Audio storytelling as methodology: proper distance in scholarly communication

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Abstract

This article provides a lyrical reflection on the production of a feature radio documentary — #City#Life for Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) Radio National — and through this reflection, it aims to solidify the foundations for audio storytelling to be heard and understood as a dynamic methodology for academic scholarship. There is now a substantial body of research illustrating podcasting's ability to inform, challenge, care, entertain, and thrive in an attention economy that has seen other modes of long-form journalism decline in popularity and influence (Lindgren & Loviglio 2022; McHugh 2022;, Zokaei 2024); likewise, much thought and energy has been given to the acceptance of journalism as research (Bacon 2006; Jorgensen & Lindgren 2022; Lindgren & Phillips 2011; Nash 2013; Niblock 2012). This article explores how the inherent strengths of podcasting and audio production can be applied to academic scholarship more broadly, providing not just non-traditional research outputs, but also a methodology for qualitative research based on two interrelated concepts: multi-modal storytelling and aesthetics. These twin dimensions of audio as methodology are explained and analysed through three complimentary frameworks. The first of these is Mark Deuze's media life, which argues that media have become environmental, and that the inherent logic of communications media have subsequently become invisible to us in the same way that water is invisible to fish (Deuze 2012); the second is Pierre Bourdieu's framework of habitus and field, which allows for a critical understanding of relationships between and within modes of cultural production (Bourdieu 2005); and the third is what Roger Silverstone describes as 'proper distance' vis-à-vis mediated strangers, strangeness, and the multiple calamities of our mediated world (Silverstone 2007). This article suggests that research methodologies that work between and across fields of cultural production are most able to recognise the inherent biases of any given field; that the production of knowledge across multiple media, including but not limited to

traditional academic outputs, allows for qualitative research to evolve in surprising, reflective, and generative ways; and that this multi-modal approach can go some way towards approximating 'proper distance' in scholarly communication.

Keywords

Research methodology, proper distance, media life, reflection, field theory, otherness

Recommended Citation

Introduction

If this were a radio script, it would begin with a bowl of beans, a jug of fresh mango juice, and a dinner conversation with a close friend named Stella, who works in a busy intensive care ward in Medellín, Colombia. Stella would say that she loves her work as a doctor for many reasons, but above all, because hospitals are places where different visions and experiences of the world are in constant collision.

> "How does one explain to an illiterate peasant that her adult daughter is brain dead?" Stella would ask. "How do I explain that, although her daughter is breathing and warm, she is no longer capable of living in the absence of machines? How does one explain the concept of brain death to a woman who has never read a book?"

In her thick Colombian accent, Stella would recount her laboured attempt at an explanation. She would describe how the mother listened with little apparent emotional response, how the beeping and murmuring of medical machinery created a dense stillness that weighed on the room, and how, stroking her daughter's forehead, the woman eventually responded: "Yes, it is the same with chickens; we kill them, but for a short while after death, they appear to be alive."

In the radio script I would describe Stella's melancholic smile at the dinner table, and how easy it was to imagine her in the hospital with that same expression, humbled before the intelligence of an illiterate mother whose daily experience of the world was as engraved with life and death as her own.

Such is communication.

When it works well, communication creates belonging, understanding, compassion, empathy, humour, and interest. It splashes our life with moments that become stories to share with friends and family. And when it transcends language, technology, class, distance, ideology, belief, and all the other natural and unnatural barriers that exist between peoples, communication enables community (Calhoun, 1998).

Stella's story is a short and lyrical way of illustrating what Roger Silverstone describes as 'proper distance' vis-à-vis our relationships with mediated strangers (Silverstone, 2007), and it is the possibility of proper distance in scholarly communication that provides the central focus and purpose for what follows. But, of course, this is not a radio script, and when I submitted this article for publication, both reviewers quite rightly put pen to paper here, noting that this short anecdote about a Colombian friend does not provide a valid

introduction to an article that purports to uphold the rigours of scholarly discourse: what, exactly, is my topic? What is my purpose?

This tension is important. In my clumsy way, I am attempting to *show* my arguments here as well as *tell* them, drawing particularly on the tradition of fictocriticism to juxtapose creative and academic writing environments and interrogate their separation and autonomy (Smith, 2009, pp.1001-1002). Fictocriticism considers form to be an essential element of the message (Flavell, 2004, p.186); however, whereas fictocriticism rarely strays from the page, in this article I draw on a reflection of radio documentary production to explore the ways in which communicating knowledge across multiple media, including academic writing and audio storytelling, might enhance the production of both. I propose that the strengths of audio storytelling — particularly its intimacy, immediacy, and narrative arc — and the process of *rethinking* ideas as audio, of writing for the ear as well as for the eye, can provide a dynamic methodology for scholarly work that goes some way to approximating what Roger Silverstone describes as proper distance (Silverstone, 2007).

I make this case in several steps. First, I define 'proper distance' and locate it within Mark Deuze's concept of a 'media life'; I then introduce the radio documentary case study, *#City#Life*, and describe how it informed many of the key ideas in this article, including my understanding of 'proper distance' and 'a media life'; I then discuss and contrast academic and journalistic approaches to knowledge production through Bourdieu's framework of 'habitus' and 'field'; and finally, I discuss the value of aesthetics in scholarly communication, and the importance of providing 'a view of the view', in the hope of furthering the case for audio storytelling to be heard and understood as a dynamic methodology for academic scholarship.

Proper Distance

At the heart of this article is Roger Silverstone's concept of proper distance, which is concerned with the moral quality of our social relationships in media. For Silverstone, 'distance' ought not be deemed a material, geographical, or social category, but — precisely because the word infers and interrelates each of these — it should be considered a moral category (2003, pp.473-474). Distance allows or denies speech and determines the quality of our listening – the ability to hear, the expectations for being heard, and the willingness to listen; 'proper', then, is a description and moral evaluation of distance. It can be

understood as a synonym for 'correct' — as in, 'now is the *proper* time to act' — and by extension it can describe and judge something as proper or improper in relation to social norms and expectations (Silverstone, 2003, p.473). Silverstone writes:

> Proper distance is the critical notion that implies and involves a search for enough knowledge and understanding of the other person or the other culture to enable responsibility and care, as well as to enable the kind of action that, informed by that understanding, is in turn enabling. We need to be close but not too close, distant, but not too distant (2007, p.172).

Proper distance is therefore not a thing to be had or achieved, but a process that is its own goal and reward. In this sense, it is akin to what Max Weber describes as 'empathic understanding', or *Verstehen* in the original German, which requires putting aside one's own vision of the world and adopting the framework of the Other (Chang 2008, p.27). Perfect *verstehen* is impossible, but as is the case with proper distance, any attempt to apply the idea opens the possibility of rich inter-cultural dialogue (ibid). This is difficult, however, because we cannot attend to the presence of every person in our life, mediated or otherwise; and yet, just as inhabitants of dense urban dwellings can choose to know something of their neighbours (or not), and just as they can imagine life beyond their suburb (or not), so too can we move towards a moral relationship with Others in the liquid spaces of what Mark Deuze describes as a 'media life', and in this way approximate proper distance with strangers and strangeness.

Media Life

Mark Deuze's term 'media life' is based on media's quotidian ubiquity. We no longer live *with* media but *in* media, Deuze argues; media cannot be placed outside our realm of experience, but are intrinsic to it (Deuze, 2011, pp.137-138). Deuze consequently argues that we have reached an ontological turn in which the greatest challenge in 21st-century communication will be the disappearance of media (Deuze, 2011, p.137). At first glance, this idea is counterintuitive, but just as fish can comprehend nothing of water precisely because they know nothing else, so too does the ubiquity of media in every aspect of life decrease our awareness of how media shape our experiences and expectations (ibid). In addition to this shift, the ontological turn that the media life perspective represents can be understood and observed in several ways. The first is that mediation can no longer be understood in epistemological terms

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because media precondition the very possibility of knowledge (Sutherland, 2014, pp.113-114). In a media life, we cannot study media, nor communicate knowledge or understanding of media, without already employing media – an inescapable feedback loop of life, research, and study *in* media (ibid). A second important observation is that, according to Deuze, we can no longer think about being alone or together, or in public or private space, in the same ways that we traditionally have. In media we are alone *and* together at the same time, all the time (Deuze 2014, pers. comm. 22 April).

#City#Life

Ten years ago, I produced a 50-minute radio essay for what was then Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) Radio National's flagship documentary program, *360Documentaries*. It was the early years of smart phone use, and the documentary was originally pitched as a lyrical half-hour feature exploring how our evolving relationships with (and through) social media were altering the nature of public space in big cities. I had already produced several multimedia photo essays on the same topic, each of them profiling a musician who busked on Sydney streets, and the documentary proposal included that material, along with key ideas that I was exploring in my PhD thesis on long-form digital journalism and the ways it was changing on the Internet. The pitch was accepted on the basis of that combined work; however, the commissioning producer, Claudia Taranto, made clear that she held reservations about the project. Her primary concern was that the weight of the ideas would turn the story into a theoretical brick, and this risk grew hand-in-hand with my vision for how key ideas in my thesis could translate into an hour of radio. As I interviewed taxi drivers, academics, buskers, volunteer workers, and other ordinary people with a unique perspective (and often a reliance) on social engagement in public spaces, I found myself 'listening back' to ideas I'd encountered in the dense language of academic texts (Lacey, 2022, p.30). None of the people I interviewed on Sydney streets had read about proper distance or a media life, but their observations nonetheless retold those theories to me, and often it was as if I were encountering the theories for the first time in this act of 'listening back' (ibid).

    #City#Life was never *a story,* exactly, but rather a series of stories about an idea, or around and through an idea. When I made the original pitch to *360Documentaries*, I subsequently found it difficult to articulate exactly what the

story was (…it's about the moral and philosophical importance of difficulty; about the need to conserve common ground in public space; about the evolving nature of public space itself; about the idea of living *in* media rather than *with* media; and about the cultural importance of busking as a public artform that intervenes in and reclaims public space; et cetera…). That is, the documentary was about many things, and none of them was *the story*. I was attempting to present and explain the concepts of 'proper distance' and 'media life' without explaining or defining either of them in a traditionally academic way. And I was telling a yarn, even if the story itself was difficult to pin down.

Editors and producers know that an inability to provide a clear and coherent pitch suggests that an idea typically lacks the detail and clear angle required for the production of any good piece of journalism — Claudia Taranto had good cause to be nervous — but despite my inability to articulate the story, the feature article that eventually accompanied #City#Life on the Radio National homepage became the most widely read and shared story that Radio National had, at that time, ever published (Ball, 2014); clearly there was a story, so why was it so hard to articulate?

One answer is that the documentary's approach to storytelling proceeded more from academic methodology than it did from radio orthodoxy. This is not to say that the production evaded the essential processes of radio production, including interviews, sound recordings, scripting and mixing; rather, in place of a clearly delineated protagonist, issue, or conflict, the documentary's genesis was a series of closely aligned questions. The documentary was a condensed thesis in radio form, and those two nouns, 'radio' and 'thesis', made opposing claims on what the outcome should be, and on how the associated verbs ought to *be done* ('to document', 'to tell', 'to explain', 'to share', 'to attribute', et cetera).

It was a gamble on Claudia Taranto's part to commission #City#Life for the ABC, but with the help of a co-producer and friend, Belinda Lopez, and the guidance and expertise of a sound engineer who, like so many in his profession, worked with the touch and lyricism of a poet, I began working through the opposing claims on what the story might be.

After four days of mixing the audio for *#City#Life*, we sat as a team and listened to the documentary in full for the first time. Claudia took notes and made suggestions for changes she would like made in the fifth and final day of the mix. And feeling exhausted and vulnerable in that small audio booth, I

peered across at Claudia's notepad and saw, written at the bottom of the page and underlined for emphasis, "This is an audacious documentary."

Field and Habitus

The production of #City#Life occurred on the volatile ground between the fields of journalism and academia, and this synergy, this tension, provided a strength and audacity that found its way into both the radio documentary and the PhD thesis.

Pierre Bourdieu developed his theories of 'field' and 'habitus' to provide a framework for analysing social relationships in and across specific settings. For Bourdieu, *field* is both a method and a thing. As a method, the field is a way of constructing and understanding social objects according to the relationships between them (Bourdieu, 2005, p.30). If we envisage society as a machine, for example, and ask whether the parts of the machine define the whole, or whether the machine defines the parts, field theory responds that it is the relationships within the whole that define both the parts and the machine (Nash, 2009, pers. Comm. 27 March); and the machine as a metaphor also illustrates the field as thing, as a working space made up of and defined by the relationships that operate within it, which in turn are defined by the economic and social conditions that the parts experience within the machine (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.105). The relationships, expectations and 'rules' within the machine are specific to it. An internal combustion engine does not work the same way as a computer because its parts do not obey the same 'rules', and producing a story for radio does not obey the same rules as producing that same story for an academic journal: the expectations and protocols for how knowledge is produced and shared in each field are different.

Individuals regulate behaviour within a field without consciously obeying rules because of our learned and evolving place within it, or *habitus* (Swartz, 1997, p.95). Habitus is imbued with varying degrees of power and authority,[1] which inform an individual's every action and reaction within a field (Bourdieu et al. 1992, pp.118-119). Habitus therefore describes how individuals act and relate according to their place within the field, just as the field is constructed according to the relationships between the individuals within it (Kenway & McLeod, 2004).

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[1] Bourdieu analyses power and authority in terms of capital, which he separates into four categories: economic, cultural, social and symbolic (Bourdieu et al. 1992, pp.118-119).

Together, field and habitus provide a way of analysing cultural processes and for recognising cultural production in terms of dynamic relationships rather than outcomes (Niblock, 2012, p.502). This is useful when examining situations in which the activities of one field take place within the context of another, as is often the case with journalism research and journalism education, and this is especially so when fields clash along epistemological fault-lines (Niblock, 2012, p.503; Rajchman 2000). Knowledge grows most effectively in the places where the world proves at odds with itself, in those peculiar zones that Gilles Deleuze describes as "the unthought": unstable territories where fields clash and new material is thrust to the surface, breaking old ground, challenging beliefs, and propelling facts into the vivid realm of unresolved story (Rajchman, 2000, p.115).

Multi-modal storytelling and aesthetics

Journalism research is inherently interdisciplinary, outward looking, and problematic. It works on ground that is not necessarily its own, telling stories that need not be *about* journalism (Niblock, 2012, p.498). And just as an earthquake is felt most where shifting tectonic plates collide or pull apart, so too are tensions most volatile at the intersections of cultural fields (Bourdieu et al. 1992). That is, tensions exist not only at points of difference, but also (and especially) along areas of convergence. Academia, art, and journalism all share a claim to knowledge, to the production of culture and thought, and this production occurs on volatile ground.

Field theory is useful precisely because it acknowledges that human thought and culture are promiscuous: Bourdieu recognises that knowledge can be found and shared in journals, lecture theatres, and conferences; but equally in conversations on the street, graffiti, songs, sculptures, hospital beds, and buildings. Knowledge can be found in kindergartens and on construction sites; it is present in what we say and how we say it; embedded in what we build and how we build it; but knowledge need not exist as story, the production of which is its own field. That is, knowledge exists everywhere without the need for its internal workings to be *told*, or for its logic to be thought about beyond the banal realm of fact, and this is perhaps the simplest and most important advantage for audio storytelling as a methodology for qualitative research. In considering a piece of scholarship — in surveying the theory, facts, data, results, and conclusions of a study — the journalist or storyteller must find the through-line,

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the elements that link together to create a story. The narrative needn't be produced as audio, of course, but doing so draws on other inherent strengths of the sonic form. David Isay suggests that working in print is like working in one dimension, working in radio is like working in two dimensions, and the inclusion of visual material adds a third dimension (Maguire, 2011, pp.13-14). In radio, a script must read well *and* sound good. This is the basic requirement of audio storytelling. The script provides a narrative, and the sound's tone, timbre and rhythm traverse the narrative axis to provide the white space and context that make radio such an intimate, evocative medium (Maguire 2011; McHugh 2022). Audio storytelling brings aesthetics to facts, and in so doing it provides a "sensorial depth" (Jorgensen & Lindgren 2022, p.55) and allows academic scholarship to return to first principles, to ask and re-ask why objects fall towards the Earth's core, for example, and if this might ever be otherwise.

The world becomes strange when facts are strung together to form stories, and this too is an important advantage for audio as a research methodology, especially in the context of Mark Deuze's concern that the quotidian ubiquity of media renders their mediating effects invisible (Cramerotti 2009; Deuze 2012). Journalists follow knowledge and tell its story, and not simply the stories of those who have knowledge, but the stories of knowledge itself, the way it unfolds through the serendipity of a taxi ride, or from an unplanned browse along a library shelf. Telling the story of knowledge as an active, thinking process, searching out disparate connections between facts, observing from unseen perspectives, and listening to new voices with new questions, can build knowledge in the field of enquiry that is being explored, whilst also providing reflexive insight into the *way* a story is told, and how the telling influences society's relationship to that knowledge.

The way a story is constructed and told influences *what* the story is – this is simply Marshal McLuhan's *the medium is the message* restated (McLuhan, 2003). The logic and limitations of any medium inform *which* facts and perspectives are combined to tell the story, *how* these facts and perspectives are brought together, for *whom* the story is told, and to what *end*. Telling a story in several ways, across multiple media (including academic media such as journals), augments the knowledge that a story seeks to communicate, and it increases the number of vantage points from which the storyteller can reflect on the narrative process, thus providing a more panoramic perspective of what Alfredo Cramerotti describes as the "view of the view" (2009, p.28).

The challenge of making media a visible part of life, of making mediation itself the focus of necessary attention, is critical, especially given the rise of misinformation and generative artificial intelligence (Arielli & Manovich 2022). Journalists often attempt to minimise their authorial presence, avoiding obvious symbolism and attempting instead to create an experience that is not undone by an awareness of the constructed artifice (Maguire, 2011, p.8). But to approximate proper distance, the storyteller must go further, drawing the audience's attention to the mediating effects of the medium whilst also ensuring that the medium does not distract the public's attention away from the story at hand, and this is a difficult balancing act. Indeed, for Bolter and Grusin, these two approaches to media production are opposites (Bolter & Grusin, 2000). When the observer ignores the medium and looks directly to the subject, the journalist works in a manner of *transparent immediacy*; and when the observer looks at the medium, instead of through it, the journalist employs *hypermediacy* (ibid).

Proper distance requires a combination of hypermediacy and transparent immediacy. A story must be felt as well as understood, and it must be understood in the context of the inability to capture an entire story. According to Michele Hilmes, audio has always enjoyed a natural aesthetic, and she celebrates radio's ability to detach sound from its source, to obscure its origins, and to project sound over previously unthinkable distances while addressing the listener intimately (2022, p.9). And the rise of the podcast, Hilmes argues, has extended audio's ability to blur the personal and public spheres, enabling an unprecedented sense of privacy as we hear deeply personal stories from people who remain hidden from us, much like a church confessional (Hilmes, 2022, p.12).

Many of these aesthetic tensions were clear to me when producing #City#Life, and they strike me again now as I listen back to another time, another place. In retelling my thesis as a radio documentary, the solitary work of academic scholarship became collaborative. I was forced to take abstract ideas to the street in search of sonic stories from which the ideas could hang suspended. What does it mean to live *in* media, for example, rather than *with* media? How can this idea be told? How can it be heard in the mellifluous vernacular of those whose street-side perspective might enrich the idea's meaning for the audience, for me, and perhaps even for Mark Deuze, who developed the concept in the first place?

For buskers and taxi-drivers in 2014, the idea made intuitive sense, and they were able to respond to it with stories about the ways that private space and public space were folding into one another, changing the way we live together in modern cities. "There was a time when I could drive up to a bus stop and see by people's body language if somebody wanted a taxi," a Sydney taxi driver said. "These days they're all standing there looking at their apps, or at how far away the bus is via their telephones. It's very technology driven, the communication."

Angela Piccini argues that the public nature of artistic practice allows researchers to explore how the meaning of knowledge can be opened through exposure to public scrutiny (Piccini, 2002). This idea is manifest in how an artistic artefact or documentary is publicly received (ibid); and it is also true in relation to how knowledge is produced *through* practice, building on the stories of people from diverse backgrounds whose ideas respond to, reflect, and extend a particular idea or body of knowledge.

As a methodology, journalism runs the risk of turning the particulars of a story into normative theory, much like photography tends to condense the flow of time and space into a single frame. But the obverse is also true. Stories are inclusive. They engender hospitality and invite the listener to participate in the process of knowledge, because story *is* process, or it is nothing (Silverstone, 2007). Without a listener, a story dies. A painter may have a deep relationship with her work — she may converse with it, argue and laugh with it, and this too is process, it is a conversation — but when the final brush stroke is applied and that original creative process is finished, the painting must generate new and ongoing reactions or it ceases *to be*, at least for a time; a story can be reborn under different conditions, of course — it can be re-discovered after lying dormant like a desert flower — but the point is this: words on a page are mere material stuff until they are read, understood, and perpetuated. This is communication as culture, and it is culture as communication, knowledge as story (Carey, 1992).

A clear advantage of telling the story of an idea or theory across multiple media is that the story is more likely to be heard, and the ideas and questions contained within the story are therefore more likely to grow (Jorgensen & Lindgren, 2022). But telling the story of my PhD thesis as radio documentary also allowed for specific and unexpected insights into the broader project of thesis production, because just as learning a second language reveals the structure of a mother tongue, so too do choices made in storytelling reveal the

innate structure and expectations of other media in which the same story is told, including academic media. The character of the narrative dance becomes more visible, its tempo, voice, tone and rhythm more evident. During the radio production, for example, I interviewed the Canadian technology writer, Clive Thompson, who mentioned the idea of "civil inattention"; and, knowing that this term comes from the work of sociologist Erving Goffman (1971), I instinctively referred to Goffman in my script. However, after long discussion with Claudia Taranto and Belinda Lopez, the reference was eventually cut.

"Do we really need to know that the idea comes from Goffman?" they asked.

"*Well, of course,*" I responded. "*It's HIS idea, HIS term…*"

"…Sure, but what does the fact add to the story? Does the listener need to know about Goffman, or is the reference simply a distraction from the bigger picture, just another name to deal with?"

The narrative dance of radio moves to a different tempo, and the addition of a fact can bog down the narrative rhythm, and therefore prove counterproductive; but what is important here is that the change of rhythm made me aware that I was already moving at a particular tempo, that my dance already had a specific shape and character, so that when I returned to my written thesis, it was with the voices of Claudia and Belinda ringing in my ears: "We can cut this bit – you've already said the same thing in two other ways, so why do we need to hear it again?"

And I did cut paragraphs, both in the radio documentary and in the thesis, and I rewrote many others, altering the expression in subtle ways, sometimes replacing a 'however' with a 'but', to give one silly example, a tiny change that any editor might make, but one that arguably transgresses the traditional academic style, nonetheless. And I should also say that Claudia and Belinda were sufficiently generous to leave the final scripting decisions to me, and I was not always persuaded away from my original words. It was my dance, and that was a second important revelation that came from *#City#Life*, because creating a succinct narrative from my research forced me to reflect more deeply on my own place within the story. As soon as I began reviewing the interview material and writing the script, it became clear that what bound the stories, ideas, and questions together into a coherent narrative was *me*. It was not my intention to make my having a stutter part of the story, for example, but I quickly realised that I must. Why was *I* telling the story? What is my own, personal insight into

the difficulties of communication and understanding? How did I feel throughout the production of a radio feature, and why? What was my *view of the view*?

My experience as somebody who stutters subsequently became a vital part of the PhD thesis, and that would not have been the case had I not told the thesis across multiple media, as a journalist and as an academic. Like habitus and story, journalism is a process, a question of relationships, and it is also a thing, an imperfect agora for debate where voices meet *through* the journalist. As a story is produced, the journalist becomes the medium through which different voices are connected, and this became most clear to me when I sat late one evening to interview Mark Deuze, each of us in a radio studio on opposite sides of the planet, two academics taking part in the process of journalistic storytelling and coming together because of the framework, infrastructure and outcomes that journalism provides. I was a conduit, a medium through which the stories of people on the street – people with whom I identified and shared a culture – were connected with the ideas and framework of an academic with whom I also identified and shared a culture; and I was crafting a story about ideas and the way they play out, working as a journalist, interviewing and recording with a colleague in the room who was tasked with throwing a ball of paper at me should my language flirt too much with academic jargon; I was working with ideas, but my primary concern was for the story, for how facts and theory could be shared, challenged, applied, and perpetuated through tales, anecdotes, songs, jokes, and testimonies. It was not possible to tell the whole story – it never is – but *a story* was possible, nevertheless – a critical story, playful and imperfect, told with an eye to proper distance — to the possibility of appreciating our own strangeness — and remediated again here in this journal article.

Conclusion

Let me finish with a final example of how the radio script for #City#Life changed the way I thought about my thesis, and about the nature of academic writing more broadly. I remember learning as an undergraduate that it's never appropriate to introduce a new idea or argument in a conclusion, and it was a notion that never sat well with me. As a journalist I had learned that an ending that delivers nothing new is not an ending worth reading or listening to, because …well …what's the point? So here, instead, I will sum up with an explanation of *why* these ideas are important.

Everything we know of the world beyond our geographical neighbourhoods, we know through media, which is to say that the world is mediated to us through books, social platforms, music, film, and even public spaces (Calhoun 1998, p.391; Silverstone 2007). The quality of our media, how it shapes knowledge, discourse and perception, necessarily affects how we live together in a mediated world (Silverstone 2007; Strate 2004). My concern in this article is thus for how academics can work within a media life in a manner that sustains the social value of rigorous, thoughtful, creative scholarship, and for how we can work across fields in ways that make visible the nature of the media we employ to conduct our research, as well as to communicate it. Remediating scholarship as audio storytelling is one way of broadening our view of the view. It allows for scholarship that draws on the productive instability between fields to cast light on the otherwise unseen expectations and constraints of academic media. The re-telling of scholarly concepts in other forms such as video documentary or creative writing may prove equally useful, but I believe the production of #City#Life provides valuable insights into audio's ability to build theoretical concepts into a story that is both aesthetic and intimate, complicated and simple, and that therefore goes some way to approximating proper distance in the communication of academic scholarship.

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