The sifting of Ian Skedd’s installation is meticulous; two finely crafted translator’s booths, one housing a DJ’s turntables, the other equipped with speakers to broadcast the DJ’s music, sit diametrically opposed in perfect symmetry. Mirror images of each other, they are aligned on either side of the gallery like stone-faced sentinels. Their smooth grey finish and carefully considered corner details identify Skedd’s project as an architectural statement and yet the structures themselves resist typological certainty. Referentially, the booths suggest banal parking lot kiosks, the ultramodern micro-living spaces marketed throughout Vancouver, and eerily vacant cur-de-sacs lined with identically engineered homes. Considering their primary function as sound organs, the structures further suggest personal music devices. It is the stripped-down minimalism of the work that lends itself to this multitude of readings, but what is the experience of moving through the spaces created by the arrangement of the booths?

On opening night the space between the booths resembled a city street where curious spectators milled about. Groups of people lined up to enter the listening booth as if waiting for an elevator or a ride. However, once the door sealed shut, all sense of feeling objectified and on-view were momentarily put aside. An atmosphere of sameness is charged as the collective focus within the booth led to mutual reflection on what was significant about being on the “inside.” Perceptually, the music heightened the insulating effect of the sound absorbent walls, creating a uniquely intimate space that had become a world within a world. In leaving the so-called public space of the gallery/closet the viewer entered another public, the community of the booth, blurring the demarcation of what was truly inside/outside. Later in the week, when viewed without the crowds, the booths sat mostly, staring each other down within the emptiness of the gallery. Entering them felt like a violation of someone’s privacy; the space between the booths had become self-conscious and vacant. The experience of isolation in the boxes seemed oppressive as if being shelled in the booth distinctly removed one from the openness of the public realm. If the booths had currents they would have been drawn.

The distance between the booths creates a space that is as charged with meaning as the structures themselves. This middle ground oscillates freely as both a space of quiet intimacy and social potential, but also amplifies the booths’ sameness of form and difference of function. A central theme here is how private space and the public sphere interact architecturally and the effect this exchange has on other dualities, including Skedd’s concerns with the relation of interior and exterior, sound and silence, and the objectification of self when exposed as a spectacular other to the crowd. The architectural theorist Beatriz Colomina wrote that “to think of modern architecture must be to pass back and forth between the question of space and the question of representation,” and so it is relevant to comment on the installation’s reflection on modern culture.

Considering the reference to music, the separation of the DJ/translation booth and the listening booth can be read as a nod to our collective obsession with music consumption as evidenced by the proliferation of ipod-like devices in public spaces. When hooked up or, in this case enclosed in the booth, our apparent desire for stimulation appears so much language or even music, but an idea about how the demarcation of physical space can be read as a medium of cultural exchange.

Skedd’s installation sets up a triangular dynamic of the DJ/translation booth and the listening booth to the normally unseen spatial limits of our private and public boundary allows one to contribute equally as spectator and performer. By isolating this interaction from its naturalized context we are invited to contemplate its relevance to daily life and perhaps conclude that, like nested dolls, the sound booths’ bracketing of the (inside) crowd magnifies a tension that is found outside in the city.


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DJ Dana D and Vynl Ritchie performed as part of DJ Booth / Listening Booth two works on February 17 and March 11, 2006.