

PERFORMANCE, POWER & PRODUCTION
A SELECTIVE, CRITICAL AND CULTURAL HISTORY
OF THE RADIO INTERVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Title: Performance, Power & Production. A selective, critical and cultural history of the radio interview

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This thesis charts the historical evolution of the ‘personal’ radio interview, in order to understand its use as a speech device, a social relationship and a communicative genre. Four contrasting styles of interviewing have been chosen to illustrate key moments and to illuminate significant shifts in the history of UK broadcasting: *Desert Island Discs* (1942-1954), *The Radio Ballads* (1958-64 & 2006), the confessional style phone interview format on independent local radio (1975) and Prison Radio projects (1993-present). These cases draw together an assortment of live and pre-recorded material, across a variety of genres that encompass over seventy years of production output, granting an opportunity to demonstrate the specificities of each example, whilst also identifying any overarching themes or differences.

Primary research has been carried out using an assortment of audio content and written archive, comprising of scripts, memos, letters, diaries, training documents, contracts, policies and guidelines, which give us a further sense of how this method of talk has developed over the decades. Power dynamics permeate all levels of broadcasting, so particular emphasis has been placed on how both ‘on air’ and ‘backstage’ interaction has been experienced by an institution, an interviewer and an interviewee. For instance, how might the interview have been used to serve, restrict or benefit the needs of a particular group, an individual or an institution? The different types of interaction that has taken place between participants before, during and after an interview exchange provide clues about the purpose, motivations and agendas of those who contribute towards on-air talk. So, while this thesis values the significance of broadcast audio and historical documentation, it also honours the experiences of individual figures, and seeks to highlight the relationship dynamics within production teams; all of which have an impact on the on-air interview exchange. As a result, research interviews have been conducted with industry practitioners, including editors, engineers, presenters, producers and phone operators.

This study will not only start to develop our knowledge of the contextual history of interview production on commercial, public service and community radio in the UK, but also begin to lay the foundation for an expansion of our wider knowledge concerning the use of the mediated interview across other disciplines and throughout other countries. This thesis suggests that the on-air incarnation of interview talk, its ‘backstage’ production, and its principal position within speech radio genres all over the world, should be viewed as a powerful barometer of institutional, individual and national cultural hopes, desires and identities.

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. List of calls to *Capital Open Line*. 05.03.1975

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

BBC WAC: BBC Written Archives Centre

B.U.F.V.C: the British Universities Film and Video Council

CA: Conversational Analysis

Castaway: Name commonly given to the interviewee on *Desert Island Discs*

IBA: Independent Broadcasting Authority

ILR: Independent Local Radio

NPR: National Prison Radio

NOMS: National Offenders Management Service

PasB: Programmes as Broadcast

‘Prof’ Button: Profanity Control

PSB: Public Service Broadcasting

PRA: Prison Radio Association

ROTL: Release on Temporary Licence

RSL: Restricted Service Licence

SM: Studio Manager

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTORY NOTE & RATIONALE	1	
1.1	<i>PROJECT OBJECTIVES</i>	4
1.2	<i>CHAPTER OUTLINE</i>	5
CHAPTER 2. METHODOLOGY	10	
2.1	<i>RESEARCHING MEDIA HISTORY</i>	10
2.2	<i>THROUGH THE LENS: EXPLORING THE ARCHIVE</i>	15
2.3	<i>DESERT ISLAND DISCS</i>	17
2.4	<i>THE RADIO BALLADS</i>	20
2.5	<i>THE 'PROBLEM' PHONE-IN</i>	23
2.6	<i>PRISON RADIO</i>	26
CHAPTER 3. SCRIPTING THE INTERVIEW: DESERT ISLAND DISCS	31	
3.1	<i>AN EXCELLENT ADVERTISEMENT FOR OUR WAY OF LIFE</i>	32
3.2	<i>CENSORSHIP: BROADCASTS AS THE SELF-EXPRESSION OF A NATION</i>	37
3.3	<i>COCONUTS, SUN, SEA & SAND: ESCAPISM, NOSTALGIA & THE ISLAND</i>	40
3.4	<i>RETREATING INTO THE PAST: THE CELEBRITY CASTAWAY</i>	44
3.5	<i>MANY THANKS FOR BEING SO HELPFUL, ALSO COCKTAILS!</i>	47
3.6	<i>SCRIPTED STYLE</i>	51
3.7	<i>A TIMID APPROACH</i>	55
3.8	<i>THROUGH THE GLASS: THE PRODUCER & THE CONTROL ROOM</i>	59
3.9	<i>CONCLUDING NOTE</i>	62
CHAPTER 4. THE INTERVIEW AND THE RADIO BALLADS	64	
4.1	<i>THE UNREHEARSED HITCH: VOCALISING THE QUOTIDIAN EXPERIENCE</i>	66
4.2	<i>PROFESSIONAL & PERSONAL NETWORKS</i>	73
4.3	<i>CAPTURING ACTUALITY</i>	79
4.4	<i>BURSTING THE BUBBLE: INTERVIEW TECHNIQUE</i>	83
4.5	<i>EDITING: CROSSING BOUNDARIES</i>	90
4.6	<i>TALKING TO TEENAGERS</i>	92
4.7	<i>THE CONTEMPORARY BALLADS</i>	94
4.8	<i>LISTENING TO THE MEN TALK: WOMEN AND THE BALLADS</i>	98
4.9	<i>CONCLUDING NOTE</i>	101
CHAPTER 5. CONFESSIONS & THE CALL-IN	103	
5.1	<i>THE LAUNCH OF A NEW GENRE</i>	104
5.2	<i>MEDIATING PERSONAL, SEXUAL & EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS</i>	111

5.3	<i>PROBLEM TALK</i>	114
5.4	<i>PERSONA</i>	118
5.5	<i>DO YOU HAVE YOUR RADIO ON?</i>	126
5.6	<i>THE SOUND & THREAT OF SILENCE</i>	129
5.7	<i>DIRECTING LIVENESS</i>	131
5.8	<i>SWEARING & SUICIDE: GATEKEEPING THE AIRWAVES</i>	136
5.9	<i>CONCLUDING NOTE</i>	141
CHAPTER 6. THE PRISONER & THE INTERVIEW		143
6.1	<i>PRISONER RADIO – BACKGROUND CONTEXT</i>	144
6.2	<i>REPRESENTATION & VOICE: THE PRISONER AS THE INTERVIEWEE</i>	149
6.3	<i>WE’VE ALL BEEN THERE, WE’VE ALL DONE IT: NATIONAL PRISON RADIO</i>	153
6.4	<i>TRAINING TO INTERVIEW</i>	157
6.5	<i>HELLO MR DJ</i>	162
6.6	<i>COMPLIANCE, ETHICS & GATEKEEPING</i>	165
6.7	<i>THEY LOCKED ME IN A TOILET</i>	167
6.8	<i>CONCLUDING NOTE</i>	172
CHAPTER 7. FINAL REFLECTIONS		174
7.1	<i>CONCLUDING REMARKS</i>	175
SOURCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY IX		
	<i>AUDIO, RADIO & TELEVISION</i>	XXVI
	<i>PRIMARY SOURCES: FILES FROM ARCHIVES AND SPECIAL COLLECTIONS</i>	XXVIII
	<i>PRIMARY SOURCES: CONTRIBUTORS TO RESEARCH PROJECT</i>	XXX
APPENDICES XXXII		
	<i>CONTENTS</i>	XXXII

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTORY NOTE & RATIONALE

The issue of power is central to media and cultural studies yet it is something usually assumed but seldom proved.

Scannell 2007, p.191

The radio interview began in the UK as a technique before the Second World War. Since then it has become a central source of programme material, used on a daily basis across public service, commercial and community networks. As a speech device, the interview has been an essential component of contemporary culture and society, where the act of questioning and answering remains central to our understanding of the experiences and motivations of both oneself and the other.¹ The interview, in all its guises, can be viewed as a quest - for information, confirmation, action or reciprocity, and is conventionally grounded in responsive turns and symbolic exchange. As Bell and Leeuwen have observed, the interview has a deep connection to notions of knowledge, power and privacy. They view it as a crucial method of interaction, not only in social institutions such as court rooms, doctors surgery's, classrooms and therapeutic situations, but it's often underappreciated and underreported place in our histories of press, film and broadcasting.²

The popularity and dominance of the broadcast interview during the 20th century has been acknowledged; Silverman has declared that we now live in an 'Interview Society'³ while Corner has commented that the broadcast interview 'is now one of the most widely used and extensively developed formats for public communication in the world.'⁴ Yet no research, before now, has yet attempted to trace the evolution of the radio interview in the UK.⁵ There has also never been an attempt to produce a comprehensive account of the radio interview across contrasting periods of time, by looking at different institutions or a variety of genres.⁶ Within this small sphere of interview research, it is the more personal portrait (one-to-one) confessional or emotional interview that has been largely neglected, in comparison with the news, political and current affairs exchange. Scholars have tended to lean towards commenting on niche aspects of interviewing practice (such as the phone interview, documentaries or news), but have not commented on similarities or differences *across* these sub-genres. This thesis is looking to rectify this prior disparity by looking at different time periods and a

¹ See Ekström et al 2006

² Bell & Van Leeuwen 1994

³ Silverman 1993, p.19

⁴ Corner 1999, p.37

⁵ See also Scannell & Cardiff 1991 & Ytreberg 2004

⁶ It is important not to discount Beaman's *Interviewing for Radio* (2011). However this has been written primarily as an instruction manual for students of media production, rather than based on primary academic research.

range of styles that have been broadcast over local commercial radio, public service broadcasting and community media.

Broadcast interviews exist within the confines of institutional talk, where speech and performance of contributors is specifically intended to be overheard by the listening public.⁷ For over seventy years, the radio interview has remained a central element heard across the schedules, both in the UK and internationally. It is a radiogenic device, ideally suited to the non-visual medium, where we are undistracted by the visual mechanisms of television or film. This collaborative and communicative potential of broadcast talk has been remarked on by those from different disciplines – by oral historians, narrative theorists, sociolinguists, anthropologists and ethnographers - who have considered the aesthetic quality of this type of communal storytelling.⁸ They have also highlighted the often subtle ways in which power and meaning can be conveyed on the radio by the authenticity and intimacy of the voice. For Street, it is the poignancy of the voice that creates meaning, connection and fascination - enabling us to ‘convey the full poetic ideas, the rhythm, volume, pause and emphasis of the spontaneous spoken word.’⁹ McHugh, meanwhile, has suggested that this type of collaborative exchange should be celebrated: ‘Perhaps it is not too fanciful to imagine the best interviewing as an art, whose purpose is to reveal the full humanity and depth of the person before us.’¹⁰

As Moberg has shown, the word itself originated from the French noun *entrevue*, meaning ‘meeting’ and *s’entrevoir* ‘come together.’¹¹ Typically this type of ‘coming together’ requires at least two people, not necessarily spatially connected: one who is tasked with asking a question, and the other who is expected to answer. While this sounds simple, this meeting, and the positioning of talk around it is not a neutral space, but somewhere that can be seen as a complex, public and performative space, where an interviewer and interviewee come together, seemingly for the benefit of the listener but accompanied by their own individual or institutional agendas.

Primary examples and personal experiences of power help to form the narrative backdrop to each Chapter, blending each section of this thesis together. This raises some interesting questions about how normalised conventions, rituals or technique came to be made across contrasting areas and eras of production. As Plummer has recognised in his own work, power should be thought of as a subtle yet intricate process ‘that weaves its way through embodied, passionate social life and everything in its wake.’¹² I deconstruct the

⁷ Tolson 2006

⁸ Bauman 1986, Booker 2007, Bell 2005 & Zahavi 2012 have emphasised the conditions of performance, spoken artistry and the rhythmical function of oral storytelling

⁹ Street 2012, p.81

¹⁰ McHugh, 2007, pp. 147–154

¹¹ Moberg 2006, p.225

¹² Plummer 1995, p.26

interview in a variety of ways, interpreting how individual figures or cultural, social and political events came to impact on its development. Within this seemingly endless large field of study I am specifically interested in the different ways that the interview has been used to serve, restrict or benefit the needs of a particular group, an individual or an institution.

I take Hutchby's view that power 'operates in the most mundane contexts of everyday life, not just, at the macro level of large processes.'¹³ For instance, what were the ideal characteristics required of an early interviewer? How might the position of a microphone be used to communicate a sense of authority or to gain the trust of an interviewee? What can early scripted interviews tell us about the idea of liveness? What was the significance of the phone box in early call in radio programmes? This type of exploration allows us to start to query, amongst others, the influence of censorship policies, the relationship with the regulatory bodies, the location of institutional authority, and the performance of the celebrity, the expert and the 'ordinary' interviewee and interviewer. I look at how unconventional recording locations came to be selected by actuality feature producers in the 1960's, and the complex editorial decisions made by BBC producers in the years following the Second World War. I note the feelings of empowerment, experienced by prisoners who pre-recorded interviews with their Governor and discuss the gatekeeping policies adopted by phone operators during the mid- 1970's, whose job it was to guard the airwaves from unsuitable callers.

The parameters of power are hence explored – and an attempt is made to uncover the often concealed or infinitesimal ways in which it is accomplished, achieved or opposed by a range of parties: the interviewer, the interviewee and the production team.^{14 15} Savigny has recently considered this issue in her recent work on feminism and the media, asking; 'In whose interests is information constructed, presented and mediated? And who is empowered as a result of this construction?'¹⁶ I am especially interested in how those who have engaged with the interview have experienced, resisted or understood conceptions of power on a personal level. I also draw attention to the often unseen, unheard and un-researched influence of those involved in the production of the interview. The producers, editors, researchers and phone operators who are involved in the 'before' and 'after' (separate from the on-air interview exchange), can play a pivotal and powerful role.

¹³ Hutchby 1996a, p.115

¹⁴ The remit of my study does not permit room for me to delve into audience research, and does not allow for the documentation of their experiences or perceptions of the interview. The role of the listener in a participatory and communicative capacity is considered by Coleman 2005; Nancy 2007 & Lacey 2011 and I suggest this future work should certainly regard the interview as playing a significant function within this area.

¹⁵ I am interested in the following ways that power is negotiated by: a) the ability to affect something strongly b) the capability to bring about change c) the means by which it is used to control, or to have authority over others, and d) its capacity to promote the interests or enhance the status or influence of a specific group or individual.

¹⁶ Savigny 2013, p.14

The study of how institutional authority and control are maintained in the interview...and other familiar broadcast situations began to show precisely how power routinely worked and how, routinely, it might be resisted.¹⁷

Similar to other historians or media academics (Hutchby for example¹⁸) I do not approach these concepts by using a specific theoretical framework, but believe that this type of focus has allowed for a more critical reflection, that allows the historian to interpret public discourse, texts and mediated broadcast talk.

1.1 PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The radio interview is rooted in the fabric of mediated communication, conceived first in Britain by the BBC, and later embraced by commercial and community networks. The intention of this thesis is to chart the evolution and use of the radio interview from 1942-2014. This is a sizable area of interest, so I use four main samples of programming output to offer an interpretation regarding the purpose, use and advancement of interviewing as a programme device. Introducing these examples together in this thesis allows me to illustrate the specific details of each case, whilst also granting me the chance to identify and reveal any overarching themes or differences. The cases have been selected in order to demonstrate significant phases, key figures or noteworthy moments, not in an attempt to offer a fully comprehensive appraisal, but to help to begin to lay the groundwork for future work in this area.

Below are the six key objectives of this research, which have both fuelled and fulfilled the choice of each case study. The purpose of this research is to:

1. Research the origins of the radio interview and changing interview techniques and purposes at specific moments of time
2. Examine the factors influencing choices of subject, interviewer and interviewee
3. Investigate the framing of questions at specific moments in time with reference to the use of scripts and unscripted techniques
4. Provide the theoretical and empirical basis of the radio interview as a mode of communication and meaning generation on radio
5. Understand the ideological, class and gender dimensions of interviewing practice over time
6. Recognise methods of interview training and policy

¹⁷ Scannell 2007, p.191

¹⁸ Hutchby 1996a

Each Chapter draws on a range of evidence, both primary and secondary, and raises questions about the following issues: the challenges and opportunities of pre-recorded and live material, the formation of scripted and spontaneous speech, the influence of television, film and magazine literature, the adoption of techniques from overseas, the use of technology in recording and editing – all across specific public service output, local independent stations and community networks.

1.2 CHAPTER OUTLINE

The opening Methodology Chapter introduces the chosen case studies and provides the contextual background for each topic. Here I evaluate past research previously conducted in each of these specific areas, identify any gaps and justify the range of methods employed to carry out my own primary research. I clarify the challenges of using digital collections and written archive and locate the often complex process of gaining access to institutions or central figures.

Chapter Three starts in the early 1940's; with an examination of the entertainment interview programme *Desert Island Discs*. This long-running format calls for the audience, the host and a 'castaway' to engage in a fantasy. Guests were (and continue to be) invited to pre-select gramophone records that would accompany them if they were left alone on a fictional desert island. This concept acts as a vehicle in which the host is able to ask questions or make statements about the significance of these records, in order to unearth the private motivations of a public figure.

Typified by conceptions performance, personality and the promotion of personal choice, *Desert Island Discs* can be regarded as an indicator of the BBC's early attitude towards interviewing. I address the first decade of the programme, (where all interviews were fully scripted) and chart how its interview style emerged from a simulated recital, to one that began to accept more spontaneous speech. I reflect on the social, cultural and technological context surrounding the start of the programme, revealing just who had the right to ask the questions, and who was awarded the opportunity to contribute towards public talk at this time. This allows us to hear those voices that were trusted to be heard on air, and those who were excluded. I identify how scripted interview exchanges were constructed, the conditions under which guests were (and still are) selected, and the means by which the recording process (the before during and after) has been regulated by the host and production team. I also consider the origin of the interview as a speech device and observe the initial roles of the interviewer and interviewee. Contextualising these types of scripted exchanges further informs our understanding of the place of the interview within our mediated cultural heritage. This all offers us a sense of how, why and when the interview developed, and the ways in which it was first used.

The series began at a time when the tone of broadcast talk was inherently deferential and paternalistic. *Desert Island Discs* was established during a climate of wartime censorship that relied heavily on scripted performance, a professional BBC moderator and a dependence on the established expert interviewee. I illustrate how these early episodes intentionally promote the professional and public persona of the castaway - based on nostalgia, memory and escapism. I go on to suggest how our understanding about power relations within *Desert Island Discs* can be exposed through the selection of the celebrity castaway, and understood

through the examination of questions, statements and directions revealed in scripts. Lastly I reflect on the roles of the production team, the experiences of the guests and outline how the format developed and changed through the decades.

Chapter Four examines the development radio interview in the 1950's.¹⁹ *The Radio Ballads* was an 8-part series that aired from 1958-64 that combined folk music with oral testimony of mainly working class interviewees with regional accents. Before this time, the portable recorder was predominantly used as a research tool, rather than as a means of recording location interviews for transmission.²⁰ Talk on radio was still dominated by scripted, rehearsed, structured dialogue which attempted to mirror the spontaneity of live conversation but the *Radio Ballads* helped to challenge this tradition by recording on location and foregrounding actuality collected in regional communities. This series allows me to see how the development of actuality and editing technology altered the way that interviews were collected, recorded and shared. My research highlights how a radio studio, portable recorder and microphone can be considered as a vehicle for enabling representation, access and participation for the 'ordinary' person - the potential of radio to provide a platform for different voices.

I then turn to 2006, when six new episodes of the Ballads were made for BBC Radio 2. I compare the technique and approach between the original and contemporary producers and note how both teams approached female contributors and teenagers. I touch upon present issues like the challenges of compliance, the political philosophies of the producers and how editing conventions came to influence how the interview might sound. This Chapter not only stresses how different technologies and techniques can impact on interviewing processes, but also creates awareness into the way authenticity and intimacy can be conveyed by the spoken word in the public sphere.

The BBC's contribution to the development of the radio interview will have been, up until this point, the main subject of my attention in this thesis – as has the pre-recorded interview exchange. In Chapter Five, I take the opportunity to provide an alternative view, by examining programming output from UK independent and commercial radio. This Chapter recognises the contrasting ways that live interviews have been managed by those who worked as hosts, producers and phone-operators on a pioneering type of local format. Specifically, my focus lies in local 'problem' radio phone-in shows from 1975, often referred to as 'confessional' or 'therapeutic'- broadcasting styles of talk which aired throughout the London area on LBC and Capital Radio. It was here that audiences would be invited to share their emotional, sexual or relationship problems live on air with presenters and the wider public for the first time on UK radio.

¹⁹ *The Radio Ballads* were first broadcast on the BBC's Home Service between 1958 and 1964. A new series was aired in 2006, on BBC Radio 2. The contemporary editions were made by Smooth Operations Productions, an independent radio production company.

So how, when and why did this mediated therapeutic style of broadcasting begin to be used on British radio? I locate the roots of the ‘agony aunt/uncle’ persona from its origins in literature, charting its development and movement into a broadcast setting. In particular I concentrate on the work of two broadcasters: Anna Raeburn and Phillip Hodson - who were the curators and creators of the confessional telephone interview format in the UK. I show how Anna Raeburn and Phillip Hodson established distinctive and intimate personas to attract and maintain the loyalty and trust of their listeners. I also outline ILR’s²¹ commitment to social action, the ‘problem’ of poor reception, and use examples from output to show how power relationships are negotiated on air, between the agony aunt/uncle, host and caller. Leading on from the last Chapter, this section also requires a note about the public performance of authenticity and individuality, where emotional encounters takes precedence. This type of programming content reflected a movement towards greater audience interaction on UK radio, mirroring a transition away from the wider authoritarian tone, to a more populist approach, heard on both public service and independent radio.

Analysis of these personal problem phone-in shows not only allows us to look closer at how the often troublesome relationship between the regulator and the producer, but also grants us further understanding of how topics of talk were connected to wider social change.²² Wray, Street & Stoller²³ have already done much to increase our knowledge of pre and post war independent and commercial broadcasting, with their research demonstrating the various social, regulatory, economic, political and cultural influences which accompanied the development of pirate radio, Classic FM, the IBA and the birth of ILR. Both Stoller and Wray have recently touched upon what they term the ‘problem’ phone-interview, and it is my objective to expand on themes taken from their work on this area. My own discussion refers partly to the early struggles of producing local independent radio, as well as recognising significant changes in culture and law, which were further compounded by a wider changing media landscape that began to embrace audience interaction.

The co-creation of regular live speech between the broadcaster, the institution and the audience brings with it a host of medium specific and public sphere related considerations.²⁴ As a consequence, those working on the show cope with this potential threat by implementing a variety of safekeeping measures to protect their own careers, the network and their presenters. I show how production teams appeared preoccupied by a number of factors: the threat of dead air, the possibility of featuring vulnerable callers and of potential profanity from contributors. As a result they drew upon a number of resources (technical, institutional, professional guidelines) to administer these fears and protect the airwaves.

²¹ Independent Local Radio

²² Chignell 2007

²³ Stoller & Wray 2010

²⁴ Most pertinent to my own research has been the recent work on the radio phone-in by the likes of Katriel 2004, Ytreberg 2004, O’Sullivan 2005, McNair 2009 and Dori-Hacohen 2012.

This study concludes by moving from the radio phone-in – an extremely public form of institutionalised communication - to one that originates from a more concealed community. Imprisonment involves more than a loss of freedom of movement. It can deny autonomy, privacy and more importantly, voice. In Chapter Six I investigate how inmates are trained to use the interview on National Prison Radio²⁵, where content is co-created; presented and constructed by serving offenders, in partnership with a team of professionals. Prisoners engage with radio as hosts, producers and interviewees, so my interest lies in the way they are taught to question, research and record these interviews. Principally, I decipher which factors might inhibit or enable the prisoner from appearing on the airwaves via prison radio, addressing concepts of citizenship, identity and empowerment.

During this Chapter I take a closer look at the history of prison radio projects²⁶ within the UK – a trend which has never before been documented.²⁷ In particular, I concentrate on the use of the radio interview as a powerful communication device, used to provide educational support, transferable skills and group identity. I also collect the direct experiences of those who deliver training and support, showing how the voices of prisoners have been increasingly used more generally by the UK's mainstream media to transmit stories from a largely marginalised community.

This last section is naturally situated within a changed mediated landscape from our last Chapter – yet the interview has continued to be used extensively across almost all local or national networks on UK radio since the start of this research in the early 1940's. The case of prison radio permits us to evaluate the legacy of the interview – what has become of a technique which is now no longer an untried and experimental programming device – in contrast to its use on *Desert Island Discs*, the *Radio Ballads* or even the problem phone interview. Rather we see it become established as a familiar and conventional tool, employed to teach communication skills in restricted and closed institutions like prisons.²⁸

These four small-scale studies come together to give an overall awareness into just how the interview has evolved. I am able to note its changing purposes over time, and to start to recognise how interviews are both managed behind the scenes and accomplished on air. The aim is that this selective historical account should look beyond the interview as a single text or simply dismissed as a taken-for-granted aspect of broadcasting

²⁵ NPR broadcasts 24 hours a day, seven days a week, via in-cell TV.

²⁶ This term refers to the production of audio content inside of prisons – intended to be broadcast to other prisoners and not the wider public.

²⁷ Reports, articles and press have documented the growth of Prison Radio – but this is the first research project that has looked at the interview or the history of Prison Radio projects in the UK.

²⁸ The funding of radio by and for prisoners has naturally been accompanied by a certain amount of political controversy and debate. While I do reference concepts connected to active citizenship, volunteering and community programming, I would also like to emphasise that it is not my goal here to debate the possibly contentious governmental, economic or legal implications of establishing prison radio stations as a means of rehabilitation. Rather I deliberate the ways in which the medium, and more specifically the interview, has been established and used in the UK.

output, and to recognise its powerful potential to reflect and perpetuate, even in small ways, some important and enduring depictions of British cultural life.

CHAPTER 2. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this Chapter is to outline some of the different ways that academics have conducted research into broadcasting history more generally, and the interview more specifically. I then evaluate the range of methods used in my own study, and look in more detail at the possibility of collating evidence from each of my chosen topics. Owing to the variety in time-frames, a disparity in existing literature and the differing availability of archive material, each case presents a diverse set of challenges or opportunities, which will be considered here.

2.1 RESEARCHING MEDIA HISTORY

Behind the features of landscape, behind tools or machinery, behind what appear to be most formalized written documents, and behind institutions, which seem almost entirely detached from their founders, there are men, and it is men that history seeks to grasp.

Bloch 1953, p.26

The methods, techniques and style of broadcast talk have so far been explored by a small number of media historians, who have gained access to public or private archive material, analysed audio transcripts, carried out research interviews and conducted their own ethnographic research inside institutions. The increased availability of BBC archive, together with the recent digitisation of audio content has made it more possible for researchers to access an assortment of rich and meaningful collections. Despite these apparent advances in resources, and in comparison with other histories (film or television for instance), historical research about radio as a whole still falls some way behind other forms of media. For Dolan, the trend is starting to shift, and radio is emerging from ‘the shadows of critical neglect.’²⁹ Within this small field of radio history, the routine production processes have remained notably unexplored³⁰, which has led Hesmondhalgh to call this gap the ‘vitaly important but shamefully neglected topic of cultural work.’³¹ Meanwhile, for Lacey, the study of radio also must contrast with other historical accounts, in order to ‘draw attention to how, in effect, the sound has been turned down in much historical writing.’³² Historical research, by its very nature, restricts us to interpret what we can from the archive – and many of those involved with the behind the scenes production

²⁹ Dolan 2003, p.63

³⁰ As noted by Kunelius 2006; Lundell 2010; Wolfenden 2012

³¹ Beck 2003, p.i

³² Lacey 2008, p.30

are no longer living to share their stories. As a consequence, the majority of research on the radio interview has relied on the analysis of transcriptions from recorded content.³³

One of the reasons why research of this nature has been lacking can be due to the complex means that might permit the researcher to gain access inside institutions³⁴. Academics traditionally have had limited right of entry to these unseen private spaces of broadcasting, predominantly due to problems in gaining admission to the very source of radio production (the studio) and the acceptance from industry professionals. This often requires approval from gatekeepers, who might then award the opportunity to speak with a select number of key figures, the possibility to observe the on-air encounter, or permission to view internal documents.³⁵

A new kind of history is needed, one that, fortunately, is already being created. This does not interpret the texts so much as explain the circumstances in which material was produced and for which it was produced.³⁶

Transcripts have conventionally been used by scholars to highlight the ways in which institutional power, authority and control can routinely be contested, negotiated and resisted. This has reflected an effort to locate the minuscule ways in which broadcast talk is accomplished in an ongoing context of institutionalised rules and social organisation.³⁷ These methods have revealed interesting and valuable information concerning pre-assigned roles and appropriate behaviour; fundamental issues which heavily impacted on the ways in which broadcast talk has been achieved. Drawing on linguistic models³⁸, the ways in which relationships between cultural knowledge and communicative intentions started to be revealed within talk radio discourse. These works, as Hutchby has discerned, also attempted to understand this idea of broadcast talk as ‘situated sociably, interactionally organized’, and a ‘phenomenon worthy of interest in its own right, and not just as a carrier of media messages.’³⁹ This reflected a shift in media studies, focussing on *how* talk is accomplished within the unique institutional space⁴⁰, where study of mediated performance alongside broadcast talk developed both from Pragmatics and Conversation Analysis (CA). The interview began to be recognised as

³³ In particular the work of Atkinson & Moores 2003 & Thornborrow 2001

³⁴ It must be remembered that it has been beneficial for socio-linguists to use transcripts to identify turn-taking, interruptions, opening/closing remarks. This method has its advantages in these instances.

³⁵ Also see Garrett & Bell 1998

³⁶ Ellis 2014, cited in Mee & Walker 2014, p.12-25

³⁷ Influenced by Grice 1975, Goffman 1981, Garfinkel 1967 and Sacks 1992 a small selection of media researchers began to re-examine the relationship between radio, producers and listeners. These theories and new practices centred on communicative intentionality, footing and ethnomethodology, leading to new studies that foregrounded broadcast talk as a legitimate and ‘serious object of enquiry’ for radio and television. Also see Scannell 2007.

³⁸ Refer to work of Higgins and Halliday 1978, as contextualised by Hutchby 1996b.

³⁹ Hutchby 2005, p.440

⁴⁰ Work by academics in language and media discourse began to expand from 1991. Following a seminar called *Broadcast Talk* at the University of Strathclyde there began a growing commitment to the multidisciplinary analysis and discussion of talk on television and radio, uniting linguistics, discourse analysis, media studies and sociology.

both a social encounter and as a communicative genre,⁴¹ ‘where there is a clearly defined type of situation which involves participants in characteristic social roles, and which has developed norms, routines and interactional patterns.’⁴²

Clayman, Heritage, and Greatbatch⁴³ were among the first to scrutinise political and news interviewing.⁴⁴ They were particularly intent on investigating unscripted interaction, demonstrating how speakers are able to be assigned and accomplish conversational tasks. Silence, hesitation, stutters, repetitions, overlaps, stress on words, pronunciation, inhalations and short utterances were seen to reveal meaning to institutional talk.⁴⁵ Also concentrating on the sequential patterns displayed in talk radio, Hutchby’s use of CA revealed how participant’s identities were revealed through confrontational exchanges. His analysis of the *Brian Hayes Programme* (1996) looked at how power can operate within a mediated institutional interaction, and be reproduced by talk on a minute by minute basis.⁴⁶ Hutchby has centred on the concept of power, both as a form of resistance and how it has been achieved on a minuscule basis on talk radio. He has looked at ways in which callers were selected, how hosts opened and closed conversations, and show how interruptions, argumentative actions and controversial talk could have significance in terms of power relations.⁴⁷

Power is not so much an all or nothing phenomenon, which people either have or don’t have, and which resides either here or there. Rather it is best viewed as a flow, a process, a pulsate – oscillating and undulating throughout the social world and working to pattern the degree of control people experience and have over their lives.⁴⁸

Yet despite their achievement in identifying assigned roles of participants, allocated tasks (opening, asking, changing topics etc.), the majority of those employing CA, like Hutchby, have, by their own admission, not conducted any research in production context, instead using the recorded and transcribed broadcast talk as their only source of research material.⁴⁹ This has led writers like Lundell to comment that ‘there is still much to learn about how the interview is managed throughout its process of production.’⁵⁰ As Skoog acknowledges, the ‘internal dynamics’ and relationships between production team members, clearly has an impact both for

⁴¹ See work of Linell 1998

⁴² Lundell 2010, p.168

⁴³ Clayman 1988, Heritage 1985 & Greatbatch 1988

⁴⁴ Lundell 2009 has described how the news interview has been extensively researched using CA. Also see Clayman and Heritage 2002/6, Greatbatch 1986/1992 & Heritage 1995

⁴⁵ See Scannell 2007

⁴⁶ Hutchby 1996

⁴⁷ Hosts were regarded as being in control of arguments or disagreements, supported by technology which meant that they were able to judge who had the last word.

⁴⁸ Plummer 1995, p.26

⁴⁹ Hutchby for instance, did not question Hayes about his own experiences.

⁵⁰ Lundell 2009, p.273

the on air encounter and final broadcasted versions. Skoog maintains that if we are to fully understand programmes or texts, we must, as researchers and historians, ‘look at the production and editorial process that is going on ‘behind the scenes.’⁵¹

I am also in agreement with Wolfendens’ recommendation that there should be further awareness and engagement regarding the practitioner’s first-hand experience and to associate further with industry professionals.⁵² Although research of this nature is limited, O’Neill has conducted an ethnographic study of radio producers; writing of his observations of production activities on RTE’s *The Art Show* believing it is ‘in the realm of the mundane that the distinct and unique features of broadcasting are to be found.’⁵³ Likewise, Lundell has commented on the ‘before’ and ‘after’ of political interviews in Sweden, offering us more of a glimpse into the interactional process of the broadcast interview. These studies of backstage encounters can offer us a glimpse into the on air performance, identities and communicative goals which take place around the context of an interview.

...broadcast interviews are not produced in a vacuum, decontextualized from a social setting without a ‘before’ and an ‘after.’ Thus the off camera interactions can also be seen as social encounters where journalists and politicians alike organize their activities and negotiate their identities in order to pursue their communicative goals. Although the structures and conventions of these social encounters are more loosely defined than those on-air, the norms, routines and interactional patterns of the interactions should be of no less interest to researchers.⁵⁴

This PhD therefore attempts a slightly contrasting methodology, and seeks to determine the processes and nuances of interview communication, by combining an historical approach with more industry-based perspectives of the interview encounter.⁵⁵ The aim is to contribute to the growing number of studies⁵⁶ which have endeavoured to harmonise practice with theory; to understand the contextual conditions of the culture of production, rather than solely relying on the analysis of single texts.⁵⁷ I do not dismiss the significance and importance of audio, but in order to examine the before/after context of the interview this should not considered to be the only solution. It is possible to gain a richer and more contextually based understanding of

⁵¹ Skoog 2010, p.241

⁵² Wolfenden 2012

⁵³ O’Neill 1993

⁵⁴ Lundell 2010, p.182

⁵⁵ See Lundell 2010

⁵⁶ O’Neill 1993, Ytreburg 2004, Luscombe 2009, Wolfenden 2013

⁵⁷ Pearson 2014

the radio interview through the use of multiple sources of evidence. I propose that this is necessary in order to attempt to understand the whole ‘communicative environment rather than just one element of it.’^{58 59}

Conducting research interviews within the realm of broadcasting history is, according to Seaton, a principle way of discovering hidden motivations and experiences, for they ‘animate the files, explain the real story and give you a flavour of the people and their concerns’⁶⁰. For Yin, qualitative research interviews are believed to be ‘essential sources of case study information.’⁶¹ I engaged with this method as a guided and fluid conversation technique, intended to gain awareness about the intentions, purposes and experiences of my research contributors⁶², who included senior producers, directors, interviewees, presenters, phone operators, editors and engineers. All but one of the interviews was taped and two thirds were fully transcribed. I draw together their quotations frequently throughout each Chapter⁶³ and these responses came to shape the direction of this thesis, helping to determine my understanding of the subject – especially surrounding control and empowerment which seemed to be most relevant to their first-hand experiences of interviewing. It is fundamental, not only in my own research, but of others like this, to use qualitative interviews gathered from those within the industry as a means of documenting history, to ensure that experiences are not lost, forgotten or dismissed. In Hendy’s examination of the work of Lance Sieveking, we are shown how the personal lives of producers might impact on the creative production of radio. This type of attention opens up new ways of thinking about the historical context and offers us additional ways to conduct historical research. I find value in Hendy’s suggestion that attention should be paid to the biographical elements of key figures, private or emotional motivations which ‘might offer fresh perspectives’ on the relationships established on air and conducted in public.⁶⁴ By studying these private motivations, some valuable insights into the development of an on-air self can potentially be revealed which seeks to ‘illuminate the ‘relations between self and society.’⁶⁵

Yet I am aware that there are limitations to this type of investigation, especially where I am reliant on their cooperation, their availability and their willingness to share information. As a result I have also engaged with

⁵⁸ Prior accounts of British broadcasting, have as Nicholas (2012) has noted, tended to fall into distinctive categories: institutional with a social-cultural focus; audiences; the domestic space; its social role; and the history of commercial radio as opposed to its public service predecessor. My own topic is an ambitious attempt and one that contemplates a range of the categories listed above.

⁵⁹ Nicholas 2012, p.382

⁶⁰ Seaton 2004, p.55

⁶¹ Yin 2003, p.89

⁶² The interviews lasted between 45 minutes and 3 hours each. These semi-structured conversations were carried out with a combination of principle people, who were/are involved with the day-to-day production of radio interviews. E-mails and telephone interviews were occasionally used at the request of interviewees. A full list can be found on p. XXXVIII. In total, twenty-seven people participated in this research.

⁶³ Spoken quotations from interviewees are emphasised by the use of italics and speech marks. Extracts from written publications are not in italic.

⁶⁴ Hendy 2012, p.4

⁶⁵ Hendy 2012, p. 15 citing Biess et al 2010, p.77

a range of both written and audio archive, collected from public, digital and private collections. Hilmes and van Cour believe that history begins with the ‘critical interrogation of existing accounts and the affirmation that there exists a past which has yet to be called to account.’⁶⁶ Adopting this view I draw together existing published accounts, other relevant academic literature, primary research interviews, official publications and archive material.

This is a large research area, so specific cases of interview history have been chosen. In doing so I can remark on programmes from the past seventy years, focus on the production of interview material to distinctly different types of radio audiences and examine a range of programmes that span local, national, community and commercial radio. The extended time period allows for longitudinal, multi-genre, and cross-institutional reflection, as I attempt to interpret output from contrasting eras and observe the influence of differing social contexts. This method of collating historical documentation is advocated by Corner;

One important way of getting across both the elements of historical change and of historical context, producing a more comprehensive yet dynamic sense of past conjectures, is the ‘case study.’⁶⁷

2.2 THROUGH THE LENS: EXPLORING THE ARCHIVE

For any historian, access to both potential respondents and relevant archive remains a fundamental concern. According to Dolan, practitioners and researchers attempting to gain entrance to a collection often find themselves in the midst of challenges from bureaucracy, constraint and restriction. A ‘bias of survival’ of course also must be taken into consideration.⁶⁸ This is particularly pertinent when considering programmes from ILR stations like LBC and Capital Radio, which had no formal storage or collection policy in the 1970’s. As a result I have retrieved material from a variety of collections; the British Library, online resources from the B.U.F.V.C⁶⁹ and personal cassettes lent to me by the practitioners themselves. As Turnock reminds us, historians and media researchers can play an important role in the construction of new digital archive projects, especially where there has been no formal method of display.⁷⁰ Much of *Desert Island Discs* is available for public use, while Birmingham’s Charles Parker Archive has a digitised catalogue of its sound recordings. In comparison, any radio content intended for play-out inside a prison is now not permitted to be shared publically in the UK. Once again, this means access to key audio material becomes problematic to

⁶⁶ Hilmes and Van Cour 2007b, p.312

⁶⁷ Corner 2003, p.278

⁶⁸ Biewen & Dilworth 2010, p.136

⁶⁹ B.U.F.V.C refers to the British Universities Film and Video Council

⁷⁰ As discussed by Fickers & Johnson 2010

negotiate. Written archives have also provided a valuable and vital component to this thesis. I spent time at the BBC Written Archives Centre in Caversham and accessing papers from the Independent Broadcast Authority (IBA) at Bournemouth University. Memos of meetings, policy files, PasB's⁷¹, Listener Research Reports, press cuttings, listener letters all offered clues into the beliefs, values and internal workings of an institution.

As I started to rely on this type of archive material, it became evident that I was interpreting it through informed subjectivity, viewing or hearing the past through the lens of the present.⁷² I recognise that my own interpretation and understanding of media history is shaped by not only my role as a researcher, but also through my own values and previous experiences of working in broadcasting.⁷³ I also became aware of the way power could alter as I conducted my *own* research interviews. This prompted me to critically reflect upon decisions that were made by both myself and my contributors in terms of interview locations (homes, public spaces, institutions), body language, questioning structure, study samples, consent, audio recordings, selection of material for inclusion in the thesis, in a qualitative capacity. Bradley accepts that this role of the academic is therefore similar to the role of an editor; 'The researcher shapes the archive in terms of what questions are asked or not asked, what themes are drawn from the interviews, which utterances are selected for writing up.' Yet she also recognises that such selection remains 'inevitable.'⁷⁴ Gaddis is in agreement, and proposes that this cannot prevent the historian of making interpretations about the past;

Historians have long understood that they have an "objectivity" problem: our solution has generally been to admit the difficulty and then get on with doing history as best we can, leaving it to our readers to determine which of our interpretations comes closest to the truth.⁷⁵

Each Chapter will critically engage with relevant secondary sources, as well as my own primary findings, in order to produce a more complete account. Consequently, these cases will differ in their content; owing to the availability of archive material; the range of existing research about the topic; the availability of the production teams; and the type of audio available for public access.

In this next section, I offer some further information about the specific chosen topics of interest. I indicate how they might look to fill a gap in current research and look at the various challenges of studying this type of topic within the field of broadcasting history. While this restriction to these four cases will naturally not be

⁷¹ Programmes as Broadcast

⁷² I see my role here as a media history researcher who must interpret and re-read meanings (see Bradley 1999).

⁷³ Before starting my PhD I worked for Smooth Operations Productions. I produced programmes for both the BBC and commercial radio. My previous work for the BBC and the independent sector has granted me greater access to archived resources and research participants. Never-the-less I am fully aware that this former relationship could also create some bias or conflict of interest in my findings.

⁷⁴ Bradley 1999, p.115

⁷⁵ Gaddis 1997, p.81

sufficient to create an entire overview of all UK interview history, they have been carefully selected to illustrate patterns - and to fulfil the remit of this PhD project, and its six objectives. They aim to help create new knowledge and to stimulate further discussion surrounding different institutions, techniques, technologies and practitioners. Of course in selecting these particular cases means that many others have been excluded. Yet, as Seaton has found, it is not always possible or even desirable, to select samples simply based on a systematic approach.⁷⁶ Rather, researchers should rather concentrate on programmes or controversial events which are selected on the basis that ‘you do the work of the whole better by looking at the illuminating detail of putting one programme together.’⁷⁷ Scannell has shared this sentiment, noting that there is no ‘correct’ single way of collating history, acknowledging that ‘history is not a social science and it tends to resist the impositions of rigid methodologies.’⁷⁸

2.3 DESERT ISLAND DISCS

This opening case study addresses the first decade of *Desert Island Discs* (BBC 1942 - 1954), when all speech content was fully scripted.⁷⁹ By looking at this era, I can start to address wider concerns of regulation and participation that came to impact on media output during this time, including the implementation of censorship polices and the management of the celebrity guest. Studying the origins of the series allows me to cast some assertions on the ways that scripting was used as a means to communicate and mediate an interviewee’s past and personality. It also contributes to a lack of knowledge in this area concerning scripted broadcasts, ‘In academic studies of production, scripts are rarely mentioned.’⁸⁰ This Chapter is not an attempt to provide a sociolinguistic assessment of interview talk, nor is it an attempt to make quantifiable claims about the types of guests invited to participate. Instead it identifies how the programme fitted into the wider institutional and cultural environment during the 1940’s and 1950’s and offers examples of how the interview was used as an early programming device.

Over 3,000 castaways have appeared since 1942, and all are considered to be public figures – those well known of as a consequence of their professional work in music, art, entertainment, politics, broadcasting or academia. During my discussion, I attend to the ways in which the celebrity castaway has been positioned and framed within *Desert Island Discs*, showing how even interviews with public figures during this time required

⁷⁶ Seaton 2004

⁷⁷ Seaton 2004, p.158

⁷⁸ Scannell 2002, p.204

⁷⁹ Because most of those who worked as hosts, producers of engineers on the show are now no longer living, interviews have also been conducted with people who have participated on the show after this time period.

⁸⁰ Ytreberg 2006, p. 423

professional and institutional intervention. McHugh has dismissed the value of conducting research into the celebrity interview – opting instead to concentrate only on the merits of documentary and oral history encounters. She has remained uninterested in the apparent ‘vacuous arena of celebrity interviewing’ and opts to ignore it in her discussion.⁸¹ Yet I do feel that this is an area that needs to be addressed within my own account, since it confronts notions of public access, participation and representation. Looking at those who embody this type of ‘star’ status can offer us a glimpse into the privileged past of radio’s powerful voices. Celebrities, as Tolson has argued, might instead ‘personify contemporary beliefs and concerns about the human condition and their talk, in this context, is designed to construct them as representatives of this.’⁸² The inclusion of a celebrity castaway (and our discussion of this phenomenon) can tell us important things about how a certain type of voice, above others, is deemed discursively powerful and as such, ‘legitimately significant.’⁸³

Desert Island Discs is one of Britain’s longest running radio programmes, yet so far it has received very little attention from academics. There has been no prior attempt to study scripted interviews on *Desert Island Discs* or to show how the format originated or developed. Rather, scholars have instead commented on the musical tastes of its guests, assessed the pleasures or perils of repetition and contemplated the recollection of memory in psychological terms.⁸⁴ Others have clarified the construction and representation of national identity⁸⁵ or mused over the inclusion of desert islands as a concept within mediated productions.⁸⁶ Both Mullany⁸⁷ and Heritage⁸⁸ have used audio extracts to determine levels and strategies of linguistic politeness in questioning procedures. Meanwhile Duberley and Cohen⁸⁹ have discussed how professional careers of female scientists have been constructed and represented on the programme by castaways, and recently McDonald has looked into the musical ‘taste’ of seventeen medical doctors who have appeared on the show⁹⁰. In recognition of its 70 year history, various celebratory publications and special editions were released in 2012, which are not based on academic study, but instead have collated anecdotal accounts alongside trivia data.⁹¹ Although interesting, this has told us little about the development of the radio interview during this time, and I am yet to

⁸¹ McHugh 2010, p.70

⁸² Tolson 2006 p.155

⁸³ Marshall 1997, p. x

⁸⁴ Papers delivered by Blake, Webb & Conway 2013. ‘*Desert Island Discs* and the discographic self’, British Academy, London.

⁸⁵ Paper delivered by Hill 2013. ‘*Desert Island Discs* and the discographic self’, British Academy, London.

⁸⁶ Email correspondence, Barney Samson 2013,

⁸⁷ Mullany 1999

⁸⁸ Heritage 1998

⁸⁹ Cohen & Duberley 2013

⁹⁰ McDonald 2014

⁹¹ See recent publications by Magee 2012 & Symons 2012.

find a study that questions those who have participated in putting together the programme; producers or hosts who research, edit, conduct interviews or appear as guests. Furthermore there has been very little comparison of the programme over the decades. Only Hendy has offered a brief description of its importance and value to the network and its audience, referring briefly (during his impressive history of BBC Radio Four) to the context of the production and the institutional management of the series.⁹²

The ever increasing online catalogue released by the BBC currently contains over 1,500 digital editions of *Desert Island Discs*. These are released as podcasts and available for both the public and research community to share, download and keep. These interviews can now be considered by both the listening public and the academic researcher as a valuable cultural resource. Cohen and Duberley are among those who have expressed delight in finding open and public access to such a large range of resources, meaning that researchers are permitted to conduct their investigations at a low cost, and at their own convenience.⁹³ Nevertheless, as with many public collections, the researcher has little say over the quality of this audio, the amount or availability of archive material, and so must work around these constraints. Moreover, content that could potentially cause embarrassment to the Corporation might have been omitted, while earlier recordings have been re-edited, or lost.⁹⁴ To date there are no episodes available to listen to from the 1940's, which means I remain reliant on scripts for many of the early editions. So, while the *Desert Island Discs* digital archive collection is free to use and relatively accessible, it is also carefully protected, shared and delivered by those stakeholders with a vested interest.⁹⁵ As Ellis reminds us, we must be aware that the increasing digitisation of broadcasting can also be seen as 'a radical dehistoricisation.'

It reforms all texts as data, stripping away all the signs of analogue specificity which carry clues to the original textual nature of the footage. It becomes extremely difficult to establish the original technical platform and institutional context of a piece of footage once it has become digital data.⁹⁶

It is essential to hear from those who have produced or participated in the making of the programme, but (as previously stated) it can be a challenge to gain access to the hidden areas of industry production, especially when those participating are well established public figures or broadcasters. Earlier studies of *Desert Island Discs* have favoured a textual approach, perhaps due to the growing availability of this online archived content, and the difficulties of contacting those who produce this type of programming. *Desert Island Discs* is almost an institution in itself, similar to other well-established, long-running series such as *the Archers* (1950), *Woman's Hour* (1946), *Just a Minute* (1967) or the *Shipping Forecast* (1967). As such, members of

⁹² Hendy 2007

⁹³ Cohen & Duberley 2013

⁹⁴ In 2012 the BBC decided to remove the recording of Plomley's 1985 interview with Jimmy Savile.

⁹⁵ These include the BBC, British Library and the Roy Plomley Estate.

⁹⁶ Cited in Mee & Walker 2014, p.12-25

its production team may regard their role as custodians of an almost sacred broadcasting tradition, who may be suspicious of academic attention and wish to protect its legacy and reputation.⁹⁷ It is my aim to begin to bridge together this current precedent of separation and suspicion between the two, and to transcend this apparent divide between academic outsiders and the creative industry's insiders.

As well as retrieving both written and audio archive, I have carried out primary research interviews with guests, engineers and producers of *Desert Island Discs*, to reveal the daily, often taken-for-granted routine customs, rituals and procedures that accompany the production of this programme. Understanding just how questions were formed, how guests were approached or how answers were scripted allows for; a) an awareness of what was considered to be acceptable and normative public interaction during this time and b) the implementation of a more comprehensive historical perspective which is not only reliant on the analysis of documentation or 'official' institutional accounts, but the experiences and perceptions of those who participated in the interview. I address the following questions:

1. How did early interviews sound?
2. How might editorial policy and the production team impacted on the interview?
3. How did the scripted and unscripted interview evolve and develop as a technique?

I do not use this more contemporary evidence with the intention to carry out a direct comparison with earlier editions, but aim to capture any parallels or modifications in interview techniques. This supports Pearson's⁹⁸ recent plea that media research should not be confined to the analysis of a single text, and advocates Couldry's proposition that scholars should consider the motivations of those who participate in these types of mediated exchanges.

What are people's experiences of appearing in the media themselves? These questions remain under researched. Yet it is in such cases – when people see the media process close up – rather than in the relaxed, but distanced context of everyday domestic consumption, that the media's symbolic power is most likely to be contested.⁹⁹

2.4 THE RADIO BALLADS

A number of academics, oral historians and radio producers have already documented the value of the *Radio Ballads* (1958-1964) in terms of their political background, their powerful poetic potential and their

⁹⁷ Producing a long-running series of this nature involves a considerable amount of commitment, so from a logistical perspective, it may not be permissible for hosts or the production team to have the time to contribute towards studies.

⁹⁸ Pearson 2014

⁹⁹ Couldry 2000, p.3-4

significant place in broadcasting history. Yet there has been no prior effort to consider or contrast interview techniques used on the original series with those from newer *Ballads*, which aired on BBC Radio 2 in 2006. These contemporary editions of the *Radio Ballads*, made for the BBC by an independent production company, used similar ideals of interviewing as the originals; they were also made using the same format, recorded in similar settings and required the use of a particular kind of interviewee. But over fifty years later, the use of digital software, changes in editorial standards and the requirements of a different network meant that the way in which the interview came to be selected, collected, recorded, edited and shared differed in a range of both comparable and contradictory ways.¹⁰⁰ Accordingly, my own research considers these differences and closely addresses the relationship and dynamic between the interviewer and their ‘informant’, both in the original *Ballads* and once again in contemporary editions. I pay particular attention to how individual performance, persona and techniques were facilitated and experienced by those who have made the programmes.

While Franklin, Harker, Howkins, Long, Linstead, McHugh and Street¹⁰¹ have all provided detailed examinations of the original *Ballads*, they have opted not to collect or record the first-hand accounts from members of either the original or contemporary production team. Expanding on this body of work, this thesis looks to develop our existing awareness, by not only incorporating written, textual and oral archive, but by hearing from those directly involved in all aspects of production – a fresher approach to studying these types of programmes.¹⁰² Speaking with those who edited, produced, conducted and composed for both editions allows us to see how changes, variations and transformations in interviewing may have been accomplished within the feature, in comparison to other shows during this time and with respect to contemporary methods of production.¹⁰³ Although audio is a helpful source of research material, I am also interested in how individuals, not just programmes, have shaped our broadcasting history.

Much of my discussion continues with the main theme of this thesis; to investigate and interpret the ways in which power has been enacted, contested and negotiated within the interview process. And, while ideological interpretations of class are naturally significant to any discussion on the *Ballads*, the cultural positioning of gender is also pertinent. To ask about the ways in which women are situated, positioned and understood by those practitioners who produce mediated content, is to ask fundamental questions about the nature of power relations. In her work on German broadcasting, Lacey has identified how radio is a ‘site on which gender

¹⁰⁰ One of the composers, John Tams (2007) has written about his first-hand experiences about this change.

¹⁰¹ Howkins 2000, Long 2004, Harker 2005, Linstead 2006, Franklin 2009, McHugh 2010 and Street 2012

¹⁰² I carried out research interviews with Peggy Seeger, Vince Hunt, Sara Parker, John Leonard, Annie Grundy and Peter Cox. Email correspondence with Engineer Jeff Link and oral history archive interview recordings with Ewan MacColl & Mary Baker were also transcribed. Written archive was accessed at the Charles Parker Archive in Birmingham.

¹⁰³ My aim is not to repeat previous studies regarding the *Ballad's* and political ideology or the relationship between oral history and radio, or editing techniques, but to highlight the role and use of interview as an important element to the production of these programmes.

relationships were open to contest and redefinition, affirmation and reproduction.’¹⁰⁴ Skoog has agreed, suggesting that research in the field of radio is ideally located to both study and challenge these nuances, tensions and boundaries of gendered experience.

As a public medium situated in the private, radio is perfectly positioned for exploring the changing boundaries between public and private – particularly if we attend to issues such as work versus family, equality between the sexes, and the implications of public policy.¹⁰⁵

In the majority of previous academic work on the *Ballads*, there has been scant attention paid to the configuration and construction of gender roles. While the professional and personal histories of producer Charles Parker and musical lyricist Ewan MacColl have been retold, debated and celebrated by the academic community, the contributions in terms of interviewing by musical director Peggy Seeger¹⁰⁶, and editor Mary Baker, have not received as much consideration. The achievements or restrictions faced by these women have debatably taken place within a decidedly gendered social and cultural system, which has, according to Hilmes, not only ‘guided these women’s lives and practices but the way they have been treated by historians.’¹⁰⁷

Less thought has also been paid to female participation and representation in feature-making and for those working in independent production more generally.¹⁰⁸ Studying the professional and institutional context in which female editors, interviewers, and composers are situated, should be appropriate to any examination of interviewing on the *Ballads*, especially when discussing ideas of marginalisation, inclusion and entitlement. My interest in studying the female experience, both as practitioners and as interviewers within the *Ballads* offers us some of the ways in which notions of equality, identity and meaning are publically and privately contested. This thesis as a whole addresses how everyday decisions are negotiated off-air, within established pre-production/post production processes, and in turn how it they come to appear represented on air. In my view, the radio interview can be seen as a site of cultural production which cultivates and disseminates prevailing and powerful descriptions of women.¹⁰⁹ I therefore offer a revisionist viewpoint, and attempt to move our knowledge of both the interview and of the *Ballads* to the next stage. I also look to shift the focus away from only Charles Parker, and bring awareness to the techniques and strategies employed by other members of the production team. In doing so, I consider the irony in the commonly discussed ideologies and ideals that have been seen to accompany the programmes. While their more democratic positioning of the

¹⁰⁴ Crisell 2006, p.148

¹⁰⁵ Skoog 2009, p.5

¹⁰⁶ Seeger is the last living member of the three. She worked as an interviewer, transcriber and composer on the *Ballads* from 1957-64.

¹⁰⁷ Sterling 2004, p.1551

¹⁰⁸ Biewen & Dilworth 2010 have started to readdress this imbalance.

¹⁰⁹ Also see Karpf 1980

interviewee was certainly an intention, I also show how tightly constructed and manufactured their approach to editing, recording and questioning still was.

Essentially then, this Chapter is addressing the transition between more conventional techniques of interview production during the late 1950's and early 1960's – a time when Britain saw many shifts in political, social and cultural ways of life. Consequently, I explore how other elements may have contributed towards discursive developments; namely the introduction of commercial television, the advancement in filmic editing techniques and the political positioning of individual BBC producers. There were further changes happening in both Britain and overseas during this period which will also be touched upon here; including the proliferation of the vox pop technique; the introduction of ITV and the work of other influential broadcasters. I must admit that it is not my purpose to claim for any direct comparison between television and radio techniques, but there is value in adopting an inter-disciplinary approach and recognising how influences from other types of popular mediated communication may have impacted on the adoption of certain methods of production within the *Radio Ballads*. Traditionally, media historians have shied away from this more integrated approach and opted to consider each medium (press, cinema and broadcasting) in apparent isolation.¹¹⁰ Yet I wish to add merit to the argument that a multi-disciplinary perspective can be helpful when assessing the evolution and cultural establishment of a method of communication like the interview. I cannot accept that the radio interview is an entirely separate entity, and as such I contest that due attention should be paid to other media when assessing the historical development of interview, both here within my own work, and future contributions to this area of research.

In essence, Chapter Four focusses on the following:

1. The different methods of recording the interview (microphone, location etc.)
2. The representation of class, regional accents, youth voices, female experiences and expert interviewees
3. The influence of key figures, filmic techniques and overseas broadcasting on development of the interview

2.5 THE 'PROBLEM' PHONE-IN

More than most other media, radio has always appeared to have the potential to act as an intimate companion or friend to the listener. I now take a closer look in particular at the performance, careers and roles of two hosts, who were architects of the new confessional Independent Local Radio (ILR) telephone interview format from the mid-1970's. Both Anna Raeburn and Phillip Hodson established distinctive conversational

¹¹⁰ See Dahl 1994/2002; Curran 2002 & Nicholas 2012

styles during their on-air careers and their professional personas pioneered the proliferation of companionship, counselling and friendship in an innovative way.

Much of the existing analysis in this area of radio studies has been concerned with the presenter/caller dynamic. A number of existing studies of this nature have centred upon the confrontational host, questioning; opening and closing sequences of political call-in shows, the performance and style of hosts, the authenticity of entitlement, the benefits of Australian talkback radio, and the psychological desires and expectations of callers in the USA.¹¹¹ My own research seeks to build on this small but significant body of work in this field, much of which has relied on conceptual and methodological tools such as Conversation Analysis (CA) or Discourse Analysis framed within fields of sociolinguistics. Atkinson and Moores for instance, drew on Brown & Levinson's research on politeness and public self-image by using CA transcriptions, to demonstrate how Anna Raeburn displayed a sense of sincerity of being 'ordinary' in her *Live and Direct* show on Talk Radio.¹¹² Yet they did not question Raeburn herself and this material was not available from an official archive – rather it was recorded 'live' on cassette by the researchers themselves.¹¹³ This shows the difficulty of researching material that has not been preserved or catalogued by institutions, and draws attention to the problems encountered by those of us who wish to examine archive from commercial stations or independent production companies. So, while I do make use of transcripts from past programmes, these do not present us with a full picture of the backstage decision making process. As such I have conducted research interviews, in the hope that they have the potential to reveal another layer of power dynamics.

A number of previous studies have informed my approach; in particular Katriel and Dori-Hacohen's work on the phone-in format in Israel, both of which draw on Habermas's conceptions of the breakdown between the private and public spheres.¹¹⁴ Similarly, in his investigation of a Norwegian political radio show Ytreburg also looked at how 'backstage' production processes mould the on-air performance and behaviour of participants.¹¹⁵ The team displayed empathetic and supportive techniques to 'prime' the contributors including the use of feedback, compliments and rewards which they believed all contributed to the success of the on-air interaction. Similarly, in her investigation into *The Gerry Ryan Show*, O'Sullivan conducted interviews with executive producers and initiated follow-up conversations with callers over a two week period in the late 1990's¹¹⁶. This type of research succeeded in drawing our attention to the more hidden production sequences of call in shows, finding that control largely lay with the production team, that audience

¹¹¹ See Monaghan 1978, Gumpert & Fish 1991, Hutchby 1996a&b/2001, Thornborrow 2001, Turner 2009, Montgomery 2001, Tolson 2006 & Hutchby 2001

¹¹² Atkinson & Moores 2003

¹¹³ Moores, personal correspondence 2012

¹¹⁴ See Katriel 2004 and Dori-Hacohen 2012. Their work will be discussed further in Chapter Five.

¹¹⁵ Ytreburg 2004

¹¹⁶ O'Sullivan 2005

participation was tightly managed and that a ‘working consensus exists about the meaning of the show and is shared by the production team and callers to the show’ while participants ‘understand the style, the tone and what is appropriate content for the show.’¹¹⁷ This research, (and other such studies¹¹⁸) have implied that callers display similar patterns of routinised and specific talk in order to achieve their goal of appearing on-air and values off-air actions.

Uncovering the often complex relationships between members of a production team adds a further dimension to our current (and limited) understanding of interview history across different genres and different moments in time. I am chiefly interested in the ways that callers are accepted, managed and coached in this ‘advice’ or ‘problem’ style of programming. I add to this small research area by looking closely at gatekeeping devices employed on these live call-in shows, as opposed to political, discussion or ‘shock jock’ led personality programmes. The ‘problem’ radio phone-in was both revolutionary and controversial, offering a marked difference to the widely used confrontational and opinionated call-in shows. We will see how it was also in stark contrast to the BBC’s reluctant adoption of phone-in shows and other types of mediated therapeutic broadcasting that was prevalent during this time.

If we take Crisell’s definition of broadcast interviews, this type of therapeutic format would fit more into the ‘confessional’ approach, which would rely much more on the personal persona of the host, unstructured talk from callers and look to encourage a loyal listenership. In his earlier work Crisell¹¹⁹ identified three main areas of significance that the radio phone in might be used by the researcher. I am concerned with 1) the amalgamation of private/public and 2) the blurring of boundaries between callers and ‘professionals’, yet I will not attempt during this Chapter to investigate his third question, which chiefly concentrates on the overhearing audience.¹²⁰ Instead I take a look at the rise of mediated therapeutic conversation since 1700’s. I contemplate the growth of this type of emotional discourse, assess the responsibility of the regulator and consider the individual responsibilities of members of a production team.

This Chapter unearths the cultural, historical, personal and mediated conditions which allowed this shift in interviewing interaction. It also moves the focus of the thesis away from public service broadcasting, and into the realms of early Independent Local Radio. I combine conventional literature on themes such as technique, validity, localness and mediated interaction, along with my own primary research, which includes the analysis of audio recordings, policies, codes, regulations and minutes from the ILR collection. I accessed files from the Sound and Vision collection at the British Library and carried out research interviews with those who had

¹¹⁷ O’Sullivan 2005, p.727 & 724

¹¹⁸ See Fitzgerald 1999 and Thornborrow 2001

¹¹⁹ Crisell 1994

¹²⁰ See work on mediated therapeutic discourse in Hodges 2001

produced, presented and directed these programmes. This is the first attempt of its kind to evaluate the first-hand experiences of Anna Raeburn, Phillip Hodson, producers and phone operators at Capital and LBC.

In the course of this Chapter, particular attention is paid to the following:

- a) The adoption of a therapeutic format on UK local independent radio
- b) The telephone as a method of interview communication
- c) The gatekeeping devices employed by members of production teams to control live radio output, comprising of the regulator, phone – operator, host and producer

2.6 PRISON RADIO

The places from which broadcasting speaks, and the places in which it is heard and seen, are relevant considerations in the analysis of the communicative contexts that broadcasting establishes as part of the sociable fabric of modern life.

Scannell 1988, p.2

Radio that operates for, or by prisoners, exists primarily within the context of community radio,¹²¹ and my research now moves from a very public form of mainstream mediated interaction, to one which originates from, and broadcasts to, a more concealed (and dare I say it, captive) type of audience. I investigate how inmates are trained to use the interview on National Prison Radio, where content is co-created; presented and constructed by serving offenders, in partnership with a team of industry professionals. This is the first national project of this nature in the world, where radio is made by prisoners, for prisoners, about prisoners. Although, as I will show, all on air content is pre-recorded and must follow strict guidelines, this can be regarded as an opportunity for a marginalised community to interconnect with itself.

I use content recorded for National Prison Radio (NPR) as one of my particular areas of interest. Established five years ago in 2009, NPR now broadcasts on a twenty-four-hour schedule, transmitting via in-cell TV to over one hundred prisons in England and Wales. Programmes are produced for the national network from different prisons – and the schedule allows some stations to ‘opt out’ to hear their own specifically created content, produced only for ‘local’ listeners inside one prison. To recognise methods of interview training and policy I look at how offenders engage with radio as hosts, producers and interviewees. My interest lies in the way they are taught to question, research and record their interviews with both visiting ‘VIP guests’ and the local prison population. Principally, I decipher which factors might inhibit or enable the prisoner from appearing on the airwaves, addressing concepts of citizenship, identity and empowerment. I examine this

¹²¹ According to Anderson 2012

from different perspectives; hearing from ex-offenders and the ‘professional’ producers who help to oversee these projects.

Until now, very little academic research has yet investigated this phenomenon – and even less has been conducted in the UK.¹²² The complex laws that inhibit scholars from gaining access to these institutions may go some way to explain this gap. As Novek and Sanford have themselves noted, this type of setting is ‘challenging to enter, understand, and document.’¹²³ Researchers must also be able to access audio, and at present there is a limited amount of material available. National Prison Radio in the UK (unlike prison radio projects in Australia or the USA) is only permitted to broadcast inside institutions, and is forbidden from being played out to the wider public.¹²⁴

In the past, some ethics committees and researchers have shied away from carrying out studies with potentially vulnerable people and groups, often due to prevailing perceptions that such research is unethical and demanding. But it can be argued that it is unethical *not* to research these often ostracised groups – be they celebrities or prisoners. The exclusion of any elite or marginalised members from examination during the research process further implies that they might also be deprived of the prospective benefits gained from research, as Baron and Spitzer have pointed out.

More often it is simply our one-to-one relationships with “informants” that encourage self-confidence in their cultural knowledge and expression in a society whose media, educational systems, and formal institutions have usually invalidated such traditional abilities.^{125 126}

The possibility of drawing on a valuable range of other documentation also has the potential of revealing important evidence about the formation of these projects, the application of editorial procedures and the enforcement of legal regulations. As well as audio content and research interviews, I draw on educational and training documents, NOM’s editorial procedures, ‘how to’ guides and in-depth interviews with staff members, former prisoners and BBC producers. I attended the Prison Radio Conference and visited the radio studio inside HMP High Down to conduct more detailed research of the broadcasting environment.¹²⁷ I also conducted research interviews with staff, tutors, practitioners and ex-offenders who have all engaged with prison radio in different capacities. Anderson has also been drawn towards the use of observation and in-

¹²² McDermott 2004 & Onions 2005 were two of the first to begin to recognise this phenomenon in the UK. Onions conducted one interview with a prisoner presenter at Radio Feltham for a radio training textbook entitled *Teaching Radio News*. McDermott wrote a 2 page article promoting the potential of prison radio projects like Radio Wanno at HMP Wandsworth.

¹²³ Novek & Sanford 2007, p.92.

¹²⁴ None can be released for broadcast on other networks (like the BBC) without re-editing or approval from NOM’s.

¹²⁵ Baron & Spitzer 2007, p.83

¹²⁶ We will see later how engaging with the radio interview can also encourage a rise in self-confidence, especially for prisoners.

¹²⁷ HMP High Down is a category B prison, located in Surrey.

depth interviews, finding that ‘interviewing was a valuable activity as it provided insights into program producers’ motivations and general attitudes about prison radio.’¹²⁸

As a researcher, I assumed that it might be detrimental to their future careers in the industry if I were to use the real names of the former offenders in this thesis and I was therefore primed to offer them anonymity. But I found that it was problematic to second guess what an interviewee may wish to include or hide from their own testimony. The ex-offenders¹²⁹ I spoke with now have careers in broadcasting, charity work and music. And, since many of them lecture and publish material specifically in relation to their prison experiences, this is a significant and important part of their personal biography and story – and something that should not automatically be decided for them. From her own observations, Yow found that, ‘this suggests the importance of active checking: the narrator knows better than the interviewer what might have an undesired impact in her or his world.’¹³⁰

This Chapter allows me to move away from conventional mainstream media and identifies ways in which the interview has been used on community radio. There are currently over 2,500 community stations running throughout Europe and their role has been discussed in a variety of ways.¹³¹ The main themes debated in the literature concerning community radio have relevance to many of the themes which are of value to this thesis; of marginalised communities, media participation, the public sphere, social change, and localness.¹³² While no investigations have until now looked at the use of the interview in this setting, similar interests do overlap with existing research; of connection, empowerment, isolation, rituals, integration and dailyness.

In particular, I look to highlight the ways in which radio and interviewing has been used in prisons as an educational tool and in an effort to promote inclusion and participation. This is built into Lewis’s assumption that ‘community media can provide opportunities for social groups excluded or misrepresented in the mainstream to come in from the margins and give voice to their cultures and concerns.’¹³³ Since they were established in 1993, there have been a wide variety of prison radio projects in the UK, so this research does not attempt to describe the activities or history of each – rather give an overview and draw on examples from local and national initiatives, which include Feltham Young Offenders Institute, Electric Radio Brixton, National Prison Radio and The Prison Radio Association.

¹²⁸ Anderson 2012, p.6. Anderson’s in-depth case study centred on Brisbane community station 4ZZZ, and specifically on a two hour weekly programme Locked In. Announcers and presenters play requests from family, friends and prisoners themselves via letters, and air documentaries associated to social justice issues.

¹²⁹ Former prisoners were approached with the assistance of PRA staff.

¹³⁰ Yow 1995, p.60.

¹³¹ According to Doliwa 2012

¹³² Especially relevant to this discussion is the work of Starkey 2011 & Atton 2002

¹³³ Lewis 2008, 5-20

While the previous Chapters have positioned the interview in a historical context, I have used this section to highlight the more contemporary history of the technique. Although this has been unusual in other accounts, I adopt Scannell's view that attention should be paid to those often ignored from other publications, those that have tended to concentrate only on mainstream media, focussing on already well documented key figures within specific organisations.

Histories of media tend...to be old fashioned, humanist narratives which focus on the histories of particular media, institutions or of particular historic 'moments.' They ensue synthetic, synoptic accounts.¹³⁴

Prison radio can tell us a great deal about how the interview has been used to serve a particular small-scale community – and it shifts our attention away from the conventional public service or commercial format which has formerly dominated our interest. It also draws our focus to a very exceptional form of broadcasting – where normal taken-for-granted methods of modern communication or interaction (texts, emails, video) or scheduling opportunities (podcasts, listen again) which would be the norm on student radio, hospital radio, internet radio or DAB are not conceivable. By studying the interview in this rare context, we can start to uncover how this type of method of communication might begin to navigate or negotiate with such basic constraints. This in turn may lead us away from the temptation of adopting an overly deterministic perspective when addressing the role that technology has played in the evolution of the interview.

This case study also poses interesting questions about the way authority and control has been negotiated by prisoners, professional producers and organisations. From a research perspective this study looks to further appreciate the changing nature of power relationships in this context, and avoid stereotyping which is often common when writing about prisoners.¹³⁵ Naturally this is an environment that comes with many pre-established hierarchies– but what interests me is how these existing structures might be subverted or re-established by those engaging with the radio interview.

Radio for prisoners more generally involves broadcasting from either side of an institution, involving prisoners, families, activists, broadcasters and former prisoners. Those scholars¹³⁶ that have been drawn to study this kind of radio production have predominantly focussed on the reception of externally produced media content in prisons rather than the creation of audio by the prisoners themselves.¹³⁷ This means that content is accessible for all members of the community, not just delivered to institutions. It should be noted that while I do discuss some international dimensions of the history of prisoner radio, the concern of this

¹³⁴ Scannell in Jenson 2002, p.198

¹³⁵ See Jewkes 2002, who has written about how the media can construct identities in male prisons.

¹³⁶ Bonini and Perrotta (2007) looked at the listening habits of Italian prisoners to externally produced radio, also available to the general public.

¹³⁷ There is a great deal of literature concerning the representation of prisoners through the media (see Jewkes 2002), yet very little which looks at the way they are trained to make content themselves.

Chapter is to look at content which has been recorded *inside* an institution, as opposed to Anderson who has looked at programmes made by prisoners but broadcasted out into the wider community. In the UK, prison radio consists of localised content from individual prisons, individual audio recorded on training courses or output from National Prison Radio, which is only permitted for broadcast inside prisons.¹³⁸

So what can all this tell us about the radio interview? To answer this question, this case study examines the following four areas in more detail:

1. Interview material intended for broadcast inside a local institution
2. Interview and audio scheduled for the national service (National Prison Radio Network)
3. Interview training for students on radio production courses, run expressly for prisoners by staff and tutors
4. Interviews conducted inside prisons or using prisoners for mainstream, publically accessible radio stations (BBC radio)

Finally, in the Conclusion (Chapter Seven) I draw each case together, synthesising the discoveries from these four main examples, and consider how this research has contributed to our understanding of the radio interview, within this small field. I assess the extent to which this work can be seen to have moved forward knowledge, arguments or assumptions, located in both previously examined accounts and new areas of broadcasting. I revisit my research objectives, and reflect upon the main issues raised throughout the thesis. Once again, I take note of the way the interview has been used, how it has evolved and the often complex way that power, authority and control form such a central space as an on-air performance and backstage production. I note the limitations of this type of analysis challenge some existing academic viewpoints and propose new avenues to explore within for future research in this area.

¹³⁸ Special circumstances (award entries, re-packed documentaries for BBC radio etc.) are re-edited to fit with compliance guidelines from NOMS, OFCOM and the MOJ. This is at the discretion of the Governor (or an elected representative of the Governor).

CHAPTER 3. SCRIPTING THE INTERVIEW: DESERT ISLAND DISCS

The first episode of *Desert Island Discs* was presented by Roy Plomley and aired on Thursday, 29th January 1942.¹³⁹ Early editions were thirty minutes in length and normally broadcast somewhere between 6pm and 9pm via the BBC's Forces Programme.¹⁴⁰ Originally commissioned for just six episodes, over seventy years later *Desert Island Discs* continues to be a permanent fixture in schedule of BBC Radio 4. In this Chapter, I explore how its steadfast format calls on the audience, the host and the 'castaway'¹⁴¹ to engage in a fantasy – interviewees are asked to pre-select gramophone records that would accompany them if they were left alone on a fictional and unspecified desert island. This fantasy acts as an instrument that permits the host to ask or make statements about the significance of these records, in order to unearth the private experiences or motivations of a guest. The inclusion of music¹⁴² serves as a centrepiece and grants permission for the interviewer to ask biographical sets of questions about the castaway's childhood, professional and private life. In doing so, it removes the impression that the interview will be a challenging or confrontational investigation – and rather positions the castaway with a tight frame of reference and clear expectations of what will take place.

Before I discuss specific examples of interviewing from *Desert Island Discs*, it is necessary for me to comment on events and policies that came to influence the creation of the series in 1942. I begin by looking at the origins of the interview as a technique of communication, noting the responsibility of the early interviewer, showing the Corporation's somewhat superior attitude towards its early interviewees. I then concentrate on how wartime conditions played a large part in the production of the early interview, and note how censorship procedures impacted on all parties, both on-air and off-air.

Examples from early scripts are used throughout this next section which demonstrate how personal and informal modes of address are used, to both consciously and subtly communicate a sense of authority by the host. Backstage processes are examined to acknowledge the role of the producer, and to understand how this impacted on the interview itself. I highlight how the pre- and post-interview recording process of *Desert Island Discs* was used to cultivate a sense of companionship and familiarity. Until now, there has been very little academic work on *Desert Island Discs*, or attention played to the role of the interview exchange within this long-running format. This Chapter rectifies this disparity, and recognises the value of studying scripted performance.

¹³⁹ The fully scripted interview was pre-recorded two days earlier at the BBC's Maida Vale studios

¹⁴⁰ This was not fixed – often the programme would change TX time and date.

¹⁴¹ I will use this term throughout the thesis. It is the name regularly used by audiences and presenters to describe the contributor

¹⁴² Other audio can also be used such as extracts from comedy performances, speeches etc.

3.1 AN EXCELLENT ADVERTISEMENT FOR OUR WAY OF LIFE

We are talking about a different time, a time when in the BBC there was more of an atmosphere of political deference, more of a sense of broadcasting performance and a greater concern about rehearsal. Were ordinary ‘members of the public’ to be trusted in front of the microphone? Probably not at that time in broadcasting history.¹⁴³

Although there were the occasional exceptions¹⁴⁴, the overall style and content of speech on the BBC at the start of *Desert Island Discs* largely reflected traditional Reithian values and qualities, while endorsing the inclusion of a previously established, often expert interviewee. This tended to echo the more paternalistic nature of other public talk during this time, mirroring the prescribed conventions of sermons, stage performances, lectures and civic deliveries that were all performed at sizeable live gatherings. This traditional type of live public address was customarily witnessed first-hand by audiences, but from 1922, listeners were now offered access to a mediated yet ‘knowable’ national community, made possible for the first time by public service broadcasting.¹⁴⁵ For Peters, these early days of radio reflected ‘the longing for an assured delivery and the desire to touch over long distances.’¹⁴⁶ This era in broadcasting history is often regarded romantically, with a sense of nostalgia, but Peters is also dismissive of this first attempt at radio content during the inter-war period ‘In the 1920’s and 1930’s the radio was undoubtedly a leading source of unmitigated bleat.’¹⁴⁷

Throughout the 1930’s, and before the start of the interview, Talks were typically given by a lone, male contributor. But a necessity to confront often controversial foreign issues, combined with self-regulation at the Corporation and a growing attempt to recognise the needs of the listener, meant that a Talk might be thought to challenge the BBC’s commitment to impartiality. This meant that a new type of format was needed, this time bringing in the voice of the BBC.¹⁴⁸ A chairman was now required, to steer the content away from ‘dangerous ground’ while ‘acting in points of fact as an umpire but not taking part in the discussion itself.’¹⁴⁹ This ensured that opposing viewpoints were given equal time and that there was greater control over the growing number of speakers in a studio.

¹⁴³ E-mail correspondence, Jeff Link, 2013.

¹⁴⁴ Cardiff has provided a valuable account of a number of live, uncensored and unscripted pre-war debates and talks

¹⁴⁵ Moores 2000, p.2

¹⁴⁶ Peters 2001, p.206

¹⁴⁷ Peters 2001, p.206

¹⁴⁸ Cardiff 1980 has written about the early evolution of style of BBC radio talk

¹⁴⁹ Ekersley 1929 quoted in Cardiff 1980, p.36

No recording exists of the first types of interviews, but this type of interaction came to be classified as what we still would recognise today as the discussion and the debate.¹⁵⁰ BBC interviews came to be characterised by tightly scripted dialogue, rehearsed and structured speech, with this professional middle class host, ‘interviewing’ or chairing a discussion with a well-known public figure. Partly due to technical restrictions, the vast majority of talk at this time was scripted and live, so the role of the chairman was seemingly limited.

The fact that a lack of recording technology for much of the inter-war period meant that programmes had to go out live was critical in this regard. Fear of unsuitable utterance, whether inappropriate political statement or simple nervous stammering, meant that programmes were tightly and sometimes unsympathetically scripted.¹⁵¹

There was to be a different name for this interviewing style: the interlocutor technique. This new role ‘involved the injection of critical questions throughout the talk, in order to provide an immediate element of balance.’¹⁵² Even though most interaction was scripted, this introduction of dialogue instead of the widely used Talks monologue brings with it a host of power related issues into the foreground. These interlocutors were made aware of the importance of keeping programmes running to time, of remaining impartial and giving equal time to opposing points of view, ‘The interlocutor acts as we expect an interlocutor to act, not merely asking questions but bringing out other points of view on controversial subjects.’¹⁵³ During these discussions, an impartial BBC chair was to reside over the contrasting opinions of his guests and manoeuvre the encounter towards a satisfactory and safe resolution. As a result there were now editorial decisions to be made which had not been required when planning the Talks. These included a conscious decision about who should have the most airtime, who would speak first, who might ask the questions, who must answer the questions, who would set the tone, when one might be silenced, cut off or excluded.¹⁵⁴ I will later discuss how *Desert Island Discs* could be regarded as a template for these types of scripted interviews during the war, where these types of decisions are entirely constructed by the presenter. Before doing so, I must briefly comment on the idea that the radio interview came to be seen, in some way suited to this idea of resolution.

I suggest that this method of interaction was seen as a means to promote British ideals of cooperation and compromise. There was seemingly a sense within the Corporation that these fresh styles of ‘interviewing’ had somehow suited and promoted a nationalistic feeling of implicit British sensibility. For instance, at a time

¹⁵⁰ Cardiff 1980

¹⁵¹ Russell 2004, p.133

¹⁵² Cardiff, 1980, p.38

¹⁵³ Controller of Programmes to North Region Director, 4th March 1938, cited in Cardiff 1980, p.39

¹⁵⁴ Also see Gibian 1997

when the army was sent to support US forces in the Korean War, the BBC Handbook proclaimed that such interviews could be regarded as an ‘excellent advertisement for our way of life.’¹⁵⁵

Indeed, the very technique of a discussion, the reasonable airing of different views and their resolution when common ground can be reached, is just that habit of compromise for which the British are famous, or, according to those of a more dogmatic tempter, infamous.¹⁵⁶

Likewise, Moran has recognised the ways in which early contributors who featured on radio programmes were given the task of sharing ‘their intellectual resources to come up with a collective solution to any problem.’¹⁵⁷ These selected and elite participants ‘have accustomed us to the idea of an intellectual fire brigade ready to solve all problems and put all controversies in perspective; its members are commonly referred to as “the experts.”’¹⁵⁸ There is evidence then, that the early discussion or debate interview was used as a way of peacefully protecting a balanced, cohesive and fair exchange, and one that ensured a respectful conclusion.

This format ensured that invited guests were able to express an opinion, (and moreover a potentially controversial opinion) without challenging the BBC’s remit of objectivity, as well as a way of ensuring that the knowledgeable guest should be understandable to the listening public at home, by acting as an intermediary figure, joining together the expert, the institution and the listener.¹⁵⁹ The BBC believed any potential problems with contributors could be avoided by practice through rehearsal and a chairman (there was no mention of course, of a chairwoman) to guide the flow of the argument – in order to reach a suitable conclusion. A memo from R.E Keen to the Chief Assistant of Talks in 15th December 1950 outlined the Corporation’s approach to discussion formats and showed that even after the war the script was seen as necessary.

A script will generally be needed for a discussion: - (a) Where it is important to cover a certain amount of ground – or to reach a definite conclusion. b) With inexperienced speakers.

A preliminary discussion would ideally be taken down by stenographers or telediphone and, following an edit by producers, a final script might mirror the speaker’s own manner of speaking. There was a common opinion in the BBC that these invited ‘subjects’ (or guests) who delivered Talks or participated in discussions, were ‘incapable of being anything more than reading aloud.’¹⁶⁰ This fear meant that contributors were to be given

¹⁵⁵ BBC Handbook 1951, p.24

¹⁵⁶ William Ash, BBC Handbook 1951, p.24

¹⁵⁷ Moran 2011, p.9

¹⁵⁸ Taken from *The Times*, 29 November 1954. Cited in Moran 2011

¹⁵⁹ See Moran 2011, who discusses the role of the expert

¹⁶⁰ BBC WAC. R51-406 Talks. Talks Policy Techniques of Talk Production, 1942-1954. Comment from Mr Gordon, who chaired a meeting with producers responding to the General Advisory Committee Document No. 132. 19th December 1950.

direction and guidance before being approved to appear on air, predominantly to protect the BBC from those with poor presentation skills and those who may overrun the time-slot. Scripting would ensure that the host, the producer (and ultimately the BBC) would hold complete authority over all the process of recording; from selecting who would appear, to deciding where they would be recorded, to selecting what was being said, and the manner in which it was to be performed. This also meant that an extra intermediary was required to communicate an interviewees own story. As a contributor this must have proved frustrating or reassuring. Discomfort in the knowledge that your own words are not deemed sufficient to communicate your own lived experience, yet reassuring to know precisely what to say and when.

Badly ordered argument...false or misleading argument...impolite statements...are all ironed out of the scripted talk.¹⁶¹

Widening its quest to advance the intellectual and cultural horizons of its audience, the Corporation took it upon itself to train its guests on how successful interviews *should* sound. BBC Talks Policy Papers reveal that they believed they should continue to ‘persist in the idea of “educating” people to be good broadcasters’¹⁶², despite the fact they were well known public figures and not directly employed by the BBC. This meant that any present and future interviewees were given the chance to understand what kind of speech was expected of them, before they ever had a chance of determining it themselves. The presentation style of an interviewee was judged as crucial to achieving successful outcomes in both Talks and discussions.¹⁶³

Broadcasters quickly recognised the risk of alienating the affections of listeners and invented diverse strategies to replace what has apparently been taken away: the presence of fellow listeners, a conversational, dynamic and personal tone.¹⁶⁴

The Corporation was concerned not only with what interviewees might say, but how they would say it. Producers like Peggy Barker remarked that the ‘importance of a good performance’ must not be forgotten and called for guests to show ‘sincerity and a really burning desire to communicate ideas and experiences.’¹⁶⁵ Guests were strongly directed in how they should speak, and what they should say and it was hoped that this kind of correct talk would be of benefit to the public figures themselves, the BBC and the listener. In essence, all parties must learn how to speak appropriately if they were to be rewarded the privilege of participating on air.

¹⁶¹ BBC WAC. R51-406 Talks. Talks Policy Techniques of Talk Production, 1942-1954. Elisabeth Rowley, one of the twelve producers who had sent comments responding to the extract from the General Advisory Committee Document No. 132. 19th December 1950. Rowley later helped to establish the Today programme in 1957.

¹⁶² BBC WAC. R51-406 Talks. Talks Policy Techniques of Talk Production, 1942-1954. Notes from Executive Controllers Conference 36, dated 6.9.44 concerning the topic ‘Public Figures as Broadcasters’

¹⁶³ Talks Director Hilda Matherson had long realised that the formal tone of its speech content alienated some its listeners and that steps must be taken to ensure that audiences were not put off by its overly stiff manner.

¹⁶⁴ Peters 2001, p.214

¹⁶⁵ BBC WAC. R51-406 Talks. Talks Policy Techniques of Talk Production, 1942-1954

Scripting content would ensure that speech could be performed in a cohesive and concise way. Since few speakers were able to stick to the imposed time limits, scripting talk on radio is a means establishing complete control over the timing of speech, for ‘there was no such thing as off the cuff radio.’¹⁶⁶ A successful script should resemble direct speech as much as possible, ‘if he takes his job seriously, he will scrutinise each sentence, asking whether he would have said it like that and if not, how.’¹⁶⁷ The BBC offered producers instructions on how to write, deliver and produce these scripts in order to sound as natural as possible. This meant that the skill, expertise and experience of the Talks Producer were considered to be paramount; not only to find appropriate speakers or to compose scripts, but to encourage the contributor to ‘acquire the art of the spoken word.’¹⁶⁸

It is the skilful producer who ensures that performance is achieved in spite of or in the absence of a highly developed personality, and who distils the experience and personality of individuals who have little or no capacity for literary expression.¹⁶⁹

The BBC recognised the perceived challenge of selecting suitable speakers for its Talks and discussions, who had ‘sufficient personality to interest the public’ but would not risk ‘rubbish and inaccuracy’ at the same time.¹⁷⁰ BBC Producers during this time believed that unscripted talk would be most suited to two types of classes of speaker; the intelligent yet illiterate or the extremely experienced broadcaster. A sense of paranoia existed within the Corporation at this time, which had dated back to the time before the BBC could pre-record speech content.

*“there was a famous case ... where a script was written by a trade union worker for live broadcast, and when he went on air he found that the producers had blue pencilled a lot of his script, and so he went on with his script and said, “I’ve been so controlled here by the BBC that I’m not going to say that. I’m going to say this,” and then spoke spontaneously. Basically, it’s all about control. It’s about, “We are the broadcaster, and we’re going to script this because we want control over our output”*¹⁷¹

Control here seemed to be paramount. Since the majority of speech output before 1940 was live, it was deemed to be far safer to trust its trained broadcasters to appear on air, than risk the possibility of tempting the inclusion of controversial material by untrained members of the public or worse, the lower classes. Yet even the trained and ‘professional’ experienced broadcasters needed to be made aware that their words might not only risk the reputation of the Corporation, but had to avoid receiving criticism of the government during

¹⁶⁶ Telephone Interview, Bob Symes, 2014.

¹⁶⁷ BBC WAC. R51-406 Talks. Talks Policy Techniques of Talk Production, 1942-1954

¹⁶⁸ BBC WAC. R51-406 Talks. Talks Policy Techniques of Talk Production, 1942-1954

¹⁶⁹ BBC WAC. R51-406 Talks. Talks Policy Techniques of Talk Production, 1942-1954

¹⁷⁰ BBC Handbook 1931, p.214

¹⁷¹ Interview, Sean Street, Bournemouth, 2013. See Franklin 2009 for further details concerning this particular case.

wartime.

3.2 CENSORSHIP: BROADCASTS AS THE SELF-EXPRESSION OF A NATION

In 1916 filmed ‘interviews’ with UK public figures were used in order to promote the war effort. Made by film producer Cecil Hepworth, contributors consisted of recognisable figures like Lloyd George, Herbert Asquith and Bonar Law, who were invited to share their (positive) comments about Britain’s ‘success’ in the First World War. Since this was the era of silent films, there was no on screen interviewer, and answers were mimed to camera, and their words were cut later with intertitles, “Great as the British infantry were in the days of Wellington and Napoleon, they have never been greater than now... I feel now confident that victory is assured to us.”¹⁷² It was here that some of the first recorded interviews are used to support national interests, with the media ‘serving as the willing vehicles for such pronouncements.’¹⁷³

Throughout the Second World War, the British government formulated censorship policies about radio content,¹⁷⁴ in order to minimise risk, to cultivate a positive view of the British at war and to promote an overall sense of stability.¹⁷⁵ As we will see later, full scripts for the recording of *Desert Island Discs* would have to be submitted for approval before recording could take place¹⁷⁶ and the host and castaway would then ‘play out’ the interview together in a studio. Plomley would be responsible for not only his own part, but would curate the tone, words and delivery of each castaway. Producers and broadcasters felt a responsibility (and no doubt, a pressure) to uphold an ideal of safe and controlled broadcasting, in order to guard against a loose-lipped live guest or BBC correspondent who might say or do something to inadvertently harm the interests of the nation. The general public, professional broadcasters and invited guests could not be relied on to speak freely on air.

In war, the commission takes on new meaning. Broadcasts as the self-expression of a nation in its will to victory; broadcasts as a message to our friends overseas and as a weapon against our enemies – these are the striking force of radio in time of war.¹⁷⁷

In the year before the start of *Desert Island Discs*, I wish to emphasise how two programmes, *The Brains Trust* (1941) and *Answering You* (1942) had challenged this rigid and scripted approach towards programme

¹⁷² Lloyd George’s words are taken from the Hepworth Cinema Interviews, courtesy of National Screen and Sound Archive of Wales. Cited by McKernan 2014 in a blog post for The British Library

¹⁷³ McKernan 2014, British Library. Blog post

¹⁷⁴ See Goodwin 2005, for his detailed paper on the role of Government intervention on BBC editorial policy

¹⁷⁵ Dupont 1999

¹⁷⁶ See Appendix 3 for an example script of Pat Kirkwood’s appearance in 1942.

¹⁷⁷ BBC Handbook 1942, p.6

making.¹⁷⁸ Members of the public were invited to put their enquiries to an expert panel of men and women who were tasked to provide spontaneous answers to listener's queries in *The Brains Trust*. Originally named *Any Questions*,¹⁷⁹ the *Brains Trust* exemplified the ways in which the host was a 'Question Master' and expected to link together technical talk of the expert in an accessible way for the general public.¹⁸⁰ As Scannell has shown, this was the very first, live unscripted discussion, where the panel would have no prior knowledge of their forthcoming questions.¹⁸¹ Skoog has also noted that programmes like *Men Talking* (1937), *How Are We Doing?* (1948) and *Woman's Hour* (1946), had also begun to use spontaneous speech, and drew attention to issues of everyday domestic life.¹⁸²

B.B.C. Steps Out!' At last the B.B.C. breaks away from the tepid technique of prepared scripts, censored speeches, and opinions so nicely balanced that they can be guaranteed to offend no one. A new series called "How Are We Doing?" deals with matters of national interest on the basis of free speech[...] It is a bold and imaginative conception and gives us live broadcasting.¹⁸³

Murphy points out that *Men Talking* 'was a bold departure for the BBC; although punctiliously produced there was an element of spontaneity, the chairman and three guests unscripted and unrehearsed',¹⁸⁴ yet as Chignell reminds us, the topics were generally safe, while contributors were typically selected on their ability to communicate clearly.¹⁸⁵ Meanwhile, transatlantic talk show *Answering You* deliberately made use of unscripted speech between contributors in both New York and London. Co-produced by the BBC, and made alongside the Mutual Broadcasting System, this show was a deliberate attempt to win over US support to the British war effort.¹⁸⁶ *Answering You* remained intentionally unscripted in order to promote a conversational, spontaneous feel and attract the sympathy of the American listener. This apparent natural, lively format was naturally just an illusion, its spontaneous feel was fundamentally artificial and an intentional form of propaganda. While the recording of the show was unscripted, the final product was always verified for any information which could prove detrimental to the war effort.¹⁸⁷

¹⁷⁸ *Answering You* was broadcast on the Forces programme, but had started a year earlier on the North American Service.

¹⁷⁹ BBC Handbook 1942, p.72

¹⁸⁰ Moran 2011, p.9

¹⁸¹ Scannell, 2003

¹⁸² Skoog 2009, p.6. *How Are We Doing?* was a three-part series on the BBC Home Service, in which each programme consisted of a 'jury' (ten men and two housewives) who were chosen to represent the public.

¹⁸³ Skoog 2009, p. 6. From 27 October, BBC WAC Press Cuttings Talks 1947-1948 P310 3B.

¹⁸⁴ Murphy 2014, p.10

¹⁸⁵ Chignell 2004

¹⁸⁶ See Duponts, 1999 & Cull 1995 for more discussion on censorship policies and the BBC.

¹⁸⁷ Audio could be edited after it was typed, transcribed and checked by BBC's Telediphone Unit.

At the start of the Second World War in 1939, news content was considered to be of particular importance. Eyewitness impressions from BBC correspondents (or ‘professional observers’) like Richard Dimbleby, Edward Ward, Bruce Anderson and Chester Wilmot had provided first-hand accounts of home and foreign activities to listeners at home. Audiences were able to hear the sounds of war via these eyewitness reports or observations, which often resembled sporting commentary to more modern ears.¹⁸⁸ Scripting was often used to contextualise first-hand stories via the BBC’s ‘*News Talks*’ more than ever, in order to further elaborate, explain and educate outside bulletins in a more ‘human and leisurely way.’¹⁸⁹ Even following the war, there remained a feeling of uncertainty (mentioned in the BBC Handbook) about featuring lighter output from those who believed that broadcasting this type of entertainment was inappropriate at such times of conflict.¹⁹⁰ Despite these concerns, there was a movement during the war towards the inclusion of variety shows, which had grown in popularity with audiences eager to be entertained.¹⁹¹ A format comprising of music and light-hearted talk (like *Desert Island Discs*) would fit well into this new demand for entertaining output.

In September 1941, just four months before *Desert Island Discs* began, its creator Roy Plomley, (contracted at this time to the Drama Department) proposed that a new programme should be commissioned, tentatively entitled *Soldiers Choice* or *Airman’s Choice* but eventually named *Forces Choice*. In his pitch, Plomley referred to a previous, pre-war ‘successful West of England series’ called *Personal Choice*, where the format appears to be very similar to that of *Desert Island Discs*, and proposed that ‘individual members of the public presented gramophone records of their own choosing.’¹⁹² Plomley recommended that this would be a fifteen or thirty minute programme, involving members of the armed forces selecting records which were significant to them and ‘provide a contrast to the voices of announcers.’¹⁹³ Network announcers, (the very voices of the BBC establishment) had been criticised during this time for being overly formal and aloof. BBC policy required that they must remain anonymous, which was intended to create a particular style, (unlike in the US), which was not dependent on the personality of its speakers. Instead the tone would mark the BBC as a singular identifiable voice, a collective personality. This was a device intended, according to Kumar, to ‘establish its claim to a special moral and cultural authoritiveness.’¹⁹⁴ Programmes like *Two-Way Family Favourites*¹⁹⁵ (1945), *Housewives Choice* (1946), *Sincerely Yours* (1941) and *Desert Island Discs* would be among those programmes that attempted to break with the rigidity of hearing an anonymous, formal

¹⁸⁸ *Boy, Oh Boy, He’s Going Down*, Archive on 4, January 2000 [radio programme]. BBC Radio 4.

¹⁸⁹ BBC Handbook 1942, p.57

¹⁹⁰ BBC Handbook 1946

¹⁹¹ Hilmes 2003

¹⁹² There is no further mention of this in the archives, although this presumably was broadcast on the BBC’s Regional Programme, which disbanded at the start of the Second World War. The new Home Service and Forces Programme had replaced the National and Regional services and needed to attract and maintain the interest of their audiences.

¹⁹³ WAC Special Collections. Plomley, Roy. Artists 1935-1941. File 1. Roy Plomley, writing to the BBC on 14th August 1941.

¹⁹⁴ Kumar 1975 p.76

¹⁹⁵ This was originally called Forces Choices

announcer, and instead offer a morale boost and connection with separated family members through musical choice and personal experience. Significantly, *Forces Choice* and *Forces' Favourites* reflected a template where music would be played based on the requests of its listeners or interviewees, rather than the BBC or the producer.¹⁹⁶

3.3 COCONUTS, SUN, SEA & SAND: ESCAPISM, NOSTALGIA & THE ISLAND

Desert Island Discs began broadcasting in January 1942, now infamously known to have been dreamt up by Roy Plomley one night and quickly commissioned by Leslie Perowne, the BBC's then Head of Popular Record Programmes¹⁹⁷. This time however, its selected guests would not be the general public or the military, but well-known 'stars' of the day.

*This is, of course, very much on the lines of the old "I know what I like" series – except that the choice is limited to ten records and the artists should not be confined only to B.B.C. staff. For example, dance-band leaders, actors, members of the Brains Trust, film-stars, writers, child prodigies, ballet dancers and all sorts of people could be included*¹⁹⁸

In each episode of *Desert Island Discs* all parties would be invited to indulge upon a shared cultural memory, based on this universal myth of life on an unidentified, intangible deserted island. As a setting, the use of a desert island had proved to be a popular narrative world for authors before the 1940's (and later in film and television) but this was one of the first instances that the model was adapted to radio.¹⁹⁹ This playful concept of finding oneself alone on a deserted island would have proved particularly enticing for listeners and tells us something about the collective cultural values, fears and tensions of Britain during this time. The format transcends listeners, contributors and its hosts far from civilisation, and away from the harsher daily realities of evacuations, blackouts or rations in wartime. Instead, it urges us to embrace a utopian environment, a warm, isolated and relatively safe space in which we are surrounded by our favourite choices of music, played out in an uninhibited space surrounded by sunshine and sea. The concept compels a sense of escapism and self-reflection, and promotes the positioning of the contributor and the listener as a lone protagonist – unbound by the constraints or freedoms of daily life and forced to defy nature. It allows for both participants and audiences to confront various contradictions; between the self and the other, loneliness and companionship, survival and death - all which would have been especially appropriate for soldiers and the

¹⁹⁶ Doctor 2013

¹⁹⁷ Please refer to Appendix 5

¹⁹⁸ BBC WAC. WAC Plomley, Roy. Artists 1935-1941. File 1. Roy Plomley, writing in a letter to Leslie Perowne. Dated 3rd Nov 1941.

¹⁹⁹ Also find examples in *Robinson Crusoe*, *Gulliver's Travels*, *The Mysterious Island*, *Coral Island*, *The Mysterious Island*, *The Tempest*, *The Odyssey*, *Utopia*, *Thule*, *The Island of Dr Moreau*, *The Man Who Loved Islands*, *Lost*, *Lord of the Flies*, *Survivor*, & *Cast Away*. Also see Samson's forthcoming thesis which looks at mediated representations of the desert island.

public, who would have regularly tuned into the Forces Programme. It also called for an escape from a very real threat of invasion by the potentially threatening ‘other.’ As Beer has noted, this is a conscious decision, ‘The decision to call an island uninhabited is always a cultural choice. It marks out what forms of life are felt as kin by the dominant speaker; it sweeps aside all other classes of life.’²⁰⁰

Unlike other more contemporary uses of the concept, *Desert Island Discs* centred upon the preparation of the castaways forthcoming journey *to* an island – rather than positioning them on it and already alone. This allows for listeners to relate further with the castaway, who shares and inhabits a more familiar ground before being sent off to this exotic unknown location. We are presented with an image of the abstract destination as an idealised sanctuary.

Mills: *From what you’ve told me about this island of yours, there’s not very much going on.*

Plomley: *Frankly, very little.*

Mills: *With only coconuts, sun, sea and sand in the present, I think the best thing to do would be to retreat into the past – and that’s what I had in mind while I’ve been mulling over this business of which records I’d take with me.*²⁰¹

All parties are compelled to ‘buy in’ to this imagined journey towards this fictional island, and fully engage with it during the interview exchange. The tight format also supports Spigel’s explanations concerning the rise of electrical communications, which had placed social encounters into ‘safe, familiar and predictable contexts.’²⁰²

Karpf has recently noted about the importance of repeated catchphrases used in comedy programmes during the war, which looked to bind together the listener and the radio performer. Although *Desert Island Discs* was not attempting to create the same level of connection, we could suggest that its strict formula, its stable use of gentle theme tune and the familiar (often dry) toned voice of Roy Plomley also looked to create, in its own way, a comfort to its audience. The rigid requirements of the series meant that all content, whether scripted or unscripted, must be built around these items, acting as a reassuring experience for regular listeners. And, at a time where the nation was experiencing a sense of collective fear, comic motifs acted as a:

²⁰⁰ Beer 2003, p. 30

²⁰¹ Extract of *Desert Island Discs*, featuring John Mills and Roy Plomley. The episode originally aired on Tuesday 11th December 1951. 6.20-7pm.

²⁰² Cited in Auslander 1999, p.17

...national containing resource, into which fears could be projected, modified if not transformed through humour and then interjected back into daily discourse shorn of some of their terror.²⁰³

There was (and there still is) an expectation that all talk on the programme should be positioned around the records. This type of imagined location compels the audience to envisage the records that they might select if they were invited on the show.

*“He (Plomley) obviously wanted the programme to elicit personal information, and he thought the music was going to elicit that. He didn’t simply want a superficial nice skate through someone’s record collection. He made it very clear that he thought the music was a line to a soul that would tell them, the audience, something meaningful about that castaway.”*²⁰⁴

Of course, these early scripted interviews would not afford that type of flexibility, but during the later unscripted exchanges (post 1954) the use of music as such a central component within the interview format was a way of granting a castaway a degree of choice in deciding *how* to talk about a more private or challenging time in their life. Leanne Buckle worked as a senior producer on *Desert Island Discs* from 2003-2012:

*“If there is a difficult moment in someone’s life or something emotional that they know will be in the programme but may want to find a way of limiting the conversation about it, having a piece of music tied to that event was a way of incorporating it without a lot of (what might appear to be intrusive questions) and the introductions give the castaway a lot of freedom about the words they use (i.e. they’re not responding to a specific question, just invited to talk about the next piece of music).”*²⁰⁵

The BBC’s Handbook proclaimed in 1947 that ‘radio has always been a medium well suited to the nostalgic’ and *Desert Island Discs* endorsed this method of engaging with private and public memory.²⁰⁶ *Desert Island Discs* tapped into a national fixation with celebrity culture, evoking notions of sentimentality, memory and escapism.

Baade has noted how ‘nostalgic icon’ Vera Lynn had also delivered an emotive and sympathetic performance during her 1940’s BBC wartime broadcasts on *Sincerely Yours*. With her reassuring and distinctive voice, Vera Lynn had portrayed herself as the No 1 forces sweetheart, and together with a humble working class spirit, she was able to connect with themes that were reportedly of importance to her listeners; a shared sense of longing for distant loved-ones, remembering a safe past community spirit and hope for a secure future. For

²⁰³ Karpf 2013, p. 66

²⁰⁴ Interview, Leanne Buckle, London 2014

²⁰⁵ Interview, Leanne Buckle, London 2014

²⁰⁶ BBC Handbook, 1947

Baade, Vera Lynn's success was based upon this ethos, where her 'voice, repertory, and persona pointed to an idealized past existing beyond the war and opened a utopian space beyond it to imagine a better post-war society.'²⁰⁷ We can hear how Lynn attempted to connect herself with her listeners using music and letters.

*This letter of mine is getting to be a sort of rendezvous, where husbands and wives torn apart by war can be bought together by music. On the wings of these melodies, the sentiments go from me to both of you, from you to her. Sincerely yours, Vera Lynn.*²⁰⁸

Influenced by circumstances of economic insecurity and conflict, Roy Plomley and Vera Lynn remained reassuringly familiar – and can be considered as trustworthy and credible when they attempt to make sense of the world for the listener. Scannell has also identified how new developments in microphone technology during this time meant that singers like Lynn could initiate a more sincere and intimate connection with her listeners.²⁰⁹ For Montgomery meanwhile, this type of format promotes 'egalitarianism, informality, intimacy, greater possibilities for participation'²¹⁰ in an attempt to communicate desirable values into the public sphere – although as we will see, this is a largely manufactured endeavour intended to unite a listener, an institution and an interviewee. Baade's research also lends support to Chignell and Devlin's assertion that live radio has been characterised by the 'creation and performances of listener friendly personas since the 1930's.'²¹¹

Baade has drawn attention to the way that these early BBC broadcasts intentionally used Vera Lynn's professional persona to connect with audiences - and the same could be said for both the host and the castaway on *Desert Island Discs*. The stable and predictable structure of each episode seemingly encourages the castaway to reflect on past personal meanings, conceivably in an attempt to establish a profound and entertaining understanding of their professional or personal lives. This type of scripted interview talk frequently stimulated a sense of collective cultural belonging and an idealised return to the past. If we take Margaret Lockwood's first appearance as a castaway in 1951, we can see how her talk typifies the scripted performance of its guests. Margaret Lockwood's memories are presented in a romanticised and patriotic way as she introduces her first musical choice, the *Eton Boating Song*. The track is faded up to accompany the end of her speech, which centres on a nostalgic sense of the past.

...it [the Eton Boating Song] always conjures up for me a very pleasant English scene. The River Thames in mid-summer, the days before petrol launches. Lovely ladies and parasols

²⁰⁷ Baade 2012, p.46

²⁰⁸ Extract from *Sincerely Yours* 1941

²⁰⁹ Scannell 1996

²¹⁰ Montgomery 2001, p.398

²¹¹ Chignell & Devlin 2006, p.75

*and flowing white gowns. Willow trees and whiskery gentlemen in straw hats and blazers. All the charm of the three men in a boat period.*²¹²

Actresses like Margaret Lockwood come well equipped to produce clear and polished performances. They are able to read convincingly, adding in subtle speech nuances like pauses, changes in tone and stresses. After all, a clear and concise guest succeeds in maintaining the attention of the listening public, while a big name works to attract the audiences' initial attention to the show in the first place.²¹³

3.4 RETREATING INTO THE PAST: THE CELEBRITY CASTAWAY

Even though the scripted content of these first 204 episodes have limited the amount of personal expression permissible by the castaway, it could be proposed that this type of interview format was one of the first attempts of radio that foregrounded an exploration of the 'politics of the personal' within the public sphere.²¹⁴ It also raises questions about our cultures fascination and representation of the celebrity interviewee. On the one hand we are invited to overhear privileged information about our castaways, yet on the other hand the format allows us to imagine the celebrity adrift, away from our lived reality, exiled on a desert island. This celebration of individuality in programmes like *Desert Island Discs* actively promotes a sense of the celebrity's achievement, revelation and transformation, often from a time before they were famous. According to Marshall, those who hold celebrity status are the very embodiment of a collective power allocated to an invested person by the public. In this case, the castaway is presented as special and separate from us (banished away) yet conversely as ordinary - through details of their past challenges or triumphs. McMullen reminds us how contemporary celebrity interviewees intentionally portray themselves as modest, normal or similar to the public. By calculatedly 'doing modesty', humbleness and presenting themselves as 'not extraordinary' the contributors worked hard to decrease the distance between the celebrity and the 'ordinary folk' who listened.²¹⁵ In Chapter Four and Five, I further explore the way that so called 'ordinary' experience comes to be a valuable commodity in the *Radio Ballads*, the phone-interview, and more widely by the media.

Roy Plomley always maintained that the purpose of the interview was to provide an extra dimension to our existing knowledge of a public person. He contested that we (the listeners) have a starting block where certain things are known, whereas 'as with the case with a programme featuring plain Mr Brown, of Balham – then

²¹² Margert Lockwood, *Desert Island Discs*, originally broadcast on 25th April 1951.

²¹³ De Jouvenel 1961

²¹⁴ Marshall in Allan 2005 p.28

²¹⁵ McMullen 2005, p.567

we have nothing on which to superimpose the extra dimension.’²¹⁶ Seventy years later, the current host Kirsty Young is in agreement, stating that ‘*Desert Island Discs* is unashamedly a celebration of achievement – the people who come on there are there because they matter.’²¹⁷ This insinuates that the wider general public are still not deemed to ‘matter’ enough to warrant a place on the programme.

Since its start, *Desert Island Discs* has faced pressure to justify the continued exclusion plain Mr Brown of Balham. As de Jovenel has observed²¹⁸, there is a distinct conflict between the idealism of individual free speech, which was starting to be encouraged during this time, and the distinct lack of opportunity to express this democratic principles on an equal level with others. Similar to other formats which have invited and encouraged audience participation, (via editors letters, vox pops, phone-in shows, or the radio feature which are discussed in later Chapters) production teams have deliberately enforced selection policies and justifications about who is included or excluded.²¹⁹

At the start of each episode, the signature theme tune *By the Sleepy Lagoon* accompanies an opening announcement by a formal BBC announcer, whose job it is to set the scene, introducing the host, who speaks first to the listening public. The decision to address the unseen listener before the studio guest is still heard today, and can be regarded as an attempt to draw in listeners who may not have heard of the guest, to disclose the intention of the format, and to include the audience in the encounter. Naming the castaway so early on and outlining their brief biography works to justify their inclusion on the programme, it signals that their credentials are worthy of on air appearances and sets the scene for the forthcoming encounter.

*“Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. On our desert island this evening is an exceedingly popular actor – popular in both the theatre and on the screen, where his performances have twice won him the National Film Award. It’s John Mills.”*²²⁰

In these early scripted editions, guests had less input into the management and maintenance of their public image, but the programme acted as a means of promoting their professional accomplishments. At the end of each episode a link was read out by Roy Plomley or the announcer: “*Jack Hilbert is now appearing in “The White Sheep of the Family” at the Piccadilly Theatre, London.*”²²¹ Not only did this create a professional motivation for guests to appear on the show, it further legitimated their celebrity status. *Desert Island Discs* is

²¹⁶ Plomley 1980, p.201

²¹⁷ Magee 2012, p.vii

²¹⁸ In his writings on ‘The Chairman’s Problem’ in 1961

²¹⁹ Littler recently presented her unpublished paper entitled ‘Castaways and celebrity culture’ at the ‘*Desert Island Discs* and the discographic self’ conference (British Academy, 5 November 2013) which explored the celebrity castaway in more detail.

²²⁰ Broadcast on Tuesday, December 11th 1951, 6.20-7pm

²²¹ Taken from BBC WAC: Files S133/18/9 116-127

scripted in a way which preserves a familiar persona, and continues to shape public awareness of them as a performer.²²² This scripted extract is from the first episode in 1942²²³ and was written by Roy Plomley.

Roy: That was your last one, Vic.

KNOCK ON DOOR.

Roy: Yes?

OPEN DOOR

Voice: Telegram for Mr. Vic. Oliver

Roy: Thanks. Do you want to open it, Vic? It might be urgent.

Vic: I daren't open it. I'm expecting bad news.

Roy: I'm sorry to hear that.

Vic: Yes. My goldfish isn't at all well. Open it for me, Roy, will you.

Roy: Surely. (OPENS TELEGRAM) It's from Bebe Daniels and Ben Lyron.

Vic: Is it? I didn't know they could write. What do they say?

Roy: It says: DEAR VIC, HAVE JUST BEEN LISTENING TO YOU ON A DESERT ISLAND. WISH IT WERE TRUE. BEBE AND BEN.

This excerpt contains a reference to the castaway's broadcasting career – which builds upon his character and professional identity by alluding to his on air association with his colleagues from the popular BBC radio series *Hi Gang! High Gang!* This was a light-hearted scripted comedy series which ran from 1940-1949, where Vic Oliver performed alongside both Bebe Daniele and Ben Lyron. This, together with the courteous content of *Desert Island Discs*, supports Marshall's suggestion that mediated communication, and in this case, the radio interview, consciously promoted this non-threatening, flattering interpretation of the 'idiosyncratic self' since the 1920's.²²⁴

²²² Also see Thomas 2007

²²³ Vic Oliver, castaway on Thursday 29th January 1942

²²⁴ Marshall in Allen 2005 p.25

3.5 MANY THANKS FOR BEING SO HELPFUL, ALSO COCKTAILS!

“I don’t think I had any idea about what an institution I was with. I just liked Plomley; I thought he was a very likeable man”

Anna Raeburn 2012²²⁵

Author and Broadcaster Anna Raeburn was reflecting here on her memories of being asked to be a castaway on *Desert Island Discs* in 1978. Any host of *Desert Island Discs* would need to navigate a good working relationship with the ‘talent’ whilst all the while having to maintain the interests of the BBC and attract the approval of the listening public. Roy Plomley was awarded the responsibility of writing the scripts, selecting records, contacting the ‘artist’ and conducting research. He would be tasked with the power of choosing his guests, of composing their words and for the overall tone and shape of the programme. It was his responsibility to initiate the topics worthy of discussion, control the agenda, lead the dialogue, and have the first and last word.

*Roy: Good-night, Vic. You see! That’s what you get for being ship-wrecked on a desert island*²²⁶

Radio hosts, and particularly those who are associated with a particular type of programme, bring with them a sense of expectation regarding their individual distinct interviewing style. Their on-air personalities are considered a brand which they use to both maintain listener loyalty, adhere to the expectations of the network and genre, provide a secure sense of expectation to their interviewees and create a sense of familiarity and consistency to the programme. The importance of the host is central to the success of the programme, as Ytreburg has found ‘the host in many ways *is* the format’ for they embody ‘the formats’ norms of performance and interaction.²²⁷ Bonner has reflected upon the way the hosts on air identity might affect any interaction with their interviews, a point which is especially relevant for hosts of long-running formats like *Desert Island Discs*, or the radio phone in, as we will later find.

The power of his persona, in which a certain rigidity is evident, makes it difficult to regard him as actually showing a range of presenting skills. Together with his social and industrial prominence, it also makes it difficult for him to always play second fiddle to his guests, or to place himself as the viewer’s surrogate²²⁸

²²⁵ Interview, Anna Raeburn, London, 2012

²²⁶ Vic Oliver, castaway on Thursday 29th January 1942

²²⁷ Ytreburg 2004, p.685

²²⁸ Bonner 2011, p.80-81

Scripts and audio archive reveal that Roy Plomley was respectful and conservative in his tone, and against prying into the uncomfortable or messy private lives of his castaways. Castaways trusted him and his team to be civil and polite, not to ruffle the surface, or to grill or challenge, even when their words were no longer scripted. *Desert Island Discs* was to be a mutually beneficial and pleasurable encounter, to help build on the existing public personality of its guests, while ensuring that its host protected his place as a respected BBC figure, and friend to the stars.

There are few people, however busy, who will not be tempted to put aside an afternoon to have a pleasant lunch, listen to their favourite music, and then get paid a fee for talking about themselves for half an hour²²⁹

The interview in this case can be seen as a transaction, and it was in the interests of all parties involved (interviewer, interviewee and institution) to foster the public façade of the professional performer in order for the programme to grow, continue and be a success.²³⁰ The use of scripted humour and irony parodied and played upon the recognised public identity of his guests, exemplified here with a scripted exchange from 1951:

RP: *Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. On our desert island this evening is Tommy Trinder*

Trinder: *Is that all you're going to say about me? Nothing about noted raconteur, celebrated merry Andrew and highly recommended refined entertainer?*

RP: *I think we knew all about that Mr Trinder*²³¹

It was the norm that scribbled handwritten messages and autographs would adorn the top of scripts. Lady Eleanor Smith wrote on her script 'Many thanks for being so helpful, also cocktails!'²³² References to apparent personal connections between Plomley and his castaways can also be heard in audio recordings. In a scripted episode from 1951, he makes an intentional association between himself and his castaway, Jimmy Edwards.²³³

Edwards: *...you were at the same school, you remember them*

Plomley: *I do indeed*

²²⁹ Plomley 1985 p.36

²³⁰ See Ytreberg 2007

²³¹ Tommy Trinder, Castaway on 6th June 1951

²³² BBC WAC. S133/18/3. Scripts 24-44

²³³ Jimmy Edwards, Castaway on 1st August 1951

This refers back to the common history between Roy Plomley and Jimmy Edwards, insinuating that they share a similar background. It could be argued that this elevates the position of the host as someone tightly linked to celebrity in stature and common history. It supports the idea that the interviewer and interviewee have an equal social relationship, both as broadcasters, and entertainers who are members of a collective club. It suggests that both Jimmie Edwards and Roy Plomley are deserving of airtime, but at the same time, succeeds in causing a sense of detachment between them and the listening public,²³⁴ by elevating them to join a special community of those worthy of appearing on-air. Here is evidence of a broadcasting hierarchy, where the interview was formed for the benefit and ease of well-connected people who socialised in the same circles and supported each other's careers. This is not based on a formal set of policy guidelines, rather on an exclusive set of social networks and contacts.

The pre- and post-recording process of *Desert Island Discs* also cultivated this idea of companionship, informality and amiability – revealing the potential power of subtle social relationships. Every six weeks, Roy Plomley and his producer would decide on which potential castaways to approach. The BBC bookings Department would contact the selected guest and negotiate a fee. Roy Plomley would go to meet with his interviewees to conduct his research and get them to agree to be on the programme. Invitations to potential castaways are now issued via email, but at the start of the series the approach was more informal. A pre-interview face-to-face conversation with the chosen guest was conducted in order to ascertain their character and speech patterns. Roy Plomley almost proudly recounted his memories of approaching actress Frances Day, backstage at a theatre to finalise details of a recording, 'Frankie was in her bra and knickers, in which she looked most delectable and I found it hard to concentrate on broadcasting.'²³⁵ Occasionally, if this pre-interview meeting was not possible, (the guest lived away from London), then the script would be devised using handwritten notes, sent by the castaway to Roy Plomley. Entertainer Vic Oliver was visited in the wings of the London Hippodrome, 'He gave me a list of records and his reasons for choosing them, and I went away and wrote a script.'²³⁶ This list of records would be passed on to the producer, whose job it was to order the records from the BBC's Gramophone Library. Meanwhile Roy Plomley would visit the News Information Office to conduct his research, making use of press cuttings, references and carrying out telephone calls to mutual acquaintances to find out more information about his guest. He wrote that this preliminary research material was 'the essential ingredient of a good interview. It has a disarming effect on a new acquaintance to find that you have primed yourself to talk about his interests...'²³⁷

Throughout his time on *Desert Island Discs* (1942-1985), Roy Plomley often took his castaways to a members only club, the pub or out to lunch before or after recording in the studio, with an intention to

²³⁴ Dame Vera Lynn's party scripted appearance on 18th December 1951

²³⁵ Plomley 1980, p.15

²³⁶ Plomley 1980, p.14

²³⁷ Plomley 1980, p.23

develop a rapport between them both. This was also an opportunity for Roy Plomley to learn more about his guests,

To prepare and record the programme is usually half a day's work. If my guest is someone I have not met before, I have a preference for the latter half of the day, so that I can invite him to lunch first.²³⁸

This was a conscious strategy to get to know the character of his interviewees and to assess their musical choices. It was also an opportunity to confirm the identity of his guests. Author Alistair MacLean was invited to appear as a castaway later in the 1970's, yet it was only during their pre-interview lunch that Roy Plomley realised that a different guest had been approached by mistake,

I slipped a piece of paper beside my plate and made surreptitious notes as we ate. I had researched one Alistair MacLean and, in an hour or two, I was to interview another one, of whose background I knew nothing.²³⁹

Realising his error, Roy Plomley went on to carry out the interview in the studio as planned, not revealing that this was a breach of normal conventions. The producer stopped the interview half way through the recording.

The top brass called a meeting. They listened to the recording and were unanimously agreed that while this Alistair MacLean was an exceptionally gifted broadcaster, the subject of tourism in Ontario was not of sufficient general interest for a Desert Island programme.²⁴⁰

Alistair MacLean received his fee and a letter of apology, but the programme was never broadcast. Although he had proved himself to be a worthy speaker, his profession was not considered valuable enough to fit into the castaway ideal. The pre-interview interaction between Roy Plomley and his interviewee was thus used here in a number of ways: a) to relax the castaway and establish their trust in the host b) to act as a means of researching the castaway's life story, and clarifying their identity c) as a way of judging the quality of guests' musical choices and d) to establish a personal and professional connection between the BBC, Roy Plomley and the well-known 'stars' of the day.

In contrast to MacLean and Mr Brown of Balham, Roy Plomley potentially regarded himself as someone in the same league as his guests. In 1942, four months after the start of *Desert Island Discs*, he chose himself to appear as a castaway, and once again in 1958²⁴¹. Later I reflect on the influence of the producer, and how the interview process changed after both unscripted answers were permitted following Roy Plomley's departure

²³⁸ Plomley 1980, p.23

²³⁹ Magee 2012, p.154

²⁴⁰ Magee 2012, p.154

²⁴¹ This trend has continued throughout the decades, with other presenters Michael Parkinson (1985-1988) and Sue Lawley (1988-2006) starring as guests – although notably they were selected before they took over as hosts.

from the show. It was here that the editorial control largely shifted to the post-production stage. But it is interesting to note that the format has become such a tradition of UK radio that castaways continue to see their inclusion as a means of entry to an elite club. Physicist Professor Jocelyn Bell Burnell was approached in 2001 and invited to be a castaway, “*It’s a great honour, a great, great honour.*”²⁴²

3.6 SCRIPTED STYLE

The act of reading implies absence – the separation of addresser and addressee. The addresser has been replaced by a text, so that if a radio listener is aware that a broadcaster is reading he will assume that she is either relaying the words of somebody else or erecting a barrier between herself and her audience. Hence to avoid creating this impression of absence and impersonality much radio talk which is actually scripted...is delivered as if it were unscripted and impromptu

Crisell 1994, p.135

Scripting, as Crisell points out here, does imply an impression of absence – a filter between natural, spontaneous speech to an inference of rehearsal and preparation. *Desert Island Discs* sought to encourage a sense of idiosyncratic individuality, which was in contrast to the ‘studied, controlled, balanced – in a word, professional presentation’ which had dominated the schedules.²⁴³ While the programme had to follow pre-approved rules of interview presentation, early copies reveal that Roy Plomley drew on a number of linguistic devices in order to bring personality and to the scripted interview and enhance the likability of himself and his guest. Again, this any playful dialogue was an artificial composition. Each line was carefully constructed, (similar to a radio play or skit) containing instructions, cues and dialogue.²⁴⁴ Clear instructions are written into the scripts, and on occasions included explicit directions. Roy Plomley often underlined words on the script as a reminder to emphasise certain words “*there is always a chance of a rescue, of course.*”²⁴⁵ As Ytreburg has noted, ‘a great number of scripting devices work not by dictating the specifics of people’s performance but by directing and setting them up in various ways.’²⁴⁶ It is natural to dismiss scripting as formulaic and stilted, yet Roy Plomley employed a series of creative devices. In following extract from Vic Oliver’s early appearance as a castaway, brackets are used in the script to indicate instructions to both parties.

²⁴² Telephone Interview, Jocelyn Bell Burnell 2013,

²⁴³ Kundra 1975, p.74

²⁴⁴ In 1935 Plomley had contacted the BBC at the age of 23 to request that they give him an acting audition. In this letter, he sells his stage and singing experience, but the BBC decided not to take him up on his offer. After working as an announcer and producer in France, he managed to get his break. By the time he began his role on *Desert Island Discs* Plomley had written, presented and narrated programmes including *Magic at the Movies*, *Hurrah for Hollywood*, *Paul Whitemans Rhythm Boys*, *Wax Works* and *Stars of London*. This could explain some of the more theatrical approaches to his scripting style, and account for the only break in the history of the programme, where he pursued his acting career.

²⁴⁵ BBC WAC, S133/18/8 Scripts 103-115.

²⁴⁶ Ytreburg 2006, p.424

Roy: *I had no idea photography was invented as long ago as that. Shall I read out your list of records?*

Vic: *Please do.*

Roy: *(READING) 1. Vic Oliver joins the Army. 2. The Army Joins Vic Oliver. 3. Vic Oliver's Twists. 4. Vic Oliver tickles your fancy. 5. Vic Oliver tickles the Ivories. 4. Vic Oliver...Oh, no. (TEARS PAPER)*

Vic: *Hey, what are you doing?*

Roy: *I'm sorry – no advertising*

Vic: *But you shouldn't have torn it up. You have wounded me as an artist. Besides, it had my autograph on it.*

Roy: *Perhaps it was rather stupid of me.*²⁴⁷

Scripts and audio recordings reveal that Roy Plomleys questioning style was respectful and polite. Instead of posing long questions, he opted for statements, which were often followed by questions such as, “*Noted*”, and “*Good. Let's hear the first one.*”²⁴⁸ These declarations also work to create a sense of validation and acceptance, signalling that Plomley is in a superior position and knows about the topic already. Hence he is in control of the relationship and it is his job to move the “conversation” forward.

Plomley: *“Exciting days indeed. And then?”*

Plomley: *“Yes I can see that”*²⁴⁹

There was no doubt that Plomley scripted himself into a position of authority. Below is the opening from an episode first aired in 1952, which saw Ventriloquist Peter Brough interviewed alongside his ‘companion’ Archie Andrews:

Andrews: *Hello Brough, are we all set?*

Brough: *Why Archie, what are you doing here?*

Andrews: *Well we're off aren't we – to this desert island. By jove, I'm looking forward to it – going to have a wonderful time. Think of all that nice sea and sunshine, lovely sleepy lagoon, beautiful hula hula girls, wonderful moonlight nights – ah, that's the stuff*

²⁴⁷ Vic Oliver, castaway broadcast on Thursday 29th January 1942

²⁴⁸ BBC WAC. Files S133/18/8. Scripts 103-115

²⁴⁹ BBC WAC. Files S1133/18/9. 116-127

Brough: *My dear boy, you've got it all wrong; this is a record programme. And this is Mr Plomley who is in charge here*²⁵⁰

Jokes, laughter, quotations, pauses, exclamations, instructions and questions were included in the scripts in an effort to mirror spontaneous conversation and promote a sense of cohesion and natural flow as the content moved from record to record.

Plomley: *You said a moment ago, quite casually, something about the rescue ship coming.....*

Lynn: *There will be a rescue ship, won't there?*

Plomley: *There's nothing in the contract about it – but it's good to be optimistic. That's fine.*²⁵¹

During these scripted episodes there is a conscious effort to enact a sense of liveness by posing simulated questions, mirroring a soap opera or play, musing casual (yet scripted) queries like “*I do wonder what your last record will be, which composer*”²⁵² even though he of course, has the answer in front of him. Plomley also uses intentional hesitations such as “*um*” and more typical interview questions such as “*who*” and “*how*” but in a formal way, mirroring the style of a research questionnaire or job interview²⁵³:

Roy: *How and why did you first get this enthusiasm for brass?*

Jimmy Edwards: *Oh well that's a question. It started when I was at school*²⁵⁴

By mirroring the informal character of daily conversation, the listener should feel more connected to the content of those voices heard in the distance from the wireless. Personal modes of address, informality and such ‘carefully placed hesitations and slip of the tongue’ sought to achieve a style that ‘transcended both ordinary speech and the written word.’²⁵⁵

²⁵⁰ *Desert Island Discs*, 5 February 1952. Ventriloquist Peter Brough & Archie Andrews.

²⁵¹ BBC WAC S1133/18/9 116-127 referring to Vera Lynn's script. This aired on 18th December 1951

²⁵² Clemence Dane 30th October 1951

²⁵³ BBC WAC S1133/18/6. Script featuring Petulia Clarke as the castaway

²⁵⁴ Jimmy Edwards, *Desert Island Discs*. Broadcast on 1st August 1951

²⁵⁵ Cardiff 1980, p.31

Roy Plomley and his production team clearly trusted some castaways over others. When Vera Lynn, the seasoned broadcaster of *Sincerely Yours* appeared on the show in 1951, she was awarded the unusual opportunity of being able to ad lib.

Lynn: *Ad lib. Must hear new tunes. Hear own records. Cup of tea, feet up, bit of quiet.*

Lynn: *Ad lib. Five. Visualise in ballet frock. Cheeky fairy. Never grow any older.*²⁵⁶

In the case of *Desert Island Discs* the pre-recorded format frees the castaway and Roy Plomley the obligation of being in a studio on the day of broadcast, and it allowed for the music to be inserted in after recording to fit with a specific duration. Scripting interview exchanges had its advantages for the interviewer, the institution and occasionally, the interviewee. There was no pressure for either party to remember what to say, no risk of making embarrassing mistakes, no danger of awkward silences or pauses, little opportunity to say something critical or controversial and little difficulty editing content at the post production stages, following the interview recording. It allows for the music to be faded up under the scripted words of the guest. Scripting protects interviewees from the risk of public humiliation, of triggering a negative reaction from the government and of the perceived threat of silence. As Scannell sums up, it dealt with the ‘terrors’ of live performance.²⁵⁷ Scripting also succeeds in controlling the tone, the pace and the delivery of each line, similar to a play. Most importantly of all, it maintains control over the timing of speech. Rehearsal, (if deemed necessary) is possible and ensures that the on-air relationship is cordial and amicable. It was rare to play the music in directly, and guests would just supply the details of the gramophone choices, and introduce them on tape. This is one of the reasons why the show is not recorded ‘as live’ (which would require continuous flow of speech) but would be edited afterwards.

The on-air performance of the castaway during the scripted years may sound stilted, artificial and pacey to modern ears, but it is doubtful that the listening public would have been aware that the words coming from these well-known and highly regarded castaways were not their own, but instead choreographed, constructed and edited by the host and his team. It is also worth noting that the apparatus of broadcasting delivery would have supported a more precise, measured performance. Any voices heard through the receivers at this time would be distant and broken in places, meaning that the use of these guests who had professional broadcasting experience would arguably favour a formal, clear and correct style of presentation.

Yet scripting also favours the literate performer. It ignores the idea that authentic biographical experience should be told by the very person who has experienced these events, rather than a professional mediator of memories who can interpret these events. We do not own our own stories. Instead, it assumes that there is a need to caricature a person’s personality to the public in order for their stories to be heard. Furthermore it

²⁵⁶ BBC WAC S1133/18/9. Scripts 116-127. Vera Lynn’s performance aired on 18th December 1951

²⁵⁷ Scannell 2003, p.105

suggests that performance is a key ingredient of broadcast talk, and that the public, or public figure cannot be trusted to appear on air if they have not been instructed or coached. Ytreburg believes that it is vital to note the history of scripted performance, and advocates the exploration of these types of shows in academic research, which he believes is;

*...tailored to focus not on what media production tells us about those producing (important though that may be), but on how such production is always geared first and foremost toward the premeditation of mediated performance*²⁵⁸

The series, (after a short break of nearly a year from 1953-4) went on to be presented by Roy Plomley until his death in 1985, yet the format and ideals of this early era - of revealing the personal motivations of public figures remained steadfast. Later, certain interviews might occasionally break with convention – (episodes might be recorded in front of live audiences, feature more than one castaway, include more luxury choices) but in essence the routines and rituals of the format have remained true to these early episodes. So far I have dwelt on the scripted background of *Desert Island Discs*, and although I do not wish to spend too much time examining the unscripted editions after 1953, it is still useful to briefly look at the legacy of this era – and how some content and speech still continued to be directed through the interview on *Desert Island Discs*, now in a more subtle way. This can raise some interesting questions about the development of the early interview as a technique, and as a form of communication.

In this next section, I now turn my attention towards the studio space, the role of the producer and the first-hand experiences of the castaway after scripted ‘play interviewing’ ended. Here we begin to see more evidence of how radio, and other media genres started to use spontaneous, unrehearsed and unscripted speech – especially in a context of the more personal or confessional interview. While I do not wish to make a direct comparison, or to tell the entire account of the *Desert Island Discs* story, I have come across some interesting parallels and changes in how the contemporary producers, presenters and castaways engaged with the interview, over seventy years since the first episode aired.

3.7 A TIMID APPROACH

In the autumn of 1954, after 204 episodes, Roy Plomley declared that he was relieved that he no longer had to submit his scripts for approval before recording his interviews.²⁵⁹ While the questions and music would still

²⁵⁸ Ytreberg 2006, p.438

²⁵⁹ Bernard Miles took part in the last scripted interview on Friday 25th September 1953. Actor Mary Ellis was the first guest a year later, to appear without a script on Friday 17th September 1954. No official reasons have been given to answer why the programme took this break. There had been other gaps between episodes and series – there was a 17 month gap between the end of the third series in March 1944 and August 1945. Initially after 67 episodes in January 1946 the programme appeared to have finished. It aired again five years later, this time on the Home Service on 3rd January 1951. Also see Magee 2012.

form a structure, the castaway could be allowed to speak without a script and in their own words - although it would still continue to be later transcribed afterwards, allowing for edits before it was broadcast.²⁶⁰ The reason for this change is not clearly evident (there was a twelve month hiatus when the programme stopped in September 1953 before returning once more in 1954) but there is little information as to why this might have happened. But after its return, we can see how methods of editorial control largely shifted from the pre-interview stage to the post interview stage. BBC producers were slowly accepting this new form of unscripted exchange, but were keen to stress that if new technique of unscripted exchanges became a common occurrence then it 'must be pre-recorded.'²⁶¹

To deal with these new risks of unscripted talk, a producer might intervene throughout the recording or after the recording. Censorship was still taking place, but in a much more concealed way, designed in part to avoid reproach from press or politicians. During a recording in 1955, castaway Pat Smyth, (a showjumper) mentioned that she was against taking her horses on aeroplane flights.²⁶² The *Desert Island Discs* producer (Monica Chapman) was concerned that this might invite complaints, and requested that the castaway should rephrase it or cut the criticism out, since this statement may prove damaging to airlines.²⁶³ In the same year, parts of the transcript had been crossed out and the lines had been deleted from an episode with yachtsman Edward Allcard, because of a comment regarding a negative reference to Admiralty charts.²⁶⁴ Roy Plomley later described this as attitude as 'timid' approach by the Corporation, but as Chignell has pointed out, there was a wider and continued pressure on the BBC from those in power, especially apparent in reaction to more controversial current affairs interviews.²⁶⁵ In the year before (1954), Winston Churchill had signalled his disapproval to the Chairman, criticising an episode aired on *At Home and Abroad*:

I do not consider that the BBC should be used for the publicizing of people hostile to this country and the gratuitous advertisement of their case ... and see the BBC used to exploit anti-colonial prejudice for the satisfaction of those whose greatest wish is to destroy the British Commonwealth and Empire...²⁶⁶

Officially the BBC was editorially independent of the Government, but in reality it was still under obligation to support the national interest.²⁶⁷ Early attempts at news interviews on television had also reflected this sense

²⁶⁰ Cardiff 1980, p.31

²⁶¹ The custom was to use the Telediphone Unit who would produce scripts after recordings

²⁶² Pat Smyth, *Desert Island Discs*, first broadcast on 3 March 1955

²⁶³ Monica Chapman produced the programme from 1951 to 1967

²⁶⁴ Edward Allcard, *Desert Island Discs*, first broadcast 26 July 1955

²⁶⁵ Chignell 2008

²⁶⁶ Chignell 2008, p.39. *At Home and Abroad* was broadcast on the BBC Home Service

²⁶⁷ Goodwin writes in detail about government interference at the BBC during the 1950s

of servility. In 1951 Leslie Mitchell had positioned himself as ‘one of us’ when interviewing Prime Minister Anthony Eden – in a fawning tone similar to the respectful opening announcement delivered by Roy Plomley:

“Good evening. I would just like to say that, as an interviewer, and as I what I hope you will believe to be an unbiased member of the electorate, I’m most grateful to Mr Anthony Eden for inviting me to cross-question him on the present political issues... Well now, Mr Eden, with your very considerable experience of foreign affairs, it’s quite obvious that I should start by asking you something about the international situation today, or perhaps you would prefer to talk about home. Which is it to be?”²⁶⁸

The agreeable questioning style and conscious avoidance of controversy meant that *Desert Island Discs* continued to offer ‘reassuring continuity to a section of the audience feeling overwhelmed by change elsewhere.’²⁶⁹ But a different approach to the interview was gaining momentum – especially with concern to well-known public figures. In the USA, Ed Murrow presented *Person to Person* (1953), which came to inspire a more pressing and interrogative questioning performance. Inspired by this new approach, television producer Hugh Burnett then outlined his vision for a new British television programme, *Face to Face* in 1958, which was to be more invasive than the pleasant interview exchange heard on *Desert Island Discs*;

[T]here is room in our output [for]...exhaustive questioning of distinguished people on highly controversial and personal topics...[the programme] would lay out boldly the history, beliefs, prejudices and character of a single human being.²⁷⁰

Bonner, Hassell and Holmes have both shown how entertainment programmes like *Face to Face* (BBC 1959-1962) later went on to alter the tone of the personal, in-depth interview on television; allowing the camera to focus in on the intricate details of guest responses.²⁷¹ Hosted by former Labour MP John Freeman scrutinised his interviewees, who were all well-known personalities (similar to castaways) ranging from politicians, royalty, sportspeople, artists and academics. While both newspaper and radio interviews had both reported on similar types of personal issues, it was the visual impact of the television close-up (especially in his interview with Gilbert Harding in 1960) that drew comparisons with interrogation, torture, and the psychiatrists couch.

He was one of the most confident, astute and penetrating interviewers ever to appear on television. Notably, however, the format agreed upon required that in all these interviews, only the back of Freeman's head would appear, with the camera focusing intently (and at times, quite intensely) upon the interviewee, who remained seated in a chair set against nothing more than a black velvet studio cloth, which further focused all attention upon the features and demeanour of the subject.²⁷²

²⁶⁸ McKernon 2014

²⁶⁹ Hendy 2008, p.32

²⁷⁰ Memo from Hugh Burnett to Assistant Head of Television, 27 February 1958, cited in Holmes 2007, p.437

²⁷¹ See Bonner 2011, Hassell 2010 and Holmes 2007

²⁷² Hassell 2010, p.110

The questions on *Face to Face* were far more probing than *Desert Island Discs*, and centred on the private lives of the interviewees; enquiring about personal failings, family relationships and religious beliefs.

All the *Face to Face* interviews were more intrusive in their attempts to understand the person behind the persona than would be likely today, and the extreme close-ups were clearly designed to reveal moments of betrayal.²⁷³

As a result the BBC received complaints about subjects ‘positively frying under the lamps.’²⁷⁴ It would seem like a natural assumption that future radio programmes like *In the Psychiatrists Chair* (1982), came to be influenced by this more public and omnipresent form of interviewing. Listeners also felt uneasy about the ‘invasive’ questioning techniques posed by Dr Anthony Clare on BBC Radio 4.²⁷⁵ In comparison, the formulaic yet familiar and sentimental *Desert Island Discs* maintained its popularity, (according to Mass Observation recordings²⁷⁶) showing that audiences failed to warm to this more voyeuristic style of interviewing found on newer programmes, instead preferring the traditional unobtrusive and gentler approach. A delicate balancing act seemed to be valued here; interviewers were not respected for prying insensitively, yet all the while needed to reveal a person’s life history and personality.

Over its last 3,000 editions, *Desert Island Discs* has largely managed to largely distance itself from other more interrogative interview programmes, perhaps through its use of music as a device - although it has not escaped the occasional controversy.²⁷⁷ The relaxed informality of the format and the musical focus encourages castaways (including politicians) to reveal more details about their private motivations, fears or experiences. As seen in this section, the pre and post interview process also aims to put castaways at ease.

During this Chapter I have started to show the potential influence of the production team itself, which has been largely hidden from both academic attention and from the final on-air interview itself. Yet the influence of the producer in particular should not be dismissed, and this next section starts recognise this often concealed aspect of the radio interview.

²⁷³ Bonner 2011, p.82

²⁷⁴ BBC Audience Research, 1960 cited in Holmes 2007, p.438

²⁷⁵ *In the Psychiatrists Chair* will later be looked at in more detail during Chapter Five

²⁷⁶ See Hendy 2007

²⁷⁷ Including Gordon Brown (1996), Lady Diana Mosley (1989), Otto Preminger (1980).

3.8 THROUGH THE GLASS: THE PRODUCER & THE CONTROL ROOM

Earlier I outlined how some Talks producers were given the task of directing the performance and scripting of a guest. The role of the *Desert Island Discs* producer during the 1950's was to assist the host, direct the guests, check the script, be responsible for the recording, supervise the final edit and most importantly, uphold the values of the Corporation. Positioned as an intermediary between the host, the institution, the interviewee and the listener, the producer's task was to judge what might be considered appropriate or understandable for the wider public, ensuring content is compliant and meets editorial standards.²⁷⁸

It is in the studio that the producer takes over. Over the years, a system has been evolved whereby the producer takes no part in the preliminaries, so that at the recording, he, or she, will hear everything for the first time, just as our listeners will. Thus, he can take an objective view, pouncing on any obscurities, and demanding that we go back and re-record any passages that may sound verbose or dull. He will also edit the programme afterwards so that it runs exactly to time.²⁷⁹

Typically Roy Plomley and the guest would be seated within the studio, while two studio managers (a sound mixer and a gramophone recorderist) observed through the glass that divided the studio with the production area.²⁸⁰ When programmes were no longer scripted, Roy Plomley discussed his intentions and set up the tone of the on air interaction with the castaway off air beforehand. During her time at the helm of *Desert Island Discs*, Monica Chapman would sit through the glass, providing suggestions and instructions during the recording on how to improve the programme, such as “*could you put it a little bit simpler?*”²⁸¹

Similarly, in current episodes, speech is not rehearsed, but like Roy Plomley, the producer is the one who issues instructions or suggestions, both to the castaway and the host. The castaway continued to be directed, a trend that which would continue into contemporary recordings of the show. Jocelyn Bell Burnell, a castaway in 2000 remembers being asked to clarify or repeat parts of her answers throughout her recording,

“*Can we sort of do that bit again and could you stress a bit more this aspect of it or something like that...They're also checking that actually what each of us says makes sense, which was useful.*”²⁸²

Peggy Seeger was also interviewed by Sue Lawley in 2001 and recalls “*She would say, “This is what I'm going to ask you for your next question... “What I'd like to find out is....”*”²⁸³ Similar to Monica Chapman, the

²⁷⁸ Cardiff 1980, p.31

²⁷⁹ Plomley 1980, p.33

²⁸⁰ Telephone Interview, Bob Symes, 2014

²⁸¹ Telephone Interview, Bob Symes, 2014

²⁸² Telephone Interview, Jocelyn Bell-Burnell, 2013

²⁸³ Telephone Interview, Peggy Seeger. Appeared as a Castaway on 8 July 2001

current producer is able to have an overview of the entire process and communicates covertly to the host, by talking directly to them through talkback. While answers from a castaway is not scripted or rehearsed, the producer has precise ideas on how the speech should sound, *“It’s just the occasional pick-up thing, or you think, “Actually, we should really cut to that next,” or, “They just said that, we’ve got to pick up on...”* ²⁸⁴

The studio would be a familiar environment for many high profile guests, yet it is essentially an institutional discursive space, where the technology and processes are predominantly detached from the control of the guest, and favour the knowledge of the host and team. During contemporary recordings of *Desert Island Discs*, the castaway is seated at a slight angle, seemingly in an attempt to make sure that eye contact is only maintained with the host – and not be potentially be distracted by other members of the team or by PR agents, *“we just wanted them to be looking at Kirsty and not aware of anything else.”*²⁸⁵ Today, the producer sits through the glass, along with the SM and usually the researcher, to promote an idea of continuity throughout the process by production team. This is an intentional decision designed, in theory, to not confuse the castaway and to keep the backstage management of the programme hidden from view. This rule insinuates that the interviewee should defer first to the interviewer, not the producer. The host is very much positioned as the one in control, and while this is intended to benefit to the castaway by making the exchange more equal it appears to actually assist the production team and host, who ensure that the interviewee is not distracted or able to query editorial decisions. But there is no doubt, at least from the perspective of a producer, who should be in charge.

The off air the pre and post production process was (and now is) intent on making it a pleasurable and successful interaction, designed to benefit all parties involved. The recording process takes two hours in total; half an hour to discuss and prepare the musical choices, and over an hour to record the programme, where music is played into the studio during the recording, although is edited and cut later on by the producer. Although the process is intended to do the opposite, it can alienate or exclude the interviewee from the process.

“Oh, no, no way was I in charge of it. Definitely not. But I don’t know that Sue Lawley was either. That was the bit I think that surprised me. There was somebody behind the glass screen in the control room that was in charge... Yes and it’s an outside party...and then of course there would be the bits they want retaken as well, which was even more disconcerting!” ²⁸⁶

Castaways, like Jocelyn Bell Burnell found it bewildering not being told who might be in control of the encounter, *“who’s in charge? There do seem to be a lot of people floating around and I’m never quite sure*

²⁸⁴ Interview, Leanne Buckle, London, 2014

²⁸⁵ Interview, Leanne Buckle, London, 2014. Here she is referring to Kirsty Young, the current host of *Desert Island Discs*.

²⁸⁶ Telephone Interview, Jocelyn Bell Burnell, 2013. Castaway on 24 December 2000

what the function of each of them is."²⁸⁷ She was left slightly confused by the chain of command while recording took place. Castaways like Anna Raeburn, Jocelyn Bell Burnell and Peggy Seeger have a certain amount of influence - around the music, books or luxuries that they chose and the reasons behind each selection. However, overall editorial control is maintained by producers like Leanne Buckle, whose job it is to uphold the independence of the BBC, "*as producer I always felt I had control over the programme*".²⁸⁸

As we saw earlier, Roy Plomley had opted to conduct his pre and post interview encounters in a more informal, social and public location. This would be based in a setting familiar to him, perhaps giving him a sense of control over the whole encounter. This evolved in later decades to increasingly centre on more private and domestic spaces. In contemporary episodes, there is also a distinct movement away from the informal off air relationship between interviewer and interviewee. Rather than taking the guest out to lunch, any meaningful conversation between the host and castaway immediately *before* the on-air encounter is now deliberately minimised:

"In their half hour beforehand we didn't want them to tell the stories perfectly then, and then feel that they were repeating them later on, or to be slightly embarrassed about saying something they've already said ... We wanted to get that stuff on tape, not before, and that can be quite tricky because we're playing the music that is (the) the trigger for those memories, and so they'll say, "This is the piece that reminds me..." and we just think, "Yes, we know! We've got the research notes. Don't tell us now!""²⁸⁹

Although *Desert Island Discs* continued to be recorded in a BBC studio, the majority of pre-interview research conversations are conducted face-to-face by a member of the production team. There has been a deliberate attempt to remove as much of the process as possible from the confines of studio (or a members club), all the while still attempting to nurture the relationship with a guest.

*"We asked a lot of our castaways in terms of their commitment to the programme – two hours for the interview as well as the pre-recording conversation which we preferred to do in their home. We felt that castaways appreciated the care that was taken to get the programme right – and it also made the process very different from other interviews they did. We wanted their Desert Island Discs to be special and to seem different to any other interview they might give"*²⁹⁰

Leanne Buckle believes that coming into the home of a castaway enables them to feel more included in the whole recording process. In his work, Salmon has noted how the home can be thought of providing additional insight to an interviewees personality – using this familiar, private and domestic space as something to be

²⁸⁷ Telephone Interview, Jocelyn Bell Burnell, 2013.

²⁸⁸ Email correspondence, Leanne Buckle, 2014

²⁸⁹ Interview, Leanne Buckle, London, 2014

²⁹⁰ Interview, Leanne Buckle, London, 2014

explicitly read ‘as a domain of revelatory signs.’²⁹¹ This is reflected in the pre- interview process on Desert Island Discs, “*We try to do research interviews in someone’s home so that they’re feeling comfortable, and you can say, “Who’s this person in the photo?” and “That’s an interesting book.”*”²⁹²

Salmon’s work addresses a time in the 1890’s when most literary interviews became centred on the home of authors or public figures. The difference of these research interviews on *Desert Island Discs* from print interviews however, is that this type of information is collected and hidden from the listener, and used only by the production team backstage, in order to draw out more personal perspectives from the castaway. This was a trend that I will also draw on in the next Chapter, where radio recordings increasingly were taking place in the home or on location. Initially utilised as a research tool, they went on to play a central part in how the interview came to sound.

3.9 CONCLUDING NOTE

I have used *Desert Island Discs* as an example of how the early interview fulfilled a variety of purposes. I have noted how the early interview was used in an assortment of ways, which can be summarised as follows:

a) as a tool to promote ‘appropriate’ delivery of on air speech by broadcasters and interviewees to the public, b) as a means of mediating, celebrating and promoting the performances of public figures, c) the use of scripting to create a sense of informality, humour and theatrical drama d), the importance of the off-air production process and its influence on those who experienced the interview and e), the use of a predictable, reassuring and innovative format that all parties must buy into in order for the interview to succeed.

The format has always been centred on the impression that the interview could be used as a pathway to gain insight into the private motivations of public people – yet of course in reality the performative method of recording in the form of a radio play prioritised a highly constructed and tightly edited interaction. The gentle scripted question/answer style consciously made use of theatrical or conversational devices to promote the illusion of spontaneity and liveness, often exploited to promote the professional persona of the castaway or highlight the status of the interviewer. Yet despite the clear methods of control, censorship and the external pressures from BBC management, I would argue that there is validity both in the scripted exchange as an audio device, *and* as a topic for academic research. In its early years, the interview was used as a creative device, and as such should not be dismissed. Instead, scripting allowed for a certain and important type of imaginative and resourceful techniques. *Desert Island Discs* should be seen as a template for the early radio

²⁹¹ Salmon 1997, p.166

²⁹² Interview, Leanne Buckle, London, 2014

interview – and one that allows us to observe the internal workings of the BBC, a reaction to wartime conditions and an attempt to create a performative interaction that celebrated the achievements of the interviewee and the public figure.

In this next section I turn to a series that encapsulated tensions between the established scripted methods of interview production, with those that experimented with newer ways of gathering material, arranging actuality and positioning participants. This time I move on to the end of the 1950's and examine the radio feature; permitting me to expand further on concepts that run throughout this thesis - notions of co-creation, representation and empowerment.

This new series, *The Radio Ballads*, reflected a tentative institutional and cultural shift, (occurring first in regional BBC networks), towards the increased inclusion of unrehearsed vernacular expression, and indicated a trend towards both aesthetic and artistic experimentation in radio content- somewhat stimulated by experimental techniques that crossed over from the UK's film and television landscape. I show how it also reflected a change from the prioritisation of the 'public' performance of the celebrity interviewee, to attempt a more 'natural' and authentic sound of the radio interview.

CHAPTER 4. THE INTERVIEW AND THE RADIO BALLADS

Impromptu talking, except in discussions, is rarely effective when broadcast in sound alone, although the advent of the tape recorder, which allows for subsequent cutting and rearrangement, has stimulated fresh experiments in this technique. It also allows producers to go farther afield in their search for new speakers

BBC Handbook 1956, p.69

Until the mid-1950's the majority of output spoken by contributors to BBC radio programmes was scripted, rehearsed or re-recorded. Interviews continued to be conducted live, and based within the safety of a studio. Radio producers would prepare for their interviews in ways similar to print journalists, using the tape recorder as a research tool, rather than as a means of broadcasting unscripted actuality.²⁹³ Sean Street describes the conventional approach during this time.

*"I would come along and interview you with a notebook. I would ask you the question. You would tell me the answer. I would write it down. I would then take it and have it transcribed and typed up. If you were lucky, I would get you into the studio and you would read what you'd originally told me spontaneously. If you were unlucky, I gave it to the voice of an actor to do it"*²⁹⁴

There was an attempt, especially in live broadcasts, features or documentaries, to simulate the syntax of spontaneous talk by employing actors, who would often perform the redrafted words spoken initially by interviewees. This meant that there was little opportunity for the general public to participate or interact with hosts or content, or to express a right of reply. As we saw in the previous Chapter, it was deemed safer for radio producers, even in the post-war period, to prioritise the voices and experiences of trained broadcasters, public figures or experts. While there were of course a small number of notable exceptions, it was still relatively unusual to hear the voices of 'real' people who would speak unscripted on either pre-recorded or live output. And if the voices of these non-media professionals were to appear in live programmes, magazine programmes or documentaries, the process was tightly managed and dominated by the requirements of the Corporation, rather than with much concern for the rights of the interviewee.

There was still a desire within the BBC to improve its speakers' levels of performance and set high standards of talk for its large mass of listeners. As a result, there was still an accusation (as Long has highlighted), that they spoke *at*, rather than *with* the majority.²⁹⁵ Yet the affordability and availability of the smaller and more

²⁹³ Partly due to the expense and availability of recording equipment

²⁹⁴ Interview, Sean Street, Bournemouth 2013

²⁹⁵ Long 2004, p.138

efficient EMI midget machine (first produced in Britain during 1952) meant that BBC producers began to more seriously consider the possibility of using recordings they had gathered whilst on location. New techniques, freedoms and innovations began to develop, where programme-makers were no longer tied to the studio or limited by financial restrictions, 'from now on the pursuit of material would not be subject to the formality and mystique of the studio and the scrutiny of professional technician and presenter.'²⁹⁶

The BBC was at first sceptical about these new methods of production, but those within the Features Department in particular began to appreciate what this new technology might start to offer. Olive Shapley, D.G Bridson, Joan Littlewood and Denis Mitchell had first challenged traditional convention, followed by Charles Parker, Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger with the *Radio Ballads*. Within these more experimental projects, the authority, significance and entitlement of the 'ordinary' person came to be regarded as an achievement in itself, and enough to justify the attention of the microphone and assume the interest of the listening public. This work seemingly reflected a movement away from a more journalistic style of programming and interviewing, to one that was based on a connection to a community and a more 'real' representation of an interviewee's story. The quotidian, domestic, personalised experiences of the working person began to be more celebrated - an attempt, it has been widely suggested, intended to give 'voices to the voiceless.'²⁹⁷ Although as we will find later, some 'voices' were considered more valuable than others.

One of the defining characteristics of the *Ballads* was their experimental styles of interviewing that challenged the more conformist, formal and accepted methods of BBC reporting and current affairs programming. Instead of prioritising the performance of the celebrity or elite guest (as *Desert Island Discs* continued to do), the *Radio Ballads* reflected a movement towards realism. It embraced, exploited and engaged with spontaneous (unscripted) vernacular speech, collected from subcultures and marginalised, underrepresented groups like fishermen, miners and travellers. Eight episodes of the *Radio Ballads* were broadcast between 1958 and 1964 with each programme dealing with a separate subject area. They combined original folk song, which were both based on, and mixed together with a tapestry of oral history testimony, collected from regional communities across the UK. In this Chapter, I show how a radio studio, portable recorder and microphone were used as an attempt to vocalise greater inclusion for these communities of fishermen, minors and railwaymen - workers who had been habitually overlooked within the interview itself, and the mass media more widely. I explain how community history, personalised memory and idiosyncratic dialogue began to be considered as a desirable quality in this type of interview. I equally recognise however, how certain types of voices continued to be highly modified, monitored and managed before, during and after interview interaction.

²⁹⁶ Long 2004, p.135

²⁹⁷ Hardy & Dean, in Charlton et al; 2006, p.511

As already outlined in Chapter Two, the *Radio Ballads*, and the post war regional features division of the BBC has been the subject of a large amount of previous academic attention. Although some context is needed, it is not my intention to simply repeat the work of others here – rather I wish to centre my focus on the interview specifically to offer new perspectives and primary evidence collected from those involved in the making of the programmes. As pointed in Chapter Two, this section also sheds light onto the similarities and differences between the original episodes and these more contemporary versions that has not yet been discussed. In 2006, the *Ballads* were reintroduced and refashioned, this time on BBC Radio 2. I draw on specific examples to show how the unstructured and unrehearsed interview was used and how it has developed as a technique. I also address the multifaceted relationship between the interviewer and their ‘informant’, show the challenges and opportunities of early location recordings. During this discussion I investigate the way the female voice has been used, shed light on the pre-recorded methods of questioning, and deliberate the possible impact that other televisual or filmic devices might have had on the production of both the original and contemporary editions. Once again I look at how power dynamics are negotiated through the interview encounter and focus my attention on both on-air and the backstage interaction between the interviewers and interviewees.

4.1 THE UNREHEARSED HITCH: VOCALISING THE QUOTIDIAN EXPERIENCE

The original eight *Radio Ballads* were divided into themes, mostly to the trials and tribulations of life for working people, communities or subcultural groupings. ‘*The Ballad of John Axon*’ (1958) told the story of railway men, ‘*Song of a Road*’ (1959) explored the building of the M1 motorway; ‘*The Big Hewer*’ (1961) examined the experiences of miners; ‘*The Body Blow*’ (1962) featured people with polio; ‘*On the Edge*’ (1963) highlighted the lives of teenagers; ‘*The Fight Game*’ (1963) heard from boxers; and finally, ‘*The Travelling People*’ (1964) depicted the peripatetic peoples of Britain. Similar to *Desert Island Discs*, speech content on the original *Radio Ballads* was shaped around music; similarly it was also pre-recorded, edited, and broadcast on the BBC’s Home Service.²⁹⁸ But unlike *Desert Island Discs*, there would be no recognisable public figure or familiar established host conversing on a one-to-one basis in a studio. The *Radio Ballads* rejected the single point-of-view approach and instead was designed around a mosaic of songs and naturalistic discourse, formed by the very words of the interviewee. In contrast to most other documentaries heard during this time, there would be no dramatisation, or established interviewer, presenter or narrator reading from a carefully prepared script. This decision sought to remove the interviewer as mediator between the listener and

²⁹⁸ *Desert Island Discs* moved to the Home Service from 1951

the storyteller. Episodes were introduced by BBC announcer, John Snagg, but a continuous montage technique is used, where actuality, song and sound effects were blended together.

*We present: The Ballad of John Axon, the real life story of a railwayman told by the men who knew him and worked with him, and set into song by Ewan MacColl*²⁹⁹

Each episode consisted of the recorded reminiscences, hopes and fears expressed by untrained contributors, spoken in their own regional dialects, intertwined with especially composed songs by folk singers and composers.³⁰⁰ The speech and songs were non-linear, and non-chronological, moving forward and backwards in time, from dialogue to description, inviting the listener to use their own imagination, to fill in the holes and links in logic and time. The montage/feature format ensured that any speech and song did not have to supply all information about a life, a process or experience (as one would expect in a more orthodox feature or documentary), but instead aimed to capture a feeling, an impression or an opinion. The *Radio Ballads* would make use of an assortment of voices to tell their own story, reflecting on how life was and how it could be “you experienced it; therefore you are the best one to speak about it.”³⁰¹

These montaged features, starring predominantly unnamed participants, were intended to give each voice the ‘authority to speak for all.’³⁰² This was a risk, since continuity between episodes or changes in topic could not be assured, and worked in complete contrast to *Desert Island Discs* which, as we saw earlier, generated a sense of expectation, trust and cohesion from one episode to the next through its familiar host, predictable format and recognisable theme tune.³⁰³ The perceived benefits and disadvantage of using a narrator within documentary or feature-making is still debated by modern-day theorists and producers.

radio has often made use of a narrator as a useful, and sometimes lazy, shortcut. But this figure also makes the most positive and creative acknowledgment of the individuality of the pre-expressive listener by countering it with an individual voice sensitive to his or her needs.³⁰⁴

Those who recorded interviews for both the original and newer *Ballads* are positioned quite differently – no longer as the professional, qualified presenter, whose questions are heard by the audience – instead only the answers were thought to be of interest and only these should be played to the public. According to Corner, this meant that these presenter/narrators of documentaries or features on television (and radio) could now be

²⁹⁹ *The Ballad of John Axon* was broadcast 2 July 1958. It was repeated 5 August 1958, 22 May 1960 & 11 June 1963

³⁰⁰ The occasional use of orchestration, news archive and sound effects was inserted during editing stage

³⁰¹ Telephone Interview, Peggy Seeger, 2013.

³⁰² Howkins 2000 p.92

³⁰³ See Corner, in Scannell 1991, p.32

³⁰⁴ Flew in Crisell 2004, p.25

categorised differently, now labelled as interviewers or reporters.³⁰⁵ Listeners to the *Radio Ballads* did not have a recognisable BBC host to script or put the words of the interviewees into context, dismissing the necessity for a narrator who, for Kumar, has ‘very great power over the way issues are conveyed to the audience, and over the predominant tone, colour or image left in their minds by the programme.’³⁰⁶ There would be no need for an intermediary to introduce, identify, validate or to frame the words of the interviewee– which looks to unite the audience to the speaker in a more direct way, “*You’ve peeled back a couple of layers, the connection between the person and the audience. This person is talking directly to the listener through me.*”³⁰⁷ Those who made the *Ballads* eventually vetoed the use of a narrator or an on air interviewer, and the same principle was advocated by makers of the contemporary *Ballads*, including Vince Hunt who carried out the majority of the interviews.

*“I think a narrator dehumanises people, in a way. If you have to have somebody to tell you why somebody’s important, why they’re still important, then you’re already one step removed from their experience, whereas what I wanted to do was for people to tell their stories in a standalone way and to get straight to the business.”*³⁰⁸

The use of a montage technique proved to be a radical decision, and the recording process of the *Radio Ballads* also broke with convention. Originally Charles Parker, (the producer and creator of the format) had intended for the tape recorder to be used as a research tool to reconstruct events, opinions or experience by using actors and musicians, which was common during this time. As Sean Street commented on earlier in this Chapter, it was customary practice to use the recorder, but not the recordings, to represent the words of the interviewee. Typically, most audio collected from field recordings would be returned to the studio, transcribed by a BBC typist, shaped by a producer and performed by an actor, often resulting in a clinical detachment between the speaker, which culminated in the communication of a filtered interpretation. Charles Parker later described most other radio content at this time as reflecting a ‘pale, anaemic perversion of life.’³⁰⁹ This policy was partly attributed to a fear in BBC management that the public would not be able to understand the regional accent of a speaker.³¹⁰ Scripts were used to deliver a softer interpretation of language, crafting a gentler rendition of a Lancashire or Cockney accent to make them more comprehensible to their listening audience.

When we use our voices to tell the stories of others, something may be gained in consistency of style, efficiency, and journalistic credibility, but something is lost too. When

³⁰⁵ See Corner, in Scannell 1991, p.32

³⁰⁶ Kumar 1976, p.74

³⁰⁷ Interview, Vince Hunt, Manchester, 2013

³⁰⁸ Interview, Vince Hunt, Manchester, 2013

³⁰⁹ Quote from Charles Parker, printed in p.3 of Schooling’s (unpublished & undated) reflections of his work.

³¹⁰ Ewan MacColl, oral history interview at the British Library, 1985

we let the other voices speak for themselves, we hear a public radio as astonishing as the world itself.³¹¹

By implementing the montage technique, the interviewer is removed from the final edited versions, elevating the position of the interviewee to the public, giving rights to those who have been pushed to the side-lines in other public, mediated or historical accounts. Many have regarded the *Radio Ballads* as the ‘basis of a democratic media in which the voices of ordinary men and women could stand alongside and equal the voice of the BBC’³¹² – although in section 4.8 I will show how this is a questionable assumption to make.

A small number of influential feature-makers, broadcasters and playwrights were advocates of this democratic approach and had, since the 1930’s, concentrated on themes of a ‘hidden drama’ behind industry and public service and the documentation of social problems.³¹³ In 1952, W.R Rodgers had composed a poetic and earnest account in the BBC Yearbook, citing first-hand actuality recordings as a ‘mosaic of conversation’ and an essential element of audio production;

It was among the whispering galleries and garrulous whisky gills of Dublin that it first occurred to me to collect and record those things ‘which seem to be nothing’ and yet make history.³¹⁴

Unlike the clean, professional and clinical monitoring of sound heard on *Desert Island Discs*, it was the capturing of raw minuscule details that proved fascinating and seemingly demanded to be recognised – where the smallest sounds became significant and revealed as much as the speech.

The hesitation, the unrehearsed hitch, the awkward halt and deflection of emphasis all that colours a man’s speech and contradicts his intention is most effectively caught by the microphone; the talker illuminates the talk.³¹⁵

The interview, according to Rodgers,³¹⁶ (a pioneering producer of the *Radio Portrait* series) should not be too moulded by the editor, but should remain true to the character of the interviewee. He also maintained that the editor should ideally have gone out to collect the material themselves. This would ensure the final version would truthfully reflect the nature of the original testimony – a process which was largely replicated in the making of the *Ballads*.

³¹¹ Allison in Biewen & Dilworth 2010, p.194

³¹² Howkins 2000, p.89

³¹³ Corner in Scannell 1991, p.34

³¹⁴ Rodgers 1952, p.136

³¹⁵ Rodgers 1952, p.136.

³¹⁶ Rodgers helped to come up with a technique of editing telediphoned scripts (an early dictation/transcription system which made use of wax cylinders). See Franklin 2009

Each episode of the *Ballads* would centre upon a narrative and music referring to a tragedy or an achievement, a way of life or a celebration. *The Ballad of John Axon*, (the first of the series to be made) was broadcast on the evening of Wednesday 2nd July 1958. The programme used tightly edited actuality interview material collected from the friends, colleagues and family to tell the story of John Axon, a steam-train driver from Stockport, who had died while attempting to stop a runaway train the previous year. As he set off to record his first interviews, Parker had no clear indication of the types of stories that his informants might tell, but he held a general understanding of what he was looking for, the ‘revelation of character, of the intangible complex of attitudes – pride in the job, relationship to a locomotive and railway tradition.’³¹⁷ It was only after they began to collect the audio that Charles Parker, Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger became attracted to the natural speech patterns and delivery of their interviewees - relatives, friends, engine drivers and firemen.

*“the two of them thought they’d go off to find out what people said about this frightful accident if they could remember it...but what they found was that people were saying it better than an actor could ever...read it, and learn it and say it.”*³¹⁸

Originally these field recordings acted as a convenient way of acquiring background knowledge on which to base a script, but after spending weeks listening and transcribing content MacColl began to appreciate the power of the original tapes. Charles Parker has since been celebrated as the pioneer of this technique, but according to Peggy Seeger, he was at first “*bitterly opposed.*”³¹⁹ In the end he relented and later was to become a fervent advocate of this method of production.

*“In the early ones, we had to battle to have the actual recordings to be used, rather to have the lines given to actors...The BBC...even proposed for Jack who should do it, and Charles Parker knew him and said, “No. This stuff is too powerful. Ewan was the brains behind it, and he was the one that pushed most of the big changes in BBC procedure.”*³²⁰

The words of the interviewee were to be told on the *Radio Ballads* without being reinterpreted by actors or scripted by producers, and this set the scene for much of the future feature and documentary production. Rather than the tightly scripted literary talk often crafted by producers to mirror everyday conversation, these new actuality recordings would break the rules of grammar and composition in favour of evocative rhythmical richness heard in everyday spoken language. The extract below, for instance, shows the type of speech typically used throughout the series. It draws attention to the vision of the railway man; edited in a way that communicates an expression of romanticised, passionate and patriotic pride.

³¹⁷ Charles Parker Archive, Birmingham Library 4000 64/62. Letter from Parker to C.H Phoenix Esquire – the district public relationships representative for British Railways.

³¹⁸ Charles Parker Archive, Birmingham Library MS 1913. Mary Baker, 2002. Oral history interview

³¹⁹ Telephone Interview, Peggy Seeger, 2013

³²⁰ Telephone Interview, Peggy Seeger, 2013

*What a feeling you have when you get off the shed. You've got the engine, you've got the control of it, and what a feeling, I'm cock of the bank. There's nobody can take a rise out of me now, she's mine. Come on, me old beauty - and off we go. The moon's out, and the countryside it's lovely. Look at that hill over there with the moon shining on it and the trees and the valley. It's beautiful. On we go, what a feeling. She answers to every touch. Some more rock on, lad. Yes it's grand. Ooh look, they're lit up in the mill across the way. Somebody else is working on nights besides us. Eee look there - sun's coming over the hills, and what a sight. England at dawn. It's been worth losing a night's sleep for this has, if only the people of England could see it. England, England - and there's nowhere like it at dawn.*³²¹

The aim was to capture the spoken word at the point at which it surpassed the personal and subjective, and reached almost mythological and heroic revelations of truth.³²² Instead of simply employing specialised interviewees to relay information and laws, the *Ballad of John Axon* became concerned with securing the very essence of vibrant experience.

my ear tells me that it is this vernacular speech which is for me, the very stuff of radio art as I understand it, communicating experiences direct where more correct, literary language in this context, communications only information about experience³²³

This vernacular speech was collected and captured through a new and more affordable tape recorder, which had begun to transform the way radio interviews were collected, aired and edited. Olive Shapley had combined recorded actuality with studio presentation and commentary in her own regional features, recorded decades earlier,³²⁴ 'We wanted to wrest John Reith's BBC from the group of stuffed shirts by taking the microphone out of the studio and into the country at large.'³²⁵ Olive Shapley used BBC recording vans out on location, and in the studio made use of new Dramatic Control Panel, which meant she could start to combine actuality recordings with music, commentary and links.³²⁶ Although wanting to get close to 'real people', without a mobile recording van, D.G Bridson could only take notes of conversations in people's homes and workplaces. Similar to Roy Plomley, D.G Bridson would then script them, returning later with his portable microphone and to get his 'subjects' to read back their own words.³²⁷ Later Charles Parker, Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger could bypass this process and collect their interviews out on location, negating the need for a specialist sound recordist or studio manager.

³²¹ Edited interview from *The Ballad of John Axon*, 1958.

³²² See Street 2012, p.64

³²³ Parker 1961, p.5

³²⁴ Heard on programmes like *They Speak for Themselves* (1937-8), *Homeless People* (1938), *The Classic Soil* (1939), and *Classic Features* (1939), which documented life away from the studio on location or invited contributors (miner's wives, pregnant housewives) into the BBC to tell their stories

³²⁵ Shapley 1996, p.186

³²⁶ Chignell 2008

³²⁷ Shapley 1996

While working for the North American Service in 1952, Charles Parker had used a Stencil-Hoffman Midget Tape Recorder to test this new potential of location recording, by covertly eavesdropping on private conversations during his recordings at the *Royal Show*. In an attempt to get as close to his ‘victim’s’ as possible, Charles Parker intentionally deployed an impolite persona, coming across as deliberately rude in an effort to get the hidden microphone close enough to the source of the sound, ‘The whole secret seems to be in the approach to the victim and in the positioning of oneself to the victim, so that he never has a clear view of the recording box.’³²⁸ This explorative method (as Charles Parker himself recognised), remained ethically suspect, since his interviewees were only told of the recording after it had taken place, when Parker had confessed his secret mission and requested their permission for the recording to be used. Olive Shapley also had concerns about these new ethical dilemmas facing the documentary producer during this time. She later observed that they ‘have always trod a delicate line and it is hard to refute accusations of exploitation and voyeurism.’³²⁹ A few years later, just before he began work on the *Ballads*, Charles Parker would become comfortable with this new technology and continue to use it in a research capacity while on location.³³⁰ When he took his tape recorder to record travellers in Cambridgeshire, he declared later that his contributors were ‘talking themselves into song.’³³¹ He later went on to publically speak of his delight in these techniques, and viewed location recordings as a powerful tool for the preservation and dramatization of oral testimony.

*Charles viewed the new technology as a precipitator, an enabler, and in a real sense, a listener, witnessing the speaker as they – finally – began debating their ideas and passions with themselves rather than with an outside interrogator.*³³²

I will shortly move on to look at the *Ballads* interview technique in more detail, but before doing so I wish to briefly contextualise this time in broadcasting history by looking in more depth at the influence of other producers on the interview styles of Charles Parker, Peggy Seeger and Ewan MacColl. I will show how much of their recording was experimental for the time, but was highly influenced by their involvement with a wider network. I also feel it is necessary to bring in examples from television and film, which also came to shape the sound of the *Ballads*, influencing their representation of the interviewee.

³²⁸ Charles Parker Archive, Birmingham Central Library. 4000 64 2/62. Memo written by Charles Parker in 1952.

³²⁹ Shapley 1996, p.52

³³⁰ At this point, Parker would still use existing and recognisable folk songs to bridge together music with actuality speech. This changed with the *Ballads* where new songs were created, using the words of contributors.

³³¹ Charles Parker Archive, Birmingham. File MS 1913. Mary Baker 2002. Oral history interview.

³³² Street 2012, p.64

4.2 PROFESSIONAL & PERSONAL NETWORKS

As we will later see, filmic techniques partly inspired the editing techniques used to produce the *Ballads*, and in particular, the stylistic and lyrical elements of the work of feature-maker Denis Mitchell would also act as a benchmark for Charles Parker. In a letter to Ewan MacColl before the start of production, Charles Parker had expressed his admiration for Denis Mitchell's methods and proposed the possibility of intercutting sequences by using field recordings and dramatic re-enactments in the *Radio Ballads*. Charles Parker appeared to be impressed by Denis Mitchell's work and considered him to be a friend, staying at his house in Stockport while he travelled to record his first ever *Ballad's* interview with the widow of John Axon.³³³

Depending on the actuality characters available, I am at the moment toying with the idea of using actuality recordings for the flash back sequence with yourself as the link between them and the dramatico-musical-evocation of the goods train, but it will have to be actuality well up to Denis' standards before this would begin to work!³³⁴

Denis Mitchell had pioneered the use of mobile tape recorders to create snapshots of community life, by interviewing marginalised members of the public in the homes, streets, pubs, houses and churches of Manchester and other Northern cities. Hours of speech would then be edited and condensed down by Mitchell to create *People Talking*, an occasional series which ran between 1953 and 1957. The power of first-hand individual storytelling heard on *People Talking* was in direct contrast to these professional, studio based professionals more frequently used. Charles Parker was evidently inspired by Denis Mitchell, but rather than celebrate the gritty, reality of poverty experienced by working class, he instead wanted to celebrate their talents, heroism and joys.³³⁵ D.G Bridson's *March of the '45* (1936), Norman Corwin's *Ballad for Americans* (1939), and Earl Robinson's *Lonesome Train* (1956) had also presented Charles Parker and Ewan MacColl with the prospect of a more autonomous mode of programme making. These templates offered creative, epic interpretations of events recreated through song, oral history and drama – and a focus on the lives, challenges and triumphs faced by the working man.

The *Ballads* eliminated the official, authoritarian voice of the presenter, the interviewer and the actor, and instead offered the chance to listen back to one's *own* words, not only through the interview, but heard through songs composed and shaped *around* these words. At the heart of the production is the interview, and the words uttered by contributors were used as the principle way to tell their story, through both unrehearsed speech and in the music. Peggy Seeger describes how she would go back to her interviewees (or 'informants') after composing her songs, asking "Do you approve of this? Is this what you want the song to say?"³³⁶ John

³³³ Charles Parker later sent Denis Mitchell a copy of the episode after it was completed

³³⁴ Charles Parker Archive, Birmingham Central Library. 4000 64 2/62. Letter from C. Parker to E. MacColl, dated 18th July 1957

³³⁵ See Franklin 2009

³³⁶ Telephone Interview, Peggy Seeger, 2013

Tams, a composer who worked on the contemporary *Ballads* likens this more democratic process to a relay race where the ‘baton handed on from life-teller to singer and on again to life-teller.’³³⁷ Yet this should not be over-romanticised. It is important to remember that these words are strictly edited and constructed at the post-production stage, and also as I will show in the forthcoming sections, managed through a range of questioning devices, intended to adhere to the producers own vision and creativity.

However, this was an attempt to not only document the lived reality of the working classes, but to offer something in return, to encourage cultural renewal by giving something back to those they were representing.³³⁸ A number of contributors (including those from episodes on polio, boxing and teenagers) were invited into the studio afterwards, to watch the rehearsals. Charles Parker also initiated a traveller’s support group in the West Midlands after the *Travelling People* was broadcast.³³⁹ Although most contributors were not identified or named within the programmes (this was not felt by the producers to be important), they received payment for their time. The team felt that the interview did not stop with broadcast and attempted to keep in touch with many they met for years after the recording – albeit those who matched their ideological philosophies:

Dear Mrs Balls,

I was grieved today that Ronnie died sometime ago and I do send you my deepest sympathy. I am very sorry that the news was so long delayed and I imagine that it must have been a great shock to you. Everytime I listen to “Singing the Fishing” Ronnie comes vividly to life and it may be of some comfort to you to know that his voice had a tremendous hold on the young people to whom, these days, I lecture on folk music”³⁴⁰

Long³⁴¹ has proposed that this more autonomous approach towards programme-making could arguably be the continuation of a particularly pioneering tradition of ‘liberal dispensation’, which had seen the movement in BBC production towards both feature work and regions like Manchester (and later Birmingham) for the likes of Joan Littlewood, Philip Donnellan, Wilfred Pickles, Archie Harding and Ray Gosling.³⁴² According to Olive Shapley, Archie Harding’s left-wing views had embarrassed the Corporation to such an extent that they felt they should limit any potential harm he might cause them, by banishing him to the north.³⁴³ These

³³⁷ Tams 2007, p.17

³³⁸ See Harker 2007 p344.

³³⁹ Interview, Sara Parker, Tonbridge 2013. Sara Parker is a feature-maker and carried out interviews for the contemporary *Radio Ballad* series in 2006. She is the daughter of Charles Parker.

³⁴⁰ Charles Parker Archive, Birmingham Central Library. CPA 2/78/2/2. Letter from Parker to Mrs Balls, dated July 5th 1966

³⁴¹ Much has been written about Parker and MacColl’s association with key left wing figures, along with detailed descriptions of their personal and political backgrounds and ideals. It is of no value to replicate this work here, but it is important to recognise key events and associations, that have specifically, in my view, influenced how the interview began to be used in the *Ballads*.

³⁴² See more from Long 2004

³⁴³ Shapley 1996, p.36

producers encapsulated a largely post-Reithian regional soundscape and had either directly motivated or worked alongside Ewan MacColl.³⁴⁴ The BBC's increasing willingness to engage with poets and writers during the mid-1950's together with the work of Lawrence Gilliam, D.G Bridson, Francis Dillon, Louis MacNeice and Olive Shapley also especially inspired Charles Parker creatively.³⁴⁵ According to Street, it was this type of 'artistic, intellectual and political potency' that both established the tone of the *Ballads*, and fashioned the professional working relationships of those who came to make them.³⁴⁶

Charles Parker, Peggy Seeger and Ewan MacColl were clearly embedded within these networks. Having narrated a number of Shapley's documentaries, Ewan MacColl³⁴⁷ had also composed several of Denis Mitchell's sound and television documentaries, including 'Eye to Eye' and 'Night in the City'.³⁴⁸ In 1953 he helped make *Ballads and Blues* alongside Mitchell, which dealt with themes of the sea, war and peace, the brutal city, love, railways, crime and criminals. Back in 1947 (known then as Jimmie Miller) he worked on 'Pleasant Journey', a six part series written in collaboration with Joan Littlewood.³⁴⁹ Produced by Olive Shapley, *Pleasant Journey* featured regional newsreader Wilfred Pickles, who subsequently went on to host the popular regional quiz show *Have a Go* (1946-1967).

Wilfred Pickles had been the first newsreader during the war to feature a Yorkshire voice, in contrast to the standard official BBC English that had dominated the airwaves. His later approach towards interviewing was also in opposition to the well-established, authoritative, understated public service delivery commonly heard or seen by most of his contemporaries. Wilfred Pickles placed his trust in those who participated in *Have a Go*. Former BBC Engineer Jeff Link worked with both Parker and Pickles, and recalls Pickle's innovative approach towards interviewing.

He had a Northern accent (Shock, Horror!) and what was significant was the way he interviewed ordinary people about their daily lives without rehearsal. He did not believe in rehearsal of interviews – if they tell you in rehearsal, they will think they have told you when it comes to the broadcast and you can never recreate the spontaneity. Inevitably they will say "As I told you earlier..." Instead he was prepared to trust the 'ordinary people' and the people did not let him down.³⁵⁰

Wilfred Pickles himself wrote in 1953;

³⁴⁴ The regional structure of the BBC and the distrust of the Reithian hierarchy informed much of these projects, which had begun almost ten years before the Second World War. See Street 2012

³⁴⁵ See Street 2012, p.66

³⁴⁶ Long & Franklin have remarked that the years between 1955 and 1965 can be seen as something of a golden age in British documentary filming (Philip Donnellan in Birmingham, John Boorman and Michael Croucher in Bristol, and John Ormond in Cardiff)

³⁴⁷ Known previously as Jimmie Miller for his political activism, and theatre performance

³⁴⁸ See McDonald and Franklin 2013

³⁴⁹ Littlewood and McColl were blacklisted by the BBC and by forces entertainment group ENSA as subversives

³⁵⁰ E-mail correspondence, Jeff Link, 2013. Link was a BBC engineer who worked with both Pickles and Parker

...while “stars” and “personalities” are exhaustible the ordinary people are not. They have yet to make their debut on TV in a big way. With programmes like *Have A Go* some of us found a way of presenting them on sound radio - as entertainment their programmes took the jackpot! And the listening figures! Just ordinary folk airing their thoughts; the witty and the wise, the daft and the droll, the foolish and the philosophical –all good fun.³⁵¹

Wilfred Pickles here was writing about the potential of this type of format to be taken to television and there was seemingly a range of collaborative projects which flowed between the two during this time, typically in terms of methods of recording and editing, practices and professional networks. The birth of commercial television had also meant that actuality and location interviews were frequently being used by ITV to compete and connect with the wider public.³⁵² When ITV launched in the autumn of 1955, the BBC's television service had been running unchallenged for almost two decades, but was now confronted with alternative ways of producing descriptive content. In just two years, ITV had won over 72% of the audience share from the BBC³⁵³ and used different methods of interviewing during news reports. Broadcaster Leonard Miall spoke of ‘the use of reporters, eye-witness accounts and interview recordings, and the enlivening of news by the infusion of the human element.’³⁵⁴ Robin Day recalled the differences to BBC output;

*As one of ITN's original newscasters, my job was to break with the BBC tradition of announcer-read national news. The ITN newscaster was to use his own knowledge and personal style. He was also to be a reporter going out to gather news with the camera crews.*³⁵⁵

The introduction of commercial competitors could be seen to have driven a more populist driven presentation style, especially in journalistic exchanges, where ‘for the first time personality was injected into news presentation.’³⁵⁶ Former ITV director of programmes David Liddiment contested that ‘The whole nature of the BBC began to change as they too recognised that they had to engage the whole community, the whole country, if the BBC was to remain sustainable.’³⁵⁷ This ‘human’ element was not only something to be desired in a newsreader, presenter or reporter, instead it began to be something that was also valued in a contributor or interviewee. Subsequently, rather than relying only on the professionally performed talks or the intellectual expert, a different type of actor, presenter and contributor emerged; one which was more visible

³⁵¹ Taken from *The Mirror*, October 31st 1953, quoted in Tolson 2009

³⁵² In the years before (and during) the making of the *Radio Ballads*, current affairs programming also began in earnest, with the establishment of *Panorama* in 1955, the start of the *Today* programme in 1957, and the launch of *the World At One* (1965).

³⁵³ Youngs 2005

³⁵⁴ Leonard Miall 1966, quoted in Schlesinger 1978, p.21.

³⁵⁵ Robin Day 1961, p.10.

³⁵⁶ Schlesinger 1978, p.41. Schlesinger 1978 outlines the influence of market conditions and competition in his analysis of early television news broadcasting, noting the changing style of interviewing from newscasters

³⁵⁷ Youngs, 2005

on both radio, television and film, and varied from the traditional middle class, educated BBC man heard or seen in previous years.

ITV appeared more willing to challenge the status quo and the establishment and from 1960 they had a new weapon. Set in Manchester *Coronation Street* proved to be one of the first to truly represent the UK's working-class contingent. As Franklin points out, BBC radio needed to provide entertainment for the mass audience and to retain a share of the working-class audience now fascinated by television. According to Hilmes³⁵⁸, *the Archers*' had also demonstrated a commitment to everyday encounters, which was seen to have contributed not only to the character of *Coronation Street* (1960) but also added the increasing amount of airtime given to communities whose voices reflected regional or local dialects. This would become a fundamental part of the *Ballads* approach to the interview.

New techniques of questioning and editing introduced first overseas also encouraged greater interaction with the public - and would come to be adapted by those who worked on the first *Radio Ballads*. The arrival of tape enabled both television and radio producers like Denis Mitchell, John Boorman and Charles Parker to cut the way filmmakers could cut.³⁵⁹ As I will also later reflect on, the tightly edited actuality achieved on the *Radio Ballads* stylistically made full use of this vox pop technique, particularly evident in *On The Edge* and *The Fight Game* (extract below), where a range of anonymous voices are edited close together, mirroring the jabbing nature of a boxing encounter.

That's a beauty

Come on, box on

There's another beaut, look he's standing him up now. Can't miss him.

When you take a good hiding, on the receiving end, you're on the sticky end, you think, what's all this for? There's all these people that have never had a glove on, they're laughing and shouting at you. You're there to entertain them.

It's like in the olden days, when they threw the Christians to the lions.

*It's, it's so much ingrained with tradition, man against man.*³⁶⁰

³⁵⁸ Hilmes 2007a

³⁵⁹ After the war, and during the 1950's -1960's there are similar styles used across radio and film, notably Kitchen Sink drama, and the French film movement Cinema Verite or Direct Cinema, that looked to represent people in everyday situations with authentic dialogue, realism and naturalness.

³⁶⁰ Edited extract, taken from *The Fight Game*. Originally broadcast on the Home Service, 13th February 1963

For Charles Parker, tape was like film and this ability to capture the essence of the everyday through actuality recordings, encouraged the powerful potential of historical permanence, 'For the first time, we have this capacity to see ourselves as others see us. We've got this power.'³⁶¹

With the coming of the tape recorder, we were more and more structuring radio programmes in a filmic form...because we were using very similar plastic materials, cutting them together, and, whether we knew it or not, starting to handle things in the form of a montage.³⁶²

In previous decades, networks in the USA had increasingly focussed their attention towards human interest, entertainment and quiz programming. During the 1930's and 1940's, commercial managers had attempted to better understand and entertain their audiences, by granting the public permission to access the microphone. These untrained, public voices were being heard on air for the first time, through the use of live vox pops, where participants began to be rewarded for just 'being themselves.'³⁶³ Similar to soap operas and talk shows, phone-in shows and the vox pop interview both allowed for 'vicarious participation' while also offering the chance to democratically express an opinion.³⁶⁴ The increasing popularity and competition of television meant that radio was forced to utilize its strengths; its immediacy and its flexibility.

Now regarded as a staple ingredient of many forms of broadcasted programming, the 'vox pop' is a device which puts the same questions to a number of participants. The editor takes out the questions and cuts answers together – often creating a vivid juxtaposition of opposing viewpoints. Each response is considered to be representative of public opinion – used to question, reinforce or challenge cultural, political or social events. In his analysis of NBC (1932-1948), Loviglio evaluated the part that this new technique would play with relation to radio's conceptions of democracy, consumption and representation. By running a cable from the studio window down onto the street it was possible for the voice of the 'man (or woman) on the street' to be heard live, and the role of these exchanges was to promote an idea of the radio interview as arguably a vehicle for 'consumerism and conformity.'³⁶⁵ Before the advent of the telephone interview, Loviglio's discussion demonstrated a tension between two spheres; public exhibitionism, and a tendency towards private voyeurism, where the vox pop interview 'revealed a public mind overwhelmed by the blooming, buzzing confusion of public life and ruled by essentially private, psychological motivations.'³⁶⁶ It also required a different type of broadcaster, one who had to navigate between the requirements of a network, the live public audience and the listener at home – something I will show would be later required in the phone-in format.

³⁶¹ Charles Parker Lecture on Documentary, School of Communication, PCL. Date unknown.

³⁶² Donnellan, quoted in Pettitt 2001, p.354

³⁶³ Talking directly to members of their audience was (and still is) an effective way for producers and managers to learn more about the views and opinions of their audiences, often exploiting this for commercial gains.

³⁶⁴ Lovelace 2005, p.2

³⁶⁵ Loviglio 2005, p.38

³⁶⁶ Loviglio 2005, p.49

The new environment places a premium on the ability to speak without a script, deal with unforeseen contingencies, and manage the delicate balancing act of being properly responsive to others while continuing to “stay on message”.³⁶⁷

Back in the UK, it was ITN’s Features Editor Brian Lewis who was one of the first in 1955 to use this ‘vox pop’ technique, where reporters were sent onto the streets to question the public. As Bell and Leewen have reflected, these ‘impromptu answers are taken as representative of the feelings of the public and used to legitimise or undermine the actions of those in power.’³⁶⁸ Filmmakers like John Boorman celebrated the apparent liberating potential of this new way of recording and editing broadcast interviews.³⁶⁹

This had a tremendous dynamic: it gave the illusion that people spoke directly to each other. The technique became so widespread so quickly that it is difficult to convey the impact it had at the time. We had leapt over the stuffy newsreader, cut out the intervention of the reporter and found a new democracy of faces. People like us were on television, giving our views; the medium had broken free of the elite, the Establishment.³⁷⁰

While the vox pop technique could be seen to reflect a movement towards a more inclusive interview format, the reality was that it was the responsibility of the producer and editor to arrange this material in a way that suited their own needs. This will be further explored in Section 4.5 when I look further at how the *Ballads* approached editing and post-production.

4.3 CAPTURING ACTUALITY

Due to the widening availability of the portable tape recorder, during the late 1950’s, producers were awarded more choice than ever before, to go into communities, ‘relying upon the real people...to tell their story simply and directly.’³⁷¹ Midget recorders were taken across the country, recording hundreds of hours of stories in factories, shipyards, homes, kitchens, canteens, and hospitals.³⁷² Often interviews were recorded at the homes

³⁶⁷ Clayman 2006, p.259

³⁶⁸ Bell & Van Leeuwen 1994, p.1-2

³⁶⁹ Cardiff 1980 and Tolson 2008 have both reflected on the history of this technique. They refer to the ‘Standing on the Corner’ section of *Town Tonight* during 1939, where the interviewer (Michael Standing) had conducted spontaneous vox pops with passers-by on the Munich Crisis. Until that point the ordinary contributor would be carefully selected, asked to rehearse and almost certainly given a script.

³⁷⁰ Boorman 2003, p.85

³⁷¹ Parker 1958, quoted in Long 2004, p.136

³⁷² Parker approached gatekeepers, organisations and union members first, requesting permission to interview at places of work.

of Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger, allowing contributors or ‘informants’ to speak “from a place of safety.”³⁷³

*“There is an ownership in what they’re doing and because they can record, they don’t have to say to an SM, ‘Let’s go and get some actuality of that steam train coming out of there,’ they can just walk across the shed and do it. The authorship belonged to the producers in a new way.”*³⁷⁴

Peggy Seeger and Ewan MacColl recorded actuality for the *Travelling People* over the space of three and a half months, visiting fairgrounds, bow tents, harvest fields and roadside pull-ins across the country.³⁷⁵ Seated around the campfires, MacColl recalled how stories were told late into the night “the kids are there during a recording session. If its 2 ‘O Clock in the morning they fall asleep on the floor and then wake up and they’ll tell a few riddles and they’ll fall asleep.”³⁷⁶ Over fifty years later, the newer *Ballads* were recorded based on these original philosophies where the studio is regarded almost as the enemy. The process of interview pre-production in studios is regarded by both sets of *Ballads* producers as problematic for the types of material they are looking for. For Vince Hunt, field recordings offer a deliberate benefit to interviewer, where the interviewee has the time, space and opportunity to engage with the process.

*“I don’t want to freak people out by taking them into the BBC and then you’ve got to go through all that palaver of sorting out parking and stupid passes and sitting in some horrible studio. I prefer to be able to talk to people at home, where they’re comfortable with the surroundings, so you don’t have to reassure them that they’re OK. ... it’s all about the interviewee and it’s all about getting the interviewee in a place where they feel comfortable and secure enough to cough up the business.”*³⁷⁷

The early midget recorder was still a weighty, unreliable piece of equipment, which often only recorded for a short length of time. As a consequence, interviews frequently had to be stopped or paused, disrupting the rhythm and flow of the interaction.³⁷⁸ This would disrupt the rhythm of questioning, and necessitate that the interviewer must, on each occasion, re-establish a connection and remind what the line of questing is. It would prove a very different experience to that of a live exchange:

³⁷³ Telephone Interview, Peggy Seeger, 2013

³⁷⁴ Interview, Sean Street, Bournemouth, 2013. An SM refers to a Studio Manager.

³⁷⁵ Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire, Hampshire, Dorset, Birmingham, London, Glasgow, Blairgowrie, Montrose and Aberdeen

³⁷⁶ The British Library, Sound Files. Ewan MacColl, oral history interview, 1985 [online]

³⁷⁷ Interview, Vince Hunt, Manchester, 2013

³⁷⁸ During the recording process for *Singing the Fishing*, all 5 midget recorders were failing, so the team flew out to Lucerne to persuade the maker to sell them a Nagra, a handmade ‘Rolls Royce’ of tape recorders. The seller agreed, but only on the allowance it would be used for ‘proper services’.

Charles Parker to Mrs Axon: Start of Part 2. July 1957: We were just talking about your husband not liking the modern dances. Were there other aspects of the modern age besides dancing and motor coaches he didn't like? ³⁷⁹

Producers also had to navigate and negotiate with background sound, which could not be controlled to studio quality. In a letter to Ewan MacColl, Parker outlines this new experience of recording his conversations with Mrs Axon at her home.

The recordings at Mrs. Axons home were a bit of a shambles; the television was on when I arrived, the "Daily Express" had just been and, generally, the conditions were not ideal but we did unearth one or two useful bits of detail. In particular, he called his grub his "scoff", and his sandwiches "butties." Apart from what is on the tape some interesting stuff came to light after I had run out of tape. ³⁸⁰

This letter reveals Charles Parkers apparent fascination with words like "scoff" and "butties" which are included in speech marks. The interview can be seen as a tool to not only start to collect such words, but one to gather evidence of a particular way of life, seemingly alien to Charles Parker. Also relevant is this conflict with other media; the Daily Express and the television, which were competing for her attention and the reality that only a small amount of content could be collected at one time.

For the *Big Hewer*, the fourth of the *Ballads*, the team took their tape recorders away from the home and deep into the working lives of their contributors, down to the mines and 'into the pit-canteens, pithead baths, into pubs and miners' welfares. ³⁸¹ Although enthused by the quality of their material, Parker confessed to feeling 'utterly uneducated' in the presence of miners, 'I was absolutely bowled over by the occasion and by its extraordinary sense of an organic, intensely human and civilised organisation. I found it tremendously emotional. ³⁸² Mary Baker who was responsible for editing the *Radio Ballads*, recalls listening to these raw tapes:

"No one could hear those people speak without your hair standing on end. Because it wasn't someone saying what it was like being a miner, this was a miner saying what it was like being a miner." ³⁸³

Instead of relying on scripting, expert opinion or on the voices of trained actors, Peggy Seeger, Ewan MacColl and Charles Parker orchestrated an approach which recognised the value of discovering knowledge through the encounter. The interview was used as a means of both finding out what had happened *and* telling

³⁷⁹ Charles Parker Archives, Birmingham Central Library. CPA 2/64/1/1. Transcript from Parker's interview with Mrs Axon 4th November 1957

³⁸⁰ Charles Parker Archives, Birmingham Central Library. CPA 4000 64 2/62. Letter from Parker to McColl

³⁸¹ MacColl 1981 [online]

³⁸² Charles Parker Archive, Birmingham Central Library. CPA 2/78/2/2. 23rd August 1960, letter from Charles Parker to Ewan MacColl

³⁸³ Charles Parker Archive, Birmingham Central Library. MS 1913. Mary Baker, 2002. Oral history interview

a story from the perspective of those who had witnessed an event. This was a unique method, used both as a technique of questioning and as a means of composing music:

*“if you don’t know about a subject, and you want to write a song about it, you go along and you interview someone who does know about it, or who has experienced the subject...and you tell them, “I want to use your words because I cannot make a song out of my understanding of this event.”*³⁸⁴

For Peggy Seeger, the experience of the interviewee (or informant) is valued – elevated to a higher position of authority. This distinctive method of prioritising the experiences of the worker was tested in the planning of the second *Ballads* programme, *Song of the Road*. Broadcast in 1959 this episode focussed on the building of the M1 (the UK’s first motorway) and would come a year after *The Ballad of John Axon*, which had been hailed as a triumph by critics. *The Sunday Times* had proclaimed that it was ‘As remarkable a piece of radio as I have ever listened to’ while the *Observer* declared ‘Last week a technique and subject got married and nothing in radio kaleidoscopy, or whatever you like to call it, will ever be the same again.’³⁸⁵ But according to Mary Baker and Peggy Seeger, pressure from Denis Morris, (the head of Parker’s BBC department in Birmingham)³⁸⁶ meant that this next *Ballads* instalment needed to be more balanced – and seemingly less sympathetic to the plight of the working class. The end result had to be a compromise; it must this time prioritise the views of employers and consultants, alongside those of the workers.

There were basic differences in the way in which words were used by our manual workers on the one hand and by the planners and white-collar staff on the other. The latter, though “educated” and “articular” were, when played back, often boring and over-technical³⁸⁷

In an essay published a year before in 1958, Iris Murdoch had acknowledged that ‘We cannot live without “the experts”...But the true open society in the modern world is one in which expertise is not mysterious,’ where ideas were not ‘the sole property of technicians.’³⁸⁸ *Song of the Road* was a site upon which the creative power of the producer was contested; and encapsulated tensions between pleasing BBC bosses, of staying true to the format and the ideal of democratising individual expression, while also struggling to provide information about work processes.

*We are the consulting engineers. We are responsible to the Ministry of Transport for the whole design of the road, and we are employed to design and supervise the construction*³⁸⁹

³⁸⁴ Telephone Interview, Peggy Seeger, 2013

³⁸⁵ MacColl 1981 [online]

³⁸⁶ According to Mary Baker, 2002 and referred to in a telephone interview with Peggy Seeger in 2013

³⁸⁷ MacColl 1981 [online]

³⁸⁸ Murdoch cited in Collini 2006, p.162–3

³⁸⁹ *Song of the Road*, first broadcast 5th November 1959

Sara Parker (daughter of Charles Parker and a feature maker who conducted interviews for the 2006 *Ballads* series) has proposed that often well trained interviewees hide truth behind their professional facade, which acts as a shield. She believes that the “expert” uses the interview to achieve a goal, often motivated by professional obligations: “*The people who think of themselves as experts....they obviously have a set pattern of things that they say about what they do...it makes them feel safe and that nobody can criticise them.*”³⁹⁰ Meanwhile the ordinary contributor is conversely regarded by producers as contributing towards a shared national conversation, and rewarded just for taking part.³⁹¹ This concept of being ‘ordinary’ in the media has become something to be celebrated, connoting images of sincerity, authenticity and entitlement. According to Turner ‘performing ordinariness has become an end in itself, and thus a rich and (or so it seems) almost inexhaustible means of generating new content for familiar formats.’³⁹²

It appears that Charles Parker also intentionally adapted his working persona to fit with the supposed needs of his profession. Brown has dated the term ‘personae’ back to the Greek term for stage mask³⁹³ – and within the context of the interview this might offer a contributor a sense of protection from fear, of not performing appropriately or promoting an official line thoroughly enough. These “professional interviewees”, require a different approach, where the interview is used to promote an agenda, located now within in a more mediatised, media-trained environment “*people are thinking of the sound bites...you don’t get any depth at all.*”³⁹⁴ Back in the late 1950’s, Ewan MacColl, Charles Parker and Peggy Seeger became frustrated by the results of *Song of the Road*³⁹⁵ and were determined that their next *Ballad* would not focus on the work processes; but instead on people’s responses and attitude *towards* these processes.³⁹⁶

4.4 BURSTING THE BUBBLE: INTERVIEW TECHNIQUE

For *Singing the Fishing* the team would find value in depth recording, spending days with their informants. It took three weeks to record their main contributor; eighty-year old Sam Lerner, amassing almost thirty hours

³⁹⁰ Interview, Sara Parker, Tonbridge, 2013

³⁹¹ What might qualifies someone an ‘expert’ has not been clearly defined, but contributors who are considered as such may now request a fee to take part in interviews – something not often offered to non-media professionals.

³⁹² Turner 2009, p.19

³⁹³ Brown 2013

³⁹⁴ Interview, John Leonard, London, 2013

³⁹⁵ There was no fixed approach to interviewing by Seeger, MacColl or Parker, and their attitudes and experiences developed often naturally between 1957-1964

³⁹⁶ See the Sleeve note for *Song of the Road*, courtesy of Topic records TSCD 802

of actuality.³⁹⁷ The team travelled by sea and to the markets to record with the fishing community. They were committed to gain the trust of their contributors, ‘on shore we had been treated with politeness mixed with some reserve, but after a day at sea we were accepted as members of the crew.’³⁹⁸ Their attention turned to the way that rhythms, metaphors, proverbs, metaphors, proverbs, ideoms, silence and hesitation could illuminate an event or a memory. Instead of directing the interview the team were intent to get their informant to a place where they were no longer answering a structured question, but instead ‘asking themselves questions, as they’re answering his questions’³⁹⁹

He [Parker] had the most important quality an interviewer can ever have - he was a great listener. He just listened and followed up with subsidiary questions which naturally followed on. He was not pushing himself as a personality interviewer. In fact all he was interested in were the answers people gave. He encouraged them to talk - encouraged them to give an answer and then give some more.⁴⁰⁰

In order to avoid recording off the cuff or surface responses from contributors, on some occasions Peggy Seeger, Charles Parker and Ewan MacColl would intentionally ask the same question up to three times. This breach in convention contrasted with traditional styles of question and answer patters. They believed this technique would guarantee that the answer became more profound and less prepared.

*“Sam Lerner was very irritated. He was almost angry....Almost, “I’ve told you that before!” But Charles Parker and Ewan, with me sitting there crocheting quilts, said, “Tell us Sam, what was that like?” And by that time, you get to a very much deeper level, because the person has opened up with confusion and anger and a deeper form of memory.”*⁴⁰¹

Although motivated by a seemingly sincere motivation to unearth a truthful and poetic recollection, it could be argued that this is deliberate and calculative strategy, (made possible the ability to pre-record), and one which seeks to undermine the opportunity for the informant to lie, protect their privacy or withhold information. By asking something more than one time suggests a sense of mistrust or disbelief in what the interviewer originally said, suggesting that the first answer is unsatisfactory. The power of the conventional symmetry of the interview means there is an expectation that the interviewee is obligated to respond.⁴⁰² John Leonard, executive producer of the 2006 *Radio Ballads*, maintained that this provocative approach would not

³⁹⁷ The final playback and transcription of this material took three weeks. The writing of the songs afterwards took another month. See MacColl 1981

³⁹⁸ MacColl 1981 [online].

³⁹⁹ Interview, Sean Street, Bournemouth, 2013

⁴⁰⁰ E-mail correspondence, Jeff Link, 2013

⁴⁰¹ Telephone Interview, Peggy Seeger, 2013

⁴⁰² Bell & Van Leeuwen 2010

work today, partly for financial and budgetary restrictions, but also because it would risk the patience of their interviewees.

*“I think that would just irritate people. If that was me, I would certainly clam up, and I think you have got to get people to that point where they are so relaxed that they will answer honestly first time, because the first time they tell you is always the best.”*⁴⁰³

In contemporary editions, the line of off air questioning is similar to Charles Parkers early attempts - with what we could now term as ‘typical’ basic interview questions: the “who’s”, “what’s”, “where’s”, “when’s” and “how’s” – seeking to fulfil a research element alongside a quest for more intimate information.⁴⁰⁴ I discuss this more in Chapter Six, but for Ewan MacColl however, his very experimental technique and irritated response was considered a necessary evil. His informants did express frustration and anger because they had already given so much of their time, *“but once that rather superficial anger had dissipated itself they said marvellous things. And more often than not they said them in a marvellous way.”*⁴⁰⁵ This type of questioning was organic and innovative, and one wholly departed from the techniques of other interviewers at the time. This was partly down to the commitment of the production team, as well as the capability of the recorder, the capacity to record on location and not forgetting the generous budget, which allowed so much time to be spent in the company of contributors.

Although the *Ballads* team were clearly eager to avoid the ‘nice clean interviewing one associates with the newsreel programmes’ the unequal dynamics might have still proved daunting to interviewees.⁴⁰⁶ Below is an extract of a raw interview with contributor Jim Hunter, (made for *Song of the Road*) which also shows an attempt to investigate the more intimate dimension of the interviewee’s life. Instead of a one-to-one interview, in many of the original interviews, there is a two or even three to one imbalance.

MacColl to Hunter: Don’t tell us what you think we want to hear but what you know

*Parker to Hunter: It means you put your life and reputation in our hands
(laughter)...you can see from our frank and honest faces...*

Hunter: Yes, well er...

*Parker: Can I first hear your personal history...where are you from again?*⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰³ Interview, John Leonard, London, 2013

⁴⁰⁴ See Appendix 2 for an extract of Vince Hunt’s diary of questions for the 2006 recordings.

⁴⁰⁵ MacColl 1985-6

⁴⁰⁶ Transcript from *Singing English*. This was a radio discussion programme about the making of the *Ballads*, first transmitted on Tuesday 16th January 1962 at 19.30. It was pre-recorded on 30th Sept 1961.

⁴⁰⁷ Transcript from *Singing English*. A discussion programme on the making of the *Ballads*, first transmitted on Tuesday 16th January 1962 19.30. It was pre-recorded on 30th Sept 1961

The interviewers are attempting to bridge the social distance between themselves and Jim Hunter by adopting a flippant, jovial, conversational line of questioning. They endeavour to allay fears of how the material could be shared and the consequences of his broadcast by promoting a sense of trust and confidence. They also try to confront popular notions of the how interviews *should* be recorded, dismissing the performative requirements which Hunter might have witnessed by listening to other output. There is a plea for Hunter to tell them what he ‘knows’, rather than what he thinks they *want* to know. This extract indicates that the interviewers clearly display awareness about the types of concerns which their interviewees may be facing.

It is necessary to briefly return to the work of Loviglio, who offered an early explanation of mediatisation in his work on vox pops. Loviglio showed how listeners and potential participants quickly came to understand what constitutes successful interaction (or presentation of the self) by learning what was acceptable, those who were chosen to be selected and the privileges that resulted from these relations.⁴⁰⁸ Most of those who were interviewed for the original *Ballads* would not have had this opportunity before, and would not have a strong image of how to perform. In contrast, contemporary *Ballads* interviewees are situated in a completely altered cultural and media environment, so have grown up watching or hearing how others have ‘successfully’ been presented on air – especially since they would have the means to listen to previous editions of the *Ballads*.⁴⁰⁹

This can be said for most types of mediated content – listeners or viewers are able to locate ‘successful’ ones by studying public and on air reactions to public speech. This means many interviewees may no longer need to be primed and often come equipped with their own agenda. *Robert took part in a pre-recorded interview for a BBC Radio documentary in 2011 with a producer with Smooth Operations, the same independent production company that made the contemporary *Radio Ballads* programmes.

“...it wasn’t really an interview. I had everything written down that I were going to say that day. [laughs] I knew everything, I knew everything that I was going to say to him, and I pretty much hit everything that I wanted to say. He asked me a question and I didn’t even bother answering the question. I says, “Right, I’m just going to tell you what I’ve written down. And at the end of it, we were just like, “That’ll do,” [laughs] sort of thing, because I knew what he wanted.”⁴¹⁰

*Robert approached this interview recording equipped with his own agenda – challenging the convention of the archetypal ‘question/answer’ interview format. Having learnt what is expected from the encounter,

⁴⁰⁸ Loviglio 2005

⁴⁰⁹ Studies looking at authenticity & communicative entitlement have found that contemporary interviewees are increasingly able to critically evaluate and adapt their own performance styles. See Montgomery 2001, Myers 2001 & O’Sullivan 2005

⁴¹⁰ Interview, Robert, Bournemouth 2012. *Robert was an interviewee for a BBC Radio 1Xtra documentary, which was broadcast in 2011.

*Robert is able to negotiate – giving the interviewer what ‘he wanted’ but also knowing what he wanted to get out of it. In contrast, from Hunter’s perspective it might have proved unnerving to be faced by two strangers holding a microphone, who are asking about his potentially private and personal history – by those have clearly forgotten where he was from. As Olive Shapley acknowledges, ‘People were not used to having a microphone thrust in front of them with the instruction to be natural – just be natural!’⁴¹¹

Contemporary reporters, like Vince Hunt, have engaged with different techniques, designed to encourage interviewees to feel able to confidently communicate in a setting they feel comfortable in.

*“I got them round to my house, because I thought they wouldn’t respond as well if we did it at the BBC, plus I live near a river, so I said, “Why don’t you come round, we’ll have a cup of tea, do some interviews...perhaps you could demonstrate some of your techniques for me and so, after we’d done the talk, we went down the river and I said, “OK, so imagine I’m the fox and you behave like you were trying to put the hounds off the scent,” and so I’m standing here, like this, going, “Alright, OK, I’m rolling,” and they’re coming up and going [barking sounds] into the microphone.”*⁴¹²

Here Vince Hunt is attempting to relax the non-professional and untrained interviewee, seeing the studio as an overly formal and disconnected environment, unsuited to the needs of the *Ballads* format and detached from the subject matter.⁴¹³ This mirrors the approach by contemporary producers of *Desert Island Discs*, who as earlier discussed, conduct many of their research interviews in the homes of their castaways. For Scannell⁴¹⁴, the studio ‘structures the communicative character of the event and performances they are expected to produce for absent viewers and listeners’ so Vince Hunt was attempting here to remove the expected behaviour and instead draw out a more natural and authentic response. Elwood and Martin’s work on location, power and the qualitative interview is of relevance here, more specifically in relation to the recording of the original *Ballads*.

Participants who are given a choice about where they will be interviewed may feel more empowered in their interaction with the researchers, and the researcher has an opportunity to examine participants’ choices for clues about the social geographies of the places where research is being carried out.^{415 416}

⁴¹¹ Shapley 1996, p.49

⁴¹² Interview Vince Hunt, Manchester, 2013. Referring here to an interview he conducted for *Horn of the Hunter*, 2006. BBC Radio 2

⁴¹³ See Ytreburg 2006

⁴¹⁴ Scannell 1996, p.140

⁴¹⁵ Elwood and Martin 2000, p.656

⁴¹⁶ Although it should not be forgotten that the interviewee was not given a variety of choices over the location of the interview.

During the late 1950's the public image of the BBC interviewer was educated and upper class. Charles Parker, with his BBC speech, his Navy background and Cambridge education stood out as tall figure, with his bow tie and 'Oxbridge drawl.'⁴¹⁷ Concerned that he could intimidate his interviewees, Charles Parker, (like Vince Hunt), also engaged with techniques designed to gain the trust of his informants. He consciously decided to position himself down on an equal or lower eye level than his contributors, in an attempt to defer command of the conversation.

*"He would sit on a little stool, almost at the feet, as it were, of the interviewee and look up to them when he was talking to them and that was a deliberate policy on his part. He said it was to empower the interviewee, to give them a sense of confidence. And the other thing that he did, which is, in a sense the opposite of that relaxing thing, was that he would burst their personal space bubble with a microphone."*⁴¹⁸

This brings an almost psychological and strategic approach to the radio interview, where power and trust has become something to consciously consider before the encounter could take place. It is also brings in a hidden dimension of interview interaction, entirely different from the more visible territory of television. The microphone here can be seen as a powerful tool to permit the interviewer to ask challenging questions, seemingly on behalf of the listener.

While Vince Hunt intentionally positions the microphone down and out of view, Sara Parker uses a similar technique as her father, preferring to keep the microphone in the eye-line of her interviewees, seeing the microphone as a tool that grants a producer permission to ask questions that she would never ask socially. Again this concept of the 'bubble' is recognised here, which both Sara and Charles Parker attempted to penetrate:

*"I straightaway whack the microphone really close, closer probably than the required four inches, shove my headphones on so they know, so you've immediately formalised it into an interview.... People have this bubble around them, which is their protective bubble. ...and the microphone is a way of piercing into it, and once you've done that, people tell you anything"*⁴¹⁹

Like Roy Plomley, Charles Parker's interview technique is polite, humble and complimentary, making use of short, sharp statements 'Well, yes indeed. I must say this is very valuable to me.'⁴²⁰ Although Parker himself is not heard on the final editions (according to *Ballads* editor Mary Baker he didn't care for the sound of his

⁴¹⁷ Harker 2007, p.129

⁴¹⁸ Interview, Sean Street, Bournemouth, 2013

⁴¹⁹ Interview, Sara Parker, Tonbridge, 2013

⁴²⁰ Charles Parker Archive, Birmingham Central Library. Transcript of interview with Mr Howarth – July 1957. Transcript consisted of 24 pages in four parts.

own voice), it is possible to get an idea of his questioning style from transcripts.⁴²¹ Mary Baker recalls his distinctive interviewing style, which differed from other producers at the time.

“He never put himself forward, he always talked to someone as little as possible and encouraged them to pour their heart out to him and they did. And one of the SM’s said to me “how does he get them to say these things?” I said “He doesn’t get them to, he doesn’t make them say anything, he lets them say it” and that’s how he discovered the treasure that was around”^{422 423}

Still used to using the tape recorder as a research tool, it seems to have taken time for Parker to develop his questioning techniques. He asked closed questions to Mr Howarth in July 1957 ‘Are you Church of England?’ and ‘Do you think he’s benefited from the Christian upbringing?’ Scripts reveal he was unafraid of directing contributors ‘That’s right’ and ‘Say it again, our friend here coughed’ and often placed himself as unknowledgeable about a subject, ‘I’ve not understood this’ and ‘what do you mean?’⁴²⁴ This encompasses the intention of the *Ballads* – to offer power, responsibility and rights to an interviewee through a seemingly submissive attitude.

At the heart of the production process Charles Parker, Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger claimed control over each aspect of speech, with their techniques largely manufactured in order to get what they needed. For Goody, this apparent ignorance by an interviewer may be an intentional device;

If knowledge is power, then to admit to ignorance, by asking, is to disclaim power. Furthermore, if to answer involves accepting responsibility, then to defer to another person’s answer is to acknowledge that person’s right to take responsibility for the choice or decision which the answer conveys.⁴²⁵

As Bieuwen and Van Leeuwen have noted, ‘the questioners are doubly advantaged: by their role as interviewers, and by their material power. They use questions as a means of control.’⁴²⁶ This is the paradox at the centre of the *Radio Ballads*. Although inspired by the democratic principles of recording, the producers had a clear approach intended to get a specific response from their contributors.

⁴²¹ Charles Parker Archive, Birmingham’s Central Library.

⁴²² Charles Parker Archive, Birmingham Central Library. MS 1913. Mary Baker, 2002. Oral history interview.

⁴²³ SM refers to Studio Manager.

⁴²⁴ Charles Parker Archive, Birmingham Central Library. CPA 2/64/1/. Transcript of interview with Mr Howarth – July 1957. Transcript consisted of 24 pages in four parts.

⁴²⁵ Goody 1978, p.32

⁴²⁶ Bell & Van Leeuwen 1994, p.14

4.5 EDITING: CROSSING BOUNDARIES

Choosing an anonymous montaged editing technique meant that interviewees were not required to justify or be accountable for their views. Instead it becomes the duty of the producer to position these judgements about the content or sound at the post production stage, (rather than at the scripting phase, as we saw on early episodes of *Desert Island Discs*). For Fortune this created an almost poetic artistic process of natural selection ‘Judicious editing of types can create the same effect as a sonnet; all that is superficial and extraneous is cut away.’⁴²⁷ Used in order to mimic the spontaneity of liveness, these new editing techniques also posed a risk and added responsibility. In 1952, Rodgers had warned early on about the possible moral dilemmas of editing unscripted talk.

The editor and compiler of such a radio portrait must exercise care. For, by the insertion or elision of one word on disc, by the juxtaposing of two separate statements, a speaker may be made, on broadcast, to say something which would be quite out of keeping with his character or intention.⁴²⁸

Although the *Ballads* interview was viewed by its producers as a collaborative gift exchange based on a foundation of co-creation, it should be remembered that the capacity to edit on tape meant that the documentary producer still holds the overall authority and ownership over material.⁴²⁹ This power had shifted from paper to tape in a more subtle way. Despite no longer wanting to explicitly regulate speech through the use of scripting or actors, it would be incorrect to assume that producers were relinquishing editorial control of the interview encounter, “*you’re still controlling their voice. You’re still nodding and smiling sweetly at your interviewee, but mentally you’re saying, “I’m not going to use this bit.”*”⁴³⁰ While Parker later claimed that editing enabled him to “free the interviewee’s thoughts from the prison of their speech”⁴³¹ the actuality remained tightly managed after the interview had taken place. Parker contested that editing allowed him to represent the essence of natural speech in a more cohesive manner, but in ways that mirrored the controlled editing on *Desert Island Discs*, the duration and detail of each phrase, utterance or silence was cut, fashioned and shaped.

⁴²⁷ Fortune 1959, p. 259

⁴²⁸ Rodgers 1952, p.139

⁴²⁹ It should be remembered at this point that the *Ballads* were being made for entertainment purposes, and not to record or preserve oral history.

⁴³⁰ Interview, Sean Street, Bournemouth, 2013

⁴³¹ Interview, Sean Street, Bournemouth, 2013. Technically it was Mary Baker’s responsibility to edit the programme, and BBC procedure dictated that Parker could not run the equipment without being trained, or without another engineer present. Baker recalls how ‘to begin with he was with me all the time, because that was the rule, the producer said and the operator did’. But in an effort to save time, and money, Parker began to edit the material himself.

Cutting/editing the tapes in the 1950's was a work of great craft skill, several machines running in sections onto the master recorder with music played in live. The event was a piece of performance art – no small wonder each programme took a year to produce.⁴³²

The only time Charles Parker appears on tape during these eight hours is at the end of *Travelling People* (1964), where his original question is included in the final edit of the last extract. This last episode of the *Radio Ballads* focussed on the lives of gypsies and tinkers. In the next extract, a clip from an interview with a local Councillor is played out, as he describes his controversial opinions about race and religion. Charles Parker is heard interrupting the Councillor, attempting to clarify his understanding, which can also be regarded as a potentially intimidating act:

Councillor: How far does it come in your mind before you say I have done everything I possibly can and I will help the broad mass of these people. But there are some I can do nothing with whatever, then doesn't the time arise in one's mind when one has to say, all right, one has to exterminate the impossibles. I know all that leads to in one's mind, Nazism, who is it next, the Gypsies, the tinkers, the Jews, the Coloured Man. I don't accept that really on these particular...

C. Parker: (interrupts) Well, I don't think... exterminates a terrible word... you can't really mean that?

Councillor: Why not?

This is a notorious example of the interviewer as challenging the accountability of their contributor. In an episode of *Desert Island Discs*, originally broadcast in 1989, Lady Diana Mosley described Hitler as “*fascinating*” and challenged Sue Lawley's statement that the Nazis had murdered six million Jews, “*Oh no, I don't think it was that many,*” Lady Mosley answered.⁴³³ This was not met with any desire by Sue Lawley to demand accountability, instead there is a pause followed by her reply “*Tell us about your fifth record, Lady Mosley.*”⁴³⁴

Through specific decisions made in the editing stage, the councillor and Mosely are left to “hang themselves” with their controversial comments.⁴³⁵ These statements are met in a deliberate way—one pauses and moves on to the next record, and the other ends breaks with convention and ends the series.⁴³⁶ I'll discuss the repercussions of it later in the next Chapter, but silence can be regarded as one of the most commanding responses, and knowing when to leave it is an important editorial decision, “*much more telling than the words*

⁴³² Tams 2007, p.16

⁴³³ *Woman's Hour*, Tuesday 6 December 2011 & Symons 2012

⁴³⁴ Lady Diana Mosley. *Desert Island Discs*, 26 November 1989. Of course this refers to the edited version. We are not aware of what was taken out of the recording.

⁴³⁵ Interview, Sean Street, Boumemouth, 2013

⁴³⁶ Other episodes ended in song. This was the first and only episode to end in speech.

themselves.”⁴³⁷ For pre-recorded programmes like the *Radio Ballads* and *Desert Island Discs*, the inclusion or rejection of silence is not only the responsibility of the interviewee. This can be a strategic and powerful judgment based on the motivations of the editor – who is able to play creatively with software to increase or decrease its inclusion. Despite the *Ballads* claim to empower the interviewee, many editing choices were based on the personal or political motivations of the producer or editor, with little thought for the councillor who, as Peggy Seeger admits, “*he didn’t realise what he was saying, and how it really sounded.*”⁴³⁸ What is also interesting about the *Ballads* and *Desert Island Discs* is that the programme is not confined to one evening, played only once or twice in the schedules and reliant on an appointment to listen. Rather the words and reputation of the interviewee lives on, shared by digital archives, cd collections, podcasts or repeats. This increased lifespan of the interview supposes new pressures, risks and consequences for all parties, whether they are the questioners, public figures or ‘ordinary’ people.⁴³⁹

Both series of the *Ballads* are heavily edited, and there is naturally a tension here between producing captivating audio for the listener, while honouring the original speech patterns and values of interviewees. The importance of the off-mic interviewer is deliberately downplayed; yet power is more subtle, implicitly achieved using a range of techniques which are balanced in both editing and questioning tenuously between discovery and exposure. Ownership of the means of artistic expression – in this case the microphone and the means of editing - sees much of the control is firmly removed away from the interviewee to the producer;

*“the person that holds the palette picks the colours. They are the ones that are applying the brushes, the brush strokes and the heart strokes and the bristles and the patting down.”*⁴⁴⁰

4.6 TALKING TO TEENAGERS

For their production of *On the Edge* (1963),⁴⁴¹ Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger took charge of the interview process. They spoke to fifty-two contributors for an episode about Britain’s teenagers, including schoolgirls, mods and rockers and the unemployed. With no requirement for parental consent, or BBC compliance guidelines, these conversations were conducted both on a one-to-one basis and in groups, “*We just picked*

⁴³⁷ This will be explored in the next chapter.

⁴³⁸ Telephone Interview, Peggy Seeger, 2013

⁴³⁹ Despite this, John Leonard and Leanne Buckle had never been approached by any of their participants who have complained about misrepresentation.

⁴⁴⁰ Interview, Mr Gee, London, 2013. Street and Franklin have both commented on the original *Ballad*’s approach to editing, but apart from Dunaway (2000) and Spinelli (2006) there has been little theorization or speculation about the impact of newer digital editing techniques. Interviews for the 2006 *Ballads* were recorded on DAT, uploaded via computers and edited on Pro-Tools, but traditional notebooks and pencils were still used to select material, collate notes, shape content categories and compose interview questions.

⁴⁴¹ First transmitted on 13th February 1963

*them up outside a school and said “would you like to talk to us.”*⁴⁴² Peggy Seeger recalls recording her interviewees in the dark in her own living room, and a teenager called Vera at an East London rave club, who told her, *“You’ve got to have your fun when you’re young, because when you’re twenty you’ve had it!”*⁴⁴³

On the Edge featured a range of accents, containing voices from Glasgow, Newcastle, Birmingham, Nottingham, Derby, Bristol, London and Reading. The teenagers were eager to articulate views which had previously been ignored in the media – and as a result they were reportedly ‘completely uninhabited’⁴⁴⁴ for ‘there was no stopping them. Like a stream of consciousness everything poured out – their hopes, anxieties, bewilderment, fears, doubts, dreams, fantasies.’⁴⁴⁵

Hilgert’s recent work on post-war radio programmes about and for “youth” in West Germany and Great Britain also revealed some interesting classifications of young people during this time.⁴⁴⁶ Hilgert’s research showed four discursive phases, and demonstrated that younger listeners and contributors had been largely ignored by broadcasters until the 1930’s. Of particular interest, for Hilgert is the 1955-1957/8 period, where young people (not just Teddy Boys) were the subject of suspicion, regarded as potentially dangerous for public security and moral standards. Then, from 1958-1963/5 this seemingly shifted, and youngsters were considered neither good nor bad – but “different” due in part to puberty and adolescence. Long and Franklin have both suggested that a time of reclamation, austerity and prosperity was dominant in the first two decades after the Second World War, and partly, as a consequence this saw a number of anxieties presented towards youth groups.⁴⁴⁷ Teenage culture became identifiable by fashion and musical tastes and together with influences from American culture (comics to rock and roll) this resulted in a growth of perceived disobedience amongst particular youth subcultures.

Almost as response to this was a change to the previous style of questioning for the recording of the interview in comparison with the previous episodes of the *Ballads*. This time the themes featured in *On the Edge* would be dictated by topics chosen to be significant by the interviewees themselves. Many of the questions had never been asked or answered before in such a way:

“When it came to the teenagers, all you had to do was present the teenagers with some fact about them, i.e. that they’re uncontrollable, that they get drunk every night and they break up pubs, and tell them, “You have this image. Is it true?” They were absolutely dying to

⁴⁴² MacColl 1985-6

⁴⁴³ Telephone Interview, Peggy Seeger, 2013

⁴⁴⁴ MacColl 1985-6

⁴⁴⁵ MacColl 1981 [online].

⁴⁴⁶ Hilgert 2014

⁴⁴⁷ Long and Franklin 2013

*talk. It was wonderful. You couldn't stop them...because hardly anybody had asked them, "What do you feel about this?"*⁴⁴⁸

These interviews culminated into a snapshot of opinions and attitudes towards the bomb⁴⁴⁹, sex, parental relationships, marriage and the future – and significantly, no expert opinions were featured. This was a similar approach adopted by Denis Mitchell and Norman Swallows in their television documentary *On the Threshold* (1958).⁴⁵⁰ Produced five years before *On the Edge*, *On the Threshold* was also an attempt to feature the views and feelings of five teenagers, told using their own words. These programmes, and others from the likes of Donnellan, and Boorman were seen to challenge other, more pejorative or stereotypical mainstream media representations of youth during this time, by allowing their voices and their experiences to be heard.

*You read about teenagers, you can't get a paper, pick up a paper without seeing Teenagers, Teenagers, and to think that you're one of them. You're just the same. You want to be someone entirely different, someone unique. This is what you're searching for, that thing that's unique.*⁴⁵¹

The *Ballads* not only sought to include collection of regional voices, but also appreciated that the voices of young people had largely been either mis-represented or excluded from radio programmes. And when, in 2006, a series of new *Ballads* was commissioned, a different set of producers and interviewers would envision the recording of an updated version of the original, provisionally titled *On the Edge 2*. Their approach to this proposed programme would reveal some interesting shifts in what is deemed appropriate interview practise, and highlights the different challenges faced by interviewers in terms of consent, compliance and commissioning guidelines.

4.7 THE CONTEMPORARY BALLADS

Forty years after the last original *Ballads* were broadcast, BBC Radio 2 commissioned six new editions. They were to be aired this time much closer, made and were made by Smooth Operations, an independent production company based in Oldham and Manchester.⁴⁵² A BBC incentive that had looked to encourage the inclusion of local accents in national radio programming was partly responsible.

⁴⁴⁸ Telephone Interview, Peggy Seeger, 2013

⁴⁴⁹ "Ban the Bomb" became a part of the youth culture during the 1960's in the UK

⁴⁵⁰ Broadcast in 1958

⁴⁵¹ An edited extract from an interview that featured in *On The Edge*

⁴⁵² John Leonard and John Tams had previously expressed interest in pitching them for BBC Radio 4.

“somebody high up in the BBC had gone to Radio Two, saying, “What are you doing about this initiative... Every network has got to do something... What about those Radio Ballads? That would use local accents.”⁴⁵³

Despite the success of the original format, this type of policy reveals a deliberate drive was still needed to prioritise the experiences of the regional speaker on national networks, over fifty years on. Many consider it the job of the British media to highlight the behaviour of those with the most power – yet of course, the media continues to be largely operated by those within the establishment, who share the same education, intonation and ideologies. John Leonard who had trained at the BBC in 1976 when the Corporation was still dominated by those with RP accents⁴⁵⁴ found it to be:

“A very Oxbridge, middle-class environment and so people with my accent still didn’t get on the radio that much and I found it all a bit patronising... which is probably what drew me towards the Ballads.”⁴⁵⁵

These contemporary *Ballads* concentrated on similar subjects to the original *Ballads*, those which highlighted communities, daily struggles and the gap between ‘us and them’; each hour long episode focussed on the steel and shipbuilding industry, the Northern Irish conflict, hunting with hounds and living with Aids. But this time all the newer versions would be broadcast in the same year, unlike the original episodes which were transmitted across a six year period.

Although keen to replicate their interview gathering techniques, Annie Grundy (the editor), John Leonard (the exec producer) and Vince Hunt (the main interviewer) consciously opted not to listen too many of the original episodes before production began, to avoid the risk of directly copying. In preparation for *On The Edge 2*, Vince Hunt was sent to gather the actuality from schools and colleges, but discovered that legal requirements would prevent them from finding a similar and often controversial types of material. While teenagers in the 1960’s had been seemingly eager to share personal opinions with Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger, updated editorial guidelines and compliance procedures meant that potential candidates for inclusion in the programme had to gain consent before recording could take place.

“In those days... being a teenager was a new thing and people were getting hit with bike chains and Sputnik was something to get excited about. Nobody had ever asked them before. You can’t do that now, no, you’d be arrested within minutes. You had to get parental permission to speak to the kids. “Now I don’t want you saying anything bad to that BBC bloke.” Awful, it was. You had to do these interviews accompanied, so I would be sitting in sixth form colleges in Yorkshire, interviewing an endless stream of teenagers who

⁴⁵³ Interview, John Leonard, London, 2013

⁴⁵⁴ Received Pronunciation

⁴⁵⁵ Interview, John Leonard, London, 2013

all said the same thing, because they'd been handpicked by the teachers, by the headmaster, to come in and deliver – everybody's on message these days."⁴⁵⁶

Evidently a main concern for the contemporary interviewer is how to a) gain access those with 'worthwhile' stories b) that even young people are aware of the risk and repercussion of going 'off message' and c) the use of consent forms, policy and consent forms to protect the interviewee from potential harm⁴⁵⁷. This was a different set of challenges than the original producers faced.

Instead of empowering the contributor by making the interview process more transparent and informed, both Vince Hunt and Sara Parker found the use of consent forms to be problematic, believing they make people uneasy and conversely offer more control to the institution rather than the interviewee, permitting them "*carte blanche to use everything that person said.*"⁴⁵⁸ Seeger though, contends that it is still vital for interviewees to have ownership over any interview material. She urges producers to be as transparent as possible:

*"Let people know they will have power once it has been recorded. Tell them what is going to happen to the recordings. Tell them nothing will be put on radio or television without your permission."*⁴⁵⁹

Essentially Peggy Seeger, Charles Parker and Ewan MacColl had seen and heard the entire interview process through from start to finish. They had selected their participants, spent time on location, met the contributors, transcribed the interviews and edited the actuality. They had worked together to compose the music and were present to conduct the live orchestration the final productions. Peggy Seeger regards this as a distinct advantage,

*"Ewan and Charles and I went out and recorded, and were altogether, the three of us, from the beginning to the end, and the songs were written by the person who went out and saw the faces of the people that were recorded."*⁴⁶⁰

In contrast, the roles of the production teams who made the contemporary *Ballads* were much more distinct. Vince Hunt and Sara Parker collected the actuality; Annie Grundy would listen through, categorise and perform a preliminary edit, selecting relevant material and removing interviews she didn't feel were relevant, or was of high enough sound quality. It was Annie Grundy's responsibility to remove the voices of the

⁴⁵⁶ Interview, Vince Hunt, Manchester, 2013

⁴⁵⁷ Budget and time restrictions were also identified as a factor.

⁴⁵⁸ Interview, Sara Parker, Tonbridge, 2013. The contemporary editions were made when iPlayer began and programmes began to be repeated, share and stored online. Through digitisation, the interview is now replayed at the convenience of the listener, not at the permission of the broadcaster.

⁴⁵⁹ Telephone Interview, Peggy Seeger, 2013

⁴⁶⁰ Telephone Interview, Peggy Seeger, 2013

interviewers from the recordings⁴⁶¹ and she believes that not having any prior relationship with the interviewees was advantageous to the selection process.

*“Because I’m not developing a relationship with them, so I’m not going to favour anybody over anybody else. I’m not going to think, “Oh, she’s much nicer than him so I’ll keep her in,” ... I didn’t know anything about them.”*⁴⁶²

In contrast, Vince Hunt felt an enduring sense of personal responsibility towards his contributors and found it problematic to compartmentalise his relationship with them.

*“For Annie they’re voices, for John they’re the people who were pieces of a jigsaw, for me they’re people and I see them in their homes and sometimes they’re crying as they’re telling me these stories...for me they’re people, they’re not bits of tape.”*⁴⁶³

A further consideration for the *Ballads* interviewer was to collect stories which would trigger an interest in the songwriter, who would consequently use the words of these interviews to compose the songs.⁴⁶⁴ John Tams was musical director for the contemporary editions and attended a number of the interviews. While John Leonard and Annie Grundy preferred to remain separate from the recording process, John Tams contends that witnessing the encounter helped with the process of writing and recording his compositions, because, as an observer in the process he could see ‘the bits the microphone doesn’t pick up - hands, face, how they carried themselves, eyes.’⁴⁶⁵

John Tams, John Leonard, Annie Grundy, Sara Parker and Vince Hunt were all advocates of the importance of the contributor within the contemporary *Ballads*, keen to embrace the original *Ballads* to give them the recognition they deserved, ‘for changing the mode of British radio, for bringing actuality in as a tool of the programme maker.’⁴⁶⁶ The legacy of the original techniques of questioning and recording lived on. They wished to highlight their interviewee’s struggles, capture the human spirit, showcase the shades of grey and understand the world through their eyes, ‘at all costs we must honour their stories, and moreover we must honour their lives.’⁴⁶⁷ Yet, as I will now show, it does appear that some stories, and some lives appear to have been represented and valued more than others.

⁴⁶¹ S. Parker conducted the interviews and carried out the initial edits for the *Enemy that Lives Within*

⁴⁶² Telephone Interview, Annie Grundy, 2013. This material would be passed on to John Leonard who would assess which interviews would be passed on to the musicians, after which he would perform the final edit.

⁴⁶³ Interview, Vince Hunt, Manchester, 2013

⁴⁶⁴ Vince Hunt intentionally avoids press officers and prefers word of mouth to find participants. Charities, unions and music departments were the starting point for the interview process, who then put them in touch with potential contributors.

⁴⁶⁵ Tams 2007, p.17

⁴⁶⁶ Interview, Vince Hunt, Manchester, 2013

⁴⁶⁷ Tams 2007, p.17

4.8 LISTENING TO THE MEN TALK: WOMEN AND THE *BALLADS*

*Fitters, carpenters, steel fixers,
In the field. He's the man –
He's the one who has to carry out the plan.*

Lyrics taken from *Song of a Road* (1959)

Earlier in this Chapter I used a quote from Howkins, who stated in his useful, (yet slightly naïve) assessment of the *Radio Ballads* that they ‘were the basis of a democratic media in which the voices of ordinary men and women could stand alongside and equal the voice of the BBC.’⁴⁶⁸ This is something I would contest here, because while the voices of working men are certainly positioned and empowered within the original *Ballads*, the voices of women are predominantly side-lined.

In *Song of The Road* (1959) for instance, there are no female voices and if we examine the production files for *Singing the Fishing* (1960) there are a range of questions directed at female interviewees – but the majority of them were focussed on their role as a wife and mother. Charles Parker and Ewan MacColl composed thirty four initial questions, intended for their male contributors.⁴⁶⁹ In contrast, five questions were drafted for the women, who were to take a secondary and supplementary role in most episodes.

1. Do you get lonely with your husband away so much?
2. Would you like your husband to follow some other occupation?
3. Did you know what was in store for you when you got married?
4. Do you want your children to go into fishing?
5. Do you share your husband’s feelings about the sea? Do you look on the sea as an enemy or a friend? Are you always conscious of the weather?⁴⁷⁰

As Skoog has remarked, the post-war woman was considered a significant citizen, crucial for the rebuilding of Britain, often positioned both as a worker *and* as a mother.⁴⁷¹ Yet women played a largely subordinate role

⁴⁶⁸ Howkins 2000, p.89

⁴⁶⁹ Charles Parker Archive, Birmingham Central Library, CPA 2/78/1/4. These were set to find out information and gauge opinion of the fishermen. Questions for men included: ‘Have you noticed what influence the weather has on the fish? What’s the best weather for fishing? What influence does the moon have on fish? Which fishing port do you most like to put in at?’

⁴⁷⁰ Charles Parker Archive, Birmingham Central Library, CPA 2/78/1/4

⁴⁷¹ Skoog 2009

in the original *Ballads*. Peter Cox was the author of *Set into Song*; a book that explored the making of the *Radio Ballads*⁴⁷²:

*“I discussed this with Peggy [Seeger]. I said, “What are the women in this?” She looked at me askance, as if nobody had ever asked her the question before. We agreed they were supports and victims, or they were lumped in with the boys.”*⁴⁷³

Largely the main themes of each original episode, (fishing, mining, railways and the making of motorways) were centred on skill and accomplishments of men and the challenges they faced. Not only were women underrepresented on air, but could be considered undervalued when it came to the *making* of the *Ballads*. Peggy Seeger was crafting out a career as a musician and had recently travelled to the UK from the USA. Officially, Peggy Seeger is credited mainly for her work as a composer, and occasionally for her contribution to the post-interview process; listening to the interviews, transcribing actuality and choosing material for inclusion in the programme. But she was also there, alongside Charles Parker and Ewan MacColl out on location and took an active (although largely uncredited) role as an interviewer. Peggy Seeger seems to have seen her responsibility (at least at the start from 1957 onwards) as supporting the labours of Charles Parker and Ewan MacColl. Although she was to take more of an active role in later interviews, she did not consider herself qualified to ask questions. She felt apprehensive about carrying out interviews for *Song of The Road* and *The Big Hewer*.

*“I was pregnant for some of it, and I was used to listening to the men talk. I wasn’t a feminist at that time...I couldn’t have interviewed the miners and the railwaymen or the road builders. They were very much male programmes. Really I was extraneous...mostly I was holding the microphone or carrying things.”*⁴⁷⁴

Although there were pioneering women who occupied positions of power during this time, female voices were largely built into “women’s interest” programming and struggled to occupy positions of power in an editorial capacity. The Annan Report, published decades later in 1977, revealed that there continued to be a taken for granted assumption that ‘a man knows how to address an audience composed of men and women, but a woman does not.’⁴⁷⁵ If we return briefly to *Desert Island Discs*, we can see that a gender disparity existed up until 2013 – the first year that as many women as men were chosen to be castaways.

It has been widely documented that Peggy Seeger and Ewan MacColl felt aggrieved that Parker was given more public recognition for his role in the making of the *Ballads*. But Mary Baker, (who edited the original *Ballads*), has not been publically credited for her work. She remained pragmatic about this, partly because

⁴⁷² Cox 2008

⁴⁷³ Interview, Peter Cox, London, 2013

⁴⁷⁴ Telephone Interview, Peggy Seeger, 2013

⁴⁷⁵ Karpf 1979, p.44

“backroom boys and girls don’t get any praise so I didn’t expect any,”⁴⁷⁶ although she did admit, “I would have liked to have been credited in the *Radio Times*.”⁴⁷⁷ As Scannell has commented, the often hidden achievements of production staff often work tirelessly with little recognition ‘they present themselves with no strings attached, and without soliciting acknowledgement or thanks.’⁴⁷⁸ Despite her prominent position in the editing process, it is interesting to note that Mary Baker is still not mentioned on any of the cd sleeve credits of recently released editions.⁴⁷⁹

In the contemporary *Ballads*, most topics are focussed on traditionally male dominated industries (shipbuilding, steel) but there is an attempt to provide a female perspective, and represent women as more than just support figures, nurturers, peacemakers or victims.⁴⁸⁰ In *The Enemy that Lives Within* female voices dominate the programme – in fact there is only one male interview. While this promotes a wider concern for greater inclusion, because of the subject matter (illness) it also perhaps, still situates the woman as Peter Cox and Peggy Seeger suggested, either a victim, or a care giver. There was none-the-less at least a growing awareness of the necessity to include more female voices. The *Ballads* composer John Tams recognised the need for female folk singers to take more of a central role, ‘Ever aware of the woman’s voice being under-represented, we needed to bring in more women writers.’⁴⁸¹

Annie Grundy, the editor of the newer *Ballads*, is credited by her colleagues with the inclusion of more female actuality voices in contemporary editions:

*“Often Annie will think something that me and John haven’t thought of, because she’s a woman and we can’t think like that, no matter how much we might try to. This is the kind of stuff I take into account, thinking, “Well, they’re a load of blokes. We need some women. What about the women’s point of view?” But I don’t want it to be tokenism.”*⁴⁸²

While Annie Grundy has received more public credit for her part than Mary Baker, she does not feel a sense of authorship over the project and is largely modest about her own contribution to the success of the series.

“Well, I sort of don’t regard it as my work. I regard it really as Vince and John’s. I think the part I played is nothing compared to what they did. Vince doing hours and hours all

⁴⁷⁶ Charles Parker Archive, Birmingham Central Library. MS 1913. Mary Baker, 2002. Oral history interview

⁴⁷⁷ Charles Parker Archive, Birmingham Central Library. MS 1913. Mary Baker, 2002. Oral history interview

⁴⁷⁸ Scannell 2003, p.110

⁴⁷⁹ Topic Records Ltd 1999

⁴⁸⁰ In *the Enemy that Lives Within* there is only one male interviewee. The rest are female.

⁴⁸¹ Tams 2007, p.17

⁴⁸² Interview, Vince Hunt, Manchester, 2013

*over the country, and John working his magic. I think I had the easiest bit going...I'm just so glad I got the chance"*⁴⁸³

Mary Baker recalls a similar feeling, recalling the three of them, "*with me tagging on behind*".⁴⁸⁴ Although I do not seek to make generalisations, there is still a sense here that there is still a gender imbalance, with men still primarily positioned to make key production or commissioning decisions. Earlier I contested that women have been undervalued when it came to the *making* of the *Ballads*, and I wish to widen this out to a research capacity. Despite the many interpretations of the making of the *Ballads*, this is the first time that a discussion surrounding gender has been prioritised.

Murphy and Skoog's projects have started to investigate women's roles within the BBC both before and after the Second World War. Drawing on their findings there seems a need to widen this out to a discovery of women who worked in independent production, and those from ethnic minority backgrounds which has previously been largely absent from scholarly attention. As Scannell has suggested, one of the tasks of research of this nature, is to uncover and honour the work of individuals which has not yet been documented, 'to redeem them from the silences of history.'⁴⁸⁵

4.9 CONCLUDING NOTE

During the course of this Chapter, I have touched upon the primary role of that the interview played in the making of both series of the *Radio Ballads*. There are, as I've mentioned, many valuable and detailed accounts, but this is the first time that we have heard directly from members of the production team. This, together with the use of archive material, has offered new (and perhaps a revisionist) perspective about some previously undocumented aspects of the series, including teenagers, location recording, the portrayal of gender and class, microphone techniques and questioning styles.

I have shown how the radio interview was influenced by other styles of editing and recording used in vox pops and television during this time. I have commented on the power of professional production networks in shaping a perception about the authenticity of the 'ordinary' interviewee. I have drawn attention to the way women were often side-lined, not only as participants, but also as programme makers. I have attempted to provide a different viewpoint by setting the interview and power at the centre of my discussion, allowing for some observations about the way that audio material comes to be heard. Location recordings, repetitive

⁴⁸³ Telephone Interview, Annie Grundy, 2013

⁴⁸⁴ Murphy 2011, Karpf 1979, and Lacey's 2006 work in particular has started to historically contextualise the experience of female practitioners working in the radio industry. See also the work of Sound Women and Women's Radio in Europe Network (WREN)

⁴⁸⁵ Scannell 2003 p.110

questioning strategies, microphone placement, and editorial guidelines can be seen to offer a wider contextual understanding into the background procedures that can surround the radio interview. By examining both the original and the contemporary versions, I have sought to not only to integrate similarities shared by both sets of production teams (left wing ideology, interview techniques) but to highlight areas that have changed during this period of time.

The pre-recorded nature of the *Ballads* encounter, along with its chosen format of montaged actuality and song, meant that interview interaction between the producers and their contributors was not visible. Overall, the encounter was still highly controlled during the post-production stage where each sentence was crafted and orchestrated to fit with the overall vision of the producer. The end product was not a collaborative or democratic production. It should also be remembered that digital editing capabilities bring with them new types of academic queries about ethics and the process of deletion, selection and access which should demand more reflection from any historians interested in broadcasting history.

The legacy of the *Ballads* technique was to recognise (although not always realise) the potential of the interview as a space that welcomed a cathartic and meaningful experience, for both the interviewer and the so called 'ordinary' interviewee. In the following Chapter we will see further evidence of a movement towards this style of public performance – which would come to form increasingly more confessional, emotional, therapeutic types of interview interaction. Moving forward into the 1970's, the clear separation between the production and consumption of cultural products would be called into question during the next decades, with the introduction of a new contested space; the television talk show and radio phone-in, which according to Carpignano et al., would work to further blur the 'distinction between expert and audience, professional authority and layperson.'⁴⁸⁶

⁴⁸⁶ Carpignano et al. 1990, p.35

CHAPTER 5. CONFESSIONS & THE CALL-IN

Desert Island Discs and *The Radio Ballads* used the radio interview in different ways, but they were united in their reliance on face-to-face, pre-recorded interaction which was shaped around music. As a result, any utterances, silences and words of the interviewer and interviewee were consciously filtered, reproduced and condensed prior to transmission. In contrast, the type of talk conveyed through the radio phone-in, (more than any other radio genre) lies closest to that of daily conversation, one of the most private of all speech genres.⁴⁸⁷ The possibility of liveness is used here to create immediate connection and foster a sense of shared community, purporting to endorse the syntax of spontaneous everyday speech, to question the accountability of experts, or public figures and to enhance community interaction with the airwaves. This is all one step further than the vox pop or montage feature, which as I earlier mentioned, was also pre-recorded and tightly edited prior to broadcast.

Despite its reliance on a small delay⁴⁸⁸, the phone-in show is typified by spatially separated presenters, listeners and callers, with the intention to reveal natural, fresh, unrehearsed and largely unscripted broadcast talk spoken by those voices which were largely unheard over the airwaves.⁴⁸⁹ Alongside this is the promise of greater involvement, of co-presence, and of the potential democratisation of radio. A greater equality of relationship looked to offer new formula of familiarity between listeners, callers and hosts. This was partly to compensate for one-sided flow of communication and to restore a sense of lost physical presence.⁴⁹⁰ Kress for instance, believes that talk-radio ‘holds out the promise of actual dialogue, of participation, the possibility of private individuals having access to the mass media.’⁴⁹¹ Celebrated for this new dialogue of personal talk, these live phone-in programmes, have since their start in the late 1960’s, simultaneously presented us with a range of contradictions, many of which have traditionally divided the academic community into ‘for’ or ‘against’ groupings. As with the vox pop, radio critics and scholars have contested those phone-ins actively advocate public exhibitionism, stimulate consumerism, impose strict restrictions about selection and encourage voyeuristic behaviour⁴⁹² – all which will be reflected upon in this Chapter.

As well as looking at the sound of the interview as a ‘live’ public exchange, I also move towards the ‘local’ element, by shifting my focus away from public service broadcasting, as I concentrate on programming

⁴⁸⁷ See Katriel 2004

⁴⁸⁸ According to Stoller, this time is 7 seconds. Tony Stoller, E-mail correspondence, 2014

⁴⁸⁹ Unlike the *Radio Ballads* or *Desert Island Discs*, callers to these early phone-in shows would also not have the opportunity to their recording back afterwards, unless they were to record the programme using a cassette.

⁴⁹⁰ Peters 2001

⁴⁹¹ Kress 1986, p.400

⁴⁹² See Higgins & Moss 1982

output from UK independent and commercial radio. In particular I focus on ‘problem’ radio phone-in shows from 1975 onwards, often referred to as ‘confessional’ ‘problem’ or ‘therapeutic’ styles of talk which were broadcast throughout the London area on LBC and Capital Radio. I look at the wider context which helped form a space where the interview came to be used by the listening public to share their emotional, sexual or relationship problems live on air with presenters for the first time on UK radio. In doing so, I consider the development of the problem broadcaster’s persona, locate the origins of agony aunt/uncle interaction and address the radio interview in relation to two presenters in particular: Anna Raeburn and Phillip Hodson.

This Chapter offers a different approach to the phone-in than is found in other work that favours a more conventional reliance on Discourse Analysis or Conversational Analysis. I look to recognise the contrasting ways that live interviews were managed by hosts, producers and phone-operators by questioning those involved in the making of these programmes. Power in this context operates through a variety of gatekeeping policies, on/off air interactions and technological considerations. Additionally, the liveness of this on-air interview encounter carries a potential threat for the host, the producer, presenter and the institution. I also explore how possible breaches like swearing, silence, and suicide calls are negotiated by individuals and teams.

5.1 THE LAUNCH OF A NEW GENRE

In 1975, Anna Raeburn, and her agent Phillip Hodson⁴⁹³ approached Capital Radio to pitch themselves as a new on-air partnership, one that would seek to position them both as a new type of ‘personal problem broadcaster.’⁴⁹⁴ Phone-in content that focussed on personal issues - in comparison with political or current affairs - was virtually non-existent in Britain during this time, but they envisioned a show where on-air content would be shaped around the emotional problems of their listeners. Inspired by their recent publicity trip to America, Phillip Hodson and Anna Raeburn had ‘honed’ their skills by taking part in radio and television appearances. They were not only convinced there was a future for this type of broadcasting back in the UK, but certain that a demonstrable need existed for the public, which was not currently being met by the media.

“...we were exposed to a lot of radio there which was really more advanced than British radio in the commercial sector and in tackling challenging fields...there were programmes which did sex talk and emotional talk and it wasn’t exactly counselling, but they were

⁴⁹³ At this point Phillip Hodson was training to be a young marriage guidance counsellor. Since then he has worked for the past thirty years as a psychotherapist, broadcaster and sex and relationship therapist.

⁴⁹⁴ Email correspondence, Phillip Hodson, 2013

allowed to discuss their relationship dilemmas and that had never been done on British radio."⁴⁹⁵

Phillip Hodson yearned for a public space on UK radio where a caller disclosed their private problems to the unseen listener and radio host.⁴⁹⁶ But management at Capital Radio were originally 'terrified', of the proposed notion of a 'double header' problem phone-in, and 'turned us down flat.'⁴⁹⁷ Although ILR was originally reticent about adopting this method, elsewhere in the UK there had been a growing awareness that the broadcast interview could be used as a method of revealing personal motivations and emotional truth. It also promoted reliance on first-hand spoken testimony, (something that Charles Parker had endorsed in the decade before) and television series' like *Face to Face* had capitalised on. The more adversarial nature of television interviews⁴⁹⁸ more generally during the 1960's and 1970's had further endorsed the idea that that audiences could witness confrontation and revelation, particularly by elected officials; rather than being presented with carefully chosen pre-prepared information 'the interviewee was no longer someone who had deigned to share some selected information with us all. They were now lying bastards and their lies had to be exposed.'⁴⁹⁹ News interviews also began to lose their previous ideal of gentle questioning, favouring a more analytic style, leading Tolson to comment that our culture 'has become fascinated by a type of public performance in which signs of 'real emotion' can be detected.'⁵⁰⁰ More emotional, honest and biographical performances began to penetrate the previously scripted, controlled and managed domain of the earlier years.

Up until this point, most radio interviews had been recorded face-to-face, with a clear division in control over the means of recording, but phone-in radio was one of the first occasions where members of the public were actively able to instigate the interaction from their own domain – and invited now to ask, not just answer questions. Listeners were invited to voice opinions, and debate, challenge and criticise the station, the host or public policy, indicating that this was more of an equal space.

Because all the parties in the phone-in are invisible there is the paradox that however 'unaccredited' the caller may be, he acquires a kind of authoritativeness merely by being on the air, he becomes a broadcaster, a performer, on par with those in the studio.⁵⁰¹

As we had seen from the *Ballads*, the personal, the everyday, authenticity, entitlement and sincerity – of 'being yourself' - began to resonate. In comparison with its print counterpart, the radio phone-in allows the

⁴⁹⁵ Interview, Phillip Hodson, Tetbury, 2013

⁴⁹⁶ This would later fall under Crisell's 'confessional' category.

⁴⁹⁷ Email correspondence, Phillip Hodson, 2013

⁴⁹⁸ As outlined in the previous chapter

⁴⁹⁹ McKernan 2014

⁵⁰⁰ Tolson 2001, p.446

⁵⁰¹ Crisell 1994, p 187

‘ordinary’ citizen permission to communicate using conversation-like techniques, which captures and legitimates their experience and knowledge, ‘in a way common to all listeners.’⁵⁰² For Montgomery, this kind of live authentic talk is associated with being spontaneous, projecting the ‘core self’ of the speaker, encapsulating their experience in its nature and manner. Performing ordinariness become an end in itself, and creating a rich and (or so it seems) almost inexhaustible means of generating new content.⁵⁰³ Based on these ideals, the radio phone-in show came to be considered as one of the most highly participatory forms of mass communication.⁵⁰⁴

Although evidence is scarce about when and where the first types of telephone interviewing were heard on air, Chignell has identified Jerry Williams’s *What’s On Your Mind?* as one of the first radio programme in the USA to take listeners’ calls during the 1950’s. In Britain, it would be later when local public service radio that first made the leap (BBC Radio Nottingham in 1968) and this is where the phone-in established its purpose and where it still continues to be used most widely. National BBC Talk’s Producers had first promoted the idea that the telephone could be used as a national democratic method of interview interaction a year later, in October 1969, when listeners were invited to call and ask questions to a host and public figure on BBC Radio Four. BBC Staff member Walter Wallich is cited as the ‘brainchild’ behind the British phone-in⁵⁰⁵ with Hendy attributing the French radio programme *Europe Soir* as the inspiration for this.⁵⁰⁶ Soon afterwards, Radio Four’s *It’s Your Line* was then broadcast on Tuesday evenings in 1970, after the Post Office had given their technical approval to support this new initiative.

Presented by Robin Day, *It’s Your Line* received over 8,000 calls for its first guest, trade unionist Hugh Scanlon. The BBC invited the audience to call in, and researchers would phone back potential contributors to ensure they were genuine.⁵⁰⁷ Day later contested that this vetting policy was fair and democratic, due to the wide range of callers who were eventually selected. The success of *Its Your Line* led to other experiments with this new genre. *Whatever You Think* (1971), *Tuesday Call* (1973), *Friday Call* (1973) all began to make use of different voices and contrasting experiences, which made the interview ‘central to a process of burrowing beneath the headlines to uncover what’s really happening.’⁵⁰⁸ And although the calls were largely reflective of Radio Four’s audience, the content was seen to add to the ‘texture’ of the schedule.⁵⁰⁹ But it was

⁵⁰² Morborg 2006, p.227

⁵⁰³ Turner 2009, p19

⁵⁰⁴ Also see Katriel 2004

⁵⁰⁵ Crisell 1994, p.183

⁵⁰⁶ Hendy 2007

⁵⁰⁷ Also see Onions, 2005

⁵⁰⁸ McKernan 2014

⁵⁰⁹ Hendy 2007, p.72

local independent radio who would start to use the phone-in most efficiently and imaginatively, where its more controversial content was in stark contrast to the stilted pace of its public service neighbours.

The sound of BBC local radio, on many stations, was very dated - even by the 80s. Stentorian announcers and a very slow pace. Phone-ins treated callers reverentially, almost as honoured guests, whereas commercial radio was more informal and even argumentative. Presenters had opinions on commercial radio; whereas the BBC was more “you may think this; or you may think that”.⁵¹⁰

Street and Wray propose that the start of legal, land based ‘commercial’⁵¹¹ radio was tightly regulated, largely orthodox and contained large elements of public service.⁵¹² The 1970s and 1980s were heavily regulated by the IBA and there an ideal of producing ‘meaningful speech’ under a PSB model, but this time with advertising. One station was permitted per town or city and ‘local’ content was intended to be at the centre of programming output. By the start of 1975, there were nine new stations which aimed to stimulate the survival of independent local radio in the UK - LBC, Capital, Clyde, BRMP, Piccadilly, Metro, Radio City, Hallam and Swansea Sound. According to Starkey, the commitment to public service developed

...in an unsystematic way through the beauty contest system... produced distinctiveness in approach and style that reflected at least in part the diversity of the different local areas being served.⁵¹³

The IBA had granted Capital Radio the London General Entertainment service, while London News was awarded to LBC. It would prove a challenging time to start this new venture. Both stations struggled to capture a loyal listenership and gain much needed financial backing from advertisers since their start in 1973.⁵¹⁴ As Wray acknowledged, the early 1970’s was not an ideal time to launch a new profitable broadcasting model, due in part to high amounts of economic instability, union strikes, an oil crisis and the three-day week.⁵¹⁵

It is not my intention to repeat the existing accounts of political tensions or cultural struggles which restricted or supported the start of ILR, since this has been done elsewhere,⁵¹⁶ but it is valuable to note there was a sense by those who worked there that these new formats were seen to be pushing existing broadcasting boundaries.

⁵¹⁰ Email correspondence, David Lloyd, 2014

⁵¹¹ As Stoller (2010) points out, commercial radio officially arrived in the UK mainland in the 1990’s. Before this it is more accurate to refer to the Independent Radio which was supported by advertising revenue.

⁵¹² Stoller & Wray 2010

⁵¹³ Starkey 2012

⁵¹⁴ It took time for radio to win the support of major advertising agencies, partly due to the fact it took time to establish a full audience research system. See Stoller 2010

⁵¹⁵ Wray 2009, p.5. Michael Baktin, Capital’s first PC (following the launch) recalls walking out of the studio and seeing Selfridges lit by candles

⁵¹⁶ See Wray 2009, Stoller 2010 and Starkey 2012

Despite having to broadcast within the confines of the IBA remit, Capital would also look to create other innovative content, producing a live soap opera, reflecting the day's news which was scripted at the start of the day. Radio City in Liverpool produced drama *Scully*, and original comedy while Metro Radio Productions continued to produce output until the late 1980's.⁵¹⁷ There was also a clear commitment by the IBA, the hosts and individual team members to promote, support and invest in off-air action. Alan Nin's *Open Line* on BRMB formed a listeners club, Piccadilly Radio ran *Family Care Line* while Radio City hosted a Job Spot on their breakfast show to promote employment for teenagers.⁵¹⁸ Tony Stoller, former head of the Radio Authority observed that 'this was the type of radio that most of those who were attracted to work in ILR stations wanted to provide. It gave them a real buzz and made privations worthwhile.'⁵¹⁹

At Trent, I feel the 'Careline' was part of the plan to ensure the station had its franchise renewed. Like many stations, it was being pushed by the regulator to be more meaningful, and this was a tolerable short feature which could be integrated with relative ease.⁵²⁰

The potential of this type of broadcasting was liberating for those who worked there. Phillip Hodson recalls that he felt what he was doing was "*free and radical and what the BBC did was basically the status quo and supported the status quo.*"⁵²¹ ILR was considered a feistier and liberating alternative to the often scripted or formal alternatives offered during this time.

Influenced by their time in the US and their own previous careers, Anna Raeburn (an agony aunt and former doctors receptionist) and Hodson (a trainee marriage councillor and psychotherapist) would be two of the first to introduce this type of format. These call-in programmes looked to focus on personal issues, that according to Tim Blackmore (Former Head of Music at Capital Radio) was unusual among ILR radio phone-ins during this time, which 'were more likely to deal with public matters.'⁵²² More common were phone-in programmes that dealt with music requests, legal advice or political opinions – all under the umbrella of what was commonly termed "*meaningful speech.*"⁵²³ At this time, the commitment in new local independent radio was to fill air time, "*just fill it. Not fill it well, just fill it.*"⁵²⁴

⁵¹⁷ See Stoller 2010, p.81

⁵¹⁸ At Hallam FM, Ralf Barnard produced a five part series called 'Dying for a Drink', which was then transmitted across the ILR network. See Wray 2009

⁵¹⁹ Stoller 2010, p.81

⁵²⁰ David Lloyd, E-mail correspondence, 2014

⁵²¹ Interview, Phillip Hodson, Tetbury, 2013

⁵²² Email correspondence, Tim Blackmore, 2013

⁵²³ See Wray 2009

⁵²⁴ Interview, Anna Raeburn, London, 2012

Anna Raeburn had received a great deal of publicity for her distinct style of writing in *Home Magazine*. Despite turning her down months earlier, Capital Radio had since changed their mind and this time approached her instead.⁵²⁵

*“Capital, who had already seen me three months before and waved me away, rang me up and said, “We’d like you to do this programme”, and I said, “What programme?” “Well, we thought we’d do a programme about phone-ins” – in those days very new – “phone-in about personal problems.” And I said, “Yes, it’s a very good idea, it’s mine. That’s what I brought you.” “Oh but you don’t want to make a fuss about that.”*⁵²⁶

In particular, the purpose of the local phone-in was to fill airtime with *local* voices, voicing their opinions and experiences about immediate and *local* issues. The regular format would look to provide entertaining content at a relatively low price and offer an alternative from the BBC’s historical preference to use the same types of voices. For the first time, the phone-in became an integral part of the schedule and a more opinionated style of presentation developed. Although they failed to gain much critical recognition at the start, (the *Economist* and the *Financial Times* dismissed Capital Radio’s early attempt at the phone-in as ‘an embarrassment’)⁵²⁷ the station had faith in this new venture and proudly proclaimed that ‘we are not aiming to be a station that talks to people: our definition of Capital Radio is a catalyst enabling people to talk to each other.’⁵²⁸

This new gamble of phone-in shows slowly begun to attract the attention of listeners in London. Over a million people per week began to tune in to Anna Raeburn’s show, *Capital Open Line*, ‘I hope this is not because a high percentage of the population of London is basically nose-y but because we are able to provide an entertaining and informative radio show.’⁵²⁹ Although there were strict guidelines concerning caller selection (which we will come to later), early episodes made use of the spontaneous and critical potential of this new style of broadcasting. The immediacy of live radio meant callers would be able to comment, criticise and correct information they did not think was communicated appropriately by a station. If we take one hour from an early episode of *Capital Open Line* from 1975, we can see the variety of topics discussed.⁵³⁰

Figure 1: List of calls to *Capital Open Line* on 05.03.1975

A woman whose children were being bullied at school

⁵²⁵ Capital FM was led at this time by Programme Controller Michael Bukht,

⁵²⁶ Interview, Anna Raeburn, London, 2012

⁵²⁷ Hendy 2007, p.139

⁵²⁸ Local Radio Workshop, 1982.

⁵²⁹ Extract from Capital News Sheet, October 1978. Cited in Radio Workshop 1982, p.43.

⁵³⁰ British Library Sound Files. C1574/7. Capital Radio. 1975.03.05. Three phone operators would put calls through to the producer on Capital FM. The producer would then talk to the caller, put them on hold and brief the presenter through talkback.

A homosexual man who is at a boarding school

A woman who had discovered her husband's secret pile of pornographic material

A woman who only wanted to have sex in the morning, while her husband got "randy" in the evening

A man who had got two girls pregnant while dating a third

A woman who wanted to congratulate Anna on her show

A 25yr old woman who was unhappy in her relationship

A woman who is getting divorced and is unsure of where she and her children can live

A man whose parents in law do not support his marriage to his wife

A man who was critical of Anna's response to the boarding school caller

The a-literacy of telephone and radio, along with the flexibility and immediacy of the medium meant that questions about relationships, sexual concerns or medical matters could be answered or challenged - at a low cost, by those of any age or level of education, something not possible with letters to magazines or newspapers. This last caller from the above edition was adamant that Anna Raeburn had not been supportive enough to a previous caller, and had prepared specific information (addresses and phone numbers) designed to help him find resources for other homosexuals in the area. Although they were not yet able to bypass the institution and communicate directly as they would later be able to do via forums, social media or fandom⁵³¹, listeners were able to start to come to the aid of each other – sharing or disclosing valuable or specific knowledge with each other via the station. This was a new kind of audio message board. In addition, broadcasters were no longer talking to themselves, or an imaginary perception of their audience out there in the ether. Instead they now got a better understanding of who, where and why people tuned in and what they wanted to talk about.

⁵³¹ See Hills 2009

5.2 MEDIATING PERSONAL, SEXUAL & EMOTIONAL PROBLEMS

Both Phillip Hodson and Anna Raeburn had previously written advice columns for magazines, and continued to do so alongside their on-air appearances. Until they made the move to broadcasting, the tradition of the aunt/uncle had been predominantly based in literature, bringing with it a precise restriction in word-count and a stringent selection process. According to Kent⁵³², the problem page was invented by John Dunton with the birth in 1691 of the *Anthenian Gazette* – allowing seemingly, for the first opportunity for audience participation in the history of publishing.⁵³³ As a magazine publisher, Dunton believed that his reader's dilemmas would be far more interesting than just reporting politics or current affairs – as well as a cost effective way of filling content.⁵³⁴ Even so, the first letters were not just about emotional questions, but about the mysteries of the world, and the columns became so popular that both male and then female writers were hired to cope with the amount of letters.

Later employed by Dunton, Daniel Defoe, (the author of *Robinson Crusoe*), could also be seen playing the part of Man Friday in his '*Weekly Review*' from 1704. Benjamin H. Day, pioneer of the US Penny Press era has also been credited as one of the first to adopt this form of public written exchange during the 1830's, yet McKernan has recently suggested that Defoe's style of collecting material published for his other, more journalistic reports, contained the same ingredients we now find in a conventional print and broadcast interview. Defoe may well have used the interview to start to gather together information through the use of question/answer techniques.

Journalists find the information they require often by asking someone questions, and then using the replies they receive as the substance of their report. That is interviewing, and Daniel Defoe employed it as a news reporter for his *Weekly Review* much as today's journalists do 400 years later⁵³⁵

The first of its kind intended to answer queries only from women was *The Ladies Mercury* which began in 1693. Fifty years later female advisers began to play a more central role. The popularity of Mrs Eliza Haywood (*Female Spectator*) and Miss Frances Moore, (*Old Maid*), established the area of advice columns as a primarily feminine domain.⁵³⁶ Content was tightly controlled and any answers to sexual problems were not published – rather the readers of *Glamour* (1939) were asked to pay for booklets which were to be posted out

⁵³² Kent 1979

⁵³³ John Dunton is credited with launching the first interactive agony uncle columns. After having an affair he realised there was no one he could ask for advice about it without revealing his identity. He went on to publish the *Athenian Gazette*.

⁵³⁴ See Carey 2009

⁵³⁵ McKernan 2014

⁵³⁶ Mangan 2009

to them in plain brown envelopes.⁵³⁷ Advisors were often anonymous - using pseudonyms and an idealized pen and ink illustration for their portrait, in complete opposition to the modern day problem broadcaster who was reliant on their public persona.⁵³⁸ In factory girl publications, the agony aunts used names like 'Joyce' or 'Margaret' to sound like their readers. Later more homely and matronly names were used, including Anna Raeburn's, alter ego, Evelyn Homes.

The agony writer appeared unafraid to rebuff or dismiss letters, scornfully criticising them for poor levels of spelling or literacy. For instance, a response from *The Weekly Magazine* in 1859 proclaimed,

W.O. – Your handwriting, if it deserves to be called such, is as bad as your composition, which is only equalled by the vulgar taste in which you have thought proper to address us.⁵³⁹

Until Anna Raeburn's arrival at *Women* in the late 1960's, these brisk Agony writers, who were responding to letters in publications such as *the Ladies' Home Paper* and *Lucky Star* appeared to be principally preoccupied with upholding moral values, standards and etiquette.

Question: *My chum and I are always arguing on this matter. Should a girl let any boy with whom she goes out walking kiss her and embrace her as a lover?*

Response: *Certainly not! No, my dear girl, don't let any boy kiss you. I don't mean that you should be a stiff with your boy friends, but you can be a perfectly good pal without any silly nonsense of that description.*⁵⁴⁰

From the 1970's onwards, agony aunts attempted to assist their readers with a wide range of topics. Letters were written during a 'climate of emotion', where the agony aunt would answer each letter, giving information about helpful organisations, telephone numbers and addresses, 'we were queen keepers of secrets and sources of help and, sometimes, comfort that only, it seemed, we could deliver.'⁵⁴¹ The likes of Proops, Kantz, Ironside, Rayner and Raeburn were not only thought of as the public face of publications, but as champions of information delivery— creating booklets, sending out phone numbers or addresses, raising awareness of support groups or public services and answering letters.

These advice columns represented the curious interface of personal and public worlds, where private issues or anxieties become available for consumption, created within an emotional community and open to scrutiny by

⁵³⁷ Ironside 2006

⁵³⁸ Also see Carey 2009

⁵³⁹ Carey 2009, p.199

⁵⁴⁰ *The Happy Home*, 1920, cited in Carey 2009, p.18

⁵⁴¹ Ironside 2006, p.68

a mass market.⁵⁴² This tension would later be played out via the radio phone-in. There is also a sense that these agony aunts/uncles were separate from the traditional artificial expert – but none-the-less had access to a large amount of privileged information.⁵⁴³ Writing the *Evelyn Home* feature in *Woman Magazine*, and the advice section in *Spare Rib*⁵⁴⁴, Anna Raeburn found the existing rules imposed by her bosses constricting, and fought to challenge the conventions.

*“In women’s magazines, we had a fight initially about the length of response. “No, we would like you to do eighteen letters on the one and a half columns”, and I said, “I can’t tell you that I’m going to do that”*⁵⁴⁵

Before moving to radio, Philip Hodson had also established a career as a print agony uncle alongside his broadcasting work, writing the Daily Star hotline, (“by Philip Hodson – Man who Understands”) and throughout his career for *The News of the World*, *Cosmo Problem Pages*, *She* magazine, *Family Circle*, *Woman and Home*, the *Guardian* and the *Times*. Like Anna Raeburn, Philip Hodson found freedom in broadcasting, viewing print problem journalism as obstructive, driven by the agenda of an editorial team. In these columns, questions and answers could be edited before publication, with little opportunity for right of reply or reciprocity. Although she does not directly reference the ‘agony’ genre, Wahl-Jorgensen’s work on the production of a newspaper ‘letters to the editor’ column is of interest here.⁵⁴⁶ Her work identified four gatekeeping rules which governed the publication of material in the newspaper: relevance, brevity, entertainment and authority. More unconventional or ungrammatical letters that failed to meet these criteria tended not to be published – as Phillip Hodson observed.

*“I remember sitting in this house writing my column for the News of the World and my particular Features Editor ringing and saying “The owner says he wants more sex in your column this week” or “we are not doing homosexuality, sorry”*⁵⁴⁷

Meanwhile letters that were entertaining, ‘punchy’, relevant and authoritative were accepted. We will find that the production teams on Philip Hodson’s and Anna Raeburn’s call-in shows employed their own set of criteria, which governed the selection of callers to air. In his study of gatekeeping processes on Israeli call-in shows, Dori-Hacohen reflected on Jorgensen’s rules and suggested that brevity/entertainment would fit under the medium demands, while relevance and authority position themselves in the public sphere bracket.⁵⁴⁸ Undoubtedly, the caller has more of a say on their own participation on a call-in show, rather than newspaper

⁵⁴² Jackson 2005

⁵⁴³ see Turner 2009

⁵⁴⁴ 1972-1993

⁵⁴⁵ Interview, Anna Raeburn, London, 2012

⁵⁴⁶ Wahl-Jorgensen 2002

⁵⁴⁷ Interview, Phillip Hodson, Tetbury, 2013

⁵⁴⁸ Dori-Hacohen 2013

or magazine columns, which allows more opportunity for flexibility and negotiation. I suggest that callers to personal phone-in shows additionally face different sets of participation criteria than callers to current affairs programmes. Later we will see how hosts, operators and producers have their own guidelines on what they expect from a successful call – and the terms under which they reject or offer other support.

5.3 PROBLEM TALK

Capital Open Line was an early attempt to increase listeners and fill the station with new content, but this was a fresh format on UK radio, and one which had little to base its rules on. BBC Radio Fours *If You Think You've Got Problems* was identified by the Annan Committee as a successful and relevant example of an existing set-up which should act as a guide to the creation of this different style of production, declaring that 'Programmes using a phone-in format cannot use the same procedures but they should aspire to the same standards',⁵⁴⁹

Broadcast on a Sunday night, *If You Think You've Got Problems* began in 1971 and can be seen as radio's version of an agony column, where members of the public could anonymously send in questions via letters to a team of 'experts' who would comment on and offer solutions to their problems. It was the first of its kind on the BBC, indicating the intimate potential of radio to reveal the private confessions of its listeners which was not available elsewhere. During this time there was little knowledge about publicly accessible and affordable support for those with mental health issues, or experiencing problematic relationships and emotional issues elsewhere, as Philip Hodson recalls 'you cannot imagine how little discussion there was in 70's Britain of personal life, sexual and marital therapy.'⁵⁵⁰ There was no British Association for Counselling, no sex therapy clinics, no bereavement or debt counselling- although key policy decisions did start to reflect a shift in social values. In 1967 the Abortion Act had passed and during the same year the Sexual Offences Act decriminalised homosexuality for men, while the No-Fault Divorce Law (1969) and Race Relations Act (1976) would see a shift in the law where new ways that public and private identity came to be publically contested and mediated. As a result, different types of questions could be raised about how people dealt on a private level with these changes in rules. Modifications to the law meant that different types of information could be given in response to questions about the rights of the individual, both in magazine columns and over the radio, promoting a sense of equilibrium to the instability of the era.

Programmes like *If You Think You've Got Problems* and *Capital Open Line* meant that listeners would be free to connect with other peoples real life stories, and learn about previously hidden aspects of human

⁵⁴⁹ ITA/IBA/Cable Authority archive. Bournemouth University. IBA Paper 287, (79) p.3

⁵⁵⁰ E-mail correspondence, Phillip Hodson, 2013

experiences. Listeners and callers to radio began to use these accounts ‘as a way of traversing the complexities and contradictions of contemporary emotional life’⁵⁵¹ but it is important to remember, as Yates reminds us, that notions of therapeutic discourse have been allied with a desire for “well-being,” which does not automatically mean that as a culture we were more concerned about ‘subjectivity, loss and cultural change.’⁵⁵² Rather, radio became another outlet for sharing these anxieties and began to be used to instead stimulate discussions about acceptable behaviour, emotions or feelings.

If You Think You’ve Got Problems was presented by former *Woman’s Hour* host Jean Metcalf and ran until 1979. Jean Metcalf, who had also worked as a BBC station announcer, would read out the letter and a panel would offer their (scripted) opinions on the issue. This crisp recording style and slower presentation mirrored the carefully edited approach and one way communication as seen in agony magazine columns. Content was largely reflective of Radio Four’s conservative audience. Tony Whitby, the new controller of Radio Four had stated in 1970 that ‘unorthodox ideas tended to produce an unfavourable reaction’⁵⁵³ but some letters began to question previously undiscussed cultural or moral taboos.

*Now our next problem today comes in a letter which I’ll read to you now. The lady in question writes: “I’ve been very happily married for 24 years and am aged 49. Now, completely against my will, I’ve begun to want another man sexually. Is there some anti-aphrodisiac to rid me of this unwanted desire?”*⁵⁵⁴

If You Think You’ve Got Problems addressed similar issues (love, relationships, sexuality) that call-in shows would focus on four years later, and offered a new audio space for emotional problems. The BBC had started to recognise the potential of the more informal potential of interviews. The 1974 BBC Handbook for example, referred to interviews as more personal, contemplative ‘conversations.’⁵⁵⁵ *In the Psychiatrists Chair*, unlike the gentle and non-invasive style of *Desert Island Discs*, or the biographical focus of *Face to Face*, was directed towards the hidden, private motivations of public figures. It was through these types of programmes that the divide between normal/abnormal feelings or behaviour was publically questioned, both during the interview and for listeners. The clearly recorded and well mixed assortment of *If You Think You’ve Got Problems*, *Desert Island Discs* and *In the Psychiatrists Chair* would be in stark contrast to the rather chaotic early ‘problem’ call-in dialogue which began four years later, where the voices, the regional, unscripted voices of listeners started to be aired.

⁵⁵¹ Bainbridge 2011, p.52

⁵⁵² Yates 2011, p.60

⁵⁵³ Hendy 2006, p.74-102

⁵⁵⁴ *If You Think You’ve Got Problems* 1971. Accessed via BBC, 2012, 90 at 90 [online]

⁵⁵⁵ Also see Chignell 2009

In The Psychiatrists Chair began over a decade later on BBC Radio Four in 1982 – the same year that the term ‘Media Psychology’ was adopted for the first time following a convention in San Diego.⁵⁵⁶ This term referred to the growing popularity of other mediated therapeutic techniques promoted via ‘self-help’ publications, television talk shows, reality series, and confessional programmes which began to permeate the boundaries of audience interaction, personal confession and performative talk - such as *Oprah*, *Ricki and Montel* in the US, and *Kilroy*, *Esther* and *Trisha* in the UK.⁵⁵⁷ As Hendy has recognised, programmes like *In the Psychiatrists Chair* and *If You Think You’ve Got Problems*, helped to both reflect and encourage a consensus that it was ‘good to talk.’⁵⁵⁸ Communication, listening and talking began to reflect a wider feeling, according to Hendy, that consumer rights, individualism, and moral guidance was prioritised.⁵⁵⁹ The radio interview can be seen to reflect this shift in values, and push forward this interest in the ordinary person. More widely, the mass media in the UK, Australia and the US, also became a public forum for the group confession, where opinion, personality and experience began to dominate the airwaves.⁵⁶⁰ The ‘problem’ phone-in also began to be represented, somewhat ironically, in the mainstream media with *Sleepless in Seattle* (1993), *Talk Radio* (1998) and *Frasier* (1993-2004). Jeremy Kyle started his career at local commercial stations during the late 1990’s, becoming the host of *Virgin Confessions* (Virgin Radio) and *Capital Confessions* (Capital FM) before moving on to television. *The Jeremy Kyle Show*, *Piers Morgan’s Life Stories* and *Big Brother* are a few of the mainstream television formats which have continued to sell themselves on the basis of audience interaction, confrontation, confession and emotional reaction.

While it is easy to deride the naivety of contributors to these types of formats, it must be remembered that interviewees can experience the interview in a meaningful and life-altering way.

*“So it were really, really, really difficult to talk about it, because the only person I ever really talked about it with was my sister and my mum. So it were difficult, really really difficult, really emotional, but I would say it was very therapeutic as well... I felt like I was helping people by talking about it to somebody, you know, knowing that it would go on radio and there’d be loads of people just like me would hear it and think, “God I’ve been through that as well...””*⁵⁶¹

Features like *Our Tune*, which had begun in 1980, had also promoted the value of sharing personal stories with DJ’s and audiences. According to Montgomery, this type of content typically recounted ‘personal

⁵⁵⁶ There was resistance from the American Psychological Association of Ethics who had stated that advice should not be given ‘by means of public lectures or demonstrations, newspaper or magazine articles, radio or television programmes, mail or similar media’. See Gumpert & Fish 1990, p.48.

⁵⁵⁷ Hodges 2001

⁵⁵⁸ Hendy 2007, p.245

⁵⁵⁹ Hendy 2007

⁵⁶⁰ Also see Gibion 1997

⁵⁶¹ Interview, *Robert, Bournemouth, 2013

dilemmas and emotional traumas – divorce, psychiatric breakdown, family bereavement’ against a musical bed of a familiar orchestral signature tune (*Romeo and Juliet*) that sought to represent ‘the everyday crisis of real lives.’⁵⁶² Audiences, listeners and contributors were positioned in a conflicting way, as Coward succinctly sums up, ‘you are special...but your life experiences are exactly the same as everyone else’s.’⁵⁶³ The radio phone-in meanwhile, would hand the extraordinary yet ordinary general public a potential platform to confess their sins or desires, to debate about societal values and to connect with their favourite agony aunts/uncles more immediately than via a letter to a magazine or radio station ever could. It also offered more to those agony writers, like Phillip Hodson who had made the move from writers to agony broadcasters “*Radio had a richness and a depth which I loved compared to writing. That was the great joy of it, it was interactive and it could therefore be more truthful and more accurate.*”⁵⁶⁴

Audiences who tuned in to these confessional radio phone-in programmes were now able to overhear a public, almost therapeutic like exchange between a client (caller) and an expert (co-host) where the usually private, one-to-one traditional therapy experience is altered. The problem call-in show would experiment with this tension between the reign of expert opinion and the need to provide a platform for public discourse – ideally in a way that entertained audiences, impressed advertisers and appeased the regulators. One step up from the vox pop, everyone was now seen to be entitled to an opinion – and the station is primed to provide an instant response to an emotion or a story, and to measure what their listener’s opinions were, tapping into the hopes, fears and needs of the community. This also gave hosts, producers and stations knowledge about their listeners, providing them with more resources or content to attract future listeners. Similar to the rise of listener participation in 1930’s America, these local ILR stations like Capital and LBC were now able to gage a clearer picture of who the listener was, what they sounded like and what they believed in.

By using the phone-in as a format, the voice of the listener was heard over an often distorted reception, thus allowing for a sense of authenticity – through accent, dialect, pace, rhythm and tone, to be communicated and shared, more than letters to *Our Tune* or magazines like *Woman* ever could, ‘for in fresh talk, we have a guarantee that it is the speakers own experience and reactions rather than anyone else’s – first-hand and original, rather than second-hand and a copy.’⁵⁶⁵ The disorder, unpredictability and heterogeneity of ILR live phone-in shows would be a far cry from the more formulaic, cohesive and controlled productions that had laid claim to the airwaves and can tell us much about who was entitled to tell their story. The broadcast interview was about to be confronted with the possibility of live, unedited self-expression by unseen and untrained members of the public.

⁵⁶² In Scannell 1991, p.138

⁵⁶³ Coward 1984, p.149

⁵⁶⁴ Interview, Phillip Hodson, Tetbury, 2013

⁵⁶⁵ Montgomery 2001, p.404

5.4 PERSONA

The more solitary and isolated I become, the more I come to like stories

Aristotle, *Fragmenta*, Fragment 668, cited in Rose 1967

Capital Radio and LBC looked to entice audience loyalty, attract the interest of advertisers and act as a live platform on which the resources and private difficulties of the listening community could be heard or debated. This more personal and informal style of interaction was intended to foster a regular listenership and provide a further basis for an early type of user generated content. Listeners of these problem phone-in shows came to believe that Anna Raeburn and Phillip Hodson could be depended upon, fitting into their routines, displaying predictable and reassuring behaviour - which is arguably especially beneficial to the ‘socially isolated, the socially inept, the aged and invalid, the timid and rejected.’⁵⁶⁶ Previously hidden, personal problems could now have an open forum – and callers could phone-in (or fax-in) relatively anonymously. The transfer of names, locations and phone numbers to the production team would permit callers to disclose emotional, sexual and relationship issues. Capital Radio, perhaps envisioning a barrage of complaints from disgusted listeners or Mary Whitehouse, had clearly set out the intentions of the programme early on, warning that “*this is the programme that deals with problems that grown-ups have.*”⁵⁶⁷

At its start this exploratory format was based upon the recognisable and public persona of its hosts.⁵⁶⁸ Anna Raeburn for instance, would co-present with other well-known broadcasters like Brian Hayes and Adrian Love in the evening slot for *Capital Open Line* (7.30-9pm).⁵⁶⁹ She would first be introduced on *Capital Open Line* as “*Anna from Woman Magazine*”, legitimising her existing social position, her public credentials and authority as someone qualified to answer questions; entitled and elevated to give out advice on the radio.⁵⁷⁰ Writing in the *Listener*, John Collins during 1975 grudgingly gave respect to the new format – although initially labelling it ‘topless radio.’⁵⁷¹

⁵⁶⁶ Horton & Wohl 1956, p.215-29

⁵⁶⁷ Private cassette recording – courtesy of Anna Raeburn. Adrian Love opening lines from an episode of *Anna and the Doc* transmitted in 1977. Exact date of broadcast is unknown.

⁵⁶⁸ Anna Raeburn had received no official training in presenting, therapy or broadcasting.

⁵⁶⁹ Anna Raeburn went on to host her own programme, ‘*Anna and the Doc*’ in the afternoon slot for 14 years until 1989, before moving on to TalkRadio until 2000, and finally, after a 6 year break, presented at LBC from 2006

⁵⁷⁰ also see Thornborrow 2001

⁵⁷¹ *The Listener*, 20.03.1975

The programme could be awkward, unhealthy and for ‘aural voyeurs.’ However it is saved by Miss Anna Raeburn’s technique...Miss Anna Raeburn has helped to put some purpose into phone-ins, which so often remain rambling and confused.⁵⁷²

Brian Hayes (and later Adrian Love) were undoubtedly in charge of the programme from a presentation capacity. They had control over the technology and drove the desk – introducing the caller to Anna Raeburn, inviting ‘the Doc’ to speak, directing the end of a call straight into jingles, the news or advertising breaks. They also signposted both to the caller and audience, using phrases like “*in a moment we’ll talk to Bill*” or “*Dorothy, do not go away. I promise you will be next on Capital Open Line.*”⁵⁷³ The ‘Doc’, was Colin Wilson, a consultant psychiatrist – a qualified expert of medical and sexual matters who would act as an authority figure and help to gain the approval of the Radio Authority and critics. Immediate feedback by the hosts would not seek to solve complex issues, but to inform callers how their behaviour might be perceived by other listeners and presenters. Callers also ran the risk of being publically reprimanded for their actions, experiences or opinions.

Brian: *Ok Tina than you very much for your call. It’s now 18 minutes past eight. This is Capital Open Line and er 3881255 is the Telephone number. Andrew you’re on the line. Hello.*

Caller: *Hello?*

Anna: *Hello*

Brian: *Yes Andrew*

Caller: *Um my name’s Andrew and I’ve got the problem at the moment that I’ve been going out with one girl while I’ve got two other girls pregnant. I’m not quite sure what to do.*

Anna: *I think you should take some advice about contraception for a start. I mean what do you want me to say to you?*⁵⁷⁴

Coyle has stressed the attraction of the private-in-public discourses of this type of radio, where ‘Listeners become voyeurs, fascinated with callers revealing intimate details of their lives or being publicly berated and satirised by all-powerful hosts.’⁵⁷⁵ Anna Raeburn here is determined to hold her caller (Andrew) to account for his actions. Brian Hayes also acted as a balance, counteracting her comments with questions and remaining in a position of authority. Brian Hayes’s speech is shaped by his own self-expression and

⁵⁷² The Listener, 20.03.1975

⁵⁷³ Private cassette recording, courtesy of Anna Raeburn. Adrian Love opening lines from an episode of Anna and the Doc transmitted in 1977. Exact date of broadcast is unknown.

⁵⁷⁴ The British Library Sound Collection: C1574/7. 1975.03.05.

⁵⁷⁵ Coyle 1990, p.34-36

institutional role.⁵⁷⁶ Often they would dissect a call together afterwards – although it is not clear if this was just a method of filling time or a conscious editorial decision.

Anna: *I think that last call is very interesting because what that guy is saying is look, I proved myself. I'm a man. I got two girls into trouble I got a third one who still wants me, arn't I a heck of a guy.*

Brian: *Do you really think that was the feeling?*

Anna: *I think thats part of the feeling because I dont know why else he would sort of turn round and say well I'm still a student and I'm helpless which is... (laughs)you know he's far from helpless.*

Brian: *Maybe he does feel helpless though, even if he isnt he may feel that he is*

Anna – *No I'm sorry Brian, you make that mistake that that you get a girl pregnant, you do that once and after that presuming you have two pennies worth of sense in your head you kow that you dont go through that thing again. To do it twice? To have both those ladies kept in a totally seperate compartment from this new girlfriend whom he is very fond of who thank god in heaven is on the pill or something, I just find quite extraordinary. And you know I always have second thoughts and think I shouldnt have lost my temper and then I think yes, I jolly well should have lost my temper. But the psychology of that situation is that he's proved himself and he didn't expect me to throw the question back at him he expected me to offer him a solution and I dont feel there is a solution for me to offer him. The solution is in his hands.*

Brian. *Okay lets see what Maureen has to say. Hello Maureen.*⁵⁷⁷

This post-mortem can be seen as an attempt to contextualise Andrew's comments for the audience, and to offer opinions about his character with no opportunity for right of reply. This interaction draws on the intention of therapeutic discourse, by using feedback and immediate reaction to inform both Andrew and the listener about how they are being perceived by others.⁵⁷⁸ Anna Raeburn here displays many adversarial characteristics that Hutchby had identified from more recent US political interviews, including the personalisation of issues, assigning personal responsibility, judgement of motives and firm position taking.⁵⁷⁹ Anna Raeburn's analytic tone also bears a resemblance to a critical response to a letter from reader 'Betty of Brum' to *Every Girls Paper* by an agony aunt over fifty years before.

'Betty of Brum' – You are a hateful little hussy. And the artless way you tell me of your wrong-doings is about the limit in brazen confession. You go out with three young men and

⁵⁷⁶ see Katriel 2004

⁵⁷⁷ The British Library Sound Collection: C1574/7. 1975.03.05.

⁵⁷⁸ Kreps in Gumpart & Fish 1990

⁵⁷⁹ Hutchby 2011

write to a fourth, and tell lies to every one of them. You don't ask me anything, so I presume you write to me out of mischief.⁵⁸⁰

Anna Raeburn objected to the title of agony aunt and had no wish (or training) to be branded as a therapist. Instead she wished to be known as a journalist - straightforward, opinionated, and sympathetic 'I wonder whether people liked to call characters like Anna, because... she simply told them what to do - in a school Ma'am way.'⁵⁸¹ In their own look at Anna Raeburn's performance later in her career, Atkinson and Moores observed how she would assert control by using hedging devices to dampen down her directiveness 'Maybe' and 'I understand' on her Talk Radio show *Live and Direct*.⁵⁸² In the 1970's Anna Raeburn had also employed a number of techniques to establish a sense of sincerity and empathy, while she used signposting to direct and reassure her callers. She recognised the need to deal with the medium specific obligations of breaking for news, traffic or advertising, while simultaneously assuring the caller and the listener:

*"I have kept people on air and said to them, "Hey, Joan, we're going up to the news now, I shall be breaking for the news in a very few minutes. Do you want to stay with me, because I'll come back after the news. It's about seven minutes, I think. Is that too long for you to wait?" "No." "Right, fine. OK, we'll talk to you after the news. That was Joan, and we'll be back with her in the news. We're just going up to the news now, it's just coming up for one o'clock..."*⁵⁸³

Like her magazine role, Anna Raeburn's on-air tone could be described as a detached but intimate sounding board – providing a site for confessions and a platform for the sharing of practical, legal, medical or emotional knowledge. Both Anna Raeburn and Philip Hodson dismissed the idea it should be their responsibility to offer a solution to their callers.

*"You know, people say, "Don't you feel terrible interfering in people's lives?" "No." "Don't you feel terrible about being so outspoken?" "No." "Aren't you worried about offending people?" "I don't wish to offend people, but I don't seek to, I just seek to give account of myself." ...I'm not a rescuer. I'm a journalist."*⁵⁸⁴

*"You are not there to solve people's problems, you are not there to settle the universe, that is ridiculous. What you are trying to do is to get people out of being stuck and to get them from that stage to the next stage... You can invite them back and say, you know, when things have moved on a little bit, perhaps you would like to talk to me again, I hope you will talk to me. Meanwhile, 264 on medium wave, whatever, 97.3 VHF, this is LBC."*⁵⁸⁵

⁵⁸⁰ Every Girls Paper 1923, quoted in Carey 2009, p.64

⁵⁸¹ Email correspondence, David Lloyd, 2014

⁵⁸² Atkinson & Moores 2003

⁵⁸³ Interview, Anna Raeburn, London, 2012

⁵⁸⁴ Interview, Anna Raeburn, London, 2012

⁵⁸⁵ Interview, Phillip Hodson, Tetbury, 2013

More confrontational or argumentative hosts or shock-jocks commonly featured in US and Australian broadcasting invited large fan followings, bought in heavy sponsorship and received strong press reaction. As Hutchby has shown, hosts like Brian Hayes deliberately used a range of confrontational devices including interruptions and insults in an effort to entertain their listeners and shame their callers.⁵⁸⁶ Ollie Raphael worked at LBC as a phone operator and producer,

*“Hayes’s programme was the bench-mark at the time. And was the absolute opposite of anything else that was on the radio. BBC phone-ins were so measured and so carefully controlled and so policed... there was an element of rogue about him.”*⁵⁸⁷

Hayes’s style formed a blueprint for both Phillip Hodson and Anna Raeburn, both by his technical and performance skills.

*“I worked with Brian Hayes, who knew more about radio than I will ever learn. He knew how to make pauses, he knew how to make ends, he knew about news, he knew about weather, he knew about station idents, he knew about repeating numbers, he knew about recapping and back announcing; he knew all that stuff and I learned it by doing it. If that’s what Brian does, that’s what I do.”*⁵⁸⁸

When Brian Hayes moved on from Capital Radio and across to LBC in the mid-1970’s, Anna Raeburn chose to stay, and instead suggested Phillip Hodson as her replacement. Receiving a starting salary of £6 per broadcast hour, he began to star as a guest on Brian Hayes’s LBC call-in show during 1975, eventually deputising for him while also presenting his own ‘therapy’ shows during a different time slot. Phillip Hodson found himself deliberately adopting both types of ‘nice’ and ‘nasty’ personas.

*“I got a postcard from somebody who said, ‘you are even ruder than Brian Hayes.’ At the same time I got postcards from people from other shows, my therapy shows, saying what a wonderful person you are. And neither of these things was true; you know I was neither that wonderful nor that awful. But eventually, the management came to me and said you have to decide who you are because the audience is confused; they don’t think you are Mr Nice or Mr Nasty. So, which do you want to be?”*⁵⁸⁹

As a qualified psychotherapist, it proved logical and marketable for Philip Hodson to pick a ‘Mr Nice’ role. It also indicates that a hosts ‘performance style’ is pre-planned and pre-positioned – as a result all interview interaction with callers is, in a sense, pre-determined by this ‘Mr Nice’ public persona. Not only does this influence the on-air interview, his directions to his production team but additionally any further media work Phillip Hodson would later receive throughout his career. If we adopt Thomas’s view on the construction of

⁵⁸⁶ See Hutchby 1996a&b for his account of argumentative talk on Brian Hayes’s call-in shows

⁵⁸⁷ Telephone Interview, Ollie Raphael, 2014

⁵⁸⁸ Interview, Phillip Hodson, Tetbury, 2013

⁵⁸⁹ Interview, Phillip Hodson, Tetbury, 2013

star personas, we can regard Phillip Hodson's radio interviewing style as a powerful tool in perpetuating his own star persona, and one that would be hard to depart from.⁵⁹⁰ While listeners and callers are able to withdraw from this encounter, the host is relatively confined

*"I chose to be Mr Nice rather than Mr Nasty because I knew it was going to be nicer for me... There was more synchrony between that role and the rest of my life.... It was going to be quite difficult to be a psychotherapist who was also known as a Shock Jock. You know, that's a tension, that's a big tension... I was nicer than most of the presenters, because that was my role."*⁵⁹¹

An extract from Brian Hayes and Phillip Hodson's LBC show shows that this 'Mr Nice' role was already in place by 1977. Speaking to Jane, (a self-confessed happily married sexual swinger), Philip Hodson uses encouraging phrases (mmm, urrhhh,) to reassuring the caller and assure her he is listening, stepping in when she is struggling for the right word. Philip Hodson controls the call in a non-assertive and familiar manner, which works to disguise his overall authority.

Jane: *...because I knew that I hadn't had any experiences before I was married*

Hodson: *uhuh*

Jane: *and that there was always a little thing over there...you know...well*

Hodson: *Niggling at you*

Jane: *Yes and this in fact did happen...*⁵⁹²

Here the conventional interviewer/interviewee dynamic is more equal and collaborative. Neither party are asking or answering questions. Rather they are interacting, listening and engaging with a storytelling process. Stories, of course, are integral to the interview, to radio and to mediated communication, helping to bind together, or disrupt the self with society.⁵⁹³ Sexual stories, like Jane's, or the writer to *If You Think You've Got Problems* can provide education in the face of recent legal reform or cultural change, or give us clues into the values of our culture 'Sexual stories live in this flow of power. The power to tell a story, or indeed to not tell a story, or indeed to not tell a story, under the conditions of one's own choosing, is part of the political process.'⁵⁹⁴ Significantly, radio phone-in shows provided a chance to learn not only what our neighbours or fellow listeners thought about relationships and emotions, but what our trusted presenters *believed* about these relationships and emotions. Jane does not call to ask advice about a specific problem, rather to share her own

⁵⁹⁰ Thomas 2007

⁵⁹¹ Interview, Phillip Hodson, Tetbury, 2013

⁵⁹² LBC/IRN digital online archive. Brian Hayes Show. Broadcast on 15 March 1977. Accessed June 2013.

⁵⁹³ Also see Plummer 1995

⁵⁹⁴ Plummer 1995, p.26

experiences of engaging in a sexual subculture. Her quest is not resolution or information, but rather she seeks validation and understanding about her chosen lifestyle.

Anna Raeburn's role was complex, based also on her dual role as a magazine agony aunt. She observes that her 'doppelganger' self – her own on-air broadcasting persona, acts almost as a shield, *"I think it is much easier to work when you know what people want of you, than it is to just be yourself."*⁵⁹⁵ According to Wolfenden, hosts and participants must perform, yet do so in a way which suggests naturalness and authenticity.⁵⁹⁶ Wolfenden believes it remains imperative that presentation styles do not sound like or feel like performances at all. This is similar to the idea, outlined in Chapter Three: that scripted talk, and interviews, should appear as natural as possible.

Presenting public service talk radio is not a straight forward process. It is not simply a matter of "being yourself." The requirement to be "authentic", the strange social context of a radio studio, and the discrepancy between that environment and the one in which the talk is revived, mean that radio presenters take on a significant challenge.⁵⁹⁷

Radio presenters, like Philip Hodson and Anna Raeburn, can be regarded not only as journalists, hosts or entertainers, but 'stars' themselves, famed for their distinct style of presentation or interview technique, used intentionally to attract a certain type of demographic to a particular slot.

*"The radio job led to the television work because the producer of the Saturday morning kids show on BBC1 said, I like your programme very much and you have got a very good response to that programme. We would like you to try and come and do something like that for children's television on Saturday mornings. Would you do that? I would and I did that for 6 years."*⁵⁹⁸

In her recent account of the television personality, Bonner describes the impact of celebrity interviewers⁵⁹⁹ who successfully managed to cross over a range of programmes, encompassing comedy, game shows, interviews and morning shows. Radio hosts (like Hodson and Raeburn) who are associated with a particular type of programme bring with them a sense of expectation regarding their individual distinct interviewing style. As we touched upon in Chapter Three, the importance of the host is central to the success of this type of show.

⁵⁹⁵ Interview, Anna Raeburn, London, 2012

⁵⁹⁶ Wolfenden's recent work on performance, authenticity and the host would also seem to support Horton and Wohl's (1956) now dated theories of para-social relationships, where hosts appear to be trapped in a cycle of illusionary intimacy, providing an artificial sense of friendship, typically experienced in daily face to face interaction; intentionally created to increase a sense of connection.

⁵⁹⁷ Wolfenden 2012, p.147

⁵⁹⁸ Interview, Phillip Hodson, Tetbury, 2013

⁵⁹⁹ Bonner refers here to the careers of David Frost, Michael Parkinson and Russell Harty

The radio hosts ways of performing their role, no less than the topics they choose to address, serve to weave together a credible and recognizable radio persona that becomes identified with the program over time.⁶⁰⁰

Roy Plomley, Philip Hodson and Anna Raeburn's on-air personalities were considered to be a brand, used to maintain listener loyalty, adhere to the expectations of the network and genre, provide a secure sense of expectation to their interviewees and create a sense of familiarity and consistency to the programme. Here we see an example of a listener who has taken Phillip Hodson's role as Mr Nice seriously – and takes his on-air persona to heart, forming a type of fan attachment as a result of his 'wise and gentle' advice.

Some written demands from listeners were outrageous: "Where can I buy a second-hand trombone in Dundee?" Some desperate: "Dear Mr Hodson, I don't have a problem but I enjoy your programmes - best of all are the agony hours. Your advice is so wise and gentle. I don't always listen to your station but I would just to hear you. What did you do before this work and are you married? Would you consider getting married again and if so could I be your girlfriend? I am a very good at being a girlfriend. My qualifications are..."⁶⁰¹

The letter was not made extinct by the phone-in, but was used both as an accompanying support to those who were not selected to get through to air and as a way to form a further connection to a host.⁶⁰² The writer of this letter to Philip Hodson did not even need to call the station with a problem – rather she had heard his regular and reliable mediated interactions with other callers which had led her to believe he would make a potentially good partner. Although dated, Horton and Wohl's conception of para-social interaction is still relevant here. The imagined relationship between the listener and Philip Hodson has been upheld by his on-air character as 'Mr Nice.' He is a predictable, safe and familiar host⁶⁰³

The relationship that listeners have with presenters and particularly those with problem phone-in presenters (due to the intimacy and emotional subject matter) is often only revealed when the dynamic is broken or breached. The hosts themselves can also feel a sense of loss – indicating instead that this is not simply a one-sided, manufactured and artificial relationship. Anna Raeburn explains her thoughts on leaving TalkRadio.

"...in independent radio, you are not allowed to say 'goodbye.' You are here on Friday until four o'clock. And you end your Friday programme, and they believe they'll see you on Monday. The producer was told that if she allowed me to give any explanation on air, she would lose her job. So she cut me off air, and I never got to say 'goodbye' to my audience.

⁶⁰⁰ Katriel 2004, p.236

⁶⁰¹ Email correspondence, Phillip Hodson, 2013

⁶⁰² Hodson reportedly received up to 400 per week, and employed a woman to respond on his behalf. Email correspondence, Phillip Hodson, 2013

⁶⁰³ See Horton and Wohl 1956

*It hurt me – I hated it. Hated it. Was traumatic, that was the only thing that was traumatic. Losing the job: yes, horrible, but it was traumatic not to be able to say ‘goodbye.’”*⁶⁰⁴

The way radio presenters leave a network or show could be an interesting avenue for future research. It brings to light some intriguing questions about a) the listeners’ relationships to radio, b) the largely hidden decision making process between the host and institution and c) the hosts relationship with their audience.

5.5 DO YOU HAVE YOUR RADIO ON?

Similar to writing letters, calls or faxes to radio stations during the 1970’s were made from a place of safety inside the home, although privacy was not always guaranteed in a domestic setting. Cordless handsets were unusual and so, to avoid the risks of being overheard or to gain access to a telephone, listeners often went away from the home or office to phone boxes.⁶⁰⁵ Here more private calls could be made in enclosed space, publically seen by others, publically heard by others on air, but not directly overheard by those sharing their immediate space⁶⁰⁶. The telephone was used as an intimate and largely anonymous resource by the lonely or isolated, connected in time to their community and their radio station of choice, yet distanced spatially from others. Rather than the prospect of seeing a counsellor or doctor face-to-face, the non-permanence of live calls, existing in a linear schedule with no option of podcasting or repeats, meant further sense of anonymity and freedom was permissible.

Many clients aren’t ready to face a counsellor in person. Young people are often more comfortable with the familiar intimacy of the phone than other forms of communicating. My “counselling service” penetrated brick walls and the common family barriers. I was also able to offer a service on the spot, in a crisis whereas Relate-Marriage Guidance would probably have a 20-week waiting list.⁶⁰⁷

Scholars are quick to point out that a poor phone line and the relative inexperience of the caller mean that those phoning-in are considered to be at a disadvantage. Broadcasting from the confines of a spotless studio is seen to place the more ‘professional’ host in a position of power. Karathanasopoulou⁶⁰⁸ has commented that Scannell’s description of early radio broadcasting is indicative of the fact that interference (or problems with reception on call in shows) is frequently seen as undesirable and unwelcome. Hutchby has shared this sentiment, noting that it is implicit that ‘sterile’ or noise-free studio sound is considered to be a positive entity.

⁶⁰⁴ Interview, Anna Raeburn, London, 2012

⁶⁰⁵ Listeners would also use fax machines

⁶⁰⁶ The phone box, and its relation to other interview content (investigative journalism, politics) deserves further thought.

⁶⁰⁷ Email correspondence, Phillip Hodson, 2013

⁶⁰⁸ Karathanasopoulou 2013

The hosts voice and presence remain consistent throughout the show, while callers' voices vary widely. This asymmetry is reinforced, in the hearing, by the fact that callers' voices are broadcast with telephone quality, with the attendant distortion and extraneous noise, while the host's voice comes across in the richness of full broadcast quality.⁶⁰⁹

In 1981, the Local Radio Workshop had also printed their assessment of a small selection of programmes broadcast by Capital Radio and LBC. The report also dismissed the inferior quality of the telephone line, believing that callers were at a disadvantage due to the poor quality of sound. They were also critical of the amount of 'inadequate' time given to callers of call in shows, proclaiming it should not be taken seriously in an attempt to help people, and fuelled a sense of voyeurism. They also believed the presenter and adviser (i.e. Philip Hodson and Anna Raeburn) to be 'detached figures of authority.'⁶¹⁰ The LRW also expressed displeasure that callers were regularly cut-off or interrupted, and conversations are often cut short. These telephone interviews were seen to offer little chance of confidentiality, little opportunity to gather background information, and a heavy screening process.

Due to the time delay, listeners had to be regularly prompted to turn all other broadcasting equipment off (after all this delay needed to be masked), but there was no guarantee this would happen. Below we see how Brian Hayes (driving the desk) and Anna Raeburn (the advisor) attempted to direct their caller, Maureen in 1975.⁶¹¹

Brian: *Maureen you are on the line now to talk to Anna Raeburn. Maureen hello*

Caller: *Hello?*

Brian: *Yes. Yes talk to Anna now*

Caller: *Oh. Er hello Anna?*

Anna: *Yes*

Caller: *Erm my problem is er ok. Hello?*

Anna: *Yes?*

Caller: *Hello Anna?*

Anna: *Yes*

Brian: *Maureen do you have your radio on?*

Caller: *My problem is Anna is about a book wot I found underyes.*

⁶⁰⁹ Hutchby 2001, p.495

⁶¹⁰ Local Radio Workshop 1982, p.43

⁶¹¹ Anna Raeburn, personal collection. Recording taken from 1975. Exact date unknown.

Brian: *Er Maureen can you hear me?*

Caller: *Its a bad line*

Brian: *Well the problem is I think Maureen is that you have your radio on. Would you please ask somebody to turn your radio off because it will confuse you.*

Caller: *It's off*

Brian: *Right its off now. Now can you hear me alright?*

Caller: *Yes*

Brian: *Ok now would you explain your problem to Anna.*

Caller: *Anna?*

Anna: *Yes*

Caller: *Erm my problem it started about a year ago*

Anna: *Yes*

Caller: *Erm I went into hospital and when I came out I discovered that there was dirty books lying around in my flat*

It is through such on-air reminders that Maureen and other contributors in call-in or face to face interviews are taught to become aware that they must speak to two audiences – in this case the studio (Anna, Brian plus ‘the Doc’) and the wider listening audience. Maureen must be urged to remember the performative element of her call. Here Hayes now performs a gatekeeping duty, trying to teach the caller, and future caller, the ‘correct’ way to appear on air. It would be natural here to assume that Maureen is put at a disadvantage – she is not able to fully engage with the conventions of ‘successful’ callers who should know to turn down their radio – and it takes over a minute to get to the story of her call. Yet conversely, the nature of live radio meant that callers could change topic, lie to the production team or challenge the answers. But one might also argue that this more chaotic, unrehearsed and unpredictable by-product of the phone-in plays a pivotal and powerful role in communicating a sense of liveness. Indeed, a sense of genuine veracity is conveyed here, mirroring the complex structure of everyday speech – interruptions, confusion, hesitation all which are far removed from the edited *Ballads* or the scripted early episodes of *Desert Island Discs*. And perhaps this played an important part of its success.

In a way, this type of call has contributed to radio’s authenticity. If I adopt Karathanasopoulou’s recent observations and apply them to these examples of the early problem phone-in, we can perhaps respect the telephone’s status as a ‘medium of magic and intimacy.’⁶¹² Instead, the motivation for this type of interaction,

⁶¹² Karathanasopoulou 2013, p.1

from callers like Maureen or Andrew reveal the need for connection and advice – where being correct, cool or in control was not the priority. Rather callers are rewarded, at times, for showing vulnerability and authenticity. They have a specific reason to call, they are able to question the ‘experts’ themselves and this type of talk would mirror the chaos of not only ordinary conversation, but ordinary telephone conversation, which they would be familiar with. I suggest that these early phone-in interviews in fact served a great deal of purpose to the caller, by providing them with much needed information and the opportunity to voice their experiences and opinions. However, as I now start to uncover, there were a number of stringent gatekeeping processes in place, to allow or exclude access to this on-air space.

One of the reasons operators, producers or hosts would instruct callers like Maureen, was due to the power of the voice to reveal or hide key clues which might help the presenter to get to the ‘truth’ of a problem: Phillip Hodson and Anna Raeburn both recall paying exact attention to the unstructured intricacies of the callers voice.

“You need to be able to hear these minutiae, these tiny tiny things, and pick up on them. You need to be able to hear that hesitation. You need to be able to hear the voice move up into the throat and go down again, and think, “What was that? What did I say to her, what did she say to me, that she felt uncomfortable about then?”⁶¹³

The rate of breathing, the pitch of the voice, the accent, the speed of talking, the pauses, the speech modulation, the vocabulary, the grammar, the thought order, the metaphors and the self-reflection all must be picked up by the presenter and the listener – and poor telephone reception might inhibit the transmission of these vital clues.

5.6 THE SOUND & THREAT OF SILENCE

Likewise, silence⁶¹⁴ was (and still is) seen as the enemy of speech radio – and tends to be especially unusual on commercial radio. Silence is often thought to be an unseen, uncontrollable, threatening act and it is widely assumed that listeners tend to feel insecure or anxious if it comes with no explanation. Set among the consistent flow of jingles, commercials, news, traffic and talk it can sound shocking in comparison– but for the listener once again this is the very essence of liveness reminding us that we are connected in real time with a station or host. As mentioned in my discussion of the *Radio Ballads*, for any presenter or editor who works with pre-recorded or live material, the approach towards silence requires an editorial decision. When editing pre-recorded interviews, cutting a breath or silence is often considered by some to be a taken-for-

⁶¹³ Interview, Anna Raeburn, London, 2012

⁶¹⁴ The term silence refers to non-speech. It is a simulation and cannot exist on the airwaves. See Street 2012, p44.

granted time saving device. But the decision to keep in a natural pause, can also add texture and emotion to a radio interview, as well as indicating a ‘mental hesitancy or vacillation’⁶¹⁵. Leanne Buckle recalls the power of small utterance by a castaway who had appeared on *Desert Island Discs*.

...gave us an incredible interview – she was smart, funny, thoughtful – a really generous interviewee. In one section she was remembering a specific period when she had been depressed, and at the beginning of the sentence she just sighed, and it was the most poignant moment– it was so heartfelt.⁶¹⁶

Although silence was regarded as the nemesis of his live phone-in shows, Philip Hodson was unafraid (at least at the start) of breaching customary etiquette, ignoring protocol and inviting the caller to share an intimate silence. This example confirms how stringent the rules about interviewing conduct were, and continue to be. There is, as Tolson detected, ‘a general ethics of conversational practice which people are expected to abide by, and, if they do not, they are held accountable.’⁶¹⁷

I once let a radio silence last for two whole minutes while the caller considered whether her father’s suicide really meant that she was worthless. It took nerve on my part (radio is opposed to the idea of dead air) but not as much as she needed in out-facing her demons. People wrote to tell me they stopped their cars in lay-bys just to wait for the outcome.⁶¹⁸

Bell and Leeuwan have observed that therapeutic problem interviews can, in circumstances like this particular example from Philip Hodson, provide ‘a model for intimate and exploitative interaction, for the non-assertive and empathetic mode of interviewing, and for the moment from confession to insight.’⁶¹⁹ Silence in Philip Hodson’s case came to mean much more than ‘dead air’ - it became here a place where listener, caller and host were connected in the moment, sharing a quiet space, ‘silence is a doorway to memory, expectation, anticipation, fear and other worlds.’⁶²⁰ The power of stillness presented an opportunity for Philip Hodson’s caller to closely work through her inner feelings– similar to a face to face therapeutic encounter. Lewis has argued that both context and intentionality is central to how silence is perceived.⁶²¹ Here however, the asking of a question, along with the presumably poor reception and the sound of the breath would indicate an eventual response would be imminent – due once again to the reciprocal nature of the interview as a speech act.

⁶¹⁵ Email correspondence, Leanne Buckle 2014

⁶¹⁶ Email correspondence, Leanne Buckle, 2014

⁶¹⁷ Tolson 2006, p.20

⁶¹⁸ Email correspondence, Phillip Hodson, 2013

⁶¹⁹ Bell & Leewan 1994, p.113

⁶²⁰ Street 2012, p.40

⁶²¹ Lewis 2013. Also see Street 2012

For producers of live output, the risk of having no callers (and potential silence) was at the forefront of each programme, so content was often directed and organised by themes, where a presenter would invite calls on a particular topic like alcoholism or bereavement. During her work on *Capital Open Line* Anna Raeburn would spend the first fifteen minutes of each programme discussing a news story or giving her opinion about a recent development in medicine. Although not a problem during the popularity of call-in shows, there were times during the later editions of these shows when the possibility of silence became a serious problem, so this time before the calls ‘officially’ started would have allowed for the planning of such an eventuality *“there were times when we would sit there for two hours and the phones would not ring at all.”*⁶²² In most cases, this avoidance of silence was discussed backstage by the production team, who would coach and advise callers on the correct ways to engage in appropriate ‘on-air’ behaviour, which would go on to affect the interview exchange.

5.7 DIRECTING LIVENESS

Hutchby has previously noted that talk radio signified a distinctive connection between the domesticated environment and an institutional space.⁶²³ But before entering the public arena, this connection is filtered via a production team, normally comprising (depending on the budget/time of the show) of phone operators, producers, and studio engineers. While it is natural to examine the on-air relationship that hosts have with callers – it is also worth noting the often multifaceted and hidden off-air relationship that callers had with production team members. There are also often complex dynamics between members of the production team with each other – and the possible motivations which underpin on-air and off air interactions between broadcasters and callers.

*“It really wasn’t just a sort of secretarial job of just grabbing a caller and a number and sticking it on a piece of paper; it really was interacting with them and, you know, learning about them. And, actually at the time there were certain shows that the phone operator was very, very important; they were really the lynch pin between the listeners and what was going on in the shows...”*⁶²⁴

Before the convenience of mobile communication, social networks, or search engines, these formats provided a new, open platform for personal disclosure, where the public was invited to reveal untold stories, private fears, shameful confessions and secret desires. For many the appeal was simply the connection to a voice –

⁶²² Interview, Former LBC producer, London, 2013

⁶²³ Hutchby 2001

⁶²⁴ Telephone Interview, Ollie Raphael, 2014

and not even the intention to get on air, or the connection to a well-known presenter. Ollie Raphael recalls how callers did not phone with the objective of getting on air.

“You would go “Right do you want to talk to someone about it”? And they would say “Oh, no, no, I don’t want to do that ...I don’t want to go on the air about it, I just wanted to talk about it.”⁶²⁵

For many listeners, the producers or phone operators also came to be relied on as permanent figures, providing stability and expectation. Presenters would refer to them by name during the show, becoming known to listeners. Repeat callers would phone regularly, *“People would ring up and they’d say “Oh, you’re not Paula, are you?” And I would say “No, I’m not Paula.” They would talk to you as if, like, they are expecting to their mate.”⁶²⁶* Callers were able to connect and form bonds not only to the on-air persona of a host like Anna Raeburn, but to those working backstage, and off-air like Ollie Raphael. This was a notable change from the more anonymous roles of Monica Chapman, Mary Baker or Annie Grundy. Hosts began to mention the names of the producers on air, intending to foster and convey a sense of community. This created a sense of openness and transparency to these previously hidden corners of production for the public, but equally ran the risk of bringing team members out into the public eye, which potentially could set them up as a target of criticism from their audience. One former LBC phone-in producer recalls people calling up to tell her *“I hope all your family die of cancer.”⁶²⁷* Like a doctor’s receptionist, the producer or phone op became the intermediary between the public and the presenter – having to cope with the challenges of this type of interaction.

The role of the producer on live radio, (as opposed to *Desert Island Discs* and the *Radio Ballads*) is fluid and complex. They are under time pressure, reliant on content collected externally from the studio. They must screen contributors, avoid putting to air anyone they might feel could be abusive or create legal difficulties, ensuring that the host is happy but also help to choreograph the content, ensuring that the ‘best’ callers appear in the right order.

“You would get a host who would come in on your talk-back, while they are on air and say, “This is a great call.” And then some would just say, “Why the hell have you given me this person to talk to?” While the call was going on they would just look at you with this sort of anguished face.”⁶²⁸

⁶²⁵ Telephone Interview, Ollie Raphael, 2014

⁶²⁶ Telephone Interview, Ollie Raphael, 2014

⁶²⁷ Interview, Former LBC producer, London, 2013

⁶²⁸ Telephone Interview, Ollie Raphael, 2014

The relationship between the producer and host is seen as vital – requiring trust from both sides, although who had ultimate control over output was unambiguous. From an institutional perspective it would be the producer who should be in charge – but from a personal perspective this was up for negotiation.

“I thought the producer was there more as a fire fighter. Because I felt that since I was the one taking the risks, I ought to be the one with the responsibilities. I mean I always thought that it was my programme and the producer always thought it was his or her programme. That was the problem. It’s never a territory that has been defined.”⁶²⁹

Dori-Hacohen and Katriel both acknowledge that the management of liveness by phone-in production teams is medium specific and public sphere related – but in the case of early ILR phone-ins, I make a further claim that it was also based on an extra set of criteria.⁶³⁰ The producer, phone operator and presenter all aim to make the interview encounter ‘successful’ and a number of other factors emerge which have been touched upon in Ytreburg’s own work on Norwegian radio phone-in shows⁶³¹: a responsibility towards the others in the team, towards management, toward the listeners. I would agree with these findings but also propose that gatekeeping devices employed on these phone-in radio shows also represents a protection of an individual’s future career in the industry. The repercussions of not pushing the delay button or for putting the wrong caller through could potentially damage their professional reputation and hurt future job prospects. Philip Hodson gave his phone-ops strict instructions as to what to do and what not to do when answering calls, *“You are not to pass any judgements at all whatsoever about what you hear. And if you do, I will have you fired.”⁶³²*

The role of a ‘shock jock’ was seen to test a caller’s ability to hold their own, in the face of confrontation or disagreement. I would propose that a therapeutic host like Philip Hodson rather values a different set of characteristics. These include: 1) integrity (personal honesty), 2) experience (first-hand, no agenda, not distressing), 3) relevancy (topic) and 4) suitability (duration, age, gender, time of show, voice). These characteristics were often filtered down to the production team. Phillip Hodson felt it was necessary to reinforce his authority over both the operator and producer in order to get the calls he felt were most suitable on his show. This suggests that hosts and teams permitted entry to the airwaves (and to the interview) based on a set of unwritten categories. Similar to Wahl - Jorgensen’s ‘letters to the editor’⁶³³, Phillip Hodson gave clear direction to phone operators about the types of callers which should not be put through to air.

“Your job is to ask about three obvious and basic questions. You are trying to establish they are bona fides and if you are in doubt about the caller, then I don’t want to do them. If they are drunk, I won’t do them. I want you to evaluate whether you think that’s going to

⁶²⁹ Interview, Phillip Hodson, Tetbury, 2013

⁶³⁰ Katriel 2004 & Dori-Hacohen 2013

⁶³¹ Ytreburg 2004

⁶³² Interview, Phillip Hodson, Tetbury, 2013

⁶³³ Wahl-Jorgensen 2002

*contribute overall to the balance of what we are doing today. Because I do not want 10 calls all on the same thing. And then on the screen that I have got I want you to type up "next call is William" and I want 8 words saying roughly what it might be about."*⁶³⁴

Callers must first justify that they are worthy of being on air and began to understand what might be required to get through to a host. As a result, many callers might have learnt what might qualify others to be accepted on air, and as Scannell sums up 'routinely reproduce not merely a particular discursive content but a communicative manner and style that embodies the shows ethos.'⁶³⁵ The first caller to Phillip Hodson's or Anna Raeburn's confessional show was considered to be the most vital, setting the scene for the rest of the show "*female, anyone young is great, fresh sounding voice.*"⁶³⁶ According to the producers, this "right voice" is dependent on the time of day, the needs of the show, and the audience demographic. Producers were looking for specific types of callers "*you want those voices to constantly reinforce the brand, or the station image or the station audience.*"⁶³⁷ Like O'Sullivan and Scannell also found, after listening to shows, callers would learn what it took to get on, "*I think people know how to get on air. So if you're listening in, if you're female and you sound bouncy and happy you would get on.*"

*"I remember clearly, there was one producer who would say to me, "How old's the caller? How old's the caller?" You would say they're mid-twenties. He would say OK. You were judging what would make good radio. You wouldn't want someone who would waffle and babble."*⁶³⁸

For callers, and especially male listeners, this was a new opportunity to speak about private or domestic matters – and receive immediate feedback on topics ranging from baldness to premature ejaculation. These were, according to Liza Donoghue, a phone-in producer at Capital Radio (1975-1982), the most common calls during the first years, where 6 telephone lines to each phone operator at the station were constantly flashing with calls "*I think a lot of men had nowhere else to go.*"⁶³⁹ Yet if we take extracts from Capital FM's chauvinist franchise application, the phone-in seemed ideally placed to target women. Female listeners were described as 'sentimental', 'fanatical' 'escapist' caring 'deeply about emotions' and yearning for happy endings and local stories.⁶⁴⁰ On the contrary, when reflecting on the history of talk-back radio in Australia, Aitkin and Norrie commented that early on it was seen as a positive educating force, and one that allowed

⁶³⁴ Interview, Phillip Hodson, Tetbury, 2013

⁶³⁵ Scannell 1996, p.118

⁶³⁶ Interview, Former LBC producer, London 2013

⁶³⁷ Interview, Former LBC producer, London 2013

⁶³⁸ Telephone Interview, Ollie Raphael, 2014

⁶³⁹ Interview, Liza Donoghue, Bristol 2013

⁶⁴⁰ Local Radio Workshop 1982, p.75-6

house-bound women ‘the opportunity to listen to other housewives questioning, criticising, and discussing, political subjects of interest to them.’⁶⁴¹

The themes discussed on local confessional call-in show like Capital and LBC focussed on stereotypically ‘female’ subjects like relationships, emotions and confessions which could be seen to demand a neat and happy ending. There was a bias in the production team towards featuring callers whose issues would be quickly resolved in the allotted time-slot, offering an impression of empowerment “*you kind of want a conclusion or you want the listener to go away and think “oh that person has been helped.”*”⁶⁴² A satisfactory conclusion to a call would also work to prime the listener to be most ready for the commercial breaks, might help to sell the products and promoted a sense of instant gratification. Yet there seemed to have been a disparity between the imagined and real caller here – attempting to attract the housewife (who was in control of the purse strings) but it appeared to be valued more by the male listener.

Meanwhile, phone operators and producers would never tell a listener the reason they had failed to get on-air. Instead they would reassure them, blaming time-restrictions or insinuating that there were too many callers. They felt it was vital not to leave a caller feeling unwanted or rejected. For those who got through the net, personal, first-hand experience was always regarded as desirable.

*“So you wouldn’t want someone coming on air and saying, “I want to talk to you about my friend, Jim” when actually what you wanted was Jim to be on the phone talking about his personal experience.”*⁶⁴³

Yet again we find evidence of the foregrounding of entitlement and witnessing, signifying what producers deems a genuine performance.⁶⁴⁴ Again, like the *Radio Ballads*, we find that real lived experience comes to be valued by all parties – especially the production team. Callers to talk radio shows like Philip Hodson’s or Anna Raeburn’s intentionally employed witnessing devices to display authenticity. Anne was the first person chosen to feature in an early episode of *Capital Open Line* from 1977.⁶⁴⁵ This first caller is chosen to set the tone for other callers, both in subject (public sphere) and in age, and voice (medium related).

Hayes: 3881255. *Capital*. *I believe Ann is our first caller. Hello Ann*

Ann: *hello?*

AR: *hello*

⁶⁴¹ Aitkin and Norrie 1973, p.32-38

⁶⁴² Interview, Former LBC producer, London, 2013

⁶⁴³ Telephone Interview, Ollie Raphael, 2014

⁶⁴⁴ Building on the work of Montgomery 2001a and Myers 2000

⁶⁴⁵ Collected from Anna Raeburn, private collection 1977. Date unknown.

BH: *Yes you 're talking to Anna now*

Anne: *It seems a bit trivial now but the fact is, I'm frigid I suppose*

AR: *Well it can't be trivial (pause). What do you mean you think you're frigid? Why do you say frigid I suppose?*

Anne: *Well my definition of frigidity is not being able to reach orgasm and I never have*

AR: *How old are you?*

Anne: *I'm 18*

A young female listener, coming on to discuss a sexual problem would have been considered as an ideal first call. Brian Hayes acts as a professional catalyst between the inexperienced caller (Anne) and the host (Anna Raeburn) in an attempt to bridge the gap between both the public and private – the studio and an unknown location. Anna Raeburn is emotionally accepting of Anne's problem, and is set in a position of authority since the caller is requesting help and validation.

Hutchby's research from 1988 had also asserted that certain devices are intentionally employed to 'routinely and recursively' present a sense that interviewees are authentic entitled to tell a story and allowed to be on air.⁶⁴⁶ By being seen to talk for yourself or recorded doing so, Langer similarly suggests, 'individuates you, and makes you a personality whether you are the Prime Minister or last week's national lottery winner.'⁶⁴⁷ But it is the job of the backroom team to first judge whether these stories are worth the airtime.

5.8 SWEARING & SUICIDE: GATEKEEPING THE AIRWAVES

The production team were tasked with protecting the host and the producer from potentially disruptive callers. As such a pre-screening process took place, a pre-interview before the on air interview encounter, which remains common across many aspects of radio production today. The role of the producer and phone operator would be to choreograph, coach and craft on-air content, ensuring the 'right' callers appear in the right order, sifting through calls to get the best ones, avoiding potentially abusive or unresolvable calls and protecting the station from threatening legal disputes. Despite seeming to respond to a societal need for mediated therapeutic discourse, producers and hosts felt it would not be appropriate to indulge in serious misery, with potential vulnerabilities to be put through to air "*even though these are people in "distress" we are still making a radio show out of it. And we can't do everyone. We can't give everybody a platform.*"⁶⁴⁸ Callers who were

⁶⁴⁶ Hutchby 2001, p.485

⁶⁴⁷ Langer 1981, p.361

⁶⁴⁸ Interview, Phillip Hodson, Tetbury, 2013

experiencing serious mental health issues were not desired – it was judged by the host that they would dismiss each suggestion for advice and risking the successful conclusion so desired “*you’re basically vetting them, and interviewing them and also priming them and trying to focus them into what they’re trying to say.*”⁶⁴⁹

*“I’ve never rung the radio station before and I’m really nervous” and you would say “Listen, it’s really simple, it’s just like you are talking to me. Stay on the line, you are going, you know, the next voice you are going to hear is going to be Anna’s” or whoever it is going to be, “and it’s just like talking to me.”*⁶⁵⁰

Pranks, suicide calls and drunk calls might get through the net – but a 7 second ‘Dump’ or ‘Prof’ button would be on constant standby to attempt to gain back control of the unpredictable nature of live radio.

The programme was recorded on a large tape machine, with the playback head moved some distance from its normal place, creating a tape gap of 7" distance between recording and playing. During the programmes, the playback head fed the transmitter rather than the 'live' signal. When the delay was 'fired', a jingle played instead of the piece of offending tape. It was very clear to listeners, therefore, when it had been used; and the presenter would usually make reference to the hiccough. More sophisticated digital systems are now employed where the join is almost undetectable.⁶⁵¹

Producers would have overall control of the “Prof” button and direct engineers to use the delay to cut off the caller *or* the host, ensuring that either party had lost their privilege of remaining on air. Although mostly used to protect the station against legal action and complaints, swearing is considered a significant ‘breach’ by regulators - a taboo for these types of call-in shows. Butler and Fitzgerald believe that it ‘opens a tear in the fabric of the encounter and reveals the institutional framework that binds the interaction together and to which all conduct is accountable.’⁶⁵² Characterised by ‘breaches of the organizational apparatus of the setting’, swearing creates a sense of spontaneity, (particularly when accompanied by laughter), bonding, group membership, unguarded intimacy and achieved authenticity, as the audience is accidentally let into a ‘backstage’ world which they would typically be excluded from.⁶⁵³ While Butler and Fitzgerald’s study provided an insight into the possible range of visual responses of both parties, it only concentrated on celebrities, presenters and politicians and not those of the listening or calling public to radio stations. They do not outline any personal or institutional penalties of these events (fines, professional reprimands etc.) but their contribution is valuable when considering the idea of authentic presentation of self, risk and consequence surrounding the live radio interview. In his discussion of swearing on BBC Radio Four during the 1970’s, Hendy identified how a change in social values, the change in laws and the decline in deference saw

⁶⁴⁹ Interview, Former LBC producer, London, 2013

⁶⁵⁰ Telephone Interview, Ollie Raphael, 2014

⁶⁵¹ Email correspondence, David Lloyd, 2014

⁶⁵² Butler & Fitzgerald, 2012, p.548

⁶⁵³ Butler & Fitzgerald 2012, p.528. Also refer to Jefferson et al 1987

‘collective determination to chastise any custodian who was felt to overstep the limits of acceptability.’⁶⁵⁴ Although his discussion does not encompass commercial broadcasting, Hendy’s observations can be of use in the context of the radio phone-in show. A caller to *Anna & the Doc* in 1977 for instance, was dismayed that the word ‘fart’ had been spoken in a previous edition of the show, and expressed her consternation on air to the team who were forced to justify its use.⁶⁵⁵

This ‘Prof’ button can be seen to indicate a number of things about independent local radio at this time. Mistakes are not considered a responsibility of the interviewee – rather the network, producer and host are deemed accountable. This so called spontaneity, unguarded intimacy and achieved authenticity identified by Butler and Fitzgerald is actually carefully manoeuvred and hidden from the listener. Most listeners and callers would not realise that controversial comments could be deleted. Once again I would argue that personal reputation should be considered when looking at phone interviews – as well as public sphere and medium related considerations. Phillip Hodson reminds us of who is ultimately accountable for the on air interaction during the show, *“I have to get somewhere with this without either saying the wrong thing, destroying the person or destroying the show and the station.”*⁶⁵⁶ The repercussions of failing to ‘prof’ a potentially libellous or controversial comment would result in career changing results. Control here is asserted in a conscious way, acting as a reassuring device in which the careers and potential damage to the reputation of the individual and institution can be managed. As Potts has noted, hosts and production teams are ultimately responsible for setting the agenda, overriding the caller or terminating the dialogue.⁶⁵⁷

*“I had two or three sleepless nights about it thinking “Oh my God, what did I do, what did I do and why wasn’t it “proffed” out?” It was nervous around the “prof” button but you knew it was there and you knew it had to be...”*⁶⁵⁸

One of the most challenging aspects of off and on air interaction was the suicide call. Although attempting to shy away from repetitive or serious problems, most teams had to deal with desperate callers. This type of call demonstrates the unpredictability of the live interview, the use of the phone-in format by some callers, and their attachment to the interviewer who they have come to trust due to the hosts previous interactions with other listeners. This on-air space is seen to these types of callers as a means to share the most personal of fears, not just on a face-to-face basis (*Desert Island Discs* or the *Radio Ballads*) but from a distance.

“Caller rings up and says....”When I finish this call I am going to kill myself.” Now, maybe histrionic, maybe a fake, maybe true. What are you going to do? It’s my job to

⁶⁵⁴ Hendy 2006, p.74–102

⁶⁵⁵ Anna Raeburn, private collection. 1977. Date unknown.

⁶⁵⁶ Interview, Phillip Hodson, Tetbury, 2013

⁶⁵⁷ Potts 1989, p.135-36

⁶⁵⁸ Telephone Interview, Ollie Raphael, 2014

manage this and to decide how long it's going to go on for, and err on the side of caution. And that call I have handled very carefully and I give extra time and I did say at the end of this, there's one thing I want you to do, I want you to call me at the same time next week."⁶⁵⁹

Philip Hodson here is commenting on his predictable role as a broadcaster – who the suicide caller relies on to be there again next week. In terms of interviewing, it is a challenge for the host who cannot determine the accuracy of these threats, due to the separation between the studio and the caller. The caller is in a position of authority here, almost hijacking the airwaves with the threat of self-harm.

When taking a suicide call on-air, the presenter might try to keep the caller talking for as long as possible – while ‘backstage’ the producer would drop the normal schedule (commercial breaks or news) and attempt to track down an address, and arrange an ambulance.⁶⁶⁰ For some producers and phone operators this was a concern, “*you would talk to a caller and then you would put them down and you would think “this person sounds right on the edge and I’m not quite sure what to do.*”⁶⁶¹ The production team in this context is performing a role as an agony aunt of sorts, in providing the caller with resources and help and possible support. Having received (often on the job) training for their paid role as a producer, an additional pastoral responsibility ran alongside the job and producers often became immune to dealing with vulnerable people, “*I’ve had loads of people phoning radio stations threatening suicide. You become quite detached from it.*”⁶⁶² There appears to have been little wider support or training for members of the production team.

*“You often were in a position where you felt some level of responsibility and you had to find a space between that, you had to say: Actually, this is not my position, it’s not my job. I am taking calls, I am working to full capacity but I am not a counsellor in any way.”*⁶⁶³

This decision looked to protect potentially vulnerable callers who had been through trauma. Instead Anna Raeburn or a producer would speak to them off air.

*“I remember Chris, one of my operators, saying to me at Talk Radio, “I’ve got a woman who really wants to talk to you. She was very badly abused. Her name’s Margaret.” And I said, “Why does she want to talk to me?” “I just don’t think she’s got there yet.” “No, I don’t want her on air.” Thank God I didn’t have her on air”*⁶⁶⁴

⁶⁵⁹ Interview, Phillip Hodson, Tetbury, 2013

⁶⁶⁰ Interview, Liza Donoghue, Bristol, 2013

⁶⁶¹ The phone operator could then talk to the caller, put them on air or provide advice or support.

⁶⁶² Interview, Former LBC producer, London, 2013

⁶⁶³ Telephone Interview, Ollie Raphael, 2014

⁶⁶⁴ Interview, Anna Raeburn, London, 2012

“Backstage if you like, in the control room, we’d have a box or a big file of help...we would be able to give an address, a phone number an email so you wouldn’t just leave people stranded, you’d give them a number to follow it through. You wouldn’t just leave them.”⁶⁶⁵

This appears to reflect this need, as identified earlier by Phillip Hodson, for radio stations and hosts to provide additional levels of support and information, similar to the function of a public library. Anna Raeburn and Phillip Hodson continued their commitment to being champions of information and often opted to use this method of communication instead.

Similar to Charles Parker, Anna Raeburn’s role was not restricted on on-air content. Performing her dual role as both a writer at Home and *Capital Open Line* co-presenter, Anna Raeburn felt an ongoing sense of responsibility to her callers, encouraging them to contact information lines, visit help centres, and call them back from her own home, after the show went out. The short, three minute interview exchange was commonly not the end point for her or for her team. Much of the literature written about call-in shows typically has dismissed them as alienating, unhealthy, manipulative and formulaic⁶⁶⁶, yet both the production team and hosts attempted, in their own ways, to provide some sort of service to the listener.

“I used to call people back from home. I used to go back to my people off air and say to them, “Do you remember Joan? Have you got a number for Joan? OK, I’ll call Joan, just make sure she’s OK, and have you got that boy who talked to me about – he thought he was gay? Right, I’ll talk to him”⁶⁶⁷

It is worth highlighting that this personal obligation was reflected in the wider institutional practices of this time. A new confidential phone service *Capital Helpline* had also been launched by Capital Radio in 1976, aiming to give listeners off air ‘help, information and advice, 24 hours a day.’⁶⁶⁸ *Helpline* signposted local information, networks and resources to help with a wide range of issues from the public. The station employed 10 extra members of staff and one social worker to deal with calls, ‘the station expects the service will have to deal with every topic from how to object to a planning monstrosity, to what to do if a pet parrot develops hiccups...’⁶⁶⁹ but notes from a Capital Helpline Advisory Committee Meeting in November 1976 revealed that calls of a personal nature tended to outnumber factual enquiries. Between 27th Sept and 3rd October 1976, 21 were referred to youth counselling organisations, 10 to homosexual organisations and 5 to VD clinics.^{670 671} Callers to *Capital Open Line* were often referred to the *Helpline* after an on-air discussion

⁶⁶⁵ Interview, Former LBC producer, London, 2013

⁶⁶⁶ Higgins & Moss 1992

⁶⁶⁷ Interview, Anna Raeburn, London, 2012

⁶⁶⁸ ITA/IBA/Cable Authority archive. Bournemouth University. Files 724/Vol 1, 5100/6. Anna Raeburn had attended this Helpline Advisory Committee Meeting after joining Capital FM

⁶⁶⁹ Draft press release. ITA/IBA/Cable Authority archive. Bournemouth University. Files 724/VOI 1, 5100/6

⁶⁷⁰ ITA/IBA/Cable Authority archive. Bournemouth University. Files 724/Vol 1, 5100/6

with a host or an off air discussion with a producer – often for further information about social, legal or housing organisations. But these private and confidential calls themselves were rarely used to contribute towards on-air content. Rather the themes and types of calls might have directed the agenda of these programmes. Tony Stoller is the former Chief Executive of the Radio Authority; ‘The idea was that topics which surfaced from those calls might then be dealt with on air. I cannot recall that ever happening, although it might well have done occasionally.’⁶⁷²

This suggests that callers had the choice of either calling *Capital Open Line* or the Capital Helpline – so must have done so with the purpose of discussing their problems on air with Anna Raeburn or the ‘Doc.’ This resource also meant that extra provision could be given to callers who had initially been rejected or excluded from on-air interaction. This willingness to commit to social action content could be seen as an attempt to secure the approval of the IBA, but once again challenges this notion that call-in radio at least attempted to provide both meaningful talk and a supportive service to those who needed it.

5.9 CONCLUDING NOTE

This Chapter has explored some of the cultural, legal and regulatory landscape that accompanied the start of the ‘problem’ phone-in interview. It has also paid attention to the individual motivations and experiences of those who both helped to actively create, produce and manage them, allowing us to reflect or challenge earlier assumptions made about the phone-in genre. The interview here was used in an assortment of ways – unscripted, unrehearsed and very nearly live, mirroring conversation talk more than ever before. Used in this way, the interview advanced from a clean, clear and controlled programming device, into one that had to deal with the unpredictability and uncertainty of daily conversation – and daily phone conversation more specifically. It now, more than ever, forced untrained ‘ordinary’ callers to consider the implications of making their talk appropriate for the wider public. This type of platform allowed for new sorts of questions to be asked about the very nature of the interview and who qualifies to be chosen to both ask and answer questions. Furthermore, audio transcripts, research interviews and archived policy documents have helped to shed light on 1) the origins of this type of ‘problem’ telephone interview in the UK, and its use by local ILR stations; 2) the spontaneity and liveness of interview interaction (silence, swearing, reception); and 3) the gatekeeping devices employed by the regulator, on-air interviewer, producer and phone-operator (the off-air interviewer).

⁶⁷¹ ITA/IBA/Cable Authority archive. Bournemouth University. July 1975-Dec 76, Vol 1. S100/6. Staff employed by Capital’s Helpline expressed concern that they were not equipped to deal with the emotional aspect of the service. Minutes from a Capital Helpline Advisory Committee Meeting on Monday 29th November 1976 revealed concerns that support systems for Helpline staff was lacking and needed to be strengthened, and that the service was ‘sapping the strength of the assistants’.

⁶⁷² Email correspondence, Tony Stoller, 2014

During this section of the thesis, I have once again drawn attention to the importance of the backstage ‘pre-interview’ encounter, and its possible impact on the on-air interaction between the interviewer and interviewee. I have shown how certain selection strategies allowed certain callers to be chosen in order to secure their place on the air. I have also revealed how a host’s on-air persona not only came to shape an individual interview style, but was used to form the basis of a career in broadcasting. Both Phillip Hodson and Anna Raeburn created a consistent and trustworthy image of themselves as an interviewer that would be carried over different networks and mediums for the next three decades, bringing with them an assortment of expectations on what audiences, guests or callers might anticipate from their own potential encounters.

The interview was utilised in this case, by the untrained, unedited voice of the public, in an entirely different way than *Desert Island Discs* or the *Radio Ballads*. Power operated in a variety of ways – and no one person, presenter or production team member might experience the interview in the same way, but the often hidden, unwritten rules that governed the process of selecting an interviewee is revealing. The on-air encounter served the listener in a number of ways. The interviewee was able to a) interact on air with a recognisable host b) gain access to previously restricted material or advice c) able to engage at a time of their own choosing from a space of comfort and relative anonymity and d) given a public platform to air their views, their fears, their secrets and their confessions. The network meanwhile was able to offer a template of a desirable voice and caller (reminding us of the BBC’s earlier attempts to educate the listener) to reinforce the brand of the station via a type of user-generated content for the first time.

In the last decade, these types of ‘problem’ shows ceased to maintain their popularity and dominance in the UK radio schedule – perhaps due to social media platforms that permit us to advertise our emotional lives or experiences to the wider public with no need for a formal intermediary.⁶⁷³ Legal or medical information is readily available from search engines, while we can spontaneously interact with well-known hosts instantly on Twitter or Facebook. Email or text has overtaken the phone-box call or the fax and letter, yet for its 1970’s and 1980’s audiences, this type of interview was pioneering and revolutionary.⁶⁷⁴

In this next Chapter, we move on to the early 1990’s to address how the interview has been used in an entirely contrasting way – where telephone interviews are not only eliminated from the schedule but not permitted at all for use by hosts, producers or listeners.

⁶⁷³ Some still exist, mainly *The Sunday Surgery* on BBC Radio 1.

⁶⁷⁴ The phone-in itself still plays an integral role in everyday radio, and especially local radio. However there has been a movement away from this more personal exchange, to one preoccupied with politicians (“*Call Clegg/Farage/Boris*”), sport (*606*) or entertainment (BBC local radio). It is ironic that the growth of mobile phones which makes it much easier to interact with a station has seen a marked reduction in callers – with many now communicating via text or email. This could also be due to the reduction in budgets that are needed to support problem phone-in shows.

CHAPTER 6. THE PRISONER & THE INTERVIEW

“Mr Aitken, welcome to ERB. Can you explain to our listeners what your first night in prison was like for you?”⁶⁷⁵

Curtis Blanc, Electric Radio Brixton.

In 2009 a presenter/producer known to his listeners as ‘Tis, was awarded the Bronze Sony Award for Best Radio Interview.⁶⁷⁶ His prizewinning entry was a pre-recorded exchange with former Conservative politician Jonathan Aitken, who had served seven months for calculated perjury. The interview had been broadcast to only a potential audience of 800 fellow offenders from the studios of Electric Radio, within HMP Brixton, London, where ‘Tis (Curtis Blanc) was serving a four-year sentence.

“Being an interviewer and being interviewed has played a huge part in developing me as a listener and a talker. In my mind, coming out of prison would be the end of my career. But it’s been the complete opposite. It’s given me the chance to explain myself, to be heard, and to be listened to. To showcase what I can do. And I’ve moved away from all the negativity that I was plagued by.”⁶⁷⁷

Since his release, Blanc has worked as an outreach coordinator, an ambassador, a studio engineer and is now a director of an artist development agency. During his time in prison, he had gained a Level 1 and 2 NCFE Diploma in Radio Production.⁶⁷⁸ These types of initiatives that enabled prisoners to participate with education providers, charities and practical work, are by no means a new conception.

In this last case study I investigate how inmates use the radio interview as a) an interviewee b) an interviewer and c) within a training programme. I explore the way that the radio interview is used to teach prisoners like Blanc, about questioning, research and recording. In particular, I concentrate on the use of the radio interview as a learning resource, intended to support educational achievement, transferable skills and group membership. During the course of this Chapter I also take a closer look at the history of prison radio projects within the UK, and the significant space that the interview takes in the schedules of National Prison Radio. I also demonstrate how the voices of prisoners have increasingly been used by the UK’s mainstream media (BBC radio for instance). In this respect I look at the way the interview has been placed at the centre of such

⁶⁷⁵ Interviewer, Curtis Blanc posing a question to Jonathan Aitken, broadcast on Electric Radio Brixton. Winner of ‘Best Interview’ at 2009 Sony Radio Awards.

⁶⁷⁶ Electric Radio Brixton was also awarded Gold Sony prizes in 2009 - Listener Participation and the Community Award.

⁶⁷⁷ Telephone Interview, Curtis Blanc, 2014

⁶⁷⁸ In partnership with Lewisham Collage

programmes and once again I bring in perspectives on location recordings, which are particularly relevant to this type of institutional communication.

The case of prison radio permits us to evaluate the daily use and legacy of the interview by a specific community of people, who experience the interview in a distinct and often empowering way. Because this is a trend which has never before been documented by any previous researchers, I find it valuable to provide some background context to the origins of prison radio projects⁶⁷⁹. I start by doing so, and then go on to discuss the way the prisoner has been used as an interviewee, before moving on to look at examples of the interview as a training resource.

6.1 PRISONER RADIO – BACKGROUND CONTEXT

I never saw a man who looked with such a wistful eye upon that little tent of blue which prisoners call the sky

The Ballad of Reading Gaol, Oscar Wilde

Prison radio projects in the UK started in 1994 at Feltham's Young Offenders Institution in Middlesex, triggered in part by reports of self-harm, racial tension, bullying and high suicide rates.⁶⁸⁰ Feltham's Young Offenders Institution had a population of 700, the largest penal institution for 15 to 21-year-olds in Europe - and radio was seen to provide something comforting to listen to when younger offenders were thought to be at their most vulnerable. The station broadcast a range of content via an AM and occasionally an FM frequency, and featured information announcements, plays and poetry, and particularly targeted inmates between 5pm and 10pm, who would be locked in their cells at 8.30pm.⁶⁸¹ Established by local residents (Mark Robinson and Rona Hooper) the station aimed to benefit those who might volunteer and those who would be able to listen.⁶⁸² It was seen to provide an outlet for creativity, allowing key information to be shared for those lacking in literacy skills, and providing opportunities for those overwhelmed by the system, 'Prisoners, those constant objects of scrutiny, of examination, are instead empowered to look about them, to look at their world

⁶⁷⁹ Although I am hesitant to deviate too far from the interview, and the remit of this thesis, I do feel it is necessary to more widely explain how prison radio started in the UK, in order to contextualise my own findings.

⁶⁸⁰ Four boys committed suicide at Feltham in the nine months up to March 1992 according to the CFOI

⁶⁸¹ See BUF&V Council, LBC/IRN News Report dated 1 February 1994 & Erwin 1994

⁶⁸² A Home Office RSL (Restricted Service Licence) together with a grant of £50,000 had led to the formation of a radio studio on the education wing of the prison also found support from a local initiative Friends of Feltham who had helped to raise the funds needed to enable the start of broadcasting.

and their place in it.⁶⁸³ It was also a chance to publicise messages of partner organisations and share recruitment information for educational courses.

It's good...to hear other people's voices' knowing it's done in Feltham, you walk past Feltham nearly every day on the way to the gym and you look in and think that's the radio, that's what I'm listening to at nights.⁶⁸⁴

Radio, as Bonini and Perrota⁶⁸⁵ observed 'plays a fundamental role in the everyday life of inmates and in their 'resistance' and 'survival' practices'. Curtis Blanc was in agreement, "*It was to give advice, guidance and to support our listeners to stay strong in their situation. It was always to create this notion of hope that can exist within a prison, within a cell.*"⁶⁸⁶ Radio was seen here to filter through the walls of a cell and act as a support to those who most needed it. Music, interviews and speech were broadcasting to a place where there was little chance of personal privacy, and where there is constant awareness of a real or imagined threat. Although not directly examining prison radio, Hendy's helpful interpretation of the popularity of late night radio listening appears applicable in this context; both appearing to meet the need to access 'sanctuary and intimacy as much as for tenuous sociability.'⁶⁸⁷ Bainbridge and Yates have suggested that radio is uniquely positioned as a medium, for as an 'introspective mode of consumption, it can be seen to create internal spaces in the mind for both fantasy and self-reflexivity about the emotional experience.'⁶⁸⁸ Television in contrast, is believed to have an almost a sedative quality "*When you're in prison you spend most of your time sitting in your cell and watching television because there is little else to do.*"⁶⁸⁹ Rather radio was seen to offer a reliable and ritualistic structure, focussing on rehabilitation, support and information for those producing content themselves and for those who would listen – something which continued into the next decades in forthcoming prison radio initiatives.

Although Feltham FM not the first radio station to feature the voices of prisoners, it was the first time prisoners had been able to produce content themselves, intended for their fellow inmates inside the UK - and can be seen to have inspired the momentum of movement towards more projects that were to embrace media participation.⁶⁹⁰ Traditionally this type of programming tended to be produced away from the prison, at well-established community studios or college stations, broadcasting out to the public in counties like Canada,

⁶⁸³ Allen 2006

⁶⁸⁴ Mark, a 17 year old presenter on Feltham FM. Quote taken from Onion 2005

⁶⁸⁵ Bonini & Perrota 2007, p.180

⁶⁸⁶ Telephone Interview, Curtis Blanc, 2014

⁶⁸⁷ Hendy 2010, p.226

⁶⁸⁸ Bainbridge & Yates 2013, p.9

⁶⁸⁹ Telephone Interview, Curtis Blanc, 2014

⁶⁹⁰ The Prison Radio Project was supported by the BBC, and The Prison Radio Association was established in 2005 as an educational organisation for offenders in custody and the community. It received charitable status in 2006, with its main focus centred on the rehabilitation of prisons, in an effort to reduce high levels of reoffending.

Australia and USA and South America. For instance, *Concertina Wire* on KWVA is a weekly radio broadcast on the University of Oregon Campus Radio that airs stories and memoirs from the penal system and its prisoners and survivors. Since 1980, *The Prison Show* has been aired on community speech radio station KPFT FM 90.1 from Houston Texas, to debate issues relating to convicts and to feature requests from family and friends to loved ones inside. Other examples have included *Unchained* (on Roots FM) in Jamaica, *The Prisoners Radio* (on Voice of Prisoners) in Gaza, *Prisoners Pipeline* (on KBOO) in the USA and *Locked In* (on 4zzzfm) in Australia.⁶⁹¹ Meanwhile in Poland there are prison radio broadcasts via cables loudspeakers into almost every cell in 156 prisons.⁶⁹² The Polish cable system broadcasts on only one channel, and incorporates retransmissions from a collection of other public and commercial stations – as well as special editions like a broadcast of mass at a one prison chapel. There is no national network, rather content is specific to each prison. Doliwar’s recent work in Poland, together with Anderson’s ethnographic research in Australia has strengthened our existing knowledge of international examples of prisoner radio– and my own study looks to outline the history of such developments within the UK.⁶⁹³

Following the success of Radio Feltham, a number of smaller pilot initiatives were launched and gained backing from established charities and the BBC. For one such initiative, Phil Maguire, (a former BBC Radio 2 current affairs producer) had helped to set up *The West Midlands Prison Radio Taster Project*. The project funded three prisoner stations in conjunction with local BBC radio and eventually led to the creation of the Prison Radio Association in 2005.⁶⁹⁴ One of these pilots was based at HMP Cardiff, where inmates created their own radio station, using equipment from the former BBC Pebble Mill studios in Birmingham. Eight prisoners originally recorded a daily two-hour show on Clinks Radio, focussing on prison life, which they were then able to send to out to their families.⁶⁹⁵ These pilots attracted interest from other BBC producers and began to gain momentum. Radio Wanno, based at HMP Wandsworth also established their station with help from two charitable trusts and BBC staff. Launched in 2004, prisoners were invited to train and then produce content for their fellow inmates, under the tag line “*Made for you, Made by you, Made with you – Made in Wandsworth.*” The successes of these smaller pilot projects appear to have gained both the impetus and the support of prisoners, professional practitioners, charities and the prison service.

National Prison Radio began in 2009, and is the world’s first and only national radio service for prisoners, currently broadcasting a full daily schedule to 107 prisons and a potential audience of over 73,000.⁶⁹⁶ The

⁶⁹¹ See Anderson 2012 for a comprehensive list

⁶⁹² Doliwar 2013

⁶⁹³ See Anderson 2012 and Doliwar 2013

⁶⁹⁴ Maguire was the founder and remains as the Chief Executive. The PRA became a registered charity in 2006

⁶⁹⁵ Other examples include Radio Altcourse 24.7 which now includes animation, puppeteering and radio production as well as drama, music, film making and audio broadcasting and editing.

⁶⁹⁶ In 2009, Electric Radio Brixton was re-launched as National Prison Radio

Network is based at HMP Brixton⁶⁹⁷ where it runs out of a specially made radio studio. It fulfils a number of objectives, with a main intention being to help reduce high levels of repeat reoffending, promote education and to encourage smoother reintegration back into society on their release. Shows on the network are varied and include both speech and music content which are broadcast via satellite into each cell via a television. The same content on NPR is delivered to all prisons – but those which have local prison radio projects (a total of 29 in 2013) having the opportunity to contribute their own content to NPR for the entire population, or to ‘opt out’ and produce specific content for their own prisoners only. The schedule typically includes entertainment output to do the following: attract listeners, compete with other media (books, television), and build a loyal audience with the intention of generating a demonstrable impact.⁶⁹⁸

The figures are high in comparison with other forms of community media. In 2013, the PRA reported that 99% of 73,000 potential listeners across 107 prisons had heard of NPR, with 84% tuning in for an average of 8.1 hours per week.⁶⁹⁹ On average 57% of prisoners listen on a daily basis – although it should be noted that these statistics were collated by the PRA themselves. This apparent popularity can be attributed to a range of factors, and I’d like to concentrate on two in particular here. Firstly the project has been backed and supported by the authorities including the Ministry of Justice, meaning it has the support of prison officials who believe in the worth of the station and are prepared to interact with it on programmes like *Governors Question Time* and lend their support to education courses. Secondly, content on the station is regarded as authentic and credible - predominantly because it is presented *by* prisoners, without being an obvious tool of the ruling establishment - unlike the first prison radio programmes like *Thirty Minutes Behind the Walls* which I will later explore. The station above any other perhaps most embraces the term ‘user generated content.’

These seemingly impressive listening figures indicate that prisoners may connect more with the idea of a closer community – shared with those in similar situation, who have collective interests, as well as being united institutionally, rather than geographically. There is also constant displacement – moving from cell to cell or prison to prison, “*So the only thing that gives them some sense of consistency would be listening to the prison radio.*”⁷⁰⁰ Constant relocation is also significant problem for the radio station staff who work with and train prisoners, especially at ‘local’ prisons like HMP Brixton, as opposed to HMP Cardiff which might keep the same prisoners for a number of years. The turnover of prisoners impacts on many aspects including scheduling, education and production – where students run the risk of being moved to a prison which does not have their own studio or tutors. The unpredictable high turnover of prisoner presenters is one of the reasons for having such a tight format, which is not reliant on ‘star’ performers.

⁶⁹⁷ The PRA and Ministry of Justice

⁶⁹⁸ See Appendix 1.

⁶⁹⁹ PRA Impact Snapshot 2013

⁷⁰⁰ Interview, Mr Gee, London, 2013

Apart from letters, prisoners are unable to directly interact with other types of mainstream media available outside its walls. It would not be possible to phone into a ‘problem’ broadcaster, text into win a competition or attend an outside broadcast. While they now have access to other stations available to the rest of the country via in-cell television and are able to bring in their own digital radio’s to the cells, predominantly prisoners appear to intentionally prefer to select output from NPR, believing that *“this content is relevant to my situation and relevant to my environment.”*⁷⁰¹ In an interview situation a listener would be able to identify with an interviewer – one of their ‘own.’

*“Their voice ain’t being heard anywhere else. I know one guy, he’s on the prison radio a lot, and he’s proud of the fact that people up in Liverpool are hearing him, people up in Northumberland are hearing it, people in Bristol; the idea that people are hearing his voice”*⁷⁰²

While the voice is of course key to connecting with other listeners, it is also the types of language chosen and the subject matter which becomes vital. The societal or cultural reference points for those prisoners who have been given a longer sentence will have remained largely static, which brings to question how they might relate to national networks like the BBC or commercial radio, where content can often reveal changes in slang, cultural references or advances in technology.

*“Little things can trigger things off, like telling someone that the shop is not there anymore or they’re doing roadwork’s here and they’ve put a roundabout on this road. Then you listen to national radio to find out what’s the latest song, what’s the hits, whatever blah, blah, blah. Say you’re locked away in 2006, that’s when your reference to the outside world is, 2006. So whatever iPhone or Blackberry was out then, that’s what your reference is. Whatever the webpages looked like then, that’s your reference. Because there might be one or two words, one or two reference points, one or two jokes, one or two scenarios, that you are not privy to, whereas within your own little system of prison....the fact is there will be someone talking that you will probably understand everything they’re saying...”*⁷⁰³

This questions a common perception that receiving mainstream media works to encourage greater connection, integration and with a world they are unable to inhabit. Bonini and Perrotta’s study into the listening experiences of Italian prisoners was one of the first academic projects to emerge on this small but growing area of study.⁷⁰⁴ Bonini and Perrotta believed that listening to externally produced programmes could enhance a sense of connection to the world outside. Radio became a ‘vital tool’ which functioned to not only build, but preserve a private sense of self.

⁷⁰¹ Telephone Interview, Curtis Blanc, 2014

⁷⁰² Interview, Mr Gee, London, 2013

⁷⁰³ Interview, Mr Gee, London, 2013

⁷⁰⁴ Bonini & Perrotta 2007

Listening to the radio is a chance to experience the world outside one's cell, to escape from prison and re-enter society, to feel part of it and its everyday rituals, by being audience to the same broadcasts that are directed to people outside⁷⁰⁵

Without dismissing this, I would offer an additional perspective, suggesting that prisoners, if given the option, prefer listening to their own content (especially an interview) by connecting with voices “*like them*.”⁷⁰⁶ Listeners in prisons are able to identify with the *voice* of someone similar that is able to relate to the same daily experiences and challenges that they might face, “*People love to listen to someone who understands what they're going through.*”⁷⁰⁷ Bonini and Perrotta's sample did not have the choice of producing their own content, so were able to feel a sense of belonging alongside a wider imagined audience by consuming the same type of media as the outside world.

6.2 REPRESENTATION & VOICE: THE PRISONER AS THE INTERVIEWEE

The consumption of mediated content by prisoners has been considered by a number of researchers, who have also examined the representation of prisoners in popular media.⁷⁰⁸ The tradition of featuring prisoners on the airwaves dates back to 1938 with *Thirty Minutes Behind the Walls*, a weekly show on Fort Worth Station WBAP in the USA.

*“Good evening Ladies and Gentlemen...This evening through the facilitation [of] WBAP, Texas prisoners make their air-debut in a series of completely original weekly broadcasts authorized by the Texas Prison Board expressly to acquaint Texas with the excellent talent behind these walls, as well as with the modernized program of rehabilitation recently adopted by the Administration...”*⁷⁰⁹

This was a new venture, and the first known programme that, (although externally controlled) had included content that had been planned, produced and presented by convicted offenders. First broadcast at 10.30pm on March 23rd from the State Penitentiary in Huntsville Texas, this was designed as a ‘bold experiment’ by a prison system ‘beset by scandal’, intended to publicise how prisons were preparing their inmates for release into society.⁷¹⁰ It was the first of its kind to permit inmates to speak to the wider listening public and two years after its conception it reportedly received up to seven million listeners. The programme aired for five

⁷⁰⁵ Bonini & Perrota 2007, p185

⁷⁰⁶ Marianne Garvey, Banstead, 2013

⁷⁰⁷ Marianne Garvey, Banstead, 2013

⁷⁰⁸ In particular see the work of Vandebosch 2000 and Jewkes, 2002a&b/2005/2007/2010

⁷⁰⁹ Extract from *Thirty Minutes Behind the Walls*, quoted in Blue 2013, p.135

⁷¹⁰ Blue 2013, p. 135

years, consisting of poetry, comedy sketches, music and interviews. Blue has discussed how interviews differed highly in their representation of ethnicity, class and gender – acting as a powerful enforcer of social control. He reported that women were rarely given the opportunity to engage in spoken discourse on air, black and Mexican inmates were regularly excluded while white, English speaking men were often the focus of interviews.

These exchanges with prison officials, and the prisoners themselves, were used to broadcast a positive version of prison life out to the wider public – overwhelmingly pointing to a reality where justice would be done to those foolish enough to break the law. Human interest interviews were focussed on the effects of prison, the promise of rehabilitation and their regret over their criminal past. These contributors were selected by officials who were often the best behaved and thought to represent the prison in a positive light. This appears to be a carefully selected and organised environment, where inclusion on the radio (and within the radio interview) reflects pervasive social divisions while being used for PR purposes, to promote the interests of the prison, the officials and the State, rather than the prisoners themselves.

It is just worth returning momentarily once again to the work of Denis Mitchell who was the first to film inside a British prison. Mitchell recorded a documentary for BBC television about the prisoners in Strangeways Gaol in Manchester, adapted from his *People Talking* radio series, first broadcast on June 26th 1957. Although there were questions from viewers regarding the unpleasant and undeserving characters, Mitchell believed in the rhythmical potential of hearing prisoners talking about their own lives. *In Prison* could be seen as an early example of the capacity of radio to infiltrate physical barriers and arguably encourage a redistribution of microphone access through the interview encounter.⁷¹¹

“I try to listen to people on two levels: to what they say and – more importantly – to how they say it. It’s in the rhythms and falls of everyday speech that people reveal their truth, their quality and strength. If you like, you listen for the poetry behind the prose. I once made a film about life in prison. What I remember most was the droop in the voices of the prisoners, every sentence fell away. That told me more about prison than a blue-book of facts”⁷¹²

Denis Mitchell here refers to the poetic essence of this type of speech, and more recently, *Poetic Justice* records the work of poet, Mr Gee, who facilitates poetry workshops in prisons across the UK, with many episodes broadcast both on National Prison Radio, and BBC Radio 4. This series uses verse, rhymes and interviewing to weave together personal reflections of former prisoners, inmates and those in custody or who are at risk of offending. Mr Gee has centred his work on emotional abstract themes like hope, forgiveness and redemption “*I want the part that triggers the most joy or the most pain or the most jealousy or the most hope,*

⁷¹¹ Franklin & McDonald 2013

⁷¹² Quoted in Franklin & Long 2013

that's what you're trying to isolate it down to."⁷¹³ The interview here is used to contextualise the poetry and the experience of the workshop contributors. Street believes poetry as the ideal partner to radio⁷¹⁴ – and along with 'spoken word'⁷¹⁵ it has been used in this case in an attempt to engage a largely isolated community who are often leading solitary lives in their cells.

At the start of one episode recorded in 2012, Mr Gee invited his students to use the word 'reflection.' As we saw in the *Radio Ballads*, meaning here can be conveyed by inflection, rhythm, timing, and pauses – with poetry acting as a means to tell a story, while the interview and montaged editing is used to contextualise and enhance the listener's connection to their lives. We can hear the whiteboard marker scraping on the board as he turns to ask a group of former prisoners what the word means to them. A mature male voice with a Scottish accent speaks, his voice shaking and breaking. Afterwards we hear an extract from his poem:

Reflection? If I had have behaved myself I could have been released on my tariff which was seven years. But I bucked the system. I got into fights, and given more time on top of my sentence. I look back and think how stupid I was. How stupid I was.

*Anger hurts as steel boots crash against concrete floors. The advancing herds surge in like a torrent. An old man riddled with hatred trying to ward off the blows from crashing boots and long wooded staves. One of them stands out from all the others. His eyes were curiously moist with a fog of shame*⁷¹⁶

Reflection, redemption and recovery seem to be dominant themes, and this is one of a number of recent attempts by the BBC to bring the stories of prisoners out from the confines of the institution and into the mainstream media to a wider audience. But with a focus on rehabilitation this edited programme of course reflects a repentant tone – similar to *Thirty Minutes Behind the Walls*. Although these are not made by prisoners, this does mean that these often previously unheard voices are starting to penetrate the divide between life inside and daily civilian life. Documentaries and features have included *The Band Behind Bars*,⁷¹⁷ *Gay on the Inside*,⁷¹⁸ *It's My Story: Let Me In*⁷¹⁹ and *Crossroads*⁷²⁰ that also been made by established 'professional' producers or well-known presenters⁷²¹ in conjunction with charities, like the Prison Radio Association, Victims Voice and Media for Development. Later in this Chapter I'll touch upon the experiences

⁷¹³ Interview, Mr Gee, London, 2013

⁷¹⁴ Street 2012. Stein 1991 and Maeve 2000 have also discussed the way that writing and poetry has been used by female prisoners. Lorde 1984 has also shown how poetry has the potential to symbolize personal and political resistance

⁷¹⁵ Spoken word refers to a performance-based poetry form that uses the aesthetics of word play and story-telling

⁷¹⁶ Extract from *Poetic Justice*, broadcast on BBC Radio 4, 30.8.2012.

⁷¹⁷ BBC Radio 2 2011

⁷¹⁸ BBC Radio 4 2012

⁷¹⁹ BBC Radio 4 2014

⁷²⁰ BBC Radio 1 2013

⁷²¹ These have included Stephen Fry, Mr Gee, Adele and Craig Charles.

of these ‘professional’ producers and the challenges they face in their attempt to capture and collate stories from prisoners.⁷²² But before they are available to the public (and often re-edited for BBC broadcast) the majority of these programmes are also played internally inside prisons, on National Prison Radio.⁷²³

In 2012 *Face to Face* was broadcast on both National Prison Radio, and subsequently reversioned for broadcast on BBC Radio 4 under the new title of *The Victims Voice*.⁷²⁴ Based on the concept of restorative justice processes, the format was largely shaped around both group interactions and one-to-one interviews. Its aim was to facilitate direct communication between victims of crime with perpetrators and featured three members of the public who had lost family members together with three prisoners from HMP Brixton, who were serving sentences for unrelated violent offences. Produced by Marianne Garvey, and presented by clinical psychologist and broadcaster Professor Tanya Byron, the programme was made in conjunction with Victim Support, a national charity who offer help to victims and witnesses of crime. Byron took on the role as a mentor, therapist, reporter and advisor, outlining her credentials in the opening section.

*“My name is Professor Tanya Byron and I’ll be hosting this restorative session. I’m a professor in the public understanding of science, and I work with children and young people from difficult backgrounds, some of whom might be at risk of going into crime. I’d also like to tell you that one of the reasons I want to do this programme is that I’ve also been the victim of crime. When I was a teenager, my grandmother was battered to death. So for me it is a personal issue, as well as a professional one. But it’s not my story we’ll be hearing today....”*⁷²⁵

Interviews took place inside the prison, in meeting rooms, a radio studio and cells, “so I’m now going into B wing to see if I can find Adrian. Gosh it’s very busy in here. Let’s see if I can find him.”⁷²⁶ Most centrally however, were the recordings from the meetings of the six main contributors, who were required to speak to each other within the group - to Tanya and to the listener. This was a complex task, culminating in an almost therapeutic tone where the emotional story of each member was shared. This contributor, a prisoner, reflected on the experience of taking part:

“When I first got told I thought that I was just gonna meet these people, listen to their stories, they hear about our crimes. That’s it job done. Then we get up and go. The depth

⁷²² Here prisoners are used purely as interviewees and content must be approved by NOMS and the governor of each institution.

⁷²³ To broadcast prisoners’ voices on the BBC there needs to be written consent of the prisoner and the consent of the Ministry of Justice. The victims issue is covered by the BBC Editorial Guidelines. See section 8.4.9: “We should, as far as is reasonably practicable, make best endeavours to contact surviving victims, and/or the immediate relatives of the deceased and advise them of our plans.” The initial approach would be made by the PRA.

⁷²⁴ BBC Radio 4, first broadcast on Mon 20 Aug 2012

⁷²⁵ *Face to Face*, March 2012

⁷²⁶ *Face to Face*, March 2012

*that it gets you. It gets right down. It makes you feel so emotional, listening to what they've been through. It just makes you think about other people for once”*⁷²⁷

This normally private and hidden process of restorative justice was given a public platform – and the interview was used as the central communicative and programming device throughout.

6.3 WE'VE ALL BEEN THERE, WE'VE ALL DONE IT: NATIONAL PRISON RADIO

The tight schedule of National Prison Radio typically attempts to incorporate entertainment with more information heavy content, assembling audio about Health issues; Education, (training and employment); Addiction (drugs and alcohol); finance (benefits and debt); children and families, and attitudes, (thinking and behaviour). A copy of the schedule, printed in the *Inside Time* magazine, from August 2013 (See Appendix 1) contains a variety of output: from the *Information Centre* for new prisoners, to 'Late Night Love Bug' (Midnight: 'Love songs, the soundtrack to write letters home to'), *Porridge*, (07:00) the breakfast show), *Prime Time*, (17:00 'the daily feature show') and *The National Prison Radio Book Club* (22.00). Like most community stations in the UK, NPR takes a news feed from sky news and three times an hour they feature adverts about rehabilitation opportunities and education courses. The interview lies at the heart of these programmes and at the core of the daily content heard across the schedule.

*“The programmes are presented, almost entirely, by prisoners ... which is very important to the sound of the station, because its prisoners talking to prisoners, and it is a community station, effectively. And the lads that are presenting are going through exactly the same thing as the people that are listening to it.”*⁷²⁸

All content on UK prison radio is currently pre-recorded, and a large proportion of talk is scripted, but despite this listeners can forge a connection and feel a sense of security. Steve Urquhart was tasked with delivering the station sound and made a deliberate decision to 'do away with' professional sounding voice over artists, in favour of the voices of the prisoners with their regional accents and 'homemade' sound.⁷²⁹ Listener surveys have revealed that audiences haven't objected to the odd mistake or occasional 'clunky' sound – rather they have enjoyed following the journey of an amateur prisoner presenter, hearing them learn and develop over time.^{730 731} Language, accent and dialect are important but it can also be the more delicate clues captured from speech.

⁷²⁷ *Face to Face*, March 2012

⁷²⁸ Interview, Prison Radio Producer & radio tutor, Bournemouth 2012 (anonymous)

⁷²⁹ Interview, Steve Urquhart, London, 2013

⁷³⁰ Prison Radio Association Survey results, discussed in Telephone Interview with Andrew Wilkie, 2013

*“There will always be a nuance in the way someone speaks, where if you’re from that environment, you lock into it straight away. I’m not even talking about slang. I might even be talking about pauses. So that is familiarity and that’s what makes them feel a sense of comfort.”*⁷³²

Not only is radio seen as a consistent and daily service for those sent away from families, or a place of familiarity for prisoners who are regularly moved from one prison to another, crucially it can also be thought of as creating an opportunity for pragmatism, *“I think that sometimes the radio might provide an escape from the prison, but it also might provide a realisation that you are in prison.”*⁷³³ Much of the interview content heard on NPR reflects the needs of newer prisoners, many of whom have not expected to receive a custodial sentence. Feelings can range from confusion, to guilt, to fear for the future and to anguish after being jailed for the first time, but shock appears to be the most common reaction *“Most people don’t expect to go to prison. For some it might be inevitable but it’s still a real shock.”*⁷³⁴

Gaucher has found that prison writing, and other forms of artistic expression become paramount to resisting the challenges and realities of life inside, where projects like magazine writing or poetry, or indeed radio look to provide ‘a means of survival and a testament to surviving the dislocations of prison life.’⁷³⁵ The interview, by its very reciprocal nature, requires some form of a connection – normally with someone not known to the interviewer. It requires research, a curiosity and an interest in another person, for whatever purpose and however superficial the outcome. It forces the interviewer to confront those who share opposing viewpoints in a way (if thinking of the listener) is not based on personal judgement.

They can be withdrawn and lack confidence and self-esteem. Most have low aspirations and believe that they could never produce and take part in a radio show. We work hard with the women at improving their confidence, encouraging them to talk about themselves and ask questions. As part of their course they are expected to produce a 30 minute radio show for broadcasting, covering a wide range of topical issues. Learners have used subjects such as black history, ageism, sexuality, and the travelling community, to raise awareness of other people’s points of view. They also interview a variety of people who represent community groups such as “mothers against violence.”⁷³⁶

The process of asking questions and relating the answers to their own experiences through the interview, is a potentially powerful act, especially for those who may have struggled to empathise or identify with others.

⁷³¹ Telephone Interview, Curtis Blanc, 2013. To reflect the diverse needs of a prison population, some programmes would feature speakers of other languages, including Portuguese, Polish, Spanish, Hindi and Punjabi, which would be relevant to its listeners whose first language was not English

⁷³² Interview, Mr Gee, London, 2013

⁷³³ Interview, Mr Gee, London, 2013

⁷³⁴ Telephone Interview, Andrew Wilkie, 2013

⁷³⁵ Gaucher 2002 p.12

⁷³⁶ Radio Tutor at HMP Styal quoted in Ofsted 2012 [online]

As well as shock, prisoners may experience a range of emotions specifically linked to their physical removal from everyday life. Although it is naturally problematic to generalise about the varied prison population, (this depends markedly on different prisons, length of sentence, categories of jails, age, gender, ethnic background, religious belief, sexuality and governance⁷³⁷), the majority may be unable to move freely, wear their own clothes, decide when or where to eat or sleep. As a result, inmates might experience the following issues relating to: confinement, scarcity of resources, systematic monitoring, removal from a democratic social system, the threat of relocation, emotional isolation and physical separation.⁷³⁸

*“We get a lot of letters saying that, “If it wasn’t for National Prison Radio I don’t know what I’d do, I don’t know how I would’ve coped.” And we also get letters from people that are leaving prison, saying, “Oh, thanks for being there for me, and you’re like a friend at the lonely times at night when I’ve felt really down”*⁷³⁹

It is a useful time to bring in Foucault’s⁷⁴⁰ perspectives on society, power and imprisonment here. For Foucault the prison assumes physical, mental and spiritual responsibility over their inmates – while it is the day-to-day verdict of prison staff (including Chaplains, Governors and guards) that reflects the severity of the penalty, and who most impose their authority and influence on the lives of prisoners, rather than the law or custodial sentence.⁷⁴¹ In this respect, the behaviour, attitudes and feedback from radio station tutors should play a significant role in either challenging or supporting the conventional customs and rituals of the prison system.

Inside a prison a clear hierarchy is set in place concerning the regulation of daily decisions, where daily positive feedback is rare, affecting the self-confidence and self-belief of some;

*“When you’re in a predicament like that, your self-esteem will go down...the amount of things that are out of your hands and your control is immense. It’s like 90% of things are out of your control.”*⁷⁴²

James Batchelor was working as an IT teacher and was unprepared for the possibility of receiving a custodial sentence, *“I think the shock is something that sinks in over a period of a few months...It’s out of your hands. You have no control.”*⁷⁴³ *The Information Centre* (17:00 each Sunday) outlines the regulations, definitions, opportunities and policies that a new prisoner might encounter. Much of this type of factual information (what

⁷³⁷ There are five types of prisons; local; training; young offenders institutes; high security and those run by private companies.

⁷³⁸ See Helsinger 2000

⁷³⁹ Interview, Prison Radio Producer & radio tutor, 2012

⁷⁴⁰ Foucault 1977

⁷⁴¹ Also see Novek & Sandford 2007

⁷⁴² Telephone Interview, James Batchelor, 2013

⁷⁴³ Telephone Interview, James Batchelor, 2013

you can keep in your cell; your money; the prison shop; smoking; food; bedding; incentives and earned privileges) would also be available in print form but audio interviews, packages and reports are able to reach those who experience difficulties with reading.⁷⁴⁴

Release from this type of structured and highly regulated environment also brings with it an assortment of emotions and practical implications. Once free from jail, Curtis Blanc recognised the need for a similar type of format as *The Information Centre*, but this time it should capture the attention of those nearing the end of their sentence, in order to bridging the gap between prison and life after release. He believed more needed to be done for former inmates to deal with the realities of life outside prison, cope with the fear of finding employment with a criminal record and curb the temptation of turning once again to crime or addiction.

*“It was so overwhelming. I was homeless for a few weeks and money was an issue.... all the temptations were real and got shoved in my face on a regular basis. The temptations to go back to committing crime”*⁷⁴⁵

Curtis Blanc felt it was crucial to provide more information about understanding the probation service and access to entitlements for newly released offenders, again in order to try to cut high rates of re-offending. Once again, the interview lay at the heart of this initiative.

*“We need to be interviewing senior probation officers, we need to be talking to the local job centres we need to be talking to other support networks, and we need to be talking to other prisoners who have been released.”*⁷⁴⁶

Currently more than twenty-three former prisoners have produced and presented *Outside In*, now broadcast on NPR and recorded in New Broadcasting House in conjunction with BBC Outreach.⁷⁴⁷ One episode features Steve, a former prisoner who established an enterprise which trains and employs ex-offenders.

Steve: I got to say though boys and girls please don't start inundating us with now with referrals, wait until you get out of prison, find your feet a bit, get on a bus, sniff the air, and then see if we can help.

Interviewer: Yeah you got to get your head in gear as well haven't you.

*Steve: Absolutely. The temptation to come out and still do a bit of gear and thinking you can burn the candle at both ends. We've all been there, we've all done it...*⁷⁴⁸

⁷⁴⁴ Natale 2010. According to a 2010 report by CIVITAS Institute for the Study of Civil Society more than a third of prisoners have literacy skills at or below what is expected of an 11 year old, which makes audio a more direct and easier method of communicating information.

⁷⁴⁵ Telephone Interview, Curtis Blanc, 2014

⁷⁴⁶ Telephone Interview, Curtis Blanc, 2014

⁷⁴⁷ After a brief hiatus when Blanc left London, the programme is now made alongside BBC staff volunteering with the Prison Radio Association in conjunction with BBC Outreach. The aim is to offer practical advice and support to those listeners who are due to re-enter society.

Interviewers are bonded together in experience with their listeners and interviewees – once again insinuating a close connection. The on-air persona of Blanc's and the other interviewers had been extended following their release – they are now the representative of the prison community, but one of them situated in the outside world. Anderson has described a similar case, when she wrote about Charlie a former prisoner, who had gone on to work on local community radio following his release from an Australian jail. Unlike Blanc, Charlie was broadcasting to both inside and out to the wider community.⁷⁴⁹ She sums up how the relationship with the radio station was not only confined to the prison.

Charlie has become a personality. He has become a direct representative of those he has 'left behind' in prison. Prisoners have expressed a connection with the new announcers who share their experience and a level of trust has been established that could not have existed formerly.⁷⁵⁰

Charlie and Curtis Blanc become powerful mediators after they leave prison, separating this distance between the outside world and the life they left behind. They are not only seen as representatives of a 'success' story, but are able to show how to conduct 'successful interviews' where they have the freedom to speak with those outside the jail, on behalf of those who could not.

6.4 TRAINING TO INTERVIEW

The first training course for UK prisoners began in Maidstone Prison during 1941, which saw twenty five men being taught precision engineering fitting for just over five months. Influenced by the demands of the war, Maidstone, Manchester, Liverpool, Stafford, Wormwood Scrubs and Wakefield Prisons all had training courses in five trades: carpentry, bricklaying, painting and decorating, precision engineering fitting and boot and shoe repairing by 1946.⁷⁵¹ Over seventy years on, there are now 'Braille Units' where offenders learn how to transcribe the written and printed word, the 'Listeners Scheme' where inmates are trained by Samaritans to provide a sympathetic ear to those in distress, 'Toe by Toe' which asks prisoners to teach colleagues to read and write; and the 'Clink' restaurants, where trainees work a 40 hour week towards gaining NVQ qualifications. Projects like these can be separated into five identifiable types of active citizenship: peer

⁷⁴⁸ Audio available from *Blue Sky* [online]

⁷⁴⁹ A similar scheme has started in the UK, bridging the gap between prison and life after release. Currently twenty-three former prisoners have produced and presented *Outside In*, broadcast on NPR and recorded in New Broadcasting House. The programme looks is made alongside BBC staff volunteering with the Prison Radio Association in conjunction with BBC Outreach. The aim is to offer practical advice and support to those listeners who are due to re-enter society.

⁷⁵⁰ Anderson 2008 [online]

⁷⁵¹ Burkley writing in Forster 1981

support, community support, restorative justice schemes, democratic participation in prison life and arts and media programmes.⁷⁵² The latter includes performing arts courses, or newspaper and television stations that are run inside prison, like music and drama project ‘Pimlico Opera’, ‘Fine Cell Work’ which teaches needlework, and ‘Inside TV’, a 24/7 television channel. This is run from inside HMP Lowdham Grange where all content (stings and trails to short films and promos etc.) has been produced, packaged or repackaged by serving prisoners.

Opportunities for inmates to attend radio production courses, to carry out training, gain qualifications and contribute towards on air audio content differs according to institution – and to the amount of staff, individual prison regime, education provider and studio equipment or resources available. Often inmates will have needed to complete a basic course in radio production skills in order to work as a producer at a station – commonly an NCFE - but many either learn for the first time or continue to learn while on the job, meaning training and feedback is incorporated into the daily routine. Tutors, like Marianne Garvey act as mentors and facilitators, working to co-create interview material alongside prisoners, who typically learn to edit, research and record on computers in a small classroom, together with 6-8 other inmates.⁷⁵³ A large component of working on the station has not just been producing on-air content - instead it relates to the wider issues including meeting deadlines and learning how to better communicate. Pupils are given access to computers, editing software, recording equipment – and above all given the opportunity to acquire new knowledge.

Tutors/staff have overall ownership and control over the uploading of content to the Prison Radio Network and the local ‘opt-in’ – but continuously ask inmates to conduct interviews, package their own programmes or perform preliminary audio edits. Preparation for an interview is collaborative but led by the tutor - who will determine the motivations for the interview or how it might be used. They will then help conduct mock interviews in preparation. Communication strategies are often discussed prior to the exchange. For instance, interviewers are encouraged not to ummm or ahhh, to maintain eye contact, use appropriate language, use open questions, to listen, and instructions on how to brief your interviewee beforehand.⁷⁵⁴ General techniques like how to hold a microphone, paying attention to background noise and the benefits of using headphones are also considered. A copy of a PRA ‘how to’ guide from revealed 12 tips on ‘how to get the most out of a radio interview.’⁷⁵⁵ Suggestions range from technical instructions (mic distance), to advice about gaining the trust of interviewees and types of questions needed:

⁷⁵² Jacobson & Biggar 2011

⁷⁵³ At HMP High Down prisoners are trained while working for the station, and create between 10 and 12 hours of broadcasted content per week. At HMP Stoke Heath a new course was set up at the start of 2014 which will contribute 1 hour to the opt-out, requiring prisoners to learn from Monday to Friday from 8.30am-11.30 and again from 1.30-4.30 (excluding Fridays).

⁷⁵⁴ PRA Leaflet 2013 ‘How to get the best out of an interview’

⁷⁵⁵ The PRA produced a number of ‘how to’ guides from 2013 for staff producers and radio tutors

Prepare and ask “open questions”—beginning with “who”, “what”, “when”, “why” and “how”—to prevent one word answers such as “yes” and “no.” This is particularly important if your voice will be edited out afterwards (e.g. for Jail Tales, where you need to make sure the interviewee responds using complete sentences).⁷⁵⁶

The open question is now regarded as the staple ingredient of the modern interview. We saw in earlier Chapters how Roy Plomley and Charles Parker preferred short, sharp statements - but since then the open question has seemingly become interpreted as the conventional route to a ‘successful’ interview exchange:

*“The best advice I ever had about interviews came from John Humphreys. I was interviewing him for the then Talk Radio, I said, “What do you do when you get stuck for a question?” He said, “You never get stuck for a question, you go back to basics. You say, ‘Who? When? Why? What? For what reason? In what place? At what date? What do you mean when you say that?’” People love to be asked those questions, and they open like roses, and it works.”*⁷⁵⁷

As Anna Raeburn herself found, this is a technique that is taught, rather than implicitly known. To prepare their students for interviews, Prison Radio Tutors will print off questions for interviews in advance, using brackets and italics to highlight possible routes the interview might take – seen as a safe option if prisoners get nervous in an interview and are unsure of what to say next. Tutors often play out previous examples of best or worst practice from mainstream interviews for inmates to hear, which attempt to showcase different interview styles. Yet despite the style guides and coaching are told to develop their own methods, to ‘be themselves’ on the air. Scripting is often used to aid the interviewer, although they are encouraged to listen to the response and go off script. There are also instances of recreating mainstream interview formats for prisoner audiences. HMP Stoke Heath refashioned *Desert Island Discs* into *Jail House Juke Box* and asked the guest what luxuries they would take to prison if they could. This time the castaways were members of staff like nurse, chaplaincy and officers. HMP Styal also experimented with the format, asking their female inmates to share their stories and musical choices. The radio interview appears to be a central method of communication, used in features, entertainment and more information centred programmes, where the acts of questioning and listening are seen as a fundamental necessity.

A technique used by tutors early on at Electric Radio Brixton⁷⁵⁸ was to pre-record prisoners asking their own questions – this meant the presenter would be relatively secure, reminding us of the role of the early BBC interlocutor – this time who could negotiate the interaction between the pre-recorded excerpt and the Governor. It also meant that a range of different voices could be aired, and the listeners would have a vested interest so tune in later to hear the response. Here the person posing the question would not have a right of

⁷⁵⁶ PRA Leaflet 2013 ‘How to get the best out of an interview’

⁷⁵⁷ Interview, Anna Raeburn, London, 2012

⁷⁵⁸ Refers here to extract taken from 2009

reply, or the opportunity to respond to the answer – and naturally means that a selection process is firmly in place where questions would have to have been approved before the start of the programme.

Presenter: *Hello and you're listening to Electric Radio Brixton and today we've got the number one Governor, Paul McDowell here in the studio for his monthly grilling. Governor McDowell, thank you for coming into Electric Radio Brixton. The first question:*

Carlos: *Hello, this is Carlos from G Wing. I just wanted to ask the Governor one question about why the portions of food are so small. Breakfast, lunch and dinner. Sometimes I go to my cell hungry and I can't sleep at night. Is it because you don't want to feed us a lot of food so we're not bigger than the officers?*

Governor: *Ok well thanks for the question Carlos. It definitely isn't for that reason, I can guarantee you that...*

One of the apparent problems with traditional training courses has been the perception they would have a white or middle class bias – unconnected to the needs and backgrounds of prisoner students. Radio is seen to challenge this conception by uniting interests which would appeal to prisoners of different ages, religious backgrounds, ethnic backgrounds, class, gender, education level, by a focus on technology, sound, music, storytelling and creativity. Training on the outside world may not be financially viable, so for many this is the only or first opportunity they may have to get these types of qualifications. Many of the prisoner students had come with prior knowledge of the recording industry, either in a production capacity or through presenting on pirate radio or occasionally on community stations. Some have been on the periphery of success within the music industry, often having themselves been interviewed for local or national stations. While the aim of prison radio projects is centred on communication, transferable skills and education, rather than working in the industry, Andrew Wilkie (Director of the Prison Radio Association) regards the system exemplifying a need to offer accessibility to a medium chiefly that has traditionally been managed on the outside by an exclusive group.

*"I think media is very very exclusive, very very upper and middle class in this country...It's very elitist. I think people from this type of background don't get to do radio unless its pirate radio which is illegal. Finding your voice and being given the opportunity to communicate your stories is a very powerful thing for anybody, whether or not they are in prison... I just feel so strongly that the media should be about giving a voice to ordinary people."*⁷⁵⁹

In a sense, the establishment of prison radio schemes act as an attempt to defy the middle-class, educated dominance of the industry, and encourage a redistribution of communicative entitlement. Prison radio projects therefore challenge the accepted radio (and more specifically, interviewing) archetypes, by providing minority

⁷⁵⁹ Telephone Interview, Andrew Wilkie, 2013

access to the means of broadcasting.⁷⁶⁰ They have also presented prisoners with opportunities to gain work placements. In 2012 a journalist from BBC Radio Manchester was seconded to Stylistic Radio for two days a week to tutor students in HMP Styal. The BBC then offered a four week work experience placement at Media City, for prisoners who were approaching the end of their sentences.⁷⁶¹ In this respect, the radio interview offers more than on-air success.

As part of their course, learners need to develop interview skills, both in interviewing and being interviewed. They become increasingly confident in talking about themselves and sharing their experiences in positive ways. They learn to relax in these interviews, a skill which is easily transferable into future interviews for employment.⁷⁶²

The guidelines, the classes, and the prison radio networks are shaped by former or current BBC producers – and all appear committed to providing opportunities to so-called amateur broadcasters, “*it’s about giving them a voice, giving them a chance to be creative.*”⁷⁶³ But it could equally be argued that traditional ‘ways of doing’ radio, and as such, radio interviews are replicated, in a different institutional environment. This supposed difference between the professional and amateur radio producer raises significant questions about the launch of projects like prison radio or community networks. Radio (and radio interview) training projects both in prisons and in colleges or universities run the risk of reconstructing existing structural inequalities.

Whenever a cultural elite starts to train and thus to “professionalize” new “ordinary” users, those traditional cultural barriers and hierarchies that have been questioned by the emerging participatory cultures are rebuilt.⁷⁶⁴

The reproduction of replicating traditional hierarchies and barriers is a risk in any type of training programme. Corcoran has acknowledged that there is naturally a tension within this type of project: between a) the objective of correction, control and custody by the prison system and b) the ideals of education which is personal development, autonomy and accomplishment.⁷⁶⁵ Powers are taken away from those who have failed to exercise control in society – yet the potential of education, in contrast allows for a process of empowerment. The Governor, the guards and NOMS would no doubt view education as a way to control inmates and reduce re-offending rates. Similar to our earlier example of *Thirty Minutes Behind the Walls* this would also seek to ensure the support of the press, the public and politicians. But the prisoners are able to take pride, ownership and confidence from the small amounts of decision-making, choice and status awarded to them through their role as an interviewer or interviewee. The reciprocal opportunities prioritised in other

⁷⁶⁰ See Franklin 2009

⁷⁶¹ Ofsted 2012

⁷⁶² TMC Course Coordinator and Tutor, quoted in Ofsted 2012

⁷⁶³ Interview, Marianne Garvey, Banstead 2013

⁷⁶⁴ Muller 2009, p.28

⁷⁶⁵ Corcoran 1985

community radio projects may not always be accomplished on prison radio, but it does promote wider participation, literacy skills and technical training.⁷⁶⁶ Complex notions of intentionality, free will, responsibility and decision making can all be found delicately balanced within this small arena of the interview. More generally prison radio, (and prison radio interviews more specifically) as both local projects and national networks, also allows for the breaking down of barriers, the crossing of borders, and a disregard for existing boundaries- something especially significant for a group whose physical movement is so monitored and restricted.⁷⁶⁷

6.5 HELLO MR DJ

“Who doesn’t want to feel that sense of importance that their opinions, their thoughts, their musings, have got some kind of worth? I guess this is why prison radio works, the idea that what they are saying will be heard by someone else inside.”

Mr Gee, 2013⁷⁶⁸

Unlike most other forms of broadcasting, presenters on prison radio projects will often have continued and direct, face-to-face interaction with their listeners. This is in stark contrast to the relative safety of a more mainstream studio, where the likes of Anna Raeburn, Phillip Hodson or Roy Plomley, who would more often than not, not be confronted with the direct consequences of their on-air performance. As a result, this unique relationship between the interviewer and their contributors has a continuing significance, making the interaction that exists before and afterwards of special importance. The context of production becomes central yet again. Because access to contemporary methods of audience interaction is predominantly limited to letters, presenters on NPR are often confronted with immediate feedback from fellow inmates. This runs the risk of scrutiny by listeners, where their inexperience is examined, along with their voice, their language, their tone, their opinions and their questions which are put forward for judgement with the potential to make them feel like they are being put in a vulnerable position. The same goes for those prisoners who are being interviewed about their personal history or more sensitive matters.

As I have noted, producing audio content while in prison can provide inmates with an opportunity engage with technology, gain qualifications and vocalise their experience. Yet it is useful to bring in Lorde’s observations, remembering that the ‘transformation of silence into language and action is considered as an act

⁷⁶⁶ See Franklin 2009

⁷⁶⁷ Also see Hilmes 2004a

⁷⁶⁸ Interview, Mr Gee, London 2013

of self-revelation and that always seems fraught with danger.⁷⁶⁹ Marianne Garvey recalled that one of her students, before he grew confidence and became their “*go to guy for interviews*” was unable to read or write, and was shaking before he recorded his first interview with an invited guest, to the extent that he “*almost physically crumbled.*”⁷⁷⁰ Curtis Blanc was also apprehensive:

*“I didn’t really want to hear what people had to say... I think that was out of fear because I didn’t know if people would actually like my radio work. I think it was out of fear that people might be cynical or slag me off.”*⁷⁷¹

There are more direct consequences, especially at local opt-in’s and more at stake if they made an error, where they will have no chance to escape or retreat to the safety of ‘backstage.’ There might also be more direct pressure after the interview for failing to hold a person in authority to account, or to ask a question that others might find relevant. In essence, they are drawing attention to themselves, breaking the temptation to “*keep your head down*”, “*ride your time*”, and “*just get through it*” which continue to be common coping strategies for some prisoners.⁷⁷² Perhaps the most precarious programme to do an interview on was *Governors Question Time*, where both prison radio presenters and staff tutors had a group discussion to decide on the type of questions needed.

*If we get a new prisoner in and we tell them, “You’re going to be interviewing the Governor,” and they’ll be like, “Right, I’m going to ask him why wasn’t I accepted on my R.O.T.L⁷⁷³? And why haven’t I got my tag yet?” and this, that and the other. We’re like, “No, you can’t ask him any of those questions, because that’s personal questions for you, what about the rest of the bloody prison?” So it’s kind of a maturity thing with them, and that I think is a great skill for them to learn, because they actually have to think about other people rather than themselves for a change.*⁷⁷⁴

The process of this type of interview experience called for those working on interview led programmes like *Governors Question Time* to step away from the specific, and out to the general – ‘creating the dimensions of both intimacy and distance’⁷⁷⁵ from individual situations or injustices that troubled them. This externalisation meant that the interview, in a small way, offered them an opportunity to talk about events and distance themselves from their own experiences – instead they are tasked with the responsibility of representing a large group of listeners.

⁷⁶⁹ Lorde 1984, p.42

⁷⁷⁰ Interview, Marianne Garvey, Banstead, 2013

⁷⁷¹ Telephone Interview, Curtis Blanc, 2014

⁷⁷² Interview, Marianne Garvey, Banstead, 2013

⁷⁷³ R.O.T.L refers to Release on Temporary Licence

⁷⁷⁴ Interview, Prison Radio Producer & radio tutor, Bournemouth, 2012

⁷⁷⁵ Maeve 2000, p.494

Working at a prison radio station can be seen to promote a sense of inclusion and identity. In HMP High Down producers at the station are encouraged to wear a National Prison Radio logo, and Marianne Garvey has noted that *“you can see them wearing it with pride.”*⁷⁷⁶ This membership and the acquisition of new skills works to stimulate a sense of ownership, creates a clear structure during the day and invites feedback from staff and listeners. This was particularly relevant for James Batchelor, who recalls his cellmate’s reaction: *“Wow I heard you on the interview.” They’d be interested. It’s foreign to them. People were bloody positive. I felt guilty. I would come out of the radio station and I’d feel happy.”*⁷⁷⁷

No names are printed on the schedule (due in part to the high turnover of presenters), so listeners learn to connect with voice, a story, and the first name of a prisoner presenter. But conversely this can still elevate them to an almost celebrity status back on the wings, *“It’s really nice. It’s a role of importance. People would be jokey like ‘hello Mr dj’ when they saw you.”*⁷⁷⁸ Steve Urquhart recalls a similar experience with more experienced presenters when he was running training sessions at HMP Brixton *“yeah I’m the breakfast show host and yeah everybody knows who I am”...they’d become minor celebrities themselves and they’d have competitions to who would get the most letters in a week...’*⁷⁷⁹

At HMP Brixton, Curtis Blanc recognised the power of hearing his own voice and the work of others being broadcast. One of his interviewees was based on the mental health wing and they recorded him playing the piano.

*“He created something and we played it back to all the prisoners. As a result of that people heard his work and he was getting compliments not just from the inmates but from the staff. Who would have known that this guy had this talent? He spends most of his time sitting in his cell. Things like that made it all worthwhile.”*⁷⁸⁰

This sense of self-worth was cited as a major achievement for tutors. The very nature of being imprisoned means that inmates are reminded of their own failures on a daily basis. Participating in work-based learning activities, like interviewing on the radio, can be seen to foster a sense of pride and confidence for some.

“It were the first time his mum had come to visit him, and he was so happy. And he were like, “It was amazing, I was telling her that I do prison radio, and she was so proud of me doing this,” and it’s – god, it’s the first time she’s ever been proud of her son, probably.”

⁷⁷⁶ Interview, Marianne Garvey, Banstead, 2013

⁷⁷⁷ Telephone Interview, James Batchelor, 2013

⁷⁷⁸ Telephone Interview, James Batchelor, 2013

⁷⁷⁹ Interview, Steve Urquhart, London, 2013

⁷⁸⁰ Telephone Interview, Curtis Blanc, 2013

He's telling us how she got here, "She had to travel, she were up at five in the morning getting here" ⁷⁸¹

"It's probably the first time in his life (and he's 30 yrs old) that he's ever done something he's really proud of... or that other people are proud of. I tell him that the shows he's making are very good and I don't think anyone has ever told him that anything he's done is very good." ⁷⁸²

"It's an absolute delight to see a prisoner who has done their first interview and its gone reasonably well. Because they'll prepare for it. They'd be nervous before. Then the person would arrive and they'd be trying to be really cool but you could tell they were a bit nervous. ...and then they'll go and do the interview, and then afterwards they would kind of be like "can I listen back to it" and "was it alright?" and "what did you think?" And then they'll hear it go out on the radio the next day and they'll get really excited. It can give a real confidence boost" ⁷⁸³

6.6 COMPLIANCE, ETHICS & GATEKEEPING

The potential for prisoner radio to promote social inclusion, to give 'voice', to provide space for marginalised groups to actively create mediated content are all situated within academic discourse surrounding the perceived benefits of community radio.⁷⁸⁴ While this of course seems to be of importance here, stringent policies have also been put in place to protect the reputation of all stakeholders involved with prison radio and to avoid the possible pitfalls of attracting of negative media attention. There are still a number of obstacles for a prisoner to navigate if they want to participate in a prison radio project. To qualify for most radio production training schemes, or be able to participate in on-air presentation, they must, for instance, have passed a local security clearance, which is also the case for inclusion on programmes featuring the voices of prisoners which would be included on national radio, like the BBC. Governors, like Paul McDowell from HMP Brixton (or their nominated representative) are responsible for deciding who attends courses, who is invited for interviews and who contributes to radio broadcasts, in an attempt to maintain confidence in the criminal justice system, to ensure reputational protection of National Prison Radio, to not impact on victims and to not undermine public perception of the prison service.⁷⁸⁵

I am a prison Governor and half of my life is spent managing the politics of prisoners. One of the things I am not going to do is put Ian Huntley on a radio station to deliver a

⁷⁸¹ Interview, Prison Radio Producer & radio tutor, Bournemouth, 2012

⁷⁸² Interview, Marianne Garvey, Banstead, 2013

⁷⁸³ Interview, Steve Urquhart, London, 2013

⁷⁸⁴ Lewis 2008

⁷⁸⁵ According to the NOMS Prison Radio Requirements and Editorial Guidelines

programme every week. That is opening us up [to attack] and if we get criticised for that then we might end up losing the whole thing... My primary role is to protect it from attacks from the likes of *the Daily Mail*.⁷⁸⁶

Tutors and Governors must take into account whether a prisoner is high profile, have committed certain serious crimes and judge how it might support their rehabilitation, learning and employment aspirations. This is also the case for any interview material produced by BBC staff that features the voice of prisoners - repackaged for broadcast to the wider public. Prisoners who have committed more serious crimes are not able to be heard in such programmes:

*"I don't know what they have done, and my producer knows not to tell me. Sometimes there'll be people that we shouldn't interview. So he'll just say, "When we are doing interviews, that guy Freddy, that guy Mikey, whatever, they are on the list." So I know not to spend too much time investing talking to them, to try and get something out of them, because it can't be broadcasted."*⁷⁸⁷

First names are used in order to minimise any potential distress caused to victims or the relatives of victims, while nicknames cannot be given, to protect both the presenter and the interviewee from being identified. This looks to reduce the potential problems of bullying, gang cultures and to make them unidentifiable outside the prison walls. All content on prison radio must be compliant, and consent forms are used whenever a prisoner contributes towards on air content. Those prisoners who have received training or contributed towards a radio project are unable to keep any interview (or audio) material due to the risk of it entering the public domain. This means that those hoping for a career in the media afterwards would be unable to share showreels or interview content produced on their radio courses.

Consent for interviews could be withdrawn following a recording. Staff producers, like Steve Urquhart felt responsible for empowering their interviewees by giving them the option to not broadcast content, *"I interviewed an ex offender and I asked him his tattoo and it was of a woman's name. And then it turned out it had been his wife's name but he'd killed his wife. He told me the whole story."* Steve Urquhart emphasised the need to protect potentially vulnerable interviewees, and makes a judgement whether a broadcast might have the potential to cause harm to his contributor. This ex offender had served a sentence for helping his wife commit suicide. He subsequently asked that his interview was withdrawn from any broadcast.

*"As a programme maker, I've got a responsibility to look out for my interviewees, because they're not media trained...they are quite trusting, they can be quite open and extremely frank and sometimes they won't self-censor."*⁷⁸⁸

⁷⁸⁶ Paul McDowell, Governor at HMP Brixton 2006-2009. Quoted in Plunkett 2009

⁷⁸⁷ Interview, Mr Gee, London, 2013

⁷⁸⁸ Interview, Steve Urquhart, London, 2013

This type of concern towards the potentially vulnerable interviewee mirrors the sense of obligation felt by Anna Raeburn (see Chapter Five) and ideology of the *Ballads* producers. The ethical, moral and legal obligations of an interviewer continue to be questioned by the staff or BBC producers themselves, even though there are codes of conduct from NOM's, the PRA, the BBC and OFCOM⁷⁸⁹. The case of prison radio in particular, further captures the personal experience of the interviewer/interviewee, the power of recording an interview within a specific location and the editorial considerations that are often confronted or breached.

In 2012, Steve Urquhart prepared to conduct a number of interviews with a repeat offender for inclusion on a BBC radio documentary. Once he had been permitted entry to the jail, they would sit and record their conversation in a quiet room together. Although his contributor was often moved from one prison to another, Steve Urquhart could largely plan the encounter, knowing how much time he would have, where he would be and safe in the knowledge the interview would not be interrupted. Later, after his interviewees eventual release, it became apparent that recording with him outside of prison, raised some ethical, editorial and moral demands.

“We’ve been in circumstances where he’s started taking drugs while I was recording...so one of the issues...was okay at what point do I withdraw from this. If I continue recording this am I passively condoning it? At what point do I need to walk away? Or do I challenge him first and then leave?”⁷⁹⁰

The radio interview in this context becomes a central space where the professional identity of the journalist or producer is used to mask their own personal beliefs or judgements. The institutional requirements (editorial policy, audience etc.) and concern for the welfare of the interviewee are deemed more important than the safety or personal feelings of the interviewer, who must mask their emotions to cope with potentially challenging interactions. In this next section I explore this in more detail, where the location of the interview is investigated in more depth.

6.7 THEY LOCKED ME IN A TOILET

In earlier Chapters I explored interview recording, specifically in relation to the studio set-up in *Desert Island Discs*, methods of gathering actuality for the *Radio Ballads* and the privacy of the home for callers to phone-in radio shows. I now turn my attention to the realm of location recording for interviews conducted inside the prison. I am interested how prisoners, guests or tutors relate to this type of institutional environment in preparation for the on-air encounter. It is a space away from the traditional broadcasting sphere of the home

⁷⁸⁹ National Offenders Management Service (NOMS); Prison Radio Association (PRA); Office of Communications (regulator)

⁷⁹⁰ Interview, Steve Urquhart, London, 2013

and the studio, but yet combining the two, for the prisoner at least. This also shows how power can be negotiated and achieved on a small scale. This is not only in respect to prisoners who are producing content, but to how staff producers and prisoner producers have carried out their interviews in this very specific working environment.

As observed in earlier Chapters, different locations can result in the manifestation of altered identities, roles or meanings during interview recordings. Elwood and Martin's observations about the qualitative research interview are once again pertinent here: 'far from being removed from social and cultural contexts at other scales, the interview site provides a material space for the enactment and constitution of power relations.'⁷⁹¹ The location of radio interviews, workshops and training in prisons will differ depending on the individual prison, the staff or the resources available – many will be done in a small studio, but some take place in the cells, a quiet room, or out on "location" – in the gym or kitchens. Having access to this type of recording environment can be intimidating for tutors.

*"The first day that I started, nine o'clock, I were given a bunch of keys that unlocked every door in the prison. I had to walk from getting my keys across the yard where all the prisoners were exercising to get to the radio station. So it were a bit, "Jesus Christ!", ... my manager were like, "Why don't you talk to some of the prisoners?" I were a bit like, 'Alright, err, OK, I will.'"*⁷⁹²

Tutors, staff and practitioners of education in prisons operate within a realm of rehabilitation – this is fundamental to the content and ideology of all projects of this nature. Teaching radio production, and interviewing skills within this context, brings with it some additional considerations. The prison educator, like Mr Gee, must deal with surveillance, security searches and 'lockdowns'⁷⁹³ which potentially interrupt classes or production.⁷⁹⁴

*"I went to Feltham. It was the first workshop I ever did, and that was intense because I didn't like the corridors, every five seconds just stopping and locking and unlocking a door. So you're at someone else's mercy, where whoever you're with, you've got to wait for them to unlock the door, open it up, you go through, they close the door, they lock it up. I remember they locked me in the toilet because a fight occurred outside on the corridor."*⁷⁹⁵

While all staff producers that I spoke to were strongly committed towards the philosophy of the project, the future of the network and showed a consistent dedication towards their students, the experience of first

⁷⁹¹ Elwood and Martin 2000 p.650,

⁷⁹² Interview, Radio Tutor and former PRA staff producer, Bournemouth, 2012

⁷⁹³ When I visited HMP High Down, the ward was on lockdown, which keeps students inside the cell until a crisis is averted.

⁷⁹⁴ Also see Corcoran 1985

⁷⁹⁵ Interview, Mr Gee, London, 2013

working in this type of ‘unnatural’ environment was not an easy one.⁷⁹⁶ Reagen and Stoughton have reminded us that ‘no matter how much paint and progressive attitude are applied, there are still grills, bars, fences, guard towers and massive walls to overwhelm the perceptions and sensory inputs.’⁷⁹⁷ Marianne Garvey worked at BBC radio and television before she took on the role as a senior producer within the PRA at HMP High Down. She recalls her first day, walking the wings “*loud, echoey, men’s voices booming everywhere. I was terrified.*”⁷⁹⁸ Mr Gee is an experienced broadcaster and performer, “*Every time I go to prison, if I’m starting up a couple of workshops, maybe the first or second night I’ll have some form of a nightmare, because I can sense that something is wrong.*”⁷⁹⁹

Although some well-known ‘VIP’ public figures might come to visit the station to take part in interviews (authors, musicians, sportspeople), the majority of interviewees are members of organisations that regularly deal with offenders – affiliates of charities, health support workers, police, or internal prison staff. Curtis Blanc has memories of visiting the radio station at HMP Brixton for the first time, a departure from the shouting, the disturbance, and the old Victorian venue, into a focussed and committed “*little hub of efficiency and organisation.*”⁸⁰⁰

*“When I first walked in there I was like, what, are you serious? This is what we have access to? I was like no way, I’m definitely getting involved. When you were there you didn’t feel like you were a prisoner, you felt like you were a radio producer. You were at work. It took you out of that prison environmental mentality.”*⁸⁰¹

The perceived safety of the studio and the new professional identity helps to fuel here a sense of protection and confidence. Prisoners are equipped with specialist knowledge, the control over the microphone and the questions. For James Batchelor, this was a chance to regain a sense of rights, membership and importance “*You’re definitely in control. They come into your domain.*”⁸⁰² In a sense this is a shifting of the conventional prison power dynamic, where the role, for a small amount of time, has the potential to be renegotiated and transcended.

“They come in. Get them a cup of coffee if they really want one – show them around. From the get go if they come into HMP Brixton you’re the tour guide. Yeah you’re helping them.

⁷⁹⁶ All ‘professional’ producers I spoke with who had worked for the PRA had not received any training from any education course or institution during their careers on how to conduct interviews

⁷⁹⁷ Reagen and Stoughton 1976, p.118

⁷⁹⁸ Interview, Marianne Garvey, Banstead, 2013

⁷⁹⁹ Interview, Mr Gee, London, 2013

⁸⁰⁰ Telephone Interview, Curtis Blanc, 2014

⁸⁰¹ Telephone Interview, Curtis Blanc, 2014

⁸⁰² Telephone Interview, James Batchelor, 2013

*No matter how much they know or are an expert in their own field. You're the expert in that field."*⁸⁰³

In this case, knowledge about the environment and the equipment is seen to place one person in a more powerful position. Prison routines are structured in a way to prevent any potential to challenge to authority.⁸⁰⁴ Having become used to the system, to court appearances and to searches, the radio interview can be seen as a place of equality and protection – where the normal structure and hierarchy is challenged in relationship with those who would normally be in positions of authority, *"they come into your domain. They have no control over you. They can't do anything to you inside. You're running the show without fail. Empowered."* This assumed power goes on to have an effect on the interview itself. PRA director Andrew Wilkie has noticed a difference with how prisoners producers might approach an interview with someone who might already hold a position of authority in the institution, *"With people in authority our audience want them to give them a really hard time."*⁸⁰⁵ Because of past personal experience, mistrust of the system or due to current issues within the institution, an upcoming exchange with interviewees who might have expert knowledge to share could be treated as a chance to build bridges between 'them' and 'us', although this is an intimidating process for prisoners who have often challenging experiences of the justice system. Andrew Wilkie recalls one of his students being astonished to be put in this position: *"when I first heard I was going to be interviewing a police officer I thought wtf."*⁸⁰⁶ The guest 'expert', would be invited on a show to discuss prison reform, gun culture or hepatitis c, and must work hard to persuade the interviewee that what they are doing is in the interest of the prisoners.

*"There's a natural instinctive distrust of authority by a lot of people who are in prison because they are being held against their will by people in authority. I think [they'll take] any opportunity for giving someone in power a hard time."*⁸⁰⁷

Any visiting interviewee (authors, musicians, sportspeople) would also have to navigate the challenges of entering the prison system. This will vary according to the institution, but before being able to gain entry, a number of strict procedures must be followed. Commonly they might be forced to leave equipment behind, undergo a search, hand over identification, or have finger prints taken. Although many of those who work in the system may be used to these rules, the pre-interview process is therefore situated in an environment dominated by suspicion, risk and constant monitoring.

⁸⁰³ Telephone Interview, James Batchelor, 2013

⁸⁰⁴ Novek & Sanford 2007

⁸⁰⁵ Telephone Interview, Andrew Wilkie, 2013

⁸⁰⁶ Telephone Interview, Andrew Wilkie, 2013. 'WTF' means 'what the fuck'.

⁸⁰⁷ Telephone Interview, Andrew Wilkie, 2013

In previous Chapters I have referred to body language and seating positions within a studio –the smaller details which might impact on the experience or power dynamic of the interview. In prisons there are extra conditions that tutors, workshop leader or radio station staff might need to prepare for. Tutors and visiting producers experience an environment consumed by an undercurrent of competition, suspicion and lack of trust– especially the struggle for the most basic of possessions.⁸⁰⁸ This all affects even the smallest of interview interactions:

“You can’t show favouritism, because of status. Chairs, we’ve all got to sit on the same chair, and if anything... we’ve got to sit on the most rubbish chairs because if we give a rubbish chair to a dude, when they are going out they might say, “Oh man they put you the rubbish chair. They can’t stand you. They think you’re a fool.” Little things... if you have polystyrene cups and someone’s got like a regular mug and you give them the same cup of tea, the guy with the polystyrene cup will feel outdone by the guy that’s got the regular mug. Little things like that, you’ve got to be very, very, very careful of, because when people have got nothing to be proud of, they take pride in very little things, very little things. Everyone gets the same pen. Everyone gets the same piece of paper, because it can trigger off incidents...”⁸⁰⁹

For Mr Gee, this type of pre-interview interaction is key when he comes to record his poetry programmes, where the smallest of details might affect the on-air interaction. Workshop leaders, tutors or outside producers also employ specific ways to record prisoner’s stories. As Charles Parker had found in the 1950’s, deliberate strategies and techniques can stimulate confidence, help foster a sense of empowerment and encourage a connection with an interviewee or contributor in a studio, a classroom or in workshop – all of which will help get them the material needed for their programmes. The same methods that Charles Parker had pioneered are used by contemporary producers, like Mr Gee, in order to downplay their own institutional status, and prioritise the words of the interviewee. After negotiating his way through the realms of cups, chairs and paper, he uses specific methods to record his interviewees inside the prisons.

“When we recorded the workshop you hold the mic not down on them but up, up at them, and then they feel a sense of I’m a president, isn’t it, I’m a president with the mic being held up to me....And I notice that the power of just holding the mic to someone, people have opened up, whereas it can be intrusive at the beginning, but throughout many of the workshops we got so much, so many recordings just from doing that.”⁸¹⁰

Trust here is considered a vital component in the interview encounter;

⁸⁰⁸ Novek & Sanford 2007

⁸⁰⁹ Interview, Mr Gee, London, 2013

⁸¹⁰ Interview, Mr Gee, London, 2013

“Obviously you have to be sensitive to issues, you can’t just go to a prisoner and say, “Oh, so tell me about your drug addiction,” ... it takes weeks or months to build up a rapport with someone.”⁸¹¹

Often interviews would involve prisoners interviewing other prisoners, not the VIP guests. For those, like James Batchelor who had struggled to come to terms with the isolation of prison, the act of inviting a fellow inmate into the studio at HMP Wandsworth was also an opportunity to gain authority. On one occasion James Batchelor had selected contributors to be interviewed for a documentary:

“I had to get them to come to me. And again it’s another display of power. They [the guards] picked them up for me. They can’t get out of their cell otherwise. Believe me when you’ve got no power but when you’ve got none it makes a bloody lot of difference. Empowering... bottom line it’s very empowering.”⁸¹²

Naturally this sense of empowerment for the prisoner is not always achieved and not always permissible. Any material must be approved before it is allowed to be broadcast and ultimate responsibility lies at the top - they will suspend or sack a prisoner if their behaviour is deemed problematic. Individual agency appears to endure and fluctuate in a vacuum of tightly regulated rules, procedures and policy filtered between the guards, the governor and the radio station staff.

6.8 CONCLUDING NOTE

Only a handful of research studies before now have looked at the relationship between radio and prisoners, and this is the first of its kind which has taken a closer look at the role of the interview more specifically. My research has presented a snapshot of how the interview has been used as an educational resource, and how it has been experienced first-hand by prisoners, projects and tutors. By looking at the interview within this context of community radio, I have been able to further demonstrate issues relating to class, training and policy, which is described further in Chapter Two. Bonini has called for work of this nature to be brought to the forefront of academic attention, following his own study into the use of ‘crazy’ radio by mentally ill patients.

Community radio practice further enhances the feeling of being at home with our-selves and with others and can effectively work as a tool of social connection and participation,

⁸¹¹ Interview, Radio Tutor and former PRA staff producer, Bournemouth, 2012

⁸¹² Telephone Interview, James Batchelor, 2013

not only in the case of mentally ill patients as has been shown here, but also in other cases of 'Otherness' (i.e. asylum seekers, migrants, prison inmates, etc.).⁸¹³

Although this is a small case study (future work in this area is certainly needed), I have revealed how the prisoner radio interview has been used in a variety of ways. It has been employed as a powerful tool for educational purposes, adapted by charities, staff producers and projects to train prisoners about methods of communication (eye contact, listening, interruption, questioning) and technical techniques (how to use a microphone, editing etc.). It has been used as a vehicle in which the personal stories of prisoners can be told to connect with audiences inside the prison, and outside in the mainstream media. I have also shown how this interaction has been experienced as a means of empowerment by some prisoners, who have found the interview as a means to stimulate group membership, receive positive feedback and as a way to challenge conventional institutional hierarchies.

Few academic studies of radio interviewing have focussed on the first-hand, off-air experiences of journalists or producers themselves. This has been a main theme that has run through this thesis and one I have felt was important to further explore here. Forming a central part in the schedule of both local and national projects has meant that the interview has been used as a means of imparting information and as a way of documenting the reality of life inside, and outside. By looking at the radio interview in this context, I am able to see how some taken-for-granted assumptions about 'successful' interviewing practice have been taught to a group of amateur programme makers. As also demonstrated in earlier Chapters, the backstage, pre and post processes that surround the on-air interview are once again found to be of great importance. Furthermore this shows us that scripting still plays an essential part in these types of interviews, (although not as meticulously controlled as the early *Desert Island Discs* radio play), that the needs of the interviewee are often prioritised (similar to the *Ballads*) and the reliance on a gatekeeper, this time in the form of a tutor or staff member, whose role it is to protect the airwaves from potentially 'problematic' interview content.

⁸¹³ Bonini 2005, p.152

CHAPTER 7. FINAL REFLECTIONS

One of the outcomes of this thesis has been to discover some of the different ways that the radio interview has been used to serve, restrict or benefit the needs of a particular group, an individual or an institution. I have done this in three ways and paid special attention to the contextual conditions that have impacted on the production of the interview. Firstly qualitative research interviews were used in order to locate some of the ways in which power has been contested, both on air and backstage and experienced first-hand by practitioners. Secondly, I have drawn upon a range of historical documentation, relevant secondary literature and written archive to learn how regulators, the wider media and policies have helped shape the creation or daily production of the interview as a technique and genre of communication. Thirdly I have used audio extracts from interview output to show how issues relating to power have manifested in a publically broadcasted exchange over contrasting time periods, different genres and across different institutions.

This thesis looked to discover key shifts and patterns, taking note of technological developments, other types of mediated communication and the social/cultural context, which all remain vital to any discussion of broadcasting.⁸¹⁴ I have considered conceptions of class, age and gender, and touched upon significant moments of interview history that have been located within specific political, cultural and mediated conditions. Each of the four Chapters has sought to both fulfil the six original aims of the thesis, and to offer an engagement with some key areas, such as scripted talk, censorship, editing, liveness, recording of actuality and gatekeeping - together with a reflection on the roles and responsibilities of individual hosts, interviewees and production teams. Studying the history of production is always a challenge, without the chance of an ethnographic perspective and remaining reliant on the recollections of willing contributors along with the scant availability of potentially valuable audio. Yet it also allows for the internal and often hidden care structure of a particular programme or format to be revealed. I have sought to situate the 'personal' interview encounter as an important and primary communication device heard on UK radio since the early 1940's. In doing so, this thesis suggests that this area has the potential to reveal rich and valuable knowledge about the history and context of broadcast talk, and proposes that it is a field considered worthy of future academic attention.

In this concluding Chapter I seek to revisit the original aims and objectives in order to contemplate some of the key questions that have come from the findings, to evaluate the limitations of this study and finally, to identify some of the different avenues that might benefit for forthcoming research in this area.

⁸¹⁴ As endorsed or adopted by the likes of Briggs 1980; Cardiff 1980; Douglas 1999 and Loviglio 2005

7.1 CONCLUDING REMARKS

During each Chapter I have revealed some of the origins of different types of radio interviews and investigated its changing techniques and purposes at specific moments of time. I have presented new evidence about how the interview developed over the years, in the scripted exchange, the pre-recorded feature, the therapeutic phone-in interaction – starting with uncovering its technique during the late 1930's, where it was perfectly positioned to manage the threat of controversy. Early interviewers were regarded as the voice of the institution – their job was to protect the BBC in the years before, during and after the Second World War and mediate between the listener, the contributor and the Corporation in order to reach a seemingly natural and satisfactory conclusion. The interview was seen to reflect a British sentiment for diplomacy and resolution during a time of immense political instability. I first concentrated on the prehistory of the radio interview - and the realisation a programme idea that went on to become an integral and lasting imprint on the last seventy years of broadcasting.

The BBC's approach to scripting talk was designed to teach the listening public, the interviewee and the broadcaster the appropriate way to 'do' an interview, lending weight to Bailey's views that one of the roles of public service broadcasting during this time could be considered as a 'civilising mission.'⁸¹⁵ The scripted interview was influenced by issues of technological restriction, institutional control and censorship policies. Yet by looking at programmes like *Desert Island Discs* we start to locate the practical ways that programme makers dealt with such restrictions and how on-air talk often conceals the hidden or undisclosed methods of production. It also seeks to encourage further research to make use of both the written and audio archive – to further compare the more contemporary episodes with those produced in its first decades. As we have seen, access to the media was available here for those who already occupied other positions of power, whether economic, political or cultural. The programme continues to feature a collection of powerful hosts and castaways who form a possible broadcasting establishment – floating between the worlds of media, politics, academia, and corporations – separated from the listening public, presented to us as ordinary yet at the same time, extraordinary.

The vox pop, the midget recorder, and the telephone interview were of course linked to technological advancements – yet they were adopted in a climate that supported a movement towards increased on air interaction with the listener, elevating the performative potential of the 'ordinary' contributor, normalising a culture that valued the mediation of personal experience and opening up the airwaves to the non-expert or non-celebrity participant. The *Radio Ballads* for instance, adopted specific questioning techniques that had never before been tried out before the late 1950's, promoted by a left-wing mentality, a wider professional

⁸¹⁵ Bailey 2009, p.98

network and their own personal motivations. They began to experiment with techniques; repeating the same question three times, spending many hours recording at the homes or workplaces of their 'informants' and using their contributors words as the basis for the creation of new folk songs. My focus on these background approaches (as well as the questioning strategies, their framing of female and working class interviewees and details of microphone techniques) provides a valuable historical context to accompany the text, or on-air audio analysis.

The first series of the *Radio Ballads* embraced the subjective, downplayed the voices of the establishment, showcasing emotionally-rich dialogue, challenging traditional methods of recording and editing, and opposing the traditional power relationship that had already been established between an interviewer and interviewee. The rejection of a narrator, scripts and actors meant that the words of contributors were no longer so explicitly framed, reconstructed and mediated, encouraging the listener to engage more directly and imaginatively. The field recording was not intended to be a trap, nor a fact-finding exercise or to permit only the public figure or expert to represent the national conversation. There was a conscious, natural decision made by producers to record vast amounts of material, spend long stretches of time in the field and let the informant contribute towards the content in a more active capacity than before – a more ethnographic approach of sorts, in comparison with the carefully structured, formulaic and predictable format of *Desert Island Discs*. These recording methods were not static, but evolved and advanced during the seventy years, reflecting the philosophy of the production team, the impact of cinematic and televisual conventions and the continuation of a small body of work which celebrated the aesthetic artistry of quotidian oral tradition.

A range of factors came to influence the *Radio Ballads*' approach to interviewing – from their commitment towards representing different stories and voices on air, to this sense of responsibility towards their informants during the process of recording. The use of the interview on the *Ballads* may be partly attributed to the capacity to incorporate cinematic or televisual editing techniques, the power of US-inspired interview devices, a movement of production outside of London, an effort to democratise and capture the working class experience and finally the proliferation of affordable recording equipment which now allowed producers and presenters to go out of the studio to meet their audiences. I suggest that the *Ballads* were not only a product of post-war feature-making or technological improvements, but these developments undoubtedly allowed its producers to offer more of a potential collaborative equality via their interviews. This legacy has continued – not only in the production of further *Ballads* series, but in other contemporary radio and television feature and documentary making – where the involvement of the interviewee starts to be prioritised. As I noted during the following Chapter, the radio interview began increasingly to be seen as a space that promoted the *Ballads* ethos (although not in the final versions) - of ownership of an individual's biography, faith in the process of public storytelling and an acceptance in the validity of personal experience. However, this section also showed the highly interventionist approach to editing the material. So while the collection of recording actuality might have been based on the premise of co-creation, the end result was still highly controlled by the producer.

If we briefly revisit Chapter Five we saw how Anna Raeburn and Philip Hodson's problem phone-interview format during the mid-1970's was at the forefront of a wider movement towards a 'self-help' society, where media, and now radio, became a platform to discuss inner fears, dispense advice to fellow listeners or converse on a more spontaneous level with favourite hosts. This type of interview exchange filled in a gap and reflected a perceived need for the British public to discuss issues relating to sex, relationships and emotions that was already available for public discussion in the USA. The interview was seen not only an arena that reflected and perpetuated cultural values, but its very manifestation was bought to life by such values. I suggest that the confessional phone-in radio format began at a time when it was seen to fulfil a demonstrable need – and represented more widely the start of a discourse of revelation and personal disclosure on a public platform. This approach towards interviewing was a device intended to produce public talk, by using the conventions of private telephone conversation. I have chronicled how the chaotic potential of live phone-in radio was far from the more measured and controlled avenues of therapeutic exchange – from the carefully crafted magazine responses to the edited one-to-one more formulaic setting of the psychiatrists chair. The liveness of the phone interview here carries greater risk for the producer, presenter and the institution. The administration of possible breaches like swearing, silence, and suicide calls are carefully accomplished by each member - and the production team used a number of classifications to permit a caller onto the air, including integrity (personal honesty), experience (first-hand, no agenda, not distressing), relevancy (topic, voice, age, location, gender) and lastly, the suitability for the format (duration of call, time of show).

Most studies about the phone interview had concentrated on the power dynamic between caller and host or the significance of talkback radio to local audiences, rather than the internal structure of the production team or the perspective of hosts. Those who work off-air (and especially those who worked off-air in smaller ILR stations) have not been the subject of much academic attention – with their responsibilities often kept out of official accounts. I have tried to not only look at the roles of individual team members, but add some comment on the often complex and fluid relationships *between* on air and off air members. Other work on phone-in programmes have discussed findings in relation to public sphere or medium related considerations. I have found evidence that professional reputation played a small but important role in the gatekeeping activities of hosts, presenters, phone-operators and producers. Studying the history of commercial radio and prison radio presents both problems and opportunities. A lack of preserved audio can prove restrictive, yet by speaking to those involved in daily production allows us to ensure that these stories are not excluded from the public domain or academic community.

As well as paying attention to the role of the host, producer, engineer or phone operator I have remained aware of the experiences of the interviewee. I do recognise the limitations of such an approach, and the various issues with relying on experience and memory when conducting historical work of this nature, but also propose that a rich amount of valuable information can be revealed. The use of particular words used by these research interviewees can also expose interesting ways of looking at the interview. The use of this concept of the 'space bubble' was captured in Chapter Four, by both Sara and Charles Parker. Many of those I spoke to preferred to use the word 'conversation' to describe the interview. We have heard interviewees

addressed as ‘subjects’, ‘victims’, ‘informants’, ‘storyteller’, ‘lifeteller’, ‘contributors’, ‘callers’, ‘participants’, ‘VIP’s’ and ‘castaways’ – all of which carry with them either positive or pejorative connotations and raise interesting questions about their perceived value. The interviewee, although positioned as the main star of the show can be alienated or empowered by the process of production – but remains isolated from the final version which is tightly edited, shared and replayed both on the radio and as part of the online archive. The invited guest is now fully aware of the ever increasing life-span of the interview - and that their musical choices, voice, tone, silences and performance will be evaluated by the listening public, the press and perhaps the media historian. This is further heightened by a movement towards the increasing movement of visualising radio interviews, which brings with it a host of new questions about its purpose, and how this is achieved, providing another area for future study.⁸¹⁶

The case of therapeutic radio interviews has drawn attention to the use of the telephone to connect listeners to hosts; the conditions in which public issues previously confined to private personal discourse started to be broadcast; and the attempt to control the unpredictability of live interviews. The phone interview continues to be used both in the UK and internationally, so many of the themes outlined in this Chapter would be relevant to the research of other current and future industry practice.⁸¹⁷ Despite the large volume of literature dedicated to talkback radio, this is the first time that ‘the Prof button’ or suicide calls to radio stations have been discussed in an academic context. I recommend that these types of broadcasting ‘breaches’ should be explored further – and that they can be used to ask further questions about the ways that isolated and vulnerable listeners might feel a deep sense of connection and companionship to a radio station or host – and add to our understanding of how liveness is regulated and managed by networks. It becomes increasingly clear that trust is a significant sentiment in all aspects of the interview exchange, something to be continually negotiated between the storyteller and the story collector, as found in Chapters Five and Six.

In Curran’s⁸¹⁸ view, there are three main claims made by liberal historians about broadcasting in the 20th century: that it has ‘diminished the knowledge gap between the political elite and the general public’, that changes in its style and tone encourage greater opportunities for participation; and that developments in broadcasting enabled different social groups to talk to each other. This has been by no means a total assessment of the radio interview – but this section has shed light on a number of factors which would support this opinion – and how this specific type of interview style laid claim to these ideals. Yet it should be remembered that the opening of such dialogues does not guarantee any solution to a problem. Gibian has interpreted Foucault’s work on the histories of psychoanalytic dialogues and proposed that the more subjects

⁸¹⁶ *Absolute Radio, Capital Radio and BBC Radio 1* are among those who now do this on a regular basis.

⁸¹⁷ At present most commercial stations continue to pre-record calls from the public during advertising breaks, and then edit them before taking them to air, to ensure no risk to their reputation or station.

⁸¹⁸ Curran 2002, p.6

we open to dialogue, the more areas of our lives are opened up to management, restructuring, and control. As Foucault has argued, an increased amount of talk does not necessarily imply more personal freedom.⁸¹⁹

During the course of Chapter Six I drew on themes that have run through this thesis - who has the right to participate in the interview? Who has the right to ask or answer questions? How is this achieved and negotiated? To recognise methods of interview training and policy I showed how, on the one hand the interview can be used as a training tool for wider social gain – promoting learning, communication skills, a sense of ownership, feedback, pride, time-keeping, reading and writing. The exchange can be seen as a powerful instrument to promote a sense of empowerment, located in an institution where prisoners are often confronted by the shock of incarceration, physical confinement, systematic monitoring, removal from daily democratic society, the risk of relocation, and emotional isolation.⁸²⁰ On the other, I attended to the idea of professional intervention by the cultural elite works to shape the amateur's participation in the interview, where a carefully assembled editorial process, a tight format and control over storage of material maintains overall control over audio. The interview can preserve or narrow the distance between those who occupy and control broadcasting from those who do not. It can also be used to promote or challenge the interests of the establishment and to gain knowledge or advice.

Research that has addressed radio and its relationship with prisoners is a small but growing field – although this is the first study to specifically address its place in UK broadcasting, and that has been interested at how interviewing has been used. This is an area that is rapidly changing and demands more attention – especially with reference to female prisoners which I have not been able to cover here. There are seemingly endless other possible avenues for further research into the history or contemporary uses of the radio interview – and how it has come to benefit or restrict those involved in its creation.

The radio interview is not confined to a particular institution, or network, or genre – not even to a specific location or dependent on a piece of equipment. Rather it is a discursive, performative space, whereby the interviewer and interviewee come together, seemingly for the benefit of the listener but accompanied by their own multifaceted agendas. Power is not always assigned or experienced by either party in an obvious way – rather it seemingly fluctuates between all contributors before, during and after an on-air exchange. It is also interpreted in different ways, from question to question, from studio to sitting room, from contributor to host. Interviews can be means by which contributors, whether ordinary, expert or celebrity can feel heard, valued and elevated to a position normally held by the privileged few. Power can operate at each layer of interaction between the interviewer and interviewee – dependent on a large number of factors which are not only structural but mundane, existing in small scales. We have seen how minuscule actions like microphone positioning or questioning styles might be intentionally used in order to seemingly empower the contributor

⁸¹⁹ Gibion 1997, p.139

⁸²⁰ Also see Helsinger 2000

or entertain the listener, yet in reality are controlled techniques. The interview is a space where interests and worlds unconsciously and consciously fuse together – spanning the private, the public, and institutional spheres. It can offer a platform, where politicians, physicists, coal miners, prisoners, agony broadcasters and callers like Maureen together with prisoners like Curtis Blanc can be heard by listeners – who, as we shouldn't forget – might interpret an interview in many different ways.

This research project has prioritised the 'personal' interview. It has attempted to weave together a history which had not previously been awarded much attention, adding more perspective to a story that was yet to be told. Yet in terms of the scope it can only be seen to have scratched the surface, due to the immeasurable amount of interview output recorded over the last decades - and the fact it remains a central part of daily broadcasting. This study has been confined to four contrasting areas of historical and contemporary output, and limited by the availability of archive material and the willingness of contributors to share their experiences. I have chosen not to look at the more journalistic encounter, nor to question the audience, to engage on a practice-based level, to carry out any quantitative studies or reflect more on the differences between the oral history, research and radio interviewing. I have instead drawn together existing literature and offered new ideas into how the interview has developed, evolved and been used in different, and I hope, telling ways. It is anticipated that this thesis can present a starting point for future research, allowing for a more primary focus on the interview in both radio and wider broadcast talk where there is still much that remains uncovered and unwritten.

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APPENDICES

CONTENTS

1. National Prison Radio Schedule: August 2013 (courtesy of PRA)
2. Picture of Vince Hunt's questions from his *Radio Ballads* diary (courtesy of Hunt)
3. Script photograph: *Desert Island Discs*, 1942 (copyright of WAC)
4. Script photograph: *Desert Island Discs* 1953 (copyright of WAC)
5. Photograph of letter from the BBC to Roy Plomley 1942 (copyright of WAC)

Appendix 1:

National Prison Radio Schedule. August 2013.

Day	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun	Eve	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thur	Fri	Sat	Sun	
07:00	Porridge The first national breakfast show made by and for prisoners - big tracks, news, sport, and the information you need to start your day. <i>Listen out for...</i> Friday - the famous Porridge Music Special							All Request Saturday The week's frequent requests back to back through the day Write to us at: National Prison Radio, HMP Brixton, London SW2 5XF								
08:00	Monday Special From shows made across the country	HYPE From HMVOC Hardy Classic soul and rare groove	Connors' Corner Hip-hop, RnB and dancemetal	NPR Urban House Show The best 4/4 sounds	igloo House Show The best 4/4 guitar music	Request Saturday The week's frequent requests back to back through the day Write to us at: National Prison Radio, HMP Brixton, London SW2 5XF	Beyond A solid hour of reggae classics	The Love Bug Love songs and tips for writing	Prime Time Repeat from Monday	Prime Time Repeat from Tuesday	Prime Time Repeat from Wednesday	Prime Time Repeat from Thursday	Monday Music Special National Prison Radio Book Club	Request Saturday The week's frequent requests back to back through the day Write to us at: National Prison Radio, HMP Brixton, London SW2 5XF	Beyond A solid hour of reggae classics	The Love Bug Love songs and tips for writing
09:00	Brt 40 The UK's number one chart show							All Music Daytime Music and information designed to help you make the most of your time inside								
10:00	Prime Time NPR helps you make the most of your time inside							Plan B Your next steps...								
11:00	Porridge Another chance to hear the morning's show							Prime Time Repeat from Tuesday								
12:00	Porridge Another chance to hear the morning's show							Prime Time Repeat from Wednesday								
13:00	The Request Show Requests and shout-outs from prisons across England and Wales. Want to hear your favourite song on National Prison Radio? To hear your song, message or poem on the radio, write to us at: National Prison Radio, HMP Brixton, London SW2 5XF							Prime Time Repeat from Thursday								
14:00	The Request Show Requests and shout-outs from prisons across England and Wales. Want to hear your favourite song on National Prison Radio? To hear your song, message or poem on the radio, write to us at: National Prison Radio, HMP Brixton, London SW2 5XF							Monday Music Special National Prison Radio Book Club								
15:00	The Selector Two hours of new music							All Music Daytime Music and information designed to help you make the most of your time inside								
16:00	The Selector Two hours of new music							Monday Music Special National Prison Radio Book Club								
Some prisons have radio production courses or workshops which produce local shows. These are broadcast at 08:30, 12:30 and 22:30 instead of the programmes listed above. National and International news: every hour, on the hour from Sky News. Prison news: Weekdays at 10:30, 14:30, 16:00, 19:30 and in Porridge. TV Guides: 09:00, 11:00, 15:00, 17:00 and 20:00. News and information from your prison: 8:00, 13:00, 18:00, 21:30 and through the night																
17:00	Prime Time NPR's daily feature show. Entertainment and support, helping you to make the most of your time behind bars. Shout-outs, real stories, and issues that matter to you. Monday's show comes directly from the women of HMP Swayl , the real from High Down and Brixton . Wednesday: DWP employment expert Jobcentre Don							BRITON Calling A weekly shout-out for people in HMP Brixton								
18:00	Prime Time NPR's daily feature show. Entertainment and support, helping you to make the most of your time behind bars. Shout-outs, real stories, and issues that matter to you. Monday's show comes directly from the women of HMP Swayl , the real from High Down and Brixton . Wednesday: DWP employment expert Jobcentre Don							HYPE From HMVOC Hardy Classic soul and rare groove								
19:00	The Request Show Want to hear your favourite song on National Prison Radio? Write to us at: National Prison Radio, HMP Brixton, London SW2 5XF							BPM Bouncing beats and bass								
20:00	Monday Special Music and talk shows from prisons across the country							igloo House Show The best 4/4 sounds from HMP High Down								
21:00	The Love Bug Love songs and tips for writing from home							Ministry of Sound Keeping you in touch with the music scene on the outside								
22:00	National Prison Radio Book Club Here into this month's book reading							igloo House Show The best 4/4 sounds from HMP High Down								
22:30	The Selector Live recordings, interviews, music, plus interactive, and more							Red Bull Music Academy Radio Live recordings, interviews, music, plus interactive, and more								
00:00	Late Night Love Bug Love songs, the soundtrack to write letters home to							NPR Urban House Show The best 4/4 sounds from HMP High Down								
01:00	Dream Time Dreamy, dist-out tunes and information on how to stay safe while you're inside							Connors' Corner Hip-hop and RnB								
07:00	Dream Time Dreamy, dist-out tunes and information on how to stay safe while you're inside							The Love Bug Love songs and tips for writing								

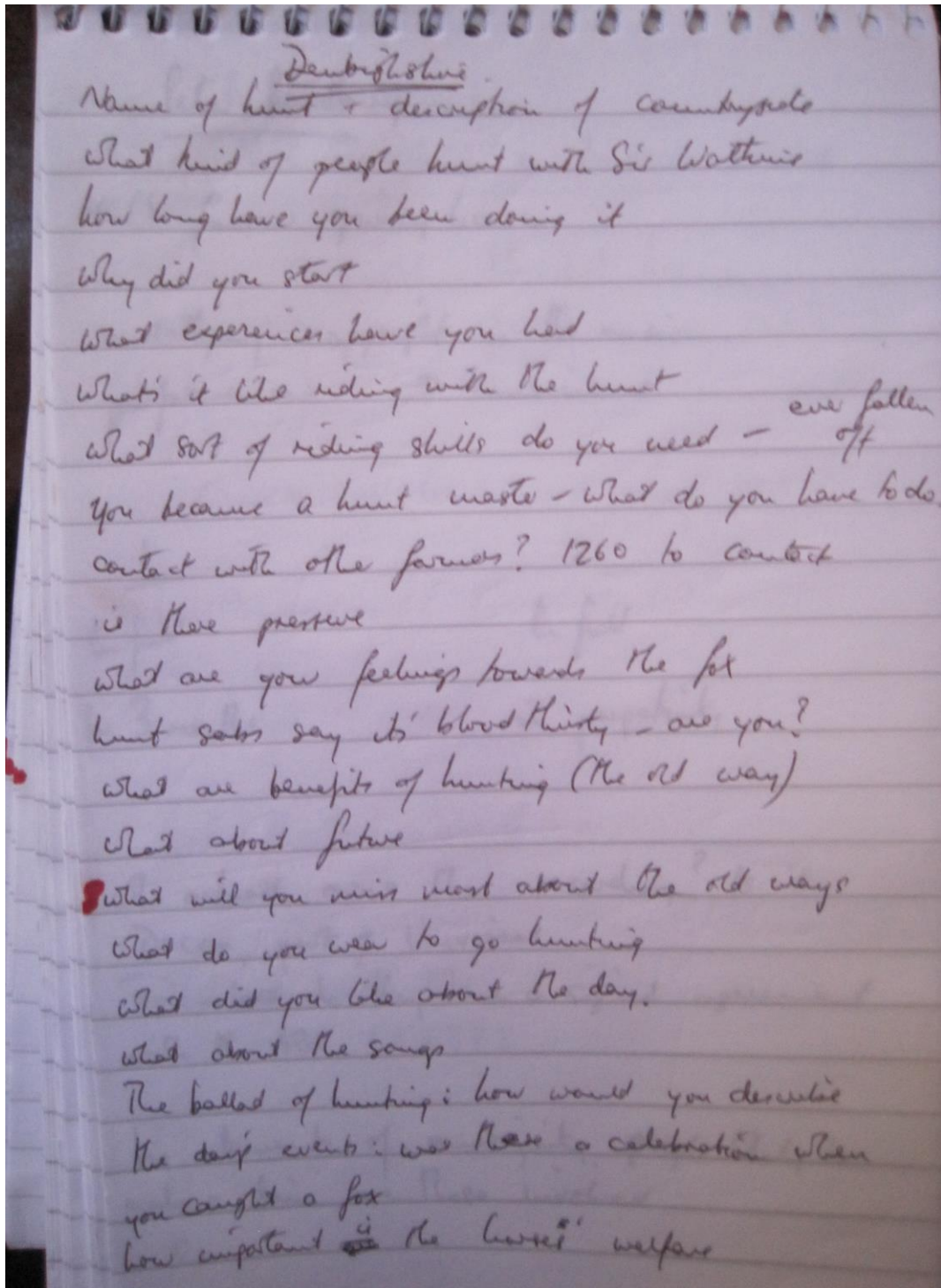
National Prison Radio August 2013 **What's on National Prison Radio?**

National Prison Radio is currently available in over 100 prisons across England and Wales.

We broadcast 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, into your cell. If your prison has National Prison Radio, you can listen through your TV by using the tuning buttons on your remote control.

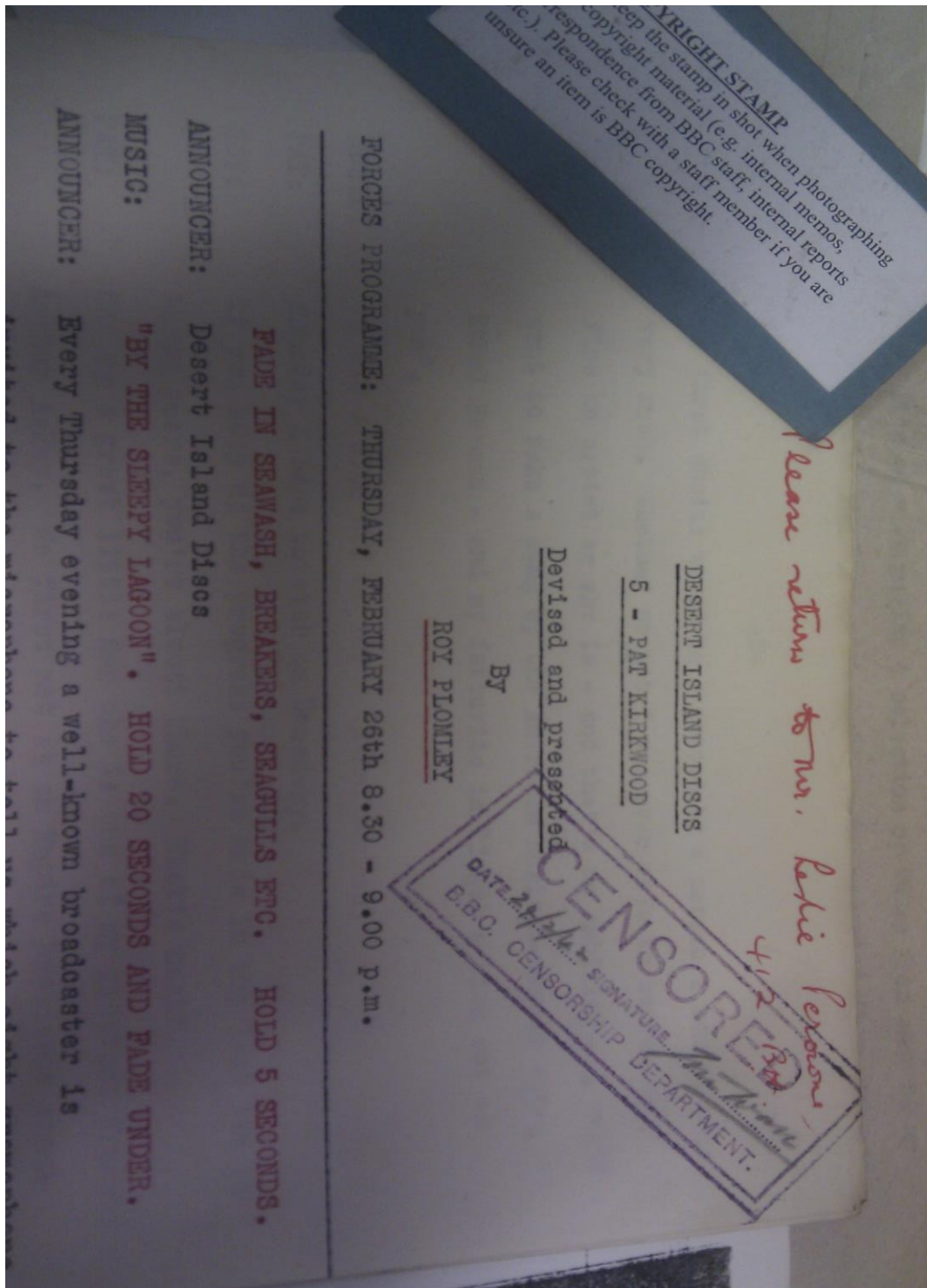
Appendix 2:

Photograph of Vince Hunt's questions. Prepared for the recording of his interviews for the *Radio Ballads: Horn of the Hunter*.



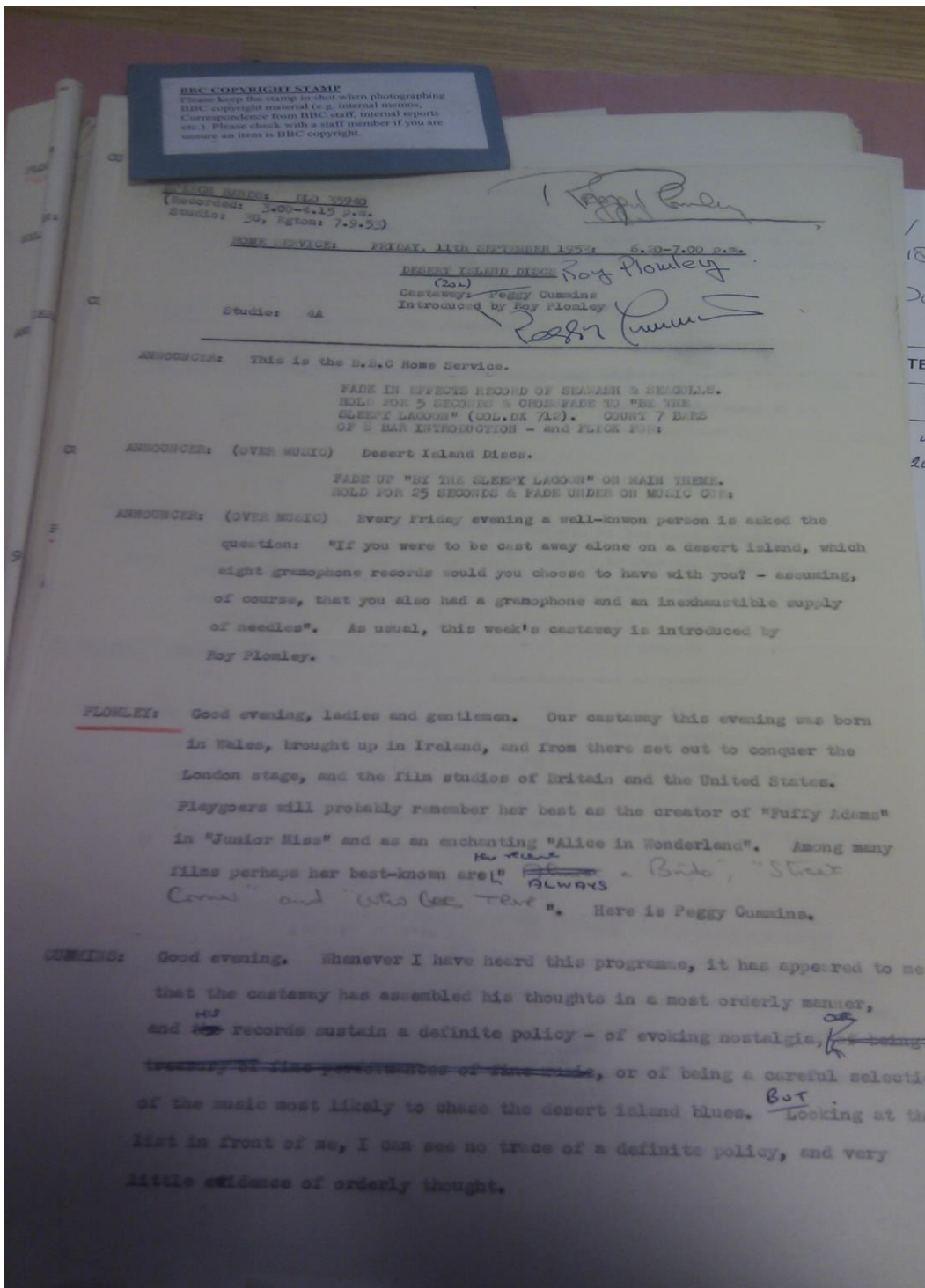
Appendix 3:

Photograph taken in BBC Written Archives, Caversham. *Desert Island Discs* Script. Broadcast 26 Feb 1942 on the Forces Programme. Located in S133/8/9. Scripts 116-127.



Appendix 4:

Photograph taken in BBC Written Archives, Caversham. *Desert Island Discs*: Script. Broadcast on 11th September 1953. Files S133/18/9 116-127.



Appendix 5:

Photograph taken in BBC Written Archives, Caversham. Letter to Roy Plomley, dated 7th January 1942. BBC Written Archives, Caversham. Roy Plomley Artists File, 1942. File 2A

