

**"It's gotta be the worst on record for sure": *Moving Homes*, a radiophonic work.**

*Moving Homes* is a forged music ethnography for an imaginary Queensland coast, somewhere 'up north'. The inhabitants of this coastline experience severe tropical cyclones ("all the smash hits from the 1970's..."), with only their radios to keep them company.

The initial idea for *Moving Homes* arose when the Lockyer Valley flooded in 2011. During this natural disaster ("natural disasters with a human touch"), I phoned 612 ABC Brisbane talkback radio from Europe to wish local farmers all the best with their clean up. The following day, during the clean-up at Uncle Jono's, it was recounted that cousin Andy could not sleep out of worry for his own farm, and was indeed listening in to the radio at 3am when I had called.

There are two observations about the anecdote above. You do not need to be local anymore to engage in the strangely intimate *vis-à-vis* of talkback radio. Furthermore, radio plays a very crucial role during a natural disaster, both in the dissemination of information concerning the dimensions of the disaster, and as a means of comfort in times of crisis. ("What's beautiful about radio music is that it is someone else's memories".)

In 2013, I was commissioned by 'Deutschlandradio Kultur' to produce the radiophonic work, *Song Buslines*. This work is a fake music ethnography for regional Australian bus routes: routes punctuated with greasy-spoon-diner visits at odd hours, routes synonymous with the smell of artificial pine and the headache-inducing, anti-graffiti patterns of bus upholstery. The music for *Song Buslines* was composed using a collection of Country 'n Western guitar licks (inspired by the musicians featured in Clinton Walker's *Buried Country*), and simple chord progressions for string quartet.

In the case of *Moving Homes*, an 'authentic tradition of fake music ethnography for the South-Pacific' already exists. The 'exotica' music of Arthur Lyman and Martin Denny, which spanned the mid-1950's to the early 1970's, references Tiki culture, Cool-Jazz and traditional Polynesian musical elements. Haruomi Hosono, Shigeru Suzuki ('Tin Pan Alley' recordings), together with Tatsuro Yamashita, extended the work of Lyman and Denny in the 1970's. They created a fictive

'tropical music' with traditional Japanese musical elements, Hoagy Carmichael references, analog synthesis, and Gamelan percussion.

Out of respect for this tradition, *Moving Homes* mixes a concocted 'Country 'n Gamelan', surf-guitar licks (à la Dick Dale), and 1960's Californian Sunshine Pop. Rich 'virtual -synthesizer' pads (recordings of acoustic instruments in the studio), and cheap, computer-generated 'midi' sounds are also employed. ("What you need is the emptiness of the object. Just sayin'!")

There are two observations about the description of the music above. Just as there is a discrepancy in wealth between neighbours, it is possible to have two economies running simultaneously. In *Moving Homes*, the out-of-the-box electronic sounds are juxtaposed with the carefully recorded acoustic instruments. Moreover, and not unlike the way survivors of severe tropical cyclones experience the displacement of their possessions, a distance between oneself and the object of study exists.

Why the distance? It would be obscene to recreate a cyclone with music. That is the role of Hollywood. ("With Hollywood, you know exactly what's coming before you experience it".) The horror experienced by the loss of one's roof should not be trivialised by our emotionally conditioned responses to music. Consequently, a number of strategies have been employed in *Moving Homes* to create a respectful distance from the subject at hand, namely, loss of the home. These strategies include "the wrong music" for otherwise poignant moments, computer-generated orchestral music to represent the eye of the cyclone, and anthropogenically-generated cyclone noise on acoustic instruments.

On the other hand, the voices in *Moving Homes* include imaginary 'shock jocks', name-dropping weather forecasters, divorcees ("Kathy came to town and took the right loudspeaker"), disgruntled punters, kids and somewhat depressed surfers. They are all stuck in a severe tropical cyclone whose name is possibly Marcia, the memory of which is already fading. Once the cyclone disappears, when the oppressive humidity sets in after the big event, confronted by the horror of the neighbour's furniture on the front lawn, everyone begins to speak in tongues, or in this case some key passages in German

from Emmanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* ("Kant was a real Kant!"). Unlike other mediums, radio is excellent for precisely *not* having to develop characters, sparing the listener from 'the journeys' that shape an individual's subjectivity. Accordingly, 'the people' featured in *Moving Homes* simply circle around each other like loose sheets of metal in a severe tropical cyclone. They recite texts, including aphorisms from various philosophers such as Kant, Paul Virilio, Simone Weil, Søren Kierkegaard ("what's beautiful about aphorisms is that they take on the appearance of objects"), and phrases from TV interviews with (real) cyclone survivors from Far North Queensland ("that was it darlin'!").

Most importantly, everyone, including my cousin Andy, is rightly their own best philosopher in Queensland. The imagined Queensland of *Moving Homes* is the same. Upon experiencing the 'terror of the real' during 'their' cyclonic event, the locals are affable, articulate and they love their neighbours ("from exactly the right distance"). They also know "there are relationships to things as experiences, and there are relationships to the experiences themselves."