

## Kunsthof Public Access Terminal on 14 September 2013

Performances by **Benjamin Egger, Ralf Homann, Rayelle Niemann,**  
and **Anne Käthi Wehrli & Bettina Stehli**

**Admission free!** With picknick and *bar*becue (please take your own grillables along).

# Towards micro and minor forms of radio, picknick, Internet and an outdoor re-enactment of a ballet choreography for life

Kunsthof brings together four hybrid performances that work with the production of the space with the idea of sharing it, and the shifting border between public, personal and political, *radio picknick (zurich)* by Ralf Homann, *ping pong: questions, ideas, rhythms, sounds / Gendered Spaces / www.citysharing.ch* by Rayelle Niemann, *SWAN SONG* by Benjamin Egger, and *Pandora's Box* by Anne Käthi Wehrli & Bettina Stehli, as sudden pulse disturbances which make us hear and see the song of the body electric as unforeseen comers of micro-flights. The four projects challenge language and use micro and minor as political-aesthetic tools of becoming, where becoming minor or micro is both a political and artistic problem, a problem which relates to all of us, which each of us has to engage with. Experimenting with the micro-physical world and talking in a minor language where analog and digital channels are not simply means of communication or bytes of information, miniaturization and mobility, but produce affective resonance in everyday space and reveal the virtual power of non-organic life itself as a multiple, impersonal reality allowing the plane of the self in a world without original and without copy.

Like in a science fiction scenario, as receivers searching for signals in an apocalyptic landscape, signals of life, of other survivors affirming our existence, we enjoy and celebrate the power of micro-waves, which is in fact the power of our interdependency and the ecological thought that we cannot survive without the other (I is another), without the swarms, the circuits of wireless connections. The electro-magnetic world and its micro-components mean slipping into an a-signifying pre-individual environment in which a peculiar milieu of invisibility that appears mute, needs tubes to be heard and the sensual skin-like softness of screens to be seen, so that from the noise appears through mixing cacophonous generic point-to-point connections or wave-after-wave reception, interdependent environments as a tune of co-existence – all of this is the radio and media geography, which is a geography of surviving, resisting and adapting, creating soundscapes of a sonic invisible social architecture in the fabric of the city, which resonate all the way to the green meadows surrounding it.

From the illegal and underground Antifa radios during WWII to citizen radio and grassroots local anti-racist and feminist radio by the people for the people, radio becomes a militant practice, a practice of “mile-goers,” not war-goers, who not only talk the talk but also walk the walk, or who go the full mile with their eyes wide open to better hear the sound of an image. The radio is no longer the technique of a war machine, but a machine against the war. Step by step, day by day, from door to door, from room to room, from state to state, wave modulation by wave modulation, the radio is a machine of odysseyans and wireless operators and programmers who on its frequencies produce epiphanies and other marvelous songs. Travelers on the road without a goal other than to learn how to speak with ventriloquist techniques in order to reinvent language and grasp the rhythm of life, the micro-radio makers are not conquerors but storytellers, exiles, strollers, rebels, strangers, wanderers, like the Beat Generation, and the radio of the 1950s with the explosion of rock ‘n’ roll and experimental and pop music stations. Radio on the road resists and dismantles the military radio machine that uses radio as a remote control or apparatus in our “civil” life to eternalize common sense with the daily-life radiation of nuclear subjection. Micro-radio waves affirm a radiation vital to life and existence, against deadly atomic radio-activity. Radio energy is a radiation that is not radio-activity.

The extension of the wireless, analog radio horizon is a pictorial multi-path combat, which depends on weather, climate and landscape, much like Kunsthof as an open-air space. The radio waves propagate beyond the optical horizon, curving slightly down to follow the landscape. The construction of each wave front is overlaid with particles from the re-composition of the previous fronts. The environment's behavior is not in itself a free space. But radio is freeing space by creating it.

The radio technique remains a craft, open to experimenters and hobbyists. Both sides of the channel, the transmitter and receiver can be built do-it-yourself with low-cost parts, often second-hand, from the flea-market and the garbage. The low cost radio analog techniques are still bodily practices, a practice for the hands. The antenna has to be adjusted manually to weather conditions.

The radio machine must be uprooted from its history as an apparatus of the war machine. Radio

has never been a technology for commands, propaganda and control. It is rather an affective combat machine. Actually, the history of the first transmitting machines is connected to the vessels on the road, on the sea, in the air or in space that on their disconnected line/state of movement allows them a new connection to the land. This is an e-mission correspondence rather than dependency, as a relation between transmitters searching for signals of each other as a matter of survival during the e-mission, or of sending letters to each other to co-respond. From the beginning, the prototype of the transmitting ma-

chine is a spatial practice in the coordinates of space and time. It can be likened to the introduction of the Internet and the explosion of digital processes, which is connected to the military machine, the US National Security Agency and the Cold War. And yet indeed, radio and Internet are the invention of amateurs, activists, experimenters, wavers, dissenters, empirics, artists, students, dreamers, mockers, fakers, aliens, mediums phoning ghosts and dead poets. Thus the means of transmission have not initially appeared as media of control, but were appropriated by the powers that be through patents and warization.

## Part II

(da capo only for patient readers who are ready to start over)

Let us start the text over with a worn-out schlager, the tune of which escapes from one of those boomboxes with batteries and an extensible antenna as we lie on the beach or picnic out in the green. The lyrics of the song compulsively repeat the same banal truth: nature is culture – culture is nature! The point is why we are listening to these words at all, and what we can make of them when it comes to technologies. Our thinking often remains trapped in the old dialectics, and somehow “naturally” we still distinguish the technological world as something artificial and cultural made by humans, and nature as something independent of social reality and the technological environment. In fact if we speak of technologies they are as much nature as culture. Not only because all these technologies make use of natural materials and their properties as molecules and atoms in the dynamics of micro-physics or chemistry, as crystals, metals, oil, water, air, etc. But nature is perceived very often predominantly as consisting of living matter, as if the order of crystals were not part of it as much as they are part of the oil industry’s processes, or the water of a beautiful lake were not rushed through turbines by power utilities to produce electricity. With the shift in computer science and biology during the 1960s, one can simply say that “non-organic machines become self-reproducing organisms, and organisms become autopoietic machines.”

A point that is often ignored, as we have the feeling that we live in a digital world, in the midst of high-speed digital transmission of data, is that this entire stream is in fact transmitted analogically. What our modem does when we connect to the data highway is to convert, to code and decode following certain protocols every byte from analog to digital and back. It thus functions as a translation machine. To translate between the automated language system without images and highly abstract as a pure function following protocols and index structure requiring of the input a high level of identity where those not in possession of the key are out. Actually,

the mobile structure of the Internet is a pure-speed 24-hour-a-day acceleration where there is only one value determining all: high speed. As any high speed and mobility, it is a matter of money. Not only luxury vehicles, but also well-paved highways. The transferability from one device to the other is aimed entirely at gaining access to ever higher speed and making more money. Growth like in a nuclear reactor run loose. This highway is a paradise for commerce and gamers and other high-speed abstract products, such as the blind automated power of scripts and algorithms supporting the high-frequency exchange at the stock market and within the banking industry. In order to achieve such higher speeds, the analog signal must be concentrated and channeled in hybrid glass fiber and coaxial cables properly insulated from the noise of the remaining environment.

There is a high cost to the increase in the speed and mobility of digital data through analog channels and high-definition protocols, required for an inflation of stock exchange transactions, and sold to consumers with the carrot of high-resolution images, high-definition video and interactive online games. We are back to the old question of low and high in old dialectical manner with all social constraints. Despite the whole hybridization of technological systems and circuits we again encounter the old issue of inequality based on low and high, center and periphery, rich and poor, and private property.

There is an enormous social and environmental impact of this process of wiring, which directly affects the landscape and environment much like the 19th century’s building of railways, when dynamite and seismic shocks directly re-shaped the surface of the earth. If we try to imagine a wireless Internet, for instance through satellites, the situation does not improve. Since satellite antennas work best in a desert environment where no vegetation will absorb the signal. Or it can be compared with privately owned and maintained highways where you have to pay toll. When we speak of the freedom of the Internet we are often focusing entirely on the content of the traffic, or questions of software and hardware – forgetting how the system is built and growing, or even accepting as positive that it is constructed predominantly on

privately owned segments, in the hands of big companies.

Indeed the Internet's entire architecture, design and construction are a result of the automation of the working processes, of integrated services and integrated control. It easily escapes our attention that there is an ongoing privatization of cultural commons, comparable to the enclosure of common land in the 18th and 19th century. As for example the scanning of entire archives and libraries by Google, which entails a surreptitious privatization of entire public archives in the digital domain, in which every millimeter is defended and access can be very quickly discontinued. In fact the beginnings of the Internet for civil purposes is an integration between home, school, working place, public space, public administration, and health system into one line where the working place is extended in a cognitive and knowledge economy and absorbs all other spheres of existence. At the same time the system is highly localized. Meter by meter, millimeter by millimeter, a fiber extends all the way from the office to the home, from the home to the office. The value in such a system is determined by the possibilities to plug in and work with all other devices in the system in a synchronized melodic way. This is the kingdom of telephone companies and their cable network systems.

When it comes to processes of digitalization we often ask ourselves mostly about its impact on the images, or the context of the digital data cir-

culating, or the social dimensions of the virtual and its impact on the real. But not about the architecture of the system and its channels, and how these transmissions and circuits become possible. Since broadcasting is compromised by the old ideology linked to the centralization of dominant power in a big tower. What can be constituted as public in this architecture? What can be our participation in it? Even with the technologies we have at our disposal at the moment as consumers, if we open a small area of our wireless network to strangers we will become producers of a new peculiar and heterogeneous Internet structure giving less to the control of companies over the construction of new spaces and new publicness. But the new idea giving the new meaning of public – because this public will not be defined based on a public square and its representational regime and display system but will be defined by the people and their new sensual organizational paradigm. Let us say that such a new space, created through desire, work and sharing, is a space of constant production and immanent growth. This space will reveal a new inside, a new organization of the body and a new relation between outside and inside. But it will not be a public display like *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* by Rembrandt (1632), where the publicly exhibited body of the dead criminal undergoes a dissection in front of the bewildered gaze of the viewers, who discover that the body has an inside, a skeleton, muscles, blood vessels, and organs.

*Text: Dimitrina Sevova*

This is the sixth in a series of events this summer and autumn 2013, comprised of screenings, public readings, performances, talks and an art guided walk through some of the playground places in the city of Zurich, which are to take place as part of

## **Opportunities for Outdoor Play? Playgrounds – New Spaces of Liberty (The Question of Form)**

A transdisciplinary collective research and production project curated by Dimitrina Sevova at Kunsthof Zürich in cooperation with Prof. Elke Bippus, Franziska Koch and the Bachelor Medien & Kunst, Vertiefung Bildende Kunst of the Zurich University of the Arts.

Project blog: [outdoorplay.tumblr.com](http://outdoorplay.tumblr.com)

**Z**

—

hdk

—

Zürcher Hochschule der Künste

—

—

### **Kunsthof Zürich**

Der Kunsthof Zürich ist ein Ausstellungs- und Veranstaltungsort der Vertiefung Bildende Kunst im Bachelor Medien & Kunst der Zürcher Hochschule der Künste.

Limmatstrasse 44

8005 Zürich

Tram 4/13/17, Haltestelle Museum für Gestaltung

[www.kunsthof.ch](http://www.kunsthof.ch)