

Apr. 26-
May 2
2001

Calendar

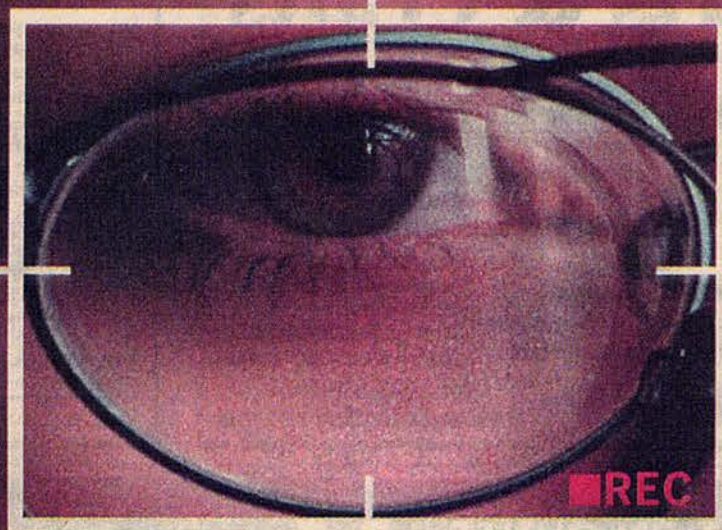
The Boston Globe

DINING OUT

Where it's
always
sunny 4

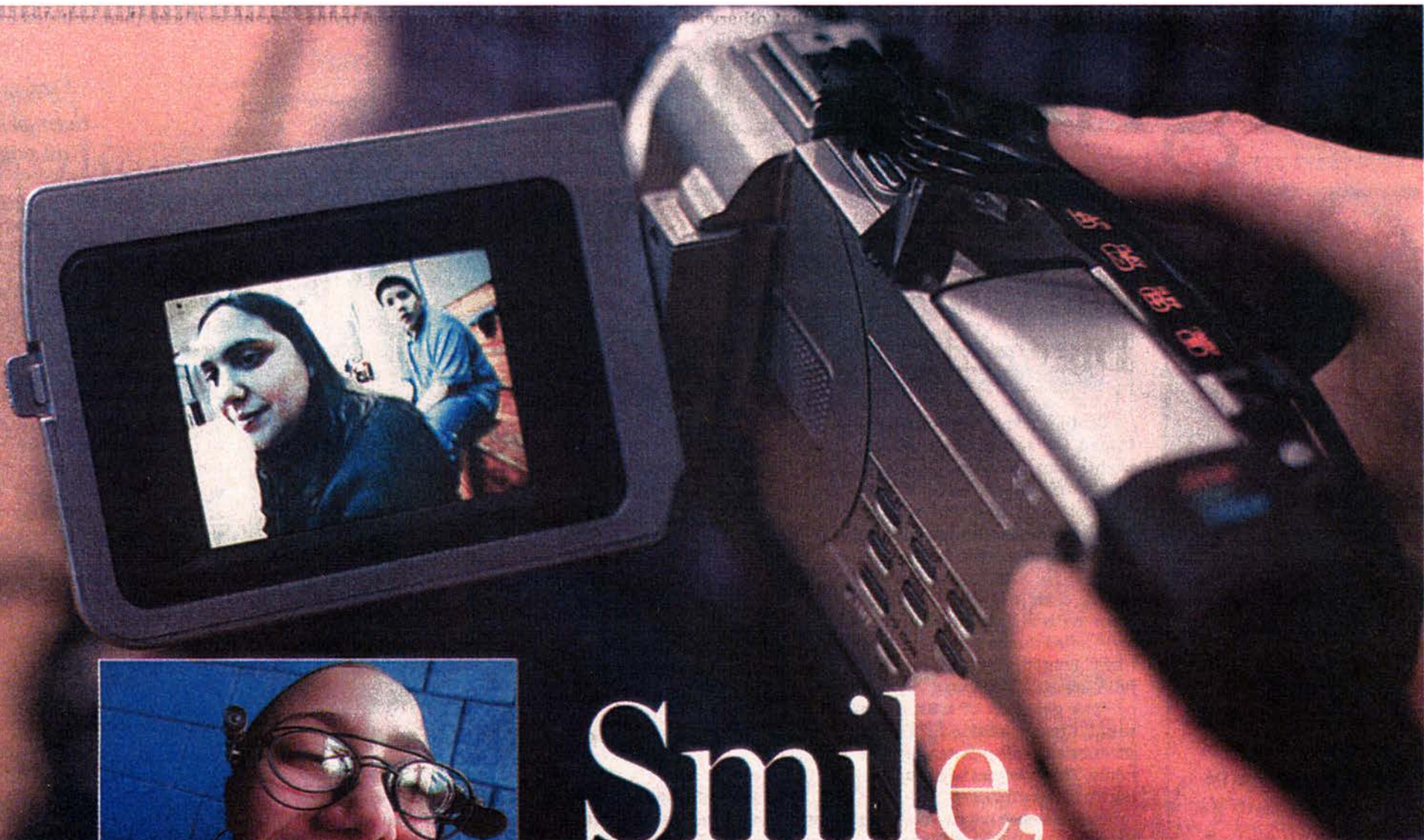
DJ SCENE

Brother
Cleve goes
Brazilian 9



See
what
I see

Cyberarts Fest lets you live someone else's life for a day. Page 10



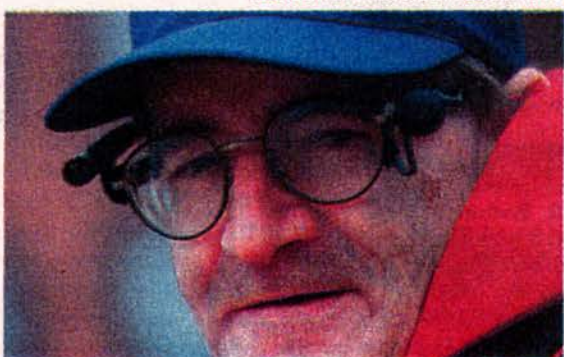
GLOBE STAFF PHOTO/SEAN DOUGHERTY

Smile, you're on cyberarts

Video diarists share their world for a day



GLOBE STAFF PHOTO/SEAN DOUGHERTY



GLOBE STAFF PHOTO/JOHN BLANDING



GLOBE STAFF PHOTO/JIM WALKER

Wearing glasses containing a camera lens and a mike. From top: Kimberly Chacon, a teen activist; Mike Murray, a homeless college student; and businessman Alan Solomont. Appearing in the viewfinder at top is Julie Autieri as she chats with Chacon.

By Sarah Bayliss
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

Start with eight people in Boston and give them video cameras for a day. Strap lenses and mikes to their glasses and record everything they say, see, and hear. Show the results on the Web — and on the exterior of City Hall, in 30-foot-high projections. What do you get?

Eight home-movie variations on "Being John Malkovich," each about 15 hours long. Participants range from a man with millions to a man without a home; from a 92-year-old blues musician to a 16-year-old community activist.

Called "Symphony of a City," the project is Liz Canner and John Ewing's contribution to the Boston Cyberarts Festival. The project is one of scores on display at area galleries, museums, and colleges through May 6. Artists in all media have incorporated technology to create works profound,

perplexing, and playful.

Canner and Ewing's subjects have been filming over the last three weeks. Tomorrow, the entirety of the first four videos will appear all day on the Web, and the evening portions will be projected on a wall of City Hall from 7:30 p.m. to midnight. A second set of images goes up on May 4.

Canner and Ewing want to show a cross-section of Boston, from its social do-gooders to its social casualties. Both artists have histories of community-minded work. Canner, a filmmaker, made a documentary about the LA riots. Ewing, a painter, has worked with Boston teenagers to create public murals around the city.

The pair's project has an aesthetic bonus, enlivening the barren walls of City Hall. As Sarah Hutt of Boston's cultural affairs office notes, it will "humanize the building."

Tomorrow's lineup includes Alan Solomont, who as a Democratic activist has

raised millions for Bill Clinton and Al Gore and as a philanthropist showered social causes with the fortune he made in elder and health services.

Like the other volunteers, he spent a day — from the time he awoke to when he went to bed — wearing black-rimmed glasses fitted with a tiny camera and microphone. There he is driving his children to school in Weston, listening to Kerry Kennedy Cuomo speak at Tufts University, attending a fundraiser for Delaware Senator Thomas Carper, and getting a haircut on Newbury Street.

Friday's segment features three other socially active citizens: a Chinese-American single mother who works with immigrants; a 16-year-old girl who is running for the Jamaica Plain neighborhood council; and city councilor Chuck Turner.

Next week's videos zoom in on Boston's housing shortage: a 44-year-old homeless man; a Harvard-trained housing lawyer; a landlord; and, sharing a camera, 60-year-old fabric artist Barbara J. Ward and her husband, 92-year-old bluesman Howard Armstrong. "Known as 'Huey Louie,'" Armstrong was a consultant to Quincy Jones for the film "The Color Purple."

Canner and Ewing were determined to have a landlord don a camera as well, but until last week, none had signed up. "We couldn't find one who was willing to share his life," says Canner. At the last minute, John Caporno, a property owner and the former head of the Greater Boston Real Estate Board, agreed.

To find their subjects, the artists asked 50 community groups to nominate candidates. The eight people selected travel in very different circles, but "everyone shares certain rituals," says Ewing, from brushing their teeth in the morning to eating lunch to going to the bathroom (no, not everything's on camera). It remains to be seen just how scintillating every moment will be. "There is a certain mundane sense to the footage," admits Ewing of the lengthy videos. "Not all of it is exciting all of the time."

But while the videos aren't exactly candidates for MTV, they are eye openers.

Take Mike Murray, who is homeless and an undergraduate at UMass-Boston majoring in American Studies — a "15th-year junior," he says. Murray donned the camera after getting off the bus from his shelter and proceeded on a "roaming commentary" of his haunts.

He stops to speak with Angelo, who sells newspapers at the Government Center T stop each morning and sleeps in ATM booths. Later, Murray attends an anthropology class and visits a married mother of three temporarily living in a Peabody motel for \$300 a week.

"They've been waiting for housing for two years," says Murray. "All they can do is call once a month to see if they've progressed on the list."

Housing lawyer Jeffrey Purcell says the day he wore the camera was "a pretty typical Thursday." Purcell, who represents tenants for Greater Boston Legal Services, arrives at housing court to find 258 cases on the eviction list.

He tapes while he's arguing his own cases, then sits in the jury box and films others — "the stories of people losing their

homes," he says, stories that otherwise would go unnoticed.

In the afternoon, he goes to Cyberphoto to develop pictures "showing the bad conditions of an apartment." On his way home, he calls clients from a packed subway car.

Ward, the fabric artist, says, "I just did my normal day" — which included working in her studio and rehearsing with her husband's band (she's the drummer). "It was quite awkward," she says. "I was playing the

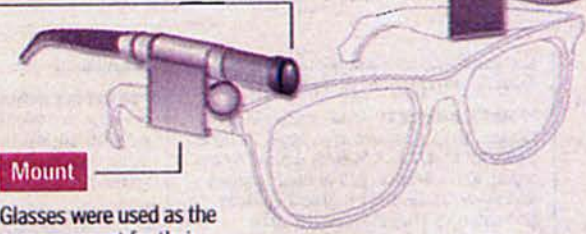
drums and singing in harmony and trying to keep my head straight." Ward and Armstrong also met with Purcell to discuss rent hikes at the Piano Factory, the artists housing where they live near the South End. Purcell was wearing his camera too. "When I saw him, I thought, 'boy, you look silly,'" says Ward. "But I couldn't say

that, because we were on camera." Serene Wong wore the camera to her job at the Chinese Progressive Association, where she translates documents for immi-

Filming a day in the life

Camera

High-quality industrial lens, wide angle, to minimize movement. About the size of a pen cap. The cable goes to the control unit.



Mount

Glasses were used as the camera mount for their rigidity. A mounting clip with a ball joint adjusts the camera angle to eye level and attaches to the arm of the glasses.

Sound

The cardio mike is shaped to pick up sounds in front with less emphasis on voice of the subject.



Power

The bag contains a video recorder with an 8-hour battery, and the camera control unit. It weighs 4 pounds.

SOURCES: John Ewing, Symphony of a City, Alex Barnett, Harvard University

GLOBE STAFF GRAPHIC/
JOAN McLAUGHLIN



Mike Murray, wearing his camera-equipped glasses, waits for the Red Line after visiting a news vendor friend. Below, Alan Solomont gets his hair styled at the Mario Russo Salon on Newbury Street.



grants and helps them write letters in English. A few years ago, Wong successfully fought to obtain a 75-year lease for 250 Chinese-American families living in a Chinatown apartment building. In the evening, she was at home, videotaping as she packed for a trip to Hong Kong.

The project is not without technical challenges — for instance, keeping the camera motion smooth. "We used a wide-angle lens, which helps the shakiness," says Ewing. "You're basically seeing out of the person's eyes, so you see their hands if they drink coffee. If they're walking, the camera moves a lot."

Chuck Turner, who filmed in council meetings and at Patriots Day festivities, posed a special problem. "He nods his head a lot," Ewing says. "Every time he agrees, the whole picture goes up and down." But Turner, who at one point got tangled up in the camera cords, thinks it was worth the hassle. "Everybody ought to try this," says the councilor, who represents Dorchester and Roxbury. "It's not quite like going up in the space capsule, but it has its own level of interest."

The lawyer, Purcell, says: "I felt like I was running a marathon by the evening. I was trying to get through this hectic day, with the added challenge of holding my head still because the camera was on."

The project presented a legal conundrum as well. State law prohibits making an audio recording of people without their consent, so the artists had to find a way to alert passers-by that they were being taped. After consulting with lawyers, Canner and Ewing asked their human cameras to wear cards that read, "You are being filmed and recorded by me for public broadcast." But not everyone complied. Solomont says, "Liz wanted me to wear this big obnoxious sign, but I've taken certain liberties" — namely, not wearing it.

The videotapers found that most people liked being on camera. "Everyone was really nice to me all day," says Kimberly Chacon, the 16-year-old. Chacon, a student at Boston Latin, filmed during school vacation while campaigning for the council spot. "People who don't usually smile were saying 'hello.' When I went into Dunkin' Donuts early in the morning, they got the food right away."

The diarists did undertake some judicious self-editing. "I had to be careful about what I said," recalls Murray, the homeless man. "I have a tendency to get so wrapped up in something that the four-letter words come out." Fund-raiser Solomont says he had to draw some limits. "When I got home and I went into the bedroom where my wife was asleep, I said, 'we're not going there.'"

Hutt, of City Hall's cultural affairs office, says she and other City Hall officials have taken a hands-off approach to the potentially controversial content of the gargantuan projections.

"You can tell what someone's intention is," says Hutt, who has been working with Canner and Ewing since November. "I think they're trying to demystify people who live in Boston. We are a very mixed community, and they're trying to point that out. So many heroes make up a city, and often you plow through your life and don't know who's next to you."