perhaps, to have been subsumed under it. But as anyone who has worked in broadcasting will concede, programmes are notoriously difficult to categorize, or even to distinguish from individual broadcasting techniques. Drama, for instance, could be regarded as a programme category in its own right, or as a technique in some other programme category such as educational radio or light entertainment. Indeed it could be argued that in a covert way drama often informs many other kinds of output by moulding them into its own format of confrontation, crisis and conclusion (Higgins and Moss 1982).

But given that there are at least titular differences between programme categories, it will be apparent that I have not included them all. Encouraged by the fact that the audience does not so much attend to individual programmes as simply listen to 'the radio' – to a general flow or sequence of programmes (Williams 1974: 86–94) – the approach I have adopted is pragmatic: the omission of certain categories and a switching from one category or technique to another as each seemed to afford some particular insight into radio's character or potentialities. I would hope, therefore, that while the kinds of programmes I discuss may be inadequate as a catalogue of what it is possible to broadcast on the medium, they are at least as illuminating about radio as those I have omitted, and broadly representative of them.

Two final points. First, I have made much more reference to BBC broadcasts than to those of independent radio partly because with their longer history they are better known, and partly because the Corporation still produces a range of separate, 'constructed' programmes rather than the predominantly streamed output that characterizes the commercial stations.

Second, I have been anxious to acknowledge that both sexes are amply represented within such broadcasting roles as 'the presenter', 'listener' or 'producer', yet have wished to avoid such tiresome duplications as 'her/his', 'herself/himself', and so on. Hence while I have tried to be consistent in my attribution of pronouns within a single chapter, I have not hesitated to refer to the listener or broadcaster as 'she' in one chapter and 'he' in another. However, if I describe the listener to cricket commentary as 'he' and the phone-in presenter as 'she', I hope I shall not be understood to suggest that there are no female cricket enthusiasts or that no male broadcaster ever chairs a phone-in: nor should my other partial descriptions be taken only at their face-value.

Part I

The medium

Chapter 1

Characteristics of radio

> When you ask some people if they listen to the radio, they say, 'No'. Then you ask them if they drive to work and they say, 'Yes'. Then you ask them if they drive to work with the radio on and they say, 'Yes'. They don't listen to it, they sit in it.
>
> (Tony Schwartz, US advertising executive)

What strikes everyone, broadcasters and listeners alike, as significant about radio is that it is a *blind* medium. We cannot see its messages, they consist only of noise and silence, and it is from the sole fact of its blindness that all radio's other distinctive qualities – the nature of its language, its jokes, the way in which its audiences use it – ultimately derive. We can get a clearer idea of radio's characteristics by comparing it with other modes of communication.

The commonest, most basic mode can be described as *interpersonal*, in which the sender of the message and the receiver of it are physically close to and within sight of each other. The contact between them is oral and visual, perhaps even tactile. The primary code, or system of signs by which they communicate, is linguistic, that of *speech*, but likely to be aided by various 'presentational codes' of a paralinguistic nature – facial expressions, gestures, bodily movements and postures, and so on (Fiske 1990: 66–70). The *context* to which the message refers and which enables it to 'make sense' is likely to be understood by both sender and receiver because of its physical proximity or because of their shared background or experience. But in addition lots of 'phatic' remarks are possible to check that the contact is working ('How are you?', and so on), and lots of 'metalingual' remarks to check that the code is being understood ('Understand?'). And both

kinds of remark prompt *feedback* – the (in this mode) easily possible transmission of the receiver's reaction to the sender. Hence the message has every chance of being accurately 'decoded', or made sense of.

The obvious advantages of modes of *mass* communication are that the sender can communicate with multitudes of receivers at the same time and at distances beyond that achievable by interpersonal communication. But the contact becomes impersonal and the risk of ambiguity and misunderstanding much greater. Feedback is an impossibility because thousands or millions of receivers cannot simultaneously transmit their varying reactions back to the sender: and because the sender cannot simultaneously present herself in person to each member of the audience she must send a representative of herself – an independent, often visible message in the form of a *text* (as in books and newspapers) or an *image* (as in film and television).

But since the sender and receivers are remote from each other this message has to carry a heavy freight. In varying degrees it has to create the context to which it refers; the sender herself, who is present only within the message, does not effectively exist outside it; and the receivers for whom the message is intended. On the other hand since, as we have seen, feedback is an impossibility in mass communication, there is no genuine facility of metalingual or phatic communication: the sender cannot check that the code or contact is working. For all these reasons it is of considerable advantage that the message should in some way or other be visual.

The oldest mode of mass communication is that of written characters – *literature* in its widest sense of 'writing, written language'. The code, a printed text, may be supplemented by other codes – numbers, drawings, photographs, diagrams: but the permanence of the contact compensates for its impersonality. Bereft of the presence of the sender, the receivers may read and re-read her message at leisure: decoding does not have to be instantaneous. In film and television, modes of mass communication whose message is in the form of an image, decoding does have to be instantaneous. There is no single, static text which can be perused at leisure. But this is offset by the fact that in film and television the conditions of interpersonal communication are partly re-created. The receivers can see and hear the sender: the primary code in which she communicates – speech – is supplemented by various presentational codes. And/or they can hear

her while seeing by means of other images, which may include an image of writing, the context to which her message refers.

How, then, is radio distinguishable from these other modes of mass communication? Very largely in ways which seem to redound to its disadvantage. There is no image and no text. The contact, or *medium* as I will now term it, is utterly non-visual: the receivers, who are *listeners*, or collectively an *audience*, cannot see the sender or broadcaster as they can on television or film; nor are they offered the compensation of a visible and lasting message as they are in literature. Radio's codes are purely auditory, consisting of speech, music, sounds and silence, and since, as we shall see, the ear is not the most 'intelligent' of our sense organs their deployment has to be relatively simple. The risks of ambiguity or complete communication failure are high, and so in all kinds of radio much effort is expended on overcoming the limitations of the medium, on establishing the different kinds of context which we would generally be able to see for ourselves.

First, there is the context to which the message refers – a context which most interpersonal communication can take for granted. Physical objects or processes which are normally self-evident have to be described: 'Tell the listeners what you are doing', 'Can you describe this object to us?' Second and more literally, there is the context of the message itself – the surrounding 'messages' (items or programmes) which also help the listener to make sense of what he hears. The description of the object may reveal that it is a fire-dog, but he will have no idea why a fire-dog is being described to him unless he has gleaned from the other messages he has heard that the programme is about antiques. One way of conveying context on the radio is by what is sometimes known as 'signposting': for example, 'Later in the programme we'll be talking about the Budget to the Leader of the Opposition'. By indicating the programme's shape or structure, signposting enables the listener to know whether he wishes to keep listening. In purely visual media such as books and newspapers – media whose messages exist in *space* rather than in time – this kind of context is immediately apparent. In a newspaper we can see at a glance what paragraphs or stories surround the one we are presently reading, and in a book or magazine we can flick through the adjacent pages or turn to the table of contents.

But of course not all visual media exist purely in space: television, film and theatre are partly characterized by movement and

(in common with radio) sound, which exist primarily in *time*. In film and theatre, however, the need to establish this kind of context is much less since their messages normally consist of a single plot which the spectators have been following throughout, rather than a number of discrete items which they are at liberty to dip into and out of. Like radio, television often solves the problem of context by signposting, but being a visual medium it has other resources too: images of programmes or items which will be shown later, split-screen techniques, captions superimposed upon images, even images consisting only of printed words. Radio has nothing but different kinds of *sounds*, some of which it uses to establish the beginnings and ends of programmes for us by what are variously described as 'frame' conventions (Goffman 1980: 162–5) or 'boundary rituals' (Fiske and Hartley 1978: 166–7) – ways of telling us that what we are about to hear is a play and not a continuation of the news bulletin we have just been listening to. This is sometimes done by a silence (which in these circumstances is a sort of negative form of sound) or by a signature- or theme-tune and/or an announcement: 'And now *The Archers*. Mike Tucker's milk-round hasn't got off to a very good start' (two contexts are established here: that of the programme itself, a drama serial which is following the 7 o'clock news, and that of the point in the story which the serial has reached).

But messages in radio consist primarily of speech, and speech consists not just of words, as writing does, but always and indissolubly of words expressed in *voices*. Hence a third kind of context which often needs to be established is the reality of the radio station and the broadcasters themselves, even when they are not the subject of the programme. In a discussion programme like *Start the Week* (BBC Radio 4) the presenter might, for example, introduce one of his guests with some such remark as 'Glad you managed to beat that hold-up on the M4 and get here on time!' Remarks of this kind are seldom heard on the television, where we can see the presenter, the guests and the studio that surrounds them; but they are common on the radio where their purpose is to locate the station within the solid, workaday world of motorways and indicate that the broadcasters are not just 'voices in the ether' but people like us who are liable to get stuck in traffic jams and miss their appointments.

Hence the constraints imposed by radio's blindness are severe and were underlined by television, which with its growth in

popularity during the 1950s was thought to be about to supersede radio altogether. I shall return shortly to the problems which the blindness of the medium can create, but want first to stress that blindness is also the source of some real advantages which radio possesses over other media.

The most famous of these is its appeal to the imagination. Because radio offers sound-only instead of sound and vision the listener is compelled to 'supply' the visual data for himself. The details are described, or they may suggest themselves through sound, but they are not 'pictured' for him; he must picture them for himself, and he may, indeed, use them as a basis for picturing *further* details which are *not* described. Moreover as we all know, the scope of the imagination is virtually limitless: we may picture not only lifelike objects but the fantastical, impossible scenes of an experimental play.

This appeal to the imagination gives radio an apparent advantage over film and television, but we must beware of exaggerating the differences between the visual and non-visual media: because film and television audiences can see, it is often assumed that they are not obliged to use their imagination. However, the imagination is more than a merely visual faculty. It can re-create abstract qualities and processes, as when the viewer imagines the inner thoughts or feelings of a character in a film merely by observing the expression on her face.

Nevertheless the imagination does seem to be mainly preoccupied with re-creating the physical, material world; yet even here its role is not always visual or pictorial. When watching a film of bacon and eggs cooking in a pan we imagine the *smell* they give off; when we read a description of a fun-fair we imagine among other things the *noise* of the crowds and the blare of the roundabout organ. How, then, does the imagination deal with the physical world?

Its workings are various and obscure, but we might make the preliminary suggestion that it is the faculty by which we re-create for ourselves any impressions that we would experience at first hand through one, some or all of our five senses. Since the greatest number of senses through which any of the mass media can communicate to us is two (sight and hearing), it follows that *all* the media, and not just radio, will invoke the imagination to compensate for their various deficiencies. Nevertheless it would seem that the primary and dominant function of the imagination *is* visual, as its derivation from 'image' suggests; for in replicating

the functions of our senses it seems also to replicate the hierarchy into which they appear to arrange themselves, with sight at the top: in our ordinary deployment of our sensory faculties our primary means of understanding or interpreting the world seems to be visual. We may hear, smell or touch an object, but it is not until we have seen it that we feel we really 'know' it.

The faculty of sight, then, seems to be a kind of epistemological yardstick which determines how we make sense of the outside world and what credence we attach to our other sensory faculties. Once we have seen the filmic image of the bacon and eggs we can imagine their smell, and once we have pictured our fun-fair we can imagine the noise of the crowds and the organ. But for most of us at least, it would seem to be extremely hard to imagine even that unique and wonderful aroma without some previous or accompanying image, whether literal or figurative and however momentary, of the bacon and eggs themselves or of the situation (for example, the breakfast table) in which they would be encountered in ordinary life. In other words, the first impulse of the imagination seems to be to visualize, even in the case of non-visual sensations such as sounds or smells: but once we have an actual or figurative picture of what approximates to the source or habitation of these sounds or smells our imagination will be able to move down the sensory hierarchy and replicate the subordinate impressions of sound, smell, taste, and so on.

But we must not assume that when we are watching a play or a film or a television programme we never have the need to picture or visualize physical phenomena. On these occasions, as in ordinary life, not only are we capable of looking and visualizing simultaneously, we do it all the time: it is simply that when we have the power of vision we are less aware that we visualize. This means that our imagination is much more active when we watch the visual media than the champions of radio claim, for not everything they deal with is visible. When, for instance, a comedian tells a funny story we watch him, but even as we do so we picture – or *imagine* – the characters and events of his story. And even at the level of the physical reality that is displayed to us not everything can be seen, for it implies a contextual world which is off-stage or 'outside the picture' and which we will also have to imagine – a fact often exploited by horror films in which the menace lurks just off the screen, so that all we can see is the terrified expression of the character who is being menaced!

Nevertheless it seems undeniable that radio will invoke the audience's imagination much more than film, theatre or television, since *nothing* that it deals with is visible. We must imagine not only a character's thoughts and feelings but also her expression, total appearance, physical situation, and so on.

However, two other important points must be made about the role of the imagination. The first is that radio is not the only medium which makes such extensive use of it. It is every bit as active when we read a book, and indeed reading and listening are rather similar in the sense that within the broad limits set by language both reader and listener can – must – form a mental picture of what is being described. But whereas literature's 'pictures' are entirely an effect of language, radio's are also suggested by the sound of voices and of other phenomena which imply the existence of a material world we cannot find in books but can see in theatre, film and television.

Hence the distinctiveness of radio is not that it involves the imagination while the other media do not, but that it involves it to a different *extent*. In literature *everything* must be imagined since nothing can be seen except printed words, nor can anything be heard. In the visual media many things can be seen and heard and proportionately less is left to the imagination. In radio many things can be heard, and this direct intimation of the material world is perhaps why, in its drama productions at least, its verbal descriptions of a physical setting or of a person's thoughts or appearance are generally much more economical than those of literature and closer to those of theatre, film and television. Moreover the fact that its codes are auditory and therefore exist in time explains the greater sense of 'liveness' that we get from radio (and the visual media) than we do from literature; for when we start to read a book we know that the last page has already been written. But radio, even when its programmes are pre-recorded, seems to be a 'present-tense' medium, offering experiences whose outcome lies in an unknown future. Like theatre, film and television, then, it seems to be an account of what *is* happening rather than a record of what *has* happened. But the fact that *nothing* can be seen on the medium means that the demands which it makes upon the imagination are much greater than those made by the visual media and almost as great as those made by literature.

The second important point which we must keep in mind is that the imagination is not confined to matters of fiction or

make-believe. When listening to the radio we are obliged to imagine not only the world of a play or story but the *real* world of news, weather reports and current affairs. Indeed, although it is dangerous to be dogmatic in these matters, it seems likely that codes in any medium which refer to any physical thing which we cannot actually see – whether they be words, sounds, or other kinds of symbols and whether they refer to listeners' requests, hobgoblins or stocks and shares – will automatically create pictures in our minds, that we cannot actually 'make sense' of these codes without at some stage and in some measure forming images of what they refer to.

It is largely upon the listener's ability to imagine matters of fact that radio's distinctive and much-vaunted sense of personal companionship seems to depend, for we hear not only the descriptions and sounds of real or imaginary worlds but also the voice of the person who is describing them and we therefore form a picture of her too. As is the case with readers of books and viewers of films or television, the pleasure the listener gains from the company of those whom he 'meets' on the medium is bound up with the sense of his own anonymity, of freedom from the obligations imposed by 'real life' relationships. He is not obliged to talk back to his radio companion or to continue listening if he is bored.

But the role of the imagination is much more crucial to the listener or the reader than to the viewer, because it is with the person *as imagined* from the words and sounds of radio or from the words of books that he forms his relationship, not with a person who is so largely pre-realized for him. And this role of the imagination transcends the conventional distinction between fact and fiction because in books and radio people and things are 'imaginary' whether they actually exist or not. In the visual media there is a general tendency towards the factual: a character in a play may be 'fictional', but she is still physically and visibly 'real'. In books and radio, though, there is a general tendency towards the fictional. Jimmy Young presenting his morning show on BBC Radio 2 may be an actual person, but since we can know him on the radio only by picturing, *imagining*, him he is in a sense a 'fiction'.

Two further points illustrate this fictional tendency of radio. The first is that within the broad limits set by the language and sounds of the medium any listener who has not seen Jimmy Young on

television or elsewhere may imagine him to be quite unlike he is without in any way 'misunderstanding' his broadcast or failing to absorb its full impact. And the second point is that since imagining is an individual act there is unlikely to be any uniformity among the 'pictures' of Jimmy Young which the listeners form – even those listeners who know what he looks like. Indeed it is very probable that there will be as many pictures as there are listeners. Hence there is the paradox that while radio is a long-distance mode of communication it is also an inward, *intimate* medium, and so integral does the imagination seem to be to the way in which we decode virtually all its messages, whether factual or fictional, that when we speak of its 'appeal to the imagination' we mean in effect its basic ability to communicate.

Another advantageous effect of radio's blindness, and one which can reinforce its appeal to the imagination, is its *flexibility* – the fact that it can leave the listener free to perform other activities while he is listening. This characteristic has been enhanced by the technological developments of the last forty years or so. The first radios were crystal sets, and since reception was generally poor and took place via headphones, listening was a solitary activity which allowed the listener little scope to do anything else. But by the mid-1920s the crystal set had been largely replaced by the valve wireless, which incorporated a loudspeaker and remained in general use until the end of the 1950s. By modern standards its reception was of somewhat primitive quality, it was heavy and attached to an outdoor aerial so that it could not easily be moved about, and it was expensive. Even in the 1930s its price ranged from £8 to £30 (S. Briggs 1981b: 33). Not surprisingly, then, very few households could boast more than one set, and since there was no television to provide an alternative attraction it was common practice for the members of the household to sit down and listen as a *group* (McLuhan 1967: 327; Pegg 1983: 197; S. Briggs 1981a: 15).

The replacement of headphones by a loudspeaker also meant that it was now possible to do other things while listening and the wireless was often used as mere 'background'; but these were activities that could only be performed within earshot of the loudspeaker: portable wirelesses existed but it was the replacement of valves by transistors at the beginning of the 1960s which revolutionized radio listening. The development of VHF, FM and stereo had already made vast improvements in the *quality* of

reception, but the transistor enabled radio sets to be built which consumed much less power and were much cheaper to buy. When the government abolished the radio licence fee in 1971 the cost of buying and listening to the radio was reduced yet further. So cheap had radio become by the end of the 1970s that there were 2.53 sets to each household (Paulu 1981: 350), or virtually one set for every man, woman and child in the United Kingdom. This means that as in the days of the crystal set, listening has once again become a mostly *solitary* activity, which presents us with another paradox about radio – although its audiences may be counted in millions the medium addresses itself very much to the *individual*.

The change in broadcasting styles which has occurred over the years is illuminating. In the days of wireless, the indifferent quality of the reception and the group nature of the audience tended to encourage a somewhat declamatory style of delivery. Now that the broadcaster may, if she wishes, whisper into the ear of the isolated listener delivery has become much less formal, more intimate. Indeed it may not be too fanciful to see this change of style reflected in a change in terminology. Am I alone in sensing that outside formal contexts or fixed collocations such as 'the British Broadcasting Corporation' the word 'broadcast' sounds faintly archaic – aimed, like broadsides and broadsheets, at a vast, passive audience and with little sense of the individuals who comprise it? Whereas its synonym 'transmit', literally 'to send across', seems rather more concerned for the recipient and hence, when a choice between the words is possible, is more often used.

But the cheapness of radio means not only that listening is once again a mainly solitary pursuit, but that the range of things the listener can do *while* listening has been greatly extended, for he is no longer restricted to what he can do within earshot of a set which he must share with several others. He can now afford his own set in his own location. Moreover it is not a *fixed* location, for quite the most important consequence of the transistor was that it enabled radios to be made which were lighter, more compact, and which were therefore easily portable or at the very least movable.

Thus if the owner wishes to listen to his radio he is not confined to his own room or even his own house; he can take his radio with him and listen in at his place of work or while picnicking, watching a soccer match, or whatever. Sets soon became small enough to be carried around like a book and even slipped into a pocket, and thanks to tiny lightweight headphones the listener can

now gain excellent reception while threading his way through noisy crowds and thunderous traffic. Similarly if he wishes to listen while driving, radios are fitted in most cars as standard equipment. By the end of the 1970s nearly 70 per cent of all radio sets in the United Kingdom were either portable or 'mobile' in the sense of being fitted in motor vehicles (Paulu 1981: 350). Hence radio is an 'intimate' mode of communication not simply because its messages can be fully 'realized' only inside the listener's head, but because they frequently reach him in circumstances of solitude and privacy and can accompany him in an unprecedented range of places and activities. This means that it can be, and is, assimilated to his daily existence much more than are the other media, and to a much greater extent than ever before.

This use of radio as what is sometimes termed a 'secondary' medium can never be emulated by television, even though the latter has also become smaller and cheaper in recent years: for while it too may be carried round its message cannot be absorbed in the same way. It makes a larger and more rigid claim on our attention, so that if it is treated as secondary (and such treatment is not unknown) we can say that most of its message is being missed, since the visual codes which make up so much of that message are being ignored. The radio listener, on the other hand, can be driving along a remote Highland glen and without taking his eyes from the road can be instantaneously apprised of an earthquake in the Far East.

Neither newspapers nor television can match radio in terms of this immediacy as a purveyor of news and information. Nor in order to demonstrate such immediacy is it necessary to instance news which originates from the far side of the globe. What is happening in the near neighbourhood may be of much more practical importance to the listener, and on an awareness of this fact rest the greatest achievements of local radio. While driving to work the motorist can be warned about an accident which has blocked the road a few miles ahead of him, and local appeals can also reach people who are unable to stop work and attend to any of the other media – the drama club's appeal for a suit of armour for tonight's play, the soccer club's request for help in clearing a snowbound pitch for tomorrow's match. Such items are too numerous and trivial for network radio to broadcast but they are vital to small communities and, quite apart from the numbers of 'secondary' listeners they reach, can be publicized much more

cheaply and quickly than in the local press. Indeed, in the time they would take to appear in the press they would cease to be 'news' at all.

The point has often been made that radio's enduring power as a mass medium derives from its unique combination of suggestiveness and flexibility – from the effect of its messages, whether factual or fictional, upon the listener's imagination together with the fact that it can accompany him in a range of other activities he may wish to perform. But the flexibility may also work *against* its suggestiveness in a way not possible in the visual media: for the freedom that radio affords us to pursue other activities while listening can, and frequently does, detract from our full understanding of what it purveys. Listening is a good deal easier than ever before but by the same token often a good deal less attentive – much of the message can be ignored. Radio communicates through only one of our five senses and beyond the bounds of this communication is a kind of no man's land where it must constantly fight for the listener's attention against the other sense impressions which make up the situation in which he presently finds himself – driving the car, washing the dishes, and so on. This perhaps explains why there is now so much music on the radio; for while music may *allow* us to use our imagination it does not 'refer to' anything in the way that speech does and so does not *require* us to use it: it therefore makes ideal background listening.

Such partly complementary, partly conflicting characteristics of radio – its suggestiveness and imaginative appeal on the one hand and its flexibility on the other – have led some observers to discern two categories of listener. A former head of audience research at the BBC distinguishes between the medium's 'predominant role – as a source of entertainment' and its 'subordinate role – as an accompaniment to other activities' (Silvey 1974: 209); while a former Director General distinguishes between those who regard it 'as an art form on its own merits' and those for whom radio is mere background, a 'service element' (Trethowan 1970: 7).

These variations in the audience pose a considerable problem for the programme producer: for if she wishes to create an 'art form' for the listener as distinct from mere background for 'hearers', how far is she at liberty to do so? Her constant dilemma, acute in education programmes but present in other kinds such as dramas and documentaries, is how far to develop a theme which will become increasingly esoteric and how far to preserve its

accessibility for the hearer, who pays less attention to radio's messages but who is always, potentially, a listener.

Of course this distinction between listener and hearer, or between the predominant and 'background' functions of radio, is useful provided that we do not exaggerate it; for while there is no doubt that the opportunities to treat radio as a 'service element' have increased greatly in recent years, it is highly likely, even before the advent of television, that a great many people have *always* done something else while listening to the radio – even if only knitting or eating. This does not mean that the greater part of their attention may not be focused on the radio, and in my own use of the term 'secondary medium' I do not wish to suggest that of the probable 98 per cent or so of the audience who treat it in this way hardly anyone is paying much attention to its messages.

Indeed such terms as 'predominant' and 'secondary' tend to obscure the fact that much more than in any other medium a whole *range* of attention is possible, from hearing through 'overhearing' to listening, from those who want unobtrusive background noise – 'acoustic wallpaper' – to those who seek an object of concentration. But this poses as big a problem for the audience researcher as for the programme producer because the former is always in some doubt as to who the radio audience actually is and whether there is any correlation between the amount of attention which is paid to radio's messages and the extent of its effects or influences, a subject we shall return to in Chapter 10.

My purpose in the following chapters is first to give some historical account of the technological and institutional development of radio and then to explore the characteristics of the medium from the varying perspectives afforded by different kinds of output. I shall begin with talk and music radio, not because it is the most illuminating in this respect but because it is now the only form of programming which the great majority of stations provide. Hence as well as exploring what it tells us about the medium, I shall attempt to explain why talk and music radio occupies so much air-time, and how its contents and conventions have helped to shape modern popular culture. An implicit effect of this discussion will be to show how an investigation of the medium can yield insights into the broader cultural context, but the subsequent chapters will focus more closely on the inherent characteristics of radio, exploring them in the light of its more traditional kinds of programming.

Nevertheless in discussing those characteristics which certain kinds of programme seem to me to illuminate I do not wish to suggest that they are not present in other kinds. In treating the multi-levelled, ambivalent relationship between broadcaster and listener under 'Commentary', for instance, I do not wish to imply that this relationship does not exist in varying degrees in *all* radio involving personal presentation; nor do I wish to suggest by discussing the distinctive nature of radio language under 'News and Current Affairs' that this language is of any less fundamental a significance in other kinds of programmes. As I have already remarked, the distinctions between programme categories are in any case uncertain: it was many years before the BBC was able to disentangle radio drama from its Features Department; drama is often used in educational broadcasts, many of which are closely akin to documentaries; and documentary can often shade into news and current affairs.

The difficulty of maintaining the distinctions between categories must serve to excuse the omission of a separate chapter on adverts – an omission which may seem surprising in the light of the recent development of British commercial radio at national level. But since the impact of adverts depends so much upon their ability to impersonate *other* forms of radio output, notably drama, comedy and news presentation, a chapter which attempted a comprehensive analysis of them would have become a monster that ingested every other chapter in the book. My aim has simply been to select from within a fairly broad range of output so as to gain a composite picture of radio's nature and possibilities.

Chapter 2

The history and development of radio in Britain

the isle is full of noises,
Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight, and hurt not.
(Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, III, ii)

Many histories of British broadcasting have been written, ranging from the detailed and scholarly (A. Briggs 1961–79; Paulu 1956, 1961, 1981; Pegg 1983; Scannell and Cardiff 1991) through the potted (Golding 1974; Parker 1977; A. Briggs 1985; Lewis and Pearlman 1986; Curran and Seaton 1991; Seymour-Ure 1991) to the subjective and anecdotal (Black 1972; Snagge and Barsley 1972). This historical sketch, and it can be no more, takes as its focus the major developments in broadcasting technology – not merely those within radio, but the arrival and subsequent evolution of its great rival, television. It considers how these developments have changed the audience's perception and use of radio over the years, and the effect this in turn has had on its programming structures, on the nature of broadcasting institutions, and on the various political arrangements that have had to be devised for them.

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries scientists of many nationalities, most notably the Italian Guglielmo Marconi, were attempting to transmit messages over distances, first by means of wireless telegraphy and then by wireless telephony. But it is important to realize that these were primarily envisaged as means of *point-to-point* communication (for example, ship to shore), and that when radio (or 'wireless' as it was known in the early days) was developed it was largely thought of in these terms.

In Britain the Postmaster General had been empowered to control wireless telegraphy by an Act of Parliament in 1904, and he

First published in 1986 by
Methuen & Co. Ltd

Second edition published 1994
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
270 Madison Ave, New York NY 10016

Reprinted 1995, 2000

Transferred to Digital Printing 2005

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group

The author and publishers would like to thank the following for permission to quote from Garrison Keillor, *A Radio Romance* (US title *WLT: A Radio Romance*) in the preliminary pages of the book: Faber & Faber Ltd, Penguin Books Canada and Viking Penguin, a division of Penguin Books USA Inc., © 1991 Garrison Keillor.

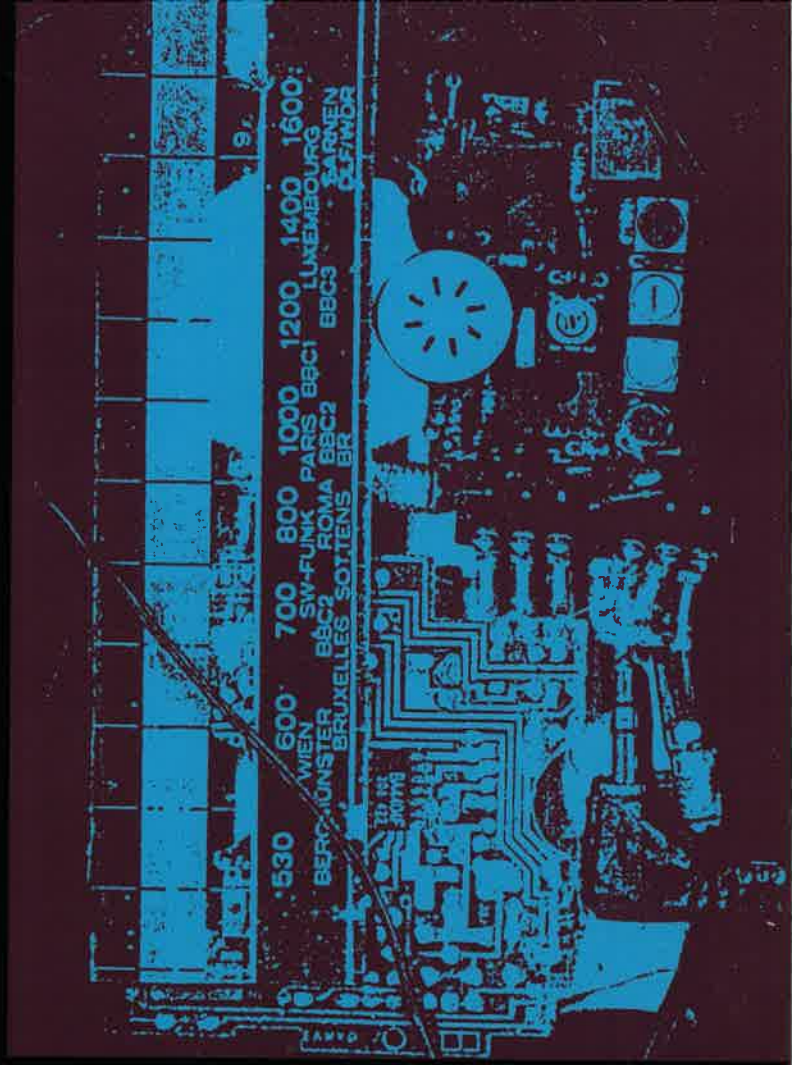
Typeset in Palatino by
Ponting–Green Publishing Services, Chesham, Bucks

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Crisell, Andrew.
Understanding Radio/Andrew Crisell. – 2nd ed.
p. cm. – (Studies in culture and communication)
1. Radio broadcasting–Great Britain. I. Title. II. Series.
PN1991.3.G7C75 1994
384.54'0941–dc20 93–43580

ISBN 0–415–10315–0

SECOND EDITION



UNDERSTANDING Radio

Andrew CRISELL

ROUTLEDGE