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Why Sound Art Works and the German Horspiel

Author(s): Everett C. Frost

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# Why Sound Art Works and the German Hörspiel

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*Everett C. Frost*

*I believe radio will one day develop a literature as great as that of the theatre and that this will happen as soon as adequate facilities are placed in the hands of writers sincerely interested in the medium. I am afraid radio cannot look to established writers of this generation for outstanding work, since most of them know little of radio's very special requirements and are practically unaware of its literary possibilities. I rather suspect the [sic] great things will come from men now unknown who will undertake to study and develop the still primitive craft of Microphone-drama and who will approach their work wholly without condescension.*

—Norman Corwin, 1939

In the United States, radio drama is generally regarded as a popular art form whose time has come and gone—suitable for those over 40 to contemplate in bursts of nostalgia, perhaps, as in the Woody Allen film *Radio Days*, but hardly worth the serious attention of people interested in contemporary drama. But in 1985 when Lincoln Center, after a decade's dormancy, was revived as a home for theatre, it was with David Mamet's radio play *Prairie du Chien*. Arthur Kopit's *Wings* (1975) was an award-winning radio play before it found success on both the stage and television (plate 1). John Cage's *Roaratorio*, featured in Brooklyn Academy of Music's 1986 Next Wave Festival, originated as "*Neues Hörspiel*" (avant-garde or new wave radio drama) commissioned by the radio department of West Deutscher Rundfunk in Köln, West Germany. The 1975 production of Susan Griffen's *Voices*, which won an emmy Award when presented on public television, started as a radio play produced by Eric Bauersfeld at KPFA in Berkeley, California. A number of this century's greatest playwrights, including Bertolt Brecht, Wolfgang Borchert, Archibald MacLeish, and Dylan Thomas, have created works for the radio. More recently, Sam Shepard, Mark Medoff, Arthur Miller, Edward Albee, Harold Pinter, Tom Stoppard, Robert Creeley, and Elizabeth Swados have all written one or more radio plays which were, not incidentally, important to each author's development.

Writing for radio has not only benefited the playwrights but the theatre as well. In 1956, the BBC was not yet sufficiently persuaded of the merits of *En attendant Godot* to attempt a radio production of the author's English



1. *Arthur Kopit (left) and director John Madden work on the mix of *Wings*, Kopit's first radio play. (Photo courtesy of National Public Radio)*

translation, but was intrigued enough to suggest that Samuel Beckett might like to try his hand at a play written for the medium. Beckett was reticent: "Never thought about radio play technique," he wrote to Nancy Cunard, "but in the dead of t'other night got a nice gruesome idea full of cartwheels and dragging of feet and puffing and panting which may or may not lead to something" (Humanities Research Center 1984:93). What it led to was *All That Fall* (plate 2), a radio play that, as Beckett has insisted, cannot be transposed to another medium without altering its impact.<sup>1</sup> During the next 15 years, Beckett wrote five more radio plays, each one an innovative gem and a significant development of the Beckett canon.<sup>2</sup> *All That Fall* led directly to *Krapp's Last Tape*, one of the very first to include electronic media in theatre performances. If a drama could "appear" on a tape recorder then presumably a tape recorder could appear in a drama.

Radio drama can also be seen as an intrinsically worthwhile and viable art form in its own right. In Kopit's *Wings*, for example, the listener experiences the play from the point of view of a character suffering from amnesia. Of all performance forms, only radio can accomplish this without the encumbrance of the performer's physical presence. Evidently, things that are not possible in any other medium are possible in radio.

For one thing, radio—made up wholly and solely of sound—concentrates attention on language as a spoken medium in which the voice is an instrument in the creation of meaning. Rudolf Arnheim identified this aspect of radio drama more than half a century ago:

In radio drama, even more forcibly than on the stage, the word is first revealed as sound, as expression, embedded in a world of expressive natural sounds which, so to speak, constitute the scenery. [. . .] But this does not mean that in radio drama the subject is of no consequence—most certainly not. But it should be realized that the elemental force lies in the sound, which affects everyone more directly than

2. Advertisement for the 1986 production of Samuel Beckett's 1956 radio drama All That Fall.

# SAMUEL BECKETT'S



*all that fall*

A PLAY FOR RADIO

BY THE AUTHOR OF  
WAITING FOR GODOT

BILLIE ◆ DAVID  
WHITELAW ◆ WARRILOW  
DIRECTOR: EVERETT FROST  
AN AMERICAN PREMIERE

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A co-production of Soundscape, Inc. & West German Radio Station RIAS-Berlin.  
Major funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Distributed by  American Public Radio  
in honor of Samuel Beckett's 80th birthday

the meaning of the word, and all radio art must make this fact its starting-point. The pure sound in the word is the mother-earth from which the spoken work of art must never break loose, even when it disappears into the far heights of word-meaning (1972:27-28).

Taken broadly to include audio art (or text/sound) productions, radio drama is the only form of radio activity that creates *ex nihilo* (see Wagner Jourdain 1986)—it begins from nothing and creates structure and meaning out of words and sound, or better, out of sounding words. As such it is a modern technological revival of something very ancient and primal: oral tradition, in which the uttered word makes aural sense without first passing through the frozen medium of print. When its principles are properly understood, radio drama allows us to “feel ourselves back in that primeval age where the word was still sound, the sound still word” (Arnheim 1972:35).

There is a sense in which radio drama is older than radio; for example, Homer, blind and unable to see his audience, could be called the first radio broadcaster. Yet radio provides the modern Homer with some extraordi-

nary assistances: it extends the reach of her/his voice without losing any of its intimacy, making it possible to whisper across thousands of miles as each member of the audience experiences the drama in intimate privacy. (Of course, such technology has changed the nature of performance, and the modern Homers, if they know what they are doing, skillfully adjust their voices accordingly.) The advent of recording equipment makes storing and duplicating a performance possible, so that it can be repeated in various contexts or manipulated and altered via tape editing and overdubbing.<sup>3</sup>

An aesthetic of dramatic literature and performance broad enough to include radio drama suggests a performative rather than literary approach. The lyrical, brooding, introspective “closet” dramas attempted in the work of so many great poets, such as John Milton’s *Samson Agonistes*, Percy Bysshe Shelley’s *The Cenci*, Lord Byron’s *Manfred*, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s *Faust*, and W. H. Auden’s Christmas oratorio *For the Time Being* are voice dramas that anticipate—and would be enriched by—production on radio. Perhaps that’s going too far—but not in the wrong direction. I am simply suggesting that writing for the radio has existed much longer than the radio itself.

The tradition of creating radio literature continues in countries outside the United States. Radio drama thrives in Europe, Canada, Australia, and Japan. If, as is often claimed, television killed radio, one would expect to find radio drama in a moribund condition anywhere that television flourishes. Clearly, that is not the case. Throughout Europe, the English Commonwealth countries, and Japan, commercial radio is virtually unknown. The public broadcast systems are heavily subsidized by license fees collected from listeners by the government. The BBC in England, the CBC in Canada, ORTF in France, and the ARD stations in Germany maintain large departments, staffs, and studios devoted to the commissioning, producing, broadcasting, and archiving of radio drama. There is hardly a major writer in any of those countries who has not written for radio. Additionally, radio drama is covered by the press. It is printed, anthologized, and studied. There is an international system of commissioning plays, with each country putting up a portion of the costs. But very little of this activity reaches the United States. A few years ago, some BBC productions were distributed in the U.S. through Earplay, National Public Radio’s radio drama production center that operated from 1972–1974. More recently the BBC’s “Hitch-Hikers Guide to the Galaxy” (distributed in the U.S. by WGBH) has developed a cult following. At the beginning of 1987, American Public Radio began distributing the Canadian series, “Vanishing Point.” But this is hardly enough.

In the United States no station or network currently maintains a department with a full time staff and a budget devoted to the production of radio drama. Commercial radio, far and away the predominant form of radio broadcast in the United States, has not been a venue for radio drama since the 1950s when the last hold-outs from the “golden era” of American radio began to die out. For the last quarter of a century, attempts to invent or revive a tradition of radio drama have been located within the rather anarchic and confusing domain of public (noncommercial) radio. With important exceptions (such as KCRW in Santa Monica, California, KPFA in Berkeley, WGBH in Boston, and WNYC-FM in New York) the public radio system is indifferent—sometimes even hostile—to radio drama. Stations depend heavily on voluntary listener subscriptions for a large part of their revenue, and they tend to believe that radio drama is not as produc-

tive in raising subscription money as is cleverly formatted music, variety, and news programming.

So the initiative for radio drama production falls to the producers, directors, and writers, such as myself, who sometimes work in conjunction with a station but are more often entirely independent—securing the necessary production funds, covering distribution costs, and persuading the stations to run the completed productions. It is rarely possible to recover more than a tiny fraction of costs from distribution.

Serious dialog and criticism that might help foster, encourage, and define the art barely exist. Newspapers do not review radio works, nor do theatre, broadcast, or academic journals regularly discuss it. Partly because radio drama's most publicized history in this country concerns works produced as popular entertainment, most scholars of literature and drama seem to regard it as a subject unworthy of serious inquiry.

For the last 40 years the most innovative work in radio drama has been produced in West Germany where it is called "*Hörspiel*"—literally, hear (*Hör*) + act/play (*Spiel*), which, as noted by the Austrian writer Ernst Jandl, is a "double imperative" (Schöning 1984:1).

As early as the 1920s and '30s German radio drama was being developed by such major figures as Bertolt Brecht, Kurt Weill, and Walter Benjamin. Brecht wrote at least two plays for the new medium: *Der Ozeanflug: Ein Radiolehrstück für Knaben und Mädchen* (The Flight Over the Ocean: An Instructional Play for Boys and Girls) and *Das Verhör des Lukullus* (The Trial of Lucullus).<sup>4</sup> Such beginnings were aborted by the Nazis who exploited radio for propaganda.

In the immediate postwar period, a functioning radio system was essential for coping with the exigencies of survival and morale. Radio was also instrumental in the growing competition between the Western allies and the Soviet Union. Consequently the redevelopment and restructuring of the German radio system was a high priority. And German radio had two distinct advantages: British (that is to say, BBC) design and American money.

But at the same time, gifted administrators, dramaturgs, and producers such as Paul Shultes, head of the radio drama department at West Deutscher Rundfunk (WDR) in Köln, or Klaus Schöning, WDR dramaturg and producer, have, through productions, programs, essays, and books, carved out whole new areas and understandings for the art of radio.

Postwar radio drama was initially closely tied to the revival of the theatre. It served as a medium to help German audiences discover what drama was like outside of Germany, and it examined the causes and the consequences of the war. On 13 February 1947, the first Hörspiel of the post-Nazi period was broadcast—Wolfgang Borchert's *Draussen vor der Tür* (The Outsider), subtitled "Ein Stück, das kein Theater spielen und kein Publikum sehen will" (a play which no theatre wants to produce, and no audience wants to see) (Borchert 1956). It was an immediate sensation and was later distributed throughout Germany and often repeated.<sup>5</sup>

In the play, a young foot soldier returns to Germany from a Siberian concentration camp where he had been imprisoned for three years after having been captured at Stalingrad. He goes home, but there is no home to go to. The wife he had precipitously married before he was mobilized now has another husband. He tries to kill himself by jumping into the river Elba, but a woman whose dead husband the soldier may have ordered into combat saves him. His commanding officer, having had no difficulty re-

turning to civilian life, offers no solace. Tempted by his comic looks, a cabaret director tries to hire the soldier as a clown—but he isn't funny. His father, having been "too gone on the Nazis," has committed suicide. God provides rhetoric but no comfort or understanding. The figure of death, belching from indigestion, sweeps into the streets. There is no place to go. A second time the soldier jumps into the Elba and this time drowns.

The drama is heavily autobiographical—Borchert had been a foot soldier, was captured at Stalingrad, and spent nearly three years in Siberia—and it is both symmetrical and tragic that Borchert died the day before the play's stage premiere on 21 November 1947 in Hamburg. It was subsequently produced as a film called *Liebe 47* (Love 47) directed by Wolfgang Liebeneiner (see Böll 1956:118).

The Hörspiel unfolds with a compelling, surrealistic, almost liturgical quality. Although it is eminently stageable, there is something elusive about it, making it intrinsically better suited to the theatre of the ear.<sup>6</sup> God and the Elba are images in the mind of the soldier (though the Elba is simultaneously a real and grubby river). Death is both an old sweeper and a force that is sinister, disgusting, and comic. Each is more effective as a disembodied voice. This is the stuff—the province—of radio drama.

The subsequent history of German radio drama may be seen as a series of radical experiments with the radio aesthetic implicit in *Draussen vor der Tür*. The foremost innovator of the 1950s was Günter Eich whose radio plays seem somewhat like the American television series "The Twilight Zone," or like science fiction or fairy tales.<sup>7</sup> But Eich's works are unique in their tenacious adherence to a realistic context—a probable setting in which the improbable occurs—and so have a rather unsettling ability to call ordinary assumptions about reality into question.

In *Die Andere und Ich* (which unsatisfactorily translates as "The Other and I") an American woman, Ellen, vacationing on a beach in Italy, decides to walk into a nearby fishing village, leaving behind her husband and children. She enters a house that seems vaguely familiar to her. Inside she is called Camilla and is welcomed as a long lost member of the family. Confused, she nevertheless takes up life in the village as Camilla. She marries, has children, and passes the years. Her husband goes to war and is reported missing in action. She then moves in with an old fisherman who tells her, " 'Missing in action' doesn't mean you are dead, it means they don't know where you are." One day she walks along the road and muses, "Here I could stand in the road and look over my whole life." She sees a car passing and recognizes herself as Ellen inside. They look at each other. Then she, as Ellen, is on the beach recovering from a near drowning or sunstroke (to my mind an unhappy concession to plausibility). When she recovers she again leaves her family behind and walks into the town and into the home she inhabited as Camilla. Camilla's daughter does not recognize Ellen. But when Ellen is able to describe the family precisely, she is permitted to see Camilla—an old woman, laid out, dead, in the parlor.

*Die Andere und ich* is a narrative play that takes place in a realistic setting, but it would be impossible to bring the play to the stage without losing its essential quality. Except for the first and last scenes, the actions of the play are presented as they pass through Ellen's mind so that the exact relationship between "the Other and the I" remains deliberately undefined. The formal ambiguity created by the disembodied—simultaneously separate and linked—voices on the radio increases the depth and compelling power of the piece.

Eich's disquieting plays were not always appreciated by his audience. His best known play, *Träume* (Dreams) puts its finger on the postwar

German mood and caused an outcry from listeners who felt stung and confronted. It opens with a simple reading of Eich's poem (1981:53) which begins:

*Ich beneide sie alle, die vergessen können,  
die sich beruhigt schlafen legen und keine Träume haben.*  
(I envy all of you who are able to forget,  
who lie peacefully sleeping and have no dreams.)

In the dream that follows, a group of people are on a train rushing headlong into the night. Beginning as a normal journey with dialog that might be heard on any train, the listener gradually becomes aware that the passengers have no idea where they are going, where they have come from, or if the train has any destination. They don't even know why they are on the train. Attempts to discover their circumstances and appeals to stop the train are greeted with silence. In the Germany of 1951, it was a compelling metaphor.

Like a conventional stage play, *Die Andere und ich* has a plot. *Träume* does not. Hörspiel is beginning to progress toward what has come to be called Neues Hörspiel (literally: "new radio play," but rather than connoting the sense of avant-garde, the work might be better described as a "text/sound composition"). Neues Hörspiel is held together variously by theme, texture, imagery, and above all, sound. As such, radio drama is less like proscenium, narrative, "realistic" theatre and more closely akin to poetry, music, or performance art. It is therefore not surprising that many of its practitioners are poets, composers, or performance artists. The writer who hands over a script to a dramaturg and a producer/director is being replaced by a *Hörspielmacher*—a text/sound creator, an audio artist—the sound equivalent of a filmmaker or video artist. Not surprisingly, the critical dialog and aesthetic concerns of Hörspielmachen closely parallel those that occur in and about performance art.<sup>8</sup>

By the 1960s the development of lightweight portable recording equipment made high-quality field recordings possible. Traditional radio drama has taken advantage of improved technology to gather sound effects and ambience from the environment in order to achieve greater realism. One form of Neues Hörspiel has experimented with incorporating these *O-ton* recordings (original sound or sound from the source) into the Hörspiel itself, not as gathered sound effects, but as structural principles in the creation of the drama. From this point of view, as Schöning noted, "The original *O-ton* Hörspielmacher was the reporter" (1972:8).

Developed and produced in 1985 by Götz Naleppa for WDR, *Robinsonate* incorporates music and natural sounds recorded in the Italian Alps with speech, breath, and songs recorded in studios (plate 3). Subtitled "ein Inselklangspiel in 15 Sätzen" (an Island Sound-Sculpture in 15 Sentences") it does not dramatize but uses sentences from Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* that reflect themes of fear, loneliness, aggression, encounters with alien cultures, and confrontation with nature. The result is a 75-minute textured weave of natural soundscapes with solo and ensemble vocal and instrumental responses. It is not music, but it approaches the condition of music; nor is the soundscape a background for action—there isn't any. The soundscape is what the play is about. It is the sound it makes, and any attempt to provide visuals would be reductive.

Faith Wilding's *Hildegard und Ich* (Hildegard and I) (plate 4) is another poetic realization of text, voices, music, children's games, and natural



**MONTAG, 4.2.'85 17.00 UHR**

**HÖRSPIEL IM RIAS-STUDIO 10**

# ROBINSONATE

Ein Insel-  
klangspiel  
in 15 Sätzen  
von  
TRANSIT  
COMMUNI-  
CATION  
nach einer  
Idee von  
Götz Naleppa  
Produktion:

**WDR**  
Köln



Robinsonate  
= eine  
Robinsonade  
in Klängen  
75 Minuten  
Sound-Poesie  
ein Klang-  
spiel aus  
Musik und  
Sprache, Atem,  
Gesang und  
Naturklängen  
aus oberitalie-  
nischer Land-  
schaft -  
15 Variationen  
über Grundsitu-  
ationen aus  
Defoes "Robin-  
son Crusoe":  
Angst und Ein-  
samkeit, Reli-  
gion und  
fremde Kultur,  
Agression und  
Begegnung mit  
der Natur.

Eintritt frei

sounds. A coproduction of WDR Köln and RIAS Berlin, it was produced and directed by Naleppa. Hildegard von Bingen was an 11th-century German abbess, mystic, composer, painter, and writer who presided over a small community of nuns near the town of Bingen on the Rhine. Wilding, a painter and performance artist living in New York, was born in Paraguay in a religious community of German pacifist refugees from the Nazis. In a description of the program Wilding wrote: "I discovered Hildegard's writings when I was eight and read them secretly in a book about German women mystics. I thought it was a forbidden book because the language was so erotic" (1987:55).

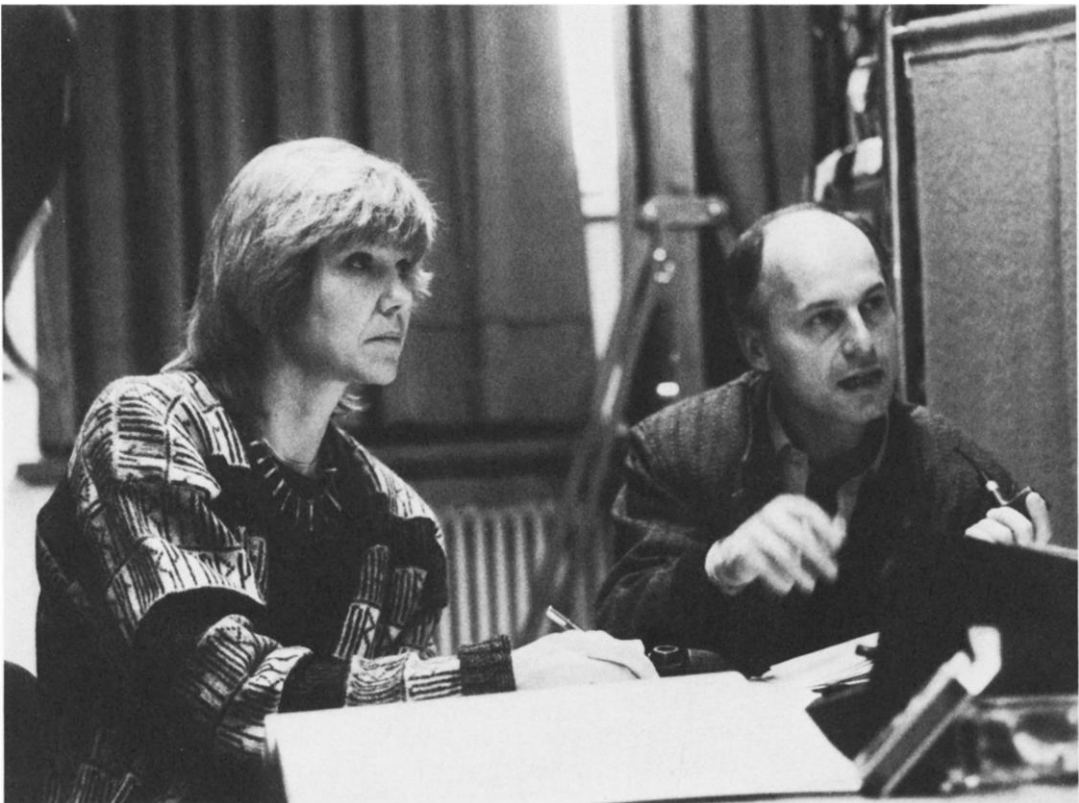
The Hörspiel is a conversation among Hildegard, Wilding (as child and as adult), and Nature about ecology, art, and cosmology. It incorporates sounds of the Paraguayan jungle, the Rhine, the modern West German town of Bingen, Hildegard's music, and a children's chorus singing songs from Wilding's childhood. The sounds are not effects but are the heart of the piece, weaving together magical harmonies and dissonances.

As a genre made of sound, realized in a studio, and approaching the condition of music, Neues Hörspiel attracts composers as well as playwrights and performance artists. The WDR Hörspielstudio maintains a continuing occasional series under the title, "Komponist als Hörspielmacher" ("the Composer as Hörspiel-maker"), and has commissioned Komponist-Hörspiele from Mauricio Kagel, John Cage, Bernd Alois Zimmermann, and others.

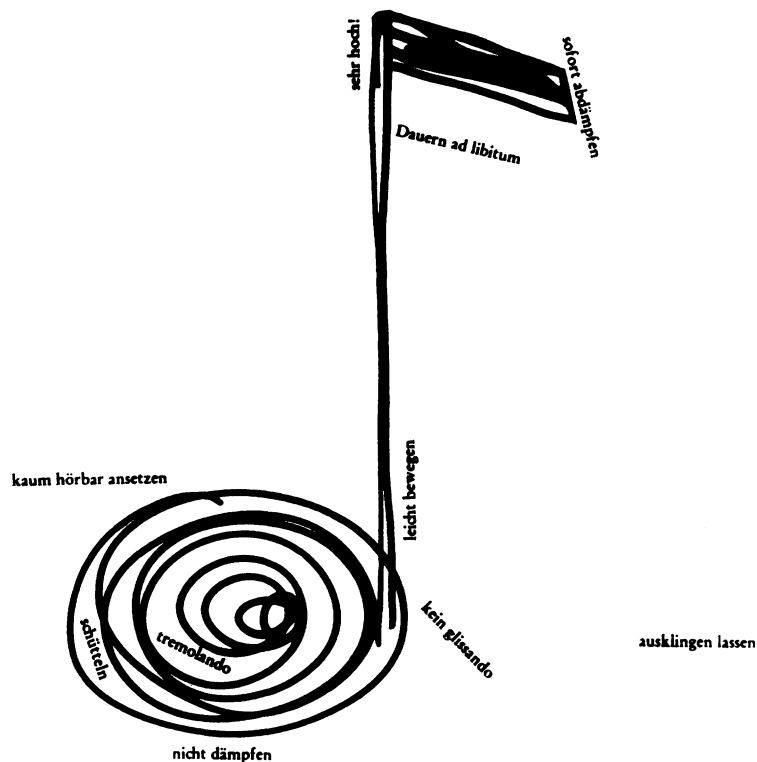
Kagel, an Argentine-born composer now living in Köln was one of the early developers of the Neues Hörspiel at WDR. "Radio drama is neither a

3. Poster advertising the broadcast of Götz Naleppa's 1985 radio play *Robin-sonate*.

4. Faith Wilding and Götz Naleppa create Hildegard und Ich. (Photo by Werner Bethsold)



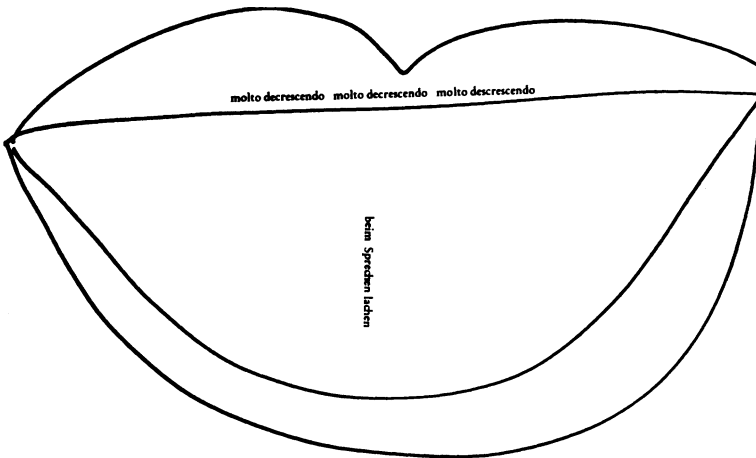
5. & 6. Mauricio Kagel's diagrams for experimental use of voices in radio drama. (Reprinted from Kagel 1982:86–87)



literary nor musical genre, but an acoustic one of undetermined substance” (Kagel 1976; see plates 5 and 6). His efforts have twice earned him the coveted Prix Italia radio award—the first in 1977 for *Die Umkehrung Amerikas: Episches Hörspiel* (The Inversion of America: A Radio Epic), and the second in 1980 for *Der Tribun* (The Tribune).

*Die Umkehrung Amerikas: Episches Hörspiel* is a response to the genocide of indigenous Americans by the Spanish conquistadores and the continuing habit of the strong to devour the weak. The music is used neither as background nor setting, but proceeds independently. The Hörspiel does not narrate or dramatize a series of events but passes through actions rendered by sound, text, and music in an emotionally compelling way. In order to portray the difficulties experienced by Indians forced to learn the language of their conquerors, Kagel has the chorus of native characters pronounce the German words backwards. When the tape is edited, the words are turned around to be played forward. “This inversion technique,” writes Kagel, “provides an acoustic equivalent to demonstrate the laborious process of learning a foreign language against one’s will. The main theme of this radio play may be understood by the listener when he has to try to follow an ill-articulated but still intelligible language” (1976).

The speed of the tape is varied during some of the passages, resulting in alterations of speech, tempo, and timbre. The script requires construction of special instruments: cardboard tubes to be blown through, and pipes partially filled with water and suspended from a string so that they might swing back and forth in front of a stereo pair of microphones. Snatches of traditional and contemporary Latin American music are heard. There is a



brutal scene in which the orders of the Spaniards and the replies of the Indians are counterpointed with the rhythmic crack of a whip. Listening to *Die Umkehrung Amerikas* is a harrowing experience. It is hard to take because of what it says, not because of what it portrays (as opposed to the mindless violence of a horror film that says nothing but defies you to watch it).

*Der Tribun* is not a sequel to *Die Umkehrung*, though it might well be. Kagel spent several years researching the rhetoric of public dictators and heads of state throughout the world. On more than 500 notecards, he notated the key phrases and ideas of the speakers:

wanting to and being able to / the neverending struggle / my mission / the people are never wrong / I am your eagle / I am the state / the enemy without / power and the exercise of power / women and children / workers / [. . .] In this drama I present—through analysis—a synthesis of political speechmaking. (No ideology from the far left to the extreme right is free of the suspicion of using demagogic, misleading, or simply untrue presentations of events as and when necessary. The startling thing in this connection is the link between vocabulary and precise vagueness. Speeches are still given which, if the political context were changed, allow for an alternative, equally “credible” interpretation.) And let me stress here that I am not talking about a specific head of state, past or present; rather my concern is with laying bare the way in which political speakers in general use language. My aim was to create the most credible composite picture possible, rather than to focus on a particular ideology and its representatives (1979: preface).

Kagel himself took the role of the tribune. For as long as seven hours a day, he shut himself up in a recording studio with his index cards and rattled on about, as he says, “every topic under the sun.”

I lied, flattered, and repeated myself, shouted, laughed, and showed I had a thick skin when it came to personal attacks. I issued warnings,

was crude and uncontrollable, accepted a fate—which my people didn't have to share with me—made demands, admonished, and didn't forget to get sentimental occasionally and use a slow, quivering voice. I picked out scapegoats and was always manly enough to march onward for the sake of our better future, reminded people of past sacrifices while talking of new ones to come. [. . .] An imagined or re-created fiction? (1979:preface).

These hours of tape were boiled down to a highly condensed hour of tyrannical megalomania interspersed with sounds of marching feet, crowds, and military music played through loudspeakers.

Kagel's *Der Tribun* is an example of another direction of the Neues Hörspiel: that of radically deconstructing language. In most radical forms, the particular language under deconstruction "drops out" so that the piece is equally intelligible to those who speak other languages. Kagel's *Der Tribun* virtually achieves this—the tone and texture of what is said are clearly intelligible even if the auditor speaks no German.

Like *Der Tribun*, Ferdinand Kriwet's *Radio* turns the medium back upon itself. The question "what language is it in?" ceases to make sense in this play. For *Radio*, Kriwet taped parts of speeches by radio announcers and newscasters from all over the world. In short bits brilliantly edited together, the piece illustrates the international vocal characteristics of high pressure hype and mellow, basso profundo. The meaning is immediately apparent. Works such as *Der Tribun* and *Radio* reveal that the language of radio can be universal.

### *Postscript: Bringing Hörspiel to America*

A project to bring a selection of German radio dramas to American audiences began at KPFA in Berkeley, where the director of drama and literature is Erik Bauersfeld.

*Hörspiel USA* all began when Robert Goss sent me his translation of a radio play about Helen of Troy written by Wolfgang Hildesheimer, with a note about doing it on KPFA. Hildesheimer is a distinguished Swiss writer, known for his radio work, novels, criticisms, and plays. [. . .] It was a long script, and I took months getting to it. But it took only minutes after reading the first several pages to get Robert on the phone. Of course, I told him, we must do it. But, I added, not as an amateur production with no funds for actors, directors, or technicians (Bauersfeld 1984:1).

Ernst Schürmann, then head of the Goethe Institute in San Francisco, his successor Manfred Triesch, and Schöning with WDR in Köln, joined the project and in October 1984 KPFA broadcast a month-long series of programs devoted to German radio drama. The series consisted of nine programs of ninety minutes each: six German Hörspiele produced in English and rebroadcasts of seven Hörspiele as originally produced by WDR which included three works by American authors.

The six German Hörspiele produced in English were:

1. Ernst Jandl and Friederike Mayröcker's *Five Man Humanity (Fünf Mann Menschen)*, translated and directed by Robert Goss in consultation with Klaus Mehrlander, the director of the original WDR production.

2. Max Benz and Ludwig Hanig's *Monologue, Terry Jo (Der Monologue der Terry Jo)*, translated by Robert Goss and directed by Klaus Schöning (a coproduction with WDR).
3. Wolfgang Hildesheimer's *The First Casualty of the Trojan War (Das Opfer Helene)*, translated and directed by Robert Goss, produced by Erik Bauersfeld.
4. Reinhard Lettau's *Breakfast Conversations in Miami (Frühstück in Miami)*, directed by R.G. Davis from a translation by Reinhard Lettau and Julie Prandi, edited by Robert Hurwitt, produced by Erik Bauersfeld.
5. Wolfgang Schiffer and Charles Dürr's *Gertrude*, translated by Robert Goss, directed by Oscar Eustis in consultation with Wolfgang Schiffer (who directed the original WDR production). The director of the production for radio was Erik Bauersfeld.
6. Günter Eich, *The Other and I (Die Andere und Ich)*, translated by Robert Goss, produced and directed by Erik Bauersfeld.

The seven original WDR productions broadcast as part of the series were:

1. Peter Handke, *Wind und Meer (Wind and Sea)*.
2. Mauricio Kagel, *On Reading Orwell*.
3. Ferdinand Kriwet, *Radio*.
4. Franz Mon, *Da Du Der Bist (Since You're the One)*.
5. John Cage, *Roaratorio*.
6. Allison Knowles, *Naturalische Aussamlungen und die Echte Krähe (Natural Collections and the True Crow)*.
7. George Brecht, *The Hsin Hsin Minh of Seng Ts'en*.

In 1985/86, three additional works were produced in English for broadcast on KPFA:

1. Gerhard Rühm, *Ophelia and the Words (Ophelia und die Wörter)*, translated by Robert Goss, produced and directed by Klaus Schöning.
2. Walter Adler, *Centropolis*, translated by Robert Goss, adapted for the American radio production, produced and directed by Erik Bauersfeld.
3. Jürgen Becker, *Houses (Häuser)*, translated by Robert Goss, revised for the American production by Oskar Eustis in consultation with the author.

By 1987, three American writers had been commissioned to create original radio plays by the California Hörspiel/USA project:

1. Ed Bullins, *The Hungered One*.
2. Irene Oppenheim, *Portrait*.
3. Lawrence Ferlinghetti, *Let's Go*.

The project has subsequently grown to include a second American production center of Hörspiel/USA in New York City. This center is a partnership of Voices, an independent production company; New York University; WNYC-FM; and the Goethe Institute, and establishes what Schöning has often called "a regional, national, and international bridge of connections." New York productions of German radio drama will be combined with KPFA and WDR productions to create an expanded series for national broadcast. Ultimately, Hörspiel/USA provides a potent dem-

onstration of what can be done with radio and carries tremendous potential for making a genuine contribution to the revival of radio drama in the United States. But its progress is exceedingly slow. Given the present moribund state of radio drama and the current priorities of the public radio system, it will be difficult to persuade many stations to broadcast serious radio drama.

In public broadcasting, the prevailing idea is to develop a larger audience not through diversified and challenging programming, but by getting as many people as possible to listen as long as possible by means of such devices as “seamless” formats (programs which give the illusion of going on forever) and advance promotion every 15 minutes of programs to follow. This is inimical to drama which has a beginning, middle, and end. I am reminded that one of the classic definitions of hell is an endless extension of time from which there is no escape. An attempt to persuade an audience otherwise is an exercise in mass hypnotism.

But radio drama may yet have an essential role to play as an indigestible lump in the seamless warp. It warns that an agenda of broadcasting that cannot adequately respond to *all* that radio can be is a bad one. Or alternatively, that the health of the system can be judged by the extent to which it is responsive to radio drama. One wishes audiences would howl, but it is hard to howl without having a sense of what’s missing. What will it take to improve matters? In Germany, radio drama had a firm footing before the Nazis squelched it—yet the fruition of Hörspiel came about because of the way the German radio system was reconstructed after the war. One hopes we can manage better results in a less devastating way.

### Notes

1. Beckett’s insistence was conveyed in a letter to his American publisher, Barney Rosset, dated 27 August 1957 (see Zilliacus 1976:2). See also Frost (1986) on the radiophonic quality of Beckett’s *All That Fall*.
2. The plays are: *Words and Music*, *Cascando*, *Embers*, *Rough for Radio I*, and *Rough for Radio II*, all reprinted in *The Collected Shorter Plays of Samuel Beckett* (1984). All have been produced by the BBC. *All That Fall* was the first installment of “The Beckett Festival of Radio Plays,” broadcast on American Public Radio and originated by Martha Fehsenfeld and advised by Beckett scholars Louise Cleveland, Lois More Overbeck, Wallace Fowlie, and Enoch Brater. A cassette is available for \$10.95 (plus \$1.00 postage) from Poet’s Audio Center, P.O. Box 50145, Washington, D.C. 20004 (Catalog no. C-1873). The Beckett Festival has just produced *Words and Music* with an original score by Morton Feldman and expects to produce the rest of the Beckett radio plays.
3. Klaus Schöning remarked that Kurt Schwitters was the first to experiment with such manipulations—even before there was audiotape. In the days when recordings were made on wax cylinders, Schwitters dubbed the recording onto film and edited the film into an audio collage (1986).
4. *Der Ozeanflug* (The Flight Over the Ocean) was originally titled *Der Flug der Lindbergh’s* (Lindbergh’s Flight), but Brecht renamed it when he became disaffected with Lindbergh’s right-wing politics. The radio play was set to music by Kurt Weill and Paul Hindemith.

*Das Verhör des Lukullus* (The Trial of Lucullus) was written in 1939 when Brecht was in Sweden and was first broadcast in 1940 in Berne, Switzerland. It is based on Plutarch’s account of the Roman consul and general, Lucius Lucinius Lucullus, accused of perpetrating wars in Asia Minor in order to consolidate political power and afford an extravagant lifestyle. The Hörspiel is the basis for an opera which Brecht wrote in 1949 with Paul Dessau. In a period in which Nazi war criminals were being tried, Brecht apparently wanted to make the political message of the piece less ambiguous and so removed passages that cast Lucullus

- in a favorable light. In the radio play, the guilt or innocence of Lucullus is left for the listening audience to judge. In the opera, he is condemned. Appropriately, the opera is renamed *Die Verurteilung des Lukullus* (The Judgment/Condemnation of Lucullus).
5. In 1985, Georges Wagner Jourdain directed an English language WGBH/Deutsche Welle coproduction of *The Outsider* for American broadcast.
  6. The most interesting and exacting staging that I can think of would require an elaborate texture of sound emanating from speakers located throughout the house—rather like a radio play to which one invites the audience.
  7. It is lamentable that the extraordinary radio plays of Günter Eich are not available in English translation and that his work is not generally known in the United States. The general case seems to be that the radio writings of authors such as Brecht or Böll, whose reputations come from genres more prestigious than radio, are readily translated, while works by writers such as Eich, whose primary reputation is based on his radio plays, are not.
  8. There is a good deal of fine work of this kind being done in the United States, but it is a more underground form of activity than in Germany. No list can fit everybody in, but certainly included would be: Charles Amirkhanian, the “Sound Sensitivity Information Director” of KPFA in Berkeley, John Cage, Bill Fontana, Suzanne Lacy, Susan Stone, and Morton Subotnick. The styles vary radically. There are also Joe Frank, Malcolm Goldstein, Sorrel (Doris) Hayes, Allison Knowles, Tom Lopez, and Ginger Miles. The annual public radio broadcasts of *New Music America*, American Public Radio’s *Territory of Art* and National Public Radio’s *Totally Wired* series, John Schaefer’s WNYC–FM *New Sounds*, and the new music journal that covers radio, *EAR*, all help.

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**Everett Frost** is a Professor in the Department of Television and Film, Tisch School of the Arts, New York University. He has directed The Beckett Festival of Radio Plays, and is the New York Project Director of Hörspiel/USA.