



Photo by Karen Werner

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WHO ARE YOU SKOTTEGATEN FM?

88.6FM, 88.6FM....SKOTTEGAAAATEN....BERGEN, NORRRWAAAAY.....SKOTTEGATEN FM!

SEEDS FOR A MINI-FM STATION

In deep winter of 2021, a three-month mini-FM radio station began transmitting in a neighborhood called Nøstet in Bergen, Norway. Nøstet² has medieval alleyways, cobblestone streets and charming old buildings and houses. On the windowsill of a third floor apartment on Skottegaten, a .5 watt transmitter sent radio waves at the frequency of 88.6FM; inside the apartment a dining room table became a radio station with a mixer, two mics and a recorder connected to a radio.³ Now the dining room table has returned to its original function for meals; the transmitter is packed away. SkottegatenFM has gone to bed, and it is a good time to ask, who are you SkottegatenFM?

SkottegatenFM emerges (the present verb tense feels right as the signal still reverberates though the station has gone to bed) from a lineage of critical radio art practices and practitioners, including artist-theorist Tetsuo Kogawa, perhaps best known for teaching people to build their own low-watt FM transmitters. In 1983, Kogawa launched the mini-FM station Radio Home Run in Tokyo with some of his former university students. The station, which lasted fourteen years, reached a half-mile dense urban radius. Though people

¹ The radio station's jingle was composed by Lisa Davol.

² Nøstet is a sub-section within the Bergen neighborhood Nordnes.

³ I am grateful to BEK (Bergen Senter for Elektronisk Kunst) for generously supporting SkottegatenFM with a home residency, University of Bergen's Faculty of Art, Music and Design and Borealis Festival for Experimental Sound also provided essential support. Hordaland Kunstcenter, up the hill from the transmitter, created a SkottegatenFM listening station in their café.

laughed at the idea of radio station with a signal that only reached a short walking distance, Kogawa observed how mini-FM enabled new kinds of communication: the station was for participants more so than for listeners, and this act of transmitting together had a qualitatively different feel than other forms of collective action. Kogawa also noted the therapeutic functions of mini-FM:

[A]n isolated person who sought companionship through radio happened to hear us and visited the mini-FM station; a shy person started to speak into the microphone; people who never used to be able to share ideas and values found a place for dialogue; an intimate couple discovered otherwise unknown fundamental misunderstandings.⁴

Kogawa's descriptions of Radio Home Run captured my imagination. I envisioned people huddling together in a storefront, interacting with the excitement that comes from speaking into a microphone, conversing live on air and being part of something together. I imagined that Radio Home Run inspired a shared identity for participants. A radio station, and this is all the more true for a mini-FM station located close to where participants live, positions members into a collective that expands beyond individual identities. A neighborhood contains generational, vocational and other forms of difference, often more so than subcultural venues or art institutions, so a mini-FM station's "we" can include those outside one's familiar circles.

Artist and theorist Anna Friz's critical and creative engagement with radio has also influenced SkottegatenFM, especially Friz's proposal for resonant radio, a vital alternative to radiant radio.⁵ For radiant radio, symbolized by the familiar radio tower icon of a tall antenna sending out powerful electrical bolts, the stronger the signal the better. Radiant radio's signal is sent from one point to many listeners, from the center to the margins. This signal carries content other than the signal itself, and the fidelity of the message is the priority. "Communication" means the sender's signal has been accurately transferred to a predetermined listener, one likely in the sender's own image. And, within a radiant paradigm, humans buy, sell and claim ownership over the electromagnetic spectrum.

Friz elaborates how a resonant radio challenges and plays with these familiar parameters of radiant radio. Resonant radio, aspects of which can be found in independent and community radio stations, prioritizes dynamic local circulation and many to many forms of communication. Less concerned with signal strength and moving from center to margin, resonant radio is at home with fragile and temporary signals. The signal itself can be enough, no need for the signal to carry something else. Notably, an aim of resonant radio is not to overcome distance, which can be understood as difference, but, as Friz puts it, "to experience distance." Pushing this further, the sender and receiver need not be recognizable or even imaginable to each other. What then is communication in a resonant radio reframing? Who and what is radio for? How can humans collaborate with or be stewards of the electromagnetic spectrum? Looking to a variety of species for inspiration, Friz considers whales who echolocate with each other and narwhals whose pointy antenna is a sensitive tooth perceiving vibrations, a reminder that the listener and receiver are central and active. Like whale radio, Friz proposes that a resonant radio could be "immersive, palpable and effective, at play in an ocean of sonorous and sibilant waves that is an index of relationship both microscopic and cosmic in scale ..."⁶

One of the aims of SkottegatenFM has been to create and learn from a resonant approach to radio and to experience resonant communication and ways of being with self and others. Another aim has been to help neighborhood residents, including myself, immerse in a palpable local circuit and, as Kogawa describes, grow feelings of collectivity and conviviality.

Radio is often understood as a gap medium, given the opening in the circuit between receiver and sender. In the gap anything might happen whether materially or metaphorically; a listener, an atmosphere or energies may be affected by or affect the signals in ways one cannot predict or control. The gap is unfathomable and central to radio's evocation. The gap ensures that communication is precarious and thereby co-creative rather than passive. What happens to the sender-receiver model and to the evocative gap, I wondered, in a resonant approach to radio?

Photo by William Kudahl



SkottegatenFM

SCORE FOR MINI-FM STATION:

- + Set up a radio station for 3 months
- + Transmit everyday
- + Have another transmitter available to anyone who wants to do their own show from their home
- + Create ways for people to be in touch with the radio station (i.e. a station email address)

SkottegatenFM began as a text score for a temporary radio station that would weave in many points of transmission and prioritize local circulation and a fragile

and enveloping signal. The intended senders and listeners were neighborhood residents.

Spreading the word about SkottegatenFM was largely analogue: hand-drawn ink SkottegatenFM postcards, in keeping with the fragility of the signal. In Norwegian and English the postcard informed neighbors of the station and how they could tune in and access the weekly programming schedule. People could contact the station to borrow a transmitter or FM radio.⁷ In early February, 200 neighboring households received the hand-delivered postcards. A SkottegatenFM Instagram account soon had over 150 subscribers.

Even as resonant radio is more about the signal than content, SkottegatenFM leapt onto the signal in a spirit of conviviality, featuring a weekly roster of

4 Kogawa, Tetsuo, "Towards Polymorphous Radio" Retrieved May 30, 2021 from <http://anarchy.translocal.jp/non-japanese/radiorethink.html>

5 Anna Friz presented these ideas of resonant radio in her 2013 New Adventures in Sound Art (NAISA) keynote entitled "From Radio to Resonance."

6 Ibid.

7 https://naisa.ca/wp-content/audio/RWB13/6_Transx2013_may19_Keynote_AnnaFriz.mp3
SkottegatenFM had FM radios available for borrowing, given that few people have FM radios in Norway anymore. As of 2017, Norway does not support the FM spectrum for its national radio; it is the only country to have switched its national radio system to digital audio (DAB).

guests and programs each day at noon. Mondays were devoted to radio topics and included shows about a Brooklyn pirate radio map; the mysteries of AM radio; natural radio with Kate Donovan and attunement with Anastasia Khodyreva. Tuesday's broadcast topic was poetry and featured Emily Dickinson readings with Deb Polansky, conversations about Sami poet Nils-Anslak Valkeapää with Leah Beeferman and Gloria Anzaldúa with Sara Smith, plus readings of Lalla and Ilya Kaminsky's twitter feed. Wednesday was Norwegian language lessons featuring duets with google translate. Thursdays featured Ricarda Denzer's program "I heard my mind today at noon," which developed into a series of conversations about dream interpretation, daydreaming as thinking and sounding research. Friday had surreal traffic and weather reports with correspondents Sam Wood and Laura Wulf from afar, followed by William Kudahl's weekly show reading the same poem, Juliana Spahr's "This Connection of Everyone With Lungs." Saturday's show was about words, including conversations about words and threads with weaver and neighbor Tim Parry-Williams, who was also a SkottegatenFM listener, and with Osama Shaheen who helped launch a Norwegian-Arabic journal, Der. Neighbor Anna Watson joined on a Saturday to share very local history going back to Medieval times. Special transmissions were scheduled from time to time, including an entire afternoon of Maxine King's Bat Mitzvah and an evening lecture by my mother about Edvard Munch's "The Scream." Broadcasts were as long or as short as felt right. Over the three months of SkottegatenFM's existence, the station made approximately one hundred transmissions ranging from twenty minutes to five hours in length; an archive exists of all of these transmissions.

Some general practices emerged intuitively: If someone expressed excitement over SkottegatenFM, they were invited on air, or sometimes I invited people I knew or met during the three month period. Rather than interviewing people, the framing was conversation as co-creation. We would choose a topic together beforehand and then riff and free associate even if we barely knew each other. The words and ideas carried on SkottegatenFM's signal were themselves resonant: loose, responsive, drifty, playful, unprepared, embodied and immersive ways of thinking, speaking and being with others and with oneself.

Those who joined SkottegatenFM on air were based in Europe, North America and Bergen. Participants from the U.S. had to wake before 6:00am to

phone in and be on air at noon Norway-time, and people were almost always willing to do so, honored to be part of this. SkottegatenFM, which sometimes felt like a pretend platform made out of air, a micro transmitter radio station with few if any listeners at any given time in a country with no supported FM infrastructure, a kind of impossible signal amidst the ruins, had palpable momentum. Some people refer to SkottegatenFM now as if it is a "thing," curious when they can tune in again and asking whether they can produce a program. Bergen Kommune referred to SkottegatenFM in its recent funding support of a related project in Bergen.⁸ This kind of enacted performativity of SkottegatenFM has been one of the joyous discoveries in this project: how declaration, showing up and repetition can create a world we believe in, which in turn shapes us.

SkottegatenFM OUTDOOR EVENTS

Three outdoor events expanded SkottegatenFM's reach and realness. On March 20, SkottegatenFM was part of the annual Bergen experimental sound festival, Boreal. We set up the station under a tent below my apartment, the power and transmitter cords hanging out the third floor living room window down to the sidewalk. The day's programming included sound and music commissions celebrating spring's birthday and an Iranian New Year Nowruz celebration, including a reading of Hafiz poetry in Persian by Madihe Gharibi. Finn Tokvam, an Norwegian national radio (NRK) DJ who is a neighbor, played antique records on his hand-cranked record player on air. Another neighbor, Linda Børnes, set up a tent to sell her mother's hand-knit sweaters. Linda made waffles under her tent and gave them away to people who stopped by SkottegatenFM in the rain.

A second outdoor event, a Saturday afternoon street party with a live broadcast-talk by me followed by Simon Alejandro's DJ-ing, took place a month later, this one sponsored by Bergen Senter for Elektronisk Kunst (BEK). Who are you SkottegatenFM? posters popped up all over the neighborhood announcing the event. The day was gloriously sunny and warm. BEK set up a waffle tent. We needed electricity for the waffles, and a neighbor agreed to have the extension cord drop from his window; he later joined the party listening to a radio next to his ear. One of the DJ's record players broke, and the vintage clothing shop on the street lent us one. Linda Børnes set up her sweaters again, and



Photos by Nayara Leite

two other neighbors sold their wares creating a market place. Families set up blankets, kids danced on the cobblestones and interacted with the radios set up all over the street. While Simon played Zouk music, a woman came to me and said with fervor, "People have been lonely! Do you know how lonely people have been?" During my broadcast my microphone created feedback from all people on the street, so I shortened my forty-five minute talk about Tetsuo Kogawa and the poetry of the gap. Several kids stepped in to speak into the

microphone and be on the radio, excited as their voices traveled to the other side of the street.

SkottegatenFM hosted a third street event on the final evening of transmission on May 8. The days were getting longer, and it was again welcoming weather. Most of the attendees of this event were from the Bergen Art Academy where I had just taught a course in radio art. The evening broadcast began with a neighbor, poet Álvaro Seiça, performing his poems in English and Portuguese. Then Gregory Whitehead joined me

⁸ This was a grant submitted collaboratively for a Nordnes Community Radio Station. SkottegatenFM was not mentioned in the grant, only briefly referred to in my bio as one of the applicants.



Photo by Su Liao

on the phone from the U.S. for an improvised “communication is community” chant, and together we sang a lullaby for SkottegatenFM. Pauliina Pöllänen DJ-ed disco into the night. When she tried to finish her set, the crowd of dancers demanded more music. Drunk people walking on Skottegaten joined us, and a boy in the third floor window facing the street danced from his perch. We danced into the darkness until Pauliina finally ran out of songs. I went upstairs to the window-sill, said, “Good night, SkottegatenFM” and turned off the transmitter.

WHO ARE YOU SkottegatenFM?

SkottegatenFM is and was a convivial and resonant way of being together, activated through a local circuit. The signal emanated from the navel of a home, the dining room table. A faint and temporary signal, one declared and described more so than actually received, became a regular excuse to be physically together in

a pleasurable way in the public space of the street and in the non-physical space of radio transmissions. I believe the faint, precarious and temporary signal summons people in a way that is co-creative and asks for co-stewardship. People stepped in to complete the circuit. Notably, the circuit was not only local but folded in people from all over who joined on the line or responded to the station’s story as presented on social media. Here too, the weakness of the signal – intentionally without an internet stream for those far away to access – drew people into the station “family.”

As the weather became warmer, I placed cheap FM radios all over Skottegaten and nearby streets during transmission times. Su Liao helped by taking the radios for walks and videotaping them receiving signals during broadcast. Sometimes cats would sniff the radios placed on a doorstep or in planters in front of apartments. Sometimes the radios took a rest at the edge of the transmission’s reach by the fjord or visited the playground. I enjoyed the radios as animated objects, a kind of toy theater or ventriloquist performance. FM

radios, especially in Norway these days, are like toys: seemingly passé, retro, breakable, beloved, fascinating. Broadcasting without a view from the dining room table, I imagined the radios in the streets speaking to or surprising people passing by. Delight in the radios as objects has contributed to the multi-generational appeal of SkottegatenFM events.

One of the realizations of running SkottegatenFM for three months is that a mini-FM station is durational performance art.⁹ Within performance art one sets the terms of engagement, and SkottegatenFM’s terms, which emerged organically in the first weeks, were to treat interactions with others as a co-creative process. This approach was necessitated by the daily broadcast schedule, not having time to prepare a new show each day and was also inspired by Ricarda Denzer’s show “I heard my mind today at noon,” a riff on the poem “Mein Denken” by Monika Rink, and others, like Brandon LaBelle, who have invoked daydreaming in the context of listening. On SkottegatenFM, daydreaming involved listening and speaking. Whether broadcasting solo or with others I let go of preparing and made room for drifting, improvising and getting lost and found together, our own form of echolocation. I found this to be pleasurable and invited surprises and insights. In this relaxed space, sender and receiver blur, speaker and listener become more permeable.

Another quality of resonant radio is how we are carried by the signal. As Kogawa notes, being on air whether solo or with another, is a qualitatively different experience compared to not being on air. A heightened presence and intentionality comes from using a microphone and wearing headphones, both of which bring sounds very close to one’s body. Even more key is the possibility that someone/ something else may be tuning in. The heightened listening and speaking space of a radio station affected me as I broadcast each day at noon. I always discovered something new when I broadcast solo, even when I chose a topic moments before going on air. Being carried by SkottegatenFM’s radio waves invited me to think as a form of speaking, or to speak as a form of thinking, or to speak-think-write. I found I listened in a deeper way to myself and

to others on air and became deeply moved by words I read aloud on air, often holding back tears on Tuesday’s poetry shows.

An important context for SkottegatenFM is who and what constitutes the station’s possible audience: the local neighborhood.¹⁰ One aspect of this is real estate and its relationship to class, age, ethnic and racial demographics. In the past five years Nøstet has become an expensive area for renting and owning, including new condominium constructions on the edge of Puddefjorden.¹¹ Norway’s housing policies have encouraged ownership since the 1950s while also favoring public housing distributed throughout the city to some degree. Skottegaten has one municipally-owned apartment building directly opposite the building where I rent. The apartments are subsidized and designated for low-income tenants. Residents in the municipality-owned building seemed reluctant to be part of the radio station, even though I encouraged them to stop by during the street events. One resident, who kindly offered electrical power for us to run the waffle maker, stopped by at one of the street parties.

SkottegatenFM is on one level an integrative project, blurring boundaries, removing distances and smoothing out gaps between art and life, including art venue and private home; performance art and social life; interior and exterior spaces; neighbors, collaborators and audience members; art-making and researching. SkottegatenFM brought participants closer, introducing us to each other, weaving us into a shared experience. In these ways, SkottegatenFM has been about overcoming more so than experiencing distance.

But what about Friz’s beautiful proposition about a resonant radio inviting participants to actually experience rather than overcome distance? A resonant radio means listening for experiences of distance and the multiple forms and qualities of distance, whether spatial, temporal, species, cultural, linguistic, psychological or political, including refusal, avoidance and indifference. How important it is to be honest about difference rather than to erase difference. What are the experiences of distance within the nearness of SkottegatenFM?

9 In his essay “Towards Polymorphous Radio,” Tetsuo Kogawa has the same observation, that mini-FM station is best understood as performance art.
 10 Tom McEnaney ably demonstrates in *Acoustic Properties: Radio, Narrative, and the New Neighborhood of the Americas* that there is much to consider in terms of radio and neighborliness in the context of real estate and other national, including immigration, policies.
 11 Moving beyond a human focus, the neighborhood surrounding SkottegatenFM includes the context of other species’ habitats. For instance the sea inlet Puddefjorden, which is paved with concrete to facilitate commercial traffic, affects local sea life. Sea and land birds are lively visual and sonic members of the Nøstet neighborhood.

The municipality-owned building residents on Skottegaten are my closest neighbors; our windows peer into each other across the street, and I believe they could see the station in my dining room. Earlier in the winter before the radio station began, I danced beside the window with two boys in one of the apartments, each to our own music as they shone a flashlight on me and I on them. Still, the residents in this building kept their distance from SkottegatenFM, though perhaps these relationships need more time.

So too, even as a second transmitter was available, my dream of roving points of transmission was not realized in the three months of SkottegatenFM's existence. In the third month I actively encouraged neighbors to borrow the transmitter and had one interested taker, the national radio DJ Finn Tokvam, whose job then became too busy. As I write this, I see the joke: national (radiant) radio interceded just as SkottegatenFM approached its dream of many to many transmission.

Anna Friz has defined resonant radio as inviting experiences of distance, and I again wonder what distance means and how distance connects to relationality. What does the space between us sound like, whoever us is? Is distance another word for the gap? What does it mean to experience distance? When is distance separation? I think of my old Zen teacher Roshi Eve Marko who said the only sin is separation. What role does distance have in conviviality and community-building, which have been central to SkottegatenFM? Radio art and mini-FM become practices for asking these rich questions and for better understanding a poetics and politics of relationality, including recognizing ways "we" are one and also different. To honor distance rather than to overcome it ...

As a practice, I wonder if efforts to overcome distance can simultaneously facilitate experiences of

distance and difference. I sense Gloria Anzaldúa's wisdom in the mix when she reminds us of the seemingly paradoxical path of a two-way movement, a simultaneous drawing in and sending out, "a going deep into the self and an expanding out into the world ..." Anzaldúa's celebrated phrase *el mundo zurdo* connotes a path of a two-way movement that can lead to individual and social repair, "a simultaneous recreation of the self and reconstruction of society."¹² For Anzaldúa, this two-way movement is how we recreate the world as more life-affirming, reconciling what is with what should be, understanding that what is most near and intimate is also far-reaching and political. This reparative bi-directional path reminds me of the paradox that when sounding, one listens more deeply and vice versa. I believe a resonant radio is a path of a two-way movement: simultaneously moving inward and outward, near and far, into the familiar and the unfamiliar. I hope to consider the two-way movement more in future radio art projects.

To create a radio station is to create a world with terms of engagement, guidelines for communing. SkottegatenFM is a platform I initiated even as it creates me, and I cannot know or control the full circuit of communications or when they begin or end. Radio's two-way movement is an ongoing revelation, one I recall, forget and recall again. I remember a story a neighbor shared of her experience during SkottegatenFM's final transmission party: she sat on the stoop of the vintage clothing shop, a radio near her broadcasting a voice on the line from the US as well as my voice coming from the opposite side of the street speaking into the microphone. She felt the enchantment and simple pleasure of voices mingling near and far in the radio, into the ear, onto the street. What is radio for? What is communication? Shall we echolocate and enjoy the pure signal? I'm here! You are there! Do we need any more?

12 Anzaldúa, Gloria. *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader*, p.49.

Photo by Su Liao

