

Joy Damousi and Desley Deacon, eds. *Talking and Listening in the Age of Modernity: Essays on the history of sound*. Canberra: Australian National UP, 2007.

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Documentary-makers, whether in film, television or radio, work on the assumption that sound is a key factor in historical consciousness, and would probably agree that broadcast and recorded sound provides the sound-scape of modernity. Academic scholars have come only lately to these insights, among them the authors of these stimulating essays. The chief interest of the collection lies in various attempts to place the Australian voice, the Australian accent, in the mainstream of history.

Bruce Johnson's essay, 'Voice, Power and Modernity', gives us the long view. Intrigued by shifts in the power of the human voice, and the 'ambiguous relationship between voice and power in the modern era', he illustrates the changing status of the voice, especially in relation to print, with historical examples. These range from Johnson's dictionary of educated (but not working-class) speech, through the mass distribution of recordings of Hitler's speeches, to the digitised voice of Pauline Hanson on the dance track, 'I'm a Back Door Man'.

Diane Collins is concerned with the missing place of sound in the story of the Victorian gold rush of the 1850s. She draws attention to the 'sonic disorder' at the alluvial mine sites, which visitors described as 'Pandemonium, Hades, Bedlam'. By day there was the noise of thousands of diggers labouring with picks and shovels, sieving gravel in wooden cradles; at night, the 'perpetual thunder' of the ritual discharge of firearms. This nightly outburst of gunfire presaged the armed rebellion at Eureka, but has been ignored by historians. Why? Because, Collins suggests, our national narrative has been that of 'the evolution of an English polity' and, as such, 'a disarmed people'. In her alternative narrative, 'the theatre of gunfire, in privatising the display of power, underscored the gold-field as an experimental democracy of sound'. I'm not so sure. When it occurs in Latin America or the Middle East, don't we regard it as machismo?

The Australian accent has been a subject of consuming interest to Australians and to visitors to Australia since the early days of settlement. So Bruce Moore explores the evolving or even revolving nature of the Australian accent. Contemporary commentators noted the 'purity' of the accent of the first generation of Australian-born colonists, meaning that their speech was free

of the regional accents of their immigrant parents' generation. James Dixon, writing in 1820, considered that '[t]he amalgamation of such various dialects assembled together, seems to improve the mode of articulating the words'. Moore identifies this 'pure' accent, resulting from the 'process of levelling', as the 'foundation accent' that, once established, was common to all native-born Australians. Thus when the English historian, James Froude, visited Australia in 1886, he too was struck by 'the pure English that was spoken there'.

Paradoxically, Froude's visit coincided with the start of a nationwide effort to 'improve' or 'cultivate' children's speech in school. Significantly for the Australian accent, learning to read included reading aloud and recitation. Close attention was given to pronunciation and articulation: the art of 'elocution'. School inspectors' reports, with phonetic renderings of children's speech, are the rich source of evidence for Moore. He links the development of a prescriptive attitude towards Australian vowels and diphthongs to the rise of the 'cultivated Australian' accent.

Alan Atkinson, in 'Speech, Children and the Federation Movement', draws upon school inspectors' reports on children's elocution in the 1890s to reach a different conclusion, arguing that the aim was a nationwide 'uniformity of speech' as part of 'building up a truly democratic people'. After Federation, however, those who promoted the 'cultivated accent' deplored the uncultivated Australian accent, which was thought to reflect badly upon its speaker and the nation as a whole. In 'The Australian Has a Lazy Way of Talking: Australian character and accent, 1920s-1940s', Joy Damousi shows how this directive came to be seen as 'cultural cringe'. By the 1970s, elocution had disappeared from the school curriculum; voice training was the province of drama schools. Moore concludes that '[m]ost Australians now speak general Australian, or, more accurately Australian—something very similar to the foundation accent of the 1820s'. 'Broad Australian', he says, 'is rarely heard, except when consciously "cultivated" for its advertising or iconising functions'.

Nevertheless, reading aloud and reciting in class no doubt helped to prepare many of our early politicians for public life at a time when oratorical skills were much admired. In her essay 'Sounds of History: Oratory and the fantasy of male power', Marilyn Lake shows how the young Alfred Deakin's oratory, along with his good looks and manly bearing, enabled him to trounce the British Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, at an imperial conference in 1887, thereby improving Australia's standing in Britain to the good of the Federation movement. When he returned to a Colonial Conference in 1907 as Prime Minister, Deakin 'surpassed all other Dominion leaders in oratorical skill' thereby, Lake suggests, revising the British elite's low opinion of Australian

manhood. Yet Deakin saw his social triumph as a fantasy, and returned to Australia a broken man. Prime Minister Billy Hughes's 'Wake Up England!' speech-making tour in 1916, by contrast, was such a popular success that, despite his noted likeness to Charlie Chaplin, he was offered a safe seat and a post in the War Cabinet.

The comic timing evident in the transcripts of Hughes's pugnacious 1916 speeches (published in *The Times*) suggests that, as an orator, he probably had more in common with the popular reciters of the age than with Alfred Deakin. These show-offs are the subject of Peter Kirkpatrick's essay, 'Hunting the Wild Reciter: Elocution and the Art of Recitation', in which he recounts how their classroom experience produced generations of family and suburban entertainers in Australia—and throughout the British Empire and America—well into the era of recorded and broadcast sound. The ballads of Henry Lawson, Banjo Paterson, Adam Lindsay Gordon, Rudyard Kipling and Henry Newbolt, along with poems by Longfellow, Tennyson, Shakespeare, Wordsworth and Milton, memorised from School Readers dating from the 1890s, and first recited in school, formed their repertoire, supplemented by 'popular reciter' books such as *The Bulletin Reciter*, first published in 1901, which went through fourteen editions. 'Elocutionary belief in the virtue of "good" speech', Kirkpatrick suggests, helped 'to fashion Australian identity in terms of imperial citizenship'.

According to Desley Deacon, what elocutionists regarded as 'good' speech in Australia was not the 'la-de-da' accent of the British upper-class. 'Good Australian' speech, she says, was cosmopolitan; indeed, the sort of 'intelligible, cultured voice' that Americans called 'Good American Speech'. Deacon's essay, 'World English? How an Australian Invented "Good American Speech"', tells the astonishing story of William Tilly, a Sydneysider who became a sort of 'Henry Higgins' to two generations of American teachers and actors, exercising enormous influence on the speech used in theatre and 'the talkies'. Born in 1860, Tilly studied languages at Sydney University and phonetics in Germany before he arrived in New York in 1917, where he taught English and phonetics at Columbia University into the 1930s. Cate Blanchett's voice coach, Deacon notes, is Timothy Monich, whose teacher's teacher was one of Tilly's pupils. What Tilly championed as 'World English' and his American disciples as 'Good American Speech', was labelled by his English pupil, the phonetician Daniel Jones, as 'Received Pronunciation'. Abbreviated to 'RP', it came to be synonymous with the cultured voice of the BBC.

These essays have opened a can of worms. Let's have more of them.

Jill Kitson