Article title
Intermedial Relationships of Radio Features with Denis Mitchell's and Philip Donnellan's Early Television Documentaries

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Abstract
Writing of the closure in early 1965 of the Radio Features Department, Asa Briggs identifies one of the reasons for the controversial decision as 'the incursion of television, which was developing its own features.' '[Laurence] Gilliam and his closest colleagues believed in the unique merits of "pure radio". The screen seemed a barrier' (*The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom*, Vol. 5, p. 348). Rather than the screen being 'a barrier' for them, a number of the creators of the emerging television documentary were from the late 1950s onwards able to transfer and transform distinctive techniques of 'pure radio' into highly effective visual forms. Two key figures were the producers of 'poetic' documentaries Denis Mitchell and Philip Donnellan, who employed layered voices, imaginative deployments of music and effects, and allusive juxtapositions of sound and image, to develop an alternative (although always marginal) tradition to the supposedly objective approaches of current affairs and, later, *verité* filmmakers. And a dozen years after the dismemberment of the Features Department, Donnellan paid tribute to it in his glorious but little-seen film *Pure Radio* (BBC1, 3 November 1977). Taking important early films by Mitchell and Donnellan as case studies, this paper explores the impact of radio features on television documentaries in the 1950s and early 1960s, and assesses the extent to which the screen in its intermedial relationships with 'pure radio' was a barrier or, in the work of certain creators, an augmentation.

Keywords
Features, BBC Radio, BBC Television, Documentaries, Regional Production; Donnellan, Mitchell.

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The output of BBC Radio's Features department is widely acknowledged as one of the glories of post-war broadcasting. Many of the department's programmes are held to exemplify 'the one unique form that radio had achieved in its short history… vital, contemporary, experimental, and above all "pure radio" '.[1] These transmissions were, as Virginia Madsen has described, 'somewhere between drama, documentary, poetry, and what the BBC also called "panoramas" – grand, large-scale productions based on fact, but rendered dramatically… the best that the BBC had to offer.'[2] Radio Features closed in early 1965, and one of the reasons for the decision is identified by Asa Briggs as 'the incursion of television, which was developing its own features. [Laurence] Gilliam and his closest colleagues believed in the unique merits of "pure radio". The screen seemed a barrier.'[3] Television documentaries by the mid-1960s were doing much that had been the province of Features, but it is in the work of two filmmakers in particular that certain of the distinctive techniques of 'pure radio' were extended into highly effective visual forms.

The early films of Denis Mitchell, including *Night in the City* (1957) and *Morning in the Streets* (1959), and of Philip Donnellan, of which *Joe the Chainsmith* (1958) and *Coventry Kids* (1960) are characteristic examples, employed layered voices, imaginative blends of music and audio effects, and allusive juxtapositions of sound and image to develop a self-consciously 'poetic' form of small-screen documentary. They also integrated techniques more usually associated with filmed drama within documentary frameworks, such as the staging of fictional scenes, albeit with their real-life protagonists. Moreover, Mitchell and Donnellan continued certain of the political concerns of the output of radio features, highlighting regional characters and concerns from beyond the metropolitan focus of much other television and giving prominence to the marginalised voices of working people. This article explores the ways in which Mitchell and Donnellan formed their distinctive styles and suggests how their films contributed to an alternative, and subsequently marginalised, strand within British television documentary alongside the supposedly objective, narrative-driven, journalist-led approaches of current affairs and, later, the forms of *verité* filmmakers.

Documentaries made in the late 1950s and '60s by Mitchell and Donnellan can be seen to extend elements of a British documentary tradition identifiable in films from the 1930s and '40s by Basil Wright, such as *The Song of Ceylon* (1934), and by Humphrey Jennings, including *Listen to Britain* (1942, co-directed by Stewart McAllister) and *A Diary for Timothy* (1945). They complement too aspects of the documentaries associated with the polemical stance of the 'Free Cinema' group in the 1950s by aspirant directors including Lindsay Anderson, Karel Reisz and Tony Richardson. This alternative tradition can also be recognised later in aspects of the work of filmmakers including Robert Vas, who worked for BBC Television from the mid-1960s to 1978, and Mike Dibb, whose BBC films include *Seeing Through Drawing* (1976) and *The Country and the City* (1979). In the 1970s this alternative tradition of authored and allusive filmmaking found a sympathetic home in the Music and Arts department of BBC Television. It was for that department's strand *Omnibus* that, a dozen years after the dismemberment of Features, Donnellan paid tribute to its radio broadcasts in his documentary *Pure Radio* (1977). Elegantly filmed in monochrome (with only an introductory section in colour), the film combined interviews with some of those who created Features programmes, including Charles Parker, with a reconstruction of a radio studio in rehearsal. Similarly recognising the significance of Features, this article draws out the connections and parallels between that department's output and the early television work of Mitchell and Donnellan, whilst also contributing to the exploration of the intermedial

relationships between radio and television at a formative moment. In the late 1950s the younger medium was for the first time reaching a mass audience at the same time as, and in part as a consequence of, the challenge to the BBC's monopoly posed by the arrival in late 1955 of the commercial network ITV.

First Features and Early Documentaries

'Before the war,' Paddy Scannell has noted, 'the development of the radio feature was uneven and chequered.'[4] A 'feature', *Radio Times* explained as early as 1928, was a special programme demonstrating 'original forms of expression, peculiar to radio,' and among the first such broadcasts were the innovative and impressionistic radio essays produced by Lance Sieveking in the late 1920s.[5] In the following decade, the London-based Talks department encouraged strands of reportage that engaged with the social and political questions of the day. Producer Laurence Gilliam also began to experiment with actuality sound recordings made on location, but this technique was exploited most effectively in programmes made in Manchester, where it was combined with an imperative to bring to the airwaves the life and language of northern England. The poet and producer D.G. Bridson oversaw a sequence of scripted feature programmes about local industries and explored new ways of working with verse and music, and from 1937 Olive Shapley used a new Mobile Recording Unit to document people speaking in their homes, clubs and workplaces. Both Bridson and Shapley foregrounded the voices of working men and women, although recorded actuality would not become central to radio's output until portable magnetic tape recorders began to be widely used in the mid-1950s. Meanwhile, in London, feature programmes were beginning to develop a more literary focus, with writers like Rayner Heppenstall and John Pudney becoming producers, a trend that was to become even more marked during World War Two with the arrival of Louis MacNeice as a writer-producer and the involvement also of, among others, John Betjeman, Dylan Thomas and Geoffrey Grigson. As Asa Briggs has observed, 'There was an intimate connection between feature-writing and poetry.'[6] Having flourished during the war, Features became a separate department in 1945 under Gilliam who was forthright in proselytising for 'the one unique form that radio has achieved in its short history. Owing something to the radio play, something to the radio talk, it is a synthesis different in essence from either.'[7]

By the mid-1950s, BBC Television had yet to develop factual programming that was comparable in achievement or distinction to the radio features from Manchester in the 1930s or from Gilliam's post-war Features department. In television, programmes of this type were more usually identified as documentaries, although they shared little with the dominant film documentary tradition established in Britain by John Grierson and others in the 1930s.[8] In 1955, in a book about how to write for television, Arthur Swinson identified three forms of television documentary: the dramatized documentary, scripted and mounted with actors 'live' in a studio; the magazine documentary, showcasing intriguing characters and travelogue segments; and the actuality documentary, which like the dramatized documentary combined studio and filmed elements, but with a stronger sense of contemporary journalism.[9] The most prominent example of the actuality documentary was the series *Special Enquiry*, which began in 1952 under editor Norman Swallow.[10] Despite's Grierson's former colleague Paul Rotha having been appointed as television's Head of Documentary Programmes in 1953[11], the service had made only a small number of factual films, in part because of the high cost of working with 35mm film stock but also because of opposition from the cinema industry and its unions. This would change, however, as television began to adopt the more affordable, though lower-resolution, 16mm format in the later 1950s for 'news and current affairs, as these areas were regarded as more journalistic than aesthetic'.[12] Denis Mitchell and Philip

Donnellan would be among the first generation of filmmakers to take up the creative challenges offered by these institutional and technological changes.

Denis Mitchell: Features for Radio, Films for Television

The BBC Television film *Night in the City* opens with a high-angle shot of a woman alone walking away from the camera down a flight of steps.[13] Her face is hidden, her step lacks urgency and her heels clip loudly on the stone, all of which suggests that she may be a prostitute. As she turns a corner to continue her descent, a graphic of the film's title is overlaid and a plaintive guitar theme breaks in. Setting, subject and mood are all suggestive of *film noir*, as is the title itself, which echoes that of crime movies like *Cry of the City* (Robert Siodmak, 1948) and *Night and the City* (Jules Dassin, 1950). The *noir*-ish tone and alluring sense of mystery continue as a male narrator speaks: 'At night the familiar shabby city is changed by silence and by shadow into an unknown land. It's this unknown land I want to explore…' Two years earlier, a radio feature also called *Night in the City* was broadcast by BBC Home Service North.[14] This begins with a woman's voice reflecting on the sadness of walking the city streets after dark before the male narrator breaks in: 'Past midnight. Time to explore the city. This symbol of art and order. This beehive. *Explore*, for it's no longer workaday and familiar; it's an unknown land.'[15] Both film and radio feature were produced by the BBC North Region in Manchester, both featured music composed by Ewan MacColl, and both were devised, produced and narrated by Denis Mitchell.

The son of a Congregationalist minister, Mitchell had moved to South Africa at the age of 18. After the war he was employed by the South Africa Broadcasting Corporation and became fascinated by the possibilities of working with wire-recorders left behind by American troops. By the time BBC producer D.G. Bridson arrived in South Africa in 1949 on a year's secondment Mitchell was convinced that 'the ability to record people talking at their jobs and in their homes was not a mere novelty but a most important means of communication.'[16] Bridson was impressed with Mitchell and persuaded him to return to Britain and to work in the Radio Features department. After a short time there he joined BBC North Region where he further developed his techniques of recording ordinary people's voices on location and presenting them without over-insistent mediation or commentary. 'Mitchell experimented with a portable recorder,' Philip Purser noted in a 1961 profile of the producer, 'taking it into the streets and pubs and revivalist chapels of the North and bringing back hour upon hour of random talk. Edited, shaped and presented as a regular feature, *People Talking*, it lent a flavour and spontaneity to the spoken word undreamt of by Lord Reith.'[17] Norman Swallow similarly recognised how significant was Mitchell's use of the portable quarter-inch tape recorder that became available in the mid-1950s, noting his 'use of this new equipment for his own personal essays in radio-verité had already generated much excitement in broadcasting circles, who now brought it to television.'[18]

After a television training attachment at Lime Grove in 1955, Mitchell refined his technique by complementing his voices with images. The television documentary *Night in the City* followed earlier films about teenagers and prisoners, and while it makes use of a narrator, in many ways it employs classic techniques associated with the Features department. Bridson recognised this when he paid tribute to Mitchell's early films:

> The only [television films] that appealed to me were the finely observed documentary studies of Northern life being written and directed by Denis Mitchell. But as these were generally frowned on by his colleagues as being 'more radio than television' there seemed little point in ploughing a similar furrow.[19]

What is immediately apparent from the opening of the television version of *Night in the City* is that this is a film in which sound will play a leading, and perhaps even dominant, role. "Documentary" elements are mixed with dramatized sequences, and the anonymous voices of ordinary people are central. Music beyond MacColl's score is also fundamental to the film, with sequences of teenagers dancing to rock'n'roll, nuns singing their night office at the Poor Clares convent in Levenshulme, and a faith-healing service at the Sharon Full Gospel Church in Stretford. Apart from a notional progression through a single night, *Night in the City* has no over-arching narrative, and instead this is an evocative mood piece which two years after transmission the filmmaker Karel Reisz described as possessing 'an astonishing feeling of unity, a strong pervading sense of a single sensibility responding to wildly diverse material.'[20] Reisz lays stress on Mitchell's singular authorship of the film, reflecting the importance of personal expression that was so prized by Gilliam and his colleagues. Gilliam had argued that:

> The essential quality of the feature programme is that it should be the expression of one mind, whatever technique it uses. It is the answer that each individual writer finds to the problem of making a statement by broadcasting, with the greatest possible force and coherence, emotional and dramatic impact, best suited to the nature of his material.[21]

The focus on authorship also chimes with the concerns of Karel Reisz and others, including the emerging directors Tony Richardson and Lindsay Anderson, that were demonstrated by the documentaries being promoted under the 'Free Cinema' banner. In the late 1950s these distinctive, independently-produced films, each of which stressed a personal, authorial vision, attracted significant attention as alternatives to the dominant documentary tradition. Reisz and Richardson's *Momma Don't Allow*, for example, which was first shown in the initial Free Cinema programme at the National Film Theatre in February 1956 is a vibrant yet intimate study of a Saturday night in a north London jazz club. Its respectful and affectionate, portrait of young people at play has a tone close to that of Mitchell's study. Reisz and Richardson's film also shares with *Night in the City* what Christophe Dupin has identified in many Free Cinema films as 'a creative way in which the filmmakers arranged sounds (often a combination of natural sounds and added music) and images, often creating symbolic contrasts between them, the rhythm of the films existing only as an amalgam of the two.'[22]

The visuals in *Night in the City* were shot with cumbersome 35mm cameras, which in part accounts for the artificial, 'studio' quality of certain sequences. For the later, Prix Italia-winning television documentary *Morning in the Streets*, however, Mitchell and his camera operator collaborators Roy Harris (who also co-directed), Gerry Pullen, Graham Turner and Ted Wallbank, used lightweight 16mm cameras new to the BBC Northern Film Unit.[23] These cameras are usually associated with their flexibility in newsgathering and with *verité* filmmaking pioneered by Jean Rouch and Edgar Morin in France and by Richard Leacock in the United States, but their poetic potential was also considerable, as *Morning in the Streets* demonstrates. But like the earlier film, *Morning in the Streets* was also based on a radio documentary, *The Talking Streets* (1958), arranged and produced by Mitchell, and described in the *Radio Times* billing as 'An impression of life and opinion in the back streets of a Northern city in the morning.'

The film begins with panoramic shots of a generic city (scenes were shot in Manchester, Salford, Stockport and Liverpool) before focussing in on streets of working-class housing, populated as dawn breaks only by pigeons and cats. A family—two adults and five children sleeping in just two beds—wakes to face the day. Scenes of home life are juxtaposed with the street games of children, of housewives at the shops, of road building, of

house construction, and of unemployed men standing around and taking refuge in a library. Throughout we hear voices speaking about the harshness of life, expressing dreams of the countryside, exchanging gossip, much of the time accompanied by an under-score composed by Thomas Henderson with Tommy Reilly on solo harmonica. The dense weave of words from voices that remain for the most part unidentified ranges across living standards, class identity, social aspirations, memories of the war and connections with global events, especially the threat of the atom bomb, even if to a viewer today it is striking that there is no explicit mention of immigration or racial tensions (although a male voice says, in a friendly manner, '…there's that many Africans over 'ere').

The film combines its allusive impressionism with sequences that are more directly narrativised. We meet a philosophical vagrant evading the police, and Mitchell constructs montage juxtapositions of images in which, for example, a motorbike being kick-started is immediately followed by a reclining doll apparently animated into a seated position. There are also sections with synchronous sound (where the person speaking is also shown on screen), as when (in an echo of Arthur Elton and Edgar Anstey's 1935 documentary *Housing Problems*) a tenant addresses the camera to describe the terrible conditions of their rented accommodation. The most clearly constructed sequence draws together a radio broadcast of the Remembrance ceremony at the Cenotaph with a widow's wartime reminiscence of her husband leaving home cut with shots of fallen toy soldiers left over from a boy's playtime. Towards its close, the film concentrates more strongly on the activities, faces, and voices of children, as John Corner has recognised:

> Over a selection of shots of individual girls, smiling and singing in their 'solo' and 'chorus' roles, their song is suddenly taken up orchestrally. As it increases in volume, the deserted playground featured in the early morning sequence is suddenly filled by a rush of boys and girls. Underneath the music and in relation to its volume and buoyancy, the camera now picks them out and frames them individually in a mode not of observed particular action but of projected general significance. Their faces stand for the future.[24]

Morning in the Streets is a rich trace of the failed post-war consensus and a striking riposte to "You've never had it so good" Tory boosterism. In its rejection of narration, its weave of voices, its contrapuntal juxtaposition of image and sound, its exploration of a theme rather than adherence to a narrative, the film can be seen as aspiring to and achieving a form of 'pure television' aligned with the 'pure radio' of the Features department. In the three decades after *Morning in the Streets*, Denis Mitchell directed and produced a remarkable range of documentaries, shot both in Britain and abroad, many of which continued to develop these formal approaches. In British television during these years perhaps the only figure with a comparably rich and varied oeuvre, and with a filmmaking voice as distinctive, was Philip Donnellan, who similarly extended the 'pure radio' concerns of Radio Features to the small screen.

The Television Documentaries of Philip Donnellan

Philip Donnellan joined the BBC in 1948, and soon started writing and producing his own radio documentaries in Birmingham, before becoming Charles Parker's deputy in the Features department. In his unpublished memoirs, Donnellan writes (which characteristic directness) that BBC Television's Outside Broadcast Unit's output in the early 1950s was characterised by 'stiff and deferential' interviews and an overall air of 'unimaginable banality'.[25] Inspired by Free Cinema and other new international documentary film work, he

came to believe that the captivating potential of television was not being adequately exploited, and he was certain he had the necessary skills and experience to make innovative films for broadcast. While Donnellan was equally dismissive of his previous radio work,[26] in his time with Features he became adept in working with magnetic tape, and in drawing out working-class interview subjects from around the Black Country and wider Midlands.

Donnellan was interested in the potential for authorial control in film documentary production 'just as one did with a simple programme on sound tape'.[27] Following a location-based secondment with Ealing Studios,[28] Donnellan attended a Gilliam-organised conference for Features producers, where Grace Wyndham Goldie (then Assistant Head of Talks, Television) spoke about writing for television: Donnellan writes 'she told of the potential wonders of studio-based "features"' for television, and he pursued an introduction.[29] Two days later, Donnellan met with Wyndham Goldie and producer Donald Baverstock, who were interested in what 'regional knowledge' Donnellan might bring to the second series of Baverstock's 'pioneering magazine programme' *Tonight* (1957-65).[30]

Donnellan's previous work with Features provided a model of poetic documentary-making as well as local stories to draw on: he produced diverting segments for *Tonight* featuring Midlands tortoise races and 'exotic' Birmingham junk shops, and in return gained experience in articulating television's 'visual grammar'.[31] Out of this work, Donnellan was permitted to contribute a film to *Eye to Eye*, the series for which *Night in the City* had been produced. Permission came after he appealed for parity across the regions: 'Denis Mitchell from Manchester was contributing a film; why not a film from Birmingham?'[32] The result was *Joe the Chainsmith* (1958).

Donnellan was very aware of Mitchell and his innovative radio work, particularly his use of the then-novel 'midget' tape recorder, writing that:

> Mitchell grasped its possibilities at once: he took his machine into the clubs, the stews, the lodging houses of Manchester, and with scarcely a word, holding the mic with one hand and a ciggie with the other, encouraging people only with his look of battered and opaque world-weariness, he recorded "People Talking" [tx. 1953-8]. It was remarkable. A new Mayhew. A combination sometimes of Dostoievsky and Jack London…[33]

Such ideas would have been in the background as Donnellan collaborated with another Birmingham producer Phil Drabble (later the presenter of *One Man and his Dog*) on a Midland Home Service radio series called *Men, Women and Memories* (1954-5), and it was on this that Donnellan journeyed into the enclosed industrial community of Cradley Heath near Birmingham, right at the heart of the Black Country, and where he first met chain-maker Joe Mallen. *Joe the Chainsmith* was Donnellan's first film that put into practice the principles of poetic television.[34]

Donnellan points out that *Joe the Chainsmith* is indebted more to his experience in radio rather than an awareness of television production, confessing that he 'had very few preconceptions about the way in which one might actually make a full-length film: in the same way, presumably, as one would make a radio programme', albeit with a visual dimension.[35] One especially striking sequence in the film, a poetic portrait of Mallen's daily life at work and leisure, is an extended observation of Mallen and colleagues hammering a ring of steel. The effect of the images and the sounds is hypnotic and transforms the sequence into, in the words of Franklin, 'a ritual of aesthetic wonder.'[36] Much of the documentary is shot away from the workplace: when Mallen shares advice given to him by his father ('a rough diamond… a typical Black Country man'), he is filmed looking directly into camera, and we can see and hear the yard – complete with chickens and terrier – in which he sits.

Mallen is presented as part of this milieu, enmeshed in a way of life seemingly untouched by modernity. By interviewing Mallen in the yard, the film illustrates, as Drabble noted, a way of life that even then were 'relics of an age that is passing'.[37]

Franklin remarked upon the film's focus on leisure pursuits, since in contrast to other contemporary representations, it 'represents the working class at play, rather than as proletariat'.[38] This is achieved through allowing these activities to be narrated by Mallen, and their association through video and audio montage of the Black Country village, working practices, and voices. Donnellan argued that Mallen's narration was a radical choice, since at the time, 'only the elect in broadcasting – commentators, interviewers, mediators – [were] allowed to speak facing the audience directly'.[39] Contrary to the original script, Donnellan and Drabble elected that Joe would 'do his own explaining' direct to camera, just as one might record an interview on tape.[40] Adopting production practices from Features offered a way of making television that could overcome what Donnellan saw as the BBC's class-bound limitations governing the ways in which, as Paul Long has written, 'it spoke of and to its audience' by allowing subjects to speak for themselves.[41]

In ways comparable to Mitchell's early films, techniques and concerns associated with pure radio are brought into play: voices from below, and in this case the surprising employment of Mallen himself as the host and dominant voice of the programme; the use of evocative music; impressionistic images employed allusively and associatively; and a concern to capture atmosphere and the textures of everyday life and leisure. For Franklin, Denis Mitchell's work and the early films of Donnellan are drawn together by their shared origin in the regions, a 'poetic and disjunctive aesthetic and humanist structure of feeling',[42] a contrapuntal relationship between sound and image grounded in the use of the tape recorder, and a central interest in *people* – as opposed to the social processes and institutional operations that so fascinated many of the films made within the documentary tradition associated with John Grierson.

Donnellan's *Coventry Kids* (1960) offers a compellingly ambivalent glimpse at Coventry's post-war resurrection. It features an innovative score by Ewan MacColl and Peggy Seeger, with the voices of Coventry residents presented over images of the city's wartime ruins, rebuilding efforts, industry, and diverse residents. Whether this film exhibits 'respect for people's individuality'[43] is a matter of debate. Many voices heard on the soundtrack for *Coventry Kids* are not identified, making the particular recorded statements into a generalised Coventry voice, even as the accents heard range from the local to the international.[44] In comparison to a mode of documentary filmmaking that would have a single narrator speaking for Coventry's residents, *Coventry Kids* does evoke a respect for the power of an individual voice to become a signifier of more universal experience.

The intermedial extension of the aesthetics of Features into this poetic mode of television documentary is most directly realised in Donnellan's television adaptations of certain of the innovative Radio Ballads. Produced between 1958 and 1964 by Charles Parker, Ewan MacColl (who had scored Mitchell's *Night in the City*) and Peggy Seeger, these radio programmes weave together the vernacularly-phrased and regionally-accented voices of ordinary Britons at work with specially-composed folksongs and ballads. Donnellan saw in the success of the Radio Ballads a 'permanent model of voice-music montage and therefore the stuff of documentary film', in both technical and political accomplishments.[45] Undeterred by a few false starts in realising this intermedial extension of radio to television,[46] the opportunity soon arose (following a change in BBC2 management) for another attempt.[47] Donnellan adapted three Radio Ballads successfully: *Singing the Fishing* (1960), which became *The Shoals of Herring* (1972); *The Fight Game* (BBC Home Service, 1963; BBC2, 1973); and *The Big Hewer* (BBC Home Service, 1961; BBC2, 1974). Alun Howkins has argued that these films 'bore the unmistakable stamp of the [Radio Ballad] form' in their

translation to television.[48] Rather than illustrating the existing audio, Donnellan updated and expanded the scope of the original programmes: for example, with *The Shoals of Herring,* instead of cutting archive footage into an 'antiquarian and elegiac' film, Donnellan travelled to Scotland in 1972 to document fishermen's contemporary concerns[49]. These often-political additions provoked the ire of BBC brass,[50] as did his decision to screen (without adequate permission) *The Shoals of Herring* for those Scottish fishing communities, who could not receive BBC2.[51]

Donnellan's later films are held by some critics to have become too partisan, too 'political', although they long remained one of the few powerful expressions of progressive and radical ideas within BBC Television. His *Gone for a Soldier* (1980), combines witness statement, archive and popular song in a critique of 150 years of imperial aggression, up to and including the 'politically sensitive' context of Northern Ireland.[52] But his film *Pure Radio*, broadcast on 3 November 1977, in the *Omnibus* series was less contentious. Donnellan's retrospective view in his memoirs argued not just for the film's importance as a memorial for the people and practices of Features, and as a 'culmination of our work in Television on the Radio Ballad form', but as a challenge against pressures for change within and beyond the BBC:

> it was also intended as a warning against those forces already on the move, indeed already largely dominant, which would curb such qualities in broadcasting in favour of a narrower hegemony: a sharp and shallow professionalism controlled by accountants and answerable to nothing. We were moving into a period, I reckoned, when the talents which Features had represented would in a dozen years be quite forgotten if we had not already built their tribute into the cultural archive of television.[53]

The irony is that *Pure Radio* was only broadcast once and forty years after its transmission archival copies of Donnellan's attempt at memorialisation are not easily accessible for viewing.

Conclusion

In the years preceding the closure of Features, the work of the filmmakers Denis Mitchell and Phillip Donnellan demonstrated that the television screen was not, as Asa Briggs suggested, 'a barrier' to translating the ideas of pure radio to the newer medium. Mitchell and Donnellan used the emerging technologies of 16mm film cameras and portable quarter-inch tape recorders to extend techniques developed with radio feature programmes into poetic forms of television documentaries. Building on the richly developed techniques of Features, they worked with allusive combinations of spoken word and music with images, and they evolved self-consciously 'poetic' filmic forms. They extended the concerns of radio features to engage with stories from beyond London and to bring to the screen the marginalised voices of workers and of families living in poverty. Both Mitchell and Donnellan continued to direct films into the 1980s and beyond, and although their concerns, techniques and driving ideas certainly never became dominant in factual programmes, comparable approaches, and indeed traces of the ambition of 'pure radio' can be recognised in the films of later directors including Robert Vas and Mike Dibb. Yet if the films of Mitchell and Donnellan have to date received only minimal critical engagement, to which this article has made a modest contribution, the programmes to which Vas, Dibb and others contributed so creatively remain, both for filmmakers today and for commentators, almost entirely unknown and undocumented.

Television and Radio Programmes Discussed

The Big Hewer, adapted and produced by Philip Donnellan, 22.10, 50 minutes, BBC Two, 9 May 1974.
The Big Hewer, music and direction by Peggy Seeger, songs by Ewan MacColl, and produced by Charles Parker, 20.30, 50 minutes, BBC Home Service, 18 August 1961.
Coventry Kids, produced by Philip Donnellan, 21.15, 40 minutes, BBC Television, 15 November 1960.
Eye to Eye: Night in the City, devised, produced and directed by Denis Mitchell, 20.45, 30 minutes, BBC Television, 14 June 1957.
The Fight Game, adapted and produced by Philip Donnellan, 22.10, 50 minutes, BBC Two, 11 June 1973.
The Fight Game, by by Ewan MacColl, Peggy Seeger and Charles Parker, 20.00, 55 minutes, BBC Home Service Basic, 3 July 1963.
Gone for a Soldier, produced by Philip Donnellan, 20.35, 105 minutes, BBC Two, 9 March 1980.
Home Town: Warwick, written by Philip Donnellan and produced by Barrie Edgar, 20.00, 45 minutes, BBC Television, 10 August 1956.
Joe the Chainsmith, written and produced by Philip Donnellan, 21.30, 30 minutes, BBC Television, 7 November 1958.
Momma Don't Allow, directed by Karel Reisz and Tony Richardson, 16mm, BFI Experimental Film Fund, 1956.
Morning in the Streets, directed by Denis Mitchell and Roy Harris, 21.25, 35 minutes, BBC Television, 25 March 1959.
Omnibus: Pure Radio, written and directed by Philip Donnellan, 22.15, 50 minutes, BBC1, 3 November 1977.
People Talking: Night in the City, arranged and produced by Denis Mitchell, 19.30, 30 minutes, BBC Home Service North, 1 February 1955.
People Talking: The Talking Streets, arranged and produced by Denis Mitchell, 8.00pm, 30 minutes, BBC Home Service Basic, 27 October 1958.
The Shoals of Herring, adapted and produced by Philip Donnellan, 21.25, 60 minutes, BBC Two, 15 September 1972.
Singing the Fishing, by Ewan MacColl and Charles Parker, BBC Home Service, 19.30, 55 minutes, 16 August 1960.

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Notes

[1] Thomas, ‘Gilliam, Laurence Duval (1907-1964)’, no page.
[2] Madsen, ‘Radio and the Documentary Imagination’, 192.
[3] Briggs, *History of Broadcasting: Competition*, 348.
[4] Scannell, ‘ “The Stuff of Radio” ’, 23.
[5] ‘Feature Programmes’, *Radio Times*, 31 August 1928, 367; for Sieveking, see Scannell, ‘ “The Stuff of Radio” ’, pp. 1-7; also Hendy, ‘Painting with Sound’, 169-200.
[6] Briggs, *History of Broadcasting: Sound and Vision*, 702.
[7] Gilliam, ‘Aspects of the Feature Programme’, 100.
[8] Key books about the Grierson tradition include Aitken, *Film and Reform*; Anthony and Mansell, *Projection of Britain*; Sussex, *Rise and Fall*; Swann, *British Documentary Film Movement*; Winston, *Claiming the Real*.
[9] Swinson, *Writing for Television*.

[10] On *Special Enquiry*, see Swallow, *Factual Television*, 72-77; and Corner, 'Documentary Voices', 43-49.
[11] Rotha remained at the BBC for only two years; on his unhappy time there, see Boon, *Films of Fact*.
[12] Sexton, 'Televerité Hits Britain', 431.
[13] *Night in the City* is available as part the BFI's DVD release *Visions of Change, Volume 1: BBC, 1951-1967* (2015).
[14] Broadcast 7.30-8.00pm, 1 February 1955.
[15] The radio feature transcription comes from Franklin, 'Denis Mitchell', which also includes a thoughtful analysis of Mitchell's work as a radio producer.
[16] Quoted in Miall, 'Obituary: Denis Mitchell'.
[17] Purser, 'Think-tape', 109. *People Talking* was an occasional radio series that ran from May 1954-December 1958. Both the radio version of *Night in the City* and *The Talking Streets* were produced as episodes for the series.
[18] Swallow, *Factual Television*, 195.
[19] Bridson, *Prospero and Ariel*, 247.
[20] Reisz, 'Denis Mitchell's Television Films', 52.
[21] Gilliam, 'Aspects of the Feature Programme', 101.
[22] Dupin, Christophe. 'Free Cinema', no page; booklet published as part of the DVD set *Free Cinema*, London: BFI, 2006. The set includes *Momma Don't Allow*. A comparison of Mitchell and Donnellan's films with Free Cinema documentaries indicates that more attention could productively be paid to the intermedial relationships between radio, television and the cinema in the post-war years.
[23] *Morning in the Streets* is available as part the BFI's DVD release *Visions of Change, Volume 1: BBC, 1951-1967* (2015).
[24] Corner, 'Documentary Voices', 53.
[25] Donnellan, *We Were the BBC*, 25.
[26] In his estimation, his work was 'completely lacking in substance or intellectual rigour' (Donnellan, *We Were the BBC*, 28).
[27] Ibid, 39.
[28] This was after rejecting an attachment with Ealing's film editors; Donnellan, *We Were the BBC*, 41.
[29] Donnellan, *We Were the BBC*, 43.
[30] Donnellan, *We Were the BBC*, 46.
[31] Ibid. 48.
[32] Ibid, 56.
[33] Ibid, 36.
[34] This was not his first film. That honour goes to *Home Town: Warwick* (1956), in which Donnellan was responsible for shooting 'uncuttable picture-postcard shots' taken with a 'double-camera': a BBC-designed hybrid of camera and magnetic recorder that Donnellan remembers was 'as manoeuvrable as Birmingham Town Hall and not nearly as handsome or useful.' Donnellan, *We Were the BBC*, 40.
[35] Donnellan, *We Were the BBC*, 58.
[36] Franklin, 'Documenting the Margins', 20.
[37] Drabble, *Black Country*, 21.
[38] Franklin, 'Documenting the Margins', 23.
[39] Donnellan, *We Were the BBC*, 64.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Long, 'Representing Race and Place', 268.

[42] Franklin, 'Documenting the Margins', 8.
[43] Colin Moffat, writing in *Contrast Television Quarterly*, cited by Franklin, 'Documenting the Margins', 8.
[44] Particularly affecting is the voice of a West Indian man who would like to 'get up a game of cricket' with his new neighbours but 'doesn't know who to ask' for an invitation.
[45] Donnellan, *We Were the BBC*, 242.
[46] Reviews were poor; Cox, *Set Into Song*, 260.
[47] Donnellan, *We Were the BBC*, 242.
[48] Howkins, 'History and the Radio Ballads', 92.
[49] Donnellan, *We Were the BBC*, 243.
[50] Franklin, 'Documenting the Margins', 52.
[51] Donnellan, *We Were the BBC*, 254-257.
[52] Donnellan, *We Were the BBC*, 301.
[53] Donnellan, *We Were the BBC*, 272.