

Institution: University of Roehampton
Unit of Assessment: Panel D, UoA 35B Drama Theatre and Performance
Title of case study: Memory, Subjectivity and Broadcast Form in Audio Drama
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Graham White's research has had an impact on the preservation of cultural heritage, on processes of memorialisation and on formal innovation in broadcasting practice. His work on the performance of memory and the presentation of the self, explored particularly in public legal processes of historical reconstruction, fed into his creation of a series of original and adapted radio dramas during the census period. The reach and significance of this research, in particular focused on his 2010 adaptation of B.S. Johnson's formally innovative 1969 novel <i>The Unfortunates</i> for BBC Radio 3, but also in adaptations of Henry James' novel <i>The Ambassadors</i> for BBC Radio 4 and JG Ballard's novels <i>The Drowned World</i> and <i>Concrete Island</i> for the same network, is borne out by a range of evidence, from audience and beneficiary response to critical reception and a BBC award for innovation. The main beneficiaries of this research are the BBC, the B. S. Johnson estate, and radio audiences.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Since 2002 Graham White has conducted published research into the performed self-presentation and articulation of memory by participants in legal forums involving the narration of collective and public history. This research has also been explored in plays and adaptations broadcast on BBC radio which dramatise significant fictional explorations of memory, subjectivity and history and which develop experimental narrative forms to examine issues of memory, subjectivity and the performance of self.</p> <p>White's initial work in this area grew out of his research for and writing of <i>The Trial of the Angry Brigade</i>, a radio play based on documentary source materials written for the BBC in 2002. This led to research focused on the role of memory and the 'play' of performance in the self-presentation of individual witnesses and protagonists in significant historical events, and on the clash between documentary sources and witness voices in resulting accounts of such events. White has investigated the 'playing' and narration of memory by witnesses in a series of research articles and book chapters published between 2006 and 2011 dealing with public legal processes, in part funded by an AHRC research award titled <i>Appearing Before The Tribunal: Performance and the Public Inquiry in the West since the '60's</i>. These publications included research on witness self-presentation in the context of the 'Bloody Sunday' Tribunal, on narratives surrounding witnesses at the Hague trial of Slobodan Milosevic, and on the characterisation of witness performance in a number of trials and tribunals in which conflicting accounts of what occurred in the courtroom have become significant in the development of contemporary conspiracy theories. In 2006, interest in the implications for narrative form of the complex questions of representation exemplified by such material led him to propose an adaptation of Laurence Sterne's novel <i>The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman</i> – a text famously concerned with the performance of the self and the reconstruction through subjective memory of the complex and shifting patterns of the past. This critically acclaimed production for BBC Radio 4 staged the adaptation in ten 15 minutes segments, and foregrounded Tristram as the narrator of his own life, struggling both with the difficulties of memory and the demands of the dramatic structure in which he was presenting it.</p> <p>This research and research-driven practice, has been explored further since 2008 through the dramatisation for radio of a series of novels which foreground the performance of memory. White dramatised B.S. Johnson's 1969 'book in a box'; <i>The Unfortunates</i>, for BBC Radio 3 in 2010, with the protagonist, Bryan, played by Martin Freeman. Johnson's novel was originally published in a series of interchangeable sections to be read – apart from the first and last – in any order. This structure was intended to mimic the processes of memory which lay at the heart of the book's narrative, in which a sportswriter encounters memories of people and events on a visit to a familiar town. The novel was adapted by White in 18 sections which were randomly shuffled prior to broadcast, as well as being made available in an online interactive 'shufflable' version, foregrounded the 'play' of memory through these structural devices. Other adaptations for BBC</p>

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Radio during the census period (*The Ambassadors*, starring Henry Goodman, *The Drowned World*, with Hattie Morahan and Tim McInnerny and *Concrete Island*, with Andrew Scott) have also focused on texts in which the protagonists and narrators have been bound up in the attempt to define themselves and their experience, and in their self-conscious voicing of this process.

3. References to the research

1. *The Unfortunates*. Radio drama, adap. from B.S Johnson. 90 mins. BBC Radio 3, October 2010 – January 2011. REF2.
2. 'Investigating the Truths: Inquiries, Conspiracies and Implied Performances in the Public Record', *Law, Text, Culture, Vol 14: Law's Theatrical Presence* (University of Wollongong Press), Jan 2010. REF2.
3. 'Witnessing Proceedings; The Hague War Crimes Tribunal, Narrative Indeterminacy and the Public Audience' *The Drama Review* (MIT Press), Feb 2008. REF2.
4. 'Quite A Profound Day'. The Public Performance of Memory by Military Witnesses at the Bloody Sunday Tribunal', *Theatre Research International*, Vol 31, No 2 (Cambridge University Press), July 2006. DOI: 10.1017/S0307883306002112.
One of the outputs from An AHRC Research Leave Award ref RL/112590 received for *Appearing Before The Tribunal: Performance and the Public Inquiry in the West since the '60's*. Amount: £15,301, Duration: 10/9/2005 -7/1/2006.
5. *The Trial of the Angry Brigade* – Radio drama based on documentary material, BBC Radio 4, transmitted 9th August 2002.
6. *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, radio drama adap. from Laurence Sterne, 10 parts, 150 mins, BBC Radio 4, 2006.

4. Details of the impact

White's research and research-driven practice engages with existing fictional texts or documentary materials, is realised in collaboration with a broadcasting organisation, radio producers, actors and audiences and with representatives of trusts and estates, making for a wide range of potential impacts and beneficiaries. This case study addresses three specific areas of impact, and the significance and reach of each, focused on the research imperatives behind the subject matter and innovative form of *The Unfortunates*.

i) Contribution to the preservation of cultural heritage

The adaptation of *The Unfortunates* brought the fictional innovations of BS Johnson to renewed and wider public attention, contributing to the preservation of the work and innovative formal practices of the author, one of the leading British experimental novelists of the twentieth century. In finding an updated dramatic equivalent to Johnson's fictional strategies through the use of online forms and the randomising of the broadcast's structure it also helped to support awareness of the close relationship between the writer's experimentation and the complexity of the subject under analysis in his novel – the processes of memory. The recovery and preservation of this influential novel's achievement was further enhanced by White and Steven Johnson, BS Johnson's son, and a representative of the Johnson estate, appearing on BBC Radio 3' 'literary cabaret' show *The Verb* in the run-up to the production to stage a draw which would determine the random order of the sections for the radio broadcast. Ping-pong balls were given the name of fictional footballers featured in the book. Each name was linked to one of the sections and the order in which the studio guests drew the balls decided the order in which the sections would be broadcast. The show also featured a discussion of Johnson's career, work and approach to writing. In addition, White contributed a Blog for the BBC Radio 3 website which demonstrated the manner in which Johnson's fictional techniques found an updated equivalence in radio studio practices. The

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beneficiaries in this case were the radio audience (the audiences for BBC Radios 3 and 4, as well as the public who had access to and visited the websites associated with these stations) and, as an indicative example of how impact regarding the promotion and re-presentation of the work of cultural heritage might function, the BS Johnson estate. White's wider project of adapting a range of texts concerned with the performance of memory and/or of subjectivity has also aided the preservation of cultural heritage in bringing to further public prominence the work of Henry James and JG Ballard.

ii) Contribution to processes of memorialisation

White's underpinning research exploration of the presentation of memory informed the dramatisation of *The Unfortunates* and impacted on the radio audience through the broadcast, the adaptation foregrounding the exploration of the processes of memory both in its subject matter and in its dramaturgy. In the case of *The Unfortunates* the decision to adapt a text concerned with finding an innovative structure to highlight the processes of memory was in part a result of strategies employed in White's previous ...*Angry Brigade* drama, bringing contrasting narratives to the fore and playing out through the arrangement of textual elements a collision between conflicting accounts of events, moments and their significance. In addition the online version provided a direct, interactive audience encounter with a shifting text and its meanings, both as an exploration of memory and as a demonstration of the challenge to conventional linear narrative of experimental techniques. In this case the beneficiaries were the public audience, though the work also impacted on the BBC and the BS Johnson estate. White's adaptation of Henry James' *The Ambassadors* also foregrounded the processes of memory - James' protagonist, Lambert Strether, played in the production by Henry Goodman, is, like Bryan in *The Unfortunates*, forced to confront the disjunction between past and present in another city, Paris. A review of the production by Moira Petty for *The Stage* stated that 'Graham White has excavated deep into the archaeology of *The Ambassadors*... and come up with an exquisite and subtle drama...built up in layers and daubs, like oil on canvas, until the glistening accretion becomes quite mesmerical' (21/11/11).

iii) Contribution to formal innovation in broadcasting

In this case the beneficiaries were both the audience and the BBC itself, whose editorial and broadcast practices were adapted as a result of *The Unfortunates*' formal innovations. The randomised broadcast was available for the usual week after transmission on the BBC iPlayer, but the provision of the online version required changes to usual broadcasting practices. This included, the extension of the availability to three months and the devising of a new form of website presence for the drama – the carousel of images allowing the audience to scroll through the sections of the production. The significance of the innovative form was in part evidenced by critical responses to the production, for example 'a remarkable radio play; moving, tender, thought-provoking, reminiscent of Joyce's *Ulysses* but easier to grasp. The memories, evocatively dramatised as short audio flashbacks, soon came flooding back in no particular order, which is the point of the book's structure; and, in a clever post-broadcast addition that I'm keen to try, the play's dedicated Radio 3 website now offers listeners the option of hearing 18 of the individual segments in any order' (Pete Naughton, *Daily Telegraph*, 17/10/10). Such critical responses provide a record of the impact of the work's approach to questions of narrative and memory. Further evidence of the significance of the work includes the winning of the 2012 BBC Audio Drama Award for Innovation for the production. The citation for the award described this as a 'beguiling blend of great storytelling and an innovative approach to structure' which 'pushed the boundaries of audio adaptation'. While other of White's adaptations during the census period appeared in more conventional broadcast slots and forms, the work contributed to innovation in content – both *The Drowned World* and *Concrete Island* brought the work of JG Ballard to mainstream radio in the context of BBC Radio 4's 'Dangerous Visions' season of dystopian dramas in 2013.

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5. Sources to corroborate the impact

a) Testimonials

- Producer, BBC Radio Drama
- BS Johnson Estate representative

b) Critical Reception/Reviews

- <http://www.guardian.co.uk/tv-and-radio/2010/oct/24/bs-johnson-the-unfortunates-review>
- <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/bbc/8071813/Winston-Churchills-black-dog-gets-some-sympathetic-petting-radio-review.html>
- Moira Petty, Radio Review (*The Ambassadors*), *The Stage*, 20/11/11.

c) Awards

- http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/radio/2012/01/the_winners_of_the_first_bbc_a.html

d) Blog reference/ online commentary

- <http://libertarianspirit.wordpress.com/2012/02/24/bbc-radio-drama-a-powerful-force-for-story-telling-audio-literature-and-sound-performance/#more-554>
- Interview: [Ballard adaptations](http://londoncalling.com/features/how-the-bbc-adapted-jg-ballards-classic-novels-the-drowned-world-and-conc/), <http://londoncalling.com/features/how-the-bbc-adapted-jg-ballards-classic-novels-the-drowned-world-and-conc/>
- Adaptor's blog, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/radio3/2010/10/the-unfortunates---how-it-was.shtml>