ilze black
republicart-interview on *interference*
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raimund minichbauer: you curated *interference:public sound* together with anna harding. what is the general concept of *interference* and how has radio and streaming media acquired an important role in the project?
ilze black: anna and me, we both had mainly experience in curating visual arts. this time in the framework of republicart, anna proposed a curatorial concept that is based on sound works. the field of contemporary art practice has developed in new directions and in many cases today we can't only refer to the 'visual' when we talk about a contemporary art practice. sound is still less talked about, but it has been an artistic practice for long time. we commissioned four artists to create a body of work that deals with the idea of the public and sound. In some cases we decided to invest in the ideas the artist were already working on, in order to make them actually possible or to make them more publicly accessible. we selected those particular projects, because they all are partially dealing with the ecology and politics of the airspace and sound as a medium or interface of those.
in the early stages we went through lots of concepts that dealt with sound and in some way also with the concept of the public, nevertheless we kept referring back to the general republicart-concept which was focusing its attention to the practice where art meets activism, so to speak. so bearing that in mind, if we honestly look around what's happening in that sphere, i should say i find the politics of radio and internet and streaming-projects most proactive as they do engage in discussions of shared space and public ressources.

raimund minichbauer: in the framework of *interference* currently a 24 hours radio station is being maintained, which is part of the project *radio cycle*. how did *radio cycle* develop?
ilze black: *radio cycle* is a project initiated by the sound artist kaffe matthews, although i must admit that i have some input in this all as well. we had long discussions with kaffe on how and what would be necessary for true public radio to exist. it grew out from the idea of running radio-building workshops using short distance radio transmitters. again, if everyone could build its own little radio transmitter everybody could become a radio. here i guess, this is referreing to the brechtian idea of two-way radio. so we wanted to encourage people to build their own radio, and then we wanted to run a mobile radio station which could roll through streets and pick up the sounds from these little radios and transmit it further, and there would be lots of little radiomixing things happening with people who take part in the workshops and so on. but then this idea was not possible because in the uk one can't have mobile radio licenses as such. also because of a lack of money for the radio building workshops, we ended up with running audio crafting workshops for broadcasts. that way we at least can give first hand experience to the general public in broadcasting and sound-making. so we set it up in *idea store*[1]. it was a good place, because it is a place local people know, and they can come and learn something.

raimund minichbauer: you are directly involved in *radio cycle*. what is you own specific interest in this?
ilze black: one thing that is interesting is this whole concept of access radio, i.e. the possibility to create access to the airspace for a community, be it local, artistic or self-made. as a normal being you don't have much opportunity to think about how the air is actually moderated, politically manipulated, etc. that's why the question is interesting, can an individual access the air and how? for me it was challenging from the very beginning, from finding out about how to get a license to actually to see what you can do when you have an access.
another aspect i was very much interested in, was that artists in today's society, in today's economical and political situation, and specifically in the local area are almost forced to become educators. we wanted to focus on the local area as well and as you can see that all projects are very local. this whole concept about art as education and the need for art to have educational

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[1] for *idea store* see also interview with anna harding, and http://www.ideastore.co.uk/

values is quite criticised, at the same time there are some interesting aspects in it, too. what you find, is that many artists basically are employed to run workshops in schools, workshops in community groups, to do all these different kinds of educational work. how does that affect their own practice and how does that affect the audience or the participant? so in a sense i really wanted to have *radio cycle* around because it touches upon those topics while allowing place for experiment. we run a workshops now and in a sense support people who are interested to learn, but we also let kids almost take over and do what they want to do, and we use those unexpected outcomes to create further beginnings.

raimund minichbauer: what is the general situation of radio stations here in east london, especially with regard to pirate radio stations?
ilze black: i think that lots of the pirate radios come out of bedrooms at the moment. there is 'sound radio'[2] in hackney, which is in a way the 'headquarters' of all pirates. they are now legal and they had an am license - am licenses are cheaper, but the technology is more difficult to sustain, to set up, etc. a couple of pirates made together this 24 hours radio station, which is now broadcasting in 15 languages. but if you tune in on fm radio here in east london now - and i think south london and east london obviously are most overloaded at the moment with pirates -, it's lots of club sounds, but also lots of local sounds. you now start getting drum'n bass, hardcore radio, or you get radio like *erotica* etc. the pirates in general blossomed in the last two, three years. in the early-/mid-90s, there wasn't much happening. but on the other hand that was the time, when the first streaming radios started. what is interesting about *radio cycle*, is that we are using this hybrid medium of this moment. both fm and streaming, we are even using local free wifi network free2air to transmit over. so we are broadcasting using all possible ways, and we want to talk about that. also it seems that at the moment many people are buying transmitters, so there probably will be many more of on-air-radios around, but i think streaming media probably will be the most accessible way for the future. the license for fm stations are still quite expensive. for *radio cycle* we paid for ten days thousand pounds, so it costs a lot of money to be a legal radio.

raimund minichbauer: is this the main reason, why there are so many pirates?
ilze black: yes. i would say so. at the moment we have pirate sounds sometimes going over our frequency as well. somebody explained me that the situation is that once the radio authority issues a license to someone, they publicise all information, and the pirates just follow this information and they tune in the same frequencies - that way they are more invisible. the same time they claim they have been in this frequency for the last 10 years so it could be from the other side that we got sold the band that is well known to be pirate. so its not very clear who is right, but that is not so important maybe, as at the end of the day it's about how do you exist side by side. now we are faced with this question - do you report pirate radio stations taking over your wave? what's your position towards it? from my perspective, i guess, *radio cycle* only exists because of the pirates, that is almost the inspiration.

raimund minichbauer: in what sense is it the inspiration?
ilze black: well, however i love the bbc - they are really doing great work -, but i believe it is about diversity, that many voices can be heard. the reality of state radio now is that there are not many voices allowed to be heard.

raimund minichbauer: is there no possibility to get a cheaper license for a community radio?
ilze black: no, not really. the license we got is what they call 'access radio', that's the cheapest one can get for now.

raimund minichbauer: is there a political scene among the pirates or is it a more or less entirely subcultural club scene?
ilze black: i heard yesterday that there is a radio in russia, which is only counting numbers.

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[2] http://www.soundradio.info/

nobody knows where they come from, but they just count numbers, some abstract kind of codes. i think germany also is a big place for obscure radio stations. here in london it is more club music, bedroom music. and then there is *resonance.fm*[3], which is the only artistic radio station. they don't do advertisements and they play obscure stuff, and also groups like indymedia run a news section there quite regularly. that brings certain communities together, and i think *resonance* is a central fm station for the activist networks right now. we also had a co-operation with them for *interference*, we had five shows on *resonance*. so it's been great to have them and i hope they get the support needed to sustain that.

raimund minichbauer: what about this question of doing pirate radio or audio streaming over the internet, where the access is not legally restricted?

ilze black: well, at the end of the day, if we are talking about streaming that means you need to have a streaming server. that is what i also find interesting in this project. we are specifically using an open software streaming server to emphasise free access and free tools. but the server we use is in germany. locally in london, there is maybe one or two independent art servers more broadly known. being a bedroom producer, how can you find these connections? in london we have spc[4]-server, which has been the only one for the last seven years supporting the independent projects. but because it is independent it's also problematic, because of a lack of money that means its sustainability and also it is not really about choice. that is why the wireless networking and the peer-to-peer things become more interesting. so you can run your own server and be a radio station and be part of a network. maybe more local, but again that depends on the future and the community. it's a bit a different debate, but i think that is potentially where the future is, your computer hosts whatever tunes you have and you share that within your peer network.

raimund minichbauer: in *interference* there are two forms of radio: on air transmittance and net radio like *radio20pwhitechapel/uphone*, where you can call in and your message gets automatically uploaded to the net. does this mean, that *interference* addresses two different audiences: the local one and...

ilze black: the whole *interference*-project is very local, which also applies to *uphone*, which is set up locally with a local telephone number. that is where you dial in - you will always be more accessible to the local phone as you would maybe be if you ask to call to new york. the aspects of *uphone's* locality is interesting, because that allows the option of both. it is a device you share with others. you can run that kind of server together with your mate - you don't need a big server, because the files are quite small, which is very practical - or you just do it for your own answering phone if you want to make your own radio station.

i came across the *uphone* quite a while ago, and i really wanted to support that project. it entails certain programming and certain time to spend on it to make it into a certain shape, and the other question is actually to let people know that it is out there, that there is such a thing available. personally i found that as *interference* in the context of eu funding and broad network of republicart we can fill this gap for the artist and make those communal/ public works to become more accessible or more real if you like. hopefully, after this period we get a diy-guide on how to set it up and also an easy downloadable software one can use, a documentation, which can be easily accessible for others. the future of it depends on people. i already know that there is lots of people asking about it and wanting to use it in different settings and different situations.

raimund minichbauer: you stressed the local aspects of *interference*. the project takes place mainly here in tower hamlets/bow and south-east hackney. how would you describe these local areas/communities?

ilze black: at the moment we are in south east hackney, or in the broader sense east/central london. for years it has been mostly known for its immigrant communities and as an area, where all small factories were located during 16th, 17th and up to the late 20th century. it has a lot of

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[3] http://www.resonancefm.com/

[4] http://www.spc.org/

very mixed communities, there used to be jewish communities, then in the 50ies a lot of asians, bangladeshis, somalis arrived. there are still a lot of squats. over fifty years many artists took the risk and occupied empty buildings here. me and also anna, we are both living here, too, and i find it very interesting to observe the regeneration-process that has happened here in the last five years. i've been living on this street for the last eight years. you actually see one street changing so much - this makes you feel about it differently as well, and also makes one questioning what that regeneration really does for an area. this street used to be a nice market street, and now it's mainly galleries and accessory shops. the fishmongers has been pushed out, the old fashion cheese shop never arrived - things you would think a little market street should do, but it actually doesn't. tower hamlets is regenerating very strongly all its assets, and bow is where the regeneration money really is at the moment. what happened during the last two years, was that lots of old tower blocks were taken down and new housing built. with this new housing there was also a change of inhabitants, a change of services taking place. the *bow festival*[5], which is one of our collaborators in *interference*, has been also partially supported by tower hamlets housing action trust. in a sense it is good, that they want art to be part of the regeneration process, so they invest part of the funding into art as well as in the local area redevelopment. but then again we can argue that maybe art is to blame for this regeneration in the first place. well, I doubt that, but surely artists do make an area look more sophisticated as it might really be.

like *uphone's* main server was hosted in *limehouse*[6] *town hall*, which again is an old council building now run by artists-activists. it is an originally squatted building, which now finally got licensed to run. it is this self-activism, i think, which east london is good about. lots of people just find space, renovate it and then you live in it and see, one day maybe you will be kicked out, or one day you actually become legalised. in that sense we are engaging with this whole issue of regeneration; which on one side can be seen as very dodgy, because you are actually being part of it, on the other - change is inevitable. like the *regent studios* - it used to be called *ada building*, now it's called *regent studios* - a change of name, change of inhabitants, fast turnaround, raise of rent. one goes with another. but the community is still here. artists are living in the area, activists are living in the area, lots of indymedia people are around here and at the same time you find also quite diverse ethnic communities nearby. a bit of this and bit of that...

raimund minichbauer: what has informed your personal approach to sound and politics in this project?

ilze black: well, i guess, just like many artists, creative people, well, everyone really, i got influenced by the events of september 11. back then in 2001 on september 11 i just finished a project i had curated in latvia, 'untitled: subverting session', which in many ways was dealing with visual and subversive strategies in public space. i must say, after the events there were 2 years for me of sort of a creative vacuum, almost. but then i came across an article written by ben watson, which also came out just after 9-11.[7] he is a music/sound critic and an official writer for *wired* magazine. but *wired* didn't want to publish it, because they found it too controversial. in his text he was calling for sound artist and sounds and he referred to stockhausen and his comment of the 'greatest artwork' with regards to 9/11 and how he got punished for that. in his text ben watson put out this call for artists to react to this situation, to wake up from this own/self/individual obscurities and self-searches - i guess, i was very much influenced by that article. I wanted to re-question the decent of post 9-11 and trace new possible ways of resistance through works of art.

raimund minichbauer: what are in general the most interesting aspects for you personally in the whole project?

ilze black: maybe the fact that all works here deal with this very borderline of arts - engagement - participation - activism - visuality/non-visuality. at the same time it resists the representational

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[5] http://www.spacestudios.org.uk/bowfestival/

[6] http://twenteenthcentury.com/lth/

[7] ben watson, *music, violence, truth* - http://www.andyw.com/music.truth.pdf

mode. i am really struggling with this idea how to use an exhibition format representing those artworks. how can you represent this work as an art work in a gallery context? and is there a need to represent it as such at all? do we need to make this final/intermediate event of the whole project, where we might have the only possibility to hear it all together, or rather hear bits of it? because with some of the works you can't disengage sound with reality - you need to be sitting in the sun or walking on the street - to listen to graeme miller's work for example. it is really a personal experience, and you need to go through it in your own time, not in the rush of an opening or closing party. talking about sound, for me, wave sound is one of the most interesting aspects, the sound of the airwaves captured by technology. like in *uphone*, you call in from your phone, but the sound you hear is not only one's voice, it's also surrounding sounds. the fact that often one doesn't recognise ones own voice on the radio, on the telephone. i guess, it's self-perception changed by space. it is this question of how technology amplifies or disturbs the sound, really, and how we as a humans engage with it or even maybe get amplified, empowered.

raimund minichbauer: thank you very much!