

WIRELESS

November 6, 2011 – January 8, 2012

Curated by Elizabeth Lovero

CAF's exhibition Wireless is a collaboration between KCSB 91.9 FM, New Noise Music Foundation, and Santa Barbara Contemporary Arts Forum on the occasion of KCSB's 50th anniversary and the New Noise Digital Music Conference & Festival 2011. Visit sbcaf.org, kcsb.org, and newnoisesb.com for more information.

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Arctic Perspective Initiative

Arctic Perspective Initiative (API) is a non-profit, international group, founded by Marko Peljhan and Matthew Bidlerman, whose goal is to promote the creation of open communication infrastructures for the circum-polar region. Beginning in 2006, API has made regular visits to the Nunavet region of Canada, collaborating with the local population of a small polar village called Igulick to build a local radio station.

The audio-enabled prints on view at CAF illustrate the multi-faceted role of radio in Igulick. *Igulick Tactical Orthophoto Bromar UAS* is a composite photo-collage of the entire broadcast region taken using a small radio operated photo-plane constructed by the artists. The print streams audio from the shared frequency which locals use in lieu of cell phones to communicate between the village and the surrounding area. *Nunavet (Our Land)* transmits excerpts from the radio station, including a popular program of Inuit music. *Maku* and *Igulick Radio* present the personal face of Arctic community radio through an interview with the local station head.

Arctic Perspective Initiative aims to work with, learn from, and empower Arctic peoples with open source technologies and applied training. Through their radio stations, API helps to facilitate the maintenance of traditional knowledge as well as develop science, technology and education opportunities for peoples in the North and Arctic regions.

Francis Baudevin

At first glance, Francis Baudevin's lithographs appear to have little to do with the subject of radio. *Sound As Weapon* and *Radio-Activity* use the strategy of appropriation—re-purposing found images as art—to make reference to radio's historical appearance in both propaganda and popular culture.

The three identical lithographs, which together constitute Baudevin's piece, *Radio-Activity*, each feature a circular grid appropriated from the album art of a 1975 Kraftwerk album of the same name. The circular grid is derived from photograph of cross-hatch fabric covering the speaker of a German wartime radio, the *Volksempfänger*. Radio was an important part Nazi propaganda. Party leaders subsidized the cost of the *Volksempfänger*, so they were easily available to average Germans. The inventor of this radio was Hitler's Minister of Armament and Wartime Production Albert Speer.

Sound As Weapon, a single lithograph, also takes as its subject a radio invention by Albert Speer. Baudevin lifted the image from the Belgian comic book TinTin. In "The Adventures of TinTin: The Calculus Affair," TinTin discovers his nemesis, the evil Dr. Calculus, is attempting to reconstruct

another of Speer's more sinister constructions – a radio weapon.

Like mobile phones and the internet, radio began as a military technology that trickled into popular hands. No matter how banal our current uses of radio technology, Baudevin reminds us of it's original purposes, and the violent impulses that drive much technological innovation. By doubly-appropriating his works, Baudevin notes how images and ideas disperse, recycle, and remix throughout history, popular culture, and high art. Technology seems to float amorally through this soup—finding traction with any willing users. Baudevin subtly encourages viewers to see the potential of violence not in any specific technology, but in the flawed motives of mankind.

Dove Bradshaw

Please touch Dove Bradshaw's work. No seriously, please touch the large pyrite stone – to function properly the work must interact with the audience. When a viewer touches *Radio Rock*, their body helps ground the antenna atop the rock and the piece emits a squeaking fuzzy hum. You are hearing the sounds of Jupiter. Unfortunately, this isn't E.T. phoning home. The shortwave radio signals from the Red Planet are not evidence of extraterrestrial intelligence. The emissions are generated naturally by plasma instabilities in Jupiter's magnetosphere.

In *Radio Rock*, the artist seeks to place the viewer's touch on equal footing with the components of the piece. The listener is an essential part of this transmission. Here Bradshaw offers her answer to the Zen riddle of a tree falling in the woods. Without a listener, there is no sound. Based in New York since the 1970s, Bradshaw was a frequent collaborator with artist/musician John Cage. Under his influence she became committed to incorporating chance into her art practice. *Radio Rock* exemplifies this interest.

Nathan Carter

Nathan Carter's, *Calling Four Towers Signal Drifting with No Fixed Purpose* is an improvised wire diagram of what the artist calls "info-way" networks. The large-scale landscape of suspended blue steel depicts a linked path of communication instruments and radio towers. Carter's chaotic network weaves through, around, behind, and over a landmass of unspecified scale and location. The apparent structural precariousness gives the work a sense of rapid movement. It is as if we are constantly on the verge of being derailed or skidding off a mountain pass.

Carter employs a style of whimsical, biomorphic shapes familiar from the paintings and sculptures of Joan Miró, Jean Arp, and Alexander Calder. These organic forms humanize the industrial transmission structures. Carter's miniaturized radio stations are not coldly transmitting and receiving radio waves, but alive with all the dramatics of human interaction—coded messages, heavy musical broadcasts, lively political debate, and ominous weather reports. In Carter's world there are no clear channels; all is interference and static, crossed lines and garbled code. It is a place that is, by his own admission, unmappable. But that doesn't stop him trying.

Tyler Coburn

Beginning on Monday, April 18th, 2011, Tyler Coburn launched a radio campaign in six domestic markets: Worcester, MA; Chicago, IL; Dover, DE; Chester County, PA; Rochester, NY and Newark, NJ. For each station, a unique, 60-second advertisement aired six times over the

course of the broadcast day. With each rotation, a different voiceover artist with an archetypical radio announcer voice read the advertisement. These spots issued an analysis of Jell-O brand gelatin, situated in cities that have some bearing on its manufacture.

Presented at CAF, *Recipe* is an audio compilation of the radio spots as they aired on each station, including the preceding and following commercials, as well as six text pieces placed on labels throughout the gallery.

If one considers that corporations have legal personhood in the United States, *Recipe* might be seen as Jell-O's coming-of-age story told in six vignettes of prose-poetry. Jell-O's narrative parallels significant developments in broader American social and economic history. Notably, Jell-O brand gelatin is an early example of successful branding: the process by which marketers attach an abstract feeling, like purity or nostalgia, to a product. Gelatin, known to diners for a few thousand years, is derived from collagen in animal skin and bones. Jell-O marketers successfully branded the ubiquitous and slightly unsavory foodstuff as a jiggling bowl of Americana and set the stage for numerous other re-imaginings of commonplace or unsettling products into more palatable brands.

Melissa Dubbin and Aaron S. Davidson

In 1907, Swedish opera singer Ada Eugenia von Böös-Farrar was invited for dinner at the home of Lee de Forest. The inventor had a microphone and some odd-looking equipment. One thing led to another, and what happened that night is believed to have been the first radio broadcast of a song. "Well, here goes something into nothing," she said before she began to sing a popular number of the day, *I Love You Truly*.

Von Boos-Farrar had not sung more than a few notes when a wireless operator aboard the USS Dolphin docked at the Brooklyn Navy Yard jumped. "I hear a woman singing!" he told his lieutenant, who grabbed the headphones. The lieutenant was "fearful of the enlisted man's sanity." But he, too, heard Mrs. Farrar.

When the singer died she had no family that could be found. As a result her ashes were given to the operator who had received her broadcast that day, Oliver Adams Wyckoff. When he died his daughter entrusted the ashes to the Brooklyn Navy Yard archives. In the early 2000's, the Navy Yard was converted into artist studios and the contents of the archives were dispersed to other collections.

The collaborative sound/installation art team of Melissa Dubbin and Aaron S. Davidson work out of a studio in the very same Navy Yard. In 2010, they were contacted to participate in the interment of Eugenia's ashes at Greenwood Cemetery. An urn was also needed as her ashes were still in the temporary tin from 1966. Inspired by archaeoacoustics, a hypothesis that inadvertent audio recordings can be found in the grooves of ancient pottery, Dubbin and Davidson made this porcelain urn. Enshrouding the singer in her own voice, the artists engraved Eugenia's singing *I Love You Truly* on the exterior of the vessel.

Ellie Ga

Ellie Ga's *Tavole: Tables (Domestic Timekeeping in the Arctic)* is based on the artist's experiences during an expedition aboard the TARA, a research vessel that spent two years drifting through the pack ice of the North Pole. The voyage had no definite end-date, the sailors agreed to stay

onboard until TARA was released from the ice. The artist recorded short radio missives, which she transmitted back to New York. They are replayed here on the tabletop radio.

With almost no personal time or space, the radio messages became Ga's outlet to the larger world – a world that she described as getting farther and more imaginary as her time on the boat stretched on. Her audio account of an uncertain voyage is the centerpiece of the installation, which also includes a photo flipbook and single enlarged print. In the flipbook, repeated images of wristwatch advertisements become a symbol for the nature of time onboard the ship, as clock faces click to 10:10 again and again. The other images contrast the environment of the polar vessel and the vast and dark landscape outside. In the flipbook, she explores how telling fortunes relates to weather prediction, linking time, chance and the Tarot to metaphors for how we cope, or fail to cope, with uncertainty.

The only American on board, Ga organized the Halloween party. *Tiksi* is a portrait of the cook in her costume. The stories told through *Tavole: Tables* highlight her search to find meaning in the mundane or to uncover clues to an uncertain future. Her tales range from incredible to ordinary, but they keep changing, just like the seemingly endless and frozen landscape surrounding the drifting boat.

Nicholas Lobo

Slow-scan television (SSTV) is a picture transmission method used mainly by amateur radio operators to transmit and receive static pictures via radio. Over the past year, artist and radio producer, Nicholas Lobo collected images transmitted by SSTV hobbyists and used them to line the lightbox sculpture seen at CAF. In keeping with the exhibition's broader concerns with radio and community, Lobo's work focuses on radio subcultures. While early proponents of SSTV used actual photographs, these images are screen-captures from the Internet. In the digital age, SSTV has lost it's actual function and become instead a kind of nostalgic media adventure for electronics enthusiasts.

In his sculptural practice, Lobo chases the inaccessible and the intangible. He frequently inserts himself into secretive, tightly-knit communities to seek out elusive knowledge and obscure information. Lobo then attempts to translate these immaterial or invisible things, into physical forms. In this way, *Slow Scan Wildlife Film* makes visible the magic conveyances of radio waves.

Neighborhood Public Radio

On November 4, from 12-1pm in Storke Plaza, adjacent to the KCSB studios on the UCSB campus, artist collaborative Neighborhood Public Radio presented a live, interactive radio art installation titled *Picnic Revolution*. The diagram here at CAF documents the manner in which Neighborhood Public Radio assembled the audio for their installation. *Picnic Revolution* featured a composition of looping broadcast streams and analog synthesizers "played" by boomboxes scattered throughout Stroke Plaza. The Plaza was divided into four sections, with each assigned to its own broadcast frequency, to create a quadraphonic matrix of sound. Passersby were also provided a chance to contribute to the live composition by dialing into a 1-800 number and adding vocals to the mix.

Radio frequencies, like National Parks or California beaches, are a public good—owned and accessible to all citizens. *Picnic Revolution*

encouraged individuals to reclaim this freely available resource by occupying the airwaves. The title is a double entendre—referencing both the lunchtime event and the history of the picnic. After the French Revolution in 1789, royal parks became open to the public for the first time. Picnics became a popular activity amongst the newly enfranchised citizens who demonstrated their ownership of the land by eating lunch at the park.

Neighborhood Public Radio is a guerilla radio broadcast group who share their moniker, NPR, with the station they critique through community-based, noncommercial programming. NPR's nomadic team—anchored by artists Jon Brumit, Lee Montgomery, and Michael Trigilio—broadcasts live shows and interactive radio installations from galleries, residences, and neighborhood points of interest. This program was presented in conjunction with KCSB 91.9FM in honor of the station's 50th anniversary.

Daniel Perlin

Sound artist Daniel Perlin's audio sculptures take the intimate medium of radio to an uncanny edge by giving human characteristics and sentiment to his radio-based sculptures.

Perlin's radio work is inspired by Gilles Deleuze's notion of the "body without organs." For Deleuze, the body without organs is the full free expression of a human being outside of the limits of both their physical body and their position in society. Delueze borrowed this term from never-aired 1947 radio play by the French poet Antonin Artaud, *To Have Done with the Judgment of God*:

When you will have made him a body without organs, then you will have delivered him from all his automatic reactions and restored him to his true freedom.

In Perlin's piece, *To Have Done with the Judgement of God (FM Broadcast)* 20 small transistor radios are strung in a line from the gallery wall. A small transmitter sends an audio recording of an English-translation of the original Artaud play to these radios. Perlin programmed a computer-generated voice to read the play in a near-perfect replication of human speech. However, he added a few purposeful glitches to remind the listener that the voice is a synthetic one. By creating an imperfect 'body without organs,' Perlin reminds listeners of what may be lost in translation when we communicate our intimate thoughts and expressions via electronic devices.

In Perlin's second work, *And Mother Always Told Me*, radio technology takes on the human emotions of love and heartbreak. Speakerwire spells out lyrics from Michael Jackson's "Billie Jean." At the end of the line a small speaker plays an excerpt on loop. "And mother always told me, be careful who you love." In contrast to the Artaud piece, this work offers a more hopeful opinion of transmission. Even in through the imperfect medium of radio, popular music can unite listeners through a shared empathy with Jackson's expression of love gone wrong.

Roman Signer

Roman Signer's "action sculptures" involve setting up, carrying out, and recording "experiments" or events that bear aesthetic results. Following carefully planned procedures, the artist enacts and records such acts as explosions, collisions, and the projection of objects through space. In the video works *Sand auf Radio* and *Beim Radiosender Beromünster*,

Signer gives a humorous twist to the traditional scientific method of experimentation and discovery. His research always ends in the destruction of the subject.

In *Sand auf Radio*, sand is trickled onto a radio placed beneath it, until all that is left is the antenna and the muffled sound of music, as if heard from a distance. The piece is an open metaphor for failed communication, listening, and perhaps censorship. *Beim Radiosender Beromünster*, depicts an illuminated fluorescent tube that is dragged along the ground by an unseen kite in an snowy mountain landscape. The kite acts as a transmitter, picking up signals from the titular station and converting them to electricity to illuminate the neon tube. As the only German language radio station not controlled by the Nazi's during World War II, Radio Station Beromünster was truly a beacon of light during dark times. The contrast of the blue nighttime atmosphere with the dancing and glowing light can be seen as a symbol of the power of radio to offer hope to listeners.

Jim Toth

For the last 30 years, audio designer Jim Toth has hand-built some of the world's premier stereo systems. Known for their extraordinary sonic quality, these systems have earned him a world-wide following in all areas of society from New York's legendary Mudd Club to the White House in Washington D.C. However, Toth is most proud of his long-standing contribution with New York's Downtown avant garde. As artists, musicians, and dancers began venture outside of traditional venues like clubs and galleries, Toth began to collaborate with his friends, building them custom mobile rigs to accommodate these site-specific performance works. Presented here is a prototype of his signature design, the *Santos Speaker*.

Audio Program

Jim Toth's *Santos Speaker* serves as a platform to present additional radio-based works by artists in the exhibition. On Saturday and Sunday, the piece will play a live-feed of radio station KCSB 91.9FM. On Tuesday-Friday *Santos Speaker* will play the following selection:

Makrolab (featuring Marko Pelijan)
Signal Territory, 1997
Intercepted radio transmissions
72 min

Francis Baudevin
Listening Gallery, 2011
Found audio tracks
68 min.

Neighborhood Public Radio
Picnic Revolution, 2011
Audio documentation
90 min.

Melissa Dubbin and Aaron S. Davidson
featuring George Positive
You Love me Truly, 2008
Audio composition
5 min.

Ada Eugenia Von Boos-Farrar
I Love You Truly, 1949
Original recording from NBC Radio
49 sec.

