

Tetsuo Kogawa, performance-artist and teacher of communication studies at Tokyo Keizai University and lives in Tokyo. In the end of seventies after studying philosophy at Sophia and Waseda universities Tetsuo Kogawa moved to New York City. Coming back to Japan in the early eighties he was one of the initiator of the Micro-Radio-movement in Japan.
Questions asked by Jan Brueggemeier.

Jan Brueggemeier: How and when did you get involved in radio?

Tetsuo Kogawa: Basically I was interested in philosophy, especially the language-theory of Heidegger and than Merleau-Ponty. I think that phenomenology emphasizes communication and expression. I don't know why, but I got interested in media. From the late seventies till the eighties I lived in New York City. At that time New York City had a big transition of mass-medium. There were also a lot of media-experiments. During my stay I naturally have been influenced by such trends. When I was in New York a friend of mine let me know about the new happenings in Italy. That has been free radio.

JB: What projects have been influencing for you like, for example, paper tiger television?

TK: I met Deedee Halleck, who is one of the founder of paper tiger tv in New York, in 1979. At that time I already started experiments and my research on free radio. Deedee Halleck was a very good supporter and suggestor of free radio, because she was very much connected to alternative media experiments including alternative radio and TV. When I was in NYC few people were interested in micro-radio and also micro-sized medium. She was one of the persons who quickly understand the micro-radio and my idea of it.

JB: What is your idea of micro?

TK: This idea is closely related to the idiosyncratic situation of Japanese media policy at that time. When I came back to Japan, I was very much interested in opening an alternative radio-station in Japan. I found that this was totally difficult to do, because of very strict regulation and the surveillance-system was very sophisticated. If you opened up illegal radio-station, in maybe thirty minutes, you might be arrested. You know, it is difficult for ordinary people. At that time we - a friend of mine and I - were interested in alternative but regular type of radio-station to circulate alternative information to the public. We needed some range of service-area at least ten or five kilometers radius. In order to do so we needed at least five or two watt-transmitter, which is totally illegal. During my research I found the special item in law-book of airwave-regulation. It is about very weak airwaves. According to the law-book you can use very low-power transmission without license. I thought that this is it. Within this regulation there were mentioned quite a lot of tiny transmitter, which are available at toy-stores and electronic-shops. There are kind of toy for hobby to relay audio-signal in the room or limited space, but when we had tested these

machines connecting proper antennas to it. We supplied that it covers 200 up to 500 meters radius even if the output power of such devices is below 50 milliwatt. We were convinced we could use that for small radio-stations. We started to use this as a device of broadcast, but it is not broadcasting it is narrowcasting.

JB: What is your concept of public especially in the context of micro-radio?

TK: In my idea public is not one. I think public is very diverse. Instead of that does the Japanese mass-media always try to combine and integrate public into one public. We had a long history of this integrating policy. I think usually Japanese people have been considered as homogeneous and one-dimensional. In my experience and also in our everyday communication we are very familiar with more diverse aspects of communications. We wanted to respond to these aspects. There were strong needs to cover these diverse desires and needs.

JB: What kind of social movements have been taking place at that time. Have there been links to for example the anti-nuclear war movement of that time and the desire to express?

TK: When we started the radio-movement in the end of seventies and early eighties I think the obvious political movements were almost over. The high tide of the student-movement was in the late sixties and of the anti-nuclear war was in the early eighties. So in the late seventies people got more interested in economics. Especially young students felt some isolation. I myself had to think about another type of politics and political situations: that is micro-politics.

JB: Looking back to the late seventies/early eighties when there was a real boom of micro-radio-stations in Japan, how does the situation nowadays look like?

TK: Nowadays mini-fm is over because the social and cultural situation is over now. In the eighties people especially young people felt isolation but there is no medium to connect them with each other. Now there are various kind of new-media such as internet mostly email and mobiles. The needs at that time, I mean mini-FM, have been substituted by such new devices, but the function is different.

JB: But the anonymity of the city didn't change?

TK: The physical situation of a city like Tokyo is not so different from the eighties. For people the physical condition of the city is more isolated and intensified themselves their isolation function.

JB: In your opinion people are isolated although we live in a time of more and more communication means. What does this mean for you for the public sphere if more and more private customs are entering public sphere?

TK: I am always optimistic to the future. The point is a new medium to combine and to relate to such new happenings and trends. It is a new type of expression for example. That especially young people put on their make-up in the car or people use their mobile phones for their public conversation. To me such phenomena implicit possibilities and potentials of new expression. Look at the bikini-style. That kind of things used to be very private underwear. Nowadays it is a fashion. I think commercial designers are

now more interested in so called private phenomenon in public space. Usually progressive people are against the commercial trends of commercial world, but I think even progressive people and radical and left-wing people could find new ideas in these areas.

JB: You mean to use the means for a different goal, but therefore one still need the imagination of a different goal. What are conditions to shape possible imaginations?

TK: I think you have a lot of interesting philosophers. They can provide the idea.