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## What Conceptual Issues Does the Installation Explore?

Telecommunications & Telematic Culture: The telephone system is an artistically underexplored feature of contemporary culture. Telephones allow almost instantaneous linkage between people anywhere on earth. They enable new kinds of communication including linkages between people who wouldn't ordinarily know each other and the creation of unprecedented kinds of social interchanges such as wrong numbers, answering machines, telemarketing, and the like. *Is Anyone There* explores both the concrete technological possibilities and the poetry of using pay phones to overcome anomie in contemporary mass society.

Interactivity, Art Audiences, and the Safety of Art Spectatorship: This event challenges two common features of art viewing: the typically elite nature of high culture consumption and the passivity of much art appreciation. All those on the street who answer the ringing pay phones — many who would be unlikely to attend any conventional art institutions — become participants in this art event. The drama of their dialogue with the computer system is an essential aesthetic focus. In addition, the event systematically questions the safety of passive art viewing by requiring viewers to generate strategies to search the images and sounds of the stored calls. More radically, the event periodically shifts the viewer in the gallery from the safety of spectator to the challenging position of full participant. It places live calls to the phone that the viewer had been vicariously experiencing and demands that the viewer engage in a real conversation with a live stranger.

Hypermedia and the Structure of Information: New computer systems enable the storage and non-linear retrieval of vast amounts of information including text, image, video and sound. These systems, which can dynamically adapt to the idiosyncratic inquiry styles of each individual user, raise questions about the most fruitful ways to organize, interrelate, and access new kinds of multimedia information spaces. *Is Anyone There* explores an innovative kind of "hypermedia" art in which the structure of information and the navigational interface design are as much the artistic focus as the images and sounds.

Artificial Characterization & Intelligence Many fears and hopes are raised about the possibilities of computers simulating the full range of human intelligence and characterization. This event investigates some aspects of these possibilities by exploring how self revealing those who answer the phone will be with the various digital characters programmed into the computer device and how gallery observers feel about these exchanges.