

Interview with Jonathan Frigeri / Q-O2 Residency (interfaces network) october 2018
by Caroline Profanter

You are fascinated in the intermediate world, the radio world, and also these kinds of hidden frequencies. Where does this interest come from?

I am not sure, but I think it is a curiosity about things that are not normal, the fascination of another parallel reality. Curiosity also about the altered states of human beings – states when we don't see things through our everyday eyes, when something is changing, when we get a look at what is behind reality. Or behind the reality that we are supposed to perceive in a normal state in our society. I think this kind of reality is the point of a big iceberg. There could be more beneath, it could be bigger. And this is the exploration of what there is behind belief, what there is behind dreams, what there is behind an idea, what there is behind a human. The unconsciousness of things. There's an interest in things that we cannot control like thought, impulse, or the unconscious. It's a kind of exploration like speleology, going deep in the cave, to try to discover what is the source of the human being. But I don't know what it came from exactly. I should ask my psychiatrist.



The matter of the radio - Q-O2 - Brussels - Octobre 2018

In your presentation at Q-O2, The Matter of Radio, you were talking about the “universal subconscious”, referring to Gaston Bachelard. Could you elaborate this idea? What does it mean for you?

I believe that there is something that surrounds everything in some way. I don't know of what it is made. That could be the universal subconscious, universal brain, or universal consciousness. It depends what we want to call it. But everyone has a personal experience of intuition. You think in the same moment about someone,

and then you meet the person. There are some connections that are behind the normal perception of the existence. Or for example you are at home, and you want to smoke, but you don't have a cigarette at home. So you have to go down on the street to buy cigarettes, and in this moment you meet someone that you haven't seen in years. This is a powerful surprise. And there you start wondering: this need to smoke a cigarette, where did it come from? It has been a kind of signal from the universal brain, that in some way knew, that if I wanted to smoke a cigarette, I had to go downstairs, and in that moment, there is this friend coming? There are this kind of relationships that we cannot really control. We can maybe try to train. There are techniques of meditation and things like that, that let you connect with something bigger, and where you can also try to find information about things, about what you should do, and things like that. I think it is this idea of universality around us. I don't want to sound like a hippie, but I have been a hippie for a while when I was a teenager.

You say that radio is situated between two infinities: the ghost-land and the dreamland.

The dreamland is really related to the human, to the nervous system, related to our imagination, to our memory, to us as a device. And the ghost-land is the deep space, is all the rest that surrounds us. The space, the cosmos, the ghost-land. Maybe there is another existence that doesn't have a body anymore. It's there, the communication between the microcosmos and the macrocosmos, and it is related to these two dimensions. And it's true that the radio is also a voice that you don't see, that is coming to your ear. This voice is speaking to you, to the conscious or subconscious, telling you things, and you are building an image by yourself. And there in that moment in some way, like a sorcerer in a village that is taking plants, or doing meditation, or drumming, or singing: that goes into a state of trance in which his mind in some way can be channelled with something that is external, from where we could have access to some information, or something, or nothing.

The radio is the medium through which you can create an imaginary space. We have a range of audible frequencies which are becoming more and more dense today. And here comes also the political aspects of the radio...

Of course radio is not free at all. Not in every country can you have a free access to FM-radio. We have several community radios that have an antenna and broadcast in FM, but the antenna is weak. It is an antenna of lower power than all the commercial radios. Radio is also something extremely powerful. As Gaston Bachelard, or Gregory Whitehead try to elucidate, the radio's voice really goes inside the subconscious of people. So for the radio-maker there is a big responsibility in what we say on the radio. And Marshall McLuhan theorises that all the media are an extension of our nervous system. From the speaking voice, from writing, to radio, television, the car, everything that is a medium, that we use, changes the perception of our existence. And the radio is the most performative and adapted medium, just after the voice, to connect with the nervous system of the human being. So that means that we can really go inside someone's personality. This is also why radio is not free. Because the group of power controlling a country don't want to give this power to everybody. Free access of the radio is always limited by power, by times, or by geographical location.

Within the spectrum of the radio, the part we call 'radio art' is very small, but it has the power to spread out. And it is uncontrollable as well. That's where the idea of the "opera aperta" comes in. How is it linked?

This is related to the object itself, to the techniques related to this medium. The idea of the "opera aperta", theorised by Umberto Eco, means that it doesn't have to be finished. A musical project, or a writing, which we don't close. He is trying to bring up a more poetic attitude, we don't say all the information. The listeners have to bring something from themselves to finalise these works.

When is an opera really open?

It is particularly difficult to define where the borders of these things are, of course. But in radio there is something that is totally clear. Because there is the techniques, the medium itself, the device of the radio – all this implies for us as creators that we never know how our voice will arrive to the listener. I am speaking into the microphone, going into the mixer, it is going to a broadcasting system, to the antenna that is diffusing on a modulation of the frequencies, on the air, maybe outside it is raining, and then it is going everywhere, and there are people with a radio receiver that are listening to my voice, but we don't know what radio receiver they have. Maybe it is mono, maybe it is broken, maybe there is some interference, maybe they are not tuned in the correct frequency, maybe they are listening to other things, maybe they are cooking, maybe they have the windows open, maybe there is the noise of the car, maybe there is the husband that is screaming, and so on. That means, that this opera is open. If you make music on the radio, you never know how people will listen when it is broadcast.

A relevant topic that you address as well, is the importance of knowing how this medium works. And that is really based on simple elements that exist in nature.

I tried to build the most simple radio receiver. The kind that was used in the beginning of the 19th Century, for receiving radio waves. It is called a 'crystal radio'. Made with a coil of wire, connected to a mineral, called galena, and finally to a speakers. With this device you can already listen to some short wave radio. There is some algebra to do, the number of coils, the size of coils etc.. and it's not focussing precisely on one frequency, but it work. Yes, we are surrounded today with a lot of objects and we don't anymore know how they work, their essence. We have lost some control over how things work, and that also means losing some connection to the roots of the things, to their existence. Today everybody uses a mobile phone, but there are very few people who know exactly how this machine works, and if we explore of what a mobile phone is made, we discover that is composed by mineral and stone. It is something that sound magic and primitive at the same time.

Today we have quite bizarre relationship with things. Because what we are is also related to what we use and how we use it. And when we lose the control of what we use , maybe we also loose some control of ourselves. That's why I wanted to really go back to the roots, using a mineral . I am not a technician, I am not an engineer. I do these experiments with a lot of trial and error. It is also for me a kind of discovery everyday, on how these things work, but it is also a need.

Comparing to your initial idea, which was actually a research proposal, you developed a kind of a ritual-performance as a presentation for Q-O2. How came all this together?

I think it has been a combination of things. I built small devices; a crystal radio, a kind of 'magic torch' composed of a pickup and a coil and an amplifier. So there were more small things that were not enough to be presented alone in an installation or for a concert. And I wanted to present all these small things. But not just to present them technically, I wanted to also tell a story. Because there is a story behind all these things. I was inspired by a course that I am following at the University, about the history of theatre. Our teacher was speaking about ritual. There is real ritual and fake ritual. The real ritual is related to a liminal experience. It is an experience that is usually happening on the border of two worlds, two dimensions, two spaces. You are living something that is bringing you outside of your normal existence and changing your status or you believe forever. This is one of the paradigms to create a real ritual. And I think the radio is already such a thing. You are already in a liminal state. You are between here and there, between the voice that is speaking to you from elsewhere, and the place where you are as you are listening. You already have a connection with something that is elsewhere. This is a heterotopic space, a suspended space, where the normal laws of your society are changed. So I believe that the radio is already a ritual. Recently i visited an exhibition about religions in Africa that are connected to divination. And it is like that. A sorcerer performs a ritual in order to create a contact with another place or another dimension, in some way is a kind of tuning. On that exhibition there was also a video, showing this sorcerer, that explained the tools he was using. And I found this fascinating, how a magician shows the tools he is using, it is a kind of demystification of something that should be keep secret. This thing became something that I wanted to mix into the presentation. I wanted to mix all this research about anthropological stuff, about techniques of the radio, about sound and magic. I am also a musician, I wanted to do a performance and to play sound. I am fascinated about the show, I wanted to create a kind of piece of theatre, a mix of performance and music and conference, something between formats, but where you also live an experience, where you learn something, where something on you can be changed by a new discovery. I don't have the pretension to 'teach' something to people. I want it to be like when you are having a dream or when you read a book that changes the perception of your existence and opens new doors of your imagination. And I also believe that radio today needs to reopen itself to imagination, because its really become something pedestrian, a flat state, where we listen to the news, where we listen to some music, some documentary, but the magic is really hidden - it is really on the border of what radio is today. And I think we have to reveal the magic of radio, to try to give some keys to the audience. What is the radio and what could the radio be?

How did you implement the idea of Clairaudience into the work?

Clairaudience is a kind of channelling, an intuition of things - to be able to listen to things that are not at the first surface. Clairvoyance is related to vision, to see things that are not there. In the presentation I made, I was trying to underline the idea of clairaudience. To go a bit back, to understand what the radio was, what were its first transmissions, to understand simple electricity, how it passes through the air, and through our bodies. There is some kind of energy that we can create. And the parallels between this and the techniques of the radio would be also a kind of help to see how the occult or the magical could be brought together with something scientific. For example: the sorcerer that is trying to connect himself to some superior force. In some ways this is the same exercise as an antenna connecting to radio waves. I was trying to mix these two worlds. The idea was to open the imagination a bit, and to open up this idea of what magic is, and what science is. The border between these two worlds is very foggy and needs more research. And I think radio is quite able to occupy this border zone.

In the beginning, after having selected all the Interfaces-Residents we were looking for partners, because we wanted the projects to spread out, also to make possible that the projects become something else. Depending on the collaborations, the projects would transform. One of our partners, BNA-BBOT, was really interested in your project, because by coincidence they were working on a neighbourhood project in Woluwe-St.Pierres, (Quartier des chant d'oiseaux) around the subject Quartier Imaginaire ('imaginary neighbourhood'). And of course your project fitted into this, because you wanted to work on invisible sounds, and to investigate the environment by exploring hidden frequencies. Using the practice of the 'sound-walk as a citizen act' (as you called it), you accepted their invitation and went to the neighbourhood to look for the sounds, and it developed to something quite different.

I had the feeling that the project had totally changed for BNA-BBOT, that is true. Because I didn't use the same device and it was not the same approach. But the final project was also about catching inaudible sounds in a specific neighbourhood which was particularly silent. The sounds were hidden inside the houses, so we decided to knock at the doors and rich the sounds that are inaudible from outside.

It is important to remain flexible, towards the conditions, because they are always different.

Yes of course. You never know how a day will end. Every discussion is like an improvisation. If you want to discover more about someone that you don't know, the easiest strategy is to become like them. To modulate yourself, to find the same code of communication with this new person, in order to develop your discussion. Because if you bring just your format, you may have your result but for sure you will not be going inside this person.

There is a book about the techniques of communication. It says that if you want to get in touch with someone, start to do the same things he is doing. For example, if he's touching his hair, start to do the same. Act as him, become a twin. Use the same language, use the same code, and you will probably open more doors if you do that. If you speak English everywhere, you will open some doors, but if you start to speak Lingala, or a traditional language from another country, you use their code, and you will go deeper.

I try to use this same attitude in everyday life. Because I want to have fun, when I do things, and the most interesting thing is to modulate yourself according to the paradigm in which you are involved, in the geographical and cultural situation. You will also discover more things. In the creation of cultural context, you have to be part of something, to share these things. Except if you have your 'opera majestic', that travels the world, that everybody understands. But if you want to go in situ, you have to work differently. I am more 'opera modestic' maybe. You have to exchange things. That's why I think that in situ is something that permits you to inscribe yourself in a place. And it's true there is this idea of improvisation, to be able to change your decision, if the context asks this of you, not to be afraid to change your direction, and to lose control. You are also the first audience of yourself and in these two cases. In the presentation at Q-O2: The Matter of Radio and the presentation for BNA-BBOT porte a porte sonore I was extremely surprised and happy about the outcome, and I was the first listener and viewer of the work.