debate over structure and action, economism and culturalism, the dominant ideology thesis, Marxism and pluralism inescapably informs all the books reviewed above. Will the parameters of our thinking still be the same in the next decade?

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15

Public service broadcasting and modern public life

Paddy Scannell

> We defend public services as if they existed only for the poor when in fact their rationale is to create common conditions of life for all classes. (Michael Ignatieff, *The Guardian*, 4 April 1988)

If broadcasting today is defensible as a public service it can only be as a service to the public. And yet what the word *public* means in the context of broadcasting remains remarkably underexamined in debates about the social role of radio and television now and in the future. When the Peacock Committee turned to the broadcasters for their interpretations of public service they remained unenlightened. 'We had some difficulty', their Report observed, 'in obtaining an operational definition from broadcasters', and it criticized the BBC particularly for being too vague or for claiming too much (Peacock, 1986: 130). If the broadcasters are confused, so too are politicians and academics. The former have always treated radio and television in terms of their immediate interests. The whole history of the relationship between broadcasting and the world of politics is one of manipulation and pressures (overt and covert) exerted on broadcast news and discussion by politicians, parties and governments (Scannell, 1984). As for academics in this country, from F.R. Leavis through Richard Hoggart to Stuart Hall, the dominant educational ideology has been that the media are manipulative, audiences are beguiled against their better interests and the benevolent, disinterested role of education is to

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teach critical awareness of how these manipulations take place 'behind men's backs'.

In this article I wish to revalue broadcasting's social role against its devaluation in arguments that regard it primarily as a form of social control, or of cultural standardization or of ideological (mis)representation. To the contrary, I wish to argue for broadcasting in its present form, as a public good that has unobtrusively contributed to the democratization of everyday life, in public and private contexts, from its beginning through to today. I do not see how there can be any reasonable case for the present system other than along such lines. I will attempt to defend this proposition first by developing an account of broadcasting as a public good and then considering the wider implications of this account in relation to possible objections and criticisms. In doing this I have in mind the work of Jurgen Habermas, whose concepts of the public sphere, and of communicative rationality, have helped to clarify my understanding of broadcasting. Again, I will not initially attempt a commentary on Habermas's theoretical concerns other than to note here that, although I do not accept the particular theoretical lines of enquiry he pursues, the issues he addresses and the problems he poses seem to me to be fundamental for the study of modern societies and the contributory role of modern media.

Two things I do take from Habermas that underlie what follows: a historical approach to the formation of broadcasting's public sphere (cf. Garnham, 1986, for a recent discussion of the concept), and a concern with the rational character of communication in everyday actual contexts. I will offer a brief, historical account of the development of broadcasting in this country which focuses on it as a *public* service in two related ways: first, in terms of a content — programme output — which constitutes a new kind of public life through the relaying and creation of real-world events and occasions that are public in a minimal sense, viz. open and accessible to the public. Two kinds of such events are taken into account; on the one hand those that are external to broadcasting but which broadcasting redistributes, from their own locations, to its audiences (a coronation, a football match) and, on the other hand, those that are internal to broadcasting which it has created for its audiences in its studios (a political interview, a chat show, a game show). The continuing interplay of such events, outside and inside the studios, make up what I will refer to as the public life of broadcasting. My second, related concern is with the audiences, the new kind of *general* public, on whose behalf this public life is routinely accessed and produced.

I

I have argued elsewhere that there were two essential characteristics that have remained, from the beginning through to the present, as constitutive of public service broadcasting: the provision of a service of *mixed* programmes on *national* channels available to all (Scannell, 1989). The principle of universal availability has technical and economic components. The full establishment of broadcasting presupposes a society that has, for the great majority, risen above the level of necessity. To enjoy the services of broadcasting people need at the least a marginal surplus of disposable time and income. In Britain before the war radio sets were not cheap, and represented a major item of expenditure in households with only pennies to spare each week. Nevertheless, 75 percent of households had a radio set by 1939, and today when 100 percent of households have radios it is common for household members to have their own sets; 98 percent of households presently have at least one television set. Thus as commodities radio and TV sets (as distinct from video display units) have become things that every household possesses.

At the same time the broadcasting authorities (BBC and IBA) have seen it as a fundamental part of their commitment to public service to make their programmes, as far as is technically possible, available to anyone with a receiving apparatus anywhere in the United Kingdom. The BBC's television services now reach 99.1 percent of the population. To reach that extra one-tenth of 1 percent, 65 new transmitting stations were added to the distribution system (Peacock, 1986: 130n). Such an investment is the mark of public service broadcasting's disregard of strictly commercial considerations in relation to its audiences. Where those are primary, broadcasters will deliver a service only to the most profitable markets — which lie in densely populated urban areas that can deliver large audiences without difficulties. The markets for cable services are likely to prove even more selective. The affluent areas of major towns and cities will be wired up, while the poorer areas will be neglected. More sparsely populated, remoter regions will be ignored entirely.

If the universal distribution of its services is one basic marker of a broadcasting service constituted as a public good, the other is the supply of mixed programme services to its nationwide audiences, i.e. a wide range of different kinds of programmes delivered on a single channel. The mix today is familiar in the output of the four national television channels at present available to all in the UK: news, current affairs, and topical magazine programmes; chat shows, game shows and quizzes; drama of all kinds from soap operas and situation comedies to police series and single-authored plays; documentaries on a wide range of topics — social issues, history, science, wildlife; religious programmes; children's programmes; music from the current top forty to the classics, opera and ballet; a wide and varying supply of sporting events that includes all the major sports and many new ones (to television, that is) such as American football, basketball, badminton and indoor bowling.

All this is deeply known and taken for granted, bedded down into the very fabric of daily life for all of us. In the sum of its parts broadcasting has brought into being a culture in common to whole populations and a shared public life of a quite new kind. It exists as such today in national television services but not in radio. The original Reithian concept of mixed programming was embodied in the pre-war National Programme (Scannell and Cardiff, 1982). After the war a three-tiered radio service was introduced — the Light, the Home and the Third Programmes — which stratified audiences into three broad cultural taste publics, lowbrow, middlebrow and highbrow. Reith, who had long since left the BBC, rightly saw this as a fundamental betrayal of his founding concept of public service broadcasting. The worm in the promising bud of his vision for radio was music. For obvious reasons music has always constituted the bulk of output on radio, but it was impossible — in the long run — to provide a general musical service on a single national channel because there is not, and never has been, a common musical culture (Scannell, 1981). Music consists of different taste publics defined as much in terms of what they loathe as what they like. This is especially so in relation to 'serious' music and the avant-garde for whom the idea of music for all, and of all music as of equal value, is anathema. Thus, the history of radio, viewed in the long term, can be seen as its gradual fragmentation into different musical taste publics (Radios 1, 2 and 3) with talk bracketed out into specific talk channels (Radio 4).

This development, which took place earlier in the United States under harsher economic pressures, is not explicable simply in economic terms. But it is economic and political pressures for deregulation today that threaten to fragment television into multiple-channel options provided by cable and satellite services owned by media entrepreneurs and conglomerates. Such services will consist either of low-cost repeats of popular Anglo-American television programmes and feature films, or of generic programming in which all the material in a particular channel is of the same kind. This latter development is at present most advanced in American cable services — Home Box Office (newly released films), MTV (music videos), CNN (Cable Network News) along with pay-per-view channels that offer mainly sporting fixtures.

Generic programming fragments the general public that is still constituted in today's four national UK television channels into particular taste publics whom advertisers are increasingly keen to target. In so doing it destroys the principle of equality of access for all to entertainment, informational and cultural resources in a common public domain. The Peacock Report has redefined broadcasting as a private commodity rather than a public good, replacing the general interest by individual interests. Individual consumers, in the media universe of the next century, as envisaged by Peacock, will choose what they want and pay for what they get. But consumers are not all equal in their purchasing power. The privatization of information, culture and entertainment may well create a two-tiered society of those who are rich and poor in such resources. Such a development would undercut the fundamentally democratic principles upon which public service broadcasting rests.

II

It is important to see that that service, as we know it today, rests upon a right of access, asserted by the broadcasters on behalf of their audiences, to a wide range of political, religious, social, cultural, sporting events and to entertainments that previously were available only to small, self-selecting and more or less privileged particular publics. What was *public* life before broadcasting? In a general sense there were certain kinds of buildings and spaces in which people could meet, outside their homes, for

relaxation, pleasure or self-improvement; public parks and libraries and public houses. More specifically there were public events that took place in particular places for particular publics. Thus, attendance at church, a theatre, a concert or variety hall, a cinema, a football match, a public lecture, a political rally, a civic or state ceremony, would seem to constitute the main kinds of events that were, by definition, public — that is, open to anyone who could get there and afford (where necessary) the price of entry.

In the 1920s the broadcasters had a sharp struggle to establish the right of the microphone to relay such events beyond their immediate location and audience to the fast-growing listening public. Concert and variety impresarios feared a fall-off at the box office, the Football Association worried about declining gates and the churches foresaw diminishing congregations. Such initial fears were, in most cases, quite quickly overcome. More patient and persistent diplomacy was required before the authorities would allow the microphone to relay major state ceremonies, especially those involving royalty. One important kind of access that the BBC pressed for very early on was the right to transmit, on a daily basis, the proceedings of the House of Commons. This was rejected by Baldwin in 1926 and was not allowed (for radio) until fifty years later. Only now, on an experimental basis, has permission been granted for the television cameras to enter the lower House.

Thus the particular publics who hitherto had enjoyed privileged access to such events now had grafted onto them a *general* public constituted in and by the general nature of the mixed programme service and its general, unrestricted availability. The fundamentally democratic thrust of broadcasting lay in the new kind of access to virtually the whole spectrum of public life that radio first, and later television, made available to all. By placing political, religious, civic, cultural events and entertainments in a common domain, public life was equalized in a way that had never before been possible. Moreover, whereas previously such events had been quite discrete and separate, they took on new meanings as they came in contact with each other in common national broadcast channels.

Consider the FA Cup Final, the Grand National or Wimbledon. All these existed before broadcasting, but whereas previously they existed only for their particular sporting publics they became, through radio and television, something more. Millions now heard or saw them who had little direct interest in the sports themselves. The events became, and have remained, punctual moments in a shared national life. Broadcasting created, in effect, a new national calendar of public events. Unobtrusively threaded through the continuing daily output was the cyclical reproduction, year in year out, of an orderly and regular progression of festivities, celebrations and remembrances that marked the unfolding of the broadcast year. The calendar not only organizes and coordinates social life, but gives it a renewable content, anticipatory pleasures, a horizon of expectations. The BBC calendar became the expressive register of a common, corporate public life that persists to this day.

III

Thus far I have considered a range of public events that existed before broadcasting, and which radio and television redistributed to far wider audiences than they had ever hitherto possessed. One consequence was that many of the performers in those events achieved, through broadcasting, fame on an unprecedented scale. Today the faces of royalty, of leading politicians, churchmen, entertainers and sportsmen and women circulate on a global scale. Broadcasting has created a public world of public persons who are routinely made available to whole populations. But at the same time it has brought private persons into the public domain, thereby extending and enriching its character. Private life has been profoundly resocialized by radio and television. They have brought into the public domain the experiences and pleasures of the majority in ways that had been denied in the dominant traditions of literature and the arts. Raymond Williams has drawn attention to the gradual broadening of the basis of representation in literature and drama since the sixteenth century. In Shakespeare's day only those of gentle blood were suitable subjects for tragedy or romance. Rude mechanicals were fit subjects only for knockabout farce. Since then, art and literature have increasingly dealt with the uneventful lives of the middling classes. By the end of the last century, working people had become subjects for art and literature, but usually as objects of compassion or as social problems, and always as described by middle-class authors for middle-class readers.

Broadcasting, because its service was addressed to the whole society, gradually came to represent the whole of society in its programmes. I do not wish to imply that this was simply or easily achieved then or now. Nor do I underestimate the difficulties of middle-class, white, male institutions in adequately representing those who are other than themselves. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge the ways in which radio and television have given voices to the voiceless and faces to the faceless, creating new communicative entitlements for excluded social groups. We are now familiar with documentary programmes on major social issues such as housing, unemployment or poverty, in which people who live in such conditions describe what they are like. Such techniques had actually to be discovered and when, before the war, listeners heard for the very first time an eye-witness account of slum conditions in Tyneside, or the unemployed themselves in 1934 describing how they tried to make ends meet on the dole, they created a sensation (Scannell, 1980).

The deceptively simple techniques of broadcast documentary programmes have given rise to much debate, and their surface naturalism has been criticized for occluding the possibility of exposing the causes that lie behind the personal testimonies of those that speak in them (Garnham, 1972). There are indeed limitations to these methods, to which I will return, but here I wish to note that, at the very least in enabling people to speak for themselves, the broadcasting institutions acknowledge their ability and their right to do so, as well as their right to be heard. All the techniques of documentary are designed to foreground the testimony of the speakers, to let them speak spontaneously and naturally, and to minimize the interventions and presence of the institutions of broadcasting. In the hierarchy of voices that speak in documentaries, the voices of ordinary persons, speaking as persons, tend to have a privileged status over the voices of experts, officials and commentators. Documentary techniques are grounded in consideration and respect for their subjects and their experiences.

But broadcasting has done a great deal more than to present ordinary people in programmes dealing with social issues and problems. It has discovered the pleasures of ordinariness, creating entertainment out of nothing more than ordinary people talking about themselves, playing games or doing silly things in front of live studio audiences. *That's Life!* such programmes say, and

Esther Rantzen celebrates it. The first programme series to celebrate ordinary life and experience was *Harry Hopeful*, produced in the BBC's Manchester studio before the war for a northern working-class audience (Bridson, 1972; Scannell, 1986). This was the first time ordinary people came to the microphone to talk about themselves and their lives, to sing a song or recite a dialect poem, or perform a knockabout double-act with Harry Hopeful before a live studio audience of relatives, friends and neighbours. The show was the first to take ordinary people and their ordinary experience and transform them into a public, shareable and enjoyable event. The sound of the studio audience singing, laughing and applauding powerfully enhanced the effect of public and communicable pleasures which the programmes generated. In multiple ways this principle has since been extended in radio and television: the essential components are a studio, a host or compere, ordinary people as performers and a live, studio audience. *Have A Go!, Jim'll Fix It, The Generation Game* and *Blind Date* are all in the tradition that invites ordinary people into the public domain for shared laughter and enjoyment.

IV

Broadcasting, then, brings public life into private life, and private life into public life, for pleasure and enjoyment as much as for information and education. The many voices that speak in this domain — the broadcasters themselves, public persons and private people — amount to a universe of discourse. The totality of output of mixed programmes in nationally networked channels adds up to a complete world. The repertoire appears exhaustive, and what lies outside its catchment — what is not broadcast — is not part of the 'normal' range of the needs and interests of the audience as expressed in the sum of its contents. To make this point is to underline the importance of trying to think of broadcast output as a totality, and always to register what it excludes as well as what it includes. The crucially sensitive 'boundary' topics for broadcasting have been political and moral: the state intervening to regulate the former and public opinion influencing the scope of the latter. Although today there are constraints on politics, sex and violence in terms of what can be said and shown, and how it can be said

and shown, there is no doubt that broadcasting has in the sixty years of its life enormously extended the range of what can be talked about in its public domain.

Nothing is more interesting, and nothing more elusive, than the domain of the 'merely talkable about' and its historical development in broadcasting. When it started up in the 1920s, there was so much that could not be talked about in public, or at least not in front of women, children and servants. In a class-divided society like Britain one of the things that had, in the novel context of mass democracy, to be claimed and asserted, was the entitlement of all to have opinions, to have them heard and to hear those of others. Here is a woman from Sunderland, whose husband is out of work, talking on radio in 1934 of her feelings when she finds she is pregnant again:

> I know I've cried when I knew I had to have another baby, not for myself, but for what they have to be brought into — no work, no means, no jobs for them. But it means expense to avoid them. I know all about the avoidance part, but I haven't the means to carry it out. It costs money . . . I think we ought to have information from somewhere given to us. It's ignorance on some people's part; or, for people like myself who know, we haven't got the money. (The *Listener*, 16 May 1934, p. 812)

Mrs Pallis's passing reference to birth control in the course of her account of how she managed to feed a family of five on a dole of 16 shillings a week brought sackfuls of letters to the BBC complaining that the subject was mentioned on radio. There were pressures, in 1935, from some of the governors for the subject to be broached in talks programmes, but it was not allowed to be discussed on radio until the 1950s. Reith had met Marie Stopes, who wished to advance the cause of contraception on radio, but he regarded her as a fanatic. Corporation policy was expressed in a letter to the National Council for Civil Liberties in 1942: 'The subject of birth control . . . has never yet been discussed at the microphone in this country. Broadcasting is not, in the Corporation's view, a suitable medium for the discussion of this subject'. Birth control had only a fugitive presence as talkable about on pre-war radio.

In the decade after the war, as the BBC's television service gradually developed, previously excluded issues were taken up in new, dramatized forms of social documentation (Scannell, 1979; Bell, 1986). Careful studies reveal the ways in which such programmes, while introducing new and delicate issues such as birth control and divorce, contrived to resolve and close off their troublesome, disturbing implications (Booth, 1980). It was not until the late 1950s, under the impact of competition and a changing social and political climate, that broadcasting's universe of discourse began to open out and blossom. The introduction of a strictly limited competition for audiences between the BBC and ITV gave the BBC something other than its political masters to worry about. Deference to political authority was replaced by a more populist, democratic stance as the broadcasters asserted the public's right to know by making politicians answerable and accountable to the electorate for their conduct of the nation's affairs. In news interviews, studio discussions and debates, current affairs and topical magazine programmes, in documentaries and documentary dramas, a whole clutch of political and social issues came onto the agenda through the medium of television — became part of the public domain, matters of common knowledge and concern. In this way broadcasting came to fulfil — never without difficulty, always under pressure — its role as an independent public sphere, as a forum for open public discussion of matters of general concern.

If a moment can be selected to illustrate the transition to more open, democratic styles in broadcasting, it might well be found in the differences in the coverage by the BBC and ITV of the first televised State Opening of Parliament in 1958 (Dimbleby, 1977: 326–30). The Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, in giving permission for this television 'first', had made it clear that it was to be treated as a state and not a political occasion. The BBC Outside Broadcasting Unit provided visual coverage of the event, but ITV took a feed from the BBC's cameras and provided their own commentary. The BBC's commentator was, naturally, Richard Dimbleby; ITV chose Robin Day. These were their commentaries on the closing stages of the ceremony as the Queen left the Great Hall of Westminster having delivered her speech from the throne:

> *Dimbleby*: Later today, in the Commons, the debate and doubtless the argument over the Government's programme will begin. But for now, as Her Majesty returns to the Robing Rooms and thence to Buckingham Palace, she leaves behind in all of us, a memory of a State Occasion at its most magnificent.
>
> *Day*: The Queen will go back to Buckingham Palace. The Crown will go back to the Tower of London. All the scarlet and ermine will go back to wherever they came from. And Parliament will go back to work.

Over the final shot of the empty throne, and as suitably solemn music was faded up, their last words were as follows:

> *Dimbleby*: The Throne remains, rich and shining, near yet remote; the symbol of this rare meeting of the Queen, the Lords and Commons — the Three Estates of Parliament. And so begins, with ceremony that springs from the very roots of our democratic history, the fourth session of the three hundredth Parliament of the Realm.
>
> *Day*: Everyone is wondering at Westminster what Government will write the next speech from this Throne. Before Her Majesty sits on it again there may be a General Election. That is when we have our say. And what Her Majesty reads from this Throne depends on what we put in the ballot box.

The differences, as Jonathan Dimbleby observes, are more than a matter of style. Since these are institutional voices they express differing institutional attitudes to the authority of the state and the force of tradition. The auratic discourse of Dimbleby puts them beyond all question, while the post-auratic discourse of Day serves precisely to bring them into question.

It was Robin Day who, with his colleagues at ITN, began for the first time to make those in authority answerable to the public through the television news interview. Interviewers now asked questions not to please politicians and let them say what they liked, but on behalf of the viewing public, and in their interests. Broadcasting thus came to align itself not with governments and parties but with the electorate. The direct, searching and penetrating kind of interview developed by Day and others, pursued, challenged, probed and, where necessary, clarified and reformulated what interviewees said (Heritage, 1983). It claimed an equal footing between broadcasters and politicians in order to create an equal footing between viewers and their elected representatives. The news interview became a more flexible, lively and influential instrument of journalistic enquiry. As such it helped to create a broadcast public forum with, for the first time, a real degree of political autonomy that was exercised on behalf of viewers and listeners.

But it would be a mistake to think of the public sphere in broadcasting as restricted to news and current affairs with documentary and 'serious' 'contemporary' drama thrown in for good measure. The transformation of the universe of discourse reached into all parts of output: in entertainment taboo subjects could now be joked about, and previously stigmatized situations

and relationships could routinely serve as the basis for situation comedies. I do not wish to imply that the changes that took place from the mid-1950s to the 1970s, though fundamental, were irreversible. The extent of 'openness' in the system is something that varies according to the social, economic and political climate. The thresholds of tolerance are not fixed, and in the late 1980s the broadcasters are under greater political pressures from a radical right-wing government and from moral crusaders against violence and sex than at any time since the mid-1960s. It is notable, however, that the present government enhanced the public sphere of broadcasting at the beginning of the 1980s by authorizing Channel 4 to give special attention to the needs and interests of minority groups, and to commission a significant proportion of its programmes from independent producers.

V

I have discussed, so far, the public sphere in broadcasting in terms of the sayable and unsayable. But it has always been a question of how things are said, as well as what is said. Broadcasting's universe of discourse is as much a set of relationships as a content. What changed, crucially, in the 1950s were the style and manner of broadcasting. One thing that has forcibly struck me and my colleague, David Cardiff, in listening to recorded material from the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, is the sheer awkwardness of the first faltering efforts to discover ways of, for instance, organizing a studio discussion, or a game show, or of interviewing a prime minister or the proverbial 'man in the street'. Linguistic analysis has yet to develop ways of accounting for communicative unease, though we can all in actual situations recognize embarrassed and embarrassing talk. So much, of course, is lost in transcription, and there are no conventions for rendering voice, intonation and all the stilted mannerisms that produce uncomfortable effects for contemporary ears. At the same time there are critical historiographical issues in attempting an historical study of communicative style. Would what sounds awkward today have sounded so to listeners forty years ago? The same question can be asked, of course, in relation to dialogue in movies from the period, and the answer must be probably, no. If what once seemed natural now seems unnatural this is because of changes in performative styles

— *forms of talk* — as much in real life as art over the years. There is no doubt that in drama, movies, radio and television today the performed talk — in most instances — is more seemingly relaxed, natural and spontaneous than forms of talk in life and art forty years ago. I regard this change in the communicative ethos of modern society as one that broadcasting has helped to bring about, and I see it as constitutive of the particular character and quality of the broadcast public sphere.

The problem of communicative manners and style, of how to address absent audiences in national channels, was acknowledged from the start. When the BBC became a public corporation in 1927 talk on radio was institutionalized as the responsibility of the Talks Department, and attention now turned to the art of radio talk. This concern arose in large part from a problem succinctly defined by David Cardiff as 'the domestication of public utterance' (Cardiff, 1980). The talk that prevailed in early broadcasting in Britain was monologue rather than dialogue, in which selected speakers spoke at length on predetermined scripted topics from the studio to absent listeners. It soon became clear to Hilda Matheson, the first Head of BBC Talks (1927–32), that the established traditions of public speaking were inappropriate for broadcasting. The voice and rhetoric of the sermon, lecture or political speech were all, in their own way, unsatisfactory. The 'holy voice' used by the clergy to read the lessons in church was a special voice set apart for religious purposes, more devout than the ordinary voice of everyday life (Matheson, 1933: 70–1). But the 'parsonical drone' was peculiarly unsuited to radio, and had a tendency to make listeners switch off immediately. Matheson noted the problems of another special voice — the declamatory 'poetic' voice used for acting or for public readings of poetry and literature. This voice, with its polished elocution and exquisite pronunciation, seemed mannered and affected to the listening ear. Again, the political voice and the rhetoric of the platform put the speaker at a disadvantage when used for broadcasting.

> The microphone [Matheson noted] has a curious knack of showing what is real and unreal, what is clear and what is woolly, what is fact and purpose and what is stock phrase, what is sincere and what is an appeal to the gallery, what is constructive and what is destructive. (Matheson, 1933: 99–100)

Matheson conducted a series of experiments with broadcast talks which led her to the view that it was

> useless to address the microphone as if it were a public meeting, or even to read it essays or leading articles. The person sitting at the other end expected the speaker to address him personally, simply, almost familiarly, as man to man. (Matheson, 1933: 75–6)

Broadcasting could not treat its audience as a crowd. It had to learn to speak to them as individuals. The quest of the Talks Department for an idiomatic, conversational style has been traced by David Cardiff, and needs no summary here. What I have tried to clarify is something still not properly understood, namely the dynamics of the communicative process in broadcasting and its basic social, relational features. The pivotal fact, it seeems to me, is that the broadcasters, while they control the discourse, do not control the communicative context. The settings in which listening and viewing take place are always beyond their control. When Reith proposed, in 1923, that the infant BBC should be allowed to relay live the marriage service of the Duke of York and Lady Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon, the Dean of Westminster refused for fear that men in public houses would listen with their hats on (Wolfe, 1984: 79).

Thus broadcasters do not have the authority and power over their audience which the institutional context, combined with real presence, bestows upon public speakers. Whereas the onus is upon the audience attending church, a political rally, a public lecture, a theatre or concert performance to affiliate to the situation and align their behaviour with performer(s) and setting, the situation in broadcasting is reversed. The communicators must affiliate to the situation of their audience, and align their communicative behaviour with those circumstances. The burden of responsibility is thus on the broadcasters to understand the conditions of reception, and to express that understanding in language intended to be recognized as oriented to those conditions.

In the first decade of its corporate life the BBC, in spite of the efforts of Hilda Matheson, tended to suppress the context in which listening took place and to ignore its implications. Concentrated, attentive listening was demanded from listeners who were brusquely informed that if they only listened with half an ear they had no right to criticize. The deliberate avoidance of continuity in and between programmes, and of fixed scheduling (apart from the news bulletins) were the major ways in which programme planners sought to discourage lazy, non-stop listening. Rather they were expected to consult *Radio Times*, select the programmes they

gramme to be presented five nights a week at the same time, and its successor through the 1970s, *Nationwide*.

Work on the conditions of reception for cinema has shown it to be a visually overwhelming experience that demands and gets from audiences a rapt attention in a state of high anxiety and expectation (Elsaesser, 1982). By contrast, listening to radio or watching television are distinctively underwhelming experiences. If cinema is a regime of wonder in which the conditions of viewing, forms of narrative and mode of visual presentation all combine to produce such an effect, broadcasting is the negation of that experience. Its pleasures are ordinary, specifically intended as such, adapted to the conditions of listening and viewing in mundane, daily domestic contexts. Cinema, and most other forms of public culture, religion and entertainment, stand apart from routine daily life. Broadcasting is deeply enmeshed in its very fabric. The usage of radio and television are interrelated, interactive with other activities and interests, and a means of maintaining sociable contacts between household members, as Bausinger has shown in his account of a typical German family's weekend (Bausinger, 1984). The characteristic look that television produces is the glance, and its output is designed to be understood by audiences who may be only half-watching, popping in and out of the room or even channel-zapping.

The communicative ethos of broadcasting, which I have tried to characterize both as a series of structuring temporal arrangements and as a communicative style, an orientation towards relaxed, natural and spontaneous modes of address and forms of talk, points up the specific quality of the public life that is continuously produced and reproduced through broadcasting. The world, in broadcasting, appears as ordinary, mundane, accessible, knowable, familiar, recognizable, intelligible, shareable and communicable for whole populations. It is talkable about by everyone. This world does not exist elsewhere. It is not a reflection, a mirror, of a reality outside and beyond. It is one fundamental, seen but unnoticed, constitutive component of contemporary reality for all.

I have tried to catch the multi-faceted realities of broadcasting in the following terms. First, for a new general public, a new access was won to previously restricted forms of entertainment and sport, and to exclusive political, cultural, religious events. As these entered into a common public domain new relationships and meanings were created between them. At the same time a new public culture of the studio was developed in which a wide variety of programme formats — from discussions and interviews to games and chat shows — created new forums for the debate of matters of general concern and new forms of shareable pleasure and play. The public life that is maintained by mixed programming in national channels may be thought of as a totality, a universe of discourse, whose boundaries had at first to be established and have, ever after, been a matter of dispute and struggle between broadcasters, the state and society. The universe of discourse inscribed in the totality of output is not merely a content, but a set of relationships, a communicative ethos, that registers the quality and manner of social intercourse between institutions and audiences and, beyond that, the expressive idioms of public and private life.

VI

One objection to this account might be that the audiences of radio and television are not genuine publics, and that it is a pseudo-public life that is constituted in broadcasting. Listeners and viewers watch and listen — it is said — as atomized, fragmented, isolated individuals, not as participant members accessible to each other in the moment of participation. Moreover there is no interaction between events and audiences; no *feedback*. Broadcasting is a one-way system of transmission, with no possibility of interaction that is the basis of any properly communicative situation. Here the metaphysics of presence reasserts itself again with the jargon of authenticity in support. Consider first the position of the 'authentic' publics in most public contexts: the audience at a concert or the theatre or a public lecture, the congregation in a church, the spectators at a sporting event, the members of a political meeting. In most of these cases, though the audiences are in each other's presence they are not communicatively present to each other. Indeed it would be quite mischievous to attempt to strike up a conversation with the person beside one in the pew, or during the lecture, the performance, the speech by the party leader. Such an effort at communication would violate the situational proprieties. On the other hand, it seems normal and natural while watching television — often with other people in the room — for there to be simultaneous comment and chat about the same event being watched 'in private'.

wanted to hear, listen to them carefully and then switch off. Listeners were expected to try and overcome the inconvenient fact that they were listening at home with all its attendant distractions, and to behave as if they were at the theatre or concert hall, or at a public lecture. To get in the mood for listening to radio plays, the BBC's advice was to be in your favourite armchair five minutes before 'the curtain goes up', with the lights in the living room turned down in order to assist the imagination.

By the late 1930s, under a range of pressures, the broadcasters had discovered that the audience did not behave itself as it was supposed to do. Most people most of the time — no matter what their class, education, age or gender — tended to treat the radio as a cheerful noise in the background, as a companionable and sociable domestic resource which occasionally — in moments of national crisis, celebration or mourning — became compulsive listening. As the broadcasters came to acknowledge how people listened in their homes they began to adapt their service to those conditions. I have discussed elsewhere one fundamental way in which this was done, through programme planning based on listener research that provided evidence about who, in the national audience, was available for listening and at what times of the day. Broadcasting had to learn how to adjust its programmes to chime in with the day-to-day life and routines of the population (Scannell, 1988a).

This new understanding of how, where and when people listened first found expression in new patterns of programming and in new kinds of entertainment programmes. In the late 1930s greater care was taken to organize daily output on routine, regular lines. Popular programmes were increasingly scheduled in fixed time slots. *Monday Night at Seven*, the BBC Variety Department's first continuity show, was an early and successful attempt to produce a fireside entertainment that recurred at a known time and could be pleasurably anticipated as a predictable enjoyment in the week. By the late 1930s, programme planners were adjusting daily output to chime in with the time routines of ordinary daily life for the whole population. At the same time, in new forms of participatory entertainment — quizzes, parlour games and puzzles — the broadcasters found new communicative styles — more spontaneous, personal and relaxed. In an audio-cassette made for the Open University's *Popular Culture* course, David Cardiff has shown how this was achieved across a ten-year period from the late 1930s to the late 1940s (Cardiff, 1982).

For all the formidable difficulties it involves, it is possible to reconstruct historically, in all areas of output, the development of effective styles of address and performance that generated a sense of ease between institution and audiences. It was an uneven process that emerged in broadcast entertainment well ahead of cultural and informational programmes. In the sphere of news and politics the prevailing style until the late 1950s, and the impact of ITN, is suggested by the title of a political talks series called *Men in Authority*, produced in 1951 by Grace Wyndham Goldie (Goldie, 1977: 80). Serious talk on serious matters called for serious, impersonal and authoritative modes of address from accredited authorities (Cardiff, 1980). Work on early television documentary reveals the awkwardnesses of interview styles at a time when it seems that both interviewers and interviewees were nervous when talking to each other as strangers across class barriers in the unfamiliar public context created by the cameras (Corner, forthcoming). What seems to have happened thereafter, through the ubiquity of television, is that as everyone has been gathered into its public sphere, everyone has become familiar not simply with its modes of address but crucially with its performative styles. Communicative ease is partly a result of knowing how to behave appropriately in the appropriate broadcast context. It is also, reciprocally, the result of programme formats appropriate to the contexts of listening and viewing.

A seminal example of how the two came together, in early television, came in 1957 when the BBC — under the spur of competition — decided to break the so-called 'toddler's truce', the period between six and seven in the evening when there was no television, partly, it was said, to make it easier for parents to get their young children to bed. The BBC decided to fill this gap with a programme that chimed in with what viewers were likely to be doing at that time. Enquiries were made.

> They would be coming and going: women getting meals for teenagers who were going out and preparing supper for men who were coming in; men in the north would be having their tea; commuters in the south would be arriving home. There was no likelihood of an audience which would be ready to view steadily for half an hour at a time. What seemed necessary was a continuous programme held together by a permanent staff of compères, reporters and interviewers but consisting of separate items so that any viewer who happened to be around could dip into it knowing that he had lost nothing by not being able to watch from the beginning. (Goldie, 1977: 210)

The result was *Tonight*, the first major topical magazine pro-

The reality is that the self-selecting publics in most public events accept — voluntarily and willingly as the price of admission and of being there — a whole range of quite unusual bodily and behavioural constraints: to kneel and stand in church, to applaud on cue at the rally or concert, to take notes at the lecture, and at all events to be silent and motionless for the most part. In most public events the nature of the communication is a one-way affair: there are the performers who perform and give voice and there are the live audiences to receive the performance and appreciate it. What live public events have is undoubtedly the 'aura' of presence, but aura is as low in communicative properties as it is high in ritual characteristics.

If the aura of presence glows more faintly for absent broadcast audiences they have far greater freedom in their behaviour while watching and listening. They can walk out on the event (a peculiarly difficult thing to do in church, for instance, or during a concert or play) and come back again, they can switch to some other channel, they can freely express their opinions about the merits or shortcomings of performer(s) and performance. In short, the absent listeners and viewers — the pseudo-public — have much wider behavioural and communicative options than the real and present publics whose behaviour is structured in deference to the event. Indeed, by virtue of not being present, absent viewers and listeners are not in thrall to the aura of the event and are thereby better able to see through the façade of rhetoric designed to rally the faithful and excoriate the faithless.

The force of this argument is to suggest that the circumstances of the absent listening and viewing public create participation without involvement. Where the live audience is committed to the event viewers and listeners may take a non-committal stance. It is not that the event is more real and meaningful for the live audience, less real and meaningful for listeners and viewers; rather there are different realities with different effects. The public life of broadcasting does not stand in a secondary and supplementary relationship to a prior and privileged public life based on presence. It has rather created new contexts, realities and meanings.

But, it might still be objected, the audience still remains fragmented, isolated and atomized — trapped in the sphere of privacy. This is to view individuals as figures in a Lowry landscape, with no social life or contact with others. But empirical research points to the manifold ways in which the output of radio and television today serve as topical and relational resources in mundane social encounters and conversations (Morley, 1986, for instance). Precisely because the public life of broadcasting is accessible to all, it is there to be talked about by all. Everyone is entitled to have views and opinions about what they hear and see. This is not the case with most other cultural resources. Bourdieu has shown how culture is a kind of capital which serves to maintain social difference, and his empirical researches cover many aspects of contemporary (French) cultural tastes: painting, photography, cinema, theatre, music, newspapers, food and furnishing (Bourdieu, 1984). But radio and television are significantly absent, precisely because the social distinctions maintained by the cultural distinctions of particular taste publics collapse in the common cultural domain of broadcasting.

In the case of 'high art' and the avant-garde, while the uninitiated and uneducated may regard them as 'rubbish' their opinions have no status because they are not 'entitled' (Bourdieu, 1984: 18 ff). Susan Kippax has shown how, for some women, particularly middle-class unwaged women, the enjoyment of cinema, theatre and the arts has only an inner, personal resonance. In social contexts they express their views tentatively and with diffidence. They do not possess their opinions because they are not entitled to them (Kippax, 1988). Uncommon knowledges and tastes confer uncommon entitlements. But broadcasting is, precisely, a common resource and a common knowledge that excludes none. And thus all are entitled to their views. It is noticeable how everyone, even the very young, have no difficulty or hesitation in talking about what they have recently seen and heard (Palmer, 1988). *Did You See?* is a common way of striking up a conversation or of keeping it going. Broadcasting thus acts not so much as a social cement as a social lubricant, easing social interaction and sustaining it in countless mundane contexts. It is perhaps the one thing (apart from the weather in the UK) that we all have in common as a topical resource.

Thus broadcasting, unobtrusively but no less remarkably, resocializes private life. Certain kinds of programme — soap operas, pre-eminently — are little ritual social events in which families or groups of friends watch together and talk about the programme before, during and after. Gossip is the life-blood of soap operas, as it is of ordinary daily life — 'the living breath of events', as Patricia Meyer Spacks calls it, quoting Faulkner

(Spacks, 1986). Gossip in broadcasting, gossip about broadcasting in the tabloid press and in ordinary conversation* — this is the very *stuff of broadcasting's interconnection with so-called private life or, as I prefer, ordinary daily life. It points up the quality and character of its communicative ethos. If it seems both ordinary and trivial it is also relaxed and sociable, shareable and accessible, non-exclusive, equally talkable about in principle and in practice by everyone.

VII

I do not then recognize the validity of arguments that broadcasting is a non-authentic or pseudo-public sphere. Nor do I accept those that construe it, in various ways, as an ideological apparatus. Through the work of Stuart Hall and his graduate students at the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, the main way in which the small parish of Media Studies has come to (mis)understand the role of the media is in terms of its 'ideological effect'. The media, so the theory goes, work to produce a social and political consensus that confirms the dominance of existing economic and political institutions and processes, and of existing structures of class, gender and ethnic relations in capitalist societies (cf. Hall et al. 1980; Hall, 1977, 1982). The national press and broadcasting agencies contribute to the reproduction in dominance of the existing economic and political order by underpinning their legitimacy through their complex practices of representation: i.e. through the selective organization and representation of images and accounts of contemporary social reality. In so doing they uphold the interests of powerful social apparatuses and groups by marginalizing or misrepresenting the interests of subordinate social groups; by excluding or distorting oppositional voices; and by producing 'preferred readings' of events which favour the dominant interests.

This led to a focus on 'the politics of representation', taking news and current affairs as favoured sites for the renegotiation of the dominant meaning system. Semiology was recruited to expose the tricks of ideology — the ways in which it naturalized itself as the seemingly obvious and self-evident, as what everybody knows and takes for granted. Barthes provided a basic way of prying apart the first- and second-order levels of meaning in a wide range of cultural 'texts' by showing how symbolic (connotative) meanings were embedded as seemingly natural in obvious, referential (denotative) meanings (Barthes, 1972). A critical semiotics was elaborated to unmask the slipperiness of contemporary bourgeois, patriarchal ideology.

The effect of this approach is to read off all the output of broadcasting as if it works in the same way, as if there were no difference between the 'discourses' or 'practices' of news, documentary, drama, or entertainment. But it has never studied the output of broadcasting systematically as a totality. At best there has developed something like genre studies (of news or soap opera to take the two most obvious cases), at worst there has been a tendency to 'read' off the 'unity' of current affairs television from a single study of a single programme (Hall et al. 1978). But in a sense there is no need for detailed study because television (radio is largely ignored) is everywhere and always the same. Barthes, years after he wrote *Mythologies*, noted ruefully that the techniques of demystification he had there developed had in turn become mystified. Students had learned to distinguish first- and second-order meanings, and expose their petit-bourgeois character, but that was all they had learned, and it wasn't much. Tearing aside the ideological veil had itself become stock phrases, discourse, dogma (Barthes, 1977: 166).

The 'ideological effect' thesis is a one-dimensional critique that, in effect, only needs doing once from a predetermined political template. It collapses any difference or contradiction in the work of broadcasting. As such, broadcasting has no history, no development. There is very little positive to study, and nothing to learn from broadcasting. It cannot produce knowledge or understanding. It cannot transform perception. Any notion that the media might be instruments of enlightenment, as Reith thought of broadcasting, must be delusory. But then, the broadcasters do not know what they are doing: 'unwittingly, unconsciously, [they serve] as a support for the reproduction of a dominant discursive field'. They may have ideas about what they are doing, but these (from the point of view of theory) are irrelevant, for 'ideology is a function of the discourse and of the logic of social processes, rather than an intention of the agent'. Ideology, as discourse, speaks itself through the media (Hall, 1982: 88). What speaks through Stuart Hall, we might wonder, that privileges the knowledge-producing consciousness of the media academic over

ignorance-inducing unconsciousness of the media professional? The answer, I suppose, is Theory (Althusser as the voice of Ideology, Foucault of Discourse), but it is one, to my mind, that systematically misunderstands and misrecognizes its object.

VIII

For all its seeming sophistication the Theory of Ideology says something very simple indeed; something not very different from what Leavis was saying in the 1930s: the media are harmful and the function of literary criticism or theoretical critique is to expose them in that light. Such an approach is not reconcilable with any view of broadcasting as a public sphere that works to enhance the reasonable, democratic character of life in public and private contexts. To regard the media as ideological is to regard them as either anti-rational or irrational. But although I reject such characterizations, a major difficulty in discussing the rationality of broadcasting lies in the way that academic debates about rationality are largely contained within the theoretical envelope of the philosophy of consciousness, the so-called western episteme from its provenance in the Greeks to its contemporary terminal state in the aporias of post-structuralism and the intellectual capitulations of post-modernism.

Although Habermas is the most valiant opponent of this latest *trahison des clercs* (this time by abandoning rather than engaging with politics), the terms of his defence of communicative rationality are remote from the actual circumstances of ordinary conversation and mundane social interaction which, I have argued, characterize the communicative domain of broadcasting. I have tentatively tried to ground the communicative ethos of broadcasting in Anglo-American sociology and linguistic pragmatics that take, as their object, mundane daily life, social interaction and talk (Scannell, 1988b). A fundamental kind of human rationality is implicated in this work which attends to the communicative basis of social life and the means whereby it is maintained in ordinary interaction, especially talk. An orientation to co-operation underpins the maintenance of a perspective of normality (Garfinkel, 1984: Ch. 2), the common grounds of intersubjective understanding (Schutz, q.v. Heritage, 1984: 54 ff.) and a communicative intentionality in talk that is grounded in considerations of clarity, sincerity, relevance and informativeness (Grice, q.v. Levinson, 1983: 100 ff.).

Such concerns are closely paralleled in the 'validity claims' that Habermas proposes as the universal grounds of communicative behaviour oriented towards understanding (Habermas, 1979, Ch. 1). My difficulty with Habermas is that he seems to regard consensual understanding as achieved through receptiveness to the best argument (i.e. the most rational one) in ideal speech situations. The ideal speech situation, it appears in John Keane's helpful discussion, is grounded in communicative competence, and the model Habermas has in mind is the classical Greek category of politics as public speaking and acting — 'Socratic forms of communication' (Keane, 1984: 159, 163). But this is to privilege not so much rationality, as rhetorical skill. It is notable about Socrates, for instance, that he always gets the last word and thus always 'wins'. The best argument can be, it is not hard to imagine, a kind of domination and oppression, to which the less articulate must submit. Feminist critiques of how men argue are very much to this point, especially in their observation that listening is as important as speaking (Spender, 1980). For almost all discussion of rational discourse considers it not merely in formal terms (its immanent, logical properties) but as a contestation for the best, the most powerful, the most convincing argument. There is virtually no consideration of rational discourse as social dialogue.

I think Habermas is right to regard communicative rationality as grounded in mutual understanding, but I do not think it is achieved (or achievable) along the lines he proposes, for mutual understanding presupposes cooperativeness as its basis, a willingness to listen, to allow the validity of the other person's viewpoint and, if necessary, a willingness to leave aside what may be the best argument (in terms of clarity, logic, force, etc.) in consideration of the most appropriate decisions in relation to the particular circumstances and the particular persons involved. The skills that are needed for coming to conclusions with which all agree, include tact, thoughtfulness and consideration for others, knowing how and when to listen, etc. Such skills produce agreements that are reasonable (as distinct from rational) and thus acceptable in the eyes of participants. They are the everyday skills that everyone possesses and deploys in ordinary talk and mundane contexts, as distinct from the peculiar communicative competence of philosophers and their peculiar discourses.

Thus, I prefer to characterize the impact of broadcasting as enhancing the reasonable, as distinct from the rational, character of daily life in public and private contexts. In this context, reasonable has the force of mutually accountable behaviour; that is, if called upon, individuals can offer reasons and accounts for what they have said or done. To refuse an explanation, if called for, is unreasonable. To be unable to offer an explanation is unreasonable. Reasonableness is a guarantee and hallmark of forms of private and public life in which people accept mutual obligations to each other, acknowledge that they are answerable and accountable to each other — in short, deal with each other as equals. In such conditions the right to ask for explanations and accounts (where necessary or relevant) is a communicative entitlement.

IX

I have used the term 'communicative entitlement' several times in this article, and it needs clarification. Communicative entitlements presuppose communicative rights. Communicative rights (the right to speak freely, for instance) are enshrined in the written constitutions of some countries, but not in Britain. A minimal notion of guaranteed communicative rights is a precondition of forms of democratic life in public and private. If one party (the state, the police, teachers, parents, husbands) refuse to be answerable for their conduct to the other party (the electorate, suspects, pupils, children, wives), not only is this unreasonable — it denies a communicative entitlement and nullifies a right. Communicative entitlements can be claimed and asserted, within a presupposed framework of communicative rights. Rights of free assembly, to speak freely and (more often overlooked) to listen, contribute to creating formal, minimal guarantees for certain forms of public political and religious life. They seed the possible growth of wider and more pervasive claims from those denied a hearing in manifold public and private contexts, that they should be listened to: i.e. that they should be treated seriously. As equals.

I believe that broadcasting has enhanced the reasonable character and conduct of twentieth-century life by augmenting claims to communicative entitlements. It does this, as I have tried to show, through asserting a right of access to public life; through extending its universe of discourse and entitling previously excluded voices to be heard: through questioning those in power, on behalf of viewers and listeners, and trying to get them to answer. More generally, I have suggested, the fact that the broadcasters do not control the communicative context means that they must take into account the conditions of reception for their utterances. As such they have learned to treat the communicative process not simply as the transmission of a content, but a relational process in which how things are said is as important as what is said. All this has, I think, contributed to new, interactive relationships between public and private life which have helped to normalize the former and to socialize the latter.

In saying this I am not trying to idealize the present system, whose reasonable/rational character is contained within the framework and limitations of mass democratic politics which work, in many ways, to sustain the power of institutional public life over mundane, private life. One way in which the limits of rationality in political debate can clearly be shown emerges from careful analysis of the techniques and protocols of political interviews. When, for the first time, viewers were invited to put questions to leading politicians, in the run-up to the general election of 1964, there was a clear and simple demand for straight answers. 'On the postcards, often underlined, were, again and again, words like "No hedging on this question please" and "please answer Yes or No"' (Goldie, 1978: 271). In the 1960s, broadcast journalists tried hard to prevent politicians from evading their questions, through the use of combative one-to-one questioning. But since then political pressures, David Greatbatch argues, have forced a more cautious stance on the broadcasters who have covered themselves against cries of bias by increasingly preferring the use of panel formats with representatives of several different political positions or views (Greatbatch, 1986a).

In a recent speech at the University of Essex Sir Robin Day complained that politicians no longer answered his questions (El Gabry, 1988). Greatbatch has shown that, although interviewers have sanctions against politicians who avoid answering questions, those sanctions are limited (Greatbatch, 1986b). There is no oath or legal sanction for perjury to oblige political interviewees to tell the truth, and interviewers cannot press relentlessly, as counsel may do in the courts. Such an aggressive line of questioning would violate norms of courtesy and politeness that operate in all more

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