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## **Announcing in multiplatform broadcasting: self-referentiality, buzz and eventfulness in a commercial music format**

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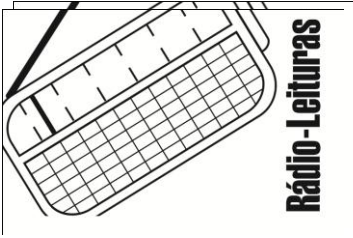
### **Abstract**

The purpose of this article is to explore what kind of transmedia – and crossmedia – strategies are used within commercial music radio. What happens when a format is extended to digital platforms and included within the crossmedia-strategies of a large media company? The materials used to explore these questions are recordings, as well as participatory observations and interviews with producers, from the Swedish radio station Rix FM, and are a part of an ongoing PhD-research project. The article shows how ‘announcing’ (defined broadly) have been transformed to take on a more collaborative character, in which listeners are invited to develop talk and buzz around the ‘micro-events’ and publicity stunts staged and performed within the ‘texts’ of commercial music radio. This, as the article shows, has also affected the role of the DJ to increasingly take on the function of commentator or moderator. Furthermore the article shows how the new digital platforms are used in order to extend the format: to give audiences access to its place of production (backstage) and to extend the scope of the ‘memory’ and ‘history’ of the commercial music radio through open access to the station’s archive for listening as well as commentating and linking. The argument put forward in this article is that, taken together, all of these strategies serve the purpose of enhancing the eventfulness of radio as communication. These developments have accordingly increased the importance of the ‘micro-event’: actions and happenings intended to stand out from - and break off the ordinary flow of music, program segments, commercials, voices and jingles.

**Keywords:** announcing, commercial music radio, transmedia strategies.

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## **Announcing in multiplatform broadcasting: self-referentiality, buzz and eventfulness in a commercial music format**

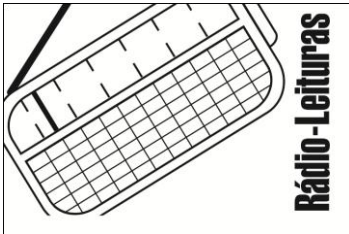
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### **Introduction**

Contemporary media is characterized by two tendencies. On the one hand, new media technologies facilitate new possibilities for audience participation within established media, (talking-back, commentating, voting et cetera), as well as new possibilities for audiences to produce and distribute their own content, and to circulate the content produced by others in new ways (e.g. Youtube). Parallel to this seeming de-centralization of the media, the same technologies supports new patterns of ownership and control (i.e. global conglomerates and media houses) and are essential for the increased recycling of content and multiplatform-strategies that effectively enhances the centralisation of media power. These two parallel tendencies have been described as paving the way for a “convergence culture” (DEUZE, 2007; JENKINS, 2006).

One of the hallmarks of such a convergence culture is supposedly “trans-media storytelling”, first described and analyzed by Henry Jenkins in his book *Convergence Culture*. He developed this concept in order to understand the ways in which narratives and the production of media stories are transformed as a consequence of the tendencies outlined above. His concept is, at least implicitly, related to the notions of “inter-textuality” (KRISTEVA, 1986) and “para-textuality” (GENETTE, 1997; GRAY, 2010), even if Jenkins describes trans-media storytelling as a more instrumental and commercial strategy, developed and adapted within the media industry. Similar to these authors, however, in Jenkins’ understanding of how convergence affects and is played out through media output, media content is perceived as text.

But what about the forms of communication not best understood as texts, at least not in a traditional sense? The flow of music, sounds and voices that constitutes radio, for example, a flow that aims at maintaining presence, sociability, liveness and identity (NYRE, 2008) rather than presenting a narrative: in what ways do trans-media strategies contribute to or transform such communication? In order to gain a better understanding for such forms of communication we have to move beyond notions of trans-media storytelling and content as texts and towards the expressivity of communication and investigate empirically how the developing ecology of multiple platforms and cross-referencing content actually are played out in media production and within the communicative forms of modern mass-media.



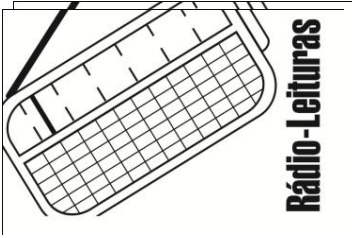
The argument presented in this article is that the trans-media strategies of contemporary commercial radio contribute to, and develop – in a rather specific sense – the eventfulness of radio as auditive communication. Hence they do not so much alter the communicative ethos of radio broadcasting as enhance one of its core elements. Top 40 or formula radio have always been dependent upon promotions, stunts and contests (Fong-Torres, 2001). This is furthered and intensified in the multiplatform broadcasting of contemporary commercial radio. However, the new media technology also modulates the temporal structure of radio programming and output. Through digital media, radio producers have greater possibilities to develop talk and ‘buzz’ about program elements - in advance as well as in retrospect.

As I will show in this article, the cross-platforms strategies of Rix FM consist mainly of involving the listeners in the practice of announcing, integrating them into the production of talk or buzz about the ‘events’ staged and performed by the hosts within the radio ‘text’. However, it is not only the role of the audience that is transformed by the new media technologies. The working roles and practices of DJs and program hosts are affected as well, since the possibilities opened up by new media technologies increasingly prompt them to become moderators of talk produced by others. At the same time, these technologies give DJs and program hosts opportunities to act as commentators, letting them provide their own “action-override” (Goffman, 1981) through text-based platforms such as twitter or web logs.

The structure of the article is as follows: the first two sections discuss materials, methods and concerns definitions. The attempt is to define what I mean by announcing and how I understand the concept of eventfulness. The empirical findings are presented in the two following sections: ‘managing expectation’ and ‘moderating the unfolding’. In the conclusion I give a short summary of the main findings and briefly discuss the relation between eventfulness as a commercial and communicative strategy and the question of ‘radio as ritual’ in the era of digital media.

### **Announcing in multiplatform radio**

The empirical materials used in this article are twofold. The first part consists of interviews with the producers (managers, DJs, sound editors etc) of the Swedish commercial radio station Rix FM. The second part concerns the output that is the result of their labor: the communicative flow of Rix FM. I have chosen to limit the scope of the materials analyzed to



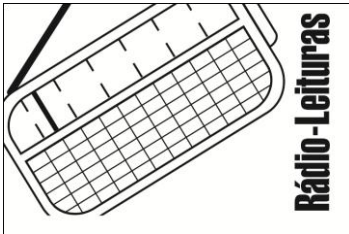
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one single day of radio broadcasting. The specific day was not selected for any particular reason. However, this arbitrariness had a point - namely, to underline the ordinariness and standardization of the type of communication analyzed. It could have been any day, since they are all structured according to the same pattern (STEEG-LARSEN, 2000). Rix FM programs a Hot Adult Contemporary format (Hot AC) using the techniques developed in early Top 40 radio by radio pioneers like Todd Storz and Gordon MacLendon (McCOURT & ROTHENBUHLER, 2004). The basic scheme of such formats – of which a plentitude exists– is that they rest upon spaced repetition of the currently most popular songs; closed playlists and clock rotation, in which each hour follows a pattern of program elements repeated in the next hour. The use of such formats aims at creating and maintaining a “total station sound” (ibid.). Since their inception these formats have expanded into an almost global dominance and are today utilized by a majority of commercial broadcasters worldwide.

In this article I focus my analysis around the DJ talk or the announcing that goes on between the songs. As Eric Rothenbuhler remarks, the “DJs in such a system [format radio] are performers of the system at least as much as they are performers of their selves”. (ROTHENBUHLER, 2010a, p. 6), which is also a point of departure in the present article. From the very inception of format radio, as Rothenbuhler rightly acknowledges, DJs have been trained to promote each other’s shows and the station as a whole, more than their own program, which has made the promotion of the stations ubiquitous. DJs have been instructed to be forward referencing; emphasizing what is coming next, not what was just played. Their talk has always circled around contests, games, publicity stunts, and audience call-ins in order to keep people tuned in and to give listeners something to talk about. This is a central feature of commercial music radio formats and my aim in this article is to explore how this “performing the system” (or the system’s performativity) is extended and affected by the introduction of new digital media, audience participation, and the cross-platform strategies of contemporary media houses.

The very character of these new digital media technologies, however, means that before I can go on to discuss these matters I have to say something about what I mean by ‘announcing’. In the following I will utilize a broadened definition of radio talk, or ‘announcing’. For example, as we shall see, contemporary DJs and hosts on commercial music radio often use text-based forms of communication to talk to their audiences (twitter, Facebook, web logs). Furthermore, through new media technologies announcing can become a social or



collective action, involving not only the DJ (and the production team that plan and execute scripting and premeditation) but also listeners themselves. All of these practices I take to be announcing. The definition of announcing that I use in this text is then by necessity unorthodox and could tentatively be formulated as incorporating all communicative acts that serve the purpose of adding meaning to, and moving forward, the perpetual flow of the format.

### **Flow, event, eventfulness**

The cultural form of programmed radio (and television) is often said to be the flow. The flow of music, sounds and voices are put together in a seamless mix. The boundaries between different elements and different shows are downplayed and the parts are supposedly integrated in a consistent programming mode that serves the purpose of integrating the listener in the flow - to prolong listening. First theorized by Raymond Williams in the 1970s, the concept of flow has since been extensively developed. The flow, it has been argued, consists of micro flows or segments within it. The television (or radio) output as a whole, as well as the possibility for the audience to navigate its way through it, i.e. switch channels, has been conceptualized as a 'macro- or mega flow' ("megatext") (BROWNE, 1987; ELLIS, 1988). Hence, the flow consists of different levels, and it could, at least hypothetically, be the case that new digital media, and the multiplatform programming developed in relation to it, creates new extensions of the flow, or what has been theorized as the 'overflow' – the spilling over to other media platforms – of popular genres and shows (BROOKER, 2001).

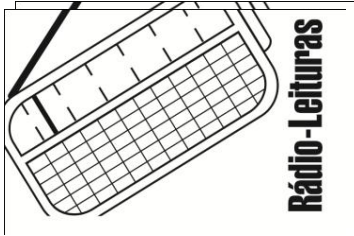
As regards commercial music radio, the concept of flow has obvious relevance, not only as a critical concept in order to understand the communicative expression per se, but also as a working notion within the production process. For example, the program director of Rix FM, Alexandra Maric, talks about the necessity to

create a better flow [...] more fluidity, since the [market] research has shown that our listeners think it's too much commercials on-air, too much stuff that stops the flow<sup>2</sup>.

Hence new types of jingles are constantly being created and evaluated according to their 'flowness' (or lack of it). Air-checks and feed-back from management to the DJs and hosts are scrutinized, as are how 'transitions' are managed by the on-air staff, how sounds and talk

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<sup>2</sup> Alexandra Maric in interview to the author.



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are made to overlap in order to create the feeling of an ongoing and consistent flow that attracts listeners and makes them stay tuned. This very instrumental way of handling the station sound seems to perfectly fit Raymond Williams' description of the plannedness of the (irresponsible) flow (WILLIAMS, 1974/2003, p. 92).

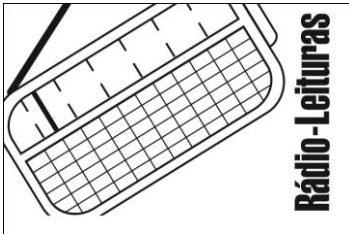
But this is only one part of the efforts of the program directors and DJs of Rix FM. As they explain in the interviews, an almost equal amount of energy is put into breaking the flow, creating ruptures within it or collapsing it. As explained by one of the sound designers, jingles and sweepers should create and bind together a flow, but simultaneously break it to make the jingle itself, and hence the brand of the radio station stand out<sup>3</sup>. And the assistant music director – responsible for the everyday scheduling of music – explains that even if the purpose of programming music is to make transitions between songs as smooth as possible, it is also important to routinely “break the flow” with an odd song or a misfit in order to “not run the risk of putting the background media too much in the background”<sup>4</sup>. Obviously then, on a working level, the radio producers have developed a consciousness of the necessity to break the flow and to create ruptures. As we shall see below when analyzing the announcing in commercial music radio, the constant flow is clearly paralleled by another communicative structure. As much as the production of radio builds upon techniques to overcome breaks and form a smooth, continuous experience, it also attempts to break it up into parts, creating discontinuities of various kinds. Much of the broadcast talk in the commercial music radio analyzed in this article aims precisely at such a production of distinct happenings that seemingly break the normal way of doing things, that stand out, that try to create the impression of being something other than the ordinary routine, to be exceptional, separated from the bulk of the content: in a word, much of the announcing aims at establishing eventfulness (SCANNELL, 1996; YTREBERG, 2009).

The relation between events and eventfulness and the media has been previously theorized as “pseudo-events” (BOORSTIN, 1961) - things arranged solely to be publicized (press conferences, charity balls etc) or “media events” (DAYAN & KATZ, 1992) organized outside of the media but adapted to their form of communication. As suggested by Yngvar Kjus, however, developments within the media during the last decades have given rise to what

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<sup>3</sup> John Rammelt in interview to the author.

<sup>4</sup> Erik Wedberg in interview to the author.

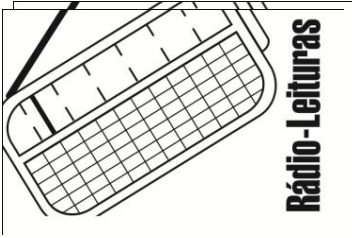


he calls “event media” or “event-based formats” (such as Idol, Survivor, etc) (KJUS, 2009). Through these formats and such programming, media institutions produce their own events and exploit what Kjus calls the “myth of the event and the drama of its unfolding” (ibid.:16) to serve their purposes (whether commercial or public service-based). Media production, Kjus argues, has increasingly become the art of not only manufacturing, but more importantly, orchestrating shows and formats as events due to take place over different channels, platforms and media contents within and beyond the so-called media houses that dominate much of the contemporary media landscape.

So far, such re-engineering of the concept of media events and the production of eventfulness has mainly focused on large-scale television formats and singular shows and series (mainly in television) (COULDRY & HEPP, 2010; DAYAN, 2009; SCANNELL, 2002). The main focus within these analyses has been on the ways in which new media technologies, trans-media strategies and cross-programming have orchestrated the media events of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as taking place and being organized not only outside of the media, but as a feature of certain genres and formats produced and pre-planned within the media industries themselves. From these previous examinations it seems to be clear that the development of media houses and the synergetic strategies that follow from developments in ownership and technology have increased the possibility (and the need) from the side of the media companies to enhance eventfulness: generating talk about their output in digital media and hence managing anticipation, as well as producing self-reflexive ‘remembrance’ of the events created by the media institutions themselves, has become a vital commercial strategy for the media of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

It might seem paradoxical to use the term eventfulness to analyze something as mundane and everyday – anti-event – as the programming of commercial music radio, which obviously is a communicative stream of music, sound and talk that is produced for and received in the background (LEWIS & BOOTH, 1989). If media events (as theorized by DAYAN & KATZ, 1992) syntactically are interruptions, monopolistic, live and remote; if semantically they are historic, ceremonial, reverent, reconciliations; and pragmatically gather large audiences in a celebrative style, then radio formats seem to be their very opposite. As expressed by Eric Rothenbuhler, the radio format

is syntactically uninterrupted flow, everyday, competitive, and in-studio; semantically it is unhistoric, has no memory, no future, unceremonial, irreverent and reconciliation is irrelevant; pragmatically it entertains and



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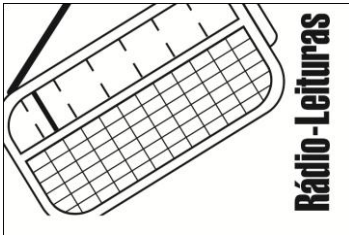
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amuses its audience and is indifferent to the rest (ROTHENBUHLER, 2010b, p. 72).

I am obviously not arguing that all everyday broadcasting constitutes examples of media events, but I would like to explore the fact that the structure or the form of the event and its phenomenological extension – eventfulness – is exploited and actively sought after in the production (using similar techniques as in media events proper) within such everyday broadcasting. I would even say that it seems as if more and more of the production of media output is the management and orchestration of what we could, at least tentatively, call “micro-events” (YTREBERG, 2009). These are the small, banal, simple and everyday (pseudo)events that are designed in order to break the ordinary flow of music and recurring program elements and enhance eventfulness. In one way this is arguably a strengthening of the Top-40 tradition of utilizing stunts and spectacular acts – both off- and on-air – to promote the format (FONG-TORRES, 2001). At the same time they also seem to differ from these well-known strategies of creating publicity and buzz. For one thing, they seem to be more regularly recurring, but more importantly, they are somewhat different in how they exploit the time structure of the event (and this will be the subject of the analyses in the following sections). Paddy Scannell distinguishes between two types of events: those that happen to us and those that we make happen (SCANNELL, 2002:271). The former he calls ‘happenings’ in order to reserve the term ‘event’ for the things that we ourselves make happen. The differences between these two concern questions of intentionality and meaning. Happenings – an earthquake or a plane crash – are ‘meaningless’ and their meaning or significance is created or produced retrospectively (Why did it happen? Whose fault was it? How can we ensure that it does not happen again?). Therefore, a major difference between happenings and events lies in their temporal structure; events have, in the words of Paddy Scannell, a “prospective meaningful character” (ibid.). Events are prepared, looked forward to and invested with expectations; most importantly they are designed to give us experiences. Therefore, not only are events, unlike happenings, planned in advanced and anticipated positively (we look forward to the experience of being in the event), but also retrospective – they are recalled. For that reason, as Scannell suggests

events before, during and after generate talk about them. And this talk is not some contingent thing, not some bit of added value, but an intrinsic feature of the event, part of its very being. (SCANNELL, 2002, p. 272).



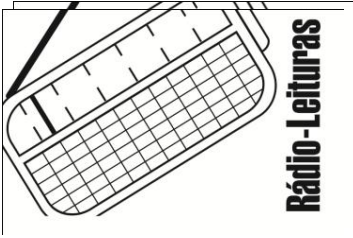


In many ways this is also how the perpetual chain of ‘micro-events’ that constitutes much of the output of Rix FM is managed; it is managed through talk (in a broad sense) or buzz, on-air and in other media. These micro-events, importantly, also exploit, sometimes in a much more direct way than the media events proper, the participation of the audience through the combination of several types of media (mobile phones, web logs, chat forums, social networking sites, radio [FM, pod casts, streaming], television and moving images etc). Within the everyday flow of the radio output in question, a perpetual rhythm of micro-events is created, with the aid of new digital media and synergetic strategies within the media house. Simultaneously, a major part of the DJ’s work is geared towards commentating and moderating the reflexive forms of talk that develop over multiple platforms, which include audiences and producers alike. The important thing in multiplatform radio is that it makes it easier, and ultimately demands of its audiences, to take part directly in the talk about the program and the events that unfold in it. The level of personal involvement then becomes a way to gather the “my-times of audiences in to the time of the program-as-event” (ibid.).

### **Managing expectation**

In this section of the article we shall follow one such ‘micro-event’ to see how it is handled before and after it happens. The example is from the morning show, Rix Morning Zoo (*Rix MorronZoo*) from the 18<sup>th</sup> of June 2010. This particular morning the program is not broadcast from the regular studio. Instead, the morning show – which has four regular members – is situated onboard the 18<sup>th</sup> century Swedish East Indiaman, Götheborg, which at the time of broadcasting lies in Stockholm’s inner harbor in order to participate in the celebrations of the royal wedding (between Princess Victoria and Daniel Westling), due to take place that weekend. However, it is not this specific (media) event that is in focus in the broadcast, even if it creates a more general frame for the morning as such. Instead, the show is – as usual – based upon a couple (1-3) of minor events around which the DJs can evolve different forms of talk. One of the events that generate talk this morning is that one of the hosts of the show has been permitted to borrow the canons on the big ship and to use them for a five-shot salute.

Throughout the show the hosts regularly return to this event that is supposed to take place sometime around nine o’clock in the morning (during the last hour of the show). Preparations are made. Experts are consulted, firing mechanisms tested. How will it sound?

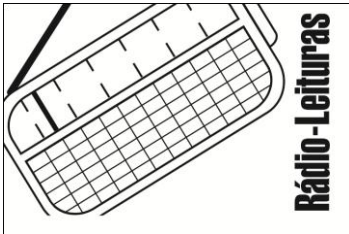


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Will the canons wake the presumably sleeping royalty from all over Europe who are staying in the castle just a stone's throw away? How will other nearby residents react? Will the Norwegian royalty, who are housed for the weekend in a royal yacht next to the East Indiaman, participate in some way? How will Ola, the host who is supposed to fire the guns himself react? These, and other questions are frequently discussed and commented upon, building up expectation, encouraging listeners to stay tuned – but at the same time giving the show an air of eventfulness, of things going on. The most frequently discussed question in advance is, however, for whom the salute will be fired. The hosts have their own suggestions, which are mainly ironic, in line with the norm of chit-chat and banter that structures the talk in the morning show. But the discussion around the coming of the event and how it is supposed to unfold does not stop within the studio and among the hosts. The listeners are invited and encouraged, via the program's page on Facebook, to give their own proposals for people who deserve to be acknowledged with a salute. The distanced, ironic and playful tone in the suggestions presented by the hosts of the show is not taken up by the listeners. Instead, their suggestions are earnest, consisting of close family members, friends and relatives who have passed away, couples about to get married; nursing staff that the listener is grateful to; children, grandchildren and beloved pets etc. During the stream of suggestions rolling in on the Facebook wall, the listeners also start talking to each other: Susan wants to salute her husband Jörgen who is about to embark upon a demanding bicycling contest, but Kristoffer objects that this is not a good enough reason, and when one of the hosts reads and comments upon some of the discussion on Facebook on-air he gets immediate replies online. Except for the direct suggestions about for whom the salute is to be fired, the discussion is more general, building expectations, mimicking the discussion that the hosts have had on-air: how will the event play out, what will happen, what are we about to hear, witness and take part in?

As Scannell points out, the modern mass media are generally a “powerful bridging media that span the times of societies and the times of individual existence. Bringing them into an available, public worldly now-of-concern” (SCANNELL, 2002, p. 273). Thus the media bind together public events with the individual's life in an inherently social time. In the orchestrating and management of this – ultimately rather futile – micro-event, the hosts of the show utilize the distribution of the radio format on to other platforms (in this case Facebook) to tie the preparations for the event about to take place and the forming of expectations around it, to the individual and private life-worlds of the listeners (as exemplified by the

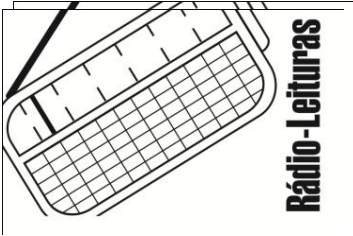


character of the suggestions cited above). This means that talk, the talk that is an inherent part of the event, is encouraged and the possibilities for discourse to form are increased through the aid of digital media (with its possibilities for ‘talking back’). In such a manner the eventfulness of the radio show is enhanced as the micro-event gets tied to the individual lives and discourses of listeners. Expectations that not only circle around the event per se, but also around an event that is supposedly involving me (the salute might be for my husband/wife/friend/lover/nurse/cat) are created and managed. This is, in the words of Paddy Scannell, to “exploit the ontology of expectations” (ibid.), the ways in which humans organize their everyday lives as a perpetually evolving rhythm of “small anticipations and everyday hopes” (ibid.) which, in this case is utilized by the hosts and the producers of the show in order to generate interest, attention and prolonged listening.

## Backstage

But it is not only, however, through the perpetual staging of such micro-events that new digital media are used in order to enhance eventfulness in the music radio format in question. In various ways, not at least through the collective force of the many media outlets, platforms and formats managed from within the media house of which the radio station *Rix FM* is part, different media are used in order to stimulate the perpetual discussion and talk about the ‘texts’ produced. This means to orchestrate the whole communicative output as an ‘event’ in itself. Various strategies are used in order to accomplish such a goal: cross-promotion, cross-referencing texts, self-referencing practices from within the media house as well as for example the creation of an ‘internal star system’ which make it possible for popular profiles from the media house to circulate as ‘textual elements’ or cues between different media and different formats. I limit the discussion to just one such strategy deployed by *Rix FM*, a strategy somewhat typical for many contemporary media: that is the function of *backstage*.

However, it is not only through the perpetual staging of such micro-events that new digital media are used in order to enhance eventfulness in the music radio format in question. In various ways, not least through the collective force of the many media outlets, platforms and formats managed from within the media house which includes the radio station *Rix FM*, different media are used in order to stimulate the perpetual discussion and talk about the ‘texts’ produced. This means to orchestrate the whole communicative output as an ‘event’ in



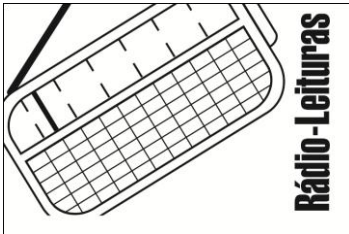
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itself. Various strategies are utilized in order to accomplish such a goal. In large media houses, cross-promotion, cross-referencing and self-referencing are typical. Within the integrated media houses, for example television, radio, press and online media cooperate in various ways. In the following I will limit the discussion to just one such strategy deployed by Rix FM, a strategy that is somewhat typical for many contemporary media: the backstage.

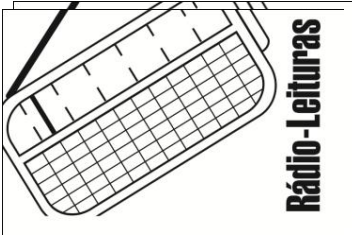
A central dimension of all (live) broadcasting is that it is heavily structured, pre-planned and premeditated. This implies that there exists a place and a time in which such preparations can be carried out, a 'behind the scenes' and 'before the show', where actions and performances are prepared before being completed in front of an audience. This place 'behind the scene' is the location where performances are monitored by management, directed while they are happening, and evaluated after the performance is over. Significant for such a place is that it is not, and is not supposed to be, visible to the audience because at least according to common industry know-how, a making visible of the practices of premeditation would break the illusion, destroy the fiction (in, for example, entertainment) or threaten authenticity and trustworthiness (for example, in a news broadcast). It would also, possibly, destroy the illusion of being 'live'. The spontaneous and 'unplanned' "fresh talk" (Goffman, 1981), for example, which is a large part of much radio broadcasting, would perhaps be perceived differently if the audience had full knowledge of the process of preparing, pre-recording and scripting such performances.

However, an increasing amount of media output currently consists of precisely such backstage-stories, apparent mediations of places, times and practices of production that were previously supposed to not be shown. Well known examples of this include the showing of the news studio, with its blue-screens, cameras, scripts, lighting etc, as the news broadcasts ends with the camera zooming out and giving the audience a last, closing panorama of the news stage. Even editorial processes have been exposed to the public: online with extra materials or in the regular broadcast (as for example when the moderator of an sms discussion in a studio debate show is seated within the studio, not on the side or in the control room, as would be the norm). In recent film and television drama a similar development can be discerned through, for instance, extra or bonus materials on DVD editions of popular films or television shows, or 'the film about the film' that has developed into a genre of its own (CALDWELL, 2008). These examples, of course, do not indicate that the audience is allowed to see any 'authentic' backstage; like all other (front-stage) media content these forms of communication



are produced in order to be consumed, with the purpose of being meaningful and are hence are equally planned, staged and premeditated.

Another event planned to take place on the same day as the salute, and one also relating to the specific location of the broadcast, is Ola's (once again the same host, since he plays the role of 'action reporter' in these broadcasts) 'walking the plank' - and not in a metaphorical sense. A plank is to be laid out over the rail of the ship where the morning show is taking place and the listeners will be able to follow, live, how he walks out on it and subsequently falls into the freezing water. In many of the same ways as expectations are boosted in relation to the salute, much air-time in the show is devoted to talking about this coming event. What will it be like? Will he touch the bottom? What will he see? As the ship lies in the inner harbor of Stockholm, Ola fears finding 'dead drug addicts, guns and heroine syringes' on the bottom. The coastguards have been invited to supervise the stunt; medical assistance is in place - all in order to amplify the eventfulness of what is going to take place. The online discussion of what is to unfold is lively, much in the same spirit as the Facebook exchanges mentioned above. In relation to this publicity stunt however, yet another feature of Rix FM's 'digital announcing' is activated. Since the range of preparations and security measures that are taken in order to make the stunt possible encompasses not only premeditations and off-air-scripts but inherent parts of the eventfulness as such, these have to be communicated and shown to the audience. However, the best way to do this is not only through radio talk; many of them are more effectively demonstrated and staged with the help of pictures and films. In the web log for the show and on the website, therefore, a number of 'behind-the-scenes' narratives unfold with the help of pictures, texts and video-clips (see one example in Figure 1).



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Figure 1: Ola Lustig (number 4 from the left) and the crew from the Swedish coast-guard.

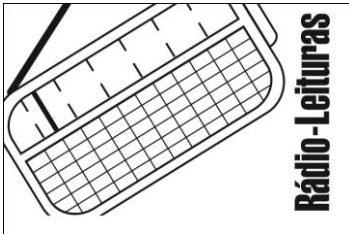
For Rix FM to use such a mode of ‘showing’ the production process and underlining its planned and premeditated character is nothing unusual. This may be accomplished as in the example above - through things that the DJs and hosts tell and through things they write in their web logs etc. But the station also has a specific service in order to produce and disseminate such texts: a site called Rix FM Backstage. The site started in 2007 and is managed by one single person, who describes the site as follows:

The thought behind Backstage is that it is supposed to be ‘behind the scenes’ of the radio station. To do that is not as easy as one would expect, not at least since the program hosts and DJ’s have *some* kind of integrity after all (laughter). But I use to think that the simple things are the best. That people actually *do* find it interesting to see how one specific element of a show is produced and edited in the studio. And that one could do simple films of guests, like for example celebrities and pop-stars in the green-room, drinking a cup of coffee before visiting the show... Essentially how things are and what they look like behind the scenes... And that people find it interesting<sup>5</sup>.

John Thornton Caldwell (2008) has previously framed such self-reflective (or reflexive) narratives as forms of self-promotion – commercials masked as editorial content – and hence a result of an increasing commercialization and conglomeratization of the media. Even if that

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<sup>5</sup> Jeanette Predin in interview to the author.



may very well be the case, these services also provision the production of eventfulness in three distinct ways. The first two relate to the time structure of the event, as described by Scannell (2002, see above). First, within Rix FM Backstage things to come are anticipated. Through the interactive character of the site, the audience can be involved in forward looking talk about what is about to happen. Secondly, the audience is here given the opportunity to provide additional information - as well as additional dialogue and commentary - afterwards, when the micro-events of the show have passed and the audience can comment upon what unfolded. But most importantly, and thirdly, in providing apparent access to the site of production, the Backstage site offers a testimony of the planned-ness of the radio output. In showing by means of photographs and videos, how micro-events like the one described above are planned, staged, even recorded and edited, it aims at affirming that the radio output consists of things *made* to happen.

## Back-sell

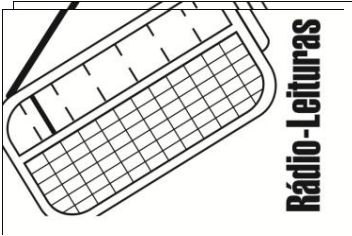
As Eric Rothenbuhler (2010b) observes, commercial format radio has no memory and no history. Once the show is over, the talk has been performed and the songs have been played they are forgotten, the flow has moved on and what is produced is arguably a perpetual now. In one sense this is of course true and it is an idea reproduced by the producers themselves when they state that what they do is “utilitarian ware [...] what I do is to speak, turn off the microphone and instantly move on and forget what I just said”<sup>6</sup>. And as we have seen, announcing in commercial radio is inherently ‘future-oriented’ - one of the slogans for format production being ‘if it’s worth saying, it’s worth promoting’.

On the other hand, even if one considers only the traditional broadcasts, it is not entirely true to say that the format has no memory, or that things past are immediately forgotten. As Roger Nordin, the host of the morning show at Rix FM states, “the promotion and back-sell of the show and the events that we produce are... I wouldn't say 50%, but a very large part of the trick in succeeding”<sup>7</sup>. Through promos and cue-cards the events of the shows, for example the salute or the walk on the plank mentioned above, can be re-enacted over the course of a day or two. And according to Roger Nordin, the promos used in the broadcasts

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<sup>6</sup> Titti Schultz in interview to the author.

<sup>7</sup> Roger Nordin in interview to the author.



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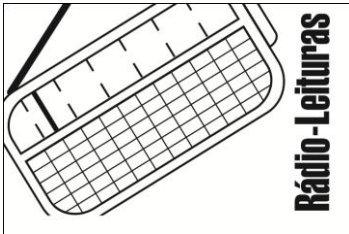
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“have to be promos that say something, that tell a story, they have to be something that creates context” (ibid.), and in such a way create experiences of their own, and not only function as a promotional message. Such ‘remembering’ is of course rather short-lived, even though ‘best-of-programs’ and seasonal reruns (in the summer, for Christmas etc) are frequent and give the radio broadcasts a longer memory (and previous ‘events’ within the ‘texts’ are also sometimes discussed among the hosts in programs on-air: ‘Do you remember when...’, ‘it was just like when’). In this respect the format Rix FM with its slogan, “we entertain Sweden”, and its hook-line, “pick you up and make you feel good”, creates a world or a universe of its own, with a distinct history (and future), as well a specific place (as depicted in Backstage, see above) and an attitude towards this world which it invites its listeners to share (ROTHENBUHLER, 2010b, p. 69).

Through extending the format to online digital media, however, these possibilities are heavily increased. The website of the station hosts a large archive of hundreds of soundbites and ‘best-of-bits’ from all of its shows (even if the morning show dominates). But this archive, which mainly consists of ‘micro-events’ like the ones commented upon in this article, not only allows for listeners to return to things they have heard before and listen again and/or re-experience the micro-events of the station. The interface also makes it possible to comment and maintain an ongoing discussion of the content of these soundbites, on the website as well as on Youtube where much of the material is uploaded. Furthermore this lets listeners share the content with friends through Facebook or to link them to web log-posts and in these ways perpetuate the buzz over time.

As we have seen in this section of the article, the commercial music station Rix FM uses cross-platform strategies to enhance the eventfulness of the communicative output and to increase the buzz around and listener-engagement with the ‘micro-events’ staged and performed within the ‘text’. What they seek to do with these technologies can hence be described as a ‘management of expectation’ played out through: (a) encouraging listeners to talk about the micro-events before they happen, building expectations; (b) gaining access to the place of production and highlighting the ‘staged-ness’ of the micro-event and dynamism of the backstage; and (c) sustaining access to such ‘micro-events’ and publicity stunts through the online archive of soundbites and edited ‘best-of’ parts. This gives audiences not only a chance to remember, but also affects expectations of things to come and generates online discussion as well as links (to the blogosphere or Facebook, for example).



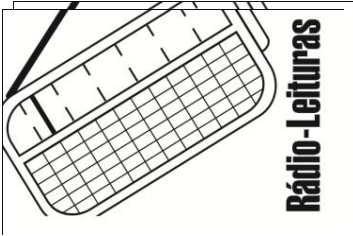


## Moderating the unfolding

So far we have seen some examples of how digital media are used within radio broadcasting in order to generate eventfulness. The enhancements of eventfulness have mainly taken place through the engagement of listeners in the ‘talk in advance’ and the exploitation of the “ontology of expectations”. In the following I will go on to discuss how digital media are managed in order to perform commentary on the events as they unfold.

Erving Goffman, in his famous essay “Radio Talk”, divides the forms of talk in radio broadcasting into three categories. (a) The ‘three-way’ announcing in which the host talks, for example, to guests and audience in the studio as well as to the distant audience of radio listeners and smoothly switches between these modes of address. (b) The ‘direct address’, which is, according to Goffman, the most common one, when the host turns directly to the absent audience. (c) The ‘action-override’, which Goffman relates to “social spectacles of various sorts” in which the “on-the-spot announcer is in a position to observe unfoldings that members of the radio audience can’t [...] and can undertake to give a running account of ‘what’ is happening immediately following its happening” (GOFFMAN, 1981, p. 232). This mode of address - in radio research commonly referred to as ‘commentary’ (BARNARD, 2000, p. 176) - is adapted to events and “public rituals” (ibid., p. 233) of various kinds (football games, royal weddings, Eurovision Song Contests) and aims at answering the question: ‘what is going on?’. The host or announcer, in the words of Goffman, is in “something like a ‘slave’ relation to the events he is reporting” (ibid.). The event, and not the talk per se, is then what is of prime interest for the listeners, and the talk surrounding it is only, writes Goffman, a means to an end; the important thing is the event that is made available through the commentator.

In a similar vein, however, this mode of address in a somewhat altered form is being increasingly introduced into contemporary radio broadcasting through the means of new, digital media. It is not as strictly tied to events, at least not in the sense described by Goffman, but could definitely be understood as part of the production or enhancement of eventfulness in relation to the communicative output of radio. The hosts of the programs on Rix FM increasingly use communicative means such as web logs or Twitter, linked to the main homepage of Rix FM, in order to comment on the speech acts and events of the radio show they are hosting, as they are unfolding. As in this example from the twitter-feed of one of the



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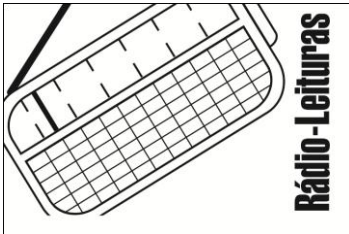
hosts of the drive-time (drive time? – I'm ignorant here, but could you possibly mean a show broadcast during commuting hours?) show of Rix FM.

1. Dogge [guest] on his way in to the studio.
2. Dogge has left. He is a monster on film.
3. Soon time for Måns [guest]. Roger [anchor] has just switched clothes. And I have put some concealer on a pimple. This is what Måns does to you...
4. Måns is wearing a white cardigan today. I can see him through the studio window.
5. Måns is going to West End. On Monday we will call him and get the scoop. And he might marry Marie this summer.
6. Gert [co-host] is about to do a dirty story
7. Hear from you on Monday again. Maybe before that here on Twitter. Now: two meetings, lunch, shopping for a birthday present, pick up the dog. That's the schedule for today.
8. I'm back again. There are those who say that they don't like my tweets. What have I done wrong? How do I fix it? Is it important?

This DJ uses the twitter-feed in order to create what could be labeled a 'commentary' or an action-override to the events that take place in the studio: guests coming and leaving, benchmarks (the 'dirty-story' is a recurring feature of the show) and actions of the hosts off-air (switching clothes). Other DJs at the station use Twitter, Facebook and web logs in similar fashions, in order to highlight ongoing studio discussions ('Do you have any plans for the summer vacation yet? Rix FM now!') or to publicize the beginning or ending of program segments and shows ('Rix FM Party! Party, dance, enjoy, play, sexualize, laugh and turn up the volume. Best music now, tonight as a party! ☺').

Contrary to the commentary or action-override discussed by Goffman, on these occasions the commentary might seem superfluous. There is no apparent need for it and the commentary is not the only way for the audience to experience the unfolding events of the radio broadcast. Even if the same could be said about many television commentators, the question still remains why there is, from the perspective of the radio hosts, a perceived need to place themselves between the audience and the unfolding events of the broadcast, or put more directly: what communicative function do these commentaries have?

The first obvious answer is that these statements in various digital media are a way to attract (potential) listeners' attention and to get them to turn on their radio. As such it is entirely different from the commentary of, for example, a football game that only has a



function in relation to the events on the field. Even though that explanation holds a lot of truth, it also seems that, for example in the Twitter-feed cited above, the intended audience for the tweets posted by the host is people already listening. Through the tweets, this audience receives additional inside information, extra value for their time spent, and the specific host's personal reflections and commentaries (those of which he/she can't share on-air) as well as the host's reflections on the show and its unfolding. Why would such a surplus of communication be necessary?

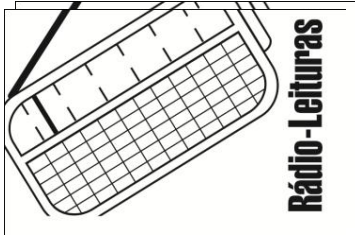
In order to answer this question we must first gain an understanding of what a format (in radio) is. It could be defined as programming style, a principal for selecting and assembling pieces of content (music, for instance) in a simple and standardized way, in order to deliver the right type of audience to advertisers and to do so with some kind of predictability. Yet that only explains the commercial logic behind the format and not its success among audiences or its communicative modus. It would perhaps be more sufficient to characterize the format as an identity, as shorthand to construct the "total station sound" (McCOURT & ROTHENBUHLER, 2004) as personality. And this is also how the producers themselves often talk about their work:

I like to think of the radio station and the format we are doing as *person*. If it would have been a human being, how would it have been? How would it have been perceived by its friends? How would this person have liked to be perceived?<sup>8</sup>

Much of what the radio producers do in their jobs could then be understood as a kind of "impression management" (Goffman, 1959/2009). Self-identity is not something entirely controlled or owned by people (or in this case, by the station) but something created in social interaction with others. Because of this constant insecurity there is thus a need to try to gain, through different 'cues' or planned communicative actions, control over these moments of interaction. This is then how the self-referential jingles and cue-lines of commercial music formats could be understood ('we play the best music', 'we pick you up and make you feel good', 'we entertain Sweden', to pick three of Rix FM's slogans). And this might be how we should understand the tendency towards 'action-override' when the format extends to digital platforms. What the DJs and hosts do in this mode of communication is to try to put

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<sup>8</sup> John Rammelt in interview to the author.



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themselves outside of the 'text' and comment upon it, in order to achieve impression management: to explain to listeners how they are supposed to experience the 'social identity' of the format, and the events and eventfulness produced by the station.

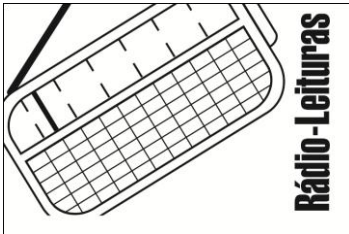
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### Conclusion

The purpose of this article has been to explore what kind of transmedia – and crossmedia –strategies that are used within commercial music radio and to answer the question of what happens when a format is extended to digital platforms and included within the cross-media-strategies of a large media company. I have attempted to show how 'announcing' (defined broadly) have been transformed towards to take on a more collaborative character, in which listeners are invited to develop talk and buzz around the 'micro-events' and publicity stunts staged and performed within the communicative output of commercial music radio. This has also affected the role of the DJ to increasingly take on the function of commentator or moderator. Furthermore I have shown how the new digital platforms are used in order to extend the format: to give audiences access to its place of production (backstage) and to extend the scope of the 'memory' and 'history' of the commercial music radio through open access to the station's archive for listening as well as commentating and linking.

The argument put forward in this article is that, taken together, all of these strategies serve the purpose of enhancing the *eventfulness* of radio as communication. These developments have accordingly increased the importance of the 'micro-event': actions and happenings intended to stand out from-and break off the ordinary flow of music, program segments, commercials, voices and jingles.

So where do these observations on the form of contemporary radio broadcasting leave us? I would like to end this article with a note on the theoretical side. The increased importance of eventfulness in the migration of the radio format to other platforms could be understood in two distinct ways. Firstly, it is obviously a commercial strategy. To orchestrate a number of platforms in order to increase the amount of buzz and talk about the content produced might increase listening and listener loyalty towards the format and the brand, and, as Roger Nordin explains, put Rix FM 'top of mind' among listeners, so that they will state that



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they listened to the station when – and if – they are asked by ratings companies (Roger Nordin, 2010-04-26).

Secondly, it also answers to a more profound communicative need. If a radio format first and foremost is a question of producing a more or less coherent *identity* and to – in various ways – work with ‘impression management’ in order to get listeners to acknowledge the identity the producers wishes to express (see above), then the production of eventfulness creates new opportunities for self-referential stories. Announcing, in the broad definition I use here, then becomes a form of self-reflection, or a self-referential practice, and the contributions from the audience a way to calibrate and negotiate this performance of station identity through the ‘rituals’ (GOFFMAN) that events first and foremost is examples of.

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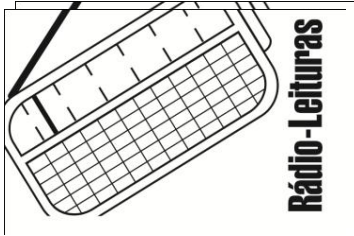
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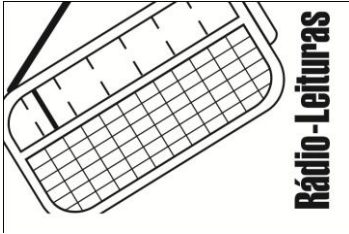
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