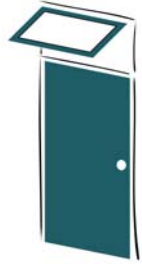


the transom review

April, 2003

Vol. 3/Issue 2



Edited by Sydney Lewis

Jonathan Goldstein

About Jonathan Goldstein

Jonathan Goldstein was born in Brooklyn, New York. He is the author of the prize-winning novel *Lenny Bruce is Dead*. He is the co-author of *Schmelvis: In Search of Elvis Presley's Jewish Roots*. His writing has appeared in *The New York Times Magazine*, *Saturday Night Magazine*, *The New York Times*, and *The Journey Prize Anthology*. His radio stories and essays have appeared on *This American Life* where he is a contributing editor. He was a producer at the show from 2000-2002. In Canada, he's contributed to numerous shows on the CBC. He was also the host of the CBC summer radio program *Road Dot Trip*. In 2002 he was a co-recipient of The Third Coast Audio Festival's Gold Prize. He currently lives in Montreal with his girlfriend Heather and her daughter, the Renaissance girl, Arizona O'Neill.



Intro by Jay Allison

Sometimes you hear a new radio writer and it's like a breeze coming through. Oh, *that's* nice. Jonathan Goldstein sounds like that. His work for the CBC and *This American Life* can be funny and moving all in one sentence. He has made pieces about Travel, Telemarketing, Voice Mail, Love... and now he's written about radio.

Prepare to be strangely moved by an image of pre-chewed food.

Jonathan can't think of a title for his manifesto, but he has some interesting questions stored up for you, in case you can't think of anything to ask.

February 26, 2003

Jonathan Goldstein's Manifesto

An Introduction

I was going to start off by asking this: “Where does the person on the radio exist?” Then I was going to answer myself with this: “The person on the radio exists nowhere. He is already dead.” Next I was going to add: “The person on the radio has nothing to lose or gain in telling you the truth. When he enters the studio, he is entering the tomb. He encrypts himself, drinks from the water cup to cleanse his throat, and then steps to the mike as though presenting himself before the throne of God.” And finally: “The voices on the radio come to you as souls free of the body and, because of this, they are already closer to Heaven.”

Then I thought, but what the hell do I know.

Initially, my feeling was that such a series of statements would establish a tone of gravity, and I like gravity. But then I thought that if I were to simply start off by confiding to you, my radio confreres, that the preceding words were merely *considered*, then they could be imparted to you in quotes, as words that are as loaded with old-school pomposity as they are with my ambivalence about my role as any kind of authority.

What I accomplish by doing so, at the risk of getting all Charlie Kaufman on your ass, is I let you in on my inner process and by doing that, I do two things: 1. I make what comes next feel more real; and 2, I create an intimacy between myself and the reader. My feeling is that this business of offering a glimpse behind the curtain can be used to create a more personal and intimate radio. Or not.

A Life Lived In Radio

My earliest experience in radio came when I was ten. I would spend whole afternoons taping songs off of CHOM FM, a hard rock station in Montreal who's slogan was “We like to rock.” My big challenge was trying to press the stop button quickly enough at the end of songs so I wouldn't end up with the DJ saying stuff like “that was Cheap Trick rocking you harder than a heavy metal rocking chair.” Getting close to the end of songs was a time of high anxiety. Also, I didn't have one of those “boom boxes” that could record radio internally. All I had was my tape recorder so I'd press its microphone to the speaker of my parents' hi-fi unit. This meant that at the same time that I was recording the radio, I was also, rather inevitably, recording whatever was going on in the background. Thus, mixed in with Pat Benatar's *Treat Me Right*, were the sounds of my father screaming at my mother

for “hiding” his underwear. The audience-- which consisted of my sister and my friend Lenny who’d listen to the tapes as we all played board games-- were given a glimpse into the psyche of the man with the mike. It was rock and roll heard through the proscenium arch of our household—the sounds of our family’s dysfunction “troubling” the text of the rock and roll. Instead of being impersonal, the tapes were personal and they said something about me and my family. Incidentally, to this day, whenever I hear the drum and bass solo during the Rolling Stone’s *Miss You*, I can also hear the phantom sound of my mother threatening to flush my dinner down the toilet if I didn’t come to the table.

The next twenty-odd years were uneventful as well as virtually worthless. I completed my public school education and then did a ten-year stint in a telemarketing office. Then one day, my friend Joshua Karpati told me about a phone message that was circulated throughout Columbia University in the early nineties. The message essentially consisted of a Jewish mother telling her Jewish son to go fuck himself. He told me about all the various lives that were touched by this message. I decided to produce a story about it on TAL.

Buddy Picture

<http://thislife.org/ra/203.ram>

Last story. It's about me, my friend Joshua Karpati, and the Columbia phone message.

During the course of production, I began to feel that just as important as the story of the message’s circulation, was my friend Josh’s telling it to me, and so I decided that the story needed to begin with a portrait of Josh. That way, hopefully, in knowing a little about Josh, the audience would be able to delight in his story in the way that I did. Also, I would be able to get in Josh’s famous “diggy-doo” anecdote. It had little bearing to the message of the story, but I enjoyed saying diggy-doo, and it is my belief that people enjoyed hearing it spoken.

My friendship with Josh, as well my trepidation in pursuing the story, all became as important as the story itself. All of these factors became frames through which the story would eventually be heard. It also helped to bring the listener closer to me. By allowing the audience to hear Josh verbally berate me (calling me, among other things, a stentorian-toned, public radio pussy-talking bitch-squealer), I was allowing the audience to hear the metaphorical “where’s my underwear” of my dysfunctional friendship with Josh mixed with the “rock and roll” of the actual story. For the first time in my life, I was humiliating myself in public for a *reason*.

Stuff on the periphery can be exciting when it reveals something about personality. It’s nice to hear someone going to use the bathroom during an interview, or putting a pot of tea on because their throat is dry. It feels real and it can add to the drama and, at bottom, it says, in a lyrical way, that we are human. I would say that these are good thing that can make for good radio.

My intention in the Columbia message story was to create intimacy—not only in terms of the details that were revealed in the conversations with Josh, but the way that they were revealed. It just felt like there was more at stake that way, that there were more layers to the whole thing. I allowed myself to get involved—because I was involved. I am not some invisible, omniscient gas. I am Jonathan Arturo Goldstein. Okay, Jonathan Stuart Goldstein. But still...

Wow. Those Are Some Balls.

All of this said, I still wrestle with the same thing that Scott Carrier writes about in his Transom discussion -- that nagging feeling that tells you that to narrate-- to put in too much of yourself and your world-- is to have failed. For one of my first radio stories, I interviewed my parents about the kind of music they listened to. My father loves Bread (“the music of Bread is timeless!”); my mother loves Paul Anka (“I saw him in '77 on a revolving stage. He had some ass.”) I wrote in the piece, “The sound of music emanating out of our hi-fi unit in the basement on Sunday mornings, rising up into my bedroom, was akin to the mounting anxiety that only a clogged and over-flowing toilet can inspire.” The thing is, that initially, I didn’t want to come in and say anything. I just felt that my parents were so great and so funny and warm, and that for me to have to come out like a circus barker and point a megaphone at them seemed like cheap carnie tricks. Though I was resistant to the idea of over-narrating, what I eventually learnt from the experience was that the listener might be able to hear my parents and find them funny, but in order for the listener to find them funny in the way that I find them funny, I had to provide the listener with a frame. Anyway, it’s still something I wrestle with, and I often feel like the guy with the pointer who directs the amphitheatre’s attention to the size of the elephant man’s testicles.

My Parents' Music

<http://www.cbc.ca/outfront/audio/99-10-25-outfront.ram>

I talk with my parents about the music they love.

Another thing we use on TAL to create a frame through which to hear voices is music. Music creates an emotional frame which more or less tells you, like the autocratic fascist that music is, how to hear something. If the music is telling you something that you mostly agree with (“yes this is a haunting little story and I suppose I do find myself a bit weepy”) then your listening experience will be a good one; if the music is telling you something that you believe in your heart to be fundamentally untrue, (“Is that Philip Glass’s excruciatingly beautiful *DancePieces* playing under that carpet salesman’s lamentation of the demise of the wall-to-wall shag?”) you will feel exploited. Anyway, there is an excellent way that a hard swallow in someone’s voice, mixed with some swell of just the right music that can be very much like a throat punch to the heart. I think the right combination of music and story can be that powerful. I wasn’t going to say this, but I will, and I’m not even going to say it in quotes: The right music can free the heart to love.

What I also learnt at TAL is that everything you do as a producer is in the interest of getting meaning across. The beauty of this is that you decide, at every turn, what that most important meaning in a story is. The hard thing is that every little thing that's there that *isn't* about that meaning is just a distraction. So each breath, choice in level, word, silence and bit of music works towards the refinement of your chosen meaning. Producing a radio story is like writing a book, reading it to an audience and conducting a symphony all at the same time. By this I mean to say that radio is for control freaks.

A Conclusion

The eyes are not the window to the soul. The radio is.

On the radio there are no mullet cuts or rat tails, no treader pants, no neon make-up, halitosis, sweaty hands, or dandruff. Just the soul. The listener becomes like the blind man in those old Greek tragedies who, despite his lack of sight, possesses true vision.

There's always something troubling about meeting someone who you have only known from the radio. There's this discord that you face. On the radio they are superheroes, capable of non-stop wisdom and emotional greatness. It makes no sense that that voice would emanate from this mouth. The two have become separated in your mind. No matter how much "sense" the match between their face and their voice might make, you have created a greater sense. A sense that makes no sense. I thought that Ira Glass was going to look like Guy Smiley from Sesame Street. I thought Sarah Vowell was going to be in black and white. Oddly though, I thought Scott Carrier was going to look exactly like Scott Carrier. He did, and that was cool.

In the time since the Columbia message story aired, Josh has lost 140 pounds. He has lost a whole person. But on the radio, this does not matter. His soul is just "husky" as it always was. Likewise, on the radio I have a beautiful mane of hair, as opposed to the Ed Asner 'do I sport here in "reality."

There's this Jack Kerouac tape I used to listen to when I was a young man. It was something that he and his friends recorded themselves in someone's kitchen. Among other things, they would recite Proust, sing, and get progressively drunker and drunker. At one point Kerouac said, quoting a Frank Sinatra song, "unrequited love's a bore." Unfamiliar with Sinatra at the time, I heard the words as "unrecorded life's a bore." I think my confusion was prescient. Recording life, out there with a mike and goofy head phones, is like trying to love life back a little—by noticing it, by slowing it down, by performing the absurd act of presenting your favorite parts of it to the world, to simply share it with people the way you would a meal—a meal you have chewed up like an Eskimo mother for her papoose.

A Conversation w/ Jonathan Goldstein

Omniscient Gas

Sean Cole - *February 26, 2003 - #6*

"I am not an invisible, omniscient gas."

I want to tape that to my computer...Not that I think every story on the air needs to have a reference to self in it. But it seems like holding fast to the pretense that we are/were not there, experienced nothing as humans, had no reactions etc., is just throwing a valuable tool out of our utility belts.

Ten In Tele-ing

Amy O'Leary - *February 27, 2003 - #7*

What did 10 years in telemarketing do to you?

Bronco Style

Jonathan Goldstein - *February 28, 2003 - #9*

I'm not sure what telemarketing has done to me just as I'm not sure what public school has done to me. It was a part of my life. I'd like to think that it's made me more sensitive when someone calls me up.

While voices on the radio may allow you a glimpse into the soul, voices on the telephone--especially when selling newspaper subscriptions, photocopier toner, or personalized pens--do not. But I do remember certain hopeful days, where I would try to learn something about the people I was talking to. It was like bronco riding. I tried to stay on the phone as long as I could. I guess that might be the thing to do, right? When a telemarketer calls you up, try and learn something about them. Either you'll have a semi-interesting conversation or you'll get them to hang up quicker. Everyone's a winner. They might start off as cold calls, but sometimes they end warm.

Seduction Skills

Amy O'Leary - *Feb 28, 2003 - #10*

Part of what I was wondering about when I wrote my question was if telemarketing forced a kind of creativity out of your ability to both listen and speak to others? Did your practice in "seducing" the potential Gazette subscriber help you develop skills that are useful when trying to seduce a listener, or a source? And, of course, do you ever feel guilt about it?

The Warble Like Blood

Jonathan Goldstein - *February 28, 2003 - #12*

Listening, our sales manager told us, was crucial for "countering objections." But really, you started to learn that what you were really listening to wasn't so much what they were saying, but how they were saying it-- the hesitation, the warble in their voice-- it was like the smell of blood. Really I'm thinking that telemarketing didn't give me more speaking ability, because it just felt more desperate and sweaty-- and you knew what you wanted: to sell a subscription, which ultimately makes things less interesting and more robotic than an interview. But it did present a challenge: how to hold onto your humanity and allow the person on the other end to hold onto theirs.

"Did your practice in 'seducing' the potential Gazette subscriber help you develop skills..."

I guess it did. You just try to keep someone from hanging up on you the same way you would try and keep someone from changing stations. On the radio you keep putting forward a new enigma, something that points to a new something interesting, another thing that happens-- you spin a story. On the telephone you keep saying, "wait... wait! One more thing..." You're more like a nine year old who's trying to stay up a little later. And with the radio you imagine the person you are trying to seduce. You craft an ideal listener in your head. This might be a combination of your father, a college prof you once had, Alan Alda, etc. On the phone, you hear them breathing, rustling around, kids crying... by all of this I mean to say that telemarketing is a harder medium.

Although I feel guilt about a wide variety of things, I don't feel guilt about that because hopefully there's some entertainment value involved; and also there's complicity. Everyone wants to be seduced.

Sympathy Training

John Hodgman - *March 1, 2003 - #16*

I admire your desire as a telemarketer to preserve the humanity of your callers, and naturally I am sympathetic to your own desire to be human. But I can't imagine that emphasis on shared humanity was in the training manual. Did anyone ever tell you to be less sympathetic?

And what was your average call time?

The Sixty Second Sell

Jonathan Goldstein - *March 1, 2003 - #20*

They just told you to be polite... not to swear at people, which was always happening. The hard sell is really difficult to pull off...

[My average call time] varied. Some days there's just something in your voice-- no matter what you say-- that just makes people hang up on you like you're the foul stench of death calling collect. Other days you were the life of the party. God, that sounds so sad. I remember that staying on the phone with someone for a minute was considered pretty good.

Way Far Off

Jay Allison - *February 28, 2003 - #14*

This is an interesting thread... the telemarketing/radio connection. It translates pretty easily to live radio, where you can feel time going by and sympathetically imagine the distracted attention of the listener. You can feel yourself boring yourself, and know you have to change the rhythm or the volume or the subject.

It's much harder to do in pre-produced radio where time is pre-measured by you, the producer. You can get way far off in your perception of time -- perhaps because you come to know the material too well and develop a relationship with it that no one else has -- and only realize that you've blown it when the piece plays for other people, back in real time, and you notice that you've lost them or are boring them mercilessly.

The Imaginary Listener

Amy O'Leary - *February 28, 2003 - #13*

Who is your ideal, imaginary listener? ... Do you always have the same one in mind, or do you shift him/her based on the piece?

Arts With Plats

Jonathan Goldstein - *March 1, 2003 - #17*

I guess I think of my friends, and what I would do to try and make them laugh. I also think of my father, who, whenever we see a movie that gets too arty, will always say, "What da hell happened to da plat?"

Your First Time

Amy O'Leary - *March 3, 2003 - #23*

Was the CBC piece your very first for radio -- if not, what was your earliest effort and how did you decide to start doing radio in the first place?

Surprises

Jonathan Goldstein - *March 3, 2003 - #28*

The one about my parents was my first reported piece. Before that I had done some radio essays. I hadn't really decided to do radio at all. I used to just read my stuff at events in Montreal and it sort of lead into radio. I did my first essay for this CBC show called Brave New Waves. I don't remember what exactly the whole essay was about, but there was this one part where I talked about my friend Howard and how when he'd get stoned and would make himself corn flakes, he would always hide a potato latke at the bottom of the bowl. When I asked him why he did this he said, "To surprise myself." I think that might be one of the most beautiful things I've ever heard. It's something I think about all the time.

When Your Equipment's Not Working.... Um, Er....READ!

Sean Cole - *March 3, 2003 - #25*

I've been wondering about your shvitz piece... if you actually brought a kit with you into the steam room but then realized it wasn't working so decided to do the story as a "read piece" ... or if you figured ahead of time that the shvitz would be too hot to use a kit and just left it at work...I think in the end it worked out better as a straight read, the writing is so good, and the scenes and characters you recreate so complete, that I can't imagine the story with tape. I also think a lot of reporters, upon discovering their equipment wasn't working because of the environment, might write off the day as a total loss. But then not every show provides the option of doing straight reads.

Schvitzed

Jonathan Goldstein - *March 3, 2003 - #30*

Initially I had gone to the bath-house with the intention of taping people upstairs from the shvitz, where they all ate and watched tv; but the tape that I got wasn't the greatest. It was Ira Glass who suggested I simply do it as a read piece.

Sonic Shotgun

Bridget Deenihan - *March 4, 2003 - #31*

I was driving down State road 436 in Orlando, FL listening to the radio, and there you were riding sonic shotgun, verbally dissecting love...I just wanted you to know I heard that piece of yours, and was truly, immeasurably moved by it. It made magnificent sense...

Sidebar: I've often thought that it would be both wretched and delightful to hear someone say, "Excuse, I must be off to the Ladies' room" during a soap opera...or at the very least have someone sneeze or cough. Bless you, for being an advocate of the human element.

Waking The Mundane

Jonathan Goldstein - *March 5, 2003 - #37*

I remember seeing this foreign film where, right in the middle of the action, the characters stopped and made themselves something to eat. The whole thing took about ten minutes. It wasn't exactly a car chase scene, but it did make you realize that certain mundane experiences, when you see them represented in film, radio, etc. can be jarring. They have the effect of waking you up to the world around you-- your own world-- which is sort of what poetry is supposed to do.

Writing Rapport

cw - *March 6, 2003 - #39*

what's the relationship between your fiction writing and your radio writing, if any?

Strictly Biblical

Jonathan Goldstein - *March 6, 2003 - #40*

I've done some fiction on the radio, too. In fact I've got a short story on TAL this weekend. It's a retelling of the story of Adam and Eve, if that could be called fiction.

Whittling To Ku

cw - *March 6, 2003 - #41*

...now that you mention your upcoming short story on TAL...did you write it to spec lengthwise? if so, how did that feel? if not, how did you trim it down to radio length? sometimes it seems that a pre-existing, longer piece of short fiction could be whittled down to radio tolerable length and still be a decent haiku of what it once was/other times it seems questionable. how do you negotiate this?

Or Trimming A Sai

Jonathan Goldstein - *March 7, 2003 - #46*

I do write stories with a length in mind. I don't mind doing that. It's like painting on a canvas of a certain size, if that makes sense.

In the case of this recent Adam and Eve story, it was drawn from a larger work in progress. I started with about seven thousand words, and played around with it until it was 2500 words, and of those words, after all the editing and revising, most of them ended up just being replaced with new stuff. I wonder if it'll be difficult to get back to the original story I had started. I had all this writing about the snake bragging to Adam about how he's able to have sex with all these bigger animals in the garden by stiffening himself and using his entire body as a phallus. There's this long description the snake gives of pleasuring a

zebra for three hours straight while the zebra gallops all across the land in a state of ecstatic insanity. It was all stuff that would not work on the radio.

TAL recently aired a long short story of Russell Banks's, and stuff had to be cut out of it, just to help it move along on the radio and Banks said that he really liked the cuts, that he had found that when he read the story in live performances, the story, to his own ears, dragged a bit. Cutting a story well for the radio can be sort of like trimming a bonsai.

Real Intrinsic

Amy O'Leary - *March 9, 2003 - #55*

I really enjoyed your piece yesterday...I feel fiction has to be ten times as "good" as a reported piece to keep me glued to my radio. Why is that? Why is it that "true" stories suck us in so effectively, in a way that fiction can only sometimes do? Why does reportage (esp. first-person) intrinsically win our curiosity over more readily than even really good fiction?

Maybe your creation story worked well for me because I knew the rough schema for where it was going. Apple. Shame. Expulsion. And with that schema there was kind of an intrinsic dramatic tension that I was eager to hear you resolve. How Apple? How much Shame? How exactly Expulsion?

They were questions I wanted to stick around to hear the answer for.

I guess a lot of fiction never sets those questions up quickly enough for me -- and I am left feeling as though I just have to "trust" the author is going to take me somewhere interesting -- and sometimes I bail out before the author gets there.

In Art Lies Truth

Jonathan Goldstein - *March 11, 2003 - #58*

"Why is it that "true" stories suck us in so effectively, in a way that fiction can only sometimes do?..."

I guess that's kind of true... even with tv. It seems like a reality show doesn't have to be as well done as a scripted tv show to keep you intrigued. It demands a more immediate response because it inhabits our universe, rather than merely approximating it. It's almost like we relate to it using a different part of our brain. Fiction has to work harder because it wears its make-believeness on it sleeve. But I guess it depends though...documentary films usually aren't as popular as movies, although "based on a true story" at the beginning still carries weight.

Anyway, most of the stories on TAL, fiction or non, are structured like short stories-- there are characters and a story arc, etc, and the writers and producers have to work just as

hard as a writer of fiction would to make the characters relatable, their conflicts affecting, and the resolutions satisfying.

Wasn't it Picasso who said that art is a lie that allows you to access a greater truth?

Humbly Whelmed

Paloma - *March 12, 2003* - #61

In my own humble efforts to pursue some story ideas, can you describe how the process usually works for you? How many ideas do you have at one time? Do they mostly come from your head? Things you hear? Things you read? What do you do to see if they'll work? I have very broad ideas, but without someone saying, "look into this aspect, describe this for me..." I get overwhelmed...

Affix With Specificities

Jonathan Goldstein - *March 14, 2003* - #66

If you're talking about stories about myself, I will usually lean towards the ones that get a good response when I tell them to people socially...A lot of times, it's just the stories I remember that I end up writing about. For good or for bad, the memory-- or at least a poor memory like mine-- has a way of acting as a natural editor, retaining the more interesting stuff.

I have a great many ideas; unfortunately most of them are not that good. I write a lot of them down in my notebook and then in a week or two, when I am sober, I look at them again and if I still like them, then I think I might have something there.

"Things your hear? Things you read?"

Yeah, if it's a reporter story, not if it's a piece of fiction. Little articles from the paper might sometimes offer you an entry point into something larger, like I was just reading a little jokey article in a Canadian paper about a cat that went crazy and kept its owner cowering for hours in a locked bathroom, afraid for his life. What made the scenario interesting was that the cat was only out for him. His wife stood watching, afraid to get in the middle. Finally the RCMP had to be called in to capture the cat. So it was this "wacky" news item, but it made me wonder what that guy in the bathroom felt like just then, singled out for aggression by this cat that he had fed, taken care of, etc-- and it was out for his blood. Did he feel like the cat saw through to the real him and hated what it saw? Did what happened change the guy in any way? Does the wife ever say during fights with him, "You see? Even the cat hates you"? Perhaps none of these questions are relevant... but it might be worth a phone call. Maybe it could just make for a nice image that leads into something bigger.

“What do you do to see if they'll work?”

Get a place to pitch your ideas to. In going public with your ideas you keep things "real."

“I have very broad ideas...”

Decide who your characters are. What are the moments that you find the most intriguing? What are some of the specific scenes? You have to go into the specificities that you are the most passionate about.

Reel Far Back

Jonathan Goldstein - *March 17, 2003* - #72

I had this tape of myself, at the age of eighteen, interviewing my friend Howard* who was on nine and a half hits of acid and at one point he became convinced I was a robot and he tried to short circuit me by repeating to me over and over, “You know what you’re doing” to “which I would respond, “doing what.” We went back and forth on this for forty-five minutes. Boy, do I wish I still had that tape. What tape do you feel the worst about having lost? Do you think you’ve turned it in to something better than it really was?

Painfully Normal

Jake Warga - *March 17, 2003* - #71

Thanks for the TAL company this weekend, a nice balance if people didn't turn off the radio after "**Brian**" and stare at a blank wall for an hour, which seems to be the main reaction I'm getting. Very in the style of public radio reflection prose on the painfully normal things in life being attributed much greater significances. Do you think there's a future in that style? I mean, just writing about the normal things in life and instilling them with a greater picture...

Big Dignity

Jonathan Goldstein - *March 18, 2003* - #76

What's so beautiful about Brian's story is the way you took his story, which is so tragic, and never made it feel like you were trying too hard to attribute anything, or make it representative of some bigger picture. You were just telling the story of someone you loved and in the sincerity and honesty of that sentiment, all of the big things just came through, and came through with dignity.

Delivery

Sasha Khokha - *March 19, 2003 - #77*

Can you talk a little bit about delivery? How do you practice before you record? How do you think your delivery style has changed over the course of your stories? Did you develop a style when you were telemarketing?

The Odd Pull

Jonathan Goldstein - *March 19, 2003 - #78*

In terms of any connection between telemarketing and radio delivery, I can say that, with both, there are some days when you're more "on" than others. It isn't the amount of coffee or the loudness... there's just something indefinable in your voice that makes people want to hear you. You aren't overselling or underselling-- you've just hit the exact right balance for you... you are "being yourself." It sounds very simple, but it is also quite deep, and on some days it can be elusive-- in recording one's voice tracks, as well as trying to sell a product over the telephone, or for that matter just existing.

As far as my delivery changing, I'm always trying to get more conversational as I go. I try to talk more and more the way that I would to my friends. I tend to lean more towards a flatter, emphatic delivery with the thought that less is more.

At TAL, when recording voice tracks, we get many takes so that in production, there are always choices. Editing voice tracks can sometimes be arduous and time-consuming work. You end up inserting pauses, replacing pauses with breaths and actually cutting the hard consonant of one word right into another, superior take. It can be very intimate, almost like crawling into someone's mouth where you can hear the sound of lips separating. What's weird is how normal editing your own voice can become.

...Certain voices hold this odd pull on our heartstrings. They are like sad oboes or something, something that makes you want to throw all your money at the radio while yelling, "I love you." I don't know what it is.

Family Obsession

Judson True - *March 20, 2003 - #80*

I'm in a class being taught by the Kitchen Sisters at UC Berkeley and the whole class (myself included) is always fighting the urge to do pieces on our families. Should we just accept that our own families are the most fascinating subjects in the world and DO those stories, or are radio listeners going to get fed up and demand a little distance?

Yeah, Whistler Ran It By His Mom

Jonathan Goldstein - *March 20, 2003* - #83

I think it's the same as with any other medium. Maybe Whistler sat around and thought, "Who the hell's going to pay money to buy a picture of my mother?" I guess it depends how you do it. Like anything else, it could be great or terrible; but I figure every family has one or two stories that are really unique and great. You just have to find the right one. Speak with friends, editors, whose taste and judgment you can trust. Ask them if they think you're wasting your time. Some of my favorite radio stories are about family... Scott Carrier's story about his kids' swimming lessons is so beautiful.

True Dilemma

Judson True - *March 20, 2003* - #82

I'm doing a piece on family...How do you take a meaning, a point, and get a narrative out of it? I know your work is the best answer to my question, but I wonder how you think about this dilemma in the beginning of the process.

Birthing Meaning

Jonathan Goldstein - *March 20, 2003* - #84

I guess I don't think of the story and the meaning as two separate entities. If I feel compelled to write about something, I just do, and assume that a meaning-- in the high school textbook discussion question sense of the word-- will make its self known. After all, I have to believe that I wouldn't have felt the need to write about it if there wasn't something deeper at stake. I would say the challenge is communicating that personal passion for something to an audience-- to make it translate. And at the same time, we know the story to be bigger than any one meaning-- it encompasses a meaning, but it isn't limited by it. If it is deep, the story is the meaning. I'm definitely wrong a lot of the time about the subjects I pick up-- or at least not good enough to make them work, and I end up chucking a lot of stuff. Anyway, I do think that a meaning emerges out of the story, no?

Mic Mania

Jesse Pine Dukes - *March 30, 2003* - #94

I was very struck by the thought you introduced with Sinatra:

"Recording life, out there with a mike and goofy head phones, is like trying to love life back a little—by noticing it, by slowing it down, by performing the absurd act of presenting your favorite parts of it to the world, to simply share it with people the way you would a meal—a meal you have chewed up like an Eskimo mother for her papoose"

I guess I love just that about TAL and radio in general but it also troubles me. Don't we also speed life at the same time by thinking about how good this conversation would sound on the radio, or how this moment would work in our book? Don't we miss too many sunsets running back to our car to get our camera? Or miss out on watching the talent show or piano recital or whatever by videoing the whole damn thing? The latter two examples are metaphoric, mostly because I have yet to produce anything for radio and these seem like more universal cases. I feel like maybe I've been drawn to radio and this site of late because of an almost manic drive to record moments and capture them forever. To slow them down and to create narratives out of everyday things. But I know that this has disrupted my experience sometimes, this mania to record. And I know that I personally need to find a balance. Do you struggle with this too? Have you found a way to balance living life against recording life and narrating life?

Record Struggle

Jonathan Goldstein - *March 31, 2003 - #95*

I guess for me, it helps me to become more engaged with things... especially turning experiences into stories. Isn't that the aim of psycho-therapy-- to make a coherent narrative out of your life?

More and more, though-- because I have such a poor memory-- I'm finding myself getting a little obsessed with the idea that everything that I don't record gets lost-- that I'm losing life. That's something I struggle with.

About Transom

What We're Trying To Do

Here's the short form: Transom.org is an experiment in channeling new work and voices to public radio through the Internet, and for discussing that work, and encouraging more. We've designed Transom.org as a performance space, an open editorial session, an audition stage, a library, and a hangout. Our purpose is to create a worthy Internet site and make public radio better.



Submissions can be stories, essays, home recordings, sound portraits, interviews, found sound, non-fiction pieces, audio art, whatever, as long as it's good listening. Material may be submitted by anyone, anywhere - by citizens with stories to tell, by radio producers trying new styles, by writers and artists wanting to experiment with radio.

We contract with Special Guests to come write about work here. We like this idea, because it 1) keeps the perspective changing so we're not stuck in one way of hearing, 2) lets us in on the thoughts of creative minds, and 3) fosters a critical and editorial dialog about radio work, a rare thing.

Our Discussion Boards give us a place to talk it all over. Occasionally, we award a Transom.org t-shirt to especially helpful users, and/or invite them to become Special Guests.

Staff

Producer/Editor - *Jay Allison*

Web Director/Designer - *Joshua T. Barlow*

Editors – *Sydney Lewis, Viki Merrick, Chelsea Merz, Jeff Towne, Helen Woodward*

Web Developers - *Josef Verbanac, Barrett Golding*

Advisors

Scott Carrier, Nikki Silva, Davia Nelson, Ira Glass, Doug Mitchell, Larry Massett, Sara Vowell, Skip Pizzi, Susan Stamberg, Flawn Williams, Paul Tough, Bruce Drake, Bill McKibben, Bob Lyons, Tony Kahn, Ellin O'Leary, Marita Rivero, Alex Chadwick, Claire Holman, Larry Josephson, Dmae Roberts, Dave Isay, Stacy Abramson, Gregg McVicar, Ellen Weiss, Ellen McDonnell, Robin White, Joe Richman, Steve Rowland, Johanna Zorn, Elizabeth Meister



ATLANTIC PUBLIC MEDIA

Atlantic Public Media administers Transom.org. APM is a non-profit organization based in Woods Hole, Massachusetts which has as its mission "to serve public broadcasting through training and mentorship, and through support for creative and experimental approaches to program production and distribution." APM is also the founding group for *WCAI & WNAN*, a new public radio service for Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard, and Nantucket under the management of *WGBH*-Boston.

This project has received lead funding from the Florence and John Schumann Foundation. We receive additional funding from The National Endowment for the Arts.