



tom moody

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The pale surrogate humans of Michelle Handelman's performance work *Passerby* infiltrated Bryant Park today, mingling with late lunch crowd. Resembling a cross between "living statue" mimes, Duane Hanson sculptures, and nerds who got lost on the way to a DEVO reunion, the actors mostly sat frozen, or changed position artistically, as if voguing. Prerecorded conversations came from iPods

concealed in their bags or clothing. Did I say actors? They're actually reenactors: what most parkgoers didn't know was that real people had sat in these same positions a few days before, eaten the same takeout food, and spoken the same words. Handelman photographed them and recorded their chitchat and then turned her pod-folk loose to simulate them. (Her notes and photos are [here](#)).

Some of the privacy issues raised by this work were discussed [earlier](#), and many of the conversations were frank and revealing despite their everyday banality. If you eavesdropped on the tapes (and you had to stand pretty close in the noisy park) you found out who was having parent problems, who was worried about blowing an audition, and who were ex-lovers. (My favorite line was one guy to another: "You were the daughter-in-law my mother never had.") But who would connect these intimate conversations to their source? Only someone in on the joke, or who stumbled randomly on the truth. If any of the tapes were mad or determined enough they could sue, I suppose, but surveillance in public places *is* pervasive, and of course we have to "watch what we say, watch what we do" in a time of total terror, as Ari Fleischer reminds us.

More info [here](#).



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