## A Critical Discourse in Sounds: Terre Thaemlitz's *Trans-Sister Radio* (2004)

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In 2004 Terre Thaemlitz, who as an artist, producer, writer and DJ has worked extensively on issues of non-essentialist transgenderism and queerness across various media, created her first work for the radio. *Trans-Sister Radio*, in Thaemlitz's own words, is an electroacoustic radio drama about transgenderism and migration. However, radio drama may be a misleading term here. In fact, what we hear is a continuous juxtaposition of pastiches and samples of existing radio and popular media formats. These include talk shows, panel discussions, personal storytelling and a short radio documentary – all loosely connected to the themes of transgenderism and migration. Manipulated laugh tracks, purposely placed signal noise and existing pop songs frame these formatted narratives, while lengthier electroacoustic music compositions by Thaemlitz serve as reflections on the narrations. *Trans-Sister Radio*, in other words, presents itself as a big sonic collage, modeled on a radio show.

This big sonic collage had its premiere radio airdate on Hessischer Rundfunk's channel HR2 on November 17, 2004 and was later issued on CD.<sup>2</sup> Thaemlitz produced *Trans-Sister Radio* especially for and in collaboration with Hessischer Rundfunk. The German station's decision to commission a work that deals with transgenderism fits well in the general trend that saw the visibility of transgender people in the mainstream media increase drastically since the turn of the millennium.<sup>3</sup> In fact, this article suggests that *Trans-Sister Radio* critically scrutinizes such increased media visibility by framing it in the neoliberal context of the 2000s, where this media visibility goes hand in hand with the absorption of identity politics within free-market logics,<sup>4</sup> and where the ideals of freedom and individual liberation stand in stark contrast with the post-9/11 rise of state surveillance measures

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Terre Thaemlitz, »Trans-Sister Radio«, http://www.comatonse.com/tsr/index.html; (3.2.2020).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> The analysis in this article is based on this CD: Terre Thaemlitz, Trans-Sister Radio, Grain of Sound / Base Recordings (GOS018 / BRCD00505), 2005. The original broadcast of Trans-Sister Radio (2004), narrated in English and Japanese, came with German dubbing which the listener could opt to hear by regulating the stereo image of the broadcast. See »Trans-Sister Radio«, in: ARD Hörspieldatenbank, http://hoerspiele.dra.de/vollinfo.php?dukey=1466788&vi=2&SID (3.2.2020). This translation is omitted on the CD version.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> See Bettina Heinz, »Sexual Orientation«, in: William F. Eadie (ed.), 21st Century Communication: A Reference Handbook (2 vols.), Thousand Oaks, CA at al. 2009, vol. 1, pp. 387–395, here pp. 389f.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> See Lisa Duggan, The Twilight of Equality? Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy, Boston 2003, p. xx.

which are heavily implicated in the production of normatively gendered bodies and behaviors.<sup>5</sup>

To come to such an understanding of *Trans-Sister Radio* it is essential to take into account the breakdown of the distinction between music and sound, which is central to sound studies. Voices, words, noisy technology and musical sounds are all meaningful in *Trans-Sister Radio*. In this article, I retrace some of the contexts and (implicit) meanings connected to these composed, sampled or parodied sonic materials, suggesting how they work together or contradict each other. In doing so I am arguing that the way in which Thaemlitz places and contextualizes these materials, with what I will call sonic détournements, allows for the emergence of a critical and ambiguous discursive field where issues of queerness and transgenderism within radio and media, and more general issues of transgenderism in the neoliberal condition are left for the listener to ponder.

Lingering throughout this analysis is the question of how gender identities are sonically constructed and reflected. In this way *Trans-Sister Radio* serves as a case study to add to the discussion about the relationship between sound and gender, to which Marie Thompson has directed our attention. On a more general level, it is also a case study of a thriving segment of 21st century radio art: *Trans-Sister Radio* stands in an exciting field of radio works that do not content themselves with aesthetic concerns and sounds-inthemselves. Artists such as Meira Asher, Yvette Janine Jackson, and those who were featured in the Documenta 14 radio program (2017), to name just a few, have used the radio medium to produce alternative histories, ethnographies and analyses of identity constructions and social discourses. Such works call for an analytical framework attuned to their specific topics and concerns. In the case of *Trans-Sister Radio* this framework consists of theories on transgender and queer cultural expression and representation (by Judith Halberstam, Jodie Taylor and José Esteban Muñoz) as well as media scholarship on queer radio presence.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Toby Beauchamp, »Artful Concealment and Strategic Visibility. Transgender Bodies and U.S. State Surveillance After 9/11« in: Susan Stryker / Aren Z. Aizura (eds.), *The Transgender Studies Reader* 2, London and New York 2013, pp. 46–55, here p. 46. See also Susan Stryker / Aren Z. Aizura, »Introduction. Transgender Studies 2.0«, in: ibid., pp. 1–12, here pp. 1 and 4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> See Michael Bull, »Introduction: Sound Studies and the Art of Listening«, in: idem (ed.), *The Routledge Companion to Sound Studies*, London et al. 2019, pp. xvii–xxxii, here pp. xxii–xxiii.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> See, e. g., Marie Thompson, »Gendered Sound«, in: ibid., pp. 108–117.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Queer is a slippery term. Its use as an inclusive umbrella term for individuals who do not conform to heteronormativity, including LGTBQI people, has been criticized for positing sexuality as a false unifying factor (E.g., Nikki Sullivan, *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*, New York 2003, p. 44.) While this article does use queer as an umbrella term, this criticism will be dealt with throughout the article.

## Queer radio and the transgender voice

When in 1956 Allen Ginsberg read Howl, a poem permeated by queer desire, on the Californian Pacifica Radio network, for the first time an openly gueer voice was heard on the radio. The queer radio programming that consistently came to occupy the airwaves after this first queer broadcast, has recently begun to be studied. Queer radio scholars have argued for the role of those programs as essential in creating space and identity for queer activism. 10 Brian DeShazor, founder of the Queer Radio Research project, has recounted, for example, how queer radio brought coverage of gay parades and rallies and provided listeners with reliable information on the AIDS epidemic. 11 Radio was also essential in shaping queer communities and identities. Interviews with queer artists sharing personal stories, listener call-ins and panel talks were broadcast as experiences for others to identify with. They articulated what Stacey Copeland has called »a queer perspective«.12 For Copeland, who has researched the broadcasting of queer women in Canada, radio is particularly suitable for the circulation of queer voices, since as a nonvisual medium it resists the objectifying male gaze and the desire of mainstream visual culture to dominate and commodify queer women through sexualization. 13 When it concerns transgender persons, this might become somewhat

more complicated. For queer theorist Judith Halberstam, the transgender body defying the heteronormative gaze is the body that retains its ambiguity and its ambivalence.<sup>14</sup> But is there a place for such an ambiguous body on the radio where only invisible bodies speak?

Thaemlitz seems to ask the same question in *Trans-Sister Radio* from the very beginning. Its opening tune is a tiny electroacoustic composition which is modeled as a station identification, typically used on radio to remind the listener to which station or program they are listening. Likewise, the identification tune in *Trans-Sister Radio* recurs consistently throughout the work, separating its different segments. The tune simply couples an attention-grabbing sound signal with voices stating: »This is Trans-Sister Radio.« The gendered nature of those voices, travelling without their bodies on the radio waves, is made very explicit. For the >neutral< words >this is

 and >radio
 a male-sounding voice is used, >sister
 is pronounced by a female one, and with >trans
 the frequency drops below the human register. There the voice is disembodied twice: as a

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> See Brian DeShazor, »Queer Radio History: Pacifica Radio«, in: Journal of Radio & Audio Media 25 (2018), pp. 253–265, here p. 253.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> E.g., Stacey Copeland, »Broadcasting Queer Feminisms: Lesbian and Queer Women Programming in Transnational, Local, and Community Radio«, in: Journal of Radio & Audio Media 25:2 (2018), pp. 209–223., here p. 209.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> B. DeShazor, »Queer Radio History« (see fn. 10), pp. 255 and 262.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> S. Copeland, »Broadcasting Queer Feminisms« (see fn. 11), pp. 215 and 217.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 218.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> See Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*, London et al. 2005, p. 97.

radiophonic voice and as a voice without gender, becoming something in between noise and voice. In his study on vocal noise, Aaron Cassidy states that a voice transgressing into noise reveals its 'grain', 15 which for Roland Barthes, who coined this term, whas us hear a body which has no civil identity, no 'personality', but which is nevertheless a separate body. 46 Such a body seems to come close to the ambiguous transgender body Halberstam wrote about. Later on in *Trans-Sister Radio* we hear another ambiguous voice, namely the one of pop artist Lou Christie, singing in a very high falsetto voice. *Trans-Sister Radio* musicalizes indiscernibility and makes us aware

of the aural gender assignments we are making all the time. Can we hear a man dressing as a woman? Can we hear an intersex person? Or as Thaemlitz puts it, acting in *Trans-Sister Radio* as the host of a talk show: »Is there any wonder why I don't put more effort into sounding like a woman?«

## **Sharing stories and private rooms**

The first voice that actually receives a body in *Trans-Sister Radio* is Saki's. In a mix of Japanese and English, Saki shares in an interview their life story as a transgender. Explaining how they started to cross-dress in the Japanese schoolgirl style, accompanied by harp arpeggios – quoting the tradition in classical music to symbolize soft female sensuality – Saki receives an image in the listener's mind. During the interview an atmosphere of naturalness and familiarity is created, with Saki and the interviewer laughing regularly. Saki's experience as a queer person is being shared with the listener so that they can identify with it, which DeShazor and Copeland deemed a crucial part of queer radio. However, the interviewer's questions are audibly cut away and the buzz of the recording device shutting on and off is heard several times. While the listener is invited into the story by means of manipulating and presenting the recorded sound, a distance is created at the same time. Moreover, at moments Saki is only speaking Japanese and then, for those listeners who do not speak the language, their story becomes just sounding material, empty signs. <sup>17</sup> What it is like to be Saki is not comprehensible, let alone relatable.

Underlying the prominence of personal stories on queer radio is its objective to build and reflect communities. <sup>18</sup> Yet, as has been pointed out by some queer theorists, seeing a

<sup>15</sup> Aaron Cassidy, »Noise and the Voice: Exploring the Thresholds of Vocal Transgression«, in: idem / Aaron Einbond (eds.), *Noise in and as Music*, Huddersfield 2013, pp. 33–53, here p. 37.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> Roland Barthes, »The Grain of the Voice«, in: idem., *Image, Music, Text*, ed. and transl. by Stephen Heath, London 1977, pp. 179–190, here p. 182.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> This remark only applies to the CD version.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> See, e. g., Phylis Johnson, »The Howl That Could Not Be Silenced: The Rise of Queer Radio«, in: Michael C. Keith (ed.), *Radio Cultures: The Sound Medium in American Life*, New York et al. 2008, pp. 95–112, here p. 98.

queer community as a unified whole fails to recognize differences of gender, class, race, ethnicity and others. <sup>19</sup> The problematics of identity-based community are expressed in another personal story on *Trans-Sister Radio*, this time shared by Thaemlitz himself. Acting as the host of her own talk show, speaking to a diegetic audience – the illusion of their presence is sonically created with a laugh track – Thaemlitz recounts an encounter with a group of Puerto Rican drag queens while riding the subway in New York, a short time after leaving the place (Missouri) he grew up in as »a hillbilly gender bender«. <sup>20</sup> The sense of community Thaemlitz felt with this group of queens – »I thought, oh god, this is really cool. Like a gang of queers. Yes, like we are safe now, right on sister!«, says Thaemlitz – proves to be false when the queens start harassing her. Over the six-minute span of this story segment, the violence becomes harsher, and so too, the realization that being a »hillbilly gender bender« is not the same as being a Puerto Rican queen.

Gradually, we also become more painfully aware of the laugh track during the story. The depicted audience does not stop laughing as Thaemlitz recalls the violence and helplessness with a broken voice. This reveals another interesting level in *Trans-Sister* Radio. Many queer radio scholars agree that radio functioned as a safe place for sharing. Phylis Johnson has noted for example that radio provides a sense of community and privacy simultaneously. You can listen to the radio, even call-in, while still in the closet.<sup>21</sup> Queer radio, in other words, connects private rooms and in doing so makes queer desire legible. Ginsberg's reading of Howl can be read as the first broadcast that succeeded in this. 22 However, Lisa Hollenbach uncovers a different perspective in her analysis of Ginsberg's reading. In the broadcast, speaking in a broken voice, Ginsberg expresses the isolation he feels in the studio, not knowing who is actually listening to his personal verses, permeated by queer desire. According to Hollenbach, Ginsberg characterizes radio as a vehicle for authoritarianism where, she writes, »our most intimate experiences are made perversely public, broadcast for all to hear, and where the inhuman systems of power produce deep concern about the specifics of our bodily and mental health under their biopolitical management.«<sup>23</sup> Hollenbach compares Ginsberg's characterization of the radio medium as authoritarian with Theodor W. Adorno's views on the radio voice, as he expressed them in »Radio Physiognomics«. 24 To Adorno the radio voice – a public voice

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>19</sup> N. Sullivan, A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory (see fn. 9), p. 44.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> All transcriptions from Trans-Sister Radio are my own and based on the CD version (see fn. 3).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> P. Johnson, »The Howl That Could Not Be Silenced« (see fn. 20), p. 98.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> A digital copy of the original tape recording of the 1956 broadcast, held by the Pacifica Radio Archives, is available: »Allan Ginsberg reads his poetry«, copy of a tape recording dated 25.10.1956, in: Internet Archive, uploaded 19.05.2015,

https://archive.org/details/canhpra 000038 (2.2.2020).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Lisa Hollenbach, »Broadcasting >Howk«, in: Modernism / modernity 3 (12.7.2018); https://modernismmodernity.org/articles/broadcasting-howl (3.2.2020).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>24</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, »Radio Physiognomics«, in: idem, *Current of Music: Elements of a Radio Theory*, ed. and transl. by Robert Hullot-Kentor, Frankfurt a. M. 2006, pp. 41–132.

that speaks to a private person in a private room — is in and of itself authoritarian, regardless of the message it might carry. Moreover, whe authority of radio becomes greater the more it addresses the listener in his privacy, since the more the listener gets whe impression that his own cupboard, his own phonograph, his own bedroom speaks to him in a personal way, devoid of the intermediary stages of the printed word; the more perfectly he is ready to accept wholesale whatever he hears. It is just this privacy which fosters the authority of the radio voice and helps to hide it by making it no longer appear to come from outside. As Hollenbach suggests, Ginsberg's view on radio inverts the power relationship: not the radio voice, but the radio listeners in their private rooms become powerful. Ginsberg is wary of the listeners and approaches them as spying eavesdroppers, as a massive surveillance apparatus. 27

Thaemlitz plays with this authoritarian potential of the radio medium in the way she broadcasts his story. While telling it, she is isolated not only in front of the laughing audience, but in the radio studio as well. Thaemlitz's most intimate experiences are made perversely public. But for the people listening to Trans-Sister Radio in their private rooms, precisely because of the cruelty of the audience laughing, our empathy is heightened. It is Thaemlitz who is in control over the story and its impact on listeners. This attitude towards the radio medium is present throughout the whole of Trans-Sister Radio. Playing with the illusion of intimacy and using bad recording quality, audible cuts and signal noise, Thaemlitz seems to throw in our face constantly that what we hear in Trans-Sister Radio is mediated. There is no anatural voice telling us a anatural truth. Following Thaemlitz's personal story is the first lengthy music segment of Trans-Sister Radio. The segment is subtitled »Still Life« and is an adaptation of an electroacoustic music composition which Thaemlitz created using computer sound synthesis for the 1998 album Means from an End. 28 Even though not originally composed for Trans-Sister Radio, this music fits perfectly in the dramaturgy of the work. It is linked tightly to the story segment that precedes it. While elsewhere in Trans-Sister Radio, segments tend to be connected only by the identification tune, here, the laugh track, functioning as a sort of pedal tone, binds together the music and the story segment. With the music segment, the linear time of Thaemlitz's personal story comes to a halt. Its slowly gushing layering of pitched drone tones opens up a meditative, interior space. In fact, it is as if the emotional content of Thaemlitz's story, so explicitly silenced in the actual narration, is now captured in music. As the composition unravels, several sounds transport the listener back to the scene of the story. The clicking sound that is heard throughout the composition might invoke a reminiscence of the doors in the subway. The laugh track appears as well. Coupled with

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> L. Hollenbach, »Broadcasting >Howl« (see fn. 25).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Thaemlitz, »Means from an End«, August 1998, https://www.comatonse.com/writings/means.html (2.2.2020).

the noise of signal buzzing, it starts to throb violently. Then there are muffled voices, only by the end of the composition it is possible to grasp what they are saying: »I said open up your fucking mouth.« Elsewhere, as a total afremdkörper within the composition, a sample of country music is played, which clearly refers to the place Thaemlitz grew up in as a whillbilly gender bender. What the listener seems to be hearing in this musical composition, is what Thaemlitz must have heard and felt in the subway ride. His interiority is evoked by the gushing drone tones and the sonic memory of her birth place in Missouri. This is violently penetrated by the outside world: the throbbing, the voices, the subway doors. »Still Life« is not only a musical reflection of the story, it functions almost as an overture, following the Wagnerian intention indicated by Thomas Grey as a kind of wencapsulation of the drama«.<sup>29</sup> Only it occurs not before, but after the drama, as a sort of afterture«.

## >Sonic détournements :: a discursive field of excessive meaning

This article started by asking what the ambiguous transgender body Halberstam has written about might sound like. Other queer theorists have pointed to ambiguity as a key denominator of queer cultural expression too. Jodie Taylor, for example, characterizes the stylistic incoherence and excess she observed in queer music scenes as directly related to a typical queer modality of identity expression.<sup>30</sup> Critic José Esteban Muñoz sees the drag performance of artist Vaginal Davis, whose performance navigates numerous conflicting identities (transforming from black queen to white supremacist in camouflage pants), as a tactic to unsettle the reification and stratification of identity by dominant ideology.<sup>31</sup> In Trans-Sister Radio ambiguity is used as a tactic as well. In fact, it is sonic ambivalence which has made the reading of Trans-Sister Radio hitherto produced possible. The way in which Thaemlitz layers the different sonic materials of the work, the sonic materials themselves and their surrounding sonic context are given double and multiple meanings. Scripted media-formats, identification tunes, laugh tracks, recording technology, speaking intonations, musics that have been used for collective identification (like the country music which referred to the »hillbilly« place Thaemlitz grew up in), or sounds that have gained symbolic meaning (like the >feminine< harp arpeggios) are constantly being crossdressed into ambivalent and ambiguous >transsounds<. The way this operates has much in common with the practice of >détournement<, which Debord and the Situationists International have defined as the »reuse of preexisting artistic elements in a new

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>29</sup> Thomas Grey, »Text, Action, and Music«, in: idem. (ed.), *Richard Wagner. Der fliegende Holländer*, Cambridge at al. 2000, pp. 36–64, here p. 36.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> Jodie Taylor, *Playing it Queer: Popular Music, Identity and Queer World-making*, Bern et al. 2010, p. 62.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> This is a compact summary of some of the thoughts in José Esteban Muñoz, »>The White to Be Angryc: Vaginal Davis's Terrorist Drag«, in: Social Text 52–53 (1997), pp. 80–103, here pp. 83, 88 and 100.

ensemble.«<sup>32</sup> ›Détournement‹ is a play of dropping something in a new context, altering or intensifying its meaning and the meaning of the context.<sup>33</sup> Usually ›détournements‹ are visual and textual. They were a favorite strategy in AIDS activist art, producing straightforward messages.<sup>34</sup> Since many of the sonic materials used in *Trans-Sister Radio* lack the denotative meaning visual materials and texts do have, the ›sonic détournements‹ here work in more ambiguous ways. Following Halberstam's, Taylor's and Muñoz' ideas, we might call the discursive field these ›détournements‹ open up a queer one, since it resists fixed and coherent signification and presents us with an excess of possible meanings.

In the lengthy segment subtitled »Trans Portation« a rich piling up of >sonic détournements occurs. Here Thaemlitz presents the listeners with a small radio documentary on the problems faced by transgender persons in transnational travelling and migration. The narration unpacks how biopolitical surveillance practices affect transgender persons, who often have to downplay their transgender bodies when crossing borders. Toby Beauchamp has analyzed thoroughly how national security and state surveillance policies are inextricable from monitoring transgender and gendernonconforming populations.<sup>35</sup> This means among other things that gender-nonconforming bodies are often targeted at airport security. 36 In 2003 the U.S. Department of Homeland Security even issued an advisory which warned that »male bombers may dress as females in order to discourage scrutiny.«37 These issues are unpacked in »Trans Portation« and contrasted with several allusions to radio commercials. Thaemitz, who acts as the narrator of the documentary, uses the speaking tone and idiom of a radio commercial. Looped as a sound layer under the whole documentary is the refrain of the pop song »Jet Set« by the German synth pop band Alphaville. This song was written, according to lead band member Marian Gold, as a jingle that advertises things we cannot buy with money such as freedom and love.<sup>38</sup> It is exactly these values of freedom and love that neoliberal societies reify as commodities. Multiple studies have shown that transgender individuals have been subject to economic marginalization.<sup>39</sup> As is made clear by Thaemlitz in the documentary, this

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Situationist International, »Détournement as Negation and Prelude«, in: Christoph Cox / Daniel Warner (eds.), *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*, rev. edition, London et al. 2017, pp. 485 488, here p. 485.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> See ibid., pp. 485–486.

 $<sup>^{34}</sup>$  See the public art interventions by the art collective Gran Fury in particular.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> Toby Beauchamp, *Going Stealth: Transgender Politics and U.S. Surveillance Practices*, Durham 2019, p. 6.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> »DHS Advisory to Security Personnel; No Change in Threat Level«, qtd. in: ibid., p. 24.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>38</sup> Marian Gold, qtd. in the liner notes of Alphaville, First Harvest 1984–92, WEA Music (WEA – 9031-76454-2), 1992, p. 7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> For an overview of such studies see Lauren Mizock and Ruben Hopwood, »Economic Challenges Associated With Transphobia and Implications for Practice With Transgender and Gender Diverse Individuals«, in: Professional Psychology: Research and Practice 49 (2018), pp. 65–74.

means that since they lack the funds to emigrate with income-based visas, transgender people often have to rely on spousal visas. Or as Thaemlitz summarizes it in »Trans Portation«: »Unable to buy our way into a country, we end up fucking our way in.« The »sonic détournement« of this documentary narrative and Alphaville's song hints at the paradoxical functioning of neoliberalism: its promise of freedom rendering opaque the high levels of economic, political and affective unfreedom upon which it is build.<sup>40</sup>

Whether it concerns queer theorists like Muñoz and Taylor writing about the potential of subcultural expressions of queerness to subvert dominant ideology, 41 or queer radio scholars who see the presence of gueer artistic voices in the mediascape as essential for shifting the way queer identities are perceived in the world, 42 all those commentators have seen transformative political potential in the gueer cultural expressions they discuss. In Trans-Sister Radio this view seems to be complicated. By juxtaposing parodies of a range of ways in which queer voices have come to occupy the mediascape next to detailed analyses of issues faced by transgender persons in the neoliberal condition, the listener is left to wonder to what extent cultural antagonism and media representation can affect socio-political reality. In an interview I held with him in 2018, Thaemlitz explained the role she sees for art and music in relation to politics: it might offer wa social analysis and in this way contribute to a larger discourse which could inform more direct forms of social organization.«43 In Trans-Sister Radio this »artistic social analysis« is reached through a piling up of the spoken narratives and the sonic détournements. Together they might unravel discourses present in queer radio, media depictions and neoliberal biopolitics. Trans-Sister Radio does not present this in a clear-cut way, it rather gives rise to an ambiguous discursive field with an excess of possible meanings, of which this article has explored some.44

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 $<sup>^{40}</sup>$  See Alexander Beaumont and Adam Kelly, »Freedom after Neoliberalism«, in: Open Library of Humanities 4 (2018), pp. 1–26, here p. 17.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> See J. Muñoz, »>The White to Be Angry<« (see fn. 33), p. 83, and Taylor, *Playing it Queer* (see fn. 32), p. 61.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> See S. Copeland, »Broadcasting Queer Feminisms« (see fn. 11), p. 211.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> Terre Thaemlitz, interview with the author and Ane Marthe Sørlien Holen, originally published in: »Episode 4: Terre Thaemlitz, Éliane Radigue, and Jessie Marino«, Good Morning Darmstadt!, podcast audio, 19.07.2018, https://internationales-musikinstitut.de/de/ferienkurse/good-morning-darmstadt/ (22.12.2019).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> I would like to thank Camilla Bork for her thoughtful feedback in reviewing this article.