

SANDRA LORI AND JACOB KREUTZFELDT

SITE / NO-SITE. THE MATERIALITY OF THE RADIO STUDIO

Being at the same time intimately connected to everyday lives and places, and yet inaccessible to most people, the radio studio has a paradoxical position in the modern imaginary. Nations listen in on what is happening in the broadcasting studio, but few people have actually had physical experience with it. Allowing no sound from the outside and controlling all sound made inside, the radio studio plays an important part in disseminating the modern soundscape, that Emily Thompson describes in her study of Architectural acoustics and the culture of listening in America 1900-1930 (Thompson 2004 [2002]). The radio studio in Thompsons account materializes a conceptualization of sound, as something that can be controlled, and one of space as something constructed in sound, rather than something reflected in acoustics. (Ibid: 234).

The studio could further be understood as the mediatized reflection of Marc Augés non-place (Augé 1995). Stripped of representational meaning, and acoustically designed to be inaudible, the studio is barely noticeable to the listener, yet ever-present. As a non-place it is characterized by its function and not by “organic relations and shared histories” the typical denominator of “anthropological place” in Augé’s terms (Augé 1995:52). Rather, we argue, these relations and histories make up what is transported out of the studio through transmission: the radio sound. We therefore suggest characterizing radio sound as a kind of anthropological place (Augé 1995:52,101).

In order to approach what an anthropological place made up of sound could be, Steven Feld’s ethnography of the Kalulis in Papua New Guinea proves inspiring: Feld has described how hearing is essential to the Kalulis, reflecting the density of the rainforest they live in. An environment in which ones sight is limited, where you can hear further than you can see (Feld 2012[1982]). Every sound, is a voice in the forest to the Kalulis and noise and movement means the presence of social others; in other words, sound is social whereas a lack of sound alludes to loneliness and isolation (Feld 2012:29,269). Through the sensible ears of the Kalulis an empty radio studio where all sound is muted seems lonely to a point where it resembles death. The transmission of voices, music as well as any buzzing noise of the broadcasting equipment on the other hand, is a place of relatedness and of life.

The paradoxical connection between the two – radio studio and sound – is that the first has become a central condition for the other to emerge. The equally paradoxical premise for this audio paper is that we venture to explore the qualities of specific radio studios through (radio) sound. In other words we attempt to scrutinize the non-placedness of the studio through the placeness of sound.

In doing this we will focus on three main characteristics of the non-place that we will attempt to investigate the soundings of. That is:

- 1) Augé writes about the non-place that the individual here is stripped of a multitude of identities and for a limited amount of time attributed just the one defined by the function of that space (Augé 1995:101)

We will explore this first characteristic in the following ways:

- Describing the material configuration of the contemporary radio studio as a reflection of the dominance of the auditory and the mouth over other senses and sensual qualities.
- Discussing the strategies through which visual, haptic and olfactory stimuli are translated to sound, and the strategies through which such stimuli are attempted minimized.

Using (auditory) field notes mimicking the radio reportage, interviews with radio producers and hosts

- 2) According to Augé “a person entering a non-place is somewhat relieved from his usual determinants” and thus can experience a “momentary availability” (Augé 1995: 101, 103)

We will explore this second characteristic in the following ways:

- Describing perceptual shifts between off-air and on-air in contemporary as well as historical cases
- Discussing the character of that availability as something that lends itself to a description of the placedness of sound.

Using interviews with guests immediately after their participation in studio interviews, historical sources from the Danish radio archive *larm.fm* and material from fieldwork in Paris and Montreal.

- 3) Finally the non-places are described as formed by distance and by solitude (Augé 1995:103).

We will explore this third characteristic in the following ways:

- Describing the fear, anxieties and nervousness sometimes experienced in the radio studio, and describing the conditions for intimacy in the studio.
- Discussing how space and sound relate to those experiences.

Using interviews with trained and untrained visitors in the radio studio, archive material from *larm.fm* and own recollections.

The audio paper will take the form of a collage including interviews, quotes from contemporary and historical radio and literature, field recordings and auditory field notes and maybe some reading of this and other self generated texts. If possible interviews will be conducted in English, but the collage will be multilingual.

References:

Augé, Marc 1995: *Non-places. Introduction to an anthropology of supermodernity*, London: Verso

Emilily Thopson 2004 [2002]: *The Soundscape of Modernity. Architectural Acoustics and the Culture of Listening in America, 1900-1930*. Cambridge, Massachussets & London, England: MIT Press

Raviv Ganchrow: *Radio Plays Itself* (http://www.kunstradio.at/2013B/29_09_13en.html)

Feld, Steven 2012[1982]: *Sound and Sentiment. Birds, Weeping, Poetics, and Song in Kaluli Expression*, London: Duke University Press