

Storytelling by sound: a theoretical frame for radio drama analysis

Elke Huwiler *University of Amsterdam*

Abstract

In German-speaking research on 'Hörspiele' or radio plays, there is little to be found when it comes to adequate theoretical tools for analysing a radio play. Radio drama is still widely seen as a literary genre and is therefore analysed by literary studies theories or drama theories. This article argues that radio drama is an acoustic art form in its own right and should be analysed as such. Its aim is to support this argument first by describing the historical reasons that led to the misinterpretation of the art form, and then by presenting a methodology, based on semiotic and narratological theories, that enables scholars to analyse a narrative radio play by integrating all of its acoustic features. The article seeks to emphasize that music, noises and voices and also technical features like electro-acoustical manipulation or mixing, can be, and often are, used as tools to signify story elements and therefore should be analysed accordingly. To demonstrate the applicability of the model, a short analysis of some German radio plays is presented at the end of the article.

Keywords

radio drama
analytical model
narratology
semiotics
German 'Hörspiel'
sound art

This article summarizes the results of research, to be published in German, in which an analytical model for radio drama research is presented, the object of the study being 60 German radio plays from 1929 to 2002 (Huwiler 2005). Although there are reasons why we should not equate the German 'Hörspiel' with the English 'radio play', the two terms are used equivalently in this article. In general, these reasons arise from the separate developments of the art form in the two different language regions. Horst Priessnitz observes that in 'contrast with the way things developed in Germany, where the *Hörspiel* could at an early date free itself from its connections with the theatre, the English radio play remained for a longer period in close alliance with stage performance' (Priessnitz 1981: 32). However, I will show in this article that the German 'Hörspiel', though at first more independent of stage drama than was the English radio play, was also strongly influenced by literary tradition and not as independent as Priessnitz suggests. Moreover, it is not only the case that the terms 'radio play' and 'Hörspiel' have never been exactly synonymous at any one time, but between them they cannot even provide a historically coherent definition of the art form in the two language regions, since neither term

1. This definition is only a working definition for the present article and does not apply to 'radio plays' or 'Hörspiele' in general, since it includes only the *narrative* radio plays that are the subject of this article. A large part of radio drama production can be called narrative, but there also exist non-narrative radio plays that do not, or only very vaguely, tell a story and that tend more towards experimental music or sound art.
2. The RRG (State Broadcasting Company), founded in 1926, was the holding company for various regional radio stations that operated relatively independently from each other. From 1932, radio in Germany developed more and more towards a broadcasting system regulated by the state and was finally taken over by the National Socialist Party and used for propagandistic purposes until the end of the Second World War. From 1945 the Allies operated the various radio stations in Germany until in 1948 different regional and public broadcasting corporations like the Bayerischer Rundfunk or the Hessischer Rundfunk were founded. Most of them still exist today, despite the introduction of the so-called dual system in the 1980s, when 'the monopoly of the public radio stations was broken [and] private broadcasters were allowed on the air' (Hepp 2004: 191).

in the 1920s meant exactly the same as it did in the 1950s or as it does now. Hence 'Hörspiel' can be translated as 'radio play', defining both terms not as historically dependent on the developments of the art form within their language regions, but very broadly as the acoustical art form that emerged from the development of the radio medium and in which stories are told or presented by means of electro-acoustically recorded and distributed sound material.¹ Departing from that broad definition and having analysed a multitude of very different styles of radio plays, I believe it is safe to suggest that the analytical model derived from my research is also applicable to English-speaking or other (narrative) radio plays. My assertion that radio drama theory is primarily oriented towards literary analysis would appear to be just as true of British research, since British radio drama has always been strongly connected to (literary) drama. Literary and drama theories both draw on written artistic expression and, in the case of drama, on stage performances. But even in the latter case, what is added when applying these theories to radio drama is primarily the analysis of the actor's voice - the emphasis again lying on the (spoken) word rather than on the other intrinsic features of an electro-acoustical medium. Since it stands in the way of establishing the radio or audio play as an art form in its own right, the emphasis of English radio drama on the term *drama* is to be criticized as much as the general emphasis on the *literary* nature of radio plays.

Before presenting the analytical model, I want to explain the reasons for the persistence of the notion that radio drama is a literary or (word-oriented) dramatic genre - a notion that is still widespread even among radio drama theorists in German-speaking countries.

Historical development

Although in German-speaking countries the habit of simply adapting stage plays for the new acoustical medium and broadcasting them as radio plays was not as strong as in Great Britain, the new art form was closely associated with literary expression, since those who provided the radio stations with material were almost exclusively writers. This tendency was encouraged by the broadcasting companies themselves: in 1927, the announcement by the Reichsrundfunkgesellschaft (RRG)² of a radio play-writing competition was explicitly directed towards writers, and in 1929 the RRG and the 'Section for Literary Art' of the Prussian Academy of Arts organized a conference called 'Literature and Broadcasting' with the aim of persuading more literary writers to write radio plays. After the Second World War, the most famous German literary group, Gruppe 47, was closely connected to various radio stations. Writers like Ingeborg Bachmann, Peter Handke or Heinrich Böll wrote radio plays, and some of them, like Alfred Andersch, were even involved in the drama production departments of broadcasting companies. This tendency to involve literary writers in the making of radio plays, thereby enabling them to shape the art form, has led to the notion shared by almost all radio drama theorists

in the 1950s, and many of them to this day, that the radio play is a *literary* or *dramatic* art form.

This notion rests on the fact that the word has always been seen as ‘the primary code of radio’ (Crisell 1994: 53). Artists who work primarily with words were therefore seen as the logical providers of creative material for the new medium. Whereas in fields like film and, more recently, digital art, people have always felt obliged to work with the elements provided by the medium itself and to acquire the specific skills that it demands, radio drama mainly developed as an alternative mode of artistic expression for writers. That this perception of the art form was by no means inevitable can be seen by looking at other elements of its history in the 1920s, as well as at the emergence of the ‘Neues Hörspiel’ in German-speaking countries in the 1960s.

In its early years, broadcasters and theorists reflected on the possibilities of radio and expressed their ideas about what an art form within this medium should be like. Rudolf Arnheim stated that radio should be seen as being as independent an art as film and that its stories should be told by integrating the genuine acoustic elements into the process of elaborating and transmitting a story (Arnheim 1936). For Bertolt Brecht the function of artistic expression in radio was to be educative and above all interactive. While admitting that his claims to ‘change this apparatus over from distribution to communication’ were utopian due to a lack of technology (Brecht 1993: 15), Brecht actually described a form of radio drama that has since become possible and is becoming more and more popular in German-speaking countries: the interactive radio play.³ Walter Benjamin also suggested that radio plays should be used for the ‘popularization of educational subjects’ (Schiller-Lerg 1984: 193)⁴ and emphasized the pedagogical possibilities of the art form by comparing it to Brecht’s epic theatre (Benjamin 1993). And Alfred Döblin, one of the writers invited to the conference about literature and broadcasting mentioned earlier, stated that the radio play should be seen not as a form of literature but as a new way of dealing with a combination of language and other features intrinsic to the new medium, and that an approach to the art form was required that was different from the literary one (Döblin 1950).

These suggestions differ from each other and not all of them initiated developments, but they show that the ideas about the new art form were varied and that, in theory, it could have followed a very different path from that which it took after the Second World War. In German-speaking countries, there are two main reasons why the radio play developed into a literary, word-focused art form. First, at the end of the Second World War, the theoretical works of the above-mentioned authors were simply not available any more for the people who began to create new programmes when the broadcasting institutions re-opened (Würffel 1978: 74). The one theoretical work about radio drama that was available was Richard Kolb’s *Horoscope of the Radio Play* in which the *word* was described as the main source of meaning in the play (Kolb 1932). For Kolb, radio drama had to

3. The ‘Kunstradio-Redaktion’ of the Austrian radio station ORF for example is very active in producing interactive radio plays, such as live performances of audio plays in which the audience of the performance as well as the audience at home can participate - the latter by logging on to the Internet and triggering certain sound effects at the location of the performance by carrying out specific moves on the computer. For more information about the interactive radio play, see Vowinckel (1998) and Geerken (1992).
4. All translations from German books not previously published in English are by myself.

be primarily poetical, and other acoustical elements like noises or music were to be used very sparingly. These prescriptions exerted the greatest influence on radio drama production after the Second World War: they were followed and defended by the leading producers, whose power can be seen as the second reason for the described direction of the development. Although the German radio landscape was primarily regional and subject to regulative and competitive forces, some stations managed to acquire a sort of monopoly in terms of defining what a radio play should be like. Above all Heinz Schwitzke, director of the Radio Drama Department of the North German Broadcasting Company and Friedrich Wilhelm Hymnen, founder of the most prestigious radio drama prize in German-speaking countries (see Bund der Kriegsblinden 2001), succeeded in imposing their views on radio drama production in general. Studies of production practices at German broadcasting institutions in the 1950s - for example, that of Böhmer (1993) - show that the influence of these ideas was strong enough to eclipse those attempts that experimented with the existing format and tried to create new ways of storytelling by sound. In 1961, these practices were strongly criticized by the radio theorist Friedrich Knilli, and in the years that followed, numerous radio drama artists managed to transform the radio play by refusing to accept the premises of the 1950s and by creating the 'Neues Hörspiel' or 'new radio play'. Knilli demanded a form that did not privilege language over the other acoustic elements but worked with sound as a means of artistic expression in itself. The semantic power of language was no longer to be the paramount element, sound material was to be presented on its own terms. Artists concerned with audio drama began to develop a new kind of radio play in which, for the most part, no stories were told. Instead language and other sound material were mixed together by montage and collage and structured in new ways, as in *Schallspielstudie I* by Paul Pörtner.

Pörtner reorganizes his materials to uncover their inherent rhythmic and tonal qualities - aspects of the material which had always been present, but which were masked by more familiar and hence readily apperceptible features (i.e., lexical content of words, initial naturalness of sound effects). Involved in this restructuring is then a distortion of the familiar, a making strange or "Verfremdung" (Cory 1974: 32).

Although the new kind of drama was soon rejected for being elitist and too difficult for a mass audience to follow, it did impose a major change on the development of German radio drama production and the shaping of the art form as such. The main factor in this changing process was the insight that radio drama did not have to be primarily language-based and focused on a realistically represented acoustical story. After a period in which the 'Neues Hörspiel' dominated the radio landscape, stations again began to broadcast plays that 'told a story'. But the impact of the so-called experimental phase was, and still is, strongly felt. Radio plays in the style of the literary radio drama of the 1950s are still being produced, but they are only one form among others. More important nowadays are radio

plays that integrate numerous styles and acoustical elements, like the radio plays of Andreas Ammer and E.M. Einheit, which have won numerous national and international prizes, including first prize at the International Radio Festival of New York, the Prix Futura, and the Prix Italia Special Prize. They work with different musical styles like pop, opera, jingles, chorals and hip hop, and use recitals, dialogues, monologues, citations, reports and commentary as rhetorical features, while using electro-acoustical manipulation and stereophony as technical ones. By putting these elements together, they allow a story to unfold indirectly instead of telling it in a baldly linguistic manner. In general, the influence of the 'Neues Hörspiel', and also of experimental music and digital techniques, is immense in contemporary radio drama production in German-speaking countries. A large diversity of styles exists within the acoustic play: apart from the genre-mixing style described above, there are also dialogue and monologue plays (although mostly integrating a large range of acoustical features), 'experiments' with language and music, documentary features, radio comics, epic adaptations of literature, interactive radio plays, and so on. So-called experimental, non-narrative sound plays which find their roots not only in the 'Neues Hörspiel', but in the avant-garde sound experiments of the 1920s that have been rediscovered in recent decades - one such is Walter Ruttmann's *Weekend* (1930) - are still produced today, but there is a general tendency within radio drama production in German-speaking countries towards *telling stories*. However, these now integrate a variety of acoustical features, thus making use of the whole range of possibilities the medium can offer.

This does not mean that the development of radio drama has reached the stage when a coherent definition of the art form can be offered. New forms of acoustical storytelling like sound play performances or interactive radio plays demonstrate that the art form is still open to change and should not be restricted by narrow definitions and prescriptions. The historical developments in German-speaking countries show above all that radio drama has a potential that transcends merely literary or theatrical forms.

Radio drama research

Strangely enough, radio drama production and radio drama theory in German-speaking countries do not share the same understanding of the art form. While in radio drama production there exists a large variety of different styles, and a large range of acoustical elements has become common, for the most part analysis still draws on theories that were elaborated from the literary radio drama of the 1950s. These theories were based on the written or spoken word. Although most of this analysis takes account of acoustical elements like noises or music, it still focuses primarily on language and sees the other acoustical features as merely ancillary, while technical features like mixing or stereophony are widely neglected. Moreover, it used to be common, and is not unknown even today, for

researchers to base their analysis on the printed version of a sound play. Whereas in film studies nobody would presume to confine their analysis to the script, this procedure has been adopted quite regularly in radio drama studies - with the result that those specifically acoustical features that are not described in the written script are excluded from the analysis. Yet even if such features were described, this would certainly be no substitute for listening to the recorded play. The problem is that recordings of plays are scarce, whereas many of the 'literary' radio plays of the 1950s and thereafter have been published. The availability of these, mostly written by famous writers, is partly the reason for the still widespread belief that 'literary' plays form the dominant and most important part of the history of radio drama. I would suggest, however, that they actually demonstrate the contrary. Because they *can* be printed, read and interpreted like literature and drama, they are unable to convey the unique possibilities of the radio play as an art form in its own right. Instead, they merely represent one - hardly innovative - strand of radio drama that gives barely a hint of the intrinsic, acoustical elements of the art form.

Historically, these literary radio plays represent only a small proportion of the overall output of German-speaking broadcasting institutions. Moreover, a large number of printed - and thus analysed - plays do reveal a more elaborate integration of acoustic elements than the analysis would have one believe. When I applied the more integrated analysis that I shall describe in this article, most of the plays included in the study from which it draws appeared to contain a wide range of meaningful signs within the non-verbal sign systems. It is clear, then, that the tendency of literary analysis to ignore the non-verbal acoustical elements of these plays has led to the notion that the word is always the paramount element of radio drama - and this in turn has led to the belief that they *can* be analysed and read as literature and drama, and to the continuing practice of printing them. While this vicious circle still determines the way radio plays are looked at by literary scholars, who in German-speaking countries remain the principal contributors to radio drama theory, new approaches and theories that are more adequate to the practice of radio drama production and to the intrinsic possibilities of the art form have been developed in other research areas like musicology, philosophy, psychology and media studies (Timper 1990; Meyer 1993; Maurach 1995; Faulstich 1981). Yet there is still a lack of interdisciplinary, comprehensive analytical tools with which radio drama can be analysed as an art form in its own right, particularly with respect to the question of storytelling.

Theoretical basis: semiotics and postclassical narratology

In order to describe the specific elements from which the audience derives narratological meaning from a radio play - that is, the parts of what we hear that actually tell the story - an adequate terminology must be devised. A comprehensive analytical model to be applied to all kinds of radio plays, non-narrative or narrative ones, has been developed by Götz

Schmedes in his excellent study of the semiotics of radio drama (Schmedes 2002). Schmedes makes the important assertion that meaning may be derived not only from words but from other sign systems, which he describes. His semiotics of radio drama draws on the theoretical work of Charles Sanders Peirce rather than on Ferdinand de Saussure's semiotics, since de Saussure mainly describes the sign system of linguistics, whereas for Schmedes's and also my analysis it is crucial that the ability to generate meaning is ascribed not only to verbal but non-verbal signs. With only slight modification, the systems that Schmedes describes are the basis for my own analytical approach to radio drama: language, voice, music, noise, silence, fading, cutting, mixing, the (stereophonic) positioning of the signals, electro-acoustical manipulation, and original sound (actuality). Rather than elaborating on each of these sign systems, I will integrate them into the short analysis of some radio plays in the next section of this article.

The model for describing the different signs that generate meaning in a radio play provides the basis for a postclassical narratological approach towards radio drama. The term 'postclassical narratology' was coined by David Herman and designates a broad and interdisciplinary study of storytelling that is not restricted to structuralist theoretical models and objects of study but extends to 'new questions about (the relations between) narrative structure, its verbal, visual or more broadly semiotic realization, and the contexts in which it is produced and interpreted' (Herman 1999: 9). Whereas structuralist narratological models draw mostly on literary objects of study, postclassical narratology insists that 'narratives [are] not merely a literary form or medium of expression, but a phenomenological and cognitive mode of self- and world knowledge' (Nünning and Nünning 2002: 2). Hence narratological analysis has a variety of applications, proceeding from the simple observation that people tell and listen to stories in varied forms and contexts: 'From the description of lived events in the form of everyday accounts, to witness testimonies and accounts of personal injury, to the reception of fairy tales, short stories, novels, biographies, history books, comics and films' (Nünning and Nünning 2002: 5).

In media studies a broadened narratological approach has been applied for some time, particularly to film (see, for example, Chatman 1978). Camera angles, lighting and framing are categories as important as setting, gesture and dialogue when it comes to analysing what is being told (story) and how it is being told (discourse). There is no reason why such technical features should not be as important in the analysis of radio plays, since here also the audience's understanding of what is being told is conditioned by elements like acoustical manipulation, mixing and cutting. Moreover, and as I shall hope to show in my analyses in the next section, these acoustical and technical features may be as important to the shaping of the drama as is the spoken word.

Narratological analysis makes use of categories like 'narrator', 'focalization', 'story time' and 'discourse time', 'actors' and 'events'. Depending

on the object of study, different categories are emphasized, and due to the above-mentioned diversity of the field, there obviously does not exist a definite model on which to draw: only certain key concepts like the distinction between story and discourse are common to all. The approach I chose for the study this article draws upon is derived from Mieke Bal's narratology. Bal herself describes 'the role of narratology as a heuristic tool, not an objective grid providing certainty' and sees the analytical tools she provides as enabling 'their users to formulate a textual description in such a way that it is accessible to others': 'text' here 'refers to narratives in any medium' and is interchangeable with 'artifact' (Bal 1997: xiii, 4, 6). While providing the basis for a narratological model, Bal's theory is not primarily concerned with mediality, a concept that becomes immensely important when we look at radio drama. Hence the (inter)media theories of Werner Wolf, David Herman and Marie-Laure Ryan are also included in the formulation of my model for radio drama analysis (Wolf 2002; Herman 2004; Ryan 2004). These elaborate on the question of whether the medium used for the transmission of a story has an influence on the story itself, a question hotly debated among narratologists. A synthesis of conflicting opinions that has been achieved by David Herman serves as the approach to be applied here, namely 'that stories are shaped but not determined by their presentational formats' (Herman 2004: 54). The ability of the medium to shape stories is particularly important in radio drama analysis since it marks the area most neglected by traditional, 'literary' research.

Basically, we must distinguish two levels of narratological analysis: story and discourse. At the level of *story*, the 'actants' (the forces that determine the unfolding of the action), the setting of the action, the story time and the action itself (the events) are to be found; the characterization of the actants and descriptions of the setting are *aspects* of this level. At the level of *discourse*, narrator and discourse time are to be located, while the element of focalization is to be described as an *aspect* of the narrator. As mentioned above, these tools are to be seen as merely heuristic ones and will not be described in detail here. The following analysis should make clear how they are applied.

A (postclassical) narratological approach to radio drama analysis

The different signs and combinations of signs in the above-mentioned systems can be used to transmit a story through sound. The listeners make sense of the narrative by relating the different acoustic signs they hear to specific narrative functions and combining them into a coherent whole. However, the functions that the different sign systems can perform within the unfolding of the story are not to be seen as isolated and having fixed meanings. Rather, they are to be regarded as flexible storytelling devices that adopt their meaning only within the unfolding and overall coherence of the narrative being presented. As David Bordwell warns in

relation to film narrative, there must be no 'atomistic conception of narrative devices' (Bordwell 2004: 204) since every acoustic sign can in principle manifest any narrative function within a specific context: 'Narrative structure and narration mobilize all sorts of material properties of the medium, in a wide variety of manners' (Bordwell 2004: 207).

Hence, in a narratological analysis of a radio play the functions of the different features can only be described within the scope of that particular play. Because in the course of radio drama history there has been a tendency to make a relatively fixed repertoire of acoustic signs stand for various narrative functions, we mistakenly assume that these strategies are a natural property of those signs. The sign system of a voice,⁵ for example, tends to serve as an indication of the attributes of a speaking person, such as gender, age, social or regional background, as well as character traits. But it may also indicate a subjective perception or memory of a character's speech rather than representing the 'actual' speech of the character. This is the case in the radio play *Die Klassefrau/The Class Woman* by Jochen Ziem (Ziem 1973).

Die Klassefrau is about a woman and man who live together as a couple but have difficulties with each other because of their different social backgrounds. The woman is educated and comes from a wealthy family, while the man is uneducated, working class, and has a police record. The audience first hears the woman talking as a narrator, telling them about her life and the difficulties she experiences with her boyfriend. She recalls some situations that in her view show how uneducated her partner is, and the listeners hear some dialogue between the man and the woman in which this is illustrated. In this dialogue, the man is presented as rude, drunken, impatient, loud and insensitive. We infer these traits mainly from the sound of his voice. Later, the man starts to figure as a narrator, telling us about his difficult life with his girlfriend. Again, the monologue is punctuated by dialogue, representing the situations that the man recalls. But now, the way in which the man and the woman talk sound different. They clearly possess the voices they had previously, but the intonations as well as the tone of the voices are different depending on which of the two narrators yields to the scene in which the dialogue occurs. In her own recollection, the woman sounds very soft and patient, whereas when the man remembers her talking, she sounds loud, shrill and impatient. When the man remembers himself talking, he sounds self-confident, friendly, and in a sense superior to the woman since he always stays calm, whereas when the woman remembers him, he sounds rude, impatient and clumsy. The listeners realize that they are not listening to the 'realistic' account of a relationship, but to two different, subjective views of that relationship, and there is no way of telling which character traits are the 'real' ones. The narrative function of the voice to indicate subjectivity and a focalized view of events is nowhere explained by the words of a narrator or character in the play, yet it becomes clear to the listener purely from the alterations of the voices during the unfolding of the story.

5. The sign system of the voice is not to be equated with the sign system of language, although the two are strongly connected. The *voice* as a sign system generating meaning in its own right covers the tone of the voice, which also includes the idiolect of a character (individual linguistic choices and idiosyncrasies), as well as the way of pronouncing (accents, dialects) and the intonation (the structure of emphasizing words or so-called melodies within the uttered sentences).

The way the voice is used here as a means of signification shows how the acoustic elements of a radio play may perform a varying narratological role: voice serves not only to characterize the actants at the level of the story, but as a means of focalization at the level of the discourse. Moreover, the second function modifies the first because while it is being performed the voices can no longer be treated as a reliable reflection of the characters. The voices in a radio play are thus capable of doing more than serving as the rigid signifiers of their characters' traits.

Many radio plays show a use of acoustic signs that combine a range of different systems, using acoustic elements for the level of the story as well as for that of the discourse. Wolfgang Hildesheimer's play *Das Atelierfest/The Studio Party* tells the story of an artist who is trying to paint in his studio but is repeatedly interrupted by incoming guests who begin to organize a party (Hildesheimer 1955). The artist flees to his next-door neighbours, who then join the event themselves: then, from their house, the artist observes the never-ending party through a hole in the wall. The acoustic realization of this story shows a highly developed sense of the possibilities of radio that is remarkable for 1955, the year in which it was broadcast. For instance, Hildesheimer uses music and noises, both 'real' and electro-acoustically manipulated, in order to characterize the people in the play. A workman who is mending a window in the studio is characterized as rather dull by means of a trumpet-like sound sequence that accompanies everything he says, thereby imitating his speech tone and emphasizing his slowness and tediousness. The speech of a woman who enters the studio, constantly talking and not listening to what the artist has to say, is accompanied by a high pitched, rattling, xylophone-like sound. For the listener, it is clear that these sounds do not belong to the story world itself but must be seen as an element of the discourse level. They replace conventional narrative commentary by adding a layer to the characters whose voices we hear. The act of *fading in* these instrumental sequences is a narrative act at the level of the discourse, even though there is no 'narrator' as such. It is merely an audible device that helps to *tell the story*.

Later in the play, the instrumental sequences which accompany the words of the guests become electro-acoustically manipulated, thereby representing another narratological element in the story: the focalization or 'point of view'. It becomes clear that only the remarks of the intruding guests, and not those of the artist himself, are accompanied by a specific instrumental sound. Moreover, after a short spell in which the artist is being prevented from painting by the dull workman and the talkative woman, the sound sequences that accompany their remarks are mingled with their voices and rise to a crescendo that becomes almost unbearable until it is cut off by the sound of a slamming door - after which we hear the voice of another guest entering the studio. The sound mix and crescendo are clearly to be understood as the artist's focalized perception of the intruding guests. He cannot bear the incessant talk of the woman

and the obtuseness of the worker who prevent him from working, and the growing loudness of the sound mix represents his feelings. It is not located within the world of the story but must be seen as an act of *telling* at the discourse level: the noise is thereby focalized by a character who does belong to the story world. The cut that puts an end to the sound mix indicates a shift in the perception of the artist: another person enters the studio, this event being indicated by the slamming of a door. But this latter noise is clearly located within the story world. The use of sounds within the story can be seen as so specific that the audience is always able to distinguish which narrative level they belong to.

The close analysis of 60 radio plays in the study on which this article draws has shown that the listener never finds it hard to distinguish these levels. A comparison of the same technique in cinematic storytelling may demonstrate what is happening here: in a scene in which the audience sees and hears a character speaking, the words might slowly become unintelligible and change into mere sounds while the character is still moving her lips as if speaking. The audience grasps immediately that this is a way of signifying that another character is watching this speaker and listening to her (the listener is himself often represented by the camera) but is no longer able or willing to follow what she is saying. This technique is used to indicate the narrative function of focalization and is understood as such by the audience. That the sound material is in this case not a realistic element of the story world does not make the story any less intelligible.

When the noises are used as a function of discourse, their origin does not have to be recognizable to the audience. As storytelling devices, they will be plainly intelligible to the listener in terms of what they indicate within the scope of a specific play. In a radio monologue called *muttersterben/mother-dying*, the narrator recounts the death of his mother in a rather unemotional way (Lentz 2002). From time to time, his account is interrupted by a strange, unidentifiable metallic noise that has an increasingly disturbing effect. It can be seen as a kind of commentary on the man's words and makes his attitude more understandable to the listeners by suggesting how difficult and stressful it must be for the young man to tell his story, even though this is not indicated by the tone of his voice.

That a varied use of non-verbal sign systems is possible and, moreover, intelligible to a wide audience, can be demonstrated by a short concluding analysis of Dieter Kühn's radio play *Das lullische Spiel/The Lullig Game* (Kühn 1975). It is a story about the life of Raimundus Lullus or Ramon Lull, a Catalan monk who lived in the thirteenth century and who invented a number of eccentric logical techniques, among others the 'lullig system', the so-called *Ars magna combinatoria*, in which he took words from different fields of knowledge and combined them in a systematic way. The old Ramon Lull recounts his life-story in this stereophonically recorded play. His voice is always located at the centre of the acoustic space. When recalling an episode from his early life, Ramon is suddenly accompanied by a voice uttering (almost) the same words but coming from another posi-

6. It should be emphasized that the four examples of German radio plays used in this article, as well as most of the radio plays studied in the book this article draws on, are *not* so-called experimental radio plays or 'Neue Hörspiele'. Although Hildesheimer's *Das Atelierfest* is not a conventional radio play of the 1950s, all four of these plays do tell a story and were perceived and appreciated by a wide audience as 'normal' radio plays, not as elitist experiments in sound. Documentation of the audience reactions to *Das Atelierfest* and *Das lullische Spiel* is to be found at the radio drama department archive of the NDR; of those to *muttersterben* at the archive of the BR; and of those to *Die Klassefrau* at the archive of the WDR.

tion within the acoustic space. While in his account the old man uses verbs in the past tense, the other voice gives the same account using verbs in the present tense. This other voice grows louder while the old man's voice grows softer, eventually fading out completely. It becomes clear that the second voice is that of the young Ramon, describing his life in the present tense. After a while, old Ramon's voice takes up the account again, starting to talk about another event in his life, until another voice, located at a position different from those of the first two voices, comes in to take over the story, this time representing Ramon at yet another stage of his life. In the course of the play, four different voices, located at four different positions in the acoustic space, are heard, representing Ramon at four separate stages of his life. Moreover, the accounts of the different stages are accompanied by specific musical pieces: medieval dance music for the episode when Ramon was very young, and Gregorian chant for the time that he worked as a missionary. Thus, various sign systems are used to perform a specific narrative function: fading in and fading out, music, voice, and, above all, the positioning of the signals in the acoustic space, to indicate the different episodes within the story being told, the life of Ramon Lull. This illustrates that the positioning of signals within the acoustic space is not a feature with a fixed narrative function, either. Although throughout the history of radio drama production it has been used primarily to indicate the *spatial* positions of characters in a realistically represented setting, this example shows that it can be used in a much more varied way.

After listening to the play for some time, the audience has no problem in locating the different episodes of Ramon's life, mostly just by realizing which acoustic positions the accounts come from. At the end of the play, the storytelling itself draws on our ability to differentiate between the story times: old Ramon Lull becomes ill and develops a fever. At this point, the audience realizes that the positions of the signals do not stay static anymore but seem to wander around in the acoustic space: the voices and music, until then assigned to one specific position and therefore one story time, begin to get jumbled up with voices and music that belong to other episodes in the story. Also, words get cut off in the middle or put together with other words or fragments of words. All these processes indicate the increasing fever of old Ramon and his decreasing ability to recall the events of his life correctly. At the end of the play, a multitude of non-verbal sign systems tells the final events of the story. While the audience first hears the diegetic noises of waves and birds (the old man is lying on the deck of a ship), a non-diegetic 'white noise', used purely as a storytelling device at the level of discourse, takes over and soon smothers the whole scene, representing the loosening of the sick man's grip on reality. At the end, the white noise cuts off, leaving total silence - another sign system that is used here to indicate the final event of the story: the old man's death.⁶

Conclusion

Some of the specific acoustic and technical features that can be used to indicate the narrative functions described in this article are by no means new and have characterized radio plays since the beginning of the art form,⁷ but they have been largely neglected in analysis. The narratological model that has been described here extends and systematizes the range of these features and emphasizes the potential of non-verbal signs in the generation of meaning. The application of this model to the analysis of radio plays is likely to reveal more medium-specific storytelling devices than are models that are grounded in literary or dramatic theory. On the other hand, the model might prompt the more active integration of non-verbal storytelling devices into radio drama production. I would suggest that it is only when storytelling devices are applied that are peculiar to the medium that we shall be able to see radio drama as an art form in its own right and not merely as another medium of literary or dramatic expression. Moreover, audiences *are* able to follow a story that is presented not only in words but in other acoustic material, and '[while] it may be true that only language can express the causal relations that hold narrative scripts together, this does not mean that a text needs to represent these relations explicitly to be interpreted as narrative' (Ryan 2004: 11). As this analysis has indicated, non-verbal sign systems can, like language, contribute in a unique way to the generation of narrative meaning.

References

- Arnheim, Rudolf (1936), *Radio* (trans. Margaret Ludwig and Herbert Read), London: Faber & Faber.
- Bal, Mieke (1997), *Narratology. Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 2nd edn., Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Benjamin, Walter (1993), 'Theater and Radio: Toward the Mutual Control of Their Work of Instruction' (trans. Louis P. Kaplan), in Neil Strauss (ed.), *Radiotext(e), Semiotext(e) #16* vol. vi, no. i, New York: Semiotext(e), pp. 29-31.
- Bordwell, David (2004), 'Neo-Structuralist Narratology and the Functions of Filmic Storytelling', in Mary-Laure Ryan (ed.), *Narrative across Media: The Languages of Storytelling*, Lincoln, NE and London: University of Nebraska Press, pp. 203-19.
- Böhmer, Gerd (1993), *Zeitgeschichte in den Hörspielen von 1945-1955*, dissertation, University of Freiburg, (im Breisgau).
- Brecht, Bertolt (1993), 'The Radio as an Apparatus of Communication' (trans. John Willett), in Neil Strauss (ed.), *Radiotext(e), Semiotext(e) #16*, vol. 6, no. 1, New York: Semiotext(e), pp. 15-17.
- Bund der Kriegsblinden Deutschlands und Filmstiftung Nordrhein-Westfalen (ed.) (2001), *HörWelten. 50 Jahre Hörspielpreis der Kriegsblinden 1952-2001*, Berlin: Aufbau.
- Chatman, Seymour (1978), *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*, Ithaca, NY and London: Cornell University Press.
- Cory, Mark Ensign (1974), *The Emergence of an Acoustical Art Form: An Analysis of the German Experimental Hörspiel of the 1960s*, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

7. Like for example the usage of a specific voice characterizing a person by applying particular tonal or idiomatic features, or fading and cutting, which have always been used to indicate changes of scene, story time or even narrative levels (like changes from sequences of dialogue to the voice of a narrator). Also, the diegetic and non-diegetic functions of music, are narrative features that have long been recognized (see Shingler and Wieringa 1998: 64-72).

- Crisell, Andrew (1994), *Understanding Radio*, 2nd edn., London and New York: Routledge.
- Döblin, Alfred (1950), 'Literatur und Rundfunk', in Hans Bredow (ed.), *Aus meinem Archiv: Probleme des Rundfunks*, Heidelberg: Kurt Vowinckel, pp. 311-17.
- Faulstich, Werner (1981), *Radiotheorie: Eine Studie zum Hörspiel 'The War of the Worlds' (1938) von Orson Welles*, Tübingen: Narr.
- Geerken, Hartmut (ed.) (1992), *Das interaktive Hörspiel als nicht-erzählende Radiokunst*, Essen: Die blaue Eule.
- Hepp, Andreas (2004), 'Radio and Popular Culture in Germany: Radio Culture Between Comedy and "Event-isation"' (trans. Peter Muellen), in Andrew Crisell (ed.), *More than a Music Box: Radio Cultures and Communities in a Multi-Media World*, New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, pp. 189-212.
- Herman, David (1999), 'Introduction: Narratologies', in David Herman (ed.), *Narratologies: New Perspectives on Narrative Analysis*, Columbus: Ohio State University Press, pp. 1-30.
- (2004), 'Toward a Transmedial Narratology', in Marie-Laure Ryan (ed.), *Narrative across Media: The Languages of Storytelling*, Lincoln, NE and London: University of Nebraska Press, pp. 47-75.
- Hildesheimer, Wolfgang (1955), *Das Atelierfest*, directed by Fritz Schröder-Jahn, Hamburg: Northwest German Broadcasting Company (NWDR), first broadcast on 25 May 1955.
- Huwiler, Elke (2005 (forthcoming)), *Erzähl-Ströme im Hörspiel: Zur Narratologie der elektroakustischen Kunst*, Paderborn: Mentis Verlag.
- Knilli, Friedrich (1961), *Das Hörspiel: Mittel und Möglichkeiten eines totalen Schallspiels*, Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer.
- Kolb, Richard (1932), *Das Horoskop des Hörspiels*, Berlin: Rundfunkschriften für Rufer und Hörer II.
- Kühn, Dieter (1975), *Das lullische Spiel*, directed by Heinz Hostnig, Hamburg: North German Broadcasting Company (NDR), first broadcast on 13 December 1975.
- Lentz, Michael (2002), *muttersterben*, directed by Josef Anton Riedl and Michael Lentz, Munich: Bavarian Broadcasting Company (BR), first broadcast on 14 April 2002.
- Maurach, Martin (1995), *Das experimentelle Hörspiel: Eine gestalttheoretische Analyse*, Wiesbaden: Deutscher Universitäts-Verlag.
- Meyer, Petra Maria (1993), *Die Stimme und ihre Schrift: Die Graphophonie der akustischen Kunst*, Vienna: Passagen.
- Nünning, Vera and Nünning, Ansgar (2002), 'Produktive Grenzüberschreitungen: Transgenerische, intermediale und interdisziplinäre Ansätze in der Erzähltheorie', in Vera Nünning and Ansgar Nünning (eds), *Erzähltheorie transgenerisch, intermedial, interdisziplinär*, Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, pp. 1-22.
- Priessnitz, Horst P. (1981), 'British Radio Drama: A Survey' (trans. J.T. Swann), in Peter Lewis (ed.), *Radio Drama*, London and New York: Longman, pp. 28-47.
- Ruttmann, Walter (1930), *Weekend*, directed by Walter Ruttmann, Berlin: Berlin Broadcasting Company (Berliner Rundfunk), first broadcast on 13 June 1930. (Walter Ruttmann (2000), *Weekend Remix*, München: Intermedium records, intermedium rec. 003, Indigo CD 93172).
- Ryan, Marie-Laure (2004), 'Introduction', in Marie-Laure Ryan (ed.), *Narrative across Media: The Languages of Storytelling*, Lincoln, NE and London: University of Nebraska Press, pp. 1-40.

- Schiller-Lerg, Sabine (1984), *Walter Benjamin und der Rundfunk: Programmarbeit zwischen Theorie und Praxis*, Munich: K.G. Saur.
- Schmedes, Götz (2002), *Medientext Hörspiel: Ansätze einer Hörspielsemiotik am Beispiel der Radioarbeiten von Alfred Behrens*, Münster: Waxmann.
- Shingler, Martin and Wieringa, Cindy (1998), *On Air: Methods and Meanings of Radio*, London: Arnold.
- Timper, Christiane (1990), *Hörspielmusik in der deutschen Rundfunkgeschichte: Originalkompositionen im deutschen Hörspiel 1923-1986*, Berlin: Wissenschaftsverlag Volker Spiess.
- Vowinkel, Antje (1998), 'Online-Offline: Ansätze eines interaktiven Hörspiels', in Jörg Helbig (ed.), *Intermedialität: Theorie und Praxis eines interdisziplinären Forschungsgebietes*, Berlin: Erich Schmidt, pp. 93-107.
- Wolf, Werner (2002), 'Das Problem der Narrativität in Literatur, bildender Kunst und Musik: Ein Beitrag zu einer intermedialen Erzähltheorie', in Vera Nünning and Ansgar Nünning (eds), *Erzähltheorie transgenerisch, intermedial, interdisziplinär*, Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, pp. 23-104.
- Würffel, Stefan Bodo (1978), *Das deutsche Hörspiel*, Stuttgart: Metzler.
- Ziem, Jochen (1973), *Die Klassefrau*, directed by Friedhelm Ortman, Cologne: West German Broadcasting Company (WDR), first broadcast on 19 March 1973.

Suggested citation

- Huwiler, E. (2005), 'Storytelling by sound: a theoretical frame for radio drama analysis', *The Radio Journal – International Studies in Broadcast and Audio Media* 3: 1, pp. 45–59, doi: 10.1386/rajo.3.1.45/1

Contributor details

Dr. Elke Huwiler is Assistant Professor at the German Literature and Culture Department of the University of Amsterdam. She teaches courses in German Literature and Culture, Media and Culture, and Literary Studies, and does research at the Amsterdam School for Cultural Analysis. Her research areas include (German) Radio Drama, Literature and Media, Narratology, Semiotics and Performative Studies. Contact: German Literature and Culture Department, University of Amsterdam, Spuistraat 210, 1012 VT Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Email: e.huwiler@uva.nl

Copyright of The Radio Journal: International Studies in Audio & Broadcast Media is the property of Intellect Limited. The copyright in an individual article may be maintained by the author in certain cases. Content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.