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Airwave Literacy

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“Truth.....speaks.....out! Truth...speaks....out! Truth...” The chant of Prophetess Vera D. Nathaniel accompanied us as we walked out of the [Riverwest Radio Station](#)— an old alternative video store reconverted, as their mission explains, in “a community platform for education, advocacy and creativity, as well as an outlet for marginalized and alternative voices”. Riverwest Radio started to emit in March 2014 after President Barack Obama signed the Local Community Radio Act in 2011. This act was the result of a long battle led by several organizations, among them [Free Press](#) and [The Prometheus Radio Project](#) against communication corporate control and inequality in media access. Local eclectic voices follow one another from one display store window to the other, where the recording tables are tightly nestled. Anybody local (from the Riverwest neighborhood or its surroundings) can make a show proposal and [become a producer](#). They can also suggest a story and the radio will try to match them with a producer or include the story in a special event programming.

Riverwest Radio is a promising project against dominant narratives, as a peek at its show title listing suggests: *The Anti* (anarchist show), *AbilityMKE Now!* (bring abled disabled together), *Ayo Sis* (drag queen show), *Disability Rights*, *Bing Bong Crunch* (collective search histories), *EXPO: Ex-Prisoners Organizing*, *Young Black & Opinionated*, etc. Whether the shows have a focused or more global interest, whether they have an informative or entertaining aim, they are overall presented by a great diversity of people, which reflects the neighborhood— one of the most diverse in Milwaukee, but where gentrification happens quickly. In this context, Riverwest Radio can help render visible “the influence of cultural structures (such as race, gender, class, etc.) on everyone’s life,” structures that “whiteness in the US (in its desire for stasis) occludes” (Ratcliffe 129). It can offer a space where rhetorical listening can happen, where listeners can understand —or rather as Krista Ratcliffe defines it in *Rhetorical Listening*, where they can stand under discourses, “letting discourses wash over, through, and around us and then letting them lie there to inform our politics and ethics” (Ratcliffe 28). Riverwest Radio offers a platform where diverse community stories and voices can be heard and where their listening “*with intent*” can thus broaden our cultural literacy (Ratcliffe 28).

Eric Darnell Pritchard in *Fashioning Lives: Black Queers and the Politics of Literacy* underlines the importance of literacy in creating meaning in socio-cultural contexts, in building identity and in creating community. He advocates for “restorative literacies” against normative literacies that create discourses “marginaliz[ing], ostraciz[ing], and condemn[ing] people for their identities and other ways of being” (Pritchard 28). Considering the tension resulting from the stark segregation in Milwaukee and the gentrification of the Riverwest neighborhood, I was surprised not to find shows at Riverwest Radio that offer “solely resistance to or defiance of oppression and marginality”—which would contribute to “reductive narratives”(Pritchard 35). Instead, I find shows that are just addressing everyday life, politics, sports, music, literature, art, video games, drag shows, etc. By offering a safe place for diverse voices, including queer blacks, to engage literacy on their own terms, “for one’s own desires, pleasures, fantasies, hopes, and needs,” Riverwest Radio can support “restorative literacies.”

As Prophetess Vera D. Nathaniel started her show by her usual chant, I left Riverwest Radio where I was interviewed for [Rive Gauche](#) (Interview #111), a show interested in French people and culture in relationship with Riverwest and Milwaukee. I felt welcomed by a community in a

neighborhood I had moved in only two months earlier. At the radio, I was welcomed for who I was: a gay woman, a poet, an immigrant, without a raised eyebrow or that slight hint of discomfort when I mention my wife. I talked about my life and my poetry, with just the stumbling of words and thoughts due to the daunting microphone. It felt good.

B.

Riverwest Radio

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LISTEN LIVE



Now Airing: EXPO: EX-Prisoners Organizing



riverwestradio.com

Upcoming Shows

- 3:00 pm [Cernuocopia](#)
- 3:30 pm [There Goes the Neighborhood](#)
- 5:00 pm [Fearless Reader Radio](#)
- 6:00 pm [Life: Welcome to Reality](#)
- 7:00 pm [Bing Bong Crunch](#)
- 8:00 pm [Active Culture](#)
- 8:30 pm [EXPO: EX-Prisoners Organizing](#)
- 9:00 pm [We Heard We're Funny](#)
- 10:00 pm [AM/FM Slaveyard](#)
- 11:00 pm You are **Online**

Picture from Riverwestradio.com