



WestminsterResearch

<http://www.westminster.ac.uk/westminsterresearch>

Broadcasting and time.

Paddy Scannell

School of Media, Arts and Design

This is an electronic version of a PhD thesis awarded by the University of Westminster. © The Author, 2006.

This is a scanned reproduction of the paper copy held by the University of Westminster library.

The WestminsterResearch online digital archive at the University of Westminster aims to make the research output of the University available to a wider audience. Copyright and Moral Rights remain with the authors and/or copyright owners.

Users are permitted to download and/or print one copy for non-commercial private study or research. Further distribution and any use of material from within this archive for profit-making enterprises or for commercial gain is strictly forbidden.

Whilst further distribution of specific materials from within this archive is forbidden, you may freely distribute the URL of WestminsterResearch:
(<http://westminsterresearch.wmin.ac.uk/>).

In case of abuse or copyright appearing without permission e-mail
repository@westminster.ac.uk

Broadcasting and Time

by

Paddy Scannell

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the
University of Westminster for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy by
written publications.**

January 2006

Table of contents

Introduction: 1--35

Part One Media Studies

Chapter 1: 36--51

Benjamin contextualised:

‘The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction’

Chapter 2: 52--67

Encoding and decoding in the television discourse
(with M. Gurevitch)

Part Two The meaning of ‘live’

Chapter 3: 68--88

The Brains Trust:

An historical study of the management of liveness

Chapter 4: 89--110

The death of Diana and the meaning of media events

Chapter 5: 111--121

Big Brother as a television event

Chapter 6: 122--136

What reality has misfortune?

Part Three Time and television

Chapter 7: 137--157

For-anyone-as-someone structures

Chapter 8: 158--177

Television and history

Chapter 9: 178--192

The meaning of *broadcasting* in the digital era

Abstract

This thesis brings together work I have published in the last five years in academic journals and edited book collections. All the material presented in the thesis, much of it substantially re-written, will appear in the trilogy I have been working on since my last published book, *Radio, Television and Modern Life* (Blackwell 1996). The organising structure of the thesis and its substantive concerns corresponds with that of the three books that will come out of it. The form and content of the thesis, and its relation to the books, is discussed in some detail in its introduction. Its fundamental concern is with human time which I have explored in all my writings since I began research thirty years ago, with my late friend and colleague David Cardiff, into the early history of the British Broadcasting Corporation. The medium of radio is time. Historiography deals with past time. The academic work of writing history on the other, and the temporality of radio and television on the one hand, are the first two themes of this thesis which shows that the orders of time in which they work are divergent rather than convergent. The third section of the thesis attempts their reconciliation through the recovery of meaningful time.

Broadcasting and Time

Introduction

All the chapters of this thesis have been published in the last five years in academic journals or edited book collections and all will appear—some substantially re-written—in the trilogy on which I have been working since the publication in 1996 of my last book, *Radio, Television and Modern Life*. The thesis is organised into three parts each corresponding to one of the three books, while the order in which they are presented corresponds with the order of publication for the books that will follow from them. Since the structure and unity of the already published material in the thesis is derived from the as yet unpublished three books I will begin with a thumbnail sketch of each book before turning, in this introduction to a more detailed discussion of the three parts of the thesis, the focal concerns of each and what connects them to each other.

The first book, due out in early 2007, is called *Media and Communication*. It is an historical review and critique of academic developments in the study of media and communication in the 20th century. It consists of nine chapters each of which offers an account of a key moment in the history of academic studies of media and communication with a final chapter that offers an historical review and critique, like the conclusion of *Culture and Society* which I took as a model. I have completed eight of the nine chapters with one still only half finished. I have yet to write the last chapter and, in fact, the first section of this introduction (The historiography of ‘media studies’) is the first draft of that review and critique.

The first two chapters of the thesis deal with two key moments in the history of academic engagements with the media in the last century. The first recounts the debate in the 1930s between Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin about the relationship between art, politics and the newly emerging ‘culture industries’. The second reviews the engagement with study of television at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham in the 1970s. In my introductory discussion I treat them as part of two key moments in the historical formation of ‘media studies’. The first is the development of mass communication research by Paul Lazarsfeld and his associates at Columbia in the 1930s and, distinct from but intimately connected with this, the critique of the entertainment industries developed by the Frankfurt Institute for Social Research in exile in America and affiliated to Columbia for a while. The second is the ‘moment’ of Cultural Studies in Britain

from which ‘media studies’ developed. I have completely re-written the two chapters of the thesis for the book whose table of contents is shown in Appendix A. Reference to it should clarify how the broad historical critique developed in the first section of this introduction is grounded in the book as a whole and how the two rather discrete and fragmentary chapters of the thesis are in fact key parts of its overall historical structure and narrative.

The second book is called *Television and the Meaning of ‘Live’* and follows on directly from *Radio, Television and Modern Life* (1996). When I wrote that book I had not fully thought through the issues raised by Dayan and Katz’s then recently published study of media events. The four chapters that make up the second part of the thesis all explore the significance of their book’s sub-title, ‘The live broadcasting of history’. Likewise, although my last book is sub-titled ‘A phenomenological approach’ most of it was written before I had read Heidegger’s *Being and Time*. I was then too much under its influence and had no critical distance from it. In the years that have passed I have achieved (I hope) a more balanced view of Heidegger’s thinking, which remains essential to me, particularly in the second part of the thesis. The table of contents of *Television and the Meaning of ‘Live’* is shown in Appendix B. Like the second part of this thesis, it is made up of case studies of particular broadcast programmes. In its introduction I will review historically the academic literature on media events before and after Dayan and Katz’s ground-breaking work. The conclusion will explore the meaning of ‘live’ broadcasting along the lines explored in the second part of this introduction.

The last book in the trilogy is provisionally called *Love and Communication*. Its title comes from a recent review essay I wrote (Scannell 2005) on *Speaking Into the Air* by John Durham Peters, another work that has deeply influenced my recent thinking. The three chapters in the final part of the thesis are meditations on some key issues of substance and method raised by chapters that precede them and all will be included in the final volume of the trilogy which stands in a similar relation to the two books that precede it. In the introductory commentary on the last part of the thesis I pursue a rather more personal line of thought, and try to connect what I think and how I think to my own experience of life as it was formed in my early childhood and education. And so the final discovery, in this introduction to the thesis, is the link between life and work. But before I get to that I must first trace something of that work and account for its historical development and what it is about and why.

I

The historiography of ‘media studies’

Chapters one and two of the thesis were written for publication in *Canonical Texts* (Katz et al 2003) a collection which to some extent anticipates my concerns in *Media and Communication*. The selected canonical texts were grouped into four ‘schools’ (Columbia, Frankfurt, Chicago and Toronto in that order) plus a final section called ‘British Cultural Studies’. It was a sketch map of the key countries and universities in which the study of the media began to be established in the course of the last century, but the emphasis was much more on the impact and significance of key individual works than on the institutional contexts in which they were produced. As I wrote my contributions to *Canonical Texts* I knew that I would include revised versions of them in my own book because both were about the two defining moments in the study of the media: the first being the development of the sociology of mass communication at Columbia in the USA in the 1930s and the second being the emergence of what came to be called Cultural Studies at Birmingham, UK, in the 1970s.

I had wanted to write a student-friendly guide to the study of media and communication for quite a while, but it took me a long time to see clearly what form it should take. I have taught courses on ‘Theories of Communication’ for over twenty five years, at undergraduate and graduate levels. In recent years most of the graduate students I have taught have been from overseas, with little knowledge either of the academic study of media and communication in Europe and North America or of their wider economic, political and social contexts. Thus, in class I found myself increasingly taking time to spell out the historical contexts in which these academic developments took place and so, eventually, I came to the idea of a historical review and critique of the formation of the intellectual fields of the study of media and communication in the 20th century. As I got seriously stuck into this task I became increasingly fascinated by the problems of historiography that it posed.

Naturally one tends to start with the concrete and the particular: how Paul Lazarsfeld ended up at Columbia and pioneered a social scientific approach to the study of the effects of new media on individuals; how the Institute for Social Research at Frankfurt also ended up at Columbia, its somewhat fraught relationship with Lazarsfeld and its own distinctive ‘critical’ take on mass entertainment; how Stuart Hall theorised the pioneering study of contemporary British culture that Richard Hoggart had initiated at Birmingham. Such developments have been quite well covered. There are plenty of accounts of Lazarsfeld by those who worked with him and two excellent histories of the ‘Frankfurt School’ (Jay 1974, Wiggershaus 1994) as well as the personal memoirs of

key personnel. When we get to Birmingham in the 1970s I have personal recollections to draw on as well those who studied there and useful interviews with Hall and others. The accounts that emerge of such developments have a familiar narrative structure: there is a host institution, there are founding fathers, an emerging agenda, key texts, turf wars perhaps within the founding institution (the Media Group versus the Language Group at Birmingham) or against others that arise to challenge it (CCCS Theory v *Screen* Theory). All this is the usual stuff of historical accounts of developing academic fields. But what they do not account for are the historical circumstances that summoned them into existence in the first place and that seems to me to be the crucial question that the historiography of intellectual fields must grapple with.

It is never simply a question of why things happened as and when and where they did. These are partly a matter of chance. The Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies was established at Birmingham because that happened to be the place where Hoggart got a chair in Literature in the early 1960s. But the emergence of intellectual fields of enquiry themselves is never a matter of chance. They are a determinate effect of the historical process; responses to the pathologies (the disorders) of modernity. They show up, in particular times and places, as one response to contemporary anxieties about the world. The form that such responses take is an effect of history in the first place, not of the founding institutions and their founding fathers. Thus, if the two key moments in the academic study of the media in the 20th century are Columbia in the 30s and 40s and Birmingham in the 60s and 70s then what must be accounted for, in the first place, is why each moment took the form that it did: why did it appear as a *social* question in 30s America and as a *cultural* question in 70s Britain and why in that order (i.e. why does the social question appear, historically, before the cultural)? An immanent account of developments cannot answer the question in either case. Thus there are two quite distinct and separate historiographies to the formation of intellectual fields: the endogenous histories of particular developments (sociology at Chicago, say) and the exogenous history to which they are a response. The former is a plurality, the latter a singularity: histories and History.

If there is one book that clarified my thinking on this matter, it is *The Lonely Crowd* by David Riesman, written in the late 1940s and published in 1950. Riesman argued that a structural transformation of the American soul was taking place at that very moment; a transition from the inner directed to the other directed individual (Riesman 1950). This restructuring of the self was not an endogenous reorganisation of the American psyche but was brought about by exogenous historical forces working through contemporary American society, most fundamentally and pervasively the transformation of the economy from the production of primary heavy industrial goods to the manufacture of secondary, light domestic products. It was the then accelerating transition from an economy of scarcity to an economy of abundance that forged a new kind of

individual in its own image and likeness. The life-circumstances of individuals were changing from work defined patterns of existence to new leisure defined ways of living. The coercive time of work and the work-place no longer dominated individual life and experience which were now oriented towards free time. The pendulum was swinging from production to consumption. It was a decisive change of gear in the long, still continuing world-historical process of societal modernization in which subsistence economies and the forms of life developed in adjustment to them gave way to unprecedented surplus economies of abundance and new forms of life defined, for the first time, by economic choice and freedom.

One has only to compare Britain and the USA in the 1930s and the 1950s to see the general force of this argument. It is a striking contrast. In both countries poverty defined the decade before the 2nd World War (lest we forget, it was known as ‘the hungry thirties’), whereas increasing prosperity for the majority of the population defined the decade that followed it: the Conservatives won an election in 1959 with the campaign slogan ‘You’ve never had it so good!’ The 2nd World war is the historical hinge of the last century. It is a bitter historical irony that a war in which 50 million people perished resolved the politics of poverty that had precipitated it. In both countries the outbreak of war brought about full employment within months and the working population experienced a real rise in its general standard of living which continued through the next decade and has been sustained ever since. The world we inhabit today is the product of the last world war whose lineaments began to appear in the 1950s. It was, as we now can see, a victory for capitalism and democracy, neither of which had, up to that moment, seemed particularly compelling, necessary or even desirable in most if not all European countries (Dunn 2005). Now it seems ‘there is no alternative’ to either. Coming out of the 1940s the politics of poverty gave way to the politics of plenty and it is this that shows up as the fundamental difference between the first and second moment of academic engagement with the question of ‘the media’.

The politics of poverty was concerned, unavoidably, with the problem of the masses or what Hannah Arendt called ‘The social question’ (Arendt 1963/1990: 59-114). The politics of plenty presupposed the resolution of that problem (ie the dissolution of the masses) before its problematic could emerge, as it did, in the 1950s; namely leisure and consumption and the politicisation of everyday life. The end of the masses was proclaimed at exactly the same time in the USA and Britain in two key academic texts: *Personal Influence* by Elihu Katz and Paul Lazarsfeld, and *Culture and Society* by Raymond Williams. There are no masses. There are only ways of seeing other people as masses, the latter famously proclaimed, while Katz and Lazarsfeld celebrated ‘the discovery of “people”’ who they had found to be leading active social sociable lives, embedded in family and friendship networks at home and work in the various neighbourhoods of Decatur. The question of ‘culture’ comes to the fore as the social question retreats. It presupposes a society no

longer ravaged by the evils of primary poverty. Its anxieties are of a different order to that posed by poverty and the threat of revolution from ‘below’. ‘The media’ as we know them today bespeak the new historical phase of world modernisation that was decisively and irreversibly established in the 1950s and whose consequences we are living and working through today. Developments in communication in the last fifty years are both products of the economics of abundance and a crucial means through which its politics has been made visible and problematic and discussable.

Thus, I want to argue, the two moments of ‘media studies’ are responses to two different worlds. In the 1930s the study of mass communication in America was driven not so much by fear of the revolutionary potential of the masses as anxiety about their well-being. What was the effect of powerful new communication technologies on the ordinary man? Was he not vulnerable to manipulation because he was ill-informed through lack of education and psychologically suggestible through economic insecurity? Such were the underlying assumptions of the first important case-study of the impact of the first great, and then very new technology of broadcast communication, radio. Hadley Cantril’s study of *The Invasion from Mars* was subtitled ‘A study in the psychology of panic’. The fact that large numbers of people were so frightened by a spoof scary play for Halloween—an adaptation of *The War of the Worlds* by H.G. Wells—that they fled their homes and took to the road seemed to confirm the power of radio and the vulnerability of ‘the common man’. It was the task of intellectuals ‘to spread knowledge and scepticism more widely among common men’ so that they might be ‘less harassed by the emotional insecurities which stem from underprivileged environments’ (Cantril et al 1940: 205). That important task was addressed in Paul Lazarsfeld’s key study of *Radio and the Printed Page*, published in the same year, whose aim was to answer the question ‘uppermost in the minds of many citizens: what will radio do to society?’ and to provide those concerned with mass education with an analysis of the conditions in which the “masses” would or would not expose themselves to education by radio (Lazarsfeld 1940: 133). The theme of *Mass Persuasion* was addressed at exactly this time, in Robert Merton’s elegant study of audience responses to Kate Smith’s marathon radio broadcast to promote the purchase of government war bonds.

All these studies of the impact of radio in the late 30s and early forties presupposed its direct and powerful impact on the lonely crowd; the powerless, susceptible, under-educated urban masses. Underpinning these concerns were further assumptions about the character and experience of social life at that time. In his study of *Mass Persuasion* Merton interpreted contemporary social life as essentially false, characterised by pseudo-Gemeinschaft, anomie and cynicism. These were not the effects of the media in the first place but of anxieties and uncertainties generated by chronic personal financial insecurity and the harsh, competitive pressures of a society driven by money in which everyone aspired to be a winner and the losers had no-one to turn to and no-one to blame but

themselves (Merton 2004). At the same time, and in sharp contrast to this, the appeal of Kate Smith (and what prompted so many to buy war bonds in responses to her broadcast) lay in her apparent ordinariness, genuineness and sincerity. Merton's classic study of the impact of radio on the masses served to problematise the social morality of contemporary America on the cusp of its structural transformation so presciently diagnosed by David Riesman.

The 1950s was the pivotal decade in which this transformation was decisively established and began to be worked through on the newly discovered terrain of 'everyday life'. I am not suggesting, of course, that something called everyday life did not exist before the 1950s—that would be absurd—but rather that it achieved an entirely novel salience and importance at this time. The simple fact that it now begins to appear as an object of academic thought and enquiry is remarkable enough for hitherto it had been deemed unworthy of the attentions of history and literature, below the radar of sociology and an impossible object for philosophy. It first appears from the rubble of war-torn France in Henri Lefebvre's quite remarkable *Critique of Everyday Life* (1947/1992). In America it achieves definitive recognition in Erving Goffman's *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959) which takes for granted that the self in question is indeed the new 'other-directed' type identified by Riesman. In Britain along with the work of Hoggart and Williams who redeem the ordinary and the everyday from the condescensions of Literary Studies, I want to emphasize the quite different, but no less important work of J. L. Austin and H. P. Grice who pioneered the philosophy of ordinary language on the stony soil of Oxford philosophy in the 1950s. Their work was fundamental to establishing ordinary language and its everyday (non academic) usage as a valid object of academic enquiry, thereby making possible the beginnings of an adequate understanding of human communication. Finally at the end of the decade Jurgen Habermas published in Germany *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* a key work which argued for the political opinions of ordinary people and the ways in which these were arrived at as the historical and normative basis of modern democracy.

These academic developments are one indicator of the quite new importance of everyday life in post-war North America and Europe. But it shows up in all sorts of ways. It is there in the theatre, novels and films of the decade but nowhere more than television, which now becomes the definitive new medium of everyday life. And most significantly of all it begins to show up as a new kind of politics, as the politics of the masses gives way to the politics of everyday life. The first stirrings of the new politics show up in the United States: the civil rights movement, the women's movement and, a little later, the student movement. This was not a politics produced or led by established organisations and their representatives. It came from ordinary people and what they wanted was something other than what traditional politics offered. Foucault has distinguished between three forms of oppression: exploitation, domination and subjection. The first is economic and concerns

the struggle for subsistence; the second is ideological and concerns the struggles over imposed political and religious authority, and the third is social and cultural and concerns the struggle to be allowed to be oneself in public (Foucault 1982). The new social movements, as they began to articulate their own self-understanding, were concerned with this third claim. The politics of recognition, as it was aptly called by Charles Taylor (1994), has grown in global significance in the last half century. In many ways its defining moment was the refusal of Rosa Parks to give up her seat to a white passenger on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama on December 10 1955: an act which in itself perfectly encapsulates the then new politics of everyday life.

This politics is no longer concerned with distributive justice (the politics of poverty) and its demand for freedom from want. The riddle of post-modernity and the politics of plenty concerns what comes after that. As the corrosive fear of poverty fades and as most people find they have some control over their life choices and circumstances the question of freedom ceases to be about freedom *from* something (from the five giants of want, disease, ignorance, squalor and idleness, for instance, that the Beveridge Report of 1942 was designed to overcome) and poses a new, quite different question—freedom *for* something... but *what*? Amartya Sen has posed this issue most forcefully. The greatest of the evils of poverty is its denial of the right of individuals to discover and develop their human capabilities; their entitlement to a full, fulfilled existence (Sen 2000). That is the new condition of existence established in the advanced economies in the last sixty years. Working through what it means has been, and remains a core concern in post-modern democracies. It is the essence of the politics of culture and it hailed into existence a new academic field of enquiry to try and get to grips with it: Cultural Studies.

Cultural Studies takes the ordinary and the everyday as its object of enquiry. It began, in orthodox fashion, with the everyday life and culture of the English working class in the 1950s and developed in response to the new cultural politics of the 1960s. Its task was to identify and account for the significance of these developments, initially in terms of their impact on working class life. I have tried, in my account of the moment of ‘media studies’ at Birmingham in the 1970s, to do justice to the real difficulties and complexities of this task. It is notable how the initial ‘settled’ task of CCCS—the heritage of Hoggart—was unsettled by the impact of the new social movements, not only race and feminism but the student revolution of the late 1960s as well, which all combined to produce a peculiarly febrile working environment in that fractious decade.

The crux of the matter was clearly identified in Stuart Hall’s cogent analysis of the two paradigms in Cultural Studies: the culturalist and the structuralist (Hall 1980). The first generation had privileged ‘lived experience’ as the authenticating, validating category of everyday existence. The new structuralisms undermined that claim. Lived experience could not be claimed as validating anything

since what determined it was quite simply beyond its grasp. Lived experience was an effect of ideological forces that reconciled individuals to their immediate circumstances and thereby to the economic and political forces which determined those circumstances. Hall's ideology critique, which I find problematic in many ways, nevertheless clearly and accurately identified the fundamental 'problematic' of the politics of the everyday; the status of human experience and the enigmatic character of ordinary daily life. That enigma, in the 1970s, showed up most clearly in the dominant communicative medium of everyday life, television, whose seeming immediacy and transparency appeared precisely to validate the facticity of ordinary lived experience while mystifying the hidden forces of economic and political domination that produced it as such. The key text produced by the Media Studies group was a study of how everyday television did precisely that. *Everyday Television: 'Nationwide'* by Charlotte Brunsdon and David Morley (1978) is today quite unjustly ignored in preference for the subsequent study of the programme's audience that Morley (1980) produced. But the earlier work is far more substantial than its successor whose aim was to check out the validity of its analysis of the ideological work performed by the programme, the ways in which it interpellated its audience as a nation of families with a shared set of unexamined commonsense values and assumptions about Englishness and the English way of life. It served to demonstrate the force of Hall's ideology critique of lived experience, its evasions and concealments.

If we now compare the two moments of 'media studies' we can see in what ways they were like and unlike each other. Both presume the power of the media and both are concerned with its social and cultural effects on those on their receiving end. James Curran has argued that the revived concern with audiences studies in the 1980s was, in effect, a revival of the agenda of American effects studies thirty or more years earlier (Curran 1996). There is more truth in this than the defenders of new reception and ethnographic studies will allow, yet the differences are striking. In the 1930s the question of media effects was a pre-conception for the new social science of mass communication and, as such, was treated as empirically provable or disprovable. The discovery of the two-step flow of media influence challenged and revised the initial working hypothesis which fell into abeyance for a time after the publication in 1955 of *Personal Influence*. The question of media power needed to be re-thought and the theory of ideology revived it. This time though the assumed power of television was not an open question. That was foreclosed from the start, for its ideological effect was not an assumption to be tested but a theoretical a priori. The concrete task of ideology critique was to show how it worked and with what effects for media audiences. It too faded as the discovery of 'active audiences' began to show (yet again) that individuals were not merely the bearers of ideological effects but used the media as aspects of their life-styles and self-definitions. Different premises in each case, I suggest, but with similar outcomes in the turn to audiences and reception studies. But crucially, as I have tried to show, the politics of these two

moments are different. The politics of poverty and the question of the masses which defined the thirties have a different basis to the politics of plenty and the question of everyday life which defined the 50s and since. Each was a response to the state of the world in its own time. The difference between them is an effect of the slow structural transformation of global capitalism in transition from an economy of scarcity to one of abundance. The world of post-modern consumer-oriented capitalism is very different from that of early modern producer-oriented capitalism.

I would like to suggest, by way of tentative conclusion, that the crucial difference between these two politics can be thought of in moral and ethical terms; more exactly that the politics of poverty is a moral question, whereas the politics of plenty raises ethical questions. Morality is concerned with the conditions of social existence; with how we live with each other. It is *the* normative social question. It is about the basis of a just and fair society. Poverty is an affront to any such notion and modern theories of justice (Rawls (1971/1999) and Sen (2000) are about social fairness. Ethics is a refinement of basic moral questions. It concerns the good life and only becomes salient, as the question of *how* to live, for individuals and societies that have risen above the realm of necessity. That poverty is a basic social injustice to be remedied by political action is a distinctively modern concept (Flieschacker 2005), and its elimination from the lives of the majority of its citizens is a real achievement of advanced capitalist democracies since the end of World War 2. What these societies now face are a whole series of ethical questions that have arisen only as the earlier pandemic disease of poverty has faded. Fat is indeed a political and ethical issue today. It was not in the hungry thirties. The characteristic dilemmas of post-modernity arise from our difficulties in finding common ground about what a good and meaningful life might consist of in unprecedented conditions of economic abundance.

If we ask what the politics of plenty is about we might agree with John Dunn's analysis of the story of democracy as the triumph of the party of egotism over the party of equality. We have settled for security and comfort, ease and amusement. That, in Dunn's view, is what contemporary democracies deliver for the majority of its citizens (Dunn 2005). Is the good life no more than this—shopping, eating out, holidays abroad and the continuing banquet dished up daily and weekly by the contemporary entertainment industries? Should we not take seriously those who warn that we are amusing ourselves to death? Such questions indicate something of the ethical dilemmas we face today. They also point to our difficulties in knowing how to begin to answer them if it is the case, as Alisdair MacIntyre has so vigorously argued, that we no longer know the meaning of the virtues (MacIntyre 1985). The critics of modernity had a clear moral basis from which to denounce the evils of poverty. We have no clear perspective on the goods and evils that prosperity has brought us. This, our post-modern dilemma, shows up in post-modern thinking which lacks any normative basis and is simply uncomfortable with moral categories (Bauman 1993).

The original sociology of mass communication, as I read it, had a clear normative basis in both its key academic articulations; Lazarsfeld and Merton just as much as Adorno and Horkheimer. Merton in particular was concerned with the condition of the masses in a society characterised by cynicism and anomie. Critical Theory's devastating critique of Enlightenment was intended somehow to salvage its original emancipatory promise, but how that might happen was beyond the reach of Horkheimer and Adorno's thinking in the early 1940s. For them the 2nd World War was indeed the end of reason. There is a similar clear moral basis to the thought of the first generation of cultural criticism in Britain. Both Williams and Thompson write in the name of social justice and on behalf of the underprivileged. But when we get to the 1970s, the study of culture and the media has lost any normative grounding. There is no moral basis that I can see in ideology critique. One can see what is being criticised (power) but *why* it is being criticised and in the name of what remains quite opaque. This lack of moral clarity is not, of course, the fault of Stuart Hall or anyone else in those years. It is rather an effect of the exogenous world historical process in play at that time. One of the most striking features of Birmingham in the 1970s as I have described it was the frantic pursuit of Theory in order to get some compass bearings on what the world was about and where it was heading. That pursuit led to the cultural relativism of the 1980s and the loss of confidence in the possibility of normative critique and judgement, for any such attempt was immediately torpedoed by the charge of Western phallogocentrism. The moral confusions of post-modernity are the effects of an economy of abundance which has brought about an increasingly diverse and pluralized world celebrated as such in multicultural identity politics. This world, our world, has no recognizable moral basis to it and no shared ethical concerns. And it is precisely this that presses on us with increasing urgency at the start of this century.

In the very last part of *Media and Communication* I try to salvage communication itself as a fundamental moral, rational, human process. My critique of the two moments in which the academic study of the media was formed in the last century focuses in the end on the significant absence, in each case, of any coherent account of the meaning (the significance) of communication or how it worked. There was, of course a model of communication put forward in the 1930s and in the 1970s: a transmission model of transmitter > message > receiver, and the well-known encoding/decoding model advanced by Hall which drew on, but significantly revised the earlier direct transmission model. Neither of these began to address the question of communication as I understood it but then, as my historical account shows, in neither case was communication a focal matter of concern. In the late 1970s a group of colleagues at the Polytechnic of Central London decided to establish a new journal for the new field of Media Studies. We called it *Media, Culture & Society*. There was no big debate about the name. It simply served to acknowledge the core concerns of the study of the media in terms of their social and cultural impact. The journal's name confirms the historical thesis

outlined above: that what started as a social critique of mass communication in the 1930s changed, for reasons suggested, into a cultural critique at the time of the journal's foundation. In each case the media were examined in terms of the operation of exogenous historical processes at play in and through them. It is, of course, interesting to examine the play of contemporary social and cultural processes in new institutions and technologies, but they can equally well be examined (and were, with similar results) in other institutions, notably education. Althusser's shopping list of ISAs included education, religion and the family as well as the media. My key criticism of both moments is that neither engages with what I take to be the defining immanent characteristic of media as new technologies of *communication*.

So the title *Media and Communication* has, for me at least, more than a hint of irony. When you pair words in this way you suggest that they have some natural affinity to each other, like 'love' and 'marriage' or 'culture' and 'society'. No such natural affinity between media and communication has yet been established in Media Studies. The key developments in the understanding of communication and how it works took place elsewhere: in the historical work of Innis, the sociology of interaction (Goffman and Garfinkel), ordinary language philosophy (Austin and Grice), the emergence of pragmatics (Brown and Levinson) and the analysis of conversation (Sacks and his successors) and finally in the theory of communicative rationality developed by Habermas. These are mapped in *Media and Communication* as all contributing to the discovery and analysis of talk as the universal expressive, communicative medium of everyday life and the beginnings of its empirical observation and analysis. The Ross Priory Group has explored the study of talk, in its many forms, as the communicative medium of radio and television since the start of the 1990s. My continuing participation in the work of this group from its inception forms the basis of the next section of this thesis. The material under discussion in chapters three to six was first presented and discussed at the seminar in Broadcast Talk held each year in the incomparable setting of Ross Priory on the shores of Loch Lomond.

II

The care structures of live broadcasting

I have never thought of communication as an abstraction requiring theoretical models to account for it (McQuail 2005). I encountered it as a practical dilemma that confronted broadcasters as they went about their business of discovering how to ‘do’ their business in the early years of the BBC. In this respect David Cardiff’s brilliant reconstruction of the work of the Talks Department from its foundation in 1927 through to the outbreak of war came as a revelation to me. It showed the cardinal significance of talk as *the* communicative medium of radio and the many problems that it presented for Talks producers. Well before our social history was finished I had begun to search for ways of getting some purchase on how radio talk worked as a communicative practice between institution and audiences. Semiotics, as an extension of Saussurian linguistics, was then the preferred tool for the analysis of media ‘language’ but it had nothing to say about talk or how it worked, for structural linguistics rejected from the start the very possibility of analysing linguistic utterances. *Langue* was privileged over *parole*. Martin Montgomery, a socio-linguist, was a friend from the early 1980s and I keenly supported his exploratory work in analysing radio DJ talk. At the same time I somehow got in touch with John Heritage at Warwick who, with his PhD student, David Greatbatch, was pioneering the analysis of the broadcast political interview. Their work, and that of Ian Hutchby on radio phone-ins, introduced me to Garfinkel and Sacks, ethnomethodology and Conversation Analysis. I brought all this together in a special issue of *Media Culture & Society* (October 1986) on Broadcast Talk and pursued the issues first raised there in the follow-on collection of the same name published by Sage in 1991. Martin founded the Ross Priory annual meeting in the same year as a way for all of us to continue sharing and discussing our on-going study of talk on radio and television.

Since then there have been three key books that have profoundly affected my work on broadcast communication: *Media Events* by Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz (Scannell 1995), *Being and Time* by Martin Heidegger (which I first read about ten years ago) and, most recently, *Speaking into the Air* by John Durham Peters (Scannell 2005). The impact of all three shows up in Chapter 3 in which I discuss a famous wartime programme, *The Brains Trust*. I had done research on this programme at the end of the 1970s when David Cardiff and I were commissioned by the Open University to write a unit about radio and World War 2 for a new cross-disciplinary course (U203) on *Popular Culture*.

I knew then that it deserved more detailed attention than we could give it, but it was only about five years ago that I finally saw what was so fascinating about it. Three things came together for the first time in my thinking about *The Brains Trust*: what was at stake in the management of live-to-air talk, the invisibility of the production process in radio and television and its transcendent impersonal character. The first point owes much to Dayan and Katz, the second to Heidegger, and the third to Peters. All three are subsumed in and by the central concept of the care-structure, one of Heidegger's most profound insights.

The Brains Trust is a key programme in the history of programme-making and, as I show, it could only have happened in the unprecedented context of a total war and the BBC's new-found commitment to making programmes with wide popular appeal. What that means, as far as radio is concerned, is making programmes to which people would want to tune in and stay with. The switch to unscripted talk is of course the basis of its historical significance as well as its instant popular appeal at the time. But it was the management of a particular kind of unscripted talk that Howard Thomas pioneered. The programme seems to have *invented* public discussion (not just for broadcasting) and is the parent of the still-running *Any Questions* on Radio 4 and *Question Time* on BBC 1, hosted by the Dimbleby brothers. In my account I attend to the particularities of the management of live-to-air studio discussion as these were observed and attended to by the programme's producer, Howard Thomas. And this leads to the fundamental issue of the invisibility of the labour process in radio and television and why it should be so.

Back in the 1970s this was regarded with deep suspicion. My readers will doubtless recall the great debate in the pages of *Screen* concerning the reactionary character of television 'naturalism', the progressive character of Brechtian techniques for film and television and the problematic character of 'bourgeois' television drama and documentary. We were all caught up in it. I taught courses for years that included screenings of *Days of Hope* and *The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil*. The whole debate was served up again in *Popular Television and Film*, one of the three course books produced to support U203. There is no need for me to re-heat it here. The crucial point is the deep suspicion at the time of the concealment by television (and cinema) of its own 'mode of production'. The ineffable Colin MacCabe's critique of 'the classic realist text' was highly influential. In his notes on some Brechtian theses he developed an argument that the realist novel of the 19th century and later realist film narrative both conceal the materiality of the processes that constitute them *as* a written or filmic text (in Bennett et al 1981: 216-235). The reader or viewer is stitched (sutured) unawares into the text by practices of writing and film-making which render themselves invisible and conceal the material apparatuses on which they depend (the publishing and film industries and their material products). The effect of this is to place the reader/viewer in an illusory position of dominance (mastery) in relation to the text. The reader experiences the

novel/film as if it offered transparent access to a fictional real world. Or rather, it is the fictionality of this world that is elided by the formal operations of the text. The naïve reader does not (because s/he cannot) see that in either case, the novel or film is in fact a construction that produces an illusion (effect) of reality. For McCabe (following Eco and Barthes who had made the same point earlier), the revolutionary text is that which reveals its own constructed character by insisting on making visible the materiality of its production, just as Brechtian theatre insisted on making explicit the theatricality of what was happening on stage.

I remember teaching all this with a slightly queasy feeling at the time, but I could not put my finger on what was wrong with it and I certainly had no available position from which to develop a counter-argument. What I did know, from my own work on radio, was that any programme that went on air was the result of a great deal of hidden thought, effort and care but it was not until I read *Being and Time* in the mid 90s that I at last saw another way of accounting for how this was embedded in the production process. Part One of *Being and Time* is a journey that leads to the discovery of care as the truth of *Dasein* (humanity). Care is not some floating metaphysical essence. It is certainly not a 'value' or norm. Rather it is immanent in every humanly made thing and in the environment (the *umwelt*) in all its parts and as a whole. It is the summational character of the human world understood by Heidegger as 'a relational totality of involvements'. The key question is 'how do we encounter the world?' This is not a theoretical, academic question. It asks rather how we deal with it; how it is that we each can go about our daily business in the world in ways that are essentially unproblematic. That we know and understand how to deal with the environment is obvious. What is not obvious at all is precisely how it is that the things which make up the environment (the life world) 'give' themselves in such ways as to be available for use by us, practically, immediately and essentially unproblematically. What are the conditions of the intelligibility of things? Or, more exactly, how do we know what to do with them? What and who are they *for*?

These matters are discussed in the celebrated chapter on 'the worldliness of the world' and particularly in relation to hammers (Heidegger 1962: 91-148). We show our understanding of what a hammer *is* by putting it to appropriate use. We are able to figure what that usage is from the design of the thing which discloses what it is for. The shaft is to-be-grasped. The head is for-striking-things. Its usage is implicated in its design which discloses what it is for and how it is to be used. This is the *meaning* of things: their meant and intended usage, their point and purpose. Things, understood in this way, never exist in isolation from other things. Every particular thing is itself part of an activity-whole which it bespeaks. The hammer presupposes nails and things that can be nailed (wood) and things that are to be nailed (the floorboard) and so on. The car presupposes roads, planes airports and so on. Things are *pragmata*. They are meant and intended for use. As such they enable

us to do the things that we do in every situation we encounter every day of our lives. The everyday world is action-oriented in all its parts and as a whole. We encounter the environment, wherever we are, as an all ways all ready fore-given relation totality of things which separately and together ‘give’ the possibility of what we are doing there. Things have their whereabouts. I do not keep pots and pans in the bedroom. The kitchen is an environment (what Heidegger calls ‘a region’) in which the preparation of food is possible only by virtue of the totality of available appropriate things and the totality of their arrangements for that activity. And all this presupposes care. Care is implicit in every aspect of every thing. It is the relational totality of every thing in any and every region. And, Heidegger goes on, it reveals our human essence, the truth of what we are, as being-in-concern. *Mea res agitur* (Heidegger 1992: 8E). I *am* my concerns: an action oriented definition of being-in-the-world. But the possibility of *my* concerns is given by the world-of-concern that is always already there in advance of me and which shapes the terms and conditions of the things that concern me.

This, when I first read it (and to this day) struck me as quite wonderful and I am wholly persuaded by it. It yields a powerful pragmatics of meaning: it begins to reveal the meaning-full-ness of humanly made things and practices. They are meaningful because they are care-full: care is the meaning of meaning. Still the analysis begs a number of questions. It’s notable that Heidegger’s hammer is a pretty primitive tool that elicits a pretty primitive practice. What of something complex like radio or television? In short what is not accounted for by Heidegger is how the hammer gets to be the thing-for-use that it is. The study of the production process in radio and television can (should) be thought of, following Heidegger, as a *care structure*, a particular relational totality of practices that come together to deliver the programme-as-broadcast. What are programmes *for*? They are to be listened to or watched. Those conditions (of listenability and watchability) don’t just happen. They are the result of real thought, effort, experiment, mistakes and adjustments in the prior work of production. The study of production shows how the final thing (the programme-as-broadcast) gets to be what it is in the ways that it is. The care-structure of a thing is the achieved realisation and articulation of all the prior concern (care) that it elicited from the moment of its conception. But why is all this labour *hidden*. Why does it not disclose itself as the critics of television drama in the 1970s demanded?

To answer that question I needed John Peters’ analysis of Christ’s parable of The Sower which gives us a wonderfully counter-intuitive interpretation of broadcasting (Peters 1999). The prevalent academic view of radio and television was that they were if not distorted at least deficient forms of communication. Broadcasting is a one-way form of communication (as proposed in the transmission model). A powerful transmitting source delivers messages to powerless individual receivers: active transmission > passive reception. There is no feedback in this system, no way in which those who receive the message can respond to or interact with it. True communication is dialogue between two

people in each others presence. Peters takes Socrates as the great exponent of this form of communication. He interprets both (Socrates and Jesus) as teachers of two different kinds of love, *eros* and *agape*. Eros is the incarnate love of human beings for each other, and is normatively that which is between two people: the Phaedrus, which Peters discusses, is the paradigmatic text that pre-supposes love as dialogue. The parable of The Sower is the paradigm of Christ's own discourse and method that shows how he himself spreads the Word; how he teaches the indiscriminate love of God for all human beings. Broadcasting is like the love of God precisely because it is one-way, non-reciprocal and indiscriminate. This is not its limitation but its blessing: it is a gift that makes no demands, that gives without expecting acknowledgement or thanks, in which the giver conceals (as Christ counselled) the act of giving from those who receive it. Eros is a wonderful thing; but it is binding and coercive. It *demand*s reciprocity. It requires mutual commitment. It is a conditional bargain. It is entered into by both parties with good faith and in the shared hope of mutually supportive happiness, but if it fails there will be recriminations, accusations of bad faith and much unhappiness. Agape imposes no conditions and makes no demands. It gives in good faith and in the hope that it may be received in good faith, but if it is not it makes no complaint. Rejection is allowed for and accepted in principle from the start. The indiscriminate scatter of broadcasting is intended for each and all to use as they see fit. Or not. The difference between the two, *eros* and *agape*, points up the gap between non-transcendent and transcendent love, the love that is between human beings and the love of the world.

Can one argue for agape or non-reciprocal love, in strictly non-theological terms, as immanent in worldly things and practices? It seems to me to be a necessary argument if we are to redeem things and practices from the hermeneutics of suspicion and the destructiveness of scepticism. In so doing what is restored is trust; not trust in God (long since eroded) but trust in the world. These things—trust and suspicion—stand in a dialectical relationship to each other and the question of which is prevalent is, as always, a matter of history. The first phase of world modernization (from the French Revolution to the end of World War 2) was characterised by suspicion. Contemporary accounts from the 19th century testify to life as the war of all against all. In both the natural and the human world life was a struggle to the death and only the fittest survived. The rest perished. 'Do other men, for they would do you', the grim philosophy of Jonas Chuzzlewit, sums up how to survive in a threatening, hostile, dangerous environment. Suspicion was the necessary default position in a world that was, really and truly, malevolent.

The post-war transformation that I have outlined above has tipped the balance in favour of a renewed trust-in-the-world. Henri Lefebvre saw this emerging in a France still reeling from the horrors of the war:

In the course of our study we will attempt wherever possible to demonstrate the new marvels which are being born at the very heart of mediocrity. They are simple, human marvels. Let us name one of them without further ado: *trust*.

It is as old a social life itself; very close to naivety, to foolishness; always abused from childhood on (trust in one's parents, in masters and bosses, priests and gods, faith and destiny, love); always changed into a distrust which is almost as unexpressed as the initial naivety—today trust in life is taking root in life and becoming a need. In the contradictory dualism 'trust-distrust'—contradictory in an embryonic, suppressed way, more ambiguous than antagonistic—trust is slowly getting the upper hand. In spite of the most dreadful trials, the most awful illusions, it is getting stronger. Today trust is bursting forth, today trust is growing. We will see how it is at work deep in the heart of the everyday, and how it works through its opposite, doubt—the restless need for material security. [Lefebvre 1992 (1947): 51]

What an astonishing perception this is, when one considers the bitter recriminations in France at the time of writing. But it points to an emerging truth about the post-war world. Trust is neither blind faith, nor a pious wager. It presupposes the reliability of things and persons. The post-modern world we now inhabit demands trust in both as the condition of its continuing existence. Two examples must suffice by way of illustration: trust in people and trust in things.

Erving Goffman is *the* post-modern sociologist. One of his most brilliant perceptions is the phenomenon of 'civil inattention'. The possibility of being in public with others, who we do not know, without anxiety or fear—a central theme of *Behaviour in Public Places* (1963)—is a long, historical and still incomplete process. It is foundational for the kind of world which we, in fact, inhabit, since our world, of necessity, throws all of us into contact with strangers on a daily basis. If we are to accomplish the myriad small tasks and interactions of daily life we *must* be able to be in the presence of strangers, to deal with them, to interact with them without it being an issue, a problem, a source of anxiety, fear or hostility. This is what Goffman draws our attention to as 'the courtesy' of civil inattention:

In performing this courtesy the eyes of the looker may pass over the eyes of the other, but no "recognition" is typically allowed. Where the courtesy is performed between two persons passing on the street, civil inattention may take the special form of eyeing the other up to approximately eight feet, during which sides of the street are apportioned by gesture, and then casting the eyes down as the other passes—a kind of dimming of lights. In any case, we have here what is perhaps the slightest of interpersonal rituals, yet one that constantly regulates the social intercourse of persons in our society.

By according civil inattention, the individual implies that he has no reason to suspect the intentions of the others present and no reason to fear the others, to be hostile to them, or wish to avoid them. (At the same time, in extending this courtesy he automatically opens himself up to like treatment from others present.) This demonstrates that he has nothing to fear or avoid in being seen and being seen seeing, and that he is not ashamed of himself or of the place and company in which he finds himself. (Goffman 1963: 84)

Civil inattention contributes to freeing up the very possibility of a *civil* society in which being in the presence of others in open public spaces without fear or threat is generally and mutually allowed. It presupposes a general equality of being insofar as anyone may expect to be treated with civil inattention by anyone else. As such it is a recent historical phenomenon and an important indication

of the democratization of civil society and everyday life. Marshall Berman has written a brilliant account of being in public on the streets of St Petersburg in the 19th century: on Nevsky Prospect it appears that high ranking individuals expected inferiors to step aside as they approached. They walked as if not seeing them, as if they were invisible (Berman 1983: 173-286, especially 219-228). Nor was civil inattention a universal experience in America of the 1950s. Goffman points to the “hate stare” that Southern whites gratuitously gave to Negroes walking past them (Goffmann 1959: 151-3). The *civil* rights movement in the USA was triggered precisely by the demand for the right to civil inattention (on the buses for instance) and thereby to be treated as an ordinary person ‘like anyone else’. Civil inattention gives the possibility of being-with-others in public in ways that are essentially non-problematic. Without it the ontology of the social (being with others) is threatened, for the world is, first and last, a public matter and it matters that it is, as such, freely and publicly available to all and in the same way.

Trust in things is equally historically determined. It is evident from the literature of the first half of the 20th century that there were enormous anxieties about the seemingly machine dominated world of that time. ‘The question concerning technology’ preoccupied Leavis in Britain just as much as Heidegger in Germany and it was of course a theme of popular culture: Chaplin’s *Modern Times*, with its defining image of Charlie as the little man literally caught up as a cog in the machine illustrates common sense perceptions about technological domination in the pre-war era. If these anxieties have faded, as I think they have, it is because technology (in its most general sense) has become a great deal safer and more reliable than it was in early modernity. The technologies of the 19th century depended on water and steam power and fossil fuels. Machinery was large, noisy, dirty and dangerous to life and limb. In the last sixty years we have experienced an unprecedented rate of technological innovation. Life conditions today are the effect of the harnessing and application of newer energy sources (oil, electricity and atomic power) and extraordinary developments in increasingly miniaturised micro- and nano-technologies. The modern home, wired for electricity, warmed by central heating, is stuffed with electrical gadgets and equipment most of which did not exist before the 1950s (a PEP report of 1947 predicted that the electric washing machine would not catch on).

Today we expect to buy things that are safe, easy to use, reliable and durable. *Caveat emptor* no longer applies. Things come today with warranties and guarantees. Nor is this happenstance. It is the realised, achieved and accomplished, practical outcome, through the years, of continuing thought and effort, trial and error, research, development and innovation in the making of things. And this is not an endogenous development in the histories of technologies. It is as much the result of continuing exogenous political pressures that have demanded that things be made safe and reliable: consumer activism, official enquiries and reports, legislation, setting of standards, regulation,

monitoring and supervision. All of this is built into today's everyday appliances but invisible. It is the hidden *care-structure* of today's technologies. It is what 'gives' us things as 'user-friendly' so that anyone and everyone (a child) can use them. It is what makes the world safe. Cars, trains and planes are intrinsically dangerous, life-threatening technologies. Who on earth would risk their life in a plane unless this utterly implausible form of human transport was safe to all practical intents and purposes? The use of planes as an instrument of destruction on September 11th 2001 serves to show, by its hideous incongruity, the taken for granted trust in the everyday world that is its underpinning and which was so grievously violated on that day.

It is time to pull together these reflections and draw them back to what prompted them. If we mostly take things for granted it is because that is what they grant us. Things 'give' themselves in ways that enable us to use them for our own purposes. That is their gift to us. This is as true of a television programme as a television set. Neither tells us how it was made. If we applied the 1970s critique of television more widely we would demand that the technology should not conceal itself. We should have television sets without their casings. That too would remind us that television is an apparatus, a construction. What *was* the point of those objections to bourgeois television drama and documentary? At bottom I think they indicated deep anxieties and fears of technology and mediation. Until very recently the world was experienced by individuals as fraught, dangerous and untrustworthy in respect of other people and other things. If it was so experienced it is because in many ways it was so. The world has become safer and more reliable. Trust has grown, as Lefebvre anticipated. It has taken root, as he foresaw, 'deep in the heart of the everyday'. This is what I saw in my work on the production process in radio and television and in the nature of the communicative relationship between broadcasters and audiences.

The social relations of production (producers—products—consumers) in broadcasting as much as in commodity manufacturing is split. The moment of encoding is indeed distinct from the moment of decoding. It is very difficult to hold these two moments together; to see over both sides of the wall at the same time, so to speak. On the whole the study of media has focused on one or other side of the wall: production or consumption and mostly the latter. There is less work on the production side. In reception and audience studies the whole invisible labour of production is simply taken as given. I was profoundly impressed by the real moral seriousness, at every level, of the production process in the BBC (then and now). Having given an account *of* it in the Social History, I wished subsequently to account *for* it. The chapter on the *Brains Trust* begins to make articulate what for many years was largely inexpressible for me. Here I have tried to elaborate a little on its basic themes and will return to some of them (especially the transcendent, impersonal character of care) in the third and last section of this commentary. For the moment I must turn to the other key themes of

the second section of the thesis, as contained in chapter seven and the catastrophic events of September 11th 2001.

I was invited by Daniel Dayan to contribute to a special issue about the media and 9/11 that he was putting together in its aftermath for *Dossiers de L'Audio-Visuelle*. One of my undergraduate students, Paul Pheasey, who had taken my course on Media Events, had just produced a wonderful dissertation on CNN's live coverage on the day, from the moment its cameras focused on the World Trade Center minutes after it appeared to have exploded. Paul produced from tapes he obtained of CNN coverage, a shot by shot, word for word transcription of the first hour of its coverage. I used this as the basis of my contribution. In reading and thinking about the transcript of this extraordinary moment and how it was handled by the broadcasters a number of things became clear to me about the essence of broadcasting: the meaning of 'live', the nature of 'the event', the function of 'news'. Further, what comes together in these things, what they disclose, is the politics of the present and, in this, how history is 'made'. What I learnt from television coverage of the attack on the World Trade Center was the meaning and significance of the subtitle to Dayan and Katz's *Media Events*—'The live broadcasting of history'.

In my essay on the death of Diana, Princess of Wales (chapter four), I had broadened Dayan and Katz's definition of media events. They took the term to relate to ceremonial occasions (the French title of the book, translated by Dayan, is *La Télévision Cérémonielle*), but this had the effect of eliminating that very large class of 'disaster' events which have always been major 'news' stories since the beginnings of recorded history. I therefore proposed a simplest taxonomy of events based on the distinction between the things that happen to us, and the things we make to happen. The former I called happenings; the latter, occasions. My account of what happened in the immediate aftermath of the death of the princess tried to show the structural differences between these two kinds of event as I reconstructed how a meaningless happening (an accidental car crash) was transformed into a meaningful occasion (the state funeral). Happenings are strictly meaningless because they are not meant to happen, while occasions are meaningful precisely because they are meant and intended. The work of meaning is different in each case: it is 'to be found' on the one hand, and 'to be made' on the other. In respect of disasters (whether natural or human) the task of finding their meaning is necessarily retrospective, whereas the work of bringing the occasion to its realisation is necessarily prospective. Thus the two classes of event have essentially different temporalities; one which works on the axis of present-past (happenings) and one which works on the axis of present-future (occasions).

These different temporalities generated, I argued, different kinds of narrative: disaster narratives are retrospective, occasions have prospective narratives. The events on the day of September 11 2001

stood that argument on its head for it was a disaster of apocalyptic magnitude that ‘happened’ live-to-air and in real time on television around the world. In its very first moment on screen it appeared as an inexplicable happening about which the broadcasters in the CNN studio knew no more than their viewers. Nevertheless they immediately understood their task to be that of *finding* the story: that is to say, they immediately took it to be the case (they *knew*) that however inexplicable this thing was, it must mean something and that in finding its story they would find its meaning. The eventful thing is a storyable thing. It has a beginning, middle and end. Events have the same structure as stories and both derive their structure from ‘life’, the existential template of event-story-narrative. The work of finding the story becomes the task of narrating it. The story is ‘in’ the event: its discovery and narration comes afterwards. And this is the usual understanding of history. History is that which has always already happened. It is necessarily treated in this way by professional (academic) historians who produce retrospective narratives in their own present times about past events. But the history-making process (historicality) is in the present and is oriented to the future. The future is made (is brought into existence) by forward-looking actions in the present. Thus we ‘make’ our own individual life histories and thus the history of the world goes on.

Historicality (the making of history) and historiography (the narration of history) exist on the two different temporal axes of present-future and present-past. They are diverging from rather than converging on each other. What is so rare and extraordinary about 9/11 is that on this day event, story and narrative all co-existed in the unfolding ‘now’, the immediate forward-moving present of the event. It showed not simply the gripping power of live broadcasting, but the capacity of live news coverage to cope with, to manage and make meaningful even the utterly unexpected, unbelievable, terrifying, terrible event. It can do this because all the structures of news organisations are geared to coping with ‘breaking news’ and all the routines of journalists are geared to finding and telling the story-in-the-news-event. But only broadcast journalism, by virtue of its live immediacy, can narrate the event as it unfolds, moment by moment. It is in this very particular sense that journalists are the historians of the present and future as well as the past. News coverage on the day, even in the direst moments, hung on to the task of figuring out what was going on in the certainty that it must make sense: it must mean something. By the end of the day, as my discussion of the BBC’s end-of-day broadcast shows, ‘news’ had not only accounted for what had happened. It had found reasons for it, anticipated who had done it and predicted the likely future political consequences. So far those interpretations and analyses have proved to be almost wholly correct.

The attack on the world trade centre was an extraordinary, world historical event and the immediate responses to it reveal something of what Boltanski calls the politics of the present. He introduces this term only in the last two pages of his lengthy, complex analysis of suffering and the modern politics of pity to which it gives rise (Boltanski 1999: 191-2). What he means by it is not elaborated,

but crucially it concerns the necessity of immediate action in the face of suffering, the work the humanitarian movement and especially, in the French context, the pioneering work of Bernard Kouchner, founder of *Médecins sans frontières*. The rise of the voluntary sector (more advanced, Boltanski notes, in the Anglo-Saxon countries than in France) is again a feature of the last sixty years and the politics of everyday life generated by economies of abundance. It is a further instance of the deepening democratisation of everyday life. NGOs, lobby and pressure groups, voluntary work of all kinds became increasingly important and globalized as the world shrank in the late 20th century and the politics of poverty re-emerged on television screens around the world (the BBC news reports on Biafra in the early 1980s was a key moment in this country). These developments were criticised in France, by the Left, on the grounds that they responded only to immediate suffering, that they offered no analysis of its causes and no remedies to rooting out those causes. Moreover, in blundering into crisis situations which they did not understand, voluntary aid might make things worse, rather than better (Rwanda was an extreme case in point).

In response to all such criticisms Boltanski asks simply, ‘Should nothing be done?’ And if something is to be done, it must surely be done immediately. By the time the correct political/theoretical analysis of the causes of the crisis has been worked out it will be too late: too late that is for those who, in extremis, cry out for immediate relief from their suffering. In other words the politics of the present confronts us with the fundamental question of human action: the necessity of action without guarantees. We must act *now*, in the immediate present. We must do as best we can without any certainty that it will prove to be the best we could do. The politics of the present concerns the unavoidable necessity of action in the present without the luxury of pausing to consider all possible options or think through all possible consequences. And this is in the nature of our human situation. Life is not a matter of contemplation in the first or last instance. It is not a theoretical thing. It is, in all its vivid, given immensity, a practical, matter-of-fact affair which summons us to action and to act. The politics of the present concerns the necessity of action without any assurance of success. The humanitarian movement is moved to act by good intentions. The sceptic will rightly point out that good intentions do not guarantee good results. True. But nothing will come of nothing. To act in good faith is no guarantee of a good outcome but, at the very least, it gives that possibility. Neither private nor public actors can hope for more from their actions. The courage of action lies in the always very real possibility of failure. The glory of action comes when it triumphs over all those possibilities. No-one has argued this more forcefully than Hannah Arendt in her justification of ‘the great and glorious public realm’ (Arendt 1958: 52) as the space of speech and action, of brave words and great deeds.

For Arendt the separation of thought and action is one of the oldest and deepest flaws engrained in the Western intellectual tradition going back to the Greeks. Thinking has long since turned in on

itself and taken itself as its object. The Cartesian *cogito* is the source of all subsequent philosophies of consciousness and the subject. It is the classic default position of scepticism. The thinker rigorously refuses to take anything as given except that which is most immediately apparent to him, namely that he can think. Everything else, all that is external to consciousness, is suspect. Might it not be, Descartes pondered within himself, that the room in which I sit and think is no more than a dream, a spell cast by a *malin genie*, an evil spirit. For Kant the scandal of philosophy was that thought could furnish no certain proof of the existence of anything outside itself. It could never be sure of the existence of an 'external world'. For Heidegger the scandal of philosophy was precisely the attempt to furnish such proofs over and over again.

The small academic parish of media studies is split down the middle by the divorce between Theory and Practice. The undergraduate degree that I and others started thirty years ago at the Polytechnic was predicated on this divide. Our initial aim was to unite them both: we wanted to teach theories of the media that might be used by the students in their practical work in print journalism, radio and television production. I fear that this amounted to no more, initially, than our advocacy of Brechtian alienation techniques to disturb the complacency of bourgeois BBC practices as taught by our radio and television colleagues who came to us from the Corporation. The effort soon lapsed—the students mostly could make neither head nor tail of it, and our practice colleagues were understandably irritated by it. Today Practice and Theory remain quite separate and staff are split down this divide. We seldom talk to each other. Our teaching is quite separate and unrelated. We, on the theory side, sometimes speak of our practice colleagues as 'the woodwork teachers'. We are quite sure of the superiority of what we do to what they do, just as Plato was quite sure of the superiority of philosophers over craftsmen in his ideal republic. Our students know otherwise.

For my part I have never accepted that the task of thinking should mean the task of theorising. I began to think in the mid 1970s, kick-started by a year of attending Stuart Hall's famous Monday theory seminars at Birmingham, and I remain truly grateful for that experience. But I was never persuaded by the theoretical turn that the study of culture took under Stuart's direction. It always seemed to claim a privileged position in relation to 'the real' (always placed in scare quotes at the time) which became something to be 'explained' by the correct theory. And if reality somehow did not fit the theory, that was its fault not theory's. Reality became something to be stretched or lopped into shape on the Procrustean bed of theory. This is doubtless too crude a caricature of those times and I don't mean to belittle the work of the Centre in the seventies. But I didn't like its theory and I didn't like its politics and the two were intertwined in ways I could not unravel still less counter with any coherent alternative interpretations.

My first book, like the first part of this thesis, is about academic theories of the media. The second, like the second part of this thesis, is about the practices of broadcasting—Theory and Practice; thought and action. To study broadcasting is to engage with it as a practice and thereby as an essentially worldly activity which serves, indeed, to give and sustain our sense of the world today. What I want then to revalue, in *Television and the Meaning of 'Live'* is indicated I hope in the chapters included in this thesis and explained a little further in this commentary on them. I have tried to restore the unity of thought and action in the study of the management of live radio and television broadcasting. The central category of care expresses this unity. It serves to indicate the forethought and foresight that is integral to any human practice and any human artefact. Another word for foresight is providence. In the final section of this commentary I turn to that question: providence and history, history *as* providence. This will be the central theme of *Love and Communication*, the third book in the trilogy whose first, rough outline is presented in this thesis and its accompanying commentary.

III

Time and television

For many years, as I have indicated, I was unclear about my own position. I knew what I liked and disliked; what I thought interesting and uninteresting, what I thought worth studying, researching and teaching and what not. *Mea res agitur*. I am my concerns. But I could neither account for nor justify them. That has only begun to become clear to me in the last dozen or so years and undoubtedly goes back to the experience of reading *Being and Time* in the early 1990s. By then I had written most of what went into *Radio Television and Modern Life* which was published at the end of 1995. I gave it the subtitle, ‘A phenomenological approach’, but only one or two chapters (the last, particularly) was written under the influence of Heidegger (as ‘under the influence of drink’!), and if you had asked me then what I meant by ‘phenomenology’ I would simply have said that it was a code word for Heidegger. I am no longer under the influence, as I was then, of that extraordinary, magnificent book and have come to a more inclusive understanding of phenomenology as the study of the ordinary world free of academic preoccupations. I have taken this way of putting it from Stanley Cavell who described J. L. Austin’s ordinary language philosophy as ‘a view of words free of philosophical preoccupation’ (Cavell 1976: 238). For Austin language and world are inextricably entwined and presuppose each other. The world and what it is to speak of it in language is the abiding concern of all the authors who have helped me in coming to understand what broadcasting is about: from sociology Goffman, Garfinkel and Sacks and from philosophy not only Heidegger but Arendt and Gadamer (his two most brilliant students) and, in another corner of the same field, Austin, Grice and Cavell .

All these writers treat the world—the actual, factual, matter-of-fact of fact world: the world as it is and as they find it, not as they think or would like it to be—with the proper respect and seriousness that it deserves. Nor is this something easily accomplished for the enigma of the everyday world lies precisely in the ways that it resists serious attention. There is a long tradition of intellectual thinking in the West (from Plato to Stuart Hall) that interprets the ordinary world as unreal and inauthentic and those who dwell in it (ordinary people) as somehow deceived into taking it as real and authentic when it is not. Plato’s story of the cave, whose shackled dwellers live in a world of shadows, and Hall’s critique of lived experience both share this perception and both conceive of the intellectual as the one who (having seen the light) aspires to free ordinary mortals from the darkness of the cave. Truth is to be found in the ideal forms for Plato and in a totalising theory of society for the New Left in the 1970s. Such thinking is always other-worldly, always in search of an ideal world

that transcends the limits of the actual ordinary, everyday world of experience. I am no idealist and I dislike utopias. I have always taken the actual, factual world on trust, at face value. What I have come to understand as ‘phenomenology’ gave me a way of articulating a non-sceptical hermeneutics of trust. Phenomenology wholly accepts and is only concerned with the apparent world, the world of appearances. It does not start from the premise that appearances are deceptive and that one must look beneath the surface of things to find their true and hidden meaning. It is not interested in motives, still less in any underlying ‘depth’ theory of the real. It holds that the truth is immanent in worldly things and in ordinary language (talk) in ways that are apparent to and understood by everyone. What is not apparent is *how* ordinary things and ordinary language are so. The enigma of the everyday world is not a malicious deception but a gift; the gift of care that is immanent in it but concealed. This concealment is not a trick but an act of generosity; a generosity that gives the possibility of action, that allows for our concerns whatever they may be. Is not this its *agape*, the mark of the world’s disinterested, non-reciprocal, impersonal, transcendent love, in short, its *care* for those who dwell in it, the living?

If we are to act in the world it must be possible for us to act and that leads straight to the consideration of the world in which we act as that which *allows* us to act. The question of action and the conditions of its possibility is a primary consideration of all the writers I have just mentioned and is inseparable from thinking about the world not simply as the locus of action but as that which gives action its possibilities. The *freedom* of action is not an effect of will, mind or any mental-cognitive metaphysics or theory but of a world that frees us for our own potential to act and thereby to realise our human capabilities. Hannah Arendt distinguishes action from labour (toil) and work (craft) in order to emphasise that only action belongs to the world of freedom, the latter two being the necessary effects of the world of necessity (Arendt 1958). Freedom only emerges as and when we escape necessity. Early modernity, driven by necessity, thought of unnecessary things as idle luxuries. Art fell into this category. But all these things (idleness, luxury, art) are precious freedoms that presuppose the overcoming of necessity. That is what it means to speak of the free world and it is part of my overall historical thesis about the last century that, in its course, the world has become freer for more and more people who now face real choices about what to do with their lives. Do I have to work? How much time do I want for myself, my family and all my interests and concerns that lie outside the necessity of work? The modern world was largely driven by necessity. Today we confront the freedoms of the post-modern world as existential choices, as what to *do* with our lives now that we, no longer driven by necessity, are free to do something with them.

The final section of this thesis consists of essays in self-clarification; efforts at figuring out the basis of my thinking. The book that will come out of this section stands in a subordinate, supplementary relation to the two books and the two sections of the thesis that precede it. I intend it as a collection

of glosses and commentaries on the thinking embedded in the studies of academic approaches to the media on the one hand, and the actual worldly practices of radio and television on the other. It is the ‘methodology’ part of this thesis. It is an interesting experience, ‘doing’ a PhD after years of providing supervisory guidance and support for others as they struggled to roll their particular stone uphill. Most students, in my experience, get pretty anxious about their methodology and the chapter they must write about it. My advice is not to worry about; at least, not initially. The key thing usually, is to figure out what the PhD is about and that usually means identifying the story. What is it about? How do you find out? How do you tell it? And what is its point? Reason and justification: the point of doing it and how it is done. The normal format of the PhD places that first. You begin with what you are going to do and why and how. The literature review, the dreaded methodology chapter have to precede the really interesting bit; the accounts of the actual topic and the work that went into it. I have preferred to reverse this structure and to put the methodological considerations after the presentation of the substantive concerns of the thesis as set out in the first two sections. I prefer to move to the general from the particular; inductive rather than deductive reasoning.

The key chapter in the final part of this thesis, and the one that was written first, is the essay on for-anyone-as-someone structures, written as an exercise in coming to terms with *Being and Time* and getting a critical perspective on it. I think it reads, more than any other part of the thesis, as a conversation with myself rather than the reader and it is still too much ‘under the influence’ of the author of *BT*. But it served to clarify what I took from Heidegger’s fundamental ontology. It was also an exercise in working out its pervasive relevance to my thinking on broadcasting. It had not escaped my notice that *Being and Time* was published in 1927, the year that the British Broadcasting Company became, by royal charter and license, the British Broadcasting Corporation and thereby assumed its settled, historical role as a public service in the national interest. David Cardiff and I had already argued that this transition created a new kind of listening public; the general public whose general interests the broadcasters must serve (Cardiff and Scannell 1986). Thus the audience addressed by the BBC in its new National Programme was anyone and everyone. Yet work on the Talks Department and its search for appropriate forms of address to this listening public showed how they came to speak to each listener as an individual, as someone in particular. How could these two apparently contradictory discursive formations—the audience as anyone in general and yet as someone in particular—be resolved? The clunky term I came up with—‘for-anyone-as-someone structures’—has a decidedly Heideggerian ring to it. I took this concept as indicating a particular communicative structure that mediated between the other two that are implicated in it; for-anyone and for-someone structures. I pushed on to consider these three structures as aspects of the self and finally as aspects of time. In the end it is always a matter of time. The common theme, the core concern of the last three chapters in this thesis, the question of

history and the role of broadcasting all come down to this. It is the last great theme of *Being and Time*.

All things are in time. First and last the existence of any thing (its being-there) is disclosed by and as its being in time, what Heidegger calls its 'within-time-ness'. The question of time is the question of existence and it is focused for us, the living, in the question of the meaning of *live*. Liveness, being alive, is the condition of our existence. What *is* it, to be alive? How do we encounter it? I have tried to raise that question in relation to the experience of listening to and watching live radio and television and to link it to the wider question of the world-historical significance of broadcasting, first raised by Dayan and Katz. The different temporalities (the different orders of time) involved in the *now* of watching television and listening to radio are extraordinarily complex. I have indicated that the broadcast now is a spatially spanned moment in which the here of the viewer's situation is connected to the there of the programme's situation to create a here-and-there. It is also a temporally gathered moment in which the time of the viewer the time of television and the time of the world all come together in the phenomenal *hic et nunc*, the here-and-now of the televised event and the here-and-now of watching it. One way of considering these orders of time (there are many more) is in terms of whether or not they are transcendent temporalities. This will serve as the final question I wish to consider as implicated in all aspects of this thesis and most clearly in this final section. By transcendence I mean, simply, what endures, what lives on in time. Death is the mark of the difference between things that endure and the things that do not. The world in which we live is, in relation to our mortal being, immortal; not eternal (for everlasting things are neither alive nor dead) but immortal, transcending death, existing in different, transcendent orders of time. These are matters that are proper to phenomenological enquiry. Pragmatics deals with social life. Phenomenology deals with the larger and more inclusive question of life as such.

Life, world and television—these are the three related matters raised in the last two chapters on television and history and the future of broadcast television. What clouds our understanding of television as an everyday worldly thing is that we think of and deal with it as if it was non-transcendent, like us. In other words, we deal with things and the world as part of our lives and our concerns. We treat them both as if they were there for us. We take them for granted. This is right and proper, of course. How else would we deal with things? And yet, in a fundamental way, in so doing we do not (we cannot) see the world as anything other than immediately obvious and as such beneath our notice. This is the enigma of 'ordinary life' upon which our lives depend and whose extraordinariness is necessarily concealed so that we can get on with our ordinary lives in the politics of the present. At the heart of this enigma, I think, is our lost sense of transcendent time and thus of transcendent phenomena that exist in different orders of time to our life-time. Immortal things are not eternal. They do not last for ever. They are immortal in that they transcend and

surpass what Arendt calls the ruin of our mortality. Empires endure for centuries but they eventually crumble and fall—thus I do not invoke *absolute* transcendence (which belongs to the universe and all universal things), but *historical* transcendence (which belongs to the world and all worldly things). The time of the world (the human world) is the time of the being in the world of humanity; that is the most transcendent order of historical time. Within the historical time of human beings there are many different institutional orders of time: the times of languages, of religions, of empires, of nation states. In ‘Television and History’ (chapter eight) I focused on the problems involved in the historiographies of different orders of time: the time of individuals (their life time), the time of institutions (such as broadcasting) and the time of the world. In each case I ask ‘Who can write this history? What narrative problems does it pose?’

The last chapter in this thesis is my most recently published essay. I have written about the meaning of broadcasting since the 1980s. My first major effort at thinking about this was an essay called ‘Public service broadcasting and modern public life’ (Scannell 1989) and I followed it up with subsequent essays that updated its concerns in the following decade (Scannell 1991, 1996). ‘*Broadcasting in the digital era*’ has a different emphasis. In the mid 1980s, at the time of the Peacock Report, it looked as though PSB in Britain would not last much longer. It was disliked by Margaret Thatcher and threatened (fatally it was assumed) by the new era of multi-channel television just around the corner. Two decades later the BBC remains one of the biggest beasts in the British media jungle. It has survived the threat of commercial terrestrial radio and television, and the hundreds of channels available on BSkyB. It has been quite remarkably successful since the 1980s and in unforeseen ways. The challenge to the BBC today is not in terms of public service versus the market, but in terms of the future of *broadcasting* as a way of delivering radio and television services in the face of the radical implications of new digital technologies whose applications provide a quite different delivery system. BSkyB’s concept of personalised television on demand and the brilliant technologies that deliver it are promoted quite explicitly as the end of *scheduled* television. And that means the end of broadcast television whose *raison d’être* is the provision of a programme service at different times of day, for those times and through the day.

This most recent essay contains all the major themes of my writing in the last five years or so and, in a nutshell, of this thesis. It is about the relationship between time and the media. Taking a clue from Sylviane Agacinski (2003) I argue that the time of the masses has given way to what she calls the time of the media, and I interpret this in terms of the key historical argument set out in the first part of this thesis, namely the transition from an economy of scarcity to one of abundance and from the politics of poverty and the masses to a politics of plenty and everyday life. I go on to consider what ‘the time of the media’ could mean. I argue that it finds its fullest realisation in live-to-air broadcasting whose liveness is held in place day by day and every day by the schedules. The

schedules hold in place the publicness of public service broadcasting. They are the unique means whereby on any day at any time, I or anyone am linked to the ongoing life and times of the world. The BSkyB alternative—customised individual on-demand television—in destroying the schedules thereby destroys television's public, worldly essence by removing it from public, worldly time. The BSkyB experience of television reduces it to an aspect of 'my time', the private life and times of individuals. I argue finally that it is not a question of either-or: either broadcast or on-demand services. But it is a question of priorities with underlying ethical implications.

If as I have argued our post-modern world is characterised by moral incoherence and ethical uncertainty it is because we have privileged the private over the public, the individual over the social and the personal over the impersonal. And all this amounts to privileging *eros* (private, individual and personal forms of life) over *agape* (public, social and impersonal forms of life). The difference between these two forms of love should finally be understood in terms of the temporal transcendence of *agape* and the non-transcendent temporality of *eros*. Today we have lost sight of the transcendent meaning and power of love (care) as *agape* and can only understand it as the non-transcendent power of *eros*. This is a profound loss for it means essentially that we can no longer understand the world, nor recognise the care-structures of everyday worldly things and institutions which give the very possibilities of our own concerns and cares. It further means that we are no longer capable of facing, of owning up to, our own radically non-transcendent finite essence. The fear of death (so natural in the pre-modern world) has been driven back by the extraordinary advances in the management of life which is one of the greatest achievements of modernity and shows up today in the extraordinary extension of life-expectancy in the advanced capitalist democracies of the last sixty years. But the consequence of this has been a refusal to face death, to deal with it and manage it with dignity and compassion (with care and love). The loneliness of the dying—their hygienic isolation from the living in hospitals and nursing homes—is an indication of the extent to which we have lost a sense of the meaningfulness of life before it finally departs from us (Elias 1985). The benefits of world modernization are quite extraordinary and hopefully irreversible. These are the results of the immense gains in knowledge brought about the scientific revolution that underpinned and continues to underpin world modernization from its beginnings to the present and beyond. But this has come at a price; the loss of understanding of the meaning of our own lives and of the world into which we are born and from which we must in the end depart. The disenchantment of the world was not a by-product but the precondition of its modernization. What we have gained in knowledge of the world has been accompanied by a loss in understanding of it.

This loss shows up finally as a loss of understanding of history. That too is an effect of post-modernity which has proclaimed the end of history and its incredulity towards grand narratives. My own sense of history, I have at last understood, comes from the world I was born into and my Irish

Catholic upbringing, but fortunately in England rather than my parents' mother country. Irish Catholicism in the 40s and 50s was a practical, devotional religion. It was quite untouched by the Reformation and the Vatican Council had not yet begun its work of bringing the Church into the 20th century. It was thus, in all essential respects, unchanged from the late 15th century church on the cusp of the religious and political revolutions that were shortly to come (MacCulloch 2003). The essential characteristics of this religious upbringing I now see as shaping the fundamental ways in which I experience and think of things. Most crucially, and what makes it utterly distinct from what was to come, it was a *practice* defined by the performance of the Mass as a public, participatory event. To be a Catholic was not so much about *believing* things as *doing* things. Catholicism was not a silent religion of the book. Still less was it an inward looking private spiritual relationship between the individual and God. Catholics defined themselves not in terms of their beliefs but their practices. I can still hear, from my earliest childhood, grown-up conversations about so and so who was 'a good, practising Catholic' and so and so who was not. A 'lapsed Catholic' was not someone who no longer believed, but someone who no longer went to Mass. Thus my marked preference for practice over theory, action over thought, public over private, my taste for the celebratory Event and for the theatricality of public life—all of which shows up in this thesis and this account of it—all makes sense to me now in terms of my upbringing in the life of the Church.

The *life* of the Church is rooted in the Church's year: its everyday pieties, its daily devotions and commemorations of the saints, the apostles and the Virgin Mary: its re-enactment of Christ's birth, life, death and resurrection which define the seasons—Christmas, Easter and Pentecost. My deep sense of the meaningfulness of day to day life and of lived experience (and hence my preference for the Cultural Studies of Williams, Thompson and the old New Left over that of Hall and the new New Left) is embedded in the ways that first in my family and later and especially at school I lived (and loved) the slow unfolding, day by day and through the year, of meaningful time. That sense of meaningful time is most fully embodied and expressed not so much in the grand narrative of salvation and redemption that the Church taught, but rather in the institutional life and practices of the Church itself in which the orders of sacred time have been maintained, in unbroken apostolic succession, since the death of Christ. Sacred time is the unity of the living and the dead *et vitam venturi saeculi*—and the life of the world to come, the very last words of the Latin Creed which I still remember from my schooldays. Past, present and future (secular historical time) becomes the living unity of the life of the world (sacred historical time) embodied in the life of the Church and its care for the living and the dead and the life that is to come.

That is where I get my sense of history as the life and times of the world. It has informed all my thinking about the historical role of broadcasting as it once was, as it is today and as it projects into its uncertain future. History *is* providential because human beings are provident; they are blessed

with foresight and forethought with which they make history in the living present. But that present is always the gift of the dead who once lived in the world as we do now. And we the living have a care for the future of the world as our gift to our children and theirs. I end here, not (I hope) in confessional or autobiographical mode but in a last effort of self-clarification. I have tried to account not only for what I think and how, but also for the historical roots of what I think and the ways in which I think. In so doing I have tried to remain true to my deepest, abiding intellectual concern. For the meaning of human time in all its radical transcendence and non-transcendence is the final concern of the thesis submitted here and, in the fullness of time, the books that will follow from the work it contains.

References

- Adorno, T. and M. Horkheimer (1944/1979) *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. London: Verso.
- Agacinski, S. (2003) *Time Passing. Modernity and Nostalgia*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Arendt, H. (1963/1990) *On Revolution*. London: Penguin
- Arendt, H. (1958) *The Human Condition*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press
- Arendt, H. (1978) *The Life of the Mind*. San Diego: Harcourt Brace
- Bauman, Z. (1993) *Postmodern Ethics*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Bennett, T. (et al, eds.) (1981) *Popular Television and Film*. London: BFI and Open University Press.
- Berman, M. (1983) *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air. The Experience of Modernity*. London: Verso.
- Boltanski, L (1999) *Distant Suffering*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brunsdon, C. and D. Morley (1978) *Everyday Television: Nationwide*. London: BFI.
- Cantril, H. (1940) *The Invasion from Mars: A Study in the Psychology of Panic*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Cardiff, D. and P. Scannell (1986) 'Broadcasting and national unity', *Impacts and Influences*. J. Curran, A. Smith and P. Wingate (eds.):157-173 London: Methuen
- Cavell, S. (1976) *Must We Mean What We Say?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Curran, J et al (eds.) (1996) *Cultural Studies and Communications*. London: Arnold
- Dunn, J. (2005) *Setting the People Free. The Story of Democracy*. London: Atlantic Books
- Elias. N. (1982/2001) *The Loneliness of the Dying*. New York: Continuum.
- Flieschacker, S. (2005) *A Short History of Distributive Justice*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Foucault, M. (1982) 'The subject and power', in *Michel Foucault. Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (H. Dreyfus and P. Rabinow). Brighton: Harvester Press.
- Goffman, E. (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Harmondsworth: Pelican Books.
- Goffman, E. (1963) *Behaviour in Public Places*. New York: Macmillan.
- Hall, S. (1980) "Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms". *Media, Culture & Society* 2(1), 57-72.
- Heidegger, M. (1962) *Being and Time*. Oxford: Blackwell
- Heidegger, M (1992) *The Concept of Time*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Heidegger, M (1993) 'The question concerning technology' *Basic Writngs: Martin Heidegger* (D. Krell, ed.): 311-341. London: Routledge.
- Horkheimer, M. (1947/2004) *Eclipse of Reason*. New York: Continuum.
- Jay, M. (1974) *The Dialectical Imagination*. London: Heineman.
- Katz, E. and P. Lazarsfeld (1955/2006) *Personal Influence*. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.
- Katz, E. et al (eds.) (2003) *Canonical Texts*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Lazarsfeld, P. (1940) *Radio and the Printed Page*. New York: Duell, Sloan and Pierce.
- Lefebvre, H. (1947/1992) *Critique of Everyday Life*. London: Verso.
- MacCulloch, D. (2003) *Reformation. Europe's House Divided, 1490-1700*. London: Penguin Books.
- MacIntyre, A. (1985) *After Virtue. A Study in Moral Theory*. London: Duckworth.
- McQuail, D (2005) *McQuail's Mass Communication Theory*. London: Sage
- Morley, D. (1980) *The 'Nationwide' Audience*. London: BFI.
- Merton, R. (1946/2004) *Mass Persuasion*. New York: Howard Fertig
- Peters, J.D. (1999) *Speaking into the Air. A History of the Idea of Communication*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Rawls, J. (1971/1999) *A Theory of Justice*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Riesman, D. (1950) *The Lonely Crowd*. Yale: Yale University Press

Scannell, P. (1989) 'Public service broadcasting and modern public life', *Media Culture & Society*, 11(2): 135-166.

Scannell, P. (1991) 'Public service broadcasting: history of a concept', *Understanding Television*, G. Whannel and A. Goodwin (eds.): 11-29. London: Routledge,

Scannell, P. (1995) 'Broadcast events'. *Media, Culture and Society* 17(1):151-7.

Scannell, P. (1996) 'Public service broadcasting: from national culture to multiculturalism 1923-1995', *Public Broadcasting for the Twenty-First Century*. M.Raboy (ed.): 9-25. London: John Libbey.

Scannell, P. (2005) 'Love and communication', *Media Culture & Society* 27(4): 614-621.

Sen, A. (2000) *Development as Freedom*. New York: Anchor Books.

Taylor, C. (1994) *Multiculturalism*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press

Wiggershaus, R. (1994) *The Frankfurt School*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Canonic Texts in Media Research
E.Katz et al (eds): 74-89
Cambridge: Polity 2003

Chapter One

Benjamin Contextualized:
On “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”

Introduction

Within any academic field the processes that determine which works achieve canonical status is partly determined by the history of the field itself. Marx pointed out that when men determine to make a revolution they look to the past to provide them with roles and models. Likewise, more prosaically, emerging academic disciplines also consult the past for guidance and inspiration as they seek to clarify their concerns and stake out a distinctive domain of enquiry. One text that speaks eloquently from the past to later generations of academics concerned with media and communication is “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” by Walter Benjamin. He wrote this essay in 1936 as a contribution to an ongoing debate, within a small but distinguished circle of intellectuals, about the status and role of art in the then-new circumstances of “mass culture.” Four years later Benjamin, a German Jew, committed suicide after being refused permission to enter Spain, fearing he would fall into the hands of the Nazis. His collected works were not published until the mid-1950s in Germany, where they had an immediate impact, and he was unknown to Anglo-American readers until a collection of his essays was translated into English, with a brilliant introductory essay by his friend and admirer Hannah Arendt. This collection, *Illuminations*, published in 1968, includes the essay on Mechanical Reproduction and is the basis of Benjamin’s worldwide reputation today.

Illuminations contains selections made from the two-volume German *Schriften*, edited and introduced by Theodor Adorno and published in 1955. Arendt’s “chief purpose” in making her selection was “to convey the importance of Benjamin as a literary critic” (Benjamin, 1968, p.

267). Most of the essays in the collection are either about literature (Baudelaire, Proust, and Kafka) or related topics (translation, book-collecting), with the exception of the celebrated “Theses on the Philosophy of History” (pp. 255-66). “Mechanical Reproduction” thus stands in some isolation from the rest of the collection. What makes it distinctive, apart from its subject matter, are certain aspects of Benjamin’s interests and concerns, notably a political engagement with questions concerning art and commodity production from a (loosely) Marxist perspective. That perspective provides the thread that links the text with its resurrection, several decades later, in circumstances hugely different from those in which and for which it was originally written. This essay thus has two tasks: first, to account for the original circumstances that gave rise to “Mechanical Reproduction” and the debate to which it made a central contribution, and second, to briefly explain the reasons for its posthumous fame when it became available to English-speaking readers nearly forty years later.

Art and Politics in the 1930s

The period between World Wars I and II was one of profound economic, political, and cultural change in Europe and North America. What we now call “consumer capitalism” was decisively established in the West in the inter-war period, when mass markets were created for a whole new range of domestic and leisure consumer goods. Intimately linked to this was the wide social penetration of new electronic forms of communication (telephone and radio) and of “mass” entertainment (cinema and the record industry). “Mass society,” “mass politics,” “mass production,” and “mass culture” were key concerns in contemporary political, social, and cultural debates. On the whole, European intellectuals were hostile to the masses (the urban, industrial working classes) and to the new forms of mass culture that catered to their tastes. Artistic modernism, buttressed by theories of the avant-garde, ensured that the arts were “difficult” and beyond the grasp of the great mass of ordinary women and men whose “low-brow tastes” threatened to swamp and destroy “high-brow” standards of taste and ways of living – or so it seemed to many artists and intellectuals at the time (Carey, 1992). This was one aspect of the debate around the role of art and its relation to the masses to which Benjamin’s essay contributed. But it had a more urgent political dimension in light of the deepening political crisis that grew directly from the economic crisis of 1929, which triggered the rise of Fascism in Europe in the 1930s and ultimately the outbreak of World War II.

A crucial issue concerned the implications of mass culture. Was mass entertainment yet another instance of the exploitation of “the masses,” or was it a potential means for their emancipation? The effect of economic and political crisis was to politicize culture and raise again the question of whether art could, or should, be directly involved in contemporary life and affairs. The question of political commitment for art and for the artist was intensely debated throughout Europe and the United States. In the Soviet Union, writers and intellectuals were called upon to be “engineers of the soul:” to throw themselves wholeheartedly behind the new Communist society and produce artistic representations of the men and women of the new Russia. A whole new genre of “socialist realism” in art and literature came into being to celebrate the achievements of the socialist revolution. In Britain, the intellectuals marched sharply to the left. They were deeply concerned with the prolonged social fallout of the economic crisis that created long-term unemployment in the industrial heartlands of the United Kingdom. They espoused new popular movements: for peace, for the republican cause in the Spanish civil war (Hynes, 1966). In the US, intellectuals became enthusiastic recruits to the New Deal administration and made films, photographed, and wrote about the impact of the Depression and the heroic efforts of the New Deal to counter it (Stott, 1986).

In Germany, those intellectuals who were hostile to National Socialism, or whose lives were threatened, fled when Hitler came to power in 1932. Among these was a group of academics who were members of the Institute of Social Research, an independently-funded research center attached to the University of Frankfurt, later known universally as the “Frankfurt School.” Two of its leading figures were Max Horkheimer (the Institute’s director for most of its history) and his close friend Theodor Adorno. Attached to the Institute as an associate fellow on a tiny stipend was Walter Benjamin. Shortly after Hitler came to power in 1933 the Institute’s offices were searched by the police, and were later seized and confiscated for being “Communist property” (Wiggershaus, 1994, p.128). Adorno and Horkheimer eventually re-established the Institute in the US, attached to Columbia University. They remained in the United States, German Jewish emigrés in exile, until after the war when they returned, with much honor, to Frankfurt. Benjamin left Germany but remained in Europe. He was in Paris when the German army invaded France in 1940, and fled south to the Spanish border hoping to escape capture.

It was this situation – the apparently irresistible rise of Fascism, the impact of mass production on art and culture, the accompanying new forms of art and entertainment (film, photography, radio, and gramophone records) – that Walter Benjamin addressed in “The Work of Art in the Age of

Mechanical Reproduction.” I consider his essay here, not as an autonomous text, but in relation to what inspired it and the responses to which it gave rise. Thus, I argue that Benjamin’s essay makes a persuasive case for the emancipatory potential of new forms of “mass culture,” but also present Adorno’s powerful criticism, “On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression in Listening,” which was written in direct response to Benjamin’s essay and published two years later (1938/1978). My aim is not to adjudicate on the outcome of this encounter, but rather to show the complexity of the issues it raised about the social and political role of art and its enduring relevance, for it was the return of this question in very different circumstances four decades later that prompted the resurrection of the texts under review here. I also present some key sources of inspiration drawn upon by both sides in the argument. In particular I will show the importance, for Benjamin, of his friend Bertolt Brecht, whose ideas about theater and politics underpin his thoughts about the contemporary situation of art. I will likewise highlight the contribution that the concepts of Georg Lukács made to Adorno’s response. In all this I aim to show how and why the question of art and politics mattered at the time. Far from being of merely academic interest, the issues that concerned Benjamin and Adorno, Brecht and Lukács, were compelling ones that intimately and fatefully touched their lives in different ways.

Art, Reproduction and the Loss of Aura

The central thesis of Benjamin’s essay is that in modern conditions, art has lost its *aura*, which is destroyed by mechanical reproduction, or mass production. The meaning of “aura” is central to understanding the essay and to Benjamin’s thinking in a wider sense. The Latin word *aura* means “breeze.” It is used as a metaphor for the subtle emanation things give off as the mark of their distinctiveness. In European painting, for instance, the aura of sanctity is represented by a halo around the saint’s head, or a subtle glow around the figure of the Madonna. For Benjamin, Art is invested with and surrounded by aura, a halo of significance that distinguishes it from non-auratic, everyday things. In modern societies art proclaims itself as Art by its *uniqueness* and *distance* from daily life and its affairs – the two key marks of auratic art. There is only one Mona Lisa, for instance, and its significance as Art is caught up to a considerable extent in its status as a unique and singular thing. Art is also marked by its distance from everyday life, retreating into the museum, the gallery, the theater, or the concert hall.

In pre-modern times this was not the case. Art was embedded in the very fabric of society. It embodied and expressed a society's most intimate values and beliefs, its sense of its history and place in the world. As such, what we now call Art had a very different function then, and was closely linked to religion, magic, and ritual. In a beautiful essay called "The Storyteller," Benjamin (1973) reflects on the decline of storytelling in modern societies, displaced on the one hand by the novel and on the other, by the newspaper. The former testifies to the collapse of tradition, the latter the extent to which experience has been displaced by information. Storytelling, Benjamin argues, is at the heart of traditional societies. It embodies and expresses the tradition; indeed, it *is* the tradition. The authenticity of the tradition (its living quality, its aliveness, its *aura*) is preserved in the practice of storytelling. But modern, secular rationality destroys tradition, ritual, magic, and religious beliefs. The Age of Reason invented a new thing, *Art*, which it invested with an invented tradition – Creativity, Genius, Beauty – to stand as timeless reminders of the human spirit. The aura of, let us call it, "Gallery Art" (which is what we mean by Art in modern times) is a secular mystique, and the "worship" of great art is a secular ritual practised largely by the European bourgeoisie and their intellectuals.

Mass production destroys Art's aura because it destroys its twin characteristics of uniqueness and distance. Photography and cinema multiply the image *ad infinitum*. There may be one Mona Lisa, but there are umpteen photographic reproductions of it in all sorts of contexts, including the downright vulgar. At the same time, mass reproduction destroys the *distance* of the art object. No longer the unique original to which we all must go in reverence if we wish to see it, it is pried from its shell. It goes out into the world, where it circulates in many forms. It comes to us. The sense of reverence for the auratic art object is shattered. In the concert hall or at the art gallery we display our reverence by our concentrated and silent attentiveness to the performance or exhibition. But the mass publics for new forms of mass culture take a more relaxed attitude. They do not have to concentrate on the auratic experience. They can watch in a state of distraction. They can listen to music on the radio or gramophone and do other things at the same time.

What are the implications of the destruction of aura? For Benjamin, it is the *democratization* of art. What was once for the select few is now available for the many. Modern technologies of visual reproduction (Benjamin had in mind photography and cinema in particular) can become art forms for the millions. Moreover, they bring about transformations in how we perceive reality, offering us new perspectives on the world. The camera is deeply enmeshed in the web of reality. It can go to places that were hitherto inaccessible to most of us. Movement can be

speeded up and slowed down to reveal the beauty of things not available to ordinary perception – say, the moment of impact of a drop of water. The cinematic close-up creates a new kind of intimacy in public, allowing millions access to the human face that was formerly reserved as a look shared only by lovers or by parent and child. In all this, what Benjamin calls the “theology of art” – its ritual or cult value as a thing of beauty and a joy forever, the *worship* and canonization of art by its ideologues, the intellectuals – is put in question. Mass reproduction destroys the unique authenticity of the original work, which can no longer be worshipped as such. “The total function of art is reversed. Instead of being based on ritual, it begins to be based on another practice – politics” (Benjamin, 1973, p. 226).

Like many European intellectuals at that time, Brecht still believed in the revolutionary potential of “the masses.” His views on the relationship between the masses and new modes of production were spelled out in a 1934 lecture he gave in Paris to the Institute for the Study of Fascism, published three years later in essay form as “The Author as Producer.” Here Benjamin argued that the revolutionary potential of new technologies depended on the role, in the production process, of the intellectual (writer, author), who must align himself with the masses. It is no use invoking the autonomy of the poet, his freedom to write whatever he pleases (Benjamin, 1978, p. 255). Art is not about *self*-expression: the author must serve the interests of the people. At the same time, in new “mass” forms of writing such as newspapers, there is a greater opportunity for readers to play an active part rather than being mere consumers. They can write letters and influence editorial opinion. In the new post-revolutionary Russian cinema, Benjamin points out, ordinary Russians are used instead of actors to portray “the masses.” Thus, new forms of mass communication may transform consumers into active participants. Benjamin is arguing for a new relationship between authors, products, and audience. Not the worship of the author (as Genius) or of the work (as Truth and Beauty) by an adoring audience, but a more equal and collaborative relationship in which the author gets down from his pedestal and aligns himself with the audience (the masses), takes their point of view, and gives it expression in his work.

This was the kind of theater Bertolt Brecht tried to create. For Brecht, the dominant theatrical tradition – the whole commercial *business*, or “apparatus” of theater – served primarily to confirm middle-class audiences in their good opinion of themselves. It did nothing to make them confront contemporary reality or question their own social attitudes and values. Brecht thought of this kind of theater as “culinary consumption” – pleasant, bland food dished up for

bourgeois audiences who wanted nothing more than a comforting, self-affirming, emotional theatrical experience. He, by contrast, wanted to create theater for new non-bourgeois audiences who did not ordinarily go to the theater. He wanted a theater that a working-class audience would enjoy, where they would feel at ease and not constrained to be “on their best behavior.” Going to the theater could be fun. It could also be a learning experience, inviting audiences to think about the contemporary world and their position in it. It should therefore be *realistic* in a double sense: in respect to what is *actually* going on in the world, and to how this affects those for whom the tale is told (i.e., working-class audiences). To do this, Brecht argued, the new theater must employ new techniques and methods: “Reality changes; to represent it the means of representation must change too. Nothing arises from nothing; the new springs from the old, but that is just what makes it new” (1978, p. 110). In all this, the aim was to achieve a new kind of involvement for a new kind of audience. Not the cozy, self-affirming emotional involvement that bourgeois theater offered its audiences, but active, conscious political involvement. Theater that would make people think, that might change their attitudes; theater that could play a part in social change rather than merely re-affirming the existing order.

Brecht’s ideas about theater underlie much of Benjamin’s thinking in both essays under discussion here. In “The Author as Producer,” Benjamin (1978) makes the links between his and Brecht’s ideas explicit (pp. 261-2, 265-7). He also makes clear that he is discussing the role of art in relation to class struggle. The instruments of production are in the hands of the enemy – the newspaper, for instance “belongs to capital” (p. 259). The new technologies have no revolutionary potential in themselves but are put to reactionary use in reactionary hands. Consider the case of “art” photography: “It is unable to say anything of a power station or a cable factory other than this: what a beautiful world!...It has succeeded in making even abject poverty, by recording it in a fashionably perfected manner, into an object of enjoyment” (pp. 262-3). This is what Adorno meant by “the barbarism of perfection:” technically perfect images dished up for culinary consumption, that aestheticize the world and thereby close off the possibility of any critical perspective on a less-than-perfect reality. In “The Author as Producer,” Benjamin (1978) calls on intellectuals (writers, journalists, photographers, etc.) to work within cultural institutions to subvert their functions. They must change their practices and use the new instruments of communication for politically progressive purposes, to make them work in the interest of the masses rather than against them: “Technical progress is for the author as producer the foundation of his political progress” (p. 263).

In “Mechanical Reproduction” Benjamin (1968) takes a less explicitly political line. He no longer calls on intellectuals to change the apparatuses of cultural production from within. Rather, in contradiction to his argument in “The Author as Producer,” he seems to see the technologies of mass cultural production as having an intrinsic emancipatory potential. By transforming the scale of cultural production and distribution, he argues, they play a democratizing role, bringing culture to the millions and shattering the aura of culture as something for “the happy few.” And by transforming the nature of perception, they offer new perspectives on contemporary reality that were hitherto unavailable.

This begins to sound like technological determinism, a questionable line of thinking that treats technological innovation as an instrument of social change irrespective of the uses to which it is put. In “The Author as Producer,” Benjamin argued (quite rightly) that photography, when put to modish, use had a flatly reactionary social function. In “Mechanical Reproduction,” however, he appears to believe the camera *per se* can change perceptions of reality. But Benjamin is alert to the possibilities of *fake aura*, by which he means the re-appropriation of mass culture for ritual purposes:

Fascism sees its salvation in giving the masses not their right, but instead a chance to express themselves. The masses have a right to change property relations. Fascism seeks to allow them expression while preserving property. The logical result of Fascism is the introduction of aesthetics into political life. The violation of the masses, whom Fascism, with its *Führer* cult, forces to its knees, has its counterpart in the violation of an apparatus which is pressed into the production of ritual values. (1978, p. 243)

A socialist politics is committed to revolution on behalf of the masses in order to eliminate the inequities of property relations in capitalist societies. It therefore seeks to rouse the masses to the overthrow of the existing social and political order. Fascism, by contrast, is committed to preserving unequal economic and social relations. It recruits the masses to politics, not to mobilize them for social change, but to allow them to express themselves, “to let off steam.” This is why Fascism aestheticizes politics. It transforms politics into theater, a spectacle in which participants can participate directly in political life but cannot effect change. It does this through the fake aura of the mass rally with its ritual pomp and pageantry, and the cult of *Führer*-worship which is given charismatic expression on such occasions. The forms of mass culture (cinema, radio) are harnessed to the purposes of propaganda and the cult of the event. All this leads to one thing: war. Against the aestheticization of politics by Fascism, socialism responds by politicizing art. That was the objective of Brechtian theater, and the final point of Benjamin’s essay.

The Fetishization of Music

Benjamin sent a copy of “Mechanical Reproduction” to Adorno for comment. He hoped Adorno would publish it in the Institute’s journal, *Zeitschrift für Sozialforschung* (Journal for Social Research). Adorno, however, was displeased by two aspects of the article: first, the “flatly reactionary position” assigned to auratic art and the progressive role assigned to new technologies of mechanical reproduction. Second, and relatedly, the presence in the essay of Brechtian themes concerning art and politics.

Adorno set out his immediate responses in an exchange of letters with Benjamin and, in a more considered way, in an article, “On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression of Listening” (1978), which put forward a detailed counter-argument to the case for mass culture that Benjamin had advanced. In his essay, Adorno attacked the impact of the industrialization of music on contemporary musical life. Two related technical developments at the end of the nineteenth century had an enormous impact on every aspect of musical life in the early twentieth century. These were sound recording and the radio, both major instances of the mechanical reproduction of sound. Before the gramophone and the radio, music was necessarily a live art in which the performance itself was central to the experience. It was thus a social activity, involving players and audience in the production and experience of the musical event. But the record and the radio shattered the immediate social relations of musical life by their destruction of the performed event. Music now had two separate and unconnected moments: the moment of production (the recording, the radio transmission) and the moment of consumption (listening via radio or the gramophone). What connected these two moments was the musical “product.” These two new “social technologies of sound” had the effect, Adorno argued, of *reifying* music.

This concept was drawn from Georg Lukács’s influential essay, “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat” (1923), which aimed at expanding the implications of commodity fetishism outlined by Marx (1867/1976) in a famous section of *Capital*, “The Fetishism of the Commodity and its Secret” (pp. 163-77). A fetish is an object endowed with magical properties – for example, a charm purchased to protect oneself from harm or misfortune – and fetishism is the worship of such objects. Marx treated commodities, especially money, as fetish objects. The magic of money is the riddle of the commodity fetish (p. 187).

The fetishism of commodities (manufactured goods) is the *objectification* of the social relations of production into relationships between *things*. This process displaces and devalues human social life. When manufactured commodities realize their value *as* commodities in exchange for the universal commodity (money), they do so at the expense of those who made the commodity but have no control over the objects of their labor and derive little benefit from it. If labor is, as Marx claimed, the expression of our common human nature, then the fate of labor under capitalist conditions indicates that “[t]he *devaluation* of the human world grows in direct proportion to the *increase in value* of the world of things” (Marx, 1844/1992, pp. 323-4).

Lukács extended the implications of Marx’s analysis to include all aspects of social, cultural, and intellectual life, via the concept of *reification*. “Reification” is rooted in the Latin word *res* (thing) and means, literally, “thingification.” Lukács argued that the commodity structure had penetrated all aspects of society, both inner and outer, and remolded it in its own image. Thus, the reified commodity-thing becomes “the universal category of society as a whole.”

Adorno, in turn, applied Lukács’s analysis of the reified world to contemporary musical life. It was not simply that music was reified as a marketable commodity-thing in the form of a gramophone record. It was fetishized (glamorized, worshipped) in all sorts of ways that combined to conceal the fate of music in modern times, namely, the loss of its social, sociable character and with that, the accompanying possibility of true musical pleasure. The first part of Adorno’s essay explores the many ways in which reified music exhibits its “fetish character” through the fetishization of performance, the stylization of production, and the fetishization of consumption. All three aspects – production, product, and consumption – bear the stigmata of reification.

The fetishization of performance shows up in various ways. First, there is the worship of “the beautiful voice.” Then there is the fetishization of the great composer or conductor, particularly the latter. Finally, there is the notion of the authentic (great, “true”) performance, a tendency greatly enhanced by the professionalization of music-playing and the notion of the “definitive” recording. This shows up in popular as well as classical music, as has been astutely analyzed by Simon Frith (1986). The fetishization of authenticity (the great voice, the great performance, the great conductor) is an aspect of a total standardization and conformity that allows no place for imperfection. The professionalization of music (itself an accelerated consequence of new technologies) devalues all other musics, which are now relegated to the inferior status of

“amateur” performance. In a telling phrase borrowed from Eduard Steuermann, Adorno wrote of “the barbarism of perfection,” which he regarded as the definitive reification:

The new fetish is the flawlessly functioning, metallically brilliant apparatus as such, in which all the cogwheels mesh so perfectly that not the slightest hole remains open for the meaning of the whole. Perfect, immaculate performance in the latest style preserves the work at the price of its definitive reification. It presents itself as complete from the very first note. The performance sounds like its own phonograph record. (p. 284).

The stylization of production means its standardization into something like an assembly-line sound. Adorno detected this development in the emergence of the pop song. The standardization of music meant its transformation into “easy listening,” something that was instantly and effortlessly consumed, epitomized by the catchy tune or refrain and the standardized rhythm (four beats to the bar). This mass-produced music pointed, Adorno argued, to the fateful separation of music into two distinct categories, “serious” and “popular.” He traced this division back to the eighteenth century, claiming that Mozart was the last composer who effortlessly combined both elements in his music. Thereafter, music diverged increasingly in two separate directions, a tendency finally sealed by its commodification as the three-minute recording aimed at maximizing profit in the quest for a hit.

All this loses sight of the intrinsic pleasure of music, which is in performance. It has regressed to an isolated pleasure for an isolated listener, who fetishizes the act of listening but loses sight of that which is listened to. This shows, Adorno argued, in the peculiar obsessions of equipment freaks who fetishize *sound* as an abstract thing independent of what is being played. Adorno pointed to radio hams as an instance of this process. We might point to hi-fi freaks and the fetishization of perfect acoustics. It also shows in the phenomenon of the fan who knows everything there is to know about the fetishized object, who writes to radio stations demanding more airtime for the object-fetish, and who is lost in fake ecstasy at live performances. In all such ways the fan is in thrall to the “star” fetish object.

Yet no one *really* listens to music any more, Adorno argued. More music is available on a daily basis than was ever possible in earlier times. In fact, thanks to the music industry, it is almost impossible to escape from music nowadays. But the more there is, the less people listen. The reification of music is indicative of music’s regression from a worldly, social pleasure to an

inner state of mind, a matter of subjective taste (“I know what I like”). Reified music is, first and last, in the head of the isolated, individual consumer of music.

Adorno saw all these aspects of reified, fetishized music as indicative of the *regression* of listening. This term, taken from Freudian psychoanalysis, means a reversion to an earlier childlike state. What Adorno meant by this is that listening to music no longer has an adult character; it has lost any critical, rational function. “Regressive listeners behave like children. Again and again and with stubborn malice, they demand the one dish they have once been served with” (p. 290). The reification of music produces a kind of mass infantilism in listening publics who no longer listen any more. What is thus lost is the possibility of resistance or criticism, and beyond that, the possibility of *autonomous art*: art as the expression of human autonomy, independence, and freedom.

Autonomous Art

Adorno believed in the redemptive possibility of what he called “autonomous art.”

“Autonomy” (Gk: *autos*, self; *nomos*, law) means self-government. In a philosophical sense it means that human beings, by the exercise of their will, are self-determining. Human freedom, in principle and practice, presupposes individuals as autonomous, self-ruling agents who are free from *heteronomous* constraint (the constraints of externally-imposed law or rule).

Autonomous art is thus the free expression of a self-determining, creative “author” who produces the art work. More crucially, this integral artistic freedom is embodied in the autonomy of the form and content of the art work itself. Art, in other words, obeys its own laws. As such, it stands in opposition to mass culture, which is governed by heteronomous factors, most obviously the profit motive. The heteronomy of mass culture reveals itself in the search for mass audiences. In order to reach large and diverse audiences the form and content of cultural products must be simple, accessible, and easy to understand. Thus, the *forms* of mass culture are determined by heteronomous factors. It follows that the autonomy of autonomous art must reveal itself in forms and content that resist the pull of heteronomous forces. If heteronomous culture offers easy, accessible, simple pleasures, then autonomous art can be none of these things.

Adorno accepted and defended autonomous art as “difficult.” It is meant to be. That is how it resists easy “culinary” consumption. Autonomous art demands real effort and commitment on the part of the reader, listener, or viewer. Benjamin might defend the “distracted attention” of mass audiences, but Adorno would have none of it. The concentration demanded by modern art was the mark of its negation of the culture market. In an exchange of letters on the topic, Benjamin tactfully conceded, “I have tried to articulate positive moments as clearly as you managed to articulate negative ones” (Taylor, 1980, p. 140).

But Adorno also rejected the political stance of Benjamin and Brecht. Art for Art’s sake, he declared, was in need of defence and rescue from “the united front which exists against it from Brecht to the [Communist] Youth Movement” (Taylor, 1980, p. 122). Adorno (1978) made his views on this matter plain in an essay on “Commitment” written many years later, criticizing Jean Paul Sartre, Lukács, and Brecht, all of whom defended the position that writers should be politically “engaged” and express this commitment in their work (pp. 300-17). Adorno does not wholly reject their position. But he points out that Lukács’s defense of socialist realism against modernism served to prop up the dreadful Stalinist tyranny. As for Brecht, it is easy to prove the discrepancy between his ideas about theater and his theatrical practice. And indeed, Brecht himself conceded that what he really cared about was the theater itself, irrespective of politics.

The case against commitment is that it can too quickly collapse into heteronymy. When it turns into propaganda, as it so easily does, it betrays its own cause and commitment, namely, truth. That was the sticking point for Adorno. He defended to the last the autonomous work of art for its stance against its betrayal by contemporary economic and political life. If it offered few pleasures, if its appeal was limited, it was nevertheless true to itself. Its negativity exposed the essentially negative character of dominant forms of economic, political, and cultural life even as they thought of themselves as affirmative.

Aftermath

When Benjamin’s work became available in English in the 1970s it played into a time in which, like the 1930s, culture was repoliticized; not by a downturn in the global capitalist economy and its political consequences, but by the new social movements of the 1960s – especially civil rights and feminism – and the American war in Vietnam. The French “cultural revolution” of

May 1968 had ramifications throughout Europe, which showed in concerted attempts to repoliticize mass forms of entertainment, particularly cinema (again) and the newer mass medium of television. In this context Brecht's ideas for a revolutionary theater were taken up again and applied to filmmaking and television drama production. Benjamin too appeared in these debates, but usually as a supporting player (Harvey, 1980; Walsh, 1981).

In the 1970s, British Cultural Studies was redefining itself under Stuart Hall's directorship of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at Birmingham University. In its concern to retheorize the meaning of culture, the Centre looked outside Anglo-American empiricism, of which it was deeply suspicious, and turned to Continental theory for support. As part of this general process, the newly available work of Benjamin was taken on board within the overarching frame of Western Marxism (New Left Books, 1977), as Hall (1980) noted in a synoptic review of the development of Cultural Studies:

It was therefore of the utmost importance that at precisely this moment [the early 1970s] many of these long-forgotten or unknown "Western Marxist" texts began to appear in translation, largely through the mediation of New Left Books and Merlin Press. English Cultural Studies thus had to hand, for the first time, an alternative source of theorizing within Marxism about its characteristic problems: in Lukács' literary historical work, Goldmann's *Hidden God*, the first translations of Walter Benjamin, the early texts of the 'Frankfurt School' (known previously only because American 'mass society theorists' were taken to have successfully refuted Adorno's pessimistic critique), Sartre's *Question of Method*. (p. 25)

Yet within this essentially political agenda, whose primary objective was to rethink Marxism, Benjamin was, at best, a warmly admired but marginal figure (McRobbie, 1994, pp. 96-9). He was always a somewhat eccentric Marxist (he had little faith in "progress"), and his overtly political writings of the 1930s with their Brechtian motifs reflected only one strand in the thinking of this complex, melancholy "man of letters."

In the "post-Marxist" 1980s, attention turned to other aspects of Benjamin's thinking and he was read as a pioneering cultural analyst of "modernity" (Frisby, 1985), this problematic now being raised in debates about its supersession by "postmodernity". A long-term project,

uncompleted at his death and largely unpublished, was the study of nineteenth-century Paris and its culture – the everyday life of a great city – as emblematic of the experience of modernity. Benjamin's notes on this topic were published in German in the 1980s and made available in English by Susan Buck-Morss in 1989. Literary and cultural theory became increasingly interested not only in the subject matter of Benjamin's project but also in how he went about it: the fragmented, allusive style of writing; the concern with the meaning of history as crystallized in everyday experience, in marginal things, and in exemplary urban types, most famously the *flâneur* who strolls the city streets (Wolff, 1993; McRobbie, 1994).

In the 1990s "Mechanical Reproduction" had another rebirth, this time in relation to the impact of digital media and the rise of the Internet. Benjamin had emphasized the impact of new technologies on the visual arts. The digitization of the image reopened old questions about the "truth" and "authenticity" of the original, especially in relation to photography (Wells, 1997). Out there in cyberspace, students in film/TV programs write essays on "Art and Authenticity in the Age of Digital Reproduction," while contemporary artists explore the convergence of text, sound, and visual images. Today, references to Benjamin's essay crop up all over the place. It has become an essential reference in an increasingly diverse set of academic discussions concerning cultural and media studies; feminist writing; film, photographic and art theory; literary and social theory; history and technology. It is interpreted in a variety of ways, with less emphasis on its overtly Marxist concerns and more on the general questions it raises concerning art and the political and cultural implications of today's new technologies. Clearly Benjamin attempted a redemptive reading of the then-new media of film and photography, arguing against the grain of prevailing intellectual opinion so forcefully expressed in Adorno's critical response. Those who see the Internet as offering the possibility of the "global" rather than the "mass" democratization of politics and art invoke the spirit of "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."

In his own time, Benjamin sought to find a framework and a vocabulary with which to make sense of newly emergent technologies and their social and political potential. This could only be done, as he well understood, within the context of the tradition in which the present is, at any time, embedded. The function of any canon serves, in part, as a collective *aide-mémoire*, a reminder that what we encounter today was once faced by others and, at the same time, as a resource for making sense of the enigmas of the future as they emerge into the present light of day.

References

- Adorno, T. (1978): "On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression in Listening." In A. Arato and E. Gebhardt (eds), *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell, 270-299.
- Benjamin, W. (1968): *Illuminations* (H.Arendt, ed.). London: Fontana/Collins.
- Benjamin, W. (1978): "The Author as Producer". In A. Arato and E. Gebhardt (eds), *The Essential Frankfurt School Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell, 254-269.
- Brecht, B. (1964): *Brecht on Theater* (John Willett, ed.). London: Eyre/Methuen.
- Buck-Morss, S. (1989): *The Dialectics of Seeing. Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Carey, J. (1992): *The Intellectuals and the Masses, 1880-1939*. London: Faber.
- Frisby, J. (1985): *Fragments of Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Frith, S. (1986): "Art Versus Technology: The Strange Case of Popular Music". *Media, Culture & Society*, 8(3), 263-80.
- Hall, S. (1980): *Culture, Media, Language. Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-1979*. London: Hutchison.
- Harvey, S. (1980): *May '68 and Film Culture*. London: British Film Institute.
- Hynes, S. (1966): *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Lukács, G. (1970): "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat." In *History and Class Consciousness*. London: Merlin Press.
- Marx, K. (1976): *Capital (Volume 1)*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- McRobbie, A. (1994): "The *Passagenwerk* and the Place of Walter Benjamin in Cultural Studies." In *Postmodernism and Popular Culture*. London: Routledge, 96-120.
- New Left Books (1977): *Western Marxism. A Critical Reader*. London: New Left Books.
- Stott, W. (1986): *Documentary Expression and Thirties America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Taylor, R. (ed. and trans.) (1980): *Aesthetics and Politics. Debates Between Bloch, Lukács, Brecht, Benjamin, Adorno*. London: Verso.
- Walsh, M. (1981): *The Brechtian Aspect of Radical Cinema*. London: British Film Institute.
- Wiggershaus, R. (1994): *The Frankfurt School*. Cambridge: Polity Press

Canonic Texts in Media Research
E. Katz et al (eds)
Polity 2003: 231-247

Chapter two

Canonization Achieved? **Stuart Hall's "Encoding/Decoding"** **[with Michael Gurevitch]**

The centrality of Stuart Hall's "Encoding/Decoding" essay in the Cultural Studies literature has long been recognized. This paper does not purport to offer yet another analysis of the "encoding/decoding" model, a vein that has been mined extensively and has produced a rich literature. Rather, it considers briefly the issue of the canonization of scholarly texts, provides a "biography" of Hall's essay, and concludes with some thoughts on the assumed canonic status of that essay.

A number of questions emerge when we consider the canonic status of any text in the mass communication literature. The first has to do with identifying the boundaries of the field. Defining the field of mass communication scholarship narrowly, that is, as a self-contained and bounded field, the pool of works from which "canonic" texts are to be selected will necessarily be fairly narrow, and the works chosen will have to be assessed as meriting such status within that smaller pool – i.e., as the bigger fish in a fairly small pond. If, however, we locate mass communication research within the broader context of the social sciences, or as sub-area within the more general study of the sociology of knowledge and culture, then the formerly big fish (from the small pond) might be dwarfed by even bigger fish. Canonic status is thus clearly relative.

A second question has to do with whether canonic status inheres in the text itself, its power, its revelatory insights, or whether it depends in larger measure on the work it spawns. In other words, is canonization achieved, or is it bestowed by virtue of its progeny, its impact on future work? If the latter, then perhaps it is more appropriate to describe an influential work as *seminal* rather than canonic. Thus, the impact of a given work is revealed in the works that follow it, are inspired by it, or carry its ideas further. A search for the DNA of scholarly works could reveal their parenthood, their longevity, their short- and long-term impact.

More generally, however, canonization depends on death, for sainthood can only be authenticated when life has ended. Perhaps it is the same with texts: their canonization is at once their sanctification and their mortification. The canonized text no longer lives within a set of concerns and commitments. It is no longer something to be thought with or about, engaged with and argued over, confronted or challenged. It becomes something to be ritually invoked, like the auxiliary saints summoned up from the dead to give aid to the living. Such a fate, we argue, has befallen the text known today as the “encoding/decoding model,” the ur-text of media studies as it developed within the larger project of Cultural Studies at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) under Stuart Hall’s direction at the University of Birmingham in the 1970s.

Biography of an Essay

“Encoding/Decoding” was published in *Culture, Media, Language*, by Hutchinson & Co. in 1980. It appeared in the third sub-section of the book, called “Media Studies.” A footnote at the start of the article tells us that, as published, it is an edited extract from a longer piece called “Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse,” CCCS Stencilled Paper No. 7, produced at the Centre in 1974. The paper was originally presented by Stuart Hall to a colloquium at the Centre for Mass Communication Research at the University of Leicester in 1973; for the benefit of CCCS students, some notes on its reception at the colloquium and points for further consideration were subsequently added at the end. The paper received another airing a year later, when it was presented as “Encoding and Decoding” in a symposium on Broadcasters and the Audience held in Venice as part of the Prix Italia. Throughout the 1970s CCCS produced and published, along with its stencilled papers, a series called “Working Papers in Cultural Studies” (WPCS). At the end of the decade Hutchinson contracted to publish the material hitherto produced and disseminated by the Centre, along with unpublished work in progress and future projects. *Culture, Media, Language* is subtitled “Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-1979”. Thus the appearance of “Encoding/Decoding” in a published book marks both an end and a beginning – the end of a samizdat culture of dissemination and circulation, and the entry into mainstream academic literature.

At first sight, the published version of “Encoding/Decoding” (hereafter E/D) is a slight piece. It is only ten pages long, and is not overburdened with scholarly footnotes and references. It has a provisional, unfinished air about it. It is a “work in progress” that might be further reworked. Its title proposes a topic that needs no further elaboration than two words separated by a slash. It has by now contracted to an internal shorthand reference that

all concerned (the members of CCCS) understand. At the same time it indicates an external reference point, *S/Z* (Barthes, 1975), that elaborated a model for analyzing the various codes that constitute the (literary) text. In itself *E/D* makes no claims whatever to canonical status. It is a text without aspirations to an afterlife.

Thus, the significance of *E/D* might be understood as running counter to the Derridean proposition that “*Il n’y a pas de hors texte*.” The importance of this particular text lies not just in its immanent properties but also in what lies outside it: the issues, concerns, and commitments that called it into existence and that prompted its changes of direction and revisions. These concerns were not static, but evolved over the eight or so years that preceded its emergence in published form. To clarify those concerns is not to furnish a historical backdrop to the text (its “context”). It is to begin to account for the textual features of the published article itself in its provisional and unfinished character. If the text-as-published does not seem to propose itself as something that was conceived in the first place as written-to-be-published, we might reasonably seek its *raison d’être* as residing elsewhere. To illuminate the text in this way, then, is to recover the concerns to which it was a crucial contribution. That means invoking the working life of the Centre in the 1970s and its samizdat culture of writing as work-in-progress, working papers that contribute to the unfolding project of cultural studies, the study of contemporary culture.

Even “insiders” – those who were part of CCCS’s work in the 1970s – may find it hard now to recover the excitement that permeated the Centre at that time; how eagerly, for instance, one awaited the next issue of *WPCS*. When “On Ideology” (*WPCS* 10) appeared in 1977, it was as if in answer to prayer: now at last the rest of us might catch up and find out what on earth it really meant. We knew we were getting it direct from the source, from where the action was. Today, media, communication, and cultural studies are all recognized as cognate areas in higher education, and undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate programs in them are ten a penny. They are furnished with their appropriate fields of inquiry, established bodies of research, and theoretical literatures. But thirty years ago none of this existed. To a very considerable extent, a new academic field emerged from the work of CCCS in the 1970s. It was not clear at the time that that was what, in fact, was happening. Rather, in a brief ten-year span, something extraordinary crystallized at CCCS, inspired by the charismatic brilliance of Stuart Hall, who enthused and energized a generation of students. They would become his disciples going forth to spread the word and establish the academic credentials of something that was yet to be recognized as “cultural studies.”

The period between the first presentation of *E/D* (1973) and its publication (1980) was one of astonishing productivity for Hall himself. The aptly-named “working bibliography” of his writings at the end of a book

produced in his honor by David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (1996) reveals a continuing flow, in these years, of written contributions to an extraordinarily wide range of issues (pp. 504-14). For all the tensions generated by the Centre – and doubtless, in part, because of them – the 1970s was the high point of Hall's work in terms of teaching and writing, and the encoding/decoding model was at the center of both. Colin Sparks (1996) describes it as “one of Hall's major intellectual achievements during [this] period” (p. 86).

By the time *Media, Culture, Language* was published in 1980, Hall had left Birmingham to take up a chair in sociology at the Open University. He had been in CCCS since 1964, and its director since 1968. After fifteen years, he was exhausted:

I felt I'd been through the internal crises of each cultural studies year once too often....Then the question of feminism was very difficult to take...if I'd been opposed to feminism, that would have been a different thing, but I was for it. So, being targeted as 'the enemy', as the senior patriarchal figure, placed me in an impossible position....In the early days of the Centre we were like the Alternative University. There was little separation between staff and students. What I saw emerging was that separation between generations, between statuses – students and teachers – and I didn't want that....So I wanted to leave, because of all these reasons. (Morley & Chen, 1996, p. 500)

Now none of this – the life of the Centre in the 1970s, its “lived reality” – is necessarily relevant to its written output. There is no necessary correspondence between life and works, either in the case of individuals or institutions. However, the rows, the banging doors, the angry silences, the bruised egos were provoked not, as in soap operas, by the grittiness of interpersonal life and family relations, but by passionate commitments to particular political and theoretical positions (Brunsdon, 1996). To hear in the texts produced and published by the Centre the echoes of “the noise of theory,” of things hotly and loudly contested, is to begin to see how they once mattered and what they meant at a time which, though only twenty or thirty years ago, now seems infinitely remote. But why should that matter now? It matters not at all if texts are proposed as autonomous objects of inquiry, uncoupled from their historical conditions of production, palimpsests upon which later readers inscribe their own concerns. That, however, is not the position E/D argues for.

A Model in Opposition

“Encoding/Decoding” can be seen as a response to what was regarded as the dominant paradigm in media scholarship at the time, associated primarily with the American tradition of media effects research. The

mainstream of American work until the late 1960s still carried the hallmarks of a positivist, quantitative, empirically-oriented study of mass media roles in society and their effects on audiences. Interestingly, however, Hall's critique is aimed not at American scholars but rather at a target closer at hand, British media scholarship, which he viewed as belonging in that positivist, empirical tradition. When asked about the origins of the essay in an interview conducted in the early 90s, Hall said:

The piece has a number of different contexts....The first, in a sense, is a kind of methodological/theoretical context, because the paper was delivered to a colloquium, which was organised by the Centre for Mass Communication Research at the University of Leicester. Now the Centre for Mass Communication Research was a traditional centre, using traditional empirical positivistic models of content analysis, audience-effects survey research, etc. So the paper...has a slightly polemical thrust. It's positioned against some of those positions and it's positioned, therefore, against a particular notion of content as a performed and fixed meaning or message. (Cruz & Lewis, 1994, p. 253)

And, a little later:

The encoding/decoding model was not a grand model. I had in my sights the Centre for Mass Communication Research – that was who I was trying to blow out of the water. (p. 255)

Some time later Hall was invited to participate in a Council of Europe colloquy on "Training in the Critical Reading of Television Language" organized by James Halloran, then director of the Centre for Mass Communication Research in Leicester. Hall acknowledges Halloran's contribution to the proceedings as properly raising the question of studying "the whole mass communication process," from the structure of the production message at one end to audience perception and use at the other. However, the key difference between Hall and Halloran (and, more generally, between Birmingham and Leicester) is that the former came out of literary studies (initially concerned with texts, language and meaning), whereas the latter came out of sociology, more particularly American mass communication sociology. Furthermore, the concerns of Hall and of CCCS were beginning to be situated within a specifically Marxist framework, whereas Leicester had no such clear theoretical/political agenda.

The key point of difference, for Hall, is that the communication process, through all its various stages, is not neutral. Mass communication sociology regards communicative failures as kinks in the system, "technical faults in transmission" (1973, p. 19). Through the interventions of professionals in sociology and education, cultural policies might be directed towards "helping the audiences to receive the television communication better, more effectively" (p. 1). As Hall saw it, such a position does not begin to address, does not even see, what the

problem really is: namely that “in societies like ours, communication between the production elites in broadcasting and their audiences is necessarily a form of ‘systematically distorted communication’” (p. 19). The presumed neutrality of both the communicative process and the interventions of academics contributes to that systemic distortion and is, albeit unconsciously, a political choice even if not seen as such:

To ‘misread’ a political choice as a technical one represents a type of unconscious collusion to which social science researchers are all too prone. Though the sources of such mystification are both social and structural, the actual process is greatly facilitated by the operation of discrepant codes. It would not be the first time that scientific researchers had ‘unconsciously’ played a part in the reproduction of hegemony, not only by openly submitting to it, but by simply operating the ‘professional bracket’.
(Hall, 1973, p. 19)

These are the concluding sentences to Hall’s 1973 paper, which clearly fire a broadside at a rival research centre in the same field. They were excised in the 1980 published version, however, for the focus of attention had by then changed.

A Text in Transition

Let us consider, then, which parts of the earlier draft disappear in the later, revised version that gets into print. The focal topic of the Leicester colloquium – television as discourse – in part determined the paper’s address, while its location in part determined the “take” on the topic: what the paper was setting itself against as much as what it was for. What it was arguing for was a semiotic decoding of elements of popular culture, which are variously treated as texts, messages, and practices of signification. To decode the text is not simply to produce a “reading” of the message as if it were in any way transparent. Rather, it invokes a “hermeneutics of suspicion” that regards the forms of popular culture (cinema and television in particular) as “systematically distorted forms of communication.”

This phrase, introduced in quotes in the first paragraph of the paper but not attributed until much later (Hall, 1973, p. 16, n. 23), is from an essay of that title by Jurgen Habermas, which treats Freudian psychoanalysis as a “scientific” resource for unravelling the systematic distortions of the unconscious as manifested in the discourses of patients in the therapeutic situation. If the texts of popular culture are like dreams “that express in

‘disguised’ form the repressed content of a culture” (p. 11), then the critical analytical task is akin to Freudian decodings of the “condensation and displacement [that take place] in the encoding of latent materials and meanings through manifest symbolizations” (p. 10). If “depth analysis” gets through to the latent meanings concealed by the “phenomenal forms” of popular culture, then decoding is the means of cracking open what is hidden (disguised) in their codes. The emerging field of semiotics, most closely associated in the essay with the work of Umberto Eco and Roland Barthes, is used to move between the surface structures of popular texts and their deep, mythic structures. These ideas are developed in a lengthy discussion of the western as a genre in cinema and, later, television (pp. 5-11), no traces of which remain in the published version of the paper.

David Morley and Charlotte Brunsdon (1999), in their engaging account of the working life of the Centre in those years, note that “[t]here were many boxes of something labelled ‘The Western’ in Birmingham in the 1970s, the uncompleted labour of yet another CCCS project” (p. 3). This was doubtless the trace of a much earlier engagement with cinema on Hall’s part. In 1961 he began teaching media, film, and popular culture at Chelsea College, University of London. Through the education department of the British Film Institute, he worked on film and television with Paddy Whannel between 1962 and 1964, which resulted in their joint publication, *The Popular Arts* (1964). But the concern with cinema (a key popular art) and television fiction genres, which was the substantive heart of E/D in 1973, had vanished seven years later.

E/D is thus a text in transition. Present in the first version, but on its way out, is the residual trace of a complex of concerns with the textual analysis of the forms of popular culture. There, but not yet central to the model, is the break into a complex Marxism that would become the defining characteristic of Hall’s work through the 1970s. For this, the concept of ideology would be central. Althusser’s essay on “Ideological State Apparatuses” and Gramsci’s more historical concept of hegemony drawn from *The Prison Notebooks* both take a bow towards the end of the paper. Each had become available in English only a year or so earlier. But neither had yet been fully assimilated into a reworked Marxist analysis of culture, which would become Hall’s most significant contribution to a field of study that he, more than any other individual, helped to establish.

The 1980 Text

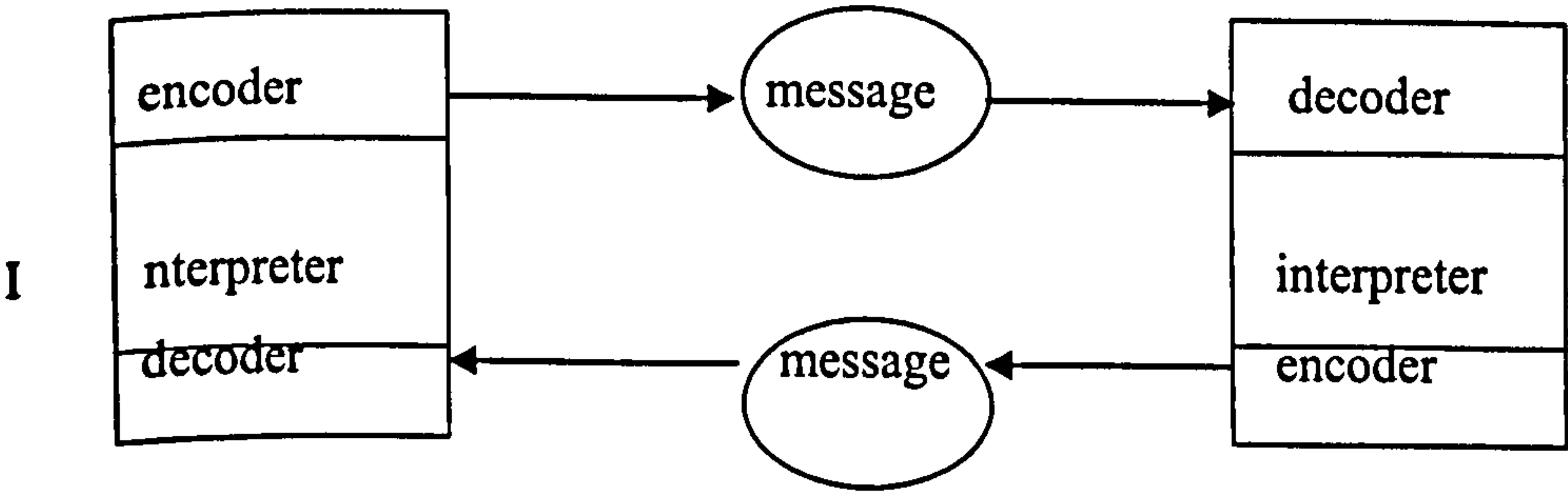
The main difference between the stencilled paper and the text as published is the excision of the semiotics of the western, which reduces the overall length by a third. It has, moreover, been topped and tailed. Gone are the

references to the topic of the colloquium to which it contributed, and the overt polemics against the sociology of mass communication and behaviorist psychology have been much toned down. Whereas the earlier paper read like a contribution to the deconstruction of texts via semiotics, the published version reads like a contribution to the interpretation of texts by audiences within a Marxist/class-based problematic, with the “dominant ideology” as the master concept underpinning the piece. The emphasis in the model and its theoretical base has shifted.

For those reared in the American tradition of mass communication research, an initial reading of the essay may first trigger a sense of *déjà vu*. The terms “encoding” and “decoding” have been familiar since Claude Shannon’s 1949 essay, “Mathematical Theory of Communication,” in which Shannon, an electrical engineer, sought to enhance the integrity of the communication process by protecting messages from being garbled and distorted by “noise.” His model of communication and information processing consisted of

source o encoder o message o decoder o destination

This outline was picked up by Wilbur Schramm, who elaborated the model of the communication process between two people as



Schramm thus introduced notions of feedback into the model, and then further contextualized it within the general framework of social relationship and a sociocultural environment.

Hall’s use of the terminology of encoding and decoding looks superficially like a throwback to the Shannon and Schramm models. But that impression is misleading. Hall begins his essay by referring to the “traditional” model of sender–message–receiver. He then criticizes the linearity of this model with its focus on message exchanges, and offers an alternative model of communication based on Marx’s model of commodity production, comprising the stages of production, circulation, distribution/consumption, and reproduction. Thus, Hall

incorporates the notion of production, essential to an analysis of the mass media as content-producing organizations, into the encoding/decoding framework.

Hall then highlights the institutional structures of the production of media messages, in terms analogous to Marx's "labour process," and uses the encoding/decoding labels to identify what he calls "meaning structure 1," referring to the encoding side of the equation, and "meaning structure 2," referring to the decoding side. The two meaning structures are not necessarily symmetrical. In fact, Hall assumes that they rarely, if ever, overlap. Unlike Shannon, however, Hall is not concerned about this absence of symmetry. On the contrary, he views it as essential to the argument that the decoding process may be independent of the encoded meaning, with a life and power of its own. Thus, while his theoretical framework draws on the basic principles of structuralism and semiology, it also challenges the semiological claim about the power of the encoded text and the notion that meanings are firmly embedded in the text. The receivers of messages are not obliged, in this view, to accept or decode messages as encoded, and can resist the ideological power and influence of the text by applying divergent or oppositional readings.

The model can therefore be applied in at least two ways, depending on whether the emphasis is placed on the moment of encoding or that of decoding. More exactly, what is obscured in titling the piece "Encoding/Decoding" is the crucial question of what is encoded in the first moment and decoded in the second, namely, "the television discourse." To flesh it out more fully: the first moment is "encoding of program (text)-as-discourse," and the second moment is "program (text)-as-discourse of decoding." While the stencilled paper focuses more on the moment of encoding, the published version moved towards the moment of decoding.

This leads to another significant contribution of the essay, namely the introduction of the notion of different modes of decoding. This discussion is adapted from a typology of value systems proposed by Parkin in *Class Inequality and Political Order* (1971). Parkin proposes a threefold typology: a dominant value system, which results in deferential or aspirational orientation among people in a class system; a subordinate value system, leading to accommodative response; and a radical value system, which promotes oppositional interpretation of class inequalities. Hall's typology is, by and large, similar. He labels the first the "dominant-hegemonic position," in which the message is decoded "in terms of the reference code in which it has been encoded." Located within this position is the professional code, "which the professional broadcasters assume when encoding a message which has already been signified in a hegemonic manner." The second he labels the

“negotiated code,” which “contains a mixture of adaptive and oppositional elements.” Finally, the “oppositional code” refers to decoding in a “globally contrary way” (pp. 136-8).

Despite the similarities between Parkin’s and Hall’s typologies, however, there is a basic and significant difference between them. Whereas Parkin’s typology of value systems is essentially a *sociological* one, relating different value systems to class differences, Hall’s typology is *semiological*, deploying the typology to identify different modes of decoding and meaning-making. This shift from the sociological to the semiological provided the theoretical grounding for the first major study informed by the encoding/decoding model, namely, Morley’s *The Nationwide Audience*.

The Nationwide Audience: An Empirical Application

Hall’s 1973 text had a largely internal reference point, produced for the students at CCCS, and the Media Studies Group in particular, as a kind of diagnostic model and toolkit for their work in progress. This largely accounts for the provisional feel of the text and its “incompleteness.” What completes the piece, what validates it (or not), is its application in concrete instances. This is a text whose autonomy is indeed relative – relative, that is, to the work it inspired and supported. In his note on responses to the paper as presented at Leicester, written as an addendum “for Centre Members Only” (note the strong sense of an exclusive in-group), Hall (1973) remarked, “The paper was quite well received, many of the questions being directed to discover whether the centre had begun to make the schema outlined at the end of the paper [i.e., the different ways in which the television message might be decoded] ‘empirical and operational’!” (unnumbered [p.21]). Hall’s exclamation mark signals that Centre members already know the answer to that question. The whole point of the schema was precisely to make it operational, that is, to apply it to television programs and to test empirically whether “real” viewers decode the programs in the ways predicted by the model.

The work of two students in the group, Charlotte Brunsdon and David Morley, was developed precisely to test aspects of the model: namely, the codes of television as inscribed in a particular program, *Nationwide*, and in a separate exercise, how actual viewers made sense of the program’s encoded “ideological problematic” as they had analyzed it. Did viewers “buy” its message unproblematically? Did they adopt a more nuanced (“negotiated”) interpretation of it? Or did they refuse to buy the program’s (ideological) world-view and

possibly come up with an oppositional decoding that “saw through” and unmasked the program’s ideological discourse (a highly specific framing of the meaning of “nationhood”)?

Morley and Brunsdon hoped to run a full check on the model – the moment of encoding, the program as encoded, and the program as decoded by selected viewers – but succeeded in dealing only with the last two. They wanted to study the production process, the internal operational practices, the professional culture of broadcasting, and the “moment of encoding” that yielded the program-as-broadcast (David Morley, personal communication). But that was virtually impossible for, with a few exceptions, access to the BBC for academics was very hard to come by in the 1970s. The model had proposed a tripartite structure whose three “moments” were integrally connected, so that the “proof” of the schema lay in examining all three aspects of it. But it was the model’s subsequent fate to be read with such an emphasis on the moment of decoding that the other two moments were gradually effaced.

Through the 80s and into the 90s, E/D was ritually invoked as the ur-text of a reincarnate audience studies, kick-started by Morley’s work on *Nationwide*. What was lost was the full heuristic value of the model for research into the culture of television. To recover something of the ways in which it was put to use in the Centre, we must flesh out the key theoretical problems it attempted to resolve within the given Marxist take on culture (itself a contentious issue), and to note something of the trajectory of the Media Studies Group across the decade. To address the latter point first is to elaborate further the attempts at the time to implement the model at both the encoding and decoding ends of the process in relation to the professional culture and practice of broadcasting.

Largely overlooked now, but very important at the time, was the Media Group’s detailed study of one *Panorama* program (Hall et al., 1976), the third and final of three programs broadcast during the run-up to the election. It was transmitted on Monday, October 7, 1974, three days prior to polling day, and was called “What Kind of Unity?” – a title that questioned the theme of national unity against a background of resurgent nationalisms in Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland and pressures for political devolution. The paper is a careful analysis of the operations of ideology, understood as the struggle over meanings within an accepted, unquestioned consensus (the legitimacy of parliamentary politics). It is a brilliant exploration of the ways in which preferred meanings are inflected through television discourse which, in this program, was controlled partly by the BBC and partly by representatives of the political parties. What is programmatically sketched in E/D is thus put to work here in a detailed case study of the moment of encoding:

In relation to the messages available through Television we shall suggest that they never deliver one meaning: they are, rather, the site of a plurality of meanings, in which one is preferred and offered to viewers, over the others, as the most appropriate....The broadcasters' encoding practices...aim at establishing a transparency between the presentation of the topic, as embodied in the program, and the view which the audiences 'take' of it. The broadcaster tries, by all the technical and communicative competences at his command, to bring the encoding and decoding moments into alignment: it is an attempt to realise a certain kind of ideological closure, and thereby to establish a preferred reading of the topic....However, it is in the nature of all linguistic systems which employ codes, that more than one reading can potentially be produced.... It follows, in our view, that different audiences...can make more than one reading of what has been encoded. (Hall et al., 1976, pp. 53, 67).

The article is much longer and more closely argued than E/D, as published. Reading both pieces together makes clear the essentially programmatic and diagnostic function of E/D itself, whose subsequent fate was largely to serve as a mandate for the study of how audiences decoded the messages of television. What did not carry forward was the commitment to a careful, detailed analysis of the discourses of television, as exemplified in the *Panorama* and *Nationwide* studies. The focus on the moment of decoding at the expense of the moment of encoding uncoupled whatever audiences made of television programs from the study of the ideological labor that went into their making. Thus, the two halves of an integral model were torn asunder. The unity of E/D itself, in the moment of its publication in 1980, was not retained, since the "moment" of CCCS itself had already passed into history.

The Beginnings of Canonization

It could be argued that by shifting the attention of critical researchers toward the audience, *The Nationwide Audience* unintentionally launched the process of E/D's canonization. In a historical narrative describing the contexts in which the work of CCCS's Media Group took place, Morley identifies the study's two different histories, one external and the other internal. The external context was the political and economic convulsions in Britain in the early 1970s, notably the miners' strike and the eventual ascendance of Margaret Thatcher to 10 Downing Street. The internal one had to do with the

imported mixture of 'continental Marxism' (Althusser, Benjamin and Gramsci) and semiology (Barthes, Eco and Gauthier) which provided what seemed like powerful new theoretical tools with which to address both the general question of the role of ideology in the maintenance and

reproduction of the social order and, more particularly, the role of the media in the dissemination of ideology. (1999, p. 5)

Within that broader framework a more specific trajectory emerged, albeit in a minor key, that focused on the need to develop a better model of the media audience than was offered at the time by either the media effects or uses and gratifications approach. Morley refers here to the “hypodermic needle” approach, on the one hand – an early (and quickly discredited) paradigm of media effects – and the “liberal models of the sovereignty of the media consumer and their relative imperviousness to media influence,” on the other (p. 6). The latter seems to lump together two profoundly different approaches: the “limited effects” school of thought and the uses and gratifications tradition, which holds a wholly different view of audiences as media consumers. While one might object to the easy dismissal of such different approaches to the study of media effects, it is nevertheless correct that absent from these approaches was any theorized discussion of the notion of meanings in media contents, and of audience members making sense of media messages, i.e., their role as decoders. E/D provided a model in which the role of audiences as decoders was reinstated.

The Contribution to Cultural Studies

The publication of E/D not only facilitated a return to the audience in cultural studies, but also gave a new inflection to the role of media organizations as ideological agencies, that is, as encoders. Audiences had been assumed to be passive recipients of media messages, subject to the ideology carried therein. As Morley (1999) notes, “the ‘common sense’ of cultural studies as we have it today, with its taken-for-granted prioritisation of matters of consumption and its recognition of the importance of ‘active audiences’ simply did not exist at the time of *The Nationwide Audience* in 1980.” E/D opened the door for the notion of audience resistance to media messages, inspired by Gramsci’s notion of hegemony as well as by the evidence of ordinary viewers’ consumption of television. Clearly, if securing hegemony required ongoing ideological work, it was due to possible audience resistance. And if media consumption required audience activity in decoding media content, the possibility of resistance was built into the process.

How is Canonization Achieved?

E/D's contribution to media studies would alone have secured its position as a seminal text. It is useful, however, to consider as well the conditions under which *any* scholarly work achieves a position of influence. First is the importance of timing. Although clearly unanticipated at the time, it can be argued in hindsight that the significance of any single piece of scholarship depends on its appearance at the right, and ripe, time. E/D challenged the dominance of positivist social science at a time when this tradition was increasingly under attack. By the time it appeared, the barrenness of social scientific approaches to the study of audiences had become quite apparent. Even the uses and gratifications approach, despite its interesting insights into audience behavior, could not respond adequately to attacks by critical scholars (see, e.g., Elliott, 1974). At the same time, the preoccupation of cultural studies with textual analysis showed a different, and no less damaging, form of myopia with regard to the audience. E/D offered a corrective to both.

Second, E/D offered new and radically different wine in what at first appeared to be old bottles. As suggested earlier, the terminology of encoding and decoding was introduced into the study of communication generally, and mass communication research specifically, almost from the moment of its birth. It was thus well entrenched. While E/D spoke a new language, it may not have struck non-Marxist media scholars as alarmingly revolutionary. Thus, the terminology may have suggested continuity even as it subverted the older conceptual frameworks.

But the test of seminality inheres primarily in a text's capacity to open new doors and trigger new questions. The emergence of reception analysis as a new approach to audience study attests to ED's influence. Within that framework, interest in audience decodings coincided with an awakening to the possible consequences of media globalization. The encoding/decoding framework facilitated new approaches to questions about how audiences in different societies and of different cultures made sense of imported texts crafted in a different cultural environment (see, e.g., Liebes & Katz, 1990; Ang, 1985). This, in turn, highlighted the significance of comparative audience studies. Growing interest in the globalization of television news could now be addressed not only to the institutional dimensions of the process, but also to different national audiences' decodings of television news stories.

A Final (Skeptical) Note

No one is a prophet in his own town. Since the publication of “Encoding/Decoding” questions have been raised about various aspects of the model, not least from inside the critical/Marxist school. Political economists, especially, have been critical of the possibility of audiences negotiating media messages and even resisting their meanings. In a different vein, the notion that a preferred reading is built into the text may be attractive analytically, but is not easy to test empirically. Likewise, assumptions about the dominant mode of encoding raise questions about the intentionality of those who craft the message. More generally, in a polysemic world, any hard and fast classification of modes of encoding and decoding becomes slippery.

The doubts do not stop there. According to Sparks (1996), “Hall appears to have abandoned the attempt to develop [the encoding/decoding] model at the start of the 1980s.” By then, he had turned his attentions elsewhere. In a wide-ranging interview about E/D, Hall reflects on the model and its problems: “the encoding/decoding model wasn’t a grand model...I didn’t think of it as generating a model which would last for the next twenty five years for research. I don’t think it has the theoretical rigor, the internal logical and conceptual consistency for that.” Later, on the problems of testing the model, he says:

Morley’s work is not quite the encoding/decoding model...it wasn’t a model which was specifically designed to be the reference of a long period of empirical work. It’s only once I have written it that I saw that if you were going to contest an old model of audience research and open a new one, then somebody’s going to try and put it into effect. And then, with Dave Morley, we had the real problem: how the hell do you actually test it with some actual folks?

But never mind. As we argued at the opening of this essay, despite the problems, the difficulties, the doubts, and the self-doubts, the canonic status of a text often inheres not in the text itself but in what it brings about. Some texts are born canonic, some achieve canonization, and some (at their peril?), have canonization thrust upon them.

References

Ang, I. (1985): *Watching Dallas: Soap Opera and the Melodramatic Imagination*. London: Methuen.

Barthes, R. (1975): *S/Z*. Paris: Edition du Seuil.

Brunsdon, C. (1996): "A Thief in the Night: Stories of Feminism in the 1970s at CCCS". In D. Morley and K-H Chen (eds), *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues*. London: Routledge.

Burns, T. (1977): *The BBC: Public Institution and Private World*. London: Macmillan.

Cruz, J. and Lewis, J. (1994): *Viewing, Reading, Listening: Audiences and Cultural Reception*. Boulder: Westview Press.

Elliott, P. (1972): *The Making of a Television Series: A Case Study in the Sociology of Culture*. London: Constable.

Habermas, J. (1970): "Systematically Distorted Communication". In P. Dretzel (ed.), *Recent Sociology*, 2. London: Collier-Macmillan.

Hall, S. (1973): "Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse". Stencilled Paper 7. University of Birmingham: CCCS.

Hall, S. (1977): "Culture, the Media and the 'Ideological Effect'". In J. Curran et al (eds), *Mass Communication and Society*. London: Edward Arnold, 315-48.

Hall, S. (1980a): "Encoding/Decoding". In *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-1979*. London: Hutchison, 128-38.

Hall, S. (1980b): "Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms". *Media, Culture & Society* 2(1), 57-72.

Hall, S. (1982): "The Rediscovery of 'Ideology': Return of the Repressed in Media Studies". In M. Gurevitch et al (eds), *Culture, Society and the Media*, London: Methuen, 56-90.

Hall, S., Connell, I. and Curti, L. (1976): "The 'Unity' of Current Affairs Television". *Working Papers in Cultural Studies* 9. Birmingham University: CCCS. 51-94

Hall, S. and Whannel, P. (1967): *The Popular Arts*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Liebes, T. and Katz, E. (1990): *The Export of Meaning: Cross-cultural Readings of Dallas*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Morley, D. and Brunsdon, C. (1999): "The Nationwide Project: Long Ago and Far Away...". *The Nationwide Television Studies*. London: Routledge.

Morley, D. and Chen, H-K. (1996): *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues*. London: Routledge.

Parkin, F. (1971): *Class Inequality and Political Order*. New York, Praeger.

Schlesinger, P. (1978): *Putting "Reality" Together: BBC News*. London: Constable.

Sparks, C. (1996): "Stuart Hall, Cultural Studies and Marxism". *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues*, London: Routledge.

Media Organisations and Production.
Simon Cottle (ed.): 72-98
London: Sage (2003)

Chapter Three

**The *Brains Trust* (1941):
the management of live-to-air talk on radio**

Introduction

We study the past in order to understand the present. What today is familiar and taken for granted once was not so. There was a time when radio and television did not exist. When these new social technologies of communication began their historical, institutional life those involved were faced with the task of finding immediate, practical solutions to the question of how to ‘do’ broadcasting across the whole range of an emerging programme output. What is radio news? What is television news? In each case, starting from scratch, answers had to be found to such basic questions by those who pioneered what we now simply take for granted. Today everyone *knows* what broadcast news is, by virtue of routine broadcast practices that produce it as such. In this chapter I engage with another fundamental problem for broadcasters, from the beginning through to today, namely the management of liveness, perhaps the most basic characteristic of radio and television. I want to show what the problems of live broadcasting are and, at the same time, how they can be dealt with successfully so that the effects of liveness are precisely what audiences respond to and enjoy. I will focus this issue in terms of the management of spontaneous, unscripted live-to-air discussion on radio, something by now so utterly familiar that it is hard to see what the problems with it might be. In order to do so we must go back to a time when such talk was not the norm on radio and try to uncover what prompted moves in the direction of live, unscripted discussion for listeners and how it was done.

I first tell the story of the production of a single wartime BBC radio programme, the *Brains Trust*. Although it is, I think, an interesting story in its own right, it serves to illuminate some of the most enduring characteristics of radio as a broadcast medium, and is meant as a contribution to our understanding of radio today. My account is based on primary sources drawn from the BBC’s written and sound archives and from contemporary accounts by those most intimately involved in the programme. But the focus of this chapter is not on the

history of the BBC, or on how to do historical research which I have discussed elsewhere (Scannell 2002). It is rather on the pre-history of programmes-as-broadcast; the whole complex, hidden process of coming up with an idea for a programme and its subsequent development from concept to realisation as a transmitted broadcast. At the heart of my discussion is a concern with the communicative intentionality of this process. Talk is seemingly the most natural of things, but talk on radio is not quite the same as the ordinary everyday conversations that we have with one another. It has an institutional setting. It is something to be *managed* by the broadcasters in ways that include, rather than exclude listeners. For it to be effective it must speak to listeners and the circumstances of listening. The talk that goes on air must appear to listeners as meant and intended for them. The aim of this chapter is to show how this is the outcome of invisible institutional practices that produce talk on radio as an entertainment, a good in itself, for the enjoyment of listeners.

The Brains Trust

The *Brains Trust* was the first live, unscripted discussion programme on British radio in which the speakers responded spontaneously and without foreknowledge of them, to questions sent in by listeners.¹ It began in response to a request by the planners of the Forces Programme, in the autumn of 1940, for something that would alleviate the boredom of the troops in their billets and at the same time respond to an identified felt need for information and discussion in the most general sense. This particular programme request could have gone to any one of three production departments for development: Talks, Features or Variety. Each had a quite different internal culture, with a different ethos in relation to their common task of making programmes. In short, if the programme went to Talks its defining communicative characteristic would be 'intellectual; if it went to Features, it would be 'artistic', and if it went to Variety it would be 'entertaining'.² It was therefore a crucial decision to send it to Variety, thereby prefiguring the decisive communicative form the programme would take. But even then, within any production centre there are different producers with different attitudes and styles towards the common task of producing, in the case of Variety, entertainment. Thus, it was significant (it made a difference to the subsequent history of the program) that the Head of Variety, John Watt, chose to delegate its development to the good genius of Howard Thomas. Individuals can and do

1. What follows is mainly drawn from Howard Thomas's accounts of the programme (Thomas 1944, 1977), which he treats as very much his own creation. The production files in the BCC Written Archives at Caversham (WAC) show that this claim, which Thomas vigorously asserted (demanding that the programme be billed as 'originated by Howard Thomas') was disputed within the Corporation partly because the original demand for a question/answer programme was handed to the production departments from programme planning, partly because Douglas Cleverdon was, from the beginning, the programme's co-producer and partly because of a corporate culture of anonymity. There was much conflict about all this at the time, but there is no doubt that the *Brain's Trust* was Thomas's brainchild.

² See Scannell and Cardiff (1991) for detailed accounts of the formation and development of these areas of production in the pre-war BBC.

make a difference within the corporate culture of production in the BBC, which Thomas had joined in 1940, from a career until then in advertising and commercial radio.

The brief Thomas received from Watt was succinct: to create an informational programme that was 'serious in intention, light in character'. The form that the programme eventually took was 'no sudden inspiration. Like most good and simple ideas it was hammered out during weeks of hard thinking' (Thomas 1944: 13). Thomas wanted a programme with 'mass appeal', to bring listeners into 'personal' contact with some of the best brains of the day in the most friendly and informal way. They had of course been heard on radio before. Indeed the mission of the Talks Department, before the war had been precisely that. Yet if the idea had been developed by Talks, so Thomas argued, it would have put enlightenment before entertainment whereas he put a premium on the latter. The kind of talk that Thomas wanted to capture was something like table-talk, the lively after dinner conversation of the educated intelligentsia. 'Spontaneous answers by interesting people, that was it'. The key to securing the effect of liveliness and spontaneity was to have a panel of speakers and a Question Master (Howard coined the term) to introduce the speakers, to set them the questions and to control and manage the talk that went out over the air.

Thomas put up his ideas for a programme he originally thought of calling *Any Questions*³ in a seven page memorandum (26 November 1940. WAC 51/23/1). It was accepted and he now began the task of transforming ideas into reality. Questions were invited, on air, and they came in, at first in a trickle then a torrent. By the time its fame was established the programme received two and a half thousand questions a week, rising to a peak of just under four thousand. It took two staff two full days each week to deal with such a volume of mail. Many letter writers wanted further information on topics discussed the previous week, and they were supplied, where appropriate, with suggestions for further reading. Questions suitable for the programme were classified into broad topic areas and then selected both for variety of subject and in relation to the interests and personalities of the speakers. Thomas would then go home with a bundle of about a hundred possible candidate questions and whittle them down to a dozen or fifteen. These were then typed up and passed to Basil Nicolls for final approval.

3. A program of this name began on West Region October 12 1948. The title was conceived quite independently, but it was based on the *Brains Trust* format, and invited questions on current political issues from a live audience to be answered by a panel of four (of whom two at least were always MPs) through the program's host (or question master). *Any Questions* is still running on BBC Radio 4 today, more than half a century later. Its companion program on Radio 4 is *Any Answers* in which listeners respond on air to the issues raised each week in *Any Questions*. The format transferred to television in the 1970s and *Question Time* (BBC 1) remains the BBC's long running flagship program for the weekly discussion of current affairs. Thus a concept developed over sixty years ago is still in use today

The vetting of the question list was partly to do with the circumstances of wartime broadcasting, but as much to do with the internal culture of the BBC where 'referral up' by producers on matters that might have policy implications was by now deeply engrained in the institutional culture. Until the end of 1942 Basil Nicolls, as Controller of Programmes, was solely responsible for vetting the programme. On one occasion he wrote to the producer instructing him to avoid 'all questions involving religion, political philosophy or vague generalities about life'. He routinely weeded out anything that he thought might cause 'irritation in Parliament'. At the beginning of 1943 the Board of Governors relieved Nicolls of his task only to take it upon themselves. They solemnly debated whether or not a question on the profit motive should have been allowed (in their view it should not) and it was they who dealt with a request from the Archbishop of Canterbury that there should be at least one regular member of the programme who spoke for Christian opinion.

All this interference from above came to be deeply irksome for the regular speakers and for Howard Thomas. But his main concern, as the questions began to come in, was to pick the right speakers and then find the right way to bring out the best in them at the microphone. He found a perfect mix in the balance between the characters and performances of the three regular panellists. There was Julian Huxley, the scientist: knowledgeable and factual, perhaps rather dry and occasionally irritable, but whose solidity and seriousness was the backbone of the programme. Then there was Cyril Joad—never short of an opinion, widely read, a fluent and occasionally brilliant speaker who, even if he didn't know what he was talking about, was never dull. He and Huxley were perfect foils; their disrespect for each other's views and their willingness to 'mix it' brought a clash that attracted millions. These two, though very different, were clearly 'brains'. The last in the original triumvirate was not, but Thomas insisted on him, overriding Cleverdon's objections and arguing that it was essential to have a link between the professors and the listeners who had never heard a professor. Archibald Bruce Campbell, an ex-navy man, was widely travelled with a colourful turn of speech and an attractive broadcasting manner. His no-nonsense common sense views could bring the talk down to earth again after the lofty flights of Joad. Campbell was relished by listeners for his curious bits of information and odd facts. He once declared on the programme, in all seriousness, that he knew a man so allergic to marmalade that whenever he ate it for breakfast, steam came out of his head. Like the other two, he was a natural performer. Thomas did not create, or even develop their radio characters, but he did carefully choose them *as* a combination. What they stood for seemed, to him, the right blend; the cool brain, the ready tongue, the voice of experience (Thomas 1977: 74).

as the BBC's preferred format for the discussion of politics on both radio and television.

The programme was recorded each week on Friday afternoon, either on film or tape, in the BBC's Maida Vale studios. It was recorded 'live', in one continuous take, as the discussion unfolded in the studio.⁴ Although there was sporadic behind the scenes discussion about whether the programme should be transmitted live-to-air, recording was preferred for a number of reasons. In the early years of the war, all programmes were scripted for security reasons, and it was to overcome this considerable handicap to its spontaneity that Thomas decided to record it each week (Thomas 1944: 82). There were further advantages. It gave time-flexibility to broadcasters and performers allowing the programme to be recorded at a time convenient for the panellists and freeing them from the obligation to be in a BBC studio each week at the time of the programme's transmission. Moreover it gave the possibilities of repeats (the programme was broadcast twice weekly) and for transmission in the BBC's rapidly expanding wartime overseas services.

Before the weekly recording session Thomas first took the weekly panellists out to lunch at the BBC's expense. A drink or two—no more—lest excess should dull their subsequent performance, was allowed to the participants. Both food and drink, as legitimate programme costs, had to be wrung from an unwilling BBC administration, but Thomas defended the expense as a necessary preliminary to getting the best out of the speakers. It helped them to relax, it introduced guests to the regulars, it created familiarity, it loosened tongues. In short, a good lunch accompanied (hopefully) by good table-talk was the best way to begin to loosen up the participants for the talk-to-come. Once in the studio they were seated at a table with a microphone in the middle. Every session began with a ten-minute warm-up with a couple of unrecorded questions put to the panel by McCullough. This preliminary was essential in a number of ways. It was indispensable for newcomers, allowing Howard Thomas to spot their idiosyncrasies and, where possible, correct them. Some, when speaking, would turn to the person next to them, thus deflecting their voice from the microphone. Others would talk at the table, holding their heads down as they spoke. Others covered their mouths. There was the occasional over-emphatic table-thumper. Some could not keep still, leaning forwards then stretching backwards, twisting and turning their heads - the result, as heard by listeners, was an unpleasant series of gushes and fades as their voices came and went. While Thomas attended to such matters the sound-engineers attended to the properties of the speakers' voices in relation to

4. Liveness should not be confused with immediacy. A programme, in order to be 'live', does not necessarily have to be transmitted in the moment of its production (ie in real time). The effect of liveness is preserved in recording in a number of ways (Bourdon 2000), but most simply by recording in one continuous unbroken take. Continuity editing, very common today, procures the same effect. I have found no evidence of post-production interventions to tidy up, for whatever reason, the original 'live' recordings of the *Brains Trust*.

the microphone and its properties. Pitch and volume had to be adjusted and balanced to produce an even-sounding programme for absent ears. Shouters could be softened, whisperers coaxed to increase their volume. Naturally loud voices were placed at the corners of the table, at an angle to the microphone. Quiet voices were placed full on to it. As a rule this was where women were positioned to stop them raising their voices and sounding shrill. Joad and Huxley were always placed opposite each other to allow them to spar more easily.

After the warm-up the programme quickly slipped into the real thing. The green light came on. The programme was now 'on record' and McCullough deftly introduced each participant before sailing into the first question. Thomas himself always sat in on the sessions. Positioned slightly behind McCullough and away from the table he tried, from moment to moment, to hear the talk with an ear for the listener. When he felt a discussion was getting too wordy he would pass a note to the question master telling him to wrap it up. Thomas was always keenly sensitive to the programme's pace, tempo and balance. To maintain tempo he would, if necessary, switch the order of questions. If for instance Joad had discoursed at length on a philosophical question he would tell McCullough to bring forward a question on snakes for Huxley.

It was extraordinarily hard to convince listeners that the talk was completely unrehearsed. The BBC publicly guaranteed the questions were not known in advance by any of the panel. Thomas would point out how it was virtually impossible to read a prepared script in the completely natural manner that characterised the *Brains Trust*. If speakers knew the questions ahead of their of their replies their answers would be duller, longer, less provoking. It was the spontaneity, the slips, the verbal clutchings in mid-air and the occasional flooring of the speakers that listeners enjoyed. Spontaneity, as an achieved effect-in-public, as an effect-for-others, never simply happens. It must be planned and worked for. If it is to be achieved it must be so effortlessly. Here is Joad, in full flight, on the question, 'what is happiness?'

In Aristotle's famous metaphor it's like the bloom on a young man's cheek in perfect health. It's not a part of health, but it's something added. It's a sign that the organism is functioning appropriately on an appropriate subject matter. Well now I should think I should like to put that by saying that happiness is something that doesn't yield itself to direct pursuit but comes incidentally. It's not a house that can be built with men's hands. It's like the kingdom of heaven, it can't be taken by storm. It's like a flower that surprises you, a sort of song that you hear as you pass a hedge rising suddenly into the night. I'd I'd like to say that er really the best recipe for happiness that I know is not to have leisure enough to wonder whether you're being miserable or not. In other words, it's a by-product of activity.

(.)

McCullough. Well I'm sure that uh (.) all over the country uh (.) at the end of that (.) answer to that question there was a burst of applause. I would just like to say that ah professor Joad answered that without any notes and without

knowing what the question was. .Hhh you may find it difficult to believe I do very much so sitting here watching him and I congratulate him.

Talk in public

The immediate impact of the *Brains Trust* in wartime Britain, was in large part due to a felt need for spontaneous, open public discussion in a time of grave national crisis. The three regular speakers, Huxley, Joad and Campbell became household names, and their idioms of speech quickly became catch-phrases: 'It all depends what you mean' (Joad), 'When I was in Patagonia' (Campbell). At the height of the programme's popularity *Life* magazine sent over its star photographer from the USA for a three page photo-spread and special filmed versions were recorded and shown in the Odeon cinema chain.⁵ In many cinemas there was a buzz of discussion as they were shown and in some, bursts of applause. In the Mile End, Fulham and the Elephant and Castle the reception was unfriendly. 'What's the difference between Right and Left?' caused such an uproar in one or two cinemas that the film was taken off before its run was over (Thomas: 1944: 25). Within a couple of years the *Brains Trust* format was being copied everywhere, including the fictional village in which the ten year old William Brown lived:

It was the time when the Brains Trust movement, so rashly started by the BBC, was sweeping England. Every town, every village, every parish, every street had its Brains Trust, at whose meetings earnest seekers after knowledge discussed the scientific, political or economic problems of the day.... The village in which William lived was not immune from this latest craze. A local Brains Trust, under the direction of Mr. Markson, the head master of the school which William attended and the acknowledged intellectual leader of the neighbourhood, met regularly at the various members' houses and discussed such things as the Theory of Time, the Beveridge Report, Post-War Reconstruction and the Origin of Matter. [Crompton 1989: 1]

William was not particularly interested in any of this. He had listened once to the BBC Brains Trust on the wireless and had been so bored that he had taken care never to listen again. But the impact of the programme on the grown-up world at that time was enormous. In London political

5. The WAC press cuttings for the Forces Programme (1941-45) show how continuously newsworthy the *Brains Trust* and its three 'resident' performers became for the daily and weekly press. There was a photo-feature spread on the programme in *Picture Post* (3 August 1941), and *Illustrated* (3 November 1941) ran a cover story on 'Why Professor Joad plays hockey'. The front-page photograph showed the 50 year old Joad in shorts surrounded by young women kitted up, apparently, for a game of hockey.

meetings were arranged according to the Brains Trust format, complete with question master.⁶ They were, in Thomas's account, very successful, helping to dissolve the barrier between platform and audience, and displacing the solo performer, the drab speaker 'who trudged through his notes and unloaded his clichés on an unhappy audience' (Thomas 1944: 9). When millions of people had become accustomed to ready speech, ready wit and cogent arguments, Thomas predicted, they would have neither time nor patience for the old-style Public Speaker. The *Brains Trust* had two kinds of listener: those who attended to the substance of what was said—the 'earnest seekers after knowledge'—and those who were entertained by the personalities of the speakers, the crackle of opposing opinion, by the play of wit and the occasional sheer brilliance of the talk. The programme's format was a device for producing such effects; talk-in-public as an art, the art of conversation.

The recently developed history of conversation reveals something of the anxieties experienced, over the centuries, by people when, in social gatherings, they know they will be called upon to enter into conversation with strangers. Conversation, of course, leaves no historical trace, but since the beginning of book publishing there has been a continuing flow of guides and manuals to conversation throughout Europe, offering advice to the anxious about how to succeed in this social art (Burke 1993: 89-122). Much of the advice, in the many European manuals and guides from the 17th century onwards, amounts to the kinds of common-sense considerations attended to both by the producer of and the listeners to the *Brains Trust*. Don't talk about yourself all the time; don't monopolise the talk; don't talk too long; don't interrupt..... such commonplace rules of conversation have, as Peter Burke notes, been passed on down through the centuries (Burke 1993: 94). The last point was particularly keenly felt by listeners to Joad and company. Howard Thomas notes that on one occasion a lady MP, who was particularly prone to jump in while others were talking, received over 800 letters of complaint. Equally listeners disliked too many *ers* and *ums* - guest speakers and McCullough were frequently taken to task for this failing. All listeners admired the felicity of fluent, extempore speech.

If we ask where, in England, such an art was supposedly cultivated we return to the dinner table, or more exactly the high tables of 19th century Oxford and Cambridge. At those tables, Matthew Arnold noted, there were 'professional conversationalists, as at the present time there

6. There were Agricultural Brains Trusts for farmers; Dig For Victory Brains Trusts for allotment holders and gardeners; Army, Navy and Air Force Brains Trusts; Women's Institute Brains Trusts, and even - on the BBC - a Religious Brains Trust called *The Anvil* which was not, however, a success. 'Made of tin, and they strike it with cardboard hammers' was the unkind description of it in the House of Commons (Thomas 1944: 10) See also *BBC Handbook* (1942: 72-3) for further details of the immediate impact of the *Brains Trust*.

are professional beauties' (St George 1993: 50). Those with a reputation as 'conversationalists' were, in the 19th century, frequently invited to dinner in the expectation that they would sparkle at the table while others would listen. They would go primed with a supply of information, anecdotes and witty epigrams that they had already prepared and committed to heart, and they arrived determined to get through their fund of talk no matter what (Benson 1920: 66). Joad granted that he, as a university professor, was quite at home with the idea of saying publicly what he thought about all manner of things because that, so to speak, went with the job. Huxley belonged to a distinguished family which, over several generations, had established itself - by the achievements of individual members and by inter-marriage with other such families - as a leading clan in what Noel Annan has called the British 'intellectual aristocracy'. Pierre Bourdieu, in his monumental study of cultural distinctions as markers of social difference, discusses what he calls 'the entitlement effect' in relation to the academic elite in particular (Bourdieu 1984: 18-25). By virtue of his status *as* a professor someone like Claude Lévi-Strauss (a well-known French academic in the 1960s) was, he argued, entitled to speak outside his own particular sphere of knowledge (anthropology), and indeed derived additional prestige from so doing. It is thus entirely apt for someone who is, as the French say, an accredited *maître penseur*, to appear on radio or television talk-shows and hold forth on art, politics and the state of the world in general. Such publicly performed fluency is part of the job of being a public person.

Such persons were invariably men. In mixed social gatherings women rarely spoke other than to admire, flatter or encourage males holding forth. As for public speaking, women were invisible since there were virtually no openings for them in public life. Thus, finding good women speakers for the *Brains Trust* was one of Thomas's hardest tasks. Women, he declared, had never inspired affection on radio. They did not seem to radiate the warmth, geniality and friendliness a man could engender. They were more conscious of their radio audience, more inclined to think in terms of how they sounded to listeners and thus tended to become too self-aware and unnatural. It was hard to find a 'human' woman. They were over-careful and over cultured in their speech and it was no easy matter to find women who could mix, 'in something of an after-dinner fashion with a company of men'.⁷ In spite of all this Thomas did discover some excellent regular women participants for the programme, most notably Agnes Hamilton, Jennie Lee, Dr Edith Summerskill and, above all, Barbara Ward whose lucid answers and attractive style made her a favourite with listeners. These, along with Sir Malcom Sargent, Kenneth Clarke, Gilbert Murray, Sir William Beveridge and an unnamed 'eminent physician'

⁷ It was a commonplace prejudice amongst (male) broadcasters at the time that women did not make good broadcasters. The characteristics described by Thomas are all attributable to the lack of confidence, exacerbated by lack of experience, which made women acutely self-conscious when

(Lord Moran, Churchill's doctor) made up the roll-call of the best-liked regular guests on the programme in its first few years.

Today we all assume that we are all entitled to our opinions; not merely to 'think' them, but to express them publicly and have them respected (or, at least, allowed) by others. At the start of the 21st century the notion of discussing things in public and in private, as something that anyone and everyone does, is entirely unremarkable. But it was not always so. Broadcasting, in the last century, transformed our ideas about who was entitled to have opinions and on what. In the early 20th century, in British society, there was a great deal that could not be talked about in private or in public. It was a conversational convention that sex, religion and politics were not suitable topics for discussion—are at least not in the presence of women, children or servants. The loosening of 'the universe of discourse' (of what can be talked about and by whom) is a feature of the second half of the 20th century. It is intimately linked with the ubiquitous presence of radio and television broadcasting in the daily lives of whole populations whose combined effect has been the transformation of the social and political public sphere.

From scripted to unscripted talk

The most basic characteristic of radio and television, as time-based media, is that they are potentially live to air and in real time. In live, real-time broadcasting there is no interval between the production, transmission and reception of programmes, and in the early years of radio and, later, television, *all* broadcasting was live and in real time. In such circumstances, what is effective talk on air? The pre-war BBC Talks Department came gradually to see that the talk it produced for transmission should try to be like ordinary conversation. It was understood that listeners did not want to hear sermons, or lectures or political speeches, the prevalent forms of talk-in-public at the time (Matheson 1933). In the course of the 1930s the Talks Department experimented with a variety of styles of talk that they hoped would encourage listeners to listen (Scannell and Cardiff 1991: 153-180). Listening to radio was a leisure activity, a pastime located in the contexts of ordinary, daily, domestic life. Radio talk, for it to become effective, had to learn to move from existing forms of public talk towards the usual forms of talk-in-private; conversation, chat, ordinary plain talk, the talk that goes on at home, on the buses or in the playground between families, friends or work colleagues. But the key difference between such talk and radio talk for the first twenty years or so of the

speaking at the microphone.

BBC's activities is that all talk on radio was scripted in advance and read to air in live transmission.

Not the least of the benefits of scripted talk, from the BBC's point of view, was that it allowed complete institutional control over what could be said at the microphone. In other words it was, potentially, a form of censorship. Offensive, libellous or politically dangerous remarks could be (and were) pencilled out of the scripts submitted in advance to the Talks Department by those invited to speak at the microphone. So long as speakers stuck to the script, and they invariably did, there was no danger of them saying the wrong thing. There is no doubt that the control of live talk on radio through the requirement that it be scripted served, in part, as a useful way of eliminating in advance the possibility of something untoward or unacceptable being said on air. So long as speakers stuck to the script, and they invariably did, there was no danger of them saying the wrong thing. But what if a speaker went off-script? It very seldom happened, but on one notorious occasion it did. In a twelve part Talks series broadcast in 1933 on *The National Character* a number of speakers from different walks of life came to the microphone to testify to the essential qualities of the true born Englishman. One of the speakers was William Ferrie, chosen to represent the English working man's point of view. There were difficulties with the script that he submitted to the Department. It made much of the economic exploitation of the working class (Ferrie was a Trades Union representative), it drew attention to the rise of fascism in Europe (a topic then studiously avoided by the BBC) and suggested that the workers were looking to Russia for a solution. Most of this was cut—on the grounds that it was not relevant to the topic—and Ferrie apparently accepted the changes to his manuscript. But on the night, when he came to the microphone, he abandoned his script, protested at the ways in which his talk had been censored and left the studio. Silence ensued for the next fifteen minutes, since there was nothing to replace him. It was the realization of the BBC's worst nightmare and the left-wing press (the *Daily Herald* and the *Daily Worker*) had a field day with the incident—it was proof of the censorship of left-wing political opinion by the BBC which they had long suspected (Scannell and Cardiff 1991: 290-1).

But this will not suffice as a sufficient explanation of the BBC's initial preference for scripted talk at the microphone. There were other issues to do with the riskiness of live-to-air talk that had nothing to do with the dangers of politically unacceptable talk. Perhaps the primary problem posed by live broadcasting is negative. Any live situation is inherently fragile. There is always the possibility, at any moment, that things could go wrong and hence there is an ever-present imperative to avoid cock-ups, for if things do go wrong this is immediately and unavoidably visible to the audience. It can be a painfully embarrassing experience, for

instance, when actors forget their lines on stage. The hidden prompter, who is following the script of the play, is there to provide a cue and thus to rescue the situation, but even so this back-up system cannot disguise the momentary failure or break-down of the performance. For the pre-war BBC the script was safety-net that protected the performer, the production department, and the corporation itself.

The decision to allow unscripted talk by the wartime BBC indicates a sharpened awareness of its listeners. And if we ask why this was not (as might be expected) a cardinal consideration from the start, two answers suggest themselves. First, there is the social composition of the broadcasters. From the beginning through to the present, the BBC has been predominantly staffed, in its senior levels of policy and programme making, by a middleclass, professional, male intelligentsia. Thus the ethos of public service, as it came to be articulated before the war, was one which presumed that the task of broadcasting was one of cultural enrichment and that, moreover, the broadcasters knew what that meant and required without needing to take its audiences into account. Whereas the logic of commercial broadcasting impels those concerned to consider what their audiences might want, the logic of public service broadcasting as a state regulated monopoly had no such inner compulsion. The ‘brute force’ of the monopoly was the second crucial factor that delayed the impact of audience needs upon the collective corporate consciousness of the BBC.

I have indicated that the relationship between broadcasters and their audiences is an unforced one, because it is unenforceable (Scannell 1991:2). Broadcasters cannot make their audience listen in the ways they would wish because, unlike performers in a church or theatre, they have no sanctions against them. But audiences do have one very powerful sanction against the broadcasters if they do not like what they are getting. They can immediately switch to another service. In monopoly conditions however, the only alternative was to switch off. Minimally, it could be argued, the BBC’s services were better than nothing. The brute force of the monopoly gave the broadcasters the power to impose their vision of what broadcasting should be upon their audiences without consultation or consideration of what they might want, because there were no internal or external pressures to do so. What has propelled the BBC in the direction of popularising its services has often been linked to the ‘threat’ of competition, most notably when commercial television was introduced in 1954. In 1940 the exigencies of total war immediately compelled a quite new attention to listeners and a desire to involve them more in programmes. Audience participation, through the simple device of inviting listeners to send in questions, was as much a novelty as unscripted discussion.

All the key management decisions taken about the *Brains Trust* (including the recognition by the programme planners of the Forces Programme of the need for such a programme) must be understood as driven by the wartime imperative to connect with audiences in the interests of national morale, for that was the crucial mission of the BBC on the 'home front'. The Forces Programme reversed, at a stroke, the thinking of the pre-war BBC. It was, from the start, thought of from the point of view of its listeners (in the first place the troops and, after Dunkirk, the home-land audience of Britain) and what they might want, rather than from the point of view of the broadcasters and what they thought they should provide for listeners. From the beginning the programme planners of this radically new service took into account the circumstances of listening and what listeners might want to hear from it.

The emphasis on entertainment is indicative of this changing attitude to listeners and prompted the key decision (unthinkable before the war) to give the task of developing the programme to Variety (responsible for entertainment) rather than Talks. The choice of Howard Thomas was equally extraordinary. Howard Thomas was not an insider. He did not share the corporate ethos, the values of the production culture of the BBC at that time. It is hard, indeed, to imagine someone like him being recruited into the BBC except in the exceptional circumstances of war.⁸ Thomas was a pioneer programme maker for commercial radio in the late 1930s. He worked in the London office of J. Walter Thompson, one of the largest American advertising agencies, and made variety programmes sponsored by the manufacturers of brand-name goods. His shows were recorded on disc in JWT's own radio studio, for transmission back to Britain from mainland Europe by Radio Luxembourg. The culture of commercial radio in the 1930s was very different from that of the BBC. It was populist and popular, and built round star performers—band leaders, singers and entertainers (Thomas 1977: 32-44). Before the war the BBC had tried at first to crush Radio Luxembourg and then grudgingly to compete with it (Scannell and Cardiff 1991: 230-2). When war broke out Luxembourg closed down immediately, and the BBC now recruited one of its leading producers. It is not surprising that two of the most successful wartime programmes—the *Brains Trust* and *Sincerely Yours, Vera Lynn*—were produced in the BBC by an outsider from commercial radio.⁹

9. He didn't last long, handing in his three months notice of resignation in November 1943 because of 'irksome restrictions' on his work. His name was then immediately withdrawn from the billings of the *Brains Trust* even though he continued to produce it while he worked out his contract. At this Thomas went public, denouncing the petty mindedness of the BBC and declaring that he was the original and only begetter of the programme. Details in WAC Press Cuttings, Forces Programme 1944 (2): P200

⁹ For a detailed discussion of the impact of Vera Lynn on wartime radio see Scannell 1996: 58-74

The management of liveness

I have thus far considered the management of liveness in negative terms, as a problem that needs to be controlled in order to avoid technical failure and human error or deviation. But this does not begin to explain why the production of live talk at the microphone should be such a desirable thing, nor why, when done well it should meet with such instant acclaim as the *Brains Trust* did. For all its advantages in terms of control, the basic problem with scripted talk is that it is boring. Everyone can immediately hear the difference between scripted and unscripted talk. To our ears scripted talk sounds flat, dull, lacking in spontaneity and immediacy in comparison with what we take to be the *real* thing: spontaneous, natural, unscripted and, essentially, *live* talk. Pre-war talk on radio almost always meant *a* talk written and presented by an authority or expert of some sort; talk as monologue. Talk as discussion—a group of people talking on a range of given topics in the studio—scarcely existed. The programme's immediate impact testifies to the pleasure of hearing real live talk between people, live on radio. Let us see how it was managed, bearing in mind that the key design consideration is that this talk should be something that listeners would, in fact, want to listen to. This means that it must somehow show, in the design of the talk, that it is managed with listeners in mind; that listeners can recognize that the talk produced on radio is, in the first place, *for* them. The radio audience is not an overhearing audience. To overhear means to listen to something not meant or intended for the overhearer. If you tap into a crossed line on the phone you are eavesdropping on talk between two people producing talk with and for each other, but not for you, the absent third party. Is radio talk like that? And if not, must it not be the case that talk-on-radio should somehow be evidently and hearably meant to be listened to by listeners?

In an essay on 'Conversation' written a decade or so before broadcasting began in Britain, A. C. Benson suggested that what was most needed in social gatherings was 'a kind of moderator of the talk, an informal president':

The perfect moderator should have a large stock of subjects of general interest. He should, so to speak, kick off. And then he should either feel, or at least artfully simulate, an interest in other people's point of view. He should ask questions, reply to arguments, encourage, elicit expressions of opinions. He should not desire to steer his own course, but follow the line that the talk happens to take. (Benson undated, c.1910: 67)

Such was the role of the *Brains Trust's* Question Master, Donald McCullough, whose assigned task was to moderate the talk produced in the studio in the interests of absent listeners. McCullough, at all points in the broadcast, acted as the intermediary between the

live interaction in the studio and those for whom it was enacted. He introduced the programme and brought it to a close. He nominated the topics and who should speak to them and in what order. The rules of engagement were few but vital. When McCullough read out the question anyone who wished to speak could raise their hand but not speak until he had identified them by name. This served two purposes: it made it clear, for listeners, who was speaking and, at the same time, it prevented overlapping talk. In test trials of the programme, a laissez-faire speak-as-you-like policy was adopted. Such 'high involvement' talk may be exciting for participants but off-putting for audiences since it becomes hard to follow who is saying what or what is being said. The simple system of one-at-a-time was adopted in the interests of listeners, though at the possible expense, Thomas noted, of lively debate and discussion. It was a delicate task to find the right balance between encouraging spontaneity while, at the same time, ensuring that it did not become *too* spontaneous, with the speakers becoming so involved in the discussion that they forgot the primary consideration of absent listeners for whom, they were, first and last, performing.

This was Howard Thomas's overriding concern. In attending to the voices of speakers, to how they sat at the table, to whether they spoke too quickly, or gesticulated too much, or talked too long (McCullough would be prompted to noiselessly signal that they should wrap up their turn); in considering the tempo of the talk as it unfolded, in occasionally changing the sequence of questions for greater balance and variety—in all these ways Thomas showed his practical understanding and mastery of what was at stake in the production of live-to-air discussion on radio as something whose communicative intention was that it should be found to be entertaining by its designated absent audience. If audiences did indeed find that it *was* an entertaining programme then, as I have tried to show, it was no accident. It was rather the meant and intended outcome of a wide ranging set of considerations and stratagems which, separately and together, combined to produce talk-on-radio as something to be listened to by absent others. For audiences, and indeed for most academic analysts of broadcast output, what was attended to in the first place by the programme's producer and, in the second place by this production-oriented account and analysis, has a 'seen but unnoticed' character. It is presumed, but seldom taken into account, in assessments and evaluations of programmes. The virtue of making explicit the underlying significance of practical considerations and decisions in the production process is that it begins to account for how programmes do, as a matter of fact, work as that which they are found to be by broadcast audiences.

Conclusions

The data presented in the narrative of the production history of the *Brains Trust* have been interpreted in this way in order to account for the simple fact of its immediate popularity. Such an approach necessarily brackets alternative, more critical interpretative frames for thinking about what the data reveal. I will briefly mention three. It is a common concern of production studies, especially of the BBC, to show the hidden manipulations of programmes as indicative of the complicity of the broadcasters with its political masters (the government and departments of state) especially in the management of news. Something of this undoubtedly shows in my account—in the topics vetoed by Basil Nichols, the Controller of Programmes and the later interference by the BBC's highest authority, the Board of Governors.¹⁰ Howard Thomas and the regular speakers rightly regarded this covert censorship as undermining the serious purposes of the programme. The topics discussed by the Brains Trust panellists in William's village, included the Beveridge Report and Post-War Reconstruction.¹¹ These were indeed the burning issues of the day, but they were not fully and openly available for discussion by the real, live panellists of the original, radio *Brains Trust*.

It should not be too readily inferred from this however that because such matters could not be discussed in this particular programme they could not be discussed at all on air. Features made a thirty minute documentary about the Beveridge Report on its publication and the Talks Department dealt with post-war reconstruction in ponderous, worthy ways in 1944 after Listener Research had found it to be a concern that was uppermost in many people's minds. Thus the politics of what can and what cannot be talked about at any time—a key issue in any study of broadcasting—requires some nuancing. The question of what can be talked about (or not) is closely related, in the study of the BBC at least, to the question 'where?' Serious matter must be dealt with seriously by serious departments whose business is to be serious, and *The Brains Trust* was produced by the Variety Department that dealt in light entertainment. That said, it is also true that *unscripted* discussion of political issues was a

11. The production files contain detailed evidence of the problems caused by the programme. There were objections from the Anglican Church about it being irreligious (for details see Wolfe 1985: 207-212), and from the Ministry of Information about its 'left-wing bias' (Joad and Huxley were regarded in official quarters as 'avowed communists'). Such external pressures created trouble for senior management which got passed down the line in the form of increasing internal managerial intervention and control of the programme (see WAC R51/23/1 and 2). Were this a chapter about wartime propaganda and censorship I would have made much more of the politics of its production.

12. These topics were aired, not without difficulty, by the BBC. For a summary review of wartime broadcasting on the home front, including the treatment of post-war reconstruction, see Cardiff and Scannell (1986).

bridge too far anywhere in broadcast output at that time. Unscripted political talk was some years away and when it came it was a right that would be reserved, in the first instance, for those most entitled freely to express their views on political matters—politicians.

A second theme, there in the narrative, and touched upon but not fore-grounded in my analysis of the programme, concerns the uneven distribution of entitlements to opinions on radio at that time (and for many years subsequently). It is always worth noting, at any historical moment, who is entitled to speak at the microphone and who is not. It is not difficult to show that working class speakers did not have the same kind of access to the microphone as speakers such as Joad or Huxley. It is not that the wartime working class audience was unimportant. To the contrary it had achieved a quite new and urgent significance ever since the dramatic transition to a fully mobilised, state-controlled war economy in the summer of 1940. A new genre of ‘factory programmes’ for the workers mushroomed into existence almost immediately. Their opinions on these programmes were carefully monitored by Listener Research and when it was found that many workers regarded them as ‘tosh’ they were quietly dropped. *Jobs for All* and *Homes for All*—the two series on post-war reconstruction produced by Talks in 1944—ventriloquised the anxieties of working people through actors in the role of ordinary working men and women who earnestly asked the experts, planners and pundits in the studio what was being done to ensure that there would be no return to the hungry thirties when the war came to an end. But working people there, as in *The Brains Trust*, are constructed as questioners. It is people like Joad and Huxley who have the answers.

A similar issue that shows up in the programme is the vexed ‘problem’ of women speakers at the microphone. It would be easy to interpret this, from the perspectives of today, as indicative of deeply sexist attitudes in a male dominated institution sixty years ago, and of course, it is true. But it is worth considering the larger social context of this problem for, although it shows up here *in* broadcasting, it does not, of course, originate in broadcasting. In his engaging essay called ‘Notes for a social history of silence’ Peter Burke remarks that it was a rule in many cultures - or at any rate a male assumption - that women should keep silent, at least in mixed company (Burke 1993: 125). A. C. Benson, in his reflections on the problems of conversation in his own day quite innocently observed that he found conversation with women more difficult than with men: ‘there is a kind of simple openness, an equal comradeship, in talks with men, which I find difficult to attain in the case of women’ (Benson 1920: 75). Is it surprising then that good women speakers for radio and other public contexts should be hard to find in a culture that in manifold ways disenfranchised them from speaking in mixed social gatherings and on public occasions? What *is* it to be accustomed to speak in public; to be

listened to respectfully (indeed gratefully); to be allowed—to be expected—to have opinions; to be fluent, graceful and witty? For certain kinds of men the experience of being in public as an opportunity to express their views was such a ‘second nature’ that they appeared as naturals on radio, effortlessly displaying those attributes of warmth, geniality and friendliness that women, apparently lacked, at least in public. Such desiderata were frequently commended by the manuals as embodying the social and sociable attributes of an art of conversation (Burke 1992). But women, barred from any opportunity of acquiring such social skills, not unexpectedly, showed up as nervous, self-conscious and awkward when speaking in public. The awkwardness of women speakers on radio is the mark of their public invisibility. Thomas, at least, persisted in his efforts to overcome the ‘women problem’ on radio with notable success in a number of cases.

These three themes—politics, class and gender—are undoubtedly there in the story of the programme and its production. If I have not focused on them it is not because they are unimportant. They are. In different ways all three themes show up in *all* the output of wartime broadcasting sixty years ago and indeed right through to and including the present. But they do not tell us anything particular about the particular programme in question and the particularities of its production which is the focal matter under consideration here. Given that the study of production can be studied from a number of perspectives with different objectives and outcomes, what is to be gained from the methodology pursued in this chapter compared with more critical approaches?

I have been concerned to make visible and explicit the hidden labour of the production process. Marx famously observed that every product of labour is ‘a social hieroglyphic’—things do not come to market with their meaning branded on their foreheads (Marx 1976: 167). In his analysis, the secret of the commodity was the hidden exploitation of the labour that went into its making. My analysis discloses something else that is hidden in the end products of human labour. One thing that shows up clearly in the narrative of the production of the *Brains Trust* is all the thought, effort and concern, in short, the *care* that went into its making. What this historical account has disclosed is the *care structure*¹² of a particular programme. My subsequent analysis attempted to show how that care is *there* in the programme-as-broadcast in heard-but-unnoticed ways such that listeners could find that the programme was indeed what it aspired to be for them, namely entertaining. Any human practice has a care-structure, which is formally indicative of all the involvements that come

13. Heidegger 1962: 225-273. For a useful gloss on the care-structure, see Dreyfus 1991: 238-246.

together in the achieved, articulated and accomplished practice to deliver it as that which it is manifestly meant and intended to be for others.¹³

But why should care be hidden in things? Why does it not reveal itself? I have shown the crucial contribution of Howard Thomas to the working success of the *Brains Trust*. In all sorts of ways it was ‘his’ programme. Yet one of the most frequent questions sent in by listeners was ‘Why, if the programme is spontaneous, does it need a producer?’ This back-handed compliment suggests that, for listeners, its producer had vanished so completely into the programme that it seemed to be a self-replicating phenomenon that stood on its own two feet as if it were the author of itself. Any practice is independent of those who make or produce it. The care-structure is impersonal and anonymous. To recover the individual human inputs into past broadcast programmes is of course, in part, to honour the dead, to redeem them from the silences of history. But it serves, fundamentally to underline the objective character of human practices which stand, uncoupled from their creators, in the common light of day for all to use and enjoy (or not) as they see fit. The non-reciprocity of practices is the mark of their disinterested generosity. They present themselves to others with no strings attached, and without soliciting acknowledgement or thanks.¹⁴

To analyse the care-structure of a practice is to make explicit the foregiven conditions of its recognition and reception. In broadcasting it is always the most obvious things that most need explaining. If a programme is found by audiences to be entertaining how are the conditions of its recognition *as such* there in the programme? It cannot be the case that the ‘entertainingness’ of programmes amounts to no more than the subjective projections upon them of individual listeners or viewers. The disclosedness¹⁵ of things, the ways in which they reveal themselves as what they are, in terms of what and who they are for (the *Brains Trust* is *for* the enjoyment of listeners), indicates that their meaning is immanently there *in* them in such ways as to be discoverable by anyone. But the immanent meaning of any humanly made thing (including radio programmes) is there only by virtue of all the fore-thought involved in its production, right the way through from the initial concept to the realised end-product. It is a distinctive feature of humanly made things considered as *pragmata* (as things-for-use), that they by and large actually do work as that which they are meant and intended to be—otherwise they are not much use. If the exploitative aspects of labour are concealed in

14. The BBC’s Listener Research Department ran an annual check on audience reactions to the *Brains Trust*. Their findings confirm that the vast majority of listeners recognized ‘that the essence of the *Brains Trust* is discussion, but it is also widely maintained that the occasional “matter of fact” question makes good listening’. WAC Listener Research Report, ‘The Brains Trust 1944-5’, LR/3657.

¹⁴ On broadcasting considered as a disinterested, non-reciprocal communicative practice, see John Peters’ discussion of the Parable of the Sower (Peters 1999: 51-62)

things, so too is the care and concern involved in their making. The one does not deny the other.

Whenever we turn on the radio or television today we most likely will encounter, in any non-fictional programme, people in various situations producing unscripted, spontaneous talk of some kind or other. We are seldom aware, ordinarily, that this talk is something that has to be managed in ways that are specific to radio and television, because broadcast programmes do not, on the whole, reveal the conditions of their production. We are even less aware that broadcast practices have a history; that there was once a time (now long gone) when all broadcast talk was scripted. The particular value of an historical approach to broadcast production practices is that it can make explicit what is at stake in the actual discovery and working out of a practice at the point of its origination. Practices have their histories. Their recovery helps us understand that how broadcasting works is the outcome of accumulated knowledge and know-how, worked out as practical solutions to immediate issues at the time, and subsequently routinised and projected forward into a future, which in turn becomes the today that we, the living, inhabit. The management of liveness is not, of course, a matter of concern just for broadcasters or academics. Fundamentally it concerns the ways in which we the living, in any today, confront and cope with liveness, being alive, the management of the fore-given conditions of our existence. Something of this is the hidden pearl in *any* human practice.

References

Austin, A. L. (1962) *How to Do Things with Words*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Benson, A. C. (undated: c.1920?) *From a College Window*. London: Thomas Nelson and Sons.

Bourdieu, P. (1984) *Distinction*. London: Routledge.

Bourdon, J. 'Live television culture is still alive: on television as an unfulfilled promise'. *Media Culture & Society* 22(5): 531-556.

Burke, P. (1993) *The Art of Conversation*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Cardiif, D. and P.Scannell (1986) "“Good luck war workers!” Class, politics and entertainment in wartime broadcasting' (pp. 93-116), *Popular Culture and Social Relations*, T. Bennett, D. Mercer and J. Woollacott (eds.), Milton Keynes: Open University Press

Dreyfus, H. (1991) *Being-in-the-World*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press

16. Heidegger 1962: 104 and *passim* and, for further discussion, Haugeland 1992: 27-44

- Garfinkel, H. (1984) *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Haugeland, J. (1992) 'Dasein's disclosedness' *Heidegger: a Critical Reader* (H. Dreyfus and H. Hall, eds.), Oxford: Blackwell.
- Heidegger, M (1962) *Being and Time*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Heidegger, M. (1999) *Ontology—The Hermeneutics of Facticity*. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Levinson, S. (1982) *Pragmatics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Marx, K. (1976) *Capital* (Volume 1). Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- Mattheson, H. (1933) *Broadcasting*. London: Thornton Butterworth Ltd.
- Peters, J. D. (1999) *Speaking into the Air. A History of the Idea of Communication*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Sacks, H. (1992) *Lectures in Conversation* (2 volumes). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Scannell, P. (1991) *Broadcast Talk*. London: Sage
- Scannell, P. (2002) 'History, media and communication', *A Handbook of Media and Communication Research* (Klaus Brun Jensen, ed.) London: Routledge.
- Scannell, P. and D. Cardiff (1991) *A Social History of British Broadcasting, 1922-1939* Oxford: Blackwell.
- Searle, J. (1969) *Speech Acts. An Essay in the Philosophy of Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- St George, E.A.W. (1993) *The Descent of Manners*. London: Chatto and Windus.
- Thomas, H. (1944) *Britain's Brains Trust*. London: Chapman and Hall.
- Thomas, H. (1977) *With and Independent Air*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson.

Rundfunk und Geschichte 2000
25 (4): 218-228.

Chapter Four

The death of Diana and the meaning of media events

I

All sorrows can be borne if you put them into a story or tell a story about them.
[Isak Dinesen, quoted in Arendt 1989: 175]

Happening/event

For a week at the end of August 1997 the British people - and many others throughout the world - were in the grip of what was, perhaps, the biggest news event of modern times, the death of Diana, Princess of Wales. Many at the time were surprised by their reactions to this event. It seemed to matter more than they knew how or why. And for those who felt unconnected with what was happening there was the sense of, somehow, being out of touch. Either way, it was an involuntary thing. It was not that people chose to be involved, or not. There was no choice. They were in the grip of an event which took hold of them and held them until, in the end, it let go and released them from its grip. That the event did this - that it took hold of a whole nation, and many throughout the world - indicates both its power and its strangeness. For a week there was no escape from it as people everywhere were caught up in the implications and consequences of the death of the princess. At the time and in retrospect many felt - and continue to feel - perplexed by the strange power of the death of Diana. What did it - does it - mean?

To begin with I want to make a distinction between two kinds of event: those that happen to us and those that we make to happen. The former I will call happenings; the latter, events. Happenings are of two kinds: natural and human. In either case, an important class of happenings are disasters and their potentially disastrous consequences. Natural disasters include great storms, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, hurricanes, drought and flood. Often these things come upon us suddenly, unexpectedly, overwhelmingly. We see, in the remains of Pompeii, an ancient city

forever caught in such a moment. Today, modern science tries to anticipate earthquakes and eruptions of the earth on behalf of, say, those living on the San Andreas fault line for whom the possibility of an earthquake is a permanent background possibility in daily life. Happenings then, have the character of coming upon us. They are unexpected. Or, to put it slightly differently, they are not meant or intended. Our efforts to anticipate such happenings - and thereby, if not to control them at least to escape their worst consequences - is the mark of our efforts to 'expect the unexpected'.

Human disasters are similar in many ways. They include all 'accidental' happenings that are not meant or intended and which, to the contrary, are to be avoided at all costs. The going down of a ship at sea, a plane, train or car crash... these are human disasters with intrinsically newsworthy qualities. They are news because human lives matter; because the loss of life is a fateful thing for the living. In the case of human disasters or accidents, questions arise: 'Why did it happen? What went wrong?' The politics of blaming is intrinsic to human disasters. It is not just that they were not meant. Very often, it is felt, they should not have happened. They should not have happened because human beings make such things as cars, ships and planes in the anticipation that they might go wrong and therefore try to prevent such an eventuality by reducing - as far as possible - 'human error' and 'system failure'. So when something does go wrong it is often against the grain of expectations. The ship was meant to be safe, so why did it - The Titanic, The Herald of Free Enterprise - go down? The plane was meant to be safe, so why did it explode in mid-air? Was it engine failure, or a terrorist bomb? Such questions are part of the necessary politics of blaming which is based upon the premise that since the disaster was not meant to happen - because great human thought and effort had been invested in forestalling that very possibility - the fact that it happened must be, in some way, a morally accountable matter. Blaming is partly fault-finding and partly the allocation of moral responsibility. Who can we blame for an earthquake or a hurricane? The weather? The gods? But human disasters with their human consequences are morally accountable matters because it may turn out that human beings were themselves responsible for what went wrong.

Events that are meant to happen have an entirely different character from those that are not. To say something is meant to happen means, in effect, that it is made to happen. It is anticipated and planned for. It requires forethought and preparation. Intended events have a forestructure that is realised in the event as it unfolds, as it takes place as it is meant to take place. Of course between intention and realization there is many a slip. Things do not always go according to plan. But any

event that is meant and intended is invested with a set of expectations (however great or small) that must be met, whether it is a child's birthday party, a soccer match or a great ceremonial occasion. Any such event will be judged in terms of how far it succeeded or failed to realize the expectations invested in it.

The difference, then, between happening and event is that the former is not meant or intended whereas the latter is. As such the former is strictly meaningless whereas the latter is strictly meaningful. In the case of happenings, we strive to make sense of them retrospectively. The politics of blaming is the essential focus of that process. But events are invested with significance even before they happen. Thus happenings have a retrospectively meaningful or significant character, while events have a prospective significance. In respect of happenings, we look back on them and wonder how or why they happened. In respect of events we look forward to them and wonder how they will turn out. Will they measure up to, or even surpass, our expectations? The meaning of the meaningless happening – it was not meant or intended – must be (can only be) found after it has happened. The meaning of the meant and intended event must be made meaningful in the moment of its realization, the moment in which it comes to life.

The death of Diana encompassed both happening and event. It began as a happening: a car crash, an accidental death, a meaningless tragedy. It ended as a great and solemn event: her funeral service and burial. Between these two moments - happening and event - which mark the boundaries (the beginning and the end of the phenomenon) - there was a complex unfolding process, a process of resolution, a process of transforming a meaningless happening into a meaningful event. This process was absolutely and unavoidably necessary in order to release all concerned from the grip of the happening-event. Until this process was worked out there was no escape from the power of something that held us in its grip. The working out of the transition from happening to event brought it to an end and thereby freed us from it. Only when the happening was transformed into an event did it achieve what it cried out for - the articulation of its significance. When this was accomplished, all those concerned were released back into their ordinary daily lives and concerns. The dominant power of the event was at last relaxed. It no longer held all those concerned in its urgent, unrelenting, grip. Thus, the core dynamic of the event-as-a-whole (its movement from beginning to end) was the effort to articulate its significance and thereby realize its meaning. When and only when this was accomplished did the event come to an end and thereby set us free. In the extraordinarily complex sequence of things that took place between the crash and the funeral, this striving for significance and releasement

was worked out.

Retrospectively it appears that the events surrounding the death of Diana fell into three distinct parts. If it is, as I will later suggest, intrinsic to events that they are storyable (narratable, tellable) things, then this event had the classic structure that makes something storyable: a beginning, middle and end. The beginning was the crash itself and the death of the Princess. The middle was the double process of letting go of the crash and its meaning and in so doing turning towards the end, namely the funeral and burial of Diana. The end was the funeral service itself and the journey of the hearse to Althorpe, the final resting place of Diana in a private grave on an island in the grounds of her childhood home. To begin to understand the event as a whole we must see how it journeyed, and with what difficulties, from the initial, gripping happening to the final, releasing event.

II

The crash

When something truly extraordinary happens, people remember two things about their initial response: where they were when they heard the news and their disbelief on hearing it. The death of Kennedy - the first great public tragedy of the television age - was remembered in this way, and likewise the death of the Princess of Wales. Doubtless everyone remembers how, from whom and where they heard the unbelievable news. 'I don't believe it'. This means two things: 'I don't want to believe it. I do believe it'.¹

The expression of disbelief marks the moment of acceptance of a truth that is hard to accept. From this moment onwards there begins the process of accepting the unacceptable. How one feels about something or someone - especially how one responds to loss or death - is not always immediately transparent. It may be that, when confronting the death of a close relative or family member, one is surprised to discover that one does not experience an immediate sense of deep

1. I am grateful to Greg Myers for this point.

sorrow or loss. Contrariwise, in the case of the death of Diana, what came as a surprise to countless millions was the discovery that she seemed to mean a great deal to them. They experienced a sense of shock, loss and grief for someone who, to all intents and appearances, had nothing to do with them or their lives. How could it be that they apparently cared more for a seemingly distant unknown public figure than for those that were closest to them? This paradox had to be worked out, individually and collectively.

In many societies mourning is a collective public process and grief is adequately and appropriately expressed in ritual, public ways. We in the West, however, have privatized property, religion and experience so that 'emotions' such as grief or sorrow are regarded as essentially private subjective matters. But subjective feelings have no meaning beyond their purely subjective significance. So that an essential difficulty, from the moment of the crash, would be the negotiation between private and public responses to what had happened. Only in the public domain could what had happened be transformed from meaningless happening and private grief into a common shared and significant meaningful event. The key agencies that negotiated between private and public, that gathered the event into its articulate significance were the press and broadcasting but especially, in this case, television.

At the time and in retrospect some felt that the BBC's response to the news of the crash and death of Diana was excessive. Normal television and radio services were suspended and replaced by a rolling, continual news and discussion service that lasted throughout the week. For those who felt disconnected from the event this interruption of 'normal service' was part of the rude disruption of their routine daily life. Was it excessive, an instance of 'media overkill'? The answer very much depends on how you stood in relation to the whole affair. That the BBC responded in this way and sustained saturation coverage of the event throughout its duration tells us something about its institutional character. That Channel 4 was the first to revert to its normal schedule tells us something about Channel 4. But we must ask why such media 'overkill' seemed necessary and appropriate to the nature of the emerging event.

On the Sunday morning and through that day, as people turned on to watch and find out what had happened and whether there was any news since then (the crash, the death) it seemed as if television was long on talk and short on information. There was a great hunger for news and that was a commodity in short supply in the first hours and through the day of the 'breaking' story. From the start there was a double process: a compulsion to talk about what had happened, and a

longing for information that might clarify what had happened - what had really happened. The compulsion to talk - there from the start and still with us now, months after the event - can doubtless be explained via some behavioural mechanism, via an appeal to some compulsive inner psychological 'need'. But such an 'explanation' entirely fails to see that the compulsion to speak had its origin not in individual subjectivities but in the compelling power of the event itself. It demanded that we speak of it. It urged us to articulate its significance. All the countless million words spoken, all the acres and acres of newsprint testify to the core necessity of utterance in order to begin to find out what the thing meant. It did not come with its meaning branded on its forehead plain and for all to see. To the contrary its meaning was, in the beginning, veiled, obscure and hidden. The transformation of happening into event was the effort of discovering the meaning of the thing. This journey of discovery had to - could only - begin in the effort of articulation. In and through this effort - a collective, interactive process whose key participants we must seek to identify - the meaning of the event appeared. It emerged into significance. When, and only when, it appeared - through the collective human efforts of all concerned - as an achieved and accomplished event, did it stand revealed at last - in the common light of day - as the thing that it aspired to be, as the thing that it truly was meant and intended to be. But to begin with no-one knew what that thing was. Nor could they unless they talked of it, over and over and over again. In this endlessly reiterative, gathering discourse - this enormously dispersed and gathered conversation in countless homes and public places; in newsprint and on radio and television - in going back over what had happened and in looking forward to what was to come, in this colossal discursive effort at understanding, the lineaments of the event and its significance would begin to emerge into the common light of day.

Thus, at first, after the initial shock of the fact of the crash and death of the Princess, the immediate question that arose was, how did it happen? What caused the car crash? First accounts suggested that the car was trying to escape from the harassment of paparazzi on high-speed motorbikes in pursuit of a shot of Diana and Dodi. This story provided the basic material for the first cycle in the politics of blaming. The most immediate recipients of public blame were the photographers themselves, and lurid stories of their behaviour before and after the crash were quickly circulated. That there were no British photographers involved was doubtless a relief for British susceptibilities and permitted a more uninhibited denunciation of 'foreign' paparazzi. Questions soon arose about whether photographs of the crash - of the dying Princess, of the dead Dodi - would be published in newspapers in Britain and around the world. As attention shifted to this question, the focus moved away from the photographers themselves to the agencies for whom

they worked and thence to those who purchased from them - the tabloid press. Thus, if at first blame was laid at the door of those apparently most immediately responsible - the photographers - it soon shifted to those seen as ultimately responsible, the proprietors and editors of tabloid newspapers all of whom maintained a low profile throughout the week. The *Sun* ran an editorial the day after the crash protesting that the papers were not to blame for the death of the Princess.

However the blame changed direction two days later when it was revealed from Paris, after an autopsy, that the driver of the Mercedes in which Dodi and Diana were travelling, had a very high level of alcohol in his blood. It seemed that the reason for the crash lay less with the paparazzi (doubts now arose as to whether they were actually in close pursuit at the time of the crash) and more with the fact that the driver was very drunk. Blame now shifted away from the press and towards Mohammed al Fayed, father of Dodi, and owner of The Ritz, whose staff were blamed for allowing a drunk to drive the car in which Dodi and Diana left the hotel.

All this had a retrospective character. It was 'after the event', an attempt to get at what had really happened, to move beyond the mere facticity that it had happened. Intermingled with such concerns, from the start, were immediate responses to the death of the Princess and attempts to assess its significance. The Prime Minister, speaking before going into church on the Sunday morning appeared shocked and distraught. He seemed to speak with difficulty and with sincerity about the news of the death of the Princess. When he spoke of her as 'The people's Princess' this became the soundbite of the hour, the catch-phrase of the week. It would be a good week for Tony Blair and the new New Labour government, and a bad week for the Conservatives (who maintained a low profile throughout) and William Hague, their new leader, whose initial response to the news was widely and unfavourably compared with that of Tony Blair. Meantime, and also from the start - there in the television studios, in editorials and feature articles, in countless conversations up and down the land - the crucial question emerged as to the prospective impact and effect of the death of the Princess. And here attention focused, inevitably, on the royal family: especially on the Queen, Prince Charles and Diana's two sons, William and Harry.

There is no need to sketch in the background here. It is known and familiar to every reader. But the key point is that all that background history - from the very beginning of the relationship between Charles and Diana, right the way through from wedding, children, divorce and its acrimonious aftermath - all this became immediately relevant to the interpretation of the consequences of Diana's death. It is a truth, universally acknowledged, that the British royal

family has become an engrossing soap opera for most of the British people and for millions around the world who follow royal goings-on on tv and in newspapers and magazines. The pleasures of soaps, as every addict knows, are cumulative. The more you know about the past biographies of the *dramatis personae* the more expert you become in assessing the implications and consequences for them of their current situation and circumstances. The more you know about the characters the more interesting it becomes to talk about them with others, equally knowledgeable, about what's happening and what might happen. Everyone in Britain was an expert when it came to evaluating and interpreting not only what Diana's death might mean for those most affected by it, but also the finest nuances of what they did and did not do in response to it.

Thus it was noted that the morning following the crash it appeared to be business as usual at Balmoral, where the royal family was taking its annual summer holiday. Both the young princes attended Sunday morning service at the local church and - most significantly - no mention was made, no prayers were offered for the Princess during the service. This gave rise to intense speculation and comment. It was seen as indicative of the Queen's well-known dislike of Diana, and of her determination to maintain royal protocol. Diana, it was recalled, had been stripped of royal status when the divorce was formally ratified. The Queen was underlining that fact now, it seemed, by ignoring Diana's death in the morning service on the following day.

The grieving

Diana's death was brought home to the British public, literally, when her body was flown back from Paris to London accompanied by the Prince of Wales and her two older sisters. Now, as her body lay in private in Kensington Palace, her former home, the complex business of grieving for her death began. There were two interwoven aspects to this process, the public and the private. On the one hand there was, for millions, the process of coming to terms with their own personal feelings about the Princess and what she meant to them. On the other hand there was an emerging concern as to how her death should be commemorated publicly. A gathering concern developed, in this respect about the precise character of her funeral service.

Joy and sorrow are things that, in the first instance, possess us. It is never that we choose these things, as if one could decide to be them: 'Today I think I'll be happy, tomorrow I'll be sad'. Grief

and joy overtake us, so that we find that we are these things: 'Surprised by joy'... as the poet says. Or grief. Both can be overwhelming experiences, but the difference between them is - perhaps - that we might seek to prolong joy, but to escape from grief. At all events, grieving demands to be expressed. It cannot be contained. It must be released. So that finding ways to express their sorrow was for millions an urgent imperative. The forms their expression took became part of the gathering power of the event as it moved towards its resolution. Messages and flowers - small tokens of remembrance - expressed the sorrow of countless ordinary people. Throughout the land books of remembrance were opened in city halls and civic centres, and flowers were laid at monuments and shrines. But the focal site of this extraordinary upwelling of sorrowful commemoration was Kensington Palace, where the body of the Princess lay.

That people were drawn to the palace in their thousands, day after day, was ample testimony to the gathering power of the event which both gathered (drew) people to itself and, in so doing, gathered in intensity. So, again, it is not that people thought about it and chose to go to the palace. They were drawn there involuntarily by the invisible, palpable, magnetic power of the event, a power which gathered and increased as the week went on. Thus, the queues to sign in the books of remembrance at the Palace (one at first, thirteen by the end of the week) grew longer as the days passed and more and more people lined up and waited patiently hour by hour. The build up of flowers at the gates of the palace and in Kensington Gardens was one of the most memorable sights disclosed by television as each day passed. In the end there was a sea of flowers each with a small written token of remembrance, affection or love. It was later estimated, when the time came to clear them away, that maybe ten thousand tons of flowers were left near the palace. On the eve of the funeral service Kensington Palace Gardens were thronged with people. As dusk fell, all over the gardens, round every tree, small shrines were made, candles lit, flowers laid, and people sat or stood in little groups, silently or quietly talking of what and who had drawn them there.

Meanwhile a very public debate began about how Diana should be publicly remembered in her funeral service. It was this focal issue - at the very heart of the transition from happening to event - that gathered in all the key participants in the unfolding drama: The royal family, the Spencer family, the government, the media, the people. At first it seemed that the funeral might be a purely private affair. That, apparently, was the wish of the Spencer family and particularly Earl Spencer, whose hostility to the media was well known. But the Prime Minister let it be known, discreetly but firmly, that the funeral must be public. The people had a right to say farewell to the

people's princess. A right of access to the funeral service was asserted by the government on behalf of the British public. The question then arose as to the form of the funeral service and here attention focused again on the Queen since it now appeared ultimately to be her decision.

The response of the Queen to the death of Diana had been a matter of intense scrutiny from the start. But as the days passed it was not so much her response as her lack of response that was increasingly remarked on. There was firstly that she continued to remain with the family in Balmoral rather than returning to London, the focus and centre of the event for there the body of the Princess lay. The first royal schedule to be released indicated that the Queen and her immediate family would return only on the eve or on the morning of the funeral. Did this mean then that the Queen would not visit Kensington Palace to pay her last respects to Diana? It became a talking point that the Queen's ensign remained flying over Buckingham Palace in her absence. Why was it not at half-mast like flags all over the country? Was this not another slight to the dead princess? It was explained that no insult was intended. The royal ensign must always fly over Buckingham Palace as the visible emblem of the historic continuity of the monarchy. But public opinion - as evidenced in many a television vox pop and op. ed. piece in the papers - would have none of this, and the palace bowed to public opinion and the flag was lowered.

But the key issue that emerged from these things was the silence of the Queen. It was not merely that she appeared to remain withdrawn and distant from the event up there in the Highlands of Scotland, but she had not spoken. Why did she not speak? Surely she must? The Queen's absence and silence rapidly became an urgent issue. By Wednesday the media were full of it. The tabloids begged her to return to London and speak to the people. 'Speak to us Ma'am' cried a banner headline in the *Daily Mirror*. There were hints of hidden fierce disagreements between Prince Charles and the Queen over the handling of the unfolding drama. Hints too of the behind-the-scenes role played by the Government in persuading the palace to abandon playing it by the book, according to protocol, and respond flexibly and imaginatively to the unique nature of the occasion. Thus, the Queen was persuaded that she should speak to the nation, and she did so with restraint and dignity. But it was widely noticed that while she spoke of Diana with respect and admiration, she did not speak of her with affection or love.

The funeral

As the week wore on, attention turned more and more to the funeral service. This, after all would gather in all that preceded it and bring matters to a climax and resolution. If the event should succeed - if it could be the adequate focus and repository of people's hopes and expectations; if it could be a fitting expression of what was widely if not universally felt - then indeed the funeral service might be the consummation of the event, its final climactic resolution. And if it were all this, then all concerned would at last, and in the end be freed, because the event had at last found how it should end. Much was at stake in respect of the funeral and how it should be.

It appeared that within the rules of royal protocol there were three grades of Royal Funeral: a Grade 1 funeral for a dead monarch, a Grade 2 funeral for immediate royal kin and a Grade 3 funeral for the rest. It seemed that Diana would get a Grade 3 standard funeral. But this would not do at all. Public opinion demanded a unique service to commemorate the unique personality of the dead Princess who increasingly appeared as a potent indictment of the apparent rigidity and indifference of standard royal protocol. Now the accounts of her experiences at the hands of the House of Windsor, as described in Andrew Morton's book, were recalled. Her famous *Panorama* interview was remembered. A complex construction of Diana appeared that was, to a considerable extent defined against the perceived characteristics of the royal family and the Queen in particular. The Queen, and the older generation of the royal family, had very largely escaped criticism in the preceding years. It was the antics of the younger generation of Windsors - above all, the very public divorces of three of the Queen's four children - that attracted all the publicity and provoked most public criticism. But now, in death, Diana appeared - at least in part - a victim of a dull, stifling and unfeeling royal regime for which the Queen seemed personally responsible. It was she who turned out to be a stickler for protocol. It was her rigid inflexibility that appeared increasingly unresponsive to and out of touch with public opinion.

Diana's personality seemed now to shine out more brightly against the perceived boringness and stuffiness of most members of the royal family. She, unlike them, was one of 'us'. She had brilliantly laid claim to this position in her *Panorama* interview in late 1995, an astonishing performance that merits a thesis in itself. Here it will suffice to note that, as she presented the narrative of her life, she contrived as she did so to speak for women everywhere of the problems of men and marriage, of the in-laws, of bringing up children and family life. Her eating

disorders, her feelings of rejection, her self-mutilation, her lack of self-belief, her marital difficulties, her love affairs.... all this spoke powerfully (and was meant to) to the experiences of ordinary women everywhere. Diana-as-victim was a potent position that she had already pre-empted in her battles against her former husband and his family. Now it appeared again with renewed potency. But mingled with this were many other strands in the complex phenomenon of her perceived personality. There was her informality and friendliness. This showed, on the one hand, in her wide ranging, and well publicised friendships within the celebrity world of film-stars, show-business people and pop-stars. But it showed too in her attitude to ordinary people, many of whom now came forward to tell of ways in which they had met the Princess and how they warmed to her open, friendly manner; how, indeed, she had quietly maintained contact, in some cases, over and beyond the call of royal duty.

Thus what began to emerge was the potent image of a caring Diana against an indifferent and uncaring royal household and its Head. Her charitable work was widely recalled and discussed; her work with children, with the sick and elderly, with the victims of AIDS. Her famous public embrace of an AIDS sufferer was pointed to as changing social attitudes towards them. Her plea, in a public speech, that every family should have a hugger was played and replayed on television. Above all her most recent, and controversial, campaign against anti-personnel mines was pointed to as transforming, single handed, this issue into a high profile international political concern. The beatification of Diana gathered pace. Mother Theresa (upon whom the odour of sanctity also dwelt) contrived to die, as if in sympathy, within days of the death of the Princess.

All this was a potent cocktail of hopes and beliefs, of admiration, affection and love, of adoration and sanctification of someone who was now, beyond a doubt, the most famous woman in the world. And somehow, somehow expectations had to be met in the arrangements for her funeral and the form and content of the service itself. It was thus a matter of exquisite diplomacy to negotiate and achieve the right and proper balance of the coming event. There were questions concerning the precise route and length of the funeral procession to Westminster Abbey. There were questions concerning how the body should be displayed in the procession. There were questions concerning who should walk behind it. There were questions concerning those invited to the Abbey itself for the service. There were questions concerning the nature of the service. And finally there was the question of where she should at last be put to rest.

It is not necessary here to recall in detail the resolution of these issues, though each had indeed to

be resolved appropriately. And all of them had to be resolved within days. Plans for the Coronation of the Queen in 1953 began at least a year ahead of the event. Then the planning took place discreetly out of sight of the public gaze and with no public participation or consultation (Scannell 1996: 80-86). On this occasion however, the whole complex thing had to be resolved in under a week: all the implications had to be foreseen within the over-arching frame of 'what will people think if we do this, or don't do that?' This was unavoidably necessary because all the issues concerning preparations for the funeral were in the public domain, and matters of continuing discussion and concern. The court of public opinion came into its own as events gathered to their climax.

In the event, and on the day, the final act in the drama surrounding the death of the Princess was a triumph. The weather gods looked kindly on the day and the sun shone. The anticipated millions foregathered in the parks of central London and along the route from Kensington Palace to the Abbey. Giant screens were set up, by government decree, so that the crowds could participate in the funeral procession and service. Both went off flawlessly. The funeral service itself, surpassed all expectations. The two key moments - Elton John singing *Candle in the Wind* and the funeral oration for his dead sister from the Earl Spencer - marked the climactic resolution of all that had gone before.

That Elton John was an invited to the funeral was not surprising. He was well-known as a show-biz friend of the Princess. They had, after all sat side by side at the funeral of the murdered Gianni Versace and on that occasion the Princess had famously shown herself as a hugger as she comforted the weeping pop-star during the service. The decision however to invite Elton John to sing on this occasion was an altogether riskier matter. It was, of course, in deference to the felt need to make the funeral service less formal and more expressive of the Princess's populist, popular appeal. But even so, the song was a re-tread of an original sung twenty years earlier in memory of the second most famous female icon of this century - Marilyn Monroe. It now received a hasty make-over from Elton John and the original lyricist, Bernie Taupin. The words teetered on the edge of tackiness... 'Goodbye England's Rose...' etc. And there was some anxiety in the press as to whether Elton could actually do it. Would he retain his composure? Or would he break down as he had done at the Versace funeral. Singer and song both seemed on the brink of banality and bathos. Would it work, we all wondered. In the event it did. Elton John's performance was hailed as triumph, and he immediately retreated to the recording studios to put it on disc. It was released within days and became the fastest selling single of all time.

But the defining moment of the service was the oration of the youthful Earl Spencer, Diana's younger brother and childhood companion. In ancient epic, Hannah Arendt reminds us, 'The stature of the Homeric Achilles can be understood only if one sees him as "the doer of great deeds and the speaker of great words".' It is not, she continues, that great words express great thoughts, for thought was considered secondary to speech. Rather speech and action were co-eval and co-equal for the Greeks. This meant originally 'not only that most political action, insofar as it remains outside the sphere of violence, is indeed transacted in words but, more fundamentally, that finding the right words at the right moment, quite apart from the information or communication they may convey, is action' (Arendt 1989: 25-6). Later the speech would be picked over minutely in conversations up and down the land, in the newspapers and on radio and television. Was it a direct attack on the Queen? What was he claiming on behalf of Diana's 'blood family'? But what the speech undoubtedly did, more perhaps the Earl could ever know, was indeed to find the right words at the right moment. It seemed to say what all would have wished to have said. It said what was right for the occasion. And whatever it said, it was said from the heart. A heroic and imperishable moment.... When the Earl finished speaking there was a pause, a silence. And then a gathering wave of sound was heard, and the cameras cut to the crowds outside the Abbey and gathered before huge tv screens, standing and applauding the speech to the echo. As this applause rolled into the Abbey, through the open West door of the nave, it was taken up by the congregation - at first by those nearest the door - so that it rippled up through the Abbey to arrive at last where Earl Spencer himself stood alone.

After the funeral it remained to say goodbye as the coffin, now placed in a funeral hearse, left the Abbey and moved away from central London, threading its way slowly at first through dense crowds who threw flowers and bouquets in its path of and on top of it, so that it looked as if the hearse might be submerged in a forest of flowers. Along the North Circular and its seedy suburbs the small procession passed until it reached the motorway. There it gathered speed as it drove straight down the centre of a strangely deserted M1, towards Northampton and the home of the Spencer family. On every bridge, at every junction crowds had gathered for one last glimpse. And finally the hearse arrived at the gates of Althorp where a knot of people had congregated for the very last sight of the coffin. The gates opened, the hearse passed smoothly through and vanished up the drive way out of sight of television cameras and the public gaze. She had gone home to her final resting place and all of us at last could say, 'It is finished.' Over. And life once again could get back to normal.

III

Event and story

I have tried to bear in mind Lukacs's dictum and to narrate rather than describe. To describe is to write as an observer; to narrate is write as a participant (Lukacs 1978: 111). In an objective world of objective things that are observed, weighed and measured in order to determine their properties, description is the appropriate mode. But in a world of concern, in which things matter, narration is the only appropriate way to express their significance. We must now begin to reflect on the meaning of this narrative. An appropriate starting point is the connection between event and story. The death of Diana was, beyond any doubt the greatest news story of recent times. Why? What does that mean?

We must first see how event and story are intrinsic to each other. It is not that there is the event and then, later, it is found that it has some storyable (ie tellable, narratable) properties. To the contrary, if it has no storyable properties, it is not an event. Its storyability is intrinsic to it. Not every happening is a tellable, storyable thing. This is easily shown by considering the nature of uneventful happenings (which turn out to be what happens in routine daily life). 'What did you do at the office/school/work today?' 'Nothing'. 'Anything on telly this evening?' 'No, nothing'. It is a structural, intrinsic characteristic of ordinary daily life that it is uneventful. This means that there is - really and truly - nothing to say about it because all that happened has happened in the same places at the same times and in the same ways umpteen times before. And if you did try to make something of all this, as Harvey Sacks points out, you would be regarded as eccentric or worse (Sacks 1992, volume 2: 215-221). So that events show up against a back-drop of uneventful life. That there is nothing to say about the latter discloses that there is, indeed, something to say about the former.

But what exactly? Why is it that the sayable thing about events turns out to be a storyable thing? What is a story? Any child knows that a story has a beginning, a middle and an end. I tried to tell the story of the events surrounding the death of Diana in this way because that was the appropriate way to tell the tale. The triple structure of stories (beginning-middle-end) is not something that gets mapped onto them. They are stories by virtue of having such structures.

Deconstructive critics can huff and puff about the virtues of 'open' texts against the ideology of 'closed' texts. But they don't really understand what stories are about or what they mean or why they matter. Stories start somewhere and end somewhere, and in between they go somewhere. This somewhere - the where of origin, the where of ending, the where of in-between (the narrative's journey) - is always a particular bounded somewhere. Stories articulate a particular kind of foregrounded spaciality, that stands out from the taken for granted environment. This outstanding, focused space, is the site upon which the story gathers and is gathered. Diana's death began somewhere. That it was a Paris expressway was, in the first instance, as accidental as the crash itself (assuming we discount conspiracy theories). But where it ended - Westminster Abbey, the grounds of Althorp - was by no means accidental. Indeed, the story could not have ended anywhere else (which begins to say that it could not have ended any other way). The dynamic of stories is the effort at an appropriate ending.

I have distinguished between happening and event and suggested that Diana's death encompassed both. It is evident that news is oriented to both these things: the unexpected happening, the expected event. The organisational structure of newsrooms - whether for radio, tv or print - is expressly designed in anticipation of events that are known in advance and those that are not. In respect of the former - whether it is a major international political conference, or an important soccer match or a royal wedding - news reporting and commentaries are intrinsic to the build-up of the event, They contribute to the mood of anticipation, the expectations invested in the event-to-come. How will the game go? What are 'our' team's chances? What will be the consequences of winning? Or losing? What of the condition of key players? What are the threats from the opposing team's star players? And so on and so on. This kind of thing is the routine stuff of sports news in whatever medium. The anticipated event is talked up and written up in advance because it is an event that is fraught with expectations. In this discourse - this discursive ferment as Foucault calls it - what is revealed is that such events are intrinsically 'talkable-about', both before and after. They are not made so by media. They always already have such characteristics, to which media respond in common sense ways, because common sense has already invested them with significance. They stand out, in this way, from the routine backdrop of ordinary existence about which there is ordinarily little if anything to say.

But the fundamental orientation of news professionals in whatever medium is towards the unexpected happening, the 'breaking' news story. Then the cry goes up 'Hold the front page' as there is a mad scramble to catch up with what's happening, to get there, to be there, to witness, to

report, to 'capture' the event-in-its unfolding. News is always deeply enmeshed in the complex web of the unfolding story. The efforts of news reporters - to establish what in fact has happened or is happening and to assess and evaluate the 'facts' as they emerge - is not (despite their own professional ideology) indicative of some disinterested 'objective' process. Rather, news is caught up in the event as it unfolds. The happening - the point of origin for news - is meaningless not because it is empty of meaning but because its meaning has not yet been found. Unexpected things do not come fully clad in their significance. That is what has to be found and this finding, this discovering is the very business (the business, the concern) of news. News is not the happening, but the telling of the happening. This is again to underline the key point that story-event, event-and-story are inseparable. They presuppose each other.

News is drawn to certain kinds of happening because they intrinsically newsworthy. This means they have a discursive worth: they are worth talking about. It would be a thorough misunderstanding of news values to suppose that their worth or value was essentially economic. Of course stories have a value in terms of price. Those 'in the news' can sell their stories to the highest bidder. Of course certain stories sell newspapers, or increase news-viewing. But 'the profit-margin' of news-event-stories is a by-product of their intrinsic human interest, which is the very core and essence of the worthiness, ie the moral worthwhileness, of news. It is not capitalism that invented news, nor is it some kind of consumer compulsion that makes us buy newspapers. It is an altogether more fundamental kind of human phenomenon from which capitalism derives profit on the side. That phenomenon is exemplified in the whole Death-of-Diana story whose meaning and significance disclose the newsworthy essence of the news-story-event. Happenings as such have no significance. Their meaning is found, made and discovered in the discursive process whereby the brute facticity of happenings is transformed into the significant, meaningful event. At the heart of this process is a recognition, and expression of the moral worth of human beings both in respect of what happens to them and what they make to happen.

The story of what happened in the week following the death of Diana, as told above, has a necessarily retrospective character. It was written 'after the event'. But the story of that week, as told at the time by daily media, was articulated in the event's phenomenal now, the time of its happening, the emergent moment of its unfolding. What is the difference between these two temporalities and how are they linked to story-telling and the medium in which the story is told? My narrative of the week, written from memory, is based entirely on what I heard, saw and read on radio, television and in newspapers. From these 'primary' sources' I have written a secondary

narrative of what happened ‘then’. Irrespective of the ‘truth’ (the accuracy, the ‘correctness’) of my narrative, it has a sequential, a consequential structure that delivers the necessary coherence which a story must possess if it is to be recognizable as that which it lays claim to be. The act of writing the narrative was the discovery of the structure of the happening-event-becoming thing. This structure is, of necessity, only available in retrospect. At the time I, along with everyone else, was in the grip of it.

What does it mean to be ‘in the grip’ of an event? It means that experientially at the time, when we are caught up in the happening event, when we are folded into its unfolding momentum, we cannot grasp its significance, we cannot ‘see’ the contours of its meaning. We are in the midst of it, given over to it, perhaps lost in it. If we, in each case, experience this ‘subjectively’, it is by no means a subjective phenomenon. Rather it is testimony to the compelling power of the event and its dominance over us. We ‘live’ it and, later, try to catch up with what it means and meant. Everyone knows that you cannot write history in advance. The act of writing history reinforces its retrospective character and produces a receding past since the time of writing and the time of that which is written are always moving away from rather than towards each other – a paradox neatly exploited by Sterne’s eponymous Tristram Shandy and his doomed attempt to write the story of his life. However, with modern media – and above all, radio and television – the separation between the time of the event and the time of its telling is collapsed. The live immediacy of radio and television means that even as things happen they are simultaneously narrativised. I would like to conclude by reflecting briefly on the phenomenal complexity of this process.

We can distinguish three inter-connected components of the narrativisation of broadcast happenings/events. First, whenever possible, television seeks to ‘show’ the event in process – live, as it happens, from the ‘scene’ of the event. Second, both radio and television, describe and evaluate what’s happening: they ‘talk’ about what’s going on and this talk – which is in present time – has both a retrospective and a prospective character to it. It concerns what has happened, what is happening and what may happen and is (in respect of all three temporalities) both descriptive and evaluative. Thirdly, and consequently, it is not the case that broadcasting ‘reflects’ what is going on. It does not hold up a mirror to an ‘external reality’, whatever that is. In the complex interstices of showing, describing and evaluating it interacts with and, in so doing, contributes to the actual configuration of what’s going on. It participates in the structuring of what’s happening. While it is of cardinal importance to hold as separate the actual happening-events and their re-working into a narrative, the crucial role of modern media is that these two

processes now take place at the same time. Events and their articulation are both caught up in the same phenomenal 'now'.

The phenomenal now of the event is the unfolding time of its being in which we are caught up from beginning to end. In a complex happening-event that stretches over days rather than hours and minutes, the mediating acts of showing, telling and discussing what is happening are interlocked. Thus, in respect of the crash there was a retrospective effort to establish what *really* happened and thereby to begin to establish the significance of the crash itself. The politics of blaming is the process, after the event, in which the wisdom of hindsight is sought for. It was in this case and in all major disasters, a media-driven process in which media institutions and their news teams try to interpret what has happened with the assistance of reports from the scene of the disaster, eyewitness accounts, interviews with the relevant authorities and experts, and studio based discussion and assessments.

Even as this backward looking task was being performed the evaluation of the consequences of the crash – its prospective significance – began to be addressed. This process – which stretched across the whole week – was the most complex element in the structural transformation of the initial happening into the culminating event. The receding past and the approaching future are dynamically linked to each other in the unfolding present as it moves away from what has happened and towards what is to come. This temporal dynamic - this tension *in* time, this necessity of resolution *through* time - is the coiled spring which gives momentum to the transformation of happening into event, of suffering into action. The processes of grieving and of commemorating were intertwined in ways that were at one and the same time intensely personal and intensely public and here the question of who drove this process – the media, politicians, the royal family or public opinion (if these are taken as the key 'players' in the process) – becomes much more hard to determine. Certainly those in the BBC to whom I have spoken all confirmed that they felt they spent their time trying to catch up with and respond to the shifting, emerging patterns of public opinion rather than trying to shape them. Though it may be the case that, at times, the media are ahead of opinion they cannot be ahead of events. It is the essence of the live immediacy of electronic, media that they *are* in the phenomenal, happening now. That is the temporality in which and for which they exist, to which they give expression, to which they bear witness. They may bear false witness, they may not express it truly, but they are unavoidably given over to expressing and witnessing the eventful happening now.

In the week following the death of Diana that is what, retrospectively, showed up most clearly: the effort, the difficulty of adequate expression and witnessing, and the search for the meaning of what had happened. Out of this emerged, in the end, the final, releasing event that was adequate in all these respects. The funeral service, as a public event, was forged by all that preceded it, the bearer of immense expectations, and the articulation of the significance of a death and of a life whose meaning had been sought for in countless conversations, in acres of newsprint and in endless on-air talk in the days preceding it. On such occasions television comes into its own as it narrates the event, thereby displaying and articulating its significance. In the mobilization and deployment of their resources – camera placements, interviewers, reporters – the institutions are in place ahead of the event and ready to cover it from start to finish. As such the coverage not only creates the effect of ‘being there’ for absent viewers but, from moment to moment is always in anticipation of ‘what comes next’. Thus television not only displays the event, but at the same time structures it as a temporally unfolding sequence with a sustained, consequential coherence. This double articulation discloses the emerging significance (the intentionality, or care-structure) of the event even as it happens. Whereas written narrative historicize events retrospectively along an axis that moves from present to past, broadcast narratives historicize events even as they are happening along an axis that moves from present to future.

In today’s television this process has a real phenomenal complexity. It is not just a question of the many perspectives or points of view from which the event can be presented nowadays. It is also the case that production and reception are folded into each other and interact upon each other. Classically we tend to think that the ‘moment’ of production is ontologically prior to the ‘moment’ of reception and that there is, however minimally, a cause and effect relationship between these two moments. The moment of production acts upon the moment of reception with potential effects and consequences. This is widely thought of as a ‘one-way’ irreversible process that allows no feedback. Production can act upon and affect reception, but the latter cannot act upon nor affect the former. But today live television coverage itself has become a resource that feeds back upon itself with a potential to restructure the character and interpretation of the event in the course of its unfolding. Insofar as it does this television becomes more than an agency that displays and narrates what’s going on. It becomes part of the event itself, an agent in the determination of how it happens as it happens. In this respect event and narrative become inextricably entwined in one another.

A singular instance of this, widely noted the following day in media commentaries on the

funeral, occurred immediately after Earl Spencer's oration which met with applause from the congregation in the Abbey:

In fact this clapping did not originate in the Abbey but from the crowds watching relayed TV. It arose outside and drifted into the Abbey where it ripples from the back of the West end up the nave towards the choir... In one way it symbolized the presence, outside, of the crowd whose constitution the service was trying to appease, the people. They intervened not in the historic mode of breaking in, but through a loop, as feedback made possible by television. It was in this sense that the television was important, no longer in producing a split between the event and viewers as in a spectacle, but in mediating the very space of the event. (Cousins 1998: 85-6)

The crowds watching the service on giant TV screens outside the Abbey, whose behaviours were not under the constraints of the congregation at the sacred event taking place inside the Abbey were able to express their immediate response to Earl Spencer's speech by giving it a standing ovation. As the sound of this response entered the Abbey it moved those inside to violate the behavioural norms of a church congregation by echoing the response of the crowds outside and applauding the oration. Thus, through television two separate but intimately linked situated occasions – what was happening in the Abbey, and what was simultaneously happening as crowds outside watched on TV what was happening in the Abbey – interacted upon each other. The primary occasion (in the Abbey) was modified by the secondary occasion (the crowds outside who were watching it). This interaction was displayed for an absent third party, namely tv viewers in countless dispersed domestic and other contexts throughout the world. Although it is impossible to work out this sequence from television's actual coverage of this moment (you cannot tell that the applause starts outside the Abbey), nevertheless both BBC and ITV noticed and displayed for tv viewers the response of the crowds outside. In so doing they responded, on behalf of the tertiary audience to the responses of the primary audience (in the Abbey) who were responding to the responses of the secondary audience (the crowds outside). Narration was thus folded into the fabric of what was happening and became part of the event itself.

The underlying concern of this article has been with the phenomenal complexity of events and, more particularly, with a specific sub-set of events, namely human (as distinct from natural) disasters. What shows in the structural transformation of disasters from happenings to events is the dialectic of suffering and action, necessity and freedom. Human beings uniquely act upon that which they must endure and so transform meaningless fate into meaningful action. In so doing they release themselves from the grip of existence and move from the realm of necessity (which

we endure) to the realm of freedom (which we ourselves create).² It is this process that I have tried to catch in my description and discussion of what took place following the 'meaningless' accident that killed Diana, Princess of Wales. What I think it discloses is that speech (narration) and action are inextricably linked in the process of finding and creating significance and meaning. Action is not historically significant without its articulation as such. These two processes have hitherto appeared as temporally distinct because, in written history, the act of narration has always necessarily lagged behind the actions and events that it narrates. In media events, however, narration and action are not merely at the same time. They can, and sometimes do interact with and upon each other so that narration and action appear as different aspects of the same phenomenon; the self-explicating significant historical event. It is in this sense that we might say that radio and television truly do participate in the making of history.

References

- Arendt, H. (1989) *The Human Condition*. Chicago: Chicago University Press
- Cousins, M (1998) 'From royal London to celebrity space', *After Diana* (M. Merck ed.). London: Verso.
- Lukacs, G. (1978) 'Narrate or Describe' in *Writer and Critic*. London: Merlin Press
- Sacks, H. (1992) *Lectures in Conversation* (2 volumes) Oxford: Blackwell

² I have in mind here Hannah Arendt's discussion of the significance of 'the public realm' (Arendt 1989: 22-78).

Chapter five

Big Brother as a television event

Introduction

A simplest taxonomy of events distinguishes between those that happen *to* us, and those that we make to happen. The former I have called ‘happenings’ reserving the term ‘event’ for those things that we ourselves make to happen (Scannell 1999). The key difference between happenings and events is that happenings have an unintended character while events are precisely meant and intended. Each has a fundamentally different temporal character.

Happenings—an earthquake, a plane crash— have a retrospective temporal structure. They are in the first place strictly meaningless (they were not *meant* to happen) and their significance is something that is sought for after the event itself. *Why* did it happen? Whose fault was it? How can we ensure it doesn’t happen again? Such questions—which look back on the event in an effort to account for it and thereby render it meaningful—indicate that unintended events have a retrospective meaning which is found and determined with the wisdom of hindsight.

Events that we make to happen have a prospective meaningful character. They are meant and intended to happen in a particular way, with particular effects for participants and a particular end in mind. As such they require, from the those responsible for making it happen, much forethought, effort and planning. Events, unlike happenings, are known in advance. They are forward looking and looked forward to. For those who will participate in the event-that-is-to-come (performers and audiences) the occasion, from its very beginning, is invested with expectations. Thus events have a fore-structure and, intimately linked to this, a structure of anticipation. What will it be like? Will it ‘work’? Will it come off—on the day—as that which it is meant and intended to be?

In a non-trivial way we make things happen in order to give ourselves experiences. We long for the event that is to come in order to experience being *in* it. Beyond that we invest in the prospective event so that, when we get to the other side of it, we can look back and remember it *as* that which we had earlier hoped it might be. Yes, it *was* a good day. It *was* a great game, a memorable occasion. Events before, during and after generate talk about them. And this talk is not some contingent thing, not some bit of ‘added value’, but an intrinsic feature of the

event, part of its very being. To talk of the event ahead of its happening is to anticipate how it will be. As such it is the talk that generates a structure of expectations and hopes that must be met. The talk *after* the event is the retrospective process of assessment and evaluation. Did it measure up? If not, why not? Where did it go wrong? During the event, as it unfolds in the live, phenomenal now of concern we talk it through, looking forwards and backwards—as, for instance, in half-time talk during a soccer match. Thus events have a before-during-after structure. This temporal structure (past-present-future: beginning-middle-end) is the structure of human existence (the structure of our life-span). It is the structure of all events and stories. All three are intrinsically linked in the live and living moment of the event itself, the phenomenal now of concern. I will try to show how and in what ways these matters all came together in the temporally unfolding event-and-story that now retrospectively was *Big Brother*.¹

The time of the event

The time-span of *Big Brother* was unusually long for a television event. It stretched over nine weeks, and as such generated a number of design problems about how to sustain its eventfulness across this extended span of time. The meaning of events (and stories) is realised in their ending. The temporal movement of *Big Brother* from its first day was its progress towards its last. The Last Day—the Day of Judgement and Revelation—was, from the start, the time-horizon towards which the program and its audiences journeyed. The programme's structure of expectation would be met when the last person in the house emerged in the last hour of the last day as the ultimate winner. Thus the programme had, from the start, a powerful drive towards a climactic moment of resolution. Its time-line was linear and irreversible. Ten people went in at the start. One would come out in the end. But how did the programme maintain interest in this process? How did it build a momentum towards the end, while maintaining interest from day to day?

¹ The analysis that follows deals only with the first British transmission of the show in the summer of 2000. Moreover it treats it as primarily a *television* phenomenon and focuses on its reception as such. The online presentation of *Big Brother* was a very important, and novel, aspect of its success. The climactic day when Nick's perfidy was discovered and discussed by the other inmates was probably the first major on-line tv event in Britain. But it should be noted that *Big Brother* on-line served as a support and extension of *Big Brother* on tv, and not the other way round. Research on the reception of the second British run of the programme, in the summer of 2001, supports this view. Subscribers to the digital Channel E4 has access to *BB2* 24 hours a day, and tended to use it rather like radio, having it on in the background or checking in for updates on the housemates. At such, it complemented, rather than displaced, the programme as a television event.

For us, in each case, time is the time *of* my being. Time is, in each case, mine: I *am* my time (Heidegger 1992: 22E). How though, does time become available; that is, how does it exist as an accessible public phenomenon? How does my time join up with the time of others (Heidegger 1988:264ff)? And what kind of time is it—the time of my being with others? How can I get into such a time? Natural temporalities (day and night) and abstract temporalities (seconds, minutes, hours) are used to create the spanned now in which supra-individual temporalities become available *as* social time, the time of societies, *worldly* time. Radio and television are powerful bridging media which span the times of societies and the times of individual existences, bringing them into an available, public, worldly now-of-concern. A range of different time spans and horizons were cleverly utilized by the designers of *Big Brother* to build momentum, to create involvement and to gather countless my-times into the time of the programme-as-event as it moved in time towards its resolution.

Thus, if the fundamental time-line of the programme was an irreversible journey to its end, this was masked by the more immediate event-horizon of each week; namely the moment when the participants nominated their two candidates for eviction. This was the moment when viewers were called upon to exercise their judgement and vote for who should go and who should stay. And how could one do this without having watched what had been going on in the house in the preceding days? And if one did vote would one not be concerned with the outcome of this act and watch the declaration of the result? Thus the days of the week were thematized as a time/event horizon in which something was resolved in such a way as to generate, by that resolution, a momentum that carried forward into the next week's event horizon.

The week, as a time-span, has a historically determined structure. In today's world it is thematized as the *working* week that goes from Monday to Friday with the week-*end* as that towards which the working week is oriented. Thus the week has a defined temporality, an internal structure that generates a certain momentum, a set of expectations, which gathers pace as the days progress towards the work-ending week end. During the working week a common conversational resource concerns plans for the weekend whose aura—however faint—marks it out as something 'to be looked forward to' and, in this way, talkable-about. To 'look forward' is to have hope. Hope is an investment in the future as somehow or other worthwhile. The *petits bonheurs* of everyday existence are marked by small anticipations and everyday hopes which, as they are met, make day to day life worthwhile. This ontology of expectations was unobtrusively exploited in the design of *Big Brother* to generate interest *within* each week and to build momentum *from* week to week. If the pivotal time in the week is Friday evening, as that which is most looked forward to, then using that night as the

weekly program-climax meshed perfectly with the time structures of daily life ‘out there’ in the real world. Friday night was the moment at which two different temporalities encountered each other: time-in-the-house and time-in-the-world.

These two ‘times’ ran in parallel for the duration of the event, but had radically different textures of relevance. For the inmates the time-structure of the week is well described by Jean Ritchie:

It is the rhythm of the nominations that has given highs and lows to every week in the house, with the air-punching delight of the survivor providing a contrast to the shock (and sometimes relief) of the contestant who was given their marching orders on Friday evening. Afterwards, came the slump of all the housemates, as another empty bed appeared in one of the bedrooms, followed by the relative calm of Sunday when the task and shopping dominated the day. Then there was tension on Monday, when names had to be named, and more stress on Tuesday until the results were announced. Wednesday and Thursday were relatively quiet days, although at least two of the residents knew that their fate was being decided by the viewers votes. Friday was the most difficult day of all, with the high emotion of saying farewell and the excitement of the crowd outside spilling into the house as the surviving contestants got glimpses of family and friends cheering from a hundred yards away. This was followed by the realization that they were, for another week at least, back in the *Big Brother* loop. (Ritchie 2000; 246-7).

Although this time-structure maps on to the time of the world and its weekly rhythms, time *in* the house was radically uncoupled from the time of the world outside. This perhaps was not so apparent to viewers, but shows up pervasively in Jean Ritchie’s useful account of ‘the official unseen story’ of the programme. What was unseen for viewers, however regular, was what it was like living *inside* the house. And perhaps the most remarkable thing was the collapse of the structured character of worldly time as it goes on each day *through* the day, and from day to day *through* the week. The inmates were not allowed to take watches, clocks or any other kind of time-piece into the house. Inside the house itself there were only two time-keepers: a clock on the cooker, and one alarm clock for the household. Moreover, the natural division between night and day was undone because the lights all over the house (with the exception of the two dormitories) were kept on day and night. Thus, what very quickly disappeared were the time-routines of the world outside and, more pervasively, any sense of structured time. The inmates rapidly lost touch with any sense of ‘the time of day’. ‘Your body loses track of time’ Sada noted, looking back on her time inside. ‘I got up one morning and thought I’d have a shower, then found it was 4 am’ (Ritchie 2000:76). On another occasion, they completely lost track of time, having managed somehow to re-set incorrectly the two time-pieces in the house. Nicola had to go into the diary room to ask Big Brother

what the correct time was (Ritchie 2000: 104). Even the chickens became disoriented (*ibid*: 150).

This collapse of structured, worldly time impacted on the inmates in various ways, but most obviously in the destruction of their normal sleeping patterns. The cycle of sleep and waking life was derailed for all of them and this was because there was nothing for any of them to do. Craig, for instance soon established a reputation as ‘The Incredible Sleeping Man’ and all, with the exception of Nick, took to napping in the afternoons (Ritchie 2000: 55). Ritchie notes that in the Dutch version of the programme the inmates slept all day and were up all night and this tended to happen in the British version too. With the lights on all the time, it was impossible just to switch off and go to bed. People stayed up until exhaustion overtook them. Mostly they stayed up all night talking. They toyed with the idea of setting times to go to bed and times to get up, but not everyone agreed. For all of them adjusting to the collapse of structured worldly workaday time proved very difficult in the first week or so and some of those who, as it turned out, were there to the end, nearly quit: ‘All we’ve got is one boring Thursday, an exciting Friday because someone’s getting kicked out, a dull Saturday, Sunday food, and the rest is crap. I will be so pleased to get out of here (Darren [Ritchie 2000: 72]).

Time in the household, then, was experientially, existentially *empty*. As such, it had, somehow to be filled, and finding ways of filling time from day to day for the inmates was a key task of the production team. Insofar as there was a routine in the house, beyond the weekly cycle of nominations and evictions, it was established by the various tasks set for the household by Big Brother. The most important of these was given to the group each Saturday, to take their minds off the previous night’s eviction. The task might be to learn semaphore, or to make their own crockery, or to cycle from Land’s End to John o’Groats. They were given three days in which to prepare for the test or complete the challenge and could bet a percentage of their weekly food allowance on whether they would succeed. Since the maximum weekly spend was not very much, success or failure in the task really mattered and demanded the participation of all. The other regular smaller task was on Tuesdays, again to provide a distraction from the other main stress-point in the week, the announcements of the two nominated for eviction. These along with the Saturday morning ritual of agreeing the weekly food spend constituted the main activities of the week. Now and again, when the production team felt the inmates needed a morale booster, they would be rewarded by small extra tasks with prizes for success. Place in order of expense three bottles of red wine sent in by Big Brother and if you succeed you get five of the best. Other small rewards might be a video chosen by the inmates, or pizza or ice cream sent in to the house as an occasional small luxury. The garden and the hens provided some occupation, and there were meals to be

cooked (mainly by Darren, universally acknowledged as the best in that department), but on the whole there was simply *nothing* to do. There was no television, no radio, no music. Some brought in books but found reading impossible. Reading is a solitary activity and the one thing denied everyone was solitude. It was quite impossible—except in sleep (and even then they dreamt about each other!)—to escape the presence of others. Time passed in trivial pursuits. The boys drove the girls mad for the first week or so by playing all the time with Andy's birthday present, a Scalectrix set. Marathon card sessions passed away the nights. And if all else failed, there was talk.

The relevance of talk

The mantra of the inhabitants of the Big Brother house, invoked more frequently as time dragged on, was 'It's only a game show!' I have suggested that the fundamental communicative character of radio and television is sociability—being sociable—and that this shows up most clearly in the design structure of all broadcast talk programmes, quizzes and game shows, particularly those that draw upon ordinary people rather than professional entertainers. Such programmes have no *raison d'être* other than fun, entertainment 'having a good time' (Scannell 1996: 22-57). They are experiments in the 'merely' sociable: being with others for no other reason than the pleasure, interest, excitement, tension and laughter that this might produce. As such the merely sociable appears to us as essentially ambivalent. It is not a necessary thing. It serves no useful purpose. It is not serious. It is trivial and pointless or, at least, beside the point. It is a 'waste' of time that might otherwise be spent to some purpose. Wasting time gives rise to existential anxiety, and is part of the essential worry about watching television. One could—perhaps should—be doing something better (more useful) with one's time.

What then, was 'the point' of *Big Brother*? It was a game, a pastime, a device for passing time. The members of the household were pervasively aware of being there for the sake of being looked at by an absent television audience. They had voluntarily and willingly made themselves into a spectacle. They were permanently on display for the duration of their time in the house. The question, 'Why would they do this?', however is not separable from the question, 'Why would we watch them?'. In other words, speculation on the motives of the participants—were they just a bunch of wannabes in pursuit of fame and fortune?—should not be uncoupled from our motives for watching. Were we, the viewers, no more than a dubiously motivated collection of voyeurs or nosey-parkers, as some press comments suggested in the early days of the show?

We should, perhaps, as viewers, acknowledge the ruthless underpinnings of the programme. In Erving Goffman's brilliant study of 'total institutions' he describes the destruction of the civil self of everyday existence and its replacement by an institutionalised self: the model prisoner, schoolboy, soldier or nun (Goffman 1968). In total institutions the inmates cannot escape (there is no 'time out') and are under constant surveillance by the authorities who run the place. The 'territories of the self' (p. 32) are remorselessly stripped away and the inhabitants lead a 'batch' existence (p. 17) There are no spaces wherein you can *be* your self by yourself, and nothing that you can claim as you own, as part of *your* self. The inmates sleep in dormitories. Bathrooms and lavatories are monitored. Privacy is impossible. You have no possessions, or very few. This leads to such behaviours as jealously guarding the few possessions that belong to you and to hoarding for its own sake. Mildly neurotic versions of these behavioural disorders showed up quite soon in the household, with individuals marking out their food stashes, hoarding things like chocolate and cigarettes for exchange and barter and, in Mel's case, squirreling away, for no apparent reason, electric batteries (Ritchie: 114). In fact, as Ritchie's account makes plain, the first few weeks were very stressful for everyone. The only escape from being in the presence of others was on those rare moments when all were asleep, and someone could 'escape' into the living area for a good cry, or by going into the diary room and letting off steam into the invisible ear of Big Brother. For those who felt truly desperate, counselling was available in the privacy of the diary room and this was the one thing that, for the inmates, was guaranteed as completely off-air and confidential.

However, in this particular total institution, the object of the exercise was not the mortification of the self of everyday life. The play of the game demanded of the inmates not so much that they be or deny themselves, but that they put themselves in play with others to test their interactions. Stripped of the props and routines of ordinary daily life something else was enforced in the house: not so much the 'merely' as the *purely* sociable. *Big Brother* was a forcing house in sociability in which 'getting on with others' (or not) was the programme's wager and prize. The one who emerged from the house last would be the one deemed to be, by both the other inmates and the television audience, the one who had got on best, somehow or other, with all the rest over the nine week span of the programme.

Everyone knows that for a time in the summer of 2000 the *only* thing that anyone talked about was *Big Brother*. The amount of comment, discussion and evaluation that it elicited at the time, in the press, in pubs and buses and households up and down the land was enormous. This talk was not accidental but a structural feature of the show's relational totality of involvements. Involvement *showed* in talk so that to consider what it was that elicited such a

‘discursive ferment’ is to get at the heart of the programme’s care-structure *as* an event invented for television. The programme invited, indeed, demanded that not only should it be watched on a daily basis but that it should be talked about. Talk was necessary in order to formulate your views about who should go and for that decision to have some validity claims it needed to be grounded in assessments of the performances of the inmates of the house. Such assessments had a cumulative weight. The more you watched the programme, the more you knew about all the inmates, their personal traits and the ways they interacted with each other. Just as in soap operas, the more you watched, the more expert you became in evaluating character and behaviour as time went by. As the programme moved through time it did not jettison its past, but rather carried it forward as a texture of relevances to be invoked in each weekly cycle of nominations and voting. The programme’s past, at any now-point, had a prospective bearing on what was to come. The end, though endlessly deferred, was always present.

‘It’s good to talk!’, and doubtless there is a moral dimension to ‘good’ conversation. But the talk that *Big Brother* generated shared the ambivalence of the programme itself and, indeed, television. Wasn’t it, yet again, a trivial waste of time—no more than ‘mere’ gossip, the stuff of soaps and tabloids? Yet gossip—like the everyday world in which it circulates—deserves to be defended against those who, like Heidegger, dismiss it as mere ‘idle talk’ and indicative of ‘inauthentic being’ (Heidegger 1962: 211-214). It is a good but not sufficient point in its favour to invoke the pleasure of gossip—the enjoyment of talking about others and what they’re up to, even while acknowledging the potential for harm of such talk (cf Spacks 1986). More to the point is that gossip (talk about others) is in itself indicative of the unavoidably social character of human life. In any society all members are, and know that they are, open to the scrutiny and assessments of others. Whatever you do (or don’t do) others will take notice, remark upon and talk about it. This knowledge serves to modify and regulate behaviours within the discursively circulating norms of any society. Positively and negatively gossip is a policing, or self-monitoring mechanism. Jane Austen famously described England, two hundred years ago, as a country ‘where every man is surrounded by a neighbourhood of voluntary spies, and where roads and newspapers lay every thing open’ (*Northanger Abbey*, ch. 34). All societies are gossip communities or have gossip-networks embedded in them.

A gossip community is a knowable community—one in which the members are known and available to each other in a particular place and in time. Gossip has no meaning (significance) without cumulative knowledge of the lives and circumstances of those who are the focus of talk. Then indeed the relevance of past events and relationships come into play in assessments of ‘the present situation’ wherein the interplay of character and action is under scrutiny. Big

Brother created its own gossip community through the daily and weekly routines embedded within the stretched time span of the programme and through the ruthless paring away of the personal routines and paraphernalia of ordinary life. Everyone in the house was not just there to be looked at, but there to be talked about. This of course, the inmates all understood but it came as a revelation to each one of them, nonetheless, to discover when they left the house just how much talk they had generated.

The *Sun* printed raunchy pictures of Caroline dancing. Craig and Andy were the subjects of kiss-‘n-tell stories by ex-girlfriends. And the Nasty Nick campaign got going very quickly, led by the *Sun* whose reporters hired a helicopter to drop Vote Nick Out leaflets over the household’s garden—a stunt which caused a brief state of emergency in the house as the production team locked up the inmates in the diary room until the garden was cleared of this unsolicited litter. They then ran a story—pure rumour—that Nick had smuggled in a mobile phone and, in the dead of night, was contacting a friend on the outside for feedback on public reaction to the show. Again, the inmates were rounded up while the house was searched, but nothing was found. When Claire left the house in week seven she was a front-page photo-story in *The Times* and, by the end of the show, Anna was the most famous lesbian in Britain. Inside the house there was much talk about sex but little, if any, action. All were acutely aware of the eyes of the world upon them. Mel, who clearly attracted Andy and Tom, was asked, when she left, whether she had considered either of them ‘romantically’. She declared she had not even entertained the thought: ‘Nothing was going to happen on national TV, absolutely no way...It was naïve and ignorant of anyone if they thought it would happen. I wasn’t trying to form any kind of sexual relationship. I was just trying to get on with them. (Ritchie 2000: 217). There were no sex scandals in the programme.²

Insofar as there was any scandal it centred on the machinations of Nick whose reputation in the house was dramatically at odds with his perception in the eyes of the watching, gossiping world. Those who departed from the house in the first weeks were, one by one, astonished to discover his duplicity as it was enthusiastically revealed to them by Davina McCall. Nick himself was, in Ritchie’s account, the one most aware of the unceasing hidden presence of the cameras and most obsessed with how he would appear to the outside world. But his evil deeds turned out to be, in the end, of the pantomime villain variety. It was only a game, after

² The absence of sex in the first series of *BB* may be indicative of the peculiarities of the British. In other European countries (France and Germany for instance) the producers actually had to ask the inmates to stop having sex all the time. There was a love interest in *BB2* when Paul and Helen famously fell for each other, but it was the process of the relationship—the flirting, and the sexual tensions it generated—that roused audience interest in the programme and boosted its ratings, rather than live sex on telly (which did not happen).

all. Nick knew this better than most for he, alone, tried to treat it as a game, and paid the price. No-one, however, was really hurt by his plotting and in the end, everyone forgave him. Nick was the one whom those left in the house in the last two weeks most wanted back to liven the place up a little. The gossip generated by *Big Brother* was of the harmless, not harmful, variety.

Conclusion

What more is there to say? Have I not already said more than enough about what was, as everyone agreed, *only* a television game show? It was good fun at the time, but shouldn't we leave it at that and not try to make more of it than it, in fact, warrants? The fundamental enigma of ordinary, everyday existence is its apparent triviality and insignificance. There is not much, if anything, to say of it. It doesn't mean or matter all that much. This is the crux of the ontological structure of everyday life. It is, at one and the same time, the source of all meaning and significance *and* yet no big deal in itself, not much to write home about. As such it powerfully resists being taken seriously, since it cannily generates resistance to the very idea of any 'depth' analysis undertaken to unmask its secrets.

Yet I would like finally to offer a serious thought about the things I have discussed in relation to *Big Brother*, namely the connections between the temporality of the event and the talk it generated. Events and stories have the same structure as human existence; the *span* of life that stretches between the moment of birth and the moment of death. The structure of existence, like the structure of events and stories, has a beginning, middle and end. Most fundamentally, in each case, this is a temporal structure. But there is a difference between the temporality of stories, events and life itself. The meaningfulness of events and stories is realised in and by their ending and this is something that is readily available to us all. But what is not available to any of us, is the meaning of our own existence because, in every case, we do not get to see (except in fictions) beyond our own ending. That is something that is only available for others to see who live after us. Furthermore, while it is of course the case that all of us make our lives meaningful in and by the things that concern us—our families and friends, our work, our various 'life' projects—what again we cannot do is lay claim to the evaluation of their significance. That is always, and of necessity, determined by others and often retrospectively. This is perhaps, the serious point of gossip. Gossip is always about others and what it is always concerned with are moral evaluations of the character and actions of others, as any regular broadcast soap fan knows. Gossip is a profoundly involving worldly thing, an essential part of the way of the world. None of us escapes it.

Perhaps then, we owe a debt of gratitude to all those who entered the *Big Brother* household. They willingly, knowingly put themselves on display, and thereby at risk. They mostly found it, by their own accounts, a worthwhile experience. But in submitting to the gaze and gossip of the world they furnished us, the viewers, with convincing evidence that, while we own our lives (they are our own and no-one else's) we do not own the story of our lives and how it will be, in the end, assessed. Life is a waiting game and all of us are in it to the death. But none of us can stand outside our own life and see it as others see it. That stands in the common light of publicness for the World in its wisdom to judge. Well might the inmates of the *Big Brother* household say to us, their audience: *Quid rides? Mutato nomine de te fabula narratur* (Horace, *Satires* bk. 1). Why do you laugh? Change the name, and the story that is told is yours.

References

Goffman, E. (1968) *Asylums*. Harmondsworth: Pelican Books

Heidegger, M. (1962) *Being and Time*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Heidegger M. (1988) *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press.

Heidegger, M. (1992) *The Concept of Time* Oxford: Blackwell.

Ritchie, J (2000) *Big Brother. The Official Unseen Story*. London: Channel 4 Books

Scannell, P. (1996) *Radio, Television and Modern Life*. Oxford: Blackwell

Scannell, P. (1999) 'The death of Diana and the meaning of media events' *Media, Information and Society* Journal of the Institute of Socio-information and Communication Studies, The University of Tokyo, Japan. Volume 4. pp. 27-51.

Spacks, P. M. (1986) *Gossip*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Chapter Six

What reality has misfortune?

When disaster strikes it seldom comes with its meaning branded on its forehead.¹ An immediate issue for broadcasters is to establish, as quickly as possible, what in fact has happened and what in fact it means. News coverage, ordinarily, has a retrospective character. The original event has already taken place ‘off-stage’ and the resources and narrative strategies of television newsrooms are committed in the first place to catching up both with what has happened and the immediate consequences for those most nearly and fatefully caught up in it. On September 11th 2001 the original event—the first plane crashing into the north tower of the World Trade Centre—did indeed take place ‘off-stage’ from television but it was, within minutes, brought live into morning news programs in the United States. It instantly became a catastrophe that unfolded ‘live-to-air’ on television screens around the world. At first it was utterly incomprehensible but, by the end of the day, the situation had been accurately analysed and correctly understood. Immediate action had been taken and future courses of action predicted and assessed.

In what follows I attend to both these moments—the breaking news story at the beginning of the day as shown on CNN, and retrospective accounts and analyses at the end of the day, in the BBC’s main nightly news programme at 10 pm. These two moments have different temporalities; the *immediate present* of live-and-in-real-time coverage and, on the other hand, the *historic present*² of nightly news as it looks back on the events of the day. Summary accounts of CNN and BBC news coverage are followed by a brief discussion of what they reveal about the role of

¹ A shorter version of this article was first published as ‘Quelle réalité du malheur?’ in *Dossiers de l’Audiovisuel* no 104: July-August, 2002. I am grateful to its editor, Daniel Dayan, for permission to publish this revised essay, ahead of its appearance in a forthcoming book, based on the special issue of their journal, to be published by L’Institut National de l’Audiovisuel. I have made some minor alterations and additions to this English version.

² For more on the immediate present, the future present and the historic present as integrally related dimensions of the phenomenal now of daily broadcasting, see the discussion of prospective and retrospective narratives in Scannell (2004)

broadcast news when disaster strikes.

I

CNN live coverage

It is a normal day on CNN’s rolling early mornings news program, *Live at Daybreak*.³ At 8.45 am, Eastern Time, the studio has a live-to-studio report on a New York fashion show of clothing for pregnant women. It is a light hearted piece with the CNN reporter at the venue interviewing three very pregnant models and the designer of the outfits they are wearing. There is playful banter between the female studio anchor, the reporter and the interviewees. As the item is wrapped, the programme cuts out to advertisements and then back to a short report on business news followed by promotional ads for the Station’s corporate business sponsors. Coming out of the ads, what is displayed next is a shot of a skyscraper with smoke billowing from its upper storeys against the backdrop of a clear, blue morning sky. Chromakeyed across the bottom of the screen is a double strapline:

BREAKING NEWS

WORLD TRADE CENTER DISASTER

CNN

LIVE

For the next fifty minutes CNN continues to hold on screen static shots of the World Trade Center, nearly all from the same camera position, about two miles away from the buildings and showing only their upper section. Advertisements are scrapped and coverage is continuous. Over images of the towers (and it is not easy to distinguish one from the other) there is what has, in effect, become a voiced-over radio commentary from the news program’s two anchors, Leon Harris and Carol Lin:

CNN: 11.09.01: 8.50 am⁴

Lin: Yes (.) This just in (.)
You are looking at obviously a very disturbing live shot there.
That is the World Trade Center and we have unconfirmed reports this morning

³ The following account of CNN news coverage is deeply indebted to Paul Pheasey’s undergraduate dissertation, ‘Convention in Chaos. CNN’s Search for Meaning on September 11th, 2001’. I have drawn extensively on his videotape and superb transcription of the first fifty minutes of CNN’s live coverage of the breaking story, from 8.50 am onwards (Pheasey 2002).

⁴ All times given are for Eastern Time (ET), the time in New York.

that a plane has crashed into one of the towers of the World Trade Center
CNN center right now is just beginning to work on this story
obviously our sources and trying to figure out exactly what happened
But clearly something relatively devastating happening this morning
there at the south end of the island of Manhattan.
That is once again one of the towers of the World Trade Center
Harris: Well you can see these pictures
It's obviously something devastating has happened
and again unconfirmed reports that a plane has crashed into one of the towers there
We are efforting more information on this subject as it becomes available to you

In retrospective news stories, the newsroom informs its uninformed audiences of what it knows. There is an asymmetry of knowledge between the producers and tellers of the news and those for whom it is produced and to whom it is told. But in this breaking story the CNN news team knows no more than viewers about what they are looking at on screen. Moreover in retrospective news coverage the boundaries of the event are apparent, precisely because it has already happened and is now over. It is available as a whole and, as such, can be narrated, discussed and assessed. But again, at this moment and for the next few hours, the boundaries of what is happening cannot be foreseen. Indeed, at a certain point (when the newsroom is trying to cope with the attack on the Pentagon as well as the World Trade Center and then the collapse of the two towers) the most terrifying aspect of the unfolding chain of events is that there is no apparent limit to it. It seems to be a spiralling disaster without end.

Throughout all this the two CNN presenters fronting the live coverage maintain their professional focus. The disaster is treated, without hesitation, as a *story* right from the start. Everything that follows is work on discovering what the story is, done live-to-air. There is no panic. A coherent flow of news-talk is maintained. Lin and Harris make clear, at all times, the status of what they say; whether or not it is confirmed, and by whom. They refuse to speculate. Even in the direst moments the situational proprieties of news routines are maintained. The overriding concern is to establish what, precisely, is happening and, beyond that, how it *could* have happened. Desk-bound in the newsroom, as viewers are bound to their TV sets, the production team searches continuously for witnesses who can testify to what has happened and what is now going on. Thus the most immediate thing to establish, as a matter of fact, is that it was indeed a plane that crashed into the building (and which one) and this is confirmed within seconds by the first over-the-phone witness (a senior manager of CNN) who actually saw the plane go into the World Trade Center.

In the next ten minutes or so CNN, while always holding on screen shots of the smoking towers, cuts away to live reports from two of its affiliates, WNYW and WABC. Both stations provide

live to air interviews with a succession of eye-witnesses who establish that it is the north tower that has been hit at around the 80th floor. At 9.02 am the WABC anchorman is talking, from the studio, to a downtown eyewitness, Winston Mitchell, who confirms that the plane went ‘totally into the building’ and lodged in it. He is then asked if there is a lot of debris:

CNN 9.11.2001: 9.02 am

Static shot of the top half of the north tower from a WABC traffic-monitoring helicopter

Winston: No because it looked like it inverted with the impact everything went into the building. The only bit that came out was a little bit of the outside awning, but I’d say the hole is

(.) just let me get a better look right now

WABC: OK go ahead

Winston: The umm (.) I’d say the hole takes about six or seven floors were taken out

A plane comes into frame for a split second and disappears behind the tower. The image cuts out for a moment and then returns to show a fireball mushrooming out of the side of the building

And there’s more explosions hold on people are running hold on

WABC: hold on just a moment we’ve got an explosion inside the

Winston: The building’s exploded! You’ve got people running up the street! I don’t know what’s going on

WABC: OK just put Winston on pause there for just a moment

Winston: The whole building just exploded the whole top part the building’s still intact people are running up the street.... Am I still connected?

Another full screen shot of the north tower

WABC: Winston this would support what Libby⁵ and you both said

that perhaps the fuselage was in the building that would cause a second explosion such as that

Winston: Well that’s just what’s happened then

WABC: That would certainly (background sounds of shouting in the studio)
We are getting word that perhaps

Winston: OK hold on the people here are everybody’s panicking

Zoom to close-up of the tower. Shot obscured by helicopter boom

WABC: Alright (.) you know Winston let me put Winston on hold for just a moment

Winston: I dunno how long I’m gonna be here I’m inside of a diner right now

WABC: Well Winston you know what if you could give us a call back (.) I just don’t want panic here on the air (.) Let’s just take some of our pictures from our news chopper 7

Cut to long distance shot

Now one of our producers said perhaps a second plane was involved let’s not let’s not even speculate to that point but at least put it out there that perhaps that may have happened (0.2) ermmm (.) the second explosion which certainly backed the theory from a couple of eyewitnesses that the plane fuselage perhaps stayed in those upper buildings

Cut to close-up shot in which both towers can now clearly be seen with smoke and flames coming out of them

⁵ An earlier interviewed eye-witness

Now if you look at the second building there are two both twin towers are on fire now this was not the case—am I correct?—a couple of moments ago. This is the second twin tower now on fire (.) and we're gonna check on the second flight if perhaps this happened.

This all began at about 8.48 this morning.

Again, what we know, in case you're just joining us. A small plane not a Cessna type

Cut to full-screen shot that focuses on flames coming from the second tower

or 5 or 6 seater but instead perhaps a passenger flight ran into the north side of the World Trade Center

As you can see the second explosion that you're looking at now, the second twin tower has spread much debris, much more debris than the first explosion or accident

Aah if there is, is Winston still on the line with us? (0.2) OK he's not there

Do we have—I'll just talk to my producer—do we have an eyewitness that perhaps sees better than we do from these pictures?

Again you can see that there is debris falling off

OK we actually have an eyewitness news reporter Dr Jay Adelberg who was downtown at the time and he is on the phone with us live.

Dr Jay what can you tell us?

At the moment that the second plane crashes into the south tower, the ABC anchor, focused on his live-to-air eyewitness interview, fails to see what is clearly, but only for an instant, visible; a plane coming in low from the right hand side of the television screen and disappearing behind the north tower. It is not immediately obvious that it has, in fact, crashed into the south tower.

Winston responds immediately: 'The building's exploded... the whole building just exploded.'

The anchor interprets this to support the point that Winston and an earlier witness have established; that the first plane is embedded in the north tower and hence may have caused a secondary explosion—an assessment accepted by the eyewitness. What is in vision on screen is hard to interpret because the two towers are not clearly distinguishable from each other. Now, as in all the early minutes of the unfolding catastrophe, there is a continuing demand for 'an eyewitness that perhaps sees better than we do from these pictures'. The instantly upcoming interviewee, Dr Jay Adelberg, confirms that a second plane came in, moments ago, at a low altitude and appeared to crash into the World Trade Center. This is followed by a sequence of replays of the plane going behind the north tower and, after a fraction of a second, a spectacular fireball exploding from the side of the barely visible south tower.

Thus far, all interviews have been with ordinary people who are on air simply because they have either a better line of vision on what is happening than the newsroom (and viewers) or else actually saw the planes going into the buildings. Next up is the first expert witness, Ira Furman, a former National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) spokesman. In the course of a lengthy discussion Furman makes it plain that it is inconceivable that two planes could accidentally crash into the towers given the perfect flying conditions and that, in the case of the second plane, the

smoke billowing from the first stricken tower marks it out as a visible disaster area to be avoided. Harris concludes the phone interview with a thanks and the observation that ‘the longer we talk the less convinced many will become that this was an accident’.

From now on there is an incremental accumulation of information from varied sources, including the major press agencies—Associated Press and Reuters—that begins to flesh in the background to the thus far inexplicable disaster that fills the television screen. An AP report talks of ‘a possible plane hijacking’. An FBI official tells CNN that the possibility of terrorist acts is being investigated. Rescue operations are under way. A further AP report describes the plane crashes as acts of terrorism. Reports come in that President Bush will shortly make a news statement from Sarasota where he is visiting an elementary school. At 9.29 am, fifty minutes into the breaking story, the President’s brief press statement is chromakeyed on screen in a small framed box but with the stricken towers still the dominant visual image. Bush speaks of ‘a national tragedy’ and ‘an apparent terrorist attack on our country’.

At 9.40 the strapline across the bottom of the screen changes to ‘reports of fire at Pentagon’. The newsroom catches up with this new headline within a minute via a phone interview with CNN’s Chris Plante in a car near the Pentagon. Reports are coming in that the White House is being evacuated. At 9.50, for the first time, the smoking towers in Manhattan are displaced by a shot from Washington of a huge plume of smoke behind government buildings in the foreground. Again the initial on-screen picture is far from clear and there is an immediate off-screen search for clarification of what is happening. The flow of background information increases as the volume of separate incidents rises. The Federal Aviation Authority has grounded all flights in the USA. John King, CNN’s senior White House correspondent in Washington, reports from there that everything that’s happening is being treated as a terrorist attack and that the initial assumption, according to an unnamed official source ‘was that this had something to do or at least they were looking into any possible connection with Osama bin Laden. The administration recently released a warning that they thought Osama bin Laden might strike out against American targets’.

CNN now has a third anchor, Aaron Brown, established in the open air on a rooftop with a clear and unimpeded panoramic view of the two smoking towers standing high above the Manhattan skyline. He continues the commentary live to camera against this backdrop. At 9.58 CNN cuts to a full-screen shot of what is clearly the Pentagon engulfed in a huge black cloud of smoke.

Voiced over this is a down-the-line report to Brown from Jamie McIntyre, CNN's senior Military Affairs Correspondent at the Pentagon:

CNN 11.09.2001 9.58 am

Full screen shot of Pentagon from WUSA

MacIntyre: Again it appears that an aircraft of some sort did hit the side of the Pentagon. The west part which faces sort of towards Arlington National Cemetery. It's a corridor where a lot of army officers are located

Brown: Wow! Jamie Jamie I need you to stop for a second. There has just been a huge explosion

Cut to tight close-up of a side of the still standing north tower and behind it a great cloud of smoke. The camera begins to pull back

We can see a billowing smoke rising and I'll tell you that I can't see that second tower. But there was a cascade of sparks and fire

Cut to Brown on rooftop against the Manhattan skyline

And now this it almost looks like a mushroom cloud an explosion.

This huge billowing smoke in the second tower this was the second of the two towers hit.

And I you know I cannot see behind that smoke

Cut to panoramic shot of Manhattan, smoke rising high above and behind the north tower and rising below and all around it, enveloping all buildings in the area

Obviously as you can't either (background sound of sirens) the first tower in front has not changed and we see this extraordinary and frightening scene behind us of the second tower (.) now just encased in smoke

What is behind it.. I I cannot tell you (.)

But just look at that.

That is about as frightening a scene as you will ever see

Again this is going on in two cities.

We have a report that there is a fire at the State Department as well and that is being evacuated

So we've got fires at the Pentagon (.) evacuated

The State Department (.) evacuated

The White House (.) evacuated on the basis of what the secret service described as a as a credible terrorist threat

We have two explosions (.) we have two planes hitting the World Trade Center here in New York

And what this second explosion was that took place about (.)

A part of that would be the south tower has apparently collapsed

In the live coverage of breaking news, as time moves on implacably, the newsroom is journeying forwards into the unknown, while looking back over its shoulder in a continuing effort to catch up with and make sense of what has just-now happened. Continuously aware that, from moment to moment, new viewers are joining the program, the presenters regularly re-cap and summarise what has thus far happened and what is thus far known about what has happened. Along the way incoming bits of information are added to the snow-balling narrative. But even so, fragments of data, which will later turn out to be hugely important may, in the first instance, appear to be no more than straws in the wind. Barely an hour after the first plane crash into the World Trade

Center the name of Osama bin Laden has been mentioned by CNN’s Washington correspondent in connection with what is happening. But at this moment it appears to be no more than an incidental detail, a passing conjecture that is instantly blown away and lost in the onrushing whirlwind of events.

II

BBC end of day news coverage

In the UK ten o’clock at night has long been the time-slot preferred by the national broadcasters, the BBC and ITN, for their main end of day news program precisely because by then the events of the day have ‘settled’ and there has been time for the newsroom to gather, assess and organise data from all available wide and varied sources. Breaking news, urgently seeking information from moment to moment, accesses incoming data along the way, and transmits it with hedges and cautions precisely because there is no time to check and confirm its evidential status.

Retrospective news, by contrast, enjoys the benefit of hindsight that only time can give. There has been time to sort and sift, to check and cross-check, to pick the most telling moments and the most incisive quotes. Above all there has been time to sort out the events and its telling and present it within an interpretative frame and a story-format: the frame is ‘terrorism’, the story-format is ‘disaster’, the narration is direct, authoritative and without qualification:

BBC News, 11.09.01: 10.00 PM
Peter Sissons, BBC news anchor:

Sissons, in studio, direct to camera
Terrorists attack the heart of America with catastrophic loss of life
The second plane crashes into the south tower
Hi-jacked planes smash into and destroy New York’s tallest buildings
Close-up of the top of the north tower as it begins to collapse
Both towers of the World Trade Centre collapse with thousands trapped
The Pentagon wreathed in clouds of smoke
Another plane explodes on the Pentagon, mocking America’s defensive might
Crowds in Manhattan fleeing an approaching dust cloud
In the streets panic, and the certainty that casualties are horrendous
Prime Minister Blair about to make a press statement
Tonight Britain imposes drastic security measures as Blair condemns the terrorist barbarism

These are the top-of-the-news headlines, read out before the signature music and captions that lead in, each night, to the ten o'clock news. The first and last headlines set the overall frame of 'terrorism' within which the catastrophe flagged in the four intermediate headlines is to be understood. The overall frame is political. The disaster is not. Those most immediately caught up in the disaster, those who suffer—the dead and dying, the injured, their relatives and friends—demand immediate attention *because* of their suffering, irrespective of any question of their causes.⁶ The narrative format of news disaster stories has a structure whose logic is determined by a hierarchy of relevance in which the imperative issue is always the nature and scale of the disaster and its fateful impact on human life. Thus the first half of the BBC news program on the night of September 11th recapitulates the sequence of events, assesses the scale of their impact in terms of human suffering and attends to the rescue efforts in their immediate aftermath. Only after this has been dealt with, does the news turn to the wider political implications of the disaster as a deliberate act of terrorism.

First the precise chronology of events is set out under the banner headline: AMERICA UNDER ATTACK. The first detailed report 'on the day that terrorism struck at the heart of the world's most powerful nation' is from the BBC's diplomatic correspondent, James Robins. It is a brilliantly edited sequence that draws on the most powerful visual images and most telling eyewitness accounts taken from the huge stock of footage available hours later to the news room. The live-and-as-it-happened images available to CNN as the story broke were visually of poor quality, static and low in information; the visuals in the end-of-day report are riveting. There are spectacular shots of the second plane going into the south tower both in close-up and from a distant panoramic shot (an amateur video clip) across the bay with the whole of Manhattan in view. The shots of the towers going down are simply heart-stopping as are the images, moments beforehand, of the doomed souls trapped in them, hanging out of windows, waving in vain for help. Intercut with shots of the buildings are sequences from hand-held, mobile cameras at ground level, that graphically capture the panic on the streets as the police try to control and direct the fleeing crowds. The ambient sound of running footsteps, of shrieks and cries powerfully evokes

⁶ For a detailed discussion of this point see Boltanski (1999:7-11) who links it to the parable of the Good Samaritan. The parable has a direct political significance in present day France where individuals have a legal responsibility to come to the assistance of anyone in distress or danger. A key point of the parable is the provision of immediate aid *irrespective* of the identity and status of the victim and the wider politics of the situation. That is, immediate help should not depend on *who* the suffering individual is, nor wait upon clarification of the circumstances that caused the injury. All considerations of the factors that may

what it was to be there caught up in the disaster zone. None of this was available in the first hour of CNN's morning coverage. The eye-witness interviews again are in sharp contrast with those used in the breaking story. Those consisted largely of people looking out of their windows at the World Trade Centre and describing, over the phone, what they saw. The interviewees were in the same position as the newsroom and the television viewers: observers, onlookers at a distance. The straight-to-camera interviews with men and women on the streets in the disaster zone have a direct and compelling character:

BBC News, 11.09.01: 10.04 pm

Eyewitness, New York:

I wuz just standing here watching the World Trade Centre after the first after the first plane hit (.) I just saw a second plane come in from the south and hit the whuh south (.) tower half way between the bottom and the top of the tower its gotta be a terrorist attack I can't tellya anything more th'n that (.) I saw the plane hit the building

To re-live a moment such as this testifies to the *pain* of witnessing. The anguish in the face and voice, in the whole body of this anonymous 'man in the street' as he tells what he just saw is all caught in the recording. His assessment of what he saw is immediate, certain and precise. It has to be a terrorist attack. It is the only interpretation that makes any sense of what, no matter how many times one watches it, is simply unbelievable—a plane flying into a world famous landmark out of a clear blue sky. The final shot in the report, from across the broad and shining expanse of the bay, of the Manhattan skyline in the early evening, the towers gone and the whole area involved in a drifting shroud of smoke, is unforgettable.

Robins' report, towards the end, touches briefly on the rescue efforts in the aftermath of the collapse of the second tower. This is the focal concern of a follow-on report from Niall Dickson. The numbers of the dead are beyond calculation, but they will be 'more than any of us can bear' says Mayor Guliani of New York, leading the rescue response, in a hastily organised press conference. The hospitals are stretched to breaking point, dealing with more than 2,000 injured. A call for blood goes out as the hospitals are running out, and improvised centres take donations from a host of volunteers. The scenes of the rescue services picking their way through the dust and rubble of the ruined heart of the city are eerily quiet. The report attends to the fatalities at the Pentagon, and the support for the wounded. Again no precise figures can be given. The one exact figure, at the end of the report, is that 266 people died in the four aircraft; the two that went into

have led to an attack on the injured, and any questions as to whether or not such an attack may have been justified or not must be set aside and immediate assistance given.

the World Trade Centre, the one that went into the Pentagon and the one that came down later in a field near Philadelphia.

The scale of a disaster is always measured in terms of its fateful impact on the lives of human beings. In terms of this event its immediate impact and consequences were immeasurable, and initial responses registered stunned shock, astonishment and disbelief. A middle aged man talks to camera of how he escaped:

BBC News, 11.09.01: 10.07 pm

Eyewitness, New York:

.uhh big boom (.) come down the steps. Everything fine till we get to the basement then everything just fell in (.) I wuz got trapped under there with another guy (.) crawled out (.) kept getting hit on the head (.) bashed all around finally we crawled our way out over the rubble (.) we did alright

It is not what he says but the sight of him standing there, in the debris—his head and face covered in blood and dust, his clothes in tatters—that confirms the enormity of what has just happened to him. For the victim himself the significance of what has happened, at this point in time, is beyond the reach of words.

What is not beyond the reach of words is the strategic significance of what has happened, to which the news now turns, having dealt with the events and their immediate aftermath.

‘Terrorists attack the heart of America with catastrophic loss of life’ were the first words of the whole programme, but who the terrorists might be is neither mentioned nor dealt with until half way through the programme:

BBC News, 11.09.01: 10.20 pm

George Eakin, BBC reporter:

And it’s this wealthy Arab fundamentalist the Americans are already naming as an immediate suspect. Osama bin Laden. He controls and finances al Qaeda, an umbrella network of Islamic militants and he’s vowed to destroy the United States.

The report gives further details of bin Laden’s activities against the US. It notes that while the possibility is not excluded, no-one is suggesting that it could be [like the Oklahoma bombing] an act of domestic terrorism. It further considers the possibility of a ‘rogue state’ being behind the attack but reports that initial US responses think this unlikely. Following on from this Peter Sissons goes to a live interview with the BBC’s World Affairs Editor, John Simpson, in Islamabad, who was in Afghanistan the previous week. He is asked whether bin Laden could

have done it, and replies that he certainly could: ‘he’s got the fanaticism, he’s got the followers, he’s got the money and he’s frankly got the imagination’. Sissons then asks, if the United States wanted to go after bin Laden, how difficult would that be?

BBC News, 11.09.01: 10.24 pm

John Simpson:

Well it’s easy enough to hit at Afghanistan and I do think it important to draw the distinction between the Taliban government in Afghanistan who are bin Laden’s hosts, not perhaps all that willingly his host, and the man himself. I think frankly it’s going to be extraordinarily difficult for the Americans to hit him. He’s got his own peculiarly difficult and complex system of communications which they simply can’t break into (.) er I think frankly they’ll they’ll if they’re going to attack if they decide that the attacker came from there they’ll hit Afghanistan very hard. They’ll hit the hosts but frankly I doubt if they’ll get the guest.

Towards the very end of the program in a studio interview, the BBC’s Diplomatic Correspondent, James Robins (who compiled the lead story on the events of the day) confirms the assumption that there will be retaliation on a massive scale from the Americans against bin Laden. He is then asked whether heads will roll in America’s intelligence community who failed to see this coming:

BBC News, 11.09.01: 10.40 pm

James Robins:

I think that’s also a very distinct possibility. It is extraordinary that both the CIA and the FBI failed to detect a threat and failed to prevent four separate concerted and synchronised attacks...[...] It’s very hard to believe that the American intelligence establishment can escape the blame.

Now, four years later and with the wisdom of hindsight we know that Simpson has been proved right. The Americans did, indeed, hit the host but missed the guest. And it did begin to emerge, months later, that American intelligence had picked up on the imminent possibility of terrorist hijacks in the USA in the weeks before September 11th. That, in turn, gave rise to questions as to why the Bush administration apparently did nothing about such reports in the weeks before September 11th.

III

The politics of the present

In his splendid study of *Distant Suffering* Luc Boltanski asks ‘What reality has misfortune?’ (Boltanski 1999: 149-169). How can ‘the moral spectator’⁷ believe the accounts of human suffering that he or she reads about in newspapers or sees on television? At the heart of this question is the problem of witnessing (Peters 2001). To be a witness is to be present at an event of some sort and thereby to have direct and immediate access to what is taking place. A witness ‘has’ (owns) the experience of ‘being there’ and thereby has moral and communicative entitlements. Witnesses have the moral entitlement to evaluate and pass judgement on what they witnessed (they are entitled to their opinions on the matter), whereas others who were not there have no such rights. Arising from this moral right, witnesses have further communicative entitlements. In particular they have the right (indeed the duty) ‘to bear witness’. They can, and must, speak to others of what they saw. Such speech, no matter how banal, has a compelling truth for those who were not there.

We, television viewers, were not there on New York’s *dies irae*. The structures and routines of news are designed to produce effects of truth in such ways that we can believe what we are told and shown. It is precisely because mediated narratives, told in the third person by a news presenter, lack the force of first-person narratives by those who are there, that broadcasting institutions invest such high-cost technical and human resources in order to establish first-person accounts and evaluations of ‘news’. The camera crews who are ‘there’, the reporters who are ‘there’, the eye-witnesses who are ‘there’, the correspondents and analysts who are ‘there’ all combine to furnish compelling evidence as to the primary facticity of what has happened and is still happening. All of them, in their different roles, act as witnesses to the truth of the event, not on their own behalf, but for the sake of absent audiences for whom they show and speak of what is happening. They do this so that anyone and everyone who watches will ‘own’ the experience and thereby be entitled to have and to speak their opinions on the matter.

⁷ Boltanski derives this term from that 18th literary taste public discussed by Habermas (1962) as the precursor of the critical opinion forming public of the late 18th century. Both note the significance of two key early English magazines, *The Tatler* and *The Spectator*; the former constituting the reader as a gossip and the latter as one who gazes on the social scene. Boltanski stresses the importance of Adam Smith’s

Boltanski criticises the hermeneutics of suspicion directed against the humanitarian movement. He wishes to defend a politics of direct and immediate response to disasters. While others sit at home in their armchairs and criticise, humanitarian aid, at least, is there trying to do something, dealing with the situation, bringing relief and comfort to the suffering. ‘Ultimately what justifies the humanitarian movement is that its members are on the spot. Presence on the ground is the only guarantee of effectiveness and even of truth’ (183). There has to be room for a politics of the present, one that is responsive to what is happening now: ‘to be concerned with the present is no small matter. For over the past, ever gone by, and over the future, still non-existent, the present has an overwhelming privilege: that of being real’ (192).

And this applies, with equal force, to broadcasting. It is part of the familiar critique of ‘the media’ not merely that they are parasitic on events, but that their presence distorts them and their accounts misrepresent them. Dayan and Katz’s pioneering study of media events began to correct that view (Dayan and Katz 1992) as do the foregoing brief accounts. Television coverage on the day established the truth of what was happening and of what was being done. It came up with explanations and anticipated future courses of action that remain unchallenged to this day. There would be no politics of the present without the presence and participation of broadcast media. In the responses of the day, on 11th September 2001, the whole world witnessed, through the mediations of television, the immediate, instinctive repair work to the torn and damaged fabric of everyday existence. In such rare moments the politics of the present achieve a transcendent character. And this is something that we get to see and understand through the power of live broadcasting, whose ordinary, worldly news routines shore up, on behalf of us all, the meaningful character of existence even as it appears to be collapsing in ruins before our disbelieving eyes.

References

Boltanski, L. (1999) *Distant Suffering* [*La Souffrance à Distance*. Paris: Editions Métailié, 1993]. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Dayan, D and E. Katz (1992) *Media Events* [*La Télévision Cérémonielle*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1996], Cambridge, Mass.: University of Harvard Press

Habermas, J. (1962/1989) *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, Cambridge: Polity Press.

Theory of Moral Sentiments which includes a discussion of the spectacle of suffering and the moral sentiments it inspires in those who witness it (Boltanski 1999: 35-54).

Peters, J. D. (2001) 'Witnessing'. *Media Culture & Society* 23(6): 707-724

Pheasey, P. (2002) 'Convention in Chaos. CNN's search for meaning on September 11th 2002'. Undergraduate Dissertation, BA Media Studies, University of Westminster.

Scannell, P. (2004, forthcoming) 'Broadcasting historiography and historicity', *Screen*.

Chapter Seven

For-anyone-as-someone structures

I

The communicative structures of everyday existence

Radio, tv and newspapers are part of anyone's life in a post-traditional society. In a country like Britain everyone without exception makes use of them on a daily basis. An obvious conclusion to draw from this is that the media must be organised in such ways that anyone and everyone can use and understand them. This does not necessarily mean that everyone will like them (will want to read this or that newspaper, watch this or that programme). But it must mean that newspapers, radio and tv programmes are so designed as to be intelligible to just about everyone. To whom then, do the media 'speak'? Who do they address, and how? If, say, a tv programme is watched by thirteen million people, how is watching that programme experienced by all those millions? Do they find that they are addressed as a multitude? As all those millions? As 'the masses'? The answer is surely, no. Each viewer finds that what they see and hear seems to speak to them directly and individually.¹ If this is so, then broadcast programmes and daily newspaper appear to have a peculiar communicative structure. They are heard, seen or read by millions (by anyone and everyone) and yet, in each case, it seems, they speak to listeners, viewers or readers personally, as individuals. They are, it could be said, *for* me or anyone. I will call this a **for-anyone-as-someone** structure. We will get a clearer picture of this communicative structure if we begin by considering the two other such structures that are implicated in it, namely **for-anyone** structures and **for-someone** structures.²

¹ It might be objected that many people find the opposite; that they are not spoken to by this or that programme or, indeed, by programmes in general on mainstream radio and television. Such claims have been raised about the unrepresentative character of output by a range of social or cultural minorities. Nevertheless, in the very act of making such claims, they all take it for granted that they personally should be addressed as the persons that they are by radio and television. The 'politics of recognition' (Taylor 1994) presupposes what is here being argued for.

² These three structures are introduced in Scannell 1996, but are not considered in any detail. Cf pp.

For-anyone structures

A for-anyone structure is something which, in its organisation and design, presents itself as useable and useful for anyone (no matter who). What we call mass-produced goods have such a structure. The critics of mass culture condemned mass produced good for their standardized, uniform character. They imposed the stamp of sameness on everything and this, they argued, tended to the liquidation of individuality and difference (Adorno and Horkheimer 1979). Well, maybe. But suppose we turn this round and see that this uniform and standardized character is a very useful feature of many kinds of manufactured thing. I want, say, a toaster that toasts. It doesn't have to do this for me personally. It does have to be designed in such a way that anyone can figure out what it is for and how to use it and in fact do so easily and quickly. It will also be important that the toaster works every time it is used - not just now and again. Given that a toaster, to do its job, must have certain basic design features, it is not surprising that toasters (when you go to choose one) turn out to be pretty similar. There will be some differences (can they cope with muffins and crumpets as well as sliced bread? How many slices can it toast?) but not much. It simply doesn't matter whether or not the toaster is 'for me' personally. Personally I don't care what kind of toaster it is so long as does its job every time and doesn't burn the toast (which mine, as a matter of fact, invariably does).

Mass produced goods may be anonymous, impersonal things. But why should they be anything other than this? Their standard, uniform, repeatable character is precisely the mark of their usefulness for anyone and everyone, any time any where.³ What of for-anyone communicative structures? Or, to put it in a more familiar way, what of mass communication? Is it appropriate to call newspapers, radio and tv, the *mass* media? In one obvious way it does seem so. When people all over the world watch the same movies or tv programmes, they can surely be described as mass media. But the crucial question is, 'How are these countless millions spoken to?' Our experience of newspapers, radio and tv programmes is that they speak to us as persons⁴ not as members of a crowd or mass.

11-15, 174.

³ It is clear that everyday "equipment", as discussed in Chapter 3 of *Being and Time* (Heidegger 1962), has a for-anyone structure. Heidegger's well-known example of equipment is a hammer which is evidently an impersonal tool, designed for use by anyone.

In the early days of *mass* communication research, the communicative model that was favoured as an explanation of how the process worked was the notion of getting a message across. This simple definition - which was seldom interrogated or analysed (it simply seemed obvious that that was what the mass media did) - had fateful consequences for the understanding (or misunderstanding) of the media and how they worked. The idea of getting a message across suggested three things simultaneously: that the communicative process was essentially manipulative, that the communicator was powerful, active and in control of the process (of getting across the message) and that those on the receiving end (the 'mass audience') were powerless, passive and not in control of the process. Much early research and debate focused around these three issues: the manipulative (or propagandist) character of media messages, their organisation and their effect on audiences (Hardt 1992).

It is not difficult to see that most forms of public communication that preceded the 'mass' media were rather like this. They were mostly propagandist or persuasive in character, concerned with getting a specific message across: the political or religious message, or 'the knowledge' contained in the lecture. In each case the speaker controlled the situation and the range of possible responses of the audience were severely constrained. It is tempting to suggest that the ways in which new media were thought of at first defined them in terms of the characteristics of older forms of public address which they appeared to displace. McLuhan called it 'the rear view' image of media and attempted to show, historically, that new media always appeared at first in the guise of the medium which they displaced. Only gradually did they 'free' themselves from the restraints of the older medium and begin to discover their own particular characteristics and potentials. Early thinking about new media of communication thought of them as mass communication, attributing to them the characteristics of existing dominant forms of public address which set aside the individual face needs of audience members, and treated them impersonally as anonymous (faceless) members of a crowd (or mass). Such a definition is appropriate to the communicative practices of public oratory at the historical moment when film, radio, mass circulation daily news papers and television became part of the social fabric of western twentieth century societies. But it is not appropriate to those media themselves and their communicative practices. A concern with the communicative processes and practices of modern media is central to their understanding. But they are not to be thought of as forms of mass communication that speak to multitudes as the masses.

⁴ The category of 'the person' is the theme of Section Two below.

For-someone structures

By contrast with for-anyone structures, for-someone structures are designed for personal use only. Mazdas, Fords, Peugeots etc are mass-produced for mass use all over the world. But Michael Schumacher's Formula 1 car is tailor-made for him and no-one else. More mundanely, things like glasses and dentures are still made-to-measure on an individual basis for most people, though hand-made shoes, shirts and suits are nowadays only for the rich. A manufactured thing that has a for-someone structure is, by definition, really only useful to and useable by the person for whom it is made.

What of for-someone communicative structures? Such a structure is not so much useful as meaningful only for a particular person. Others can 'see' what it is or says, but it doesn't mean anything - anything in particular that is. It is not that it is unintelligible. Rather, it is not significant. For-someone communicative structures have a purely personal significance. Familiar examples of things with a for-someone communicative structure are hand written letters, photographs (more exactly, snap-shots) and home videos. We no longer live in a letter-writing culture in which we write each other personal letters. Its conventions linger on. We still begin 'Dear so-and-so' and sign off with a profession of sincerity or love. But mostly we don't long for certain letters from a special someone as people used to do. The telephone has to a great extent displaced the intimate function of letters.

We can best see the significance of for-someone structures when we think of snapshots. A snap-shot is what you or I take with a camera and almost always as a matter of personal record: of babies and children as they grow up, of holidays or of significant family events:- birthdays, weddings, graduation day and so on. These are purely personal things and are quite distinct from 'photographs' by professionals as 'art' or for advertising or whatever. Photographs have a public significance, and they proclaim their 'publicness' (as art or advertising or social comment) in their form and content. Likewise a snapshot in its content and form (its lack of composition, its fuzziness etc) proclaims its ' privateness'. We have all had the boring experience of going round to friends or family and being shown the holiday snaps (or video) or the recent pictures (or video) of the toddler. We look and comment politely and shuffle through them as quickly as we can without seeming impolite. We have, of course, seen them all before. They have that unmistakable air of déjà-vu about them. All holiday photos are the same, as are all photos of children, family or special occasions.

In a beautiful essay on photography Roland Barthes describes looking through some old

family photos shortly after the death of his mother. He is looking for one that will bring to life for him the spirit and being of his mother: the one in which he recognizes 'the truth of the face I had loved'. At last he finds it:

The photograph was very old. the corners were blunted from having been pasted into an album, the sepia print had faded, and the picture just managed to show two children standing together at the end of a little wooden bridge in a glassed-in conservatory, what was called a Winter Garden in those days. My mother was five at the time (1898), her brother seven. He was leaning against the bridge railing, along which he had extended one arm; she, shorter than he, was standing a little back, facing the camera; you could tell that the photographer had said, "Step forward a little so we can see you"; she was holding one finger in the other hand as children often do, in an awkward gesture. The brother and sister, united, as I knew, by the discord of their parents, who were soon to be divorced, had posed side by side, alone, under the palms of the Winter Garden (it was the house where my mother was born, in Chennevieres-sur-Marne). I studied the little girl and at last rediscovered my mother.... In this little girl's image I saw the kindness which had formed her being immediately and forever, without her having inherited it from anyone.... (Barthes 1984: 68-9)

This is something of what Barthes sees in the faded old photograph of his mother. He can tell us what he sees in it, what it means to him. But you or I can not, nor ever could, see it as he sees it. The photograph is not reproduced in the book. For Barthes himself it is everything. 'For you, it would be nothing but an indifferent picture, one of the thousand manifestations of the "ordinary".' (Barthes 1984: 73) For-someone structures point to the incommunicable self and the incommunicableness of experience. Each one of us has an inner (an ownmost) self that is inexpressable to others. This inexpressable self is a cumulative thing that is formed by the gradually extending narrative of a life as lived, of cherished and cherishable moments, people and places. At most this self is shareable with an intimate other (a partner, a child). It finds objective expression in great art and literature. But ordinarily and for the most part it is not sayable or shareable. I understand what Barthes sees in the photograph of his mother. I understand it because I know what it is to feel such things. There are people in my life who have such significance for me. But to understand and accept the truth of what he sees in this particular photograph is not to share it. All I would see was something that said 'History' (that's an old photo) and 'Culture' (what funny clothes she's wearing, and what's that conservatory thing she's standing in?). The Winter Garden photograph is meaningful for Roland Barthes and no-one else. Thus, for-someone structures point to the inwardness of a personal life as experienced by someone with the attributes of a person.

For-anyone-as-someone structures

For-anyone-as-someone structures show up mostly in the field of culture. Novels and popular songs have such a communicative structure, and I suspect that its history coincides with the formation of the modern 'self' (cf. Taylor 1989). To understand this structure we must constantly keep in mind its double character that operates at two levels simultaneously: it is always, at one and the same time, for me *and* for anyone. It thus is an intermediary structure that mediates between the impersonal for-anyone structure and the personal for-someone structure. As such the for-anyone-as-someone structure expresses and embodies that which is between the impersonal Third person and the personal First person, namely the Second person (the me-and-you). The for-anyone-as-someone structure expresses 'we-ness'. It articulates human social. sociable life. One pervasive way in which this structure shows up on radio and television is in the mode of address they routinely employ. The mode of address of radio and television shows in two interconnected ways. Most basically it is manifest in ways of saying. To this is added, in television, ways of showing. Saying and showing - letting things be heard and seen - these are the two fundamental communicative acts of broadcasting.

How to speak to its unknown, invisible absent listeners and viewers was and remains the fundamental communicative dilemma for broadcasters. David Cardiff (1986) has shown how this problem was encountered by the BBC Talks Department in the formative years of British broadcasting. As a national radio service began to settle in the late 1920s the inescapable questions arose: 'Who are we talking to?' 'How should we talk to them (whoever they are)'? The first head of BBC Talks, Hilda Matheson, was keenly aware of the inadequacies of existing forms of public address for the new medium of radio (Matheson 1933). She realised two things: first that the unknown audience should not be thought of as a mass but as a constellation of individuals, with individual interests, needs, tastes and opinions. It became an article of faith, in BBC Radio Staff Training, that radio spoke to 'an audience of one'. Second, that the design of talk for absent listeners should take into account the contexts within which listening took place. Matheson realised that the broadcaster must consider where listeners were situated as they listened, and adapt what was said to those circumstances. In short, radio adopted a conversational mode of address that spoke to listeners as if each was a person in his or her own right. At the same time, the spaces within which listening took place were implicitly acknowledged in the design of radio talk. The key point to note - in the British case at least - is that how to talk to absent audiences was something that had actually to be

discovered and learnt. If, today it seems natural and obvious that the experience of radio and television is, in each case, that I am spoken to as a person in my own right this is the outcome of a complex, historical process in which the manner and style of broadcasting has changed and adapted to changing times since the early decades of this century.

Television's mode of address is underpinned by the way in which it constructs its 'look', how its speakers are presented to viewers, how they appear to us when we turn on the set. It is, for instance, an entirely unremarkable, taken-for-granted thing that when I watch the news on tv it seems that the newreader in the studio is speaking directly to me, as I watch.⁵ I know, of course, that the news reader is in fact reading the news. I don't suppose that he is an accomplished actor who has learnt a script by heart and produces a word-perfect performance each night. Nor does it appear that the newscaster 'ad-libs' the news. It is not a brilliant, spontaneous improvisation that is routinely produced for tv viewers. Given that news is read, why do we not see the newsreader reading the news from a script in front of her or him? Why should it matter that he or she appears to be addressing the viewer (who turns out, in every case, to be 'me') directly? Why, indeed, bother to have a visible newsreader at all? It makes no difference to the actual content of what is being said. But it does make a difference to my attitude to what is being said.

A basic thing about news, for it to be news, is that it must be - really and truly - believable. The conditions of the believability of news are not simply in the factual nature of its content, but are very much a consequence of the ways in which news is told and, of course, crucially, who is telling it. Suppose there were a different newscaster every night of the week. Suppose the newscaster was never the same - always someone different. Would that make a difference? Not to the content of the news of course, but surely to my attitude to it. The believability of what is being said rests in part on the reliability of who is saying it, and that is something that is built up over time. It matters that news is read at the same time by the same person day in day out, year in year out. For many years Walter Cronkite was the acceptable face of network news in the USA, just as Trevor MacDonald of ITN is regarded by millions of British people as the reliable, trustworthy believable face of Independent Television News (ITN). News is not just some impersonal, factual thing that exists

⁵ This 'look' has a history. Its discovery and invention was linked to the need, in the early years of tv news (the late 1950s), to make it both watchable and believable. To this end special techniques were invented in order to deliver a direct look-to-camera for the newsreader (the tele-prompter or auto-cue). Thus this look must be understood as a consciously sought for, technically achieved and humanly accomplished device that contributes to the production of news as a real-world interactive occasion between the institutions of broadcasting and each and every viewer, whose deliberate intention is to secure the effect, for each and every one of them, of 'I am being told' (for further details see Scannell 1996: 14)

independently of who tells it, and this was something that broadcasters in the UK had actually to learn.

The direct look-to-camera of the newsreader is directed 'out' of the studio. It implicates a someone someplace to receive it who turns out, in each case, to be 'me'. This look and the talk that goes with it is in real time - which turns out to be the same time that I am watching (nine pm if I'm watching the *9 O'Clock News* from the BBC). And all this begins to establish what's happening (namely the newscaster reading the news) as a realtime realworld event of which I am a part. This does not yet or necessarily mean that the news of which the newscaster speaks is thereby established as a realtime realworld thing, but rather that a relationship between the newscaster and every viewer is established as a realtime realworld communicative event and interaction. On such a basis broadcast news can begin to establish its factual, worldly significance.

Thus I find, when I turn on the news, that I am spoken to while knowing that millions of others are watching at exactly the same time and seeing and hearing exactly the same things. In each case the experience is the same. In each case it is 'for me'. This is the characteristic effect of a for-anyone-as-someone structure. The news is, in each case, appropriated by me as an aspect of my experience⁶ and yet at the same time this experience is shared by countless others. It is thus an experience that I share with others and as such is, in principle and in fact, talkable about by me with anyone else who has watched the same news programme. And so it is more generally in respect of the daily output of radio and television. For-anyone-as-someone structures in principle create the possibilities of, and in practice express, a public, shared and sociable world-in-common between human beings.

II

The available self

I have attempted to distinguish three different kinds of human practice and to indicate in each case their particular communicative structure. Together they point to different aspects of

⁶ I have discussed in detail whether or not watching a tv programme can be claimed as 'an experience'

the self. Each one of us takes for granted that the self in question is, in each case, mine. Each one of us holds it to be the case that there is an I-myself and this I-myself is 'me'. What or who is this me? Whenever I claim to be 'me', I mean something like 'the person that I am', a particular someone... 'me'. It is this that is invoked by the first person. 'I' think, 'I' feel, 'I' believe... meaning 'I *personally* think, feel, believe that...' (whatever that may be).

Whenever I say something like this I am laying claim to an entitlement to be heard as a someone with the right to such personal thoughts, feelings and beliefs. This right is not in any primary sense some subjective (internal) thing. It is definitionally *public*; a right of *self* expression. Self expression is not directed back at oneself. It is of no consequence if I simply internalize my thoughts feelings and beliefs (as if I was required to keep them to myself, as if I was debarred from *saying* what I think or feel or believe). A person is someone whose personal views matter in some public, articulate, expressable sense.

Being a person is a socially sanctioned matter. To be treated as a person is to be allowed to be someone in particular (and not a mere cipher, a slave, an 'unperson'). For that to be meaningful it must have practical, recognizable attributes. Amongst the attributes of a person are the entitlements to the tastes, preferences, interests, views, beliefs and opinions that all go to constitute you as the particular person that you are. And it must be the case that all these attributes count (must be taken into account by others when dealing with you). Entitlements are nothing (are meaningless) unless they matter in ways that go beyond being matters of purely personal or subjective satisfaction, conviction or whatever. The entitlements of a person are essentially public matters that require public recognition and public guarantees. It is an essential characteristic of a democratic society that it protects the right of all its members to be treated as particular someones, that is, as persons in their own right.

Those whose beliefs, thoughts and feelings are publicly denied or suppressed or ignored are not persons: they are not allowed to be them-selves. If they have no right to self expression they have no public self. The self is experienced, in each case, as in the first instance a personal matter (the me that I am). But the me that I am is not an essence - not some natural, eternal given; not something we are always and everywhere born with or into. It is a historical phenomenon in a double sense. In the first place only certain historical societies have recognized and guaranteed 'the category of the person'.⁷ And secondly, and even so, within such societies the person is not simply a given. It is something that, in each case, I become. It is not so much a question of 'being me' but of 'becoming me' - the person that I am - in the course of a lifetime. The self is something that I grow into, that I develop, that I lay claim to.

that gives rise to communicative entitlements (Scannell 1996: 93-116)

It is not a given or fixed essence. It has the attributes of a retrospectively tellable story (a biography).

What then is the self that I become? In *Being and Time* the question of the 'who' of everyday existence is raised in the pivotal fourth chapter (Heidegger 1962: 149-168). It is evidently the case that dasein's situated being-in-the-world belongs to the entity that is, in each case, me: 'the subject', 'the self', the 'I myself'.⁸ But Heidegger is in haste to claim that 'proximally and for the most part, dasein (human being) *is not itself*' (151). Who then is ordinary dasein if not me? It is the 'they self', the average self, the anonymous self. It is *anyone*. It thus corresponds to the for-anyone structure discussed above. But what, for Heidegger then, is one's *own* dasein? This is not discussed and is only taken up later, in Division Two, where the *ownmost* self emerges as a significant (a defining) aspect of Authentic dasein (312-348). The ownmost self is me in my radical particularity. It is the I myself alone, and it shows up in my being-towards-death. The mortality of dasein - the ineluctable and inescapable facticity of death - appears as a grand and universal fact. *All* men are mortal. But the mortality of others is, in each case, of secondary significance. It is the fact of *my* death - its radically indeterminate certainty - that impinges on every aspect of *my* life. No matter what I do I can neither take away from others their death (though my actions may prolong or shorten their time on earth), nor escape from the inevitability of *my* death. Death is, in each case, mine. It is what I face, what I must own up to. It is the one thing that I most certainly and intimately own and is thus the clearest indication of my *ownmost* being. What shows in death is the finiteness not of Life, but *my life*. Thus, lifetime - the span of life in each and every case - has a for-someone structure. It is always the one sure and certain thing that is particular, in each case, to me alone.

The they self and the ownmost self are roughly in correspondence with the anyone and the someone structures discussed above. But what of the anyone-as-someone structure in *Being and Time*? It is there in the phrase that is used so often that it is something of a Heideggerian mantra: 'being is, *in each case*, mine'. What is the force of 'in each case', if not to say that being (dasein) is what I or anyone have. It is - in *every* case - constitutive of me. Dasein is recognizable (is manifest) in me or anyone. The kind of being that shows up in me is, in each case and at one and the same time, formally indicative both of someone in particular ('me') and of anyone in general ('they'). Dasein has a for-anyone-as-someone structure. There is a

⁷ See Carrithers, Collins and Lukes (1985) for a debate on this issue.

⁸ Dasein is Heidegger's term for human existence, by which is meant, more exactly, the aliveness of being. Each one of us has dasein. But it is not the case that 'I am dasein', for dasein is not a subject. It does not have its source and origin in me.

triple structure of the self in *Being and Time* -- the theyself; the myself; the ownself -- that corresponds with the three communicative structures traced above. The theyself has a for-anyone structure; the myself has a for anyone-as-someone structure, and the ownself has a for-someone structure. The myself - with its mediating for-anyone-as-someone communicative structure - interacts between the impersonal theyself and the purely personal ownself. These aspects of the self are indications of phenomenal realities that show up in how ordinarily we speak of and orient ourselves towards ourselves and others and the world. All three structures must be understood as equiprimordial. Each presupposes the others. None can be privileged over and above the others

'The they' is the way that Heidegger's English translators render the sense of *das Man*. It does not translate directly, comfortably, into English. Its close equivalent in French is *On* (*On dit*, one says). Hubert Dreyfus, in his excellent commentary on Division One of *Being and Time*, prefers to render *das Man* as 'the One' (the oneself) which - like the French - captures the idiomatic use of the impersonal in English: 'it's what one does', 'it's the way one does things' (Dreyfus 1991: 151-2). There is then, in idiomatic English a 'oneself' - an impersonal self - that does 'the done thing' and that can think and talk of itself impersonally, as if it were someone else. But such a formulation misses the force of 'the They' as an anonymous collectivity of which 'one' is a part. Heidegger's key perception is that the possibility of individual 'subjectivities' is always already given by the play of anonymous prior and public social processes. The problem is that, rather than exploring the ontology of 'the They', Heidegger leaps ahead to his own existentialist interpretation of the phenomenon:

In utilizing public transport and in reading newspapers, every Other is like the next. The Being-with-one-another dissolves one's own Dasein completely into the kind of Being of the Others, in such a way, indeed, that the others, as distinguishable and explicit, vanish more and more. In this inconspicuousness and unascertainability, the real dictatorship of the 'they' is unfolded. We take pleasure and enjoy ourselves as *they* take pleasure; we read, see, and judge about literature and art as *they* see and judge; likewise we shrink back from the 'great mass' as *they* shrink back; we find shocking what *they* find shocking. The 'they', which is nothing definite, and which all are, though not the sum, prescribes the kind of being of everydayness. (Heidegger 1962: 164)

In this passage the lineaments of a 'mass society' are described. The masses travel by public transport, read newspapers, share the same enjoyments and have the same opinions about everything. Each of us is one of the masses, while not recognizing that we are: 'we shrink back from "the masses" as *they* shrink back; we find shocking what *they* find shocking'. But

rather than analysing the significance of this, it is simply judged and condemned. The tyranny of the They is thought of as a form of domination over the Authentic self. It is 'a falling', a 'disburdening of one's Being' a 'surrendering' to 'distantiality, averageness, levelling down, publicness' (166). It is the mark of 'inauthenticity and failure to stand by one's Self' (166). It is a way of being that 'misses itself and covers itself up' (167). But what Heidegger misses - and it is essential to his whole thesis - is anything like an adequate analysis of the *necessarily* anonymous character of social life as that into which *any* individual is thrown and *in* which individuality is formed. The ontology of being-with *as such* is simply not undertaken.⁹ The nature of the social - which is what is at issue in the phenomenology of being-with - remains underexamined in Heidegger's analysis.

It is, of course, quite beyond the scope of this article to begin to deal adequately with that fundamental question, but I will try, at least, to open it up via the issues raised in the passage cited above. What Heidegger describes is the play¹⁰ of that essentially modern phenomenon, 'public opinion'. It does indeed usually turn out to be the case that the opinions that I have about what I see or read or hear about what's going on in the world happen to be pretty much like what anybody else thinks. But what does that indicate? The usual interpretation is one that points to the dire consequences of mass society and mass culture in particular. Habermas (1988) has lamented the demise of critical opinion publics (formed in the 18th century) and their supercession by uncritical mass opinion publics in the 20th century. Habermas thinks of the formation of public opinion as a decisionistic process; the coming together of individuals into a shared, intersubjective, reflective view on some matter of general concern (the expression of the general will) via processes of public, collective discussion and debate.

But opinions are, for the most part, not the outcome of individual or collective acts of cognition, deliberation and self-reflection. Rather each one of us 'finds' that we have opinions that are responses to something like the prevailing public mood. The phenomenology of mood (a theme taken up immediately *after* the discussion of 'the They') is one of Heidegger's most brilliant insights.¹¹ The prevailing public mood is a primary indication of the nature of

⁹ This is in sharp contrast with the brilliant and sustained analysis of being-in as such, the theme of Chapter 5 which runs to 55 pages compared with 20 for Chapter Four. The ontology of being-with is discussed in a ten page subsection: *The Dasein-with of Others and Everyday Being-with* (pp. 153-163).

¹⁰ In *Truth and Method* Gadamer discusses the nature of play: 'namely that the player's actions should not be considered subjective actions, since it is, rather, the game itself that plays, for it draws the players into itself and thus itself become the actual subjectum of the playing' (490). His discussion focuses on the play of language itself, 'which addresses us, proposes and withdraws, asks and fulfils itself in the answer'. Here I try to grasp, in this hermeneutic sense, the *play* of social-historical processes..

¹¹ Heidegger 1962: 172-182. It should be noted that mood is very largely interpreted as a subjective

historicality - the play, the process of history. In finding that we have an opinion -- in expressing it (each one of us) and in seeking to act upon it -- the dialectic (the play) of the social is revealed. Historical mood is a primary phenomenon to which historians attend and which they try to capture as 'the spirit of the age'-- the Dark Ages, The Age of Enlightenment, Romanticism, Capitalism, The Age of Extremes, etc. etc. Historical mood is not a theoretical concept. It is not an essence that hovers over society. It is always manifest as what it is - the texture of lived experience, the 'structure of feeling', the 'climate' of the times. It is always felt, without necessarily being articulated as what it is. You might 'feel' it, but not be able to put your finger on it, to express it. Such a mood showed up in the 1950s when American women sought to clarify 'the problem without a name' (the thing that was felt but unsayable), the sources of their veiled sense of oppression.¹² In giving expression to this thing, in finding and naming it *as* patriarchy or sexism it entered into publicness *as* a historical phenomenon. It thus became available for scrutiny, reflection, criticism etc and as a basis for individual and collective action. Opinion was already there-to-be-found, but nevertheless *it had actually to be found*. In being discovered it became available *as* opinion. This is the play of the social, the articulation of the historical. Upon the basis of this play, the process of collective will-formation depends and proceeds.

Heidegger's analysis of the They - freed of his own historically situated preconceptions, prejudices and opinions - indicates the horizon of social significance.¹³ This horizon - always spatially and temporally specific - 'gives' the scale and scope of what is available *as* experience at any time any where. It is mood determined and determining. It is always prior to individual experience. The historical horizon 'gives' a determinate set of thrown possibilities, always sometime somewhere, as any determinate someone's resources for self-becoming. The horizon of the historical-social is necessarily, in the first place, a silent and anonymous given. In this respect it is like language. It is 'there' for each and all. The question

phenomenon (fear and anxiety are the concrete examples that Heidegger considers in some detail). The subjectivist account of the phenomenology of mood is part of the general confusion in Heidegger's account of the structure of the self (the 'who' of everyday existence). It must be the case that for individual *daseins* to have moods, mood must be (and in the first instance) a historical phenomenon with a for-anyone structure. If Heidegger is right (and I think he is) that mood is a fundamental indication of the openness of being (which 'gives' the possibility of being-in-concern) then mood *as such* is necessarily an historical *a priori*: it is always already there in the world as an anonymous, public, social phenomenon that is available for anyone to have and experience. Historical mood is ontologically foundational for ontic, individual moods.

¹² 'The problem without a name' is the theme of Betty Friedan's book, *The Feminine Mystique* (Friedan 1963), the pioneering feminist work which opened up the question of American women's felt but, at that time, indefinable sense of dissatisfaction and unhappiness. Later writers identified the source of this unhappiness as male oppression and named it 'patriarchy' (Millet 1972). For a critical account of the development of feminist writing and theory, starting with Friedan, see Spender 1985.

remains however, as to how anonymous social processes become activated as history. How does the background get to be foregrounded? How do phenomena go through the essentially historical process of articulation, expression and recognition? I have tried to indicate this through the transitions of historical mood into public opinion into collective decision making processes. Public opinion is the expressive register of historical mood. Historical mood, at any time, is something like 'the climate of the times', the 'how it is'. Whatever 'it' is, it is never the decisionistic outcome of agreed public norms. These are rather found (or not) as embedded in the normal, the natural, the usual... 'the way things are'.

For-anyone-as-someone structures register the play of the social, the dialectic of the impersonal and personal, collective and individual historical processes. What is 'at play' in the discovery and disclosure of, say, 'racism' or 'sexism' is the movement of history itself as individuals, responding to the times in which they find themselves, seek to recognize, articulate and express the ways in which the times impinge and impact upon *themselves* and their lives. What shows here is the encounter between for anyone structures (the anonymous givenness of existence) and for someone structures (our personal experience of existence). These two incommensurate orders of reality are mediated by for-anyone-as-someone structures through which they interact with and upon each other. In *Being and Time* what remains unclarified is any adequate recognition and discussion of the life-world of individuals *and* the common public world in which countless my-worlds are situated. What remains unexamined, because unrecognized, in Division One, is the great world of public affairs through which history is expressed. The world that is under consideration is always the immediate life-world, the surrounding, roundabout-me-world, the *umwelt* of everydayness.

Here is a description of it in a lecture course given at Freiburg in the summer of 1923, a few year before the publication of *Being and Time*:

In *the* room stands *the* table (not 'a' table alongside many others in other rooms and houses) at which one sits *in order to* write, eat, sew, play.... Its standing there in the room means: it plays a role for such and such a use; this or that is impractical, unsuited for it.... here and there it shows lines--- the boys made themselves busy at the table; these lines are not just occasional interruptions of its colouring, but rather [it means]: the boys have been here, and still are. This side is not the easterly side, the small side is not so many centimetres shorter than the other, but rather this is the side at which my wife sits if she wishes to read; earlier we had this or that discussion at the table; here a decision was made with a *friend*; there a certain *work* written; that *holiday* celebrated (Quoted by Caputo 1994: 333)

¹³ On 'the horizon', cf Gadamer 1993: 302-7.

In *Being and Time* Heidegger gives formal accounts of two different ontologies that are concretely indicated in this description. Ontology A is an object world of object-Things. Ontology B is a meaningful world of significant things. The fundamental difference between them shows here in the difference between the indefinite and the definite article. *A* table... any table, a table Thing. Any table (as a universal) can be *objectively* described and defined in terms of its *objective* observable and determinable properties. It (any table) is made of such and such materials. It stands so high. It is *x* centimetres long and *y* centimetres wide and it weighs so much. On the other hand *the* table (*this* table) is a particular thing. Heidegger clarifies the significance of the table (what it means as distinct from what objectively it is) as part of a world for those for whom it matters. Its significance lies in the ways that it matters. It is significant because it is put to significant use. *This* is what we do at the table, Heidegger says: I write, my wife reads or sews, my scallywag sons play and (literally) leave their mark upon it. They have scored its surface with their coloured pencils, so that whenever he see those marks Heidegger is reminded of their presence (perhaps with affection, perhaps with irritation, perhaps a mixture of both). The table is marked with their being. They have impressed themselves upon it in their own small way. Such are the structures of significance in which and of which the table is a part.

Everyday things - even impersonal things (like the table) - are everywhere imbued with the presence of particular someones. Anything can be transformed to appear as something: a transformation brought about by someone impressing upon the thing the mark of their presence. You can tell that a room bears the mark of the people that live in it. You see this without noticing it really in the things that show as theirs - mementoes, keepsakes, ornaments and souvenirs - in all the bric-a-bric, the seen but unnoticed clutter in the room. A room stripped of such stuff is not a homely (lived in) room. It may have an aesthetic purity. It may be technically efficient. It may be a good place in which to meditate or cook, for instance. But it is strictly impersonal, as so many public, institutional rooms are... lecture and seminar rooms for instance.

At the centre of everyday existence, is the everyday *available self*; the self that is, in each case, mine but that discloses itself, that is reciprocally available to anyone else; that displays itself in the things it owns and the ways it impresses itself on everyday things. The realest who of everyday existence is not, as Heidegger supposes, the Theyself (not an average, de-personalized self that is just the same as everyone else).¹⁴ Nor is it the Ownself (me myself

¹⁴ 'If we "see" it [the "they"] with an unprejudiced eye, it reveals itself as the "Realest subject" of everydayness.' (166)

alone, an incommunicable, inexpressible self). The realest who of everyday existence is neither of these, although it possesses both as aspects of its more or less openly displayed, shown and shareable, always potentially publicly available self. It is this self that Heidegger is talking about in his discussion of the table in the family living room. It is this self that is indicated by the recurring refrain, 'being is in each case mine'. The Myself that I or anyone has, is a sociable, public communicable phenomenon in which difference and sameness show up. The particular (the ownself) and the general (the onself) are derived possibilities of entities that always already possess both characteristics. Thus for-anyone-as-someone structures are primary *communicative* structures that mediate between for-anyone and for-someone structures; and the available self is the prime locus of the self with the theyself and the ownself as aspects of the sociable my-self that I or anyone am.

III

Available time

For Heidegger the kind of being that humans have is most fundamentally linked to the kind of temporality that they have.¹⁵ Human being is being temporal. The finiteness of human existence is constitutive of our being (of what and how we are). All finite things have boundaries. The finitude of dasein shows up as *lifetime*. Death does not so much diminish life as throw it into sharp relief: life as, in each case, the time of my being in the world. In an object world of object things, things exist (endure, 'go on') *in* time indefinitely. But the time of my life is the time *of* my being. Being temporal, for us, is not being-in-time but the time-of-being. Since life is, in each case mine (the unique time of *my* being in the world) it follows that, in each case, lifetime has an ownmost (for-someone) temporal structure. But the time of my being in the world is the time of my being in the world with others. It is something like *generational* time.¹⁶ In generational time I am, in each case, in the midst of and in touch with others everywhere. It gathers us into its common, shared temporality as being together

¹⁵ Division One of *Being and Time* is very largely preoccupied with Dasein's spaciality (its being in the world), and the temporality of Dasein is taken up only in the last three chapters of Division Two (383-488). For a succinct statement of the interconnectedness of 'being' and 'time', cf. Heidegger (1992).

¹⁶ There is only a glancing mention of this essentially historical order of temporality in *Being and Time* (p. 486) which deserves a much fuller thematization than it receives here. For a useful, brief discussion cf. Ricoeur (Volume 3: 109-112).

now. A common world must have a common time as the basic means whereby co-ordination for whatever common public purposes becomes available for human beings. As available time it again indicates a for-anyone-as-someone structure.

One of the most obvious and overlooked aspects of broadcasting is that it runs to a time-table. No matter where in the world, no matter whether we're talking of commercial or public service, national or local services, radio and tv will be delivered as a daily schedule, not now and then but continuously, uninterruptedly and indefinitely (as far as we can tell they will go on for ever). This dailiness yields the sense we all have of the ordinariness, the familiarity and obviousness of radio and television. It establishes their taken for granted, 'seen but unnoticed' character. Underlying the structure of everydayness, in the modern world, is an intentionality that shows itself in what we think of as standardisation and uniformity which, I have argued, are indicative of for-anyone structures. Standardised uniform time has such a structure. It has a diachronic and synchronic dimension, yielding simultaneously a punctual 'now' as a coordinating point for whatever social action and a calibrated continuum that yields an always manipulable sequence of 'befores' and 'afters'. This structure yields the timetables of modern daily life and is fundamental to the ways in which broadcasting appears daily as part of and as for each and every day.

The specific character of the publicness of today's media lies in the kind of temporality that they have; their dailiness. It is this characteristic that marks the particular structure of significance (or care structure) of the press and broadcasting. This temporality has a for-anyone-as-someone structure. Readers, listeners and viewers are invested with the attributes and entitlements of particular someones. Each one of us experiences what we read or hear or see as if it spoke to each one of us personally. But that does not mean as if it spoke *only* to me. Each one of us knows that just as it speaks to me it speaks to millions of others at the same time, *now*. We do not treat what we read and see and hear every day as if it were a purely personal matter. I do not internalize the output of the media as I might a well-loved song or poem which I commit to heart in order to own it for my ownmost self. To the contrary. One of the commonest findings reported by reception studies is that daily output is an inexhaustible topical resource for everyday conversations. That anyone and everyone can talk with each other about last night's news, or what happened in the latest episode of a favourite soap is not an accidental or contingent feature of daily media, but a revelatory aspect of their fundamental structures. It is precisely indicative of the common world that they create. A common public world, for it to be such and not otherwise, must be talkable-about as an essentially unproblematic, seen but unnoticed thing whose understandability (whose

intelligibility) is taken as given by each and all.

This does not mean, of course, that it will be assessed and evaluated in the same way by all concerned. If that were the case there would be nothing to talk about. The endless disagreements that daily media generate are indicative of the involvements, engagements and concerns that they elicit. They indicate, in an essential way, that the everyday things that they disclose do indeed matter and are of concern at least to the extent that people care enough to disagree, to debate and discuss their differing tastes, interests, convictions, attitudes and so on. And in talking about media output in the ways that we do, we disclose quite unselfconsciously a recognition that we have indeed treated that output as if it spoke to us as having the attributes and entitlements of persons whose opinions, tastes and interests are taken into account as if they mattered in some essential way. We are confirmed as persons in such ways and in conversations with others we reciprocally re-confirm each other as such. All this - which is entirely unremarkable - is nevertheless indicative of a kind of engagement (of being-in-concern) into which we are gathered on a scale without historical precedent. The double articulation of the temporal now of media discloses their daily services as the time of our being with one another in a common, shared world. This is what is meant by generational time. The peculiar accessibility of daily media - the structure of their openness - is that they are, for each and all in the very same here and now, continuously available as a matter of common concern for me or anyone anywhere.

This now of concern is doubled, and it is this doubled spaciality and temporality that yields the specific for-anyone-as-somone structure of daily media *as a new kind of available-now*. There is the now of the broadcast event or occasion and at the same time the now of listening and viewing. Each of these nows is distinct (each has a different location: the now of broadcasting is situated in the studio, say: the now of listening or viewing is elsewhere; in the car, at home etc). But the broadcast now is *for* the situated now of reception. The broadcast now gathers us - in millions - into a shared now of concern (Scannell 1996: 75-92). But it is not so much the singular moment of a particular event, but the structure of daily schedules that discloses the doubled phenomenal now of broadcasting, for the structure of the schedules is articulated to (indeed articulates) the structure of our days. It is this articulation that gives expression to our particular historicized sense of days, that realizes routinely for us the two worlds of concern that we each inhabit: my-world and its concerns and beyond that the great world (the common public world) that broadcasting articulates routinely day by day.

Through daily media each day shows up for us as the day today, this day in particular; this

day with its own particular concerns and involvements. What this means is that each day is significant because it is full of significant matters. That is what the schedules - in all their parts and as a whole - disclose, and what shows up in the sum of the contents of daily newspapers. There is always something going on. The most basic phenomenal aspect of what we think of as *news* is that it accomplishes the routinization, day by day and every day, of history. History is no longer something apart from my-world and in its concerns. It enters into my world, it becomes part of my concerns. And so it is for everyone. History is no longer a *post hoc* narrative that gets written, of necessity, after the event. Such history always encounter the *Tristram Shandy* paradox: the more you write about it the more it recedes. The time of the narrative and the time of its writing necessarily move away from rather than towards each other. Thus written history, in the very act of writing, creates a receding past. For us, however, and by virtue of the specific temporality of media (their doubled spacio-temporality which constitutes the phenomenal here-and-now of their dailiness), history is essentially an unfolding narrative. History is relocated: it is no longer 'then', but 'now', no longer 'there' but 'here'. And the unfolding now must mean that it is structured for and towards that which is to come. The historicity of days, for us, is structured in expectancy. The historical now is future-facing. The future facing present is disclosed, again by the structures of dailiness articulated and expressed by daily media. For, although it is the case that the institutions of the press and broadcasting are so organized as to deliver daily services *on* the day, each day, it is also necessarily case that the institutions are always already ahead of the particular day (this day, the day today) that we are and the newspapers and the broadcast schedules are actually in. This is the mark of their institutional temporality. They are *for* the future, the generations that come after us when we are gone. It is in this sense that the past is the future. Institutions, whose care-structure is inter-generational, are inherited by each living generation as a gift from the dead generations for dealing with the present in anticipation of the future. Our now, structured in anticipation of what is to come, is always already forestructured by the heritage of the past.

Three distinct aspects of human temporality are routinely implicated in the phenomenal now of daily media. Institutional time is futural, always ahead of itself, structured in anticipation of the generations to come. Without such temporal fore-structures the phenomenal now - the now of concern - cannot appear. The great human world that goes on from generation to generation is underpinned by temporal structures whose role is precisely that of re-generation. This world is necessarily anonymous and impersonal. It is the they-world, with a for-anyone structure. On the other hand, and quite distinct from this, there is my-world, whose temporality is bounded by the span of my life. Day in day out radio, television and newspapers link these two incommensurate human temporalities: the historical life of

societies and the lifetimes of individual social members. Routinely they bring together the they-world and, in each case, my-world, which now are gathered into our-world, the common, public life-and-times of the generations of the present. In *our* time—the shared generational time that is articulated day by day in daily media—we are routinely gathered into a common shared world of concern that is manifestly available for all in a particular way. The common public available time of broadcasting is for me and anyone as someone. In this respect it can be said to have a for-anyone-as-someone temporal structure.

References

- Adorno, T. and Horkheimer, M. (1979) *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. London: Verso.
- Arendt, H. (1989) *The Human Condition*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Atkinson, M. (1984) *Our Masters' Voices*. London: Methuen.
- Barthes, R. (1984) *Camera Lucida*. London: Fontana.
- Braudel, F. (1980) *On History*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Caputo, J.D. (1994) 'Sorge and Kardia: The Hermeneutics of Factical Life and the Categories of the Heart', in *Reading Heidegger From the Start*, T. Kisiel and J. van Buren (eds). Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Cardiff, D. (1986) 'The serious and the popular: aspects of the evolution of style in the radio talk 1928-1939', in *Media Culture & Society. A Critical Reader*, R. Collins et al (eds). London: Sage.
- Carrithers, M., Collins, S. and Lukes, S. (1985) *The Category of the Person*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dreyfus, H. (1994) *Being-In-The-World*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Gadamer, H-G. (1993) *Truth and Method*. London: Sheed & Ward.
- Giddens, A. (1990) *The Consequences of Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Goffman, E. (1972) *Interaction Ritual*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- Habermas, J. (1988) *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hardt, H. (1992) *Communication, History and Theory in America*. London: Routledge.
- Harvey, D. (1988) *The Postmodern Condition*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Heidegger, M. (1962) *Being and Time*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Heidegger, M. (1988) *The Basic Problems of Phenomenology*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.

- Heidegger, M. (1992) *The Concept of Time*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Matheson, H. (1933) *Broadcasting*. London: Thornton & Butterworth.
- Scannell, P. (1996) *Radio, Television and Modern Life*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Taylor, C. (1985) *Human Agency and Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Taylor, C. (1989) *Sources of the Self*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Taylor, C. (1994) *Multiculturalism*. Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press.

Chapter Eight

Television and history

Studying television

‘What’, asks Charlotte Brunsdon, ‘is the “television” of Television Studies?’ She raises this question in a collection put together by Christine Geraghty and David Lusted to announce Television Studies which, they claim, ‘now has a body of knowledge and history of how that knowledge developed which can form the basis of debates’ (1-2). The book then, is *not* about television but about the ways in which it is and has been studied, and Brunsdon shows how this has come about. She examines the contents page of six academic readers on television and the mass media in order to establish the central concerns of the disciplines which have combined to produce what is coming to be called Television Studies. In short we are witnessing the invention of a new academic discursive formation¹ whose self-validating task is to produce the object of which it speaks. Television Studies begins as a discourse about itself, not about television. There is nothing particularly unusual about this. It is more or less how new academic territories are carved out these days in an increasingly competitive environment.² It does indicate however something of the difficulties that arise in trying to think about ‘television’ if we want to resist the temptation (the fallacy) of seeing it *in the first place* as an academic object. Whatever it is it is certainly not that, and I can’t help feeling that, at the end of the working day, when the theorists of Television Studies have returned home from their university departments, they stop thinking about television as a-thing-to-be-theorised and deal with it in the same way as everyone else; ie as a seen but unnoticed, taken for granted aspect of their daily life. To say that *that* is where one wants to begin an enquiry into television is to indicate an alternative approach that I will explore here. John Ellis puts it well. He notes the universality of television ‘which has gained the currency of everyday life

¹ Foucault (1974: 31-40). For a useful discussion of the concept, see Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982: 58-78.

² It’s a fertile fissile process. Television Studies is begotten from Film Studies, Cultural Studies and Media Studies and is now in turn generating Radio Studies. Likewise Visual Culture (Jenks 1995)—an omnium gatherum of film, photography, television, advertising and painting) has inevitably hatched Auditory Culture as its counterpoint (Bull and Black 2003).

itself. To ensure significance in the developed world today, any new phenomenon has to be touched and is touched by television. That is, it must be touched by the dominant form that television takes in modern society: the form of broadcast television programmes supplied into people's homes.' (Ellis 2004:275).

A first recommendation: to begin to understand what 'television' is, look at how it occurs in ordinary language usage. Such a move is in tune with J. L. Austin's concern, as Stanley Cavell puts it, that 'we try to take a view of words free of philosophical preoccupations' (Cavell 1976:238). Here I try to take a view of television free of preconceptions mapped onto it by academics. Brunsdon points out that 'much innovatory work in television studies has been focused on [...] the television text' (Brunsdon 1998:105]. But no-one, apart from academics, talks about television *texts*. 'Did you see that interesting text on television last night?' is an implausible conversational gambit. Rather, ordinarily, we talk about television and its programmes as Ellis does. What is this television? It is not this or that television (French, American, whatever). It is all over the world. It touches on every aspect of life today. It has major production centers, to be sure, and certain American products (mainly drama) dominate many national markets elsewhere in the world. But American product is not the same as 'American television' whose peculiarities mark it out as significantly different from most other countries and their televisions. Television now flourishes in parts of the world where twenty years ago it was introduced as a development medium for educating peasant farmers. India is a notable case in point. If television lacks the penetration that radio has as the dominant medium in large parts of Africa and South America it is, along with its parent medium, global in its reach. Broadcasting—radio *and* television—underpins our sense of the world today. All this hints at the *worldliness* of contemporary television. On the one hand it is routinely experienced everywhere as part of the ordinary life-world of members of modern societies (watching TV is just one of those things that most of us do in the course of an ordinary day).³ On the other hand, and just as routinely, in daily news services the world over audiences experience, as a commonplace thing, their situated connectedness with what's going on elsewhere in the world. In exceptional moments people the whole world over are glued to their television sets as witnesses of celebratory or catastrophic events. In all this broadcasting has accomplished something quite unprecedented; the routinisation of history on a world wide basis. In this chapter I explore, in a preliminary way, the *world-historical* character of television, what this means and how it has come about.

³ On the ordinariness of television see Bonner 2003.

I start with the facticity of a common world⁴ made visible as such by broadcast television the world over. This world is the ultimate outcome of those historical processes gathered under the sign of ‘modernity’, that revolution which took off in Europe over three centuries ago and which transformed the ways in which we, as human beings, understood and thought about ourselves and the world we live in. Scientific and technological innovation, the formation of modern states, the capitalist mode of production, the transport and communication infrastructure are all the achieved historical outcomes of a revolution which looked to *this* world and our situation in it as humanity’s most fundamental concern. That is what television now makes visible *as* the historical process. Through it we now see the manifest truth of the claim that human beings do indeed make history; their own histories, the history of the country in which they live, the history of the world. But what is much harder to see is how to account for and understand these interlocking historical processes which are all embedded in each other. I have argued that the history of the world (world history) is an impossible narrative.⁵ There is no point of view, no point of rest, from which it could be written by human beings. And the same is true, I think, for television. As a world-historical phenomenon it paradoxically appears as an impossible historical narrative. So in order to broach the world-historical character of broadcast television⁶ I begin with the perplexities of historiographies of broadcasting, communication and media technologies.

Broadcasting histories

What is broadcasting history’s natural subject matter? In the mid 1950s the British historian, Asa Briggs, embarked on the history of broadcasting in the United Kingdom which turned out to be the history of the British Broadcasting Corporation who commissioned him (Briggs 1961-1994). Fifty years and five volumes later this is a still continuing history with Jean Seaton taking over from Lord Briggs to produce Volume 6 (1974-1986). This, the earliest scholarly history of broadcasting, was immensely influential and set the benchmark standard for subsequent histories of broadcasting in other countries. Briggs produced a meticulously researched history, based primarily on the BBC’s huge written archive, that offered a rolling

⁴ On ‘the hermeneutics of facticity’ (how we encounter and deal with worldly things) see Heidegger 1999: 54-8. It is the theme of Chapter 3 (Division One), of *Being and Time* (Heidegger 1962: 91-148).

⁵ Scannell 2004b. This history was, in the West, originally the Judeo-Christian narrative of humanity’s fall and ultimate redemption. It was revised in the Enlightenment as the historical struggle for the kingdom of heaven on earth in the form of the perfectly free and just society. Postmodernism has proclaimed its incredulity towards such ‘grand narratives’ (Lyotard 1986).

⁶ ‘Given the overall mapping of the globe that today is taken for granted, the unitary past is one which is worldwide; time and space are recombined to form a genuinely *world-historical* framework of action and experience. (Giddens 1990:21, my emphasis). I follow Giddens in thinking of ‘globalisation’ as the-world-as-a-whole experienced by each and all of us ‘embedded’ in our own time and place.

narrative of the development of the BBC as its activities grew and expanded in time. It was largely concerned with the internal history of the institution; its administrative structure, its hierarchy of policy and decision making, program production and delivery. At the same time it looked outwards to the external pressures that constantly impinged on the operational activities of the broadcasters from its two masters; the state on one hand, the audiences on the other. These pressures bore down on different aspects of the work of broadcasting but together they helped to shape and define its universe of discourse, the limits of permissibility, of what could and could not be said or shown on radio or television, at any time. Radio broadcasting began everywhere on a local basis and sooner or later a process of consolidation and centralisation took place that set in dominance a national system of broadcasting that remains intact today. This convergence took place very quickly in the UK, partly because of its small size, partly because of the rapid domestic uptake of radio by the population and partly because so much of British economic, political and cultural power was already concentrated in the metropolitan capital, London. In other parts of the world, with much larger territories, with different socio-political geographies and a slower rate of uptake, the centralisation of broadcasting took place more gradually and the central broadcasting authorities had less power over regional and local broadcasters.⁷

Briggs established a 'first generation' history that put in place a narrative of the institutions of broadcasting. It served to generate further 'social' and 'cultural' histories. These focused on the output of broadcasting and its impact and so were moved to consider their reception. Susan Douglas's engagingly readable history of 'listening-in' to the radio in America is exemplary (Douglas 1999).⁸ Such histories however do not run in parallel with histories of the broadcasters. They are separate narratives whose concerns are with daily existence, the place of the radio or tv set in the spaces of domestic, family life, and their role (along with the movies and other elements of popular culture) in the lives of, say, girls growing up in America in the 1960s (Douglas 1994). These histories have no necessary connection with the histories of the broadcasters because, as mass communication sociologists gradually learnt and as Stuart Hall (1980) argued, there is no direct correspondence between the outputs of broadcasting and their impact and effect on audiences.⁹

⁷ Australia, France and the USA may serve as exemplary case studies. See, respectively, Johnson 1988, Meadel 1994, Smulyan 1994.

⁸ Douglas has that rare ability to write as an academic (observing academic norms of scholarship, research etc) for a non-academic readership and her books are widely reviewed and read outside academia. It is partly a matter of style but it is, more exactly, the narrative point of view that she assumes. She writes of radio in the way that it matters for listeners as part of their own lives and experience.

⁹ Except on very rare occasions. The Orson Welles' *War of the Worlds* scare in 1938 is an early and classic case of a single program with an immediate, dramatic effect on audience behaviour.

All these histories are embedded in national histories, for the nation-state remains the containing frame within which historiography operates, the world over, today. The possibility of comparative, international or global histories has exercised historians for centuries.¹⁰ It is an increasingly pressing issue today since all of us know that we are living in a single, common world. Broadcasting history, in response to this pressure, has tried to transcend its national boundaries. A comparative study of Nordic television brought together condensed histories of developments in Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden, each drawing on its own, more comprehensive national history of broadcasting (Bono and Bondebjerg 1994). Kate Lacey has made comparative studies of broadcasting in Germany, Britain and the USA (Lacey 2002). Michelle Hilmes has argued the need for larger comparative broadcasting histories (Hilmes and Loviglio 2002: 1-19) and has brought together British and American broadcasting in *The Television History Book* (Hilmes 2004). All these works proceed by setting national accounts alongside each other and noting their points of convergence and divergence. But what do we learn from them beyond the structural similarities of broadcasting's organisation, mode of production and program service which are subject, inevitably, to national variations and differences determined by the size of available native audiences, and indigenous economic, political and cultural factors? The comparative study of national broadcasting certainly illuminates their idiosyncratic character—the Japaneseness of Japanese broadcasting, the Americanness of American broadcasting etc—in a supranational historical context. But it does not bring us closer to the global character or impact of the spread of broadcasting in the 20th century.

What of the history of *world* broadcasting? The case of the BBC is exemplary. In the 1930s the BBC began overseas broadcasting first to white settler audiences in Britain's imperial outposts and then, in the late 1930s with a European war imminent, to countries that the British government wished to influence. In the course of World War 2 the BBC developed a truly global broadcasting service that transmitted British versions of events, suitably inflected for reception in different parts of the world depending on their part in the global convulsion. Coming out of the war the BBC's now established World Service, funded by a grant-in-aid from the Foreign Office, played an important part in the cold war, backed up by the government-funded Monitoring Service which eavesdropped on broadcasting transmissions from within the Soviet bloc and from many other parts of the world. It might be thought that this service, born out of *raison d'état*, should have begun to disintegrate as Britain gave up its Empire in the decade after the war and to have disappeared completely with the fall of the

¹⁰ Breisach 1983. See especially his discussion of 'The enigma of world history': 319-322, 395-411.

Berlin wall at the end of the 1980s. It is remarkable then that, at present, the World Service's audiences continues to grow each year and not only for its English language services. The audiences for the Brazilian service, in Portuguese, have grown since September 11 2001 and the number of those working in it has doubled since then.¹¹

The continuing existence and growth of the World Service indicates, I think, not only the overlooked global importance of radio as the parent broadcasting medium, but the existence of a growing felt need around the world for reliable, authoritative news of the world that comes from one of its centres, from where the action is.¹² But what would the history of this service consist of? It is, inevitably, a history *of* the centre; of the growth of the scale of its operations and of key historical moments such as Suez and Hungary in 1956 (Mansell 1982). What it cannot be is a history of its reception the world over, for that is historically irretrievable beyond the most fragmentary indications to be found in newspapers, magazines and other sources in particular countries throughout the world. Thus broadcasting historiography's natural limits are set by the situational geographies in which, and for which, broadcasting institutions exist—the territorial boundaries of nation states. Moreover, it seems to be a one-sided history. Either you write about the institutional side, or you write about the reception side but between them there is a wall over which it is hard to see the other side. The narratives of institutions and their activities and the narratives of the social uptake of those activities are invisible to each other for good reasons, as we shall see.

Technological histories

Broadcasting histories belong within the more encompassing history of the extraordinary growth in mediated forms of communication that underpin the modern, electronically wired-up and wireless world. Radio broadcasting is after all a by-product of an earlier technology (wireless telegraphy) conceived for different purposes and use. The same is true of the Internet and world wide web. Both were later applications of technologies that had, at first, a restricted military use as outcomes of earlier histories of scientific exploration and discovery. Communication technologies reach beyond national borders and their histories are not

¹¹ In the early 1990s the Brazilian service was on the point of closure. It now has 40 staff, and is the one of the largest sectors in the BBC's foreign language transmissions. See bbc.co.uk/brazil. I am grateful to Lorena Barbier of CBN (Central Brasilieras de Noticias) Recife, for this information.

¹² The hegemony of English as the world's language is crucially important to the position of the World Service as the dominant global broadcaster today. In many countries people listen to improve their understanding of the English language.

constrained within them. Brian Winston has produced a sophisticated model of the complex transition from ‘pure’ scientific experimentation, through the recognition of possible practical applications and the development of prototypes, to the invention of a new technology with a strong potential for use and profit (Winston 1998). His magisterial narrative of developments from the early 19th century telegraph to the late 20th century Internet is, throughout, a *technical* history of scientific discovery and commercial application. The same is true of Pawley’s important history of the BBC’s engineering division (Pawley 1976). In both books the concern is only with the scientific, technical process and its richly complex historical unfolding. The boundaries of technological histories are set by the moment of transition when the technology in question moves out of the laboratory, so to speak, and achieves social recognition and uptake. At that point different histories take over; the histories of their social application and use as discussed above, in the case of broadcasting.

It is important to note how this transition comes about. A technical thing comes out of the R&D laboratory and enters into the world. It ceases to be a technical thing and becomes a worldly thing. For this to happen it *must* present itself—if it is to be an ordinary, worldly thing—not as a complicated technological object but as a simple piece of equipment such that anyone can use. The development of the radio set illustrates the point. In the aftermath of World War 1 radio had become a popular ‘scientific’ hobby even before the British Broadcasting Company began to transmit a program service in November 1922. In garden sheds up and down the land men and boys (it was very much a male thing) were building two-way radio transmitter-receivers or one-way receiving sets to scour the ether for sound signals. In either case the results were a naked display of valves, knobs, wires and amplifiers. The scientific innards had yet to be encased and its operation required endless fiddling and twiddling. It was not yet a domestic object fit for family living rooms.¹³ Adrian Forty describes three stages in the evolution of the first truly modern, mass-produced radio set in Britain; the Ekco AD65 receiver designed and manufactured by the E.K.Cole company and in the shops by 1934 (Forty 1986: 200-206. Scannell and Cardiff 1991: 356-62). The mediating stage in the transition from technology to domestic equipment is *design*. It is a basic mistake to think of design as style and aesthetics applied to mass produced goods, as if it were some kind of value-added. Design is essential to the transformation of user-unfriendly technologies that only trained experts can use into simple user-friendly things that anyone can use. The famous Ekco set was designed by a leading architect of the time. Its scientific innards were concealed in a circular moulded plastic case made of bakelite, with a chromium plated grille and just three knobs for volume, wavelength and tuning. It was not a piece of furniture, but a

¹³ For an account of this history in the United States see Douglas 1999: 55-82. See plate 1, opposite p.192, for a photograph that vividly captures this moment.

thoroughly new and modern piece of equipment suitable for any household with electricity, and any child could use it.

The point is perhaps obvious enough; you do not need to know how a thing is made in order to understand how to use it. Nor do you need to know how programs are made in order to like or dislike or be bored by them. The labyrinthine complexities of the scientific-technical development of radio and television broadcasting and the production processes that lie behind their transmitted output are equally invisible in the design of the receiving equipment and in the design of programs. We are not aware of the manufactured character of either except when they break down. And yet it must be the case that the design of television sets and of television programs are, in different ways, disclosive of how they are to be understood and used. How else would we know what to do with them? To study the hidden labor processes of technological innovation and application and of broadcasting institutions and their program making, is to begin to uncover the care-structures that are concealed and yet immanent in humanly made things.¹⁴ More particularly to attend to the design of receiving equipment and to the communicative design (or intentionality) of the programs they disclose is to begin to find answers to the question as to how something such as ‘television’ appears in the world *as* a worldly thing; as an ordinary, available thing for use by each and all, anyplace, anytime.

Media histories

A third approach to the historical study of communication was pioneered by the Canadian economic historian, Harold Innis, whose ideas were taken up and popularised by Marshall McLuhan.¹⁵ McLuhan’s fame has overshadowed and distorted the significance of Innis’s late work which today needs some contextualising in order to rescue it from the condescension of contemporary media historians (eg Curran 2002:51-4). Outside Canada Innis is known for two books written at the end of his life: *Empire and Communication* and *The Bias of Communication*. In them Innis developed what was then a startlingly original thesis about the *media* of communication; the material forms (and their technologies) through or upon which human communication is registered and moved. Today, via their diffusion in McLuhan’s writings, these ideas have become commonplace. They include the periodisation of historical

¹⁴ Scannell 2003 for a discussion of the broadcasting production process as a care-structure.

¹⁵ Notably in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* which McLuhan describes, in the preface as ‘a footnote to the observations of Innis on the subject of the psychic and social consequences, first of writing and then of printing’ (McLuhan 1964: ix).

epochs according to their dominant form of communication (oral, manuscript and print cultures); the distinction between speech and writing (emphasising the role of the latter in the management and maintenance of religious and political power); the communicative bias of different media of communication towards either time or space. Throughout the emphasis is on the material forms of communication and not their particular content.

Innis's late work is hard to read today. It is written in an assertive, oracular style with a vast historical sweep and a high degree of abstraction: 'Minerva's owl', the first chapter of *The Bias of Communication*, gets from ancient Babylon and Mesopotamia to the industrial revolution and the Communist Manifesto in just over twenty pages. This kind of writing was more acceptable fifty years ago and in fact represented probably the last and certainly the most original attempt to write 'world history', a genre which, even as Innis wrote, was in decline and has fallen out of favour ever since for reasons hinted at above. World history took its inspiration from Hegel's *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (The Phenomenology of the Spirit) in which the enlightenment narrative of progress found its ultimate expression as the story of the Spirit of Humanity's long journey to self-understanding and reconciliation. The challenge to translate this from a philosophy of history into an actual historical narrative was taken up by historians in the 19th and early 20th century. The most influential of these, in Innis's day, was Arnold Toynbee's multi-volume *Study of History* which started by tracing the history of the world first in terms of the rise and fall of civilisations and, later, of world-religions.

Innis's *Empire and Communication* took the same broad canvas as earlier world histories but painted a very different picture. The transcendental narrative of the movement of *Geist* in history via the rise and fall of civilisations was replaced by the movement and circulation of people, goods and information. To see how Innis got to this we must return to his early historical work on the Canadian economy. In his detailed, empirical studies of Canada's export staples (fur, timber and fish) Innis came to see them as key components of a front tier (frontier) economy heavily dependent on the 'back tier' economies of Europe and its dominant American neighbour. More exactly he found that his work was, in a fundamental way, a study of the movement and circulation of people and goods underpinned by available forms of transport and communication and all of which came up against the material exigencies of time and space. If his later work seems to operate at a high altitude it is grounded in the earthy, practical realities of his early empirical work. As part of his definitive study of the fur trade Innis bought himself a canoe and paddled down the remote McKenzie River to the Hudson Bay (the route taken by 19th century trappers) in order to understand

how the pelts started on their long journey to the shops of London and Paris where they were sold as fashionable beaver hats.

It is customary to read ‘medium theory’¹⁶ as flawed by technological determinism; the view that technological innovation causes social change. The difficulties lie, to a considerable extent in the way that the question is posed in terms of technology and its social effect. That formulation presupposes a dichotomy between the hidden processes of technical discovery, invention, application, manufacture and distribution all on one side with ‘society’ on the other side of the wall. It is as if human inventions are discovered outside society and then are suddenly parachuted into it. Furthermore the question is posed in terms of a cause-effect relationship as if one could isolate and specify the particular change(s) that could be attributed to the technology itself and nothing else. Moreover what is almost completely overlooked is that what begins, at the point of social uptake of modern technologies of communication, is the process of working out what can be done with them, the discovery of what in fact they are (good) for. Technologies do not arrive in the world with what Ian Hutchby calls their ‘communicative affordances’ known and understood. Hutchby places this concept at the heart of his penetrating review of current approaches, in the sociology of science, to the question of technologies and their impact (Hutchby 2001: 13-33). The traditional deterministic interpretations of technology were largely negative. Technologies were the product of instrumental reason that exploited the natural environment and were instruments of social exploitation and domination. Recent sociology has challenged that view but, Hutchby argues, ends up by rejecting determinism completely. His own more nuanced position allows that technologies do indeed have constraining effects but these should be thought of as enabling rather than disabling. The question now becomes, what affordances do new communicative technologies open up. What are they good for? What difference, for instance, does television make to our lives? What does it do with us and what can we do with it?

The historicity of television

The historiographies of communication and media, with which I have thus far been concerned all point to the difficulty of grasping the historicity of media and particularly the world-historical character of television. Histories of broadcasting, in which television’s history is situated, turn out to have a one-sided institutional and national character which it is difficult to transcend. Social and cultural histories are written on the other side of the wall. Narratives

¹⁶ The label attached to the approach of Innis and McLuhan by Joshua Meyrowtiz (1994)

of the development of technologies of communication are similarly one-sided and stop at the point of social uptake. Finally, efforts to write the history of the world in terms of communication media appear today as discredited by our incredulity towards grand narratives. The wider question of the historical impact of communication technologies presents major hermeneutic difficulties. At the heart of these problems is an issue that medium theory highlights. Historiography is about history but points in a different temporal direction.. Historiography operates on the temporal axis of present and past while history operates on the axis of present and future. History's subject matter is the history making process. Both are situated in the present, the phenomenal 'now'. Historiography looks back to the past as a clue to the present situation. Meanwhile however, the history-making process, in the very same phenomenal now, is moving forward into the future, is giving the world its future through its actions in the present. The writing of history and the making of history inevitably diverge. Broadcast television is part of the history-making process. That is what its *historicality* (its being historical) indicates. That is why historiography can never catch up with, can never quite grasp, its object of enquiry. As historiography looks back history itself is moving forwards and away from it.

Historiography is about the *writing* of history. A much debated crux in a number of disciplines is the status, in historiography, of the *event*. The influential Annales School (Burke 1994) was deeply dismissive of *histoire événementielle* whose time was that daily life and whose concern was with the kinds of event that show up in newspapers (Braudel 1980:27-29). A preoccupation with historical actors (monarchs, statesmen and military leaders) and with great events (politics and war) produced surface narratives, it was argued, which overlooked the underlying structural factors that produced both the events and their agents. The rejection of surface history however produced peculiarly motionless and abstract histories and there was a swing back to narrative in the late 20th century, accompanied by vigorous debates about its reliability in relation to the 'truth' of the event-as-narrated.¹⁷ The event, for all the difficult issues it poses, is the bedrock of history. If nothing happens, there is nothing to tell. One elegant definition of daily life is precisely that there is nothing to say about it. It is uneventful *because* it has no storyable, tellable characteristics (Sacks 1995, volume 2: 215-221).

History however is not simply the event. Events remain unhistorical unless or until they are narrated. History is the act of narrating the event. To narrate is not to chronicle. It is to find

¹⁷ A useful review of history and narrative as discussed by historians, philosophers and literary theorists is provided by Roberts 2001.

and tell the story of the event. The investigate process of finding and telling the story is the task of the historian and the journalist:

Yes (.) This just in (.)
You are looking at obviously a very disturbing live shot there
That is the World Trade Center and we have unconfirmed reports this morning
that a plane has crashed into one of the towers of the World Trade Center
CNN center right now is just beginning to **work** on this **story**
obviously our sources and trying to figure out exactly what happened
But clearly something relatively devastating **happening** this morning
there at the south end of the island of Manhattan. (emphases added)

This is the moment that the event breaks, live to air, into CNN news at 8.50 am on September 11th 2001. It is the moment of first sight, for viewers *and* the news-desk, of a pall of smoke billowing from one of the towers of the World Trade Center, and these are the first words from the newsroom about what, coming out of the ad break, is now on screen with the strapline, BREAKING NEWS. It is immediately and naturally assumed, by the newscaster, that this—whatever it is—is a story. There is ‘something[...] happening’ as viewers can see. What exactly, is unclear beyond ‘unconfirmed reports’ of a plane crashing into the building. Though the situation presents itself as incomprehensible and inexplicable, it is spontaneously treated as self-evidently potentially meaningful and significant. The *work* of finding the story is the task of the CNN news center and it is now, off screen and invisibly, working flat out on it. In the interface between its backstage finding and its front-stage telling, the meaning and significance of the event-as-story will be uncovered. It was to be a long and terrible journey of discovery on that day (Scannell 2004b).

Journalists are the historians of the present. To find and tell the story is to give structure, coherence and meaning to events-in-the-world and thereby historicise them. The world-historical character of life today shows up, like a bolt from the blue, in the world-historical event. Both are, in significant ways, an effect of television. To reiterate: it is not the event-in-itself that is historical. It becomes so only through the story-telling narratives of its historian(s). History is the sum of the relationship between event, story and narrative. The attack on the World Trade centre in New York instantly became a world-historical event through its immediate uptake on television news-programs round the world. Most news comes after the event. But on September 11th event and narrative were both in the same forward-moving history-making real-time now. The significance of television—its essential meaning, power and impact—is encrypted in its most fundamental communicative affordance as *live broadcasting*.

Live television broadcasting

‘You are looking at obviously a very disturbing *live* shot there.’ To find and tell the story in the live, phenomenal now of television is to articulate a prospective, forward-looking narrative. This in contrast with written histories (including film and newspaper histories) which are backward-looking retrospective narratives. Innis and McLuhan drew attention to the fundamental communicative affordances of writing (inscribed in all its mediating technologies) and speech. But the force of this distinction was considerably vitiated by the terms in which it was made: the distinction between ‘oral’ and ‘print’ cultures has a curiously flattening and distancing effect (it is an academic distinction). We will have a more vivid grasp of its force if we think it in terms of the *living* and the *dead*. Historiography’s subject matter (history) is in, as we say, the dead past. But history itself (the history-making process; the *a priori* of historiography) is in, as we also say, the living present. The past is dead because it is over and done with. ‘It’s history’ (it’s finished). The perishability of news (‘yesterday’s news is dead news’) reminds us of this each day. The present is alive because it is the now-becoming-future of the lives of the living. The liveness of television is not its technological effect but its existential basis, the condition of its existence in a double sense: its possibility and its manifest, expressed effect. It is because, and only because, television is live that it is inextricably implicated in the history-making process which today has long since been routinised by modern media (starting with the daily press) as news. Today’s news is tomorrow’s history.

The meaning of *live* has been much misunderstood in the academic literature on television. In most discussions it is pointed out that television was broadcast live to begin with but was, from the 1960s onward, replaced for the most part by recorded programs. But ‘recorded’ is not the negation of ‘live’. Jane Feuer’s influential and much cited essay on ‘The concept of live television’ conflates liveness with immediacy. Of course in live broadcasting the moments of production, transmission and reception are all in the same real time now, but what Feuer neglects to consider is the temporal ontology of the immediate now and, crucially, what gives its possibility. As human beings we exist, at one and the same time, in many different and incommensurate orders of time. The immediate now, for instance, is radically different in digital and analogue time. In digital time reckoning we say: ‘Now it is 8.50. Now it is 8.51 etc. Time is manifest as an ever-present punctual moment that cannot ever be anything other than ‘now’. In analogue time reckoning we say: ‘Now it is ten *to* eight. Now it is ten *past* eight’. Analogue time’s immediate now is expressed (both on the clock-face and in

the way we say it) as being in a relationship with its before and after, neither of which exists in digital time. The now of analogue time is the phenomenal now of our concern. It is the matter to hand in the now that matters. It is an immediate present that exists only by virtue of the *historic* and *future* present which are the conditions of its possibility, of its coming-into-being. The possibility of live-to-air program transmissions, in which we experience liveness-as-immediacy, is given by the structure of the daily programme schedule which, in broadcasting, is attuned to the existential arc of days.

The two ontologies of time expressed in analogue and digital time pieces are implicated in two temporal orders of the day. The day, in 24/7 news-time, exists in a continuous, never-ending succession of punctual moments that are always in the ever-present now. This strictly abstract, numbered and sequential time overrides the natural temporality of the day with its immanent structure, rhythm and tempo around which human life, even today, remains adjusted.¹⁸ Light and darkness; waking and sleeping—the days of our lives have a natural arc of morning, noon and night which is the storyable arc of our own existence too. Life and days are inextricably folded into each other and show up in the schedules of the broadcast day in which the historic, immediate and future present show up in relation to each other. *Good Morning America*, which Feuer briefly discusses, is a start-of-day program whose live-to-air unfolding format performs the task of orienting its audience to the day ahead and all its upcoming business. It is not just *at* that time of day, but *for* that time. For Feuer liveness and immediacy are essentially ideological. She never sees either as matters of time or as time-that-matters.

Live broadcasting. The two terms must be thought together. We owe it to John Durham Peters for a corrective reminder of the communicative affordances of broadcasting, in his seminal discussion of Christ's parable of The Sower (Peters 1999: 51-62). To broadcast, before radio and television, meant to sow; to scatter seed abroad. In the parable the broadcaster is careless of where the seed falls. Some lands on stony ground and is pecked up by the birds of the air. Some falls among thorns and is choked as soon as it springs up. Some falls on shallow soil, springs up quickly and soon withers. And some falls on fertile soil and yields a good harvest; a hundredfold, sixtyfold, thirtyfold. This is inefficient communication that is indifferent to its success. It is inefficient because it is indiscriminate. It makes no effort

¹⁸ The time-of-day, like the lunar month and solar year, is a natural (non-human) order of time and is both linear and cyclical in its movement. Digital time is motionless and is a perfect example of Zeno's paradox of the arrow in flight. In any indivisible instant of its flight is a flying arrow moving or at rest? If the former, how can it move in an instant; if the latter, it is never moving, and therefore is at rest (Honderich 1995: 922). The punctual moment of digital time, with no 'before' or 'after', appears trapped in the eternity of the ever-same now. *Groundhog Day* is a wonderful exploration of the paradoxes of digital and daily time.

to disseminate only to chosen, selected and responsive audiences. It allows for rejection and indifference. It has no measure of its own success. It is a strictly one-way, or non-reciprocal form of communication. But whereas this has usually been regarded as its deficiency, Peters sees it is a blessing. To give (to broadcast) without any expectation of return is an unconditional communicative act that comes with no strings attached. Any recipient can make of it what they will, and that is allowed for. It is unforced, non-coercive communication that offers involvement without commitment. In all these ways broadcasting is deeply democratic. It is intrinsically non-exclusive and non-binding. Anyone can watch or listen and anyone can, if they so choose, disagree with what they see and hear. The generosity of broadcasting is strictly impersonal, but allows for persons and their personal opinions.

Television, history and the world

The broadcast character of television indicates its spatiality. Its liveness is its particular temporality. Together they yield an unprecedented historical here-and-now. History is no longer 'then'. It is 'now'. The event is no longer 'there', but 'here'. The now-and-then, the here-and-there come together in the live immediacy of broadcast news and events which are structured in expectancy of what is to come. These real-time, real-world moments produce a spanned and gathered now in which, daily and routinely, countless individual lives and the historical life of societies intersect with each other the world over. In such moments each of us experiences the news-event as if it spoke to me-and-others now.¹⁹ The world-event, through television, impinges directly and immediately, in each individual case, upon me and my life. Individuals the world over in live transmissions are not so much spectators as witnesses of events.²⁰ As witnesses we become implicated in the events themselves. Witnesses have communicative entitlements and obligations by virtue of having been present at the event. As such we are not just entitled to our views and opinions but we may be called upon to bear witness, to testify to what we saw and how we saw it (Peters 2001).

¹⁹ For a fuller discussion of the complexities of how 'we' are addressed by radio and television, see Scannell 2000.

²⁰ There is a very basic issue at stake here. The witness has experienced something by virtue of having been there. Can the viewer lay claim to an experience having watched something on television? The various communicative entitlements of a witness derive from the assumed *authenticity* of their witnessing. That is presumed to be validated by the fact of their presence and their immediate, first-hand experience. If television offers mediated, second-hand experience it is inauthentic. I have argued it is possible to have an authentic experience watching television and thus to be a witness (Scannell 1996: 93-116), a claim which underpins the whole of this chapter. See Ellis 2002: 31-36 on television as 'live witness realized'.

BBC News, 11.09.01: 10.04 pm
Eyewitness, New York:

I wuz just standing here watching the World Trade Centre after the first after the first plane hit (.) I just saw a second plane come in from the south and hit the whuh south (.) tower half way between the bottom and the top of the tower its gotta be a terrorist attack I can't tellya anything more th'n that (.) I saw the plane hit the building

To re-live a moment such as this testifies to the *pain* of witnessing. The anguish in the face and voice, in the whole body of this anonymous 'man in the street' as he tells what he just saw is all caught in the recording. But what is our position, as viewers, in relation to what we witness on television?

Luc Boltanski has eloquently argued that, as 'moral spectators of distant suffering' via television, we are unavoidably implicated in what he calls the *politics of pity*. In France, if you are an immediate witness of suffering, you have a legal obligation to come to the aid of the sufferer (Boltanski 1999: 7-17). What, then, is our obligation (if any) as television viewers in relation to what we witness? As *moral* spectators we cannot assume the indifference of an objective stance ('that's how it is') and turn away. We *feel* for what we see. The politics of pity requires that we take a stand and confront the choice between detachment or commitment, a choice made reflexively visible by broadcasting. We may be roused (politicised) to act; to protest, to demonstrate or at least to make a donation to an aid agency. At the very least we may be roused to speak; to express our indignation, pity, or even our malicious pleasure, to discuss with others, to form an opinion on the matter of the suffering of others. Through the communicative affordances of today's television, their suffering achieves a visibility and publicness which 'presupposes an international public space' of discussion (Boltanski 1999: 184), a global public sphere. This is how we, as viewers anywhere, encounter the world-historical character of life today. This is how we are implicated in what Boltanski calls 'the politics of the present' which responds immediately to immediate events.

Critics of the politics of the present accuse it of a naïve humanitarianism which merely responds to the victims of suffering without addressing its causes. Boltanski replies that 'to be concerned with the present is no small matter. For over the past, ever gone by, and over the future, still non-existent, the present has an overwhelming privilege: that of being real' (Boltanski 1999: 192). It is the reality of suffering brought to presence by television everywhere, that stirs us to present thought and action. Present actions have no guarantees of success. We cannot be wise before the event, though all of us can be wise in its aftermath. The CNN newsdesk and other broadcasters on the day had no such available wisdom as they

wrestled with the unbelievable events unfolding live and in real time on their screens; yet, by the end of that day, news-rooms the world over, had digested, framed and interpreted their momentous significance. They had named Osama bin Laden as the likeliest perpetrator of the attacks on the United States and correctly anticipated an American-led attack on Afghanistan as its likeliest political consequence. Journalists, as historians of the present, face and anticipate the future that present events will bring about. They do this on behalf of their publics everywhere today.

Boltanski's meditation on the television news-viewer as moral spectator has a premise that this chapter shares—it is through television that we are implicated, day by day on a world-wide basis, in the history and politics of the present. The beginnings of that historical development was the theme of Jürgen Habermas's hugely influential account of the emergence of public opinion as the foundation of modern mass, democratic politics (Habermas 1989). Habermas pinpointed the moment that the opinions of ordinary citizens became *historically* relevant as the moment that they became *politically* relevant. When the opinions of ordinary people began to impinge on the decisions and actions of those who exercised political power, the people themselves became, for the first time, involved in the process of making history. The role of media in making public the political-historical process was and remains crucial to the formation of critical public opinion as part of that process. In the last century the live and broadcast affordances of radio and television have drawn us all into the history-making politics of the present which all of us experience normally, and normatively, as members of the societies in which we live. Our *own* situation and its attendant circumstances are understood by each of us as embedded in the world-historical framework of life today as disclosed, daily and routinely, in television news and events wherever and whoever we may be.

References

- Boltanski, L. (1999) *Distant Suffering*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bonner, F. (2003) *Ordinary Television*. London: Sage.
- Bono, F. and I. Bondebjerg (1994) *Nordic Television. History, Politics and Aesthetics*. Copenhagen: University of Copenhagen, Dept. of Film and Media Studies.

- Braudel, F. (1980) *On History*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
- Breisach, E. (1983) *Historiography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Briggs, A. (1961-1995) *The History of Broadcasting in the United Kingdom* (Volumes 1-5). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Brunsdon, C. (1998) 'What is the "television" of Television Studies?' *The Television Studies Book*, C. Geraghty and D. Lusted (eds.): 95-113. London: Arnold.
- Bull, P. and R. Black (2003) *The Auditory Culture Reader*. Oxford: Berg.
- Burke, P. (1995) *The French Historical Revolution. The Annales School, 1929-1989*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Cavell, S. (1976) *Must We Mean What We Say?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Curran, J. (2002) *Media and Power*. London: Routledge.
- Douglas, S. (1994) *Where the Girls Are. Growing up Female with the Mass Media*. New York: Times Books.
- Douglas, S. (1999) *Listening In. Radio and the American Imagination*. New York. Times Books.
- Dreyfus, H. and P. Rabinow (1982) *Michel Foucault. Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. Brighton: Harvester Press.
- Ellis, J. (2002) *Seeing Things. Television in the Age of Uncertainty*. London: I. B. Taurus.
- Ellis, J. (2004) 'Television Production', in *The Television Studies Reader*, R. Allen and A. Hill (eds.): 275-292. London: Routledge.
- Feuer, J. (1983) 'The concept of live television. Ontology as ideology' *Regarding Television*, E. Kaplan (ed.): 12-21. Los Angeles: The American Film Institute.
- Forty, A. (1986) *Objects of Desire. Design and Society 1750-1980*. London: Thames and Hudson.
- Foucault, M. (1974) *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. London: Tavistock Publications.
- Giddens, A. (1990) *The Consequences of Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Habermas, J. (1989) *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Hall, S. (1980) 'Encoding/decoding', in *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-1979*, S. Hall et al. (eds.): 128-38. London: Hutchison.
- Heidegger, M. (1999) *Ontology—The Hermeneutics of Facticity*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Heidegger, M. (1962) *Being and Time*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Hilmes, M. and J. Loviglio (2002) *Radio Reader. Essays in the Cultural History of Radio*. New York and London: Routledge

- Hilmes, M. (2004) *The Television History Book*. London: British Film Institute.
- Honderich, T. (1995) *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hutchby, I. (2001) *Conversation and Technology*. Cambridge: Polity.
- Innis, H. (1950) *Empire and Communication*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Innis, H. (1964) *The Bias of Communication*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Jenks, C. (1995) *Visual Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Johnson, L. (1988) *The Unseen Voice. A Cultural Study of Early Australian Radio*. London: Routledge.
- Lacey, K. (2002) 'Radio in the great depression: promotional culture, public service and propaganda', *Radio Reader*, M.Hilmes and J. Loviglio (eds.): 21-40. New York and London: Routledge.
- Lyotard, J-F. (1986) *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Mansell, G. *Let the Truth be Told. Fifty Years of BBC External Broadcasting*. London: BBC.
- McLuhan, M. (1962) *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press
- Meadel, C. (1994) *Histoire de la Radio des Années Trente*. Paris: Institut National de l'Audiovisuel.
- Meyrowitz, J. (1994) 'Medium Theory', *Communication Theory Today*, D. Crowley and D. Mitchell (eds.): 27-49. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Pawley, E. (1976) *BBC Engineering, 1922-1972*. London: BBC.
- Peters, J. D. (1999) *Speaking Into the Air. A History of the Idea of Communication*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Peters, J. D. (2001) 'Witnessing'. *Media Culture & Society* 23(6).
- Roberts, G. (2001) *The History and Narrative Reader*. London: Routledge.
- Sacks, H. (1995) *Lectures on Conversation* (2 volumes) Oxford: Blackwell
- Scannell, P. 1996 *Radio, Television and Modern Life*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Scannell, P. (2000) 'For-anyone-as-someone structures'. *Media Culture & Society* (22(1): 5-24.
- Scannell, P. (2003) 'The Brains Trust: a historical study of the management of liveness', *Media Organisations and Production*, S. Cottle (ed.). London: Sage
- Scannell, P. (2004a) 'Broadcasting historiography and historicity', *Screen* 45(2): 130-141.

Scannell, P. (2004b) 'What reality has misfortune?' *Media, Culture & Society* 26 (4).

Scannell, P. and Cardiff, D. (1991) *A Social History of British Broadcasting, 1922-1939*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Smulyan, S. (1994) *Selling Radio. The Commercialization of American broadcasting, 1920-1934*. Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Winston, B. (1998) *Media, Technology and Society. A History from the Telegraph to the Internet*. London: Routledge.

Chapter Nine

The meaning of *broadcasting* in the digital era

Twenty years ago the Peacock Report on *The Financing of Broadcasting* endorsed direct consumer choice, assumed that subscription would eventually replace the license fee and ended with the hope that Britain would soon ‘reach a position where the mystique is taken out of broadcasting and it becomes no more special than publishing became once the world became used to living with the printing press’ (HMSO 1986: para. 711, p. 151). It reluctantly concluded that public service broadcasting (PSB) was defensible as a corrective to market failure in commercial television services because it provided those special ‘minority’ programmes of cultural value that commercial TV failed to supply. Peacock was the first Parliamentary Committee of Enquiry into British broadcasting led by an economist (Sir Alan Peacock) and written in the language of economics. The vocabulary and concepts of Peacock define the terms in which the new regulatory authority, Ofcom, deals with broadcasting today.

The enquiry into the funding of the BBC was partly driven by political animus because Margaret Thatcher disliked the BBC and the principle it represented. It was also driven by the genuine problem of justifying the license fee in a new television age of multi-channel services, just around the corner, that would vastly extend consumer choice beyond the four national services then available (BBC1 and 2, ITV and Ch4). But what happened? Not a plethora of tv channels in a noisy marketplace of competition, but the emergence in the 1990s of a new ‘big beast’ in the British media landscape—BSkyB. Today the two key players, in the business of tv and radio provision, are the BBC and Sky.

In this essay I want set aside the economic and policy issues concerning the regulation of broadcasting today—matters of immediate concern in the UK at this moment, with the BBC’s charter under review—and try to think of what essentially broadcasting means today, and whether it matters any more. It is no longer a question of public service versus the market, I suggest, but of whether *broadcasting* is a relevant way of delivering services in today’s world. Digital technologies, satellite and cable delivery systems and the new media (the extraordinary growth, in less than ten years, of the Internet and world wide web) pose the

challenge today: has broadcasting in *any* form a future in the so-called digital age of the 21st century?

Broadcasting as dissemination

We should remember that ‘broadcasting’ is an old, rural term that found a new technological application and meaning in the early 20th century. It was used to describe the transmission effect of wireless telephony, a technology that extended wired telephony by providing links between two transmission-reception points without the necessity of lines (above or below ground or water) to make the connection. In point-to-point communication—the original intentional application—the side-effect of transmission (that anyone else within range of reception and with adequate receiving equipment could also pick it up) was a minus rather than a plus. The general social application of the technology for informational and entertainment purposes was discovered in the 1920s when wireless *broadcasting* began. John Durham Peters has recently reminded us of the true force and significance of this word by reconnecting it to Christ’s parable of The Sower which he takes as the paradigm for communication as *dissemination* in contrast with the other great communicative paradigm of *dialogue*, exemplified by the discourse and method of Socrates (Peters 1999).

Historically it is clear that radio was conceived as a technology for extending dialogue, but discovered its true communicative role as broadcast dissemination. Dialogue is a personal two-way interaction between people. Dissemination is an impersonal one-to-many one-way system of communication. To broadcast, before radio, meant to scatter seed abroad. Christ stands before a large anonymous crowd, gathered on the shore of the Sea of Galilee and tells them a story. The sower goes out one day to scatter his seed: some falls on stony ground and is pecked up by the birds of the air; some falls among thorns and is choked as soon as it springs up; some falls on shallow soil, springs up quickly but soon withers and dies. And some falls on fertile soil and yields a good harvest; thirty fold, sixty fold, a hundredfold. The story is, of course, Christ’s discourse on his own method as a teacher, on what he is doing even as he speaks to the assembled crowd.

Socrates, Peters tells us, argued for insemination as more virtuous than dissemination. Insemination is to implant the seed in another where it will bear fruit. Dissemination is like the sin of Onan who spilled his seed upon the ground. It is a wasteful scatter for there is no guarantee that the seed will, in due course, bear fruit. Put like this, Christ’s method of communication is scandalously inefficient. But that, Peters stunningly argues, is its

disinterested kindness and generosity. The parable of the sower makes manifest, in its form as much as its message, that the love of God (*agape*) is indiscriminately available for all, not just the few that are open and receptive to the Word. Broadcasting is a fundamentally democratic form of communication. But more than this, and crucially, it is like the love of God in that it is non-reciprocal. It gives without any expectation of a return. It neither expects nor requires acknowledgement and thanks. It is one-way and unconditional and for anyone and everyone anywhere anytime. It *cannot* be reciprocated. This is the blessing of broadcast communication and its indiscriminate scatter.

Peters, then, offers two paradigms of communication; one, a dialogue of intimacy and reciprocity, the other of indiscriminate mass dissemination. It is a contrast between two kinds of love, *eros* and *agape*: human and divine, non-transcendent and transcendent, personal and impersonal, individual and social, present and absent, embodied and disembodied, immediate and mediated. In Britain the public service model of broadcasting was understood, from its beginning, in terms of Christ's parable. Broadcasting House, the home of the BBC from 1932, has a famous sculpture over the entrance of Prospero and Ariel. Inside, in the foyer, there is another less well known carving by the same Catholic sculptor, Eric Gill, of The Sower. The key feature of the British model from the start, its core commitment, was to the universal dissemination of its radio service as an inclusive public good. Public service has been, and remains to this day, the dominant and still valued means whereby truly *broadcast* services are delivered in Britain and other Northern European countries. Nor does it exist in isolation from other public services—health and education. The continuing political will of electorates to support such services, in spite of the neo-Conservative challenge of the 1980s, indicates the direction taken by Britain and other northern European countries since the 2nd World War as one that favours *social* democracy. The USA of course has favoured a different version of democracy; one that is strongly libertarian, that favours individual endeavour, that rejects central government and is suspicious of any notion of the public good. The wholly marginal position of public service broadcasting in the USA (an audience share of 2% and largely dependent on voluntary donations) is indicative of this.

Broadcasting, as the parable and Peters make quite clear, is wasteful, inefficient communication. But is that a blessing or a curse? From the start less wasteful and more efficient methods of distribution have been sought, by those who regard radio and television as a business like any other, that target only paying customers: pay-per-channel, ideally pay-per-view, *narrowcasting*, in short. The political demand, in the UK today, to justify public services in economic terms is, while understandable (value for tax-payers' money must be demonstrated), in the end paradoxical. The reasons and justifications for public services are,

ultimately ethical and political; they are concerned with what we think a good society should be like and the political form it should take. They are underpinned by a commitment to common goods. Economic rationality is normatively thought in terms of individual goods—profit is private, and rational choice theory presupposes self-interest as its start and end point. It may help to rationalise the delivery of common goods, preventing waste and corruption, but it can never justify them. Americans are cynical about their radio and television services because they see them simply as businesses and, therefore, exploitative. They treat their media, to paraphrase de Tocqueville, as kings do their courtiers: they enrich and despise them. A viable public sector, of which broadcasting is a part, presupposes as the condition of its existence, trust in the political institutions of public life and those who serve them. Democracy does not depend on public trust for it has many forms, but the particular form of democracy that has developed in Northern Europe clearly does.

Broadcasting and liveness

Radio and television are time based media. It is ‘empty’ time that is filled by their schedules and time that is consumed in listening and watching. The very first weekly publication of the BBC in 1923 was *Radio Times* and it’s still on sale on sale today. What are the times of radio? Sylviane Agacinski makes the point beautifully:

We cannot speak of *the* time, as if it were homogeneous, unifiable by a single measure and a single history. There are different orders of temporality (corresponding to the *tempos* of various events) just as there are different orders of historicity.

Today, the universal clocks are the audio-visual media, and the *clock-radio* is the object that best represents the takeover, the makeover, of the clock. Indeed, this object is not a simple means for being awoken by music or the morning news; it is the concrete sign that we live *in the time of the radio, in the time of the media* and their programs.

[Agancinski 2003: 46-7. Original emphases]

Agacisinski contrasts the time of the media with older historical temporalities—the rhythm of the sun, the seasons, the harvest. But really the time of the media stands in contrast to the time of the masses; industrial, factory time whose coercive, punitive and disciplinary character was fully explored by Edward Thompson (1963) long before Foucault wrote *Discipline and Punish*. The time of the media means, in the first place, time *for* the media. Societies of which daily radio and television services are an integral part have of necessity risen above subsistence economies and the realm of necessity. They bespeak a world in which the ‘silent majorities’ have at the very least a marginal surplus of money and time to spend on the

purchase and use of radio and television sets as pastimes. The transition from the time of the masses to the time of the media depended on the decisive world-shattering, world-transforming event of the last century; the 1939-45 war, the historical hinge of the 20th century.

Let's say, to simplify greatly, that in the first half of the 20th century it seemed as if human beings existed to serve the tremendous apparatuses (economic, political, technological, cultural) that dominated their lives, threatened the liquidation of their individuality and produced them as the silent, passive, manipulated masses. This was the world of mass production, mass politics and mass culture—the time of the masses. At the end of the 20th century this world has disappeared. *That* is the real meaning of post-modernity. The transition from Fordism to post-Fordism, as the British Left saw it in the 1980s, signalled 'The end of the masses' (Hall and Jacques 1989; Hebdige 1989). Raymond Williams had noted this much earlier, in the 1950s when the decisive, silent transformation began: 'There are no masses any more, there are only other people'. In the 1950s a new conception of culture began to appear at exactly the same time as a new politics¹ and an economy geared to the production of domestic appliances or consumer durables. The 1950s is the key decade of the second half of the last century: in it we see emerging a new historical phenomenon called 'everyday life'. This is the beginning of 'the age of television' and the time of the media, in which time no longer dominates and oppresses individuals but begins to be something that they manage and occasionally enjoy as part of their ordinary, everyday life. To understand this time is to grapple with the meaning of *live* broadcast radio and television which is intimately entwined in the historical emergence of everyday life as a particularising order of historical time.

We experience the liveness of broadcasting in the immediate now of the particular programme; the soccer match, say, or the news. But that is an effect of something larger and more difficult to grasp; namely the times of the schedules and the temporality of every day life. The day is a natural order of time (it is not a human invention like hours and minutes). Each day has an immanent structure, rhythm and tempo around which human life, even today, remains adjusted. Light and darkness; waking and sleeping; morning, noon and night: a natural order of time that is both linear and irreversible and infinitely cyclical and repetitive. Each day goes through the same cycle as every other day. Human life is 'naturally' in the first place and historically and culturally in the second place adjusted to the rhythm and cycle of

¹ The women's movement and the civil rights movement. Both appear in 1950s America and give rise to what is later labelled 'identity politics' or 'the politics of recognition' (Taylor 1994). The refusal of Rosa Parkes to give up her seat to a white passenger in Montgomery, Alabama on 1 December 1955—the trigger of the civil rights movement—is exemplary of the new politics of everyday life.

days. Today we live in the order of days just as other cultures in other times lived in the order of the seasons: the time to sow and the time to reap. The days of our lives have a natural arc of morning, noon and night which is the storyable arc of our own existence too. Life and days are inextricably folded into each other and show up in the schedules of the broadcast day in which the *historic* and *future* present show up in relation to each other in the *immediate* present of live-to-air transmissions.

The future present shows up as a set of expectations at the beginning of each day. Start-of-day news and indeed all early morning live-to-air programmes on radio and television are not just *at* that time but *for* that time. In all sorts of ways a rolling three-hour news and discussion programme, such as the aptly named *Today* on BBC Radio 4 that starts at six am each weekday morning, is concerned with the day ahead and all the upcoming and ongoing issues that will mark Today as this day in particular. The routine, recurring time-checks, weather and traffic reports provide relevant data that allow listeners to orient themselves to and prepare for the day ahead. End-of-day news (BBC1, *News at Ten*) looks back on what was anticipated in start-of-day news. It brings the events of the-day-now-past into the present in its live-to-air reports and interviews. This is the retrospective historic present, concerned with what has just-now happened and what it meant. It too exists in and for its own and particular time-of-day. It summarises, assesses and, where appropriate, brings closure to the now-ending day. The weather reports that immediately follow nightly news are oriented to tomorrow. News junkies, who switch to *Newsnight* (BBC 2: 10.30pm) after the news, know that they will get further discussion and comment on the events of the day. The programme always ends with a brief look at tomorrow's newspaper headline stories, thereby indicating closure and renewal—back to the future!

Thus routinely, day by day, the broadcasting schedule articulates and expresses each day in its prospective and retrospective character—its ontology of expectations, its assessments of whether they were met—in the live momentum of the phenomenal now from morning through to night. If we can meaningfully speak of radio and television as part of our lives it is because (and only because) their services articulate the existential structure of the days of our lives while at the same time connecting each and all of us, day in day out, to the life of the world in its manifest, manifold diversity. This double articulation of life (my life linked to the life of the world) is endlessly reiterated in news and other programmes in the course of each and every day as we and broadcasting move through it from morning to night. This is the unobtrusive world-historical character of television and radio broadcasting today and it depends upon the fact that it is *live*.

Underpinning all this is a continuing interactive conversation between the broadcasters and their audiences. Broadcast radio and television services in fact combine Peters' two communicative paradigms of dialogue and dissemination. They *talk* continuously to their viewers and listeners; not just in news programmes and all studio based talk, quiz, game and people programmes but in the crucial in-between continuity segments that segue from one programme to another, that point to future programmes, that forecast the weather and so forth. The relationship through the day and from day to day, between broadcasters and audiences is essentially a real-time *communicative* relationship realised in talk—the universal communicative medium of everyday life. Each and every listener or viewer encounters this as an aspect of their own experience; as if broadcasting spoke to, in each case, me. At the same time, each one of knows that what we have seen and heard has also been seen and heard, at exactly the same time and in the same way, by countless others. Each and all of us has a communicative entitlement to speak of what we have witnessed in live broadcasting, which thereby creates the conditions of common experiences as the basis of the formation of public opinions and tastes.

BSkyB as a media superstore

Most work on audiences concentrates on their responses to this or that particular programme. Less attention has been given to the experience of listening and watching as such. I want to consider for a moment the experience of watching BSkyB's digital satellite service in order to compare it with that of broadcast television as I have just described it. At the heart of Sky's extraordinary success in the last ten years is the way in which it has brought order to chaos and tidied up the experience of access to the new world of multi-channel television and radio. The key to the Sky experience is the Electronic Program Guide (EPG). In the early days of satellite television you could access lots of different channels, but they came up randomly, you had no idea what you were looking at or what their schedule was. You would hit many channels that were either a snow-blizzard or encrypted so you hadn't a clue what they were (apart from the heavy breathing). Watching satellite television was a frustrating hit and miss experience to which the EPG was a brilliant technological solution.

The EPG functions like a home-shopping catalogue. It provides clear, easy and fast access to any of the one thousand television and radio channels on the menu. When you turn on, the initial display screen offers 10 options: all channels, entertainment, movies, sport, news, kids, music and radio, specialist, A-Z and personal planner. With the buttons of the remote (a key part of the technology) you can quickly toggle through to the channel you want. A text-frame

at the bottom of the screen—it disappears after thirty seconds—tells you the date and time, the channel and the title of the programme as well as displaying various interactive options. At any time you can check what's coming up next and, indeed, the schedule for the rest of the day. Channel browsing is very easy and you always know where you are and what you're looking at. The many hundreds of channels have been sorted and stacked together: God? Sex? Sport? Music? Travel? Shopping? DIY? Gambling? All these and much more have been conveniently grouped together, the way goods are stacked and displayed in the supermarket: this aisle for dairy products, that for meat and so on. Once you get used to the EPG, just as once you know where things are in the supermarket, browsing through them is a comfortable and similar experience.

But the EPG is a highly sophisticated piece of equipment that allows much more than easy channel browsing. It is essentially an interactive device for the customisation of viewing. You can identify and mark your own channel favourites so you can call them up directly. You can earmark a particular programme you want to see later and get a reminder when it's time to watch it. And the live channels have a red button which brings up an interactive menu that offers a range of alternative choices to what's on screen; particularly useful for news and sports programmes. The latest refinement is Sky+ which adds a DVR (digital video recorder) and other technical goodies to the basic Sky package. The DVR needs no tape, for the hard drive of the digibox can hold up to 20 hours of recorded material (60 hours on Sky+ 160) that you can arrange as you wish into your own viewing schedule. You can record two other channels simultaneously. You can record a whole series—the Series Link feature will do this automatically and avoid recording repeats and omnibus editions. While watching live programmes—Sky News, say, or a live game on a premium sports channel (for which you pay extra)—you can pause them to answer the phone or whatever and you can if you wish, fast-forward when you return to catch up with the action in real time or carry on from where you stopped. You can also rewind whenever you want: instant replays on demand. Sky's core concept is personalised viewing; the perfection of individual consumer choice that the Peacock Report dreamt of. Sky+ adds the refinement of flexitime; viewing in your own time as well as the power to stop and reverse time in live programmes. Sky offers a supermarket conception of the meaning of choice, attuned to late 20th century post-modern post-industrial lifestyles that have become increasingly individualised.

Sky is very clever and very successful. It makes television something you can customise to your convenience in much the same way that you can customise your own favourite music selections with MP3s. As such it is the antithesis of traditional broadcast services. It has the effect of privatising the experience of radio and television. First, and crucially, it destroys the

significance of the schedules which are rendered strictly meaningless: that is to say, the time at which any programme appears has no particular point, nor any meaning in relation to any other programme. Thereby the channels themselves become largely redundant. They are simply time-stores in which individual programmes of a certain kind (sport, music, sex) are held. What counts is the huge diversity of programmes on offer. From all the channels available you pick the programmes that you want, to watch at leisure. It is convenience television based on individual customer sovereignty and choice. It removes the experience of television from public time into the private times of private individuals. The Sky experience is typically in *my* time. The time of the world has disappeared.

The defining characteristic of broadcasting is its worldliness, which is the hidden meaning of publicness. I have tried to show this as the effect live-to-air transmission which creates a spanned and gathered now that brings together into the public worldly time of the programme all who watch and listen. In this common, public time the common experience of a common world is created. We experience this with sometimes shattering intensity in great events or disasters, but such exceptional moments depend upon the routine structure of schedules attuned to the existential arc of days and a continuing communicative dialogue between broadcasters and their listeners and viewers—the two distinguishing characteristics of live broadcast public services. With Sky you create your own television time from a large and diverse supply of programmes available for you to pick and mix. With BBC services you attune your time to the times of broadcasting and the time of the world. Sky digital makes television a personal life-style accessory. Broadcasting makes it part of your daily life connected day by day to the life of the world.

I have mainly been concerned with television but it's important not to forget radio which is arguably the more important broadcast medium of daily life. Radio listening in the last few years has increased a little, while viewing has correspondingly declined. More people listen to radio in Britain each day than they watch television. The unique communicative affordance of radio is that you don't have to stop doing other things and watch it as you must with television. Radio allows us all to do two at least things at once: to listen and get up and dressed, and drive to work, and work at the computer, and cook or do the housework or go to bed and read. The structure of daily listening (with its early morning and drive time peaks) compared with that of viewing confirms that radio is a through-the-day medium whereas television is what it has always been, essentially an evening leisure time activity—at least for the working population. Radio today is the primary communicative medium of daily life because it is more accessibly and intimately connected to the daily time-routines of the working week while television is more attuned to the pleasures of the weekend. And in the

UK there's no doubt that BBC radio services have a much more distinctively public service character than its television services. Thus, in thinking about PSB today it is important to unbundle radio and television, to recognise their differences and that people use them differently, at different times of day and for different purposes. One is not more important than the other. It is the combination of both that matters for us.

The meaning of publicness

Broadcasting then is the sum of radio and television and is greater than what each part offers individually. Yet public discussion today of the future of PSB as the BBC's charter is under review is focused exclusively in terms of television. What escapes recognition and acknowledgement is that both mediums are important in people's daily lives in different ways and at different times. But people are never discussed by the policy wonks. Their talk is always of citizen-consumers—a convenient ideological fiction that suits the politicians (with talk of citizens) and the economists in Ofcom (with talk of consumers). But real people do not conceive of themselves as either as they watch and listen. That has been my concern: the experience of radio and television today and what it means for people as an aspect of their lives.

It is natural enough to think of the experience of radio and television in terms of the programmes that we listen to and watch. Public discussion of PSB today is very much in terms of trying to identify (and then to protect) certain kinds of program that have some added 'public value'; documentaries, religious, ethnic minority and children's programmes, 'serious' drama. These are the terms in which Ofcom sets the agenda for discussion. But it misses the essential point about the meaning of PSB.

It is *not* just, or in the first place, about programme content. Obviously any television service must somehow supply a content. But the key question is: What determines the content supplied? And the answer very much depends on how the supplier conceives of those for whom the contents of the services are intended. To conceive of the recipient as a consumer (as Post-Peacock debate in the UK does unquestioningly) is to change fundamentally the meaning of PSB. In fact it renders meaningless its core commitment to publicness understood as the general public and its general public interest. It marks a regression to pre-20th century forms of public life and experience such as existed before the advent of radio broadcasting.

What was public life and what were publics then? They were always particular publics that

gathered in a particular place at a particular time for a particular event. These typically consisted of political, religious, sporting or cultural occasions: the political rally or state occasion, the church service, the cricket or football match; the opera, concert or theatre. Which ever case you take it is clear that the public is always a minority interest public of some sort; a self-selecting, self-defining body of the faithful gathered together for a common purpose. Access to all such occasions was limited by a number of factors that depended not only on time and money but also, and crucially, on availability. The vast majority of people before broadcasting had never heard or seen the king, the prime minister or a full-scale symphony orchestra performing in concert, simply because they lived too far from the metropolitan centres where public life, people and events were situated. Even the reading publics of books, magazines and newspapers remained interest publics of some kind; particular political opinion publics, taste publics, gendered publics.

We entirely fail to understand the significance of broadcasting if we do not recognise the structurally different public that it created: the *general* public, society at large, anyone and everyone within range of reception and in possession of a decent receiving apparatus. Now anyone anywhere could hear the voice of the monarch or political leaders of the day, had live and direct access to a football match or a symphony concert or a religious service from church and much more besides. Events that had hitherto been for particular publics, now became generally available and of general interest to the new general public. The general public is not an amalgam of particular publics writ large. Nor is the general interest that it creates the sum of particular interests. The general interest marks the broadening and deepening of the range of experiences of public life and events that are available to us as individuals. Through broadcasting many things of potential interest to all but hitherto inaccessible, now became available to all. I may like to watch, for instance, international soccer or rugby and be occasionally enthralled by it. That does not mean I am a fan. Fans constitute a particular community of interest who follow the game (more exactly, their club) week in week out. They are prepared to pay for access to Sky's premium sports channels to follow their passion. The general interest in international sport continues to be protected by the listed events in broadcasting acts that grant a right of access to them on behalf of the free-to-air terrestrial broadcasters and the general public whom they serve. It is designed to prevent the removal of such events from the common public domain and their privatisation for particular paying interest publics.

The general public and its general interests are the unique effect of radio and television broadcasting which produced it as a matter of fact, almost as a by-product of their generous, indiscriminate scatter. The discovery of this new public and the working through of what it

meant took time but it is a process that, from the beginning through to the present, lies at the heart of the meaning of democracy. We should never forget what a recent thing mass representative democracy is, nor how fragile it seemed in the first half of the last century. The establishment of mass representative democracy in the UK (the Representation of the People Act, 1918) coincided with the beginning of broadcasting that supplied the unprecedented, unique and necessary conditions through which the meaning of democracy could be continuously and routinely worked through. It made the *demos*, the people, the whole population, into an audience with live access to a host of worldly events, public discussions, entertainment and cultural resources that were hitherto beyond the reach of the vast majority.. The general public is first and last a political public, the communicative realisation of the democratic process, the means by which a dialogue is maintained routinely, day in day out, between the public world of politics and the private worlds of individuals. When constituted as a public service, broadcasting is neither part of the state, nor of civil society. It is an independent public body, answerable to both and charged with the task of maintaining the necessary conditions of public life for all, independent of class, age, sex, religion or ethnicity. This huge task has been discharged, never without difficulty or tension, but on the whole successfully by national broadcasters such as the BBC.

It is *because* the audience, in public service broadcasting is acknowledged as the general public that it has developed its characteristic method for the delivery of mixed program services in national channels that reach all parts of the country. Only in this way does it fulfil its representative remit which is at the heart of its democratic mandate. On the one hand the service is for each and all, irrespective of who they are or where they live. On the other hand, within the GBP (the Great British Public), there are of course a host of differences that depend on age, class, sex, beliefs, tastes, attitudes and where you happen to live. The historic task of PSB has been to cater for these differences within the general public through programs that acknowledge their particular preferences and circumstances, while preserving it *as* the general public in the first and last instance. If there is such a thing as the *general* interest it is expressed and maintained by mixed programme services for the general public. In the UK the national terrestrial tv channels, BBC Radio4 and the World Service still maintain a mix of programmes in their daily output, but under increasing market pressure.

Audiences defined as consumers will naturally be considered in terms of their particular interests and for which they are willing to pay. Under market conditions the general interest and the general public collapses. The complete range of programmes available on Sky's EPG represents the total mix (and more) of the terrestrial PSB television channels. But what has disappeared is the appearance of the elements in the mix, side by side in a single programme

service or channel through the changing days, weeks and months of the year. Generic programming has replaced it. Instead of religious programmes on Sundays, or sport on Saturdays or children's programmes at tea-time each has been repackaged as an all-day everyday customised option for a particular public. Religious, sporting and children's programs now no longer appear in relation to each other, at particular times of the day and week, as part of a common public domain. Each has been withdrawn from the general public and the general interest. Each now represents only a self-selecting, self-defining minority. All have regressed to those 19th century publics made up of discrete, self-involved communities of interest that acknowledge nothing outside themselves (community broadcasting is not in principle democratic).

Mass democracy grants formal political equality to all and is (like justice) blind to difference. Its fundamental principle is inclusion. On the other hand, and only as a result of their inclusion, there have been growing demands for rights on the part of hitherto excluded groups; the new social movements of the late 20th century and the politics of recognition. The politics of culture, since the 1980s, has emphasised difference, diversity and choice. It may look like the triumph of consumption as life-style, but it is more than that. Culture, for most of the 20th century, was supplied by the culture industries. The new communication technologies of the last twenty years or so increasingly allow individuals to customise their own taste preferences and to create their own cultures. A host of new lightweight portable audio/visual appliances have come onto the market recently that depend on digitisation, computers and the Internet; MP3s and iPods, digital cameras, video-cams and image scanners, CDs and DVDs, the latest generation of mobile phones. Individual and family home-pages, on-line text- and photo-blogging, text-messaging and the exchange of digital images (still and moving) on mobile phones are all indications of the ways in which individuals now create and disseminate statements about themselves, their beliefs, their tastes and their lives. Interactivity is the buzzword that partly captures what this transformed and enhanced presentation of self in everyday life is about. It is part of the long, complex, continuing process of working through the meaning of democratic ways of life. Sky is one contemporary response to this general process.

Conclusion

The scenario I have described is not an either—or. Sky and other contemporary instances of the digital revolution are all part of the personalisation of experience as something that

individuals can now manage and manipulate themselves through new everyday technologies of self-expression and communication. But these developments do not surpass older broadcast technologies of the earlier 20th century nor do they replace their function. That function I have tried to show is not to be thought of in terms of some notion of the ‘value-added’ content of certain kinds of program. It is much more to do with a communicative relationship between broadcasting and the new kind of general public and general interest that its indiscriminate scatter created. That relationship exists in an order of time—the living present—that is embedded in the natural, existential arc of days and seasons and depends for its possibility upon the liveness and immediacy of the technology. I have suggested that broadcasting uniquely spans several orders of time—my time, the time of day, the time of institutions, the time of the event—and brings them together into a gathered now that joins the lives of individuals with the life and times of the world. That is the incomparable communicative affordance of live broadcasting. It does this day by day and every day and it is irreplaceable.

The difficult problem that social democracies face today lies in squaring the circle of contradiction between its fundamental inclusiveness that depends on the denial of difference, and the demands that inevitably and increasingly arise, once everyone *is* included, for the recognition of the right to be different. The economic, political and cultural developments of the late 20th century have all been in the direction of diversity, difference and choice. This places increasing strain on the unity of the political body, the nation-state, as the guarantor and defender both of democratic inclusiveness and the rights of difference. It puts national systems of broadcasting, through which these tensions are played out daily and routinely, under similar stress. It is in the interest of nation states committed to social democracy to preserve such systems for they preserve the principle and practice of a common public life against all those contemporary forces that fragment it. The enrichment of private life and experience is no bad thing. It is one side of the democratic coin that makes possible self-realisation and fulfilment. But if it takes place at the expense of public life and experience—the other side of the coin—it has catastrophic consequences for the meaning of democracy. Broadcasting, pace Peacock, is not a business like any other. Sky is—rightly and properly—a business geared to individual consumers. The BBC—equally rightly and properly—is not a business at all. It is at heart a political matter. That is why state-regulated public services developed in the 20th century as its rationalisation and justification. Public service, as is now abundantly clear, is the only means of guaranteeing *broadcast* radio and television services. And in our world, broadcasting remains an indispensable guarantor of open, common forms of democratic public life. It is a mark of how far we have lost sight of the essential meaning of broadcasting that it is discussed today in the language of economics and consumer choice and the political rhetoric of citizenship.

References

Agacinski, S. (2003) *Time Passing. Modernity and Nostalgia*. New York: Columbia University Press

Hall, S. and M. Jacques. (1989) *New Times. The Changing Face of Politics in the 1990s*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.

Hebdidge, D. (1989) 'After the Masses' *New Times* (S. Hall and M. Jacques, eds.): 76-93. London: Lawrence and Wishart.

HMSO (1986) *Report of the Committee on the Financing of Broadcasting* (The Peacock Report). London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office

Peters, J. D. (1999) *Speaking Into the Air. A History of the Idea of Communication*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Taylor, C. (1994) *Multiculturalism* (A. Gutmann, ed.). Princeton, J Princeton University Press.

Thompson, E. P. (1963) 'Time, work-discipline and industrial capitalism', *Past and Present* Vol. 38

Appendix A

**Media and Communication:
An historical review and critique**

Publisher: Sage, UK
Length: 125,000 words
Publication date: early 2007

Table of Contents

**Part one
The masses**

Chapter 1	
The sociology of mass communication	9,867
USA 1930s	
Lazarsfeld, Cantril, Horkheimer and Adorno	
Chapter 2	
Modernity as mass deception	15,062
Germany/USA 1930s and 40s	
Horkheimer, Benjamin, Adorno.	
Chapter 3	
The discovery of ‘people’	13,207
USA 1940s and 50s	
Lazarsfeld, Merton, Riesman, Katz	

**Part two
Everyday life**

Chapter 4	
Ordinary Culture [unfinished]	4, 846
England 1950s	
Leavis, Hoggart, Williams, Thompson	
Chapter 5	
The medium is the message	10,136
Canada 1950s and 60s	
Innis, McLuhan	

Chapter 6	
The sociology of interaction	11,080
USA 1950s and 60s	
Goffman, Garfinkel	

Part three
Communicative rationality

Chapter 7	
Language and communication	12,283
UK/USA 1960s to the present day	
Austin, Grice, Sacks et al	

Chapter 8	
Communication as ideology	14,976
UK 1970s	
Hall	

Chapter 9	
Communication and rationality	11,912
Germany 1960s to the present	
Habermas	

Part four
Review and critique

Chapter 10	
Media, society and culture	[to be written]

Chapter 11	
Media and communication	[to be written]

Appendix B

Television and the meaning of *live*

Publisher: Sage (UK).

Length: 90,000 words.

Publication date: Late 2007

Table of contents

Introduction

1. The management of talk
The Brains Trust (BBC Home Service, 1942)
2. Live and recorded: early television Outside Broadcasts
At Home (The Archbishop of Canterbury meets Richard Dimbleby)
BBC television 1956
3. Saying and showing: Bloody Sunday, 30 January 1972
The Troubles (ITV 1981), *Creggan* (ITV 1986)
4. Happening and occasion:
The death of Diana, Princess of Wales: August 31 1997
BBC, ITV, Sky coverage of the funeral
5. Television as event:
Big Brother (1st series, 2000)
Channel 4
6. What reality has misfortune?
CNN, BBC news coverage of September 11th 2001
7. Moments and their men:
David Beckham's goal. England v Greece, October 6th 2001
BBC Sports coverage
8. The meaning of 'live'.

[**Note:** All the case studies (Chapters 1-7) are written. Only the introductory and concluding chapters remain to be done.]