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For about 6 months in 2008 there was a mysterious sound in my house. No matter how we tried, we could not locate the source of a periodic buzzing that would quickly arrive and then vanish. I noticed it more during the daytime, when the house was still. It sounded like some kind of small motor. But for a while I even thought it was our back screen-door, blowing open with the wind. It was disquieting.

The mystery was solved after I waited in the right room long enough to hear and locate the source. It was coming from a wardrobe in my children's bedroom where we store extra toys. As I opened the wardrobe, I saw the wheels of an overturned radio-controlled truck quickly spinning, as two short bursts of control-signal were received. I turned the truck off, and the noise ceased to haunt the house. What caused these periodic bursts, I can only hypothesize—but I imagine that radio frequencies moving through my home are occasionally in the right range in terms of Hertz to cause the truck to respond. I have also noticed that incoming cell-phone calls produce a short beeping/clicking sound from nearby stereo systems (such as computer speakers). The sound precedes the ring-tone,

introducing it, and revealing the radiophonic nature of the communication about to take place.

“Active Radio” is the unifying thread in this issue of *Wi*. It is meant to disrupt the passive way we often consider radio technology—as a form of mass media—with most of us on the receiving end of radiophonic broadcasts. While wireless technologies have continued to proliferate throughout the 20th and 21st century, “radio” as a concept is most often associated with the act of tuning into a radio broadcast. But what is the state of radio as an active force within sound art and the history of electronic sound recording? To what other concepts can “active radio” be linked—such as “mobility”? What have we forgotten about the origins of radio, and the different ways the technology has been employed as a practice? What links early wireless telegraphy with remote controlled toys, micro radio, electronic music, portable recording, soundscape studies and alchemy? These and other questions provide a network of considerations out of which articles collected in this volume can be read—as well as listened to, since many of the contributions also include audio examples as well as spectacular digital images.

The concept of active radio comes from Jean Laurendeau’s french-language biography of Maurice Martenot—inventor of les Ondes Martenot. This early electronic musical instrument (1928) produces its sound through the interaction of two radio waves. The Theremin (1919) uses the same mechanism to create its fundamental sound. These instruments are key technologies for 3 of the 5 papers in this issue—in part because they were collected under the auspices of a research project with two titles: “Radio Activités: à la recherche des Ondes Musicales,” and “From Audion Tubes to ‘The Girl Who Never Finished Her Music Lessons’: a genealogical history of the Theremin, Ondes Martenot

and Hammond Organ.” These two descriptions are indicative of the bilingual nature of the research and research group, and also reference the variety of the concepts and technologies we are working with. The project website is <http://collectingdust.org>.

The “Active Radio” edition of *Wi* begins with an essay by Anna Friz, Radio as Instrument, in which she “considers the relations of proximity, distance, interference, and feedback” invoked in her title along with “the potential for the notions ‘radio’ and ‘instrument’ to mutually reinforce or subvert one another”. Friz discusses the Theremin extensively, as an early example of a different kind of radio, one that employs the interaction of a body with an electrical circuit to create radiophonic feedback that is transformed into sound. Friz describes her own work, as well as the contributions of Tetsuo Kogawa and other radio artists who focus on “the human scale of radiophony, such that bodily and electro-magnetic gestures have audible consequences.”

Caroline Martel’s contribution, Maurice Martenot, alchimiste de l’électricité also explores the material dimensions of radio technology employed in musical instrument design. Alchemy’s articulation of natural philosophy with spiritualism and art is adopted as a model, for Martel, in unraveling the mystery of les Ondes Martenot, along with the life and motivations of its inventor, Maurice Martenot. The Ondes is one of history’s most successful electronic instruments in terms of “classical” music, with many scores written for it by famous composers such as Olivier Messiaen. It has also been used in countless film soundtracks since the early days of cinema. It is nevertheless an obscure musical reference for many people (the Theremin being much more commonly known). Relying on abundant original research conducted for her forthcoming documentary on the Martenot (*Le Chant Des Ondes*), Martel’s discussion reveals an important truth

about active radio—that it transforms the player as much as the material played. “Une des conditions du procédé alchimique en effet est la transformation non pas que de la matière, mais également de celui qui capture l’élément rédempteur au sein du chaos primordial”. Martenot’s goal was as much the transformation of the human spirit as it was making radio waves into music. His life-long commitment to developing “la méthode Martenot,” a form of musical pedagogy based in relaxation, creativity and enjoyment, stands as testimony to this fact.

In *The Fourth Track: Re-visiting the Cassette-Based Portastudio*, Sam Thulin offers an enthusiastic examination of “the cassette-based multi-track recorder as an obsolete technology, an articulation of mobility and sound-recording, and a site for creative possibilities.” His chosen device, the Tascam 464 Portastudio not only represents an important semantic innovation (being that its moniker brought the concepts of “portability” and “studio” together for the first time), it can also be understood as an evolved form of “transistor radio” technology in terms of its “miniaturization” through the use of non-vacuum tube amplification circuitry for multitrack audio recording. Thulin’s study explores new creative uses of the Portastudio—practices such as tape looping, reverse playback and additive layering. The project, in revealing new potential for this obsolete technology, calls into question the processes by which concepts such as “portability” are attributed to technologies that are then eclipsed by exciting, new gadgets. The relationships between artistic intent, forgotten media, the pace of technological change and the aesthetics of electronic composition are stretched and made manifest through this Heideggerian research-creation contribution.

In my own paper, *Radio Activity: Articulating the Theremin, Ondes Martenot and Hammond Organ* I sound-off on the limitations of narratives of technological “progress” in understanding the histories of different electronic musical instruments (such as the three mentioned in my title), and in particular the notion of the “democratizing” power of new devices. Sound technologies are always negotiations in terms of the underlying social values they either uphold and/or bring into strong relief through their contradiction. Consideration of the state of radio technology in the 1920s and 30s in terms of the new horizons forecast for its future can provide insight into how determinist statements around the unlimited promise of contemporary digital sound technologies in 2009 smack of sales-pitches more than sound arguments.

The issue closes with Kristen Roos’ short piece, the micro radio project — a description of his ongoing audio art project of the same name. This “radiophonic work” involves the creation of “musical sculptures” through small-scale radio broadcasts featuring field recordings of the broadcast sites themselves, sent to an assortment of transistor radios. Roos creates ephemeral moments through these transmissions—aural experiences that mirror “the montage we create with our minds on a daily basis” and which are reminiscent of the soundscape work of Canadians Andra McCartney or Hildegard Westerkamp, in addition to the influences he mentions, such as William Burroughs, Bertolt Brecht, Tetsuo Kogawa and Marcel Duchamp.

While presenting an earlier version of my paper at a conference in Vancouver this summer, I was surprised to find a vinyl re-issue of the 1975 Kraftwerk album *Radio-Activity* at a local record store while shopping. I had never heard of the record, having thought myself rather original for using the play on words as a title for my essay. The

chorus on the title track proved also to have anticipated the theme of this edition of *Wi* by 24 years:

Radioactivity, Is in the air for you and me

Radioactivity, Discovered by Madame Curie

Radioactivity, Tune in to the melody

Radioactivity, Is in the air for you and me

Radio waves are undulating all around us. “Tune in to the melody” is about active over passive participation in radiophonic circuits. It’s about recognizing that we are playing the radio when using mobile communications technologies, electronic musical instruments and/or remote-controlled children’s toys. “Radioactivity, is in the air for you and me”. It is disquieting. As it should be.

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