

AM Mogul in the PM on FM

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Listening, more than thirty years later, to a recently resurfaced copy of Susan Mogul's first and only experiment in live radio art, one has the impression of a woman who has been seized by a manic and desperate sense of urgency. During the twenty minutes allotted for the performance, Mogul manages to run through another radio station's Top Ten list from two weeks ago, take nine phone calls from listeners and friends, and to keep running updates on the time—at 10:00, 10:01, 10:02, 10:07, 10:08, 10:10, 10:16, and 10:17—all while telling three or more simultaneous narratives about a sometimes fictional version of herself. The result, while perhaps not Mogul's masterpiece, provides tremendous insight into her process.

Mogul's performance was presented as part of KPFK's *Close Radio*, a weekly program of artists' radio projects that was primarily organized by artists Paul McCarthy and Nancy Buchanan between November 15, 1976 and March 21, 1979. Collectively, *Close Radio* presents a remarkable, and remarkably diverse, array of approaches to the use of sound and live radio broadcast as an artistic medium, with projects spanning the entire range of conceptual and performance art and experimental and underground music practices typical of the late 1970s. Surprisingly, Mogul's project is one of only a handful that play with the familiar tropes of commercial radio programming, and it is certainly the only project in the series that attempted to play with all of those tropes at once.

What seems to have most captured Mogul's attention with radio is its ability to act as a barometer of the present, with "Top Ten" lists presenting a supposed snapshot of our collective musical tastes, call-ins providing core samples of public opinion, and traffic and weather reports presenting empirical evidence about the changing conditions in our cities. But can these forms be turned to more subjective ends? A typical radio broadcast might aim to simulate casting a net to catch fragments from the world at large, but Mogul would wish to cast herself out with that net, infecting the world at large with fragments of her self. Thus, Mogul is not interested in the weather for Los Angeles, but in the weather for Wendy Birnbaum on Prospect and Vermont (and "while we're waiting for the weather, let's go back to my childhood. AM Mogul in the PM on FM, I have to confess, was a lonely, shy kid.") Finding out that the weather on Prospect is "better than it was," Mogul presses on:

Mogul: And emotionally, what is the weather over there?

Birnbaum: Well it's muggy.

Mogul: Emotionally muggy.

Birnbaum: Very muggy

Mogul: Wendy, I'll be checking in later with you in your helicopter. So just don't go away. I'm going to have to get back to my childhood now—okay?

This is a search for emotional microclimates, and it could be viewed as a descriptive model for every work Mogul has ever made. Picking up a video camera in 1973, Mogul began a series of works that twisted the conceptual forms of performance and video art into blunt, personal, and always hilarious narratives about her life. This focus has remained constant throughout her career, as the works have steadily gained in complexity. Mogul's narratives succeed precisely through the tension produced when "high art" and popular genres are forced to coexist within the same work, and as they are then equally brought to their knees, having failed on their own to measure up to the emotional complexities of a single life. But perhaps, Mogul seems to postulate, if you just try everything, and then keep trying...

Mogul the fictional DJ continues on with byzantine stories about installing ten phone lines in her home, about posing as a survey operator, about her fear of fame, about her real fake age (65, even though she looks 15). Prearranged calls are interrupted by surprise calls and hecklers. Panic when a real meteorologist calls in. Traffic in Laurel Canyon was pretty good two hours ago. It's foggy in San Pedro, shaky in Granada Hills. And how's the weather down at the station? "It's great. There's a cute guy outside the window. There's *two* cute guys outside the window." And the Top Ten countdown continues. In the midst of this barely controlled chaos, Mogul the artist emerges to speak:

My job is my mouth. And I have been very concerned about what I would do if I should lose my mouth. Recently I took up visual art as a form of security. Some people believe in division of labor. I believe in the division of the senses. If I should lose my mouth, I still could make art. You don't need a mouth to make art. Just eyes. And besides, most artists say they can't verbalize anyway. They just can't talk about their art or their work, or their pieces—whatever they want to refer to them as. But even if I should lose both my mouth and my eyes, I still feel fairly secure. Because I will still have my ears. And the field of listening is an untapped area. Very undeveloped. As I see it, there is a glut on the market of orators. Every day there is a new orator on another soapbox seeking an audience, trying for at least one listener. And I predict that in the near future, that instead of the lecture circuit, colleges will be hiring professional listeners on the hearing circuit. That's right- a hearing circuit. I think all of you closet listeners should come out. It's about time you got paid for all that hard work you do every day.

We imagine Mogul gradually stripped of her senses, with each removal testing her abilities to define herself as an artist, and she poses a surprise conclusion: listening would be enough. The artist whose every move has involved twisting conventions in the service of her own voice would be content to, like the video camera she uses, simply receive. To be the net that is cast out. To be the microphone (unamplified). To become the medium, even if there is no message. It can hardly be a surprise then to learn that the number one song—formerly number 72—is "I Just Want to Be Your Everything." And so she does.