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[Art for the MTV Generation](#)

Posted by **Jane Coulter**, Tuesday, June 20th, 2006

“Urban Networks,” the latest installation at Art Interactive in Cambridge, MA, could be seen as an example of artwork for the MTV generation. Several projects in the show layer sound bytes with streaming panoramic video, an aesthetic approach that caters to an audience known for short-attention spans and an affinity for virtual reality. Contra MTV, however, the multimedia pieces observe and critique social encounters in a digital world, exploiting the voyeurism of video and cell phone technology as an artistic medium.

In Jody Zellen’s “Disembodied Voices,” toy cell phones dangle above four video screens that display, via black and white images and text, cell phone conversations and surround the viewer. Finishing School presents two projects from the Public Interaction Objects series: “Write/Send” provides wooden “PIO” postcards (and pays for postage) and a book that contains the addresses of national, state, and local government officials. Also, “Meet/Greet” is made up of a film shot by a roving camera — the footage shows passersby ignoring and approaching a racecar-like robot.

The slideshow-style visual presentation of “Objects of Wonderment,” created by Urban Atmospheres, combines “Bluetooth technology with a newly fabricated public object.” The jury is out on whether pieces like this will become a viable art form in the digital age. The slideshow is made up of contrasting words and images about everyday life, alternating between the ordinary and extraordinary. It was as sleep-inducing as a lecture last spring by David Byrne about the artistic possibilities of slideshows entitled “I Heart Powerpoint.”

URBANtells’ “La rue c’est mise a nu par ses orielles, partout (the street is stripped bare by her ears, everywhere)” operates outside the gallery. It creates an audio experience, made up of signals from a series of micro AM transmitters tuned to the same frequency and placed within private homes, storefronts, rooftops and alleyways in the Central Square neighborhood. A radio, chalk, and map can be picked up at the gallery — viewers are encouraged to make chalk marks at signal sites and then email photographs of their sound journeys.

“Imaging Place” by John (Craig) Freeman is an interactive virtual reality map of Cambridge and it is the most intriguing project in the installation. Freeman has come up with clickable videos of diverse

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local inhabitants. The project, in sympathy with the underlying vibe of the installation, encourages the voyeuristic exploration of Cambridge from within the gallery. In one panoramic video, a man on Summer Street jabbbers about the filming of a locally shot scene from David Mamet's "The Spanish Prisoner;" in another, girls speak in Spanish about their neighborhood.

"Urban Networks" makes good use of its small exhibition space, which is only open on weekends. There's room for visitors to comfortably amble about even during the unavoidable high-traffic times. Project stations are spread out, defying any logical approach to the experience. Loose floor tiles, although acoustically valuable, make the space seem intentionally industrial chic in the midst of the technologically-tuned art. The installation offers a fresh look at the urban neighborhood and technology as art not to mention a worthwhile getaway from video games and reality television for the MTV crowd.

"Urban Networks" is on display at [Art Interactive](#) through August 6.

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