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Exploring, Documenting, Archiving

Radio Web MACBA. The Internet-Radio of the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona

Jens Heitjohann (Leipzig)

JH: Anna, could you please give me a short introduction into the project Ràdio Web MACBA? What were the founding interests, how has it developed since then and how would you describe the core interests of the project now?

In the last decade, podcasting has not only allowed radio to once again overcome geographic frontiers (one of the principal desires that drove its invention), but also has put the microphone back in the hands of non-professionals and artists. Both of these reasons inspired our decision to try an experiment called Ràdio Web MACBA back in 2006. Over its almost six years of life, this platform, which began as a showcase for the exhibitions and activities of the Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona – featuring interviews with artists, curators, philosophers, scholars, etc. – has also developed into a content-generator for specific projects, focusing on the exploration of sound art, radiophonic art and experimental music. Therefore Ràdio Web MACBA is a platform for the diffusion of programs relating to contemporary sound creation, heedless of geographic boundaries or language barriers.

In an organic, totally unpremeditated way, we have been building up a network of collaborators who have something in common: most of them belong to the first generation of compulsive music lovers who were able to set up a studio in their bedrooms rather than taking over their parents' garage. So (once again) we benefit from the technological revolution of the nineties, which entailed the gradual introduction of personal computers as a necessary, ubiquitous, technology. Working in a medium and at a time that makes it possible to attain a professional finish even with means that are little more than those of a home studio, we work with artists, musicians and producers who are capable of overseeing the production of a program from beginning to end, from drawing up a proposal (based on a commission and designed collaboratively), to delivery of the MP3 and final documentation.

Besides, an essential and enriching task is documenting the present continuous of the MACBA, so we also take advantage of the constant flux of artists, curators, philosophers passing through the Museum. Hence the variety of thoughts and voices we feature. To mention a few: Michel Feher, Mark Fisher, Franco Berardi, Ann Demeester, Judith Butler, Rick Prelinger, Suely Rolnik, Michael Baldwin, Mel Ramsden, Allan Sekula, Seth Siegelaub, Kenneth Goldsmith, Fared Armaly, Stuart Bailey, Will Holder, Guy Schraenen, etc. (Their thoughts and plenty more can be found here <http://rwm.macba.cat/en/sonia>).

Furthermore, we make a special effort to offer alternative content to complement the exhibitions and public programs. We say "alternative" content because it seeks to document events, issues and artists from a different perspective, making the most of the potential of our medium: radio. We have never set out to provide a voiceover to the material exhibited (as an audio guide would, for example) or to offer audio of museum content (like a lecture), as we already publish these kinds of materials on the MACBA website (<http://www.macba.cat/en/audio>). Instead, the idea is to seek the complicity of the exhibition curators in order to create specific, stand-alone programs, and even to literally and metaphorically put the microphone in the hands of other agents who can trace a parallel course.

This approach has allowed us to commence our own lines of work, such as reflecting on the radio medium itself (an analysis of John Cage and the different ways he used radio http://rwm.macba.cat/en/specials/cage_jose_manuel_berenguer-carlos_gomez/capsula), recovering unreleased sound material by artists included in the MACBA Collection (like Juan Muñoz's radio works http://rwm.macba.cat/en/tag_juan_muoz), and documenting musical movements of interest (whether it be by celebrating the festive and revolutionary fervor of Tropicália http://rwm.macba.cat/en/specials/tropicalia_2/capsula or reviving the sound legacy of Fluxus http://rwm.macba.cat/en/specials/fluxradio_joe_gilmore_rhiannon_silver/capsula). All of these are linked to the Museum's programming, but go further than simple interviews and contribute added value. Some of our programs have also had the full and active support of relevant curators and/or artists, who have created and presented specific programs for Ràdio Web MACBA (such as the unique exploration of military music by Basque artist Asier Mendizabal http://rwm.macba.cat/en/specials/signals_asier_mendizabal/capsula, and the informal analysis of the influence of the Cold War on popular music by Serge Guilbaut <http://rwm.macba.cat/en/tag-serge-guilbaut>).

In keeping with our desire to complement the activities that take place in the Museum, in 2010 we started a new line of work in the Specials section, in which artists from the MACBA Collection talk about their own works. This new series entitled Fons Àudio (http://rwm.macba.cat/en/fons_audio_tag) has featured so far the direct testimony of Àngels Ribé, Josep Maria Mestres Quadreny, Ferran Garcia Sevilla, Muntadas, Ibon Aranberri, Rita McBride, Pep Duran, The Otolith Group, Pere Portabella, Benet Rossell, Jef Cornelis, Deimantas Narkevičius, Armando Andrade Tudela and Esther Ferrer.

JH: How would you describe and characterize the relationship between the museum, with its collection of artworks, and your process oriented, web based radio project beyond being a platform and a reservoir for additional material to the museum's exhibitions? In a text you wrote, you mentioned the project's special interest in Eastern European Sound Art. Could you describe this a little bit and bring it in a context with the other interests of the Radio?

Ràdio Web MACBA is now a project that produces its own content as a base from which to build bridges between radiophonic production and other lines of work (from generating documentary material for the MACBA Study Center or MACBA Collection to programming public activities or related exhibitions), replicating and intensifying the viral functioning that is inherent in working on the Internet in other spheres of activity. The relationship of the contents and our main lines of work is very rhizomatic; there's always a thread that leads us from one place/subject to another and most of the times we end up in unexpected, unexplored sites. But in the end, you can always undo the way and relate that to the Museum's programming or the radio programming. And that's exactly what we are looking for: we don't want to follow literally what goes on in the Museum, rather than expanding it. So you can listen to a mix of extremely obscure West-African percussion music curated by the power electronics legend William Bennett, and we got there by discussing and exploring the world of collecting records; the keyword here is collecting and it is applied to our main source of work at the radio, which is sound, so it is connected to one of the main lines of work at the Museum but at the same time what we are exploring is totally unexpected.

Similar and sometimes not too visible rhizomatic paths have led us to explore and showcase subjects as varied as

- psychoacoustics: Florian Hecker
http://rwm.macba.cat/en/curatorial/interruptions_4_florian_hecker/capsula,
- the relationship between maths and music: Marcus Schmickler
http://rwm.macba.cat/en/curatorial/interruptions_marcus_schmickler/capsula
- pastoral landscape and computer music: Jon Leidecker
http://rwm.macba.cat/en/curatorial/interruptions_1_jon_leidecker/capsula,
- the dystopic German scene of the Kassetentäter: Felix Kubin
http://rwm.macba.cat/en/kassetentater_tag,
- lettrism and sound poetry: Frédéric Acquaviva
http://rwm.macba.cat/en/specials/gil_wolman_frederic_acquaviva/capsula,
- the wild and experimental sounds emitted in California in the early eighties: Chris Brown
http://rwm.macba.cat/en/curatorial/interruptions_chris_brown/capsula,
- or appropriative collage music: Jon Leidecker
http://rwm.macba.cat/en/variations_tag,

to mention a few.

Other relevant keywords are: **processes** (hence the survey on generative art and music by Mark Fell and Joe Gilmore http://rwm.macba.cat/en/composingwithprocess_tag, or our new line of programming named EXTRA <http://rwm.macba.cat/en/extra>, where we publish varied related documentation produced during our research process); **document** (which is imprinted in the DNA of everything we do); **Eastern Europe** (Felix Kubin's reconstruction of Eastern European music and sound art underground http://rwm.macba.cat/en/parasol_tag); **Mediterranean** (the starting point for the forthcoming radio explorations by the Sublime Frequencies co-founder Alan Bishop); **radio and radiophonic art** (we do have a soft spot for anything meta-related, which in the past led to the 'Radio Music' essay by Jon Leidecker or the 'Lines of Sight' <http://rwm.macba.cat/en/linesofsight-tag/> Curatorial series by Barbara Held and Pilar Subirà); **avant-garde** and **architecture/urbanism** (i.e. *Sonidos en Causa*, a forthcoming

collaboration featuring field recordings of wild reservoirs in Latin-America currently undergoing irreversible change).

JH: In your answer to my first question you speak about the complicity of the curators of an exhibition, which you always seek for. Can you give us a practical example of an extensive exchange between the producers of an exhibition/project and you, the radio?

There are quite a few examples. One of the ones I enjoyed the most was the collaboration with Frédéric Acquaviva, who curated the Gil J Wolman "I am Immortal and Alive" exhibition (June 4 2010 – January 9, 2011). Frédéric is also a composer and had previous experience with radio, so it was very clear from the very beginning that we had to collaborate. While the Gil J Wolman monograph mainly focused on his audiovisual, plastic and documental output as part of the French lettrist movement, one of his main interests was language and consequently voice and sound. Not only was Frédéric an expert on the subject who had been in touch with some of the artists of the French lettrist movement, he was also (and still is) a collector of sound poetry and many other intersections between sound and language. Even though there was no script for his show, he had a very clear idea of what he wanted to explain and a list of works to be included. The idea was to have Gil J Wolman's *meganeupnie* (breath poems) as the starting point from which to explore French Lettrism and the sound poetry scene and at the same time expand the scope to include other like-minded solitary figures who explore similar issues. So both intentionally and inadvertently, the radio show became an exhibition in itself, expanding what was shown in the Museum galleries to the radiophonic format, with sound as the main subject matter.

The recording session was exciting and nervewracking at the same time: instead of replicating a radio studio I was asked to follow Frédéric through different spaces around the Museum, both indoors and outdoors, with our harddisk recorder and a few mics as a kind of weird umbilical chord. Due to the set up of the exhibition at the Museum the previous day, he had only slept a few hours and I was terrified because the recording conditions were so random and irregular. After a one-day marathon session he got the files, and a few months later we had completed *Wolman, Lettrism, Sound Poetry and Beyond* (http://rwm.macba.cat/en/specials/gil_wolman_frederic_acquaviva/capsula). It turned out to be one of our most lively shows, documenting what could be seen as the antecedents of sound poetry and the main figures behind the lettrist movement.



Exhibition "I Am Immortal and Alive". MACBA, 2010/2011.

Photographer: Tony Coll. © MACBA Study Center

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Another examples is the 3-episode series *Radio Waves. Hot Songs for a Cold War* (http://rwm.macba.cat/en/radiowaves_tag), Serge Guilbaut's foray into Cold War paranoia and propaganda carefully inserted in the popular music of the time (be bop, swing and jazz), which expanded and translated part of the thesis of the exhibition *Be-Bomb: The Transatlantic War of Images and All That Jazz. 1946-1956*.

JH: Along these same lines, I'd like you to describe or shed some light on the special potentiality you see or realize in the radio as a medium – its process-oriented work, its cursoriness compared to the more immobile and fixed nature of an exhibition. What kind of use of the radio have you already tried out or do you imagine for the future in this context? How does that vary for different projects?

This is indeed a very interesting issue. Working with musicians and sound artists, as we do, we quite often find ourselves in the nebulous but fascinating frontier at which a radio show can be conceived as an exhibition space for sound, and can also be experienced as an auditory essay or as radiophonic/sound art. I like to think there are many examples where we cross this borderless zone in our online radio. We never force it, we just end up there: the characteristics of the projects and the sensibility of the curators make it happen and lead us to this uncharted territory.

Jon Leidecker's exploration of the history of sampling (*Variations* http://rwm.macba.cat/en/variations_tag/) is a clear example of this: he embarks on a very academic chronological analysis that begins many years before the invention of tape cut-ups or the sampler; stretching as far back as Charles Ives or even further, based on the thesis that it was not until the fourteenth century that it became "standard practice for a composer to sign his name to a piece of music and claim it entirely as his own work". As the series slowly develops and reaches the present, it becomes more lysergic and introspective, since it touches his own practice and goes deep into his thoughts.

Another fine example is the *Composing with Process: perspectives on generative and systems music* series (http://rwm.macba.cat/en/composingwithprocess_tag) by British sound artists Mark Fell and Joe Gilmore, which explores generative art and music. This piece that works as an auditory essay is very formal and analytic but at the same time it clearly goes beyond the artistic practice they are documenting, featuring exclusive works by contemporary artists and also their own insights into philosophy and creativity. Many aesthetic decisions in the creation reveal Mark and Joe's own artistic inclinations.

Similarly, *Parasol elektroniczny. Rumours from the eastern underground* (http://rwm.macba.cat/en/parasol_tag), by German musician and hörespiel composer Felix Kubin, reconstructs his brief encounters with underground artists from different regions in Eastern Europe. Kubin's own aesthetic views and values are omnipresent throughout, not only in the interviews but also

in the structure and the many decisions involved in the production process. Dystopia, sci-fi, playfulness, surrealism and DIY politics are part of the DNA of the whole series.

A recent and very fruitful discovery is that an online platform such as ours allows us to share very valuable parts of our research and project development process (as we do in our EXTRA section <http://rwm.macba.cat/en/extra>), in the form of deleted scenes, transcripts, conversations with artists and other documents, which are usually as interesting as the final show itself.

These are some of my favourite series and examples, but there are of course many more worth mentioning. As I said earlier, every case has its own personality and the contributions and approaches of the curators is crucial. The future is still being written.

JH: Many of the collaborations that you discussed in your first answer mentioned that the content of your radio program draws on exhibitions, which are of course also showcased on your website. But what about the other way around? Was the radio program, or related issues, included in the exhibition? If so, how did it interact with the archived sound material presented there, or how was it presented in the exhibition in general?

I like to think that our programming goes further than merely featuring what's happening in the Museum galleries. The more we work on it and develop the project, the more we conceive it as an alternative exhibition space, one which transcends the physical boundaries, the four walls of the Museum. As I said earlier, some of the shows are based on the programming directions and people linked to the Museum, but we also make a huge effort to go beyond this relationship and expand these ideas into other spheres.

That said, some events related to the radio have been embodied physically in the Museum galleries and the MACBA Auditorium. In 2008, we held an exhibition called *Possibility of Action. The Life of the Score* (<http://www.macba.cat/en/exhibition-possibility-of-action>), curated by Barbara Held and Pilar Subirà (who were then producing the Ràdio Web MACBA series *Lines of Sight* <http://rwm.macba.cat/en/linesofsight-tag> <http://rwm.macba.cat/en/linesofsight-tag>). This exhibition extended their exploration of the concepts of transmission and interpretation into the visual world, and applied them to musical notation and related forms of expression. We've also organised concerts and lectures related to *Variations* (<http://www.macba.cat/en/variations-a-showcase-of-sound-appropriationism>) and *Memorabilia. Collecting sounds with* (<http://www.macba.cat/en/memorabilia>), a series that offers an insight into private collections of music and sound memorabilia. However, our goal is not necessarily to bring the radio into the Museum galleries, but to find contexts in which the interaction between the two makes sense.



© MACBA Photo left: Gemma Planell; Photo right: Tony Coll

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JH: As you explain in your second answer, and as I can see in your EXTRA section, you use the potentialities of online radio to work on an online archive that can bring together – or better still, give access to –, bits and pieces of works that would never be found together in the physical world. You also talk about the potential of online archives to gather all kinds of material that has not found its way into the final version of the work, rather than just the finished broadcasts. Through this strategy, you also become a kind of archive of your own work, and not just the (art)work of others. Are there special concepts related to archiving? Do you think about RWM as an archive and develop it according to a certain strategy?

It would not be accurate to say that our EXTRA section compiles ALL the research-related material, but it does compile some of the miscellaneous materials that we generate in the research process. These can be as diverse as conversations with artists and curators, additional documentation, transcripts of shows, deleted scenes, etc. It was only back in 2011 that we realized that our research and project development process was generating and accumulating additional documentation (both audio and text-based) that was stored away in our hard-drives and could be as interesting as the final show. So the next logical step was to feature it, whenever possible, in order to offer listeners a more complete vision of our different lines of work, or simply to complement them. Since Ràdio Web MACBA is both an experiment and a work-in-progress, we are developing our strategy on the run, as we stumble upon (the) questions. And you can easily see how happy this recent discovery makes us, just by seeing the amount of work we are publishing in the section.

That said, I like to think that an online radio is, by definition, an archive, or at least it that it has the potential to archive its output on a long-term basis. This should be imprinted within its DNA, especially now that there is so much debate and that it seems drastic international developments may permanently change the Internet as we know it. Projects like Ubuweb, Resonance FM, WMFU, Sonosphere.org or the newly created Radio Boredcast and SONM are very fine examples of online archives and/or radio projects that are much more than just files or music: they offer curation, non-mainstream content, access to knowledge.

JH: In addition to all the RWM audio programs, I have also come across the *Quaderns d'àudio* section on your website (<http://rwm.macba.cat/en/quaderns-audio>), which features a series of

essays. It also includes a sketch book of graphic scores by Llorenç Barber (http://rwm.macba.cat/en/quaderns-audio/qa_yokohama_llorenc_barber/capsula). To finish the interview, could you explain some of your ideas behind the decision to combine radio content with text material and even some drawings – perhaps also interacting with the exhibitions in a kind of menage à trois?

There's an incredible amount of work involved in our research and scripting process, so we often stumble upon amazing material or certain subjects, themes or threads that could be explored further but cannot be fully developed because of the medium and its limitations. We had an earlier, very successful experience at the MACBA website with our *Quadern portàtils* (Portable Notebooks) section, where we publish texts based on lectures and seminars that have been held at MACBA, as well as exhibition catalogues that are currently out of print. So it was just a natural step for us to experiment with the online publication format and commission some of those essays.

Llorenç Barber's "Cuaderno de Yokohama" is a perfect example of this. We visited him in Valencia in relation to a monograph on his work that we were preparing for AVANT (http://rwm.macba.cat/en/avant_tag), a series documenting twelve key figures from the Spanish avant-garde. After sharing an amazing paella that he had cooked himself, Llorenç Barber took Roc Jiménez de Cisneros, the curator of the series, into his studio and showed him some of his graphic scores, which had already been displayed in the exhibition *Possibility of Action. The Life of the Score* at MACBA. He also showed him a small envelope in which he kept the amazingly beautiful series he had made in Yokohama as a way of keeping his mind occupied while working on a Naumaquia there. It contained 17 loose pages from an old notebook, and they were just sitting there, unpublished and unseen. It was pure serendipity: not only did they fit perfectly with the format of our electronic essays, but Llorenç Barber was also more than willing to share them.

[to flickr slideshow *Cuaderno de Yokohama*. Per Llorenç Barber
<http://www.flickr.com/photos/arxiu-macba/sets/72157626414644495/show/>]

An unexpected spin-off is that the scores were recently interpreted and performed in Detroit at the INCA Institute by Joel Peterson (<http://vimeo.com/35313052>). I'm working on a conversation with Joel right now about this experience, and also reflecting on the challenges that performers face when interpreting such an unorthodox set of instructions. Again, this will soon be published in our EXTRA section.