

Radio's vernacular modernism: the schedule as modernist text

Article (Accepted Version)

Lacey, Kate (2018) Radio's vernacular modernism: the schedule as modernist text. *Media History*, 24 (2). pp. 166-179. ISSN 1368-8804

This version is available from Sussex Research Online: <http://sro.sussex.ac.uk/id/eprint/74686/>

This document is made available in accordance with publisher policies and may differ from the published version or from the version of record. If you wish to cite this item you are advised to consult the publisher's version. Please see the URL above for details on accessing the published version.

Copyright and reuse:

Sussex Research Online is a digital repository of the research output of the University.

Copyright and all moral rights to the version of the paper presented here belong to the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. To the extent reasonable and practicable, the material made available in SRO has been checked for eligibility before being made available.

Copies of full text items generally can be reproduced, displayed or performed and given to third parties in any format or medium for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

Radio's Vernacular Modernism: The Schedule as Modernist Text

© **Kate Lacey**

School of Media, Film and Music

University of Sussex

Accepted pre-print, peer-reviewed version of an article to
be published in a 2018 special issue of *Media History* on
'Radio Modernisms', ed. A. Lodhi and A. Wrigley.

Introduction

One of the most celebrated pioneers of the BBC radio feature, Lance Sieveking, once described his experimental soundworks as 'themed sounds without a plot'.¹ Such modernist radio montages evidently stood apart from the everyday narratives, both fictional and factual, that were routinely broadcast over the airwaves. But the idea of 'themed sounds without a plot' also unwittingly describes the montage of elements that made up the early BBC's mixed programming schedules.

Many of the familiar tropes of the modernist aesthetic – the fragmentary and the fluid, the dissonant and the distracted, the automatic and the alienated – can be identified in the early scheduling practices when all radio was still, by definition, experimental. Rather than focusing on the exceptional modernist texts that punctured the scheduled flow of everyday radio, and which have been relatively well attended to by critics versed in the techniques of close reading (and even, sometimes, close listening), this article examines the framing device of the schedule itself. The central hypothesis is that the schedule is not only a significant site for the mediation of modern experience and a new sensorium, but that it can be read as a modernist 'text' in its own right. Reading the schedule in this way reveals it as a text that produced, and was expressive of, a pervasive and insistent vernacular modernism; a flow of broadcasting that could be experienced by listeners as a montage of remediations and acted as an invitation to reflexive engagement with the conditions and contradictions of modernity.

Broadcasting as vernacular modernism

Modernism has long been understood as more than a singular aesthetic movement or repertoire of styles associated with a particular canon of avant-garde artists.² It is now widely understood as a term that embraces a whole range of cultural responses to the processes of modernization and experiences of modernity. The radio is doubly articulated in this modernist moment, being itself both a textual practice and part of the wider context of changing communicative practices and possibilities; a site, in other words, for new forms of artistic expression, a new sensory regime and a new politics of consumption.

But beyond this familiar duality of text and context, I want to argue that the form that British broadcasting assumed in its first decade or so - broadly speaking, a schedule of mixed programming - can also be read as a site for what Miriam Bratu Hansen, in relation to classic Hollywood cinema, called 'vernacular modernism'.³ Hansen used the term to describe American movies as a popular mass cultural form that was contemporary with high modernist experimentation, but which had long been widely - albeit problematically - conceptualised as its other.⁴ If Modernism offered a reflexive and critical engagement with the dislocations of modernization and a rejection of classical aesthetic traditions, Hansen argued that Hollywood films - produced for (and producing of) a new mass public via the most modern technological means of the day - correspondingly provided a way of translating (that is to say, mediating and expressing) the contradictions of modernity into everyday experience. She explained her preference for the term 'vernacular' over 'popular' in that it avoids loaded assumptions and value judgements, while carrying with it the idea of everyday usage as well as 'connotations of discourse, idiom, and dialect, and with circulation, promiscuity, and translatability'.⁵ She was interested less in on-screen modernist techniques than in the way that, 'even the most ordinary commercial films were involved in producing a new sensory culture'.⁶

Vernacular modernism in this sense is a term full of resonance for early broadcasting. Radio was certainly involved in a mass public - and, at times, popular - address; and it was involved in the production of a new sensory culture: one based on the simultaneous encounter of distant listeners with dislocated and disembodied sounds. It was certainly vernacular - both in the sense of bringing the spoken word back into public life (albeit, in the case of the BBC, a form of speech that was in the early years predominantly scripted, and articulated in the tones of received pronunciation), and in the sense of being woven into the warp and weft of everyday life in communal, and especially domestic, spaces. Indeed, it is arguably in its domestication and everydayness, as much as in its lack of a visual image, that broadcasting most clearly differs from

the glamour and spectacle of the cinema. But, as I will argue, the form of the schedule and the domesticated and distracted conditions of its reception make it no less important a site for the mediation and translation of modernity's contradictions.

There has certainly been a recent flowering of interest in radio modernism in Modernist Studies, a field long dominated by the visual, musical and literary arts. But, broadly speaking, this interest has tended to focus on certain modernist *auteurs*, or the transmission of particular instances of modernist theatre, music or poetry. Some address the idea of the 'radiophonic', others the phenomenology of listening to modernist texts on the air.⁷ Todd Avery (next in this volume), has shown how the ethos of public service broadcasting itself influenced the work of modernists working in other arts in the interwar period.⁸ And of course there has been plenty of attention given to the role of radio as a modernising influence in general.⁹ Some writers have also touched on radio's vernacular modernism. Aaron Jaffe identifies it at the moment of radio's technical inception when a modernist 'rhetoric of invention' was translated into the foundational and popularising myths of the new technology.¹⁰ Shawn VanCour, meanwhile, invokes the term in his discussion of mobile, ambient and distracted regimes of modernist radio reception.¹¹ My contention, however, is that the broadcast schedule itself - the very 'stuff' of radio, to adapt Sieveking's phrase - is marked by modernist tropes and techniques, making it the quintessential vehicle for radio's contribution to the vernacular modernism of the pre-war period.

Conceiving the schedule

Conceptually, the schedule lies somewhere between text and medium, between form and formlessness. It is the institutionalised response to the technical capacity of continuous transmission. It is in the act of scheduling that the transmission of discrete sounds and voices over radio waves is metamorphosed into broadcast form. The schedule is both the thing listened to and the silent framing of that which is listened to. It comprises all that can be heard while at the same time being something that always already exceeds that which can be listened to by any individual. It is the institutionalised address to a listening public which is itself only produced in the moment of its being addressed. In its written form the schedule exists in anticipation of sounds as yet unsounded, and survives as archived record of the live and ephemeral sonic texts of this period that are lost to history. It represents the whole of the broadcast output in representing the fragments of programming that make up its flow. It follows predictable patterns but it is read - in advance by audiences, and by historians in retrospect - primarily for its marking out of the

individual instances of any particular day. It is, in short, not merely the context within which the modernist radio text appears, but is itself a complex and contradictory modernist phenomenon.

The schedule is a text that is not a text. Historians of early radio have long grappled with the almost complete absence of a sound archive, and instead negotiate its graphic traces left behind in the written archives, the contemporary commentaries and the listings magazines.¹² These anticipatory and reconstituted representations must remain, however, only partial witnesses to the schedule as it manifested in sound. Then again, the schedule in sound was always already something of a fiction, beyond the apperception of any normal listener (listeners tend to listen intermittently), a sum always somehow less than its programmed parts. Though the schedule might be co-extensive with all that is broadcast, we never speak of listening to a schedule. We listen to ‘the radio’ or to particular named programmes, stations or shows; the schedule as listening event disappears in the acts of reception and recall. There is a strange disavowal at work here, even in those moments when the announcer speaks, assuming the role of the meta-narrator, giving voice to the schedule. The invisible and unnamed announcer ventriloquizes the institutional framing of the other-authored texts.¹³ On a national wavelength the ubiquitous and authoritative voice of the anonymous announcer might even stand in, at some imaginary (ideological) level, for the voice of the nation itself.¹⁴ But inasmuch as the schedule is the disembodied voice of the institution of broadcasting, it also exemplifies and amplifies the disembodiedness, the deep uncanniness, of all radio voices. It amplifies this disembodiedness in the sense that this particular voicing body, this ‘voice of the BBC’, is encoded as anonymous, depersonalised and interchangeable.¹⁵

Early scheduling by the BBC

A week before the British Broadcasting Company was originally due to begin transmissions in the summer of 1922, the *Times* announced that it was expected ‘to provide a six hours’ programme every evening from 5-11’, apart from Sundays, ‘when the programme will occupy practically the whole day’.¹⁶ Although there was some brief mention of the intended content, including non-denominational sermons and ‘dead’ (already published) news, it is striking how a story about the imminent launch of a long-anticipated new medium leads on the time to be filled, on the empty premonition of the schedule.

The first day’s broadcasting, on 14 November 1922, consisted of short bulletins of news and weather, read out twice at different speeds by the Programme Director, Arthur Burrows, with a request to listeners to let him know which they preferred.¹⁷ However, it wasn’t long before regular schedules developed that included a daily and diverse diet of music and drama, lectures and

literature, sermons and sport. Yet the early BBC had a famously ambivalent attitude to the idea of a fixed schedule. On the one hand, the institution needed to plan and transmit material daily in sequence. On the other, there was a resistance to producing a predictable or seamless flow of programming that might encourage profligate and indiscriminate listening.¹⁸ Listeners were enjoined to study published schedules in advance, in order to focus their listening purposively on individual elements. To this extent, there was a performative disavowal of the schedule by those who produced it.¹⁹

Another way to read this is as a perverted sort of Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*.²⁰ Here the construction and framing device is in plain and deliberate view, but the audience's attention is deliberately directed elsewhere. The listings serve as a reminder of the contingency and constructedness of the form, and yet fade away in the act of listening. In this sense, the schedule is emblematic of the experience of all radio as frameless or immaterial: the radio apparatus is forgotten in the moment of absorption in the ephemeral radio text, but also in the moment of distraction when used as background noise or sonic companionship. The radio set is rarely the object of the gaze; indeed, its domestication for mass consumption as the decade rolled on involved disguising its technicity as mere furnishing. But even if this furnishing does become an object of design and display, when in use it does not need to be looked at.²¹ In that moment, the listener becomes the receiver. The stuff of radio in all its ephemerality, invisibility and ethereality transcends and overwhelms the materiality of the radio set. But the listener-as-receiver is at the same time a co-author, a producer of mental images and associations to accompany invisible sounds. Radio's intimacy and immediacy, then, afforded new forms of interactivity and engagement. All of this is by now well known, second nature; but once it was disruptive, novel, modern.

By extension, even the most conventional content could be rendered novel and modern in its translation into this virtual, wireless world. Much of the content and sensibility might have been positively Victorian, but it bore of necessity the imprint of technology, science and innovation. At the same time, since most material at this time was poached from prevailing cultural tastes and traditions, it is hardly surprising that early radio bore the birthmarks of a deeply stratified society. A 'general public' was constituted by the technical indiscriminacy of broadcasting, but in practice that public was very often addressed sequentially in terms of various – though far from exhaustive - imagined constituencies.

The first weekday schedule listed in the *Radio Times* (for the London station, 2LO, on Monday, 1 October 1923) illustrates the point: the broadcast day began at 11.30 with the Morning Concert (classical, of course); then a break until *Women's Hour* at 17.00, *Children's Stories* at 17.30,

Boys' Brigade and Boys' Life Brigade News, followed by a 35-minute 'interval' until the *1st General News Bulletin* at 19.00, the short *Weekly Book Talk* at 19.15 and a *Symphony Concert* at 19.30. There then came a talk about aeroplanes by someone from the Air Ministry at 21.10, the *2nd General News* at 21.30 and a final classical concert from 21.45 until *Closedown* at 22.30. The rest of the weekday output followed a similar pattern with different youth groups' news, talks on theatre and films, and the inclusion of some dance music towards the end of the week.

Although it is true that all these various listening constituencies were imagined through a thoroughly middle-class filter, and can be understood as connected to modern disciplinary techniques of division and categorisation, it is nevertheless also true that within the course of a single programmed day the schedule might address any singular listener at turns *as if* they were a woman, man or child, a reader, concert-goer, student or citizen. While individual shows ostensibly spoke to an idealised and specialised listener, the schedule obliquely invited any individual listener to adopt a series of guises - to masquerade repeatedly in borrowed identities, or inhabit the role of interloper or eavesdropper. The polymorphic form of the schedule in this emergent moment thus interpellates a fractured and fluid subject, a listener who is marked by the modern, able to traverse longstanding social and cultural divides and overcome distances in space and time and class.

Mixed messages

Over the years, in both public service and commercial contexts, the 'art' of scheduling has developed with the precise aim of maximising the size of the audience, either by matching the daily (gendered) routines of domestic and mobile audiences, or by targeting ever more precisely defined taste publics. By 1928 the BBC was already beginning to offer alternative programming via simultaneous broadcasts on different wavelengths. At this point it began to conceptualise its programming as either 'universal' or 'specialist': the former demanded no particular concentration, whereas the latter would require deliberate and focused attention.²² One way to understand the distinction is to recognise this as a moment where the institution begins to loosen its attachment to pre-existing cultural practices and begins to come to terms with the radiogenic character of broadcast flow and the realities of secondary listening.

The standardisation of the schedule in terms of daily output, time slot or duration of particular programmes was a gradual affair in the BBC's first decade.²³ Sometimes content had not been finalized by the time the *Radio Times* went to press. This was the case, for example, with the series of 'Special Features' broadcast on Wednesday evenings on 2LO, the London station, throughout the summer of 1925, the details of which would 'be announced through the

microphone, and will appear in the Daily Press.’²⁴ Asa Briggs describes the struggle to define any sort of principle for scheduling during this early period beyond two broad principles: ‘contrast’ (often delivered by the alternation of music and the spoken word), and ‘balance’. This was a policy driven in part by an anxious desire to ensure that no one listener was alienated for too long by finding nothing to their taste.²⁵ Eventually this came to produce a ‘middlebrow’ schedule defined, in Toby Miller’s withering phrase, by ‘the law of maximum inoffensiveness’.²⁶ But in these pioneering years, the bricolage of broadcasting was not yet fully tamed.

The schedule, already a long way from broadcasting all day long,²⁷ was further punctuated by lengthy periods of silence to signal the output as a series of discrete cultural productions. The intention was to encourage listeners to prepare for, or reflect on, their listening, with just a ticking clock to reassure the audience such breaks were not breakdowns.²⁸ In this way, the schedule tapped into a deep modernist concern with questions of connectivity and its failures. But for Reith, the mixed schedule with its distinct elements and moments of silence was a key instrument in the moralising project of self improvement and social uplift.²⁹ The resistance to standardisation in principle allowed flexibility for producers, and chance encounters with unfamiliar or improving fare for listeners.³⁰ It is just one of the constitutive paradoxes of these early schedules that the content, so often shaped by longstanding traditions of value judgement, was presented within such a radically novel frame.

The schedule as automatic writing

One of the novelties of Modernism is its fascination with automatism as a route to the unconscious. The preoccupation of many writers and artists with the psychic, the spiritual and the dreamlike, gave rise to a series of techniques and styles of creative production that tried to circumvent tradition and authority or to liberate consciousness in some way. Technologies old and new were invoked in these movements variously as prosthetic conduits to new states of being and subjectivity, or as instantiations of an amputational and dehumanizing machine logic.³¹ If the chosen technology of the surrealists in their classic experiments with automatic writing was the pen, it was as a tool of ‘magic dictation’ as artists tuned into an unconscious interior monologue ‘akin to spoken thought’, producing a rapid trace with ‘no clear beginning or end, and (seemingly) a lack of narrative and of style’.³²

It is evident that broadcast radio was at first an ersatz medium, a substitute for theatres, cinemas, newspapers and other places of public congregation and communication. In other words, the early schedules were characterised by the logic of remediation: the repurposing of already

available plays and concerts and newspaper reports, children's stories, church sermons and academic lectures; the reviews of films and books; the relay of ceremonies and sporting occasions. Such a list also reveals a high degree of intermediality – radio was immediately imbricated in wider cultural networks, its producers borrowing and refashioning both form and content from sources across the realms of information, entertainment, education and the arts. The schedule was promiscuous in its attachments, albeit these relationships were not always straightforward nor uncontentious.³³ The schedule also regenerated itself daily, year after year. It therefore reflected, with varying degrees of selectivity and distortion, the unfolding history and preoccupations of the age.

It is tempting, then, to read the schedule as a form of automatic writing at the level of an institution – humanly produced, yet impersonal, machinic and abstracted. The schedule represents the long – potentially never-ending - form of radio; authored, yet somehow also authorless. Indeed, over time, and seen from enough of a distance, the relentless flow, drawn from all the tributaries of journalism, literature, music and science, melds into something like the nation's stream of consciousness, its interior monologue with itself (or at least that hegemonic form of the national culture that made its way to air).

Of course none of these borrowed genres were conveyed unchanged, and the historical schedule can reveal the gradual emergence of specifically broadcast genres, from studio discussion to soap opera to sporting commentary - not to mention the celebrated radio 'feature' dedicated to exploring the possibilities of the radio form.

Features, fragments and flaneurs

Of course, the Feature was one of the key locations for modernist experimentation in the early BBC. But looking at the way that the term 'feature' featured in early schedules indicates it took time for it to bed down in the way that now can seem inevitable. The *Radio Times* listings show the term 'feature' could mean anything from music written for radio to recitals, plays, humorous interludes and specials on subjects like football. Some interactive experiments also catch the eye – for example, 'A New Feature by Old Friends', broadcast by 2LO on Saturday afternoon, 14 March 1925. Listeners were invited to suggest a title after listening in, the best suggestion winning the chance to attend the next feature performance in the studio. Or 'Puzzle Programme', broadcast on 23 November that year by 6BM (Bournemouth), which invited listeners to complete the blanks in a short story published in the magazine, using words found from the items played by the orchestra during the programme. Some flew obstinately in the face of the lack of visuals, like the

weekly feature, 'Drawing by Numbers' with Heath Robinson. Others still were labelled as 'experimental transmissions', either as a space for 'amateurs', or sometimes for the transmission of sound and vision - on separate wavelengths - of nascent television broadcasts. Of course, these few illustrations are themselves just residues picked from the schedules, highlighted here to nod to the diversity and experimentation above and beyond the classic modernist feature, and to highlight the construction of the schedule from a series of fragments.

In pre-broadcasting radio days, the dominant listener experience had been of fishing for fragments of sound from the white noise of the boundless ether. Wireless content mattered less than wireless contact.³⁴ If radio reception was born in this random and serendipitous realm, early scheduling practice can be understood as instituting the gradual domestication and cohesion of this fragmented experience. Eventually this insistent logic would see a widespread shift from mixed schedules through specialist and genre-specific channels to the personalised programming of so-called smart radio today. But early BBC schedules were not yet shaped by these logics of commodification and pseudo-individuation. Mixed programming assembled the flow of time into discrete fragments.

Raymond Williams identified such fragments as 'timed units', alluding to broadcasting's part in the broader industrialisation of culture.³⁵ From this perspective, the schedule is the mechanism by which broadcasting contributes to the modern rationalisation and commodification of time, and which acts as the conduit for the shared and simultaneous experience over distance that is the hallmark of the modern mediated condition. Williams, in his influential discussion of broadcast flow, makes the argument for radio 'programming' marking a break from all previous forms of cultural arrangements, and the 'specific, isolated and temporary' forms of attention associated with them. At the same time, though, he recognised how this mixed programming was an expression of the increasing 'variability and miscellaneity of public communications', itself a response to profound changes in the levels of social and physical mobility, and the privileging of consumer over community culture. He noted how the radio moved from the transmission of events already happening in the world to how the demands of the schedule and the power of the institution began proactively to *programme* those events. Here we see in the logic and power of the radio schedule the inception of the processes of 'mediatization'.³⁶ Eventually, the logic of continuous output to capture the audience would produce, as Williams described it, a flow without interval: a 'generally available experience' that has by now become the quotidian experience of media.³⁷

The idea of the fragment also holds a hallowed place in the aesthetic modernist imagination, revealing now the disjointedness and disembeddedness of the modern experience,

then a shoring against the ruins.³⁸ At the risk of straining an analogy, the fragmentary writing of the schedule shares with its literary counterpart what Maurice Blanchot described as its ‘distinguishing characteristic’, namely ‘the interruption of the incessant [...] interruption’s having somehow the same meaning as that which does not cease’.³⁹ This is not just to recognise the interruption of the rounds and routines of private life with the rhythms and rhetoric of public life. Nor is it just to reassert the segmentation of the broadcast flow into the disparate programming formats. Rather, it also speaks to the constant repetition without reproduction, the familiar framing of constant novelty, the refusal of any real sense of final closure as the daily, weekly, seasonal and annual round promises ever more of the almost same. Just as the fragments from different realms and times of cultural life produced the sense that ‘radio’ exists out of time, or in all times simultaneously, so the mix of voices suggest at least the possibility of a space beyond a single locus of power. The relentless unfolding of the schedule over years and decades produces through these fragments a communicative text that exceeds comprehension or control.⁴⁰

From the start, then, the BBC developed a mixed programming style, mixing up in a single channel music and the spoken word, the serious and the popular, the factual and the fictional, the general and the bespoke, the traditional and the modern. This daily mosaic was complicated by the weekly and seasonal rhythms of the schedule as it echoed and amplified a national calendar.⁴¹ The result was a kind of polyvocal and polyphonic bricolage. The printed schedules provided a map that charted a linear, unified route through the aural collage; but the repeated exhortations to use the map to isolate features in that acoustic landscape suggest that listeners were perhaps more likely to wander aimlessly than head for specific destinations.⁴² Here we might find the figure of the listener as flaneur – not the ‘strolling detached observer’ of the city streets and byways, but the distracted, detached auditor of the airwaves.⁴³

The shock effect of the schedule

If the institution had to learn the art of scheduling, then so too did listeners have to adapt. Although radio technology had been around since the turn of the century, the experience of hearing voices over the airwaves only gradually became part of everyday experience. There are plenty of accounts through the 1920s of the wonder of radio reception; discourses of magic and mystery jostle alongside scientific and technical explanations.⁴⁴ But the shock effect of hearing disembodied and distant voices was compounded by exposure to voices that were simply unfamiliar. While the few cosmopolitan ‘early adopters’ might have closely matched the small middle-class coterie of voices on the airwaves, with time the variety of accents and interests began

to widen, producing spaces for entirely new and often unexpected encounters. If listeners did not at first know how to react to the voices of monarchs and ministers in their parlours – witness establishment anxieties about listeners acting inappropriately while in the acoustic presence of these absent figures⁴⁵ - neither did they necessarily know how to react to the orchestration of mannerisms and modes of address appealing for their attention. This active and continuous experience of displacement and dissonance in daily life is surely one of the key devices of radio's vernacular modernism.

It was in part the unknowability of the absent audience that shaped so much of the BBC's thinking about the schedule. Apart from its initial resistance to audience research (for fear it could be misdirected into giving this phantasmatic audience what they wanted, as opposed to what was good for them), the BBC was decidedly anxious about the apparent power of this untested medium in an age when 'the masses' were widely conceived of as both volatile and suggestible, where domestic audiences that included women and children were understood as innocent and vulnerable, and where the power of the spoken word was being unleashed on an unprecedented scale in the public sphere.⁴⁶ All this, set against the prevailing anxieties and uncertainties of an age caught between the aftermath of one war and the anticipation of another⁴⁷ - anxieties and uncertainties that were so often the impetus and subject of modernist treatments - helped produce a schedule that was constrained by convention and routinely steered to the middle of the road.

And yet here is another of the express contradictions of the BBC in relation to its schedule-building. Though listeners were enjoined to listen with discernment and intent, presumably to programmes that already 'spoke to them' in some way, so too was it an explicit policy to enable listeners to chance upon improving or challenging material by scheduling it between other attractions. Would it be too much of a leap to think about the dysjunctures between sequential programmes of different styles and voices like jump cuts and film frames having the potential to induce a sort of shock effect - that celebrated modernist technique to jolt people out of their comfort zones?⁴⁸

The intimacy of radio's address – of human voices speaking to listeners in their own homes – reinforces this invitation. The fact that a listener's own domestic soundscape was overlain with the artifice of sounds curated elsewhere breathed the air of modernity right into the home and into everyday life. I have argued elsewhere about the particular import this had for women working in the home who were otherwise, in this period following the First World War, the least integrated into the modern.⁴⁹ Women like these were not just newly exposed to ideas and voices in the public sphere, and were not just newly connected imaginatively to other isolated women in domestic spaces; they were also directly involved in this strange new fluid and fragmentary sensory regime

that the mixed broadcasting schedule relayed into their everyday lives. That the vernacular modernism of the schedule, produced in and expressive of the changing public sphere, was matched to the archetypal rhythms of the family day had a progressive potential to make manifest that which is by definition unremarked and unremarkable: the monotony, repetitiveness, interiority and interruptibility of the everyday.⁵⁰

Conclusion

Early BBC scheduling exists in a strange place between intention and accident.⁵¹ It is the product of not yet institutionalised practices within the institution. It is the novel result of juggling the different ideas and contributions of the various producers and departments working out what it means to have to fill a permanently available stage before a transient and invisible audience. It is the corporate application of an upstart cultural technology striving, by remediating more conventional cultural forms, to find recognition as an arm of the establishment.

There are, then, good reasons to attend to the schedule as something that exceeds the individual text or genre, but that still gives itself up to the techniques and insights of textual analysis. In so doing there is, I would suggest, a strong case to be made on various counts for the early broadcast schedule as modernist text and, more particularly, as a vehicle for vernacular modernism. It has, perhaps, been overlooked as such precisely because it has, over time, taken on the mantle of second nature. The schedule is, after all, the given environment against which named and celebrated 'features' stand out. Perhaps, too, it has been overlooked because the schedule is a text of uncertain authorship – produced in the confluence of input from policymakers, producers and programme makers certainly, but also in the expectations, and experience of its publics; or because it is also a text of uncertain content – unending, polymorphic and contradictory, elastic enough to contain both high modernism and kitsch.

Despite its ill-defined authorship, its hybridity and its transient content, the early mixed programming schedule is not a text without purpose, import or meaning. Rather, it represents (in both senses of that word), the logic of broadcasting practice; an instance of 'intentionality without intent'.⁵² The schedule is the medium's self-consciousness made manifest, in the sense that it is through the schedules that the institution of broadcasting speaks itself, revealing its purpose, its patterns, its predilections, its principles and its publicness.

In terms of form, too, the schedule can be argued to share in many of the tropes and techniques that so fascinated the modernists, and is matched in its modernity by the conditions and experience of its reception. Such a formalist reading has its limitations in terms of drawing

conclusions about either intentions or consequences. Modernism comes in many guises, after all, both reactionary and progressive. But I hope such a reading might highlight the ambivalences and contradictions within early broadcasting as a whole, complicate some of the easy stereotypes about the early BBC, and help expand the discussion about radio modernism beyond the canon and beyond the limits of the archive.

Notes

¹ Sieveking, *The Stuff of Radio*, n.p. For Sieveking's contribution to radio modernism, see Hendy, "Painting with Sound".

² Rainey and von Hallberg, "Editorial/Introduction", 1.

³ Hansen, "Mass production".

⁴ Huyssen summarizes this ambivalent relationship in *After the Great Divide*, vii-xii.

⁵ Hansen, "Mass Production", 60.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁷ Some indicative titles: Campbell, *Wireless Writing*; Cohen, et al. (eds), *Broadcasting Modernism*; Dinsman, *Modernism at the Microphone*; Porter, Hepburn, "Acoustic Modernism"; Whittington, "Radio Studies and 20th Century Literature".

⁸ Avery, *Radio Modernism*.

⁹ Scannell, "Public service broadcasting"; Scannell, *Radio, Television*.

¹⁰ Jaffe, "Inventing".

¹¹ VanCour, "Early Radio Listening", 8.

¹² Historians in many fields are used to dealing with incomplete archives, and Josie Dolan for one has argued that radio historians should not fetishise the sound archive: Dolan, "The Voice".

¹³ During this period, the announcer was less likely to be a named personality, or a figure with whom the listener was expected to develop a familiarity, other than as a cypher for the organisation.

¹⁴ Mugglestone, "Spoken English and the BBC".

¹⁵ Of course, the voice could be decoded otherwise. While the BBC wanted its announcers to be aloof, it seems that, 'An announcer could not cough during a broadcast without receiving presents of everything from cough lozenges to woollen underwear'. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/aboutbbcnews/spl/hi/history/noflash/html/1930s.stm>

¹⁶ "Wireless For Six Hours A Day." *The Times*, 15 August 1922, 5. Negotiations with the Post Office meant transmissions did not, in fact, begin until November that year.

¹⁷ BBC, "About BBC News: 14 November 1992, the BBC Takes to the Airwaves", <http://news.bbc.co.uk/aboutbbcnews/spl/hi/history/noflash/html/1920s.stm>

Note how modernist tropes of experimentation, distanciation and interactivity were already inscribed in this very first broadcast.

¹⁸ Scannell and Cardiff, *A Social History*, 372-3; Lacey, "Towards a Periodization"; Goodman, "Distracted Listening".

¹⁹ Note this is a world away from later incarnations of the schedule as a vehicle to keep an audience listening across programme breaks, with the use of cliffhangers and explicit exhortations to stay tuned in.

²⁰ The 'alienation effect', or 'distanciation', in Brecht's theatre was a technique to draw the audience's attention to the artifice of a production in the hope of producing a critical distance in place of bourgeois identification.

²¹ Moores, "The Box", 31-3.

-
- ²² Briggs, *The History*, 27.
- ²³ Scannell and Cardiff, *A Social History*, 371; Crisell, *An Introductory History*, 53.
- ²⁴ Schedule details are drawn from *The Radio Times* listings, available via the BBC Genome project: <http://genome.ch.bbc.co.uk>
- ²⁵ Of course there were pragmatic institutional decisions at play too, to do with cost and representation of all the various departments of the BBC. Briggs, *The History*, 30-31.
- ²⁶ Miller, 'An Editorial', 1. See also, Frith, 'The Pleasures'.
- ²⁷ Even by 1927, the broadcast day did not start until 10.30am, and then only with the shipping forecast, read twice, the second time at dictation speed, with a long break until schools programming in the mid-afternoon. Briggs, *The History*, 25.
- ²⁸ Young, *Shall I Listen?*, 256-7; Lacey, *Listening Publics*, 82-3.
- ²⁹ LeMahieu, "John Reith", 195.
- ³⁰ Hendy, "Public Service", 58-9.
- ³¹ Armstrong, *Modernism*; Danus, *The Senses of Modernism*.
- ³² Bauduin, Tessel M. "The 'Continuing Misfortune'", p.6.
- ³³ See Briggs, *The BBC*, 15; Chignell, *Public Issue Radio*, 13-14; Nicolas, "Media History".
- ³⁴ Sconce, *Haunted Media*, 65.
- ³⁵ Williams, *Television*, 88.
- ³⁶ 'Mediatization' is a term that attempts to encapsulate how pervasive media profoundly reshape (rather than simply reflect or represent) all aspects of contemporary social life. c.f. Couldry and Hepp, "Conceptualizing Mediatization".
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 96.
- ³⁸ 'These fragments I have shored against my ruins'. Line 430 of T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*
- ³⁹ Blanchot, *The Writing*, 21.
- ⁴⁰ Even with a relatively short broadcasting day by current standards, the BBC broadcast 65,800 hours of 'output' in 1927. Briggs, *The History*, 24.
- ⁴¹ Scannell and Cardiff, *ibid.*; Hendy, *Radio*, 178. This sonic landscape is further complicated by the patchwork of local, regional, international and 'pirate' broadcasts available to listeners at any one moment.
- ⁴² Goodman, "Distracted Listening"; Lacey, *Listening Publics*, 35-7, 128-31, 183-6.
- ⁴³ VanCour, "Early Radio Listening".
- ⁴⁴ Sconce, *Haunted Media*.
- ⁴⁵ Scannell, "Public Service Broadcasting", 149.
- ⁴⁶ Scannell, "Public Service Broadcasting, 143, "The Box", 23-6; Lacey, 2016.
- ⁴⁷ Overy, *The Morbid Age*.
- ⁴⁸ Benjamin, "Work of Art". Note these are arguments about latent listening positions rather than speculations about actual audience effects or responses.
- ⁴⁹ Lacey, "Towards a Periodisation".
- ⁵⁰ Blanchot in Moran, 'Criticism', 175; Lacey, *Listening Publics*, 129-30.
- ⁵¹ Scannell, *Radio*, 9.
- ⁵² Bourdieu and Wacquant, *An Invitation*, 19.

Bibliography

- Armstrong, T. *Modernism, Technology, and the Body: A Cultural Study*. Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Bauduin, T.M. "The 'Continuing Misfortune' of Automatism in Early Surrealism," *Communication+* 1, 4, no.10 (2015): 1-42.
- Benjamin, W. (1936/1992) "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction". In: *Illuminations* (trans. H. Zohn). London: Fontana, 211–44.
- Blanchot, M. *The Writing of the Disaster*, trans. A. Smock. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995.
- Bourdieu, P., and L. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Cambridge: Polity, 1992.
- Briggs, A. *The History of Broadcasting in the UK*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Briggs, A. *The BBC: The First Fifty Years*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- Campbell, T. *Wireless Writing in the Age of Marconi*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006
- Chignell, H. *Public Issue Radio: Talks, News and Current Affairs in the Twentieth Century*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
- Cohen, D. R., M. Coyle, M., and J. Lewty. *Broadcasting Modernism*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009.
- Couldry, N. and A. Hepp. "Conceptualizing Mediatization: Contexts, Traditions, Arguments," *Communication Theory* 23, no.3 (2013): 191-202.
- Crisell, A. *An Introductory History of British Broadcasting*. London: Routledge, 1997. Second Edition. London: Routledge, 2002.
- Danius, Sara. *The Senses of Modernism: Technology, Perception, and Aesthetics*. Cornell University Press, 2002.
- Dinsman, M. *Modernism at the Microphone: Radio, Propaganda, and Literary Aesthetics During World War II*. London: Bloomsbury, 2015.
- Dolan, J. "The Voice that Cannot Be Heard: Radio/Broadcasting and 'the Archive'". *Radio Journal: International Studies in Broadcast & Audio Media*, 1, no.1 (2003), 63-72.
- Eliot, T.S. *The Waste Land and Other Poems*. London: Broadview, 2011.
- Feldman, M., H. Mead, H. and E. Tonning, eds. *Broadcasting in the Modernist Era*. London: A&C Black, 2014.
- Frith, S. "The Pleasures of the Hearth: The Making of BBC Light Entertainment". In *Music for Pleasure*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988

-
- Goodman, D. "Distracted listening: On Not Making Sound Choices in the 1930s". In *Sound in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, edited by D. Suisman and S. Strasser, 15–46. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010
- Hansen, M. "The Mass Production of the Senses: Classical Cinema as Vernacular Modernism." *Modernism/Modernity* 6, no.2 (1999): 59-77.
- Hendy, D. *Radio in the Global Age*. Cambridge: Polity, 2000.
- Hendy, D. *Public Service Broadcasting*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.
- Hendy, D. "Painting with Sound: The Kaleidoscopic World of Lance Sieveking, a British Radio Modernist." *Twentieth Century British History* 24, no.2 (2012), 169-200.
- Hepburn, A. "Acoustic Modernism: BBC Radio and the Little Girls." *Textual Practice*, 27, no.1 (2013), 143-62.
- Huyssen, A. *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism*. Bloomington and Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 1986.
- Jaffe, A. "Inventing the Radio Cosmopolitan: Vernacular Modernism at a Standstill." In *Broadcasting Modernism*, edited by D.Cohen, M. Coyle and J. Lewty, 11-30. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009.
- Lacey, K. "Towards a Periodization of Listening: Radio and Modern Life." *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 3, no.2 (2000), 279-88.
- Lacey, K. *Listening Publics: The Politics and Experience of Listening in the Media Age*. Cambridge: Polity, 2013.
- Lacey, K. "Listening with Mother: The Cultivation of Children's Radio. In *The Child Savage, 1890–2010: From Comics to Games*, ed. L.Wesseling (2016): 151-70. Farnham: Ashgate.
- LeMahieu, D.L. "John Reith 1889-1971". In *After the Victorians: Private Conscience and Public Duty in Modern Britain*, edited by S. Petersen and P. Mandler, 189-208. London, Routledge, 1994.
- Miller, T. "An Editorial Introduction for Radio." *Continuum* 6, no.1 (1992), 5–13.
- Moore, S. "The Box on the Dresser': Memories of Early Radio and Everyday Life." *Media, Culture and Society* 10, no. 1 (1988): 23-40.
- Moran, J. "Criticism: Benjamin and Boredom." *Critical Quarterly* 45, no.1-2 (2003), 168–81.
- Mugglestone, L. "Spoken English and the BBC: In the Beginning," *AAA-Arbeiten aus Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 33, no. 2 (2008), 197-215.
- Nicolas, S. "Media History or Media Histories? Re-addressing the History of Mass Media in Interwar Britain," *Media History* 18, no. 3-4 (2012), 379-94.
- Overy, R. *The Morbid Age: Britain Between the Wars*. London: Allen Lane, 2009.

-
- Rainey, L. and R. von Hallberg. "Editorial/Introduction," *Modernism/Modernity* 1, no. 1 (1994): 1-3.
- Scannell, P. "Public Service Broadcasting and Modern Public Life," *Media, Culture and Society*, 11 no.2 (1989): 135-66.
- Scannell, P. and Cardiff, D. *A Social History of British Broadcasting. 1. 1922-1939, Serving the Nation*. London: Blackwell, 1991.
- Scannell, P. *Radio, Television and Modern Life*. London: Blackwell, 1996.
- Sconce, J. *Haunted media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000.
- Sieveking, L. *The Stuff of Radio*. London: Cassell, 1934.
- VanCour, S. "Early Radio Listening as Modernist Practice: Ambient Radio and the Aesthetic of Distraction." *Modernist Cultures*, 10 no.1, (2015): 6-25.
- Whittington, I. "Radio Studies and 20th Century Literature: Ethics, Aesthetics, and Remediation." *Literature Compass*, 11, no.9 (2014), 634-48.
- Williams, R. *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*. London: Fontana, 1974. Third Edition. London: Routledge, 2003.
- Young, F. *Shall I Listen? Studies in the Adventure and Technique of Broadcasting*. London: Constable, 1933.