

SHAKE, RATTLE, ROLL

a radio manifesto by Gregory Whitehead 1992

Shake, Rattle, Roll (0:00)

Shake, rattle, roll.

Shake, rattle, roll.

Shake, rattle, roll. The kind of strange and paradoxical fate of language out of the body, language once it continues to move through . . .

Song For a Punch-Drunk Disembody (1:04)

My body flies over the ocean

My body flies over the sea . . .

Won't you please bring back my body

Oh, bring back my body to me.

My body flies over the ocean

My body flies over the sea . . .

My body flies over the ocean

Oh, bring back my body to me.

Shake, rattle, roll (. . .)

And this is what I mean by shake, rattle, and roll: I mean that the whole idea of live radio was an illusion, that the living only speak through the articulated corpses of technology. The dead mediate the living, and so the more dead the transmission, the more alive the sensation: the more dead, the more alive, the more dead . . .

Castaway Chorus (4:06)

Bring back, bring back, bring back my body to me, to me,

Bring back, bring back, oh, bring back my body to me!

You're on the air. (Scream)

Thank you very much.

Slower, slower, slower . . .

And this is what I mean by shake, rattle, and roll.

A World of Lips (5:00)

Sorry . . . Sound check. We did not rewind here.

Very, very good.

Finally, repeat the proposition without using your larynx.

The problem with bodies is the reason for antibodies, and the problem with antibodies is no body at all.

Very, very, very good. Let's consider the proposition proved.

Shake, rattle, roll (. . .)

Get wired, stick a needle in the brain and spin those tunes, baby, 'cause you're a tightly twisted roller derby brand of wild thing.

I am the prosthesis.

A land where the unutterable is uttered . . .

And this is what I mean by shake, rattle, and roll.

A Jog Through the Cave of the Imagination (6:43)

That it is not just a place of sudden bursts of philosophical illumination, but is also a place of the most depraved kinds of madness.

That it is not just a place of sanctuary, but also a place of danger.

Not just dreams, revelations and sanctuary, but nightmares, madness, and danger.

The Cave of the Imagination.
Have you been there?
What about your research?
Darkness.

Rattle My Bones (8:26)

A very, very kind of disquieting thing to hear over your headphones. Anyway, we almost crashed on take-off from Honolulu. With stabilizing flaps damaged by metal bars that had broken away from the landing gear, the plane barely lifted off the ground before it began to rattle violently.

Now in the wake of each fresh plane crash, I confess to being one of those morbid souls who reads survivor accounts with intense curiosity. And I do keep voluminous files. Such accounts almost invariably refer to violent rattles moments before disaster.

So as the luggage compartments sprang open above our heads and those little miniature Samsonites coming down onto us, I felt certain that we were moments away from rattling right into a burn unit.

But the Qantas pilot immediately - when you hear a Qantas pilot, they tend to be very deeply cool dudes, when you hear a note of anxiety in a Qantas pilot voice you really know you are in serious trouble - the Qantas pilot immediately informed

us that he was lightening our load by dumping two thousand liters of fuel into the Pacific ocean.

Shake, rattle, roll (...) This is what I mean by shake, rattle and roll.

Proof Positive (10:31)

Pneumatic Stress
The Trembling Hand
A Bad Time for Noses
Rough Throat
Squeal Squeal Squeal
The Intrinsic Boredom of Immortality
Signs and Wonders
The Outsider
Fingers Tapdance with Love Ghosts in the Darkness
(That is a very poetic one.)
Death Letters Live on Air, but Smell Like Sewage
and, Finally, Whispered Nonsense.

Several hours later in a typically incongruous late twentieth century change of scene, I sat watching the surfers ride the waves at Waikiki with a Qantas complimentary cocktail - I think it was a banana daiquiri, though I was so rattled I have no idea what it was - but I was downing them as quickly as they could bring them. I thought about other waves, air waves, the risks of mechanical vibration. I thought about all the radio art transmissions that dump their fuel and make premature landings, about the countless audio aircraft that never arrive at their true destination, or that shake, rattle, and roll violently, without ever coming to the climax. And after three or four more complimentary cocktails, the voices in my head piled up like drowned rats . . .

Liturgy for Radio Utopia (12:00)

Communication is community.
The technology of transmission
is the promise of one world
made whole, brought together,
all languages, all races, all cultures.

I dream of a time
when everybody on the planet lives,
breathes, and touches each other air.

A glorious communion
A celebration to end all celebrations
in a language to end all languages.

Communication is community.
The technology of transmission
is the promise of one world
made whole, brought together,
all languages, all races, all cultures.

I dream of a time
when everybody on the planet
lives, breathes, and touches each other on air.
A glorious communion, communion, communion.

A celebration to end all celebrations
in a language to end all languages.

Finnegan's Wake!
Here Comes Everybody.

Finnegan's Wake!
Here Comes Everybody.

How Fast My Body Flies (14:04)

Slower, slower, slower . . .

The local daily newspaper alluded only to, and I quote,

A sinister dance of satanic voices, group necrophilia, and degenerate gobbledegook . . . " And this is what I mean by: shake, rattle, and roll.

Radio Thanatos (15:09)

Shake, rattle, roll (. . .) You're on the air.

Sometimes when you try to talk about radio art in public you get needled, you get needled by the living and haunted by the hanging vibrations of the dead. With the passage of time, I find that my most pressing problem is how to tell the difference.

From stone cold hard fact, larynx exposed at every stage of physical decomposition; from talk show golden throats cut with a scalpel, transected, then taped back together and beamed across the airwaves; from voices that have been severed from the body for so long they don't remember which body they belong to or whether they belong to anybody at all; from pop-monster giggle bodies guaranteed to shake your boodie; from artificial tissue folds, sneak-stitched and distilled into computer synthesis and digital processing; from mechanical chatterboxes dead to begin with; from cyberphonic antibodies taking flight and crashing to pieces on air.

From down and dirty drive-time jingles to spotless digital recording of Handel's Messiah. Sit-com patter becomes fused in the memory with the speeches of candidates and the numbing rhythms of traffic reports and weather forecasts. Needles are an inescapable fact of life in the schizophrenic and still amply animate the radio body, even if the world's fastest fake fingers, laser-beams, have made it possible to get off without them.

As the possibility of public discourse collapses, at least in the United States, into communal lip-sync extravaganzas, perhaps the most direct form of radio art, and certainly the cheapest, is to simply get wired, stick a needle in the brain and spin those tunes 'cause you're a tightly twisted rollerderby brand of wild thing.

(...) This is what I mean by shake, rattle, and roll.

A World Without Lips (17:49)

Now let's try to repeat the proposition without opening our mouths:

"The problem with bodies is the reason for antibodies, and the problem with antibodies is no body at all."

Very, very good.

Some of course just heard other voices, one called in and said, "They have been telling me I'm a schizophrenic, but after listening to you I think I may only be a schizophonic."

But others describe various forms of uncontrollable voices that would erupt from their throats at the most embarrassing times. Several were acutely aware that their language had become infected by the electronic media, that their language was in fact no longer their own, and often found themselves talking like cartoon characters.

Shake, rattle, roll (. . .)

The Dangers of This Night (19:15)

Ok, is the glass of water still being . . . ?

Actually, it's a glass of wine since we are going to do a liturgy. Think wafer.

Yes, they do get a bit sticky on the throat. We probably better have a glass of water of wine or two. Ok, and . . .

You can always tear off a piece of cardboard at a pinch.

Yes.

Lighten our darkness, we beseech thee, oh Lord, and by thy great mercy defend us from all perils and the dangers of this night.

We, I think, are beginning to move toward the liturgical mode.

Dangers of this night!

Yes . . . Book of Common Prayer.

Yes. Are we ready?

I believe so.

Song for a Punch-Drunk Disembody (19:59)

My body flies over the ocean
My body flies over the sea . . .
Won't you please bring back my body
Oh, bring back my body to me.

Shake, rattle, roll (. . .)

Nothing More Than That (20:38)

I am the prosthesis.
I am the prosthesis.

How would you like to go through life hearing nothing more than that?

Song of a Spirit, Off (21:24)

Won't you please bring back my body to me.
It has gone a long way over land and 'cross sea.
If I promise to shake and to rattle and roll,
won't you please bring my body to me.

If I promise to shake
and to rattle and roll
won't you bring
my body to me.