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Radio Narrative: Considerations on Form and Aesthetic

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+ Radio Narrative – Considerations on Form and Aesthetic



Dr Siobhan McHugh, University of Wollongong

+ The Radio Feature: 'Acoustic Film'



Secret life of Australian Mother

- The feature maker is a lonely animal not really fitting into the drawers of established radio. Take him or her as a cocktail of contradictory ingredients, a bit current affairs, a bit documentarian, some radio drama, a musician and sculptor, a technician, a detective, a poet, a journalist of course and the conductor of an orchestra of facts. The zebra among the programme-herds of radio.

- Peter Leonhard Braun 2007

- Sound 'offers a portal through which a deeper, often inarticulate, consciousness can be glimpsed... the intention is to find deeper and wider resonances within – and without - the listener.'

- Hall in Biewen 2010 p99, p104



Documentary: a reprise

- Kinship to Nichols's 'discourses of sobriety' (1991, p3):
- 'Science, economics, politics, foreign policy, education, religion, welfare – these systems assume they have instrumental power; they can and should alter the world itself, they can effect action and entail consequences. Their discourse has an air of sobriety since it is seldom receptive to "make-believe" characters, events or entire worlds...
- Documentary is authorial in that it is about creativity and transformation based on vision - *Corner 1996 p14*
- Documentary is 'the creative treatment of actuality' – *Grierson, 1932*
- '*Ghastly impermanence*' (*Sieveking 1934*) of radio broadcasts undermined their consideration as research texts – but podcasts have changed that.



Long-form vs 3-min digital story

- Time... allows character, and mood and themes to emerge 'by stealth'. With time on our sides, the journey we travel is as much emotional as informational... we, as listeners, have the space to find empathy with the subjects: we become involved because we feel that we get to know them. - *Hendy 2009 p236*
- I like a radio programme to have a rhythm like a piece of music, like a symphony, so it goes through various different movements and lots of different rhythms, paces. *Barrell in Aroney 2005, p399*



Liz - race

+ Against the Three-Minute Zeitgeist

- Sober, expensive to make, and with what all too easily appears to be a hopelessly idealistic claim to be part of a progressive social project, it exists, against the odds, in a media ecology characterised by intense competition for audiences and resources, by an apparent popular taste for exhibitionism and thrills, and by widespread public scepticism over journalistic ethics and the 'hidden agenda' of the media... it demands attentive listening at a point in history when radio is heard distractedly. The documentary is the 'built' programme par excellence...

-Hendy in Crisell 2009, pp220-1

+ BUT speech can be dreary

- Oral history interviews lengthy and painstaking: tedious dead-ends as well as precious metal
- Journalistic interviews can be shallow, pressured, miss complexity
- Same voice can pall
- Solution: apply radio editing and production elements to raw speech, blending journalism, oral history and art to create hybrid genre: entertaining/compelling/affecting radio anchored in well researched oral history



Helen: flouted/smorgasbord

+ Opening Montage components

Catholic hymn of era - diegetic, mood, era

Gay Wilson: perception of Catholics

'James': 'Catholics need not apply'

Dramatised sectarian taunts

Debbie: 1966 spat on, 'Catholic dog'

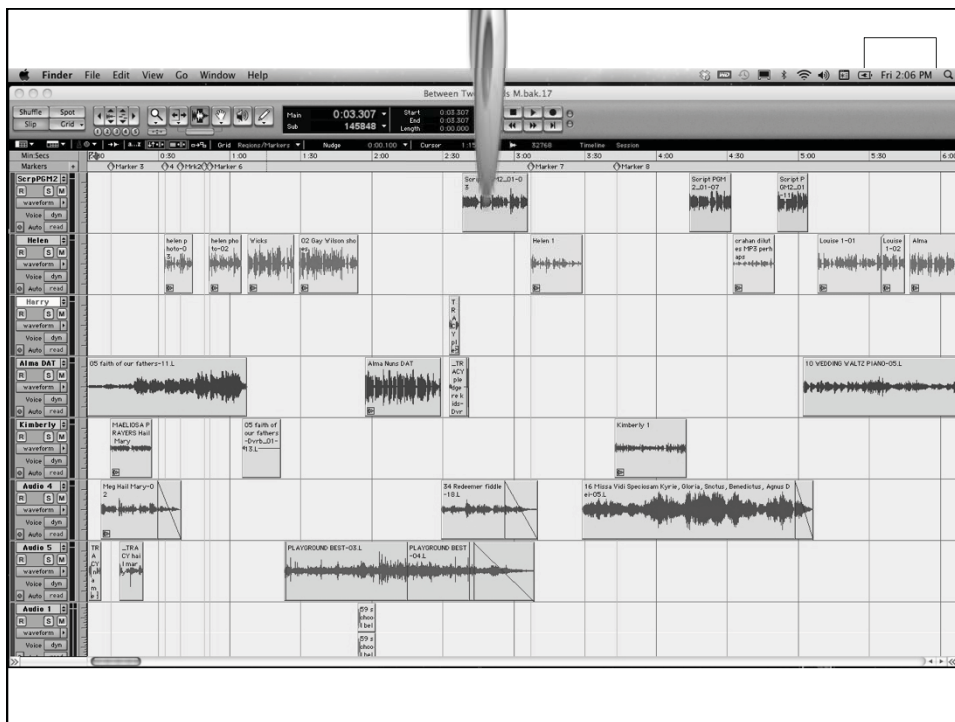
Gay pt 2: sympathy card jibe

Kaye A: Methodist wedding service, husband a Catholic, converted

Judy - Catholics 'other' in every way

Music: Faith of our Fathers (inst) evokes era; inst allows v/o.

NARRATOR: 'I came to Australia as a refugee from the Catholic Church in Ireland'



+ Creative Combustion



Rowan job ads/busk

- 'Sound - pure sound - is as potent a substance as any carefully weighed word or well chosen musical figuration. Possibly even more potent. It should be used with care: *no sound is innocent.*' - *Alan Hall in Biewen 2010 p97*
- **METHODOLOGY:**
- 1. Record 'the raw' (discover via interview, gather audio verite)
- 2. 'By your juxtaposition of detail create an interpretation of it' – *Grierson*
- 3. *Layering, sequence and selection of audio – 'the alchemy of the mix'.*
- 4. *Narrator as explicit author, functional presence – or absent voice.*

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