THIS IS NOT RADIO

Intw Knut Aufermann, Dominique Balaÿ, march 2011

For webSYNradio :

DB : What do you mean exactly when you say "Radio for me is an ephemeral medium" ?

KA: There are a few indicators that designate the possibility of good radio for me.
One is liveness. Live radio is exciting for producers and listeners alike. It has to work in a single listening. Play on demand, podcasts and archives should be left for academic research. Music and sound art should be released as such. They are different to radio and therefore have to take into account their different modes of "transport", such as CD, mp3 download, installation etc.
The iPod generation has forgotten how to ache for a (half) missed show. The excitement of accidentally stumbling across an irrecoverable fragment of radio that will be etched into your memory is lost.
Another indicator is the human touch. In radio this can have many facettes such as humour, the human voice, radio art or technical mishaps. Interventions like these make it clear that the transmission is not run by algorithms and creates a connection between radio maker and radio listener.
A third one is locality, which is connected to analogue radio transmissions. Analogues radio broadcasts are defined geographically by their transmission radius, which can be anything from a few meters (micro fm) to thousands of kilometers (short wave radio). Internet streams are delocalized. For me it makes a difference if I listen in Germany to an internet stream of a London radio station that is purely an internet station or one that also has a London fm transmitter. Only in conjunction with the knowledge of the fm transmitter can I feel part of that city when I tune in (or broadcast there). Analogue radio reception has often overlooked advantages too, e.g. non-traceability (nobody can tell if I listen to a certain program), low power consumption (a set of standard batteries can power a normal transistor radio for months) and the ease of finding new stations accidentally.
This list is not exhaustive!

DB: Do you still consider radio as a social (mass) media?

KA: I am sorry; I don't really understand this question. The more radio I produce the more I think that there is no dogmatic difference between the listening to and making of radio. In an ideal radio space the border between the two should be permeable, where one can cross-over in each direction with ease. I experienced this mobility in the experimental music scene in London, audience members would over time often become musicians and vice versa. I think that Resonance FM, which has its roots in this scene, is a prime example for the disregard of the boundary between radio listener and radio maker.

DB: What do you call "radio" today ?

KA: Radio. Unfortunately many other things are called radio today that have little or nothing in common with radio. I am consistently amused by the plethora websites with the suffix .fm who are trying to pretend that they have something to do with radio.

DB: Like many criticals & observers, do you agree with the concept of post-radio to describe the many different contemporary practices of radio? Do you think all these practices have common features ? If yes, which ones?

KA: I am sorry I don't really know much about the concept of post-radio.

DB: Let me precise my mind: radio now stands at a crossroads in its development, and question whether the medium has a viable future or whether it will converge with other forms of multimedia and audiovisual media services.

KA : o.k. now I understand what you mean by post radio. I agree that radio is in the middle of cross-roads. if you look at it from the point of content, rather than from the technological point, i think that there will be two tiers of radio going two different paths after the crossing. One will be interesting radio with challenging, free content, run by enthusiasts in the fringes of the digital domain and for the foreseeable future also on the analogue band. The other boring kind of radio will be swallowed up in the multimedia future that will be controlled by very few content providers whose business model is based on cutting off their customers from the internet as we know it now and keep them trapped in a giant bubble of apolitical mainstream blandness. See the current discussions on net neutrality.

DB: In what way a project like webSYNradio can meet your own research & practice ?

KA: On the theoretical side it pushes me to make many of my rather fuzzy notions more precise.

DB: Can you tell us a bit more about your attempt to develop a radio network with your Radia project? What about collaboration in this attempt? What is your aim: experiment new forms of interactivity?

KA: The Radia network was jointly founded by about a dozen people in 2005. Since then it has produced over 300 shows, contributed to numerous radio festivals, and has grown in size to 20 member radio stations and projects spanning the globe. Its motto is "new and forgotten ways of making radio", which reflects the idea that there is a lot of unchartered and abandoned territory in radio that needs exploration. The network can be characterized by the communal curiosity to find out what the others think radio art is.

DB: Are you interested by Radio Art in the context of Wireless Culture and multi -devices?

KA: I am sorry I don't know much about this context. Maybe my answer at the top of this interview covers this aspect too.

DB: Is there really a place on radio for experimentation?

KA: Sure! The need to pose this question shows though, that there is a need for making it more public, to reintroduce people to the art of radio listening, which is inextricably linked to the art of radio making.

DB: What is your position regarding copyright and intellectual property?

KA: Wherever possible I release my work under a creative commons license. I don't comprehend the idea of intellectual copyright in its judicial form and am deeply disturbed by the ongoing political developments to further expand it (ACTA etc.*).

DB: Have you an economical strategy to enable & assure your different radio project?

KA: No. If the idea is strong enough I will do it. If other people think so too I will get paid for it.

*_Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement_