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<https://glissando.pl/relacje/radiophrenia-czy-potrzebujemy-manifestu-wspolczesnej-sztuki-dzwiekowej/>

(Translated from the Polish)

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Radiophrenia. Do we need a manifesto of contemporary sound art?

I was getting ready for Radiophrenia in November. I bought a flight ticket to Glasgow for the first 5 days of the festival. I was glad that I was able to book them at such a bargain price. In January, however, I received a message from the carrier that my flight was canceled due to the mysterious "XXXX" reason. There was no need to explain exactly what was going on. Covid prevented me from going to Scotland. Fortunately, the basis of Radiophrenia is the art of transmission, radio art, and sound art, and this can effectively affect the recipient from a distance. "Reaching far, to bring you near" - I am reassured by the voice of the announcer, which without interruption reaches my ear located in Katowice, Poland. The sound signal in the blink of an eye covers the 1934 km distance between me and the Center for Contemporary Art in Glasgow, where a temporary radio studio has been set up for two weeks. Radiophrenia broadcast from February 7 to February 20, 2022 on 87.9 FM - it's analog. And digitally it was available in every corner of our globe. The condition for participation was, of course, access to the Internet. Back then, laptops and smartphones temporarily turned into radios.

The article will therefore be a subjective memory of the past festival. However, I am not limited to a brief account of the event only. It is also an opportunity to take a closer look at its formula, ask what trends - for seven years now - it has been presenting to the public. What perceptual challenges does it pose for us, the audience? To build a broader picture of Radiophrenia, I invited this year's participants - Dorota Błaszczak [1], whose work Garage Live Stream was included in the 27th set of the so-called shorts [2] and Tomasz Misiak [3] and Marcin Olejniczak [4], who form the Radio Noise Duo project. Their miniature Accumulate and fire was broadcast in 31 selections. "Our grain of sand" - comments Marcin, announcing the broadcast of his own song on the Facebook group "Listening to the medium". This is where we meet and I write down the date and time of the broadcast in my calendar. In the commentary under Marcin's post, Dorota speaks immediately, mentioning her own grain. From that moment on, we participate in the festival together, although each of us listens on our own.

Radiophrenia is an extremely diverse festival. Not only because of the multitude and richness of the radio forms presented there, but also because of its participants, who often come from completely different backgrounds. Therefore, the program includes, among others, renowned musicians and veterans of the art of radio, such as Felix Kubin or Gregory Whitehead, professional radio broadcasters e.g. from BBC4, independent sound designers from around the world, experimental musicians and DJs. There are also amateurs of sound, who are often not connected with the world of art on a daily basis. The authors of the festival go to the festival schedule through an open recruitment or at the invitation of curators - Mark Vernon and Barry Burns. First of all, each of the authors and authoresses - regardless of their origin and experience - occurs at the same frequency. As a result, the border between professionalism and amateurism, music and radio art is blurred, which helps the recipient to prepare for a new, strange sound that rejects all known formats.

From the perspective of the Polish listener, Radiophrenia seems to be doubly interesting. It presents the art of sound, which is very rare in our domestic radio stations. Once tamed by the Polish Radio Experimental Studio,

it has now found its place in the programming of social and student radio stations. In a way, withdrawing from institutional, national recognition to an independent, partisan niche. The term "radio art", coined in the second half of the last century, continues to surprise and misunderstand us, despite the omnipresent podcast boom.

Since 2015, the Scottish festival aims to explore all kinds of sound phenomena. The organizers consciously resign from developing a single guiding line or a coherent idea that would collect and define all broadcasts. It is about accumulating one medium on the air of such forms as: field recordings, radio plays, radio reports, sound poetry, meditations, experimental music, events broadcast live from a radio and concert studio. From short messages lasting a few minutes to all-night radio epics. The leading language on the air is, of course, English. But we will also hear German, Spanish and French. The aforementioned open recruitment allows the influx of works in every language of the world.

How is Radiophrenia participating? By simply listening, which seems quite simple and pleasant. However, the content of the broadcasts and the rhythm of the antenna require a specific focus from the listener, putting their everyday perceptual habits to the test. Due to the fact that it was the first time I participated in the festival, I decided to prepare myself properly. I marked the items that I would like to hear in the program, I wrote down the hours (you also had to remember that the clock in Glasgow, compared to Katowice, is set an hour earlier). After two days, however, my plan was consumed by a radiophrenic stream. The festival radio forces us to receive the broadcast signal as a fluid whole, rather than a collection of individual events. "It is an overwhelming element to which I surrender myself as a listener," adds Tomasz Misiak. "I listen to Radiophrenia casually, it becomes the background for my various activities," says Marcin Olejniczak. Dorota Błaszczak experienced the festival in a similar way. She answered her students' emails with headphones on. For two weeks, radiophonic content builds the atmosphere of our homes - we work with them, fold the laundry, cook, rest, and fall asleep. They have an accompanying function and do not require our full attention. When the radio is on, I switch from the task mode (listening to this one broadcast and getting measurable satisfaction in its consumption) to set myself up for the lack of expectations regarding the flowing sound. You also have to accept the fact that many programs will simply miss us, because we are not able to follow the stream 24 hours a day. Most of the works are broadcast irretrievably in the air, impossible to find later on the Internet. Which in the modern reality of on-demand podcasting is not so easy to accept. However, it brings us back to the beginnings of radio, when the broadcast could not be recorded yet and the content appeared on the air once. We are more open to what will be on the air in a moment. We study. We listen. We cannot rewind. But we can also turn off and leave the event at any time.

By accepting such an attitude of reception, you can experience a specific Radio-phrenia after the festival. The sonic closeness to "schizophrenia" does not seem to be accidental, although nowhere on the official website of the festival can we find such a direct comparison. The multitude of contents, their inconsistency and fragmentation are not indifferent to our well-being. After turning off the radio, the sounds absorbed by our ear are still present. They resonate in us, if we have seen meditations or field recordings on the air, or they will keep us feeling anxious when we hear sonic visions that do not belong to the world of natural sounds. Actually, I use the terms synonymously here: sound art, radio art, broadcast art, which may cause some confusion for the reader. A separate article attempting to differentiate each of these areas of art would certainly be helpful. Radiophrenia, however, does not need a conceptual explanation of these issues. In the program presented on the air, each of the areas is mixed with each other, which makes it difficult to name them specifically. Festival organizers consistently avoid categorization and it seems that they do not need it. Among the plays listed above, one should also mention the music that is understood in Cage's language on Radiophrenia (although there are also peculiar pieces of popular music, such as the daring "The Swan" by Nwando Ebizie).

John Cage was one of the first to promote the act of listening as a creative process. "We don't need sheet music. We don't need an orchestra. We don't have to play any instrument to create a piece of music. It is enough for us to listen to what is around us for a while, just like a piece of music. Then it will be a piece of music. Provided we listen carefully. Then we will also be able to repeat after Cage: "Everything we do is music". [5] The quoted quotation comes from the article by Tomasz Misiak "Deep Listening". However, when I ask Tom a question whether in the case of the work 'Accumulate and fire' presented at the festival, together with Marcin Olejniczak, he would describe himself as a musician, he is evasive. "When we play, I think musically. Most often it is improvisation, in which the noise produced by the radio is our element. We try to tame it, give it a specific shape. The radio becomes our instrument, which is unpredictable. It cannot be said that someone is a virtuoso of the radio as an instrument. Radio changes the traditional relationship between

the author and the instrument. We get carried away by its sounds and joint improvisation, and then the author's work takes a back seat," he explains.

Before starting, Marcin and Tomek plan the structure of the piece together - they initially define its frame, pauses, intensity or duration. They decided to record 'Accumulate and Fire' in isolation. They left in August 2021 to the town of Gorzkie Pole, near Poznań, where, surrounded by the local soundscape, they could focus for a moment. They both emphasize that live recordings are a strong emotional experience for them, which depends on the place where they are currently staying. "It is a very intimate activity for me, then I directly express who I am," admits Marcin, adding at the same time that the emotions he arouses through the creative process are not realized. Therefore, they both strive to collide two elements - human emotions and the mechanics of the radio. Radio Noise Duo = "pure radio" - adds Marcin.

When listening to 'Accumulate and fire', my ear is the first to pick up and recognize radio noise, characteristic squeaks of frequency changes. After some time, however, specific radio sounds transform into more abstract and metaphorical images. Then the noise turns into an approaching swarm, the density of which is diluted and blown away by the wind. Underneath him, a rumbling voice emerges - perhaps this is a message sent by an unknown civilization? We fail to catch any sense, however, and a moment later the piece fades out, leaving us with an open end - a disturbing audio message. What to do with it? Should we answer? The authors of the work agree that nothing is needed. Just experience it. In a similar way, Tomek patiently replies to his children, who ask dad about the purposefulness of his actions: "what for? What is going on? It's not music after all. "

The conversation with Marcin and Tomek helped me understand several important aspects that define their creative approach. First of all, the work they present is an example of an open narrative. An ending without a clear punch line, based on calmness without reaching the climax. The authors deliberately choose this solution. "We don't have to and don't want to be literal," they explain. A fluid composition in which one motif seems to lead to another and another, giving the impression that if it were not for the sudden ending of the piece, it could go on forever. I observed the phenomenon of open narrative more widely throughout the entire program of this year's Radiophrenia and it seemed to be ubiquitous. In broadcasted field recordings, sonic visions, sound poetry, collages or experiments. Often, after the broadcast, they left me unsatisfied, some embarrassment or disorientation. It is possible that this was the effect that the authors of these works wanted to have in me, which in consequence was supposed to knock me out of my deliberate attitude towards the perceived sound. Possible... although I was often just unconvinced.

The key element of open audio narratives is their sensual impact and the author's creativity in the selection of effects. An example is a sharpened and processed video in which an unknown species of insects rubs against their own chitinous shells. The resulting sound paralyzes us, making our skin tingle. Then the openness and timeliness of the form ceases to matter, we focus only on the sound experienced here and now. It is not only about the ASMR effect, but also about following surprising compositional operations, or exploring spaces and sounds that have not been heard before. And that seems to arouse our greatest curiosity. Once you feel the sonic awesomeness, the experience is complete.

The basis of Marcin and Tomek's creative approach is their attitude to the sound produced. When they play, they disappear, giving space to the element of the radio, which is excited by them. The stage persona and the non-artistic persona related to it, its authorship is no longer so important. The musician (?) Is subject to improvisation. It becomes a transmitter that has previously been soaked with sounds, noises and clashes of the outside world. In the act of self-expression, he transmits them back to the world - "accumulate and fire [6]".

The artists appearing at Radiophrenia take so many different separate approaches. However, the one described above seems to be quite common to me. In particular, the authors of field recordings mention the need to completely silence your own body during field recording. The author becomes invisible and inaudible to the recipient, and thus disappears. After all, it is about rendering the examined soundscape as faithfully as possible. Some creators even admit to cleaning the recordings from the traces of sound human activity - a plane noisy in the distance, a motorway, the rustling of a jacket. It is worth mentioning here the statement by Tomasz Pizio from the SZSZRZ collective [7] broadcast on Radio Klang, in which he says that the very experience of being in the forest, listening to and recording the surrounding sound atmosphere is important. Often, he does not listen to later recordings. Thus, the work itself - "field recording" and its reception by the audience is no longer as important as the creative process. Listening becomes music - Cage's words echo back.

When we talk about the trends present on Radiophrenia, we can certainly mention the ubiquitous field recordings. They appear not only as separate works, but also become the basis of other forms - incl. reportage, radio plays, sound collages. Their accumulation in the program makes the overall impression of communing with the antenna boil down to contemplation, following a slow story, or entering the spaces emerging from the loudspeakers with your ear. Often you could hear a sound portrait of a real place, such as the Brompton cemetery in London [8], or created in sound from scratch. There were also songs that were a mixture of both options. Here one should recall the magical works of Vincent Eoppolo [9], which in the first place bring to mind the acoustics of the Vatican underground and secret church rituals. The effects he used broke this vision at every step, placing us in the filling of an unknown sonic architecture.

This year's Radiophrenia gave the impression of a fairly serious festival. There was little funny content or programs full of spontaneity and wildness that played freely with the sound material. The schedule was mainly meditative. Also socially engaged works were heard strongly - statements of non-binary people, reports from the perspective of people with disabilities, the culture of national minorities and climate issues. However, the sense of humor was kept in radiophrenic jingles and this is what I would like to distinguish. Apart from the fact that they constituted an important element of the radio stream - a guarantee of the consistency of the message - they were joyful, originally realized and surprising each time. The phrase - "Radiophrenia 87.9 FM" - was once uttered solo in a whisper, and once sung (slightly falsified) in a polyphony. They fulfilled their role perfectly, successfully memorizing the festival frequency - 87.9 FM, 87.9 FM, 87.9 FM ...

Since I mention jingles, the word of appreciation should also be given to the radio announcers who announced every program or concert. The presence of their voices on the air (each pleasant to the ear and friendly) gave the impression that they were looking after us, the audience. They did not let themselves get lost, and when the ear was lost in the sound trap, they effectively brought us back to life with their short and calm message.

As for festival humor, or rather its scarcity. "Maybe the times we live in are just bleak and Radiophrenia is an expression of that?" - wonders Dorota Błaszczak, who admits that she rarely smiled to herself when listening to the radio. Or maybe this is what contemporary sound art is like? - we ask together. Committed and focused on the social problems of the world, rather than wanting to show the admiration for, for example, a unique generator that interestingly modifies the amplitude of the sound?

'Garage Live Stream' by Dorota Błaszczak is an example of work carried out with a sense of humor. It obtains its thanks to the assembly and the form it gives the whole. In short, it is a piece of 24 hours in the life of a garage. Not accidental. Dorota chose a garage located in the building where she lives. She was delighted with the acoustics of this place, and it was mainly about the sound that came from the pipes flowing water from the apartments located above the parking spaces. The humming, gurgling and hum of the stream told the story of the building's inhabitants in a specific way. "By following the flowing water, I could get to know the rhythm of each day" - adds Dorota to her motivations. In the end, she decided to hang an automatic recorder (which she usually uses to make eco-acoustic recordings [10]) on the pipes and left it for 48 hours. She kind of stuck her ears there, and the recording equipment allowed her to extend her perception. As a result, she received recordings that allowed her to look at the garage from a completely different perspective. This inconspicuous and rather pedestrian room revealed its richness - varied sound sets and stories of people who often appeared in the garage for talks or an evening beer. The latter raised an ethical dilemma in Dorota while listening to raw material. Suddenly it turned out that thanks to the recordings she gained access to the private affairs of her neighbors. She was responsible for the fate of people who unknowingly passed them on to microphones placed on the recorder. Ultimately, she decided to remove fragments of the conversations and did not use them in her work, and marked the presence of a man in a more subtle way. The accompanying doubts seemed to me an interesting reaction. I think that to some extent they prove that Garage Live Stream is also a work with a documentary tone. More than one radio reporter has probably encountered this dilemma.

Let's move on to the assembly, because it is thanks to him that Dorota makes the garage come to life and becomes a separate character, in whose guts strange metabolism takes place with the participation of humans and cars. The author explains that the editing process begins by grouping the sounds present in the recording. A special algorithm selects - cars entering the garage, then leaving separately, then people's conversations, dripping water, etc. Then he listens to each sound and cuts out interesting fragments for her. Later he starts composing. "She draws the score so that the whole thing has some meaning, above all it makes sense for her," admits Dorota and adds - some people treat the form as contamination, they do not need it. All they need is an audible message. It is a different creative attitude, also interesting. I know, however, that without at least a

minimal rational approach to the sound matter and dressing it in a specific structure, I would not have released the piece for emission. " I must admit that 'Garage Live Stream' is a work with a fairly clear narrative.

We track one garage day for over 15 minutes. It begins with the increased movement of cars - one engine switched on after another. This is where the first humorous element comes in. The sound of vehicles leaving the garage has been unnaturally compressed in the assembly by the author. It makes the effect comic and we imagine men in ties and women in suits slamming the doors of their machines to start the daily race all over again. Then comes the moment of breathing, return from work, circulation of water, cleaning the garage and ending with the punch line, which is a cap falling on the concrete and the sound of relief with the first sip of your favorite drink. I also found the ending joyful. The humor at work is subtle. It touches us and helps us get closer to the daily routine, find harmony in it. This seems to interest Dorota the most. To create new recordings, she is driven by the need to discover the closest sound environment and to look at it down to the smallest detail. As she says, it is always a magical, life-enriching experience for her. She admits that she can admire a fragment of the lawn under the house. When she listens carefully to her surroundings and examines its structure, she gains valuable knowledge. Thanks to the acquired awareness, it can turn what is around into a personal garden, i.e. a place for contemplation, reflection and rest ..

According to Dorota, Radiophrenia has developed a lot over the years of activity, which can be seen in particular in the richness of the programming. All the air time is devoted to sound art, broadcast or radio, which gives a total of 20160 minutes to listen. Dorota herself has already sent 4 works to the festival. One of them, Inherited Sounds [11] (2019), was so liked by the curators that they decided to join the next Lights Out Listening Group [12] event, as well as at the Borealis experimental music festival in the Radio Space section. Marcin and Tomek have also been participating in the event for several years. They admit that when their work is selected in the recruitment process, they feel appreciated and honored. The festival is also a valuable source of information about the authors, thanks to which they can network with them and enter into various collaborations, which resulted in the album of Jeff Gburek, Trans Beskid Radio Session 1, issued by Antenna Non Grata, which they run.

The festival attracts with its atmosphere. It is open to any work that goes beyond the common forms of radio art. This makes it more accessible than Prix Europa, Prix Italia or the International Feature Conference - flagship items on the map of radio festivals. Radiophrenia also gives the impression of a niche event. I wonder if the festival attracts people who have never had any contact with sound art before. You probably have to be an initiate or have a certain auditory sensitivity to participate in it. Maybe the issue is the status of sound art and its reception in popular culture? "It is a distributed art with a conceptually ungrounded sphere," explains Tomasz Misiak, "Radiophrenia is an important bridge between authors who come from different spaces and aesthetics. This festival tries to popularize something that will never be popular. In my opinion, it will always remain with a similar range of impact. I do not expect a sudden change that this kind of creativity will be more important or more noticed. "

Therefore, the direction in which the sound experiments presented during the festival are headed is puzzling. What are they striving for? What is their motivation? Is it the need for self-expression? Forwarding the recorded audio message? Telling stories of disfellowshipped people? Willingness to show a technical novelty? Arousing a specific mood and emotions in the recipient? Or maybe it is about the emancipation of sound in contemporary culture and art? Creating space for this type of art and the entire network of dependencies - festivals, publishing houses, the community of recipients and creators, as well as critical and scientific activities. I would love to read the contemporary sound art manifesto. I am curious what its postulates would be. It is worth recalling that in 2022 it will be 109 years since the Italian futurist, pioneer of noise and sound art, Luigi Russolo, wrote The Art of Noise - a manifesto setting new aesthetic standards of the modernist era. Russolo postulated the abandonment of contemporary music and the construction of new instruments that would better reflect the realities of an industrialized society. To this end, he constructed a noise generator - intonarumori, to bring out grinding sounds, squeaks, hissing, rumbling, grunting and noises. Do we not need a manifesto of silence in the 21st century?

We invite you to broadcast the works presented at the festival by Dorota Błaszczak and Radio Noise Noise Duo on Radio Klang on April 14 at 21:00. As part of the Radio Drama program in Klang, miniatures of 'Garage Live Stream' and 'Accumulate and fire' as well as works by Vincent Eoppolo and Rick Myers will be presented.

More information about Dorota Błaszczak and her work can be found here - <https://dorotablaszczak.pl/> ↑

Shortcuts on Radiophrenia define the selection of works admitted for emission. Each of the works was previously selected in an open call. During the two weeks of the festival, 40 shorts appeared on the air. Each of them contained about 5-7 short sound pieces. ↑

Tomasz Misiak - philosopher, cultural expert, artist, professor at the University of Arts in Poznań. Together with Marcin, he also runs the Antenna Non Grata publishing house - <https://antennanongrata.bandcamp.com/> ↑

Marcin Olejniczak - sociologist, cultural expert and educator; currently a lecturer at ANS in Konin. <https://antennanongrata.bandcamp.com/album/mothertape-radio-noise-duo-split> ↑

T. Misiak, Deep Listening [in]: Deep Listening, BWA Contemporary Art Gallery, Katowice 2019, p. 21. ↑

The title of Tomek and Marcin's work refers directly to the English phrase: accumulate and fire, which defines the method of computer programming based on creating the so-called anti-patterns. The anti-pattern describes the case of repeated, rediscovered bad solutions to problems made by software. Collected anti-patterns are recognized and organized in order to avoid mistakes made in the future. In their piece, Marcin and Tomek wanted to transfer this digital phenomenon to the reality of analog radio instruments. ↑

I am referring to the radio program Przyszło do Klanga: SZSZRZ broadcast on August 27, 21 on Radio Klang. I had an interview with Tomasz Pizio, Łukasz Suchy and Jędrzej Siwek together with Weronika Stencel. <https://www.mixcloud.com/radioklang/przysz%C5%82o-do-klanga-szszrz-270821/> ↑

L. Mitchison, S. Urquhart, The Quick and the Dead. An oral history of Brompton Cemetery, <https://www.royalparks.org.uk/parks/brompton-cemetery/about-brompton-cemetery/the-quick-and-the-dead> ↑

V. Eoppolo, Ritual - https://soundcloud.com/vincent_eoppolo/il-rituale-the-ritual ↑

I refer to the article by Dorota Błaszczak, Ekoakustyka from Behind the Window, where she describes in detail the process of creating eco-acoustic recordings. The text was published as part of the audiopapers issue Ecology of Sound of the Glissando magazine - <http://audiopapers.glissando.pl/ekoakustyka-zza-okna/> ↑

The work is available online on the website of Dorota Błaszczak - ↑

It is an event that selects sound and radio works, which are later listened to in complete darkness - <https://www.mixcloud.com/lights-out/lights-out-listening-group-wednesday-24th-april-2019/> ↑