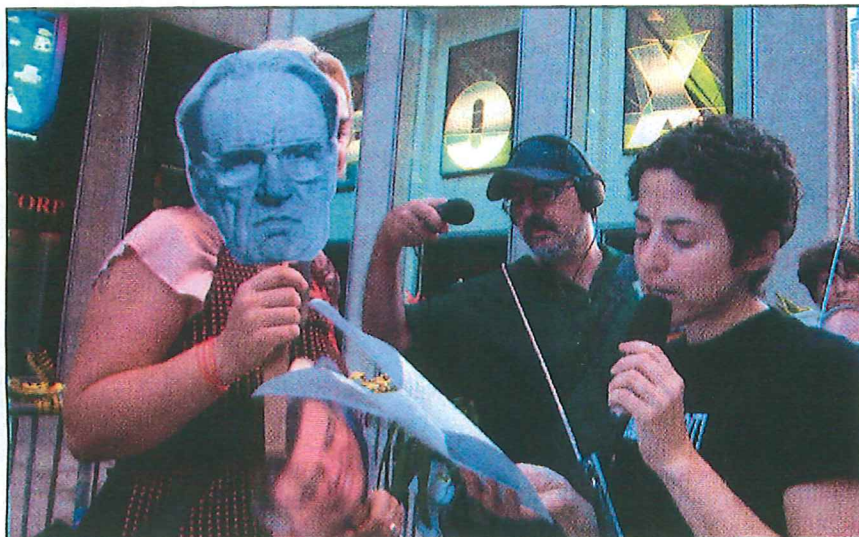
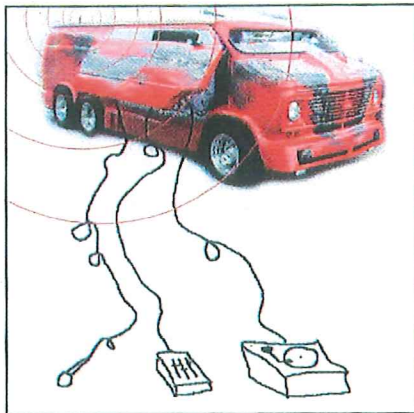
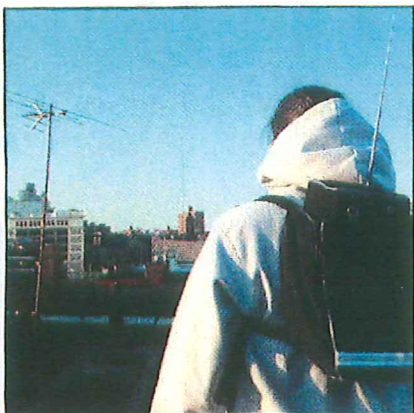


NEUROTRANSMITTER: INTERVENTION ON THE STREET LEVEL

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Some of the most closely guarded instruments of state and commercial power are television and radio networks—patrolled not necessarily by arms, but by regulations about who and what can be transmitted on air. Access to the audiences of mass communication is zealously safeguarded by the FCC in the United States, and breach of such control is considered piracy—the theft of radiowave resources which are artificially delimited so they can be licensed at great expense to generally private corporations. The recent controversy over Howard Stern's indecency and his move to the as-yet unregulated zone of satellite radio underscores the political volatility associated with the airwaves.

The art collective *neuroTransmitter*, founded by artists Angel Nevarez and Valerie Tevere, utilizes as their medium radiowaves and the objects associated with their deployment. The collective has developed devices they term “com_muni_ports,” mobile radio transmitting and sound recording/mixing equipment housed in backpack form. In performances staged in and around major cities, they transmit from these portable units low-frequency, close-proximity broadcasts that remain just within the range permissible by the FCC. Because the com_muni_ports record and remix as they travel throughout the city space, the resulting sounds that nearby listeners pick up with radios tuned to specific frequencies (say 88.1 FM) is a spectrum of urban encounters. Interviewing passersby, playing music, interspersing it with ambient noises; the com_muni_port is pedestrian in the fullest sense of the word, a localized, mobile encounter with urban space and culture.

Seeking to expand their audience beyond the walking tour, in 2003 *neuroTransmitter* proposed a lowrider and radio-broadcast van described as having “more bounce to the frequency.” Equipped with an FM radio transmitter, turntables, microphones, a 12-channel mixer, a DAT player and recorder, and dual-axial hydraulics, the *neuroTransmitter* lowrider expands upon the still-vibrant history of Chicano lowrider music culture in Los Angeles as well as references the Caribbean tradition of truck-mounted mobile sound systems that bypassed the established payola structure which granted radio play only to select artists.

In a visual and sound installation entitled “landscape and oscillations” (2003), a simple line drawing on paper of a radio satellite in the New Mexico became the antenna for a series of transmissions of live sound broadcast. Here *neuroTransmitter* willfully confuses genre and medium boundaries that serve to differentiate sound from visual form, a trend that has increasingly come to be known as sound art. Stemming from the composer John Cage's work in the 1950s and beyond, and his influence on artists such as Robert Rauschenberg and the Fluxus performers of the 1960s, sound artists combined the event—often an art performance in a gallery or museum context—with the musical score. In “landscape and oscillations,” the score is a traditional object of art, an ink-on-paper drawing, which is then enhanced sonically by becoming the medium of transmission for broadcast to nearby radios.

By intervening in established distribution networks of mass media communication, *neuroTransmitter* allows for a redefinition of what can and should be heard on radio. Radiowaves are, after all, a naturally occurring part of the electromagnetic spectrum, albeit with a lower frequency and longer wavelength than light. In aggressively rethinking the politics of the street and what can happen on it, *neuroTransmitter* joins a legion of intervention genres such as graffiti art that expand the notion of where art can exist and whom it can address.