Mapping – Der Diskurs der Klangkunst
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Looking at RadioArt today we are presented with an interesting paradox: on the one hand we witness a waning commitment on the part of public radio to artistic experiment, on the other there is an increasing interest in radio practice from outside the broadcast institutions. The urge to understand this situation in its evolution and possible prospects leads us straight into a complex interplay between diverse determining factors. Without taking these into account, we run the risk of remaining in the grip of outmoded aesthetic, political and ideological ideas, and of being overwhelmed by dystopian visions - or no vision at all. To free our minds from these limitations: therein lies the efficacy of theory.

One of the biggest impediments to reflection and discussion today seems to be terminological. The use of the term *radio* points in many different directions: to technology, institutions, media, and multifarious journalistic, political, administrative and artistic practices. To get a clearer picture of what is happening we need not only to pool our observations, ideas and experiences, but also to reach a clearer understanding of what exactly it is we are talking about. And as soon as we inquire into a specific radio practice - such as RadioArt - or compare this practice with other artforms - such as SoundArt - the problems begin to mount. Now that all art practice is in full flux, and traditional territories dissolve and merge as we speak, grasping what is happening, and then figuring out what is possible, promises to be challenging.

RadioArt and SoundArt have a long history of entwinement: RadioArt as a single-sense, uni-directional audio practice in a "hot" medium; SoundArt as a multi-sensorial, synergetic, often participatory art practice, in which sound is always *relational* – that is to say, connected to other media: spatial, corporeal, visual or tactile.

Taking account of recent developments, there is certainly more to the relation between Radio and SoundArt than the transmission by radio stations of the radiogenic components of SoundArt[1] or the presentation of RadioArt pieces in live contexts - cinemas, museums, galleries. Despite their fundamental differences, both Radio and SoundArt share a history that started well before radio institutions came into the picture. And the affinity between them has only strengthened over the last decades, during which SoundArt has established itself as a distinct artform, enjoying a continuous widening of its range, while radio has undergone massive and fundamental political, technological and artistic changes[2]. In order to devise effective strategies for future action, we need to understand the forces at work, and the way in which they influence RadioArt practice.

1. Politics

RadioArt was established in the 1960s and blossomed in the 1980s and '90s in publicly funded institutions. As Heidi Grundmann put it - "without the involvement of state radio there would be no

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1 - as were Kubisch's *Six Mirrors*, 1995, or Fontana's *Satellite Bridges,* 1987 &1993.
2 Shingler, Martin: *Sounding Out Radio*. In The Radio Journal – International Studies in Broadcast and Audio Media. Volume 5 Number 1. 2007, p. 5-7.

radio art"[3]. In common with all publicly funded institutions, public radio depended crucially both on the broad political climate - which determined the level and type of support received - and the conceptual direction the institution took. Public radios stated their missions in charters and committed themselves to "promot[e] education and learning" and "stimulat[e] creativity and cultural exchange" (this from the BBC charter). And although RadioArt always had to fight its corner in these institutions, their

charters obliged them to support the development of a RadioArt culture, both inside and outside radio. In the heyday of RadioArt, many public radio stations in Europe, Australia and Canada ran regular weekly RadioArt programmes, funded special departments with permanent staff and large budgets to produce and commission works, awarded special prizes for outstanding pieces, and organized live-telecommunication events, satellite bridges and public concerts. In 1989 the European Broadcasting Union founded a special transnational body uniting RadioArt presenters and producers across all European public radio stations: the *Ars Acoustica*.

Over the last 15 years, and in the wake of developments in the political environment, all this changed. With the shift of power away from politicians as representatives of nation states and into the hands of global businesses, traditional politics came under attack, along with the public funding that supported them. Public radio felt the consequences of this power-shift strongly and had to make substantial concessions in respect of its founding principles. As Western politics and its public institutions felt the tightening grip of 'free market' ideology - and as a new media landscape took shape around it - public radio came under threat, facing growing competition from commercial stations, visual media and new audio technologies, such as podcasting, webcasting, MP3, live streaming and Internet downloads. It reacted by popularising and downsizing: stations were merged[4], staff and budgets were reduced[5] and entire programmes and broadcasting platforms were closed. In an accelerating shift toward 'wider-interest broadcasting' and away from special-interest programming or medium-specific art experiments, RadioArt slots shared their fate with other demanding formats - investigative documentaries, in-depth news programmes; even classical music broadcasts[6]. Quality was increasingly measured in audience numbers, and experimentation in the art domain was deemed not 'efficient'. Public radio would not now venture beyond documentaries and 'imaginative features'. And even they would soon be under threat.

The attachment of new media platforms to terrestrial broadcasting output – such as websites - made the process seem less drastic[7], since these were not only welcome additional outlets, but also became places of exile to which unconventional programmes could be banished. This was the approach of Australia's ABC to RadioArt when they shut down the *The Listening Room*[8] and Netherlands's VPRO's when it exiled its *Café Sonore*.

With the new priorities, RadioArt's commission budgets were drastically reduced[9]. Under

3 Musicworks #53, 20.

4 For instance, in Germany SDR and SWF merged into SWR in 1998; SFB and ORB into RBB in 2003.

5 in 2007 RTVE in Spain reduced their staff by 40%, retiring people in their thousands. In the same year there were drastic staff cuts at the BBC in England.

6 http://www.dasganzewerk.de.

7 Strategies were devised to make the process seem less drastic: for instance, the posts of retiring RadioArt producers were quietly eliminated and the heterogeneous output of RadioArt departments split up - the "more musical" works being shifted into traditional classical music programmes while experimental, noise-related pieces were banished onto the internet or LoFi AM mono.

8 Black (2005), p.11

9 The *ABC Acoustic Arts Unit*, for instance, commissioned 27 new works in 199. By 2004-05 this was down to 12 (Black (2005), p.12)

pressure, programmers adapted, by devising new formats: *EarClips*[10], for instance - short-format sound pieces inserted into regular programming to accommodate wider audiences and a low-attention-span culture. But in the broader scheme of things, such strategies could not turn back the tide of downsizing and, eventually, long-established RadioArt departments were shut down altogether - ABC Australia's *The Listening Room* (1988-2003), ChaÎne Culturelle de Radio-Canada's *L'Espace du Son* (1997-2001) and SFB/ RRB Germany's *Internationale digitale Radiokunst* (1994-2006), to name only a few. Fights against these closures were bitter: petitions and protest letters were written and signed and original radio mission statements cited to remind institutions of their founding mandates. The results were negligible. Today we look at a much depleted - and largely frustrated - RadioArt scene in European public radio, with only few survivors left standing.

If the BBC is anything to go by, we can expect further changes in the profile of public radio. Under constant pressure from competitors and politicians, the BBC – one of the oldest and most prestigious representatives of public radio - already out-sources large parts of its programme production to private companies, "ensur[ing]" as the BBC's recent Strategic Review[11] testified, "its own future irrelevance"[12] by preemptively censoring its own assets.[13]

In this general context, the prognosis of Danish Radio's Hans Peter Larsen has proved accurate: six years ago, he called RadioArt "a dying genre" since "stations will not have the resources for it in future."[14]

However, RadioArt in public still has one advantage: it has always kept one foot in the real world, drawing widely from art practice and often placing its own products in the world outside radio, collaborating with external institutions and initiatives. This may yet prove a great asset for its future development, especially in view of the nature of current technological developments.

2. Technology

When RadioArt was established, public radio was an institution that had a lot to offer the artists it embraced - not only money, but also state-of-the-art recording equipment, studios and transmission technology. This made public radio an exceptional place for sonic experimentation. This 'advantage through technology' has now mostly disappeared. Today, new technologies have provided alternatives to terrestrial broadcasting and introduced very different ways of communicating within very different power formations – addressing, as Vilém Flusser put it "the horror (that) lies … in the … cables"[15]. Terrestrial broadcasting - the distribution of sound via analogue radio waves – informed a centralized hierarchical structure defined by sameness of time and territory. Through this structure it defined fixed territories, and therewith, local communities for whose wide interest-range it catered. Digital Web 0.2 technologies, on the other hand, give form to a *network*, a bottom-up structure that links interest groups in different – and often distant - places in both real and shifted time. And although public radio makes use of these new technologies, adding another string to its bow, so does everybody else. New digital and web technologies simply overwrite the exclusivity and hegemony of public radio, enabling outsiders to make radio too – just as Pirate, Independent and Community Radio initiatives had before

10 *EarClips* - thematically directed 3-minute sound clips – were introduced in 2002 by *The Listening Room* in Australia. Deutschland Radio Kultur (*Wurfsendungen*) and ORF Kunstradio and BBC also experimented with short-formats.

11 March 2010.

12 Bennun, Paul: BBC Strategic Review & Online: Our Response. 4.3.2010. http://www.somethinelse.com/2010/03/04/bbc-strategic-review-online-our-response/ [accessed 8.4.10]

13 Re: self-harming actions of the BBC "these cuts are totally unnecessary & purely politically motivated".

14 quoted by Colin Black: Radio Art: The age of the "Bunker" Artist, digging in deeper, spreading thinner … Paper submitted for the "Virtual Signs" conference 2005, RMIT University, Australia, p. 15.

15 Flusser, Vilém, Medienkultur, Frankfurt/ Main: Fischer, 1998, p. 73/74.

them, only without the legal limitations of license control.

This process is irreversible. Even if politicians came to their senses and started to invest heavily in public radio, things would never be the same again. The exclusive technological status radio once held is gone for good. New technologies have empowered people to make their own radio. Technological development has worked in favour of a multitude of independent radio practices. A widening of the media base through a combination of terrestrial broadcasting and digital networked narrow-casting – including the internet and the mobile phone – has allowed even small stations to extend their reach.

By the end of the 20th century, independent RadioArt initiatives had sprung up all over Europe. Broadband technology enabled artist-producers to get their hands on the controls and make radio that went far beyond existing formats and programming. These new players wanted to explore the creative potential of radio in their own way and to develop their own ideas without preconceived exclusions, standards or controls. They imagined "a radio without a mission"[16] – not commercial, political or cultural -, a radio made by artists and radio enthusiasts; by *radiasts*. This free-form radio concept was at first embraced by individuals who came together in loose groupings to organise occasional projects or events, eventually setting up independent stations. They then invited outsiders to propose initiatives, try out ideas and come up with new kinds of programming. When *Resonance FM* first came on air in 1998, it had an initial core of 150-200 artist-producers. By 2007, this had expanded to circa 2000 contributors. Using networking technology, independent stations collaborated and expanded into networks. They did not just exchange finished programmes and piece but, for them, radio became a form of collective practice. Some stations collaborated in more or less permanent trans-national networks, such as the European *Radia Network*[17] founded in 2004 by 15 independent FM stations from 13 countries in Eastern and Western Europe, in partnership with OFR *Kunstradio* in Austria. Stations organised multinational projects such as *Radio.Territories*[18], exchanged programmes, ran common events or swapped ideas at project conferences – for instance *Media - Space – Society* in Vienna (2006).

Web and open source technology encouraged artist-producers to combine studio work with live-streaming. This made their broadcasting profile more flexible and open to improvisation. Such Radio is produced in public places: clubs, auditoria, warehouses and outdoors, often with a live audience present and the occasional visual web-cam transmission.

The flexibility of digital technology upgraded the integration of radio transmission and live-performance. The use of radio as a tool for artistic expression and communication resulted in diverse exchanges and collaborative practices, bringing together creative people working with sound – on and off air – and linking them across national borders (Telecommunication). This went far beyond station networking. Radiasts gathered at special festivals such as *Radiophonia 07* (2007) in Brussels and *RadioREVOLTEN* (2006) in Halle. They organised local events, like *Radio Tesla* (*Radio Visionen,* 2007), or *Backyard Radio* in Berlin (2007). They joined workers from other sound and art practices in annual or biennial sound festivals: *Ars Electronica* in Linz, *Sonar* in Barcelona, *Deep Wireless* in Toronto[19] and, until 2008, the *Radio Biennale* in Mexico.

New technological platforms also furthered the artistic combination of radio-sound and other new media. This has become an issue for radio art initiatives working primarily as internet radio

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16 Aufermann, Knut: Telephone interview with author, 19 Sept 2007.
17 www.radia.fm
18 October 2005 to September 2006 - a series of urban and acoustic interventions taking place across Europe.
19 NAISA with CBC/ Canada.

stations, such as *turbulence, transom, Art on Air (*previously WPS1) and *silence radio*[20]. By the end of the 20th century several non-profit organisations had formed around a wider sound or media-art profile – such as *Apo 33* in Nantes, *NAISA New Adventures In Sound Art* in Toronto, *ACSR Atelier de Création Sonore Radiophonique* in Brussels and *free103point9* in New York. They supported and promoted a diversity of practices and media; organised festivals, public performances and exhibitions - and ran on-line radio stations and study centres, workshops, labels, artist-residence programmes, educational initiatives, FM radio stations, and archives.

These radio activities outside the public radio eventually caught the eye of traditional art institutions still firmly anchored in real space and time, as museums and galleries initiated collaborations with independent radio stations: *Resonance* with Tate Modern and The Serpentine Gallery in London; the contemporary art centre PS1/ Museum of Modern Art in New York with its own webradio *WPS1* (*2004), now working independently as *Art on Air'*; *Radio Web MACBA* run by the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (*May 2006). The Venice Biennale also worked with *WPS1 Art Radio* and Italian radiasts in 2005 and 2007. These collaborations signified changes in the art world that went far beyond mere casual alliances. Art itself was in the process of change.

3. Art

Decades before radio stations began to invite artists to experiment with the medium, artists were fascinated by radio technology and worked both with the sounds and the space that radio provides. Already in 1936, John Cage had spoken about his fascination with radio noise as the "static between the stations"[21], later writing pieces using radio as a randomising instrument: *Imaginary Landscapes 4* (1951), for instance. Other musicians, like Keith Rowe and Nick Collins,[22] followed this lead. Composers - Edgard Varèse, in particular - were interested in the spatial dimensions that radio could provide[23], and in 1962 kinetic sculptor Jean Tinguely started to integrate radios into his works, such as *Radio B* (1964). Max Neuhaus used radio transmitters in a number of SoundArt installations, *Drive In Music,* for instance, at Lincoln Parkway in Buffalo, New York, (1967-1968), and in his radio station and telephone network projects: *Public Supply* (1966), *Radio Net* (1977) and *Auracle* (2004).

These artists and many others were using different aspects of radio in their work well before public radio institutions opened their studios to encourage artists to work with sound. In 1969 and 1987 respectively, the Studio Akustische Kunst of the German Radio in Cologne (NWDR)[24] and the Kunstradio-Radiokunst at the Austrian Radio in Vienna (ORF) were pioneering forums for artistic sound experiments.[25] Over the last three decades of the 20th century, public radio stations all over the world followed. By supporting this particular art practice, public radio helped sound cultivate a broader profile, gaining wider recognition and acceptance outside the world of music. It also introduced non-musicians to sound-work, thereby aiding the dissemination of sound into other art forms and contributing to the vast changes the art world has undergone in the last decades.

As sound equipment became increasingly mobile, accessible and easy to use, artists working primarily in other media began to bring sound into their work. This phenomenon, vital to SoundArt, was pioneered by Robert Rauschenberg[26] and Jean Tinguely in the 1960s, accelerating through the

20 http://www.silenceradio.org/
21 John Cage: Credo: Future of Music, 1936.
22 Devil's Music, 1985
23 *Espace,* 1932-1947.
24 founded 1963; since 1969 Neues Hörspiel
25 see also Vancouver Co-op Radio (*1974) and Bologna's Radio Alice (end 1970s)
26 Robert Rauschenberg: *Soundings*, 1968.

next decades in the form of sound installation and sound sculpture until it eventually opened out into synergetic hybrids of video, performance, photography and screen-based art. The current tendency to fuse sound with visual and spatial art forms has exerted a powerful influence on radio artists working *outside* the pure audio space of radio.

Many museums and galleries now incorporate SoundArt projects into their exhibition programming: The Witney Museum of Modern Art in New York, for example, The Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin, The Centre Pompidou in Paris,[27] the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm,[28]The Victoria & Albert Museum and Tate Modern in London[29] - not to mention the emergence of dedicated SoundArt galleries (Galerie Mario Mazzoli, Singuhr in Berlin). Sound artists are now a regular part of the art world, and are represented by prestigious galleries (Bill Fontana by Haunch of Venison). One even made the short list of this year's Turner Prize[30].

These expansions into event and exhibition culture introduced RadioArt to the diverse field of Sound and Media Art, confronting radio artists with new creative possibilities. It was here, in the individual creative process, that the most significant changes occurred: Artists began to cultivate *old* technology, using radio as a *performance tool*, working with the physical properties of the electromagnetic spectrum (TransmissionArt). As Sarah Washington put it: "you want to get your hands on this dying technology before it vanishes; [it's] similar to the use of LPs"[31]. Analogue radio technology now figures in many art practices as a transmission or performance device. Artists like Kaffe Matthews, Robin MacGinley, Charlie Hooker und Christina Kubisch use radios as objects, or radio technology as part of their installation or performance works.

But to individual sound artists it was *new* technology that made all the difference. Affordable sound recording and production equipment, alongside highly sophisticated software, put production tools directly into their hands, allowing them to experiment independently with sound in their bedrooms or home studios, away from the restrictions and interference of established aesthetics and its reinforcers. In this way RadioArt finally revealed itself as what it had always been: audio art played on the radio.

Conclusion: Three tentative prospects for public radio & RadioArt

Coming back to public radio, there is still one great responsibility it has to bear: Over the last 50 years radio has accumulated a vast body of works made in, by and for radio, and owned by public broadcasters. This is a priceless archive, the content of which is completely original. These archives need to be preserved - and with departments and whole stations closing, the danger is imminent that nobody in public radio will any longer relate to this material, which will then fall victim to clearing or downsizing – as happened when the East German Radio closed down at the beginning of the 1990s or when WDR's Studio for Electronic Music was mothballed a few years ago. Making these historical treasures available for generations to come constitutes an urgent challenge for public radio – and some initiatives have already been taken, such as the setting up of a RadioArt Archive in The New Museum Weserburg, in Bremen.

Since RadioArt has now been widely adopted and incorporated into other art practices, one way to be part of these new developments is to get involved with them. This means finding ways to circumvent institutional exclusivity. It has been done successfully in the past – public radio's RadioArt departments have an excellent track record with such initiatives. However, since money is drying

27 *Son et Lumieres,* Pompidou Centre, Paris, Sept 2004 - Jan 2005.
28 Christer Lundahl & Martina Seitl: *Symphony of a Missing Room*, Nationalmuseum 2009
29 *Shhh… Sounds in Spaces*, Victoria & Albert Museum, London, 2004.
30 Susan Philipsz. She also won it.
31 Sarah Washington: Telephone interview with author, Sept 2007.

up, imagination will have to take its place. This should take an inclusive trajectory focused on radio's wider community, rather than on exclusivity, institutional politics and lost causes. Fighting to convince public radio's administrators and technocrats – or even its established audience - that they are missing something, is likely to prove futile in the age of new connectivity and alternative listening communities. Strengthening contacts with one's interest-bound allies outside the institution is likely to be the only way of remaining relevant.

While a strong tendency towards multimedia and synaesthetic experience is apparent in the art world today, we also find a revived and conscious interest in single-sense experience. Since radio was always tightly linked to listening, we can observe a renewed fascination with the medium, especially amongst young technophile artists - an attraction to focused listening in all its different modes, whether deep, semantic or reduced. Diverse types of public listening events - such as acousmatic concerts featuring radio and other sound works - might have a chance in the future. Some producers have a good track record, organising Hörspiel- and RadioArt presentations in cinemas and other venues. This second life of radio productions could create an interesting *niche* in the future.

However, for the time being, we can say that, as the radio majors go digital and commercial, RadioArt has found its way into the broader sound and media art community. So long as it is supported and cared for by radio enthusiasts and artists in independent stations and organisations, it might yet retain its own profile in the great pool of sound and media-based art.