

Radio Beyond Radio

The Ràdio Web MACBA
Working Group



Re—
Imagine
Europe

Ràdio Web MACBA (RWM) is an online radio project based at MACBA Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona: a radio-beyond-radio that dwells in the folds and intersections of critical thinking, contemporary art, artistic research, activism, knowledge transfer, sound... and everything in between. RWM produces podcasts which can be listened to on demand, downloaded, and/or subscribed to. Bordering on filecasting, it also publishes essays, texts, and related documentation.

The Ràdio Web MACBA Working Group¹ started in 2016 as a means for the closest members of the RWM team to spend some time together, slow down processes, share physical space, and see what happens along the way. The Covid-19 crisis put this approach on hold, and the group is now trying to rework a methodology that was heavily dependent on the suspension of ordinary time and schedules, and on a hands-on practice of togetherness. The questions in this interview were posed by the editorial team of Re-Imagine Europe and answered by various members of the Ràdio Web MACBA Working Group.

¹ Many hands and voices have dipped in and out of the Ràdio Web MACBA Working Group, but we regularly meet with: Dolores Acebal, André Chêdas, Antonio Gagliano, Roc Jiménez de Cisneros, Verónica Lahitte, Violeta Ospina, Tiago Pina, Gemma Planell, Quim Pujol, Anna Ramos, Txé Roimeser, Matías Rossi, Anna Irina Russell, María Salgado, and Albert Tarrats.

Cover photo
Conversation with Élisabeth Lebovici



The Ràdio Web MACBA Working Group in action, Barcelona, 2019

Why did you feel that it was important or necessary to start a working group?

Quim Pujol: In a post-human society in which the myth of the liberal subject is breaking down, it is improbable that anybody is not 'working in a group' already. But once you realise that knowledge stems from making connections between ideas, and that other people boost this process, it becomes desirable to consciously work with as many people as possible in order to keep these myriad connections emerging. However, space and time constraints limit the maximum number of people for a conversation to remain understandable, without noise completely taking over meaningful exchanges. So the important thing is not just to start a working group, but also to figure out the right size and rhythm for the group at a given moment.

Anna Ramos: It began with the simple gesture of sharing both time and space in a different manner. We are interested in duration, and time seems to be elastic in our conversations and processes: we rarely hesitate to test weird twists, ideas and connections in post-production, knowing that the worst thing that can happen is that we might waste time in the process. Nonetheless, everything else seemed to be rushed, we never seemed to spend a single moment sharing anything but the practicalities of whatever current project we were involved in. The Working Group began as a proposal to be together, to get to know each other as a group, to embark on a collective conversation that is not necessarily about RWM.

Interestingly, we spent the first sessions talking about what we were doing, discussing the politics and aesthetics of editing from an amateur stand-point, identifying what we could learn from each other, and sharing tips, likes, and fears. And then we began cooking (this is not a metaphor), doing different kinds of stuff together.

Who is in the Ràdio Web MACBA Working Group? Is it a mix of artists, curators and radiomakers? If so, what distinguishes a radiomaker from a sound artist, with regards to approaching an audience, for instance?

Quim Pujol: I believe the group would happily describe itself as a freak show. Our backgrounds could not differ more from each other. In our conversations, there is an unspoken rule against resorting to pre-established identities based on work categories such as artist, educator, curator, or radiomaker. We are all multi-employed cultural workers engaged in really diverse activities and bread-winning occupations. The fact that we manage to keep working in the cultural field in Spain despite many adversities is in itself a huge common denominator.

Verónica Lahitte: The fact that we are so all different makes it possible to share knowledge and tools. That is one of the group's commitments: to generate a space for self-learning and exchange, a space in which we convey our own experiences and strategies and at the same time enter into the worlds and interests of others. Creating that hybrid space of text, gadgets, and sound is part of radio.

How would you describe the aim of the Ràdio Web MACBA Working Group? Is it mainly to make better, more interesting podcasts that probe subjects more deeply? Or is it just as important to grow a community of like-minded people and learn from each other?

Quim Pujol: The thing about making connections between ideas is that you can't foresee the exchanges that will take place. Sometimes we discuss a practical issue and we have a conversation aimed at solving an audio-editing problem. Other times we ramble on for hours about astrophysics and obscure YouTube videos. Both types of conversations are equally satisfying and we can easily switch from one mode to another almost without realizing.

Anna Irina Russell and Albert Tarrats: Everything is permeable, and so is the Ràdio Web MACBA Working Group. So, yes, we are sure that our get-togethers influence our podcast-producing practice in one way or another, but that is not the main objective. As you put it, it is more about the possibilities arising from this community of like-minded people. Although we would say it is more about nurturing than growing.



Discussions after lunch, Barcelona, 2019

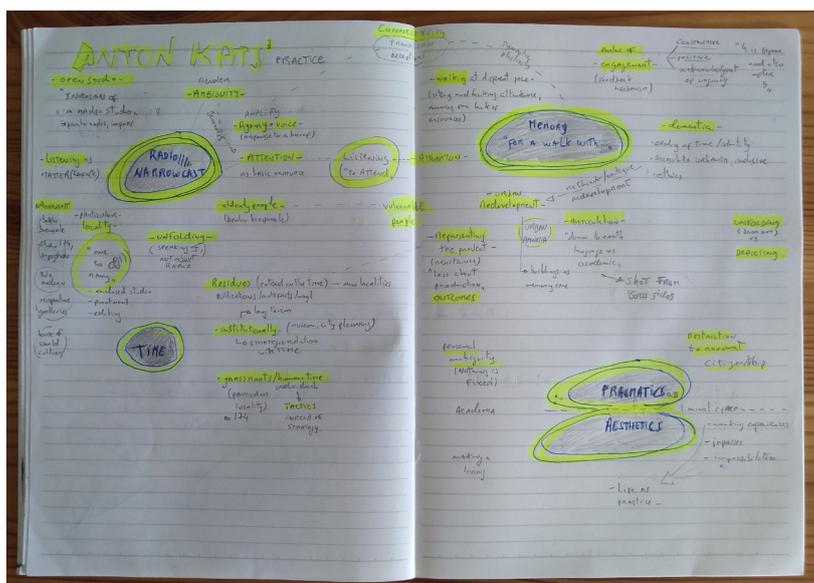
How would you describe your way of working?

Roc Jiménez de Cisneros: As clichéd as it may sound, it's a rather organic process rooted in the very simple premise of sharing a given space: a kind of office space that turns into a kitchen after a few hours. So by being in the same place, working on our own things, chatting, procrastinating, cooking together, then eating, you create a window of opportunity for shared interests to arise. More often than not, these meetings turn into parallel sub-meetings, based on different ideas, interests, etcetera. Simply by having a bunch of people under the same roof for a few hours, these unexpected Venn diagrams occur sporadically. Every now and then, one of the things that have come out of those interactions gains enough traction to become an actual project, or a loose idea to explore as a group, such as building antennae or recording Foley.

Anna Irina Russell and Albert Tarrats: The Ràdio Web MACBA Working Group has evolved in a kind of parasitic way. During our gatherings, we do not always all work together. As Roc points out, we tend to split into smaller groups that feed on each other's interests and obsessions, until eventually Anna (thank you Anna!) brings us together to go over things we might have left open or unfinished as a group. These are often opportunities for collaboration among members of the group who may otherwise not have worked together directly based on their interests. Or they may even be invitations to merge our interests with outside communities and extend our parasitic practice. Examples of this could be our

incursion into gamelan with the Gamelan Penempaan Guntur² at the Museu de la Música de Barcelona, and helping with the audio archives from the Euraca project.³

Verónica Lahitte: The way we do the RWM interviews is not the usual way of creating content. We do not work with fixed scripts prepared in advance. Instead, we allow room for the conversation to move in unexpected directions. Talking while leaving room for hesitation and for the possibility of error is a different way of producing knowledge.



André Chêdas' notes for our podcast with Anton Kats

What did you discover during the get-togethers with the Working Group? Did you share any obsessions, interests, objects of fascination that you had not expected beforehand? How did that translate into your working process?

Violeta Ospina: I found that I could learn from the way others work, and take risks with our podcasts that I would never have dared without first discussing those processes as a group. I could make a proposal, and also make sure it had meaning within the podcast.

² We recorded a bunch of sounds on a Gamelan to be used as background audio for podcasts. The idea was to capture Gamelan sounds that are non-canonical in terms of structure and timbre, thinking of them as raw source material rather than actual Gamelan music.

³ Euraca is a laboratory of speech, of tongue, of deed, of language, of poetry. It is based in Madrid, but draws on experiences from places like Argentina, Chile, and Belgium, to name a few. Euraca had recorded quite a lot of performances and talks during their own events, but never got around to doing anything with them due to lack of time and experience. We helped them clean up the recordings so that they could publish them online.

For example: leaving in a fragment of voice that would normally be taken out, where the interviewer (Anna) was giving reading instructions to the person doing the voiceover (Juan) in the fictional reading of a letter. A bit like creating a fiction in order to then break it. Or another time, we spent an afternoon talking only about the annoying clicking and popping sounds that people make when they speak, which are amplified in the membranes of our ears. It was quite comforting to hear everyone's pet peeves in that regard, the difference between what we deem natural and artificial when it comes to human voice, things that have no real answer, but can be shared with intuition. Being able to share these obsessions brings a smile to your face in the solitude of the editing process.

In what fields did you feel you needed to grow as a group?

Violeta Ospina: In connecting to the material we work with and to sound-matter in more playful and intuitive ways: through the practice of Foley, live broadcasts, studio rehearsals, and making antennae. Kneading sound together as a group, plunging our hands into the dough, is a long and tricky process. And the long impasse we are currently going through may end up providing clues for ways in which to attend to the meaning of what we do.

Anna Irina Russell and Albert Tarrats: Since the group is shaped by the needs and interests of each of us, it is hard to speak from a single point of view. Energies and situations always vary from person to person, and we try to be attentive and listen to them when choosing our next steps. For example, right now we are rethinking ways to get together in these forcedly online times that are keeping us from eating Roc's delicious cakes. We're starting a sort of reading group (in name only, because we might deal with any kind of document that interests us, not just books) as an excuse to keep sharing thoughts.

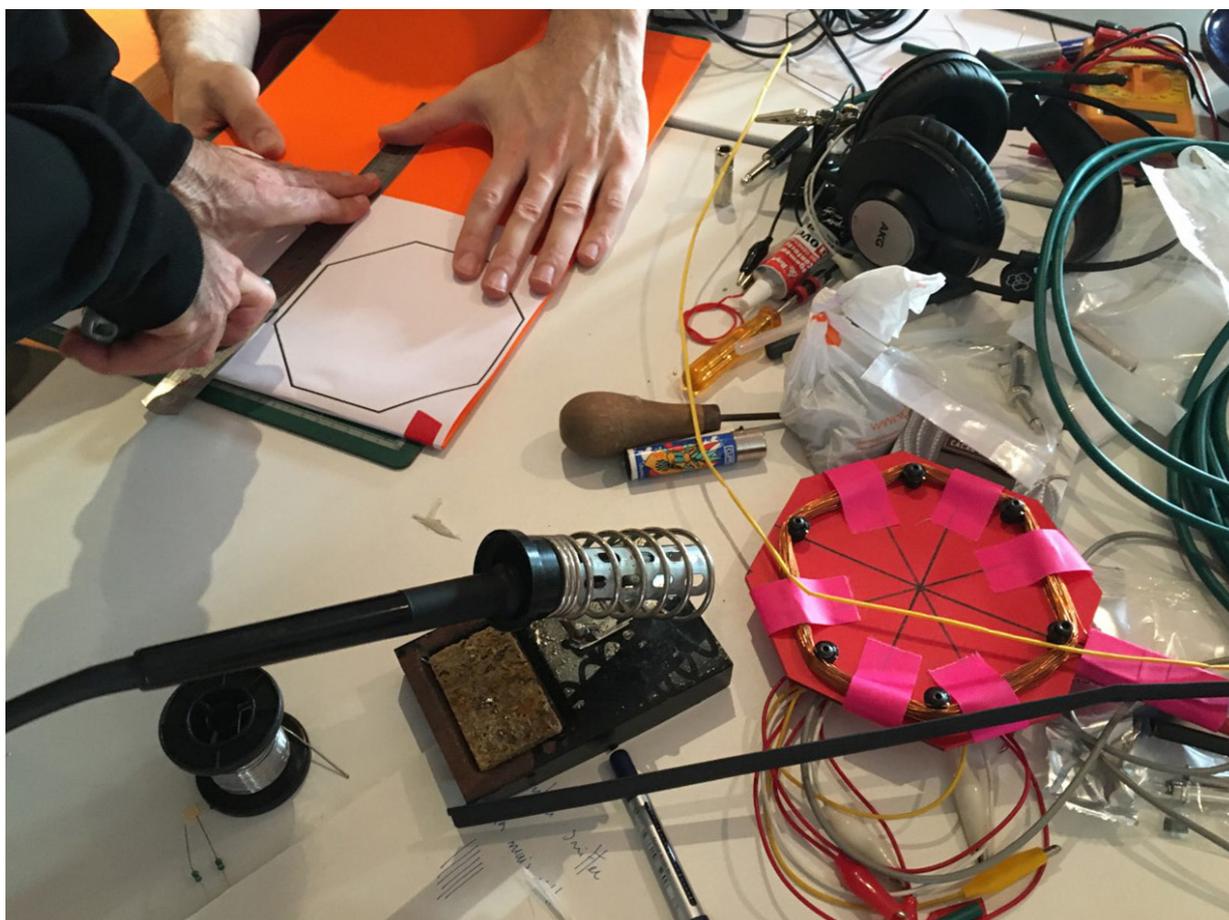
Why was slowing down considered so important? How do you slow down?

Anna Ramos: The synergies, conversations, alliances, and generousities that the Ràdio Web MACBA Working Group has generated led me to realise, for the first time in more than a decade behind the scenes, that our community is inside. It is made up of the hands, ears, and brains that have forged the RWM project. It is made of all the tiny yet huge contributions of our interviewees, the beautiful amateur voices we use for our voice-overs, our colleagues at MACBA... and especially, of those who have been involved in making our podcasts. We are all amateurs, we have learnt (from) and taught each other. Slowing down is such a simple, yet challenging, gesture, because you don't see any immediate results, there's no clear objective. It does help to keep the learning curve quite high, as it has always been, and to keep things even more interesting, open to discussion, to reflection and to unexpected chaotic, collective contributions/experiments.

Could you describe the most important result of slowing down?

Roc Jiménez de Cisneros: Even in projects that should be all about reflecting, learning, and digesting vast amounts of information, it's easy to get caught up in production cycles, deadlines and so on. Meeting once a month with no clear goal in mind, no fixed order of the day, just for fun, means that our meetings are not subject to those constraints. In fact, 'fun' is a key word here, encapsulating ideas related to amateurism and a playful approach to experimentation with whatever side-project emerges from the meetings. Slowing down means trying things for kicks, regardless of the outcome or how productive they may be.

Quim Pujol: We may still be hampered by the invisibility of production modes. In itself, simply sharing space and time with a bunch of people with similar interests gets a lot of work done, as we constantly update each other about our concerns and experiences each time we meet. So I would say there are always different types of 'work' going on at the same time. There is a certain type of work where we don't really need to do anything except pay attention to each other and try to understand what a particular person is going through at a given moment in time. And for that type of work, we need emptiness. We need to let go of our particular and collective aims, although they will be enriched by this apparent hiatus in our activities.



DIY sniffers and antennae in the making, Barcelona, 2019

Do you feel there is a community around RWM, or is RWM a tool that grows communities for MACBA?

Violeta Ospina: Both. There is a working and listening community linked to the production of RWM podcasts, which is organised around the shared work, social relations, thinking, and affects involved in each project. This community does not just consist of the relationships among the people in the Ràdio Web MACBA Working Group, but also encompasses the people (voices) who weave together ideas and sounds, beyond RWM. On the other hand, there is a growing community of RWM listeners and thinkers, for whom radio is not just a tool, but a channel for interconnecting these communities based on subject matter, style, meanings, practices and knowledge. They also contribute tools that enrich the museum. It is important to add that the physical space where some of the Ràdio Web MACBA Working Group meetings have taken place, the MACBA Kitchen (which had previously been a multipurpose space) has allowed the chance encounter of listeners and thinkers, people from other departments and from initiatives such as educational and public programmes. These activities sometimes include people who are not necessarily linked to the museum.

Where would you place current RWM podcasts in the landscape of radio documentaries, radiophonics, radio programmes (and their history?)

Anna Irina Russell and Albert Tarrats: We are kind of new to the world of podcasts (Anna Irina & Albert), but we'll take a shot anyway. Before we started participating with the group, we had used RWM as a resource for our own research and as an ear-opener to lines of thought that were around us but may have slipped under our radar. We feel that RWM has quite a distinctive approach to the podcast format. The lack of an interviewer or narrator's voice, plus the usual duration – definitely aiming for long podcasts – offers interviewees the chance to explain themselves calmly and at length. This often brings up tangential thoughts that may otherwise not have surfaced. If they find their place in the overall narrative of the podcast, these provide a broader view of things. And if they don't, they can always end up in the lovely catch-all deleted scenes section.

How do you relate to the wider community around RWM? Are activities such as the electromagnetic sniffing workshops, the public events in the city, and the kitchen project a part of that?

Violeta Ospina: I think it's the podcasts and writing that give rise to these other activities, producing this extended community. And also the people who are interviewed, and the path that the writing creates (or not) in the museum. I may be wrong, but instead, I think that taking part in public events such as the Radiotón #2 (XRCB)⁴ and Smart City⁵ pilots (which we did with the support of *Re-Imagine Europe*), help to expand the notion of a single audience and to talk about radio in different ways. Not just content, but also finding meaning in being present, as a cooking group.

Anna Irina Russell and Albert Tarrats: Events like the Barcelona Community Radio Network (XRCB) Radiotón#2, where we played around with the sounds we had recorded in the Blind Foley sessions, and the Smart City Week programme, where we did a couple of antennae and sniffer workshops, are opportunities to open up our small community to the outside world. The work we do with the group often focuses on shareability, but that can only happen when some of these projects gain a certain momentum and coincide with opportunities. However, this openness is not always about giving and showing, it can also involve learning and receiving from other communities, as in the case of the sessions with the Gamelan group. In any case, it's always a slow simmering process.

How do you grow a community around the podcasts? Is content (the subject matter) the main attractor? Do you shape a community or do you 'listen in' to your community to find out what their fascinations and interests are?

Antonio Gagliano: In my experience, RWM content crystallises in a blurred zone between planning and chance. Sometimes we talk to people who are passing through the city: the interviewees are often people linked to the museum's activities, with whom we wouldn't otherwise manage to arrange a meeting and get together. When we do, the conversations are a celebration of abundance, but also of straying, which is a way of dismantling any kind of prefabricated discourse. The interviews often go down unexpected paths. The editing process conveys sensitive decisions that frustrate expectations of what that particular interviewee was supposed to say. So I think that the content is also shaped by our persistence in encouraging and capturing moments in which something special happens. Atmospheric instants in which multiple gut feelings intertwine, giving rise to disconcerting, not immediately obvious ideas. I'd say that this exploration comes through, and that it is one of the project's attractors. As for the relationship with communities, I think that rather than directly seeking audience loyalty, RWM content is chosen based on identifying what research processes need to be accompanied, what ideas need to be stretched in order to grow, what is so sexy that it can't be left out, what discussions cannot be postponed.

⁴ Radiotón #02 was a live radio event organised by XRCB (Barcelona Free Radio Network). The Ràdio Web MACBA Working Group had a slot in the general programme to present our work on what Anna Irina Russell (one member of the group) called Blind Foley – that is, Foley sounds not intended to accompany any images. From her experience and methodology, we built our very first collective library of sounds.

⁵ Within the context of the Smart City Week in Barcelona, we had our second ever live radio event, again organised by XRCB. Since we were working on DIY sniffers and other electromagnetic antennae at the time, we decided that our contribution would be to actually build sniffers there, as the event unfolded. At the end, we tested them live and talked to the audience about the devices and how we approached them from different perspectives and levels of (non)-expertise.



Presentation of *Colapso* in the context of Radiotón #2, Barcelona, 2019

How would you like to see the Ràdio Web MACBA Working Group develop in the future?

Violeta Ospina: Like a small, open community that works online or cooks together, exploring the meaning of being present, of listening and broadcasting. A space in which to heal together in a situation of isolation and precarity in several senses: precarity of contact, technological precariousness, affective precarity, precariousness of collective learning...

Quim Pujol: I'm very thankful to the institutional framework that allows our get-togethers, but at the same time I believe this Working Group could lead to experimental proposals that overflow the aims, interests and dynamics of the institution. I dream of working on proposals that the museum would not know how to frame within its current understanding of itself. This grassroots approach might even lead to a new understanding of the public mission of the museum. In a virtuous circle, this redefinition could lead to a further expansion of the field of possibilities at RWM.

Anna Irina Russell and Albert Tarrats: As long as it remains active, which is the main thing we would like to see happening, and it keeps on being a space for getting together – ideally physically, if the situation allows –, we do not have any special requests for the future. We are sure that having fun and being open to each other's interests, which has so far been the main engine of our projects, will keep giving in many unforeseeable ways.

CONTEXT

This article is part of the *Re-Imagine Europe* publication. The publication collects articles, essays, interviews and reports about audience engagement for interdisciplinary arts organisations. It aims to share knowledge gained throughout the *Re-Imagine Europe* project with professionals in the cultural sector who would like to gain a deeper insight in audience development and capacity building.

Re-Imagine Europe (2017-2021) is a four-year project of ten cultural organizations from across Europe, responding to the current social and political challenges. With a programme of residencies, commissions, symposia and workshops, the project partners stimulate both artistic production and audience development. They experiment with new ways of reaching out to their audiences, motivated by the ambition to develop a broader and more engaging approach to audience development and capacity building.

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