving the "creative" aspect of photography, in spite of its scientific heritage.

This is why, I believe, that photographers, more so than artists of other media, are so concerned with- and about- postmodernism. Given the fact that from its very origins modernist photography has devoted itself to convincing the general populace that it is in fact a creative process, if perhaps in a formally different *manner* than the other arts, one can understand why postmodernism's desire to reform notions of creativity may be seen as particularly threatening to the photographer, perhaps much more so than to the practitioners of other media.

In fact, despite their differences in technique, the creative process of the other arts and that of photography are revealed by postmodern

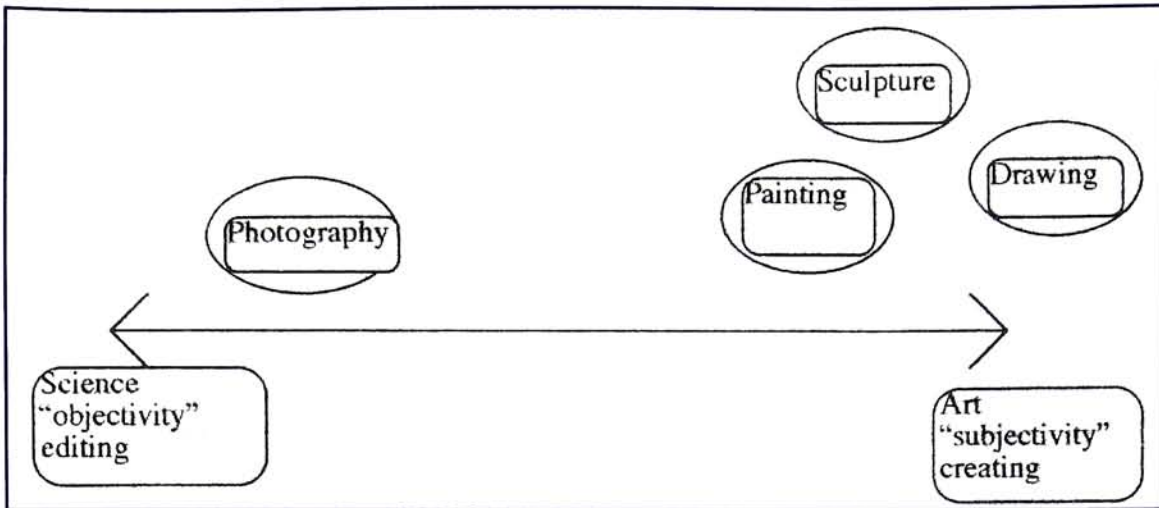
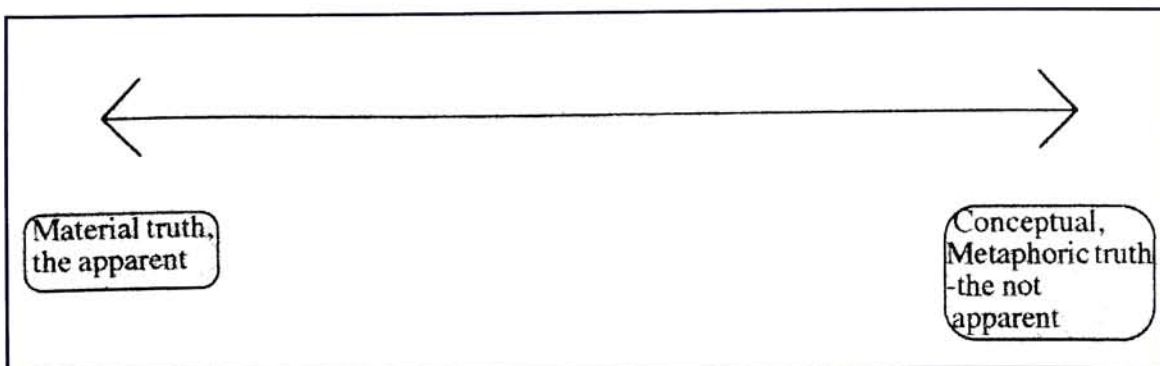


Fig. 52

thought to work in much *more* similar manner than modernism would have us believe. It is photography's association with science, and our dissociation of science from art, which results in the misperception and leaves photography on the other end of the spectrum of art, creating but creating almost in spite of itself, through the back door of science, (see Fig. 52). Rather than placing these two terms in opposition with one another, art versus science, creating something from nothing as opposed to borrowing from the already extant, we could more accurately describe all artistic activity as involving science to greater or lesser degrees, and all creative activity as involving science to greater or lesser degrees, in neither case creating a thing where there was nothing, but rather borrowing in *every* case to some degree. Conversely we may also conclude that to borrow or edit is to be creative in *every* case to some degree. We can more accurately replace the opposition of art versus science, or creating

Fig. 53



as at odds with editing, with an opposition of the material , “apparent” versus the conceptual, the “not apparent,” (see Fig. 53).

However what becomes of our discrete art categories in this new light? Rather than seeing categories of artistic media as immutable and discrete, it would be more accurate to acknowledge the constructed nature of these media categories, to acknowledge the fact that they derive more from the convenience of categorization by historians and society than from a fundamental, universal nature in art. If in photography we borrow likenesses of objects in light, we also borrow the technology of the camera, as well as strategy of acceptable modes of display; in order to create a painting one must borrow the likeness of a model, the likeness of colors, the idea of stretching a canvas and applying pigment to it. No painting, photograph, or other artwork is without precedent, not even the first cave painting, for even then materials and images were selected from the world and implemented- in an editing process. All art then, involves editing, and an act of re-presentation.

Likewise, neither does the most straightforward, documentary or “scientific” elude aspects of the “creative.” Even a photograph taken automatically by a machine, which would seem the very picture of objectivity, is giving an illusion of objectivity, for there is a person behind the programming of that machine who made certain choices, had a previsualized conception of what results were desired and would be obtained, which he then attempted to carry out- no matter how unexciting. All art then involves the creativity of the not already extant, the not apparent, or the metaphor.

In this way we may see that, rather than opposing forces of “creation” out of “nothing” and scientific “examination” of extant things- we more accurately describe the situation as a case of the inextricability of

these two activities of creating and editing, art and science, one never present without the other. We never create out of “nothing” but must always be borrowing when we create; likewise, we cannot be scientific and examine, without being “creative” or conceptual, without some element of the “not-apparent” being involved. The previously distinct

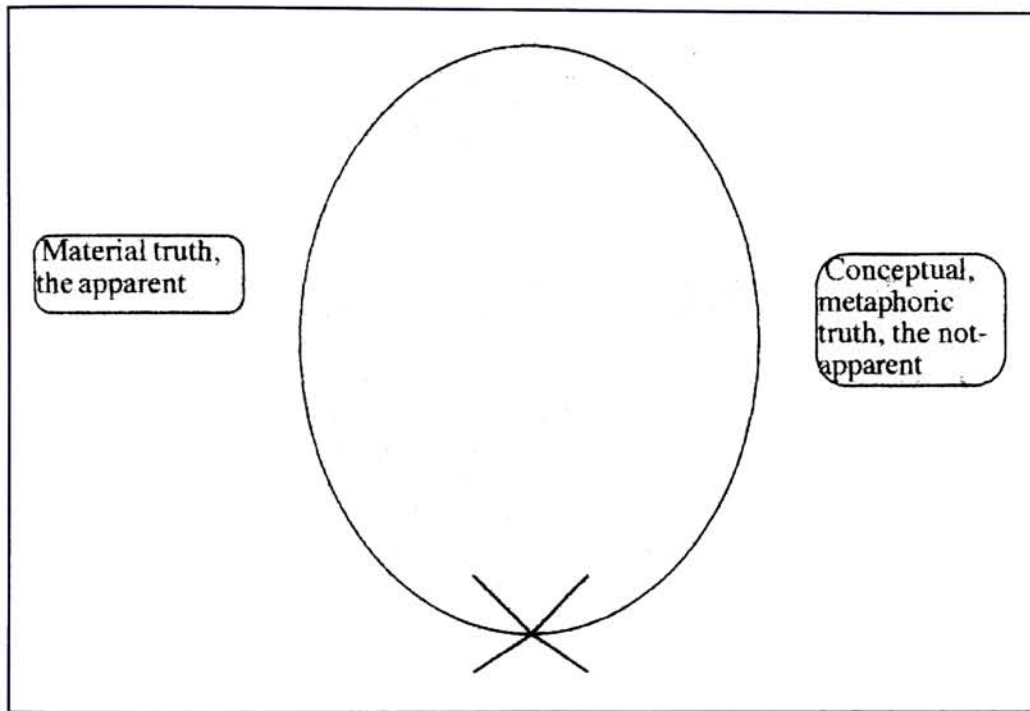


Fig. 54

media now appear as they are: simply different strategies along a spectrum of continuous possibilities for connecting the material to the conceptual, the apparent and the not-apparent. And this is what the installation surely strives to do, and this is why it should be considered art.

In the artists state-

ment posted in the installation, I made reference to the fact that, seen in a particular light, the installation could be seen as a photograph, that is it “takes the editing aspect of photography and implements it literally, rather than editing with the assistance of silver halide in two dimensions,” the installation was “editing with the assistance of dozens of people at RIT, in three.” All artworks involve a re-presentation of one sort or another. Although traditionally such re-presentations have been more readily distinguishable from the aspects of reality they are intended to display,- as in the difference between a bowl of fruit and a painting of a bowl of fruit- this distinction need not necessarily be so drastic in order for a designation of art to be accepted. It is in such re-presentation that

we find a re-examination or metaphor. I would argue that although this installation shows realistic elements, it nonetheless is art, because in re-contextualization, in re-presentation, this is where the activity of all art truly takes place: that whether it is through a painting of a couch, or through the placing of a couch in the SPAS Gallery, in both cases what is being accomplished is a change in meaning, simply due to the change in our perspective towards it. Much in the way a microscope operates, taking these elements and focusing attention upon them may serve to reveal meaning. The line which we previously drew may then be seen to turn in on itself, (see Fig. 54) more accurately forming a circle: surface, scientific or objective truths may *lead to*, not away from, metaphoric, not-apparent, subjective truths, as well as vice-versa.



How I Learned to Stop Worrying: A Conclusion

Previously we had made the observation that the majority of gallery entrants behaved toward the installation in a “hands-off” posture of looking and reading only, much in the fashion of receivers of a “masculine” or one-way form of communication which we had associated with the classroom and the camera. This is to interpret the apparent lack of viewer interaction with the installation not as a response in and of itself, but rather as the lack of *any* dialogue or reciprocation. It could, however, be suggested that the viewers actions and movements through the gallery *were* a type of response, or at the very least that those few intrepid viewers who sat on a chair or looked through the camera *were* in some way making an attempt to cross through their pre-conceived notions of art as a one-way communication.

Yet, I would argue that although most viewers appeared at least marginally conscious of the videocamera’s presence, rather than attempting to engage with them directly through a confrontation with the camera, or indirectly through purposefully allowing one’s actions to remain within the frame of view of the camera, instead most viewers appeared to find the cameras an intrusive and watchful presence, almost intimidating- as if fearing that if their reaction to the installation was “incorrect,” some vague unidentified presence would be aware of it. Many behaved as if they walked slowly and softly through the space, that they might avoid

alerting the camera to their presence, as if it were some sort of gallery guard itself. Rather than communicatory, such a response seemed a deliberate attempt *to avoid* responding. Even if the viewer somehow subconsciously intended for his responses to become part of the video-taped data, it is hard not to view the relatively rare actions of picking up the telephone- one viewer picked up a couch cushion- as motivated primarily by curiosity. Rather than *through* a desire to communicate, the actions seemed to occur *in spite of* a desire *not* to communicate. The viewer was not responding with information, so much as he seemed to be seeking out more information than already provided, as if to somehow justify the presence of ordinary objects in a privileged display space by discovering something extraordinary about them.

Given then, that viewer response was overwhelmingly similar, and characterized by both a curiosity for more information, and yet a reluctance to provide any responding reaction, can we say that this installation “encouraged” a one-directional communication? There is certainly an argument to be made that it is the very nature of art to communicate in such a one-directional, “masculine” manner, because of its involvement with “exhibiting knowledge and skill, and...holding center stage through... performance.” The installation was of my own preparation and design, rigidly arranged in its execution, with video cameras acting as surrogate artist’s eyes causing a mildly Big Brother-esque effect, and the ensuing “statistics” gathered from them interpreted toward my own previsualized conclusion. Are the results gathered indeed statistics, or rather “statistics,” as the RIT classroom was to my “Classroom?”

Yet, besides the presence of a gallery guard to prevent the removal of any of the borrowed objects, what aspect of the installation *prevented* a back and forth dialogue from taking place? Aside from more

conventional forms of response outside the “medium” of the show such as written or verbally communicated response, couldn’t some other response be imagined within the medium of borrowed furniture and videocameras? The moving of objects, writing on the board or directing actions at the videocamera are the first reactions which come to mind although certainly many more are possible- bringing other articles *in* to the space for example.

In the alternative can viewer reaction be attributed instead to a social preconditioning on the proper manner in which to view art regardless of the particulars of any one individual show? As we have seen, social preconditioning does play an impressive role: the SPAS Gallery not being a particularly overwhelming display space, it nonetheless retains fragments of the aura one would find in the Metropolitan Museum of Art or other hallowed art environment, as we have seen that the objects for display in this instance are not only like ordinary RIT objects, but they in fact are the very same objects which would ordinarily be used without so much as a second thought. The difference in their treatment by their viewers is due entirely, it would seem, to the mere shift from one room or building to another. Although the generic indicators- white walls, etc.- are all there, rather than being the result of inherent qualities of the gallery it would seem due to the label placed upon the space by authority figures in control of it.

Yet we have seen that such preconditioning on the part of the viewer can be just as easily overridden as declared. We can point also to the arbitrariness of the designation if we remember the instances in which different authority figures designated the gallery to take on different roles, such as that of classroom setting or “party” setting (the opening.) Despite the fact that the installation had not physically changed at all, the reac-

tions and demeanors of the viewers changed accordingly with each redefinition. It would seem that all the elements of the nature of the installation, the preconditioning of the viewer's expectation, and the authoritarian designation, all may be overridden in specific instances, but in their working in conjunction with one another, they bring about a highly predictable, almost orchestrated response.

Even so, there are brief moments, such as the moment of "intersection" I referred to earlier which occurred during Ken White's class when two viewers wandered in, or the instance in which one viewer spent equal amounts of time sitting and reading in first the "classroom," and then the "lounge," in effect conducting an experiment *on himself*. Can this be read as a reciprocating gesture, or is it motivated again solely by a form of viewer curiosity for his own information? The significant aspect about this example is the fact that the experiment has been commanded by the viewer for a moment. This situation may be seen as analogous to the one I faced in the creation of an installation, the result of my own experiment being conducted within the parameters predetermined by what I was allowed by RIT to do, so too was this viewer conducting his own experiment within the parameters which I had established. The possibility for the viewer to respond in an analogous manner to that of the artist is demonstrated by this example.

I am, however, not interested in privileging one form of viewer interaction over another, so much as I am in discussing the supposedly "inherent" nature of the art communication and positing it against our social preconditioning toward it. Rather than setting out to favor either the monologue or the dialogue as a sort of ideal communication for art, or attempting to statistically prove Dr. Tannen's hypothesis concerning strictly human verbal communication and my extensions of it, encom-

passing the more subtle and pervasive communication techniques of human constructed technologies and environments, I am more interested in the tensions which result when we realize that these questions are far less clearly defined than they may seem. Through my installation, in combination with my paper, I have attempted to produce a work which would ideally not so much come to a concluding point, but rather would “hover,” calling into question the validity of placing such terms in polar opposition as “art” and “science,” “object” and “idea,” “monologue” and “dialogue,” in hopes of illuminating the assumptions which we come to art with, and placing them on display.

Ideally the installation hovered in *between* definitions of conceptual and traditional art forms: certainly a conceptual piece, but composed not of alienating objects about which people would have no response to refer to, but of familiar and even comfortable ones about which many people, (the object’s everyday viewers), demonstrated a wide variety of emotions ranging from personal attachment to departmental self definition and power- not aesthetically pleasing per se, but not devoid of any underlying aesthetic either, purposefully arranged, with careful attention to detail, and with perhaps an aesthetically pleasing concept- not demonstrating skills of hand-craft, but rather a variety of ostensibly “non-art” related skills (for what are artistic skills but skills borrowed from other disciplines and put in the service of art?) and bureaucratic strategies developed over a period of time- purely conceptual in many ways, yet maintaining very purposefully a solid, sculptural, material presence. In its rationale, the installation could as easily be art behaving in a scientific way, as science behaving in an artistic way. Ideally it is a piece to be accessible not to one audience or another, but rather to many different possible audiences through many different possible aesthetics: whether

oriented toward intellectual discussion, an aesthetically pleasing concept, a critical investigation, a scientific experiment, or simply a having provided a temporary, alternative space in which to perform some of the everyday RIT activities of studying, relaxing, attending or giving a class.



Fig. 55



Fig. 56

As the show's alternate title, as well as the paradoxical nature of the term itself might imply, "conceptual art" can be a difficult thing for an artist to embrace, many traditionally trained artists reacting toward it in the manner of a typist reacting to a computer- as if the advent of one had brought about the obsolescence of the other. At the same time, it can be liberating to the philosophical discussion which lies beneath issues of material aesthetics, bringing it out full force where it

had previously and necessarily been subordinate. I think much of the drive, and perhaps the humor, behind my work lies in an unwillingness to see things in stark oppositions or to let assumptions go unexamined. It is acceptable if in the end result we may find that we have simply come full circle, in particular with regard to a piece such as this which has no end product if not the discussion, that it is the revolving discussion itself, rather than an ending point, which makes the work worth doing.

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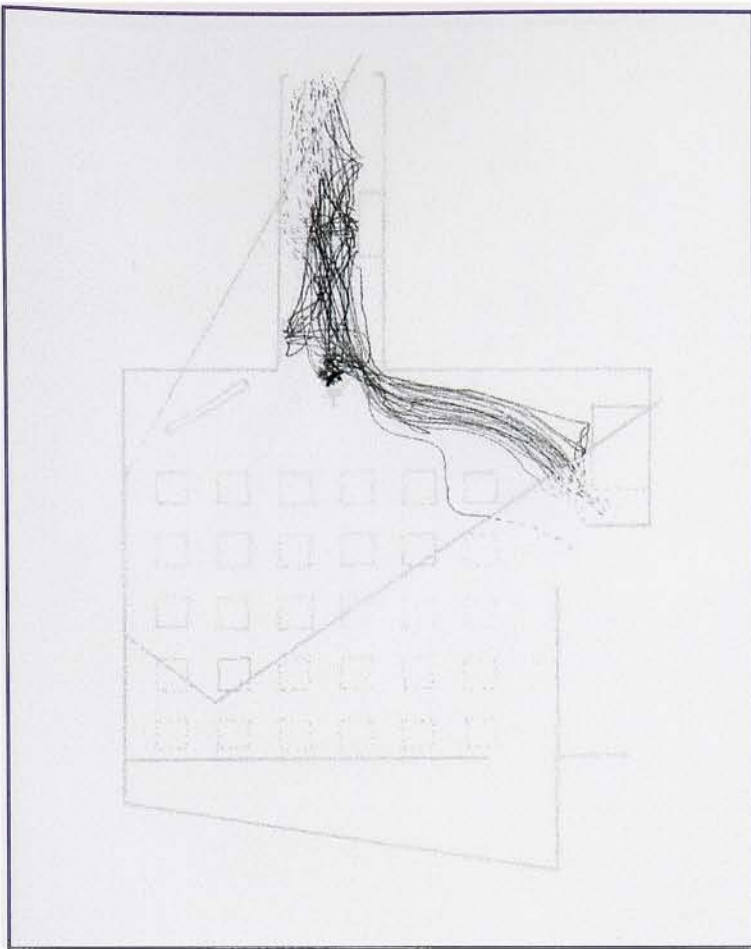
In many respects it is difficult to cite particular artists who have influenced my work, for it could get to be a very long list indeed. Those who are of relevance to our discussion here are those who can be seen to be straddling some of these same definitions that were discussed above, questioning in various ways our definitions of art. Christo, Hans Haacke and Robert Smithson all have dealt with either bringing works of art into

the “real” world, or bringing the “real” world into the art display context, discussing the issue of the borders or limits of the artwork. Christo and Haacke both specifically dealt, in very different ways, with issues of bureaucracy as a type of medium and as subject matter.

Two specific works I saw in Rochester were very influential to my own work: RIT professors Alex Miokovic and Linda Levinson’s “Coffee Cantata,” (see Fig. 55) and RIT MFA student Deborah Rieders’ “Signs” piece (see Fig. 56). “Coffee Cantata” involved the setting up of an actual working cafe serving coffee and cappuccino, in the SPAS Gallery; “Signs” was part of a thesis show which also took place in the SPAS Gallery, but this particular group of pieces were strategically placed about the RIT campus along roads and pathways. Both of these works, again, called into question our assumptions about the definition and contexts of art, and “non-art,” bringing to my attention assumptions we have about “borders,” not only of art pieces and art display areas, but what was even considered possible to accomplish. Certainly the ideas of posting temporary signs or opening a temporary cafe do not seem unusually difficult at first, but when we consider that these artists were in need of getting permission and assistance from both RIT and non-RIT related people, and convincing them all that it was worthwhile to help them with these projects, despite the fact that they would be temporary, they did not take on the traditional appearance of “artwork,” and that had never, we are assuming, been done before in these contexts, one begins to glimpse the challenge presented by such seemingly ordinary tasks, simply due to the shift in their context, from one room to another, or from indoors to out.

Appendix 1

Classroom Charts



Classroom Tape #1

9-11 am

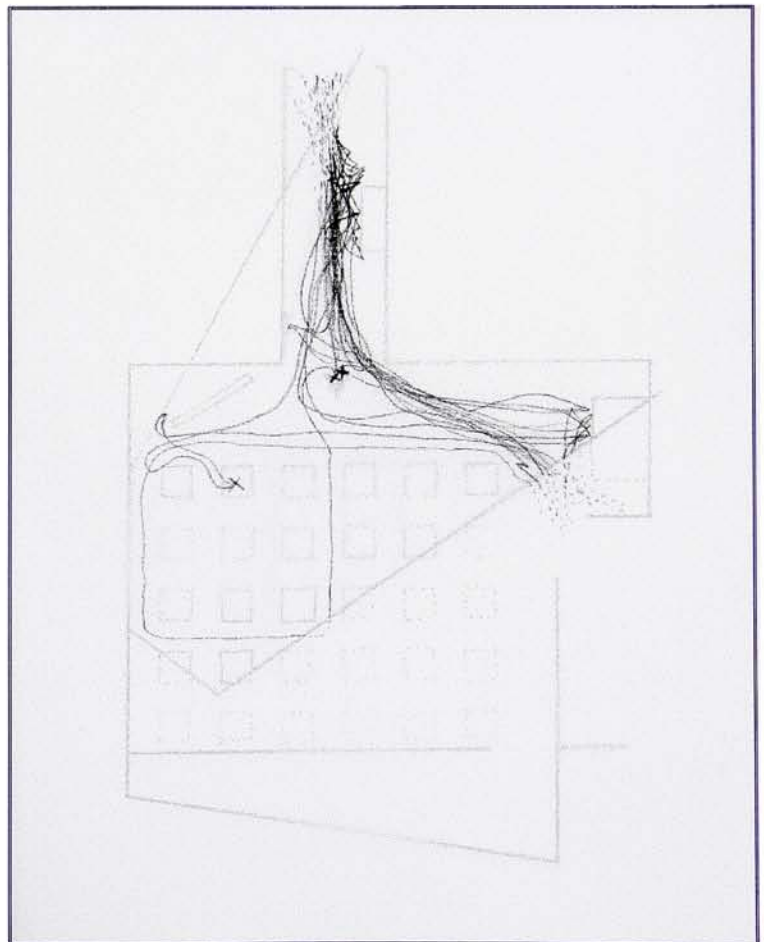
9/16/96

Total People: 11

5 Women

6 Men

Camera Use: 2 Women



Classroom Tape #2

1-3 pm

9/16/96

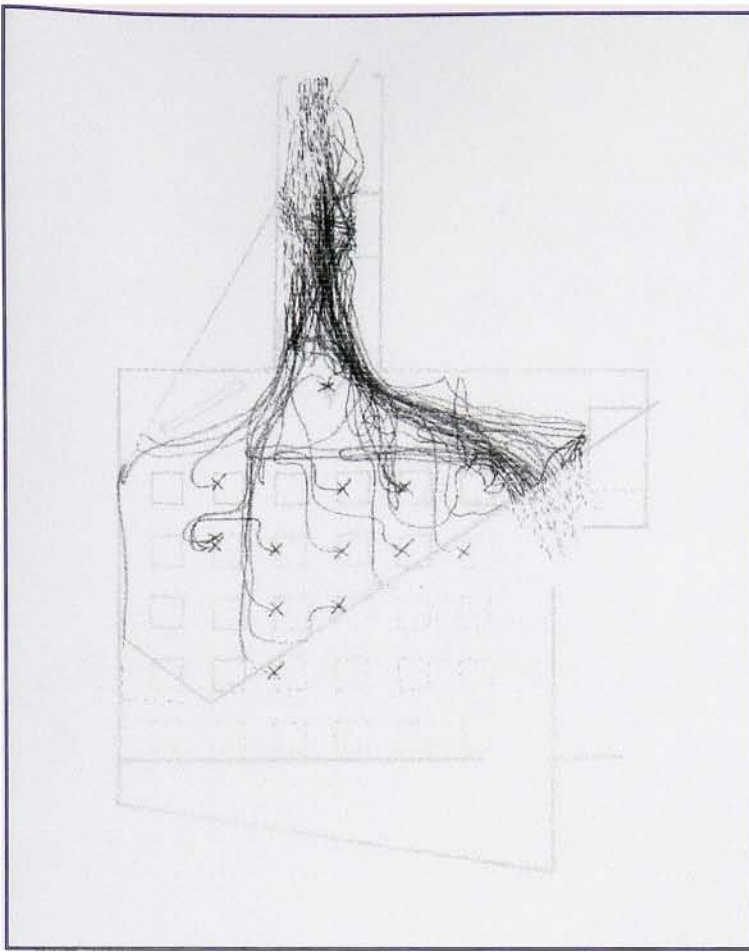
Total People: 9

4 Women

5 Men

Camera Use: 1 Woman,

1 Man



Classroom Tape #3

9-11 am

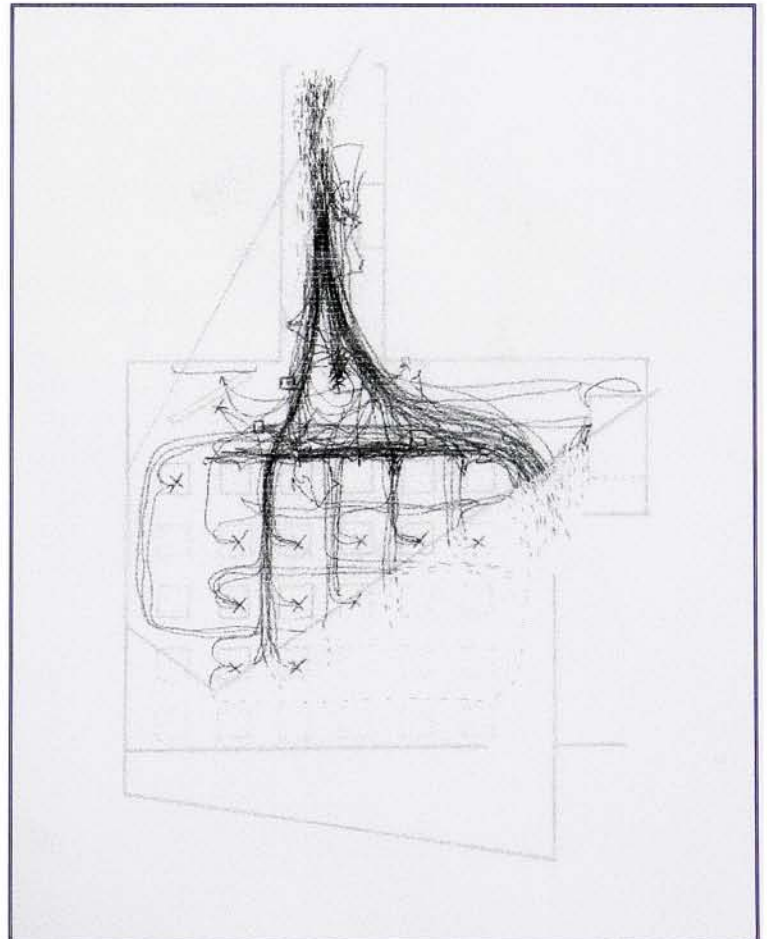
9/17/96

Total People: 25

11 Women

14 Men

Camera Use: 1 Man



Classroom Tape #4

7-8:30 pm

9/17/96

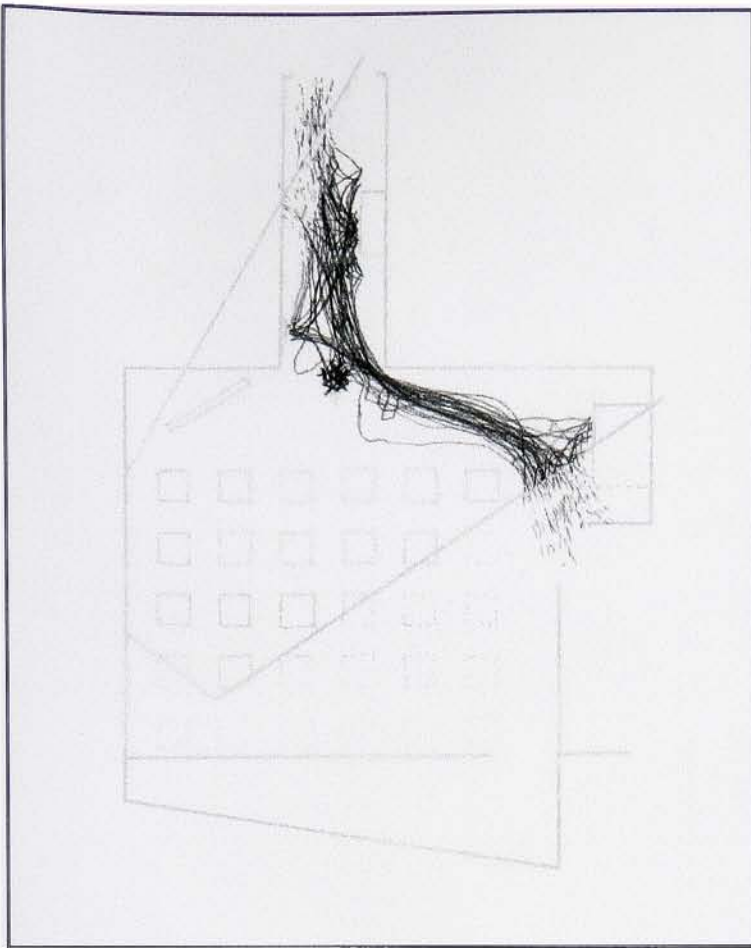
Total People: 18

6 Women

12 Men

Camera Use: 1 Woman,

4 Men



Classroom Tape #5

1-3 pm

9/18/96

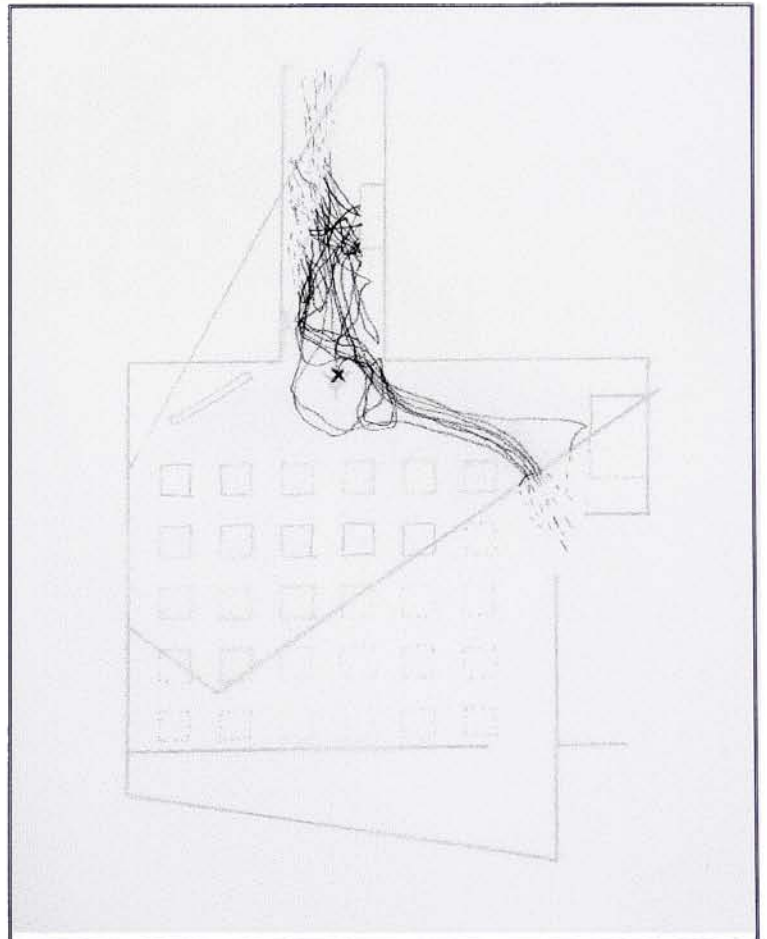
Total People: 15

9 Women

6 Men

Camera Use: 4 Women,

2 Men



Classroom Tape #6

9-11 am

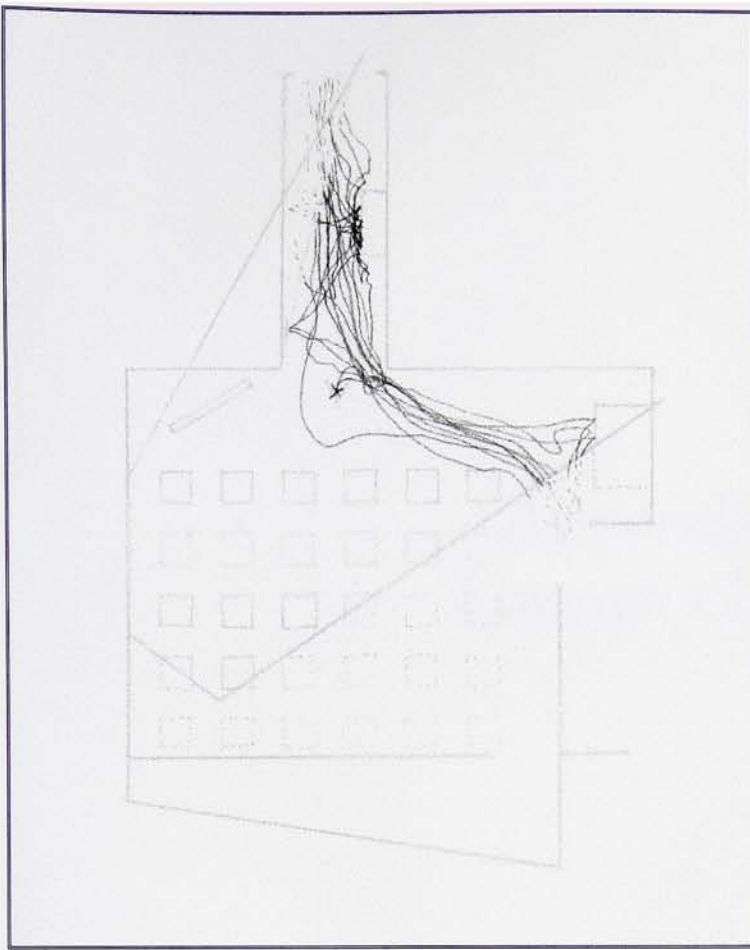
9/19/96

Total People: 5

0 Women

5 Men

Camera Use: 1 Man



Classroom Tape #7

1-3 pm

9/19/96

Total People: 8

1 Woman

7 Men

Camera Use: 1 Man

Classroom Tape #8

9-11 am

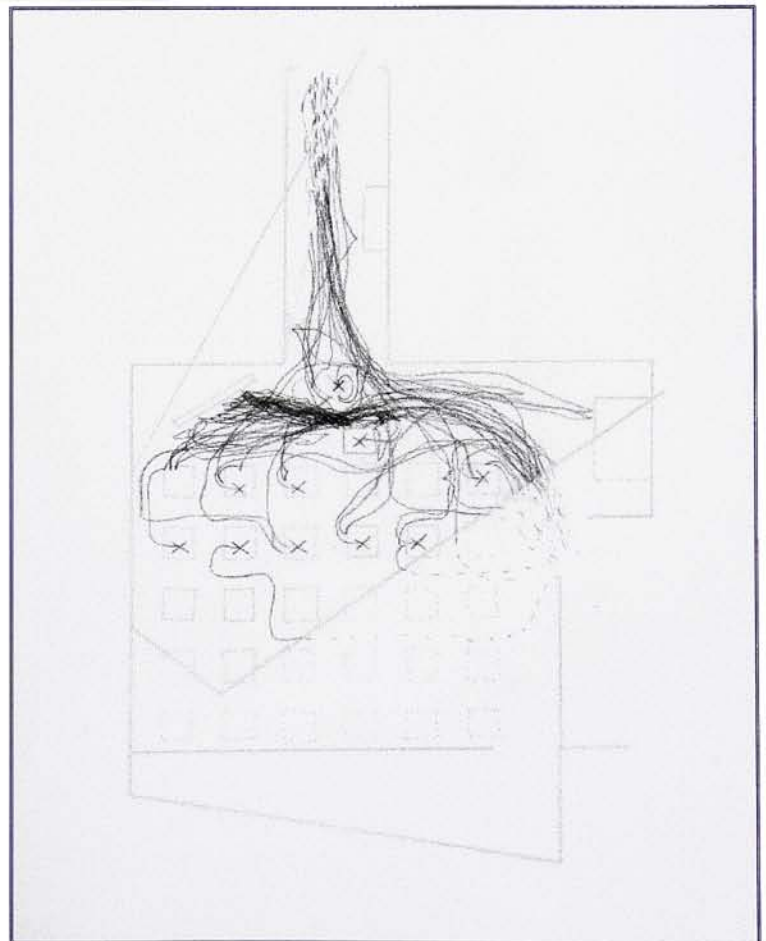
9/20/96

Total People: 13

4 Women

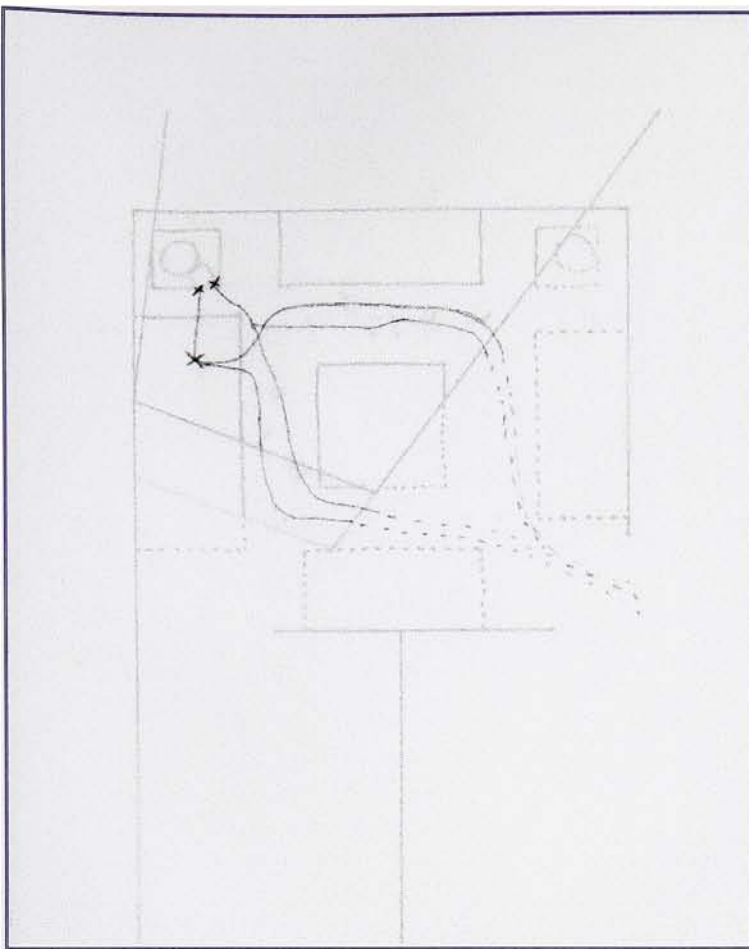
9 Men

Camera Use: 1 Man



Appendix 2

Lounge Charts



Lounge Tape #1

9-11 am

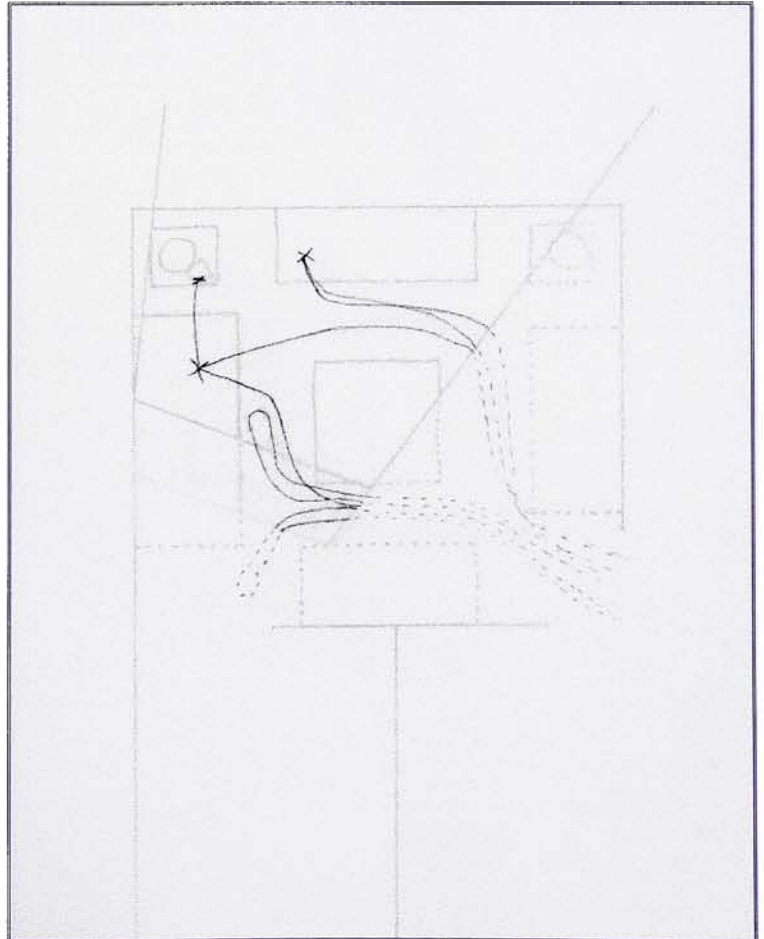
9/16/96

Total People: 2

2 Women

0 Men

Phone Use: 2 Women



Lounge Tape #2

1-3 pm

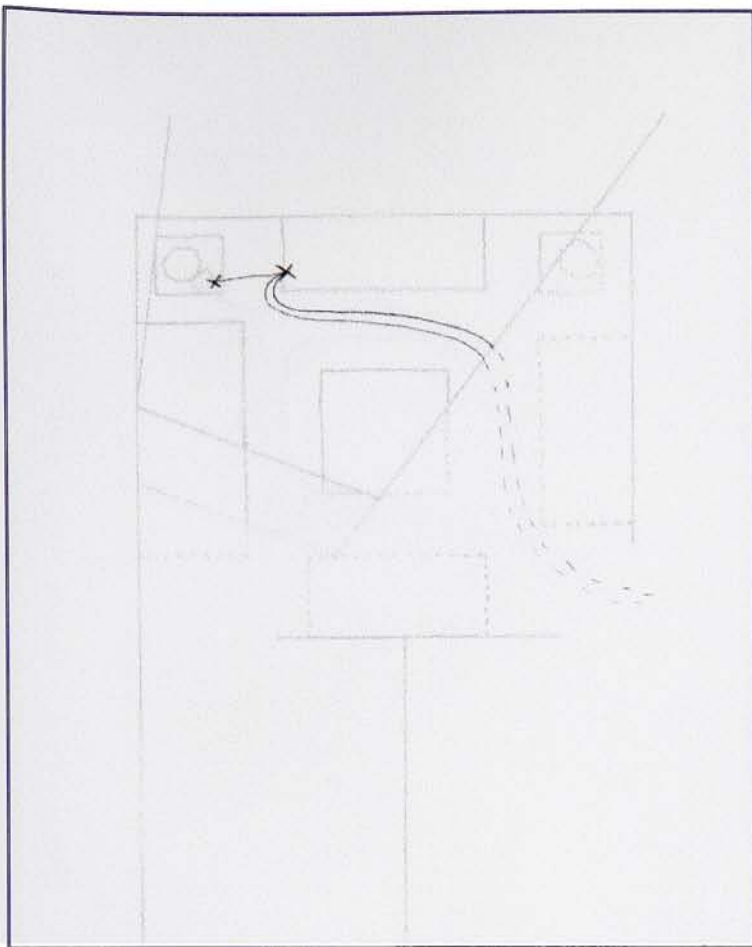
9/16/96

Total People: 3

0 Women

3 Men

Phone Use: 1 Man



Lounge Tape #3

9-11 am

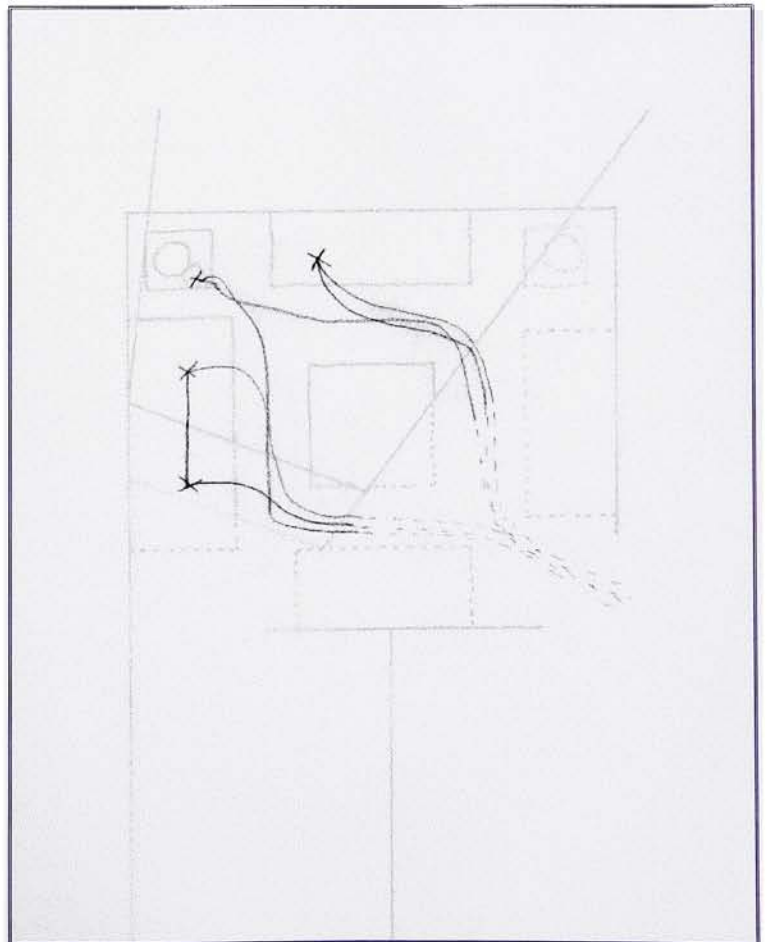
9/17/96

Total People: 1

1 Woman

0 Men

Phone Use: 1 Woman



Lounge Tape #4

7-8:30pm

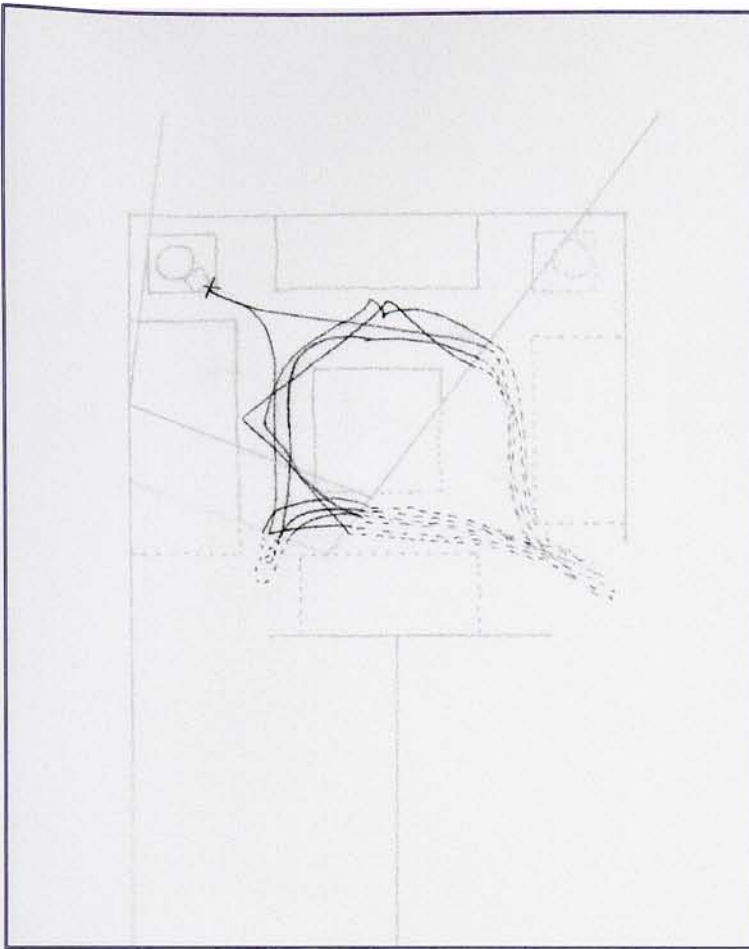
9/17/96

Total People: 3

2 Women

1 Man

Phone Use: 1 Woman



Lounge Tape #5

1-3 pm

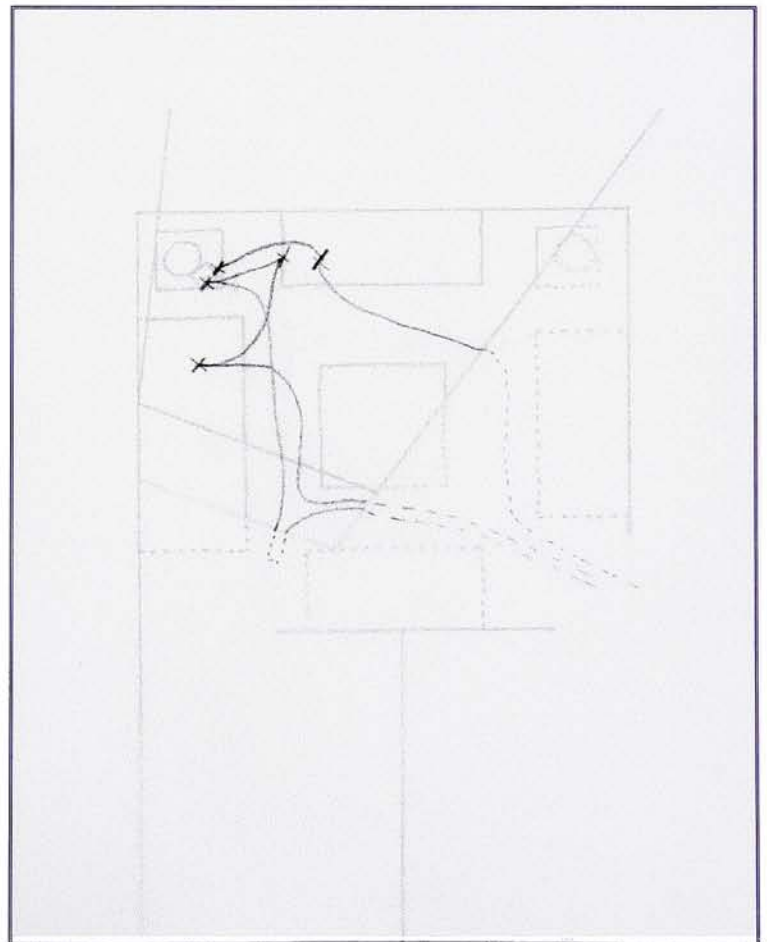
9/18/96

Total People: 4

3 Women

1 Man

Phone Use: 1 Woman



Lounge Tape #6

9-11 am

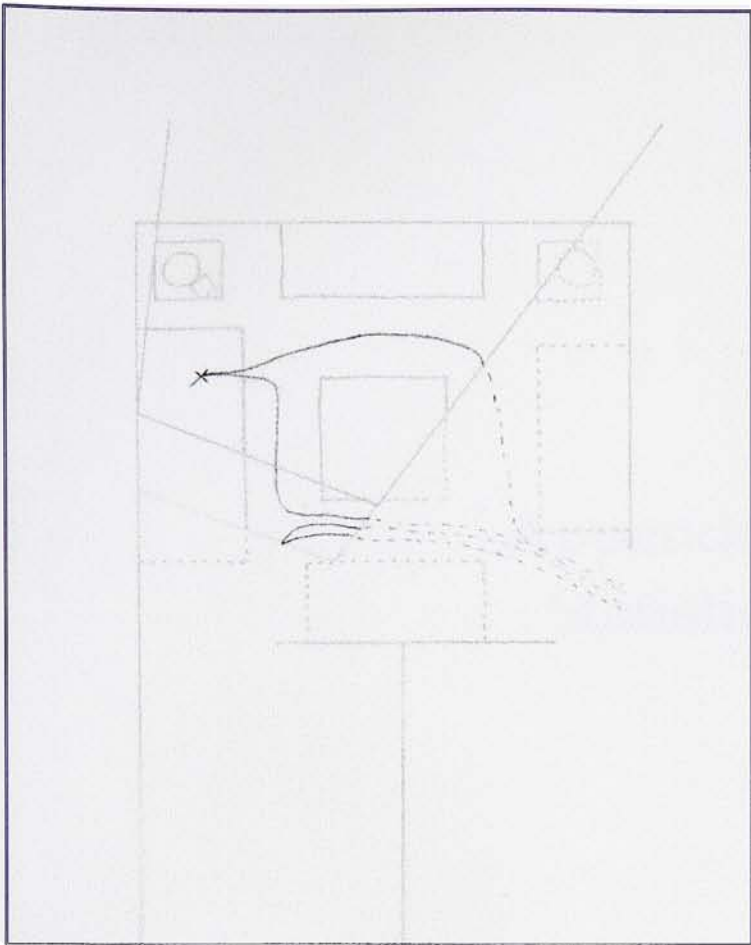
9/19/96

Total People: 2

0 Women

2 Men

Phone Use: 2 Men



Lounge Tape #7

1-3 pm

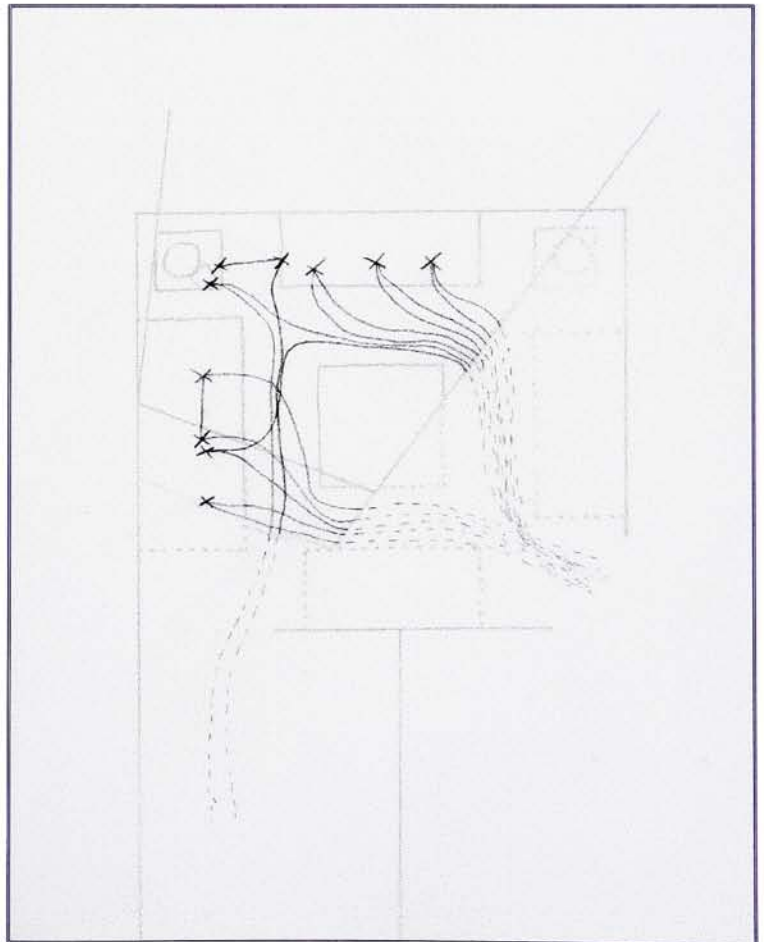
9/19/96

Total People: 2

0 Women

2 Men

Phone Use: 0



Lounge Tape #8

9-11 am

9/20/96

Total People: 7

3 Women

4 Men

Phone Use: 1 Woman

Appendix 3

Statistics

Tape	Men	Used Camera	Women	Used Camera	Total (Men & Women)	Total Used Camera	Men, Present for a Class*	Women Present for a Class*	Total Present for a Class*
1	6	-	5	2	11	2			
2	5	1	4	1	9	2			
3	14	1	11	-	25	1	6	10	16
4	12	4	6	1	18	5	11	6	17
5	6	2	9	4	15	6			
6	5	1	-	-	5	1			
7	7	1	1	-	8	1			
8	9	1	4	-	13	1	5	4	9
Total	64	11	40	8	104	19	22	20	42

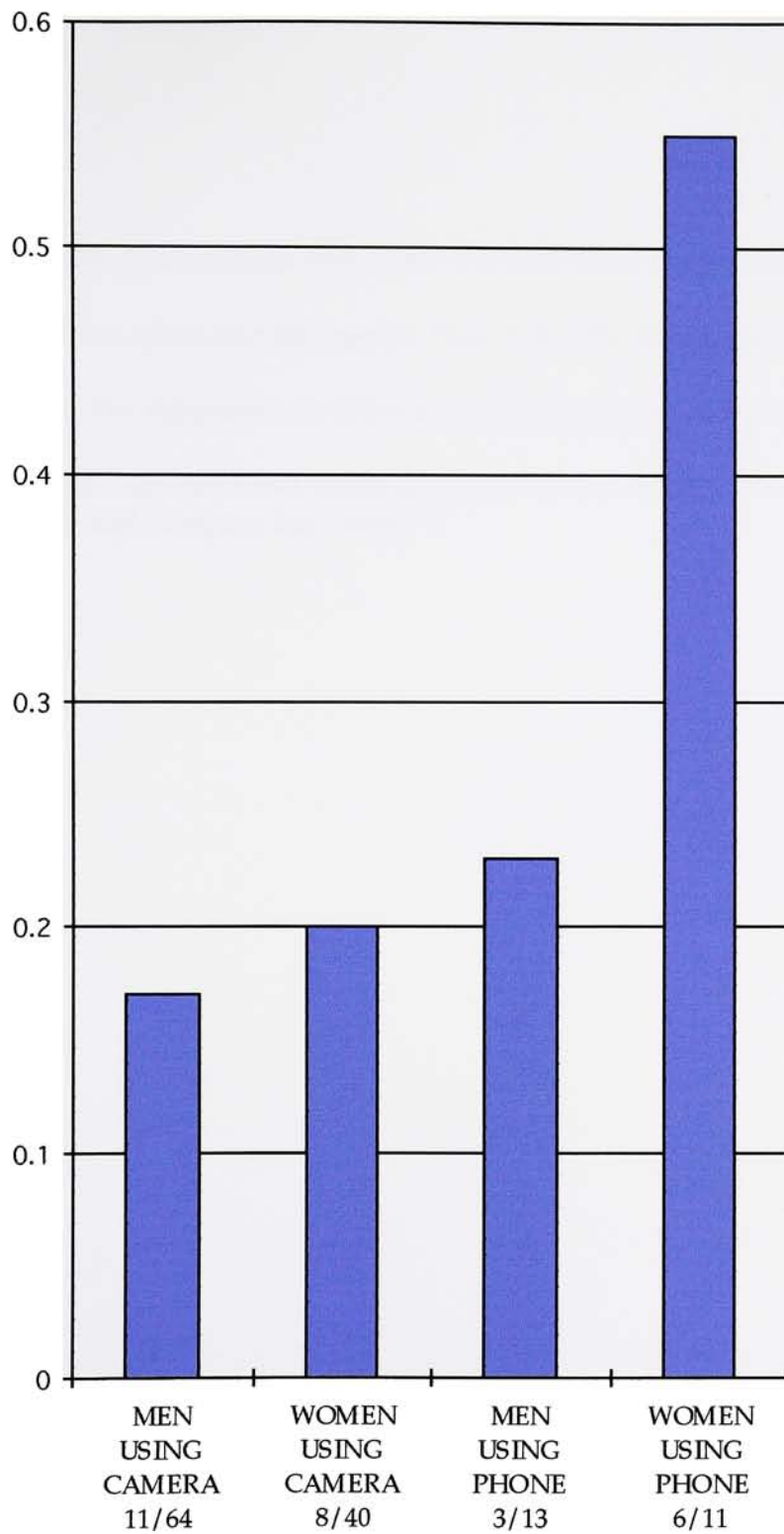
*(out of totals shown on left)

Classroom Statistics

Tape	Men	Used Phone	Women	Used Phone	Total (Men & Women)	Total Used Phone	Men, Present for a Class*	Women Present for a Class*	Total Present for a Class*
1	-	-	2	2	2	2			
2	3	1	-	-	3	1			
3	-	-	1	1	1	1	-	1	1
4	1	-	2	1	3	1	1	2	3
5	1	-	3	1	4	1			
6	2	2	-	-	2	2			
7	2	-	-	-	2	-			
8	4	-	3	1	7	1	4	2	6
Total	13	3	11	6	24	9	5	5	10

*(out of totals shown on left)

Lounge Statistics



Degree of Likelihood for Technology Use in Installation

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