

From 1976 to 1979, *Close Radio* was broadcast on KPFK in Los Angeles. For a short time each week, *Close Radio* gave control of the airwaves to artists. One word describes the variety of programs over its four-year history: experimental—in the best sense of the word. In July 2007, the Getty Research Institute presented a panel discussion with three of *Close Radio*'s organizers—artists John Duncan (who along with Neil Goldstein was the co-founder), Paul McCarthy and Nancy Buchanan. (Another organizer was Linda Frye Burnham.) Also on the panel was Paul Vangelisti who, as cultural affairs director at KPFK from 1974 to 1982, both oversaw and supported the often mischievous and consistently inventive *Close Radio*. (Vangelisti was also the founding chair of the graduate writing program at Otis College of Art and Design.) Moderated by Getty Curator Glenn Phillips, the recent discussion ranged from humorous to nostalgic, passionate to political.

Vangelisti provided an overview of a typical broadcast day on KPFK during his tenure. In addition to *Close Radio*, the station served up an impressive variety of music styles, political perspectives and cultural offerings not entirely unheard of today—public radio remains and there are still at least a few alternative stations—but this wide range is increasingly less common. The steady takeover of the free press by large corporations is daunting for any number of reasons, not least the gradual disappearance of diverse, exploratory and anti-establishment programming heard on the likes of *Close Radio*. But there is something else at play that warrants deeper examination: If all the practical limitations were removed, would this kind of program be possible today? The immediate response is to look to the Internet where, in fact, it is not only possible to create a similar program, but thanks to McCarthy's careful preservation of the archives and, more recently, meticulous archiving by the Getty Research Institute even these programs are now available at: [http://www.getty.edu/art/exhibitions/evidence\\_movement/close\\_radio.html](http://www.getty.edu/art/exhibitions/evidence_movement/close_radio.html).

So, while it appears that there is a system in place whereby artists, or anyone who wants to, can take over the airwaves—now cyberwaves—the democratic and experimental process that makes *Close Radio* so interesting doesn't seem to be happening currently, in part due to the immensity of the Internet. Certainly, somewhere in this vast reservoir of information, artists are rebelling against the norm, but Internet sites are generally created and visited by and for like-minded subgroups; unlike radio, it is less likely that someone not looking for a particular kind of content would stumble upon a site.

Perhaps most importantly, the power dynamic has changed. Shortly into the panel discussion, Duncan aptly and impishly described the founders' philosophy by saying, "We were told we had to respect the voice of authority of professional radio and we decided, no way, there's no way we're going to do that." Vangelisti, a poet and writer himself, backed this up by explaining that he, as the voice of authority in that context, had a lot of explaining to do each week. Even rebellion cannot exist in a vacuum; the "against the grain" mentality that defined *Close Radio* would be hard-pressed to find a rule to buck up against in the wild west of the Internet. The final program of *Close Radio* is a fine example of the conflict that comes up when considering the potential of a public program like this one today. Aired on March 21, 1979, *Send Me Your Money* featured Chris Burden repeat-

edly asking listeners to send checks to his address. As Vangelisti explains it, Burden's program broke federal FCC laws that prohibit individuals from soliciting money for their own use. And, though the artist knew this ahead of time and began the nearly hour-long program by asking listeners to *imagine* sending him money, his enthusiasm quickly moved from abstract idea to clear solicitation. Requests for funding on radio programs (although not for individual use) are now standard fare, which makes Burden's program all the more prescient and interesting. But at the time, *Send Me Your Money* was the last straw. Following it, *Close Radio* was taken off the air.

Not surprisingly, as public radio grows larger and more bureaucratic within a very litigious society, on-air experimentation grows less frequent. And yet, in comparison to corporate-owned media, public broadcasting remains something of a last frontier. So why aren't artists taking over public radio or television or the Internet in the same way now?

During the panel Buchanan observed that, "What was interesting to me about *Close Radio* was the variety of programs that were done." Throughout the discussion, clips from different shows were played and indeed the diversity and ingenuity is palpable. While an overview certainly cannot encapsulate each program, *Close Radio* can be loosely grouped into certain categories: shows about memory or personal anecdote, others that deal with language play or sound collage, experiments with meditation and psychology, and (generally political) creative soapboxes. Buchanan continued to say, "the impulse to resist art as commodity is practically impossible now." A handful of programs included invitations to random members of the public to either call in or to take over the show. This type of request directly relates to the phenomenon of so-called reality television and to the popularity of Internet sites like YouTube or Myspace. In some ways, *Close Radio* programs such as McCarthy's *Paid Strangers* (February 21, 1977) in which he paid visitors to a Hollywood bar to speak their mind on air, and Laurel Klick's *Secret for the Public, Part 2* (December 6, 1976) where she invited listeners to call in live and reveal their secrets on air, are predecessors to the current craze for reality TV and virtual sharing. But a more careful listen reveals an important difference: These artists' programs had an element of resourcefulness and honesty that is, if not lost today, certainly much more difficult to attain. Were the very same show to air today, would we believe that McCarthy's strangers were indeed strangers and not paid extras? Likely not. And what of Klick's callers, certainly it's possible that some invented their secrets even then, but the milieu precludes this assumption. Today, the omnipresence of invented and virtual "reality" would make any read other than a fictional one contextually implausible.

At the end of the panel, the organizers expressed their hope *Close Radio* would inspire others to follow in their footsteps. Implicit in this wish is that artists find the means—be they electronic, virtual, telepathic, or something else—to challenge the status quo. Things are surely different now—not necessarily harder but arguably more layered—but in speaking about the initial impulse behind *Close Radio*, Duncan framed the current situation for potential successors: "What happens [next]?" he asked, "That's when it becomes interesting."

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