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Ever since the fall of the Berlin wall quite an effort has been invested into the definition of "transition". Many intellectuals from "both" sides are still employed on formulating a kind of translation area, which would serve as a special window to observe, understand, and maybe even design the so-called "changes", especially in the former Eastern countries. As with any observation work nowadays, there is hardly a way to describe an object of investigation without superimposing a certain referential model to which the occurrences of interest would be compared to and judged, but first of all, described.

One of the big problems emerging within the business of transition is probably the fact that there is no observer found (or founded) yet who would be able to take the position between the two different contexts and their representatives; thus the reasons, the goals and the motives for the design of referential field could be various, but largely predetermined. It is not hard to foresee a possibility of obviously ideologically colored backgrounds while one would try to shape the active role in bridging the gap between two parallel realities as found in the historical interpretation about the divided world during the Cold War period. This could certainly attract the attention by some of the Eastern observers who had been, by the nature of their education, practicing the criticism of ideologies as a kind of highly evolved mental sport, so often without influence on the political hardware that was determining social environment they lived and acted in.

Intellectual obsession with the transition period is surely not just mere voyeurism, a need to document the unknown past and the hardly predictable present and the future. An opportunity to redefine the basic understanding of the social, political and economical principles that form the picture of society is far more seductive, even more so when one is trying to build anew, to impose visions into structuring the social relations that would function as catalysts or generators of the Possible, before the inertia of unreflected every-day pathology would lead the course down to an abyss, beyond the border of the light which humanistic ratio would still dare to emanate. Again, it is not hard to predict a certain prejudice from the Eastern camp which could also be called one of the most bitter lessons of the history: Is it really possible to design social processes out of one's head, no matter how great a logistic backup?

Without a common agreement on referential criteria and with skepticism about new great stories (some of them regarding the merging of the new world out of East and West were nevertheless produced) the time has come to change the position and the view of the observer. What we need is some refreshment of the black and white picture, and we will try to contribute with a brief comparison between two different types of transition. The first one is an abstract redefinition of the role of the public radio in the civil community, the second is a practical problem of re-organization of the independent radio station in Ljubljana (Slovenia) known as Radio Student.

The author of this text is by no means an objective observer. I am deeply involved in a practical research of new media as an artist and I am an active collaborator of the Radio Student since the appearance of Slovene independence, back in 1991.

Radio Student is a unique phenomenon in the European independent broadcast tradition. The station runs continuously for 27 years now, out of which nearly ten years with 12 hours of daily produced program, covering the rest of the day with music played out of CD robot which is in function for two years already. But let us shorten the legendary success story that was made during the golden years of democratization and dive straight into the problems we find at the station nowadays.

Public access radio is slowly but surely gaining the attention in local communities all around Europe. We could discuss this phenomenon from different aspects. First of all, radio became, technically speaking, an incredibly cheap medium, compared to other more elaborated types of broadcasting. The interest of centrally organized media power shifted to visually oriented media and more sophisticated types of signal transmission - be it satellite and/or cables. This means a certain shadow on commercial interests in radio field. Even though the largest part of radio activities is covered by commercial productions and forms, radio is not a high-profit market activity anymore. Accordingly, mainstream political pressure is not as pronounced as it used to be just some years ago.

How could we project the situation at Radio Student into the coordinates just exposed above?

In the newly established democratic Slovenia there was an immediate boom of commercial radio stations which suddenly put Radio Student in the competition for the audience with a dozen of new entertainers in the local region of Ljubljana. This introduced a fall of interest for the station from the peak audience of nearly 30.000 in 1989 down to 11.000 in 1994 with the trend pointing down. Contrary to the highly defined media markets, radio still remains a solid profit investment in Slovenia, due to very low taxes considering copyrights of any kind. In spite of a very progressive general copyright law, which was finally established a year ago, a critical investigation would probably find half legal or even pirate conditions for most of the broadcasted material, compared to the policy of Western media markets. Following the trend, Radio Student became more expensive than ever, not just because of losing commercial partners together with the audience, but also because of a need for a bigger support by the state, the City Council, the Soros Foundation and the Student organization of the University in Ljubljana. At this stage two important facts should be introduced. Back in 1989 Radio Student presented the only different Radio in Slovenia besides the three programs of the national radio and main regional stations, one per area. Organizationally and politically it was held by Communist Youth organization (the Association of Socialistic Youth of Slovenia), but the international image of the station was easily managed as one of the independent radio. The image of the station in this manner was the most appealing in the midst of the sharpest political pressure and fights, when testing the edge of mainstream communist censorship brought in the biggest interest and response from the audience. Thus we can speak about political pressure as the most successful "independent" marketing, but not the freedom of expression and latent political presence as we find it lately at the station.

This brings us to the point where we can introduce the factor of motivation for the radio activism as we could predict it out of evolving media situation and corresponding social circumstances.

Every introduction of the new technological possibilities in the communication brings in, to a certain extent, a reevaluation of the former evidence of existing media practices. There are many reasons to

sustain the interest in the radio field, especially if we want to actively experiment with the different clones of combined media practices. As one could have started to observe a global media face of emerging information society surfing the medium and long radio bandwidth some fifty years before the occurrence of the satellite TV, the first experience of long distance interaction was also available before anybody would even think of the fatal attraction of the interactive programs as proclaimed nowadays.

It looks very promising to evolve new types of communication using the infrastructure of the radio environment just as a basic platform, a point of departure. Let us check some of the hot topics which are getting closer to radio activities in the big transition of the roles that various old and new media will have to undertake in the near future:

Horizontal synchronization vs. central synchronization

After the first exercises and experiences with the global networks it is becoming increasingly clear that the global view of the world as presented to the individual viewer via centralized media is just a new kind of entertainment - dream industry. There is nothing more global than ourselves as viewers exposed to the media in the environment we live in. Logically speaking, the point of departure in dealing with reality could only be the ground we stand on as opposed to the perspective from a satellite down to the Earth. Therefore all people are supposed to get a detailed picture of the rest of the planet at the same time. On the contrary, by a more flexible approach to the already existing networks, it is possible to synchronize local communities in any order or combination, one to one or one to many at a time. As popular as celebrating the informational highways might be, even the Internet prophets are about to lose orientation in defining rules of the game. It is hard to find a reason contemplating on the laws or non-laws of the highway traffic if the case is just the definition of a way how to connect two very concrete and local points, if/when they both have a developed BBS environment. Inside this kind of panorama it is easy to introduce widespread interest in international activities and exchange between very local communities, like local radios, for example. And this is what we call a horizontal approach.

A lower scope magnitude: a different ratio of time compression per broadcasted unit

Time compression in our case is a relationship between the time which is used to realize a production and the displayed time of the production itself. The more complex and sophisticated the production is, the more men's hours of work (which means investments in money, energy, elaborated production teams) have to be invested before it reaches the short period of "real" life in the air.

If it is up to an individual alone to produce a broadcast, he/she must have the tools and knowledge to work on the fly. Ideally, the time of this kind of the transmission would equal the time of production. Concerning this criterion, radio is still one of the most light-weight and flexible media.

On the other hand, we find the same relation between the time compression for such a dedicated production and the available time in the transmission time scheme. If You have two minutes to

explain the whole world daily weather broadcast, You will hardly spend two hours on discussion about the problems of the local kindergarten. A lower scope magnitude means more time for devoted public problems. They can be examined in details and the audience is offered an opportunity to join forces towards a possible solution. This leads to a softer and more continuous approach, which effectively differs from the big booms produced by dominating media, where problems are sold without a chance to be fully understood or saved.

Breaking out of the pre-defined barriers of a certain medium

When some ten years ago someone recorded a radio jingle for Radio Student, which began with the announcement: "You are listening to Radio Student Television.." he had no idea how soon the joke would become true. In 1992, at the time of Documenta exhibition in Kassel, when Van Gogh Television presented the first all-European interactive television program via 3SAT satellite network, Radio Student launched in its own part of real time interactive TV program for an hour and a half. No matter how simple the visual part of the program was (transmission of the picture via videophone), the contribution was possible due to elaborated local FM links together with phone lines picked up at the radio studio. Ironically, this happened before the national television succeeded in hooking up its own satellite reports.

In August 1995, another quite unique version of Internet Radio was presented. Macadam Musak (Code Public, Paris) helped to evolve a program consisting of musical samples which were all triggered in real time over the Web pages. Four listeners could collaborate at a time and listen to the results of their interaction transmitted through the Radio.

The described examples should just serve as transparent illustrations of SOMETHING ELSE that is already possible, with the "misuse" of the already available low-tech technology.

New possibilities for non-radio, half radio or different radio - Radio are permanently arising in various directions. Soon we will be just talking about communication links and especially about social structures. But still, the basic Radio configuration is all You need to get started.

Synchronized to the broadcast vs. desynchronized with the broadcast

It is so simple: What will You turn on when You will be chatting live on the net: the television or the radio? What if You call in the late night program and inform Your fellow surfers about the interesting conference You are just participating? If You do so, then You are broad spreading the news synchronized to all the audience at a certain moment in time. But of course, You can catch anything on the net out of broad possibilities just at the time You want, being synchronous with Your own interest only. To find out which one of both directions will best suit the particular media configuration and how to subtly graduate from one form to another is becoming one of the most complex questions at the present moment.

A full response interaction vs. pre-defined interaction

Martin Lucas, one of the producers of the Paper Tiger Television (USA), explained this problem in the interview at Radio Student in the following manner: "Sure, You can press Yes or No or Up or Down button on Your interactive TV setup at the time when You are asked what You want to buy or where You want to go, left or right. But this is just a choice You get in any opinion pool, it is not a real response, a freedom of expression. Let us be honest. TV set is there, right in Your house. How can You really respond to it? Will You talk back to the TV announcer? In the order to respond to a TV You have to have Your own camera, a possibility to make a video montage and the knowledge to produce a transmission. And of course, time slot on the TV channel to transmit Your work..."

It is certainly easier to manage with basic sound editing facilities and to evolve the response to the general media wall which is pressing the mental picture of a citizen at the point where the bricks are the loosest.

Without a step to step comparison of the exposed thesis to the actual state of awareness at Radio Student, we will focus on two basic facts, emerging out of an attempt to understand the changes in the field of public radio.

The structure of radio work is going to change from the specialist preoccupations into a holistic multi-media approach. This prediction of course is valuable if we focus on small, costless radio configurations with the tendency to open the access to civil society.

Radio Student, to a certain degree, is keeping on as an open structure, but one could find the motives of present protagonists quite unusual for the direction towards independent, public, free radio. If we check out what the heroes of Radio Student from the great historic period are doing nowadays, we can find them employed either as top politicians, national radio, TV and newspapers editors, high rated journalists or more or less successful managers in the field of new private media and media marketing companies. Some of the technicians are running commercial studios, some of the announcers are continuing their work at bigger institutions. It is not hard to conclude that RS was mainly playing the role of a kindergarten for the preparation period, after which one could successfully continue the career to the top of national political and media elite. The same possibility and motivation is still sustained nowadays with additional opportunities to join the private media business world.

Newcomers to RS can still choose, as in good old days, between dedicated fields of specialist activities. Either they can be trained as announcers, technicians, music experts or radio journalists. This is possible due to the fact that organizational structure remains the same as it was formed 15 years ago.

RS is not a small station either. An archive with around 10. 000 units (reel tapes, records, CDs, mini discs), two fully equipped broadcast studios, a broadcast vain, local LAN network with a dozen of computers and local BBS still can't satisfy ambitious workers, six of them being regular employees with some 20 regular collaborators. In 1996 the station will move into a new, bigger space with larger studios, equipped with more and better professional technology. All these without redefinition of organizational structure and without a plan for public access. The main idea is to produce more

professional program and to compete for the audience on the market, but still to be supported as much as possible from the side of donators already mentioned.

The Alternative, which had to deal primary with the image of being "different", will have to focus on the real functionality of social and technological systems it depends on.

We will have to wait for the news, because at the moment at the RS there is nothing happening in this field that we would be able to report on or compare with.

As we can see, radio is a lovely little island with a lot of new adventurous possibilities, what is especially convenient for broader and safer experiments with less fatal consequences than we can aspect from more powerful media brothers, forming the continents of unified Power. Nevertheless the problems of transition in the field can be detected to the level, where many of the advisers will have to learn how and what to advise on, before one could graduate to the level of a serious observer. An observer we need so much to understand what is going on in any transition.

In the meanwhile, what we can do is to transmit some noise, if the signal is becoming too polished and too clear to believe in. Broadcast Yourself. Act now!