

7a-11d International Performance Festival 2014
October 29, 30, 31 and November 1st, 2014
Narrow-cast on FM93.1 and webcast on NAISA's internet radio

by Alison Cooley

blog dispatch I from Radio Equals

claude wittmann restarts his computer. I can hear the indelible clicking of a track pad. He finishes a phone call with tech support.
"This is the beginning of a project at 7a11d festival, about equality and egalitarian actions. We are on the air, on the internet."
Christian Bujold is conversing with claude about equality. Or first not about equality, just about how the two know each other. Regardless, it feels intimate, secretive. They are in a small room, alone. To be interviewed (and to be in a small space) is precarious and tentative and vulnerable. I can hear this intimately through my portable radio.
Where does equality manifest in the body? wittmann feels it in his throat, in the opening and closing of the passage of language.
Rather than begin with the abstract inequalities that might come to mind in the ether of current events, the ongoing actions of the powerful against the disenfranchised, wittmann and Bujold sit with the equality that materializes between them, as two people in relation to each other.
The exercise between these two seems to be to constitute equality at its simplest level—not in opposition to inequality, as a response to a moment of injustice, not as an assumed presence, but as an experience to be actively cultivated.
Bujold and wittmann agree that there is strength to be found in vulnerability. wittmann hints at the reserves of energy we have in childhood. That there is strength and vulnerability in re-developing those energies.
Bujold begins to make a distinction between power and strength—
Then there is static.

blog dispatch II from Radio Equals



What does it mean to receive *Radio Equals*? claude wittmann broadcasts his interpersonal egalitarian experiment (one-on-one interviews recorded inside a small, closet-like room) over the radio and online. As I listen, I am receiving a private conversation, I am being enfolded into a broadcast moment of incredible intimacy.

It is rare to receive the words of someone whose bodily attunement is as precise, as honest as wittmann's. It is utterly striking. wittmann monitors and relays his changes in breath, in voice, the opening of his throat and jaw. He catalogues them as changes in spirit.

When we receive *Radio Equals*, we also receive a deep, embodied knowledge.

I find myself self-conscious, evangelistic, even. To write about *Radio Equals* with such embrace, to write about receiving

(receiving the word, receiving knowledge, receiving the gift, receiving fulfillment)

—to write about being receptive to these conversations of wittmann's, spoken measured and low, deeply felt, is to feel as if I am bowing to the conventions of writing about religious teachings. Humans seem to have new potential to be generous with each other.

Today, again, wittmann and his guest stray from the particularities of specific political scenarios, and focus, instead, on the equality that sits between their two bodies.

"What if I said that I don't believe that we feel completely equal?" wittmann asks.

"There is no such thing as an uninterrupted feeling of equality," suggests his guest. "We are exchanging ideas, and as we respond to each others' ideas, equality flows between us."

"Until now," says wittmann. "I thought it could only be death that would make us equal."

Today when I receive *Radio Equals*, I sense I am receiving not something natural, instinctual, but profoundly learned: a listening I did not know could go so deep.

blog dispatch III from Radio Equals



"We have never met. We don't know each other. Whatever magic happens here has not been rehearsed," says claude wittmann's conversation partner today.

"I am in a little room with white walls, no windows," claude describes. "There is a vent on top. My goal is to sit here and exchange something about equality and egalitarian actions. I want to collect a list of egalitarian actions, and we will choose one to do. I don't have a list now."

His guest asks claude why he moved to Toronto. He explains he had a growing preoccupation with the ethics of his work in molecular biology at the time. He and his guest exchange personal histories.

Is it an interview? What does it mean to speak with someone you do not know? Up until this conversation, I have not felt that wittmann's project consists of interviews. claude confesses that he had to prepare himself to see his guest (a figure who comes with some power and prestige in artist-run culture, who is tall and assertive, whose demeanor is masculine and scholarly.) This guest describes a project he attempted which engaged in non-argumentative exchange, with individual people encountering an archive of radical and artist-run culture. "Do you think we can still be utopian now, like you were then?" one of his attendees asked.

Is *Radio Equals* about the nature of conversation? I didn't think so at first, but it seems to have become this. What do we receive in conversing with each other? Language has the potential to be so instrumental, tool-like, message-driven, devoid. How does information sit elsewhere in conversation? In the pauses, deflections, in incidental moments of static, in mouth-sounds?

I spoke to claude for a moment today, as I came in to pick up my portable radio. He said he had read my blog posts. He comments today on the feeling of having someone listening. I feel burdened and tense and hopeful to know claude knows I am listening.

His guest talks about the potential of sound, of radio, to convey a sense of communion, of closeness.

I listen to a lot of radio, and I have thought through my relationship to radio in ways I hadn't anticipated in the past three days. My attraction to listening to radio has much to do with my own propensity towards anxiety—to wanting to hear others' voices, to fill silence, to seek a resounding consensus (or test myself against voices I disagree with) in an ecosystem of sound. To think through positions I do not have the courage to try in the embodied world. To receive information. To quell fears of alienation and access social situations in a safe way, removed from actually having to be in the moment with another human. To know what to expect from others.

Radio Equals is a shattering reversal of what I have come to expect from radio. But it is enfolded in a new way.

I lose the signal.

When I come back in: "what is the difference between a sensation of equality and love? Is it too much?"

"How can you have a conversation and have trust immediately?" his guest responds.
claude asks, instead, for the two to try out how they could be unequal. Any number of ways. We exist in difference.
I lose the signal.

blog dispatch IV from Radio Equals

