

HORIZONTAL RADIO A TELEMATIC RADIO NETWORK PROJECT

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ORF KUNSTRADIO

&

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x-space

<http://www.thing.ac.at/thing/orfkunstradio.html>

A co-production between the Ars Acustica experts group of the EBU (European Broadcasting Union) and TRANSIT, KUNSTRADIO (Austrian National Broadcasting Corp.) and the Ars Electronica Festival'95.

24 hours live on the frequencies of many radio stations in Australia, Canada, Europe, Scandinavia, Russia and Israel.

In the Internet and at the network intersections in Athens, Belgrade, Berlin, Bologna, Bolzano, Budapest, Edmonton, Helsinki, Hobarth, Innsbruck, Jerusalem, Linz, London, Madrid, Montreal, Moscow, Munich, Naples, Québec, Rome, San Marino, Sarajevo, Sydney, Stockholm, Vancouver.

June, 22 noon to June, 23 noon (CET)

HORIZONTAL RADIO was a telematic radio network project, that took place simultaneously at different locations, in different media and on different frequencies and bandwidths.

The starting point was the analogue cable and broadcasting network of the EBU (European Broadcasting Union), which served as a primary telematic sphere of action and was connected in several cases to independent radiostations or interfered with by pirate radio. Linked to this network was the Internet, which served as a medium of access and distribution beyond the broadcasting range of the participating radio stations but also in some aspects as a possibility to influence the broadcasts.

The basic intention was to allow the unfolding of a media structure as heterogeneous as possible - as opposed to the unifying and standardized pressures of "communications" by the big broadcasting institutions and entertainment conglomerates.

HORIZONTAL RADIO functioned as an experimental field of tension generated by the highly differing characteristics of transmission and communication of the classical isosynchronous properties of radio and the asynchronous context- and download-related properties of digital data networks (on demand, random access, caching).

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HORIZONTAL RADIO, instead of perpetuating the vertical hierarchy between clearly defined transmitters and receivers turned into a platform for the exchange of transmissions.

Each individual radio station had to determine its role in the network, e.g. by making its own selection of artists, sub-projects and materials.

A series of regional sub-networks not only served as geographical bridges but also as gateways between different media and bandwidths. As a consequence, they created the preconditions for the desired decentralised structure, in which the individual station did not have to build up links to all other stations in order to be connected to them.

The following devices were employed

As carrier media analogue modulation lines for the transmission of hi-fi audio signals (stereo/mono)

- ISDN and standard telephone lines with corresponding frequency range reductions (7kHz: 3.4kHz)
- data transmission lines in the shape of ISDN or standard telephone lines for the remote access to musical computer equipment (e.g. for the purpose of real-time sound installations).
- the Internet as a caching server and as a medium of communication, interaction and distribution as well as a stage for conferences (telnet. ftp. irc. www. social netbrowser)
- VHF, MW and SW.

The resulting differences in sound quality served as an artistic tool and provided one of the very few means of orientation as regards the geographical areas and media covered by HORIZONTAL RADIO. Differences in sound were consciously used by some participants as "soundscape signatures" which helped to identify transmitters acoustically.

Such a network environment implies an artistic conception that places less emphasis on primary production and more on dialogic distribution and administration.

"Hi friends!

I am sorry your event is closing down in one and a half hours. I have been listening to your night program on FM4 until the small hours of the morning and I have not missed one of the programs on the cultural channel.

To me - a radio and net freak - it was a fantastic adventure to somehow have been part of it. The event has changed my attitude towards nets and about what radio could be in the future as well as my attitude towards information"

(e-mail msg. to the Austrian Radio on June 23rd)

HORIZONTAL RADIO proved to be a unique event. It was realised by more than 200 artists (the exact number may never be found out) together with a truly unknown number of

technicians and organizers. At locations far apart, in different media and on different bandwidths, a wide variety of projects took place simultaneously and, together, drew an image of the rapidly changing communications technologies of our time and their cultural implications.

Unlike e.g. the transmission of the New Year's concert of the Vienna Philharmonic or the soccer championships HORIZONTAL RADIO did not have a center, from which the event was transmitted to the whole (passive) world. Instead, the stations, while receiving contributions from - sometimes many - other participants, simultaneously transmitted their own contributions into the net. The result were constantly changing constellations and connections between the participating radiostations, the Internet and the physical sites, at which performances and concerts took place in front of big and small live-audiences and/or people walked through - in some cases interactive - installations. The hierarchical transmitter-receiver model of traditional mass-media was replaced on many levels and in differing intensities by a model of being a participant or at least being part of it...

In projects like Horizontal Radio artists first assume the role of initiators, organizers, managers, who develop a situation inside networks, in which an unknown number of participants/users will in an effort of distributed authorship be able to contribute to the unfolding of a "piece". This "piece" or "work of art" relates, if at all, only in some aspects or rather fragments to traditional definitions of a work of art. Similar to Christo, artists acting as initiators/organizers of telematic events consider the preparation and design of the situation as part of their artistic activity. But - other than in Christo's projects - the unfolding of the event itself, its holistic form ("gestalt") and its specific contents escape any control by the initiators, who turn into co-authors among many other participants and users. Each of those - even the most passive user of a radio-programme - develops his or her completely unique image of the whole structure (sculpture), an image that cannot be anything else but a fragmentary memory of something much bigger, something that is breathing like a living organism, constantly changing shape and energy - sometimes resting, sometimes almost bursting.

The theme : M I G R A T I O N

How and by which artistic means the participants interpreted this theme was completely open. There was no central agency controlling content or form of any contributions. (It would not even have been possible to spot contributions differing from regional or national broadcasting laws in time to prevent their live transmission....) Due to this artistic freedom the material used for HORIZONTAL RADIO in retrospect proves to be an unexpectedly rich anthology or international radio- and telecommunications art of the 90's: all possible genres were represented from live-soundscapes to complex tape-compositions, from live-concerts to multi media performances, from moving

collages of interviews/sounds/music and literary texts to telematic simultaneous events between some of the participating stations, from sound sculptures to sounds, texts and collages triggered by the Internet etc.

Anything delivered into the Net - sounds, compositions, texts, images - data - turned into material, which could be manipulated and changed by any other user/participant to be sent on and changed again....Our ideas about authorship or intellectual property lost their meaning. In the case of HORIZONTAL RADIO also the most traditional sound-text-compositions, broadcast on the radio broke down into data, that could be mixed, layered, manipulated live with all the other data arriving simultaneously from other places in the world or recorded in an earlier stage of the event. Parts of the live mixes were picked up by other stations and woven into new broadcasts and so on...No performing rights association will ever get an accurate report on HORIZONTAL RADIO....For instance it is entirely impossible to unravel the collages, mixes, layerings of material that arrived live on telephone lines, stereolines, monolines, ISDN during the 10 hours broadcast by the Austrian National Radio as to what their exact sources let alone their authors were. The mixes and layerings were not done by one particular author; sound engineers had as much to do with them as the narrators in the studio, chance effects or the artists working on the Internet projects which again released sounds into the radio-mixes etc.

No user/participant/author/"co-conspirator" (self-definition of participating artists group) could come close to perceiving the event in its entirety how it spun itself around the globe. Each location - the physical locations of performances or installations delivering material into the radio-net and the Internet, as well as the different radio broadcasts by national or independent radios around the world or the Internet - presented a completely different "image" of the event to its users/listeners.

A project like HORIZONTAL RADIO is - we thought - only alive as long as the network organised for the event stays active, i.e. for the duration of the time-span negotiated in a complex process between organizers, institutions, technicians, subsidy-givers, sponsors etc. It is here that analogies of telecommunications art to "art in the public space" make a lot of sense.

With HORIZONTAL RADIO a 24 hour period had been given as the frame-work in which radiostations transmitted and received by whatever lines they could technically and financially muster. The 24 hours were also the framework for live performances and installations with or without live audiences in a physical space and they were the framework for Internet activities.

In the meantime it has become apparent, though, that the project did not stop at noon on the 23rd of June. The performances and installations are gone, true, but radiostations keep on broadcasting bits and pieces from HORIZONTAL RADIO

and though some of the servers active during the project seem to be inactive now, others go on (REAL AUDIO Server) and some of the on-line projects will be revived. The documentation of HORIZONTAL RADIO keeps quite a few people busy, challenges them with questions on how or whether it is possible to "write" a history of telecommunications art. And new plans are made for other versions of HORIZONTAL RADIO.

HORIZONTAL RADIO just as its - less complex - predecessors was and is a collage of different spaces, locations, materials, technologies and systems. The project operated in the "found" (existing) transmission and broadcasting spaces of international public and independent radios, of the telephone of Internet. In telecommunications art we can recognize artistic strategies and intentions, which have been crucial to the development of art in our century. These strategies and intentions however are transferred into a context, which challenges both the role and definition of art and artists in our society.

The importance of sounds (and text) in HORIZONTAL RADIO points to the fact, that it is still more promising - also artistically - to get a hold of virtuality, virtual reality by means of sound - and therefore the absence of images - than by computer images rooted in a naive realism. Just as minimal art has taught us to reconstruct the wealth of the concept of sculpture out of the absence of its many possibilities and aspects, sounds permit the reconstruction of an incredible wealth of virtual images out of our individual memories.

A project like HORIZONTAL RADIO amassed so many data that an image of our changed relationship to data/information developed. It became clear that metaphors like speed - let alone infobahn etc. - belong to the past, do not apply. Instead one got the image of a geometry in which each place is of equal distance and in which data is not located at any specific place but floating. It is either there or not there, the users/listeners are either in it/with it or out of it. On or Off. Nothing in between. The passage from being without to being within the domain of information is abrupt, sudden, complete. Once you are in, you are.... everywhere.

As soon as the floating data become visible/audible to a specific user they turn into information: they are endowed with meaning by the user not the artist, whose information has turned into floating data once it is released into the net/web. What the pre-structuring by artists/organizers/technicians/institutions provided in HORIZONTAL RADIO was points of possible entry - in different media, on different locations, different bandwidths.....The rest was out of control.

Recent history

HORIZONTAL RADIO was a further development of earlier simultaneous telematic projects of the 90's. Especially important in this context are the projects Chipradio (92), Realtime

(93), and State of Transition (94). which were realised for TRANSIT and the ORF-KUNSTRADIO. These projects took a network of simultaneous live performances as a starting point and then used various means of communication (radio, television, telephone, data networks) in order to explore the communicative potential of mass media. Special emphasis was placed on strategies to reconcile the requirements of linear, one-way media, with the diametrically opposed requirements of open communication networks.

In addition HORIZONTAL RADIO explicitly referred to the period of the pioneers of telecommunication art. In Austria, this was roughly the time between 1979 and 1986. It was therefore no coincidence, that artists like Robert Adrian X (Vienna), Hank Bull (Vancouver) or Art Pool (Budapest) participated in this project as they were closely related to some of the very early projects in Art & Telecommunication.

Therefore, HORIZONTAL RADIO not only reflected the technological development and changing characteristics of the media, but also the political changes, that have taken place since these early projects - among them telephone-music -projects between Western and Eastern Europe. In 1995 radio stations in Russia or Hungary contributed substantially and with all kind of technologies to a telecommunication project that incorporated much more than just the transmission of telephone music. In Sarajevo, though, the situation has regressed to the early telephone music stages...

HORIZONTAL RADIO - a few statistics:

Participants:

- 14 national public radio networks on
- 24 channels
- at least 10 independent stations
- pirate radios

VHF. MW, Short-wave

- 7 INTERNET SERVERS
- 1 REAL AUDIO SERVER
- 24 cities in the whole of Europe, Israel, Australia, Canada with performances, installations, concerts, poetry readings
- more than 200 artists, composers, writers
- an audience of millions (Ostankino Radio's Short wave service alone has 300 Million potential listeners in Asia, Africa etc.)

HORIZONTAL RADIO was not only broadcast in programs dedicated to radio-art, but on news programs, youth-programs, cultural magazines, science-programs, on Pop-channels, on Music-channels, Culture-channels etc. In some cases also in prime-time slots.

- **Numbers of hours broadcast:** so far unknown.
- So far 69 DAT cassettes plus a number of tapes have reached us from the participants. But not all of them have sent their material...

- Some radiostations used the project to test technologies, e.g. ISDN lines.

The technical standard was very high.

- A publication attempting to document some aspects of this undocumentable project is planned.

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Notes

1. EBU: the European Broadcasting Union is an organisation of public broadcasting corporations. (Canadian and Australian broadcasters, as well as New Public Radio [USA] are associated members.
2. TRANSIT is a non-for-profit organisation specialised in the praxis and theory of artistic projects in the electronic space, with an emphasis on the changing nature of radio & TV. TRANSIT is based in Innsbruck/ Austria and is funded by regional and national public funds and the National Radio & TV, ORF.
3. The 24-hour-schedule of HORIZONTAL RADIO was a conscious reference to a specific project, which was realised at the Ars Electronica in 1982: "The World in 24 Hours". The project was initiated and developed by Robert Adrian, and its character is still exemplary.