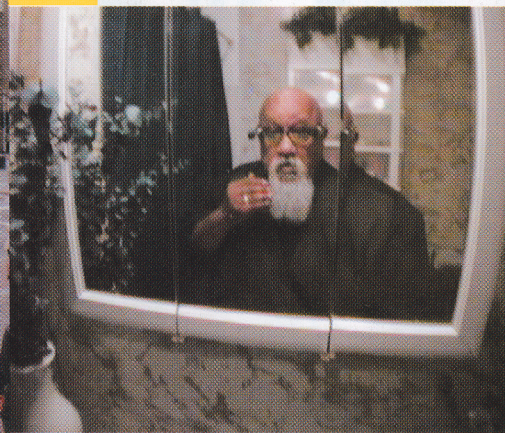




This page: *Symphony of the City* caters to your inner Peeping Tom. Facing page: It's flower power, Boston-style with *Magic Book*: Flora



FRIDAY, MAY 4, 7:30 P.M.

It's just past dusk at Boston City Hall Plaza. I'm immersed in a fluid crowd of about 30-odd onlookers, to see the second night of the *Symphony of the City* presentation. Lila Kanner is here, and so are most of the remaining members of the project's epic crew. That includes two directing artists (Liz Canner and John Ewing), a technical director, two Web designers, a Web techie to keep the project's site afloat, and myriad outsourced sound and projecting experts. And who could forget the experiences of those citizens who wore the tiny cameras? In living color on four perpendicular screens, their tales played out. At any one time, we could see four stories running simultaneously.

The first screening on April 27 looked at community builders like Serene Wong, who led tenants in Chinatown to stop unwanted developments. Tonight's stories focus on housing issues. On one screen right now is a day seen through the eyes of

Mike Murray, a UMASS Boston student who can't afford dorm costs and is effectively a homeless student.

Each of the eight subjects that participated donned a specially developed wide-angle lens that gives the feeling of human view. They wore it for one day, from waking to bed. The cameras were embedded in a pair of glasses, so even those with 20/20 eyesight had to wear specs (along with, for legal purposes, a sign warning anyone they came across that they were being recorded).

But after watching their stories unfold, I realize that voyeurism is far from the point. What's startling is the dramatically different reactions to the subjects, each nominated by community groups in their neighborhoods and each from varying ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds. Viewers watching the film, however, don't see the faces of those wearing the camera, so stereotypes are null and void, and viewers wind up seeing the world

from a perspective otherwise unknown.

While City Hall is the physical forum for the recordings, it isn't the only one. On its website, the group offers both the footage and interactive forums for viewers, adding more voices to the symphony.

"Two years ago, this would never have been possible," Kanner tells me. "And even still, we were about a half a step ahead of the technology on the whole project; viewers who didn't have DSL or cable modem connections had trouble picking up the site stream properly. We pushed our Internet capabilities and means for artistic ends."