

**RADIOTEXT(E)**

Neil Strauss, editor,  
Brooklyn: Semiotext(e)

**RADIUS #1**

Sheila Davies, Helen Thorington, and Terry Allen  
What Now? Recordings

**RADIUS #2**

Jacki Apple, Donald Swearingen, and Gregory Whitehead  
What Now? Recordings

The more I think about radio, the less I listen to it. Imagining its possibilities makes holding my nose and wading barefoot through the fecal airwaves that much harder. Always quick to look on the bright side, I'll just think of it as fertilizer for flowers of a future spring.

There's a seed catalog of a book I've been carrying around for months now. Between the pages of *Radiotext(e)* are recipes for insurrection and for making art, as well as histories, tall tales, and theories. Radio can be a utopian sphere and it is discussed that way here. Still, utopia manages to intersect with reality in these pieces: case histories and biographies of people who actually harnessed some of radio's potential for free speech and free thought, if not free form.

Like a lot of people who have participated in various forms of community radio and made themselves heard, I harbor a deep secret: I still believe in democracy. And democracy isn't just about rights or representation; it is fundamentally dependent on communication. In Japan, I learned, mini FM stations become community centers, transmitting no farther than the corner store. All over the world, illegal stations broadcast from ships anchored offshore, blasting seditious ideas and songs onto the mainland. In Amsterdam, they collage music out of records found on the street and play horror movies in their off hours to keep the signal steady. Pirates, subversives, and people just plain believing in themselves all over the world use the radio not as filler between stoplights but as the means to conversation. Bertolt Brecht's essay laments radio's one-sided limitations. Later in the book, Jeff Zilm's "Nomad Radio" responds by chronicling the exploits of Red Asphalt Nomad, a CB group in Texas who communicate with each other on open channel 23.

From Edward R. Murrow's eloquent "Broadcast from Buchenwald" to Frank Ballester's "The Vanilla Bean Talks to a Phone Hooker About Elvis Live on WFMU," *Radiotext(e)* embraces the rotting, exciting, silly whole of the twentieth century and doesn't let go. Dave Mandl's sadistic "How Awful is the Radio in Your City? Take This Simple Test" offers a point by point rundown of everything slimy and degrading about contemporary mainstream radio. But even if your town scores negative 500 or lower ("worse than I thought"), you still might be lucky enough to pick up Joe Frank, discussed in the "Lives of the Great DJs" chapter. The first time I ever heard his *Work in Progress* program, washing dishes at a job in college, I was instantly, fundamentally embarrassed by his down-deep self-reflections. I don't know if he was doing his show in a bathtub but that's how I remember it—that he was absolutely naked and soaking wet.

As Derrick Sington and Arthur Weidenfeld write in "Broadcasting in the Third Reich," "Goebbels once defined the task of broadcasting as a twofold one: to be the 'instrument for forming the political will' and to be 'a disseminator of culture.'" For better or worse this basic talk and rock dichotomy still holds true. Yet certain furtive deviants have been tiptoeing into studios the world over to use radio waves not to sell records or test the Emergency Broadcast System. They call it art. As Neil Strauss points out in his introduction, "It's a decadent art: In politically embattled countries, there's little—or more likely no—radio art, while relatively untroubled Canadians are the most prolific producers of works of art exclusively for broadcast, followed by Americans and Western Europeans."

The Radius series (available from What Now? Recordings c/o Nonsequitur, P.O. Box 344, Albuquerque, NM 87103) claims to scan "the radioscope for signs of intelligence drifting in the ether, gems otherwise lost in the jumble of crossed signals, static interference, and fallout from the hostile bombardments of corporate broadcasting. Radio is not all dead air." Of course there is a little irony in the fact that the medium of the ether is canned into the Mason jar of the CD format. It's not merely something to listen to. It's something to buy. In this respect, radio art is no different than visual art: it becomes a medium of exchange shut in a CD jewel box like a Hopper painting on a museum wall. Is it a coincidence that Helen Thorington (contributor of the piece "Partial Perceptions" on *Radius #1*, as well as an essay in *Radiotext(e)*), in describing her job running the New American Radio series, identifies herself as curator?

That Thorington, along with Jacki Apple and Gregory Whitehead, shows up on the CD and the book underlines the fact that the audio art community inhabits a small, small world. On *Radius #2*, Whitehead, the Gerard Depardieu of radio art, poses as Dr. Scream from Sydney's "Institute for Screamscape Studies." From the shrieks in question, strung together from answering machine messages of polite Australians introducing their maddening cries, the doctor concludes that each scream possesses "an individual, psychoacoustic force to it." Thorington's piece claims to be built of "restructured spaces." It must be constructed of burnt logs and painful friction, sinking into a dark green swamp: I was listening with the light off and it made me so nervous that I had to wait until morning to finish it. Apple's piece "Voices in the Dark" asserts that "the cosmos is an audio archive." It is a smart, sci-fi version of Brecht's call to combat distribution with communication. In a multi-galactic bull session that defies history enough to enable conversations between Mussolini and John Cleese, broadcasts never die and the voices clog up the universe.

Terry Allen's "Bleeder" from *Radius #1* is described as an "audiobiography" of a Texas hemophiliac, religious zealot, and gangster who could spin yarns and take pills. "He was crooked as they come, crooked as a true story," remembers The Woman as played by Jo Harvey. Backed by Allen, an artist and storyteller from Lubbock, and his Panhandle Mystery Band, Harvey speaks in a voice like my own Okie aunts, the best tall tale-tellers in the world, and the kindest too. It's a twang we used to call "hillbilly" before the *L.A. Times* language police cracked down on prejudice against the last social group in America whom it was culturally sanctioned to treat with intolerance and hatred. When I asked the great country music historian Bill Malone for a good replacement word for "hillbilly" and its country cousin "hick," he replied in one long, considered Texas breath, "I prefer the term Real Americans."

Sarah Vowell, San Francisco, California

Muzak intends to be a sort of sonic Calgon, calming our threatened nerves, blocking out the noise of life from traffic to television. But if the 20th Century has taught us anything, it's how to make art out of what's bothering us. In "Salvation at 1 AM" (on the compilation CD "Radius #2," What Next? Recordings, c/o Nonsequitur, PO Box 344, Albuquerque, NM 87103), Donald Swearingen welds together the voices that stalk late-night TV, offering whiter teeth and peace of mind as operators stand by. The televangelists and weight-loss clinics ask the questions that nag at the office workers faced with Muzak everyday—basic questions like "What do you want?" and "Would you like to be free?" They speak in mantras of "mon-eymoney money money" and invoke the average will to contentment. For, as Lanza cites Aldous Huxley, "Whenever the masses seized political power, then it was happiness rather than truth and beauty that mattered."



# MUSICNet<sup>TM</sup>

## Notes

CD-ROMs, video toasters, and Internet services are shifting into overdrive on the information superhighway. It's enough to make that radio you're listening to while fighting through morning traffic seem downright primitive. That same radio, however, remains the technological medium best suited for storytelling and the spoken word. The *Radius* series is dedicated to presenting experimental works made for radio broadcast to a wider audience. The two volumes which have been issued so far were curated by Helen Thorington, director of the New American radio series, which is the only syndicated program in the U.S. devoted to presenting experimental works for radio by a wide range of artists working in many different styles. The two CDs feature pieces which explore philosophy, mythology, and the cosmos in an experimental context. Lighter works include a satirical "infomercial" and an investigation into the nervous system of the city of Sydney. Painter, sculptor, and country singer Terry Allen's fictional biography "Bleeder" is included on the first volume in a recording that features performance artist/actress Jo Harvey (who appeared in David Byrne's *True Stories* film) as the storyteller. Those looking for radio art that stretches the boundaries of *Prairie Home Companion* might do well to start with this series. #72431

**March 1994**  
**Volume 2, Number 3**

## N D 19

**Radius #2** [What Next?] (CD, 73 min) Subtitled “transmissions from broadcast artists” this series presents artists who create audio art for radio. The Apple and Swearingen pieces did very little other than annoy, however Gregory Whitehead’s “Pressures of the Unspeakable” is a masterpiece. Creating a fake media around screaming, this 30 minute excursion combines humour, hipness and lots of screaming contextualised in a form of radio panels, voices of authority, and interviews. It is a an aural rollercoaster that must be experienced. (RF)

## **VARIOUS ARTISTS**

### **■ *Radius # 1-2***

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(What Next?/Nonsequitur) This is about as experimental as it gets. There's sound-collage mixed with spoken word and/or music (Sheila Davies, Jackie Apple, Donald Swearingen), some abstract, wordless vocalizing (Helen Thorington), dramatic monologue (Terry Allen), and an uncategorizable piece on screaming (Gregory Whitehead). It's interesting on first listen, though not all of it demands another play.

STEVE HOLTJE

## RADIO SCREAMSCAPES

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### SOME DELECTABLE JUNKETS

The intensity of a whispered secret is often freeze-dried, shrink-wrapped, and neatly-packed into a homogenous row of black inked fonts, read left to right, on a creamy white page. Books. The Gutenberg galaxy. Imagine the excitement when our geriatric forefathers put their books down again, and glued their attention to the spookish presence of the new phenomenon of radio.

**reviewed by spiro(s)**

Today's spectral radiowaves are lifeless ghouls selling you stupid music or inane products. Even the not-for-profit public radiowaves are paralyzed by the poisonous unimaginative standard of commercial classifying, segmenting, and formatting. Thus Albuquerque's own, ¿What Next? Recordings, birthed its Radius series. From the liner notes, "RADIUS scans the radioscape for signs of intelligence drifting in the ether, gems otherwise lost in the jumble of crossed signals, static interference, and fallout from the hostile bombardments of corporate broadcasting. Radio is not all dead air..." The Radius releases pry open your earhole with some strange ethereal tool that's a cross between a mental crowbar and a psychic crazy straw.

*Radius #1* opens with "What Is the Matter in Amy Glennon," by Sheila Davis, a strange alloy comprised of psychotic whimsy and flat-lined logic. As this radioplay begins, the air of pretense may initially turn you off, but after two minutes you oughta be gripped and giggling down the yellow brick rollercoaster, careening towards the fruitful marriage of pure science and mythological philosophy. Helen Thorington's "Partial Perceptions" is an ambient nonverbal landscape with swampy nature sounds and surprising machine eruptions. Consider it an aural picturebook. Terry Allen's "Bleeder" grabs

yer earlobe with the draawl of a smalltown cowpunk fable. A hilarious "audiobiography" of an enigmatic Texas gambler, religious fanatic, possible gangster, magician, and hemophiliac. All this is set to the ominous ambience of the Panhandle Mystery Band's psycho-delic Texas swing.

*Radius #2* opens in the swirl of cosmic pomo rhetoric. In Jacki Apple's "Voices In The Dark," the cosmos becomes an audio archive of information broadcast to the stars, a repository of histories which times melts and language dissolves into signals. Yes, it's a bit highbrow and speculative, but it wouldn't be that annoying if the presentation didn't...didn't sound...didn't sound just like...just like Laurie Anderson. The closest pop music analog to Donald Swearingen's "Salvation at 1 a.m." is the media collages of Negativeland or the Tape Beatles. This amazing romp through the psyche of latenight television and the pathetic promises of phone sex adds and program-length commercials is comprised completely of samples from this insane familiar bewitching hour. Then last and loudest is Gregory Whitehead's masterpiece, "Pressures of the Unspeakable." Herein lies a beautifully unnerving analysis of screams. Welcome to the screamscape. Enjoy your 27-minute enrollment into the "Institute for Screamscape Studies." Your dean will be Dr. Scream. Somewhere along this educational adventure you'll slip into the Invisible City, the Sydney Nervous System, and start screaming yourself, with everything you've got. Which isn't much. More reason to scream. Your neighbors may call the cops. They'll show up at the door and start screaming too. A joyous cacophony.

Your neighbors may not love you for these radio pastries, but hell, for tea parties, it beats reading. ■

RADIUS: Volume #1 (CD)

Radio art is considered a legitimate art form around the globe. In the United States, however, this medium of expression has yet to gain significant recognition. The Radius series seeks to compensate for the lack of exposure American radio artists are receiving. Although sometimes this mode of expression is a spontaneous event live on the air, the three pieces on this CD appear to be pre-meditated compositions that may have even been assembled in their entirety prior to their broadcast. The text in "What is the Matter in Amy Glennon?" would work well alone on the printed page, but this is nicely augmented by musical fragments and a female a capella group. "Partial Perceptions", by Helen Thorington, is a non-narrative use of sound that ranges from high pitched piercing music to the soothing blend of water and electronic noises. The final track "Bleeder" returns to the narrative with a linear story about a legendary man in Texas. These three works, each between 20 and 30 minutes in length, serve well as an introduction to American radio art. They also represent the heights that can be achieved through this medium. You'll want to listen to these pieces a few times in order to appreciate the many details that have gone into these recordings. (NONSEQUITUR, PO BOX 344, ALBUQUERQUE, NM 87103)

RADIUS: VOLUME #2 (CD)

If you find a dearth of adventurous radio programming in your surroundings, the Radius recordings may be just what you need. The second disc in this series centers on social commentary in radio art. Jacki Apple takes a narrative approach on "Voices in the Dark." In this piece, outer space is viewed as a place where signals from radios, telephones, and satellites collide. Donald Swearingen's "Salvation at 1AM" takes a look at television advertising by placing countless ads against each other. We always had some notion that tv attempted to manipulate, but seeing these false promises of ease, money, salvation, and opportunity in condensed form leaves no doubt. The third and final track, "Pressure of the Unspeakable," by Gregory White is a documentation of screaming. Commentary and discussion occur while people scream (and on occasion even introduce themselves). \_Radius #2\_ succeeds in altering the audiences perception of the world. After hearing these works, I doubt if you will ever look at television ads, radio signals, or screaming from the same perspective again. (WHAT NEXT C/O NONSEQUITUR, PO BOX 344, ALBUQUERQUE, NM 87103)

# OPTION

MUSIC ALTERNATIVES



● **RADIUS VOLS. #1 & #2** Each of these discs contains three pieces of audio art originally made for radio broadcast. They combine text, narration, theatrical performance and all manner of sounds and effects into a rich stew of auditory information. "What Is the Matter In Amy Glennon," by Sheila Davies, features the first-person narration of a woman on a mythical quest for her Self. The quest is repeatedly interrupted by an English-accented auctioneer selling commentary on her quest to Freud, Jung, etc. At the end, he sells off the manuscript of the audio drama itself. Post-modern gymnastics of this sort abound in these pieces, perhaps inevitably, given how the medium brings together information from so many sources. I sometimes found them annoying, but overall the pieces are pleasantly challenging, rewarding the careful listener. The Radius series is curated by Helen Thorington, who contributes the only piece that eschews narration. It explores the boundary between the human and the machine using Joseph Celli's reeds and electronics, and Shelley Hirsch's non-narrative vocalizations. Thorington chose pieces she thought would hold up to the repeated listening implied by a CD rather than a radio broadcast. I'm not sure how many times I could hear any of these, but a couple pieces were delightful the first two times. My favorite is Jacki Apple's unsettling "Voices In the Dark," about radio signals bouncing between the stars, gradually melting into each other and losing their meaning. (Nonsequitur, Box 344, Albuquerque, NM 87103) — Scott Lewis



# Pform

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**RADIUS**, two CDs from Nonsequitur concentrating on works for radio. Both volumes feature works that were commissioned and broadcast through New American Radio, the only nationally broadcast radio art series in the US.

Volume 1 features works by Sheila Davies, Helen Thorington, and Terry Allen, but was not acquired in time for this review.

Volume 2 traces three approaches that are entirely different yet connected in an interesting way.

Jacki Apple's *Voices in the*

*Dark* is a narrative work, a kind of storytelling-with-spacey-synthesizer-music piece. Her text describes the transmission of radio signals around the planet that continue on into space leaving artifacts for the radio archeologists on distant planets to

excavate. Donald Swearingen's *Salvation at IAM* is a different take on the archeology of radiophonic space.

Essentially an electronic music composition, his site of excavation is in commercial media manipulations: an intense stream of sampled late night talk shows, infomercials, and televangelists all promising salvation variously through Jesus, cosmetics, or good eating habits. Gregory Whitehead's *Pressures of the Unspeakable* is constructed from a kind of media intervention he conducted on Australian Public Radio. As an "authority" in "screamscape

studies" he invited listeners to call in with their own contributions. He also performs entries from his "scream memory catalog." Whitehead creates a fiction from the fiction of radio to give actual content to the fiction of mass communication. Available from Nonsequitur, \$13.50.

## RECORDING REVIEWS

# PHOSPHOR

an European / independent & Industrial magazine • a radioprogram • a agency

This is an issue of PHOSPHOR  
May 1994

## Various Artists 'Radius'

CD

Three artists make a contribution to this compilation. One of them is **Jacki Apple**, a media, audio and performance artist. She tells about all those voices out there, in the dark, all those satellite signals and all those long distant calls. The cosmos is an audio achive of information broadcast to the stars. The cosmos party line? It feels like a telephone is ringing . . . And it (?) is calling you. This interstellar radio play is a great experience.

**Donald Swearingen** is a classically trained composer and pianist. He took all material, like fragments about sex, money and self-esteem from real television broadcasts (circa 1990). Those samples are repeated so many times that it makes you feel sick. Maybe he wants you to?

The writer, radiomaker and audio artist **Gregory Whitehead** made a 27 minute screamscape. He asked people to call him and scream to him on the phone. And so they did. The rest of the song is a conversation about the scream.

The transmissions from these braodcast artists are odd but interesting. ?What Next? Recordings c/o Nonsequitur, PO Box 344, Albuquerque, NM 87103, USA.

# PULSE!

TOWER RECORDS/VIDEO

APRIL 1995

## New American Radio vs. the Ear of Newt

**A**merican radio is so completely inculcated in commercial music industry rhetoric—statistics, playlists, market shares, charts—that it's almost impossible to believe that there are any truly "alternative" airwaves being stirred, even in the non-commercial zone of the spectrum. Radio is treated as a delivery system that dutifully "presents" music, which is presumed to be the actual art form. But "alternative" radio doesn't necessarily just mean radio that plays "alternative" rock; "alternative" radio can be different in attitude, philosophy, methodology and basic kernel of existence. Imagine a way of treating the medium as more than a mode of distribution, but as a full-fledged artistic medium with its own set of inherent structural, compositional, aesthetic, legal, and political issues. Creative radio production starts here.

"The implications of de-funding are obvious," says Helen Thorington, curator of New American Radio (NAR), an organization that treats radio as just that sort of creative medium. The decade-old radio series, which has commissioned and purchased a huge number of works—ranging in orientation from pure experimental sound and spoken word to new narrative and dramatic strategies, documentary and pieces exploring the subversion of media conventions—faces imminent peril in Newt Gingrich's vision of America. "There will be a diminished number of commissions for artists. If it continues, series like New American Radio will simply cease to exist."

The future is bleak for the public support of creative radio. Predictions vary, but what seems certain is that when the rug is pulled out, the marginal programming will be the first to go. This means that long-term experimental or creative programs will be housecleaned out of existence. "Jackie Apple has had 'Soundings' on KPFK, Los Angeles, for years," says Thorington. "She's living proof that an audience can be developed for this work. But everybody's feeling the question in the air: Who's going to be purged as a result of the Republican

effort to get rid of public radio?"

Syndicated on between 40 and 60 stations weekly, NAR began in 1985 with a \$15,000 grant from the (likely to be eliminated) National Endowment for the Arts. In 1987, it produced a series of 13 programs with assistance from the (now extinct) satellite program development fund administered by NPR. "We were picking up on the desire of artists in that period to move from the limited venue of the museum into public spaces," explains Thorington. By what she calls "sheer accident," NAR was funded in 1988 by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting's new Radio Fund, which allowed it to become a weekly series.

"The irony is that at almost that same moment ... audience research began to flex its muscle in public broadcasting, and we were put head-to-head with more traditional radio in audience research tests." Faced with NAR's challenging programming, test audiences scrambled for the security of recognizable shows. One wonders how, if the assumption is that an audience already knows what it wants, anything ever changes? And why audiences should be applauded for being afraid of anything new or different. That's what is so significant about shows like Jackie Apple's: They prove that an initially wary audience may actually grow more daring over time. Perhaps conservatism wears off. (Since the withdrawal of CPB's Radio Fund money, NAR has been sustained by grants from the Rockefeller and MacArthur Foundations and other arts-supporting organizations.)

Each program is different, so the audience can't expect to hear the same thing or even the same type of thing week in and out. NAR's emphasis on diversity is evident in the range of artists who have produced for them: Charles Amirkhanian, Shelly Hirsch, David Moss, Earwax Productions, Don Joyce and Negativland, Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Gregory Whitehead, Sheila Davies, William Morelock, Terry Allen, Donald Swearington and many others (including Thorington herself). Some of the series' finest programs are available on two CDs, *Radius #1* and *Radius #2* (What Next? Recordings).

Will jackboots crush this small but significant bug in the radio industry into oblivion? Will those dedicated, growing audiences interested in unusual, risky programming that engages their imaginations have that nascent interest nipped in the bud? Stay tuned. —John Corbett ■





**RADIUS volume 1.**  
WN0013 ¿What Next?  
Recordings. Dist.  
Metamkine.

**RADIUS volume 2.**  
WN0014 ¿What Next?  
Recordings.

Dist. Metamkine.

**Gregory WHITEHEAD** "The Pleasure of Ruins and Other Castaways" S.T.CD 059 / KP 4493 Staalplaat / Korm Plastics. Dist. Semantic. Odd Size. Metamkine.

**HÖRSPIELE.** La Muse en Circuit.

**Luc FERRARI** "Le Banquet" - "L'Escalier des aveugles" 291 302 MU 750 La Muse En Circuit / Musidisc.

La distinction entre création radiophonique et musique sur support est assez vague, difficilement discernable, si ce n'est que d'un côté, on revendique le mot musique et de l'autre, il a disparu. La radio existe en tant que vecteur, support de diffusion au texte, à l'information, à la musique... Mais la radio est également lieu de création et d'expérimentation. N'oublions pas que la musique concrète est née au sein de la radio. Ce qui est annoncé comme création radiophonique pourrait parfois être annoncée comme musique, et vice-versa. La radio est liée à un événement unique (même si l'on peut l'enregistrer), on l'entend une fois et c'est tout. L'ambiguïté devient encore plus forte quand on nous propose des enregistrements de créations radiophoniques sur un disque. Ainsi ces pièces peuvent-elles vivre en dehors de la radio? Serait radiophonique ce qui utilise la voix, ce qui raconte une histoire, ce qui passe à la radio...? Y a-t-il une forme de composition spécifique? Autant de questions qui restent sans réponse même après l'écoute des deux disques compilations suivants qui nous proposent deux exemples de créations radiophoniques, l'un français et l'autre américain.

Le disque **HÖRSPIELE** (hors commerce) regroupe sept lauréats (Harald Brandt et Chantal Dumas, Rémy Carré, Philippe Le Goff, Tom Mays, Christian Rosset, Christian Sebille) retenus lors du premier concours de création radiophonique à l'initiative de La Muse en Circuit, la Sacem et Radio France. Hörspiel est un mot allemand que l'on pourrait traduire par "jeu pour l'oreille", et désigne l'idée de création radiophonique née en Allemagne au milieu des années 20 (cf. le livret). A ce propos, on pourra se référer au nouveau mini-CD de la collection "cinéma pour l'oreille" de Metamkine. "Weekend" de Walter Ruttmann, pièce radiophonique réalisée en 1930.



**N°19, trimestriel, mars 94**

**20 F**

Dans le domaine hörspiel, Luc FERRARI est une référence, et d'ailleurs pas seulement dans ce domaine. A titre indicatif "Brise Glace". Mille fois hélas, cette fois il s'est planté, il a loupé la marche et se casse les dents avec cet "Escalier des aveugles", où mis à part le fait d'apprendre qu'il aime les femmes, ce que l'on sait depuis bien longtemps, on s'ennuie tout le reste du temps dans des banalités sur fond de musique insipide. RADIUS est une nouvelle collection de ¿What Next? Recordings, consacrée à des créations radiophoniques d'artistes américains. Deux volumes viennent de sortir, le premier avec Sheila Davies, Helen Thorington et Terry Allen et le second avec Jackie Apple, Donald Swearingen et Gregory WHITEHEAD. Du fait d'éléments narratifs dans certaines pièces, on peut être gêné si l'on ne maîtrise pas l'anglais. On retiendra les pièces de Helen Thorington (avec la participation de Shelley Hirsch et Joseph Celli), Donald Swearingen (collage de messages publicitaires télévisuels) et Gregory WHITEHEAD. Ce dernier travaille régulièrement pour la radio et a dirigé différentes organisations impliquées dans ce média. La voix est toujours au centre de son travail. Ici, dans "Pressures of the Unspeakable", il s'agit plus spécialement du cri. Des gens sont invités à crier ou à témoigner d'une expérience sur le cri, cette zone entre le plaisir et la douleur. Il cherche à créer un paysage sonore uniquement à base de cris. C'est une pièce très forte dans les deux sens du terme, on se retrouve presque comme un voyeur à écouter ces gens.

On retrouve Gregory WHITEHEAD sur "The Pleasure of Ruins", un CD sorti l'année dernière chez Staalplaat, avec 12 pièces composées entre 1983 et 1990 et réalisées principalement à partir de la voix du compositeur. "The Problem With Bodies" nous présente différentes possibilités de cet organe, une phrase est répétée sans ouvrir la bouche, sans utiliser la langue, puis le larynx. Souvent composées par accumulation successive d'éléments, ces pièces se situent entre musique et poésie.

# SF WEEKLY

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## SOUNDBITES

### The art of noise

*Exploring the outer reaches of radio*

**When I was** four years old, I thought I could communicate with radio stations by yelling into the speaker of my family's old Westinghouse portable. But as I animatedly talked to the box, I soon sadly realized that my voice wasn't being heard by the people on the other end.

Today, a lot of sound artists are as frustrated as I was by the lack of public access to radio, even on so-called "public" or listener-sponsored radio stations, and they've been creating provocative, often subversive work that challenges the status quo. Now you don't have to wait for sporadic satellite transmissions or fleeting pirate broadcasts to hear the latest work, because the Nonsequitur Foundation is issuing *Radius*, a new series of CDs devoted to radio art. Nonsequitur plans to release two volumes annually, with selections chosen by a changing group of curators. The first two volumes — each presents three 20- to 25-minute pieces — were curated by Helen Thorington, director of New American Radio.

Gregory Whitehead is an ingenious and prolific radio artist. In his *Pressures of the Unspeakable*, on *Radius* #2, he infiltrated the government-run Australian Broadcasting Company and turned it on its ear. Posing as Dr. Whitehead of the Institute for Screamscape Studies, he discussed his research on talk shows and invited listeners

to participate in his study by calling a 24-hour "scream line" that recorded their screams and comments. Later, still acting as the bogus doctor, he broadcast an edited version of all this material, calling it the result of his research. The piece, among other things, exposes how the fraudulent authority figure tries to exert interpretive control over the voices of the listeners. It's an apt analogy to the way most radio stations operate.

Two Bay Area artists are also on the discs. Sheila Davies' witty and surreal *What is the Matter in Amy Glennon?* uses experimental narrative techniques — including an a capella chorus — to blend philosophy, science and mythology. Donald Swearingen, in *Salvation at 1 AM*, creates a collage of late-night sales pitches that reveals radio's commercial tendencies.

These radio artists challenge and transcend the limitations imposed on the medium; they try to open up the channels and open up our ears. Until we can tune our dials to public access stations or hear radio art more often on existing stations, the *Radius* series is an excellent way to explore this pioneering art form.

Liz Sizensky

➤ **Nonsequitur Foundation:** P.O. Box 344, Albuquerque, NM 87103. **New American Radio:** 120 Tysen Street, Staten Island, NY 10304.

# TapRoot Reviews

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## **RADIUS: Transmissions from Broad-**

**cast Artists, Vols. 1 & 2**—Nonsequitur Foundation, PO Box 344, Albuquerque NM, 87103. CDs, \$13.50 @. Two collections of radio art, not to be confused with linear radio drama we're used to from "Golden Age of Radio" collections. A variety of styles are presented, from the Laurie Andersonish narrated monologues (with sonic backgrounding) of Sheila Davies & Jacki Apple, to the Negativland-style splice & dice of found material in Donald Swearingen's "Salvation at 1 AM," to the ambient spatial soundscape of Helen Thorington's (wordless) "Partial Perceptions." The standouts for me were the closing pieces on each volume. Terry Allen's "Bleeder" (on vol. #1) is an ungimmicked & rich reminiscence about an archetypal American anti-hero; greed, violence, and hemophilia paint a grim picture of the national character. Gregory Whitehead closes vol. #2 with "Pressures of the Unspeakable," continuing in his creation of perfectly believable and discomfiting pseudoscience institutions, in this case "The Institute for Screamscape Studies." Helen Thorington is the producer of the series, as well as being the curator of the "New American Radio" series, where some of these pieces first appeared—this may account for the consistent length of the pieces (around 25 minutes @—there's an argument to be made here for leaving the material to dictate its own length, rather than radio stations' programming blocks). Many European countries have strong traditions of radio performance; these works provide a vital introduction to the genre, and perhaps a basis for further growth.—lbd

# THE

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PEEPS FROM THE INVISIBLE WORLD OF

MUSIC

## RADIO

## ART

BY JAMIE ALLEN

The radiobody... challenges the audience to cross and recross the obscure boundaries that separate radio dreamland from radio ghostland, living from dead, utopia from oblivion. Just beneath the promise of a lightning connection to a world of dreamy invisible things lurks a darker potential for spotlessly violent electrocution, for going up in smoke...

This passage, taken from Gregory Whitehead's essay "Out of the Dark: Notes on the Nobodies of Radio Art," is one of many ready musings found in the book *Wireless Imagination: Sound, Radio and the Avant-Garde*, recently published by MIT Press. But what exactly is radio art? And why does it inspire such fiery prose? Maybe we should start somewhere closer to the beginning.

The term "radio art" was coined in 1925 by composer Kurt Weill in his farsighted essay, "Radio and the Restructuring of Music Life." Witnessing a meteoric rise in the prevalence of radio in Germany between the wars, Weill saw in this fledgling technology "the preconditions for the development of an independent artistic genre of equal stature [with other arts]," and felt strongly that radio must avoid the mere "reproduction of earlier artistic achievements." He challenged those who would work with this new instrument "to search through the entire acoustical landscape for sources and means—regardless of whether they be called music or sounds—to structure one's own art."

Nearly 70 years later, Weill's vision has experienced an odd, simultaneous nonfulfillment and fulfillment. In America, radio has become almost entirely utilitarian. It is either a military missile navigator or an invasive tool of consumerism. It is rarely, if ever, thought of as raw material for creative artists.

Yet in Europe (most notably in Germany and Spain), large amounts of money are bestowed upon artists who are continually expanding the artistic possibilities of radio. As far back as the 1920s, the Radio Drama Prize of the War Blind was established in Germany to provide sightless veterans with a constant stream of new and interesting programs. In 1968, when Ernst Jandl and Friederike Mayröcker's experimental *Fünf Mann Menschen (Five Men Mankind)* captured the imaginations of the award judges, this prize became, literally overnight, one of the single greatest international prizes for avant-garde audio broadcasts.

In America, we have become so used to radio "formats" where every frequency band has its own narrow range of artistic and consumer products to hawk, that the idea of breaking through the noise and making radio a vehicle for cosmic sound experiences is virtually impossible to imagine. But the strength of artistic vision can be as fierce as it is intangible, and such a wall has not arrested the efforts of a new breed of creative professionals and amateurs who tend to light on the title of "audio artist."

Half a dozen of these voices in the sonic wilderness can be heard on a pair of newly released CDs from (What Next? Recordings titled *Radius #1* and *Radius #2*). Although the sound art on these CDs admittedly loses some of its impact when consciously selected for listening on a home audio system as opposed to suddenly appearing in one's sonic landscape through the magic of radio, its ability to engage, enrage, and even entertain is still forceful.

The range of styles on these releases is so vast as to make them almost useless as a point of study for radio art. But given that, there are some self-proclaimed gems otherwise lost in the jumble of crossed signals that truly deserve such an epithet. The most riveting of these is Sheila Davies' *What is the Matter in Amy Glennan?* A Special Commendation winner at the Prix Futura Berlin in 1991, this piece whirls us into an alternate reality that is possible only in the world of absolute audio. Ostensibly a work of drama, its main character is a disembodied spirit whose control over her own thoughts and actions is constantly in question as the ideas and metaphors of the text continually go up for auction to mythical personae. Although it never entirely crosses over from using language as a medium to using language as material, it certainly toys with the assumptions inherent in both. The result is 26 minutes of mental joyriding that seems over in less than ten.

Other works on the CDs range from studies in pure sound to intense human explorations into the nature of a scream to self-reflective, quasi-musical ruminations on the universal aspects of radio. Some have obvious connections to the modern tradition of performance art, while others come from a much more classically structured, musical point of reference. But regardless of their creators' backgrounds, these pieces are not merely nostalgic. Unlike the French Surrealists of the 1920s and '30s (who felt a strong connection to the artistic possibilities of radio art), these artists are brimming with conviction. Such conviction gives a glimmer of hope to the optimistic proclamation on the liner notes that "Radio is not all dead air."

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**RADIUS 1 & 2** (*Compilation CD's by What Next? Recordings*). Releases with recordings of radioplay are, alas, rare. A fact that is due to its nature (broadcasting is something of the here and now, now everywhere and then it's gone) and perhaps because normally radio stations do not concern themselves with the release of sound through other media than radio.

It is therefore that I cordially welcome releases if they do occur. These two CDs, produced by What Next? each present three compositions. They give a complete survey of what radioplay has to offer. On Radius 1 there is wordplay like in Sheila Davis' "What is the Matter in Amy Glennon?", abstract soundscape in Helen Thorington's 'Partial Perception', and descriptive narration (documentary) in Terry Allen's 'The Bleeder'. Davis' work is hilarious and terribly difficult, full of pun and referral to literature, philosophy and several areas of cultural expression. 'The Bleeder' gives you the typical story for a cold and stormy night, the listener sitting next to an open fire.

Radius 2 starts off with Jackie Apple's 'Voices in the Dark', like Thorington's piece an electronic soundscape. But where Thorington wants to lay bare the connections between (wo)man, nature and machine and thus remains on earth, 'Voices in the Dark' is a message into outer space which she regards as an audio archive. Perhaps someone/something hears the transmissions... and doesn't get the picture.

Number 2, Donald Swearingen's 'Salvation at 1 AM' a collection of nonsense from the AV media, cut and

pasted into a collage which will make some of you pop up with the name of the Tape Beatles. This however is at least twice as interesting. Closing off Radius 2 is Gregory Whitehead's 'Pressures of the Unspeakable', a sort of reality radioplay. While in Australia at the invitation of a large radio station Whitehead opened a telephone number people could call to talk about their screams, to scream, and to philosophize on screaming. The results were broadcasted and a dr. Vicekopf came to elucidate and talk about his research in the field of 'screaming'. The results of this Australian adventure Whitehead skillfully blended into an amazing composition.

These Radius-CD's are very much worth listening, they offer intellectual and intelligent passtime. (IS)