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ByDarius James

This summer, the Bootlab collective hijacked the net's new networking protocol for their Juni Radio experiment. The hope is to turn what looks like becoming a corporate hustle into a community radio tool. Darius James joined the merry pranksters

[IMAGE]

June, 2003, Berlin. When I walked into a makeshift radio studio in a room off an equally makeshift bar with Mario Mentrup, the Bootlab collective was already in the third week of its month-long Juni Radio experiment utilising the new IPv6 intelligent networking system. IPv6 is an upgrade of the nearly 20 year old Internet Protocol version 4 (IPv4), which is beginning to creak under the strain of the net's popularity. It's a protocol upgrade which uses 16 byte addresses (not the current 4 bytes) and will help to avert the address shortage currently looming. On the downside, it allows more control over routing which could lead to the prioritisation of some (i.e. high paying, corporate) traffic. At the time, I knew nothing of Bootlab, the IPv6 networking system or Juni Radio. Mario had only said, 'I'm going to spin records and ask you some questions.' That was the extent of his concept. Mario has a prankster's imagination. It could have meant anything.

I was outfitted with a powerbook and a clip-on microphone. Mario spun (or, more accurately, chewed) some German bubble-gum. The song had one recurring lyric in English: 'O, Mammy!'. Mario was clearly trying to get on my nerves so I responded with an mp3 of a Malcolm X speech. How, I thought, I could take him seriously I have no idea. The show was like my experience of improvising plays on FM radio in the late '70s – except, in this case, there was no post-production before airing. It was warts and all.

I still had no clue what was going on. Was Bootlab a pirate radio station? Another clandestine Berlin club? What?

This would change the following night. Stranded in the Mitte section of Berlin, I found myself back at Bootlab. Inside, however, there was no on-going party like the night before. Instead, I saw hundreds of programmers pecking away at laptops. The scene was spookier than the techie halls at a Chaos Computer Club convention. That's when I bumped into Diana McCarty, one of the project's driving forces. She's also a homegirl from New Mexico.

'What the fuck is going on?' I asked. 'This looks like some Blade Runner/Snow Crash type shit.' It had a real outlaw atmosphere.

Diana grinned. She sat me on a sofa and handed me a beer.

Bootlab, she explained, was an organisation of hacker-activists and culture jammers. Rather than hype the IPv6 networking system as the next new thing for the internet, and cater to the greed and delusions of corporate hustlers, the point of Juni Radio was to use the technology to reroute the internet and go directly to the planet's most accessible means of broadcast communication – radio. It was unlikely a village in the wilds of Africa would have high-speed broadband connections, she said, but they would have radio. So Bootlab is creating an open source and downloadable digital radio-tool kit (available for educational and noncommercial use on their website); and tested it in conjunction with the new IPv6 intelligent networking system. 'It's like peer-to-peer filesharing,' she said, 'except, instead of swapping mp3s, one can swap whole communities of people.'

'Our plan is to radically alter the acoustic landscape by utilising this technology through radio broadcasting; and strengthen networks of social, political and cultural activists globally' she said. Sounded good to me. I asked for another beer.

Juni Radio [<http://www.juniradio.net>]

Reboot [<http://www.reboot.fm>]

Bootlab [<http://www.bootlab.org>]

Darius James <[Darius_james2002 AT yahoo.com](mailto:Darius_james2002@yahoo.com) > is the author of *Negrophobia; That's Blaxploitation!!!* ; *Voodoo Stew* and *Froggie Chocolate's Christmas Eve*