Public Space

2. Go to a public space and observe the people and the space. How do people negotiate around each other? How do they communicate with each other? How does the space communicate with the people in it? What signs of past presence do you see? What communication technologies do you see and how are they used?

3. Think about new communication technologies. Do you see a need for them in this environment? (Or changes to existing ones) What would be interesting to have available? How would such a thing change the dynamics of the space? What about the types of devices discussed by Rozier et al or Rekimoto et al?

Public space: RISD art sale along Benefit Street.

Setup: boothes along both sides of the street, covered by a large tent-like thing. People walk down the street, looking at the wares people are selling.

This is not a space that is forever - its constructed for this one day and is torn down again at nite. Normally, its a street, a very popular street. You can see that by looking down - the ground shows the wear of tires and the weight of cars, small potholes, street lines and pebbles. A police officer stands at teh end of the street, letting the owners of cars know that they cannot take their regular route. They emphasize this with barricades that would never actually stop a car. The sidewalks have been warn by shoes and newfound weeds are growing up through the cracks. Only the tents and boothes are new - and quite new, in that rented always to look new kind of way. Each merchant has decorated hir booth in a different way, but they all have a yellow card with a number and the name of the merchant. The brick buildings are decorated with signs advertising the sale. Yet, on the small hill overlooking this street, tons of RISD students are lounging, some with books, but most of the books are closed. Mostly, the loungers are watching those who are at the sale.

The people who walk Benefit today are not the normal patrons, but instead, folks who showed up for the sale. This street sits in the heart of RISD, a college with mostly 20-something-year-old students. Today, there are many individuals who are older than that.

Patrons are usually in small groups (2/3 people) and they are wandering as clans, pointing things out to one another and talking about the pieces. Rarely do the patrons talk to stranger patrons, but they frequently question the merchants who are more than thrilled to talk about their pieces. Patrons negotiate space in front of the merchant's make shift counter in order to look at the wares. Once in a while you hear an "excuse me" or "i'm sorry" when patrons misjudge their physical location in relation to others, but other than that, there is little talk between groups of patrons.

While there was minimal direct interaction with other patrons, most patrons were scanning the crowd to see if they knew other people (and quite a few did, which lead to hugs and bouncing). People were aware of each other, creating a social situation where watching was a direct component of the event, without actually interacting.

Twice i heard cell phones go off and people scramble to grab them and then speak. I saw a few other cell phones, but mostly they were being used by merchants on break, behind their stand.

Many of the merchants had little cards or pamphlets to show their wares, and most of these had a URL attached, letting the patron know that they could find this work again. Some

merchants had credit-card readers. Other than that, minimal technology was in the space.

I am actually surprised that most merchants don't have credit-card readers or that they can't be easily rented. When i was in the Caribbean, i was stunned that every beach donut retailer had a credit-card reader hooked to a cell phone, and yet this is not at all common in the US.

Frankly, about the only piece of technology i would have wanted to see in this space was easier access to money - i.e. credit-card readers. Although i recognize the opportunity to put audio commentary in the space or to have more information available through VR, i don't think that i would like what it would do to the space. While most people were there to browse or be involved with the information, there was definitely a side purpose of being seen and seeing other people, getting out on a nice Saturday and being involved with the information. Even knowing who was there was not as important as watching other people. Frankly, i think that the technologies would put too much emphasis on the information gathering/perusal instead of the secondary purpose. It makes me think about why people thought ecommerce would surpass real life shopping... shopping is not simply object gathering or information perusal - its a blatantly social experience for the senses.