

## Towards a theory of praxis. Audiobox: traces of a controversial path

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"A man walking in a field ran into a tiger: he ran away followed by the tiger. When he arrived at a precipice, he grasped the root of a wild vine and let himself hang beyond the edge. The tiger sniffed him from the top. Trembling with fear, the man looked down, where deep in the abyss another tiger was waiting to devour him. Only the vine was holding him. Two mice, one white and one black, started gnawing the vine. The man saw a beautiful strawberry just close to him. Holding himself with just one hand, with the other one he picked the strawberry up, it was so sweet!" (A Zen story)

The recent analysis and market research made on the offer and the use of the radiophony in the 90s take us to just one conclusion: the radio -private and public- "must select the audience and address to it through a targeted communication with no uncertainty. The radio is a targeted mean and any compromise to this basic assumption represents a communication mistake and takes out of the market". Changing the conclusion into introduction, the new RAI general manager goes further and declares with entrepreneurial confidence that "the radio is the business of the future".

It is not my intention to bring forward the realism, the far-sightedness or the prophetic qualities of the apostles of this doctrine; or to start a comparison between a generalistic radio and a thematic radio. I am prevented to do it not only by the subject of my participation to the *L'immagine leggera*, but by time, room and will, mainly. This start simply allows me to open a brief speech on Audiobox -the radio research space created by myself many years ago-, starting from the end, I mean from its current destiny or from its imminent fate. Actually, when you will read this essay Audiobox could exist no more. It would not be the end of the world, everybody would survive, because as the Ecclesiastes says, "there is a time for the research and a time for the abandonment". Anyway, it takes a turn for the worse. Actually, a thematic radio-public or private would never dedicate a network or some of an important programme schedule to the production and broadcasting of an experimental or free research programme, which inexorably "takes out of the market", and which is free for definition, "because it clears your mind" On the other hand, a relatively generalistic radio (and I fear that a public radio has to be generalistic unless it has many channels, Internet apart) less and less tolerates, also in the so-called "cultural" network, a programme which cannot be included in well-known codes and in codified genres, not referable to the serial nature, or associable to the standards of size, time, rhythm and sound; a free area which perhaps cannot be governed because of the kind of the research, the authors and route mates, as it is far from the important circles, the exchange of favours, the escape from the risks, the glorification of what exists. Moreover, people are afraid of the word "experimentation", which is always brought forward on the aesthetic, media and philosophical level, and not only by us. When Moro died in 1978 and along with the reiterated request "not to echo the BR (the Red Brigades) message", the atmosphere of freedom/liberation changed, an atmosphere which had characterized the eventful years of terrorism, and which had already faced the other request not to encourage the "opposed extremisms". "People" are not protagonist anymore, mistrust and fear increase, the control is stronger. The 80s are characterized by a falling back into the private sphere, the falling down of solidarity, a going back to the escape: a jolly fellow will call it "Reagan edonism".

In this atmosphere, between 1978 and 1979, "Fonosfera segments, paths and sound dynamics in a workshop proposal by Armando Adolgo and Pinotto Fava" was started, a programme which anticipated Audiobox and was broadcasted every fifteen days on Thursday, alternating every week with "I Pensieri di King Kong" (King Kong's thoughts) made by the same authors. The politics of streets and squares has moved towards the new places of the research, the language (subversive even when it sounds evasive) is the source and the landing of the new protest. "Fonosfera" represents, in some respects, the development of the radio experimentation in the 60s and 70s, mainly committed to artists and operators from the theatre. But in some other respects it breaks its continuity with new needs and new existential and expressive actions. The "theatrical reason" of the radiodrama is questioned, moving away from this genre

as well as from a "specific" radio and suggesting a new protagonism linked to others. The radio looks at the intercodes; the behaviours, the practices and the languages of the historical European avant-gardes starting from the Futurism are recuperated. Relationships, exchanges and cooperations are established with the neo avant-gardes as well as with all the esthetical, synesthetical, media and political fields: strip, comics, fanzine, aggressive music, videoart, experimental cinema, performance, etc. The theatre was not the only genre and not even the major reference, but just one of the many. When I recall the artists who for many years animated our "sound dynamics" with unique works, I find out that theatre people were practically absent. Authors and executors of the sound works were, among the others, Alberto Grifi, Giordano Falzoni, Christina Kubisch, Walter Branchi, Michela Mollia, Arrigo Lora Totino, Teresa De Santis, Vittore Baroni, Corrado Costa, Rod Summers, Vittorio Gelmetti, Walter Ruttmann, Lamberta Pignotti, Giuliano Zosi, etc. Artists of the visual were also present, and not by chance, such as Ferruccio Ascari, Luca Patella, Gianfranco Baruchello, Valerio Mioglio; Falzoni and Pignotti themselves worked mainly on painting, graphics and visual-word poetry. If "Fonosfera" represented the working work-shop (all the works were made in Via Asiago by an usually stable team using an inadequate equipment), "I Pensieri di King Kong" (King Kong's thoughts) a pointillist programme, in fits and starts, oscillating between information and small bits of creative material -intended to represent the reality of the parallel worlds from the outside: the workshops experimented new languages taken from comics and satirical magazines, from the recycling of information and from the new TV technologies, from both the "high" and "low" quality music. From Fonosfera and King Kong the passage to Audiobox is very easy. It is a programme in which Armando Adalgiso worked very actively, mainly planning an international festival about the sound research, which we will talk about later on. Actually, the two older programmes were included in two of the four spaces which Audiobox could use up to '94 Fonosfera kept this title and was still broadcasted on Thursdays; the I Pensieri di King Kong's structure was used in the new live broadcast Audiobox (about 50 minutes of fast communication, encounters, fragments of shows, small performances) which started in Rome with Sergio Messina and then moved to Naples where stayed for about nine years, up to the last broadcast, March 9 1994. Audiobox Diretta involved many artists, ensemble, musical and political collectives, experts, producers and organizers; many different creative events were held, recorded or live with an audience. Important names come back to my mind such as Giuseppe Rocca, Lamberto Lambertini, Antonio Neiwiller, Roberto Paci Dalò, Isabella Bordoni, Enrico Frattaroli, Gianni Celati, Gabriele Frasca, Pier Luigi Castellano, Mario Martone, Peter Gordon, Francis Bebey, Bisca, Daniele Sepe.

Thinking back, retrospectively and globally, on an adventure lasted about twenty years in an extraneous environment, silent or hostile, provokes a compression, a squashing of tensions, emotions, feelings (as well as changes, innovations, sudden change of track) which have marked its history, the unpredictable and not linear progress. Then, it is not easy to identify the directions and the reasons -others will say the theoretical priorities- which have inspired and defined the activity of Audiobox. Actually, many directions and reasons can be identified. The significant first and then the meaning.

The crossing of the genres. The multicode and the intercode. The forms and the languages of advertisement. The new technologies, the multimediality. The recycling of materials. The changes, wrong-footings, heading offs up to the detournement. The "sentimental" choice of team and authors.

The effort, finally, to provoke a new imagination and a new imagery. Subjects we will have the chance to discuss again. But we have not tried to prejudicially build an overall theoretical structure. And actually "theories have been made just to die in the war of the time... And in the same way no living age is the result of a theory: first of all, it is a game, a conflict, a journey..." (Guy Debord). Well, may be this will help us to find out the meaning of a movement, of a praxis. When I am forced to choose, with hindsight, the pulsions and the needs which more than everything else have marked our path toward a dramaturgy of listening, I tend to privilege those which follow. 1 The proceeding than the reaching of the goal. ("Every road which is followed up to the end, takes you nowhere. Climb up a mountain just a little bit to see if it is a mountain.

From the top you could not distinguish if it is a mountain". 2. Starting from the loss of the centre the nomadism, the confusion, the driftage ("We I did not look for the formula in the books but. in the wanderings. It was a fast driftage, in which nothing was like it was the day before and which never stopped"). 3. The agreement with the science and then with the nature ("In 1974 even if very few colleagues knew it, Feigenbaum was working on an important problem: the chaos". "The new condition of the artist... refers to the molecular biology to the geology, to the order/disorder in a physical universe to be explored. We look for an ecology of the mind in the fantastic silence of Matera). 4. The mechanism of attraction/seduction ("Surprising encounters. Dangerous...enchantments... nothing lacked... did we reach the goal of our research at least? We must think that we have seen it briefly at least because... starting from that moment we possessed a strange power of seduction..."). 5. The obliquity and the transverseness of the sound, ("The voice can easily flow intact/ through the oblique holes which are in the things but: this/ is not possible for the visual images born to be divided/ if in straight holes they do not open their passage..."). 6. The silence ("Silence!/ Cry of cicadas/ penetrates the rocks". "Of the sonorous image... through, the silence, specular to the great uproar, container and measure of everything..."). 7. The fight and the game ("Resist means exist". "The disciple said: -Master, we need a verse-. With the roar of a triumphant lion , Hoshin cried: -Kaa!- and died"). The encounter of these elements, in a continuous and circular movement, made possible the activation of energy circuits and then the production of many programmes. Audiobox has not only mediated and spread things: it has organized as well as made a lot of things. Sabina Sacchi's arrival (who with Paola Scalericio and then Antonella Bottini has given energy to our work, each of them in a personal way, expressing the female part of the hermaphrodite Audiobox) coincides with the first planning and organizational phase of the International Festival of Sound Experimentation which was made in 1984 in Cosenza (Arcavacata, more precisely) in collaboration with the University of Calabria. The reasons which took us towards this first phase were initially: give more space to the radio as a protagonist compared to the more powerful and enthralling TV using its residuality in addition to its "difference", which allowed it to captivate and aggregate people right where the market pressure was less aggressive and violent; meet and cultivate a young audience beginning with students; look for likes, beyond the national border, starting from Europe to establish a direct contact: give an external and "physical" visibility to the relationship between the radio and the new reality (language, media and perception) which worked within the artistic environment and sustained the emergent forms; carry out in a more continuous and firm way the collaboration, exchange and coproduction, started since a long time, with not radiophonic institutions and institutional boards. The relationship between physical body/ether and materiality/immateriality, would acquire a more clear meaning and sense later on -showing its radio equipment off- and would give a stronger image of Matera Festival, an important place and the icon of the material culture as well as of the history, and in the same time abstract, alien and timeless entity. The Festival had five editions: in '84 and '85 in Cosenza, in '86, '88 and '90 in Matera; in '86 was sponsored by EBU/UER (Broadcasting European Union). These are the subjects of each edition: "The sound, the radio, the new techniques, the intercode, ("Since generals do not die on horse anymore, painters are not obliged to die in front of their easel"); "The radio and the sound art, towards a cartography of silence (may the word be visible, black"... "the eye pierces the silence and the ear which is silence is pierced by the sound"); "The radiophonic time and the small size" ("short stories, mini, shows, slogans, jingles, tunes, clips, shorts, spots, blitzs... How much can 1' radiophonic space hold and how long does it last?"); "The radio and the other media, there/back, Inside/Outside" ("multidirectional situations and multiple paths towards the new theatre, the performance, the TV the LP and the CD, the scientific workshop, the urban and extral urban spaces and vice versa"); "From the form of places to the forms of sound" ("Inside the physical space of the landscape, the sound communication... recuperates the original elements of language... provokes the state of ecstasy contemplation and trance vertigos... an ecology of the mind with energy discharges and exchanges..."). From '84 up to '90 the most advanced research production of radio institutions was listened, seen and followed at the Audiobox festival. It was made in spectacular, audiovisual, performative and installation forms (in university classrooms, museums, outdoor

spaces, caves, rural churches), or just listened, outdoors and indoors or on the headphones with a work selection made by the audience/spectators themselves. Many works were live shown and listened and were broadcasted in the RF Audiobox spaces, some performances were also live broadcasted. I cannot list all the authors, titles and executors/actors, but I want to mention the participation of Lawrence "Butch" Morris, Paolo Fresu, Anecchino/Rendine, Helen Thorington, Arsenije Jovanovic, Koine, Alvin Curran, Radio Subcom, which gave a strong sound impact and a complex technical-formal structure. Exciting, may be memorable, was "Dumb tuff" an ambitious project by Alvin Curran: Matera people voices, two instrumental quartets placed up and a local aggressive rock band, electronic effects and live sampling stroke the audience placed backwards, into a large tuff cave 120 mt long and 40 mt large with natural quadraphonics which created poignant evanescences, fugues, runs and sound superimposings. In this extraordinary container "Risultanze" by Paolo Fresu was also planned and made.

In '86 in Florence within the EBU Ars Acustica, an international committee was created from the festival workshops and analysis which put together the experimentation sectors of the public European radios (with correspondents in Australia and USA) and linked and coordinated all the activities. In time it organized meetings, radio festivals and new media, annual programme exchanges, coproductions. It is strange but sensible the fact it was originally a filiation of the already existing radio-theatre, which struggled and still struggles in a crisis of ideas and operativity, alternating fits of pride and discouragement for the sad time we live in.

In many other occasions Audiobox moved from the studios to outdoor spaces, through the cooperations with radio-TV, cultural artistic, musical institutions, museums and galleries; but above all with associations, groups, multipurpose spaces folk schools, producers and independent radios, social centres, etc. Maybe the presentation of about ten works of Fonosfera already in a multimedia way, -to the GNAM in Rome in '80 represented the first occasion. Many others followed: Pavia, Turin, Naples, Clusone, Ferrara, Ruvo di Puglia, Bologna, Bari, Frankfurt, Cologne, Madrid, Arles, London, Ragusa, Rimini, Palermo, Rome, Linz...mAnd it also visited Oppido Lucano, in Potenza province, where there is Demetrio Stratos Square with a spring (beautiful!). An since '86 LPs and CDs have been produced, often a coproduction with works broadcasted by Audiobox and made by Eugenio Colombo, Steve Lacy, Roberto Laneri, Arturo Anecchino and Sergio Rendine, Charlie Morrow, Alvin Curran, Roberto Paci Dalò, Paolo Modugno, Franco Fabbri, Tziano Tononi, Jon Rose, Laboratorio Musica e Immagine. Alvin Curran is a leading figure in the variegated Audiobox panorama not only for the quality of his works and performances, but also for his being present in all the most important events and international initiatives and most of all for the innovative imprint of his radio projects. Two of them in particular marked a turning point in the "production", management and fruition methods of the medium itself. These are "A piece for peace" in '85 (Italian Prize winner, made for the European Year of the Music) and "Crystal Psalms" in '88 (in many occasions listened all over the world and considered as an unique work of its kind), two coproductions made with several European radio institutions. I just want to talk briefly about the second one, which dilates and develops the intuitions of the first one. Occasion and source of inspiration for "Crystal Psalms" was the commemoration of the Krystallnacht when the massacre of the Jewish people by the Nazi regime started, in the night between 9 and 10 November 1938. Simultaneously, from seven different cities (Rome, Frankfurt, Berlin, Copenhagen, Vienna, Paris, Hilversum) seven vocal and instrumental groups, plus some soloists play the scores which had been previously distributed for the rehearsals. In the central direction in Rome -which also broadcasts prerecorded tapes with voices from different places and cities- converge the signals picked up indoors and outdoors by the many radio stations of the participating institutions, and immediately mixed by Curran and his Roman technicians and broadcasted to the reception centres of the seven broadcasting stations and then listened live in six nations. Actually, each music performance listened live by the audience is a autonomous concert in its compositive structure; but the result is a "concert in the concerts" which goes through a single console. Some short considerations. There is a complex design and organization. The whole workshop is involved: graphic schemes, writing, composition, elaboration, rehearsals The simultaneous live broadcast ensures the fastest immediacy. Each executor thinks at his score, but everybody is

mentally in communication with the others. The audience has the chance to choose how listen to the music, if outdoors at the concert place or on the radio. You are in many places and nowhere. Time unifies what space divides. And finally, the work is not conceived only for the radio, actually it represents the radio itself. That makes Rudolf Arnheim happy, a great radio and cinema theorist, as it realizes his dream of an universal radio embrace. Within the radiodrama two projects made I between '88 and '89 were particularly important, made by Carlo Infante: the cycles "Teatri d'ascolto" (6 works) and "La scena invisibile" (16), in which the best of the theatre (above all the Italian theatre) was shown, through targeted radiophonic projects or on the radio: Koine, Toni Servillo and Enzo Moscato, Teatro delle Briciole, Fiat Teatro Settimo, Giorgio Barberio Corsetti, Giacomo Verde and Banda Magnetica, Mario Martone and Peter Gordon, Giovanna Marini and Thierry Salmon, etc. In Teatri d'ascolto, authors, producers and groups prerecorded dramaturgically autonomous tapes, strongly evocative in the sound image. The radiodrama tapes were then played in theatres, halls or open spaces merging and interacting with parts (dialogues, music, effects) written and ideated right for that stage situation. The result was two levels of perception/fruition, long distance and length echoes: one of the radio listening and one of the theatre viewing/listening. Moreover the prerecorded tape was broadcasted simultaneously with the show, the theatre performance, and it was perceived -by the audience as well as by the authors- as a live show, like a voice from the radio which was switched on in the action place, right when the transmission was starting. This process, both sophisticated and warm, was strongly based on oscillations, such as ether/body, visible/invisible, material/immaterial, real/virtual. Actually, it was also based on other oppositions/encounters which can easily be found in radio broadcasting when it does not flatten its own languages on the linear narration or on the present of the media tribality: flux/suspension, undertone/concentration, hooliganism/meditation, trash/sublime, moment/infinity

In '94 arrives Pino Saulo who was already working at the RAI but who I helped to quit an ungrateful job associated to the programme direction. Armando Adolgo had already gone away from both Audiobox and RAI tour-court. Pino Saulo introduced new ideas and involved new people working above all in the experimental music field -he was also capable of extra and metamusical participation- and in particular in that kind of music which can be defined as "extracultured" or heterodox, which actually is more cultivated than that kind of music which is labelled as cultured for repetition compulsion or corporative defence: Evan Parker (not a new figure in Audiobox, many performances, excellent that one made with Curran), the Blegvad-Cutler-Greaves trio, Tm Hodgkinson, Dagmar Krause, Ossatura, Otomo Yoshihide, Fomoflo, Ned Rothenberg, Zu, Musica Elettronica Viva and Italian Instabile Orchestra (two recurrences after a long time), Abaoaqu (thirty musicians divided in eight or nine groups playing for 7' each), Il Gruppo Romano Free Jazz, Stefano Maltese, Pasquale Innarella, Mike Cooper, N.o.r.m.a., Lamusim, Giorgio Occhipinti, Gianni Gebbia, What we live, Takla Makan, Fraili, Rudiger Karl, Mistress, Mauro Orselli, etc., many of them working live in Via Asiago studios. Very good are the programmes dedicated to Coltrane and in particular to his last period, a radiophonic work as well as critical ordering: musicians, critics, audience, for a workshop, a live concert, three broadcasts, a CD with Tiziano Toroni and other brilliant interpreters ("Coltrane's infinity train"). All that was organized along with "Musica Jazz" magazine, which also published the texts of the workshop. To Pino Saulo is also due the first imprint of "Valvole", a way of acting on the radio as well as a programme made of splinters, fragments, media (radio, cinema, TV press) wastes, taking them from different archives including that one of the knocked-about Audiobox. This idea is not original, beginning from the choice of an unifying subject which each time has to "orient the disorientation". But new is the big variety of the sources and then the expressive levels and codes, the sudden time and cultural changes, the lack of a link with the current events which characterize other paths of electronic flux (such as "Blob"). I want to conclude my excursion with two collective adventures "Horizontal Radio" (1995) and "Rivers and bridges" (1996), two huge multimedia machines made by about twenty Rf broadcasting stations scattered around the world which gave different contributions -big and small. They have been made by the group "Ars Acustica" in a teamwork with "Ars Electronica" from Linz. Complex structures of mental bridges over the rivers of planetary communication, veins of the wired world in the attempt to find out

like minded emigrants who share the mirage of an anarchic radio which prefers hybridization, which does not cancel what is different and pushes back what is exclusive and superior. Thousand and thousand of things have happened in the cities, fields, rivers, museums, in front of the computer. How many instruments, how many techniques, how many media have been used? You know it: radio, telephone, TV, computer, Internet And before finishing I want to mention Debord again: "A long time ago the strategist Tsun Tse said that advantage and risk are both related to the strategy... Contrary to the imaginings of history spectators, when they try to play the strategists on Sirio, the most sublime theory will never guarantee the event, and actually is always the event itself which proves the theory Then, it is important to risk and pay cash to see what happens." With great pleasure I want to mention (mnemonic exercises are almost always good) the people who more than others have tried to live close to me for long or very long periods, building the magnetic, ambiguous, changeable, mutant and monstrous body of Audiobox. They are, besides the already mentioned Adolgiso, Scalercio, Sacchi, Bottini and Saulo: Enrico Zummo, Sergio Messina, Claudio Grimaldi, Guido Piccoli, Giacomo Forte, Canio Loguercio, Gabriele Frasca, Emiliano Li Castro, Silvana Matarazzo, Nicola Catalano, Barbara Ambrosini, Roberto Bernardi, Sergio Chistolini, Marco Diodato, Valerio Rivelli, Francesco Sergi, Gianni My, Umberto Ammendola, Gigi Amore, Luigi Becchimanzi, Ennio Rossi, Rosario Barbaraci, Ciro Lutricuso. To the many others I beg their pardon.