Bruce Barber

I

No matter how different from television the works of individual video artists may be, the television experience dominates the phenomenology of viewing and haunts video exhibitions, the way that the experience of movies haunts all film. (Lanier, 36-45)

Among the many media theorists on the left who have realized the inherently undemocratic and undialectical nature of radio (and television) communication, we owe to Bertolt Brecht the seemingly self-evident notion that neither the emancipation of the telecommunication systems, nor the emancipation of the listening public can occur independently of the other; they are in fact mutually dependent.

Radio must be changed from a means of distribution to a means of communication. Radio would be the most wonderful means of communication imaginable in public life, a huge linked system — that is to say, it would be such if it were capable not only of transmitting but of receiving, of allowing the listener not only to hear but to speak, and did not isolate him but brought him into contact. Unrealizable in this social system, realizable in another, these proposals, which are after all the natural consequences of technical development, help towards the propagation and shaping of that other system. (Brecht, 129, seg. 154)

Just after Hitler’s assumption of power in January 1933, and a full year before the invention of the “vollanstehender,” the people’s wireless set, model V.E. 301, Brecht had realized the extent toward which radio could become an ideal apparatus for control. How different, indeed, is Brecht’s critical comprehension of the uses of radio technology in the indoctrination of the masses from that of Hans Redlich, the father of German radio who in 1927 enthusiastically endorsed its “general communicative and educative possibilities.” Or from that of Albert Einstein, who upon opening the seventh German Radio Exhibition in August 1930, enjoined his audience to remember that it was the technicians who made true democracy possible. They have only simplified daily work, they are also disseminating true thought and art to the public at large. Radio, furthermore, has a unique capacity for reconciling the family of nations. Until now nations got to know one another only through the distorting mirror of the daily press. (von Eckhardt and Gilman, 57)

“Radio,” he continued, oblivious to the neo-colonial pretensions of his statement, “acquires them in the most immediate form and from their most immediate side.”

Three years later Einstein’s colleague on radio as the petrifying technological vehicle for democracy was destroyed. Under the direction of Goebbels, Hitler’s minister of propaganda, wireless wonders appeared in rural villages and towns to ensure that communal wireless sets were installed (and listened to) in the correct fashion. This chiseled the identity of a radio system with the “capacity for reconciling the family of nations.” Leading members of the National Socialist Leader’s Union realized the extent to which party unity, and further the education of the whole German people to the ideas and ambitions of the Third Reich, were to be obtained. “The German radio programmes must shape the character and the will power of the German nation, and build a new political type.” (Bunting and Weidenfeld, 273, emphasis added)

From a relatively privileged middle and upper middle class (where in the mid-1920s, radio was by the mid-1930s being purveyed to the masses in individual receiver sets. The emancipatory potential of the new communication medium had been denied in favour of its limitless capacity to order information in such a manner as to assure the unilateral demonstration of power. It must have been of little comfort to Einstein in America to realize that the same technicians he was suggesting were responsible for democracy could at the same time be responsible for the formation of fascism.

There are still those today who believe that the demonstration of the communications system is possible. Questions relating to production and reproduction, and the “shaping of other systems” remain central to contemporary nature and extent to which the media act on it conforms. These questions were presented by Brecht as resolvable within the dialectics of actual or imagined events best explained by the dialectic concept of historical issues besetting interchanges and the con-
central to contemporary debates about the nature and extent of emancipation, both within the media and the society to which it conforms. These questions, as they were presented by Brecht in 1932, may be ir-
resolvable within the present conditions of actual or incipient control and may be best explained by the abstract yet total-
izing concept of hegemony. While the issues besetting inter-community ex-
changes and the control thereof can be examined within the terms of "electronic colonization," their resolution may not be achieved simply through a re-orientation of the uses and abuses of the media, al-
though this would help for starters. It may have to begin with a radical refocusing of the problems and possibly as well, the re-
constitution of the terms of discourse.

Power, however, remains a good start-
ing point. While the macroscopic condi-
tions of power may be seen in the interna-
tional context of wars over the air-
waves, the dialectic implied in Brecht's rejektorium — "unavoidable in this social system, realizable in another..." — contin-
ues from the interstate and national to the community, and finally, to the level of the individual. The reproduction and contes-
tation of power relations continue at ev-
ery level. It is toward this examination we
must now turn to recognize these determi-
nations on the production of contempo-
rary audio artistry.

II

Within the history of broadcasting there are few instances of broadcasts which demon-
strate the peculiar and absolute power of the medium. Aggrandizing pub-
lic addresses — we may call these the clas-
sic use of radio — have usually been gener-
ized under the term propaganda. The
authority of radio is confirmed in wartime
documentary newsreels, which today evi-
dence a peculiarly melodramatic and fic-
tive character. The powerful propaganda
speeches of Churchill, Hitler, Stalin and
Roosevelt are paradigm of radio's propens-
ities toward mass indoctrination. Goebbels and others argued convincingly that indoctrination was the necessity, the very actuality of the medium.

One very famous instance of radio's peculiar ability to convince has been imm-
ortalized in the annals of broadcast his-
tory. Since the publication of Howard
Koch's book, it has become known simply
as The Panic Broadcast. The event took
place on Halloween, Sunday 30 October,1938 at 9:00 pm. The occasion was Co-
lumbia Broadcasting System's production of H.G. Wells' novel The War of the
Worlds. Produced by Orson Welles and the
Mercury players, the play documented the "landing" of hundreds of Martian aliens in
an obscure New Jersey town called
Grover's Mill. The Martians' destructive
mechanics, the total disruption of communi-
cations and the defeat of thousands of "defenders" took the listening public by
surprise. For a total of 8 minutes hun-
dreds of thousands of demoralized listen-
ers believed that Martians had occupied
whole sections of the country, indiscrimi-
nantly moving down hundreds and incin-
erating whole villages with their "heat
rays." The CBS network audience reacted
accordingly. They panicked.

As the programme's end, Orson Welles read a statement suggesting that the broadcast had been a Halloween prank, but this did little to dispel the fear of those caught off guard by the totally convincing character of the first half of the pro-
grame. According to one of the many
studies undertaken after the event, these
were the people who subsequently lobbied
for legislative powers to prohibit "such pseudsutrition" on the airwaves. It is un-
likely that a similar programme could
spark the same response today. Sociolo-
gists and psychologists who conducted
"post-invasion" studies suggested that the
responses of the approximately six million
people to the broadcast, and the estimated
one and half million who took the story
literally, were the result of a number of
factions, including the approach of conflict
in Europe, previously reported sightings of
alien airships and extra-terrestrial visitors,
and the traditional eightness of paranoia
associated with All Hallow's Eve. However,
the fact that one short radio programme
case have such extraordinary effects gives
some pause for reflection on the power of
radio in general and art in particular.

Within popular culture there are many representations of radio as "the disturber of the peace", the public intruder, which
invades the sanctity of domestic space, filling up warm and intimate rooms and
substituting the natural sounds and har-
mony of everyday life — with noise. In
marked contrast, revealing the popular
representation of the sanitized nature of
the medium, early newspaper and maga-
 Izine advertisements for radio tended to
emphasize its intimate qualities, or at least
its capacity for providing intimacy and
companionship. The wireless was often
illustrated in the 1920s as a piece of furni-
ture amid the other material possessions
of the petit-bourgeois interiors in which it
was most often found. The radio's func-
tions and its existence as technological
ap-
pearance was de-emphasised in favour of its
deorative (aesthetic) values which were in
keeping with other objects in the house-
hold.

The radio is represented as the substitute for
the absent friend on those cold lonely winter
nights, or alternatively, as the additional (in-
dispensable) "family member" surrounded by
adoring siblings, parents and household pets,
exuding its "warmth" like a coal fire.
These familiar conditions of radio-as-friend, or surrogate "love object," is a multiplicity of images, have provided the lyrical content for many musical performers as diverse as Bing Crosby, Dolly Parton, the Beatles and Queen. They have provided the necessary reflection and nostalgia base for "when I was young movies" like Woody Allen's Radio Days and reproduced the stereotypical image and sounds of America's vaudeville's "Oh, de...de...deh..." (via megaphone); the "movin' on, out n' up" of Nashville: the Motown refrain of "turn on (off) that radio!", and the post-audiovisual, hip hop "ta, ta, ta, ta, dino, di, di, di, si, si, o." 

The extent to which these cultural representations have become social and ideological indicators of some significance has begun to be explored by a growing number of popular culture researchers (examining the soundscapes of contemporary societies) (R. Murray Schafer's term in The Turing of the World: Toward a Theory of Soundscape Design.)

Some of this work on the social effects of radio, which includes the examination of sound imaging, and audio-cultural analysis generally, has taken its theoretical cues from recent debates within post-structuralism and Marxism. The Marxist interpretation and analysis of culture (and society) as well as contemporary post-structuralist and feminist film theory have been particularly useful for those exploring the psycho-social and socio-political aspects of audio production and consumption. During the past fifteen years the locus of debates within film theory and film analysis has tended to revolve around the name of sexual sublimation, voyeurism and filmic pleasure. The work of the 70s-80s group — Laura Mulvey, Peter Wollen et al., who have based their theories on the writings of Christian Metz (The Imaginary Signifier: Psychoanalysis and the Cinema), Jacques Lacan (Ecrits) and The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis) and Julia Kristeva (DeSade in Language) among others — has done much to isolate and identify significant aspects of cinematic pleasure, the construction of meaning and the production and reproduction of ideology through the agency of the cinematic apparatus. Similar theoretical work ("contextual" analysis) is beginning to be undertaken with respect to sound and has located its points of reference in psycho-social rather than in bio- or eco-social terms as had previously been the case in the work of Schafer and others.

The desire for listening, which places emphasis on the passive subject as the recipient of the 'code,' has begun to be more widely understood in psychoanalytic terms. The passive 'innocent' so eloquently evoked by Lacan, is a process which involves the sublimation of sexual desire into the level of imagination(s). These imaginings, reveries or semi-conscious states allow feelings of pleasure (unconscious) to be obtained.

In (practical) audiophonic terms, Lacan's thesis allows us to understand a range of listening behaviours described by those studying the social behaviours of audio consumers: why, for instance, many people listen to the radio or other audio-phonetic equipment in darkened rooms, or just prior to sleep; why listening aids digestion; why music increases commodity production in factories and commodity consumption in shopping malls.

The power of radio is more readily understood if we consider the sum public concerns of radio listeners (and some television viewers) who use their listening behaviour to almost literally stay alive. For somewhat obvious reasons, little is understood about the behaviour of those who, fearing or needing death, maintain a similar, somnolent, often hypertensive state by keeping the radio on while they attempt (fool) to sleep. In such cases, the intrusive presence of sound, of "noise," often regardless of content (although talk and phone-in shows are favourites), is used as an analgesic. In such instances, radio acts as both an "upper" and a "downer."

The split yet interdependent nature of listening — its intrusive yet friendly character, as well as its source of pleasure and unpleasure (distinguished from displeasure) — finds its consensus in the general problems associated with broadcasting: the privileging of reception over transmission, and of consumption over production. There is a paradigm in the historical developments which link the first radio receiver with those of today. It is of some importance that the first speaker was in fact a listening tube placed in the ear rather like a stethoscope. From the first, the experience of listening was very much an individual one. Dr. Lee de Forest's invention of the vacuum audio tube fostered the development of the audio speaker, which became, simply because of its shape, size and power, a commercial receptacle device. The wireless is aptly named in more ways than one. The intimate contact of the body with the machine was soon lost. Once connected to the body by a cord, the radio soon became an instrument of collective listening, part of the furniture and, by extension, the architecture — or in Mimi Schach's terms, taking his cues from McLuhan, the "bio-sphere." During the late 1960s, we have reawakened this intimate, interrelated contact with the machine.

Some 70 years after we have returned to a thoroughly individualistic form of the "news" (1920s and 1980s). The listener replaced by the uninvolved in the "advances" of mini-phones and stereo; in the late 1980s, the radio receiver turns on, "we now have air and turn it on." Its meaning is perhaps best illustrated in 1980s radio when (playback and record) makers/Walkman-wielders with audio tape players — chimes of production music like Stevie orilyn's capabilities — reveal that the decaying equipment has led to the creation of a new set of fashions. Still, such outputs are a means to an end, for the production line is of the passive ovens, tapes and radios.

The history of our listening behaviour, of individuality, to the mass and, prior to that, to the masses. For the last 20 years, we have been inventing the tension of the equipment that is fully articulated; that equipment would be familiar.

And the choice it made so much between noise, or the self-source (Schafer's "phonica"), but also between a narcissistic with self-imposed limitations to its advanced commercial acceptance, and the hyper-commercial, the latter connected with varied alienation.

The first involves a fiction, the second, a self-righteousness in the negotiation, and the latter, a manifesting of schizophrenia. That radio has its place in the combat or resist after its reproduction, is restrained inhomogeneous, theoretical discussion of the fact the primary tendencies in the means of engagement, "exchange" in step with participation in social reality.
"biosphere." During the past decade we have achieved the intimacy of this vital umbilical contact with the audio appara- tus.

Some 70 years after de Forest's invention we have returned to savour the se- verey individualistic hyper-tonic listening on the 'new' equipment of the 1970s and 1980s. The listening tube has been replaced by the umbilical cord representing the 'advanced generation' of mini-phones and stereo headsets. And where in the late sixties, Timothy Leary enjoined his followers to "drop out and turn on", we now have a situation of "turn on and turn in." It is particularly interest- ing that the machines marketed so suc- cessfully in the 1980s were those focusing on play-back and reception - the Walkman/Walkwoman with AM/FM and mini audio tape players - and not the ma- chines of production with multiple fea- tures like stereo or multi-track recording capabilities; although recent indications reveal that the decrease in prices of such equipment has led to an increase in pur- chases. Still, such equipment still main- tains an emphasis on consumption, in-sofar as its productive use is primarily re- stricted to the passive duplication of rec- ords, tapes and radio broadcasts.

The history of audio traces a vector of listening behaviour from the extremely individualistic, to the family, to the community and, prior to World War II, the masses. For the last 30 years it appears that we have been reversing this trend, travers- ing the terrain of choice, which is less fully articulated than advertisers of audio equipment would have us believe.

And the choice now is not so much between signal and noise, or the sound and its source (Schafer's "schizopho- phonias"), but between a narcissistic withdrawal and self-imposed isolation or ad- vanced commodity fetishism and hyper-consumption - the latter conditions associ- ated with various states of alienation.

The first involves a form of self-alleg- nation, the second, a self-approbation. The rough terrain in the center cannot be negotiated, is manifest as a form of critical schizophrenia.

That radio has the capacity to both combat or resist alienation, and assist in its reproduction, is not yet fully under- stood in human terms. Within recent theoretical discussions acknowledging this fact the primary tendency has been to fo- cus on programming and content as a means of regenerating an information "exchange" in step with contemporary social reality. The fact that radio in its ac-

tive form could be used to examine and change reality has rarely become a major item on the agenda at any of the debates attending discussions about the role of public broadcasting services. Radio has been discussed as a "social lubricant" which can assist in ameliorating the social impact of change. It has also been sug- gested that talk-back radio shows give maximum opportunities for community input into crucial decision making proc- esses. However, it has often been demon- strated that most of the situations where public responses have been invoked have remained superficial. Listeners, potential social actors, remain isolated consumers. Domestic listening programmes tend to domesticate their audiences.

III

As Hans Magnus Enzensberger observed in his famous Brechtian essay "Counterparts of a Theory of the Media" (1974), radio, since its raw beginnings in the minds of mid-19th century technologists, has been redefined as an apparatus for broadcast. While there is nothing intrinsic to the technology which privileged consumption at the expense of production, the intu- itive communication possibilities inherent to transmission/reception technology be- came subordinated to a one-way distribu- tion and passive reception system. The value of Enzensberger's ideas, and below them those of Reich, Walter Benjamin and Theodor Adorno, is that they each ques- tioned in different ways this emphasis on consumption.

It is wrong to regard media equipment as a means of consumption. It is always in principle also a means of production. The contradiction between producers and consumers is not inherent in the electronic media: on the contrary, it has to be artificially reinforced by eco- nomic and administrative means. (Enzensberger, 56)

While many of the examples En-zensberger used in his essay to demon- strate the dialectical uses of the media (network broadcast radio and television, satellite communications) still hold true, others used to illustrate his thesis - the telephone, the computer, electro-static copiers, users/producer audio and visual equipment and services - have been al- tered by (usually) subtle emphases and/or reconceptualizing in order to adapt to ei- ther the changing demands of the market and consumers or the new determinations of the communications systems. The tele- phone, for instance, can no longer be con- sidered primarily as a single line speaker/receiver apparatus, as Enzensberger ar- gued. It must now be understood in terms of its dialectical potential as a multiple tele-conferencing (networking) system as well as a place where a number of commu- nications systems (computers, copiers) can interface simultaneously.

Within the past decade, theory has preceded the practical applications for the new technologies. Technologists point to the "education gap," the fact that people are unable to adapt quickly enough to the newer generations of technological appa- ratuses. Moreover, the new technologies
they themselves have demonstrated their fallibility as interactive systems. Information flow is oftentimes masked by conflicts, drop-outs, or, to use a political metaphor which may become more instructive in the next few years, anarchy. The counterpart to the AIDS virus among the human population is the computer virus (system bug) and other "new age" syndromes which have increasingly given new meanings to the "science" of cybertechnics and particularity to the notion briefly espoused by Enzensberger: stochasticism, the randomness of interactive communications systems.

Stochasticism, while it reduces the Orwellian spectre of total control, is no reason to applaud the impending arrival of democracy. Neither is the late capitalist hyper-consumption of user/producer audio and video equipment, cam-corders, micro-wave video broadcast systems, citizen band and low frequency transmitters, etc., etc., — none of which can in themselves alter forth the emancipation of the masses. For as Enzensberger noted,

Until these instruments find their way into the actual working lives of people, that is into the schools and factories, farms and government bureaucracies rather than their lives as consumers, then their potential use as instruments of emancipation remains unrealized. (Enzensberger, 56)

Control and the undiscursive use of the media will continue as long as the consuming masses are buying the ideology of autonomous production imbued together with hyper-consumption. Mass production and mass consumption (as it is implied by Benjamin, via Marx), is best assisted by the reproduction of the masses.

Even where it can be demonstrated by "futurologists" like John Nashbitt (italicized) that in the U.S., for instance, the increased number of radio and television stations is allowing greater flexibility in programming to ever increasing numbers of special interest constituencies, this does not offer cause for celebration. These constituencies are still composed of isolated individuals whose lives are, to a major extent, "controlled" by the major media conglomerates and other institutions of capitalism. The consumption of local media programming by these groups is limited and while they may own a cam-corder, C.B. radio, VCR, stereo or four track equipment which allow production, they remain amateurs.

It has long been clear from apparatus like miniature and 8mm movie cameras as well as the tape recorder, which are already in the hands of the masses, that the individual, as long as he remains isolated, can become with their help at best an amateur and not a producer. (Enzensberger, 57)

The emphasis given by Enzensberger on the term producer is derived from the importance given it by Walter Benjamin in his essay "The Author as Producer" (1937, reprinted in Walter Benjamin, Reflections 1968) in which he argues that the artist/ author must retitle him/herself of the traditional stereotypical roles and class alliances and identify with the struggles of the proletariat and other disenfranchised or marginalized groups within society. Enzensberger re-offers this problem of "conscious integration" to those within the left as well as those liberals who wish to locate conditions ripe for change — including their own consciousness.

IV

For the old-fashioned "artist" — let us call him the author — it follows that he must see it as his goal to make himself redundant as a specialist in much the same way as a teacher of literacy only fulfills his task when he is no longer necessary. (Enzensberger, 76)

Both Enzensberger's and Benjamin's positions encourage the articulation of a new role for the artist, one which is premised less on the production of aesthetic objects or events or might be more precisely phrased, than on the provision of objects or actions which have some kind of social and cultural utility. Their insistence on the artist's relinquishing the exhibition (culi) and hence commodity value of his or her work centers with it the indications of alternative practices; at minimum the transposition or substitution of work beyond its service as a bearer of 'spiritual' or economic signs. The critique of the specialist role of the artist, as this identity has been historically constituted, is at base a critique of the autonomy of the institution — art. The use of new technologies and the emphasis on developing critical strategies for the attack on the status quo of conventional artistic practice — both of these have been at the core of many so-called avant-garde theories, from the Futurists of the first decade of this century to the conceptualists and conceptualism respectively of the early 1970s and 80s. And yet, often the attack on the status quo — the hegemony of bourgeois culture — merely resulted in what Peter Bürger has suggested in a "re-stewing of the stereo-type" (Theory of the Avant-Garde). Too often the works of contemporary artists, including those using audio technology, have capitulated to the production of discrete objects for exhibition and sale in the conventional manner associated with the dealer gallery system and its surrogates. This, or the aggrandizement of the artist's persona-as-star, the result is the same, the construction of a commodity.

An "alternative" which many audio and intermedia artists have intentionally adopted as a quasi-critical strategy is the role enactment of the marginal "outsider" figure. The most compelling images of this role are represented in many of the major works of audio art, performance, theatre and film produced within the past 15 years, including arguably one of the most influential, Samuel Beckett's play Krapp's Last Tape (1958). The narrative of the play is deceptively simple. As it progresses we learn that Krapp, Beckett's artist figure, has habitually recorded, on each of his birthdays, the principal events of that year. During the recording for his "last" birthday, Krapp chooses to review and reflect upon some of the previous years' recordings, playing back significant portions of his tape collection.

As a few critics have suggested, the play contains one major theme — impotence. Krapp's Last Tape is informed by a kind of narcissism broadly represented in the liberations of a man in his late middle ages whose creative impotence is coupled with his imagined (or actual) sexual impotence. His audio reminiscences reveal his lost youth; the mistakes he has made have been carefully chronicled in the stacks of tapes which have become his electronic electronic.

Without these diaries, Krapp would become the contemporary (Mitztechas) man-without-belief forced into the existential anguish of willing himself to power. His attempts to reconstruct his life's identity from his reminiscences (his taped history becomes his aides-memoire), even where his acts and those of others around him retune that his existence has any meaning, is merely a melancholy consolation to those who have rejected the solace offered by religion. And to the remaining, art and culture are necessary, yet ultimately poor, substitutes.

The implicit materiality of crap, and the scatological references throughout the play, further reinforce the existential aspect of Krapp's intellectual orientation. The cultural significance of shit, or rather its purging — within literature, from Rabelais to Swift, Sade, Jarry, Artaud, Beckett, and the visual arts, from Dada to Duchamp, Manzoni and Warhol — is too large a subject to discuss here. Suffice it to suggest that Beckett's representation of and cultural alternativism is one which may also be found in many contemporary ruminations on the role through a focus on the type for an artist like Krapp.

Day after day I look at myself in the mirror, am I still the same—— tall and handsome, always in style——. Why should I care? I am only a common, acme-pimple mediocrity, an acme-pimple's covered. I (Warhol, 7)

Warhol's mirror and his ghost, as do in its audio recordings. This engages the twin aspects — self-aggrandization and self-effacement or self-actualization at the same time as the potential of the popular medium of television. Beyond the historic manipulations of the artist/titivate power of radio and television, many of the words from

Vito Acconci's Other Voices, m.o. and particularly in the 1960s and early 1970s, develop a watershed for artists' audio. Vito Acconci and Richard Foreman, for example, and their "naturalism" as "predictable" or being described as the sounds of the laws, the manner in the exhibition of audio art in which the human being is transformed, these are all elements of consciousness, ideological underpinning and cultural of the period since the turn of other technological art forms.

Acconci is acutely aware of the public aspects of
Although Accocci’s audience, like Beckett’s, may be an indispensable aid for securing the proverbial “whole truth and nothing but the truth,” the “confessions” are for the most part egocentric affairs. The audience members are not requested to be givers of absolution, witnesses, a judge, nor even the jury. Like the audience for the typical radio programme, they are merely asked, like Peter Sellers’ character Chauncey Gardner in the film Being There, to be there.

The audience members support Accocci to come to terms with himself. And arriving at some kind of resolution regarding the “other” in ultimately a marginal operation. At the conclusion of the tape Accocci affirms his prior sanction and admits, “Maybe coming to terms with our relationship means ending our relationship...” And the parallel identification of the other with the audience results in his ending his relationship with them as well.

The recording studio in Air Time was further developed in an exhibition the following year for New York’s Museum of Modern Art. It represents an interesting comparison for later works by a number of other artists including Eric Bogosian’s (and now Oliver Stoer’s) Talk Radio. Tiedoff Other Voice for a Second Shift (1974). Accocci’s performance/installation represents the self-writ large aspects of the disc-jockey or talk-show host moving into and controlling the hearts and minds of his listeners, while looked into a hermetically sealed sound-proof chamber with an audio projection device — radio. “Like building a life on an all night talk show” (my emphasis.) The middle gallery space contained a recording/reception studio and on either side was the light room (right) and the dark room (left). The right room contained slide projections and films of the artist in various poses projected across thin fabric fields... “transcendence calls to me...” In the left room, slides were projected through acetate banners revealing the artist’s naked body as well as a series of political figures. As Accocci has written, “like a room of the world — public life comes down to me” and the D.I./D.I is the “voice that drifts through the dark, that tells you into the night that makes you forget (emphasis added)” yet the radio show is a final hour, a final program that seemingly may go on forever.” And later, in a perfect description of the dialectic we have been attempting to describe:

...it’s a power dream, a dream of glory, yet my voice...like a machine; the voice becomes an undertow, it sneaks in a frame of mind, installs a habit, moderates, it says refuse, withdraw, don’t make a move.
While he attempts to provide his work with some kind of socio-political use value, Accors is frustrated in his attempts, because, he says, he may not "believe anymore in the efficacy of art." He is trapped as surely as Spi Knopp, in the intractability of his own actions. He is forced into a position of either aggravizing his impotence, renewing the stereotypes of the neo-avant-garde and/or finally capitulating to the safety of the art market. In Benjaminian terms he reproduces the conventional social powerlessness of the isolated author, acting out the behaviour, producing the products which will secure the autonomy of the institution art and deny its potential to achieve through the aims of its authors as producers, a critical press.

The determinations of alienation on the production of audio artists is a larger subject than there is space for here. Suffice it to say that the denial of art's social utility for the sake of transcendentism, both social and cultural, has always been subsumed under the avant-garde's intentions. While a small number of artists have obtained a true pratological condition for their art (Tardini, Brecht, Heartfield, among them) this has usually been for a short time only. It is a well-known function of the art world's institutions that they have the capabilities of co-opting that very work which precludes to announce their redundancy.

We have witnessed the power of radio and tape recording in other ways since the late 1940s when Pierre Schaeffer began to manipulate audio recordings to produce some of the first electro-acoustic works. John Cage's celebrated Imaginary Landscape No. 5 (1952) has been described as one of the first uses in the U.S. of magnetic tape to produce a musical work for radio broadcast. In keeping with the Duchampian ready-made aesthetic, the work of Cage and others was perceived as an intrusion into the conventional ear and airspace of audio reception. The title Imaginary Landscape is somewhat ironic given the technical aspects of the recording itself and the material objects, including hub caps, bottle lids, etc., which produced the sounds. Much of the broadcast work produced in the late 1950s and early 60s by artists in the U.S. and Europe stocked its inventory with more musical form. However, it did not take long for Cage's music compositions and their variants to be accepted as conventional high art practice. Like Duchamp's Vasestrasse ready-mades, they have found their place as classical components of the cultural hall of fame.

An unanticipated result of this institutionalization process is the manner in which Cage's avant-garde strategies have become a justification, in aesthetic terms, for a bi-social apprehension of the airwaves which, after McAulay, has tended to obliterate cultural, class and ethnic boundaries in favour of a total homogenizing of the ecosphere.

Murray Schaeffer's celebrated Soundführer projects place much significance on the reception analysis of periodical content. And yet this analysis is limited, providing material for the subsequent rendition of radio transmission into rhythmic configuration of bio-harmony. The work of a number of Canadian composers and audio art producers has been influenced by Schaeffer's book The Taming of the World — even its title echoes McLaughlin's "Global Village" — although most have neglected the salient criticism of the culture of consumer capitalism implied in his work and have opted for the grandiloquence (and aesthetic potential) of his metaphors.

Montreal audio artist and composer Paul Theriaque, for instance, produced a radio-phonic work which is based on an sentence (11 days) of programming from the Radio Canada Parc network. Brief extracts of music, news and cultural programs were montaged together on an eight-track recorder, then mixed down to form a one minute to one hour tape of recorded time to transmission time. About this work Theriaque has written:

...through this extreme compression of material, themes, juxtapositions and modulations characteristic of Radio Canada perhaps become, more apparent and hopefully, a certain global rhythm inherent in the programming synapses begins to emerge... (Theriaque: 3)

A similar approach to radio broadcasting and hence audio composition is apparent in the work of many artists producing works which follow the paths of least resistance and attempt to market their work through the museum system and the small scale alternative recording industry. Alvin Lucier is a good example of this, the preferred market model for most audio artists today. Artists from this group usually aspire to graduate to the first option — they produce work which tends to conform to the styles and tastes of a highly phonoliterate minority group of consummers who may also be artists themselves. Worldwide, this market commodity is of substantial size and developing and yet the standards of the industry giants, is minimal.

The second option does not exhibit the conventional extremes of the first. Artists adopting the "high-culture" option usually follow the paths of least resistance and attempt to market their work through the museum system and the small scale alternative recording industry. Alvin Lucier is a good example of this, the preferred market model for most audio artists today. Artists from this group usually aspire to graduate to the first option — they produce work which tends to conform to the styles and tastes of a highly phonoliterate minority group of consummers who may also be artists themselves. Worldwide, this market commodity is of substantial size and developing and yet the standards of the industry giants, is minimal.

The third Underground option is characterized by an extremely small market and a relatively closed system of production/consumption. Tapes and recordings are produced under the cover of groups whose names are inevitably obscuring their otherwise public name. Often the work produced within this category has the 'look' and feel of that presented within political cells or cafes. It is produced in limited edition, often anonymously or under the cover name of a group and is sold, exchanged or given away. The most celebrated form of this kind of marketing strategy was that of Ayotlalchik Khomost, before the Iranian revolution and the fall of the Shah. From his place of exile in L.A. Khomost properly orchestrated a major religious coup by clandestinely exporting cassette tapes of his speeches which were subsequently dubbed thousands for distribution among the faithful and dispersed in Iran, thus giving...
programming rejected or altered if one can operate successfully outside of the conventional marketing/broadcasting system.

Around the world, immigrant groups, religious factions, various left wing activist and subcultural groups, environmentalists, anti-makup, specialist producers, new wave musicians, poets and other artists of various denominations have often concluded that the risks associated with operating outside of the law are worth taking, particularly given the saturation of the airwaves and the control exerted by the major networks of broadcast systems.

The relationships between these three options are more fluid than the belief described above would suggest. There are many permutations which allow for alternative distribution methods to develop.

The third option is gaining popularity for those who recognize their potential which have been demonstrated in spectacular ways.

The Khomeini example above, Watergate and Irangate all emphasize the importance of the magnetic recording apparatus. Each event has focused attention on the fiduciary and fallibility of the technology the manner in which wire-tapping/bugging can support and strengthen an existing institution, or undermine and destroy it. The zeal to real and the humble cassette have come into their own, updating the primary of the visual which had subjected the aural to secondary status for hundreds of years, at least since the invention of History techniques of representation in the Renaissance and the subsequent development of photo-mechanical apparatus in the early 19th century. One of the classic audio-image films of the 1970s, Francois Reaud Coppola's *The Conversation*, accurately depicts the impotence and power of subphonetic representation. While the plot of *The Conversation* is imaginary, its symbolic representations of the concretion of power ultimately give way to the real.

It is to the examples of Watergate, Iranagate, and Khomeini that artists must address themselves. For it is within these examples that the actual and potential power of audio production, in all its negative and positive aspects, becomes visible. An exhaustive examination of the institutional conditions of production and consumption is also a precondition to the re-visualization of the artist's role from author to producer.

Perhaps the most appropriate image of the power relations flagged in this essay—between the all powerful radio, the passive consumer and the alienated author/artist—is contained in Nancy Bult's *A Tribute To Andy Manes* (1982). This performance/installation work was presented at the Kitchen (Centre for Video and Performing Arts) in New York as a tribute to Andy Manes, a stage carpenter who had converted the kitchen of the former Merce Merce Centre into the Kitchen performance space. Paik's Tribute, de

blished by John Howell for *LIVE* magazine, consisted of the following:

He (Manes) put together a stage platform while Paik wandered around eating ice-cream. As a classically trained Cage student, Paik always wanted to work a burlesque house and so he played, smashing old Victorica records, bringing out matches of coads and scales and Beethoven, broadcasting re-defined target backwoods— as only Paik can play. While on stage, Lois Wise performed a discrete strip to a Sony Walkman (in as much to be illustrated by Paik's cacophonous, less than rhythmical score. (*LIVE* Vol. 1, no. 67 1982)

Sony advertisement, 1980s

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**NOTES**

1. This is a larger subject than there is space for here. Within the past ten years much has been written on the "constructed" and subjective characteristics of documentary film and photography. See Frith, S. *The Politics of the Image: The Making of BBC Light Entertainment* in *Formations of Pleasure* (Bennett, Burgess, V., et al. London: Routledge, Kegan, Paul, 1983): 101-123.


6. The teacher who has converted the kitchen of the former Merce Merce Centre into the Kitchen performance space. Paik's Tribute, described by John Howell for *LIVE* magazine, consisted of the following:

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