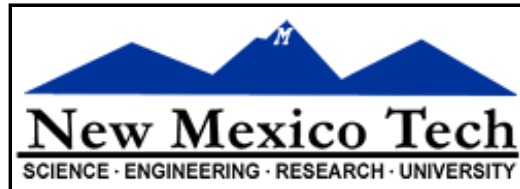


# Advanced Calibration Techniques

Mark Claussen NRAO/Socorro  
(based on earlier self-calibration lectures)



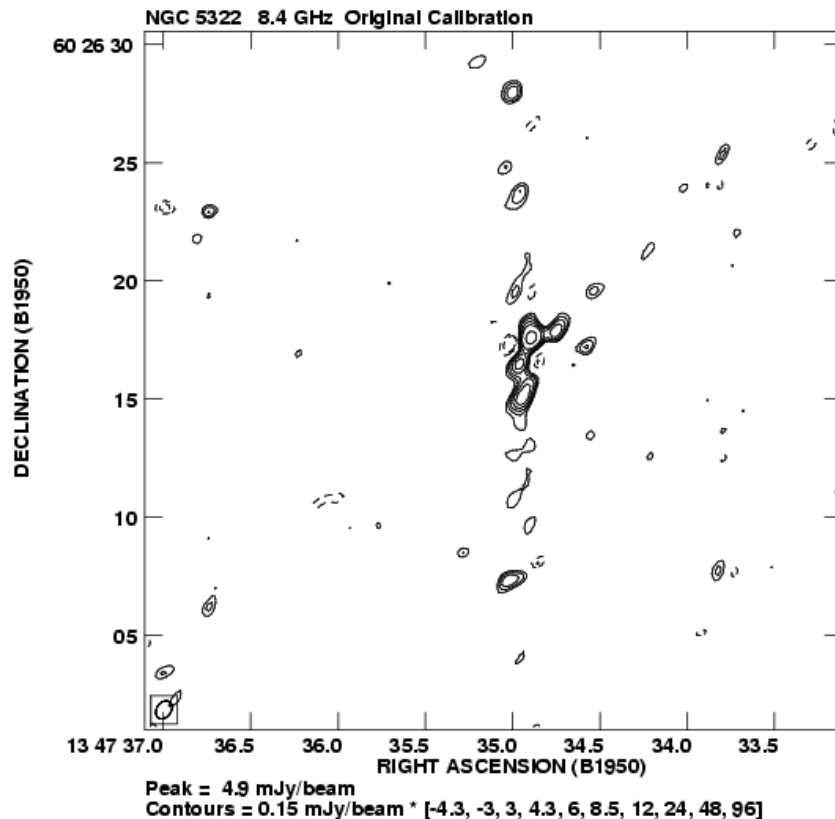
Twelfth Synthesis Imaging Workshop  
2010 June 8-15



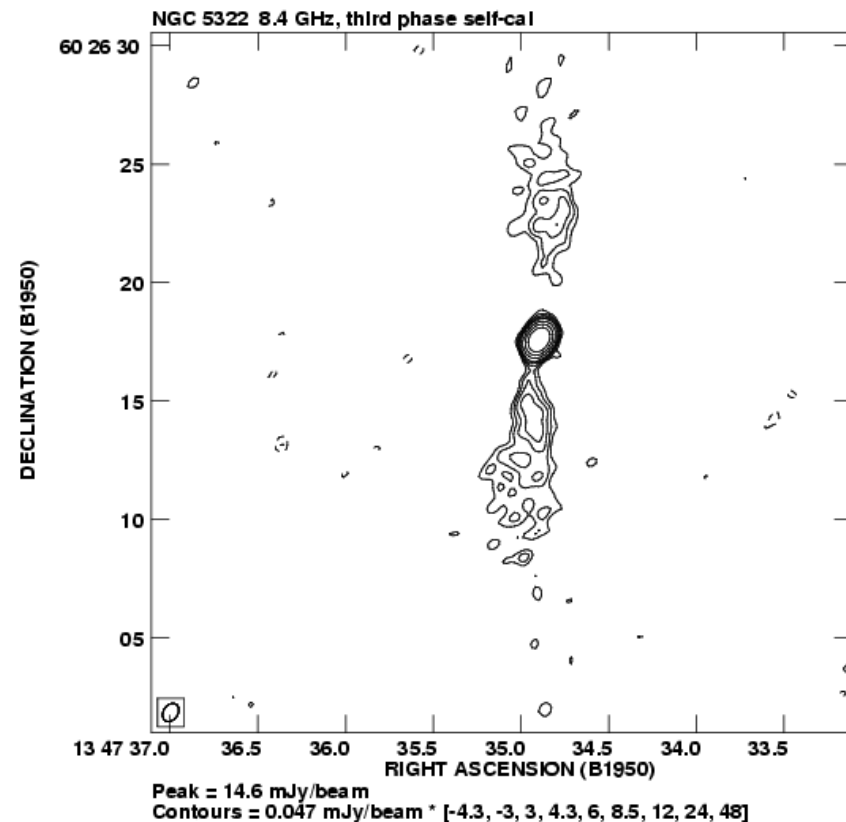
# Self-calibration of a VLA snapshot

2

Initial Image



Final image



# Calibration equation

- Fundamental calibration equation

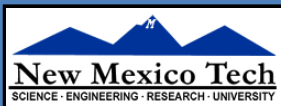
$$V_{ij}(t) = g_i(t)g_j^*(t)V^{true}(t) + \varepsilon_{ij}(t)$$

$V_{ij}(t)$       Visibility measured between antennas  $i$  and  $j$

$g_i(t)$       Complex gain of antenna  $i$

$V^{true}(t)$     True visibility

$\varepsilon_{ij}(t)$       Additive noise



# Standard calibration using a point source calibrator

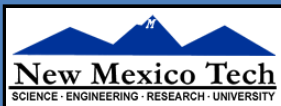
4

- Calibration equation becomes

$$V_{ij}(t) = g_i(t)g_j^*(t)S + \varepsilon_{ij}(t)$$

$S$  Strength of point source

- These are calibrator visibilities; given a point source can solve for the complex gains
- Works well - lots of redundancy
  - N-1 baselines contribute to gain estimate for any given antenna



# Why is *a priori* calibration insufficient?

5

Initial calibration based on calibrator observed before/after target

Gains were derived at a different time

- Troposphere and ionosphere are variable

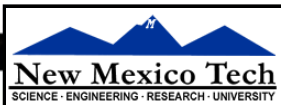
- Electronics may be variable

Gains were derived for a different direction

- Troposphere and ionosphere are not uniform

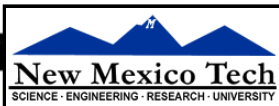
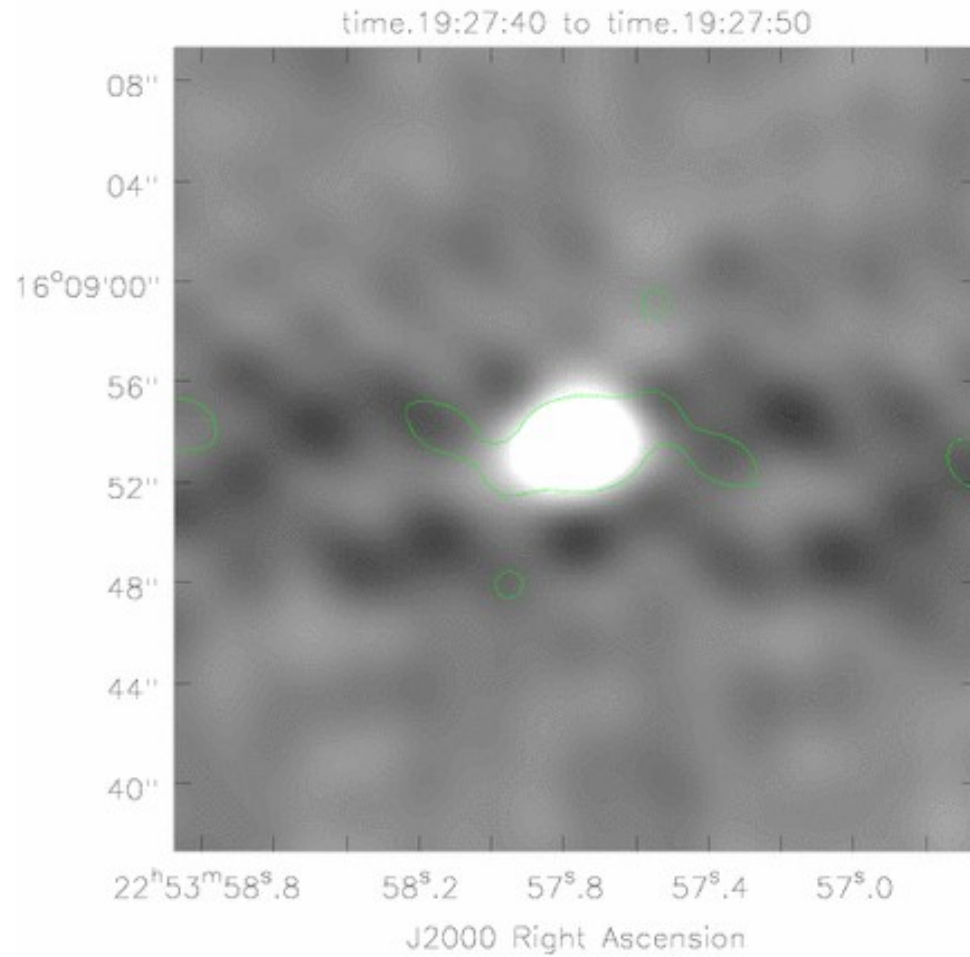
Observation might have been scheduled poorly for the existing conditions

Calibrator may have structure and may not be as strong as expected



# Movie of point source at 22GHz

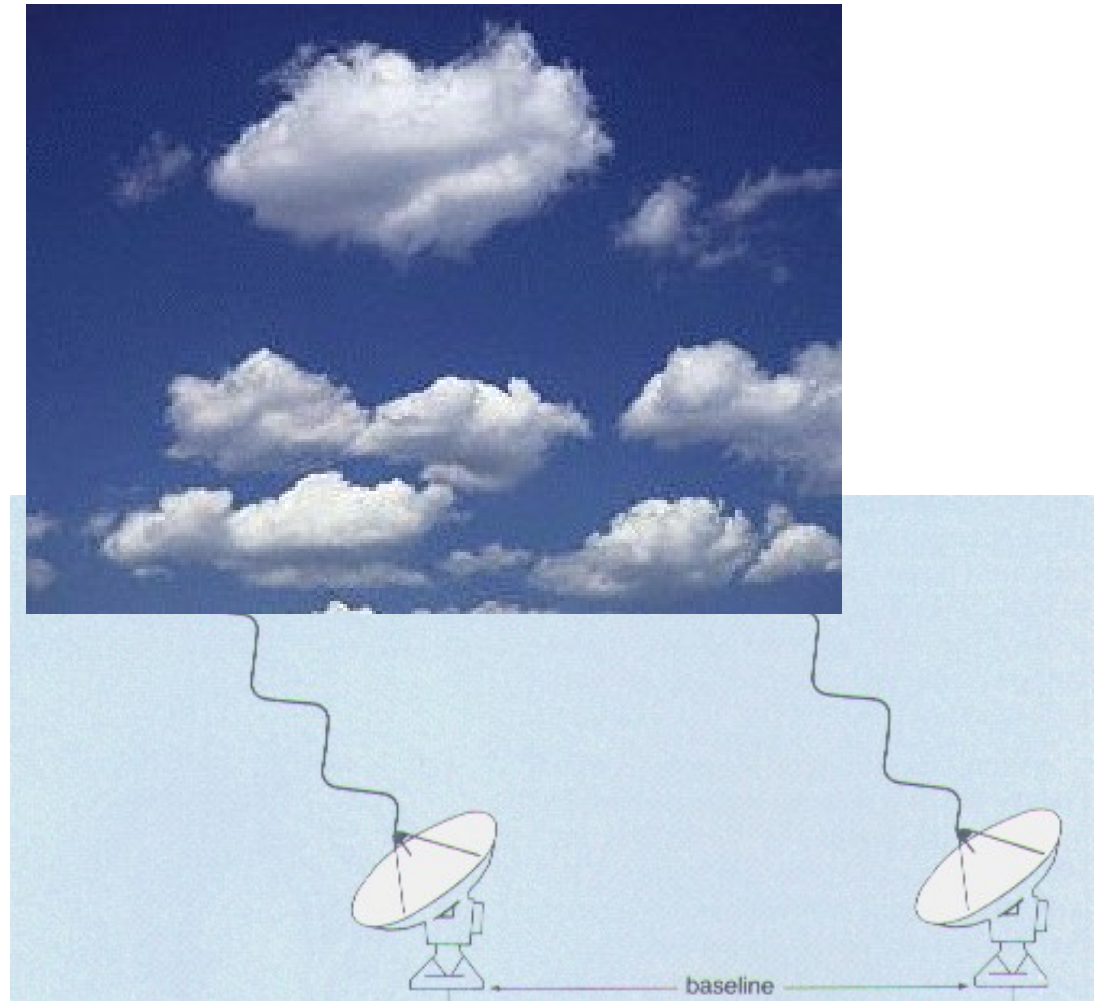
6



# What is the troposphere doing?

7

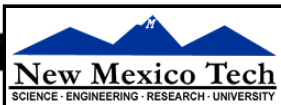
- Neutral atmosphere contains water vapor
- Index of refraction differs from “dry” air
- Variety of moving spatial structures





# Self-calibration

- Use *target* visibilities and allow the antenna gains to be free parameters.
- If all baselines correlated, there are  $N$  complex gain errors corrupting the  $N^*(N - 1) / 2$  complex visibility measurements for a given time.
- Therefore there are  $N^*(N - 1) / 2 - N$  complex numbers that can be used to constrain the true sky brightness distribution.
- Even after adding the degrees of freedom from the antenna gains, the estimation of an adequate model of the target brightness is still overdetermined.





# Self-Calibration using a model of a complex source

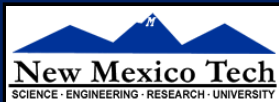
9

- So begin by using a *model* of the source visibilities:

$$V_{ij}(t) = g_i(t)g_j^*(t)V_{ij}^{\text{model}} + \varepsilon_{ij}(t)$$

$V_{ij}^{\text{model}}$       Model visibility

- One can form a sum of squares of residuals between the observed visibilities and the product of gains and model visibilities and do some kind of minimization by adjusting the gains.



# Relationship to point source calibration

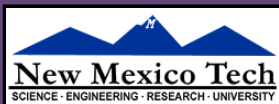
10

- We can relate this to using a point source for calibration
- Made a fake point source by dividing by model visibilities

$$X_{ij}(t) = g_i(t)g_j^*(t) + \varepsilon'_{ij}(t)$$

$$X_{ij}(t) = \frac{V_{ij}(t)}{V_{ij}^{\text{model}}}$$

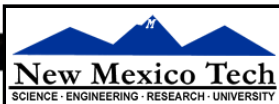
$\varepsilon'_{ij}(t)$  Modified noise term



# How to self-calibrate

11

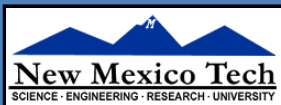
- I. Create an initial source model, typically from an initial image (or else a point source)
  - Use whatever constraints you may have on the source structure
  - Convert the source into a “point source” using the model
- I. Find antenna gains
  - Using some “least squares” fit to visibility data
- I. Apply gains to correct the observed data
2. Create a new model from the corrected data, again using constraints
  - Using for example Clean or Maximum Entropy or some other method to create the model
- I. Go to (2), unless current model is satisfactory
  - shorter solution interval, different uv limits/weighting
  - phase → amplitude & phase



# Closure phase

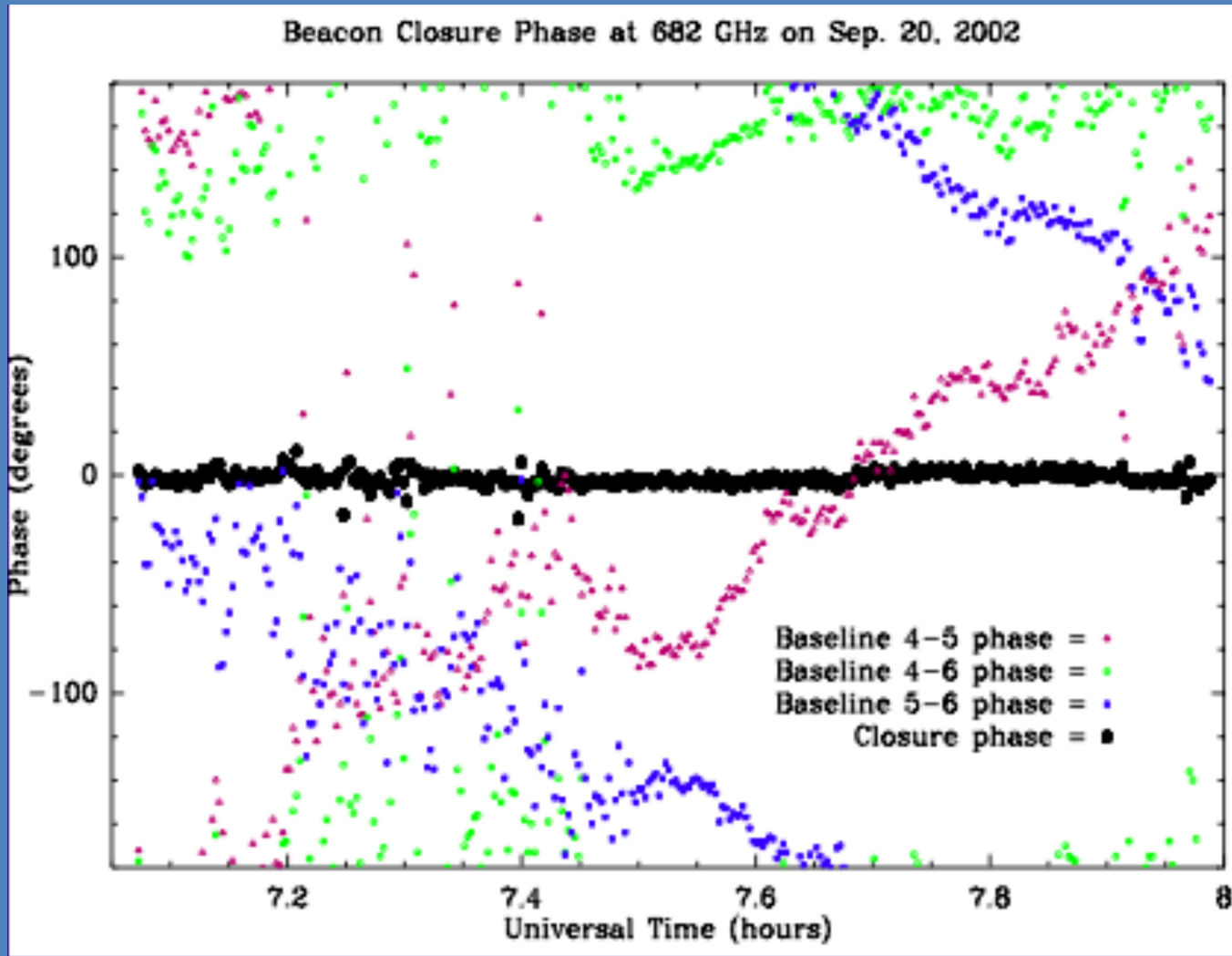
- self-calibration preserves the *Closure Phase* which is a good observable even in the presence of antenna-based phase errors

$$\begin{aligned}
 \Phi_{ijk} &= \theta_{ij} + \theta_{jk} + \theta_{ki} \\
 &= \theta_{ij}^{\text{true}} + (\varphi_i - \varphi_j) + \theta_{jk}^{\text{true}} + (\varphi_j - \varphi_k) + \theta_{ki}^{\text{true}} + (\varphi_k - \varphi_i) \\
 &= \theta_{ij}^{\text{true}} + \theta_{jk}^{\text{true}} + \theta_{ki}^{\text{true}}
 \end{aligned}$$



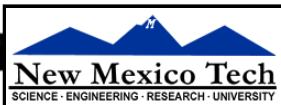
# SMA closure phase measurements at 682GHz

13



# Advantages and disadvantages of self-calibration

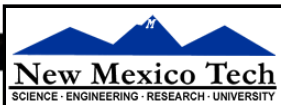
- Advantages
  - Gains derived for correct time --- no interpolation
  - Gains derived for correct position --- no atmospheric assumptions
  - Solution is fairly robust if there are many baselines
  - More time on-source
- Disadvantages
  - Requires a sufficiently bright source
  - Introduces more degrees of freedom into the imaging: results might not be robust and stable
  - Absolute position information lost



# When to and when not to self-calibrate

15

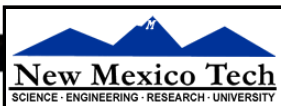
- Calibration errors may be present if one or both of the following are true:
  - The background noise is considerably higher than expected
  - There are convolutional artifacts around objects, especially point sources
- Don't bother self-calibrating if these signatures are not present
- Don't confuse calibration errors with effects of poor Fourier plane sampling such as:
  - Low spatial frequency errors (woofly blobs) due to lack of short spacings
  - Multiplicative fringes (due to deconvolution errors)
  - Deconvolution errors around moderately resolved sources





# Choices in self-calibration

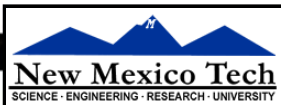
- Initial model?
  - Point source often works well
  - Simple fit (e.g., Gaussian) for barely-resolved sources
  - Clean components from initial image
    - Don't go too deep!
  - Simple model-fitting in (u,v) plane
- Self-calibrate phases or amplitudes?
  - Usually phases first
    - Phase errors cause anti-symmetric structures in images
  - For EVLA and VLBA, amplitude errors tend to be relatively unimportant at dynamic ranges  $< 1000$  or so



# More choices....

17

- Which baselines?
  - For a simple source, all baselines can be used
  - For a complex source, with structure on various scales, start with a model that includes the most compact components, and use only the longer baselines
- What solution interval should be used?
  - Generally speaking, use the shortest solution interval that gives “sufficient” signal/noise ratio (SNR)
  - If solution interval is too long, data will lose coherence
    - Solutions will not track the atmosphere optimally



# Sensitivity limit

- Can self-calibrate if SNR on most baselines is greater than one
- For a point source, the error in the gain solution is

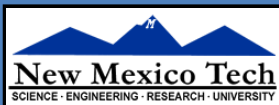
Phase only  $\sigma_g = \frac{1}{\sqrt{N-2}} \frac{\sigma_v}{S}$

Amplitude and phase  $\sigma_g = \frac{1}{\sqrt{N-3}} \frac{\sigma_v}{S}$

$\sigma_v$  Noise per visibility sample

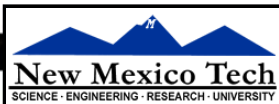
$N$  Number of antennas

- If error in gain is much less than 1, then the noise in the final image will be close to theoretical



# You can self-calibrate on weak sources!

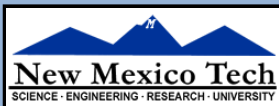
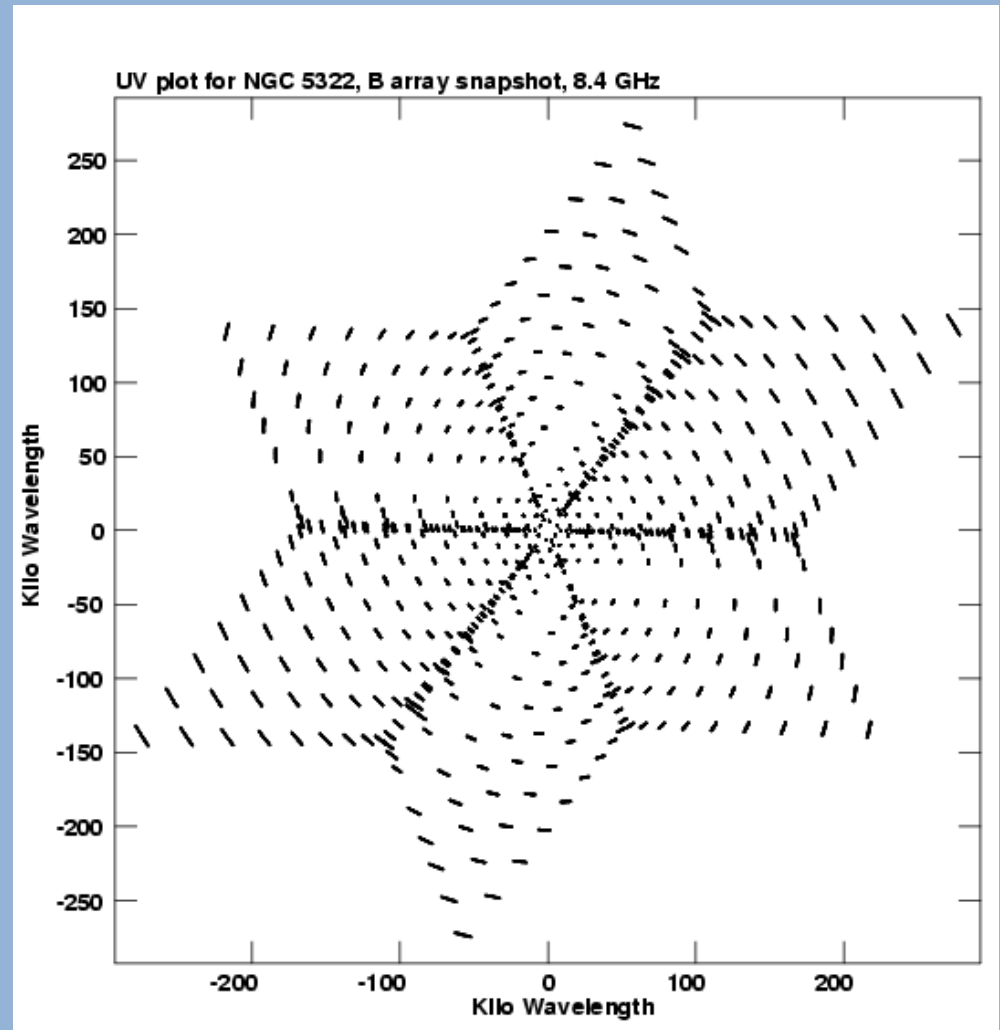
- For the VLA at 8 GHz, the noise in 10 seconds for a single 50 MHz IF was about 13 mJy on 1 baseline
  - Average 4 IFs (2 RR and 2 LL) for 60 seconds to decrease this by  $(4 * 60/10)^{1/2}$  to 2.7 mJy
  - If you had a source of flux density about 5 mJy, you could get a very good self-cal solution if you set the SNR threshold to 1.5. For 5 min, 1.2 mJy gives SNR = 1
- For the EVLA at 8 GHz and up, the noise in 10 seconds for an 8 GHz baseband will be about 1 mJy on 1 baseline! Of course this requires the ability to calibrate the band passes and average the subbands coherently. We will be working on doing this as we continue to commission the EVLA.



# Hard example: VLA Snapshot, 8 GHz, B Array

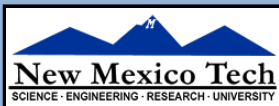
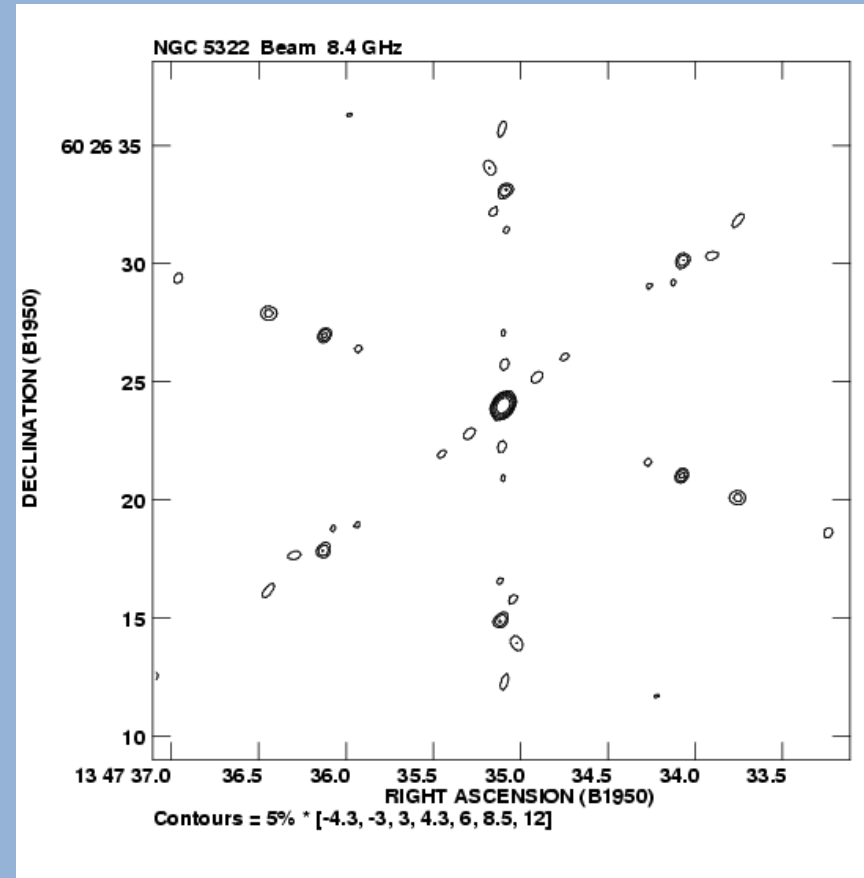
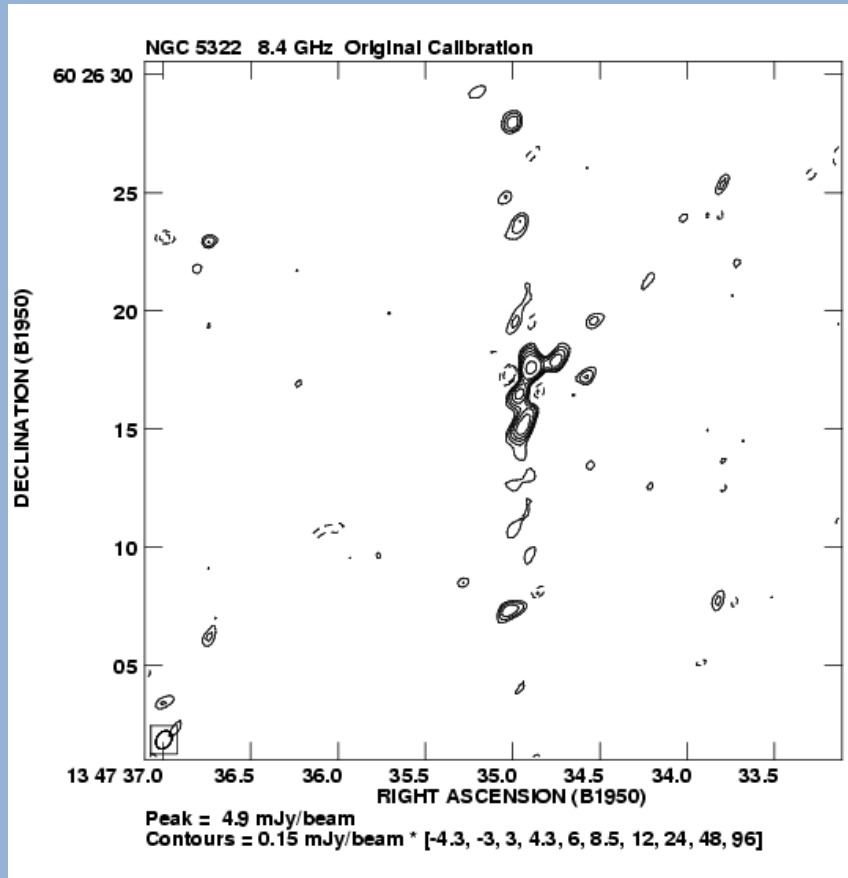
20

- LINER galaxy NGC 5322
- Data taken in October 1995
- Poorly designed observation
  - One calibrator in 15 minutes
- Can self-cal help?



# Initial NGC 5322 Imaging

21

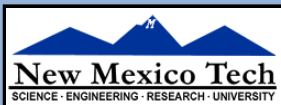


# First pass

22

## Used 4 (merged) clean components in model

- I. 10-sec solutions, no averaging,  $\text{SNR} > 5$ 
  - CALIBI: Found 3238 good solutions
  - CALIBI: Failed on 2437 solutions
  - CALIBI: 2473 solutions had insufficient data
- I. 30-sec solutions, no averaging,  $\text{SNR} > 5$ 
  - CALIBI: Found 2554 good solutions
  - CALIBI: Failed on 109 solutions
  - CALIBI: 125 solutions had insufficient data
- I. 30-sec solutions, average all IFs,  $\text{SNR} > 2$ 
  - CALIBI: Found 2788 good solutions

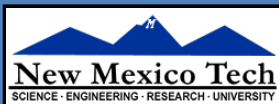
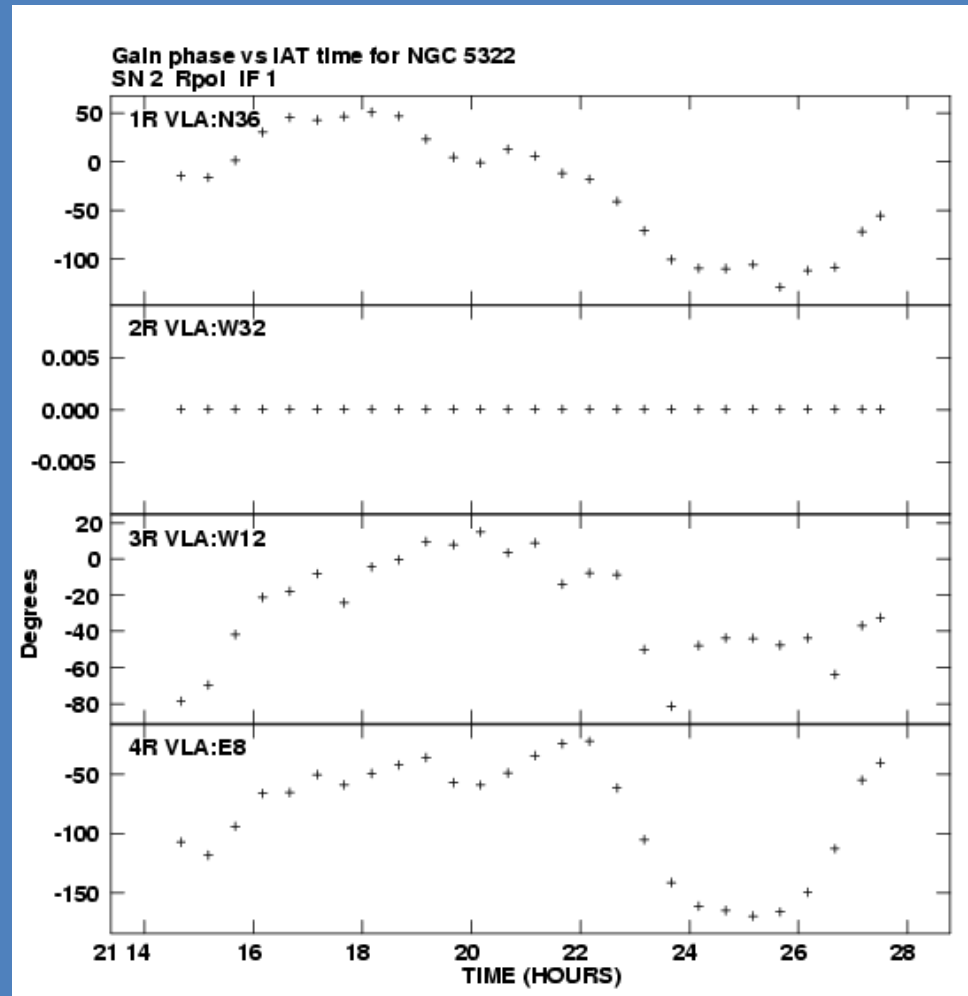




# Phase Solutions from 1<sup>st</sup> Self-Cal

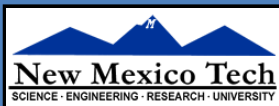
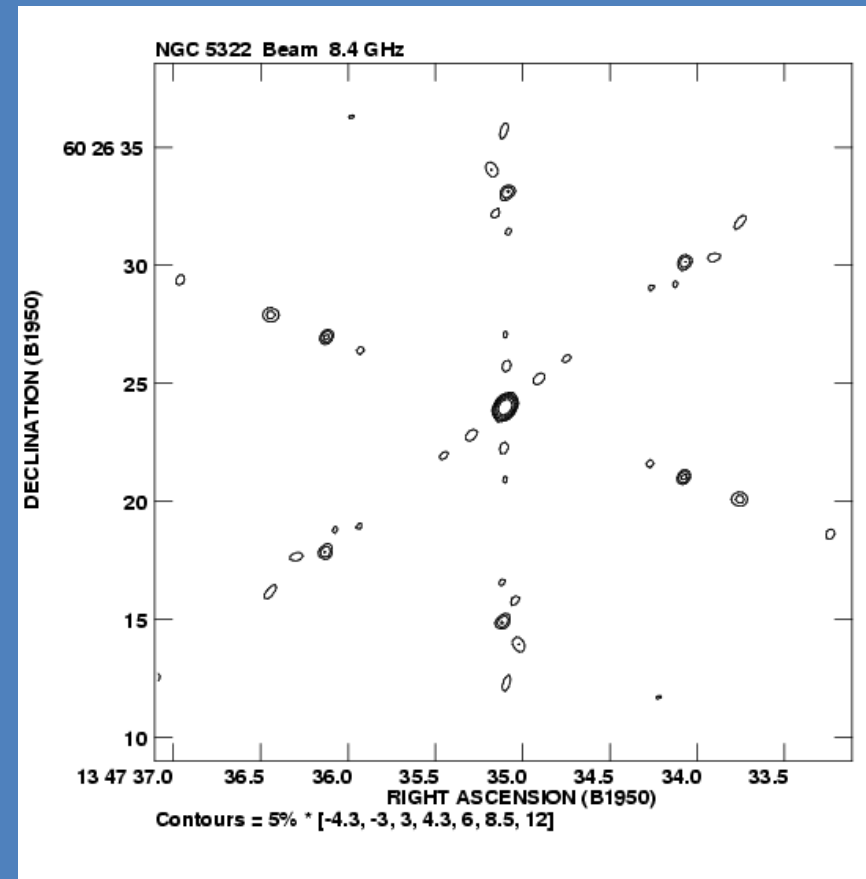
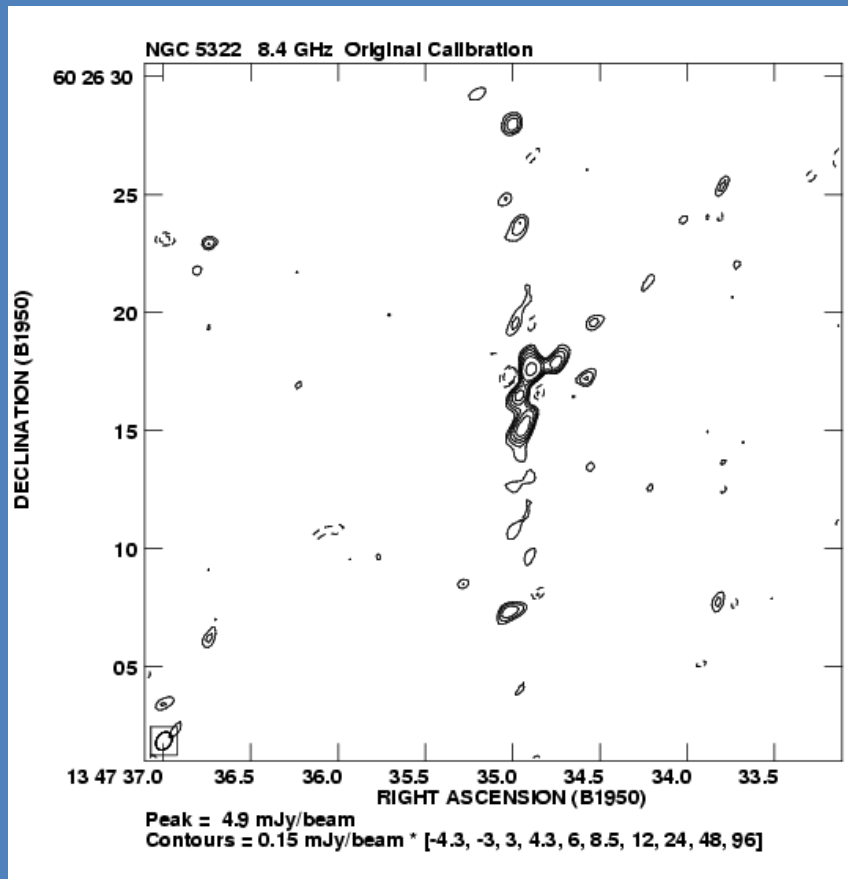
23

- Reference antenna has zero phase correction  
→ **No absolute position info.**
- Corrections up to  $150^\circ$  in 14 minutes
- Typical coherence time is a few minutes



# Initial NGC 5322 Imaging

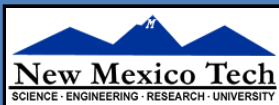
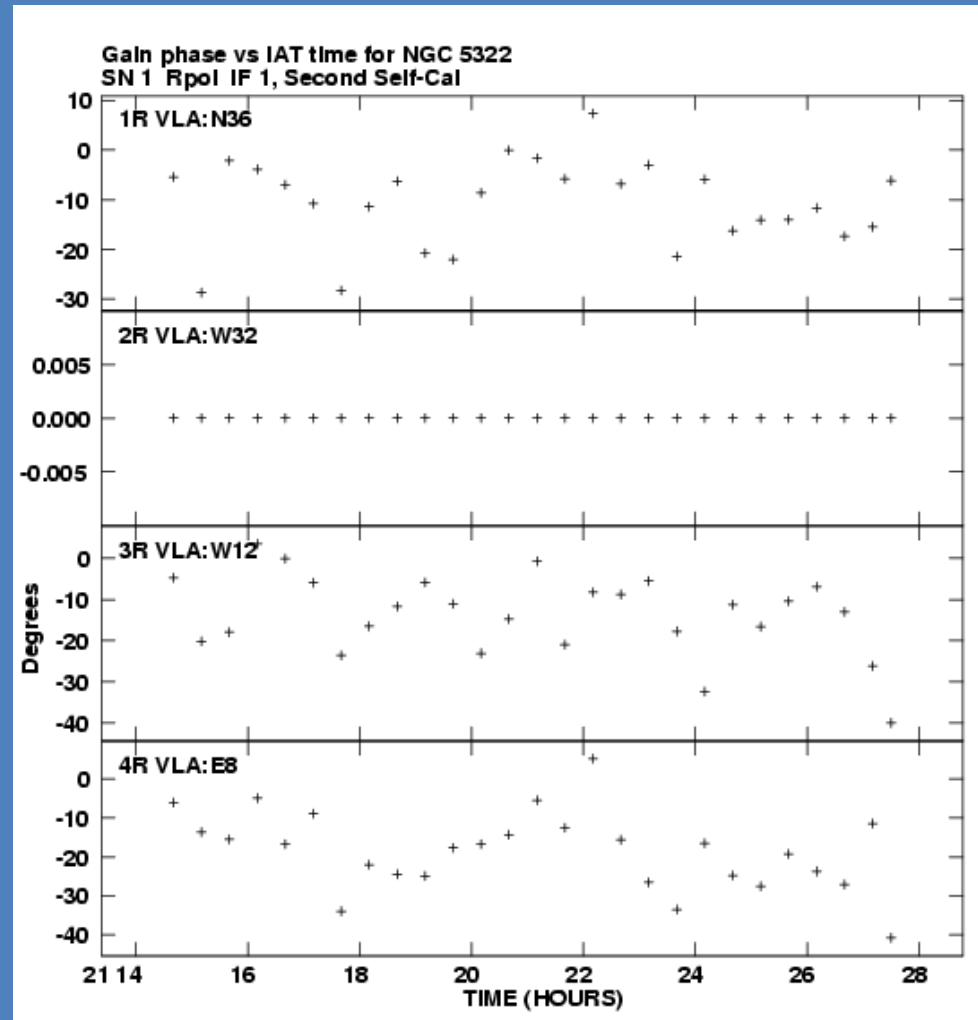
24



# Phase Solutions from 2<sup>nd</sup> Self-Cal

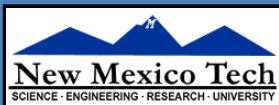
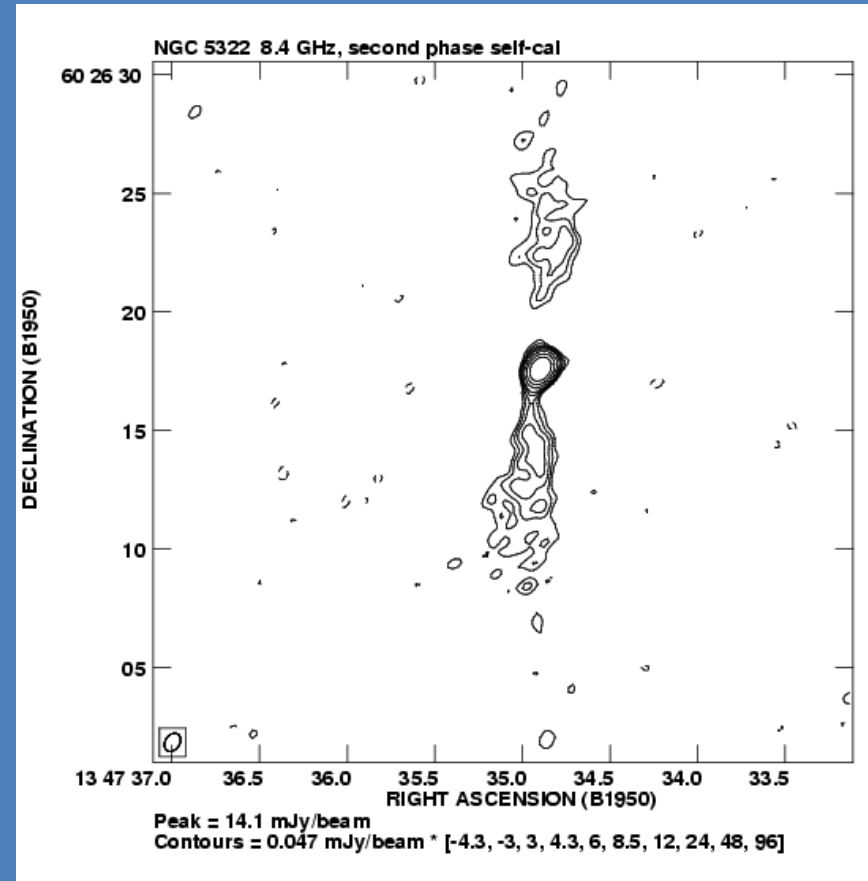
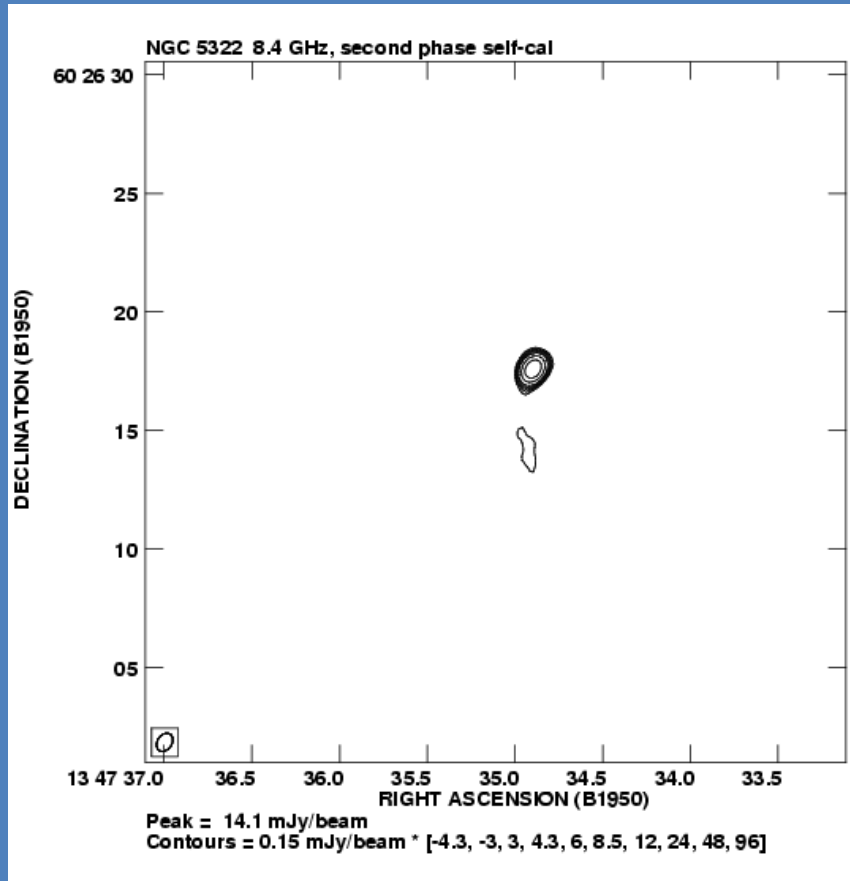
25

- Used 3 components
- Corrections are reduced to  $40^\circ$  in 14 minutes
- Observation now quasi-coherent
- Next: shorten solution interval to follow troposphere even better



# Image after 2<sup>nd</sup> Self-Calibration

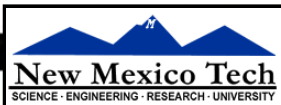
26



# Result after second self-calibration

27

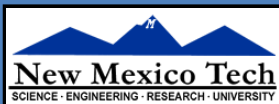
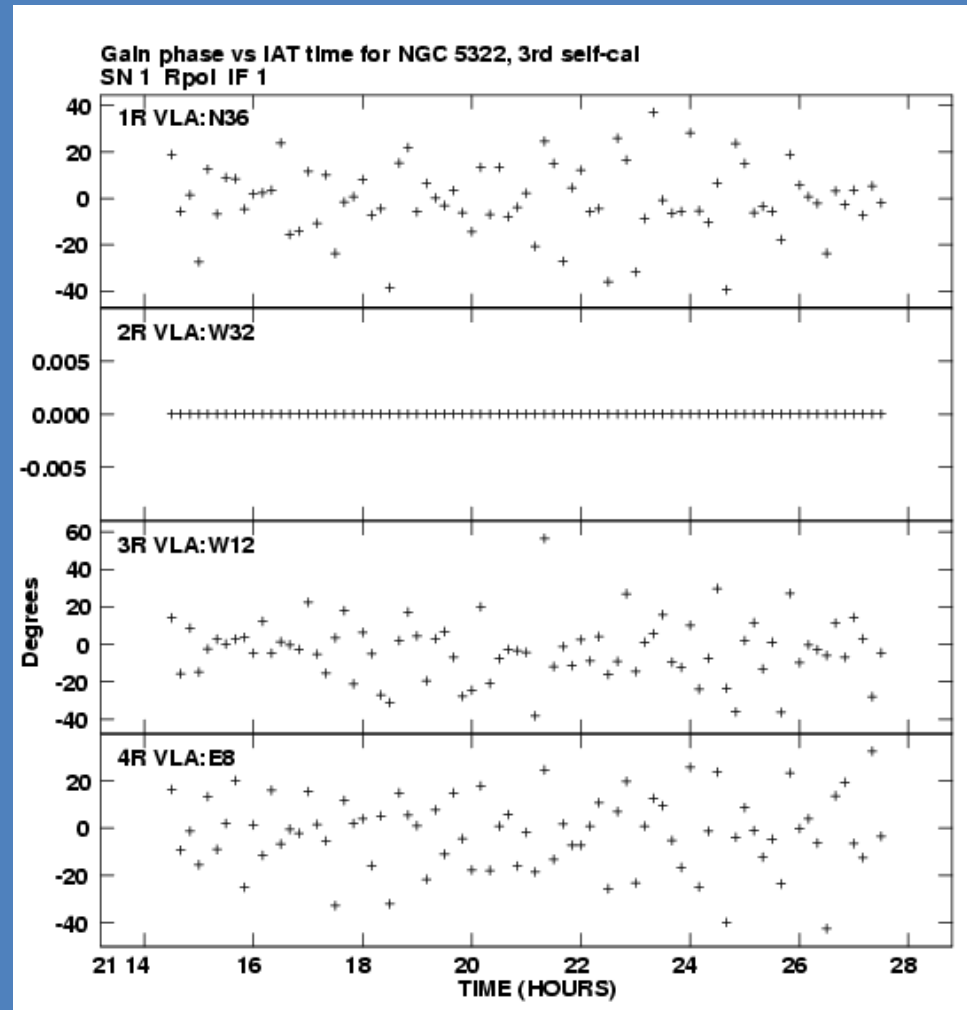
- Image noise is now 47 microJy/beam
  - Theoretical noise in 10 minutes is 45 microJy/beam for natural weighting
  - For 14 minutes, reduce by  $(1.4)^{1/2}$  to 38 microJy/beam
  - For robust=0, increase by 1.19, back to 45 microJy/beam
- Image residuals look “noise-like”
  - Expect little improvement from further self-calibration
  - Dynamic range is  $14.1/0.047 = 300$ 
    - Amplitude errors typically come in at dynamic range  $\sim 1000$
- Concern: Source “jet” is in direction of sidelobes



# Phase Solutions from 3<sup>rd</sup> Self-Cal

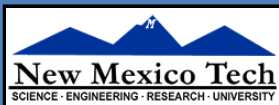
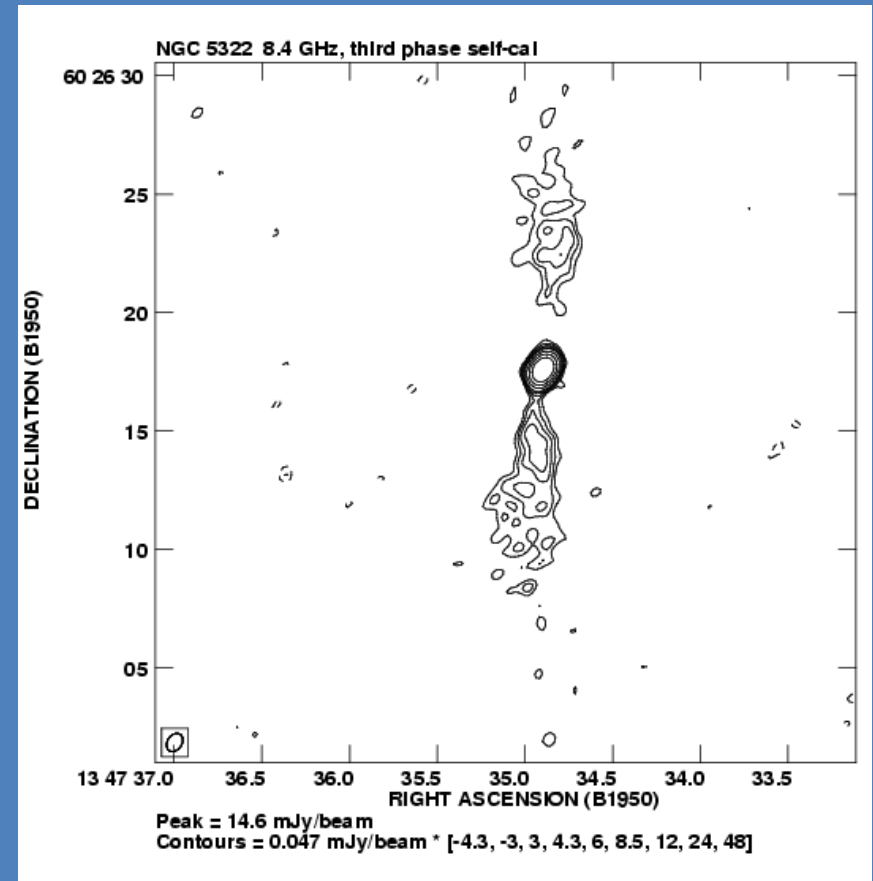
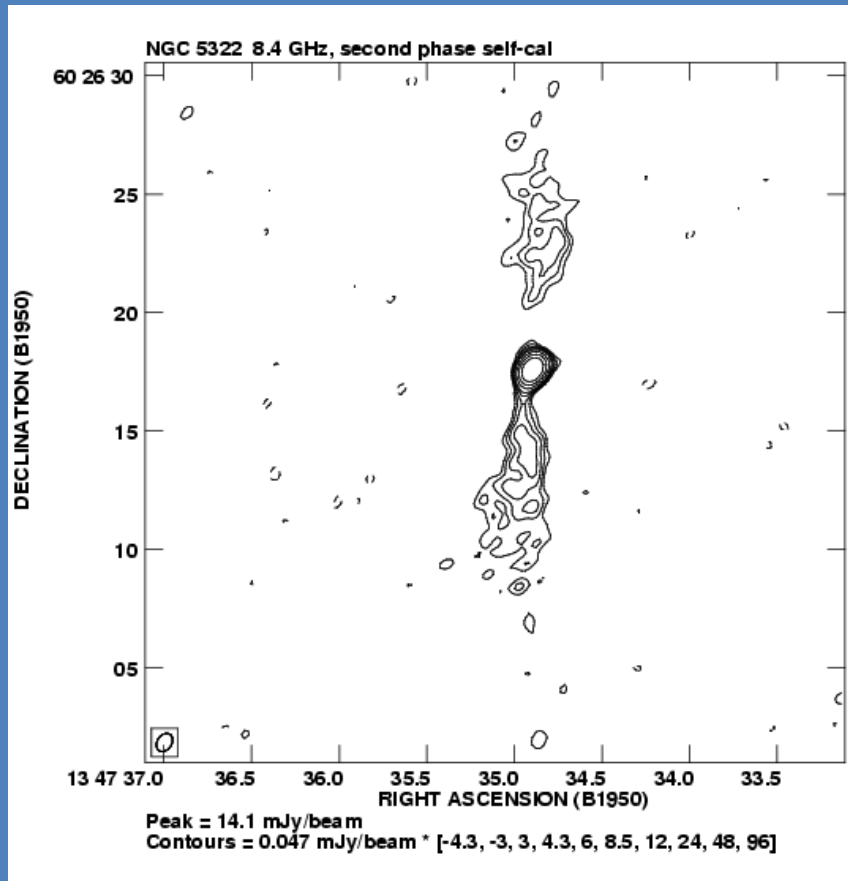
28

- 11-component model used
- 10-second solution intervals
- Corrections look noise-dominated
- Expect little improvement in resulting image



# Image Comparison

29

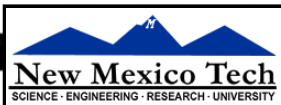




# When Self-cal Fails

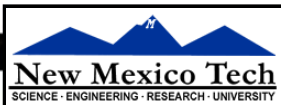
30

- Astrometry (actually it just doesn't help)
- Variable sources
- Incorrect model
  - **barely-resolved sources**
  - **self-cal can embed mistakes in the data**
- Bad data
- Images dominated by deconvolution errors
  - **poor boxing**
  - **insufficient uv-coverage**
- Not enough flux density
  - **fast-changing atmosphere**
- Errors which are not antenna-based & uniform across the image
  - **baseline-based (closure) errors (e.g., bandpass mismatches)**
  - **imaging over areas larger than the isoplanatic patch**
  - **antenna pointing and primary beam errors**



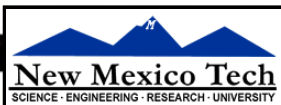
# How well it works

- Can be unstable for complex sources and poor Fourier plane coverage
  - EVLA snapshots, sparse arrays (VLBA, MERLIN)
  - Basic requirement is that the total number of degrees of freedom (number of gains plus the number of free parameters in the model) should not be greater than the number of independent vis. measurements.
- Quite stable for well sampled EVLA observations and appropriately complex sources
- Standard step in most non-detection experiments
- Bad idea for detection experiments
  - Will manufacture source from noise
  - Use in-beam calibration for detection experiments



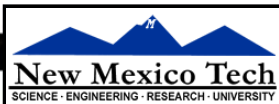
# Recommendations

- Flag your data carefully before self-cal
- Expect to self-calibrate most experiments (other than detection checks)
- For EVLA observations, expect convergence in 3 - 5 iterations
- Monitor off-source noise, peak brightness, “unbelievable” features to determine convergence
- Few antennas (VLBI) or poor (u,v) coverage can require many more iterations of self-cal



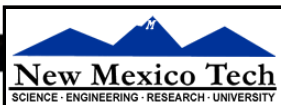
# Recommendations

- Be careful with the initial model
  - Don't go too deep into your clean components!
    - don't embed junk in your calibration
  - False symmetrization in phase self-cal (using, e.g., a point source model)
  - If it's important, leave it out: is this feature required by the data?
  - If desperate, try a model from a different configuration or a different band
- Experiment with tradeoffs on solution interval
  - Average IFs
  - Shorter intervals follow the atmosphere better
  - Don't be too afraid to accept low SNRs



# More Calibration Techniques

- Water vapor radiometers  
22 GHz (EVLA) and 180 GHz (ALMA)
- Ionospheric measurements (TEC)
- Dual-frequency observations – calibration transfer
- Use self-cal to transfer phase solutions from narrow-band to broad-band (strong-line, weak continuum)
- Baseline-based calibration (removal of closure errors)  
antenna delay errors, antenna IF bandpasses



# Finis

