



RADIO DRAMA THEORY AND PRACTICE **TIM CROOK**

**RADIO
DRAMA**

 ROUTLEDGE

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Radio Drama

Radio Drama brings together the practical skills needed for radio drama, such as directing, writing and sound design, with media history and communication theory. From the early audio broadcasts of 1914 and the development of General Electric's New York WGY station in 1922, through Orson Welles's startling Hallowe'en broadcast of *War of the Worlds* in 1938, to more recent radio spoofs and the subversive challenge from 'media guerrillas', Tim Crook explores the history and contemporary practice of radio drama. Challenging the belief that sound drama is a 'blind medium', *Radio Drama* shows how experimentation in radio narrative has blurred the dividing line between fiction and reality in modern media. Using extracts from scripts and analysing radio broadcasts from America, Britain, Canada and Australia, the book explores the practicalities of producing drama for radio. Tim Crook illustrates how far radio drama has developed since the first 'audiophonic production' and evaluates the future of radio drama in the age of live phone-ins and immediate access to programmes on the Internet.

Tim Crook has written, directed and produced award-winning radio plays, series and documentaries. He is the Head of Radio at Goldsmiths College, University of London, and is the author of *International Radio Journalism*.

Radio

Drama

Theory and practice

Tim Crook



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Contents

List of plates	viii
Acknowledgements	ix

Part I

PRACTICE MEETS THEORY

1 A New Media History Perspective through Audio Drama	3
2 Radio Drama as Modernity	12
3 The Electrophone or Théâtrophone: broadcasting audio drama before the radio	15
4 The Six Ages of Audio Drama and the Internet Epoch	21
5 From Sound Houses to the Phonograph Sound Play	30
6 A Technological Time-line	37
7 A Culturalist Approach to Internet Audio Drama	41

Part II

SOUND THEORY AND PRACTICE

8 Radio Drama is <i>Not</i> a Blind Medium	53
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9 Sound Design Vocabulary	70
10 The Cinematic and Musical Inspiration	90

Part III

THE NEW RADIO DRAMA FORM: SKITS AND LIVE IMPROVISATIONS

11 Blurring Fiction with Reality	105
12 Radio Drama Panics: a cross-cultural phenomenon	115
13 Moving from Burlesque to Propaganda and News	121
14 The <i>War of the Worlds</i> Effect: <i>Spoonface Steinberg</i>?	136
15 <i>Spoonface Steinberg</i>: constructing the Holocaust as a means of identification	144

Part IV

THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF WRITING AUDIO DRAMA

16 The Writing Agenda for Audio Drama	151
17 Creating the Character and Effective Use of Characterisation	183
18 Writing Dialogue	188

Part V

CONSTRUCTING THE RADIO DRAMA/DOCUMENTARY FEATURE

19 The Phantom Distinction	201
20 Making the Documentary Feature	213

Part VI

THE PRACTICE AND THEORY OF DIRECTING AND PERFORMANCE

21 Directorial Responsibility	235
22 Managing the Production	240
23 Experimental Direction and Performance	246

Notes	251
Audio drama bibliography	269
Index	288

Plates

1	Eva Stenman-Rotstein, Swedish Radio Drama Director	97
2	Christine Bernard-Sugy, Head of Radio Drama at Radio France	97
3	Kate Rowland, Editor of BBC Radio Drama	97
4	<i>Losing Paradise</i> : international co-production	98
5	<i>A Dream Play</i> : classical radio drama in the studio	98
6	<i>Beo's Bedroom</i> : multicultural casting and content	99
7	<i>The Trojan Women</i> : CBC/BBC co-production	99
8	Location recording with the studio manager, LBC, London	100
9	Location recording with musician and performers simulating the beach ambience	100
10	<i>The Great Los Angeles Opportunity</i> : location recording with the director	101

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This book is the result of a personal odyssey lasting twenty years. Radio drama and radio drama-documentary expression are undoubtedly the most understated creative, dramatic and literary art forms and seem to have suffered an element of cultural neglect in terms of the volume of critical publication rather than the quality. I think that this area has been under-explored from the point of view of academic study compared with other dramatic media. This medium of drama offers the dramatist considerable control and a fast route to the centre of human consciousness and psychological engagement. It is probably the most efficient and cost-effective way of reaching a huge audience, but it is also one of the more interesting and enjoyable storytelling forms to access the world of media and communications theory. Through audio drama you can explore the rich and intellectually fulfilling world of cultural history, semiotics, psychology of communication, sociology, study of audiences and other theoretical concerns centred in the field of human communication and society.

I have tried to write an enabling book to open doors and windows in the world of practice and theory and to give students in media and communications an exciting and enjoyable journey that truly articulates an interplay or integration of the thinking and the doing, the education as well as the training.

I have sought to explore key subjects such as media history, sound, writing, directing and the distinction between fiction and reality for audiences with as much international perspective as I have been able to research. I realise that I have neglected much. I could not pretend to offer a comprehensive text on the entire subject. I have also had to leave out considerable amounts of

research and writing that I had undertaken for the project. Detailed questions of representation and political economy have not been engaged: they deserve a separate volume. I have explored radio acting through the perspective of directing since a book focusing on radio performance has recently been published. I also think that much could be gained by performers appreciating the director's perspective and recognising the common aesthetic and professional concerns.

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Part I

**Practise meets
theory**

A new media history perspective through audio drama

There's no romance in television: it's just the Wal-Mart of the mind. Radio is infinitely sexier.

(Garrison Keillor, *Radio Romance*, 1991)

And more particularly:

I live right inside radio when I listen. 'The Medium Is The Message'.

(Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 1964)

Radio drama has been one of the most unappreciated and understated literary forms of the twentieth century and the purpose of this book is to demonstrate that this neglect should not continue into the twenty-first century. Academics, media theorists and writers in most cultures have not fully appreciated that the medium of sound has provided an environment in which a new storytelling genre has been born. It has developed with sophistication and explosive energy; it now occupies a significant position in the cultural lives of societies throughout the globe. Even where the dominance of long-form popular dramas has transferred to television, the audio drama narrative is central to the short narrative communication of radio commercials. Huge traditions, styles and movements have been established and remain largely undocumented. Even now, radio drama is regarded as an adjunct of radio production practice. The shelves of the library at Goldsmiths College, University of London disclose the following ratio of critical publication space between novels and poetry, theatre texts, film/television and radio drama: 64, 21, 14 and 1.¹

There are strong signs that this neglect is being challenged. The international radio academy, which includes practitioners as well as philosophers, is gathering to debate, discuss and present papers.² In Britain, drama lecturer Alan Beck at the University of Kent has undertaken the first and most significant comprehensive research into the history of British radio drama, which will have an impressive output in CD-ROM publication. Many aspects of previous academic evaluation of the subject are unreliable. This is not due to intrinsic failings in individual approach. It is more a case of underdeveloped radio theory and a continuing struggle to legitimise sound art or radio drama in terms of its equality as an art form.³

I began with hubris from Garrison Keillor and the phrase for which Marshall McLuhan is most remembered: 'The medium is the message'. If this is the case, radio or audio drama has to begin with the medium of recorded sound and the dynamics of its transmission. These phases clearly predate radio. There is no evidence that I can find of researchers or writers who have even considered the significance of 'electraphones' during the period from 1900 until the advent of licensed broadcasting. So much store is placed on the first 'drama broadcast' or transmission of the 'first radio play written for the wireless'. This is perfectly valid. History requires datelines to frame development. Fortunately texts exist to point to defining moments. The BBC's first Chief Engineer, Captain P. Eckersley, in his *The Power behind the Microphone* (1942), describes a radio drama experiment transmitted on 17 October 1922 from the research station at Writtle, near Chelmsford, Essex:

We did a wireless play. We chose the balcony scene from *Cyrano*: it is played, on the stage, in semi-darkness with virtually stationary players and so it seemed very suitable for broadcasting. 'Uggy' Travers, a young actress and her brother came to help. We sat round a kitchen table in the middle of the wooden hut, with its shelves and benches packed with prosaic apparatus, and said our passionate lines into the lip of our separate microphones . . .

It was all rather fun. Doubtless at times I was horribly facetious, but I did try to be friendly and talk with, rather than at, my listeners . . . We failed to take ourselves seriously, and broadcasting, as we saw it, was nothing more nor less than an entertainment, for us as much as the listeners.⁴

Evidence of an early experiment in the broadcast of audio drama emerges from a study of the history of radio in California by John Schneider, which is available on the World Wide Web. In his narrative about the history of KQW and radio programming pioneer Charles 'Doc' Herrold, Schneider states:

About this time [1914], Herrold's station attempted its first remote broadcast. The event was a play being performed in the auditorium at Normal College (now California State University at San José). The carbon button microphones Herrold used had very limited

pick-up range, and his students improvised a reflector to collect the sound out of an old wooden chopping bowl. The signal was transmitted to the bank building through an ordinary telephone connection. Newby related: 'We would use a phone, and they would take the receiver off of the hook and we would hold the receiver on the other end at the microphone of the transmitter. And it would go through; voices would go through pretty good.' He told of another incident when they tried to broadcast a harp recital. They had to keep the microphone very close to the strings to pick up the harp with enough volume, and the mike upset the harpist so much that she couldn't play a thing.⁵

American radio history is complex and chaotically documented. It would be a brave scholar who confidently asserted that the first US radio drama had been identified with a particular date and on a certain radio station. There are some references, for example 1922 has been marked as the year when General Electric's New York station WGY in Schenectady broadcast 'the first dramatic series . . . and the first sound effects were used in "The Wolf", a two and a half hour play on the same station.'⁶

Photographs of WGY's engineer and the WGY players with a microphone disguised as a lamp to minimise performers' jitters appear in the American publication *The Early Days of Radio Broadcasting*.⁷ Since opera is effectively musical theatre, it can be argued that there are earlier licensed and regularly scheduled instances of audio drama transmission. KYW in Chicago began in 1921 as a specialist opera station and did not include time signals, weather bulletins, news and phonograph records. The early pioneering programming concentrated on six days a week broadcasts of the Chicago Civic Opera Company.⁸ On 15 March 1922 WJZ in Newark brought the entire touring company of the opera production of Mozart's *Impresario* into a 10 by 40 foot makeshift studio and broadcast the production as a radio/studio based event rather than a remote broadcast.⁹ The 27 October 1923 edition of *Radio Digest* disclosed:

The radio play, a new form of dramatic interest, is increasing rapidly in popularity. Go to a movie and then come home and listen to a Radario and you will have received two exactly opposite theatrical effects. Perhaps, in the near future, you may have both movie and Radio broadcast to you . . .

Of course, scenes and acts from current plays are often broadcast, but many eastern stations now have their own theatrical groups and give plays especially adapted for Radio use. Pretend you are blind and listen to these plays. The better your imagination, the better the play.¹⁰

Dates for the first transmission of radio drama on BBC Radio depend on what you define as a radio play. It is generally agreed that the first play written for radio was *A Comedy of Danger*

by Richard Hughes, which was transmitted on 15 January 1924. Research by Alan Beck has highlighted a personal account of the play's genesis in an edition of *The Listener* magazine in 1956:

the climax came when we said we wanted an explosion. The engineers had helped all they could, but this was the last straw. Even popping a paper bag would blow every fuse in Savoy Hill. But Playfair was something of a genius, and utterly unscrupulous. Reporters and critics were going to listen in a room specially provided for them, with its own loud-speaker. It would never do for them to hear no more than the diminutive 'phut' like the roaring of a sucking-dove, even if that was all the public would get. So Playfair staged a magnificent 'explosion' in the room next door to the press-room. Our 'explosion' got top marks with the press. They never discovered they had heard it through the wall. And so – presumably for the first time in history, anywhere in the world – some sort of 'listening play' specially written for sound somehow went on the air, thanks to Playfair's ingenuity and the helping hands of all Savoy Hill. Radio drama had emitted its first, faint, infant wail.¹¹

The engagement of public relations by the play's director/producer Nigel Playfair resulted in national newspaper coverage in the *Daily Mail* on Wednesday 16 January 1924:

In a brightly lit room a young woman in evening dress and two men holding sheets of paper in their hands declaimed to a microphone their horror at being imprisoned in the mine. Outside the room a young man sat cross-legged on the floor, with telephone receivers on his ears, and as he heard through the receivers the progress of the piece he signalled to two assistants on a lower landing to make noises to represent the action of the play.

However, Lord Asa Briggs in his formidable history series of the British Broadcasting Corporation states that 16 February 1923 signified the transmission of extracts of Shakespearian classics such as *Julius Caesar*, *Henry VIII* and *Much Ado About Nothing*, while the first abridgement for radio of an entire Shakespeare play was *Twelfth Night*, transmitted on 28 May 1923.¹²

It would appear that the first radio play produced and broadcast in Australia was a melodramatic production of the myth of *Sweeney Todd, The Barbarous Barber*, on the Melbourne station 3LO, which went out on 21 March 1925.¹³ About a year earlier the Sydney station 2FC broadcast a direct transmission from Her Majesty's Theatre, Sydney, of the Royal Comic Opera Company staging *A Southern Maid*. This was achieved by placing a microphone near the centre of the footlights with a special speech amplifier under the stage.¹⁴

I think that radio drama has shared with stage theatre an evanescent art form status. If the script does not survive and there is no permanent recording how are we to evaluate the artistic

experience? The title of the first chapter of Lance Sieveking's publication on radio drama *The Stuff of Radio* (1934) is 'Ghastly impermanence of the medium'. Most early radio plays created by the BBC and other international broadcasting organisations have not survived as mechanical records.

Very few mechanical records are made of stage productions. The script has tended to survive for both forms in the same way that manuscript musical scores have preserved the code of historic operas and musical presentations. Without permanent record, radio drama is an ephemeral art form. It exists in the moment of its produced performance. Peter Brook defined the experience of stage theatre as RRA: 'repetition, representation, assistance'.¹⁵ The third ingredient of his definition, 'assistance', is where stage theatre and audio theatre experience their significant differences.

It is interesting that French writers have asserted that film was born in 1895 and became the 'seventh art'. However, it is my belief that rather than audio drama becoming *l'art huitième*, the position of media nascence should be reversed. Sound art or storytelling through recorded and transmitted sound was spawned before the technological gestation of film. Sound drama achieved its artistic independence as a dimension of theatre before film.

A theoretical framework for evaluating radio or audio drama is largely dependent on the physical and psychological relationship between performance/ presentation and reception/ perception. Is sound drama only a sound phenomenon delineated and separated from image-based narrative? I would argue that it is not. I would argue that it cannot be said that the ear cannot see. Blind people see. I realise that this is an oxymoronic statement but I would additionally argue that their brains construct an imaginative world based on image and fully separated from the eye as camera. Their experience is as rich and fulfilling as those who have the eye as camera. Profoundly deaf people can hear in their minds. The music created by deaf people has narrative, mood, emotion and aesthetics. I have been engaged in an interesting debate with a stage theatre director on the meaning of the word 'theatre'. My position is that 'theatre' as a dramatic etymological concept is not exclusively owned by stage or physical theatre. In Latin theatre is a feminine noun, *theatrum*. In Greek it is a feminine noun, *theatron*. *Theaomai* means 'behold'. The theatre director asserts that *theatron* means 'spectacle'. I disagree. I believe that a more appropriate translation is 'drama'. Sound theatre exists as a dramatic storytelling form communicating action as well as narrative.

I stress these issues because if we are talking about radio or audio drama, the state of listening is linked directly to the technological and psychological experience of hearing radio signals. The same can be applied to audio or sound signals. Can theatre encompass the idea of a staging or amphitheatre in the mind of the individual as much as in the physical auditorium or cinema? I believe that theatre as a concept is not intrinsically linked to and dependent on the spectacle. It is as much about listening as it is about spectating. Inside the

mind of the listener we have the conditions of both the spectator and listener. Audio/radio drama shares the imaginative function which is recognised as 'off-stage' in live physical theatre. Hence the confidence in the expression 'the Theatre of the Mind'. I believe this is what Marshall McLuhan meant by 'I live right inside radio when I listen'. Perhaps he should have said 'radio lives right inside me when I listen'.

Is there a seminal theoretical text to accompany an understanding of the social and artistic significance of sound and radio in relation to the human imagination? I would venture to suggest that McLuhan's *Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (1962) is this text.¹⁶ McLuhan parallels the impact of electrical communications technology with the significance of the invention of Johann Gutenberg's printing press in the fifteenth century. Print communication created a psychological perspective which was linear, uniform, connected and continuous and heralded a linear framework of thought which McLuhan went on to assert manifested itself in linear economics, industrial environment and the linear assembly lines of manufacturing. It became a communications root for disseminating the concept of nationalism.

The primary medium of human communication in the preliterate, tribal era was the spoken word and the human ear. The Gutenberg Age introduced the printed word and the human eye as the primary medium of human communication. McLuhan defined the spoken word as 'acoustic space'. This is boundless, directionless, charged with emotion and horizonless. The written page bounded this space with margins, sharply defined letters and edges. The printed page removes the acoustic space for speech, but it then acquires a powerful visual bias.

The significance of the introduction of sound recording and transmission technology is that it marked the onset of the retribalised electronic age. McLuhan argues in his *The Medium is the Message* (1967), that the apparently powerful extension of speech afforded by recording and transmission technology had the effect of reducing the sensory capacity of speech.¹⁷ He asserts that radio is not speech, but like writing, it creates the illusion of containing speech. What is clear is that mechanical and electronic sound communication depends on the single sense of the auditory canal and like writing stimulates a powerful visual perspective. I would suggest that McLuhan's analysis supports my definition of the unique nature of audio/radio drama. It is auditory in the physical dimension but equally powerful as a visual force in the psychological dimension. McLuhan said in 1964: 'Radio provided the first massive experience of electronic implosion, that reversal of the entire direction and meaning of literate Western civilisation.'¹⁸

McLuhan emphasised in 1971 that radio in contrast to the telephone permits the listener to fill in a good deal of visual imagery. In 1954 McLuhan thought about the spatialisation of media and ascribed to writing the spatialisation of thought. I believe that a significant factor in audio drama is that its literary quality enables the creator of audio/radio drama 'to control

space'. When McLuhan wrote in 1954 that the 'power to shape space in writing brings the power to organise space architecturally. And when messages can be transported, then come the road, and armies, and empires. The empires of Alexander and the Caesars were essentially built by paper routes', he could have been defining the potential for the audio/radio dramatist.¹⁹

McLuhan has classified radio as a 'hot' medium. A hot medium is that which has high definition for senses and gives a lot of information with little to do. He is right in the sense that only the ear as a sense is engaged. But I believe he may well be wrong in the limit he places on the participation of the listener as audience. Lance Sieveking stated that 'a reader of a novel always has to meet the author half way and do half the work. He has to imagine for himself what the people look like and the scenery, creating them out of his own experience. So he has in the radio-play',²⁰

McLuhan was undoubtedly right in his realisation that modern electronic communications were creating a 'global village'. His empirical and philosophical exploration of this notion was certainly predated by the 1936 work of Rudolf Arnheim, who devotes his 'Introduction' to a lyrical description of sitting in the harbour of a southern Italian fishing village. The café proprietor tunes in a large radio set and fishermen watching their catch being brought home hear an English announcer introducing folk songs in German. Then the dial is retuned to an Italian station playing a French chansonette:

This is the great miracle of wireless. The omnipresence of what people are singing or saying anywhere, the overlapping of frontiers, the conquest of spatial isolation, the importation of culture on the waves of the ether, the same fare for all, sound in silence.²¹

Here is an inspiring definition of the first electronic global village: it was radio. Arnheim mentions that 40 million sets were scattered around the world in 1936. In 1996 it was estimated that 40 million computer users were connected to the Internet. In sixty years the global village was transmogrified into a multidimensional nexus of world media. Sound whether by wire or wireless is a communications web that has made our world a village of information and entertainment. By the year 2000 it has been estimated 300 million people will have been connected to the Internet.

Sieveking's book was written and published at a defining moment in the history of British radio drama. About ten years had elapsed during which transmitted audio drama had had a dominant 'laboratory' period. There had been the curious juxtaposition of sound drama offering words but no physical images, and silent films which offered images but no physical

voices. It should not be forgotten that film was presented to audiences with a powerful, dramatic and narrative structured musical accompaniment. This laboratory stage operated in other countries.

In the German Weimar Republic, radio programming had embraced a powerful and experimental period of audio drama production in the context of a non-commercial and state controlled industry. Weimar Republic thinkers had high expectations for radio, believing that it could be used to educate the masses politically and culturally. Radio was to be the medium which brought the fine arts of music and theatre to the common people. Bertolt Brecht was a pioneer practitioner and significant theoretical philosopher on the artistic and social potential of radio. In 1927 his play *Mann is Mann* was adapted for radio broadcast. In his essay 'Der Rundfunk als Kommunikationsapparat' Brecht argued against the passive unidirectional function of radio:

radio is one-sided when it should be two. It is purely an apparatus for distribution, for mere sharing out. So here is a positive suggestion: change this apparatus over from distribution to communication. The radio would be the finest possible communication apparatus in public life, a vast network of pipes. That is to say, it would be if it knew how to receive as well as to transmit, how to let the listener speak as well as hear.²²

Brecht argued that there was a risk in radio's technological development surpassing the listeners' ability to appreciate and utilise its value:

It was not the public that waited for radio but that radio waited for the public; to define the situation of radio more accurately, raw material was not waiting for methods of production based on social needs but means of production were looking anxiously for raw material. It was suddenly possible to say everything to everybody but, thinking about it, there was nothing to say.

Brecht's analysis was intriguingly echoed in 1974 in Marshall McLuhan's comment on radio: 'Radio . . . transforms the relation of everybody to everybody, regardless of programming.'²³ Brecht's apprehension about the power of radio is illustrated by his poetic observation:

You little box, held to me when escaping
So that your valves should not break,
Carried from house to ship from ship to train,
So that my enemies might go on talking to me
Near my bed, to my pain
The last thing at night, the first thing in the morning,
Of their victories and of my cares,
Promise me not to go silent all of a sudden.²⁴

Between 1933 and 1936 several key texts exploring ontological and conceptual considerations for radio art or sound art were published and provide useful foundation stones for a theoretical radio drama discourse. Sieveking's *The Stuff of Radio* (1934) is predicated from his practitioner status, but he does touch on literary and psychological issues. Rudolf Arnheim's *Radio* (1936) is probably the first extensive philosophical analysis of radio as an art form. Arnheim defined the challenge with his observation:

The essence of broadcasting consists just in the fact that it alone offers unity by aural means . . . The sensory preponderance of the visual over the aural in our life is so great that it is difficult to get used to considering the aural world as more than just a transition to the visual world.²⁵

Radio drama as modernity

Despite the considerable development of feminist perspectives within media and communications and cultural studies, contemporary scholars appear to have neglected the practical and theoretical contributions of Hilda Matheson (1888–1940), who was the highest achieving woman in British broadcasting before the Second World War. Her book *Broadcasting* (1933) would appear to have been the first single authored text on radio and broadcasting by a woman published in English.¹ Yet in the vast majority of theoretical analyses of radio it would appear that Hilda Matheson did not exist.² Matheson founded the separation of an independent News Section at the BBC and fostered the cultural celebration of literature through broadcast talks. It was her championing of the avant-garde writer James Joyce through Harold Nicolson which led to her falling out with Director General Sir John Reith and her departure from the BBC. Her contributions are paradoxical for the period and for the stereotypical assumptions made about gender equality and social hierarchy in Britain at that time.³

She was a communist and at the same time patriotic. Her over-exertions in intelligence work during the Second World War probably contributed to her early death. She was a passionate believer in freedom of expression, particularly in the context of culture and literature, yet she had been and continued to be a British intelligence careerist. She was a lesbian and lover of Vita Sackville-West and at the same time and for six years a close working colleague of the allegedly homophobic Sir John Reith. She predates Marshall McLuhan by quoting H. G. Wells on the sociological and cultural significance of radio communication:

The history of mankind down to our own day might be shown, as Mr H. G. Wells has suggested, in five different stages: (1) Before Speech, (2) Speech, (3) Writing, (4) Print, (5) Mechanical Transport and Electrical Communication . . .

How can we escape from this new noise that is adding to the distractions of an already complex world? Is it to be yet another by-product of man's inventive mind which will get beyond his control before he has learnt its power?⁴

Matheson echoes Brecht in the opening rhetorical section of her book. Chapter 5 of her book, entitled 'Literature and drama', is an articulate and reflective essay on the ontological as well as practical philosophy of radio drama and communication of literature. The questions she posed are as relevant today as they were then:

Drama, throughout the ages, has been presented as an art, a show, in which vision was at least as important as hearing. How far can broadcasting hope to translate the appeal to the eye into the appeal to the ear? How far must it seek for a new literature and a new drama? And how far – to look even deeper – can any form of art, – most of all, perhaps, the intimate art of poetry – hope to make itself understood and appreciated when it is diffused indiscriminately through millions of loud speakers to the whole general public?⁵

Hilda Matheson was at the heart of the British cultural intelligentsia responding to the creative and social impact of new communication technologies. To what extent can this experience account for the emergence of modernity in the contemporary writing of the period? James Joyce embraced the linguistic experimentation of subtext through phonetic irony in a way which challenged the linear framework of the hundreds of years of previous literary expression. Paul Tissien of the Wilfrid Laurier University has recognised this curious dynamic:

In a way, the highly visible new media made strangely appropriate bedfellows for the new literature developing under the modernism of Joyce and Eliot, Richardson and Woolf. The modernists were 'making it new' in their prose fiction and poetry, largely discarding conventional literary allegiance to linear space and time and the objective authority of the omniscient narrator. They were exploring subjectivity, dream, memory, and the unconscious by concentrating on the impressionistic role of the various senses in apprehending experience; to observers as early as 1919 and 1920, the modernists seemed at times to be imitating, or parodying, the new media.⁶

A few years later in 1927 the German philosopher Martin Heidegger was also writing about how radio was transforming the concept of spatiality, and more recently Paddy Scannell has recognised the ontological significance of radio bringing the concerns of the wider world

within the range of the listener's sense of being.⁷ A key word in Heidegger's *Being and Time* (1917) is *Dasein* – a sense of human life as past, present and future:

With the 'radio', for example, *Dasein* has so expanded its everyday environment that it has accomplished a de-severance of the 'world' – a de-severance which, in its meaning for *Dasein*, cannot yet be visualised.⁸

In 1917 T. S. Eliot was pointing to the capacity of the auditory imagination to renew and retrieve human art through the technological extension of communication:

What I call the 'auditory imagination' is the feeling for syllable and rhythm, penetrating far below the conscious levels of thought and feeling, invigorating every word: sinking the most primitive and forgotten, returning to the origin, and bringing something back, seeking the beginning and the end. It works through meanings, certainly, or not without meanings in the ordinary sense, and fuses the old and obliterated, and the trite, the current, and the new and the surprising, the most ancient and the most civilized mentality.⁹

The electrophone or théâtrophone

Broadcasting audio drama before the radio

It is significant that an entire culture of audio transmission of drama entertainment had been established and funded by a subscriber system in the three decades before the advent of radio. In 1881 French engineer Clement Ader had filed a patent for 'improvements of Telephone Equipment in Theatres'. His invention, known in France as the 'Théâtrophone' and marketed elsewhere as the 'electrophone', involved telephonic transmission of live performances from theatres and music halls into domestic households and amplification of the sound through phonograph speakers. The new entertainment was funded by the telephone companies. Ader himself was responsible for the first wired broadcast experiment at the Paris Opera.

Ader's pioneering invention also introduced the technological concept of stereophonic transmission nearly forty years before Edwin H. Armstrong patented the radio transmission of stereo signals on FM. Ader's 'musical telephone' was a major attraction at the International Electrical Exhibition in Paris in 1881 and he presented a stereo transmission by direct telephone from the stages of the Paris Opera House and the Comédie Française. The 'stereo' technology consisted of two transducers picking up signals from two points close to each other. It has been argued that the transmission was nearer to 'two channel mono' than true

stereo, since there was a separate channel for left and right with none of the 'phasing' which occurs in real stereo.¹

From August to November crowds queued up three evenings a week before two rooms, each containing ten pairs of headsets, in the Palais d'Industrie. In one, listeners heard live performances of the opera transmitted through microphones arranged on either side of the prompter's box. In the other, they heard plays from the Théâtre Français through ten microphones placed at the front of the stage near the footlights. Not only were the voices of the actors, actresses and singers heard in this way but also the instruments of the orchestra, the applause, laughter of the audience and the voice of the prompter were heard.

In 1890, the Compagnie du Théâtrophone commercialised the technology by distributing music by telephone from various Paris theatres to coin-in-the-slot telephones installed in hotels and cafés and to domestic subscribers. This demonstrates that the principle of 'pay per view' was predated by 'pay per listen'. Subscribers were offered special hookups to five Paris theatres for live performances. The annual subscription fee was a steep 180 francs, and 15 francs more were charged to subscribers for each use. Between acts and when nothing was happening on stage, the company piped out piano solos from its offices. The market for such acoustic consumption was so strong that it was possible to present several different programmes from various theatres. The Théâtrophone receivers were attractive ornamental boxes with telephone earpieces attached on trailing wires, and connected by the use of a pair of microphones, left and right on the stage, to the home receivers.

The English electrophone had arrived on the scene by 1895. Subscribers were offered 'local' relays from theatres, churches and London's Royal Opera House.²

Radio did not kill off the Paris service until 1932. The communication of concerts over longer distances was achieved between Paris and Brussels in 1887 and from Paris to London in 1891, and a mixed service of news, telephone concerts and lectures was developed in Budapest in 1893.

An article in the *Boston Evening Record* in 1891 indicates that electrophone communications were being developed in the USA. Telephone operators sometimes sponsored entertainments in the middle of the night when consumer demand was small. The *Evening Record* reported that a concert was organised by a group of telephone operators in Worcester, Fall River, Boston, Springfield, Providence and New York. The paper stated:

The operator in Providence plays the banjo, the Worcester operator the harmonica, and gently the others sing. Some tune will be started by the players and the other will sing. To appreciate the effect, one must have a transmitter close to his ear. The music will sound as clear as though it were in the same room.³

There are various sources in American newspapers charting the development and potential of electrophone technology. A thousand people were said to have listened to a formal recital presented through the facilities of the Home Telephone Company in Painesville, Ohio, in 1905.

In England in 1889 people in Hastings could hear *The Yeoman of the Guard* nightly at the Tower of London. Religion was a major incentive for the application of the new technology. Carolyn Marvin found evidence of an inauguration in 1890 of a service in Christ Church in Birmingham which was connected to subscribers in London, Manchester, Derby, Coventry, Kidderminster and Hanley.

When the morning service commenced there was what appeared to be an unseemly clamor to hear the services. The opening prayer was interrupted by cries of 'Hello, there!' 'Are you there?' 'Put me onto Christ Church.' 'No, I don't want the church,' etc. But presently quiet obtained and by the time the Psalms were reached we got almost unbroken connection and could follow the course of the services. We could hear little of the prayers probably from the fact that the officiating minister was not within voice-reach of the transmitter. The organ had a faint, far-away sound, but the singing and the sermon were a distinct success.⁴

From 1895 the Electrophone Company established connections for subscribers and hospital patients to the leading churches of London, including St. Margaret's, Westminster; St. Anne's, Soho; and St. Martin's-in-the-Fields and St. Michael's, Chester Square.

By 1896 well-off people could hear a full programme of live entertainment, musical, operatic and theatrical, for an annual rent of £10 after an installation fee of £5. Queen Victoria was an enthusiast with special lines from her sitting room to the Foreign Office, the Home Office, the Board of Green Cloth, and Marlborough House.⁵

At the beginning of the twentieth century *Daily Mail* reports underlined the historical though as yet under-appreciated significance of this advance in telecommunications. On 5 November 1903 Lord Northcliffe's paper demonstrated how journalists in London could hear a live telephonic broadcast of a speech by a leading politician of the time in Birmingham:

The electrophone beat the telegraph by one hour and twenty seven minutes . . . In a silent room at the 'Daily Mail' office last evening a dozen men sat at a long table listening to the speech of Mr Chamberlain as the words fell from his lips in the Bingley Hall, Birmingham. To look into the room was to hear nothing. But to take a seat at the table with one of the little Y-shaped electrophone 'receivers' at one's ears was to be transported instantaneously as by a magic carpet to Bingley Hall, Birmingham about 113 miles away.⁶

During the First World War, when 10,000 telephone users in London cancelled their connections, there was a definite increase in subscriptions to Electrophones connecting people to theatre and music halls. A *Daily Mail* article on 4 April 1916 quoted an official from the Controller's Office stating: 'People do not care so much about going out at night and like to have amusement brought to their fireside.' The headline 'Fireside Music-Halls' predated the communications value of the beginning of licensed radio by six years. Recordings of short plays presented at music halls during this period were also marketed on phonograph discs for domestic entertainment and some of these have survived in private collections and are now available on archive compact discs (CDs).⁷

There is a series of reports published in the *London Times* in January and May 1913 referring to the extent of electrophone consumerism and its potential as a social mechanism for cultural entertainment. Socially and psychologically the communication and the experience by the listener was equal to the relationship between broadcaster and listener in radio. On 15 January 1913, the *London Times* reported the presentation of a paper by J. H. Pattman to the Institution of Post Office Electrical Engineers about 'The Electrophone Service'. The report included valuable information about the technology and problems encountered:

[Pattman described] the apparatus by which subscribers are enabled to listen to the performance in any theatre, music hall and gave an account of the methods by which the service is maintained. The appliances supplied at the subscribers' end, he said, comprised a portable table, four pairs of receivers (or in the case of the limited subscriber 2 pairs) induction coil, cells and c [etc.] and the operation of which was explained. In the theatres the installations varied in accordance with the demands for service and the numbers of transmitters ranged from 12 to 96, 20 to 24 being the general number. The transmitters were fitted in the footlights and the other apparatus was placed in a cupboard under the stage. The transmitter, known as the Angelini and made in Rome, was of the granular type. Its efficiency was greater than that of any pattern tried hitherto. The apparatus employed in churches was similar to that used in the theatres and in this case it was placed in the pulpit, the lectern or the choir stalls. In the exchange situated at no. 36 Gerrard Street, there was equipment sufficient for 1,000 subscribers and at present the total was 850. The author was convinced that there was a future for the service if it could be developed on business lines. There would be considerable improvements to transmission at an early date. The present trouble was connected with the transmitter for although the volume of sound received was satisfactory, the desired clearness of articulation was not secured.⁸

It is in the last sentence that the *Times* report demonstrates that Mr Pattman had defined the essential challenge for verbal communication in the new medium of sound. When a