Panel Proposal:
Liberated, outlawed, re-invented?
The crisis of radio art in the digital age

Organiser: Ania Mauruschat, Dipl.-Journ. Univ.
University of Basel, Switzerland
ania.mauruschat@unibas.ch

Panel Abstract

In 1970 Klaus Schöning spoke of Hörspiel as “verwaltete Kunst”: “administered art”. The renowned German editor was referring to the dependency of radio artists on both the technological means of production and the expertise at the public broadcasting stations. A by-product of this dependency was bureaucratic control over production and artists. However, it also guaranteed the existence and possibilities for growth of a powerful yet subtle art form opening a space for diverse and sophisticated developments and bringing in international artists and collaborations.

Almost 50 years later, however, the situation has radically changed: digital technology liberated radio art in all respects. Today, artists are working independently and thus by-pass the ‘gatekeepers’. But with this emancipation, institutionalized radio art is in danger of becoming a “vanishing territory of art” (Virginia Madsen). This holds true especially for Australia: once a leader in the radio arts, today the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) no longer produces or commissions this field of work. In Germany, radio art departments are not immune from attack, and face significant cuts in their budgets. However, artists in love with the medium continue to find spaces to work and re-invent this oldest of electronic art forms, even creating new, subversive art interventions, like LIGNA’s Radio Ballet.

Bio: Ania Mauruschat (Organiser)
Ania Mauruschat researches the alternative history of Hörspiel, the German tradition of radio art, which is transnational and quite entangled. She has lectured on auditory culture and radio art at universities and art schools in Zurich, Vienna, Munich, Basel and Karlsruhe. With an academic background in literature and media studies, along with professional training as a journalist and editor, she has a long record in working for radio and radio art departments. Currently she is completing her PhD thesis on noise and the epistemology of radio art at the University of Basel, Switzerland.
A brief history of radio art at the ABC: from *Listening Room* to no room

Dr Virginia Madsen  
Macquarie University Sydney, Australia  
Director Centre for Media History  
virginia.madsen@mq.edu.au

Abstract

Up to the 1980s the Australian Broadcasting Commission/Corporation (ABC) had devoted little space to the audio arts on air. The predominant pattern of the organization’s first 50 years is marked by brief periods of active interest in radio as a site for artistic expression and provocation with support for innovation and experiment not really growing in any significant way until the 1970s. By the mid 1980s, ABC radio art was transforming in a much more radical way, as artists, performers, composers and writers were invited in and sought out to essay and play with a whole new set of ideas, techniques and forms in a revitalising and changing medium. Through programs like *The Listening Room* and after this *Radio Eye*, the ABC became an influencer itself, recognised as a world leader in radio art – or the art of making radio. In the last 10 years, this position of leadership and influence has however all but vanished. This paper is an act of remembering in a time of active forgetting, particularly as the new managerialists leading the ABC have succeeded in expunging the traces of this long history of creation, jettisoning its last bastion, the Creative Audio Unit. This paper seeks to define a vanishing territory of art through a series of vignettes from this past. In the midst of an overwhelming disavowal of all national and international traditions of radiophonic expressiveness and sonic provocation, we might also ask: where might we find the new rooms for audio experiment and artistic engagement? Is there room for art or true artistic freedom in podcasting’s big bang?

Bio: Dr Virginia Madsen  
Dr Madsen is Director of the Centre for Media History at Macquarie University, Sydney. She also leads the radio strand for MMCCS Dept. Madsen has published widely in the field of radio studies and is an established radio producer whose works have been broadcast in Europe, USA and Australia. Her research interests span the history of public broadcasting in audio media; radio’s documentary forms, traditions and developments; sound and radio production in all aspects; auditory and sound culture studies; new audio media, podcasting and the audio arts. Currently she has two major research projects underway: a history of the Australian public broadcaster’s ‘ideas network’, Radio National, an ARC Discovery Project; and she is also writing an international account of the ‘documentary imagination’ in radio from the 1920s to the present.

Projects and publications:  
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Centre for Media History: https://www.mq.edu.au/research/research-centres-groups-and-facilities/resilient-societies/centres/centre-for-media-history
The re-invention of Hörspiel in the digital age and the dangers of its emancipation

Ania Mauruschat, Dipl.-Journ. Univ.
University of Basel, Switzerland
ania.mauruschat@unibas.ch

Abstract

In 2016 the German radio artist Andreas Ammer and the musicians Andreas Gerth and Martin Gretschmann, together with 1400 fans, produced the longest radio play in history: they turned David Foster Wallace’s novel *Infinite Jest* (1998) into a Hörspiel. Each fan read aloud one page of the novel, and the artists remixed these recordings with the music of an analogue synthesizer, which was constantly playing for an entire year. The final version of the collaborative radio play *Unendliches Spiel* (*Infinite Play*), mainly funded by the Westdeutscher Rundfunk (WDR) in Cologne, lasts 80 hours.

This innovative example shows how traditional institutionalized radio art has started to open up (again) for amateurs. As such, it mirrors the increasing participation of citizens in public debate, via new communication media and platforms like Facebook or Twitter. However, digital technology enables consumers not only to record their voice but also to become producers, just like Bertolt Brecht once imagined the future of radio. In the last 15 years, affordable home recording equipment has helped to establish an independent Hörspiel scene in Germany.

This paper traces the different kinds of re-invention of German radio art in the digital age. I will argue that its liberation is certainly to be appreciated, but this should not serve as an excuse for managers at fee-funded stations to abolish radio art in their programs – a threat, which even in Germany as the “homeland of Hörspiel” has become more and more real and calls for action.

Bio: Ania Mauruschat

Ania Mauruschat researches the alternative history of Hörspiel, which is transnational and quite entangled. She has lectured on auditory culture and radio art at universities and art schools in Zurich, Vienna, Munich, Basel and Karlsruhe. With an academic background in literature and media studies, along with professional training as a journalist and editor, she has a long record in working for radio and radio art departments. Currently she is completing her PhD thesis on noise and the epistemology of radio art at the University of Basel, Switzerland.
LIGNA and the movement of free radio in the digital age

Heather Contant
University of New South Wales (Sydney), Australia
h.contant@unsw.edu.au

Abstract

This paper discusses how the use of digital technology in the performative work of the LIGNA free radio collective allows listeners to experience the possibilities of broadcasting in a new way. In 2002 LIGNA developed the Radio Ballet, a radically interactive experience that invites audiences to physically gather together in a public place and become participants in a live performance facilitated by radio. Prior to the event, a low-powered transmitter is set up near a public venue, like a train station, shopping mall, or town square and portable radio receivers are distributed to participants. Participants then tune into a specified frequency to hear LIGNA's broadcast, which directs them to act unconventionally in public places by raising their hands, lying on the floor, or walking in slow-motion. Since the Radio Ballet, LIGNA has used radio technology to develop other forms of interactive performance that provide similar opportunities for listeners to consider and re-evaluate their interactions with technology, surroundings, and one another in society.

In this paper, I explore how LIGNA's performance practices resemble those of Italian free radio stations Radio Alice and Radio Popolare during the 1970's, since both explored how broadcasting can mobilize listeners and affect their movements. I argue, however, that LIGNA's use of digital hardware and software allows their performance to be repeated in different contexts, creating what Walter Benjamin calls a Spielraum or "room for play" that experiments with the possibilities of radio technology in public life.

Bio: Heather Contant
Heather Contant researches communities that have come together throughout history to explore the possibilities of the radio band of the electromagnetic spectrum in an artistic context. She lectures in media art and audio production at the University of New South Wales | Art & Design in Sydney, Australia, where she is a member of the Sound, Energies & Environments research group. Her writings have appeared in Leonardo Music Journal and elsewhere. She is currently completing a PhD thesis about Walter Benjamin and collective tendencies in radio throughout history.