

Pronto!

On Telephony

3 september - 8 november 2009

20 september und 1 november 2009, 2 pm

Guided tour through the exhibition

8 november 2009, 2 pm

Artist talks

with Heath Bunting and Christian Croft

The exhibition Pronto! On telephony shows artworks which deals with both playful-experimental and critical-reflexive themes in regards to the social impact of the telephone.

Despite the symbolic and cultural richness of the telephone, there has never been an independent „telephone art“. Some isolated examples of artists' involvement with telephones are Laszlo Moholy-Nagy's experiments using the telephone to transmit instructions for fabricating enamel tile paintings (1922), the conceptual art exhibit „Art by Telephone“ (1969) in Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art where thirty-six artists were invited to communicate with museum staff by telephone to indicate their contribution to the show, and Robert Adrian's „Telephone Music“ (1984), which integrated musicians from all over the world for a performance.

The exhibition „Pronto! On telephony“ examines the social impact of the telephone in its culture-conditioned alteration, with notable attention on the participative and interventive aspects of this medium, which are consistently considered in political contextualisations. The exhibition does not want to affirm technology for its own sake but instead shows the eminent complexity of its cultural, political, economic, and techocological aspects. In this way, also a reflection on the ideological implications of the medium of the telephone is made.

Heath Bunting
@ KING'S X (1994)

In “Cybercafé”, his BBS account, Heath Bunting published the numbers of the public phones of the metro station of King's Cross, along with a prompt to call them at a specified time. On 5th August 1994 at 6pm, the environs of these public phones was transformed into a ringing cyberspace. For the duration of a phone call, Callers from all over the world, randomly formed a temporary virtual community together with passers-by and adepts in place. This hack of a public space emphasizes the inextricable entanglement of the physic (street) and the virtual (telephone) communication space and its entwined effects on human beings. Heath Bunting plays with the status of the telephone as the first medium in the history of the electronic realization of a telematic network, and with its potential to undermine the boundaries between the public and the private.

www.irational.org/cybercafe/xrel.html

Heath Bunting
**THE STATUS PROJECT:
A1014
A MOBILE TELEPHONE
CUSTOMER (2009)**

Started in 2004, The Status Project is an expert system for the mutation of identity, accessible on the website irational.org. It consists of a database which, in over 5000 database entries, records traces which Bunting left during surfing in the internet, when using shopping services or when contacting bureaucratic services of organisations. Bunting applies certain hypotheses to examine the connections between them and generates network maps, which aim to keep records of temporary social statuses. The focus of the investigation lies on the effect which identity, publicly constructed by various data such as numbers of credit and identity cards, bank account numbers, computer passwords etc., takes on our movements in social space, in the internet and in private or institutional databases. A1014 forms a new part of the Status Project which aims to demonstrate the prerequisites for mobile phone contracts in Great Britain.

<http://status.irational.org>

Fabio Gramazio/
Martin Kubli/
Daniel Udatny/
Michel Zai
HIRN-lein (1992)

In the beginning 90s, when 156-numbers, subject to raised charge, were introduced in Switzerland, a dispute broke out concerning their harmfulness (especially in regards to phone sex) – like so many times when a new usage of mass media is introduced. Fabio Gramazio, Martin Kubli, Daniel Udatny and Michel Zai, at the time 18 to 20 years old, who later founded the internationally renown artist group etoy, made use of the media hype around 156-numbers. Their fake company HIRN-lein sparked the interest of mass media, provoking them with (alleged) violence and pornography which laid the basis for infiltrating them with fictitious and ludicrous stories. To name one of them, they asserted that revenues from 156-numbers were used to build an UFO landing strip, which incited yellow press magazine Blick to publish the headline “Hello Ufo, please land”. This form of media hacking and corporate mimicry has persisted in the later work with etoy. The documents of HIRN-lein are shown here for the first time in an exhibition.

Courtesy:
etoy.ART-COLLECTION

IDEO LONDON
Crispin Jones/
Graham Pullin*/
Anton Schubert/
Mat Hunter
SOCIAL MOBILES (2002)

Social Mobiles deals with habits of modern telephony and the inherent social interaction by alteration of interfaces, and subsequently asks to what extent mankind conforms to machine and how this adjustment affects social behaviour. One Social Mobile may give electric shocks triggered by speaking too loud, another one requires the dialling of the number with the help of playing a flute, and in the third case, you literally have to knock before entering the connection.

www.ideo.com/work/item/social-mobiles

*now at the University of Dundee: www.imd.dundee.ac.uk/moli/index.html

Graham Harwood/
Richard Wright/
Matsuko Yokokoji
**TELEPHONE TROTTOIR/
TANTALUM MEMORIAL
(2008)**

<http://mediashed.org/TantalumMemorial>

Lisa Parks
ROAMING (2007)

<http://lisaparks.blogspot.com/>

Christian Croft/
Andrew Schneider
**GENERATIVE SOCIAL
NETWORKING (2006)**

www.generativesocialnetworking.com/

The Western World know little about the fact that the wars in Congo mainly origin from Tantalum metal which is essential in the production of mobile phones and laptops and is therefore traded at prices higher than gold. Tantalum Memorial, built from a pre-electronic phone exchange from the 30s, brings the conflict out into the open while at the same time commemorating the three million deads. On the other hand it is connected to a campaign involving the Congolese exile community by working as an operational centre for Telephone Trottoir (Telephone Sidewalk). Telephone Trottoir refers to the traditional Congolese principle of uncensored gossiping and information exchange in the street among pedestrians, called „Radio Trottoire“. Over 1800 persons regularly contribute to Telephone Trottoir.

In Mongolia, owners of mobile phones often resell call minutes, which sprouts the existence of one-man service market stalls. In Roaming, Lisa Parks deals with telephony outside the Western World, where access to technology is limited, and she demonstrates the small micro-economic appropriation strategies which go along with this. The visitor is situated at the technological and financial interface of Mongolian white phone workers who operate on the streets of Ulaanbaatar. Positioned as if a user who is standing within the footprints of the Mongolian wireless infrastructure, he finds out about a different configuration of mobile telephony.

Generative Social Networking (GNS) uses a security breach and the ignorance of a great number of mobile phone users by tapping their digital address books. The first entry of the list is being called and the reaction (e.g. Hello? Who is it?) of the called person is recorded. The record is then played to the next entry of the list, whose reaction is again recorded. Applying parody and criticism, GSN deals with the role of mobile phones in social life and with the boom of „Social Networking“ websites. It thereby reveals the very basic communication rituals in telephony and their incidental going astray in some sort of automated mix-up comedy. An additional focus lies on the subject of dealing with private data.

Unsworn
OPHONES (2005)

www.unsworn.org/ophones/

This work of the Swedish collective Unsworn Industries centers around the participatory principle of telephony, a technology which is very easily accessible (at least in the Western World). In the installation Ophones, a continuously changing soundscape is created by the audience contributing via telephone receivers. Each telephone receiver is directly connected to a loudspeaker which entangles the intimate with the public sphere.

Unsworn
TELEMEGAPHONE (2008/2009)

www.unsworn.org/telemegaphone/

“Telemegaphone Dale”, sitting seven meters above the tip of the mountain Jøtulshaugen, looks down upon the idyllic Dalsfjord in western Norway. Upon dialing the number of the Telemegaphone, the caller’s voice resounds over the fjord, the valley and village of Dale, far away from where s/he is actually calling. After a test phase in 2008, the Telemegaphone has been installed on a permanent basis. You can get through to it by dialling +47 90 369 389.

Cada
TODAY (2007)

<http://today.cada1.net/>

Today is a mobile phone application which performs a real-time translation of personal calls or SMS of a user to a visual symbolic language. A phone call e.g. generates a circle, the size of which correlates to the duration of a call, and its color represents the dialled number. This private data, over time, generates an emotional diary. Its colorimetricality is irreproducible and tells uniquely intimate stories of a given phone user. The focus of this project is put on the strong effect mobile telephony has on our daily lives. The exhibition shows graphic representations generated by Today along with a real-time log which covers the entire duration of the exhibition.

!Mediengruppe Bitnik
OPERA CALLING. ARIEN FÜR ALLE (2007)

«Der Rosenkavalier» von Richard Strauss
Telefonanruf – Sonntag,
25. März 2007, 16:28:52

www.opera-calling.com

Between March and May 2007, hidden audio bugs, taken from remodeled mobile phones and placed in the auditorium, retransmitted the shows of Zurich Opera House to randomly selected phone connections in Zurich. Citizens of Zurich were connected live to the auditorium and were able to listen to the show for as long as they wanted. In total, over 90 hours of live opera were broadcast to 4363 households over Zurich city’s telephone network. The opera house’s management found out about the operation via mass media and announced the prosecution, a threat which was withdrawn only after several hearings. Opera Calling is an experimental Hacking Operation connected to a do-it-yourself movement in the emancipation of media, which refers to the early days of the telephone, when opera transmissions could be booked via phone. A live-recording of an opera transmission and the reactions at the other end of the line will be presented in the exhibition.

Christian Marclay
TELEPHONES (1995)

Courtesy:
Paula Cooper Gallery, New York

In his video Telephones, Christian Marclay deals with the rituals of telephony and its representations in popular culture by separating telephone sequences from Hollywood movies to their basic structure and serializing them. His associative montage charges the material with new meaning. The callers seem to make phone calls across the history of film and thereby run through the entire spectrum of human emotion that are triggered by the absent presence inherent in telephoning.

Cooperation:
/dis/connecting/media/

The exhibition is part of the cooperation project /Fest Netz/ about the medium telephone. It was initiated in the context of the interdisciplinary postgraduate program „Intermediale Ästhetik. Spiel – Ritual – Performanz“ at the Universities of Basel and Bern. Along with the exhibition, it includes the international conference /dis/connecting/media/ (October 1-3, at baselcitystudios, Basel) and the film programme „Sorry, wrong Number! Telephone in film“ (October 1-31, Stadtkino Basel).

www.disconnectingmedia.ch

Curated by Andy Blättler and Raffael Dörig.

[plug.in] is supported by:
Christoph Merian Stiftung, Kanton Basel-Stadt, kulturelles.bl

Telephone exchange: loan from SiemensForum Zürich

The exhibition is supported by:



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Eidgenössisches Departement des Innern EDI
Bundesamt für Kultur BAK

[PLUG.IN]

St. Alban-Rheinweg 64 CH-4052 Basel
+41-61-283 60 50 office@iplugin.org
www.iplugin.org

Hours **Wed-Sun 2 - 6 pm**
Thu 8-10 pm only on appointment