CAMCORDER TRAINING ASSIGNMENT
DUE 13 OCTOBER 2004

Daily concerns assign to instruments a place which has nothing in common with pure geometric distances: my glasses, . . . once they are on my nose, are much farther from me than the object which I see through them.
- Jean-Paul Sartre, 1953

Object lesson

Observe the space that is involved in an interaction between a person and an everyday object. Use the video camera to explore and articulate the characteristics of this space.

The object which you select should be inanimate. It has a center of gravity. It might be portable and/or kinetic. It produces sounds. Unless it happens to be a piece of natural landscape, this object was probably designed by somebody.

Perhaps it is utilitarian, a tool or implement—fork, chair, garden hose, lightbulb, kitchen sink, article of clothing, clothesline, paper bag, bath towel. Or an architectural feature—doorknob, tree, windowsill, column, handrail, step or curb, flight of stairs.

Consider the size and shape and directions of the zone of interaction. What are the trajectories of gesture, the rhythms and cycles and the lapses of time? Does the character of the space defined by person and instrument change (over time, for different tasks, in the employ of different users, etc)? Experiment with a variety of camera locations, angles, and moves. Do not use the zoom except for focusing and framing your shots. Explore the acoustics of the space and repertoire of non-verbal sounds that characterize the action. What is the minimum set of views that will suffice for constructing the sense of this space? What is the best position for the microphone?

Since a primary purpose of the exercise is to get acquainted with the feel and the presence of the camera (and microphone), you are welcome to shoot as much as you like. The "edited-in-camera" sequence which you plan and select to show next week should not exceed three minutes. Please cue your tape before class.

Although each student shall submit an individual project, you are required to work with one or two partners. In trading moviemaker and assistant roles, everyone should experience both operating the camera and taking sound. You are requested to use headphones, and you are encouraged to use an external microphone.