

# Radiocasting: Musings on Radio and Art

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## Introduction

Although historical and contemporary artistic and theoretical discourse regarding radio art is scant to say the least, there has been, and continues to be, audible evidence of artists and writers whose considerations on the subject begin to shape a theoretical body. The combination of influences shaping this history sheds valuable light on radio art practices today, as there appears to be a clear relationship between early explorations and more recent theoretical considerations. From the beginning, artists were prone to considering radio as a material as opposed to merely a distribution apparatus, as is evidenced by the writings of Bertolt Brecht, F. T. Marinetti, and others. However, when compared to the other arts, namely the visual, there is a marked absence of historical radio art works and theoretical writings. There are many factors which contribute to this absence including the prominence of the visual over the aural, industrial impositions, the practice of transposing other media onto a radiophonic space, the lack of an autonomous theory of sound, and finally, a generalized disengagement with the spatial and temporal shift brought about by the new electronic technologies. In addition, radio artists have had to confront the regulation of contents, political and conceptual, that follows with state regulation of the airwaves. The development of, and desire for, new modes of production and interpretation that artists have expressed over the years, has not always materialized as a result of these imposed restrictions. This essay attempts to explore some of the reasons for the historical discontinuity regarding radio art, while at the same time points to the relevance of the theoretical groundwork laid.

## A Gap

There is no history of a self-described and autonomous [sound] art in the way one might think of the history of sculpture, no facade of a purposeful unity and linear continuity, no ongoing biographical intrigues and libidinal exchanges of influence. As a historical object, sound [and radio art], cannot furnish a good story or consistent cast of characters nor can it validate any ersatz notions of progress or generational maturity. The history is scattered, fleeting and highly mediated — it is as poor an object in any respect as sound itself.[1]

In 1936, Rudolph Arnheim contemplated in his book *Radio*, the possibilities for what he perceived to be a new form of art, born from the invention of the wireless, a phenomenon that by 1933 had already provided Europe with 235 radio stations and a "wireless police"[2] based in Brussels. He discussed a range of ontological and conceptual considerations with topic headings such as "A new art of sound," "Voices without bodies," "The hermit at the loudspeaker" and "Armaments in the ether." His ruminations on the order of the senses are most relevant when considering the gap in historical, theoretical and practical developments of an art of radio.

The eye alone gives a complete picture of the world, but the ear alone gives an incomplete one. ... The essence of broadcasting consists just in the fact that it alone offers unity by aural means ... the essence of an event, a process of thought, a representation. ... The sensory preponderance of the visual over the aural in our life is so great that it is difficult to get used to considering the aural world as more than just a transition to the visual world. Thus there is a widespread fixed opinion as to the task of the wireless.[3]

Arnheim's observations point to one of the major contributing factors that has stifled the development of radio art: a hierarchy of the senses which installs sight at the top of the perceptual ladder. It is the gaze that has preoccupied theoretical ruminations in western art discourse. While there now exists a massive body of deliberations on the ontology of the image, representational strategies, stasis, objecthood, perspective, body/object relations, performative tactics and the resultant consumptive transactions that accompany the digestion of the visual arts, an autonomous language suited to the task of developing a discourse on the non-objecthood, the time-active and the de-localized reality of media forms such as radio art remains elusive. As Peter Weibel has stated, this deficiency is nothing less than striking:

If we take an inquisitive look at the aesthetical conceptions during the last two centuries, it is striking that they are based on the ontology of the image, upon a static world-picture, that inadvertently ignores, makes impossible, the essence of media art; its dynamics, immateriality and time related form.[4]

Other factors have also contributed to the underdevelopment of an art of radio. This includes the imposition of a borrowed musical discourse[5] applied to all sound phenomenon, stripping away any social and/or cultural referentiality, thus creating a situation in which aurality in general is perceived as music, as if the origin, context and phenomenology of any given sound or noise can be measured only by its contribution to a renovation of western art music. Radio art requires a consistent body of research and practice that concentrates on sound at its point of signification, not a literal rendering which will collapse into *cliché*, but a sensitivity to the ways in which meaning in sound circulates, dissipates

and reemerges. The development of an autonomous body of theory and practice regarding aural referentiality — in particular as it relates to radio and electronic media — will contribute to a better understanding of the role that radio art plays in the articulation of social and cultural ideas.

Impeding the development of an art of radio, above and beyond a complete consideration of aural signification, is the fact that artists have not had easy access to the airwaves, as the radio apparatus itself has historically been consigned to the control of state and corporate interests, in a bogus effort to protect the general well being of the public. Radio, and other electronic and digital technologies, are derived from military research and development, sought primarily as weapons of destruction and social control. The military-industrial lineage of the radio apparatus itself presents artists with a particular challenge: how to circumvent the all-prevailing influence of these violent roots and how to minimize the likelihood that their ideas will be subsumed and co-opted by these power structures. When considering radio *as art* (and this pertains to electronic media communications in general) most practitioners have grown to accept a level of control and censorship than is normally tolerated with forms of artistic and cultural expression such as painting and literature. Given the restraints applied to the medium (broadcast quality, balanced programming, congruent appeal, enforced programmatic assumptions, marketing research, the trained voice, restrictions to access, uniform time allocations, technical specifications, licensing regulations, for example) there is little room for the complex and idiosyncratic forms of expression that we experience in day-to-day cultural and social transactions. These restrictions make radio art distinct from what is generally considered to be a form of autonomous art-making, placing the radio artist in a quasi-industrial relationship with the medium.<sup>[6]</sup>

For those who wish to autonomously express themselves via the medium of radio a barrier exists that is now so firmly entrenched it represents a crisis of democracy and freedom of expression. Without the usual cultural support systems provided for other forms of expression, radio artists are left to their own devices. The education provided regarding media in general is one-sided and deficient. The majority of media literacy programs concentrate on the development of analytical listening skills *only*, while denying any *actual* production experience. In other words, literacy is a two-way street in which reading (as in listening), and writing (as in producing) play equal roles in the development of expression and comprehension. To offer children, for instance, *only* a discourse of reading we deny them a child's artistic engagement with radio and all that implies. In addition, it is the mainstream radio model that dominates the context of the majority of production and reception. However, if one is to seek out alternative approaches, ones that point to alternative modes of expression, it is to the documented historical artistic ideas and activities that we must turn.

### Precedence

New technological space has been at one and the same time a new horizon and a closure, an intoxicating possibility and a dangerous suppression of something just beginning to happen.<sup>[7]</sup>

Given the complexity of the historical developments of radio as industry, radio as military weapon, it is no wonder that artists have had a difficult time in creating autonomous works and contingent theoretical histories. However, although the odds were, and are, stacked in favour of a radio controlled, aimed as if a missile, devoid of any real communicative properties, there were and continues to be, artists who have developed complex relationships to the medium. One of the earliest of such artists was Russian avant-garde poet Velimir Khlebnikov,<sup>[8]</sup> whose poetry was "aimed at revealing the primeval meaning of existing word roots, expressed through consonantal sounds rather than conventional semantics," creating "a universal language based on similar-sounding roots."<sup>[9]</sup> In 1921, Khlebnikov wrote a manifesto entitled *The Radio of the Future*:

The Radio of the Future — the central tree of our consciousness — will inaugurate new ways to cope with our endless undertakings and will unite all mankind.

The main Radio station, that stronghold of steel, where clouds of wires cluster like strands of hair, will surely be protected by a sign with a skull and crossbones and the familiar word "Danger," since the least disruption of Radio operations would produce a mental blackout over the entire country, a temporary loss of consciousness.<sup>[10]</sup>

Khlebnikov considers radio as a kind of billboard, an agit-prop device that can inform, educate and unify all people. His somewhat prophetic understanding of how new media would affect the collective consciousness of humankind by its global presence, is mirrored in a later manifesto written by the Italian Futurists Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and Pino Masnata. *La Radia*,<sup>[11]</sup> written in 1933, borrowed from Marinetti's earlier notion of *parole in libertà* (words in freedom). The basis for his idea was "that the elements central to the logical linguistic structure (conjunctions, adverbs, adjectives, verbal conjugations and punctuation marks) had to be eliminated to reduce language to its essential parts."<sup>[12]</sup> Words that were now "liberated" from their original syntax could be juxtaposed by analogy, creating what Marinetti called a *wireless imagination*. The manifesto, prefaced with a general Futurist overview, details what "La Radia Must Not Be .. theatre because radio has killed the theatre already defeated by sound cinema," what "La Radia Abolishes ... time" and "unity of action" and what "La Radia Shall Be:"

3 The immensification of space No longer visible and frameable the stage becomes universal and cosmic

6 A pure organism of radio sensations

7 An art without time or space without yesterday or tomorrow

The possibility of receiving broadcast stations situated in various time zones and the lack of light will destroy the hours of the day and night The reception and amplification of the light and the voices of the past with thermoionic values will destroy time

17 The utilization of interference between stations and of the birth and evanescence of the sounds<sup>[13]</sup>

*La Radia* signals a clear understanding of the implications inherent in the ability of new technology to enable a simultaneous presence, a de-materialization, an "organism." Marinetti and Masnata grasped what has since developed

into a body of theory regarding mass communication as it relates to artists working in media. Their reference to the use of "interference between the stations" is in evidence today in many artist works that point to the saturation of the airwaves and conceptual considerations of noise as information. *La Radia* predicts the shift from an industrial world to a post-industrial world, from a machine age to an electronic age, moving beyond radio into the kind of global information society that has since come to be. In that same year Marinetti wrote five short pieces for radio that he called "Radio *sintesi*," which incorporated periods of silence and various noises such as "the *rrrrr* of a motor."<sup>[14]</sup> These works were never aired. In the *sintesi* entitled *Dramma di Distanze* (Drama of Distances), Marinetti most clearly elucidates his understanding of the ability of transmission to traverse the globe in a simultaneous juxtaposition of dislocated sites:

#### Drama of Distances

- 11 seconds of a military march in Rome
- 11 seconds of a tango danced in Santos
- 11 seconds of of Japanese religious music played in Tokyo
- 11 seconds of a lively country dance from around Varèse
- 11 seconds of a boxing match in New York
- 11 seconds of street noises in Milan
- 11 seconds of a Neapolitan song sung in the Coco Cabaña Hotel in Rio de Janeiro<sup>[15]</sup>

The specific ideological and political intention of Marinetti's conceptual radio works is unclear, however, it may be useful to consider — especially in light of how the technology has developed — the premeditation that informed his enthusiasm towards transmission. It is known that at least twice during his life he maintained ties to Mussolini's Fascist Party although it appears that the Party had little interest in him. "Marinetti's most political works, *Democrazia futurista* (Futurist Democracy, 1919) and *Al di là del comunismo* (Beyond Communism, 1920)," point to a "wide gap between Futurists and Fascists. It lies in the Futurist anarchic element that rebels against all state hierarchies."<sup>[16]</sup> However, there is a thin line separating technological utopianism — the belief that there may lie in new technological developments possibilities for emancipation and cultural equality — and fascism — characterized by an elated state of mind regarding the extension of perceptual powers based on the recognition of the technology's propensity for aesthetic and social control. What is clear is that by the time Marinetti had formulated his conceptual and artistic theories on the "wireless imagination," radio had firmly implanted itself into the European home and psyche in a very political way.<sup>[17]</sup>

Earlier thinkers had already recognized the impoverished implementation of radio into society and the insidious aspects of that intrusion. Among them was Bertolt Brecht who, in 1926, wrote a paper entitled "The Radio as an Apparatus of Communication." Brecht was concerned with the lack of collective participation in radio, its uni-directionality and its (even by then) apparent function as a propaganda tool for the state. He was also aware of its impact on the structure of family life stating that radio was not "an adequate means of bringing back coziness to the home and making family life bearable again."<sup>[18]</sup> Brecht elaborated on the problem that

radio is one-sided when it should be two —. It is purely an apparatus for distribution, for mere sharing out. So here is a positive suggestion: change this apparatus over from distribution to communication. The radio would be the finest possible communication apparatus in public life, a vast network of pipes. That is to say, it would be if it knew how to receive as well as to transmit, how to let the listener speak as well as hear.<sup>[19]</sup>

Although somewhat rhetorical, Brecht's desire to redesign the radio apparatus as an instrument of communication is evidence of his recognition of a crisis in cultural production and reception. Autonomy, as it relates to a diverse and democratic proliferation and exchange of forms, ideas and artistic development in general, becomes non-existent in the sender-receiver model of the authoritative radio presence. This structure is epitomized in the isolation of the individual at the cost of a diminished collective expression. As contemporary theorist Florian Rötzer suggests,

The set up of a radio broadcast lends expression to this structure, with a voice emanating from the loudspeaker on the one hand and the many scattered individuals listening to that voice, linked together to form a virtual community created through the simultaneity of listening rather than a physical community created through their actual presence in one and the same place.<sup>[20]</sup>

Rötzer also points out that Brecht's notion of radio was influenced by the historical fact that radio was known to accommodate one-on-one communication, for example, in the early uses of telegraphy and wireless. He notes that "Brecht saw radio as an agora in virtual space where anyone can produce unfiltered messages and where the transmission of the message is not controlled by a censor or editor."<sup>[21]</sup> Brecht also felt that society was not ready for a technology that was capable of so much, yet was implemented on a premise of so little. He stated that "radio imitated almost all existing institutions that had anything to do with the diffusion of whatever could be spoken or sung," adding that the "result was an inescapable profusion and confusion in the tower of Babel."<sup>[22]</sup> As Stuart Hood has since pointed out, Brecht was one of the first to suggest that radio should be more than a simple transcriptional device. Hood quotes Brecht's reference to the musical compositions of Kurt Weill and Paul Hindemith, referring to the secondary ways in which they were utilized on German radio drama programs, in which Brecht states that "their work must be performed in principle and they must compose works *exclusively for radio*."<sup>[23]</sup> German historian and theorist Friedrich Kittler suggests that inherent in the history of media is the housing of one form in another, creating a kind of piggy back from one technology to the next, bypassing the exploration of any salient features present in each new development.<sup>[24]</sup> On a similar train of thought, Brecht suggested that the technological development of radio superseded the public's ability to accept and utilize it to their best advantage:

It was not the public that waited for radio but radio that waited for the public; to define the situation of radio more accurately, raw material was not waiting for methods of production based on social needs but means of production were looking anxiously for raw material. *It was suddenly possible to say everything to everybody but, thinking about it, there was nothing to say.*<sup>[25]</sup>

Utopian desire, expressed through the conviction that the new technology of wireless telegraphy would serve as a catalyst to a more humane society, is evident in the formidable number of amateur wireless radio operators and inventors in the United States, whose presence was felt from 1906 to 1912 and beyond. Prior to both state and military recognition of the important role that radio would play in the control, dissemination and secrecy of information, these amateurs, by 1914, were numerous enough to organize a national organization they called the American Radio Relay League, which boasted two hundred relay stations across the country. In that same year, the technical magazine *Popular Mechanics* pronounced that the invention of wireless telegraphy "has made it possible for the private citizen to communicate across great distances without the aid of either the government or a corporation," marking "the beginning of a new epoch in the interchange of information and transmission of messages."[\[26\]](#)

However, this model of free exchange was short lived. As the number of amateur wireless operators and technical innovators increased, so too did military and government intervention: "their [the amateurs] activities became a nuisance to wireless companies and government." It was also discovered that the ether, which previously had been considered a territory as grandiose as the universe itself, was in fact restricted: "Too many people had embraced the invention and its possibilities."[\[27\]](#) In the end, amateurs were thwarted by corporate, governmental and military lobbyists:

During the *Titanic* disaster of April 1912, interference from amateur stations trying to relay as well as elicit news was so great that within four months the Congress banished their transmissions to a portion of the spectrum then deemed useless: short waves. The Radio Act of 1912 also required that amateurs be licensed, and imposed fines for "malicious interference."[\[28\]](#)

Hence, the free play of cultural exchange via the ether was constrained at a very early stage in the development of radio technologies. Ever since artists have expressed interested in the medium, the tension between perceived possibilities and the actuality of a space controlled, regulated and creatively stifled, has sustained a frustrated and incomplete history of actual radio art practice. From Klebnikov's notion of radio as the "central tree of our consciousness," to the *Popular Mechanics* assertion that radio would bring about a "new epoch in the interchange of information and transmission of messages," artists have come to understand that there is limited room for the proliferation and diversity of artistic works. The expressed desires and traffic of ideas that artists have applied to the apparatus of radio — as a material, a communication conduit, a vessel in which to pour out an expanding currency of autonomous cultural expression — appear to be incongruent with the technological, political and social realities of the apparatus itself. However, in spite of the perceived limitations, and as Brecht so eloquently puts it, artists do persist. "If you should think this is utopian, then I would ask you to consider why it is utopian."[\[29\]](#)

### A Body Inscribed

the presence of my corporal

pain,  
the menacing,  
never tiring  
presence  
of my  
body ...[\[30\]](#)

In 1947, playwright, poet, painter and actor Antonin Artaud[\[31\]](#) was commissioned by French radio to create a radiophonic work for broadcast on *Radiodiffusion française* the following year. The resultant recorded work, entitled *Pour en finir avec le jugement de Dieu* (To Have Done with the Judgment of God),[\[32\]](#) was never broadcast as it was censored and, although Artaud and others attempted to have the decision overturned, they were unsuccessful. Contrary to Brecht's concern regarding the ability of the collective body politic to utilize radio as an interactive exchange system, Artaud's radio work reflects a dystopian view of the individual as he/she relates back to culture at large. *Pour en finir avec le jugement de Dieu* represents a radiophonic extension of Artaud's "Theatre of Cruelty," in which theatre, "because of its physical aspect and because it requires expression in space (the only real expression in fact), allows a magical means of art and speech to be practised organically and as a whole, like renewed exorcisms," creating a "unique language halfway between gesture and thought."[\[33\]](#) Although *Pour en finir avec le jugement de Dieu* contains anti-Americanisms, scatological references, sacrilegious pronouncements and excruciating screams, it is more than likely that the work was censored as a result of its perceived ability to instil fear in the listener, rather than any specific content of the text. Artaud's idea of a material language, the language of a corporeal body that would utilize sounds, cries, screams, grunts, onomatopoeia, glossolalia, and so on, was well suited to the disembodied space of transmission, as it is a language that, like a gas, *escapes* from the entire body. The mouth in this case constitutes just one sound-emitting hole of many. This is a body without organs which, according to Allen S. Weiss, places this particular work by Artaud clearly in the realm of a radio-phantasmic space:

The body without organs is the ultimate deboning of the voice, a recreation or disarticulation of the corporeal structure that takes on cosmic dimensions. It is thus no accident that this corporeal phantasm first arises in conjunction with a radiophonic work, radio being the site par excellence for such anatomical revisions, and ultimately for the loss of the body.[\[34\]](#)

Weiss goes on to comment that "it is only when our entire body becomes a mouth that we can truly speak."[\[35\]](#) Artaud's body was literally in pain when he recorded *Pour en finir avec le jugement de Dieu* and in fact he died shortly thereafter from rectal cancer. Theorizing about the difficulty in articulating bodily pain through speech, author Elaine Scarry has speculated that the presence of pain creates a resistance to language, actively destroying it, "bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is acquired."[\[36\]](#) However, in the context of transmission, the body is prone to disappearance — the babble, the word, the scream, is never



returned — for the body will not, cannot, travel with its signifier, the voice. The body poised for anatomical flight must satisfy itself with the illusion the prosthesis creates, uttering a language of severed recognition, a language of disjunction, a language without writing. The illusion of intimacy that transmission portends, through a conscious corporeal assertion, does in fact allow for diverse references of bodily signification. However, as Christof Migone has written, the temporal and spatial disjunction, accompanying a radiophonic (lack of) presence, "creates a sensual fiction, a poetic virtuality, creating a space where we can describe ourselves and still not know who we are."<sup>[37]</sup> The sterility of the voice, as heard on the majority of radio transmissions, stripped as it is of any corporeal references, trained, controlled and dead, is the child of a paranoid body, afraid to speak of and for itself. French playwright Valère Novarina, as quoted by Weiss, provides a succinct description of this "cleansing" process:

They work night and day with immense teams and enormous financial means: a cleansing of the body in sound recording, a toilet of the voice, filtering, tapes edited and carefully purified of all laughs, farts, hiccoughs, salivations, respirations, of all the slag that marks the animal, material nature of the words that come from the human body <sup>[38]</sup>

The lack of bodily sound on mainstream radio signifies a fear of disembodiment, a lack of will to address what is considered taboo: sub-vocal speech, scatological sounds and bodily noise in general. The conceptual frameworks that are necessary to recognize such expressions include considerations of production and reception that allow for ambiguities, a reading that oscillates towards the complex rather than a simplistic faith in the sterility of the "objective," factual, authoritative presentation methodology so often heard on mainstream radio. The phenomenon of dead air, for instance, will strike fear in the radio producer's heart, not because it may signify a deficiency in production technique or continuity, but because it allows authority to fall away. Silence has plagued the entire history of radiophonic production, as it is believed to indicate a nothingness, a space in which the listener is apt to insert his or her own idiosyncratic noise and meaning, a space in which the listener's own body may constitute a presence. As William S. Burroughs — one of the few to contemplate the phenomenon and relevance of inner speech as it relates to notions of silence — has written:

The word may once have been a healthy neural cell. It is now a parasitic organism that invades and damages the central nervous system. Modern man [sic] has lost the option of silence. Try halting your sub-vocal speech. Try to achieve even ten seconds of inner silence. You will encounter a resisting organism that *forces you to talk*. That organism is the word.<sup>[39]</sup>

The radio is always on, or so it would seem, recalling Marinetti's "pure organism of radio sensations." For Burroughs, the word exists at the cellular level, an attachment, even, to the body's central nervous system: "what we call history is the history of the word. In the beginning of *that* history was the word."<sup>[40]</sup> The word is passed on genetically, as if by electrical transmission, continuing its influence over human ideas and actions — a technological parasite. Marshall McLuhan also relates the body to speech and radio, suggesting that

radio is that extension of the central nervous system that is matched only by human speech itself. Is it not worthy of our mediation that radio should be specially attuned to that primitive extension of our central nervous system, the vernacular tongue?<sup>[41]</sup>

But to *whom* does this vernacular tongue belong, from whose *body* does it fly, from what *location* does it emanate? Peter Weibel suggests that the language of absence that accompanies the new telematic (cyber) spaces represents not so much a new form of communication — writing itself, and later the printing press, had already enabled a delocalized displacement of information — but rather, a new spatio-temporal configuration.

Here, time dislocates space and produces a placeless space. The signs of the telematic communications revolution are more immaterial and incorporeal than the earlier ones, due to the separation of (material) messenger and (immaterial) message. As a result, the bounds of space and time are alternately reduced or expanded. <sup>[42]</sup>

In this non-locality the radio-body resides: however, even if you cannot touch it, the radiobody will not go away. Through a conscious recorporealization of the body its lack of presence may symbolically suggest its existence. The vernacular to which McLuhan alludes can be extended to include not just the tongue, but the entire environment of blood, bone, tissue and organ.

One development that opened up possibilities for including bodily and other worldly sounds in radio art works, was phonography. By the late 1940s, Pierre Schaeffer and Pierre Henry had developed a new compositional technique referred to as *musique concrète*. By 1950 they had acquired the use of magnetic tape and were actively composing recorded works for radio broadcast. The use of concrete sounds, and the technological ability to edit and electronically alter them, led to a new form of radio that was not dependent on scripts, actors or the radio studio. In Germany (1964 to present), *Neues Hörspiel* — a term introduced by Klaus Schöning to describe the new developments that were impacting on the traditional *Hörspiel* radio drama — was made evident in works by Paul Pörtner, Ferdinand Kriwet, Peter Handke, Friederike Mayröcker and others. Mark E. Cory, in his essay *Soundplay*, documents the innovative strategies the *Neues Hörspiel* artists employed. They include the "testing of semantic boundaries between shaped sound and deformed language; the use of stereo, synthesizers, and vocoders to manipulate acoustical material and even to generate sounds not found in nature; the flirtation with chance operations; and the substitution of musical principles of composition for traditional approaches to organizing a text."<sup>[43]</sup> Cory goes on to describe a form of *Hörspiel* that developed in the 1970s, called *O-Ton*, which

differed from the features of the past by virtue of its compositional techniques. Instead of beginning with a script and then taping interviews to illustrate and give depth to the various points the author wishes to make, the O-Ton artist simply begins recording and then assembles out of the recorded original material a coherent and sometimes surprising, sound portrait. ... The O-Ton Hörspiel was the first to employ postwar

technology (the tape recorder) to implement Brecht's prewar hope that radio would go beyond mere distribution (*Lieferantentum*) to organize its listeners into producers. The most productive source material for O-Ton has proved to be the voices of those otherwise disenfranchised by traditional radio art. The men in the street, prisoners, workers, apprentices — those whose distinctly nonliterary voices and nonstandard diction had seldom figured in Hörspiel — became its staple.<sup>[44]</sup>

In addition, the tape recorder introduced the ability to gather sounds from the din of a media saturated environment created by radio, television and the media industry in general. This ability prompted artists to compose works that were critical of the new electronic landscape, turning it back upon itself. The recontextualization of the mediated voice was the subject matter of *Neues Hörspiel* artists Handke and Kirwet in Germany and by, for instance, Howard Broomfield in Canada. Broomfield's *Radio on Radio: a radio program about radio* (1974) was broadcast on the national radio station, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. *Radio on Radio* formulated a critique regarding contemporary broadcast "flow" and illustrated the historical sounds of radio from the 1930s to the present. Broomfield, an anthropologist, utilized sound recordings as a resource for research into social and cultural habits and circumstances, paying close attention to diction, common sound environments and nonliterary aural expression. As a member of the *Soundscape Project*, led by R. Murray Schafer, Broomfield believed that close attention paid to a relatively non-mediated aural signification would reap great benefits in the comprehension of cultural communication. *Radio on Radio* also reflects a criticism that Schafer levels against western broadcasting when he suggests that it "is tyrannized by an instrument we have accepted as inviolable: the clock. Radio today is the pulse of a society organized for maximum production and consumption." <sup>[45]</sup>

Another influence on Broomfield was Glenn Gould's *Solitude Trilogy* (1967–77), comprised of recordings of speech made at various locations, then treated and edited to form a collage of considerable density, blurring the distinctions between reportage and art. Challenging the myth of media objectivity Gould stated that, "one simply has to incorporate that information on its own terms — on terms which admit to no contradiction between the processes of 'art' and of 'documentation'."<sup>[46]</sup> The tape recorder introduced a new freedom in the artist's mobility. No longer sequestered in the studio, artists can interact with the world at large, enabling them to represent the human voice in a cultural context; to deconstruct official media; to juxtapose disparate times and places; to disintegrate dominant language forms; to make evident the noise of the body; to utilize sound as a material in ways that might better elucidate the multitude of ways in which we communicate through the production and reception of sound; and finally, to throw away the script.

## Conclusion

Move from that which is easily identifiable to that which is at the limit of being identifiable. Listen to them [sounds] non-knowingly but alertly. Enjoy their materiality. SUSPEND the MEANING of sounds by multiplying their naturalistic-realist role to the point where no single anchoring is possible, no message can be congealed, no analysis can be complete. ... Cutting, a sentence at different places for example, assembling it with holes, repeating it in slightly different forms and in ever-changing verbal contexts, helps to produce a constant shift and dislocation in meanings. Silences and repetitions are rejected as a failure of language when they are experienced as oblivious holes or as the utterance of the same thing twice or more. WE SHOULD NOT STAMMER, so goes the reasoning, for we only make our way successfully in life when we speak in a continuous articulate flow. ... After many years of confusions, of suppressed voice and INARTICULATE SOUNDS, holes, blanks, black-outs, jump-cuts ... I FINALLY SAY NO: yes, sounds are sounds and should above all be released as sounds. Everything is in the releasing. There is no score to follow.<sup>[47]</sup>

Although Trinh T. Minh-Ha is writing about image/sound relationships in the context of experimental film production, her words are pointedly relevant in the consideration of an art of radio. She argues for an opening up of interpretation, for a different kind of listening, one that is as dependent on the ear's work as it is on the mind's. In her critique of media manipulation, she encourages transgression of the monolithic, of the factual, of static interpretations, offering as an alternative what Frances Dyson refers to as "a speaking and listening practice which is antithetical to the voice of authority."<sup>[48]</sup> The assertion that "everything is in the releasing" points to differences between those who work *for* radio and those who wish to work *in* and *with* radio. The recognition of the historical influence of industrial models — including state, corporate and militaristic — on the relationship of artists to the radio apparatus, suggests the identification of a territory. Kim Sawchuk has written that "in establishing its spatial-temporal grid, the state creates foreign bodies within its own territory."<sup>[49]</sup> If transmission is a space in which there transpires a phantasmic loss of the body, it is also a space in which a clear boundary is drawn between the machinery of political and cultural control, and the desire to acknowledge the fluidity of cultural experience and utterance.

The history of radio art represents a struggle to overcome the enforcement of the arbitrary boundaries drawn by the paranoid hands of the state. These boundaries stifle creativity in many ways including the political, the aesthetic, the conceptual, the sensual and the multitude of creative imaginings that shape the various modes of expression and perception in a diverse cultural terrain. An autonomous and anarchistic cultural alternative that comes with the refusal to identify and participate in the control and manipulation of artistic expression, may be one of the few ways of circumventing the notion that we as artists are relegated to simply "playing" with hand-me-downs from the garbage heap of military mayhem and research. As the radio apparatus increases its range continually, through the development of new technologies such as the cellular telephone, satellite transmissions and so on, the "primitive extension of our central nervous system, the vernacular tongue," remains suppressed. The development of an all too often inaudible host of vernaculars into an expanding transmission of variable and multi-dimensional cultural expressions will come to radio via a fluid and transgressive noise, filtered through the minds and the bodies of those unafraid to speak in the face of mediated taboos. "If you should think this is utopian, then I would ask you to consider why it is utopian."

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## Notes

- [1] Douglas Kahn, "Introduction: Histories of Sound Once Removed," in *Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio and The Avant-Garde*, eds. D. Kahn and G. Whitehead. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1992), 2.
- [2] Rudolph Arnheim, *Radio* (London: Faber & Faber Ltd., 1936), 236—237.
- [3] *Ibid.*, 135—36.
- [4] Peter Weibel, "Transformation der Techno-Ästhetik," in *Digitaler Schein: Ästhetik der Elektronischen Medien*, ed. Florian Rötzer (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1991).
- [5] For an interesting discussion on the topic of "the weight of music" regarding a diminished consideration of an expanded field of sound see Douglas Kahn, "Track Organology," *October* 55 (Winter, 1990), 67—78. Kahn asserts that, "Music's dominance gained momentum from its complacent valorization as the *sine qua non* of the arts of sound. Its establishment as such has served to stifle the other arts of sound: the blinded ones, the multisensory ones, and the daily experience of aurality in general....Musical auto-referentiality did violence to a system of aural signification whereby the associative characteristics of sounds, their attendant social and imaginative domains, were reduced, trivialized, or eradicated," 67.
- [6] See Dan Lander, "Radio Art: The Pubescent Stage," in *Radiophonics and Other -Phonies, Musicworks* 53 (Summer, 1992), 20.
- [7] Jody Berland, *Toward a Creative Anachronism: Radio, The State and Sound Government*, in this volume.
- [8] For more on Velimir Khlebnikov see Douglas Kahn's essay *Radio Space* in this volume.
- [9] *Russian Futurism Through Its Manifestoes, 1912—1928*, trans. Anna Lawton and Herbert Eagle (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1988), 13.
- [10] Velimir Khlebnikov, "The Radio of the Future," in *The King of Time*, ed. Charlotte Douglas (London/Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 155.
- [11] For more on Marinetti and Masnata see Heidi Grundmann's essay *The Geometry of Silence* in this volume.
- [12] *Russian Futurism Through Its Manifestoes, 1912—1928*, 3.
- [13] Filippo Tommaso Marinetti and Pino Masnata, "La Radia" in *Wireless Imagination*, translated from the Italian by Stephen Sartarelli, 265—68. There are twenty separate points in the manifesto outlining what *La Radia* shall be. These excerpts were used to indicate the range of territories covered in the manifesto.
- [14] This excerpt is from the Radio *sintesi* entitled *I Silenzi Parlano fra di Loro* (Silences Speak Among Themselves) published in Michael Kirby and Victoria Nes Kirby, *Futurist Performance* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1986), 293. See also Kevin Concannon, "Cut and Paste: Collage and the Art of Sound," in *Sound by Artists*, ed. D. Lander and M. Lexier (Toronto and Banff: Art Metropole and Walter Phillips Gallery, 1990), 163—67.
- [15] See Kevin Concannon, "Cut and Paste: Collage and the Art of Sound," in *Sound by Artists*, 167.
- [16] Pontus Hulten, *Futurismo & Futurismi* (Milan: Gruppo Editoriale Fabbri, 1986), 512. "Marinetti needs to be remembered also as a polemicist and political writer. From the beginning, politics were inherent in the movement's ideology. In fact, Marinetti and other Futurists participated in early Fascism. It was only at the second conference, held in Milan in 1920, that Marinetti, Mario Carlo and other Futurists angrily slammed the doors on Fascism because their anti-clerical, anti-monarchical proposals had not been accepted....Although, in 1923—24 Marinetti returned to the ranks of Fascism and in 1929 he was elected to the Academy of Italy, Marinetti and Futurism were never supported by the Fascist régime, but merely tolerated," 512.
- [17] Alice Yager Kaplan, *Reproductions of Banality: Fascism, Literature, and French Intellectual Life* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 135—37. "In the Italy of the 1930s, Mussolini organized a radio show called the "Workers, Ten Minutes" that interrupted all activity in factories, unions and public squares....In Germany, the government imposed mass production of a seventy-six-mark Volksradio, then sold 100,000 of them in one evening at a nationally organized Radio Fair. As of 1933, La Poste Parsien (a French radio station)...began, as part of its morning diet, a translation of the radio speeches of Hitler, the new chancellor."
- [18] Bertolt Brecht, "The Radio as an Apparatus of Communication," in *Video Culture: A Critical Investigation*, ed. John Hanhardt (Rochester: Visual Studies Workshop, 1986), 53.
- [19] *Ibid.*
- [20] Florian Rötzer, "Aesthetics of (Tele-) Communications?" in *On Line: Kunst im Netz / Art in the Network* (Graz: Steirische Kulturinitiative, 1992), 51.
- [21] *Ibid.*, 52.
- [22] Bertolt Brecht, "Radio as an Means of Communication: A Talk on the Function of Radio," trans. Stuart Hood, *Screen* 20: 3/4 (Winter 1979—80), 24.
- [23] Stuart Hood, "Brecht on Radio," in *Screen* 20: 3/4 (Winter 1979—1980), 19, my emphasis.
- [24] See Friedrich Kittler, "The History of Communication Media," in *On Line: Kunst im Netz / Art in the Network* (Graz: Steirische

Kulturinitiative, 1992), 76–77. The reference reads as follows: "The electrification of sensory input data through transducers and sensors enabled the entertainments industry to couple analog storage media firstly with one another and secondly with transmission media. The sound film combined optical and acoustic memories; radio, before the introduction of the tape-recorder, largely transmitted gramophone records; the first television systems, prior to the development of electronic cameras, scanned feature films. Thus the content of entertainment media always remains another medium, which in this way they serve to promote."

[25] Brecht, *Screen*, 24, emphasis in original.

[26] Quoted in Susan J. Douglas, "Amateur Operators and American Broadcasting: Shaping the Future of Radio," in *Imagining Tomorrow: History, Technology, and the American Future*, ed. Joseph J. Corn (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986), 50.

[27] *Ibid.*, 51.

[28] *Ibid.*, 52. Douglas describes several reports of these so-called incidents of "malicious interference" as follows: "During what Navy operators claimed was an emergency situation, amateurs refused to clear the 'air', some of the amateurs even arguing with the Navy men over ownership of the ether. In another instance, when a Boston amateur was told by a naval operator to 'butt out,' he reportedly made the following classic remark: 'Say, you navy people think you own the ether. Who ever heard of the navy anyway? Beat it, you, beat it.'" She goes on to make an important point regarding the programmatic and technological development of radio: "In the years after the Radio Act of 1912, the amateurs not only advanced radio technology but also anticipated broadcasting. Between 1910 and 1920, amateur stations began to broadcast music, speech and even advertising. By 1917, amateurs were relaying messages not just regionally but from coast to coast, demonstrating the benefits of a national communications network," 51.

[29] Brecht, *Screen*, 26.

[30] Antonin Artaud, "Pour en finir avec le jugement de Dieu," trans. Clayton Eshleman, in *Wireless Imagination*, 324.

[31] For more on Artaud see Gregory Whitehead's essay, *Holes in the Head: theatres of operation for the body in pieces*, and Douglas Kahn's *Radio Space*, both in this volume.

[32] A 24' 03" excerpt of Artaud's "Pour en finir avec le jugement de Dieu" can be heard on the five CD set entitled *Futura: Poesia Sonora*, ed. Arrigo Lora-Totino (Milan: Cramps Records, 1989).

[33] "The Theatre of Cruelty (First Manifesto)," in *Antonin Artaud: Selected Writings*, ed. Susan Sontag (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1988), 242. This volume also includes the complete script for Artaud's *Pour en finir avec le jugement de Dieu*, in addition to several letters pertaining to the work in question and its subsequent censorship.

[34] Allen S. Weiss, "Radiophonic Art: The Voice of the Impossible Body," *Discourse* 14:2 (Spring 1992), 192. For an expanded discussion on Artaud's radio work see Allen S. Weiss, "Radio, Death, and the Devil: Artaud's Pour en finir avec le jugement de Dieu," in *Wireless Imagination*, 269–307.

[35] *Ibid.*, 197.

[36] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 4.

[37] Christof Migone, "Language is the Flower of the Mouth," *Musicworks* 53 (Summer 1992), 47.

[38] Valère Novarina, "Lettre aux acteurs," in *Le théâtre des paroles*, 7-26, as quoted in Weiss, "Radiophonic Art: The Voice of the Impossible Body," 187.

[39] William S. Burroughs, *The Ticket That Exploded* (New York: Grove Press, 1967) 49–50, emphasis in original.

[40] *Ibid.*, 50, emphasis in original.

[41] Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1965), 302.

[42] Peter Weibel, "New Space in the Electronic Age," in *Book for the Unstable Media* ('s-Hertogenbosch: Stichting V2, 1992), 72.

[43] Mark E. Cory, "Soundplay," in *Wireless Imagination*, 363.

[44] *Ibid.*, 362.

[45] R. Murray Schafer, "Radical Radio," in *Sound by Artists*, 208–209. Schafer adds: "What I am urging is a phenomenological approach to broadcasting to replace the humanistic. Let the voice of the announcer be stilled. Let situations be presented as they occur without the interruption of sponsors, clocks or editorial manipulation." 214.

[46] Glenn Gould in conversation with editor Tim Page, "Radio as Music," published in *The Glenn Gould Reader* (Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys, 1984), 388. In 1992, Gould's *Solitude Trilogy* was republished on three compact discs (Toronto: CBC Records, PSCD 20003-3).

[47] Trinh T. Minh-Ha, "Holes in the Sound Wall," in *When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender and Cultural Politics* (New York/London: Routledge, 1991). 205-206.

[48] See Frances Dyson, *The Genealogy of the Radio Voice*, in this volume.



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