

FIAT IFTA #ArchivalReads



The 'Value Use and Copyright Commission' (VUC) of FIAT/IFTA recently decided to publish a series of interviews and articles about the use of audiovisual archive materials. In this interview Louise Broch of DR and Michael Liensberger of ORF explain how their role evolved from radio archivists to in-house historians contributing to cross media formats with a focus on the history of a broadcaster and a country.

By Brecht Declercq, Digitisation and Acquisition Manager at meemoo - published on 10 July 2020.



*Both started their careers in a sound archive. Both explored the limits of what a traditional media archivist does. Both now work across the boundaries of traditional media and proudly show their work online. Both also contribute to the historiography of their broadcaster and thus also to that of the country where they work. Not exactly a classic story, but that is not in their nature. **Michael Liensberger** (Brixen / Bressanone, 1984) and **Louise Broch** (Esbjerg, 1973) chose a path less traveled.*

We speak with Louise and Michael while the covid19 lockdown in western Europe is slowly getting lifted, via a video call connecting Antwerp, Copenhagen and Vienna. Of course they know each other. They heard about each other's work at the FIAT/IFTA World Conference in Mexico City in 2017. But how did they actually end up in a broadcasting archive?

“I did my master thesis research on the influence of DR on Danish music life and shortly afterwards I was asked to collaborate on a book about avant-garde music in the 1960s. That is how I originally ended up as a cataloger in the music archive of DR,” says Louise. “And I could do research for journalists. That's when I became really excited about working in a media archive.”

“We hold this hidden history which is important for society. I just thought it was important enough to bring it out to the public.”

Louise Broch, DR

Also Michael went straight from the university into public broadcasting: “I attended courses by Peter Dusek and Herbert Hayduck (the previous and current head of the ORF archives and both former FIAT/IFTA Presidents). They've both been lecturers at Vienna University, so I certainly had heard about the ORF archive. Later on I entered the archive as an intern, cataloging and digitizing tapes and choosing music for TV programs. I felt like working in a gold mine and I was very proud when in the evening I heard the music on TV that I had handpicked during the day.”

All in all, their careers had a fairly classic beginning. But when did things start to change? “It happened only when we moved to the new DR building in 2008, and the radio and television archives merged,” says Louise. “I became more and more interested in the television world. My then chief Tina Pipa thought that while the archive was being digitized, we should also make its value clear by communicating about it. So I signed up to participate in a project where we presented DR archive fragments at culture festivals across Denmark. However, at some point one reaction was: ‘why should archivists communicate when we have the journalists who do that job already?’

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Still, also when heavy budget cuts struck in 2018, we felt we had to continue this communication effort, even if we couldn't do it anymore by bringing people physically in touch with it. It was Mette Buchman who suggested doing something with the history of DR itself and I suggested that we asked the editor of the DR press editorial, if he wanted to collaborate with us. He liked the idea, and Jan Dohrmann and I created a new website concentrating on the history of DR. So I started writing a piece about bird's songs on the radio in the thirties. I offered it to Jan - just for his inspiration - and I told him he could do with it whatever he wanted, because I am the researcher and he is the journalist. To my delight he said: ‘you've written an article, it's full, it's finished, it's your work so why not publish it directly?’”

“It just happened because I did it, without really asking for permission.”

Michael Liensberger, ORF

In Michael's case, too, voluntarism played a role in crossing the line between archival work and journalism: “it just happened because I did it, without really asking for permission. In 2018 we commemorated the Anschluss of Austria with Nazi Germany. During the preparation I found a lot of new material, I listed it and I realized that on the program they normally don't use that much original content, while we do have it in the archive and it makes things so much more authentic. So I convinced the producer to feature longer excerpts instead of quick soundbites. That was the first

time I had made such a big contribution to a program. In the following projects it became increasingly clear that the journalists had underestimated the contents of the archive, and that it was a clear added value if someone from the archive really entered the production team. That had already happened in the TV archive, but it was the first time for the radio.”

“It’s a matter of proactivity to tell the journalists what they don’t know yet. They don’t know the archives, but we do.”

Michael Liensberger, ORF

Louise recognises the story: “I really had this idea of making the history of the public service broadcaster available to everybody. What cannot be found on the internet does not exist today... but we had this hidden history which is important for our society. I thought it was important to bring it out to the public. Journalist’s reasoning is often the other way round. They start from the story they want to tell and then see if there is archival material to connect with it. We start from the great archive material and look for how we can tell a story with it.”

Job title

“My job title didn’t change when I started focusing on the articles about DR history,” says Louise. “So somewhat paradoxically, I am still an ‘Archivist’ and even the last person at DR that wears this title, which earlier was given to people in the archive who did not have the authorized background as a librarian. But today I’m actually quite proud of it.”

DR'S HISTORIE

			
1925-1950: Statsradiofoniens spæde start, tysk censur og våben i Radionhuset	1951-1962: Premiere på første tv-program, på Melodi Grand Prix og børneprogrammer	1963 – 1988: Ny radiokanal til unge, kultserien Matador og monopolbrud	1989-2018: DR går på nettet, åbner nye kanaler og flytter til DR Byen

The ‘Alle Tiders DR’ website, co-curated by Louise Broch, provides insight in interesting episodes of DR’s own history.

Michael's title did change: "since 1 January 2020 I became an 'editorial journalist.' I still do a lot of more regular archiving work, but the good thing about it is that now that I'm working for productions, the archive is also compensated for the work that I do for the production department. I think it is important that the connection with the archival collections is maintained. My job title changed, my perspective changed, but still I also do more regular archive work such as digitising tapes or cataloging special sound materials. I'm also involved in the development of our archive system and so on. Also in that regard it's good that I can bring the end user's perspective in. I know how archival materials are used, how journalists are researching and what their focus is.

Louise agrees: "I see the same effect. I still do a lot of research for journalists but because I began to write these historical articles I know a lot about the history of DR. Often I can tell them that I researched the subject that they are exploring and that I can help them if they want. For example I wrote an article about a magazine called 'Horizon', with foreign news, which celebrated its 60th birthday this year. Through my research I got to know well about how it evolved, what the subjects were ... Now this article induced an anniversary programme in May and the producers returned the question to the archive: 'could you find all the great stuff from our magazine from the last 60 years?'"

"It's important to be in the archive, because it is the only way how we can keep our knowledge about the collections alive."

Louise Broch, DR

Selecting archival stories

But how to decide which stories are worth to be told? Louise: "I have a meeting with my editor twice a year or so, and we speak about what is happening in Denmark, which commemorations and anniversaries are on the calendar and we discuss what could be interesting. For example I made an article about women producing radio in the last 50 years because of International Women's Day on the 8th of March."

Also Michael focused on the history of the public broadcaster itself: "the programme that I made about the immediate post-war history in Austria contains a great deal of ORF history, and I did a broadcast about the first public radio broadcaster in Austria,

RAVAG, founded in 1924. But usually I get involved when programmes establish their focus. For example last year there were stories to be told about 1939 and 1969. This year we focus on the events of 1945 and 1955, which brought some fascinating stories to the archive. For example this summer I'll be making a programme about the European Forum in Alpbach, an interdisciplinary platform for science, politics, business and culture, founded in 1945. But basically, it's anything that comes around the corner."

Louise adds: "It is important to become aware of what people are interested in. For example I've seen that the early years of DR raise a lot of interest. So when I write about a radio soap opera of the thirties I know that it will get a lot of readers. The same effect was there when I interviewed some of DR's former correspondents. People are interested in people that they know."

"You have to entertain people, but there's also an educational aspect. There has to be a message."

Michael Liensberger, ORF

But how to ensure that your story becomes really attractive? Michael shares a few of his tricks: "You have to entertain people, but there is also an educational aspect. There has to be a message. So it's important for radio broadcasts that you present both: catchy things and things that trigger people's thoughts. I learned a lot from journalists with whom I was researching, how they created the stories. For example which language to use in a radio broadcast. I'm used to academic language, but you should never use that on the radio. It would be far too complex."

The all digital era

"Of course this all would not have been possible in the pre-digital era," says Louise. "When we only had the tapes we couldn't present anything from the archives. We could listen to the audio, watch the video and film material, but the digitisation changed so much in the way we access the archives. The digitised clips in the articles have brought life to the stories I've told and that's just one thing we couldn't have done before."

"But of course digitisation didn't solve everything," Michael adds. "I would be really, really happy if I would have a transcript of all the tapes in the archive. We know the

struggle with metadata. If there could be some enrichment, via automatisisation, AI and so on, even if it would be just 80% correct ... We have a lot of material for which the metadata is still limited. There's still a way to go but - as Louise said - especially right now during the corona crisis: I'm sitting at home and I can still work as if I were at the office. I cannot digitise tapes obviously, but I can do research, send files to the production tools, ... if this would have happened 20 years ago we had to go and live in the office!"

Feedback and reactions

Does their work feed back into the archive? Are existing descriptions getting enriched? In Louise's case it does: "it happens as we speak! I wrote about a radio series called 'The Radio Twins' of 1951: a housewife who told about her life as a mother of twins in the fifties. One of the daughters just wrote to me. Her mother had told her about that radio show long ago, so she had searched on the internet and that's how she found my article - she thought the show had been lost! She told me a lot about the family and I could expand the existing metadata largely. Wouldn't it be great if someone could make a new programme out of it?"

The success of her historical articles even brought Louise some fans: "there's this retired colleague of the radio archive ... he just wrote to me that I had made his day again! I can also see that the journalists like the articles. They verify the content with me and my research adds credibility."

Also Michael gets reactions from his audience: "especially when they can correct you (laughs). I remember I had made a mistake in my radio series about post-war Austria and someone wrote to me that the speaker was not the famous ORF journalist Axel Corti but someone else. I checked it and the mistake came from the archival catalogue. So I thanked my listener via email and corrected the error. The radio station Ö1 on which my programmes are broadcasted collects all the messages they get via email, social media etc. and they send it to the producers on a daily basis ... It's an excellent way to learn and improve your skills."

"My colleagues are positive about my articles and they sometimes help me with the research", says Louise. "Actually I like to have direct feedback from my colleagues. Unfortunately corona now prevents me and that makes me feel a bit lonely in this regard. Every time I find something I enthusiastically tell that I will be writing about it

Actually I'd love that more of my colleagues wrote articles, but if it will be possible, I don't know."

Der Volksempfänger - Teil 2

Mit Wunschkonzert und Propaganda in den Zweiten Weltkrieg (2).



Radiokolleg



Die Propaganda ist in antirepublikanischen Zeiten von immenser Bedeutung, im Dritten Reich war sie der zentrale Faktor des Machtausbaus und der Machterhaltung. Dabei setzten die Nationalsozialisten die ganze Palette der damals zur Verfügung stehenden medialen Mittel ein: Presse, Plakate, Ausstellungen, Filme und das damals im Rang eines Massenmediums stehende Radio.

Michael Liensberger, [Robert Weichinger](#)

One of the “radio college” episodes co-produced by Michael Liensberger was about the Volksempfänger, a popular radio receiver developed by the nazi’s in Germany.

Looking for partners

Michael also sees opportunities for collaboration outside of the broadcaster: “I constantly use other archives too, because I know that we don't have everything. I mean... how could we? There are a lot of sources one could use, also to enrich your own archive. For my most recent episode I was looking for some programmes called “Russische Stunde”, “the Hour of the Russians”. In the ORF radio archives we only have a few snippets. So I got in touch with a professor of the Austrian Academy of Sciences. She pointed me to the archives of the former communist party in Austria. They had more than 1100 tapes with this content! I contacted their archivist and he was so kind to send me eight files... absolutely incredible material. It was a great collaboration and I wanted to interview him because next to the history itself I am also interested in the cataloguers because they know the collections best. Unfortunately due to corona we couldn't do that, but I could use three snippets of 20

seconds each and the rest was archived in our collection. It's not ORF material, we can't use it as we like, but I added that as a note and I'm glad that at least we have it.

Ever the radio archivist

With such a strong background in the radio archives, but also a perspective from beyond, can Louise and Michael tell what makes a radio archivist someone different? Louise has a clear opinion: "I still feel that my background is radio. We are working cross media all the time, but I still feel this special connection with the radio materials. I see the difference in the way of registering things and finding your way quickly. You have the ability to listen just to the beginning, browse through the programme and find the important things fast. Television archivists are more focused on what they see, while there can be very important sound in television programmes as well. The ability to listen is still a good background skill to have."

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Michael agrees. But unlike Louise, he started to work with television materials just recently: "I'm the first in the ORF archive who really works across the borders of the media, so it's a work in progress. But Louise pointed it out very well: in TV the visual element is the most important, in radio it's all about what you hear. Radio triggers your fantasy, it provides inspiration. It's about what happens in your head. And it definitely is another kind of media, following its own rules."

What the future brings

Both Louise and Michael clearly enjoy their work very much. But what will the future bring? Do they still have great plans they'd like to accomplish?

Louise is very occupied with the work she's doing currently on the history of nature documentaries made by DR, on which she'll publish an article over the summer. Michael has a dream project he'd still like to do: "I don't know if and when I'll ever be able to work on it, but I was born in South Tyrol in Italy and I've seen that there has never been a long documentary about it. So that could be a really interesting project, a documentary of four or five hours, who knows. One hundred years ago South Tyrol became Italian. The hatred of the early years has made place for mutual interest and influence. From the viewpoint of a radio producer it could be something really special, but it's a young idea, let's see what happens.

Would you like to know more?

Alle Tidere DR, 'Always DR', co-curated by Louise Broch can be [found here](#).

And 'Betrifft: Oesterreich', 'Re: Austria', a radio programme with many contributions by Michael Liensberger can be [found here](#).

Louise Broch's [presentation](#) on 'Alle Tidere DR' at the 2019 FIAT/IFTA World Conference in Dubrovnik and Michael Liensberger's [presentation](#) on the commemoration of the 1938 events in Austria at the 2018 FIAT/IFTA World Conference in Venice, both on FIAT/IFTA's Slideshare.