

RADIO CHIGUARD

MAKE
RADIO





Radio Chiguiro (www.chiguiro.org)

is a social platform for the distribution of Lafayette, Indiana's glocal culture. It operates as community radio, which explores youth practices associated with parties, live music shows, and free radio workshops by using a web site as a medium for contact and production, functioning under the principles of participation. These elements propose resistance and open tactics of opposition to corporate mass media as well as forms of control and restriction in the circulation of information and knowledge.

-Fernando Escobar in *Glocalizados y desrealizados: colectivos artísticos en Colombia*, Arte Contexto 18. (2008/2), Madrid

MAKING COMMUNITY RADIO BY ESTEBAN GARCIA

Before I start talking about the Radio Chigüiro experience, I would like to mention some areas of study or topics that are related to the idea of "making radio" that have been crucial for my research and execution of this project.

The first reference is Bertolt Brecht's essay from 1932, *The Radio as an Apparatus for Communication*¹. In the early development of radio culture and broadcast, he envisioned using radio as a participatory medium. He proposed it as a bi-directional medium as opposed to one-way broadcast, a model in which the listener could participate and potentially become a broadcaster himself.

Much of the research on radio revolved around topics like media activism because some media activist tactics were studied and later adopted by Radio Chigüiro. Even though Radio Chigüiro has no activist content on its programs, the use of free wireless networks and the airwaves without official permission or mass media channels to promote non-mass-media content are methods that have been used by media activist groups in the past.

This project explored the use of technology for community purposes. I approached this idea by experimenting with it and doing it myself, networking with a local group of people.

I was motivated to work on this project because I wanted to understand my ethical disagreement with copyright and the current model of culture production and distribution.

THE CURRENT CONTEXT OF CULTURE PRO- DUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION: A MOTIVATION

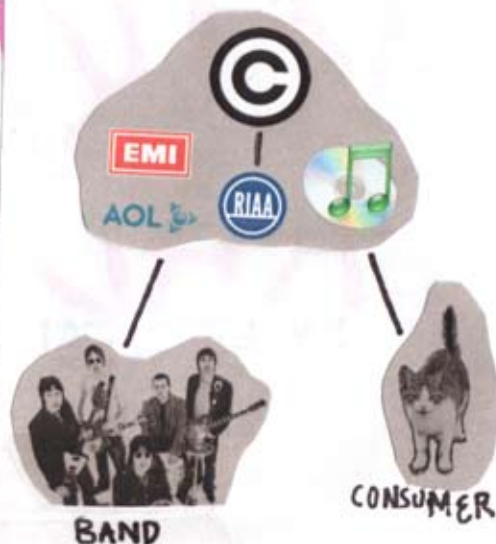
When I think of the current context of culture production and distribution, the first thing that comes to my mind is a pop idol such as Britney Spears. Her media image represents a culture product literally produced for mass consumption. For me, Britney is an example of how the music business uses mass media channels of distribution to create popular idols, but then the music is less relevant than the artist's private life.

The massive success of an artist is not based on talent, but on the economical power reach of the corporation that promotes and profits from him. There is a rule of proportion for this: the more wealth there is, the bigger the created consumer trend. This rule also applies to the range of a radio broadcast: The most powerful economic conglomerates will build the strongest and tallest antennas to cover the largest audience.

In his essay *The problem with music*² Steve Albini states that the possibilities of becoming a rock star are comparable to a narrow passage with one door, through

which only one band can pass. The rest of the thousand or millions of artists will never make it into the mass media circuit. Furthermore, Albini argues that even when the artists make it so far as to sign a contract with a major record label, they achieve no sustainable income because they must pay for their own recordings. The band received a very small percentage of the record royalties and will have to pay for all the expenses, often getting into debt with the labels. The performance artists *Chicks on Speed* from Berlin are a case in point, signing a deal with EMI. At a conference in Barcelona, they presented on how it took them about four years to pay their multi-million dollar debt to this major record label. In the end, they decided to start their own label, had better results and their creative freedom back.

On the other hand, there are the consumers of this cultural product. Labels are represented by what is called the RIAA (Record Industry Association of America); All of the major record labels in this country participate in it and their business is based on copyright law. A handful of students at Purdue³ (and other universities across the country) have received a letter from the RIAA stating how they could face a lawsuit of up to \$500.000 for copyright infringement for using peer to peer (P2P) file sharing.



In an interview for *The Exponent*, Purdue's student newspaper, one of these students said: "I got nailed for Vanilla Ice." ... Even though Vanilla Ice is not the one that is directly suing her.

As human beings we are culture consumers, but it seems that we cannot have ownership of the culture that is imparted to us.

The current model of distribution is based on an industry that operates as an intermediary between the producer and the consumer, but none of these last ones is benefiting from it. Copyrighted productions that favor globalized mass markets want to homogenize the world and are counter-productive to local culture, people and artists.



A possible solution to this problem might be artists having a direct connection to their fans without intermediaries. It is simple: the art product is made independently and distributed to the consumer's hands.



IDEA + SITE SPECIFIC

My idea of making an independent radio station found an ideal context in Lafayette because an active, independent music scene already existed. The music scene in Lafayette consists of a group of individuals that cooperate to book shows, bring in touring bands, and play and promote their own music. This community is based on the principles of friendship, fun, and solidarity... there is usually no profit for any of the live weekly music, but it does not seem to matter since local musicians use this venue to promote their music and network with other bands or promoters.

PUBLIC EVENTS AND COMMUNITY NETWORKS

When I first moved to Lafayette, I was interested in doing research about internet radio and podcast technologies. I had been working on a similar project in Bogotá called *Radio Cápsula*, part of the grid of programs of the *Burn.fm* net radio station from the Barcelona based collective *Platoniq*⁴, and I wanted to learn to do it on my own.

Initially, I programmed a website that had a podcast embedded. It had the possibility to archive and play sound files, but I did not have any content.



That was when I had the luck to meet Chris Toliver, a local electronic musician that introduced me to people with similar ideas and interests here. We started talking about joining forces to make a free public event with visual art and music. In conjunction with Jeremiah Beaver and Mike Booth's project, *Downtown Records*, and the Contemporary Art Initiative (CAI), we organized the first Radio Chigüiro event on January 21, 2006.



Our idea involved holding an event with local musicians to record live shows so that they could be uploaded via podcast and to promote the project locally. I was not anticipating anything from this show more than having a good time with some friends, but attendance was high and people showed their support. It was overwhelming. In a certain unexpected way, that first event laid out the method, strategy and channels for the development of the rest of the project. For example, the use of handmade posters, Myspace bulletins and word of mouth to promote the show, and the idea of a free party.

The sense of building community through shows and events began to grow gradually as I started to cooperate and collaborate with Downtown Records, a small independently run used vinyl record store on 10th Street in downtown Lafayette, which slowly became the principal venue for the local music scene. The true sense of community and friendship emerged from that space, bringing together music

aficionados and performers. Shows turned over more frequent and though 2006-2007 three to four local and touring bands might play weekly. I collaborated with Downtown Records by making flyers, zines or playing visuals for the hip-hop and electronic music shows. I also made some video documenting concerts. This was indeed my opportunity to meet people and promote the Radio Chigüiro project within this music community. It was a great time for local music production and everybody was working with various bands or projects simultaneously, to name some: *The Minivans*, *The Mans*, *The Half Rats*, *Trent and the Rippers*, *Bastards Choir*, *The Leather Scandals*, *Bossman & His Bad Habits*, *The Romance Novels*, Toliver, *Atarilogic*, *Analog Zebra*. There would be shows with touring bands that got to play shows and interact with the Lafayette community such as: *CoCoComa*, *The Turpentine Brothers*, *Black Lips*, *Times New Viking*, *Black Sunday*, *King Kahn & BBQ*, *Mind Controls*, *Demons Claws*, *River City Tanlines*, *Headache City*, *The Willows*, *Miss Alex White & The Red Orchestra*... These bands were appealing to me because of the channels of the distribution that they used. Much of their promotional materials (T-shirts, tapes, zines, buttons and patches) were self-produced. The cost of these products was always inexpensive, would have that handmade aesthetic and it could even sometimes be free or traded for other DIY merchandise.



On March 2006, Temporary Services⁵, an art group from Chicago, gave a workshop at Purdue's Art Department through Rosanne Altstatt, a visiting scholar, who had been curating a sound art project for the *Audio Relay*, one of the *Temporary Services* projects (in collaboration with Brennan McGaffey). The *Audio Relay* is a portable and autonomous radio station that can broadcast in a radius of up to a mile away. We had an *Audio Relay* showcase on Main Street presenting the sound collection she curated, including live music sets by *Atarilogic* and *Analog Zebra*. This public event also allowed visitors to submit demos and CDs they wanted to be played on the radio. Temporary Services (TS) agreed to let the *Audio Relay* continue to be used for Radio Chigüiro. From this day forward, Radio Chigüiro turned from being simply a podcast-internet radio station to

an actual radio station on the FM dial and acquired a more tangible means of approaching the local community. The *Audio Relay* is a traveling project that has been in the hands of different groups and artists.



BRETT BLOOM (TS)
PLAYING A CD ON THE
AUDIO RELAY

Parallel to a 24/7 radio broadcast that covers the downtown area of the city of Lafayette (fig), Radio Chigüiro has frequently taken the radio transmitter to public spaces to promote the community use of the station. Such is the case of the events *Radio Chigüiro Reclaims the Airwaves* (May 25, 2007) made in the Chauncey Hill Mall parking lot and the *Radio Chigüiro Grill* (April 9, 2006) on the sidewalk in front of the old Downtown Records.

I have had the luck to have access to a screen print press from my friend's independently-run business *MINE-US* (Jeri Foley and Aaron Zernack) and make patches, posters, sweatshirts and T-shirts with Radio Chigüiro-themed prints to advertise it in the same way bands mentioned above would. Screen-printing is a very easy and inexpensive way to make large quantities of merchandise. *MINE-US* designs and prints many of the sweatshirts and T-shirts for local bands because they are part of the same group of people that used to get together at the record store.

TECHNOLOGY TOOLS AND COMMUNITY NETWORKS



Developing Radio Chigüiro involved at it's very beginning much research on RSS feeds and podcasts (XML). Dynamic content management, sound archives and subscribers were very important topics to understand to be able to develop a community website. Back then, there were few web applications for writing a podcast

or RSS feed, so uploading files was very complicated and I had to rewrite the XML each time there was a new program. It was not very practical for me and much less easy for people to submit their own radio programs or recordings, making the

radio archive grow very slowly. During this research period, to make the uploading process easier, I found an open source tool called *podcast generator*⁶ and installed it on the Radio Chigüiro site. *Podcast generator* has a HTML interface that allows any user to upload media files into a podcast feed in a very simple way. Once this tool was implemented, the archive began to grow rapidly with submissions from the local community as well as from all over the US. As of August 2008 there are 65 original radio programs and mixes, averaging 2 or 3 new uploads every week.

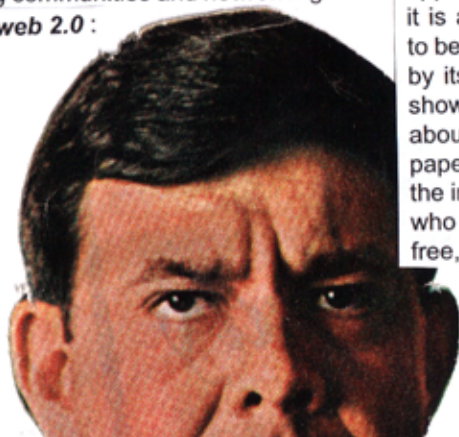
Another important development for the website was having a live internet radio stream, which make our public events available to remote listeners in real time, allowing live interactions with other communities outside the range of the radio transmitter or in other cities or countries. This live web stream was made possible through the *Global Independent Streaming Server*⁷(GISS), a project by the Barcelona based media activist group *Hackitectura*.

Both the *Podcast Generator* and *GISS* projects share the same open source and copyleft principles with Radio Chigüiro. Making a project like Chigüiro would have been impossible to be this free and independent if it were not for the copyleft license and the wide amount of communities that share all the information and documentation necessary.

There is a sense of community and cooperation among these web communities and it is a channel for human interaction and exchange of information. Using the Internet for creating communities and networking it's known as **web 2.0** :

Web 2.0 is a term which describes the trend in the use of world wide web technology and web design that aims to enhance creativity, information sharing, and, most notably, collaboration among users. These concepts have led to the development and evolution of web-based communities and hosted services, such as social-networking sites, wikis and blogs.⁸

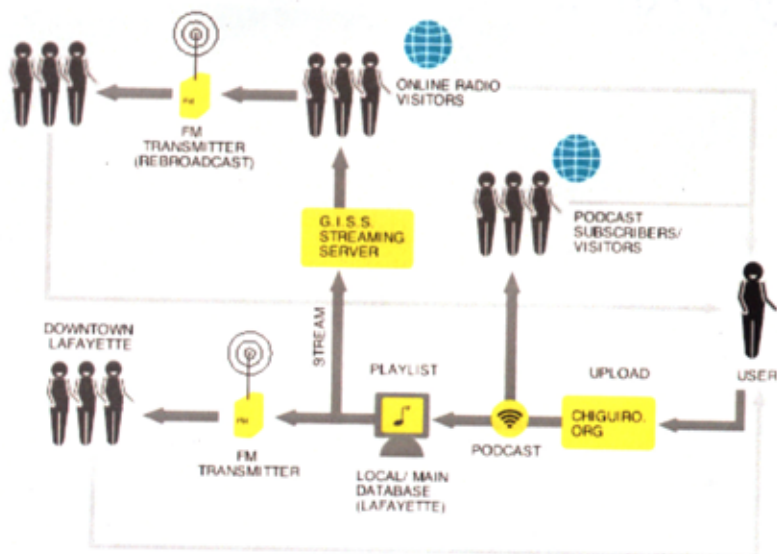
There are currently many web sites that are a virtual platform for social networking such as *Myspace*, *Facebook*, *Twitter* or *Flickr*, that have changed the way people interact, group and communicate. Danah Boyd defines these virtual communities as *globalized networks*⁹ because the internet allows people to interact on a global scale, but also to communicate and participate with their immediate local context. In the specific case of Lafayette, the use of *Myspace* has been crucial for the promotion of all the Radio Chigüiro events and activities because it works as a friends' list manager, which grows everyday. Part of the Internet strategy of the Radio Chigüiro site includes the design and use of a *Myspace* page (www.myspace.com/radiochiguero), because it appeals to a larger music community and it is another point of contact that seems to be even more popular than the internet by itself. The use of digital 'flying' has showed better results to spread the word about something new than leaving a paper stack of flyers on a store because the information gets directly to the people who want to read it and, best of all, it's free, easy and quick.



HOW DOES EVERYTHING WORK TOGETHER?

The combination of these old and new technologies allows listeners to become broadcasters, if they so desire. All the material uploaded through the website's interface will play on the radio. When the user uploads a file (Fig. B), it becomes part of the archive and will be available to all the podcast subscribers. The same file will become part of the radio playlist that is being broadcasted through the radio transmitter on the airwaves (88.9FM) and in the internet simultaneously.

For the past 2 years, Radio Chigüiro has been broadcasting local live recordings and mixes collected through the website's (www.chiguero.org) uploading system or turned in to the station in the form of tape, CD or vinyl. The radio station has weekly live shows, free public events with live music, and recording workshops. Radio Chigüiro is interested in making radio technologies available to people. For this reason, users of the website can download digital-analog recording instructional manuals or participate in different activities such as the amateur DJ sessions or the Mini-FM transmitter workshops to learn how to make small-range radio transmitters with very simple electronics. One case I believe to be extremely successful is the '*Terrorista Tuesdays*' (formerly known as '*Militia Mondays*') radio show that is broadcast live every week. Max Campbell, who plays



STRUCTURE OF RADIO CHIGUIRO

WE ARE ALL USERS. USERS ARE BROADCASTERS

with *Hudson Falcons* and *Bastards Choir*, TJ Maxfield and Joe Yackimiki, who played with *Brassnuckle Boys*, have been using the radio station the way it is supposed to be used: made by the local community for the community. Their program includes a selection of independent hardcore, punk and oi! music and is also a talk show with local news and stories. They come to my apartment every week and we record and broadcast the show, which has a firm group of regular listeners. *Militia Monday* episode 9 is remarkable because it was the result of a collaborative effort to make a radio program that compiled 30 years of Lafayette's punk rock history, starting from *Dow Jones & The Industrials* to *The Sweet Sixteens*. This initiative left an important document for our community.

RADIO 'CHIGÜIRO 'MUST,DIE'

The whole point of this project is to undermine the structure of power that is behind the current music industry and the massification of the cultural product through the use of copyright. Making a radio station that has community revindicates the use of technology for social purposes, but it can not persist. The intention is not to become established. There is no point in asking permission to use the airwaves. The impact of a small radio transmitter will never be as big as the ones run by larger corporations. The music and radio programs we play will never have the mass appeal compared to what is promoted to mainstream culture.



Radio Chigüiro will never succeed in quantity or quality, it's simply a temporary symbolic sabotage.

My intent with Chigüiro is to diffuse and share knowledge and experiences through the workshops, zines and manuals to form and inspire new community radios to happen. The idea is to deliver a message of autonomy and a multiplicity of visions, which only individuals and site specific communities can have.

It is not important to have a big budget to start your own radio station, the information to make it is available and free. Working cooperatively within our immediate contexts will be more beneficial for

individuals who make part of communities which have similar interests.

This zine is a compilation of thoughts and conversations around making a radio station in Lafayette, Indiana and has the intent to work as an operating manual or a reference for people who might be interested in making their own radio station (over the internet, on the airwaves or both), cooperative work and self distribution.

Radio Chigüiro has been a community effort and this compilation of texts presents different visions and interpretations of some of those who have participated.

THANKS
XOXOXO
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¹ Der Rundfunk als Kommunikationsapparat in Bitter des Hessischen Landestheaters, Darmstadt, No. 16, July 1932 Available online at: <http://www.tonisant.com/class/2001/fall/brechtradio.htm>

² <http://www.negativland.com/albini.html>

³ The Exponent, **APRIL 4 2007**

⁴ <http://www.platoniq.net/>

⁵ <http://www.temporaryservices.org>

⁶ <http://podcastgen.sourceforge.net/>

⁷ <http://giss.tv/>

⁸ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Web_2.0

⁹ Boyd, Danah. *Why Web2.0 Matters: Preparing for Glocalization*, September 5 2005, Available at: <http://www.zephoria.org/thoughts/archives/200>

MICHELLE CARREON
ROSANNE ALTSTATT
JUAN OBANDO
FABIAN WINKLER
AARON ZERNACK
JEREMIAH BEAVER
CHARLES GICK
TEMPORARY SERVICES
STEPHANIE SCHNITZ



THIS TOWN IS MINE

A CONVERSATION WITH AARON ZERNACK,
LOCAL MUSICIAN AND VISUAL ARTIST THAT
RUNS A SCREEN-PRINT BUSINESS AND
HAS COLLABORATED WITH RADIO CHIGÜIRO
FROM ITS BEGINNING. RECORDED IN
APRIL 10 2008.

CHECK OUT
[www.
myspace.com/
analogzebra](http://www.myspace.com/analogzebra)



EG: Zernack, I wanted to talk to you about Radio Chigüiro, because since we lived together and before you have always been supporting maybe more than anyone else on this project. So I am interested in knowing what are your motivations for this support?

AZ: It was pretty new, it was fun... It kind of changed the idea of shows in town. It was something fresh that everybody was excited about.

EG: How do you think that getting involved with Radio Chigüiro helped you, or related to your artistic practice? as a musician and visual artist

AZ: The collaborative... Everybody getting together for shows and the fact that it was free too. It was definitely an outlet for the music and art coming together in projects like t-shirts and stuff for different shows... It set deadlines and goals to reach, so it actually got me doing more things than I think I would have done.

EG: That was the first time we met, for that first Radio Chigüiro that we put together over the CAI space in Main St. How do you feel from that day that you play that Radio Chigüiro has evolved to now?

AZ: wow... the first one I would compare to preschool, meeting for the first time was fun and we made friends like you would at school with somebody that has similar ideas and then I would say that we've grown up a lot from then. And jointly together in the work that we do it has definitely evolved from stick figures to masterpieces.

EG: There's also this blurred boundaries between the stuff we were making and Downtown Records being this place that promoted the local scene. There was this time period where there were a lot of shows going on.

AZ: We were very close to Jeremiah, so if there was kind of like a random show, he would ask us a lot to play there, which was good though because we were always doing new and different stuff or at least trying to do new visuals or new music or new ways of playing music and also being involved with Hip Hop, they asked us to play a lot. The fact that we were in between genres got us there a lot, and also having a screen and a projector already there made it fast and simple

EG: Talking about your music project **ANALOG ZEBRA**, I'm interested on knowing how do you use technology and the internet to promote your music?

AZ: I don't do it enough, but I try. I definitely use the *myspace* because the whole world is there and mainly I'm always trying to communicate back with anybody that says "I like your music" or people would add me as a friend and I would say "hi, I'm a person", you know, it's not just music coming out of nowhere. That's also good because other people see that when they're on that other person's page and they might want to check out yours too. I definitely try to use catchy visuals, the visual aspect is what draws people into music. It is what they see first, you would be bombarded if you had forty sounds coming out at the same time, but you can quickly look over forty pictures and pick which one looks appealing to you. People tend to know what they like when they see it, it explains itself as "that looks like what I like, so.. I'm gonna check it out" and then their sound will follow.

EG: It is like when you pick a record cover and look at the artwork, if you like the artwork maybe you might be into the band that it's on it as well. Your first connection with it is visual

AZ: Yeah, and that's why having you do the visuals is great because we're on the same page where we don't really have to talk, we do, but we don't have to because we like the same things. It looks like what I think it sounds like.

EG: So you would say that Internet is the main source you use to promote your artistic practice right now?

AZ: Yeah, I wouldn't really do this on a global scale if there wasn't the Internet. I mean, that goes back with time too, before there were cars or planes nobody would travel, it was hard to move and everything was centralized. But with the Internet, people in Germany can tell me that they like my stuff.

EG: But more than the Internet, it's the fact that there is an online community that is already sorted out by genres or similar interests. Because that's how you can start networking with people that you can find related to what you do. So it is just the channel

AZ: I take it back to even when I was buying CDs when I was younger, I would read the "thank you's" in the CDs to find out who was like the CD i bought and I would find more bands like that. And that was just a paper trail, like a bottomless black hole finding all the stuff that's connected and the Internet just made it easier and faster, everything is connected.

EG: There's a lot of new formats, and we have talked a little bit about CDs, but we are more interested on collecting records. What is the advantage of a 7-inch record over a CD from a major label?

AZ: The record is a hard copy, it's like handmade almost because it is made on a press; you can FEEL it, the needle feels it. It's an old technology but it is such a warm real feeling, as opposed to digital media that has no specific format, it's invisible. Just because it's on a CD doesn't mean it's ON the CD because you can rewrite a CD or whatever. CDs seem so cheap now to where if it gets scratched you would say "who cares, I'll burn another one" or "if you like my CD you can take it, I'll just BURN another one". It's really inexpensive.

I think you have to release in vinyl to do anything, because people don't really care anymore as far as digital.

EG: What is your opinion on big record labels or the record industry itself?

AZ: I think it is DEAD. It's DEAD MEAT, along with other corporate ideas, I think they can't grow and adapt as quickly as people do, because so many people are connected through the internet and people want things different ways now. The record Industry is old, they didn't jump on when they should have, I think even apple releasing *itunes* or *amazon* selling songs for a dollar, it's definitely too late. And I hope that the rest of corporate ideas that cover every aspect of the world change like that, i mean, by people being connected.

EG: A lot of the debate with MP3 and downloads is that you're not really supporting the artist

AZ: The artists usually get maybe 10 percent, and as far as the actual cost of a CD is just a few cents and it's sold for about 10 dollars, and there is all this money going somewhere. The Industry just put out the worst music too, they're not paying attention to what's going on

EG: What are the alternatives for people like you to put your work out?

AZ: I definitely do free downloads off my *myspace* page, but that's MP3 and it's a really poor quality, and so if you wanna hear the music and how's supposed to be heard you can buy a CD off me, but I want to change it to where you can download better versions of the music, where you can sample it, if good quality as far as digital matters to you, you can have the option to buy a song, to purchase DATA.

EG: Well, there are different things we've talked about records... One thing is that when you have the hard copy, you also have the artwork. You don't have that on the digital format. At the same time, it can't be totally black and white, even if you hate the corporate use of mp3's, we use the same technologies to network and make things work...

AZ: yeah, it is weird

EG: Talking more specifically about Lafayette, could you describe the Local music scene?

AZ: The Local community is physical, you can see it, because we go to the same places. It's a positive force, nobody is competing because that is not what it is about and collaboration is crossing the board. You know, I talk to the Bluegrass band, they talk to the rockers

EG: So, what are the opportunities for all these people that are producing so much creative material?



AZ: mostly, good nights... a couple of good nights a month when you play, have a good time with your friends. Everybody wants to spread their music around and get out but that's not really gonna happen for everybody, it is not really tangible to think that way. It is music and art so it is mostly for yourself, and if people like it and they want to hear it somewhere else that is a good thing that is not expected.

EG: What is your goal collaborating with Radio Chigüiro?

AZ: I would say that it is like a brand that I would definitely wear and support and I would hope that when people hear that I'm playing a show they would subconsciously think "Radio Chigüiro". Me playing shows can be synonyms with Radio Chigüiro. Besides that I'm always saying "upload shows, this is about what YOU like and spread it around". It is like Max Campbell (Militia Mondays, Terrorista Tuesdays), he's been on tour with the Hudson Falcons and he can get people listening from the places he's been by sending them a message through the internet or talking to them...Radio Chigüiro is Hardcore or Oi!music or it could be Chris Benedyk playing records and having fun with it, it is whatever people do with it.

EG: During the whole last year, when were living downtown, you were basically the main DJ of the radio station. How did it make you feel to broadcast all the stuff you were into?

AZ: It was awesome. Like anybody, I always wanna hear new stuff, so I kept putting new and interesting stuff up. I mean, I would always listen to the same things because the radio was always on at the apartment, but it was more fun because it was like a real radio station with stuff you and I had picked out. And then also playing what I was feeling and knowing that it was going out around the community

EG: Do you feel that Radio Chigüiro has been a form of putting community together?

AZ: I would say the community is small, maybe 10 people are contributing, and I know Jordan Allen says whenever he drives through downtown he turns on the radio station just to see what he hears. And the fact is that we're working on it and it's just gonna get better. With people doing solid radio shows that's good too

EG: Why do you think there's the need of an Independent or Community radio station?

AZ: Because with the technology, there should be multiple stations were you just hit "play" to something that fits into a genre, there's AOL radio, but when it is "hand made" it is more personal, more human.

EG: My impression is that what has happened here is that the radio has adjusted to whatever the community wanted it to be instead of the radio imposing what the people should be listening. It's kind of backwards from what mass media does.

AZ: Yes, it is what you and me like, but it's more than that because it's open-ended to whoever

EG: I didn't know anything before about the music that I hear now, and I think that it was through this project that I was able to meet the people that actually make this music and hang out with them

AZ: Having some of the Downtown Records live shows broadcasted and every local band that has submitted recordings is great and I see more people starting to use it.

EG: I'm really happy. We're getting about 2 new programs every week and I was going through the archive and we have more than 40 programs... That's already a lot of music! Wherever I go, I know the music is always there

AZ: As far as the Mixes, the DJ mixes, a solid track that is 60 minute long, 10 years ago they would release it as "DJ so-and-so"'s live set, but now it's popping up to where somebody that just collects records, they might not actually be on a band, they record a set of what they like and upload it. That started happening when you added that option to the radio's website

about 5 months ago and since then it has kept going. An those are people's feelings and personalities, it's like the soundtrack of these people's lives.

EG: I like that people are making mixtapes or mixes, because it is like they're owning the music to certain extent, it is an appropriation of something that is copyrighted but defines people's personal identities. And that's why I think culture should be for the people at the very end.

*Benedyk
Making
Some
Burgers*



INTERVIEW WITH ROSANNE ALTSTATT*



ART HISTORIAN AND
INDEPENDENT CURATOR.
VISITING SCHOLAR IN

PURDUE UNIVERSITY'S DEPARTMENT OF VISUAL
AND PERFORMING ARTS. RECORDED IN APR 9 2008



EG: How did you meet Brennan McGaffey and Temporary Services?
And how did you bring Audio Relay to Lafayette?

RA: I moved to Lafayette and spent a year doing studio visits in Chicago in order to get to know the art scene. Brennan was one of those visits and he showed me the Audio Relay apparatus for a microradio station. He said that he was kind of disappointed because museums would display it mainly as an object and it often wasn't even turned on. Other venues just broadcast what might as well be commercial music and wasn't particularly interesting. They weren't really using it in the form it was intended – enabling individuals to broadcast an alternative to commercial radio. I thought to myself that I could curate something for Audio Relay because I know a lot of sound artists from my work in Europe. Asking them for sounds would be one way of staying in touch. I also wanted to do something where I could say "thank you" to the people who had opened up their studios to me in Chicago by asking them to submit something as well. Hundreds of tracks were submitted in the end – work made for Lafayette, sound dug out of artists' archives, sounds that artists and curators recommended – it was incredibly varied. In the meantime I met you and asked you to help with the technical side. But that was expanded right away as you brought in tracks by local musicians. You had just started working on Radio Chigüiro. We pooled our knowledge and resources to point broadcast Audio Relay from Lafayette.

EG: We wanted to stream live through the Internet at the time, but that wasn't developed until recently. It is interesting because Audio Relay was developed with a CD player. One would put in a CD to be broadcast and then leave. But this specific version of the Audio

Relay has a Line Input and that has been actually the way I have been able to develop Radio Chigüiro for the Internet.

RA: Brennan put that in for us.

EG: Without that we wouldn't have been able to do it, and it is just this one little technical thing...

That was great because before I had the Internet broadcast figured out I used a MP3 player for the broadcast. And the line input made us able to plug in guitars, drum machines, turntables.

RA: Yes, it was all just broadcast from your apartment. For a little while it was broadcast from my house and we wanted to send it around town more. It did get around because you move a lot, but it didn't in the sense that it went to other people. That's probably just as well because it is kind of fragile.

EG: I was supposed to give it back to Temporary Services last January, but apparently they are really happy with all the activities that have been going on in Lafayette. They had stated earlier in the catalogue for the Beyond Green exhibition how they wished Audio Relay would turn into a real radio station from a local place and incorporate public activities.

RA: There was a first event in a store front on Main Street, hosted by the CAI (Community Art Initiative) hosted, and it took place while Temporary Services was in town for a workshop at Purdue. It seemed like they were really pleased as there had been a need for Audio Relay to be realized in the way it was intended. I felt the need to improve the radio in Lafayette and was driven by loneliness to find a curatorial way to keep a connection with the artists I knew. Your need was a local, physical medium for Radio Chigüiro beyond the website. So lots of different kinds of needs were fulfilled that day.

EG: There were two or three more events in which Audio Relay got out of the apartment, like the one in Chauncey Hill, taking it literally to the street. None of the activities I have been doing with radio over the Internet have been as positive as simply putting a table outside in a parking lot. That was the best way to let people know that there is Independent or Community radio in Lafayette.

RA: Well, that's one thing I wanted to bring up during this conversation. People who don't experience it first hand always ask me why bother with something like radio which seems nostalgic and "retro" to them in a time when the Internet and *MySpace* seem to be the way to disseminate one's information of choice.

EG: I have been using a combination of both, specifically 'web2.0', in which the site is a platform for the exchange of information, more like a dialog. And radio is a tool used to engage a geographically local community, it's part of the medium. It is true that radio is an old technology, but it is still current in the same way it used to be.

RA: What does radio accomplish that the Internet does not?

EG: The public events engage certain groups of people. The fact that there is a live broadcast, the physical events like having people coming over to the apartment and bring their own music, playing their own records.

RA: But you can do all that stuff over the Internet, too. You don't actually need the radio.

EG: Taking over the airwaves makes it more meaningful for the broadcasters, even though we use the same audio signal to broadcast on the Internet simultaneously. The live aspect of it can't compare to any recording, the small (global or local) group of friends of the DJ's or bands will support their radio shows sitting at home and actually listening to the radio program. So in that sense it is more of a traditional broadcast because it brings people together.

RA: I feel it is kind of interesting that you say that people will be sitting at home listening to this program, but the broadcast signal doesn't go very far. There are probably very few who actually receive it. But in a certain sense that is irrelevant because it is almost like the idea of radio is more important than the actual radio itself. The idea of micro-radio - not having a registered station - and doing something that has a certain thrill to it. And also the idea of geography: the idea of physical presence is more important than the actual physical presence because those waves aren't getting very far.

EG: Yes, I agree with you. I think that the fact that it is on the airwaves sets the tone and it is almost like a symbolic action. But to a certain extent one of the advantages of the Audio Relay over other radio transmitters is that it actually goes pretty far. It covers over a mile radius if the weather conditions are good, it is amazing! And I actually get comments or emails from people saying that they've been listening to our programs. But it has been a very long and slow "word-of-mouth" Process. People I have never seen in my life come up to me and say "Radio Chigüiro," and that is really nice.

RA: That's fantastic! It relays community. Historically, in the 30's and 40's, it was a primary medium of communication. I don't know how prevalent this was, but you hear about how they would have *open mic* at small radio stations around the country and locals would come in. My mother and her sister, when they were about ten and twelve years old, both played the accordion and they had a show on their local radio station in North Dakota. They played for the other farmers and called themselves "The Lollipop Girls" [Laughs]. That kind of thing doesn't happen in radio now at all.

EG: ... Radio created and unified the concepts of nation and identity. And I think that in the beginning of radio broadcasts the approach was very naive. There was a new technology, but what is the content going to be? It is like this open box. I just read about Orson Welles' "War of the Worlds" broadcast, being commissioned by the Rockefeller Foundation to analyze and study the impact of mass media on people. They didn't know how much credibility it had with the public. Then it started to be used in a more authoritarian way.

EG: Much of your research and work as a curator is in the field of New Media practices. Can you think of other artists who use technology for social purposes?

RA: ...for community building. Well, we saw a lot of it in the 90's directly related to net.art. Artists became interested in using the Internet as a democratic tool and giving everybody a voice. Those years also saw the rise of Rhizome, which is more US-oriented, and Nettime, which started in The Netherlands, but is really pan-European. It's kind of odd for me to give these websites for the net.art and media theory community geographic localities, but everyone notices an orientation because the participants have similar backgrounds and do meet at events. These are simply List-Servs and discussion boards for artists and curators of media art. Especially in the 90's many were writing and publishing without asking for a fee. There were, and still are, many discussions about copyright and copyleft. Sometimes these List-Servs will put up information about art making, about theory. On Nettime there was an artist, for instance, who would send in his ASCII art, using the List as part of the medium. There is a famous net.art piece called BRANDON (1995/1998) by Shu Lee Chiang, on the subject of a teenage cross-gendered individual who presented as a boy, was found out to have female anatomy, raped and killed in a hate crime. Shu Lee Chang started doing a multi-layered narrative website with many interactive elements. She built a community around this event or situation, raising awareness about the hate crimes.

But this is your project, Esteban. With what artists or initiatives would you align yourself?

EG: There are a few of artists that have inspired me to work in Radio Chigüiro. Some referents are visual, some are conceptual but for the most part it's their attitude.

I'm interested in artists that have found spaces for their art different from the gallery or museum circuit. I think that every project has to find its own context and not always is necessary to think that the art experience is going to happen on an art space, sometimes places like bars or sidewalks could be more engaging for public participation and I'm very interested on that.

There is a project from the Platoniq group called "Burn Station", a mobile station for copying and distributing music and audio files with a copyleft license. I was very intrigued by the idea of bringing net culture to the streets or the public space in general and they have been able to do it with this great initiative. When I went to Barcelona, I met with Ignacio Garcia and asked if he considered Burn Station to be an art project and he told me that he didn't care. He said that the important thing is to take it out to the street and make people use it, to burn CDs. He mentioned that contemporary art can open very interesting spaces and budgets to make projects like these possible. In a similar line of thought, Temporary Services has that idea of using art strategies for social purposes and their interest of using public space as a point of contact and participation... there are also some projects that they work with communities that have specific needs, like in the case of "Prisoner's Inventions" or "Personal Plastic". I have adopted some of their methods to engage participation, like making workshops and zines.

The work of the now extinct Todopipas collective (Camilo Turbay, Paulo Licona) from Bogota, was very eye-opening for me. They worked together on their studio a lot making sculptures with paper and card stock, screen printing clothes and making costumes to go out in the street and freak people out. They weren't attached to their artwork and since they were so prolific they would literally destroy all the work they made every couple of months. During some time they starting making their own piñatas as sculptures, then they would make art events in bars and let people destroy them. They had been working on those piñatas for months and they really didn't care about it at all! The piñatas were also full of art stuff that they made and they gave all that work for free.

Chicks on Speed is a performance based group that started doing collaborations at the beginning of the 1990's when they were going to school in Berlin. Working in collectives wasn't something cool then, but they were able to do a lot of costumes and clothes by themselves and make music projects on their studio. They're now very well recognized as music performers, but they actually come from an art background and I like their aesthetics and their approach to the studio practice as something where anything can happen. Another visual referent is the work of Raymond Pettibon, I think his

murals and drawings are amazing and then I got to know he did all those Black Flag record covers and flyers, which make me even more interested because it made me think about the role of the artist on a music community or maybe creating a visual work for a specific music scene.

RA: One of the questions of New Media Art from the beginning is about disseminating your work in another way. Video Art had a lot to do with breaking away from the gallery system. Many artists wanted to find a way to make cheap video that could theoretically be broadcast in everybody's home. The idea was to sell video art tapes for 30 dollars instead of buying an "original" work of art for 30,000. They wanted to sell so much in volume to make their money that way. People still want art as an "original" and in a sense it's a status symbol when you pay that much. Also, when it comes to contemporary art, there aren't enough people interested to make it profitable. It didn't work out at all.

EG: The permanence of these kinds of approaches doesn't really matter as much as making them. I've personally enjoyed developing ideas without having to worry too much about anything. That sort of artistic freedom wouldn't be present if I knew it was something that is going to become established. Different essays talk about this, for example in the case of the rise of community TV's in Barcelona, right after Franco's dictatorship went down. All of these community initiatives disappeared slowly as they worked on their intention to become established. And it happened again with the free radio movement here in the United States during the 90's. In the end, small local community media starts networking with other similar projects, they get bigger and expand to the point that they fall into the same process of buying other radios/TV and their content.

RA: That's why it has been so successful for you, because your intention was always to make it very local and to activate the talents that were already here. You used the technology given in order to bring together what we've got around this relatively small town and kept that goal in mind. Sometimes, when you have stricter parameters like that, creativity flourishes because it's elbowing for its own space, instead of the goal of making everything as big as possible, where you're trying to think of stuff to fill that space. If you have a smaller space, being a geographic space or a little bit of bandwidth, metaphorically speaking, your ideas are going to have to be crunched into that.

EG: I've already started to feel like that... right now, by working on other smaller projects that move faster. Even though Radio Chiguiro has been constantly changing its own aesthetic, as opposed to a brand trying to build one identity, the continual search for new spaces, events, content and musicians doesn't move as fast. Something that was supposed to be so open and changing becomes a system.

RA: It's only open to a certain extent. Its form is very set and so is a question of how many different kinds of things can you set into that form without it getting boring.

EG: In my own artistic practice I question how long you can work on the same things. How can artists do this anymore?

RA: It is true, but the radio itself is just the medium. The question is about how many different types of content can you plug in, and it's endless. It's just a medium and not the content itself. And yes, media does shape message, but it doesn't dictate message.

DISTRIBUTION, DIY METHODS, DIY AESTHETIC

EG: I wanted to talk about the Do it Yourself (DIY) in terms of aesthetic context.

RA: It relates to the Bauhaus saying that form follows function. If you're fulfilling a certain function, the form that better fits the realization of the function is then in itself the most beautiful form. So the beauty of something is defined through its function and not necessarily through formal "truths." With the DIY aesthetics, of course part of the charm is figuring out how it works and using your own two hands to make something. That handmade, not straight-from-the-factory look is part of the DIY movement's aesthetic.

The radio listeners don't have the sense of a visual aesthetic as much as that they hear an amateur DJ and sounds they wouldn't otherwise hear. You also work with the CAI (Contemporary Art Initiative), including the decorations or set design (whatever you want to call it) for the first Main Street event, which has a very strong DIY look. The flyers and patches you make of fabric cuttings and so many drawings with your own hand are a part of it. Even your silkscreened clothing is obviously hand made and obviously low budget, but everything has a certain originality and creativity to it that makes it desirable at the same time. Each thing has a function even if it's decorating an event's space to turn up the feeling of it being

something special that day. It's all part of that "we did it ourselves," moment, which in the end follows the function of building your own community.

EG: The mediums of distribution, even if it is over the Internet, they're very DIY. I programmed and found the code for making the website, and the tools were used without any PHP knowledge. It was pretty much crafted.

RA: I'm sure you looked online for how to do it. Part of DIY is also this sharing of knowledge. The Internet is full of posts by people explaining how to do certain things: "If you want to build this kind of a lamp, this is what you need." They tell you exactly how you can do it and then you go and you do it yourself, but you add a certain twist to it that makes it yours. But even in computer programming, you don't have to write everything from scratch, like you didn't develop JavaScript on your own, but one gathers pieces together and the knowledge you can get through the Internet to fix your own site or service... and that is part of DIY. I think it is an anti-movement; it's trying to get away from the slick aesthetics of this mega-conglomerate world we live in.

EG: But then, you go to Urban Outfitters and you see the market of that 'hand-made' look. I feel almost bad because I see this really cool t-shirt or book, but then it's wrong because it defeats the purpose of why you want to make things look that way.

RA: All those Urban Outfitters kind of stores are not stupid, they're hiring people like you, right out of college who design those t-shirts because they know that's what the people want.

EG: Another relating aspect is that I have been able to connect with a lot of the local and touring bands (garage rock/punk mostly), which make their own records and directly interact with the consumer of that specific cultural product. They sell everything themselves. The DIY aesthetic fits this kind of underground market or culture, where you have a direct relation with the artist. It is a more active relation as opposed to the 'cold' going to the store and just getting what you need. Seeing this was very interesting while working on Radio Chigüiro, people making their own recordings or tapes.

RA: It became part of it. It's the *MySpace* thing. Like attracts like.. DIY extends to not just being a band playing music, but to be a band with everything that is involved in it - the full merchandising. It's almost making fun of the whole idea of merchandising because people make their own very Low-Tech products, each piece having it's own beauty (limited editions, stickers, pins, and all)

EG: The feel I get from these people is that they don't really care about their own merch either; they trade. They make it just for the fun of it...

RA: ...They don't care in terms of money so much because they're not making any. But they do care in terms of making a really interesting thing and putting it out, and by trading, getting other people's stuff too so it's like a collection.

MEDIA ACTIVISM

EG: Would you consider Radio Chigüiro to be a Media Activism practice?

RA: When I think of activism I think of a group of people getting together in order to change the world with certain political goals in mind, I think of activism as people protesting against the World Trade Organization, or act up for AIDS awareness... I think Activism is that sort of thing.

That is also one of the ideas that Brennan and Temporary Services had for the Audio Relay. It has a shoulder strap so that you could theoretically be in a protest march be carrying it along and maybe set it up at a station somewhere during the march and broadcasting what's going on at that time, maybe both information on the subject you're protesting and getting a word out that there is a protest and what happening there. That was one of the original ideas for the use of Audio Relay and in that sense that's what I think of as activism.

I don't know if I can answer whether I think Radio Chigüiro is activism in that sense. It is something you're going to have to answer for yourself because I don't know if it has certain political goals. Obviously it has a political dimension, because it is not big media radio, but is it activist in the way of actively trying to bring down big radio?

EG: I question Radio Chigüiro as being a Media Activist project or practice because the media activist guys really want to change the world and they have hope in it while Radio Chigüiro doesn't. Radio Chigüiro really just wants to do it. It is almost like a political

statement that our way of approaching or maybe resisting mass media is through showing that we don't care. It is active in the way that it's useful for the community, but it's not trying to change people's minds. It wants to create some social awareness but it doesn't have to do with the big picture of the global and political context. It's creating a smaller, local awareness of cooperation and participation within smaller networks of people.

It relates to media activist practices because we're using new and old media in a way that is not supposed to be used.

RA: Yeah, in that sense an inferred political dimension, but I would have a hard time considering it Activist art. There is such a thing, as "Activist Art" and I don't think it would fit in there exactly. The tool, the Audio Relay, could be used for that, but you're not getting on the radio and exposing your political views.

EG: It is not through words, but more through from what it is. It reveals some sort of disagreement with certain aspects but it's not trying to change them.

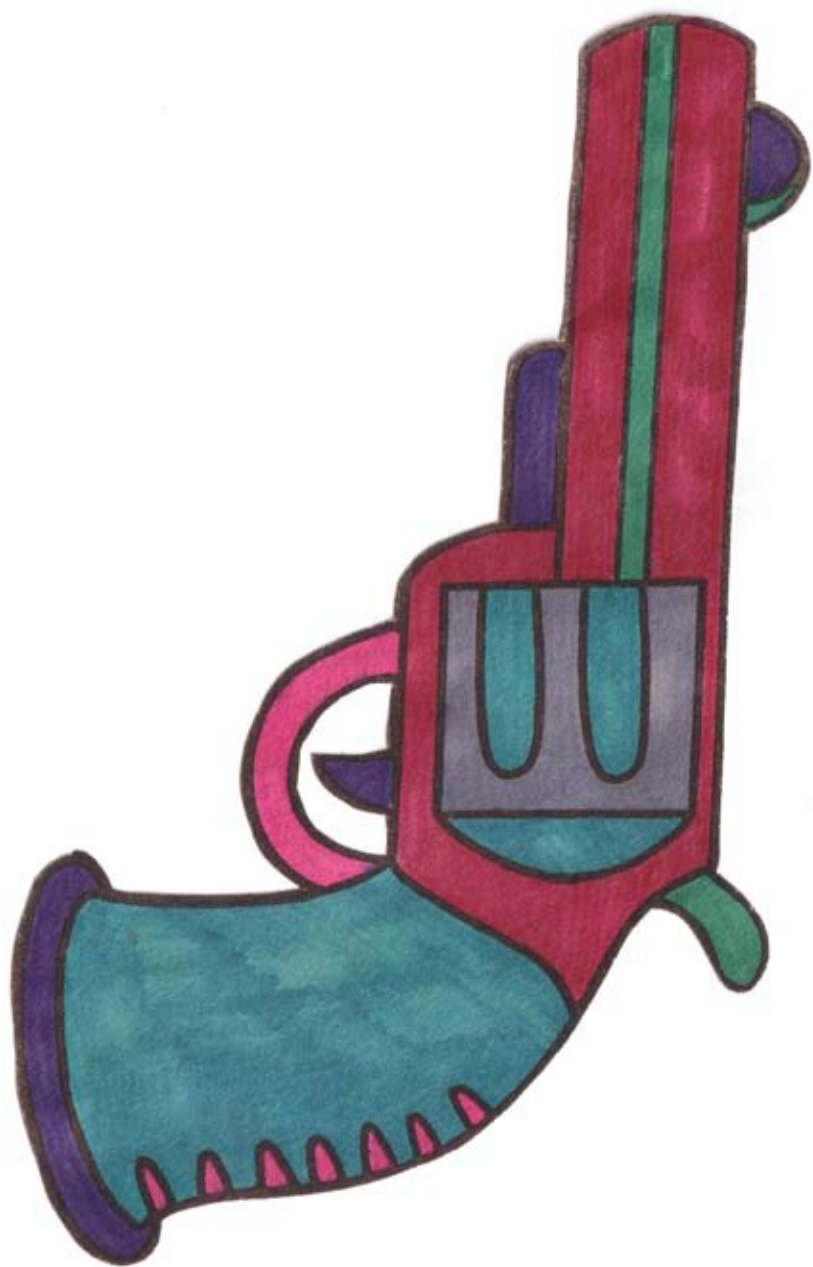
RA: Well, Brennen McGaffey and Temporary Services developed the Audio Relay device and that micro-radio station is the "activist" device. So I would say that those artists are the closest to activism.

But what has been done with it is to give it content. Has that content been particularly activist? I don't think so. Audio Relay is like a shell that you fill with content, so it doesn't have to be activist. That kind of flexibility is very specific to electronic media.

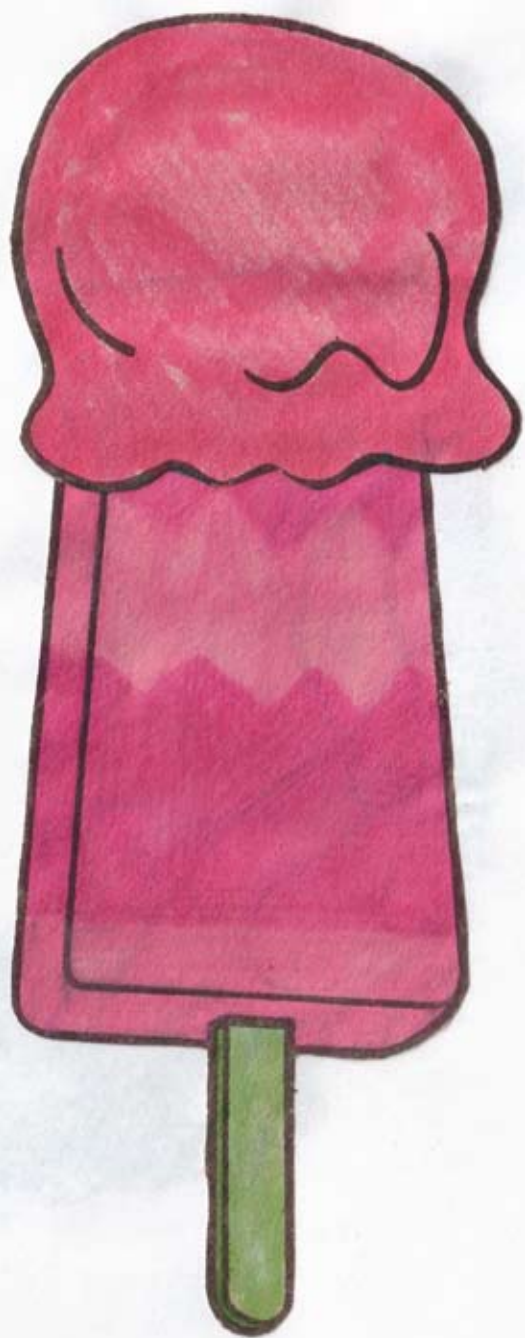
Audio Relay is an artwork by Brennen McGaffey and Temporary Services. I'd argue that you are a collaborating artist in that you paired it with Radio Chigüiro. What do you think is the "art part" that Radio Chigüiro brought to Audio Relay?

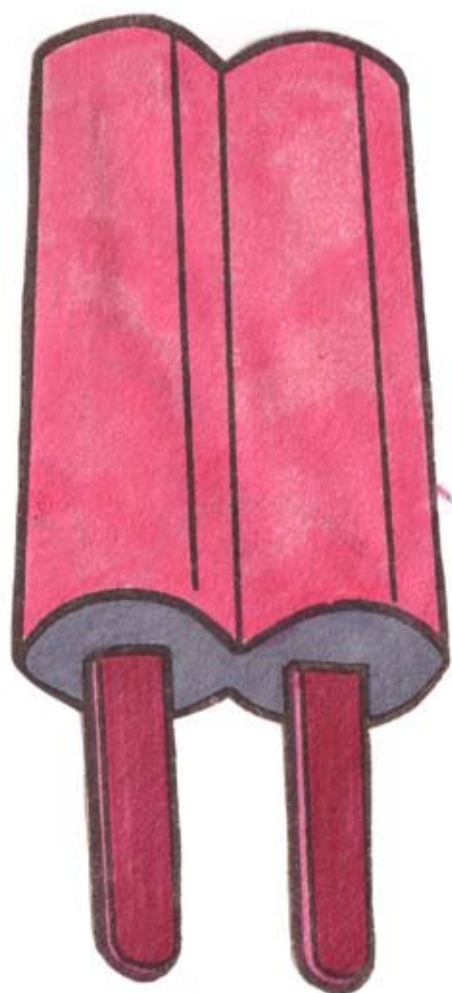
EG: Yes, I agree with you on that. Radio Chigüiro gives the Audio Relay a specific use for its own purposes. Audio Relay is the medium and Radio Chigüiro is the way of collecting the content. A device like the Audio Relay facilitated making the project the way it is, but it is not necessary. I've been working lately building my own radio transmitters and that has been very satisfactory as well. Radio Chigüiro's art part that you ask is in the form that the content is collected and archived, it is also all the design aspect of every single detail but mainly it is art if it is understood as a catalyst for a social service.

I often think that Radio Chigüiro could or could not be considered an art project by others and it won't matter. I present it as art sometimes because it is convenient, contemporary art organizations can open spaces that are less structured because there's no need or pressure to make profit and allows to have the budget for making this kind of activities, for example the shows and the workshops.











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