



Radio's Art | Earlid, summer 2017

Ten practitioner-listeners—agile critics, experimenters of the air—offer the long-tail of history and a bit of static. We open our ears to its public sounding.

By [Joan Schuman](#) | curator, Earlid, July 5, 2017

It was 1987 when I stumbled upon Joe Frank's voiced artistry on a community station. "You can do that on the radio?" I whispered to myself.

I didn't need a critic telling me I could.

In nearly 50 years of networked public radio; in podcasting's rebellious surge and influence upon its 'parents'; in radio's ephemeral-blessed invitations to aural aesthetics; in brick-and-mortar spaces engendering new ways to listen to sound art—there can be intentional blurring among genres. Practitioners try to lay claims. Territories seem closed, but are evidently malleable, more porous than listeners and makers imagine.

Earlid opens a portal for the public to engage with some of the assumptions about what practitioners do, how we talk about it and how we find resonances among all the dispersed vibrations of radio and sound art. We open our ears to its public *sounding*, as storyteller Dragan Todorovic suggests we hear all forms derived from radio.

Ironically, we're doing this online as Earlid has always existed *here*. We're hoping that this is a useful gathering space to discern ideas in more inventive ways around media criticism that can sometimes be too exclusively positive, sometimes flippant. Radio artist [Gregory Whitehead](#) and I co-moderate. Ten written vantages unfurl via short 'page-long' essays from critics and podcasters and academics and experimenters of the air.



Towards an exacting ear

There's a keen desire for a bridge—or maybe it's more akin to a wheel with spokes towards a center—to connect legacies or expand out to other arts and media. No matter the analogy, this forum's focus aims to raise voices in the din of contemporary radio, podcasts and sound art amidst the context of earlier critical discourse.

When reviewers silence a vibrant history, failing to mention the 20th century's critics, how are 21st-century practitioners to understand where their medium was born? There's a lively gamut of writers who crossed from theater and film genres over a threshold to radio in the late-1920s: Bertolt Brecht, Kurt Weill, Kurt Schwitters, Rudolf Arnheim, Walter Benjamin, Upton Sinclair; then later, Norman Corwin at mid-century and Studs Turkel in the '60s. They invite us to listen, but also to funnel perspectives from many directions.

How are practitioners to discern what hue their medium's poetics took without such context? Radio poetics is very different from podcasting. Perhaps it's the longer tail of the broadcast medium compared with the shiny glitter of a little more than a decade of online transmission. But which kind of podcast? Is it the storytelling that tumbles out of years of public radio or theater aesthetics, or the kind that rises, seemingly anew, into a form that isn't quite any one thing, but might be limiting itself without an ear towards these legacies that came before?

Like the cassette sound-art underground or museum installations, these territories borrowed from theater as much as they did from radio. But in those eras, as today, critics have been gnashing about it significantly more than simply offering a shrug of silence.

A suspension bridge, not a toll booth

Barry Lam and Cathy FitzGerald, Sherre DeLys and Neil Verma and Sarah Montague open the conversations towards other artistic criticism—fiction writing, theater, film, dance—forcing intersections between them and radio criticism. When Lam, host of [Hi-Phi Nation](#) podcast, collides 19th-century gothic fiction's veiled and obscured hues with some of radio's narrative traits, a critical discourse unexpectedly greets our ears. Other participants suggest that critical awareness is vital, no matter the source.

Listener-theorist-academic Daniel Gilfillan says in the very vibrancy of our contemporary radio and sound art culture, characterized by an old-fashioned set of industry standards as it is by DIY play, the critical language and practice deemed missing are readily apparent. And in use.

Today's practitioners have penetrated their own styles forging and plowing through boundaries with their own languages, questioning poetics, even knowledge (dare we mention "theory"?). Why gate such inventions as hybrid documentaries, impressionist narratives, and audio fiction; sonic ethnography and oral history?

Radio re-think

It's prescient to read Jacki Apple's "The Art of Radio" in my dog-eared anthology, [Radiotext\(e\)](#) from the early 1990s, though I don't agree when she says practitioners have yet to establish a critical discourse (given my overflowing bookshelves of writings from Gregory Whitehead and Allen Weiss; Dan Lander, Doug Kahn and Frances Dyson; and David Toop and Helen Thorington and Brandon LaBelle and Johnathan Sterne and Anna Friz and Seth Kim-Cohen).

Today, when I hear someone bemoaning a 'lack' as if someone making the work isn't suitable to talk about it, I consider two realities.

First, we're not blessed by *The New Yorker* opining on radio's art every week (and as Cathy FitzGerald wonders, maybe that would harm more than help); and secondly, perspective is useful: only two percent of Americans' ears in a recent [Pew study](#) are listening via podcasts. In our little landscape, it feels like everyone's tuned in to storytelling and so there should be a staff critic for radio or podcast narratives, like we have for film, at every publication.

Talking about new forms of radio and sound art seems the thing we want to do more of; who is the right critical voice seems to be an unanswerable question.

Pre-internet, Jacki Apple is astutely speaking to the same issues around radio's seductive medium that a listener can have in her drive-way as she can intentionally seeking an adventuresome sound-art program that only exists via an app or here online, that doesn't bombard with ads and metrics and invitations to review (in this democratization, anyone with a set of ears becomes a critic).

Apple lasers her attention towards radio's space-time territories. Its inherent poetic qualities as a medium are recognized 20 years later in the writings of [Salomé Voegelin](#) (her 2010 *Listening to Noise & Silence* immerses a reader in sound art and the everyday acoustic environment). Voegelin echoes her progenitors, R. Murray Schafer and LaMonte Young. Their examinations of sound and art and physical space and its relationship to a singular medium from which so much has bellowed into our ears for a century is mind-boggling. John Cage at mid-century invites us to tune the radio and the body to different frequencies, drones, durations. Pauline Oliveros's deep listening carries us into new territories as we navigate radiophonic voices on the air today as it did in the late 1980s when I first discovered Joe Frank, or just this year, when I stumbled upon the independent podcast, [Mabel](#).

What does that suggest to the different kinds of creative makers toiling in story and experimenting with sound today, mostly on the radio or its mediated relatives such that Joe Frank's 30-year *oeuvre* is still on terrestrial radio via KCRW's [UnFictional](#), but so too is the five-year-running podcast, [Here Be Monsters?](#)

We seek more laterally the archives and dialogues built at the launch of popular virtual worlds (Ubuweb, Transom, Third Coast) or rising more recently: [Radio Nonspace](#), [Sounding Out!](#), [Sonic Field](#). And, here, at Earlid.



What's inaudible to Audible

This forum is especially curious about narrative and its incarnations. We reach out to consider experiments in both narrative and radio's sound itself in such artists as veteran Christopher DeLaurenti and recently DJ'ing Olivia Bradley-Skill, as well as Karen Werner's inquiry about the very politics of storytelling.

From its launch, Earlid has been grappling with critical context around how makers of sonic works appeal to our ears and brain's desire for stories. I often point towards literature to bolster the earworms: writer Italo Calvino's invisible cities coheres the work of radio artists Dragan Todorovic and Pip Stafford; social media as 'storyteller' platform aids comparisons of DeLaurenti's protest symphony to Sontag's ideas of complicity. In a wise essay by Em Strang about distant horror, there's resonance to Gregory Whitehead's recent *Soundproof* piece on Guantanamo torture and Scott Carrier's refugee series on *Home of the Brave*.

It's always in service to story and, no doubt, a question of style and content, something a producer will consider no matter the genus of radio or podcasting, sound artistry on the air or in a physical space.

You're invited

Let's have a conversation about how we approach our work (and our audiences) around these themes and what institutions we navigate or walls we bump our heads into. It's not one linear path; rather there will be spurs and surely the legacies of writers and thinkers and critics prevail.

Maybe you work in radio or podcasting (or both) and want to invite in artistry or teach it more readily to new makers or surprise your listeners. Perhaps you are steeped in radio's artistry or other spaces of sonic arts for decades: step around known inquiries and mind the gaps among maker and platform and consumer and share your knowledge with others eager to learn—even (especially) to those navigating new realms of podcasting and old radio formats.

The divisions of artistry are better when made more blurry. How we use constricting terms as radio and sound art even seem crippling. Maybe we can make these distinctions less rigid and more rounded. This forum and this platform have the potential to distill discourse into streams rather than a concretizing into hierarchical canons.

The radio clock

Regine Beyer, who co-founded [New American Radio](#) (1987-1998), and, since returning to Germany, continues to write about radio art's history, suggests we broaden the concept of an ever-changing medium. Transmission artists and their 'airwaves' offer us new listening publics, such as those created and installed, networked and narrowcast at [Wave Farm](#). This is a more expansive definition, says Beyer, than what we thought radio was in the 1980s and 1990s. But still, wise and generous advice prevails today:

Dear Folks ... as I told Joan already, I am too busy at the moment to write something coherent and in depth for Earlid, but I happily agreed to make a few comments. My very practical advice for further procedures:

Read and listen as much as possible and know which tradition you're coming from.

Be a part of or at least be aware of interdisciplinary efforts surrounding the various fields of sound.

Keep in mind that everyone, of course, has his or her own agenda: to protect turf, to bolster reputation (rampant in academia!), his or her own aesthetic perception and preferences, etc.

Find your own position and be ready to promote and defend it!

Above all: keep producing – and archiving.

Greetings, Regine ...

[AGILE CRITICS](#)



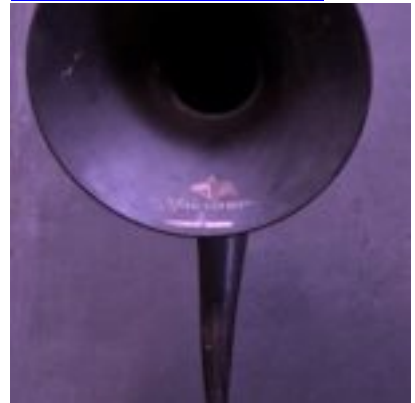
Cathy FitzGerald
Dragan Todorovic
Sarah Montague
Daniel Gilfillan

[TULIPS & RADIO HISTORY](#)



Neil Verma
Sherre DeLys
Olivia Bradley-Skill

[VEILS, POLITICS, STATIC](#)



Barry Lam
Karen Werner
Christopher DeLaurenti

Ten essays follow ...



Agile Critics

A Medium of My Own Cathy FitzGerald

It was a dark mid-winter afternoon and we were waiting for the train. My friend Chris was telling me why he loved Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. I was only half-listening: it's never been one of my favorites and really, it was too cold to think. But then he said, "It's a chain of stories—how it's structured. A series of conversations between lonely men."

And suddenly, this book that I'd never cared much about, never thought much about, started to glow. That's criticism's mighty power. It can take an art-work—something already wondrous—and make it more. Partly that's an act of revelation, but also of creation; at its very best, criticism is close to an art-work in its own right, a surprising, idiosyncratic, deeply felt and deeply thought response.

That kind of criticism I'd like to read more of. I don't think it matters too much whether it's written by someone from inside the field or outside: what's important is that it's done rigorously, brilliantly and with some writerly panache. It needs to give us something: new concepts, new language, new insight. It has to move beyond appreciation of craft and simple review.

We have theories of sound and noise, but I think there's, perhaps, less work on documentary audio. I'd like to see historical surveys of influence that analyze different geographical and institutional traditions of documentary-making and which identify moments of stylistic innovation. I'd like to understand more about how what I make fits into the long history of the field—and I'd love to see recognition of contemporary producers who 'make different.'



A caveat though. I don't subscribe to the idea that we're adrift as a medium without criticism. The creators who have done well out of artistic canons, historically, are white, male and middle-class. When I started in the field, I think the lack of that critical history—and the attendant anxiety of influence—was actually helpful. To borrow from Virginia Woolf, radio was a medium of my own—somewhere I could make myself heard without having to shout.

This current desire for more criticism stems in part from a desire to be taken more seriously; for audio documentary to be understood as an art-form, not just an ephemeral entertainment. But it's not just up to the critics to give us that status; it's up to us to claim it. We are a shy, modest bunch generally—and on the whole I like that. It might not make for the wildest parties, but it does make for the deepest chats. But maybe that's one of the (many) reasons why the medium doesn't get the respect we think it deserves. As makers, we have to stop being so humble and say I'm an artist; I'm an auteur. There now, I've said it. Your turn.

[Cathy FitzGerald](#) is a multi-award-winning documentary presenter and producer, and the caretaker of [Strange & Charmed](#), a school for audio storytellers. The Radio Times calls her “one of radio's most original voices.” She has a PhD in the work of Charles Dickens.



RadioActivity: Saving Public Sounds
Dragan Todorovic

When I think of radio, of the noun and its content, I think primarily of the meaning used in physics, where ‘radio’ as a prefix means something related to rays, radiation, radioactivity. This same notion where ‘radio’ as a prefix means something related to rays, radiation, radioactivity. This same notion applies to all forms derived from radio: sound art, podcasts, everything. It is all *public sound*.

Although it can contain translucent, sublimely aetheric pieces, works that are red and loud, and anything in-between—at its best public sound is disturbing. However, this inherent power does not mean that it is not vulnerable. Like any other space of freedom public sound needs to be defended and maintained. Silent audience is a complacent audience. Governments hate disturbing radio and love complacent audience. Every time there is a cut in funding, every time there is a grant opportunity lost, a tooth in that serrated knife that radio is—is gone. Forever.

Critique is one of the ways we can keep public sounds in focus, and there lies a very important reason for establishing here a permanent field of influence. There where publicly funded radio exists it is considered a public service. This political category is strangely ambivalent.

On the one hand it emphasizes the democratic nature of the medium, but on the other hand it shields it from closer scrutiny. You either take the bus or you don't take the bus, but you don't delve into the quality of the ride.

We need to reclaim radio—and with it the whole area of public sound—as an artistic form. With radio it has always been difficult, because it is many things at once, from utilitarian to high art. Plus, there is a lot of mimicry today and various tricks and cons are passed under the noble name of radio: computer-generated playlists, distributed phonoteques, etc. But there where real radio is still holding, mixing art with the mundane, we need to give it a full critical attention because without it artistic forms wilt and die.

Here, we need to be careful. Social networks as potential fields of critical thinking have proved catastrophic. They are almost never constructive and mostly serve for self-promotion or, worse, for trolling. On the other hand, the mainstream media has long ago revoked the space for reviews of all kinds, with a possible exception of Hollywood. This all leads, I think, to a situation where we need to organise strong communities, strong *international communities* of artists, curators and sympathisers of our dark arts. In this sense, sites like Earlid become crucial.

This, in fact, could be beneficial: tightly knit units tend to be purifiers and they are what has organised every revolution in history.

[*Dragan Todorovic's*](#) novel, *Diary of Interrupted Days*, was shortlisted for *Commonwealth Writers' Prize*, *Amazon First Novel Award* and other awards. His memoir, *The Book of Revenge*, won *The Nereus Writers' Trust Non-Fiction Prize*. His collection of interactive poetry, *Five Walks on Isabella Street*, was the winner of the *Astound International Competition*. His radio art, [*In My Language, I am Smart*](#), is featured at Earlid.

Towards A Poetics of Audio—The Importance of Criticism: **A continuation by Sarah Montague**

It was exciting to have been asked by [The Sarahs](#) to contribute an essay about the importance of, and relative paucity of, established criticism of the radio, audio, and sound arts. Like all such essays, it aimed to simply raise and briefly follow an argument, but not to be a comprehensive survey of all the ways our field defines itself and has been explored.

With the current forum, there will be an opportunity to further explore the underpinnings of both my initial argument and to envisage through a look at the past what our possible future might look and sound like.

Even on the textual side, our field can certainly boast some groundbreaking personages—Helen Thorington, Gregory Whitehead, Douglas Kahn, Allan Weiss among them, and the important texts they helped create. Still, we can't be said to have consistent, established field of criticism, so what I want to explore here is what needs to be in place for that change to take place, and then, how might that change actually affect us.

In order to do that, I propose looking at two different patterns in art forms where independent criticism exists, such as art, dance, film, photography.

First, does a critical movement need a catalyst? Did the astonishing flowering of dance companies in the 1930s-1950s call forth a critical language? At what point did that happen—the point at which dance

'reviews' moved a higher plane? In art, one of the seminal essays was [Roger Fry's appreciation of Cezanne](#)—it established the Provencal painter as the abiding master of post-Impressionism. Did it also frame the larger discourse? In the 1970s, did [Andrew Sarris's](#) branding of the concept of the director as auteur also open up the field for more nuanced language in discussing this form? Did Sarris's subsequent (not always flattering) celebrity in this area generate a movement? A following?

So exploring this notion for us might be trying to locate the moment when for various art forms criticism began to separate itself as a distinct discipline. When and why did that happen, and what was the result? Then, did having more complex language, and baseline standards, change the way practitioners worked (one of the points made by A.O. Scott in his book [*Better Living Through Criticism*](#)).

Second, one of my contentions is that one thing that distinguishes the discipline of criticism is that it exists outside the frame of creation, answers to its own standards, and has its own evolving language. And that we have few examples of that at the moment—most discussions of audio productions are still limited comments from inside the field, sometimes addressing technical issues, sometimes production values, sometimes social-political positives and negatives, but still in the realm of camaraderie, and still rarely moving the debates to an aesthetic plane. Once again, it will be interesting to look for examples from outside our field, for example, the dancer and dance writer [Deborah Jowitt](#) and the photographer—and *New York Times* photography critic—[Teju Cole](#).

[Sarah Montague](#) is an award-winning radio and audio producer and director of documentary, drama, features and spoken word programs including Selected Shorts. She is adjunct professor of culture and media at Eugene Lang College/The New School, co-founded the Internet radio station [newschoolradio.org](#), and teaches courses in media, audio theatre, and journalism.

***The Path Not Taken:
Or, How to Avoid the Long (and Immediate) History of Radio and Sound Art Criticism***
Daniel Gilfillan



I am not a producer or practitioner of the radio and sound arts, but I am a listener, a theorist, an academic, and a critic of these art forms.

Sarah Montague laments an absence of critical voices writing about audio media (podcasts, radio broadcasts, sound art), stating that, amid all that characterizes our new vibrant sound culture, what we are missing are a “critical language” and a “critical practice.”

By invoking A.O. Scott’s *Better Living through Criticism* (2016) as her central measure for understanding what constitutes a critical language and a critical practice, Montague adopts the same limitations that surround Scott’s arguments regarding criticism, that it is something that exists somehow outside or above the medium and artistic practices of production, rather than as an inherent product of these artistic practices and media formats.

In the very vibrancy of our contemporary radio and sound art culture, characterized as much by an old-fashioned set of industry standards as it is by a DIY experimentation, the critical language and critical practice deemed missing are, in fact, readily apparent and in use. At the same time that artists working within the realm of sound have become more agile thinkers and practitioners of the various media that comprise our contemporary soundscape, critics and criticism (and whom we allow to be thought of as critic) must also become more agile and more fluid as to the formats they engage and the identities they assume.

The artist as critic engages an immediate and retrospective understanding of what informs their art in any one socio-cultural moment.

The academic as critic engages a longer historical, philosophical, and theoretical understanding for how the artwork functions.

The listener as critic engages an even more immediate understanding for how the piece they are hearing helps them make sense of the world around them in that moment of listening.

All are viable forms of criticism, all undertake a critical language, and all assume an understanding of critical practice. Key to making this new agile criticism work is not an understanding of the “art critic” who serves as the clearinghouse for taxonomies and definitions, but rather a sensibility for the always-changing and fluid nature of sound and sound art production itself.

These writers are ones I return to in order to help understand notions of boundaries within radio as broadcast and radio as spatial construct:

Anna Friz – [*Radio as Instrument*](#)

Gregory Whitehead – [*Radio Silence*](#) & [*Radio Play is No Place*](#)

Heidi Grundmann – [*But is it Radio?*](#)

[*Daniel Gilfillan*](#) is Associate Professor of German Studies at Arizona State University. He is the author of *Pieces of Sound: German Experimental Radio* (Minnesota, 2009), and has published widely on German/Austrian radio and sound art. His current book project is titled *Sound in the Anthropocene: Sustainability and the Art of Sound*.

Tulips & Radio History



Why bring radio history into debates around new audio?

Neil Verma

Recently, audiobook powerhouse Audible—long dabbling in science fiction franchises and thriller drama—announced [5 million](#) in commissions for new one- or two-person audio scripts to be judged by a group of famous playwrights, stage directors and actors like Lynn Nottage, Trip Cullman and Annette Bening. I have three observations about this development.

First, a competition like this undermines radio art as a precursor to audio fiction. From what I can tell, with the exception of Tom Stoppard, none of the judging panel dramatists has long experience in radio; in this way, the structure of the competition is a disavowal of broadcasting. Is that so terrible? Audio fiction's well-known habit of forgetting its own roots is dismaying for scholars, but I've argued in [RadioDoc Review](#) that as an artistic precondition this forgetfulness is also a source of energy. To cure audio fiction's amnesia is to remove what has historically been a generous naivete, and that's not something to undertake lightly.

Second, Audible needs directors more than writers. Poor direction plagues the medium, while effective work goes unnoticed. That's always been the case. In 1940 legendary director Earle McGill put it this way "If Max Reinhardt should be working in Studio 3 and across the way in Studio 4 Gordon Craig or Komisarjevsky were whipping up some four dimensional radio treat, countless die-hards in the trade would refer to them—if they were aware of them at all—as production men and not as directors."

Finally: be wary of borrowing from the stage. Outreach to theater has happened before. CBS did it in the 1930s, drawing on luminaries of New York theater to help it become the "Tiffany" network by offering middle-brow audio fiction. After a decade, many considered the use of theater technique on the radio an error.

In his 1947 *Handbook of Radio Writing*, for instance, radio writer Eric Barnouw advocated techniques drawn from novels and music rather than from theater, which he called merely radio's "foster parent." Contrast his view with that of Trip Cullman, one of the Audible judges, who comments that the chasm between theater and audio fiction "is not so wide."

But why not let it be wide? Let it be vast. Let audio fiction be radically other, let it be impossible to stage. As I've written elsewhere, podcasting needs to be twice as weird as it is now if it is going to be nearly as weird as radio is all the time.

Don't get me wrong, I'm happy about Audible and I'm excited to hear what it produces in this project. But if history is any guide, and it took a flirtation with and eventual abandonment of theater technique in order to find a true "radio technique" in the last century, then today we should be even more interested to hear what's too non-theatrical to even compete in a contest like this.

As audio fiction grows, in other words, keep an ear out for what's inaudible to Audible.



* Illustration for "The Soul," 1705 English edition, *Orbis Sensualium Pictus*

[Neil Verma](#) is assistant professor of sound studies at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois. His books include *Theater of the Mind: Imagination, Aesthetics, and American Radio Drama*, and (as co-editor) *Anatomy of Sound: Norman Corwin and Media Authorship*.

After all, it had only been a few years earlier ...

Sherre DeLys

Sure, I was shocked when, near the beginning of the 'renaissance of narrative radio', no keen young American radio producer I asked had heard of [New American Radio](#). After all, it had only been a few years earlier that NAR was 'the key place for artists in American radio.' I'd assumed they'd know NAR because its producers Helen Thorington and Regine Beyer were part of the same networks that linked me and my colleagues at [The Listening Room](#) (1988-2003, Australian Broadcasting Corporation) with writers, musicians, sound sculptors and sound poets, tape collagists and radio remixers, filmmakers, dramatists, auteur documentarists and experimental feature makers, environmental sound recordists, video, online, transmission, performance and installation artists, pirates and other provocateurs the world over—through our shared interest in radio as a creative medium.

But this culture of forgetting isn't unique to the U.S. At a presentation to indie radio and podcaster types in London a few years back I decided to play works by [Barry Bermange](#) when a straw poll revealed the British radio experimentalist's name didn't ring many bells. And it's nothing short of daft that the unruly [close cousins](#) of today's inspired experiments in podcast and radio, namely a stunning array of radio-driven experiments in audio fiction and composed non-fiction, is being disappeared in my own adopted country in a neo-liberal inspired narrowing of the 'listener offer.'

But we should remember that the collapse of the market for tulips in Holland in 1637 didn't diminish Dutch flower painting, in which roses, forget-me-nots, honeysuckles, narcissi, iris, lilies-of-the-valley, cyclamens, violets, hyacinths, marigolds, chrysanthemums, poppies and even pineapples hung out together improbably, along with the greatly admired and numerous species of tulips, in extravagant orchestrations,

to create outrageous sprays of colour.

The cautionary tale of Tulip Mania is only glibly transferable, but in our own frenzied times it's worth thinking about the role of audio visionaries whose speculative bubbles are of a completely different kind. Those that inspire me have skin in the game, yes. But the game is the art, with its audacious and hybrid histories. Through their strange writings and art they teach that if we make our most daring and personal work, people will learn how to hear it.



Her style described as 'symphonic soundscape that shows without telling' (Prix Italia, 2016 jury) and her use of voice, 'intense and spellbinding' (Voice Studies, Routledge, 2016), [Sherre DeLys's audio experimentation](#) has earned some of the world's respected radio awards. Collaboratively she's created sound sculptures and participatory media platforms, and performed improvised vocal music.

Radio has become a small club that only looks at itself.

Olivia Bradley-Skill

We should talk about how radio can become a breathing, creative enterprise again, rather than a blind regurgitation of a limited perspective on culture. The kind of discussion that most radio practitioners are having today is too practical and too focused on industry. Radio and podcasts need to lose their professional veneer. Even college radio is slowly getting consumed by music promotion companies, the commercial radio sphere, and public radio formats. Increasingly, students are encouraged to market themselves and think of radio as a professional step. The creative and "alternative" forces that have historically existed within college radio are getting pounded out.

As a result of these forces, radio has become connected with consumption, not creativity. Radio has become a platform to sell music and pitch news. DJs and producers are mostly curators, for lack of better term, but not artistic practitioners themselves.

Where's the ingenuity?

I like to think that I am pushing boundaries. I produce radio at a community station that mostly focuses on music. My show blends music with narrative, dialogue, and extraneous noises; there's a lot of layering. I think that this approach proves how intimate and strangely alluring the human voice can be, as well as how cinematic radio can be. My show is also largely improvised, and often becomes as surprising to me as it might be to listeners. I think this spontaneity and surprise, the ways in which my experimentations figure themselves out as we go along, are also a refreshing take to today's radio. Most radio has been reduced to a talk-show format, when it can actually be much more vaporous and ambiguous.

Negativland's *Over The Edge* was a huge revelation for me in learning how radio could sound. I must admit that without listening to their program, I wouldn't have been able to fully formulate how music, dialogue, and other distinct textures could bounce off one another all at once, without academic

pretension. In that sense, more transparent and accessible canons are necessary in providing models that budding radio artists can wrap their brains around, study, and circumvent.

Voices like Gregory Whitehead, Alan Weiss, Delia Derbyshire, Hildegard Westerkamp, the Tellus series, Ubuweb.com, etc., have been fundamental to expanding my mind and practice. I still go back to their works (audio and written), further uncovering new meaning and new understanding each time.

Furthermore, experimental film documentaries, film theory, film criticism, and general art history have also served as an important anchor in my development. Chris Marker, Michel Chion, among others, have been particularly useful. Radio has a lot to learn from other fields. It would be a disservice to the medium (and its myriad possibilities) to only engage a canon directly related to “sound” and “radio.” For example, Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* is extremely sonically rich and it’s incredibly interesting to analyze it from that angle. Ellison himself is a wonderful writer on music, which unveils a great deal about how we listen and how we can discuss listening.

Sound is omnidirectional. It also exists in the internal as much as it does externally (you know those voices always bumping around in our heads?). We’re always balancing the narrative in our head with the multitude of sounds around us (whether these sounds are songs, voices, industrial clangs, etc). Radio can be a perfect vessel to explore our relationships through sounds.



Olivia Bradley-Skill is an audio artist, currently broadcasting on WFMU, Wave Farm and Resonance (see archives [here](#) and [here](#)).



Veils, Politics, Static

Veiled Intentions in Radio **Barry Lam**

I have been thinking about the aesthetic and epistemological dimensions of narrated versus non-narrated forms of documentary audio.

Even in audio with narrators, the kind of narration varies. At one end of the spectrum the narrator of a nature-documentary, a disinterested but knowledgeable observer pointing out and informing the listener of underlying facts. Alternatively, a narrator can be actively advancing some kind of argument, with a very distinct position or political orientation, like Michael Moore in documentary film.

At the other end of the spectrum is completely non-narrated audio, where the story and messages comes through only from production choices. When you are narrating, you are leaving very little up to chance, and when you are actively stating a thesis in your narration, you leave no room for misinterpretation. The more you state, the less you show. But there is a certain kind of aesthetic cost.

When [Ann Radcliffe](#) drew a distinction between ‘terror’ and ‘horror’ in 19th-century gothic fiction, prioritizing terror as the better form, she was picking up on a distinction in human experience generally between the explicit and implicit, the overt and the veiled. “Horror” literature displays blood, guts, sex, and gore, appealing to bodily disgust. It is overt and explicit. When an act of violence occurs in “terror” literature, it is veiled or obscured; we know it happens, but it does so behind a closed door. For Radcliffe, our reactions in literatures of terror are more cerebral, connecting us more closely with the sublime experiences.

This aesthetic difference between overt and veiled messaging is everywhere in human life, and it translates directly to the case of narrative audio. Having a narrator is overt, having an opinionated narrator who is arguing her point even more so. We will get our message clearly and unambiguously across, but maybe the only people listening are the ones who don’t need persuading. On the other hand, when we veil our

intentions through editorial decisions, sound design, and soundtracking alone, without anyone telling the listener what to think, you are providing the experience of beauty and the sublime through veiled messaging, the analog to Radcliffe's "terror."

But then how much risk are you willing to take that your audience will not get the right message, or perceive the lack of transparency as manipulation?



Barry Lam is host and executive producer of the story-telling philosophy podcast, [Hi-Phi Nation](#). He is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Vassar College, and produced the first season of Hi-Phi Nation as Humanities Writ-Large fellow at Duke University.



Stories Make the World
Karen Werner

I've been thinking about the politics of radio storytelling. Words, sounds, and stories are powerful—they co-create and shape the ever-emerging world. This understanding about the power of words, sounds, and stories as bringing worlds into being (again and again) comes from speech act theory, as well as from Buddhism and Indigenous philosophies, which in their different ways point to the responsibilities of storytelling. What worlds are my words, sounds, and narratives co-creating and energizing? What is my storytelling complicit with?

It's also the case that I can't fully control the unfurling of "my" words, sounds and stories, all of which have life and intentionality of their own, given the momentum and materiality of the past and the vitality and animism of language and sound itself. Amidst all of this, I try to approach my work in and with words, sounds, and stories as a political and ethical practice, infused with a desire for a just, beautiful, and inclusive world.

I offer this analysis of the politics and ethics of radio storytelling in the context of this Earlid forum on audio criticism, because radio storytelling has become increasingly complicit with the privatization of the self.

I fell in love with radio in the context of easing my own loneliness. Listening to the voices of others, I found pleasure in the immediate, if fleeting, intimacy; the narrative arcs of meaning and redemption, and the stimulating information about the world. This is a kind of entertainment and thrill that one can get hooked on. Words, sounds, and narrative sensibilities subtly reinforce notions of the coherent self; the meaning of community; the centrality of the human; empathy as a virtuous feeling, and the world as by and large knowable.

This co-creation of self and world happens within (and energizes again and again) a broader social and economic narrative and context. So much podcast and public radio storytelling is typically listened to alone these days—at the gym with headphones or as part of a solo commute. And increasingly these radio stories and podcasts are underwritten by companies that prepare your meals and snacks, deliver beds, send automated newsletters, and so forth amidst an insidious hush about the slashing of public funding for radio and art in the U.S. (and to varying degrees outside the U.S., as well.)

I am inspired by U.S. playwright [Erik Ehn](#) who considers narrative and aesthetic strategies (such as strangeness) that resist capitalist privatizations of the self and narrow forms of empathy. Ehn offers wonderful inspiration for working with words, sounds, and storytelling as practices that can, in fact, expand and undo the self. This is basically turning radio and storytelling into a spiritual activist practice.

How are we to produce radio stories that co-create a just and inclusive world, and how does one do this, on a practical level, while inhabiting deeply entrenched patterns of privatized economics and privatized selves? Keeping these questions front and center and struggling and playing with them is a way of making radio storytelling more ethical. I'd like to see more audio/radio criticism that keeps these kinds of ethical questions present.

[Karen Werner](#) is a radio producer & sociologist. She has been an artist-in-residence in Vienna at studio das weisse haus (Fall 2016) and at the Museum Quartier/Tonspur (Fall 2017) producing episodes of Strange Radio, a project about the intergenerational impact of war and displacement. Karen teaches at Goddard College.

Lost Antennae **Christopher DeLaurenti**

After I finished writing an essay on Glenn Gould's landmark radiophonic work *The Idea of North*, I was jolted by the brief terror of a suddenly obvious absence: Where is my radio?

Gould and a bunch of .mp3s from the late, lamented Australian Broadcasting Company program *Soundproof* populate my laptop's "current listening" folder. Jose Pivin spun down in my portable CD

player just a little while ago. My bookmarks can and do take me to great listening online, including Earlid, [Hollow Earth Radio](#), [radioCona](#), [Resonance FM](#), [sfSoundRadio](#), [The Third Coast Festival](#), the [Wavefarm](#), [WFMU](#), and my first gateway to radio art, [Kunstradio](#).

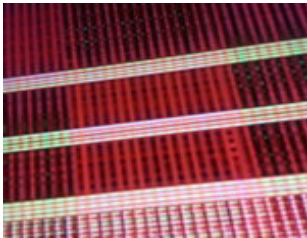
Yet I miss what radio scholar Margaret Ann Hall in her dissertation “Radio After Radio” describes as “early radio’s distinct qualities: the chaos from a listener’s perspective of random and broken narratives, feedback, and static,” qualities which help hone the desperate focus of listening to a singular event. Where is the bracing, live-in-the-moment feeling that I may never hear again what I am hearing on the radio?

In his essay “Out of the Dark: Notes on the Nobodies of Radio Art,” Gregory Whitehead declares that radio art can be much more than merely an act of transmission by “whatever any artist from any medium happens to represent, acoustically, on air.”

I seek an opaque, churning ether of sound, listening, conversation, surveillance, transmission, and community which, according to Whitehead, “challenges the audience to cross and recross the obscure boundaries that separate radio dreamland from radio ghostland, living from dead, utopia from oblivion.”

Where might this radio be found? Much as the web has regressed into well-runnelled networks which lead most everyone to *The New York Times* and away from confined, pocketed eddies of information stored on someone’s manic angelfire or tripod page, the radio will stream through phones. Yet Marshall McLuhan’s notion of “the continuing process by which new technologies create new environments for old technologies” suggests other paths: hacking (social, infrastructure, technical) has become a form of transmission while new forms of reception await an algorithm dependent on responsive metadata.

Ultimately, NPR will be NPR, and you will have to navigate to interesting destinations of your own volition.



[Christopher DeLaurenti](#) has been making adventurous [radio](#) since 1997. His recent works include *Fit The Description* (Ferguson, 9-13 August 2014) (2014); *To the Cooling Tower, Satsop* (2015) and *The Surry Power Station EWSS Test heard amidst a stand of bamboo* (2016).

114 Comments – July 4 through Sept. 5, 2017



[Gregory Whitehead](#)

July 4, 2017 at 4:21 pm

First, loud and heartfelt BRAVAS to Joan Schuman for curating the strong, polyphonous statements linked above, and for hosting this forum. A few words just to get the juices flowing:

In my long experience since the early 1980s, three “P” words have never failed to create discomfort in public radio circles, at least on this side of the Atlantic: Philosophy, Politics and Poetics. Yet broadcast radio is deeply entangled, riddled and steeped in all three! To my ears, once we enter radio space in all its slippery ambiguity, the Triple-Ps are everywhere, whether one wants to hear them or not.

Thinking through the space then becomes inseparable from creating in the space, or in collaboration with the space. When radiomakers become more deeply aware of the poetic, philosophical and political puzzles intrinsic to radio in all its phenomenological sloppiness, their radiophonies become ever more irresistible to the hungry ears of the absent other.

Podcast space fires up a different kettle of fish in each of the Triple-P dimensions, as different from broadcast radio as a frog pond from the Sargasso Sea. Same goes for installations, audio walks and every other acoustic modulation; each space suggesting a distinct poetic, a distinct politics and a distinct philosophy. There is no blanket poetics of sound as such, only diverse poetics of sounds in relation to distinct listening situations, each with its own inherent politics.

Forget this, or ignore it, and everything starts sounding like everything else, with the rich diversity of our acoustic ecology sacrificed to the convenience of “multi-platform” formats, ego brands, blandly predictable modules and other shallow blurts and blahs.

OK, enough preliminaries: in the interests of creating a collective repository of ideas and inspirations, intended to tickle the minds and ears of a fresh generation of audio adventurers, Joan and I will do our best to mediate in days and weeks to come. Welcome one and all, and let the comments flow!



Joan Schuman

July 5, 2017 at 10:11 am

Context is king, Gregory. When we first started talking about this forum, I considered another arts-community brewing contested ideas of critique.

There may be parallels or simply synergies, but I think it's important to peek around at other artistic genres, as many of the writers in this forum have done. For me, one of the salient examples is the visual work by Dana Shulz and her Whitney Biennial painting responding to Emmet Till's funeral. It caused both heated protest and defense by artists, curators and museum visitors and continues to motivate critics to contest who's allowed to paint, speak, etc. (Shulz's painting is a response as a mother herself, a white woman, to another mother's insistence on an open casket so her son's unimaginable torture at the hands of racist white men in the South could be blatantly viewed.)

There were demands for the painting to be destroyed. There were inquiries into whether it should have been included at all. One of the [Whitney curators](#) suggests these many strands of discourse unravel due to the speed at which engagement happens online.

The latter is a curious zone. Is this what happens when we talk about radio experiments or hybrids of conventional approaches (dare we say, commercialized) and offer them up to listening 'publics'? Are we too quick to offer glib responses (opinions) without maybe more deep tackling? How would that look/sound for 'radio's art'?

What do you want to see that's not out there, being engaged with?



[Gareth Stack](#)

July 6, 2017 at 11:47 am

While my work is primarily funded for broadcast radio in Ireland, I always consider online the 'medium of record'. I've been podcasting since 2005, and coming from an online first I'm interested in the distinct characteristics of that audience – which to my mind relate more to ways of listening than demographics. Primarily the podcast audience is choosing to listen, and indeed subscribe to a programme or series, rather than happening upon it in the chaotic stream of the airwaves. And at least here in Europe, where satellite radio never took off and podcatchers in cars are less prevalent – the audience are primarily listening on headphones.

I grew up – like Karen Werner, a lonely child filling the late night silence, listening to BBC radio four. There was little difference in my mind between book serialisations – like John William's

wonderfully evocative but barely remembered ‘Silver Threads’, and radio drama proper. Primarily monologues from that time stick in my memory for some reason – adaptations like Wallace Shawn’s ‘Fever’.

In the years since I’ve begun creating my own work, despite finding much to love in the production and sound design aspect of radio, I’ve rarely enjoyed listening to radio drama. For me the most exiting ‘fictional’ work is being created in the narrative journalism space: Liminal work mixing reality and fiction to explore subjectivity through sound. Not by mimicking the faux discursive chattiness of American public radio, but by merging recollection, found recordings and outright fiction – in a manner influenced by the ‘new journalism’ of Truman Capote and Tom Wolfe, Gregory Whiteheads cutups, the experimentalism of Daphne Oram and Delia Derbyshire.

I’m thinking of work like Kaitlin Prest & Shani Aviram’s ‘Movies in your Head’, Pejk Malinovski’s ‘Everything, Nothing, Harvey Kietel’, Julia Barton’s ‘One Time’, Paolo Pietropaolo’s ‘Signal to Noise’. These pieces, and numerous others by outfits like Nick Van Der Kolk’s Love + Radio, merge hypnagogic sound design with fragments of real and fictional memory. They seduce empathy from tiny moments of personal experience and fling time up into the air pizza dough. They employ leitmotif – both musical phrases and repeating sounds and words to support their themes, keeping the affective tonality of sound on an even footing with language. Above all they are sound native: They could exist within no other medium. They turn the weaknesses of podcast – it’s linearity and isolation, into attention and intimacy.

For me this is interesting soil in which a new kind of audio fiction could grow. I’ve only begun to think about how to develop such work. Its need to emerge through experimentation with sound, through cutup, foley and the pillaging of personal archives and found footage. It’s allergic to funding streams which demand (as here in Ireland) a finished, readable script prior to production. As a writer / director I’ve tried to engage with aspects of the ‘distinct qualities’ of radio referenced by Christopher DeLaurenti – the mechanics of surveillance, the body as both a storehouse of sound and a physical presence which can be explored and invaded. Too much of the current crop of radio drama – and I include much of my own work in this – treats sound as a secondary consideration. The possibilities inherent in the singular attention of the listener – positional audio, textural noise, the physicality of sound, tone, POV, exposure of the mechanisms of listening – are often discounted in favour of ‘accessible’, linear narrative.

Meanwhile the explosion of creativity occurring in the fine art space, as sound art has become the flavour of the day, seem to have had little impact on the day to day work of the radio dramatist. What’s lacking is exactly the kind of awareness of context, and interplay with work in other mediums that defines work as contemporary. If podcast drama is to develop it needs to respond both to the polarised political context and it’s artistic context – not only in the tradition of narrative radio or sound art as a whole, but also visual art and performance. It requires a criticism that provokes and elevates serious work, that serves a curatorial role, identifying and cataloguing pieces and artists worthy of attention. Perhaps criticism emerging from makers and artists engaged in the same effort at sonic innovation. Ideally criticism that values equally the aural, literary and sonic aspects of the art form.

In 2013 I had the great fortune of attending an event called ‘Ears Forward’ at the Brooklyn performance space JACK. This listening event curated by Brendan Baker exposed the audience to a revelatory variety of contemporary audio. Events like these – where sonic art is presented in context, with exposition, fidelity and selection, seem to be springing up everywhere. Often where radio makers present recent discoveries to one another in their own homes. They’re vital to the emergence of a creative conversation, and have had an enormous impact on the development of my own awareness of the ‘radio’ landscape. What’s missing – at least in the Irish context – are events where makers from distinct sonic worlds like radio, the metal noise scene, fine art audio, audio hacking, and podcast can meet collaborate and gain exposure to radically distinct work.

Locally there is one festival which does this ‘Hearsay’ in Kilfinnan, Co. Limerick. Internationally, I’m aware of one other, Philadelphia’s Megapolis.

These kinds of events can help engender alternatives the stagnant modes of storytelling – narrator driven, found tape, discursive, genre bound – that are becoming mainstays of the revival in podcast audio drama. From a pragmatic creator standpoint, they can potentially point towards alternative funding sources that allow writers and producers to escape the demand characteristics of specific advertisers or funding bodies. From an artistic point of view their invaluable jumping off points, that transform a solipsistic introspective medium into a lively conversation.



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Joan Schuman

July 6, 2017 at 2:16 pm

Gareth, I’ll jump back towards your robust ideas in a moment, but want to offer clarification about Megapolis that you mention.

It is a festival taking place in Philadelphia, but that is a result of the roving nature of Megapolis itself. It takes place in a different city, every other year or so since 2009 (Boston; New York; Oakland, California; Baltimore). It is this kind of roving that allows for nearer-by locals to participate.

In fact, Earlid’s “Radio Art” —this very forum— is going to be revisited there in Philly in September. I’ll be taking a sort of snapshot (or several poses) of what transpires this summer and participants at the festival will parse the activity of this very gathering.

<http://megapolisfestival.org/artists/philadelphia-2017/>



■

Joan Schuman

July 8, 2017 at 2:32 pm

I would add to your list of festivals for engendering the much-needed in-person moments that foment excitement enough to take us home and do more work. Deep Wireless is one of those to add to your list. I attended in 2005 (met both Gregory Whitehead and Dragan Todorovic there, among others). It takes place annually in Toronto, Canada, since 2002, and they have numerous spin-offs (installations, symposia, festivals, commissions, sound walks, etc.). Invaluable

<http://naisa.ca/festivals/deep-wireless/>



■ *Joan Schuman*

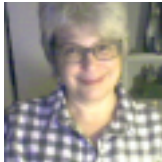
July 9, 2017 at 11:03 am

I'm on a variety of Facebook group pages where I discern activity and festivals around these themes.

Gareth and others, here's a tidbit I just gleaned from The School of Radio in Italy. Its director, Roberto Paci Dalò, chimed in at FB about this Earlid gathering with excitement. He says: "We're working on a little radio art symposium (scheduled for next November 2017 in San Marino) around The School of Radio / Scuola di Radiofonia and this conversation is a treasure. Let's share ideas, wishes, and thoughts."

Seems a vital connection ... and resonant with others we've linked to (many links Chris DeLaurenti offered in his essay here)

<http://www.theschoolofradio.org/>



○

[Marjorie Van Halteren](#)

August 4, 2017 at 4:08 am

Just replying here, because I really enjoyed this post, Gareth. When I left the US in 1992, I was exhausted from trying to find a way to make radio drama in the US – not that you can't ("The Truth" for example is an effort I have followed with interest) – but I was coming off of our particular aesthetic and context – I wrote my masters thesis at NYU about it before I left and will spare the readers from it here.

I just wanted to say, in moving to Europe, I became a daily listener to BBC 4 and 3 and heard radio drama habitually like UK listeners do, for the first time. I found I was free to enjoy it! although I did write and direct one play myself for Radio 4, in general I became simply a listener. Like Gareth, artistically it often didn't inspire me, and sometimes it is downright awful, but I loved hearing actors that approached it without shouting and telegraphing (in the US I made them wear headphones because they did not grow up with

the medium), I loved the fact that its an established genre the way actuality-driven storytelling is in the US (and no, it didn't start with This American Life).

Oh, so much to read and listen to on this site!!!



[Gregory Whitehead](#)

July 7, 2017 at 11:41 am

Gareth (and others!), I would be curious to hear your response to Neil Verma when he writes:

“Let audio fiction be radically other, let it be impossible to stage. As I’ve written elsewhere, podcasting needs to be twice as weird as it is now if it is going to be nearly as weird as radio is all the time.”

To my ears, those occasions when linearity and isolation transform into attention and intimacy, to use your own wonderful description, are all too few and far between.

In contrast to the open egalitarianism and entropic ambiguity of radio space, qualities that support non-linear and freely associative forms of radio art, is there something inherently flat and aesthetically reactionary within podcast space, with ambitious podcasters engaged in the eternal search for the exact balance of elements that will secure the highest number of downloads, the best statistical metrics, and thus hook commercial sponsorship, after which it will become imperative not to do or say anything controversial, upsetting or disorienting?

Podcasts are packaged bits of digital acoustic flotsam in the vast informational and global surveillance ocean of the internet, with its nasty riptides of taste algorithms and push-media feedback loops, loops that terminate only when our subjectivities have been fully mined and commodified. Or? What am I missing?

Then come these powerfully persuasive thoughts from Karen Werner:

“Words, sounds, and narrative sensibilities subtly reinforce notions of the coherent self; the meaning of community; the centrality of the human; empathy as a virtuous feeling, and the world as by and large knowable.

This co-creation of self and world happens within (and energizes again and again) a broader social and economic narrative and context. So much podcast and public radio storytelling is typically listened to alone these days—at the gym with headphones or as part of a solo commute. And increasingly these radio stories and podcasts are underwritten by companies that prepare your meals and snacks, deliver beds, send automated newsletters, and so forth amidst an insidious hush about the slashing of public funding for radio and art in the U.S. (and to varying degrees outside the U.S. as well.)”

Against the branded self and artist-as-entrepreneur as required in podcast space, Werner proposes a storytelling practice as spiritual activism and resistance to neo-liberal exploitations of the self. What think ye? What about the ethical dimensions of our artistic practice? Anyone?



Joan Schuman

July 8, 2017 at 2:26 pm

Gregory and Gareth, you raise vital experiences that feed your curiosity. It is the former that changes how each of us conjures up the latter as we listen—flung to the far reaches of radio's ears, which have now landed here online as both of you are noting. This experience is robust and wobbly, depending on funding and metrics.

I echo the examples you cite, Gareth, for their inventive intertwining of sound and story. Something you raised resonates for me about 're-inventing' the wheel. We've got an explosion of platforms beyond what once was 'just radio.' Recently, a multi-part exploration of how we producers (artists, radio-makers) can create anew, popped into my iTunes via a podcast that had been dormant for more than a year. I kept peeking around to see if the podcaster had added any new episodes. And then he came up with this.

Anxious Machine is Rob McGinley Meyers' consideration of how we humans relate to technology. Stylistically, it borrows from public radio; it pushes story to the front; often it is transparent and the host lays out his relationship to the story. In fact, this 'series' lands us squarely inside his life and why the last two episodes have a gaping hiatus between them. The gist of this series is to explore if podcasts could be treated like creating a masterpiece of literature for the audio medium. It's not about creating audio fiction. Rather it's about ambition, like Joyce's *Ulysses*, Meyers suggests. He asks: What if we think of audio as a new medium for audio storytelling, encouraging people to take it into new directions?

Isn't this already happening, I wanted to shout? Or, louder, isn't this what has been happening in cycle after cycle of creative radio-making across generations? Let's make something really big! He realizes this might sound like re-inventing the wheel (and the other gist of this series is about Meyers' grappling with his own mental health, but that's another story, or another part of this story and a fairly radical one because his content isn't reliant upon metrics or funding). But he rightly questions, I think, that we are in an era not unlike the printing press and its impact on novel-writing or the electric guitar, on rock bands.

As I listened, I became curious (and yes, Gregory, it was in private, in a cross-country flight, 42- and 36-minutes apiece for each of the two episodes he finished, despite suggesting there'd be a third, but with a year between these two, who knows ... the joy of independent podcasting non-responsibilities). I thought more about the cycles for many of us (and mirrored loudly in Meyers' own depression and manic episodes). He raises an excellent issue to consider: public vs. private failure. Both seem to matter. And I guess if you accept more failure or demand to rise above it, pushing creative energies or experiments aside, it's possible to devalue your own work or never get it off your hard drive.

Meyers' positing these ideas as if they are brand new (and his own acknowledgement that they aren't) could be a template for critical discourse. He's talking about energy, mental

health, creativity, masterpieces; he's looking at how to make money; he's transparent in his style and yet not completely naval gazing.

Anyone else hear this 'series' on *Anxious Machine*, which is one of the founding members of a small, podcast network, called The Heard (originally launching with six and now eight podcasts, all of them in varying stages of funding or sheer independence)? Even comparing smaller networks against larger ones (like Radiotopia and Panoply or Gimlet) is a relevant launching point for critical understanding of media structure, no?

<http://www.anxiousmachine.com/>
<http://www.theheardradio.com/#what>
<https://www.panoply.fm/podcasts>
<https://gimletmedia.com/>



○

Neil Verma

July 25, 2017 at 1:57 pm

When I give talks about podcasting these days, I focus on the connection between podcast aesthetics and the values of the tech industry to which the medium is increasingly tied in the United States. I like to open with this little piece by Paper Radio, which I take to be both quite amusing and also a very serious statement on these matters, so maybe not funny at all: http://paperradio.net/episodes/fm/paperradio_fm10.mp3



■

Joan Schuman

July 25, 2017 at 2:55 pm

Neil, I explored Paper Radio a few years ago (both their 'AM' and 'FM' split into non-fiction and fiction pieces out of Australia — entirely sourced from that geography, as adamantly stated in their submission guidelines). Thanks for the reminder to re-listen. And re-listen is something we can do with a podcast that has gone 'dark,' as Paper Radio seems to have had a run from 2010 to 2016. It's like turning down an alley in a city, finding a bookshop or odd little museum and dipping in for a few hours.

Who would be a good critic for a 'completed' run (not an intended short series, that is)? The wealth of work that lives online begs us to consider it against the present moment, as you're noting.



Gregory Whitehead

July 31, 2017 at 10:21 am

Neil, I just had a listen.

Feeling the market in every cell of the body! Yes, such is the toxic dream of neo-liberalism, where subjectivity becomes so reduced and distorted by the anxiety of economic precarity that the imagination no longer functions as a means for contemplating alternative sorts of spaces, different ways of being, thinking, creating a shared future, living together.

The Italian philosopher Franco Berardi (Bifo, well known for his work with the pirate station Radio Alice) proposes that within the deep sleep of a neo-liberal subjectivity shot through with market logic, poetry (understood in its broadest sense) becomes the ultimate “insolvency” whereby a new language of resistance might be incubated.

<https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/uprising>



Gareth Stack

July 9, 2017 at 7:43 am

To my mind there's a radical discontinuity between hobbyists and those seeking to make a living in the podcast space. While access to the airwaves – outside spaces like community radio, and the American public access channels, has always been an expensive, limited commodity; podcasts, like the web itself are defined by their accessibility. Traditionally in the radio space, as with print and television – the broader the audience, the more rigid the gatekeepers. Podcast initially lacked this restriction (though that has largely changed). It comes with a host of other qualities that differentiate it from the broadcast space – from time shifting to an overwhelming overabundance of programming. By its very nature, everything released in podcast format exists perpetually. Yet paradoxically, podcasting still largely flies under the radar of defamation and even copyright law. It's a somewhat lawless space, and yet one almost entirely coopted by the curation and promotion of the large podcatchers.

Within podcasting, you have this ongoing tension between hobbyist makers, who tend towards relatively simple discursive formats, and 'professional' producers with a more substantive production skillset. For this latter, highly diverse group, podcasting may be an offshoot of journalist and radio broadcast, an aspect of arts practice, an opportunity to 'build a personal brand' or some other form of resale of existing 'content'. As Gregory points out, this can tend towards

highly market driven, or at the very least market influenced programming. This is made more problematic by the algorithmically driven nature of the filter bubble, and the tiny subsection of podcast audio – usually from well known media companies – promoted by gatekeepers like the iTunes podcast store. Network effects make the popular ever more popular: Creating a pressure towards replication of production approach and content.

This was part of my thinking in suggesting the utility of curatorial criticism. There are almost certainly large number of more interesting ‘experimental’ podcasts – be they individual documentaries or one off programmes, or ongoing series – that are all but invisible to the winner takes all popularity contest that fills podcast recommends within apps and app stores. Aside – I’ll be sure to check out the Anxious Machine podcast.

Moreover, frequent updates build audiences, and audiences build on themselves creating network effects. Given the much larger amount of time taken to produce more substantive audio, whether it be sound native drama, art radio or sound driven documentary – there will always be less of this kind of programming than simpler discursive programmes. The end result being that it will be harder for such podcasts to build and maintain listenership, and hence to be heard and noticed at all.

The more ambitious podcast networks – like Radiotopia & The Heard, do a great deal to help promote more abstract and innovative programming. This includes the syndication of award winning or boundary pushing episodes from other sources. A parallel can be drawn here to how blogging developed from a vast series of isolated voices, inexorably towards aggregated curated experiences that occasionally invited outside contribution – e.g.: Boingboing; eventually towards cooption and near irrelevance in the wake of the large social media platforms. The problem aggregation is an inevitable homogenisation, both of political and cultural perspective, and of aesthetic. In the case of Radiotopia, the otherwise excellent homegrown programming tends towards the creative side of the didactic NRP approach. There had of course long been a tradition of this kind of aggregation of sonic art and creative radio in the broadcast space, from Between the Ears and Short Cuts in the UK, to Nova on RTE Lyric in Ireland. These however, remain niche government funded programmes.

Another parallel with the early days of blogging is as Karen & Gregory suggest – is the element of self expression and exploration. What has always excited me about the podcast space is the freedom for the public to engage with rather than passively consume the media conversation. This has never been simpler with the ubiquity and relative inexpensive of recording and compositional platforms, from the smartphone to tablet computers. This lends itself to Dave Winer’s original conception of citizen journalism. A pioneer in the development of the RSS media syndication technologies underlying the podcast, Winer wrote extensively in the early – mid 2000s about the possibilities for sousveillance and citizen reporting to redress imbalances in power created by the emerging surveillance state.

The ubiquitous podcast creation device that Winer called for (and even attempted to build) at the birth of podcasting is with us today in the form of the smart phone. And we see active resistance to corporate and government malfeasance from radio journalists turned podcasters like Scott Carrier. In a sense, the easily skipped sponsorship ecosystem of podcasting, still provides an escape from the linear inescapable product placement and explicit advertising of television, cinema and broadcast radio.

A precarious ecosystem exists here too, with the crowd funding platform Patreon providing an essential source of funding to iconoclastic voices – at least those who manage to develop and maintain an audience. Reading the industry newsletter Hotpod however, it quickly becomes apparent how tenuous the open nature of podcasting is – with a number of highly funded efforts seeking to replace MP3 / RSS in order to create better metrics for advertisers; with the inevitable

side effect of sealing access to a previously open platform. Some of these – like the NPR One app, even spring from the American public radio space.

The issue of maintaining open platforms and indeed funding streams, be they public patronage, foundation grants or something else entirely, is inseparable from the future of podcast as a platform for both self expression and resistance. In it's absense we have access to the only the most popular, detoothed, or 'gentleman scientist' forms of alternative media. While aiming for mass popularisation delimits the possibilities for both creative and critical audio, avoiding any hope of a wider audience succeeds only in creating echo chambers that intersect only trivially with the wider cultural discourse. It's certainly true that podcasting has yet to find its Michael Moore or even its Banksy. Personally I'd rather see a greater number of more truly eccentric creators find an audience – ideally through the aggregation of informed, diverse, opinionated critics.



Joan Schuman

July 10, 2017 at 2:41 pm

The question seems to be, where would you/we like to see or hear those informed, diverse, opinionated critics? What kinds of media? How often? And how would we preserve or define those spaces? Should they be for practitioners or outsiders? Many of the contributors to this forum suggest a multiplicity of approaches. Interestingly, I think the more refined and robust and serious of criticism happens offline and yet we spend so much of our time (I do) online, listening and forming an opinion and seeking out the opinions of others. Right here in this ever-so ephemeral of spaces in which everything is saved and archived.



[Gareth Stack](#)

July 11, 2017 at 12:52 pm

Good question Joan.

Speaking as a writer and programme maker, while academic criticism can be fascinating, I find it of little practical use. It surprises me that podcasting hasn't already given rise to a legion of popular recommendation and critique programmes. In the video space, youtube is swamped with such things – and for all the sound and fury of vapid polemic, there is at least an ongoing community and conversation.

Expanding on a point I implied before. I do think that there's a real and immanent danger of podcasting being subsumed into another medium. One better suited to the needs of advertisers and 'big content'. We've seen this happen before with both blogging and user generated video, and till

now it's only been the lack of investment in the space that's kept the open technologies of podcasting sacrosanct.

Should this happen, the owners of the platform will have the power to effectively censor, to 'demonitise' and of course control the promotion of individual episodes and programmes – in the way Youtube, Twitter, Reddit and Facebook do today. To exclude creators from the platform all together, or accede to the demands of censorious regimes.

I'm not sure what can be done to prevent such an outcome. Perhaps it's an inevitable outcome of technological media under 'late capitalism' (i.e.: in an era when monopoly legislation is detoothed to the point of irrelevance). Right now though, we have a period of relative freedom and concomitant creative engagement.

What we face is what has often been referred to as the discovery problem. Despite (and perhaps because) the ever expanding hold media and online media especially has on our attention – independent media of all sorts, most notably highly creative and original work faces greater difficulty than ever being noticed at all. User ranked recommendation systems have proven inadequate to the task of promoting 'the good stuff'. They're readily gamed, payola'd and tend towards the lowest common denominator. So what I suggest as an antidote are specific outlets and avenues tailored to the criticism of adventurous and original programming: Be they blogs, online videos or indeed podcasts themselves. The logical homes for such criticism would be where the audience is (and has been paid for) – large podcast producers and distributors. And indeed Gimlet did have a podcast show of this type – Sampler, which was cut from their schedules last year. The question is, how can 'big content' be incentivised (or guilted) into giving back?

In the absence of this kind of worthwhile ongoing criticism and promotion, I think we're going to see ever fewer programmes taking broader and broader swathes of listenership. With independently produced shows at best irrelevant, and at worse ultimately excluded from emerging platforms.

[Chris DeLaurenti](#)

July 13, 2017 at 12:26 pm

Can I invert the pyramid? Much of the discussion so far remains rooted in systemic issues. As systems are enveloping constellations of individual attitudes and actions, I would like to respond to Gregory's question about the ethical dimensions of our artistic practice.

How we approach our material, topics, and interviewees could spawn separate discussions, but I wonder what is our obligation to ourselves and each other as makers and listeners?

Before fulfilling obligations to others – and potentially solving the discovery problem by creating a community – it's crucial to know yourself and what you can do. The thrust of this discussion has a wonderfully brainy, activist stance, but activists (especially young, inexperienced, or inattentive, out-of-practice activists like me) tend to bite off more than they can chew. "Reform yourself then pick one, only one, cause," remains a great gift of advice I received from a veteran activist.

My first obligation is to know why I make the work. "Putting endless time and work," writes Kyle Gann "into a disciplined, unremunerative activity for the potential benefit of audiences unknown constitutes sufficient defiance of capitalist imperatives." Sufficient or not, I make the work to teach myself to listen.

My second obligation is to history and histories. I seek out lost ghosts, ranging from low-bitrate .mp3s of classic radiophonic works hacked from various sites to providentially mispriced CDs. FOUR discs of Jose Pivin for US \$18! The four-disc Pivin set I mentioned in my initial response likely stands as the “Heaven’s Gate” of radio art.

Rather than imagine oneself into a place of oppression, imagine the pre-neo-liberal Pivin pitch to a record label: “Yep four CDs, all in French, some of it guttural, amidst lots of silence. And cowbells! The guy died in 1977 so he’s ripe for a revival. Sure, the 4 disc cardstock wallet and booklet is extravagant, but we’ll save money by printing in one color on the discs. Oh, and this set just focuses on works Pivin made in and about Africa. After this release, we can do multi-disc sets from his great run of work in the 1960s.”

Our history has yet to be written, so I re-write it often by seeking out new (to me) makers and listening to what they make. I regret “discovering” Sherre DeLys via Soundproof only last year; I blame myself and our fractured communities for the doltish time-delay.

Reading is crucial. Most everyone has recommended a text, yet how a text is handled is just as important. Every summer, I beat up on *The Wireless Imagination*.

My wife asked why I didn’t buy or borrow a used copy of the book. I figured my repeated library check-outs were a selfish middle finger to the cosmic undertow of someone else’s serendipity; my “actual,” proudly shelf-sitting copy was out on ten-year loan, likely never to return (I think the cover was pink).

So my battered, shoved-in-the-bottom-of-a-backpack copy (hardback, natch) is written-in, dog-eared, and otherwise brutalized in unmentionably hyphenated ways. There, Douglas Kahn take that! I underlined and starred three sentences vigorously, so you’re wrong (or really right)!

I wish I could do better regarding my third obligation, which is to advocate for fellow artists. I did so when I hosted two radio shows in succession from 1997-2002 and 2006-2009, but now I teach in the classroom to a much smaller audience. For some of my students, the apex of radio is “This American Life” or other fine NPR programmes whose evergreen formulae remain invisible to most of them.

Earlid and other shows and sites I mentioned in my initial response offer activist acts of advocacy for our art form. Not everyone can (or should) cobble a website together; for some making the work and surviving is all they can do.

So aside from “know thyself,” know your history, and champion fellow artists, what might be effective ways of advocating for adventurous listening rooted in the radio?

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Joan Schuman

July 13, 2017 at 4:18 pm

These questions of ethics and branding, that you raise Gregory (and Karen Werner, you mentioned in your essay), are vital. I get all sorts of notices in my email and on social media for podcasting classes (and of course, the ubiquitous ads from platforms that will assure your project gets pushed out beautifully via Squarespace and Mail Chimp) and they seem, lately, to overshadow what used to be workshops for storytelling or sound artistry. We can divide up 'them' and 'us' and fall into whichever camp feels comfortable, our stances being noble, our goals hidden or overt. I think without the more corporate-leaning structures, we've got the democratic nature of online spaces to become 'radios' of sorts. But it depends, of course, on your financial motivations. Art has always had these divides.

Get yourself a mentor; become one. Reinvent the medium.

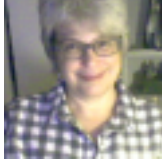
Chris, I agree that in your inversion of structures in favor of listening to oneself, to re-invigorate and stabilize one's own aesthetic ballast might be the best (better?) place to focus. But what if you're just beginning in this sonic medium and/or you want to 'make it big'? I think by being a real artist-maker standing in front of (or online with, in my case) newly experimenting practitioners, is the place to offer up your first two obligations and even a bit of your third one. Be a repository or archive. Earlid was in the 'note-taking' stage for five years before launching and has only been 'open' less than three years. I have no plans on stopping. It's more than a labor-of-love; it's a kind of beckoning to this far-flung community to land, get lost, listen for a while.

I'm not sure there's any bridge from the big leagues towards the margins. Gareth's wondering about how big content can give back to smaller-scale programming pockets. Everything's changing in ways that were once thought unimaginable (the disappearing material listening or viewing object—LP, cassette, CD, movie theater screen). I like that you take out *Wireless Imagination* from the library, Chris—a 25-year-old book that the library was astute in shelving. It's like checking out an old LP. I remember listening, over and over, to Antonin Artaud's *To Have Done With the Judgment of God* before I ever found it available online at UBUWeb. Crackling static. LP going round. I even secretly recorded it in the tiny library LP-listening room and wove it into a sound art piece, Artaud's voice bellowing from the late 1940s into some wobbly early-internet era, destined for gallery spaces and some radio programming in the early 2000s.

Check out these kinds of LPs and books. Have a listening party.

Something Dragan Todorovic mentions in his mini-provocation, is that community-building is key. I think it goes further than being asked, democratically speaking, to offer an iTunes review (that's not what Dragan is arguing for). There's something of this constant request that feels like a fake kind of community, even a fake kind of critic (a gathering of data rather than real voices, real bodies—although some podcasts invite even more creativity into this request and will offer an 'enacted' kind of review, like I just heard on [The Organist](#)).

What I'm wondering is can these divisions be vitalized somehow or co-equal? Can a regular critique of ourselves be enough? This goes back to Sarah Montague's ideas towards criticism and the numerous responses to her original essay.

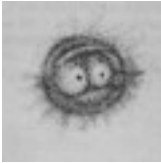


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[Marjorie Van Halteren](#)

August 4, 2017 at 4:14 am

To Chris – great posts, I agree, fantastic site you have too!



[Gregory Whitehead](#)

July 13, 2017 at 2:27 pm

Christopher, so beautifully put, and that is an extraordinarily powerful trio you have voiced, beginning with one's own ears, extending into our shared —if obscured — history, and then building community through hearing each other out, and helping in the hearing. Yes!

Your own website is a fantastic resource for our community, so much food for thought and further, deeper reflection. I take special note of your artist statement:

“My work, the offspring of my love affair with sound, incorporates murky atmospheres, everyday speech, and unusual field recordings.

I bear witness to current crises which impel me to respond. I also heed my impulse to conjure sonic places where raw emotion, memory, and imagination find refuge to dream.

To listen is to liberate. I start with myself, taking my microphones towards and sometimes beyond the boundaries of property, the law, and oppression. I make field recordings, but I'm not interested in capturing a place or building a documentary archive. When I tape small microphones to my skull, or button up a stout vest with sewn-in mics, or strap a stereo pair to my homemade mic boom, I am venturing into the world to ask “Who is heard?” “Who has?” “Who is here?” and “Why are we listening to this right now?” I ask these questions to open my ears and open my heart. Can I listen bravely? Can I hear justice?

I attempt to bear witness to current crises. Activist Sound is one way I describe the sound pieces, performances, and installations I sculpt from field recordings of protests, testimonies, and other pertinent sonic materials of social change. War, poverty, inequality, racism, and climate change impel me to respond.”

Hear hear!

<https://de laurenti.net/about/>

[Daniel Gilfillan](#)

July 14, 2017 at 2:57 pm

I wonder if I might complicate or “complexify” (I think that’s the neologism of the day) the conversation a bit, and ask about the art of radio that isn’t centrally located with human voice as its main structuring agent.

I wonder about artistic projects that center on the use of ambient sound, that seek to articulate an understanding of spaces/places not always tethered to human experience of them.

This may sound a bit too abstract, but as sound and radio artists capture and archive their pieces of sound, I wonder how those pieces of sound themselves tell their story, prior to a human-centered organization of that story. Is there narrative prior to human-centered narrative? Or does the capture itself already presuppose an organizational narrative?

Then in an artistic rendering of those pieces of sound, how true is the story that is then told? What alternate stories might be produced were the archive offered to other artists to produce narratives? Or does the experience of sound capture, the physicality of being present or being telematically present, afford an understanding of these sounds that resist archivization? Do the field recordings sound and radio artists capture take on a type of bio-acoustic signature specific to each field recording?



[Gregory Whitehead](#)

July 18, 2017 at 11:52 am

Daniel, I think immediately of the last passage from Heidegger’s essay on art (particularly sculpture) and space, as expressed in the following three sentences:

“Sculpture: the embodiment of the truth of Being in its work of instituting places.

Even a cautious insight into the special character of this art causes one to suspect that truth, as unconcealment of Being, is not necessarily dependent on embodiment.

Goethe said : It is not always necessary that what is true embody itself; it is already enough if spiritually it hovers about and evokes harmony, if it floats through the air like the solemn and friendly sound of a bell. ”

Sound sculptures often aspire to work in — and on — space in the same way, but the question of “embodiment” (and agency) is so maddeningly complicated and complexified, isn’t it?

Even the microphone in R. Murray Schafer's so-called Wilderness Radio required placement, and monitoring. Then comes the question: at what point does the disappearance of active human embodiment (voice or otherwise) become a form of passive surveillance, or acoustic voyeurism?

Can you write a bit more about the complications brewing in your mind? Once technology enters the space, isn't human experience always present, even when it is not central or dominant?

Let's say that I am in a deep cave, listening intently in the dark. I am acutely aware that my presence is of no consequence, even as I try to make sense of the space around me. Yet if I record that experience, and listen again in my studio, that experience is completely dependent on my agency, my active decision to record that space, in all its acoustic diversity, no matter what I make of it later. Or?

Agency is also present in the act of listening, as Goethe inadvertently discloses in the above quote; I mean, why is the sound of a bell "solemn and friendly"?

As soon as we listen, we name and create narrative, and impose a specific truth onto an acoustic space. Yes, there can be many such narratives, yet aren't they all the product of human embodiment and agency? Do the multiplicity of possibly interpretations or uses of the archived material in any way dislodge the supremacy of human engagement, within any mediated space, no matter how abstract?



Joan Schuman

July 18, 2017 at 1:08 pm

Daniel and Gregory, I love this kind of question particularly for the very relationship of sound and radio. We tend to think of radio as all voice, stories, narrative. There's much 'explaining' of how things work or are or should be, even in creative approaches to storytelling. Narrators abound.

But when there is just sound for our ears and it's on the radio, I'm mesmerized. A great example was the 3-year-running program on ABC/Australia, [Soundproof](#), that was consistently brave enough to offer this kind of sonic palette. The range was immense, and two of this forum's participants (Whitehead and DeLaurenti) had work on that program. But another piece comes to mind, also featured here at Earlid. Pip Stafford's [Iris](#), offers only the sounds of her grandmother's house as another doorway into a story. Of course, much editing, rather much composition, ensued, to transport our ears throughout this old house. But radio's relationship to these sounds seemed key for its disembodiment. You could hear the humans inside this piece; yet they were not offered as the usual human engagement of voice and story.

Perhaps Soundproof's producers (Julie Shapiro and Miyuki Jokiranta) could expand on these ideas?

Slightly different in nuance, is a web project produced by La Cosa Preziosa (Susanna Caprara) who focuses on the creation of experimental miniature audio pieces, all composed out of field-recorded material. These are fragments of impressionist realities. Sitting atop the online surface,

we are transported for a minute or two in a similar way as the aleatory radio signal. I'd be curious if Caprara also offers her work to be transmitted via other 'signals.'

We're beyond the one-pass experience of radio. We are beckoned, invited, urged to listen at whim, at our discretion, repeatedly. I can return to La Cosa Preziosa's compositions for a couple of minutes, to sample or re-listen in the same way I can revisit all of Soundproof's archives. I am less-inclined to return to revisit sounds on sites that are designed solely for sound ecology (sites such as The Paris Soundscapes Archive) perhaps because it is less-composed. But someone else might return there for untainted nostalgia. And then wouldn't they be designing their own story in listening?

<http://www.lacosapreziosa.net/listen>

<http://soundlandscapes.eu/paris-soundscapes>

[Chris DeLaurenti](#)

July 18, 2017 at 1:43 pm

Thank you for the kind words, Gregory. I agree that "as soon as we listen, we name and create narrative..."

Daniel, I too struggle with words like "true" and "story" as the traditional usage of those terms can dig in giant roadblocks to listening.

"Narrative" is often coded as "a familiar way of telling a story." Radio is often cursed by an introduction ("On this week's programme, we take a visit to..."), the expectation of a single chronology, and other markers (can I say "signs"?) both obvious (like names) and overlooked (like last names – quick, what's the last name of the heroine of "Sorry Wrong Number"?).

Myself, I avoid naming and introducing voices as I believe the voice continually _names itself_ in our memory (that sounds like [insert name of person I know/knew] who is from _____, who has a gender and age of _____ etc.) as do non-human creatures and other sounds amidst the soundscape.

We in the West can (or try to) name everything we hear. After a soundwalk, my students report only one or two unknown sounds, but they can describe them without a trace of fear or dread of the unknown. Naming the unknown is nonetheless a name.

I wrestle with the notion that the field recordings captured by sound and radio artists embody or record (ha-ha) or take on "a type of bio-acoustic signature specific to each field recording." Can field recordings capture a signature specific to a place?

Sound archives are filled with bird-song recorded with parabolic (i.e. narrow focus) microphones and steep hi-pass filters (get thee gone, wind below 120Hz!*). Let's not forget that almost every field recordist strives to eliminate (or later erase) their own audible presence. I and a few others don't, but that's more phonography than field recording.

Remember when geo-tagging sound was all the rage? To me, this tagging was astoundingly and ignorantly visual by assuming that a 5 minute (or 5 hour) recording could mark or adequately tag a place irrespective of time, day, season, year, etc. Such recordings are basically a stretched-out sample interpolated and elongated by the listeners' memory and response to the photo glued next to the soundfile.

So there is a “signature” there, but is it reasonably “bio-acoustic”? Perhaps only with repeated visits and careful, annotated comparisons such as in the work of Bernie Krause.

I have to remind myself (after 20 years of making field recordings!) that the microphone is not the ear, but akin to an ear. There’s a wonderful passage from Le Carre’s *The Little Drummer Girl*: “The ear selects, you see, dear. Machines don’t.”

Many factors (frequency response, neural aka sensory adaptation, etc.) distinguish the ear from the microphone. Note that the single diaphragm (two if recording in stereo) distortion of the microphone is broadband while the ear can handle distorted and non-distorted frequency bands at the same time (e.g. listening to wind and rustling leaves).

What about “true”? For me, the truth happens only while recording. The microphones and the deck (no I don’t record with headphones – monitoring is not listening) somehow make me listen and live more intently than when I do not have that stuff with me.

After recording, techniques and tactics such as multi-band compression, editing, EQ, forgiveness of my own incompetence, and so forth, are tools to recreate what I remember happening and feeling about those crickets, those birds (or whatever else I recorded out in the field).

Listening while recording is the only truth I know. Subsequent editing is an honorable fiction, a leavened-with-love lie to tell a truth worthy of the listener’s time.

* I know, wind is broadband way above 120Hz.



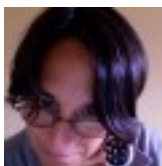
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Joan Schuman

July 18, 2017 at 1:54 pm

Just to point out that today is World Listening Day, in commemoration of R. Murray Schafer’s 84th birthday. This year’s homage is to the passing of the great listener, Pauline Oliveros, with “Listening to the Ground.” WLD launched in 2010 and is a hands-on (ear’s on) day to listen, listen some more.

<http://www.worldlisteningproject.org/2017/01/world-listening-day-2017-listening-to-the-ground/>



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Joan Schuman

July 18, 2017 at 2:26 pm

This is fascinating, Chris, that not wearing headphones provides you a pathway to hear while recording. In production courses for students learning to make radio or voice-based narratives, I drum into them the importance of wearing headphones so they can detect extraneous sounds while interviewing. Their goal is to get a voiced story that doesn't get obscured by the rustling of a mic against a jacket or a disrupting whirl of a computer fan—unless they actually want that sound. My goal is to get them to hear everything around them during the non-studio interview—a skill that has to be practiced and honed before they can begin to experiment. (They often suggest that they are happy to rely on 'fixing' the unwanted sound in 'post-production'—which for me, and maybe you, is 'production' or 'composing,' and not 'post'-anything—only to realize it sounds worse than if they just listened at the source.)

Phonography's goals are different or, maybe laterally, distant from these voiced-story kinds of narratives that eventually find their way to radio of some sort. But in understanding these divides (and bridges of artistic practice), you've given me some ideas for recording with and without headphones in order to 'hear' and to 'hear differently.' I hope to build that into a listening exercise (for myself and for my students ... so thanks!).

What do you think of ideas Daniel Gilfillan raises in his "[Agile Critic](#)" essay about critical language when it comes to how critics might be drawn towards these distinctions (phonography, composing, radio-making that leans towards creative non-fiction, the didactic, etc.), when he says this:

In the very vibrancy of our contemporary radio and sound art culture, characterized as much by an old-fashioned set of industry standards as it is by a DIY experimentation, the critical language and critical practice deemed missing are, in fact, readily apparent and in use.

Daniel, I'd be curious, also, to hear what you think about Chris' motives or stances around archiving and truth as these are intertwined conversations that span out to what we hear on the radio as well as on social media. Chris' piece about the protests at Ferguson is a great example of the 'archive' or the 'cloud' and the phonographer of conscience, as he and I talked about in late 2015 when he shared his protest symphony here at [Earlid](#), commissioned first at *Soundproof*.

Olivia Bradley-Skill

July 19, 2017 at 1:44 pm

Thank you for pointing to Daniel Gilfillan's essay, Joan — I couldn't agree more about how the idea of 'the critic' can be expanded to include artist and listener, in addition to the academic. Criticism's embodiment/meaning is continually molded and diversified by artists and listeners themselves and can take shape far beyond the perched essayist. As artists we build upon others, and criticism is inherent in our work, whether recognized or not, on paper or through sound, formally and informally, within and without academic conventions. There's a certain

responsibility that this process encourages for the artist (and listener). Know your history. Attempt to understand your own (and/or another's) intentions. Take the time.

I like to think that this kind of 'folk' criticism is especially enhanced by the medium of radio, which relishes in multiplicity and anonymity, where a communication develops that is at once rhetorical and real. In this imaginative, expressive "radio space," artist and listener engage in their own forms of critical language, perhaps even swapping roles in the process?

What I enjoy most about formulating criticism as a way of listening is the patience and attention that it emphasizes on both practices. On an average workday, I spend a large portion of my waking hours in front of a computer screen. I absorb an insane amount of random content, as I click through emails and flick through a slew of tabs that delineate 'work' and 'play', switching modes between pressure and relief. I welcome the purposeful escape from the continuous social media scroll through focusing on a piece of work and really listening, allowing the work to unfold in unfamiliar ways.

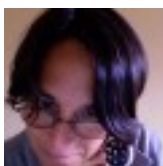
How does reframing the conversation from a need for more 'criticism' to a need for more 'listening' (on both a wide and intimate scale, harkening to Oliveros & her deep listening, R. Murray Schafer, & a listening to historical voices/ghosts, as Chris DeLaurenti so beautifully put) interact with the barrage of content in our online world? How has that platform/mindset impacted our (specifically sound+radio) work? How do we emerge triumphant from the cacophony of our online world?

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Sarah Montague

July 31, 2017 at 10:55 am

This is an important point—the need for the type of listening that considers any sonic work—or (in the case of Schafer) of perceiving the world sonically) as a gateway to the world around us, and potentially a spiritual path. However, I still think there is a value to the role of a designated critical listener, someone whose self-defined role is to place works in larger critical contexts and to establish vocabularies with which it discuss them. This role would actually aid in “allowing works to unfold in unfamiliar ways”, just as, all those years ago (harking back to my originating essay) I was ‘taught’ how to look at De Kooning by a good critical review. These worlds should co-exist, I think.



Joan Schuman

July 19, 2017 at 5:21 pm

Before I get to your useful questions, Olivia, I want to recommend a compelling article by Kate Crawford who suggests that all this ‘lurking’ we do online is really ‘listening.’ There are numerous versions:

“Following You: Disciplines of Listening in Social Media”

-in Jonathan Sterne’s 2012 Sound Studies Reader

<http://www.katecrawford.net/docs/ListeningCulturesOfParticipationKC.pdf>

-an earlier version in Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies
Vol. 23, No. 4, August 2009

<http://www.katecrawford.net/docs/FollowingYou.pdf>

○

Daniel Gilfillan

July 19, 2017 at 7:47 pm

There is so much in these last few threads that my synapses are firing all over the place. I’ll get back to an organized reply soon, but just wanted to submit a quick tidbit on lurkers as listeners:

In the early history of German broadcast radio, there was much discussion about the issue of “Zaungäste” — lurkers/listeners who clandestinely listened without participating (two-way transmission/reception sets) or, after the technology was refined to do away with sets that could transmit as well as receive, didn’t pay their subscription to the government but listened anyway, known as “Schwarzhören” or listening in the black.

More soon as I try to piece together some ideas based on the interesting comments and questions coming at my post from last week.



Gregory Whitehead

July 20, 2017 at 1:25 pm

Olivia, your own radiocasts provide an excellent example of “thinking aloud” in the flow of your decisions and selections. I can hear your mind embody thought down into your fingers, as one idea spills into another!

I've always thought the philosophical/critical side of radio work cannot be avoided or dismissed; the space itself is so full of philosophical puzzles, noise, interference, paradox. A space of intoxicating bewilderment, which calls for us to enter the wilds and navigate, find our bearings, figure out where we are and who we are, rocked by the riptides.

For my blood, the most invigorating radiocasts embrace the murky, slippery nature of the space in all its terrifying beauty, and refuse cheap "clarity" or "resolution" of the sort one hears with alarming regularity on NPR.

For those who want to pin things down, print offers a far better medium; for artists in tune with the medium, radio offers an infinite expanse of honest bafflement and meaningful chaos, where all sorts of sounds and ideas, at odds with each other, may nonetheless find themselves on the same dance floor.

For those who have not entered into the worlds of Olivia and Radio Ravioli, open your ears and be prepared to get blissfully lost:

<https://wfmw.org/playlists/OB>
<https://wavefarm.org/archive/g51rpe>

— —

Chris, I also want to spotlight your sentence:

"Listening while recording is the only truth I know. Subsequent editing is an honorable fiction, a leavened-with-love lie to tell a truth worthy of the listener's time."

Aye!

[Chris DeLaurenti](#)

July 20, 2017 at 2:28 pm

Joan, I agree that students should wear headphones, and I ask mine to do the same. Your insight that it's a different kind of focused listening is a marvelous one. A tool must be fully visible before casting a spell to make it evaporate.

I agree with Daniel that the terms are already in use, but we as radio makers lack a crucial corner of the Gann triangle – the work, the listener (I hope more than one), and a critical apparatus. We're missing the latter – which might be a good thing – unless there's a blog or forum (this one?) I don't know about. On the other hand, it may be a great gift to be an artist about whom no one has ever written about accurately.

I confess before hitting Post Comment for one of my previous posts, I excised a gentle jab at the Prix Italia – not for fear of my own career (their website and the awarding of the prize itself are too arcane for me – almost nothing I do is state sponsored) but because I didn't want to make fun of a group that helps many artists I admire.

The texts and terms are there, but we need more writers with no skin in the game as makers to critique, goad, damn, and praise.

And, crucially, to refine what Olivia Bradley-Skill calls folk criticism: there are plenty of sly nods, grateful allusions, and angry responses to other work in what we make. Connecting these works “where a communication develops that is at once rhetorical and real” as Olivia writes, can only deepen our understanding of the work.

[Barry Lam](#)

July 20, 2017 at 4:47 pm

I just gave a two-day workshop on producing audio for philosophers at Sacramento State University. The philosophy department there contacted me because they were interested in pursuing public-facing projects in a new medium. One of the things workshop participants found helpful was listening to familiar pieces of audio, things they just heard for content in the mainstream podcasting and public radio space, with the ear of a producer/maker. Once they did that, they not only appreciated a lot more of the nuances of production, but had more informed opinions about what they think worked for them and what didn't. In addition, I explored the idea that different minds process audio information differently, with some people getting too distracted by sound and music to fully appreciate the content of spoken word, while others really needing it to keep their attention. I think one of the things about academic criticism that can be helpful is that the cycle of teaching, research, debates, back to teaching has a way of helping to bring out insights over time that would otherwise be hard to do in solitary or even strictly professional environments. New students mean new virgin ears that are otherwise curious, and that has a way of pushing even the seasoned sound artist toward new ways of thinking.



Joan Schuman

July 21, 2017 at 10:13 am

This idea, Barry, that different minds process audio information differently speaks volumes about the audience more than it does about the intention, artistry and motivation of the solitary person making radio. (And perhaps this is a broader conversation about funding and/or our coddling towards those ears or desires to be heard ‘right’ or ‘right now.’)

Yet, as a maker of radio art that sometimes even I don't know why I've structured it a particular way (my right-brain takes over; I'm excited to experiment), I'm always fascinated when a listener responds in unexpected ways. I will whisper: “Hmmm. ... that isn't where I was going”... when where I was going was un-mapped from the beginning. How to teach this process is my greatest challenge when so many of my students want to be the next Roman Mars or Sarah Koenig or comedian-with-a-podcast.

Do we make art for ourselves first and then find a ‘Focus Sentence’ to describe it to others' ears? I'm beginning to lead new makers to doing this. Forget about where it ‘can’ air and just get it to be their own true voice so they can massage it strongly rather than trying to sound like someone else that can guarantee its airing. In this world of ‘anybody can make a podcast,’ maybe that's the better approach to expanding the palette and the media platforms. I used to try to get students to listen and hear where their work can stylistically fit. Now I want them to dive deeply into their voice and art and eventually

they'll find a home or build a new nest. Olivia, you seem to be following this ethos; Chris, it seems that has always been your approach.

I agree that new students mean new ears. Mine get a work-out each semester. But I am constantly up against those ears thinking there's just one way to make a radio story or a narrative in sound. Like Gregory's asking, I'd be curious to know how your workshop students consider the platform itself. I find it's my responsibility to bring to students the context of many different kinds and eras of radio in all its bone-rattling vibrations and disembodied tactility. In that way, while figuring out which toggle to switch to make the music fade, or how not to give the story away in their 'I'm here to tell you what you'll be listening to' narrations, they will engage with broadcasting and all its many, jelly-fish forms.

It's a delicate balance among Story (yes, capital "S"), original voice and artistry, and where to air when we've got this expansiveness of many options of the broadcast landscape and all of it, seemingly, sounding the same.



Gregory Whitehead

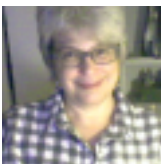
July 21, 2017 at 6:03 am

Barry, I am curious if any of the philosophers in your group engaged with or even mildly resonated with the deep philosophical/phenomenological qualities within radio space, or whether they heard it merely as a platform for (forgive my yawn) "public-facing projects."

Also, regarding your prepared statement: as someone who has long favored open structures with unlimited possible interpretations, I disagree with your characterization of such an aesthetic as "veiled", since that assumes that the radiomaker always has a predetermined "message" that is the "right" interpretation.

You refer to such structures as having a "lack of transparency", as if the radiomaker is engaged in a perpetual game of hide and seek with the listener. Yet what if an open structure is an honest admission of not knowing, and an invitation to the listener to find their own way?

<https://gregorywhitehead.net/2012/08/29/bewitched-bothered-bewildered/>



[Marjorie Van Halteren](#)

July 22, 2017 at 7:23 am

“It’s always in service to story” – from Joan’s introduction, referring to certain kinds of narrative. Of course Pauline Oliveros, R. Murray Schafer, La Monte Young, John Cage (and many, many more) were/are not exactly storytellers, but this has been forgotten by many. I have over the last two decades become more and more disturbed by this word – storytelling evokes wonderful work (as the original producer of radio’s Selected Shorts I know how vital it is) but meanwhile it is a term that has been appropriated by advertising mavens, fashion designers, and perverted into cliffhangers, confession, scandal and voyeurism to generate clicks and sell mattresses. It is almost as though if a producer can find a person with two heads that will talk, or discover an actual moon man, s/he can lay driving or moody music over it and claim a Peabody.

Of course much of the radio and podcasting work focusing on storytelling today is first rate. When *This American Life* is great, it’s layered and subtle and reverberant like a wonderful piece of fiction – and when it’s not, it’s because they are caught in a mechanism that requires them to deliver every week. I was very admiring of *S-Town* for many reasons. I felt that it was, as the author claimed, a kind of novel for radio, as *The Wire* was for TV. The patience, passion and talent that went into it was as careful and deliberate a high-level work of fiction. But also, I wondered about the ethics of this kind of audio autopsy. Has “but it really happened” ever been a defense of a choice in creative writing? Or is it the effect of story, story, story driving high profile radio for a couple of decades now. My jury’s still out.

“As makers we have to stop being so noble and say I’m an artist” – from Cathy FitzGerald’s piece.

I agree, but I’ve often felt that broadcasting and art are strange bedfellows. I like Heidi Grundmann’s “zero audience” phrase, when referring to the important work she has done on Austrian radio by making a space available for art that doesn’t make it on the audience-measuring graph. That’s it, art needs a space. A safe space – room to fail. It needs to be able to fail to sell mattresses. It needs all the time it needs to be created, in whatever length or vocabulary. People point to Beckett, Pinter, Tom Stoppard, Brecht etc. as having been attracted to radio. Of course, radio is magical. But they were invitees that did their work as one-offs, not cranking out series to feed the hungry beast. (Norman Corwin did his best to feed it – and it didn’t always serve him that well.) In the past, I had the pleasure of creating pieces for BBC Radio Three’s *Between the Ears* which I would not have been able to do with the creation of a national window where I could take my time and make something that was, if not art, artful – with a rather demanding editing brief. Are “zero-audience” slots “à l’antenne” still available? I think not so much. So enter podcasting. Audio broken free of the antenna-mooring – and I welcomed it – having fled radio in the 90’s and spent my time exploring galleries, performance spaces and other off-the grid spaces until now. And how do we garner criticism, develop audience and grow our art? Keep the spaces out there. Support the Heidi’s and the Joan’s. The transmission people, the poets, the jugglers, the screamers, the winners and losers. Don’t create camps – united we stand. I’ll be listening.



Joan Schuman

July 24, 2017 at 1:37 pm

Gareth, your earlier question (“... how can ‘big content’ be incentivised or guilted into giving back? ...”) reminds me of the relationships community radio stations once had with the behemoth NPR in the States. Those independent stations once stood proudly separate, maybe mindful if not

wary of NPR affiliates. Or they programmed wild stuff knowing that their town's NPR station would button down appropriately. Some communities continue with these splits. And it resonates as well between the large podcast distributors and smaller networks, all the way out to the renegades.

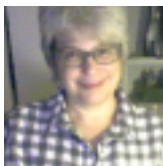
Why is this wheel being re-invented? Maybe it's fine that it is since it allows for new oil and energy. There are larger questions, of course, around public media and the ethos of serving a listening audience. Maybe this is a parallel conversation around what you're raising, Marjorie, around the zero-audience that doesn't land on the metrics graph, but exists solely for experimentation, for art.

About a year ago, Melody Kramer, a media thinker-activist, wrote in Medium, a 30-point piece exploring these issues. Revisiting them yearly would be useful and I would love to hear what she might think about art on the air, since mostly she's focused on divides in programming and audience that gears more towards public radio. But her ideas resonate as I noted above and we can apply them, still, to this argument about who stands at the gates.

I'd love to hear from podcasters in the thick of 'big content' around these issues, but also, I'd love to hear from the independent podcasters not succumbing to ads on their projects, or are partnering with public radio stations and allowing that model to help them be renegade. Before podcasting as a distribution model, we used to call those 'special projects' or 'series', via fiscal sponsorship from a community radio station or even an NPR-affiliate. Now they are expansive in platform by the simple distribution availability and the democratization of tools and ease of production.

Behind-the-scenes, my email and social media feeds are full of promises to join this conversation here—excitedly—about who functions as a critic or whether we need more than just the iTunes review. Is there a hesitation to join the conversation? Something at stake? Is it just too many deadlines on projects that stymies this conversation, I wonder?

<https://medium.com/@mkramer/today-s-public-media-fight-misses-the-point-1383b4ef8a71>



[Marjorie Van Halteren](#)

July 25, 2017 at 2:36 pm

Melody Kramer's article is interesting, especially in the context of the Slate article before it. Over the last 25 years, it has been interesting to watch NPR become the establishment. I remember the NPR that Jay remembers. Public media was supposed to be the alternative. Since the history of broadcasting in the US is unique in the world (generally speaking, not having an established state broadcaster, with commercial broadcasting coming later – like in France and England then depending on the Public Broadcasting Act in the 70's to create this visible non-commercial alternative space in the point-to-many model), then the US landscape still continues to be unlike any other.

I agree with her point: public media should be focusing on serving the public, and using the plethora of new tools to that end, rather than looking over its shoulder and giving into numbers jealousy.

I LOVE Planet Money – an example of making information smart and substance attractive, BTW. I'm a fan of the NPR One app too – for my news and entertainment.

Obviously the audio podcast phenomenon is parallel to what's happening in TV, with cable providers etc. becoming content providers – with a subscription funding model. So many of these series are really great – innovative, etc. One can spend all one's time bingeing.

But I go back to right to fail, zero audience.

I remain vocal about saving slots for art and experimentation. Again, in the audio world where are those at? Cause I want to hear them.

As I'm involved with audio art, I could use a published listening list of experimental audio art podcasts.

(I don't mean narratives like Love and Radio, Here Be Monsters, etc. Not that they're not often excellent and entertaining, and produced with passion and style.)

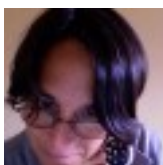
Maybe a sidebar on Earlid?

When I first started dipping my toe into “zero audience” podcasting (I know that sounds dumb out of context – I am not defeatist) I looked all over the place for this.

Here's a contribution to the list:

<http://radiophrenia.scot/>

And you see, they've got an open call going! I was on it last year and plan to contribute again.



Joan Schuman

July 25, 2017 at 4:17 pm

Neil Verma posted above, a link to a podcast with two ‘strands’ to their episodes—mimicking the AM and FM bands of radio, where one is non-fiction and the other is fiction. That seems it might fit as a beginning to launch a listening list of experimental audio art podcasts, Marjorie.

I quite enjoy listening to now-dark podcasts, re-listening to the scope of their finished oeuvre, such as Verma's link to Paper Radio above; recently I dipped back in to Soundproof so that I could listen to the vast expanse they created over 2-3 years of it being on the air.

But I recall one of my earliest discoveries in 2007 of a podcast that specifically was uploaded to be a complete entity, and then simply remain archived online (I learned of it via Third Coast, in

fact, when the genre was something beyond a relationship with radio, nor two guys sitting in their garage opining about something—in this case, it’s art leaning towards drama).

It’s called “The Tin Man.” You can download all 20 episodes; you can also discern some of the creative process behind the scenes over at Third Coast. Because it was my earliest foray into podcasts of this sort, I go back to it as a model of how things were done a decade ago, but also a model of what could expand today (or return to, really). I follow “Mabel” for similar reasons, as I mentioned in my intro.

Oh gosh, a side-bar on Earlid. For a while, I tweeted my own “All Ears” listening moments, but then I didn’t have time to continue this! Hmm, I’ll consider this side-bar idea, but I also like that Earlid is a discrete quarterly experience, quietly offered, then archived, more than a living-in-the-moment experience with up-to-date offerings or discoveries blasted out. That’s why I kept that “All Ears” posting separate, or, at any rate, just in social media.

<http://www.pferdzwackur.com/tinman/>

<https://www.thirdcoastfestival.org/explore/feature/tin-man>

<http://mabelpodcast.com/>



Neil Verma

July 25, 2017 at 6:50 pm

Hi friends,

So much to digest on this thread, and by such accomplished creators! Thanks for taking the time to write, and for giving me much to consider. I have one small tangent to add about the role of the critic that occurred to me while reading these comments.

The ambivalence toward terms like “narrative” and “storytelling” above reminded me of a passage in Donald McWhinnie’s *The Art of Radio* where he writes about Beckett’s *All that Fall*, Giles Cooper’s *Without the Grail*, and Thomas’s *Under Milk Wood*. In the passage, McWhinnie talks about these as plays that take up the problem of shape — ATF is essentially a circle, WTG is essentially a zigzag. Now, that observation reminded me of Tom Stoppard’s *Artist Descending a Staircase*, which famously takes the form of a staircase, as Elissa Guralnick and others have discussed.

Anyway, it’s pretty interesting that when it comes to these highly literary radio works (it’s hard to think of radio writers more burdened with the term “Literary Figure”) critics really go out of their way to emphasize how these plays work on the level of structure, rather than dealing with them at the level of words or stories. It sort of doesn’t matter what they’re “about;” in this analytical mode, these critics are more interested in diagramming what’s not writing than they are in explaining what is. Rudolf Arnheim does the same thing in his book on radio. I do in my books, too. My experience is that students listen to radio and podcasts as documentary literature and I’m often trying to show them how to think about them as just about anything else: drawings, sculptures, cartoons, blueprints, dreams, thought experiments, messes.

Point is, historically, one thing radio critics have been good for (if we are good for anything — and I'm open to the possibility that we're not) is that when we're doing our job well we are pretty good at listening **against** story in the ordinary sense, order to banish the listener's lazy emphasis on "aboutness" that can often be the bane of serious listening.



Joan Schuman

July 27, 2017 at 3:02 pm

If one were to ask me what (the podcasts linked above) "The Tin Man" or "Mabel" are about, I would suggest they are about my own listening and conjuring more than they are a plot or even characters. Yet there are plenty of the latter, quite nuanced. But I'm not a critic (I'm a creative maker of radio art; I'm a curator and connections-maker here at Earlid).

I love that I don't always know what's going on in these creative podcasts. In particular, Mabel's episodes read like chapters as they launch with just "Mabel, episode #14, where a stranger arrives" like those 19th-century gothics that tell you what's going to transpire in the next chapter. I can be washing dishes and a couple episodes go by and they, too, are washing over and around me. And that's quite different than the novel-esque structure of S-Town, as you've mentioned, Marjorie, given how much 'explaining' is offered in that podcast series. These are apples-and-oranges comparisons I'm making, at the very least.

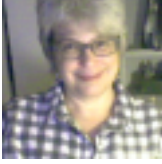
These ideas about plasticity (Marjorie) and aboutness (Neil) resonate as they expand into and around other ways of critiquing art, borrowing and bending, but ultimately, one has to ask, "Then why not for radio artistry?"

Two projects come to mind and they are not of sparkly, brand new work. This hearkens over to the archive question below — conundrum vs. joy of stumbling upon vs. concerns of algorithmic controls (Gregory). Sitting on many an artist's portfolio website might be an archive of work that spans decades. My "HyperAcousia" created as a 22-channel installation in a gallery setting in 1998 still resonates (particularly in this conversation about Antonin Artaud as that purloined LP recording of his found its way into the piece, since that was prior to my finding a shareable link with students).

<http://www.joanschuman.com/hyperacousia/posts/hyperacousia/>

But I'm also not bashful, in curating, of presenting an artist's early work if it resonates with the theme I'm exploring, such as the plasticity of language as 'performed' by the installation-video-audio artist, N.B. Aldrich, in which his "Hiroshima" from 2004 is a powerful reminder of listening against story.

http://www.earlid.org/posts/n-b-aldrich_hiroshima/



[Marjorie Van Halteren](#)

July 26, 2017 at 2:23 am

Thanks Neil – excellent. Laziness on “aboutness.” My problem is that I have come to view the “aboutness” as driving something I want to forget. Selling mattresses I guess. Time for me to get off my mattress and make some coffee.

Ambivalence – that describes me to a tee.

I’m teaching people that often know little English (I’m in France) or don’t have the intimate relationship to every nuance nook and cranny that I do. They play with French, and I try to keep up.

Also – I teach people studying “arts plastiques” (as well as young engineering students in love with their guitars and drum sets) so I’m borrow the work “plasticity.” That level – that serves the resonances of meaning, the “non dit.” I guess that’s what my butterfly net is set for.

I also borrow the work “recherche” – because in France this is the word for research – and they use it for artists, too. A bridge between my two different populations of students.

“drawings, sculptures, cartoons, blueprints, dreams, thought experiments, messes.” Love that.

In the 80’s and 90’s, when I was commissioning radio dramas, I despaired that the reference points were still the Stoppard, the Beckett, Wings (a rare American one)...(not to mention the 1940’s which 75 percent of people doing radio drama were imitating) – and is it still? Why is that?

Thanks again, Neil. So happy to become acquainted with you and your work.

PS Sorry to suggest more work for you, Joan! I have certainly seen enough here to feast on for the time being.



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Neil Verma

July 26, 2017 at 6:47 pm

I love “plasticity,” particularly the way it points to the model of the plastic arts. The headline of the Sarah Montague essay that many here are responding to alludes to Aristotle’s Poetics. But maybe just as necessary would be a radio critic inspired by

Lessing's Lagoon, something to explore the fissures between time based arts and plastic arts as well as their interpenetration.

On reference point broadcasts, I can only give my limited perspective on how "canon" radio drama changes over time in the US context. Sometimes it's a matter of changing taste (Giles Cooper and Norman Corwin are less and less known among researchers I know, although I'm working on that), but I find that what counts as canon or a reference point is far more dependent on changing accessibility.

For instance, I think a lot more people here started listening to Artaud's To Have Done With the Judgment of God again primarily because it became easy to find on WFMU and ubuweb in recent years. Orson Welles will have a comeback in 2018 because Indiana University is digitizing their copies of the original Mercury Theater transcription discs (they sound awesome; I've heard the "Dracula") and will be making them available free as WAV files; others have new recordings that are easy to find — new copies of works by Louis MacNeice and a long lost Langston Hughes play that Michele Hilmes found are making their way onto my syllabi.

It's always the 1970s-1990s that are the hardest (my colleagues call it the "donut hole"), but that's primarily because so many broadcasts don't behave like good commodities. There's never a large enough market to make money off them, so few prestige editions are released. Yet they're never so devalued as to obviate the enforcement of copyright. The truth is my students know very little about Stoppard, Cooper, even Harold Pinter. All they know is This American Life.



[Gregory Whitehead](#)

July 26, 2017 at 5:27 am

Neil, "aboutness" as the bane of serious listening, spot on! So important, to teach students to hear layers of meaning embedded in tone, texture and mixage; what Barthes called the "grain" of a voice, though here I am interpreting voice more broadly than the voice of a singer, to include the singing voice of the radiotext.

Julia Kristeva distinguished between the phenotext that conveyed competently ordered communication, and the genotext, which was non-signifying yet highly meaningful, embodying deeper (instinctive) psychological understandings or resonances that may be outside — or beneath — the author's intention.

Marjorie, I understand what you mean by needing to allow for cultural spaces free from the anxiety of finding an instant, measurable audience, yet Heidi Grundmann uses the phrase "zero audience" differently, to describe projects whereby artists might use the publicly subsidized space of the national broadcaster for experimental network-building, or for triggering intermedia relationships where the conventional notion of a radio listening public is absent or irrelevant.

Hard as it is to fathom now, in 1977 NPR allowed Max Neuhaus to create his pioneering Radio Net in the same spirit of open exploration. In that case, there was something for radio listeners to hear – lots of wild whistling! – but Neuhaus’ primary interest was in looping the network.

The endless censorious attacks on radio art or transmission art as not being able to find or keep an audience tell us more about the attackers than the work. Such unthinking negations reflect the impatience and narrowness of the philistine, unable or unwilling to grasp what culture is, or how it changes.

I am hoping Galen Joseph-Hunter and Tom Roe will weigh in at some point regarding their experience with growing an audience for transmission art at Wave Farm and WGXC. Slowly but surely, an audience arrives to the flow — and stays.

Art does not follow the same rhythm as the news, nor relate to an audience in the same way as telling or serving “the story”, whatever that is.

To my ears, the deeper story told by most of what I hear on mainstream public radio these days (podcast as well as broadcast) reveals a state of numbing monotony, proud mediocrity, shallow complacency and tidy, well-crafted solipsism. That’s a worry, for a supposedly “public” space, though it gives us an honest vibe as to where we are as a culture!

<http://radia.fm>
<https://wavefarm.org/wgxc>
<https://resonancefm.com>



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Neil Verma

July 26, 2017 at 6:56 pm

By the way, I don’t know if I told you that I use your “The Problem With Bodies” track in class whenever I teach that Barthes essay. It was a real treat for me when you performed it with the cabaret audience when we were in Halle last year! Proposition proved, indeed.

[Galen Joseph-Hunter](#)

July 27, 2017 at 6:53 am

Hello. I’ve/we’ve been remiss in making space to participate in this really wonderful effort. Apologies. Thank you Joan and Gregory for creating this dialogue.

For those who don’t know Wave Farm (<http://wavefarm.org>), we started out as a microradio artist collective in Brooklyn in 1997, and have since evolved into a non-profit organization in New York’s Upper Hudson Valley with a residency program dedicated to transmission art, and a full power hands-on creative community radio station: WGXC 90.7-FM (<http://wavefarm.org/wgxc>), among several other major activities. (See video tours and property installations at <http://wavefarm.org/map>)

We at Wave Farm are deeply committed to the transmission medium, electromagnetic spectrum fanatics some might even say.

We embrace open seam radio and take immense pride in being able to offer public access to an FM frequency in a way that has become far too rare. WGXC is a convergence of community-produced and art content. The medium of radio is considered at every turn and this emphasis/cognition is shared by the 100 or so volunteer programmers at the station, whether they be from the local community or an artist producing a transmission art/experimental sound program from afar.

I'm not well-versed in the land of podcasts. Running an organization with a 24/7 broadcast outlet leaves little time for such things, but I must admit that I'm not a fan so far. What I have heard has been one-way communication, formulaic, and produced in a way that leaves me fetishizing terrestrial radio even more, finding radio's spontaneity and mishaps all the more magical.

A while ago an artist traveling to Wave Farm was pulled over by a local police officer late at night. Once learning that the artist was heading to Wave Farm. The officer said, "Oh yeah, WGXC 90.7-FM, it sounds sort of like Radiohead with no rhythm and disintegrates from there." He offered this analysis with a smile, sincerity and delight according to the artist reporting the incident. (No ticket was issued.) Now, while many might not take this as a compliment, we do. Here is someone likely not already invested in radio art, who is listening and thinking about what he is hearing—curiosity peaked.

Another listener offered the following on Facebook in form of a review: "This station is one of the most eclectic things I've ever listened to! We just spent a long weekend in Chatham, NY and couldn't get enough of everything we heard! We were very confused and entertained the whole time, as we mostly couldn't understand what we were listening to! Really loved the radio from radio show on Saturday! And listening to the guy from Wichita's dad from Olathe explain Hamm radios was.....something we did. Haha! Keep up the good work! Loved hearing the dad and his kids sing "do the flop" repeatedly. Keep it weird WGXC!"

Don't get me wrong, there are moments on WGXC with serious clarity too, but first in foremost we embrace radio as an experimental, hands-on, participatory medium.

This brings me to the Neil Verma quote offered by Gregory Whitehead at the beginning of this discussion. I couldn't agree more.



Gregory Whitehead

July 27, 2017 at 11:36 am

Thanks for these listener quotes, Galen! The hunger for "off map" wilderness and mystery is real, and growing.

Earlier today, Joan sent me a link to the below article in the Paris Review lamenting the disappearance of "weirdness" on NPR. The usual suspects are rounded up and quoted,

though believe me, there were far more wild, wooly and wonderful voices in the late 70s and 80s than the ones mentioned in the article!

<https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2017/07/26/american-sounds/>

Radio thrives on inchoate polyphony, improvisation, drop-ins, accidents, insomnia, passion and the unspeakable.

Some may find that kind of mix “weird”. To my ears, such a rich and tangled swamp foment more energy and life than the tight and tidy modules of the mainstream, with the smarmy patronizing hosts; the faked-informal ums; the coy segues; and the simple-minded enslavement of sound where “moo” always means “cow”.

So predicable and relentless, I find my mind drifting to the contemplation of death and taxes, seeking respite!

Galen, you and Tom have been nothing short of magnificent in your beautifully stubborn resolve to create a different sort of listening community. Brava, and keep it coming!



Joan Schuman

July 27, 2017 at 3:29 pm

Galen, the fact that you get these unsolicited critical ‘reviews’ of WGXC means you’re reaching a community, firing up sparks. And yet, I send my students, far-flung from your signal, to press their ears up against your programming via online streaming. They return with similar responses! Some listeners are hungry for off-map journeys as Gregory says.

The very physicality of the art of an invisible process such as transmission is something I would think a critic could ‘hold onto’ (to echo our conversation above about plasticity). All those contradictions make for interesting listening, beaming and conjuring. The piece I linked to above that I made in the late 1990s, with interstices of Antonin Artaud’s voice, was excerpted and offered in my town’s radio programming, unannounced. It was a station that was not affiliated with the university in town, nor was it completely buttoned-down, though it was an NPR affiliate. We had all kinds of listeners responding (one who found the layers of voices disturbing for her own layers of audible hallucinations, but that’s another story). The greatest push-back was from the volunteer DJs who didn’t like the week we programmed these 2-minute radio art compositions because they interrupted the flow of their prized landscape of airwaves. That level of propriety felt odd, but in the context of stations such as KUSP, the disappearing of them or usurping into something much more ‘professional’ (i.e., wall-to-wall NPR programs), it makes sense. The station eventually morphed, devolved and went into bankruptcy by the time I returned to living here in Santa Cruz, California, after a six-year hiatus recently.

To have held onto your vision for 20 years is commendable, Galen. It offers context, something many of the contributors and commenters here are talking about. Interestingly, many of us are also teachers, dragging this context around our syllabi (Max Neuhaus is

one of my favorites to share, Gregory, as well as his “Times Square” installation still audible in NYC (if you listen deeply through the cacophony). That an artist spans platforms is also the essence of utilizing his/her ears beyond the usual space.

<http://www.max-neuhaus.info/audio-video/>

<https://hyperallergic.com/298871/a-hidden-times-square-sound-installation-returns-to-full-hum/>



Gregory Whitehead

July 27, 2017 at 11:59 am

Neil, your comment that broadcasts do not behave like good commodities gets to another important important subject for both artists and media critics.

I have always loved and embraced the indeterminacy, ambiguity and instability of analog broadcast, exemplified by that recording of Artaud’s intense and agonizing *cri de coeur*, the first broadcast coming decades after his death, having been censored by Radio France until the year 1968, a year when tightly compressed corks flew from many bottles. Yet those same qualities, so rich with poetic and creative possibility for radiomakers and listeners alike, are anathema to the marketers and measurers.

The transition to digital self-mythologizes as the creation of flexible access and choice; in reality, digital radio simply achieves a far more efficient and statistically confirmed commodification, delivering packages of demographically tagged listeners that are more easily sold to corporate sponsors.

Internet “radio” (in quotes because it is such an obvious misnomer) and related podcasts provide an even more perfect embrace of commodification, in which branded producers might eagerly participate, becoming commodities themselves. Announcing the neo-liberal utopia, in which Voice and Sponsor merge into one perfectly marketable statistical entity!

There is no ambiguity or instability whatsoever in the download of a file, with every twitch and tweak producing more marketable ore inside the vast Data Mine. Every online action and event becomes part of the tangle of taste algorithms and push-media funnels that provide a sort of virtual straightjacket for the listener, who once upon a time in Radioland had enjoyed blissful privacy.

Eventually, the straightjacket transforms into a noose, with autonomous subjectivity choked and strangled by social media and an unending parade of connectivity apps, all plugged into the “security” drive to inspect, evaluate and control. Extreme dystopian rants? Perhaps, but articles like the below make the above analysis seem, if anything, still too naive.

<https://theintercept.com/2016/07/07/israel-targeting-palestinian-protesters-on-facebook/>

I am hoping the brave and brilliant radiophonista Meira Asher will jump in soon with some thoughts on the powers of radio in a high-conflict, heavily policed community where the privacy of a cheap transistor radio can be a matter of life and death.

<http://www.radioart106fm.net>



Joan Schuman

July 27, 2017 at 3:42 pm

The question that arises in this idea, Gregory, of heavily policed communities, reminds me that, in the global sieve, we are all heavily listened in on. Less and less is there an escape from prying ears/eyes.

How can we 'join 'em' more than 'fight 'em' in the sense that we have some autonomy? How can online spaces become more aleatory, more radio-like, more stumbled upon rather than obviously linked to? I think it's something to be worked towards, given the 20+ years of this online medium and how it has been usurped.

Should we be revitalizing the cassette mail art and voice suggestions there for online spaces that might be vital (useful, interesting, quirky) to 'visit'? I'd point a listener to Wave Farm; someone else might point them to Earlid; someone else might simply invite a listening to the archive of a long-practicing radio artist or darkened podcast.



Gregory Whitehead

July 28, 2017 at 4:39 pm

Joan: usurped indeed, and possibly irretrievable at this point, though obviously the internet retains many practical and helpful uses; what concerns me is the persistence of delusions about cultural or political autonomy, online. Ça n'existe plus!

Yes, I know radio also has a very dark side, whether as the voice of tyranny or as the medium for delivery of weapons, or as a weapon itself. Yet radio always holds out the possibility of an autonomous otherness; radio waves create and sustain a naturally unruly sort of public space that is extremely difficult to bring under complete control.

Joan, you also mentioned audio cassettes, presently making a comeback for distribution among musicians for limited releases. A few months ago, after enduring my skepticism about the longterm cultural vitality of podcast space as a space of deep listening and philosophical discovery, a friend suggested I think of it as a digital iteration of the 1980s cassette underground. A very appealing thought, but unfortunately there is really no comparison between the two.

During the years of the cassette underground, also called “cassette radio” by some, unexpected packages would arrive daily through the public space of the US post, usually covered with strange stamps and markings, works of art in themselves. Inside, a sub-package, using every conceivable material from fur to barbed wire would beckon further exploration, and then you would eventually uncover a cassette tape, containing its own semiotic mysteries.

Sometimes the tape was blank, tape hiss providing the lone acoustic as you picked through the scraps of text and other information riddling the package. An aesthetic and poetic experience far removed from downloading a file from iTunes and clicking a button!

Of course, it would be easy to dismiss the above as nostalgia for things past, though the uncomfortable question remains: do we advocate for and contribute our talents to a culture with texture and multiple layers of meaning, or do we just passively accept whatever toxic gruel Google and other corporate Big Data miners want to cram down our throats? Or has the very idea of such creative agency become part of the “things past”?

My ears are wide open — hungry even — for the counter-arguments. I’m hoping the ever-adventurous and boundary-crossing Kaitlin Prest and Nick Van der Kolk, with whom I’ve had many invigorating exchanges in the past, will jump in soon and remind me of the thousand things I am missing.



Joan Schuman

July 30, 2017 at 7:29 pm

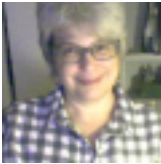
I’ve been contemplating content lately. Naturally, I consider platform—the ‘where’ it can air is never too far back in my mind. But sometimes content wins even over structure. I can be transported by the simplest radioesque styles and powerfully moved by the theme or story’s unraveling. Karen Werner’s contributing essay asks about the ethics of storytelling and we’ve meandered around this theme earlier in the forum.

But it reminds me, too, Gregory and Galen, about the very matter of the piece. Even with a plodding structure (now up to episode 12) of the “Seeing White” series about race and dominant culture on the Duke Center’s for Documentary Studies “Scene on Radio” podcast, I can see how the platform of radio is changing. This podcast tries on many

styles, though not taking much aesthetic risk, nothing out-of-whack in terms of sounds (although how it keeps surprises, particularly its very honesty, and springs it on the listener is a risky kind of radio). It is taking risks to insert the podcast host's own sense of himself as a white man in context of his guests and themes and his co-host, who is a Black man. Despite its structure and form, it is a radicalizing of radio that hasn't been heard lately, even on public radio airwaves because it allows for a good chunk of 'airtime' to ask questions and figure things out or leave open questions.

It doesn't sport ads because it's supported by an academic institution. Maybe these are models to explore, despite the obvious barriers to some makers. It's like another prong to this question of 'us' or 'them' or online vs. terrestrial (vs. pirate radio, which in my town is celebrating its 21st birthday).

<http://podcast.cdsporch.org/episodes/>



[Marjorie Van Halteren](#)

July 31, 2017 at 5:19 am

Thanks Joan, that is interesting – the honesty is growing. Plus, language has overflowed its constraints – negative example – recent White House Communications (missing: respect for human beings, empathy). Good example: the one above, and communicators being themselves and perhaps therefore examining themselves with a clearer eye.

As for new prongs of support: for years, for students in media, communications, other classes, I have drawn a triangle. The three points of the triangle are: time (available granted by broadcaster and listener), money (meaning support for resources of all kinds and whatever strings come attached to it), content (including format, length and the questions that brings). Those three points interact and resonate in undertones and overtones into infinity. The triangle came out of my experience with broadcasting. But it still works, at base, now that we've gone point-to-many to...what?



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Gregory Whitehead

August 2, 2017 at 12:04 pm

Marjorie, does it matter that the context for the triangle shifts from the public, open, anonymous, entropic, transient space of radio into the monitored, mathematically fixed, archived space of digital downloads?

What effect does the nature of the medium have on what happens at each point of your triangle, and within the space created by connecting those points?



Joan Schuman

August 2, 2017 at 10:16 am

Radiotopia just launched their “Showcase” series this week—a different approach for this podcast network.

It’s described on the platform’s web site as ” ... a new podcast featuring original series of all stripes, from emerging and leading producers around the world. Coming this Friday, “Ways of Hearing,” a six-part series about listening in the digital age from acclaimed musician Damon Krukowski. ...”

This resonates with my earlier comments about “Anxious Machine” and questions about how a ‘masterpiece’ can find an audience or a platform (how it once did and how it feels like old wheels being re-invented). Certainly more outlets are useful for more producers and more ears a-listening.

What struck me, listening to the intro episode with Executive Director, Julie Shapiro, and Roman Mars, host of “99% Invisible,” one of the founding podcasts at the network, is how they talk about their new project.

Their comments are weighted with metrics and data and audience management:

- ‘leveraging the Radiotopia reputation’
- ‘a Radiotopian sense of surprise and quality’
- ‘how can you trust the idea of the channel’
- ‘new types of listening that come out of a podcast’

And then a side-point about encouraging different kinds of talent (more women, People of Color) is valorous and a recognizable hearkening back to public media.

But still, the primary conversation is about branding.

This is not a new beast—showcasing talent and having a platform to do so. Public media has done some excellent jobs, such as, in the States, “Hearing Voices” and, still-running, The Independent Producer Project out of KCRW. Numerous other examples exist (The Creative Audio Unit in Australia comes to mind).

We makers and listeners want the next, big, shiny thing. I would hope someone would be an engaged critic of this new project. Bifo reminds us (thanks Gregory for zooming me back to my

own Berardi bookshelf) about the power of sounds and poetry. I flip open to a page where he's talking about Buddhist ideas, how symbolism is tied to timeless mystical quests, knowing the way to nonconventional dimensions of communication.

This is getting heady. And yet, a maker of sound-rich, poetic radio is consumed with magic. The power and excitement in this introduction to Radiotopia's project feels more weighted towards how we all (with ears) will follow like a congregant or disciple rather than a revolutionary.

I'm all-ears ...

<https://www.radiotopia.fm/podcasts/showcase>

<http://hearingvoices.com/cast/>

<https://www.kcrw.com/news-culture/independent-producer-project>



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Gregory Whitehead

August 2, 2017 at 11:49 am

Joan, it has been a while since I visited Radiotopia; I am discouraged to discover the sense of absolute and unrepentant compliance with the prevailing neoliberal language of hype, assets, brands and (most importantly) seventeen million downloads per month.

"Feeling the market in every cell of the body", as explored in the Paper Radio podcast cited by Neil Verma above: http://paperradio.net/episodes/fm/paperradio_fm10.mp3

I am also discouraged by several podcast producers with whom I have had numerous frank, open and unedited conversations in the past express anxiety about posting those same thoughts in public, that is, on this forum. Accepting a heavy brand sacrifices that inch of flesh; the free, playful, and exploratory voice goes up in smoke, like so much fat on a BBQ.

In *The Uprising*, Bifo suggests that only acts of language, enlivened by the poetic imagination, can break the spell of neoliberalism and its obsession with growth metrics and branded, "automated" selves: "Poetry is the reopening of the indefinite, the ironic act of exceeding the established meaning of words."

It would seem that the revolution will not be podcasted! Cue Gil Scott-Heron: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QnJFhuOWgXg>

Knut Aufermann

August 3, 2017 at 4:41 am

Gregory brought me here, and I read everything in the thread with great interest.

I'm not very good at writing but recently had the impetus to speak to many friends and radio artists to create a series of programmes about Radia network stations. More context than criticism, but better than nothing.

The radio stations and radio art works featured are so varied and to me proof that radio is a function of locale.

Maybe now the shows can serve as 45 minute long annotated links for further inspection. There is no intended order to them.

https://www.mixcloud.com/Mobile_Radio/playlists/radiaphiles/



[Marjorie Van Halteren](#)

August 4, 2017 at 3:54 am

So, according to what Joan has written, Radiotopia is working on their triangle. And they must, they're broadcasters.

Time: how many people working can they have, how long can the pieces be, how long can the podcasts survive. Which depends on the Money/resources they can get in whatever way they have to. Content: they can take some risks and program some things that don't get listeners/clicks, but only if it is carried by the other things that do. They can't let the whole triangle fall away into a gelatinous trapezoid that can't stand up on its own. But in the "trusting the channel" talk, of course they are trying to make some space in there for risk. These are talented, inspired people. I'm sure they would like to make a triangle to be made outta risk. But once it is clicking along, it becomes no longer risky. It can be really, really good, even brilliant, but it can't ever fail, big time, or no more Radiotopia. Humans love product. We are dependent, habitual creatures. Formatting is a powerful tool that helps keep up quality and supply chain. I will be listening to these podcasts and enjoying them like everyone else.

If they can sneak in some down and dirty art, more power to them. But not too much. Or it will "go downhill."

Going downhill is part of life. So is the day, so comes the night. It is not normal to be immortal.

The UK version of The Office is nasty funny. 2 seasons. The US version of the Office is cute/funny. 8 seasons, in which things start to work out. Peace, love and understanding.

I wanted to draw a bunch of new triangles for Gregory. Oo, what fun. However, I see that my triangle is a business plan – because one of the points is money, or clicks, or something quantified. So I came up with odd things, like straight lines: direct to audience...hmm that's street theater. A single point: that's a happening. A circle: we're all in this together! If a radio play falls in the forest...all that fall...

Does the monitored, mathematically fixed, archived space of digital downloads worry me? I don't know yet. That falls into the category of Does the internet worry me...sure, but I don't really know why. Some days I think the big baby at the end of 2001 a Space Odyssey is simply

developing its nervous system, but that's for another thread.

This is intensely personal, but why not. When I left the United States in 1992, I knew I wanted to be an artist (theater, I thought, but linguistic challenges and cultural differences made that an odd choice. It has taken me 25 years to be fluent in French, and most theater here is all about language.) I also knew that I wanted to separate any "art" that I made from money. That I would make a living in another way and do what I wanted creatively. Not that I don't accept money for my self-expression (I'm not nuts) but I reserve my right to remove it from the equation. I don't know what makes me like this – I don't know if I will ever know.

You also have to be very, very careful what you do for free, and of course I often won't. But I like to make the choice myself. I guess I was running from the triangle!

I've paid a price for this, energy-wise. But I've kept my art alive, somehow. Continuing to do it keeps me going.

What makes it radio? The antenna? The straight line? The bottle in which one can send the message? The magic of the ether? I'm all for that.



o

Gregory Whitehead

August 4, 2017 at 11:24 am

Marjorie, I tend to think of digital downloads as drawing the straight line, archive-to-ipod, with radio rather creating a diffuse, ambiguous territory of the Big Sloppy, an entropic murk fading out into a universe of noise. The antenna may be straight; the signal, anything but.

I'm sure you are familiar with the thesis of "the great acceleration", but here is a compelling visual summary: <http://www.anthropocene.info/great-acceleration.php>

I read the present obsession with numbers of thumbs, numbers of retweets, numbers of downloads, trending names and so forth as a media reflection of this parabolic expansion, what Heidegger called "the frenziedness of technology". It is not hard to predict how the great acceleration ends, since we know that all parabolic curves must eventually revert to the mean. The frenzied dancers eventually crumble into an exhausted heap on the dance floor, dissolving into a puddle of body fluids.

I agree with Knut regarding the crucial significance of a specific locale, as opposed to the globalized lowest common denominator. In place of brands, assets, quantity, growth, the desire for global fame and universal corporate appeal, such stations celebrate idiosyncrasy, humility, art, service to a specific community and a healthy skepticism towards corporate everything.

— —

The philosopher Santiago Zabala writes:

“Emergency aesthetics intervenes in the danger that the absence of emergency holds. This danger frees aesthetics from its traditional preoccupation with beauty and calm contemplation in order to overturn the relationship among the work of art, the artist, and the audience. Through these works of art, the audience becomes responsible for an emergency that is absent because of the very danger it implies. If, as Hölderlin says, where “danger is, also grows the saving power,” then turning to art’s demands instead of those of religion and politics is not giving up but rather venturing into intellectual disruptions that are vital for our existence.”

Radio art must be somewhere in the mix, also growing the saving power!



[Marjorie Van Halteren](#)

August 4, 2017 at 1:14 pm

Well, for sure, if it all swims in the same soup with no sense of place, something is definitely lost.

Pod direct to pod...then all vibrate in the same rhythm...

The word brand comes from the thing seared on the backside of a cow soon to be steak. Has everyone forgotten that?

2.

[Knut Aufermann](#)

August 4, 2017 at 3:48 pm

One other obvious quality of radio (in my opinion radio and podcasting have very little in common) besides originating from a specific place is being rooted in the present. Live radio is just exhilarating. So for me as a listener I would prefer some kind of announcement service of upcoming weird and underground transmissions more than reading about it afterwards. Is there such a thing?

In 2010, after they carried my article on radio art*, I suggested such radio listings to The Wire magazine but they didn't go for it. Some time later I created an online radio aggregator, that would relay live streams of my favourite shows from about 20 different radio stations so I didn't have to switch manually between them. Hm, a bit like podcasting, but for live radio streams. I haven't maintained the schedule, but the technology is still in place should somebody have an idea for it.

In the early days of Resonance FM several advertising agencies offered their “services” to us for brand development. In reality they were attracted by our street cred, which they craved but

couldn't manufacture. Ed Baxter ended up offering them free air time to promote a benign client of their choice, with the only condition that their advert needed to last a complete hour. They declined in horror.

* http://knut.klingt.org/docs/Breaking_the_Airwaves.pdf



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Joan Schuman

August 7, 2017 at 11:21 am

Horror, indeed, Knut. What Resonance FM was suggesting to these ad agencies was so off-radar that it would be unfathomable. Thank you for this article link. Such a useful expression of history and context that those new to these radio art venues you mention can begin searching for the connections (broadcast, or at least, to discern what's out there).

In another context, I teach sound culture and curating projects within that genre. I was just reading a quote, apparently from Igor Stravinski: An artist without tradition is doomed to plagiarism. These contexts of radio artistry—individual and collaborative projects—remind us that knowing what came before and what still exists is relevant.

We hear so much about the 'local' being more relevant to enacting change—whether at political or creative levels. How do we engage the flat landscape of the internet with the equally cacophonous, yet significantly more embodied feel of the radio broadcast that you're alluding to and Karen Werner explicitly raises below?

As a practitioner and listener, sometimes gatekeeper, I can't eliminate the experience of the last 20 years of this mediated flattening here online. I turn, as you mention, to live, gathered festivals and the flash broadcasting moments. Those always feel like localized energy bases from which to catapult and return, tucking my feathers upon landing back home. There are, sadly, often dead zones of radio experiments that feel utterly wasted after so much work. For example, living in a small town near the U.S./Mexico border a decade ago, a tiny low-power station launched and it had no idea what to do with my own creative radio-narrative offerings. While I left town without being able to get further involved, it seems they got their rhythm after a few years, though only to focus on music and airing of lost-animals and other community offerings.

Not every signal is going to be a venue for art (we see this, easily, in that flattening media, again). It goes back, again, to the questions of re-invention. You have to know what came before, what is out there, in order to follow or break out of the line.

karen werner

August 5, 2017 at 7:27 pm

Themes that have stayed with me in reading these comments so far (in case this is helpful for others reading through to this point):

+ what is a critic and can we have more please? Listening around the “about”...attuned to the contexts of the work, including funding -sure!

+ radio/ podcast—characteristics of the spaces and relations to market and download monitoring (and how to make a living.)

+ poetics and politics of radio – radio features, uses of story as form, networks like Radia (inspiring to hear those interviews, Knut) and places like Wave Farm, assemblage radio shows, practices of listening, building community, content. The revolution won't be podcasted and HOW CAN IT BE / IS IT RADIOED?

+ “art has always had these divides” (Joan) – the issue in every art world of the relationship between the mainstream and the margins...a wonderful prodding to experiment, take creative risks, and be weird.

+ a theme touched on here and there but not yet fully developed (but I'm curious if it resonates for anyone else) about the body and radio. I've been thinking about radio as a body practice –what does/could this look like? Body and memory, walking and field recording, breathing, feeling, voice, radio as spiritual activist practice...That spark anything for anyone?

○

karen werner

August 6, 2017 at 2:38 pm

And to expand on some associations related to radio, revolution, and radio as a body practice that are just getting clearer for me, I'm doing research these days for an upcoming radio piece about a particular haunted house and came across this quote in Avery Gordon's, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (University of Minnesota, 1997/2008).

“Transformation means something distinct from resistance...It is the necessarily experiential and embodied quality of the transformation... [that differentiates it from resistance.]...But this change is not intellectual; it is extremely difficult and must become incarnate...It is individualistic, but it does acknowledge, indeed it demands, that change cannot occur without the encounter...there are no guaranteed outcomes for an encounter...But if you think you can fight and eliminate the systems' complicated 'nastiness' without it, you will not get very far because it will return to haunt you” (202-203).

In the spirit of free association, I want to share this because it gets at something about what it means to make radio (or any art work?) that is about whatever word you want to use –revolution, resistance, transformation. How does the making of the radio piece affect the producer, how does it affect the listener, how does it affect the media system they are both participating in? This blurring of the transformation of the individual body and the social body intrigues me.



Joan Schuman

August 7, 2017 at 11:28 am

Karen, your investigations remind me so much of the handful of artists I collected for an Earlid called “The Intermediary,” where submissions were based on what is interstitial, what comes between. Various artistic approaches arrived!

I launched the ‘flattened’ space with a piece by husband-wife collaborators, Maile Colbert and Rui Costa and their engagement with VLF (Very Low Frequency). It reminds me of similar ‘hauntings’ being so ripe for radioesque experiences and stories swirling around them.

<http://www.earlid.org/posts/the-intermediary/>

Are you going to ‘broadcast’ the piece inside an allegedly haunted space as well? Transformation is a ripe subject for any radio story, since to my ear, a voice or other sounds are always transformed by the signal.



Gregory Whitehead

August 7, 2017 at 6:41 pm

So true, that quote, Karen: the nastiness will haunt if not brought inside to the depths of the self.

I know when I was working on the torture archive, I had to voice every dry record of insanely indifferent brutality, make it carnal through the voice, let it burn me, and change me — first. Only then could I send those twisted incarnated transcripts off into the public space of the airwaves.

No internal burn, no chance of public friction; you are left with only the ghost, only the haunting.

Can you write a bit more about “strange radio” in relation to these themes? And how you use your own voice, in confronting the ghosts?

This all touches on your ethical concerns as well.



■
Joan Schuman

August 8, 2017 at 8:43 am

Gregory, it's intriguing to learn about your process for voicing a work that is quite haunting. Your piece, "On the Shores Dimly Seen," was commissioned by the radio-sound-art program on ABC/Australia called "Soundproof"—no longer airing.

Here at Earlid, in the fall 2016 exhibit (launched about six weeks prior to the US presidential election and remaining throughout that autumn), you spoke at length about distant horror that you navigated (we all navigate from the moment we dip into the news of the day) in a theme-based exhibit I called "Over Yonder Horror."

<http://www.earlid.org/posts/over-yonder-horror/>

■
[*karen werner*](#)

August 13, 2017 at 11:40 am

Yes, interesting to hear about your powerful experience in voicing the torture archive, Gregory. You know I initially was thinking of radio as a body practice in other ways than voice —walking while recording, visiting actual places (haunted ones, generally speaking), feeling these places in my body and seeing how they compare to the places as I've imagined them, working with the emotions these places raise... So I appreciate your reminder of the voice. As I think about it, the voice for me has not been how I knowingly incorporate the burn, the brutality (that took a lot of courage for you to do that.) More so, it seems I have been using my voice to speak back to the burn. Still part of the bodily processing and hopefully transforming of the ghosts, of me, and who else?

To give a little context about the particular ghosts I am working with - Strange Radio is a radio series I'm making about Jewish Viennese exile. The ghosts I am encountering come from Holocaust-era violations, some very gruesome.

I'm working with personal material (both parents fled Vienna, lots of family history in the Jewish district there) partly to test out a hunch

about the relationship between the intimate and the political –the micro and the macro. My old zen training has left me with a belief that the world exists in a dew drop – who is to say that transforming this one body of mine, and this one house full of ghosts in Vienna’s Jewish district, isn’t going to transform something larger than me, too. So this is part of my radio practice and the ethics I’m testing out –to mend, transform, expose a wound, integrate through a bodily practice of transformation on a micro level with an understanding that this has effects I may not fully understand. And Gregory and others have written and modeled so wonderfully the nuances of dead/ living, presence/absence that radio is about – so it’s rich to think about how we work with our bodies (a kind of presence) in producing radio work and also how the medium lends itself to the disembodied ghosts and wounds (absence and presence?) that haunt us personally and socially.

I think it’s helpful to mention, in the context of discussions about how the listener or producer are constructed, that because Strange Radio is funded (modestly) by art residencies and a fellowship — rather than by product sponsorship on a system that counts downloads– and will be broadcast on a city-funded, at the moment, radio station in Vienna, I have creative freedom in terms of how these pieces sound. I can actually test out ethical questions and hunches and accompanying aesthetics about how radio can transform ghosts with far less pressure if any to construct the narrative in familiar ways and for familiar purposes.

[Daniel Gilfillan](#)

August 6, 2017 at 4:41 pm

This forum is turning out to be a great example of engaging an agile criticism that I talk about in my short piece. Kudos to Joan and Gregory for their excellent job in curating it.

There is much that I want to get to in this post, so I’m going to break it down into somewhat arbitrary sections because I think there are nodal points throughout that interrelate. Some will refer back to thought-provoking questions posed directly to me from an earlier post, and others will focus on ideas that have jumped out at me as I’ve caught up with the forum as a whole.

Sound / Field Recording / Captured Sound

In my post on July 14 (some indexicality is always good sometimes!) I asked a lot of abstract questions about how story/narrative does or doesn’t develop in sound/radio art projects that center on ambient and/or found sound, or a mixture of ambient/found sound and sounds sourced from any number of texts (diary entries, poem, official institutional documents, etc.) and reproduced as voiceovers (I talk about an example of this in a forum piece for the journal German Quarterly called “What is Close Reading? A Focus on Sound Objects” <http://bit.ly/2wxV2PN>).

Gregory had asked if I could write a bit more about the complications I saw within the act of field recording and its subsequent use in broadcasts, and its middle ground existence as archive. As background, I’ll mention that I have only had one weekend-long experience of field recording as part of an acoustic ecology field laboratory in the Beaver Creek Wilderness area in central Arizona. I accompanied colleagues from the ListenN Project (<http://ecolisten.org>) to record the soundscape of this biosphere reserve, and, while trying to sit quietly in the sagebrush armed with a small tripod, digital audio recorder, and pair of headphones, and becoming ultra-aware of all the

noises my body was making, pondered: what is “this ideal for the lack of human presence for capturing natural presence in sound. What lies therein, why are human-produced sounds not part of this natural presence? When did we begin to not belong in this presence? Or are there human-produced sounds that do belong in this natural presence, and others that do not?”

To your question/comment, Gregory, about listening intently in a deep, dark cave, I would agree entirely with you that we become acutely aware of the inconsequence of our presence, but I would add that our human presence and agency ultimately become the focal point of such a field recording, no matter how much we try to erase or subdue the physicality of that moment. I think this is also true for those type of radio art projects (like Bill Fontana’s 1990 piece “Landscape Soundings — <http://kunstradio.at/FONTANA/LS/index.html>) that place microphones in the landscape to live stream and capture sounds of the environment without humans being physically in the space at the time of recording. The presence of human-produced technology (the recording device, the microphone, the use or non-use of headphones [following the conversation between Chris DeLaurenti and Joan Schuman]) certainly assures the centrality of human agency, as do, I think the presence of human ears, which in some respect are an element of our biological systems technology. So, even the act of listening in the cave is an act of shaping and recording that experience.

I think what I’m trying to get at is a way to acknowledge a deep set of entanglements that have assisted human agency in becoming the measure of all things. How do we begin to acknowledge the myriad other human (non-Western, pre-/postcolonial, the ethnographic other), non-human (plant, animal, geological, atmospheric, microbial), and symbolic (global economic systems, systems of control/surveillance) agencies that allow a single human agent to be and become what they are across a span of time? For me, I think the realm of sound helps move us toward being able to articulate this.

In the post, I was thinking aloud about differences between and across the various lives of sound, and the different ways stories arise or are developed across and through those various lives. So, I thought I would flesh out here some ideas I’ve been having about sound and how it reveals or conceals itself to us, with some asides about how/why we source it and resource it:

- sound as it exists in its “natural” and “unmediated” state (audible sound that humans never hear but romanticize in some primordial fashion, or inaudible sound that humans never hear because our aural anatomy doesn’t allow us to, or inaudible sound because we don’t find ourselves in the times/places where the sounds are occurring)
- lively sound (the realm of sound encountered by the artist/field recorder in the act of positioning themselves in the space and time where these lively sounds are occurring)
- captured sound (sound that is siphoned, transformed into binary code, and made available as both source and resource)
- archived sound (mementos of a human-lived experience to replace, supplant, be purchased, or serve either as standing reserve or archaeological novelty object for a future planet missing the sounds it once housed)

I think I’m going to stop here before it gets too dark and foreboding. These ideas are just things I’ve ruminated over in the past couple of hours. Other readers of this forum (and the curators, too!), I’m sure will have their own ideas about the various lives of sound as mediated through human experience of it. Maybe none of this has anything to do with our critical approaches to broadcast and podcast, to radio art and sound art, or to the plasticity and agility of our critical product.



○

Gregory Whitehead

August 7, 2017 at 7:08 pm

Daniel, so much to mull and consider here!

With regards to “captured” sound: at a conference years ago, an American producer played a series of pop songs composed entirely from pristine field recordings of the voices of other creatures, from parrots to whales.

He presented them as joyful celebrations of biodiversity, and was unable to comprehend the dark melancholy that descended upon the room full of other audio artists and producers from around the world; ever darker with each new little ditty he played.

Yes, once recorded, everything is a floating signifier, in one dimension. Yet I insist the body-of-origin is still present, even when transformed into 0s and 1s, and must be respected — honored. Certainly not crammed into the human supremacist acoustic cage of a pop song format.

These are fruitful rumination of yours — keep them coming!



○

Joan Schuman

August 8, 2017 at 9:14 am

Daniel, one element that arises while reading these deep and rich ideas about field recording as it is enlisted for radioesque work, is the internal sound that no one else is privy to.

About a decade ago, I began experiencing tinnitus. Initially, it freaked me out (as it might for anyone who works in a medium where you don’t want unwanted sound ...). Ellipses intended. “Why not?” I soon asked myself. Why not listen to the ringing and, aside from getting used to it, discern that it did absolutely nothing to interfere not only with my listening capabilities, but also did not impact my production forays. Why not simply embrace it? I hardly notice it now and perhaps it’s due to that acceptance (though I suspect certain dietary shifts might have nudged it further away—geez, who knows, maybe I’ve lost my ability to hear it and other things, more acutely, in general).

I know of three approaches to radio artistry exploring not just the sounds of tinnitus, but also the very meaning of it for these practitioners and in one case, utilizing the sounds to

compose his own music. Each tries to bring the sounds they hear internally to an external audience. As a 'sufferer,' their re-enacted sounds do not disturb me nearly as much as students I share the works with—fear of the unknown may be at play.

We tend to think of field sound or ambient noise as 'out there' sound. I find the 'in there' sounds compelling for the reasons you're landing on as well: who says they are (or are not) sounds if they can't be heard universally?

In Paolo Pietropaolo's exploration ("Signal to Noise"), he interviews his audiologist and Gordon Hempton (the latter is in search for the quietest place on earth). Each invite him to listen to this unwanted sound as if it were the by-product of his deep listening 'career'—more blessing than curse.

Why do we fear these human-based sounds, whether external or internal? A landscape of the unknown, unnamed, un-tamed in terms of sound might be part of the answer.

Signal to Noise: Paolo Pietropaolo

<https://www.thirdcoastfestival.org/explore/feature/signal-to-noise>

Perfect Hearing: Nubar Alexanian

<https://transom.org/2003/perfect-hearing/>

The Tinnitus Suites with Daniel Fishkin (The Organist episode #19)

<http://www.kcrw.com/news-culture/shows/the-organist/episode-19-composing-the-tinnitus-suites>

One Square Inch of Silence – Gordon Hempton

<http://onesquareinch.org/>



Joan Schuman

August 8, 2017 at 8:13 am

This call for submissions reminded me of ideas you're raising, Daniel:

Those in love with drones and/or duration – Soundart Radio, Dartington, UK are in the middle of #droneweek and seek more submissions, which engage with "a rigorous dismissal of traditional radio orthodoxies."

As Chris Booth put it in an email to the radia mailing list this morning, lamenting the absence of pieces truly embracing this durational imagination: "I bring to you a request. Soundart Radio here in (not) Sunny South Devon UK, are attempting to fill an entire week with drone and drone-related audio pieces."

While submissions have been numerous and varied we find ourselves still short of the allocated time we wanted to fill (nearly 200 hours!!). I ask you all, and ask you all to ask your friends:

please, if you have work with a drone theme, submit them. I am especially looking for long durational works that would seldom if ever find a place on the radio. So far only one submission has hit the 4 hour mark. Many many submissions are only 3-10 minutes.”

Gregory, aren't you at work on a related theme?

http://www.soundartradio.org.uk/services/projects/Droneweek_2017/

[Anna Friz](#)

August 10, 2017 at 1:49 pm

Greetings to all, and it's been my pleasure to catch up on a many-weeks conversation after being out of range myself most of the summer, so thank you to everyone for such fullsome and thought provoking comments.

Many thoughts to weigh in on, but just wanted to add a few thoughts in no particular order:

A persistent issue seems to be that of form versus content, as if these are entirely distinct categorical realms. Yet one of the important aspects of radio art and indeed audio art was always to reveal the ever-entangled operations of technology and meaning, and to trouble the ascendancy of the message over technologies of transmission, as technology does not merely play the role of distribution. I need only remind us of Tetsuo Kogawa's arresting radio art performances where transmission is the meaning *and* the operation, and where the collaboration between body(ies) and electronics in electro-magnetic space are foregrounded. What story is being told in such a performance or interaction? One about movement, distances, interference, the indexicality of noise(s), and complex interactions, using radio, on radio, which include and exceed human intention. Many of us who work directly with radio transmission and transmitters do so in order to further explore these relations, while also producing sonic or visual traces. The liveness of radio to which Knut refers –that sense of risk– can also include radio which is performative, sculptural, created by the explorations of the potential of all those technologies, all those bodies, including that of the listener(s), implicated in a temporary circuit. Knut's work with Sarah Washington as Tonic Train is another excellent example.

Podcasts are no less implicated in the chain of technologies which enable them, which is where I agree strongly with Gregory's critiques of their context—podcasts are implicated in the logic of databases, of clicks, and of hits, and therefore prone to branding, surveillance, advertising, and all the rest. Podcasts also require internet, must be downloaded on complex devices whose material construction includes rare earth minerals, which are constructed in enormous factories under dubious circumstances, and are designed for the listener (the pod) to listen to on headphones, solo. I don't say this to uphold the old analog above the new digital, I merely state what has been obvious since the 1980s when Donna Haraway reminded us of the ethical implications of the integrated circuit: the podcast takes place in this context of power relations. Radio might do so as well, but it need not. It can be constructed from very basic equipment, both transmitters and receivers, and in fact the whole business can be created from recycled junk. Sure, millions of listeners will not ensue, but there is some leeway here as to how a radio program might be sent and received, and how the audience might experience this moment. Radio need not stick to the studio, need not be heard in the kitchen or the car. Radio waves may be engaged, over small or large distances, in many ways. A podcast, however well crafted, operates in a specific context, which, as Gregory points out, has some obvious implications. I don't see podcasts trying to engage with this context of databases, of Big Data or the iTunes store, all that often, though there are some that are self-reflexive in this way. But podcasting is not radio, and radio is not podcasting. These contexts are not interchangeable platforms for a piece of 'content', they are as different as a street performance versus a gallery.

Community radio (which, I will argue, is very much alive and accessible in most towns I've ever lived in, even in a small town in east Iceland), engages all these unplanned aspects—as Galen mentioned, you often have unexpected programs rubbing elbows due to the local origins of the producers, which means that a listener who enjoys the local metal show may well leave the radio on when a totally different show follows it. There could be a consortium of podcasts that are just as varied as a community radio station, but I have not encountered yet.

Gene Youngblood was inspired by the experience of telematic networking in the early 1980s to desire constant access to “everybody else out there in the world who is like me”. He went as far as to describe geographic community as the preserve of ‘ants and termites’, and proposed to virtually establish ‘Autonomous Reality Communities’ defined “not by geography but by consciousness” (cited in Heidi Grundmann’s excellent history of telematic art “Art+Telecommunication” from 1984). But this is precisely the problem as I now perceive it: fracturing the media landscape along ‘taste communities’ has eradicated any of the accidental diversity that might occur through, among other means, geography. Radio can still offer this, podcasting is ever siloed.

Don’t get me wrong, I’m not against all podcasts, and enjoy listening to some. But much as I am painfully aware of all the flaws apparent when turning on the radio, I can’t ignore the flawed context of the podcast, which is not simply a recorded bit of audible storytelling. The implications of technological infrastructure, the logic of the database, and the kind of listener who is constructed by the industry is worth debating, critiquing, and challenging, in service of a more complex, more interesting discipline of listening.

Radio for me will remain a passion because it is not just about delivering content to listeners. Radio is also about the activity of bodies that vastly exceed the scale of the human—as Velimir Khlebnikov reminds, “even starlight is a wireless signal”. Radio is not just the human voice and the human story. This decentering of human plans and intentions makes it so fascinating: the fact that music and storytelling and news and radio art all share the dial somehow with encoded military communications, and submarine locators, and sunspots, and electrical fields, makes it a complex and ever-changing wilderness to explore, to listen to, and to tell.

○

Sarah Washington

August 12, 2017 at 1:29 am

Thanks Anna for your razor sharp analysis (as always!). There’s nothing missing from that, and I entirely concur so perhaps I’ll just give a couple anecdotes.

Recently I witnessed an avid fan of podcast make radio for the first time. At the documenta radio project, about half of the invited artists had never made radio before. I was discussing with one of them the difference between the two media, my point being to outline the vast gulf between them (even though this is sometimes breached), and that this is often perceptible in the listening experience. She couldn’t get a foothold in my argument, so I suggested that we see what happens after she’s been on air. A few days later she came bounding up to me saying that she totally gets what I was saying, and that radio is the business!

I guess in essence I was exposing podcasting as a dead media, whereas radio is a living

one. This is not only to do with the exciting ‘liveness’ of the live broadcast (so much of radio is not live), but the fundamental energetic relationship between the body, the technology and the workings of the universe, as so beautifully described above by Anna. We are an organic part of the system – which is perhaps why we wither and become diminished organisms on the internet...*

My second point is a gripe that also showed up during documenta. It’s a fundamental misuse of the term podcast which is being tossed around. People are sloppily using the term to mean ‘an archived radio show on the internet’. When I pointed this out it was agreed that this use was incorrect, but the habit is not easily broken. I think this will fade out at some point; it reminds of the period when web streaming (without an associated terrestrial broadcast) was called ‘radio’ for quite some time, but that seems to have corrected itself as the differences worked themselves out. There’s nothing wrong with podcasting or web streaming per se, it’s just that they have their own names!

*A tiny digression into this topic: When we reduce ourselves purely to the building blocks, the zeros and ones (the unbroken and broken lines), we lose our connective and unifying energetic force. All we’re left with is a little unhealthy background radiation. How ironic then, that it’s the internet we turn to for connectivity! (I guess that’s the challenge being addressed by virtual reality systems, how to embody the data flow.) This is why we’ll never give up radio, it’s something we recognise – we’re in it, it’s in us, it surrounds, penetrates and vibrates us, and even encourages us to reciprocate! It’s our direct link to the cosmos... waiting for us to play.



Gregory Whitehead

August 12, 2017 at 1:48 pm

All very powerfully and persuasively put, Anna and Sarah.

The challenge for the radiomaker: how to channel those complex, entropic and infinite qualities of the space into the body of the radiocast, above all when the piece is recorded. Many newbie producers think they need to fake “liveness” (influenced by aesthetically primitive shows such as *This American Life*) when in fact they need to understand the subtle, deep tensions between living and dead, on air, and embrace them.

As for the role of the human voice: of course, the voice can also be used as the embodiment of the space, rather than as the delivery system for the message, dropped into the space. Anna, this is something you achieve brilliantly in your piece, *Radiotelegraph*.

<http://theradius.us/episode44>
<https://desperadophilosophy.net/2013/10/21/here-for-the-night/>

I am hoping Jeff Kolar will chime in regarding his extensive experience with, as Sarah puts it, “our direct link with the cosmos.”

<http://theradius.us/about>



Joan Schuman

August 13, 2017 at 1:06 pm

The theory and lived experiences both Anna and Sarah are writing about remind me of how every semester I teach Radio Experiments, I pose to students to come up with a different name for podcasting. At some point in the course, students seem to finally ‘get it’ that radio has had this legacy and podcasting has usurped or assumed it is the next best thing—created out of the void, without some sort of context (or merely that Apple offered the digital device and RSS capabilities and then took it upon themselves to enjoy this ‘thing’ being called podcasting. Though Apple didn’t come up with the moniker, it certainly ran with it. (I forget who actually coined the term ... I believe it was someone in the UK, but I’ll have to revisit my notes).

Last term, wonderful nuances appeared in devising new names and I share them here in the spirit of loosening or tackling some of these quandries we’re landing on. Some of them resonate, Sarah, with what you mention about terms such as ‘web streaming’ and ‘archived radio.’

Focused Listening
Aural Potpourri
ODIR (on-demand internet radio)
Nowcast
Mixed or Assorted Transmit
Sound Experience

In particular, “Nowcast” gets to the idea of ‘presence,’ though mired in the mediated experience of online navigation, it loses that aleatory radio relationship Anna’s mentioning. I kind of like ‘Mixed or Assorted Transmit’ as it quite gets to the very core of what happens here online.

Perhaps if we begin to use these terms, there can be a little clarity. It continues to further isolate what happens online (or segregate it) with radio experiences. And it should because it is in no way the same medium, relationships, etc.

Sarah Washington

August 14, 2017 at 2:20 pm

Clarity probably takes a while to become widely spread. It appears to have an in-built delay factor!

OK, what follows mostly seems too obvious to state, but perhaps we are not always precise enough with our terminology. Plus hopefully someone will find one or other statement at least a little contentious!

Podcasts are radio show formats (and other things) remodelled for an internet distribution platform which is known as podcasting. Podcasting is both a new format and a new media.

Sometimes, podcasts are broadcast on radio.

– This doesn't make them radio shows.

Some radio shows are podcast as well as broadcast, and/or made available online for download or streaming*.

– This doesn't stop them being radio shows, and it doesn't make them podcasts (even when they are podcast!).

* Podcasts are not downloads or streams, they are feeds.

Except in cases which deal exclusively with the technology, it's not broadcasting in and of itself which turns human-made content into radio, it's the act of being created for broadcast.

Likewise for podcast.

(A song heard on the radio remains a song, a radio show never broadcast is still a radio show.)

We can broadcast a podcast, or podcast a broadcast.

In the first case broadcast is media and podcast is format, in the second podcast is media and broadcast is format.

I can see why you go looking for another name with your students Joan, it might be useful to clarify one half of the equation. Some of the names they came up with talk about podcast as format, and others address podcast as media.

The format of radio has several names: radio show, radio programme, radio broadcast. It seems to me that the term 'podcast' refers more closely to the distribution mechanism than to the form of the content.. Perhaps it would be helpful then to think in terms of 'podcast shows' rather than using the term podcast to mean both content and distribution.

Sarah Washington

August 12, 2017 at 5:22 pm

For non-live work, it should be enough to know that it is going to be broadcast on radio. You only need to become intimate with this knowledge to begin to tune in to the potency of broadcast (receive) and summon your own forces (transmit) – thereby channelling radio into your work. Another dimension of the interplay between body waves and radio waves? Feeding forward, feeding back.

After all, we are transmitters too. Just think about when we meet face to face – so much is said without words. All the important stuff. Whole worlds sometimes.

○

Sarah Washington

August 12, 2017 at 5:26 pm

This was supposed to be a direct reply to Gregory in the above thread...

■

[*karen werner*](#)

August 13, 2017 at 10:09 am

Since going to the extraordinary and fabulous Fall 2016 Halle, Germany festival Radio Revolten — co-organized by Anna Friz, Sarah Washington, Knut Aufermann, and several others— I’ve been thinking a lot about what it means to work in radio and not just in audio.

In the U.S. audio storytelling world I was trained in during the past 5 years (at Duke, and surely similar approaches happen at Transom and Salt), there is not yet a critical discourse like the one emerging here on Earlid about how a listener or producer is constructed by the industry/ infrastructure (to borrow Anna’s wonderful description) of podcasts and radio and audio. In fact I also recently took a field recording class at Union Docs in NYC and didn’t see this critical issue come up there either, though other questions did. I see this as an ethical issue about how we position ourselves in relation to our mediums —but when raising the issue of ethics, people often stay on the level of asking permission for recording someone. (Which is also important.) There are a lot of unexamined assumptions about the good liberal values of “public” radio and podcasts (for instance, “they increase empathy.”) And so there is a big need for a broader critical understanding of ethics, complicity, and responsibility in work we create and podcast or broadcast.

This lack of a critical discourse is a big problem in the U.S. podcast audio storytelling world —and I hope people who teach in such programs will get excited by the questions posed here. New (often young) podcast producers do feel frustrated by the ways various aspects of the industry impinge on them stylistically, politically, and even ontologically, why they do this work! I believe there is a real desire in the US (where it is likely most lacking) for intelligent critical conversations...imaginative thinking and experimentation, even economic forms of experimentation for creating a livelihood while doing adventurous radio work. A number of us on this forum so far are teachers and do our parts to keep these critical questions and possibilities alive and expanding.

I want to reiterate how much my own radio and audio practice has been enhanced by the critical thinking, writing and practices about radiophonic space and the very art and poetics of making pieces by many of the people writing here on Earlid, and this gets back to the crucial value of radio/ audio criticism and community. So far, there seems to be a silence from those participating in crafted podcasts that are not critically reflecting on the podcast space and form. I can imagine this forum would not be an easy space for them to enter...probably such conversations, which would be valuable, are easier done face to face in real time. I'd love to see this.

■

Sarah Washington

August 13, 2017 at 11:54 am

It could just be that we are further on with experimental radio. The discourse happens very slowly, it needs a lot of time to develop. Especially little seems to happen in the critical period when some of the new approaches have not settled into a fixed rhythm.

I remember a few of us trying to jump start this process of reflection on the kind of radio we were making at the beginning of the Radia network. We even tried to establish a forum, but it didn't take off, even though we were having amazing conversations. After a while I was grateful for that breathing space, as we didn't force any moves or write ourselves into awkward corners.



■

Joan Schuman

August 13, 2017 at 2:30 pm

Karen, these themes around how we're constructed as listeners and producers have played out before, though, no?

When "This American Life" was the innovator of a kind of reporting and storytelling—voicing even—some in the audience and at the gates balked. Many ran towards this 'new' style. Now the innovator is the staid stalwart. I recognize these legacies every time I turn on public radio and now, often, when I subscribe to a podcast. Many of my students, as Neil Verma mentioned earlier as well, believe that the terrestrial (archived) radio program exists only as a podcast—because that's how they access it. There's a lot of confusion there in

understanding liminal spaces of media and the scaffolding propping them up.

In terms of ‘real’ podcasts, I’d love it if the algorithm actually pointed me towards something completely different rather than the ‘you may like “Y” because you previously subscribed to “X” ...’, and pointed me towards the random, strange podcast on the next time-slot the way you’re illustrating, Anna. Even if that strange ‘radio’ isn’t at all similar to something I previously downloaded—especially.

Even the podcast ‘curators’ — such as RadioPublic from PRX or the Public Media Scan from AIR (Association of Independents in Radio)—seem to fall into this structure of sameness, as if we all want to listen to the exact same thing.

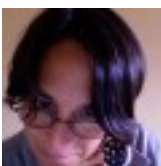
Lately, I’ve been unsubscribing and then re-subscribing to programs that are no longer podcasting or broadcasting (such as “Soundproof”) in the hopes that the algorithm will think I want to listen to work such as this and will direct me towards another sound-art program. No, that’s not fitting into my earlier desire for an algorithm that gives me something opposite; rather it’s just a way to jumpstart my strange relationship to this particular media, this particular construction of my own listening ‘curation.’

I realize we can go digging for our own experience, though it will doubtfully not have that moment of forgetting to turn the radio off and being mesmerized, as you’re noting, Anna, and as I was doing in ’87 when Joe Frank’s voice came whispering in my ear.

It’s useful to learn, Sarah and Karen, about the networks, challenges and curricula failures (or omissions) on both sides of the Atlantic. I am ever assuming that non-U.S. training or audio landscapes are infinitely more advanced, only to learn that ‘it takes time over here, too’. With the seeming leveling field of online space, one of the things I aim to explore at Earlid is a doorway into and out of not just ‘strange’ radio(s), but a questioning of this very online space. I think I mentioned this earlier and asked how we could make the online space more radio-like, more random and stumbled upon.

Any answers ... anyone?

<https://airmedia.org/resources/#/cat/public-media-scan>
<https://www.radiopublic.com/>



Joan Schuman

August 13, 2017 at 1:18 pm

Anna, you wondered about a consortium of podcasts that potentially offers a diversity of experience, perhaps even resonating with how terrestrial radio functions, that are just as varied as a community radio station with all those random moments.

A couple years ago The Heard formed. It's comprised of six (and now I think it's up to eight) podcasters who banded together (across North America), to offer support to one another (editing, story ideas, not funding or financial relationships). I have watched their individual podcasts grow or fizzle (Anxious Machine, which I mentioned early in the forum, is one of the founding members, as is the more popular How to Be a Girl podcast which now partners with a public radio station in Seattle). A number of the podcasts only take donations; some partner with local radio stations; some are taking Audible ads—it's a range far disparate than the podcast members of Radiotopia (far less funded, for sure).

<http://www.theheardradio.com/>

They are all focused on storytelling content. Nothing in the realm of microscoping ideas around transmission within their artistry. But they are remaining a collective on the fringes for the most part.



Joan Schuman

August 13, 2017 at 4:41 pm

Regarding the kinds of spaces we enter to talk about these myriad ideas raised at this particular Earlid forum seem to beg for bravery—if one is ensconced in a wobbly sort of relationship with “a” medium, that is. Karen Werner, both you and Sarah Washington as well as, earlier, Marjorie Van Halteren, engage these ideas.

Your question, earlier, Gregory, about creative agency, resonates as well. It makes me think about radio's original one-pass evanescence. There's a dearth of responses here at Earlid from folks who seem to want to talk about 'what we do in radio' ... with gusto as much as was indicated in all the splashing around in social media initially around this forum's theme. And I empathize that coming to an online forum might feel off-putting for some and I hope it has been at least quasi-inviting for people to jump in despite (or because of) the depth of ideas, thinking, writing around themes that might feel unsafe. I personally like the idea of doing things online that are anathema to the online platform. For example, posting long introductions to artists I'm presenting here rather than the pithy short intro that we can read while listening to something else or while walking down a street.

Self-censoring would be a sad reality and that, too, is what crosses my mind as the co-moderator of a forum such as this. I am curious most about what someone has to lose? So much freedom and so much constraint are at play along these mediated platforms we navigate for our very artistry. I created Earlid without a backbone of funding. So I have limitless freedom. Others might not feel so carefree, depending on their own risks, positions, career or artistic momentum. But can we at

least agree to disagree? Chime in when it doesn't feel like we're in a space where we have all our friends chiming in as well? Is the silence you mention, Karen, about a lack of critical reflection from those making crafted podcasts? I try to get students to engage in this discourse so they have a broader sense of what came before, what is ongoing today. A third 'way,' if you will, is to engage the medium itself and entwine it with the artistry, as both Sarah and Anna are inviting.

I agree to an extent, Sarah, that the in-person gnashing around these ideas is safer. I suspect it's also about ethos of the invited crowd. I recall the first festival I attended where I organized a panel on taking risks in radio. This was the inaugural Third Coast Festival in the U.S. in 2001. Someone inquired how (how in the world???) I would propose making money at this kind of quirky radio. My eyes (ears) glazed over as I realized that particular audience was not going to be 'convinced' of anything I had to say about radio art or the medium even, although someone sitting in the space might have been encouraged to continue on. In other festivals (Deep Wireless, Megapolis), I found a home to talk about these things; I know I was also singing along with people who only thought about radio artistry in similar ways to me. Yes, it was safe. But I craved the energy of a more conventional radio festival to dig deeper with folks who thought differently than I did. When I returned in 2008 to Third Coast, I was surprised at how things had changed so dramatically. I literally felt like I was pushing against crowds all going in the opposite direction on their mad dash to succeed—in podcasting, in public media, online. My greatest comfort zone that year was in the educators' breakfast. I still use tricks I learned in that session in mentoring new makers of radio artistry.

I would love to go, in person, to a festival or conference where these ideas could be engaged with 'safely,' and where those who are beholden to advertising's scaffolding could have a conversation with those who are more carefree. Are we destined to always be in our own camps?

○

Sarah Washington

August 14, 2017 at 10:26 am

Although that may be true for some, I wasn't actually saying that talking is safer than committing to the written word (Karen mentioned it being easier, I was talking about us not knowing what to say – or perhaps how we could begin outpouring all the things buzzing around our heads).

In the early days it was mostly a case of us not knowing where to jump in the stream. Although we wanted to determine a new discourse, quite naturally we couldn't take a big enough step back from what we were doing to be able to make a decent attempt at positioning ourselves within or without existing radio theory. We were, however, convinced that the cupboard was rather bare and we needed new theories!

Discussion naturally revolved around that ever-present question 'What is radio art?', but this had much more to do with artistic considerations than theoretical ones. We only knew what we thought radio art was not (i.e. what we didn't want to hear in Radia shows). Other than that it was more than enough to be working together, feeding off each other, and discovering different approaches. The support of a solid background in media theory was supplied by the Berliners, and there was a lot of political experience and engagement within the founding group.

After not too long some of us decided that we didn't desire a definition of radio art at all.

Quite the opposite in fact. The last thing we wanted was to become complicit in upholding a canon of works!

I still have no interest in pinning the term down. Each person should make it up as they go along. That way we continually learn what it is and glimpse what it can become. When it comes to that sticky question in conversation, I am happy enough to state simply that I make art with radio. People are free to take it or leave it, I'm not in the business of convincing anyone. You enjoy art made with paper or a guitar? Fine, let's talk about that. I don't want to distance myself from people, so I just talk about it like it's a normal activity.

Let the curious imagine and the non-curious move along (to something they might like better)!

■

Sarah Washington

August 14, 2017 at 10:45 am

I should perhaps make explicit, seeing as we're in print which has that wonderful quality of being easy to misconstrue, that this is not an arrogant stance, it's in exact opposition to that. When you normalise things it gives people an easy entry point to engage if they want to. You're not perched on some lofty tower they can't see making work they could never hope to understand.

(That's a funny turn of phrase, given that both Anna and I recently made work in a lofty tower!)



■

Joan Schuman

August 16, 2017 at 10:01 am

These kinds of clarifications are useful, Sarah. Too rigid a canon may solidify where flexibility is more useful—like a radio wave, in fact, always morphing, bellowing, echoing, casting about.

Cathy FitzGerald echoes your sentiment in her mini-essay in “Agile Critics.” I, too, have long described my work as ‘making narrative with sound.’ I leave it at that, anticipating more questions (which is fine) or simply raising the possibilities that it's not ‘something else,’ like a film

or a radio documentary (though I also use the phrase, “Cinema for the Ear” to clarify).

I invite those unfamiliar with Radia that you’ve been talking about, Sarah (and that “a” at the end is correct, not a misspelling), to explore more:

<http://radia.fm/>

The “About” section launches as such:

“The Radia Network emerged from a series of meetings, clandestine events, late night club discussions and a lot of email exchanges between cultural radio producers across Europe. ...”

There is one U.S.-based organization amidst the 26 stations and 1 affiliate and that is Wave Farm, whom we’ve heard from in this forum via its director Galen Joseph-Hunter.

I think this was the project you’re talking about with Anna Friz related to clock towers, Sarah?

<http://nicelittlestatic.com/2016/06/25/clock-tower-radio-towers-signal-structures/>

■

Sarah Washington

August 19, 2017 at 8:02 am

Yes, that briefly mentions Anna’s piece. Further info here:
<http://radiorevolten.net/en/radio-revolten-in-the-red-tower/>

In the end I was lucky enough to be able to make the companion broadcast work for 3-frequencies (rather than 2 as planned).

Short edit:

<https://soundcloud.com/mobile-radio/in-the-air-we-share-edit>

Pictures:

<http://marcus-andreas-mohr.de/radio-revolten-with-sarah->



[Gregory Whitehead](#)

August 14, 2017 at 5:30 pm

Radio may begin in that pulsating phenomenology of transmissions and trance missions, including brain waves and the electrical impulses of forests, creatures, distant stars. Next it might extend to the complicated series of relationships, internal to the artistic process and also very much at the heart of the sociological and political space of radio, including the micro-politics of stations and “markets”.

Yet there is also another dimension for us to consider, one that I have been exploring for three decades, and that is the cultural and historical identity of radio, an identity that finds expression through forms and formats that may have become entrenched and ossified through time, while also opening up, ripely, for infiltrations and resuscitations by artists.

For example, a form that I love: the simple dialogue between a Host and a Guest. Forget the names, for they are irrelevant! Add the third element of “the band”, and the possibilities are endless, above all when the artist decides to inhabit all three roles at once.

Such reinventions of entrenched cultural patterns initiates a special sort of dance with listeners, who are now placed in the position of being both “at home” and bewildered. In my experience, the familiarity turns the initial fog of confusion into a welcome space of free association, while also being wrapped in the comforting embrace of a familiar form. The essential play in such a poetics bounces between cultural expectations and creative otherness.

We must also be aware of how radio is culturally experienced. How we listen in conferences and festivals does not accurately reflect the reality of radio space for most listeners, who are typically doing something else: chopping veggies, driving kids to school, taking a bath. For me, this has always been part of the material for radio art, to conjure and play with structures that embed an understanding of the listening reality, that is for the most part lo-fi and “dirty”. There is also an element of compassion here, and a willingness to meet listeners where they already are!

Too often (for my ears), work presenting itself as radio art assaults listeners with a defiant and closed — even solipsistic — sort of strangeness, privileging novelty and difference over the peculiarities that are already present in the lived experience of the medium. So yes, while I am forever in favor of experimentation of every sort, and while I agree that the airwaves are available for every artistic use without exception, if part of our challenge is to foster and sustain a community of listeners, we need to keep ears open to all of these “material” realms, all of these dimensions of how radio exists in the world.

What discourages me about so much of what I hear both on public radio and in the affiliated podcast spaces: formats and identities are inhabited passively, without any play, and without any hunger to begin THERE, and go somewhere ELSE.



Joan Schuman

August 16, 2017 at 10:29 am

Useful distinctions, Gregory and Sarah, around how to ‘define’ —or not—and how to engage the medium further.

Much of what I hear on more cinematic or artistic (or writerly/character/plot-driven) podcasts is a play in the virtual medium much more than an experiment in radio at its very source: there’s a plethora of phone conversations, calls made by the ubiquitous mobile network and their unclear/misty quality as well as their transparency, an invitation to eavesdrop. There’s plenty of missed calls; warbled ring tones; fingers a-tapping.

When a sound is referencing a radioesque space, it will dive back further than most listeners remember or relevant today towards the turning dial, the nostalgic static and attempts to land on a signal or wallow in the interstice.

What discourages me, Gregory, is how much transparency there seems to be, seems to ‘need’ to be. Explaining is the new narration. But even in artistic realms, we are bombarded with faux journalism or a reporter gone rogue as if that is the only option for engaging a medium that once offered a liveness (as we’ve mentioned earlier) and a bending towards and away from that radio quality for artistic purposes. It’s as if artists jumped right over that medium in order to exploit the mobile/virtual media in our hands today.

I still get a thrill when listening to basic, conventional public radio—a host and a guest on the phone—and the guest’s phone line goes dead. It seems to happen more now that everyone is on the mobile network. A play between the media could be a way to engage both perhaps?

Helen Hahmann

August 19, 2017 at 3:10 pm

When does a radio piece evoke a reaction from a recipient? When do people write an email to applause, call the station to complain or even grab a microphone to disagree on air? When does the listener get involved in what is happening on air?

Like Sarah Montague states in her essay: “most discussions of audio productions are still limited comments“. I would like to contribute a few thoughts on the devastating and empowering effects of feedback on radio productions from the perspective of a community radio maker. Even though feedback and criticism are not quite the same, these practices are overlapping. At the station I’m from (Radio Corax, Halle/Germany) giving feedback is a strong and very important, although imperfect practice.

Silence. Days of conception, writing, recording, of listening and re-listening, and after the broadcast there is nothing – as if nobody heard what was said. But of course it was heard. In the case of Radio Corax it’s potentially heard by half a million of people on FM. Telling a person directly what thoughts come up about their radio piece is a risk. To be more profound: it’s a

responsibility, it's a tool to take what we do seriously, it's to encourage criticism, and over all, it is to make clear that what is shared publicly within a community respectively within a society is from relevance. Maybe because of this fragile and energy-sapping setting, too many times (profound) feedback is avoided.

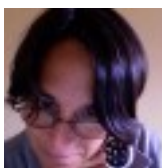
Feedback, a form of raw and direct criticism, requires one to listen with attention and to talk/write about it carefully. What is the focus of my criticism, what do I want to say with it, what do I want to change with it and with whom do I share it? It's a struggle to implement a culture of listening and a culture of feedback even within a community of radio makers. It's a practice that needs training and development. Even the feedback needs feedback. But in the end it needs to be recognised as an important task, for it is also a way to express an active role within society.

Yet in the free radio context, aesthetic contemplations of audio works are some kind of luxury; a "side contradiction" (Nebenwiderspruch) to use a Marxist term. Most reviews/feedback/criticism circulate around the social, political and historical discourses that are brought on air, discourses that shape our society. Free radio's meaning has always been to be a critical observer, narrator and commentator, to speak out against discrimination, exclusion, the destruction of nature, war, centralisation and injustice. Radio is a powerful tool to contribute to these discourses, to get people into discussion and to speak out publicly.

I am in two minds: You can't implement an aesthetic feedback-culture in community radios, because of the subordinated general objectives of these emancipatory media projects. Next to the content-led discourses they seem to have no space. However, I believe that thinking about the power of aesthetics, about artistic and creative approaches to radio is one of the main future aspects for the medium, to keep it fresh and lively. Community radios together with radio artists and unconventional radiomakers are the architects of this future, if that is Resonance in London, WGXC/Wave Farm in New York or the Radio Revolten Festival of Radio Corax.

How does the implementation of new, and also emancipative audio formats and aesthetic practices into the routine of community radio open up new horizons for people's habits of listening and their perception of what is happening in the world and in society? Can this kind of radio move the people to discussion and involvement?

Thanks so much for providing this inspiring and rich resource of thoughts on so many aspects of radio reception here on earlid.org. Greetings to all of you. Thanks for reading and thanks for further thoughts.



○

Joan Schuman

August 24, 2017 at 2:09 pm

Helen, your ideas about nurturing listeners to adequately (even creatively) offer feedback—a kind of training course of how to listen and how to respond—reminds me of the mini-essay Dragan Todorovic wrote here.

<http://www.earlid.org/posts/agile-critics/>

Like you, he says we need to reclaim radio for artistry, but also for critical responses to it. He offers a caveat and it goes a bit beyond community radio, though I think it resonates because of our cultural affinities for networks, radio or otherwise, because such entwining is meaningful, given the newest platform many 'listeners' step into today:

"Social networks as potential fields of critical thinking have proved catastrophic. They are almost never constructive and mostly serve for self-promotion or, worse, for trolling."

I have discerned across this summer's forum here at Earlid that while there is excitement expressed online, a good deal of it landed in a kind of vapid community of 'likes' and 'hearts.' Sadly, there has been a disturbing reticence to actually participate. It makes me think about working in radio itself (in its day-to-day programming, in the late-1980s, again in the late-1990s), the only time you heard from a listener was, often, to complain and not to praise. The phones would ring with people calling to tell you to get rid of voices they didn't like, agree with, were angered by. Now we have such immediacy in the extremes of online participation: the ubiquitous thumbs up or emoticon happy face or the flippant remark. The nuanced, artful responses we've generated in this forum are quite pleasing. But I wonder about those who decided to stay quiet.

Now more than ever, when I ask whether art matters in the hate-spewing political climates that swirl upon us (with such networked immediacy), I answer, resoundingly, YES! Bridges offered through Resonance and Wave Farm and Radio Revolten (I linked to your activities below) remind us that the very platform of radio is now and still a risk-taking venture. These are not your typical radio fare. Thank goodness for their existence. And while the above-mentioned caveat about social media is important, so too is the equally accessible 'signal' via the online streamer.

I was just re-reading Kim Sawchuk's essay in "Radio Rethink," a text published in the pre-internet early-1990s. I was reminded about 'piracy'—another art form of the air that has a long and vibrant history. It offers a useful context and comparison, given the ease of the distribution tools at our fingertips today.

In re-reading her essay, I am further motivated to echo her words for the next Earlid exhibit that follows this forum, which is an exploration of the 'foul mouth' of men in power, though in context of considering how women sing, what languages and very words are utilized, what voices are heard (and where and to whom, as well), whether considered profane or mundane, whether destined for radio or performance or an LP, CD or Sound Cloud channel.

The artists I'm selecting will consider how women's voices maintain 'presence' in this landscape of not just vocalized profanity, but real experiences where their lives, bodies, voices, words, songs continue to be overpowered.

Sawchuck reminds us that the pirate, like Donna Haraway's feminist cyborg, emerges as one of the illegitimate offspring of a culture of information, communications and capital, where information 'is' capital. There seems to be a resonance with your ideas, Helen and Dragan, regarding free radio, criticism, listener feedback and the power of art on the air.

<https://front.bc.ca/events/radio-rethink-art-sound-and-transmission/>

[Chris DeLaurenti](#)

August 19, 2017 at 5:32 pm

Joan, your contention that “Explaining is the new narration” reminds me of a line by the artist Jordan Crandall who describes this narrative shift (rooted in reality TV and YouTube watching) where “The reality of representation is substituted for the representation of reality.”

One symptom in radio is the interrupting, injected narrator, which has become prevalent on U.S. NPR shows out of fear of losing listeners and the impulse to continually be “on-brand.”

ps Am I the only one who, upon re-reading the entire thread, thinks that there is a book proposal waiting to be made along with a sample chapter culled from these texts?



Joan Schuman

August 24, 2017 at 8:48 am

Chris, this is a fantastic idea to cull these writings in this forum into a text. Got any leads on who to propose this to? Small-scale is fine (maybe even better than large-scale).

At the end of the comment period (after Sept. 5), I'll make the entire forum available as a PDF so at least further use by people leading workshops or teaching courses can download or simply to point an interested, avid self-learner to do so.

[Sherre DeLys](#)

August 19, 2017 at 9:18 pm

Hello, it's great to be amongst such articulate, intelligent and impassioned people in discussion about important ideas.

Somehow I feel I should say right up front that along with making radio, I've always worked in other art forms, with sound and body including voice common to all. And, like for so many of us, it's impossible for me to tell where 'art' ends and the rest of my life begins, so that other things I do, like teaching and conducting myself in relationship, feel like a seamless part of the whole. I feel the fundamental act of creativity is found in relationship with others, and the forms of art-making feel to me like rarified versions of that.

I felt compelled to say that at the start because, as you'll see, my depth of commitment to the form of radio is not as impassioned and engaged as some of the brilliant and beautiful *cris de cœur* expressed here for this mysterious and also indivisible medium. Still I recognise that radio as a spirited medium encompasses all I hold dear, and reading through all the deeply-caring posts here I find much resonating. Even so, I'm going to allow myself a personal frolic in a slightly different direction, in hopes that this description of one journey refracts usefully into the conversation here.

As someone who worked at the Australian Broadcasting Corporation for a couple of decades I've felt the gradual insinuation of neoliberal values over radio's indivisible poetic, mysterious, complex energies as pain in the body. For example in my neck and shoulders, as my body toiled ever-longer hours at a “workstation” feeding what we're told is a voracious appetite. (But like gigantic plates of food shoveled out at restaurants in the United States, the appetite is

manufactured and manipulated, rather than served.). And I've felt it in my brain learning to default to the left instead of the right, as increasingly my psyche was tied to the fixity of supplying the expected for generalised 'end users' rather than the aliveness of connecting with 'the listener', where hearing and insight come into being through unique acts of transmitting and receiving.

(And though exploration of left and right brain hemisphere differences was stifled by pop psychology and management manuals decades ago, for a powerful understanding of how the two hemispheres create different versions of the world, I recommend Iain McGilchrist's work. His account of how the right hemisphere presents a world based in: possibility (as opposed to certainty), the new (as opposed to the known), flow (as opposed to fixity), wholeness (as opposed to parts), uniqueness (as opposed to the general), context (as opposed to abstraction) embodiment (as opposed to the cerebral), quality (as opposed to quantity) the animate (as opposed to inanimate), realism (as opposed to optimism), and territory (as opposed to map) could equally be a description of radio's potentials. His warning that we're witnessing the triumph of the left hemisphere will resonate with those in this forum I'm sure. I think his book "The Master and His Emissary" is downloadable here <http://iainmcgilchrist.com/>).

Virginia Madsen's writings explore, among other things, that stunning array of experiments across genres, sites and geographies taking place in Australia and internationally, that I was fortunate to bear witness to as a maker at ABC's 'The Listening Room'.

https://www.academia.edu/196946/Chapter_Experiments_in_Radio_in_Experimental_Music_Audio_Explorations_in_Australia_Ed._Gail_Priest_UNSW_Press_2009

And, with thanks to Magritte, that name 'The Listening Room' remains so resonant for me that this week in teaching the arts of meditation to designers who are charged with solving seemingly intractable problems in complex environments, I've tossed it in as one possibility to describe the kind of 'group mind', the 24/7 emergence, the moving process, the flow, the aliveness, the presencing, and the connectedness of our evolving relational process as we design the space we'll work in together in over the next few weeks.

But I'm barely making radio these days. While others here have admirably chosen to create and inhabit spaces where it's still possible to be one with the indivisible wireless imagination I've slipped seamlessly into other forms. To be clear, I realise I could just as well have kept my attention focused on radio that encompasses, as so beautifully described by Anna indeed, 'the fundamental energetic relationship between the body, the technology and the workings of the universe', it's just that my attention got captured by the technologies of meditation which I find simple and so immediate to access. I've made field recording as a form of withdrawal and transition. And to pick up on a thread started by Daniel, I first had to break old habits by bringing mindfulness to my reactive urges to kayak to the most 'sweet' spot of the lake in a Thai national park in order to capture the 'perfect envelope' of the rising and falling of the dawn chorus of gibbons, birds and other creatures. Once that habit was let go of, instead I could just switch the recorder on wherever I found myself at 5 am each morning and walk away to do listening meditation at a good distance, leaving it on its own to capture the interdependence of people pounding spices and shopping vegetables for breakfast mingling with the rest of the sounds of the world waking up, and turning it off arbitrarily when the meditation bell rang. This getting out of my own way created recording and sonic ethnography of profound beauty I would not have noticed had my habituated mind prevailed, and allowed insights into 'the hearing without hearer', perspective, memory and much more. Creating art is a matter of clearing away everything getting in the way of creation, (or perhaps it is everything between us and the creation) and I've had to re-learn that when it comes to audio recording. I'm also teaching meditation to people being treated for cancer, developing along with these fellow humans the skills of creative embodied responsiveness to pain and illness, and aliveness in dying. And I'm collaborating on an artwork involving sound, needle work, film, two modernist homes and two social housing apartments in

two countries. (Karen! more haunted houses.) Thankfully, so far I can't figure out the why or what of this work other than that the process feels alive.

Hope this wasn't too much of a tangent, just my way of saying hello as authentically as I knew how.



Joan Schuman

August 24, 2017 at 3:07 pm

It's so interesting to consider Iain McGilchrist's work on the right and left hemispheres of the brain, Sherre, and to consider how we might navigate radio's artistry as well in this context.

In the Earlid exhibit preceding this forum—an open call for artists to submit work around the theme, “Right-Ear Dominant”—I selected works focused on the left hemisphere. This is the side that processes the auditory and the primary churning for the emotions, speech and language comprehension. They mirror the wordy, watery, audible activities on that side of the brain.

I don't think this is ‘opposite’ to what Gilchrist is positing since it's the left-brain language center I was curious to explore with the chosen artists. Certainly many of them were evidence of flowing right-brained processes, even embodiment. Stories, particularly in this medium, can be cerebral and disembodied; voices and words soar. Simply being whispered into the ear makes these listening experiences a dance between (across) the hemispheres of both maker and listener and the very power of the medium, no?

Right-Ear Dominant

<http://www.earlid.org/posts/right-ear-dominant-2/>

Your experiences of sonic ethnography and meditation remind us that listening attentively and deeply are powerful tools we have right between the ears (and within the body). I was just listening to a piece on “Short Cuts,” a podcast via BBC Radio 4. Its episodic theme was “duets.” The piece offered by artist Duncan Speakman, called “A Duet for Here and There,” invites the listener to engage in a kind of duet not just of listening, but of space and one's body. An odd thing happened while listening, via earbuds. The host suggested to not listen in that realm; rather to listen in a space with speakers. My hands were full of de-stemming the inky-staining huckleberries I'd just picked on a trip north along the coast. I worried my ears might be blasted. But, no, instead, I was invited to listen to both Speakman's voice (a kind of guided, artful meditation) and to my surroundings. He led the listener towards and away from his voice, to explore the lines on the back of one's hands and the very space of the room in which a listener might be situated.

All kinds of listening spaces are ripe for the radio and our numerous ways of accessing it.

Short Cuts – BBC radio 4 podcast – episode “Duets”
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b091tx5z>

[Sherre DeLys](#)

August 19, 2017 at 9:34 pm

By the way, while mentioning Virginia Madsen’s writing, and since this forum got started by thinking about good ‘criticism’, I highly recommend her piece about a work of Gregory’s (already mentioned in the forum) that continues to inspire me and serves to define some of the powerful potentials of radio and radio -making.

From the limbo zone of transmissions: Gregory Whitehead’s “On the shore dimly seen”, Radio Doc Review, 2(2), Dec 2015.
<http://ro.uow.edu.au/rdr/vol2/iss2/7/>



Joan Schuman

August 24, 2017 at 8:44 am

For those not familiar with Helen Hahmann’s mention of Radio Revolten as a space, akin to Wave Farm and ResonanceFM, both mentioned in her comment and elsewhere (e.g., the collaborations linked to by Sarah Washington in her work with Anna Friz), here is a link:

<http://radiorevolten.net/en/>



Gregory Whitehead

August 24, 2017 at 5:06 pm

Sherre, thanks for bringing McGilchrist into the mix. In the introduction to that exceptional book, he offers the following words that should ring in the ears of all aspiring radiomakers:

“A central theme of this book is the importance of our disposition towards the world and one another, as being fundamental in grounding what it is that we come to have a relationship with, rather than the other way round. The kind of attention we pay actually alters the world: we are, literally, partners in creation. This means we have a grave responsibility, a word that captures the reciprocal nature of the dialogue we have with whatever it is that exists apart from ourselves.”

I also want to underscore your thoughts on the high significance of “aliveness in the process”; software-centered processes so often drain all kinesis and vitality from the creative process, requiring the injection of pseudo-liveliness through either compression or strange performances by hosts, who at some level must be aware that they inhabit a space of deadness — moldy, fungal, leaking toxic gas — and thus must toss a few dragon’s teeth into the open grave and hope for the best.

And Helen, thank you for that crucial distinction between feedback and critique. To my ears, Corax has found a powerful way both to fulfill the emancipatory practices of community radio and to celebrate the pure joys of radiophonic bodies sounding out, during those exuberant days of Radio Revolten and beyond! Radio Unbroken!

<http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/soundproof/future-of-radio/8054326>

I know that Virginia Madsen is laboring under a tight writing deadline, but I hope she may have time to join us before Labor Day; her early (1980s) radio essays for The Listening Room set a high standard for both poetics and politics within that “reciprocal nature of the dialogue with whatever it is that exists apart from ourselves.”

[Felix Kubin](#)

August 25, 2017 at 8:49 am

I figured this must be a fine place, as Gregory Whitehead asked me to come here and drop a letter or two. Unfortunately, I was buried under cardboard boxes of a move, holiday travels, the finishing of a Hörspiel (there you go!) and general chaos. This forum should be extended a bit in time, I guess lots of people are on their holidays. I didn’t have the time to read all of the comments right now, so I hope I am not repeating what others have said already.

Out of the blue, just a few thoughts, written down like automatic notes:

- radio art / play / Hörspiel starts to succeed when it cannot be staged. And as soon as it imitates other disciplines, it fails. And we’re still searching for its exclusive qualities. However, it can be challenging to transfer a Hörspiel into another medium. Of course, it will become something else then – but it will be informed by the radio desire
- In Germany, maybe the country in the world with the richest (state-funded) Hörspiel culture, there have been many bold experiments in radio art, especially since Akustische Kunst established in the 1960s. Hardly anyone outside of Germany knows about them. And this is one of the biggest tragedies in Hörspielkunst: it cannot be dubbed or subtitled, unless it’s completely abstract and sound-related. The brutal dominance of the English language that characterizes the globalized world and internet prevents the polyphony of phonetics. It mutilates expression, even while I am writing here in my limited English. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if you could listen to German, Czech, French, Italian, Japanese radio works without the language barrier? “Marathon” (1957) by Naoya Uchimura is one of the few examples that work without knowing the language. There are endless radio works produced (and archived in media pools) every week by German stations like WDR, BR, SWF etc.

A lot is classical criminal stories or dokus but you still find many fine things there

- I believe there is a history of radio critic over here, probably not much of it is translated to English, though. Maybe Knut and Sarah will contradict me here. True – it’s getting less. But for example check out the site of Wolfgang Hagen: <http://www.whagen.de/main.php> There’s brilliant essays about the schizophrenic patient Daniel Schreber, whose perceptions and

writings Hagen interprets as early forms of media critic and art. Some texts are in English, like the one about archiving.

- radio means: RadioRAUM. This is a space that you can't measure and define by any parameters. It doesn't have a frame like an image.

- radio means: you don't know who is listening and you can't see who or what is speaking / sounding. My most exciting experiences in radio were sudden tunings into frequency ranges of far away stations, sudden entries into strange worlds of sound and voice

- I think that radio is made for experiments. And these should be funded by public radio stations, so that Hörspielmacher can make a living from their work without having to compromise. I also found that (at least in Germany) the editors in radio play departments are very more open-minded to experiments. I don't want to say that good sound / radio art necessarily needs funding. But the belly does.

- The most progressive pieces I created for radio were the ones that I worked on like a blind searcher. I didn't really have a clue and knew where I was going. Two examples: "Paralektronoia" (a piece about ghosts and electricity) and "Mother in the fridge" (a conversation with my mother in English). The former became a mix of documentary and fiction that was new to me, the latter wasn't even planned to become a Hörspiel, it was just a phone call of my mother that turned into a play at some point, after I started to record it. Her voice on the phone was like a radio voice itself, dismembered from her body. So, in hindsight it was a piece about the nature of radio. To form a thought while speaking (an old trick by Heinrich von Kleist), this is one of the nice methods of experimenting with radio.

Good luck with this blog!



Joan Schuman

August 26, 2017 at 3:59 pm

Felix, thanks for linking to some of Wolfgang Hagen's writings. Plenty to explore in English. I didn't know of his ideas and writings.

[Sherre DeLys](#)

August 26, 2017 at 1:35 am

Joan, you say: 'Simply being whispered into the ear makes these listening experiences a dance between (across) the hemispheres of both maker and listener and the very power of the medium, no?' Yes, and to stay with McGilchrist a moment longer, I think he'd agree that one of the reasons we can say a radio program or podcast is embodied is that we relate to it as bodies, our heart rates can change in response, for example. He considers works of art to be embodied, implicit, integral, holistic and unique – these all, in his schema, being 'right hemisphere related'. Interestingly in telling the story of his journey into exploring right and left hemisphere function, McGilchrist's starts at the moment when he came to feel art criticism as inadequate, because activities of

criticism he sees as left brained fail –metaphors fall flat when you have to explain them, for example, and art dies when subjected to detached de-contextualisation. But I'll leave McGilchrist's history here and add a more personal suspicion about criticism, which is that if criticism issues from the neoliberal city to which 'audio storytelling' has lately been given the key, we should be wary we're not listening to human podcast aggregators, intelligent consumer guides. That concern comes from my own history.

I return to my own biography not because I'm habituated to the current media gospel of communicating ideas 'through a personal story' (a prescription caught up within the "I" formulation of consumerism, and the dangerous 'to hell with experts- facts are irrelevant' trends about), but because I might serve, I suspect, as a partial stand-in for the podcast producers whose absence here has been lamented. Not because the form of my work is in the same territory, but because I did work in institutions of radio that became caught up in neoliberal ideology. In my earlier post I mentioned the toll the encroachment took on my body, and the shift in notions of relationality and identity around transmission and reception, but another set of breached ethics relates to the 'attention economy'. Thankfully I was able to exit before being press-ganged into scrabbling around in the mud doing anything possible to 'attract eyeballs' -in other words, to steal people's attention-but this is possibly the most insidious part of the neoliberal takeover of radio. It's helpful that the term 'attention economy' identifies human attention as a scarce resource, but too bad it frames attention, just as all other "resources" as something to exploit. I think here of The Leap Manifesto <https://leapmanifesto.org/en/the-leap-manifesto/> and how, now that modern capitalism has reached the end-days, the positive resistance we need must be based in kindness and interdependence, and built on a model that overturns notions of humans, the environment and, I would add attention, as resources. (Hardly surprising that while at ABC I found refuge in meditation, a framework in which attention shows itself to be a precious tool that we ourselves can control. I value the McGilchrist quote you highlighted Gregory – 'The kind of attention we pay actually alters the world: we are, literally, partners in creation.' When I'm focused on my body the world's intimate, tingly, pulsing. When I bring my attention to my thoughts, my world is the noticing of a thinking machine. When those small spritzes of dopamine catch me up on clickbait I'm an addict looking to score. But of course even this precious tool of meditation with its implicit critique of big business has become big business ...for some anyway. Mindfulness stripped of ethics, mindfulness for success in business, mindfulness that tells you 'if you're stressed and depressed in the workplace you're just not mindful enough'- and all other forms of 'McMindfulness – aside, it's disappointing to continually notice that 'serious' articles on mindfulness in the press are written by someone touting their book.)

Joan thanks for directing us to the Short Cuts piece by Duncan Speakman. It was great to hear a radio artist aiming to create a genuine relationship with an embodied and specific listener. Like you, I was led to study the lines in my palms and notice the sounds in my room, invited into the freefall of letting go of the constructed sense of 'I', by a relational conception of radio that interweaves forms of silence, noise, transmission, and interference common to both radio and mediation- a conception a million miles distant from 'creating content' for a generalised 'end user'.

Yes Gregory, aliveness and software. When I first started in radio, it was live performance even when pre-recorded. In rooms with 5 or 6 Revoxes a couple of us would run between them firing off tape loops in a hit and miss dance, rhythm and timing dependant on the body in space rather than clock time or algorithm. No perfect fades. Where radio, like Duncan Speakman's piece, is an escape from not only the workstation but from consumption and sense of disenfranchisement that fascist movements build their base on, then long live (public) radio.

But it would be a mistake to focus critique on form. As Gregory and others have articulated, ultimately it's neoliberalism's insidious hold over much of radio and podcast alike that should be the focus of our attention.



Joan Schuman

August 26, 2017 at 3:49 pm

Sherre, these ideas you're raising resonate in experiences I've just had—strands of 'knowledge' or 'news' that disturb me in related ways to the neoliberal take-over of media via the latest technologies.

We like to 'blame' one media for overtaking others, but really, that's been happening over and over (TV killed the radio star ...). We bemoaned the loss of oral storytelling the moment the printing press arrived.

In the contemporary realm, it saddens me that communities are losing the print version of their papers; more disturbing are the demise of alt-weeklies here in the States, with a major one—The Village Voice—deciding to go all-online. Somehow the rebels decided to join the mainstream. Do not convince me that it is an environmental decision to save trees when as we've discussed here, the metals mined to extinction will be 'reported' on via our computers/tablets/phones, whose very existence is about 'ease' and 'corruption,' simultaneously.

I digress. But I don't. I've spent as many years working in radio as I once did toiling for alt-weeklies. It is the ethos of those experimenters (of the air, on the page offered for 'free' to their communities) that is being lost. Just the other day, I heard a reporter interviewing a technologist who was swooning over the concept and potential reality of a machine speaking for us, for that very reporter, sounding like his own voice, because the technology is available.

I imagined a weird kind of radio artistry upending this potential 'improvement' with the robot voice leaping off the table in a Frankenstein-like take-over. Radio has always been about the voice, among other sounds, other embodiments. It saddened me to think a machine would be selected so that it sounds like a natural voice rather than a person 'finding their own voice' to explore how to make art out of those sounds to present on the air.

I shared a radio piece with my students recently that plays with this interface between machine-voice and 'records' (i.e., those old, crackly LPs) and upon my initial hearing, I renounced the main character's voice being an email reader, very robotic-sounding. I wondered why a machine reading a letter was better-suited to our ears than a real person reading aloud. But over and over I listened and dialogued with my students and we surmised that the form and its content were intentionally intertwined (other 'records' were braided into the piece, from an old LP to a subway announcement from a PA system). The piece itself is called "The Record" and was the winning entry of The Sarah Awards 2015 Very, Very Short, Short, Stories Contest. Was it so subtle to my ears or was it merely taken as the norm that we now listen to machines standing in place of our very real, breathed, percussive, rhythmic bodies?

The Record, by Elie Gordon-Moerschel

<http://thesarahawards.com/listen/2016/10/6/the-record>

[Felix Kubin](#)

August 26, 2017 at 1:14 pm

I just realized I made a little mistake in my last comment, when I said that “...this is one of the biggest tragedies in Hörspielkunst: it cannot be dubbed or subtitled, unless it’s completely abstract and sound-related.”

Of course, I meant that abstract pieces don’t need translations and therefore have a chance to get attention outside the own country. I know that radio play (Hörspiel) is only a fraction of what this blog is about – or what radio is about – but it really is a pity that probably most English-speaking folks will hardly ever listen to word-based radio plays from non-English-speaking countries. Let me know, if I am wrong. Gregory, I know you have been traveling the European radio waves a lot, do you ever listen to pieces in languages you hardly understand?

There have been many great productions from all over Europe, and especially many coming from Germany, Austria and Switzerland. Radio plays cannot be subtitled, that’s the tragedy and that’s why I feel like I am living in a rich Hörspiel culture here that I cannot easily share with foreigners. It has survived the advent of TV and made huge developments in its forms of expression since the 1950s but the knowledge and legacy that we accumulated stays within our own borders. Only abstract audio pieces have a chance to travel.

When I give lectures abroad about Hörspiel, many people even don’t have a clue what Hörspiel is and what it can do. That it is not just the narration of a book or a “movie in the head” or linear storytelling. The classical storytelling I already experienced as a youngster: we grew up with great children fairy tale audio productions from the 60s and 70s, both in former West and East Germany, with twisted plots and sometimes political (anti-capitalist, anti-war, anti-materialistic) subtexts. I’d be interested, if there was a culture like that in other countries. My generation was definitely shaped by it.

Later I learned about the sound/word collages of Ferdinand Kriwet and Ronald Steckel (great: “Das Ohrenlicht”, 1984), the uncanny silent pieces of Günter Eich (1950s), the wild pre-punk improvised spoken word recordings of Rolf-Dieter Brinkmann (1973), the archive cut-ups and fake documentaries of Hermann Bohlen.

What I actually fear is that in the end the global community of “radia” networks will – like the internet – be dominated by English language again, which would exclude a lot of great works produced in other languages, though I feel that especially in this field they have much to contribute.



Gregory Whitehead

August 26, 2017 at 2:47 pm

Felix, yes the German tradition in particular is full of exuberance, playfulness, open experimentation, beautiful accidents, strange imploded languages and on and on — all of which are wonderfully present in the Kubinwelt!

For those who have not travelled before to this odd and indispensable world, please visit:
<http://www.felixkubin.com/?str=radio>

Yet since I do indeed have an ear for the global airwaves, I have listened as one by one, these rich traditions are diminished and even erased, supplanted by the neoliberal formula that privileges (as Sherre points out), um, “multi-platform” Universal Puddings (in globalized and spineless English, to be sure) for a statistically-generated end user who is likely a bot, or a bot-broker.

Germany is in many ways the Last Mensch Standing, and you are very fortunate to have commissioning editors with major broadcasters who are fierce defenders of the space, and who are as passionate about Hörspiel as we are. They are the best in the world, and without them, I suspect the space would quickly shut down.

Yes, Sherre, neoliberalism’s “insidious hold” is the stranglehold we must break, though I remain adamant that form (that embodies both a poetics and a politics) offers a powerful means of resistance: against the thin neoliberal gruel, we must offer inviting, open, idiosyncratic, personal sorts of Hörspiel that deliver pleasure and mystery to listeners, rather than inject them with easily digestible (lifeless) content.

Felix, please help me lure Herr Bohlen from his preferred Nacht und Nebel to join us here in this mix!

<https://www.srf.ch/sendungen/hoerspiel/sag-doch-auch-mal-was-von-hermann-bohlen>



Joan Schuman

August 26, 2017 at 2:57 pm

Actually, Felix, I’m happy to share with you and others that radio plays, documentaries, strange wordy-oriented radio pieces in languages other than English *can* be subtitled.

About a year or two ago, a project launched out of the UK called “Radio Atlas” that does just that: offers subtitles while you listen to the radio piece. Sometimes you hear enough English (or I do, anyway) that I get the gist of it; then I read the subtitles. I return to re-listen to just the sounds. I feel the same way I do when I discover a newly translated novel, knowing that so much is available in other cultures that I can barely tap into (not because I won’t or can’t or don’t want to, but rather due to the energies and insistence of the English-speaking world to focus only on English-language culture, be it writing, radio, film, etc.).

Radio Atlas is all online—or at least that is the way I access it from here in the States. But in the upcoming audio festival where I’ll be presenting a session about this Earlid forum, there’s an evening of ‘live’ presentation of Radio Atlas with subtitled works to be ‘aired’ in a theater space. I’m very excited to see and hear how this experience of non-English-language works will be received. The festival takes place in Philadelphia in mid-September.

Radio Atlas
<http://www.radioatlas.org/>

Megapolis Sound Art Festival
<http://megapolisfestival.org/artists/philadelphia-2017/>

Hermann Bohlen

August 28, 2017 at 6:57 pm

Good evening Kolleginnen und Kollegen!

When I read the name „earlid“ of this forum I was instantly reminded of an essay by Jean Paul, hidden in his novel „Dr. Katzenberger Badereise“ from 1809. In it the author reflects the disadvantages of having no earlids. The essay is entitled „Das Glück auf dem linken Ohre taub zu sein“ (The fortune to be deaf on left ear) – and that’s exactly where his thoughts on missing earlids end: Right at Jean Paul’s exclusive advantage of being deaf on the left side. After he layed down his right ear on the pillow he was completly shut off und fell asleep fast.

Thank you Gregory and Felix for the invitation to join!

I am glad to sit here for a while and listen or comment or console.

Good night, liebe Kolleginnen und Kollegen!
Hermann

<http://gutenberg.spiegel.de/buch/dr-katzenbergers-badereise-3192/3>



Joan Schuman

September 1, 2017 at 4:11 pm

The phonograph was invented in 1877, fashioned in the shape and likeness of our bodies. Machines tend towards this shapeliness.

I’m reminded, Hermann, from your recollection from this early novel, about another, later tale—in 1886, a story written by Villiers de l’Isle-Adam called “L’Eve Future,” whose author was enamored with noises from the past that could not be recorded.

“I would have complained that while the phonograph was reproducing sounds, it was unable to represent the sound, say, of the fall of the Roman Empire. It can’t record an eloquent silence or the sound of rumors.”

These kinds of ‘lamentations’ remind us of our long-standing relationship with machines and metaphor. And yet the longest-lived one is with our ears, lidless and open, always. Our brains miraculously mold a story among the sounds.

In the 1920s at the birth of popular radio broadcasting, philosopher Martin Heidegger writes about similar relationships in the 'wireless' both bringing communities closer and widening them, and thus overcoming distances of bodies and media and machines.

It's resonant with this new 'wireless' geography of nowhere here online. We've landed on these ideas throughout this fascinating summer-long forum, finding ways to wrap our ears around changes to the mediated radio landscape across decades (for some of us) and across more recent time-frames. Geography, in a way, almost doesn't matter 'here' online. The experience of the listener is saliently on our minds.

Dichotomies prevail, and I feel a warning is useful, around contentions of form as 'opposed to' content. Some projects I've worked on and/or listened to sound quite conventional until you deeply focus on the story. There is so much experimenting one can do with narrative (not just structure, but at the very base of its matter). To point to form as the only risk omits the power of narrative. If the metaphor of a story is so subtle as to kick me awake after reading and wonder if I dreamed its essence, I will revel in its content, no matter if the form looks just like another book.

I digress, but written narrative has a kindred relation to some radio experiments. Sometimes the whole bath doesn't have to be tossed in order to come clean and make something new. I mention this at the very launch of the forum about re-invention and radio. It seems we could land there and wonder about radioesque spaces, consider where we've been and where we want to go.

Lee De Forrest (born just a little before the phonograph came to life, self-described "Father of Radio") claimed radio was intangible yet solid as granite, imponderable yet most substantial. How do we grasp something that offers us such contrasts?

Thank you all for your vibrancy, resonance, shades of subtlety; for your poetics of audio.

Miyuki Jokiranta

September 1, 2017 at 11:10 pm

Dear all,

I've been dipping in and out, reading the discussion over these past weeks, poised over the keyboard, but a little overwhelmed as to what to respond to.

First, thank you to Joan and Gregory for bringing such a diverse and accomplished group of artists and thinkers together.

Up until the beginning of this year I was working on a program called Soundproof. Since it was taken off air I have remained on at the ABC standing with a foot on either side of a cracking ice-shelf, with radio on one side, podcasting on the other (the gulf ever widening). I agree the forms are vastly different, but I have to (choose to?) believe not irreconcilable. I've found drawing out difference between forms shuts down the space they share and so have been curious about models of intersectionality. Podcasting is a difficult term that refers to both a technological platform and, increasingly, a specific and all too often normative and neo-liberal culture. Understanding and communicating (upending?) the difference is key to opening the use of these technologies to more creative and inclusive ends.

Now a few months on from the end of the show (still sore...) I've been thinking through what a version of it would be as a podcast. I hope to be proven wrong, but am certain it will never feel

buoyed by the airwaves of the broadcaster again. And so, I think what I can offer to this thread is some questions I have been grappling with that will form the beginnings of something new...

Always partial to a manifesto, I've returned to Christof Migone's Radio Naked (<http://christofmigone.com/RadioNaked>) as a source of inspiration. What would some of this disruption look like in the online space?

Recently I've been collaborating with a small group with the goal of creating some form of online object that is anathema to the reams of 'storytelling' flooding my ears. And conversations around experimenting with the RSS have been bubbling up. Entwined in radio art is the act of transmission, could the technology, the techne, of RSS be commented on in the podcast form?

This week, I learnt that RTE in Ireland and Catalunya Música in Spain have both lost their radio art/ electroacoustic music programs. And there has been a suggestion of a network that spans both broadcasters, independents, online, community groups, et al, gathered around the form rather than the platform or the brand. (very nascent though, nothing quotable yet!)

In other words, what would Max Neuhaus' Radio Net sound like networked across platforms?

As Gareth's comprehensive post mentioned, there are a few folk producing shows of difference, that to my ears understand and interrogate the form. I think of The White Whale (<http://www.cynarpictures.com/the-white-whale>) and Mad Manor (<http://www.madmanor.com/>), The Fifth Runway (<https://soundcloud.com/buildmusic>) and The Basement Tapes of the Mole Cabal (<http://www.fancystitchmachine.org/fsm/tapes.htm>). Thank you GW for that tip off. I've no doubt more are to come and it's with a mix of patience and resistance I watch the horizon.

By no means am I capitulating to the podspace, I'll always advocate for radio, but I am trying to think through tactical uses of digital and analogue technologies in tandem to shape new spaces for creative work. Here in Australia, we have been and will continue to be very reliant on the AM transmissions to cover this vast territory. I grew up on our radio waves, but at the same time was shocked, shaped and formed by the treasure trove ubuweb.com...

Thank you all for your fascinating contributions, so much to tuck into! I look forward to returning here over the days and months to come.



[Gregory Whitehead](#)

September 2, 2017 at 3:09 pm

Miyuki, the recent cancellations of the programs in Catalunya and Ireland are part of the same culturally reactionary wave that terminated Soundproof, at a time when you and your colleagues were creating and sustaining one of the most consistently lively and engaging cultural spaces (in any medium!) on the planet.

As I wrote recently to our ars acustica colleagues, shutting down such vivid spaces remains a critical part of the neoliberal dystopia, where anything that eludes easy definition, branding and (most importantly) statistical measurement must be obliterated. In a way, this flattening represents

the import of market-evaluation criteria that have been perfected within the internet (fetishizing the number of eyeballs, clicks and downloads) into a space that is by its very nature far more ambiguous than that, and natural resistant to such fatuous and superficial tabulations, as is the case with any truly public space.

The prevailing business model sucks all resources to top management who then justify their obscene salaries with endless restructuring, squeezing artists and experimentation out of the mix until nothing is left but rinds and peels. I smell death everywhere in their perverse “strategic plans” and “implementation schedules”, and indeed this throttling of polyphony connects to other elements of the burgeoning crisis, whether embodied in other creatures through the Sixth Extinction, or expressed through the emergence of a global precariat, obliged to live on crumbs shaken from the napkins of the .001%, with the exception of a handful of compliant and obedient “stars”, who then provide a sort of sycophantic glamour for the ensuing danse macabre sans fin.

You mention discussions, still tentative, regarding the creation of a different platform, one that would bridge all of our different practices. Since corporations have hijacked the existing public radio systems, we need to incubate a new sort of public radio, or a public space within which radio provides one pulse among others. Can podcast be transformed in a way that becomes part of this new public space, and less of an expression of the neoliberal dystopia, where bots compete with each other to secure top ranking for their humanoid brands? Yes of course, but only if we can give those podcasts a different autonomous context!

Joan and I hoped that this forum might help in imagining and then creating a deeply alternative sort of media space, cooperatively owned and sustained, within which ALL of the audio arts might take hold and thrive. Though on Tuesday this particular session of the forum will come to a close, we will talk about what might come next, in support of creating a genuine alternative.

Until then, many thanks to all contributors, and to Earlid’s curator/editor/convener extraordinaire: Joan Schuman. To be continued!

[Dragan Todorovic](#)

September 5, 2017 at 12:59 am

1

One of the pioneers of sound art, professor Arsenije Arsa Jovanovic, created his extraterrestrial sound experiments in the state owned studios of Radio Belgrade in the years when communism was alive and well and Yugoslavia instilled pride in its citizens. I was in my early teenage years when I heard first of his works and I was immediately stricken by the conscious oddity of that experience. His compositions are usually the opposite of what a ‘normal’ radio would emit (keep in mind that this is the same radio that had launched one of the greatest hits of all times, Lili Marlene), but the reason they were played in handsome time slots was that Jovanovic regularly submitted his works to international competitions and often won awards for his work. State media adore winners, and so even his most esoteric works got their air time.

When I read the review of one of the early works of Marina Abramovic in Belgrade’s Student Cultural Centre I encountered the same feeling (at about the same time). These artists taught me that strangeness is a means of communication, not an exit into personal exile, as is usually perceived. Another thing common to both Jovanovic and Abramovic is that they arrived into my life through criticism.

2

Artists walk with fire. Critics walk with water.

A good fire boils water and turns it into soup. Soup is good for the soul. The soul feeds 10,000 people with two fish.

That's how art works, and criticism with it.

3

BBC Radio Three has just announced that they will experiment with 'slow radio'. Imagine long sequences of someone's footsteps, breathing, wind—uninterrupted (more here: <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2017/aug/30/bbc-radio-3-slow-radio-programmes-walkers-boots-chanting-monks>)—monks chanting, such stuff. Editing seems to have gone out of fashion.

I was once, in a public debate, attacked by purists for having a narrative in my non-written art. The narrative was surreal, tightly edited and was there primarily as a backbone unifying disparate bosons, yet it still brought foam to their mouths.

But I've always thought that narrative is the central ingredient of everything we do, so if you don't take care of the narrative, the narrative will take care of you.

4

There is always that reluctance about giving a critic too much power, and that is understandable—nobody should be given an unchecked power, as there is no such thing as 'power for good'. But as a creator of narratives and an occasional artist I would rather live under the shadow of a volcano than in a windswept naked field. Seeing one's work in perspective, placed within a frame of contemporary, is an excellent creative tool, which can be—and so often is!—a source of further development, of new shifts and turns in one's own paradigm. Just one word: Bowie.

5

I am inclined to believe that the great Japanese artist Takehisa Kosugi is right in his choice of terms when he claims that it is not about making music or sound art, but about events. I always apologise for interpreting other artists, but if I'm not mistaken his notion of events means that there is a clear relationship between sound and environment. That relationship is not necessarily defined, as—indeed—it is often based on his art of setting traps for the sound instead of creating it.

To me, this is the place where the reality and the intervention interact, and that aspect is truly universal. Philosophical even. By intervening into the tissue surrounding us we add to it, but we also illuminate it, dissect it, take away from it, we have a full sexual intercourse with the reality. And there we clash with what Gregory Whitehead calls reactionary wave: we are unwelcome to do it. Experimental is the enemy of business plans, and it would be better if we could somehow implement monetisation of our art(s). That Facebook thumb up has gone back to its gladiatorial origins: live, or die ignored.

I get scared when something I have done becomes liked on social networks. I get worried. My works are not my babies. They are meant to be sophisticated instruments of questioning, hence possibly the instruments of torture. When the hive likes some of it, I am unhappy. I've done bad. I lived in the hive, I've seen how it works, how it eats people alive, destroys without building, annihilates without a palimpsest.

Critics are an antidote to the hive. Let's observe how Michiko Kakutani's departure from the New York Times affects the American publishing scene. My projection is that the horrible Nielsen BookScan will now fully replace editorial brains, leading to many more shades of grey than we think we can take.



Joan Schuman

September 5, 2017 at 10:09 am

The synergy between Miyuki's and Dragan's comments, here at the end of "Radio's Art" leaves us with testimony, a way back to this forum's beginnings. A snake and its tail or a spiral has formed and I trust we will navigate these swirls.

From radio to podspace, from listener to critic.

Ears wide open, happily lacking lids