,,,,,,,,,,, Radiospace

> Radio is no longer what it was once regulated to become, a device for recep-
> tion-only of commercial /institutionalized productions. On the contrary, contem-
> porary radio artists from around the world have begun to experiment with these
> traditional notions of radio as a reception device, by cracking it wide open to
> expose the myriad wavelengths, frequencies and bandwidths that comprise
> radio's multiple, yet often inaudible, uses. It is this actual materiality of the radio,
> the radio as instrument and the radio as medium, that forms the substance of
> today's radio art.[1]

The image of radio art has long been molded—above all in Europe—by the so-called Ars
Acustica group of the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), a coalition formed in 1989
by the radio art departments of the major public broadcasting companies. Klaus Schön-
ing, the founder of this group and the coiner of the term Ars Acustica, presented this
artform in 1987 in its own domain at the Documenta as a genre rooted in the early 20th-
century avant-garde and defined it as art initiated and administered by radio and its experts.[2]
By "radio," he meant public broadcasting stations, and "experts" referred to the editors
and sound engineers responsible for it.

However, there has long been another sort of radio art to which scant attention has been
paid by European public broadcasting experts and what little literature there exists on
this subject: radio art in the so-called tertiary sector of non-commercial local and regional
cultural stations in the US, on the community and subscription stations in Australia, and
on Canadian C/C (community and campus) radio stations. This comparatively "impov-
erished" radio art that has no state-of-the-art studios, sound engineers or assistant direc-
tors and no artists' fees at its disposal—though, on the other hand, more frequent time-
slots were often made available for it, and these were often multi-hour blocks at night
and on a regular weekly basis—was bolstered by criticism of the support structure made
available by the commercial art world on one hand and by the regulations of the main-
stream broadcasting media on the other.

In an internationally unique 1992[3] overview entitled *Selected Survey of Radio Art in Canada
from 1967 to 1992,* artist/curator Dan Lander wrote:

> "… there is a common thread of critical concern regarding the state of contem-
> porary radio, the end result of which constitutes a kind of love/hate relation-
> ship with the medium. This is made tangible by artists' desire to reinvent the
> medium through deconstruction and/or reconstruction, the use of 'dangerous'
> contents and the refusal to produce works that easily fit into the categories of
> sanctioned radio broadcast."
> And curator Daina Augaitis added: "A predominant feature of radio art is a resist-
> ance against state regulation of the airwaves and the many subtle and overt
> levels of control that have resulted. Not only is government censorship an issue,
> so too is corporate power."

Artists closely aligned with the Fluxus movement or conceptual art regarded the uncom-
plicated access to the tertiary broadcasting sector—to the extent that one even existed
in particular countries, such as Austria, for example, where it has a very brief history—
as a possibility to put their dematerialized art on display directly without mediators and
curators in a radio space that was often conceived of as sculptural (meaning that it was
determined by the respective individuals receiving it). Some artists with their own radio
programs became important nodes in a worldwide mail-art network for audio cassettes,

for which, for example, Rik Rue produced live radio mixes with the help of what was at the time a very compact portable studio. Twenty years later, Rue, the "elder statesman of Australian sound collage" (Illegal Arts) is still putting together live on-the-air collages including everything that reaches him by mail via his Pedestrian Tapes label together with other found sounds. He is among the radical skeptics of traditional conceptions of a finished work, of intellectual property, and of previous practices of what has today become such virulent exchange among like-minded peers. Others, such as Maurizio Nanucci on his Radio Zona in Italy, thematicize the concept of radio as archive that attains new dimensions by means of data banks in which all available sound files and streams are stored. Meanwhile, the endless unedited conversations with artists and curators Great Britain's Bill Furlong puts out on his Audio Arts cassettes are unlike anything that has ever been disseminated in any format, broadcasting or print.

Several individuals who called themselves radio artists—some of whom, like Hank Bull in Vancouver, produced live radio art shows over the course of many years—were, in the late 70's, among the pioneers of telecommunications art that was being produced by artists aligned in what were then new global computer networks (in contrast to often rigidly controlled art and media enterprises) and collaborating independently with globally dispersed peer nodes.

Kunstradio was launched in late 1987 as a weekly radio art program on station Ö1 of the Austrian Broadcasting Company (ORF) and defined itself (on the basis of prior encounters with radio artists and telecommunications projects) right from the start as a facility to provide artists with open access to the context of public broadcasting radio, whereby it has always been the artists themselves who are regarded as the experts and their concepts are seen as being more important than the institution's rules.

In his essay "Subverting Global Frequencies: Experimental Art Radio and the ORF," American literary scholar Daniel Gilfillan wrote:

> Public access, public domain, public broadcasting, public reception; these are all concepts that uphold a regulatory system and gatekeeper function of haves and have-nots; a structure based on a notion of access which is itself regulated by granting agencies, and systems of content surveillance. Where the Kunstradio-Radiokunst project builds bridges of access to the means of production symbolized by the ORF broadcasting monopoly, various individual artists of artist groups supported by the project have applied unsanctioned techniques of pirate radio and tactical media in the creation of their radio pieces, which in a type of subversive sleight of hand, are happily broadcast as part of the cultural programming on ORF. Where the semantics of public access and public domain remain lodged within the discursive vocabularies presided over by commercial broadcasting companies and regulatory commissions, the subterranean artistic techniques and media dialogs facilitated by certain radio artists tunnel beneath established notions of radio programming, and radio administration to create a new system of radiophonic space, a volatile system of channels unsettling to the dominant telecommunications paradigms representative of the convergent systems of globalization.[4]

Daniel Gilfillan's essay dealt primarily with the work of Radio Subcom (Armin Medosch and Oil Blo), which had already linked up with *Kunstradio* in 1988. Back in those days, Bruno Beusch was also a member of the *Kunstradio* circle. Shortly thereafter, he joined up with Tina Cassani and began to develop complex projects (media-fictions) in which, first and foremost, the traditional roles of curator / producer and artist, media theory and practice, as well as concepts of work and material were called into question and even

turned on their head in an innovative and radical way through a process of interaction with those who played those roles *(Besuch in S)*.[5]

Josef Klammer and Seppo Gründler, Mia Zabelka and Andres Bosshard, x-space (Gerfried Stocker, Horst Hörtner, Martin Schitter) and Giardini Pensili (Roberto Paci Dalò, Isabella Bordoni) were among the many artists who more or less simultaneously approached *Kunstradio* with proposals for projects that were taking a variety of different approaches to the medium of radio that had been regulated down to the status of a one-way broadcasting mode and linking it up to the horizontal paradigm of telecommunications art.

Explicitly citing the model of *Die Welt in 24 Stunden,*[6] the classic of telecommunications art from 1982, artists eventually got together in 1995 to produce the legendary 24-hour project entitled *Horizontal Radio.*[7] This network was made up of nodes that enjoyed equal rights with respect to one another, were self-administered, often physically distant from one another, and had highly divergent technical facilities at their disposal, whereby they often, in rather bizarre and untested ways, linked up old-fashioned technology with the state of the art and used a wide variety of channels, lines, routers and servers, as well as the entire spectrum of broadcasting models ranging from public broadcasting stations to pirate radio. The result was radio produced in the studio just like it was being done in broadcasters' own living rooms without electric power in Sarajevo. The artists from x-space conceived and actively collaborated to set up and administer a hub for *Horizontal Radio* located in Linz. In going about this, these artists drew inspiration from, among other things, a strategic tradition that artist-engineers like Max Neuhaus in the '60s or Bill Fontana somewhat later used to realize their innovative live radio art projects: they first established alliances with "internal experts" at larger radio stations in order to gain access to transmission facilities and then ultimately to utilize these in ways that were totally different than what the institutional experts had foreseen.[8]

Kunstradio on Line[9] was launched in 1995 as an independent art project, and was followed in 1996 by *Rivers & Bridges.*[10] This successor project to *Horizontal Radio* debuted with an 18-hour nonstop broadcast and today is still streaming a website that is designed by artists and has become a one-of-a-kind archive of radio art. "On-the-air, on-site and online" is how such projects were subtitled as soon as the artists recognized that the streaming technologies enabled them to emancipate themselves from the timeslots and hard-and-fast networks of the major radio institutions. In network-linked streaming projects that sometimes went on nonstop over the course of weeks, performances as input/output of local nodes were more and more often replaced by generative installations that were likewise network-linked. Traditional live radio broadcasts within the framework of such projects have always been conceived as temporarily open windows permitting a glimpse into a complex, networked, international production system of a different sort of radio in which, among numerous contrasts, the copyright conceptions of the institutions are deactivated and are replaced by new concepts. "Recycling the Future IV"[11] was produced in Vienna in 1997 by Bruno Beusch and Tina Cassani, who for the previous two years had already been operating their *TNC Network* as an art project featuring spectacular network link-ups of personalities, stations, event locations, online communities, listeners and other segments of the public from the pop and art scene. In doing so, they joined a long tradition in which artists assembled networks and thereby created "spaces of art"[12] in which others could interact. Beusch and Cassani declared: "It's clear that such processes based on the production, hierarchy and responsibility structures of networked systems can no longer be thought of in terms of a conventional production pattern. The authority of an author over a work is replaced by what we transcribe with the term 'joint process and data management.'"

In the meantime, in a far less spectacular way, this 'joint process and data management' has increasingly established itself in the everyday process of radio production—though, unfortunately, above all by means of the concept of syndication of contents that is not entirely unsullied by its association with the staff-downsizing, profit-maximizing practices of the commercial media and/or media conglomerates. Despite all reservations, as artist Matt Smith put it in his address at the 2004 Radiobiennale in Mexico City,[13] syndication is, however: "… one of the most simple and powerful ways to maximize impact of independently produced content, and is increasingly used also in community and college radio stations to re-broadcast each other's shows. A more radical project reflecting an alternative approach to syndication is Radio90.fm. It was conceived, designed and implemented in the late 90's by the British artist and activist Heath Bunting at the Banff Centre for the Arts in Banff, Alberta, Canada. Basically it is an automated FM radio station, re-broadcasting independent content available on the internet via a microtransmitter. It can be received in the village of Banff and the freeway in its immediate area, as well as by the hordes of tourists roaming the surrounding mountains. The transmitter is fed by a server running software called the World Service Scheduler, a system for creating a playlist with independent programming from internet broadcasters. Participating stations can then collectively administrate a schedule for the Radio90 broadcasts, and select material to re-broadcast on their own FM transmitter, if they have one. Of course the general internet-using public can also access the World Service Scheduler, on line it offers various ways to access different streams at any given time.

Another good example of the syndicated media formats that are developing are websites like indymedia.org. Geared toward maximizing the options for delivering independent information, Indymedia's concept encourages the blurring of audience and producers."

Here a minor, hardly noticed piece of the history of the Ars Electronica Center: Matt Smith has been a part of FirstFloorElectronix and FirstFlooRadio, one of those nodes that was operating completely beyond the pale of institutionalized broadcast paradigms and one that, among others, *Kunstradio* could rely on repeatedly in its highly brachiated, decentralized productions.[14] The speed with which underground methods in Linz have turned into everyday radio practice in Vancouver, for example, is a topic that the following two excerpts from Matt Smith's address shed some light on.

> FirstFlooRadio has been a facilitator of low-budget and underground projects. In the period from 1995 to 1997 it used the network and hardware available at the Ars Electronica Center to push the envelope of network-based renegade broadcasting. As a program or content distributor it started as a pre-recorded show, streamed "live" from a desktop computer at the Ars Electronica Center in Linz Austria to the then-pirate FM radio station RadioFRO (also in Linz, Austria). At the same time FirstFloor organized the first internet-transmissions for events hosted by the Ars Electronica Center. Using this experience FirstFlooRadio started providing a small North American network for independent webcasts together with the Western Front in Vancouver and The Thing in New York City. The goal was to give groups with ideas but little or no know-how and equipment an opportunity to experiment with online-broadcasting while it was fresh and undefined. Now FirstFlooRadio is mainly a traditional radio show on CITR.[15]

This three-hour-long, live, nighttime show is a radio art project-in-process that has been aired weekly since 1999. CITR, on the other hand, is the station of the University of British Columbia that celebrated its 65th anniversary in 2002 and its eventful history as a popular, alternative, local station manned mostly by unpaid volunteers. CITR comes up over and over again in the history of radio art for achievements such as a series of 24-hour,

live/on-the-air/online radio art productions and the internationally network-linked "Art's Birthday" celebrations of 1999, 2000, 2002 and 2003.

"FirstFlooRadio got involved with CITR in 1999, on invitation of (radio-artist and then station-manager) Anna Friz to organize the first permanent internet-feed, as well as integrate play-back from the internet into the studio's console. Slowly, the idea was pushed to reality by Anna, and about a year later, as part of a major upgrade of the station, a computer was installed to receive audio from the net. Within weeks, downloading audio for play-back was something most DJs had at least tried out. Now nobody can imagine not to have this option, and the computer is being used for receiving online communication from listeners as well as simple administrative tasks such as entering playlists. DJs can now even burn archives of their show to CD directly from the studio computer. Others install weird audio programs and mess around with those. These interesting developments reflect how the new technologies are perpetuating the old broadcasting formats into the "Digi-tal Era"—nearly every radio station now broadcasts in some form on the internet, and most of them have web sites supporting and complementing their on-air programming. Even some of the (more adventurous) commercial efforts already incorporate opportu-nities for listeners to not only submit commentary, but even upload their own audio content for potential broadcast by the station."[16]

Today, under the onslaught of newer technologies, radio—in spite of the many predictions to the contrary—is anything but dead. Instead, it has been continually expanding, has re-mediatized in complex processes and has, in turn, had an impact upon other new media such as TV and the new formats of streaming technologies. "Expanded radio art" was the experimental name *Kunstradio* gave to those art projects that extended far beyond the tradi-tional broadcast medium and the Webradio stations formatted in their image, and under-took expeditions into a much larger and more transient radio space that was continually constituting itself anew. The navigational instruments include tiny, homemade—and never-theless translocal—transceivers, packet radio from the MIR space station, radio transmissions from the cockpit of an intercontinental jet, reworking of data from weather satellites and stations observing seismic movements, "radio astronomy" (radioqualia), and the abstrac-tion of dispersed data streams from performances and installations specially configured for network-linked data dissemination to and/or reception from simultaneously active nodes.

> So in the last 100 years radio has come full circle, from being a utilitarian commu-nication tool for ships talking to shore and vice versa, over becoming the most powerful and controlled propaganda tool ever used by governments […] to, most recently—by virtue of its technological concept—radio-transmission, which is quickly becoming the main tool for person-to-person communication (through cellular telephones etc.) as well as machine-to-machine communication, being the fastest growing carrier for data-transmissions (satellites and Wireless Local Area Networks).
>
> [....]
>
> … it is very tempting to make the connection between radio as a medium and radio as a technology by including the new forms of radio-transmission inde-pendently of their intended use and format. In other words, if one disregards the conventional separation between format and technology, cellular telephones, wireless local area networks, satellite communication, the traditional HAM and CB radio systems and, of course, all the various micro-transmitters used either privately or for macro-broadcasting in small areas represent the modern face of radio together with AM/FM, as a medium and a technology.[17]

In the "monstrous channel system" (B. Brecht) that is undergoing constant change in

processes of network-linkage and reciprocal saturation and re-mediatization of the entire spectrum of communications channels as well as older and newer radio technologies, artists and activists thus continue to create spaces for art and interaction in which they repeatedly come up with another sort of radio and its inherent utopia of a universally accessible "communication apparatus" (B. Brecht) and analyze and criticize this constantly recurring quotation. Over and over again, art projects of this kind generate different pictures of what radio is today, formerly was, and one day could be, whereby what also emerges—whether intentionally or not—are the dystopias of the immediate monopolization of every new telecommunications technology not only as a "distribution apparatus" in a powerfully networked marketing system but also its perversion into an all-pervasive apparatus of control and surveillance. Nevertheless, the network-linkages among the communities of artists and activists working tirelessly and in so many different ways on alternatives to this development are growing as well.

> „Never before has there been so much opportunity to communicate and exchange work and ideas," said Matt Smith and took his place among the ranks of those producing that rich genre of art that is constantly oscillating between marginalization by the institutions of art and media and disappearance in the ever-changing everyday practice of radio production when he went on to say: "Providing artists and producers stay on the leading edge, using and especially abusing the offered technologies to their fullest extent, it may be possible to wrestle some control over our future culture back from the corporate entities currently controlling the media.

Translated from the German by Mel Greenwald

▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

1   Gilfillan, Daniel: *Subverting Global Frequencies: Experimental Art Radio and the ORF,* Arizona State University
2   Schöning, Klaus: "Auf den Spuren der 'akustischen Kunst,'" in: *Radio. In: documenta 8, Kassel 1987,* Vol. 1, and "Audiothek: Akustische Kunst," in *documenta 8, Kassel 1987,* Vol. 2, Webhofer & Weidemeyer, Kassel 1987
3   "Selected Survey of Radio Art in Canada, 1967 – 1992" was initially part of an exhibition in conjunction with the international symposium "Radio Rethink: Art, Sound and Transmission" at the Walter Phillips Gallery in the Banff Centre of the Arts in the Canadian Rockies. *Selected Survey of Radio Art in Canada, 1967 – 1992* appeared in 1994 (assembled and published by Dan Lander) as an accompaniment to the book/CD *Radio Rethink: Art, Sound and Transmission* (edited by Daina Augaitis and Dan Lander), Walter Phillips Gallery, The Banff Centre of the Arts, 1994
4   op. cit.
5   See Beusch / Cassani: *Besuch (Visite) in S. Ein akustischer Führer durch eine 40-minütige Ausstellung. Guide Aucoustique pour une Exposition de 40 minutes.* Compact Disc including Kunstradio des Österreichischen Rundfunks, Schweizer Radio DRS—2 Radio France / France Culture ACR. Kunsthalle Luzern Helmhaus Zürich Centre Culturel Suisse/Paris Wiener Secession 1992
6   Also see the article by Robert Adrian on p. 172 of this catalog.
7   Also see *http://kunstradio.at/HORRAD/horrad.html*
8   Also see Max Neuhaus in Symposium Texts at *http:// kunstradio.at/ZEITGLEICH/*
9   *http://kunstradio.at*
10 *http://kunstradio.at/RIV_BRI/index.html*
11 *http://kunstradio.at/FUTURE/RTF/index.html*
12 Also see the article by Robert Adrian on p. 172 of this catalog.
13 Smith, Matt, "Some Thoughts on Radio as Format and Technology," speech, Quinta Bienal Internacional de Radio 2004, Mexico City. The text of this speech will be published in the documentation of the Biennale.
14 During the "Long Night of Radio Art" broadcast at the 1997 Ars Electronica Festival, FFR was also the first to be able to convince the highly skeptical Austrian Broadcasting Company sound engineers that the audio streams that are essential for network-linked art radio projects could assume an important function as input for live radio mixes on a public broadcasting station and could also achieve a thoroughly satisfactory broadcast quality.
15 Also see *http://www.firstfloor.org/eastside/FFradio.html*
16 op. cit.
17 Matt Smith, op.cit.