

In Focus: Sound Studies

edited by Michele Hilmes

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Foregrounding Sound: New (and Old) Directions in Sound Studies



by Michele Hilmes

Nominating “sound studies” as a field of scholarship does several interesting, yet potentially controversial, things. It can imply a move toward fragmentation—breaking into established fields like music, film, and television study and positing yet another cultish research niche, taking away from a more integrated focus on sound as part of a medium-centered totality. Some have accused visual culture studies of doing this, of poaching on parts of barely established fields and rearticulating them to more accepted areas of study such as the visual arts and material culture, doing considerable violence along the way to the modes in which visual expression is actually produced and experienced.¹

Yet, as visual culture scholars have argued, such tactics can also draw parallels and establish continuities between disciplines separated more by historic accident than logical coherence, and reach out to embrace fields that might not have been even considered under the old paradigms. I believe sound studies holds much promise along these lines. If any one characteristic marks the field currently referred to as media studies—or cinema and media studies—it is the *convergence of sound and screen*, across institutions, venues, texts, forms, and reception situations. While most sound scholars would agree that the visual, screen-based aspects of contemporary media have received the bulk of academic and cultural attention, not even the most adamant visualist would argue that sound in all its aspects has not played an equally important, though less studied, role in media expression and production, even during the days of silent film.

The essays in this section span a wide spectrum of sound-based work, though they do not encompass all the approaches that can be brought to the study of sound in cultural expression and everyday life. For instance, a vibrant field has grown up around the study of “soundscapes,” or acoustic ecology, in the past twenty years,

building on the theories of R. Murray Schafer and reflected in contemporary anthologies like Michael Bull and Les Back's *The Auditory Culture Reader*.² The "World Soundscape Project," inspired by Schafer's work, collects sounds from around the world and compiles them in geography-based sound files.³ This work has obvious application to media-centered approaches and could bring greater depth to that relatively untouched third dimension of the classic sound taxonomy: music, voice, and sound effects. A field of historical work has also arisen that attempts to recover and represent sound as it existed at various points in history, and to reproduce historical soundscapes.

Running along history of science and technology lines through the fertile fields of American cultural history, another strand has produced work such as Emily Thompson's *The Soundscape of Modernity* and Jonathan Sterne's *The Audible Past*, examining listening practices and applied acoustics in American cultural life as they intersect with the development of technology, emergent practices of modernity, and social structures and hierarchies of the twentieth century.⁴

However, the two largest bodies of work on sound come from musicology, particularly its ethnomusicology and popular music branches, and film study, where the analysis of film music predominates over investigations of voice or dialogue.⁵ When Rick Altman proclaimed in 1999 that sound studies was "an idea whose time has come," he was referring primarily to the study of the film soundtrack.⁶ Of the four essayists presented here, only Anahid Kassabian's work has focused primarily on film. Yet her present essay limns a new approach, one that takes film and music studies as a starting point, but extends it into new modes of listening, inspired by technologies and applications that break out of the bounds of the theatrical listening experience, opening the study of sound to previously neglected areas, such as television, video games, and mobile media.

It is a fact that, among the major sound and screen media, television sound has received the least attention.⁷ If it is mentioned at all, it is subsumed under the practices of film sound, or discussed in terms of the music video—the one arena that has recognized the subject of Norma Coates's essay, the intersection of popular music with the field of media studies. Coates argues that the field of media studies cannot be properly constituted without including popular music, and that, conversely, popular music cannot be understood without a consideration of both its deep historical entanglement with radio, television, and film—both industrially and aesthetically—and its cultural functions, which bring it into close alignment with the subjects and methods of media studies. Her call for incorporation of popular music within academic film and media studies curricula and research has met with rising enthusiasm over the past few years, and interest in this approach seems likely to develop even further as new technologies presage an even greater convergence of industries, texts, and uses in the future.

Another area of study to benefit from the rise of sound studies over the last fifteen years is radio, a medium more often couched in a teleological narrative as the

precursor to television than as an expressive form in its own right. David Hendy's essay on radio history as cultural history does much to articulate an integrative approach that starts out with a consideration of radio as a sound-only art but places it within the complex social, institutional, cultural, and political matrices that have defined radio as a medium. This approach gives full recognition to the fact that the growth of expressive forms does not take place in an aestheticized vacuum, but instead is deeply imbricated in cultural context, most importantly the national context.

Finally, Anna Friz writes as an artist in the field of sound whose work engages specifically with the phenomenology of radio as a symbolic construct. The concept of sound art, outside the field of music, remains a relatively new one whose parameters are just beginning to be explored. Situating her work within a creative nexus arising out of radiophonic experimentation in Canada, Friz creates "self-reflexive radio art works where radio is the source, subject, and medium of the work." She aims to "re-enchant" radio as both a platform for aural expression and a palette of sonic tools, in works such as *You are far from us* and *The Clandestine Transmissions of Pirate Jenny*.

The formation of a new scholarly interest group in Sound Studies at this year's SCMS conference gives a new public face to the amorphous arena of aural culture, out of which so much productive work has emerged over the last twenty years. These essays explore a few corners of the field, but clearly we will be hearing more as the area develops.

Notes

1. See Margaret Dikovitskay, *Visual Culture: The Study of the Visual after the Cultural Turn* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005) for a full discussion of these debates.
2. R. Murray Schafer, *The Soundscape* (1977; Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 1994), and *The Tuning of the World* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1977). See also Michael Bull and Les Back, eds., *The Auditory Culture Reader* (Oxford: Berg, 2003).
3. See <http://www.sfu.ca/~truax/wsp.html> (accessed June 23, 2008) for the World Soundscape Project. Listen to a few short excerpts on <http://www.last.fm/music/World+Soundscape+Project> (accessed June 23, 2008). A source of good links to all kinds of environmental sound is the Acoustic Ecology Institute's site at <http://www.acousticecology.org/soundscape/links.html> (accessed June 23, 2008).
4. Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Emily Ann Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003).
5. With some exceptions; see Sarah Kozloff's excellent and unique study *Overhearing Film Dialogue* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).
6. Rick Altman, "Sound Studies: A Field Whose Time Has Come," *Iris* 27 (Spring 1999): 3–4. He followed this with a call for a much-expanded concept of "film sound" that would include audience, theater, and environmental sound—a call so far little heeded in film study. See Rick Altman, "Film Sound—All of It," *Iris* 27 (Spring 1999): 5–12.
7. Rick Altman, "Television/Sound," in *Studies in Entertainment*, ed. Tania Modleski (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 39–54.

Inattentive Engagements: The New Problematics of Sound and Music



by *Anahid Kassabian*

Consider this partly an autoethnography of my intellectual past, present, and near future. Consider it an account of my participant observation of my own scholarly trajectory. Consider it an offer of one possible history, position, tendency.¹

I grew up in a family of musicians, people whose talents intimidated me, they were so good. As a young adult, I had many ideas about what to study and started and stopped my undergraduate education multiple times, with periods of activism as punctuation, before landing in media studies. I thought I would be a music and theater journalist.

But in the early 1980s, in a required course taught by Patricia Clough, I was blown away by feminist psychoanalytic film theory. It seemed to offer a good—and not condescending—explanation of why we act against our own historic self-interest. What I couldn't understand was why it was so resolutely visual. So I began to write essays for film courses on film music. This turned into the motivation to go to graduate school, and, like an impressive lineup of film scholars before me (even though I did not know it)—Tania Modleski, Dana Polan, Rey Chow, Sarah Kozloff—I went to Stanford's Program in Modern Thought and Literature; I needed an interdisciplinary program because I wanted to combine serious film study and musicology to think about these questions.

My 1993 Ph.D. thesis ultimately became *Hearing Film*, which considers the different paths of identification commonly offered by compiled and composed scores.² *Hearing Film* put me in distinguished company with a small group of scholars who had written monographs about film music that are informed by contemporary theories of culture.³ Since then, a number of important works have been published, such as Annette Davison's *Hollywood Theories, Non-Hollywood Practice*,⁴ and particularly anthologies such as *Soundtrack Available, Music and Cinema, Popular Music and Film, Pop Fiction*, and *European Film Music*.⁵ Where once I saw only a few scholars, now I see a recognizable and interdisciplinary field of scholarship, with institutional apparatuses such as journals and conferences.⁶

In our journal, *Music, Sound, and the Moving Image*, coeditor Ian Gardiner and I, with editorial assistants Tim McNelis and Elena Boschi, spend a lot of time talking about how to keep the spread of disciplines lively in the journal. The question of disciplinarity has been of great interest to me, and I have always been intrigued that the founders of film music studies, one could argue (and I would), all call film studies home.⁷ But I have never seen a job for a film music—or a film sound—scholar advertised, and of all the important centers of film scholarship,

only the University of Wisconsin–Madison has a film music scholar (Jeff Smith), and only the University of Iowa can boast a film sound scholar (Rick Altman). As far as I know, all the other scholars in the field are at smaller universities, or in departments other than film studies.

When I began a job search in 2004, I regularly read the advertisements for posts in film or media studies departments, and I did not think I could answer a single one of them. But I received three offers from music departments—outside the United States, mind you, because most music departments in the United States are still quite disciplinarily conservative—even though I do not have a degree in music and I consider media studies my home field. I certainly do not feel out of place in music, and especially not in the School of Music at Liverpool, which houses the Institute of Popular Music, whose staff is as interdisciplinary as one could possibly hope for. But I'm very concerned that the perspectives and insights of film and media studies not be lost or set aside in the growing field of music, sound, and moving image studies—while the scholarship in musicology on film music is strong and exciting, it asks and answers genuinely different questions than film or media studies might generate.

Moreover, the field of sound, music, and moving image studies is a “growth industry.” Especially for music departments, who are struggling to find their audience internationally (as are symphony orchestras, operas, and other canonical music institutions), the study of music and the moving image offers a possible salvation. In a market—both in the United States and the United Kingdom—where music departments need to find ways to draw students, popular music studies and film music studies offer great ways to boost FTEs (full-time equivalent student numbers), and they do not require a curricular overhaul (though they certainly should provoke one, if they are understood at all).

I genuinely have two disciplines now, and I am thinking from the inside of music in a new way. But I am committed to keeping one foot in each. In a workshop on the methodological and theoretical problems posed by Howard Shore's score for *The Cell* (2000) at the annual Bradford Film and Music Conference in 2006, I argued that one of the important arenas for film music studies to move into is the search for a way to analyze the soundtrack as an entire unit. I am not the first to make this call—see, for example, Rick Altman's model in his contribution to *Music and Cinema*—but it needs to be made repeatedly and loudly. The problem is that it is an unlikely approach to come through musicological approaches to film music.

As my work on film music progressed, I became more and more interested in the problem of listening, in particular of listening as a secondary or simultaneous activity, and what I have termed ubiquitous musics. The theoretical problem of ubiquitous musics has always drawn me, like an obsession, and while I have not yet come up with answers, I have at least figured out some of the questions. What we tend to think of as the outcome of the World Wide Web and multimedia is actually a condition of postmodernity that has its roots in the early twentieth century, that is, in radio and Muzak. Both provoked the onset of listening alongside

other activities, and thus the beginning of multitasking. Followed by television, then by transistor radios, the Walkman, the reformatting of films onto VHS and then DVD, the Web, and then by personal technologies such as PDAs, mobile phones, and handheld videogame consoles, multitasking has been a long time in coming.

The particular problematic raised by simultaneous listening, and thereby multitasking, is that of attention. While certain economic, including Marxist, theorists are talking about the attention economy,⁸ theories of culture have yet to produce a paradigm for considering how subjectivity is conditioned, or how ideology circulates, or any of the other kinds of questions asked by media studies, in and through inattentive engagements with texts. This is no small problem. As Ola Stockfelt has said,

When considering music that . . . is especially suited (possibly with intent) to “sound-bite listening” with its rather arbitrary breaking points, to shifting between different activities (of which listening to the music is one) and to shifting between different modes of listening, our analysis of that music should center precisely on its suitability for such shifts between modes of listening and between varying degrees of attention. The shift between different modes of listening is hence both an object of analysis and a means for analysis. . . . Insofar as we strive to understand today’s everyday music and/or want to develop pedagogical programs with real relevance for those who will live and participate in this musical life, we must develop our own reflexive consciousness and competence as active “idle listeners.”⁹

None of our usual methodologies, theories, or approaches will help us understand consumptions of texts, activities, or engagements that happen neither consciously nor unconsciously, and probably not even preconsciously or subconsciously, but rather *inattentively*.

While attention is the name of a state of mind that appears everywhere, we have not thought about it much in the humanities.¹⁰ There are no models that suit our modes of research and ways of thinking. But I keep returning to it as a crucial problematic. I have trouble paying attention, so maybe this is why . . . I have a hundred things to do at any one moment, and I feel guilty if I do only one at a time. The condition of postmodernity, pace David Harvey, is the fragmentation of attention, not just narrative.¹¹ But I have always had trouble paying attention, and now it is a diagnosis for my child—after it became a scholarly interest, intriguingly enough. Her “deficit disorder” might better be seen as a new consciousness in formation, one that sometimes delves deeply and at other times flits among many simultaneous options all being perceived simultaneously.

For my work on attention . . . inattention . . . split attention . . . fragmented attention . . . I have been drawn to metaphors of contemporary computing problematics and approaches and particularly models of the diffusion of computing, such as distributed computing and pervasive computing.¹² Distributed computing offers a beautiful image of a web of nodes of information, sometimes working collectively, often individually, wherein it is easier for information to flow from some

places to other places, but flow can always go in any direction. This, it seems to me, is the image of a post-individual subjectivity. Ubiquitous or pervasive computing, the notion of small processors that pervade everyday living space so that all small objects, from clothing to walls to appliances, are “intelligent,” is a wonderful metaphor for how we interact with music in contemporary everyday life. It is imbedded all around us, and we come into contact with it, at widely—wildly—varying levels of attention, everywhere and anywhere. Pieces of my current project, on ubiquitous listening and distributed subjectivity, include thinking about coffee shops, the Internet home, gift shops, movies, wearable DJs, TV musicals, and bus and train stations.¹³

Most of those musical interactions share one difference with current studies of music, sound, and the moving image, including my own work: the intersection of the visual and auditory fields is randomized, or, perhaps more conservatively, non-synchronous. That is to say, even if I choose the song on the CD playing in my office, I cannot decide hit points at which the music and the knock on the door will synch. Nor can anyone else, of course. But the models we have for how to describe and study sound, music, and moving images are based on synchronization.

In the case of interactive forms such as video games and Web sites, the problem is even more pronounced. Because no one can predict when a user will do what, the creators of the games and Web sites cannot choose what auditory material is heard with what visual content. This means that the musical choices are, by and large, unobtrusive. By this, I do not mean uninteresting or uncomplicated—there are some fantastic game scores, and the crossover between game scoring and film music is becoming more and more significant, not only in video game films like the *Tomb Raider* series, but also more generally.¹⁴ But it also means we have no real way of studying or talking intelligently about these phenomena.¹⁵

So, for now, I find myself stuck in a river of questions about attention and simultaneity, without theoretical paddles. While I am struggling to carve them, let me end with a few exhortations:

First, begin watching and listening to a film or TV show that you like, and turn the sound off. Force yourself to watch it, silently, all the way through. I promise you will recognize the folly of having moving image studies without sound and music. Then hire a young scholar to teach your students something about the field that should never have been absent to begin with. If you are a young scholar, be sure to include sound and music in your thinking. And if you are a young sound or music scholar, perhaps you can suggest this exercise to your friends and colleagues to help them “get it.”

Second, when you think about multitasking, think about how frequently you do it by listening with part of an ear to music while you are chatting, shopping, reading, working, driving. This is, it seems to me, a kind of work that precedes what we call multitasking by a very long time, and it is worth the attention of media scholars.

Third, when you think about reception, or consumption, or reading, think about attention and simultaneity. Is this activity likely to be taking place on its own? In a setting surrounded by other activities? With full attention? Or in a variety of scenes, with differing levels of attention? And if so, what effect does the attention level have on the reception/consumption?

The study of sound and music offers new problematics—and therefore new insights—to film and media studies. I hope the disciplines are ready to embrace it.

Notes

1. I did not choose an autoethnography because my story is unusual, but rather because it highlights a series of issues I want to raise here, and because I believe that autoethnography offers ways into and through some theoretical obstacles. On autoethnography, see Norman K. Denzin, "Performing [Auto] Ethnography Politically," *The Review of Education, Pedagogy & Cultural Studies* 25, no. 3 (2003): 257–78.
2. Anahid Kassabian, *Hearing Film: Tracking Identifications in Contemporary Hollywood Film Music* (New York: Routledge, 2001).
3. Philip Tagg, *Kojak, 50 Seconds of Television Music: Towards the Analysis of Affect in Popular Music* (New York: Mass Media Music Scholars' Press, 2000); Claudia Gorbman, *Unheard Melodies: Narrative Film Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987); Caryl Flinn, *Strains of Utopia: Gender, Nostalgia, and Hollywood Film Music* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992); Kathryn Kalinak, *Settling the Score: Music and the Classical Hollywood Film* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992); Royal S. Brown, *Overtones and Undertones: Reading Film Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Krin Gabbard, *Jammin' at the Margins: Jazz and the American Cinema* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996); and Jeff Smith, *The Sounds of Commerce: Marketing Popular Film Music* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).
4. Annette Davison, *Hollywood Theories, Non-Hollywood Practice: Cinema Soundtracks in the 1980s and 1990s* (Aldershot: Ashgate Press, 2004).
5. Pamela Robertson Wojcik and Arthur Knight, eds., *Soundtrack Available: Essays on Film and Popular Music* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001); Ian Inglis, ed., *Popular Music and Film* (London: Wallflower, 2003); Steve Lannin and Matthew Caley, eds., *Pop Fiction: The Song in Cinema* (Bristol: Intellect Press, 2005); and Miguel Mera and David Burnand, eds., *European Film Music* (Aldershot: Ashgate Press, 2005).
6. *Journal of Film Music*; *Music and the Moving Image*; *Music, Sound, and the Moving Image*; Music & Moving Image Conference, New York City, May 2005; Sound, Music, and Moving Image Conference, London, September 10–12, 2007.
7. See David Schwarz, Anahid Kassabian, and Lawrence Siegel, eds., *Keeping Score: Music, Disciplinarity, Culture* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1997).
8. Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002); Patricia Ticineto Clough, *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007); Jonathan Beller, "Cinema, Capital of the Twentieth Century," *Postmodern Culture* 4, no. 3 (May 1994).
9. Ola Stockfelt, "Adequate Modes of Listening," in Schwarz, Kassabian, and Siegel, *Keeping Score*, 143.
10. For one example, see Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999).
11. David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989). There are many post-structuralist writings on

- the fragmentation of narrative. One place to begin is Jean-François Lyotard, *The Post-modern Condition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); and in film studies, one notable text is Teresa deLauretis, *Alice Doesn't* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984).
12. The term “pervasive computing” supplanted “ubiquitous computing,” which was originally proposed by Mark Weiser (see “The Computer for the Twenty-first Century,” *Scientific American*, September 1991, <http://www.ubiq.com/hypertext/weiser/SciAmDraft3.html> [accessed July 16, 2008]). It has subsequently broken off into subfields, including “mobile computing,” which has been one of the roots of a new field of study, mobile music. See, for example, Layla Gaye et al., “Mobile Music Technology: Report on Emerging Community,” in *Proceedings of the 2006 Conference on New Interfaces for Musical Expression (NIME-06)* (Paris, 2006), 22–25.
 13. There is a real threat of thinking that music was actually listened to with full attention in the past, which was probably rarely the case. See Peter Gay, *The Naked Heart* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996); and James Johnson, *Listening in Paris: A Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).
 14. Anahid Kassabian, “Some Futures for the Study of Sound, Music, and the Moving Image,” in *CineMusic: Constructing the Film Score* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008).
 15. Karen Collins, “Flat Twos and the Musical Aesthetic of the Atari VCS,” *Popular Musicology Online* 1 (2006), <http://www.popular-musicology-online.com/issues/01/Collins-01.html> (accessed July 1, 2008); Joanna Demers, “Dancing Machines: ‘Dance Dance Revolution,’ Cybernetic Dance, and Musical Taste,” *Popular Music* 25, no. 3 (2006): 401–14.

Sound Studies: Missing the (Popular) Music for the Screens?



by Norma Coates

As *Cinema Journal* and the Society for Cinema and Media Studies welcome sound studies into their midst, I cannot help but wonder what the fallout will be for the study of popular music and the recording industry. I fear that it may not bode well. Sound studies, as it coalesces as a field under the auspices of SCMS, runs the risk of becoming “Soundtrack Studies.” Historical radio is now frequently studied, but only as the precursor of television. What about radio after television? Or on the Internet? If a screen is necessary for SCMS inclusion, then popular music and its industry, along with post-TV and Internet radio—and new communicative forms that have yet to emerge—could remain forever marginal. Moreover, a definition of “sound” as “soundtrack” could limit the ability of media scholarship as sanctioned by SCMS and taught in graduate programs in media studies (by whatever name) to adapt to changes in media composition, delivery, programming, audiences, economics, and other factors. As for popular music in particular, relegating it to

the role of soundtrack forecloses its analysis as a medium in its own right. The media scholar whose research focuses on popular music or the recording industry is therefore in a bind. To explain what I mean, I tender a few subjective anecdotes.

Anecdote 1: I recently received a reader report for an edited volume about girl groups and girl singers in 1960s popular music. I had written an article for the anthology about singer Marianne Faithfull, her relationship to the Rolling Stones, and the subsequent use of their 1960s selves in the ongoing careers of both. The anonymous reader was quite charitable to me, saying very kind words about my essay, while noting that “it seemed to have nothing to do with music.”

Anecdote 2: I did my Ph.D. in the Media and Cultural Studies program at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. I am trained in media history and theory, cultural studies, cultural theory, and television studies. My intention to focus on popular music was clear from the outset, but I had to think creatively to make my coursework relevant to what I wanted to study. Having a dissertation adviser who wrestled with similar object-of-study problems in her graduate student days helped. On the advice of that sage adviser, I did not focus my dissertation solely on popular music, but added a big dose of television to it. Television, in fact, is in my dissertation’s title, and popular music on network television is the subject of the book that I am working on. I taught or was a teaching assistant for several media studies courses. At my first faculty job, I turned mass communication courses into media studies courses. I present my work at SCMS, ICA, and Console-ing Passions in addition to conferences more focused on popular music, and my publications apply media studies methodologies and theories to topics in popular music and the recording industry. But until I landed my current position at the University of Western Ontario, a joint appointment in the Faculties of Music and Media Studies, I was often told that I was “too music” in my orientation.

Anecdote 3: I recently finished reading almost sixty applications for a tenure-track position specializing in popular music in our Faculty of Information and Media Studies. Of these applications, roughly half were from ethnomusicologists or musicologists. About fifteen were from candidates who were trained in media studies or cognate fields, such as communication, and of these, less than half were from American universities. It was often difficult to identify whether media studies applicants truly had enough depth and breadth of knowledge in popular music to successfully teach four graduate and undergraduate courses per year.

I offer these anecdotes because I think that they capture the state of popular music and the popular music/recording industry scholar in the realm of media studies. Popular music scholars are usually relegated to popular music AND (name your visual medium) here.¹ Studies of the recording industry on its own are usually not presented at media studies conferences, or at least not at SCMS.² Now, with the arrival, finally, of sound studies, popular music may have found a way into media studies—or not.

I suggest that historically, SCMS has not perceived popular music to be included within the definition of media. There are welcome signs that this is changing, but SCMS defines itself as “a professional organization of college and university educators, filmmakers, historians, critics, scholars, and others devoted to the study of the moving image.”³ Exceptions get through from time to time, but it appears that for SCMS, media usually has a screen attached. By this definition, popular music is not media—even though it emerges from the same industrial maw as film and television, has a parallel and often intertwined history with the film and television industry, and can be studied with the same tools and methodologies used to dissect film and television. This is an unfortunate exclusion, as the tsunami of the digital age hit popular music first, and what is happening in and to the industrial and other spaces of popular music paves the way for what will happen to visual media.

It is difficult to define popular music as media in part because it exceeds the category. Popular music is (or at least, used to be) expressed via a physical object (record, disc, tape), analogous to reels of film or a television program on videotape or DVD.⁴ It is also “content,” something accessed through something else, such as music played on the radio or indeed as part of film and television soundtracks. Popular music is a product of a media industry centered on technologies and hardware as well as software and texts.⁵ It is the product of an industry with its own history, an industry that often, but not always, intersects with visual media industries. Popular music can be linked to a visual medium, such as film or television music, or a soundtrack. It can also be a genre unto itself when tied to a visual medium, such as music video.⁶ Essentially, if we accept the dictionary definition, then popular music is a form of media, but not necessarily one linked to the visual.

At present, there is a lot of “sanctioned” media studies work that reads through popular music to get at some aspect of visual media. But popular music is also an organizing concept for a host of other things: analyses of identity, subjectivity, ethnography, political economy, cultural history, globalization, industrial history, cultural industries, cultural labor, “new media,” transnationalism, genre, and, I am sure, much more.⁷ These modalities of popular music can take it farther and farther away from the visual, and hence farther away from the center of the “acceptable” academic modes of media studies.

A problem that arises for the media studies–trained popular music scholar is that these modalities are often also too far from “music,” by which I mean scores, notes, and other things valued and studied by musicologists. This returns me to my first anecdote, the comment that my paper about Marianne Faithfull and the Rolling Stones had nothing to do with music. Indeed, from a musicological perspective, my article did have nothing to do with music. It is a work of media studies. I would also find it difficult to submit this work to most music journals, outside of the three specifically oriented to popular music.⁸ I am an editor of one of them, the *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, and actively seek out media studies–oriented work, but there is a problem: not much of it is out there.

This brings us back to my second and third anecdotes. Media studies departments are not training popular music scholars. They do not all ignore popular music, but they also do not highlight it in course offerings. A few programs carve it into seminars on sound studies, covering it for a week or two. The simple, but not entirely accurate, reason for this is that departments are not opening lines for popular music scholars. Popular music, and now sound studies, may turn up in job ads as part of the “laundry list” of desired areas of expertise, but rarely as the main event. Resources are tight, but I also fear that a primary reason for the paucity of popular music positions in media studies departments is that popular music is where television was in the academy twenty years ago—deemed unworthy of study.⁹

In fact, it may be worse for popular music studies. Popular music, unfortunately, is often reduced to stereotypes of unruly men and “sex, drugs, and rock and roll.”¹⁰ In fact, a review of yet another book bemoaning the state of the American intellect was recently ranked number one on the list of ten most e-mailed articles from the *New York Times* Web site. The review takes the usual potshot at university courses that feature “ponderous musings on rock music.”¹¹ Pop music (Madonna, Britney Spears) elicits similarly disparaging opinions, even as the cultural power of pop music artists and fans influences media production and consumption on an unprecedented scale. (*American Idol*, anyone?) Attacks on pop are often actually attacks on the young females constructed as the audience for this music, which should concern feminist media studies scholars. Hip hop has entered the academy, more visibly in African American studies than in media studies, but can still be relied upon to push the buttons of those who claim to know what belongs in higher education and what does not.

Within higher education itself, lots of people seem to know, or think they know, lots about popular music, bands, rock and pop history, and so forth, yet they oddly disdain popular music scholarship. In fact, the idea circulates that “anyone can do it” and that it does not need any special knowledge or competency to study popular music. I am not suggesting that there are not many excellent studies that analyze popular music as a way to gain insight about a cultural or visual media phenomenon, or that popular music should not be used in this way.¹² The interdisciplinarity of media studies requires this sort of methodological flexibility. I am suggesting, however, that the elitism inherent in an “anyone can do it” mentality is condescending and detrimental to the development of popular music studies as a field of academic inquiry.

Rather than continuing to focus on the problem, I want to discuss what the study of popular music and the recording industry can bring to media studies, and why it is important to prevent “Sound Studies” from defaulting to “Soundtrack Studies.” Media studies should embrace popular music as an acceptable object of study, with or without a screen, for the insights it brings to an increasingly complex and convergent mediascape, for its usefulness as a teaching tool for our students, and for the opportunity it presents to uncouple the media studied at SCMS

from the screen. I believe that this will not dilute the organization's mission but rather will enrich and extend it. It also creates clear paths for the study and sanctioning of new media that we cannot even envision right now.

The recording industry and popular music are at the leading edge of changes brought about by "new media." If new media is digital media, and if the study of new media includes inquiries into the impact of digitization upon industries, texts, audiences, business models, delivery technologies, cultural labor, and so on, then the recording industry should be closely scrutinized as the "canary in the coal mine," experiencing and responding to key challenges in advance of other media sectors. Scholarship about popular music and the recording industry may provide screen scholars with insight into and ideas about how to approach the changes that digitization has brought to the objects of their studies. For example, metaphors for and ways of accessing musical media are rapidly being deployed by the television industry. Television programs are now being assembled into "playlists" and "streamed" to computer users, much as music has since the advent of the iPod—in 2001! As we know, television programs can be purchased from iTunes and downloaded to iPods, where they are accessed just like music. When texts are reduced to their foundational digital elements, 1s and 0s, distinctions between visual and nonvisual media become cloudy. For example, video mash-ups now reside on my iPod alongside musical mash-ups. The digital "text" is just another thing for a computer-savvy user to play with, and for screen industries to be afraid of. There is a growing body of work in popular music studies about the legal, economic, social, and cultural impact of digitization and its metaphors upon popular music and its industry.¹³ Methodologies of and insights gained from this work can greatly assist television and film scholars as they begin to make sense of what their objects of study are as they engage with or become new media.

As anyone who watches and studies film and television or listens to radio in its several incarnations (terrestrial, satellite, and Internet) knows, popular music and its industry are arguably more intertwined and important to visual media industries than ever. This is demonstrated by the proliferation of reality and scripted television programming organized around popular music or the idea of it (*American Idol* or the entire MTV network) or the utilization of various genres of music as crucial aspects of plot and character development in film as well as television (*The O.C.*, *Grey's Anatomy*).¹⁴ Nor is this just a new media phenomenon. Popular music, film, and television have been entwined with each other from the beginning.

Courses focused on popular music can enrich our students' knowledge and understanding of and engagement with culture and media. As media scholars, we are familiar with the perception that college students are not big TV watchers. They appear to be selective viewers, and passionate about what they do watch. At the same time, they are all plugged into their iPods or other mp3 players on their way to class and as they conduct their daily lives. Music's affective power and connection to youth and youth cultures is well theorized and documented.¹⁵ My experience in the classroom is that courses about popular music are wonderful Trojan

horses for imparting and getting students interested in difficult theoretical concepts and, to my delight, cultural history.

Even so, I am not certain that the sort of work that I teach in my gender and popular music class is likely to be accepted for the SCMS annual conference or printed in *Cinema Journal* if it does not have a screen attached. Will I still be able to present papers at SCMS when I begin my next project, which is an examination of age and popular music? Would SCMS accept a paper about the affinity of the so-called “soccer mom” for Michael Buble (if I were to write such a thing)? Or the use of the Internet by unsigned middle-aged female members of the “musical middle-class,” a term currently popular on music industry blogs? How about a paper on how and why aging male rock stars continue to be among the biggest draws on the global arena rock circuit? The questions that would inform these topics are best accessed using the insights and methodologies of media studies, involving careful analysis of layers and networks of audiences, industries, texts, and contexts—that is, the “meat and potatoes” of media studies. None of these projects would be remotely musicological in my rendering, but they may well lack screens except as “pass-through” vehicles, like the computer that streams Internet radio to my home stereo through my wireless network.

Will sound studies become the study of *sounds* (including popular music) and where they come from (including the recording industry) in a media studies context, or will it become the study of visual media through the context of sound? It should be obvious by now that I believe that it will lose a lot if popular music continues to hover at the margins of media studies, its organizations, and its journals. Rather than subsuming popular music into sound studies and continuing to focus on how sound augments the visual, we could instead focus on how the visual augments sound, or how popular music works as media, or how its industry negotiates the digital future. That said, musicological analyses of popular music do not, in my opinion, belong in SCMS or in *Cinema Journal*, but I suggest that a study of, say, the Rolling Stones from a transnational perspective, or studies of certain albums, songs, artists, or fan cultures (to name a few), could indeed fit into a model of media studies as it evolves, whether or not a picture is involved. There is room for popular music, the recording industry, all types of radio, and more under the sound studies tent.

This is not to minimize the emergence and acceptance, finally, of sound studies in the academy and SCMS. That is a remarkable and long-fought-for achievement. It is also not to say that studies of popular music tied to visual media are not necessary; on the contrary, they are arguably more necessary than ever. But it is to say that media studies of popular music as *media*, not just as part of an ineffable “sound” in sound studies, with or without pictures attached, are crucially important for the field and for the understanding of media cultures, industries, labor, histories, identities, audiences, and all of the other things that media studies scholars study. To continue to restrict media to visual media within the leading academic

organization for media studies is to discourage potentially important scholarship that moves the field in interesting directions. It is time to hear popular music, not just sound, in media studies.

Notes

1. The University of Western Ontario, where I teach, now has four popular music scholars on its Faculty of Information and Media Studies. To my knowledge, this concentration of popular music scholars outside of music departments—and inside of them, for that matter—is unique.
2. The workshop on the recording industry at the recent annual meeting of SCMS in Philadelphia was the first panel on the topic in the ten years I have attended the conference.
3. “About SCMS,” on the Society for Cinema & Media Studies Web site, http://www.cmstudies.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=798&Itemid=168 (accessed March 3, 2008).
4. See, for example, Murray Forman, “Television before Television Genre: The Case of Popular Music,” *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 31 (Spring 2003): 5–17; Murray Forman, “‘One Night on TV Is Worth Weeks at the Paramount’: Musicians and Opportunity in Early Television, 1948–55,” *Popular Music* 21, no. 3 (October 2002): 249–76; and Norma Coates, “Elvis from the Waist Up and Other Myths: 1950s Music Television and the Gendering of Rock Discourse,” in *Medium Cool: Music Videos from Soundies to Cellphones*, ed. Roger Beebe and Jason Middleton (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 226–51.
5. See, for example, Keir Keightley, “You Keep Coming Back like a Song: Adult Audiences, Taste Panics, and the Idea of the Standard,” *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 12, no. 1 (March 2001): 7–40; Keir Keightley, “Long Play: Adult-Oriented Popular Music and the Temporal Logics of the Post-War Sound Recording Industry in the USA,” *Media, Culture & Society* 26, no. 3 (May 2004): 275–391; and Kyle Barnett, “Furniture Music: The Phonograph as Furniture, 1900–1930,” *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 18, no. 3 (December 2006): 301–24.
6. See in particular two important books: Andrew Goodwin, *Dancing in the Distraction Factory: Music Television and Popular Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992); and Carol Vernallis, *Experiencing Music Video: Aesthetics and Cultural Context* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004). Beebe and Middleton, *Medium Cool*, extends the definition of music video to Soundies, television programs, and video art.
7. In fact, the recording industry may have been the first transnational media industry; for example, around the turn of the twentieth century, Columbia Phonograph, later owned by CBS, set up offices in Paris, Berlin, and London. See Gary Marmorstein, *The Label: The Story of Columbia Records* (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 2007), 18.
8. These journals are *Popular Music*, associated with the International Association for the Study of Popular Music; *The Journal of Popular Music Studies*, associated with the International Association for the Study of Popular Music—US Branch; and the unaffiliated *Popular Music and Society*, none of which have the academic heft or circulation of journals attached to more established or accepted disciplines and societies.
9. Michele Hilmes, “The Bad Object: Television in the American Academy,” *Cinema Journal* 45, no. 1 (2005): 111–16.

10. A debate rages within popular music studies about the hegemony of “rockism,” especially since the field emerged out of rock criticism as practiced by sociologists in the 1970s. Whether this bias still exists, and whether the ability to be a “rockist” is equally distributed across various axes of identity and subjectivity, is questionable.
11. Patricia Cohen, “Dumb and Dumber: Are Americans Hostile to Knowledge?” *New York Times*, February 14, 2008, <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/02/14/books/14dumb.html?em&ex=1203742800&en=b2771b34bce125e7&ei=5070> (accessed March 11, 2008).
12. See, for example, Michael Curtin, “Feminine Desire in the Age of Satellite Television,” *Journal of Communication* 49, no. 2 (June 1999): 55–70; Lisa Parks, “Satellite Rhythms: Channel V, Asian Music Videos, and Transnational Gender,” in *Rock over the Edge: Transformations in Popular Music Culture*, ed. Roger Beebe, Denise Fullbrook, and Ben Saunders (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 216–32; and Christopher Holmes Smith, “I Don’t Like to Dream about Getting Paid: Representations of Social Mobility and the Emergence of the Hip Hop Mogul,” *Social Text* 21, no. 4 (Winter 2003): 69–97.
13. Notable recent works include Kembrew McLeod, “MP3s are Killing Home Taping: The Rise of Internet Distribution and Its Challenge to the Major Label Music Monopoly,” *Popular Music and Society* 28, no. 4 (2005): 521–31; Jack Bishop, “Building International Empires of Sound: Concentrations of Power and Property in the ‘Global’ Music Market,” *Popular Music and Society* 28, no. 4 (2005): 443–71; Tom McCourt and Patrick Burkart, “When Creators, Corporations and Consumers Collide: Napster and the Development of On-Line Music Distribution,” *Media, Culture & Society* 25, no. 3 (2003): 333–43; and Jonathan Sterne, “The mp3 as Cultural Artifact,” *New Media & Society* 8, no. 5 (2006): 825–42.
14. Fine work already exists in this area. See, for example, Jeff Smith, *The Sounds of Commerce: Marketing Popular Film Music* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998); Pamela Robertson Wojcik and Arthur Knight, eds., *Soundtrack Available: Essays on Film and Popular Music* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001); and Kay Dickinson, “‘My Generation’: Popular Music, Age and Influence in Teen Drama of the 1990s,” in *Teen TV: Genre, Consumption and Identity*, ed. Glyn Davis and Kay Dickinson (London: BFI Publishing, 2004), 99–111.
15. See, for example, Simon Frith, *Sound Effects: Youth, Leisure, and the Politics of Rock’n’Roll* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981), still the most comprehensive description of the relationship between youth and popular music.

Radio’s Cultural Turns



by David Hendy

In the late 1970s, one of the BBC’s regular presenters, Tom Vernon, declared that enough was enough. Radio folk like him were simply spending too much time in windowless studios, handling words and ideas on little pieces of magnetic tape—like processors of “substitute reality,” as he put it. If there really was “a world out there you can touch” it was surely his—and his fellow broadcasters’—job to reach

out and touch it. Vernon's response was to abandon the Corporation's central London bunker, Broadcasting House, and take his (generously sized) body out on the road. The result was an acclaimed series for BBC Radio 4 called *Fat Man on a Bicycle*, a piece of radio vérité woven from a succession of apparently inconsequential encounters with ordinary people. The series also attempted what Vernon's line-manager called the basic goal of all good programs on her network: "an understanding of the human predicament."¹

Vernon's tale brings the horrible shock of recognition to anyone studying radio. Our world, like his, is often portrayed as absurdly inward-looking, an academic discipline that enjoys its own company rather too much and desperately needs to get out more, meet the neighbors, perhaps go on a few trips abroad. Take the recent critique from Kathy Battles of Oakland University. Too often, she warns, we rely on a suspiciously settled narrative for the radio medium, one where it has been shaped almost entirely by those established "institutions" of broadcasting, national networks such as NBC or the BBC. The result? Myopic neglect of the immense local variation in program making and the extraordinary diversity in listening practices. Worse, with radio's grandest institutions treated as "fixed objects," there has been an overemphasis on stability instead of the constantly changing and infinitely complex "web of relationships" that lies behind every broadcasting act. There is, she implies, some catching up to do with the broader academic worlds in which we move.²

If Battles is right, we should indeed be worried. After all, as Michele Hilmes suggests, it would be absurdly parochial to ignore how the Internet, satellite technology, and digitization more generally are all reorientating radio away from its national or local preoccupations and toward something truly *transnational* in nature.³ Further, as the British academic James Curran points out, a "medium-centric" discipline invariably gives rise to fractured and incomplete understandings of the media's collective relationship with the wider historical processes of the last hundred or so years, such as democratization and the rise of mass culture.⁴ Meanwhile, that other *eminence grise* of British media studies, Nicholas Garnham, reminds us that unless we find a way to connect our work with neighboring traditions of cultural, social, and intellectual history, we are destined to neglect what ought to be our central task: to understand in the broadest sense the media's role in the origins and development of what, for want of a better phrase, we call "modernity."⁵

Yet something is amiss in all this fretting. For there is, surely, little that is *intrinsically* inward-looking about the radio medium and the people who work in it. And just as Tom Vernon saw a solution in escaping the confines of his office, so scholars of radio have, for nearly two decades now, been seeking (and patiently revealing) the various ways their medium operates in precisely that complex "web of relationships" described by Battles. Those of us engaged in tracing radio's transformations are, in some sense, always dealing in *cultural* history, simply because we have to. Sound carries, and it has never been easy to keep the airwaves segregated. Hence, as Susan Douglas has eloquently demonstrated, it was radio that

played a crucial role in exposing white American teenagers in suburban bedrooms to R&B in the 1950s: it brought an alternative culture into the home as nothing else could at the time, least of all the somewhat monoracial world of network television.⁶ Nor is radio a dispassionate carrier of content. Those working in it have wrestled constantly with what they should or should not transmit—a thought process that demands a high degree of worldliness, or, at the very least, one ear fixed constantly to the ground. The medium changes in response to these decisions through a series of evolutionary adaptive nudges. It constantly mutates in surprising ways, exhibiting what Douglas refers to as a kind of persistent technical “insurgency,” so that at just the point when corporate interests believe they have it tamed, a new and feral subspecies is unleashed. Indeed, as a whole raft of work from American scholars such as Michele Hilmes, Michael C. Keith, Jason Loviglio, Kathy Newman, Derek Vaillant, Susan Merrill Squier, Barbara Savage, and others has shown through its attention to the heterogeneity that characterizes American broadcasting and American life, if there *is* an essential feature of the radio medium, it is this: its extraordinary *hybridity*.⁷ It is always and everywhere a vital, *involved* site of cultural exchange. It is always, of necessity, turning its face to the world.

Given this, even the grandest and most “stable” of broadcasting institutions can rarely be regarded in radio studies as a monolithic entity incapable of revealing nothing more than its own internal history. Take my own work, which has focused on the evolution of the BBC’s main speech network, Radio 4. In many ways, Radio 4 is the archetype of the kind of institution that Battles warns us against: the successor of the BBC’s Home Service, and before that the National Programme, it carries the DNA of the Corporation’s founding father, Sir John Reith, in its commitment to putting a broad range of mixed programming—news, current affairs, drama, stories, religion, debate, comedy—before a mainstream (though distinctly middle-class and establishment-flavored) national audience. As such, it is an icon, not just of BBC values, but of Britishness, and of immutability.

Yet, if one immerses oneself in the network’s archives, it becomes clear pretty quickly that over the decades, very little has been taken for granted by those working there, least of all what BBC values or Britishness might actually be. One vivid example of this ceaseless worrying-away at radio’s public role came in August 1975, when various senior program makers and managers met, as they did every week, to discuss a selection of programs that had been broadcast and the kind of aesthetic or philosophical issues they raised. On this particular occasion, one of the programs they chewed over was *Going into Uniform*, a montage portrait of life in the British armed forces, built up from a mix of firsthand accounts. There was little aesthetically or editorially exciting about the program; indeed, for some at the meeting, that was precisely the problem. One network controller complained that it offered talk of “the most banal kind,” another that it “sounded like a wartime morale-building broadcast.” The most serious accusation, however, was this: that the ready availability of portable recorders had evidently made it rather too easy to record interviews with, well, *anyone*. In place of “rigour” and an “analytical

framework,” the BBC was “in danger of filling the air with nothing but empty chat.” When the program’s producer defended his efforts by claiming simply that “those interviewed had said what they meant . . . one could not put words into their mouths,” the outraged response of one of his colleagues was that this seemed to accept a distinctly un-Reithian sentiment: that “anyone who talked without thinking was real, while anyone who thought first and then talked was not.”⁸

So the argument raged. And for me, at least, such vigorous debate—minuted in near-verbatim detail by the BBC, as all those meetings were—provides a delicious illustration of an institution searching for, questioning, revising, *challenging* the form of radio required in a fast-changing, diversifying society. Should it be demotic in tone? Yes, of course. But how demotic, before it threw away the BBC’s historic reputation for being detached and authoritative? Similarly, when it came to matters of taste—over, say, sex or swearing—should radio move with the times, relax a little, and take a descriptive rather than prescriptive stance, as many producers urged? Or, as many others inside the BBC cautioned, should it be remembered that radio was a “blind” medium in which difficult language was especially exposed, and, as a medium invited into people’s homes, that it was expected by many ordinary listeners to conform to notions of “family” behavior?

Barely a week went by without heated debate on this particular conundrum inside the BBC, not least because it touched on the enduring question of whether or not the Corporation should be leading or following public behavior and morality. On each occasion, discussion drew upon an array of personal prejudices, inherited traditions, and institutional restrictions. But it also looked across to what was happening in television, the theater, cinema, literature, pop music, journalism, and local media; it assessed the political climate, the moral climate, the weight and strength of public opinion, the response of professional critics and experts, the hard data of audience research, letters of complaint, and press coverage. In short, it metabolized the world around it. Indeed, it was, and is, precisely the job of radio producers to breathe in the atmosphere in which they live and work. That is why, whenever I have talked to producers about the creative spark that led to the making of a particular program, they have invariably replied by saying, in effect, that there was simply “something in the air” leading intuitively to a particular theme and a particular style of production.

Naturally, the air being breathed will change according to time and place. Take, first, the matter of historical contingency. Since the late 1960s, broadcasting in many parts of the Western world was struggling to navigate a tortuous line between the high watermark of liberal optimism in the 1960s and the more peevish conservatism of the mid-1970s. At other times, the anxieties and influences bearing down on radio, though no less intense, have been different: the pressures of war, the arrival of television, the forging of racial identities. As for geographical contingency, the gathering desire among radio scholars for more transnational study appears to be heightening, rather than diminishing, our awareness of the ways in which radio is bound up in questions of national cultures and national anxieties.

Those who have studied radio's development in Africa, for instance, have rightly been exercised most by questions of decolonization and its implications for the management of ethnic or linguistic divisions.⁹ For those, like me, focused on the United Kingdom, there is a fascination with the way in which a network like Radio 4, being part of the BBC (a "national instrument" regarded by many Britons as more influential in public life than either the Church of England or Parliament), has long been implicated in the question of what it means to be British—in a way, incidentally, that might seem far-fetched to those studying, say, National Public Radio in the United States. This role manifests itself in certain obvious ways on the BBC channel: a predilection for dramatizations of classic English novels, for gardening programs, understated styles of presentation, arcane parlor games, and dark humor or dry wit—all echoing assumed aspects of the national character.

But it emerges in more subtle forms, too. One reason Radio 4 has always resisted becoming an all-news network, I would argue, is that "rolling news" has smacked too much of an "American" news style—ruthlessly efficient and unbending in format—as opposed to that artfully chaotic schedule that has always been preferable to most Radio 4 listeners, and that no doubt conjures up for them the style of an English country cottage garden, with its meandering paths and a riot of plants, all blended with pleasing irregularity. Radio 4 folk, it should be added, remain equally suspicious of the more avant-garde radio styles that find favor among some continental European public service broadcasters: the soundscapes, *musique concrète*, and experimental glossolalia of German, French, or Italian artist-producers. Over the years, such work has been dismissed by many BBC staff as "incomprehensible," "indulgent," "pretentious," or (this being the most serious flaw in BBC eyes) failing to engage in the task of "pragmatic communication" to the widest public possible.¹⁰ And in this, Radio 4's institutional culture reflects with uncanny accuracy the deep distrust of the avant-garde that other historians have seen as firmly embedded in the matter-of-fact, somewhat literal-minded, and sometimes unpleasantly jingoistic British temperament.¹¹

None of this, I should add, argues for a discipline in which scholars hunker down in their respective national bunker and congratulate themselves on the unique features of their own institutions. It is worth noting, for example, that among those leading BBC Radio in the postwar era were a great many continental European émigré intellectuals. These men and women undoubtedly brought a more cosmopolitan outlook to their adopted home. And, as Michele Hilmes has ably demonstrated by comparing the rhetoric issuing from broadcasters on both sides of the Atlantic between the 1920s and the 1940s, much that we recognize as distinctively "British" or distinctively "American" has actually emerged through a process consisting, in part, of a mutual (but generally unacknowledged) trading in formats and styles. In part, too, it has consisted of the calculated projection of a stereotyped other in order to frighten domestic regulators away from giving houseroom to alternative models. The lesson, she concludes, is that radio scholarship needs to challenge some of the rigid dualisms it has adopted in the past.¹²

Nor am I claiming that the academic scrutiny applied to a national network such as Radio 4 is particularly novel in paying attention to the medium's wider cultural significance. Indeed, quite the reverse. Eric Barnouw's history of American broadcasting, now some forty years old, acknowledged early on that radio was forged through a broad range of social organizations. And the field of radio history is now rich with studies that pursue the implications of this openness. Hilmes, for example, has recently edited a collection of essays on NBC that establish very clearly that a radio network, though firmly in possession of its own character, is "by its very nature a diffuse formation, consolidating discourse but also dispersing it."¹³ Elsewhere in the States, Steve Wurtzler has analyzed early radio in the context of the broader commodification of sound and recording technologies, while Todd Avery has looked at the links between British radio and modernist writers during the same period.¹⁴ In Britain itself, historians such as Seán Street and Hugh Chignell have traced, respectively, the complex interactions between the BBC and overseas commercial stations in the pre-war era and the influence of Thatcherism on current affairs in the 1980s, while Kate Lacey has looked to German radio during the Weimar and Nazi regimes to explore its role in restructuring the troubled divide between what was supposed to be a predominantly masculine public sphere and a predominantly feminine private one.¹⁵ In Italy, meanwhile, scholars such as Enrico Menduni and Peppino Ortoleva are busy reimagining radio in terms of long-term shifts in aural culture and human consciousness.

And so the list of good works could go on. But the essential point is this: in every case, radio emerges as something of a panopticon, or, more appropriately perhaps, a "panacousticon." To enter it is to get a marvelous feel for the broader ecology in which radio lives. As the writer and dramatist Jonathan Raban once said, it is "a corridor through which the whole world passes."¹⁶ The effect is to make radio history an immensely pleasurable terrain, if only because of its infinitely porous and hence largely unpredictable nature. Thus, while Asa Briggs, whose monumental five-volume history of British broadcasting provides the starting point for many a research project, had no doubt that his focus should be almost exclusively upon the BBC, which had preemptively occupied the central role in that narrative, he also recognized that to write such a history was "in a sense to write the history of everything else."¹⁷ With such authoritative backing, we might reasonably conclude there is little need to force a "cultural turn" upon radio studies. It has already arrived.

For some, I suspect, this diminishes radio's appeal as a site of aesthetic study. If radio is about all this prosaic, worldly stuff, the argument goes, then it cannot be an art form in its own right. To be an art form, different from but equal to, say, cinema, would allow it a place in the pantheon of serious academic debate. Instead, it is a mere conduit for others' work, others' art, others' ideas. Such anxiety is entirely understandable given the very real critical neglect of radio's artistic potential in comparison with the attention given to visual media. It is also, I think, entirely misplaced. For a start, even if we agree that most radio is not essentially *about* sound, but merely deploys it as a kind of aural typography, one important aesthetic

task remains: to analyze more fully the complex ways in which transmitted programs have invariably shown all the scars of the various cultural debates, presumptions, tensions, or compromises that constituted the circumstances of their making. Indeed, as Paddy Scannell would say, it is *precisely* the programs that disclose the “care-structure of humanly made things.”¹⁸ Old-fashioned close-listening and rigorous textual analysis both remain indispensable parts of the radio historian’s toolkit if we are to understand what broadcasting is fundamentally *about*.

We might also remember that, in radio, form can genuinely be as interesting as content. Though, perhaps, “form” is not quite the right word. Talking of radio’s *purpose* or its cognitive *power* might be better. For I would argue that it is the purely *communicative* aspects of its development that might yet provide our richest seam of untapped intellectual inquiry. Indeed, Scannell has argued for a reorientation in our approach to *all* media in roughly these terms. As he put it recently, “the question of communication . . . is, or should be, quite central . . . if we are at all concerned with how [media] work for viewers, listeners and readers.”¹⁹

Here, then, is where we might own up to a few genuine lacunae in radio scholarship, and even, perhaps, assess the possibilities for further cultural turns that might enrich our field. Note, for instance, Scannell’s words: “how they *work*.” Despite our oft-expressed worries about radio’s historic trajectories—the homogenization, the fragmenting audience, the struggle with television for critical attention, the struggle to find airtime for challenging and creative programs—one thing is constant: we still *listen*. Indeed, in Britain, we are actually now listening more than at any point in the past forty years. Such loyalty to the medium, and the intensity with which it is usually articulated, speak to radio’s extraordinary psychic hold over us. Why on earth should this be, in what is so often presumed to be a visual age? Susan Douglas once wrote of “the Zen of Listening”: radio’s ability, through sound and music and its effect on our memories, to call us toward the past or toward unseen worlds around us.

Since then, there has been a flood of new work in neuroscience, evolutionary theory, and psychology, ranging from the Harvard historian Daniel Lord Smail’s *On Deep History and the Brain* to the New York psychiatrist Oliver Sacks’s studies of the impact of music on the mind in his recent book, *Musicophilia*.²⁰ Simultaneously, there has been a burgeoning literature on “sensory culture,” in which a new fascination with the role of listening in past and present societies is tangible. Radio history might reach out to these intellectual threads, grasp them, and tie up a few loose ends in the process. In his recent survey of the past century of research, for example, the American broadcasting historian Christopher Sterling identified both audience studies and the question of communication effects as two neglected corners of the field.²¹ Perhaps we have been frightened by the extraordinary difficulty of pinning down the precise ways in which listeners have used a medium generally regarded as “nothing special,” just there, in the background. Maybe it is our reasonable distrust of crude “hypodermic needle” models emerging from the so-called “media effects” tradition. But neuroscience and sensory history now tell

us to be more relaxed and more *optimistic* about the chances of mapping this neglected terrain: culture and evolution, we learn, are more closely intertwined than we supposed, and *what* we listen to—and *how* we listen to something—are two important parts of what makes us modern, sentient, sociable human beings.

An understanding of the historical *impact* of radio would undoubtedly be a vast and challenging project. Yet it now seems not just desirable, but possible. And it might just be the next in that long series of cultural turns that have turned radio history into one of the liveliest and most innovative areas in the whole discipline of media studies.

Notes

1. Quoted in David Hendy, *Life on Air: A History of Radio Four* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 221–24.
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4. James Curran, *Media and Power* (London: Routledge, 2002).
5. Nicholas Garnham, *Emancipation, the Media and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
6. Susan Douglas, *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination, from Amos ‘n’ Andy and Edward R. Murrow to Wolfman Jack and Howard Stern* (New York: Random House, 1999).
7. See, for example, Michele Hilmes, *Radio Voices: American Broadcasting, 1922–1952* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), and *Only Connect: A Cultural History of Broadcasting in the United States*, 2nd ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2006); Michael C. Keith, *Voices in the Purple Haze: Underground Radio and the Sixties* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997), *Sounds in the Dark: All-Night Radio in American Life* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 2001), and many others; Jason Loviglio, *Radio’s Intimate Public: Network Broadcasting and Mass-Mediated Democracy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005); Kathy M. Newman, *Radio Active: Advertising and Consumer Activism, 1935–1947* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Derek Vaillant, *Sounds of Reform: Progressivism and Music in Chicago, 1873–1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Susan Merrill Squier, ed., *Communities of the Air: Radio Century, Radio Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003); Barbara D. Savage, *Broadcasting Freedom: Radio, War and the Politics of Race, 1938–48* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).
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9. See, for example, Richard Fardon and Graham Furniss, eds., *African Broadcast Cultures: Radio in Transition* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000); and Winston Mano, “Renegotiating Tradition on Radio Zimbabwe,” *Media, Culture & Society* 26, no. 3 (2004): 315–36.
10. See Martin Shingler, “Some Recurring Features of European Avant-Garde Radio,” *Journal of Radio Studies* 7, no. 1 (2000): 196–212; David Hendy, “The Prix Italia Files: Creativity, Europe and BBC Radio in the 1970s” (paper presented to Radio Summer School, University of Siena, 2004).

11. Ross McKibbin, *Classes and Cultures: England, 1918–1951* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
12. Michele Hilmes, “British Quality, American Chaos: Historical Dualisms and What They Leave Out,” *The Radio Journal: International Studies in Broadcast and Audio Media* 1, no. 1 (2003): 13–27.
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18. Paddy Scannell, *Media and Communication* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2007), 4.
19. *Ibid.*, 2.
20. Daniel Lord Smail, *On Deep History and the Brain* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); Oliver Sacks, *Musicophilia: Tales of Music and Brain* (London: Picador, 2007).
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Re-Enchanting Radio



by Anna Friz

When I was young, radio measured the day. My mother listened to the talk radio channel of the national public radio station on a transistor receiver during the week: the jingles of various shows marked the top and bottom of the hour, an urgent fanfare warned when the news was imminent, and the voices of various hosts chattered away from distant rooms in the house as my mother carried the radio around to accompany different tasks. As I grew older, radio launched the day from my bedside clock radio, but radio also began to propose the night. With the volume on low, I lay awake late while the house was asleep, listening to stations with weak signals and late-night programs filled with unusual sounds, and I felt that strange, impersonal intimacy of a voice from the radio, in my ear, in the dark, as I

gradually developed an awareness of other ears and barely audible voices, sharing darkness; a radiophonic night that could not be easily quantified.

None of these experiences led in a straight line to the art practice that I would develop years later, but they did strongly inform my desire to explore invisible but audible spaces and to conjure and compose unusual sounds and voices of my own, first as a programmer at an independent radio station, and eventually as a professional sound and radio artist. For the past decade, I have been creating self-reflexive radio art works where radio is the source, subject, and medium of the work. From the childhood fiction of “the little people in the radio” to documentary remixes of live political events, I aim to create dynamic, atmospheric works equally able to reflect upon public media culture or to reveal interior landscapes, which I broadcast on radio, as well as perform live or install using low-watt FM transmitters and receivers. I want to re-enchant radio, and in this, listen deeply for what is often missed or missing; I want to think beyond the formats to which radio has been confined and naturalized to wonder what radio might have been or might be. I will take the opportunity here to explore some of the persistent themes that preoccupy my radio art works, namely notions of transception, embodiment, resonance, and the strangely intimate distance of radiophony. Along the way, I reflect upon two very different but related solo pieces: the pirate intervention and performance *The Clandestine Transmissions of Pirate Jenny* (2000–2003) and a recent installation entitled *You are far from us* (2006–2007).¹

Experimental radio has never been easy listening, and so it has flourished in micropolitical forms: from licensed independent campus/community stations, to temporary clandestine low-watt broadcasts, to online collaborative networks. My own work as a radio artist has developed within such independent or appropriative contexts as Canadian campus/community radio, artist-run culture, and unlicensed interventions, with a focus on the critical (re)use of terrestrial radio technology. Though independent radio is largely volunteer-based, the relative or complete lack of overhead institutional structure has also fostered a unique and eclectic radio art practice that is able to move radio into unexpected territories.

Canadians enjoy a measure of access to radio broadcasting unheard of in many countries in the form of campus/community (c/c) radio. The long-standing c/c radio sector distinguishes itself from the public and private (for profit) radio sectors by being single-station operations run mostly or entirely by volunteers, claiming nonprofit status, supporting multiple modes of address and style on air, broadcasting in multiple languages, reflecting the different needs of urban or rural broadcast, and often broadcasting on low-power or even micropower transmitters. These very diverse stations share a mandate to supply programming that is absent from the mainstream, so in addition to featuring Canadian music and culture, no more than 4 percent “hits” may be played in the music programming, and stations are licensed only with a significant commitment to promote cultural, gender, and ethnic diversity reflective of the community in which the station intends

to broadcast. C/c radio has notably also been a starting point for women getting into electronic music and experimental sound production, an area of new media that continues to be dominated by male producers and artists.

Bertolt Brecht, writing in 1932, envisioned radio as a tool for more than “mere sharing out” of information. For Brecht, the radio could be a means of connection, a medium that could link communities as well as individuals and could bring listeners “into a relationship” instead of isolating them.² His ideal radio was a transceiver, an apparatus for both sending and receiving, which would do away with a silent mass audience and build a network of communicators instead. Even within the confines of radio’s one-to-many state-controlled format (German radio was under state monopoly in Brecht’s time), Brecht wrote that radio should be far more educational, democratic, and publicly accessible, such that regular people could speak and contribute on air, creating a place for radio art and experimentation. In much the same way that Brecht sought to pull theater away from the traditional forms and themes in order to implicate the audience in art-as-political-intervention, so did he propose radio as a means for the community to engage with itself, to enter a deeper relationship.

Campus/community radio provokes the audience into listening for the unexpected while encouraging them to come to the station and become programmers, thus beginning a kind of circle of transception between the listening community and the radio station. Radio art in this context is not necessarily the purview of “experts” or “professionals,” but instead is enacted by a community of listeners and creators in shared radio space—where space is something actively produced rather than a vacancy waiting to be filled. The ramshackle character of such stations (with their small budgets, inherited equipment, scavenged furniture, and anticonsumer political ethos) encourages a do-it-yourself ethic and aesthetic that is also common in radio art work produced on unlicensed airwaves. Speaking for myself, first as a listener and (starting in 1993) as a volunteer programmer, it was through c/c radio that I was exposed to collaged and bricolaged audio works, field recording and soundscape composition, sound poetry, absurdist radio plays, critical remixing of media debris, and improvised radio-making. C/c radio provided the training on recording and editing equipment, the studios with which to make my own original works, and the confidence to experiment live on the air.

Artist-run centres have also played a significant role in fostering my work and that of countless other contemporary Canadian sound and media artists. Centres like the Western Front in Vancouver were established in the 1970s by artists who resisted the limited access to galleries and the institutional determination of art in favor of a more unorthodox, experimental, parallel scene. Such centres often lead the way in terms of fostering new art practices, particularly in sound and media art, by offering training, equipment resources, and venues for dissemination. Thus, c/c radio and artist-run culture have clear affinities, and it is no surprise that experimental sound and music events sponsored by artist-run centres tend to partner with a c/c radio station.³ Crucial to my emerging radio art practice in the 1990s in

Vancouver, the Western Front also provided me with the opportunity to learn basic electronic construction and tinkering, specifically to build my own microwatt FM transmitter.

Like other radio-makers and media artists, I became interested in extending radio beyond the fixed format of broadcasting to become more mobile and unstable, and so I have taken up an itinerant radio art practice. Despite the restrictions of terrestrial FM radio (one-way, state-licensed over fifty milliwatts in Canada), I wondered if Brecht's oft-referenced dream of transception might still be invoked by subverting broadcast formats, or by pulling radio out of the formal studio altogether and into site-specific installation or performative contexts using small transmitters. How could radiophonic space be (re)created, current conventions highlighted and challenged, and different characters or imagined spaces (part radio, part acoustic) come to life? What might be the possibilities for transmission and indeed communication if conventional radio technology were experienced in a new frame?

Pirate Jenny. "Are there little people who live inside the radio?" So begins *The Clandestine Transmissions of Pirate Jenny*, a solo piece for radio transmitter and receivers, walkie-talkies, static, and voice. When I was young, like many children, I half-believed the voices emanating from the radio were the voices of little people who lived inside. Turn on the radio, the little people begin to talk; change the station, and they change their voices. I imagined the radio to contain a miniature theater in which the people performed whenever I wanted. But perhaps there is dissent brewing in Radioland. Working conditions have certainly not improved in the past decades; with downsizing of both the crew of people in each radio and in the physical space (as radio technology allows for increasingly compact radios), there is only one person per radio who is responsible for all the voices. What if one such person, sick and tired of our listening whims, decides to take action? What if she attempts to communicate with other radios, dreaming of a secret radio relay network linking clock radio to car radio to walkman, while we, the dictatorial Ears in charge of the dial, are inattentive, absent, or asleep?

The Clandestine Transmissions of Pirate Jenny is a tale of a radio pirate featuring Pirate Jenny herself, transmitting from inside the black box of radio technology that is atopic—a Futurist nightmare in which she is imprisoned without contact with others of her kind. When I extracted her from *Threepenny Opera* and put her on the air as a modern-day mutineer, Pirate Jenny became all my radio listening and longing folded in on itself and demanding acknowledgment. But rather than an insurgent chambermaid plotting bloody revenge against the bourgeois clients of the hotel, this character is a radio pirate who is *in* as well as *on* the radio. This fable maintains ties to Brecht in more than name alone: Pirate Jenny's alienation and loneliness prompt her to take action by transforming her radio into a transceiver so that she can both send messages to other radios and monitor the bandwidth for the longed-for response. Pirate Jenny transmits when the Ears turn off her radio, and listens to the distant signals of other radios performing for other

Ears, so she knows she is not alone. Through Pirate Jenny, radio can literally become (self-) conscious. But will another little radio person hear her and respond? And will she be able to decipher the message when she finally receives it?

My fictional descent into the black box of radio is part of a real-life practice of radio deconstruction and remix, both as a listener and as a broadcaster. In effect, I made myself into the transceiver, listening to the city between stations, broadcasting with my homemade low-watt transmitter, invoking unseen radio territories to trouble the conventions of radio use and practice. I have presented the piece as an unlicensed radio intervention in Montreal (tuning my signal immediately next to a major station, so if someone's radio is slightly detuned, they will hear Pirate Jenny's plea), as a late-night "takeover" of a c/c radio station, as a live theatrical performance (using walkie-talkies and live radio sampling), and as a studio composition on national public radio. The piece consists of Pirate Jenny's SOS signal, her monologues to herself and the unknown listener, and soundscapes created from intercepted signals, radio scanning, static, and noise. The in-between places of the radio are not considered dead air zones but uncharted airwaves rich in meaning and potential—the habitat of the little radio people, the mythical off-spring of early radio technology. Through these soundscapes, programming and noise cease to be binary opposites but intertwined concepts: much like the early-twentieth-century avant-garde artists' proposal of trans-rational languages consisting of phonemes, single tones, and noise, the programming *is* noise, and the point is that noise is meaningful sound. As Pirate Jenny says, "If you are receiving this message and can't respond, please send more static."

Pirate Jenny is constituted by the same paradoxes of immanence and imminence that characterize voices on the radio: her voice indicates her presence on the radio, but as a creature *of* the radio, where is she exactly? In my radio, in yours, in the transmission between radios? She is present within her signal range—everywhere within it, and nowhere. She is fiction, and yet she is "real"—audible, vibrating in the listener's ear (or Ear). She has a singular name, and yet when she performs for the Ears, she is also all the other voices that clamor from the radio: the news anchor, the Top 40 DJ, the weather reporter, the Sunday morning evangelist. I recognize that some of the desire for connection never dissipates, no matter how many friends and relationships we enjoy. Our voices grope in the dark: "Who's there?" *The Clandestine Transmissions of Pirate Jenny* is a dream of the transeptual potential for radiophony, and as such the radios themselves become dreamers, implicated in the static-y landscapes and stuttering secret texts revealed. "What do they do when I turn off the radio?" When radios sleep, what dreams may come?

You Are Far from Us. Radio is often described as the realm of disembodied subjects. Acousmatic in its current form, the peculiar modernist tendency has been to associate radio with a kind of psychosis: "I hear voices, but there's nobody there." But for me, sound and radio are precisely about presence—however different

from a face-to-face encounter—not absence. As Jonathan Sterne notes, “phenomenological understandings of subjectivity need not privilege self-presence or reject historicism.”⁴ For radio, then, the broadcast voice is not “severed” or fundamentally “alienated” from the body, but is characterized by its indexical relationship to both the body that produces it and the technology that amplifies and transmits it. We are not confronted with the voices of the dead, but the traces of the living, whether or not they still live. Where do we situate the voice as it becomes implicated in the relationship between multiple bodies, organic and inorganic? N. Katherine Hayles proposes that in the same moment that sound reproduction technologies such as recorders or signal effects shatter the dream of the voice as belonging to a holistic subject, “in another sense they create a new subject ambiguously located in both the body and the recorder.”⁵ This form of subjectivity, shared and partial, embodied in the oscillations between flesh and technology, amplified by desire and transmitters, palpable and affective, is what I term resonant subjectivity.

How far is far away? I return to the persistent paradox of intimacy and distance in wireless transmission. Gregory Whitehead has noted that “radio happens in sound, but sound is not really what matters about radio.”⁶ Radio is about traces and reverberations, resonance of the living mortal desires to communicate. That we are so often thwarted in our dreams of union realized through profound communication makes this the most mortal dream of all. Whitehead posits “dreamland/ghostland as the natural habitat of the wireless imagination,” but he goes on to state that “mostly, this involves staging an intricate game of position, a game that unfolds among far-flung bodies, for the most part unknown to each other.”⁷ Mobile- and micro-radio art bring these formerly far-flung bodies into contact and context, and allow for something else to happen. The body, no longer visible, is nonetheless palpable, felt, resonant. With minor media such as community and micro-radio, the circuit of transmitting bodies is smaller and more apparent—the broadcast takes place in a localized site such that transmission and reception are intimately interwoven *in situ*, while the less conventional format allows for more of the “secretions” of this aggregate radio body to emerge: the lip-smacking, sniffing, coughing, breathing, pauses, and filler words; the uneven microphone technique, the limits of cheap equipment, and the sound of the environmental context—be that a living room, a street corner, or a forest. Bodies resonating in wireless space. Through such palpable, embodied radio presence, I have been inching closer to the understanding that transmission is us, that the dream and reality of transception is us; and that even across distance and time, radio is us.

The radio of the future as imagined by the past was filled with the promise of extraordinary, extraterritorial union across distance and time. Spiritualists and pseudoscientists ardently believed radio would allow access to realms of the uncanny; that the radio would provide a connection with the dead or other ethereal spirits. Meanwhile, the radio of the present is filled with incessant tallies of the dead: casualties of war, of street violence, etc. Rather than dream again of the radio

transmitting messages from those who have passed away, I wondered what communication we might be missing from those living around us. What nearly inaudible signals, transmitted in moments of intensity or crisis, might we hear if the radio was tuned to hear? What do people seek to transmit, in a moment between the intake of breath and the breath held, waiting, in tension? In listening for and imagining these signals, I seek to hear the social life inherent in very personal liminal moments.

You are far from us is an installation for four low-watt FM transmitters, and sixty pocket-sized radio receivers, all suspended just over six feet above the floor in a nearly black space, lit by small LED lights. The piece is a four-channel composition, with the radios each tuned to one of four FM frequencies broadcast from the transmitters, such that the radio array constructs an immersive, dynamic, sonic environment, where sounds are felt to be both near and far. It contains five movements: inhale, suspend, witness, nocturne, exhale. Built on breath and other bodily exclamations typically absent from regular radio broadcasts, the radios operate at the limit of their capacity to transmit emotion. Voices in the piece are sampled from eyewitness and survivor accounts of people confronted by assailants with guns. Other sampled sound sources include theremin, accordion, and stopwatch.

You are far from us proposes that transcription be unmoored from a strictly technical media definition to become a central paradigm of human communication. I continue to explore the desire for presence enacted through a transmission medium without the message being paramount—and to propose that even in a one-way format such as FM, speaking and listening could have other consequences than just transmission of information. Here the idea of empathy—the ability to understand and share the feelings of another—across distance and time has potential. The radiophonic subject as empathic is also transceptive: empathy becomes the ground zero for the “becoming radio” of human community. If we believe that radio must not represent so much as enable encounters, then we are also proposing a spirit of openness in the face of current corporate and state systems of media command/control. Far from overcoming or eliminating distance, I aim to emphasize distance, to truly *hear* the distance between myself and the huge, anxious, emotional breathing that pours out of the motionless suspended radios, while still feeling close to the people that these sounds affirm.

Radio as a medium for artistic exploration is potent: at the moment when radio would seem to be an exhausted, ossified, or obsolete technology, radiophony also regains the potential for rethinking deeper questions of community, communication, and the persistent ontology of senders and receivers that has continued to seep into emerging forms of transmission. Just at the moment when radio is relieved of the pressure to be new or inherently transformative is the time when something unexpected becomes possible. Though I also engage in experimental and improvised music, and sound design for theater, I am motivated by the enduring if commonplace magic of radio to continue my explorations in radiophonic space.

Notes

1. *The Clandestine Transmissions of Pirate Jenny*. Premiere performance at *Send+Receive Festival of Sound*, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, 2000. Premiere broadcast on CKUT-FM, Montreal, 2001. Studio composition commissioned for ORF *Kunstradio*, Austria, 2002. *You are far from us*. Premiere at *Radio Revolten*, Halle, Germany, 2006.
2. Bertolt Brecht, "Radio as an Apparatus of Communication" (1932), in *Radiotext(e)*, ed. Neil Strauss (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 15–17.
3. For instance, *Art's Birthday/24 Hours of Radio Art* at The Western Front and CiTR-FM radio in Vancouver (1999, 2000); *This City Is a Radio* at Paved Arts and CFCR-FM in Saskatoon (2006); *Deep Wireless* with Charles Street Video and CKLN-FM in Toronto (2002–8).
4. Jonathan Sterne, *The Audible Past: Cultural Origins of Sound Reproduction* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 21.
5. Katherine N. Hayles, "Voices Out of Bodies, Bodies Out of Voices: Audiotape and the Production of Subjectivity," in *Sound States: Innovative Poetics and Acoustical Technologies*, ed. Adalaide Morris (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 74–96.
6. Gregory Whitehead, "Out of the Dark: Notes on the Nobodies of Radio Art", in *Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio, and the Avant-Garde*, ed. Douglas Kahn and Gregory Whitehead (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 253–64.
7. *Ibid.*, 254.

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