

Radio Underground

George Higgs

At different points in a greenhouse, I propose planting¹ 4 AM radio transmitters with a signal range not exceeding 20 metres, all transmitting at 1 Mhz. Each will be transmitting recordings of speeches that are significant in the history of radio broadcast:

Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech (1963)

The Hindenburg Disaster radio report (1935)

Mohandas Ghandi, Soldier of Peace (1947)

Albert Einstein, $E=mc^2$ speech (date uncertain)

Audience members are invited to borrow an AM radio at reception², and engage in a kind of sonic hide and seek, where they "unearth" the different transmissions as they pass through the space. The only instruction they will possibly need to receive is how to turn on the radio, switch it to AM and tune it to 1 Mhz. There will be an interesting interplay as people pass out of the range of one transmission and into the range of another, and additionally, hearing another person's radio picking up a different speech to their own a few feet away³.

This installation will celebrate the power and mystery of broadcast, as people pick up on invisible signals strolling through the gardens, and the importance of live broadcast in the last century. Moreover, it will reveal the wonderful paradox of radio in general: the sense of independence it gives a listener embodied in its affordability and portability, and its contrasting connection to a community as many people tune into the same transmission.

The transmitters will be assembled affordably: simply using 1 Mhz crystal oscillators, a small 1000 to 8 ohm transformer, a 9 volt power supply⁴, some wires and clips. The entire apparatus can fit into the palm of a hand. All connections will be soldered to ensure good contacts, and housed simply but effectively to protect the circuit from the damp environment. It will be important for the transmitters to be connected to a decent ground (there should be plenty of pipes available in the Winter Gardens) and a short antennae. Each transmitter will have an input from a portable CD

1 By planting, I mean placing the transmitter, which is very small, in the soil of the garden. Should this be unfeasible, an alternative is to secure them discretely to the floor or wall of the space.

2 Audience member will have to leave collateral (license, credit card). This worked very well in the recent Sound Works Exhibition in Manhattan; August, 2007. where radios were lent out with a license left as a security. The work itself was very different from this proposal, as the radios were merely picking up the a track played from a laptop.

3 One possible idea is that there could be a competition whereby the audience guess the identity of all the speakers.

4 A 9 volt battery could be used, but I would suggest avoiding batteries altogether, as it means having to change them.