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Internet radio as a means to construct community

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Abstract:

This paper deals with new possibilities of constructing and strengthening communities via Internet radio as a format. It is the result of an anthropological fieldwork at the Danish Internet radio, *Den2Radio*, and among the listeners of *Den2Radio*. The paper seeks to answer what kind of relationship the radio producers and their listeners have. The paper takes the reader behind the scenes and into the radio studio while recording. It shows how the sound technician and the radio broadcasters co-operate in the voice performance of the radio broadcaster. The paper follows the sound as it changes materiality in the many steps from the taped recordings, through the edited and compacted files uploaded to the Internet and finally to the output of radio sound in the listeners' homes. The paper also takes the reader into the private homes of the listeners and into their private soundscapes to investigate the listeners' experiences of the radio sound. In short, the paper investigates the many ways in which different actors enact the phenomenon of radio sound differently. The paper concludes that the radio process, which includes the practice of both the radio producers and the listeners, is a renewal and a clarification of the values of the radio producers and the listeners on which they base their community..

Keywords:

community, enactment, acousmatic voice, soundscape

Introduction

On the 1st of May 2008 a new Internet radio station started sending Danish talk radio online. From that day the listeners could tune in on a homepage and the pre-recorded programmes would start playing automatically. This new Internet radio station was the beginning of a 'new' way to enact a community. The broadcasters who started this station were former workers at the Danish Broadcasting Corporation (DR), who did not agree with a new development in the form and the content of the radio programmes at DR. Shifting from FM-radio to online-radio meant having new opportunities for designing their own radio programmes with no predetermined instructions on the form, the content or length of the radio programmes. This Internet radio station is called *Den2Radio*, which translated in to English means: the other radio.

In this paper I will present an anthropological investigation of a Danish community, whose foundation is the Internet radio station Den2Radio. The starting point of the investigation is the research question of how the radio broadcasters and the listeners construct a radio community. The Internet radio station differs from a traditional community radio by not belonging to a community, which has one specific locality. This means the radio programmes are reachable within the reach of the Internet, which broadens the horizon of the community radio station. This also means that the people involved in the community do not constitute the community on a regularly face-to-face contact. So how are they able to construct and maintain the community? The investigation

of this papers starts in the radio studio of Den2Radio and moves on to the homes of the listeners and ends in the radio community.

As a way to combine the space of the broadcasters with the space of the listeners I use theory of anthropological theatre performance. The Danish anthropologist Kirsten Hastrup has made a study of the social action in Shakespearean Theatre, which is combining the world of the director and the actors with the world of the audience (Hastrup 2004).

As a way to investigate the different enactments of radio sound I will use the Dutch philosopher and ethnographer Annemarie Mol's study of atherosclerosis (Mol 2002). In this study Mol investigates different enactments of the phenomenon of atherosclerosis, which helps to understand the different enactments of the phenomenon of radio sound.

The radio studio

Outside, to the right of the radio studio, a lamp is located to indicate what kind of performance is going on in the radio studio. If the lamp is turned on the surroundings need to be quiet, because the acoustic performance is being recorded. This lamp represents an essential part of the enactment of radio sound in the radio studio: that is the isolation of the radio sound while recording. The radio studio is both a place for the broadcasters to perform under direction of the sound technician, and a place for the sound technician to work on the radio sound after being recorded. I will start by analyzing the performance of the broadcasters and the sound technician, which constitutes their enactment of radio sound.

Ready, Set, Go!

In the radio studio the cooperation between the broadcasters and the sound technician is crucial for the enactment of the radio sound. I find this cooperation similar to the cooperation of a play director and an actor during play rehearsal, because of the similar social roles they play in the production. The theatre as a 'stage' for social action is inspired by the work of the Danish anthropologist Kirsten Hastrup, who investigated the social actions of a theatre company performing the plays of Shakespeare (Hastrup 2004). In a theatre constellation different actors fulfil different roles and to complete a performance a director, an actor, a text, and an audience are needed. A similar situation goes for radio communication when a sound technician, a broadcaster, a text, and an audience consisting of listeners are needed. The sound technician is directing the broadcaster to perform optimally and the broadcasters take directions from the sound technician while performing the text. The listeners are the distant audience for the radio sound and the sound technician is the immediate audience for the performance. Thus the sound technician plays a central part in the radio communication. Investigating the role of the sound technician I use the British anthropologist Tim Ingold's concept of skills. In Ingold's phenomenological view skills are acquired not by the means of genealogy, but by the means of social and cultural construction (Ingold 2000). Thus in the practical carrying out, the sound technical craft is important. The sound technician at Den2Radio has been working as a sound technician and radio producer for decades, and has a lot of practical experience with the craftsmanship of sound. She has a clear image of her work, as she explains:

"The most important is to know one's craft and have that musical sense of how to combine the sound elements in a composition...to be able to hear if the sound you make is good".

This statement supports the theory of Ingold that certain people can develop "a fine sense of hearing" (Ingold 2000: 283) as for example musicians. So the sound technician is tuned in for listening. In the next part I will take the reader inside the radio studio to a recording session with a broadcaster and the sound technician to investigate the different roles of the actors and to investigate the cooperation between the broadcasters and the sound technician.

The cooperation

In the radio studio the recording sessions often consist of either an interview or a 'speak'. The term 'speak' refers to a recording, which only consists of pure speak. The recorded speak is later going to be a part of a radio programme that consists of different sound elements.

The radio studio consists of a radio recording-"booth" and a sound registration-"booth" in one room. In the right part of the room is a table with a microphone surrounded by two sound isolating removable walls. This represents the recording booth where, the broadcasters sit with earphones while performing. In the left part of the room is the sound registration booth, consisting of a computer, which the sound technician uses to monitor and record the sound. There is also a mixer to control the recording level. The microphone wire connects the two places.

While conducting my fieldwork different broadcasters performed in the recording booth. A young broadcaster, Nalle, was one of the first broadcasters I got to experience during my fieldwork. He had prior radio experience, but as many of the others he still needed directions from the sound technician. The sound technician is connected to the sound performance by earphones, so she has an immediate access to the performance of the broadcasters. The programme, which Nalle was recording a 'speak' for, was a programme dealing with old cookbooks in a cultural and social view. Nalle sits in the recording booth rehearsing his text, while the sound technician connects the earphones to the mixer. They discuss the length from Nalle to the microphone, before recording. They also discuss the way Nalle speaks while reading aloud. The sound technician is of the opinion that it sounds a bit like a stewardess. Some of the sounds like s-sound and p-sound are difficult to record, because of the type of studio, so the broadcasters have to be aware of their diction. This is also the case for Nalle. The sound technician also tells Nalle to slow down while reading and to pronounce the endings of words more distinctly.

The sound recording example with Nalle shows that the sound technician functions as a direction for the performance of the broadcaster. The sound technician is the first listener. Another example, which supports the crucial function of the sound technician, is an example where the sound technician is *not* present. The broadcaster, Jesper, is living in France where he is producing radio programmes for Den2Radio. He has no sound technician helping him, so he has to be extra careful about his performance, as he explains:

"You have to be careful when performing your own shows... When you sit there 'talking to your self' you can be tempted to be too sincere or too relaxed... When you are in a studio it more feels like you are talking to someone else".

The statement of Jesper shows that radio communication is a specific kind of communication, which is supported by an immediate audience as represented by a sound technician. The Canadian micro-sociologist Erving Goffman developed theories of social interaction in the late 1950s, which is today still helpful to understand the performance of the broadcasters and the sound technician (Goffman 1992 [1959]). Goffman's theory of social interaction highlights the means of expression as important in communication. One needs to have control over ones means of expression (ibid.: 49). This is also very important in radio communication, because the communication is mediated through a non-visual medium. The communication then only consists of sound elements, so the sound elements have to be clear and correct. The broadcasters use their own voice to communicate, and the sound technician makes sure the voice is recorded under the best circumstances as possible by isolating the voice from any noise. In my work I found the voice of a broadcaster to be an essential part of the radio communication. In the next part I will investigate how the broadcasters use their voices.

The voice

The voice in radio broadcasting has a special double status as both being an object the broadcasters can modulate to fit the specific radio programme, but also as a representation of the personal 'self' of the broadcaster,

which can be used as a means to create a certain presence for the listeners. In her study of the Shakespearean Theatre Hastrup has investigated the roles of the actors and actresses, which can be helpful in understanding the double status of the voice. In the stage of play rehearsal Hastrup differs between the *character* and the *actor*. The aim is for the actors to feel at home in the play and be able to lift the character from the text (Hastrup 2004: 122-3). While rehearsing the actors have to 'meet' the text and in this meeting the shaping of character takes place (ibid.: 124). This shaping of the character and meeting the text are similar to the situation of the broadcasters. Several of the broadcasters informed me that gradually the broadcasters find their own style and own 'voice', which are the starting point of their performance. Also in the radio studio the text plays an important part in the performance of the broadcasters. A broadcaster told me: "*a good text is a text one can read aloud. It goes from the eyes through the mouth and if that is not possible it is a bad text*". In the radio studio the broadcasters often write their own text, which fits their own style and fits the programme in a whole.

In the studio the broadcasters are equipped with earphones so they are able to deepen themselves in their own voice and through that modulate their voice and get in character. Getting in character is a crucial moment for the radio communication. This is where the broadcaster is completely committed to the radio communication and has control over the means of expression. Hastrup describes this moment as "performance time" (Hastrup 2004: 129-130). At Den2Radio the performance is not sent directly to the listeners, so the performance does not need to be right in the first take. This means the sound technician can direct the performance of the broadcaster during the performance. The sound technician explains that she can sense when a broadcaster gets in character, because the voice gets deeper and she senses a strong concentration. This concentration is therefore important for an optimal performance. In the next part I will investigate how the sound technician, after recording, polishes the voice performance by editing the sound to optimize the performance.

The visual sound

The American English literature professor Walter J. Ong states that sound is difficult to fixate; because when sound is paused one can only hear silence. It differs from a visual image, where a still image appears when a motion picture is paused (Ong 1986 [1982]: 32). In a matter of investigating the voice the British literature professor Steven Connor investigates the relation between the body and the voice. He finds the voice as an element leaving the body as soon as the vocal chord is in motion (Connor 2000: 3-5). Both Ong and Connor can be used to emphasize the fleetingness of sound as a media. In an attempt to control a fleeting media as sound, the sound editing process at Den2Radio is made visual by a digital sound-editing programme. Following Connors theory one can visually observe the voice of the broadcasters as it leaves the body in a recording session, and also after it has left the body on the computer screen of the sound technician. The voice is illustrated as red sound waves during recording, and afterwards illustrated as green sound waves when it is saved on the computer. When the voice is saved, it becomes a part of other sound elements, which the sound technician uses to compose a whole radio programme. It is now the job of the sound technician to edit and modulate the voices. In the next part I will introduce the sound-editing programme.

The visual tool

The sound-editing programme used by the sound technician is called *Dalet*. This programme facilitates the sound editing process, by facilitating a structural approach to combine the different sound elements. On the computer screen the sound technician has several tracks, which give a structural overview of the sound elements. One track is for speak, one for interview, one for music, and one for 'cleansound'¹. In the process of editing, the

¹ Cleansound is an empirical term, which is a sound element recorded in the field often before an interview. This can be used as a means to create an atmosphere of the location.

sound changes materiality and becomes visual as sound waves on the computer screen. This process of visualization is similar to the visualization process performed by the doctors at a Dutch hospital in an attempt to diagnose and treat a patient for atherosclerosis. The Dutch philosopher and ethnographer, Annemarie Mol, has made a study of how atherosclerosis is enacted differently by different actors at the hospital in order to treat the patients (Mol 2002:79). By using Mol's approach I can study the radio sound as a phenomenon enacted differently by different actors. As I will show in the next part it is a challenge to enact the sound in a visual manner.

The challenge

The sound technician often refers to the sound editing work as plastic, because of the visual image it leaves on the computer screen. Even though the visualization process is making the digital sound editing process possible, it is also a challenge not to get fixated on the visual image on the computer screen. When the sound technician gets fixated on the visual image, he or she often forgets to incorporate brakes in the radio programmes. A sound technician emphasized that it was important to: *"Use your ears instead of using your eyes"*. This can be seen as a symptom of the favouring of visual perception in the Western world (Lundberg in Hastrup 2003). In the native lingo also visual terms are used to describe the enactment of sound editing as for example: *"I am composing an image, which is pleasant for the spectator"*. In the next part I will investigate how the sound technician composes this image.

The composition

After recording in the studio the job of the sound technician is to compose the different sound elements to become a whole programme. As the director in Hastrup's studies of the Shakespearian Theatre it is her job to create a whole of the narrative parts, and to combine them to become a joint and convincing story (Hastrup 2004: 197). The sound technician is focused on creating a story, which has a certain tempo and pulse and fits the theme and the voices. When editing a voice she is focused on the personal rhythm of the speech, but also focused on the listeners who will be receiving the product. It is important not to have many *"uhms"*, because it distracts the listeners. So the sound technician is trying to control the means of expression and isolate the radio sound, which then is transmitted to the listeners. In the next part I will investigate how the listeners receive the transmitted radio sound, and thus how they enact the radio sound.

The space of listeners

The listeners become the audience for the performance of the broadcasters the minute they turn on the radio sound and tune in on their selected programme. This process of 'tuning in' is a matter of focus of attention. The definition of hearing versus the definition of listening will help to understand the process. The Australian anthropologist Jo Tacchi has also investigated radio habits and has made a distinction between the background - and the foreground status of the radio sound (Tacchi in Askew & Wilk 2002: 249-50). When the radio sound has a background status people *hear* the radio sound, but when the radio sound has a foreground status people *listen* to the radio sound. The enactment of radio sound by my informants concerning Den2Radio was a matter of *listening* to the radio, where the listeners had their full attention on the radio sound. To obtain a full concentration on the radio sound, the listeners isolated the radio sound from other sounds. I will refer to this process as *soundscaping* (ibid.: 251). Soundscaping is when people can choose which acoustic elements they want in their surroundings. Many of the listeners use earphones to obtain this level of concentration. I will get back to the concentration level later in the paper, but first I will investigate how the listeners perceive the radio sound.

The acousmatic voice

As also emphasized by Tacchi, listening to radio is difficult for listeners to talk about, because it has become a natural part of everyday life and often a somewhat unconscious act (Tacchi in Askew & Wilk 2002: 249-50). But still some of the listeners reflect on the voice of the broadcasters entering their living room as a kind of a mystical situation. The voice, which seems detached from the body of the broadcaster, is often referred to as an acousmatic voice by sound scholars (see Samuels et al. 2010: 333). The Slovenian philosopher Mladen Dolar studies the effect of the acousmatic voice and refers to the myth about the Greek philosopher Pythagoras. The myth tells the story of Pythagoras' teaching methods. Pythagoras would stand behind a curtain during classes so only his voice would reach the students. Dolar explains:

"...the students, the followers, were confined to "their Master's voice," not distracted by his looks or quirks of behaviour, by visual forms, the spectacle of presentation, the theatrical effects which always pertain to lecturing; they had to concentrate merely on the voice and the meaning emanating from it" (Dolar 2006: 61).

So the teaching methods of Pythagoras focus on the effect that the 'isolated' voice can have on the learning process. In my study I find the effects the acousmatic voice can have on the listeners interesting. As I mentioned in the part of the broadcasters at page four the voice is used to create a presence for the listeners, so I was interested in investigating how the listeners experienced this presence. I asked the listeners how they perceived the acousmatic voice and if they imagined the person it originated from. Below I will present answers.

Ole is in his mid 50s and lives with his family in Jutland. To my question he answered:

"I don't put a face on the voice, it is more a feeling of a certain type".

Anja is in her mid 50s and lives on Zealand. She answered:

"I am not sure...I don't think so. I think I am content with the sound image".

Gitte is in her mid 40s and lives in Copenhagen. She answered:

"I never thought about how the voices I remember from my childhood and from Den2Radio looked like. They don't really exist as persons, just as voices and associations... If I hear a certain voice of a broadcaster I think about how it was being a teenager and the friends I had at that time".

So it does not seem that the listeners connect the acousmatic voice to the person it originated from. In fact the listeners have described the acousmatic voice as an advantage. The semi-present person in the shape of the acousmatic voice appearing from the radio gives the listeners an opportunity to create their own sound mediated personalized space. This depends on how successful the listener has isolated their soundscape, so the listener can enter a state of flow. The Hungarian psychology professor Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has studied the importance of the state of flow in the so-called "optimal experience" (Csikszentmihalyi 1991 [1989]: 91). The state of flow is an experience of actions and consciousness melting together. In this case the person does not reflect on his or her actions (ibid.). This state of flow I would argue is achievable for the listeners when listening to the radio. But it takes a successful cooperation between the broadcasters and the listeners. In the next part I will investigate this cooperation between the broadcasters and the listeners.

The partnership between the broadcasters and the listener

Again Hastrup's study on the Shakespearian Theatre is helpful to understand the social actions of the different actors in radio communication among the broadcasters and the listeners at Den2Radio. Hastrup states that to obtain a successful theatre experience the actors and the audience have to become 'partners', which means the actors have to consider the audience as equals and actually as potential co-actors (Hastrup 2004: 298-9). In the field of radio communication the listeners are co-producers of the soundscape, so the broadcasters also have to consider them to be co-soundscaping partners. An example showing that the broadcasters consider the listeners as partners is when recording the sound. Both the broadcasters and the listeners emphasize the sound

quality as a key element to a successful radio communication. If the sound quality is bad the state of flow gets unobtainable for the listeners and the 'communication line' is disconnected. Hastrup explains the process in which the partnership between the actors and the audience is established. This is a process towards a transformation, which is the goal of the theatre (Hastrup 2004:299-300). The situation of radio communication is similar, because a transformation is taking place in the communication from the broadcasters to the listeners. The British media scholar Andrew Crisell makes an interesting analysis on the process of transformation in a British radio historical context. Crisell investigates the different terms of "broadcasting" and "transmission". Broadcasting is a previous term used for the radio communication, which supports an idea of the broadcasters announcing to the listeners. The term transmission refers to radio communication as being more complex than announcing. It refers to something crossing over to the listeners (Crisell 1996 [1986]: 12). The term transmission is useful in the investigation of the communication between the broadcasters and the listeners, because in the process of transformation it is not a matter of the broadcaster announcing to the listeners. It is a matter of the broadcasters transmitting radio sound to the listeners, which the listeners will use to create their own sound-mediated personalized space. And this space is up to the individual listeners to organize and decorate with images, thoughts etc., which is taking place in the minds of the listeners.

In the paper so far I have shown that the broadcasters enact the radio sound in another space and time than the listeners. And when the sound is enacted by the listeners it only 'exists' in the sound-mediated personalized space of the listener. So how can the different actors in radio communication, who operate in different spaces and in different periods of time, create a community? In the next part of the paper I will argue how this is possible.

The resonance

"Den2Radio is a new haven I found. It has more obvious relevance for me [than other forms of radio communication]. It inspires and informs me. It brings substantial information in a constant flux of information. We have so many platforms to obtain information, which has lowered the standard quality and made the information superficial. Certain calmness is needed in order to make in depth journalism [which, Den2Radio supplies]."

Thomas, a Den2Radio listener

Thomas' statement illustrates qualities associated with Den2Radio by both the broadcasters and the listeners. In this part of the paper I will argue that these qualities constitute the radio community of the broadcasters and the listeners. As shown in this paper the broadcasters and the listeners do not have an actual physical encounter, but there appears to be a kind of resonance among the different actors. The different actors belong to a so-called "imagined community". The Irish political scientist Benedict Anderson is the first to systematically use the term imagined community. Anderson was investigating the feeling of belonging to a nation, where the face-to-face contact, which is significant for a smaller community, is impossible in an entire nation. Anderson argues that the feeling of belonging to a nation was easier to imagine by the means of the development of media, because the media can cross over large geographical distances (Anderson 1991 [1983]). I will investigate Den2Radio as an imagined radio community. For this investigation I will use sociological theory on "distinction" by the French sociologist and anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1984 [1979]).

A taste of radio

As mentioned above, the community of Den2Radio agrees on certain qualities associated with Den2Radio as calmness and in-depth journalism. The broadcasters and the listeners have certain ideas about what constitutes a good taste in radio and in the media in general. They also have an idea about what constitutes a bad taste in radio and in the media in general. Bourdieu has made a large study of the preferences of taste in different groups

in France in the 1970s. Bourdieu explains how different groups in society navigate and position in reference to other groups in society. In my investigation I can use Bourdieu's study to explain how the community of Den2Radio enacts a certain kind of radio tradition, which the broadcasters and the listeners find in good taste. The Danish journalist and cultural analyzer Rune Lykkeberg's (2008) study of the Danish political situation after the change of government in 2001 can be used to explain why the community of Den2Radio enacts this certain radio tradition. Lykkeberg investigates why certain values in the Danish society changed after a long period of social democratic values. Lykkeberg uses Bourdieu's theory of distinction and taste to analyze the Danish society and studies how different groups in the Danish society position in reference to other groups and also in the political scene. This change in the political scene with a new government affected the Danish Broadcasting Cooperation (DR), where many of the employees of Den2Radio used to work. As a result of the structural changes the former employees at DR started Den2Radio. Starting Den2Radio meant that the former employees could keep producing radio in their chosen radio tradition. Thus Den2Radio was started as a reaction to the structural and substantial changes at DR, which I analyze as the Den2Radio-community positioning in reference to DR and to the new political scene. I will now show empirical examples of how the listeners speak about good and bad taste in media consumption as a way of positioning.

Good taste, bad taste

Rune is a listener in his mid 30s living in Copenhagen. He is especially fond of one of the programmes of Den2Radio. It is a weekly programme where a broadcaster in eight minutes gives his opinion about the political scene. Rune explains his fondness: *"He is a sharp analyzer...I consider his analysis of high quality in relation to the other low standard analysis in the press"*.

Gitte is fond of the programmes concerning literature and she shares the same dislike of other media coverage as Rune. Gitte is fond of the tempo of the programmes and she explains: *"Listening to Den2Radio means listening to uncovered topics in the mainstream media. Den2Radio has comfortable slow dialogs, compared to the upbeat dialogs at other radio stations... The topics remind me of the topics broadcasted in the 1970s...It has a different pulse and a certain calmness"*.

Both Rune and Gitte compare the programmes of Den2Radio to other media and have a specific idea of what they prefer. Gitte's consumption of Den2Radio can be seen as an act of nostalgia in the same way that Jo Tacchi detects among her listeners (Tacchi in Bull & Back 2003). Listening to a radio channel only playing music from the 1960s and 1970s Tacchi's informants can connect with the values of that time. This nostalgic act is a way to connect the past with the present and the future. The case of Den2Radio is similar. By enacting values of 'the past' they act towards values of the future. This goes for both the listeners and the broadcasters.

An imagined radio community

In this closing part I will again use Hastrup's study of the Shakespearian Theatre to explain how the relation between the listeners and the broadcasters can constitute a community. I will start with a quote:

"The joint creation of a space of shared meanings is the point of theatre. 'Shared meaning' does not refer to a canonical interpretation of texts, but to sense in which the actions and words hurled out from the stage free the audience's imagination and resonate with whatever capacities the audience have" (Hastrup 2004:299-300).

In this quote Hastrup explains the aim of the theatre as being a frame where resonance is made possible because the social actions take place within a space of shared meanings. This is also the case in my study of radio communication. The space of shared meanings consists of a certain taste, which refers to certain ideological values. The radio community, which the broadcasters and the listeners of Den2Radio constitute, is not a face-to-face community. It is an imagined community. According to the British anthropologist Michael Herzfeld the idea

of an imagined community only makes sense if it is realized socially (Amit 2002:8). I argue that the broadcasters and the listeners realize the imagined community socially when they become 'partners' in a radio programme through the enactment of voice performance, sound editing, isolation of radio sound, and sound-mediated personalized spaces.

Conclusion

This paper presents an anthropological investigation of the relation between broadcasters of Den2Radio and their listeners. The investigation is constituted of the different actors' different enactments of the radio sound. The broadcasters are performing orally while the sound technician is directing the voice performance of the broadcasters. After recording the sound technician is optimizing the radio sound by digital editing, which requires certain listening skills. The listeners are tuning in on the radio sound and make sure to isolate the radio sound from surrounding sounds. This process is called soundscaping. In a successful soundscaping process the listeners can get in a state of flow, and in this state they are able to create a sound-mediated personalized space. Cooperation between the broadcasters and the listeners is necessary to establish a successful radio communication. The cooperation is based on an existing frame of shared meanings consisting of a common taste in radio based on a common ideology. The paper concludes that the relation between the broadcasters and the listeners is a matter of an imagined community, which is realized socially by the different enactments of the radio sound.

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