

FROM ENZENSBERGER TO CLAUSEN: AN AUDITIVE TRANSFORMATION

Ib Poulsen

The radio feature is one of the most prominent genres in the historization of radio. Based on an extensive study of Danish radio montage and its roots, this contribution considers the montage genre in Danish radio and – in particular – the transnational influence that helped shape it. Danish radio feature producer Viggo Clausen's adaptations of Hans Magnus Enzensberger's radio essays to Danish radio features will be discussed as an example of transnational inspiration and creative re-production.

In 1964, Hans Magnus Enzensberger published a book entitled *Politik und Verbrechen*, i.e. Politics and Crime (Enzensberger 1964). The book consisted of a number of essays, originally broadcast as radio features on Hessischer Rundfunk in Frankfurt am Main a couple of years earlier. Thematically and historically, the book comprised a rather varied bunch of flowers. From Russia on the edge of revolution in the second half of the 1800s to Italy in the 1950s, and from the execution of a deserter to the murder of a young girl and to the steep fall of dictators. Among them, there was also a story about the gangster era in Chicago in the 1920s.

Each of Enzensberger's essays had a clear didactic purpose. The story should not only be told and understood as such, it should also be related in what respect this story was a symptom of something more general. As a listener, you were told a story, but you were also instructed as to how it should be understood.

Viggo Clausen read Enzensberger's book in 1965, and he also heard the original German radio features. He became fascinated by the stories and decided to produce a Danish version. Thus over the next fifteen years, twelve essays were transformed into radio montages. One of the first was Viggo Clausen's version of Chicago Ballad, broadcast on Denmark's Radio (Danish Broadcasting Corporation) on August 21st, 1965.

However, let us start with a few minutes from the original German version of this gangster story. Below an English translation:

ENZENSBERGER: CHICAGO BALLAD, START

The cello case snaps open; on the burgundy velvet lining rests a pristine machine gun. The bodies are discovered at dawn: The milkman on his rounds finds them next to the fire hydrants, the elevator boy in the hotel lobby, the warehouse keeper between the oil cans in the warehouse. The leading hosiery shop in the area has put a sign in the window reading: Bullet holes in clothing repaired here – guaranteed invisible mending at very reasonable prices. (Enzensberger 1966: 76)

Apart from a somewhat lucid beginning, Enzensberger's version is most of all reminiscent of an academic dissertation. After this beginning, the thesis is formulated: The gangster is one of the 20th century's myths, and mob boss Al Capone is a key figure in this myth – not as a historical person but as a mythical person. After that, the background is briefly outlined, followed by a review of the development of the gangster system. First John Colosimo with his business methods rooted in the 19th century, then the industrial Torrio who systematized both production and distribution, and then Al Capone who created a modern group and a monopoly. Within a decade, the development of the capitalistic system is illustrated: From a one-man business over an industrially organized business to the monopoly. Al Capone is portrayed as a modern businessman on the one hand, but also as a mobster for whom business is not based on legal rights, but on mutual loyalty. The conclusion is that it was possible to create such a business model because society was ready for such regression – as later in Italy with fascism and in Germany with Nazism.

Different voices read Enzensberger's text, however, apparently only for variation. In any case, with the exception of the reading of Al Capone's quotes, it is not possible to identify a specific voice connected to a specific role. Thus, it seems that the use of different voices has no communicative purpose beyond variety. Music, primarily ragtime, is also one of the means of expression, often used in the transition from one chapter to the next. Finally, the positioning of the listener is one that you are being informed and to some extent even lectured, especially in the end where the analysis is carried out and the conclusion is drawn.

The Danish version is different, and particularly the auditive expression has changed.

CHICAGO BALLAD, DANISH VERSION, START

(Chopin's Funeral March, ambient sound recording with horse hoofs on pavement (six seconds), speaker's announcement of the program with the ambient sound in the background,

after the announcement the ambient sound is back full strength for approximately ten seconds and subsequently softer as background throughout the entire fictitious commentary).

Reporter: Today (p)1 on November 14, 1924 (p) Dion O'Banion is carried to his grave (P)2 with mounted police leading the way, the two kilometer long funeral procession makes its way through the streets of Chicago (P) Dion O'Banion (p) florist (p) shot down in his shop diagonally across from the Holy Name Cathedral (p) where he sang in the choir as a boy (p) and has since attended mass so often.

Commentator: Dion O'Banion (p) mob funeral large-scale supplier (p) of flowers (p) and wreaths (p) and right (p) now his own last and biggest customer.

Reporter: Four days ago he was in the back room of his shop (p) arranging chrysanthemums (P) when a blue limousine pulled up by the door (P) there were four men in the limo (P) one remained behind the wheel (p) the other three got out and went into the store (p) O'Banion came out to meet them, hand extended.

Commentator: So reckless! (P) Why didn't Dion O'Banion greet his customers in the usual way (p) standing (p) legs astride (p) right hand firmly resting on his hip (p) left hand in his pocket (p) automatic pistols ready in the tailor-made suit? (p) He must have known his killers very well (p) have felt entirely safe.

Reporter: Now Dion O'Banion rests in a 10.000 dollar coffin (p) specially in from Philadelphia on a chartered train (p) the coffin is made of bronze (p) two layers of bronze (p) and silver plated (p) O'Banion rests on a bed of satin (p) a lace pillow under his left hand.

Commentator: Police attribute 25 murders to Dion O'Banion (p) but he has not yet been brought to trial for a single one (p) of his 32 years of life (p) only one has been spent in prison (p) and that was in his youth (p) the amateur years (P) with the prohibition came his era of greatness (P) all of northern Chicago became his territory (p) and not only the speakeasies but also all of the gambling joints had to pay him protection money (0.00-2.56).

This account has two levels. There is the reportage of the funeral and of events leading up to it, and there is background information and speculation as to why things turned out as they did. Each level has its own voice, and the difference between the two voices is rhetorically underlined. The reporter's sentences are short and descriptive, in contrast with the commentator's greater variation. And then there is the irony – on the one hand it is a radio report of a funeral worthy of a king, on the other it is emphasized that we are at the burial of a florist who has murdered several people.

With an opening like this, several narrative advantages have been achieved. It provides a frame in which you can present a milieu, social norms and persons, and at the same time you can include the whole gangster myth, that

1 | (p): Pause less than a second

2 | (P): Pause more than a second

comprises the connection between business, organizations, territory and corruption woven into society in general. In addition this framing reflects the immense wealth and influence of the very few, rough and cold-blooded gangsters, who also have a specific code of conduct in a conflicting atmosphere with brutal shootings and good manners. In words and sounds it is not the gangster period as a historical phenomenon, but the media designed version of it. In that respect, the opening is not only the beginning of the story, but a prelude that gives you an impression of the whole feature and an anticipation of the end.

The German and the Danish versions follow two different rhetorical strategies. In contrast to the German version, the Danish version is constructed more like a drama or a fiction piece. E.g. music plays a more prominent role in the Danish version compared with the German one. More pieces of music are used, and in several cases a theme is shortly introduced, and later a more extended part is heard. The first time this happens is in connection with Jim Colossimo's death. He was a man of the old school, and he preferred to put his money in diamonds:

Chicago Ballad, Danish Version:

Commentator: Money should not be put in diamonds (p) it needs to be put to work (p) making new money (P) Colossimo did not see the huge opportunities the prohibition offered for a decisive and financially powerful leading personality type (P) (slightly less distinct and with a slightly deeper voice) that is why he died (p) on May 11, 1920 (p) a bullet through his head ("Nearer My God to Thee", organ interlude, 7 seconds.) No, we will not be joining the procession in the first of the big mob funerals (P) they are passing by down there (p) the judges and the brothel owners (p) the Senators and the bootleggers, the highly esteemed Member of Congress and the notorious gunman (p) they will be meeting often (p) in cemeteries over the next half-score years (p) perhaps unaware (p) that they are accompanying an era to the grave? (P) while the little shovelfuls of dirt fall on the coffin and the Apollo Quartet sings "Nearer My God to Thee" (the Mills Brothers quartet lends its voices) preparations have already been made for the assumption of power by men with the weapons of the new era (p) bookkeeping machines and machine guns

(The Apollo Quartet sings: "Still all my songs shall be// nearer my God to thee// nearer my God to thee// nearer my God to thee", concluded by the organ interlude). (17.00-19.32).

First you hear the brief organ interlude with the main theme of the well-known funeral hymn. Later the title of the song is mentioned, and then you hear a longer sequence – a well-known and often used narrative trick, called set-up/pay-off.

Chicago Ballad, German and Danish Version:

The cello case snaps open; on the burgundy velvet lining rests a pristine machine gun. The bodies are discovered at dawn: The milkman on his rounds finds them next to the fire hydrants, the elevator boy in the hotel lobby, the warehouse keeper between the oil cans in the warehouse. (Enzensberger 1966: 76)

The cello case snaps open, and on the burgundy velvet lining is a brand new machine gun. The bodies are discovered in the early hours of the morning. The milkman on his morning rounds stumbles over one by a fire hydrant; the night clerk can't open the door because there is a dead man behind it; the warehouse keeper moves a couple of oil barrels in the warehouse, and there are the bodies. (Clausen 1965: 5)

The story is the same, but the Danish version is more lucid. You can image more clearly what happens. One example is the body at the hotel. It is not merely found, but it prevents the night clerk from opening the door. And the milkman does not simply find the bodies, he stumbles over one of them. Secondly, information is divided into more full sentences, as seen for example when comparing the last sentence in the German version to the last two sentences in the Danish version. Thirdly, the Danish version is more precise and adequate idiomatically. The word *morgendæmring* in Danish ('dawn' in English) has a poetic and solemn touch compared with the more precisely reporting expression *de tidlige morgentimer* (in the early hours of the morning), and in this specific context of simply reporting an event the latter is more adequate to the genre than the former. Similarly, a machine gun can be 'pristine', but 'brand new' is better, the product taken into consideration.

Generally speaking, the Danish version is more lucid, as mentioned, but also comprises a clearer psychological profile characterizing the different characters involved. They simply present themselves more distinctly psychologically. This is achieved in two ways: More quotes from each person and consistent use of a specific voice for each person – i.e. a consistent role-specific and more expressive/outgoing use of voices. As mentioned, this is not the case in the German version, except for the quotes of Al Capone.

Finally, a few brief remarks on the critical-analytical reflections that are so dominant in the German version. This same dominance is not found in the Danish version. However, in relation to Viggo Clausen's features from the 1950s, the critical dimension is stronger in Chicago Ballad. Not as contemporary social critique, but as a critique of history writing and its immanent ideological assumptions. As such, both Enzensberger's feature and Clausen's version represent a preliminary version of the ideology critique, which became popular among social scientists in the 1970s.

REFERENCES

Enzensberger, Hans-Magnus (1964): *Politik und Verbrechen*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

Poulsen, Ib (2006): Radiomontagen og dens rødder, Part 5 “Den Clausen’ske feature”, Copenhagen, pp. 437-523.