

HORDALAND **KUNSTSENTER**

Performance for Podcast:
a collection of digital commissions

Phase 1, 2017:
new works for podcast by Mykki Blanco and Mårten Spångberg

Application for project support from Hordaland Fylkeskommune

In 2017 Hordaland Kunstsenter furthers our ongoing exploration of the ideas of publicness, institutional presence, and audience through a series of commissions of artworks made for the medium of podcast. Called “Performance for Podcast”, this project is concerned with three main questions:

1. How artists’ radio, and in particular the format of the radio drama, is transforming in response to the conventions of internet distribution and sharing. The termination of FM radio broadcast in Norway in 2017 is a significant effect of this, and is a telling reflection of levels of access to and freedom in the digital realm in Norway.
2. how artistic qualities not native to the audio - such as live performance, writing and choreography and visuality - can be translated for a sound broadcast concept
3. and finally, whether the wide distribution potential of podcasts might offer a platform to increase the “visibility” of performance art in a contemporary art context in which performance art still lacks consistent presentation opportunities outside of live events and video documentation.

We have chosen the podcast format, rather than other natively digital distribution formats such as video streaming, precisely because of its distance from the visual. The intention is that this distance will reveal aspects of performance rendered invisible by the dominance of visuality in this art form. Furthermore, in situations where licensing of visual imagery, censorship of visual material, or low bandwidth limit the distribution of video, audio material is able to reach more widely into society across geographical, economic and political boundaries.

Unlike watching a video interpretation of a performance, which requires the viewer to look at a screen, an audio track allows the listener to carry the sonic experience into any visual and spatial experience. The world of the work is not defined by the scale of personal screen devices, nor by the compositional and technical constraints of video. More importantly, however, because a podcast is accessed on demand, the listener is able to insert it into other sensory contexts of his or her choosing. In this light, the experience of an audio work, particularly while one is “doing other things”, is always live because it is integrated into life. The highly portable and minimally intrusive, nature of the podcast places the audience in control of the artwork’s conditions of manifestation, a possibility that is largely denied through visual documentation and through the practical constraints of collective live events.

Although the genre of artist's radio has a rich and established place in contemporary art practice, this project is primarily concerned with the translation and transformation of ocular forms of address - performance, text and image - into the non-visual, in order to draw attention to what is taken for granted in the regime of the visible. For this reason, we have not chosen to commission works from artist who have established sound practices, but have rather selected artists working in fields tangential to sound - specifically performance, choreography and writing - in order to bring about this translation.

In 2017 HKS will commission two performances for podcast as a pilot phase of the project, with the intention of commissioning a further two works in 2018. The artists invited to produce works in 2017 are Mykki Blanco and Mårten Spångberg. With this application we request support to cover part of the costs related to Mykki Blanco's production and residency



Mårten Spångberg, *Natten*, 2016,
performance at the ICA, London.
Photograph: Anne van Aerschot

The radio drama format

In order to give a formal guideline to the invited artists we have suggested the format of the radio drama as a reference point for conceptualizing a performance for the medium of podcast.

In the 20th century radio broadcast revolutionised not only levels of access to information and culture across classes, but also the experience of spatiality. Radio space, co-existing with and cutting across physical space, is arguably the first instance of spatial virtuality, if we understand the virtual, following Deleuze and Guattari, as an “alternative continuity” in relation to the actual (*Milles Plateaus*, 95).

Today this spatial function is largely replaced and exaggerated by the internet, which, like photography replacing the functional value of portrait painting, brings about conditions for considering what is left in the radio format that is essential to it. In inviting Blanco and Spångberg to interpret or respond to the format of the radio play, we are in fact searching for some quality that is particular to broadcast - the disembodied voice, the use of atmosphere, the possibilities of distribution, and perhaps other unforeseen elements as well. Furthermore, by citing the radio play format we bear witness to this moment of the loss of FM radio in the developed world, which is, at the same time an inevitable reminder of its continued ubiquity in parts of the world with poorer digital infrastructure. Thus radio, in its digital and analogue manifestations, has become an indicator of economic status and development.

There is a sinister side to the replacement of radio with the digital, namely the expansion of the possibilities of surveillance and content ownership. The obscure channels of monetisation to which content published online is vulnerable, and the possibilities for personal data mining that are introduced by the free engagement with online content, police this virtual space in a way that radio could not. Contemporary digital radio is therefore a contested field of engagement in which access and freedom are at stake.

Relevance to HKS programme for the year:

This project is an important part of Hordaland Kunstsenter's 2017 programme entitled “After Exhibitions”, which considers the possibilities for contemporary art in an era that does not necessarily take the primacy of the exhibition format as a given. With this in mind, many of our new commissions and events in 2017 deviate from the exhibition format, which has been the lynchpin of Hordaland Kunstsenter's programming since its inception in 1976. Online presentation and distribution extend access to the art centre's programme by potentially reaching audiences who are not able to visit our premises physically.



Mykki Blanco, 2015. Photograph: Chuck Davenport

Project plan, presentation and timeline:

We have consulted with London and Bergen-based audio production company Reduced Listening with a view to engaging their services for sound production and distribution of the final pieces. Founding Director of Reduced Listening, Peter Meanwell, is a curator, writer and radio producer based in Bergen, and is currently artistic director of the Borealis Festival for Experimental Music. We will work closely with Peter in realising and distributing both podcast works.

Mykki Blanco will undertake a residency at Hordaland Kunstsenter as an extension of our normal residency programme, during which her radio play will be written and produced. The final piece will be presented in a live public event at Hordaland Kunstsenter in collaboration with BIT-Teatergarasjen as part of Meteor Festival 2017, which will take place in October 2017. This project connects to the research topic of this year's residency programme, 'writing as and around art'.

Spångberg's production is more extensive and will be developed from April onwards in Bergen and London, with the engagement of voice artists in both cities. Voice artists will be commissioned by the artist. The final piece will be recorded in London and in Bergen and will be ready for presentation in September 2017.

Mårten Spångberg will produce a 'podcast opera' in five acts, each lasting approximately 20 minutes, based on his recent 7-hour choreographic work *Natten* (2016). First shown at Xing in Bologna in April 2016, *Natten* had its international premiere at the Kunsten des Artes Festival in Brussels in May 2016 and has subsequently been shown at MDT in Stockholm, Black Box Teateret in Oslo, and the ICA London, amongst other venues. Choreographed for nine dancers, the piece is accompanied by a collection of short stories written by Spångberg that replaces the usual performance programme. This book (attached to the application in a separate attachment) will comprise the libretto for the podcast opera. Spångberg also developed a soundtrack for the performance using a combination of found sound, compositional elements and popular songs, and this will form the basis of the score for the podcast. This piece will premiere as part of the exhibition "Image Drain", at the Tallinn Art Hall, opening on 1 September 2017, and will subsequently be presented in Bergen a live event co-hosted by Hordaland Kunstsenter and BIT-Teatergarasjen. Spångberg is currently an Associate Artist at Black Box teateret in Oslo, and after its Bergen presentation the piece will be presented with a similar live event in Oslo, facilitated by Black Box teateret.

In addition to these live presentation events both pieces will be distributed online for free, through podcast streaming services, art radio platforms and through Hordaland Kunstsenter's and partner organisations' websites.



Mårten Spångberg, Natten book, 2016.
Photograph: Mårten Spångberg

Biographies:

Mykki Blanco (Michael David Quattlebaum Jr, born 1986) is a New York based transgressive musician and writer, artist and poet. He describes himself as a transgender artist and has recently worked in residency at The Breeder gallery in Athens. His previous publications include the highly acclaimed poetry book 'From the silence of Duchamp to the Noise of Boys' (2011).

Mårten Spångberg (b. 1968) is a choreographer and artist. His interest concerns choreography in an expanded field, something he has approached through experimental practice in a multiplicity of formats and expressions. He has been active on stage as a performer and creator since 1994, and since 1999 has been creating his own choreographies, from solos to larger scale works, which have toured internationally. Under the label International Festival, Spångberg collaborated with architect Tor Lindstrand and engaged in social and expanded choreography.

Reduced Listening is a creative audio company that works with artists, musicians and broadcasters to make outstanding radio, podcasts and drama. As well as music based projects such as BBC Radio 3's weekly series Late Junction and delivering large scale projects with the Old Vic and Artangel in the UK, Reduced Listening has been at the forefront of working creatively with artists and institutions engaging with the medium of radio - including the 2016 Serpentine Marathon (a day of live artist radio projects), James Langdon's Sinkhole (Francesco Pedraglio); The Cast of the Crystal Set (Matt's Gallery); Drawing Room Confessions (David Lamelas, Richard Wentworth...); Albanian Pavilion, Venice Architecture Biennale (Etel Adnan, Mourid Barghouti, Anri Sala...); PROA, Argentina (Maia Urstad); Dark Ecology (Cecilia Jonsson); Artangel Podcasts (Daniel Silver, Yael Bartana). We are committed to building new, creative spaces in broadcasting, using the medium of radio and our expertise in producing it to engage an audience through listening, and widening the discussion about the creative arts through developing new formats. Today, in 2017, Europe has developed a taste for podcasts, and the US school of creative radio making (Love & Radio, Radiolab, 99% Invisible etc.) has given them a desire for crafted audio that tells engaging stories and embraces bigger concepts. As a company Reduced Listening combines the creative and practical expertise and experience of years of radio making for the BBC, with a creative sensibility drawn from a team who are actively engaged in music and visual arts. With production bases in London, UK and Bergen, Norway we can work flexibly across the UK, Europe and Scandinavia.

Additional images



Mykki Blanco performing at Grasslands, 2015. Photographer credit unavailable



Mykki Blanco, Loner, 2017, video still



Mårten Spångberg, *Natten*,
2016, performance at the ICA,
London. Photograph: Anne van
Aerschot



Mårten Spångberg giving
a reading from the Natten
publication at Kunsthall
Giessen, 17 January 2017