



# HIGH SCHOOL VIDEO AS INSTALLATION ART

*This project was created by Robert Moriarty, art teacher, and his students at Morton West High School as a project of the Contemporary Community Curriculum Initiative.*



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What are the uses and possibilities of video? Our tendency is to think of video as a story-telling device (comedy or drama), or a public service delivery device (propaganda), and at its worst, a way to sell products through commercials. There is also video as a means of documentation that usually begins and ends with taping school life such as football games or talent shows or family events such as celebrations or vacations. Usually the vision of curriculum for a high school video class is largely formed and limited by the culture of mass-media (spectacular and commodity culture) and tends to reflect that culture without critique.

This project began with a discussion of the modern and postmodern practice of installation art. Through stills and texts of artworks, students were introduced to the art of Tony Oursler and Adrian Piper in which video is an integral part of an art installation.

The class then talked about the school art show and the way it transforms the school lobby. This created the opportunity to define and vividly describe for students the concept of “site-specific” art.

The video art installation transformed the school show. Many students commented on how the video work made the show seem “cooler.” Rather than being a collection of individual artworks, the collaborative installation foregrounded the notion that students can use art to comment on and effect the environment in which they learn. The success of the installation was largely due to the students' commitment to create something real (art).

Many schools are adding video classes to the high school curricula. Will these classes just teach students to mimic mainstream media or will they empower students to explore alternate potentials of this powerful medium?



## **DISCUSS USES OF VIDEO**

We're talk about the use and possibilities of video and our tendency to think of video as a story-telling device (comedy or drama), or a public service delivery device (propaganda), and at its worst, a way to sell products through commercials. There is also video as a means of documentation that usually begins and ends with taping school life, football games, or talent shows...or family vacations. Our vision of video is largely formed and limited by our relationships with the culture of mass-media (spectacular culture) and tend to reflect that culture without critique.

## **DISCUSS SCHOOL ART SHOW**

We talk about the school art show and the way it transforms the school lobby while it is up. Talk about the way video has been used in the art show in the past. (Most of the work shown was music videos the students made for well known corporate rock bands.)

## **DISCUSS INSTALLATION ART**

We talk briefly about installation art (resource book: *ARTSPEAK: a Guide to...*). Define/describe: site-specific.

Introduce and describe Tony Oursler and Adrian Piper as artists who integrate non-narrative video with installation. Show stills from their work. If possible, take a field trip to see video installation work at a local gallery or museum.

## **DECISION: INSTALLATION ART AT THE SCHOOL ART SHOW**

An important aspect of building student commitment to collaborative projects is to let the class decide on the scale, scope, theme, and site of the project. Admittedly, the samples and ideas shared by the teacher will have a strong impact on student decisionmaking, but nonetheless, there is a real difference between presenting options and facilitating group choicemaking and simply assigning a particular task.

When creating art installations, logistics need to be considered as an integral part of the planning process. (Think Christo.) In this case, rather than working directly in the school lobby (site of the art show), we needed to create a piece that could be brought into the space.

## **BRAINSTORMING**

Conduct a guided visualization. Students close their eyes and picture the space. Ask a series of questions, such as, "What is in the space? What do you especially notice?"

To get the students imaginations flowing, suggest unusual or bizarre changes in the space. "Imagine it all painted bright pink. Imagine it filled with water. Imagine a large creature in the space..." Then let the students relax and let their minds wander.

The students imagined the lobby with the art show set up:

*Picture the security desk. (Now this is the point when you should exercise your imagination.) Someone saw an oversized cartoon-looking video camera pointed right at you. In the two-foot diameter lens is a video projection of a single eye looking around the room. The video edits and there is another eye--someone else's with a different expression--again looking around the room, another edit, another eye, another expression, you get the idea....*

*We talked about how the large video camera would change the feel of that space and possible readings of meaning. What was the viewer intended to see or feel under normal circumstances? How would our installation change the ambience?*

*Then we came up with more possible projects that incorporated video into an installation. Many ideas were inspired by the work of Tony Oursler. A large stuffed figure with images of a face projected onto a balloon head. A series of stacked monitors, which would each contain 1/3 of a figure; each monitor would change or mix up the parts of the body.*



The ideation process alternates brainstorming, visualization, and discussion. The visualization can include brief drawing or video sketches so that students can more effectively share ideas with each other.

Decide when you've reached maximum output in terms of free flowing ideas, review possibilities and decide on which projects to develop and make. Don't set up a competitive decisionmaking process between student ideas. Think yes/and, not no/but.

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## **INSTALLATION**

Often time and logistics makes it difficult to "test" the installation ahead of time. If possible, rehearse problems with hanging or mounting back in the art room.

*Because of the time factor, we only knew these were going to be in the art show, not the exact placement of our pieces. It was their presence in the mix of work that mattered most to us. When the art show happened the placement of the pieces was perfect. The large camera was pointed at the security desk and the ID piece was next to the desk. The involved students really felt like they made a difference to the energy and interest of the show and they did. We did.*

## **CONSTRUCTION**

Here the only limitations are skills, available materials, and time.

*Our installation was created using video cameras and editing stations. We also used many common art supplies such as hot glue, cardboard, paint, and mat board. For finishing touches, we used black masking tape and stick-on lettering.*