Radiophonic Cities

The City Portrait in Transnational Radio Collaborations

Jacob Kreutzfeldt

The evening of December 7, 1930 saw the broadcast of one of the most ambitions productions for Danish Radio to date when Danish *Statsradiofonien* aired "Vore Dages København i Radiofoniske Billeder" or in English: "Contemporary Copenhagen in Radiophonic Images." The broadcast was remarkable in several ways. First, it was Danish Radio's first adoption of sound film: that is, sound without images recorded on film and edited for a sound montage in radio. Second, it was the first ambitious portrait of Copenhagen, attempting over the course of 4 hours to relate to the listeners the life and sounds of the Danish capital. And third, Danish Radio had hired the modernist and highly experimental writer Emil Bønnelycke to make the sound film. (Kreutzfeldt 2018)

An excerpt from the program sheet from Danish Radio (DR) gives an impression of the broadcast:

> Striking of the hour and carillon from the city hall tower at 6 in the morning.
> The factory whistle squeaks – workers turn up at "Burgmeister & Wain" [shipyard] at Ovengaden Neden Vandet.
> In the machine halls Overgaden and Sydhavnen.
> Sailing trip to Refshaleøen. Riveters, cranes and machines in action." (DR 1930, author's translation)

The montage portrayed contemporary Copenhagen by including not only traditional attractions like the fish market, the flower market, churches, and museums, but also sounds from modern Copenhagen like machinery at the B&W shipyards, the industrial harbor, the train station, and the modern concert studio. Clearly the route was not following a tourist's tour through the city, but rather one of changing glimpses of life in the city displaying its noisy, as well as more folkloristic, aspects. The structure was one of temporal condensation from early morning carillons and factory bells to afternoon dance and evening entertainment in Tivoli, and the perspective was elevated and de-personified.

The broadcast was not meant for Danish listeners alone. Rather, as the head of Danish radio Emil Holm relates in an article in *Arbejder-Radio*, it was aired for Danish listeners first and then later included in collaborations with other national broadcasters:

> The intention is that we will continue this work, and in January next year, when we embark on mutual exchanges with larger foreign cities, through which listeners in the different countries will get a radiophonic view into the lives and physiognomy of the cities in question, we will include at least parts of the sound film in these exchanges. (Holm in Anonymous 1930a: 707)

As Holm foresaw, parts of the sound film were included in "Norden paa besøg i København" ("The Northern Countries visiting Copenhagen"), broadcast 9, January 1931, 8-12PM. This program was simultaneously transmitted on all stations in Finland, Sweden, and Norway and involved producers from all the involved countries who were in Copenhagen during the broadcast. Holm clearly makes an effort to present the Copenhagen portrait to Danish listeners as a modern and daring move by Danish radio. In fact, both the use of sound film and the practice of exchanging city portraits was not new. Sweden, Norway and Germany had by that time already completed a round of exchanges of radiophonic city portraits, and by the summer of 1930, the German filmmaker Walter Ruttmann had presented his sound film montage "Weekend" on Berlin radio as well as in a cinema. The city portrait was a highly prestigious genre in early radio, one that called for full production engagement, and one well fit for radiophonic exchanges and collaborations.

This case study explores the idea of the radiophonic city portrait in transnational radio. As illustrated in Holm's statement, the city portrait is imbedded in discourses about national exchange and propaganda, and also activates a vocabulary for the radiophonic experience as not only visiting, but *seeing through* foreign cities: "looking into the lives and physiognomy of cities." (ibid.) This study investigates the practices of such transnational exchanges from a Danish and Nordic perspective and interrogates how these relate to the complex identity politics of places and nations in modern Europe.

NATIONAL COMMUNITIES AND TRANSNATIONAL IMAGINATIONS

Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* describes how the industrial spread of print in renaissance Europe created the conditions for nationalism to arise. In Anderson's analysis it was the convergence of capitalism, print technology and what he calls the "fatality of linguistic diversity", that made new national communities imaginable. (Anderson 2006[1983]: 56) Printed books and later on newspapers in national languages made it possible to imagine sovereign and limited political communities – most of which were defined by the spread of a unique and increasingly standardized language.

Anderson sees the decline of hand-written Latin and the rise of national language print books as mass commodities as the major defining factor for the rise of nationalism, and later in the establishment of nation states. He does not give a clear analysis of radio, probably because of a major shift in the historical conditions from the spread of the printing press to the spread of radio. In considering the appearance of national radio in the 1920s and 30s we are no longer dealing with an *imagined community*, but with an institutionally and ideologically given and *materialized community*. While the printing press in Anderson's theory created the conditions for people to imagine a nation, state radio took as its task to educate and entertain an already existing national public. In the light of this it might be surprising to find that the early commercial imaginary of radio was actually dominated by a fascination with the transnational – much more than with the national. Producers of radio receivers seemed more interested in selling an ideas and images of the world, than the nation and the national language (see Figure 1).

Such imaginaries could indicate that while the state sold national community and culture to the listeners, radio producers simultaneously sold the ability to travel the world by the means of radio receivers. Radio was thus connected both to the national and the transnational, and to a certain extent torn between those two power structures: on the one hand producing and circulating national culture, and at the same time allowing listeners to imagine journeys to the outside. The central question is how these transnational imaginaries were inhabited and explored – not only by market forces and intellectuals like Rudolf Arnheim (1971[1936]), but by radio producers.

Figure 1: Telefunken adverts from the Danish Listener Magazine Radio-Programmet, September-December 1930.

More recently, Arjun Appadurai's *Modernity at Large* (2010 [1996]) and the sociology of globalization, argue that we are now dealing with destabilized national identities assembling from various global flows, imagined worlds, and aspirations. Along with ideas such as Manuel Castells's (2010 [1996]) dialectic of *space of flows* and *space of places*, Appadurai's theory of global -scapes allow us to conceptualize global dynamics where money, people, images and imaginaries circulate more or less independently of nations and give rise to hybrid identity forms. Appadurai engages head-on with Benedict Anderson's account when he writes about the five types of -scapes in his theory, the *ethno-, media-, techno-, finance-, and ideoscapes*: "These landscapes thus are the building blocks of what (extending Benedict Anderson) I would like to call *imagined worlds*, that is the multiple worlds that are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups spread around the globe [...]. An important fact of the world we live in today is that many persons on the globe live in such imag-

ined worlds (and not just in imagined communities) and thus are able to contest and sometimes even subvert the imagined worlds of the official mind and of the entrepreneurial mentality that surrounds them." (Appadurai 2010[1996]: 33, emphasis in original)

Appadurai's imagined worlds transcend the nation and allow counter-official worlds and aspirations to emerge. It is no surprise that global entertainment products play an important role in constructing such imagined worlds according to Appadurai, writing in the 1990s: particularly Hollywood movies, which circulate internationally in cinemas and as video tapes, music and celebrity culture etc.. Like Anderson, Appadurai does not pay much attention to radio. He focuses entirely on electronic media – possibly in extension of Anderson's focus on print media – yet he leaves out radio. Radio seems to occupy an uncertain (if not unimportant) position between national communities and global imaginaries, and the city portrait can be understood as a prime vehicle of such ambivalence.

CASE MATERIAL

This study looks into two historical cases of large-scale transnational projects involving city portraits: collaborations between Nordic state broadcasters in the early 1930s and the Metropolis-series initiated by Studio Akustische Kunst in the 1980s and 1990s.

Researching Danish program sheets, sound archive and listener magazines one finds a dense traffic of city portrait exchanges in the early 1930s, but one that seemed to lose its attraction already in 1932 (see Table 1).

Nordic Exchanges in the Early 1930s
A Round Trip in **Oslo** and Surroundings (March 16, 1930: No, Swe, N-De)
An Evening in **Hamburg**. Strolling with the Microphone (April 1, 1930: No, Swe, N-De)
Visiting **Stockholm** (April 8, 1930: No, Swe, N-De)
The Northern countries visiting **Copenhagen** (January 9, 1931: Dk, No, Swe, Fi)
Helsingfors Broadcasting (February 22, 1931: Dk, No, Swe, Fi)

Nordic Exchanges in the Early 1930s
Transmission from **Hamburg** via "Norddeutscher Rundfunk AG " (May 6, 1931: N-De, Dk)
North Germany visiting **Copenhagen** (September 8, 1931: N-SDe, Dk)
European City Portraits: **Stockholm** (January 31, 1932: Dk, No, Swe, Fi)
European City Portraits: **Oslo** (May 22, 1932: Dk, No, Swe, Fi)

Table 1: Overview of large-scale city portraits found in a study of Danish listener magazines. Author's translations of titles from Danish program sheets.

The material is structured in three different rounds of exchanges, first between Norway, Sweden and the North German NORAG, then a new round between Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland, and – running in parallel – collaboration between Denmark and NORAG. Of these, only audio material from the "North-Germany visiting Copenhagen portrait" has been preserved in the archive, but all are relatively well described and discussed in listener magazines.

The series of *Metropolis* city portraits was initiated by Klaus Schöning and produced for Studio Akustische Kunst at the WDR Cologne. It comprises of around 25 unique productions each portraying one city: "Metropolis Paris," "Metropolis Copenhagen," "Metropolis Calcutta." The earliest piece seems to have been Clarence Barlow's portrait of Calcutta from 1980, and while – like in the case of the 1930s works – there is no clear overview of the material, the years between 1984 and 1996 seem to have been particularly productive. For an exhibition in Copenhagen in 1996, a series of highlights – including an early inspiration by R. Murray Schafer and The World Soundscape Project – were presented (see Table 2). This material exists, excerpts are published in CDs, and other parts can be found in different broadcasters' archives.

Metropolis: City Soundscapes Copenhagen 1996
Metropolis Atlanta (Sorrel Hays, 1990)
Metropolis Benares (Peter Pannke, 1988)
Metropolis Buenos Aeres (Francisco Kröpfl, 1989)
Metropolis Calcutta (Clarence Barlow, 1980)

Metropolis: City Soundscapes Copenhagen 1996
Metropolis Cologne - Kyoto (Bill Fontana, 1993)
Metropolis Cologne - San Francisco (Bill Fontana, 1987)
Metropolis Copenhagen (Stephen Schwartz, 1996)
Metropolis London (Karl Sczuka, 1987)
Metropolis New York (Richard Kostelanetz, 1984)
Metropolis Paris (Pierre Henry, 1984)
Metropolis Rome (Alvin Curran, 1987)
Metropolis Sydney (Vincent Plush, 1988)
Metropolis Tokyo (Emmanuelle Loubet, 1990)
The Vancouver Soundscape (R. Murray Schafer, 1973)
Metropolis Venice (Marielouise Franke, 1987)
Metropolis Vienna (Gerhard Rühm, 1992)

Table 2: Overview of the productions presented at the ACOUSTICA INTERNATIONAL. METROPOLIS, City Soundscape exhibition, Copenhagen 1996 (Schöning 1996a).

FUNCTIONS OF CITY PORTRAITS IN TRANSNATIONAL RADIO

Given the historic and geographic differences between the early Nordic exchanges and later Acoustica International projects, it remains to explore why and how the city portrait functions as a genre in transnational radio. The city portrait may be understood to provide a vocabulary for exploring relationships between the national and the transnational, and in the following the cases will be studied further in terms general features concerning territory, technology and aesthetics.

Territory

Bønnelyche's project may, as the head of Danish Radio Emil Holm stated above, allow us to look into foreign cities, but it will also, he continues, "serve as propaganda for Copenhagen and for Denmark under hitherto unknown forms." (Holm in Anonymous 1930a: 707) Both cases in their serial logic connect places as belonging to the same category while also highlighting each as something unique. They activate a touristic gaze at the foreign city while also building a shared space that connects cities and broadcasters. Schöning describe this function as an *acoustic bridge* in his curatorial text for the 1996 exhibition in

Copenhagen: "Sounds of the earth's metropolises salute the Danish capital, this year's European Cultural Capital. They form acoustic bridges between cities of Europe and other continents." (Schöning 1996: 2)

Clearly the city portraits form bridges building on and extending existing geopolitical alliances. In the cases of the 1930s collaborations, it is the Nordic region that is being explored and inhabited: first in alliance between Norway, Sweden and Northern Germany, and later without Germany but in unison between Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland. This delineates the Nordic cultural sphere and tests ideas of "Nordic brotherhood."

Unlike the early collaborations between national broadcasters, the Metropolis series connect global metropolises that are not easily described by an existing geopolitical entity. Instead, the series seems to reach out beyond a European sphere to build a global community. In the context of the European Cultural Capital, the global outreach of the Metropolis exhibition in Copenhagen in 1996 clearly has political implications. Also, the Metropolis series was a significant element in Schöning's endeavours to establish an international sound art community. Schöning had organized three events titled "Acustica International" before the exhibition in Copenhagen: first in Cologne in 1985, then in New York and Montreal in 1990 and in Cologne in 1994 (Schöning 1996b: no pagination). Clearly, as illustrated by the name "Acoustica International," the Metropolis compositions did perform the work of articulating an international community of sound and radio artists, building an international art form from the vocabularies of urban life.

Technology

While, as we have seen, both projects build territories by means of *calling locations*, we can also say that they explicitly use technology to *connect locations*. This function of course lies firmly in the nature of all broadcasting, but what is prominent in both projects is the way that this function of technology is made explicit.

The early 1930s was a time of rapid expansion of cables for quality sound transfer between broadcasters. While earlier co-transmissions had been made in the form of wireless relays, where signals from foreign transmitters had been wirelessly received and then re-transmitted, the new cables allowed high quality transmission from foreign broadcasters. (Lommers 2012) The Danish-North German collaboration broadcast May 6 and September 8, 1931 were organized as a consequence of the establishment of a North Sea cable for radio transmission, which was discussed during the broadcast (DR 1931: 10.22-10.34). Similarly, but in a more experimental fashion, the two compositions by Bill Fontana in the Metropolis series were the results of temporary satellite connec-

tions, so-called 'sound bridges', between Cologne and San Francisco in 1987 and Cologne and Kyoto in 1993.

While connections and bridges are explicitly present on a macro level of both projects, putting cities, nations and broadcasters in connection with each other, the practice of connecting places also figures prominently on the micro level of the productions themselves. A daring feature of the German visit in Copenhagen broadcast September 8, 1931 is the re-transmission via short wave from a steamboat in Copenhagen Harbor, something that is articulated as an experiment in itself (DR 1931:10.20-16.30). In Bønnelyche's piece from December 7, 1930, partly rebroadcast in January 9, 1931 city portrait, the use of sound film allow recordings form different places in Copenhagen to be played directly after each other – a montage technique to be explored much more in the later Metropolis pieces. The character of experiment was so prominent that one listener and writer at *Radio-Programmet* found "sound images" from different places "lively" and "clearly noticed the difference between the machines presented", but lacked some action and concluded that the broadcast was: "As an experiment, amusing. As an institution, barely recommendable." (Anonymous 1930b: 4, authors translation)

Aesthetics

The productions can be heard as explorations of sonic displacement. From Bønnelyche's early and rough Copenhagen montage in 1930 to Pierre Henry's complex "Paris" composition in 1984 runs a paradoxical concern with site specificity in sound and radio: what does it mean to be listening to sounds from a city – even if it is your own city – in a sound production? How can that be illustrative, satisfactory and even aesthetically appealing?

The above-mentioned comment from *Radio-Programmet* clearly illustrates that expectations were not always in line with the results. The editorial voice called Radax in *Radiolytteren* was somewhat similarly disappointed with the broadcast from Finland February 22 1931: "We expect that the foreign city will reveal itself for us [...] We want to hear its noises! Every city has its characteristic noise and tone, if they can be captured! We await carillons, the cries of street vendors, the sensational cries of the newspaper man, the fire engine setting out, the guard parading [...] but how would it be possible to capture all this in a live recording?" (Radiax 1931: 7, author's translation). The answer to the rhetorical question, of course, is that it is not possible at all for a live recording to achieve the desired plurality of sounds, and that experiments with sound film and later sound storage media like discs and tapes would provide new means to pursue this dream of a localized sonic essence. Yet the slight uncertainty in the quote, "if they can be captured" (ibid.), point to the ambivalence of the whole project of finding a sonic essence of a city.

Pierre Henry, who – with a background from French radio's Club d'Essai and musique concrète – was commissioned to do one of the first metropolis productions: "Metropolis Paris" from 1984 also used the more general title "La Ville Die Stadt", and structured the later CD publication in tracks with generic titles like "stairs" "traffic," and "metro." (Henry 1994) Paris may be heard in the composition, but the overall impression is an abstract and compositional approach to the exercise of portraying a city, and from time to time it seems we are listening to a *city* rather than to *the city of Paris*.

Whether the approach is compositional or more realistic and prosaic, a central tension in the material is that of working with displaced sound: sounds presented in an explicitly different context than where they come from. Displacement of sound is a feature in all sound reproduction, of course, but the sonic city portrait as a genre makes this displacement explicit. It would seem that in allowing everyday sounds from designated locations to be heard, the genre also allows aesthetic reflections on this displacement: that the sounds are simultaneously 'here' and somewhere else; that the sounds refer to something known yet slightly foreign; that they allow us to sense, yet not fully grasp, an environment, to decode, yet not fully recognize, the place. In doing so, the city portraits may feed the global imaginary that Appadurai describes.

Conclusion

This case study has provided insights into the role of city portraits in transnational radio. Based on two cases: collaborations and co-transmissions between Nordic broadcasters in the early 1930s and the *Metropolis* series produced for Studio Akustische Kunst at WDR in the 1980s and 1990s the study has investigated the function of the city portrait in transnational radio. Looking in particular at how these two projects address territory, how they use and articulate technology, and their aesthetic form and judgement, the study has articulated some of the ambivalent affordances that allow the genre to work in the intersections between materialized communities and global imaginaries. These broadcasts confirm existing territories, while also negotiating new alliances; they make the foreign present while clearly stating the distance, and they excel in the aesthetics of displacement that allow us to listen into and dream about a radically-connected global world, while placing the listener safe at home.

References

Anderson, Benedict (2006 [1983]): Imagined Communities, London & New York: Verso.

Anonymous (1930a): "Hverdagens København I radiofoniske Billeder," In: Arbejder-Radio December 7, pp. 706-707.

Anonymous (1930b): "Hvad Ugen bragte," In: Radio-Programmet December 12, p 4.

Appadurai, Ajun (2010 [1996]): Modernity at Large, Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press.

Arnheim, Rudolf (1971 [1936]): Radio, New York: Arno & The New York Times.

Castells, Manuel (2010 [1996]): The Rise of the Network Society, Malden & Oxford: Blackwell.

DR (1930): Program Sheet December 7. (http://www.larm.fm/Asset/e0568181-bddd-94ce-22fb-a33698faa25b)

DR (1931): Kopenhagen – ein Städtebild. Nordtyskland på Besøg i København. Broadcast September 8 8 p.m.-12 p.m. (http://www.larm.fm/Asset/32e7cb6d-0464-4e7e-974a-61c3c2c62501/edac766f-ab6c-4355-965e-9221b457a42d).

Henry, Pierre (1994): La Ville Die Stadt Metropolis Paris, Mainz: Wergo.

Kreutzfeldt, Jacob (2018): "State-Controlled Avant-Garde? – Emil Bønnelycke's Radiophonic City Portrait of Copenhagen" in Tania Ørum/Per Stounbjerg/Benedikt Hjartarson/Andrea Killnitz (eds.), A Cultural History of the Avant-Garde in the Nordic Countries 1925-1950, Amsterdam: Brill/Rodopi (forthcoming).

Lommers, Suzanne (2012): Europe – On Air. Interwar Projects for Radio Broadcasting, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.

Radiax (1931): "Finland Gennem Æteren. Nogle Betragtninger I Anledning af Helsingfors-Transmissionen," In: Radiolytteren March 1, p. 7.

Schöning, Klaus (1996a): Acoustica International Metropolis City Soundscapes, Catalogue text received by the author from Markus Heuger May 3 2016.

Schöning, Klaus: (1996b): Acoustica International. Lydrejse. 100 værker fra Studio Akustische Kunst WDR Köln (1969-1996), Roskilde: Museet for Samtidskunst.