

# Baltic Sea Radio

Varvara Guljajeva & Mar Canet (2012)





The artwork was the part of Baltic Goes Digital exhibition organized by Art Line Project\* that took place in the Gdansk City Gallery in Gdansk, Poland (14.09-04.11.12).

Baltic Sea Radio was one of the three winning works of Baltic Goes Digital contest.

\* <http://artline-southbaltic.eu/>



## Baltic Sea Radio (2012)

Varvara Guljajeva & Mar Canet Sola

Baltic Sea Radio is an art project that makes use of the Baltic Sea traffic for artistic purposes and offers a novel sonic experience to the audience. The artwork reflects the local ships' movements in real-time and applies marine traffic as a score of a sound composition. The boats that can be reached by the AIS-receiver, which is installed in Sopot right on the coast of Baltic Sea, are affecting and determining the score of the soundwork in real-time. Hence, the artists have given away the control over the sound composition to the marine data. In other words, the sound work is in a constant flux and relates to current activity of Gdansk Bay. It means, one could listen to the voice of local sea, and imagine the movement and activity of it.

The artwork uses unaware participation concept developed by the artists through their past works, which applies certain human or animal activity for artistic purposes without awareness of the subject in real-time. It means, the artwork is based on daily life events at the moment. In the case of Baltic Sea Radio, the sound installation is affected by the ships' movement in Gdansk Bay in real-time. Thus, the artwork aims to draw



on everyday life and invite the audience to rediscover reality in unusual way, rather than to be an auto-reflective piece of art.

Baltic Sea Radio goes beyond gallery space. It expands over 3 spaces: the receiving station on the coast of Gdansk Bay, the listening and visual installation in the gallery, and virtual space in the form of online radio stream. Hence, the work cannot be seen just as a sonic one because it interacts with different spaces and has its visual and experiential elements besides the sonic part. It is important to mention that as visual artists we have approached sound as a visual material and tried to give a texture to the composition elements. In addition to that, we are not talking about sonification of marine data, because the data do not correspond directly to certain parameters in the software but rather determines the score, the characteristics and activity of used sonic textures or instruments created in PureData program.

## THE BALTIC GOES DIGITAL



Marek Dybuś  
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15/09 - 4/11/2013



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### The Baltic Goes Digital

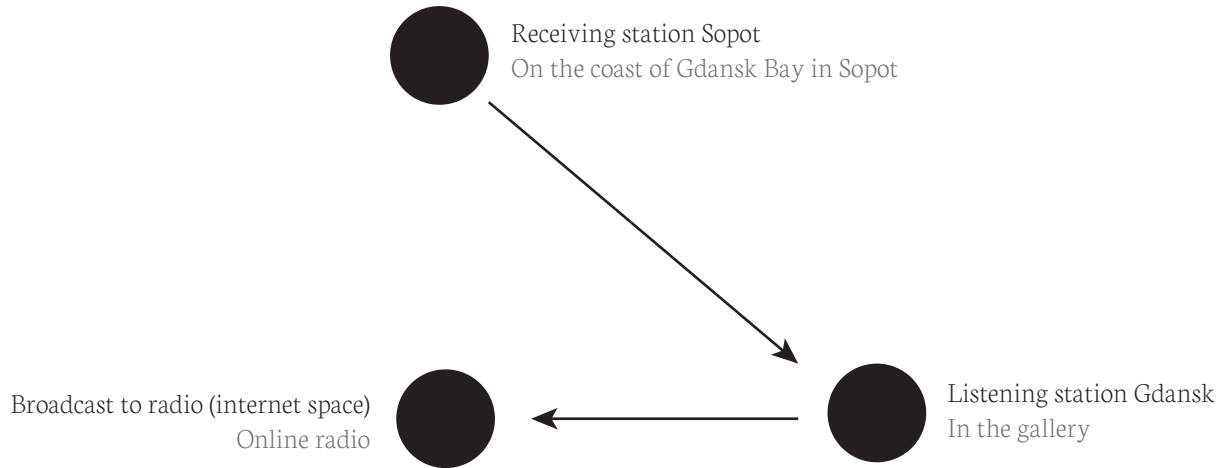
#### Jury members:

(Iwona Bigos (PL), Andreas Broegger (DEN), Martin Koplin (GER), Ryszard W. Kluszczyński (PL) and Anna Zalewska (PL))

#### Jury Verdict:

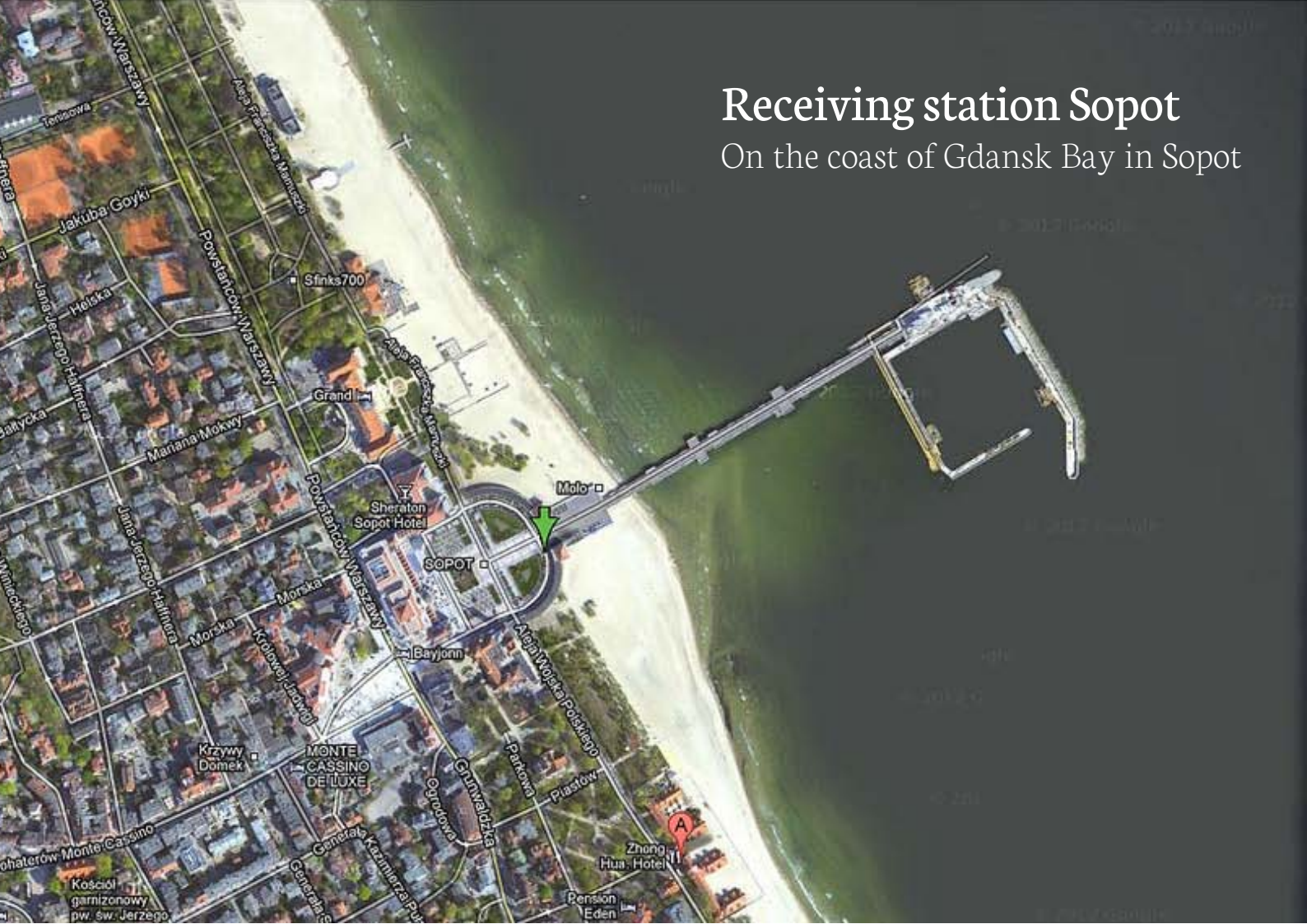
In the project there is an exciting mixture and a dialogue between well-known media, like radar and radio, combined with opportunities offered by ge positioning and the use of internet. What distinguished the project is the idea of drawing a parallel between marine and city traffic and a presentation of Baltic cities being networked via ships. Baltic Sea Radio makes the fascinating yet hermetic world of sea communication accessible to everyone. All three projects outstand remaining applications with their visionary character and the fact that they all include information processes and networks. The chosen projects engage the audience to take active part and therefore influence the shape of the works. Due to the use of locative media, these real-time based art works transgresses the local place of presentation by including one or more remote locations which unites the Baltic states.

# Baltic Sea Radio layers



# Receiving station Sopot

On the coast of Gdansk Bay in Sopot





# Listening station Gdansk

In the gallery

Varvara Guljajeva & Mar Canet /Baltic Sea Radio/













## Technical realization

Concerning technical realization, an AIS-receiver was used for receiving the marine traffic. This device has 50 nautical miles of reachability. It constitutes, the receiver has to be placed on the spot that has a view on sea. Hence, the AIS-receiver was placed on the coast of Gdansk Bay in Sopot where in average 40 - 100 ships could be reached and applied as a source for composition. There was installed also a computer that makes sense of received data, decrypts it and forwards to the second computer that is located in the exhibition space in Gdansk City Gallery. The listening station is also the place where real-time sound composition is generated. The sound-work uses Pure Data software for electronic sound composition purposes and also for receiving decoded marine data from another machine. Moreover, from the gallery space is realized also the broadcast of Baltic Sea Radio online.



## Visual Presentation

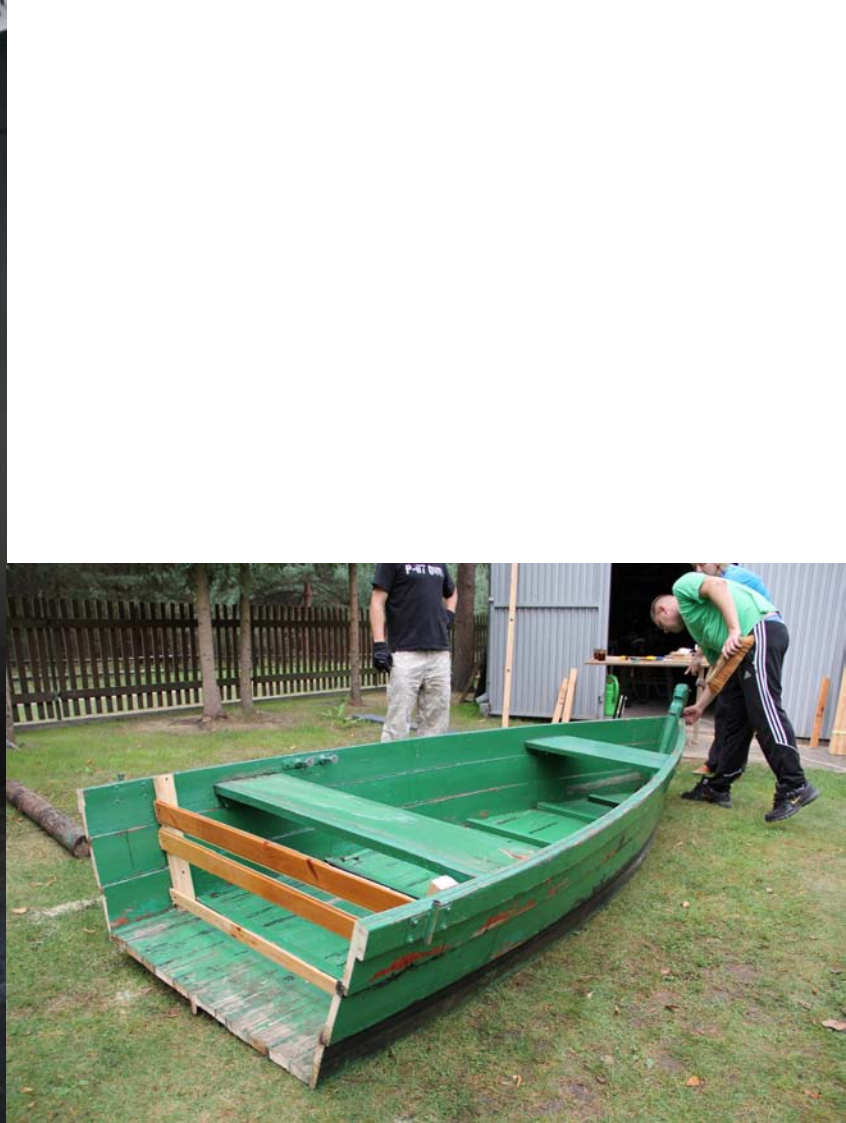
In terms of visual presentation in the gallery space, the audience is invited to take a seat in the half-boat and experience the real-time composition of Baltic Sea. The listening station is made out of old fishing boat that was cut into two pieces, equipped with a seat, computer and headphones.

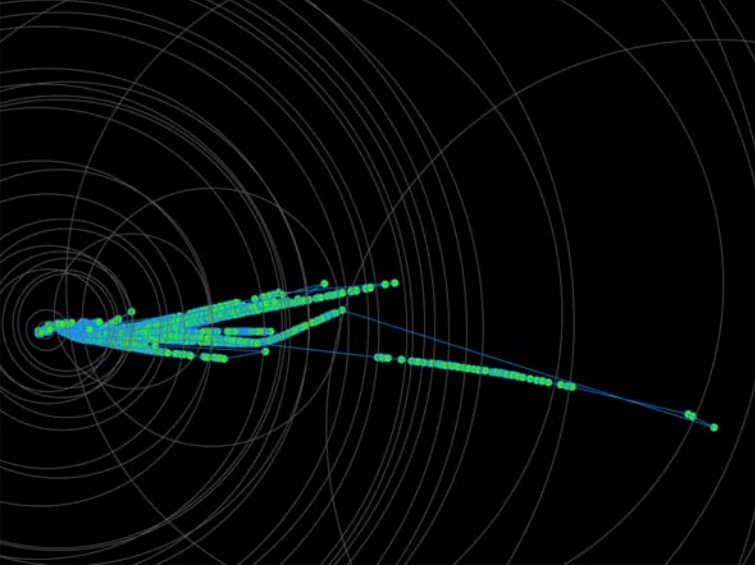


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POST DUTY





Flux of the sea (2011) - Mallorca, Spain.

## Review

### **Baltic Sea Radio: on data flows and life in real-time** **Pau Waelder**

One of the largest seaports on the Baltic Sea, the port of Gdańsk is constantly receiving ships that dock on the Dead Vistula or sail along the Port Channel and the Kashubia Canal into the city. The vessel traffic is converted into data as each ship's identification, position, course and speed is tracked in real-time by the

Automatic Identification System (AIS) base stations located on the coast. Easily available on several web services, this data becomes an additional layer of information that extends over the port and the city. It increases the flow of data already present in wireless networks and adds a content that is specific of this location: it belongs to the port of Gdańsk.

We usually perceive the information displayed in our digital devices as ubiquitous and unlocated: even when it refers to a particular place (such as the weather forecast in our city or the Wikipedia entry about a certain town), it seems to come out of nowhere, to belong to that vast, formless cloud (formerly cyberspace) we call the Internet. It travels invisibly over a network of servers and routers, and finally pops up on the screen as if it had always been there. Even if Wi-Fi network coverage has taught us that we live surrounded by data flows, and that we have a growing need to interact with them, we are seldom reminded of the geographical and physical origin of the data we have access to. Furthermore, the fact that this data is generated by some kind of human activity is usually overlooked. In this sense, if we are “immersed in data”, as Lev Manovich points out [1], we should not forget that the large amount of data that surrounds us is not an abstract entity, but the output of billions of actions carried out by people almost everywhere in the world. Artistic projects that convert these data flows into something meaningful should, according to Manovich, “represent the personal subjective experience of a person living in a data society” [2]. In doing so, only if the collected data is related to a

particular location and a certain human activity, we can avoid the impression of simply observing an infinite array of numbers and network packets. Data becomes information when it has a meaning, and as such it can be integrated into an artwork.

Varvara Guljajeva has explored the interaction with data flows in the context of particular locations in a series of artistic projects developed with Mar Canet. In *The Rhythm of the City* (2011), several metronomes are modified to react to the flow of data from Twitter, Flickr and YouTube in a particular city [3]; in *Wireless Poetry and Revealing Digital Landscape* (2013), the network density in the city of Seoul enables a novel way of written expression [4]. *Baltic Sea Radio* (2012) belongs to this series of works, as it culls data from AIS base stations located at the port of Gdańsk and applies it as a score in a sound installation [5]. In a previous project, *The Flux of the Sea* (2011), this process was tested at the seaport of Palma (Majorca, Spain) in the form of an open-air concert and a limited series of prints in which the location of the ships at a particular moment was rendered as a generative image [6]. *Baltic Sea Radio* has been further developed as a temporary exhibition and an online radio stream, enhancing its relation with the port and the audience. The sound installation uses an old boat as a listening station, providing an element that establishes a visual connection with the origin of the data generating the score. The audience listens to the real-time composition (which is, therefore, unique to every visitor at any given time) in a setting that suggests an intimate experience: the boat is placed upright, as a sort of chapel, while the composition can be heard by putting on a set of headphones.

In this manner, each person is invited to listen attentively to the score by isolating herself from the environment and imagine the activity that is taking place at the port and far away at sea. Additionally, the online radio broadcast enabled anyone to listen to the real-time composition in a different location, providing a way to experience the maritime traffic as sound, just as it can be seen on a website that visually displays AIS data.

While *Baltic Sea Radio* takes the ethereal flow of data back to its specific context in the sound installation at the Gdańsk City Gallery, it also introduces a concept that is recurrently addressed by Guljajeva in her artistic practice. “Unaware participation” states the artist, “is an artistic concept that explores a novel way of applying real-time human or animal activity for artistic purposes without their awareness of participation in the artwork” [7]. It implies a re-contextualization of an everyday activity, which acquires an additional meaning while not being altered by the fact that it is integrated into the artwork. In this case, the maritime traffic is not affected by the sound installation, while it is, at the same time, transformed from a daily activity into an artistic performance. Artists have long sought the fusion of art and life, and while unaware participation only provides this possibility in one direction (from daily life into the artwork), it enables a different form of exploring the everyday by observing it in real-time. This observation is carried out by means of a *détournement* of the data flows, that allows the data to simultaneously serve its original purpose (here, to locate ships at all times and prevent them from crashing) while providing an

input to the participatory artwork. Surveillance comes to mind, as in fact the network provides the means to obtain information about a human activity without requiring conscious involvement on the part of those who are engaged in such activity. And while it is true, as Boris Groys states, that “the internet is by its essence a machine of surveillance” [8], it must be pointed out that it is not the specific action of one person what is being traced, but the activity as a whole, which generates and modifies a certain output. In this sense, Baltic Sea Radio provides a new form of experiencing the constant coming and going of ships at the port, not focusing on the vessels themselves but on the “life” that is happening, at that moment, on the sea front of Gdańsk.

## Notes

- [1] Manovich, Lev (2002). “Data Visualisation as New Abstraction and Anti-Sublime”. <[http://manovich.net/DOCS/data\\_art\\_2.doc](http://manovich.net/DOCS/data_art_2.doc)>
- [2] Manovich, op. cit.
- [3] Varvara Guljajeva and Mar Canet, The Rhythm of the City. <<http://www.varvarag.info/the-rhythm-of-city/>>
- [4] Varvara Guljajeva and Mar Canet, Wireless Poetry. <<http://www.varvarag.info/wireless-poetry/>>
- [5] Varvara Guljajeva and Mar Canet, Baltic Sea Radio. <<http://www.varvarag.info/baltic-sea-radio/>>
- [6] Varvara Guljajeva and Mar Canet, The Flux of the Sea. <<http://www.varvarag.info/the-flux-of-sea/>>
- [7] Varvara Guljajeva, “Unaware Participation in Art”. Short description of thesis.
- [8] Groys, Boris (2013). “Art Workers: Between Utopia and the Archive”, e-flux journal #45, May 2013.

# THE BALTIC GOES DIGITAL

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wernisaż

14/09/2012 | godz. 19/30



GDAŃSKA  
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Wystawa pokonkursowa organizowana w ramach międzynarodowego projektu artystycznego ART LINE,  
dofinansowanego ze środków programu South Baltic Cross – border Co – operations Programme 2007 – 2013.



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2+3 D

piktogram

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art

artklub

gazeta

dwa tygodnie

Radio  
Gdańsk

An aerial photograph of a public square. In the foreground, there is a long, white, modular bench. The square is paved with light-colored stone tiles. To the right, there are several green trees and a fountain with water spraying upwards. A person in a yellow jacket is walking across the square. In the background, there are more people and a building with a dark facade.

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<http://varvarag.info> - <http://mcanet.info>