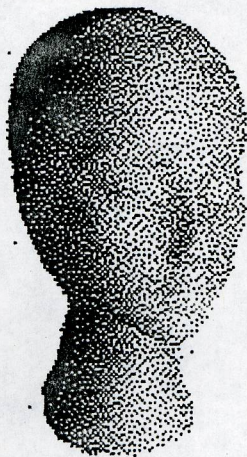


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Is Anyone There?
A Voice Activated Tour of San Francisco Via its Pay Telephones



Overview

For one week a computer telemarketing device makes hourly calls to selected pay telephones, engages whoever answers in conversations about life in the city, and digitally stores the conversations. The installation later allows viewers to interactively explore the city via a database of these recorded calls and digital video of life near the phones. It appropriates the often intrusive computer-based telemarketing technology and uses it in a new way, involving people who don't traditionally participate in the art world in an event that probes the diversity of life in the city and the relation of truth to fiction.

Concrete Description: What is going on in the installation?

A Database of Calls to Pay Phones: Several locations in San Francisco were chosen on the basis of socioeconomic diversity and their significance to the life of the city. For a week a computer-based system with digitized voice capabilities systematically called pay phones in these spots, at a particular time every hour, 24 hours a day. It used intelligent response programming to engage passersby curious enough to answer a ringing pay phone in a short discussion and digitally recorded the conversations. The topics focused on the lives of those who answered and whatever they consider noteworthy at that particular location. At other times video was used to capture representative images of the locales of the phones and the people who typically spent time near them.

The Installation: An interactive video installation set up months later allows viewers to explore life near these phones by using this bank of stored sound and digital Quicktime video to selectively call up recorded responses and images. An interactive hypermedia program encourages viewers to devise strategies for exploring this information— for example, using a spatial/temporal framework to choose to hear the record of the people who answered a financial district pay phone location during the midnight to 3AM period. Typical digital video of the phone locales accompany the recordings and digitally manipulated images become metaphors for information about the recorded calls - for example, dynamic colorizing used to indicate the depth to which a particular answerer went in a conversation.

Live Calls During the Installation: The installation challenges the safety of passive art viewership by shifting occasionally into real time mode and automatically placing live calls to the pay phones, linking the viewer with a real person on the street at the location on the screen.

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