

## **THE RADIO FEATURE FORM AND DOCUMENTARY POETRY:**

**Does poetry offer a documentary framework for thinking about the playful treatment of source material in contemporary non-fiction radio/podcast works?**

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**This research was undertaken on unceded Gadigal and Wangal land, and  
Wallumattagal land where Macquarie University sits.**

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## Summary

Radio feature conventions that allow for the playful treatment of source material have received little scholarly attention despite being utilised in contemporary audio works. There are artistic and journalistic tensions inherent in a form that allows scenes to be constructed, and where the changes and edits are not always audible. In documentary poetry there is similar creative use of source material, and this is only made visible on the page by choice. Yet there is documentary intent related to the very documents being turned *into poetry*. This research project asks: How do poets, scholars and critics think about this same issue in documentary poetry? How is this form understood as documentary? It explores the wealth of critical and scholarly discourse afforded to the literary genre, focusing on the definitional debates and the discussion of non-fiction representation in creative works. It finds a useful framework in an expanded theory of documentary that draws on the double definition of the word: the *act of documenting*; and the *use of documents*. Thinking about the documentary/ political intent of a work, considerations for documentary authenticity, and the managing of audience expectations for the playful treatment of source material, guides the analysis of three radio feature/ crafted audio texts.

## **Statement of Originality**

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

(Jessica Consalvo Minshall) \_\_\_\_\_ Date 01/08/22

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## Introduction

Presenting at a *Third Coast International Audio Festival* conference session in Chicago in 2016, UK producer Eleanor McDowall was asked about ‘fidelity to truth’ in her documentary making by an audience member.<sup>1</sup> The co-director of the highly acclaimed *Falling Tree Productions*, which makes commissioned series and programs for the BBC, had played for the audience part of a radio feature about ballet dancers retiring. The creative use of source material in “A Dancer Dies Twice”, broadcast on BBC Radio 4 that year, prompted the question which goes to the very heart of the radio feature form: how could this be documentary? For McDowall, as for many feature makers, this is a non-issue when ethical considerations are informing the editorial decisions. She explained how constructing a scene can still be representing ‘a truth’:

...you’re in a space that’s not a literal space, and you’re not saying ‘I went and I recorded this woman when she fell down and this is the noise that it made’. And I’m not trying to represent it like that. You’re representing it as a kind of musical fantasy where they’re not all there dancing to Flamenco and talking to each other. It’s *just by the way in which it’s been delivered* I think you’re saying to a listener, ‘there are lots of different sounds and feelings at play that are coming in here’. So it’s illustrating something at a point that you need to hear it...<sup>2</sup>

This response suggests radio feature conventions which allow for artistic licence in the telling of non-fiction stories — which I shorthand term ‘the playful treatment of source material’ — are expected to be understood, and even heard, by those listening. In this example, McDowall created a dramatic montage that weaved together interviews with multiple dancers reflecting on the end of their careers, interspersed with ballet teachers instructing classes, set to a bed of Flamenco music and the hard breaths of a close mic-ed dancer *en pointe* that builds to the visceral crack of a knee. While McDowall had let the festival audience know this was not the sound of a dancer’s body — and therefore career — shattering, but a

recording of her own knee as she climbs stairs, there could be little listener expectation that the injury being described in the piece had been captured. However, the audience member who asked this question could not move past that McDowell had recorded her own knee and ‘put it on the dancer’. ‘Absolutely!’, McDowell chimed in. Of course this is allowed in documentary. It is not as though they would be dancing to Flamenco.

The exchange is significant because it illuminates some of the concern US radio and sound studies scholar Michele Hilmes outlined in 2014 about audience literacy. As digital platform publishing opportunities and the corresponding audiences signalled ‘a new kind of “golden age” for soundwork’<sup>3</sup> — a larger umbrella term Hilmes uses which includes the radio feature — it seemed the impact of radio’s missing/inaccessible archives and the lack of the critical and scholarly attention afforded to other art forms would carry over into podcasting:

Without such attention, soundwork remains a form cut off from its roots, with even its most talented contemporary practitioners *innovating in a vacuum*, giving audiences little purchase on how they might understand and appreciate the complexities of the best new work.<sup>4</sup>

Although this was just one audience member asking this question, the audience at *Third Coast* is predominantly made up of audio producers and others with a keen interest in crafted audio. This suggests that even when a work has been made in keeping with European feature traditions and for the BBC, some international audiences struggle with the concept of a radio feature as they hold to strict notions of documentary. Yet the issue of terminology has long been a major focus of scholars attempting to define and understand the radio feature form. As outlined in chapter one: a ‘documentary’ can be considered one type of ‘feature’; or ‘documentary’ is used to demarcate a more journalistic work from a more artistic one; or the choice of term might reflect geographical common



usage; or both are used interchangeably, or even together as with ‘documentary feature’. There are flow-on effects from this, with the choice of descriptor, and the reason behind it, informing the producer’s approach to the use of source material. Often the full creative possibilities of the audio medium are not explored in ‘documentary’ works, for concerns to do with documentary authenticity and journalistic credibility, despite the playful treatment of source material being a core characteristic of the feature form.

Importantly, while some radio scholars have turned to documentary film theory to search for language and concepts to help understand and describe the radio feature, the differences in forms and mediums mean such a comparison falls short when thinking about this key issue. For example, Australian producer and academic Eurydice Aroney proposed conceptualising the radio feature as “postdocumentary”, which might instead allow:

a modern reading of the functions of ‘documentary’ material in the invisible world of the aural imagination. In this acoustic space the radio producer can build up layers of sound and meaning, superimpose ‘real’ or documentary material and fictional elements on top of each other, weave them together in ways that are just not possible with visual images.<sup>5</sup>

However, a similar kind of playful treatment of source material is possible on the page. In documentary poetry, the creative use of interviews, court transcripts, redacted government files, news reports, found text etc. can be substantial or minor parts of the poem — threaded through, blended, any changes to the source material made visible by choice. Importantly, it is the intention to document (an event or social issue for example), or to say something about the documentary materials used, that gives this poetry genre its name. This similarity suggests an opportunity for comparative study and, with it, an entry into the vibrant critical culture and scholarly debates documentary poetry is fortunate to attract by virtue of being even a relatively small literary genre. In an artistic practice that literally

turns documents and other source material *into poetry*, how is this issue understood? Is it important that changes made to source material are indicated within the text or otherwise explained? Do fictional techniques sit comfortably in documentary works, or are there perceived limits to do with ethical representation/ authenticity/ journalistic credibility as with the radio feature? Is there a documentary framework in the way poets, critics and scholars think about the genre that could aid an understanding of the radio feature and its inherent artistic and journalistic tensions?

The intention is to contribute to scholarship on the radio feature form, in turn aiding the critical discussion of contemporary radio and podcast features and wider works, non-fiction storytelling and journalism series alike, which utilise conventions inherited from radio feature traditions. This would assist producers and audiences in navigating decisions to do with the playful treatment of source material, and hopefully encourage more adventurous works that explore the full creative possibilities of the audio medium in keeping with the radio feature's international histories.

## Chapter one — The radio feature form

The challenge in defining and understanding the radio feature in relation to documentary is exemplified by the core issue this thesis is concerned with: a radio feature can be documentary and a radio documentary can employ the playful treatment of source material. Adding confusion is personal preference as well as regional variation in how the terms ‘feature’ and ‘documentary’ are used; with different radio traditions in Australia, Canada, the United States, and across Europe also informing producers’ approaches. This is where the much understudied radio feature was sitting a decade ago: still forging an understanding of the form from its historical contexts and searching for a critical language to adequately explain what it can be. Presently, in amongst the countless and predominantly conversation-led podcasts, the industry boom has also fostered audiences for shows and episodes that can be considered crafted audio, including feature and feature-like non-fiction works. Many listeners among them are being introduced to what Australian academic and producer Virginia Madsen calls the ‘documentary imagination’:

From broadcast to podcast, new forms emerge yet draw on these traditions and roots. As these new ‘features’ become more audible *and visible*, audiences — the likes of which we have not experienced since radio’s first golden age — encounter this porthole onto reality fiction energized by an expanding auditory imagination.<sup>6</sup>

Yet, instead of additional attention, the feature barely gets a mention in contemporary scholarship on podcast storytelling.<sup>7</sup> At a time when crafted audio is increasingly made by independent producers and others working without the institutional support of the public service broadcasters and even community radio stations, are they, as Hilmes warned, ‘innovating in a vacuum’? For the critical and scholarly engagement necessary to help guide producers and aid audience

literacy of feature conventions in contemporary audio, we must pick up where the fledgling study of the radio feature began to be interrupted by podcasting in the search for a dedicated language or theoretical framework.

## Understanding the radio feature

It does not help the terminological confusion that ‘producer’, ‘feature’, even ‘editor’ and ‘editing’, have different meanings across the radio, online and television desks in the same newsroom, let alone in the parts of a public service broadcaster working on more crafted programs, and again for those not inside the building. Yet it is the radio producers and sound engineers in the editing booths of radio feature departments around the globe who developed and experimented with the form and whose influence extends into podcasting today. The radio feature is best understood through this history, i.e. the ‘European feature’, and by beginning with its most expansive definition.

The late Australian producer Tony Barrell, who made award-winning features during his career with ABC Radio National, illuminatingly sketched the complicated nature of the radio feature. Writing in his contribution to a how-to guide for making radio, first published in 2000, he explained his inclusive approach:

‘Feature’ is a more useful term than ‘documentary’, which is just one kind of feature. Long or short, a feature need not be non-fiction and it can be pure *journalism*... It can be a ‘slice of real life’, actuality, or an event that has no interviews, narration or mediation by a chair or presenter, just actual sound. It can be a carefully written historical, biographical, literary or philosophical rumination, meditation, exposition, performance, satire. It can be a fantasy. A feature can be noise and excitement. It can use the techniques of drama. It can tap memory and emotions. It can be poetic.<sup>8</sup>

In the late German producer Klaus Lindemann’s treatise on the European feature, “What is a Feature?”, the origin of the term is said to be a borrowing of the

English word from newspaper literary journalism. It is a crafted artistic and journalistic audio form, that includes reportage, the essay, poetic radio and more, that began to be developed at the BBC in the 1930s and 1940s. In the piece, Lindemann tracked the development of the feature in the German context after the second world war, crediting Peter Leonhard Braun, who later founded the International Features Conference, for pioneering experimental use of stereophonic sound and thereby giving full life to the radio feature. For Lindemann, the feature was importantly a non-fiction form: “the feature must convince the listener that what he hears is the truth”, that “the problems dealt with, the people involved are real, not fiction”, even as “the boundaries have long since become blurred”.<sup>9</sup>

Barrell described a similar responsibility that rests with the producer: ‘The program-maker constructs the logic, the means by which listeners move through an idea, a time, or a space.’<sup>10</sup> Significant here is how meaning is made in this aural medium. ‘Audio images can be arranged, heard, felt and understood in a non-literal, non-linear way.’<sup>11</sup> UK producer and *Falling Tree Productions* founding director Alan Hall writes that feature producers have the freedom ‘to apply the techniques of fiction to factual stories’<sup>12</sup>, and that radio ‘affects us physically, touching our ears and penetrating our bodies, leaving auditory images that resonate in our hearts and minds. As a medium, it’s both cerebral and emotional.’<sup>13</sup> For Kaye Mortley, the renowned producer of highly artistic and award-winning documentaries, this audio engagement is a fundamental part, because ‘radio is writing that disappears’<sup>14</sup>. For the Australian producer, who has lived and worked in Paris for decades, the evocative and ephemeral nature of the audio medium (formerly much more so than today), and what is still colloquially

called *writing with tape* — with speech and sound — are essential qualities of the feature form, even if, as outlined below, ‘feature’ is not the word she would use.

### **Naming the feature**

Firstly, a quick note on the use of language in this thesis. As Barrell’s writing makes clear, audio fiction and drama can be considered subsections of the radio feature. Yet, while radio fiction traditions have likely influenced the characteristics and conventions of the non-fiction feature<sup>15</sup>, fictional works are beyond the scope of this research. Therefore ‘radio feature’ is used here as a shorthand term, referring to the non-fiction feature form and inclusive of podcast and other online distribution.<sup>16</sup>

The main challenge in understanding the radio feature is that the term ‘has different meanings across and even within different continents’<sup>17</sup>. One aspect of this would have to be confusion over what the form can be, with Aroney favouring Madsen’s definition of “documentary-like pieces”<sup>18</sup>. Madsen explains that the term ‘feature’ was developed to describe the ‘new kind of radio reality-fiction’ being made at the BBC and at European public service broadcasters, and that this preceded the use of ‘radio documentary’ to describe the same kind of audio works.<sup>19</sup> Particularly in the United States.<sup>20</sup> The reach and influence of the BBC and the ‘European feature’ on local radio traditions in parts of Europe, and in Canada and Australia, can be connected with more common usage of ‘feature’ in these locations<sup>21</sup>, although Canada is also influenced by its neighbour. UK academic, producer and poet Seán Street explains that even ‘a poetic maker of radio’ would likely use the word ‘documentary’ in North America because, ‘the “feature” as a term is not used in the way it would be by a producer, say, from Britain’.<sup>22</sup> Complicating this is that the terms are also used ‘interchangeably’<sup>23</sup>, including in Australia<sup>24</sup>. This is the case in scholarship too, with researchers

favouring one of the terms in a non-mutually exclusive way<sup>25</sup>. It is important to note that with the feature developing in different international contexts, it was also developing in different languages. In the same way that McDowall's side project, *Radio Atlas*, which subtitles international features in dynamic text videos, is a much-needed resource for monolingual Anglophone producers, a similar knowledge gap exists for writing about the feature. With such little scholarship on the feature form, English-speaking researchers are also reliant on bilingual researchers to translate any seminal texts.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, this thesis research is heavily skewed to English language works and to what writing about the feature exists in English. This is an unfortunate limit.

Generally, when a distinction is made between 'documentary' and 'feature' it is 'by level of truth'<sup>27</sup>. This approach is: 'conceptualising documentaries as being closer to journalism and features nearer to sound art, although this is a simplified divide, as documentaries can include elements of art and features can provide analysis.'<sup>28</sup> This is a common approach in the Australian context too: 'Usually when a radio work is described only as a documentary it implies a more investigative, journalistic approach to the material, or that it simply records actual events with *little* dramatic or creative interpretation.'<sup>29</sup> Thinking through the different uses of the terms, Street also makes a case for distinguishing the 'documentary feature':

On one level the term 'documentary' implies something borne out of a formal news-based journalism rather than an impressionistic sound world which plays with facts rather than 'documenting' them. A documentary feature 'documents' the feature-maker's journey in coming to terms with what he or she is trying to do or say. So it is not a document of the reality — the subject — necessarily, it is a document of the maker as they are trying to find their way through it.<sup>30</sup>

What the above demonstrates is that competing notions of documentary are at the core of the difficulties in defining and understanding the radio feature form. With this, importantly, also affecting how audio works are thought about and made.

In the opening moments of Hall's BBC 4 production "The Ballad of the Radio Feature", we hear established radio producers reflecting on how they would describe themselves and their work. This was before the podcasting boom. Canadian Chris Brookes introduces himself: 'I'm a radio producer. I'm a documentary maker, that's a nicer word. I'm a feature maker — well, we don't say feature maker on this side of the pond.' Mortley uses a different term. '*Un documentariste* we say in French', and she makes 'radio documentaries, of a certain sort'. The late Piers Plowright explains his approach: 'I'm a British feature maker. Taking reality and not cheating with it, but turning it, or looking at it from another way.' Another UK producer, Mark Burman, his umms left in as he thinks, 'I guess for want of a better word I'm a feature maker'. When asked what might be a more fitting way to put it, he replies: 'I think it's the best word you can come up with.' And then: 'Flaneur.' These short responses further muddling the delineations above.

The title of Hall's feature appears to reference the tradition of radio ballads at the BBC, including eight programs made by producers Charles Parker, Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger between 1958 and 1964.<sup>31</sup> The first, "The Ballad of John Axon", drew on working-class folk music traditions, which producer Denis Mitchell had also been experimenting with at the BBC in the preceding years.<sup>32</sup> The use of newly portable audio equipment led to a 'revelation', Street writes, when the producers intending to collect interview material that would be primarily turned into a script and re-voiced by actors, realised these recordings "held an



authenticity of quite a different order from that attainable in a studio”.<sup>33</sup> These original recordings were edited together with ‘MacColl’s musical sung narrative’<sup>34</sup>. It ‘created a new form, in which sound montage, actuality and music told a story that flowed seamlessly in a poetic telling of a documentary subject’<sup>35</sup>. Interestingly, “Song of a Road”, the second ballad made in 1959, was deemed by its producers to be ‘less successful, falling between two stools, that of the conventional documentary and the more poetic form that had been created’ with the first<sup>36</sup>. Street quotes MacColl’s reflections: “We found ourselves asking questions about bridge-building, about running a concrete-batching plant, about prefabrication techniques. Worse, we found ourselves incorporating the answers in the programme itself.”<sup>37</sup> In his discussion of the last of the ballads, “The Travelling People” which aired in 1964, Street provides the transcript of an unedited interview for comparison with how this section of speech was cleaned up in the editing process. Street writes, ‘some will see a tension here’<sup>38</sup>, as did English teachers who Parker shared the transcripts with:

Many found the unedited version preferable, claiming that the raw actuality has more innate ‘drama’ in it, as the speaker strives and struggles for the right word, whereas the edited version simply uses the right word. Parker’s answer to this is significant and perhaps helps us to define the relationship between reality and non-reality — or rather documentary and feature, journalism and poetry — in his work, and by extension, much of the work that feature-makers since him has created: ‘I believe that what one is really doing when one handles recorded speech in this way, is what every artist has always done with his material, and I do see this as an artistic process; one is going through the actuality to reveal the reality of the situation.’<sup>39</sup>

That this documentary/authenticity/journalistic tension is present even in the uncontroversial editing of interviews — standard practice in radio — demonstrates the issues that could arise in more creative works. This is further complicated by the personal approaches of producers, and their own understandings of the feature and documentary. Reflecting on how his own

approach drastically changed, Brookes explained that when he started making radio “a documentary for me was the *real* sound of the *real* place and you’re *really* there”<sup>40</sup>. For him, this meant no inauthentic sound effects: “I thought this was absolute anathema — you can’t do that, it’s not *proper* for a documentary! Now I think differently; it *is* alright. It is about imagining a reality. It’s not about being in it really, it’s about it being in your mind.”<sup>41</sup>

Threaded through the above — both in defining the form and thinking about individual works — is an approach that conceptualises the radio feature in relation to a spectrum, with correlating responsibilities for where it is placed along the line. With fiction at one end, non-fiction at the other. Or art and journalism. Poetry and “documentary”. Imagination and reality. In the overlapping boundary space between fiction and non-fiction, according to Lindemann, sit fictional forms such as the documentary novel, as well as a great deal that could be classified as a radio feature. Indeed this blurry middle could itself be thought of as a smaller sliding scale between the categories, depending on the degree to which the playful treatment of source material is employed: this is the playground for the more artistic works. Aroney writes of Barrell describing his approach:

As he says, his style of work moves along the axis between acoustic entertainment and reportage; it is neither avant-garde sound composition, soundscape or ‘acoustic film’, nor straight reportage, but a hybrid that draws on and deploys the tricks and techniques of all the styles along this continuum.<sup>42</sup>

Storytelling has more recently been added into the mix. In her 2014 study, Australian academic and producer Mia Lindgren captured the influence of the North American storytelling style on young Australian producers who ‘described storytelling and radio journalism as existing on a spectrum without clear divisions marking one from the other.’<sup>43</sup>

One of the survey respondents described their production style as: 'Too emotive to be journalism, too removed to be biographic, not technical enough to be radio art. It's telling other people's stories.' They perceive journalism as a hard-edged discipline with a commitment to facts, whereas radio production has the capacity to be more creative, driven by storytelling rather than news.<sup>44</sup>

### **'Invisible' edits**

In describing the complex features Barrell made, 'hybrid' works where he would 'regularly combine "documentary" materials and devices with dramatic elements and blend them with separately recorded atmosphere and sound effects', Aroney stressed the challenge that comes with the creative possibilities of the audio medium:

The 'invisible' nature of the medium encourages experimentation of this sort: as opposed to film where the edits are visible, in radio there is no obvious separation between fiction and fact in a technical sense. As Tony Barrell says you can't 'see' where the edits are on the radio.<sup>45</sup>

Presenting at an *Audiocraft* conference session on sound design, "Fine Tune", Australian producer Jaye Kranz spoke about 'the power of suggestion' in audio. She played a short section of a feature where her father is speaking about his earliest memories in war-time Poland: "Sitting on Dad's back, watching men marching by in formation. My next memory would be in hiding." We can hear the army in those streets, but Kranz explains, 'that's actually just a recording — that sound that sounds like marching because we link it — is just an old record turning under the music.'<sup>46</sup> This is something Madsen has termed '*trompe l'oreille*'.

'Literally "trick of the ear". A word play derived from *trompe l'oeil*',<sup>47</sup> or optical illusion. With the capacity to play with sounds and perception being embraced for its creative potential in audio documentary, how are producers thinking about the responsibility they have for how material is shaped and presented?

Interestingly, Lindemann's framing of the challenge of convincing listeners of the veracity of the voices and scenes they are hearing is the reverse of how the issue is put to McDowall by the *Third Coast* audience member, as discussed in the introduction. This suggests different audience expectations from radio listeners who would have heard European features programmed alongside radio plays and other fictional forms, and those in today's podcast environment dominated by the North American style of podcast storytelling, with the host or producer guiding the predominantly linear narrative.<sup>48</sup> When pressed on what she would not do, McDowall was firm in that she 'wouldn't want to misrepresent anything' or 'present something as a real sound that's coming from a space, recorded at a time if it wasn't'<sup>49</sup>. The distinction being made here is between the use of evocative sound effects as an enhancement, and the accurate depiction of actuality ('scenes of life captured by a microphone'<sup>50</sup>). In this example, the building of a representational scene is audible in how the material has been presented, even if the individual edits are not. However this does require some literacy of feature conventions. With such little critical discussion of this issue, does it matter if producers are 'innovating in a vacuum' — if everyone has a different approach?

### **Ethical considerations**

There are two main concepts that recur when producers discuss ethical considerations in their works: the idea of 'poetic "truth"' and journalism principles. These are, however, understood in slightly different ways, with individual approaches again tied to how the feature is defined. For example, Street writes that for Canadian producer Brookes, his idea of 'a poetic reality' was 'fundamental to the understanding of the difference between the journalistic documentary and the more impressionistic feature'<sup>51</sup>. However, Street asserts,

even in more artistic features, ‘there is — has to be — a greater or lesser degree of journalism at work’<sup>52</sup>. Barrell, who also made features for Radio National’s flagship investigative program *Background Briefing*, rejected notions of objective truth, and a journalism category more broadly in defining his work:

It’s an art doing it, and the product of it is art in a way. It’s not journalism, it’s something else. It’s hybrid. I’ve said this before: I make hybrid programmes. There are serious interviews interspersed with all this stuff, but the point is that *you’re playing with the meanings of things*. In a respectful way if you like.<sup>53</sup>

While there are literary journalism links with this idea of poetic truth, the point here is that ‘playing with the meanings of things’ is not the same as misrepresenting events. ‘On ethical questions of *representation* — you are not trying to re-create the “truth”, but rather a fair version of your perception of it, and this requires creative imagination as well as exact recordings of what happened.’<sup>54</sup> Ethical intent is important, but so too is bringing the audience with you. Hall explains that local radio traditions play an important part in this: ‘For a British audience, the terms of the *contract* between documentary producer/reporter and listener are built on expectations rooted in long-established journalistic conventions.’<sup>55</sup> Writing in a review just as the “Serial”-fueled podcasting boom was taking off, Hall’s concern was with audiences hearing works made by producers from different feature-making traditions. Although impressed by German producer Jens Jarisch’s craft in his *Prix Italia* award winning “Children of Sodom and Gomorrah”, re-versioned into English by Australian producer Sharon Davis<sup>56</sup>, Hall felt ‘a suspicion of that same virtuosity, the storyteller’s seductive use of the tools of fiction to represent true stories’:

This is an elaborate, multi-layered production, originated for a German audience in that country’s rich feature making tradition, before being filtered through an Australian production sensibility. It can’t be assumed that the contract with the listener will be universally signed up to — that

conventions, whether predictably fulfilled or meaningfully confounded, will be understood, that the grammar of the piece will necessarily be shared by all.<sup>57</sup>

In a companion review, however, Madsen writes that this piece is ‘a story driven and bounded by realities, but propelled by a distinctive writing in sound, which draws on long journalistic, non-fiction and fictional forms, in addition to more specific radio feature making traditions’<sup>58</sup>. While this idea of the ‘contract with the listener’ could offer a unifying approach, as an extension of the producer ‘constructing the logic’ of a work, a guiding framework for critical engagement with this issue is essential. This is because for Hall, in the BBC-informed British tradition, fundamental journalism principles still apply in creative audio; an opinion not shared by Jarisch or Madsen. We can perhaps see here the effect of the different branches of European feature, that while ‘inspired directly by the British tradition’ broke from it ‘in separate parallel developments’.<sup>59</sup> Or it could be a difference in positioning of the feature, or even this feature, on the spectrums discussed above. Or a different understanding of journalism conventions in a medium ‘tending to apply the techniques of fiction to factual stories’, quite unlike journalism conventions in news reporting. Nonetheless, the contract with the listener, and what Jarisch was trying to achieve, was broken for Hall. With podcasting, the need for critical engagement with this issue, and a framework to guide decisions around the playful treatment of source material, has only grown.<sup>60</sup>

As explored in chapter two, documentary poetry offers such a framework in an expanded theory of documentary that draws on the double definition of the word: the *act of documenting*; and the *use of documents*. Thinking about documentary in this way collapses much of the terminological confusion and the reasons for the competing definitions outlined above. This allows the radio feature, in all of its creative iterations, to be more broadly conceptualised as a

documentary form. This predominantly North American poetry tradition, part of wider literary traditions there, might also be a contributing factor for why this approach sits more comfortably with North American radio producers. At the very least, a comparative study of documentary poetry offers a framework for thinking about the playful treatment of source material and the contract with the audience within creative audio.

## **Chapter two — Documentary poetry**

Documentary poetry is a wide-ranging poetry practice, encompassing poetry interested in documenting something, an issue or event for example, or which uses documentary source material within or in the shaping of the poem. Significant here, within these two overlapping strands, is the documentary intent of poets, as well as the use of official government and other state records in ways that work to highlight and subvert the violence and power represented — even in absence — by the document. This suggests that in the writing of this poetry, the authors are communicating something with consideration to documentary authenticity.

This thesis research is a scoping study to determine whether there is a framework in how documentary poets are thinking about this issue — and the playful treatment of source material more broadly — that could be applied to the radio feature. Documentary poems can be experimental, challenging ideas of poetry forms; they can utilise fictional, dramatic and imaginative devices. These poems are arguably forged in a similar boundary-crossing space to the radio feature. With changes made to source material similarly invisible on the page, how do poets signal to audiences their approach? How do audiences understand this issue? Critical engagement with these poems, and scholarship on the genre and its debates, offer useful insights into how such a genre is able to be understood as documentary.

### **The documentary poem**

Muriel Rukeyser's "The Book of the Dead" is regularly used as a defining example of the genre. Published in the United States in 1938, Rukeyser develops a narrative of events through a series of connected poems to document the silicosis deaths of hundreds of workers and this corporate manslaughter in the



construction of a hydroelectric plant tunnel in West Virginia. ‘If the men had worn masks, their use would have involved / time every hour to wash the sponge at mouth.’<sup>61</sup> It is a mix of on-the-ground reportage, a portrait of Gauley Bridge as a place in time and damning evidence found in official records. Rukeyser spoke with sick workers and the family members of those who had died. Their voices are in the poems: recounting the working conditions, the fight for medical attention and compensation, the final wishes of loved ones. There are transcript exchanges from congressional hearings and court cases, with doctors forced to defend the x-ray evidence and their expert opinion:

- Did you make an examination of those sets of lungs?
- I did.
- I wish you would tell the jury whether or not those lungs were silicotic.
- We object.
- Objection overruled.
- They were.<sup>62</sup>

Other found and collected text is reproduced and interspersed; a table with the company’s share price figures becomes part of the poem. In describing Rukeyser’s approach in a journal article in 1999, Shoshana Wechsler called “The Book of the Dead” a ‘hybrid work’ that ‘erases the boundaries between art and the document, lyric and epic, pen and camera, naming and heroising the exploited and forgotten in an extended and self-reflexive act of witness’<sup>63</sup>. Wechsler’s critical engagement with this work, six decades after it was published, was part of renewed interest in Rukeyser’s poems and their forms.

In tracing the development and understanding of documentary poetry as a distinct genre, US poet and critic Jill Magi points to these discussions of Rukeyser’s poems in literary studies journals in the late 1990s — as well as a dedicated documentary issue of literary journal *CHAIN*, and a university course

taught by US poet Susan Howe — as ‘some of the first instances of “documentary” and “poetry” used in the same breath’<sup>64</sup>. Here, an important note on terminology is needed to avoid confusion. While ‘documentary poetics’ is often used in relation to/ in substitution of ‘documentary poetry’ in this literary context, the term also has a separate usage in the discussion of film and other documentary forms which use poetic techniques. With this claim, however, Magi is referring to the idea that a poem could also be documentary.

The relatively recent establishment of documentary poetry as a recognised genre within American and Canadian literary traditions is a result of the lively definitional debates in the critical discussion of contemporary documentary poems, with scholars looking for its foundations in early examples of the genre, such as “The Book of the Dead”. The level of critical engagement afforded to the genre is evident in how Magi’s claim has been embraced as a fact-checking challenge. US poet and academic Michael Leong says that while he agrees this ‘interest in documentary in the 1990s prepared the way’ for the documentary poetry authored in the early 2000s, there are earlier references to poems as documentary<sup>65</sup>. A significant one was found by US academic Joseph Harrington: ‘The first poem in English to call itself “documentary” is probably Canadian Dorothy Livesay’s 1949 work “Call My People Home,” originally subtitled “A Documentary Poem for Radio”’ which was recorded and broadcast on the CBC. ‘The poem, based on transcripts of interviews with Japanese Canadians who were interned and dispossessed during World War II, uses the realism of voice to articulate a scathing indictment of the government’s treatment of its citizens.’<sup>66</sup> However, Leong found an earlier use of ‘documentary poetry’ in Edwin Honig’s critical discussion of Archibald MacLeish’s poetry<sup>67</sup>. Interestingly, in this 1940 article, Honig wrote: ‘It would seem vain to establish as absolute the essential

dichotomy between the concepts of document and history — just as it would seem vain for anybody to do the same between prose and poetry, between mysticism and religion, or between journalistic reporting and fiction.’<sup>68</sup> Honig includes a quote from the US poet, from a note to *Conquistador*, where MacLeish references his source material but also says: “I have however altered and transposed and invented incidents at my own pleasure.”<sup>69</sup> Writing in a new entry in the *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature*, “North American Documentary Poetry and Poetics”, Sarah Ehlers and Niki Herd suggest the credit should instead belong to the author of a review of Rukeyser’s *U.S. 1* — a poetry collection that included “The Book of the Dead”:

When 1930s critics set out to describe Rukeyser’s practice, they grappled with the supposed opposition between poetry and documentary in ways that revealed and unsettled assumptions about both. Indeed, the first time the term documentary and poetry were used in tandem in the Anglophone context may have been in Ben Maddow’s (writing under the pen name David Wolff) review of *U.S. 1*, “Document and Poetry.” Maddow grappled with the supposed opposition between poetry and documentary. He asserted that ‘Documents, skillfully cut, do have a poetic force,’ but he took issue with Rukeyser’s practice of ‘not marking off the documents clearly from the body of the poem’ and, as a result, converting ‘the poem itself’ to ‘factual uses.’<sup>70</sup>

Rukeyser’s own approach to this has become an often referred to aspect of the genre. In an endnote to “The Book of the Dead”, just before listing her source material, Rukeyser asserted: ‘Poetry can extend the document.’<sup>71</sup>

It is clear that many of the core tensions in defining and understanding the radio feature are similarly central in documentary poetry. So how is this genre understood as documentary? Firstly, this is the site of ongoing definitional debates about what the genre is and can be: how to demarcate it from conceptual poetry, poetry of witness etc.; how to think about the political intent in poems and the issue of ethical representation. Some of this can be seen in the

ways documentary poets (or rather, authors of works that can be considered documentary poetry) refer to themselves and what they do. Philip Metres outlines how poets, himself included, variously describe their work as ‘documentary poetry, investigative poetics, poetics of inquiry, research-based poetics, or social poetics — all overlapping practices, each with its own figuration of the poet: poet as alternative historian, detective, philosopher, radical text-worker, etc.’<sup>72</sup>

Harrington, who favours the portmanteau ‘docupoetry’, defined the genre in 2011 as poetry which ‘(1) contains quotations from or reproductions of documents or statements not produced by the poet and (2) relates historical narratives, whether macro or micro, human or natural’.<sup>73</sup> After critical engagement, he modified and qualified it five years later, in part to argue for a distinguishing of the genre in the conceptual vs. documentary poetry debate:

Unlike conceptual poetry, documentary poetry makes use of sources rather than simply reproducing them: it combines, paraphrases, and contextualizes them. Poet and critic Cole Swensen has added the category ‘research-based poetry’ to describe that which uses source material in a manner that is neither expository nor tendentious. Tony Trigilio prefers the broader term ‘historical poetry,’ which could include poetry that relates historical events without directly citing documents. These are important and welcome modifications of my earlier definition.<sup>74</sup>

These are all points of contention. The issue here is to do with different understandings of ‘documentary’. As Leong argues, this is a word which has two distinct dictionary definitions; it ‘encompasses competing meanings that may or may not intersect’ relating to both the use of documents and the act of documenting.<sup>75</sup>

Part of the forging of documentary poetry as a distinct genre has been the categorisation of works as key examples, a challenging exercise considering the definitional debates. US poet and scholar Jena Osman included William Carlos Williams’ *Paterson* (1948), Charles Reznikoff’s *Testimony* (1978) and Ernesto

Cardenal's *Zero Hour* (1980) on her year-2000 list of documentary poems<sup>76</sup>.

Writing in 2007, Metres selected examples of documentary poems to highlight the use of collage as a technique and explore the idea of news contained within poems.<sup>77</sup> Somewhat confusingly, Bob Dylan's 1964 song drawn from news reports, "The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll", is included. It is emotive storytelling, a simple retelling of events to frame and spotlight the racism in the murder and the court impunity that resulted. Leaving aside the issue of this song being categorised as a documentary poem, this example is useful in understanding the latter distinctions attempted in the modifications to Harrington's definition. Interestingly too, for a comparison with the radio feature, Metres is suggesting here as he says elsewhere: 'One could begin with balladeers as a starting point for a list of documentary poetry'.<sup>78</sup> But can a simple retelling of events, without any original reporting for example, be documentary? What would make works, like or unlike the Dylan example, an act of documenting even when source material is not directly used in the work? Related ideas are discussed below in the section on documentary poetry and poetry of witness.

Also included in Metres' examples is an often discussed work by C.D. Wright. In *One Big Self: An Investigation*, the late US poet uses as source material conversations and observations from visits to three prisons in Louisiana. This project was in collaboration with photographer Deborah Luster, who took striking, stylised portraiture shots of inmates. In her poems, 'Wright juggles these voices and images in ways that create "one big self" that contains author, reader, and prisoner.'<sup>79</sup> Wright's approach, as Magi writes, is to 'treat language collected as a large collage, removing quotation marks'<sup>80</sup>, and 'moving from found text to author commentary, submitting both kinds of texts to fragmentation and inserting white space at will'<sup>81</sup>. Significantly, this is not unlike Rukeyser's "The Book of the Dead",

where there is ‘frequent presentation of found material without markers to distinguish it from her own language’.<sup>82</sup>

Osman’s year-2000 list was updated by Harrington in 2011. Harrington chose with his list to showcase ‘writing in various experimental/innovative/ investigate forms’<sup>83</sup> and included, again just to name a few, M. NourbSe Philip’s *Zong!* (2008), Craig Santos Perez’s *from unincorporated territory* series<sup>84</sup>, and Mark Nowak’s *Shut Up Shut Down* (2004) and *Coal Mountain Elementary* (2009).

The selected works:

...go out of their way to call attention to what is included and what is excluded — what is known and what can’t be known — to the seams, gaps, and collapses between and within what the poet has discovered in the record and the poet’s response to those discoveries.<sup>85</sup>

This cohort also marks a shift in approaches over time. ‘Twenty-first-century documentary poetry’, Harrington writes, ‘implicitly questions the status of both poetry and documents’<sup>86</sup>.

Donovan Kūhiō Colleps, in conversation with Santos Perez in an essay titled “Two Pacific Decolonial Doco-Poets Walk into a Tiki Bar”, says he was introduced to documentary poetry as a genre in his graduate creative writing class.

When asked what I thought ‘documentary poetics’ was in that class, I remember saying something like, ‘It’s an evolving dance between documents and poetic imagery that turns a subject inside-out.’ But even now, I feel that it is not a good enough definition.<sup>87</sup>

Metres quotes Kūhiō Colleps, from this conversation with Santos Perez, saying “documentary poetics has ways of inverting the colonial/imperial power of documents”<sup>88</sup>. Santos Perez explains that for him, the documentary poetry ‘movement’:

encouraged me to conceive of and activate documents in different ways, as well as to explore a plenitude of archives (real and symbolic, written and oral) in order to weave political, historical, religious and cultural contexts

into my poetry. Sometimes these documents are visible foregrounds and sometimes they are interwoven palimpsests.<sup>89</sup>

Documentary poetry texts in this category are discussed in chapter three: this in part to think about how ‘the work of poetry’ — as Australian poet and academic Astrid Lorange calls it<sup>90</sup> — that these texts are doing can be understood as documentary. First, related questions to do with how this genre is thought about in relation to documentary theory, and how documentary authenticity can be retained with the playful treatment of source material, must be explored.

### **As documentary**

Some of the strongest arguments for documentary poetry being understood as documentary are outlined by Ehlers and Herd in their *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature* entry, which looks to poetry’s inclusion within early documentary theory, as well as in Leong’s *Contested Records*, with his more separate focus on the two meanings of the word. Others, too, arguably begin with the assumption documentary poetry is a documentary genre. There is the tracking of parallel developments of documentary forms, and the workshopping of whether documentary film theory, namely Bill Nichols’ modes of documentary, could aid the critical discussion of approaches used and ethical representation in texts. Magi’s focus on the way the book form allows for the playful treatment of source material to be both signalled and experienced is particularly helpful to this thesis research, with Magi herself suggesting documentary poetry offers valuable contributions for documentary theory more broadly.

As Ehlers and Herd explain, part of the issue is that contemporary notions of documentary are drawn heavily from film theory and discourse, and not reflective of wider documentary traditions. They argue ‘the assumption that Depression documentary poetics is primarily modeled on photography and film is perhaps

more symptomatic of our own era's reductive understandings of 1930s literary culture'.<sup>91</sup> 'Depression-era documentary writers experimented with a range of documentary modes and genres — including ethnography, oral history, folklore, and journalism — that developed in an era marked by the urgent need to represent social and political realities.' The term documentary was 'first used in an arts context'<sup>92</sup> in John Grierson's review of the 1926 film *Moana* (Robert Flaherty's dramatised depiction of island life in Samoa) and developed in his subsequent writings<sup>93</sup>. In arguing that this originating definition of the word and genre includes significant references to poetry, Ehlers and Herd say this aspect has not been fully engaged with even by scholars of documentary poetry.

Grierson's initial definition of documentary, though based in film, contains a definition of poetry that introduces what have proven to be ongoing tensions between documentary and poetry as ideas about art and as modes of representation. Rarely attended to in writings about documentary poetics, Grierson's frequent evocation of the poetic points to how a particular ideal of poetry has been codified in relation to — and as an integral part of — documentary.<sup>94</sup>

This extends to the use of documentary source material. In Grierson's essay, "First Principles of Documentary", he

made a claim for documentary as a creative form distinguished by its use of 'natural material' and asserted that 'the choice of the documentary medium is as gravely distinct a choice as the choice of poetry instead of fiction.' Grierson aligned 'choosing poetry' with 'choosing documentary' as he distinguished documentary filmmaking from the constructed storytelling practices of studio filmmaking. What is more, across his writings on documentary film, Grierson referenced poetry and the poetic as a space of emotion, creativity, and contemplation that transforms documentary filmmaking into an art form.<sup>95</sup>

Magi drew on documentary film theory in an attempt to move discussion of documentary poetry into the 'complex and generative space that considers representation — "what kind" of reality, and whose reality, is being represented',



to have the kind of discussions she was seeing in film scholarship and alongside “the documentary turn” in visual art<sup>96</sup>. She models analysis of documentary poetry texts using Nichols’ four documentary modes from 1992: expository, observational, interactive and reflexive. Wright’s *One Big Self* is studied as an example of expository mode; Nowak’s *Coal Mountain Elementary* and Philip’s *Zong!* are examples of the reflexive mode, even as Magi considers the ways in which all documentary poetry could be considered reflexive.<sup>97</sup>

With reference to these same documentary modes, Harrington traces developments in Canadian and American poetry. He writes, that for twentieth-century poets:

documentary poetry contains fact, those facts are hard, and poets should use them to fight oppression and neglect. By the twenty-first century, however, both documentary film and poetry had changed substantially. Cinema verité and oral histories, examples of what Nichols terms ‘observational’ and ‘interactive’ modes, respectively, became more common from the 1960s onward. Moreover, the late twentieth century saw the growth of the ‘reflexive’ documentary, in which ‘the focus of the text slides from the realm of historical reference to the properties of the text itself’. ...This reflexive tendency in documentary film in the late twentieth century can be seen in documentary poetry in the twenty-first. It is not surprising that the 1930s documentary poem that has received the lion’s share of critical attention in the last fifteen years, Muriel Rukeyser’s “Book of the Dead,” is also one of the most reflexive. Rukeyser’s refusal to set forth a linear, unambiguous argument, and her critique of the documentary gaze have become hallmarks of twenty-first-century North American documentary poetics.<sup>98</sup>

Magi, however, concludes her exercise suggesting that instead of drawing on film theory, ‘the information about making art flows in the other direction:

documentary discourse can learn from “the documentary poem.”’<sup>99</sup> For Magi, the book form offers its own mode of engagement with the reader and, with this, opportunities to make visible liberties taken with the material. She writes:

‘Reading poetry is a participatory practice of perception involving breath, pause,

white space, music, fragment, excess, even illegibility.’<sup>100</sup> Documentary poetry texts ‘often come with an extensive notes section’, and the reader’s ability to be able to ‘back up, reread, annotate and research at will... is not politically insignificant for non-fiction representation’<sup>101</sup>. For example, in reading Philip’s *Zong!*, which attempts to document a 1781 British slave ship massacre, a massacre committed for financial compensation, by using the judgement in the insurance court case as a ‘word store’<sup>102</sup> and a constraint, ‘we may always flip back to the source document, to the author’s essay on process and theory, to a fictional ship manifest, to a roster of languages and words’.<sup>103</sup>

Philip, interestingly, was one of the poets included in the 1995 documentary issue of *CHAIN*. Contributors were asked to answer questions about how they conceive of documentary and its forms, and these responses accompany the works. Philip’s piece, “Ignoring Poetry (a work in progress)”, opens with a section of a cover letter she sent with her manuscripts to publisher after publisher, which is then fashioned into a poem: ‘...how does the poet work / a language / engorged / on her many / many silences / Carefully’<sup>104</sup>. Philip briefly defined documentary as a ‘work that documents or attempts to record “facts” or the “truth” both of which are/can be problematic’<sup>105</sup>. This is particularly so when, such as in the case of *Zong!*, the stories being documented — the people who made up the human cargo on board that slave ship — are missing from the record and unknown.

Documentary poems, Metres says, are ‘the place of meeting between materiality and the imagination’, but in doing so they ‘constantly court their own collapse’<sup>106</sup>. Harrington argues ‘the longstanding generic dichotomy between poetry and documentary is based not only on a normative conception of poetry, but also on a rather static and reductive notion of documentary’<sup>107</sup>. He sees the

capacity for a poet's 'simultaneous belief in and mistrust of referentiality' to be contained in contemporary documentary poetry, and he terms this its 'creative friction'<sup>108</sup>. Perhaps, then, it is useful to think about the documentary intent in these works. Additionally, Leong's double definition of documentary offers an approach where these artistic and journalistic tensions are less central in a consideration of these poems as documentary. The next two sections explore the idea of documentary intent in relation to the act of documenting and use of documents (as well as poetry of witness and conceptual poetry respectively).

### **Act of documenting**

While poems such as Rukeyser's "The Book of the Dead" incorporate both the use of documents and on-the-ground reportage (which provide the foundation for her telling of events as she saw them), how can we understand the documentary intent in poems without a heavy reliance on source material? If the use of documents, interviews and first-person observation provides additional documentary weight or authenticity to the poems, how would a poetic retelling of events based solely on information publicly available be able to be considered documentary? Is first-person observation necessary, or a personal connection to the events? Discussion of whether poetry of witness is an overlapping or separate practice to documentary poetry provides insights into key questions to do with documentary evidence, ethical representation and the contract with the audience.

American poet Natalie Scenters-Zapico who describes herself as a 'fronteriza', living in El Paso, Texas just over the border from Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, documents appropriative attempts to highlight the area's femicides in art and her own experience of having loved ones go missing in her short seven-stanza poem "Placement". '2. / A book of poems about the women found in pieces. The line breaks, dis- / jointed like severed limbs across the page. I ask the

author if she's ever been / to Juárez. She says, *It's terrible what's happening*. She doesn't face me.'<sup>109</sup> Writing about this poem in her discussion of documentary poetry and poetry of witness, US poet and academic Sandra Beasley focuses on the power contained in the poem's ending: 'Only in the final section does the speaker activate her own firsthand grief, over a loss that may or may not be related to this larger crime wave'.<sup>110</sup> Beasley continues: "A poem as trace, a poem as evidence," Carolyn Forché once wrote. *A poem as flint*, I would add. *A poem as tinder*.<sup>111</sup> Forché edited a foundational anthology on poetry of witness that was published in 1993, and Beasley writes: 'the one thing every poet in *Against Forgetting* had in common was participatory authenticity. The poet had been *there*, wherever *there* was.' But, she asks, 'in the internet age, what does *there* mean anyway?'<sup>112</sup>

Langston Hughes's 1925 six-line poem "Johannesburg mines", Ehlers and Herd write, 'deals with the enormity of a single fact', as the US poet 'asks "what kind of poem" can be made out of the facts of colonization, apartheid, and labor struggle'<sup>113</sup>.

In the Johannesburg mines  
There are 240,000 natives working.

What kind of poem  
Would you make out of that?

240,000 natives working  
In the Johannesburg mines.<sup>114</sup>

Ehlers and Herd suggest the poem 'bears an important relation to modernist documentary long poems' which contained 'a felt pressure to accumulate information into a narrative — and the seeming impossibility of doing so'.<sup>115</sup> While US poet and Pulitzer prize-winning author Anne Boyer says the political intent is clear: 'The poem's question is the poem's own answer, which is that things must not continue like this, and yet they do.'<sup>116</sup> With this poem, Hughes has 'given the

world an enduring form, one with which each of us can write our own version of the poem, substituting for the first and third couplet other brutal facts of the world'.<sup>117</sup>

In *The News from Poems*, editors Jeffrey Gray and Ann Keniston say contemporary 'engaged poetry' seems to have shifted away from poetry of witness — 'a term associated with much Latin American poetry from the postwar period' as well as Forché's 1993 anthology. Instead, 'there seemed to be more distance between event and speaking subject, and in fact the notions of both subjectivity and representation were complicated'.<sup>118</sup> One of the criteria Forché used for the work included in her anthology was 'experience of extremity' such as war: 'poets must have personally endured such conditions'.<sup>119</sup> With poetry of witness, 'its mode is evidentiary rather than representational', but what Forché means by this is that first-hand experience of events leave their mark in the language of the poem. Even if the poem is not in reference to those events, the language is 'itself material evidence of that-which-occurred'.<sup>120</sup> The witnessing then, Beasley suggests, 'occurs not in the poet, but in the reader'.<sup>121</sup> US poet and academic Michael Dowdy explains that in contrast to this "transitive energy", 'which renders singular experiences of extremity, documentaries present exemplary cases to allegorize general historical conditions.'<sup>122</sup> Although Beasley suggests: 'Many of this past decade's most interesting collections cycle between the two impulses.'<sup>123</sup>

In an essay of art criticism titled "Against Witness", US poet and academic Cathy Park Hong argues: 'In an era when eyewitness testimonies, photos, and videos are tweeted seconds after a catastrophe, poetry's power to bear witness now feels outdated and inherently passive.' This documentary evidence, even when it is entered as *evidence*, does not alter the systemic violence and murder

of Black men on the streets by police. In discussing Colombian artist Doris Salcedo's installation works, Park Hong positions the artist's approach in contrast to much poetry of witness. Salcedo considers herself a "secondary witness", with her art a response to stories she sought out about a plantation massacre in Honduras and forced disappearances in Colombia. The artist 'refuses any attempt at verisimilitude because what is absent in her work is the body in pain'. Beasley, as well as Gray and Keniston, focus on the questions Park Hong asks about who can witness and who should witness in this piece.

The proximity between you and me is infinite. (And what kind of proximity do I need to write as a witness? Should I have experienced the event myself? If I watched the video, can I write about it? Do I need to be related to the victim? And what do you mean by relation?)<sup>124</sup>

While issues to do with ethical representation, and who should tell which stories, are key considerations, Park Hong's frustrations suggest it might be more constructive to think about the issue that is being discussed in the poem and what is being communicated about it. Perhaps too, it is helpful to think about the documentary intent in poems as political intent.

Included in *Metres*' selected examples of documentary poems is Forché's "The Colonel". The 1982 poem, 'written in prose, offers itself as a documentary retelling' of events from time spent in El Salvador, one of the places Forché had been working as a 'human rights activist'<sup>125</sup>.

It ominously begins: 'What you have heard is true.' Yet this poem is interesting precisely because it contains both a documentary veneer and plenty of hints of literary artifice. In other words, it suggests the highly fictive nature of the life the colonel leads behind his walled compound, as well as the literary aspect of all documentary poetry.<sup>126</sup>

But what is the audience expectation for authenticity and journalistic credibility in poems that are a representational telling of events or which use facts? Is it enough for readers to understand the genre conventions used? Do they need to

know, or be able to research, that Forché had likely attended a dinner with a military figure in *similar* circumstances? Writing elsewhere, Metres suggests some level of documentary authenticity in the representation of events is important; documentary poems can be a form of testimonial even if they ‘will not “stand up” in a court of law’.<sup>127</sup> Documentary poems, ‘ride the ambiguity between a nothing and a something that can be used’.<sup>128</sup>

In discussing the ‘participatory authenticity’ that Forché expected, Beasley writes: ‘Documentation, sourced from existing material or created en route to the poem, now provides an alternative foundation for authenticity.’<sup>129</sup> However this raises a separate set of questions, especially when facts are used and news events are covered in poems. Beasley highlights Patricia Smith’s “Blood Dazzler”, a collection of poems about Hurricane Katrina and her use of source material:

Smith appropriates Federal Emergency Management Agency emails in “What to Tweak.” Yet she resists the available detail of victims’ names for the polyphonic “34,” which depicts those who died at St. Rita’s Nursing Home. She does not incorporate information from later news reports that corrected the body count to 35, and clarified the extent to which the drowned were abandoned by nursing home owners. Why? Once one engages ‘documentarian poetics,’ is one ethically obliged to use available documents?

These questions highlight key issues to do with audience expectations and documentary authenticity, although — especially with “34” — they are perhaps more related to the idea of journalistic credibility in a poem where there would be none: the poem appears to be projecting imagined final thoughts onto the victims. The use of emails in “What to Tweak” would separately allow for a categorisation of this poem as documentary, and Smith includes above her poem clear information about the source material and how it has been used: *‘Italicized excerpts are from an Aug. 31, 2005 e-mail from Marty Bahamonde to his boss Michael Brown, head of the Federal Emergency Management Agency.*

*Bahamonde was one of the only FEMA employees in New Orleans at the time.*<sup>130</sup>

Bahamonde's increasingly desperate email exchanges, as the infamous and disastrous situation at the Superdome developed, became documentary evidence for the subsequent investigations and are still widely available. Incorporating the lines into her poem, Smith considered documentary authenticity a key concern. This is even while taking other liberties in the collection to evoke a sense of the events and impacts as they unfolded.

While related, there are also larger questions central to an understanding of documentary poems as documentary. If the use of documents and other source material in poems helps to provide documentary authenticity, does it matter how this documentary material is used? Do changes made to these sources in the crafting of the poem need to be signalled, such as in accompanying notes or in the formatting of the text itself, or otherwise communicated to the audience? Or is it enough that there is a general expectation for the use of poetic licence, especially when the documentary intent (the political intent) is clear in the poem? For contemporary documentary poetry, audiences likely have the means to research the issue themselves: to find online the original sources or information that aids an understanding of what the poet has done with the texts. Is this depiction-in-relation to the original source material an essential part of documentary poetry being understood as documentary? The focus on the use of documentary source material offers a way to simplify these issues relating to representation, authenticity and audience expectations for how material has been shaped, aiding an understanding of the poetry genre as documentary more broadly.



## Use of documents

The use of documents in documentary poetry can be separated into two categories. The first, where the source material gives documentary weight to the poems; the second, where the documentary intent is related to the documents themselves. Harrington writes: 'The relationship between historical documents and poetic imagination is sometimes difficult and fraught.'<sup>131</sup> This issue is however helpfully illuminated in the conceptual vs. documentary poetry debate which discusses key concerns as well as clarifies how the double definition of the word 'documentary' is understood in this poetry genre.

It is important, especially in the consideration of a documentary framework for the radio feature form, to spell out that interviews and representations of conversations had are also documentary source material. While the complicating factor of invisible edits varies between the two mediums<sup>132</sup>, the use of speech and how it is indicated in documentary poetry is significant. For example, in discussing Wright's *One Big Self*, Metres writes: 'The language of the prisoners is not embodied but rather floats, hauntingly, among the language of everything and everyone else'.<sup>133</sup> And yet this poem has and retains both documentary weight and authenticity.

Beasley writes, the 'documentary imperative is to be suspicious of the poet's interference' and so 'documentary poetics explicitly welcomes undigested texts'.<sup>134</sup> However, Harrington's modification to his definition of the genre, mentioned above, was intended to clearly separate out conceptual poetry. This is a demarcation Leong argues against since:

separating 'making use of' and 'reproducing' conflates formal technique with poetry's potential cultural functions. In other words, Harrington fails to acknowledge the selection and re-presentation of source material as transformative activities of praxis and poesis. Reproducing is always already recontextualisation.<sup>135</sup>

The 2012 edition of *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* contains new and separate entries for documentary poetics and conceptual poetry. With reference to US poet Kenneth Goldsmith, Lori Emerson's entry explains:

conceptualism elevates the concept behind a work and the labor required to produce it over its semantic meaning or emotional content. Goldsmith has explicitly called for an 'uncreative writing' in which 'all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the text'.<sup>136</sup>

Leong argues that the two entries have been added to reflect that they are 'emergent categories of critical import' and still developing, as outlined in the preface to the encyclopedia; 'it is no surprise that they are contested and remain the source of considerable misunderstanding'.<sup>137</sup> He argues that while there is value in poets selecting between the labels 'documentary', 'conceptual', and even 'investigative', these terms 'connote discrete sets of often overlapping techniques'.<sup>138</sup>

Goldsmith's much discussed and controversial autopsy report poem, "The Body of Michael Brown", does not exist in a publicly accessible form, with the video of the performance of the poem at a conference in 2015 taken down following the backlash. In *Defacing the Monument*, Susan Briante labels Goldsmith's poetry, along with that of US poet Vanessa Place — who has, for example, turned documents from a child sexual assault court case into a poem<sup>139</sup> — as 'vulture work'. She criticises the use of:

documentary evidence of violence perpetrated on brown and black bodies, without context or consideration of the source. When Kenneth Goldsmith read the autopsy of Michael Brown in front of an audience at Brown University, he treated the document with a kind of impunity, with the logic of a colonizer. Perhaps if he had sought permission of the [sic] Michael Brown's family and chose to read the autopsy in front of the Ferguson city council or the US Congress, the act would have had a different resonance. But he did not.<sup>140</sup>

Metres argues that this poem highlights a key distinction from documentary poetry: 'In contrast to certain tendencies in the conceptual poetry movement, which parallels and often overlaps investigative poetics, most practitioners of documentary and investigative poetics advocate for an ethical treatment of texts that carry the traces of lost or othered voices.' Writing about Goldsmith's earlier work, and while critical of approaches taken by Place on an ethical level, Magi is 'not convinced of the critical value in importing the term "conceptual" from the visual arts into writing and poetry'<sup>141</sup>. Despite both poets calling themselves "conceptual writers", Magi uses their poems as examples of 'observational' documentary. Magi's intention in using Nichols' modes as a framework was to encourage deeper consideration of the 'ethical challenges' to do with non-fiction representation in documentary poems.<sup>142</sup> She argued, 'a poem engaging non-fiction reality, no matter what its approach or style, will always pivot on an ethics; ethics may be explicit or implied, intended or not.'

In Nowak's *Coal Mountain Elementary*, there is no playful treatment of source material, instead sections are selected and interspersed 'in a ping-pong structure'<sup>143</sup>. 'Without a single "original" word'<sup>144</sup>, Dowdy writes:

Nowak uses American Coal Foundation lesson plans for school children, newspaper articles about Chinese mining disasters, and 'verbatim excerpts from over 6,300 pages of testimony transcripts housed at the West Virginia Office of Miners' Health and Safety' about the disaster that killed twelve miners on January 2, 2006, in Sago, West Virginia.<sup>145</sup>

There are also images of Chinese miners taken by British photographer Ian Teh, and US mining landscape shots by Nowak. While the poet advocates a progressive 'social poetics' in his practice<sup>146</sup>, Magi is critical of the effect of the representation of Chinese miners in comparison with the US miners, such as the inclusion/absence of bodies in the respective images.

Another difference is in voice: the West Virginia miners are known through their court testimonies and the Chinese workers' texts are known from news stories about them. This form of difference that corresponds with the race of each subject is not addressed or pointed out as problematic in the text itself.<sup>147</sup>

She considers the book to be 'documentary because Nowak is obviously making an argument about the dangers of multi-national corporate interests trumping miners' interests and safety'<sup>148</sup>. Magi intertwines political intent and documentary intent here, not unlike how others understand Rukeyser's idea that 'poetry can extend the document'. With "The Book of the Dead", Briante writes, Rukeyser wanted to add into the evidentiary record the profits the company made in their decisions not to protect workers, and to demonstrate this was not an exception but systemic: 'she suggests that the poem can account for a document's limits as well as its elisions and erasures'.<sup>149</sup> This political intent is reflected in the Princeton and Oxford encyclopedia entries on documentary poetry mentioned above.

Leong offers a definition of the genre that allows even the most playful treatment of source material to be comfortably considered documentary. He is interested in how the document is used in poetry, and develops an argument around the idea of 'documental', a portmanteau of document and monumental. With this term, Leong is 'emphasising poems that cite, quote, or appropriate "documents," those objects and artifacts stored in offices and archives, on disks and in databases'<sup>150</sup> as a way to connect documentary and conceptual poetry. However, due to the double definition of the word documentary, this type of poetry can also be considered:

a subset of 'documentary' — if we more broadly define documentary as both 'consisting in documents' and 'factual, realistic' — in that it distinguishes between ethnographic poetry based on first-person witnessing and poetry that largely derives from extant documentation.<sup>151</sup>

Or, between the act of documenting and the use of documents.

The political/documentary intent in this type of documentary poetry is significant, in part because it is related to the documents being reworked in the poems. For example, Philip's *Zong!*, Solmaz Sharif's *Look* (2016) and Layli Long Soldier's *Whereas* (2017), 'appropriate language from the legal decision *Gregson v. Gilbert* (1781), the US Department of Defense's *Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (2007), and the "Congressional Resolution of Apology to Native Americans" (2009), respectively'. In doing so, Dowdy argues, these poets: 'raid official archives, re-citing their imperial and empirical taxonomies, and locating the rhetorical thrust of documentary techniques in the reappropriation of languages plundered by capital and the state.'<sup>152</sup> Contemporary documentary poems, including Sharif's *Look*, are examined in chapter three to understand how the documentary intent guides the playful use of source material. Have any changes to source material been signalled to the audience or otherwise communicated? Or is this more generally understood as poetry convention, with the expectation that creative liberties have been taken? How are critics thinking about these issues? This focus on the similar playful treatment of source material in documentary poetry is in search of a framework that will aid critical discussion of relating issues in radio and podcast works.

### Chapter three — Documentary criticism

This chapter focuses on how poets, critics and audiences think about the playful treatment of source material in contemporary documentary poems. In these case study poems, the documentary intent is not only tied to the documents being used but, through this, the changes made to these documents are an essential part of these poems being documentary. How then are considerations for documentary authenticity handled, and how is the documentary weight of these poems retained? The rich critical discourse and scholarly attention provided to documentary poetry is explored here in relation to these case study texts. How do these poems ‘extend the document’, what is the documentary ‘work’ that they do, and how is it that ‘documentary discourse can learn’ from these poems? This is in search for a more tangible documentary framework informed by the ideas discussed in the preceding chapter; one that could aid an understanding of the ways in which the playful treatment of source material is able to be comfortably understood as documentary, both in poetry and in audio.

#### Amelia Dale’s *Constitution*

In her scholarship on contemporary poetry that uses legal and historical documents as source material, Lorange is asking: ‘how can poetry offer a model for reading that can be mobilised elsewhere in order to study the performativity, contingency, and ambiguity of language in places where we might ordinarily (and erroneously) imagine discourse to be more fixed’.<sup>153</sup> She reads Australian poet Amelia Dale’s *Constitution* as belonging to a category of documentary poetry that includes *Zong!*, *Whereas*, and Chilean poet Carlos Soto-Román’s *Chile Project: [Re-Classified]* (2013), which further erases highly redacted intelligence files on

American intervention in Chile in the 1970s. These poems ‘work both from and against their source materials’<sup>154</sup>.

In *Constitution*, Dale guts the language of the Australian constitution, re-inserting transcript quotes of then-prime minister Malcolm Turnbull’s appearances on ABC current affairs program 7.30 — capturing the moments when he is off-message and trying to get back on message — to produce the book-length reproduction of the governing text with all of its numbers, sub-headings, legal tables and footnotes in place.

**88. Now I’m sure**

They didn’t have my best interests at heart.

**89. But the problem is the consequence of that**

Was to essentially represent a united cohesive government:

- (i) and that is why I pushed back;
- (ii) because it was a complete and utter falsehood:
  - (a) and had to be stopped in its tracks. Well I wouldn’t say that was a promise Sarah. That was certainly an expectation;
  - (b) It is very far... It is very — it’s not a pledge. It was a forecast. It is very far advanced and it’s going very well and the discussions are proceeding very well;
- (iii) but what is — what’s really exciting is that, no I don’t — well, I — no I don’t think it will. We’ve, we’ve, we’ve been — we’ve factored things in pretty carefully.<sup>155</sup>

The arrangement of Turnbull’s speech is without overt reference to the content of the sections in the original text<sup>156</sup>, with Dale prioritising the structure of the document; she treats it as a whole for the power it enacts, highlighting its artifice. Lorange writes: ‘We can read every half- or abandoned sentence, every paradox and back-pedal, every euphemism and mixed metaphor as the repressed remainders of settler sovereignty and its insistent performance of naturalness.’<sup>157</sup> The questions put to Turnbull have been edited out; the context of the day removed. The sections of slightly edited but verbatim text run into each other. ‘It

is unclear where the jumps and joins are in Dale's editing, which means that from one fragment to another there is an indeterminate relation of space, time, and subject position, producing a Turnbull perpetually scrambling to find his syntax.<sup>158</sup> Lorange argues that Turnbull's speech can be seen as an example of the 'constant and reiterative performances in the settler colony' required to maintain its legitimacy<sup>159</sup>. This performance is needed because the colonial state was built on legal fictions.<sup>160</sup> The political intent of *Constitution* is a significant part of understanding the text as documentary, along with its use of documents as source material and considerations for documentary authenticity. Lorange is however also thinking about the language work that poetry can do more broadly. This is not unlike Harrington who writes, documentary poems 'are always oriented towards the outside': 'What *use* can you make of it?'.<sup>161</sup>

### **Alison Whittaker's "exhibit tab"**

Lorange discusses the 'work of poetry' in reference to Gomeri poet Alison Whittaker's "exhibit tab", included in her collection *Blakwork* (2018). It is one of three poems in *Blakwork* that use legal documents as their respective source material: the judgement in landmark Stolen Generations court case *Trevorrow v South Australia* (2007); the 1992 High Court Mabo decision that overturned the concept of *terra nullius* (that the continent was uninhabited at the time of British colonisation), and which led to Native Title legislation in place of land rights; and the source text for this poem, the coronial findings from the inquest into the death of Ms Dhu in 2014. Ms Dhu, a 22-year-old Yamatji woman, was arrested for cumulative and accumulating unpaid fines, and died in WA police custody while being held for four days to cancel the debt.<sup>162</sup> Police and hospital staff repeatedly dismissed her pleas for medical attention as her health deteriorated from septicaemia; police dehumanised her, manhandled her, suggested she was faking



it, or that she might be experiencing drug withdrawals, as they fatally denied and delayed necessary treatment. WA State Coroner Ros Fogliani described this as ‘inhumane treatment’ in her report<sup>163</sup>: uncharacteristically strong language of culpability for a coroner, and yet she did not refer the case to prosecutors in order for criminal charges to be laid against police.

In “exhibit tab”, Whittaker who also works as a legal researcher, detaches the detached language used in the coronial report. The searchable title for the report and brief explanatory information is included at the start of the poem: ‘*The forty-nine most common three-word phrases in the Western Australia Coroner’s findings on the death of Ms Dhu, ranked.*’<sup>164</sup> Sections of the poem include: ‘The emergency department / That she was / Am satisfied that / I am satisfied’<sup>165</sup>. And it ends with: ‘Was feigning her / Lock up procedures’<sup>166</sup>. Lorange writes:

it is not entirely certain what Whittaker has done in order to transform these legal documents into poems. And this uncertainty is a vital aspect to their being poems. They do not have to mirror the exactness of their source documents; instead, they offer multiple opportunities for reading with, against, alongside, and in between the language of law.<sup>167</sup>

For Lorange, the poem can be ‘read as a companion text’<sup>168</sup> to Whittaker’s year-long investigation into 134 Indigenous deaths in custody, and an opinion piece she wrote highlighting the significance of language used by coroners in this and other cases, with particular reference to the number of times certain words appear. ‘To this list, we might add “tragic,” a word that Fogliani uses multiple times in relation to Miss Dhu’s death,’<sup>169</sup> although not often enough to be included in the poem. With this, Lorange makes clear she has herself consulted the source document. She argues that the work the poem is doing is tied to Whittaker’s ‘documentary approach’ (unlike if it had been ‘a poetic retelling of a legal case’)<sup>170</sup> and the documentary intent behind this decision. This is because, ‘if we can read an inquest like a poem, or rather, transform an inquest into a poem, then we can

read the law itself for its writtenness and therefore also its authorship'<sup>171</sup>. Lorange looks to 'the work that contemporary Australian poetry might do to further break with the legal and poetic foundations of the settler imaginary' as well as capitalism.<sup>172</sup> This work 'can be understood in terms of an ongoing and vitally necessary labor through which meaning is made — and therefore able to be remade — through language'.<sup>173</sup>

Importantly, a strategy for documentary authenticity can be seen in these two poems that is not always present in documentary poetry. It is tied to the source material existing independently of the work, and available to be sought out. In Whittaker, this is indicated through the inclusion of the report's title and reference number and the short explanatory note; in Dale, perhaps it is the sheer volume of transcribed speech, with the poetic shaping of the material suggested in its design (the references to 7.30 hosts, the continuous flow of Turnbull's contextless messaging). In both, too, the documentary intent is clear in that it is the use of language that the poet is interested in, as well as in drawing the reader's attention to this. In this way, these works provide for an audience expectation that the words presented as being sourced from these documents and these figures are exactly that. The poetic construction of the text does not extend to the changing of the words themselves. Yet this is not always the case in documentary poetry. How is documentary authenticity retained when sections presented as documentary are substantively changed by the poet? And when the source documents are not as available for fact-checking, such as when the material is drawn from on-the-ground reportage and interviews, how are expectations for documentary authenticity handled?

## Don Mee Choi's *DMZ Colony*

In *DMZ Colony*, poet Don Mee Choi returns to South Korea, the country of her birth, from the United States where she lives and works as a poet and translator. Her father was a photojournalist and she finds him captured by a colleague in a photograph from the day of the 1961 military coup that hangs in the old city hall in Seoul.<sup>174</sup> In documenting the atrocities inflicted on civilians in the lead up, during and after the Korean War, and the ongoing American military presence, Choi conducts interviews, seeks out archive testimony, and includes notebook fragments of sketches and notes made during the interviews, as well as other drawings and photographs. She visits a former long-serving political prisoner who now lives and farms in the 'Civilian Control Zone' area adjacent to the demilitarised zone (DMZ) border. He is still placed under house arrest whenever North Korea fires a test missile.

I'll leave it up to your imagination what a DMZ village looks like, what his house looks like, what his dogs look like, how many of his teeth are missing, how fit he still is, how he carefully peels sweet potatoes roasted in his woodstove, how terribly beautiful the Han River looks behind the endless barbed-wire fence, how many soldiers guard the Civilian Control Zone, how he points to the river...<sup>175</sup>

Choi documents his prison experiences and those of his cell-mates, representing the broken speech fragments in the text: '...May of 1957...we started a hunger strike...there were 367 of us...'.<sup>176</sup> There are descriptions of the torture inflicted: '...the guards aimed a jet of cold water at my forehead...full force...'<sup>177</sup>. In his review, US critic Kion You writes:

Here, Choi works as a preservationist and witness; she then intersperses Ahn's words with photos of her handwritten interview notes which flit between Korean and English. She also inserts scrawled geometric shapes that trace the architecture of Ahn's imprisonment, from his face to the dimensions of his cell, revealing to the reader Choi's real time processing of Ahn's story. In the fourth iteration, Choi riffs on Ahn's words set during a

time in which he was tortured and starved: ‘then I heard the vowels from my own mouth / O E / A E / I E / E E E / 0|0|0|’ Choi strips down Ahn’s language to its most guttural, a siren-like scream of pain. She mirrors the Korean character ‘0|,’ which has the same sound as ‘e,’ returning to Ahn’s own language and reversing the course of translation, making it so that the Korean reader hears Ahn’s echoing cry.<sup>178</sup>

The attention to documentary detail within Choi’s telling of events provides an expectation that subsequent pages of testimony were found through her investigation and translated for inclusion, although hints are offered to the reader that it is otherwise. Choi describes her meeting with a human rights abuse investigator at a restaurant, who tells her what is known about the civilian massacres. In the following section, “The Orphans”, the experiences of eight girls who survived the Sancheong-Hamyang massacre in 1951 are represented in photographs of handwritten Korean script, with the English translation on the adjacent page. But Choi first introduces the horrific stories that follow in a section that includes: ‘Be factual, you say?’<sup>179</sup> The stories are graphic and gruesome, embedded with everyday details: ‘The soldiers came back to check. I pretended I was dead. I was on top of Mother’s stomach. From her open mouth I could still smell the noodle soup she had for lunch. A strand of noodle around her neck looked like a necklace.’<sup>180</sup> While not indicated within the text, there is an extensive endnotes section to *DMZ Colony*. It is here that Choi explains the poetic liberties she has taken, the connections she is making and additional referencing information for the source material used. She explains how she has crafted the orphan testimony:

These imagined accounts are based on what Ahn-Kim told me when I met with her in 2016. She also gave me *Sancheong-Hamyang Massacres of Civilians* (2011), conference proceedings which contain findings and analysis by Ahn-Kim as well as transcribed testimonies of the survivors. The year 2011 was the 60th anniversary of the massacre. Thus these imaginary stories are based on reality — history — yours and mine, and

dreams — theirs and mine, and memory — theirs and mine. This is just another way of saying that “The Orphans” are poems, poetry of the unconscious. I first wrote them in Korean, then translated them. It made most sense to deploy my childish handwriting — it didn’t have much of a chance to grow up outside of Korea. These poems in Korean and English are not exactly identical, as no translations are.<sup>181</sup>

Australian critic May Ngo writes in her review: ‘Perhaps it is because the unspeakable resists structure, resists articulation that it needs to be “translated” into poetic fragments, into images and “fictions”. ... *DMZ Colony* utilises montage or bricolage to document the un-documentable.’<sup>182</sup> For You, this approach adds something to the telling:

These orphans’ sentences are simple and direct, mimicking a diary form. When read in Korean, their unvarnished nature only heightens, as these accounts lack the honorific, reverent tones a Korean child would use when talking to an elder. In this way, Choi’s fictionalized accounts prove more intimate than if she had gone back in time and interviewed the children herself.<sup>183</sup>

It is unclear, without asking the poet or consulting the original testimonies in the documentary source material she names, which aspects of the narratives correlate to each named child, or even whether these are their real names. And yet, these are not fictions either. Choi has found and elicited documentary evidence through her on-the-ground reportage. Perhaps, since her interviews are harder to fact-check, documentary authenticity was of greater concern in the representation of her conversation with the political prisoner than for the survivor testimony that is locatable in the report on the massacre. Further, Choi’s documentary intent in *DMZ Colony* is tied to the work of language in translation: ‘Translation as anti-neocolonial mode can create other words. I call mine mirror words. Mirror words are meant to compel disobedience, resistance. Mirror words defy neocolonial borders, blockades.’<sup>184</sup>

Significantly, Choi's lengthy, detailed notes section is in keeping with contemporary documentary poetry trends. Leong writes that 'the paratexts of twenty-first-century documental poems — the "Works Cited" and other lists of sources — are becoming more scholarly and including detailed bibliographical information'<sup>185</sup>. There is also 'the increasing popularity of statements of poetics, complete with bibliographical apparatuses, that accompany the poetry proper'<sup>186</sup>. Is this documentary poetry's response to the issue of authenticity when there is the playful treatment of source material? Choi's inclusion of the line 'Be factual, you say?' suggests she felt it was necessary to provide this small indication of her approach within the text itself. This signalling does not only help guide audience expectations for the pages that follow, but arguably adds documentary weight through the demonstration that care and consideration for authenticity has been taken in the poetic and imaginative telling. Interestingly, while poets such as Santos Perez say the source material he uses are sometimes 'visible foregrounds and sometimes they are interwoven palimpsests', he, for example, makes use of strike-through, bold and italics text formatting to indicate some of this in his *from unincorporated territory* series. In addition to supplementary notes, how do documentary poets use the medium to visually signal the use of/ changes made to source material on the page?

### **Solmaz Sharif's *Look***

In Solmaz Sharif's *Look*, terms from a US military dictionary are extracted. Sharif provides new meanings for some terms, meanings that are less removed from the consequences of war, as she eases into the incorporation of reworked military language into her poems. The opening titular poem follows the only military definition included in the collection, for the word 'look': 'In mine warfare, a

period during which a mine circuit is receptive of an influence.’<sup>187</sup> The poem begins:

It matters what you call a thing: *Exquisite* a lover called me.  
*Exquisite.*

Whereas *Well, if I were from your culture, living in this country,*  
said the man outside the 2004 Republican National  
Convention, *I would put up with that for this country;*

Whereas I felt the need to clarify: *You would put up with*  
TORTURE, *you mean* and he proclaimed; *Yes;*<sup>188</sup>

This stylisation of the text continues throughout: capital letters to mark the military dictionary terms; italics to indicate the recollection of speech, and lines from elsewhere. In a review essay about the work, Lena Khalaf Tuffaha highlights how the visual representation of the military terms elicits a certain audience response:

Though they are visually distinct from the rest of the text, the small caps offer no instructions on how to read the words... They remind the reader that we are now “seeing” the words — words we thought we knew — ripped from ordinary life and weaponized. In the landscape of these poems, words such as LOOK or PATRIOT or THEATER or DIVERSION or BREAK-UP or FIRE create a system of meaning predicated on violence.<sup>189</sup>

In her review, Rebecca Hazelton writes that Sharif ‘encourages her readers to greet all words with distrust, mirroring the scrutiny endured by *Look*’s speaker and her family in post-9/11 America’.<sup>190</sup>

In parts of the collection, Solmaz writes about, and addresses, her uncle who was killed in the Iran-Iraq War. She includes explanatory text copied from somewhere about the 1982 Operation Ramadan offensive, complete with its ‘[dead link]’<sup>191</sup>, and similar text later in the book for Operation Nasr.

And by April the script in his letter grew tighter, barbed, men in a shoulder-width trench

And when I sounded out M-EE-N to mean *mine* a hole appeared in the letter  
and I couldn’t look at it<sup>192</sup>

In one section of the collection, the poems start ‘Dear Salim’. They are letters composed to a Guantánamo Bay detainee. We know this because the first is titled “Reaching Guantánamo” and they are gap-filled; there are empty spaces where words should be. What Sharif is doing in these sections is illuminated not in the endnotes, which focuses instead on the difficulty of there being multiple versions of the military dictionary, but in a question and answer session after a poetry reading and in her own writing about her documentary poetry practice. For instance, in an essay about erasure as a documentary poetry technique she writes:

Erasures I have written: 1) a series of imagined letters to Salim Hamdan from his wife, redacted by the Joint Task Force; 2) a mimicked attempt to translate, with my own broken Farsi, letters an uncle wrote from the frontlines of the Iran Iraq War shortly before he was killed in said war (one of a million). ... My inability to translate was like my inability to speak to him physically and that inability, I thought, should remain. ... Both of these utilizations of erasure are letters written by myself and then obliterated. Neither manipulate actual source materials as erasure often does. Both are about communication interrupted by state and political forces. Both attempt to parrot the loss and attempt really only that. <sup>193</sup>

This approach is further explained in conversation with Tuffaha:

One, it’s not found text. I’m not taking a text that already exists and striking it out. The other thing that I do that was ethically important to me — but also *invisible* to you as a reader — is that I didn’t write a complete letter and then cross it out. So whatever is blank for you is blank for me. I wrote with those gaps. <sup>194</sup>

The idea came from seeing a newspaper article that mentioned the redacted letters, and while those letters were subsequently in the public domain, it was important for Sharif that they were not when she wrote her versions of them. She describes her documentary intent: ‘how do I apply my poet’s imagination in ways that are possibly politically useful and ethical, and to also talk back to this formal movement that was happening in American poetry at the same time’. <sup>195</sup> The work



she is trying to do is elaborated on in her essay on erasure: ‘the proliferation of erasure as a poetic tactic in the United States is happening alongside a proliferation of our awareness of it as a state tactic. And, it seems, many erasure projects today hold these things as unrelated.’<sup>196</sup> The complex strands of documentary/political intent in this work are considered by Sharif with regard to audience expectations. She explains this through reference to the cover image of *Look*. The photograph is a reproduction of Joseph Nicéphore Niépce’s “View from the Window at Le Gras”, a contender for the first photographic image but taken with an extended exposure so sunlight is visible on multiple sides of the buildings. ‘That intersection between representing “the real” — and the obvious impossibility of that — and the way the photograph reveals it’s not real is central to my practice as a documentary poet.’<sup>197</sup> This demonstrates that this issue is a key ethical consideration for documentary poets such as Sharif.

While these are just a select few poetry texts, the ways in which poets, scholars, critics and therefore audiences are able to navigate the playful treatment of source material and documentary representation, as demonstrated here, offer insights for thinking about the radio feature. The next chapter explores whether these ideas lend themselves to a guiding documentary framework for the feature.

## Chapter four — Feature framework

While this thesis research is not intending to align the radio feature with documentary poetry, or to consider radio features (even those made by poets) as documentary poetry, there are some helpful comparisons that can be made to aid an understanding of the feature form. Firstly, crafted audio is very much an authored form. Many producers think about what they do as a form of writing: *writing with tape*, writing with speech and sound. Very often this is with an actual page of script. This is a page that is in correspondence with the audio it is representing, as well as what this audio will become: the words in white space; the texture and emotion of how something is said; and what the listener is able to take in from the woven fragments. Does the radio feature also *make use* of language in the way that documentary poetry does? Secondly, if we can think about the audio construction blocks of ‘found sound’, on-location recordings and interviews all as documentary source material then, as demonstrated by Leong in his discussion of documentary vs. conceptual poetry, *by definition* radio features which use this source material can be considered documentary. But, and this leads us to the third aspect, does it matter *how* that source material is used: does it need to be utilised in the non-fiction representation of events, for example? Or, otherwise, does the documentary intent need to be *about* the source material that is being incorporated into a work? While the playful, artistic and dramatic approaches to using this source material are central to both forms, some of the creative liberties taken with source material are similarly *invisible* to the audiences: words can be erased, sentences rearranged and scenes constructed, and these techniques are reliant on a certain level of audience literacy of conventions used. So how is documentary authenticity, as well as the contract with the audience, able to be retained in radio feature works? Could a

documentary framework drawn from documentary poetry aid the critical discussion of contemporary crafted audio? This chapter explores these ideas in relation to three radio features. Analysis of these texts is guided by an informal framework drawn from the discussion of documentary poetry: How can we understand the documentary intent of the work (including in relation to the act of documenting/ use of documentary material)? Have considerations for documentary authenticity shaped the work, and is there a managing of audience expectations for the playful treatment of source material? How is the producer making use of language through the audio medium?

### **Raymond Antrobus's "Inventions in Sound"**

In his acceptance speech at the 2021 Third Coast International Audio Festival awards, having won *Best Documentary: Bronze* for "Inventions in Sound", Raymond Antrobus introduced himself as 'a poet and investigator of missing sound'<sup>198</sup>. The first-time radio producer collaborated with McDowall to make the *Falling Tree Productions'* half-hour feature for BBC Radio 4. In the piece, Antrobus documents, explores and plays with the experience of closed captioning for television and film: 'As a deaf person in the hearing world I know that there is no universal experience of sound. So how can we capture what it is? How do we turn sound into words? What is sound?' These personal addresses to the audience guide the piece as Antrobus reflects on his own and broader experiences of closed captioning for D/deaf and hard of hearing audiences through feature interviews with US poet and academic Meg Day and US artist Christine Sun Kim. We also hear from a captioner, as well as a film director pushing for greater inclusion in the industry.

Threaded throughout these engaging conversations is an electronic-sounding voice reading closed captions. This voice begins the piece with: 'Sound

of time passing. Air pauses at night. Sound of separation. Radio of unsettled frequencies.’ There is unfilled space between these lines. The sound of static and the toggling between stations comes in just before the radio is mentioned. When the music starts it is announced by the caption voice: ‘Music.’ And Antrobus asks: ‘Can you remember the first time you saw closed captions? Turning on the subtitle setting so you can read the sound of a show.’ The caption voice says: ‘Sound of secret speech.’

It is important to note here that while, as the Third Coast judges wrote, Antrobus is ‘radically de-centering hearing listeners’<sup>199</sup> in this work, the following discussion of how Antrobus plays with his source material through the caption voice does centre the response of a hearing listener. This must also limit full appreciation of how Antrobus is using this caption voice, as it moves between traditional sounding captions and those which describe emotions or joke and experiment with what a sound and its description could be.

The experience of the caption voice, as someone who does not use closed captioning in everyday life, is initially: Is this what closed captions are? Is this what they would sound like read aloud? And yet, the first literary lines do indicate that the captions are not quite as you would expect — that these are not lines that have come from a film or television scene, or not only lines that have come from a film or television scene. ‘Reading the sound world of the shows I am watching,’ Antrobus tells us, about bingeing television during lockdown, ‘has made me wonder about the act of translation’. On one level, Antrobus is also translating the experience of closed captioning to the audio medium, where language descriptions are able to evoke a visual picture. The effect of not having the information of where the caption lines have been sourced from, is a grappling for a reference point: to try and make sense of it from the context provided in the

interplay with the conversations. This is happening at the same time as, for example, Day is discussing the idea that sound is ‘an invention of the hearing’. ‘Silence too.’ That Antrobus tells Day he had been rewatching films he had first seen growing up, but which had no captions on the tapes when he watched them and he had imagined whole other subplots happening: ‘I’ve kind of made up my own story for what I didn’t understand.’ We hear Kim say she wishes there was the capacity to ‘toggle’ between the level of information provided in the captions, depending on the program or the day, or to choose (or know) who had done the captioning. She says some of the best television captions ‘include feelings, emotions, like it’ll say [anticipating] [waiting]’.

It is easy to make too much of the caption voice as a kind of mirroring of the user experience of reading closed captions and the effect of information gaps, except Antrobus has provided additional information about the source material in a companion transcript. Some are his lines of poetry, some are the captions from specific film scenes, and others are experimental captions from Kim’s video work. Antrobus explains in the feature that he is ‘conscious of making something in a medium that excludes us — D/deaf people — hard of hearing people’, and that he hopes the transcript ‘offers an even richer version of this work than the audio version’. This annotated transcript and a subtitled video version are both available alongside the broadcast feature on the BBC Radio 4 page. At the start of the transcript, Antrobus explains:

Throughout the documentary there is a voice that reads out closed captions — some are real, some are drawn from my poems — it is the only non-human voice in the programme. Its readings are automatically generated, the tone is flat and emotionless...

It also spells out some of what could be inferred from the structure of the piece. For instance, that the captions in the section where Kim’s “[Closer Captions]”

video is being discussed are taken from this work: ‘The sound of sun entering the bedroom. The sound of eyelids opening.’ Lines from one of Antrobus’s poems, “Poem With Captions” — in this style and published with an acknowledgement of Kim — also appear in the piece. Antrobus features Kim’s work and builds on it, spelling out in the transcript how he is playing with the captions. Some are directly taken from the films he rewatched recently, including this scene from Baz Luhrmann’s “Romeo + Juliet” (1996): ‘Thunder. Sirens. Sobs. Wailing. Knocking. Knocking. Knocking. Door opens.’ However the caption scene that follows is: ‘Sound of sky splitting. Sound of emergency. Sound of heart accelerating. Sound of pain spreading. Sound of red hands. Sound of shadows behind a door. Sound of something inward. Sound of something invented.’ In the transcript, Antrobus explains: ‘I have a notebook of Captions that I had been collecting from TV shows. I went to the notebook and selected some that would dramatise the Romeo and Juliet captions even more.’ Yet this leaves some room for interpretation, or raises some questions, given the more abstract captions, and especially when listening to the piece. Are these found captions, or are these Antrobus’s captions, and does it matter?

This may seem a laboured point, however understanding how feature conventions that lean into the imaginative and evocative possibilities of the audio medium — as Antrobus and McDowall have done with the character-like caption voice — can also be consistent with documentary expectations is helpful. Firstly there is a clear logic in the piece, with the interviews being edited together in keeping with radio journalism expectations and the caption voice as a separate creative element even as they are woven together. Secondly, there is care for documentary authenticity in the use of the caption lines. They are lines from film scenes Antrobus has rewatched, and those collected in a notebook over the

course of a year<sup>200</sup>; they are lines from Kim's video work experimenting with what a caption could be, and lines from his own poems that are doing a similar thing, as well as new moments of experimenting with the idea of closed captioning. The use of documentary source material with the caption voice does not need to be explicitly signposted, as it is clear that Antrobus is including us in his own imaginative exploration of this issue. There is additional documentary intent here too, one of demonstration. Antrobus is demonstrating, through the caption voice and his interviews, how language is an act of translation, and how other strategies could be employed. The use of swelling and pulsating music is a demonstration of the capacity radio has, as Day says, to 'lean into its own physical quality'. Day urges producers making programs to: 'Make them with, like, high reverb materials. Make them with an "I'm alone in my house" version of the volume.' Antrobus provides some explanation of this demonstration in the transcript. He includes a note after a caption that says 'sound of interpretation', just before we hear from Kim. He writes: 'I like how the time that passes while this caption is read matches the time it took Christine Sun Kim to receive my question from Beth, her ASL interpreter.' The piece is richer for the playful treatment of source material, and — even without the additional information found in the companion transcript — uncontroversially documentary as Antrobus takes us with him in his exploration.

### **Jaye Kranz's "Are We There Yet?"**

Australian producer Jaye Kranz's feature "Are We There Yet?" was one of two audio works commissioned with the same brief by experimental audio site and podcast *Constellations*. The two producers were given a digitised tape recording 'from 1992 made by a news reporter unfamiliar with field recording, but entranced by a chance encounter with trumpeter swans on an icy lake' and asked

to ‘compose their own landscapes — both real and imagined — in response’.<sup>201</sup> This information appears on the *Constellations* page titled “Feel the Sky” along with the two embedded audio files. These works have been audibly presented in the tape format of Side A and Side B. Each ‘side’, or audio file, begins with a small part of what must be the prompt audio and a voice recollecting that moment in time. ‘You could feel the sky’ in that landscape, this voice says, due to the birds squawking at a distance. We hear the birds loud and overlapping the mimicry of their sounds. Kranz’s Side A, “Are We There Yet?”, is introduced<sup>202</sup>, and this prelude is demarcated with the sounds of a cassette tape. Unconventionally, Kranz’s 10-minute feature is followed by a five-minute recorded reflection by the producer about the work. The text of the majority of this reflection also sits predominantly on the page, just underneath the thin bar of the player with the audio file.

The piece begins with a young child addressing Kranz who must be speaking into a home cassette recorder. We hear tangible movement and knocks to the tape deck and the enveloping static: ‘Hello Jaye, I’m making you a tape of lovely music. Now what?’ A sound effect like an old television switching off, the transmission cut. A car passes. Then we are mid-way into a recorded conversation with someone saying: ‘There’s breaks in the earth where you could fall in and go 100-feet.’ A ‘wow’ in awed response. This transitions into a more modern sounding voice recording, with the digital effects of a rewinding tape behind it, speaking about ‘the space between things’. The child announces and then plays ‘every note on my violin’. We hear the car. A more heavily accented American says: ‘We don’t know what’s in that coal mine up there. If it gets enough pressure, it’ll come out somewhere.’ Violin notes. A road train horn. Perhaps it is the first duo again, he is speaking about being so familiar with that area he would



recognise a single tree but first needs to find his bearings. Tape scratching. There is no narration, but this must be Kranz, sounding a little off-mic, encouraging her interviewee to speak about that place she visits and has spoken about before.

This intricate crafting of the audio continues with its fast transitions, aided by the heavy use of overlapping sounds and sound effects: vehicles cut across the landscape; the whirring of a tape in a re-wind or fast-forward search as physical and interior places are also sought out; static; the ground cracks and air breathes into a mine shaft; music is woven in; and footsteps in snow wade through different narrative strands. We hear a handful of US-sounding characters in momentary scenes from archival tape conversations, and two feature interviews which include Kranz's prompting questions and seem to be recently recorded in Australia. Threaded together and into the archival recordings, these interviewees describe their relationships with vivid but imaginary locations; places presumably visited in recurring dreams. The focus here is on their emotional responses to these specific and familiar landscapes they otherwise do not know. Threads of connections are made through the close placement of similarly themed moments from the archival conversations, such as with the idea of home. It occasionally feels as though Kranz is playing with the spatial properties of the audio in her piece. We can hear the children's voices shift in clarity at times, almost as if they are moving between the digitally cleaned-up version and how the tape would sound in analogue. As the interviewees speak about their imagined landscapes, this interiority is reflected as Kranz's voice is seemingly pushed away.

Kranz's reflection is part artist statement, part extensive referencing of her source material (this information is not included in the text online):

I drew on four different sources of material. One is Heather's source tape. The field recording of trumpeter swans she made on the frozen lake in

British Columbia on her way to do a story on a smelter nearby. The other three sources are sets of conversations. Questions and answers, layered around each other like the winding paths up the mountain mentioned in one interview. One of these is archival family cassette tape from the mid-90s where my sister asks her daughters questions for a tape they're making for me while I'm living away. It's full of my nieces, evocations of home and songs performed on scratchy open strings. I used two interviews I recorded for this project, these are with people who have a strong relationship to specific landscapes of their imagination. And the third source material I drew from are recordings made by an ethnographer who was recording around the same time Heather recorded her swans. I chose these, not just because they describe simultaneous landscapes, captured at the same time on the same format — cassette. But because they're also recordings of people speaking about landscapes they literally inhabit. They're their landscapes of home. They're also lands altered by mining in and around the central Appalachian coal fields of Coal River, West Virginia in the early to mid-90s.

The feature is almost entirely made from documentary source material: the archival recordings from both personal and public archives<sup>203</sup>, as well as the new recordings made by Kranz. It is a feature that works as documentary on multiple levels, and the inclusion of this broad explanatory information suggests documentary considerations were guiding Kranz, along with her background as a musician<sup>204</sup>, as she made the piece. However, even without the supplementary note-style material, this is clear within the work. It is the audience expectation established through — and audible in — the treatment of the source material. Authenticity is retained through the voice. Connections have been highlighted, but the stories are not merged; they stand as documentary representations of those conversations in time. This is even as these conversations have been cut short, sonically treated and threaded together. We can hear that person at that place as it was recorded, even if we do not know exactly who they are or where they were standing when the recording was made. The playful treatment is in the weaving of the stories and use of sound effects to create a sonic experience representative

of what the more recent interviewees are describing. This use of sound effects could be thought about as an enhancement of — without substantially changing — the original material, allowing the piece to work on multiple levels. The documentary intent in this is expressly articulated in Kranz’s reflection as a desire to create a ‘dreamscape where the laws of separation and structure, boundary and contour, do not apply’. An experience of reality where there is ‘bleed between our experience of external landscapes and interior states’, with the mining landscape a metaphor for unstable ground in the everyday, ‘that could split apart at any moment’, alongside the ‘forever-safe places we build ourselves’ in our imagination. Kranz’s intent here is to evoke an experience of this aurally, and it has a kind of head-spin effect as so many strands and connections are being made at once. This is Kranz making full use of language in — and of — the audio medium, an appreciation of which only increases on repeat listens.

### **Jordan Scott’s “Ambient Sir”**

“Ambient Sir” is one of three short features in the half-hour BBC Radio 4 *Short Cuts* episode, “Silent Night”, which aired in 2018. The long-running broadcast program, along with its podcast version, is made by *Falling Tree Productions*. Produced by McDowall, it is hosted by UK comedian Josie Long — who is asked by McDowall to walk through a forest, lie in a river, write poems etc. as she is recorded for the delightful conversational links that help tie each episode to a particular theme. The tag line for the program is: ‘Brief encounters, true stories, radio adventures and found sound.’ There is minimal episode information on the program page, and Canadian poet Jordan Scott, who has made the on-location recordings, is described as ‘featuring’ in the work and his *Lanterns at Guantánamo* website is listed. Jess Shane, the Canadian producer who is also co-founder of *Constellations*, is named as having produced the

feature. This suggests that the audio recordings were seen by Shane or McDowall and, with the idea they could be shaped into an interesting feature, Shane has worked with him to do so.

The structure and design of the program aids listeners in understanding feature conventions that include the playful treatment of recorded material. In this episode, we find Long sitting on the front step of her London home at night. She tells us where she is and guides our listening, to try and make out a moped passing and an old musical performance recorded in a rain storm playing in the background: 'So hopefully you're in two places at the same time, united by the night time.' This music continues into a simple montage with moments from the first two features where there is specific mention of sound and sound recordings. We hear Carl Cattermole from the piece produced by Thomas Glasser saying: 'At night in prison, the sound stops being so much from the wing and starts being more from the outside world.' And Jonathan Zenti's lament in his work: 'I crossed half a world, I risked being eaten by hyenas to have a recording I can find on any sound library that I already have.' And back to Cattermole. The music and rain fades and we are inside Long's house. She says: 'If you listen carefully, what you can hear in the background is the boiler firing up and the heater going on in my house. There's an atmospheric shift, which I think is a sound shift as well, which happens when everyone else in the house that you're in has fallen asleep.' This not only introduces the episode but sets up the careful listening required in richly textured features, where there might have been a shifting in time and place. It explains that rearrangement and simultaneous placement is both possible in the feature form and utilised here, as well as demonstrating the effect the emotional tone of one layer, in this case the music and the rain, can have on how separate documentary material is heard.

Long provides an unusually lengthy and detailed introduction<sup>205</sup> for “Ambient Sir”, perhaps due to the journalistic nature of the feature in which Scott is allowed to tour US military detention facilities at Guantánamo Bay to record ‘ambient sounds for poetry’. The feature has been crafted from three sets of audio: on-location recordings of Scott wandering around the disused Camp X-Ray and other spaces he has access to; extracts from radio diary recordings he makes after his visits; and a narration style reflection that explains and describes the moments we are listening to and interactions had while there, as well as the intent of the project. We hear crickets and the hums of generators and air-conditioners; Scott briefly announces where he is as he records inside abandoned cells. He says he wanted to get ‘a sense of how the landscape would sound at night’ for someone who had been transferred there from Afghanistan wearing a hood and headphones, discovering the audio environment for the first time. He tells us he read an account from someone who was tortured by being left to freeze in a cold room. ‘Once you understand that that machine is actually a vehicle of torture you can’t unhear it’; the buzzing of an air conditioner grows louder and louder, until it drops off into the sound of crickets.

Circular in structure, the dramatic final scene is set-up in the first moments of the feature as Scott separates from his guide and wanders towards Camp X-Ray at night, before this is noticed and becomes a problem. ‘The guard turned away from us, he got on the radio, and all you could hear was, “Yes, sir. Camp X-Ray, sir. A poem, sir. Yes, sir, a poem. Yes. Ambient, sir. Yes, sir, a poem.” And then turned back towards us and said, “Get out of here”.’ These moments of confusion with military staff — as well as in the daily check of material that would go relatively quickly for him compared with other media visiting — demonstrating an undervaluing of the potential for these recordings to be documentary

evidence. Scott explains in the feature: 'Ambient sound could sound like something in the background or something that's not important, when in actuality these sounds they tell us something that escapes the censors that exist at the prison. These recordings at Guantánamo, they form a kind of witnessing.' It is unclear whether the media scrutineers realised snippets of conversations with military staff were also recorded, with Scott and Shane's feature providing insights into how press visits to the military base were managed and handled. More information about his visit and the strict rules, including copies of the documents that facilitated the press tour, are available at *Lanterns at Guantánamo*. The full recordings are also on the site, as are the Freedom of Information request side projects concerning the detainee art gallery and library. The released documents, artworks made by those held at Guantánamo and the list of resources in the library, are published too. 'Redaction looks like ambience sounds', Scott writes, with mention of 'the lexically redacted poem'<sup>206</sup>.

This feature is uncontroversially documentary: the documentary and political intent is tied to recordings made at a politically sensitive site, as well as what was able to be captured and what more is necessarily excluded. The shaping of this material into a short feature is made clear for listeners both within the piece and the program more broadly: we understand we can be in two places at once, there outside the fence at Camp X-Ray with Scott, and simultaneously with Scott, at some other place at some other time, speaking about the events. There are expectations for journalistic credibility and documentary authenticity which are established by Long through her extensive introduction, especially important considering the program is more regularly a mix of lighter documentary and personal storytelling pieces. Approaches such as this encourage a close listening, equipping listeners with the skills to be able to hear certain constructions in the

shaping of the audio, and to hear when, even as other creative liberties have been taken in the editing and rearrangement of recorded source material, a consideration for journalistic ethics and documentary authenticity is guiding these decisions. Furthermore, this piece is not separate from the website it has been drawn from and is linked to, encouraging audiences to explore the issue further.

## Conclusion

The impetus for this research came from thinking about how radio feature conventions that allow for the playful treatment of source material would provide for the presentation of new documentary evidence. How could more investigative non-fiction storytelling and journalism podcast series embrace the full creative possibilities of the audio medium and the enduring radio feature form, while confidently retaining documentary authenticity and journalistic credibility? However, without the history of critical and scholarly attention afforded to other forms, foundational questions needed to be first addressed. This thesis research establishes these questions as being related to how the feature form is — and has — been understood by producers internationally, and how this is complicated by competing notions of documentary. Furthermore, if contemporary producers are ‘innovating in a vacuum’ and audience literacy is a key part of the ‘contract with the audience’, how then is documentary authenticity/ journalistic credibility able to be retained? Could there be a way to think about the feature form as a documentary form that might aid producers, audiences and critics in navigating these issues?

The focus on the use of documentary source material has been advantageous in three ways. Firstly, the playful treatment of source material is emblematic of core characteristics of the radio feature, with this research into the inherent journalistic and artistic tensions contributing to scholarship on the feature form (and in a way that places the feature firmly within the study of contemporary crafted audio). Secondly, this focus suggested documentary poetry as an attractive form for comparative study, since there is similar artistic licence in the use of documentary source material. Thirdly, certain scholarship on documentary poetry has leaned into the double definition of the word



‘documentary’, adding *use of documents to act of documenting* for what can be understood as an expansion of documentary theory. This is particularly relevant for thinking about the feature.

Designed as a scoping study, this research project searched for an appropriate framework to think about these issues within the wealth of critical and scholarly attention in a literary genre with significant similarities to the feature form. With documentary poetry previously overlooked in radio and podcast scholarship, this researcher’s intentions were to locate, summarise and explain some of the key critical debates relevant to the feature, and to see how poets, scholars, critics and audiences were navigating these same complex issues. An informal framework emerged from within this scholarship and criticism, which guided the analysis of “Inventions in Sound”, “Are We There Yet?” and “Ambient Sir”.

These three works demonstrate varying approaches to the feature form, as well as the use of documentary source material. Constructively, they each offer a separate model for how supplementary material could be provided to audiences, and these are not dissimilar to those that can be found in documentary poetry. While they have been traditionally less common in radio works, online publishing is offering new opportunities, with detailed show notes increasingly used. At the same time, this additional information, as we can see from having access to it, is not essential for documentary authenticity to be retained. The feature form, with its long documentary histories, provides opportunities for journalistic credibility and documentary authenticity alongside full creative use of the audio medium. However, producer consideration for the contract with the audience, and audience literacy of conventions used, are essential. These issues need to be

thought about in the making of the program, and in the critical discussion of crafted audio.

Documentary poetry offers an invaluable way of thinking about the feature form as a documentary form, without limiting the creative possibilities for the *use of documents* and documentary source material (including interviews).

Significantly, this broader documentary classification would likely encourage producers to think about the artistic and journalistic tensions and issues relating to ethical representation, as well as journalistic credibility and documentary authenticity, in the crafting of their works. The framework drawn from documentary poetry may help guide producers in their decision-making. It also provides a way for criticism to more fully engage with how the medium is being used in contemporary crafted audio, not just the content of a work. Discussion of the documentary/political intent and editorial decisions to do with the artistic and journalistic tensions in creative audio can only enrich the form. Furthermore, thinking about the feature as a documentary form offers legitimacy for journalistic series and more investigative works to be more adventurous in their use of feature conventions and the creative possibilities of the audio medium.

It is clear additional research into the feature form would benefit from comparative study with documentary poetry. This researcher is particularly interested in the ways documentary evidence, especially newly uncovered through investigative journalism, could be effectively presented in a feature. How could an investigative feature *make use* of the medium, beyond the traditional journalistic limits? Further research into the use of documentary evidence within this literary genre could offer additional insights, particularly when there is a strong tradition of poetry that uses and responds to redacted government documents.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> McDowall, "Under the Skin."

<sup>2</sup> McDowall, (emphasis added, McDowall's speech has been slightly cleaned up for clarity).

<sup>3</sup> Hilmes, "Lost Critical History of Radio," 12.

<sup>4</sup> Hilmes, 12 (emphasis added).

<sup>5</sup> Aroney, "Invisible Achievements," 404. Aroney has borrowed the term "postdocumentary" from John Corner's discussion of reality television, see 403.

<sup>6</sup> Madsen, "Transnational Encounters," 84 (emphasis in original). "Reality fictions" is credited to the late René Farabet, Director of the L'Atelier de Création Radiophonique, see Madsen, "Your Ears Are a Portal," 137.

<sup>7</sup> A push for a separate field of "podcast studies" is instead subsuming contemporary crafted audio into a discussion of podcasting as a whole. This scholarship is unhelpfully disconnected from radio feature traditions and histories. See Spinelli and Dann, "Audio Media Revolution", 3. Also Berry, "Emergence of Medium Identities," 26.

<sup>8</sup> Barrell, "Torque Radio," 297 (emphasis in original).

<sup>9</sup> In Madsen, "A Critical Reflection," 6n3.

<sup>10</sup> Barrell, "Torque Radio," 297.

<sup>11</sup> Barrell, 298.

<sup>12</sup> Hall, "Cigarettes and Dance Steps," 96.

<sup>13</sup> Hall, 96.

<sup>14</sup> Kaye Mortely in Street, "Poetry of Radio," 120.

<sup>15</sup> See Madsen, "Facts and Friction," 42.

<sup>16</sup> In making a case for a documentary framework for thinking about the radio feature, 'audio documentary' begins to be used in this same way.

<sup>17</sup> Aroney, "Invisible Achievements," 398.

<sup>18</sup> In Aroney, 398.

<sup>19</sup> Madsen, "Facts and Friction," 41.

<sup>20</sup> This can be understood due to the more separate radio developments in the United States. (See Madsen, "Your Ears Are a Portal." Also Hilmes, "Lost Critical History.")

<sup>21</sup> See Lindgren and McHugh, "Not Dead Yet," 104. Also McHugh, "How Podcasting Is Changing," 68.

<sup>22</sup> Street, "Poetry of Radio," 5.

<sup>23</sup> Lindgren and McHugh, "Not Dead Yet," 104.

<sup>24</sup> Aroney, "Invisible Achievements," 398.

<sup>25</sup> See Lindgren and McHugh, "Not Dead Yet."

<sup>26</sup> See Lindgren, "Journalism as Research," 13. Also Preger, "Storytelling in Radio," 11.

- <sup>27</sup> Lindgren and McHugh, "Not Dead Yet," 104.
- <sup>28</sup> Lindgren and McHugh, 104.
- <sup>29</sup> Aroney, "Invisible Achievements," 398 (emphasis added).
- <sup>30</sup> Street, "Poetry of Radio," 5.
- <sup>31</sup> Street outlines the approach of Parker, MacColl and Seeger in a chapter on the radio ballads. Interestingly, Parker was in-part influenced by hearing US producer Norman Corwin's "The Lonesome Train". This 1944 program 'traced the journey of Lincoln's funeral train from Washington, DC to Springfield, Illinois, punctuated by vignettes of personal stories and memories of ordinary people', and was 'a mix of folk music and oral testimony framed by a narrator and linked with music'. See Street, 62 and 63.
- <sup>32</sup> See Street, 65. Also Harker, "Class Composition," 343.
- <sup>33</sup> Street, "Programme-makers on Parker," 190. Street is quoting Parker here.
- <sup>34</sup> Street, 191.
- <sup>35</sup> Street, "Poetry of Radio," 68.
- <sup>36</sup> Street, 69.
- <sup>37</sup> Street, 69.
- <sup>38</sup> Street, 71.
- <sup>39</sup> Street, 71-72.
- <sup>40</sup> Street, 91 (emphases in original).
- <sup>41</sup> Street, 91 (emphases in original).
- <sup>42</sup> Aroney and Barrell, "Researching the Zone," n.p. Madsen quotes Braun talking about the development of the portable recording technology: "We no longer wrote about a subject; we recorded the subject itself. We were acoustic cameras, shooting our sound material in the wild; then combining it into documentary works we called 'acoustic films'." See Madsen, "Your Ears Are a Portal," 134.
- <sup>43</sup> Lindgren, "This Australian Life," 69.
- <sup>44</sup> Lindgren, 69.
- <sup>45</sup> Aroney, "Invisible Achievements," 403.
- <sup>46</sup> Kranz, O'Callaghan and Tjhia, "Fine Tune."
- <sup>47</sup> Madsen, "Cantata of Fire", 93.
- <sup>48</sup> There are related tensions in narrative storytelling to do with the level of artistic licence taken by producers in their scripts. US producer Scott Carrier writes about changing his own approach from initially wanting to make radio closer to cinema vérité: 'I've learned since then that reality is always grounded in a story, which is something you and I make up. For me, in the end, there's only one rule: to tell a story that's true.' See Carrier, "Jackie Kennedy Moment," 33.
- <sup>49</sup> McDowall, "Under the Skin."
- <sup>50</sup> Madsen, "A Call to Listen," 396.

<sup>51</sup> Street, 91.

<sup>52</sup> Street, 91.

<sup>53</sup> Aroney, "Invisible Achievements," 403 (emphasis added).

<sup>54</sup> Barrell, "Torque Radio," 301 (emphasis in original).

<sup>55</sup> Hall, "Children of Sodom," 3 (emphasis in original).

<sup>56</sup> Produced for ABC Radio National in 2011.

<sup>57</sup> Hall, "Children of Sodom," 4.

<sup>58</sup> Madsen, "A Critical Reflection," 6.

<sup>59</sup> Madsen, "A Call to Listen," 392.

<sup>60</sup> Meanwhile, journalism studies scholars discussing investigative podcast series are grappling with issues to do with journalistic credibility and authenticity, without engaging with the particular qualities of the audio medium. See Perdomo and Philippe Rodrigues-Rouleau, "Transparency as Performance."

<sup>61</sup> Rukeyser, "Book of the Dead," 80. These lines are directly from congressional testimony according to Wechsler. See Wechsler, "Fact and Vision," 126.

<sup>62</sup> Rukeyser, 92.

<sup>63</sup> Wechsler, "Fact and Vision," 121.

<sup>64</sup> Magi, "Poetry in Light," 247.

<sup>65</sup> Leong, "Contested Records," 207n7.

<sup>66</sup> Harrington, "Politics of Docupoetry," 68.

<sup>67</sup> Leong, "Contested Records," 207n7.

<sup>68</sup> Honig, "History, Document," 386.

<sup>69</sup> Honig, 386.

<sup>70</sup> Ehlers and Herd, "Poetry and Poetics," n.p.

<sup>71</sup> Rukeyser, "Book of the Dead," 604.

<sup>72</sup> Metres, "(More) News from Poems," 64.

<sup>73</sup> Harrington, "Archive Desire," n.p.

<sup>74</sup> Harrington, "Politics of Docupoetry," 81n1. He explains further: 'For instance, Camille T. Dungy's *Suck on the Marrow* (2010) is based on extensive research, which it weaves into the fictionalized voices of people held in bondage — individuals about whom nothing is known other than their names.'

<sup>75</sup> Leong, "Contested Records," 35.

<sup>76</sup> See Filreis, "Osman's list," n.p.

<sup>77</sup> Metres, "From Reznikoff," n.p.

<sup>78</sup> Metres, "(More) News from Poems," 68-69.

<sup>79</sup> Metres, "From Reznikoff," n.p.

- <sup>80</sup> Magi, "Poetry in Light," 252.
- <sup>81</sup> Magi, 253.
- <sup>82</sup> Wechsler, "Fact and Vision," 127.
- <sup>83</sup> Harrington, "Archive Desire," n.p.
- <sup>84</sup> *from unincorporated territory [hacha]* (2008), *from unincorporated territory [saina]* (2010), *from unincorporated territory [guma]* (2014) and *from unincorporated territory [lukao]* (2017).
- <sup>85</sup> Harrington, n.p.
- <sup>86</sup> Harrington, "Politics of Docupoetry," 67.
- <sup>87</sup> In Harrington, "Tracking/Teaching," 2.
- <sup>88</sup> Metres, "(More) News from Poems," 66.
- <sup>89</sup> In Harrington, "Tracking/Teaching," 6.
- <sup>90</sup> See Lorange, "Work of Poetry." This is discussed in chapter three.
- <sup>91</sup> Ehlers and Herd, "Poetry and Poetics," n.p.
- <sup>92</sup> Ehlers and Herd, n.p.
- <sup>93</sup> Grierson, "First Principles," 145.
- <sup>94</sup> Ehlers and Herd, "Poetry and Poetics," n.p.
- <sup>95</sup> Ehlers and Herd, n.p.
- <sup>96</sup> Magi, "Poetry in Light," 246.
- <sup>97</sup> Magi, 266-267.
- <sup>98</sup> Harrington, "Politics of Docupoetry," 68.
- <sup>99</sup> Magi, "Poetry in Light," 271.
- <sup>100</sup> Magi, 271.
- <sup>101</sup> Magi, 249.
- <sup>102</sup> Philip, "Zongl," 191.
- <sup>103</sup> Magi, "Poetry in Light," 271.
- <sup>104</sup> In Osman and Spahr, "CHAIN," 186.
- <sup>105</sup> In Osman and Spahr, 187.
- <sup>106</sup> Metres, "(More) News from Poems," 65
- <sup>107</sup> Harrington, "Archive Desire," n.p.
- <sup>108</sup> Harrington, "Politics of Docupoetry," p. 67.
- <sup>109</sup> Scenters-Zapico, "Verging Cities," 28.
- <sup>110</sup> Ehlers and Herd, n.p.
- <sup>111</sup> Beasley, "Flint and Tinder," n.p.

- <sup>112</sup> Beasley, "Flint and Tinder," n.p. (emphases in original).
- <sup>113</sup> Ehlers and Herd, n.p.
- <sup>114</sup> In Boyer, "Anti-Extinction Engine," 146.
- <sup>115</sup> Ehlers and Herd, n.p.
- <sup>116</sup> Boyer, "Anti-Extinction Engine," 147-148.
- <sup>117</sup> Boyer, 147.
- <sup>118</sup> Gray and Keniston, "Introduction," 1.
- <sup>119</sup> Forché, "Against Forgetting," 30.
- <sup>120</sup> Forché, "Living Archives," n.p.
- <sup>121</sup> Beasley, "Flint and Tinder," n.p.
- <sup>122</sup> Dowdy, "Shakeout Poetics," 158.
- <sup>123</sup> Beasley, "Flint and Tinder," n.p.
- <sup>124</sup> Park Hong, "Against Witness," n.p.
- <sup>125</sup> Forché, "Against Forgetting," 30.
- <sup>126</sup> Metres, "From Reznikoff," n.p.
- <sup>127</sup> Metres, "(More) News from Poems," 65.
- <sup>128</sup> Metres, "From Reznikoff," n.p.
- <sup>129</sup> Beasley, "Flint and Tinder," n.p.
- <sup>130</sup> Smith, "Blood Dazzler," 25.
- <sup>131</sup> Harrington, "Tracking/Teaching," vii.
- <sup>132</sup> For example, see the discussion of "Are We There Yet?" in chapter four for how authenticity is retained in the voice.
- <sup>133</sup> Metres, "(More) News from Poems," 83.
- <sup>134</sup> Beasley, "Flint and Tinder," n.p.
- <sup>135</sup> Leong, "Contested Records," 29.
- <sup>136</sup> In Greene et. al., "Princeton Encyclopedia," 292.
- <sup>137</sup> Leong, "Contested Records," 52.
- <sup>138</sup> Leong, 30.
- <sup>139</sup> See Magi, "Poetry in Light," 257-260.
- <sup>140</sup> Briante, "Defacing the Monument," 74n18.
- <sup>141</sup> Magi, "Poetry in Light," 256.
- <sup>142</sup> Magi, 249.
- <sup>143</sup> Magi, 267.
- <sup>144</sup> Dowdy, "Shakeout Poetics," 157.

<sup>145</sup> Dowdy, 157.

<sup>146</sup> See Nowak, "Social Poetics". Nowak describes social poetics as 'a radically public poetics, a poetics for and by the working-class people who read it, analyse it, and produce it within their struggles to transform twenty-first-century capitalism into a more equitable, equal and socialist system of relations' in ch. 00.

<sup>147</sup> Magi, "Poetry in Light," 269.

<sup>148</sup> Magi, 267.

<sup>149</sup> Briante, "Defacing the Monument," 19.

<sup>150</sup> Leong, "Contested Records," 2.

<sup>151</sup> Leong, 209n37.

<sup>152</sup> Dowdy, "Shakeout Poetics," 156.

<sup>153</sup> Lorange, "Re-reading the Constitution," 48.

<sup>154</sup> Lorange, 49.

<sup>155</sup> Dale, "Constitution," 34.

<sup>156</sup> Although in reviewing the work, Tony Messenger reads connections into the replacement text for the 1967 amendment to section 51. See "Tony Messenger Reviews," n.p.

<sup>157</sup> Lorange, "Re-reading the Constitution," 49-50.

<sup>158</sup> Lorange, 54.

<sup>159</sup> Lorange, 54.

<sup>160</sup> This includes, although others are mentioned, that Australian courts have decided they have no jurisdiction over cases asserting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sovereignty. This is for catch-22 reasons: if this legal argument is heard the court might find in favour, thereby rendering its own authority in this case, and all others, illegitimate. See Gregory, "Rewriting History," 158; and *Commonwealth of Australia v Coe* [2000] NSWSC 1243.

<sup>161</sup> Harrington, "Archive Desire," n.p. (emphasis in original).

<sup>162</sup> Wahlquist, "Ms Dhu Endured," n.p.

<sup>163</sup> Fogliani, "Record of Investigation."

<sup>164</sup> Whittaker, "Blakwork," 70.

<sup>165</sup> Whittaker, 71.

<sup>166</sup> Whittaker, 72.

<sup>167</sup> Lorange, "Work of Poetry," 195.

<sup>168</sup> Lorange, "Work of Poetry," 195.

<sup>169</sup> Lorange, 195.

<sup>170</sup> Lorange, 197.

<sup>171</sup> Lorange, 197.

<sup>172</sup> Lorange, 202.



- <sup>173</sup> Lorange, 202.
- <sup>174</sup> Choi, “DMZ Colony,” 125n‘Wings of Return’.
- <sup>175</sup> Choi, 23.
- <sup>176</sup> Choi, 24.
- <sup>177</sup> Choi, 33.
- <sup>178</sup> You, “Review: DMZ Colony,” n.p.
- <sup>179</sup> Choi, “DMZ Colony,” 49.
- <sup>180</sup> Choi, 61.
- <sup>181</sup> Choi, 126-127n‘The Orphans’.
- <sup>182</sup> Ngo, “See You,” n.p.
- <sup>183</sup> You, “Review: DMZ Colony,” n.p.
- <sup>184</sup> Choi, “DMZ Colony,” 99.
- <sup>185</sup> Leong, “Contested Records,” 193.
- <sup>186</sup> Leong, 234n21.
- <sup>187</sup> Sharif, “Look,” n.p.
- <sup>188</sup> Sharif, 3.
- <sup>189</sup> Tuffaha, “My Dear COLLATERAL,” n.p.
- <sup>190</sup> Hazelton, “Civil Affairs,” 195.
- <sup>191</sup> Sharif, 62.
- <sup>192</sup> Sharif, 83 (emphasis added).
- <sup>193</sup> Sharif, “Erasure,” n.p.
- <sup>194</sup> Sharif and Tuffaha, “Afterwords,” n.p.
- <sup>195</sup> Sharif and Tuffaha, n.p.
- <sup>196</sup> Sharif, “Erasure,” n.p.
- <sup>197</sup> Sharif and Tuffaha, “Afterwords,” n.p.
- <sup>198</sup> Antrobus, “Acceptance Speech.”
- <sup>199</sup> Cohn et al., “From the Judges”, n.p.
- <sup>200</sup> Antrobus indicates this on the last page of the transcript.
- <sup>201</sup> Macklem and Shane, “Feel the Sky,” n.p.
- <sup>202</sup> Kranz and Side B artist M. Bassel Al-Rahim seem to have introduced each other’s work.
- <sup>203</sup> Kranz includes a credit for the Library of Congress.
- <sup>204</sup> The Audiocraft conference session mentioned in chapter one, where Kranz discussed ‘the power of suggestion’ in audio, was a panel with Kranz and Australian producer Jon Tjhia speaking about how they as musicians think about sound design in crafted audio.

<sup>205</sup> This is Long's full introduction for "Ambient Sir": 'Our last story features the voice of Jordan Scott, who's a poet who also has a stutter. He was researching a connection he'd observed in his own life. Which is, the more that he stutters, the more people in power assume that he's lying. His research brought him to studying interrogation transcripts from Guantánamo Bay in which interrogators also interpreted detainees' stutters as signs of their dishonesty. Jordan decided to apply to tour the prison so he could speak to interrogators and linguists who were working there and learn more. But he knew that it was very difficult to be allowed on one of these tours, so in order to appear less threatening he applied for the visit as a poet. Guantánamo officials said that Jordan wouldn't be able to speak to any interrogators or linguists, he wouldn't be able to record "unauthorised human voices" so Jordan had to change tactic very quickly. He asked if he could record the ambient noises around him. When he arrived, the shorthand explanation of what he was doing became that he was recording ambient sound for poetry, even though in reality he wasn't sure what use he would find for the recordings while he was taking them. This recording starts in a part of Guantánamo called Camp X-Ray. Camp X-Ray now stands abandoned and overgrown with nature because it's the site of an active war crimes investigation into the torture that happened there.'

<sup>206</sup> Scott, "Intro," n.p.

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