

you engaged and curious about the nature of what it means to listen, produce, and exist in an ever-evolving soundscape that is being drowned out by modern invention and technological advances. I highly recommend *Listening* to anyone who enjoys exploring new ways of thinking. Östersjö's conversational writing style makes it feel like you're sitting right alongside him on the riverbed, listening intently to his theories, as he adjusts the strings on the floating guitar, immersing us completely in his world.

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*Radio Revolten: 30 Days of Radio Art*

Knut Aufermann, Helen Hahmann, Sarah Washington, Ralf Wendt  
Spector Books, 2019, 356 pp.

Reviewed by: Lou Mallozzi

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“It is highly peculiar and requiring of interpretation that technology can accidentally be accompanied by ghosts.”

—Günther Stern, “Ghosts in the Radio,” 1930, originally published in *Anbruch*; as quoted by Ralf Wendt in *Radio Revolten: 30 Days of Radio Art*, p. 258.

Radio has been inescapably haunted and haunting since its inception. Its unnerving acousmatic anxiety, its role in propaganda, and its ephemeral electromagnetic fluidity have all contributed to its appeal to our curiosity and concern for all that is apparently beyond us. Artists, who have accompanied radio since its genesis, have long explored the physical and metaphysical attributes of transmission and have trod thick and contradictory paths through its noisy materiality, its insistent messaging, its monarchic territorialism, and its promise of non-hierarchical networking. It seems that nothing in radio inheres, yet it can traverse, transform, infuriate, engage, repulse, soothe, and sometimes even entertain, whether we like it or not. Any casting—broad-, narrow-, web-, etc.—is that which throws out a net hoping to catch . . . what? An audience? A discourse? The next thing to reject? The next thing to unify?

The ghosts became flesh in the fall of 2016 in Halle, Germany, at the second edition of the Radio Revolten Festival, which provided an open framework for a large international cadre of radio art experimenters. The festival's scope and ambition are uncontested, and the fact that the first edition took place ten years earlier is perhaps a testimony to the value of long fermentation periods to the bearing of full-bodied results.

The Radio Revolten Festival was curated by the team of Knut Aufermann, Anna Friz, Sarah Washington, Ralf Wendt, and Elisabeth Zimmermann and epicentered at Halle's highly active community radio station, Radio Corax. It presented 720 hours of radio art in 17 locations, which, according to the listings in the book's latter pages, comprised the work of 76 artists and groups with an additional 86 contributors (activists, performers,

etc.). These were facilitated by the Radio Revolten production team of 94 individuals and groups. True to the spirit of artist- and activist-organized events, these roles sometimes overlapped. In addition to its planned programming, the festival provided an open format that invited spontaneous projects and collaborations among invited artists. All in all, the festival and the book that it spawned present an impressive range of artistic production and inquiry, as well as a remarkable range of thoughtful and informed interpretation, discourse, and reflection.

*Radio Revolten: 30 Days of Radio Art* is the book that documents and reflects on the festival. In the book's introduction, three of the four editors, Knut Aufermann, Helen Hahmann, and Sarah Washington, accurately describe the book's intent and, to a great extent, its accomplishments: "In an attempt to convey as much detail as possible, this book seeks to awaken, stimulate, encourage, and to extend faith in collective artistic radio spaces." The spaces invoked were architectural, virtual, societal, imaginary, and historical, united not only through the tangible efforts of the organizers and the artists but also in the conceptual frame of "Hertzian space," a term coined by Anthony Dunne and eloquently extended beyond its electromagnetic definition by Anna Friz: "Hertzian space is fundamentally relational, described by overlapping fields of influence. However, for artists working with transmission and waves, the extrasensory nature of Hertzian space allows for a productive slippage between what is real and what is imagined."

True to the festival's eclecticism and quasi-anarchistic nature, the book is a 356-page kaleidoscopic compendium of descriptions, interactions, contradictions, surprises, unanticipated encounters, anecdotes, shortcomings, and tangents. It is structured as 19 thematic chapters authored by participating artists and organizers, with titles that include "Voice," "Participation," "Walking," "Aeriality," "Biological Radio," "Rituals," and "Ghosts." As such, the artists' works, be they installations, performances, broadcasts, narrowcasts, or hybrid activities, are often mentioned in different chapters and interpreted through different lenses. For example, Lucinda Guy's *Ritual for Revolten* is described in at least three distinct but interrelated contexts: as mutating musicalized conversation by Ralf Wendt in "Voice"; as a dissolution of the individual into a collective smartphone feedback bath by Helen Hahmann in "Participation"; and as a tender and sincere mock-nuptial procession by Sarah Washington in "Rituals." This latter entry quotes Gabi Schaffner, whose highly perceptive diaristic writing on numerous festival events provides an illuminating and luminous path of wry, intelligent, and highly personal remarks meandering through the book:

Is she a bride? Yes, she is! Ms. Guy has married Radio Art, a young man sparkling with wit and love of the arts, with a taste for the beauties of life and a vision of an open society where communication is respectful, inclusive and sincere. Alas, alas, this young man is forced to give in to the King's law and go to serve in the army. And his bride singing by the shores of Halle's "salty waves" expresses her unbroken hopes of his return and their happy future.

Similar polyphonic descriptions and interpretations benefit the reader's appreciation of many other festival works, including Alessandro Bosetti's *Minigolf*, which repurposes

voices including those describing the live audience through a single loudspeaker; Ralf Wendt's radio/street performance *Hauser*, with its ambiguous and troubling manipulation of social space and pedestrian compassion; and Sarah Washington's *In the Air We Share*, an installation comprising three simultaneous radio transmissions heard in the 500-year-old Roter Turm in Halle's city center.

Since the book's strength lies in its contrapuntal approach, in which ideas are articulated in disparate places by disparate people under disparate headings, the reader has the opportunity to select from this idea-collage, dissect the corpus, and rearrange the fragments, assembling collusions and collisions among viewpoints that were never in the same room at the same time but that are now thankfully in the same book. For example, in various chapters where they are not speaking directly to each other, Gregory Whitehead, Hartmut Geerken, Miyuki Jokiranta, and Lukas Holfeld (among others) outline some of the fractious disagreements between art and progressive politics—how the artistic voice participates, integrates, disintegrates, or just plain grates; how progressive politics demands consensus through accessible production approaches; and how state-funded radio wants artists to simultaneously provoke and concede in order to prove that art is not a threat. Reading into these arguments, one may detect attitudes that are naïve, exclusionist, patronizing, or dogmatic; or, alternatively, that are informed, inclusive, respectful, or open-minded. But I should hasten to say that I am being very selective in (re)constructing this particular discourse from the materials at hand. In reality, the book contains very few moments of negative criticism toward the work presented in the festival and—perhaps because its authors and editors were all involved in the festival—tends instead to outline the intentions of the artists from mostly sympathetic or celebratory perspectives. Here the polyphony becomes a bit of the Rashomon effect with multiple not-altogether-trustworthy narrators. Critiques of any perceived “failings” of the festival are in fact rare and come mostly from community radio activists such as Lukas Holfeld who adhere to an insurmountable form/content binary.

With all that the book includes and probes, there are several other omissions as well, some practical, others thematic or discursive. Despite an exhaustive list of artists and personnel, there is, in fact, no list of the works presented in the festival. Perhaps most frustrating on the level of readability, there is no index, which seems like a glaring absence given the brilliant cross-referencing structure of the book in which a particular artist's work is typically discussed from varying perspectives and intellectual contexts in several different chapters. In order to flip back or forward to compare alternative descriptions and interpretations of a given work, one relies primarily on one's own increasingly crowded memory.

Besides these pragmatic lacks, two thematic and discursive voids stick out. First, there is no substantial text by any listener other than those affiliated with the festival—that is to say, the very people whom many of the artists and authors hope will “stumble upon” the work or seek it out through curiosity are almost entirely mute. As Sophia Lerner points out, artist and festival co-curator Anna Friz “. . . keeps bringing us back to this question of listening, and to thinking about listeners.” Yet we readers never hear from those listeners who are supposedly at the center of the work. The very few references to highly selective

comments from the local public are mostly dismissive, condescending, or quaint. Some belie at least veiled hostility.

The second discursive void, in the festival as well as the book, is the apparent lack of a cultural perspective other than whiteness. There is no discussion of the ways racial discourses may shape radio art or vice versa. Artists of color who may have been in the festival never identify as such. There are some very brief references to Sun Ra (by Hartmut Geerken and Gregory Whitehead), and the work of artists such as Pipa Miusical (Rogerio Krepski and XTO) may be exceptions to this observation, but all in all, it seems like a notable lacuna not only retrospectively in the current (as I write this) racial comeuppance in the United States but also given the global immigrant crisis in Europe that was in full swing in 2016. Steve Bates's installation *Concertina* might also be cited as an exception. By all accounts both brutal and poetic, it used barbed wire (also known as concertina wire), a material employed by immigration detention centers, as an antenna to transmit the plaintive sounds of a concertina displayed in the same space. *Duo Infernal*, a performance by Famoudou Don Moye and Hartmut Geerken, which appears to have had directly Afrodiasporic roots, is described in Sarah Washington's "Rituals" chapter as a performance invoking "a type of primal mysticism, akin to shamanism perhaps in its techniques, without sharing any of its mythologies." Here "shamanism" and "ritual" are terms disconnected from any cultural specifics; this seems at odds with Geerken's own resistance—as quoted earlier by Washington in the same chapter—to referring to the performance in these very terms: "To transfer shamanism to other forms of contemporary creativity is a problematic crutch." That coupled with the historically problematic use of words like "primal" to describe Afrodiasporic musics could be a red flag or a red herring. Nevertheless, avoiding Blackness here and other nonwhite discourses elsewhere in an otherwise deep and wide-ranging book appears to be a disconnect.

The criticisms cited above, however, are in fact one of the main reasons to read this book and a measure of its importance, not an admonition against the authors' sensitive engagement with the contents and discontents of radio art. The authors raise questions both intentionally and unintentionally and thus facilitate an unpredictable interrogation supported by the book's structure and content as well as its subjects. I asked myself all sorts of questions (thankfully unanswered) while reading: What or whom does radio art erase or foreclose rather than invite? What is the erotics of radio in the absence of flesh? Given its obsession with "territory," can radio excise itself from colonizing its listenership? Some of these questions came from mulling over overlapping concerns across multiple chapters, and others were reactions to short, apparently inconsequential asides. Stimulating this sort of spontaneous generative interrogation may be the book's true value, as well as the true value of the festival that it documents. In fact, the book's value extends beyond the particular time and place of the festival. The Radio Revolten Festival was an important cohering meeting point and tension-center; *Radio Revolten: 30 Days of Radio Art* is a laudable text that further catalyzes those tensions and coherencies so that the reader can rearrange them into different configurations and explore new and unanticipated fields of inquiry.