

## **Speak / Listen**

### **Invisible voices in radio, radio art and works for sound alone**

#### **Lotta's voice**

I'm desperately seeking Lotta. By the time you read this I may have found her, but at the time of writing Lotta Erickson is still a mystery voice. Right now, all I have is a piece that she made and called *Please, Mr Coldstream*, for reasons I don't understand. The piece is on a CD of experimental radio art, but the cover offers little information.<sup>1</sup> A series of possible contacts has led from one person to another, with no luck. Email addresses have bounced, people have moved on, details have not been kept on file. An Internet name search produced various references to the CD and an intriguing web page for a Finnish production of *Grease*. Perhaps she is the young woman who grins out from a cast photo, but it seems unlikely to me: although I don't know who she is, I feel that I do know who she *isn't*. Nobody has heard of her. Except that I have heard her, many times. I have listened to her and I feel that I've got to know her quite well. We're on first name terms, although she appears to be invisible.

I believe her voice is in her piece, which, I believe, is primarily a documentary radio work. A young woman, speaking English fluently but with a strong Swedish accent, tells the story of a love affair she once had. She reminisces with the boyfriend concerned, and interleaves their conversations with her own monologues. I *think* she is in her piece, with her boyfriend (or ex-boyfriend?). I think it is a piece about remembering. They remember how they met, and what they did, and how they felt. (Recording encourages remembering; tell me what happened, speak into the microphone, let it all out - nobody can see.) Their voices are natural, but I can hear that he is slightly embarrassed in the way he pauses and stumbles at times. And surely he knows that he is being recorded?

#### **Broadcast voices**

Turn your radio on, and there is a crowd of voices jabbering away at you.<sup>2</sup> Let me introduce just a few members of the speaking chorus: the voice as authority, the voice as confidante, the voice as adviser, the voice as friend, the voice as expert, the voice as reader, the voice as questioner, the voice as listener, the voice as performer, the voice as the link between. All these voices, and more, can broadcast a powerful, defined presence, straight into your ears. Generally, on conventional talk radio at least, they maintain a discrete distance from one another. Though a multi-tasking radio personality may well finish an interview, then turn to make a link, or introduce a piece of music, she does so by adopting a new 'persona' each time. Her intonation may change quite

perceptibly as a result. These aural personae populate TV too, but on radio, their sound is all we have to focus on. We have grown accustomed to their voices, and evaluate their roles with some precision. Or at least we feel we do. Yet, although there are now perhaps as many women's voices as men's floating on the airwaves, certain kinds of personae have been – are perhaps still are - perceived as male.

[the radio voice of authority] does not mumble or stutter, it pronounces full and meaningful sentences, it says something. As a voice, it is traditionally male, having a certain timbre and intonation that suggests a belief in what it is saying and a degree of authority in saying it. (Dyson, 1974, p.167)

An authority explores an argument, or is there to throw light on a postulate, or to provide an informed opinion. The voice of authority – whether male or female, sounded or written – assumes that you will listen because it has information that you need to know. Authority doesn't digress into personal reminiscence on a whim, or move from discourse to anecdote at the drop of a hat. It is above such things. But if anyone speaks to us, we notice them, *whatever* kind of voice they may have. This much is a truism. And although the toffee-nosed voice of authority frequently seems to jostle to the head of the queue when it comes to paying attention, there are other voices worth listening to. This *should* be a truism too. Authority is often over-rated or misused, and it can be just a load of hot air. Trusting an authority without question can be as mindless as assuming that all academic writing must be conducted in the third-person, using long, inelegant sentences (with convoluted embedding), and frequent digressive sub-clauses, in order to achieve an appropriate *gravitas* – just for the sake of making an educated-sounding noise. But you don't need to write (or read) things that way.

About fifteen years ago I spent a year working at a large institution for severely mentally handicapped people, some of whom were deemed 'insane' on their childhood hospital records (euphemisms were less gentle then). One of my 'regulars' was a small, middle-aged lady called Joan<sup>3</sup>, with a 'mental age' of about five or six. She was never quiet. Usually she spoke incessantly under her voice, in a half-spoken, rapid monologue which otherwise lacked any expression. It was impossible to understand her words or if she was speaking to me, or to anyone else. Sometimes I heard snatches of questions or swear words, but all spoken in the same hurried gabble. She always appeared to be tense, worried, and fearful. She never looked me in the eye, however much I flailed around with guitars, percussion, or silly songs. Then, one day I abandoned tambourines in favour of a delay system using two reel-to-reel tape recorders. I started it going and handed the microphone to Joan. At first she was terrified, and then amazed when she heard a voice. Gradually she talked more slowly, listened and responded to her own words coming back through the speakers a couple of seconds later. And she spoke up – so that she could hear her 'other voice'. For the first time she appeared to be aware that *she* was doing the talking, and that she could be saying something worth listening to.

Vocal transformations and unexpected asides can invert the familiar, and stand it on its head. Boys will be boys, but girls will be boys too:

In performances, I loved to use the lowest setting on the Harmonizer, a digital processor that lowered my voice, to sound like a man. This was especially effective in Germany. When I spoke as a woman, they listened indulgently; but when I spoke as a man, and especially a bossy man, they listened with interest and respect.

(Anderson, 1994 p.131)

Laurie Anderson's use of what she calls the 'voice of authority' mocks the misguided power relationship between how it looks, how it sounds, and what it says. The vocal transposition comments on the dissonance between her seemingly 'un-authoritative' physical embodiment (not only small, but a woman at that) and the sound of the voice that appears to issue from it. She thereby challenges our notions of what 'authority' is<sup>4</sup>. Significantly, she remarks that she stopped using this voice after taking singing lessons.

I began to use my own voice for pieces that contained pointed social criticism. I've always thought that women make excellent social critics. We can look at situations, especially those involving power, and size them up fairly well; since we don't have much authority ourselves, we don't have that much to lose. (Anderson, 1994, p. 261)

Anderson's habitual multi-layered commentary is such that one would hope this nonchalant admission is itself an ironic call to ascribe authority to a different kind of voice. Similarly I would like to believe that conventional radio's remit has developed to acknowledge authorities of other kinds. But it is a sad fact that the voice of authority is still generally deemed to be the province of the male. If you currently look up "voice of authority"+ radio with any internet search engine, the majority of references refer to male radio presenters or personalities, despite the significant number of female broadcasters in reality. It seems we still define radio voices without listening at times. Yet, I think, it is the fact that the vocal personae of radio are *entirely* defined by sound that enables access to a different kind of listening when these conventions are resituated in works of composed sound. This is perhaps particularly effective if the work is not intended for radio presentation and itself raids the possibilities of both 'radio' and 'musical' listening to speech.

Here's a shaggy dog story: The popular music track *Everybody's Free (To Wear Sunscreen)* offers an interesting subversion of several of these associations. It was written by Baz Luhrmann (the director of *Strictly Ballroom* and *Moulin Rouge*) in 1997, and became a hit after a shorter version was released a while later. The urban myth surrounding this track – in which a male 'voice of authority' recites rather 'cheesy' maxims over a beat – is that the words come from an actual commencement speech delivered by author Kurt Vonnegut at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In fact the words were a tongue-in-cheek column written by a Mary Schmich, a writer on the Chicago Tribune (June 1, 1997). The text was posted on the internet, with authorship attributed to Kurt Vonnegut, and the myth began to proliferate. Luhrmann was sent the words, contacted Schmich, made the track and got into the charts. The voice on the recorded track is that of Lee Perry, a professional voice-over artist. Interviewed in 2001 (*I Love 1999*, BBC 2 TV, 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2001) he remarked that when the track was subsequently performed 'live', he was somewhat at a loss as to how to present himself. In the end he wore a dark suit, and spoke from behind a lectern. He created a speaking voice which he said 'had lived a little'. The Chicago Tribune described his choice of tone as having 'fatherly authority'<sup>5</sup>.

It's worth noting that the *sound* of the voice is more significant to the success of both the text, and its subsequent 'realisation' on the music track, than the visual presence of the speaker. The internet community seems to have sensed this in promulgating the fictional notion of Kurt Vonnegut as author. The author could have remained anonymous, but Vonnegut as author has an almost mythical cult status as a 'voice of authority' in the world of sci-fi writing, amongst American students in particular. Mary Schmich's 'authority' on the matter remains deliberately hidden behind

a host of other voices. Just as everyone within a certain cultural orbit ‘knows’ what tonal music sounds like and ‘does’ (even without knowing how to articulate this), radio listeners ‘know’ quite a lot about listening to the invisible speaking voice. We are all authorities on the matter.

Lotta is in her piece, with Rob. He is very candid about his feelings. He speaks to her, not to me, but I can eavesdrop on the very personal details of his insecurities, regrets and the emotions he felt then, and now. (Of course, it’s all ‘then’, now that it reaches me). He, she and I are looking back on that time they had together. I know that she and he remember different things, and also that they remember the same things differently. Lotta knows this too. But there is only one point where Lotta (for surely it is Lotta herself?) and Rob converse on tape in front of me, and both appear oblivious to my listening presence:

[4:44]  
[Continuing background ambience of voices, phones ringing - an office perhaps]  
She: ‘Maybe I wanted you just to take care of me and love me and ...  
He: (Interrupting) ‘right, right..you, you see, yeah..I think...that’s probably what I wanted you to do to me, as well...Yeah, that’s what I wanted. I mean..after all that’s what all men want isn’t it...  
[behind this a simple scalic pattern commences, played on a child’s toy glockenspiel]  
to be kind of...taken care of.  
  
[glockenspiel continues but all background ambience disappears abruptly.]  
  
She: I remember that we only travelled in warm countries. He was so cool among all those colours...

## Radio voices

The speaking voice on radio is an intriguing paradox. Voices ‘off the radio’ are readymade material for composers, and are ripe for parody and collage. But they are also alluring, in that they transmit both the ‘romance’ of disembodiment – an inexplicable mystery – and the chummy informality of being a friend in your ear. Sounds that reach us over the radio waves appear to be magical; they are flying, dislocated, free, and liberated – however mundane their origins.

And such sounds do ‘reach’ and reach out in a way that other media don’t. Once we’ve found that friend in the ear, we don’t want to lose her. It is very hard to woo ‘regular listeners’ from one station to another, while ‘regular viewers’ are far more fickle. While TV offers different *channels* – an opportunity to go with the flow, change, move – radio *stations* ask you to put down your bags and rest awhile. The technology significantly assists a reluctance to abandon friendly voices – we may flip channels at the touch of a button, but we need to ‘retune’ our radios<sup>6</sup>. Of course, many radios allow the listener to assign stations to preset ‘memory’ buttons, giving a ‘flip’ control comparable to the TV remote control. But this generally restricts choices to a few favourite selections – and by assigning those buttons to the stations we ‘always

listen to' we abandon any subsequent adventures. We only retune our radio listening when we find ourselves abroad.

**CD [23]** Evelyn Ficarra's *Frantic Mid-Atlantic* takes radio listening to another country, far beyond simple collage. This piece of radiophonic art is an invitation to turn the dial on what those familiar radio voices mean to us. Her sources are gleaned from American stations, with a few from the UK, and are for the most part from the most mundane kinds of news and 'talk radio' programmes. There are fragments from interviews, traffic news, weather reports, news bulletins, phone-ins and late night shows. The voices initially rise out of a distant sea of crashing waves whose white noise has been gradually infiltrated by timbres reminiscent of short-wave radio static (although how often do we actually hear that particular radio noise now?). Choruses made from voices 'from the radio' are used to touching, and somewhat humorous effect (everyone tells the weather or traffic news at once, everyone announces their radio station's name or frequency at the same time, everyone says their own goodbyes). At other times phrases reappear again and appear to comment self-referentially on their roles within radio: 'we're going to continue'.... 'you know, I mean, it's a little disorderly...' 'we're trying...'. These voices – none of whom can 'hear' each other – become a chattering cast of 'radio personae' who are familiar friends thrown into new relief by their un-programmed collisions. What they say doesn't really matter, but how they say it does. A male BBC interviewer questions an articulate, educated High Commissioner with authoritative, weighty insistence. This is interleaved with the interrogation, via an interpreter, of a female, Spanish-American. The latter is a nervous witness to a crime; the former is confidently evasive and sly. Some editing on Ficarra's part throws a little ridicule on the male interviewee ('let's talk about fish' is hauled out of context), but otherwise allows the painful differences between the two scenarios to speak for themselves.

In its episodic coming and goings *Frantic Mid-Atlantic* creates its own narrative tide from layered voices, swathes of static and surrealised Morse code beeps. (We know in our bones that these beeps are coded secrets, but how often have we *actually* heard such messages outside fiction?). The piece has a rhythmic structure that could be heard as a hybrid between 'magazine' format<sup>7</sup> and a kind of overtly musical rondo refrain. The pace is gentle and the touch is light. While rolling waves of noise crash softly on the borders of abstraction, the voices are never fragmented to the point of losing their radio connotations. The content – what they say – is carefully edited to *accentuate* their role as being 'about the radio' while the sound of their voices provides a musical ebb and flow of varying intonations. Perhaps, while they float back and forth across the boundary between information – sense – and sound, we retune between radio, music, radio, music...

The final section of the piece offers a typical 'late night sign off' from a particularly saccharine radio host. Her voice is warm and cosy, in your ear; she's right there, keeping you company – but by now the insincere intimacy of this radio persona is made explicit. Displaced from her usual context she is vacuous and ephemeral, and nothing more than air.

[continuing sound of waves crashing in the distance, subdued noise]

Well, well, well, here we are...

In this grey and cool air evening, umbrellas and raincoats are in order...

And it's a night to snuggle up. And, if you're close to a fire, and the logs are crackling away...

Remember to put one on for me.

[Waves crash and fade]

Lotta and Rob are talking in my ear. On the face of it her work is a small, inconsequential documentary that has an understated realism and remains unclouded by too much technological intervention. The natural-sounding conversation seems to take place within everyday environments - perhaps from his (their?) flat, then a café, an office, children - with a few bars of glockenspiel or out of tune piano music added to the final mix. The narrative thread is provided by Lotta's commentary.

Their simple story seems quite touching and naïve; they are just sitting there, baring their feelings to one another, but also to me, of course. I have come to care about them - are they still together, are they in England now, was this just a brief moment of nostalgia before they went their separate ways? Sometimes I recollect similar experiences alongside Lotta and Rob's remembering. And sometimes I am more jaded, and the piece seems a rather self-indulgent, self-aware construction that makes me feel I have been duped into eavesdropping on a fake, contrived relationship. Those domestic background sounds are clearly 'mixed in'. Worse, the very opening is an arch reference to both the radio programme 'theme tune' and the fact that technology mediates both sound and how we hear it: after a few notes of unannounced recorded music Rob turns off a cassette machine and changes the tape because, as he then observes directly to Lotta, 'this one sounds all furry'. This could be real, or acted after the fact. What is the fact? What is 'real'? Who are they? Things do indeed sound a little furry.

Lotta is in her piece, interviewing Rob. Actually, in the sections of apparent 'actuality' she is hardly there at all. I can only hear Rob's responses to those questions which she presumably asked - 'what do you remember? Do you remember...? What did you feel when...'. This kind of absence is quite the norm in documentary radio where an interviewer might ask questions to elicit information and response, subsequently editing out her own voice when mixing the programme. The interviewer's role in this context is to elicit content, and then step out of the limelight. More importantly, the now silent interviewer may be inaudible, but is not absent. She becomes a listener, who brings us, listening, into the time of the interview. It's as if we're almost there in her place.

But when Lotta does this her inaudible voice is the missing half of an *intimate* dialogue between two people. She *should* be there because she is directly involved. By wilfully silencing her voice, she places me in *her* position, so that I become the listening lover to whom Rob reveals his emotions and feelings of remorse, and even his remembered sexual insecurities. He's uncomfortable. So am I.

## **Hidden voices**

Well, well, well, there we were...snuggled up by the fire together. But Evelyn Ficarra's sugar-sweet presenter wasn't really there for me. An endless wall of blindness came between us. In order to get close, sight had to be bracketed out of the experience. I couldn't see her (sitting behind her desk in a brightly lit booth...) and she couldn't see me (lying in the bath with one toe stuck up the dripping tap...). But I didn't even want to imagine her. If there are certain boundaries that a radio persona cannot cross without deliberate transgression there is one that she shouldn't cross at *all*, and that is from invisibility to visibility.<sup>8</sup>

There has to be space between us because she is not really either 'here' or 'there'. Transmission takes (a kind of) time, even without the 'obscenity delay' that most live radio employs. Once inside a radio drama we may go along with the pretence and imagine pictures for the characters in a play – too often an approximation of visual theatre - but we don't want to see the voice of radio presence. Some things are best left hidden, and there are reasons for this:

... while in cultural production, and particularly in mass media, the model for presence is the speaking subject, the real significance of presence is caught up in the notion of inner speech. For 'truth,' we know, can be spoken only through the technology of language. Despite the simulation of interiority by the media, the voice comes full circle – back to language, and back to its silence in the anaerobic, anechoic chambers of the mind. (Dyson, 1974, p.177)

The disembodied voice has a presence beyond vision. As Dyson notes, the interiority of the speaking voice produced by mass media is a simulated one. Certainly the radio voice in the ear can encourage the feeling that we are listening to our own beliefs and thoughts articulated (hence our loyalty to programmes which 'speak our language'). But, while we're not looking, variations on this disembodied voice can slip from place to place under cover of darkness. That visual blackout is essential to any work for sound alone; it might be radio, or the electroacoustic concert hall, installation space, gallery - or just the space between your ears. I have always distrusted that old wives' tale, 'what the eye doesn't see, the heart doesn't grieve over'. Because when the lights go down, we still listen. And we can still grieve.

**CD [24]** *Hidden Lives*, by Cathy Lane, is her 'celebration of all lives lived and forgotten' and explores ideas of 'women as the curators of memory and of hidden histories'.<sup>9</sup> This work for sound alone – composed for the concert hall rather than the radio - broadcasts a subtle lament through a host of inner voices that speak invisibly. Whilst drawing attention to the 'interior' domestic territory that women have often, historically, both inhabited and made, the piece also grieves audibly for what wasn't seen, and still isn't seen by too many.

Although the major part of the work is made from speech sounds, the piece begins and ends with the quite 'ordinary' ambience of life on a normal street. This documentary sound, the recorded comings and goings of people walking about, does not communicate 'music' or 'abstraction' but does transmit the voice of 'broadcast actuality' and presence. It is, in that contradictory way that unadulterated recordings imply, the sound of 'how things are' – the truth – 'right now'. It is also the sound of unfettered, exterior space. Both these actualities are now re-broadcast in the concert hall. But it is not long before the resonant crash of a metaphoric door slams shut on one truth and offers an alternative. Space is very much at issue here - this is most definitely not a radio work, since the slam of the door puts us 'inside' the concert hall, participating in a metaphor. Isolated vocal fragments occupy this newly confined space,

appearing first in one place, then another. These sounds are miniscule to the point of non-existence, ranging from short sibilants (tss...psss...ssss) to tiny inhalations and shush-ing sounds. Though very much part of normal speech, these are sounds that are generally unheard, or at least remain un-noticed. But now they are placed in the foreground, buzzing back and forth in our ears, while, in the background, an ominous distortion creaks and groans.

It is not until about 7 minutes into the piece that intelligible words start to emerge. Prior to this the sound world is made from flurries of vocal fragments (all women's voices – this is very clear from the timbre) that gradually build into swishing, repetitive surges before subsiding again. These repetitive rhythmic waves are too fast to be soothing, and have a sense of industry that is perhaps reminiscent of sweeping, scrubbing or polishing. There are fleeting moments where fragments become phonemes, and a vowel sound leans towards the possibility of speech. Despite the nature of the sounds – soft, unvoiced, ephemeral - there is a sense of frantic urgency throughout. The imprisoned speaking voice – an identity that has been cut into tiny pieces - is somehow masked or trapped beyond communication, but is most definitely there.

You might expect that words would grow from this striving mass and that fragments would lengthen, bit by bit, into phonemes, words, and finally speech. But although they certainly build towards some kind of denouement, this is not how speech emerges. Why not? Well, the community of tiny speech sounds *cannot* speak because it is truly incorporeal – a fact delineated by the dynamic use of space – and is not concerned with direct reference to any exterior 'reality'. These sounds do amass as a single voice, but this is the speechless voice of a disturbed 'interiority'. Here the interiority that radio voices strive to appropriate for speech – let me just whisper in your ear and we'll pretend *you're* thinking my words – is itself appropriated to become an interiority that speaks through sound alone. Words fail it. Words require other voices, which is the reason why snippets of speech begin to step forward from behind this wall of vocal disturbance; here at last are the ordinary voices of women speaking. Although they are invisible too, they represent an exterior normality. But, because they are both invisible and 'real', they must be 'transmitted' from 'outside'. And this is a reference to the 'non-live' broadcasting voice that sets them apart from where 'we' are, listening in.

[6:45 onwards. More than one female voice, layered.]  
sleeveless dresses...fresh eggs...Mondays...in hot weather a deodorant should be used...you  
will find...at least a job...only herself to blame...  
...washed...baby's breakfast...dining room...passage...8:30...boiled sweets...kitchen and  
lavatory...passage...sweep bedroom...bedroom...prepare baby's lunch...wash up...do  
shopping...1pm...and change...baby's tea, put baby to sleep...cleaning silver...the  
pram...7:30 7pm 3pm...living room, baby's bed...

While this is going on the fragmentary vocal sounds continue to obstruct and colour the texture. But the speaking voices become more and more insistent, mix in lower and higher transpositions, and get louder – and thus nearer – until their words become a ranting cacophony. But wait, rewind a bit: there's something in their tone that is quite revealing. Whether by inspired accident or design, the voices are not *performing* their words in declamatory fashion; they are *reading* aloud. Although I didn't speak up about this earlier (I apologise for keeping you in the dark) the source material for *Hidden Lives* is taken from recordings of women reading from 'The Book of Hints and Wrinkles'. Lane describes this wryly as 'a small piece of social history from the 1930s

which describes how women should manage both their houses and themselves in no uncertain terms'.<sup>10</sup>

In her programme notes for the piece Lane describes these voices as building up to a 'wall of orders and commands' but I think the passage concerned can also be heard as the articulation of an escalating anger in reaction to unsustainable demands. In speaking about the work, Lane has remarked on how friends that read for her expressed amazement, amused astonishment – and sometimes anger – at the sentiments in the text.<sup>11</sup> And I wonder if you can hear this in their neutral speaking tones that place space between voice and text and say, 'this is my reading voice'. Read my lips, but someone else's words. These voices depict and comment, simultaneously.

In reading a text, one invisible voice addresses another; the reading voice meets the authorial voice, and words are shared.<sup>12</sup> But the reading voice also meets the listening voice. When we 'do' reading we are also doing listening to our own interior voice. So there are other implications to get cosy with. When someone (whether Daddy or a tape) reads aloud to us, it's not just that we are listening to someone 'doing reading' for us, they are also doing 'being us'. It's no wonder that we prefer to find the voice attractive, or at least to feel we might just get along. Well-known actors with distinctive voices are often used for recorded readings of novels: the success of BBC Radio 4's long-running *Book at Bedtime* lies in its winning combination of attractive timbre (...and now that nice Martin Jarvis) and popular text (...reads *Pride and Prejudice*, episode 11). Yet certainly don't want readers to make a big performance out of the activity, and the voices that read in Cathy Lane's *Hidden Lives* don't. They read in an unaffected manner and their voices are well modulated and easy to understand. When they 'do' reading for us, we are perhaps more likely to listen with them, and identify with them, than if they had stood up on a soapbox and yelled. We hear their dignity in relation to the indignation of the text they are encountering. And, after all, it is a piece about indignity beyond words.

And here are a last few words on the reading voice. Other than the important translation from seeing letters on the page, and processing them as text, we read prose without any particular need for visual amplification<sup>13</sup>. The text communicates an entirety and though we may picture how a character or situation looks, our visualisation is simply a pencil sketch or a quick snapshot to sum up what was said. And I think that this is another reason why taped books are good for accompanying driving or trying to nod off. It's not just that someone else turns the pages while you're busy turning the wheel; it's also that that you don't need to concretise visual or visualised images to be fully involved. We don't run a film in our mind, frame by frame, as we listen to a novel on tape. Both our external visual apparatus, and our inner eye, can be directed elsewhere (which is fortunate). But we are doing *listening* whether we are read to, or read 'to ourselves'. It is very hard to attend to someone speaking while immersed in a book. Shush, stop it, do go away; can't you see, I'm trying to read.

Lotta tells the story. Her words are clear and unhurried, probably scripted or thought out in advance. Her narrative tells me the story, and the story that has already happened.<sup>14</sup> This is no 'audio-diary' confession. She is not embarrassed, nervous or shy. The recording quality is impeccable; she wants to get it right. More significantly, when she speaks the background ambience fades to almost nothing and she is just there in 'dead' air, outside its world.

This convention is widely used in 'magazine format' radio, where documentary segments are corralled together by written 'links'. We go 'back to the studio' for the familiar presenter's voice. (Perhaps the written equivalent is the return of a different typeface each time...). Reassured, our listening ambles off obediently, taking geographical and metaphorical displacement in its stride without noticing, overly, that it is responding to direction. But this presenting voice - always the same voice - situated in a neutral, very 'present' place - keeps coming back to talk to us and keep us on track. It is the same voice every time, and frequently the same voice 'at the same time next week'. It's an old refrain.

So Lotta is presenter. But her voice transgresses the boundaries of this role too. While her interviewing presence may be virtually silent, her presenting voice says too much. She's explaining her side of the story to me. She has stepped out of the background into dead air to tell me secrets, which Rob can't hear (she refers to him in the third person). Her links are not a means of getting from one place to another. The content is personal, intimate and anecdotal. Rather than create objectivity she draws me in, to an illicit relationship with a presenter who is involved rather than disinterested. Her voice does not comment on the story, her voice *is* the story. She wants me on her side, and she presents her side immaculately.

### **Clean and unclean voices**

Cathy's Lane's *Hidden Voices* rails against a text that extols the virtue of cleanliness but surreptitiously uses that virtue to keep women invisible, locked in their homes by routine tasks. Well, that was the 1930s and things may have changed a bit. In Lane's subtle reading the text becomes both a cipher for those things that haven't changed, and a celebration of those things - and people - that have. Today, sitting at a laptop in my 1930s-built home, I didn't even make the bed, let alone scrub the step. But cleanliness is still a metaphorical worry when it comes to sound. The live radio announcer's one aim in life is to get through the whole performance without a hiccup. To cough or splutter is to admit human weakness, and thereby unintentionally to embody a disembodied voice. And to retain it's superior 'other-worldliness' the radio voice of authority needs to be suspended in 'an abstract and idealized' space. [Dyson, 1974, p.180]. When BBC Radio discussion programmes are aurally invaded by the sound of off-stage drills (as quite often seems to happen), a boundless space for sparkling wit encounters the brouhaha of a less than perfect wall. There is embarrassment all round.

Dyson's exploration of the 'radio voice' is confined to tracing the genealogy of that well-spoken voice of authority. This voice (whether male or female) is, of course, clean-cut; it speaks in a clear, educated manner, with a confident tone.<sup>15</sup> A 'good voice for radio' in this very particular sense is one that indicates trustworthiness and reliability *as a result* of its clean enunciation. However the enunciation must remain 'invisible' in the listener's conscious evaluation of these character traits. It can be a nasty shock when this voice turns up in the wrong hands; it's no coincidence that the 'Bond movie' villain and similar are well-spoken individuals (and in American movies, often played as stereotypically British 'upper-crust').<sup>16</sup>

When it comes to post-production in radio, not to mention other recorded media, the ‘clean edit’ is a vital complement to the announcer’s clarity of enunciation. Sound editing can become an obsessive quest to wash away troublesome grime. The dark secrets of the edit are so well-hidden that, in common parlance, ‘sound editing’ refers solely to the cutting and splicing of recorded sound in time whereas, in reality, it can often involve precise manipulation of the recorded material to ‘remove error’ by means of digital filtering or reverberation. Such techniques are usually used quite crudely in speech radio to compress away unwanted background noise but, significantly, pop music stations with DJ presenters are more fastidious, desiring to erase all signs of a space other than the one created by the music.<sup>17</sup> A ‘good’ edit ensures that the text is clear and uncluttered, and able to speak on its own terms. A ‘good’ edit is ‘invisible’ to the reader or listener. The ‘good’ radio edit enforces the disembodiment of speech but remains inaudible. You cannot hear the joins. No listener should even consider the possibility that a hard-pressed production assistant spent an irate 30 minutes on someone’s nervous throat clearing. Edit and enunciation go hand in hand into this perfect world of mainstream radio where everything appears to be cut and dried. (Clean is good - invisible and absent; unclean is bad – visible and present). But let me mention some ways in which these two ‘voices’ – edit and enunciation - can speak up through their subtle subversion. The two are omnipresent and cannot be got rid of: clean or unclean they are always there, the one in the technology, the other in the voice. Even the live microphone ‘edits’ the enunciating voice by accentuating various aspects of its timbre and paying less attention to others. But the squeaky-clean enunciation that still characterizes the ‘voice of authority’ is now ironised (and alien, to many people). Producers now relish ‘unclean voices’ as communicative in a very precise way: to the British, Scottish accents are currently deemed ‘trustworthy’<sup>18</sup>, ‘Estuary English’<sup>19</sup> appeals to youth audiences, and minority and/or regional accents promote inclusivity (at least, that’s what it sounds like). Radio trips over itself in an effort to leap over class-conscious boundaries yelling ‘hey, listen. I’m not that posh you know’. But though the lepers of received pronunciation have been banished, the re-appropriation of regional enunciation on mainstream radio is still somewhat self-conscious - it has to be heard to make a noise.

Everyone is trying to get down and dirty – but the voice of authority has not really left the building. A nice Scottish radio voice with ‘sultry’ or ‘husky’ tones remains a disembodied one.<sup>20</sup> Achieving disembodiment is one thing, but re-embodiment of the incorporeal voice requires a bit of an act. It involves painting on a bit of stage make-up, accentuating the positive through the unclean voices of editing and enunciation. When Barthes speaks of the ‘grain’ as the ‘body in the voice as it sings, the hand as it writes, the limb as it performs’<sup>21</sup> he is calling for the corporeal presence as an antidote to the disembodied purity of the technically ‘perfect’ singing voice. For him, cleanliness is not necessarily next to godliness: the embodied singing voice is transcendent *through* the very sounds of its embodiment – the presence of the throat in the roll of an ‘r’, the ‘patinated’ vowels that show the ‘wear of the language’. The re-embodiment of disembodied sounds requires one to go from the sublime to ... this guy I used to listen to, called Bruce.

As an insomniac graduate student, far from home, I spent many a wasted, late-night hour listening to phone-ins on local radio. I really enjoyed them. I had a particular soft spot for Bruce, (no doubt syndicated across America) who dispensed wisdom on anything from roof cleaning and résumés, to how to get off the booze or on to TV. His steady stream of callers greeted him like a neighbour. I was fascinated by the trusting, bizarre and sometimes desperate, folks who called in, and their various problems

and...hey, I just liked his laid-back drawl. ‘Well, well, well, here we are again...’ But what was it that made him so ‘ordinary’? Why did people trust him? What did he do that made his little constructed world so convincing? How could he be ‘just like me’ to so many individuals? I got hooked on the cracks between his words – the way he was so *audibly* ‘human’ – he sniffed, creaked in his chair, snapped open a can of coke, rummaged for a cookie, flipped through papers, pressed and punched buttons, frequently fumbled with either his words or his technology. He made no secret of being in a radio studio, and I swear I heard him put his feet up on the desk. We were all in on the act.

And those ‘off-stage’ sounds that nobody edited out became the accompaniment to the personal anecdotes that he snuck in now and then (another dirty trick you’re probably familiar with). In addition, because he was thinking on his feet, his speech had lots of ‘spacers’ – all those sounds we use to fill gaps, the ‘ers, ahs, hurrumphs, mmms’ of our non-verbal communication. Who gave him a creaky chair? Why didn’t he drink out of a plastic cup? Did he really need to rustle all that paper and hit all those buttons? Did he really have to make such a racket? Of course not. But extraneous noise did not appear to be edited out (though the programme was certainly not live by the time it reached me) and his voice luxuriated in the grunge of paralanguage. The two unclean voices, edit and enunciation, were working together to give a semblance of corporeality to a radio voice. By these means Bruce and his ilk – they are such stereotypes that we make shows about *them* – invite you to come on in and pull up a chair. But beware of letting strangers into your home; they may notice the dirt, and use it to their advantage.

**CD [25]** In *Geekspeak*, Pamela Z walks right in and pulls the rug from under her victims’ feet. She subverts the voices of edit and enunciation to dish the dirt on some other stereotypes. Her subjects are not incorporeal; as with Bruce, the ‘dirt’ in sound is used to flesh them out and create a fictionalised presence, but here these same processes heighten their lack of substance in other terms.

*Geekspeak*’s recorded sources are the speaking voices of several employees in the Laboratories of Xerox PARC, Palo Alto. These male Californians are interviewed *in situ*, and give their opinions on various computer operating systems and terminology. Their voices become the material for an apparently jovial piece of sampler-chic. But though it may be lightweight and humorous on the outside, *Geekspeak* comments insidiously on the darker implications of some disconcerting binaries. And it does so by means of some disarmingly ordinary tricks. On the whole, words remain perfectly intelligible, and the verbal content is exposed, rather than being turned to purely sonic ends. However the content is edited into short phrases and repetitions, and forced to participate in musical games. The piece cheerfully dismantles grammatical sense and thus draws attention to the non-verbal communication of diction, accent, turns of phrase and vocal mannerisms. It doesn’t take a huge amount of effort to get the point and smile (or wince, depending on your own situation).

[opening – counterpoint, one voice entering after another]

Bit baud byte Bit baud byte Bit baud byte Bit baud byte Bit baud byte ....

Currently written as 32-bit able Currently written as 32-bit able Currently written ...

Quite an operating system Quite an operating system Quite an operating system ...  
the basic... the basic simple definition of a geek..

(sotto voce mumble) howdihowrightyeah/(breath) ...I ..I.. don’t know how to articulate it really...

Of course, they *have* articulated it, pretty much; they dug their own hole as soon as they opened their mouths, though Pamela Z certainly helped them to jump in. In more than one sense this piece is about undermining how people define themselves – in both the verbal and social arenas – and the difference between defining yourself, and being defined by others. These voices inform us that they are articulate and expert at one level, but are perhaps inarticulate and lacking in insight from another point of view. In their obsession with clarity, machine-reliability and system optimisation, their sights are set on the sterile perfection of the digitally clean binary world. But, as Laurie Anderson has said, that's 'just not enough range'.<sup>22</sup>

The piece continues along a deftly constructed episodic narrative, during the course of which the speakers voice their own definitions of a 'geek' or a 'nerd'. Later on they are evidently invited to consult the dictionary. I say 'evidently' because the voice that asked is silent, edited out. They read (and we hear them 'doing reading', as in Lane's piece) with obvious surprise.<sup>23</sup>

[layered speech, reading voices]

Geek...the carnival performer...person that bites chickens heads off...geek eats chickens heads...nerd eats pizza!...(reading) biting a head of a live chicken or snake...the origins of the word aren't terribly pleasant!

As an underlying provocation, the work interleaves two genres, and it is never quite clear which one is in parentheses.<sup>24</sup> This is a documentary radio work (the material is recorded interviews, and the subject matter is organised into a narrative) and it is music (often edited into rhythmic patterns). It is affectionately teasing (looped speech fragments become amusing riffs) but also pokes cruel fun (the repetition makes the speakers sound ridiculous). In formal terms the piece is cleanly constructed (episodic 'counterpoint' or *ostinati* interspersed with solos but) in production terms the sound is unclean (the sounds often contain room noise, the edited cuts are 'crude', and the voices are not particularly 'good' for radio).

These are patently location recordings: there is quite a bit of room ambience in the signal and at times the background hum of machines and some 'off-stage' human activity is quite prevalent. Speech is of priority, and background noise is neither loud nor brought forward to participate. (Non-vocal 'noise' is only used once as an overtly illustrative foreground element - the turning of pages when the dictionary is consulted). For the most part the more undefined noise in the signal is just 'there', untreated by filtering or compression. But noise is in the way. Though apparently just a bit of barely-noticeable grit its presence blurs the edges between zero and one on a number of counts. Editing accentuates it; it becomes audible at the beginning and end of a sample and its timbral profile 'speaks' through its looped repetition. In Lane's *Hidden Lives* the meticulous editing of spoken words created a metaphorical veil, from voices suppressed through the 'de-verbalising' of speech. But here, noise communicates over and above perfectly intelligible speech. It adds its unclean veneer to the over-verbalised 'precision' of technobabble and provides a surreptitious interpretation: jargon makes a noise in order to exclude the uninitiated, who perhaps should get back to their sweeping). Sadly, for Pamela Z's victims, cute and rather imprecise sampler loops undermine any pseudo-Masonic posturing.

There is also noise in the speakers' enunciation in the first place, or rather in their lack of performance. These people are talking, in a relaxed manner, caught in their natural environment. They are confident, and not even particularly self-consciousness

in front of the mike (possibly they weren't aware of its presence). They are generalised by disembodiment (you can't put a face to them) but particularized by their different vocal timbres. And of course these utterances are also used as instrumental voices. The use of deliberately trite 'counterpoint' (the opening being a prime example) sees them marshalled into responding to a musical baton and 'coming in' at the right time. This ushers natural, speaking voices onto stage. Once there, they become stereotypical characters in a play on more than words, and the lights can be very unforgiving. One speaker has a distinctive manner of speaking that is so apparently relaxed that he has a constant underlying 'drawl'. But his fast, monotone delivery contradicts this, and reflects the hyperactivity of his obsessive enthusiasm. When his voice is looped the drawl becomes a comical ratchet sound ('quite an operating system') that turns listening from words to timbre. Elsewhere the same voice's monotone delivery is mocked by merely presenting its speech as a stream of relentless verbiage. This strategy is interesting, because it's clarity that gives the game away. In both the examples below phrases have been spliced together, to give the impression of natural continuous speech. In fact there are not that many splices, and joins are largely 'invisible', with words or phrases shortened or gaps 'filled in' with other words:

[00:58, solo]

my definition of a geek would be some one who finds a machine er...really esoteric like logical to be really fascinating construct and likes to and understands it see what its limits are and see exactly what it entails play with it and to the extent that they probably find it slightly more fascinating than conversation with most people.

Here there are no loops or contrapuntal layers but there is radio's concern with clean edit and clean enunciation. He is indeed the (defining) voice of authority, to his own ears, at least. Of course 'he' is a constructed persona caricatured by this alliance of edit and enunciation. This cartoon-ish quality is barely noticeable on first pass since the speech appears convincingly 'real' in a documentary sense, and this part of the piece seems skewed towards a more straightforward radio presentation. A join at the end is revealed not by a 'bad' edit, but by a shift down in intonation. This provides a cadential touch that is comic both because of the words themselves, and the fact that it shifts attention back to musical construction ('more fascinating than conversation with most people' is in an emphatic and slightly pitch-shifted voice). Just a short while later the same persona provides a neat illustration of his own definition:

[3:16]

Mac...no question

Originally written as 32 bit able..didn't have the ability to handle 32-bit data passes in the ROM..no, sorry, the *machines* had the ability to handle it before the operating system did and then they eventually had to go back and write an operating system 2cx where you had to buy a little enabler patch 32-bit mode the way that they designed the system software is that you could tell the system to not look in the ROM ..but just to look somewhere else in the system you know you just rewrite it in the system and they change the pointer to where that particular data is

[ continuous speech goes on for several more minutes...]

...Although I do dream of computers and I had one really weird dream where I was trying to move my arm by double clicking on it.

So if in the first example the content is only touching on incoherence, with a comic twist to finish, by the second he's off on a geek-ish roll, and there's no real stopping his peacock display. When other voices enter, the monologue continues relentlessly in the

background, repeatedly pushing to the fore. Although he's not exactly talking rubbish it does seem a bit grubby for our listening to match his obsessive fervour, given the content. This second monologue, which goes on and on an *on*, is not an unaccompanied solo throughout. When it begins the other voices contribute underlying repetitions of a previously heard bit of mumbling and then voices gradually enter with variations on 'I was toast', 'toast...' leading into a 'chorus' on the theme of 'toast' (computer-geek slang for having messed something up or having got into trouble) Later there's a cruelly elegiac 'slow' episode: 'Cool little box ... .. it was so beautiful in that it was all ...structured ...cool little box... ..just a cool thing in itself...how cool! [growing volume and enthusiasm] just like...how cool...the most exciting thing in modern...Cool!...'

A solo male performer, given to swaggering a bit and performing in a fast, rhythmic monotone. A posse of on-stage (male) friends who listen, and encourage with an interjection here and there, and who chip in with the chorus. An unbreachable barrage of words, with its own rules of grammar and street-cred argot. He's toasting. He has all the bits, bauds, and bytes on his side. He knows just which pointer goes where. You know, I think I've heard this somewhere before. Perhaps this nod to that most misogynist of musical forms is just a subtle 'rap' on the knuckles, a gentle way of dishing the dirt on what computer geeks (or any other type of 'geek') is doing when they show off all their fancy words. But in this piece, don't forget that in this particular case a woman pulls the strings. And nothing could be less intimidating - we're laughing.

Did I find Lotta's voice? Perhaps it's sufficient to hope so. Lotta Erickson speaks through and in her piece. All these created voices - interviewer, presenter and reminiscing lover, are 'Lotta'. They break their own rules of engagement by ganging up together in one persona. In doing so, perhaps they comment on the impossibility of a reliable documentary of memories and feelings, or describing either without peering through the present at the recorded past.

They join a host of invisible voices that can speak in different ways: documentary voices, musical voices, invisible and unseen voices, unseeing voices, suppressed voices, authoritative voices, reading voices, speechless voices, the voices of editing, enunciation, disembodiment, re-embodiment and the voice that hears it all. And all these voices - how they can speak, and who can speak through them - are open to interpretation. You just need to listen.

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<sup>1</sup> Because I can't find Lotta Erickson to ask her permission, I can't include an excerpt from her work here. The work is *Please Mr Coldstream* and it was released on a CD of radio art which accompanied an issue the London Musicians' Collective journal, *Resonance*, entitled 'Retuning Radio', vol 5, no. 2 (November 1996). At the time of writing you can still order this issue from [www.l-m-c.org.uk/resonance/vol.5.2.html](http://www.l-m-c.org.uk/resonance/vol.5.2.html). If you cannot find it, you could try [soundingart@novamara.com](mailto:soundingart@novamara.com).

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<sup>2</sup> The voices in this essay are English-speaking voices, and the radio references are to English-speaking radio, both British and American. This is because I have chosen to speak through my own experience, and these are the voices I know - but of course there are other voices too.

<sup>3</sup> This is probably not her real name; names can reveal too much, but at least they help to create an internal image of a small woman with an indistinct voice..

<sup>4</sup> 'The Salesman', track 2 of *The ugly one with the jewels and other stories* has an example of this kind of ironic social comment. Laurie Anderson's processed voice enacts the puerile, competitive backbiting of the salesman calling into Head Office: [Anderson, in 'voice of authority' mode] 'uh, Frank? Listen...Frank....you know I hate to say this about Brad, I mean we both know he's got a heck of a job...yeah...right...we both know that Brad just isn't pulling his weight...and I'm not just saying this because we're up for the same Safeway account...'

<sup>5</sup> see *From column to song: 'Sunscreen' spreads to Chicago* by Mark Caro, Tribune staff writer; March 31, 1999; available at [www.chicago.com](http://www.chicago.com). URL visited January 2003.

<sup>6</sup> Of course, many radios allow us to assign stations to preset 'memory' buttons, thus giving us 'flip' control comparable to the TV remote control. But this generally restricts us to a few buttons – so now we are even more conservative. By assigning those buttons to the stations we 'always listen to' we abandon any subsequent adventures.

<sup>7</sup> For an interesting (and inadvertently amusing) example of this see the program structure of Hong Kong Business Association of Hawaii's radio program. [http://www.hkbah.org/radio\\_program.htm](http://www.hkbah.org/radio_program.htm) (click on the link to 'Program Format'). I hope you enjoy the music too. (URL visited January 2003).

<sup>8</sup> An example from the parallel universe of TV: *Morecambe and Wise*, the popular UK comedy show, once featured Angela Rippon, a nationally-known TV newsreader, as a guest. (*Morecambe and Wise Christmas Show*, 1976, BBC 1). At that time newsreaders always sat demurely behind a desk. In the sketch concerned Rippon read the news for a few minutes, before breaking off to come out from behind her desk to commence a high-kick dance number. The transgression still provokes amusement, and is endlessly re-shown (and purchased), which perhaps gives some indication of just how fixed and stereotypical the newsreader role remains.

<sup>9</sup> Programme notes by Lane for performance of *Hidden Lives*, in the programme booklet for the International Computer Music Conference, 2000, Berlin.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> During Lane's presentation at 'Sound Practice, The First UKISC Conference on Sound, Culture and Environments', Dartington Hall, UK. February 16-20, 2001.

<sup>12</sup> Being read to in bed is another situation in which the listener has eyes closed so that the reading voice is 'unseen' and disembodied. Paul Lansky's piece *Now and Then* is about the very activity of reading stories out loud. He says 'Common wisdom has it that it is never too soon to read to children. Even before they can speak they enjoy the regular, soothing patterns of speech – it must be a kind of music to them. ... *Now and Then* is a musical encapsulation of the sound of this activity.' (Liner notes to *Homebrew* by Paul Lansky, BRIDGE BCD 9035).

<sup>13</sup> Obviously there are genres in which visual and textual media are integrated, but here I mean prose.

<sup>14</sup> 'We believe that narrative consists not in communicating what one has seen but in transmitting what one has heard, what someone else said to you. Hearsay.' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p.76).

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<sup>15</sup> As an example, see <http://www.castaway.org.uk/>. *Castaway* is an agency that offers a range of clients with good voices for radio describing one (male) actor as having a ‘true voice of authority, gravelly, lyrical. A gift for documentaries.’ And another as ‘a friendly Scottish voice with strength & vitality.’(male). URL visited January 2003.

<sup>16</sup> In a directly self-referential and subversive nod to the broadcast voice of authority’s implications ‘Side-show Bob’, the well-spoken villain of the popular cartoon series *The Simpsons* is voiced by Kelsey Grammer, who himself plays the eponymous star of the comedy TV show, *Frasier*. Frasier is a radio phone-in psychiatrist whose radio persona (‘the voice of Seattle’) is the epitome of well-educated, trustworthy authority; of course, the whole show is built on lampooning this in relation to the disasters of his ‘real’ life. Similarly, ‘Side-show Bob’ is a parody of the intelligent villain persona. Parodies of two genres are entangled in their own self-parody. And don’t forget that cartoons are another medium that relies heavily on the ability of the voice to transmit nuances of character. (In a parody of yet another cultural icon, the final words each week on *Frasier* are ‘Frasier has left the building’. They call Elvis - that other now disembodied voice - to mind. And as with Elvis, though we don’t see his bodily presence in the flesh, some of us like to pretend he’s still out there.)

<sup>17</sup> Of course, editing frequently crosses into producing, and the line between the creative preparation and actual creation of new material becomes difficult to demark.

<sup>18</sup> ‘Robotic-sounding voices are not pleasant to listen to so we set out to develop a synthesised voice that was as human sounding as possible. Scotland is often chosen as a location for call centres because the Scottish accent has been said to engender trust and is popular with many people. We have already recorded a Scottish voice from a fairly generic Scottish speaker. It is more of an Eddie Mair, Scottish newsreader-style accent rather than a regional one that people might find difficult to understand. We are also working on younger and older and male and female voices.’ From an article on voice-synthesis software, published in *Scotland on Sunday* May 27 2001.

([http://www.rhetoricalsystems.com/press/010527\\_scotsun.htm](http://www.rhetoricalsystems.com/press/010527_scotsun.htm) for full article)

<sup>19</sup> ‘Estuary English’ is a colloquial slang in Britain for English with an un-educated accent, specifically from the Thames Estuary area in Essex. This accent has become so fashionable that people have been known to fake it in order to sound ‘right’.

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.speak-voices.com/> displays online promotion for voiceover artists: two examples: ‘Funky charismatic presenter with a husky voice’ (woman) and ‘Very experienced commercial voiceover. Her voice also lends itself to menu and promo reads, as it can be cool and sultry sounding, but adding warmth with great ease.’

<sup>21</sup> ‘The ‘grain’ is the body in the voice as it sings, the hand as it writes, the limb as it performs. If I perceive the ‘grain’ in a piece of music and accord this ‘grain’ a theoretical value (the emergence of the text in the work), I inevitably set up a new scheme of evaluation which will certainly be individual – I am determined to listen to my relation with the body of the man or woman singing or playing and that relation is erotic – but in no way ‘subjective’ (it is not the psychological ‘subject’ in me who is listening; the climactic pleasure hoped for is not going to reinforce – to express – that subject but, on the contrary, to lose it).’ (Barthes, 1977, p.188)

<sup>22</sup> From the lyrics to *Lower Mathematics*, 1986: ‘Now, in my opinion, the problem with these numbers is that they are just too close – leaves very little room for everybody else. Just not enough range. So first, I think we should get rid of the value judgments attached to these two numbers and recognize that to be a zero is no better, no worse, than to be number one. Because what we are actually looking at here are the building blocks of the Modern Computer Age.’ (Anderson, 1994, p. 135)

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<sup>23</sup> And for a good read about *that* kind of geek I recommend *Geek Love*, a novel by Katherine Dunn.

<sup>24</sup> Though commissioned by New American Radio *Geekspeak* was first presented as a performance at SoundCulture '96 festival. This work steps into that interesting (and increasingly common) transgressive space between experimental radio and music.