On the ruins of TSF[[1]](#footnote-1)

Radio is today one of the basic media, perceived as almost latent, as part of the “natural” human environment. In addition, it is one of the archaic media, compensating for its limits largely by accompanying prosthetics, such as a printed newsletter or magazine, a web archive, online streaming, a camera installed in the studio …

If radio is in essence only partly *inter*active (decisions are always made by the editorial staff, director, technicians – you broadcast I listen, at best I call the studio, send a query or suggestion in a letter or by e-mail), then hardly anybody is concerned about what preconditions the results, i.e. who determines them and how the broadcast itself is created. It often means that we perceive and receive radio broadcast as unavoidable noise, as part of the everyday soundscape. As a result most of the radio stations, broadcast formats or content consciously or automatically comply with such an approach. Nevertheless, from the very beginning of radio broadcasting there were creative minds who initially dreamt of its unimaginable possibilities,[[2]](#footnote-2) only to arrive a little later at an understanding of the specific limits of this medium as a possibility of how a tool for recording, producing and disseminating sound events could be changed into an active medium and to rouse the passive listener from lethargy by attacking his expectations and habits. The listener is in this case immersed in concentrated listening so as to capitalize on the radio’s own specific qualities – de facto confirming its limitations.

The building up of the tradition of radio acting, radio documentary, radio play, radio propaganda, as well as experiments based in sound effects and editing and traditional attention to the battle between word, sound and musical composition within a single whole were brought to fruition through the emergence of a highly specific, and to this day acceptable genre, the German “Hörspiel”, i.e. “a radio musical-dramatic composition”, particularly in the form of so-called “Neue Hörspiel”. The domain of so-called radioart has also been kept alive until today although it seems to have been petrified as a self-restricting and rather academic discipline.[[3]](#footnote-3) Some popularly known highlights of radio experiments such as the radio production of the *War of the Worlds* by Orson Welles from 1938, or a radio composition bordering on musique concréte, a musical composition and a field recording by the pianist Glen Gould (*Solitude Trilogy*, 1967 to 1977), have to this day marked out the basic reference points on the cultural map of the past one hundred years.

The musical exploits of Karlheinz Stockhausen and a number of other composers of contemporary music are inseparably linked to the radio broadcasting studio and its technical opportunities. But the German tradition of the “Hörspiel”[[4]](#footnote-4) which is the closest to the local cultural setting, exploits text-word, music and sounds-noises as equal component parts used to build an original whole. It was in particular music composers and musicians, such as Mauricio Kagel, Georges Aperghis, Heiner Goebbels or Olga Neuwirth and Helmuth Oehring who made the Hörspiel (often in direct contact with a theatrical performance and with regard to the possibilities of musical theatre) a specific genre,[[5]](#footnote-5) which might be expanded by adding other media, but whose strength remains in principle preserved in the form of an active listener’s performance. Many examples of Czech experimental works created for radio in the second half of the 1960s which were significantly contributed to by writers, among others Věra Linhartová, unfortunately went to rack and ruin shortly after 1989. At least we have available a recording of the electro-acoustic opera by Jaroslav Krček from 1971, which owes its origin to the Pilsen music-acoustic studio (established by another musician, Miloslav Kabeláč) presenting a good example of a complex approach both to the possibilities of radio equipment in its time and dramaturgical invention.

Another alternative for coming to terms with radio broadcasting and radio as an institution or a technical instrument is to use its outputs and technical aspects as the material for further processing and operations. This was a procedure used in some of his compositions and performances by John Cage, probably the most radical artist emerging from a musical background taking no hindsight regarding tradition. An analogical (but still underappreciated) is the position of Mauricio Kagel, a German composer of Argentinean origin, whose ironical approach to performing classical music and its institutions may have lost something of its original radicalism and wit if removed from the period context, but may serve as a good example of “institutional criticism” at its birth stage. Symptomatically, Cage and Kagel were close to the activities of the Fluxus movement and a performative approach to a work of art. A reflection or the use of radio (and a radio set) as a tool for producing a (musical) work of art by both artists preceded the conceptually-oriented interventions that were a contribution by the British artist David Trootswyck and an important protagonist of Canadian radioart, Ian Murray.[[6]](#footnote-6)

Nevertheless, an interest in the deconstruction of radio as a medium and as an institution by concentrating on the hidden constructive background of the resulting form is a relatively new phenomenon. The advance of the new media and the internet temporarily redirected artists’ interest to a continuous interactive media environment offering a fresh chance of experimenting with (virtual) space, time, image, sound, text and technical operations. Only the archival U-turn and a resuscitated interest in the classic avant-garde seem to have initiated a return to radio and radio broadcasting as a modern, yet historical institution.[[7]](#footnote-7)

I would hesitate to state that Roman Štětina from the beginning consciously reflected the development of the relationship between art and radio. Yet, alongside personal fascination with the world of the broadcast studio and testing the alternatives of audio-performance and radioart we encounter a characteristic absorption in the background, aesthetics, structure and environment of the radio broadcast studio as a social and historical entity in his work.

In his complex projects Roman Štětina works with projection, object and installation. They are employed to visualize the technical and institutional conditions of creating fiction, or specific “places and methods of cultural production”, which in principle remain backstage for the receiver (listener or viewers).[[8]](#footnote-8) The artist’s profiling locus is the broadcast studio to which several of his important works are related.[[9]](#footnote-9) He is fascinated both by the recording equipment and the physical conditions of the radio broadcast, but most of all by the hidden events and actions, which are directed towards creating, capturing and preserving an acoustic track. The actual radio broadcast and the broadcasting formats are therefore only the initial impulse, theme or one of the motives of a more comprehensive view of the radio and the broadcast studio. As if the perspective of the former attention to the radio on the part of the avant-garde and experimenters was turned upside down: it is more important to show or deconstruct the process of the production, than in a sophisticated way to arrive at a result, which is in reality pre-programmed and in all of its aspects present in the possibilities (regardless of whether unused or taken advantage of by negation) provided by the broadcast studio. In this way Štětina approaches radio with an understanding of its specificity, but from the outside and remotely.

The new video installation, *Instructions for Use of Jiří Kolář*, under which the artist is signed together with the director Miroslav Buriánek this time, is an attempt to comprehensively capture a radio director’s action as an original, but hidden and “impersonal” art performance. The personal dimension is added to the project by the fact that ten years ago the radio broadcast director featured at its centre opened to Štětina the door to the world of radio-fiction in the Pilsen broadcast studio. One of the initial impulses for this work was deliberation about the role of the director as a creator bound by the decisions of the radio dramaturge. An offer to choose for radio production a literary work according to the director’s own preferences, enabling the director to produce it and capturing the progress of its making incidentally attained (among other things) the function of a homage to Miroslav Buriánek at a time when he was retiring from the Plzeň radio broadcast studio.

The basis of the installation is a film recording, something like the “making-of” a radio production of Kolář’s collection of poems *Instructions for Use* (1965, first edition 1969) involving five members of the KLAS Theatre Company. The viewer watches the birth of a radio broadcast form in an environment dominated by a large projection screen and objects designed for sitting on, their geometrical basis being derived from the director’s notes by Buriánek for texts by Kolář. The director’s action itself, guiding the actors, rehearsing alternative readings of the individual poems by Kolář, elucidating comments on the interpretation (directly responding to the situation in the studio, or added ex post as a separate sound layer based on the director’s notes) and the environment of the radio broadcast studio itself create a powerful dramatic arc thanks to which we nearly forget about the simple fact that we are denied hearing the result, i.e. the definitive rendering of the texts, as could be experienced through a radio broadcast. With reference to a study by Jakub Stejskal, which ponders, over Štětina’s video *The Murderer Hides his Form* from 2010, the discrepancy between a “thin” description of the underlying work of art (Schulhoff’s film detective story *The Murderer Hides His Face*) and its visually “thick” interpretation through a new work of art, it can be stated regarding Štětina’s new project that “it gives contours to what is not explicit but is active regardless”.[[10]](#footnote-10)

The film lasting more than two hours and the installation reflect the hidden backstage of radio production inaccessible to the listener. In a fascinated way it dramatizes the construction itself and the more or less traditional process of directing actors in radio. Simultaneously, the film essay fulfils the aim of Kolář’s set of instructions for performing simple activities in a completely different way than how his attempt at “destatic” poetry tends to be interpreted – as pushing the reader into doing the action described in the text.[[11]](#footnote-11) It is the search for an adequate interpretation of the original text that becomes the action here. The performative aspect, which in Kolář is demonstratively embodied by the poetic “instructions” and whose greatest strength actually rests in the mentally processed and imagined possible action, is implemented in Štětina’s and Buriánek’s shared effort indirectly, but within the intentions of Kolář’s creative gesture: as an edited record of the battle to find an adequate way of reading aloud (or reciting?) Kolář’s seemingly civil, but essentially lyrical and to a great extent symbolically-loaded, instructions-poems.

A kind of an anthropological survey and a deconstruction of radio broadcast directing by means of a recording (perceived as a performative action), a film and an installation yield an original art form, which is based on the absence or negation of the scrutinized medium (and its institution). The result is everything else but a radio programme. Although our attention is primarily caught by a film recording of the radio director’s action, this is interrupted by a striking spatial installation forming the scene-environment as an apparent framework, an analogy and commentary enabling us to be remote from the moving image and the urgently present spoken word and at the same time to realize the initial, thematised and absent medium of radio broadcasting. The gap between sound and image which Karel Císař[[12]](#footnote-12) thought about in relation to the author’s earlier works is now replaced by Štětina’s thematising of the seams between text, action, sound, process and result, the precondition of which is the exclusion of radio as a medium, which on the contrary makes an attempt not to acknowledge their existence.

Marek Pokorný, May 2016

1. Title of the text is reffering not only to the Douglas Crimp book *On the Museum’s Ruins*, but most importantly to the book of poems *On the Waves of TSF* (1925) writen by Czech poet and Nobel Prize Winner Jaroslav Seifert. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. “And really, radio raises even more hopes than the gramophone,” writes E. F. Burian in 1928 in the article Mechanické nástroje, which is part of the book Jazz. Cit. according to *E. F. Burian: Nejen o hudbě, Praha 1981, p. 71.* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. At least as it has long been presented by Czech Radio in the rAdioCUSTICA programme on the Vltava station and on an independent portal. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. This tradition follows in the footsteps of the experiments of the Viennese (and in the Czech Republic well-known) poets Günter Eich, Ernst Jandl and Friederick Mayröcker, as well as the protagonist of the Wiener Gruppe Gerhard Rühm, and had some analogy in the activities of Josef Hiršal and Bohumila Grögerová. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Recently, Lukáš Jiřička published the book *Dobyvatelé akustických scén. Od radioartu k hudebnímu divadlu* (Prague 2015), which is quite an original accomplishment following the relationships between the music avant-garde, radio, theatrical performance and musical theatre both from the historical perspective of the founders, and in case studies dedicated to Goebbels, Neuwirth, Ammer and Oehring. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The principle of buying advertising time was used for his TV broadcast intervention, for example, by Chris Burden. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. One of the projects testifying to the new interest in radio oriented clearly “archaeologically” was the exhibition *Sounds. Radio – Art – New Music* (curators Marius Babias, Gaby Hartel, Frank Kaspar, Katrin Klingan), which took place at the Berlin N.B.K. gallery in 2010. Based on the Czech-German *rádio d-cz* project it was mainly participated in by visual artists. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The black-and-white photographic diptych *Pozemek* from 2015 captures a film set in such a way that the illusion of a historical space is commented on by a shot of the construction which forms its hidden structure, without the viewer recognizing and at first glance understanding the artificial nature of the whole situation; both photographs can be thought of as a depiction of independent architecturally striking real estate. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The video installation *Studio č. 2* from 2013, *Auditorium* from 2014, *Jazykolam* from 2014 and also the new project *Návod k použití Jiřího Koláře* (2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See Jakub Stejskal: Estetický modernismus dnes, In: Dějiny umění v rozšířeném poli, Prague, pp. 72-79. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See the study by Pavlína Morganová *Smysl slova spočívá v jeho použití. Jiří Kolář – Yoko Ono*, In Sešit pro teorii a příbuzné zóny, No. 15, Prague 2013, pp. 34 – 57, as well as the postscript by Josef Hlaváček to the first edition of the collection Návod k upotřebení, which talks about fulfilment and human behaviour (*Josef Hlaváček: Návod k upotřebení Návodu k upotřebení od Jiřího Koláře*, In. Jiří Kolář: Návod k upotřebení, Prague 1969, unpaginated), or a study by Jiří Padrta *Básník nového vědomí* from 1975 (in Jiří Kolář, Prague 1993, pp. 65-96), where he also reserves the possibility for the potential reader of fulfilling the prescribed action as a purely private matter (quoted study, p. 89). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. See the text by Karel Císař in the catalogue of the 6th Youth Salon, Zlín 2012, p. 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)